

ROY THOMAS' STAINLESS
COMICS FANZINE

Alter Ego™



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THE
DAWN OF

STEVE ENGLEHART

ALSO:
GEORGE
MANDEL



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On Our Cover: Thanks to Christopher Day, our layout wizard, for assembling this montage of Marvel heroes who were scripted by Steve Englehart in the early '70s so skillfully that it's hard to tell they came from a half dozen or more different comics. And thanks to John Morrow for providing the photo of Steve, which may be of a slightly later vintage than the art. No matter. Steve, like the four-color super-stars, is timeless, right? The figures were penciled, at various times and places, by Gil Kane, Sal Buscema, Jim Starlin, and Frank Brunner, and were inked by myriad hands. [Art of Beast, Mantis, Falcon, Captain America, Shang-Chi, Valkyrie, Hulk, Silver Surfer, & Dr. Strange ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Above: The Woman in Red, as noted in the interview with her premier artist, George Mandel, is probably the first masked female in comic books, preceding a certain Amazon by a good year and a half! Of course, the Better/Nedor heroine had no super-powers, let alone a magic lasso or invisible plane, and it must've been hot in that robe—but being first has to count for something. Mandel says that Black Terror/Fighting Yank-creating writer Richard Hughes originated the character; but the issue of Thrilling Comics from which this panel is taken is, alas, unknown. Thanks to Jim Ludwig. [©2011 the respective copyright holders.]

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Joanne Siegel, Louise Altson, Joe Vucenic, & Ed Lahmann



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A Long Day's Journey

We're proud as a puffed-up peacock, this time around, to present the first part of a two-tiered interview with late-Silver Age/Bronze-and-beyond scribe Steve Englehart, conducted by Richard Arndt. (The second installment will appear in our sister mag *Back Issue* #51, dated September.)

The Golden Age, too, is, well represented herein—by Jim Amash's conversation with early-'40s artist George Mandel, who after World War II became first a comic book writer, then the author of a number of well-received novels... as well as by 1950s Ziff-Davis editor Herb Rogoff's piece on writer/artist/editor Jim Miele... Michael T. Gilbert and Mr. Monster scaring up the *Spirit* of vintage letterer Abe Kanegson for a third time... and tributes to Joanne Siegel and Louise Altson.

But what I want to talk about just this minute, right up here at the front of the magazine, is a guy named Chris Day.

Christopher Day (to use his full appellation, as we do on our contents page) has been in charge of "design & layout" on *Alter Ego* since issue #8 way back in the spring of 2001.

He came aboard a decade ago to put the magazine together from the text files and art scans and photocopies that I sent him... on a tricky issue in which he had to squeeze an obscene number of Wally Wood drawings into far too little space. He managed it, and he's been working wonders on *A/E* ever since, even as he occasionally changed residences from Chicago to Rhode Island and back to Chicago... without ever missing a beat, or a

deadline.

I know that I, for one, have come to take him too much for granted... 'cause that's what tends to happen when somebody is so good at what he does, makes it look so easy to come through like a champ time after time. We sang his praises briefly back in *A/E* #50, but he deserves more. As Arthur Miller wrote, "Attention must be paid." Even if only for the inadequate space of a half-page editorial.



Recently, Chris informed publisher John Morrow and me that, after ten years at the layout helm, he was stepping aside so he'd have more time to pursue other, more personal life goals. Typically, thoughtfully, he gave us several issues' advance notice of his departure. And, naturally, John and I did exactly what you'd expect us to do in such a situation: namely, we tried to bribe him into staying by offering him a few more bucks.

But we knew even as we did so (to no avail) that Chris was right to go, and we bear him nothing but good will.

Oh, yeah, and we're also giving him a lifetime subscription to *Alter Ego*.

Because that's the kind of guys we are.

Best of luck to you always, Chris—or, as Jerry Bails and I tended to put it,

Bestest,



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“I Think [Having Been An Artist] Gave Me An Edge In Writing Comics”

Part I Of An Incredible Interview With Star Writer STEVE ENGLEHART

Conducted & Transcribed by Richard J. Arndt

INTERVIEWER'S INTRODUCTION: Steve Englehart (b. 1947) is one of the best-known and most influential comics writers to come out of the 1970s. But, though this fact is not as well-known, Steve actually began his career as an artist, drawing horror stories for Warren and Skywald and a few romance tales for DC and Marvel. He soon focused exclusively on writing, however, beginning with the adventures of the just-turned-blue-and-furry Beast in Marvel's Amazing Adventures. He quickly earned credits on such Marvel titles as The Avengers, The Defenders, Hero for Hire, Doctor Strange, Master of Kung Fu (which he co-created), and, probably most notably, Captain America, which he took from being a modest seller to one of Marvel's top titles. He also created the cult hero "Star-Lord" for Marvel's black-&-white magazines. This first part of the interview, which was conducted in May and June of 2010, covers Steve's work through the mid-'70s; the conversation will be concluded in Back Issue #51 (Sept. 2011).



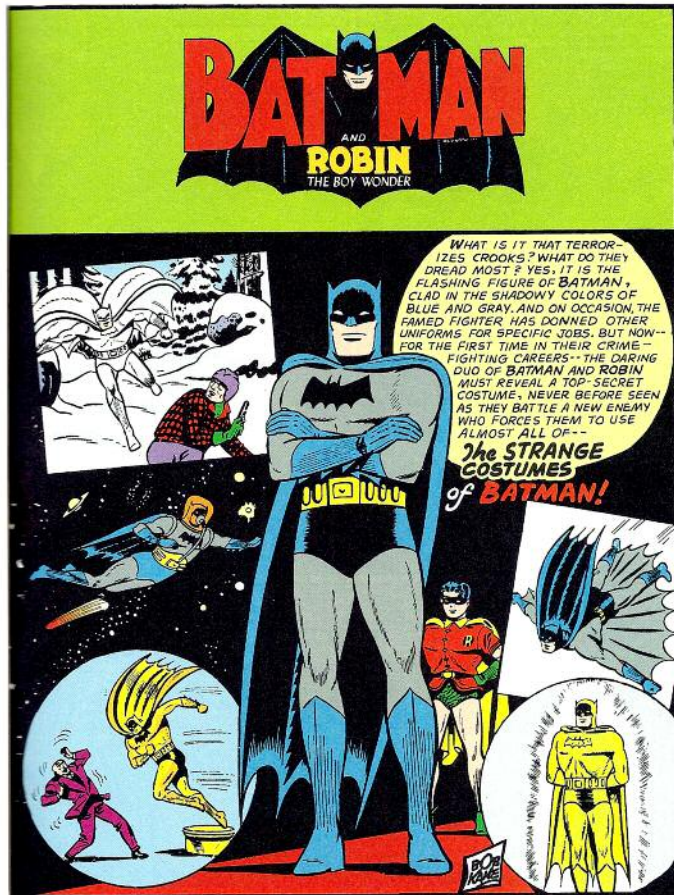
Drawn To Writing

Steve Englehart, according to Jon B. Cooke (to whom "Stainless Steve" had provided the above photo several years back for JBC's mag *Comic Book Artist*), is seen here "hanging off a bridge... about the time when the writer was hitting his stride as a scripter at Marvel Comics in the mid-1970s. Steve told us to dig the funky glass frames!" Below are images of his early work as first artist, then writer:

(Left:) The p. 2 splash of "Demona" in Skywald Publications' black-&-white comic *Psycho* #7 (July 1972), penciled by Englehart from a Gardner Fox script. Inks by Vince Colletta. Thanks to Rob Allen. [©2011 the respective copyright holders.]

(Right:) The moody splash page of Steve's very first outing on *Captain America* (#153, Sept. 1972). Art by Sal Buscema & Jim Mooney. Thanks to Barry Pearl. [©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]





All In Color For A Crime
 A trio of Steve's favorite early memories of comic books (clockwise from above left):
 Dick Sprang's "Batman" of the 1940s & '50s is, for many, the definitive artistic rendition, as per this splash from *Detective Comics* #165 (Nov. 1950). Inks by Stan Kaye; script by Edmund Hamilton. Reproduced from the hardcover *DC Comics Classic Library: The Batman Annuals Volume One* (2009). Just imagine—along with the original comics, they're even reprinting *Annuals* now! [©2011 DC Comics.]
 A "Mickey Mouse" mystery splash panel drawn by Paul Murry for Dell/Western's *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories* #236 (May 1960). Script attributed to Carl Fallberg. Thanks to Bob Bailey. [©2011 Disney.]
 As Steve reports, Harvey's reprints of Chester Gould's comic strip *Dick Tracy* often ran afoul of the Comics Code Authority. In these panels from issue #112 (June 1957), the nice folks at the Code apparently "asked" the company to delete black line art, and even some color, depicting a woman's corpse in the first panel (as can be seen in the printed comic by an empty white shape against the purple background of the street), yet let the body remain in the second. That reprint title was a treasure trove of censored artwork, more of which will be seen in our special Halloween feature "Tales from the Code," coming in *A/E* #105! Thanks to Michael T. Gilbert. [©2011 Tribune Media Services or successors in interest.]

"I Wanted To Be An Artist"

RICHARD ARNDT: We're here with Steve Englehart, whose four-decade-long career has endeared him to comics readers. First, thank you for agreeing to this interview, Mr. Englehart. Second, can you tell us something about your early life and where you encountered comics for the first time?

STEVE ENGLEHART: I read comics as a kid, of course. There were three titles that I remember now as liking particularly. One was *Batman*. Dick Sprang was the main artist in those days. I thought his art was amazing to look at.

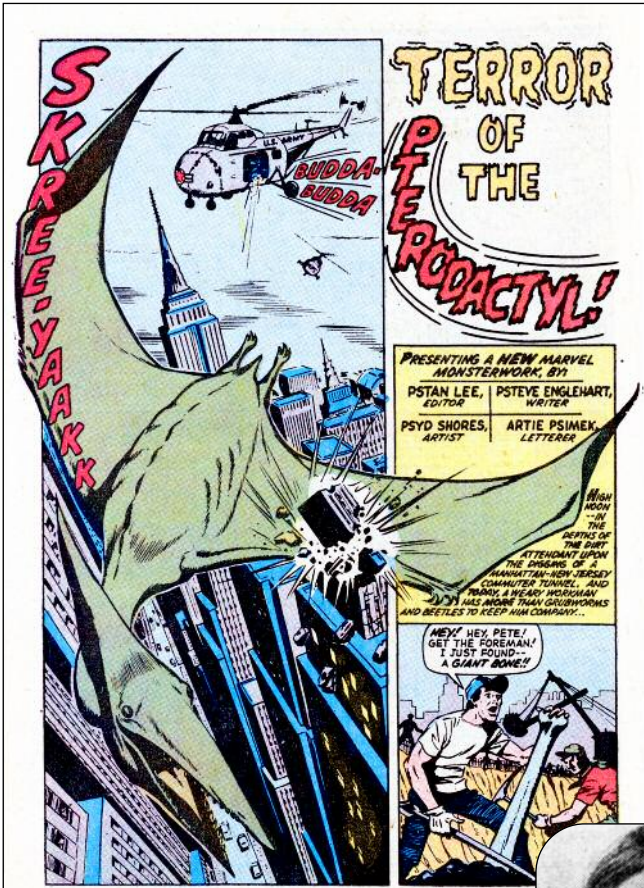
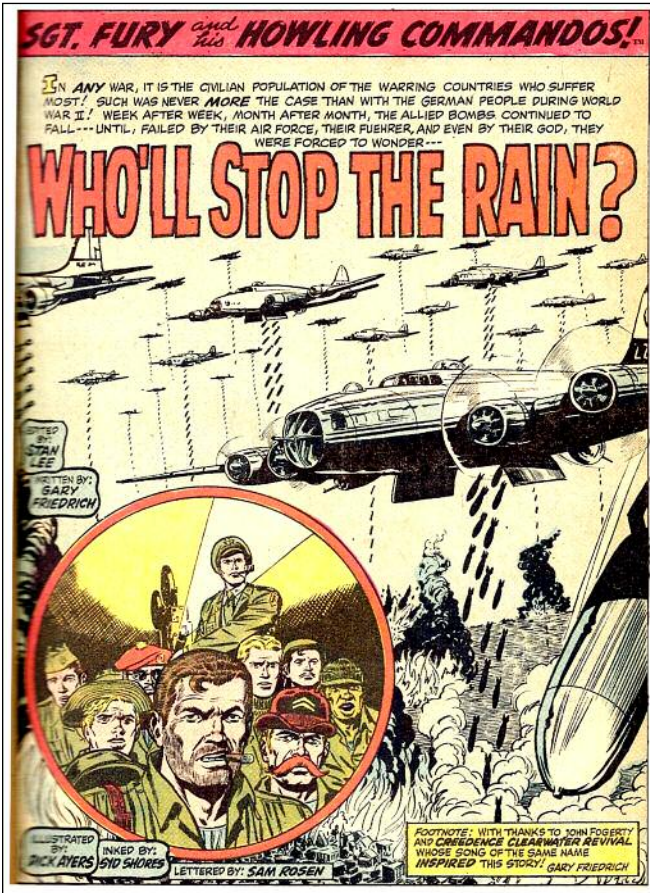
Another was *Dick Tracy*, which really was a reprint of the newspaper strip. I first read *Dick Tracy* in the comic books. I liked that world, Chester Gould's world. The interesting thing about those comics, though, was that they had first been reprinted by Harvey during an earlier comics era, and the version I was reading was the second or third reprinting. The Comics Code had come into existence between these editions, so whenever something came up that would offend the Code, such as a gun or a hand being crushed in a door, they would take the offensive image out of the black printing plate. However, they didn't touch the red, blue, or yellow plates. Even as a child, I understood the concept of how comics were done—and here you could see the blue shape where a gun would be and a red streak where the bullet was flying, but there was no black outline around it. Or you could see the flesh-colored spot where the hand would be crushed in the door, but there'd be no outline of the hand. It didn't confuse me, but it sort of sensitized me, maybe not directly at the time but later, how cool stuff could be taken away or censored from you.

The third comic was the "Mickey Mouse Mysteries" by Paul Murry that ran in the back of *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories*. I loved Carl Barks' "Donald Duck," which was up front, but, in fact, the "Mickey" stories were actual mysteries—three-part serials—and the art was really nice to look at.

I think what attracted me to those three titles was that they had a particularly juicy ink line to them. I always like black-&-white art, and [noticing] the missing black lines in the *Dick Tracy* thing make it clear that that's what I was focusing on.

RA: How did you get involved in comics to begin with? You started off as an artist...

ENGLEHART: Right. I wanted to be an artist, and when I was going to college in Middletown, Connecticut, at Wesleyan, Dick Giordano was the editor at Charlton Comics in Derby, Connecticut, which was some



Gary On, Scriptor

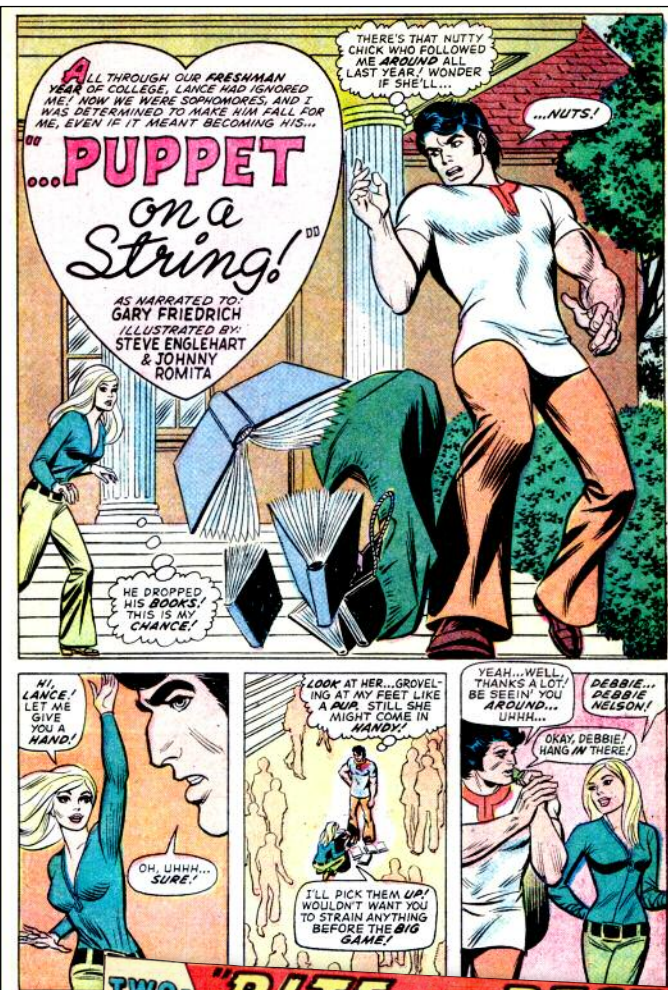
Gary Friedrich (seen here from 1969's *Fantastic Four Annual*) furnished Steve's entry into Marvel, first as a staffer and later, inadvertently, as a scriptor, as related in the interview. Steve received no credit when he was assigned to rewrite a bit of Gary's dialogue in the Ayers-penciled *Sgt. Fury* #94 (Jan. 1972)... nor did erstwhile staffer Al Hewitson when Gary opted not to dialogue the Hewitson-plotted story "Terror of the Pterodactyl!" in *Monsters on the Prowl* #15 (Feb. '72) and it was handed to new staffer Steve instead. Plotting a story as opposed to dialoguing it, in those days, frankly didn't generally receive the respect (and credit) it deserved. Art by Syd Shores; thanks to Barry Pearl for the art scans. Steve reports that he also did some "additional dialogue" in 1972's *Sgt. Fury* #97, *Iron Man* #45, and *Incredible Hulk* #152. Thanks to Barry Pearl. [©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



My Love Does It Good

(Far left:) This story in *My Love* #16 (March 1972) was co-written by Steve and Marvel production assistant Holli Resnicoff, who's seen at near left with production manager John Verpoorten in a photo from Marvel's fan club publication *FOOM Magazine* (#2, Summer 1973)—but only she received

a byline. Well, assuming this wasn't just another rewrite job: During this era, Stan wasn't wild about male names appearing as scriptors of romance stories, since those tales tended to be written in the first person (as if they were being related by the tearful heroine), which led to the "as told to" phrase; and the latter worked even better if the scribe was a woman. Art by Mike Sekowsky & Jack Abel. Steve says he and Holli also teamed up on a tale in *Our Love Story* #16 (April 1972). Holli was later married for several years to artist Mike Ploog. Thanks to Barry Pearl for the art scan. [©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



Sentiment And Six-Guns

(Above left:) Before he decided to concentrate on being a writer, Steve penciled a few stories for Marvel, as well, starting with a Gerry Conway-scribed tale in *Our Love Story* #15 (Feb. 1972).

(Above right:) He also penciled a Gary Friedrich-scripted story in the aforementioned *My Love* #16—which was inked by none other than Jazzy Johnny Romita himself.

(Right:) Meanwhile, Steve strapped on his spurs and did some rewriting on the lead story in *Two-Gun Kid* #103 (March 1972), working with veteran artist and credited writer Ogden Whitney, of "Skyman" and American Comics Group fame. Thanks to Barry Pearl. [©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

asked me if I'd like to fill in for him on staff at Marvel for the summer. He was probably just looking for someone who didn't have anything else going on. I almost said no, because, at the time, I was living two hours out of the city up in Milford, Connecticut, which was a suburb of New Haven. I was a freelancer. I didn't have to be close, so it was two hours in and two hours back out by train. I remember going in to interview for the job and thinking that I wasn't really going to take this job, but that it was kind of cool to be considered. With that attitude I remember that I told Roy—it was Roy Thomas, who was either editor or de facto editor under Stan who interviewed me—that I could only do the job four days a week because of the train travel. For whatever reason, he said that was OK, so I went on staff at Marvel.

I worked Monday through Thursday. Then, one day, in the midst of all that, Gary Friedrich was supposed to dialogue a six- or eight-page monster story for one of the anthology titles. He was in Missouri and didn't want to do it, so he sent it back and said that somebody else should do it. Roy looked around, saw me, and said, "Well, you're sitting in a chair. Here, why don't you dialogue it?" I had a good time doing it. I really liked

it, and I guess it caught people's eyes, so I wrote some more stuff. Suddenly I wasn't just an assistant editor. I was a comic book writer.

RA: *One of the first Marvel credits that you had was in a Sgt. Fury issue. A fill-in issue, I'd suspect.*

ENGLEHART: I didn't actually write that one. I went over it. I don't actually know for sure the complete circumstances, but Gary was still in Missouri. He was out of the pressure cooker of New York. He was the regular writer on *Sgt. Fury*, but for some reason, Roy wasn't totally happy with that issue. He asked me if I could go back over it and tighten up the writing on it. I did a couple of those things. Not just over Gary's scripts but other people's, as well. Stuff would come in. Roy would say, "Why don't you see if you could touch it up?" None of that stuff was ever planned and probably came as a surprise to the guys who thought they had written it.

RA: *Who was Holli Resnicoff? She's credited as your co-writer on several of your early stories.*

ENGLEHART: She was Stan's secretary. I really liked Holli a lot. She was not only Stan's secretary but also the general secretary for the bullpen workers when they needed one. Marvel—maybe all the comic companies of that time, but certainly Marvel—paid you a salary for being on staff, but they threw freelance work at you, as well. Something you could work on in your free time to earn extra money. At that time, they still had romance books. In fact, they were trying to revive them. Romance, Westerns, and monster stories—short pieces—were the non-super-hero stories where they could train people. You could write short romance or monster or Western stories to learn the craft of comic book writing. At same time, you weren't destroying an entire issue of *Iron Man* in the process. I don't remember if Holli wrote those stories and I got involved or... I tend to think that we got the assignment together. I haven't thought about that in a long time, but that romance work was a way to break in at Marvel. You got a number of chances to show them what you could do. If they decided at the end of it that you actually could do something, then you got more work.

"The X-Men Weren't Like They Are Today"

RA: *I think your first regular book was a rebooting of *The Beast*, who'd been an X-Man.*

ENGLEHART: Yes, that's correct.

RA: *Did you completely do the first story there, or was that plotted by someone else?*

ENGLEHART: The first issue was written by Gerry Conway. I think he co-plotted it with Roy. They set it up that *The Beast* was going to change from human-looking to looking like a werewolf. That was typical of Marvel at that time. Quite often an established person would do the first issue of a new title, and then they'd hand it off to somebody else.

RA: *Yes, that happened with "Werewolf by Night," "Killraven," "Man-Thing," and [Tomb of] Dracula, just to name a few.*

ENGLEHART: Most of the time, the writers had their own series. But, kicking off a new series, if Roy or Gerry couldn't write it full-time, then they would write the first episode and hand it off to somebody like me or Steve Gerber or whoever. I started with the second issue of "*The Beast*," which was running in the title *Amazing Adventures*. They'd set everything up, and I proceeded to continue it.



Bringing Out "The Beast" In Steve Englehart

Steve's first writing credit on a super-hero title was the second "Beast" solo story, in *Amazing Adventures* #12 (May 1972). The photo of artist Tom Sutton is from *FOOM Magazine* #19 (Fall 1977). For the short sweet run of that "Beast" series, pick up a copy of the hardcover *Marvel Masterworks: The X-Men, Vol. 7*, in which Cory Sedlmeier and his kookie crewmates in Marvel's reprint department have assembled half the stories which (along with reprints) kept the young mutants front if not center between *The X-Men's* cancellation in 1969 and 1975's *Giant-Size X-Men* #1. Vol. 8 of that hardcover series reprints the other half! Thanks to Barry Pearl. [©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

RA: *I actually liked the art teams on that book quite a lot, although it was usually a rather an odd combo—Tom Sutton did the penciling and he got inkers like Syd Shores or Mike Ploog. The artist combos would seem to be a match of two completely wrong artists to put together, but the final product actually seemed to come out rather nicely.*

ENGLEHART: Not sure I was that crazy about the art. I've always wanted to sort of put across the realism of the fantasy, and Tom Sutton's stuff was always kind of cartoony for my taste. But, for the first several years of writing comics, you have no clout. In those days, you just didn't go to the editor and say, "I've got an artist that I want to work with." That would never come up. All the books were done by assignment. They said "You're writing 'The Beast.' Tom Sutton's drawing it." You didn't discuss it. I certainly didn't think of what kind of alternative artist I could possibly get. That was just the way it was. I wasn't totally crazy about Tom's artwork, although, to be fair, there was a lot of charm to it, but his approach wasn't what I was seeing in my mind when I plotted the story.

Having been an artist—and I won't claim that I was a great artist at all, but I could visualize things; I knew how I would draw it—I think that

“I Come From A Very Primitive Background”

An All-Encompassing Interview With Golden Age Artist & 1950s Novelist GEORGE MANDEL

Conducted by Jim Amash

Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

INTERVIEWER'S INTRODUCTION: *I've interviewed a lot of colorful people in the pages of Alter Ego, but few as fascinating as George Mandel. The late Dan Barry once described George as a real individualist (as was Dan himself), and credited him as being very helpful in Dan's early days in comics. While George worked for several companies such as Cinema Comics (later known as Better/Standard publications) and for Lloyd Jacquet's Funnies, Inc., shop, the truth of the matter is that George's life and career outside of comics is a much more fascinating story. While we do talk about George's time in comics and some of the people he knew (Mickey Spillane, Ray Gill, Richard Hughes, etc.), this interview focuses at least equally on other aspects of his life, including George's friendship with Joseph Heller, the celebrated author of Catch-22. Special thanks goes to my friend David Hajdu (the exceptional writer of books like Positively 4th Street and The Ten-Cent Plague) for giving me George's contact info. —Jim.*

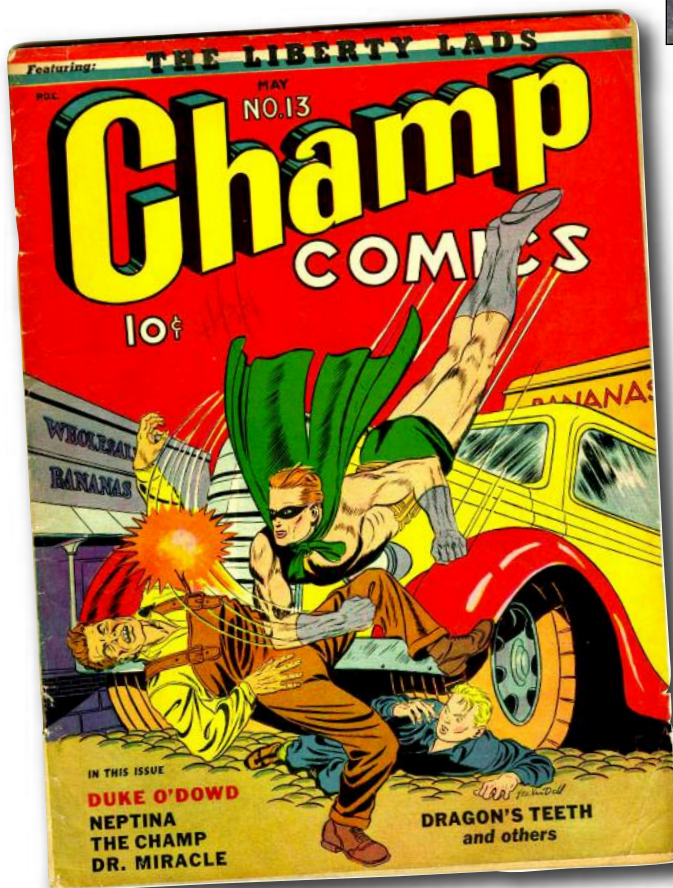


“All My Life, I've Been Drawing”

JIM AMASH: *I'm going to ask you the hardest question anyone's ever asked you. When and where were you born?*

GEORGE MANDEL: That's a real hard one, but don't worry: I may not remember. I was born in New York City, February 11th, 1920. And I'll tell you who else was born that day: Thomas Edison, the fighter Max Baer—but on my very day: King Farouk, the big fat king of Egypt.

JA: *What got you interested in writing and drawing?*

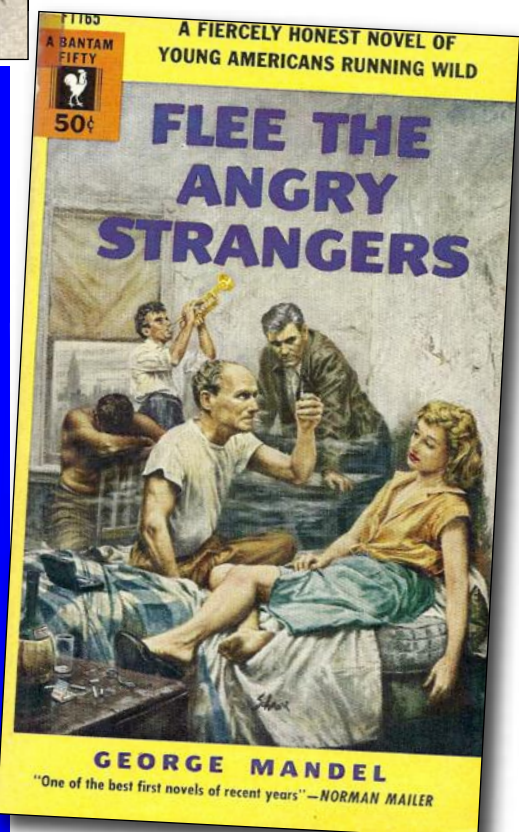


Slug The Angry Stranger!

George Mandel circa 1952—flanked by covers that trumpet his accomplishments first as artist, then as writer. The photo is from the dust jacket of his first novel, *Flee the Angry Strangers* (published by The Bobbs-Merrill Company, '52). [©2011 the respective copyright holders.]

(Left:) The cover of Harvey's *Champ Comics* #13 (May 1941) is signed with his pen name “Geo. [for George] Van Dell.” The pictured hero is “Duke O’Dowd,” a.k.a. “The Human Meteor.” Thanks to Jim Ludwig. [©2011 Harvey Publications or successors in interest.]

(Right:) The cover of the 1953 Bantam paperback edition of *Flee the Angry Strangers*, which sports an applauding blurb from Norman Mailer, then celebrated as the author of *The Naked and the Dead*. It has been called the first “Beat” novel (referring to the so-called Beat Generation). Cover artist unknown. Thanks for both this cover and the photo to Don Rosick & Pat Mason of Five Points Bookshop in Columbia, South Carolina. [©2011 the respective copyright holders.]



MANDEL: Listen, I come from a very primitive background, and nobody there knew about fine art. As a child, I was always gifted, always able to draw. In fact, I used to have a lot of fun with my friends. I could draw Mickey Mouse with a water gun on the sidewalk when I was ten years old. I belonged to a club in Coney Island. That's where Joe Heller shines in. And I had one very close friend, Danny "the Count" Rosoff, that I used to cartoon [caricature] in a very funny way. And there was another guy we called Midge that I used to bust up; he'd get out of control. I reached a point where all I had to do was pull the pencil at a board of wood and Midge would go apart. [mutual laughter] In other words, all my life, I've been drawing.

In fact, my oldest sister... I was drawing a flower at the windowsill, and then I cut it out, and I couldn't find the stem. And she taught me my first lesson in life: in order to cut out [a drawing], you need a double line. [mutual laughter] I cut out the flower and the leaves and the stem, but it only had one line. It goes that far back.

JA: It sounds like you came from Damon Runyan territory.

MANDEL: Ah, listen, Joe Heller and Beansy Winkler were brought up in the same baby carriage. During the Depression, the mother of one would take both kids out shopping to allow the other to do her chores, and vice versa. Each kid was the other's first image of life.

Joe Heller became an Oxford scholar, and Beansy Winkler became an echo of Damon Runyan. Now it's interesting that you mentioned that name, because many people in Coney Island fit that bill. But Beansy was an especially interesting guy, and very close to Joe all their lives.

JA: How did he get the nickname "Beansy"?

MANDEL: Number one, he started out in life as a career failure. Nothing ever worked for him. Once, he saw a sign in the drug store that said, "Guess how many beans are in the jar and win this beautiful bike." That night, Beansy got up on the roof, climbed down, and spent the night

counting beans. It took him all night. And then, at dawn, he successfully got out of the place, right into Hurricane Alberton, and almost got washed out to sea. The best part of it is, he didn't win the bike.

JA: Wasn't Mario Puzo [author of *The Godfather*] a childhood friend of yours, too?

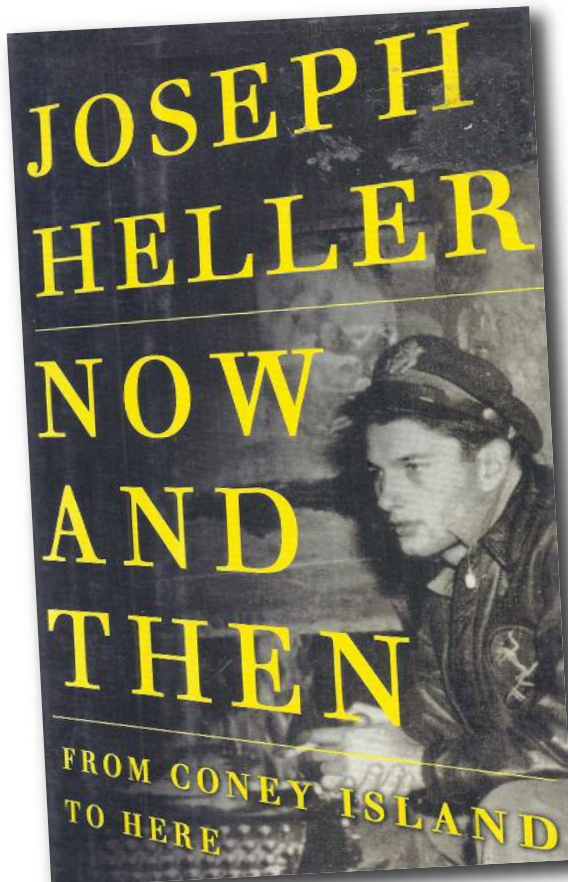
MANDEL: Mario Puzo I regarded as my more recent friend; I didn't meet him until 1946. [chuckles] My old friends were from *before* the war; my new friends are from *after* the war. Mario and I met at the New School for Social Research, where we took writing courses. I also took a sculpting course. Mario and I took each other for gangsters. Smart gangsters. We were very leery of each other. And then I came up with a riddle that nobody could resolve. I'll tell you the riddle, and I doubt that you can solve it. "What was the ethnicity of the noblest Europeans in World War II?"

JA: I'm not going to be able to answer that.

MANDEL: The answer is German. You know, the Germans who hid Jews at their own peril. Not only their peril, but peril of their children. That impressed Mario so much that he slipped me a news item. This was the first exchange we had. The news item was this: castration is a sure cure for dandruff, but it's regarded as an improvement cure. From then on, we were buddies.

JA: What do you remember about Joe Heller as a youngster?

MANDEL: I'll tell you exactly what I remember. Everyone in Coney Island knew better than to call his name from behind, because there was a danger that Joe would jump out into the middle of the road and get hit by a truck. He was the most nervous kid you ever saw, and this guy flew sixty missions as a bombardier. It wasn't the deal they made at first when they made him a bombardier with like ten, fifteen missions. They kept jacking it up, and much of this goes into *Catch-22*, of course. But I want you to know that I never knew Joe to lack courage until a week before he died—to my surprise.



From Coney Island To Hollywood

Two of George Mandel's literary buddies.

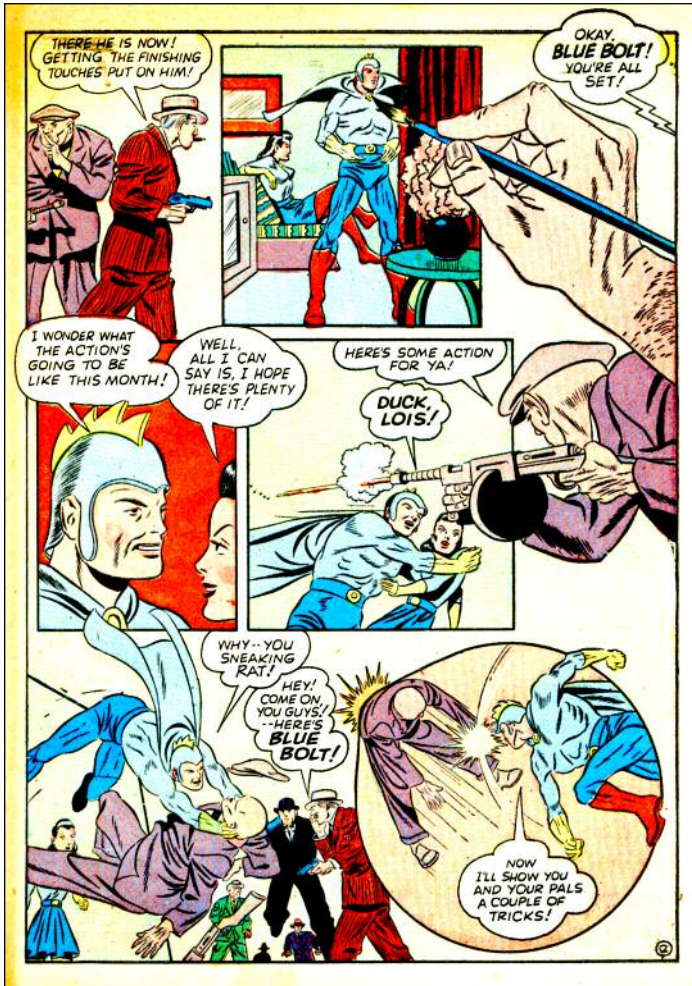
(Left:) Joseph Heller, as portrayed on the cover of his 1998 memoir *Now and Then: From Coney Island to Here*. The 1944 photo was taken on the island of Corsica, while Heller was in the U.S. Army Air Forces, inadvertently gathering material he would utilize in his monumental novel *Catch-22*.

(Above:) Mario Puzo accepts his Oscar for his and Francis Ford Coppolla's screenplay for the film *The Godfather - Part II*, based in part on Puzo's bestselling 1969 novel *The Godfather*. Puzo and Coppolla had won the screenplay Oscar for the first *Godfather* movie, too—but Puzo hadn't been present to accept that one. [©2011 the respective copyright holders.]

Here's what it was: as you know, we had what was called a Gourmand Club. Mel Brooks was a member; Carl Reiner was a guest, but Mel was steady. Joe brought me into it, I brought Mario Puzo in. Joe knew these guys from Fire Island: Mel Brooks; Speed Vogel, who worked with Joe later on; and the funniest of them all, Julie Green. He couldn't say "Pass the sugar" without Mel Brooks folding up in laughter. He'd say, "My kit is missing." You know what his kit was? It was his plate, bowl, and chopsticks. [mutual laughter] Here's a typical Julie story: we're in a car, a guy comes over and said, "Give me some change. I gotta get a drink." So we gave him some change and as he walks away toward the corner, at which there was a beautiful diner. Julie said, "That faker! He's going in for a doughnut and coffee!" [chuckles] That's typical of Julie. By the way, I lost track of your question.

JA: We were talking about Joe Heller and his courage.

MANDEL: I never saw him without courage until his last week. We had not been seen each other for maybe a year. When we went out, it was customary for



Like Two Bolts Out Of The Blue

(Left:) George Mandel, as artist, worked himself (or at least his drawing hand) into an action page in the "Blue Bolt" story in Novelty Press' *Blue Bolt*, Vol. 2, #12 (May 1942). Thus, Ye Editor suspects this may be one of the stories written by George, as well. Thanks to Jim Ludwig.

(Right:) When George was drafted, his big brother Alan took over, as per this splash from *Blue Bolt*, Vol. 3, #3 (Aug. 1942). By this time, the hero appeared in costume only on the splash page—and features like "Edison Bell" and "Dick Cole" had taken over the most prominent spots in the comic. All art retrieved by Jim Ludwig. [©2011 the respective copyright holders.]

Julie Green to pay the bill. Now, all of us were walking down the street to catch a taxi. This particular night, Joe took me away. Now, my wife always said that Joe regarded me as his father, but that's not true. He regarded me as a stepfather. We had this big boulevard to cross, and he got scared. It was so unlike him to be afraid of anything that I stopped in the middle of the street and said, "What's the matter?" Joe said, "These cars... I don't think we can make the light." I said, "Hey, Joe. We're going to make the light, and besides, there are people in those cars. They're not going to hit us." On the way across, he said, "I get short of breath." And I have not forgiven myself since then for not knowing that shortness of breath is a specific symptom. A few days later, he was dead.

At the graveside, I saw a young man shouting at Mel Brooks. He was in a state of absolute fury. I got there toward the end, and I walked off with Mel, and I said, "Who's that guy?" And Mel said, "That's Joe's doctor. He's furious that no one told him that Joe was short of breath." And here's the worst part of it: Joe's wife was a trained nurse.

"A Job At Cinema Comics"

JA: I understand why you feel as you do. Well, let me get back to your earlier days. Your brother Alan worked in comics...

MANDEL: He was a first-rate big brother who was seven years older than

me. And I got him to be my inker... he did okay. And then, Danny the Count recommended Dan Barry for me. Dan was a remarkable guy. He used to read two books at a time. Dan stood by me after the war when I was really a basket case. I was really wiped out by that head wound.

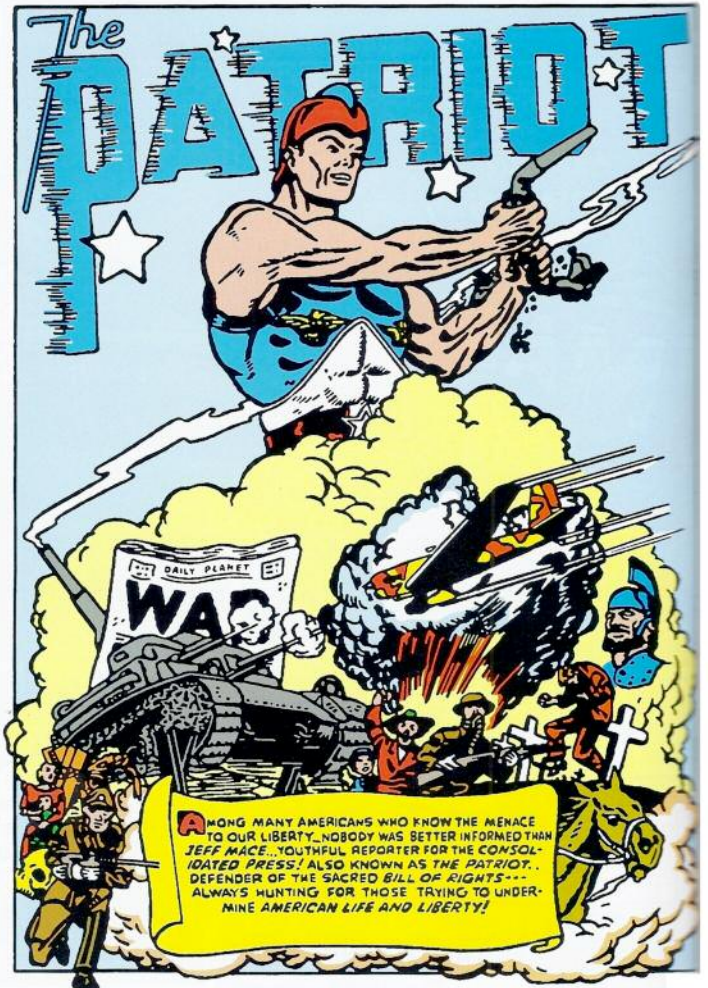
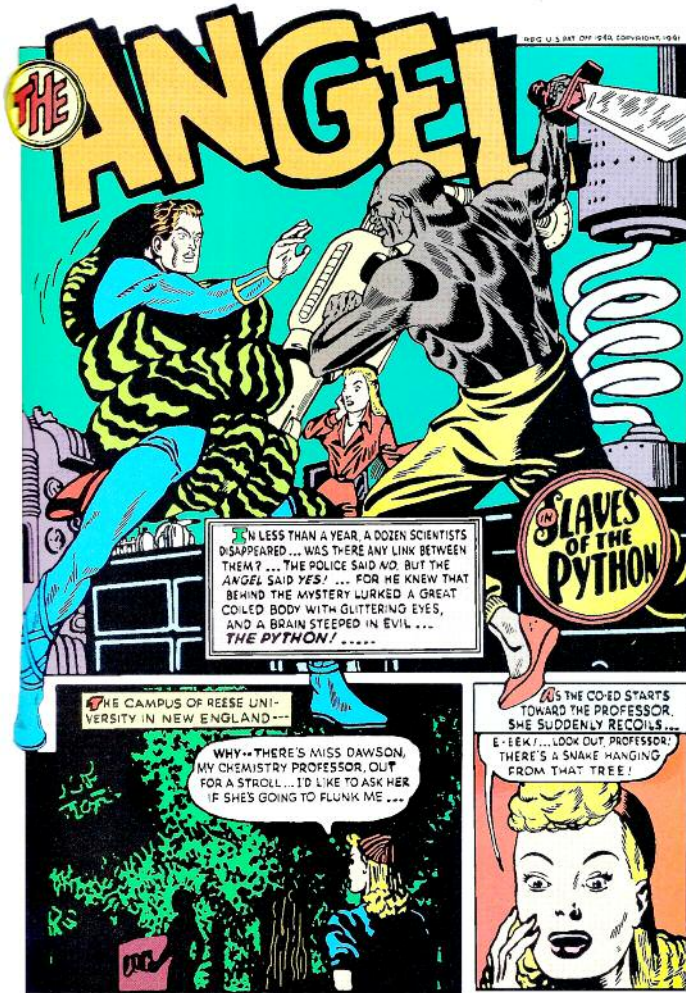
So Dan worked for me, and when he talked about having done "Blue Bolt," he did it for me. I had the "Blue Bolt" account. When I was drafted, my brother Alan took over—which is a natural thing—but to Dan Barry's justifiable resentment, because he was an artist and my brother was an inker, you see. Dan, as you know, went on from there and did very well for himself.

JA: Right. Now when you were a kid and you're drawing all the time, I'm assuming...

MANDEL: I drew all the time. I was influenced by newspaper strips. I came from a very primitive background, and all I had was newspapers. And Milton Caniff was the guy; he was my inspiration.

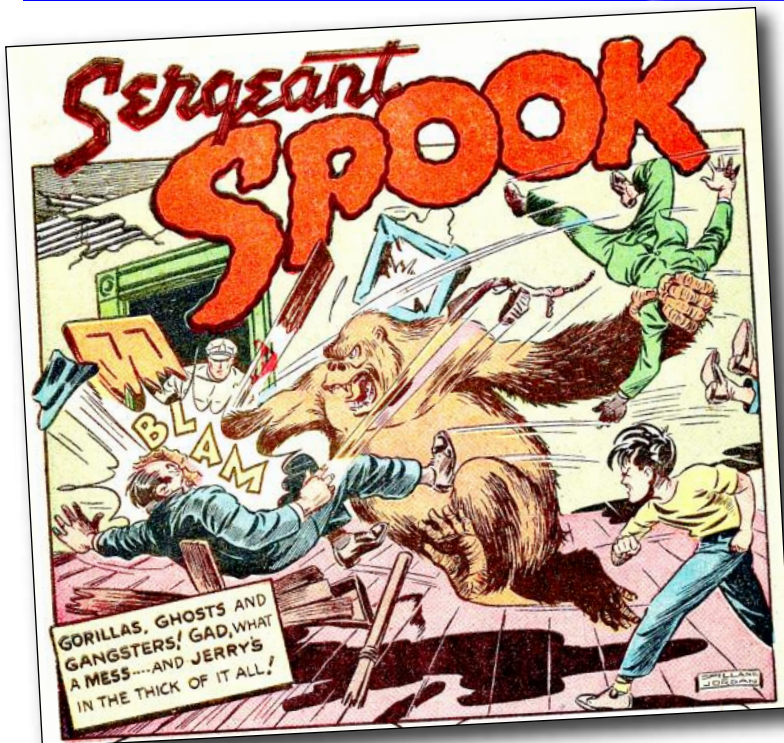
JA: When did you get the feeling that you were going to do this for a living?

MANDEL: The Depression was the bottom line of our lives. Everything was based on the Depression. My father would get me a job here and there, and on one job I got pushed around by a fat guy, and I punched



Angels And Patriots

Lynn Walker, co-host of the Alter-Ego-Fans website, informs us that, back in 2005, comic art-ID expert Craig Delich revised a few of the art credits in the Grand Comics Database to show that George Mandel had drawn the "Patriot" story in *The Human Torch* #4, (Spring 1941) and "The Angel" in *Sub-Mariner* #2 (Summer 1941). The "Whizzer" yarn in *All Winners Comics* #9 (Summer 1943) has also been suggested as having GM art—but unless it had lain on the shelf for a year or two, that seems unlikely, since George was called into uniform right after Pearl Harbor in December of '41. These splashes are repro'd from the hardcover *Marvel Masterworks: Golden Age Human Torch, Vol. 1* & *Marvel Masterworks: Golden Age Sub-Mariner, Vol. 1*. [©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



Spooked!

Comic writer (and later bestselling novelist) Mickey Spillane—and, at left, the splash panel of the "Sergeant Spook" story from *Blue Bolt*, Vol. 3, #3 (Aug. 1942). Art is by John Jordan—but scripter Spillane got top billing on this one! [©2011 the respective copyright holders.]



ABE KANEGSON WAS A LETTERING GENIUS. HIS BOSS, WILL EISNER, CERTAINLY THOUGHT SO! ABE'S BRILLIANT ALL-LETTERING SPLASH PAGE ON THE RIGHT DEMONSTRATES WHY HE INSPIRED GENERATIONS OF COMIC BOOK LETTERERS. EVEN THIS ISSUE'S "MYSTERY OF THE MISSING LETTERER!" TITLE WAS COMPOSED WITH *SEZ YOU*, RICHARD STARKINGS' KANEGSON-STYLE COMPUTER FONT.

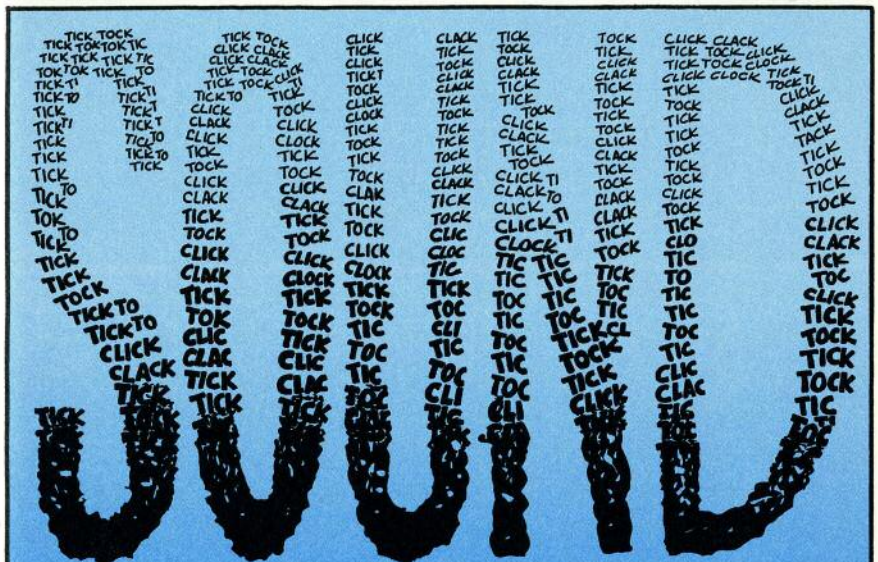
ABE LEFT COMICS IN THE EARLY 50S TO BUILD A NEW CAREER AS A FOLK SINGER AND SQUARE DANCE CALLER.

AND THEN TRAGEDY STUCK...

(Above:) Back cover photo of Abe's 1969 album.
 [©2011 the respective copyright holders.]
 (Right:) "Sound!" Sept. 24, 1950, *Spirit* splash page.
 [©2011 Will Eisner Estate.]



ABE KANEGSON! THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING LETTERER! PART 3



LISTEN ...

Do you hear... the scream in the night... **EEK!!**
 the awakened cry of the baby... **WHAAA**
 the lone passerby on the silent street... **CLICK! CLICK!**
 the heavy breathing of a man asleep... **AHH AHH AHH**
 the quiet hissing of a radiator... **SSSSSSSS**
Now listen..... hear the drumbeat of nothingness...
 the rhythm that is no sound...
 the terror that is **SILENCE**



The Mystery of the Missing Letterer! - Part 3

"Remember he had a guitar in the shop? In the afternoon he played. It was a wonderful shop, wonderful. He played the guitar in the afternoon and we talked."

—Will Eisner, from a 1982 Chicago-Con panel discussion

Abe Kanegson was Will Eisner's letterer from 1947 to 1951, assisting him on *The Spirit* and other projects. He was also Eisner's friend and a dependable sounding board. Kanegson proofread and edited Eisner's text, and even pitched in with inking when deadlines got tight.

But, soon after Kanegson quit comics in the early '50s, Eisner and Jules Feiffer, a fellow *Spirit* ghost, lost touch with him. Despite searching for decades, neither Eisner nor Feiffer ever found out what became of their old friend.

In our previous issue, I told about how I finally solved the 60-year mystery last September, when I happened upon a record album on eBay which featured Abe's name and photo. Further investigation revealed that Kanegson had pursued a career as a respected square dance caller and folk singer.

Sadly, Abe passed away in 1965. His only record album came out four years after his death. But I still wanted to know more about his life before and after comics, and hoped the liner notes might provide some answers. Luckily, I was not disappointed. As you'll see, while hardly complete, there are details of Abe's life that have never before been revealed to fans of his *Spirit* work. Here's the text in its entirety. (The actual back of the album was depicted last issue, but may have been difficult to read in that format, so....)



Little Letters!

"The Strange Case of Mrs. Paraffin," March 7, 1948. Art by Eisner & Grandenetti. [©2011 Will Eisner Studios, Inc.]

1969 Kanegson Record Text

"Abe Kanegson was born in Eastern Europe of Russian-Jewish parents and immigrated with them to America as a small child in the early 20's. He grew up in the Lower East Side of Manhattan and in the Bronx during the midst of the depression. He held many jobs during his life—on farms and in factories, for trucking firms and design studios; he was even a cartoonist for a time. At other times, he had no job at all; so he studied music and painting, he wrote and roamed the countryside. Gradually he developed a career as a folksinger, folk-dance camp teacher, and square dance caller. He always returned, eventually, to New York City. He died there of leukemia in 1965, leaving a wife, two sons, and countless friends scattered all over the nation. They all will remember him less for his short and difficult life than for the courage, love, humor, and good faith he showed in the living of it.

"Abe was many things: singer, musician, artist, poet, linguist, teacher, humorist, philosopher; his many talents were both his delight and his burden. One of the many challenges he had to meet was a persistent stammer, which he eventually lessened simply by ignoring it and not letting it interfere with any of his interests, least of all his music. He was a man who managed to be himself as completely as any man could hope to be. One might wonder why he never became famous, but he never sought fame as a goal and the lightning of commercial success never happened to strike him.

"His singing here gives us only one view of Abe Kanegson, but since he put all of himself into everything he did, it is a long view in a short space. The range and resonance of his baritone voice, the excellence of arrange-



Prisoners of Deadlines!

(Left to right:) Caricatures of Jerry Grandenetti, Will Eisner, and Abe Kanegson as convicts from the "Slippery Eall" *Spirit* story for Nov. 30, 1947. Eisner once joked that, if he and his studio were stuck in jail, their lives wouldn't be all that much different. Those boys should've gotten out more! Art by Eisner & Grandenetti. [©2011 Will Eisner Studios, Inc.]

“Everyone Deserves A Golden Age”

The Inspiring Story Of The Hero Initiative (Née ACTOR)

by Brandon Huigens

Days of comic book yore brought riches to readers and made heroes of men like Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—two teenage, first-generation Jewish immigrants and comic book creators who would define a medium and an entire American era with their character Superman.

The catch? In 1938, the year Superman was sold to the company that would one day be DC Comics, and for many years that followed, there were very few creator-owned deals offered like those at many comics companies today—agreements that now allow comics creators to keep at least some rights to their characters while still being published by a major concern. In earlier days, there were next to zero permanent positions for creators; it was mostly, if not quite solely, work-for-hire.

This sort of business made for big, big bucks for the comics companies in the Golden and Silver Ages, but not for the creators. Keeping in mind that the Superman case is one of, if not *the*, highest profile cases ever to be made public, there are a perplexing myriad of similar stories about wildly inventive men and women who received little initial compensation for their work, had no effective pension or retirement programs, and even remain uncredited for creating legendary icons.

Eleven years ago, under the twin aegis of Jim McLauchlin and CrossGen publisher Mark Alessi, a small group of comic publishers and industry veterans banded together and decided to take action on behalf of unfairly compensated comics creators like Siegel and Shuster.

ACTOR—standing for “A Commitment To Our Roots”—was born. Since its original title sounded confusingly like an amalgamation of stage or screen actors, the organization’s name would be changed, in 2006, to The Hero Initiative.

“I used to be a sportswriter,” says founding member (and now president) Jim McLauchlin about how it all got

started. “And when I was a sportswriter, Major League Baseball had a program called BAT—the Baseball Assistance Team—and it was really the same kind of premise as The Hero Initiative. We all live in the day where the utility middle infielder gets \$2.7 million a year, but you don’t have to go too far back in MLB history—just to the early 1970s—to find players making literally \$10,000 a year. That was it. So the MLB did something to help out some of the older players, and even some of the scouts and

coaches. I was always very enamored of that organization, and whenever they would have their typical \$300-a-plate rubber chicken dinner, I would go there and do whatever I could to support BAT. When I got into the comic business, it seemed to me that a similar organization should exist in comics. There was honestly no single comic book situation that precipitated it; it was simply a similar idea in baseball.”

Since 2000, through fund-raising opportunities such as art auctions, exclusive collectibles, and charity events, ACTOR/Hero Initiative has disbursed several hundred thousand dollars to comics creators in need through grants and non-interest loans and has often helped pave the way for creators to re-enter the field and continue working.

Charlie Novinskie joined the group nine years ago as Secretary to the Disbursement Committee and has been on the Board of Disbursement for over eight years. As sales and promotions manager for Topps Comics during most of the 1990s, Novinskie had plenty of first-hand experiences with comics professionals struggling to make ends meet, even after putting in years of hard work: “I saw a lot of the Golden Age and Silver Age guys when we were doing the ‘Kirby-verse’ books—and there were people we were working with that weren’t getting by too well at the time. When Jim McLauchlin said there was going to be an organization to help out, I thought any way I could help would be great.”



Crisis On Earth-Prime

One of the most active elements in The Hero Initiative has been its chairman, artist/writer George Pérez. This fabulous drawing is one of no less than *four* pieces he drew related to 2003’s long-awaited *JLA/Avengers* series. The previously-unpublished drawing above depicts the “second tier” DC and Marvel heroes—although that’s some second tier that includes Plastic Man, Hawkman, The Vision, et al.! It was auctioned off for a considerable sum—all of which was donated by George to The Hero Initiative—to aid veterans of the comic book industry who could use a helping hand. [Art ©2011 George Pérez; JLA TM & ©2011 DC Comics; Avengers TM & ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

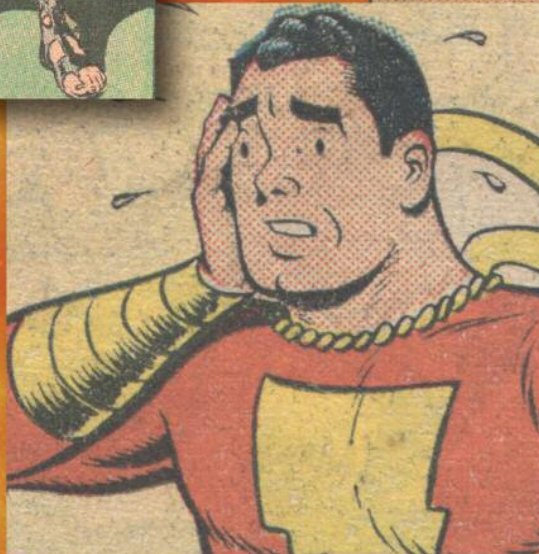
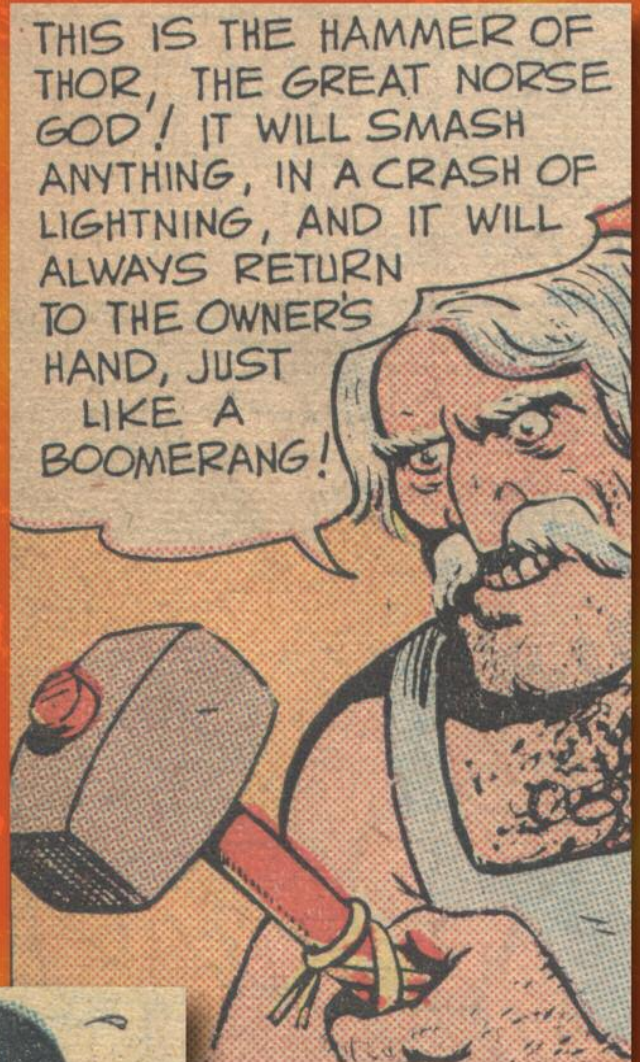
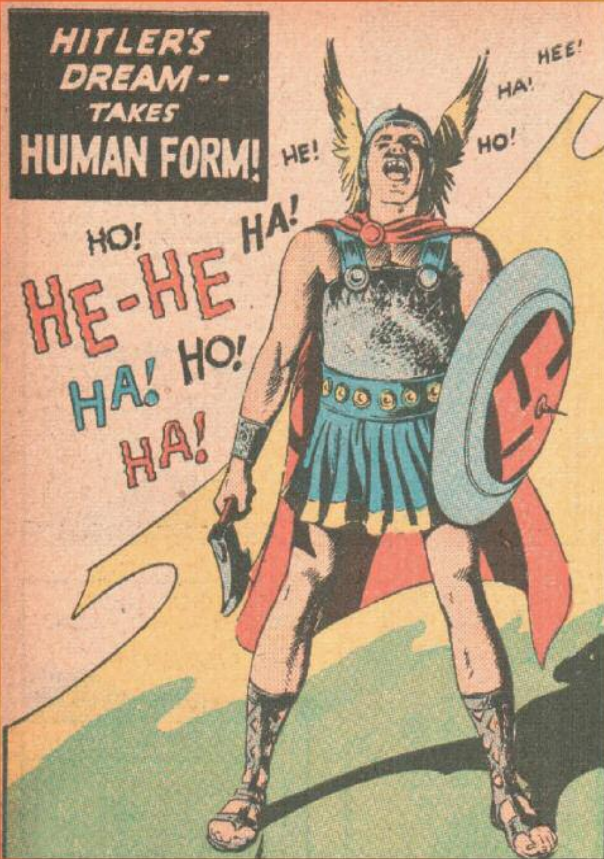
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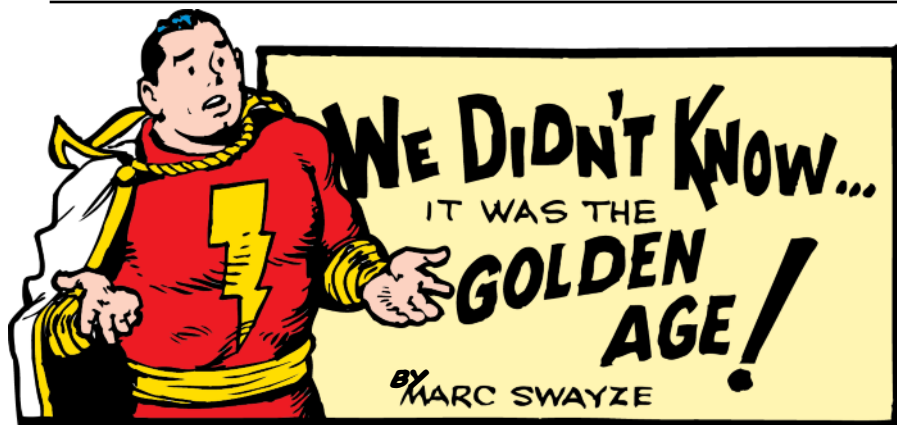
Fawcett Collectors of America

#162

July 2011



SONS OF THUNDER



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

[FCA EDITORS NOTE: From 1941-53, Marcus D. Swayze was a top artist for Fawcett Publications. The very first Mary Marvel character sketches came from Marc's drawing table, and he illustrated her earliest adventures, including the classic origin story, "Captain Marvel Introduces Mary Marvel (Captain Marvel Adventures #18, Dec. '42); but he was primarily hired by Fawcett Publications to illustrate Captain Marvel stories and covers for Whiz Comics and Captain Marvel Adventures. He also wrote many Captain Marvel scripts, and continued to do so while in the military. After leaving the service in 1944, he made an arrangement with Fawcett to produce art and stories for them on a freelance basis out of his Louisiana home. There he created both art and stories for *The Phantom Eagle* in *Wow Comics*, in addition to drawing the *Flyin' Jenny* newspaper strip for Bell Syndicate (created by his friend and mentor Russell Keaton). After the cancellation of *Wow*, Swayze produced artwork for Fawcett's top-selling line of romance comics, including *Sweethearts* and *Life Story*. After the company ceased publishing comics, Marc moved over to Charlton Publications, where he ended his comics career in the mid-'50s. Marc's ongoing professional memoirs have been a vital part of FCA since his first column appeared in FCA #54 (1996). Last time, we re-presented the beginning of John G. Pierce's discussion with Marc from *Comics Interview* #122 (1993), which covered Marc's initial work at Fawcett on *Captain Marvel*. We pick up with part two of Marc's recollections, including his post-WWII Fawcett work. (Thanks to David Anthony Kraft - comicsinterview.com) —P.C. Hamerlink.]

JOHN G. PIERCE: Okay, so you went into the armed forces in 1942, but continued to write for Fawcett as a freelancer. During that period of time—before you went into the service, that is—how often did you go to the Fawcett offices to take in or pick up assignments?

MARC SWAYZE: Before I went into the service I was a 9-to-5 employee on the art staff. As I was not freelancing, I did not pick up and deliver assignments, but received them from the editorial office down the hall. This was during the period when all offices were in the Paramount Building. All of the writing, to my knowledge, was freelanced from outside, the only exception being the new *Captain Marvel* stories that I wrote. Later, when I returned to New York in '44, I did freelance for a couple of months while working out arrangements to come back south, and I went into the offices once or twice a week. I wasn't particular about what the editors gave me, and I doubt if they were. I remember doing a *Mr. Scarlet* and a *Prince Ibis* and a one-pager featuring *Mary Marvel* promoting the paper conservation program at the time. Funny—I drew *Mary* just as I had in the beginning, and I'll bet she didn't look anything like she did in the stories of that period.

JOHN: I'm kind of curious about your service days, at least as they relate to your Fawcett work. Do you know who drew the *Captain Marvel* stories which you wrote while you were in the armed forces?

MARC: No. But I'm sure they were drawn in [C.C.] Beck's studio, which was supplying all the CM art at the time. Incidentally, Beck's shop was created while I was in the service. When I left Fawcett, Beck and I both worked at the editorial and executive offices located in the Paramount Building at Times Square. Despite some of the published stories to the contrary, I never worked for Beck. He was my friend, but never my superior.

JOHN: Did any of your fellow GIs ever catch on to what you were doing in your spare time and make any comments to you about it?

MARC: It wasn't a secret. And I don't recall anything ever being made out of it. As a matter of fact, now that I think about it, I wonder if the readers, or anybody, ever gave a thought to comics being written. Or drawn!

JOHN: Well, I wasn't born until 1947, but I recall that when I was reading comics as a child in the 1950s, I had this vague idea that someone had to be writing them, but had no notion at all that artists existed. I thought the whole thing was done mechanically somehow! Well, anyway, did you ever see any servicemen reading comics, especially *Captain Marvel* or any other Fawcetts?

MARC: Not often, if at all. I spent several months in an army hospital and a little of that time in the recreation rooms maintained by the Red Cross. There were usually a few servicemen lounging around reading. May have been comics. I believe there were statistics to the effect that comics were the major form of literature read by the military.

JOHN: That's what I'd always heard, which is why I was wondering. Well, here's a question which may be just a bit out of order, but also



Paper Doll

After returning to New York from military service in 1944, Marc Swayze recalls that one of his first jobs back as a civilian was illustrating a wartime paper conservation one-pager starring *Mary Marvel*—a panel from which is extracted here from the opening page of *Wow Comics* #28, Aug. 1944.
[Shazam heroine TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

Sons Of Thunder

Fawcett And Thor

by P.C. Hamerlinck

Booooom! The mighty Mjölnir of Thor had hammered its way into Golden Age comic books long before the thunder god of Norse legend flourished in the imminent epoch of Marveldom. These early manifestations included: Thor himself having bestowed his mystical powers upon an ordinary man to combat world strife within the pages of Fox's *Weird Comics*; later on, Kid Eternity summoning Thor to come to his aid in Quality's *Hit Comics*; and, in the next decade, in Charlton's *Out of This World*, Steve Ditko epitomizing Thor as a weak Scandinavian Viking boy who stumbled upon a cave (what is it about those caves?) and absorbed its interior luminous beams, which bequeathed him super-strength and a hammer-like weapon with magic lightning.

Fawcett Publications had likewise incorporated the god of thunder into an array of their comic book stories, including a bout between Captain Marvel and Thor—transpiring long before two stalwarts with those names would face off some 45 years later.

Warlock The Wizard Vs. Baron Gath *Nickel Comics* #1 (May 1940)

Warlock the Wizard raised the power of Thor to defeat vampire Baron Gath in the hero's 1940 debut. "Warlock" was drawn in the puerile yet delightfully enigmatic, anatomically-incorrect style of Alfred Newton—the same artist who left his mark on Fawcett's most disreputably prosaic and derivative super-hero: Master Man.

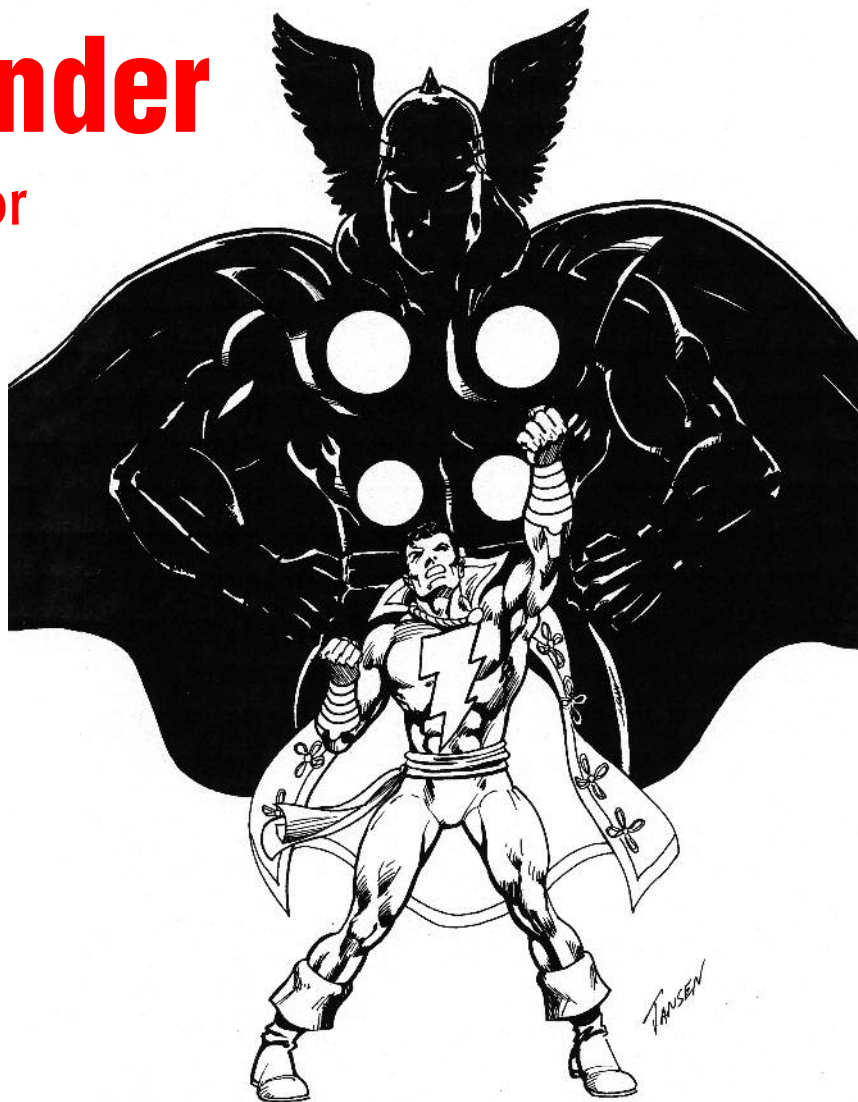
Actually, Warlock himself was somewhat imitative of Fawcett's very own Ibis the Invincible, who had premiered just three months earlier in the first issue of *Whiz Comics*.

Whereas Ibis battled evil with a wave of his "Ibistick," Warlock the Wizard instead displayed his "Golden Hand" (basically a fist-on-a-stick) and cried out a magic word (no, not "Shazam!" but "Abraxas!"), enabling the "last of the white magicians" to usher forth



Warlock The Wizard Vs. Baron Gath

[Warlock the Wizard TM & ©2011 respective copyright holder.]



Shazam!—The Norse Beginning

Artist Eric Jansen rendered this homage to Tom Mandrake's cover for *Shazam: The New Beginning* #1 (April-May 1987)—with a unique twist especially for this article. [Shazam hero TM & ©2011 DC Comics; Mighty Thor TM & ©2011 Marvel Comics.]

supernatural forces for crushing all the wickedness in the world. And, whereas Ibis had been accompanied by his partner, the exquisite Princess Taia, Warlock instead collaborated with an intelligent, talking, and telepathically-communicating pet raven named "Hugin." (Incidentally, the same name as of one of Odin's pair of information-gathering ravens.)

Hugin led the Wizard to a huge fortress where a damsel struggled to escape the wrath of Baron Gath. When Warlock displayed his Golden Hand and shouted his magic word, the fist opened up, enlarged, split (analogous to M.F. Enterprises' disembodied "Captain Marvel" from '66), and plucked the distressed woman from the vampire's grasp right before the giant hand slugged the blood-sucker in the jaw.

But Gath still held his former captive's father hostage in a castle imported straight from Transylvania. In the interim, Warlock and his Golden Hand stopped a werewolf and prevented two gargoyles from the castle's tower from coming to life (transforming one of them into a festive balloon!), while his reliable raven gobbled up gigantic spiders.

When his Golden Hand was stolen by a lizard, Warlock sent Hugin to fly over to his house and grab the "Lamp of the Gods." (Don't leave home without it!) The raven

returned with the mystic appliance, which Warlock used to call up Thor: "Lord of the thunderbolt! Give me your hammer!" The Wizard launched Thor's mighty mallet at the Baron ("Let's see you dodge the thunderbolt!"); it struck and effectively slew the vampire. Hugin retrieved the Golden Hand and returned it to his master, who went forth "on his eternal battle against evil!" But the battle would only endure for a few more months, for Warlock the Wizard cast his final spell in *Nickel Comics* #7 (Aug. 1940).



**Captain Marvel & the Dragon-Men/
The Monsters of Saturn**

[Shazam Hero TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

Captain Marvel & The Dragon-Men/ The Monsters Of Saturn Captain Marvel Adventures #1 (1941)

Unable to tap the talents of C.C. Beck and other occupied Captain Marvel artists—but eager to further expand their most popular franchise—Fawcett selected the team of Joe Simon & Jack Kirby to manufacture the entire contents of the first "CM" solo book, *Captain Marvel Adventures* #1, for March '41, date as S&K's debut issue of their celebrated series. Thus, before they justly made a name for themselves in France "Eddie" Herron had secured the rights to *Captain America Comics* during the war, he and his partners holed themselves up for two weeks in the New York Timely offices and raced through *CM* #1 with various inkers (most notably Dick Dillin). The makeshift tales obviously lacked the polish of the pair's tailored techniques.

In the third story in *CMA* #1, Billy Batson petitions Saturn petitioning "A champion to free the whole thing is pretty "rotten," imprisoned Captain Marvel—and blasted off towards the planet Saturn. It happened to be lying around. (As to what happened under his own power... well, those are the things that happen when you have a 68-page book.)

The Dragon-Men welcomed Captain Marvel's death ray upon him. Marvel's special powers in a battle between the World's Mightiest Man and Captain Marvel decided to change back to Billy Batson to free the enslaved humans. After he found the Dragon-Men right in front of them, much to the surprise of the captives.

"Handsome stranger!" called out one of the captives. "Are you the thunder-god?"

"No, I am Captain Marvel, at your service!"

The imprisoned people's legend foretold that a "thunder-god" would

come and save them before perishing from their enemy's cruelty. Marvel assured them that the Dragon-Men would be over-thrown, and went onward to live up to his promise.

With the iniquitous beasts defeated and the slaves freed, Marvel bade a fond adieu and flew off in his spaceship. (Uh, wasn't that thing—which he didn't need in the first place—completely destroyed earlier?) One of the liberated inhabitants looked skyward to watch Marvel fly away and wistfully asserted that "Not even the thunder-god could have been so great!"

Of course, Captain Marvel's original name was intended to be Captain Thunder... and twenty years later, Jack Kirby, the same artist who drew the "Dragon-Men" tale, would go on to draw the origin and early chronicles of Marvel Comics' thunder god: The Mighty Thor.

Coincidentally, the Marvel Thor likewise encountered some Saturnians (the Stone Men) in his very first outing (*Journey into Mystery* #83, Aug. '62). As most of us know, during a vacation in Norway, Dr. Donald Blake hid from the aliens inside a cave where he discovered a wooden cane (the disguised Mjöllnir, also spelled Mjolnir—the "j" somehow vanished in one of the Fawcett panels reproduced on the cover of this edition of *FCA*), and when the good doctor frustratedly struck it to the ground he was instantaneously altered into the Norse god of thunder, complete with hammer. In addition to the lightning-like transformation parallel, the partially-disabled Blake may have been involuntarily inspired by the crutch-supported Freddy Freeman... a.k.a. Captain Marvel Jr. Speaking of which...

Captain Marvel Jr. Battles Hitler's Dream-Soldier Master Comics #42 (September 1942)

Perhaps it was the influential drollness of editor Rod Reed—or a simple conveyance of the general mood that swept the country during the war—which had artist Mac Raboy depict images on the *Master* #42 cover of Adolf Hitler associate Hermann Goering getting a gold boot to the chest... and Joseph Goebbels draped over Captain Marvel Jr.'s lap while being spanked by the World's Mightiest Boy. Whatever the case may have been, the tales were metaphorically perfect preambles to the off-the-wall story that awaited readers beyond the book's covers. And, while this particular

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