

MYSTERY COMICS: Charlton Anthologies • Black Orchid •
Madame Xanadu • and 'Scooby-Doo!' featuring Aragonés • Evanier
Kaluta • Shoberg • Talaac • Wrightson • and more!

ATWOMORNING
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BACK ISSUE!

TM

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This issue:

DC's **BRONZE AGE HORROR SERIES** &
HOSTS RISE FROM THE DEAD!



09

Volume 1,
Number 52
October 2011

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

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BACK ISSUE

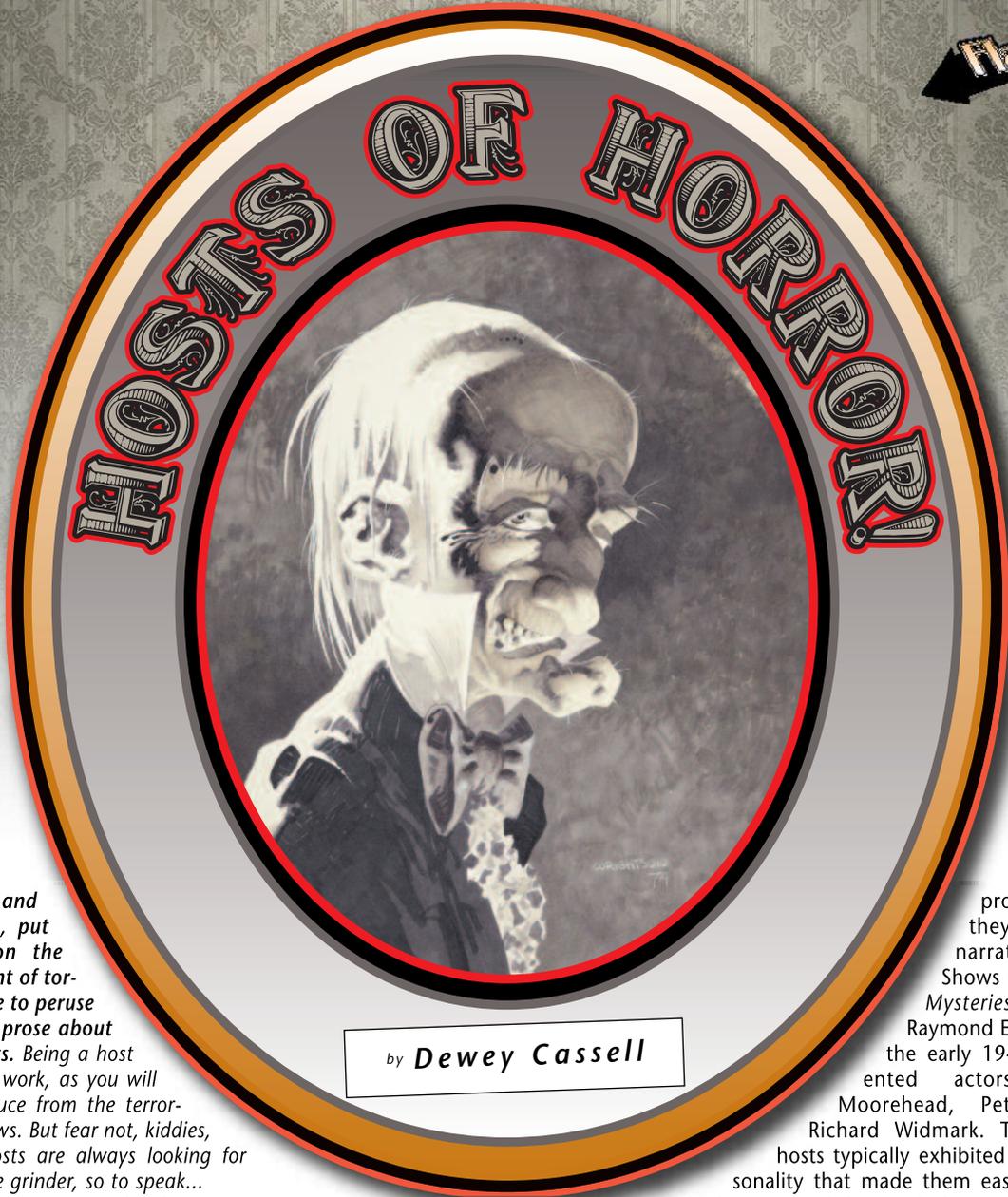
The Retro Comics Experience!

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Art (from Nick Cardy's *The Witching Hour* #4 cover) is TM & © DC Comics



Greetings, guys and ghouls. Sit back, put your feet up on the nearest implement of torture, and prepare to peruse this penultimate prose about my kindred spirits. Being a host of horror is hard work, as you will undoubtedly deduce from the terrific tale that follows. But fear not, kiddies, for we horror hosts are always looking for fresh meat for the grinder, so to speak...

Why do you suppose it is that horror comics seem to demand a host, while other stories leave you all on your own? There always seemed to be something curiously contradictory about the extension of hospitality in a tale meant to terrify. Then again, who wouldn't want a hand to hold while walking through a haunted house? But was that the purpose behind these polite purveyors of fear?

To answer that question, we must first turn to their origins, and the original hosts of horror were found on the radio. Starting in the 1930s, radio was the perfect forum for dramatic horror and science-fiction stories because it fueled the imagination of the listeners. Imagining in your mind the horrors you were hearing described could be far more powerful than actually seeing them, as evidenced by the success of Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* broadcast in 1938.

One of the common characteristics of the anthology radio horror

Cry Uncle!

(top) *Creepy* magazine's host, Uncle Creepy, as illustrated by this issue's cover artist, Bernie Wrightson.

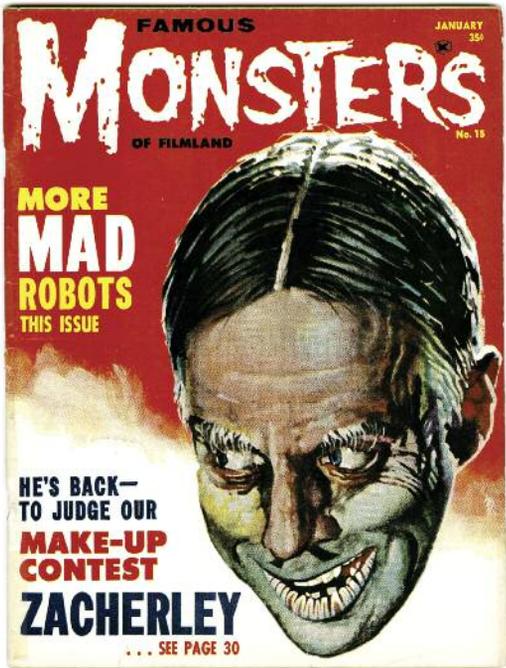
© 2011 Warren Publications.

programs was that they were typically narrated by a host. Shows like *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, hosted by Raymond Edward Johnson in the early 1940s, featured talented actors like Agnes Moorehead, Peter Lorre, and Richard Widmark. The radio horror hosts typically exhibited a distinctive personality that made them easily identifiable to the listener.

With his morbid sense of humor and his ominous laugh, Raymond provided a welcome break in the tension of the story. Other radio horror hosts included Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee. The stories themselves were often violent and gory, and the programs were eventually challenged by censors, although the regulations imposed were difficult to enforce. Ironically, what brought about the demise of radio horror programs was television.

GHOULS RULE

One of the first, and arguably best, television horror hosts was Zacherley. In 1957, actor John Zacherle got a call from WCAU Channel 10 in Philadelphia to host *Shock Theater*, a collection of horror films from the 1930s and 1940s being released to television by Universal Pictures. Dressed in an undertaker's coat and sporting ghoulish make-up with his hair parted down the middle, Zacherle portrayed Roland, the "cool ghoul" who was host of the show and lived in a crypt. Roland introduced the late night movie, accompanied by the occasional severed head in a basket, and he also appeared in numerous "break-ins" or instances in which the cameraman would break to a shot of Roland wearing a curious expression and then back to the film in progress. This approach to hosting the show proved to be wildly popular and gained Roland thousands of fans. Numerous imitators fol-



lowed, including Ghoulardi, Moona Lisa, and Marvin the Near-Sighted Madman.

But by the time Zacherley and other television horror hosts made their debut, the tradition of hosting horror stories was already well entrenched in comic books. The use of a host for horror comics, however, was preceded by a comic book from another genre, *Crime Does Not Pay*. In 1942, starting with issue #24, editor Charles Biro introduced a host named Mr. Crime, who narrated the feature stories in *Crime Does Not Pay*. Mr. Crime was an ethereal host, whose top hat and flowing robe contrasted with his pointed ears and sharp teeth. In the stories in which he appeared, Mr. Crime typically popped up several times during the tale to provide a pithy



commentary on the characters or their predicament. Peak circulation for *Crime Does Not Pay* reached over one million copies a month.

When you think about the hosts of comic books in the Golden Age, though, one group comes to mind: the Old Witch, Crypt Keeper, and Vault Keeper of the EC anthology horror comics *The Haunt of Fear*, *Tales from the Crypt*, and *The Vault of Horror*. Arguably the most recognizable of all horror hosts even today, the EC ghouls were the brainchild of editor, writer, and artist Al Feldstein and his publisher, Bill Gaines. As for their inspiration, in an interview for issue #9 of the legendary EC fanzine *Squa Tront*, Feldstein explained, "We had come on to this thing of doing horror and scary stuff. Bill and I had remembered *The Witch's Tale* and *Lights Out* from radio—this is all old hat, I know—and we tried it out in the comics ... I first came up with the Crypt Keeper and the Vault Keeper, who were direct steals from the witch in *The Witch's Tale*. I don't remember the witch being as facetious, and with the puns, but she cackled." Although originally designed by Feldstein, other artists became identified with the EC hosts. "Ghastly" Graham Ingels rendered the definitive

Old Witch, Johnny Craig drew the Vault Keeper, and the Crypt Keeper was most famously illustrated by Jack Davis. Craig later created an attractive assistant for the Vault Keeper named Drusilla. Craig even served as the model in full makeup and costume for photographs of the EC hosts that were sold to fans through the comics letters pages. The EC hosts appeared in house ads and EC Fan Addict fan club materials as well.

The hosts contributed to the recognition and growing popularity of the EC horror comics. But the explicit violence and gore of the EC horror comics led to the unwanted attention of Dr. Fredric Wertham in his infamous treatise, *Seduction of the Innocent*, and the subse-

Star of Shock Theatre
 (above) TV's Zacherley, as seen on the cover of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* #15 (Jan. 1962).

Famous Monsters of Filmland
 TM & © 2011 Philip Kim.

Certainly No Samantha!
 (upper right) "Ghastly" Graham Ingels' Old Witch.

© EC Publications.

Uncle Creepy
 (right) Jack Davis' model sheets for Creepy's host. Courtesy of Jim Warden.

© EC Publications.



quent Senate Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency in 1954. It was in those hearings that EC publisher Bill Gaines attempted unsuccessfully to defend his horror comics, leading ultimately to the Comics Code and the demise of the horror genre in comics for years to come. The EC horror hosts were retired.

CREEPLY COMEBACKS

There were several attempts to revive the horror-comics genre. For example, in 1957, Harvey Comics published the comic book *Man in Black*, which ran for four issues, featuring the host Fate and his acquaintances Venus and Weaver. In 1959, comic-book icon Joe Simon published *Weird Mysteries* and *Eerie Tales*, black-and-white magazines not subject to the Comics Code, featuring a horror host named "Morgue'n the Morgue Keeper." Joe's son, Jim Simon, recalls Morgue'n well, and his father's inspiration: "On TV, Zacherley was a very popular monster-movie host with the kids. My father knew my brother and our friends stayed up late at night just to watch Zacherley host his monster TV shows!" Unfortunately, Simon was ahead of his time. While they were well executed, both magazines only lasted one issue.

The real revival of the horror host came in 1964, when Jim Warren first published *Creepy* magazine. *Creepy* was a black-and-white anthology title, with compelling horror stories by exceptional artists, many of whom were veterans of EC Comics. The magazine was hosted by "Uncle Creepy," a tall, gaunt figure with thinning hair and dressed in a threadbare tuxedo, originally rendered by Jack Davis. Uncle Creepy was soon joined by Cousin Eerie and Vampirella in sister publications of their own. Cousin Eerie was short and stout, bearing an almost toad-like appearance, and was also illustrated by Davis. By contrast, Vampirella was tall and shapely, poured into her iconic, revealing red costume, as first depicted by Frank Frazetta and later defined by José "Pepe" Gonzalez. However, in the early days of the Warren magazines, the hosts were often drawn by whichever artist happened to be illustrating the story, leading to many different variations of the characters.

Recognizing the marketing opportunity, Jim Warren ran house ads in his magazines, offering a variety of merchandise bearing the images of his horror hosts, from Halloween masks to underwear, available through his own fulfillment house, Captain Company. Each host also had their own fan club.



However, the most popular, and most enduring, of the Warren horror hosts was Vampirella. Images of Vampirella were made into a six-foot life-sized poster, stickers, calendars, a T-shirt, a jigsaw puzzle, and graced the covers of six *Vampirella* novels by Ron Goulart. There was even an Aurora model kit of Vampirella, and actress Barbara Leigh appeared on the cover of several issues of the magazine, wearing the famous costume. Leigh was cast to play Vampirella in a motion picture by Hammer Films that was never made.

[Editor's note: See *BI* #36 for a Vampirella history.]

Vampirella was not, however, just a host. Stories about Vampirella appeared periodically in her title from the start, and in every issue beginning with #11 until the title's cancellation with issue #112. The rights to Vampirella were acquired by Harris Comics in 1983 and stories featuring the character continue to appear in print today, courtesy of Dynamite Entertainment. Vampirella spawned numerous imitations, the most successful of which was *Elvira*, published by Claypool Comics.

DC's HOSTS OF MYSTERY

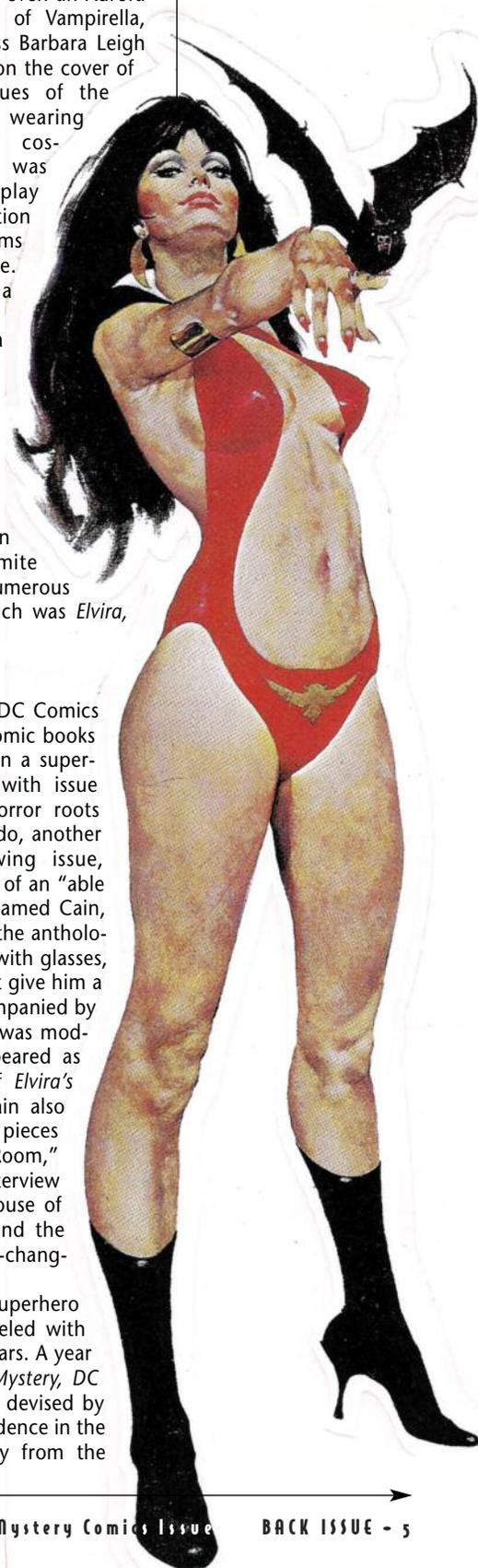
With the success of *Creepy* and *Eerie*, DC Comics decided to test the waters of horror comic books once again. *House of Mystery* had been a superhero book since the mid-'60s, but with issue #174, in 1968, it returned to its horror roots under the tutelage of editor Joe Orlando, another veteran of EC Comics. The following issue, Orlando introduced a host in the form of an "able caretaker" for the House of Mystery named Cain, who introduced most of the stories in the anthology series. Cain is a tall, thin character with glasses, upswept hair, and a pointed beard that give him a deliberately devilish appearance, accompanied by a pet gargoyle named Gregory. (Cain was modeled after writer Len Wein, who appeared as Cain in a photograph in issue #4 of *Elvira's House of Mystery*.) A caricature of Cain also appeared in humorous one-page filler pieces in *House of Mystery* like "Cain's Game Room," illustrated by Sergio Aragonés [see interview in this issue]. Cain's residence, the House of Mystery, is in the hills of Kentucky and the house itself is alive, containing an ever-changing array of rooms (and mysteries).

House of Secrets had also been a superhero title in the mid-1960s, but was canceled with issue #80 and lay dormant for three years. A year after the debut of Cain in *House of Mystery*, *DC Special* #4 featured a new horror host devised by Orlando named Abel, who took up residence in the *House of Secrets*, across the cemetery from the

He is Your Host

(left) Bernie Wrightson's depiction of Cousin Eerie, host of *Eerie* magazine.

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The Lady is a Vamp!

(right) Jose Gonzalez's classic full-figure color painting of Vampirella. This version is actually the rare promotional sticker that was given away by Warren Publishing as a subscription premium. Courtesy of Dewey Cassell.

Vampirella TM & © DFI.

TERROR

IN THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE OF

WRIGHTSON

Bernie Wrightson? Simply the best in the horror field from the late '60s to the mid-'80s.

Here he shares with us some recollections of the great day of DC mystery/horror and afterwards. Got the cold chills already? Good, kiddies ... heehee ... good!

(Most of the images provided came from Jerry Boyd and the Swamp Thing recollections were kept to a minimum due to its being covered already in BACK ISSUE #6.) – Jerry Boyd

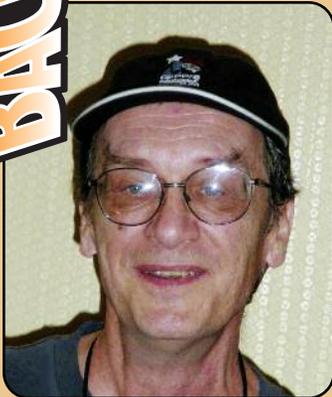
by **Jerry Boyd**
conducted February 3 and March 11, 2011



It's a Weird Mystery!

(left) Detail from the much-coveted 100-Page Super-Spectacular #4, titled *Weird Mystery Tales*. While featuring just so-so '50s mystery book stories, this poorly distributed 1971 giant remains a lusted-after collectors' item, no doubt in part because it sports Wrightson's (ahem) spectacular cover art.

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Cyberspace:
www.wrightsonart.com

**BERNIE
 WRIGHTSON**

Beginnings:
 First sale: DC's "Nightmaster" in *Showcase* #83 (June 1969) / First published art: "The Man Who Murdered Himself" in *House of Mystery* #179 (Mar.-Apr. 1969)

Milestones:
 Nightmaster in *Showcase* / *Swamp Thing* / numerous covers and title pages for *House of Mystery* and other DC titles / *Tower of Shadows* and *Chamber of Darkness* / *Creepy*, *Eerie*, and *Vampirella* stories / *Badtime Stories* / *PLOP!* / *Frankenstein* / *Creepshow* / *Spider-Man: Hooky* and *The Thing/The Hulk: The Big Change* Marvel Graphic Novels / *Batman: The Cult* / *Captain Sternn* / *Batman/Aliens* / *Toe Tags* / Production designs for the film *Serenity* / *City of Others* / *Dead, She Said*

It's Not Easy Being Cain
 (right) The proprietor of the *House of Mystery* ponders "The Gourmet" in the classic *PLOP!* #1 story written by Steve Skeates and drawn by our man Wrightson. Word is that the macabre tale was inspired by an infamous S. Gross cartoon in *National Lampoon*, where Bernie also contributed his artistry in the '70s.

TM & © DC Comics.

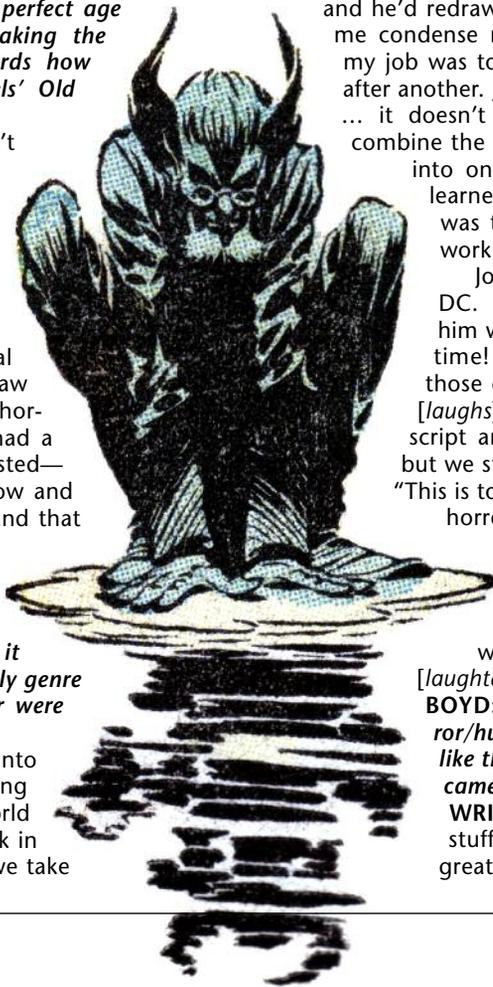
JERRY BOYD: *You were at the perfect age when the EC Comics were making the rounds. Can you put into words how strong an effect Graham Ingels' Old Witch strips had on you?*

BERNIE WRIGHTSON: I wouldn't be doing this today if it weren't for those comics ... or even be the person I am, I believe. They were a huge part of my life then and shaped my artistic future.

In the late '50s, they released all the old Universal monster movies to TV and I saw them all. The time was right for horror, y'know. In Baltimore, we had a guy named Dr. Lucifer who hosted—and interrupted—the movies now and then with jokes, late at night, and that added to the fun. He was on Friday nights, 11:15.

BOYD: *When I look over your early fanzine work, it mostly leans toward mystery/horror. Is it safe to say that that was the only genre in comics that grabbed you, or were there others?*

WRIGHTSON: I wanted to get into comics. I didn't know anything about fanzines. I went to the World Science Fiction Con in New York in 1967. A friend suggested that we take



the train there and I met people like Jeff Jones, Mike Kaluta, and we just hung out. My first love has always been horror, graveyards, scary houses, and so on. I came into sci-fi late. The "science" part scared me! [laughs] I had the assumption that you had to be "smart" to get sci-fi. In my teens and twenties, I got over it and did some sci-fi. There's not much science in it once you look into it! [laughter]

BOYD: *There really isn't! [laughter continues] Some authors, of course, really delve into scientific theory, but a lot of the most acclaimed sci-fi is just human drama with wild scientific possibilities thrown in.*

WRIGHTSON: That's it. Exactly!

BOYD: *How did you become a "resident" of The House of Mystery and The House of Secrets?*

WRIGHTSON: At that con in '67, I also met a lot of people in comics. I met Carmine Infantino and Joe Orlando and others ... like Dick Giordano. Then I went home. A few months came and went. [Michael Wm.] Kaluta called me and said, "Listen, I heard, through the grapevine and roundabout—these guys at National [DC Comics] want you to work for them." That knocked me on the floor! At a con in 1968 that I attended with my new buddies, I met up with the DC guys again. The *Baltimore Sun* was the newspaper where I was working, but I hit this summer con and they told me, "If you lived here, we'd give you work." By August, after thinking it over, I moved to New York. Shortly after that, Kaluta became my roommate.

BOYD: *What was Joe Orlando like to work with? What did you learn from him?*

WRIGHTSON: Joe was great. He was a teacher ... informally. He kept a pad of tracing paper and he'd redraw panels I'd done and help me condense my storytelling. I thought my job was to draw pretty pictures one after another. Joe would say, "No, no, no ... it doesn't work like that—you can combine the action in these two panels into one" and things like that. I learned an awful lot from Joe. He was the guy I most wanted to work with.

Joe edited my first stuff at DC. My strongest memory of him was us just laughing all the time! Everything we saw in those comics struck us as funny! [laughs] I read some ridiculous script and he had to clean it up, but we still laughed a lot. He'd say, "This is too bad—too funny to be in horror!" Eventually, those bad scripts ended up in *PLOP!* They weren't scary enough to make the *House* books, but they were perfect for *PLOP!*

[laughter]

BOYD: *Sergio Aragonés did horror/humor one-pagers. Did you like those? What stories of yours came out especially well to you?*

WRIGHTSON: I loved Sergio's stuff! I thought those were great! Of my stuff, I liked the

THE SCARY/FUNNY WORLDS OF

SERGIO ARAGONÉS



1970: It was a great time for horror.

ABC-TV's *Dark Shadows* was going as strong as ever, and a horrific vampire movie culled from some of its earliest, greatest storylines came out that year. Hammer Films and its British cousin, Amicus Productions, brought *The Vampire Lovers* and *The House That Dripped Blood* to audiences worldwide. Marvel Comics had jumped into the arena with *Tower of Shadows* and *Chamber of Darkness*, blowing eyeballs out with work by Steranko, Tom Sutton, Don Heck, John Romita, Neal Adams, Marie Severin, and the Buscema brothers. Charlton, Warren, and *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine added to the nocturnal chills.

But it was DC's revamp of *House of Mystery* and *House of Secrets*, eschewing "Dial H for Hero" and "Eclipse" (respectively), that turned a lot of heads in the publisher's direction. I was one of those fans. DC had these two new guys, Bernie Wrightson and Neal Adams, who were doing things with a pencil I didn't think were possible! And even more, they had Alex Toth, Jack Sparling, Gil Kane, and ... Sergio Aragonés, that *MAD* magazine guy, who came in once in a while with those whimsical, twisted humor/horror one-pagers that none of the competition was able to mimic! His brand of hilarious black humor continued on into the '70s, of course. Mr. Aragonés speaks to us about those great days.

— Jerry Boyd

JERRY BOYD: Who contacted you to do those great cartoons for *House of Mystery* and the other titles at DC? Was it Joe Orlando, and if so, what were his reasons for wanting humor pages between the stories?

SERGIO ARAGONÉS: I just arrived from Europe in '68. When I got back, [MAD publisher] Bill Gaines told me Joe Orlando wanted to see me. He needed two scripts for *Young Romance*. [DC art director] Vince Colletta was there in his office waiting for some scripts. I suggested that they go to lunch and I wrote the scripts. They went along with it. [laughs] Someone cleaned up the language because I was still learning English! [laughs] Joe

came back, looked them over, and said, "I didn't know you wrote!" "Neither did I!" I said. [laughter] It was the basic boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl—and a little twist.

BOYD: So you were thinking about writing. What made you feel you were ready?

ARAGONÉS: It wasn't that complicated. I was a fan of comics, so I didn't really write it for Vince, I drew it out in layouts, and made it really loose. I went to the library at DC and looked over a few comics before that. One story I came up with was how I met my first wife. That was the basis. [The male story character] was a musician instead of a cartoonist, though. It was very basic, very innocent stuff—it wasn't that difficult.

by Jerry Boyd

conducted November 13, 2010 and January 19, 2011

Brotherly "Love"

Cain and Abel came to half-dead life in this convention illo done for the interviewer in 2006.

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YOU WILL BELIEVE IN...

GHOSTS

During the 1960s, Leo Dorfman regularly contributed scripts to DC Comics' Superman family of comic books, but he often wondered if it was worth the headache. Chafing at the treatment he endured under editor Mort Weisinger, the writer dreamed of creating a new series for a more congenial editorial office. He envisioned a supernatural comic book with a very specific focus and was certain it would be a hit. Leo Dorfman believed in *Ghosts*, and he soon convinced Murray Boltinoff to join him.

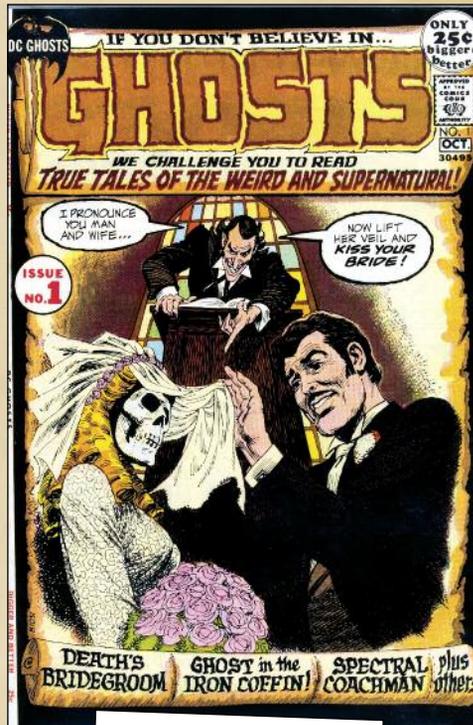
For his part, Boltinoff missed the days when he was shepherding new series like *Doom Patrol* and *Eclipso* [in *House of Secrets*]. The longtime DC editor remained a reliable presence who could be counted on to shore up and sustain preexisting books like *The Brave and the Bold* and *The Unexpected*, but it wasn't the same as creating a new series from the ground up. Having lost the editorial reins on Steve Ditko's *Creeper* and E. Nelson Bridwell's *Secret Six* series to Dick Giordano in 1968 after only a single issue apiece, Boltinoff longed for another opportunity.

In Leo Dorfman, he saw both a kindred spirit and a consummate professional. He also empathized with the writer's discomfort at DC. "Since I shared an office with the tyrannical but talented Mort Weisinger," Boltinoff wrote in *Robin Snyder's History of the Comics* vol. 2 #3 (Mar. 1991), "I was privy to his humiliation of Leo during their story conferences plotting Superman and Superboy stories. To free himself of Mort, Leo hoped that his introduction of a new title would earn him a new editor."

[Unless otherwise noted, all Boltinoff quotes in this article are from the essay cited above.]

DORFMAN POSSESSED

By 1971, Weisinger had retired, but Dorfman's desire to launch *Ghosts* was undimmed. "For a long time," Boltinoff continued, "[Dorfman] had been suggesting to me that DC publish a ghost magazine. If Dell's *Ghost Stories* could



by **John Wells**

flourish since 1962, it was evident that with its abundance of talent, DC could produce a better mousetrap."

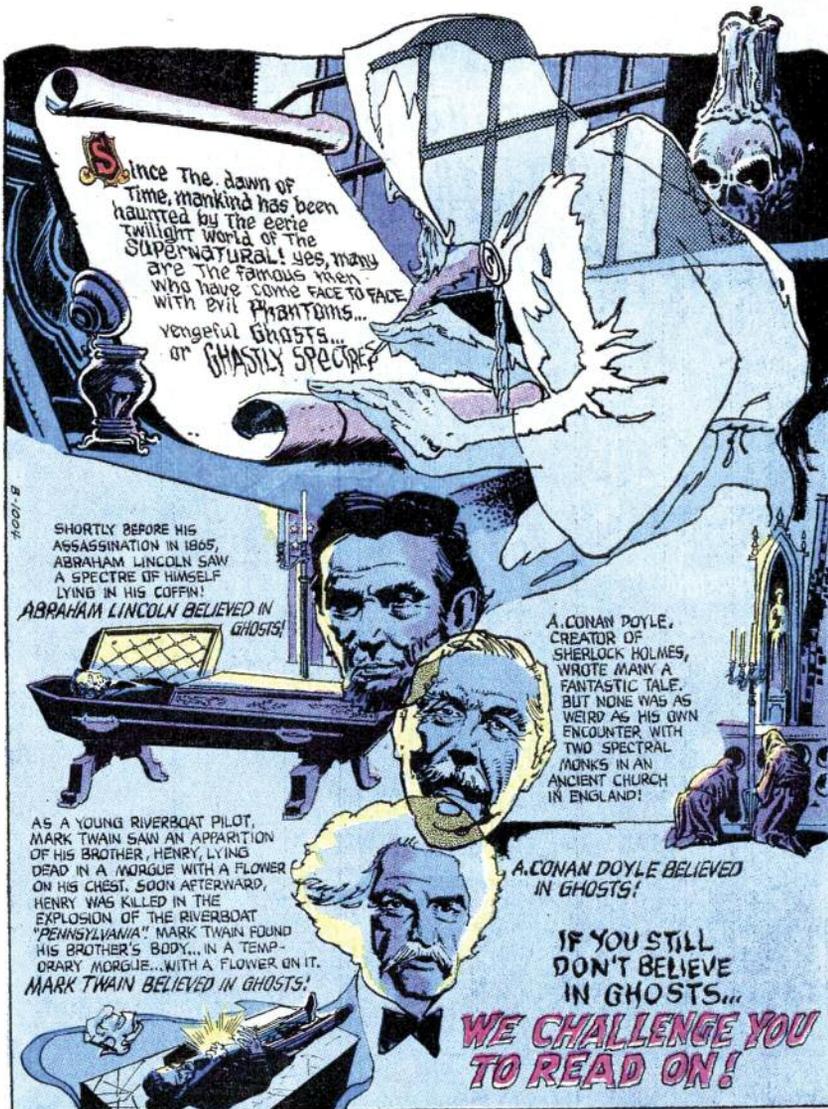
Dorfman made no secret of his fascination with the supernatural, the occult, and UFOs, cited in an autobiographical sketch in 1970's *Action Comics* #396. He indulged it in his scripts for Gold Key comic books like *Boris Karloff Tales of Mystery*, *Twilight Zone*, and *Grimm's Ghost Stories*, and such elements were a staple of the Superman scripts he wrote for Boltinoff starting in 1970.

Within a few years of Dell's *Ghost Stories* #1, Charlton Comics editor Dick Giordano

You Will Believe!

Murray Boltinoff and Leo Dorfman's *Ghosts* sported verbose covers from the very start and still cover artist Nick Cardy made some visually striking efforts. Here's the cover of the first issue (Oct. 1971).

TM & © DC Comics.



They Believed In Ghosts!

With fidelity to its tagline, "True Tales of the Weird and Supernatural," *Ghosts* repeatedly delved into the influence of spectral beings on real people. Here's Tony DeZuniga's evocative splash page from #1, featuring two renowned authors and one of America's greatest presidents. (opposite) Nick Cardy's covers to issues #2 and 8.

TM & © DC Comics.

launched *Ghostly Tales* and *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves*, titles that were joined by *Ghost Manor* in 1969. At DC, Murray Boltinoff had revived the supernatural/suspense genre in a 1967 makeover of *Tales of the Unexpected*, even as his intended lead feature ("Secret Six") was launched as a comic book of its own. With the addition of the revamped or brand-new series *House of Mystery*, *The Witching Hour*, and *House of Secrets*, DC believed it had the spook genre well-represented. Boltinoff and Dorfman persisted that none of those titles had the specific theme and visceral impact of *Ghosts*. "After a prolonged hard-sell," Boltinoff continued, "Carmine Infantino, then-editorial director, was ultimately persuaded to add the title to DC's roster.

"For our enterprise, I was appointed editor and assigned Leo to write the entire [first] issue," Boltinoff said. Rather than create the appearance that one writer had a monopoly of the comic book, Boltinoff had Dorfman use the pseudonyms Geoff Browne and David George on the first two stories in the issue. (The former was inspired by the writer's son Geoff and his wife's maiden name Brown.)

Boltinoff made a point of matching up artists in that first issue to the genres that represented their strengths. Consequently, Sam Glanzman drew the World War II-based "Ghost In the Iron Coffin," while Tony DeZuniga illustrated a Western five-pager entitled "The Spectral Coachman." Jim Aparo, then the regular artist on *The Phantom Stranger*, was tapped to illustrate

the opening story ("Death's Bridegroom"), a gothic chiller wherein two swindlers wandered into a castle filled with a ghostly wedding party.

"The whole project was unusual," former DC Comics president and publisher Paul Levitz tells *BACK ISSUE*. "Murray rarely launched anything (last book before this that I think he more than nominally launched was *Plastic Man*, five years and a whole different DC culture before), and didn't give over anthologies to a single writer. Leo was pretty weary-looking in those years, but he seemed to really connect with this project. He'd had success with Gold Key's ghost anthologies, and both he and Murray put more life into this run. Murray even got some strong artists into the early issues—guys like Nick Cardy, who rarely worked on the anthologies at that time. Sales were strong—probably Murray's bestselling mystery book, and Murray usually outsold the other editors in that genre."

Ghosts #1 (Sept.–Oct. 1971) debuted in the midst of a year-long expansion of the DC line that saw the page count of every standard title increased with an attendant price hike from 15 cents to 25 cents. The extra pages in each issue were designated for reprints and Boltinoff found himself drawing on stories originally produced in the 1950s. Tales like those, which tended to dismiss seeming supernatural incidents with plausible explanations, were at odds with *Ghosts*' conviction that such things were real. Nonetheless, the editor resisted major revisions, mostly punching up the final panels with more ambiguous dialogue or newly inserted captions like, "Now do you believe in ghosts?"

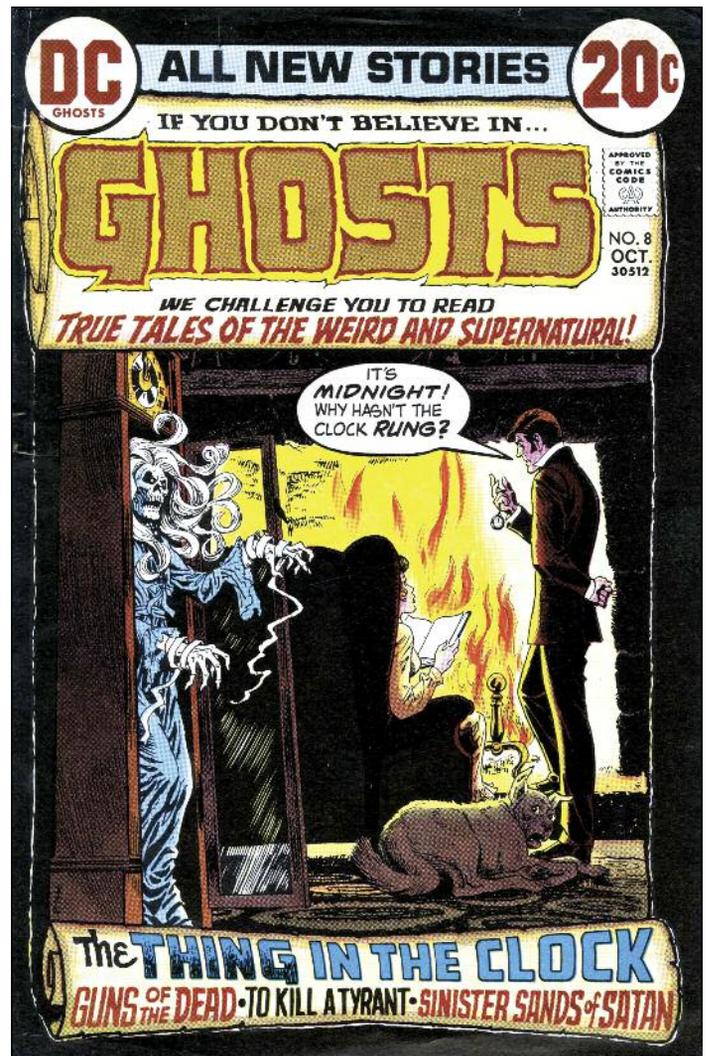
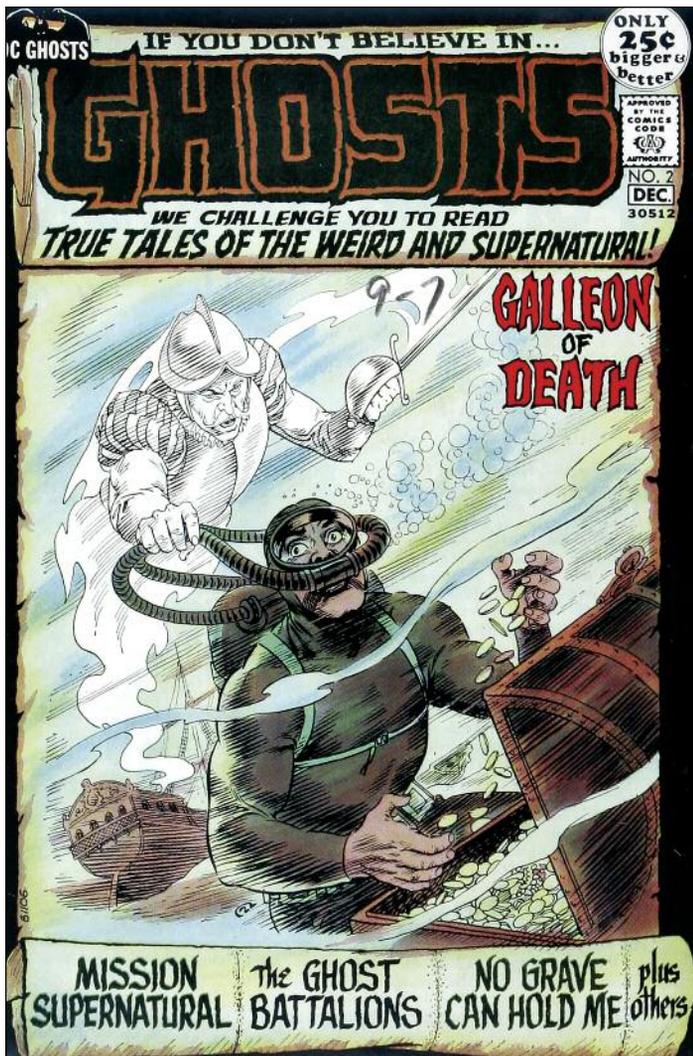
For all the effort invested in the interior, Boltinoff knew that a strong cover image was essential. He selected veteran artist Nick Cardy, whose simple, bold style had been increasingly put to use on DC covers since the late 1960s. On other titles like *The Witching Hour* or *The Unexpected*, Cardy's art mostly stood on its own merits with little or no cover copy. For *Ghosts*, Boltinoff went to the other extreme, splashing text on the cover with the zeal of a carnival barker.

At the top of the cover, the actual title of the comic book was sandwiched in a longer declaration that remained unchanged for 40 issues: "If you don't believe in ghosts, we challenge you to read true tales of the weird and supernatural!" Meantime, the titles of every new story in the issue were run across the bottom of the cover. Thanks to Cardy's artistic skill and the stock design that placed the words and pictures on an unrolled scroll, the cumulative effect was quite eye-catching. The scroll backdrop was finally dropped after #15 (June 1973), but Boltinoff maintained a virtual table of contents on most covers until nearly the end of his editorial tenure in 1978. From his perspective, a comic book promoting multiple story titles had greater value to prospective readers.

One of the central hooks of the series was its assertion that the stories within its pages were based on real events. Indeed, its original title was "True Ghost Stories" and the indicia for issue #1 contained only the word "Ghost" with conspicuous blank spaces where "True" and "Stories" would have appeared. One presumes the change was a consequence of Gold Key regularly using the "True Ghost Stories" phrase prominently on the covers of *Ripley's Believe or Not*, a series for which (not coincidentally) Dorfman also wrote.

FACT OR FICTION?

Helping to create the illusion, the typical story employed an authoritative tone, dutifully citing in the



first panel the year a particular ghostly incident took place and recording an update in the last, documentary style. (Stories in #73, 76, and 95 even referenced or actually depicted later writers Carl Wessler, Robert Kanigher, and George Kashdan interviewing eyewitnesses.) "What amused me were inquiries from readers regarding the veracity of the stories, which were purportedly true," Murray Boltinoff remembered. "In some instances, the accounts were genuine, and when they were not, they were written in such a style and manner as to appear to be real.

"To make a story seem authentic when I edited *Gang Busters* [in the 1950s], I invented a ploy: mix fact with fiction, and the reader swallows the whole thing as genuine. For instance, a character says, '1945 was my best year. The war ended. Hoop Jr. won the Derby. And I met Larry O'Toole.' The first two really did occur, but the fact about O'Toole is also gulped down. I thought I'd created a clever writer's trick until some time later I read that our government intelligence agents used a similar propaganda strategy in World War II."

Dorfman possessed a personal library that inspired awe in friends and family alike. "There's enough space for the door to swing open," one of the writer's sons detailed in *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #156 (Feb. 1973). "And then you come face-to-face with tiers of books stacked to the ceiling. Books on space travel, on oceanography, exploration, history, pre-history, anthropology, medicine. You name it, he's got it! And all those thousands of books are in constant use. My dad's always thumbing through them to verify some fact or scientific twist he's planning to use in one of his story ideas."



NICK CARDY

Dorfman and Boltinoff's formula also included occasional appearances by recognizable historical figures. *Ghosts* #1 actually opened with a Tony DeZuniga-illustrated page asserting that Abraham Lincoln, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Mark Twain had all believed in specters. Later stories would feature the likes of Julius Caesar (#22), Napoleon Bonaparte (#16), Edgar Allan Poe (#26), Jim Bowie at the Alamo (#15), Grigori Rasputin and Josef Stalin (#8), Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (#34), Mata Hari (#24), James Dean (#44), and perennial favorite Adolf Hitler (#16, 18, 22, 24).

There was a particular fascination with ghost stories linked to the president of the United States, including an astrological-themed text feature (#14), a page of vignettes entitled "The Haunting of the White House" (#37), and the tale of would-be assassin John Schrank's attempt on Theodore Roosevelt—because the ghost of President McKinley told him to do it (#61). Abraham Lincoln's assassination held special power, with pieces focusing on both his murderer John Wilkes Booth (#4) and his death train (#30). Perhaps the most fascinating account was #21's "Shadow of Death" and its revelation that the slain leader's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, had been on the scene of the subsequent assassinations of Presidents Garfield and McKinley. Issue #11's "The Death Circle" documented the eerie fact that, "since 1840, every president voted into office in a year ending in zero ... has died in office." [Obviously, that ghostly chain of coincidence came to an end after Ronald Reagan—elected in 1980—completed two full terms in office.]

For all the fact-based accounts like those, Boltinoff didn't necessar-

FROM THE

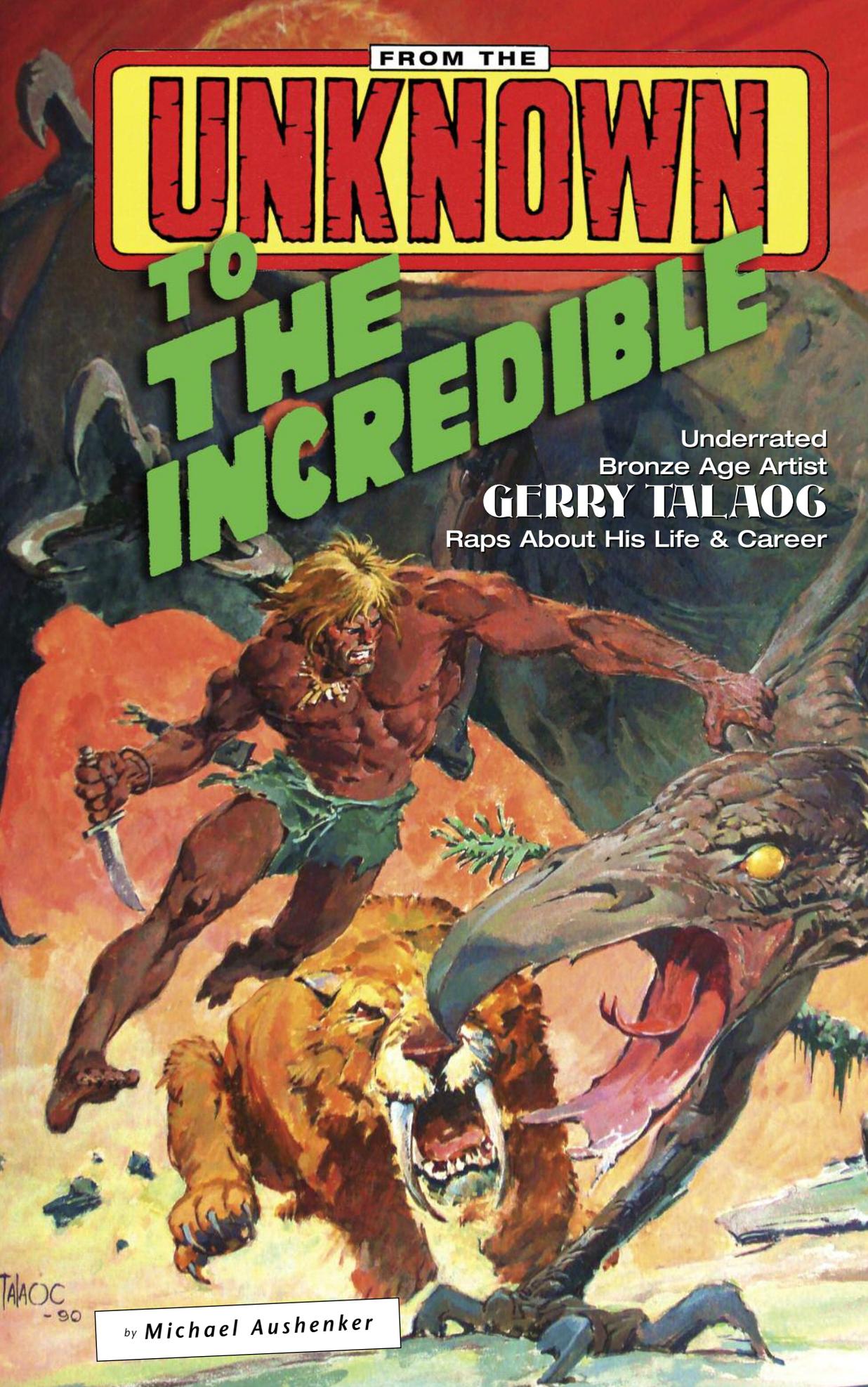
UNKNOWN

TO THE INCREDIBLE

Underrated
Bronze Age Artist

GERRY TALAOC

Raps About His Life & Career



by **Michael Aushenker**

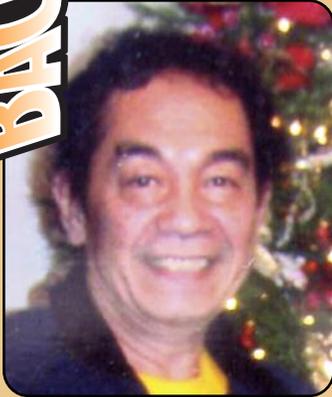
*A Tantalizing
Taste of the
Tremendous
Talent of Talaoc!*

Ka-Zar and his kitty, Zabú, take on a pesky Pterosaur in this dynamic painting by our interview subject, Gerry Talaoc! Courtesy of the artist. Wow, indeed.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

ARTIST

DATA CARD



GERRY TALAOC

Beginnings:
Filipino "komiks" work in 1960s / First work published in US: "Phony Face!" in *House of Mystery* #205 (Aug. 1972)

Milestones:
House of Mystery / *Ghosts* / *The Phantom Stranger* / *The Unknown Soldier* / *G.I. Combat* / *Incredible Hulk* / *Alpha Flight* / *Comet Man*

Works in Progress:
Paintings and commissions

Every BACK ISSUE piece has a backstory, and the one behind finding the artist Gerry Talaoc for my article on *The Unknown Soldier* for BACK ISSUE #37 is a real doozy.

Among the artists of the so-called "Filipino Invasion," Talaoc was never as big a name as Alfredo Alcalá, Nestor Redondo, or Tony DeZuñiga, who—with editors Joe Orlando and Carmine Infantino—led the charge to travel to the Philippines in the early 1970s and enlist the South Pacific island nation's top talents to work for DC Comics for lower page rates than their American counterparts. And yet Talaoc, as a penciler and/or inker, created handsome art for DC Comics (and later Marvel), most notably *The Phantom Stranger*, various DC horror anthologies, *The Incredible Hulk*, and, above all, his lengthy run on *The Unknown*

The Real Deal
Filipino artist Gerry Talaoc's US debut was in the pages of *House of Mystery* #205 (Aug. 1972), starting off spectacularly with this epic, suspenseful splash page depicting E. Nelson Bridwell's tale of terror! From the collection of Benton Jew.

TM & © DC Comics.

Soldier (originally penciling and inking, but later embellishing Dick Ayers' breakdowns).

"Gerry is a very nice guy," recalls Tony DeZuñiga (who has not been in touch with Talaoc for decades). He tells *BACK ISSUE*: "Gerry's a very good craftsman. He was very dependable. You give him a deadline and you don't have to worry on getting the work. He's a real pro."

I didn't know much about Talaoc when I went on a quest to find the artist in early 2007. Even the thorough Filipino Invasion issue of *Comic Book Artist*, edited by Jon B. Cooke, had little to say biographically on the artist or his whereabouts. To find him, I had to travel all over the world (by Internet, of course). And so, my journey took me from the Philippines—where Elmer cartoonist Gerry Alanguilan led me to Talaoc's son, Jeremy, who led me back to America—Alaska—where Talaoc lives today as an employee of the City of Juneau. After a phone-number mix-up, I left a voice message on Talaoc's landline. And then—nothing...

...Until several months later, on a radiant August 2007 afternoon, I was at my then-girlfriend's house in verdant, suburban

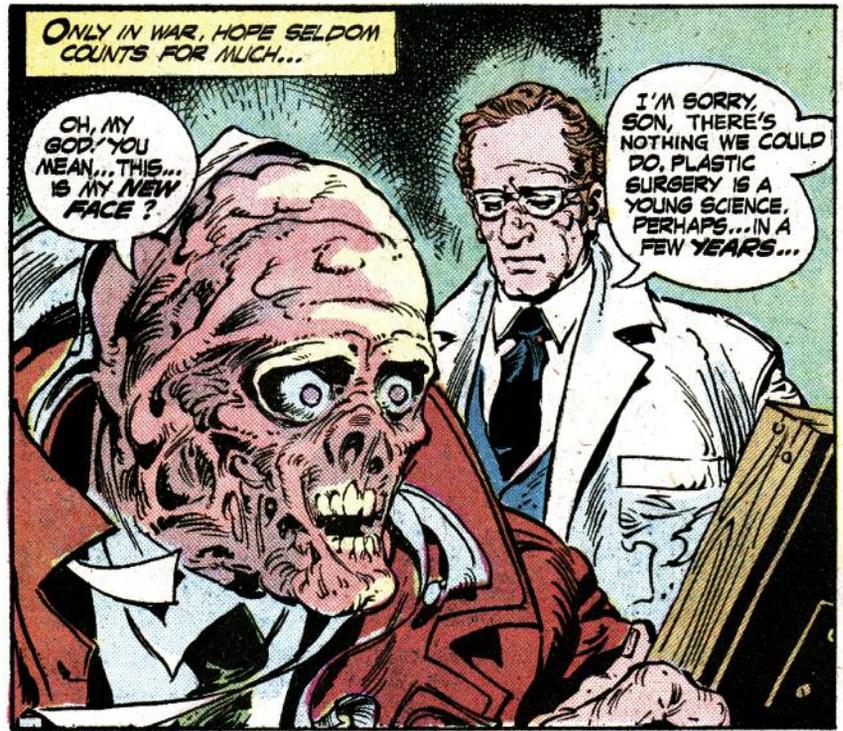




DEATH--THE FINAL ARROGANT ACT IN A PLAY FAR TOO OFTEN TAKEN FOR GRANTED. BUT JUST WHO MAY RING DOWN THIS FINAL CURTAIN? WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO END LIFE NOT EARNED, BUT GIVEN? THE SOLUTIONS TO THESE RIDDLES ARE NOT EASILY FOUND--FOR THEY LIE HIDDEN, LOST WITHIN FORGOTTEN LABYRINTHS OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT.

IF YOU WISH YOU MAY COME WITH ME, THE PHANTOM STRANGER-- AND WE SHALL SEEK THE ANSWERS TOGETHER...

Irvine, California (about an hour south of Los Angeles), where I received a phone call. It was Gerry Talaoc. I dropped whatever I was doing to conduct our interview on the spot. After a half-hour's conversation on Talaoc's *Unknown Soldier* experiences, without any solicitation, Gerry graciously offered to create a little something extra special for our article. Six months later, I received a jpeg of a terrific painting of an unmasked Soldier in a trench fending off some potato masher-lobbing Nazis (Talaoc was the first artist to render the Joe Kubert creation sans bandages). The piece was stunning. It was clear that, after about 12 years of



ONLY IN WAR, HOPE SELDOM COUNTS FOR MUCH...

OH, MY GOD! YOU MEAN... THIS... IS MY NEW FACE?

I'M SORRY, SON, THERE'S NOTHING WE COULD DO. PLASTIC SURGERY IS A YOUNG SCIENCE. PERHAPS... IN A FEW YEARS...

comics-industry dormancy, Gerry Talaoc still had his chops. We teased it on the cover of *BACK ISSUE* #37 and ran the complete image inside. After the issue came out, I soon discovered that not just myself but a circle of my cartoonist peers were smitten with the Talaoc style. Turns out my *BACK ISSUE* brudda, writer Jerry Boyd, owns a Talaoc original art page from *House of Secrets*. Meanwhile, my fellow Cartoon Art Professionals Society members, Anson and Benton Jew, informed me that they had been fans of Talaoc's work since childhood (coincidentally, like Talaoc, the Los Angeles-based twin brothers happen to be of Filipino descent). "I know Talaoc's work primarily through the various DC horror anthology comics stories he did in the late '60s and early '70s," says Anson Jew, who has created independent comics and storyboarded the *Wolverine* and the *X-Men* cartoon. "He was very much like Alex Niño in a lot of ways, but what he seemed to do really well was sinister. For creepy, jerk characters with skull-like faces, you could do no better than Talaoc!" "My first exposure to Talaoc's work was when I was a preteen kid," says Benton Jew, a storyboard artist (*Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*) who worked on *Wolverine: Agent of Atlas* #1. "There was a story in *The Secrets of Sinister House* #10 called 'The Cards Never Lie!' It was a ghost story set in the days of the Mob. I had also seen his work in *The Unknown Soldier*, as well as his work replacing Jim Aparo on *The Phantom Stranger*. "Although I didn't care for his work at first," Benton continues, "the images in 'The Cards Never Lie!' stuck with me. As I got older, and my tastes matured, I gave Talaoc's work a second look and realized that I was a complete fool! This guy's work was incredible! Just as Jordi Bernet's work kind of looked like as if Joe Kubert inked Alex Toth, Talaoc's work took on some of the best qualities of Frank Robbins work as if inked by Alex Niño!" Count London-based artist Rufus Dayglo (the *Tank*

Seeking Answers, Facing Reality
Two iconic Talaoc panels from his most beloved DC assignments. (left) The Phantom Stranger, from *PS* #35 (Mar. 1975), and (above) the Unknown Soldier, from *Star Spangled War Stories* #183 (Dec. 1974). The latter was Gerry's debut on that title, which shifted the character from a bandaged-faced hero to this new, grotesque, decidedly more horror-inspiring visage. What chills! What thrills!

TM & © DC Comics.

The Many Lives of the BLACK ORCHID

FlashBack!



by **Shannon E. Riley**

"It was midnight ... a man ... a good man ... was in trouble ... and she appeared! It was as simple as that! She showed a strength that was impossible to believe ... removed the man from danger ... and then vanished! Nothing more was known about her, except that everyone who saw her agreed that she looked like a huge flower—an orchid—a Black Orchid!"

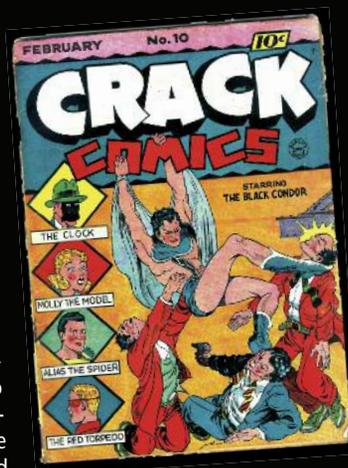
So began the escapades of the mysterious Black Orchid. Bob Oksner's moody cover for *Adventure Comics* #428 (Aug. 1973) depicts our heroine perched on a Gothic rooftop, set against the backdrop of a full moon and a bat-filled sky. Below her, a gang of gun-toting criminals peer out a window—unaware that they are about to become her prey. While it's prominently touted as an origin issue, the true identity of the Black Orchid would remain a puzzler for another 15 years. She was a malleable cypher, with DC seemingly content to let the character shift in and out of stories with no attempt to define her. That is, until a newcomer named Neil Gaiman turned that idea on its head and crafted a new mythology. But before Gaiman could do that—the *Black Orchid* would have to die.

TAKING ROOT IN ADVENTURE

Under the guidance of editor Joe Orlando, DC's long-running *Adventure Comics* took a brief detour away from traditional superheroics in the early '70s. Beginning with issue #425 (Dec. 1972), the focus shifted to fantasy and supernatural adventure tales. It likely made good business sense to Orlando, given the success of the company's other mystery titles following the loosening of the Comics Code. Non-costumed protagonists—like Robert Kanigher's and Alex Niño's "Captain Fear," and John Albano's and Jim Aparo's "The Adventurers' Club"—appeared in the series through issue #427 (May 1973).

Making her debut in issues #428–430 (Aug.–Dec. 1973), the Black Orchid brought the costumes back to *Adventure*,

but with a twist of mystery: she was a master of disguise and, in effect, a blank slate. Unique in DC's stable of characters, her powers were unexplained and even stranger, she left an aromatic orchid as her calling card. The first three stories—"Black Orchid," "Challenge to the Black Orchid," and "The Anger of the Black Orchid"—all followed similar arcs in that the heroine would mysteriously



Night Flight

We photo manipulated the proportions of this, Gaspar Saladino's "Black Orchid" logo and Bob Oksner's bodacious cover image from *Adventure Comics* #430 (Dec. 1973).

TM & © DC Comics.

A Fine Inspiration

(left) Black Orchid designer Tony DeZuñiga explains that the costume was inspired by another "black" character, Quality Comics' the Black Condor, Lou Fine's Golden Age superhero.

TM & © DC Comics.



appear, save a protagonist, and then shake down crooks by masquerading as dancers, waitresses, or femme fatales. As
 co-creator
 T o n y

DeZuniga relates to *BACK ISSUE*, the Orchid was essentially Orlando's brainchild—and it was DeZuniga and longtime DC editor/writer/cartoonist Sheldon Mayer who executed the idea.

This was the first and only collaboration between Mayer and DeZuniga, and it was Mayer's health issues that would indirectly lead to the partnership. Failing eyesight had forced Mayer to abandon his first love of cartooning, and begin scripting stories for DC's mystery titles. He wrote such tales as "This Evil Demon Loves People!" for *House of Mystery* #207 (Oct. 1972), "Small Invasion" in *House of Secrets* #101 (Oct. 1972), and "Death Laughed Last!" for *Forbidden Tales of Dark Mansion* #12 (Sept. 1973).

Flower Child

(above) Tony DeZuniga recently created this lyrical image of the sublime Black Orchid
 TM & © DC Comics.

DeZuniga had left his home in the Philippines in 1969 and ventured to New York City, where he began working for DC under Orlando's guidance. His first job was as Ric Estrada's inker on the story "For Love or Money" in *Girls' Love Stories* #153 (Aug. 1970), and his first American penciling gig appeared in "Dark City of Doom" in *House of Mystery* #188 (Oct. 1970).

DeZuniga says, "Joe Orlando, for me—he's the best editor DC ever had. He gave artists free rein and he recognized every artist's [strengths]." Anyone familiar with DeZuniga's work knows that it exhibits a stunning realism and a strong command of the human form (as evidenced by the pen and ink commissions he did for this article). These traits would be put on full display in his visual interpretation of Mayer's scripts.

DeZuniga found the most obvious inspiration for the Orchid's garb from her flower namesake—*Cymbidium canaliculatum sparkesii*—a plant resplendent with dark black-purple petals and sepals. It was a Golden Age Quality Comics hero that would further serve as a muse for the artist. DeZuniga tells *BI* that in brainstorming the design concept, he "read the character description and [recalled that] in the '40s there was this character called the Black Condor, but [since] that was a male superhero, I took some ideas and revised [it] to a female form. I had fun working on it—I love the character because [she] was beautifully, elegantly designed." DeZuniga acknowledges that while the issues didn't sell that well, she's fondly remembered by collectors to this day. "Even now, I get a lot of commissions and people still ask me a lot of questions about Black Orchid."

THINGS GET STRANGER

While not successful enough to graduate to her own title, Black Orchid was awarded the backup feature in *The Phantom Stranger*, starting with issue #31 (July 1974). Mayer and DeZuniga stayed on as the creative team for the story "Island of Fear," but this would be their final joint effort on the character. With issue #32 (Sept. 1974), Michael Fleisher and Russell Carley took the scripting reins, with Nestor Redondo handing pencils and inks for "The Crime of the Black Orchid." The tale sees the Orchid framed by a young couple leading a life of crime. The woman, Myrna, pulls a bank heist in

Who's That Girl?

(right) The true identity of our hero is pondered in this nice DeZuniga panel from *Adventure Comics* #428 (Aug. 1973).

TM & © DC Comics.





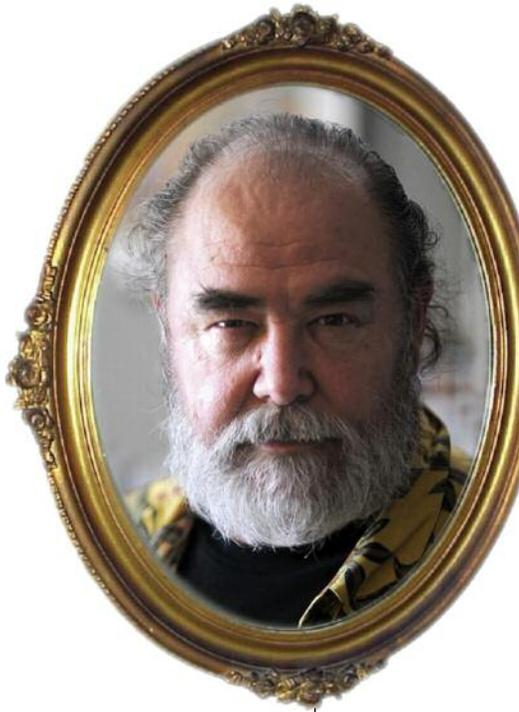
**BEYOND
Capes!**



by *Jarrold Buttery*

Enter Freely, Unafraid

non-superhero.com

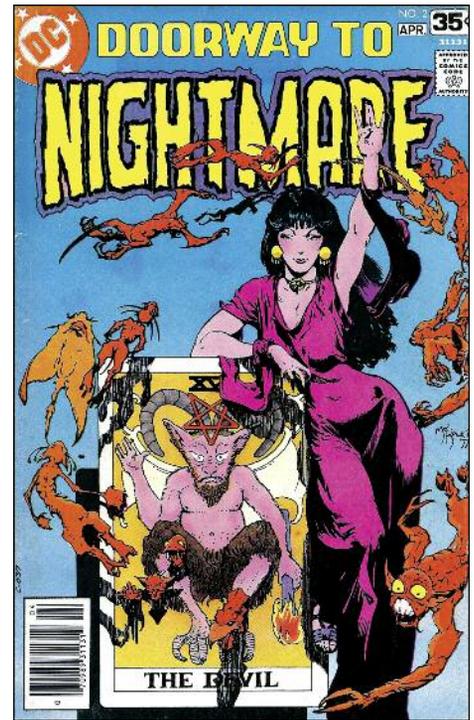
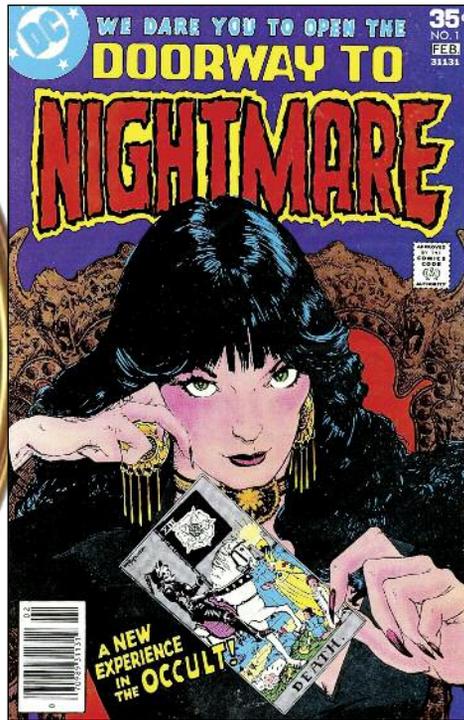


Artist and Model

Perhaps second only to The Shadow, Madame Xanadu is a character forever associated specifically with the singular artistry of one Michael William Kaluta, certainly one of the finest creators ever to share his illustrative talents with a comic-book audience.

Did you know the hostess is based on a real person? Check out the sidebar near the end of this article, "The Once & Future Madame Xanadu."

The above photo portrait of the artist is by and courtesy of Kyle Cassidy.



In the 1970s it was *de rigueur* for each mystery comic to have a host. With its 1978 debut, *Doorway to Nightmare* featured a host who didn't simply introduce the stories but participated in each tale. The issues followed a formula: each wholly independent full-length story featured lovers beset by occult forces seeking advice from an enigmatic fortune-teller—whose otherwise-locked door always seemed open for those genuinely in need. Guided by the Tarot, Madame Xanadu would advise, but allow her visitors to tread their own paths, reappearing for the denouement to ensnare that issue's supernatural antagonist in one of her Soul Jars.

Artist Michael Wm. Kaluta remembers being approached by DC editor Joe Orlando: "Joe's exact words were, 'We're developing a hostess for a book called *Doorway to Nightmare*—she'll act as a way to introduce the stories, though, other than appearing at the beginning, she won't take part in the actual stories. I want a witchy, Gypsy-type woman; she'll live in Greenwich Village where she has a fortune-telling shop.'" Somewhere in development, Madame Xanadu's role expanded from host to participant. However, Orlando had approached the right person, for Kaluta had drawn a mystery hostess for seven issues of *Forbidden Tales of Dark Mansion*. "I adapted the nameless hostess from *FToDM* into Madame Xanadu, but Joe O. never asked me to do that specifically," recalls Kaluta. "The woman who graced the indicia page of *FToDM* was tall, dark, mysterious, and un-edited; I drew the pieces as evocative mood images and the editor had the words added afterward—it was as close as I'd come to self-expression at that time. The agreement between me and the editor was she'd never be named and she'd never act like the other, EC Comics-based hosts: never putting on funny hats and acting like a carnival barker (until the final issue, where I believe Mr. Chaykin put her in a Santa suit). She naturally morphed into the template for Madame Xanadu." [Writer's note: This character was eventually named "Charity" in *Starman* #2 (Dec. 1994).]

Joe Orlando edited the first two issues of *Doorway*

before Jack C. Harris took over. "The title was, from the beginning, going to be a showcase for both new and established artists and writers," reveals Harris. "The thought was to combine new writers with established artists and new artists with established writers. I don't recall the specific incidents leading up to the creation of *Doorway* or Madame Xanadu, except for the Tarot cards. They were at the very heart of the idea from the beginning. The Soul Jars were added to the character and her 'look' was 100% the work of Mike Kaluta."

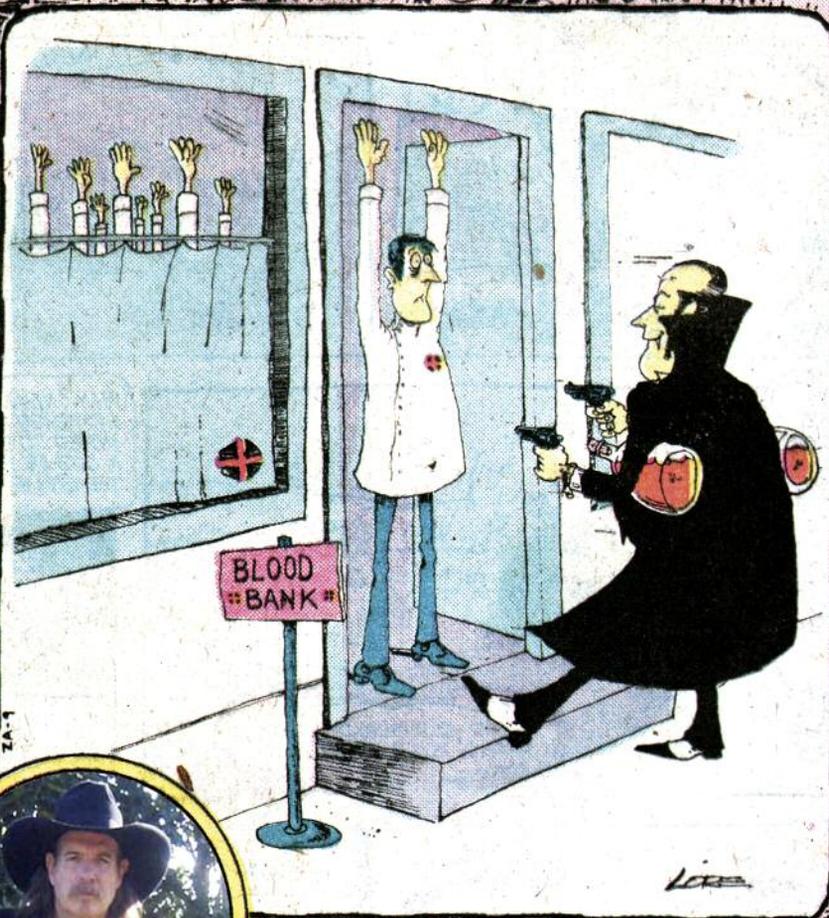
ENTER FREELY, UNAFRAID

Kaluta states, "The cover for *Doorway to Nightmare* #1 (Feb.–Mar. 1978) was certainly suggested by Joe O: 'Have her holding a Tarot Card.' Whether he asked specifically for the Death card from the Major Arcana, I don't recall."

The debut issue was written by David Michelinie. "I do remember that I was asked to write the first *Doorway to Nightmare*; it wasn't a project I brought to DC," offers Michelinie. "I worked most closely with Paul Levitz, I believe, who was Joe Orlando's assistant at the time. [Mr Levitz declined to answer *BACK ISSUE*'s questions.] I'm pretty sure that the character, names, and general concept were there before I was brought in. I think the idea was to have sort of a female Phantom Stranger, a mysterious character who was more than she appeared to be, who took a more active role than other hosts but let the individual characters from the separate stories take center stage. So I basically constructed a story that would establish things for other writers to follow, expanding on the specifics I was given."

And follow they did. Michelinie's introductory story showed a young woman seeking to save her boyfriend from an Egyptian succubus, but also established concepts that have remained with Madame Xanadu over her 33-year history. The writer says, "I'm pretty sure Christy Street (a play on Christopher Street, an actual address in the Village), 'Enter Freely, Unafraid' (the sign on her door), and the bit about the door being

THE HYSTERICAL HIPPY HORROR HUMOR OF
LORE



by **Bryan Stroud**

Lore Shoberg, by his own description, arrived at the offices of DC Comics via a circuitous route, being referred to Joe Orlando because of his "dark" humor illustrations that he'd been providing to National Lampoon. Lore had originally gone to New York City from San Francisco to pursue publication of a children's book, but while he was seeking that goal, began to try to get

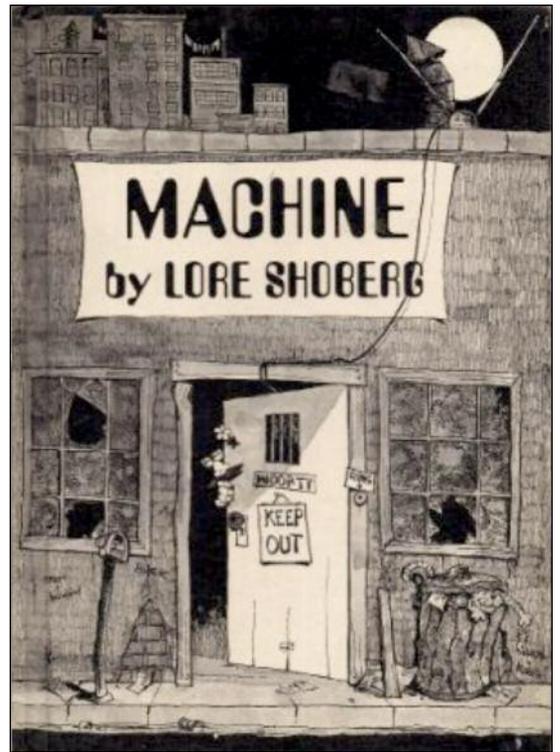
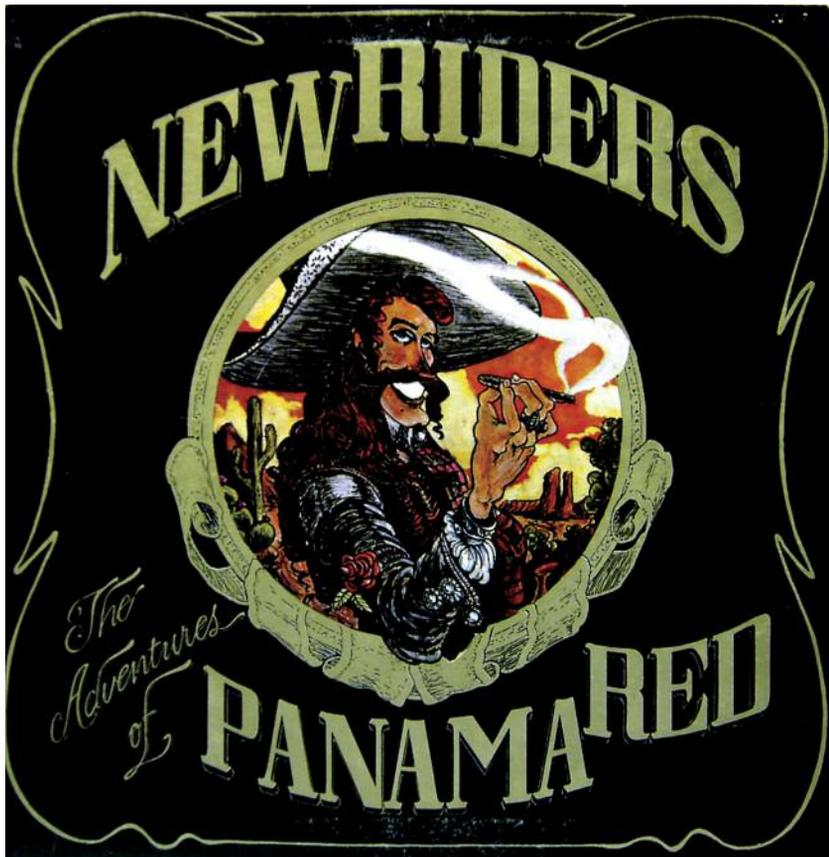
any sort of work to keep body and soul together. He ultimately did get a publisher, so his time in comics was brief, beginning with a one-page gag strip for Cain's Game Room in DC Comics' House of Mystery #192, (May-June 1971). Lore also scripted two mystery stories during his association with DC in 1971 and 1972.

– Bryan Stroud

**Withdrawal
 Symptoms**

Main image is a slightly photo-manipulated page from *PLOP!* #7 (Oct. 1974), featuring this Lore Shoberg gag. Inset is a recent photo of the multi-talented hombre, who now goes by the brand of Loren Orion, pardnah.

Page TM & © DC Comics.
 Photo ©2011 Loren Orion.



Purple Sage Haze

(above left) Lore just might be most famous for his New Riders of the Purple Sage album covers.

(above right) He originally came to New York City to pitch a children's book. Before returning West, Lore produced three books. Here's the cover to *Machine* (1973).

TM & © the copyright owner.

Lore of Yore

(inset) Young Master Shoberg, who still is in a rock band today.

TM & © Lore Orion.

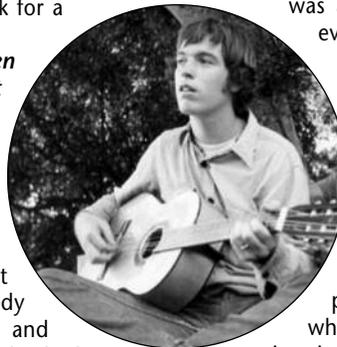
BRYAN STROUD: *You've had quite the colorful career. You've gone coast to coast and points in between and done a lot of extraordinary things. Are you driven or lucky or both?*

LORE (SHOBERG) ORION: I'm kind of like a monkey with a shiny object. I go where the mood suits me, I guess. You know, one thing leads to another, and has led to another, and as I made the steps the first step made before led to the next one. So I guess it was luck—being in the right place at the right time and a blind determination not to work for a living. [laughter]

STROUD: *I wish I could say I've been as fortunate. I guess some of us get opportunities at an early stage and others have to wait a little longer.*

SHOBERG: Well, I also grew up at a point when it was okay to do that. A time when following your nose, so to speak, or to follow your own heart was not only accepted, but encouraged. It was "do your own thing," where nobody was criticized for not getting a job and [not] being like your parents. Now, I do think we gained some bad things because of it, but also gained some good things. I think we lost a lot of things that should have been integral to the legacy of that whole time. I don't mean "legacy" as some kind of big, important thing. "Residue" would probably be a better word.

I live in Bandera, Texas, about 75 miles north of San Antonio in the Hill Country and in this little town, per capita, there has been more people successful in the music field than pretty much any other town. They don't advertise it here. It's the Cowboy Capital of the world. There have been seven World Champion All-



Around Cowboys from Bandera. So that's the big selling point for the Chamber of Commerce. Guys like Jimmy Foster, who wrote "Eight in the Middle" and some other songs for Diamond Rio and others. I've had my songs cut by Waylon [Jennings], Tim McGraw, and some other people and a friend of mine, Bobby Boyd, just got a Grammy a couple of years ago for "Bless the Broken Road." There are managers, one from here who managed Pat Green. Willie [Nelson] spent his time in Bandera. So there has been a lot of people who've come from this town that are musicians.

STROUD: *I had no idea.*

SHOBERG: I grew up in Ramona, California, near San Diego, on a ranch my grandparents owned when it was a one-stoplight town. In fact, it didn't even have a stoplight. We'd come down out of the hills and ride the waves at Pacific Beach and other places. So that's some of my background.

STROUD: *You're an artist in more than one sense of the word. What do you feel are your greatest strengths?*

SHOBERG: Songwriting, I think. Writing, generally, but songwriting in particular. It's what I do and basically what I do best. I've come to that realization just in the last year or two. I'm 61 now and when I first started in the music business—which was directly related to the art business because I was doing album covers—it was just fun to do. I'd been writing songs for myself, so I figured I'd just go and write songs for somebody else. So I went up to Nashville and from there it was a natural thing to decide I wanted to be a recording artist. So I went through that whole thing and wound up on MCA Records and all this while doing the artwork at the same time. Eventually, the recording-artist thing went by the wayside and I just wanted to be a songwriter, and still at the same time trying to write books and trying to do another children's book

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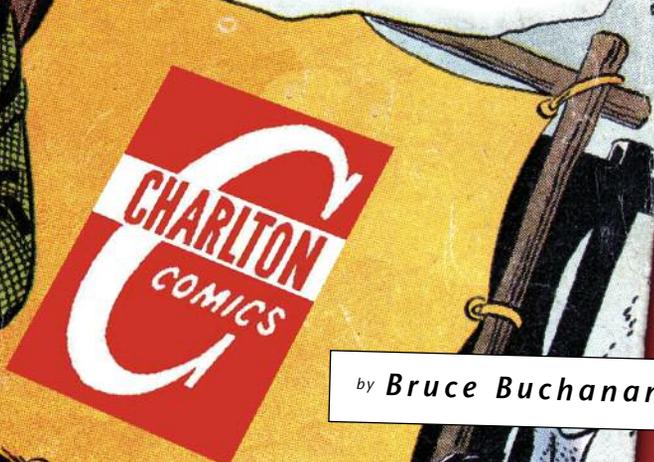
COMICS

of CHARLTON PUBLS!

BEYOND
Capes!

PERHAPS YOU SAW THEM AT THE BOTTOM OF A SPINNER RACK AT YOUR LOCAL NEWSSTAND. OR MAYBE THEY WERE TUCKED AWAY ON THE BOTTOM SHELF AT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD PHARMACY OR GROCERY STORE. BUT IF YOU WERE A COMICS FAN IN THE 1970S AND EARLY '80S, CHANCES ARE YOU ENCOUNTERED ONE OF CHARLTON'S GHOST-STORY COMICS WHILE PICKING UP THE LATEST ISSUE OF FANTASTIC FOUR OR BATMAN.

IF THE QUIRKY, OFF-BRAND COMICS ATTRACTED YOUR ATTENTION ENOUGH TO ACTUALLY PICK UP A COPY, YOU WOULD DISCOVER AN AMAZING ARRAY OF TALENT, OFTEN WORKING BELOW THE RADAR AND FOR LITTLE PAY. CONTRIBUTORS TO CHARLTON'S LINE OF HORROR ANTHOLOGY BOOKS INCLUDED STEVE SKEATES, JIM APARO, STEVE DITKO, DENNY O'NEIL (WRITING UNDER THE PEN NAME "SERGIUS O'SHAUGNESSY"), PAT BOYETTE, JOE GILL, NICK CUTI, MIKE ZECK, JOE STATON, AND MANY MORE!



by Bruce Buchanan



PAT BOYETTE

non-superhero-comics



Host Ghosts

Steve Ditko's renderings of the host character icons that appeared on Charlton's mystery comics. On the left is *Haunted's* Impy o and, right, Mr. Bones of *Ghost Manor*. Courtesy of Heritage.

© 1973 Charlton Comics.

While published under a wide range of titles—notably *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves*, *Scary Tales*, *Haunted*, and *Ghost Manor*—the Charlton books were largely interchangeable in format. Each issue featured two to four short stories, generally ranging from 8–12 pages each. The stories were entirely self-contained—none of the characters in these stories had appeared before, nor would they appear later. And each title generally had a unique, otherworldly host who introduced the stories and perhaps served as a narrator. Some of these hosts included Dr. Graves, Winnie the Witch (*Ghostly Haunts*), Baron Weirwolf (*Haunted*), Countess Von Bludd (*Scary Tales*), Mr. Bones (*Ghost Manor*), and Mr. Dedd (*Ghostly Tales*).

Unlike the infamous EC horror comics of the 1950s, the Charlton titles were light on actual violence and gore. Instead, they relied on suspenseful setups and twist endings to deliver chills and thrills to readers.

THE BIRTH OF THE CHARLTON MYSTERY LINE

The mystery line started in 1966, with the publication of *Ghostly Tales*. The first issue actually was numbered #55, taking over the numbering from a previous Charlton title [*Editor's note*: oddly enough, *Blue Beetle*]. *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* was added the subsequent year, and *Ghost Manor* came on board in 1968.

One of the early writers to work on the Charlton horror line was Steve Skeates.

"What I liked most about working for Charlton was the vast variety of genres I had the pleasure there to work within—that and the fact that I'd get assigned as many pages as I could possibly handle," Skeates recalls. "Sure, the pay was less than half of what the big com-

panies (and I do mean DC and Marvel) were shelling out per page, yet those guys tended to be downright stingy as to the number of pages they'd toss in your direction; not so with Charlton!

"I was writing Westerns (Captain Doom, Kid Montana, and the Sharpshooter); a forever-continuing, heavily captioned sword-and-sorcery period piece (The Thane of Bagarth); a private eye (Sarge Steel, in the back of the *Judomaster* comic as well as on his own in something called *Secret Agent*); humor pieces ("Far-Out Fairy Tales" for that teen-oriented comic called *Go-Go*, and the entirety of the *Abbott and Costello* comic book); I even got to create my own superhero group (the Tyro Team)," Skeates says. "And so it was that when editor Dick Giordano one day suddenly (seemingly out of the blue) asked if I'd like to try my hand at a bunch of spooky, ghostly, pseudo-horror-type stories, I of course leapt at the chance!"

Giordano's assignment to Skeates was the write two eight-page "slightly frightening mood pieces" for the second issue of *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves*. As was the case with most Charlton stories, Skeates said he was under tight time constraints, although he was grateful for the work and the artistic freedom he had at the company.

"More often than not I'd start pounding those keys with only a vague utterly bare-bones idea as to where I was going and then let the plot work itself out even as I was typing the tale up," Skeates says.

The grind-it-out schedule also made collaborating with artists impossible. Skeates said Giordano didn't assign an artist to the story until a completed script had been turned in and, sometimes, the writer didn't know which artist had drawn his story until he saw the finished comic on the newsstands. However, Skeates found Giordano's choice of artists to be close to perfect.

Skeates' favorite Charlton horror collaborations include "This Old Man," drawn by Pat Boyette for *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* #8 (Aug. 1968). Skeates particularly likes the title panel of the story: "It's like that panel's the very definition of 'claustrophobic,' while furthermore you can almost smell the mustiness!"

Other Skeates favorites include "The Best of All Possible Worlds!," with Jim Aparo in *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves* #5 (Jan. 1968), and "Routine," with Steve Ditko, in *The Many Ghost of Dr. Graves* #7 (July 1968).

"The beauty of this genre (this ghostly anthology stuff) was that I wasn't boxed in by the constraints of continuity—outside of the narrator, there were no continuing characters here, and therefore I could do whatever I wanted with those who were involved," Skeates says.

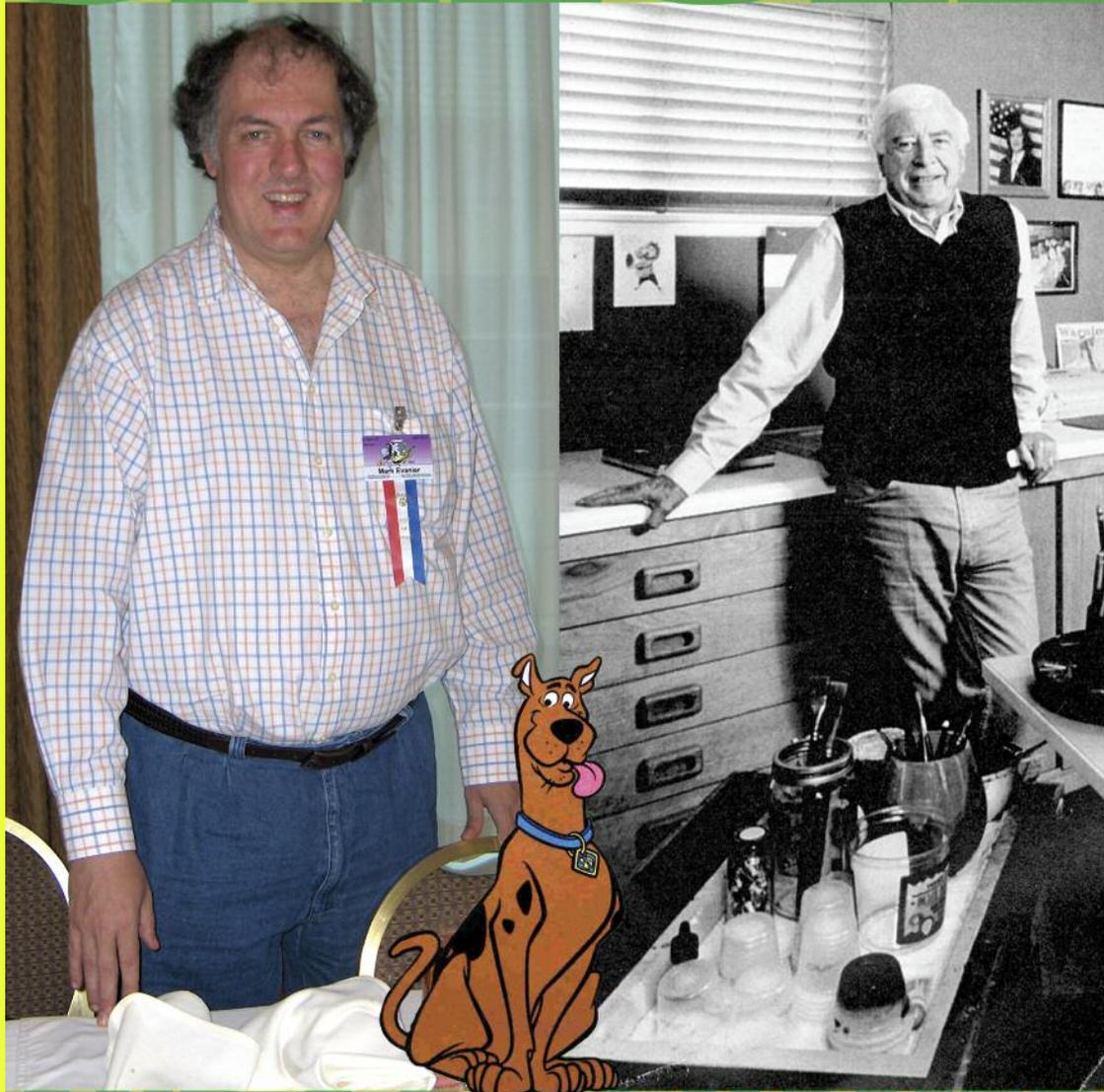
MR. DITKO COMES TO DERBY

After leaving Marvel Comics in 1966, as well as the *Amazing Spider-Man* title he helped create, artist/writer Steve Ditko returned to Charlton, where he previously had worked on a variety of titles. While he helped launch the company's "Action Heroes" line with such superhero characters as the Blue Beetle (the Ted Kord version), the Question, and Captain Atom, he also became a regular contributor to Charlton's line of ghost-story comics. Ditko would remain a frequent artist on these books for more than a decade.

Ditko found artistic freedom at Charlton, something that had been a source of tension at Marvel. He also had the opportunity to work closely with Charlton's workhorse writer Joe Gill. Gill and Ditko had

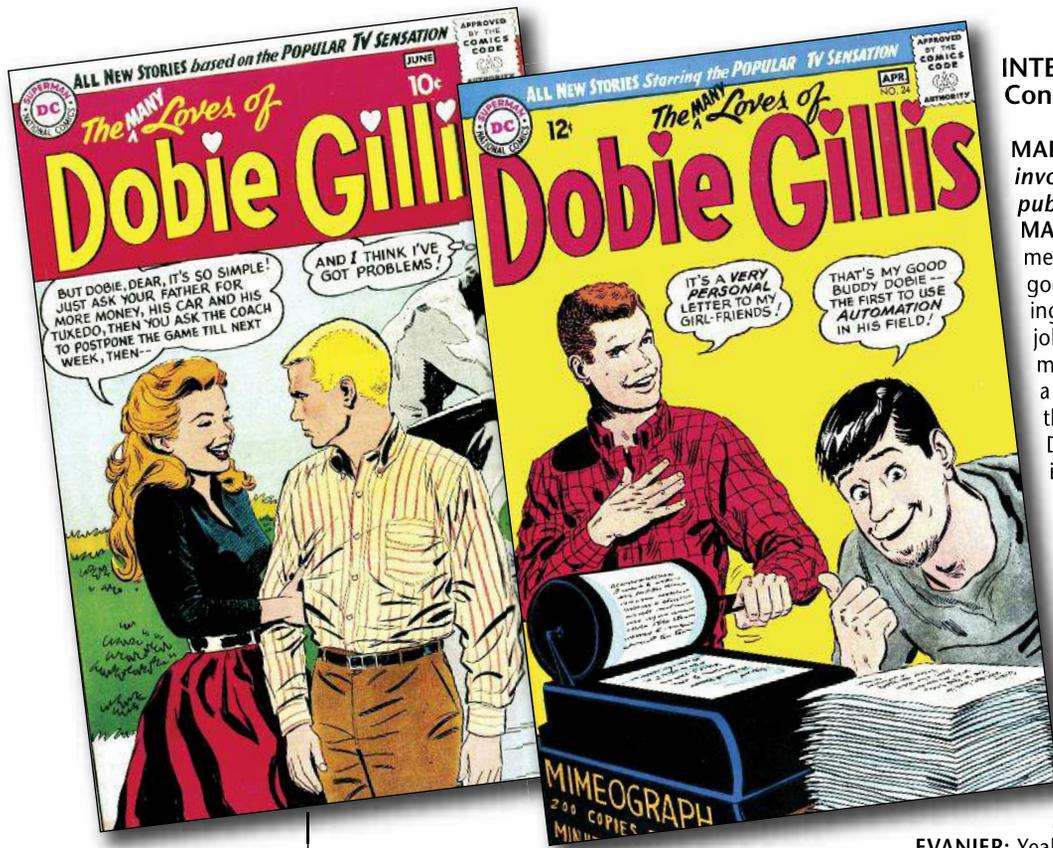


EVANIER SPIEGLE



AND A DOG NAMED SCOOBY-DOO

by *Mark Arnold*



INTERVIEW WITH MARK EVANIER
 Conducted January 4, 2011

MARK ARNOLD: Tell me how you got involved with Gold Key Comics, the first publisher of Scooby-Doo.

MARK EVANIER: One of the first people I met in comics was Mike Royer, who is still a good friend of mine. When I started working with Jack Kirby, I helped Mike get the job as Jack's inker. Mike in turn recommended me to write comic-book stories for a department they had at Disney Studios that was producing material for foreign Disney comics ... stuff that didn't appear in the United States. At the time, the demand for Disney comics overseas was so great that it surpassed the quantity of pages that Western Publishing, a.k.a. Gold Key, was having written and drawn for the Disney comics they were publishing in America. For instance, Gold Key was not producing new *Uncle Scrooge* stories and the Disney publishers overseas wanted new *Uncle Scrooge* stories.

ARNOLD: Is this similar to Egmont, the overseas representative for Disney today?

EVANIER: Yeah, sort of. I started writing Disney comics there. I worked with a fellow named George Sherman, who was a very nice, bright man, but he was in failing health at the time. He wound up dying at a very young age and when I was working for him, he would be away from the studio for weeks at a time due to illness and then he would come back and find his desk piled high with Evanier scripts, which I guess was injurious to his health. One day he was talking to Chase Craig, the editor over at Western Publishing, and Chase mentioned that some of his best writers were retiring or had died,

"Here's a chance to get something of the sort. For me, he recommended me to Chase. I'm here who's very prolific and I know key characters, and I think I had actually met Chase as the subject of writing for the comic. This time, it did. I bought scripts he'd bought from me and said, "Hey, can you

transition to Scooby-Doo? I'd like to go to to write all the

the Disney books at first. I think maybe he sensed that I was a writer or maybe I said something. Woodpecker and then on to the Bros. comics.

For his third job for him, he had a comic based on a new character called *Chan and the Chan* the ducks and wabbits.

There and he asked me if I could do it. Dan Spigle had taken the job which was unusual casting. Dan as doing that kind of comic book but at the time, no one did, including Dan. He was having a little problem making the transition from

Maynard is Shaggy

Evanier explains that as *The Flintstones* was loosely based on *The Honeymooners*, so too was the popular 1959–1963 sitcom *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* the template for *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?* Here's a couple of issues of the DC comic, with cover art by Bob Oksner.

© 20th Century Fox Television.

Scooby-Doo, Where Are You? premiered on television in 1969, and it has arguably become the most successful Hanna-Barbera cartoon TV show of all time, with many, many various episodes and incarnations with the basic central theme of four teenagers solving mysteries with their large dog. According to Mark Evanier, "The four kids were based—in the same way *The Flintstones* was inspired by *The Honeymooners*—on the old TV show *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*. Fred was based on Dobie, Velma on Zelda, Daphne on Thalia, and Maynard."

The TV show was originally going to be called *Scared?*, but network powers-that-be felt that would be too disturbing for smaller children, and that comedy should be introduced into the show, so the changes led to the addition of a Great Dane dog to be christened Scooby-Doo. The show's name is attributed to Frank Sinatra's 1965 hit "Strangers in the Night," in which the crooner sings "scooby-doo" but upon closer examination, the name may actually have its origins from an old doo-wop song from 1947, "Denise" by Randy and the Rainbows, in which the singing chorus sings "shooby-doo" over and over.

Whatever the case, *Scooby-Doo* has also been a mainstay on the comic-book shelves by various publishers from 1969–1979 and again from 1992 to the present day.

Although many other artists and writers have written the various *Scooby-Doo* comic books that have come out over the years, it is often considered that the prolific writer Mark Evanier and premier artist Dan Spigle produced the best stories, and a working relationship that went on to other projects and as you can see, an occasional return to the dog that originated them together.

Here, Evanier and Spigle reminisce on the first time they brought them together.

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BACK ISSUE #52

Bronze Age Mystery Comics! Interviews with **BERNIE WRIGHTSON**, **SERGIO ARAGONÉS**, **GERRY TALAOC**, DC mystery writer **LORE SHOBERG**, **MARK EVANIER** and **DAN SPIEGLE** discuss *Scooby-Doo*, Charlton chiller anthologies, *Black Orchid*, *Madame Xanadu* art and commentary by **TONY DEZUNIGA**, **MIKE KALUTA**, **VAL MAYERIK**, **DAVID MICHELINIE**, **MATT WAGNER**, and a rare cover painting by **WRIGHTSON!**

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– Mark Arnold