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TRUE BRIT

THE DIGITAL EDITION

A CELEBRATION OF
THE GREAT COMIC BOOK ARTISTS
OF THE UK

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PREFACE by George Khoury

THE GRIT IN DIGITAL TRUE BRIT

Over the last 30 years, British comic book creators have had a tremendous impact over how comic are crafted today. British writers, like Alan Moore, Garth Ennis, Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman, and Warren Ellis, have entirely changed the dynamics of how we perceived stories in these four-color books, each of them re-energizing a form that had been stagnant for too long. For their written work, these men have received loads of much-deserved accolades and recognition, but the artistic counterparts were remaining a bit under-looked. Don't know about you, but I find the artwork by Windsor-Smith, Gibbons, and Bolland as alluring and as important to comics today as when I was a 13-year old schoolboy, discovering their works for the first time. These artists are very much storytellers and pioneers in their own right, they're the ones whose art heralded those issues of Conan the Barbarian, Watchmen, Batman, and so many other fondly-remembered titles. So it was my privilege to have had the opportunity to spearhead *True Brit*, a book exactly as the subtitle indicates: "A Celebration of the Great Comic Book Artists of the U.K.," and the last of my sort-of trilogy of books on British comics that started with *Kimota!* and continued with *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore*.

True Brit was an idea which had been brewing in my head for a bloody long time. There have been various articles and occasional magazine issues, here and there, devoted to comics' "British Invasion," but I wanted to paint a more complete picture, one that was inviting, attractive and accessible to comics readers, both new and old. This is an in-depth book that studies the roots of British comics. We look at the work of classic artists like Ken Reid, as important as the contributions made by young guns like Frank Quitely to the entire picture. Within this book are interviews and profiles of, in my opinion, the very best British artists ever to have drawn a comic book. Each and every one of the 21 artists is someone of quality and someone I respect, for who they are and the work they've done throughout each respective career. Without any hesitation, I can say this is easily the most important book of the few that I've produced.

Here in America, very little is known of the British creators prior to Barry Windsor-Smith. Artists like Frank Bellamy, Leo Baxendale, and Sydney Jordan are far from household names; a tragedy, really, because when you see their art, it will seduce you. Adding to the tragedy is the fact that not much of the U.K.'s most important comics prior to mid-'70s has not been reprinted or imported into the States. There's also a growing concern in the U.K. that, as British comic readers grow older, new readers are not discovering the richness of the nation's history in comics. Long gone are the "golden age" days of U.K.'s very active comics fandom in the '70s and '80s, when great magazines about comics, like *Arken Sword*, *Fantasy Express*, *Speakeasy*, and *Escape* were commonplace in comic shops. My hope is that this book will provoke people to search for the work of artists they are less familiar with, to appreciate even more the ones they know. If you're feeling that American comics are becoming somewhat redundant, search those great U.K. titles that feature strips 'Garth,' 'Jeff Hawke,' 'Charley's War,' 'Dan Dare,' and 'Modesty Blaise.' You won't be disappointed in how entertaining and beautiful these serials are.

It's hard for me to believe that this 200-page book was completed in less than a year, because of the great many people and sheer research involved. I pitched the idea to my publisher, John Morrow, on August 13, 2003, and the completed tome was in stores roughly around the same date, one year later. If there was a difficult decision, it was narrowing down a list of artists to interview and profile from what seemed like hundreds of greats; so I decided to cover the gamut of the artists who I decreed most important, and best represented this history we were writing about. Along with the other contributors of this book, I made an effort to interview as many living artists as possible, to capture each one's story and feelings regarding their heritage (and for those deceased, feature profiles filled with the appropriate respect and sincere admiration).

Above all, I enjoy working with my friends – and everyone who made a contribution in this book is a friend. I don't think I could have done *True Brit* if that wasn't the case. It's important for me to know who I'm working with, and I've toiled with good people, people of substance, so I'm very proud of everyone who lent a hand. Those appendages belong to old friends like Jon B. Cooke and Eric Nolen-Weathington, as well as newer friends from "across the pond": Brian "Duke" Boyanksi, Norman Boyd, Paul Holder (also the brilliant designer of this project) and Peter Hansen. David A. Roach was my Yoda, my spiritual encyclopedia of the entire 100-plus-year history of British comics, and has been one of the top artists in U.K. funnybooks for close to 30 years. David spoke to me for many hours over the last year, and wrote the important – and exhaustive – historical exposition that opens this volume. No one was more important in making this book than Mr. Roach, who always – and unerringly – pointed me in the right direction.

So, in closing, why would a Yank like me, one from the armpit of the United States (that's New Jersey), write and edit a book on comic creators from the British Isles? Because I wondered why there were so many great artists coming from the same place, and I think, with this book, we discovered a beautiful kinship that crosses different artists. As I said in the original preface of the book, "This tome is recognition for every British artist (past, present, and future) for a rich heritage that I hope will never be forgotten." I trust these sentiments are apparent whether you're just browsing or doing us the courtesy of actually buying this book."

THE HISTORY OF BRITISH COMIC ART by David Roach

Judge Dredd Megazine cover art by Patrick Goddard & Dylan Teague. © Rebellion A/S

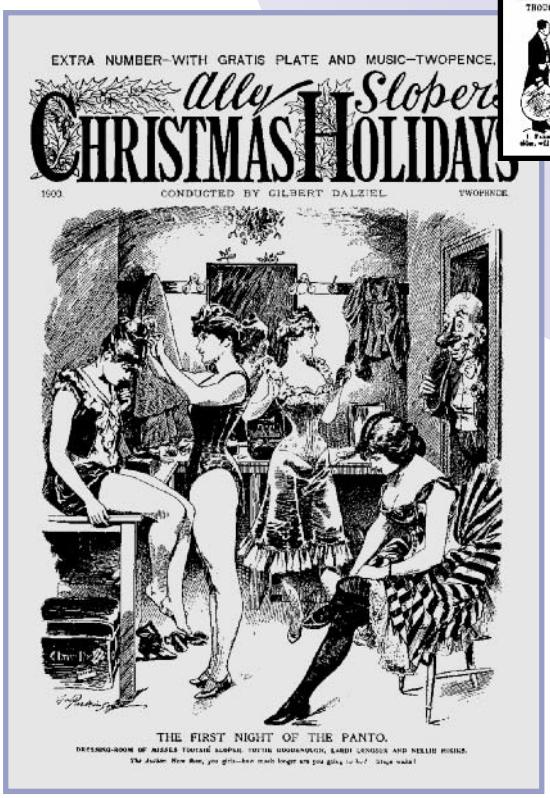
The story of British comics is a long, rich, diverse, frustrating and largely untold one. Britain was one of the first countries of the world to develop the comic strip as we know it today, predating American strips by several years. Indeed, some believe it to be the true home of the comic strip. For the first few decades of its existence, from the 1890s to at least the 1930s, the British strip evolved largely in isolation from developments, traditions and innovations from elsewhere, creating its own idiosyncratic language. While both British and American strips share a common root in such Victorian humorous titles as *Punch* and *Puck*, they emerged in different formats. British strips initially appeared in comic books, only establishing a significant presence in newspapers in the 1920s, while in the States the opposite is true; there, newspaper strips inspired a comic book counterpart in the mid-'30s. In fact, in most critical ways it is Britain that led the world in creating the comic strip as we know it today, from the comic strips in the first regularly published comic book (*Comic Cuts* in 1890) to the first significant recurring characters ('Weary Willie and Tired Tim', in *Illustrated Chips* in 1896) and the first adventure strip ('Rob the Rover', in 1920).

From the late '40s onward, the British adventure strip really came into its own, partly inspired by America's comic strips, and this caused a schism in the marketplace and among fans which persists to this day. So it is probably true to say that there are two distinct traditions of British comics: humour comics that have their origins in Tom Browne's 'Weary Willie and Tired Tim', and post-war adventure comics, which combined British and American influences. Strangely, UK comics historians have largely been fans of the humour comics and have regarded the nation's Golden Age of comics as being in the '20s and '30s. Consequently, what has been written about the country's comics (and there has been surprisingly little) has been grotesquely unbalanced, partial and misleading. This has extended to the perception of comics as a whole in the UK: for a long time, they have been seen as a juvenile, disposable and somewhat tawdry medium, with little of substance or depth to it. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Rob The Rover

In America, Britain, and mainland Europe, sophisticated society throughout the Victorian era was entertained by humorous publications which combined comic verse with satirical illustrations and cartoons. In Britain, publications such as *Punch & Judy* and *Comic News* often featured comic illustrations and even rudimentary strips – short, comic narratives told over the course of several linked illustrations with accompanying captions and even the occasional word balloon. However, although publications such as *Funny Folks* (1874) and *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday* (1884) regularly featured these proto-strips, each issue was dominated by captioned single illustrations and short text pieces. The British comic strip as we know it really emerged in *Comic Cuts*, first published by Alfred Harmsworth in 1890, which featured many short strips and set the pattern of British comics for the following few decades. It was cheaply priced (at a half-penny), was printed in a black-and-white tabloid format, and was published weekly.

Comic Cuts was soon joined by competitors such as Funny Cuts as well as companion titles from Harmsworth itself, such as *Illustrated Chips* and *Funny Wonder*. All were published weekly and all ran at a miserly eight pages! Visually, they shared the broadly realistic, highly rendered and somewhat fussy styling of most Victorian publications, but all that changed dramatically with the arrival of the 'father' of British comic illustration, Tom Browne. Browne was something of a Renaissance man, entering comics in 1895 at



Weary Willie and Tired Tim

Art by Tom Browne. © AP/Fleetway
Other images ©respective holder.

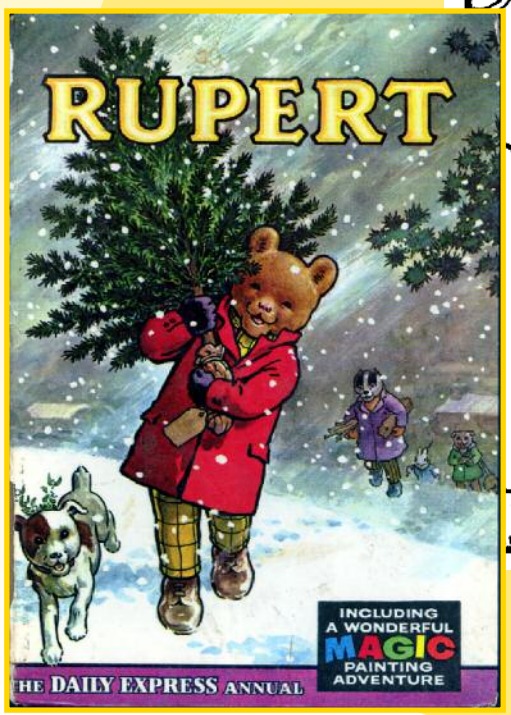
the age of 23, working for two years in the United States for the leading New York and Chicago dailies, and travelling across Europe and the Far East as an artist for *The Graphic*. On his return to London, he helped found the Sketch Club, exhibited at the Royal Academy and became a member of many leading artistic societies, including the Royal Institute, before dying at the tragically early age of 38.

What Browne brought to comics, particularly in the form of his first significant strip work, 'Weary Willie and Tired Tim' (which first appeared in *Illustrated Chips* #298 in May, 1896), was a dynamic, pared-down, linear style that did away with Victorian over-rendering at a stroke. Browne was inspired by the elegant minimalism of *Punch* magazine's leading cartoonist, Phil May, but he combined May's precision of line with a wicked eye for caricature and exaggeration. The result was the modern comic strip as we recognise it today. Interestingly, R.F. Outcault's first 'Yellow Kid' strip appeared some six months later, which puts the lie to the notion that he pioneered the form. Admittedly, the Browne strip rarely used speech balloons in its early years, preferring the standard British approach of a printed caption beneath each panel. However, the captioned panel was a ubiquitous feature of British comics right up to the second world war, and is indeed still common in comics for the very young to this day – it is simply a quirk of the nation's comics. It is also worth noting that, whereas Outcault's early strips had little plot, background or dialogue, Browne's strips were witty narratives with fully realised settings, a roving visual viewpoint and a keen ear for dialogue. Visually, Browne's economy of line was years ahead of Outcault and his fellow pioneers, F. Opper, Jimmy Swinnerton, and even Rudolf Dirks, creator of the Katzenjammer Kids.

'The Adventures of Weary Willie and Tired Tim', two work-shy tramps prone to endless mishaps and pratfalls, quickly propelled *Illustrated Chips* to sales of 600,000 copies per week – an astonishing figure for the 1890s – and helped make Harmsworth into the country's leading publisher. Through mergers and name changes over the years, Harmsworth became first the Amalgamated Press, then Fleetway, IPC and Fleetway again before being bought by Egmont/Methuen in the 1990s. For most of its 100-year existence, the company was the country's most prolific and successful comic publishing house and enjoyed a virtual monopoly until the late '30s. In the early years of the twentieth century, Harmsworth/AP released a steady stream of titles, including *The Rainbow*, *Puck*, *The Butterfly*, *Comic Life*, *Merry and Bright*, *Tip Top*, *Sparkler*, and *The Jolly Comic*. These were aimed at a predominantly young readership and featured strips about children, anthropomorphic funny animals (such as Julius Stafford Baker's 'Tiger Tim' in *The Rainbow*) or disaster-prone adults in the Weary Willie-Tired Tim mould. Such artists as H.S. Foxwell, Frank Minnitt, Brian White, Percy Cocking, and Albert Pease found great success by working broadly in the Browne style, which remained largely unchallenged for decades.

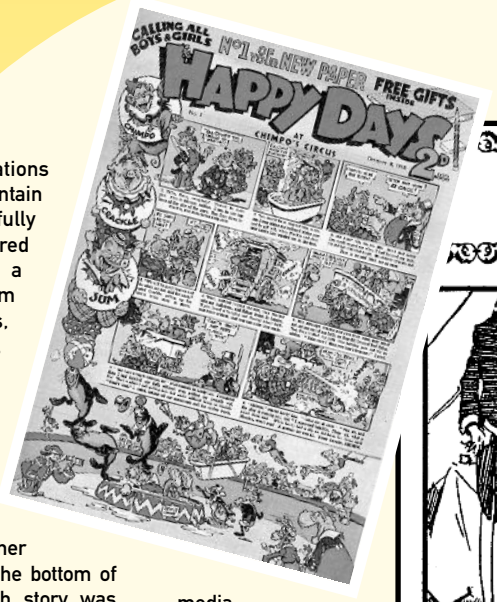
Whereas in the United States the comic strip originated in newspapers before spreading to comic books some 40 years later, in Britain the reverse was true. Aware of AP's success, many of the country's leading newspapers adopted their own strips, including (in 1919) A.B. Payne's whimsical 'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred', which ran for 36 years in the *Daily Mirror*. The strip described the gentle highjinks of a dog, a rabbit, and a penguin, and it attracted a loyal following (known as the Wilfredian League of Gugnuncs) numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Other important strips included J.F. Horrabin's 'Dot and Carrie', Roland Davies' 'Come on Steve', and Charles Folkard's 'Teddy Tail', which first appeared in the *Daily Mail* in 1915. However, the most successful British newspaper strip of that or any other era was undoubtedly 'Rupert the Bear', created by Mary Tourtel for the *Daily Express* in 1920.

Tourtel's elegant, simple line was both charming and sophisticated, and the little bear's whimsical adventures in the village of Nutwood immediately struck a chord with the paper's readership. Collections of Rupert strips appeared as early as 1921, and the first hardbacked annual collection made its debut in 1930, initiating a publishing sensation that continues to this day. Tourtel retired in 1935 and was succeeded by Alfred Bestall, who was in his 40s and already a distinguished and successful illustrator for *Punch* and *The Tatler*. Bestall soon became one of the most important comic artists that the country has ever produced, and under his brilliant stewardship the strip became a British



Rupert the Bear

Art by Alfred Bestal and Mary Tourtell. © Express Newspaper



institution, delighting generations of readers and inspiring a mountain of merchandise. The wonderfully eccentric strip invariably featured young Rupert encountering a strange array of characters, from pirates and Gypsies to pixies, dragons, talking birds, magicians, inventors and cannibals. Another eccentricity was the strip's unique format. In the annuals, each page displayed four identically sized panels, below each of which were two lines of rhyming narrative, while two further paragraphs of text appeared at the bottom of the page. This meant that each story was effectively related three times: first in pictures, then in rhyming couplets and finally, in expanded form, in prose. Happily, the annuals still maintain that strange convention to this day.

Bestall's visual style flourished in the strip's rigid conformity, displaying virtuoso drawing and a remarkable sophistication – imagine a cross between Arthur Rackham's fairy tale illustrations and Hergé's minimalist *Tintin* artwork, and you will get some idea of Bestall's style. For the covers and endpapers of the annuals, Bestall would create achingly beautiful, character-filled panoramas, fully painted in subtle washes of watercolour which would have made Rackham proud. Bestall also appeared to have an unusual interest in the Orient; he often filled his strips with Chinese dragons, pagodas and conjurors, as well as regularly providing readers with origami puzzles. Under his tenure, sales of the annuals grew to one-and-a-half million copies per issue at peak, and they still sell over 250,000 today. The great man began to scale down his 'Rupert' work in the early '70s and drew his final strip in 1982; he died four years later, soon after receiving an MBE from the Queen. In his later years he had starred in a TV special written by Monty Python's Terry Jones, and his biography had been written by George Perry. Among Rupert's almost uncountable media tie-ins can be found comics, toys, several animated cartoon series, confectionery, books, hit records (including the 'Frog Chorus' single by Paul McCartney, which reached number three in the British charts in 1984), and even shops devoted to the character. Artists Alex Cubie and John Harrold have kept the strip alive since Bestall's retirement, and right up to the present day each new generation of young British readers is raised on Rupert.

Pop

Another notable early newspaper strip boasted an artist who, like Bestall, had come from the illustration field. This *Daily Sketch* strip was called simply 'Pop', and his artist was the extraordinary J. Millar Watt. 'Pop' – effectively a British version of George Macmanus' legendary US strip 'Bringing up Father' – centred on the pratfalls of a put-upon, portly dad and his demanding family. Like 'Bringing up Father', the strip was often visually quite stark, but Millar Watt had the expressive, loose line of a painter rather than Macmanus' Deco-minimalism. A quirk of the 'Pop' feature was Millar Watt's way with a joke: in each four-paned installment, panels one and two set up the gag, panel three had the pay-off, and the final panel usually contained a wordless reaction shot. Millar Watt was an outstanding draughtsman and imbued his linework with an expressive vitality and a sense of space and drama that bordered on the poetic. With its visual sophistication married to a more conventional – though invariably funny – storyline, 'Pop' appealed to both intellectuals and the masses, and it ran from 1921 to 1960.

Miller Watt retired from the strip in 1949 to concentrate on his illustration work (Gordon Hogg took over 'Pop' in his absence) but in the mid-'50s he was recruited into AP's burgeoning comics line, where he enjoyed a third career change as a comic book artist. For the rest of the decade he drew incredibly dense and detailed strips such as 'Robin Hood' and 'The Three Musketeers' while also painting a series of outstanding covers. In the '60s he moved on to full-colour, glossy AP/Fleetway prestige comic titles such as *Ranger*, where he drew his final major strip work in 1965: an atmospheric adaptation of *Treasure Island*. With that exception, however, from 1962 until his death at the age of 80, Millar Watt concentrated primarily on illustrations for *Look & Learn*, *Princess* and *Once Upon A Time* – illustrations which rival the likes

Tiger Tim
© AP/Fleetway

Leo BAXENDALE

by Peter Hansen

It would be impossible to have a book about great British comic artists without including the enigmatic Leo Baxendale. In the early 1950s, British weekly comics were undergoing a revolution with the Eagle comic entering the marketplace to redefine the standards for boys comics. In Dundee, Scotland, home of the giant DC Thomson publishing empire this new event was largely ignored and the focus instead was to revamp their own line of popular comics and redefine the way humour comics were presented.

Bash Street Kids

Given a new direction, men who became comic legends such as Dudley Watkins, David Law, Ken Reid, and Paddy Brennan stormed onto the scene ushering in the new era. At the centre of this cauldron of creativity was 'Che Guevara' himself, Leo Baxendale.

An outspoken Englishman from Lancashire, Baxendale was a self-taught artist who after completing his National Service in the Royal Air Force in 1950 joined the art department of the local Lancashire Evening Post newspaper, where he wrote and illustrated his own short, humorous pieces. He also gained experience drawing the occasional comic strip and sports cartoons.

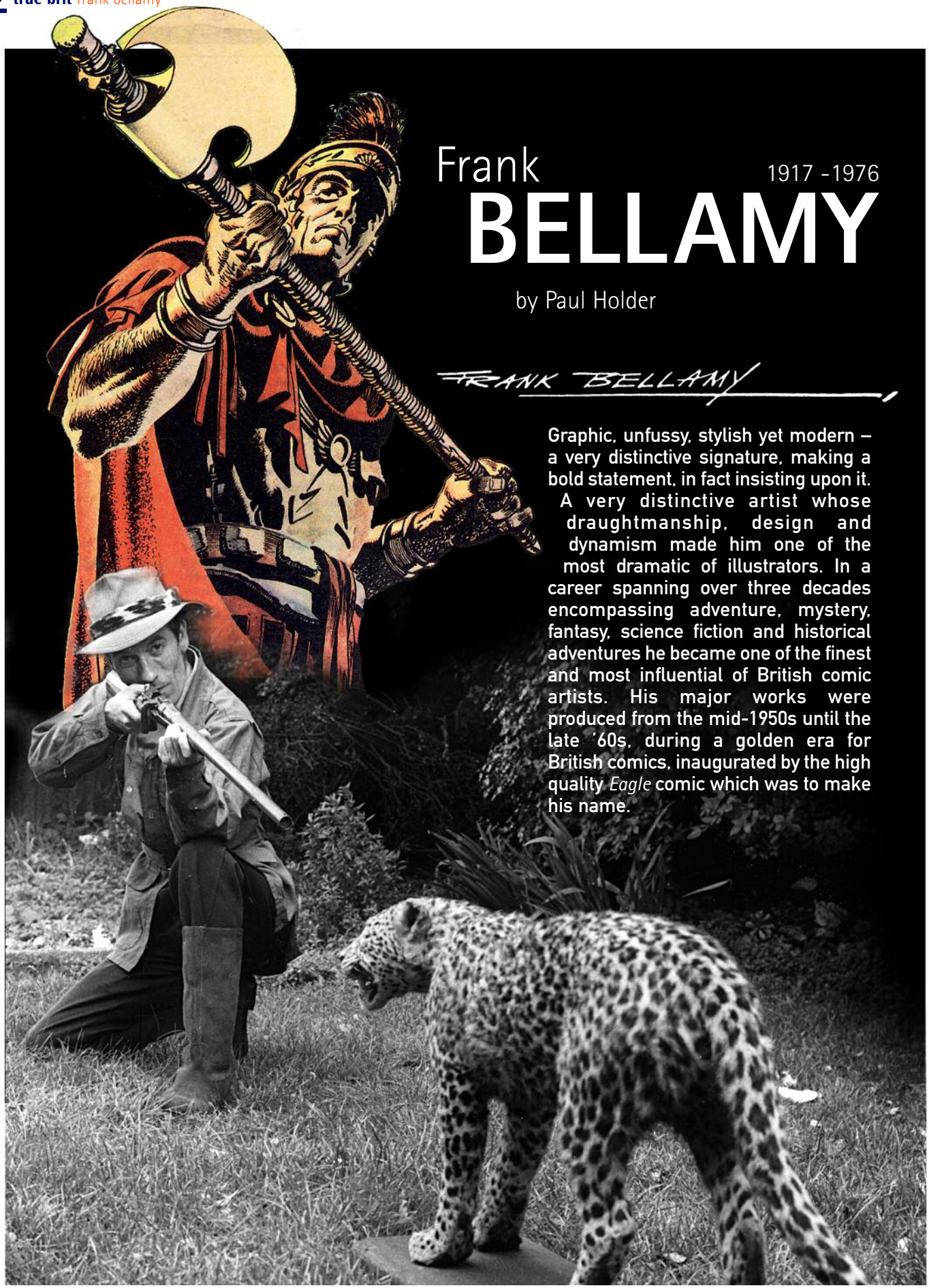
At the age of 21 Baxendale submitted some of his comic strips to the Beano comic published by DC Thomson. They hired him immediately and he began work on a number of minor pieces as a freelance artist. His first real comic strip, 'Little Plum, Your Redskin Chum', made its debut on October 10, 1953.

Instantly popular, this strip was followed up with 'Minnie the Minx' and 'When the Bell Rings', which eventually changed its name to the now world-renowned 'The Bash Street Kids'. He added to his ever-growing output in 1956 when he started drawing the popular 'Banana Bunch' and 'The Gobbles' in the new comic, *Beezer*.

His last major contribution for the firm was the addition of 'The Three Bears' in the *Beano* in June of 1959. This hilarious animal strip where the animals are more human than the people became extremely popular.

In 1964, following a rift with DC Thomson, Baxendale left to work for Odhams Press. Surprisingly the refit revolved around artistic license and not money as one would expect. Once the die was cast Baxendale began preparing a total of 30 samples which he sent out to British comic publishers at the rate of two per day. Years later he found out from Albert Cosser of Odhams Press that he needn't have gone to all that trouble, as Cosser recounted, "If you'd have sent a scribbled note saying 'I'm available,' that would have been enough."

As it happened only two packages were mailed out and both recipients responded quickly. Two days after he mailed his packages Baxendale was sitting across the table in Dundee with Alf Wallace, the managing editor of the Odhams group of comics, who had traveled from London to see him in person. He told Baxendale that Odhams market research had revealed the complete dominance of DC Thomson's comics in the marketplace, especially the *Beano*. He went on to say that he didn't want Baxendale to draw some strip in *Eagle* or *Swift*, but instead wanted to build a new comic around his talents. Within a short time a new contract was signed that doubled Baxendale's income in one fell swoop. Furthermore, he could now sign his work, and the new comic would be printed in full-colour gravure. At Thomson's any scripts provided by Baxendale had been free, but Odhams were willing to pay him for any he may write, which would further



Frank BELLAMY

1917 -1976

by Paul Holder

Graphic, unfussy, stylish yet modern – a very distinctive signature, making a bold statement, in fact insisting upon it.

A very distinctive artist whose draughtmanship, design and dynamism made him one of the most dramatic of illustrators. In a career spanning over three decades encompassing adventure, mystery, fantasy, science fiction and historical adventures he became one of the finest and most influential of British comic artists. His major works were produced from the mid-1950s until the late '60s, during a golden era for British comics, inaugurated by the high quality *Eagle* comic which was to make his name.

Frank and Nancy Bellamy in the mid-sixties

Frank Alfred Bellamy came into the world on 21st May 1917 in a small bedroom of a Victorian terraced house in Bath Road, Kettering, in the county of Northamptonshire. A central part of England that is obviously a fertile breeding ground for talent as artist Alan Davis and writer Alan Moore both hail from the region. The second child of Horace and Grace and younger brother of Eva, Frank was a bright and lively boy, full of jokes and fun who soon displayed a love for drawing. He must have craved adventure too, as at the age of six or seven, he managed to pull some hairs from a lion's tail while visiting a local circus. They were proudly kept in a jar for a number of years no doubt until he could fulfill his ambition to be a big game hunter! Art and Africa remained abiding passions throughout his life.

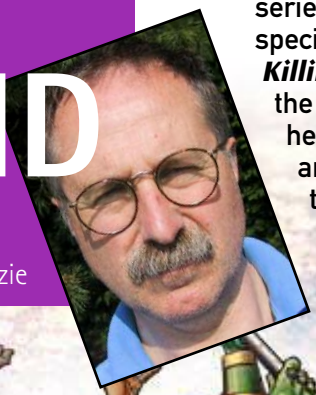
If he couldn't be a big game hunter then he would have to be an artist. Luckily, Kettering had its own advertising studio and soon after leaving school he managed to get a job there. He spent some six years at William Blamire's studio, with a break for his national service, learning lettering, layout and honing his drawing skills. There was a lot of local advertising and display work, particularly for the local cinema advertising forthcoming attractions such as the films of Cagney and Bogart. He had volunteered to go to Africa when his call up papers arrived, but was considered more useful to the army as an artist and posted to West Auckland in Northern England. Over a period of six months he painted an aircraft recognition room, thereby being one of the few people allowed to draw the German swastika, yet still managed to draw a weekly football cartoon for the *Kettering Evening Telegraph* for their Saturday sporting paper 'The Pink 'un'. He was promoted from Lance Bombardier to Sergeant. Promotion from the ranks of a single man came when he married 19-year-old Nancy Caygill from nearby Bishop Auckland, County Durham on 6 March 1942.

A son, David, soon followed in 1944, like Frank arriving at the tail end of a world war. Aware of growing family commitments, he looked to London to further his career, securing a job at Norfolk

Brian BOLLAND

by George Khoury

Transcription by Marc McKenzie



Out of Lincolnshire came this left-handed virtuoso, who grew up on a steadfast diet of Silver Age DC Comics, and was so enamored with the art that by eleven he created his very own comics, sequential drawings on reams of typing paper. While enrolled at Norwich School of Art, Bolland immersed himself into the British underground – early strips were printed in ***Oz*** and ***Friendz*** in the early '70s along with the self-published ***Suddenly at 2 O'Clock in the Morning***. Upon leaving school he acquired an agent, Bardon Press Features, and landed commercial assignments for magazines such as ***Time Out*** and ***Parade*** along with providing illustrations for restaurants, concert promoters and other advertising work. By 1975 Brian landed his first professional ongoing strip, rotating artwork with Dave Gibbons on ***Powerman***, a comic that was distributed primarily in Nigeria and neighboring African countries. Beginning in 1977, he became associated with the stellar roster of talented artists at ***2000 AD*** and became the book's most celebrated artist with his bold work during 'Judge Dredd"s golden age. After a lengthy stay at ***2000 AD***, DC Comics enlisted Brian to render work for ***Green Lantern***, ***Justice League of America***, ***Adventure Comics***, and ***Mystery in Space*** – the work on these titles was a childhood ambition now realized. With writer Mike W. Barr, the artist undertook the longest narrative work of his career, (and one of the few occasions where his work would be inked by others) in DC's bold experiment – the company's first limited series ***Camelot 3000***, which was only sold in comic specialty shops. 1988 brought readers ***Batman: The Killing Joke*** with writer Alan Moore which remains the last full-length work he's produced. Afterwards he's dedicated himself primarily to being a cover artist and creating some of the most exciting and titillating imagery seen throughout his lengthy stays on ***Animal Man***, ***Wonder Woman***, ***The Flash***, and ***Batman: Gotham Knights***. Bolland has also written his fair share of eccentric

stories, all drawn by him and capturing his sense of humor, like 'The Princess and the Frog' (in ***Heart Throbs*** #1), 'The Kapas' (in ***Strange Adventures*** #1), 'The Actress and The Bishop' (in ***A1*** Vol. 1 #3), and 'An Innocent Guy' (in ***Batman: Black and White*** #4), plus his chronicling his own ongoing short: 'Mr. Mamoulian'. Today, Bolland illustrates directly into his computer with his trusty Wacom tablet the same sharp linework and meticulous detail that we've come to expect from this master.

Let's start at the beginning... where and when were you born? [laughs] Well, I was born on the 26th of March, 1951 in a small village called Frieston near the town of Boston – that's the original Boston – in Lincolnshire.

What type of profession did your parents have? They owned a farm, I believe? Yeah, my dad was a farmer, but we didn't live on the farm. We lived in the village, but his farm was in the next village, Benington, a couple of miles away. You don't really have villages over there [in the United States], but we have villages. It was a very small farm; it was only 68 acres. By American standards that's like a garden – a backyard, isn't it?

No, that's a decent plot of land [laughs]. Yeah.

What did he do on the farm? Did he have livestock, or – ? No, it wasn't livestock, it was arable. Cabbages, potatoes, and sugar beets, things like that.

Did you have any other siblings? How would you describe your childhood? No, I was an only child. Growing up I've got nothing really to compare it with. It was in the country and there was a small town nearby. I'm not sure what I can say about all that; I was – I just grew up with whatever most 1950s-1960s children grew up with, really.

What was your earliest comic book experience? I don't think I really particularly took to comics until I was nine or ten – no, I think I was nine; it was 1960. But, even then, I remember that there had been some *Batman* comics around the house, because I later found them without covers lying around in a cupboard. I don't know where they came from, because American comics only started being shipped here in 1959. There was one from 1956-57; it was a Dick Sprang *Batman* story. The one where Batman was – there were Batmen from all countries. There was a Mexican Batman and there were... other kinds of Batmen, all in slightly different foreign Batman outfits.

So your parents didn't have a problem with comics? Ah, well they did later, because from 1960 onwards I started to collect them in a fairly excessive way and my dad was really worried, you know, whether they were a bad influence on me. He once threatened to take 'em out and burn 'em.

What exactly did he want you to be? He always said he didn't really want me to be a farmer; I had very little interest in the farm, and he always said that he didn't particularly want me to be a farmer, but later, in adult life, I'd been told that he was, kind of, disappointed that I didn't take up farming. But he was very supportive when I became interested in art. He was very, very supportive when I made the decision and paid for me to go to art school later on.

So when exactly did you get the urge to start drawing? I started drawing in 1960 or '61, pretty soon after I started buying comics and it was – well, actually no, I remember – all kids did drawings at school, whether you take it up later on or not, because I've still got drawings I did of dinosaurs and of the local birdlife. There are some drawings I did in crayon of bluetits and thrushes and things. I've a vague recollection of stickmen comics. I'll have to have a look for them.

Was that one of your Insect League strips? The Insect League coincided with the beginning of my collecting comics and it was maybe trying to do something that looked like a comic book. That would have been from 1960-1961 onwards. I did quite a lot of that.

So being a teenager, did you experience peer pressure because you were so into comics? When I was 16, I was at school with a kid called Jeff Harwood, and his brother Dave turned out to be a great comic collector. I met Dave and we became great friends. We still are today. He was into the fanzine scene. I wasn't particularly, but through his contacts I got my early stuff printed in various places.

He would ink your early work, stuff like that? Yes, he inked my stuff, and I inked him, we did these kind of one-off comics – fanzine type of things – together. And that was very good for me because it meant I had someone nearby who I could show the work to and get feedback from and who would do the same to me. We just drew in ballpoint pen and colored in in crayon.

But you were pretty much a loner during high school, or – ? Well, I had a fairly typical circle of friends. I don't think I was any more of a loner than most kids. I think the fact was that I was at a school that wasn't all that close to where I lived meant that I didn't spend time with the local kids. So once I left the school at the end of the day, I was not surrounded by close friends. So I suppose to that extent that's true.

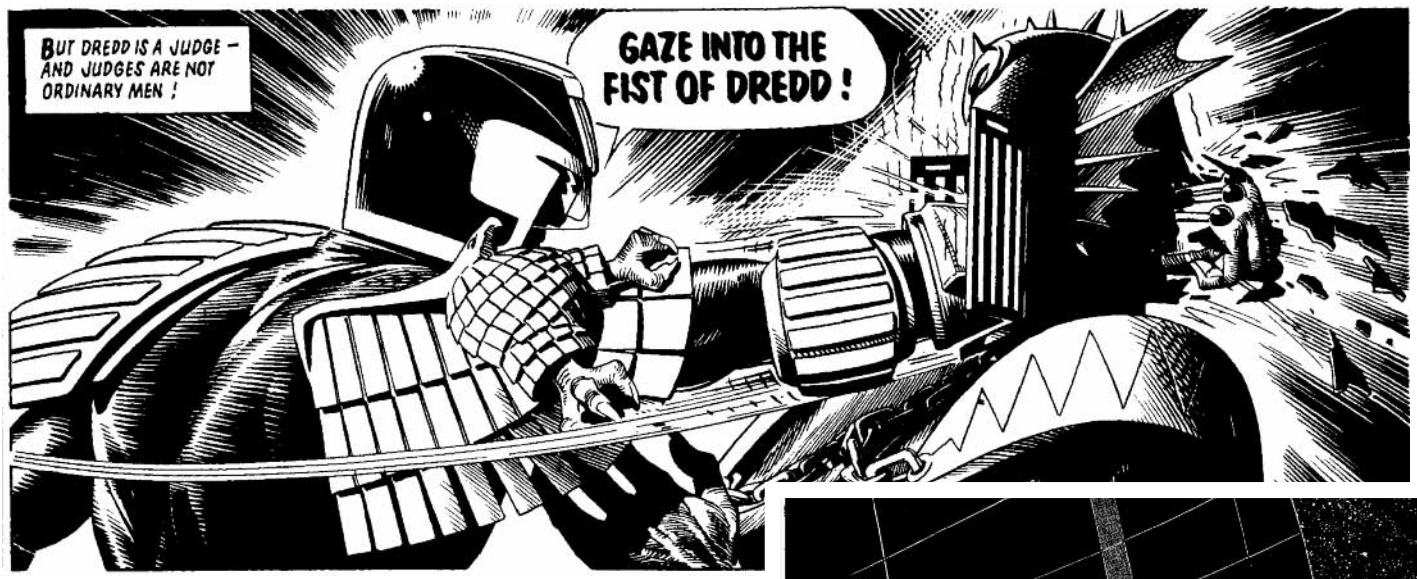
So who were the first artists that struck your fancy? Well the first comic I ever bought was called *Dinosaurus*. I talked my granny into buying it, bless her. It was a Dell comic, from 1960, drawn by Jesse Marsh, although I didn't know his name until many years later, when Joe Staton informed me. After that, I was buying DC, and I think Gil Kane was pretty much my first passion. I just idolized him and I really wanted to draw like him. But I mean, all those other artists – Alex Toth, Carmine [Infantino], Bruno Premiani, Curt Swan, Murphy Anderson – they were all there and to various extents they were influences on me.

The Actress and The Bishop © Brian Bolland

What about British comics? Had you not seen too many at that point? No, I wasn't particularly impressed with them. I was never into the funny comics; a lot of people in this country, they were keen on the funny comics like *Beano* and *Dandy*. But I was never into that at all. There was a comic that started the year before I was born, which is well known, and that's *Eagle*, but I'd never bought it. So I never got into that stuff until my college years. I've now got a few of the very first ones from the year I was born. Number 6 is the earliest from 1951.

But there was something about the American culture you liked or... was it something about the comics that were different? That's an interesting question. I mean, as far as the comics were concerned, I think I liked them as objects. I was really keen on the comics and –

You were strictly a collector – was that what it was? I don't think I was consciously thinking of building a collection here; I just wanted the next one and the next one and the next one. But when I got the comic itself, I held it in my hand like it was sort of

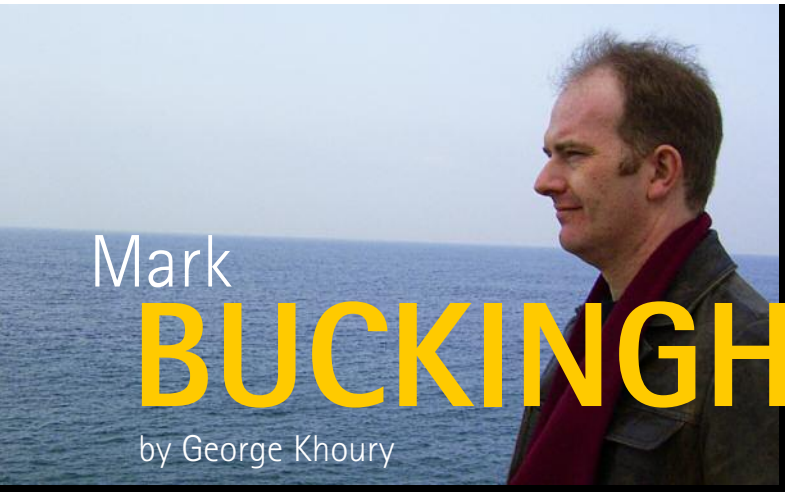


But there were also a lot of adventure artists like Don Lawrence, Hampson, and Bellamy.... Yes, all of those things I discovered in my later teenage years, in my later school years, and through my college years. I was able to, kind of, expand and discover everything that was going, including Don Lawrence's 'Trigan Empire' and all the *Eagle* stuff that I'd missed in my childhood, you know?

Were you naturally drawn to Bellamy's style? Well, I was never a big Bellamy fan; I'd never bought anything by Bellamy. I knew he was very highly regarded, but I never had a Frank Bellamy passion at all. In an answer to an earlier question, the first British comics I started buying as a boy, from about the age of 12 or 13 in '64 was a comic called *Valiant* and that had in it a strip called 'The Steel Claw' drawn by Jesús Blasco, a Spanish artist.

You were very into his work? Very, very much so. I think he used photos quite a bit, which was rare at the time, but it looked good. And also, something called 'Mytek the Mighty,' drawn by Eric Bradbury – a Brit. And various other strips in that comic. I was very keen on *Valiant*, so that's the only British comic I really was into as a child. My interest in British stuff was acquired later on, really. Other things from that period – I also got very into Syd Jordan's 'Jeff Hawke', a daily newspaper strip, and another one called 'Carol Day,' by David Wright. Both fantastic and underrated.

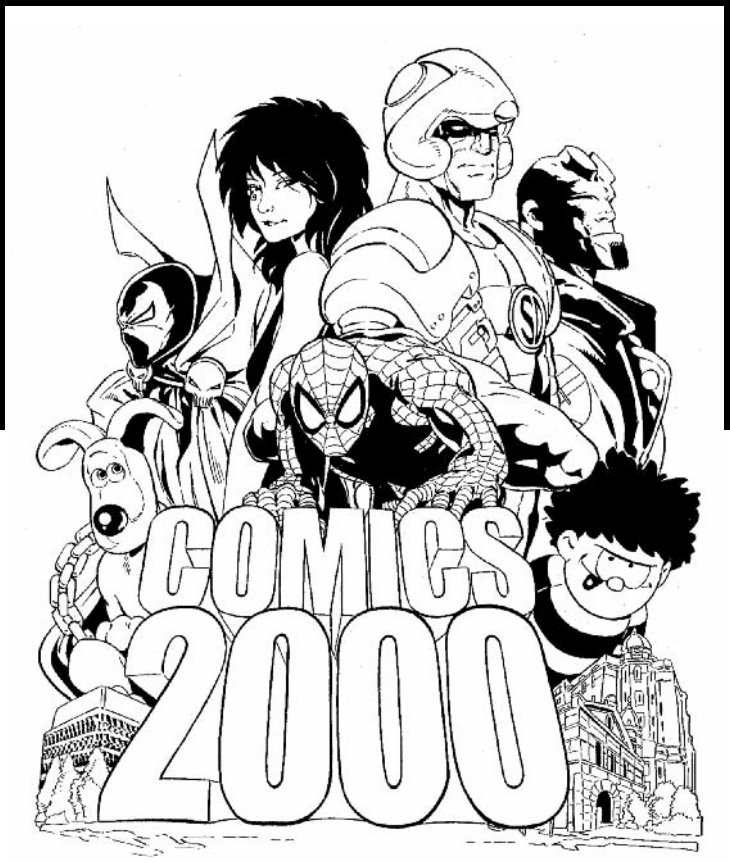
What was it about the Silver Age that struck you, that appealed to you so much? Well, I mean at the time it wasn't the Silver Age; it wasn't called that until later on, really, was it? It's just the comics that happened to be coming out at the time.



Mark BUCKINGHAM

by George Khoury

While earning a Bachelor of Arts in Design at Staffordshire University, Mark flirted briefly with a career in animation before taking on comics. Within *Strip AIDS*, he made his debut and became acquainted with Neil Gaiman when he provided illustrations for the satirical magazine ***The Truth***. He broke into DC Comics as an inker on ***Hellblazer*** and established himself as one of the top inkers in the industry with his brushwork bringing out the best of his pencilers in titles like ***Generation X, Sandman, Ghost Rider 2099,*** and ***Death: The High Cost of Living***. Championed by Gaiman and Dave McKean, he was able to prove to the DC brass that he was a more than an inker when he would fully illustrate a Poison Ivy story for *Secret Origins* and eventually penciling even ***Hellblazer*** itself. In ***Miracleman – Book IV: The Golden Age***, Mark displayed his knack for impeccable storytelling and design, sculpting some of the finest comics ever seen. More of his versatility as a penciler can be seen in ***Death: The Time of Your Life, Merv Pumpkinhead, Peter Parker: Spider-Man, Batman: Shadow of the Bat, Doctor Strange: Sorcerer Supreme, Mortigan Goth: Immortalis***, and his 'Tyranny Rex' art in ***2000 AD***. Today, you can find his present work on the critically-acclaimed Vertigo title, ***Fables,*** with artwork as compelling as ever.



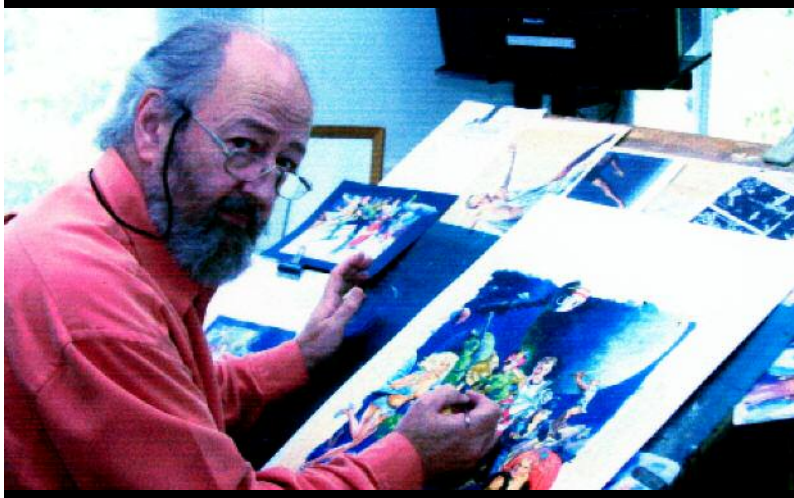
Who were your British artistic influences? What was their appeal to you?

British comics were so important to me growing up, and remain so today. I loved Frank Bellamy's stuff, and Don Lawrence.... And as for Frank Hampson and his studio producing such rich and lovingly crafted art on 'Dan Dare'... I wish I could lavish such time and effort on my own work. Leo Baxendale... a genius. British humor comics in general, especially *Monster Fun* and *Shiver and Shake*... I loved those books and I dearly wish I still had copies of them. Those were the days when comics were a cheap disposable entertainment that you shared with friends. Collecting? What's that? *2000 AD* and *Warrior* – my two favorite UK comics of all time – and the greatest influence on my work. Kev O'Neill, Dave Gibbons, Brian Bolland, Alan Davis, Garry Leach, Ian Gibson, Mike McMahon, Steve Dillon, Bryan Talbot, Alan Moore, Grant, and Wagner... heroes every one!!

What lead you to a career in comics? And what has been your secret to constantly work in the business?

I have always loved comics and they have always been a part of my life. They helped to establish my appetite for reading from a very early age, inspired me, fueled my imagination and my creativity, and they offered me a safe haven to escape to during those darker moments of childhood. I soon realized that it also offered me the chance to access my own imagination and desire to tell stories in a very direct and personal way, and I took pleasure in using it to entertain others.

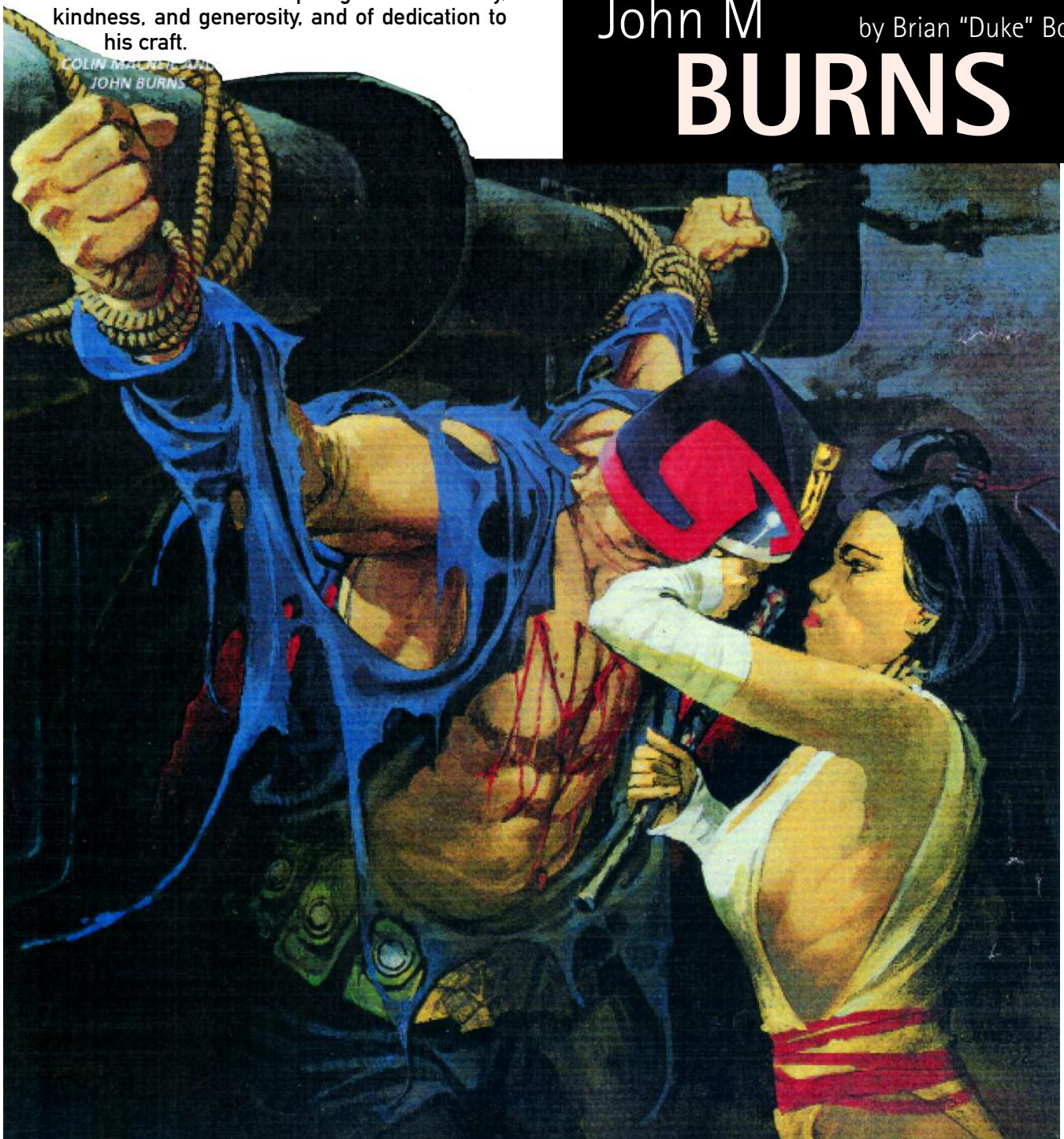
I always endeavor to remain open-minded in all aspects of life, and especially in my work. I love to try new things and stretch myself as an artist. I am also a very versatile artist... I have survived when others have not because I am always adapting. I guess the other reason is that although I rarely dazzle people with my art, writers and editors have often complimented me on the strength of my storytelling – which is something that will always be essential if you want to survive in this business.



John M BURNS

by Brian "Duke" Boyanski

John M. Burns represents the finest in visual storytelling graphics – not just as a British artist but a visionary who has spent a lifetime advancing his art without the slightest interest in what it is to be a "hot artist", "flavour of the moment/month/era," or simply put "a star". All he ever did was thrive in the joy of telling the best imaginable stories the best imaginable way: from within, constantly managing to improve and stay fresh no matter if it is doing black-and-white ink drawings with pen or brush, coloured pen and ink visuals, or painted vistas that inspire with their sincerity. The reason for his inclusion in this wonderful book is simple: Mr. Burns is an artistic treasure – a paragon of modesty, kindness, and generosity, and of dedication to his craft.



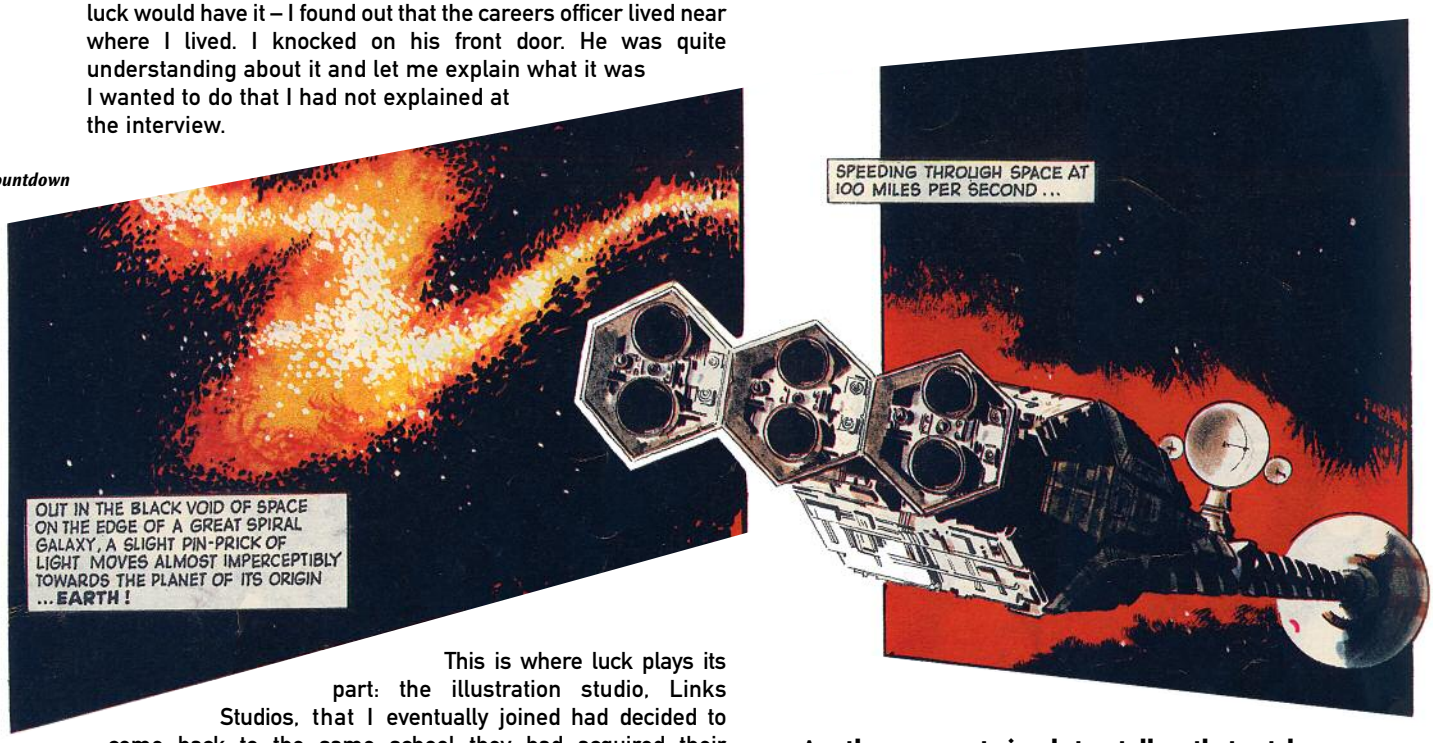
***Judge Dredd* cover**

Judge Dredd
© Rebellion A/S

Did you always want to draw comics?

Yes. I always wanted a job drawing or illustrating, well, ever since I was 13 years old and passed my 13+ exam which enabled me to go to the West Ham County Technical School [in East London]. Here the lessons were in favour of art. I remember having the usual career, "what you want to do with your working life when you leave school" interview and being nervous I hadn't explained really what I wanted to do. Later – as luck would have it – I found out that the careers officer lived near where I lived. I knocked on his front door. He was quite understanding about it and let me explain what it was I wanted to do that I had not explained at the interview.

Countdown



This is where luck plays its part: the illustration studio, Links Studios, that I eventually joined had decided to come back to the same school they had acquired their previous apprentice from. Every two years the Links Studios took on a young boy as an apprentice – the year I was leaving school was the time for a new apprentice to be taken on. A friend and myself went for an interview. I had concentrated on figure illustration, my friend more towards advertising. The Link Studios was an agency for comic strip illustrators, so I joined Link Studios as an apprentice in 1954 at the princely sum of two pounds and five shillings [per week]. The career officer had nothing to do with my joining Link Studios and becoming an illustrator, but I think it shows how badly I wanted to do this job.

What has inspired you to start drawing in general – and when did you start?

My brother was always drawing, and I wanted to draw as well as he did. When I was 13, a friend and I entered and came first and second in a national painting competition (the very same friend I went to the Link Studios interview with) and the art teacher was very encouraging, so having passed the 13+ exams we both went on to the County Technical School.

How long are you in the comics business?

I started in 1954 when I became an apprentice at Link Studios.

Well, congratulations for the first 50 years, sir! Now, who were the artists that inspired and influenced you?

My leaving present from school was a book suggested by my future studio manageress and owner of Link Studios, Doris White. The book was Figure Drawing, by Andrew Loomis – an American illustrator and instructor at the American Academy of Art in Chicago. He was the first of many ***American*** illustrators to inspire me. Some of those were Austin Briggs, Ken Rilley, Joe Demers, Joe Bowler, Norman Rockwell, Robert Fawcett – a fantastic draughtsman – and lots more. Later I became aware of Alex Raymond and Stan Drake, newspaper strip artists.

Are there current visual storytellers that catch your fancy at the moment?

Not one in particular. I like bits from most. I'm usually looking for outstanding drawing, colour, and storytelling.

Did you ever write your own scripts, or do you prefer to work with other writers?

I would like to be able to write my own scripts, but I'll stick to what I do best.

Do you challenge a scriptwriter – bouncing back and forth ideas, proposing your vision, etc. – or do you prefer just to visually realise what is written for you?

I illustrate the script as presented. I might change a point of view or two if I think it makes a better looking page, but I never change the writer's storyline.

Did you have any formal art training?

No, but I had a better advantage [than formal art school training]: full-time drawing and being taught by working strip illustrators, plus [it seemed at the time] every night evening classes and weekends sketching in London museums!

When have you decided to start painting your pages? Do you prefer that to 'just inking' the pencils?

When I realised that transparent inks were not giving me the

Alan DAVIS

by Eric Nolen-Weathington

Alan Davis was born, raised, and currently resides in the Midlands of England. At an early age, Alan developed a keen interest in stories and soon began creating his own. These stories took many shapes and forms, be they short stories (usually accompanied by illustrations), bits of sequential art, or even complicated dioramas. But Alan never thought he would become a comic book artist. In fact, it wasn't until well after he had established both a career and a family of his own that he drew his first professional comic book work. Initially, Alan thought his foray into comics to be merely a fun hobby he could spend time with during the weekends. Before long, though, the hobby became the career – and a very successful career at that. From his beginnings on such strips as 'Captain Britain,' 'Marvelman,' and 'D.R. & Quinch,' through ***Excalibur*** and ***ClanDestine***, and with his current work on ***JLA: Another Nail*** and ***Uncanny X-Men***, Alan has built quite a resumé. But when it's all boiled down, Alan Davis is simply a storyteller.

Nightcrawler © Marvel Characters, Inc.

I'm going to call out some names and I'd like you to say what you think of first with each one.... Frank Hampson.

Well obviously, I've got to say 'Dan Dare', but I don't know what else I could say about him really. I know other work that he's done, but 'Dan Dare' is what he's most well known for.

You read 'Dan Dare' some as a child, right?

Yeah, it was actually before I got into looking for my own comics. I had older relatives who had *Eagle*, but 'Dan Dare' was reprinted at various times, so I did get to see it all. It was a landmark comic and a landmark character. Anyone who's seen it will know that the designs and the philosophy behind it were far ahead of anything that was done in comics then, or even since. As a science-fiction strip, it had just terrific inventiveness.

Did the strip influence you creatively in any way?

I can't say that it influenced me in a specific artistic way, because the artwork was very labor-intensive; it was produced by a studio. Frank Hampson did the original artwork as thumbnails or roughs – which were amazing things on their own – but then you would have a studio of people do the finished art. They posed in costumes; they built models of all the characters, the ships, the cities; so it was very, very intensive to get the reality of it. All of this stuff I've only found out in recent years; I didn't know it at the time.

But could you tell even as a child that there was a lot of work going into it?

I don't know. I think that when I was a kid, I just thought that some artists are better than others. It's only as you get older that you start to really understand the dedication and the limitations of the medium and the efforts that people make to try and overcome those limitations.

How about Don Lawrence?

Well Don Lawrence did 'The Trigan Empire', which is what he's most known for. I wasn't really a fan of Don Lawrence's artwork – I always found a bit of a woodeness to it – but the coloring and the way it was put together was very nice, and I liked 'The Trigan Empire' as a concept. It was like 'Spartacus meets 300 Spartans in space'. It was always nice to look at, but I wasn't ever really into as much as I was 'Dan Dare' and some other things.

Changing styles a bit, Leo Baxendale.

The creation of his that I liked most as a kid was 'Grimly Feendish'. As a kid I didn't know who Leo Baxendale was, because a lot of the artwork, if it was signed I didn't notice, but there was a lot that was just unsigned, and he did have an awful lot of imitators. The thing about a very simplistic art style is that it is very easy to copy it. I think that Leo Baxendale would be the equivalent of Carl Barks in British terms. He had a style that everyone else based their work on or at least were very heavily influenced by.

You use a lot of humor in your writing and in your artwork as well at times, depending on what you are working on, of course. Did any of that develop from humor strips like 'Grimly Feendish', or was it always a part of you?

I don't know if the humor comes from a specific source like that. I always appreciated it, and I don't know if it was a chicken and egg thing. Did I appreciate it because the humor was in me, or did the humor appeal to me and make me think that way? I don't really know. 'Grimly Feendish' was like the British version of 'The Addams Family'. I honestly don't remember that much

about it, I just remember that there was a certain look to the artwork and a certain design to the characters that appealed to me, because it was so different than all of the 'nice' stuff that was being done at the time. It was an anarchic strip.

Syd Jordan.

'Lance McLane' was my favorite of Syd's work, although he made his name with 'Jeff Hawke'. 'Jeff Hawke' was aimed at an older audience while I was still in my infancy. I caught on to 'Jeff Hawke' later on. But Syd was often ghosted by other people – Paul Neary drew some of the stuff for Syd, and since then there's quite a few other people I know who either helped Syd or filled in for him on the artwork side. But he had a vision of science fiction which I don't think I've ever seen in comics. I'd say even with 'Dan Dare' and things like that, his vision was far more realistic – he was far more grounded in science – and it had this Lovecraftian twist where there were dimensions to the alien species and to the cultures that the characters interacted with which were just very, very strange.

Since you have that connection to him through Paul Neary, have you ever met Syd and talked about art with him?

I met him a couple of times many, many years ago, but I can't claim to know him that well. I was fortunate enough to go into his studio and to see a lot of his work and listen to him talk about how he approaches storytelling, but, no, I can't really claim to know him.

John M. Burns.

John M. Burns has been fairly prolific. Although the work of his which I prefer most are his newspaper strips, he did a tremendous amount of work in kids' comics and various other things over the years, – in newspapers, magazines – and he's just a phenomenal artist. I don't know what else I can really say. *[laughter]* His coloring is terrific. He's done work for Europe – *Capitán Trueno*. I've never seen him anywhere else, outside of Europe. He's just very, very prolific and he's able to draw anything.

Does he stick mainly with newspaper strips or...?

No. I think it might be *TV 21*, he did some science-fiction strips for. I know he drew 'Doctor Who' a long time ago, and he did another science-fiction strip, but it was a long time ago and I don't have any copies of it. Obviously, a lot of the British comics when I was growing up were anthology titles, and what I would do was rip the pages of artwork out that I liked best, or the stories I liked best, and staple them together. But when you tend to do that, it means that you end up with a pile of ratty copies that are falling to pieces – you don't keep them like you do comics that are complete.

Now for the one who had probably the biggest influence on you, Frank Bellamy.

Frank Bellamy I knew because he'd filled in for Frank Hampson on 'Dan Dare.' He'd also done the 'Thunderbirds' strip, which he was very well known for. Before that he'd done work for *Eagle* - 'The Churchill Story', 'The Montgomery Story', 'Fraser in Africa', other things like that. But it was when I saw 'Garth' that I really recognized his ability, because one of the things about seeing an artist's work in color is you can be dazzled by the technique in a different way so that you don't see the simplicity; it's so clever, that's it's almost too clever. But when you see an artist work in black-&-white, and you know the limitations of black-&-white, and you see them go so far beyond what anyone else is able to do, you realize the ability in breaking the restrictions that other artists acknowledge.

He influenced your take on 'Captain Britain' as well. Can you go into that a little?

Well he wasn't really a big influence; it was more the character of 'Garth'. I'd followed 'Garth' before Frank Bellamy came onto the strip, but I'd never really liked it because I didn't like the artwork that much. But when Frank Bellamy took over 'Garth', I got into the 'Garth' character. He was a mix of James Bond, John Carter, and pretty much every other hero you can imagine rolled into one. The way that Bellamy drew the strip, it just felt right.

Barry Windsor-Smith, or Barry Smith as he was known when you first saw his work.

Well Barry Smith came quite late really. I think the first work I'd seen of Barry Smith was when he was into his Kirby/Steranko-influenced stage when he first started working for Marvel. I don't know if he did anything before then; I'm certainly not aware of anything. He was novel, because he was so different from everyone else – you could see that he was doing the American style artwork, but it didn't quite fit. I really watched him grow when he took on 'Conan' and basically made 'Conan' his own.

When you first saw his work, did you just assume he was an American artist or were you aware he was British?

I don't remember. I just remember seeing the artwork and thinking, "Some of this isn't very good, but there's something going on here that's exciting."

Obviously, you spent a lot of time as a child reading the British comics and newspaper strips, but you also saw a lot of American comics. They were very different in terms of style and content. Do you think the American and British styles of comics have become more similar over the years?

I think to a great extent comics have died out. They don't have any individuality. I don't want to sound too depressing, because it is a quite depressing picture, but when I was younger, British comics were anthology titles – the ones that still exist are as well – where you would get two- or three-page stories, and maybe six or seven of them in an issue. The very first comics that I saw were mostly text and the comics were a very small part of them, so they were almost like serialized novels with a couple of comic strips as well. As for the actual content, there weren't any super-heroes per se, especially when I was younger there were war stories, historical stories, mythological, and sci-fi. In the war stories genre, you'd have things like 'Captain Hurricane', 'Typhoon Tracy', and 'Braddock', who was a WW II pilot. With the historical stuff you had 'Heros the Spartan' from Frank Bellamy, and the classic things like Robin Hood and King Arthur – they were always coming up. With the kids' comics, you had things like football stories, athletes' stories. 'Roy of the Rovers' is one of the big footballing characters over here – he's almost iconic. I never really got into football comics; I was never interested in football. There were other things like 'Wilson, the Greatest Athlete', who trained on the moors and ran barefoot and won in the Olympics and things like that. For kids' characters there were things like 'Billy the Cat', a school kid who decides to be a super-hero dressed as a cat, but that came quite late on. There was 'General Jumbo', a kid who could control an army of toys – he had a control device on his arm. There were 'The Cubites', which was basically just a gang of kids riding around on bikes.

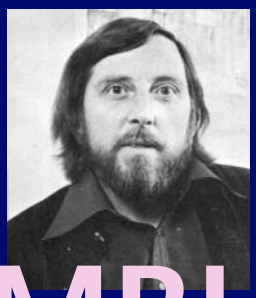
There were things that might be recognized more as super-heroes: 'The Dollman', who I've told you about before – the guy who has the group of robots he controls and uses ventriloquism

to give them personalities – and that was pretty freaky. There was 'The Spider', who was very strange – he was sort of a super-villain who fought other super-villains. As always with these things there was a lot of science fiction. 'The Iron Man' was a particular favorite of mine. You basically had a robot who was a super-computer, super-strong android. 'The Steel Claw', had the guy with the artificial hand who became invisible except for the hand whenever he got an electrical shock. More recently – when I say more recently, it was in my early teens, so it's only more recently in a historic sense *[laughter]* – there was one called 'The Missing Link', which was about a caveman that was thawed out and turned out to be The Missing Link. He was mutated and became a super-hero called 'Johnny Future' and was in a super-hero costume for a while. I would say that he would have been the most recognizable as a super-hero. There were other interesting things where there were period super-heroes. 'Heros' might fit into that slightly, but 'Janus Stark', who I suppose was a little bit like the character in X-Files, in that he was able to distort his body and crawl through places, and he was a Victorian equivalent of Houdini. There was 'Adam Eternal', who was cursed with immortality – he actually travelled through time in the end, and they did some interesting things with him. But it was more bizarre stuff than what you would recognize as part of a DC or Marvel universe.

Most of the diversity in American comics faded out over time and tended to follow trends, but it sounds as though the British comics really kept that diversity throughout.

I don't think it was a case of trying to be diverse, because with 'Dan Dare' there were imitators, like 'Jet Ace Logan', where as soon as you've got something that's successful, everyone else will try to imitate it. There were always lots of robots - giant robots, alien robots, clunky robots, heroic robots. 'Robot Archie' was a very successful strip – not one that I particularly liked. There were a lot of Tarzan-type characters, and there were loads and loads of war comics and Western strips. I think the diversity came purely because there seemed to be a market for it.

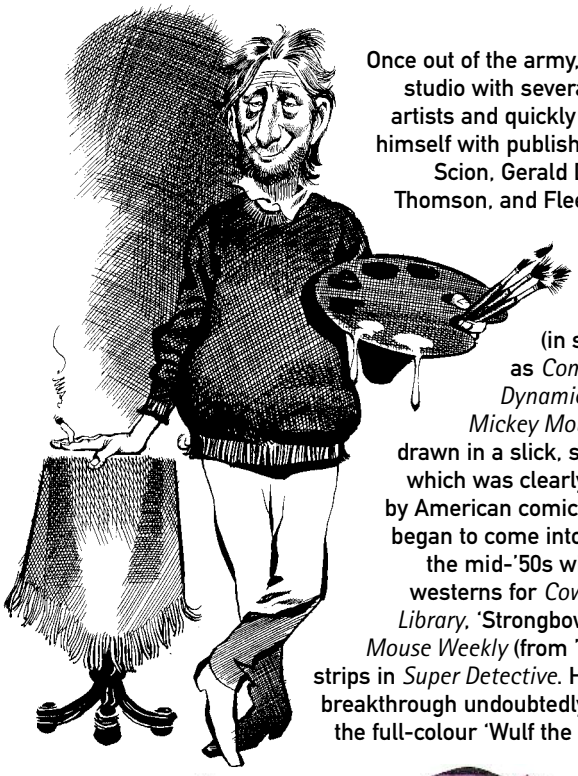
Doctor Who



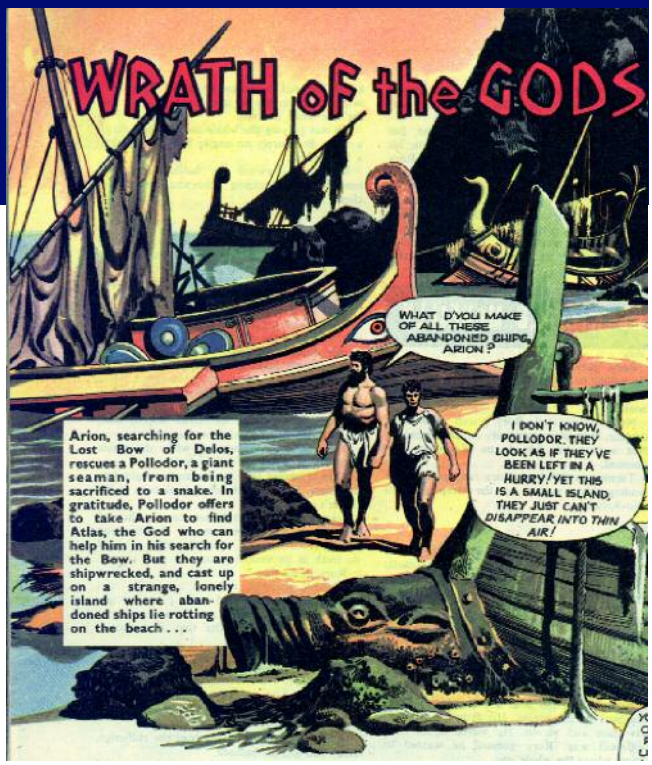
Ron EMBLETON

by David Roach 1930-1988

Ron Embleton was one of the true giants of British comics and, along with the other artists of the "big four" (Frank Hampson, Frank Bellamy, and Don Lawrence), did much to establish the adventure strip in the country. Embleton was the first of the big four to become a professional – at the precocious age of 17 – with strips for Scion's ***Big*** series of comics. His budding career was interrupted a year later when he was "called up" for his period of National Service (Britain's equivalent of the Draft), including a tour of duty (1948-1950) in Malaya.



Once out of the army, he set up a studio with several other tyro artists and quickly established himself with publishers such as Scion, Gerald D. Swan, DC Thomson, and Fleetway. Much of his work in this period was westerns (in such comics as *Comet*, *Hotspur*, *Dynamic Thrills*, and *Mickey Mouse Weekly*), drawn in a slick, smooth style which was clearly influenced by American comics. Embleton began to come into his own by the mid-'50s with yet more westerns for *Cowboy Comics Library*, 'Strongbow' in *Mickey Mouse Weekly* (from '54-'59), and strips in *Super Detective*. However, his breakthrough undoubtedly came with the full-colour 'Wulf the Briton' strip in *Express Weekly* (one of the weeklies inspired by the *Eagle*, the pre-eminent comic of the '50s). 'Wulf' was set in the time of the Roman conquest of Britain, and gave Embleton ample scope to develop his painting skills and to reveal his seemingly effortless mastery of the human form.



By the end of Wulf's run ('57-'59), the mature Embleton style had emerged: an astonishingly realistic and detailed drawing style married to a sophisticated, dramatic control of colour. He was fast, too. Invariably, it seemed as if nothing – not even the most apocalyptic scene of massed armies in pitched battle – fazed him, and in addition to producing several fully-painted comic-strip pages he always managed to find time to contribute to numerous annuals, magazines and books. 'Wulf' was followed by a succession of war strips for the renamed *TV Express* ('60-'61), *Young Lorna Doone* in *Princess* ('62), and *The Wrath of the Gods* for *Boys World* ('63). The Michael Moorcock-scripted *Wrath of the Gods* is widely regarded as his masterpiece, though

Stingray

If Leo Baxendale, the quintessential British mainstream 'bigfoot' artist, could somehow have mated with brilliant American underground comix cartoonist Robert Crumb, such unholy spawn would doubtless resemble our next subject, Hunt Emerson. Though we Yanks tend to ignore any Brit comics outside of the pages of ***2000 AD***, Great Britain has its own rich history of homegrown underground comix – that is, non-mainstream, 'alternative' funny-books quite often focused on confessional tales of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll – and England's 'cartoony' comics, with its weekly episodes of (more oft than not) the manic, 'bigfoot' antics of anarchistic, reprobate schoolchildren, have been wildly popular on the Isles since well before World War Two. Hunt, it appears, is comfortable straddling both indie and mainstream camps, and – as you'll find out momentarily – he has a fine grasp of the history of British comics.

Hunt EMERSON

by Jon B. Cooke Transcribed by Steven Tice

Where are you originally from?

Newcastle-on-Tyne, which is northeast of England.

You were born when? 1952.

What kind of upbringing did you have? Was it working-class? Yes, I guess so. The class distinctions, I'm sure you know, are very finely defined in England *[laughter]*, and we would probably be lower middle class. My dad was a radio operator on weather ships, among other things, but that was his main thing. And me mum, when I was small, she didn't work, and then later she was an office worker.

Did you have siblings? Two brothers.

Were your parent's creative at all? No. Me mum was slightly musical. But no, it all came out in me and my brothers

Any relatives? Not particularly, no. I had an uncle who was a very dynamic man and could kind of do most things, including sketching and suchlike, but that wasn't what he did. He didn't do it as a hobby or anything, it was just something he could do. But no, me mum's often wondered this. She doesn't know where it came from, the fact that I've got this art and me brothers, we're all musicians as well. We were always playing in bands together. Especially me and Norm, the elder of the two. We still play together when we get together.

Do you still play music today? Yes and no. Not a lot, but I certainly do. I've been in a band – well, there is a band, or there was a band, a couple of months ago, which got together for a birthday party, actually for my partner Jane's birthday party, when she was 50. We put a band together. And then we did another gig for somebody else's birthday party. There's nothing else that's happened since then.

How'd it sound? It was great. *[laughter]*

What do you play? Guitar.

What's your preference? I like playing live. I don't mind what I'm playing. *[laughs]* For listening, I like country and western, Bob Dylan, Emmylou Harris.

I would venture to guess that maybe 80% of cartoonists would be terrified to be on stage.

It's just something that I do. It was funny, actually, doing it with this band – what was it, two months ago now, three months ago – at this birthday party, because it was actually a good stage and a good P.A., and we were doing tracks like 'Money' and 'Mess of the Blues'. Very rock and roll and R&B things. And I can really do these, I can belt it out. But all of the people that I know in Birmingham have never seen me do this, 'cause I hadn't actually done it for years. So we did this gig and everybody was saying, "I didn't know you could do that, that's fantastic!" I said, "Well, I've always been able to do this. It's just nobody's ever seen me do it." Because other times I've always been playing country music or traditional music, which isn't the same, you know. [laughs] I like rock and roll.

So was it a pastoral kind of upbringing?

The first half of it was, yes. Then we moved to a place that was a bit more urban. The first half was cornfields and, yeah, fantastic.

And when did you first start drawing?

Well, I've always drawn, since I could hold a pencil. I always did funny drawings to amuse me classmates and things, but never really thought about it seriously. I knew that whatever I was going to do, it was going to be something to do with art, so when it came time to choose college and things, I insisted in going to art college.

©Hunt Emerson

And I did two years of preparation work in Newcastle, a two-year course that was really more like an extension of high school. And then I came to Birmingham to do university – well, the equivalent to a university degree – in painting, but I was only there a few months and realized I didn't know what the hell I was doing, basically. Whatever I was, I wasn't an artist in that way. So I quit that after a year, and that was when I started doing comics and cartoons.

When you were a child, did you regularly read the British weeklies?

Yeah, everybody did. *Beano* and *Dandy*, *Beezer*, *Topper*, and things like that. I wasn't fanatical about them, but yeah, all kids saw them; they were around the place. I also used to see *Mad* when it was published as a comic book, except that I saw it in the Ballantine paperback reprints, the ones you had to turn on the side to read. And they were an absolute revelation. I'd never seen anything like this before, and I was very, very interested in those.

You know, I'm talking to a lot of American underground comics artists, and for me – I remember exactly where I was when I first encountered the Ballantine paperbacks, because they just – I mean, I had seen the "Super-Duper Man" beforehand but just thought that was an anomaly. I had no idea that *Mad* was comics. Do you have a distinct memory of where you were?

Actually, I ***do!*** Which is quite unusual for me. *[laughs]* But yes, there was a time when, the first one I saw was *Utterly Mad*, and some kid had brought it into school. I must have been about eight or nine. And some kid had brought it into school, and I remember there being a great pile of kids on the desk looking at this thing, and my kind of glimpsing it from the back of this crowd of kids, sort of seeing what it was, and literally fighting me way through to the front, because I'd never seen anything like it before.

And you *must* see it. *[laughs]* Absolutely! I was totally intrigued by it. And I didn't see any more after that for quite a while, for maybe a year or more. But then gradually I started to find out where they were, so I saw two or three of them. Of course, it was only later that I managed to get hold of a full set and all the rest of it. But the one that first got me was 'G.I. Schmoe' in *Utterly Mad*.

Were you particularly attracted to the plethora of kid humor material, like Leo Baxendale?

Yes, rather than the adventure strips, because we had two forms of comics in England at that time. There were the humor ones – *Beano*, *Dandy*, *Topper*, and *Beezer*, and others like that – and then there was *Valiant*, *Hotspur*, *Victor*, and other ones, which were basically adventure strips. And I was never particularly interested in those ones. I always liked the funny stuff.

I don't know if this analogy is wrong, but it seems to me that I talk to a lot of British artists, they seem to almost have the same experience in the '50s and early '60s that a lot of American cartoonists and comics artists had in the '30s: that a culture was being developed just for them. There was the growth of the weeklies with Frank Bellamy and the adventure stuff. There would actually be movie serials, right? When they were long gone in the United States, they were still going on strong in England, weren't they?

Oh, that's right, yes. Used to go on a Saturday morning to see *Batman* and *Zorro*....

Did you feel like you had your own little culture?

Yeah, I guess so... I never really thought about it. I don't know if you noticed, but I've been working for the *Beano* now, you know?

Are you? For the last year I've been drawing 'Little Plum, Your Red-skinned Chum'. Although they don't actually use the 'red-skinned chum' line these days. [laughter]

How do you like it? It's great fun. I wish they paid more, 'cause they don't pay a lot, but it's actually great fun doing these. I'm not writing them, the editor's writing them, sends me scripts. But it's very good fun doing it. And it's the most visible thing I've ever done in the comics world.

Did you have favorite cartoonists who worked in the British weeklies when you were –

No, I didn't realize there were any. *[laughs]*

David Chester Gibbons was born at Forest Gate Hospital in London, England, on April 14th of 1949 to Chester, a town planner with architectural training, and Gladys, a secretary. At the age of seven he discovered Superman and was soon completely enraptured by the romanticism of the comic book, both British and American, like ***Mad*** and ***Eagle***. Among those that whet his artistic eye from childhood were the elegant styles of Wally Wood, Will Elder, Frank Bellamy, Jack Kirby and Will Eisner. This self-taught artist spent much of his youth emulating the comics he cherished by often illustrating his own personal humor strips before eventually breaking into the world of comics fandom for fanzines like ***Rock & Roll Madness***.

In his early 20s Gibbons became a building surveyor but managed gradually to break into the UK comics scene lettering mostly humor books for IPC. In time he scored more illustration work at DC Thomson where he would do adventure and sci-fi strips. By 1975, together with Brian Bolland, Dave worked on ***Powerman***, a book designed and illustrated by both, for the Nigerian marketplace. Shortly after, Gibbons put aside his surveyor day job to solely focus on his career as a comic book artist which was just beginning to take-off for the better.

With the arrival of ***2000 AD*** a new exciting breed of comics were about to commence – and Gibbons was there from the inception of the anthology comic. At ***2000 AD***, he illustrated and wrote stories for 'Harlem Heroes', 'Dan Dare', 'Ro-Busters', 'Rogue Trooper', 'Judge Dredd', and various other short stories. With his growing reputation and professionalism, his work became sought after by most comic book companies including Marvel UK where he helmed a fondly remembered 'Doctor Who' run for many years.

Gibbon's art finally made waves in the United States when DC recruited him to be at the art helm of ***Green Lantern***, in 1982, and paired him with writer Len Wein. He continued to work at ***2000 AD*** while exploring the rest of the DC universe doing covers and stories for almost every DC character, from Batman to Wonder Woman, at some point or another. A major career highlight – and one of his best experiences at DC – was the tale, 'For the Man Who Has Everything', a quintessential Superman story written by Alan Moore and edited by the legendary Julius Schwartz, the editor of many of the comics the artist adored as a child. The arrival and success of Gibbons' efforts in the States – alongside those of Moore and Bolland – helped open the doors for the avalanche of British talent that would follow in the coming years. Now triumphant on both sides of the Atlantic, the artist would soon confront his biggest challenge in another book with Alan Moore that would shake the foundation of the comics industry.

Watchmen was the twelve-part maxi-series that transformed the art form and captured unprecedented accolades from critics, comic fans, skeptics, and the mainstream reading public. For the project the artist liberated himself from second-guessing what the American reading public wanted to see and constructed pages much the way he did for ***2000 AD***. The series collected many awards and prizes from many literary circles including a prestigious Hugo Award in 1988. With ***Watchmen*** Gibbons was able to push his storytelling abilities by experimenting with the design and mood of this highly expressive work. From the unique symbolic covers to the intricate layout of his pages, the artist was able to tell a bold story with complete and utter mastery of composition. The title remains fondly remembered because it will forever stand as a testimony to the craftsmanship and application that series writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons injected into this complex super-hero epic.

As if being one of comics most influential artists wasn't enough, Gibbons has also demonstrated that he's a fabulous writer, having written ***World's Finest*** (with artist Steve Rude), ***Captain America*** (with artist Lee Weeks), and

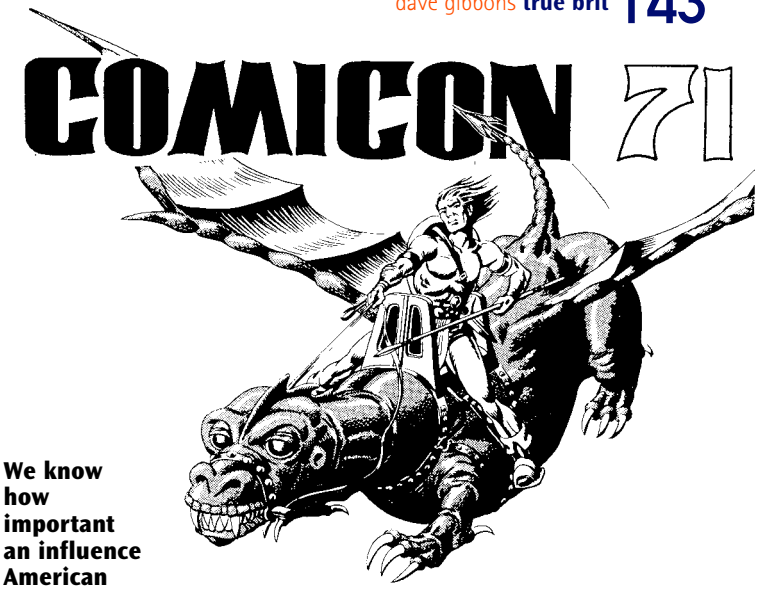
Rogue Trooper

Batman Versus Predator (with artist Andy Kubert). And on the art front he has also continued to collaborate with the finest writers in the field like Frank Miller (on the ***Martha Washington*** series), Stan Lee (on DC's ***Just Imagine: Green Lantern***) and Harvey Kurtzman (on ***Strange Adventures***).

To this day Dave Gibbons remains as one of the most prominent names within his field. The virtuoso continues to be a part of the kind of comics that are always adventurous and fun. Presently, the artist is at work on his largest and most ambitious project since ***Watchmen***: an original graphic novel named ***The Originals*** which is also written by him. Having spent the last two years working on ***The Originals***, it promises to be his most personal and most thought-provoking work, utilizing all of his storytelling and design skills to make it a truly unique effort.

Outside of comics, Dave has provided art for advertising clients, educational companies and designed various record covers. He continues to live in England with his family.

(top) The Story So Far © Dave Gibbons – (lower) A.B.C. Warriors © Rebellion A/S



We know how important an influence American artists like Wally Wood and Will Eisner were to your career, so how impactful were the works of British artists like Hampson and Bellamy early on? Were there any other English artists who've inspired you as a professional?

Most British comics of the '50s and '60s were in black-and-white on really cheap paper, so the beautifully printed *Eagle*, where Hampson and Bellamy's full-color work was mainly seen, was an object of wonder. I loved the precision and detail of their work and their powerful storytelling.

Other artists whose work influenced me were Joe Colquhoun who drew World War II strips (and whose work I later ghosted at the beginning of my career); Ron Embleton, whose beautiful full-color work appeared in many places and who ended up drawing 'Wicked Wanda'; Don Lawrence, of 'Trigan Empire' and 'Storm' fame; Ian Kennedy, who drew great aircraft strips; and Ron Turner, who drew 'Rick Random, Space Detective'. Turner was heavily influenced by American pulp illustrators like Ed Cartier and drew the best aliens and spaceships ever!

I also loved a lot of artists who turned out to be Italian, rather than British, notably Tacconi and Gino D'Antonio, who drew for the monthly War Picture Library series.

Were there any favorite British strips as you were growing up? Did you passionately pursue and collect them? Did your parents encourage your comics passion?

I've mentioned a few of my favorites above. Hampson and, later, Bellamy drew 'Dan Dare'. Bellamy was also responsible for 'Heros, the Spartan' and, later, 'Thunderbirds'. As for newspaper strips, I loved 'Jeff Hawke', a science-fiction strip by Syd Jordan and Willie Patterson; I persuaded my parents to get the daily newspaper it appeared in and would clip the strips out.

My dad had been a reader and collector of American SF pulps in the '30s and drew cartoons himself as a boy. His parents had a lodger in their house when my father was young, who drew illustrations for DC Thomson, the big Scottish comics publisher. I still have his paintbox, given to my dad, and inherited by me.

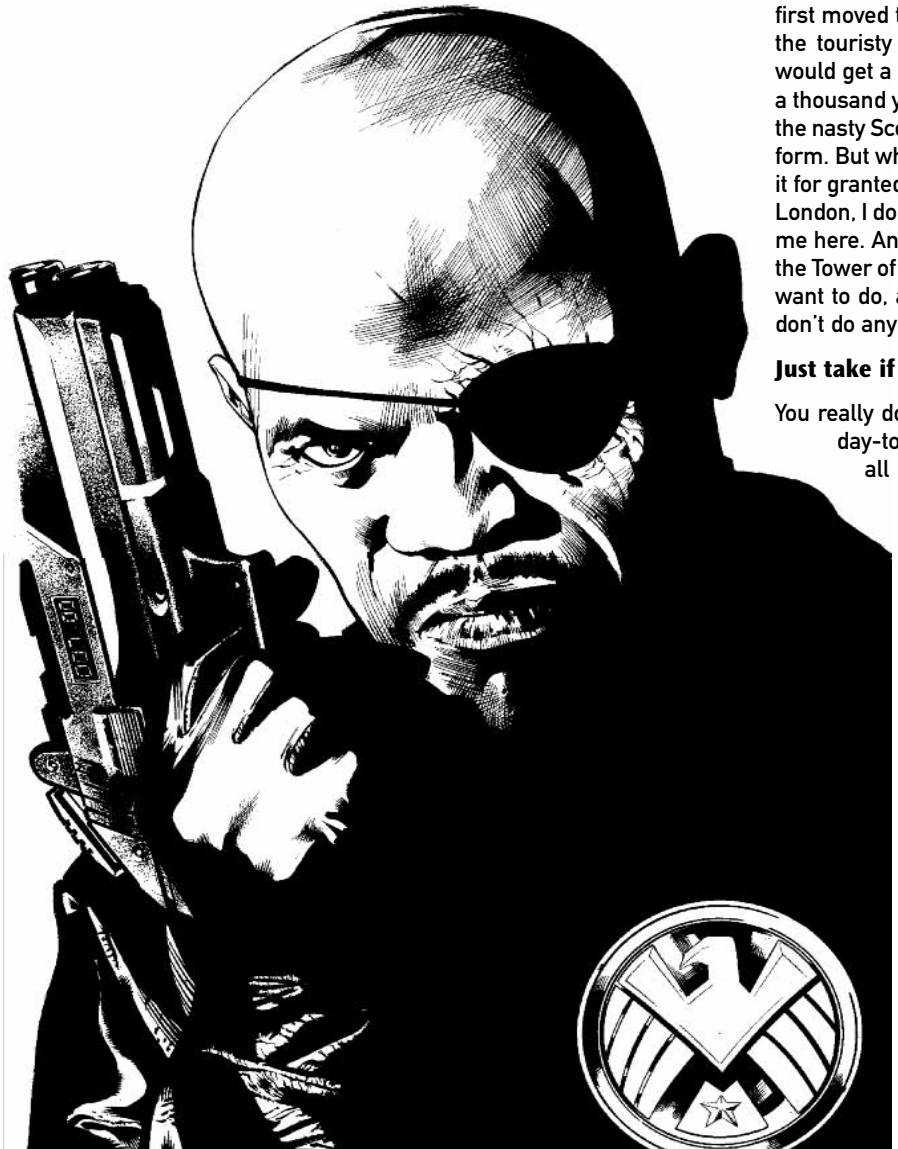
I remember my dad bringing home the first British edition of *Mad*, ostensibly for me, but I think he read every page, too! I have fond memories of him driving me around the local newsstands to buy comics. My parents were a little less supportive of me drawing comics for a living, with good reason, given the alternatives that were open to me!

Top: Comicon '71 © Dave Gibbons Above: Cyclops © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Think Neal Adams on methamphetamines and you'll get an inkling of the kinetically hyper-realistic stylings of one Bryan Hitch. Currently the Brit artist is taking super-hero comics up a notch with his superb artistry on Marvel's ***The Ultimates*** (a riotous reworking of ***The Avengers*** written by Mark Millar and inked by Paul Neary, penciller Hitch's collaborators on their previous – and equally offending opus – ***The Authority***), with each issue pushing the spandex-costumed envelope to the extreme. But no alien-noshing, horny Hulk – however grotesque – can disguise the fact that Hitch just might be the finest realistic comic book artist working today. The guy's work is simply awesome. 'Nuff said.

Bryan HITCH

by Jon B Cooke Transcribed by Steven Tice



Where are you originally from?

Far northwest of England, just before you trip over Scotland.

What's the name?

Cumbria. Carlisle's the city.

Carlisle? I visited that.

Oh really?

Yeah, the Lake District?

Oh, yeah, I grew up around there, I know that very well.

And I loved visiting Edinburgh. That's probably my favorite city in the world.

I haven't been there for years and years. Mark [Millar]'s up in Glasgow, but he's not far from Edinburgh. In fact, Edinburgh and Glasgow are only an hour and a bit away from where I grew up. I grew up in a place that's been both part of Scotland and part of England in history, and you only have to walk about ten minutes in a northerly direction to discover a Scottish accent. It's not very far at all. Hadrian's Wall ran through the city, of course. The original border was very close.

So you had history all around you?

Yeah! Not that you appreciated it when you were a child. After I first moved to London in 1992, I used to go back and then I'd do the touristy stuff, because I would have time on my hands. I would get a chance to visit the museum or the castle – which is a thousand years old and built by William the Conqueror to keep the nasty Scots out (it didn't work) – or the Lake District in proper form. But when you grew up with that stuff around you, you take it for granted or worse, fail to notice it's there. Likewise, living in London, I don't do the tour stuff unless I've got somebody visiting me here. And I've got all the museums and all the galleries and the Tower of London and all the possible tourist things you might want to do, and some extraordinary history around here. And I don't do any of it.

Just take if for granted, huh?

You really do, because you're just so busy getting on with your day-to-day nonsense that you seem to forget that there's all this stuff to do that's very, very interesting, but somehow not as pressing as getting the children to bed or getting a deadline met – which nowadays seems to be something of a current joke. [laughter] And all the other stuff that just presses at you for attention.

When were you born?

I was born in the sleepy late winter, early spring, of 1970.

What did your parents do for work?

My mother worked part-time for the city council in a clerical capacity, and my dad was a painter and decorator. We always used to joke that my dad was a painter, he could do three coats in one afternoon.

Nick Fury © Marvel Characters, Inc.

***[laughs]* Did either have creative leanings?**

I don't know. It's hard to say. My mother prided herself on a singular lack of imagination, but she could multi-task better than anybody I've ever seen before in my life. I mean, her evening activity was watching television whilst reading a book, talking to my dad, and knitting, simultaneously. I never discovered how she could possibly do that, because I simply can't multi-task. I can uni-task very effectively, but I really, literally, can't talk and chew gum simultaneously. But my dad, I think, had potential. He used to draw pictures for us as children, which as a child I remember being very good. Especially Black Beauty; he was very good on horses, I remember. Certainly he was very good at copying. I suspect he had unrealized talent but was never encouraged, having grown up in the crumbling industrial North and told to go to work at 14, with no education. I think he could have quite happily sat on a stool in the middle of the countryside and painted watercolors. He got into fishing in a big way for a while. I think the solitude really appealed to him, as a family man.

Did you have relatives who were creative, or of note?

Apparently there were artists on both sides. My mother's uncle and my dad's uncle were both artists. My dad's uncle was a war artist of minor note, or possibly of no note whatsoever, which means he probably painted semi-naked ladies on aircraft copied from George Petty. I certainly remember seeing drawings in one of my grandmother's scrapbooks, which she said were by her brother. I remember them as a child being very good, but I can't confirm that, as a child's recollections aren't necessarily a good judge of quality. I know there were a number of average watercolors in my mother's parents' house, which were supposedly by her uncle, so there was certainly some attempts at artistry in the family, but nobody ever made a living out of it that I'm aware of.

How many siblings do you have?

I have one sister. She's a psychiatric nurse, and has no artistic or imaginative leanings whatsoever – more left-brain than right-brain I feel.

Is she older or younger?

She's two years older.

So as a child, were you read to a lot?

Actually, I was! One of the more enduring memories of childhood, other than running around outside in my sister's knickers because she told me they were swimming trunks, is my dad reading the books of Enid Blyton stories to us. He had a very good reading voice. He had, when he was younger, attempted to become a priest. He felt a strong vocation, went away to seminary and spent a year or two there studying, though he never went through with it to the bitter end. Well, he never got as far as being crucified, but I understand that's no longer a pre-requisite. He remains a very devout Catholic, however, and maintains a delightfully child-like view of faith and religion, which seems to make him happy. However, one thing that they did teach him there was enunciation and clarity of speech which, given a heretofore unrealized thespian leaning, lent itself to dramatic readings, and he brought all those powers to bear on fairy tales like 'Rapunzel'. And my favorite was 'Mister Meddles Muddles'.

Did you watch a lot of TV as a kid?

A great deal of television. I was very taken, and always have been, with science fiction. Of course, we grew up with *Doctor Who* and *Blake's 7*, which was this appalling *Star Trek* knockoff in the '70s. I mean, if you think the sets were bad on *Star Trek*, you should see the *Blake's 7* stuff. You could see the strings hanging off the spaceship! [laughter] But we kind of liked it. If I was out playing (and in those days nobody seemed worried about child welfare, as we were sent out to play very early in the morning and told to come back at dinner time – no mobile phones if we got into trouble; we were armed only with the advice to avoid anybody dodgy looking and not to shoplift if we could help it), I would always make sure I was back for *Blake's 7* or *Star Trek*.

Did you read?

Quite avidly and, again, it was science fiction and fantasy stuff. Of course, comic books were always a must. I was introduced to comic books very, very early on, with the classic tale of the kid who was ill and off school one day and his parents brought him a comic home. So, yeah, I always remember reading.

What was the comic that they brought home?

There were two. Well, memory being what it is, it might not be at all accurate, but I remember both a Marvel and a DC comic. The

Marvel comic was an *Avengers* issue drawn by George Pérez and featuring one of the many Atlantis attacks on humankind. [Hitch's note: I wonder if was issue #154, which was my first *Avengers* comic? There weren't that many Pérez-drawn mid-'70s *Avengers* issues featuring characters from Atlantis, after all.] The other one was an issue of Superman wherein Superman's identity was revealed to the Daily Planet by Lois Lane pulling his shirt up and saying, "Go and save us from this falling comet, you arsehole!" or something like that. [Jon laughs] I was talking to Mark Waid about it, and he assured me that happened almost every issue during that particular series of *Superman* comics, so I have yet to identify it. Mark Waid's apparently an expert on these things and is able to identify any issue of *Superman* just by a description of the punctuation; I think I remember talking to Mark about this once when we were working on JLA. I mentioned to him one line of dialogue from a *Superman* issue I recalled, and he was able to tell me the issue and who drew it and what number it was. I'm sure he'll be able to fill you in if you actually ask him what happened or describe the number and placement of exclamation points.

The Ultimates © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Were you attracted at all to the weeklies, the British comics?

Sure. When I was about five, I think, in the mid-'70s, there were a couple of things, *2000 AD* and *Starlord*, both separate magazines published by the same publishing house, and had these science-fiction characters in them, such as 'Judge Dredd' and 'Strontium Dog' and they certainly appealed to me. It was the first time I came across that kind of thing over here. It was quite different. It was black-and-white, it was harder-edged and was grittier. Not that you knew words such like hard-edged, gritty, postmodern, or anything like that in those days. But they were very much out of the punk rock scene, because that was what the writers and artists drawing them were into for a while. Many of the stories, particularly in 'Nemesis the Warlock', drawn by O'Neill were inspired by The Jam songs. They eventually merged into one magazine called *2000 AD* and *Starlord*, and eventually just *2000 AD*. Of those characters, I think 'Strontium Dog' was originally in *Starlord*, and 'Judge Dredd,' of course, in *2000 AD*. They really did engage me for quite some time. The accepted route in those days was of course to go and work for *2000 AD* and then hopefully get discovered by DC, like Dave Gibbons, Steve Parkhouse, Alan Moore, Alan Davis, to name but a few – Kevin O'Neill. All of these chaps DC came over en masse to recruit. I remember that in the early '80s, just seeing all these people I knew from British comics suddenly showing up in American publications getting quite a kick seeing them doing real comics. Super-heroes. Today, of course, it's de rigeur, but in those days it was quite a novelty.

Did you enjoy the humor titles? *Dandy* and *Beano*?

Well, we got *Beano*. Every Wednesday, *Beano* showed up on the doorstep, and my sister and I used to fight over breakfast for who was going to read it first and who was going to read the *Daily Mail*. She usually won and I would have to settle for her girlie comics after my dad grabbed the *Mail* whilst wearing only a vest. But I was never into it in such a way that I wanted to draw for *Beano*. I enjoyed reading it, just like I enjoyed watching Saturday morning cartoons. But *2000 AD* and the super-hero comics, those I've always wanted to draw. From the minute I read them, I would copy from them. I would never copy from the *Beano*, because I wasn't interested in that kind of cartooning (there are other people who can do that better and have that kind of natural leaning) I think I always leant toward the dramatic stuff.

Did you have a subscription to it, or would the newsagent deliver it?

To us, subscriptions were from the newsagent. You just put in a regular order and it came through your front door with a newspaper. Oh, a memory just sparked! I remember getting a regular order for a *Tarzan* weekly magazine, which was in black-and-white. It must have been a reprint, because my memories tell me that it was drawn by Joe Kubert. Of course, I've got all those DC *Tarzan*s now, the original books. I'm sure that must have been my first exposure to his work, too. But, again, I didn't realize it was an American comic, or a reprint of one then. I just thought it was a British comic, and I didn't really know who'd drawn it. I do remember it being absolutely extraordinary though, and my admiration for Kubert continues to grow to this day.

Did you live in a rural area?

No. I grew up in I suppose what you would call Victorian Industrial housing in the '70s. You can imagine all these terraced houses, just streets upon streets upon streets, each with corner

shops, newsagents, green grocers, butchers, all kinds of local businesses, no central business district. All of these were usually surrounding some Victorian industrial centre, in our case it was a big steelworks that was at the top of the street. It's now a vast retail park with a drive-through Burger King, but in those days it was this great British steelworks building huge cranes. These houses we lived in and other people lived in were all the original workhouses from the 19th Century and every morning I was woken in several different stages. First is the wakeup call for my dad (being shouted at from downstairs by my mother). My dad was in bed and she'd attempt to wake him up quietly by shouting from downstairs. Then he would stir. Then she would shout again even louder with a little more impatience, so as not to disturb anybody and he would finally get up. Then, just when I'd get off to sleep again, this great claxon sound of an air-raid siren would go off every morning at a quarter to seven, and that was the original buzzer (as it was quaintly known) to call all the workers to the steelworks, to wake them up, basically their industrial-sized alarm clock to call them t'mill which naturally woke up the entire city. We were pleased in the early '80s when that was demolished and replaced by a Burger King which was altogether quieter.

When did you start drawing?

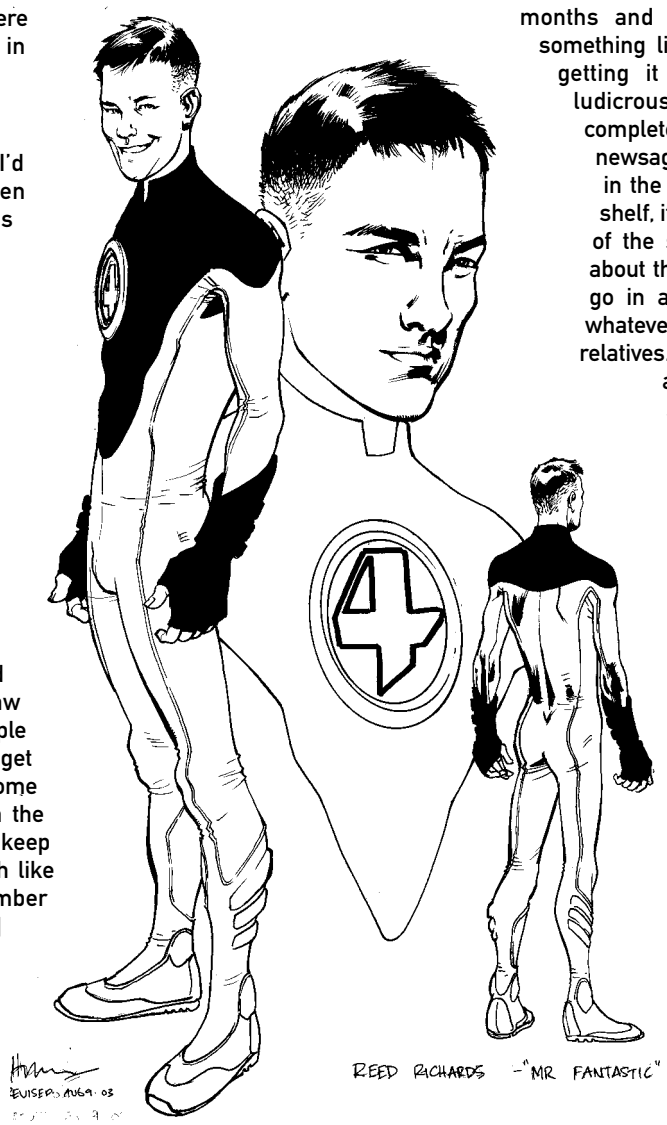
Well, I think pretty much from as soon as I could hold a pencil. I don't have any memories where I'm not involved in drawing in some form or another.

What were you drawing?

Stuff out of my head, stuff I'd seen on television. I'd been reading comics since I was four and five years old, and I'm sure that the comics and the drawings went together. I can't remember a time when I wasn't drawing comic book super-heroes and copying pages from comics.

Were you doing sequential stories?

Not originally. I mean, there were times I would create a super-hero for that particular day, called original things like 'Electron, Proton and Neutron' and I would draw three or four panels or a couple of pages of a strip and then get bored with it, throw it away, come up with another variation on the same idea tomorrow and keep going that way. I think, much like today, I don't really remember completing stories. [laughter]



Mister Fantastic © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Did you do your own knockoffs or imitation characters based on existing stuff?

It was the classics. Everybody, of course, had to have an emblem on their chests.

How was the stuff? Did you ever look at it again, or is it gone?

Much like today, I just don't keep it. I think the fun for me has always been in the doing, and I really hate looking back on the stuff. You know, there's times when I come across some older or past work and it doesn't suck as badly as I remember it sucking, but frankly, if people are willing to part with money to own the originals, then that's fine and I appreciate it a great deal. I really do enjoy the process, I'm just constantly disappointed in the end results. As long as I've got a set of photocopies I can look at occasionally, I don't really need to retain the original artwork.

***[laughs]* So, from early on, was it a mixture of British comics and American comics that held your interest?**

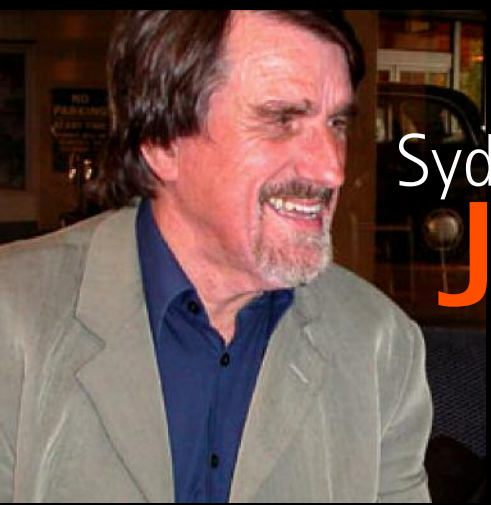
I suppose. I mean, I read *2000 AD* and I enjoyed it very much, but really it was American comics, it was *Superman* to start with, and *Batman*. Mostly I could only get DC comics. The way it worked in those days, especially where I lived, in the '70s, there were no comic book shops so the newsagents got this stuff that I think came over as ballast in ships. It was always months and months out of date, it would say something like June '83 on the cover, and I'd be getting it in July of '96 or something, just ludicrously out of date, and sometimes completely out of order, as well. But my local newsagents would just put it all in a big stack in the corner, wouldn't even put it out on the shelf, it'd just be a corner of a desk in the back of the shop, and they'd just stack this stuff about three feet high when it came in. I would go in and day by day erode the stack with whatever money I could possibly scrounge from relatives. Judging by the way the pile went down and the fact that when I went back in the same stuff was left. I don't think anybody else bought it. Gradually over the month I would go in, week after week, and start by buying all the ones I wanted desperately, and then gradually work my way through the pile to eventually get to *Jonah Hex* or something, where just because it was a comic, I'd buy it. I knew I didn't like it, I certainly didn't want to read it, but it was a comic, so I bought it anyway even if it was by Dick Ayers.

You know, that's a little unfair, because I saw Ayers' stuff at the arse end of his career, and as I've grown more familiar with the history of comics I've come to appreciate a lot of earlier work, including that of Dicky A, especially his inking over Kirby.

Sydney JORDAN

by George Khoury

For over 50 years he's explored the furthest reaches of the universe, discovering new worlds, encountering unknown alien races and breathtaking adventure – the legendary draftsman Sydney Jordan has done all of this and so much more in the space yarns he's chronicled. The artist, a native of Scotland, is best known for being the creator of 'Jeff Hawke', the world's longest running science-fiction newspaper strip, for ***The Daily Express***, and the popular 'Lance McLane' in ***The Daily Record*** – both syndicated across the globe. Jordan's interest in aviation and space started at the end of World War II when he enrolled at Miles Aeronautical Technical School for aspiring aviation designers, an education that would serve invaluable throughout the rest of this career. Unable to find work in the aviation industry, he turned to comics and landed worked as an assistant to Len Fullerton on his comic Dora, Toni and Liz in 1951. By 1952 he moved to London and worked for the agency Man's World, where he did the art for 'Dirk Hercules' in a series of comics promoting physical fitness. Soon after, Jordan pitched a proposal for a character called Orion to ***The Daily Express***, who picked up the strip once the hero was turned into a Royal Air Force pilot and bestowed the name of Jeff Hawke in 1954. In 1956, Willie Paterson, a childhood friend of Jordan's and a fellow classmate at Miles, joined Hawke as writer/co-plotter and assisted in making the newspaper strip a classic by presenting heavier science-fiction elements to the plotlines and introducing amusing aliens like the infamous Chalcedon, the space pirate, a villain as beloved as the hero himself. When 'Jeff Hawke' ceased in 1976, Jordan created 'Lance McLane', a more psychedelic and fantastic mix of science fiction that endured many years of fanfare. Whether it's the sight of his celestial landscapes, his gut-ripping action, his meticulously detailed aircrafts, or his beautiful women, Jordan's library of work and brushwork has made him one of the true masters of British comics.



When and where were you born? What was your upbringing like?

Born 1931 in Dundee, Scotland, where the renowned publishing house of DC Thomson was producing a staggering range of comics, including five story magazines a week filled with intelligent, literate adventure tales for boys and carrying the title illustrations by some of Britain's leading illustrators of the day. Enjoying that peculiarly literary emphasis which the Scottish educational system bestowed at that time, and encouraged by my parents to read the comics and earlier classics, my childhood was happy and full. My father used to quote the great poets to me from an early age, and I fell in love with what he called "golden-tongued romance."

Did you study art formally? And what attracted you to the comics form?

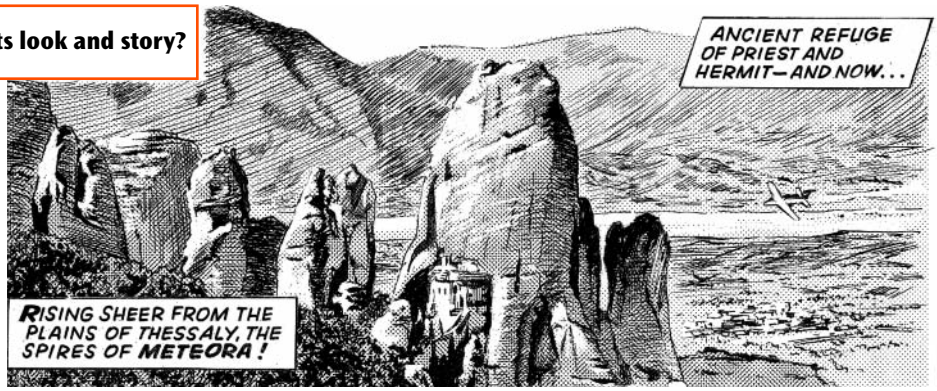
Despite my interest in drawing and writing my love of aviation led me to attend Miles Aircraft's experimental college for would-be aeronautical engineers just after the war, and it was there that I learned about the nuts and bolts of flying. But the lure of storytelling through comic book brought me back to Dundee where I worked in a studio run by an ex-Thomson artist and his colleagues. This was how I studied art – at the feet of those who understood the demands of drawing the human figure in the medium of pen and ink.

Who were your most important artistic influences?

While at Bill McCail's studio, I studied the work of Alex Raymond ('Rip Kirby'), Milton Caniff ('Steve Canyon'), and later Stan Drake ('The Heart of Juliet Jones'). Raymond for his mastery of the clothed figure, accurate and graphic; Caniff for the wonderful rendering of uniforms and particularly aircraft (no one could touch him for the image of an aeroplane in combat); and Drake for his photographic use of tint and the sheer glamour of his characters.

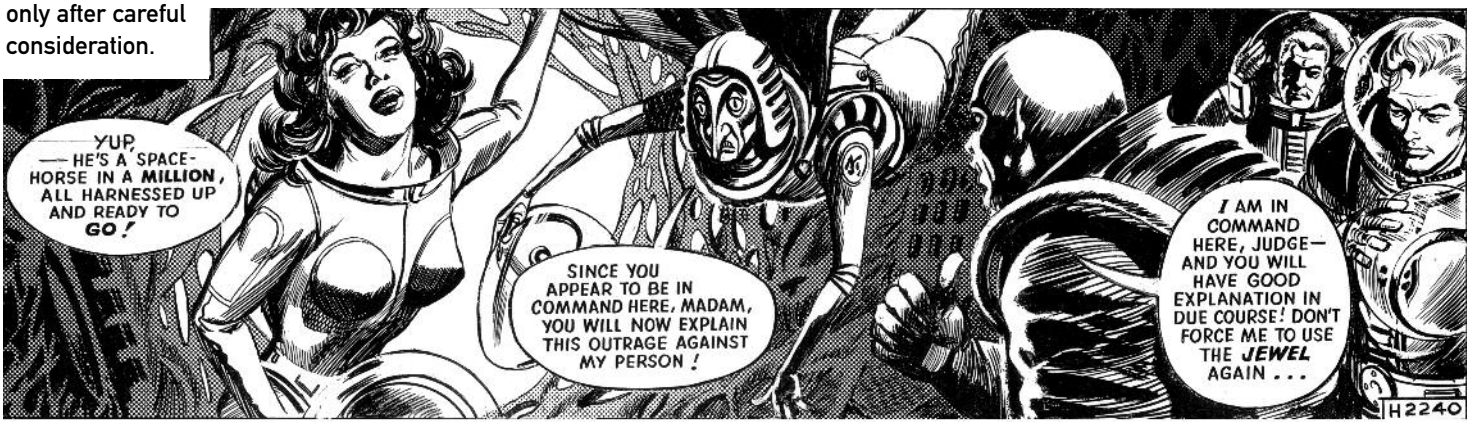
What inspired the 'Jeff Hawke' strip, in terms of its look and story?

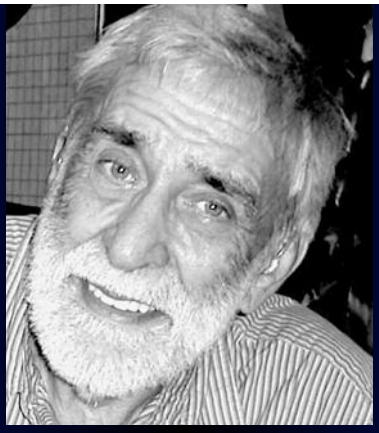
In 1954 the flying saucer phenomenon was well under way, and by linking my opening sequences to the contemporary newsworthy nature of the 'sightings', I was able to sell the idea to the *Daily Express*. The first two or three stories saw Hawke progress from being a kind of super-hero to a much more realistic character firmly based in a not too distant future. Chesley Bonestell's fabulous spacescapes and the eerie science fiction of Ray Bradbury were to influence the background and storylines which eventually developed.



Could you please describe how Willie Paterson and yourself collaborated on the strips?

Willie Patterson, a school friend and fellow student at Miles Technical College, had an intellect bordering on genius, and when I asked him to help with the scripts he brought all of his classical knowledge and Bohemian lifestyle to bear. The result is what the Italians (the most receptive of all the foreign syndication readers) call the Golden Age, including as it does the pantheon of aliens which he and I created – bizarre, yet cursed with most of the frailties which beset mankind! We thought so much alike that it was rare for us to argue over any aspect of the story or drawing. His scenarios, linked with the dialogue, were almost always what I myself would have envisioned, and I changed them only after careful consideration.





Don LAWRENCE

1928-2003

by Peter Hansen

Donald Southam Lawrence was born in East Sheen London on November 17, 1928. With his passing in December of 2003 the last of the great British comic book illustrators/artists passed on to the big art college in the sky.

Like many of the greats, Don was quite modest and self-effacing where his art was concerned, and when asked about his work would always wax lyrically about others. A lifelong admirer of his great friend Ron Embleton ('Wicked Wanda' artist in *Penthouse*) and others such as Frank Bellamy and Frank Hampson, Don never really saw himself as their contemporary. When I mentioned that he would be featured in this book alongside Bellamy and Hampson he was embarrassed and humbled to be even considered alongside people he admired so much. Such was the man.

Never a great student Lawrence, took refuge in his art at school. After being evacuated during the war he joined the army in 1947, leaving in 1949 to study art at the Borough Polytechnic in London until he left in 1954. Almost 50 years later in September 2003, I had the pleasure of interviewing Don Lawrence in London at the first British convention he had attended since 1976.

After leaving art school, Don, what did you do?

Well I had decided to do strip work after an ex-student had come back to the college to show off a page of cowboy artwork that he had done. So I went to see a man called Ted Holmes at Amalgamated Press who gave me a tryout... which I failed!! *[laughter]*

I thought it was going to be easy you know, but of course it's not easy. Anyway he paid me for the art and he said, "Well look, why don't you try Mick Anglo," who was the bottom of the bottom, you know, you can't get any lower than Mick Anglo. *[laughter]* So I did and he paid me a pound a page for black-and-white and he gave me a tryout and he said okay, and that's how I started.

A pound a page doesn't sound very much.

No, and I didn't realise it was only a pound a page at first. He asked me to draw a sample page of Marvelman flying over a bunch of skyscrapers and I went home and spent a whole bloody week drawing that sample page with all of the windows in the skyscrapers. It was bloody murder. I almost died when I found out he was only going to pay me a pound a page!

Wells Fargo © Respective Holder

So this was the first real paying job in the comics business that you had?

Not really, I also did a small little magazine called *Dolphin* for a gentleman called Mr. Feldman who lived in Meadowvale who was a tailor, and he wanted a magazine to advertise his business, and he was my first paying customer. Which was great, because up until I got that job I had been really struggling.

It's a strange looking little magazine, Don, and I can't see what it had to do with a tailoring business.

[laughs] It had nothing at all to do with tailoring. He just wanted to do it, and he handed them out to his clients. I did a few stories for it, but once I started on 'Marvelman' I really didn't have time for it anymore.

So once you started on 'Marvelman', Don, were you thrown in at the deep end? Or did you start off by erasing pencils or inking?

No, he just sort of said "off you go" and he gave me a few scripts to start with, but after a while they dried up and I started writing my own stories.

Did you know anything about comics when you started, Don? You know, were you an avid comic reader when you were a kid?

Well it was war time, you see, and there really weren't any comics around. I remember getting my hands on a Canadian comic, it was a big one, and how I got hold of it I don't remember, but it had 'Dick Tracy' in it and a lot of the heroes of that time. I mean, I just loved those types of comics, but I never thought about being a comic or strip artist. It was the fact that at art school abstract impressionism was 'in' and I never really liked it as I was a 'realist' painter, and I was completely out of my depth. I just thought that I had to use what talent I had and comic strips seemed to fit. I didn't want to go into advertising, I knew that. I had gone up to London to show a company my stuff even before I went into the army, and they said, you know, "Do your service and come back and see us."

So you never really did any commercial work?

Well, I did a bit, but not much, I did a game cover design for Milton Bradley called 'The Temple Raiders'. But they would come down every couple of weeks to make little changes and they were so picky, I thought, "Well I'm not going to do this again." I also did a big poster to advertise Hong Kong, and got paid very well for it, but in the end they decided not to use it.

Wells Fargo

David LLOYD

by George Khoury

Beneath the sadistic grin of a man named ***V***, within the belly of a dark, totalitarian British government and beyond Alan Moore's visionary script – you will find that the true foundation of the timeless ***V for Vendetta*** is the rich atmosphere and theatrical storytelling that the artistry of David Lloyd provided in every page of that tale. When he was 13, he would doodle and emulate the art of his favorite comic book artists. The young artist was a constant fixture in the early days of British fandom, and learned the fundamentals of illustrations when he trained as a commercial artist in advertising. After a few attempts of pitching newspaper strips, David broke into professional comics when he drew a strip for ***The Magician*** annual in 1975, an effort he considers a misstart. It was in 1978 with his faithful adaptation of Quatermass' 'Enemy from Space' (in ***Halls of Horror*** #23) that his career began to take shape as he landed a variety of steady work with strips like 'Night Raven' and various ***Doctor Who*** back-up stories (for Marvel UK) along with 'The Kicktail Kid' and 'Kojak'(for ***TV Comic***). Over the years, Lloyd has drawn over a hundred comic stories for a wide array of publishers, but the jewel of his body of work remains ***V For Vendetta***. With ***V***'s powerful semblance, stark blacks and moving frames – along with a dash of inspiration from Jim Steranko's ***Chandler*** – Lloyd earned the respect of his peers and the admiration from legions of fan for what still stands as his largest endeavor in comics. The illustrator continues to remain a vital force in the industry, always striving for excellence in his art and stories that are free of clichés and rich in originality.

The Spirit

Could you fill us in on your background in terms of what your parents did? What type of upbringing and education you had?

My dad worked in a bus garage doing maintenance work. My mum did lots of different part-time jobs as well as looking after the family. My dad didn't really understand what I was about as an artist. Once he suggested buying me a paint-by-numbers kit, and I didn't know how to answer him – though I think he guessed from my reaction that it wasn't what I wanted. For years, I thought he had no artistic ability himself until the day he decided to redecorate the upper rooms of the house and pick the color scheme for every room, including mine (at a stage when I wasn't particularly worried about what it looked like). He chose an unusual but effective combination – and even though the decision he took was governed as much by how many tins of paint he had left in the shed as by his own good sense, it was obvious he knew exactly what he was doing. I think he was one of those guys who hid an understanding of art and color, because it wasn't what guys of his generation and his background were supposed to know anything about. He was a really great dad when he could be, and I wish I'd seen more of him. Sadly, he spent too much time doing night work because that's where the best pay was.

My mum did everything humanly possible for me and my brother. She saved and bought new things for the house with the money she got from her part-time jobs. My education was ordinary – I didn't shine academically. I was always good at art and English, then later took crafts like photography and printing. Left school at 16 with no really useful qualifications, except for one in art. Wanted to go to art school, but career guidance officers hadn't been very informative about that route to fame and fortune – and by the time we figured out how I could get to art school, it was too late to me to enter in the year I left school. There was no question of me hanging around doing nothing until the year after, so I was directed to the nearest employment office, and soon secured a job as a trainee artist/messenger and general gofer at a commercial art studio in central London, a stone's throw from St Paul's Cathedral.

When did you start drawing – and when did you want to become a comic book artist? How did you go about learning your craft?

As a kid – can't remember what age – I think the first strip I drew, though, was a collaboration with a friend of mine. I can't remember exactly how the tasks were broken down but we both drew some of it. It was like a little newspaper three-framer, and it was called 'Jim Tack' and 'Jack Boot'. Memory dissolves into a mist after that... until I did an adaptation of Arthur C. Clarke's 'Security Check' – my very first attempt at a comic book style strip – which was heavily influenced by Steve Ditko's work. Then I produced a controversial, two-page tribute to the ECs (which I'd been introduced to via the Ballantine reprints). It was controversial because having hung it in the school corridor – to my art teacher's enthusiastic urging. I found myself being summoned to the headmaster's office for publicly displaying something he considered to be lacking in appropriate taste. He was very nice about it, though, and congratulated me on my talent. However, the art had to come down – before it could spread its poison of corruption to many more of my vulnerable schoolmates. The strip was called 'Vampyrus', and owed a lot to Graham Ingles.

The studio I trained at was a perfect place to learn how to appeal to comic readers, because we were taught how to draw stuff in a way that would make people want to buy it. However, almost all of it was still life work: toasters, desk lamps, tea sets. I taught myself how to draw people, and how to draw strips. The only how-to books on strips I had were a Walter Foster book which I liked as much for its large-size format as for what it contained, and a little Charlton tips-'n'-tricks book I got from somewhere. For figure drawing, one of the best books I had was *People in Action*, by Nigel Lambourne; it emphasised the necessity to initiate a drawing first from rough lines of energy, which could be moderated at completion. I just loved strips and I wanted to draw them whenever I could. I practised endlessly and loved it. Drew great epics in line and wash that no one was ever meant to see. They were my stories, just for me. Like painting for fun, I drew strips for fun. I even drew them in the lunch hour at the studio – and when things were slack.

When I left the studio, it was on the tissue-thin promise of being able to sell some newspaper strip concepts I'd come up with to a European syndication agency. It didn't happen, I'm sorry to say – and it's just as well it didn't, in the long run, because I still had a lot of very rough edges as an artist which I desperately needed to smooth out. I ended up doing non-art-related part-time jobs for some time, as well as trying to get freelance work doing book covers, children's book illustration, posters, and greeting cards – comic strip work was not my first choice to aim for at that time, for reasons I have yet to fully understand. I did a number of greeting cards, but most of my samples leaned a bit too much towards the dramatic, and I had to be guided towards evoking a lighter feel for things. My heart definitely wasn't in it. It was an unstable existence, work-wise, but I was determined never to go back to a nine-to-five job in art, again. I liked being my own boss – even if I wasn't paying myself much money!

Who have been some of your influences? And exactly what about their work influenced you, and how that affected you?

Turner. I had an aunt who always gave me cool things at Christmas and one of them was a little book called *The Observers Book of Painting*, which had reproductions of the great masters. One of them was Turner's 'Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus', which I managed to get a print of, and which remained on my bedroom wall for years – even during the 'film poster wallpaper' period of my late teenage years. It was the atmosphere made from light that impressed me most with Turner – and Rembrandt was on the same team. Then Millais for his extraordinary photo-realist work allied to amazing lighting effects, Geoff Campion – he drew 'Texas Jack' in one the English weeklies – Steve Dowling, who created the newspaper strip, 'Garth', the first British super-hero (not Marvelman); Giles, an English political cartoonist whose work was an extraordinary blend of the realistic and the cartoony; George Woodbridge and Jack Davis – loved their work so much, of daffy dogs and gunfighters, that I did tracings of them and hung them on the wall; little b-&-w reprints of US comic book stories, packaged in the UK under the titles *Mystic* and *Spellbound*; Wally Wood; Orson Welles; H.G. Wells; Ray Harryhausen – The *Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*; Ron Embleton; Rod Serling; Ian Fleming; Mickey Spillane; Robert McGinnis; Josh Kirby – who painted covers for a series of sf paperbacks (some time before he did Pratchett stuff) including some for... Ray Bradbury. Then there was Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch, Robert Sheckley, H.P. Lovecraft, Don Medford, Don Siegel, Alfred Hitchcock, Boris Sagal, Terence Fisher, Ron Cobb of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, Frank Frazetta, John Burns, Steve Ditko, Jack Kirby, Frank Bellamy, Al Williamson, the EC crowd, Tony Weare, the early Warren crowd, Gray Morrow, Toth, Torres, Jim Steranko.

Steve Ditko astounded me with his work on *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, which was the most consistently powerful, individualistic, and

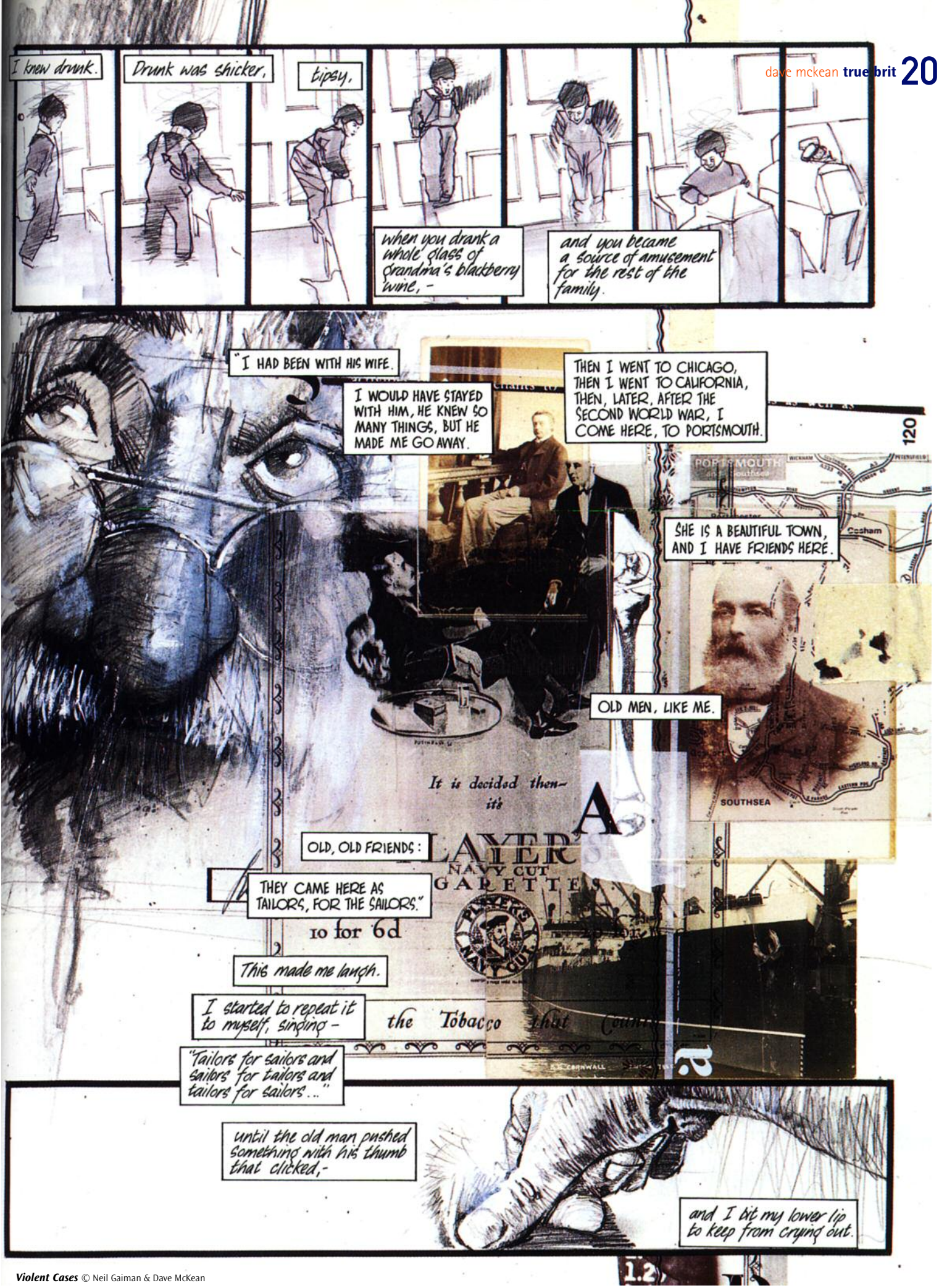
Above: The Spirit © Will Eisner Right: Global Frequency: © DC Comics and Warren Ellis

Dave McKEAN

by George Khoury

To pigeonhole Dave McKean as being just 'a comic book artist' would be criminal, for he's not only a talented all-round illustrator but also a gifted wordsmith, an accomplished photographer, an exceptional musician and a visionary filmmaker. It was back during his education at Berkshire College of Art, from 1982 to 1986, that McKean began to seriously consider comics as a career. Although comics were an early love in his life, they weren't the driving force for the sequential stories he wanted to tell. Rather, he was driven by his appreciation for the great illustrators and painters whom he had studied and became interested in injecting the abstract qualities of expression into comics. During 1986, the artist befriended an up-and-coming writer named Neil Gaiman, and they started a fruitful collaboration that began with the release of the acclaimed ***Violent Cases*** and continues to the present day with ***The Wolves in the Wall***. DC editor Karen Berger soon scouted the pair and they soon found themselves working on ***Black Orchid,*** a three-part prestige series lavishly painted by Dave. When the Batman hysteria of the late '80s hit, the artist was able to raise his profile by showcasing his talent for imagery with ***Batman: Arkham Asylum***, written by the renowned Grant Morrison, and at one point the most successful graphic novel of all-time. From 1990 to 1996 he worked on his next project, ***Cages,*** a graphic novel which stands at 500 pages and remains his magnum opus. For ***Cages,*** his most personal work, McKean created its art with everything and anything imaginable, in every media possible and using all of his skills to illustrate his inspiring ode of creativity and emotion. Another of his achievements in comics are the haunting covers he's provided for so many books like ***Hellblazer, Black Orchid, The Dreaming, Alice Cooper: The Last of Temptation, Miracleman,*** and the entire collection of ***Sandman.*** Other graphic novels by the artist include ***Mr. Punch*** and ***Signal to Noise*** (both written by Mr. Gaiman), and ***Slow Chocolate Autopsy*** (with Iain Sinclair). Outside of comics, he's designed and illustrated plenty of compact disc covers, among them one for The Rolling Stones, and created ad campaigns for Kodak, Nike and other clients. The filmmaker-side of McKean has directed and written 'The Week Before' and 'N(eon)', both short films, and now his first feature film ***MirrorMask*** for Sony Pictures and slated for release in the fall of 2004.

The Dreaming © DC Comics



When and where were you born?
How would you describe your upbringing?

Taplow, near Maidenhead in Berkshire, England. December 29, 1963. A background I would characterize as supportive, but neutral. My parents had a Northern England working class ethic, but ended up in the aspirational middle class. My father was the managing director of a shipping company, but also fought for his workers rights. But underneath all of this he really wanted to be an architect, but never got the opportunity to try, despite the offer of a scholarship.

My father died when I was 12. My mother supported me completely and unconditionally, and so I think I had the opportunity to create my own path from an early age.

Was there a particular moment that caused you to want to be an artist?

I remember a few key moments, my father drawing cartoons for me. Drawing some portraits of film actors that actually looked like them. Drawing a surreal little illustration that worried my father about my sanity. Seeing Max Ernst paintings at the Tate. And then reading comics, Marvel comics at eight, Warren magazines, *Heavy Metal*, American undergrounds, independents. Four great years at art school, publishing our own comics, arguing with everybody. Great teachers who hit me in the head with a whole world of possibilities. Exhibitions by Ralph Steadman and Gerald Scarfe at the Festival Hall, Jim Dine, Jasper Johns. A wonderful talk by Marshall Arisman at the ICA.

Mike NOBLE

by Norman Boyd

Mike Noble is to most British fans what Curt Swan is to American comic fans. Like Swan in the '60s, he could always be relied upon to produce beautiful work. Noble holds a special place in UK comic readers' hearts because his regular output during the '50s to '90s expanded children's horizons and conveyed a positive value system. Many of his works are based on television shows, some American, some British – 'The Lone Ranger', 'Fireball XL5', 'Captain Scarlet', 'Zero X' (from the *Thunderbirds Are Go* film) – and many UK children's series. His work is entirely his own because in the UK, unlike most American comics, artists tended to pencil, ink and colour their work.

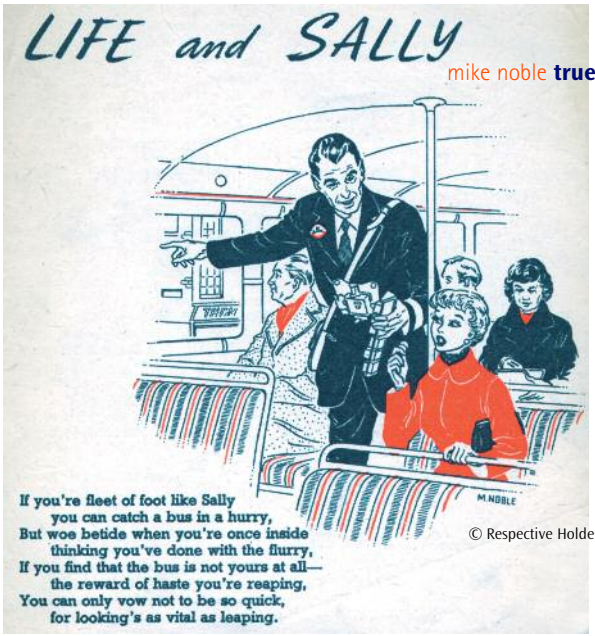
But what of the man? When I tried to share with Mike how I personally felt about his work, I asked him to think back to his childhood. A big smile crossed his face and he burst out with 'Sexton Blake' (a fictional British detective created in 1893). "I used to buy *Film Fun* with Arthur Askey in it; it was a Friday treat back then." Noble is a humble man who still cannot understand all the fuss about his work. At times I felt that Mike was very self-denigrating about his work, but I suspect now, he is, in fact, the quintessential Englishman, modest about his achievements.

We interviewed Mike on a typical drizzly March afternoon at his Sussex home. He is retired now but not idle. His life in a rural village sees his participation in village life. He won a national competition to design a church lychgate, he co-designed a poster for the Millennium celebrations of people in the village, and has made a brief comeback illustrating posters of familiar subjects for the recent Gerry Anderson-inspired comics of the '90s. He lives in a detached bungalow inherited from his parents, a well-kept garden surrounds the property, and Mike is keen for the rain to let up so he can get out there. We started the meeting at one of Mike's favourite pubs, next to which he informed us he often played cricket. We enjoyed a relaxed meal and pint of the local beer whilst Mike regaled us with stories of the war. His knowledge is obviously inspired by having lived through the period in the London Blitz as an 11-15 year old. When I mentioned my mother came from Lüneburg, in Germany, Mike immediately pricked up his ears, citing the signing of the armistice on the Lüneburg Heath. The subjects of his early childhood drawings were war subjects, too.

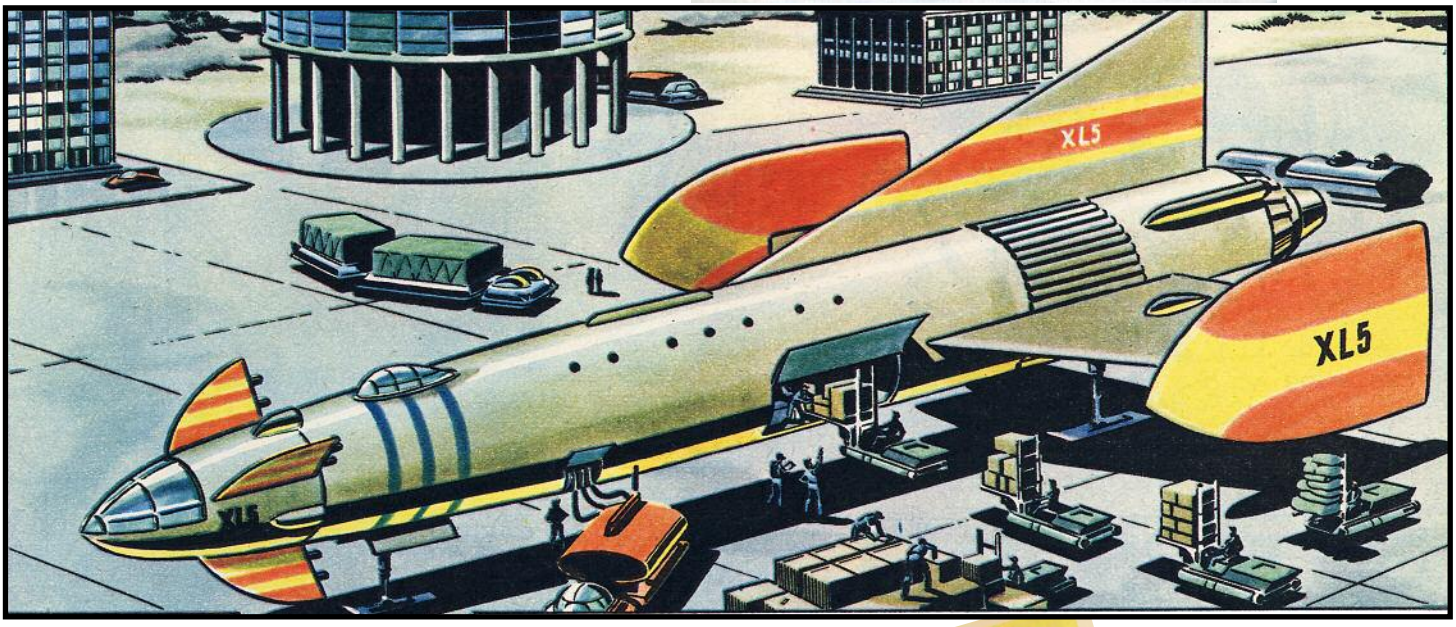
Mike Noble was born on the 17th of September 1930 in Woodford. His father was a stockbroker's clerk at the Stock Exchange, where he would deal on behalf of clients. Mike

Captain Scarlet

laughed when I asked if, like the children in *Mary Poppins*, he had the opportunity to follow his dad to his place of work. "Well, I went into the offices with my brother while father was dealing on the floor and used to tap away at the typewriters." Mike's father is important to him as his main inspiration. His father, although a talented artist, did not take up art as a career: "You were regarded as a mad fool if you relied on art to make a living, in those days. From his background, which was in the country, work in the city of London was a real step up, a real advantage and father was pretty intelligent and it suited him and he enjoyed it. But his art was always going to be a hobby. But nevertheless he was very capable." Mike has samples of his father's works at home. His brother would draw as a child too: "It was obviously in the genes. Father would let us get on with it and every now and again he'd do a drawing for us and we'd be all aquiver."

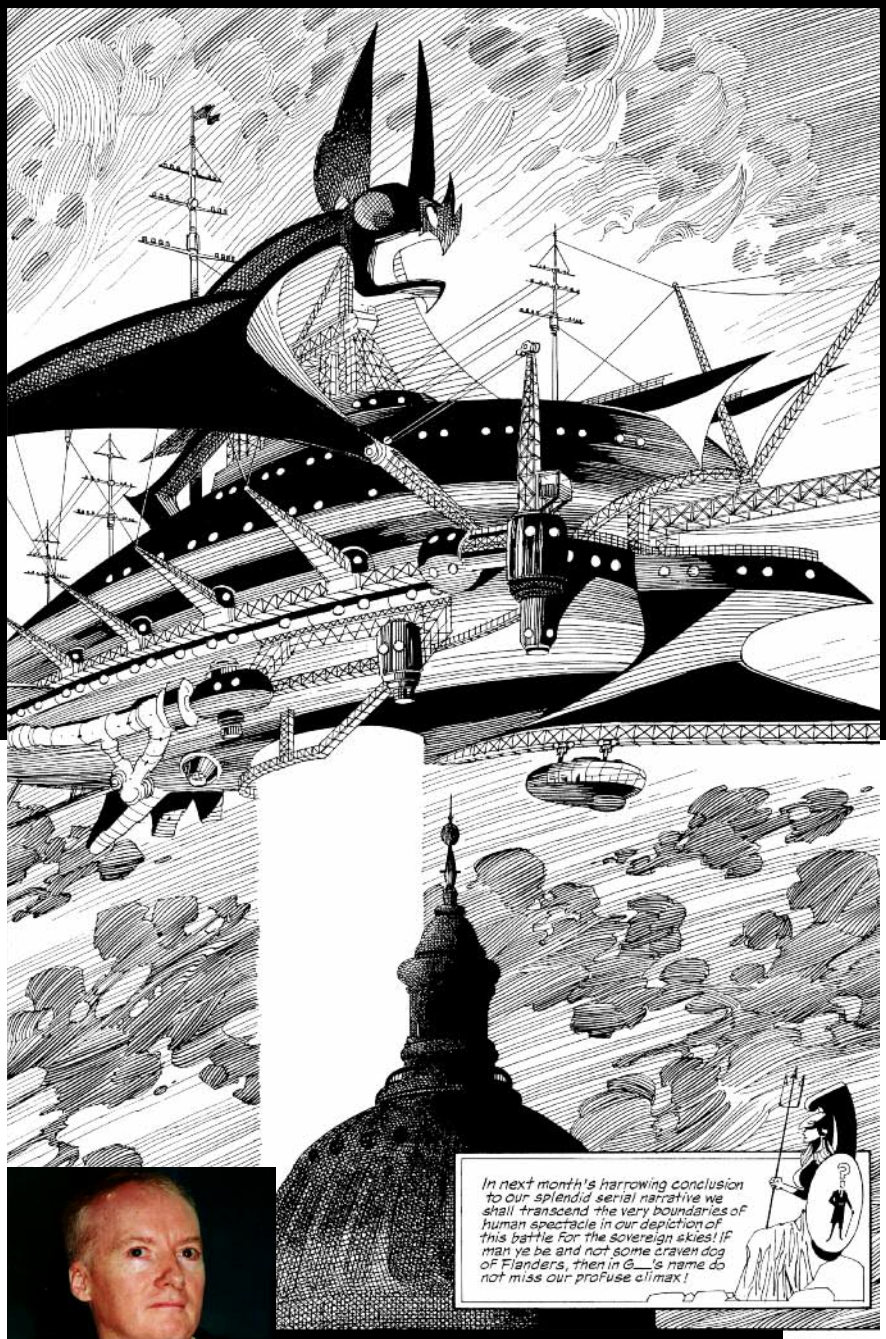


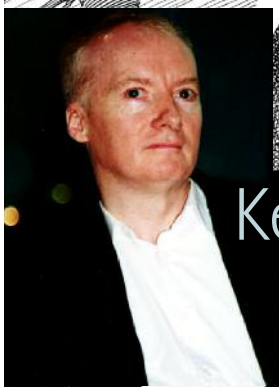
Fireball XL5



Mike's older brother (by 18 months) shone at school and went into the Navy, having to do his National Service. "In universities, at that time, there were certain vacancies for ex-servicemen, and because of David's qualifications, he went up to University College Oxford for three years and then he went into hospital administration, eventually leading to his working for the Medical Research Council and a CBE at the end of it all." I was curious why one son should have such a different career path from the other, and Mike admitted, "Academically I didn't shine like my brother, but father thought, 'This boy can draw,' anyway, and insisted I had a reasonable education, which I thought very wise. So I went to a private school in Ilford and then to art school (South West Essex Technical College)." "Why that one?" I asked. "There was a lady at my school, who had been to this art school, and she said if one or two of us wanted to go to this art school she could put in a word, and father was happy with that. And besides, it was the nearest to home. So I had to produce some drawings for a test, and they accepted me. You went to life class, drawing for plaster casts, Greek Gods – a classical education. They taught you the basics of how to draw, and I chose the commercial course, which was advertising rather than fine art, because I didn't see myself starving in an attic. [laughter] If you do fine art you have to come

His long journey into professional comics began behind the scenes at IPC magazines, where as a teenager he was employed as an office boy on ***Buster***. Over subsequent years, O'Neill paid his dues working through the production ranks at IPC until finally serving as art director for ***2000 AD*** during one of the most fondly remembered, and controversial, periods of the title. Shortly after, Kevin left his staff position to pursue freelance assignments and the chance to demonstrate the artistic skills that he had been honing for so long. The artwork that the artist unleashed must have come as a surprise to those who only knew O'Neill's cavalier and low key demeanor, because his provocative illustrations reflected a far different side of him – these drawings were intense with grittiness and full of menacing, kinetic energy with a richness in detail and atmosphere. With his chief collaborator, the legendary scribe Pat Mills, the illustrator co-created tales full of social commentary, darkness and, mostly important, mischievous humor in books like 'ABC Warriors', 'Ro-Busters', 'Metalzoic', 'Nemesis the Warlock', and ***Marshal Law***. Nowadays, a more seasoned O'Neill shines brightly with the most ambitious work of his career in the adventures of ***The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*** for America's Best Comics with Alan Moore.





Kevin O'NEILL

by George Khoury

Where and when were you born? And how would you describe your upbringing?

I was born in Eltham, South East London on the 22nd of August 1953. I was raised on a working class council estate by an Irish father and an English mother. As a small child I became a big fan of the Fleischer's *Popeye* cartoon transmitted on British television in the late 1950s. Was addicted to all animation subjects and read as many comics as I could afford: British, American, hybrid reprints of *Captain Marvel*... also Marvelman and British Annuals that reprinted *Blackhawk* and *Plastic Man*.

How did you discover comics? How did you know this was the career you wanted?

My first comic was probably a British nursery comic, something like *Playhour*, but I really wanted *The Beano* and *Dandy* – as soon as I had the pocket money to spend I bought those that I have always loved: the DC Thomson work of Dudley D. Watkins (especially his masterpiece 'Desperate Dan'),

League of Extraordinary Gentlemen© Alan Moore & Kevin O'Neill

shy, no idea why no one else in family was like that, so I guess I retreated into the world of imagination. I think this spurred me on as I was clearly unfit for work in the real world. When I was 15 I had a Saturday and summer job in a supermarket working in the store rooms and filling shelves – memories of wearing that vast brown overall in front of girls from my school still make me shudder!

Could you list your most important influences – and what is it about their art that lured you in? Is there anything of those influences that you see in your art and storytelling?

Influences are interesting to reflect on; comic art, animation, and illustration all at some level alter perception. Comic art, in particular; those ink lines and squiggles, represented to me a glimpse of worlds more real and powerful and desirable than the world I lived in. And attempting to draw my own images conjured up a wonderful sense of well being – most probably some intense form of daydream manifest. Instead of having sports heroes, I had artists whose work I grew to recognize and even worship, even if it would be many years before I knew their names (if British). As I've said *The Beano* and *Dandy* artists were important to me, but when a school friend traded me his *Son of Mad*

Leo Baxendale on the 'Bash Street Kids' and 'Little Plum', Davey Law's 'Dennis the Menace', and the magnificent cartoon art of Ken Reid on 'Jonah'. I started drawing from an early age, and I know my father did not care much for me reading comics as I grew older, but as I also read a lot of books from the local library, he tolerated it. My parents never discouraged me from my ambitions, they just could not help in any way; there were no other artists in the family that I was aware of. It never occurred to me that it may have been impossible to break into comics or animation. I was always a dreamer and inhabited a pretty rich fantasy world in my head. The main obstacle was putting that world on paper from a self-taught background. I was painfully

League of Extraordinary Gentlemen © Alan Moore & Kevin O'Neill

paperback, it had a truly profound influence – Bill Elder, Wally Wood, Jack Davis, and 'the usual gang of idiots' as they say, all burned into my psyche. Also, as I picked up *Mad* magazine when I could find it, I learned to be a little more suspicious of the adult world I was growing up into; even as a kid I was never comfortable in the Catholic faith. And our teachers despised *Mad* as a pernicious evil American rag – the very things that made it so attractive. I'm loathe to invoke truly great artists as having an influence that shows in my work, but I'd like to feel the art of Ken Reid and Bill Elder had a lasting effect on me. Their paper worlds were so rich and detailed. They just inspired me to keep on drawing, drawing, drawing….

When you were 16 your father retired and you had to seek employment – was your family in a dire place? Was it difficult in deciding between work and the possibility of going to art school?

My father taking early retirement meant I had to give up a place at St. Martin's School of Art (and Goldsmith in New Cross – I had a choice). Financially things were tough, but an ill wind proved good in the long run; my headmaster before I left school said I should apply for a job at Odhams, the publishers. I did and a very nice lady in the women's magazine department told me they had sold their comic division to IPC magazines and I should go to Fleetway House in Farringdon and visit an editor: Mr. Sidney Bicknell.

Could you describe what it was like working at IPC when you were an employee there? How you went about learning your craft?

Sid interviewed me when I was 16 and had just left school, and Fleetway House seemed like a rather strict school. Sid introduced me to his boss, Jack Le Grand, and also their top art editor, Janet Shepherd. I began work as an office boy on *Buster*. I handed out soap and towels to the editors once a week, spent time leafing through old volumes of comics, and gradually doing minor art and lettering corrections and pasting up reprints of 'Billy Bunter' strips. Jan was a good, if strict, teacher. She also told me while looking through my samples that it would be ten years before I was good enough to work as a professional artist – and she was right!

Kind of an odd atmosphere at Fleetway House, the older staff all seemed to wish they were working on something better than comics, and the younger guys (Steve Moore, Steve Parkhouse, Dez Skinn…) really were looking for an opportunity to rejuvenate the place. It seemed the house rules on grammar were more important than the pure art and story of comics. The whole business by now (1970) was aimed at their antique idea of what the maximum of eleven-year-old reader wanted (based, I think, on what their fathers had wanted). I appreciate the grounding it gave me in production and I did pretty much every job including a stint in the coloring department – no regrets, but that old school 'job for life' mentality did not appeal to me. Steve Parkhouse gave me some very valuable advice. He said never learn to letter because if you do they will have you constantly doing urgent freelance lettering jobs instead of having time to concentrate on your art. Jan did encourage me to do display lettering and logos – she was brilliant at this (Jan designed the original 'Judge Dredd' logo).

After working on *Buster, Scorcher, Valiant, Whizzer and Chips*… I'd really had enough and in 1973 went freelance. My folks were surprised as self-employment seemed like unemployment to them but I was doing a little freelance art for the humor department annuals (or) coloring for the Disney reprints and girls comics and some paste-ups. In this period I was also doing fanzine art for *Fantasy Advertiser* and an H.P. Lovecraft fanzine and several others. I began my own fanzine called *Just Imagine*, which was dedicated to interviewing special effects people – an early interview was with Ray Harryhausen (I was a lifelong fan). I found Ray's phone number in the London phonebook, rang him up, and he invited me to visit his home. He and his wife were delightful. (In common, with Ray the original *King Kong* had a profound influence on me as a kid – fantastic film, and those Gustave Doré-inspired jungle scenes are the best ever!) Having spoken to Ray, I had the courage to approach other effects people like Derek Meddings, Brian Johnson, Ian Scoones, John Stears, Les Bowie…. This fanzine work overlapped with my position as art editor of *2000 AD*. I covered the first *Superman* movie and then stopped the publication. When I began it nobody was covering the FX world apart from *FXRH* – devoted to Ray

Frank QUITELY

by George Khoury

Quitely studied Fine Art at Glasgow School of Art and has worked through every facet of illustration, from face-painting to advertising. Since breaking into the comics industry with his underground work on 'The Greens' in ***Electric Soup***, Frank became known for his unique characterizations and elegant storytelling. In 1993, the artist started work on 'Missionary Man' (written by Gordon Rennie) in the pages of ***Judge Dredd Megazine***. He entered American comics working on short stories for DC editor Andy Helfer's ***Big Book*** line through the companies' Paradox: Big Books imprint. Although the limited series ***Flex Mentallo: Man of Muscle Mystery*** (written by Grant Morrison) is tragically out-of-print, because of legalities, it was with that title that the fanboys began to take notice of Quitely's refreshing line work and imagination. His later work with Mark Millar on ***The Authority*** continued the progressive tone set by Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch's early run with stories that were even more twisted than the original. For his next work ***The New X-Men***, Frank reimagined the X-Men for a new generation of fans and won ***Wizard*** Magazine's Best Artist of 2001. Aided by Grant Morrision's scripts, he was able to give the mutant team a fresh look with the attitude to match. More of Quitely's artwork can be seen in ***JLA: Earth 2***, ***The Invisibles***, ***Flinch***, ***Kingdom Come: The Offspring***, ***Strange Adventures***, ***Transmetropolitan***, ***411***, ***Weird War Tales***, ***Heartthrobs***, ***Gangland***, 'Blackheart' (in ***Dark Horse Presents***), ***Batman: The Scottish Connection***, ***20/20 Visions***, and the upcoming ***We3*** (written by Grant Morrison). He continues to make Scotland his home with his wife and three children.

Flex Mentallo © DC Comics

Where and when were you born?

Start with the easy questions. Glasgow, in Scotland.

What year?

In January '68.

What did your parents do?

My dad, Vincent, was a high school teacher. He taught P.E. – physical education. [chuckles]

And you went to the same school where he taught?

Unfortunately, yes. Every kid's worst nightmare. [chuckles]

And your mother was a housewife?

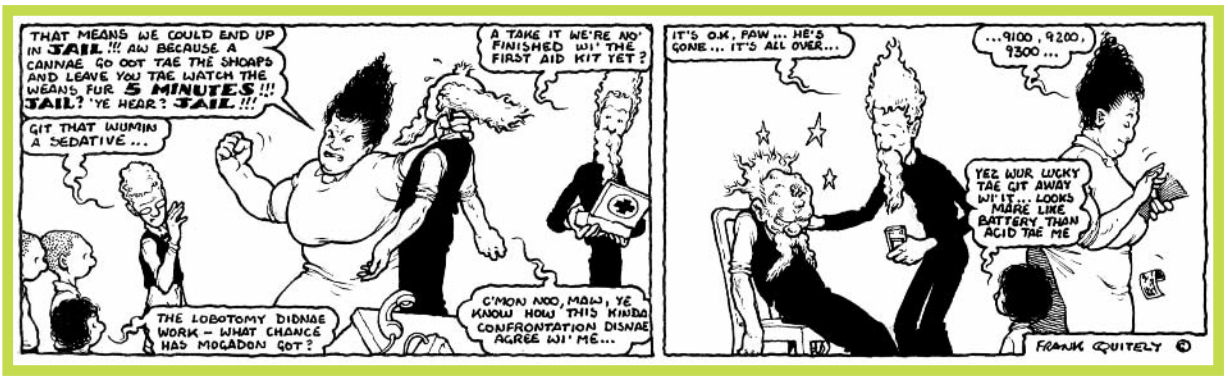
And my mum, Patricia, was a housewife, yeah. She had been a teacher prior to being a housewife but, I can't imagine her being cut out for it.

Did they encourage you into the arts?

Yes, they did. At the very least they were very, very enthusiastic and tolerant, even indulgent of my art. Neither of them were particularly artistic themselves. Both of them were very, very practical. They could do a lot with their hands, but neither of them was actually artistic. You would expect two teachers would have pushed their son further in the academic side of it and less so on the art side, but I think they just resigned themselves to the fact I was a whimsical child with a short attention span and the arts were the thing that was doing it for me. You see I performed kind of average in everything else, and I'm sure I could have done better. I mean, they did encourage me to study my academic subjects, they just weren't too strict about it, thankfully, and they were very supportive about my art.

But, you were rebellious growing up, or were you the laid back-type?

Yes and no, I looked rebellious. I dressed as a rebellious artist, and I used to make my own clothes and make my own hats, make my own hairstyles and modify my own clothes. Yeah, I was quite a colorful teenager, growing up. I'm sure to people who didn't know me, I'm sure I looked liked a real handful, but I wasn't really. I wasn't really a rebel to my core. [laughs] I just liked to look the part.



Did you ever professionally design clothes and hats?

No, I sold some of my efforts, but the combination of being artistic and liking David Bowie and Iggy Pop and Frank Zappa and Lou Reed, and y'know, and the combination, I suppose, of being artistic and being a teenager, wanting to look different, wanting to make some kind of a statement, not having a lot of money to spend... all these things came together. I've got some painfully embarrassing photographs I could show you from my teenage years, but I never started out with the ambition of being a clothes designer; I was just enthusiastic about it.

What were the comics that got you into? What were the ones you remember best?

Unlike most comic artists who come from anywhere in Britain, I didn't actually grow up reading *2000 AD*, and loving *2000 AD*. [chuckles] My earliest memories were of a Scottish newspaper strip. There were two strips, one was called 'The Broons', and the other was called 'Oor Wullie'. They were written and drawn by the same artist, a guy called Dudley D. Watkins. I would say if I had to pick only one comic artist as being the single biggest influence on me, then Dudley D. Watkins would be the one. When I was very young I read 'The Broons' and 'Oor Wullie', and I read 'Rupert the Bear'.

In Scotland, we have quite a strong tradition of children's comics, like *The Beano*, *The Topper* and *The Beezer*; I read comics like that, too. As I got a little bit older – seven, eight, nine, ten – I started reading comics like *Bullet*, which was an adventure comic – war stories and crime stories – and it always had at least one story about a kid from a working class background struggling against the middle class. I never saw *2000 AD* when I was younger, and I only saw a handful of American comics and very few European comics. I particularly liked *Conan the Barbarian*, for some reason.

Did you solely live off comics, or did you have a job? Did you go to art school?

After high school I went to Glasgow School of Art. I specialized in fine arts; I specialized in drawing and painting. Because I had this idea that if I studied drawing and painting I would become good at drawing and painting and I could become a children's book illustrator. This was one of the big ideas I had of how to use my talent to make money. The only dream I ever really had, in terms of using art professionally, was just that. It was "imagine you could make a living from drawing," and how good would that be?

I had ideas that it would be nice to design clothing, or to illustrate books, or to do backdrops or whatever. But really it was just anything – if I could just use my talents, just to get an average wage to help pay the bills and I was actually doing something that I enjoy, then that would be a dream come true. That was the extent of my ambitions.

When I went to art school, the first year was fantastic! I did a bit of everything. And the variety was great. And then, I had entered drawing and painting and realized that drawing and painting

The Greens © Frank Quitely

Ken REID

1919-1987

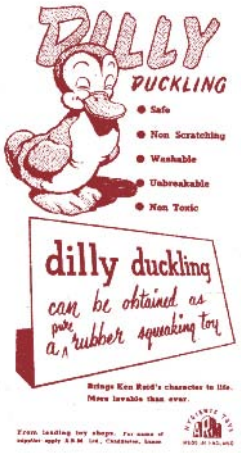
Britain's comic genius

by Peter Hansen

Fudge the Elf

It is difficult to describe the impact Ken Reid had on the British comic book market without first describing briefly what that market is all about. Even to this day the British comic book market bares no resemblance to its American counterpart. It's almost as if they are on two separate evolutionary tracks really.

In the UK, comics for the most part have always been weekly publications. Historically they have been produced on newsprint resembling the Sunday funnies more than they do a comic put out by DC, Marvel, Dark Horse, or any other US comic book publisher. Furthermore, not only were they weekly and on newsprint but they were a mixture of humor with adventure strips in serialized form stretching over from one week to the next carrying a single storyline for weeks, sometimes months. So perhaps it would be best to think of them as weekly Sunday Funnies sections with *Prince Valiant* type adventure pages, and full page *Blondie* type humour strip stories side by side. Finally, on top of this for most comic books there was no color added except on the cover, back page, and the centre page, with all the interior pages just plain old black-and-white. Of course there were a few exceptions, but they were few and far between.



Usually aimed at pre-teens, the British comic book relied heavily on humour strips, and from his first appearance in 1953 in the *Beano* comic published by the giant DC Thomson and John Leng publishing companies, Ken Reid made an immediate impact in this genre. Over the course of the next 25 years he would rise to the very top of his profession as one of, if not the best humour strip artist ever to dip a pen into an inkpot anywhere in the world.

The Nervs

Born on the 19th of December 1919 in Manchester (same town and a few months before Lee Elias) Reid was a born artist. His mother was quick to tell friends and family that he was drawing recognisable things at the age of two. Like all kids of his day, he grew up on a diet of British comics such as *Funny Wonder*, *Film Fun*, and *Chips*. At the age of nine, Reid was diagnosed with a Tubercular hip, and as a result was confined to bed for six months with the possibility that he would spend the rest of his

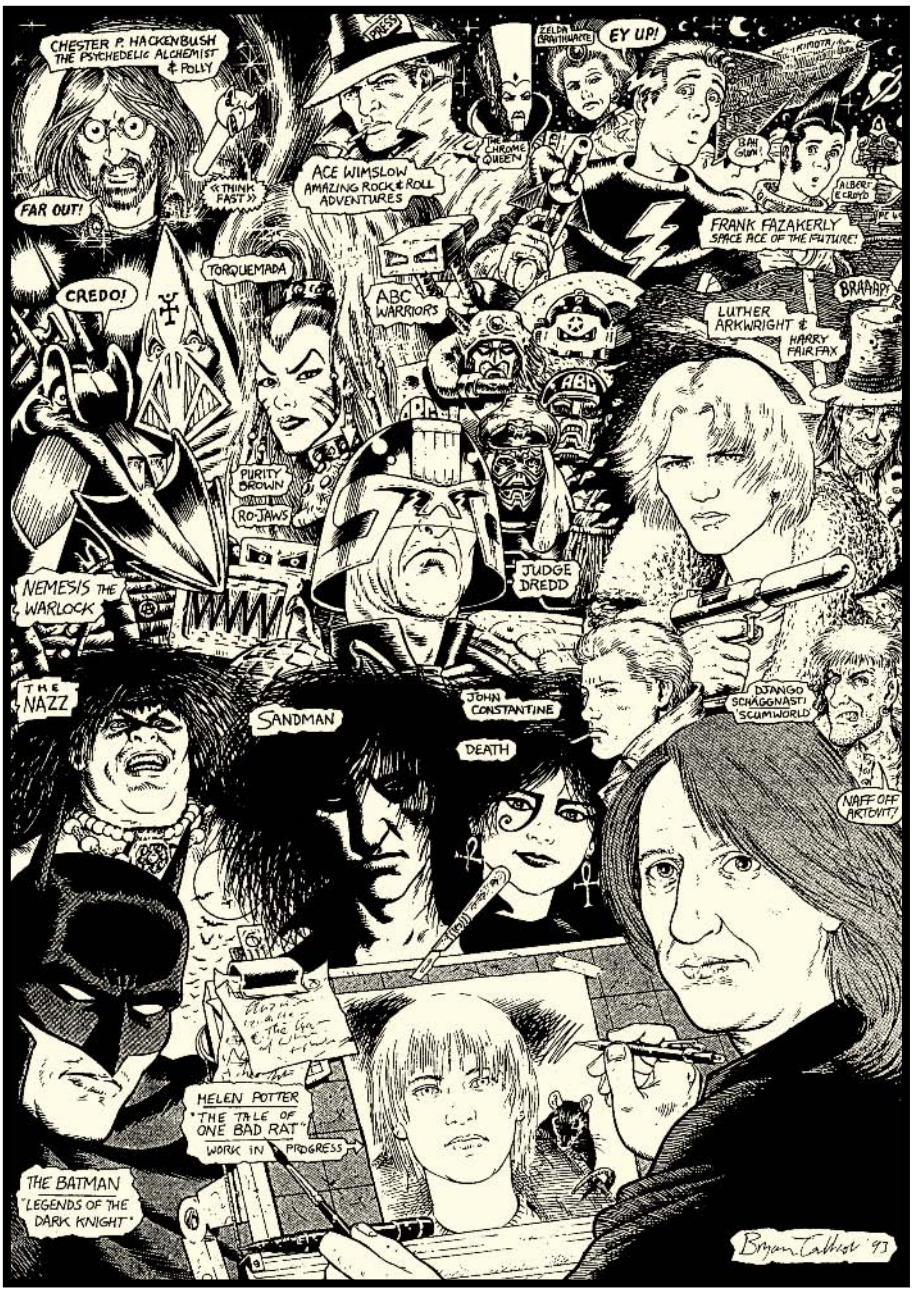
life in a spinal carriage. Fortune smiled on him, however, and not only did he recover, but throughout his illness he drew continuously. On leaving school at 14 years of age, Reid was granted a full scholarship to Salford Art School in Manchester. After four years and just before graduation, Reid was expelled for refusing to sign a letter of apology when he was caught by the Principal during class time at a local café near to the school (boy have times changed!)

Having made the decision not to return to art school, Reid set up his own studio in a room behind a store in Water Street Manchester in 1936. He made himself a large sign: KEN REID: COMMERCIAL ARTIST, and sat back waiting for the work to roll in. As he would comment many years later, "Absolutely nothing happened!" Without a small amount of work from a commercial photographer in the same building, Reid would have quickly joined that well known fraternity of starving artists. Either way the amount of work was not enough to live on, and so he hit the streets visiting every commercial art studio in the telephone directory asking if they had any freelance work. In this way he managed to get a couple of minor jobs but still not enough to keep him going.

Eventually Reid's father intervened and offered to come around with him and act as his agent. Although Reid's father was not shy about going where angels fear to tread, a whole day of slogging around the streets of Manchester produced nothing. At the point of going home Reid and his father found themselves outside of the *Manchester Evening News* offices – still in business! A veritable impenetrable fortress, at least as far as young freelance artists were concerned. But not to Reid's father! With Reid in tow, he strode into the large imposing foyer and marched up to the peak-capped, sergeant-major type Commissionaire and told him he had an appointment with the art editor. He delivered this line in such an authoritative fashion that the man immediately got a boy to take them up to the art editor's office. Barton, the editor, looked blankly at them for a moment before saying that he didn't remember making an appointment with a Mr. Reid. At this point Reid's father confessed that he had lied in order to in to see him and show him his son's artwork.

Whether he admired his cheek or what we will never know, but he invited them in and carefully went through Ken's portfolio. He then told them that the *Evening News* was thinking of starting a children's feature and various artists had already been asked to come up with ideas, adding that perhaps Ken would like to submit something? Reid immediately set to work and his first idea was to take advantage of the current craze for keeping budgerigars as pets. Why not turn one into a strip and call it 'The Adventures of Budge'. However, Reid quickly discovered that he wasn't very good at drawing budgies and so he invented a companion he could

Martha's Monster Make-up



Bryan TALBOT

by George Khoury

Coming from a mining town and generations of miners, Bryan Talbot began drawing his own comics as a child for his own enjoyment, never once imagining that comics would be his true calling. It was after studying graphic design at Preston Polytechnic, that he began to seriously consider comics as a career when he entered the UK comics underground scene. His strip 'Chester P. Hackenbush – The Psychedelic Alchemist', his first major work at 65 pages, was chronicled in the first three issues of Brainstorm Comix for Alchemy Publications. 'The Adventures of Luther Arkwright' was given life in the pages of ***Near Myths and Pssst!,*** and proved to be a ground-breaking cosmic epic and a provocative reaction to mainstream comics. When 'Luther' was completed and collected, it would earn the storyteller four Eagle Awards and The Best Produced British Work of the Year title from Society of Strip Illustrators, and helped bring forth a successful sequel, 'Heart of the Empire'. In 1984, he followed Kevin O'Neill on ***2000 AD***'s 'Nemesis the Warlock' for three successful full-length books of devilish delight. Over the subsequent year, the artist crossed over into America, providing artwork and stories for a variety of titles like ***Sandman***, ***Hellblazer***, ***Legends of the Dark Knight***, ***The Nazz***, ***Fables***, ***The Dreaming***, ***Teknophage***, and so many others. The '90s brought readers the most important work of Talbot's career, ***The Tale of One Bad Rat***, one of the most emotional works ever created in comics. The poignant ***One Bad Rat*** demonstrated the possibilities of what could be achieved within a graphic novel – here was an engaging story tackling the difficult subject of child abuse with great tenderness and maturity. Presently, Talbot continues to work on his latest opus ***Alice in Sunderland***, and bedazzling us with his vision and passionate artwork.

Where and when were you born?

Wigan, Lancashire, 1952.

And how would you describe your upbringing?

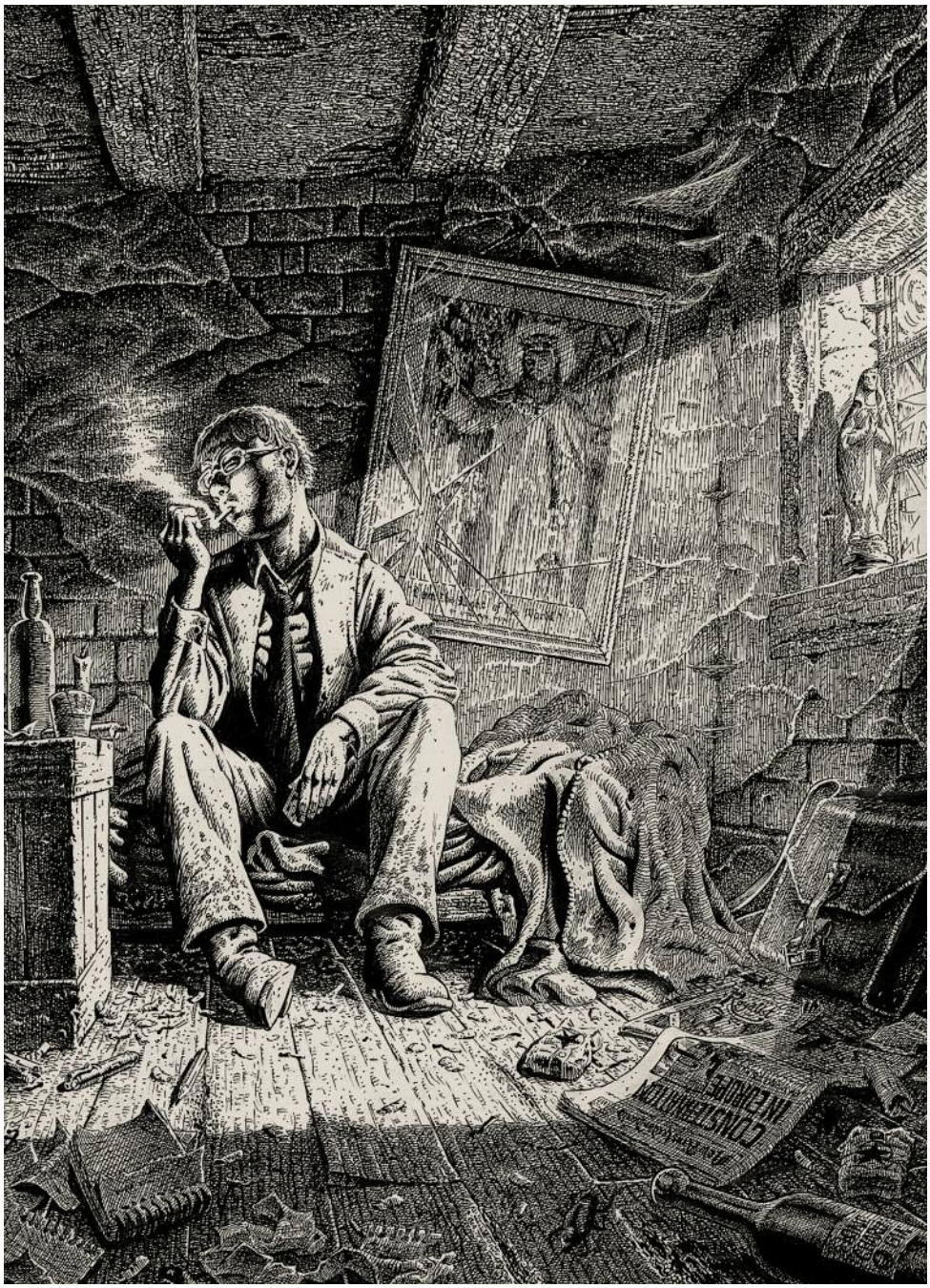
I was an only child and both my parents were working, so I spent a lot of time by myself – playing with toys or watching the tiny screen TV. My folks both encouraged my drawing (my dad used to paint at one time) and introduced me to comics by getting me a weekly nursery comic, *Jack and Jill*, from when I was two to encourage me to read, and later the DC Thomson comics such as the *Beano* and *Beezer*. Every Christmas my dad bought me the *Rupert the Bear Annual*.

When did you decide that you wanted a career in comics?

I didn't. I always knew that I wanted to work in 'Art' in some way, but I didn't know what. When I was five, an uncle gave me a pile of old *Giles* annuals, which I loved (and still have) and for a while, I wanted to be a newspaper cartoonist. Even though I read comics all the time I was growing up, and even drew my own stories, it never occurred to me that I could make a living by doing it professionally.

Which were the types of comics that appealed to you? And who were some of you influences?

I loved the strips by Leo Baxendale, Ken Reid, and Dudley D. Watkins. And I think that Alfred Bestall's Rupert style eventually had an influence on *Bad Rat*. In the '60s, I became a big fan of Marvel comics and Jack Kirby, and, later, artists like Steranko, Starlin, and Barry Smith were big influences.



How did you go about learning your craft?

By reading comics all my life, making them for my own amusement while I was growing up and then, later, writing and drawing underground comics, which I still consider to be my apprenticeship in the medium.

What formal art training did you have?

My art education was a complete cock-up. At grammar school we were just given sheets of paper and told to draw. That was it. I used to spend most of my time doing big and extremely silly 'Bash Street Kids' style cartoons, like the ones in the *Beano* annuals by Leo Baxendale. Leo was a big hero of mine and eventually we became friends and were in exhibitions and such together.

I barely scraped through my O- and A-level art exams, and went to Wigan School of Art, a department of the technical college, to do a one-year foundation course. Unfortunately I learnt bugger-all there as well. I was taught there by three exhibiting abstract artists who had a total horror of figurative art. Abstract was very trendy then, realism scorned as old fashioned. As a result, all I learnt there was how to make abstract pictures; pretty damn useless considering my future career.

After this, I failed to be accepted at any Fine Art colleges because, I suppose, I just wasn't enthusiastic enough about the portfolio of abstract art I dragged around to interviews. At the last minute I managed to blag my way onto a graphic design course in Preston. After starting the course I realised that no

Luther Arkwright © Bryan Talbot

Barry WINDSOR-SMITH

by George Khoury

The Pictish King Bran Mak Morn from *Five Robert E Howard Characters* © Barry Windsor-Smith

Barry Windsor-Smith was born in London's East End on May 25 of 1949, and studied art at East Ham Technical College where he earned a degree in Industrial Design and Illustration. A connoisseur of comics all throughout his childhood, it was the grandness of Jack Kirby's storytelling that appealed to him more than the others. His early art, which was very Marvelesque in approach, earned him his first pro assignments: providing illustrations for Odham Press, the English publisher with the Marvel Comics license at the time, on books named ***Wham!***, ***Pow!***, ***Terrific***, and ***Fantastic***. During the summer of 1968, with his friend Steve Parkhouse, Barry came to America with barely a dime to his name and a portfolio that would open the doors for him at Marvel Comics. ***X-Men*** #53, was his first Marvel book, and along the way he would make stops throughout the Marvel line in ***Daredevil***, ***The Avengers***, ***Astonishing Tales***, and ***Iron Man***. ***Conan the Barbarian***, his only regular series at Marvel, proved to be a major stepping stone in his career along with being a period of growth as his artwork started to become more sophisticated, drifting away from the super-heroics to a more romantic approach. His last stories for ***Conan*** and the elegant adaptation of 'Red Nails' (in ***Savage Tales***) are among the most fondly remembered of the title and have been reprinted countless times. Upon leaving ***Conan*** and the world of comics in 1974, the artist formed The Gorblimey Press, which gave him the opportunity to expand beyond comic books and a chance to be independent. For his imprint he created art full of romanticism, detail and vigor in producing his fine line of posters, prints and lithographs. This was an important creative phase for him as he embraced his influences, particularly Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau, into the way he would create art afterwards. Longing to create new comic art and stories, he returned to Marvel Comics in 1984 re-energized and provided artwork for ***Machine Man***, ***Uncanny X-Men***, and covers for ***The New Mutants***. His most prolific period in comics occurred in the '90s when he became an integral part of Valiant Comics' success as their creative director and writer/artist of twelve issues each of ***Archer and Armstrong*** and ***Solar***, followed by ***Rune*** (for Malibu Comics), 'Weapon X' (for Marvel Comics), and his most personal and ambitious work in the industry, nine issues of ***Barry Windsor-Smith: Storyteller*** (for Dark Horse Comics). ***Storyteller*** was an anthology comic that presented the stories of 'The Freebooters', 'The Paradoxman', and 'Young Gods'. Fantagraphics is presently publishing all three features from ***BWS: Storyteller*** separately along with unpublished material. Two volumes of ***Barry Windsor-Smith: Opus***, his series of autobiographical art books, have been released thus far, and they show his life's work as comic book artist, painter, designer, illustrator, and publisher, as well as his work in film. Today, he keeps himself constantly busy working on new stories and paintings in his upstate New York studio.

1970's self-portrait © Barry Windsor-Smith / Early UK Odham art © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Have you always been artistically inclined?

Once the school system singled me out as a 'talented boy', I began to realize that I perceived things and thought differently from my friends and most of the other children at school. Although it's the outward manifestations (drawing pictures that surfaced from one's imagination) that teachers and elders will first respond to, the bottom line is that this kid or that kid possesses raw capabilities to access and channel parts of the brain that the other kids can't. But having this capability means nothing much at all if it's not nurtured. Having talent is as elementary and natural as being born; it's what you make of your life that matters. In my case, a working class ethic superimposed on my own particular neural composition.

What initially attracted you to the comics form?

Storytelling, I guess. From my youngest years I can recall no particular artist or style of art that attracted me to British comics. But once I discovered the Miller & Co. black-and-white reprints of American comics, I began to recognize and appreciate indivi art styles, and style and clarity of how each artist told a story. I guess, by the middle years of my pre-teen youth I'd bec attracted to comics for both their story and their art. Once was established in my head, I began to judge and criticize art by their capabilities, their standards, and their limits. I awfully precocious. It was like I'd become a functioning edito the age of eleven, or something.

Did the works of any of the British comics old masters Bellamy, Jordan, Baxendale, etc. – make any impressio on you? Were there any British strips you enjoyed?

Do you mean 'strips' in the American or British sense? In the comic strip means newspaper strip (a few panels published single horizontal strip each day in a newspaper). Strip in Bri seems to mean any form of comics. I'm a bit fuzzy on timelines here. I recall being stunned by Frank Bellamy's 'He the Spartan', but in what period of Bellamy's work, or my yo this came about is lost to malleable memory. I don't recogn Baxendale's name, but Jordan sounds familiar. 'Jeff Haw right? There was another strip artist, he did *Modesty Bla* What a great name for a heroine. I do recall the slick brushw of 'Jeff Hawke' and *Modesty Blaise*; all those dramatic bla and chiaroscuro. Despite my appreciation of these Bri artists, I really wasn't influenced by any of them at all. If I w I'd've probably tried to emulate them in one way or another seek work in England rather than in America.

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