

Alter Ego™

CENTENNIAL

Edited by
**ROY
THOMAS**



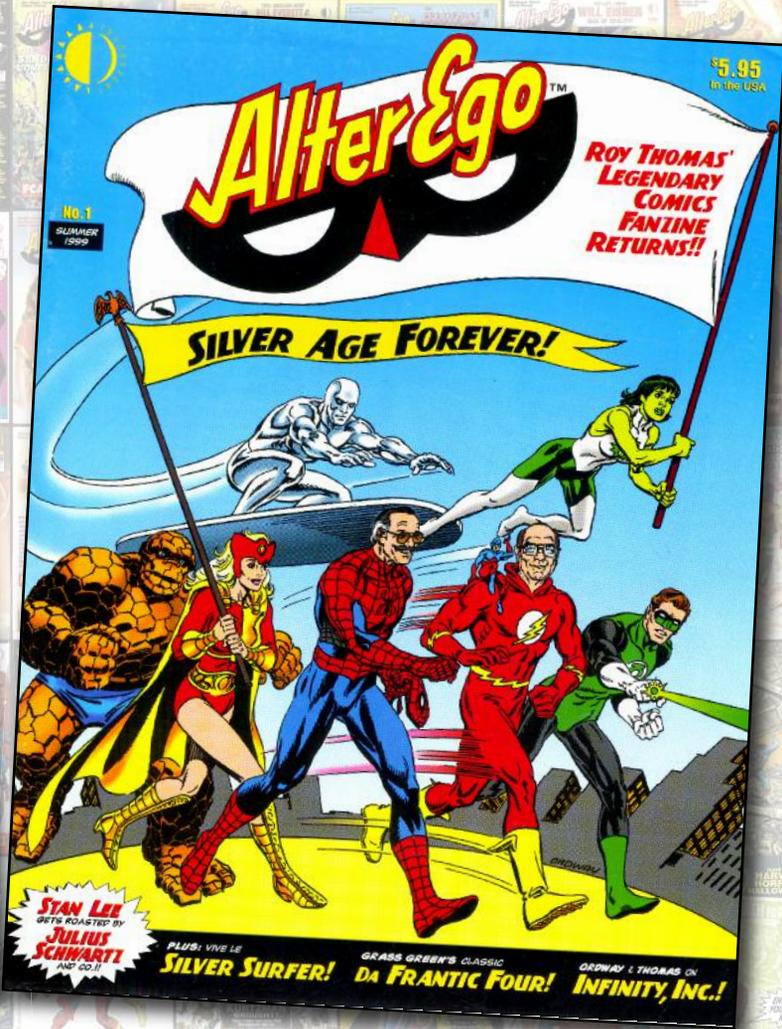
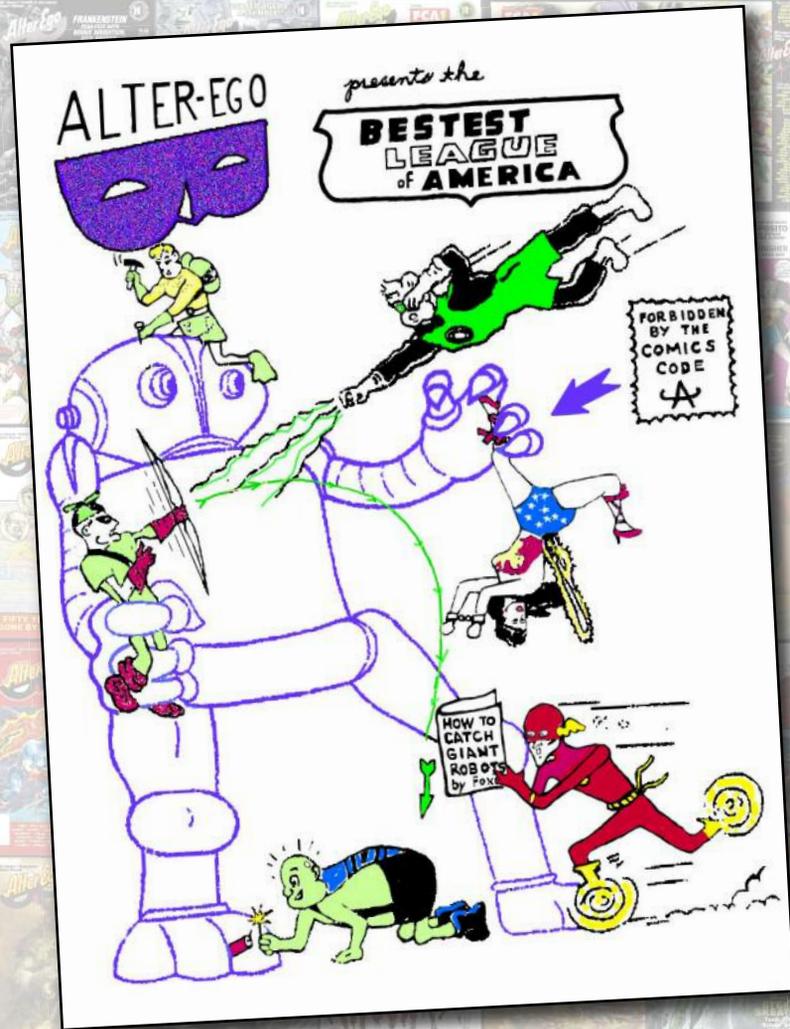
**Celebrating
100 issues—
and 50 years—
of the
legendary
comics fanzine**

BUCKLER
& ORDWAY

Alter Ego™

CENTENNIAL

Edited by
ROY THOMAS



ALTER EGO: CENTENNIAL

THE 100TH ISSUE OF ALTER EGO, VOLUME 3

Published by:



TwoMorrows Publishing
10407 Bedfordtown Drive
Raleigh, North Carolina 27614

www.twomorrows.com • e-mail: twomorrow@aol.com

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First Printing: March 2011

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Softcover ISBN: 978-1-60549-031-1

UPC: 1-82658-27763-5 03

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Eight-issue subscriptions \$60 U.S., \$85 Canada, \$107 elsewhere (in U.S. funds)

Send subscription funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to editorial offices.

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Mike Esposito
and Dr. Jerry G. Bails, founder of *A/E*



Gil Kane panel above from *The Ring of the Nibelung - Book Two: The Valkyrie*. Script by Roy Thomas, after Richard Wagner. [©2011 DC Comics.]

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110
after
ORDWAY
1985
after
HASEN
1947

On Our Cover: *Some years back, Ye Editor commissioned artist Rich Buckler to re-pencil the magnificent interior “cover” featuring the 1941 Justice-Society of America (plus soon-to-be-member Wonder Woman) that he’d drawn for the All-Star Squadron Preview in Justice League of America #193 (Sept. 1981). This time, the art would be inked by Jerry Ordway, who’d embellished the 14-page introductory tale that had followed it—while the incongruous non-JSAer Shining Knight would be replaced, fittingly, by Starman. It’s been one of the treasures of Roy’s personal collection ever since. [JSA TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]*

Above: *For this 100th issue, Shane Foley depicted our “maskots” Alter Ego and Captain Ego—and RT himself, garbed like the late-’30s Crimson Avenger—in an artful homage to Jerry Ordway’s cover for Infinity, Inc. #10 (Jan. 1985)—and ultimately to Irwin Hasen’s for All-Star Comics #37 (Oct.-Nov. 1947). Thanks a zillion, Shane—but why The Crimson Avenger? Roy always saw himself as more the Atom type! Oh, and thanks to Randy Sargent for the coloring. [Alter Ego TM & ©2011 Roy & Dann Thomas – costume designed by Ron Harris; Captain Ego TM & ©2011 Roy Thomas & Bill Schelly – created by Biljo White; other art elements ©2011 Shane Foley.]*

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The First Hundred Issues Are The Hardest!

W

elcome to *Alter Ego: Centennial*, a.k.a. the 100th issue of *Alter Ego*, Vol. 3!

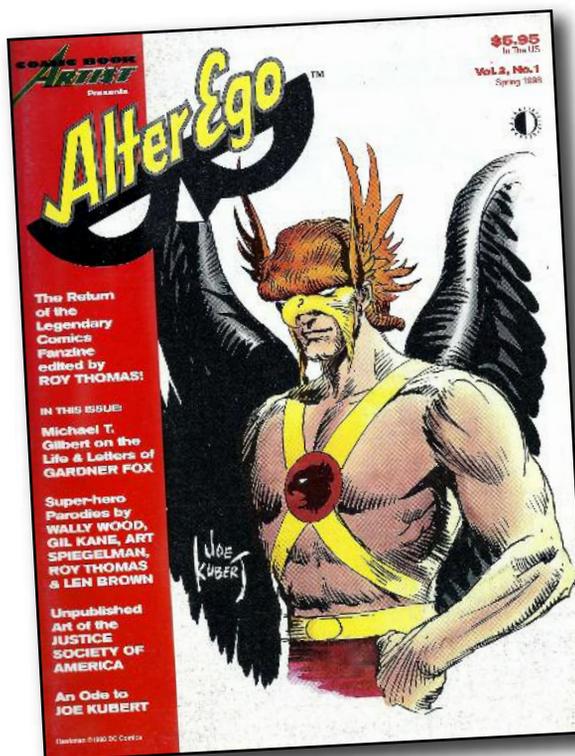
Or, if you count (a) the five truncated “issues” of Vol. 2 that appeared as part of *Comic Book Artist* in 1998-99, (b) the eleven issues of “Vol. 1” published between 1961 and 1978, and even (c) the four issues of the 1986 First Comics series starring a masked super-hero named *Alter Ego*, as currently being reprinted by Heroic Publishing in a 25th-anniversary edition (see p. 72)—well, then, make that the 120th issue!

Any way you slice it, that’s a fair number of issues—if hardly a record—for a comics “fanzine,” even if we’ve deliberately stretched the meaning of that word a bit in this incarnation.

All 120 issues, of course, have one thing in common—and that, with all due blushing, is Yours Truly.

As a college senior, I was invited by my new correspondent Dr. Jerry G. Bails, a young assistant professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, to be the sole other contributor to the first issue of the comic book fanzine he had recently decided to produce. He christened it *Alter-Ego*, complete with hyphen, and in #1 (postmarked and mailed out at the end of March ’61) generously listed me as “co-editor.” Well, actually, I did eventually become the only person to contribute material to every single one of those 120 issues. (I kept that streak going by the skin of my teeth in *Alter Ego* [Vol. 1] #5 in 1963, though, when two-issue editor/publisher Ronn Foss simply printed a Bestest League pin-up I’d sent him. Of course, at the time, I had no idea I was *working* on a “streak.”)

As for that March 1961 date: yes, it’s merely a serendipitous coincidence (though an amazing one!) that this 100th issue of *A/E*, Vol. 3, comes out exactly 50 years to the month since Jerry’s V1#1 hit the U.S. mails. Cue *Twilight Zone* music!



That gave us all the excuse we needed to make this a triple-threat of an issue, celebrating:

The 100th issue of *Alter Ego*, Vol. 3...

The Second Time Around

(Top of page:) Roy T., in a photo taken in 2007 by his TV producer pal Alan Waite at the Hollywood home of some mutual acquaintances—plus (left) Joe Kubert’s cover for *Alter Ego*, Vol. 2, #1 (Spring 1998), repro’d from an illustration done for Bill Schelly. Oh, and in the photo—dig the customized *Alter Ego* watch Dann got Roy as a gift! [Hawkman TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]



The 50th anniversary of *Alter-Ego* [Vol. 1] #1...

And the present writer’s sojourn as a scripter and editor at DC Comics during the 1980s.

Okay, so that last is not exactly an inevitability. Still, it made sense to Jim Amash and me to spotlight an *A/E* co-founder’s decade at the company whose *Justice League of America* title (and ultimately its 1940-51 *All-Star Comics*) were the primary reason Jerry launched *A/E* in the first place. But that interview, lengthy as it is—and even though anecdotes re my 1980s work for Pacific, First, Heroic, TSR, et al., will mostly have to wait for another day—makes up only one-third of this issue.

Thanks to John Morrow of TwoMorrrows Publishing, who decided that this 100th issue we’ve produced together should be a double-size spectacular, we also had room to include a number of other special items:

The entire contents of *Alter-Ego* [Vol. 1] #1, which haven’t been fully reprinted since the early ’60s...

“The *Alter Ego* Story”—an account of the original fanzine’s genesis which I wrote in 1965 (it’s on view in the still-available book *Alter Ego: The Best of the Legendary Comics Fanzine*, so I’ve sprinkled this issue’s version with new notes to put the whole thing in some kind of perspective)...

“Longarm of the Law”—a permutation of the script that, if editor Julius Schwartz had given it a thumbs-up in 1964, would’ve become the very first comic book story of mine published by DC or anybody else...

An interview done with instead of by *A/E* ace interviewer (and co-associate editor) Jim Amash...

Michael T. Gilbert’s lively account of his own fanzine days...

P.C. Hamerlinck’s showcasing of the Captain Marvel connection in my *All-Star Squadron* comic and some Fawcett “spider men,” as well as his own interview with artist Marc Swayze...

Co-associate editor Bill Schelly’s chat with early fan Bernie Bubnis and a re-presenting of *The 1964 Super Hero Calendar*, one of the landmark fan-projects of its day...

Alex Wright’s salute to the pulchritudinous pin-ups of the 1940s, featuring some of DC’s most pneumatic super-heroines...

And, last but not least, *A/E* contributor Jerry K. Boyd’s assemblage of tributes to the 50-year, 100+-issue history of *Alter Ego*.

All in all, we were lucky to be able to shoehorn all these goodies into a mere 160 pages—and to cover three past issues of *A/E* in our catch-up letters section, to boot.

A word about the Thomas interview that begins on p. 4:

When Jim and I finished it, I realized I’d given voice to a greater number of negative feelings about my 1980s tenure at DC than I had in *A/E* #50 and #70 about my initial 15 years at Marvel. But, unless I planned to disclaim my own memories, they needed to stay in. For me at DC in the ’80s,

alas, the bad vibes were intermingled with the good almost from the start, as you'll see.

Still, as I insist several times in the course of the interview, there was far more good than bad, and I can scarcely regret an era that gave me the opportunity to write adventures of the Justice Society of America, the All-Star Squadron, Infinity, Inc., The Young All-Stars, Captain Carrot & His Amazing Zoo Crew, the secret origins of many of DC's Golden Age heroes, detective/human lightning-bolt Jonni Thunder, Captain Marvel, Wonder Woman, the Teutonic gods and heroes, Arak, Son of Thunder, and Valda the Iron Maiden—not to mention Mr. Mind and Hoppy the Marvel Bunny. Frankly, for me, the experience of writing and editing *All-Star Squadron* alone would've made those years worth twice as much *tsuris!*

As for the names I've named, in terms of a couple of folks who are clearly not my favorite memories of my DC decade—well, *A/E*'s letters section is open late for alternative viewpoints. And for my response to same.

Will the second 100 issues of *A/E* really be easier to produce than the first?

Will there ever *be* a 200th issue, in this day of the increasing digitalization of all things at the expense of printed books and magazines?

We'll just have to wait and see, won't we?

John Morrow surprised me, last summer, by telling me that several folks came up to the TwoMorrows booth at the San Diego Comic-Con and asked him if I intended to discontinue *Alter Ego* with #100... to consider, in short, my job of helping to record comics history finished and done.

But this issue is only a milestone, not a gravestone.

The Bald Ego

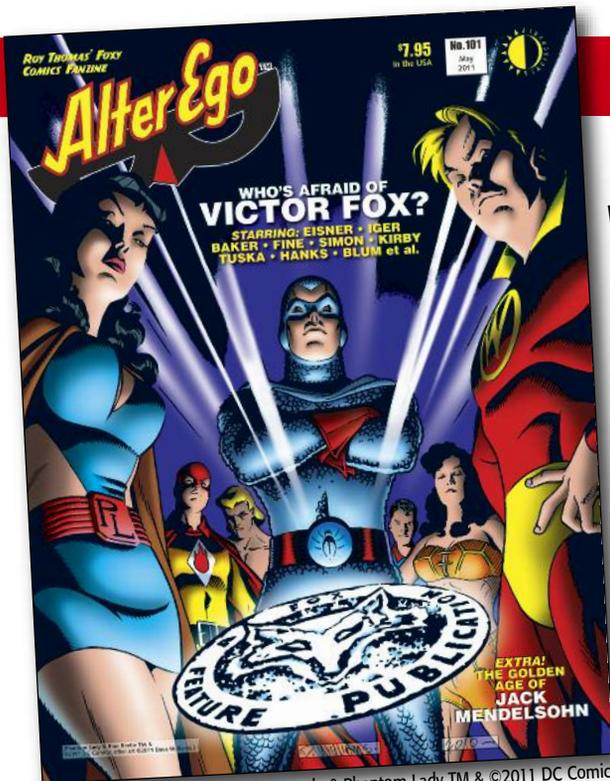
This great (and even funny!) *Alter Ego* parody cover by Pete Von Sholly appeared in his 2006 TwoMorrows special *Comic Book Nerd* #1. [Characters TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

In fact, look me up at the 2011 San Diego Comic-Con, which will celebrate 50 years of comics fandom (since *Alter-Ego* #1 and Don & Maggie Thompson's April 1961 *Comic Art* #1)—and, with luck, I should be able to autograph your copy of issue #103!

Bestest,

P.S.: Thanks once again—most inadequately—to co-associate editors Bill Schelly and Jim Amash, “Comic Crypt” editor Michael T. Gilbert, and *FCA* editor P.C. Hamerlinck—and to co-publisher/consulting editor John Morrow—for all their many contributions to the past 100 issues; and to *all* those who donated their time, talents, scans, and photocopies.

P.P.S.: A special, end-of-editorial thank-you to Chris Day, who has been in charge of layouts and putting *A/E* together for ten years now, and who has become all but indispensable to this mag. If Chris hadn't existed, I'm not sure John Morrow and I would've been able to invent him!



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- **MICHAEL T. GILBERT** on **ABE KANEGSON**, the man who lettered **EISNER**’s *Spirit*—**BILL SCHELLY** talks with 1960s fan-artist **RUDI FRANKE** (part 2)—*FCA* with **MARC & JUNE SWAYZE** and the *Captain Marvel/Thor* connection—& **MORE!!**

Edited by **ROY THOMAS**

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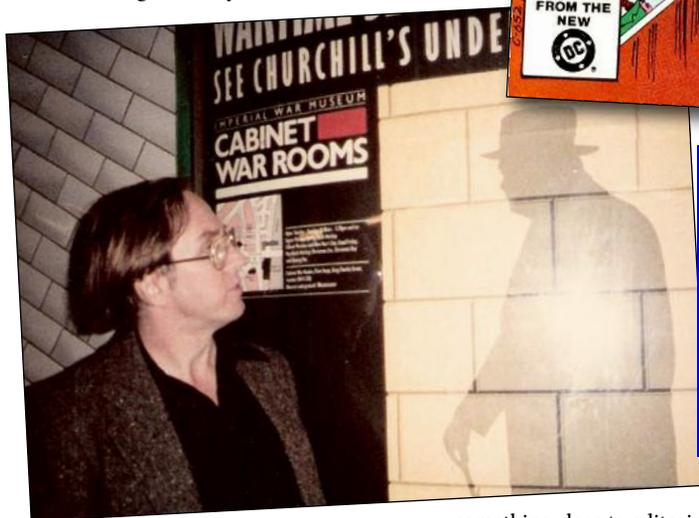
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“I Want To Do It All Again!”

ROY THOMAS Talks About The 1980s at DC Comics—Schwartz, Warts, And All!

Conducted by Jim Amash
Transcribed by Brian K. Morris

The first decade and a half of Roy Thomas' comic book career was spent writing and editing for Marvel, as we discussed in interviews in A/E #50 & 70. For this anniversary issue, we felt it was time to step into the 1980s and see, from Roy's perspective, what it was like working for DC Comics on features such as Wonder Woman, All-Star Squadron, Infinity, Inc., Young All-Stars, Arak/Son of Thunder, Shazam! The New Beginning, Secret Origins, and Captain Carrot, among other titles. One might think scribing stories of his childhood favorites plus a bunch of newly minted heroes would be a pure blessing for any writer, but there were a number of bumps in the road, which Roy doesn't shy away from discussing. While some fans may prefer Roy's previous Marvel work, I find his DC work to be just as interesting and possibly more varied in style and substance than the work that brought him to a prominent position in the four-color world of comics. Not a bad way to spend a decade, huh? —Jim.



“Grand Gestures”

JIM AMASH: You left Marvel for DC in 1980. How did you initiate contact with DC?

ROY THOMAS: I didn't. I'd been in contact, off and on. Carmine [Infantino, DC publisher] had talked to me about my coming over to DC around the time I left the editor-in-chief job at Marvel in '74, and even before that, but I really wanted to stay at Marvel, partly out of loyalty to Stan [Lee]. Around the turn of '76, I met [new DC publisher] Jenette Kahn. We even dated a couple of times, since by then I was separated from [my first wife] Jeanie for the final time. I met Jenette through [inker/DC assistant art director] Vinnie Colletta—who else?

She and one or two others at DC made it plain that, if I wasn't happy at Marvel—and they knew that increasingly I wasn't, after Jim Shooter became editor—I could have a job at DC. I couldn't be a writer/editor there, since they didn't have that position then, but I was assured I'd have



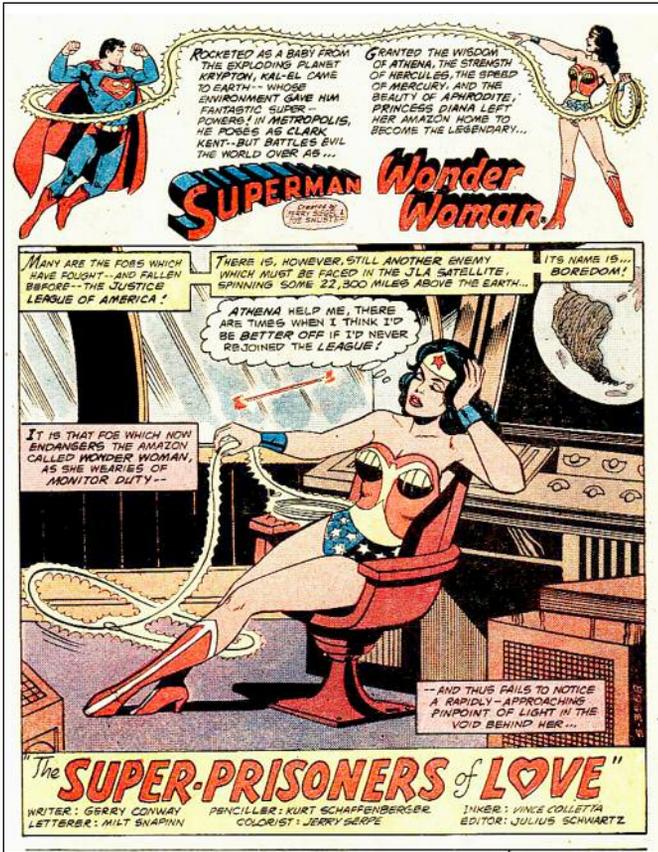
All-Star Squadroom

Roy in the 1980s, conducting historical research for *All-Star Squadron* in Winston Churchill's underground London bunker from World War II days—juxtaposed with the Rich Buckler-penciled, Dick Giordano-inked cover of *All-Star Squadron* #1 (Sept. 1981), RT's personal favorite among covers drawn for comics he wrote at DC—or anywhere else! Thanks to Gene Reed for the scan; photo by Dann Thomas. [Cover ©2011 DC Comics.]

something close to editorial authority over the scripts I wrote. So when I had my final blow-up with Shooter, I phoned Paul Levitz—he was editorial coordinator then—and told him I wanted to leave Marvel, since I felt Shooter had dealt less than honorably with me with regard to contract negotiations, something I took very personally and very hard. Paul said, “Fine,” and that was that. I promptly informed Shooter I was leaving when my contract ran out later that year. I didn't try to negotiate with Marvel. Well, actually, [publisher] Stan and [president] Jim Galton had me drop by the Marvel offices to talk when I came to New York to meet with DC in the interim, but by then it was pretty much too late, since they hadn't any real assurances to offer. What was done was done.

JA: How did it make you feel to have to give up being your own editor? Because that changed everything for you, really.

THOMAS: It was being changed anyway, since part of the disagreement between Shooter and me was that I'd told him I wouldn't sign another contract with Marvel unless it was another writer/editor contract. [NOTE: See A/E #70 for Roy's detailed account.] That was what I felt he'd been dishonest with me about—at the very least, in a Clintonesque



Now It Can Be Told!

During the final days of his Marvel contract in 1980, Roy did fudge just a little bit and secretly help out his busy buddy Gerry Conway by dialoguing the above two stories Gerry had plotted for *DC Comics Presents* #31 & #32 (March & April 1981). Roy's memory is that editor Julius Schwartz (shown at the 1998 San Diego Comic-Con, with Roy standing behind him) didn't know about the subterfuge. Hope you can read the art credits! Thanks to Jim Ludwig. [©2011 DC Comics.]

sense. I figured, if I'm *not* going to be an editor at Marvel, what the hell?—I might as well *not* be an editor at DC. Maybe it was time to seize the opportunity to work with the JSA and features like that. It's not that I was all that wild about DC's set-up. But [editor] Julie Schwartz, after all, had been my first real contact in the field—and I thought, well, recent Marvel émigré [writer] Marv Wolfman was doing okay there. So, I figured, after fifteen years at Marvel, I might as well exit while I had a little capital left, rather than let it be frittered away at Marvel over the next few years—assuming I'd have lasted that long, which I sincerely doubted.

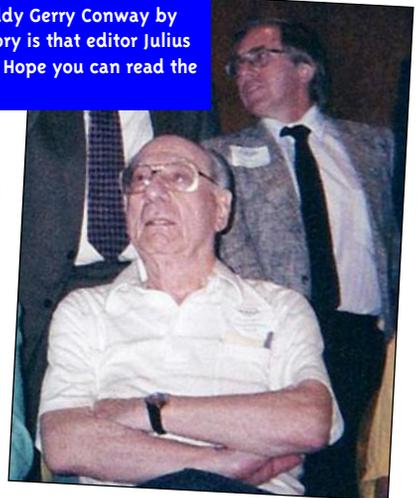
JA: Did your DC contract have a length, or a quota of pages per month?

THOMAS: It was a three-year contract; it called for a certain number of pages each month, but I don't recall exactly how many. My Marvel contract had called for 100 pages' worth of writing a month, with some of that covered by editorial work I did. The DC contract guaranteed a similar amount of work; I don't believe I lost much if any money in the switch, though I don't believe I gained any, either. I ended up doing three books a month that were well over 20 pages apiece, plus some specials.

JA: You wrote *The Fortress of Solitude*.

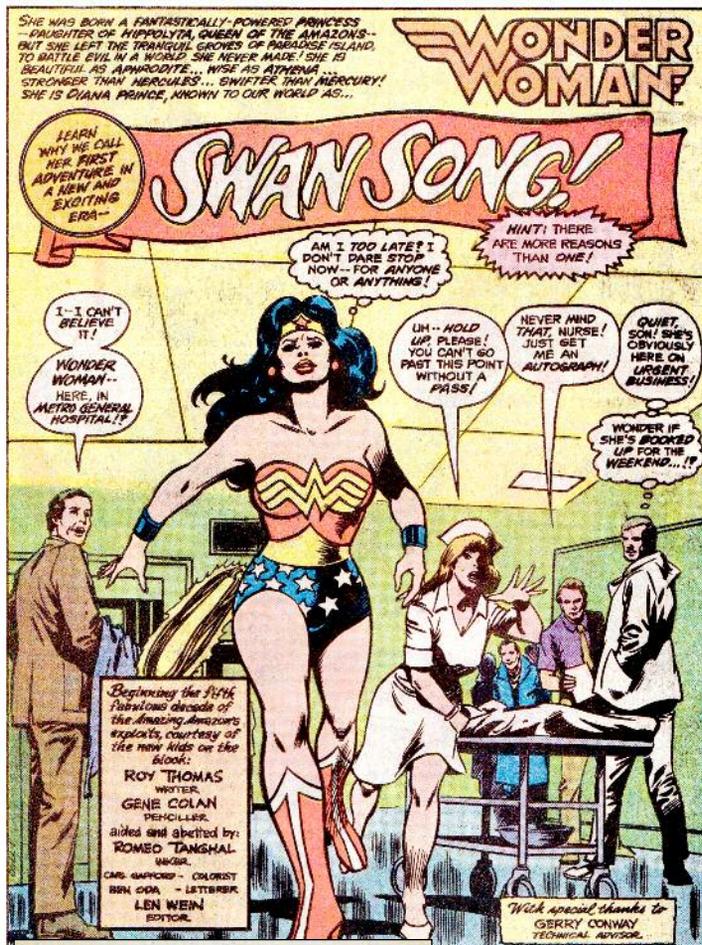
THOMAS: That *Solitude* tabloid was one of the first things I did for DC. While I was still under contract to Marvel, I met with the triumvirate of Jenette, Paul, and Joe Orlando, who'd flown Dann and me to New York. Jenette made a grand gesture: when Dann and I checked into our room at a nice hotel, it was filled with balloons. We were both amused and touched. But considerably few grand gestures were made at the meeting, and I was left dealing with just Joe after the first few minutes. Before she and Paul left, Jenette said to me, "I know you'd like to do something with the Justice Society." The modern-day "JSA" series had recently been cancelled, so I said I'd prefer to do a World War II mutation of it, and that

was quickly agreed to. DC also wanted me to create a sword-and-sorcery book, since the main two *Conan* titles had sold so well under me at Marvel. I also said I'd love to do "Captain Marvel," but they weren't interested in starting another *Shazam!* book right away; the feature had recently been discontinued, and besides, they still didn't own those characters outright. They also nixed my suggestion that day of a *Dr. Fate* comic.



Meanwhile, DC had other writers—Bob Rozakis, Jim Starlin, Jack C. Harris—plot stories that I could dialogue as soon as I was free to legally do so. I didn't ask them to do that; I didn't even *want* them to do it. I didn't like the idea that my first DC work would be stories on which I was only the second-listed of two writers, but if that's what they wanted, I felt I shouldn't object. Also, for the *DC Comics Presents* title Julie edited, I gave Gerry Conway my idea for a "Superman/Captain Marvel" story I really wanted to do, and Gerry fleshed it out and of course got plotting credit (and payment) for it [as issue #33]. They also had me writing a special or two the moment I legally could, most involving Superman.

Carmine always reminds me that at one stage he'd wanted me to come over to DC and handle all the "Superman" material... but in 1980 I told Jenette, Paul, and Joe that I didn't want to work on either "Superman" or "Batman" on a regular basis, because there were other writers doing those characters. After all, I'd even given up writing *Fantastic Four* when The



Everybody's Here But George Clooney!
 When Roy read A/E's sister mag *Back Issue!* #41 (July 2010), containing Dewey Cassell's study of the Thomas/Colan *Wonder Woman*, he was startled to behold a penciled splash for #288 (Feb. 1982) that didn't match the one in the printed issue! Roy's synopsis had called for that splash to strongly echo the one Gene had drawn for his very first "Iron Man" story, in *Tales of Suspense* #73 (Jan. '66)—coincidentally, also the first super-hero story Roy had dialogued for Marvel. Gene's initial *WW* splash didn't display a full-figure shot of the Amazon, so Roy must've persuaded editor Len Wein to have Gene redraw it. The second version filled the bill perfectly; Ye Ed hopes and assumes Gene was paid for both! Thanks to Richard Fowlks & Mike Nielsen for the *Wonder Woman* art, and to Barry Pearl for the splash from *TOS* #73. [DC pages ©2011 DC Comics; Marvel page ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

suddenly tosses a "Huntress" feature, written by Paul Levitz, in the back of the book—I think it'd been going on before, but this was supposed to be a big push on *Wonder Woman*, remember. So right away we don't have a full book, and this really teed me off. I mean, nothing against Paul, and The Huntress was a good character—but I felt, if she can't stand on her own in a book, forget about her. Don't chop up the only book *Wonder Woman* has in order to give her a series! I complained. Another pat on the head.

We'd only done a few issues that way when Paul plotted this three-issue story for the entire book that was less a "Wonder Woman" story than a "Let's use every heroine in the DC stable" story: Power Girl, Huntress, Black Canary, Supergirl, Zatanna, *everybody!* It wasn't a bad story, but I felt it belonged in a separate mini-series, not in *Wonder Woman*. All I did was dialogue it. This interrupted Gene's and my flow for three months, right after we'd got started. Really hurt our momentum. And even when it was over, there was still the "Huntress" backup.

So, after a few issues with "The Huntress" on top of the "all-girl orchestra" issues, I said, "This isn't what I signed up for. I've only been

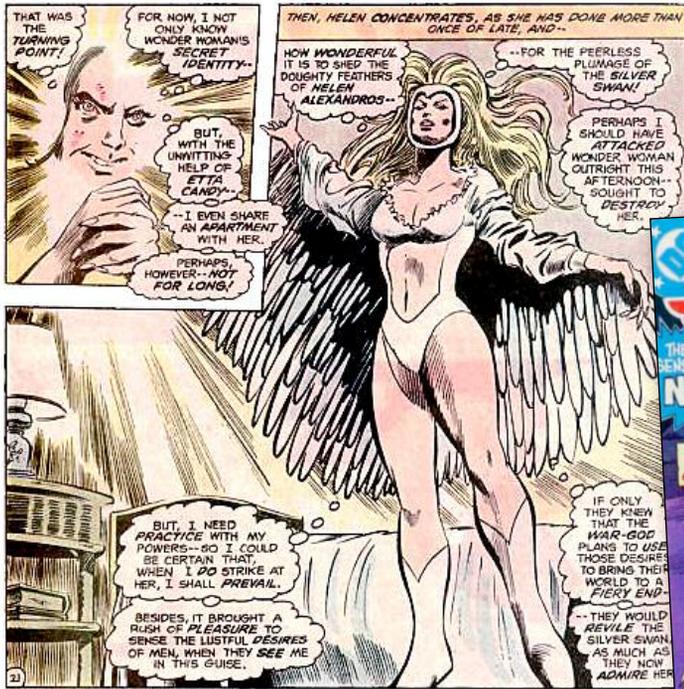


able to do about half the work I should have on *Wonder Woman* by now." So after a few, I think, fairly well-crafted stories, especially the one with The Silver Swan, and just as we were getting started with the Commander Video storyline, I left that book in protest, and Dan Mishkin took over the writing. Gene soon left, too.

I'll admit I was happy when they asked me to come back a few months later to write *Wonder Woman* #300. I worked with Dann on the plotting and even on the dialogue; she became the first female

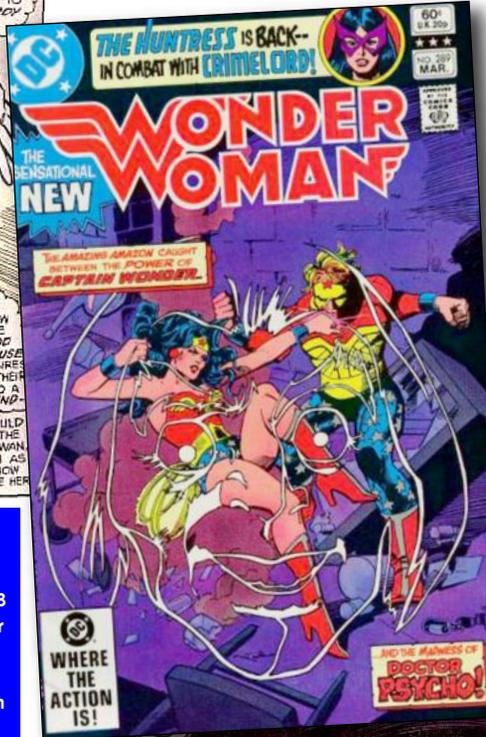
ever to have a scripting byline on a "Wonder Woman" story, and together we introduced the Earth-Two *Wonder Woman's* daughter—who'd soon become Fury in *Infinity, Inc.*—and we gave an origin to the 1970s Simon & Kirby Sandman. But otherwise I was done with the *Wonder Woman* book. The funny thing is, a dialogue balloon on the cover of #288, which had heralded our new team, had proclaimed, "And *this time nothing* will stop her!" But the fact is that Gene and I were never really allowed to get started!

Please understand—it's not that I feel Paul, Jenette, or anybody else was out to sabotage Gene's and my stint on *Wonder Woman*. I just think



some decisions were made that undercut us, and didn't help Wonder Woman. DC had its own agenda, and right from the start, it wasn't a particularly good fit with my own. Or maybe I wasn't a good fit for it.

JA: Colan draws a couple of covers, then there are no Colan covers on Wonder Woman, either.

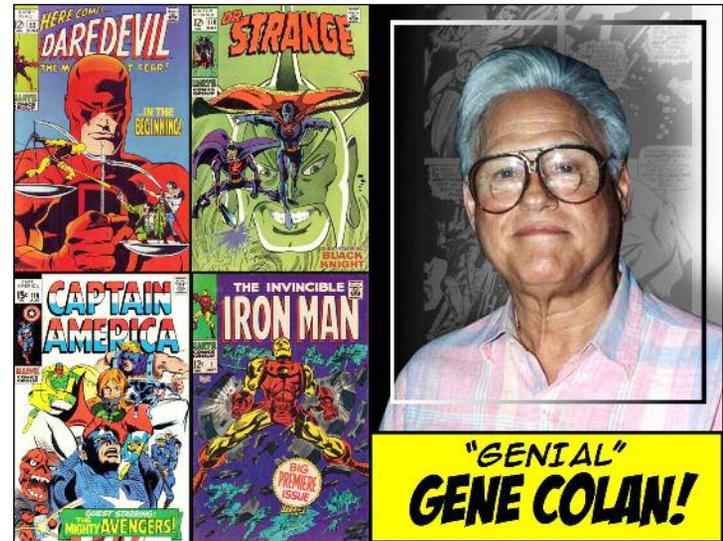


THOMAS: I love Gene's work, but sometimes his covers weren't as clear as publishers and editors liked. On the other hand, I'd have had Gene do the covers. I mean, if he's supposed to sell the book with his inside art, people will probably like his covers. At Marvel in the '70s I'd had Gil Kane and others do a lot of covers because it was convenient; but I don't recall any proof that the books necessarily sold better when Gene didn't do the covers. But my main objection was, DC wouldn't even leave us alone *inside* the book.

Memories Light The Corners Of Our Mind

The Rascally One looks back fondly on many aspects of his *Wonder Woman* stint with Gene the Dean, including (a) their co-creation in #288 of *The Silver Swan* (and her "ugly duckling" alter ego); (b) Steve Trevor briefly becoming the super-powered *Captain Wonder* in #289 (March '82), sporting Diana's abandoned eagle sigil; and (c) the Sandman sequences in #300 (Feb. '83), which harkened back to the Thomas/Colan *Dr. Strange* of the late '60s. Inks on #288 by Romeo Tanghal, on #289's cover by Dick Giordano, and on #300 by Frank McLaughlin. Danette/Dann Thomas covertly co-plotted all three, and openly scripted #300. Thanks to Jim Ludvig & Lynn Walker. [©2011 DC Comics.] Gene himself is seen below as a printout of digital wallpaper created by cartoonist Jim Engel, who depicts the artist with four of his Marvel covers—two for comics he drew with Stan Lee, two for scripts by Roy.

[Marvel art ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]





"Repent, King Kull!" Said The Marvel Bunny

The splash and a climactic page from the RT-written *DC Comics Presents* #34 (June 1981). This second chapter of this two-issue tale had everything: Superman, The Marvel Family, Capt. Marvel Bunny, King Kull, Mr. Mxyzptlk, Mr. Mind—even a title that, for no particular reason, homaged that of a famous science-fiction story by Harlan Ellison. Pencils by Rich Buckler, inks by Dick Giordano; see pp. 21 & 17 for photos of the artists. *DCCP* #33-34 are a particularly fond memory of Roy's of his years at DC. Thanks to Jim Ludwig. [©2011 DC Comics.]

"They Let Me Write The Stories I Wanted To Write"

JA: So basically, you had close to no editorial input, I'm assuming.

THOMAS: Well, they let me write the stories I wanted to write, and that was important! I had to get approval in advance, but only via short conversations over the phone. There was none of the stuff that I'd have hated if I'd been in New York, working closely with Julie Schwartz and the older editors. I would've really hated having to come in to the office like Gardner Fox used to and plot out stories in detail with Julie, so that you wound up with this polyglot story, half yours and half the editor's. That method produced a lot of good comics—I'd be the last to deny it—but it wasn't anything I was interested in at that stage, admire Julie though I did and still do.

Most of the time, my editors didn't change a word of my scripts. That's my kind of editor. That was close to what I'd tried to do when I was Marvel's editor. If I had to change a lot of a writer's plot or dialogue, I felt I had the wrong writer.

I remember that, very early on, I had a few words—though polite ones—with Julie when he let his assistant, Nelson Bridwell, remove a couple of balloons at one point in *DC Comics Presents* #34, the issue that reintroduced the Marvel Bunny. Nelson's change messed up a set-up I'd

written. I had Superman saying in one panel, "You keep asking that!"—but Nelson had removed the earlier exchange where Captain Marvel had first spoken *his* line, just keeping the "You keep asking that!" line, which now didn't make sense. I only learned this when I saw the printed issue. Nothing personal against Nelson, whom I liked and respected for his considerable talents, but I told Julie at the time, "I don't mind a little editing—but I do mind *bad* editing." But then, what editor, myself included, ever thought he *did* bad editing?

JA: You were writing *Marvel method*, weren't you?

THOMAS: Yeah, a lot of people were back in those days. Marv, Len...

JA: Well, that's not the public perception. For a long time, DC editors would say, "We do full scripts at DC and Marvel does the *Marvel Method*."

THOMAS: Things were changing by then, because of guys like Len Wein and Gerry Conway and Marv Wolfman, even before me. Once you got writers going back and forth between Marvel and DC, plus some artists who'd gotten used to the "Marvel Method" and didn't want to go back to working from a full script, you had a sort of revolution, or at least an evolution. Obviously, that hadn't been true with old-line writers like Jack Miller on "Deadman" and so forth, and that had produced some good comics, too. It's not the method: it's the people. Though I still think—and looking at today's comics makes me believe it even more—that the

method Stan Lee pioneered produced better comics by allowing the pencilers to pace out the storytelling.

JA: I'm sure Murray Boltinoff, who was still there in the '80s, wasn't working that way.

THOMAS: Probably lucky for me that I never had to work with Boltinoff. In the end, I worked pretty well with Julie. I have to say that Julie was pretty adaptable, when you consider he'd been immersed in DC's the-editor-as-God system since 1944. And now he's working increasingly with people who didn't want to work in that style and who had enough clout that he realized it wasn't smart for him to force them to do so. The first full story I did for him was that *DC Comics Presents* with Superman and Captain Marvel—Gerry's plotting for part one, but my concept—the two heroes discovering they've switched bodies. That two-parter came out pretty much as if I had plotted it all. Julie accepted that he didn't have much real input on a story like that.

JA: Your not being in New York probably contributed to problems you might've had.

THOMAS: My living in L.A. was both good and bad for me. It helped me because I'd wanted to keep a certain distance from the day-to-day world of comics ever since I'd left the Marvel editor-in-chief job in 1974, before I moved out West.

But it also hurt me at DC, because I was never around the way Marv and Len were, since they lived in the East a while longer. I was never

really a part of the DC office scene. And I think that, combined with the things I was allowed to do, the projects, the relative freedom, etc.—I believe there was a certain amount of resentment among the DC staff, below the level of Jenette, Joe, and Paul. I think there were people at DC who, once the things I did didn't sell as well as we'd all hoped, were very happy to see that. Need I add the parallel with reported staff views of Jack Kirby, a decade earlier? DC always had a lot of politics going on.

"An American Indian In King Charlemagne's Court"

JA: One of the first books you started was *All-Star Squadron*. I'm trying to figure out which came first, it or *Arak/Son of Thunder*.

THOMAS: *All-Star* and *Arak* had been started around the same time. They were both advertised in the same month in DC's house publication that was sent to comics shops and had the same cover date. I can't remember which mag came out first, though.

JA: Let's do *Arak* first, because you haven't said much about that in past interviews or articles. DC wants you to do sword-and-sorcery, so you do something like *Conan*, but not too something like *Conan*.

THOMAS: My original idea was one that it's probably best I didn't pursue. I was going to suggest to DC—maybe I did suggest, at one point—that we license another Robert E. Howard hero, maybe *Cormac Mac Art*. The *Cormac* stories take place around 500 A.D., in the Dark Ages. In retrospect, I'm not sure that would've worked ideally, because there were only a handful of *Cormac* stories, plus we couldn't have had a lot of Hyborean-Age-style "shining cities" in a more history-based world, since we know there weren't a lot of shining cities back then. Even Rome was pretty much run-down in that era, and London and Paris were still just towns.

And then my wife Dann—well, actually, we weren't married till May of '81—my fiancée, or partner, or whatever you want to call her; and she was still "Danette" then, not legally changing her first name till a year or so later—she had this notion. She liked the Dark Ages part of my idea... because, if you set a sword-and-sorcery series in historic times and you set it much later than that, maybe Medieval times or the Renaissance, it's harder to accept the idea of real magic as a part of that world. So she came up with this idea about "an American Indian who discovers Europe."

I really sparked to that. Besides, we could own a piece of a new character, which we couldn't have done with a Howard hero.

We set the series around 800 A.D., the age of Charlemagne and all the legends about that part of the so-called Dark Ages.

We'd start off with this image that Dann had of an American Indian boy adrift in a canoe out in the Atlantic, picked up by Vikings who'd been blown out to sea. We came up with the notion of utilizing the very



Between *Arak* And A Hard Place
 The image above was the starting point of the concept of the DC sword-and-sorcery title—but it was the brainchild of Danette Couto (the future Dann Thomas), not of Roy or any artist: an American Indian youth, adrift in a canoe far out in the Atlantic, is found by Vikings who have been blown, as the Northmen would say in the comic, "far west of any place sane men should be!" Pencils by Ernie Colón, inks by Tony DeZuniga, from *Arak/Son of Thunder* #1 (Sept. 1981). Incidentally, the foregoing italicized wording, complete with the slash, is how the comic's title was written in the indicia, so that's how we've transcribed it for this interview. [©2011 DC Comics.]
 Dann and Roy are depicted, above right, in an early-'80s snapshot, with Roy sporting an *Arak* t-shirt (with a head shot drawn by Colón) that she'd made for him—while Ernie and wife Ruth Ashby can be seen in a photo sent by EC.



"I Be Thor!" Yeth, We Can Thee That!

Starting in #6, Adrian Gonzales became the second *All-Star Squadron* penciler, with Jerry Ordway assigned an enhanced role as inker/embellisher on most issues. Seen above are Adrian's pencils for a page from his final issue, #18 (Feb. 1983), which features the All-Stars locked in battle with a hoodlum who thinks he's the thunder god—and the Rick Hoberg-inked printed page of same. Thanks to Jerry O. for saving the photocopies of Gonzales' pencils that DC sent him as reference while he himself was busy penciling #19. See p. 19 for a photo of Adrian. [Pages ©2011 DC Comics.]

I should make it clear, by the way, that Len and I never had any arguments about the stories. He, like Dick on *Arak*, gave me pretty much carte blanche on what the stories were, what characters were used. Maybe that's why he insisted on handling the covers with no input from me. Hey, an editor's gotta have something to do... and Len was a good editor. I didn't like it when he insisted that The Atom's lapels be colored red instead of the historically correct orange, but that was a minor glitch.

Later, when Dick made me the editor of the comics I wrote, I put Adrian on *Arak*, figuring I could get Alfredo Alcalá to "Conan" it up. And he did. Over in *All-Star Squadron*, Rick Hoberg did some really nice work later. I'd known Rick out in L.A.; Dann and I often drove down to his and his wife Aleta's place in Orange County for parties. Arvell Jones did some good work on the series, too, adding a Kirbyesque flavor in the later days. But once Jerry left to do *Infinity, Inc.*, I didn't feel DC was trying very hard to help me get suitable artists. That's why I had to go out and scramble for artists myself. I couldn't go crying to Dick all the time. But I felt that, if a good new artist came around DC, I wasn't going to hear about him till the New York editors had all had their chance to snap him up. That's just the way it was... one of the consequences I had to accept for my not being back East.

wonderfully well—and I suspect that, if Len *had* shown me Jerry's work earlier, I'd have concurred. After all, I've never forgotten that when Stan put this newcomer named Tom Palmer on Gene Colan's pencils on *Dr. Strange* after he'd done nothing but pencil one lackluster issue of *Strange*, I wasn't happy about that, either—until I saw his first inked splash page. It's not that I didn't think Len had good taste in artists; I just wanted to be consulted, not presented with a *fait accompli*.

My first two titles I created for DC were tricky, because they required artists willing to draw stories set in the past—the very late 8th century, and 1941-42. Some artists, especially in those days when royalties were just starting to be paid, were reluctant to take such an offbeat assignment. I can't really blame them... but I wanted to do what I wanted to do. When Rich left, due to disputes with Len that partly involved the covers but that otherwise I don't know much about, Len assigned Adrian Gonzales to pencil *All-Star Squadron*, again without consulting me. He just wrote me a note saying that "You're going to like Adrian Gonzales"—and basically I did. Len's reasoning was that Jerry Ordway would fix up the pencils. As Jerry's said, he was given to understand that from this point on *he* was the most important artist on that series; and that was true. Of course, Adrian and Jerry worked out quite well together.

The same thing happened when Jerry insisted on either becoming full artist of *All-Star* or else he was going to walk. I had a few reservations about Jerry's first few pages, even though they looked promising; but when I flipped through the original art and saw his pencils for the scene where eight JSAs are strapped vertically to a surface inside the Perisphere—well, that did it for me. I became as big a fan of Jerry's penciling as I already was of his inking.



Now That's What We Call A Vending Machine!
 The full-page panel by Jerry Ordway for *All-Star Squadron* #19 (March '83) is the one that immediately made scripter Roy T. a fan of JO's penciling as well as his inking. How could he have resisted? Jerry drew the self-portrait of himself for that same issue.
 Soon afterward, at now-editor Roy's behest, Jerry redesigned Tarantula to look less like the 1942 Sandman. An earlier version is seen above left, the final one at right. Great work, Jerry! The sketches were done on stationery of the Berkshire Place hotel in Manhattan, so they must've been drawn while Roy, Jerry, and Dann were in New York to confer with DC. [©2011 DC Comics.]

"Gerry [Conway] And I Co-wrote—And, Better Yet, Got Paid For—Seven Screenplays"

JA: I understand, but DC—and I don't mean this in a negative sense—did exploit your name from the outset because you'd come over from Marvel at a high point. It was very reasonable that they'd want to take advantage of the fact, "Hey, we've got Roy Thomas!" So you'd think that you wouldn't have had any undercutting.

THOMAS: Well, that might've been true for maybe a year, but after that, naturally, I was old news if my books weren't blockbusters. And they weren't. They sold okay—but after they settled down to be middle-range books, instead of selling like Marv and George Pérez's *Teen Titans*, I was sort of moved to the back burner. I'd done it to myself, I guess.

There was another problem, and this one I definitely brought on myself—not that I'd do things much differently if I had them to do over again. During the first half of the '80s, I spent a lot of time co-writing screenplays. A couple of years before that, [artist] Mike Ploog had brought me in to talk with [producer/animation] Ralph Bakshi about doing a sword-and-sorcery movie with him; maybe that would've been *Wizards*. But I had to turn Bakshi down. By then I'd signed a contract with *Conan the Barbarian* [the film] producer Ed Pressman to be story consultant to director [and writer] John Milius. One clause said that, for the one-year length of that contract, I couldn't write a sword-and-sorcery movie for anyone else. Since I was getting ten grand as a consultant fee, I wasn't about to jeopardize that.

In 1981, though, Bakshi called me up one day right after New Year's and asked me to come talk with him about writing the movie that became *Fire and Ice*, co-produced by Frank Frazetta, whose art style it would attempt to capture on film. By then Gerry and I had already sold one screenplay, *Snow Fury*—based loosely on a 1950s science-fiction novel I'd read about snow that eats people—so I again brought in Gerry and we went into high gear screenwriting. Over the next few years, Gerry and I co-wrote—and better yet, got paid for—seven screenplays, though only two of them made it to the screen in any form. That took up a lot of my time till the mid-'80s, and while I tried not to shortchange DC in terms of the time and effort I spent writing and editing for them, it did alter my focus considerably. There was at least a brief period there when I had to seriously consider what I'd do if it came to the point where something had to give, writing movies or writing comics. Of course, Gerry was writing comics then, as well. And I can't rule out a bit of resentment in some circles back at DC over our movie work. We both felt there was some.

I suppose this sounds as if, for me and DC, the honeymoon was over pretty fast. But it wasn't over totally, not quite yet. After all, Jenette and

The Wright Stuff— 1940s Version

Pulsating Pin-Ups By Our Dazzlin' Doctor Of Digitalization

Text by Roy Thomas

Artist Alex Wright's first "1943 Calendar," in which World War II movie actresses were digitally transformed into DC-owned super-heroines, got a strong reaction when it appeared in *Alter Ego* #55 a half decade ago. No less esteemed a personage than sf writer Harlan Ellison phoned to tell Ye Editor how much he loved the flip cover, on which Alex's talents had transmuted Veronica Lake into DC's heroine Liberty Belle (who, after all, had clearly been modeled on Ms. Lake's so-called "peekaboo" hairstyle).

That was followed up in #64 by a second "1943 calendar," this time utilizing Timely/Marvel ladies. Alex's computerized canvases have appeared in a few other issues since then, as well as in volumes of our *All-Star Companion* series... but we haven't found space for all the Wright Stuff we've hoped to showcase. And we've long regretted that, except for a couple of flip covers, we haven't been able to display any of it in color.

Thus, with both color *and* 160 pages to play around with in this centennial edition of *A/E*, we decided—no more excuses or delays! It was time to spotlight a second multi-image project of Alex's.

Namely, a couple of years back, he began transforming some iconic painted *pin-ups* of the WWII era, by some of the medium's most noted artists, so that he—and we—could see what might've transpired if there'd been real, red-blooded super-heroines during the 1940s for the likes of Alberto Vargas, George Petty, and others to paint as calendars and so-called "nose art" on the fuselages of U.S. bombers. On the ensuing pages, we're pleased to present Alex's (and some very fine artists') cheesecake homages to eight of DC's most pulchritudinous paladins... counting a couple of distaff do-gooders later acquired from once-rivals Fawcett and Quality.

This time around, we've foregone the actual "calendar" part of the equation—but hey, if we hadn't said anything, we doubt if most of our beady-eyed readers would've noticed. For comparison purposes, we've also reproduced smaller images of the original pin-up art on which the newies were based, since we want one and all to appreciate the talents of those practitioners of so-called "calendar art."

Starting with:

HAWKGIRL

Hawkman's partner Shiera Sanders, the co-creation of writer Gardner Fox and artist Dennis Neville (while Sheldon Moldoff first drew Shiera as Hawkgirl)—as she might've looked if painted by Gil Elvgren, described by Wikipedia as one of the most important of 20th-century pin-up artists. Elvgren did much of his work for the prominent firm of Brown & Bigelow of St. Paul, Minnesota, which provided much of the "calendar art" of the period. Interesting that the word "Feathers," printed on the hatbox in the original art, resembles the word "Feithera," the name of that Arctic bird-land where Hawkman journeyed during the 1940s, and from which later came Northwind, a 1980s stalwart of Infinity, Inc. [Hawkgirl! TM & ©2011 DC Comics; Elvgren art ©2011 the respective copyright holders.]





They're Baaaaaack!

(Above:) Our Aussie buddy Shane Foley's notion of what a 1986-87 *All-Star Squadron*, Vol. 2, #1, might've looked like, complete with a new logo. It assumes, of course, that DC would've allowed Roy to feature most of the original members. For his part, Roy vividly recalls the minor furor he stirred up when he used the original Green Lantern on the cover of *Infinity, Inc.* #39 (June '87)—even though no one had ever told him to avoid using GL and Flash (and Lord knows who else) on covers! [All-Star Squadron heroes & Baron Blitzkrieg TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

"Calling It 'Young All-Stars' Instead Of 'All-Star Squadron, Vol. 2,' Was Dann's Idea"

JA: Crisis basically rips the guts out of All-Star Squadron, because all of a sudden, you can't do things you planned. I assume it didn't help your sales, either. I know when I ran a comics store I found that, while series wound up selling an extra thousand or two copies of crossovers with big series like Crisis and Legends, afterward I found that the middle-range titles—like Blue Devil and All-Star Squadron—often dropped by 10 or 20% from what they'd been before the big series.

THOMAS: Actually, the book did fine with its so-called "Red Skies" Crisis crossovers. We never really had a chance to find out how the book would've done post-Crisis, actually, though the sales had sunk by then. By that point, DC, and that included Dick, decided the best thing to do was use this as an opportunity to reboot a second series of *All-Star Squadron*, the way they were doing with some other titles—so the post-Crisis issues were all one-shot stories, mostly just origins, not really "All-Star Squadron" stories at all.

That second series wound up being *The Young All-Stars*—ancestor, in its way, of all the *Young Justice* and *Young Avengers* and other series we've seen (in my case, only at a distance) in recent years. Calling it "Young All-Stars" rather than "All-Star Squadron, Vol. 2," was Dann's idea. She's pretty smart, my wife. I told the story of *Young All-Stars* in such detail in the third volume of the *All-Star Companion* series that I don't figure we need to rehash it here.

Besides the fact that we had severe artist problems on *Young All-Stars* from the very beginning, so that it's even hard to say *who* the main original penciler of the series was, there was the fact that, although I was told I could have the older All-Stars drop by briefly from time to time, I had to create a new, younger group. I'm very happy with the series in general—bringing over Tsunami and Neptune Perkins from *All-Star Squadron*—making up Flying Fox, a name young Bruce Wayne had once used—and especially "Iron" Munro as the son of Hugo Danner, the protagonist of Philip Wylie's novel *Gladiator*, which had almost certainly influenced Siegel & Shuster on "Superman." But *The Young All-Stars* never really got off the ground. It's like there were tacks on the airport runway... just a series of bad breaks.

JA: Now there was no more Earth-Two. But earlier, at some point, you'd been designated the "Earth-Two Editor," which I'm assuming was an official designation.

THOMAS: It was. It was stated in a written agreement implemented sometime around 1983, which gave me authority over the use of the Earth-Two heroes and the basic concept as Julie Schwartz and Gardner Fox had created it. I didn't want those characters appearing all over the place in other books. DC'd always had its little fiefdoms; I guess this was mine. Later, while that agreement was still in effect, I acquiesced in giving up control of Dr. Fate and The Spectre, despite my having wanted to do a *Dr. Fate* series back in '80, and in return was given a lien on *Shazam!* That didn't turn out to be the smartest move I ever made.

JA: Did you feel a particular need to put your own stamp on those characters, or at least a particular need to guide them?



Leaping Tall Buildings At A Single Bound: The Sequel

In *Young All-Stars* #14 (July 1988), the young Amerindian hero Flying Fox flies "Iron" Munro to a rendezvous with a resuscitated dinosaur. Not that the son of Hugo Danner couldn't have leaped into the fray on his own, mind you—an eighth of a mile at a time! Roy & Dann Thomas writers, Howard Simpson penciler, Malcolm Jones III inker. [©2011 DC Comics.]

THOMAS: Yeah, I even worked out an astrological chart for the main All-Star Squadron members in the very beginning. Not that I believe in astrology, but since most of the Golden Age heroes were rather two-dimensional, I felt they needed some added personality traits to differentiate one from another. So I made one a Libra, and gave him (or her) the traits that supposedly went with that, and another a Scorpio, and another a Sagittarius, and so on. I forget who was what... I kept my paperwork on it for years, but it's lost now... and anyway, in the end, I mostly wound up winging it and doing what I could to their personalities on the fly, so to speak.

"Watch Your Back"

JA: When your contract comes up after three years and you become a writer/editor again—

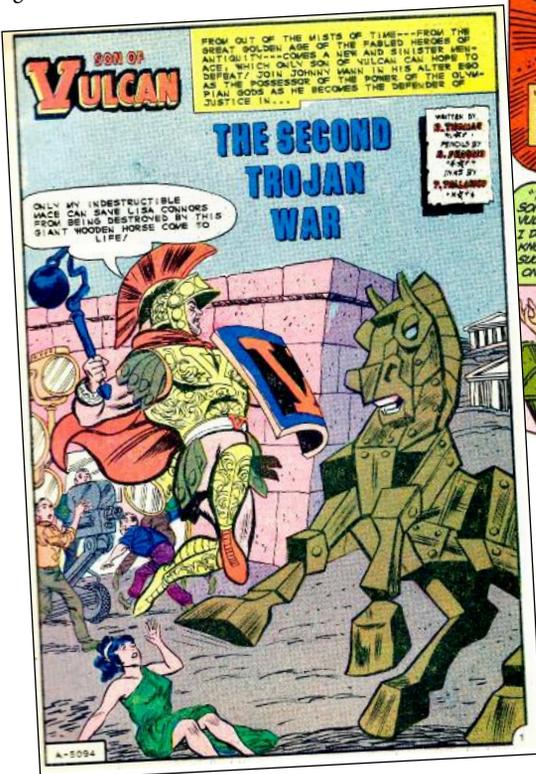
THOMAS: Well, the situation kept changing. For most of the time after Dick first made me editor of books I wrote at the turn of 1983, I was indeed the editor. But later, to get back control "in-house"—and, I think, because of some politicking that was going on that in the end Dick didn't feel he could or should resist—guys like Gerry and I were redesignated as "story editors," which retained our control over our scripts but put a kind of official firewall between our being able to choose or direct artists. I remember Dick telling Gerry and me once, at a meeting the three of us had in Hollywood, that things had gotten a bit tricky at DC, and that Gerry and I should "watch your back." What the hell was *that* supposed to mean? That we had people back East gunning for us... well, okay, we already kinda knew that... but how were we supposed to "watch our back" from L.A.? Still, this subtly verified to us that we weren't just being paranoid, and that Dick knew it.

I was still able to have some informal influence on the art, but I increasingly had to accept artists DC lined up for me—and I wasn't at the top of anybody's list. This despite the fact that I'm the guy who brought them Todd McFarlane—whom DC later pissed away, so that he went to Marvel and became a super-star there instead. That's a whole 'nother story.

JA: So tell it to me.

THOMAS: Well, I forgot some of the details.

But, while he was penciling *Infinity*, Todd, who's Canadian, wanted DC to help him become a U.S. resident. Mike Friedrich, who was then my agent for comics work, got involved, and he kept pushing DC to move on it. All they had to do was sign a few papers, and after Todd left *Infinity* he would've kept gratefully working for them drawing "Batman" or some such. But they dragged their feet, and they dragged their feet, and in the end Todd jumped ship to



Marvel. Reminds me a little of what Mike Barr [DC writer and editor in the '80s] once said when Jenette announced that DC was "creator-driven." Mike said, "No, they're creator-towed." [mutual laughter] I know that carping on all the problems may make it seem like I didn't enjoy working at DC... but in truth, I really did. I loved the characters, and I liked a lot of the people. I just hated the politics of the place.

JA: You also did an issue of DC Challenge.

THOMAS: Yeah, I thought that round-robin thing was a great idea of Mark Evanier's. I even got a chance to write a few panels with Son of Vulcan, who'd been the first comic book hero I'd ever written professionally.

JA: At one point, a guy named Greg Weisman became your assistant editor. Was he stationed in New York?

THOMAS: Yes. All the assistant editors were—Mark Waid, Bob Greenberger. Greg Weisman lasted longer, and we had more rapport at the time.

JA: Did they help you pick the artists?

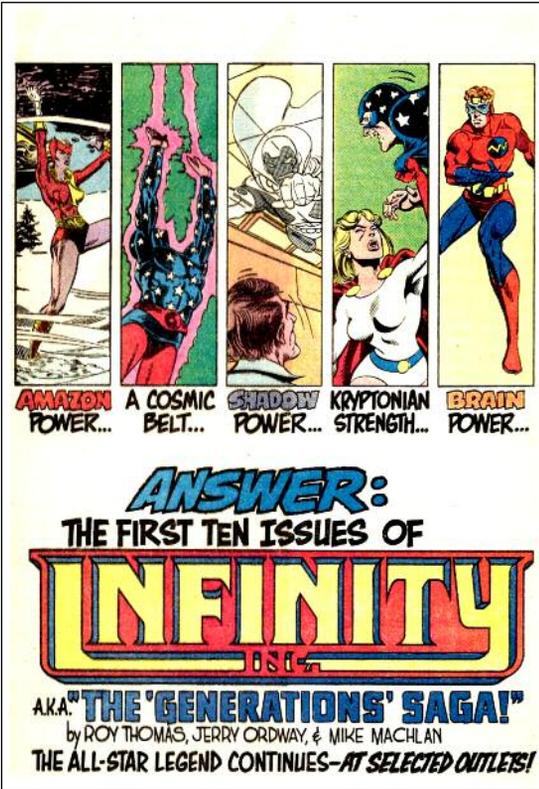
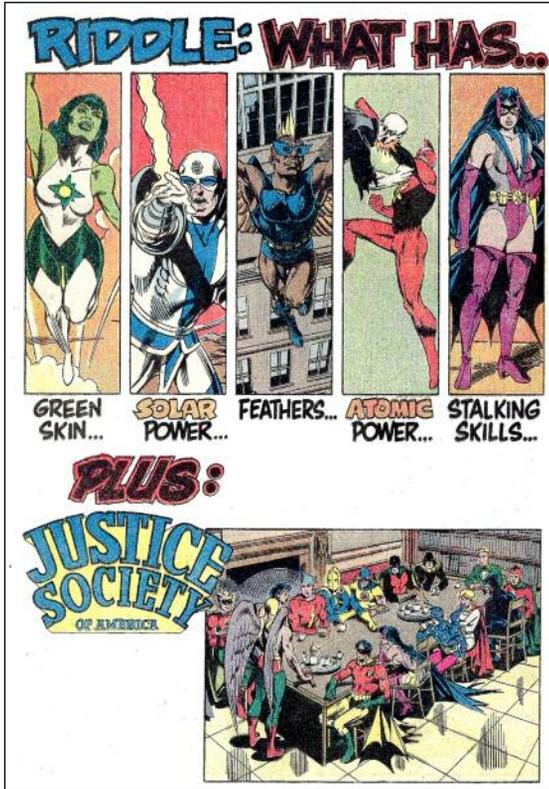
THOMAS: Increasingly, during that "story editor" period near the end. But the lines of power got confused. However, at least I had reasonable access to Dick, if I had a problem, though sometimes I know I pressed him too hard. Once, when I had to call him at home and we got in a dispute, he got mad and hung up on me. I probably deserved it that time. Things got a bit difficult between Dick and me, and between Dick and Gerry and one or two others at that time. We felt like we'd talk to him and work out an agreement on some matter... and then whatever we talked about wouldn't be implemented, as if Dick just forgot about it. I even complained to Jenette and Paul about the situation in writing once. I hated doing that, but I was at my wit's end, because I really liked Dick and was hoping we could straighten things out. Over the long haul, I think we did, and in later years he and I were as friendly as ever. My memories of Dick as DC's editor are far more positive than negative. But maybe some



Consider It A Challenge!

(Left:) Probably the first comics script Roy ever sold is the one published in Charlton's *Son of Vulcan* #50 (Jan. 1966), with his name rendered simply as "R. Thomas" on the splash page penciled by B. (for Bill) Fraccio & inked by T. (Tony) Tallarico.

(Right:) So, on the first page of his chapter of the 12-issue round-robin series *DC Challenge* (#9, July '86), Roy had Son of Vulcan rescue an unconscious Plastic Man, left over from Gerry Conway's cliffhanger ending in #8. Art by Don Heck. Jean-Marc Lofficier gave Roy an uncredited plotting assist on the issue. Thanks to Rodrigo Baeza & Frode Dreier for the scan. [©2011 DC Comics.]



"Generations" To Come
 (Left:) This double-page plug for *Infinity, Inc.* drawn by Jerry Ordway & Mike Machlan (and written by RT) appeared in the Sept. 1984 comics shop giveaway *DC Sampler*. After an almost inexplicable delay, considering how many issues were penciled by either Jerry Ordway or Todd McFarlane, DC will finally reprint the early issues of *Infinity, Inc.* (and its three-issue *All-Star Squadron* lead-in) in a color hardcover in June 2011. O frabjous day!
 (Below:) Jerry Ordway's pencils for a climactic scene from *Infinity, Inc.* #9 (Dec. 1984). Thanks to Jerry for the photocopies. [©2011 DC Comics.]

penciled by artists they'd chosen but decided not to publish them anyway. The next thing you know, I'm told, "Oh, by the way, your hold on *Shazam!* has expired and someone else now has dibs on it."

JA: Didn't DC own the character by that time?

THOMAS: Yes. But I don't know exactly when that happened, or how much it cost.

"Infinity, Inc. [Was] A Series Very Definitely With Four Creators"

JA: [laughs] To get back to *Infinity, Inc.*, since that's really your baby—

THOMAS: Yeah, mine and Dann's and Jerry's... and very definitely Mike Machlan's, as well.

JA: How much input did everybody have?

THOMAS: First, Dann and I went to New York on a trip paid for by DC. I intended to sell them on a series I called *The Time Titans*, though I figured the name would be changed because of *Teen Titans*. I suspect the group included The Shining Knight and Tomahawk, maybe some future guy like Space Ranger—but also a few new characters, which I doubt I'd bothered to make up yet. Time enough for that if DC okayed the idea.

Dann and I took a ferry over to see the Statue of Liberty—first time I'd been there since my high school senior trip from Missouri in 1958. Dann didn't care to go inside, so we just stood around waiting for the next ferry and got to talking about this notion of the sons and daughters of the JSAers. By the time we got back to Manhattan, we'd made up this group—not all the members, but several of them. I even knew the title I wanted: *The Centurions*. That would've made a great name for the *Time Titans* group, too. But I soon learned that a new TV animated series with that name was about to debut, so Dann came up with *Infinity, Inc.*, which I'll admit I was never wild about. But I couldn't come up with anything better, and DC liked it, so that became our title.

JA: So she is quite the complete co-creator, then.



THOMAS: Oh, very definitely. We worked out all the early details together, just the two of us. She had ideas uncontaminated by much knowledge about the JSAers themselves, and of course I knew the JSA, so we were playing off each other's strengths. DC wanted Power Girl and The Huntress in there to give the team continuity, though it made the group a bit crowded. Then, with DC's blessing, we met with Jerry Ordway and Mike Machlan, who were friends in the Midwest, about drawing the feature. I remember the four of us going out to lunch in New York and talking things over. Immediately, of course, Jerry and Mike were coming up with ideas, drawing sketches, and the like—so from that point on *Infinity, Inc.* became a series very definitely with four creators. I cover that in such detail in *Alter Ego* [Vol. 3] #1 and in *All-Star Companion*, Vol. 4, though, that we needn't spend much time on it here.

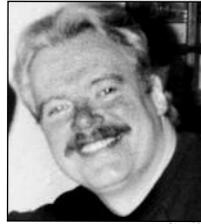
Originally, Mike was to pencil the book and Jerry would ink it. Very quickly, though, it got switched around so that, except for the first couple of covers, Jerry became the penciler and Mike the inker. Mike did most of the actual developmental drawings, but with plenty of input from Jerry. When DC worked out a creators' contract, and then just a couple of years ago when they agreed to give us a small payment each issue for that recent, short-lived *Infinity, Inc.* series that had little to do with our creation, the company wanted to count Jerry as the creating artist, getting that half of the royalties. Jerry and I insisted both times that Mike get an equal share; he deserved it. Dann deserved half of my half, of course, but since I turned all the checks over to her, she didn't complain.

Unlike on *Arak*, Dann and I co-wrote *Infinity* from the beginning, co-plotting it, with Dann usually, if not always, doing the first draft on the script, which I then rewrote. Not that she was openly credited as co-writer right away; I had to take it slow in that area.

JA: *I wondered how your writing collaboration went. I always figured it would be whatever was expedient when something needed to be done.*

THOMAS: Some plots for some titles I wrote alone—especially on *All-Star Squadron*, though even there we often verbally co-plotted. Eventually

I wanted to sign some of the stories "Roy & Dann Thomas." Before that, she just got a co-plotting credit, even though she had often contributed to the dialogue, as well. Sometimes the two of us fought like cats and dogs, especially when I changed something for



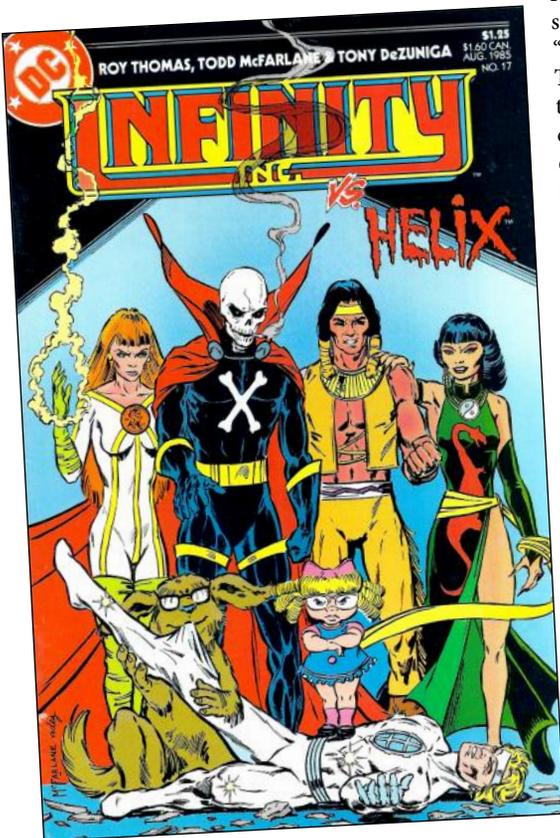
Brain Drain

Mike Machlan in a 1999 photo—and perhaps the only one of his conceptual drawings for the *Infinity, Inc.* series which hasn't been previously published either in *A/E* V3#1, or #44. This was primarily an adaptation of the original Brainwave's second "look," from *All-Star Comics* #58-59 (Jan.-April 1976). [©2011 DC Comics.]

what she felt was the worse. Sometimes I'm sure she was right, because I'd be in a hurry since I was jumping around between writing comics and movies, and some inconsistency or mistake might slip in. It got a bit stormy sometimes, but lots of collaborations are like that. Although I have to say, Gerry Conway's and mine never was. But then, Dann's and mine has lasted a lot longer. [mutual laughter]

JA: *You've gone on the record as saying that you didn't want to create characters for the comics companies, because you wouldn't own them. But you apparently changed your mind to some extent here.*

THOMAS: Well, in this case I had contracts with DC that called for me to own a piece of characters I created—not in the sense of controlling them, or being able to take them to a different company or medium, but at least in the sense of getting royalties when they were used. We all still get money whenever DC does a toy or some such with Jade or Obsidian or whomever. Arak was once was a toy figure; I forget if characters like Tsunami or Amazing-Man from *All-Star Squadron* ever were. Oddly, DC gave me a piece of Neptune Perkins when we started *Young All-Stars*, even though I told them he'd really been created by Gardner Fox, with



Helix The Cats

One of the highlights of the post-Ordway-ε-Machlan era of *Infinity, Inc.* was the "nuclear family" of mutants ("genomorphs") called Helix: Penny Dreadful, Mr. Bones, Arak Wind-Walker, Tao Jones, Kritter, ε Baby Boom. Seen here is the cover of issue #17 (Aug. 1985). Pencils by Todd McFarlane; inks by Tony DeZuniga. Arak Wind-Walker was presumably a descendant of the original Son of Thunder. Later, a couple of editorial geniuses changed most that was unique about the characters, getting rid of Mr. Bones' rhyming talk and even costume. Nor did those staffers ever understand Baby Boom or Kritter, apparently being unable to get their minds around the *Tin Drum* interview with the Vampire inspiration for the child-sized yet young-adult Babe—and believing Kritter to be a dog with human intelligence instead of what he always was, a computer-whiz boy mutated into doglike form. A *Helix* limited series was scheduled right after *Infinity*'s cancellation, but that got stalled and inanelly chipped away at and was never published, although the first issue was plotted. To quote satirist Stan Freberg, Roy was finding much of his later experience at DC "like being nibbled to death by ducks." [©2011 DC Comics.]

The Annotated *Alter-Ego* #1

A 1965 & 2011 Look Backward At The Origins Of Jerry Bails' Epoch-Making 1961 Fanzine

Original Article & 2011 Notes by Roy Thomas

Introduction

At the risk of repeating myself—and since an impatient few among you may not read the deathless editorial on pp. 4-5:

Fifty years ago this very month—at the tail end of March 1961—Jerry G. Bails released into the U.S. mails the first, frail frigate of what would ere long become an amateur armada: the premier issue of *Alter-Ego*. It can be called the first true comic book fanzine... certainly the first such that had ever been devoted primarily to heroic-adventure comics. I was privileged to have been invited to be the sole other contributor to that historic little publication.

Although by then both of us were well aware of Dick & Pat Lupoff's 1960-birthing, mimeographed science-fiction fanzine *Xero* and its groundbreaking comics-nostalgia series best known as "All in Color for a Dime," Jerry was content to put out his own zine by means of a lesser technology. By #4, however, he would switch to photo-offset printing, a distinct improvement.

In 1962 Jerry decided to turn *Alter-Ego* over to artist Ronn Foss and a couple of his associates, so he himself could concentrate on other projects, such as collecting data on comics creators, the beginnings of what ultimately became the Who's Who of American Comic Books. In late 1962 and 1963 Ronn published issues #5 & 6, dropping the hyphen out of the title. In 1964, Ronn in turn decided to relinquish the zine's reins to a third editor/publisher... our mutual fan-friend Bill ("Biljo") White of Columbia, Missouri. I was slated to be Biljo's editorial helpmeet, much as I'd been Jerry's. However, before he really got started on what would've been his initial issue, Biljo decided he'd prefer simply supplying art rather than writing, editing, and overseeing the printing and mailing. Thus, at his invitation, and with a mixture of enthusiasm and reluctance, I took over *Alter Ego* as editor and publisher, commencing with #7, in the fall of '64.

By the time I produced A/E #8 early the next year, despite my duties as a high school teacher in the St. Louis area, and with Jerry's blessing, I'd decided to put together a photo-offset reprint of the best material from the first three, spirit-duplicator-printed issues. For a special feature therein, I would write "The *Alter Ego* Story"—"telling how super-hero fandom's first zine was created." (I called it "super-hero fandom" in this instance to avoid claiming any chronological priority over Don & Maggie Thompson's mimeographed *Comic Art*, a fanzine devoted to comic strips and comic books as a medium; CA #1 seems to have hit the



First Look

(Above:) This "house ad" from *Alter Ego* [Vol. I] #8 (Winter 1965), which came out early in that year, included the first mention of the "Alter Ego Story" which Roy intended to write for a publication to be called *The Bestest from Alter Ego* Nos. 1-3. Art & text by RT. [©2011 Roy Thomas.]

(Left:) That art was a parody of the cover of *Justice League of America* #31 (Nov. 1964), the issue that had—finally!—inducted Hawkman into the group. Pencils by Mike Sekowsky, inks by Murphy Anderson. [©2011 DC Comics.]

mails a week or so after A/E #1, but had been in the planning stages months longer. I don't recall ever really thinking of our burgeoning movement as "super-hero fandom." To me, it was "comic[s] fandom.")

Of course, the ideal person to have written this recent history would have been Jerry himself, but he showed no inclination to do so. However, to assist me in scribing my tale of the origins of the fanzine, he sent me copies he had saved of most of the correspondence we had exchanged since November 1960, when we'd first contacted each other. (I wasn't prescient enough to have made carbon copies of my own letters, or for the most part to have saved Jerry's to me.)

I had written the piece just about to the point where we'd commenced work on the second issue before I realized that, because of my new pro-comics job offer in New York, *The Bestest of Alter Ego* Nos. 1-3 wasn't gonna happen... at least not for a while.

As it worked out, my manuscript sat on the shelf until 1997, when my new correspondent and friend Bill Schelly, author of the landmark 1995 book *The Golden Age of Comic Fandom*, and I decided to assemble a compilation of the best material from A/E #1-11, which had been published between 1961 and 1978. Bill's Hamster Press would be the publisher of record; he and I would co-edit, with the blessings of and some participation by Jerry Bails and Ronn Foss.

To give that decades-old material context, Bill and I decided that most of my "Alter Ego Story" should be printed in our book. As indeed it was, along with my 1965 Bestest League cartoon which mentioned the proposed Bestest of Alter Ego Nos. 1-3, the first part of my initial (Nov. 3, 1960) letter to Gardner Fox, and Jerry's thank-you note of Feb. 12, 1961, to Fox and Schwartz for their generosity to him during his New York stay. "The Alter Ego Story" was in 1997, and remains today, the most complete and accurate accounting which is ever likely to exist concerning the events culminating in the publication of Alter-Ego [Volume 1] #1.

Bill's and my trade paperback *Alter Ego: The Best of the Legendary Comics Fanzine* was a modest success in 1997, with some 1500 copies distributed before it went out of print. In 2008 *TwoMorrows* issued a second edition, which is still in print.

This celebration of the 50th anniversary of *Alter-Ego* #1 seemed to cry out for inclusion of "The Alter Ego Story," utilizing the three above-mentioned art spots plus a few additional ones. However, rather than simply reprint the text, this time I wanted to annotate it fully, examining the article in detail with the advantage of 45+ years' worth of additional hindsight. Accordingly, below, after every un-italicized paragraph or so of the original text, you'll find new comments by Yours Truly, written in italics [and between brackets], toned, and preceded by the bold notation "2011:"

So let's get started. To repeat what Bill and I wrote in 1997:

"Step into your time machine and set the dial for the year 1960—when Dwight D. Eisenhower was President of the United States... when the Silver Age of Comics was a-borning...."

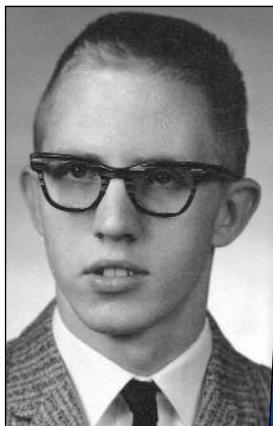
Alter Ego owes its existence to the Justice League of America. It's as simple as that, actually.

Having learned to read on *All-Star Comics* as a child of five, I had long harbored a latent nostalgic feeling for the Justice Society and its ilk. In fact, when the last issue of *All-Star* had been followed by the putrid mess known as *All-Star Western*, I had vowed to one day possess every single issue of my favorite comic—and had, in desperation, taken up reading *The Marvel Family* with a new vengeance.

[2011: Too true, except that in 1965 I was way too hard on *All-Star Western*. It wasn't a half-bad comic, containing as it did stories drawn by Carmine Infantino, Gil Kane, Frank Giacoia, and Alex Toth, three of whom had worked on 1947-51 "Justice Society" stories in *All-Star Comics*. Still, it was just another relatively undistinguished cowboy comic, while the Justice Society had been one of the most important concepts in comics history.]

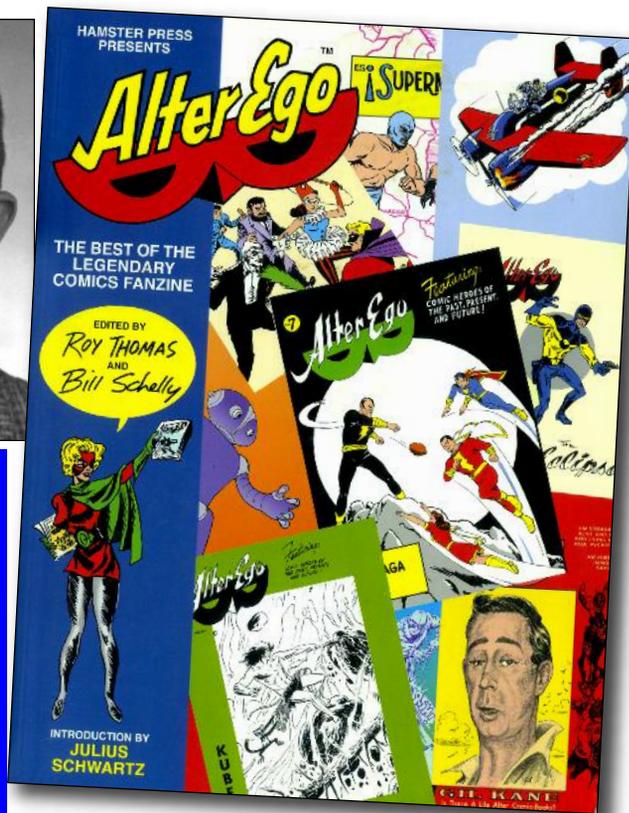
So when, without fanfare, *The Brave and the Bold* began carrying the adventures of the JLA, I was overjoyed. After the last of the three trial issues was read and digested, I could not contain myself any longer. I wrote a letter to editor Julius Schwartz, congratulating him on his superhero comics in general, and the Justice League of America in particular.

I asked if I might know the name and address of the writer of these stories, so I could express my thanks to him in person. In that day before editors of one-shot comic fanzines had cluttered his desk with dozens of



Portrait Of The Editor As A Young Whatever

(Above:) Reluctant as we are to print it yet again: a 1961 photo of Roy Thomas, then near to graduating from college at age 20. (Right:) The cover of the 1997 book *Alter Ego: The Best of the Legendary Comics Fanzine*, edited by Roy T. and Bill Schelly. That of the 2008 *TwoMorrows* edition is virtually identical. The second edition of this nearly-200-page trade paperback is still available from *TwoMorrows* [Art ©2011 the respective copyright holders.]



requests every day for exclusive 10,000-word autobiographies, Julius Schwartz was kind enough to send me the home address of Gardner F. Fox—who, he added, had also written the first three dozen or so JSA tales. He also suggested that there, rather than at the National offices themselves, was the place to search for the back issues of *All-Star* after which I lusted so vocally.

[2011: From time to time, I've written that Julie sent me Gardner's home address "unbidden"—but my 1965 memory, being only four-plus years after the fact, is doubtless far more accurate. I asked for it... and Julie obliged. Whether or not he first checked with Fox is not known to me.]

Needless to say, the mailman was still on our block when I began to type a nice long letter to Gardner Fox, lauding him for his recent JLA-Amazo episode and offering to buy any old *All-Stars* or related comics collecting dust in his attic.

[2011: Lord knows how I'd have paid for them, being a college senior at the time. By then, I'd even given up my part-time job at the Palace Theatre in Jackson, Missouri. My only hope of financial solvency was to graduate the following summer, having gone through college in three years. Which duly occurred. The graduating, I mean... not the financial solvency.]

Fox's reply was gracious and understanding. He stated, however, that only a few months before the decision to revive the JSA as the JLA, he had sold his remaining *All-Stars* to one Jerry G. Bails, with whom he had been corresponding off and on for years concerning the JSA, its authors, and its artists. He gave me, however, Jerry's address and suggested that we might enjoy getting in touch with each other.

[2011: Since the decision to launch the Justice League had been made at least a year prior to my letters to Julie and Gardner, which followed hard on the heels of the group's third and final newsstand try-out in *The Brave and the Bold* #30 (cover-dated July '60), that tallies with my recollection, based on later seeing letters exchanged between Jerry and Gardner, that Jerry had

purchased Fox's bound volumes of All-Star Comics #1-34 a couple of years before we got in contact with each other.]

Accordingly, on November 21, 1960—just one day before my twentieth birthday—I dashed off a letter to “Mr. Bails”:

“The two of us do not know each other, but I discovered recently that we have at least one thing very much in common—we are both great devotees of the old Justice Society of America, which appeared some years ago in *All-Star Comics*.”

I followed this with an offer to buy any *All-Stars* he might be willing to sell, and an expression of a desire to read any he might be willing to loan, informed him that I was a senior at Southeast Missouri State College in Cape Girardeau and a future high school teacher, and then plopped my hopeful missive in the nearest mailbox.

[2011: *More likely I took it to the post office. I wouldn't have wanted to take a chance with such a valuable and urgent letter. I'm glad I dated my communications, at least; Jerry had a maddening habit of failing to date many of his own.*]

A few days later, on a Saturday morning, I received in the mail two of the most pleasant surprises of my young life: a package containing worn and partially incomplete copies of *All-Star Comics* #4-6, and a letter from one Jerry G. Bails of Detroit, Michigan.

[2011: *I'm not sure if Jerry's letter was sent separately, or inside the package. I still remember vividly the state of the three comics:*



307 Greenaferry Road
Jackson, Missouri
November 3, 1960

Dear Mr. Fox,

I hope you do not mind my writing to you at your home address, but I obtained it from Mr. Schwartz of National Comics because I wanted to write a letter personally to the man who has given me so many hours of pleasant comic reading over my twenty years (as of the 22nd of this month, that is). I'm not just a person who can't read anything else—as a matter of fact, I have an A- college grade average. It's just that I like the super-hero comics which DC puts out, especially "Justice League of America." I read the old "All-Star Comics" from the age of five years old, before I was in grade school, and I've liked them ever since. From the demise of "All-Star" till the revival of Flash in 1956 I didn't read too many, but now I have a renewed interest in Flash, Green Lantern, et al.



AUTOMATICALLY, I STARED OUT THE WINDOW -- AND WHAT I SAW MADE SOMETHING CLICK INSIDE ME...

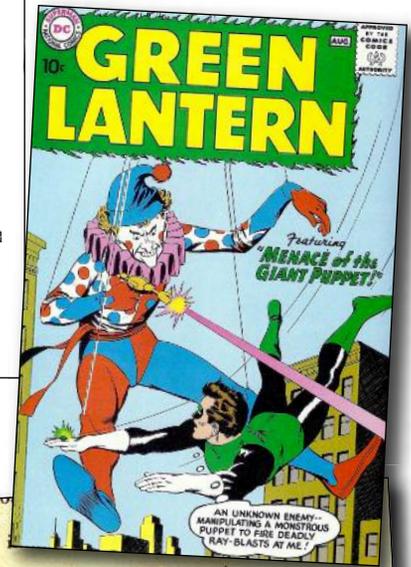
THAT SPACESHIP! IT'S EXACTLY AS THE WAY I DESCRIBED IT IN MY LOST STORY!

On DC Street
(Clockwise from above left:)

The beginning of Roy Thomas' 11-3-60 letter to Gardner Fox.
(Photocopy provided by Michael T. Gilbert.)

The first letter of Roy's that was printed in any comic book appeared in *Green Lantern* #1 (July-Aug. 1960), as partly seen at right; so Julie was already familiar with his name by the time he wrote asking to be put into contact with the author of the new "Justice League of America" tales in *The Brave and the Bold*. Thanks to Matthew Peets. [©2011 DC Comics.]

A year after *Alter-Ego* #1, DC writer Gardner Fox (seen at right in above panel) and editor Julius Schwartz (center) would co-star in that odd four-color yarn "The Strange Adventure That Really Happened!" in *Strange Adventures* #140 (May 1962). The cigar-smoking gent at left is production chief Ed Eisenberg. Script by Fox; art by Sid Greene. Thanks to Bill Schelly. [©2011 DC Comics.]



Dear Editor,
Although I am well past what is normally considered the "comic book age," I still find time to enjoy a few of the ones you at DC publish, especially WONDER WOMAN, WORLD'S FINEST COMICS, THE FLASH, and now GREEN LANTERN, if, as I hope, you star him in a magazine of his own. I learned to read on the old FLASH COMICS and especially ALL STAR COMICS, so I have a strong attachment to some of its characters, and am especially glad

All-Star #4 was complete except for the cover (and perhaps a missing four-page center section)... #5 was complete, cover and all, and in good condition... and #6 was minus the cover and the first and last two-sided pages of the interior, so that the first panel I saw of its story (p. 3) depicted The Flash scolding Johnny Thunder for using his Thunderbolt to try to force his way into the JSA as the speedster's replacement. The total retail value of those three comics today would probably be something like \$1000, if not more. The real shock I found in the mags was Hour-Man, who appeared in all three issues; I would never even have heard of him before, unless Julie had mentioned him in a recent letters column.]

After glancing for a few moments at the comics—which I had never seen before, as I had been only a few months old when they had come out—I opened the letter. It began:

“Dear Roy,

“I can't begin to tell you how happy I am to find another *All-Star* enthusiast after all these years. I've been a fan since the first Justice Society adventure appeared in *All-Star Comics* #3 (Winter 1941). In 1945, I began my campaign to collect all the back issues of the magazine, and in 1951, when the JSA was dropped, I began my campaign for a revival of this old favorite. Just last year, as you know, my efforts finally paid off. Now, I'm off on a new campaign—to make the Justice League of America more popular than Superman. First, I want to see the *JLA* published monthly; then I want to see it published as a giant edition. I hope you will join me in working for these goals.”

Across The Wide Missouri

Jerry Bails in 1960, on the balcony of his Kansas City, MO, apartment, before he moved to Detroit to begin his college teaching career. Courtesy of Jean Bails.

[2011: Actually, as I learned later, Jerry misspoke [miswrote?] slightly in a couple of places in this letter. Besides the date of All-Star #3 being Winter of 1940—though of course that meant the winter that ended in March of '41—he was consistent in later accounts that the first issue of the mag he'd ever seen had been not #3 but #6. In fact, the chances are that the very copy of #6 which he'd just sent me was the very same, much-read issue he had purchased nearly two decades earlier.]

He went on to state that he had duplicates of #2-8, 10, and 18-24, but that he had just offered them (through Julius Schwartz) to National, whose own files were incomplete. So far Schwartz had neither accepted nor declined his offer, and until he did so, Jerry felt he could hardly offer the comics to me. In the meantime, as he said, all was not lost, as he had sent me some old, worn triplicates of issues 4-6.

[2011: I'm a bit unclear on whether National/DC wound up with some of those other fifteen issues. Several of them were among the comics Jerry sold less than a year later via Alter Ego and the pages of his second fanzine creation, The Comicollector, the first so-called "adzine." At any rate, I never got another shot at them... but, though I was naturally disappointed, I wasn't about to complain!]

In the more personal part of the letter, he observed that we had other things in common besides our JSA/JLA interests. He, too, was a Missourian, having done most of his undergraduate work at the University of Kansas City. He had moved to Detroit just that preceding July to become Assistant Professor of Natural Science at Wayne State University. He hoped we could get together sometime, perhaps when he returned to Kansas City to visit relatives and friends.

[2011: Weird the way Alter Ego stalwarts seem to come in clusters. Two Missourians would soon get together to launch the fanzine. And, between 1999 and 2001, several guys living in the Carolinas would combine forces on A/E, Vol. 3: myself in rural South Carolina... John Morrow of Raleigh, North Carolina... and, with issue #9, interviewer (and soon associate editor) Jim Amash of Greensboro, NC. In none of the above instances, however, did geographical proximity have anything to do with the fact that we wound up working together!]

This was the beginning of a long and voluminous correspondence, which in less than five months added up to in excess of 100 pages.

[2011: Rather more than 50% of those pages, I should add, came from my own portable Smith-Corona electric typewriter. But Jerry wasn't exactly a shrinking violet himself.]

Among other things, I mentioned an idea that I wanted to see reinstated in comics. *Star-Spangled Comics* had, for years, contained a teenage bunch of boys in association with a shield-toting crimebuster called the Guardian (invented by Simon and Kirby, who, I was to discover later, had also created the shield-toting Captain America years earlier). I wanted to see such an idea used in connection with National's weakest super-hero, J'onn J'onzz, or perhaps with a revival of another old favorite, Robotman.

[2011: It may seem odd to today's reader that I was unaware of Joe Simon & Jack Kirby's connection with Captain America Comics—but after all, by the time I started reading that *Timely/Marvel* title circa 1946, they were five years gone from the feature—and from *Timely*. Even the "Newsboy Legion" stories I was recalling (apparently as the "News Legion") had, by then, only covers that were drawn by the S&K team, with lesser hands

imitating their style inside. Not that I knew that, either. The *Grand Comics Database* was still several decades away.]

His reply was that, besides liking my idea for a "news legion," he had one of his own, which he had suggested to Gardner Fox already in a letter the previous summer: "I also think that DC should revive the Atom as a character like the old Dollman. Do you remember him?"

Did I? The idea immediately obsessed me that a new Atom should be the next hero to be revived after Hawkman joined the JLA. (Ha.) The next day (December 4), I fired off a letter myself to editor Schwartz, and asked Bails who he thought would be the best artist for such a comic. (His answer: Murphy Anderson, who, of course, did do the inking, until he took over Hawkman and left the *Mighty Mite* to Sid Greene.)

[2011: The exact genesis of the 1961 Atom—the first of the five "revivals" to date that didn't strongly resemble the Golden Age hero who had inspired it—has been in dispute ever since. Julie believed he had the idea of a six-inch Atom on his own and didn't recall Gardner Fox showing him Jerry's letter dated August 29, 1960—though Julie definitely saw it, since he printed most of it—all except the sentence that mentioned *The Atom and Doll Man*—in a JLA letters page. Moreover, artist Gil Kane was absolutely positive that he came up with the idea of a miniaturized Atom independently sometime in late 1960, and that he even drew some sketches which he'd had colored and presented to Julie in order to sell the notion. Amazingly, a number of the letters exchanged on



Paper Doll

The artist of the splash page of "The Doll Man" for *Feature Comics* #116 (Nov. 1947) may (or may not) be Bill Ward, according to the *Grand Comics Database*; nobody's even guessing at the name of the scripiter. [Doll Man TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

the subject in 1960 and early 1961 between Jerry, Gardner, and Julie still exist... and those notes, as well as a phone interview with Gil that I did in 1999, became the basis for a detailed study I wrote of this Rashomon-style situation for A/E, Vol. 3, #2, which I feel was pretty much the definitive treatment of the subject.]

Our first attempt at working together on any common goal came about as a result of a three-page letter I received from my college-professor correspondent on December 13. It began:

"I am 'Jerry' to my friends, 'Mister' to those who don't know me, and 'Doctor' to those who insist on formalities. I hope that you are one of the first group." (So, exit the "Mr. Bails" bit.)

[2011: *I'd been raised to address strangers and new acquaintances as "Mr.," "Mrs.," or "Miss" (no "Ms." in those days) until and unless invited to refer to them differently. It took me decades—and a move to southern California, where no one I met at my Burbank apartment complex seemed to have a last name—to rid myself of that convention. I'm not sure it was an improvement.]*

Jerry went on to state that he had sent Julius Schwartz a rather complete description of the Atom, who should have only limited power (as I concurred). His suggestion was the following:

"Al Pratt, a young physics professor, discovers how to replace the normal atoms of his body with heavy metastable isotopes. For an hour at a time, he can compress the atoms of his body and acquire a six-inch stature with strength to smash ordinary matter with some exertion, and to leap several stories high. If trapped in a lead box at the end of his 'hour,' the tiny titan can't absorb the cosmic rays he needs to resume normal size and he shrinks into a subatomic world, return from which is always replete with new danger."

He also mentioned that he had included my idea for a group of boy companions, who might carry the main action, with the Atom helping them—perhaps even unknown to anyone but the boys. "What I really wish," he went on, "is that I had the time to write an occasional Atom script for *Showcase*. Maybe you and I could collaborate in some way and submit a script and cover panel to Julie. How about it?"

[2011: *Ah, the confidence of youth! Jerry may have been seven years older than I, and an assistant college prof, but he brashly seems to have assumed that the only obstacle between ourselves and the sale of a script to DC and Julie Schwartz was the time in which to write it. His enthusiasm carried me along with it. Actually, I never got the impression that a career in comics was a particular ambition of Jerry's—to him it would've been merely an avocation, a bit of moonlighting—nor, at that stage, had it ever occurred to me, either, that a young man half a continent away from New York City could ever get a job writing in that field. Still, if Jerry wanted to give scripting a try....]*

This suggestion, plus the fact that Jerry offered to send me his duplicate *All-Stars* to read over the Christmas vacation, cheered me immensely, and I immediately plunged myself into the project.

In fact, even before receipt of this letter, I had already dashed off my own two-page synopsis of an Atom origin which in many details resembled his own concept. In my version, Al Pratt was a college student (as the old one had been), who was given his power to shrink by MOM (Molecular Order Modifier), the invention of a physics professor with whom he was friendly, and who was killed in the first story by spies. I also included a non-talking parrot named Copernicus (Copey for short) who would serve as short-range transportation for the Mighty Mite. I had even created a host of subsidiary characters: a roommate, a girl friend, and a grandmother, who would now seem like a wealthy version of Spider-Man's Aunt May.



Good, Better, Bestest?

The splash page of the 5-page chapter of "Bestest League of America" written and drawn "twice-up" by Roy on poster paper at the turn of 1960-61. It would be redrawn on typing paper in Feb.-March '61, and that version, as traced and slightly edited by Jerry Bails, would appear in *Alter-Ego* #1. The five "twice-up" pages were finally printed in Bill Schelly's anthology of *Fandom's Finest Comics* in 1997. [©2011 Roy Thomas.]

[2011: *Putting together "The Alter Ego Story" several years after the fact, I realized that I probably shouldn't have gotten carried away and sent my own ideas to Julie without clearing them first with Jerry—but my new Detroit friend wasn't the only one who was sometimes transported by his enthusiasms. Interestingly, I don't seem to have included my idea of a "kid group" in my version of the new Atom—but Jerry did include it in his.]*

At the very end of this December 17 letter to Jerry, I added as an afterthought a paragraph that was to have far-reaching repercussions as far as my own leisure time for several years was concerned:

"Oh, by the way, also during the January lay-off, I begin work on a project long dear to my heart—a *Mad*-type take-off on the JLA called the Bestest League of America, and starring Green Trashcan, Wondrous Woman, Cash, Aquariuman, and S'amm S'mithh, the Martian Manhandler, and featuring Superham, Wombatman, and Aukman. If you wish, I'll let you see it when I finish it in February or March."

I had, you see, long before done a similar parody of the JSA, as lorded over by Mean Lantern, with members Hogman, Dr. Mid-Day, Trash, Blunder Woman, and Mildrat (for Wildcat, since I didn't like Black Canary).

[2011: *As will be noticed above, super-hero comics were far from the only things I loved about the medium. Though I never liked*

THE REINCARNATION OF THE SPECTRE

By ROY THOMAS

Dr. James Corrigan sat gazing intensely at the weird, blue gem before him on his desk. He was lost in thought, remembering the strange circumstances under which he had received the jewel.....

It was only a few months before, when as a young society doctor bored with his practice, he received a cablegram from his uncle--Dr. Peter Corrigan, a physician in India. As he opened the cable, he was unable to keep from comparing his own easy life, treating rich hypochondriacs, with that of his uncle's, who had given up wealth and fame to minister to the ills of the poor in an over-populated nation.

The cable contained terrible news. His uncle, his only living relative, was dying in a small village near Bombay. Within an hour, the young doctor was on board a plane to India, hoping against hope that he could find a way to save his uncle's life.

When he arrived at the village, he was greeted by his uncle's devoted servant, Ali, who led him to his uncle's side. His uncle was sinking fast, but he recognized Jim at once. Knowing his time was short, the elderly Dr. Corrigan handed his nephew an ornate, jeweled box containing a blue Spectral Sapphire, and gasped the story of the strange gem with his final words.

"A dying Hindu fakir gave me this a few years ago," he said with difficulty, "in return for my making the last days of his life less painful. He told me that it had great and strange powers for both good and evil. He said it will bring out the best that is in man, and also the worst. I--I feel I must give it to you--perhaps you will be the one to unlock its awesome secret."

With these final words Peter Corrigan died.

From Ali, Jim learned the legend of the Spectral Sapphire. Legend says that one man, many years ago, found the secret power of the magic stone, but the legend also says it caused great fires and earthquakes, and huge monsters, to appear from out of nowhere, till finally a great hero came who drove out the monsters and saved the people of the land."

And now once again Jim found himself looking at the sapphire of mystery, before him on the desk. He thought of his uncle's phrase--"the best that is in man, and also the worst." Had his uncle really been compelled to give him the jewel, or had that just

been his imagination in a time of approaching death?

Just then a lone ray of sunlight drifted through the venetian blinds into the dimness of Jim's office, striking the gem and causing that weird phenomenon which only the Spectral Sapphire could produce--a black-and-white spectrum, with incredible degrees of darkness and brightness. Although Jim had seen this phenomenon several times in the past, it never failed to amaze him.

But this time something was different! This time the sun's lone ray struck the gem so that the spectrum fell on Jim's face, bathing half of the young doctor's features in great light and the other half in extreme blackness. Jim felt strange almost at once. His first impulse was to rise, but he stayed in his seat as if held there by a super-powerful force.

Slowly an intense drowsiness descended upon him. As he drifted ever nearer to sleep, Jim was dimly aware of two figures appearing near him, one on each side.



2011 NOTE: Perhaps because the copy of A/E VI#1 reproduced in this section was scanned by Doc Boucher from an early reprinting, Count Dis is pictured above wearing a mask. This is a misinterpretation of the drawing as it appeared in March 1961. (The Spectre's belt got lost, as well.) At left is a pen-&-ink drawing of Dis done around that time by Ye Editor.

The Missourian Chronicles

Brief Tributes to *Alter Ego* And—Ulp!—Its Ebullient Editor

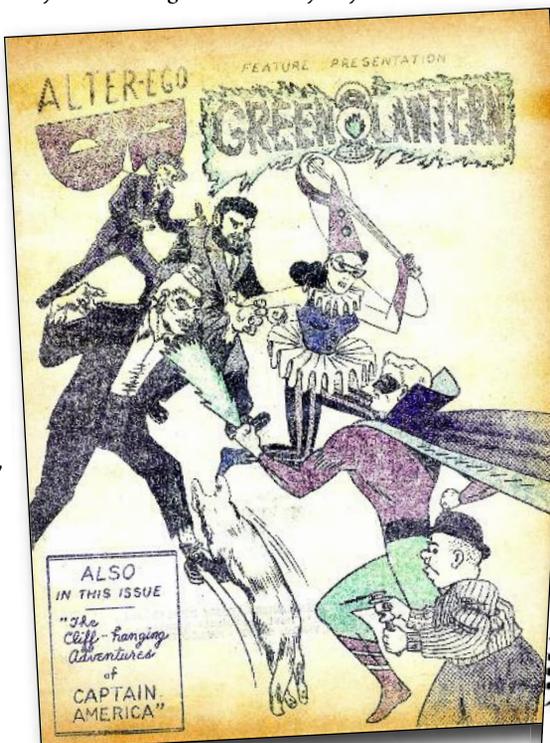
Compiled & Introduced by Jerry K. Boyd

Introduction

How often does a fanzine make it to its 100th issue? Not often. Thus, congratulations are in order to Roy Thomas (who's a native of Missouri, hence my splicing together above of his origins with Robert E. Howard's Nemedian source for tales of his favorite Cimmerian) for gathering all that much-needed history for us and for readers and historians yet to come.

And, since I'm talking history and special occasions, *Alter Ego*: Centennial presented a unique opportunity for me to ask a number of *TwoMorrows* contributors, prominent fans, and comics industry professionals to wax philosophical about A/E's importance... or to write about their favorite Thomas-written stories or series over the years... or just to relate experiences they had working with "Rascally Roy."

It became a "surprise party" of sorts, and Roy was receptive to the idea when I first told him about this project—in the fall of '09, when it was already two-thirds completed! Humbly, after he read my initial draft, Roy requested that I add a few more folks who could talk (in his words) "more about *Alter Ego* and less about me," and I complied.

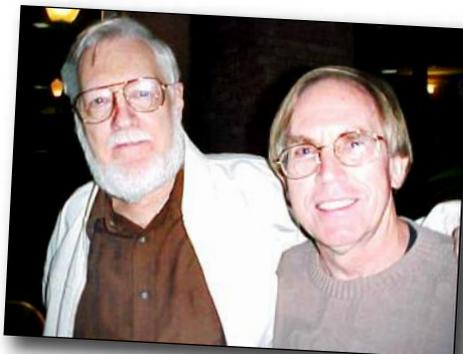


Hitting A Triple

(Clockwise from directly above:) A/E founder Jerry G. Bails' cover for A/E [Vol. 1] #3, a montage of work by various Golden Age "Green Lantern" artists, which has faded a bit since it rolled off his spirit duplicator (in color) in 1961— Roy Thomas with Jerry Bails, at their last meeting (in Detroit, 2002) before Jerry's Nov. 26, 2006 passing; photo by Dann Thomas— And the flyer that was handed out at 1999 comics conventions to advertise A/E, Vol. 3, #1.

A personal note from Roy re "The Missourian Chronicles": "I feel I should state up front that I'd hoped this piece would deal only with *Alter Ego*, not with my comics career. Still, Jerry K. Boyd had already basically put it together by the time I first saw it, so there was little I could do but accept his heartfelt fait accompli and say... thanks, Jerry." Photo by Dann Thomas. [Green Lanterns, Streak, Solomon Grundy, Harlequin, Vandal Savage, Gambler, Flashes, Atom, Jade, Fury, Batman, & Hawkman TM & ©2011 DC Comics; Spider-Man, Thing, & Silver Surfer TM & ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.; other art ©2011 Jerry Ordway.]

So let's take a few pages to celebrate the 100th issue of A/E, Vol. 3—plus the 50th anniversary of Jerry Bails and Roy's *Alter Ego* [Vol. 1] #1 in March 1961—as well as writer/editor Roy!



Many responses were sent via e-mail; others were made via phone calls, and I'd like to thank several of the participants for including unpublished or rarely seen art to go along with their commentaries....

RICHARD LUPOFF
writer; editor of 1960s fanzine *Xero*

Alter Ego #100?! That's hard to believe. Fifty years?! You've gotta be kidding! It was only a couple of weeks ago, wasn't it? Pat and I had barely got our fanzine *Xero* off the ground, Don and Maggie Thompson were busy starting up *Comic Art*, and Roy Thomas and Jerry Bails were putting together the inaugural issue of *Alter Ego*.

ALTER EGO™ **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT!**
IS GOING SOLO!

Yep, you heard us right! In JUNE 1999, the world's first super-hero comics fanzine will be published regularly again as a SEPARATE MAGAZINE from TWOMORROWS PUBLISHING, edited by co-founder ROY THOMAS!

HERE'S THE SPECIAL, ALL-NEW JERRY ORDWAY COVER FOR A/E, VOL. 3, #1!

AND HERE'S A SNEAK PEAK AT THE BACK (FLIP COVER BY GOLDEN AGE GREAT IRWIN HASEN!)

ALTER EGO #1

PARTIAL CONTENTS:

- STAN LEE GETS ROASTED** in Chicago, 1996, by JULIUS SCHWARTZ, among others!
- THE UNSEEN WONDER WOMAN** by GARDNER FOX, "CHARLES MOUTON," & H.G. PETER!
- Interview with ALL-STAR! GREEN LANTERN artist **IRWIN HASEN!**
- THOMAS & ORDWAY on **INFINITY, INC.!**
- PLUS:** Special features by **MICHAEL T. GILBERT GRASS GREEN BILL SCHELLY**
- ADDED BONUS:** REGULAR FEATURE—J.C. Hammerlinck's FCA (FAN/CET COLLECTORS OF AMERICA) with rare work by **MARC SWAYZE**

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From Xero To 50
 Dick & Pat Lupoff (she's on right, standing), co-publishers/editors of *Xero*, took time in 1966 to help friends Maggie Thompson (seen at left) and her husband Don—who probably took the snapshot—assemble copies of their equally legendary mimeographed fanzine *Comic Art*. Photo supplied by Maggie.

Fifty years? One hundred issues? *Alter Ego* is just getting started. I expect it to last another fifty years and another hundred issues at least—with Roy Thomas still at the helm!

RICH BUCKLER – artist/creator

What can I say about Roy Thomas? Let's see... I've known Roy and his work since the early fanzine days of the '60s. I have gone on record many times stating that he is my favorite comic book writer. Well, he was probably my favorite editor at Marvel Comics, too. If not for Roy, no Rich Buckler on *Fantastic Four* or the *Jungle Action* "Black Panther" series—and no *Deathlok*.

It was remarkably easy and rewarding to work with him a decade or so ago when he and I collaborated on two independent comics, *The Forever Warriors* and *The Invincibles*. Unfortunate that only one issue of each saw print. Maybe an opportunity will open up again for Roy and me to launch "Death Machine," a character we co-created around that same time.



That's Rich!
 Rich Buckler was seen on p. 21, so at left is a drawing of the super-hero Aegis, from *The Invincibles* one-shot comic he and Roy T. did a few years ago. The lads are determined it won't be their last co-venture; in fact, they're currently developing (believe it or not) a brand new World War II super-hero group, echoing the early days of *All-Star Squadron*. All they need is a publisher! [Aegis TM & ©2011 Rich Buckler & Roy Thomas.]
 On view above is Rich's original sketch for the cover of *A/E*, Vol. 3, #7 (2000). We figured you might enjoy seeing a few behind-the-scenes moments from the past 100 issues of this incarnation of *A/E*, spread throughout this article and issue. [JSA & JLA TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

Historians can argue to their hearts' content over who was the initiator of comics fandom. And in fact there had been articles about the comics—*Buck Rogers*, *Brick Bradford*, *Flash Gordon*, *Superman*, *Alley Oop*—in the fan press ever since the 1930s. And there was the EC Fan-Addicts Club in the '50s. Hey, I was a faithful member.

But this was a new generation, in truth a new fandom. *Xero* was actually first off the press (or more accurately, out of the mimeo tray), but *Xero* was always a hybrid comics/science fiction fanzine. *Comic Art* took in the whole field of cartooning, emphatically including newspaper strips. And *Alter Ego* was the first to cast its lot with super-hero comic books. Or at least, that's the way I recall it.

Late 1960—early '61. Why then? Why hadn't any of those earlier fumbblings toward a real comics fandom ever taken root and flourished? And why did comics fandom soar once those three fanzines made their appearance? I'll leave it to some social science major looking for a thesis topic to figure that one out. To borrow a phrase I've come across in another context, maybe it was just "comic book time."

Who would have imagined a comics fan world with hundreds of thousands of members, collectibles selling for a million dollars or more ("...and all in color for a dime"), super-hero movies among the biggest blockbusters coming out of Hollywood—a graphic novel winning the Pulitzer Prize—reprints of Golden Age comics lovingly produced on fine paper and bound in expensive cloth, and ancient Sunday pages in full size and color, comic book stores prospering in every city worthy of the name?

We pioneers—I guess you'd have to call us that—didn't set out to change the world. At least, Pat and I didn't. We were just a couple of youngsters having fun. But it seems as if we did exactly that—at least, to a sizable piece of the world.

Of course we've moved in different directions since 1960. Don Thompson and Jerry Bails, sadly, are both deceased. Maggie Thompson is a leading light in professional journalism, still covering the field of comics and cartoons. Pat Lupoff is a longtime professional bookseller, and Dick Lupoff has worked in various areas of cultural history when not writing novels and short stories of his own. But Roy Thomas is still at it, tending the home fires, defending the faith.



In terms of intellectual abilities, I would say that Roy is brilliant (he wouldn't say that, though). I would go even further, to say that he has been a continually important positive influence throughout my career. He was generous in contributing the introduction to my book *How to Draw Dynamic Comic Books*. Believe it or not, it was actually more important to me than getting Stan Lee's foreword (!). Creatively speaking, Roy could probably write a book on "How to Be a Dynamic Force in Comic Books!"



I regard my collaboration with him on *All-Star Squadron* and *The Avengers* as career high points. To say I hold him in high regard, both personally and professionally, is probably an understatement!

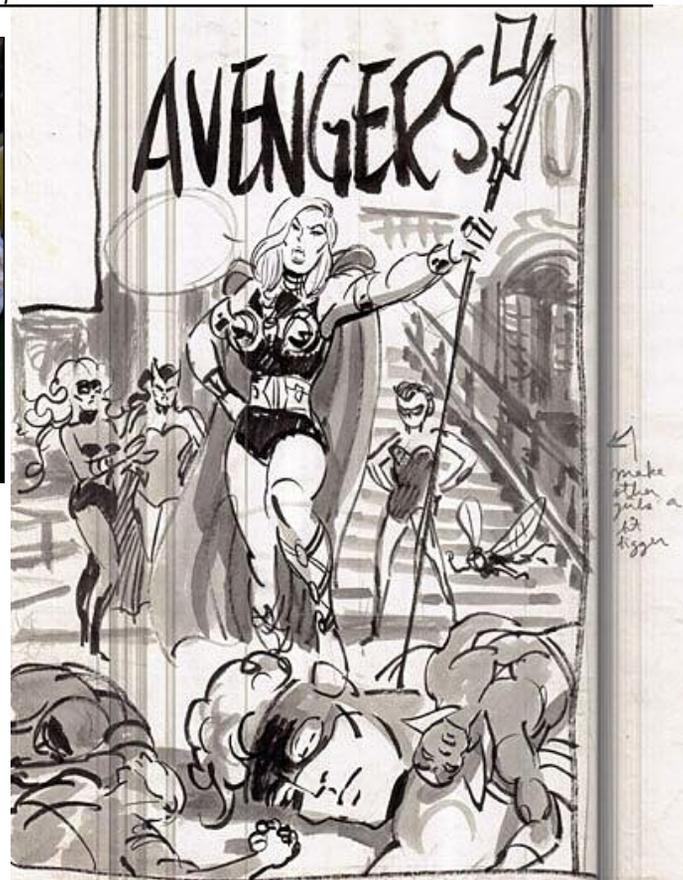
MARIE SEVERIN – artist/creator

Working with Roy was delightful because he knew all the characters, and Roy was always on target—he knew the history and development of those [Marvel] characters.

He was a professional fan... and that really helped him. Stan and Roy always let me do my own thing, and they let the creative juices flow. Roy was always professional, and it was wonderful doing comics with him.

LEE HESTER – TwoMorrows contributor

I'm a big moviegoer and it's always a pleasure taking in one of the old classics I've never seen. Some of those classics reached "perfection." Accomplishments like *An American In Paris*, *Psycho*, *The Treasure of*



This Lady Was Already Liberated!
(Above:) Marie Severin—and her cover rough for *The Avengers* #83 (Dec. 1970), featuring The Valkyrie and her Lady Liberators. The sketch was sent—with Roy's note to "make other girls a bit bigger"—to John Buscema, who penciled the finished cover. The photo appeared in the March '77 issue of the fanzine *Fans of Central Jersey*, in conjunction with Bernie Hogg's interview with Marie, which was reprinted in *A/E* #95. Thanks to Bernie, Barry Pearl, & Nick Caputo. [Art ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



the Sierra Madre, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Shane*, *West Side Story*, *Maltese Falcon*, and *Citizen Kane* (to name just a handful) could not have possibly been scored, cast, directed, or written any better than they were.

"Perfection" sometimes finds its way into comic magazines, also. From cover to cover, there are collective efforts that couldn't have been colored, lettered, inked, drawn, (and in Roy's case) written (and/or edited) better by any conceivable combo in the industry. *Conan the Barbarian* #20 is one of those comics. The Cimmerian's young-mercenary period was delivered at its best through Roy's scripting, Barry Smith's penciling, Dan Adkins' inking, and even John Costanza's innovative lettering; all added to the mind-blowing quality of the book. This was a top issue of *Conan* in a line of toppers!

That said—Roy's sensahumor should not go without a mention in his Marvel efforts. I still laugh at his great *Not Brand Echh* parodies (particularly "The Origin of The Simple Surfer!" in #13, "Captain Marvin" in #9, "The Origin of Charlie America!" in #3, "Arch and the Teenstalk" from #9, and his send-up of Stuporman's start in #7). The *Spoof* take-off on *Dark Shadows* ("Darn Shadows," issue #1) was wonderful, as well.

Dork Shadows
The splash page of the Lee Hester-lauded parody "Darn Shadows!" from *Spoof* #1 (Oct. 1970). Artist Marie Severin told Roy T. at the time that, although the youngsters in the tale were characters in the popular daytime TV gothic series *Dark Shadows*, she actually based their likenesses in the parody on what she figured Roy and then-wife Jean must've looked like as moppets! Script by RT. Thanks to Barry Pearl for the *Spoof* scan—and to Lee Hester for giving us an excuse to print it! [©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

What made these stories chart toppers? Wonderful cartooning by Marie Severin (Marvel's all-time best at the funny stuff!), Tom Sutton, and Gene Colan (all terrific talents!) all helped made it work. Yes, Roy's reached perfection in his chosen field... and given us some of his own "classic moving pictures" worth remembering.

DR. MICHAEL J. VASSALLO
 – TwoMorrows contributor

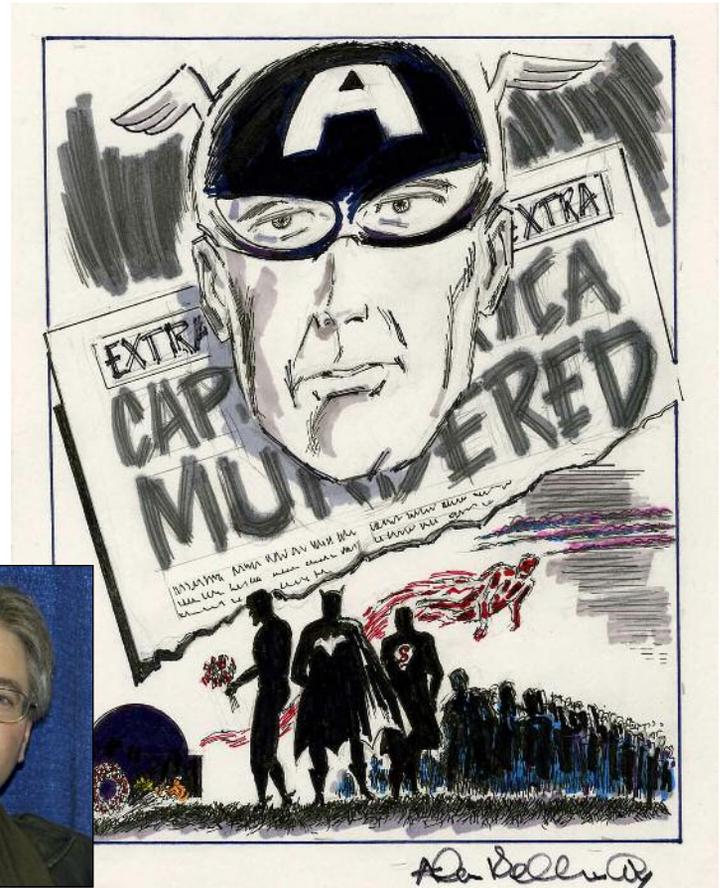
In its third incarnation, Roy's *Alter Ego* is a national treasure. There has never been a publication that allowed the deep ongoing dissection of comics history, month after month, as these 100 wonderful issues have. Nearly every major figure has been examined, company publishing histories evaluated, characters highlighted, and incredible interviews with creators both well-known and long-lost, have been conducted by Jim Amash, helped by an array of the finest fan historians and industry professionals. The material presented over the years will provide reference for future research and scholarship for years to come.

My own connection with *Alter Ego* came in the form of articles detailing Timely and Atlas creators of the 1940s and 1950s, my main area of interest and research. I thank Roy tremendously for giving me the opportunity and venue to present my own interviews of lesser-known Timely creators, wonderful artists like Allen Bellman and Marion Sitton, talents deserving to have their stories and experiences told. I was happy to shed light on Vince Fago's Timely funny-animal line and all the great creators that contributed to it. And lastly, Roy and *Alter Ego* gave me the opportunity to show fandom just how fantastic and prolific an artist Joe Maneely was for Stan Lee's Atlas line in the 1950s. Roy, congratulations on an incredible run, and may it long continue. I'm eagerly looking forward to the next 100 issues!



ERNIE COLÓN – artist/creator

I'm tempted to state that Roy Thomas is the premier writer in the history of comics.



Capping Things Off
 "Doc V."—and a drawing done a couple of years back by Golden Age Timely bullpenny Allen Bellman in response to the "Death of Captain America" storyline. Thanks to MJV & Barry Pearl for the photo, and to Allen for the art. We've no idea *who* the silhouetted funeral attendees are! [Captain America, Sub-Mariner, & Human Torch TM & ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Before anybody starts throwing ripe, vaguely organic clods at me, let's consider his output. Others have produced as much, and some few even more, material than Roy. Many have worked in as many genres as he—whether *X-Men*, *Arak*, *Son of Thunder* (which I happily worked on with him), or *Captain Carrot*. But Roy imbued his stories—not only with inner logic—but with a sense that there was real-life logic to the goings-on. A rarity in comics—a given in Roy's work.

Arak, of course, is my favorite of all his work. Never a fan of super-heroes, I jumped at the chance to draw this great character and wonderful premise. I'd gladly be drawing it still, had *Arak* been allowed to develop.

FRANK BRUNNER - artist/creator

Back in the early '70s, I had Roy Thomas' ear, so to speak. After all, he had hired me to draw "Dr. Strange"... so when I heard he was *reserving* future adaptations of Robert E. Howard stories of Conan, I quickly got on his list and reserved Howard's "The Scarlet Citadel"—one of my very favorite Conan stories of when he was King Conan!

When the time came, Roy sent me the paperback edition... and simply

Another Fragrant Hint Of Colón
 You already saw a photo of Ernie Colón on p. 15—where you were reminded that, three decades before his and writer Sid Jacobson's bestselling graphic novel adaptation of *The 9-11 Report*, Ernie penciled the *Arak/Son of Thunder* series he co-created with writers Roy & Dann Thomas. These pencils from the splash page of *Arak* #2 (Oct. 1981) appeared in the magazine *Comics Feature* #11 (Aug. 1981). [Art ©2011 DC Comics.]

“A Lot Of These Guys Have Great Stories To Tell!”

JIM AMASH Talks About His Pro Career—And About Being *Alter Ego's* Star Interviewer

Interview Conducted & Transcribed by Bruce MacIntosh

A/E EDITOR'S NOTE: For roughly 90% of the life of this volume of *Alter Ego*, Jim Amash has been a virtually every-issue contributor—and, for nearly as long, one of its two associate editors. In the course of human events, he's conducted in-depth interviews with everybody from Lee Ames to Les Zakarin. So Ye Editor decided that it was high time Jim himself was interviewed in these pages. A while ago, Bruce MacIntosh sent in a long talk with Jim that had appeared in the pages of CFA-APA, the *apa-zine* of a group of avid comic art collectors. (“Apa” stands for “amateur press alliance,” a term from science-fiction fandom which refers to a group of fans who print and mail their own smallish fanzines to a sort of “central mailer”—Jerry Bails’ term—who assembles them all into one big package or fanzine and sends them out to members only. And that’s all ye know or need to know about that.) The interview was, alas, far too long to be printed in its entirety, but we’ve excerpted major parts concerning Jim’s life and training, his interest in comics and their history, the comics conventions he helped put on, his pro artwork, and—because this is, after all, the 100th issue



Sit-In

(Above:) Jim & Heidi Amash with artist Joe Sinnott in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, 2009, taken by Joe’s daughter Kathy Kiriny. (Left:) A caricature (or perhaps an almost photographic likeness) of genial Jim drawn by Joe. Jim has filled in for Joe from time to time on the long-running *Spider-Man* newspaper strip, whose Sunday page Joe regularly inks. [Art ©2011 Joe Sinnott.]

of this volume of *A/E*—his relationship to this magazine and to the professionals whose lives and careers he has so ably chronicled for the past decade. It will surprise no one who’s followed *A/E* for any reasonable part of the past decade that they’ll find numerous insights about Golden and Silver Age comics talents in the pages that follow—and see the end of the interview for information as to how to access the entire conversation. You won’t be sorry. —Roy.]

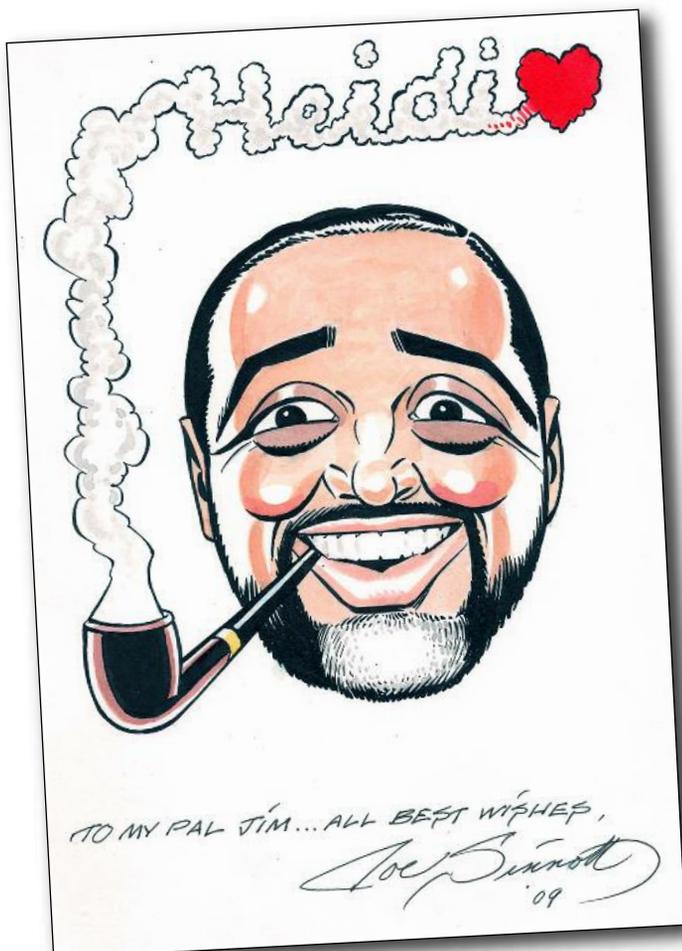
Catching The Comic Book Bug

BRUCE D. MacINTOSH: Let’s start at the beginning. Tell me about your background, where you were born...

JIM AMASH: I was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania... the home of the railroads. There were a lot of railroads there. You know the old saying, “across the tracks”? That’s exactly where we lived. The house we lived in was probably built in 1886. I sometimes think one of the reasons I like history is because I kind of grew up in it.

I’ve always loved history. I can still remember what the cover of my first grade history book looked like. And in that book, there were some paintings, some engravings, and etchings of historic events and personalities like Daniel Boone. Stuff like that. That really got me interested in drawing.

The thing that *really* got me interested in drawing, though, was George Reeves. As a little kid, I’d watch him on a black-&-white set, flying





Memories

Of his 1989 drawing above, called “Billy and the Gang,” Jim says: “Billy Ray was a dear friend of mine who died; he’s the bearded fellow in the tree. I drew Heidi and myself and A/E contributor Bob Millikin in the piece, too. Harvey Kurtzman was so taken by this drawing that he requested that I give him the first print struck. I got a call from him when he got it, and he said, ‘I love this piece. Every time I look at it, I see it in a different light. The message you’re sending is messing with my head.’ Harvey framed the print and it hung over his drawing table the rest of his life. I’ve never gotten over that.” [Art ©2011 Jim Amash.]

BDM: You know a lot of comic history that preceded you by 20 years.

AMASH: In 1978, I went to my first comic book convention. The first professional I ever met was Manly Wade Wellman, and I couldn’t stay away from him. I know I asked him stupid questions, because I didn’t know any better. I would have loved to have had that opportunity years later, when I started interviewing pros about their comic book careers. Wellman was impressive to me, the way he carried himself, like the very proud Southern gentleman that he was. He wasn’t really a *gentleman*, because he could cuss like a sailor! [laughter] But he had an authority in the way he walked, and the way he talked. He was very impressive to me.

Education

BDM: So, how did your parents feel about your comics obsession?

AMASH: I heard, “What do you want to do that for? You can’t make a living at it!” And I said, “Well, *these* guys are making a living at it!” They’d say, “They live in New York. You gonna go to New York?” “I sure am!” I was an A-student in school, but I didn’t think I was going to be a doctor or a lawyer. Can you imagine: *Doctor Amash*? Only if I could be a doctor like Moe Howard... or Curly, at least. [laughter] I always knew I was going to be an artist and a writer, and nothing was going to change my mind.

BDM: When you were a kid, did you set out to become a comic artist?

AMASH: Yes. But around 1972 I became interested in fine arts, when—I think it was on CBS—they played a five-part documentary on the life of Leonardo Da Vinci. When I saw this documentary, showing the scope of this *brilliant* man, it made me realize that art was more than just comic books. Now, I had a dual interest in the arts: cartooning and fine art.

I decided to concentrate on both when I went to college. If I couldn’t be a cartoonist, I would be a fine artist. Or vice versa. Not knowing—as my father used to say, “What do you want to be an artist for? They work all their lives, they don’t make anything, they die broke, and then if they are any good, their heirs make the millions off their work!” There was some truth to that, though I don’t imagine my work will ever be that valuable.

I went to East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina, then transferred to UNC-Greensboro, where I got my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Fine Art.

The Comics Shop & The Conventions

Then there was Acme Comics in Greensboro, which is where I still live. I made friends with the guys who were running it, Tom Wimbish and John Butts. It was like, “Hey, man, there’s somebody else who loves comics besides me!” They were older than me by about 6 or 7 years, and knew more about comics than I did. And both of them could draw, I mean, *really* well. In fact, if either of them had any stick-to-itiveness, they would have both made solid careers in comics or cartooning. Soon I was helping out there, and the next thing I knew, I was *working* there.

Tom and John Butts decided to put on conventions. They did the first one without my help, though I was the one with the contact information for Murphy Anderson. He became their first guest. The second year, Murphy came back and he got Will Eisner to come. By the summer of 1985, John Butts left, and we decided to do another convention. We decided to get that Jack Kirby fella. Since I was already friends with Jack, I got him to come. By then, I was *actively* helping to put the shows together as a co-manager. Later that year, we got Alex Toth as our main guest, and I co-chaired that show, too.

By 1989, I was running Acme by myself, and I did the conventions by myself. It became a matter of, “Who am I going to *get*? Who do I want to see?” Archie Goodwin gave me Harvey Kurtzman’s phone number. Getting him as a guest took a little doing because he was trying to make up his mind whether he wanted to come. Finally, he says, “Call me this Tuesday.” I didn’t think about it at the time, but I was going to be on my honeymoon. On that Tuesday, I thought, “Oh, my God. I’ve got to call Harvey Kurtzman!” I *had* to call him, because he had to know he could trust me to keep my word.

I called him, and he wanted to know if we could pay for getting him to the airport, because he didn’t drive. “Yes, we can do that.” So he said, “Well, I’ll talk to [my wife] Adele, and call you back in about an hour.” I said, “Harvey, why don’t you let me call you back, because I’m not at my usual place.” He said, “Where *are* you?” I said, “I’m on my honeymoon.” “On your *honeymoon*!?” I said, “Yeah, I didn’t realize that when you said to call on Tuesday, I would be on my honeymoon, so...” And he stopped me and said, “I don’t have to talk to Adele. Anyone who thinks about Harvey Kurtzman on his honeymoon, I’ve got to come to his show.” And *that’s* how I got Harvey Kurtzman. [laughter]

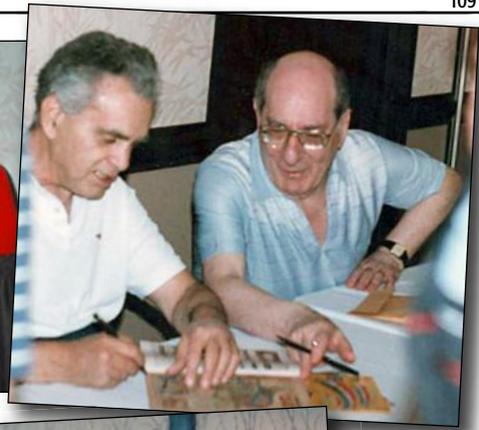
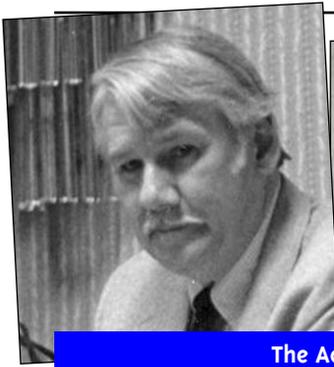
I got other guests over the three years I did the AcmeCons, like Jim Steranko, Bill Gaines, Gray Morrow. Gray came to a couple of my shows; a true gentleman. When Steranko came to the convention in 1990, he brought a number of his paintings with him. I did three conventions solo. Then I left Acme in the summer of ’92 to work in the comics business.

A Career In Comics

BDM: What happened then?

AMASH: Well, I wanted out. I didn’t get an education to run a comic book shop. I wound up doing fine art and getting in a lot of art shows. I wasn’t making any *money*, but I was getting in a lot of shows! I even had a few one-man shows. But, you know what fine art is like. And that was while putting my wife through college. She had just graduated in December of ’91. So I was going to hang on until she got a job. She came home on a Tuesday, and said, “I’ve got a job, and I start on Thursday at Nations Bank,” which is now Bank of America. I quit the comics shop the following Monday. The reason I waited that long was because that following Monday I got paid for the week before!

I just wanted to do something else with my life. But I didn’t *know* what



The Acme Of Perfection

A halcyon handful of talented titans, in photos taken at Greensboro, North Carolina, AcmeCons hosted in whole or in part by Jim. (Clockwise from above left:) the legendary Alex Toth onstage in 1985... *Mad* creator Harvey Kurtzman, moderator Jim, and "Sgt.Rock"/"Hawkman" artist Joe Kubert on a 1989 panel... Jack "King" Kirby & DC super-editor Julius Schwartz at an in-store signing at Acme Comics... and artist Gray & (wife) Pocho Morrow, Jim, Steve Austin (artist in Neal Adams' *Crusty Bunkers*), & *Flash Gordon* artist Dan Barry at the 1991 AcmeCon. Special thanks to Teresa R. Davidson, who took most of these pics... and to Heidi Amash, who took the one with the *Morrrows*, et al.

I was going to be doing when I quit. So, when I came home, I had my arms full of stuff that was mine from the shop: papers, books, etc. As I was opening the back door to my house, I heard the phone ring. I put the stuff down, answered the phone, and it was Millennium Comics, with an inking job. That's how long I was out of work.

In 1993, I began working for Marvel, and I worked for them for a while. I worked for DC for some time, for Malibu for about a year and a half. I worked for Dark Horse, Valiant... I worked for darn near everybody!

Unfortunately, I stopped doing fine art, because I could make a living in comics. And I've been doing it since. I've had down times like anybody else, but I've had more up times than down times. I worked for Warner Bros. for five years, and that was kind of neat, to be inking Bugs Bunny, and Daffy and Elmer. I worked for Disney for six years; got to do *Aladdin*, *Toy Story*, and *Toy Story II*, *101 Dalmatians*... *Pirates of the Caribbean* was the last one I did. It was great, especially because I was given good pencils, and I could still bring something to them, because by then I knew how to work in those styles.

When I was breaking into the business, my inks weren't really good enough to improve *anybody* but the worst artists' work. Luckily, I had a lot of people help me. Dan Barry used to give me advice and criticism, Pat Boyette did, Alex Toth did, Steranko, and Jack Kirby... Murphy Anderson, Bob Burden, Archie Goodwin, John Romita... Dick Sprang. By the way, when you look up the word "gentleman" in the dictionary, you see a picture of Dick Sprang.

John Romita: When I was in New York one time, trying to break into the business. I went to his office at Marvel, and he recognized me. He said, "Are you up here for the convention?" I said, "Yes. I'm also here trying to get work. I was hoping to show you my stuff." He said, "Jim, I only have an hour to get this cover rough done, and I just can't spare the time." I said, "Okay. How about if I just leave it? I'll give you a call later." He said okay, and I left the portfolio and turned to leave. John said, "Wait a minute! You live in North Carolina, don't you?" I said yes, and he said, "I'd forgotten that." With his right hand, he brushed aside the cover rough and said, "You've come that far, I'll give you twenty minutes." It was twenty minutes he *didn't* have... but he did that for me.

John also said to me, "You know why I like helping you? You *listen* to me. Sometimes I try to help people, and their eyes kind of glaze over because they're not really paying attention. Or they act like I don't know what I'm talking about. But you actually take my advice." I said, "When John Romita's trying to help me, I'm duty-bound to listen!" I never could understand how someone could go to John Romita for advice, and not pay attention.



I was lucky when I broke in at Marvel, because I worked for an editor [Rob Tokar] who had a lot of his books behind schedule. As soon as he realized he had somebody who was willing to pull all-nighters *every single night*, he started feeding me all kinds of stuff... all different pencils, all different styles. I had to adapt fast! It was the best thing that ever happened to me, because I got better. And better *faster*, because I had to do everything differently. I had to think while I was sweating to make production. Rob had seven books, and in one month I had work in six of them.

I've had a few down times, but I've been working at Archie Comics for 15 years now. On several occasions, I've filled in for Joe Sinnott on the *Spider-Man* Sunday strip, and I'm doing a couple of weeks on the *Archie* newspaper strip right now, also as a fill-in. I still do *Alter Ego*, of course.

Interview With An Interviewer

BDM: *Let's talk about Alter Ego. How did you land that gig?*

AMASH: I started doing interviews when I was in the CFA-APA. Only a few of them got in print. If I had have stayed with the APA for a while... maybe I could have interviewed some of the people who died before I got to them, had I not broken into the comic book business. Something else to think about, isn't it?

[Re *Alter Ego*], I had met John Morrow shortly after I had heard there was going to be a *Jack Kirby Collector*. Of course, I was very interested, because I had known Jack all those years. I had been a house guest of Jack's. I wrote a couple of things for John Morrow, and when *Comic Book Artist* got started, I did a few interviews for Jon B. Cooke. I was *very* interested in *Alter Ego* and had mentioned it to Roy, whom I had already become friends with—because Roy had moved to South Carolina around '92 or '93. I remember in '93 I went to a convention, and the person putting the convention together knew what a fan I was of Roy's, so he graciously, *thankfully*, sat me next to him.

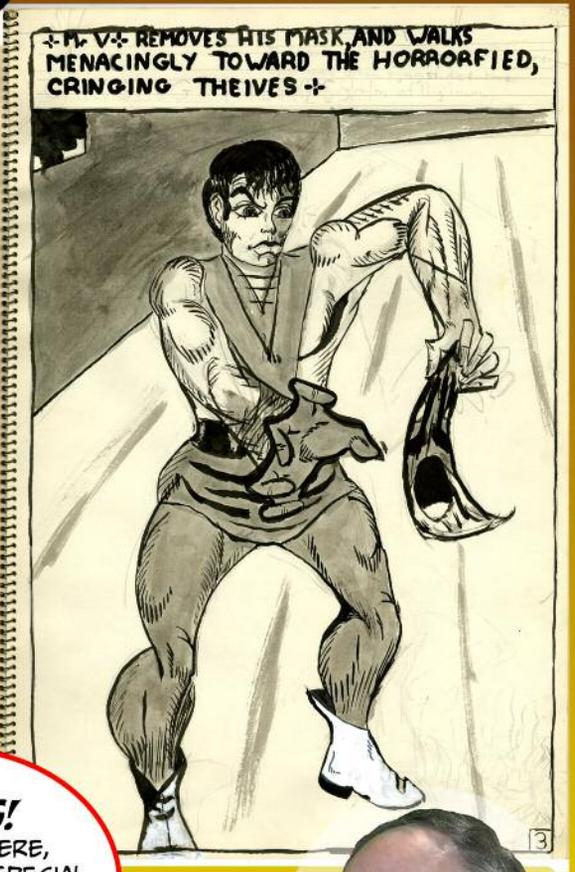
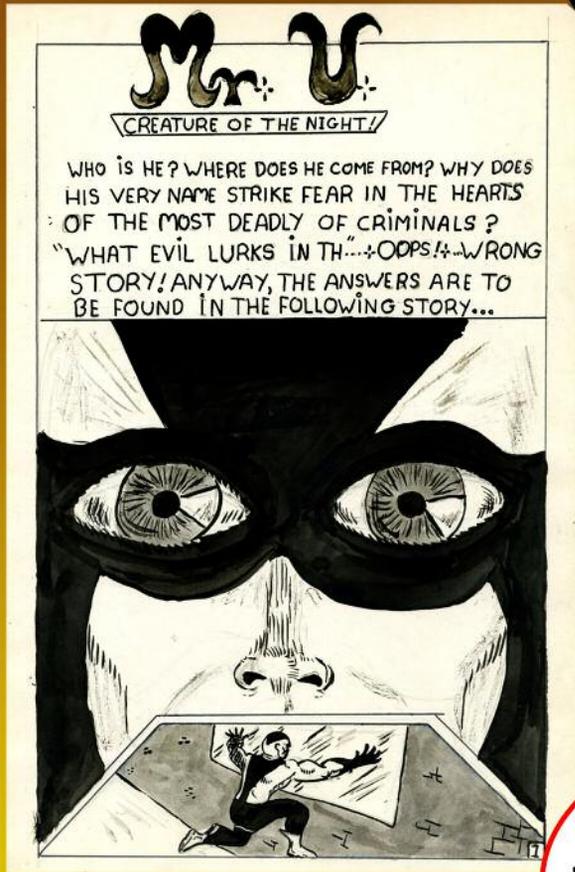
Roy likes to talk, and I like to talk, and we got to be friends immediately. I mentioned writing for *A/E* to Roy a couple of times, and he said he'd be interested, but nothing really happened because *Alter Ego* was quarterly at that point. So, I'm at a San Diego convention—I think it was 1999—and Bill Schelly, who was associate editor of *Alter Ego* then (and

DOGSTEARN

MR. MONSTER

MR. MONSTER'S COMIC CRYPT!

BY MICHAEL T. GILBERT MR. MONSTER © AND © 2011



LET'S CELEBRATE WITH A TRIP DOWN *MEMORY LANE*, JUST EAST OF *SCENIC SENILITY DRIVE!* CHECK OUT MY VERY *FIRST* COMIC BOOK STORY, STARRING THE MYSTERIOUS *MR. V*. -- A *VAMPIRE* HERO I DREW IN 1966 AT AGE 15! AND IF YOU'RE "*HORRORFIED*" BY MY *SPELLING*, YOU AIN'T SEEN *NOTHING* YET! BUT YOU WILL, AS WE EXPLORE...

HI, GANG!
MICHAEL T. HERE, WITH AN EXTRA-SPECIAL 100TH EDITION OF *MR. MONSTER'S COMIC CRYPT!*



**MICHAEL T:
THE FANZINE
YEARS!**

100

ABOVE: MR. V, PAGES 1 AND 3. MR. V. © 2011 MICHAEL T. GILBERT

Michael T.: The Fanzine Years!

by Michael T. Gilbert

It's all Gardner Fox's fault!

In 1998, my wife Janet discovered that Fox—a comic book writer since the late 1930s—had bequeathed his papers to the University of Oregon library, a stone's throw from my Eugene studio. Naturally, I had to check it out.

While there, I stumbled on a box of '60s-era letters, some from fans who later became pros. Roy Thomas, with whom I'd worked back in the '80s on Pacific Comics' *Elric* series, was one of these young scribes. I sent copies of the letters to Roy, figuring he'd enjoy seeing them.

Coincidentally, Roy was about to revive his 1960s fanzine *Alter Ego* as a part of Jon B. Cooke's *Comic Book Artist*. He suggested I write a column on my discovery. One column led to a second, then a third. Now, twelve years later, I find myself with 100 issues of *Mr. Monster's Comic Crypt* under my belt. (Actually, a few more than 100 columns, if we include the *CBA* issues, but for neatness' sake let's just count the *A/E* issues.)

First off, I'm incredibly grateful to Roy and publisher John Morrow for granting me this forum, and to the late great Jerry Bails for creating *Alter Ego* way back in 1961. It's been a genuine honor to contribute to this award-winning magazine. But with great power comes great responsibility! When I realized we were almost to issue 100, I had a heck of a problem. What to write about?

Then it hit me.

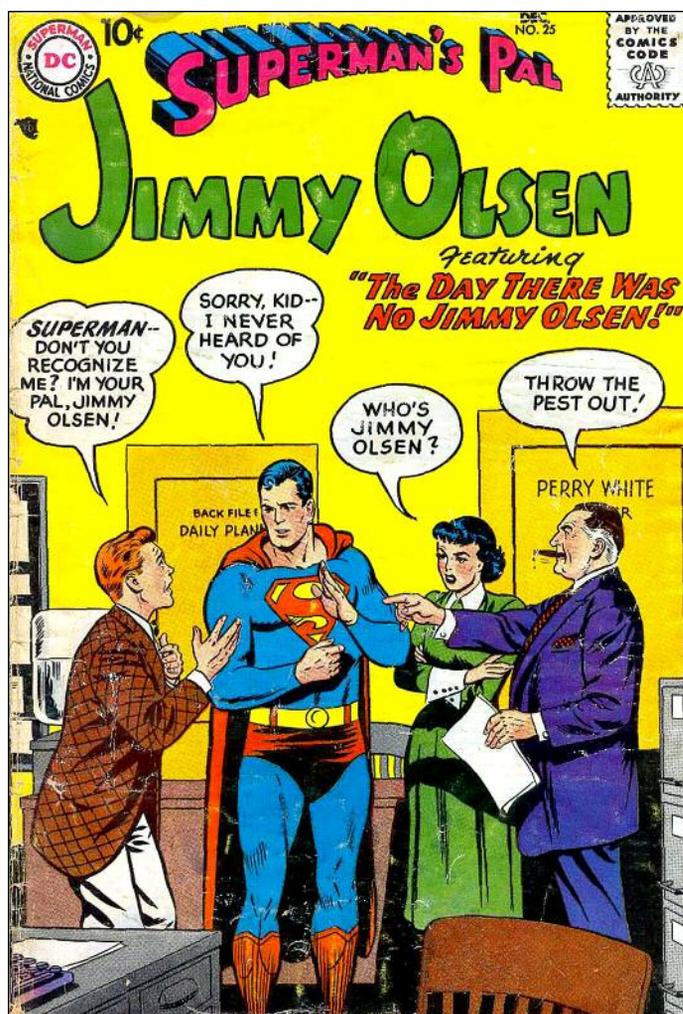
The century mark is traditionally a stopping-place to look back and reflect. In past columns I've explored the early lives of cartoonists Will Eisner, Bob Powell, and Wally Wood, as well as many lesser lights. So why not look back at the beginnings of my *own* comics career and my half-century love affair with comics?

While some may accuse me of self-indulgence (*Guilty, your honor!*), this brief memoir will hopefully be more than that. Like me, many of you fell in love with comics as kids and never stopped. I hope my own fond memories will jog a few of yours!



Super, Man!

Panel from Michael's 2000 graphic novel *Mann & Superman!* [©2011 DC Comics.]



O' #1!

Michael T.'s first comic, *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #25 (Dec. 1957).
Check out the cool Curt Swan cover! [©2011 DC Comics.]

First Love!

The little scrawl at the bottom right is the earliest drawing in my files, drawn on the back of a 1957 *Li'l Abner* Civil Defense comic. It was a gift from my Grandma Nurock, the woman most responsible for my lifelong obsession.

A volunteer at New York's Montifiore Hospital, Gram regularly raided the hospital's kiddie ward to keep me supplied with comics. The very first was *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #25 (Dec. 1957)! I was born on May 7, 1951, so you do the math!

The cover illustration for "The Day There Was No Jimmy Olsen" had Lois Lane asking "Who's Jimmy Olsen?" Oddly enough, I wondered about that, too. Just who was this red-haired pest?



P.C. HAMERLINCK'S

FCA

Fawcett Collectors of America

#159

March 2011

APPROVED
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12¢

AUGUST
NO. 15

INTRODUCING

SPIDER MAN

THOUGH
THE WORLD
MAY NOT
YET KNOW
MY NAME...

IT WILL
SOON MARVEL
AT THE
AWESOME
MIGHT OF
SPIDER MAN!

MMFFFF!

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:
AN IMPORTANT
MESSAGE TO
YOU, FROM THE
EDITOR--ABOUT
THE NEW
AMAZING!

Art by Mark Lewis
(with respects to Kirby, Ditko, and Beck)
Billy Batson TM & ©2011 DC Comics.



[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). This time around, we reprint, for the first time in the pages of *Alter Ego*, Marc's interview from FCA #11 (Nov. 1978), conducted by Matt Lage and FCA founder Bernie McCarty ... and including additions to the initial interview which were later published in *Bill Harper's FCA & ME, Too!* #5 (FCA #41), Spring 1988. —P.C. Hamerlinck.]

Marcus D. Swayze is one of those special, multi-talented guys who make a lasting impression on everyone they meet. Artist, writer, musician, athlete ... above all, Marc is charming and gracious, possessing that rare ability to make instant friends.

This interview is primarily concerned with Swayze's career as artist-writer for Fawcett [Publications]... and will attempt to illustrate the fact that he was one of the top people connected with the Golden Age of comic books. But it would be unfair to the man if discussion here were limited only to Marc's association with Fawcett. He was also a newspaper comic strip artist and writer... and a professional jazz musician.

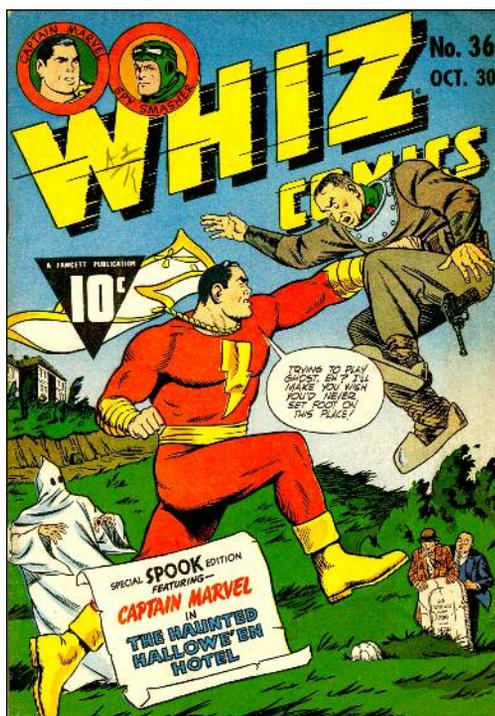
When he learned Swayze was being interviewed, former chief [Captain Marvel] artist C.C. Beck commented, "Swayze is a remarkable person, a fine Southern Gentleman, a great, great, artist, and a beautiful guitarist, pianist and violinist. In addition, he has a beautiful wife and family, a fine Southern mansion, and a marvelous sense of humor. He's an outrageous punster. Last time I saw him he was working as a gypsy fiddler in a tea room and loving every minute."

Former Fawcett editor Rod Reed, in an interview [FCA #5, Oct. '74], gave Swayze just recognition for creating the pictorial concept of *Mary Marvel*. Reed noted, "Although Jack Binder is acclaimed for his work

on *Mary Marvel*, Marc Swayze did the first portraits. I have before me the number one issue of her very own magazine, and her garb is amazingly mod with short skirt and boots to the knees. Swayze, of course, wanted to do the whole *Mary* series himself and it was my distasteful job to convince him that he couldn't be spared from the *Captain Marvel* team."

FCA: When did you decide to study art?

SWAYZE: When I got my degree [from Louisiana Tech] I went back to work at my uncle's dairy farm delivering milk. I got an offer for a job through one of the faculty members, whose cousin, Russell Keaton, was doing *Flyin' Jenny*. It was an important contact ... and I look at it as a valuable apprenticeship that I was fortunate to get, as Russell was a first-rate comic strip artist and gentleman as well. I had left home to work with Russell and when I decided to move on up to something else I sent applications and got a reply for an interview with Fawcett as well as some others.



Shazam-Twofold

When Fawcett Publications hired Marcus D. Swayze in 1940, it was to exclusively work on *Captain Marvel*. He later created the first drawings for *Mary Marvel* and drew her earliest adventures. Otherwise, it was just he and the *World's Mightiest Mortal* until the artist left in 1942 to serve in World War II. And while in the military he wrote CM stories on a consistent basis. Seen here are Marc's covers for *Whiz Comics* #36 (Oct. '42) and for *Wow Comics* #10 (Feb. '43). [Shazam! heroes TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

FCA: Steranko's History of Comics credits you with working on a variety of Fawcett features. Which specific feature did you do the greatest amount of work on?

SWAYZE: It would probably be a toss-up between Captain Marvel and Phantom Eagle. I was hired in 1940 specifically to work on Captain Marvel. Except for the time it took to do the original drawings for the Mary Marvel character and drawing the first one or two stories for that feature, plus an occasional illustration for the non-comics magazines, Captain Marvel was all I did until I left for the armed forces in 1942. In the service I wrote stories for Captain Marvel on a fairly consistent basis. I took over Phantom Eagle shortly after my discharge in 1944, doing all the art and some of the writing until the feature was discontinued in *Wow Comics* [#69, Aug. 1948].

FCA: On a scale of Captain Marvel's artists—with C.C. Beck and Pete Costanza heading the list—where do you believe you rate? And did you work on any other hero characters besides CM and Phantom Eagle?

SWAYZE: Considering Beck the #1 Captain Marvel artist, I considered myself number two, probably because they told me I was. While on the Fawcett staff, from 1940 to 1942, nobody produced more Captain Marvel art than I did. And as I look back over the books that were published at the time, I am convinced that I contributed more Captain Marvel scripts than any other artist—and more than some of the writers. I returned to New York after my discharge from the Army. I did not join Beck's shop or the Fawcett staff because I was determined to continue my career from my hometown of Monroe, Louisiana.

In a few months I had accomplished that by an arrangement with Ralph Daigh, Fawcett editorial director, and with Will Lieberson's approval, to produce Phantom Eagle, and a contract with the Bell Syndicate to draw the *Flyin' Jenny* newspaper strip Sunday page. (Before leaving New York, I went by Bell ... to tell some of the folks I knew I was leaving. They asked me to take over the Sunday pages of *Flyin' Jenny*, as Russell was going to do some work for the Air Force ... shortly after, Keaton got sick and died and, as a favor to his widow, I took over the daily strip.) During the several months these negotiations were being made, I drew one [story] of Ibis, Mr. Scarlet and Pinky, and maybe one or two others.

FCA: Your working freelance "long distance" was rather unusual back then, wasn't it?

SWAYZE: I guess I was one of the first people that worked that way. When I suggested it to Fawcett, I was proud of their response. Ralph Daigh said, "We have never operated like this." Before, they had always insisted that freelance people be in the New York area, almost as if they were on staff. I told them I had decided to go back South—even if I had to work as a truck driver for a living. Ralph said, "Hold on, I'll talk it over with the staff." So Ralph came back and told me that [art director] Al Allard said, "Marcus is one of the few artists who have a respect for deadlines." So I was told to go to Will Lieberson and get an assignment.



Flyin' South

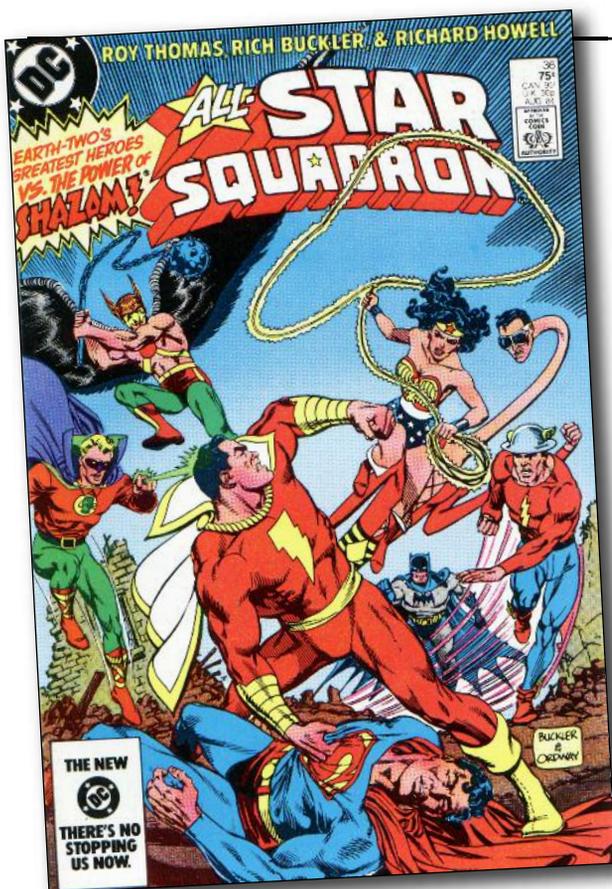
Before leaving New York City and heading back home to Louisiana with the Phantom Eagle assignment from Fawcett, Swayze also signed a contract with the Bell Syndicate to draw the Sunday page of the *Flyin' Jenny* newspaper strip. Marc had assisted on *FJ* with its creator Russell Keaton prior to coming to Fawcett. When Swayze took over the *FJ* Sunday, Keaton had moved on to work for the Air Force, but passed away soon thereafter. As a favor to Keaton's widow, Swayze took over the daily strip, as well. A Glenn Chaffin-written, Marc Swayze-drawn *FJ* Sunday page from 6-17-45, courtesy of Ger Apeldoorn. [©2011 The Bell Syndicate or its successors in interest.]

FCA: Do you recall specific art/stories/covers that you did at Fawcett prior to taking over Phantom Eagle?

SWAYZE: I have a few books from that era, and from them I have drawn the following list of work I did. It's not a complete list by any means. Beck retouched all Captain Marvels whether they needed it or not, which was as it should have been for consistency of character.

Cover art: *Whiz Comics* #36-39; *Captain Marvel Adventures* #12, 15, 19; *Wow Comics* #9, 10. Complete story art (layout, pencil, inks): "Capt. Marvel and Klang the Killer" (*CMA* #15); origin of Mary Marvel (*CMA* #18); "The Training of Mary Marvel" (*CMA* #19); "Capt. Marvel and the Baron of Barracuda Bay" (*CMA* #30); "Capt. Marvel Gets the Heir" (*CMA* #40); "Ibis Makes a Pact with the Devil" (*Whiz* #59); "Mr. Scarlet and Pinky Wrestle with the Spectre of Death in the House of Beauty" (*Wow* #29). Writing: "Capt. Marvel and the Mad Hermit" (*CMA* #25); "Capt. Marvel and His Country Cousin" (*CMA* #26); "Capt. Marvel and the Pledge of the Gremlins" (*CMA* #27); "Capt. Marvel and the Baron of Barracuda Bay" (*CMA* #30).

There were quite a number of Fawcett romances [*Sweethearts*, *Romantic Secrets*, *Life Story*, etc.] containing two stories by me—art, that is. In digging out these old books, I noticed that in *Life Story* #21 (Dec.



The Very First (In One Sense, Anyway) Superman/Captain Marvel Clash

An All-Star Meeting Of Shazam's Squadron

by John G. Pierce

Edited by P.C. Hamerlinck

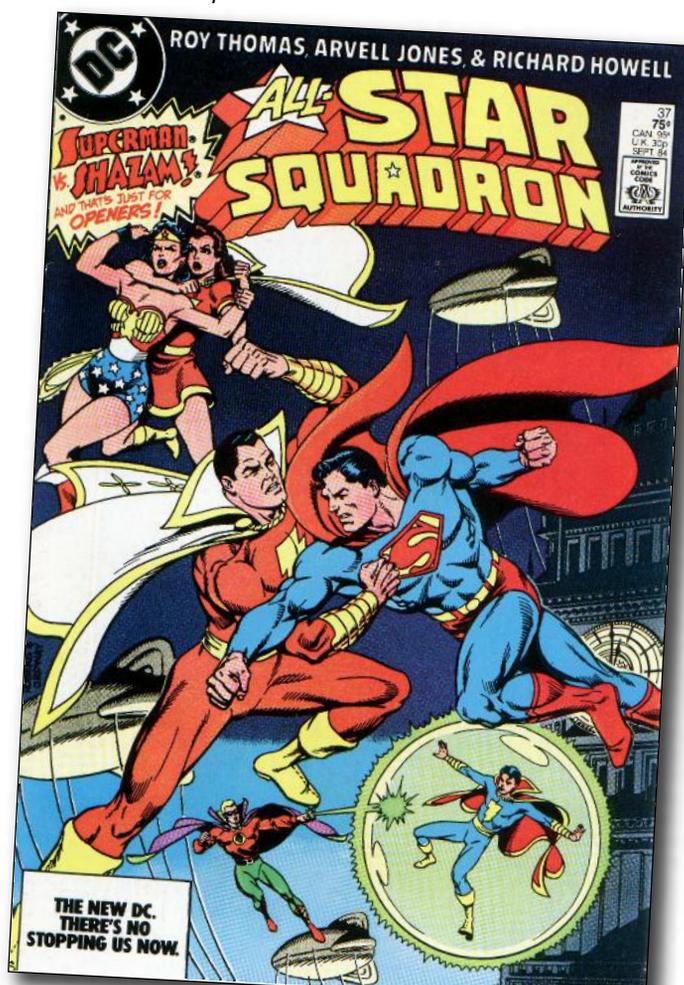
The late comics/radio/movie serial historian Jim Harmon wrote, in his seminal 1961 *Xero* essay “A Swell Bunch of Guys,” that “At times we kids fantasized ... meetings between Superman and Captain Marvel—his nearest compeer in the comics pages ... After all, every man—even Superman—needs a friend. Even Superman had to feel himself part of society. And in due course, Superman’s publishers provided him with an appropriate society. It was the Justice Society of America.”

One might wonder, too, if the early comics readers ever fantasized about a meeting of Superman *and* Captain Marvel *and* the JSA.

Roy Thomas just might have done so—but, unlike other readers, he later had the opportunity to turn his fantasy into reality, when he wrote his own tribute to the JSA in the 1980s series *All-Star Squadron*. There, not only did Superman have his Society (far more so than he had experienced in the '40s, when he had interacted with the JSA only twice), but he also met Captain Marvel and Family.

Since DC had subsumed the major Fawcett characters into their line in the 1970s, Superman and Captain Marvel had met on several occasions, a number of which might lay claim to having been “the first.” But, in terms of timelines, the *Squadron* story was the first such meeting, given that it was set in 1942.

Before we get to that, though, perhaps we should explain that the All-Star Squadron might be called “the JSA on steroids,” for it included not only the members of the Justice Society as it had existed in the pages of the 1940s *All-Star Comics*, but numerous other heroes, as well: not only other extant DC characters of the early '40s, but also heroes from the later-acquired Quality Comics line—plus a couple of brand new heroes retroactively created in the '80s for gender and ethnic balance. In other words, Thomas “revealed” that the JSA had actually been part of a much larger umbrella group, the All-Star Squadron. Had any kids of the '40s wondered why, say, Aquaman never interacted with the JSA, even though he was around? Well, in this version, he did (although admittedly not often). Did they go further and fantasize a meeting of Plastic Man or the Phantom Lady with DC heroes? Less likely, perhaps, but if they'd just hung around the comics



All-Star Marvels

(Top of page:) The Rich Buckler/Jerry Ordway cover to *All-Star Squadron* #36 (Aug. 1984) and (directly above) the Rick Hoberg/Ordway one for #37 (Sept. '84). Roy Thomas' usage of The Marvel Family in the 67-issue series was minimal, due to DC not yet owning the characters outright. [©2011 DC Comics.]



See You In The Funny Books

In *All-Star Squadron* #36, a newsstand copy of *Captain Marvel Adventures* #4 catches Superman's eye, but he's not quite ready to join the Captain Marvel Club just yet. In these panels Rich Buckler and Rich Howell briefly captured the C. C. Beck art style. [©2011 DC Comics.]

field for 40 more years... well, all things come to those who wait!

Thomas had wanted to incorporate The Marvel Family and all their peers into the *Squadron* stories from the start, just as he did the Quality heroes, but at that time DC did not own the Fawcett characters outright. Instead, DC had to pay a pro-rated fee based on how many pages or whatever percentage of a story a Fawcett character appeared in. He was therefore restricted in what he could do; whatever characters he wanted to use had to be cleared by the DC brass. So he had to settle for a two-part storyline in *All-Star Squadron* #36 & 37 (and, later on, a plot featuring Mr. Mind and Captain Marvel in #51-53); otherwise, Fawcett characters had no part in the series. And, as Thomas recently mused, "In retrospect, I think it'd have been better if I'd left out the Quality heroes, too!"

Following Rich Buckler & Jerry Ordway's exciting front cover, issue #36, "Thunder over London!" opens with Superman, Batman, Flash, Hawkman, Green Lantern, and Wonder Woman sitting in the balcony of a movie theatre watching a newsreel in which Captain Marvel, here christened a "Super-Nazi," is demolishing Allied planes. (This opening scene was inspired by the cover of *All-Star Comics* #24, Winter 1944-45—the first issue of that title I ever saw as a young fan in the early '60s—a time when I became easily intrigued by the comics of the '40s; later, to help satiate my thirst, the very generous Julie Schwartz, whom I used to ply with numerous letters, sent me a copy of that very issue, which he had found lying around the DC offices.)

The scenes of destruction have a particularly moving effect on Superman, who watches them with an unusual grimness. Later, when the All-Stars pass a newsstand, he picks up a copy of *Captain Marvel Adventures* #4 (Oct. '41), since he had recognized Captain Marvel from the newsreel (but only as a comic book character). He's so upset that he incinerates the issue with his heat vision and flies off, leaving Plastic Man, who has joined them, to pay for the destroyed comic book! (Incidentally, in the panels showing

They're At It Again!

Superman and Captain Marvel have encountered each other many times since the 1970s, but in terms of timelines, the 1942-set *All-Star Squadron* story is chronologically the first such meeting. Here, the Man of Steel battles a not-sound-of-mind CM, and even the particular Buckler/Howell pose above is reminiscent of the mini-series *Kingdom Come* that would come along 12 years later. [©2011 DC Comics.]

the CMA #4 cover and three interior panels from that issue, Buckler and guest inker Richard Howell show their ability to capture, albeit briefly, the C.C. Beck style of the original.) Left behind as the rest of the group makes their departure are two youngsters who try to get their attention. And you just *know* that we're going to see them again!

Meanwhile, in Berlin, the "Super-Nazi," (alluded to as "Hauptmann Wunder"—a good German translation of "Captain Marvel") reports to Hitler. It becomes obvious that he is operating under some kind of spell or hypnosis, specifically (we soon see), the Spear of Destiny, which Thomas had introduced back in issue #4 as a device which has drastic effects on magic-based super-beings who come within its range of influence.

It isn't long before this particular group of All-Stars arrives in London, where Superman stops to visit The Shining Knight, hospitalized by his own encounter with Captain Marvel. As he flies away from the hospital, Superman has his own first clash with CM, a battle which ends up badly for the Man of Tomorrow. The others arrive to join the fray, but not even the beams from Green Lantern's ring can contain CM for long. Even so, Marvel decides that in this case flight might be the better part of valor, and heads back across the English Channel.

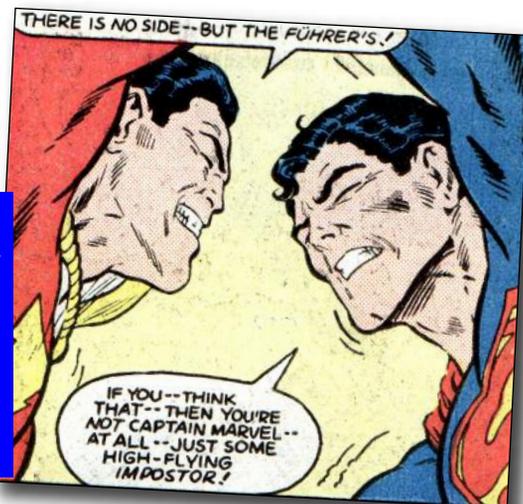
But as they near the French coast, Batman (who's riding with Wonder Woman in her invisible plane) realizes she is starting to stiffen, and, always the World's Greatest Detective, he quickly fathoms the situation. He shouts to Hawkman to stop GL from venturing further.

As the group land and confer, Wonder Woman is puzzled why the non-magic Superman should be vulnerable to magic as are she and Green Lantern. "Frankly, I'm not sure *myself*," Superman comments. But well-informed readers know that Mort Weisinger, the Man of Steel's long-time editor, had years earlier decreed that the science-fiction-based Superman was vulnerable not only to Kryptonite but also to magic... and Mort's word was martial law around DC's hallowed halls.

Anyway, before the discussion can progress further, the two youngsters previously seen in the shadows have somehow made their way across the Atlantic to catch up with the All-Stars, and now they introduce themselves as the two whom we knew they were all along: Mary Batson and Freddy Freeman. Concluding that otherwise the All-Star heroes are "never gonna believe us," they say their magic words and change into Mary Marvel and Captain Marvel Jr. But that merely transforms them into what Hawkman calls "Hitler Youth versions of that Super-Nazi," and Green Lantern shouts: "Get them, All-Stars—before they get us!"

So, if Weisinger's influence still prospered, here we see the influence of another long-time editor, Marvel's Stan Lee, who decreed that whenever heroes meet, they automatically misunderstand each other and fight! (Well, okay, Stan probably never actually issued such a declaration, but that's what almost always happened in the stories he wrote—or edited.)

The tense situation picks up the following month in #37, wherein Batman, ever the voice of



Fawcett's Amazing Spider Men

When Captain Marvel & Co. Battled A Horde Of Web-Spinning Wonders

by P.C. Hamerlinck

"Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly!
Hah! You are caught in the web of... Spider Man!"

—"Captain Marvel and the Webs of Crime,"
Whiz Comics #89 (Sept. 1947)

Everyone hates them. But writers of adventure fiction and the sequential arts have long found the cunning spider an effective plot device and gimmick for both the righteous and the immoral. Unveiled below is a web of notable arachnid premises spun by the inspired comic book scriptwriters at Fawcett Publications—including one particularly memorable Spider Man—all of which emerged years before the eminent and edifying words, "With great power there must also come great responsibility!"

The Spider People

Nickel Comics #5 (July 1940)

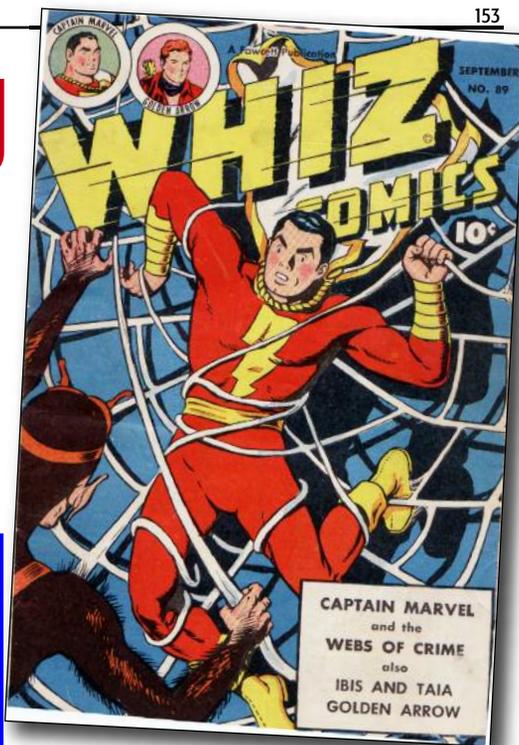
The second escapade of Captain Venture and his beautiful partner Zyra (a.k.a. "The Planet Princess"—last survivor of Earth's Saturn colony) unfolds when the couple notice from their ship an uncharted planet—a world so dark that "telescopes have missed it"... even though all is completely luminous when they touch down to investigate. It's not long before they encounter the planet's large and intelligent inhabitants: the



The Spider People
[©2011 the respective
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Spider Man, Spider Man, Does Whatever a Spider Can

Fifteen years before a new wall-crawling sensation swung into action in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, Spider Man had Captain Marvel ensnared in "The Webs of Crime," appearing in *Whiz Comics* #89 (Sept. 1947)... incidentally, the *FCA* editor's very first *Whiz* purchase, over 30 years ago. [Shazam hero TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]



Spider People—or, as CV casually first called them, "Spiders ... big ones." Capturing the Earthlings with large strands of web, the Spider People take their prizes through the "web-fortress" and to their leader: the Spider King.

The Spider King divulges his grandiose scheme to transplant two Spider People brains into the Captain and Zyra and then have them live among mankind as spies in preparation of world domination. But the quick-on-her-feet Princess informs the King of an apparatus on their ship that can assist the Spider People in their campaign—all they have to do is just let her show it to them—so the King agrees to it. (Okay, so maybe the Spider People *aren't* so intelligent, after all.)

Zyra leads the Spider King inside the ship, dupes him into touching the vessel's power cables, and effectively fries him to death. In the interim, Venture has broken free, notes that "small spiders on earth make flying machines of their webs," then improvises his very own flying web-chute, quickly builds a fire, and floats away over heated air to Zyra. The couple then enthusiastically destroy the entire spider kingdom with that most popular celestial weapon of all: the ray gun.

Granted, this early entry from the Fawcett comics canon wasn't exactly a remarkable piece of science-fiction fantasy, but it undoubtedly satisfied the escapist thirsts of its young, nickel-paying customers. *Nickel Comics* was one of Roscoe Fawcett's few failed experiments, and after its final issue a few months later, Captain Venture rocketed over to *Master Comics* #8 for a 15-issue last hurrah. The character was created by Rafael Astarita, who also illustrated Venture's earliest exploits. At least writer Otto Binder can't take the blame for "The Spider People," since he didn't take over the "Captain Venture" strip until March of 1941—his very first comic book feature for Fawcett before significantly appropriating his words of wonder to the much more fertile world of *another* Captain.

Invasion From Mars/The Spider Men

Captain Marvel Adventures #2 (April-July 1941)

The Earth's astronomers see it coming: an invasion from Mars! WHIZ radio's boy broadcaster Billy Batson gets on the air and tries to calm down his listeners as a fleet of ships descend upon New York City.

The Spider Men invaders (which young artist George Tuska depicted more like large four-legged beetles than like spiders) immediately unleash pandemonium until a familiar flying red-clad hero shows up: "All right, Mr. Spider Man. You're now dealing with Captain Marvel!" The Mightiest Mortal takes one of the spiders down, only to discover they are nothing but robots. Billy informs his boss, Sterling Morris, that "we've got most of the people into Jersey" and then surmises that he needs to "get to Mars" to find out exactly who is manufacturing the robots. Morris rolls his eyes and tells the kid he "better go home and get some rest!"

It takes the Big Red Cheese a whopping five minutes to get to Mars, but since all is "as quiet as a tomb" he confidently changes back to Billy. The boy, of course, is immediately seized by guardsmen and brought to their long-haired king. Billy is about to be beheaded when he and Marvel switch places ("Hmmm ... too bad. And a nice new axe at that!"). After some "gentle" persuasion by Marvel, the king promises never to invade Earth again—but insists he can't call off his spider-militia. Marvel races back to Earth and makes an instant junk heap of the Spider Men.

Otto Binder—who had been working freelance before taking an editorial position at Fawcett in January of 1942 when Ed Herron was drafted into the Army—didn't write this story, either. Binder quit the editorial job six months later and returned to freelance writing, developing the Marvel Family mythology further than any other writer. And in just six short years he would craft his own Spider Man for Fawcett.

The Webs Of Destruction

Captain Marvel Adventures #30 (Dec. 1943)

Chapter 9 of Otto Binder's groundbreaking oeuvre, "The Monster Society of Evil," found that malicious, spectacle-wearing worm, Mr. Mind, on a flight with Dr. Smashi to Japan's base at Rabaul in the South Pacific—where the diminutive nuisance conspired to annihilate Australia. Mind establishes a collaboration with Smashi and two other partners-in-crime: Germany's Herr Phoul, and Jorrk, a crocodile-headed alien from the planet Punkus.

Mind and his cohorts get down to business by assembling a flying mechanical spider (even though C.C. Beck's art staff drew the darn thing with only six legs; break out the art morgue already!) and then head to the Aussie Allied post, Port Darwin. Arriving there, Mind's Spider Plane snatches up opposing aircraft with a "silken webwork." Captain Marvel hurries to the scene, where Mind and associates release more web from Mind's flagship, which keeps CM busy rescuing spiraling pilots from certain death. Marvel returns to chase down the Spider Plane, but Mind's manic invention becomes entangled in its own webbing and falls out of control. The wicked worm and his minions parachute down to safety and evade CM. (See *Alter Ego* #64 for a chapter-by-chapter study of "The Monster Society of Evil" and its 25 installments.)



The Webs Of Destruction
[Shazam hero TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]



Invasion From Mars/The Spider Men

[Shazam hero TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

Web Of Evil

Fawcett's Funny Animals #38 (May 1946)

The gentle, fairy tale-like comics of anthropomorphic Hoppy the Marvel Bunny—extended family member of the Captain Marvel franchise—were clearly geared for the youngest of readers... but the Bunny's creator, Chad Grothkopf, wasn't afraid to push the envelope a smidgen for the kiddies every now and then.

The use of the wily spider was fairly routine within kid comics, of course, and *Fawcett's Funny Animals* had its fair share of wall-crawlers over its 83-issue run. One early Binder-Grothkopf production from 1944 had introduced the Spider Master to Marvel Bunny's rogue gallery ... and a couple of years later, cigar-smoking Sam Spider entered the scene.

Queen Butterfly, fearful that Sam Spider and his armed spider forces are planning an attack on her kingdom, enlists the Marvel Bunny for help. And indeed, Sam has been massing his spiders across the border and equipping them with his recently-developed automatic steel web throwers.

Hoppy confronts Sam Spider at his home, but he denies any imminent attack. Sam then cons Captain Marvel Bunny to stay for dinner. Since well-mannered Hoppy knows it isn't polite to eat and run, he stays put a little

while longer, allowing the spider-troops time to launch a surprise attack. Marvel Bunny finally tears apart the spider soldiers' steel webbing and strikes them a series of punches. The situation intensifies when the Queen is captured by Sam Spider. Marvel Bunny zooms to her rescue, but Sam unleashes his "wild, untamed, terrible tarantulas! One sting from them and you're dead!" So, Marvel Bunny—in good ol' Tom Tyler technique—lifts each of the tarantulas above his head and tosses them off a cliff to their doom! Fawcett's *Funny Animals*!?



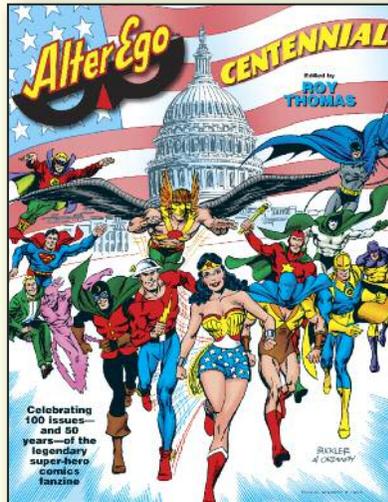
Web of Evil

[Hoppy the Marvel Bunny TM & ©2011 DC Comics.]

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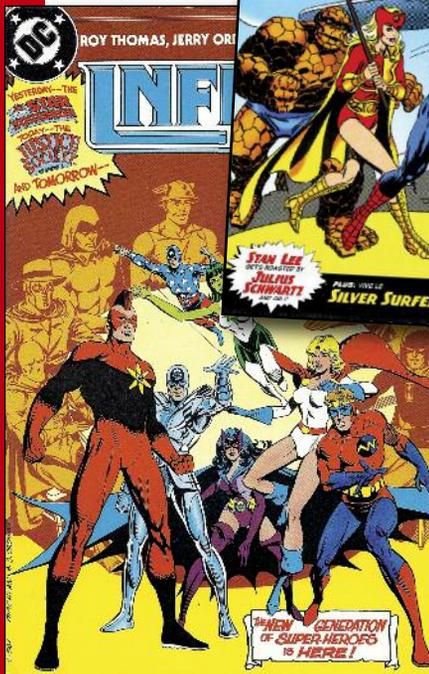
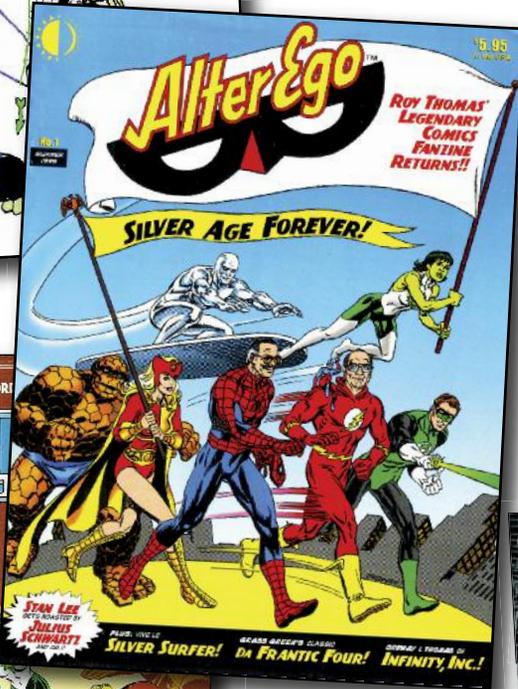
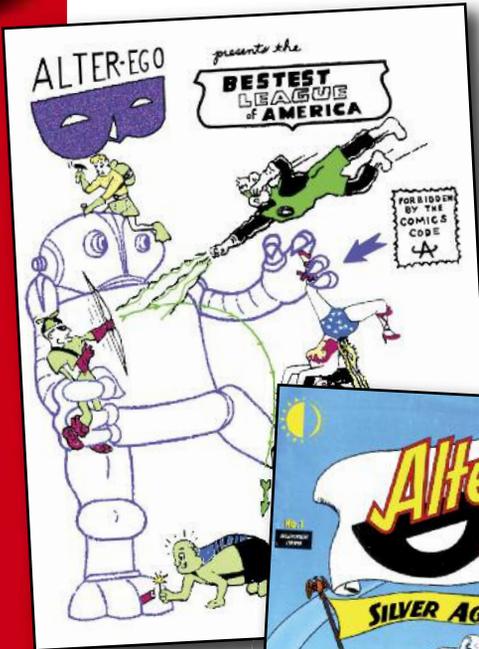
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