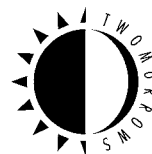


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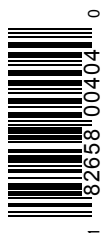
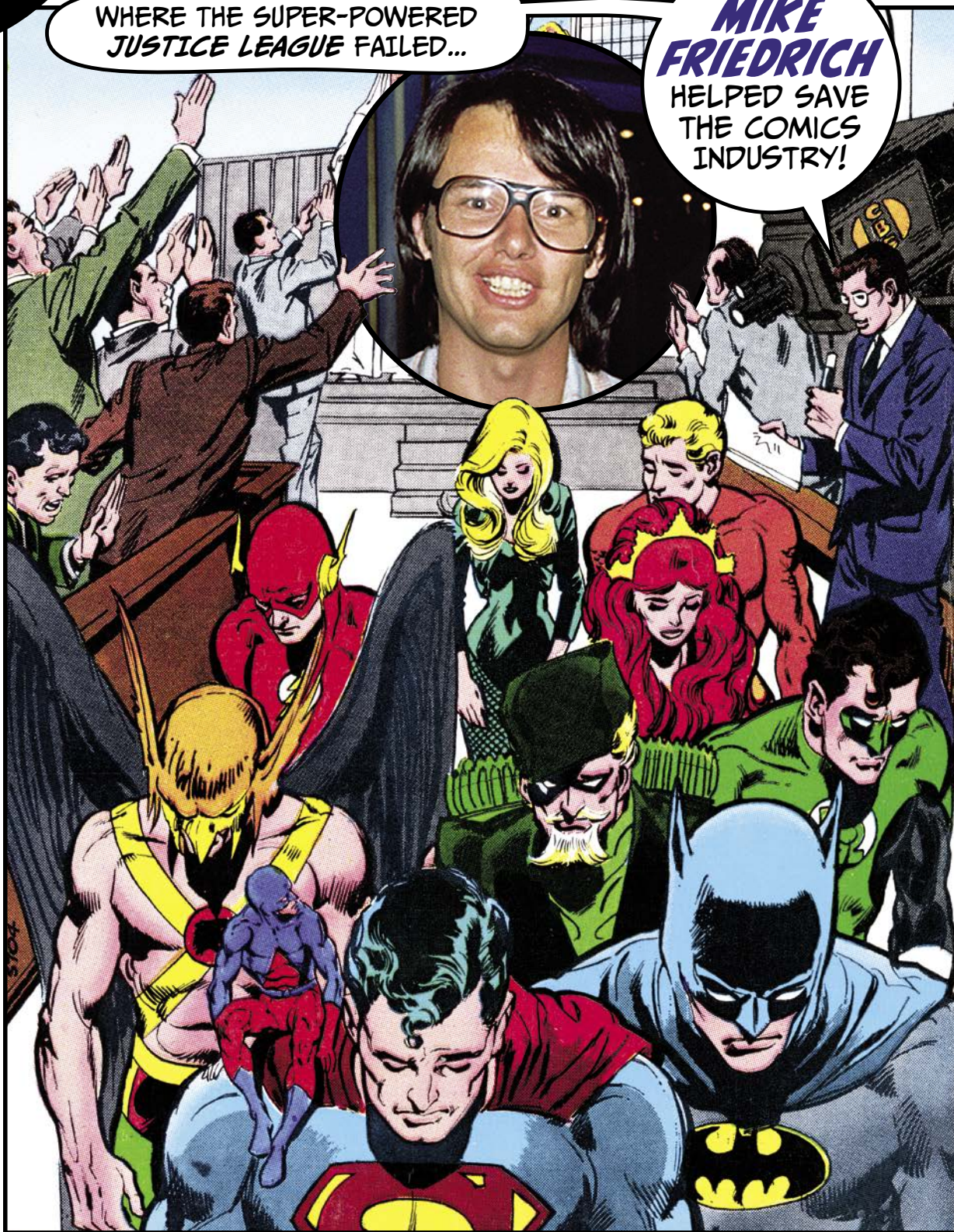
No. 164
May
2020

WHERE THE SUPER-POWERED
JUSTICE LEAGUE FAILED...

**MIKE
FRIEDRICH**
HELPED SAVE
THE COMICS
INDUSTRY!

AND HE DID
IT WORKING
ALONGSIDE
**ADAMS
KANE
DILLIN
TUSKA
BUSCEMA
STARLIN
CHAYKIN
BRUNNER**
& MANY
MORE!

BONUS:
WELCOME TO
**RURAL HOME
COMICS
COUNTRY!**
WHAT? YOU'VE
NEVER HEARD
OF
**THE GREEN
TURTLE
CAPTAIN
WIZARD
& THE
BOGEYMAN?**



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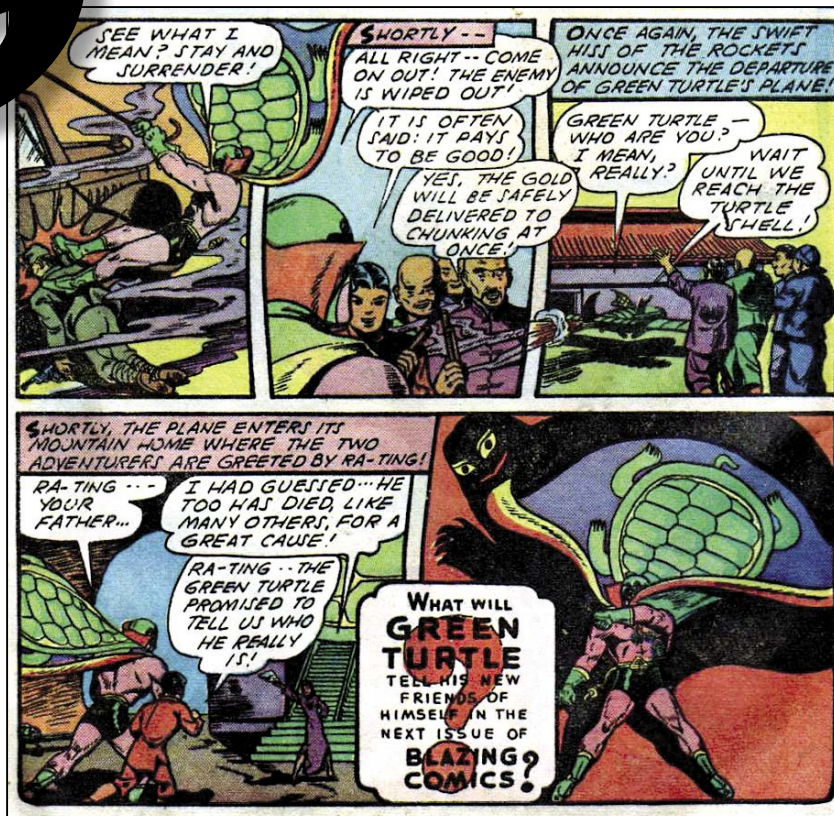
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On Our Cover: Many of Mike Friedrich's early-1970s issues of Justice League of America were blessed in having powerful, oft-symbolic covers by Neal Adams. A case in point: that of #88 (March 1971), whose dialogue we've altered to our own purpose in order to recognize the importance of Mike's 1974 publication of the first true "ground-level" comicbook, Star*Reach, and the many titles that came after it. Inks by Dick Giordano. Thanks to the Grand Comics Database. [TM & © DC Comics.]

Above: If there is one super-hero who more than any other stands out from the pack of late-World-War-II comics companies who played hide-and-seek with the paper-supply restrictions of the U.S. War Production Board, it would be Chu Hing's "Green Turtle." Here, as a sneak peak of what you'll see in Mark Carlson-Ghost's long article this issue, is the final page of the Turtle's timeless tale from Rural Home's Blazing Comics #1 (June 1944). Thanks to Comic Book Plus website. [© the respective copyright holders.]

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FIRST PRINTING.



“I Wanted There To Be Comics That Had A Young-Adult Sensibility”

Writer/Entrepreneur MIKE FRIEDRICH
On DC, Marvel, & His Own *Star*Reach*

Interview Conducted & Transcribed by Richard J. Arndt

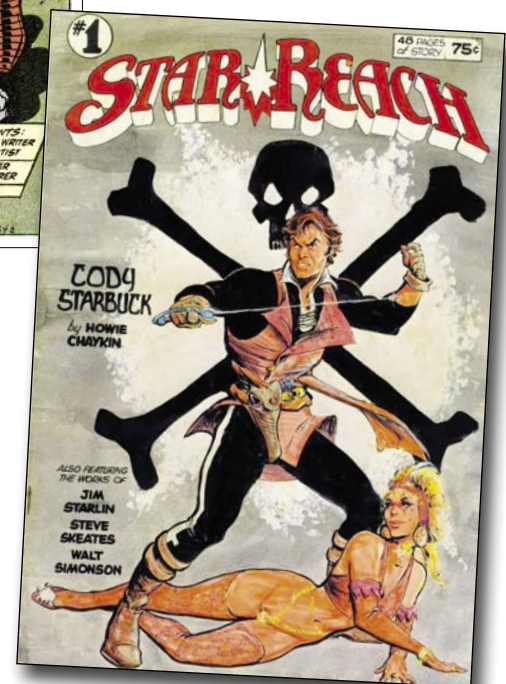


Mike Friedrich

in a photo that appeared in *Alter Ego* [Vol. 1] #11, the single issue of this magazine he co-edited and published, back in 1978. In terms of the comicbook industry: during the latter 1960s and the 1970s, he was first the writer, and later the publisher, of noted comics, including scripting the likes of DC's *The Spectre* #3 (March-April 1968; art by Neal Adams) and Marvel's *Iron Man* #51 (July 1972; art by George Tuska & Vince Colletta)... and editing and publishing *Star*Reach* #1 (April 1974; cover by Howard Chaykin). Thanks to Art Lorite, Barry Pearl, and the Grand Comics Database, respectively, for the art scans. [*Spectre* art TM & © DC Comics; *Iron Man* art TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.; *Star*Reach* art TM & © Howard Chaykin.]



INTERVIEWER'S INTRODUCTION: Mike Friedrich was one of a number of comicbook scripters in the mid-to-late 1960s who got their start as professional writers while still teenagers. Joining the ranks of Jim Shooter, Cary Bates, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Willi Franz, and Gerry Conway, among others, Friedrich's first published script was for an issue of *Batman*. Over the next decade, his work appeared in such titles as DC's *The Spectre*, *The Witching Hour*, and *Justice League of America*. In 1971 he moved to Marvel, where he worked on *Iron Man*, *Marvel Feature* (starring *Ant-Man*), *Captain Marvel*, and *Sub-Mariner*, among others. In 1974 he began to transition from writing mainstream comics to his own self-published "ground-level" comicbook *Star*Reach*, an anthology title that presented some of the best writers and artists of the 1970s producing comics material that the mainstream publishers wouldn't publish at that time. More than any other title, *Star*Reach*—and Friedrich's swiftly following related titles—laid the foundation and set the stage for the explosion of independent publishers and comics that appeared in the 1980s, an explosion that continues to both transform and influence the comicbook market of



today, even though *Star*Reach* itself expired in 1979. This interview was conducted via telephone on April 14, 2016.

RICHARD ARNDT: Thanks for agreeing to do this, Mike. Start us off with your early life, would you, please?

MIKE FRIEDRICH: I was born in Oakland, California, and went to high school there. Then I attended Santa Clara University, circa 1967-1971. I sold my first comic story a couple of months before I graduated from high school. In fact, writing for comicbooks is what paid my way through college.

My first sale was a ten-page "Robin the Boy Wonder" back-up story. I sold it in May of 1967 and used that money to fly to New York for the first time in my life. That story ran in *Batman* #202 [cover-dated June 1968]. That wasn't the first story of mine that saw publication, but it was the first one that sold. They held onto it for a while before they published it.

ARNDT: I have your first published story as the lead tale in *Batman* #200 [Mar. 1968].

FRIEDRICH: That's not quite correct. It was *The Spectre* #3 [Mar.-Apr. 1968], which came out on a Tuesday, and then *Batman* #200 came out on Thursday the same week. [laughs]

ARNDT: So distributors delivered magazines and comics twice a week in the late 1960s? When I was working the bookstores in the mid-1970s, books and magazines came out every Tuesday, to be put out on Wednesday morning. I'm pretty sure that's how they're still doing it today—even on the Internet.

FRIEDRICH: I have no idea how the distribution system worked anywhere. In the area where I was living at the time, they delivered new comics on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In other markets they may have been released on the same day, so it was still pretty close to a simultaneous publication of *The Spectre* and *Batman*. The *Batman* #200 story was my second story accepted, and the *Spectre* #3 story was my third sale. I sold both of them in the summer of 1967. I was still very much a novice at learning how all of this worked. From then on the stories came out pretty much in the order that I wrote them.

ARNDT: Was it a big deal writing the story for the 200th issue of *Batman*? Nowadays it would be quite a special event.

FRIEDRICH: I think that was the first time DC made a big deal about that type of thing. Julie Schwartz was the editor, and he guessed that fans would appreciate anniversary issues. He was taking advantage of the fact that this comic fan was now writing for him, and that was why he assigned me the issue. It was purely for that reason. I don't remember if he gave me any guidelines on the story. I'm pretty sure that I was the one who suggested using The Scarecrow as the villain, but I don't think that there was anything, except possibly the cover, that really pushed it as an anniversary tale.

Less than a year later, I was asked to write the 30th-anniversary issue of *Batman* appearing in *Detective Comics* [#387, May 1969]. That was very purposefully done. That was also Julie's suggestion. It was an update of the original "Batman" story from *Detective Comics* #27 [May 1969]—"The Case of the Chemical Syndicate," with that first story being reprinted in the back of the book. The original story was only six pages, but it had a lot of panels, so it wasn't that difficult to redo it as a 17-page updated version.



Chic Stone

ARNDT: That's the one that I remember. I was just looking at the covers of those two anniversary comics and I don't recognize the *Batman* cover at all, but the *Detective Comics* one, with *Batman* holding up the two comicbooks—*Detective Comics* #27 and *Batman* #1—is the one that I read at the time and remember well.

FRIEDRICH: I remember having a lot of fun writing that. I didn't have to worry about creating the plot, which was always my problem, because it was already done. I could just riff off of the original storyline and try to make it interesting. I had fun with that story.

ARNDT: Now the "Spectre" story featured the re-introduction of *Wildcat*, who hadn't been seen in fifteen years or more at that point. That, I would think, would have been kind of a big deal also.

FRIEDRICH: At that point, Julie had been slowly reviving the 1940s characters in various forms. There had been several team-ups in *Showcase*. The Spectre had just gotten his own title. I was not a big *Wildcat* fan, but I'd enjoyed the character from the *Justice Society* comics that I'd collected. I thought *Wildcat* was the most interesting unused character at that point. To me now it seems kind of weird to



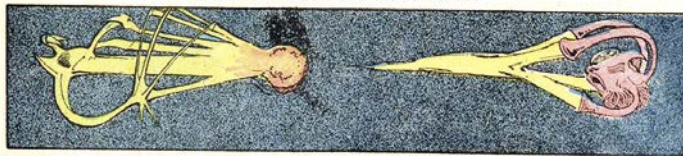
Rockin' Robin!

Wow! Looks like Mike was lucky enough, with his very first professional sale to *Batman* #202 (June 1968), to work with "Batman" co-creator Bob Kane! Okay, okay—so actually, despite the then-omnipresent signature, Kane's artistic "ghosts" on this occasion were penciler Chic Stone and inker Joe Giella. But that's not a bad pair to start out with, right? Thanks to Bob Bailey. [TM & © DC Comics.]

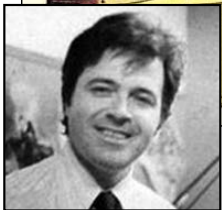
PROLOGUE



SIMULTANEOUSLY, SINISTER SPELL-BOLTS SHOOT OUT...



COLLIDING WITH FORCE UNIMAGINABLE, THEY FLARE OUT IN AN OVERWHELMING HOLOCAUST...



Neal Adams
around the time
he first entered the
comicbook industry
circa 1966.

And Now For Something Completely Earlier...

Two stories by Mike F. that apparently came out, at least some places, on Tuesday and Thursday in the very same week (yes, that's right—back then, comics hit the stores *twice* a week, not just once—they were a *mass market* then, remember?)—two months before the first story Mike had sold to editor Julius Schwartz appeared: the Neal Adams-drawn "Prologue" to *The Spectre* #3 (March-April 1968), and the lead tale in the giant-sized *Batman* #200 (March '68), again drawn by Stone & Giella as "Bob Kane." Thanks to Art Lorie & Bob Bailey. [TM & © DC Comics.]

put *The Spectre* and *Wildcat* together in the same comic, but I managed it somehow.

I mean, it's really a *Wildcat* story guest-starring *The Spectre*. *The Spectre* doesn't even show up until the second half of the story.

ARNDT: *You were working strictly for Julie Schwartz at this point?*

FRIEDRICH: For the first year, yes. I was going to college and needed to concentrate on that. I'd only been in New York that first summer, between high school and college, and so I was just working for Julie. I'd been introduced to [Superman line editor] Mort Weisinger, but there was no chemistry there. I was also introduced to the other editors, but I wasn't trying to work for them. I was only eighteen years old. Also, I was totally a Julie Schwartz fan. It was my fan sensibility that was motivating me at that point. I had no sense of trying to have a career writing comics or anything like that. It was really very... present time... just the idea that this would be a fun, and fannish, thing to do.

So I then wrote a couple of stories during my college freshman year. I did a "Green Lantern" story that featured the Golden Age Green Lantern and the contemporary one in a team-up. Then I did that *Detective Comics* re-do. Then I went back East again, between my freshman and sophomore years, and DC really treated me royally at that point. In the meantime, Carmine Infantino had

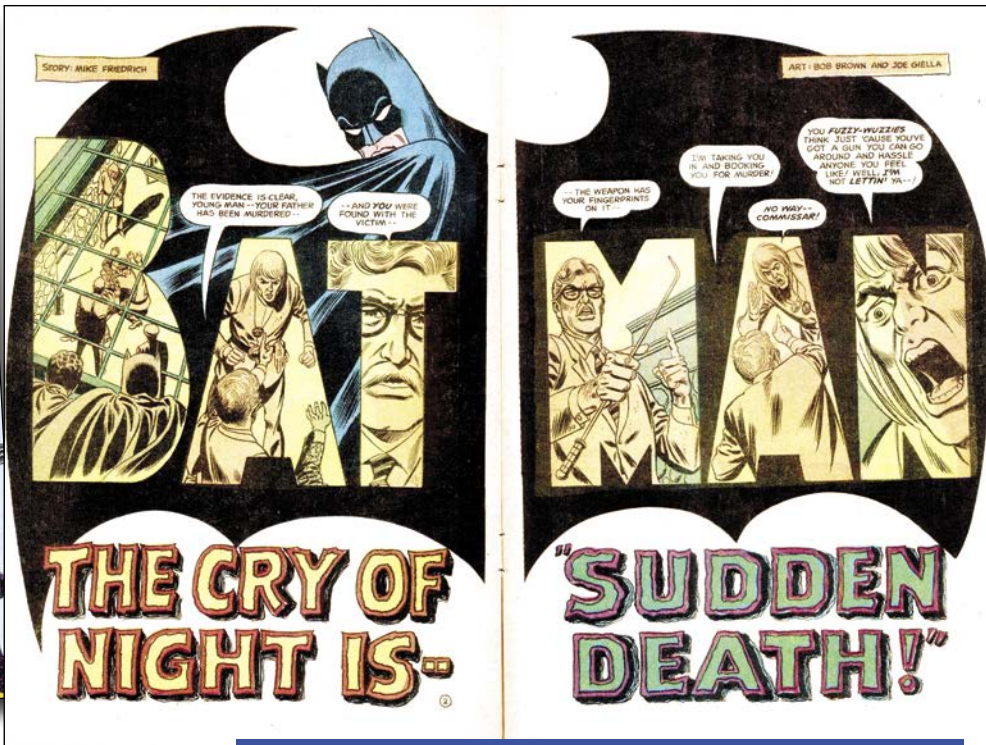


Julius Schwartz
Taken during fan
John Fahey's visit
to the DC offices in
1965. First appeared
in *A/E* [Vol. 1] #9.

become the new editorial director. They decided they wanted to use me to help promote a younger, hipper readership. Little did they know! [laughs] I was then actually asked to write for all the editors.

By that second summer DC had hired Dick Giordano and Joe Orlando. So I did my first stories for them. I wrote a *Challengers of the Unknown* for Murray Boltinoff. I helped relaunch *The Phantom Stranger* for Joe Orlando. I did a *Teen Titans* issue for Dick Giordano. And I did a few more stories for Julie, who, although he'd helped set up all this work for other editors, was, I think, a little resentful of all these other people using me. The Julie stories were, at this point, back-up stories—"Robin" and "Batgirl" tales. I think I wrote the "Batgirl" stories first, and then started up the "Robin" stories. I kept going with the "Robin" stories because I was more comfortable with him. I never quite understood what "Batgirl" was all about.

By my third year I was much more independent. I was a couple of years older and there were now some contemporaries of mine working for DC. Gerry Conway, Marv Wolfman, and Len Wein were starting to get regular writing work. I needed to do more of my own assignment-getting, instead of having the editor bring them to me. I was doing about half to two-thirds of my work for Julie and the other third for Dick Giordano.



Wildcat Strike!

Wildcat, the Irwin Hasen/Bill Finger masked heavyweight boxer who'd made his four-color debut back in *Sensation Comics* #1 (Jan. 1942), was given the Mike Friedrich/Neal Adams treatment in 1968's *The Spectre* #3. Thanks to Art Lortie. [TM & © DC Comics.]

"The Case Of The Comicbook Syndicate"

(Above:) Irv Novick's dramatic cover for *Detective Comics* #387 (May 1969—the 30th anniversary of Batman's debut) led into Mike Friedrich's rewrite of the first Batman caper under a different title (with art by Bob Brown & Joe Giella) based on the 1939 story by Bob Kane (artist) and Bill Finger (writer) from *Detective Comics* #27 (May '39). Thanks to Bob Bailey. [TM & © DC Comics.]

That summer of 1969, between my sophomore and junior year, was when I wrote my first story for Marvel. It was a Western story of some sort [NOTE: *Western Gunfighters* #1, Aug 1970. —RA]. By the end of that summer was when I started receiving my first regular assignments.

By my fourth year of college I was regularly writing *Justice League of America* [from #86, Dec. 1970, though #99, June 1972], as well as the back-up "Robin" stories appearing in *Batman*.

ARNDT: You brought back Wildcat and *The Phantom Stranger* to the DC stable. Did you bring back Solomon Grundy in *Justice League*, or had he already been returned earlier?

FRIEDRICH: He had come back in an earlier Golden Age team-up that Gardner Fox wrote and Murphy Anderson drew. That was two or three years before my story.

ARNDT: I noticed that, when they brought him back, he looked a good deal stouter than he'd appeared in the 1940s. Then, he was simply a dead-white zombie with incredible strength, but when he came back he looked a bit more like a dead-white Hulk...

FRIEDRICH: That bulking up was, I believe, done by Murphy Anderson. He was the artist to draw his return and so he would have done the new design.

ARNDT: There was a story that I really remember vividly that was done for Joe Orlando's *House of Mystery* called "His Name Is Kane!" It was a mystery/horror story that managed to parody some of the DC staff as well. They were in *Cain's House of Mystery* and were actively involved in the story. Was that in your original story, or did Gil take that on himself to put the editorial staff and himself in the story?

FRIEDRICH: That was editor Joe Orlando's idea. I was a willing victim of it is, I guess, the way to put it. Joe wanted to make fun of

The Forgotten Super-Heroes Of 1944-45

The Untold Story Of RURAL HOME & Other True Crimes

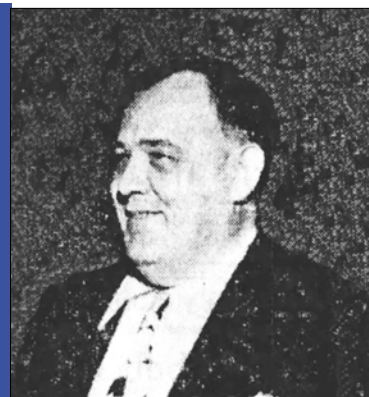
by Mark Carlson-Ghost



Lindsay L. Baird

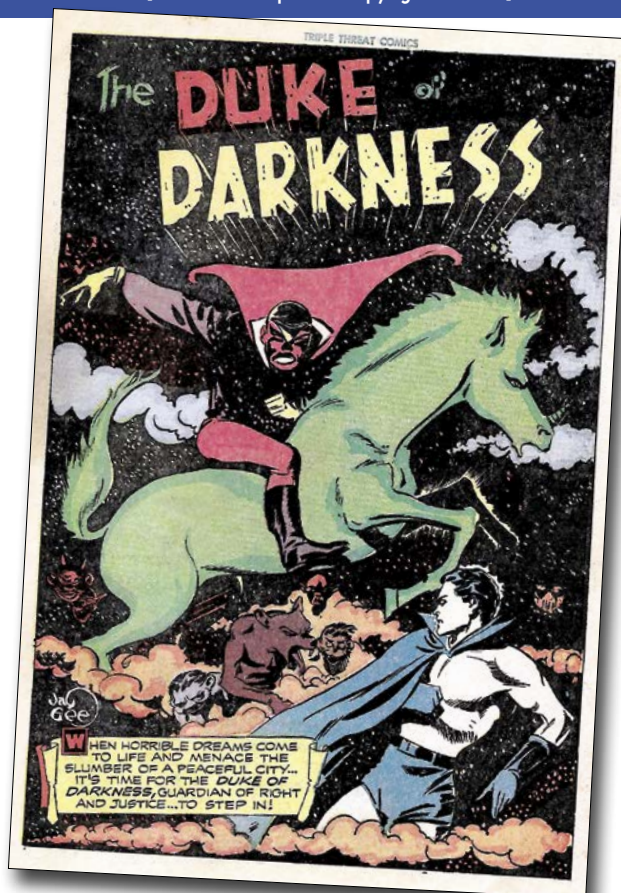
The legally and ethically challenged publisher of Rural Home Comics (and probably a behind-the-scenes presence in several other WWII-era comics publishers as well, if the truth be known)—plus artwork featuring three memorable, yet somehow almost totally *unremembered*, super-heroes of the year 1944 and, at least in terms of cover dates, early '45. Baird photo courtesy of David Saunders. (Clockwise:)

Maureen Marine attacks a Hitlerian octopus on the cover of *Blue Circle Comics* #3 (Sept. '44); art possibly by Harold Delay.



The Duke of Darkness in a dramatic splash by underrated artist John Giunta, from *Triple Threat Comics* #1-and-only (Winter 1945). (The Duke's the one at bottom, facing a Nightmare-ish foe, Mr. Slumber.)

El Kuraan, on the splash of his introductory story in *Red Circle Comics* #3 (March 1945). There were apparently just two tales of this early Muslim comicbook hero. Artist and writer unknown. Courtesy of the Comic Book Plus website. All comic art accompanying this article, unless otherwise indicated, was provided by author Mark Carlson-Ghost. [TM & © the respective copyright holders.]



Supply and demand. That's the simplest explanation for the explosion, back in 1944, of short-lived super-hero features—and the equally short-lived companies that published them. Almost all of the heroes have names only the most diligent students of comicbook history will recall: Maureen Marine, The Duke of Darkness, and El Kuraan, to name but a few. They were a quixotic bunch, and only a few of them deserved a longer shelf life on the newsstands than what they got. But what they lacked in pedigree, the character concepts often made up for in sheer inventiveness.

However, equally interesting is the story *behind* these heroes, the men (and at least a few women) responsible for the raft of new publishing ventures in the closing years of World War II. Rural Home, Spotlight, William H. Wise: the list is long. And there were more than a few shady real-life characters in the narrative about to unfold.

The most important thing to understand about this brief period in comicbook history is that stringent paper quotas were set by the U.S. federal government early in 1943. But the demand for comicbooks remained the same. In an era of world war, if anything, the desire for escapist fantasies increased. So do the math. Reduced product on the newsstands, and the same or increased demand, meant that just about everything on sale sold out.

In short, there were huge profits to be made by anyone able to create product. And not everyone was particularly scrupulous about honoring a law on paper use that, on the face of it, seemed very challenging to enforce.

The backstory of this influx of offbeat, short-lived heroes (and publishers) is largely untold. Established stars like Superman and Captain America would just have to make room. The Green Turtle, Purple Tigress, and a raft of often ill-conceived wannabes were on their way.

The L-241 Paper Limitation Order

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, what unfolded during the subsequent months prompted regulations limiting the amount of paper used in publishing. For one thing, the supply of available pulp paper was down, due to fewer (undrafted) men to cut down the trees and fewer (rubber) tires for the trucks that were needed to transport that lumber for processing. At the same time the wartime need for that paper dramatically increased.

"Paper is a war weapon," Batman somberly explained in 1944 in a one-page public service announcement in *Detective Comics* #86. "It's used to make countless military items like parachute and bomb bands, containers for army rations and for shells, war maps and naval charts and many other battle necessities."

True enough, but it became apparent to the federal government that the biggest publishers of books, magazines, and newspapers were able to buy up most of the remaining available pulp for paper. This left smaller publishers—or less well-heeled larger ones—out in the cold.

As such, the government instituted paper conservation measures on January 1st, 1943. Policies allotted companies new quantities of paper based on their volume of consumption during the base rate year of 1941. Each existing publisher could utilize only a notably smaller percentage of paper than they'd used in that year. There were also separate regulations for publishers of newspapers, magazines, and books. They were covered under Limitation Orders L-240, L-244, and L-245, respectively.



The Butler Did It!

Jerry Robinson, then an art "ghost" for Batman co-creator Bob Kane, drew this DC public service announcement featuring Bruce Wayne's butler Alfred and a couple of masked employers. [TM & © DC Comics.]

An important caveat was that there was a small-publisher exemption, spelled out in Limitation Order L-241, which addressed the regulation of commercial printers. As long as a small publisher notified the War Production Board afterwards, and didn't use more paper than allowed, they would not be considered in violation of the legal limit. Any excess usage would need to be made up by the printer who allowed it.

For comicbook publishers finding themselves under paper use restrictions for the first time, the impact on their schedules was almost immediate. The first sign of modified schedules appeared in comicbooks cover dated March 1943, which makes sense if you remember that the dates on comicbooks were usually two or three months ahead of the actual calendar. Some under-selling titles were canceled on the spot, and some others were reduced from monthly to bimonthly status. As restrictions grew tighter, the total number of pages in most comicbooks was reduced from 64 (not counting covers) to 56 or even 48.

Not everyone, however, was content to play by these new rules. As will be seen, certain packagers tried to find ways around these limits, sometimes seeking a surrogate publisher who had not used his entire allotment and who was willing to use it on the packager's behalf. This could be legal, but only if the surrogate publisher notified the WPB in triplicate within one month of the transaction.

A second strategy was to seek out individuals who were not actually publishers but who were willing to put their name and

address in the indicia of a one-shot comicbook. In this way, the individual technically acted as a small publisher as long as he stayed within certain limits. But sometimes the same packager and de facto publisher might be behind a half-dozen or more such one-shots, clearly violating the spirit of the law. Such cooperative activity could be seen as a conspiracy to defraud the government.

A third strategy was simply to obscure one's publishing efforts, ignore the governmental restrictions, and hope not to get caught.

A final strategy has not been mentioned before in comicbook histories, at least to my knowledge. That was to use a book or newspaper publisher's paper allotment for printing comicbooks. So far as this author can tell, such an approach would also have been illegal. However, given that some book publishers also dabbled in comicbooks, it was likely hard to track.

The history that follows centers on the comics of Rural Home Publishing Company, a brash new player in the already crowded comicbook market of 1944. In my humble opinion, Rural Home used more creative strategies to circumvent the new regulations than any other existing company. The article will also shine a light on other publishers who ran afoul of the new laws. But to understand the unique strategy of Rural Home as a comicbook enterprise, we must also look at the comic art shops who supplied pre-packaged material for them.

Lloyd Jacquet's Forgotten Heroes

Lloyd Jacquet charged a lower page rate for the material produced by his comic art shop (Funnies, Inc.) than did most of his competitors. Its glory days of producing Carl Burgos' "Human Torch" and Bill Everett's "Sub-Mariner" for Martin Goodman's Timely Comics were well behind it now, although Funnies still produced stories featuring those characters for Timely Comics, albeit now with lesser talents. But Jacquet had no difficulty in

finding work for his studio, often with smaller companies that couldn't afford to pay for a more expensive product.

Consolidated Magazines was one such company, owned and operated by Joseph A. Rubinstein. Consolidated Magazine's two titles, *Key Comics* and *Lucky Comics*, both debuted in issues cover-dated January 1944. They were distributed by FDC, Fawcett's distribution arm, and were described as monthlies. By the second issue, however, a skittish Rubenstein noted in a text page that his comicbooks were "now published quarterly due to War Production Board limitations on use of paper." Someone must have alerted Rubenstein of the legal problems that would have resulted from a monthly schedule.

Jeffrey Quick, *Key Comics*' number-one hero, proudly declared, "Since I am the possessor of the Key, I have no need for masks, costumes, or superhuman powers!" In the first two issues, Quick carried the magical Key on the end of a rope as a sort of bolo. The Key also served as a signal of danger, glowing whenever evil was near. With issue #3, Quick became merely a collector of keys, telling the story behind a different one each issue.

Key's other borderline super-hero was Gale Leary, the Will o' the Wisp. When Gale was just a baby, her mother was murdered and the killers placed a willow branch in her small hands to keep her from crying. As an adult, Gale hunted down her mother's killers, sans any special costume, but with the aid of that willow branch, which granted her magical powers. These powers seemed limited to glowing in the dark and making Gale impervious to attack, for reasons never clearly explained.

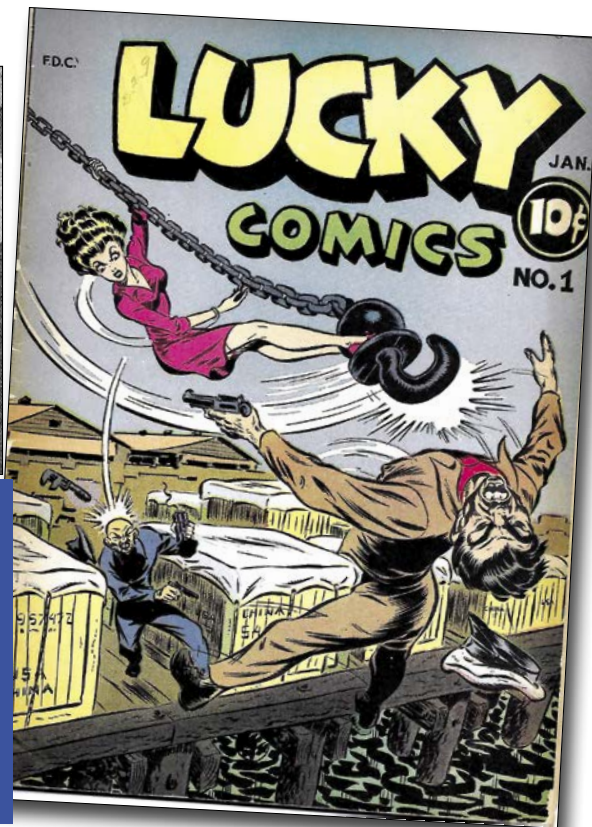
Consolidated's second title, *Lucky Comics*, showcased Lucky Starr, a run-of-the-mill photographer and adventure feature. That was pretty much it. Both of Consolidated's titles ran only five issues, scattered over a two-year period. Later issues listed Jacquet as a co-owner.

That same year, the Jacquet Studio began work for *Camera*



Lloyd Jacquet

The legendary founder of Funnies, Inc.—bookended by the covers his comics shop produced for *Key Comics* #1 (Jan. 1944; art by Walter T. Johnson) and *Lucky Comics* #1 (Jan. '44; cover artist uncertain). The former spotlights Gale Leary, a.k.a. the Will o' the Wisp. [© the respective copyright holders.]





More For '44

Two of Jacquet's other 1944 forays into producing comics for small publishers were *Camera Comics* for U.S. Camera and *Yellowjacket Comics* for Levy & Santangelo, the future proprietors of Charlton Comics. Linda Lens strikes an action pose on the cover of *Camera* #3 (Dec. 1944), courtesy of an unknown artist—while George Gregg drew the insect-herding hero on that of *Yellowjacket Comics* #2 (Oct. '44). [© the respective copyright holders.]

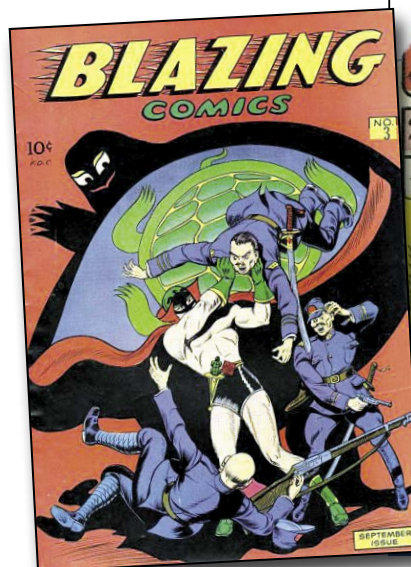
Comics (featuring the spunky news photographer Linda Lens) and Edward Levy and John Santangelo's *Yellowjacket Comics*. Secretly detective-story writer and amateur beekeeper Vince Harley, Yellowjacket could summon his namesakes with the stirring cry of "Bees to me!" His costume was a striking combination of yellow and black.

The other super-hero in *Yellowjacket Comics* was Diana the Huntress. The heroic goddess was drawn in a style reminiscent of H.G. Peter's Wonder Woman, after whom she was clearly patterned. *Yellowjacket* also featured the guerilla efforts of Juan Manito, the Filipino Kid, against the Japanese who occupied his homeland. Levy and Santangelo's fledgling effort would blossom into the much-loved publishing underdog, Charlton Comics.

When a fellow named Lindsay Baird approached Jacquet to produce comicbook content for the new enterprise he and several associates were starting up, it must have seemed like business as usual for the comic shop veteran. It soon became far more complicated than that.

The Unsung Heroes Of Rewl Publications

Lindsay Baird and his Rewl Publications launched their comicbook line in June of 1944 with two titles, *Blazing Comics* and *Blue Circle Comics*. Both magazines were produced by the Jacquet shop and featured the rather bland artwork that all too often came with it. Editorial offices were listed at 500 Fifth Avenue in New York City, and the comicbooks were again distributed by Fawcett

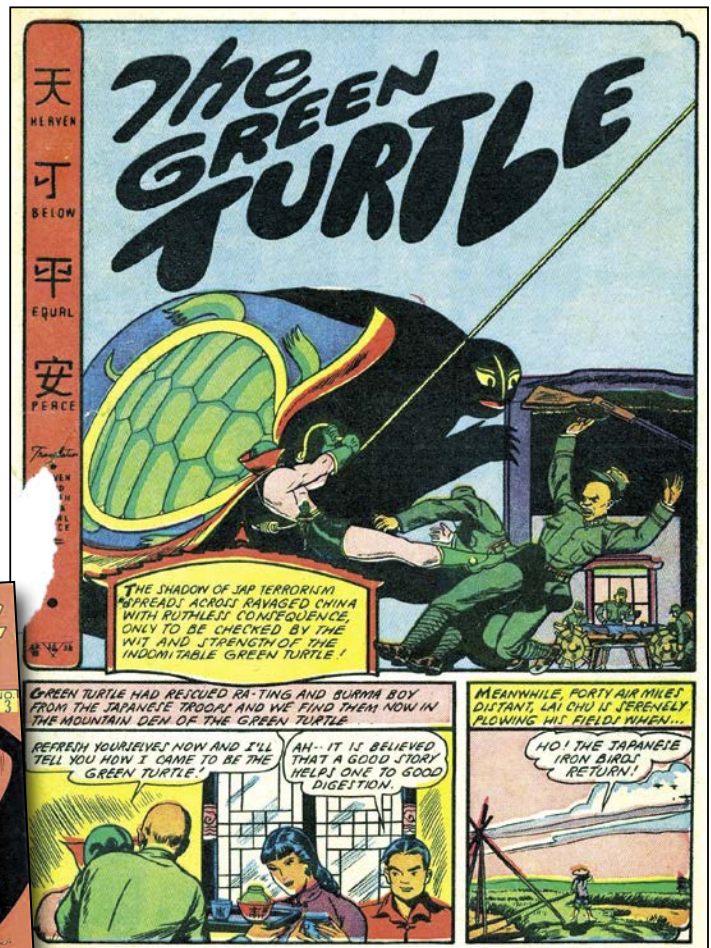


Comics' distributing arm, FDC. The designation of Rural Home as publisher was not yet present.

Blazing Comics was headlined by "The Green Turtle," whose partially masked face was always obscured or turned away from the reader, perhaps to create an air of mystery. Another more interesting possibility was that, by not showing the hero's face, an Asian-American artist named Chu Hing could make it ambiguous as to whether the hero was white or Asian. While aiding the Chinese against the Japanese invaders, the Turtle sported a distinctive green cape that gave the appearance of a turtle's back. A large black shadow of a facially expressive turtle followed behind the hero wherever he went. It was all engagingly strange. And here, at least, "good" Asians were portrayed alongside evil ones. That said, the Chinese need for a white savior, if that *was* The Green Turtle's ethnicity, was unfortunate.

The *Blazing* line-up also included "Redhawk" (a Native American aviator), "The Black Buccaneer" (a historical swashbuckler who was white, despite his name), and "Jun-gal," the racially insensitive story of a white female Tarzan-type grown strong with the aid of her black "Mammy." It was an odd mix, to say the least.

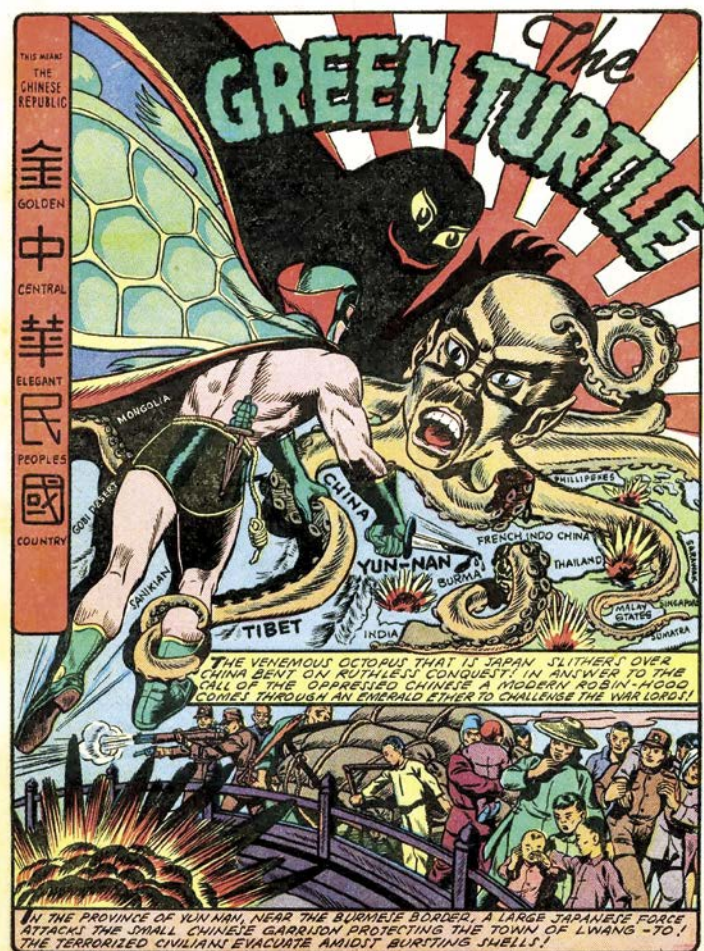
Blue Circle Comics, for its part, rotated its cover honors between its five main features, which included a hero by the same name.



Nippings For The Boys From Nippon

Chu Hing's "Green Turtle" splash page from Rural Home's *Blazing Comics* #2 (July 1944)... and his cover for #3 (Sept. 1944). Courtesy of Alex Jay and the Grand Comics Database, respectively.

[© the respective copyright holders.]



It's The Voice Of The Turtle, Dove!

Both on the cover and in the "Green Turtle" lead story of Rewl Publications' *Blazing Comics* #1 (June 1944), the super-hero's face—yes, even his masked face—was never shown, for reasons that remain a matter of speculation to this day. The art is by Chu Hing, who may or may not have also written scripts for the series. Thanks to Alex Jay for both art and photos in this grouping. Incidentally, Alex has written an article on Chu Hing that will appear in an upcoming issue of *Alter Ego*—you won't wanna miss it! [© the respective copyright holders.]

The Blue Circle led a group of pardoned criminals who used their intimate knowledge of criminal technique to help stamp out crime. They would all sit around a circular table after being summoned by a slip of paper with a time and—naturally—a blue circle.

The comicbook also featured Queen Maureen Marine, the human monarch of the weird fish-like inhabitants of Atlantis. Maureen was granted the power to breathe underwater by Father Neptune after the boat she was on was destroyed by the Nazis. The series was derivative of other more popular heroes in just about every way imaginable. Other series starred Steel Fist (a costumed hero with a steel fist), Toreador (an American bullfighter), and Driftwood Davey, a handsome, crime-fighting itinerant nursing a perpetual five-o'clock shadow.

The third issues of both titles, each cover-dated September 1944, were the last for several months. Something clearly happened to make Baird skittish about continuing to publish *Blue Circle* and *Blazing*. Had the federal government begun to sniff around? Baird, as we'll soon learn, had no legitimate paper allotment. But any serious legal consequences were still several months away. Had he received a warning without immediate consequences? Subsequent events would reveal that he was already headed for trouble. Whatever the precise details, Baird's publishing strategy took an immediate and decidedly different direction.

A new comicbook titled *Red Band Comics*, also distributed by Fawcett, appeared in November 1944. It was ostensibly published by a company called Publicaciones Recreativas, operating out of Mexico City. But the features of *Red Band* were copyrighted by a group called Enwil Associates, no address provided. The company names of Rewl and Enwil have several letters in common, and forthcoming events clearly suggest a common publisher or publishers. The timing, the common distributor (FDC), and subsequent evidence will all suggest that Lindsay Baird was behind this south-of-the-border enterprise. It certainly appeared to be an effort to circumvent American paper restrictions.

With artwork exclusively provided by the Bernard Bailly Studio, *Red Band Comics* starred The Bogeyman, a mustachioed Spirit lookalike who still managed to strike fear in the hearts of crooks. Also featured was a farcical super-hero named Captain Milksop. His story told the adventures of nerdish Mortimer X,



Chu Fook Hing

A 1919 photo—taken a quarter of a century before the Asian-American artist (he was born in Hawaii of immigrant parents from China) drew "The Green Turtle."



HEY, CHECK OUT THE MEN IN THE SQUAD ROOM BELOW. THE YEAR IS 1965, AND THE GUY UP FRONT (ON THE PIC'S RIGHT) IS PETE A. (PAM) MORISI, THE *COMICBOOK COP*! HE DREW SOME *ACTUAL* COMICBOOK COPS THE PREVIOUS DECADE FOR MARVEL'S *CRIME EXPOSED*, BUT BACK THEN, BECOMING ONE WAS JUST A DISTANT *DREAM*. HOWEVER, SOMETIMES DREAMS DO COME TRUE -- THOUGH NOT ALWAYS THE WAY WE EXPECT. LET'S CUT TO THE LATE '60S AS WE CONTINUE TO EXPLORE PETE'S FASCINATING *DOUBLE* LIFE IN ...

THE PAM PAPERS (PART 6)



The Boys in Blue from *Dynamite* #3 (Sept. 1953). Pete, seen at bottom right in photo, joined the New York City police force in 1956. [© the respective copyright holders.]

The PAM Papers – Part 6

by Michael T. Gilbert

Last episode we published letters from Pete to his correspondent and friend Glen D. Johnson, describing the rise and fall at Charlton of his beloved character Peter Cannon...

Thunderbolt! Charlton killed its entire super-hero line shortly afterward, but Pete's editor, Sal Gentile, kept Morisi busy on other projects. After Charlton's "action hero" line died, PAM—unsuccessfully—tried to buy the rights to T-Bolt.

Getting his offer rejected was disappointing. But something else was even worse...

(8/12/68)

Dear Glen—

Here's some fast info that makes me want to scream!

Just spoke to Sal regarding originals, and he says that he has orders not to give anything back, but to destroy the art after a certain time period. So all my stuff eventually winds up in a "shredding" machine.

That's not the main reason for my writing "out of sequence"—here's the screaming news—Charlton will put out the King Features titles in the future. *Flash Gordon*, *The Phantom*, *Jungle Jim*, and *Beetle Bailey*. Great, huh? Except that "due to the value of my work in westerns, and deadline considerations" I'm out of the King Features titles that'll feature original art for:

Flash Gordon—Boyette

Jungle Jim—Boyette

The Phantom—Aparo

Beetle Bailey—Who cares?

I screamed, yelled pleaded, asked and screamed again—but no deal—"We need you to keep doing what you're doing."

Grrrrroowwrrr!

See ya, Pete

MTG: DC was notorious for destroying original art, but Charlton was nearly as bad. The official reason for doing so was fear that the black-&-white art could be used to illegally print comics overseas without paying the companies—a questionable reason at best. However, most cartoonists didn't care, since the art wasn't considered particularly commercial until the 1970s. But a few, like Pete, slaved over their art and valued it. His editors did manage to slip him a handful of pages over the years.

Making things worse, Pete had always begged his editors to assign him super-hero stories, but they had other ideas. As we can see from his "Phantom" art on this page, Morisi'd have been ideal for that series.

(6/15/69?)

Dear Glen—

Thanks for letting me know that my *Flash Gordon* job came out—I haven't checked the stands in a few weeks—but they were sold out anyway. So I called Sal and he said he'd mail me a copy.

The verbal agreement I have with Sal is the same one I've always had, but lately I've wanted "out" of one of the westerns I do. We've been kicking it around, and Sal's been offering me Romance and/or Hot Rods, which I've refused. So I've settled for Montana, Loco, and fillers.

That's it, Pete



A Comic Fandom Archive

Though Pete was a big fan of the genre, Thunderbolt was the only (non-Western or sci-fi) costumed comicbook hero "PAM" ever drew professionally. However, this sample page, published in *Charlton Bullseye* #5 (1976), demonstrates that he'd have been an ideal choice for Charlton's version of Lee Falk's *Phantom*. This sample was likely drawn in the late '60s, and colored by Michael T. in 2018. One of Pete's letters referred to a Phantom drawing he did for a Charlton display at a NY convention. Could this have been it? [TM & © King Features Syndicate, Inc.]

MTG: The *Flash Gordon* story Pete referred to wasn't the title character, but a sci-fi backup story in issue #16 (Oct 1969).

(9/1/68)

Dear Glen—

That "Savage" by Kane is probably his best stuff to date—but his writing falls into traps (over-description), like my writing did on Dynamite.

Re: The King Features titles—for a while I honestly thought of quitting Charlton and going over to DC or Marvel—but the idea of being "late with Giordano deadlines" changed my mind. I can't do that to him again. As for Marvel... I'm just not in the mood to clash with Stan again. So I'll swallow my pride and vanity and stay where I am.

Guess that's it.

See ya, Pete

P.C. HAMERLINCK'S

FCA

Fawcett Collectors of America

#223
May 2020

MR. TAWNY'S SHADOW:

*The Day Otto Binder
Met Walter B. Gibson!*



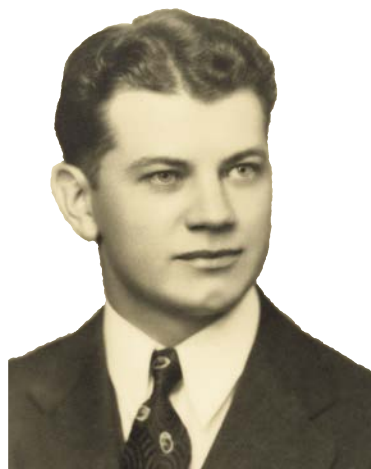
Art by Carl Shinyama, creator of "Windurfer" [ponocomics.com].
Shazam hero & Mr. Tawny Tawny TM & © DC Comics.

Mr. Tawny's Shadow

The Day Otto Binder Met Walter B. Gibson

by Brian Cremins

[Edited by P.C. Hamerlinck]



Otto O. Binder

"Captain Marvel Saves the King," for *Captain Marvel Adventures* #9 (April 1942), marked his first four-color foray with the World's Mightiest Mortal. Earlier he had done a "CM" prose story, "Return of the Scorpion," for Fawcett's 1941 Big Little Book-alike *Captain Marvel Dime Action Book*. Artist unknown. [Shazam hero & Billy Batson TM & © DC Comics.]



Walter B. Gibson

The creator of the pulp version of The Shadow, in a photo circa the mid-1930s. The cover shown is that of Street & Smith's *The Shadow*, Vol. 39, No. 3, Oct. 1941. Art by Charles Rozen. Thanks for the artist ID to Anthony Tollin, current editor/publisher of a stunning run of reprints of the original *Shadow* magazines; look 'em up online! [TM & © Advanced Magazines, d.b.a. Condé Nast.]



I'm not sure that a Midwesterner can fully appreciate The Shadow and what he means to those of us who grew up in New England. Then again, I'm not certain that many readers under the age of 45 or 50 even remember the character, unless they're fond of the 1994 film with Alec Baldwin and Penelope Ann Miller, a movie that, like Warren Beatty and Madonna's ill-fated *Dick Tracy* (1990), failed to capture the public's imagination the way that Tim

Burton's *Batman* had in 1989. The Shadow, the character shaped by magician and pulp novelist Walter B. Gibson (1897-1985), belongs in the same disembodied landscape as William Austin's Peter Rugg the Missing Man or with the many haunted protagonists in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories. More a presence than a body, more an idea than a fully formed hero, The Shadow, with his eerie laugh and his blood-red girasol ring, lives about as far from Billy

Batson and the old wizard Shazam as you can imagine.

Although their sensibilities were radically different, Otto Binder admired Gibson; and, in a letter to his Chicago friend Cliff Kornoelje written in the fall of 1942, Mr. Tawny's co-creator describes a conversation he'd had in New York with one of the most prolific pulp writers of the 1930s. That Binder ends the letter with a reference to Hoagy Carmichael, another romantic Midwesterner like himself, speaks not only to his sensibility as a science-fiction and comicbook writer, but also to his nostalgic affection for music, the pulps, and for comics themselves. The Shadow, of course, lurks mysteriously in these spaces, too, appearing briefly before he—like Holmes' nemesis Prof. Moriarty or Wells' Invisible Man—disappears from view, leaving little behind that might betray his presence.

Over the last few years, Doug Ellis, one of the organizers for the annual Windy City Pulp and Paper convention held in Lombard, Illinois, has shared with me and with other friends and pulp-fiction colleagues a selection of Binder and Kornoelje's letters from the 1940s. The one I keep returning to is from September 22, 1942, near the start of Binder's career as the chief writer for *Captain Marvel Adventures*. Filled with references not only to Gibson and Carmichael but also to broken typewriters, *Amazing Stories*, and the looming threat of World War II, this letter invites us to reflect on how The Shadow and Captain Marvel have shaped American literature.

After reading this letter again, I also began to think more about the literary impact of Binder's work with C.C. Beck. While Binder's influence on popular culture remains as pervasive as ever—from the CW network series *Supergirl* to Mr. Mind's cameo in David F. Sandberg's 2019 *Shazam!* film—he remains, like The Shadow, a largely unseen though vital presence. As he did in other pieces he wrote over the course of his career, Binder, in this letter to his friend, imagines what lies ahead for pulp fiction and for comicbooks. "How do you feel about the comics?" he asks Kornoelje. "Do they entrance you at all? Disgust you? Leave you neutral?" Binder follows these questions with details on the encounter with Gibson, who, it seems, also saw great potential in

comicbooks. For all their similarities—their professionalism, their prolific imaginations, their grand contributions to some of the most significant American heroes of the last century—it's difficult to imagine two writers with such different philosophies. What did they have to say to each other?

Here's what Binder told his artist brother Jack, whose Smith as well as for Fawcett:

The man who writes The now wants to write comic magician on the side. Draw then for a confab. Believe of them. So do I. Get into Captain Marvel regularly today.

In a reminiscence published in the new issue of *Shadow Comics* hit new after Billy Batson's debut in *Wonder Woman* essay in the *Scrapbook*, the title & Smith magazines, which was chosen as the leader became "treatment" (128). Having written his first appearance in his own pulp, "[turning] out six- to eight-page from such [*Shadow*] novels as *Lingo*." Gibson also praises the noting that in order "[t]o speed was turned over to a highly e Binder, while free-lance artist assignments" (128). Jack is even featured in Street & Smith's *How to Draw for the Comics*, which includes profiles on other important artists such as *Supersnipe's* George Marcoux.

At the close of this essay, Gibson remarks on the "misinformed comic historians" who had dismissed "the Shadow scripts as a 'shop job' without carrying their research further." Like Binder,

Gibson took a great pride in his work, and points out that the stories that appeared in *Shadow Comics*, far from being simplistic adaptations of adventures that had appeared in the magazine, "were specially designed from start to finish, in contrast to the other stories appearing in those books" (Gibson 128). These comicbooks, like the pulps that had

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ALTER EGO #164
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The Shadow's Nose!

(Far left:) Neal Slavin and Robert Anthony, Inc.'s cover for Walter B. Gibson's *The Shadow Scrapbook*, 1979.

(Near left:) Debuting shortly after *Whiz Comics* #2 was Street & Smith's *Shadow Comics* #1 (Jan. 1940); cover art by George Rozen. [The Shadow TM & © Advanced Magazines, d.b.a. Condé Nast.]