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STAN LEE AND
OTHERS REVEAL
THE SECRET
ORIGINS OF
MARVEL!

RARE JACK
KIRBY ART
AND INFO!

I PREFER THE INTERVIEW
WITH AL SULMAN--
"PERSONAL ASSOCIATE
OF STAN LEE"!

MAKE MINE
MARVEL!



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P.C. Hamerlinck presents the memories of two Fawcett stalwarts: Marc Swayze & Roy Ald.

On Our Cover: *Our heartfelt thanks to Ron Frenz for re-rendering the original Jack Kirby cover of 1961’s Fantastic Four #1, as it might have looked if the quartet had been sporting the costumes they didn’t actually don until the third issue—while, to show how it could’ve looked if it had been inked by Joe Sinnott, who is all but universally acclaimed as the best F.E. inker ever, we just had to talk Joltin’ Joe himself into doing it! We truly appreciate their Herculean effort—and Joe, in particular, is still bothered by that detached shoulder rotor muscle of a couple of years ago. [Fantastic Four TM & © 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]*

Above: *While a number of fine comics artists have drawn The Silver Surfer over the years, both in a mag of his own and elsewhere, the gleaming guardian of the spaceways will forever be identified with Jack Kirby, who came up with the hero for Fantastic Four #48 (March 1966) just so worlds-gulping Galactus would have someone to talk to! This dynamic drawing, penciled and possibly inked by Kirby, was utilized as the cover figure on the program book of Phil Seuling’s 1975 New York Comic Art Convention. Thanks to John Benson. [Silver Surfer TM & © 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]*



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FIRST PRINTING.

STAN LEE's Amazing Marvel Interview!

Two Extraordinary 2005 Audio Sessions With The Man Who Spearheaded Marvel Comics

Additional Text by Roy Thomas • Interview Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

A/E EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: To celebrate the 50th anniversary of *The Fantastic Four #1*, which went on sale circa July/August of 1961 and thereby set in motion what Stan Lee would later tout as "The Marvel Age of Comics," I'm honored to be able to present in print for the first time ever what is probably the longest interview ever given by Stan, the writer/editor who started it all.

So how did I stumble upon this treasure trove?

Sometime in early 2005 I received a phone call from a young man named Conor Risch, an editor for a Seattle-area editorial book-packaging company with the offbeat, uncapitalized, and exclamation-pointed name of *becker&mayer!* They were about to put together a book centered around my old boss and mentor Stan Lee (with whom I was still working, actually, on the daily-and-Sunday Spider-Man newspaper comic strip). It was to be titled Stan Lee's Amazing Marvel Universe, and would be issued by Sterling Publishing Co., Inc.

Becker&mayer!'s personnel had sold Sterling on a concept for an unusual type of book. It would elaborate upon a number of key moments in Stan's career as writer and editor at Marvel. (But—50 moments? 100? The precise number was still up in the air.) It would combine straight text—which Stan had kindly suggested I might be the right person to provide—with accompanying audio tracks to be narrated by Stan himself. Interspersed throughout the 200-page tome would be a series of so-called illustrated "icons." Each time the reader came to one of these icons at a particular spot in the text, he needed only to press the "PLAY" button on the digital audio player (a 2½" x 11" x ¾" mostly-plastic device physically attached to the book), and he/she would hear Stan's voice, relating a sentence or three that would augment the information on that particular page



Digital Doings

Photo taken on Sept. 5, 2005, at the conclusion of the second recording session held for the book pictured below. From left to right: editor/questioner Jenna Land Free... Marvel fountainhead Stan Lee... longtime Marvel writer & editor Roy Thomas... and audio session director Leigh Gilbert. With thanks to Jenna.

and subject. The project sounded like a fascinating experiment, and I was overjoyed to be involved.

Almost immediately, however, Conor Risch left *becker&mayer!*, and I was handed over into the consummate care of his colleague Jenna Land Free, who made all subsequent editorial and production decisions on the book (with feedback from her *be&m* bosses and Sterling, of course). At some point she and I settled on 50 as being the maximum number of "moments" we could handle well in 200 pages, so we began culling an earlier list of around 100 down to half that number. (The finished book would appear in 2006, with image research for *becker&mayer!* credited to Shayna Ian, design to Todd Bates, audio sound editing—an unusual credit in a book—to Kate Hall, and custom audio engineering—ditto—to Steve Beck. My main contacts via phone and e-mail in 2005, while I wrote the text, were Jenna, Shayna, and Todd.)

But the contents of the book weren't all handled "long distance."



The cover of *Stan Lee's Amazing Marvel Universe* (Sterling Publishing, 2006), with its John Romita art and attached "digital audio player." Photo by Jon B. Cooke. [Art ©2001 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

In August, with the writing well under way but with the list not yet totally pared down to the "final 50," Jenna phoned to ask if I could fly from South Carolina to Los Angeles (where Stan has lived for the past three decades) to take part in the first of probably two recording sessions to be done with Stan for the book. Nice as it would be to see Stan again, I was less than eager to hop a plane for an overnight stay in L.A. But Jenna felt I might be useful in jogging Stan's memory concerning some bit of Marvel arcana about which, due to my long-standing interest in comics history, I might remember more than he did—and frankly, I figured she was probably right. So, "California, here I come!"

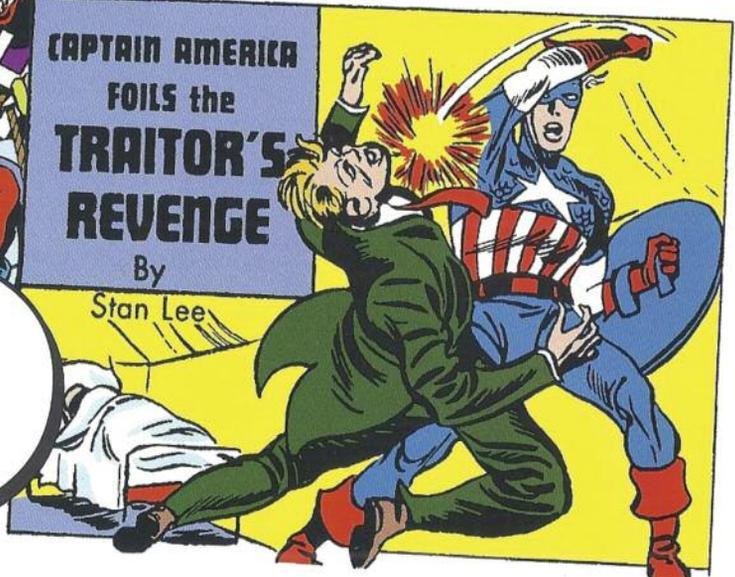
The recording studio, nestled somewhere in the urban sprawl that is the Los Angeles Basin, was a tidy little building which contained a

The RED SKULL Planned
a Horrible Death for BUCKY
and BETTY -unless....



Icon Do It!
The first of the book's "icons," in a cartouche flanked by images of Simon & Kirby's cover for *Captain America Comics* #3 (May 1941) and of the Kirby-penciled illo that accompanied Stan's text story in #3, the latter's first published comics work. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

"THERE I WAS IN A
COMIC BOOK WITH MY
NAME ON IT."



small sound booth set off by a glass window for the recorder, while the rest of us would sit or stand in a larger room, 10 to 20 feet from where Stan would sit and answer questions relayed to him electronically. In addition to a recording engineer (the "Steve Beck" credited in the book?), Jenna had hired an "audio session director" named Leigh Gilbert to advise her on various vocal aspects of the sessions. The three of them would be physically closest to Stan (though not that close), while I was free to sit or stand a bit behind them and would be called on only if and when necessary. Which was fine by me. In fact, I prayed that I would prove so superfluous to the proceedings that Jenna would feel no need to have me present for the second session, if one were needed.

The Q&A session was designed so that Stan could state—and re-state, if necessary, to achieve just the wording mutually desired—his answers to questions posed by Jenna (which had been partly worked out with Yours Truly). From a response that might have lasted just a few seconds or a couple of minutes, Jenna and her crew would later excerpt the "sound bite" they felt would work best at that point in the book. We were all aware from the start that, out of several hours of recording, only a half-hour to 45 minutes could be utilized by the "audio-book." So some points we covered would definitely not make the cut, and most would do so only in truncated form.

Jenna, of course, wasn't out to elicit startling new revelations from Stan, let alone engage in any "gotcha" moments; what she, b&m, and Sterling were after was concise summaries of events and motivations, mixed with colorful anecdotes, all of which would make the reader/listener feel that Stan was filling him/her in personally, virtually face-to-face, on the colorful

history of Marvel Comics. Stan would basically be asked, once again, some of questions he'd answered most often... plus, hopefully, a few that were new to him. Under Jenna's gentle prodding, there were a few disclosures which even I didn't recall have heard from Stan before.

There would also be, as it turned out, a fair amount of back-and-forth banter between Jenna and Stan—with my humble self becoming involved from time to time (through exchanges with Jenna, or occasionally directly with Stan) in order to clarify a question or to suggest a pertinent fact that Stan might consider adding in a rephrasing of his answer. With such an exhausting pace and a full schedule, it's not surprising that occasionally Stan misremembered a fact or two—who wouldn't?—but in the end his answers are all his own, made after he had both searched his own memory and received such verbal reminders as Jenna or I could give him, along with his occasionally perusing pages from the original comics. All in all, it was a formidable, once-in-a-lifetime feat, and I'm proud to have been on hand to help, even a little bit.

At any rate: Stan arrived on his own, having driven to the studio, looking as dapper and cheerful as ever. We exchanged a few pleasantries, though Stan was eager from the outset to find out how long the session would last. Unfortunately, Jenna could only tell him: "An hour or so." Stan, ever the trooper, took his place on the chair in the sound booth before a microphone, while Jenna, Leigh, and the recording engineer took their stations in the outer room—and I sat and/or paced behind them. Most of the time, from my angle, I couldn't even see Stan, though we could all hear his electronically-amplified voice. He was wearing headphones in order to hear Jenna's questions.

And so, after a few sound checks, it began. Jenna's specific questions (and my own verbal suggestions) were not recorded—only Stan's answers were—but the former are generally easy to reconstruct from a combination of memory and simple deduction....

SESSION I (August 2005)

First, Jenna asks Stan a double question about Spider-Man's powers, and about working with artist/co-creator Steve Ditko.

Hmm... about his powers?... Well, considering that his name was Spider-Man, it would have been silly to give him any powers other than the spider powers, I think. It seems to me, since we called him Spider-Man, like any good spider, he should be able to crawl on walls, he should be able to spin a web. That was just very natural. Perhaps the cleverest part of it was thinking that he should have the proportionate strength of a spider, which of course means, if a spider were the size of a man, how strong would he be? And I always loved that phrase, "the proportionate strength of a spider."

Working with Steve Ditko was an absolute joy. He was fast. He was good. He was inventive, creative. After the first few stories, Steve was very helpful in the plotting. In fact, after a while he did most of the plotting and I just wrote the copy. So, it was really a true collaboration between me and Steve Ditko.

It was really very funny when I suggested "Spider-Man" to my publisher, Martin Goodman. He thought it was the worst idea ever. He said, "Stan, you can't give a hero the name Spider-Man. People hate spiders!" And then, when I told him I wanted Peter to be a teenager, he said, "No, teenagers can only be sidekicks!" And then, when I told him that I wanted Peter to have a lot of personal problems—he's not that popular with his friends; he has to worry

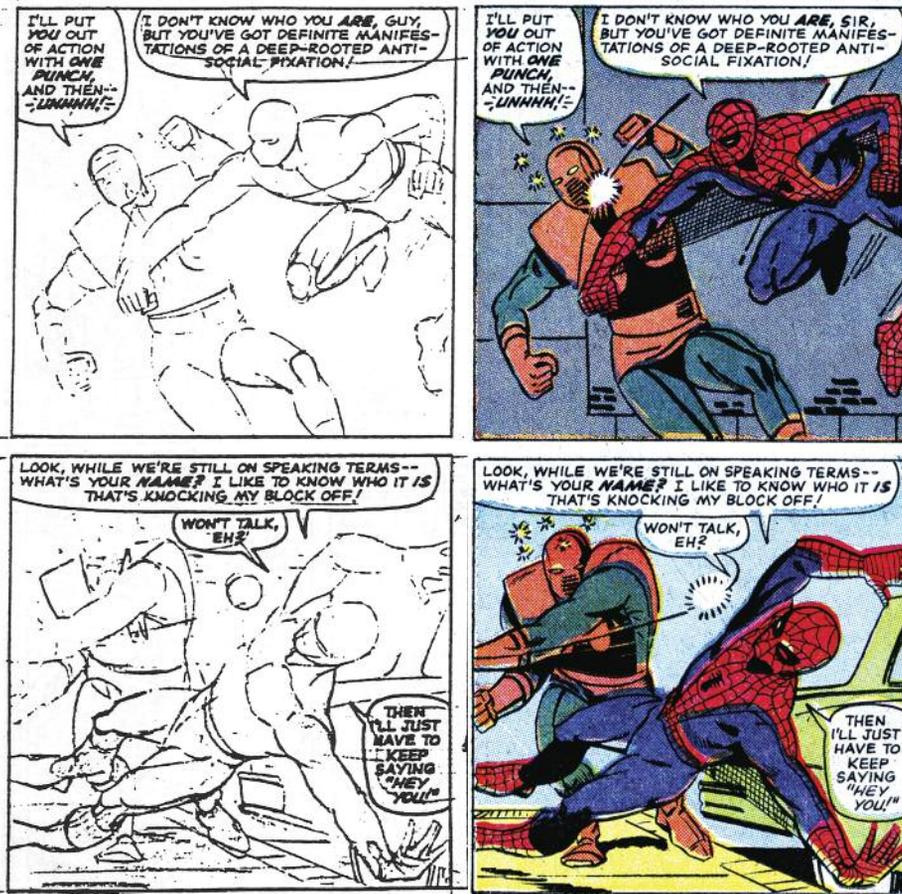
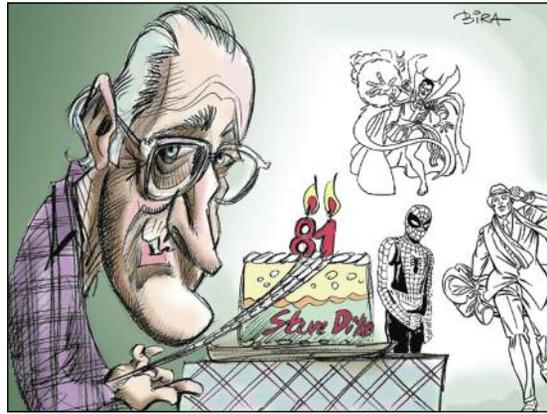
about his schoolwork; he doesn't have enough money—Martin said, "Stan, don't you realize what a super-hero is? They don't have those kinds of problems." So, you could see he wasn't totally thrilled with the notion of "Spider-Man."

Next: Since Peter Parker was originally a high school student, why is he called "Spider-Man" and not "Spider-Boy"?

You know, it's very interesting why I called him Spider-Man instead of Spider-Boy. It's something I've thought about quite a lot. I think probably because Superman was Superman, and somehow Spider-Boy would've sounded too immature. Too... not fully developed. Not enough of a super-hero. And I wanted our super-hero to be on a par with any other competing super-hero. So I felt I've gotta call him Spider-Man. Also, I had the idea that, if he succeeded in subsequent issues and in subsequent years, we would age him. And at some point he would

be a man. And when he became an adult male, it would be silly to keep calling him Spider-Boy. So I guess I was just farsighted enough to think ahead and be wise enough to call him Spider-Man.

Well, the reason "Spider-Man" first appeared in *Amazing Fantasy* is: As you may remember, my publisher hated the idea and didn't want me to go ahead with the script. But I just felt I had to get it out of my system. Well, we had a magazine called *Amazing Fantasy* that I loved, but it wasn't selling. And we were about to drop it. Now, when you drop a magazine, nobody cares what you put in the last issue. Because it doesn't matter; that's the last issue and there won't be any more. So, just for fun, I put "Spider-Man" in the last issue of *Amazing Fan... Fantasy*—almost forgot the name—and I featured him on the cover, just to get it out of my system. Strangely enough, that was the best-selling book that we had had all year after it was published. So, it shows virtue is



The Amazing Steve & Spidey, Man!

Steve Ditko—and two stages of a pair of primo panels from his final issue of *The Amazing Spider-Man*: #38 (July 1966), "Just a Guy Named Joe!" (Left:) The only clearly printable panels from a photocopy of Ditko's rough pencils, with Lee's text already added by letterer Artie Simek. With thanks to David "Hambone" Hamilton. (Right:) The same two panels from the finished comic. Thanks to Barry Pearl. © 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

(Top center:) The affectionate caricature of Ditko turning 81 in 2008—drawn by noted Brazilian cartoonist Almeida Bira—utilizes images of three of Ditko's most noted co-creations. For photos of Steve, see p. 8. Thanks to Roberto Guedes. [Caricature © 2011 Almeida Bira; Spider-Man & Doctor Strange art © 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.; Mr. A art © 2011 Steve Ditko.]

rewarded and righteousness always triumphs.

After Jenna has a brief exchange with the recording engineer:

A question for the engineer? Am I competing with the engineer? His answers better not be cleverer than mine. [in response to an unrecorded comment from someone:] I like your attitude.

Stan is asked about the creation of J. Jonah Jameson as a foil for Spider-Man.

You probably can't tell by listening to me, but I love humor. And I feel that, even in serious stories, the more you inject elements of humor, the more palatable it is and the more you enjoy the story. So, even though "Spider-Man" was the story of a super-hero who's fighting deadly super-villains, I wanted to inject some humor, and I couldn't think of a better way to do it than to have another character that Spider-Man or Peter Parker would be involved with and who would hate Spider-Man. And who would not like Peter Parker that much, either. But poor Peter had to be with this guy, and of course that would be Jonah Jameson, the publisher of *The Daily Bugle*, which was the newspaper that Peter sold photographs to on a freelance basis.

Now, I didn't want to make him like the editor of the paper that Superman was involved in—although I never read "Superman" that much. But I know there was an editor, a publisher, or somebody named Perry White. And as far as I could tell, he was just a regular guy. But I made our J. Jonah Jameson not really a regular guy. I made him irascible, a loudmouth, bigoted, narrow-minded, with a quick temper... everybody that you wouldn't like. And poor Peter was stuck with this guy as his boss. And I don't know if the readers liked it, but I had a lot of fun writing the dialogue between Peter and J. Jonah Jameson.

Jenna asks Stan why he had so much faith in Spider-Man as a character?

You know, it's a funny thing... I'm not sure that I had so much faith in "Spider-Man." It was just an idea that I had. And I hate to let an idea go to waste. I wasn't sure it would be a hit. It was just something I wanted to do, mainly because I felt he's different than all the other super-heroes. First of all, he was a teenager and all the others were adults. They had teenage sidekicks, but that was all. And he had all these problems. And he wasn't that handsome. And he wasn't that tall or strong, and I just thought it would be fun to do it. I wasn't certain that it would be successful, but I wanted to try it. I love trying new things.

There's one very interesting thing about Spider Man's costume that I don't know if everybody is aware of. And it happened, I think, accidentally. When Steve Ditko designed the costume, he covered Peter up totally.



"Look Out! Here Comes The Spider-Man!"

Because virtually all of Stan's Marvel work has been reprinted—and re-reprinted—and re-re-reprinted—this A/E will feature very few images taken from the comics themselves, such as the Kirby-penciled cover of *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (Aug. 1962)! The above art—the cover Steve Ditko drew for that issue but which Stan and/or publisher Martin Goodman elected not to use—saw print for the first time in *Marvel Tales* #137 (March 1982). Thanks to Henry Kujawa. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

As for Stan saying, "I'm not sure I had so much faith in 'Spider-Man'"—Jenna Free asked that question partly because Roy'd told her that 1960s Marvel production manager Sol Brodsky had used the very phrase "Stan always had faith in 'Spider-Man'" when talking to the very interested new staffer RT about the subject in 1965-66.

You don't see any skin, any flesh at all, which is unusual. On most other super-hero costumes, you see a bit of the face, or the hands, or something. Well, what happened was, it was a very fortuitous choice of costume, because—and I learned this later; I wasn't aware of it in the beginning—but it happened that any young person of any race could identify with Peter Parker, or rather Spider-Man. Because, for all we knew, under the costume, he could have been black... he could have been Asian... he could have been Indian. He could have been anybody with any skin color. And I think that turned out to be a wonderful thing, and I think it may be one of the reasons that Spider-Man is so popular all over the world.

"Tell us about Dr. Octopus."

Hm-hmm... I always loved Dr. Octopus. First of all, as you may have realized by now, I love wacky names. And the big thing with a villain—usually in creating a villain the first thing I would think of was a name, and then I would try to think of, "Well, now that I've got the name, who's the character going to be and what will he do?" For some reason, I thought of an octopus. I thought, "I want to call somebody Octopus. And I want him to have a couple of extra arms just for fun." But I had to figure out how to do that. Well, I worked that out. But then, getting back to the name: Since he was a scientist, I figured, I'll call him Dr. Octopus, which sounded good to me. But again, I kept thinking about it and—oh, incidentally, in order to make it realistic, I called him Dr. Otto Octavius. But because he had these artificial tentacles, I had the people who knew him call him Doc Ock—Dr. Octopus. Just as a nickname. Something that they might in real life call somebody whose name was Octavius, and who looked like that. But then I thought I'd even make it

more of a nickname, and I changed Dr. Octopus to Doc Ock. And I loved Doc Ock. I always think of him as Doc Ock. As you can tell, I really turn on to strange names.

I guess I nickname everybody. For example, Spider-Man himself. I mean, nobody ever called Superman "Supey," as far as I know. But I felt, "Spider-Man, it's a good name. It's dramatic, but it's a little bit stiff." So I began to refer to him as "Spidey." And I think I did that with most of our heroes. I gave almost all of them nicknames which I enjoyed. I had no idea how the readers felt about it, but I was making myself happy when I wrote the stories.

I think it humanizes them. And I think it also makes the reader feel a little friendly toward them. Daredevil I called "Horn-head," and Thor I called "Goldilocks," 'cause he had that long golden hair. I had little names for everybody.

"Why didn't Peter Parker tell the world he now had spider-powers?"

I just felt it was more dramatic for Peter to keep his Spider-Man identity a secret, because if everybody knew he was Spider-Man, I couldn't get as many problems for him in his life, in his personal life. And it just seems to me that the more personal problems a character has, the more interesting he is. So, except for the Fantastic Four, I think just about all or most of our super-hero characters had secret identities.

Jenna asks for a few words about The Green Goblin.

The Green Goblin, of course, is another of my favorite villains. In fact, I think *all* of my villains are my favorite villains. But Steve and I—Steve Ditko, the artist, and the co-plotter, I might add—we had a big argument. Now, I'm not sure it was about The Green Goblin. It might have been about someone else, 'cause my memory is terrible—but The Green Goblin will serve as a good example. So let's say it was about The Green Goblin. At some point we had to tell the reader who The Green Goblin really was. And Steve wanted him to turn out to be just some character that we had never seen before. Because, he said, in real life, very often a villain turns out to be somebody that you never knew.

And I felt that that would be wrong. I felt, in a sense, it would be like cheating the reader. It would be like in a murder mystery where you find out, well, it was the butler who did it, or it was the innocent aunt or someone. But if it's somebody you didn't know and had never seen, then what was the point of following all the clues? I think that frustrates the reader. So that was a big argument that we had. And we ended up... I won that one. And not probably because I was any more right than Steve, but because I was the editor. So we made The Green Goblin turn out to be Harry Osborne, who was this millionaire businessman. And of course that led to a

lot more complications, because he had this son who was Peter's best friend, who hated Spider-Man because Spider-Man was the one who had brought his father down. And, as I mentioned, the more complications you get, I think the better the story is.

After Roy, through Jenna, corrects Stan on a point or two:

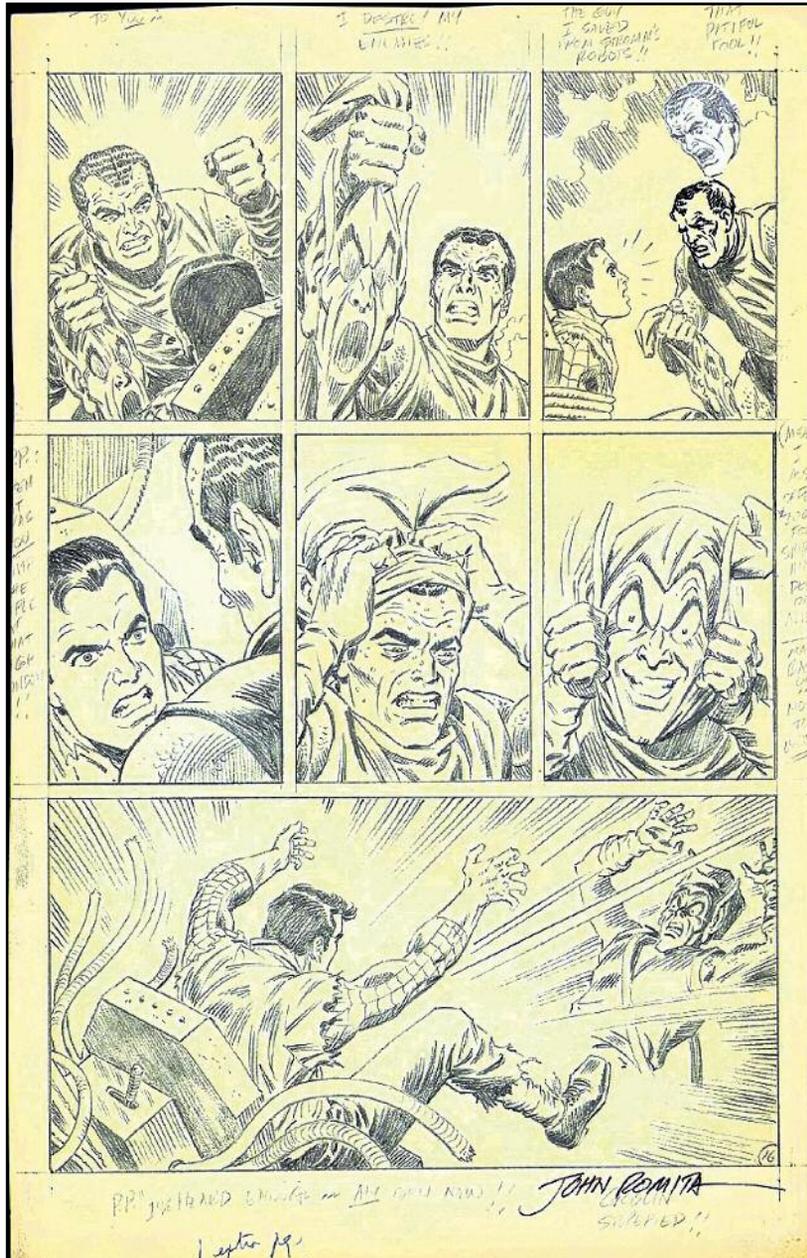
What did I say? [after Roy's response] That's typical. You know, Roy, I don't think it was The Green Goblin. I think we had a—he was a gangster.

There was a gangster in one story. That's who it was! Oh, is that what happened? So, I was right about the—Okay. Good. So, now I gotta say it again. Cuz it was Norman Osborne. Harry is the son, right? [At this point, Stan rephrases his answer in the previous paragraph, replacing "Harry Osborne" with "Norman Osborne."]

"What about your second character created with Steve Ditko?"

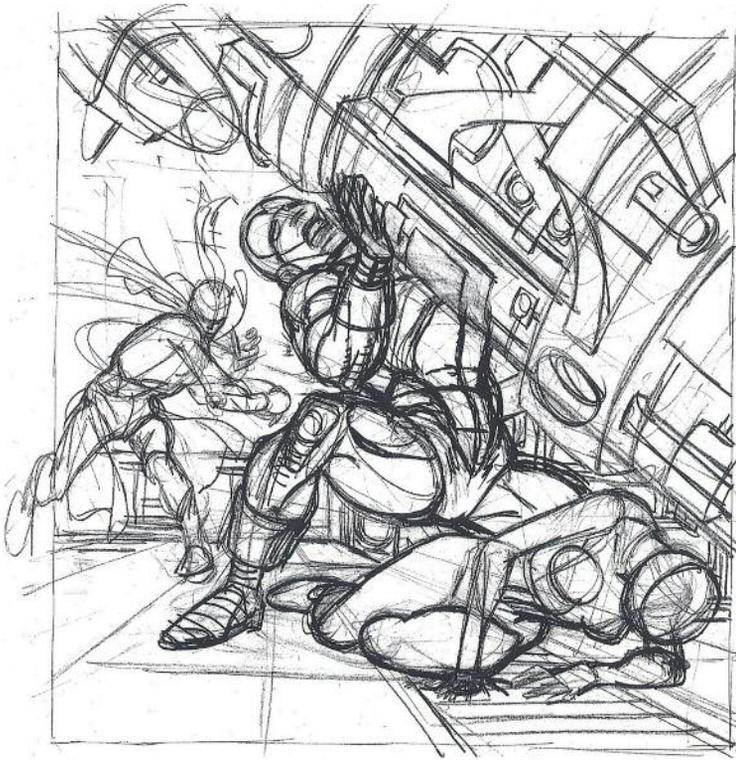
The two of us? You mean— Oh, I see. Of course, another favorite of mine, which I did with Steve Ditko, was "Doctor Strange." We had done a character some years ago—I think we called him Dr. Droom, or something—who had been a magician. And I always liked him, but I forgot about him. It was a one-shot thing. And one day while we were trying to think of some new heroes, I thought I'd like to bring back a magician. And I gave him the name Doctor Strange—I think Stephen Strange; something like that. And Steve was the fellow who drew it.

I don't think "Doctor Strange" would ever have been as successful if anyone but Steve Ditko had drawn him. Because Steve found a way to draw backgrounds and areas that we made up, like Dream World and all kind of other dimensions. The way Steve drew these places, you really thought you were in a different dimension. And, of course, Steve gave Doctor Strange this great cloak and this amulet that he wore, and everything looked mysterious and magical. And all I had to do was write the



Goblin Up Spider-Man

Collector/dealer Mike Burkey, whose art website is www.romitaman.com, no less, supplied us with this never-used version of a Spidey/Green Goblin penciled page from *Amazing Spider-Man* #40 (Sept. 1966). He says it's "the only existing large art [i.e., twice-up] fully penciled John Romita ASM page I've ever come across in 20 years of collecting *Amazing Spider-Man* artwork!... The Norman Osborne head was inked partially, and John Romita, as a favor, redrew the Norman Osborne head in pencil on a separate piece of drawing board which fits perfectly over the partially inked Norman Osborne head! What a great guy John Romita is... and what a great piece of art we have here!" 'Course, since Mike was *selling* the page, he could've been excused for exaggerating just a bit—but, in truth, it is a great unused page find. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



our main characters ever since. Tony Stark, “The Invincible Iron Man”—and it’s his mansion where The Avengers have their headquarters.

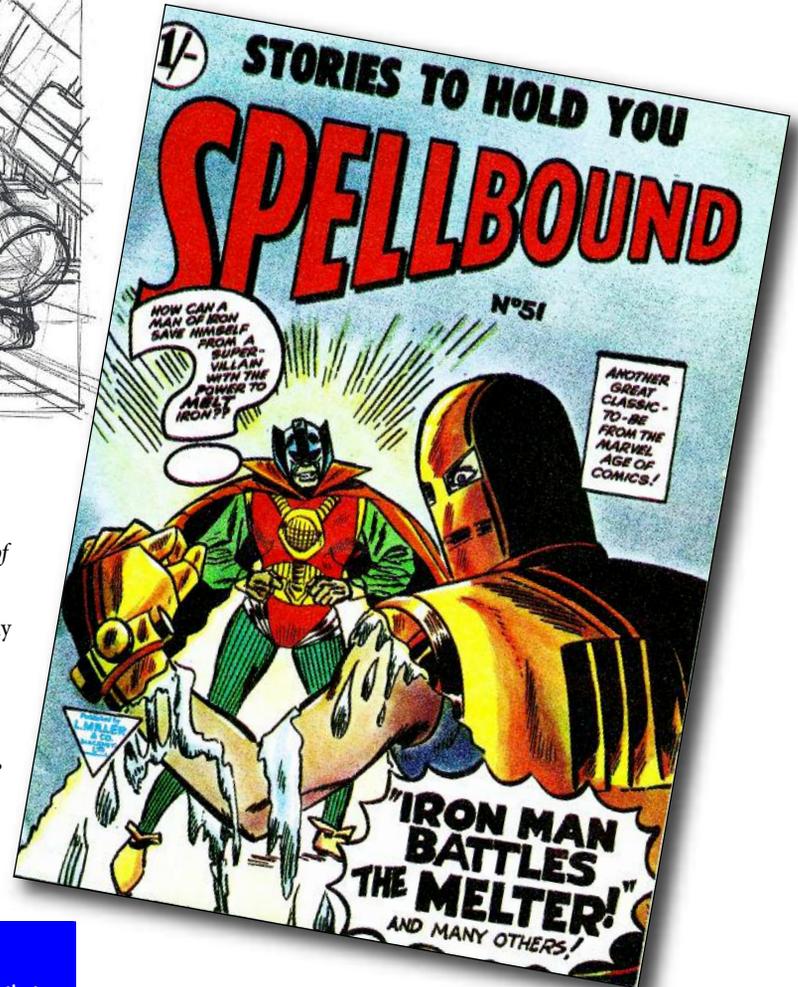
Jenna asks about Gabriel Jones, the African-American member of the Howling Commandos....

Was he before The Black Panther, Roy?... Okay. No... I probably won’t mention that, but...

I’m not a great war lover, but in looking for variety when we were doing so many books, I thought it would be nice to do some stories of World War II. So I created this character, Sgt. Nick Fury, and I really wanted him to be like our version of John Wayne. He’s “rough and tough,” but he’s got a heart of gold, and he loves his men and he takes care of them, and he’s the best darn sergeant in the Army. And just for fun, I wanted to give him a

very *ethnic* platoon, because again, I love to show that, in a perfect world, people of all colors, races, and religions would get along well. So I made his platoon—I had it consist of Izzy Cohen, who was Jewish; Gabriel Jones, who was black; Dino Minnelli, who was Italian; Dum-Dum Dugan, I believe he was Irish; and on and on. I had a few others... there was even an Englishman named Percy somebody, and now that I think of it, he seemed a little bit gay, [chuckles] although it wasn’t purposely done that way. However, I loved this platoon, and I think, by the way, that Gabriel Jones, the black soldier, was the first time any black had been a super-hero in a book, ’cause this whole platoon, they were super-heroes.

And one thing I’m proudest of—I think those characters acted and



Getting Some Iron Man In Your Diet

(Above:) Ubiquitous 1970s cover artist Gil Kane’s pencil layout for that of *Iron Man* #62 (Sept. 1973); thanks to Anthony Snyder. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

(Above right:) By 1965, the still-ongoing UK version of the old Timely/Atlas mystery title *Spellbound* (#51) from publisher L. Miller & Son, like its surviving American cousins, was being headlined by a super-hero—in this case, Iron Man. Shellhead’s still in his original bulky armor in this Steve Ditko drawing (inked by “Iron Man” artistic co-creator Don Heck) that had been the splash page of *Tales of Suspense* #47 (Nov. 1963). So why wasn’t Jack Kirby’s cover utilized instead? You’d have to have somebody in balmy Britain! To whoever sent us this cover—thanks!

Alas, there are a couple of verbal missteps in Stan’s narration, though they didn’t make it into the audio tracks as part of the book. Iron Man’s 1962 creation did not occur during a period when the U.S. was particularly “sick of war”—though *Tales of Suspense* #39 (March 1963) did hit the newsstands in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October ’62. Likewise, his origin occurred not in Korea, of course, but in Viet Nam, not yet an area of real American military involvement. Stan was doubtless momentarily confusing the Vietnamese War with the Korean War, since he had lived through both of those conflicts, as well as the Second World War.

talked in a very true-to-life way, the way soldiers really did talk, but we were able to achieve that feeling without using any profanity in the books themselves, and I thought that was a real good accomplishment. And of course we had the usual kind of stories where our little platoon, which consisted of just a few men, would defeat half of the German army, the Nazi army.

The stories were good. What happened was, I got tired of doing war stories after a while, so at some point we dropped the books, and so much fan mail came in from readers who wanted more of *Sgt. Fury*, but we didn’t have time, I didn’t have the men to draw it, I didn’t have the time to write it, and we were busy with other things, so we just started re-printing the books, and strangely enough, the reprint versions of *Sgt. Fury* sold as well as the original ones had! And we reprinted them for the longest time until we finally stopped. [laughs]

Apparently, at this stage, Jenna asked Stan to rephrase part of his previous response.

Gabriel Jones was probably the first African-American super-hero in a comic, and I was very proud of that. I was proud of all these types in Sgt. Fury's platoon, and I loved the way they were all friends and comrades, and each one of them would've taken a bullet for the other one, and it just—Sgt. *Fury and His Howling Commandos* was very satisfying to me.

Oh, can I mention about the name? We have time? I almost started that book on a dare, because my publisher Martin said to me once, "Stan, why are our books selling so well? I don't understand. They seem to be similar to the competition, but we're outselling them!" And I said, "Well, I think it's the style that these things are being written and drawn in." And he said, "No, I don't think that's it. I think they're better names; we've got better titles." I said, "No, that isn't it!" And we argued about it. So I said, "Look, I'm gonna prove you're wrong. I'm gonna come up with a book with the *worst* title in the world, and I bet we could make it sell!" Yeah, now I remember exactly how it happened. And he said, "All right, go ahead." So I said, "And I'm gonna make it a book of war stories, and you *know* they're not as popular as super-hero stories, so if we can make that sell, you'll know it isn't the title, or the subject, it's the style. He said, "Okay," so I came up with *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos*, which really is a *terrible* title for a comic book! [laughs] And it *did* sell, and it was successful, and Martin finally had to admit that, well, maybe I was right. [chuckles]

Jenna asks about the 1953-55 revival of Timely/Marvel's "Big Three" heroes: The Human Torch, Captain America, and Sub-Mariner.

Woo. This is one Roy could answer much better than me. I remember there was such a book; I don't remember a damn thing about it. And... who was in it?... [Roy reminds Stan]

You know, back in the olden days, like in 1953, whenever Martin told me to do a book, I just did a book without giving it much thought, I'm afraid. One day he said, "I wanna do a book called *Young Men*, and I want it to feature The Human Torch, Sub-Mariner, and Captain America." And I said "Great," and um, we did the book, and it contained those characters, and, you know, nothing happened; it wasn't anything special. Unfortunately, we really didn't have anything special until the '60s, when we started with *The Fantastic Four*, and we developed our so-called Marvel Style. But *Young Men* was typical of the type of books that were published in those days, where you just throw a lot of characters into a book, get somebody to write 'em, get somebody to draw them, and you knew you'll sell a certain amount of copies.

While dealing with the 1950s, Jenna asks about an artist of that period who wasn't around for the Marvel Age: Joe Maneely.

One artist who was really great, and it's very tragic that he didn't survive, was Joe Maneely. Joe was an artist that worked for us in the early days. One of his most famous strips was one called *The Black Knight*, and it was really a series about knights in armor, *magnificently* illustrated. He



Color Me Embarrassed!

By the time of the double-page spread from which the above figure in *Sgt. Fury #1* (May 1963) is taken, a tiny image of Gabriel Jones had already been colored "Caucasian pink" on the cover—as well as a slightly larger one on the splash page. But when the engravers "corrected" the flesh coloring on this far larger figure, it was just too much! Fortunately, by #2, they colored Gabe as gray, which would soon give way to a more complex (but more accurate) brown. It took a little time for the engravers to get their heads around the fact that an African-American was one of the seven Howling Commandos! Thanks to Barry Pearl.
[© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

also did a number of Westerns and horror stories and humor strips. He was the most versatile artist in the world. He was as fast as any artist, even as fast as Jack Kirby, who, [laughs] people thought—nobody could be that fast! The way he [Maneely] drew—he would just sketch a line or two in pencil, and then he would take a pen or a brush and go over it and do the finished drawing. It's as though he actually did his drawing with a pen, or with a brush! And he was accommodating; no matter what you gave him to draw, he did it, he did it quickly and *beautifully*.

Unfortunately, one day he was going home to his home in Jersey from Manhattan, and something happened on the train, and he fell off the train, and that was the end. It's just *really* tragic, because I think Joe Maneely, today, would be one of the most honored artists, if he had just been around a little longer.

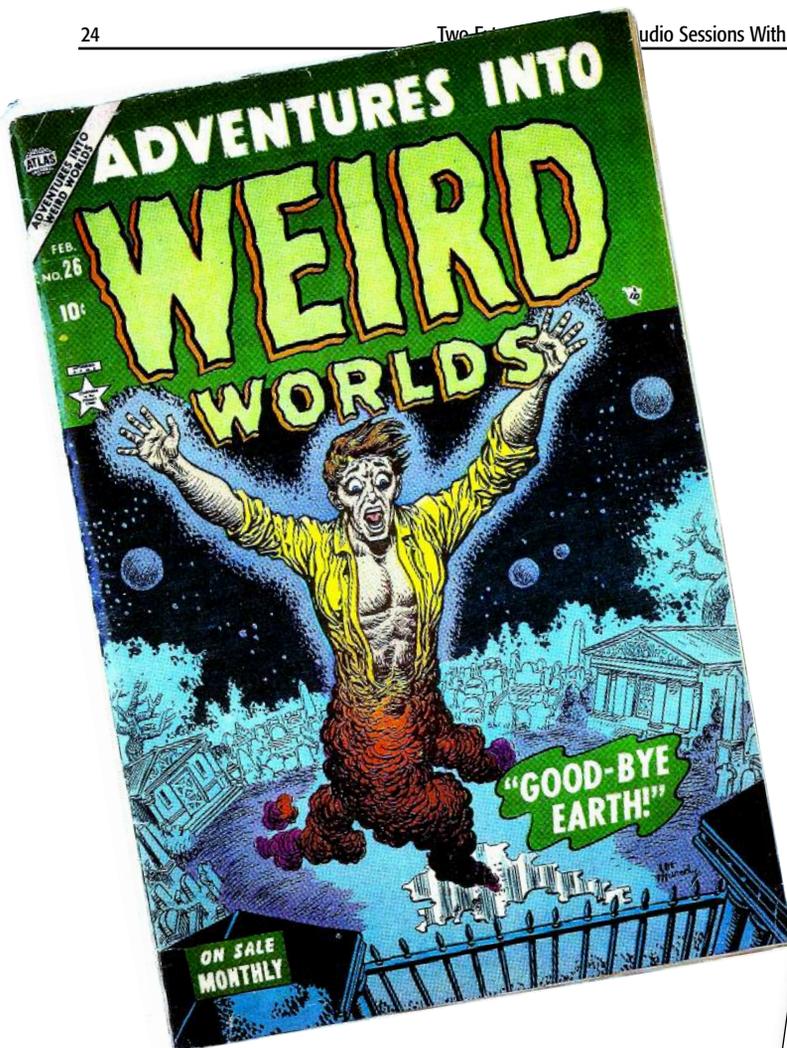
Jenna next brings up "Captain America Foils the Traitor's Revenge," the two-page text story in Captain America Comics #3 (1941) that had become Stan's first published story of any kind.

Oh that little thing, "The Traitor's Revenge!"—was that what it was called? I don't remember the story, but I remember the name. Um... The first story that I actually wrote in comics and was published was in *Captain America #3*, which was probably in 1940 or '41, somewhere around there. It wasn't a comic strip. In those days, the Post Office had a law saying that the publishers couldn't call a comic magazine a "magazine" unless it had at least two pages of just words without panels. I'm not sure of the reason for that—it doesn't matter—but because of that, every comic book had two pages of text. And nobody cared who wrote them, 'cause nobody read those two pages. The people who bought the books just wanted the comic strips. So, when I came to work for—it was called Timely Comics at the time—the first assignment I was given was to write one of those two-page text pieces, and I wrote something called "The Traitor's Revenge" starring Captain America, and it was—I *think* it was starring Captain America—and it was published in *Captain America #3* with my name on it, and oh, I was so proud! I ran home, showed it to all my friends, who never read it, probably, but there I was in a comic book with my name on it. I'll never forget that day. [NOTE: See p. 4.]

Jenna, having been made aware that Stan's most successful hero creation before 1961 was The Destroyer, in the early 1940s, asks Stan about the character.

Dunno. Roy showed me a picture of it, but I don't know what to say. He was a good guy, right?... [after Roy says a few memory-jogging words to Stan about *The Destroyer*.]

One of the first really popular characters I created in those early days was called *The Destroyer*! I love that name! And he was a little like Captain America in those days. He fought the Nazis also, but unlike Captain America, he was in Europe, so he was fighting them overseas. He had a great costume. And I was in my element, I was writing action stories, I had myself a hero, I loved the name "The Destroyer," and I was



off and running. And I even put my name on the story, ha ha ha!

At this point the session ended. As he prepared to leave, Stan said a few words about how glad he was that everything was over and had turned out all right, and seemed a bit surprised when Jenna reminded him (if he been told before) that there'd probably have to be a second session in a very few weeks. Stan accepted that in good grace, said they should get in touch with him when the time came, and then he was gone... while Jenna and I were soon winging our way back to Washington State and South Carolina, respectively. But, based on the day's experience, I was pretty certain I'd be back.

SESSION II (September 2005)

As indeed I was, three or four weeks later. The routine was pretty much the same, with Stan just wanting some assurance (which Jenna duly gave) that this indeed would be the final session. However, this one was destined to last approximately as long as the previous one. Stan, Jenna, Leigh, the recording engineer, and I all took our by-now familiar places.

This time, Jenna begins by asking Stan about the origin of his motto, "Excelsior!"

Destroy All Nazis!

(Right:) The Destroyer, Stan Lee's most popular super-hero co-creation pre-*F.F.* #1, goes into action for the first time ever in *Mystic Comics* #6 (Dec. 1941). Besides his blue face-mask, The Destroyer's most unique quality was the fact that he did all his Nazi-busting in Occupied Europe, not on the Home Front; Captain America, Human Torch, and Sub-Mariner divided their time between the two. Art by Jack Binder. Thanks to Warren Reece.

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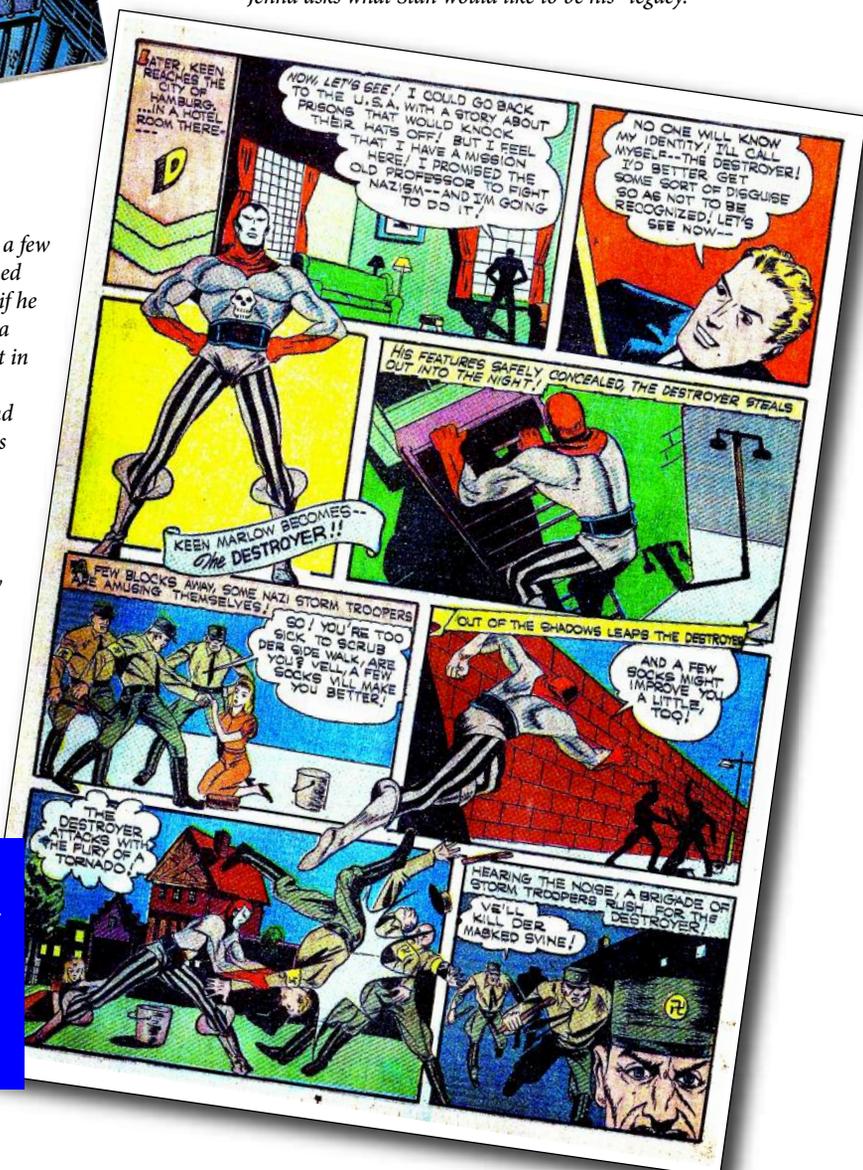
Weird—And Wonderful!

(Left:) Artist Joe Maneely's entire three-issue opus on Timely/Atlas' *Black Knight* (plus his covers for #4-5) is on gorgeous display in the hardcover *Marvel Masterworks: Atlas Era Black Knight/Yellow Claw*. But that's only the tip of the talented iceberg that was Joe Maneely. He drew in virtually every genre—and did them all splendidly, with his own individualistic flair. Here, courtesy of Dr. Michael J. Vassallo, is his cover for *Adventures into Weird Worlds* #26 (Feb. 1954), at the height of the horror-comics craze. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

All right.... Years ago, when I was writing the Soapbox and the Bullpen Bulletins page—I wrote the whole thing at the time—I would usually end whatever I wrote with some expression like "Nuff said!," "Face front!," or "Hang loose!" or whatever I could think of. And, little by little, I would noticed those expressions creeping into our competitors' magazines, and I felt I've got to think of something that (A) they won't know what it means; and (B) they won't know how to spell it. And I came up with the word "Excelsior," which at that time was the slogan of the State of New York; it was on the New York State code of arms, but I did not know that at the time. I took it because it is from the Old English. It is an Old English expression that I had read somewhere which means "upward and onward to greater glory." I later learned that it is even on the New York State code of arms, which I thought was great, but anyway, I started writing "Excelsior!," and I guess it was just too big a word for anyone to cope with, and it sort of remained mine for all this time.

EXCELSIOR! That's for you, for your very own. [chuckles]

Jenna asks what Stan would like to be his "legacy."



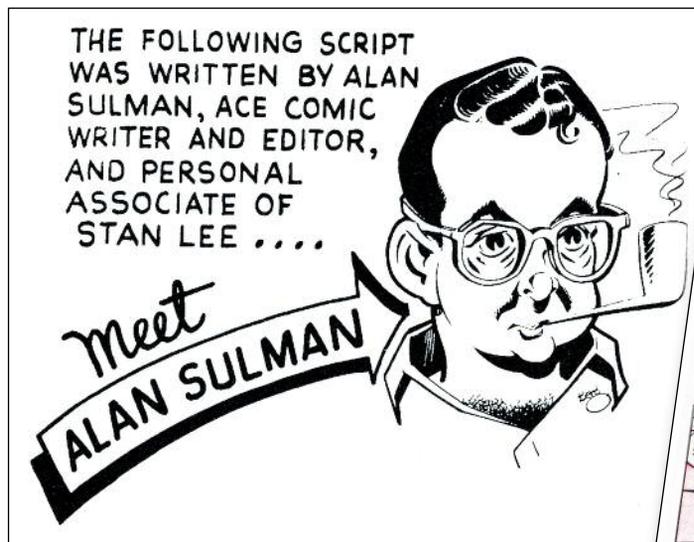
“I Had A Liking For The Comic Magazine Business”

A Catch-As-Catch-Can Conversation With AL SULMAN, “Personal Associate of Stan Lee”

Conducted by Jim Amash

Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

Albert Sulman has been discussed any number of times in A/E interviews with other Timely Comics staffers and freelancers, not to mention those who worked for him at Ace Publications. An editor and writer for comics and magazines—the latter chiefly at Martin Goodman’s Magazine Management—Al had a long career in publishing, but not much was known about him. Former Marvelites Sol Brodsky, Mike Esposito, John Romita, Stan Goldberg, and Roy Thomas (and later Al



Milgrom) used to play poker with Al during the '60s and '70s, but they never became close friends with him.

Apparently, Al built a wall between him and most others—a wall I tried to penetrate with small success. I finally did get him to laugh a few times, but did not succeed in getting him to send a photo. At first, Al wasn't interested in granting me an interview, but I managed to persuade him to talk to me; so, figuring that I'd probably have only one shot at it, I mostly asked him basic questions. He enjoyed talking to me enough that he agreed to another short session. We spoke a couple of times, and right as I was breaking a hole in the wall, Al's health (which was not good) precluded further discussion, resulting in an uncompleted interview. I've been unable to re-establish contact with Al for over a year now, but hope he is alive and well somewhere. Many unasked questions will remain unanswered, I'm sorry to say, but at least we have this peek behind the Sulman curtain. Thanks to Steven Rowe for helping me find Al Sulman. This interview was conducted in 2009. —Jim.

BLONDE PHANTOM

"I HATE ME!"

PAGE 1

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| <p>PANEL 1. 2/3 PAGE TITLE SPLASH SHOWING THE BLONDE PHANTOM AT LEFT AND LOUISE GRANT AT RIGHT, WAGGING FINGERS AT EACH OTHER, AS IF ARGUING, WITH MARK MASON IN CENTER, HOLDING HIS EARS AS IF NOT TO HEAR THE LOUD TALKING BETWEEN THE GIRLS, WHICH REALLY CONCERNS HIM.</p> <p>PANEL 2. SCENE SHOWS MARK GAZING OUT WINDOW OF HIS OFFICE, AS LOUISE PECKS AWAY AT HER TYPEWRITER IN BACKGROUND.</p> <p>PANEL 3. CLOSEUP OF LOUISE, LOOKING SLIGHTLY ANNOYED, AS SHE THINKS TO HERSELF.</p> | <p>TITLE (IN CIRCLE) "I HATE ME!"</p> <p>2. CAPTION: THE END OF ANOTHER DAY AT MARK MASON'S DETECTIVE AGENCY...</p> <p>MARK: HO-HUM! ANOTHER DULL EVENING AHEAD OF ME, LOUISE! WISH I COULD THINK OF SOMETHING EXCITING TO DO!</p> <p>3. LOUISE: (THOUGHT) I COULD THINK OF LOTS OF THINGS, YOU HANDSOME BARBOON! A GOOD MOVIE, DANCING... BUT WHAT'S THE USE?</p> |
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Blonde Ambition

(Top left:) Photos of Al Sulman are virtually unobtainable—but fortunately this skillful caricature of him, drawn and signed by fellow bullpener/future *Madman* Dave Berg, appeared in Stan Lee's 1947 mini-tome *Secrets behind the Comics*, a 700-copy limited hardcover second edition of which was published by Marvel in 1994. A/E's editor kicks himself every time he recalls how he played poker with Al, all those years, and never asked him what Stan might've meant by calling him a "personal associate" of his! Roy recently did e-mail Stan on the point—but, surprise, surprise, Stan had no memory of ever using the term. (Incidentally, although Stan refers to him in the book as "Alan" Sulman, the editor/writer's first name was actually "Albert.") [© 2011 Stan Lee.]

The book reproduced both the full typed script (left) and the black-&-white Syd Shores artwork of the 4-page yarn "I Hate Me!" from *Blonde Phantom* #15 (Fall 1947), starring the gorgeous gang-buster Al had co-created. Seen above right from *Secrets* is the tale's first page, in color from an art scan provided by Betty Dobson. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

"My Brother Asked Me To Help Him With The Scripts"

JIM AMASH: *When were you born, and how did you break into comics?*

AL SULMAN: I was born in March 19, 1918. So I'm now 91 years old. My older brother Joseph was a cartoon artist, and he worked for Detective Comics. So, after I graduated from college, he got me in the business of writing scripts for him on a freelance basis. He did do some work for Timely Comics—also on a freelance basis, of course. His cartoon style was pretty much like Al Capp's, who did *Li'l Abner*. He drew several scripts for Timely, like "Eustace Hayseed," which looked a lot like *Li'l Abner*. He mainly drew humor features. He was not an artist—he was a cartoonist. But he was a very, very good cartoonist. He was born in 1911.

I graduated from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1940. I majored in English literature and American literature. I minored in European history and American history. [After graduation], I went to New York looking for a job. I applied at Timely for a staff job as a story or script editor, and told them that I'd written a couple of strips for Detective Comics [National/DC]. Stan Lee was the art director; he hired me as a staff script editor and as a story editor to buy from freelance writers in 1941. At that time, Timely was located on West 42nd Street. That's how it started.

Simon and Kirby must have left the company before I joined them, because I don't remember meeting them. Timely must have moved to the Empire State Building while I was in the military service. I was drafted in February of 1942.

JA: *Since you hadn't gone to college to be a comic book writer—*

SULMAN: Oh, no, no, no.

JA: *—what did you have in mind to do with yourself before comics came about?*

SULMAN: I wanted to be a novelist and a short story writer, but my brother asked me to help him with the scripts, and I had a



liking for the comic magazine business, you know.

JA: *When you wrote for your brother on those DC comic stories, did DC pay you or did he pay you? Who had the account?*

SULMAN: My brother paid me. [DC] had a strip called "Zatara the [Master] Magician," and a guy named Fred Guardineer was the artist. But the time came when he didn't want to draw it anymore, so the editor at DC turned it over to my brother, and he began to draw the strip; but he had to imitate Fred Guardineer's drawing style, because the character had to look [the same], and it worked out fine. I wrote a few "Zatara" scripts, and that got me interested in writing comic scripts. But Joe and I didn't do "Zatara" for very long.

JA: *You wrote "Eustace Hayseed" for Timely, and "Zatara" for DC. For Quality Comics, your brother drew something called "Woopy." Did you write that for him?*

SULMAN: No. I did not write everything that he drew.

JA: *He drew three other features. One was "Socko Strong," for DC. Did you write that?*

SULMAN: Yes, I did.

JA: "Caveman Curly."

SULMAN: "Caveman Curly" sounds familiar. I think I may have written a few scripts on that one, too. But "Socko Strong," I definitely remember.

JA: *And the other one is "Biff Bronson."*

SULMAN: Yes, I wrote that one, too.

JA: *Basically, your brother was packaging these features for DC. You weren't going into the offices, were you?*

SULMAN: No, I did not go to the DC office. I gave my brother an outline which he submitted it to the editor at DC, whom I believe was Whitney Ellsworth. [NOTE: "Biff Bronson" with a byline for both brothers appeared in All Star Comics #1, as well as in issues of More Fun Comics, so the former work must've been done for All-American editor Shelly Mayer. —Jim.] When it was it was okayed, I wrote the scripts. Joe showed

Thar's Gold In Them Thar Hillbillies!

The Sulman brothers, Al (writer) and Joseph (artist), seem to have been typecast for a time as the writer-&-artist team called when a company needed a knockoff of Al Capp's wildly popular daily comic strip *Li'l Abner*—even though we couldn't come up with any definite Sulman art and/or story in that area:

(Top:) This "Woopy of Shoot'n Creek" splash page is from an uncertain Quality Comics issue, in a story bylined not by Joseph Sulman but by Art Gates (with the scripiter totally unguessed at). The hillbilly hero appeared in *Hit Comics* #26-29 and *Uncle Sam Quarterly* #6 & #8 in 1943. Thanks to Jim Ludwig.

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(Above:) Dr. Michael J. Vassallo feels this "Eustace Hayseed" yarn from *Krazy Komiks* #1 (Aug. 1948)—with its super-heavy Capp influence—is most likely the work of Joseph Sulman, so it's quite possible that his brother wrote it. It was some of Joe's last work in comics. Thanks also to Steven Rowe for pointing us the way. [© 2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

me how many pages he needed, a four-page script or a five-page script.

JA: Did Joseph ink these features as well as pencil them?

SULMAN: Yes. He did not letter them. Someone in the office lettered them.

JA: Did he serve in World War II?

SULMAN: No. He worked for a company that built submarines.

JA: His comic book career was not a very long one. What he did after his comic book days?

SULMAN: He had a job with the government. It had something to do with delinquent students, like a probation officer, things like that. And that's what he did the last ten years of his life.

JA: He didn't keep his art career going, did he?

SULMAN: No, he did not. I'll tell you what he did. In our home town newspaper—New London, Connecticut—he used to draw editorial—I don't know if I'd call them "cartoons," but editorials for the local newspaper, for the editorial page. That was after [his comic book days]. He did not do that for a long time. Eventually, he retired down to Florida. I had two older brothers; they're both gone now. I had a still-older brother who was a doctor for 50 years in New London. He died ten years ago.

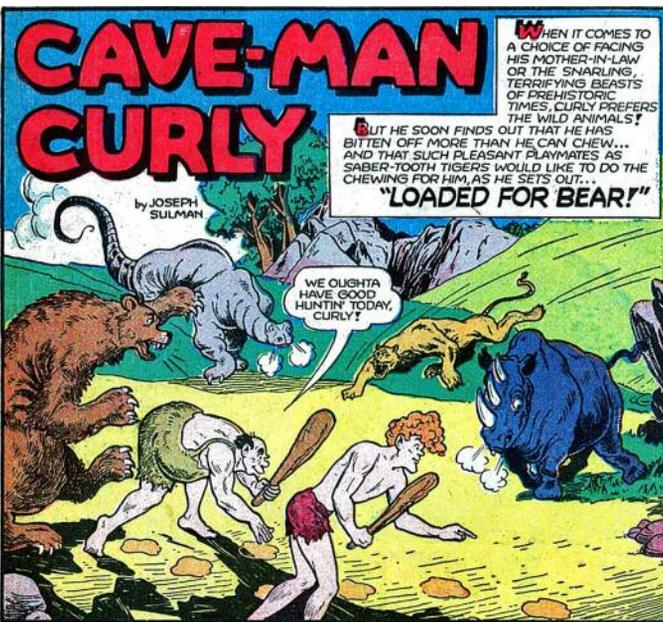
"I Just Had To Buy The Scripts"

JA: Since you've read my interviews, you have an idea of what I'm looking for, because a lot of people we talk about were never interviewed, and they're gone now. I have to rely on people like you to tell me about them, so their biography won't fade away.

SULMAN: Yeah. Well, I can't say that my memory is very good now at my age.

JA: I'm grateful for whatever you can give me. First I'd like to know a little bit more about your brother Joseph. What kind of person was he?

SULMAN: He was a very good brother, and he graduated from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. And my doctor brother graduated eight years before



Come Out Of The Cave, Man
Al says he "may have written" a few scripts of "Caveman Curly," which was likewise illustrated by his big brother Joseph. This splash page from *All Funny Comics* #14, (Nov.-Dec. 1946) was provided by Michael T. Gilbert. [© 2011 DC Comics.]

The Brand New 1940 Mottle
Joseph Sulman became the first artist to succeed creator Fred Guardineer on the "Zatara" strip the latter had created—though whether or not his brother Al wrote this particular script for *Action Comics* #30 (Nov. 1940) is unknown. Thanks to Mark Muller. [© 2011 DC Comics.]

me from Yale. We were all very well educated.

JA: Were your parents?

SULMAN: No, they were immigrants from Eastern Europe. My father came from Lithuania, and my mother from Russia.

JA: I had wondered about your last name, because I looked "Sulman" up on the Internet, and it's both an Arab name and a Jewish name.

SULMAN: Well, my father's original name was not "Sulman," it was "Shulman," with an "h." When he came to America, he dropped the "h" and became "Sulman." So I and my two brothers are Sulmans, not Shulmans. But we are Jewish, yes.

As a matter of fact, during the war when I was with the Air Force in North Africa, I picked up a few Arabic expressions from the local population, so I do speak a little Arabic. I do speak French, though. When I graduated from high school, I was [at the top of] my class, and I also won the French Prize. I'm very good at picking up languages.

JA: I take it you didn't see combat in the service.

SULMAN: No. I was not a member of a crew. I was in Squadron Intelligence, in a bomber squadron. We had B-25s, medium bombers, but I was in the Intelligence office, gathering intelligence from information where our bombers should drop their bombs. We got information from various sources, so we bombed bridges and ammunition dumps and things like that. We started in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, and then we moved to the island of Corsica, in the Mediterranean. Our final airport was on the east coast of Italy, just south of Venice. I was in the military for 3½ years, and overseas two years and seven months. I was a staff sergeant in the Intelligence Office of this bomber squadron. Not a sergeant, but one higher.



IN 1966, MIKE FRIEDRICH WAS A 16-YEAR-OLD KID TRYING TO BREAK INTO PRO COMICS. MIKE'S EARLY WORK WAS *PASSIONATE*, SOMETIMES TO THE POINT OF *PURPLE* -- AS SUGGESTED BY HIS 1973 ODE TO FELLOW WRITER HARLAN ELLISON (BELOW)! BUT HE QUICKLY MADE A NAME FOR HIMSELF SCRIPTING STORIES FOR *BATMAN*, *JUSTICE LEAGUE*, AND OTHER DC AND *MARVEL* ICONS. HE LATER TRADED HIS TYPEWRITER FOR A *PUBLISHING* CAREER UNDER THE *STAR*REACH* IMPRINT. A FEW YEARS LATER MIKE *MORPHED* AGAIN, BECOMING ONE OF COMICS' FIRST *AGENTS*.

BUT THAT WAS STILL FAR IN THE *FUTURE!* WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS AN 1967 ARTICLE PRINTED IN 1974 IN *BATMANIA* #19. IN IT, MIKE RECALLS THE EVENTS LEADING TO HIS VERY FIRST PRO SALE. WE THINK YOU'LL FIND IT *HONEST* AND *INFORMATIVE!*



WHEN *THE BATMAN* LOOKS WITH VENGEANCE ON SOMEONE HE HATES, IT IS *I* WHO HATE! WHEN *AQUAMAN* DIES FROM WATER-THIRST, WHEN *GREEN ARROW* FACES A CHARGING MINOTAUR, WHEN *BLACK CANARY* LOOKS INTO THE EYES OF ANOTHER HUMAN BEING AND SEES HIS SOUL, IT IS *I!*

AND... WHEN *HARLEQUIN ELLIS* CRIES OVER THE LACK OF RETURNED LOVE, IT IS *I!*

MANY ARE THE THINGS A WRITER IS FORCED TO DO BY THE CRASH-POUNDING OF HIS CREATIVE SOUL. THIS STORY WAS ONE OF THEM; FOR THERE IS NO ESCAPE FROM THE SOUL-SHATTER OF THE NOVA-AWARENESS THAT *I*, IN SO MANY WAYS, AM... *HARLEQUIN ELLIS!*

To H.E., that you might understand, brother...
Mike Friedrich

Introduction

by Michael T. Gilbert

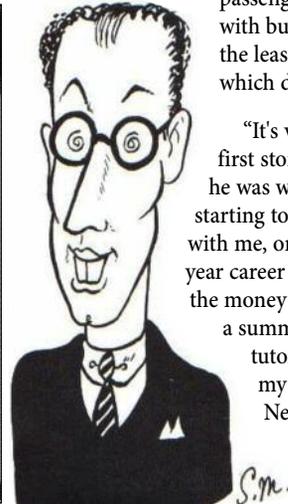
I recently stumbled across a fascinating 1974 fanzine article in *Batmania* #19, featuring a blow-by-blow account of writer Mike Friedrich's attempts to sell his first pro story to editor Julie Schwartz.

This was no easy task in 1966, especially for a starry-eyed 16-year-old high school student. DC had pretty much slammed the door on new talent when sales took a big dive after the notorious 1954 Congressional comic book hearings. But by 1966, young Turks like Neal Adams, Jim Steranko, Roy Thomas, Marv Wolfman, and Len Wein had begun to break into the old boys' network.

Friedrich's article provides a rare snapshot of those times, a peek behind the editorial curtains of staid DC. Though his memoir is painful in spots (oh, the rejection!), Mike's youthful enthusiasm still shines through. We've all been there.

Mike submitted his article to *Batmania* founder Biljo White in July 1967, shortly after his first sale. It sat on Biljo's shelf until second editor Rich Morrissey published it in 1974. "Blood, Sweat, and Tears... and Then Some" is comic history in the raw, at the cusp of Mike's writing career.

Julie, in this account, comes across as tough but fair. A long-time sci-fi fan himself, he was unusually receptive to others of his tribe. Reading between the lines, one can also see how staid DC would soon lose their #1 spot to upstart Marvel. Schwartz was horrified at Mike's use of the Golden Age villain Two-Face. He also disapproved of any mention of drugs, which seems positively quaint in light of DC's current storylines.



Pictures Perfect!

(Left:) A mid-'70s photo of Julius Schwartz, from *Amazing World of DC Comics* #3 (Nov. 1974).

(Right:) Sheldon Mayer, editor Schwartz's former editor, draws Julie for *AWDC* #3.

[© 2011 DC Comics.]

After getting Mike's permission to reprint the piece, I asked him to explain a couple of obscure references, and also encouraged him to share any thoughts on his old article. On 4/21/10, Mike replied:

"Hi, Michael, I completely forgot that I ever wrote up my breaking-in story for *Batmania*. It's a pleasure to read this report from my younger years. To fill in a couple of obscure references: in his letter columns Julie came up with cute names for some of his regular correspondents, like myself. I lived in Castro Valley, California, as a teenager, and he'd dubbed me 'Castro Mike.' Also, an oblique reference is made to a 'bloody' event to July 4, 1966. Fellow Schwartz letter-writer Guy H. Lillian III also lived in the Bay Area at the time and we got together a few times in high school and college. On July 4, 1966, Julie Schwartz was vacationing in San Francisco. Guy and I arranged to meet with him but were involved in a near-serious pre-seat-belt car accident. We were both

passengers in the back seat and fortunately escaped with bumps and scrapes. It was very traumatic, not the least for missing the opportunity to meet Julie, which didn't occur for another year.

"It's very clear in retrospect that Julie bought my first story not because it was any good, but because he was worried that I was giving up, just when I was starting to develop a tiny talent. I'm glad he stuck with me, or otherwise I may never have had the 35-year career in comics that I wound up having. I used the money from that first check to go to New York for a summer and get a first-hand 'tough-but-fair' tutoring from Julie. Three months later I wrote my first published script, which was drawn by Neal Adams. Now that's a real sweet debut!

"Mike"

Sweet, indeed, Mike! A young Arlen Schumer illustrated Mike's article when it was published in *Batmania* #19. In later years, Arlen became a talented commercial artist and comic historian; his *The Silver Age of Comic Book Art* won the Independent Publishers Award for Best Pop Culture Book of 2004. And now, without further ado...

"Blood, Sweat, and Tears... and Then Some" or "How to Sell a Batman Story in 12 Easy (?) Lessons"

by "Castro" Mike Friedrich

Background: In the spring of 1966, NPP [National Periodical Publications, a.k.a. DC Comics] issued a statement at the end of most of their lettercols to the effect that "letters will not be answered unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope." Now to any normal-thinking person (like myself, natch), this meant "letters will be answered when accompanied by an SASE." So I made a practice of writing a LOC [letter of comment] to every Julius Schwartz mag when that came out, enclosing an envelope for a reply. A regular correspondence was set up this way (though I had to wait days and weeks for replies because thousands of other fans had the same I idea I had). In early June I asked a post-scriptural question to the effect, "Do you take seriously reader contributions?" adding that I had an idea for a story that I would like to submit. The reply was...

"(June 16, 1966) Finally, do I 'take seriously reader contributions'? Yes

and no—depends on the contributor. In your case, you get the red carpet treatment. As a matter of fact, I definitely *do* encourage you to take a crack at writing for me. I'm open to EVERYTHING!

"However, I recommend that you send me a *plot* first—no point in doing a whole script based on an idea or development I don't like—or on something similar I may have coming up [sic].

"Believe me, I'm not putting you 'on' with writing for me. I'm hopeful you can come up with some fresh ideas. I'm confident that you have the literary ability to make a go of it—if not right off, then in due time, if you're willing to stick to it and learn the business..."

Naturally, I went out of my skull—Julie Schwartz asking *me* to write for *him!* Me, who had never done anything in the line of straight fiction more than a short story for an English class the year before! I quickly dashed up a Batman story featuring the return of the old villain TWO-FACE and sent it in....

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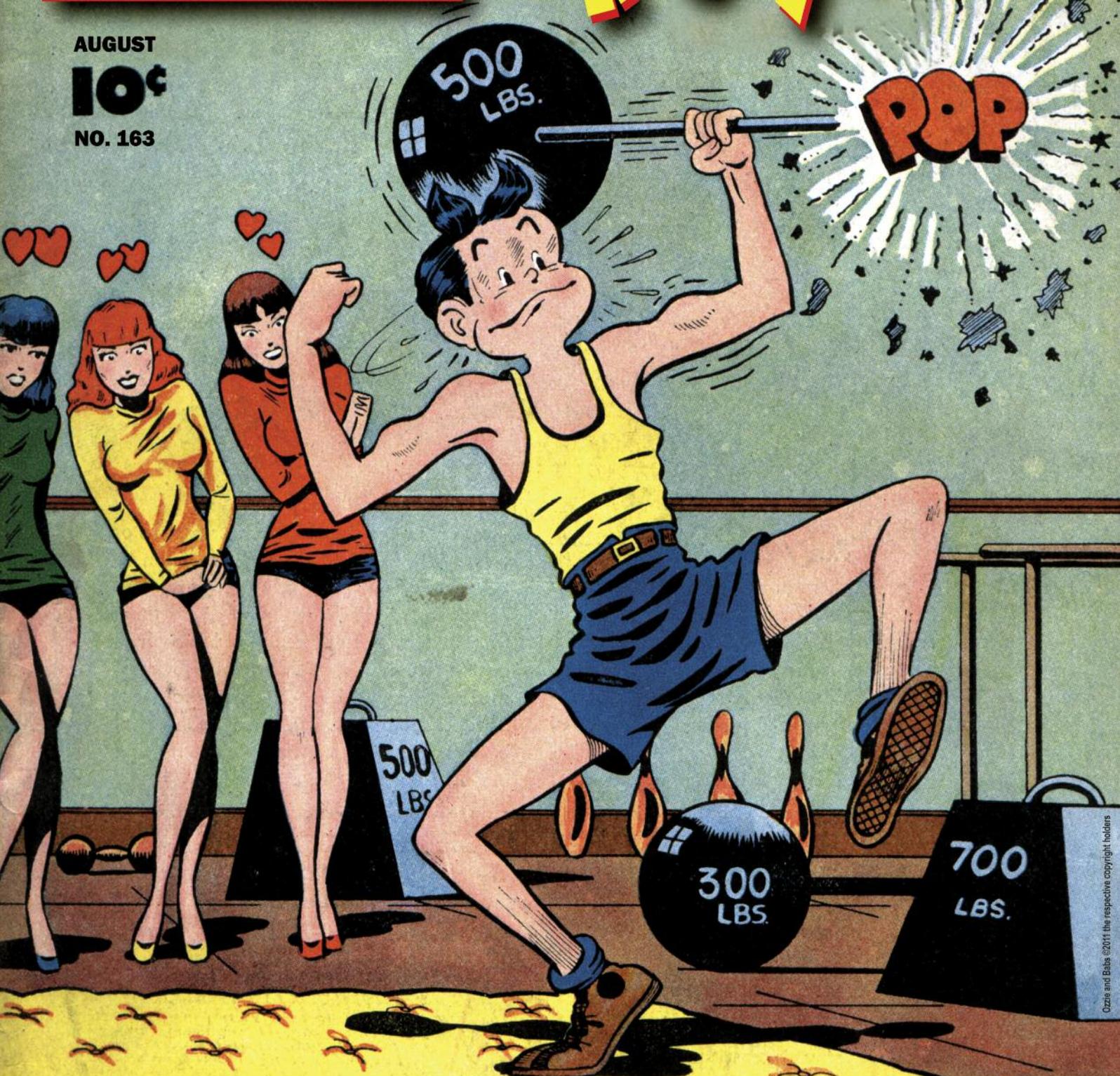
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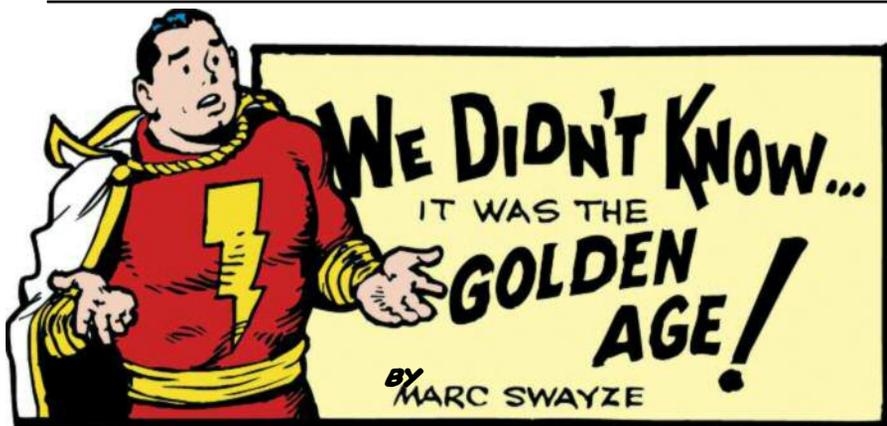
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NO. 163

ROY AID



is this what i want to do for the rest of my life?



[Art & logo ©2011 Marc Swayze; Captain Marvel © & TM 2011 DC Comics]

[FCA EDITORS NOTE: From 1941-53, Marcus D. Swayze was a top artist for Fawcett Publications. The very first Mary Marvel character sketches came from Marc's drawing table, and he illustrated her earliest adventures, including the classic origin story, "Captain Marvel Introduces Mary Marvel" (Captain Marvel Adventures No. 18, Dec. '42); but he was primarily hired by Fawcett Publications to illustrate Captain Marvel stories and covers for Whiz Comics and Captain Marvel Adventures. He also wrote many Captain Marvel scripts, and continued to do so while in the military. After leaving the service in 1944, he made an arrangement with Fawcett to produce art and stories for them on a freelance basis out of his Louisiana home. There he created both art and stories for *The Phantom Eagle* in *Wow Comics*, in addition to drawing the *Flyin' Jenny* newspaper strip for Bell Syndicate (created by his friend and mentor Russell Keaton). After the cancellation of *Wow*, Swayze produced artwork for Fawcett's top-selling line of romance comics, including *Sweethearts* and *Life Story*. After the company ceased publishing comics, Marc moved over to Charlton Publications, where he ended his comics career in the mid-'50s. Marc's ongoing professional memoirs have been a vital part of FCA since his first column appeared in FCA #54 (1996). Last time we re-presented the second part of John G. Pierce's discussion with Marc from Comics Interview #122 (1993), which covered Marc's post-1944 Fawcett work as well as the baseball game get-togethers with the Jack Binder art shop. As the final installment of this interview unfolds, we pick up with Marc recounting his work on "The Phantom Eagle." (Thanks to publisher David Anthony Kraft [comicsinterview.com]. —P.C. Hamerlinck.]

JOHN G. PIERCE: Now, to draw a feature such as "The Phantom Eagle," you had to have some knowledge of planes. Was research mandatory, or did you just use your imagination a lot?

MARC SWAYZE: My approach was to rough in the planes the way I wanted them in relation to the story, then get out

the file material for detail. I suppose that would be employing both imagination and research. I redesigned The Phantom Eagle's plane after taking over the feature in 1944, endeavoring to create a small, easily identifiable jet that reflected Phantom Eagle's character. Due to the volume of work I had taken on, which included the *Flyin' Jenny* Sunday page and later the daily strip, time was of extreme importance; therefore all the fussy detail was omitted from the plane.

JGP: That brings two questions to mind. First of all, do you know who created *The Phantom Eagle*?

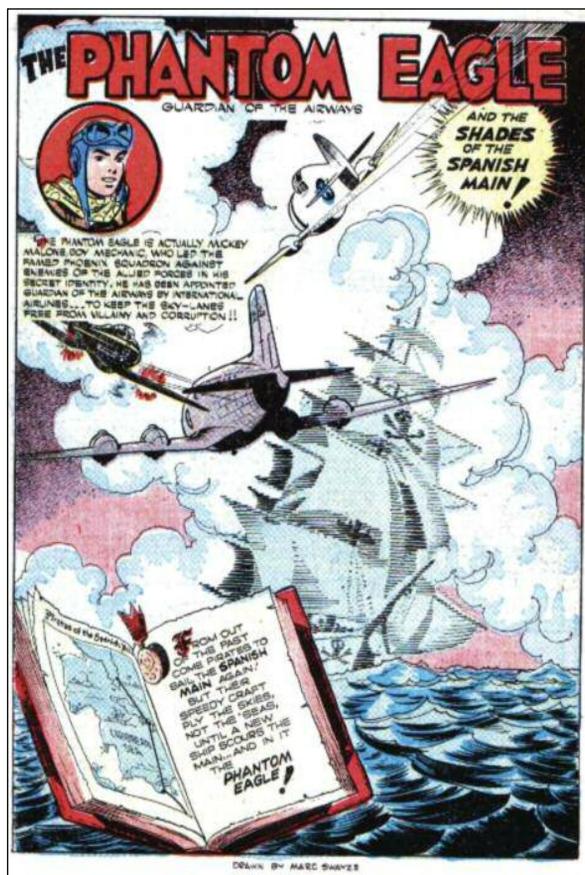
SWAYZE: No, I don't. Probably Bill Parker, who dreamed up many of the Fawcett characters and titles. I believe "Phantom Eagle," along with such features as "Mr.

Scarlet," "Prince Ibis," and "Golden Arrow," was in existence when I first joined the Fawcett staff. When I took it over in '44 it was being done by the [Jack] Binder studio. [Executive editor] Will Lieberman and I discussed the feature before I brought the assignment South with me, and the general understanding was that I was to do anything I wanted to do with it—changes, that is. I changed the title logo completely and did away with the six or seven young flyers representing Allied countries who followed Phantom Eagle everywhere he went—and had to be drawn! I connected him with a commercial aviation firm and centered the interest around him, his girl friend, and a few minor associates. I think I must have been

readying the feature for peacetime.

"Phantom Eagle" was a fun job—both writing and drawing. I regret that there is little possibility that it will ever appear in reprints because much of the opposition was the Rising Sun.

JGP: The second question: when you were working on "Phantom Eagle" and *Flyin' Jenny* simultaneously, did you have any trouble keeping them separate? Both, after all, were aviation-oriented. I would assume that *Phantom Eagle* operated in more of a fantasy realm than did *Flyin' Jenny*, and likely this helped to keep them apart.



Guardian of the Airways

Swayze's striking "Phantom Eagle" opening page from *Wow Comics* #52 (March 1947)—edited by Roy Ald, whose interview begins on p. 77 of this very issue. After his discharge from the Army in '44, Swayze took over the strip as a freelancer, creating both art and often scripts from his Louisiana home until the feature came to an end with *Wow's* cancellation in 1948. [Phantom Eagle TM & © 2011 respective copyright holders.]

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