

THE RETRO COMICS EXPERIENCE!



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BACKISSUE!

TM

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This issue:

SPACE GHOST™

in comics!



TOON COMICS ISSUE: JONNY QUEST • MARVEL PRODUCTIONS, LTD. • STAR BLAZERS • MARVEL'S HANNA-BARBERA LINE • UNPUBLISHED PLASTIC MAN COMIC STRIP & MORE

S. RUDE '11

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Number 59
September 2012

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

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Detail from the cover of DC Comics' Space Ghost #1 (Jan. 2005). Art by Alex Ross. TM & © Hanna-Barbera Productions.

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FlashBack!

SPACE GHOST™

In Comics

by Max Romero

Since debuting as a Hanna-Barbera cartoon in 1966, *Space Ghost* has enjoyed a long life as a pop-culture icon of Saturday morning television. But somehow, in spite of his enduring popularity, the intergalactic protector and bringer of justice has only haunted the fringes of the comic-book universe that was a source of inspiration for his out-of-our-world adventures.

In the character's 45-year history, *Space Ghost* has never had its own regular, ongoing series. The most recent title was a six-issue miniseries by DC Comics that wrapped up in 2005, while the rest comprise a collection of one-shots and appearances in licensed comics featuring other Hanna-Barbera characters and adaptations. Before the DC miniseries, there hadn't been a dedicated *Space Ghost* comic in more than seven years, with the one before that preceding it by ten years—a trend of spotty appearances that is typical for the Phantom of the Spaceways.

On television, *Space Ghost* stayed in the popular culture thanks to reruns, a poorly received second series in 1981 that was gone after just 22 episodes, and later VHS and DVD collections. In the mid-'90s he was reinvented as a charming, though somewhat goofy, cable talk-show host broadcasting from the Ghost Planet and joined by co-hosts/prisoners Zorak and Moltar. For many people of a certain generation, this is who they think of when *Space Ghost* comes up, maybe having only a vague idea that, at one point, the hero was something else ... something *more*.

Having gone from television to comics and back to television—and then back to comics once again, where the interstellar lawman finally got a real origin—the question is still there: Who is *Space Ghost*?



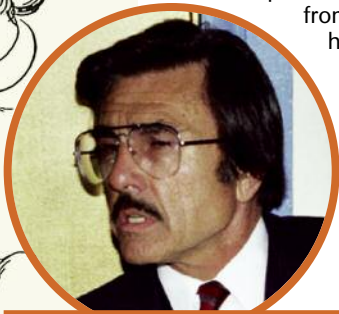
A COMIC-BOOK BEGINNING

Space Ghost made his first appearance on September 10, 1966 on CBS as one-half of the Hanna-Barbera cartoon show *Space Ghost and Dino Boy*. The two-in-one episodes were unrelated, though Space Ghost would eventually cross over with other Hanna-Barbera cartoon characters such as the Herculoids (a group of quasi-barbarian humans and their superpowered creature colleagues), the Mighty Mightor (a magically empowered caveman superhero), Shazzan (an *Arabian Nights*-styled genie), and Moby Dick (a do-gooder version of the famous white whale). There would be 42 original episodes of *Space Ghost* and 18 episodes of prehistoric *Dino Boy* adventures before the show aired its last episode on September 7, 1968—nearly two years to the day after its debut.

Despite starring in almost 50 episodes, most of what's known about Space Ghost is based on the equipment he has and the company he keeps—and even then, it's not very telling. Over the course of the show's run, viewers were introduced to Space Ghost and his supporting cast, including his two teenaged wards Jan and Jace, twins who were under his care and who served as his masked assistants at his otherwise unpopulated Ghost Planet headquarters. Comic relief was provided by Blip, a surprisingly clever monkey who was often left in charge of the base and outfitted with the same uniform, jet pack, and inviso-belt as the twins. Almost serving as characters themselves was Space Ghost's gear: the inviso-belt that allowed him to move unseen; his sleek spaceship, the Phantom Cruiser; and, of course, his power bands, which could shoot out anything from a stun ray and freeze beam to a heat laser and shielding "viso-wall."

Just as important was Space Ghost's rogues' gallery, a substantial collection of would-be world conquerors and space scoundrels that routinely kept Space Ghost and his crew busy. Standing out from the collection of galactic criminals were the villains who would eventually band together as the Council of Doom, which included Zorak, a mantis-man and Space Ghost's main nemesis; Brak, a cat-like pirate; Creature King, sowing terror with a menagerie of giant creatures and his "nightmare beam"; Spider-Woman (also known as Black Widow), mistress of horrifying space spiders; Metallus, a robot master and tyrant; and Moltar, who rules his molten monsters with deadly intent.

In addition to its jazzy score, creative sound effects, and the reassuring baritone of Gary Owens as the title character, a large part of *Space Ghost's* appeal was the striking character and set design, concepts that came from comic-book legend Alex Toth. Toth, who in his



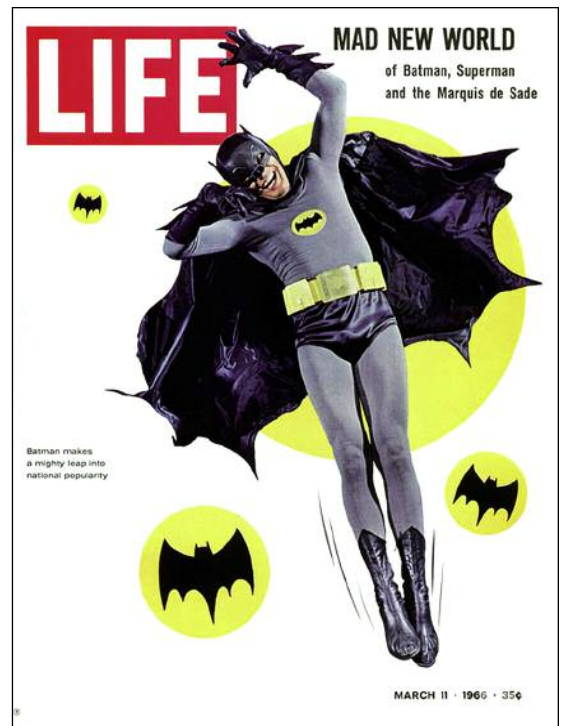
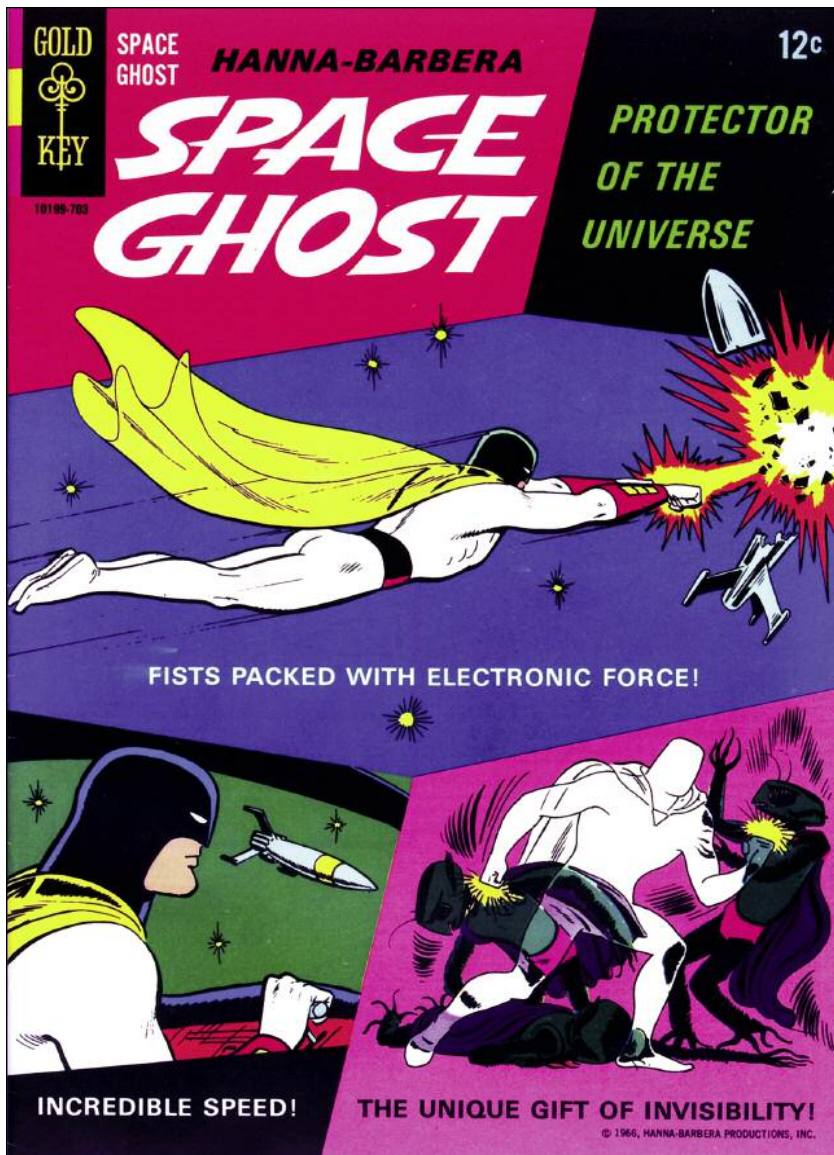
GARY OWENS



In the DC Universe ... Sort Of

(top) DC Comics readers of 1966 first encountered Space Ghost in this house ad promoting CBS-TV's Saturday morning. (left) Toth's 1966 model sheets for Space Ghost's young companions.

Characters © the respective copyright holders. Space Ghost characters © H-B.



Caped Inspiration
 The March 11, 1966 issue of *Life* magazine (right) featuring Adam West as Batman prompted TV exec Fred Silverman to order artist Alex Toth to pattern the in-development *Space Ghost* after the senior member of the Dynamic Duo. (left) Featuring a spiffy Dan Spiegle cover, Gold Key Comics' *Space Ghost* #1 (Mar. 1967).

Space Ghost TM & © H-B. Batman TM & © DC Comics. *Life* © 2012 Time Inc.

decades-long comics career worked on everything from science fiction and superhero books to Westerns, noir, and romance, brought his strong and fluid style to many cartoons of the '60s and '70s. In addition to *Space Ghost*, Toth is also credited with designing Hanna-Barbera's *Herculoids*, *Birdman*, *The Galaxy Trio*, and, perhaps his most well known contribution to animation, *Super Friends*. Toth's work on these shows would make an impact on an entire generation of artists and writers.

Strangely enough, Toth himself didn't see what the big deal was where *Space Ghost* was concerned. As Toth stated in an interview with Darrell Bowen for *Toon Magazine* #12 (Fall 1996): "I don't know what all the shouting's about. I always thought it was mediocre. Freddie Silverman [Fred Silverman, a network TV executive and producer] came in one Monday morning banging around all kinds of ideas and I guess on the previous Friday, or Thursday and Friday, we had locked down on *Space Ghost* but the question of the costume was still up in the air.

"So there we were on Monday morning in Joe's [Barbera] office, and in walks Freddie Silverman with this *Life* magazine in his hands and damn, right on the cover is Adam West and the kid, Burt Ward, as Batman and Robin and he throws the magazine down on Joe's

desk and he looks at me, and he looks at Joe and he says, 'That's the look I want. I want that *Batman* look.'" [Editor's note: Actually, the March 11, 1966 cover of *Life* featured only West as Batman.] Toth continued, "I said, 'Well, he's supposed to be *Space Ghost*. He should be white, you know, so how do we...?' And Silverman says, 'I want that *Batman* look.' So finally, *Space Ghost* wound up with that black cowl, that black helmet over his head, and I kept fighting him on it, saying that it would drop out in the artwork when we had him superimposed against a space background—that didn't matter. Then they came up with the rim light idea, to edge-light him up there, with a good thick band of light so that he'd always stand out against the space and we went with that. I didn't want the cape—that diaphanous, squirrely cape that he wound up with, which looked like ectoplasm, but that's what they wanted. I was just there as a pair of hands. So anytime anyone, Steve Rude [*Nexus*] or all those other cats who walk up to me or write to me and say, 'God, you know, *Space Ghost* changed my life and you did such a marvelous job,' I have to keep from scratching my head and telling them I really didn't have much to do with it."

Toth, in fact, would not be the artist for the first *Space Ghost* comic to reach print. Gold Key published *Space Ghost* #1 in 1966 with the idea of having the comic on stands quickly in support of the show. Because of this, artist Dan Spiegle [the writer is unknown] was able to work with some of Toth's model sheets but not much else. Spiegle's representation of Zorak ended up looking very different than the mantis-man who appeared on the cartoon, but Jan, Jace, Blip, and *Space Ghost* himself were all faithful to the original designs. (Working blind was nothing new to Spiegle, who, in addition to being well known for his six years of work on the *Hopalong Cassidy* newspaper strip and *Korak, Son of Tarzan* comic book, also provided art for many titles licensed from TV. In an interesting turnaround, *Space Family Robinson*, which he co-created with writer Del Connell, is widely credited with inspiring the television

by Rude and Evanier, the book also features artwork by Rude that uses a clean, modern line for a look that is still very true to the show. The art is further enhanced by Ken Steacy's work on coloring, a lush painting job that gives the book a depth and richness not often found in typical comic books, much less licensed titles; on many pages, panels could easily be mistaken for animation cels from the original show. Because of this and a fast-moving, adventure-laden plot, the Comico one-shot is considered *the Space Ghost* book for many fans.

"By the time I got into comic books, I never heard anyone talking about *Space Ghost*," Rude says. "And when I got to do *Nexus* [the sci-fi superhero he co-created with writer Mike Baron], he was my version of *Space Ghost*—the feeling of the show, the emotions, the look, the cool gestures. So when I was approached by Comico, I knew the comic had to look like the show.

"When they had done comics before, they always looked kind of silly unless it was done by Toth or one of those guys, one of the Hanna-Barbera staff. [On the Comico book,] Evanier was co-writing the thing, and he sent me these faxed copies on this flimsy paper. So it was Evanier who sent me my first Toth design sheets, and it was thrilling," Rude continues. "I had some of those, and I had some bad copies of the original show on VHS tapes a friend sent me and I could stop those and look at the poses and designs. It was a huge boost for me. I had never seen [*Space Ghost*] done right in comic-book form, and that drove me crazy. What I wanted to see was the show on paper, and I had never seen that in a comic book. The Phantom Cruiser didn't look right, *Space Ghost* didn't look right ... and that wasn't *Space Ghost* to me. Can't get no satisfaction that way. Even when the colors came back [from Steacy], I would touch up dozens and dozens of things to make sure those things in my head and from the show stayed intact. But once it was done, the only thing we didn't have in the comic was actual movement."

What it *did* have was a classic *Space Ghost* story. Contacted by a mysterious stranger only he can see, Zorak is given a familiar-looking power band and instructions to get together a gang of criminals who together can destroy *Space Ghost*. Zorak uses the power band to break out of prison, along with Brak, Creature King, and Lurker. Soon *Space Ghost* has his hands full with assaults from this ersatz Council of Doom, the mysterious stranger, and Metallus, who manages to kidnap Jan and Jace.

Using his wits, and a helping hand from Blip, *Space Ghost* runs a gauntlet of sleep mist, impregnar shields, giant monsters, and the actual gauntlets of Metallus before finally facing the stranger, who stands revealed as an evil android version of *Space Ghost* himself. A perfect replica constructed by Rob-Corp, the android is designed to defeat and replace the real *Space Ghost*, when he will then use his power to further the malevolent ends of the criminal organization. But after the now-freed Jan and Jace help *Space Ghost* hold off the android's aerial attack, the Galactic Protector is able to end the android's threat for good—thanks to an unwitting assist from Zorak.

As much as an impact Comico's *Space Ghost* #1 had on readers, it might have had even more of an impact on Rude.

While working on the book, "I'd walk from my apartment to the art store, and as I walked I could see the

comic book move in my head, I could hear the music, hear the sound effects. And that feeling just never left until months after I had finished the book," Rude says.

"There is a simple, single way to think about how it works. You have your characters, you have your background, and don't do anything to mess that up. There was no stupid dialogue in our comic book. Steacy painted on the [original art]—he's the only guy I could have imagined doing it. The [finished] book was like the shows."

The Comico one-shot was like the original show in one more way: While it gave readers plenty of non-stop adventure, it didn't tell them anything new about the sentinel of the solar system. For the most part, *Space Ghost* would stay a cipher—and a nearly blank slate ripe for parody.

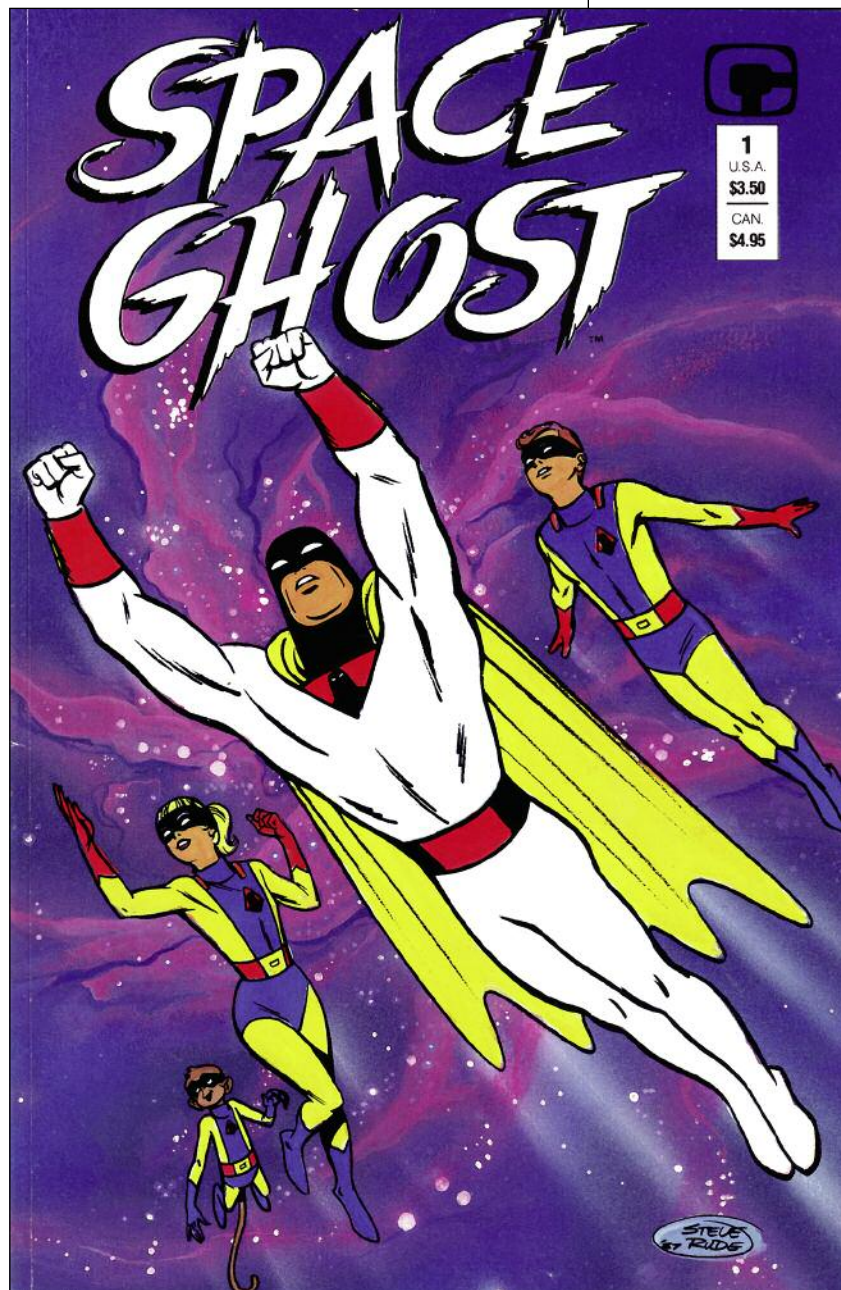


STEVE RUDE

Born to Draw *Space Ghost*

The Dude's dood it again! (opposite) A 2010 *Space Ghost* color-marker illo by Steve Rude. (this page) Rude's Hanna-Barbera-like cover to Comico's 1987 one-shot.

TM & © H-B.



Hanna-Barbera

BEYOND
Capes!

at

by Mark Arnold



MARVEL COMICS

Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera originally teamed up to create the highly popular Tom and Jerry theatrical cartoon series, which won more Oscars than any other animated cartoon series during animation's Golden Age. From 1940–1957, they produced over 114 cartoons before being shown the door by MGM.

Rather than retiring and calling it a day, Hanna and Barbera pulled the unlikely trick of starting their own television animation studio. Their first series called *Ruff and Reddy* was an instant hit, spawning even more popular cartoons in quick succession including *The Huckleberry Hound Show*, *The Yogi Bear Show*, *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, *Jonny Quest*, and later on, *Scooby-Doo*.

Comic books were an integral part of Hanna-Barbera's success. In the days long before home video, owning a comic book about a cartoon series was akin to owning a part of the show. It was also a way to get new stories featuring your favorite characters—in many cases, long after a show ceased production.

The first Hanna-Barbera-related comic books appeared as part of Dell's *Four Color* series, with *Ruff and Reddy* being the first one. Many titles and series followed,

and eventually the Dell moniker gave way to Gold Key in 1962 and eventually to Whitman in the 1970s and 1980s. These were produced out of the same office of Western Publishing and Lithography, according to Mark Evanier, who has a page on his website (www.newsfromme.com) explaining the relationship between Western and Dell, Gold Key and Whitman.

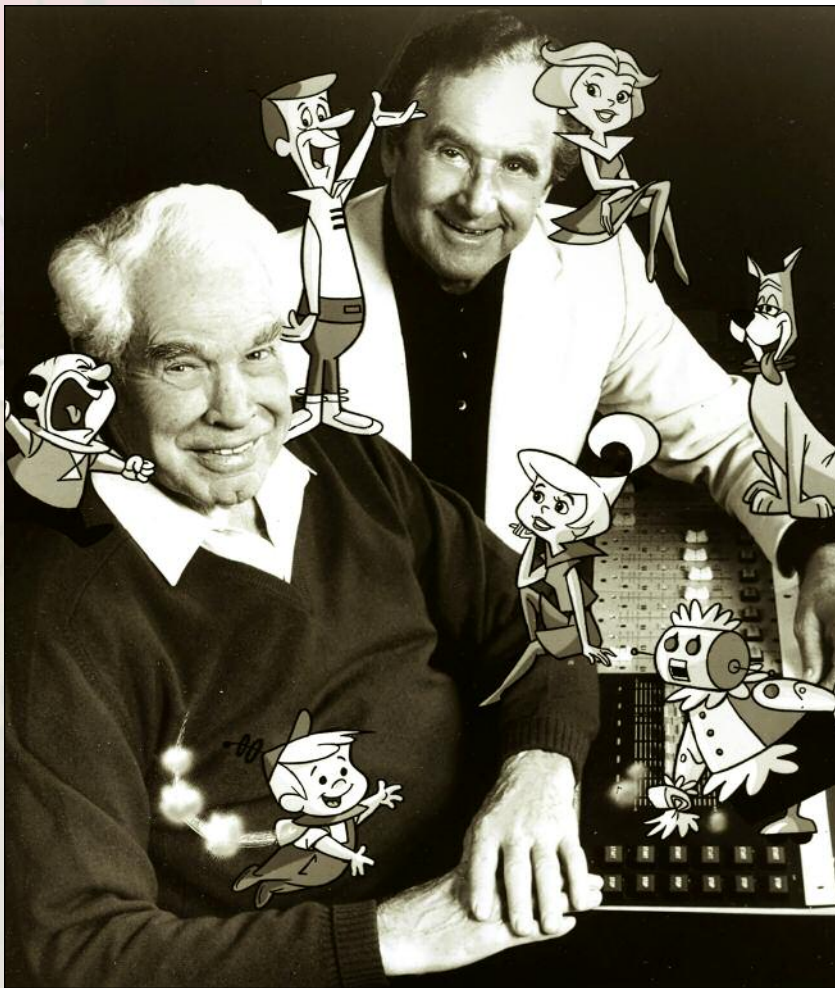
As explained in an article about *Scooby-Doo* in *BACK ISSUE* #52, Hanna-Barbera resold the Dell and Gold Key stories to foreign markets, but eventually greed took over and soon Hanna-Barbera allied itself with Charlton Publications. This was an unfortunate misstep, as most of Charlton's artists were inadequate for drawing the Hanna-Barbera characters on model, whereas many of the Dell/Gold Key stories were actually written and drawn by Hanna-Barbera employees.

At first, Charlton only produced the older Hanna-Barbera series that were retired by Gold Key. Charlton eventually took on H-B's current properties and in doing so created a tremendous drop in quality—and in an ironic twist, a drop in revenues from the foreign markets that were so lucrative during the Gold Key days.

The Gang's All Here

Excerpt from the original art by Scott Shaw! (one of ye ed's faves!) from the cover to Marvel's *Laff-A-Lympics* #11 (Jan. 1979), recolored for *BI* by our designer, Rich Fowlks. Hokey Wolf, exiting stage right, was eliminated from the cover's printed version.

TM & © Hanna-Barbera Productions (H-B).



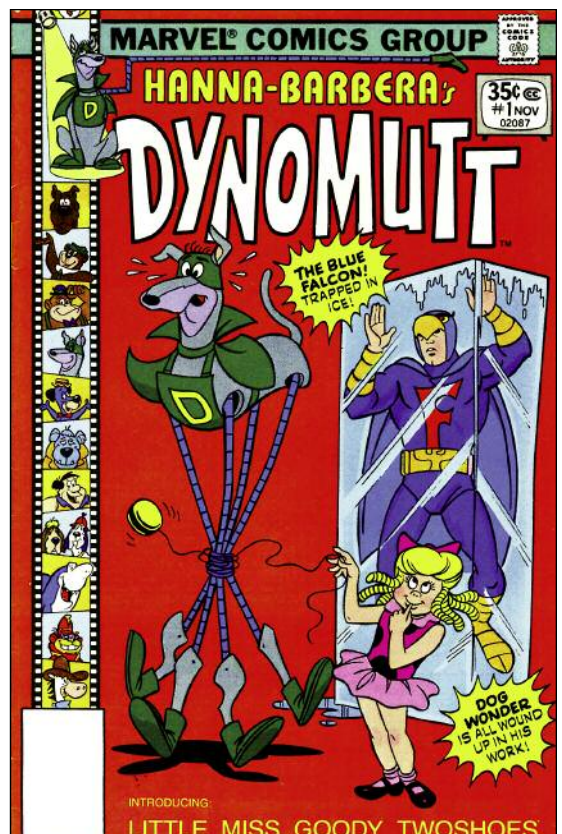
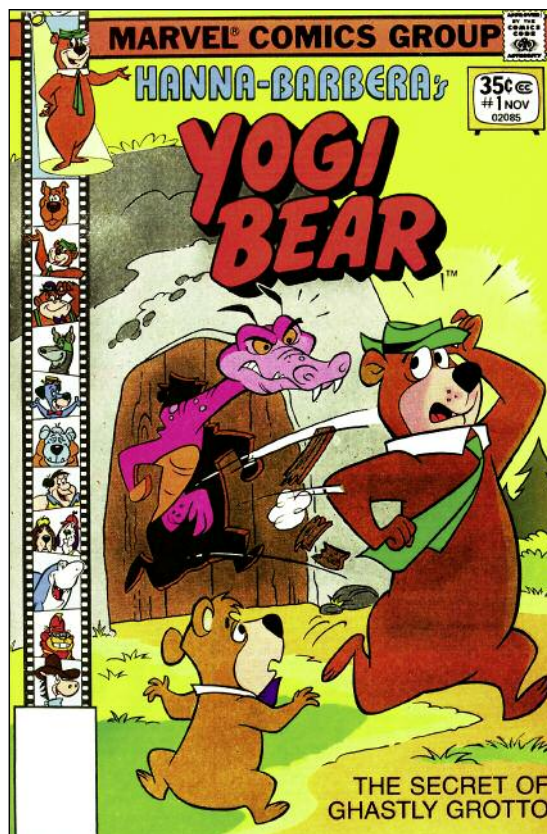
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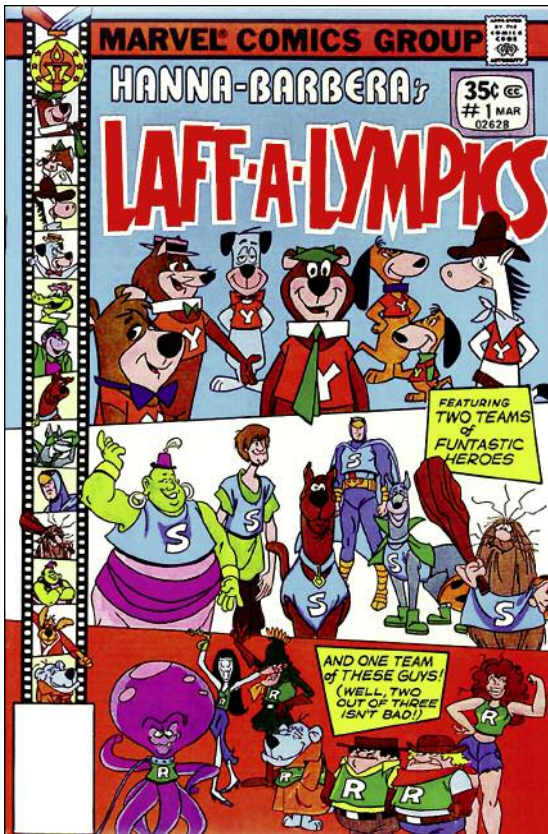
Hanna-Barbera felt that Charlton was the problem and decided to remedy the situation as soon as Charlton's license contracts expired in 1977. When they did, Hanna-Barbera considered publishing comics themselves, but eventually was swayed into having Marvel Comics do the honors.

An informed source (who prefers anonymity) who worked for Hanna-Barbera at the time reveals for the very first time the complete behind-the-scenes story of what actually happened with the Marvel Hanna-Barbera comic books. He speaks: "The deal was set up by people at Taft Broadcasting in Cincinnati. Taft owned H-B then and handled all the merchandising out of that office. Someone there (I forget his name) was unhappy because they couldn't sell reprint rights to the Charlton material to most of the foreign publishers who had licensed the rights to do comics of H-B properties. Several of the South American publishers were hiring local artists and writers to create material for their comics instead of buying material from H-B as they had done when H-B was offering the Western Publishing material. Some of the South American publishers were selling their materials to other licensees, and Cincinnati decided that had to be stopped because a lucrative revenue stream was petering out. They went to Charlton and began demanding better stories and art. I was not involved in those discussions, but I was told Charlton said that was the best they could do. Cincinnati decided they had to begin offering material as good as what Western had done. They hired the former Western editor Craig Chase to consult, and he told Cincinnati that the Charlton material was hopeless and that it could not be improved, even with him supervising H-B's interest in it. Cincinnati asked if he could generate new material and he agreed. The license with Charlton was allowed to expire and was not

In the Mighty Marvel Manner
 (above) Toon titans William Hanna (left) and Joe Barbera, with the Jetsons. (right) First issue covers to *Yogi Bear* (art by Pete Alavarado and Scott Shaw!) and *Dynomutt* (art by Aquaman co-creator Paul Norris).

TM & © H-B.





renewed. Chase became editor of a department out of the H-B studio on Cahuenga, where I worked.

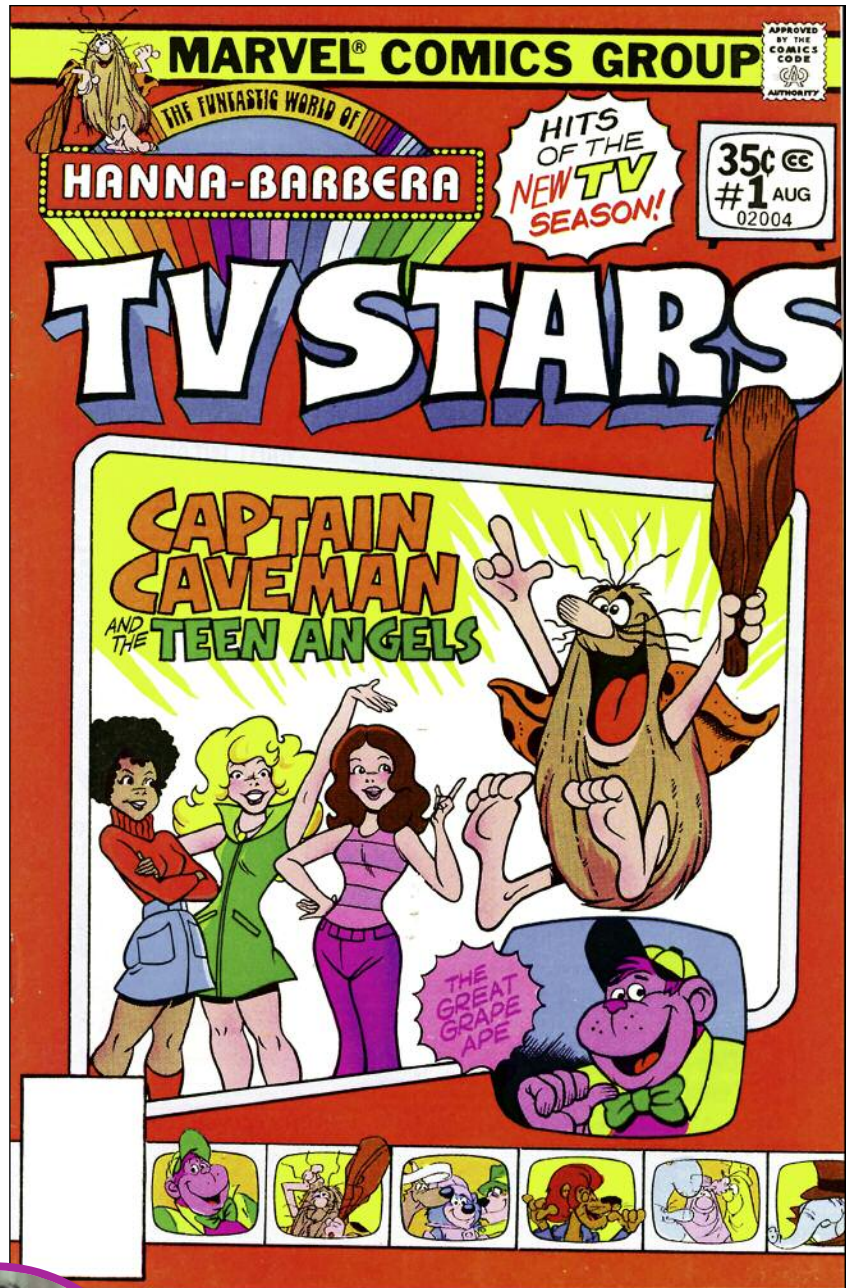
"Cincinnati had him produce mock-ups of four comics to be the first comics in a planned H-B comic company. They brought in a publishing consultant Chase knew and he shopped the package around to distributors. They all refused to carry a new line of comics. He reported back that DC, Marvel, Archie, and one or two companies had a lock on the distribution and were not about to allow a new competitor into the market. He said DC and Marvel were both willing to distribute H-B comics but they would have to be the publishers." The irony of this statement is that eventually all three of these publishers took a stab at publishing Hanna-Barbera comics over the years, with DC being the current publisher and publishing *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?*

Our H-B source explains why the initial series were chosen for publication: "Someone in Cincinnati decided. They picked *Flintstones*, *Yogi Bear*, and *Scooby-Doo* because those were the three most popular comics among foreign publishers, and the idea was to do comics that could be sold for reprints by those foreign publishers. Several foreign publishers were doing *Dynomutt*, so that was included. There were presentations for several other comics like *The Jetsons* and *Jabberjaw*, but they decided to start with those four.

"We produced the contents of the comics out of our studio. Craig Chase supervised the first books, and then when he decided to go back to retirement, he recommended that Mark take it over. We delivered ready-to-print comics. Marvel paid all editorial costs and then paid us a license fee plus royalties."



MARK EVANIER



"Mark" was Mark Evanier, who had written *Scooby-Doo* and many other non-H-B comics for Craig back at Western Publishing. Evanier wrote almost all the comics Craig edited for Hanna-Barbera and later took over as editor. He concurs with our source in H-B business affairs. As Evanier explains, "Their initial idea was they were going to start their own comic-book company called Hanna-Barbera Comics. That's when they hired Chase Craig. They would

make their own comics and they would control the content and have them all done in a format to serve the foreign market and for the rest of the world. They approached every distributor and got nowhere, but Curtis, which distributed Marvel's books and was owned by the same corporation, was willing to handle them if Marvel was the publisher.

Line Expansion

Joining Marvel's original four Hanna-Barbera titles were (left) *Laff-a-Lympics* #1 (cover art from H-B model sheets) and (right) *TV Stars* #1 (cover penciled by writer/editor Mark Evanier—you read that right—and inked by Scott Shaw!).

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THE

PLASTIC MAN

Greatest Stories NEVER TOLD

COMIC STRIP:

FROM PUDGE TO PLOP! TO PLASTIC MAN



by Paul Kupperberg

Jive Talkin'

Plas and portly pal Woozy Winks in Lee Marris' first Sunday strip. (background)

Detail from DC's *Plastic Man* #4 (May-June 1967).

Cover art by Carmine Infantino and Mike Esposito.

TM & © DC Comics.

BY ANY STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION

With his creation of Plastic Man in 1941, cartoonist Jack Cole caught mercury in a bottle. Comics' Golden Age may have been a creative Oort cloud shucking off countless characters into the comics universe, but there was far more quantity being produced than quality. In a time when the average page of comic-book art could best be described as well intended but crude, written to service simple, disposable stories for ten year olds, *Plastic Man* was a step above the rest. Cole could not only out-cartoon most everybody, but his stories were smarter, snappier, and funnier than just about anybody else's, as likely to bring a chuckle to the adult reader as a belly laugh from the kids.

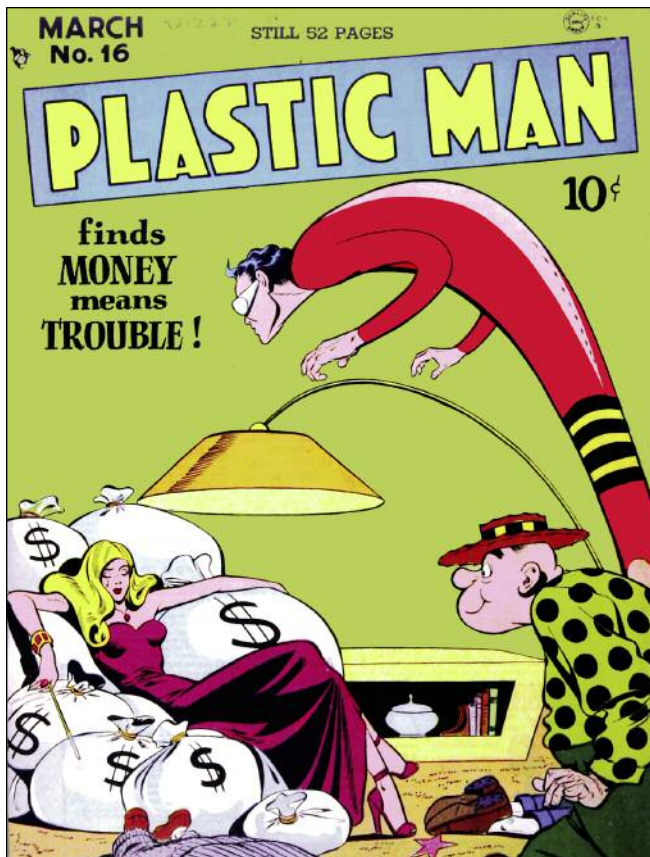
It is no coincidence that Cole found a home for Plastic Man at Quality Comics, one of the more aptly named publishing companies of the era. His manic, malleable, bouncing, bounding stories were a perfect fit for the house that also served as home to Will Eisner, Lou Fine, Bob Powell, Alex Kotsky, Klaus Nordling, and Chuck Cuidera and their creations, including the Spirit, Blackhawk, Black Condor, Uncle Sam, and Kid Eternity. Plastic Man's run stretched across 127 issues of *Police Comics* (Aug. 1941–Oct. 1953) and 64 issues of *Plastic Man* (Summer 1943–Nov. 1956), almost the lifetime of Quality Comics, which ceased publication in December of 1956.

But while Quality was gone, some of its characters were to live on—National Periodical Publications, the corporate forerunner to DC

Comics, acquired the failed Quality's assets. The last issues of all Quality titles were dated December 1956. The last issues of all Quality titles were dated December 1956. The last issues of all Quality titles were dated December 1956. The last issues of all Quality titles were dated December 1956. The last issues of all Quality titles were dated December 1956.

Plastic Man lay unused and alone in the memory of his fans for almost a decade—excluding three issues of unauthorized reprints by the small and marginally legit I. W. Publishing in 1963 and 1964—before DC, responding to changing trends in comic readership, resurrected the Stretchable Sleuth, first in the pages of the '60s kitsch favorite series, "Dial 'H' For Hero" in *House of Mystery* #160 (July 1966), and then in his own title, a ten-issue run that lasted from Nov.–Dec. 1966 through May–June 1968. This series, written by Arnold Drake, with art across the run by Gil Kane, Win Mortimer, and Jack Sparling, resembled Cole's Plastic Man the way a Yugo resembles a Rolls-Royce; both have four wheels and engines, but that's where the similarities end.

It was enough to send Plas back into hibernation for another decade (except for a 1973 cameo on an episode of the animated *Super Friends*), returning briefly for a continuation (in numbering, at any rate) of the 1960s series, #11–20 (Feb.–Mar. 1976–Oct.–Nov. 1977) by Steve Skeates, Elliot S! Maggin, John Albano, and Ramona Fradon.



A CARTOON ARTIST FOR A CARTOON CHARACTER

Though this take was closer than its predecessor to Cole's concept, it seemed to underscore the problem with the previous attempt: Plastic Man was not a character that worked particularly well under the assembly-line process of modern comic books. Plastic Man was a character best approached by a single creator, and by a cartoonist instead of a comic-book artist (Curt Swan was a comic-book artist; Joe Kubert is a cartoonist). Jack Cole was a cartoonist, a versatile illustrator who could make the absurd believable; indeed, at the end of his life (which ended, unfortunately, in suicide in 1958), he had made the jump from comics to sophisticated cartoonist for the newly launched *Playboy* magazine.

Fortunately, the editor assigned to the next Plastic Man project was himself a cartoonist. Joe Orlando (1927–1998) began his career in the late 1940s and by 1950 was an illustrator for Bill Gaines' legendary line of E. C. Comics and *MAD* magazine. He would later help create (and draw for) Jim Warren's *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines, illustrate the *Little Orphan Annie* newspaper strip, co-create the Inferior Five, revive the horror genre for DC, and serve a long, distinguished, and creative role in the upper management of the company and its sister publication, *MAD*.

In 1979, Joe was tasked with yet another Plastic Man revival, but not as a comic book. This time, Plas was coming back in a comic strip.

A year earlier, in April 1978, DC's *World's Greatest Superheroes* (*WGSH*) strip had premiered in newspapers nationwide, distributed by the Chicago Tribune/New York News Syndicate. Written by veteran Superman writer Martin Pasko, with art by George Tuska and Vince Colletta, *WGSH* was essentially a Justice League of America strip with the primary focus on the world's greatest superhero himself, Superman, all done in anticipation of the December 1978 debut of the big-budget *Superman: The Movie*. Thanks to the upsurge in popularity from the film, *WGSH* had a strong start; by the time I assumed writing duties on the strip in January 1982, the *Superman* furor had been spent and the strip had lost most of its major newspapers and all but a relative handful of its smaller subscribers.

But in 1979, at the height of the Man of Steelmania, the newspaper strip seemed a strong venue for DC's character list. And, with all the big guns (Superman, Batman, Robin, Wonder Woman, the Flash, Green Lantern, Green Arrow, Black Lightning, *et al.*) tied up in *WGSH*, the publisher looked to its second-tier heroes for inspiration.

And there was Plastic Man, the clear frontrunner thanks to his starring role every Saturday morning on ABC's *The Plastic Man Comedy/Adventure Show*, a Ruby-Spears Production. The show was not very good (it included Hula-Hula, Plastic Man's bumbling Hawaiian sidekick; Plas' hot wife; and even a Baby Plas), but it was exposure for the character, and DC knew that would be a major selling point to the newspaper syndicates.

The job of interpreting Plastic Man for the strip format was given to underground cartoonist and DC Comics contributor Lee Marrs. Lee had begun her comics career in the strips, as assistant to *Little Orphan Annie* artist Philip "Tex" Blaisdell (1920–1999), himself a veteran of 22 syndicated strips, before becoming one of the first women underground comic creators, a founding mother of the *Wimmen's Comix* Collective, and contributor to titles including *Wet Satin*, *El Perfecto*, and *Gates of Heaven*, as well as *The Further Fattening Adventures of Pudge*, *Girl Blimp* (1973–1978) and *Lee Marrs' The Compleat Fart and Other Body Emissions* (1976).

Lee and editor Orlando were not strangers to one another in 1979. "During the 1970s, I did work for Joe Orlando," Marrs says. "I started out doing inking and backgrounds for Tex Blaisdell on weekends, sort of.

The Bounce-Back King

(top) The Stretchable Sleuth as rendered by his creator, Jack Cole, on Quality Comics' *Plastic Man* #16 (Mar. 1949).

(bottom) After a tryout in *House of Mystery* #160, Plas headlined his own short-lived DC title beginning with the Gil Kane-drawn *Plastic Man* #1 (Nov.–Dec. 1966), the first of various attempts by DC over the decades to use the character.

TM & © DC Comics.

A HISTORY OF



by *Stuart Fischer*

MARVEL PRODUCTIONS, LTD.

Marvel Productions, Ltd., formed in 1980, was Marvel Comics' wholly owned animation studio that was set up for the purpose of Marvel producing its own shows without having to go to outside production companies with its characters.

This was a bold and very ambitious move on Marvel's part to become more in charge of their destiny, and they succeeded.

When looking at all the facts involved, it was bound to happen, and this author always thought that it should happen. When Marvel Productions, Ltd. was announced to the public, I was not surprised and I knew that Marvel would be successful—Marvel had the characters, the brand name, the ability, and people who were already with Marvel as well as anybody who they could hire to become their own production company.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE SCENES

In 1980, Marvel Productions, Ltd. was essentially born.

At the urging of Stan Lee—who had always wanted to be in movies and television and knew that Marvel had the characters to make that dream come true—and indeed, through the efforts of other production organizations that had already done so, it was like a dream come true.

The idea of forming an in-house studio had already been floating prior to 1980. When the partnership ended between David DePatie (born: May 26, 1935) and Friz Freleng (August 21, 1905–May 26, 1995), the two men responsible for the formation of DePatie-Freleng Enterprises, a major Saturday morning TV supplier that had begun in 1963, an executive with years of production experience became available to be brought in by Marvel. Stan Lee, already established as a leader in the field of comics and eager to become involved in movie and television production, was poised for takeoff.

At this time, Marvel Comics was owned by Cadence Industries, and James Galton was the president of Marvel.

Marvel and DePatie-Freleng Enterprises already had a good relationship prior to Marvel starting their own studio and David DePatie, who had been in movies and television for many years and who just became available for something new after his partnership with Friz Freleng came to an end, was a natural to become the president of Marvel Productions, with Stan Lee heading up the creative affairs part of the studio.

Mighty Marvel Media

Peeking through the Marvel Productions, Ltd. logo are some of the company's animated hits: *The Incredible Hulk*, *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*, *Transformers*, *G.I. Joe*, *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Muppet Babies*, *Jem*, and *Fraggle Rock*.

© the respective copyright holders.

DePatie-Freleng had produced *Spider-Woman* and *The Fantastic Four* in the late 1970s for network Saturday morning and had worked with Marvel on a new *Spider-Man* syndicated series as well in the late 1970s.

At the time of the DePatie-Freleng breakup, Freleng went back to Warner Bros. and helped run that studio's animation wing. He had been employed for decades at Warner Bros. before Warner had closed that division in 1963, which is where Freleng and DePatie had first met. Freleng, famous for helping to create such cartoon characters as Porky Pig, Sylvester the Cat, and Yosemite Sam, had produced and directed many Warner Bros. cartoons for decades. DePatie had been an executive at Warner Bros.

When it was decided that Warner would close down its animation division, DePatie and Freleng decided to form their own animation studio and call it DePatie-Freleng Enterprises. They became very successful,

producing animated motion pictures, including a few for Warner Bros., in addition to *The Pink Panther*, for which they are primarily known. They also produced other shows that ran on network Saturday morning television, like *The Oddball Couple*, *Super President*, and *Here Comes the Grump*.

But it was *The Pink Panther* that was their biggest hit and became one of the most successful Saturday morning cartoons of all time. When DePatie became president of Marvel Productions, he continued his relationship with United Artists, the studio responsible for distributing *The Pink Panther*, in a new capacity.

When Marvel Productions got underway in Los Angeles, California, DePatie brought in his longtime production associate, Lee Gunther, who became the senior vice-president of production and a co-founder of Marvel Productions and helped provide the new studio with its very special look which was clear, sharp, and detailed.

Lee Gunther (May 30, 1935–August 25, 1998) had a very good production background. He had worked for Warner Bros. in the 1960s, and when DePatie-Freleng went into business, joined that company where he helped supervise production on that studio's shows. After he left Marvel, he formed a company of his own called Gunther-Wahl Productions and helped produce that company's shows, including *Angry Beavers* and *The Adventures of T-Rex*. He won a total of four Emmy Awards in addition to others and really knew the art and science of animation production.

SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS

Marvel Productions' first show was *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*, which began on NBC-TV in the fall of 1981. This was a milestone year for both Marvel and for the animation industry, with Marvel Productions becoming a new competitor in the Saturday morning cartoon industry.

Working with NBC, Marvel learned that producing a television cartoon was a much different affair, both creatively and financially, than producing a comic book.

The TV audience is more fickle than the comic-book audience in terms of what they are attracted to and for how long, and its younger audience requires that stories be simpler than what usually appears in a comic book.

Spider-Man had been done in animation twice before this new incarnation.

His first foray into television was in 1967, when a small production company called Grantray-Lawrence Animation produced *Spider-Man* for ABC. Then in the late 1970s, Spider-Man was done for the syndication market by DePatie-Freleng, with some involvement from Marvel. (There was also a live-action primetime *The Amazing Spider-Man* TV series that was done in the late 1970s by Charles Fries Productions. Marvel reportedly was not pleased with that series.)

This new *Spider-Man* was going to be a bit different with Marvel at the production helm. They brought

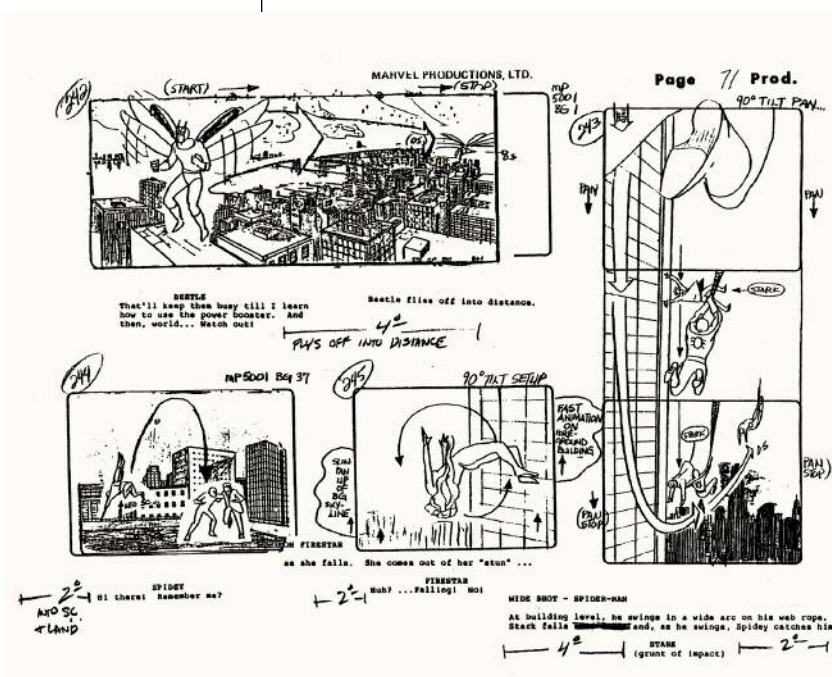
Flagship Character

(top) Spidey was featured on the

company's corporate logo. (bottom)

Storyboards from an episode of *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*.

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in Iceman from the X-Men and created Firestar to team with Spider-Man on his crimefighting adventures.

Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends was basically an adventure show with some elements of comedy tossed in. The villains were from Marvel's comics and a few other villains were created from scratch for the series. It became a hit, and for most of the 1980s was very strong in the ratings partially because of the immense success of another NBC Saturday morning cartoon produced by Hanna-Barbera, *The Smurfs*, based on a European property. NBC was happy with *Spider-Man's* success.

HULK SMASH!

Having proved that it could produce a successful cartoon series, in its second year of operation Marvel Productions, Ltd. sold a second show: *The Incredible Hulk*.

At this time, the Hulk was a very popular superhero with a terrific track record not only as a comic-book series, but also as a cartoon (done for the syndication market in the 1960s by Grantray-Lawrence) and in a CBS primetime weekly series from 1978-1982, starring Bill Bixby as David Banner and Lou Ferrigno as the Hulk. [Editor's note: See BACK ISSUE #5 for an exclusive interview with TV Hulk Ferrigno.]

NBC picked up *The Incredible Hulk* and paired it with *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*, giving the network a solid hour of true down-to-earth superhero action.

Marvel Productions spent a lot of time and effort making the Hulk a new cartoon star, and the personality of the Hulk was very much the same as it was from the comics, a green goliath who speaks very little but certainly does not hold back when he has to use his muscles and is capable of almost anything with his seemingly limitless strength.

The stories from the TV show were a bit simpler than those in the comics, since its target audience was the 8-12-year-old crowd. Characters such as Rick Jones, General "Thunderbolt" Ross, and Betty Ross were taken from the *Hulk* comics, and there were others done specifically for the show. The basic premise that made the Hulk such a popular comic book remained the same on Saturday morning TV: here was a brute who could do all kinds of miraculous things with his strength, and instead of using his powers for evil, he was always on the right side of the law and wound up protecting, rather than harming, mankind. Hulk's biggest drawback was his volcanic temper, which made people afraid of him and caused him to be misunderstood.

Marvel Productions' Big Two

(top) The series title and an animation cel from *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*, from 1981. (bottom) An *Incredible Hulk* episode title and a cel featuring ol' Jade Jaws, from 1982. Cels courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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JONNNY QUEST™

BEYOND
Capes!

THE ADVENTURE COMES TO COMICS

by Roger Ash



Anubis!

(overleaf) An undated illo by master cartoonist Doug Wildey recreating the classic *Jonny Quest* episode "The Curse of Anubis" (ye ed's all-time fave *JQ*). Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

TM & © Hanna-Barbera Productions (H-B).

Hanna-Barbera's Jonny Quest debuted in prime time on ABC-TV in 1964. The animated series created by Doug Wildey featured the globe-trotting adventures of ten-year-old Jonny; his friend Hadji from India; Jonny's genius scientist father, Dr. Benton Quest; their bodyguard, Roger "Race" Bannon; and Jonny's mischievous bulldog, Bandit. They faced dangers from mummies to robots to the machinations of the evil Dr. Zin. They were occasionally joined by the mysterious and lovely Jezebel Jade, who had a past with Race. Even though the series only lasted one season of 26 half-hour episodes, it was rerun for many years, gaining a legion of fans.

COMICO LICENSES JONNY QUEST

Given the show's popularity and lasting appeal, it's surprising that Jonny's exposure in comic books was limited. The only American comic to feature Jonny in the title was *Jonny Quest: The Mystery of the Lizard Men* (Dec. 1964) from Gold Key, which adapts an episode of the TV series. That would change in 1986 when Comico the Comic Company brought *Jonny Quest* to comics in a series featuring original adventures.

How did *Jonny Quest* end up at Comico? Bob Schreck explains:

"I think Phil LaSorda [Comico business director and co-publisher] brought up his love of the TV show. I was a big fan, as well. As the administrative director (which meant I did the PR/marketing/advertising), I agreed with the Comico team that the book would have some traction with comics fans at the time. We researched who owned the license and negotiated a deal."

Once word of Comico acquiring the *Jonny Quest* license got out, one of the people interested in writing the series was William Messner-Loebs. "I heard that they were interested in doing it from Sam Kieth, who was inking *Mage* at the time," Messner-Loebs says. "[Comico editor-in-chief] Diana Schutz had mentioned it to him and I called her and said that I would be interested in doing it."

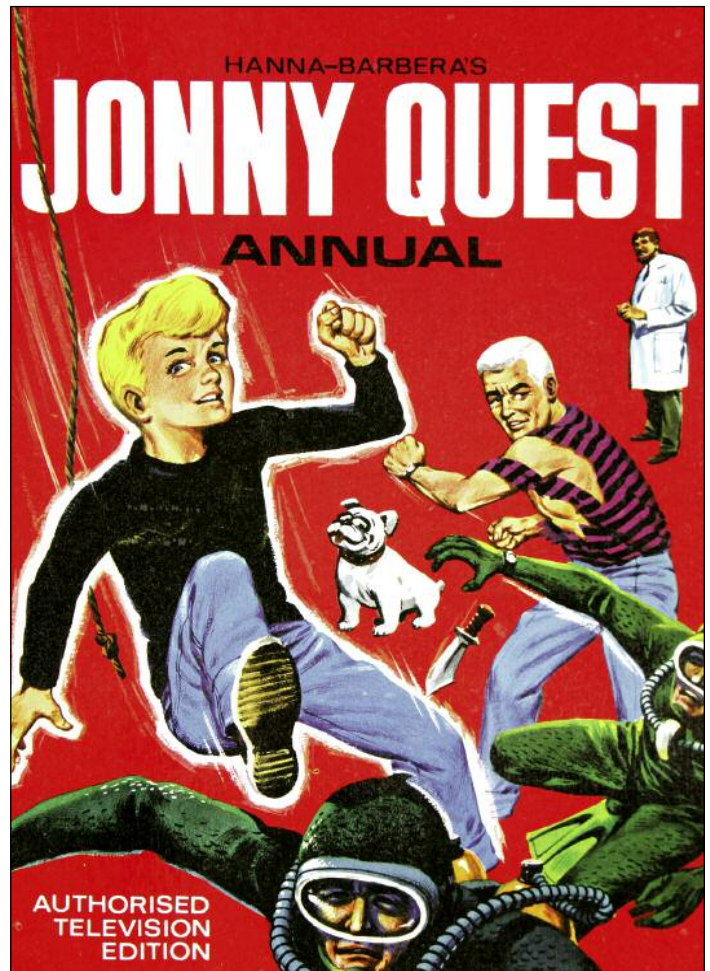
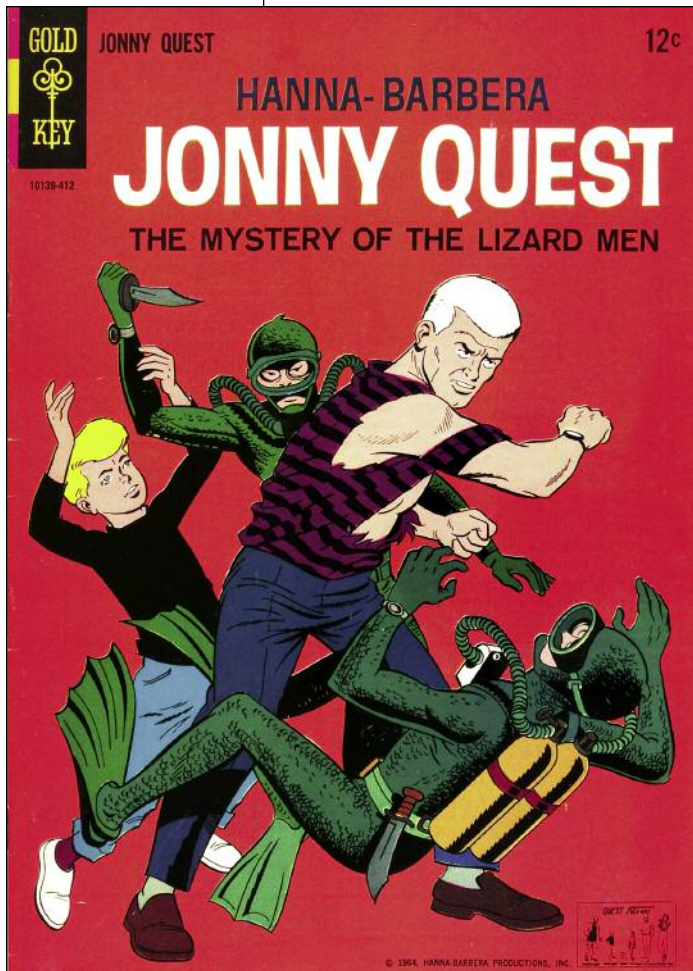
That call bore fruit, as Messner-Loebs was hired to write the series. What made him a good fit for *Jonny Quest*?

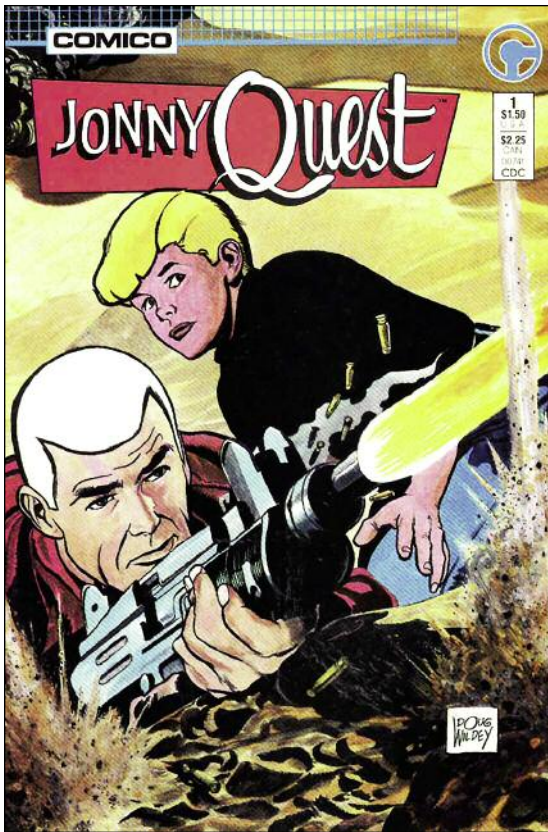
"In 1985, when I first hired Bill to write *Jonny Quest*, he was best known for a book called *Journey*, about an American frontiersman in the 1800s," editor Diana Schutz explains. "I'd read those comics and loved them, mostly because of the writing, which was thoughtful, provocative, and unusual, as you can probably tell just from the subject matter. *Journey* was evidence also of Bill's historical knowledge and aptitude for research—both of which were essential to a series like *Jonny Quest*,

Early Quests

(left) Gold Key Comics' 1964 *Jonny Quest* one-shot and (right) a comics album produced in the UK were among the rare examples of licensing of the concept during the TV show's original run.

TM & © H-B.





which takes place in exotic locales, often using the myths and legends of those locales as a starting point for the development of a given story.

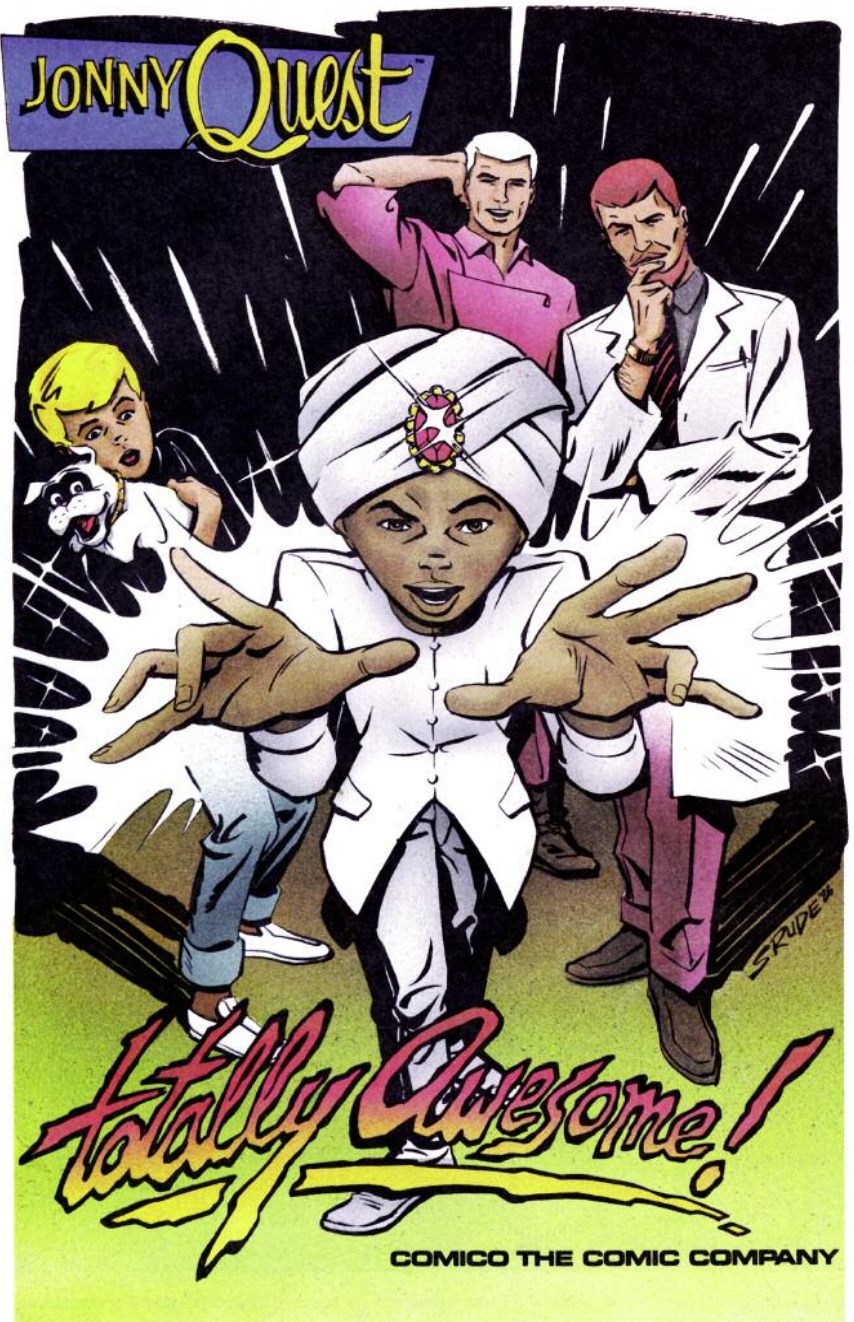
"You know, traditionally, licensed comics have gotten a rep for poor quality, and it's certainly true that, in those days, Marvel and DC tended to give short shrift to any properties that they licensed and didn't own—movie or TV adaptations, for instance," Schutz continues. "We wanted to make *JQ* a comic worth reading; we wanted to do right by this group of characters that we were all pretty fond of at Comico. But no matter how beautifully a comic is drawn, if the story's not there, then it's just not worth it. We don't make comics to hang them on the wall like pretty pictures; we make them in order to tell stories, in order to be read. The writing had to be not only good; it had to be superlative in order to fight the existing stigma attached to licensed properties. And in order for the monthly adventures to have any real kind of impact, the characterization had to be especially strong. I had tremendous confidence in Bill's ability to pull that off, to prove himself as a serious writer even on a more commercial property, and he came through with flying colors."

You would think for someone to want to write *Jonny Quest*, they must have been a fan of the series. That wasn't the case with Messner-Loebs.

"I was around 18 when the *Jonny Quest* cartoon came out. I caught that full blast of the Hanna-Barbera hype where this was going to be the best cartoon ever," Messner-Loebs says. "It was very realistic. It was an adult show. I was old enough to realize that it was extremely limited animation. It was not what I was looking for. So, as a result, I judged it extremely harshly. But I knew that all my friends were fans



DIANA SCHUTZ



so I thought there must be something to this. I asked all my friends what they liked about it. Their response was, 'Oh, it was very deep.' 'There was this sort of conflict between Race Bannon and Dr. Quest about who was going to be Jonny's father.' When I finally got my fourth-generation videotapes Diana duped for me to see the show, I realized that it actually wasn't any of that. It was basically the Quest Jet would take off from Quest Island and they would go to a different Pacific island where there would be some kind of monster. It would turn out that the monster was

connected to a mad scientist who was taking over the world. Dr. Quest and Race Bannon would go and investigate. They would leave Jonny and Hadji on the plane telling them not to go anywhere. They would

"Totally Awesome!"

(above) Well, it was the '80s, and we said things like that back then. Steve Rude house ad for Comico's *Jonny Quest*. (left) Doug Wildey's cover to *Jonny Quest* #1 (June 1986).

TM & © H.B.

Menacing MARVEL: Dennis the Menace at Marvel Comics



Dennis the Menace has been one of the most iconic characters on the comic pages of newspapers worldwide for over 60 years. Created in 1951 by cartoonist Hank Ketcham (1920–2001), the character of Dennis Mitchell is not just well known for his antics in your local paper. The character has proven very popular in other mediums as well. Indeed, the perpetual five-and-a-half-year-old mischief-maker has proven time and time again that his strip, much like the corner his mom usually sends him to, isn't enough contain him and his abundance of energy. Dennis the Menace has become a pop-culture sensation in a wide variety of productions. He and his cast of supporting characters have been featured in everything from a live-action television show to cartoons to feature films, and Dennis the Menace was even the official spokesman for Dairy Queen for 30 years.

Without question, though, the most successful venue for Dennis the Menace outside of the comic strip has been in comic books. The first comic-book publishers to produce a *Dennis the Menace* series were Standard and then Pines, which published his exploits from 1953 to 1958. After that came Fawcett. The legendary company that had been home to Captain Marvel and other Golden Age heroes like Spy Smasher, Bulletman, and Ibis the Invincible published Dennis the Menace comic books from 1958 until 1980.

MOVE OVER, LOKI—THERE'S A NEW MISCHIEF-MAKER AT MARVEL!

Before Dennis the Menace left the newsstands for good in the early 1980s, he had one more comic-book series that was published by Marvel Comics. The *Marvel Dennis the Menace* comic book lasted a mere 13 issues, cover-dated Nov. 1981 through Nov. 1982, along with three digest books that reprinted earlier material. While this run marked the end of an era for Dennis the Menace in comic-book form, it laid the groundwork for a new generation of creators to work with Hank Ketcham, and prepared them to become the guardians of Ketcham's cartoon son and legendary comic strip.

As Ketcham prepared to bring Dennis the Menace to Marvel, he began by hiring new assistants to illustrate the comic book. His first recruits were cartoonists Brian Lum and Karen Matchette (who back then went under

by Dan Johnson



(Stan's) Soapbox Derby

Alice from Richard Thompson's delightful comic strip *Cul de Sac* hitches a wagon ride with Dennis Mitchell as they pick up some of Marvel's late-1981 entries—including *Dennis the Menace* #1! Actually, this marker illustration (without the added comic books) was done in 2011 by *Dennis* mainstay Ron Ferdinand. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

Dennis the Menace © 2012 Hank Ketcham Enterprises, Inc.
Cul de Sac © 2012 Richard Thompson.
Spider-Man and X-Men © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.

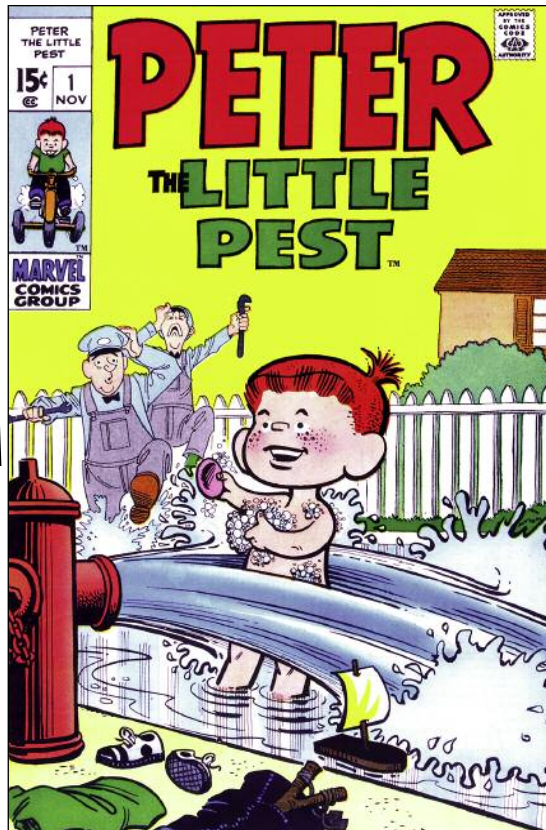


Marvel's Original Menace

Some of you will remember Marvel's late-Silver Age/early-Bronze Age Dennis the Menace-like series *Peter the Little Pest*, which ran for four issues in 1969–1970.

What you might not know is that Marvel's *Peter* was a repackaging of the Stan Lee/Joe Maneely *Melvin the Monster* (not to be confused with Dell Comics' *Melvin Monster*), six issues of which were published in 1956–1957. Seen here are (center) *Peter the Little Pest* #1 (Nov. 1969), (right) *Melvin the Monster* #6 (July 1957), and (inset) *Petey* (as the *Peter* series was retitled with its final issue) #4 (May 1970), altering the cover art from the *Melvin* issue also shown here.

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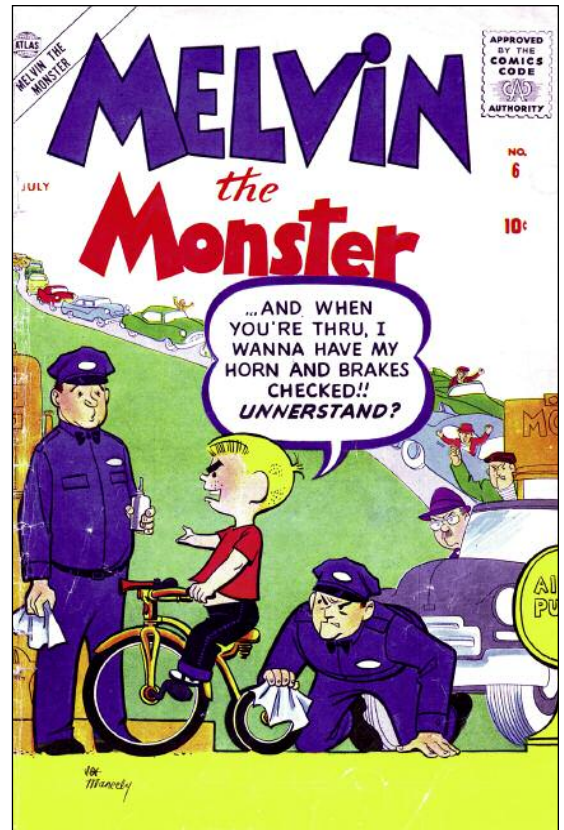
her maiden name of Donovan). Matchette, who had previously illustrated a children's book called *The Golden Gate Bridge Troll*, remembers how she came to work on Dennis the Menace: "I learned that Hank was looking for assistants through the publication *Cartoonist Profiles*. I immediately threw myself into a study of all things Dennis, especially the Fawcett books. Hank seemed pleased with those books at the time as well. And I admired his work so much and tried to emulate it as best I could. Those [Fawcett] books were very helpful in studying his style."

Cartoonist Ron Ferdinand came onto the Marvel book a little later than Lum and Matchette, but did so through the same advertisement: "I sent Hank some Dennis pencil drawings and after a little back-and-forth correspondence, he flew me out to California [from New York] and put me to work on the Marvel comic. I came in on issue #5 or 6. [In] 1981, Hank flew me out for a two-week trial period. [When I first met him,] Hank was sitting behind his drawing board, and I felt like I was meeting the president."

UNDER KETCHAM'S WATCHFUL EYE

One of the key things that Ketcham felt he needed on the Marvel series was get his young assistants up to his standards to work on the comic book. "I remember that first visit to his studio, when he showed me one of the Marvel comic books," recalls Matchette. "I remember him being very critical of it, and if I wanted the job, he'd train me to do it much better. That actually scared me because I didn't think it was half bad, but didn't say so."

Ferdinand also recalls Ketcham's demand for excellence: "Well, since he had three trainees working on it, I'm sure he was gritting his teeth. We were all trying so hard to please him. He was such an incredible artist that it was so hard to meet his standards. He was very patient with us and didn't care how long it



took to produce the finished art. Quality was always first with him."

Ketcham is well known for putting his assistants through a rigorous training so they could present Dennis in the fashion that his creation deserved. As Matchette recalls, it wasn't just copying his style that mattered to Ketcham. "What [Hank] was looking for was many things it took me years to learn," she says. "Not just the likeness, but an artistic movement of the line, acting ability and gesture that could be drawn into the characters, interesting camera angles as you become sort of a film director as well. Then it was important to do research on the props used, and the actions of the figures also had to be drawn well. Anyway, the bar was always high."

While Ketcham's new assistants worked on the Marvel book, they were each left to do their own stories. "We would each be given different stories to do as we thought best," says Matchette. "It was enough to have Hank critique our work without each other's two cents all the time so we'd leave each other alone artistically. We always penciled, lettered, and inked our own work." As Ferdinand recalls, "The art duties were pretty evenly divided. We did about the same number of pages each and we left the coloring up to Marvel."

THE DREADED DEADLINE DOOM

Sometimes Ketcham's demand for perfection meant his employees had to keep some tight schedules. "The only problem we had with Marvel was meeting the deadlines," says Ferdinand. "Hank was such a perfectionist, and we were all so green, that there were lots of corrections and redrawing. Even with three artists we were always straining to get the art out in time."

Besides Hank's new assistants, the other creative member of the Marvel Comic was Fred Toole, who was the one holdover from the Standard/Pine and Fawcett

WE'RE OFF TO OUTER SPACE... STAR BLAZERS IN COMICS

by Daniel DeAngelo



The saga of Star Blazers begins in the year 2199. Earth is under attack by the planet Gamilon, ruled by the arrogant Leader Desslok. Gamilon has been bombarding Earth with radioactive "planet bombs," which have irradiated the surface and forced mankind to retreat into underground cities. In just one year, all life on Earth will become extinct.

Just as Earth seems doomed, a message arrives from Queen Starsha of the faraway planet Iscandar, who offers Earth a device called "Cosmo DNA" that will restore life to the planet. The only catch is that mankind must travel to Iscandar to get it. Fortunately, Starsha also sends plans for a new "Wave-Motion Engine" that will enable a starship to make the long journey.

The engine is installed in a sunken WWII battleship called *Yamato*, which is rebuilt into a space cruiser and re-christened the *Argo* (named after the ship that Jason sailed in to find the Golden Fleece). Captain Avatar leads the perilous mission and is given a crew of brave young volunteers called the "Star Force," including combat leader Derek Wildstar, navigator Mark Venture, radar analyst/nurse Nova, and science officer Sandor. Initially, the hotheaded Wildstar blames Avatar for the death of his older brother, Alex—whose ship was lost during Avatar's last battle—but he gradually matures, winning the love of Nova and being promoted to Deputy Captain when Avatar is stricken with radiation poisoning.

When they reach Iscandar, the Star Force learns that Iscandar and Gamilon are twin planets and are both dying, which is why the Gamilons attacked Earth—because they were seeking a new home. After a climactic battle with Desslok on Gamilon, the Star Force arrives on Iscandar, where Wildstar discovers that his brother was rescued by Starsha. Alex falls in love with Starsha, who is the last surviving person on Iscandar, so he decides to remain there with her. Avatar passes away as the Star Force returns with the Cosmo DNA, arriving just in time to save Earth.

Protecting Mother Earth

The star-blazing Captain Derek Wildstar, Nova Forrester, Colonel Cosmo Shannon, Captain Mark Venture, and IQ-9. Detail from the front cover of Ken Steacy's wraparound painting for Comico's *Star Blazers* vol. 2 #1 (May 1989).

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Searching for a Distant Star
 (above) An overview of the *Quest for Iscandar* series depicting the *Argo* leaving Earth along with the main cast members—the Star Force, Queen Starsha, and the Gamilons.
 (right) At the core of *Star Blazers* is the love story between Derek Wildstar and Nova.

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A year later, Earth has fully recovered when a new threat appears in the form of a white comet, which conceals a massive city/fortress called the Comet Empire. Ruled by the merciless Prince Zordar, the Comet Empire travels through space, conquering everything in its path—and Earth is its next target! Receiving a warning from a mysterious woman named Trelaina, the Star Force sets out for planet Telezart, where she informs them about the comet's true nature. Although she possesses great mental powers, Trelaina refuses to use them for fear of losing control. Back on Earth, the Comet Empire wipes out the Earth Defense Fleet and destroys the moon, forcing mankind to surrender. On their way to Earth, the Star Force is again attacked by Desslok, who seeks revenge for the destruction of Gamilon. However, witnessing Wildstar and Nova's love for each other and Earth, Desslok realizes that he and the Star Force are not so different and that both are merely fighting to preserve their homes, so he leaves in peace. After a fierce battle, the Star Force manages to destroy the Comet Empire city from within, but an enormous space dreadnaught emerges from the wreckage. Fortunately, Trelaina is moved by the Star Force's love for Earth, and with her help, Zordar is defeated.

SPACE BATTLE

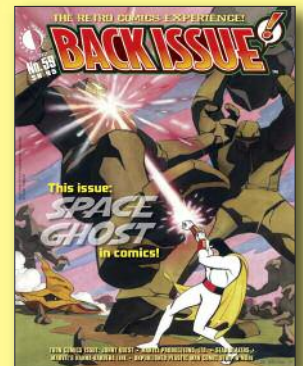
The saga of *Star Blazers* animated TV series was first created by Yoshinobu Nishizaki. The spaceship hidden in the name is Leiji Matsumoto's *Yamato*—being a *Yamato* basing the space battleship that was the animated series, which ran in 26 episodes. The series was re-edited in 1979. The release of *Star Blazers* which helped re-launch the movie a big success. It may be the start of the series was so popular.

Farewell to Star Blazers story of *Yamato* and the threat of Empire. In the end, he killed—including Dessler (Dessler) Zordar's dreadnaught (Captain Avatars).

his own life to save Earth, which he does by ramming the ship into Zordar's dreadnaught.

The second movie was an even bigger success than the first with fans lining up for blocks to say farewell to *Yamato* and its crew. Although it was intended to end the saga, *Farewell* was the most successful animated movie in the history of Japan at that time. There was obviously more money to be made in further sequels, and Nishizaki realized that killing everyone off was a mistake (something Matsumoto was against from the start)—especially when fans began demanding more. So, when a second animated series aired in 1979, adapting the *Comet Empire* story in 26 episodes, the ending was changed so that most of the cast survived. Yes, long before the term became popular, *Yamato* "retconned" its history, ignoring the ending of *Farewell*. "Continuity is not a Japanese virtue," says writer/artist Doug Rice.

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