



# GRAIL PAGES

ORIGINAL COMIC  
BOOK ART AND  
THE COLLECTORS

DON'T YOU  
UNDERSTAND?

YOUR  
FATHER!

NO, THE YOUTH  
DOES NOT  
UNDERSTAND! FOR  
HE--LIKE THE MANY  
WHO WILL FOLLOW  
HIM--IS ALREADY  
A VICTIM OF--

THE  
PLAGUE

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AT LAST!  
CONAN AND BELIT  
RETOIN THE  
BLACK  
CORSAIRS!

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BY STEVEN ALAN  
PAYNE

# GRAILPAGES

## ORIGINAL COMIC BOOK ART AND THE COLLECTORS

by Steven Alan Payne  
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### Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the professionals who caused my imagination to bloom, who gave me an appreciation of the written word and the drawn image, and who set my moral compass pointed in a direction I still have not strayed from.

And it is dedicated to Tai and Taylor, two amazing little girls.

### Special Thanks

To all the collectors and dealers who so generously gave of their time, and shared their art collections for this book.

And to all the other collectors out there – may you someday find your own Grailpages.



*X-Men* #115 (Nov. 1978),  
 pgs. 2-3, pencils: John  
 Byrne, inks: Terry Austin.  
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## CONTENTS

### FOREWORD & INTRODUCTION

by Steven Alan Payne.....4

### CHAPTER 1

Overview: What is Comic Book Art?.....9

### CHAPTER 2

Collecting By Artist.....21

### CHAPTER 3

Collecting By Covers, Splash Pages,  
 Panel Pages and Sketch Pages.....53

### CHAPTER 4

Long Term and Discerning Collectors.....71

### CHAPTER 5

Mega-Collectors.....79

### CHAPTER 6

Theme Collections.....93

### CHAPTER 7

Blue Chip Collectors.....101

### CHAPTER 8

Skyrocketing Prices.....113

### CHAPTER 9

Overseas Collectors.....121

### CHAPTER 10

Collectors of the Modern Age.....127

### CHAPTER 11

Industry Professionals Who Collect.....137

### AFTERWORD

Grailpages.....141



# FOREWORD

by Steven Alan Payne

"You buy, you sell, (and then) you buy the same thing again. The quest is often more important than the object itself." - Michel Maillot

If there's one thing comic art collectors love to do, it's discuss. Discuss their collections, discuss the state of the hobby, the stature of the hobby, the future of the hobby. Steve Welch presides over a roundtable discussion of several collectors in the Chicago area who meet for dinner, similar to dinners held by West Coast and East Coast original art collectors alike. There are virtual meetings on Yahoo, and discussion boards on eBay and community websites.

As soon as I announced the compilation of this book I was invited to several group meetings, some held at conventions, and some ad hoc arrangements by individuals welcoming me into their homes or offices where a veritable museum of comic artwork is proudly hung on their walls. Collectors were inordinately open, look-

ing at this as a leg up to garnering more public awareness and support for the hobby which has come to mean so much in their lives.

And I felt that openness not just from collectors, but from those who labored in the industry. They poured forth stories of their years sweating through ponderous work assignments in the '60s and '70s with their intent solely on supporting their families by securing the next gig, without awareness that they were, in the process, creating a new art form.

From these varied and numerous sources I got a picture of an industry that began in the 1940s. There were studios of artists – young men fresh out of art school, and cartoonists with years under their belts – like the image of newsmen of old, replacing teletype machines and typewriters with drafting tables and quills. The volume of work that was turned out in the '40s was tremendous, with the various studios sending the large publishing houses dozens of books a month in return for salaries of \$10 and \$15 a week to their staff artists.

By the '60s and '70s comics had begun paying by the page rate, with an average around \$50 per page. These artists, many survivors of the studios of the '40s, supplemented their income by doing two or three books a month. They were hustlers. To most of them it wasn't about making art, it was about the next gig. Jobs weren't secure. Healthcare was non-existent. It's the energetic accounting of the birth pains of an industry.

In and of itself, comic book art has no remaining worth. It is a work-for-hire enterprise which, once the artist is paid and the art reproduced, becomes of negative value. The characters portrayed in the art are still the property of the publisher, an issue recently with the advent of the slew of comic book-inspired films, but the physical art is not, and can be bought and sold and used for private exhibition.

The returning of the art to the artist was facilitated after much arbitration, which artist/inker/editor Dick Giordano explained to me like this: "I believe DC first started returning art at the time that ACBA (Academy of Comic Book Arts) was formed in the early '70s. There was some concern that it would turn into a union and DC felt that returning the art might forestall more problematical demands later. Marvel soon followed with a similar form of art return that did not acknowledge that the artists owned the work. In 1976 a new



*Fantastic Four* #109  
(Apr. 1971), cover,  
pencils: John  
Buscema, inks: Joe  
Sinnott.

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copyright law recognized the artist as owning his work in perpetuity.”

With their art now once again theirs, most artists decided to sell, first at conventions and then through art dealers, and as the hobby became more sophisticated, those that still had art sold through agents and auction houses. In the beginning art sold for \$20 - \$50 a page, but with the recognition of the art form and the growing appraisal of its worth, that has changed dramatically. Al Williamson summed it up best when he said, “If I’d known how much they (comic art) would end up being worth I’d’ve saved it all!”

Once while selling comic art on eBay I was amused when a non-collector e-mailed me about a couple of “pages” of comic book art I had for sale. She was very polite, and stumblingly inquired as to whether or not I was ripping pages out of comic books and selling them one at a time for \$300 and \$400! I’m greeted with that sort of unawareness from friends, from co-workers, from even some comic book readers – anyone who is not intimately involved in the hobby. But more counterproductive is the disregard many have for this hobby, for the art of comic books in general.

I’ve come to see that comic books and jazz bear a resounding analogy. Similar to comic books, jazz was, in a different era considered not an emerging art form, but only the cacophonous music of Negroes and hop heads. Jazz’s original sculptors hewed it out of heartfelt passion, a cobbled together mix of African and European music with roots dating back to the 1880s, which by definition of its fusing of disparate cultures makes it wholly American. Comic books bear a similar parentage, being part one thing and wholly nothing, and through the confluence of necessity and creativity, emerge as something unassailably original.

Outright resistance to an enlightened view of comic art is evinced in the opinions of far too many of the general public who maintain that comic books are only the playthings of youth. Comic art is not just misunderstood, it’s much worse than that; comic art is ignored. The roar in the ears that “this is comic book art” drowns out the objectivity needed to regard the art in overview. Michael Chabon’s pastiche work *The Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* depicted a comic book creative team, culled in part from actual stories in comics’ early years, and for the public at large is probably the only real peek they’ve had into this wonderful business.

A concession has to be made that comic book art was never meant to be held in esteem. The pen and ink works were always considered a disposable art form for a disposable medium. As such, little care post reproduction was taken with the originals. Horror stories abound of pages lost by office workers, and printers using the original works as floor mats.

From that origin arises the need for this; a book of the collector and his passion. It is an introduction to what comic book art

is, and hopefully answers why it is collected. In it I talk about the creators and their lives, about the art and its influence on collectors, about the soaring prices that threaten to alienate some collectors, and through it all make a collage that reflects this hobby to the participants as well as makes it accessible to those who are unfamiliar with it.

I also want it to be a testament to the great works of comic art that are out there, a sort of ark of an era in comic book history. Currently these pages are collected and appreciated in individual collections. But these works, and the stories of those who created it, need to be recorded, and given their proper stature as a uniquely American creation.

For this book, I’ve tried to break down the collectors into their type of collections, a taxonomic ranking with an orderly genus, class and kingdom. At the very least I’ve applied an ad hoc assigning of collectors to a category, to try and give some semblance of order. Otherwise, with some collectors topping 1,000 individual pieces, this book would be a jigsaw landscape of random assignments of indecipherable intent. Hopefully no one is offended if I’ve narrowed my focus to only a portion of their



*Tomb of Dracula* #14  
(Nov. 1973), pg. 27,  
pencils: Gene Colan,  
inks: Tom Palmer.

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collection. It would take many volumes to display all the works in the possession of all the collectors I interviewed.

The book's tone is intentionally personal, eschewing the formality of a purposefully academic study. Despite the candor of myself, collectors and industry professionals there is no attempt to mock or belittle any aspect of this hobby. The book seeks only to get a little distance, and with distance the perspective this grants. I wanted to take the lid off the box and examine each of the pieces found inside, some favorably, some with disfavor. But none so harshly that I felt content making final judgments and sending anything off to the headman.

One of the sensitive topics I touch on in collecting comic art is costs. It's sometimes spoken about like a family indiscretion. Like a secret we all know, and through its avoidance will dwindle into insignificance. But everywhere you turn in the market, there is a page that breaks the previous record in highest priced for an artist.

Are the precipitously ascending prices really doing anything to establish legitimacy to the hobby? Are we trying to buy respect? Or is it ultimately going to be revealed to simply be a conceit of

collectors, a shot at bragging rights, to say who spent the most on a page. Like a successful man with a trophy wife, are we proud of the purchases we make for the astronomical sums we pay and the bragging rights that entails? Are we boasting about the cost on our purchase thereby elevating our status in the hobby more than we're trying to acquire memories?

After speaking with two dozen collectors I'd have to say no. For the most part we buy for the most mundane of reasons. It follows a similar refrain in collectors from the US and abroad, our story collective. And it goes like this: I bought comics when I was young. They stirred my imagination. And the artists excelled in an industry where they could have been mediocre. And I'm able to collect this art. For the memories. To honor an overlooked art form. And that is it.

In summation, this is an attempt to introduce a broader public to comic book art when that broader public still struggles with accepting fantasy artists like Frank Frazetta. But it's a first step. Camelot had an address, and it was on Madison Avenue. And the grails produced there have spread throughout the world. This is who we are.



## INTRODUCTION

### PREY IN THE DRY SEASON by Steven Alan Payne

"The nostalgia factor is what is at the heart of this hobby..." — Tim Townsend

**S**tarting with an illogical premise and moving logically to an illogical conclusion, I decided after losing my corporate job to be a comic art dealer.

Steven Alan Payne



I'd rediscovered comic book art a few months earlier, after I noticed the office manager at my job had hung on her office wall an original art *Garfield* comic strip, her favorite read on the morning commute, which her observant husband had purchased and framed for her as a birthday gift. Seeing it made my mind fishtail back to the 1,000 or so comic books I'd amassed as a teenager. I easily recalled the names of the artists on those books, like recalling the names of favorite grade school teachers. I'd bought a couple of pages of original art back in 1979 at the ComicCon (now WizardWorld) in my native Chicago, only to sell them a few years later to buy some vintage comic books. I began kicking around the idea of buying a couple of pages to decorate the new apartment I'd just moved into. It would

be, I felt, the perfect collusion of kitsch and nostalgia.

But then I lost my job. And in the ensuing months out of work I went through my savings like a wildfire. Of my financial future I knew little and feared much. Being over a year out of my field reduced my charm at interviews. At this point salvaging my career seemed as impossible as trying to reconstruct a cow from a gallon of milk and a pound of hamburger.

I started thinking outside of the box, since the box was clearly empty. Whatever I had learned I tried to do differently. Try a new angle. Try it this way and that. Test the elasticity of my abilities.

So I found myself at my first comic convention in over 20 years. The atmosphere at the convention was just a striped awning away from a market bazaar. One dealer of original art had a corner table and worked it like a Las Vegas croupier. He had comic pages in plastic Rubbermaid tubs bound in dog-eared Itoya portfolios, and the art, for him, was selling like tickets to a hot Broadway show.

I got into conversation with another dealer, Mike Burkey, who had an inverse system to his speech; smiling when he spoke seri-



ously and telling jokes with a mournful expression. He had several sloppy piles of comic book art in slippery magazine bags which he constantly adjusted. I shuffled randomly through the art, focusing on nothing, impressed by everything. (I was later to discover Burkey was to comic art what Al Pacino in *Scarface* was to cocaine.)

Someone from the crowd behind us veered over, attracted by a page of art on the table. The two men's attempts to talk were like the Wright brothers' first flight – a long and uncertain running start, taking off for just a brief moment and then over before you knew it. But in that brief time \$8,000 had changed hands, for a Steve Ditko page from *Spider-Man*. No one else around the table was even looking, inured.

My illogical conclusion was, with an uncertain future and an unambiguous mountain of debt, to take a stab at dealing art. Like the research scientist from a thousand comic books who injects himself with his own serum, I experimentally bought \$3,500 worth of comic book art with the intent of reselling it on eBay. I wanted to bring back prey during the dry season.

Concerned friends beseeched me not to predicate my financial future on the vicissitudes of a fad. But I needed something. Sitting unemployed in my apartment was verging on turning into *The Shining*. More germane, at this point I had all my savings tied



LEFT: *The Avengers* #51 (Apr. 1968), cover, pencils: John Buscema, inks: Joe Sinnott.

Characters TM & © 2009 Marvel Characters, Inc.

RIGHT: *Savage Sword of Conan* #17 (Feb. 1977), pg. 22, pencils: John Buscema, inks: Alfredo Alcalá.

Characters TM & © 2009 Conan Properties Intl., LLC

up in the propagation of my stock. Backing out now would be like trying to correct an explosion.

I had noticed that in the early days, many of the auctioneers on eBay did little other than name the artist, mention the size of the page and offer shipping charges. But I had the advertising background, and when I pitched the pages I filled them with artists' bios and detailed analysis of what the page expressed. Three months later I'd sold them all, and grossed nearly \$10,000. It's become a tale I've told around a thousand dinner tables.

The money led to other purchases, and other likewise lucrative sales. But somewhere throughout there blossomed a flower of regret in my heart. I'd sold pages from books I'd loved as a child.

That ushered me into the collecting phase of my career, where I continue to pursue comic art, some to storybook happy endings, some financially out of my reach, and others somewhere out there in that great nether region of private collections. Still, I often regret the ones I sold.

I once spoke with letterer Tom Orzechowski, and asked him if he collected any pages of comic book art. He said in his view, at one point he owned them all. Good philosophy. At least I can always say I had them.

SPIDER-MAN

15¢ 75  
IND. AUG

APPROVED  
BY THE  
COMICS  
CODE  
AUTHORITY

# the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN



MARVEL  
COMICS  
GROUP

## DEATH WITHOUT WARNING!



ROMITA

YELLOW T S

RED T S

BLACK T S

BLUE T S





# CHAPTER 1

## OVERVIEW: WHAT IS COMIC BOOK ART?

"Being a collector is a very strange thing, probably some mental illness..." – Michel Maillot

### Collectors Hari Naidu and Bill Woo

**D**r. Srihari (Hari) Naidu is an interventional cardiologist who specializes in angioplasty and stenting at New York-Presbyterian Hospital (Cornell). He's won numerous awards including the Bristol Myers-Squibb forum of excellence. He's also a Sigma Xi Scientific Research Society Award winner at Brown University, his alma mater. "I can go to almost any city in this country and find someone who would welcome me with open arms. I have had people pick me up at my hotel and treat me to dinner, show me around and take care of me in a foreign city." In Chicago he was treated to the same deferential. A local lawyer picked him up and ferried him to a Northside bar where for Dr. Naidu the drinks were on the house. None of this bonhomie he enjoys, however, has anything to do with Dr. Naidu's profession. Hari Naidu has a deep passion for collecting original comic book art, a passion he shares with collectors across the world.

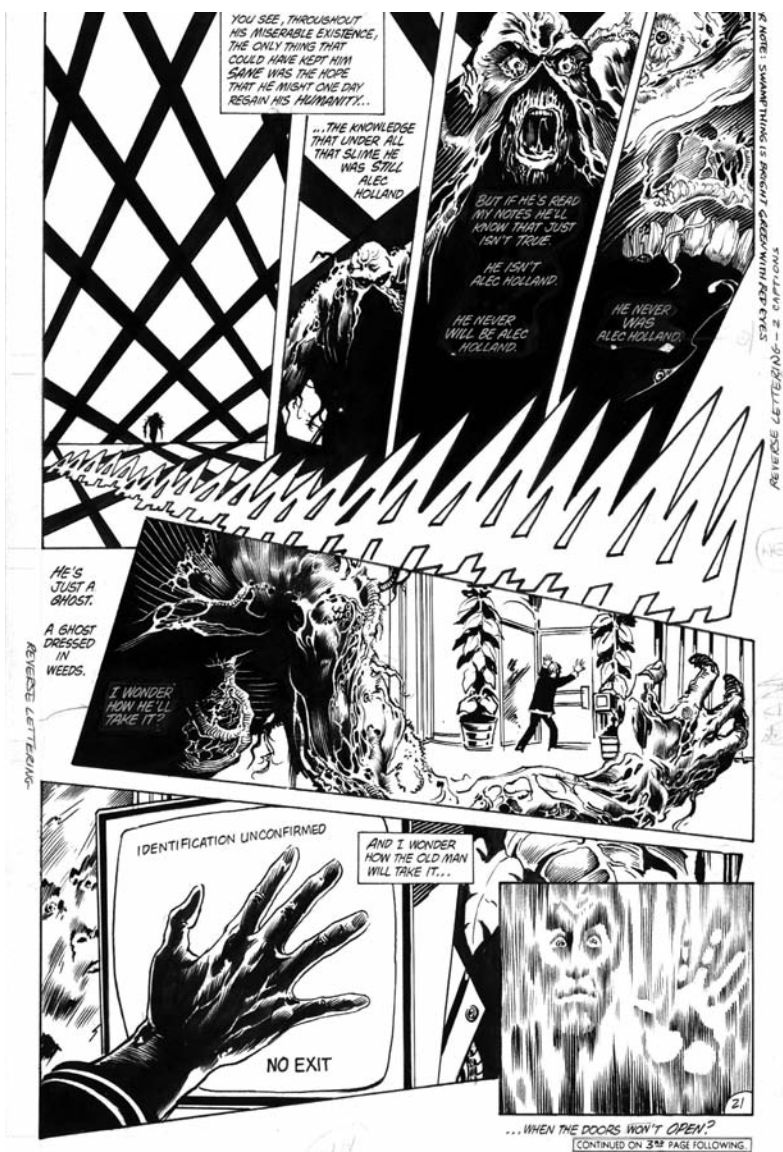
For those outside the hobby, put simply and in block letters, original comic art is the original art crafted by a confluence of writing and artistic talents, which is then reproduced in a reduced format for the production of comic books. It is a series of sequential images, much like the frames of a movie, that tell a tale through snapshot images of a story. They are the bastard child of the pulp magazines and comic strips, outcasts of literary and artistic circles alike. And even though a patina of respect first for their longevity and now for their cross-over film appeal has released comic books from their ignominy, the art itself, ironically, is largely overlooked outside of the subculture of comic art collectors.

Comic art collecting is a tenacious hobby tangential to comic book collecting, which has escalated voraciously in price and stature from the level of obscure novelty to the chic



*Silver Surfer* #14 (Mar. 1970), pg. 1, pencils: John Buscema, inks: Dan Adkins.

OPPOSITE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #75 (Aug. 1969), cover, pencils and inks: John Romita. Characters TM & © 2009 Marvel Characters, Inc.



Once art is done for hire, for many it is no longer art. To these critics, art is something done not for monetary or statutory gains, but emerges from an uncontrollable urge to create, much like some mad god's dream.

But by that definition many held in the embracing arms of art's warm esteem will have to be let loose. People like Norman Rockwell, whose bucolic, visual anecdotes were done for the publication *Saturday Evening Post*, N.C. Wyeth and the inhabitants of his color-soaked cherubic realms, or the diminutive Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, whose garishly colored, wildly kinetic fever dreams were done as promotion for the Moulin Rouge. Either these talents and many others will forever be barred from the realm of art, or the definition has to be broadened and ameliorated.

Given the high dollar value of '60s and '70s comic book art, it comes as no surprise that claiming a greedily large wedge of the pie chart demographics of collectors are professionals like Dr. Hari Naidu, marking a loftier assemblage for what is thought of as a cloistered, idiosyncratic market. If it really is a cloistered, idiosyncratic market.

"Compared to the market for say automobiles, yes," Ed Jaster, ex-Chicagoan and Director of Acquisitions at Heritage Comics clarified. "But as a collectible, (comic book art) collecting is a significant hobby." His claim is backed up by his company's tallies. In business since the 1960s, Heritage Galleries and Auctioneers began auctioning comic book artwork on their website, [www.heritagecomics.com](http://www.heritagecomics.com), and at live auctions at conventions in 2001. Based out of Dallas Texas, they are the third largest auctioneer in America with sales exceeding \$350 million annually. 30% of Heritage's Pop Culture revenue is from comic art sales, about \$8 million dollars.

Ed has sold a John Romita *Spider-Man* cover for \$75,000, and his personal best, a 1939 Superman cover that sold for \$135,000, both rivaling the costs of the minor works of recognized artists like Sickert or Remington or even Picasso. During the summer of 2002, Heritage grossed \$5 million at their signature auction held in Chicago. Included amongst Heritage's sales was a John Romita cover for *Amazing Spider-Man* #69 that fetched \$41,400.

The buyer of that piece was Bill Woo, a 46-year-old comic book shop owner from Delaware. Though not the most expensive page he's ever bought, that honor going to the cover for *Fantastic Four* #55, his collection has made Bill, along with others like Dr. Hari Naidu, rock stars in the field of comic art collecting. The Heritage buy was a novelty for Bill, whose 30 prized pieces, like much of Naidu's prodigious collection, were largely culled from a less public forum.

ABOVE: *Saga of the Swamp Thing* #21, (Feb. 1984), pg. 21, pencils: Steve Bissette, inks: John Totleben.

OPPOSITE: *Batman* #608 (Dec. 2002), cover, pencils: Jim Lee, inks: Scott Williams.

Characters TM & © 2009 DC Comics.

esteem of a true collectible. Original comic art had at one point been traded for old comic books. Old comic books still remain a viable collectible, especially when copies of *Captain America* #1 sell for as much as \$8,950. But somewhere down the line someone made the quantum realization that buying a comic book gave you one out of 100,000, but original art on the other hand was one of a kind.

Commercial art, production art, copy art – it has been given many names, most intended to be polite euphemisms for something detractors feel can be easily dismissed. Just as there are those who do not believe dinosaurs were actually living creatures, who don't believe that man ever set foot on the moon, the whole act staged in the Mojave desert, there are those who do not believe comic book art collecting is a worthwhile hobby.

CURTISS WAY



BLACK T S

BLUE T S

ABOVE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #69 (Feb. 1969), cover, art: John Romita.

Characters TM & ©2009 Marvel Characters, Inc.

RIGHT: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #8 (Nov. 1985), cover, art: George Pérez.

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**GRAILPAGE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #40**

As an image of authoritarian oppression, this cover by John Romita Sr. provides a decisive, unequivocal argument. Almost like some Communist Era propaganda on the repressive evils of capitalism, the Kingpin, the embodiment of capitalist excess, bears down on the proletariat Spider-Man, holding him in submission by a simple arm lock.

Despite his concealing mask, Romita gives Spider-Man a sense of pained helplessness through the body's rigid attitude. The expression on Kingpin's face can't be called elation as much as entitlement. Capitalism, at its worst.

From the collection of Bill Woo, who also provided the covers that appear in the foreword and introduction.

"I am actually making much more money now," stated Dr. Hari Naidu. With the additional income he is outpacing, or at least staying in the race with the ever increasing costs of comic art. "But I don't have nearly as much free time to devote to the hobby. That has been the limiting factor for me." Still, he expresses gratitude for entering the hobby when prices were more subdued, which has allowed him to acquire a few pages

"My favorite piece is the cover to *Crisis* #8, which is famous as the 'Death of the Flash' issue. *Crisis* came out right during the peak of my collecting and I remember issues #7 and 8 as the climax of the series, where Supergirl and Flash [respectively] die. The cover itself is amazing," he described, "drawn with deep black and reds and depicting the Flash holding the Psycho-Pirate, and it is easy to tell that it's a dramatic and climactic point in the series as well as the Flash mythos. I couldn't wait to read it, and to this date that cover is one of my all-time favorite covers."

Hari has been interviewed numerous times about his collection, including write-ups in *Smart Money* magazine, and *Forbes*. Those articles he views as "targeted to pure investors."





LEFT: *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), pg. 39, art: Brian Bolland.

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RIGHT: *Daredevil* #176 (Nov. 1981), pg. 21, pencils: Frank Miller, inks: Klaus Janson.

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Yet and still he believes the hobby is relatively virgin from pure speculators. "For the vast majority of buyers, this is still a hobby, and there always remains a real emotional or nostalgic attachment to the subject matter.

"The vast majority of art remains affordable. As the 'first tier' artists' prices climb to the stratosphere, folks will start collecting the 'second tier' artists. This is the same thing that happens in all hobbies; blue chip items are for the very wealthy. For example, not everyone can afford a first appearance of *Spider-Man* comic book, but that doesn't mean that you can't collect *Spider-Man* comic books! In the same way, just because you can't afford a John Byrne *X-Men* page doesn't mean you won't still try to get a page by Cockrum, Smith, Silvestri, Lee, Romita Jr., or any number of other great artists whose pages are to various degrees sought after."

#### GRAILPAGE: *Daredevil* #176

DD's return to New York, and his eventual break-up with the

Black Widow led to a slump in the stories. Further adding to the slump was Colan's defection from the book. DD might have floundered after that in superhero hell, bouncing from creative team to team, none assigned long enough to gain control. Then Roger Stern took over the book, with a relative newcomer named Frank Miller.

Tall, lanky, terse in speech, Frank Miller injected DD into a New York that looked like something crafted by Will Eisner. New York became a city full of con men and petty crooks, and even the established villains like the Gladiator and the ludicrous Stilt-Man became sad moralizing denizens lost in the vast uncaring world of this Eisner-like New York.

The rise of Frank Miller doesn't need to be charted, but from early on he was a talent never content to rest on past, or even current, achievements. He refined his style on the book, even stepping into writing chores where he revealed an equal if not greater facility than his artistic abilities.





# CHAPTER 2

## COLLECTING BY ARTIST

"I think the most important thing is to have a very personal 'voice'..." - **Jaume Vaquer**

### THE RELUCTANT SUPERSTAR

**M**arvel comics, the preferred diet of most art collectors, gave the malingering superhero industry a life-giving transfusion in the early '60s, as well as introduced a new sensibility to the writer/artist relationship. As such these pages hold a preeminent place in the field of collecting. The industry was the Wild West then, with each direction Marvel Comics took uncharted territory.

In the '70s Marvel went through another alembic as artists like Gene Colan and John Buscema, with their more realistic style, replaced in Marvel's aristocracy Kirby's and Ditko's more comic-booky approach. And what Stan Lee began with superhero angst, writers like Steve Englehart, Gerry Conway and Roy Thomas turned into full blown dementia. Every issue was a Mardi Gras.

Every month, the artists and writers at Marvel Comics would receive stacks of the company's monthly output. When Gene Colan received his books he would run to them and quickly pull out issues drawn by John Buscema. "First to see how gorgeous they were and then to torment myself. I always admired John Buscema the most."

Stunning praise from a man of Gene's talent. He detailed for me what he liked about John's work in simple, respectful words.

"Very natural, very real. I've seen him work and he's very confident in whatever he did. He didn't struggle over a thing. And he was fast if he needed to be. He could do lots of work in one day. If you wanted him to he could do three pages. And they were wonderful pieces of work. I loved John's work. I admired it so much in fact I thought he was far better than I was! So I used him as something to scrutinize carefully and try to remember how his work looked. But you know, you inevitably come back to your style, whatever it is. It's an impossible thing to dodge. You try to look like someone else but you wind up looking like yourself, which is as it should be."

Gene also admired another characteristic of John's. "He could draw anything. And he would draw anything. He didn't care what they wanted him to do." But for John Buscema, who hated drawing futuristic machines and space ships, and the countless superheroes whom he described as men wearing their underwear outside their pants, *Conan* was an oasis, a diversion from professional apathy.

Hal Foster had *Prince Valiant*, Burne Hogarth had *Tarzan*, and the fine illustrator Alex Raymond had *Flash Gordon*. But John Buscema, the logical successor to those talents, lacked one thing, a character that he would forever be tied with, something he could leave his stamp on. In his work on the *Fantastic Four* he was forever in Kirby's shadow – that was and always will be Kirby's book. His Spider-Man would be compared to Romita's. He shone under Tom Palmer's inking on the *Avengers*, but was one of many artists who passed through the book as frequently as members of that illustrious team.

Consciously or unconsciously he was searching for his *Tarzan*, his *Flash Gordon*. Despite his talent, without that seminal linking, he would be remembered as a remarkable illustrator, but nothing more.

Roy Thomas, writer and eventual editor for Marvel, spoke of his first time seeing John's work on the *Avengers* #41. "I was knocked out by how well he could draw. And after seeing the splash – just the splash – of his first *Avengers* I decided to try and keep him as the regular artist."

And that association lead to something better, to what would fulfill John's ambition and tower most notably in his career.

In the late 1960s Lancer Books began publishing the short stories of a highly creative and largely forgotten writer from Peaster, Texas named Robert Ervin Howard, featuring his titanic character, Conan of Cimmeria. Enhanced by covers from the miraculous '50s comic illustrator turned painter Frank Frazetta, the books caught the eye of Thomas, the second major writing

OPPOSITE: *Conan the Barbarian* #91 (Oct. 1978), cover, art: John Buscema.

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talent, Barry Smith. Within a few issues of doing the book, Smith evolved from being a forgettable Kirby mimic to a genuine stylist. And when his financial and time requirements grew beyond the bounds of Marvel's tolerance, after a brief stint by Howard fan Gil Kane, John was finally given the reins.

John Buscema's adaptations of the Howard tales were every bit as lush and adventurous as the author had intended. Though he complained about never having the time to do his best work, complained about the inkers working on his pencils, complained about the poor quality of the printing, John had found his immortality. And in his work, and the work of his collaborators, the essence that makes comic book art truly art can be seen. It is the reason collectors collect.

The relationship between an artist and an inker are like that of a beautiful model and her makeup artist. The artist provides the raw structure, the layout, the underlying direction, while the inker, far from just laying down a layer of black India ink, highlights and heightens the gridwork, sometimes moving the finished piece to levels neither artist could achieve individually.

An artist and inker working at cross purposes are often like listening to two erudite speakers talking at the same time, conversing on totally different topics. Snatches of brilliance can be discerned, but without a harmony of purpose it just becomes so much noise. It was the duty of the editor to bring together what hopefully would result in a beautifully illustrated page.

But that didn't mean the artist would be happy with those decisions. Envision the likelihood of two cars colliding and as a result producing a beautiful piece of sculpture. This very thing occurred on the pages of *The Savage Sword of Conan* when John Buscema was first inked by Filipino talent Alfredo Alcalá.

Everyone seemed pleased by the Buscema/Alcalá pairing except for Buscema himself. Respectful of Alcalá's talent, John nonetheless descried how Alfredo embellished his pencils. John's style was dependent upon good design, strong form, and a painterly approach to brushstrokes. Alcalá's inking filled up all the negative space with a world of detailed inking. "Noodling" was John's derogatory dismissal of it.

Hired during Marvel's push to develop foreign-born inkers whom they could pay a lesser page rate, Alcalá boasted an ability to handle 80 pages a week. And though he and John worked on only a limited number of projects, Alcalá used everything from his characteristic detailed inking, ink washes, and even ink and charcoal to highlight some of the best adaptations of Howard's classics Marvel produced.

Roy Thomas admits admiring Alcalá's collaborations on John, though ultimately he cited Tony DeZuniga as his favorite

*Conan the Barbarian* #43 (Oct. 1974), pg. 15, pencils: John Buscema, inks: Ernie Chan.

OPPOSITE: *Savage Sword of Conan* #23 (Oct. 1977), pg. 5, pencils: John Buscema, inks: Alfredo Alcalá.

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talent to emerge from Marvel Comics in the '60s. Howard's creation was a larger-than-life barbarian, whose mythical world combined the adventure stories of Talbot Mundy with the visceral horror of his contemporary, the pulp horror stylist Howard Phillip Lovecraft. The Conan tales were lush adventure stories with hair-raising supernatural elements. Hard to categorize, they surfaced every decade or so to the acclaim of small but loyal readers only to re-submerge without a ripple.

On Thomas's insistence, Marvel secured the rights to do the comic adaptations of the stories of the brooding Cimmerian. But despite John's demands to handle the art chores he was passed over when Marvel tried to recoup their \$150 licensing fee to the estate of Howard by hiring a lower paid

THE MAN IN THE SHADOWS

Some of the most classic examples of flow in storytelling can be assessed from viewing John Buscema's art. His images appear as snapshots taken at key moments during a story. Along that line, but subtly different, Gene Colan's comic panel pages appear as frames of film, some blurred with motion, some just catching the back of a figure as he leaps out



of frame. Colan's deep affection for acting, for film, has gifted his art with a sense of cinema unmatched anywhere.

As John Buscema's work was the human figure in motion, Gene Colan's was the human spirit, captured on the faces of his subjects. Gene's art was done up close, personal, almost uncomfortably intimate. His incredible ability to draw faces and to express emotion characterized and separated his work from others. The emotion he captured wasn't the cartoon stock reactions of shock and anger, but the finer emotions running between those extremes.

John Buscema was often called the Michelangelo of comic books, because of his affection for the human form. But if he was Michelangelo, then Colan was Caravaggio, with his intense relationship with the absolutes of light and darkness.

Until November of 1967 the comic workload was produced on paper measuring a breathtaking 14"x20." But the costs of production occasioned the reduction of the original size to a more manageable 11"x17," which gained the nickname of one-and-a-half-up, referring to the pages now being only approximately 1.5 times larger than its published form, down from twice the published dimension.

Most artists took the change in paper size in stride, some even developing new styles as a result of the change. Others, on the dark side of the equation, suffered from the more cramped confines panels were restricted to. "The artists I think adversely affected were Jack Kirby and Ross Andru," Roy Thomas offered.

Gene began doing some of his best work in the mid-'60s, when the larger size paper was still in use. "John Severin asked me to try the larger size out," Gene recalled. "After a while I began to realize I could show more and express more with big pages. I found small size very restricting." And in those restrictions he felt that backgrounds suffered. "Everything had to be compressed."

And with the compression, his figures were often narrowed down just to the explosive close shot, where the flicker of emotion was easily read. As time went on Gene reflected an even greater emotional intensity despite the limitations of panel size. And it was what gave books like *Tomb of Dracula* their strong emotional power.

Marv Wolfman had as good of a grasp on Bram Stoker's character as Roy Thomas had on Robert E. Howard's. The *Tomb of Dracula* stories were an amalgam of the horror and the adventure that made the *Dracula* novel such compelling reading. And all the subtexts of eroticism made it to the comic book as well. The recherché art and storytelling actually made you feel pity for the character who would qualify as singularly the most ruthless serial killer in history. Gene's emotive depiction of shadows, which seem to flow

RIGHT: Gene Colan  
BELOW: *Tomb of Dracula* #21 (June 1974), pg. 26, pencils: Gene Colan, inks: Tom Palmer.

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and swirl, his adroit uses of blacks adding depth and mystery to the scene, all of it made the book a moody tribute to some of the horror classics of directors James Whale and Todd Browning. Gene's art was muted by colors, and is best appreciated in its original black-and-white renderings, like a fine old black-and-white movie from Universal Studios.

There's a certain irony in having a man named Wolfman writing a book on Dracula. Does Marv Wolfman retain any of the art from the books he labored on? "Lots. Not as much as I once did, but still lots." That statement, by the rules of this book, establish Marv as a comic art collector.

With the perspective of years Paul McCartney once said about the music he did with the Beatles that reading the lyrics now "is like reading poetry." No longer crushed by deadlines, looking back at the art and his work on the book, how does Marv view the book he and Gene shared?

"I think we had some really good stories, but I'd really love to redo the dialogue as it's overly heavy and there's much too much of it. I think I could say the same things with half the words today."

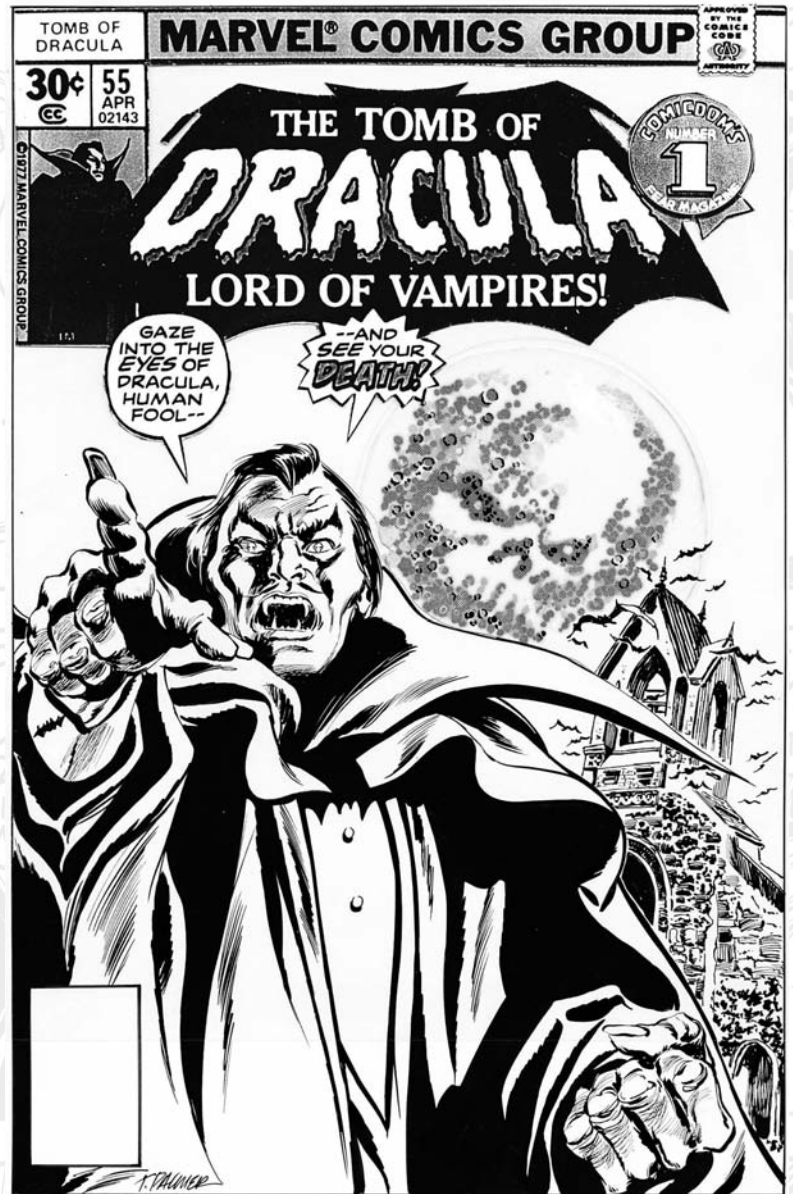
Unlike Gene who fought tooth and nail to get the Dracula book, Marv was less intent on helming the writing chores. "I think Marvel thought it was a dead end comic – in six issues there had been three writers and I was writer #4." Nonetheless, he felt he was a tailored fit for the book. "I liked writing horror so it made a good match."

Marv came to the book without a wealth of preconceptions. He claims to, at the time, have never seen a Dracula movie and had only read the novel years before. "But I did like the novel a lot and used that as the basis of my stories. Since I never saw the movies it helped me give it a unique look as I wasn't just doing what others had done."

*Tomb of Dracula* was for Gene what *Conan* was for John Buscema. When posed that hypothesis Gene smiled and nodded agreement. "With *Dracula* I got to draw so much." Even in his long and fertile run on *Daredevil*, Gene's full ability as an illustrator was not uncorked until *Dracula*.

Gene modeled his Dracula off of Jack Palance who donned the cape and fangs of the count in a 1973 television production of the story, adapted by legendary science fiction writer Richard Matheson. "I thought he was perfect," Gene alluded to actor Palance. "That face. Where are you gonna see a face like that?"

Gene Colan was the uncontested champ of *Daredevil*. His swirling shadows became almost a visual rebus for the world of darkness the blind hero moved through. Gene's pliant, graceful movements for the character stressed that *Daredevil* was the most athletic of any character. While Spider-Man was



double-jointed superhuman power, *Daredevil*'s moves were a practiced ballet.

There is no better time in the history of the book than *Daredevil*'s alliance with the Black Widow. Those stories depicted one of the most mature male/female relationship in all of comic book history. Matt and Natasha had an easy/uneasy combative love. It exhibited all the signs of life – growth, movement, decay. Few writers in comics have made a more convincing and bittersweet relationship than the one crafted by *Daredevil* scribe Gerry Conway.

Gene and I had a phone conversation in March of 2008, and talked about these characters he drew, as well as the many inkers he's worked with in his career. Gene of course had his highest praise for Tom Palmer, and spoke about how comfortable he was

*Tomb of Dracula* #55, (Apr. 1977), cover, pencils: Gene Colan, inks: Tom Palmer.

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Well, you can't get much more conflicted as a character than the Thor of the '60s and early '70s. On the one hand, the guy is a god – literally; on the other, he's deeply enmeshed with humankind, and for a time believed himself to be human. Remember, he was always Thor; his human identity as Donald Blake was a punishment enacted by Odin. But for years, he – and we – thought that somehow Don Blake was his real self, and Thor was some kind of 'overlay' – a secondary self that only came into being when he struck his cane upon the ground. The discovery that Don Blake was, in fact, a product of Odin's imagination was, at the time, mind-boggling. It certainly boggled my mind. I thoroughly enjoyed my time on that series."

While on *Thor* Gerry got to work with John Buscema, an artist who stressed strong storytelling. "John was more of an outside-in artist. His storytelling was more straight-forward and direct. I actually found it more difficult to work with John's art, fine as it was, than with Gene's rougher, more emotional approach.

"Both men were twenty to thirty years older than I was, so we didn't have a great deal in common. I started working with Gene when I was 17 or 18, and he was already in his 40s, I think. I have no idea what they thought about working with such a kid, but I was a huge fan of both artists and felt privileged to have them as partners in crime." Some of Gerry's early work with Gene was on *Sub-Mariner*, tackling a Dr. Doom/Modok/Cosmic Cube storyline. Obviously a writer of small ambition.

As a child I grew up a big fan of Gerry and Steve Englehart's *Captain America and the Falcon* work, particularly the developmental work done on the Falcon character. Prior to Gerry, the Falcon was largely relegated to the "supportive buddy" role, but under his aegis the character became a lot more assertive. He created quite an interesting world for him, and I inquired as to why he, in his brief run on the book, worked on developing The Falcon.

"I guess I never can leave well enough alone. Seriously though, I felt there were opportunities inherent in the Captain America/Falcon team that should be explored. Here we had Cap, the ultimate Square White Guy, teamed up with the Falcon, who had the possibility, at least, to provide a contrasting point of view to Cap's middle-American, probably conservative, approach to the world. In order for that to work, The Falcon needed to be developed as a character. Besides, as a writer I was tied to the legend and mythology already inherent in Steve Rogers' history. Sam Wilson, on the other hand, was something of a blank slate. That made him pretty appealing.

"It may sound from some of my answers like I think things through beforehand, and apply careful logic and reasoning to

my craft," Gerry soberly clarified. "The truth is, most of the reasoned analysis happens afterward – I write from the gut, from instinct, from what feels right. If I can't feel my way through a story I can't write it. Making the characters 'real' for me wasn't just important – it's the only way I can approach my work with any authenticity. It's easy to tell when a character doesn't feel real to me – the story is terrible and unconvincing. That's not to say I didn't write some terrible and unconvincing stories about characters who felt real to me; but I doubt I ever wrote a convincing story about a character that didn't resonate with my inner world in some way.

"At Marvel, artists worked from a writer's story outline – and depending on the relationship between the writer and the artist, those outlines could be either extremely detailed or pretty vague. With most artists, my initial outlines were tight and detailed, but as we came to understand each other's approach to story, my outlines would become looser. Some, looser than others. Ross Andru and I ended up plotting stories together over the phone; Gene Colan and Sal Buscema required more detail."

Gerry confesses that he has a few pieces of original art still in his possession, "but not as much as I wish."

Post-comic books, Gerry went on to tremendous success, working prominently on *Law and Order*, and its spin-off *SVU* version in both writing and producing roles. But I wondered if he ever misses working in comics?

"Of course. I also miss the feeling of falling in love for the first time. Life moves on. The comic book business I knew has changed a great deal since I was in it, and so have I."

## THE ART DIRECTOR

### Collector Glen Brunswick

Iconic is a word used to describe anything emblematic of a specific industry, genre, mindset, trend or time in history. Some iconic imagery can encompass more than one of those fields, like an industry and the time in which it flourished. Marvel Comics in the '60s was in a time of change, of campus riots and unrest. Marvel's characters were feisty, the rebellious stepchildren of DC's establishment era.

One of the more iconic covers from Marvel in the '60s is the cover to *Amazing Spider-Man* #68, by Spidey's equally iconic talent, and Glen's focus, John Romita. John Romita was one of the all-around solidest talents Marvel ever had. He was great as a storyteller, terrific as a layout man, and earned and excelled in his job as art director at Marvel. Best appreciated for picking up the reins after Ditko abruptly left *Spider-Man*,

SEPT 60 JAN

SP.# 68 "CRISIS ON THE CAMPUS!"

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## CRISIS ON CAMPUS!



YELLOW T S

RED T S

BLACK T S

BLUE T S

Romita's later work on *Captain America*, an attempt by Marvel to bring readers in to the then failing book by using the popular *Spider-Man* artist, has risen in fan appreciation.

"Besides just being a beautiful image," said Californian Glen Brunswick, owner of the *ASM* #68 iconic cover, "the cover evokes imagery of the Vietnam protests and Kent State. Spider-Man's job is to protect the innocent kids who are protesting. But he's also a crime fighter that must uphold the law. It's pretty clear he's about to get caught in the middle. You get the sense that he's about to swing out of his comic book world and into a severe real-life incident that's about to land him in a whirlpool of trouble."

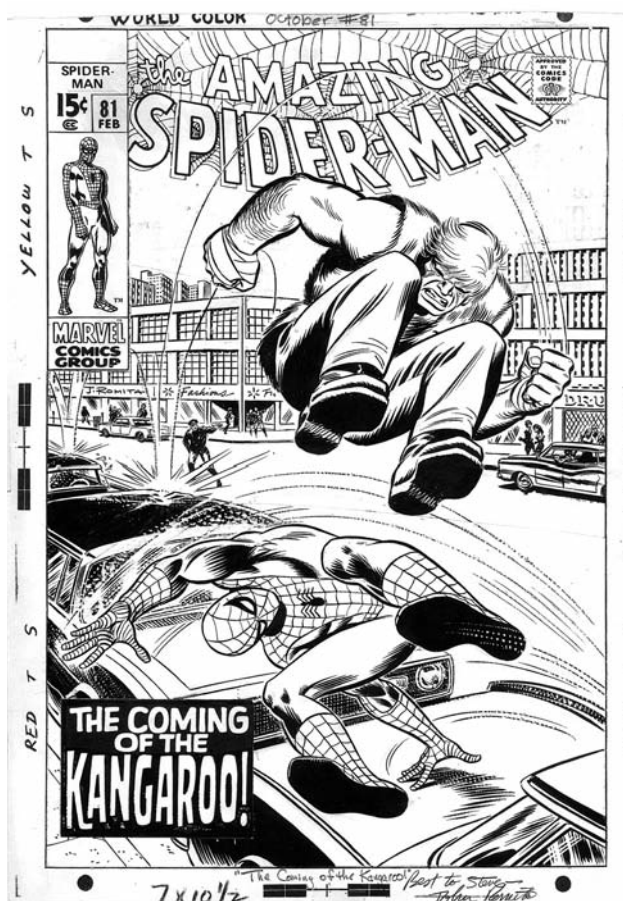
One of the greatest professional thrills for Glen, a professional writer of screenplays and comic books, was while on the book he created for Image Comics entitled *Gray Area*, he was paired with artist John Romita Jr., the extraordinarily talented son of Glen's childhood comic art idol John Romita Sr. Glen still retains a number of covers and a good portion of the artwork from that series. While John Jr. and he were working on the book, Glen was constantly inspired by Romita Sr.'s original *Spider-Man* art that hung on his office walls. The art that fueled his imagination as a child

provided a wonderful contrast for him, indicating just how far he'd come professionally. Heady stuff!

Back in the early '90s Glen's first ambitions in the acquisition of comic art was to get a classic cover of *Amazing Spider-Man* drawn by John Romita Sr. "I started going to conventions and was offered a few *ASM* covers that I passed on. At this time, in 1994 they were going for about \$3,000 - \$5,000. Currently these same covers are in the \$30,000 - \$50,000 range. Anyway, I figured if I was going to spend that kind of money it had to be a cover I truly desired."

Glen was told that if anyone could help him secure the cover he wanted, it would be dealer Mike Burkey, who went under the *nom de plum* of "Romitaman." His favorite *Spider-Man* cover happened to be the *Amazing Spider-Man* #68 which has graced his collection now for 13 years. "When I contacted Mike back in '94 he had just sold the cover to another prominent collector. He told me he would try and get the cover back for me."

But after a few months' effort Burkey informed Glen of the sad assessment that the deal just wasn't going to happen. The new owner loved the cover too much. "He was nice enough to



OPPOSITE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #68 (Jan. 1969), cover, art: John Romita.

LEFT: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #81 (Feb. 1970), cover, art: John Romita.

RIGHT: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #83 (Apr. 1970), cover, art: John Romita.

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give me the name of the new owner, über collector, and now good friend, Will Gabri-El. Thus began a series of offers to Will. I offered \$7,000 but Will declined. \$8,500? Good offer, but just not interested. Okay, Will, how about \$10,000? He turned me down flat."

Will Gabri-El remembered that marathon bargaining session. "Mike Burkey decided to introduce myself and Glen via phone. Although I had little interest in selling the cover, Glen and I stayed in contact."

Hearing of Glen's aggressive offers Mike Burkey offered a conciliatory purchase of another fine *Spider-Man* cover, one that still resides in Glen's collection – *Amazing Spider-Man* #71.

"A few weeks later Will called to tell me that if I agreed to buy two other covers besides the *ASM* #68 for a total of \$13,000 he'd do the deal. Apparently he had a line on another grail cover and he needed the money to pick it up. I agreed immediately."

"Glen flew out here to New Jersey from sunny California, and we've been friends ever since," Will confirmed.

The two other covers Glen got as part of the deal were *Captain America* #145, also by Romita, and a *Thor* cover by Jack Kirby. "Just [recently] I sold the *Cap* #145 cover alone for

substantially more than I paid for all three!"

Romita was credited with making *Spider-Man* accessible to the general public, but Glen felt he did more than that. "He infused his illustrations with a grace and an elegance that was not typical for a superhero book. He brought his background in romance comics to the adventure genre while sacrificing none of their romantic beauty in order to adapt to the Kirby-inspired action that *Marvel* books were famous for. This proved to be a perfect fit for Stan Lee's soap opera aspects of the book."

That soap opera aspect is what made Peter Parker's social life as important to the book as the battles he fought in his alter ego. "If you polled a fair number of *Spider-Man* art collectors, I think you'll find that it's just as important for them to have a page by Romita Sr. with Parker's love interests, Gwen or MJ. I myself own two special consecutive pages from *Amazing Spider-Man* #47 that depicts the first ever double-date with Peter, Harry, Gwen and MJ.

"What makes a picture art is a question we could debate for quite awhile," Glen offered. "For me, art has to be spiritual. It has to evoke an emotional response in the viewer. Romita is an absolute master at depicting the emotional dilemma in a



LEFT: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #80 (Jan. 1970), cover, art: John Romita.

RIGHT: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #71 (Apr. 1969), cover, art: John Romita.

OPPOSITE: *Thor* #142, cover, (July 1967), pencils: Jack Kirby, inks: Vince Colletta.

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## CHAPTER 3

# COLLECTING BY COVERS, SPLASH PAGES, PANEL PAGES AND SKETCH PAGES

"Authenticity has always been a huge issue for me in portraying comic art stories..." — Gene Colan

### COVERS

The aspects of comic book art need to be understood in order to follow the mental perambulations of collectors. In the collecting of comic art, this declaration reigns supreme: all pages are not created equal.

The best covers (like this Dan Adkins cover from Will Gabriel's collection) are both a summation of the story, and a highlight of what is to come. As a result a great deal of time and care was put into their production, from the art directors' layouts, to the chosen artists' designs and finished work. The cover's purpose is to arrest the attention of the casual buyer. Books were sold by their cover, which were the visual equivalent of a carnival barker.

Some artists were predominately cover artists, because their larger than life styles lent itself to the requirements. One of the most talented artists to hold down the job of fashioning covers was Gil Kane. In the '70s for Marvel, he and then-art director John Romita produced a staggering number of covers.

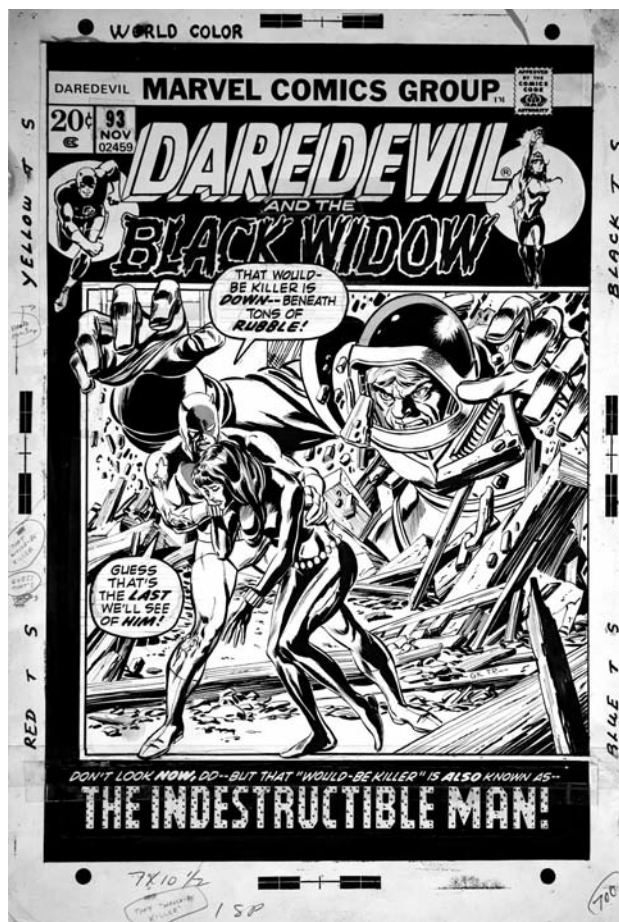
Gil Kane was extremely good at this freeze frame pin-up style of art (as seen in this cover from Bill Woo's collection). It made him picture perfect for covers, where his figures loomed larger than life, often out of proportion with their background, whatever was needed to excite a passerby to grab the book off the stands. In comic books the maxim not to judge a book by its cover was the quote of the naïve.

For many years during the '70s, Kenneth Landgraf, artist on the Wolverine Vs. Hercules story in the *Hulk Treasury* and DC's *Hawkman*, worked with Gil Kane. Landgraf met Kane at the Village Comic Art Store on McDougal Street in New York. Kane would come with art every other week, and when he did, Kenneth would photocopy everything Gil brought in to sell for his own study.

Stories abound about Gil the perfectionist, which Landgraf verified. "He constantly tried to improve his work. He studied anatomy books by George Bridgman. He would also sketch with a ball point

pen on photos that appeared in the Sunday newspaper. He had a wooden mannequin in the studio. He also drew from a Captain Action figure."

Hogarth, Heath and Kubert were the contemporaries Gil spoke most admiringly of according to Landgraf, as well as Lou Fine and Reed Crandall. And when it came to his own work, Gil expressed an appreciation of inkers like Tom Sutton who inked him on the "Adam Warlock" series that began in *Marvel*



*Daredevil* #93 (Nov. 1972), cover, pencils: Gil Kane, inks: Tom Palmer.

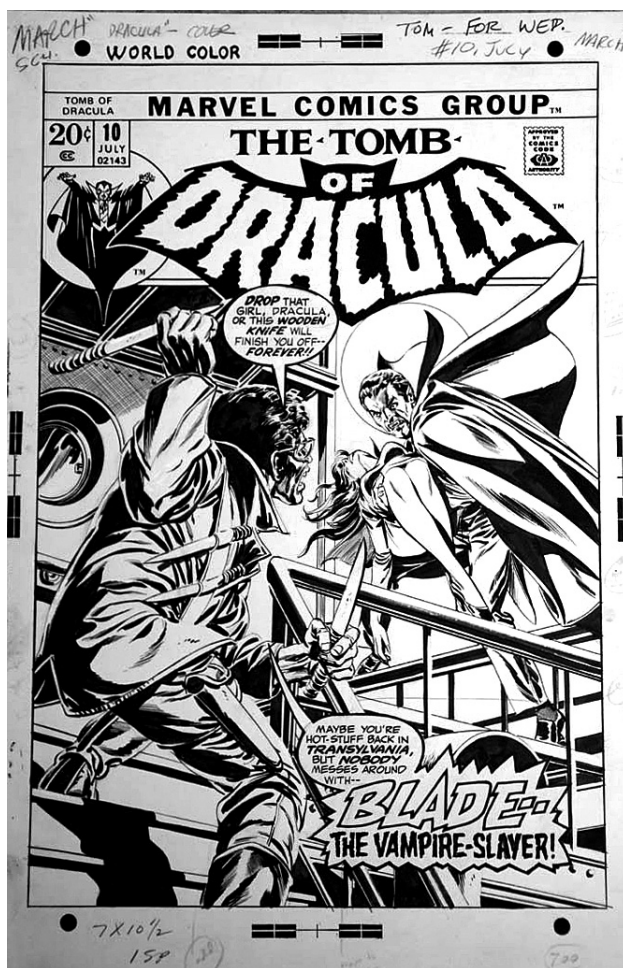
OPPOSITE: *Strange Tales* #164 (Jan. 1968), cover, art: Dan Adkins.

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LEFT: *Tomb of Dracula* #10 (July 1973), cover, pencils: Gil Kane, inks: Tom Palmer.

RIGHT: *Daredevil* #47 (Dec. 1968), cover, pencils: Gene Colan, inks: George Klein.

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Premiere, and Dan Adkins with whom he had a long association. There were other inkers Gil liked, including Wally Wood, who inked him on *Hawk and Dove* as well as *Teen Titans*, and Ralph Reese, who inked Gil's work on his first, brief run on the *Conan the Barbarian* color title.

*Conan* was a project near and dear to Gil. Around the time he worked on his *Blackmark* series, Gil had even purchased the rights to *Conan*. His covers to the book told entire tales of adventure and sorcery, and always seemed to contain too much action for one image.

Beyond just the contributions of the artist, the letterers were also vital to the covers, rocking every area not covered with essential art with explosive word balloons and arresting captions, as well as stylized logos. And though the latter were most often stats, they still contribute to the drama that makes covers the most sought after comic art.

#### GRAILPAGE: *Tomb of Dracula* #10

The lord of vampires given appropriate gravitas by artist Gil



Kane. Kane has worked the angles sharp as razors to portray predator and prey in a diagonal line, with the predator perched in what seems like uncomfortable proximity to his aggressive prey. There isn't a wasted inch of space, and in the best tradition of horror the image feels crowded, uncomfortably incommensurate.

Far from being hackneyed, the full moon yawning in the background is totally apropos, and the image would suffer for its absence. The helpless female victim simply gives the image a touch of urgency. This is one of the "20 cent covers," known for their distinctive inset image and color border scheme.

From the collection of Nick Katradis.

#### GRAILPAGE: *Daredevil* #47

Graceful composition marks this cover. Daredevil's upward thrusting kick launches him bodily into a tight, pointed arch. Below him the stairs drop in another line. And at the point of intersection is Willie Lincoln, the man at the center of the story's conflict, who stands not quite stooped or defeated, but equally challenging by his refusal to back down.



## CHAPTER 4

### LONG TERM AND DISCERNING COLLECTORS

"An entirely different matter is that the majority of big collectors will have retired or even died within the next 10-20 years. What happens then?" – **Lars Teglbjaerg**

"I just want my piece to be a choice example of what it is." – **Vince Oliva**

#### Collector Vince Oliva

\$35 isn't what it once was. \$35 now might get you an appetizer at Chicago's Lawry's Prime Rib (no drink). It will get you a glass trifle bowl at Crate and Barrel and about enough gas for a week's commute from the suburbs to a city job. But back in the mid-'70s and early '80s, \$35 could get you the splash to *Spider-Man* #88 by John Romita Sr. At least that's what Vince Oliva, a Floridian with a half-century of life under his belt paid for it. "[The splash] was purchased directly from John Romita many moons ago," remarked Vince with an open candor and more than a little gratitude. "I was purchasing whole *Spider-Man* books from him [at] \$25 per page, \$35 for the splashes."

It's the kind of statement that, after which, you struggle to retain your balance. But we're talking about a long time ago. Some people bought a page here and there as a novelty in the '70s when the art first became available to the public. But for some it immediately became a passion. These long-time collectors very often were able to snag treasures for nominal sums that are now hard to get, if not just prohibitively expensive. And if you collect long enough and at a steady rate, 20 or more years can give you quite an impressive show.

Vince has worked the hobby up, down, left and right. He's hit it from every angle, and been everything in the hobby. He's been in the collecting field for a long, long time. He has cross-traded, and has numerous collections running simultaneously. With science having found the "fat" gene, the "collecting" gene probably isn't far off, and a sample from Vince's blood would go far in science's understanding of the obsession. But of all his myriad collections, foremost in Vince's esteem is his collection of comic book art.

A native Chicagoan, Vince Oliva has lived since 1976 in Florida where he grew up in the construction business, taking



over his parent's company when they retired 30 years ago. He's an avid softball player and plays in his local county league as well as the statewide Florida Half Century League.

He got into comic collecting seriously by the age of 13. He began buying back issues from Howard Rogofsky and Robert Bell who listed in the classified sections of comic books. "As I didn't have a bank account at the time, I'd give my saved up allowance money to my mom and get her to make out checks to purchase the comics that I had to have." With a business savvy belying his age, he then sold the books through Alan Light's original *The Buyer's Guide*, precursor of *The Comic Buyer's Guide*. "I'd get checks, \$10 here, \$20 there in the mail and give them to my mom to deposit. My parents were flabbergasted that I was doing this."

Around that time Jim Steranko came out with his *History of Comics*. "I marveled at the postage stamp sized photos of WWII era books that I never knew existed. In it, Steranko stated that the storytelling team of Simon and Kirby produced the most incredible 37 *Captain America* stories before quitting

Vince Oliva  
OPPOSITE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #88 (Sept. 1970), pg. 1, pencils: John Romita, inks: Jim Mooney.

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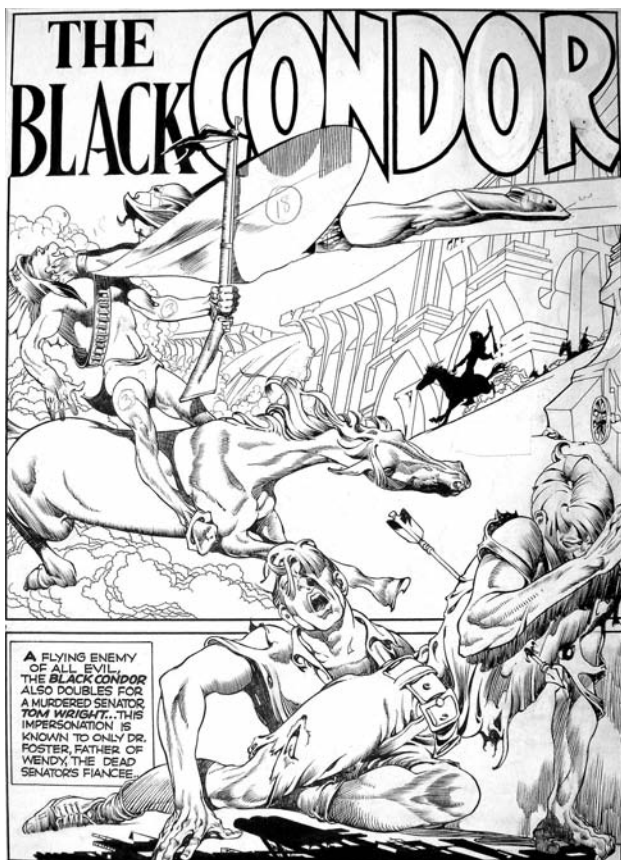
LEFT: *Crack Comics* #17, (Oct. 1941), pg. 1, art: Lou Fine.

RIGHT: *Star Spangled Comics* #8, (May 1942), cover, pencils: Jack Kirby, inks: Joe Simon.

Characters TM & © 2009 DC Comics.

OPPOSITE: *The Amazing Spider-Man* #90 (Nov. 1970), pg. 10, pencils: Gil Kane, inks: John Romita.

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the Timely company. What I didn't know was that all of those stories were published in the first ten issues!" Vince convinced his mother to write a check for \$25 to get issue #11 of *Captain America* only to find the issue had no Kirby art. He sold it for \$50. And though his parents were impressed with their son's business acumen they were hesitant to finance his next bid, a \$250 purchase of *Captain America* #1. Buying a lesser grade copy of the issue for \$125 of his own money, he sold that for \$250 and his parents finally started to accept that they had a business tycoon for a son.

"To make extra money I started loaning my rare, key Golden Age books to Alan Light for reprinting in his *Flashback* series. Those classic reprints from my books are all over eBay now." His parents took him to his first convention where he got to meet a lot of the dealers who knew him by name only. "They were amazed to learn that all along they had been dealing with a kid.

"When I got my driver's license I began setting up at shows in Chicago. It was 50 cents admission and \$3 table fees for the monthly show at the downtown YMCA. As there were only about 100 different comics existing that were valued at \$50 or more – we referred to them as 'heavyweights' – I was able to own a great many of the classic Golden Age books. As I put

runs together of those rare books I started sending information to the *Overstreet Price Guide*."

At this point Vince still had not gotten into original art. He'd seen pages by Kirby from the early *Hulk* issues going for the "astronomical" prices of \$100 - \$300. "Reasoning that there was no way that I could ever get my money back if I had bought stuff like that, I passed on art. Obviously I was wrong."

His art collecting started in 1981. "I purchased a complete Captain Marvel story from C.C. Beck for \$125. It was one of the ten stories he did for DC around 1972. I also bought a killer Kirby Thor page from *Journey into Mystery* #87 for \$75. That was my start."

From there Vince contacted John Romita's agent. "He had loads of Romita's work on *Spider-Man* issues #39 - #100, *Captain America* in *Tales of Suspense*, *Hulk* in *Tales to Astonish*, and *Daredevil*." Through Romita's agent, Vince bought his splashes. "Large art splashes were \$65, interior pages \$45."

Romita had been Vince's all-time favorite. His first newsstand purchase was *Spider-Man* #57. "I picked out well over 100 pages from Romita's agent, going heavy on splashes and cool on interior pages. I took what I thought were the best pages from issue #39, pages 6-11, the battle pages with Spidey in costume. While Romita's agent had complete books





# CHAPTER 5

## MEGA-COLLECTORS

"I often wonder how the guys that have thousands of pages get to enjoy the entirety of their collection." — Glen Brunswick

### Collector Nick Katradis

"Have you seen my collection?" inquired Nick Katradis, when I idly remarked on just one aspect of the prodigious sweep his collection encompasses. "I have a vast collection of prime Bronze Age covers. 1960s Silver Age covers. 1980s covers. 1990s covers. 160 pages and eleven covers of Steve Epting's fantastic *Captain America* art. I have the complete 14-page story from 1964's *Strange Tales* #107, a classic tale of Sub-Mariner vs. Human Torch. And about 125 pages of twice-up art, including spectacular *Tales of Suspense* splashes and *Tales to Astonish* splashes. The point I'm trying to make is, when did my collection become Sal Buscema Cap art?"

Necessarily rebuked, I took the time and reassessed Nick Katradis' collection. Originally too focused on the trees to admire the forest abounding, I started my attempts to categorize Nick's monumental collection by assigning him as an aficionado of Sal Buscema's *Captain America*. And while not some imagining on my part, a presumptive portion of his collection is dedicated to Sal's Cap. Part of an attempt to assemble uninterrupted the contents of every issue spanning the key years of Nick's appreciation of this character that ushered him into comics. Nick's collection actually burgeons on yet another facet of collecting; the mega-collector.

What is the line crossed that bloats a collection into the mega-collection, the pebble that presages the landslide? 50 pages? 100? 200? More important, what is the psychology that leads to such an em-

barrassment of riches? You don't go from zero to 1,200 pages overnight.

"I try to structure my collection, which is now over 1,200 pages, as a representative sample from every significant artist from the 1960s all the way up to 2006." And generally when a page is purchased by Nick, owner of his own mortgage brokerage company in New York, it is off the market for good.

Married now for 16 years and the father of three, Nick was



OPPOSITE: *Captain America* #4 (Apr. 2005), cover, art: Steve Epting.

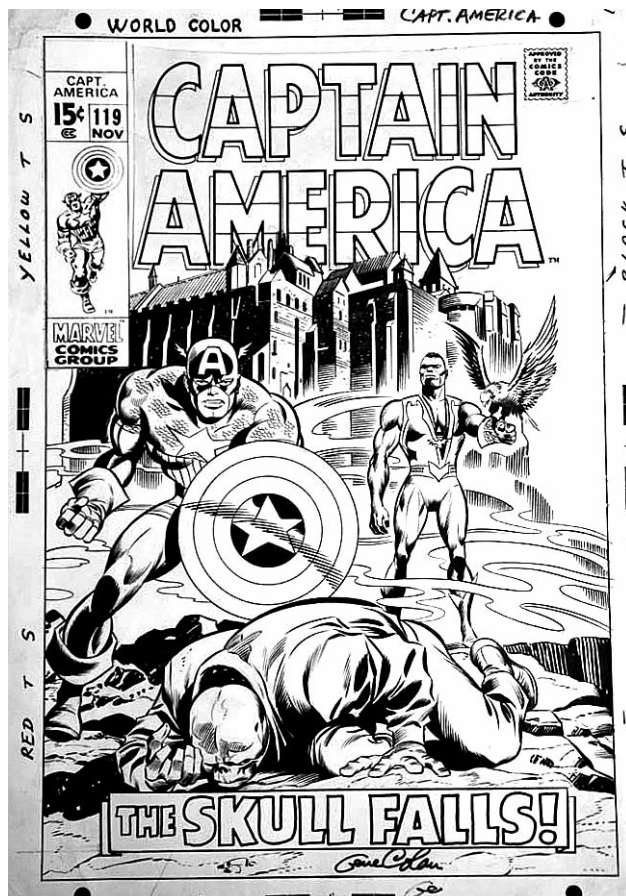
LEFT: Nick Katradis  
RIGHT: *The Incredible Hulk* #143 (Sept. 1971), cover, art: Herb Trimpe.

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LEFT: *Captain America* #153 (Sept. 1972), pg. 27, pencils: Sal Buscema, inks: Jim Mooney.

RIGHT: *Captain America* #119 (Nov. 1969), cover, pencils: Gene Colan, inks: Joe Sinnott.

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born in a small town on the island of Chios called Kardamyla. Nick and his parents relocated to Brooklyn in 1970. Within two years, the then 11-year-old Nick was buying comics off the newsstand, starting with *Captain America and the Falcon* #153.

"I read and collected Disney comics even in Greece from the age of five. Every young child in Greece read Mickey and Donald Duck. When my parents went to 'hora,' or the marketplace, I could not wait to go with them so I can buy some Mickey Mouse books." By the time his parents were ready to leave for the US, Nick and his brother had 5,000 comics. "I wanted to save them because my dad didn't sell our house in Greece. But my dad and older brother suggested we get rid of them. So one month before we left for the US, my older brother and I burned them all in the back yard in a massive fire that still burns in my psyche sometimes." And it was that fire, he surmises, that ignited the fire to collect with such diligence.

"I stopped reading comics in 1994 around the time that most publishers started to implode and the quality of the comics fell off a cliff. I stopped reading but I started to more seriously collect Golden Age and Silver Age comics, as well as the 1970s titles I read growing up. By the time I started selling

my comics in 2002 I had amassed a personal collection of almost 30,000 comics, of which 12,000 were Gold and Silver and Bronze."

After selling the comics for months on eBay, Nick bid and won his first page of original comic art, a page from *Thor* #306 featuring Thor in battle with Firelord. The pebble that presaged the landslide. "It felt great when I finally received it in the mail and I looked up the page in the actual comic. So I began to selectively buy art on eBay, usually art under \$100, mostly even under \$50. As my taste grew I began to bid on covers, mostly from the early '90s as I did not want to spend a lot of money on the older, more expensive art."

Then came his first Heritage Auction purchases in 2002 of a Ken Kelly cover and a Joe Jusko Spider-Man/Wolverine painting. Afterwards Nick began bidding on '70s covers. "My 1970s appetite was officially awakened."

His ambitions more focused, there followed Sal Buscema and Captain America. "I have probably the largest 1970s *Captain America* art page collection by Sal out there, and very proud of it." The primary breadth of Nick's Cap interest spans the fertile Englehart and Sal Buscema years. "I own over 100



# CHAPTER 6

## THEME COLLECTIONS

"It's amazing what can happen to prices when a few collectors focus on a particular segment of the market..." — Glen Brunswick

### Collector David Gearheart

"I can't sell a son or a daughter," is how David Gearheart of Chicago describes his inability to part with his comic art. "The art is like children to me. The art can be on that level."

Taking to heart the words "be fruitful and multiply," David has over 20 children of the same litter: *Iron Man* pages mostly by George Tuska, part of a theme that runs through his collection. Clocking in at a relative youngster for the collecting field at only 30 years old, David started reading *Iron Man* in the late Bob Layton era. "But over time I did pick up back-issues and discovered Tuska's fantastic work along with that of Don Heck and Gene Colan." David's favorite storylines in Tuska's long run on the title were some of the early issues where George was paired with the smooth inks of long-time comic artist Johnny Craig.

David began collecting about a decade past, along with a lot of other collectors who were ushered in by the ready availability of the Internet. "Quite late for the pieces I am looking for. I have been quite lucky finding a few pages from stories I love the most, but like most collectors, it's the luck of the draw.

"I saw a comic page from an "Iron Man"/*Tales of Suspense* story I read two days prior. I said to myself, 'Man, that's ironic to see an original page from a book I just read and enjoyed.' So I bought it for what I thought was an obscene amount of money, \$330. At the time I had no frame of reference, did not know what it was worth, but it was so cool to be holding the page from a book that blew me away when I read it."

Over the next couple of years he continued to purchase, and classified the amounts he paid as "a ridiculous amount of money. Looking back, I wish I would have bought every page I passed on. Complete books were selling for less than what one page is selling for now. It should have been obvious that these works would continue to grow in value because these

items are one of a kind, and more important, history."

Nearly half of David's collection gravitated to him from other collectors, either from direct offers, or through casual conversations that led to them offering him pieces of their collection based on his interest. He keeps up his associations with other collectors via the online boards and at some shows.

On the price of comic art: "Some titles/runs/characters/artists have gotten ahead of themselves, but other have room to grow. New collectors can start tomorrow and find some good, affordable examples of their favorite characters or artists. The key is keeping your eyes open, talking to fellow collectors and dealers about your interest, and being patient."

Patience served David well while he searched for a Gary Gianni *Indiana Jones and the Sea Devil* splash. "I looked for it for two years and spoke with Mr. Gianni about it on several occasions. He said he doubted that he had it, but if he did it would cost X dollars. It showed up on eBay by chance a few months later for less than Mr. Gianni quoted me on it, and for less than the owner paid for it! Best of all, no one bid against me. It was the first true piece I sought out, found, and was able to afford easily."

David has a few pieces he's currently seeking, including the splashes from his favorites, *Iron Man* #7 and #8. "This hobby has gotten very competitive. If one of your 'competitors' has a lot of money and collects the same stuff you do, it makes it hard. But, if you do your research and ask around, you can still find stuff. No one can corner everything, no matter how big their pocket book is."

Iron Man had the most political origin next to the FF's, as Stark's pro-war munitions industry landed him wounded in the clutches of the "Commiss." Don Heck got him started, but handed the baton to Ditko. Then started a changing of artists as frequent as armor upgrades, beginning with Kirby, back to Heck, Syd Shores, and in the '70s George Tuska, another artist trained over the instructional pencils of Kirby who aped Kirby's boxy style but developed a picture perfect image for this transistor-age knight. Comic books have always been

TOP ROW: *Tales of Suspense* #52 (April 1964), pg. 11, art: Don Heck. *Tales of Suspense* #47 (Nov. 1963), pg. 8, pencils: Steve Ditko, inks: Don Heck. *Tales of Suspense* #47 (Nov. 1963), pg. 19, pencils: Steve Ditko, inks: Don Heck.

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MIDDLE ROW: *Tales of Suspense* #47 (July 1964), pg. 14, art: Don Heck. *Weird War Tales* #31 (Nov. 1974), cover, art: Luis Dominguez. *The House of Secrets* #118 (Apr. 1974), cover, art: Luis Dominguez.

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BOTTOM ROW: *Weird War Tales* #23 (Mar. 1974), cover, art: Luis Dominguez. *Indiana Jones and the Shrine of the Sea Devil* #1 (Sept. 1994), pg. 24, art: Gary Gianni. *The Invincible Iron Man* #57 (Apr. 1973), pg. 1, pencils: George Tuska, inks: Mike Esposito and Frank Giacoia.

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at their best when the characters are used as primary-colored anthropomorphisms of ideologies. Iron Man struggled through alcoholism, broken hearts (literally) and professional collapse, but of late Tony Stark's more conservative, right wing political views have made him the antithesis of the more liberal Captain America. And though this has led to what some consider a new golden age in comic book storytelling, it is somewhat of a disappointment to long-term fans that their hero has now become the goat – put bluntly, he's everybody's bitch. But the marvelous thing about comic books is that death and disgrace are just launching pads for ambitious comebacks down the line. The name Iron Man doesn't just refer to the armor he wears, but also to the indomitable man inside the armor.

The Mandarin, Iron Man's quintessential foe, was an offshoot of the Sax Rohmer character Fu Manchu, and by his very name conjured images of Eastern mysticism and magic despite the fact that his powers came from an advanced alien civilization, the aliens behind the myth of the Chinese dragon. It was the contrast of the ancient Mandarin that made him the most appropriate villain for the high-tech, Western creature of science.

## Collector Weng Keong Tam

Weng breeds chinchillas. Everybody needs a hobby. He's also an avid player and collector of board games, particularly the new "Euro Games" that arrived on the market in the past decade. And, of course, comic art, with a definite lean towards the *Defenders*, and a concentration on issues #22-#25, the issues Bob McLeod inked.

"When I was a kid I loved the early *Defenders* stories that were typically along the lines of 'Whoops, there's a crisis and Dr. Strange needs some help to deal with it. Let's see who he can find to help out.' The early issues of *Defenders* all seemed to rotate around those lines and I fell in love with that."

Weng earns a buck as an international tax accountant. "This is my busy season," he deflected me with on my first venture to contact him during the month of March, but somehow squeezed in the time to answer my questions. "I do tax work for US citizens working outside the US and for non-US citizens coming into the US to work. There are a lot of very unique tax issues that come from being an expatriate, and multinationals engage the Big 4 accounting firms to provide tax assistance to their expatriate populations."

Weng, who describes himself as 80% theme collector and 20% art collector, grew up in Southeast Asia but did his college grad work in Texas before moving to Singapore to start his career. Sal Buscema wasn't a factor for Weng in his attraction to the *Defenders* art. "It just happens that he drew many of the stories I have a strong nostalgia for.

"Actually I have a lot of pages from the Sons of the Serpent

storyline because I traded with another collector of early *Defenders* art who got all my art from the Guardians of the Galaxy storyline and I received a bunch of pages from the Sons of the Serpent story and a Starlin piece I really wanted."

Only about a quarter of Weng's collection comes from collector deals. Being in Asia, he's a little out of the usual bailiwick of art collecting, and thus hasn't fostered a cache of close relations with other collectors.

"I developed a strong liking for the Captain Marvel character and the cosmic storylines involving Thanos," Weng offered as introduction to several nice Jim Starlin pages that are another facet to his collecting. "Starlin was the artist on most of those and that is what drove me to collect those pages. I was also a huge fan of the Avengers and to a lesser extent the X-Men, growing up."

Among his collection is a beautiful Neal Adams *X-Men* page, a pricey and rare addition to a collection because of the small number of issues Neal drew. "I've found that I am now a lot more careful on what I spend money on. That being said, the cool thing about this hobby is that when you pass on a piece there is always a chance that something else you like will come along."



*The Defenders* #24  
(June 1975), pg. 26,  
pencils: Sal Buscema,  
inks: Bob McLeod.

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# CHAPTER 7

## BLUE CHIP COLLECTORS

"The comic art hobby has an effect; to get the rush you go for higher prices. . ." – **Jaume Vaquer**

"Jack Kirby is the Marvel Universe. I think as long as those characters exist, and are popular, Jack Kirby will be popular." – **David Schwartz**

"I am of the Kirby faith. . . without Kirby, where would we be?" – **Kelly Borkert**

### Collector Steve Welch

**“W**ho am I? I've been asking myself that for years. Only a good therapist can help me sort that out."

When I spoke to Steve Welch he was engaged in bidding on page 15 from *Fantastic Four* #40 by Jack Kirby which was three days from its end date on eBay. To anyone who knows him it's the worst kept secret that Steve is trying to put together the big battle scene between the Thing and Doctor Doom from that issue that spans pages 14-20. He already has three consecutive pages – 16-18 – and his hopes in this auction are to expand that to four consecutive pages, putting him that much closer to his monumental goal.

There was no genius to Stan Lee in the creation of his superheroes. The *Fantastic Four* was a pastiche commingled from Carl Burgos's 1939 creation the Human Torch; any of a dozen Timely comics monsters, including the Heap, becoming the Thing; Mr. Fantastic, a less capricious Plastic Man; H.G. Wells' Invisible Man given a sex change for the Invisible Girl; and the template for the comic descended from DC's meandering Jack Kirby story "Challengers of the Unknown." Challengers of the Unknown was an exciting concept but it needed just a little tinkering. That is where Stan Lee's genius did manifest. Boy, did it get tinkered.

*The Fantastic Four* premiered in 1962, with the concept of COTU shot into the stratosphere, literally. No longer the survivors of a plane crash, the FF walked away from a manned orbital space flight irradiated and mutated into superhuman beings. Their tales of scientific adventures were driven by Marvel's who's-who of talents. Their co-creator Jack Kirby is most associated with the title, though John Buscema, Walt Simonson and John Byrne were notable torch bearers. But the FF will always be Jack's book.

Jack defined Marvel in the '60s, either as the artist on a book, or because of the influence his style had on developing

the new talents entering the business. So many artists cut their teeth doing finishes over Jack's layouts. And so many others entered the field as imitators of the Kirby style.

Steve likes Kirby's *FF*. He also likes his pre-hero art. But Steve's a great guy, the kind that wouldn't begrudge someone who outbid him on this auction. Beat him out for a page and he'd still invite you for dinner.

Looking more like he should be in California, the tanned



*Fantastic Four* #40 (July 1965), pg. 15, pencils: Jack Kirby, inks: Vince Colletta.

OPPOSITE: *Fantastic Four* #40 (July 1965), pg. 18, pencils: Jack Kirby, inks: Vince Colletta.

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Steve Welch, sporting the Reed Richards graying above the ears as well as a comic book physique, is a hard-core scuba diver, along with his wife. They are trained in and dive with rebreathers rather than standard scuba. They also collect Mexican folk art and he's a pinball enthusiast who has a couple of pinball machines of his own, both with monster themes: Elvira Scared Stiff, and Monster Bash.

"When I was a kid I loved dinosaurs, monsters and of course monster movies." His affection didn't distinguish between classics like *King Kong*, and the unapologetically cheesy B-movies of the '50s with their host of egregious giant radioactive bugs and space-faring conquerors. "I'm a big fan of Ray Harryhausen," technical effects director of the movies *20 Million Miles to Earth*, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, and *It Came from the Sea*.

The bagatelle Kirby and Ditko monster anthologies that bulked out the '50s Marvel lineup were in essence homage to the sophomore but addictive double-billed '50s monster features. "Basically the comic book equivalent of them. I always loved the stories, even though there are about seven different plots that get recycled!" Steve collected the comics and put together high-grade runs of all the titles. "I love the stories. Specifically the Kirby and Ditko art. So when I began collecting original art I always thought, boy, would it be amazing if I could ever get a Fin Fang Foom page. In fact, when I joined the CGC boards in 2004 I had as my most wanted collectible *Strange Tales* #89's Fin Fang Foom splash page. Whooda think I'd end up actually owning one a couple of years later?"

The pre-hero monsters were a fertile bed for later harvesting in Marvel's superhero characters. The name he and others have applied to these pre-hero inspirations for the superhero revolution of the '60s and '70s are "prototypes." "They provide insight into the incubation and development of key aspects of the future Marvel Universe."

Steve gave an example, citing a clear prototype from *Tales of Suspense* #6, "The Mutant and Me!" "There's a story where two businessmen are debating the existence of 'mutants' – people with extraordinary powers. One of them has a theory about their existence while the other kind of pooh-poohs the idea. Later in the story the man who doesn't believe in mutants gets locked in one of his safes and just before he is asphyxiated he unknowingly phases through the wall of the safe, thus saving his life [Shadowcat or Vision prototype, anyone?] and then realizes that mutants do indeed exist and he is a mutant! So right there you've got the prototypical essence of the X-Men and Marvel mutant mythos, with a little Hulk essence thrown in (transformation occurs under stress). Seeing that kind of thing

published several years before the *X-Men* even existed just jazzes me for some reason. It's like seeing a draft of the Declaration of Independence. And almost as historically important!"

Steve admits to being a fan of a number of modern artists, "but I haven't actively pursued works by them because I've been focusing on my Kirby addiction – ahem! – I mean collection."

Of the belief that any and all art is worthy of collecting to someone, Steve makes the acknowledgement that any individual's opinion on "art" as an overview means absolutely nothing. "Art appreciation is so subjective that I can't make broad sweeping statements about what's worthy or unworthy art. I know it's a cliché to say 'if you collect what you love it will never matter if it loses value.' But those are very true statements. I just happen to love Kirby. When I started buying Kirby art it was not terribly expensive. Now it is.

"I think there are some artists today who are doing and creating very significant things and who will be the blue chips of the current generation," Welch forecasted. "Every generation will have its favorite artists. I know a lot of younger collectors who don't have the appreciation that I do of Kirby and Ditko, and that's cool. Someone who grew up reading Marvel comics in the late '70s and early '80s is probably going to want Sal Buscema art more than I do, and that's okay. There are so many talented artists in the business today and a lot of people appreciate their art. Some of it will become very valuable and some of it will not. If I knew what that was, I wouldn't tell you – I'd just buy it all up. After all, when I'm 70 Jack Kirby art might not be valuable any more. Who knows, right? *Walking Dead* art might be going for \$15,000 for an interior page by that time, instead of Kirby/Sinnott FF.

"...Okay, maybe not zombie art... (not that I'm dissing the artists on the series!)

"The art is really moving into the stratosphere. You can find reasonable Silver and Bronze Age art," Welch pleaded, "if you aren't talking about the blue chips like Kirby, Ditko, Adams, Steranko, etc. Severin pages are still reasonable as are some Colan pages. Heck art was reasonable but has been going up lately, partly due to the pre-movie *Iron Man* hype. I think you'll see less new blood buying in the blue chip Silver Age markets, unless it's speculators or people who can afford those prices. Who knows what the ceiling is? You've got people who used to spend \$15,000 on a comic [book] now realizing they can use the money to buy art." He went on to observe, "I see comic collectors paying \$300 for a 9.9 *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1 and I just shake my head. But hey, that's their preference and if that makes them happy then more power to them.



# CHAPTER 10

## COLLECTORS OF THE MODERN AGE

"There are reams of more recent pieces out there for as little as \$10-\$50 that would look nice on the wall." – **Vince Oliva**

"I fear the market will crash when the boomers die out..." – **Bob McLeod**

### THE '80s: MANIFEST DESTINY

There's the tale of Ouroboros, the world-girdling serpent that consumed its own tail, which has become an analogy for just about every industry prey to repeating past successes. TV seems, in regular cycles to repeat popular genres. Sitcoms will be on the rise one year, and the next everyone's a private detective. Fashion is constantly borrowing from decades past, and it's called retro. Comics are not inoculated against this cultural virus, and the '80s saw less innovation, and more renovation. And to dress up some of these retreads a whole new line of young Turks were given the artistic helm.

And in this new age, artists like Don Heck, first on every editor's mind as one of the solid talents, couldn't find work. Herb Trimpe, who defined the look of the Hulk more than his genesis artist Kirby, went into forced retirement. And though John Buscema found a resurgence of popularity when he teamed with erstwhile *Avengers* inker Tom Palmer on the book they first worked together on, he also considered thoughts of retirement.

The Buscemas and Williamsons and Romitas came from a time when illustrations were big. Magazines ran ads that were drawn more often than photographed, like the famous Coca-Cola paintings of Santa Claus by artist Haddon Sundblom. It was a time when artists found bountiful work and honed their skills at agencies and studios doing paperback book cover paintings, movie posters, print ads, storyboards, you name it. Then the '60s rolled in and the ads shifted more toward photography. Advertising artists scrambled for every job and agencies became like a scene out of the *Day of the Locusts*. Artists were ready to pump gas, when some ran to comic books, bringing with them a diverse training background.

But after two strong, unforgettable decades the superhero tales, without innovative direction, began consuming their own tail. Most of the newer artists weren't of the caliber of the

draftsmen before, but for those new talents, they were like actors on a once powerful TV series now in its final season.

From this artistic ennui emerged a powerful underground of comics. In part homage to the great talents that broadened comic books' appeal, and equal part rebellion to the serialized super-

OPPOSITE: *Love and Rockets* #28 (1988), cover, art: Jaime Hernandez.  
*Human Diasporism*, pg. 62, art: Gilbert Hernandez



74

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82

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*Love and Rockets*  
#46 (1994), pp. 6,  
art: Jaime Hernandez.

hero slugfests. This Gutenberg battalion of indie books popped up through direct marketing in comic book shops, offering deconstructed views on comics' traditional men of steel. Others eschewed the whole superhero format and offered intimate and observant portraits of human life, of the disaffected, of the young.

By far, one of the best things to come out of the '80s was a Fantagraphics book set in "Hoppers" and "Palomar." Written and drawn by two brothers, the book told the meandering tale of two bisexuals and their falling together/falling apart romance, and a town seemingly adrift in a timeless state.

I'm talking of course about *Love and Rockets* by the brothers Hernandez. In its original incarnation *Love and Rockets* was a parody of spaceships and superheroes, but it grew precipitously, leaving its past behind and not looking back.

The Palomar stories in *Poison River* portrayed the diorama of a small matriarchal Mexican village. Like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's great novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and its somnambulant village out of time, Gilbert Hernandez produced an eerie, entirely convincing suspension of the laws of reality. His mythical village of Palomar was populated with fascinating characters whose bizarre lives interacted with the peculiarities of their society as a whole.

It was a melancholy journey done with humorous sagacity and consummate style, that jumped between time agilely to tell a generational story featuring characters like Gorgo, who watched slavishly for a lifetime over the exiled Maria and her daughters, and Casimira, the rebel girl whose arm was accidentally shot off by the town sheriff, who now defiantly flails her plastic arm above her head, lit like a torch. There were discoveries of fish pulled from the river with Holy Crosses inside them, and a river bed with statues of the town's inhabitants. And of course, there was Luba, the hammer-wielding matriarch of the stories.

In his half of the book, Jaime Hernandez spun a tale of modern life, redolent of the whole '80s scene, but timeless in its portrayal of disaffected youth pushed inexorably toward a maturity none of them yet had. Hopey embodied all the rebellious insignificance of youth, perfectly balanced

by the sagacious Maggie who had too much heart to confine to one love. She moved between Hopey and Ray, who eventually rejected the instability of Maggie's wavering affections and plunged into a relationship with Danita, who brought stability but revealed to Ray that he in fact was not as ready to commit as he first believed. The stories painted an intimate portrait of dizzying youth and true emotion, cooked up with all the real complexities of those intoxicating years. The characters aged, gained weight, ended relationships, made personal discoveries, and felt more real than anything this side of actual experience.





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# GRAILPAGES

ORIGINAL COMIC BOOK ART AND THE COLLECTORS

One of the driving reasons many attend the summer's numerous comic conventions is to find the original comic art dealers, who work their tables like Las Vegas croupiers. Largely this hobby has been the province of comic book fans who've grown up, become settled in their careers, put children through school, and are enjoying middle age and financial stability. Not still interested in comic books, but fond of the comics of their childhood, original comic art offers a way to connect with their past, while at the same time make a sound investment.

Comic art from the '60s-'70s, the prime real estate of this hobby, sold originally in the area of \$20 to \$150. With the advent of the Internet, as in most all things, comic art dealing found a broader market. Currently on the über-site eBay, individuals can sell the art at prices with which they can make down payments on condos.

This book offers to other collectors, and the general public as well, a peek into this exciting hobby.

Contained within are a wealth of stories, with interesting and personal reminiscences from collectors who live in the US, France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Denmark. The art they present is a who's who of comic art talents: Covers and panel pages by John Buscema, Gene Colan, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Jim Steranko, Gil Kane, George Tuska, Steve Dillon, Joe Maneely, Don Heck, Marie Severin, Frank Giacoia, John Romita Sr., Wallace Wood, Graham Ingels, and John Byrne. Some of these pages have never been displayed on any of the numerous comic art websites.

To assist in seeing the hobby through another facet are interviews with several of the professionals who produced these coveted works, including writers Steve Englehart, Gerry Conway, Marv Wolfman, and an interview with the great Gene Colan. In addition Tony DeZuniga, Ernie Chan, Dick Giordano, and Bob McLeod reminisce about the old days, and their view on the modern direction of comics. And from the indie market, the artist/writing team of Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez talk about the origins of *Love and Rockets*.

To round things out are incisive comments from those who professionally deal comic art. And through the convergence of so many perspectives, a comprehensive overview of the hobby emerges.

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