

ROY THOMAS' SPIDER-HAPPY
COMICS FANZINE



Alter Ego™

STEVE DITKO REMEMBERED



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Steve Ditko
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P.C. Hamerlinck presents Brian Cremins' look at Ditko in *This Magazine Is Haunted*.

On Our Cover: For several years in the mid-1960s and perhaps even after, a Photostat of this Spider-Man drawing, especially prepared by **Steve Ditko** (with editor Stan Lee's name also appended), was mailed out to readers who contacted Marvel Comics asking for a pin-up—or perhaps a lock of Stan's hair or a frame from Steve's eyeglasses. Though Ye Editor has retained his own copy all these years, this issue's actual cover was scanned for us by Nick Caputo—for which thanks! This primo piece of art may well have appeared in color before somewhere—maybe even in *Amazing Spider-Man*, we forget—but it was colored especially for this issue by **Glenn Whitmore**. [TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Above: The art of the oft-wonderful **Steve Ditko** first drew the notice of 19-year-old Roy Thomas with the debut of "Captain Atom" in Charlton's *Space Adventures* #33 (March 1960), 2½ years before *Amazing Fantasy* #15, in stories written by co-creator **Joe Gill**. This splash panel and the origin story depicted Cap mostly in shades of blue—though on the cover his outfit was red and yellow, which would supersede the former hues in early future issues. Years later, after a costume change, the hero was purchased by DC and has been around ever since. Reproduced from DC's 2004 *hardcover The Action Heroes Archives, Vol. 1*. [TM & © DC Comics.]

This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Steve Ditko,
Vince Argondezzi, Fred Patten,
& Hames Ware



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FIRST PRINTING.



STEVE DITKO:

A Life In Comics

A Brief Bird's-Eye View Of A Remarkable Artist

by Nick Caputo

Steve Ditko was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, on November 2nd, 1927, where he spent his childhood and teenage years. After high school he joined the post-World War II Army, and upon his return to civilian life became a student at the Cartoonist and Illustrators School in New York City. There he was taught by comicbook artist Jerry Robinson, one of the early (and renowned) contributors on "Batman." Ditko was greatly influenced by Robinson, along with many other comicbook and strip artists, including Mort Meskin.

Ditko's entry into the comicbook field began with a number of small publishers. While his first sale, scripted by Bruce Hamilton ("Stretching Things") for Ajax-Farrell, appeared in *Fantastic Fears* #5 (Jan. 1954), his first full-art published

story was "Paper Romance" in *Daring Love* #1, cover-dated Sept.-Oct. 1953, for Stanmor. Other 1953-executed stories include the even earlier "Hair Yee-eeee" (signed "SS," likely a collaboration with fellow student Sy Moskowitz) in *Strange Fantasy* #9 (Dec. 1953; Farrell) and at the Simon & Kirby studio, assisting on *Captain 3-D* #1 (Harvey) and the unpublished second issue (primarily as background inker) and as full artist on "A Hole in the Head," a 6-page thriller in *Black Magic*, Vol. 4, #3, for the Prize group.

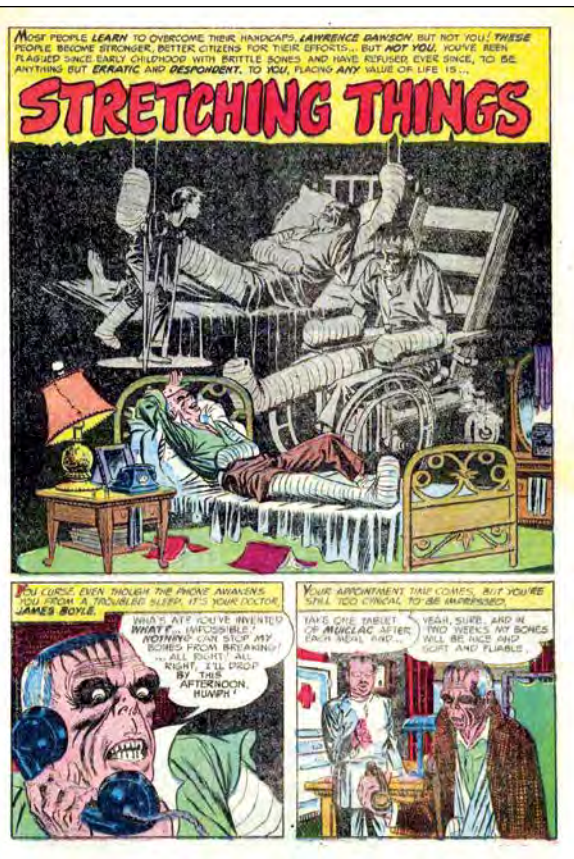
In addition to more *Black Magic* stories and Ditko's first Western for Timor [A/E EDITOR'S NOTE: See p. 33], 1954 launched a long and creatively rewarding association with Charlton Press. In his first year with the company, Ditko



Steve Ditko

in one of the most-reproduced of the relatively few photos of him known to exist—flanked by the splash page of the most famous story he ever drew, the origin of "Spider-Man" from *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (Sept. 1962), scripted by Stan Lee—and a splash featuring his most personal creation, "Mr. A," from *witzend* #3 (1966). Thanks to Bob Bailey and Jim Kealy, respectively, for the two art scans. [Amazing Fantasy page TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.; "Mr. A" page TM & © Estate of Steve Ditko.]





In the late 1950s, Ditko shared studio space in Manhattan with a fellow artist he befriended at the Cartoonist and Illustrators school: Eric Stanton, recognized for drawing erotic/fetish art in small press publications. According to Stanton, both men assisted each other from time to time. Ditko ghosted for Stanton (as "stantoons"), possibly over layouts; his distinctive inking/lettering is evident on strips such as "Sweeter Gwen." Stanton and Ditko remained studio mates for close to a decade and friends for the rest of their lives.

Daring Fears!
 (Above left:) The splash page of the first Ditko-drawn story ever published—from Stanmor's *Daring Love* #1 (Sept.-Oct. 1953).
 (Above right:) This story for Ajax/Farrell's horror comic *Fantastic Fears* #5 (Jan. 1954) was reportedly drawn before the Stanmor story, but appeared in print shortly after it. Thanks to Nick Caputo. In fact, all art scans accompanying this look at Ditko's career were supplied by Nick, unless otherwise noted. [© the respective copyright holders.]

produced over 150 pages of art, drawing crime, science-fiction, and horror stories. For a beginning artist, Ditko's work displayed a sense of confidence that pointed to a great talent in the making. His understanding of mood, pacing, characterization, and panel-to-panel storytelling was already well above average and would grow considerably in the years to come.

Only one Ditko-drawn story appeared in 1955, "Flymouth Car Show" in Charlton's humor title *From Here to Insanity* #10 (June). 1956, though, was a watershed time, the start of a nearly 10-year association with editor Stan Lee and Timely/Atlas (later Marvel) comics. There he produced 4-page thrillers for *Astonishing*, *Journey into Mystery*, *Marvel Tales*, *Spellbound*, *World of Mystery*, *World of Suspense*, and *Strange Tales of the Unusual*, some scripted by veteran Carl Wessler. While "The Badmen" (*2-Gun Western* #4, May) was one of countless Western genre tales, its importance in comics history is assured due to its being the first story with a "Stan Lee and S. Ditko" byline.

That Old Black Magic
 An early Ditko monster, from the Simon-ε-Kirby-produced Prize comic *Black Magic* #27 (a.k.a. Vol. 4, #3; Nov.-Dec. 1953)—except that Nick Caputo's analysis, reflected in the online Grand Comics Database, says that Jack Kirby redrew all the monster figures in the story "A Hole in the Head" except the one in the third panel on this particular page.
 [TM ε © the respective trademark ε copyright notice.]



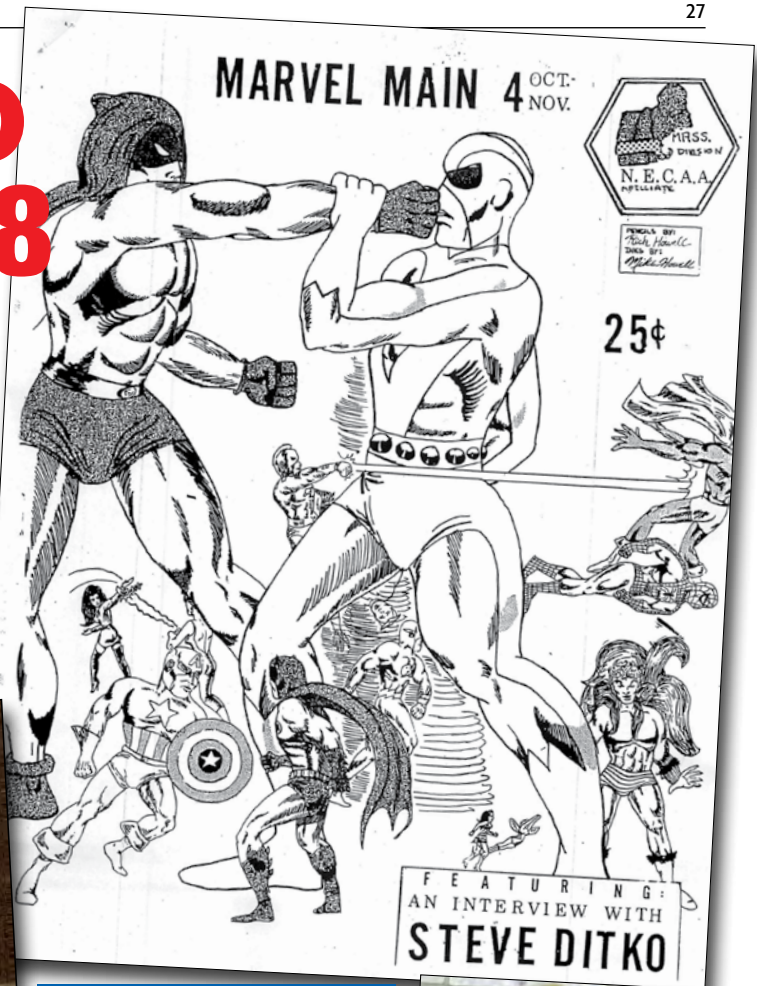
STEVE DITKO Interview—1968

Conducted by Mike & Rich Howell
and Mark Canterbury

AIE

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This interview, which was conducted by mail, first appeared in the fanzine Marvel Main #4 (Oct.-Nov. 1968). It has been reprinted with the permission of Mike & Rich Howell.*

At our request, Mike wrote the new introduction below, which immediately precedes the interview. Alas, Mark Canterbury, who asked a few questions of his own, passed on several years ago. The interview was retyped for Alter Ego by Eric Nolen-Weathington.



Steve Ditko & Richard Howell

The former, on left, in the mid-1960s—and the latter, on right, in a more recent photo (though, alas, we have none of his brother Michael or of Mark Canterbury). Above them is Rich's cover for *Marvel Main* #4. [Heroes TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]



Part I - Introduction

How Steve Ditko Talked To *Marvel Main*

by Mike Howell, founding editor of *Marvel Main*

The summer of 1968 was one of the most historic in American culture. Along with assassinations, demonstrations, and presidential elections, another, quieter, bit of upheaval was taking place: Steve Ditko was bringing out new characters and often-polarizing stories.

News of this tectonic change in the national comics industry was spread by the Blue Blazer Irregulars who made up the nascent comic fan community through their network of choice: the fanzine.

Through a combination of idle determination, sincere respect for Ditko's work, and an elevated sense of mission, I directed my self-published mimeographed fanzine, *Marvel Main*, toward trying

to get a "big name" interview. And we got a beauty, from Steve Ditko.

How difficult was that? you might wonder. Well, if you were a sheltered, suburban 14-year-old it was really quite a challenge. To start, I had no idea where (although New York City was a starting guess) or how to locate Ditko. My trips to the big city of Boston helped me learn the subway system and become familiar with Filene's Basement and its automatic markdown policy that was catnip to my mother. When my brother Richard and I accompanied her there, we almost always were rewarded with a *Tintin* book, so braving the crowds had its perks, but that didn't get us any closer to Steve Ditko.

A bit of background. Our core fan group was very tightly held: myself, my brother Richard, and our next-door neighbor, Mark Canterbury. We shared a delight in comics and absurdist humor and quirky corners of what would grow into America's pop culture. The fact that we all sucked at sports and that dating, etc., seemed decades away helped with our hermetic association. Our impulse to keep ourselves amused led each of us to found a self-published

“A Very Mysterious Character”

An Essay On STEVE DITKO

by Barry Pearl

Barry Pearl

seen some years back, when his older brother Norman was teaching him to read. Thanks to BP.

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb in his skin and walk around in it.”

—Atticus Finch, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

One day a man will ring your doorbell and offer you CELEBRITY! He will offer you fame and fortune and recognition. He will fight your battles for you and gear up the troops to go after your perceived enemies.

And all you have to do is give him everything you have... your privacy, your intimate moments, your private thoughts, your old artwork, your new artwork, and details from events fifty years old. You’ll be expected to show up at conventions and sit and autograph comics that someone will sell tomorrow on eBay and sit in on panel after panel examining your work from fifty years ago and dismissing what you are working on now.

There are those who accept the offer, love the money and attention, but then complain about the lack of privacy and the wave of criticism.

Those who don’t take it are called eccentric, outsiders, has-beens, and hard to work with. With their subject out of the limelight, people can write newspaper articles and books saying outrageous things that bring publicity onto themselves, knowing



their subject will not bother to respond. They will tell you that they tried to get Ditko to cooperate with them, but it is never unconditional. They want something from him: his opinions, his personality, and most of all his approval. They will have people who never meet him write about him, make claims about him, and, by keeping him out of it, they seem to validate their own absurd remarks. This is not journalism; in fact, it is not even common sense.

Some people’s work speaks for itself. In the world of serious comicbooks, no one’s work speaks more for itself than Steve Ditko’s.

The Marvel Age of Comics was built on Jack Kirby’s creativity, Steve Ditko’s ingenuity, and Stan Lee’s continuity. Jack Kirby gave wonder to the Marvel Universe. Steve Ditko gave it awe. Kirby externalized the quest for knowledge, Ditko internalized it. On a journey to the Infinite, Kirby took us to the outer reaches of the universe. On a journey to find Eternity, Ditko took us into the minds of the Ancient One and Doctor Strange. In Doctor Strange’s first adventure in *Strange Tales* #110, Ditko introduces us to Nightmare, a villain that personifies an anxiety that we all share. Ditko places us in another dimension, one that exists in all of us, where the laws of physics are not relevant or even observed. Soon, this will be developed into the intangible home of Dormammu and all that follow.

The Hulk is a great example of Ditko recognizing what made a character work and what didn’t. When Kirby introduced him, his change was caused by external factors, dusk and dawn, and later a machine. Ditko’s Hulk changed that to an internal issue, uncontrollable anger. This made the Hulk unique among

He Rode A Blazing Western!

The Rawhide Kid (as re-conceived by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in the early 1960s) and Peter Parker/Spider-Man may indeed have had similar origin stories as Barry suggests. But Steve Ditko never drew *Rawhide Kid*, so we’ll just toss you the splash page of a Ditko-illustrated “Utah Kid” story from Timor Publications’ *Blazing Western* #1 (Jan. 1954). Barry’s buddy Nick Caputo, who supplied it, says that the “Utah Kid” references are “crudely lettered” (like, the “H” looks ready to fall off!)—and he does bear more than a passing resemblance to Timely/Atlas’ Ringo Kid—so could this have been an art sample that went astray and wound up at another company? We’ll doubtless never know. [© the respective copyright holders.]



Steve Ditko

Here’s a rare photo of the artist in 1963 with his nephews Mark (on the left) and his older brother Steve—yep, another Steve Ditko! With thanks to Mark Ditko, via John Cimino. This pic came in just before we went to press.

A Life Lived On His Own Terms

Encounters With Spider-Man's Co-Creator, 1962 to 2017

by Bernie Bubnis

Bernie Bubnis

with a cosplay Spidey at the New York Comic Con in October 2017—and, because this article is partly the story of Bernie's long "hunt" for essence of the elusive Steve Ditko, an image of the iconic cover of *Amazing Spider-Man* #34 (May 1966). Thanks to Bernie for the photo, which was taken by his wife Lucille, and to the Grand Comics Database for the cover scan; note his "Comicon 1964" button. [Cover TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]

first met Steve Ditko in 1962. The last time I saw him was October 2017, and that is where this story begins.

The New York Comic Con at the Javits Center was a circus of people. I was flipping through some original artwork stacked on two tables. Every other second, someone bumped into me, and it was getting crowded. So crowded that it started to bother me. A guy in a Spider-Man costume offered to climb onto my shoulders so my wife could get a better photo. Just take the photo with him next to me, *please*. I was ready for lunch.

My wife and I left Javits and headed to a restaurant on West 52nd St. that we remembered from years ago (please, please make it still be there). Victor's Cuban Cafe was, and it brought

back memories of joining a conga line led by Roberto Duran (Victor's boxer cousin) and dancing into the night. Honestly, remembering a good moment in your life is a magic pill, and that led me to start remembering a lot of good moments with artist and

writer Steve Ditko. Wasn't his studio just around the corner?

I had corresponded with him over the years, but those letters were too few and far between. My last in-person meeting with him had been in August 1964. I was growing up, and life's responsibilities took control of my time. Our correspondence became more consistent in 2014, the year the NYCC would host a panel called "Survivors of the 1964 Comicon." I knew he would want to be there... hey, what do I know... I'm a dreamer. He didn't, but his handwritten letters would make me wait patiently for the next envelope from him to arrive in my mailbox (please, please make him answer his phone).

His hearing is bad and he admits it. Mine is bad and I don't admit it. My wife took the phone and let him know we would be coming by. His studio/apartment was located at 1650 Broadway, and the entry was from West 51st Street. A guy at the front desk asked if we had an appointment and pointed us to the elevators. Before his floor, the doors opened and in steps someone I knew. "Steve, it's me, Bernie!" He looked confused, so my wife increased the volume, "IT'S BERNIE BUBNIS FROM THE 1964 COMICON!" He stared and said, "You look different." I didn't know if he was kidding, and I started laughing, "It's been



Boxed In

Bernie and Lucille Bubnis at Victor's Cuban Cafe that 2017 day—and a portrait of boxer Roberto Duran that hung there. Bernie recalls joining the fighter there in a conga line years earlier. Thanks to the Bubnises for both photos.

We're informed by Bernie that Roberto Duran "is still an icon to a lot of people. This portrait was in the bar area of the restaurant, and they were redoing the floors. When I showed interest in taking the photo, two workers built a shaky platform and then stood on it to take this photo for me. That is true love."

didn't know what to say. Like always, he was sitting at his drawing table. He saw me and said, "Did you bring any new fanzines?" He had never asked me that before. I would just put them on his desk, on top of whatever pile of paper was already there. I carried nothing. I started breathing again. At that very moment, I knew I was safe.

I really believe that Steve Ditko *always* felt safe at his drawing board. He told me once, "I work until I'm finished." It sure seemed that way. I know Stanton once asked him how late he worked the day before. Steve's answer: "Way past your bedtime." I'm glad he was there today. My planned speech was forgotten; I just told him my father died and announced that I was skipping the funeral. BANG! As easy as that... I thought.

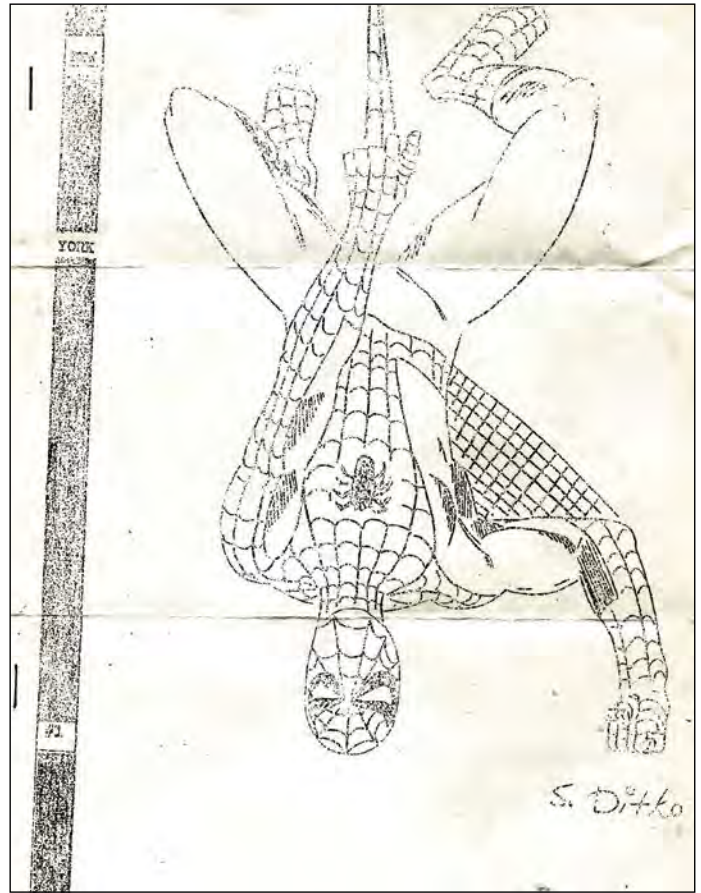
He dropped his pencil, our eyes locked, and I thought his stare would drill a hole right through my head.

I backed up against the shelving on the wall and slid to the floor. He and I talked for over an hour... him telling me that I was doing the wrong thing. I should be with my family. Without family there is nothing. I told him some stories of my childhood and why I preferred to hide inside science-fiction novels and ten-cent comicbooks. He told me to be "stronger than the fears" around me, do not let the past control my future. At some point I stopped talking and just listened. He never raised his voice or picked up his drawing pencil. We just talked. It was a turning point for me, remembered moments that steered my life for years to come.

I stood up, thanked him, and headed home to be with my mother. My regular visits to his studio would continue, and sometimes I would bring a guest. This day it was fellow fan Len Wein, long before he became a famous writer for comicbooks. This day he wanted Ditko's autograph on a copy of *Spider-Man*. Oh my.

Len buys a *Spider-Man* comic off the racks at Penn Station. I tell him that I don't think Steve will sign a comicbook. Len opens the book to the first page and puts it on Ditko's art board. Ditko *does* sign (in the lower border under the art), using his drawing pencil. Then... he *erases* it. He reminds both of us, "If you do it for one person, you have to do it for everyone. So I don't sign for anyone."

Months later, he did reward Len with an original drawing



Along Came A Spider...

The Spider-Man drawing Ditko did for an early Bubnis fanzine. We've printed it before, but what the hell. Thanks to Will Murray for sending this particular scan. [Spider-Man TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]

of Dr. Strange, and it was signed. Len used it for the cover of his fanzine *Aurora*. If I had to guess, Ditko was tiring of fans visiting his studio.



Len Wein

The late great comics writer and editor (seen at far right) and his onetime buddy Bernie Bubnis reunited for the panel to celebrate the 1964 con, on Oct. 12, 2014, at the NY Comic Con. Len's next to early comics dealer Howard Rogofsky, while Bernie and Flo Steinberg talk near the podium. Thanks to Bernie B. for the photo.



"Survivors Of The First Comicon"

We printed this pic from the 2014 reunion back in *A/E* #149, but the guys who joined forces to put on the first-ever comics convention deserve another bow. (Left to right, standing:) Rick Bierman, Bernie Bubnis, Ethan Roberts, Art Tripp, and non-attendee but major fanzine collector Aaron Caplan. Seated in the wheelchair because of an injury is Len Wein. Two of the guys are holding copies of Len's vintage fanzine *Aurora* #2. Sadly, Len and Ethan have passed since this pic was taken. Photo courtesy of Bernie.

Two Visits To STEVE DITKO'S Studio/Sanctum Sanctorum

by Russ Maheras

I wrote my first letter to Steve Ditko in early 1973, while I was still in high school. It was the typical letter a budding fan-artist might send a seasoned professional comics artist back then—full of effusive praise, capped with a request for some secret kernel of artistic knowledge that would magically transform overnight a fan's crude artistic efforts into professional-level artwork. Ditko did his best to answer, giving what was, in retrospect, a solid list of advice.

Two years later, I wrote him again, and this time I asked if I could stop by his studio for a visit when I was in New York City later that year. He politely declined, and I pushed that idea into the dustbin of history—not realizing that 28 years later my request would become a reality.

More than two decades passed before I wrote Ditko again, in 1997. In the interim, I joined the Air Force, learned to be an aircraft avionics technician, got married, had kids, opted to be a career Airman, traveled and lived abroad for nearly a decade, earned a bachelor's degree, retrained into public affairs during the early 1990s military drawdown, kept drawing, and kept publishing my fanzine, *Maelstrom*. In fact, my third letter to Ditko was a request for what I knew was an extreme longshot: an interview for an upcoming issue of my zine. Again, he politely declined.

I wrote a few more letters during the next two years about nothing in particular—including a couple while I was stationed in the Republic of Korea in 1998. In one of them, I included some terrifically supple Korean-made brushes that were ridiculously cheap, but feathered ink like a Winsor & Newton brush costing 30 times as much.

In 1999, I retired from the Air Force, published *Maelstrom* #7, and dutifully sent Ditko a copy. Our correspondence continued off and on until 2002, when I started preparing a Steve Ditko article for *Maelstrom* #8—along with a cover I drew that featured many of his more notable characters. When the issue was published, I sent him



Russ Maheras

circa 1973, around the time he first met Steve Ditko—juxtaposed with an anonymous but skillfully done homage composed of samples of Ditko's 1960s super-hero work, which appeared online shortly after the artist's passing: Charlton's Captain Atom and Blue Beetle—Marvel's Spider-Man, Dr. Strange, and Nightmare—and DC's Creeper. Thanks to Russ for the photo, and to Michael T. Gilbert for sending the homage. [Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, & The Creeper TM & © DC Comics; Spider-Man, Dr. Strange, and Nightmare TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]



a copy, and something about it must have struck a chord, as he sent me several letters of comment. Suddenly, our correspondence was a regular back-and-forth, and as my letters got longer, so did his. Some of his letters were 10, 12, or even 16 pages long.

So when I found out I had a business trip to New York City in mid-August 2003, I figured it couldn't hurt to call ahead of time and ask if I could stop by his studio on the 11th. To my surprise, he said yes. What follows are the notes I made in my hotel room immediately following visit #1, followed by notes I made after my second studio visit on Feb. 11, 2005.

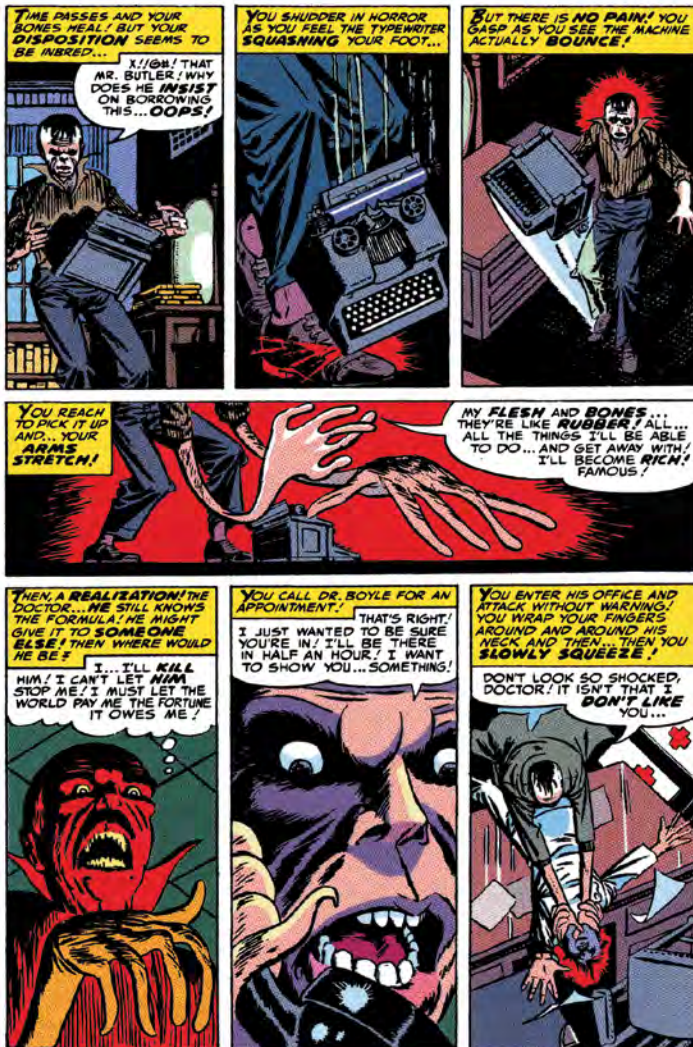
Visit #1

At about 2:50 p.m., Aug. 11, I knocked on Steve Ditko's studio door. He opened it and said without introduction, "Hello, Russ," and reached out and shook my hand. I went inside and gratefully thanked him for seeing me. I asked him where I could set down my laptop carry case and he pointed to a spot; then I asked him if he minded if I took off my suit coat, and he said, "Here, let me take that from you," and he took my coat and hung it up on his coat rack.



CHECK OUT THE PAGE BELOW, (LEFT), FEATURING "STRETCHING THINGS," STEVE DITKO'S VERY FIRST STORY! I WROTE AND DREW A SEQUEL IN 1991, "REVENGE OF THE BONELESS MAN," IN HOMAGE TO DITKO. IRONICALLY, MY STORY WAS COMMISSIONED BY PUBLISHER BRUCE HAMILTON, WHO WROTE "STRETCHING THINGS" BACK IN 1953.

I DID A BRIEF RECAP ON PAGE TWO OF MY "STRETCHING THINGS" SEQUEL (SEE BELOW). IT'S GOOD, BUT IT'S NOT DITKO. STEVE WAS, IN EVERY SENSE, A TRUE ORIGINAL. DITKO'S GONE NOW, BUT HE REMAINS, NOW AND FOREVER, ONE OF MY STRONGEST INSPIRATIONS. THIS ONE'S FOR YOU, STEVE!



(Above:) Ditko's "Stretching Things" from Farrell's *Fantastic Fears* #5 (Jan. 1954), recolored by Bernie Mireault in 1991. This story, scripted by Bruce Hamilton, was one of Ditko's first! © Farrell Publications.]



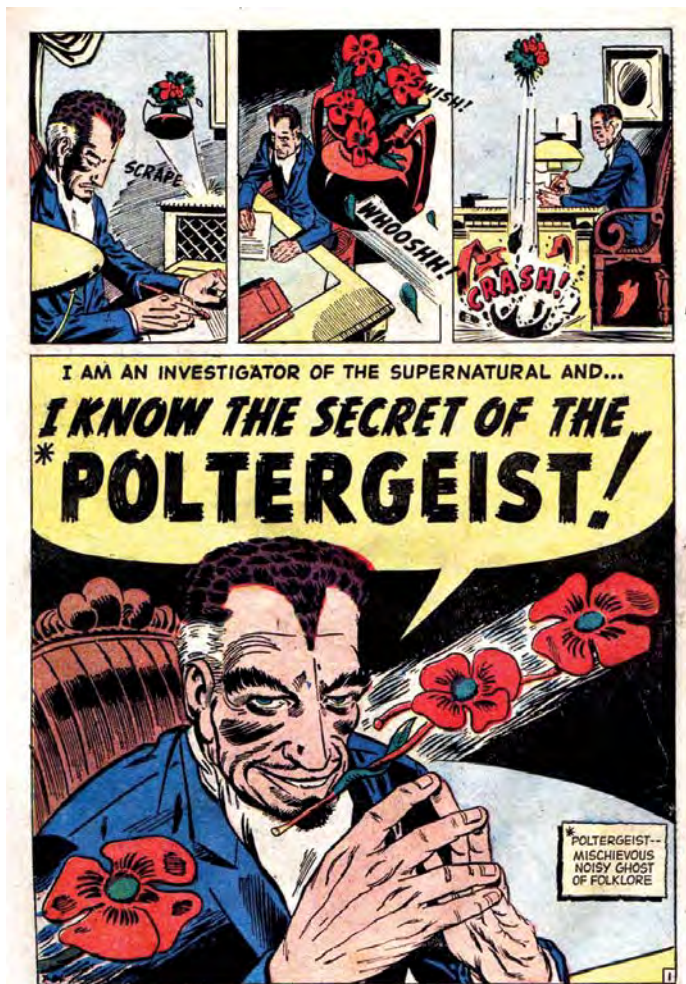
(Above:) Gilbert's "Revenge Of The Boneless Man," drawn in 1991 for Hamilton's *Grave Tales* and published in 2005 in *Atomeka's Mr. Monster: Who Watches The Garbagemen?* Color by Bernie Mireault. © Michael T. Gilbert.]

First Love...

by Michael T. Gilbert

Hooked on Ditko!

1959 was the year Grandma Nurock gave me a beat-up copy of Marvel's *Tales to Astonish* #1. Jack Kirby's lead story featured a mutated turtle, roughly half a zillion feet tall. *Wow!* Tales illustrated by Jack Davis and Carl Burgos followed. But the story that really hooked me was "I Know the Secret of the Poltergeist!"—illustrated by you-know-who!



"I've Got A Secret!"

(Above:) Ditko's splash and final panel for "I Know the Secret of the Poltergeist!" from *Tales to Astonish* #1 (Jan 1959). Scriptor unknown. [TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]



Steve Didn't Put All His "X" In One Basket!

(Above:) "The Thing from Planet X" from *Tales of Suspense* #3 (May 1959). Scriptor unknown. [TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.]

I was seven years old. And so began my sixty-year love affair with Steve Ditko.

Ditko's art was direct and powerful, the storytelling wildly inventive and compelling. Moody black areas gave the stories solidity. Ditko's characters were warm and ethnic-looking—a stark contrast to the cool, WASPy heroes drawn by DC mainstays like Carmine Infantino and Mike Sekowsky.

By contrast, the hero of Ditko's "Poltergeist!" tale looked like a Polish peasant. In this story an investigator devoted to debunking the supernatural comes to a young couple's house—a house apparently haunted by mischievous spooks called Poltergeists.

BART BUSH, Then And Now

– Part 2

Continuing Our Talk With The Co-Founder of OAF (The Oklahoma Alliance Of Fans)

Interview by Bill Schley

Introduction

can think of few fans who have done as much in fandom as Bart Bush: a fan and collector with wide-ranging interests, a fanzine publisher, a comicon organizer, and a comic retail store owner.

My interview with Bart last issue covered his youth, his early collecting years, his entrance into comic fandom, and the formation of OAF. We then discussed the OAF fanzine from its launch in 1967, and its evolution from a newsletter to a more elaborate fanzine under Bart's editorship, beginning with OAF #15 (June 1968). We ended the discussion with Bart's entry into college in the fall of 1970, when he was forced to shed those editorial duties.

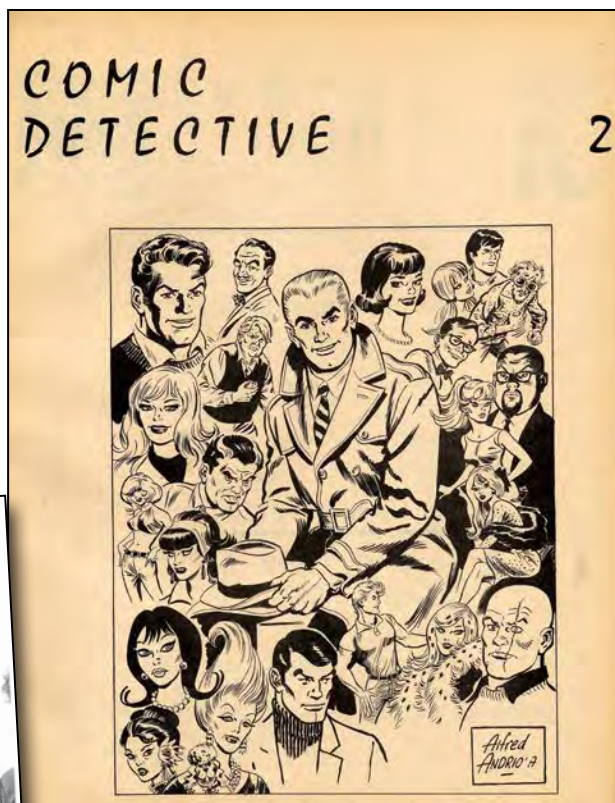
But it turned out that the Oklahoma Alliance of Fandom had bigger fish to fry than an informative fanzine; its members became the nucleus of a committee that would mount not one, but **four** major conventions in Oklahoma in the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, although we would get to a discussion of OAF activities in recent times, we first needed to talk about the phenomena known as Multicons. This interview, at Bart's request, was conducted via e-mail in the waning days of 2018 and the first weeks of 2019. All photographs are courtesy of Bart Bush. —Bill Schelly.

BILL SCHELLY: *How was Oklahoma's Multicon born?*

BART BUSH: Dallas held the first Southwesterncon in 1966, Houston held the second one in 1967, and then it went back to Dallas in 1968. The idea is that they would each do the con every other year. Houston held the Southwesterncon in 1969. But then Dallas announced that it was bidding to host the 1973 World Science Fiction Convention, so it didn't want to do the Southwesterncon in 1970. That's when OAF stepped forward to do the 1970 con. Dallas put their support behind us, as did Houston, who didn't want to do the con in two successive years.

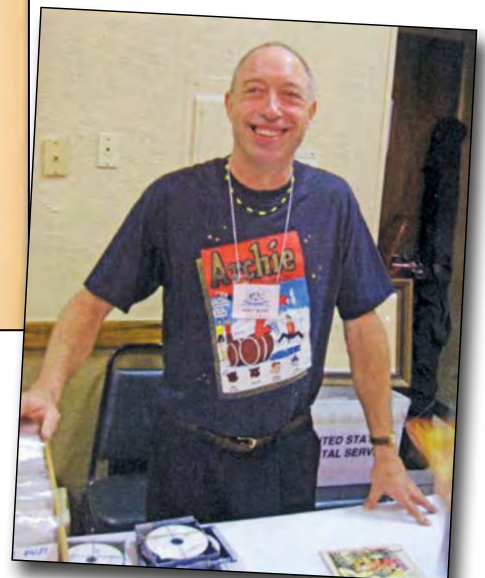
BILL: *What were the specific challenges OAF had in putting on cons that, say, New York cons or San Diego cons didn't have?*

BART: The biggest challenge was hoping fans would come to the Midwest for a show. None of us had done anything like this. Most of us were teenagers and were inexperienced in business matters. But we had seen how the previous cons had gone, and with their help and support we figured we could pull this off. Don Maris and Robert A. Brown were the chairmen for 1970. Eric Groves and Don Maris chaired Multicon 1972, Don and Robert in 1975, and then Robert and myself in 1981.



Bart Bush

in 1971 (left) and today (right). In the early-to-mid '70s he published four issues of the fanzine *Comic Detective*, largely as a tribute to the classic comic strip *Dick Tracy*, as well as other syndicated detectives such as Alfred Andriola's *Kerry Drake*, seen here on the cover of *CD* #2 (Summer 1973). [TM & © the respective trademark & copyright holders.]



One Life, Furnished In Early DITKO

An Imaginary Story Featuring Charlton Comics, Ibis The Invincible, Doctor Strange, & The Great Connecticut Flood Of 1955

by Brian Cremins

for Harlan

These are the facts as I know and understand them: The late Steve Ditko, legendary co-creator of Spider-Man and Doctor Strange, *never* worked for Fawcett Publications.

He was a few months too late. By the time he began drawing covers and stories for *This Magazine Is Haunted*, a title introduced by the Fawcett comics line in 1951, Charlton Comics from Derby, Connecticut, had taken over the title. In 1954, Ditko drew five covers for the series, along with four stories. Then, by early 1955, *This Magazine Is Haunted* ceased publication. Sort of. It carried on as a comic called *Danger and Adventure*, which, as the Grand Comics Database points out, picked up where *This Magazine Is Haunted* left off with issue #22. On the cover of that issue of the series is none other than Fawcett's Ibis the Invincible. Unlike the members of the Marvel Family—which Fawcett, as part of its settlement with National, had promised never to publish (or allow to be published) again—Ibis

still had some life left in him, even if the story Charlton published had first appeared in *Whiz Comics* #45 a decade earlier. (And, just for the record, *This Magazine Is Haunted* returned to the Charlton lineup in 1957-58 for five more issues, though sporting a butchered numbering system that can confuse the unwary reader—and Ditko contributed heavily to the revised series' covers and interior artwork.)

Those are the facts. But we're all friends and comicbook fans here. We love our *What Ifs?* and our Imaginary Stories (many of which Otto Binder himself wrote for DC's Superman comics after Fawcett's settlement with that company). When I began working on this article, P.C. Hamerlinck urged me to explore one of these alternate histories: What if Charlton had hired Steve Ditko to draw "Ibis the Invincible" for *Danger and Adventure*? What if Ditko had gotten a head start on ideas he later introduced with Stan Lee at



Steve Ditko

in his studio in the 1960s, flanked by his cover for *This Magazine Is Haunted* #21 (Nov. 1954), that comic's final issue in its initial Charlton, pre-Comics Code incarnation—and the cover of *Danger and Adventure* #22 (Feb. '55), which continued the *TMiH* numbering but cover-featured Ibis the Invincible, a sorcerer-hero, in an Alex Blum-penciled story reprinted from Fawcett's *Whiz Comics*. Charlton had recently purchased many of Fawcett's effects after the latter publisher left the comicbook business in 1953. Alas, this was far too early for Ditko get the opportunity to work his own particular brand of magic with the potent Ibigick! [Ibis the Invincible TM & © DC Comics; other cover TM & © the respective trademark & copyright holders.]





Sheldon Moldoff
 during the Golden Age of Comics—juxtaposed between covers for Fawcett’s *Captain Midnight* #37 (Feb. 1946) and the same company’s *This Magazine Is Haunted* #1 (Oct. 1951). He had brought the latter concept to Fawcett Publications. The first issue of *Haunted* was illustrated by Moldoff. Besides *TMIH*, the artist sold other horror titles to Fawcett. Even late in life, Moldoff claimed that EC publisher Bill Gaines lifted some of his horror-comics concepts after Moldoff had presented his ideas to him... and he had some paperwork (and published stories) to strengthen his claims. [TM & © the respective trademark & copyright holders.]

Marvel? What if his version of Ibis’ companion Princess Taia

had looked just like Clea from *Doctor Strange*? Never happened, of course. Then again, we’re talking about magic and the supernatural here, right? We’ve got plenty of ghosts and tall tales in the Naugatuck River Valley, where Charlton was located. So why not daydream a little?

But, before we try to answer these questions, let’s look at the history of *This Magazine Is Haunted*, first by turning to P.C. Hamerlinck’s interview with Sheldon Moldoff from *FCA* #178 [*Alter Ego* #119, pp. 57–60].

A few years after World War II, Shelly Moldoff had an idea for a new comicbook series. Back in New York, he tried to find work with DC, but found himself instead at Fawcett, where editor Will Lieberson offered him “plenty of ‘Captain Midnight’ stories, as well as a few for ‘Don Winslow of the Navy’” [qtd. in Hamerlinck 58]. Like other freelancers of the era, Moldoff shared with PCH his fond memories of Fawcett and its editors. The company, he recalled, “was less big business and more like one big happy family,” with great folks like “Ginny Provisiero, Roy Ald, Dick Kraus, Stanley Kauffman, Wendell Crowley,” all of whom were part of what Moldoff described as “a tight ship” with Lieberson as their tireless captain.

Despite this strong working relationship with Fawcett and his friendship with Lieberson, however, Moldoff’s idea for a horror comic was something that the company’s editors “weren’t quite

ready” to publish. When Fawcett passed, Moldoff turned to publisher Bill Gaines at EC Comics. Eventually, the writer and artist found himself “back again [at] Fawcett, who finally,” he explained, “bought it after they saw the horror trend starting to grow” [59]. With a cover by Moldoff featuring the book’s eerie host Doctor Death, the first issue of *This Magazine Is Haunted* appeared with an October 1951 cover date. A year earlier, as Qiana Whitted points out in her groundbreaking new book on the “shock comics” of the early 1950s, Gaines and editor/writer Al Feldstein “experimented” with the genre “by placing their own original horror stories in two of EC’s crime comics,” which resulted in “a subsequent bump in sales” [Whitted 12–13].

The stories proved so successful, Whitted adds, that Gaines decided “to transform *War against Crime* and *Crime Patrol* into” what would become “*The Vault of Horror* and *The Crypt of Terror* (which later became *Tales from the Crypt*),” the company’s flagship horror titles [Whitted 13].

For his part, Moldoff claimed in his *FCA* interview that Gaines’ company “ended up stealing some of my concepts after I had presented my ideas to them.” Nonetheless, as PCH notes in the *FCA* interview, Moldoff’s other horror titles for Fawcett, including *Worlds of Fear* and *Strange Suspense Stories* (1952–1953) “weren’t as gruesome as what EC and some other publishers were dishing up back then.” Moldoff agreed, noting that as Fawcett “test[ed] the waters with [these comics], Will Lieberson was always very careful not to go too far with anything” [58]. Like Gaines at EC, Lieberson and Fawcett could not afford to ignore the changing tastes of their readers who, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, shifted their affection from superheroes to crime, horror, and romance comics.

As EC ushered in what Whitted and other scholars have described as “The Atomic Age of Comics” [13], Fawcett, with Beck, Binder, and Costanza’s mighty Captain Marvel still their most popular, defended itself against the rise of DC. Coupled between comic book sales and the lawsuit “did ‘Superman’ members know two” [60]. Bill Lieberson’s best they could do in the 1940s, when the company was in anytime soon.

The hour of *This Magazine Is Haunted* was these sudden changes of the desperate banner that rained cloud surround *Whiz Comics* and *Tom Mix*. Each newsstand and entertainment real and frigid of the atom bomb the possibility

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