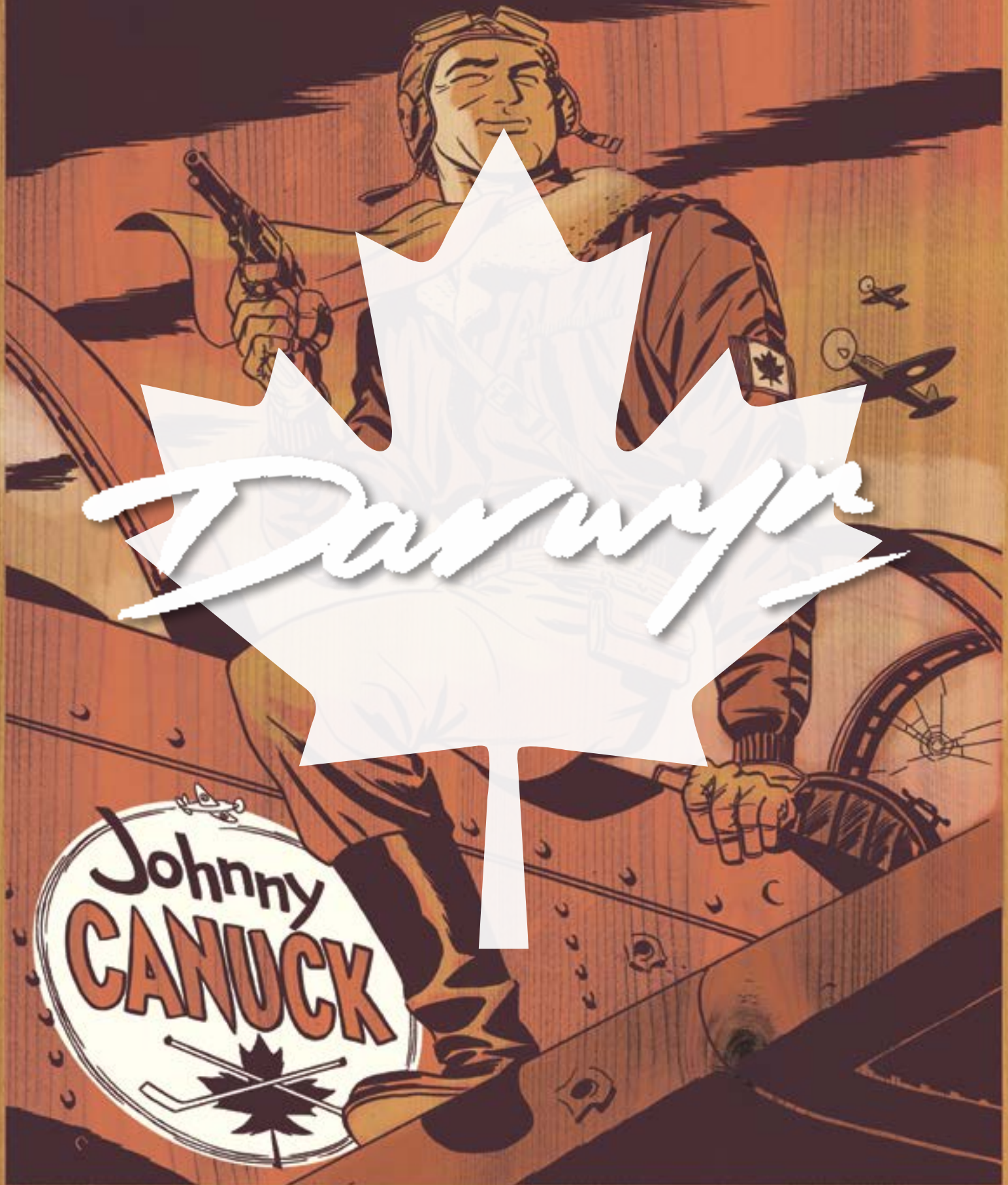


THE AIRBORNE CHAMPION OF THE DOMINION!



**Johnny
CANUCK**

comic book CREATOR

presents

Darwyn Cooke and the Canadians special tribute

COMIC BOOK CREATOR #46, November 2026

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Special thanks to **CALUM JOHNSTON** for sharing incredible artwork and pix!

FRONTISPIECE: Darwyn Cooke renders the True North '40s comic book hero, Johnny Canuck.

THIS SPREAD: In 2003, Steve Manale shot this noirish photo of Darwyn, presumably taken in the states.

NEXT SPREAD: Darwyn produced this delightful tableau for his *Comic Book Artist* V2 #3 cover.

TwoMorrows Publishing

Raleigh, North Carolina USA



Comic Book Creator™ is published bi-monthly by TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Dr., Raleigh, NC 27614 USA. Phone: (919) 449-0344.

Jon B. Cooke, editor. John Morrow, publisher. *Comic Book Creator* editorial offices: P.O. Box 601, West Kingston, RI 02892 USA. E-mail: jonbcooke@aol.com. Send subscription funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial offices. Four-issue subscriptions: \$53 US, \$78 Int'l, \$19 Digital. All characters are © their respective copyright owners. All material © their creators unless otherwise noted. All editorial matter ©2026 Jon B. Cooke/TwoMorrows.

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ISSN 2330-2437. Printed in China. FIRST PRINTING.



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table of contents

Ye Ed.'s Ode to True North6

Ronn Sutton's Cannadian View.....7

Canadian Frontiersman: Darwyn Cooke

 "That Cartoonist from Toronto"

 Interview conducted by Jon B. Cooke10

 "My Buddy, Darwyn" by Jon B. Cooke41

 "Making Parker as Perfect as Possible"

 Interview conducted by Tucker Stone.....42

Remembering Dar: Testimonials from Mark Askwith, J. Bone,
 Kevin Boyd, Michael Cho, Calum Johnston, Brian McLachlan,
 Ramón Pérez, and a Superman Club fave personage60

Dateline: Hembeck – Canadian Edition75

Celebrating Canadians of the Comics

 Four Founding Comics Creators by Ivan Kocmarek.....76

 History of the Joe Shuster Awards by Janet Hetherington .80

 Richard Comely and the Coming of Captain Canuck86

 James Waley's Absorbing Orb 110

 Dean Motter's Andromeda Reign 116

 Paul Rivoche on His Part in the Creation of Mister X..... 121

 Katherine Collins, Arn Saba, & Neil the Horse..... 122

 Riding the Vortex with Bill Marks..... 136

 David Boswell: The Tough Love of Reid Fleming..... 147

 Chip Zdarsky: The Sexy & Criminally Talented 148

 Ramón Pérez is Putting on the Blitz..... 153

Coming Attractions: Archie Goodwin's Epic Life 155

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words by Tom Ziuko 160

ABOUT OUR COVER: The Superman pose rendered by Darwyn Cooke is based on Jack Kirby's full-pager depicting Mantis in *The New Gods* #2 [May '71]. Art originally commissioned by Hans Kosenkranius.

Illustration by Darwyn Cooke

O, Canada and Her Comics!

Our CBC tribute to the Great White North's Comics and the Canuck Creators who make 'em!



Above: The "passport" for those lucky attendees of the 1967 Montreal Expo, an event that trumpeted the arrival of a new era for America's neighbor to the north, Canada. The "silver age" of Canadian comics, covered pretty extensively in the second half herein, followed in the subsequent decade. **Inset right:** As appearing in every issue of Comic Book Creator, a Ronn Sutton pencil portrait, this one of Canadian-born co-creator of Superman, Joe Shuster.

For this ish, Ye Editor thought it a cool notion for Canadian-born Ronn to also draw a self-portrait to accompany the artist's autobiographical essay. (Oh, and do note that Ronn's partner, Janet Hetherington, contributes a feature in these pages on the Joe Shuster Awards!). **Below:** The Man of Tomorrow, a joint U.S./Canada creation (if you will), on a 1995 Canadian postage stamp.



by JON B. COOKE

Okay, I'll admit it. I have this thing about Canada. I have since I was eight years old, learning about Montreal's Expo 67 (maybe through *Life* magazine?) and, as a two-time visitor to the '64-65 New York World's Fair, I was so wanting to attend the officially titled "1967 International and Universal Exposition." I think it was my oldest brother who had attended the months-long event sometime during that so-called Summer of Love, but whoever it was in my family who went, I was wickedly jealous.

There was something alluring about the Great White North in that year of the Canadian Centennial, as the nation exuded modernity to me, especially that flag they adopted in '65! In retrospect, I see now that I was enamored with clean graphic design even from a tender age and I still believe the Canadian flag is beautiful in its pure design, a perfect melding of the organic – a maple leaf – and synthetic – the solid red bars. It just knocks me out! And don't get me started on the official word-mark utilizing the Baskerville typeface! My appropriating the font for use in this issue's headlines should sufficiently express my passion for its elegant simplicity.

As my powers of persuasion were limited at the age of eight, I never made it to Expo 67, but a few years later I did take note of the Montreal Expos, a new major league baseball team, entering the game. (But I didn't dwell on that much, as that was the year of the Miracle Mets, a really – really! – big deal in our New York Westchester County home.) I finally crossed the border in 1977, me and a pal traveling cross-continent by way of the Trans-Canada Highway, passing by the stadium where Pink Floyd was performing (a notorious show that inspired the concept behind the band's album, *The Wall*).

And the missus and I have gone to Canada a few times on getaways, once to Prince Edward Island for a wonderful visit, another to Toronto, and we do plan to experience the Bay of Fundy in the near future (if the price of gas gets reasonable again). So it's fair to say, Beth and I love the Great White North.

Plus, of course, I admire the comics of our Neighbor to the North ever since I picked up *Captain Canuck* in '75, utterly delighted with the notion of Canada having their own Captain America, so to speak, donning a super-hero costume based on that terrific flag I was nuts about. (And the eventual arrival of brilliant artist George Freeman made me love it even more!)



Joe Shuster by Ronn Sutton

Still, to be honest, the idea for this issue went a bit further than simply because of my gratitude for another country's funnybooks. Part of this is due to the critical and sales success of *CBC #40*, the Dave Stevens issue, as well as the natural extension to make it all-Canadian, as, after all, Darwyn Cooke was from Toronto, a big part of its talented cartoonist community. That aspect was a no-brainer and, while I haven't even scratched the surface of properly covering the tremendous number of comic book folks up north, it gave me an excuse to find out more about a number of cartoonists and publishers I was curious about – including Arn Saba/Katherine Collins; Bill Marks of Vortex Comics; James Waley of *Orb*; Dean Motter of *Andromeda*; David Boswell; and (of course) Richard Comely of *Captain Canuck* fame.

But what prompted me most was thinking about Superman and his Canadian co-creator, Joe Shuster. The artist was born in Toronto, in 1914, to Jewish parents – father from Rotterdam and mother from Kiev – and he worked as a paperboy for the *Toronto Daily Star*. In 1924, the lad moved

with his family to Cleveland, Ohio, where he would meet future collaborator Jerry Siegel. Together, the boys would originate the first super-hero and, with Superman, turbocharge the comic book to become a hugely lucrative publishing category, one that made a select few very wealthy. Despite singlehandedly creating the new genre, Siegel and Shuster were not among those who got rich. But that's a different story.

Given the current state of affairs, it comes as no news that things are off-kilter between the United States and Canada, whether because of careless rhetoric about turning the country, an ally of over 40 million, into the 51st state, as well as punitive tariffs, neither reflective of how most Americans think about Canada. Putting it mildly, the relationship is strained.

In the spirit of our historical mutual respect and friendship, I subtitled this issue a play on the Man of Steel tagline: "Truth, Justice, and the Canadian Way," including it less to annoy belligerent Americans than using it to celebrate the commonality of mutual goodness within our better angels. Just doing my bit. I hope you find the ish entertaining.

This being the second of our hybrid magazine-slash-books, I'm curious to discover if anybody in our readership might have ideas for any future double-size specials. Please feel free to send thoughts my way. Thanks, all! 🍁

Ronn Sutton's Cannadian View

CBC's official illustrator, a native of Toronto, Ontario, shares his take on his beloved country

by **RONN SUTTON**

[Editor's note: Now, it wouldn't be right not to ask our own Canadian contributor – CBC's official illustrator, Ronn Sutton – to share about his life up in Canada for this all-Canuck ish, so, with a little prompting from yours truly, here goes! (Oh, and we also thought it was fitting to ask our pencil caricaturist, who's been with the mag since #1 – January 2013! – to do a self-portrait, which has R.S. drawn here with Elvira and Carson of Venus!)]

I was born in Toronto over 70 years ago, a fourth-generation Canadian from British immigrants. My family was largely blue collar workers... security guard, school janitor, policemen, including my father, who was with the mounted division of the Toronto Police. I started growing serious about art in my mid-teens and was being published in fan-zines during high school. In 1972, I was a significant organizer of Cosmicon, Canada's first major comic convention, and, later that year, I moved to Saugerties, New York, to sleep on Bernie Wrightson's living room couch for a lengthy period. I also spent significant amounts of time with Jeffrey Jones and Michael Wm. Kaluta. I earned money by anonymously "ghost" penciling and inking on other people's comic projects.

When I returned to Canada, I had a number of strips published in various places before eventually writing and drawing things for *Orb*, *Vortex*, *Renegade*, *Cerebus Bi-Weekly*, as well as American publications, all the while doing illustrations for mainstream newsstand magazines. By the 1990s, I had moved to Ottawa to be with writer/artist Janet Hetherington, and I worked on an enormous number of assignments, most notably nine years penciling *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark* (for Claypool Comics), as well as drawing and inking the *Lucifers Sword* MC graphic novel (Motorbooks), written by Phil Cross of the Hells Angels. It's now been 10 years since I began drawing weekly online comic strips for Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc.: *The Man-Eater*, *Carson of Venus*, and *Korak the Killer*.

[Ye Ed. inquired if it's fitting that the U.S. shares with Canada the fact both countries can boast Superman's creators as native sons.] Yes, Superman is a hero and inspiration for many countries and many cultures. In addition, many Canadians have moved to the U.S. for opportunities in comics, and



Ronn Sutton by Ronn Sutton

among the better known are: Joe Shuster, Hal Foster (there's a plaque in Halifax commemorating his birthplace), J.R. Williams (of *Out Our Way*, a long-running newspaper comic panel), John Byrne, and many more.

Regarding our country's homegrown comics, I owned a few Canadian Whites over the years, and, by odd coincidence, in my mid-teens, I met Jim Fleming, who had drawn a number of the Canadian *Captain Marvel* comics.

But my prolonged exposure was the 1971 hardcover book, *The Great Canadian Comic Books*, which reprinted hundreds of pages of stories. In the mid-'80s, I had begun a revival strip of "Freelance" for a national magazine, but ended up withdrawing the project as I was sensing looming potential editorial interference. Otherwise, I've done commissions and book illustrations of *The Wing* (from Bell Comics), *Nelvana of the Northern Lights*, *Brok Windsor*, and others.

[Ye Ed. asked whether Ronn had anything to share about the constant drumbeat coming out of Washington, D.C., as of late, regarding making Canada the 51st state and whether it provoked any defensive reaction that boosted Canadian pride and recharged patriotism.]

First of all, I want to say I have visited the United States many times, including memorable trips to the Frank Frazetta Museum, Norman Rockwell Museum, Las Vegas, Grand Canyon, Disney World, and many other places. While not normally a political person, I do see that the current U.S. administration has turned many Canadians into activists of a sort. There are huge "Buy Canadian" and "Travel Canada" movements currently in response to both U.S. tariffs and rhetoric. In my opinion, a positive outcome is our renewed focus on Canadian sovereignty and the promotion of our own homegrown talent. I am pleased to see Canadian entertainers and creators in film, TV, music, literature, art, and comics being recognized and receiving both national and international success.

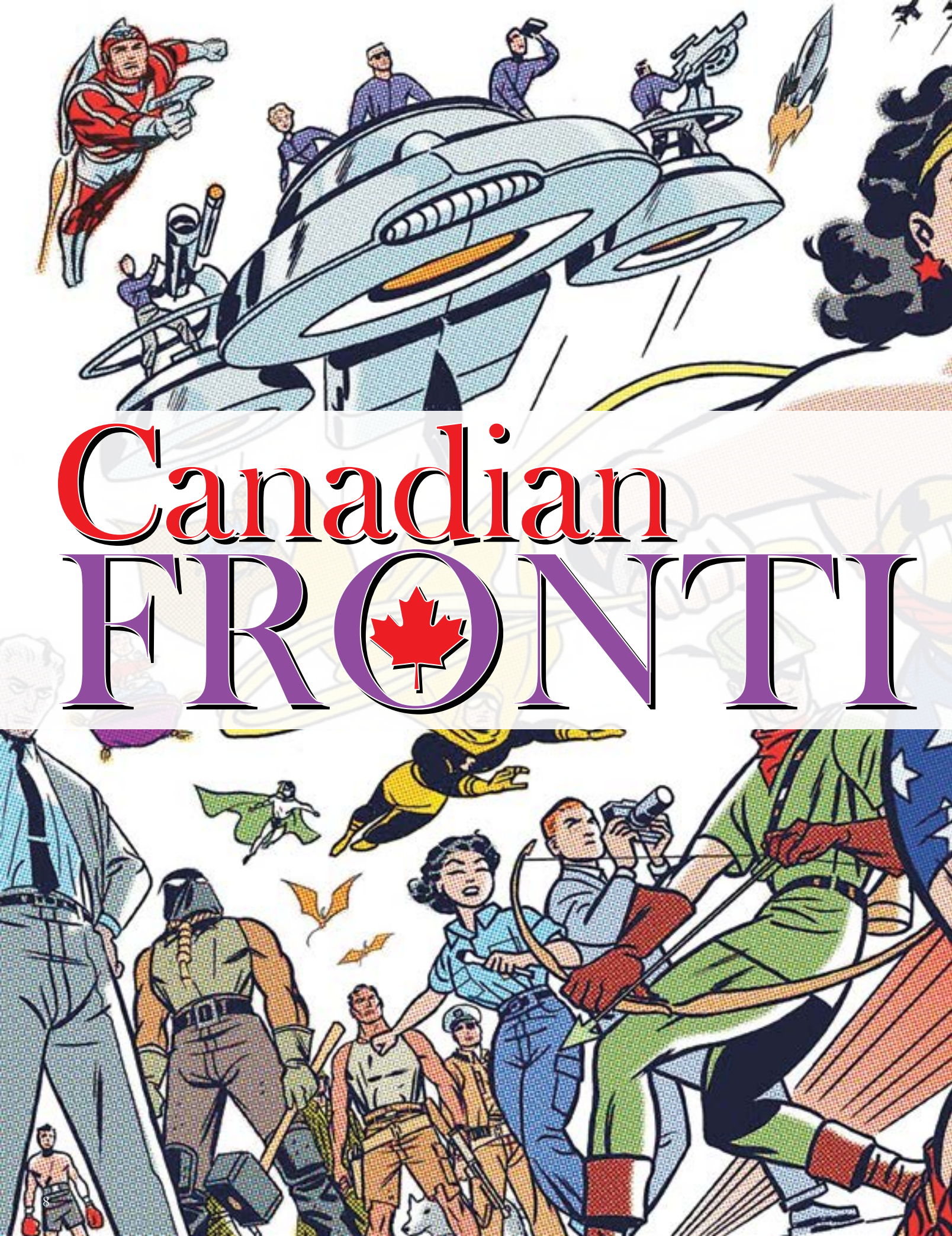
[Finally, yours truly asked if there is such a thing as "The American Way," as well as "The Canadian Way."] Renowned Canadian journalist Peter Gzowski once humorously self-defined us "as Canadian as possible under the circumstances." We have often lived in the shadow of our U.S. neighbor, but I think the vision of "The Canadian Way"... our Canadian identity... is really emerging now as Canada continues to develop our own success stories, whether it's in the creative arts, business, finance, science, technology, or other areas of innovation. 🍁



Above: Ronn back in the mid-2010s, in a photo by his partner, Janet Hetherington (who wrote the Shuster Awards article in this ish).

Below: Portrait by Ronn of the renowned *Mistress of the Dark*, Elvira! The artist drew nearly 50 issues of her title for Claypool Comics.





Canadian FRONTI



ERSMAN



That Cartoonist from Toronto

Ye Ed.'s 2003 extensive chat with Darwyn Grant Cooke at the Dawn of His New Frontier

EDITOR'S COMMENT:

The interview here differs from the published version in Comic Book Artist V2 #3, as the audio was re-transcribed and it includes some material not previously seen. Back in 2003, I made an instant connection with Darwyn working on that issue together and he was very generous, not only regarding his participation, but also with his kind gestures of sending original art, T-shirts, and stuff he produced over his career. We liked to say we were brothers with the same last name from different mothers. Our time as chums was brief, as I soon enough had to grapple with some difficulties that arose in my life, sending me away from CBA and the comics realm for some years. But, having weathered the Great Recession and gratefully sober, around 2011, I started attending the New York Comic Con to reconnect with the comics world. I think it was that year when Darwyn and I met again and we exchanged pleasantries. I had always harbored a sense that Dar lived a little too close to the edge, where I was for a chunk of the '00s, and our encounter on that cloudy Manhattan day did not dispel that feeling I had. He seemed to maybe be smoking too much, like I used to smoke too much, and maybe living too hard like I used to live too hard. We were in different places in our respective lives at that point, but still cordial and friendly, if a mite distant. But, when I said goodbye, I didn't know it would be the last time I'd say goodbye. Til we meet again, Darwyn Cooke. I miss you, my brother. – JBC.

Conducted by JON B. COOKE

[Interviewer's original 2003 introduction: Darwyn Cooke is an "old-school" type of guy, the kind who still believes we need heroes. Whether he is talking about artist Alex Toth or Hal Jordan, the cartoonist is passionate about the subject and nowhere is it more evident than in his current on-going DC Comics six-issue mini-series, *The New Frontier*, an epic retelling of the origin of the Justice League of America written and drawn by Darwyn. The creator, who cut his comic-book teeth on various Catwoman series over the last few years, was interviewed via telephone on April 24, 2003. (Steven Tice was the original transcriber.) – JBC]

Jon B. Cooke: What year were you born?

Darwyn Cooke: 'Sixty-two.

JBC: So you do go back. People would think that you're a new hot shot just right on the scene, right?

Darwyn: It's kind of funny sometimes when people meet me. I try to explain that I'm in my second life, my second childhood. [laughs]

JBC: Well, I guess we'll hopefully learn it all here. Where are you originally from?

Darwyn: Toronto, Canada. Born and raised.

JBC: What kind of childhood did you have? Did you live in the city itself?

Darwyn: Only when I was a very small child. We moved out into the suburbs, I think, when I was in grade one. Yeah, a very typical North American childhood from that era. Suburban home, a couple brothers.

JBC: Older or younger?

Darwyn: They're both younger.

JBC: So you're the oldest. Any sisters?

Darwyn: No, much to my mother's chagrin. [laughs]

JBC: What did your mom do?

Darwyn: She was a really bright lady. She would work when she felt like it, and she took care of the house when she felt like it. So what would happen would be, for two years she'd be home making lunches and everything, keeping everything rolling. And then she'd get bored and say, "Well, I'm going to go get a job." And she did various things: office manager, she worked in a restaurant, whatever she felt like doing.

JBC: She was pretty much an empowered woman?

Darwyn: Yeah. I'd say almost totally, except for her attachment to my father. [laughs]

JBC: But love'll do that...?

Darwyn: Yeah. He was a bit of a rascal. I'd say he was her weakness...

JBC: What did he do?



Darwyn: My father was a construction worker most of his life, and then he ended up running the union.

JBC: So he had connections? [laughs]

Darwyn: Yeah.

JBC: Did they stay together?

Darwyn: Yes. My father passed away a few years ago.

JBC: Were there any creative inclinations in either family?

Darwyn: Not really. The closest my mother's able to establish this is perhaps I got this from my grandfather – her father – who I never met. But apparently he had quite a degree of creative ability.

JBC: Were you into the trappings of American pop culture?

Darwyn: Oh, very much. Canada, in the '60s, anyway, we had very limited access to American culture. Before cable and everything, I think we got one American TV station, from Buffalo, that we could pull in on the aerial. As a matter of fact, the first thing my mother said that it was clear I was enthusiastic about as a child was the *Batman* TV show. She said that it didn't matter what I was doing, her responsibility was to get me in front of that television at 7:00 Tuesdays and Thursday nights, no matter what. [laughter] And she says I wouldn't talk to her for two days if it got screwed up. [laughter]

JBC: So, for '66 and '67, you were a junkie on that. Did you pick up American comic books as well?



Darwyn: Yes, we got a lot of American comics up here. And, like a lot of people, I guess, who are into stuff, as a child I loved comics, but I got away from them probably around nine or ten. And it wasn't until I was 13, I guess, I was visiting some relatives for a couple of weeks and I was bored one day, and I ended up buying a comic book. I had been very interested in artwork and drawing my whole life. It was the... Do you remember the... They did it as a black-&-white magazine first or they did it as a magazine, *Spectacular Spider-Man*. It was the one where Osborn flipped out. And what a great book to have picked up for my first crack at it at that age. And I remember the next day, I was so excited, I went out and I bought... I think it was four sheets of Bristol board. And, back then, they were those real toxic markers, but I got three big, fat magic markers. I spent the next three or four days just swiping these wonderful Spider-Man drawings that [John] Romita [Sr.] had done. And I think it was right there I knew. I loved it, and that was what I wanted to be.

JBC: So did you become a comic book collector from that moment on, as well?

Darwyn: Yeah, I became a big-time collector at that point. And, of course, back then it was just whatever you could find at the newsstands, especially where I lived. When I was a kid, there were six places you could buy comics in my neighborhood that you could get to by bike, so I checked them all. And I didn't even know when the new ones came in, so it was just a matter of always checking and grabbing

everything you could.

JBC: Did you have a particular favorite artist that you started to clue into?

Darwyn: Oh yeah, absolutely: Neal Adams. And this is going back now, we're looking at between, say, '73, '74, '75, I guess. Right when he was "The Man." And I remember I was deeply interested in art, and had done a lot of drawing and painting up until that point, but I'd never really connected it to comic books. Back then, there was the stigma, as well, where comics are one thing, and I thought I was going to be an... [pauses]

JBC: "Artiste"?

Darwyn: Yes. So a guy like Adams was tailor-made for me. And I think it mirrors the reason Alex Ross is so popular right now. Young people really, really like the idea, I think, of a convincing reality being constructed around these fantasies. Adams delivered that in spades.

JBC: I guess it places the reader within it, makes it a comprehensible world?

Darwyn: Well, you look at what was going on then, and even the great guys like Romita, Sr., say, the style was still very simple, very much cartoon, compared to what Adams did. Now, it sort of seemed to legitimize it. Now, at this age, I look back and, oh, he's probably one of the worst things that happened to the medium, when I look at it historically. But, at the time, yeah, he was definitely my hands-down favorite.

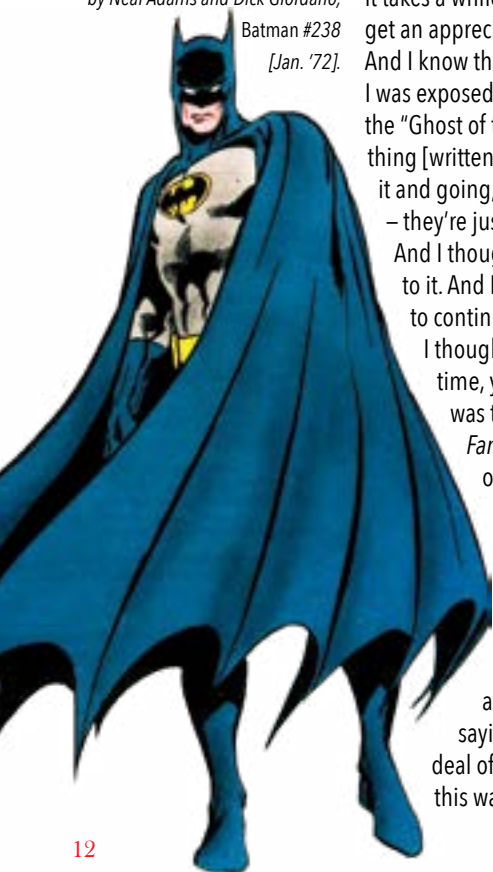
JBC: How was he "one of the worst things"?





Darwyn: Well, I think that when you get past Neal and what he did, you get into the way he influenced the medium. And I think he took a certain emphasis off storytelling and placed it more on illustration. And I don't think we really see it start to fall out completely or we don't see the results of it, I don't think, until the Image explosion. And, I think, there's a really strange line you can draw between Neal and those guys. And I don't think that's Neal's fault, by any stretch, but I do believe it shifted the emphasis to a great degree from storytelling. And the fact that these are stylized fantasy constructs. It put an

Above: One of Darwyn Cooke's earliest comics purchases was at 13, when he bought *The Spectacular Spider-Man* #2 [Nov. '68], the color magazine edition. **Previous spread:** Amy Roth's headshot of Darwyn taken at the 2011 Toronto Comic Art Festival; Dar's contribution to *Comic Book Artist's Will Eisner* tribute issue; and a shot of Darwyn in Aug. '09. **Below:** Cover detail by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano, *Batman* #238 [Jan. '72].



emphasis on making the material look more real, look more adult. I think that's still going on to this day. I mean, look how popular Bryan is, Bryan Hitch.

JBC: Right. So, at the time, did you look back at the more cartoony guys like Alex Toth and Jack Kirby, and also appreciate what they were doing, or was the magnetism totally toward the realism?

Darwyn: Well, this is what I think is – I don't know if you've noticed this, Jon, but did you ever notice that if you hear a song for the first time and you like it the first time, it's like a week later you've kind of had enough of it. But if it takes a while for that song to grow on you and for you to get an appreciation for it, you seem to stick with that stuff. And I know that with Toth that was the case. The first Toth I was exposed to (other than, probably, the cartoons) was the "Ghost of the Killer Skies" story, which was the biplane thing [written by] Archie Goodwin. I remember looking at it and going, "This is ridiculous! The ice cubes look like – they're just squares, with a big fat line around them!" And I thought it was ridiculous, but I kept coming back to it. And I couldn't understand why I was compelled to continue to look at this work, despite the fact that I thought that it was simple and childish. And, over time, you began to understand, right? With Kirby, it was the same thing. I could only stand Kirby on the *Fantastic Four* with [Joe] Sinnott inking it. All the other Kirby stuff, I just thought it was too crude and childish. I was looking for more polished artwork, better draftsmanship.

JBC: Would you agree that, in some major aspects, your work has elements of both those guys in it?

Darwyn: Oh, they're *primary* elements, absolutely. And this goes back to what I was saying. My appreciation of their work took a great deal of time, and I had to figure out for myself why this was important, despite the fact that I thought,

say, Neal Adams was a much better artist. I had to figure out why I was *emotionally* reacting to this work. And that took me a little while to figure out. And once I had, yeah, it all clicked into place.

JBC: Now, did you have the opportunity to also clue into their influences? To go into Milton Caniff and some of the...?

Darwyn: Absolutely! As soon as Toth clicked into my head for me, and it was around the time the *Super Friends* treasury came out, again, and by then I automatically began tracing the roots back. And, it's funny, because it seemed like a long time ago then, but it really wasn't, it was work from 25 years earlier. Now it was a long time ago. But, yeah, I started getting the Warren magazines – *The Spirit* – and they just blew my head apart. I mean, up to that point, I thought a story was all about the powers, the spectacle, the villains... And, all of a sudden, I saw past the artwork for the first time, I think, and it was all about the story. Eisner, again, was a guy [of whom] I could see a lot of things about his draftsmanship that I wasn't keen on, but his overall vision and the way it all coalesced all together in his stories, that's what stuck and that's when I realized the importance of this type of work, and how a simple drawing can carry so much more emotional impact than something that's been painfully realized. The angle you choose to show a person's reaction has as much to do with it as how carefully you draw that reaction on that page.

JBC: I guess I'm surprised how really quickly this happened. I think the *Super Friends* treasury came out in '75 or '76. I mean, it was pretty quick that you'd gone through these changes, these realizations.

Darwyn: It's kind of neat, because at the time I was still a devout Neal Adams fan, I still loved his work, but I knew that real value... And the minute you start to trace the lines back, you get to, say, *Johnny Hazard*, and then you get to *Terry* [and the *Pirates*] and you get to *Scorchy* [Smith] and Noel Sickles. And, if you're capable of making those connections, I thought it came together very clearly. Now, my ability to actually implement any of this took years. But, at that point, in my teens, I was positive this is what I was going to be, so I studied it for ages. [Brief pause in interview for interviewer to get bins out for trash collector]

JBC: You know, there was something I really thought was just eye-popping in that *Super Friends* treasury, and that was that Alex did this incredible section on animation. Was that eye-opening for you as well?

Darwyn: Absolutely. That's what sank in, in that treasury. It wasn't the four or five pages [of story] that he drew, it was that piece he did on how cartoons are made. The wealth of information there and the way it was presented, I thought, "Man, this guy's a genius!" [Laughs] Yeah, I bought it all the way in and, from thereon in, it was a hunt. By then I'd discovered there were a couple of old comic stores downtown, so I'd make the pilgrimage down. And not having price guides or checklists or anything, it was tough going. But back then, comics weren't bagged, so you could rifle through them all day long. And see things I liked, or I'd say, "Holy sh*t, that's by that guy!" I could tell, "That's the same stuff!" and I would take it home.

JBC: Yeah, [Toth] was really tough to find! But I wonder if... for our age... I remember being in the newsstand, I would

literally rifle through almost all the comics there, except for the Archies, maybe. And I would go through this process of discovery with so many different artists that I would never encounter in the super-hero books.

Darwyn: That's right.

JBC: Like Ken Barr. All of a sudden, Ken Barr popped out at me. "Whoa! This guy's cool!" Or Walter Simonson, for the first time, was in the back pages of Star-Spangled War Stories.

Darwyn: "Captain Fear," I think...

JBC: He did that later, but for his real right-out-of-art-school stuff, it was back-ups in [DC war books].

Darwyn: What was that story?

JBC: It was called "UFM." I forget what it stood for. And they did a sequel to it, too. I'm very close* with Walter, probably because also he's a big Rhode Island connection and that's where I'm from. And he did it with a Rhode Island writer, as well, and they just got a real break by Archie Goodwin.

Darwyn: That guy is one of the nicest guys I've ever met in the business.

JBC: Who, Archie? Or Walter?

Darwyn: Well, Archie, too, but Walt. When I was a kid, he was one of the first real comic artist personalities I got to meet, and that guy taught me exactly how to be if ever I was in that chair. What a wonderful man.

JBC: He truly is. He truly is cut from the same cloth as Archie, I think. Just out of pure niceness. He is the first guy I ever dealt with, too, in the business, and probably of his stature, I'm probably closest to him. But I'm still in awe.

Darwyn: I lived and breathed for "Manhunter." I cried when he died. I thought that was the most amazing, innovative strip I had ever seen. And again, the style was so different from anything else. It's funny, because most of the guys I talk to, say Bruce [Tim] or [Mark] Chiarello or any of the guys I know that are all around my age, they were heavily into Marvel Comics during this period of time, and I wasn't at all. I thought they were loud and crass and noisy. And I really didn't have much time for super-heroes. I thought all the war books, all the Westerns, all the mystery books, those were the things that I really enjoyed. And yeah, you would be exposed to so many different artists because of the nature of the books.

JBC: Yeah, it's interesting. I was lucky enough that with Marvel, they were reprinting a lot of Jack's stuff, so it was Captain America who pulled me in to begin, then it was Jack's stuff over at DC, then I went back to Marvel because of the legacy.

Darwyn: Sure!

JBC: And then, whatever... Marvel was about writing and about characters; it certainly wasn't about art, per se, regardless of that they had some great artists working there.

Darwyn: I'm looking at a page from [Fantastic Four] #64 on the wall here that I bought a couple of years ago. And this is when I realized there was something to Kirby. You know the "Blastaar, the Living Bomb-Burst" arc?

* First, an apology to readers for my talking so bloody much in this interview. Sometimes I fail to realize I'm conducting a Q+A for print and just chatter away! That said, I exaggerated a bit here in my characterization of my friendship with Walter, though he was the first professional I ever had the pleasure to deal with, way back in the mid-'80s, when I asked his permission to sell copies of an amateur comic he did with scribe Gerry Boudreau, while Walter was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design... See? I'm doing it again! Yammering on and on... - **Ye Ed.**



JBC: Yeah.

Darwyn: I bought those off the stand when they reprinted them in *Marvel's Greatest Comics*. And I was like, "Holy sh*t!" [laughter] And I was talking about this book in San Diego, two years ago, as I was walking along (I'm not sure who I was with), and then - bam! - a guy had a page from it on the wall.

JBC: Kismet!

Darwyn: It was just like that!

JBC: Had to buy it. [laughs] Did you increasingly turn your back on the Neal Adams, the more illustrative approach, or were you able to [reconcile] both of them? That one was an indulgence and one was actually teaching you something?

Darwyn: There were so many different... I'm trying to hit the most major influences, but there were other things running along in that same period of time that were mightily impressive. Like [Jim] Steranko, being one of them, made a profound impression on me, I think because of his sense of design and his ability to add that elegance to Kirby's basic approach. And then *Red Tide* came out, and looking at *Red Tide* and doing all my burrowing around, I came up with [Al] Williamson's *Secret Agent Corrigan*, where he'd taken the

Above: Page from Limited Collector's Edition #C-41 [Jan. '76], with art by Alex Toth. **Below:** Detail from the cover of the *Manhunter* Deluxe Edition [21] by Walter Simonson.





Above: Various exquisitely designed Blue Note album covers from the 1960s, which had a lasting influence on Darwyn. **Below:** The jazz album cover art by David Stone Martin also had a seminal impact on the Canadian comic book artist.

idea of high-con[trast] photo ref[erence] to an extreme. And I was looking at that work and I found a middle ground for myself for quite a while, and it was trying to hit the realistic proportions and nature of Adams' work, but breaking it into solid black-&-white the way Toth would or the way Williamson did during that period. Dave Stevens was just starting to happen. I had just started collecting all these

E.C. Russ Cochran volumes. That's half my education is in those books. So I started to see that there was a middle ground for me at that time, where trying to keep my drawing classic and sweeter, but trying to break it down into that black-&-white, getting away from the idea of feathering or anything keeping me away from finding that hard line between the light and the dark.

JBC: Did you find that hard to do? Obviously, I've never seen any of your pre-professional work, so I'm wondering... As a kid, I remember I was spend hours and hours feathering and feathering and just indulging myself into it, and realizing, after a while, you just had a bad drawing. It was like, I remember hearing an anecdote about... well, it was Neal standing over

an artist saying, "You're just trying to cover up a bad drawing."

Darwyn: Exactly.

JBC: There's a reason for feathering, there's an appropriateness for feathering, but, generally speaking, it's embellishment.

Darwyn: Well, I also think one of the biggest problems the industry faces, in general, is how little most of the artists look at outside of this business. I still had an interest in art and design at that age, so at that time I'm also looking at Blue Note album covers from the '50s, and I'm looking at Norman Rockwell, and I'm also looking at David Stone Martin. So, myself, I was drawing from a really deep pool of stuff, and looking at

all kinds of things. So, to me, the simpler comic work made sense in the context of Picasso and the '50s illustration and design revolution. So I think it seemed legitimate to me that the more you stripped away from the stuff, the more powerful it became. And a lot of those lessons for me came through graphic design and other areas. I could see how it all connected there and why it was working.

JBC: Now, what education did you pursue?

Darwyn: It's kind of a long story. I got out of high school, I was still 17. Somehow my mother made it so I skipped a grade – I'm not that smart – but she somehow got me into kindergarten a year early. And I decided to work for a while. So, for two years, I worked construction. At this point, I was doing mostly portrait work and experimenting with wash and just trying to capture people – drawing movie stars or friends. And one of the guys I worked with, this construction worker's neighbor was one of the instructors at one of the colleges we had there. And he and I ended up getting together, and I got into college that way. And then, after a year, they threw me out. [laughs] For poor grades and bad habits. And that's when I got serious. I'd been thrown out of school and I was pretty ashamed of that, and I thought, "If I'm going to do something with my life, I've got to get to it."

JBC: So what year was this, roughly?

Darwyn: This would be about 20 years ago now.

JBC: So '82, '83.

Darwyn: And I decided that comics was the thing. I spent the next year working in a bar as a waiter and working on my comics stuff. And I went down to DC at the end of that year, I guess. They had just started up *New Talent Showcase*, so they had actually made it clear they were looking for new people. So I got really excited about that, made the big trip down to New York City. It went really well, they bought my sample that day. Sal Amendola saw me, he was editing the book at the time, and I got a six-page private eye story



that was completely pantomime. There was no dialogue or narrative. I just thought of it as a sample and I wanted to show them that I could tell a story, so I took words out of the equation. And I remember he was looking at it, I was sitting there in my one-piece jacket type thing, sweating through it. [chuckles] And Julie Schwartz, of all people – he was still working there at the time, full-time – came strolling into the office to ask Sal a question. And Sal shows him my work, and he said, "Julie, look at this stuff. This kid's real good, but he doesn't draw the super-hero stuff. What can we have him do?" And Julie looked at the sample and he said, "Buy this." And then he walked out of the room. [chuckles] And they made up a voucher right there for me.

JBC: Wow! What issue was it printed?

Darwyn: It's in the very last one, I think it's #15. [It was #19, Oct. '85 – Y.E.] Yeah, the story went downhill from there real fast. [laughs] After the initial elation of all of this, I had to look at some cold realities. First off, back then, you have to keep in mind, there were no fax machines, no Fed Ex, no computers. People didn't even have answering machines, for the most part. So it was very difficult to work for a New York company from Toronto, especially back then. Most of the young guys who broke into the business then were New York-adjacent. And it turned out that the rate back then for a newcomer was \$35 a page for pencils. And back then it took me about a week to do a page. [laughter] At the time, the Canadian dollar was worth a lot more than the American dollar, so once I had the money in the bank, it worked out to something like \$23 a page. And I just couldn't make a living that way. And it was so difficult to really communicate because of the way things were. So I headed in another direction, and I guess it was 15 years before I got back.

JBC: Yeah, I was looking through the 1996 comic book index, and the single entry for you is Talent Showcase #19.

Darwyn: It's funny. It's kind of like Bruce [Timm]'s *He-Man* comics. It's something nobody knows about and I'm not too quick to talk about. [laughter] He almost sh*t himself one

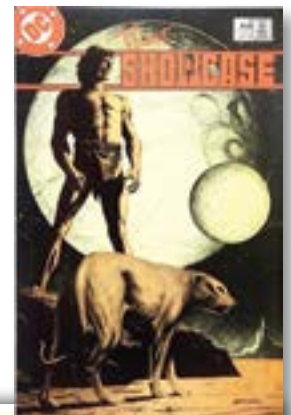


day, a friend of mine up here in Toronto sent me down one, they found one in a store, and sent it down and said, "Have Bruce autograph this for me, will you?" And I remember walking into Bruce's office with it going, "Hey, Steve wants you to autograph this for him." And Bruce just looks at it. And I go, "Hey, man, come on! We all got skeletons in our closet." "This sucks." So he signs it, and we were going to head out for a cigarette, he goes okay. We go back in and behind the bookshelf he pulls out a whole stack of them. He goes, "Here they all are, go ahead, have a ball." [laughter]

JBC: So what did you do?

Darwyn: The bar I worked in, there was a couple that came in every night, and they were magazine publishers. They worked up the street and they published what was basically Canada's music magazine at the time. It was called *Music Express*. And I'd had a little design training in school before I got tossed, and they told me they were looking for an art director, so I went out and bought a copy... and it was a

Above: A 1962 Johnny Hazard Sunday page by Frank Robbins. Below: Dan Adkins cover art for Talent Showcase #19 [Oct. '85]. **Bottom:** Three pages from Darwyn's story in that same ish, his first pro work.





Above: We can't say with certainty that these issues of Music Express are "before and after" examples of Darwyn's design work on the Canadian magazine, but we're likely not far off. Left, Nov. '80; right, Sept. '90.

Inset right: Darwyn drew this caricature of Madonna in 1986 for Rock Express, presumably a sister magazine of Music Express.

Below: For a time, Darwyn was an art director for a couple of Canadian fashion magazines, where he got to interact with super-models, including the cover subject of this Flare Jan. '89 cover, Cindy Crawford. He said of his two-year tenure at Flare that it was a "great gig."



terrible looking magazine. So I remember I sat at home in the evenings for a couple of weeks and I sort of redesigned it and then took it in to show them. They liked it and they hired me and that was it, I was off and running in graphic design for about eight years.

JBC: But did you have a background in production, knowing about galley type, how to paste up a magazine, and all that?

Darwyn: Oh, I had to pretend I did. [Jon laughs] I studied at night for the first two years. I had to teach myself how to run the stat camera, how to mark up type. I had a wonderful assistant, a young girl who was very well-versed in production, and she got me up to speed quick. [laughter] But, yeah, I had no idea what a friggin' waxer was! [Jon laughs] She's turning on this machine every morning to heat up this waxer, and it's like the fourth day and I finally said, "Why do you do that?" [laughter]

JBC: She must have been really nice not to get you bagged!

Darwyn: I think my design work was strong enough that everyone was happy to have me there. And, certainly, I was not shirking my need to get up to speed, so I took it upon myself to learn everything I didn't know.

JBC: Now were you, as a young person, pretty much in your life, self-possessed? Did you have a good sense of ego?

Darwyn: Well, that's... it's a half-and-half. Most people who know me would tell you I'm an egomaniac because of my presentation or whatever, but, no, not really. I guess, to start, I was an overweight kid, so there was that to deal with socially. And I think part of the reason I responded to this stuff was because it was something I could enjoy on my own and experience by myself.

If you've got a weight problem as a kid, you're just looking for other ways to compensate. So I found I became more of a clown, more outspoken, and I would... I developed this other side of me, which was this, for lack of a better term, artistic side. And I found that that fed my self-esteem. So it was kind of half-and-half. When I was at the table doing something, yeah, I felt very much like I could do this and one day I'd be good at it. But, as a person, no, I didn't have a great deal of self-esteem.

JBC: Did you get popular in high school by being funny?

Darwyn: Yeah, by the time I got to high school, I'd pretty much found a way to – Yeah, yeah, I was relatively popular, I guess. Was on the student council... Again, I guess that's a little different. I was always fighting my geekdom. I was always trying to become part of society. [chuckles] So, yeah, I played football for two years, I got knocked around for two years. I stuck all that out. I never really withdrew. I tried, y'know, the exact opposite.



JBC: I think that's more the exception. I think generally... I do find... Y'know, I went to a crossroads when I was 13 years old. It was either I was going to sit here and draw or I was going to go out with girls.

Darwyn: Exactly.

JBC: And I said, "I want to go out with girls." [laughs]

Darwyn: That's true for me, too. I honestly believe that my weight problem and my inability to attract girls, on a certain level, had a lot to do with the time I got to devote to putting this together for myself.

JBC: So then there was another trapping of low self-esteem, and it still remains to this day, and that was substance abuse, drinking and drugs. Were you able to, pretty much, avoid that?

Darwyn: Oh no, absolutely not.

JBC: Did that become problematic for you?

Darwyn: Yeah, I think it did. Not so much that it ever cost me a job or a relationship, but I think it came pretty close. I come from a family, y'know, of drinkers. My aunts, my uncles, my folks, social drinking was something I was around all the time, so it was a natural thing for me to get involved with. And that was cool. But I think... [sighs] what

it was for me was... and it took me a long time to figure this out, it was all in retrospect... but I really wanted to be doing comics or telling stories, and I had gone ahead down this other road, which had been very rewarding to me.

JBC: *The graphic design?*

Darwyn: And then, by this point, by the time I hit my late 20s, I'm doing ad agency work. That's when the drinking and the drug abuse really accelerated.

JBC: *The stress of...?*

Darwyn: Well, the stress and the absolute moral bankruptcy of it.

JBC: [Laughs] *I like how you turn a phrase!* [laughs]

Darwyn: Well, y'know, it's true.

JBC: *Oh, it's very true!*

Darwyn: You're being paid to lie, first off. So whatever you've gotta do to submerge the decent side of yourself and through that. And then there was the fact that you were devoting whatever gift or talent or ability you've cultivated to *this*. *This* is what it amounts to. Turd-polishing, I used to call it. [chuckles] High-priced turd polishers. And you would find – and, to this day I think it's true – that most people in that industry have substance problems, because I think they're trying to blind themselves to the fact that they're doing what they're doing. And I know for me this all came to a head around the time my father was passing away. There were a couple evenings in particular. And I had a couple good friends who talked to me at the right time. And I still enjoy having a good time, but it's in check, y'know?

JBC: *You know, a lot of that, I think-- I look at myself and I realize that, uhh, we did a lot of drinking as kids. Of course, this is before the drinking age was 21, it was 18, and, if you dressed up nice at 16, you could go in [to the liquor store], and, if you were 14, you could hang out in front of it and have someone go and get you a six-pack.* [laughs] *[Drinking] had to do with fear, it had to do with being afraid of reality and just wanted to escape. And that's what comics was able to do, too. You were able to escape within them and rather than have to face the reality of the day-to-day. I guess I'm just making an observation, I don't know.* [laughs]

Darwyn: Some guys, I guess, don't even want to discuss this kind of thing. [pauses] I don't want to end up a construct one day, where I'm putting out a certain personality in telling people this is who I am, because I'm too stupid to have to figure that out or untangle it all, all the time. And, let's face it, man, you see me in San Diego come midnight Saturday night and you'll know what I'm all about. [laughs]

JBC: *We have to hook up, 'coz that's where I am, too!... San Diego is about partying, y'know...*

Darwyn: I'm still, y'know... I'm not afraid to admit there's still a lot about the world... there's still times when you want to just wipe all that away. And, if it's Friday night, the only way you're going to do that is with a couple of quick martinis. [laughs] I'm not a Buddhist and I don't know yoga, so...

JBC: [Laughs] *So, the time frame... how long were you at Music Express?*

Darwyn: I was at that magazine for four years, and it was a wonderful experience. I learned everything I had to know. I was in charge of buying the print after the first year, so I also got to learn the press and the pre-press, and everything that that meant.

JBC: *Now, was this a real magazine or was this a free weekly or...?*

Darwyn: No, it was a real magazine up here, in Canada. We had a circulation of maybe 50,000, which, for Canada, was huge. And the Musicland group, who owned Sam Goody, a big chain of those stores down there, they decided that they wanted to buy the thing from us, a million copies a month, to distribute in their store free with purchase. And we went right over the top at that point. I mean, it was like night and day what happened almost overnight.

JBC: *Was it a good thing?*

Darwyn: Yeah! I mean, in terms of the money we had coming in now and the access we had to American acts and the production value of the magazine, everything! So my time there was, it was just great.

JBC: *Did you go on photo-shoots and everything?*

Darwyn: I was the art director! I got to f*cking meet Robert Plant; I got to meet David Bowie; U2, when they were just punks, y'know. So it was a *really* exciting and cool job to have. And that was another thing that kept me distracted. It's not like this was miserable. These were great times in my life. And, yeah, when you're that young and you like to party, there was no better place to be. [chuckles]

JBC: *Now, do you see that it's advantageous to have that kind of diversity of background? Do you see that you're able to utilize some of the things you've learned – within the graphic design and within advertising – within the comic book work today?*

Darwyn: Absolutely. And it's funny because every time I... there are times when I look and I go, "Geez Louise! Fifteen years I could have been doing comics and I wasn't." And every time I started moaning like that, Chiarello always says to me, "Dude, you wouldn't be where you are right now without what came before" He said, "If you'd just stayed with comics, maybe you'd be a burned-out guy by now. You would have hacked out a bunch of monthly books because you came in weak and you had to do whatever you could, so you would have been put on obscure monthlies. Maybe you'd work your name up after five, six, seven, eight years, and by now you'd plateaued and were considered some also-ran." So you never know. And it's definitely true that the magazine work and then the agency work and then running my own animation company, those things informed everything I



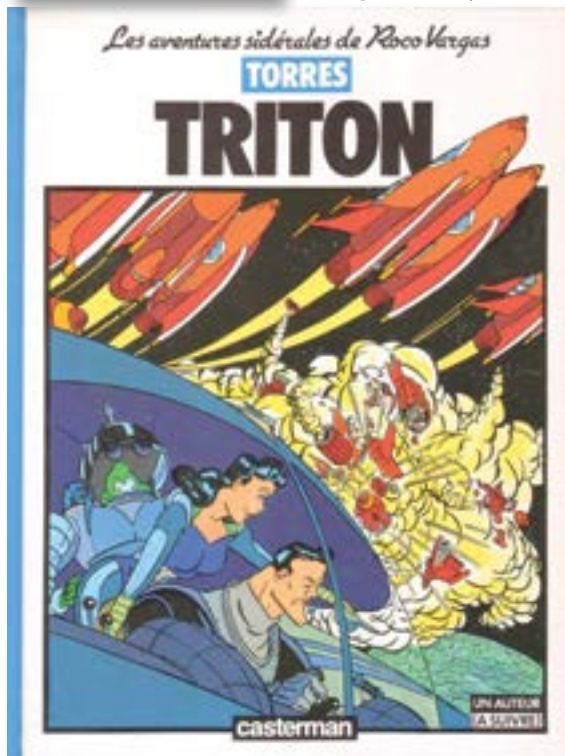
Above: The beloved Toronto comic book shop, Silver Snail, was located at its Queen Street location, until it moved in 2012, though, in a few short years, it would be no more.

Below: We don't know if Darwyn was the art director for this issue of Chatelaine during his brief time at the fashion mag, but here's an example anyway.

Bottom: Mark Chiarello (left) and Darwyn at San Diego Comic-Con 2002. (Apologies to Dave Bullock and Lee Loughridge, both cropped out of the pic.)



This page: From top is Heavy Metal, a huge influence on Darwyn; and two artists who appeared in that mag's pages, Daniel Torres and Yve Chaland, whose French cartooning work is represented here.



do right now. Absolutely.

JBC: So why did you leave the magazine?

Darwyn: I left that one to go to another one. I left to go to a magazine called *Flair*, which is... this is Canada's fashion magazine. It's our *Vogue*, I guess you'd call it. And there was a position open there for associate art director. And I thought, "Wow! Okay, it's magazines and chicks!" [laughter] So, man, y'know, I was *there*. That was two years at *Flair*. And again, [chuckles] we got to photograph, like, Cindy Crawford, y'know? What's the blond one...?

JBC: Claudia Schiffer?

Darwyn: Schiffer... Paulina Poriskova, Linda Evangelista, Paloma Picasso. That was a great gig, too. That was just two years. But they had real money then, and I learned how to really do a photoshoot and how to really work with photographers and stylists.

JBC: Were you making major money now?

Darwyn: At that point? Y'know, to me, it seemed like I was making pretty good dough, I guess. I think I was making about 40K a year at this time, and this is 15 years ago.

JBC: That's pretty good!

Darwyn: Yeah, I was 25, so, to me, it was good, damn good.

JBC: Yeah, a lot of disposable income there, huh? Were you a single guy?

Darwyn: Yeah. I've never been married, but I have had two, like, seven-year relationships. So I'm always joking with all my divorced friends, "Well, I may as well have been married twice."

JBC: Your name, is that the spelling you were born with?

Darwyn: Yeah. Another one of my father's little things, I guess. There's

absolutely no reason for this at all.

JBC: It's not Charles at all? [laughs]

Darwyn: No. And he never would tell me, either, why he named me Darwyn. And then, I think it was my 21st birthday [when] he finally told me. My father had a hard time – like, I guess, a lot of guy's fathers – showing any sort of emotion around 'em. But he said, "Y'know, it's a guy... I knew a guy in high school who had that name." And he said, "I didn't really know the guy, but I knew him well enough to know that he was the *nicest* person I'd ever met in my life." And he said, "So the name stuck with me." So, yeah, y'know, there's no deep mystery behind it.

JBC: That's pretty nice, though.

Darwyn: Yeah, it's great. It's a name you definitely have to grow into.

JBC: What, did you take a ribbing for it?

Darwyn: Yeah, well, you know, when you're a kid, if there's anything different about you, like in suburban... the Wonder Bread Belt. [laughs]

JBC: You and I, not only do we share the same last name and the same spelling of the last name, is that both our [first and last] names are probably consistently misspelled, [chuckles] which is, y'know, slightly annoying. But I get some artists who get really pissed off that one of their names is misspelled, and I go, "C'mon, dude, I mean, geez! I'm Jon B. Cooke, y'know?"

Darwyn: I'm so used to it, at this point, that it doesn't even faze me.

JBC: I guess I would naturally ask for my readers that I would ask you whether we're related or not, but I know that we're not, because my grandfather was illegitimate.

Darwyn: I bet if you traced back far enough, you'd know...

JBC: But my last name, my grandfather was left on the doorstep of the Cooke family. * [laughter] So forget it. Probably first cousin to my mother. Aaahh! [laughs] But WASP, all the way back. ** So during all this time after Talent Showcase, were you still into comics? Did you still regularly read them?

Darwyn: I would dip in and out. And I would get excited about certain things, and then they would dry up, then a couple of years would go by and something would come out and I would get excited about it or...

JBC: Did you go down to Beguiling with any habit?

Darwyn: You know, Beguiling, at that time, I think it might have been brand-new. The big place to go to get old books or the stuff I was into back then would be the Silver Snail. Beguiling's more like Meltdown, y'know. Like Golden Apple: Silver Snail; Meltdown: Beguiling, a more like an art comic maybe type, boutique store.

JBC: So would you just occasionally go in there?

Darwyn: Well, yeah, I would. I'd drop in occasionally, and if there was something happening that I thought was pretty cool, then I would be going in regularly until it dried up. For example, *Dark Knight Returns*. I became aware of that. Right around then, *Watchmen* started, too, all these things were kind of going on. So I remember getting really interested again at that point. But I didn't see it really follow through anywhere. Certainly projects hadn't distinguished

* That turned out, apparently, to have been family lore, not that it matters. No need to share the sorted tale of my paternal lineage here! – Y.E.

** Nope. Genetic testing later found we were mostly Irish... *Hic!* – Y.E.

themselves. Then, I guess, it was the early '90s, when Image started to explode and the whole industry seemed like really picking up. Then I took another look at it. By that time, I'm at an ad agency and I'm just f*ckin' *hating* it. Y'know, yeah, the drinking was out of control. I literally... it was one of those days where I sat down and said, "Now, when was the last time you were *really* happy?" And I had to go all the way back to 13, 14, and sitting there at that kitchen table with my pencils. And it really kind of hit me, like a ton of bricks, all at once. "Why are you doing this? Why aren't you doing that? That's what you want to do."

JBC: Boy, I wonder if it's in our last names, I had exactly the same experience. [laughs]

Darwyn: Yeah, isn't it funny?

JBC: I was in advertising and I was really... with my wife, I was reaching an absolute crisis level. I was drinking, I wasn't coming home. And she just said, "It's this or that." And I realized, too, that it was advertising. It was the pressure and the lies and... God, and the subterfuge that would go on! And the politics and all that! I'm unemployable now, I couldn't work for anyone else. * [chuckles]

Darwyn: Well, yeah. I can barely get through a f*cking phone call with someone at DC Comics.

JBC: [Laughs] If it wasn't for Chiarello, I wouldn't be calling! [laughs]

Darwyn: If it wasn't for Chiarello, I wouldn't be working for them. And I told Dan Didio that a few months ago. I said, "You know, I don't know what you think or what you think the circumstances are, but I'll tell you right now, if it wasn't for f*ckin' Mark Chiarello, there's no way, no way at all."

JBC: He's truly a real person... Anyway, back to the chronology: obviously, '86 was also an explosion for me for realizing the possibilities that were going on. But there was also something that was coming from... Maus had come out-

Darwyn: Well, of course.

JBC: And *Love and Rockets* was really going full-steam, Jaime and Gilbert were just doing amazing things.

Darwyn: Thanks for reminding me.

JBC: Did you get into that stuff?

Darwyn: Yeah. *Maus*, I can appreciate it. That's about all I can say about it. I can appreciate it and I can appreciate what it did for our medium.

JBC: So it's an intellectual respect?

Darwyn: Yeah.

JBC: But not an emotional one?

Darwyn: Well, it's a familiar story. So I know that, for myself, through my recent experiences, I had experienced that story in one or two other ways already. So it wasn't like I came to it wide open and it was a revelation, so it just seemed to me it was a rather brilliant concept to have that material presented that way.

JBC: Did you think that maybe, was it his... I don't know what you'd call it, bread-and-butter technique, his... If there's something you can say about Artie [Spiegelman], he doesn't have that much flash to the work. But the thinking behind the work is absolutely profound. [Darwyn added this note of the original transcript, he added, "At this point, Ye Ed's voice contained just a hint of sarcasm." I can't attest to the truth

* Though I still hadn't found sobriety at that point, but, here I go again, making it all about me, eh? – Y.E.

of that, but if Dar wanted it included, who was I to refuse him...? – Y.E.]

Darwyn: Exactly.

JBC: Could that be why you didn't passionately get into it, because...?

Darwyn: It could be.

Y'know, I try not to... Most of my buddies up here, they're more indy-oriented. They kick me in the ass all the time for being a whore.

JBC: For being a what...?

Darwyn: For being a whore. [Jon laughs] And, ahh, y'know, I don't know what to say. I just don't

have those artistic pretensions. I just think it's a bunch of nonsense. I'm looking for a good story and I'm looking for, yeah, aesthetic pleasure in the stuff.

JBC: But there must have been some independent stuff that you did...?

Darwyn: Oh, yeah! For example, *Love and Rockets*, holy sh*t! *Holy sh*t!* And when [Dean] Motter got them on Mr. X...? Holy sh*t! Yeah, okay, this is great... we just hit this point. This is the point at which I should probably mention what was a profound and primary influence and it came into my life right about this time, and that was Heavy Metal. They were reprinting [Yves] Chaland and [Daniel] Torres. And, when I discovered those guys – holy sh*t! – did it all snap together! Because, at that point I'm art directing fashion-oriented stuff, so I'm being really exposed to New York illustration and European illustration, and this whole move towards a '40s look was going on at that point. And I *loved* the stuff. And then I saw Torres and Chaland, and I thought, "Oh my god, it translates into comics!" And I just became a devout student, at that point, of that work. And I would say Paul Rivoche was another guy at that time.

JBC: Yeah, I was going to ask you: did you know Paul and Dean [Motter] and...?

Darwyn: No. Oddly enough, no. Paul and I met for the first time about six months ago, I guess. We had some lunch.

JBC: He was in the area, though, right?

Darwyn: Yeah, it's hilarious. We have worked together on TV shows. He was designing sets and stuff for *Batman* and *Superman* shows down in L.A., at that time.

JBC: The magazine you were working for was *Flair*?

Darwyn: Yes.

JBC: That lasted two years?

Darwyn: Yeah. After that,



This page: Darwyn shared these two black-&-white photos of himself in the '80s/'90s for his CBA feature.

Below is a panel from his autobiographical story in *Solo* #5 [Aug. '05], "World's Window."





Above: The ad in *The Comics Journal* #191 (Nov. '96) that Darwyn answered and promptly scored a gig at Warner Bros. Television Animation, where he worked on *The New Batman Adventures*, *Superman: The Animated Show*, and *Batman Beyond*, the latter for which he designed and animated the opening sequence. (In a *Comics Journal* interview, Darwyn revealed he used his own Macintosh computer at home to create the titles.)

Below: A promotional piece Darwyn created for his animation company, *The Brotherhood*, sometime in the 1990s.



Chatelaine magazine hired me, and that's the biggest circulation magazine in Canada. This is hilarious: [chuckles] I was like, "That's it, I've hit the pinnacle of the Canadian magazine business as an art director!" And, within four weeks, one day I was called in, they said, "We want you to leave today. We'll give you three months' severance pay, but this isn't a good fit." And I couldn't have agreed more! And I was getting three months' pay! So I split, and that's when I started my own company.

JBC: What was the tension that was taking place there?

Darwyn: I wanted to do better work and it was a

mass-market magazine, so we were getting into aesthetic arguments. Every day was a different battle with a different editor, and it was all pretty firmly entrenched.

JBC: Did you come on board as the art director?

Darwyn: Yes.

JBC: Where'd you go from there?

Darwyn: From there, I started my own company. I had three months' pay and I had money in the bank, and I thought, "You know what? I know a lot of people now. Why don't I just start a design studio of my own?" And that's basically what I did. And, more and more, I was working for agencies. And, by the time I was 30, an agency had said, "Hey, look. Why don't you come in-house here? You can run your studio out of here. We'll pay you X per hour for work we can provide you." And I drifted into... So, you're doing, like, Honda, sh*t like that, y'know? Selling cars, selling soap.

JBC: Now, was this when computers were starting to come into the business?

Darwyn: Another real debt I owe is to the lady who published *Music Express* magazine, because we're talking '84, she networked our office up. Now, it was IBM and they were horrible, but it was a start. And it got me involved in computers far earlier than a lot.

JBC: So were they Macs that you were getting into?

Darwyn: No, they were IBMs. At that time, Macs didn't make anything powerful enough and nothing that can interface. So what we had was a situation – I mean, sh*t, man, we were typesetting this magazine on an old, I don't know, it was some... equipment. But basically, the girl had to typeset it the way I marked it up and then pull this big suitcase cartridge onto the top of it, go into the darkroom with it, and develop it as galley. Now, if it wasn't right, it wasn't in memory. This machine had no memory. She had to retype it all again!

JBC: So you learned to use an X-Acto, I think, with finesse, right? Kern that type right over, baby! [laughs]

Darwyn: We went from that to having a computer system with a memory. Certainly for body text and everything, it certainly made life a lot easier.

JBC: It was like a Compugraphic or a Linotype machine?

Darwyn: Yeah. So, yeah, I can remember cracking Photo-shop 1.0, all that stuff.

JBC: So did you buy your own computer system for your own agency?

Darwyn: Yeah. I guess I was... [ponders] I'd say I was 29, I guess, when I bought my first computer, and it was a Mac.

JBC: Why are you thankful to have been introduced to computers earlier? Are they important to you now?

Darwyn: Yeah, absolutely! And they have been all along. They're not as important to me now as they used to be. But I'm just glad that I was introduced to it early, so I wasn't afraid of it. Like, I know guys my age who still haven't jumped on, and I can see how difficult it is for them to consider, so I'm glad I became fluent at it early, because it opened up a lot more opportunities.

JBC: Did you see that also – y'know, I recall, when I was an art director, I came in when the generation was very computer-literate, and the people I would hire would come in and want to jump right in on the computer and were really lacking on the tactile skills of drawing. They forgot how to draw.

Darwyn: Well, this has been the biggest problem with computers, right? I learned the old-school way. I learned that if the scan had too much red in it, that the red piece of film had to go into an etching bath to contract the dots. So you learned how to get the results you wanted on paper through these approaches. And nuts-and-bolts of the press and of filmwork and things like that. Now, you get the computer software that enables you to do this...? If you don't have that background, you're not going to be able to use that equipment properly. The software – like, and you see this all the time on stuff that's produced by people who don't understand print, where there's no trapping between solid colors... something's obviously been constructed in RGB. You can see the telltale signs of what happened. So, I dunno, the computers are great, but without a rudimentary knowledge of print production or broadcast production, a lot of people, I think, are flying blind with this. Typesetting,

too, in particular. The art of kerning a typeface, of keeping its height/weight ratio within reason has gone completely out the window.

JBC: So you had your own agency for how long?

Darwyn: Let's see... I think it was about three years. The Brotherhood Animation Company is what we were called and what we were doing was we were providing animation for agencies or client direct, depending.

JBC: How did the switch to animation happen?

Darwyn: It was real simple, actually. We used to get these reels from the U.K. called shots, and what they were, were a look at the outstanding commercials of the last month worldwide. And one of them had a beer commercial from Ireland. What they had done was film the whole thing and then used Adobe Premiere to turn it all into... used a watercolor filter on all the shots, and then some of them were combinations of animation and live action. But it was really incredible. And, when I found out it was done on a Mac, I was automatically intrigued. And I went down and I bought Adobe Premiere software and began to experiment with it. And, within a couple of months, I'd figured out that, yeah, we could produce animation with this. And I began to... y'know, I had a lot of contacts for design work and art directing on a freelance basis, so I was going to them saying, "Look, we're getting into animation now, so by all means, if we can help you with anything, let us know."

JBC: So you could really do a wide diversity of style through this program?

Darwyn: Keeping in mind, Premiere and then After Effects, which I picked up shortly afterwards, these programs are 2-D animation programs, so we still had to bring the artwork to the table. So we were creating the artwork by hand – we were doing all it by hand, inking it, then scanning it in, coloring it in Photoshop and then compositing it in the software – and, y'know, there were a lot of digital effects and tricks you could apply, but you still had to start with "art art." This wasn't CGI stuff; it all looked like 2-D stuff.

JBC: And where to from there?

Darwyn: This is the point at which I knew I had to get out of the agency, and I knew that animation was very exciting for me to be into. I'd been a student of this as long as I'd been a student of comics, I guess. And I was a lot happier with it, but we were still just producing stuff for ads for clients. And I remember, one day, I went down to the store and I picked up a copy of *The [Comics] Journal*, and there was a full-page ad in it saying that Warner Bros. was looking for artists for the *Batman/Superman* shows.

JBC: Oh, I remember that ad, right, yeah.

Darwyn: And I was just floored. Because my perception, went from being, "Oh, they must have guys lined up until the end of time to work on that thing, all the greatest artists in the world probably want to work on this. That would be a way to get in on that." So I see this ad and I went, "Holy sh*t." And I went home and I made up a little sequence and I did a board sample, and that was that. Now, it's important to note, just to backtrack a bit, when I was 30 – and this was four years before this – I had put the *Ego* pitch together and gone out to Chicago [Comicon] with it and gotten a very lukewarm reception to it. So I had taken another shot at



This page: Darwyn created this set of stickers and the bottom illustration to promote his animation-for-advertising firm, The Brotherhood, in the 1990s. The cartoonist gifted this batch to Ye Ed. one Christmas, along with a "Frontier Airlines Tour" T-shirt and (gulp!) an original page of his artwork!

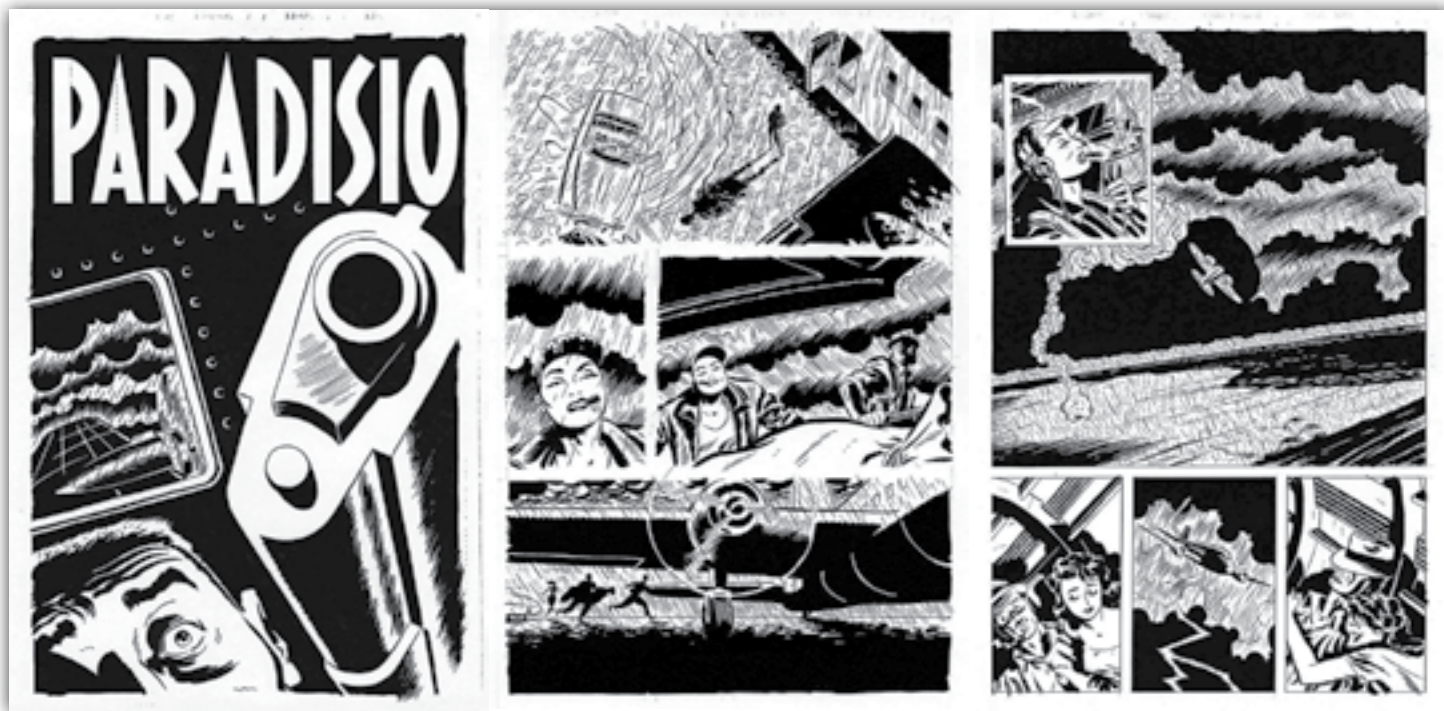


getting into comics and it had failed, as far as I knew.

JBC: Can you give us a... what was the *Ego* pitch?

Darwyn: It was basically the core story that became the full *Batman: Ego*, and it had, I





This page: Rich Dannys, who posted all the pages of Darwyn's "Paradiso" tale on the "Art of Darwyn Cooke" Facebook page, smartly called the yarn "A collision of Spillane's Mike Hammer and Toth's Bravo for Adventure," with "a touch of Los Bros. Hernandez in the mix." The wordless story, with accompanying pin-ups (seen below) was likely drawn by the cartoonist during his time running The Brotherhood animation company. **Opposite page:** At top are designs drawn by Darwyn for the "Legends of the Dark Knight" episode of The New Batman Adventures airing in Oct. '98. Bottom are screen grabs of his Batman Beyond opening sequence.

guess, 12 full-page, full-color images with it. It was kind of Velox, because I had access to an 11" x 17" color laser [printer] that fed to the computer and everything, so I made a real splashy presentation out of it. The thing is, nobody wanted it, or nobody knew what to do with it. So, as far as I knew, it was dead, at the point we're talking about now. Getting back into comics hadn't worked, I thought, so I started the animation company. I was a little happier with that, but it still... I knew it wasn't what I wanted to do. Then I see the ad in the *Journal* for *Batman/Superman*. So I send them a sample, and they hired me right away.

JBC: Did you send them directly to Bruce?

Darwyn: No, I think they went to... I forget who the woman's name is. There was a woman in charge of submissions at Warners [Liza Ann Warren] and her name was right on the ad, I believe. But it ended up down in Bruce Timm's office. I guess it was, like, two weeks later that I started working on the show.

JBC: Like I said, I haven't seen your earlier work, so how do you characterize... was this the same Ego that saw print?

Darwyn: Yeah. As a matter of fact, part of the pitch included the first 14 pages of the book. And, while there are changes in it, in its published version, they're all just... It's because I learned better combining structure. So I got it and lightboxed it and pulled it all back together, but it was basically the same thing that saw print, it just wasn't quite as well-executed.

JBC: This would have been your first move from...

Did you move to...?

Darwyn: At first I worked freelance for Warner Bros.

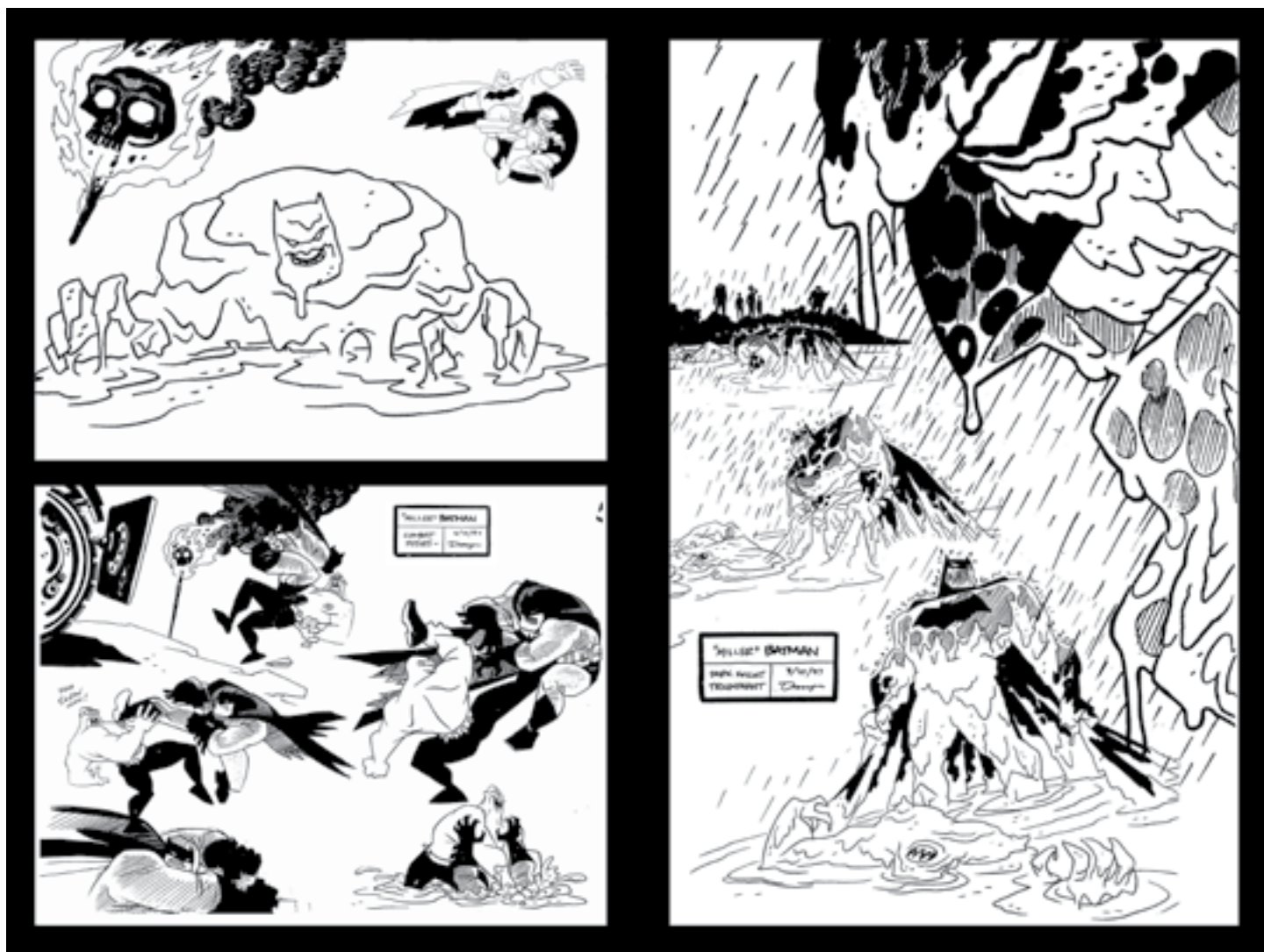
JBC: Still up in Canada?

Darwyn: Yes. And running the animation company concurrently. I think there were four of us, at the time, in the studio, and I was doing this on the side. Yeah, I did it freelance for... I dunno... four or five episodes, then I went down to San Diego to meet up with the guys, because I was a big admirer of Bruce's work. I had loved the show, so, all

of a sudden, I am working for them, it was an opportunity to move to California and meet them and – boom! – I was down there. And, at that point, we discussed the idea of me coming down to work, and I wasn't interested at the time. I had no interest in living in L.A. and I still had commitments, y'know. The company... it wasn't just me, there were other guys involved, so it wasn't like I could just turn around and drop everything. But that is what happened. Over the course of six months, it became clear that that was something I did want to do.



"Paradiso" TM & © the estate of Darwyn Cooke.



JBC: Now, when you're saying "the guys," you're saying Glenn [Murakami] and Paul [Dini] and... ?

Darwyn: No, I'm talking about The Brotherhood...

JBC: No, no, I know that. I'm sorry. Just prior to that.

Darwyn: Down in San Diego... Glenn and Shane [Glines] and Bruce [Timm] and Dan Riba and James Tucker and Butch Lukic. And it was a total... it was like a total... y'know, like a second life that I had and, all of a sudden, there was a group of people you could share all this stuff with, who were cognizant of the... And I thought, "Yeah, it would be a great experience to come down here. And I'm 35, and it's like, if I don't do this now, I'm never gonna do it." So I'd never left Toronto before and it was a big step, but, yeah, I did it.

JBC: Y'know, I had one of those moments of clarity. I distinctly recall where I was, I was parked waiting for my kids to do something or something like that, and for some reason I had picked up... Oh, I know, because the Demon was in it... I picked up this Batman

Special and, I mean, that was one of the great moments I had in the '90s. Timm just exploded at me. It was just a moment where I said, "This guy

gets it! This guy is Toth and Kirby together! This guy..."

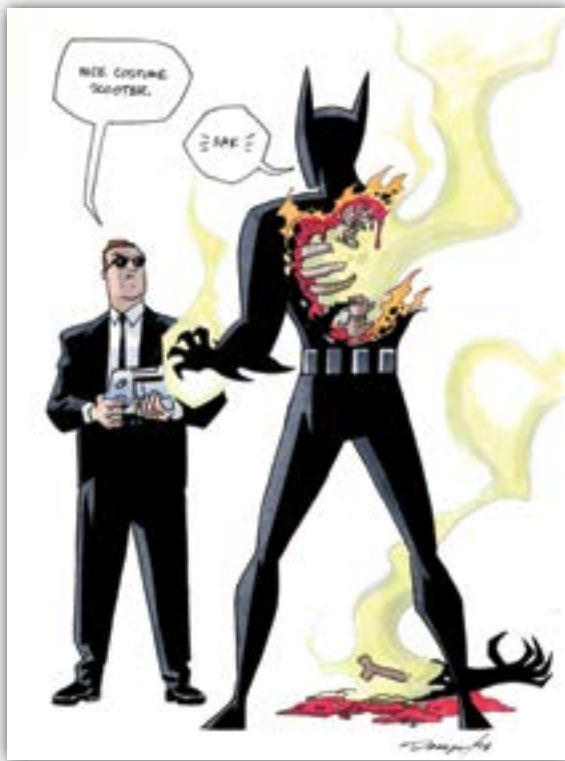
Darwyn: You just nailed it. It was funny, because when I looked at Bruce's stuff, it wasn't like it blew my mind coming out of left field, it was like, "This guy gets it!" That's exactly the response. It was like, "Holy sh*t! But, of course!"

JBC: Right! It's so obvious, but...

Darwyn: "But, of course! This f*cking guy gets it!" And, y'know, in subsequent conversations, we'd sit there, and, yeah, it was that at almost identical ages we were taking down the same stuff. Y'know, we're both big *Johnny Hazard* fans, [Frank] Robbins fans. And you can see all the same linkage. So it was interesting, because, by the time I got to the studio, my appreciation and my desire to go in that direction was all in place. I'd seen all the right stuff. So, yeah, what Bruce was doing down there clicked in almost right away for me.

JBC: That was a question I had for you





Above: Before he left animation as his primary career, Darwyn was offered the opportunity to direct episodes on season three ['99-00] of *Men in Black: The Series*. This gag cartoon, featuring the Batman Beyond character, is dated 1999.



Below: Again mixing DC properties with the *Men in Black*, Kay and Jay apprehend two aliens from the *Superman* universe.



before. Did you have a... A big number of comic fans, when they first encountered Frank Robbins' work, they are repulsed by it.

Darwyn: Oh, sure! I remember the only Marvel book I bought when I was young was Captain America. And then Robbins took it over. And I went f*cking nuts! I swore the book off. And worse than that, considering the time period (and I hope I can be forgiven for it) it was, like, right after Robbins, it was Kirby. And I'm going, "Oh, f*ck!" [laughter] Just hated Robbins until I saw Robbins when he was creating in the period he belonged in.

JBC: So you didn't get clued into the Batman stuff or The

Shadow that he did? I was repulsed about the way he did legs, and there was something about The Invaders that did not work for me. But there was something about his Batman, there was something about his Shadow that was just like...

Darwyn: It was about the blacks.

JBC: Yeah, right, exactly! "We need ink, people!" [laughs]

Darwyn: I had an appreciation for how he was doing everything but the people, I think. Because I looked at, say, the way he did the engine room in that shot with The Shadow with the Nazis on that boat. And I'd look at the way he inked all that stuff, like all the gear, and the way he would do a ship or a tank or a jeep. And that all clicked in for me. But I saw an inherent goofiness in his posing. And, yeah, it wasn't until I looked at the older stuff that I saw how it all fit together. I, personally, for myself, I put him above Caniff, personally. It's because of the vitality of his work.

JBC: Oh, that's a radical thought...

Darwyn: I think Caniff's abilities, as strong as they were in

every level, his work is very locked down onto the medium shot, eye-level, people are in very static poses, even when it's action, and I found Robbins's work just way more alive.

JBC: This is true, I guess you're right. Yeah, the POVs. But there would be no Robbins without Caniff.

Darwyn: Exactly. I know, I've got a big Caniff here, too.

It's a drawing of Steve Canyon he did on a big piece of tagboard, probably at a lecture or something. It's just a huge Steve Canyon head with the Caniff signature. He did it with a grease pencil, I guess.

JBC: I just went through, this guy, Lew Sayre Schwartz, he used to be, in the '50s, he was a Batman artist. He became a really good friend of Caniff and he let me come to his house and scan all this unbelievable custom art that Caniff did for him. It was amazing.

Darwyn: There's a store in town here called Dragon Lady. They're the guys who reprinted...

JBC: Oh, right, sure, yeah!

Darwyn: The guy who runs that store has, I think, the biggest private collection of Caniff originals in the world. It is just f*ckin' unbelievable. [chuckles]

JBC: I guess we got sidetracked. The introduction to Timm. Did you realize at this point this guy was a contender?

Darwyn: Oh, he was past a contender at that point.

JBC: He was the champ?

Darwyn: The show was all you really needed to see. By that time, *Mad Love* had come out, so it was obvious that the guy had... He wasn't just an animation guy who was able to draw influences out of this stuff; this guy was obviously a master of the medium.

JBC: So what stage did you come into it? Had the TV show come out yet?

Darwyn: Yes. I began working on *Batman Adventures* during the second pool, where they redesigned it all. That's where I came on board, for that run of production.

JBC: So what did you think of the initial run, did you catch that before you saw the ad?

Darwyn: Oh, yeah! Yeah, I was a devout fan of the show. I was a huge fan of the show. I had a bunch of them on tape already. Like I said, I was... Y'know, interviews can only be so long, I guess, but if we were to sit and start talking about animation, I could have talked just as long about how that has affected me and the pieces of it that I've enjoyed or...

JBC: Honestly, I think that it's important. We're talking about a feature interview with you, which generally speaking I do go for three hours. I can't today, but if you're up for it, we could go for another session.

Darwyn: That's cool, whatever you want.

JBC: Well, I think animation is so integral that... yeah, I do, I do want to go down that road. But right now...

Darwyn: Well, why don't we talk about animation in the second call?*

JBC: Yeah, exactly, I want to do comics today.

Darwyn: Whatever feels appropriate.

JBC: So how long were you with Warner?

Darwyn: I think it worked out to a couple of years. I think I was freelancing for about nine [months] and then I was on staff there for just over a year.

JBC: Now, what was Bruce's influence on you?

* Alas, to my eternal regret, that second call would never transpire. —Y.E.



Darwyn: Well, Bruce... well, first, to start with, I think it's important to note, and we can talk about this some more next call, but I would say Bruce is probably the second-most important person in television animation. If you consider [Bill] Hanna and [Joe] Barbera as one person or one unit, then I'd say next to them it's Bruce. He's singularly, as far as I'm concerned, the most important person other than the Hanna-Barbera guys in American television animation.

JBC: Why?

Darwyn: Well, because he proved that it didn't have to be sh*t. He's the guy who proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that if you had the taste level and the commitment to the material and the passion, that you *can* achieve those kind of results. And it set a new standard. It showed everybody that for the money available, you *could* do quality work. You only really have to look at the way most shows are designed now to see the effect that I think these guys have had. Bruce, and everybody, for that matter.

JBC: Was [John] Kricfalusi pretty much contemporary at the same time? Was he rising up at the same time?

Darwyn: Yeah, they know each other fairly well. I know that Shane Glines has worked for them, is good friends with both of them, so I know they're relatively connected. And John... that's a whole other deal, right? [laughter] What John did is something else again. I think it's more cultural than it is animation-specific.

JBC: But certainly a profound effect on content. Everything from The Powerpuff Girls to...

Darwyn: He was just up here about a month ago for this [Toronto] Comics Arts Festival, and he was telling me, they're in the middle of this new pool of *Ren and Stimpy*s where

they've been given carte blanche...

JBC: He's back on it with...?

Darwyn: Oh, yeah. The original crew is producing a new pool of them right now, and there's no censorship.

[Jon laughs] Now, he's telling me, maybe he's just jerking my chain, but apparently in the first one, Ren and Stimpy come out.

JBC: [Laughs] But, of course!

Darwyn: They proclaim their homosexual love for each other and they start flaunting it.

JBC: [Laughs] Smoochy, smoochy! [laughs] Do you watch The Ripping Friends?

Darwyn: Oh, yeah.

JBC: [Laughs] I just think he's brilliant. Mad as a hatter, but brilliant.

Darwyn: I'd trade all the Miyazaki films in the world for that two minutes of Rip on the pain machine. [laughter]

JBC: Kirk Douglas, thank you. [laughter] Did you guys kind of realize you were in a Golden Age of sorts? Or maybe a second Golden Age of animation? Maybe it was the first Golden Age of television animation.

Darwyn: I think it's like anything – and this is something that's really hard to explain to a fan or to anybody without it disappointing them – but the day-to-day work isn't a very glamorous thing. However, I think we were also very proud

to be working on that show and knowing that we were working on the best stuff being done. Y'know, when I came from Toronto, I'm thinking, "Okay, I'm moving to Hollywood, I'm gonna be working on the Warners lot." I had all these preconceived notions. And I get down there and no, it was in this old, sick bank building in the valley. All the chairs were broken.

JBC: Really?

Darwyn: It was just the most disgusting place I've ever worked in my life, to be quite honest. There was absolutely no personality to the facility. But it was just... it was so exciting. To be able to watch a guy like Shane Glines sitting there drawing and drawing. To watch Bruce just kick something out...

JBC: Now, was it a high-stress environment?

Darwyn: No, I didn't find



This page: Especially for brilliant editor Axel Alonso, Darwyn drew a batch of stories for Marvel Comics in the 2000s, including a "what if Peter Parker was Archie Andrews" story in Spider-Man's Tangled Web #11 [Apr. '02], the two-issue Wolverine/Doom [July '03], and an Ant-Man story in Marvel Double Shot #3 [Mar. '03]. Plus, Darwyn described his status as artist on X-Statix and X-Force as the bench-warmer "water boy" for series regular Mike Allred, though Darwyn certainly did his far share of material. He particularly enjoyed drawing the stories starring Edie Sawyer, U-Go Girl, and Orphan.





This page: Darwyn made his first big impact with his Catwoman work, which included a complete redesign of her costume and a graphic novel, Selina's Big Score ['02], cover above, as well as the first four issues of a '02 reboot, #1 cover below. Upper right are Darwyn designs from '00.



it was. I mean, once I mastered the... The problem originally for me was the mileage. Being a storyboard artist, you're drawing, I don't know, 300 drawings a month, I guess. So it took me a while to conquer the actual physical mileage of it, but once I was past that, I didn't find it that stressful. The title sequence, doing the *Batman Beyond* titles was stressful, but that was for a whole other bunch of reasons?

JBC: Was that because of deadline pressure?

Darwyn: Well, there was a deadline pressure, but even more stringent was the budget pressure, what we had to accomplish within the time we had, with as little as we had.

JBC: How did you look at that second season of *The Batman Adventures*?

Darwyn: I think that, for my money...? 'Cause everybody's got a different point of view, right? I think what we saw happen there was there was a quantum leap in the look of the show. I think for people who understand animation and its actual production and the fact that things go overseas to be executed, when you look at the design changes that occurred between the first pool and the second, it's clearly guys who knew exactly what they were doing, retooling their stuff to make it work better. Anybody can draw anything they want to draw. The question is, can you draw something attractive that can be sent over to Korea, where 500 people, who don't speak our language, are able to execute it well? Because that's the mandate, right? And this is what makes Bruce brilliant. It's that he's not sitting there jerking himself off with the drawing, he's designing something that any retard could draw, but it's still going to look beautiful, it's going to hold together, at the very least.

JBC: And the magic of it is that Bruce is still getting his ya-yas out. [laughter] Right?

I mean, he's got his own playground, right?

Darwyn: Well, he's got a playground, but he's on... Again, this is a thing that I think elevates him from a lot of people... I mean, you'll sit with people who are mounting a production and you'll listen to what they've got in mind or what they're going to try to achieve on a cheap budget, and you know they're out of their minds and they don't have the experience, because if they did, they wouldn't go this route. Bruce's decisions are all based on the experience all the way around, and I think, from a visual standpoint, if you look at the first pool of *Batmans* and the second pool, I don't think it would matter which one you preferred stylistically, you'd have to admit the second pool looked way better animated. It looked more consistent, it looked less lumpy, more streamlined, more sexy. So I think once you have an understanding of how these things get made, and then you see what Bruce does, and you understand all the different decisions that have been factored into it, it's impressive.

JBC: Now, when you went to Southern California, how was your life there, besides the work?

Darwyn: Well, for the first six months, it was kind of fun, just because I was in this new place, right? And it's Hollywood and it's warm all the time. But I didn't really like it and ultimately decided to come home.

JBC: How long did you live there?

Darwyn: I think it was about two years. Ultimately, I didn't really like it. I've been living in a city, like an urban center, since I was 18, since I moved out of the house. And in L.A., I mean, geez, it's 40 minutes to go anywhere. It just doesn't matter, it's 40 minutes no matter where you go. [laughs] Everything's disconnected, there's no sense of community... I don't know.

JBC: A nice place to visit?

Darwyn: Yeah, exactly. And I still do. I mean, I was there for the month of February. I try to get down there twice a year.

JBC: What, for fun or for work?

Darwyn: You know, it's... I can work pretty well anywhere now, which is cool, right? As long as you've got a paper and a pencil, I can work. I meet some good friends down there. So I go down, I stay with one buddy, David Bullock, who's



just started the covers for *Action Comics*, actually, and I get to hang out with everyone.

JBC: How long was your career in animation? Do you still work in it?

Darwyn: I haven't done anything in a long time, but I was talking with guys in February about things in the future, possibilities. I didn't go down to L.A. or get involved in this to have a career in animation. And it's kind of the one thing that separates me from the other guys. Most of them, like, this was the career they picked. They went to school or whatever and did what they did and this is their career. I went down to work on *this* show, and when the show's wrapped up, there was no need for me to be there anymore. Because I wasn't going to hang out and just stay in animation and then work on *He-Man* or *Buzz Lightyear* or *Lilo and Stitch* just to make a living. That wasn't the way I wanted to go.

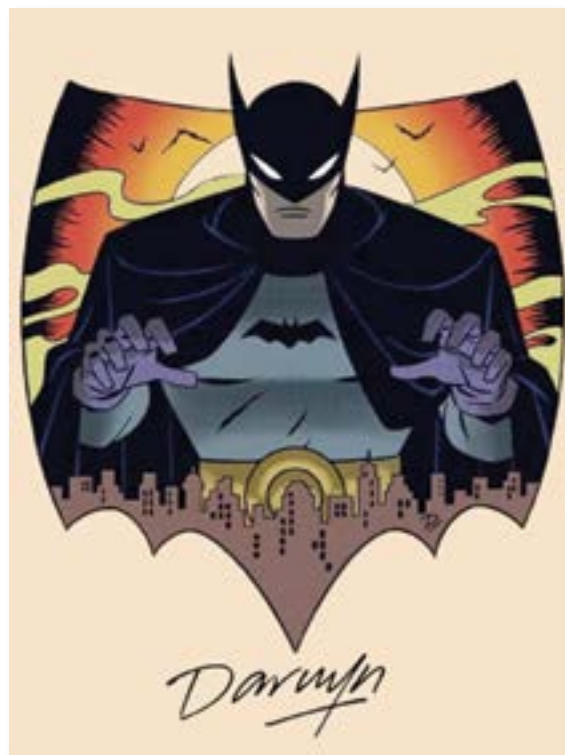
JBC: Were you still yearning to do comics?

Darwyn: Yeah, and that's where this gets interesting, because... This would be right before *Batman Beyond*, right before I start the title sequence. One day I get a telephone

going to do it, and it sort of went over off to the side.

And it was like, "Okay, I know that that's there." And I think, yeah, it probably started to affect my decision-making. Because I know we finished the *Beyond* titles and the first season of *Batman Beyond*. Now, at this point, I'm 37, I guess. And, y'know, it was a tight shop. Three directors, right? And I know Curt Geda, the only way he made it to director was the guy before him had a heart attack. [Jon laughs] And, y'know, it was pretty clear it was going to be a long while before I'd get to that level there, and I had to make a decision about how I wanted to go ahead. And, at that point, coincidentally, I got a call from Sony Pictures, and they asked me if I would be interested in directing a season. At the time, they were just casting about for directors. They had *Rusty the Boy Robot*, and *the Big Guy* going, and they had *Men in Black*. And I loved *Men in Black*, so I said, "Yeah, I'd love to do a season of that." And I thought, "This is what I'll do. I'll go to Sony, I'll do a season of *Men in Black*, which gives me a director's credit, and then I'll get into this comics stuff and see how it goes." I left Warners, went over to Sony for about seven, eight months. Just long enough to be able to do a season, and then started working on *Ego*. And that's been it since.

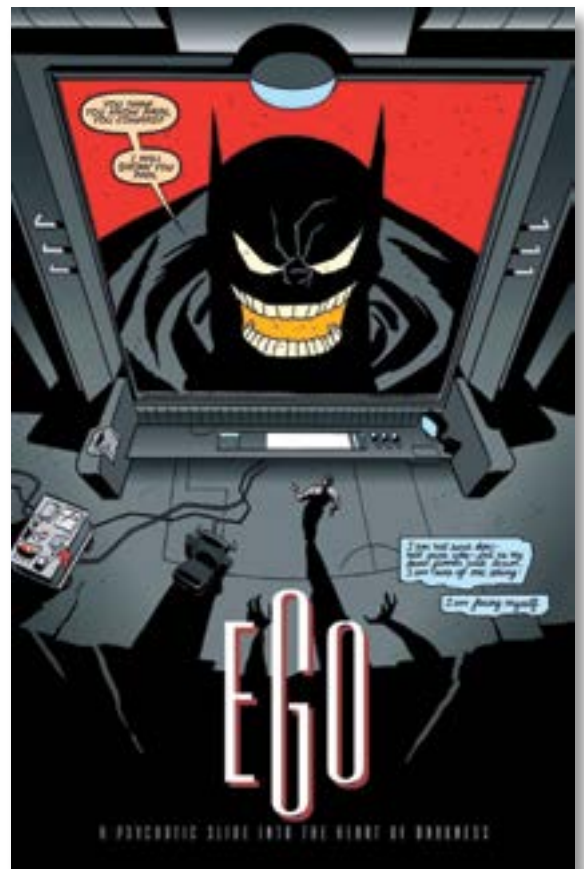
JBC: I think that's the one work I've not seen. People are always raving about it and I can never find it. And I've been clued into your work relatively... Y'know, it was Mark [Chiarello]! First, it was Mark handing me, saying to me, "Look through this." And I've, always... just for the last five years of doing CBA, it's been pretty much retro, it's always been looking back, not looking at much contemporary work. And then he handed me Selina's Big Score. And I just went, "Wha-!?" [chuckles]



call from this Mark Chiarello fellow.

JBC: Whom you didn't know or...?

Darwyn: I knew of *Batman: Houdini*. As far as I knew, he was a guy who painted comics. He calls me up and he says, "Hi, I've just sort of started as the art director here at DC. And I needed this office and they were clearing out... there was a big stack of old submissions in the back of the office and he was throwing them out. And as he was going through them, he found this thing called *Batman: Ego*. And he said, "I was wondering, would you be interested in doing this still?" Now, this is four-and-a-half years after I pitched it. [laughs] And this is coming out of the blue from this guy. And I said, "Yeah, I would love to do it." But I knew we were just gearing up for the titles. I said, "But it's probably a year away before I'd be able to actually do it." So we promised that we were



Above: Splash page from Darwyn's *Batman: Ego* [#00]. **Inset left:** Dar's cover from *Batman: The Golden Age Omnibus Vol. 1* [#15]. **Below:** Dar's "Deja Vu" page, Solo #5 [Aug. '05].



Slam Bradley Trail of the Catwoman

BRUBAKER
COOKE
HOLLINGSWORTH
KIMOT
IDELSON



This page: Darwyn, along with write Ed Brubaker, re-introduced one of DC's oldest characters – one created by the originators of Superman, Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel, no less! – Slam Bradley, in his Catwoman stories and The New Frontier. Here is Darwyn's title page design and character color guide.



And then, all of a sudden, your name was all over. I saw Tangled Web, I scooped that up, and I'm just falling all over this stuff and saying, "This is another guy who really gets it!"

Darwyn: Mark Chiarello is my patron saint. [laughter]

JBC: What was Ego? Was it a Batman adventure?

Darwyn: Yeah, at the time that I'd conceptualized the thing, I was trying to find the one Batman story that would allow me to do everything I thought was cool with the character. Which is a tall order for any story to hold. And I can't remember what the exact inspiration for the conceit was, but I came with this idea, "What if you separated the two of them and they were able to have a conversation about what the f*ck their life was all about and what was wrong with them?" And that became the idea I had in my head. It sort of started to fall into place there. Because if it was Batman and Bruce Wayne looking at their life and what they've made of it, it gives me an opportunity to draw pretty much anything I want. And so I began to look at these two, thinking of them as individuals, as opposed to one person, and thinking about what it was about each other that they would have problems with. And that becomes pretty clear.

If he wasn't Batman at night, if he really was just Bruce Wayne, what would that man think of him? And what would he think of Batman, if he was just Bruce Wayne? And that's sort of what I started doing with it, playing with it, and I thought, "This is great." Batman would want to kill the Joker. What's stopping him? Bruce Wayne's stopping him. And that I started looking at psychology, your basic ABC's of psychology, and it's the ego, the superego, and the id. So Bruce is the ego, Batman is the id, the dark part of him that he can only let

little bits out. And then there's the superego, which is some combination of the two of them, holding each other in check and keeping this balance. And that might sound highfalutin, but it really wasn't. I thought it was pretty simple. That was the idea, what if Bruce Wayne and Batman could go out and have coffee and discuss what life was about. And I sort of thought about Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and the thought that the Batman persona in the story would be able to transport them to other times or places or create things out of vapor, because it all is basically a hallucination or a dream, right? I know this probably sounds really weird. It reads a lot clearer than this. [laughter]

JBC: So what if it had only been the Batman existing or the Bruce Wayne existing?

Darwyn: Well, what you're doing is... At the beginning of *Ego*, something really horrible happens that makes Batman have to think about what he's doing and the responsibility he carries for the repercussions of what he does. And he figures he shouldn't... He's going to quit. It's like a *Year One* story. And he falls asleep and he's woken up. As Bruce Wayne, he's woken up by Batman, who wants to have a talk with him. They cover everything. In my mind, Batman's like a shark. He's an instrument of vengeance. He's got a certain amount of honor, but he's a warrior. And he's looking at Bruce Wayne and going, "You pitiful creature. How dare you put your emotional needs in front of my honor? You've got a 14-year-old boy in a red shirt standing in front of me every night because you're too f*ckin' weak to get through life without a companion." The whole idea of one of them thinking the Joker should be killed right now, at all costs, and the other one saying, "No, that's..." So it's all about the push/pull between the two sides of his personality. It takes place early in his career and it kind of resolves itself in a way that leads into the approach he takes as Batman.

JBC: And what's your assessment of your execution?

Darwyn: It's okay, I did my best. It's a very transitional thing for me to look at, because I constructed the story at a different point in my life. You look at something five years later and, yeah, you're not sure you agree with everything you've done, because you've grown or learned more. But I stuck with it. Artistically, it was troublesome because I was caught between the Bruce look in the Warner's show, which I'd just come off of, over two years of drawing that way, and then wanting to draw it more of my own way. So it was a difficult book for me to do. I think it worked out very well. I'm certainly... it's not like I'm ashamed of it when I look at it. I just look at it and go, "I wasn't quite there yet."

JBC: Now, as far as the comic book work goes, the New Talent Showcase was obviously the first thing you had published, right?

Darwyn: Yes.

JBC: And was *Ego* the second thing...?

Darwyn: Yes. Other than one-page strips I did for magazines or other goofy things.

JBC: So you immediately came into the fold as a storyteller, as a cartoonist, as separate than being a comic book artist or a writer. You did it both. Was that important for you? Not to become part of an assembly-line process?

Darwyn: Yeah. At my age, it was like— It was funny, because life's all about making a living and keeping things

together and stuff. And I was at a point where I was single. I could obviously make a living doing a few different things. So I'd gotten a little more particular. If this is my first love, then I'm going to treat it right. And I'd rather not do it than do it in a half-assed fashion. And I've, more or less, maintained that, other than a few missteps, maybe. I've sort of kept that attitude all the way down the line. And, I think, part of it, in the beginning, anyway, was, "Yeah, if I'm writing this thing, or at least constructing it for the writer, I've got the control I'm going to need." Because it wasn't about trying to show people that I could draw, it was more like yeah, "I want to show I can tell a good story in an attractive way."

JBC: Is your contact, the person you deal with, at Marvel, is that pretty much Axel?

Darwyn: That's it! Axel Alonso.

JBC: Is he an important person over there?

Darwyn: Yeah. I don't think that Axel's importance to Marvel in the last two years could be overstated.

I really don't.

JBC: He seems to be an editor that really... I just briefly know him, but certainly I look at the books, and I actually buy books because they're edited by Axel.

Darwyn: Right.

JBC: Which is very rare for me to do, to base anything on an editor. But he seems to come from that Archie Goodwin school, which Mark is certainly an adherent to, of being really pro-creator.

Darwyn: Well, yes. I guess that may very well be all it comes down to. It's a remarkable... If we're going to get to talk about the industry, we can talk forever. But, yeah, it's funny. I basically work with two guys. I work with Mark and I work with Axel. And it's because of their approach to me. It's



Above: Darwyn's variant cover for *I, Zombie* #1 [July '10]. **Below:** For the one-shot *Witchblade Animated* [Aug. '03], Dar co-drew this cover.





Above: Darwyn drew this Doctor Fate story in the style of original Golden Age artist Howard Sherman for the six-pager in JSA: All Stars #3 [Sept. '03].

Below: Darwyn produced this spectacular cover for Graphic Ink: The DC Comics Art of Darwyn Cooke [15].



not like I want my ass kissed or something, I want to know that a guy gives a sh*t that we're doing the thing. And I want to know that the guy's looking at the work.

JBC: What is it about them? It's just that... it's that they're considerate and they're looking at the work?

Darwyn: Each one of those guys, on more than one occasion... and for Mark in particular, [chuckles] the poor bastard... I know that they've gone and put themselves out there on behalf of our project.

JBC: So it's the work that's important.

Darwyn: Yes. If we have senior people question or try to alter something... there've been instances where I've made it clear that it was very important to me that we don't alter it. And

those guys both stepped up. And, y'know, to me, that goes a long way.

JBC: So they're advocates?

Darwyn: Yes. And the quality of the work is important to them. And I'm saying it's not important to other editors. I've worked with very few, so I really couldn't say.

JBC: But there certainly is exceptional material that comes out that they oversee.

Darwyn: Well, I think this is the thing. If you start to look at the body of work that the two men generate. Now, Mark's got a full-time gig as an art director there, but if you get down to the projects he's put together or edited, it's a very distinguished body of work, and I'm incredibly proud to have been a part of it.

JBC: You know what I like about both those guys very much? There's such a distinction... while the material can be so incredibly eclectic and diverse, if you put out... and I don't think I'm very smart, but if you put out there the entire line of Marvel stuff, for instance, I could just walk by and pick out which Axel edited. And the same thing with Chiarello, I can go, "This guy gets it, this guy gets it, this guy gets it." You know

what I mean?

Darwyn: Exactly. That is a very important component of it to me. As new as I am to the business in a lot of ways, I'm 40. People who think that this is a rough business or full of weird characters? Well, they've never worked in advertising. They've never worked in the fashion business.

JBC: [Laughs] This field is full of pussies! [laughs]

Darwyn: It's Pussy City, y'know?

JBC: But pussies with power.

Darwyn: Pussies, yeah, with sort of a passive/aggressive ability, yeah, exactly. [laughter]

JBC: I'll tell you, this is something I often say, it's an open secret that Comic Book Artist isn't about artists at all; it's really about editors. It's about what makes a good editor and what makes a bad editor. It's facilitating artists and bringing them together, making them feel safe. If you want good work. But if you want consistent work that comes out every month, well, you can do the Jim Shooter approach and scare the sh*t out of people and make them not produce their best work, but work on time.

Darwyn: I don't understand where the emphasis is on the editor's role anymore. For example, if you're penciling a mainstream monthly title, if your editor, you can only get him on the phone once a month. I'm trying to figure out what it is they do. There's a lot of stuff they do, but I don't understand it. But, I mean, you can't get the guy on the phone – And a lot of the people are like this. I don't even know what the criteria is for being an editor is anymore, because a lot of them come through admin or from the mailroom. You can't even talk about story structure. The writer sends you the script and you phone the editor and you go, "Looks, there's a major plot hole here on page 12, the foreshadowing of this event, but it contradicts what we did in the issue last month." And the editor doesn't know what the f*ck he's talking about, you know? So you get into a pissing match with the writer, because the editor isn't even there to play up... They don't even understand the fundamentals of a story.

JBC: I think maybe it can get down to... I guess it's becoming a dialogue here, but... maybe it can get down to that there's a certain type of people in comic books and the industry themselves that love characters, that really have always wanted to work on a Superman book and that's really their life, and it means there must have been an emotional void in them when they were very young and the want to fill it up with the super-hero, this character or that character. And then there's people who love the art form. The form itself. Who would appreciate Bruce Timm as well as Bryan Hitch. You know what I mean?

Darwyn: Exactly...

JBC: Any kind of wide swath, you just go, "Wow, this is cool." And you'd rush up to the guy who just loves super-heroes with R. Crumb and go, "Isn't this f*cking guy a genius?" And the guy just looks at you blank, going, "But... it's like Walt Disney stuff, what are you talking about?" [Darwyn chuckles] And, unfortunately, because it's so writer-dominated with power in the industry, that it's people that rise from the ranks always wanting to have written... always... their life's goal is to write a Superman story.

Darwyn: Right.



JBC: Not to write a good story, but to write a Superman story. And you get editors who are group editors over...

Darwyn: They leverage that, I know.

JBC: I can't fathom the structure at DC comics when you have a group editor over the Batman titles. Who gives a sh*t! But all they care about is the continuity of the Batman books. Maybe it's less so, because obviously they're shaken up by what Axel and Joe [Quesada] and Bill [Jemas] have been doing over at Marvel. But I just can't fathom it. When I see that Darwyn Cooke is doing X-Statix, I don't give a sh*t whether the continuity comes over from the previous issue, whether it does or not, it's cool.*

Darwyn: That's why it took three years to get *New Frontier* approved. Because I refused to do it if I had to adhere to their continuity. But I struck a middle ground. I said, "This is what I'll do. I promise I won't contradict a single thing that the men who created these characters did. [Bob] Kanigher, [John] Broome, [Julius] Schwartz, all of those guys...? I'm going to adhere strictly to what they did. I won't contradict any of it. But if you expect me to adhere to the revisionist sh*t that the 25-year-old guy down the hall did this month, no way." And ultimately it had to get kicked all the way up to Levitz. For all of the criticism that guy [Paul Levitz] takes, I'll tell you, man, he's applied some real common sense to a couple situations I've been in. In the case of *New Frontier*, he said, "Look, continuity is not the issue. The story is the issue. And I know you respect these characters, so don't worry about it." This was against the wishes of a lot of group

* Wow. Just wow. Was I an arrogant putz or what in 2003? – Y.E.

editors, a lot of people.

JBC: Because of their little fiefdoms?

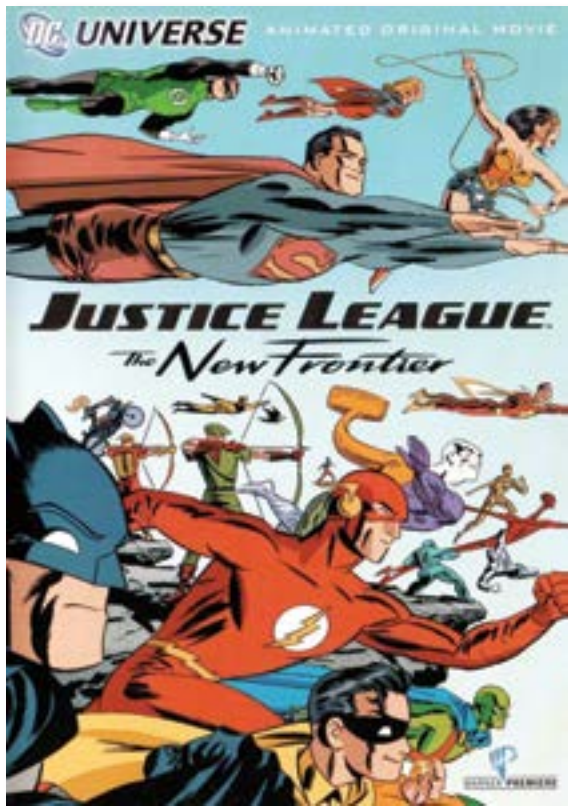
Darwyn: Oh yeah. "Oh no, you can't have Wonder Woman in it, because she doesn't exist yet." Well, f*ck you, man, she was there in '61! And that's what I'm talking about. "No, no, it's the Black Canary." We went through like 18 months of me trying to f*cking satisfy their continuity problems. So I put in this bloated, revised outline that covers all the continuity. I actually get a phone call [chuckles] from Paul Levitz saying, "Darwyn! What happened to that wonderful thing you had?" "Because this is what's happened here." And that's when he said, "Look, okay, abandon the continuity and just go back to the [original pitch]." So that was back on track.

JBC: What is *New Frontier*?

Darwyn: *New Frontier* is... Y'know, it's funny, it started out just because DC, after *Ego*, said, "We think JLA would be cool if you could do something with them." And I didn't really have anything to say about the JLA until I looked at the period of time right before they became the JLA, and then I saw I had "some crawlspace to work with," as Axel would say. And, as the project evolved, I realized that what it was doing was maybe tearing through a bunch of this revisionist sh*t that's been done. And when I got into it I saw that, geez, between what they did to Hal Jordan in *Emerald Dawn*, a drunk driver and all this type of stuff. I look at, frankly, what Mark Millar's doing in *The Ultimates*, and... I'm going to try to re-present the

This page: Though he had only been a comic book professional for less than five years, Darwyn Cooke's epic retelling of the origin of the Justice League of America, *The New Frontier*, catapulted him to super-star status in the field. Here's two illustrations from that six-issue mini-series appearing in 2004.





Above: DVD cover art for the DC animated adaptation of Darwyn's mini-series, *Justice League: The New Frontier* ['08]. **Below:** Prior to the launch of *New Frontier*, Darwyn promoted the forthcoming series during 2003 comic convention appearances, which the cartoonist dubbed, "The Frontier Airlines Tour."



notion of a hero, and the notion that, "Yeah, you know what? Maybe there are six, eight people on the planet who would put others ahead of themselves if they had these abilities, and these are the people we're talking about. I'm frankly disgusted by a lot of the stuff I see these days and, y'know..."

JBC: *Not to pick on Mark, but are we talking about, like The Authority?*

Darwyn: Oh, *The Authority*... Now, here's where I draw the line. I think with *Authority*, it's, hey, go for it. They're original characters and it's the mandate of the book. No problem. [In *Ultimates*] it's like, hey, dude, what the f*ck are you doing with the Hulk and what is the point of it? Is it really this juvenile need to know

that you've got a comic book printed where this green guy's running down the street screaming he's horny? Is there a point beyond it? Because I don't see it. And this kind of degradation of these characters is kind of disturbing to me. And a lot of guys will go to me, "Aww, man, you're too old-school, you're a fuddy-duddy." And it's like, "No, I'm not! I'm not. I don't read super-hero comics. I just don't understand why you adult men are trying to steal these characters away from young people. I don't know why you're taking something that it took them 30 years to build up, why you're subverting it in a matter of two or three months."

JBC: *Do you look at this, perhaps, though... How do you feel about the other Ultimate books, like Spider-Man? Do*

you read that at all?

Darwyn: I think it's really well put together. But again, I question... I'm at a point where I'm going, "Why the hell, why is Gwen the second girl in now? If you were going to start with square one, why didn't you just go back to square one?" I don't understand... and I'm going to lay this mostly up at the writer's feet, their need to tweak things out this way. I mean, if this thing's achieved the level of myth – and, to me, that's what I'm looking at here – I look at these things the same way, I'm sure, a lot of Greek people looked at Hercules or those types of stories. I consider these North American mythology. And I don't see the need to deviate from the core stories that revolve around these core characters. I see the need to tell different types of stories or more adult stories. I can see why some people want more sex and violence in their comic books, if that's what they want. But I don't understand why Captain America or characters like that are the vehicle for that kind of expression. And it shows such a lack of respect for ourselves as an industry.

JBC: *Do you think it's kind of tied in to indulgence and the harm perhaps that has done to the industry? It's losing sight? It's just basically masturbating?*

Darwyn: Mm-hm!

JBC: *That it's just indulging oneself, saying, "What about the Hulk running down the streets screaming that he's horny!"*

Darwyn: That's the problem. It's like... This kind of thing... this can really alienate me from a huge portion of my fan base saying this. I think what's happened, and what I would say the real problem with this industry is the fact that there are a bunch of adults who couldn't let go of it, and they've stolen it away from what is the ideal market. We've found a way to put it in stores that kids can't readily access. The older the reader has gotten, the bigger bang he needs for his buck. It's like, stealing a peek at Julie Newmar when you're 12 will do it for you. By the time you're 40, you need to see a full-blown gang-bang... [laughter] And I think that's what we're looking at. People who still want to get a jolt from characters they should have been prepared to leave behind or look back at with affection. I can pick up *Amazing [Spider-Man]* any month, and [J. Michael] Straczynski and [John] Romita [Jr.] do a f*cking bang-up job on that book. You know it, I can *read* this book. A big part of what's wrong here is something I've learned in advertising. When you're selling beer, you're not selling to people who drink beer; you're selling to people who are about to *start* drinking beer. You're bringing young people in, that's the objective. And I know it sounds sinister to quote such a strategy. But, for over 15 years now, we've completely ignored the idea of keeping young people coming into it.

JBC: *I think there's something, of all names I'm going to throw out here is Jim Shooter. He did have a lot of editorial lessons that are quite valid, and one of his favorite lines was that every book that comes out is the first book for somebody.*

Darwyn: Right.

JBC: *It's the first book that will either bring him in or repel him. And you obviously want him to come back and buy the second one. It's interesting. I personally, I quite agree with you in a lot of ways, though, I'm a victim of liking to be*

indulged as well as anybody, I guess, and sometimes laugh at certain aspects of it. They're not very important, but they're an indulgence. Brian Bendis, because of his skill as a writer, I tend to give him the benefit of the doubt until... the climax, whatever it is. And I wonder... He always leaves me curious as to where is this going. It doesn't feel as indulgent, for instance, as Millar.

Darwyn: I don't question their abilities, what I question is their decisions, and the subject matter that they're embracing and they want to pursue. I mean, we're looking at a lot of talented writers here. I'm just trying to figure out why this is the road they're taking, or why we're going this way with it.

JBC: So getting back to *The New Frontier*, is there an allusion there to J.F.K. in 1962?

Darwyn: That's basically where the title comes from. *The New Frontier* primarily looks at the period of time from when Barry Allen gets hit by lightning right up until Starro the Conqueror, at the beginning of the Justice League.

JBC: When was that, 1960 or '61?

Darwyn: 'Sixty-one.

JBC: So between '56 and '61.

Darwyn: Yeah. What I've done is, I went and constructed a DC publishing timeline for that period of time. And I thought, "Now, what if I treated this like real time, and these things actually happened on these dates?" Like in October 1957, four men's plane crashes, and they become the Challengers of the Unknown, which is the month the book rolled out. And looking at the timeline you see that Hal becomes Green Lantern right before the Justice League is born. So everything all kind of comes together in that period of time. And Martian Manhunter is on the scene... I sort of looked at it and I thought, "This is fascinating! We're going through the Red Scare and the race for space and Camelot and the New Frontier. It all comes up right on the verge of it. What an interesting period of time. And then I started looking at the characters, and they'd always seemed so one-dimensional to me. But, within the context of the time they were created, I could see other dimensions to them. And I started looking at it as... I don't know, yeah, this is going to be my *big, epic story*. This is going to be it. There's sort of this basic notion in the DCU that the Justice Society, they retired because of the witch hunting McCarthyism. So using that as sort of a springboard into my story, it's like the world doesn't have any heroes anymore, because they've sort of been legislated out of existence, other than a couple of them, like Superman and Wonder Woman. And who are going to be the heroes of tomorrow, because it's a different world now. And what I'm doing is I'm looking at the key characters that formed the original Justice League and how it is that they've become the people that they are, and become the heroes



that they ultimately become. It shows what they go through to sort of achieve the consciousness or the sense of purpose that's going to carry them through. And, of course, there's a huge, life-threatening menace and all of that. [laughs] Certainly this is not a talking heads book. At 380 pages, I've managed to find a way where always every scene in the book takes place in action.

JBC: What's the format? Is this a mini-series?

Darwyn: Six 64-page books.

JBC: And what's the scheduling?

Darwyn: At this point, we're still diddling around with that. It hasn't been nailed down. But I'd say we're looking around New Year's 2004. We're thinking of going out earlier, but it's up to them. We could roll it out in October or November, but, in order to do that, they'd have to commit to it being a bi-monthly. And they're hung up on it being monthly, which I think is ridiculous. But they're really hung up on that. So that might push it later so that there's more in the bag.

JBC: Now, pragmatically, as far as CBA is concerned, is it smarter to push this toward the release of that?

Darwyn: To hold it off?

JBC: Not for long. Right now we're scheduled for October.

Darwyn: My understanding, I guess, of the way these things work is that, if it was up to me, the ideal month for this to come out would be the month before or the month of *Previews* solicitation for the first one so it helps create awareness...? So, from my point of view, that would be ideal. Now, if

Above: For their December 2014 releases, DC had Darwyn produce 23 variant covers for that month's line-up, including this Justice League #37 piece featuring the classic JLA crew plus Cyborg. **Below:** In conjunction with the release of the DVD *New Frontier* animated movie, DC enlisted Darwyn to produce a 52-page one-shot, *Justice League: The New Frontier Special* [May '08], which included this playful table of contents page, as well as work by a bunch of his Canadian artist cohorts.





Above: Double-page spread from DC: The New Frontier #6 [Nov. '04]. **Below:** Darwyn's plus-size Wonder Woman. **Opposite page:** Top is New Frontier promotional art and bottom is Darwyn on his wedding day with the groom's entourage, in Las Vegas, on November 16, 2012, when he married Marsha Staggs. **Pages 36 & 37:** Multi-fold New Frontier brochure used to promote the series.



it was released in January, that's basically October.

JBC: Right. So I guess the timing is right.

Darwyn: Yeah, and if they decide to come out earlier, then it's there to alert the reader, to get them excited.

JBC: And the content mode for the cover... shouldn't the cover reflect...? [A detail of Darwyn's CBA V2 #3 cover can be seen on pgs. 4-5 in this ish of CBC. – Ye Ed.]

Darwyn: Well, Mark and I were talking about that. Now, I gotta admit, when I sat down to think about a CBA cover, I put my art director's hat on and put myself into your shoes and thought, "Now, what's going to move more copies for Jon? Essentially drawing a Catwoman or a drawing of a super-guy...?" [laughs] So, yeah, in terms of the relatively new project, it would be New Frontier. So in terms of the cover revolving around that, I think that's probably why I sent you the Wonder Woman. And, much to Mark's alarm, I told him, "Look, my Wonder Woman," I said, "We're talking Maggie. Love and Rockets' Maggie...? But today." The big one.

JBC: [Laughs] "Much to Mark's alarm!"

Darwyn: I said, "Dude, let's logic this out, which is what I'm trying to do with every one of these characters. This woman is a Greek goddess, okay? So come on! She's going to be big. She's an Amazon! She's going to be a steak-eating,

wine-chugging, life-lovin' woman. [Jon laughs] She'd be big, man! She'd be taller than Superman. She's an Amazon! And she'd have meat on her bones." He went, "Oh, my god." I said, "I think it's gonna kill people when they see her and Superman standing there and she's clearly three inches taller than he is." [laughter]

JBC: Now, that would be audacious. [laughs]

Darwyn: Yeah, I wonder if DC's going to freak out a bit about that one when it does come down, but Dan Didio's kind of championing the project now. I know he's given me carte blanche, at this point. And I'm hoping that they realize that creating a little controversy about a character like this might be good. If it outrages a few people, that might be the best thing for it.

JBC: Well, I think stirring up anything with Wonder Woman is always a good idea.

Darwyn: Well, they won't let me cut one of her tits off in true Amazon style. [laughter]

JBC: You know, I got your covers,* and I have to admit, the art director hat was on me, I went "Wow!" And then the marketing hat went on me and went, "Hmmm... I need breasts." [laughter]

Darwyn: Exactly!

JBC: So sorry about that slip into the muddier recesses.

Darwyn: Dude, look, you've got to sell magazines. And this is another thing that I don't think enough guys in our business pay attention to. Hey, Brubaker! Your job isn't just to f*cking grind out a *Catwoman* every month. It's to sell enough copies of it that you can sustain publication.

JBC: Right. Keep it alive, keep it viable.

Darwyn: Yeah. Your personal vision be damned. The book is now hovering at 22,000 copies. It's within 2,000 copies of being cancelled, technically.

JBC: Oof!

Darwyn: And he's driven it that far down in 12 months. And it's like there's no check and balance in there. Nobody's coming in and saying, "Hey, every month this book loses 1,500 readers for the last ten months. Maybe we should tweak the approach." [laughs] So, when I'm... as a past art director and agency guy, I'm thinking, when I'm doing a cover for a magazine, I'm thinking, "What's going to help him sell more magazines?" I don't know, it's just part and parcel of it.

JBC: Yeah. Well, do we still want to think on it...?

Darwyn: Maybe there's something...

JBC: I like the heroic. And I do like sex and sexiness on the cover, too. But I have to admit, personally, I'm harping on the heroic right now, because I

* I searched through my hard copy and electronic files and couldn't find anything resembling cover roughs from Darwyn, though interestingly did find a sketchbook mockup. — Y.E.



have major debates with a lot of my friends and acquaintances about the advent of the anti-hero in society these days. And I just had a very good interview with Alex Ross last week about that. Because he was really pulled into comics by the advent of the anti-hero, which was *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* and especially *Marvelman*. And, as wonderful as those works are, that I believe, they still are a part of bringing this great darkness.

Darwyn: Oh! The indulgence in those books, as brilliant as *Watchmen* is... Now, *Dark Knight Returns*, that's about as brilliant as I, the Jury, if you ask me. I mean, it's fun, but it's not a work of literature. It's a power fantasy, that's what it is.

JBC: I agree. It's the concept that I liked.

Darwyn: But what it cost the industry to have those books be here... It's too bad. And, y'know, it's funny, because I think Alex's artwork is a real hindrance to the growth of the business, but I've read enough interviews with the guy that I'm

fully... We're in perfect sync in terms of our perception of the industry and the way it's being handled.

JBC: He really is smart about... That's the thing that gets me is the intelligence behind the work. Because, if it was all flash, then I would have been thrilled with *Marvels* and then gone, "Okay, what's next?" You know, from somebody else.

Darwyn: Exactly.

JBC: But I have to admit... As much as... I didn't really fall in love with *Kingdom Come* so much, though there's some work... I like his Uncle Sam



and stuff like that. But there's just [an intelligence] behind the stuff that always... He just did this, I had Neal Adams pencil...

Darwyn: Oh yeah, I can't wait to see that... [JBC digresses to talk about CBA V2 #1 cover by Neal Adams and Alex Ross.] I just don't think that [Ross] should be doing comics. And not because he's not great. He's great! But I think it's pushing everything the wrong way.

JBC: But that's not his fault.

Darwyn: No. And that's the thing. This is not, like, "Oh, Alex Ross is the enemy." [laughs] It's not like that! I just think that I appreciate his philosophy a lot more than I do the techniques he's using. I guess that's the point of it... [Another digression by JBC, this one over Neal Adams.] He's Neal!... I'll tell you the ones I really love are some of the later *Brave and the Bolds* he did. The one with Sgt. Rock [#84, July '69] and the House of Mystery one [#93, Jan '71]...

JBC: "Red Water, Crimson Death"? Ohhh!

Darwyn: I still... I can pick those f*ckin' books up and I look at them and I get such a rush! There's also... it's not one of the more reprinted *Batman* ones, but "The Bruce Wayne Murder Case"! [*Batman* #245, Oct. '72] F*cking gorgeous work! Oh my god.

JBC: Killer!

Darwyn: I'd be terrified of meeting the guy. I've got this real fear of meeting my heroes, because I don't want it to go bad. I'd rather just keep in my bubble, the way it is. And my brother forced me to go over and meet him in San Diego. And yeah, we had a very nice chat. He let me come around and sit with him behind the table for about half-an-hour. And he was great. [laughs]... [JBC talks candidly about Adams.] We all want somebody to be one thing or the other, but that's never the case. People are both. And you look at a guy like Neal, you boil it down, he's one of the only guys... Whatever you want to say about him, maybe he [messed with] this guy or this guy's got a story to tell, he's probably one of only five guys in this f*cking business in, like, 60 years, who ever stood up on his hind legs for the rights of lesser men than himself and took all the sh*t for it. And, if you really want to boil it down, I mean, there's been [Bernie] Krigstein and him that actually made an attempt to better our lot. And what did they get for it? And you look at what Neal did for Bernie [Wrightson], Mike Kaluta, Alan Weiss, Rich Buckler... y'know, the



list goes on and on... Pat Broderick. All the young guys that he gave a table to, or inked their first job to help them get going... [Conversation turns to Alex Toth.] I've got originals of his all over the walls.

JBC: Wow, you do buy the stuff, huh?

Darwyn: Holy sh*t, man, I've got the entire "Seeley's Saucer," which was one of his *Jet Fighters* [#7, Mar. '53] stories for [Standard] in the '50s. I've got a spread out of *The Brave and the Bold* [#53, May '64]. I have a "Sierra Smith" here...

JBC: Somebody* gave me a Jack Kirby page from *Chamber of Darkness* [#4, Apr. '70], which is actually, historically, it's very important.

Darwyn: It's an awesome page, isn't it? That's the one with the two guys with the flashlight?

JBC: Yeah! And you can see all the erasing that took place behind it. I did an investigative story behind that story ["The Monster of Moraggia," *The Jack Kirby Collector* #13, Dec. '96], and it's one of the reasons that Kirby quit working with Stan. Because Stan was going nuts at that time, making people change sh*t all the time. I mean, he was doing it to everybody, he was doing it to Marie [Severin], doing it to Gil [Kane]. For some reason, there was a two-year period there where Stan was simply out of control, making people change things for the stupidest... Like that "Man-Thing" story [*Astonishing Tales* #12, June '72] that Neal did? Erasing the faces and putting Johnny Romita faces...? Are you telling me Johnny Romita can draw better, [more] beautiful women faces than Neal? I mean, I'd say it's equal, but...!

Darwyn: Dude! I couldn't fuckin'... I remember being mystified. I was like 15 when I got a hold of that book and, yeah, I was trying to figure out why they'd hacked it up with that stuff. I know, Romita's fine, but Jesus Christ!

JBC: But he don't jibe! [chuckles] Whether it's a Thor story or whatever, he don't jibe with Neal Adams!

Darwyn: By the way, just really quick: I should tell you, I can't thank you enough personally for all the great reading. [Jon chuckles] These fuckin' magazines... And I'm not alone! Most of the guys I know, it's like, we go into the store hoping there's more TwoMorrows stuff. 'Cause there's no comics for us to buy! [Jon chuckles] The magazines are very important

JBC: Thank you...

Darwyn: I want to pitch Quesada on an insane idea, which is I want to take all the

penciled pages of *Captain America* #103, re-ink them myself, and write a new story to it... It's one of the [issues] Syd Shores inked, so it just got demolished. But you guys have been running the pencils for the last two years a bit at a time [in *The Jack Kirby Collector*] and I was looking at it, going, "You know what? Just to ink this right and then write a whole new story over the top of it; it doesn't matter. Just make it look gorgeous, color it right, and just have a proper story written on it, and just release it as a new book." Have the money go to Jack's foundation or family, I don't care.

JBC: Cool! What was the reaction of *Ego* coming out? Did you get one?

Darwyn: I got a pretty good reaction, I guess. Considering it was my first thing and it came out with very little fanfare. But I know that there were a lot of guys whose work I liked and who I respected who had really great things to say about it, and that was really gratifying.

JBC: And what did that lead to?

Darwyn: It led to my believing that, "Yeah, maybe I can tell a story." I think what it did... It's not like the book went over the top in any way or created such a stir that it changed me radically in that regard, but I got the impression that okay, you know what? I got through this without it being a disaster. So maybe I can tell a story. And it gave me the confidence to start looking at other stories, and just... Which, to me, has become the most important part of this now. The artwork definitely is a tool. It is an instrument that you use to tell the story. So I guess that's what I got from *Ego*: the reaction. Some things are just incredibly gratifying. It's hard for me even to understand. But a guy will come up to me at a convention with a copy of it and he'll go on for five minutes about the book, and I'm just stunned.

JBC: What year did *Ego* come out?

Darwyn: I think it was 2000.

JBC: And what was your next project?

Darwyn: After *Ego*, I guess the next thing of any distinction was *Catwoman*.

JBC: The back-ups in *Detective Comics*?

Darwyn: Those were actually done after the first four *Catwomen*. There was a real lead time on the *Catwoman* project for a number of reasons. Basically, I had done that *Catwoman* work, I was finished 18 months before *Catwoman* was printed. The way that went, in San Diego one year, Mike Carlin said there was something they might want me to have look at,



and they introduced me to Ed Brubaker, who was going to be taking over writing *Catwoman*. He wanted to know if I would like to draw it. And I said I would commit to the first story arc if I got to do the covers and if I could redesign her. Because I was very concerned about a book that was just... it was a tit-fest. It was a very salacious kind of book. And I didn't know which way Ed was going to go with it at the time, so I wanted to know I could redesign it in a way that I thought would be positive. And DC said that that would be fine, so it was bombs away.

JBC: How would you characterize your redesign on her?

Darwyn: I would say... The way I try to explain it is it was an attempt to re-dignify the character. And it was an attempt to apply practicality. And, most importantly, looking at everything that had come before and seeing what was good and what was bad. And, to me, what was good was Julie Newmar and Michelle Pfeiffer. Those are catsuits on sexy women. So I came down to that. Ed's wife [Melanie Tomlin] had the idea of her wearing something that was more like a helmet with goggles. And I thought that was brilliant, a real novel touch. I got excited about that, and the idea was to take old Enemy Ace's helmet and add the cat ears to it. And, once that was in place... I can't thank her enough for that, because that was really all it needed to distinguish itself and not just be another black cat suit.

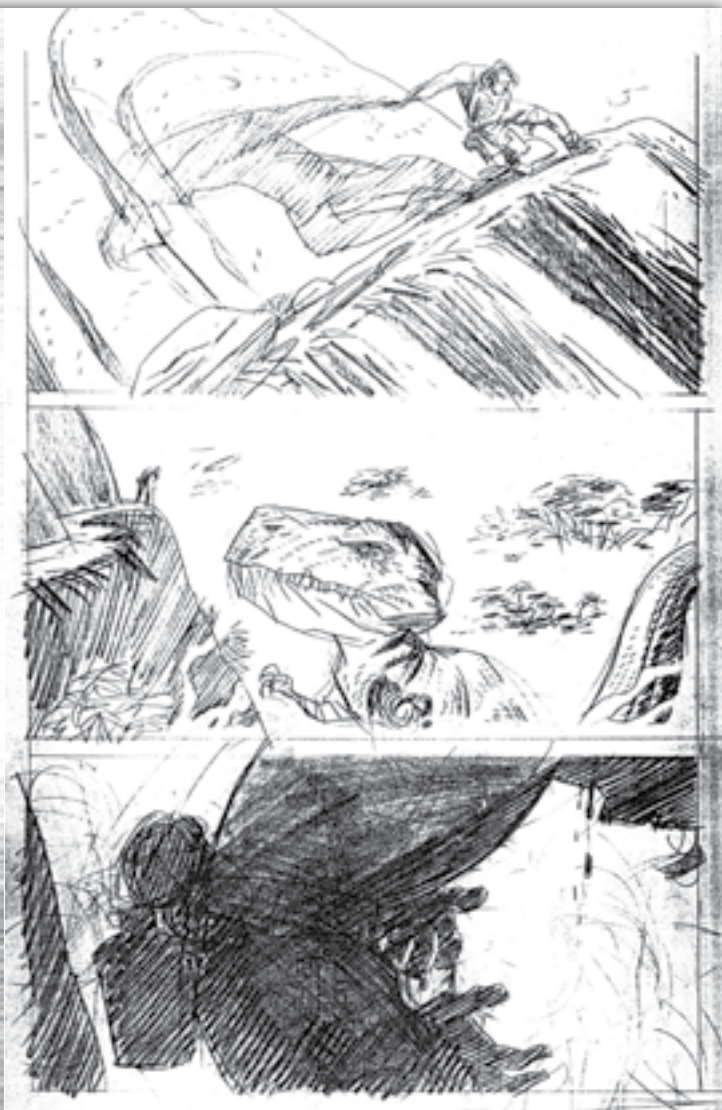
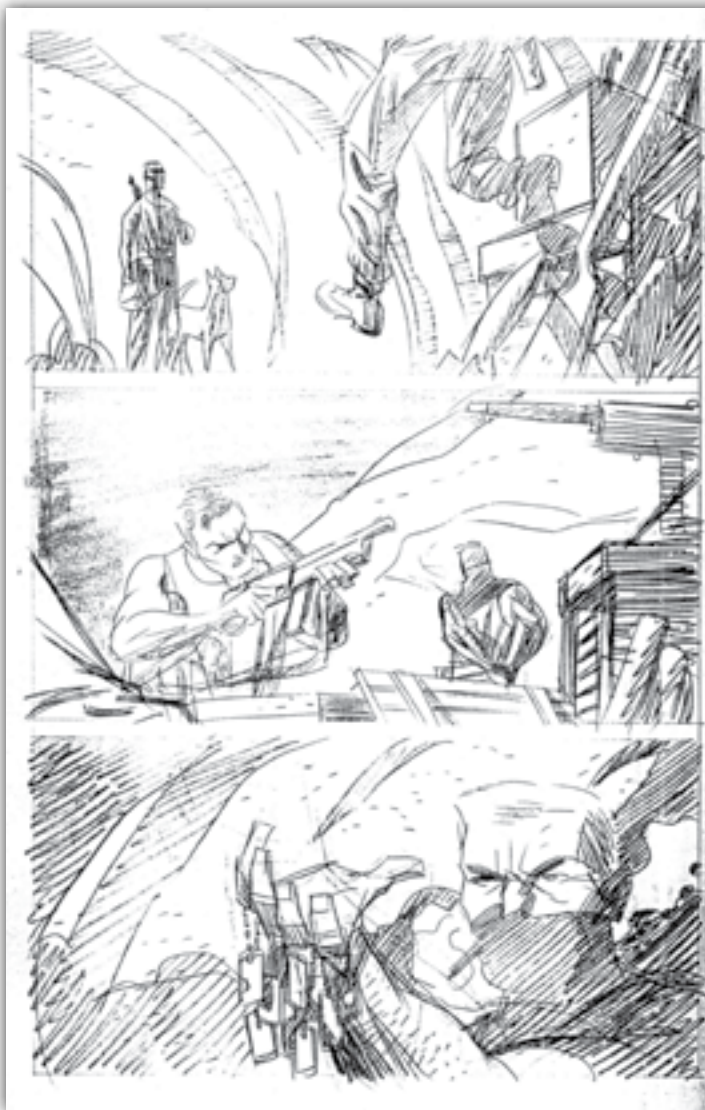
JBC: Do you take any criticism as being a clone of Bruce Timm?

Darwyn: I don't even know if it's a criticism, but there was definitely a desire on a lot of editors' parts to get me to fulfill, say, the Bruce role on projects early on.

JBC: Oh, as an asset.

Darwyn: And, y'know, frankly, it's fun work, right? I mean, I loved working on the shows, and I did a brief stint on... I've done some covers for the [Batman] *Adventures* comic and it's fun stuff to do. But I definitely had to make sure... I guess by the time *Catwoman* was done, it was important to me at that point that I made sure I was distinguishing myself as an individual artist. So I've shied away from doing much more of the *Adventures* stuff. But my biggest joke is, yeah, I'm the guy they call when Bruce says "no." [laughter] "We have a job that's perfect for you, Darwyn!" "Yeah, okay, Bruce must have said he's too busy." [laughter]

JBC: Have you focused on that distinc-



This spread: While helping to prepare his Comic Book Artist V2 #3 issue, Darwyn provided a bunch of Xeroxes of DC: The New Frontier in various stages of development, including these pencil pages from #1, these depicting Losers member Johnny Cloud's ultimate sacrifice.



tion? What makes you different?

Darwyn: From Bruce?

JBC: Mm-hm.

Darwyn: What makes me different from Bruce... I think that Bruce has a more... I think his stuff is more pumped-up. It's more super-heroic. I know that my natural sense of proportion is a little more realistic, or smaller, say. It's not quite on the same scale. And also, I dunno, I prefer things chunkier and dirtier.

JBC: Yeah, I'd say there's certainly an organic quality to your work that's appealing, that's different.

Darwyn: Well, I did a lot of life-drawing, as well, when I was young. And I try to use that gesture approach to drawing when I break down the pages and stuff. I think there are other differences, y'know, that are maybe linked more to the way we would tell a story. I mean, we can talk about, "Well, sh*t, Bruce does knuckles as a wavy aspect; I draw knuckles..." We can talk about that all day long, but those are all just technique things. I think we probably approach story a little differently. Bruce tends to like really classic approaches to story. I'm interested in deviating a little more, maybe. I'm a little more interested in non-linear things. Dream sequences or narrative that butts up against visuals that give it a completely different meaning, things like that.

JBC: What, as far as you know-and obviously this is more of

a question for Bruce himself, but there's Shane, there's you, there's people who... How does he feel about the people who have similar styles to him? In the industry, I mean.

[Off-the-record reply to this question.]

Darwyn: I think that the success he has had has led him to believe that he invented this style he works in or something, and most of the guys that are his age were all drawing from the same pool of influence here. And Bruce, geez, you didn't invent any of this. None of us did. And, yeah, it was my responsibility to draw as close to you as I could when I worked on the show. That's what an animation storyboard artist does. He's expected to achieve the model, or as close as he can get, in order to facilitate production. But I didn't learn how to draw then. And it wasn't like Bruce handed me my first Alex Toth comic. It was like... I was prepared to step into that style and familiar enough with the work that Bruce has used as inspiration that I could pull it together.

[A few more off-the-record comments.]

JBC: So you did Catwoman, then you did the "Catwoman" back-up?

Darwyn: Yeah. Well, what happened was, I did the four covers for Catwoman all at once, with the redesigned outfit, and I sent them in. And when they saw them, they got really

excited. And they decided that what they wanted to do was let the title die and then relaunch it. So they decided there'd be a three-month gap. And they figured, "Maybe we'll do some back-up stories in *Detective* to whet everybody's appetite." So that's when those got put together.

JBC: Were they released before Catwoman?

Darwyn: Yeah, they were. At the end of the first run of her series, she's presumed dead. And the back-up stories in *Detective* basically have the mayor of Gotham City hiring Slam Bradley to find her because he doesn't believe she's dead. And it's sort of like Slam following this mystery leads up to the relaunch of the title and puts it all together for new readers and stuff.

JBC: Then what did you do after the back-up?

Darwyn: By the time this is happening, Axel's finally lured me over to the Dark Side, I guess, and I've started doing some work for him. Axel and I first talked about working way back when he was at Vertigo. And it was actually a story that I laid out that I was going to do for him for one of the horror anthologies, but I just got too busy. I couldn't do it. And, ironically, Javier Pulido ended up doing it. But finally he's over at Marvel and he had *Tangled Web*. And he *really* wanted a Spider-Man story and I *really* didn't want to do the Spider-Man story. But I went back and looked at Spidey, what did I like about it? It was the Romita era, with the girls and the coffee shop and all that stuff.

JBC: The romance.

Darwyn: Yeah! So then I looked at the whole cartoony style, and I thought, "It kind of comes together." On a high concept level, it was *What If Archie Andrews was Spider-Man?* So again, I didn't really want to do a Spider-Man. So it was like, "Now, *this* I could really get into doing, but I doubt Marvel's gonna want it. But this is what I'll throw out there." And Axel said, "Go for it." [laughs] So the minute he was onboard, then, yeah, I dove right into it. And again, I didn't want to contradict continuity, and I couldn't, so I just made up two new girls for that big romance thing and, yeah, I'm really proud of that book.

JBC: What issue was that?

Darwyn: I think it was #11 of *Tangled Web*. Here's a comic that I think the older people who're into the style can enjoy, but they'd also be able to read it to their kids. So yeah, it was a lot of fun.

JBC: Did you feel any friction at all, jumping between the companies? They're obviously highly competitive at this moment. (Of course, they always are.)

Darwyn: Well, they're both sort of vying to get the majority of your attention or maybe even try to get you exclusively. And one thing I can't seem to communicate very clearly, or nobody seems to really want to accept this as a fact, the company is not really relevant to me. It's the editor. It's the person. I follow people, I don't follow companies. I mean, each company has characters that are interesting enough to do something with. So it comes down to people. So, if Axel went to Dark Horse tomorrow, you'd probably see me working for Dark Horse. And if Mark was to go to Marvel tomorrow, you'll probably see me doing more work for Marvel, because the relationship's what's important to me.

JBC: And obviously if you hook up with another person you hit it off with, right, you could work for them?



Darwyn: Exactly. The problem is, right now these two guys are jamming as much work as I can handle down my throat. [laughs]

JBC: I had noticed a continual presence. I guess next month you've got the Doop and Wolverine...?

Darwyn: Yeah, it's funny. Because I'm not connected to a monthly book, the work kind of comes out in fits and starts, it seems. But yeah, next month *Wolverine/Doop* comes out. And again, what a f*ckin' riot, what a lot of fun to do.

JBC: [Laughs] You know, it was a casual conversation. I'd been increasingly admiring your work, and it was a casual conversation with Mike Allred. I said, "Who would you like to see in the magazine?" And you were the first name that he immediately came out with. He didn't hesitate a second.

Darwyn: That's only because I had just left his place a few days ago. [laughter]

JBC: He's an advocate for you, anyway.

Darwyn: That guy is, like... There again, there's a guy who



just completely knocked me out. I mean, what a guy.

JBC: As a person?

Darwyn: Yes! Well, and as an artist. As a creative force, his whole vision. But as a person, yeah, what a guy. Laura and Mike are two of the nicest people I think I've ever met. Nothing but... It's all positive energy. Mike's always looking at what's good about the industry. He saved my ass on *Catwoman*.

JBC: What'd he do, ink?

Darwyn: Yeah, he inked my four.

JBC: I just picked up *X-Statix* yesterday, and I can't even remember what the guy's name is, but there's this fill-in issue by this new guy, this is great-

Darwyn: That's Philip Bond. That broke my heart, that I couldn't do that one. Because it's an Edie Sawyer story. And yeah, I almost cried when I found out that was happening and I couldn't do it. I'm kind of like... I'm the *X-Statix* waterboy, that's how I put it. [laughter] I warm the bench until one of them hurts themselves for a couple plays, then I get to run out there. [laughter]

JBC: The pinch-hitter. Am I blanking out on anything? What else have you worked on?

Darwyn: Well, let's see. Other than that, it's been little things I did for fun. Somebody would have a character or a thing that would come up that would catch my eye. I did an "Ant-Man" story.

JBC: Oh, that's right.

Darwyn: Just 'cause it was... I would never have done it, but when I looked at a recent *Avengers*, I saw that Ant-Man's costume was basically the Kirby

costume. It hadn't been screwed up to bad. So I thought, "Okay, this'll be fun." I've got a "Doctor Fate" coming out. It's in the JSA...

JBC: This whole anthology thing they're coming out with?

Darwyn: Yes, yes. And I did that with a young man named Steven Manale, up here in Toronto, a writer. He's never worked for DC or Marvel, but he's one of the biggest Doctor Fate fans I've ever met. And actually did it in-- It's got kind of a Howard Sherman-ey, Charles Burns-ey thing going. It's really very different.

JBC: Charles Burns-ey?

Darwyn: Yeah, well, I was trying to capture that Golden Age Doctor Fate look, which was like a really kind of creepy, almost [Al] Feldstein-ish kind of thing. So it's really quite different. I know it made an impression, because Chiarello, when he saw it he said, "I'll color this." So Mark's actually stepping down off his throne to color the thing. [laughter]

JBC: His annual coloring job.

Darwyn: I believe that comes out in July. DC's got a new book called *Bad Girls* that's launching, and I'm doing the covers for that. The other thing would be *Witchblade Animated*.

JBC: What are you doing with that?

Darwyn: Believe it or not, I get a call from Jim McLaughlin, who I've known. I've donated stuff to ACTOR and what have you, because he's editor-in-chief now at Top Cow. And he said, "Look, we're doing an animated version of the characters for a one-shot. Would you like to do it?" And I said, "Sorry, absolutely not." And he said, "Well, Paul Dini's writing it..." And again, I'm still, I really am trying to make sure I'm not seen as the guy they call when Bruce says no. So I said, "Let me think about it." And then I phoned them back and I said, "I tell you what. If it can be me, J. Bone, and David Bullock" -- who's a veteran of the show, as well, that's doing comic book work not -- "if the three of us can do it jam-style together and that's cool with you, then I'll do it." And they thought that was fine. So we're actually just

getting going on that now. I've been doing design work, Dave's breaking down the story. That comes out in August, I believe.

JBC: Are you in for the long haul? Are you in the business as long as you can get work?

Darwyn: Yeah. I think that the nature of how I'm in the business is probably going to change somewhat after *New Frontier*. I think I'm going to make the move into doing some of my own things at that point.

JBC: Creator-owned?

Darwyn: Yeah. I don't want to talk too much about that just yet, but it'll definitely be different.

JBC: Do you like where you are?

Darwyn: Oh, hey, y'know, I'm like the luckiest guy in the world. I think that every day. People who know me know I bitch about stuff all the time. It's like my nature. But, hey, when all is said and done, I'm just the luckiest guy in the world, man. I'm doing exactly what I should be doing right now. And once you've got that beat...

JBC: Obviously you worked in advertising, you worked in animation, you worked in some fields that pay pretty good. Is the pay okay in comics?

Darwyn: Well, you know... I think you have to have a strategy or a plan to make comics work for you. The pay isn't as good as, say, animation, so you've got to make decisions. Like if you want to make a certain income level, then you have to look at how many pages of production that means per day or whatever. I know for me what made it really feasible was the idea that I could move back home here. Because right now our dollar is weak compared

to yours. So if I make \$1,000 on a job, the American company pays me, I put it in the bank, it's \$1,500 Canadian. So I've been able to maintain my animation level in comics by moving home. Now, on a long-term level, I think if you have a strategy... And I don't know how well anybody can apply this, but what I'm trying to do is produce things that are going to be collected and that are going to have a shelf-life. And what I'm trying to do is create a situation where hopefully I've got a dozen books one day and there's royalties and this kind of thing, so when I'm older I've got that there.

And *New Frontier*, this was a huge part of the negotiation. I wanted to do is as a 380-page stand-alone book that came out, boom. And I was saying, "It's never been done, let's do it." And they can't afford to do it. It's just impossible for them to make their money back on a product like that. But when we got down to signing a deal, you only get the good royalties on the first printing of these things, so the six comics come out, I'll get good royalties. But if the thing's a hit, like *Watchmen* was -- and I'm not saying it's going to be a *Watchmen* [laughs], that's not what I'm saying at all. But if it's a perennial favorite and it's got that shelf life, I don't want to miss out on that. So we set up a deal where I'm going to see the same royalties on the collected versions of the thing as I do on the first print run. Which means for the rest of my life.

JBC: Hopefully?

Darwyn: Yeah! If this book is selling, that means I'm going to be seeing a return on it.

JBC: So your pragmatic approach to your career, it must be your age and experience that really, truly...

Darwyn: Running your own business, having your ass reamed by a couple sharks in advertising a few times, [chuckles] you learn your lessons. And yeah, it's age and experience. Yeah, if I'd gotten into this when I was 20, I would have gone through all the same nonsense and abuse everybody else did. No doubt.



john st.

Jon -
Just a quick thanks
for everything! Call u
when I see CBA next week -
best
Darwyn

My Buddy, Darwyn

[Editor's Note: In 2016, Michael Dooley of Print magazine asked me to write a tribute to the late Darwyn Cooke in 2016, just after he passed away and here's what I shared, which ironically starts with reference to another pal whose untimely demise was more recent and just as tragic.]

Ed Piskor, the *Hip Hop Family Tree* comic book artist phenom, shared the other day on Facebook: "Darwyn Cooke told me once, 'Ed, you can either make the best comics to your ability or you can be a good boy for your editors.'"

Despite being one of this age's great cartoonists, let's be honest: the late, great Darwyn Cooke, who made some of the best comics of our time, was rarely a good boy. However deceptively simple his artistry, he was an equally complex human being, one who would leave his primary publisher in a huff and go off to produce a series of graphic novels about a 1960s hard-boiled detective. And while I was never working in the DC editorial office and thus any target of his pique, I'll venture to suggest the comics world is much better off for that complexity.

But, whether or not anger and obstinance can be a factor in cutting short a life, such personal intricacies do come at a cost. It's hard to say. But I could always intimately relate to Darwyn, ever since our marathon interview session conducted for March 2004's *Comic Book Artist*. Beyond our

same last name and consistently misspelled first names, we shared similar experiences working in advertising and a love for Alex Toth and Jack Kirby. We developed a brotherly bond, and had a mutual empathy when recognizing perhaps in one another hurts that were still raw from long ago. We also had our own long-standing romances with cigarettes and alcohol. We were both wounded bad boys yet still somehow survived to do good work. And we both were passionate about comics.

Similarities end there. Darwyn was a brilliant cartoonist and expert storyteller who did great work. Me, I can't separate the man from the material. I love them equally. His smile was ready, but his eyes would betray a sadness. But we didn't have to talk about life's hurts because we shared the same antidote. We could escape and enthuse with one another about the connection that brought us together: a mutual appreciation for the wonder and awe of comic books.

Godspeed, brother. We'll talk Toth and Kirby again, I know. 🍁

This page: Items Darwyn shared with Ye Ed. during our time working on CBA V2 #3 together, in 2003. Below is Dar's delightfully crowded and playful cover for that issue.



Making Parker as Perfect as Possible

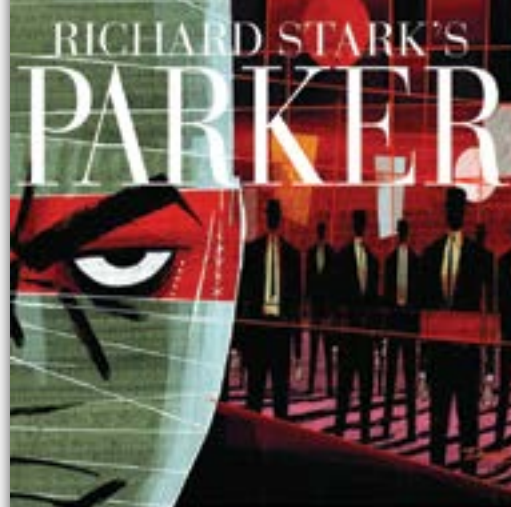
A conversation with Darwyn Cooke about the cartoonist's Donald Westlake adaptations

Conducted by TUCKER STONE

[Interviewer's intro: I found out that Darwyn Cooke knew my name back in 2008, when he showed up on this blog and left a comment supporting my decision to burn a giant X-Men Omnibus. It remains (and will remain) my favorite way I have ever met a comics creator. I had no idea how he found the blog, or whether he was joking or not about burning books – at the time, I remember being convinced it was some odd kind of joke. I had an email conversation a few days later, but even after I knew it was true, it still had that same feeling: that this couldn't be happening, and I wasn't allowed to be happy about it, because it was a lie, and the rug was gonna get pulled.

But it was true. And while we didn't speak very much, Darwyn and I did email each other a few times. We spoke mostly about a John Flynn movie called *Rolling Thunder* that I had fallen for pretty hard, and that eventually led to him asking me to interview him for a big article on his second Parker adaptation, *The Outfit*.

It was a lot of work, and I've never done anything quite like it since. I sat in my apartment in Brooklyn, talking to him on the phone for hours. He was funny, charming, and very smart: but most of all, he had a definite set of feelings and opinions about his work and the work of others, and it was exciting to hear that, to hear someone who wasn't concerned with pretending to like everything. I transcribed the conversation into an 15,000-word piece, found a home for it with Laura Hudson, who figured out a way to split it into separate parts so that whoever it was that owned Comics Alliance at that time would have to give me more money, and we put it out there. I then got a chance to meet Darwyn when he came to New York for a book signing, and he took me out to dinner with Marsha and all his friends. He treated me like I was Gay Talese and he was Sinatra, and while the evening's performative qualities took a wear on both of us as the night went on, it was one of the few times in comics where the show we were all playing at felt like one put on by wry grown-ups as opposed to the dress-up games that stunted children so frequently play now. I lost my temper on one of Darwyn's dipsh*t sycophants, Darwyn needled him alongside me to



defuse the tension, I went home embarrassed. We spoke a few more times, and that was it. I was proud of that piece of writing, and I think Darwyn was happy with how it turned out as well. We had another follow-up planned – the conversation we had on the phone that day went into many more subjects besides Parker – his feelings about Chris Ware, his thoughts on *Batwoman*, people he didn't like (people I didn't like), but it never came to pass. I never did the work, and that night had burned me out. I didn't want to be Gay Talese, and I wasn't a good enough writer anyway. Instead I kept the raw mp3 recordings and promised myself we'd do it later.

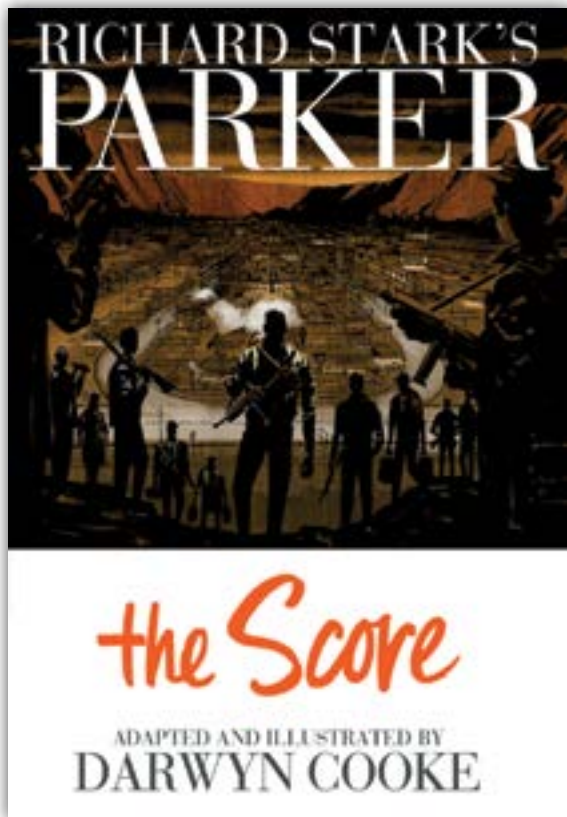
We didn't speak much, but when there was a minor fracas over some comments I made about why the piece went to Comics Alliance instead of its original home, he stood up for me immediately. We caught up briefly, and that was it. Years passed. We decided not to carry the *Watchmen* books at Bergen, and word got back to Darwyn and Marsha, and I was too lost in my own head to realize how that might make them feel, something I didn't even pick up on until a few years ago, when we saw each other again at TCAF. I'm ashamed that I never reached out to him before I sat down on some useless MoCCA panel to say we were going to do that to a pack of assholes who didn't care about comics in the first place. In that moment, Darwyn deserved to be treated with more respect than I gave him. He deserved a heads up, even if I disagreed with him, because he had disagreed with me multiple times before that and had addressed it with me immediately. I apologized a bunch at, and after, that TCAF show. But a late apology really isn't worth that much. It isn't worth anything at all.

I am not part of his circle of friends, I'm not a close associate. But I will say that I saw him with those people, and I know that he loved them dearly, and they loved him right back. He was a funny smartass, and I think those are the best kinds of people in the world, and I think there are not enough of them. I wish I had done a better job of being the kind of person to him that he was to me. I will never forget the time I

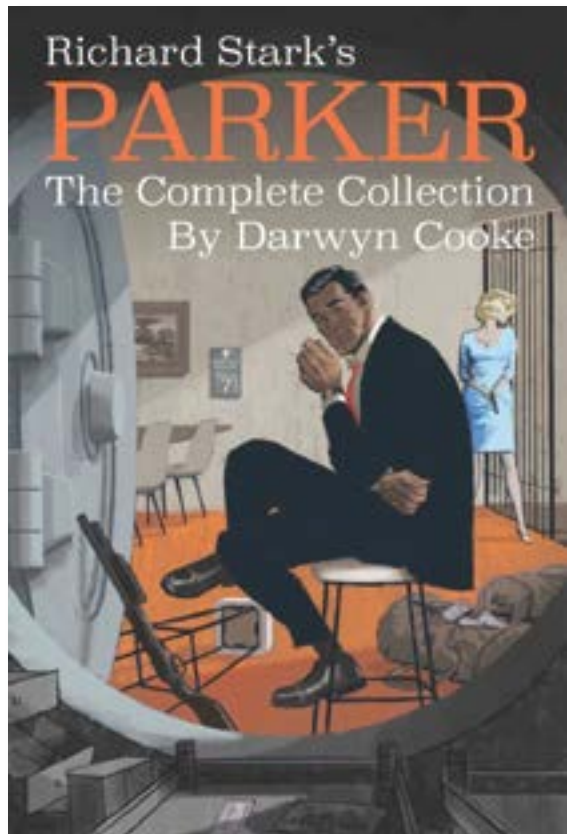
got to spend with him, and how much fun it all was.

Thanks, Darwyn. God bless you, too. – T.S.]





Above: Amazingly, Darwyn Cooke completed four adaptations of Donald Westlake's Parker novels over the course of four years, *The Score* ['12] being the third. **Below:** In 2023, IDW collected the run, which also included associated tales.



Tucker Stone: Let's start things off by talking about the look of the book. Are you sticking with the same watercolor and brush methods you were using for the color in *The Hunter*?

Darwyn Cooke: Yeah, I don't intend to try and reinvent the wheel. I want the look for these books to remain consistent across all four of them. That's why it took so long before I first set brush to paper, because I wanted it to be something that would last through all of them. You know how you can look at something like the first 20 issues of *Madman*, and you can see [Mike] Allred's evolution as an artist...? You can see when he gets hot for Dave Stevens, you can see when he's really grooving on [Alex] Toth or

[Dan] DeCarlo, and that's really cool, a fun journey. But the alternative could be something like Ho Che Anderson's *King*, which, while it's a f*cking great book, it took a long time for him to get it done. And there were so many long gaps in between that it ends resulting in a lot of stylistic disparity. I think that detracts from the book somewhat.

You have to be confident, but you have to be consistent.

And the Parker books aren't about me finding a new way to draw a f*cking revolver. It's about designing a visual shorthand that best tells this type of story.

Tucker: I'd like to talk about the point in *The Outfit* where you start to break it up into the different styles, to tell the various heist stories, like the crime magazine, the men-in-suits, and the – is it okay to call it the "art deco" part for the horse racing stuff...? I know you utilized a few different styles when you did *The Hunter*, but I felt like this was far more drastic.

Darwyn: Sure. It's the kind of approach that I never would have thought I could have applied. But I realized when I was going into that part of the book that the stuff outside of the Parker narrative, the parts with all

of the robberies – it was all the same thing, you know? Guys show up and steal sh*t. That was going to become incredibly repetitive, over the course of the four or five robberies. There's good things in them, but what made each one of them unique was Westlake's love of process. He was really into the way the rackets themselves worked. That's what was fascinating. He spends all that time, breaking down how the New York numbers racket actually worked. The robbery isn't really that important, because we already know how that works: the guys use cunning, daring, weapons, and psychology to steal a bunch of money. Where the money came from – that's way more interesting.

Tucker: *Chasing that dime, from the housewife all the way to the outfit's backroom.*

Darwyn: It's pure Westlake. That's how that chapter opens up: "You take one dime." Besides that, he explains the whole bookie system, how layoff bookies worked. Once it occurred to me that this, these explanations, were what was fascinating about the jobs, I started thinking that it would be nice to distinguish each job.

I hate to try and give people the impression that I pulled things out of thin air. Here goes: my favorite comic book of this century was probably *Ice Haven*. I've got a lot of admiration for the way that Daniel Clowes pulled that story together, using all those different approaches. Using that as a jumping off point, I thought about what I could do, stylistically, to approach each of the heists differently. And when I looked at the way Westlake broke down all of the scams, I started thinking about charts and numbers, graphics that put all of that narrative across, so that people could really understand it in simple terms.

At first I thought that I'd just tweak the style I was using. I'll do this one with an open line. I'll do this one in pencil. But, when I sat down and started screwing around, and I realized that it was still going to be the same shapes, it was still going to be the same thing. That's when I made the move to take things towards what you see there now. The inspiration behind the individual heists were sources and artists that were popular at the time... Noel Sickles spot illustrations for *Reader's Digest* for the illustrated text portion, and a take-off on UPA animation and the Hanna Barbera house style for the airport/suitcoat scam.

I knew I'd taken it as far as I could go when I got to the men in the suits, as drawn by Hanna-Barbera. It was like – wow, this is as far as you can push something like this.

Tucker: Oh yeah, the nose on that guy. Those noses come straight from the little guys who would show up as the comic foil against those fruit characters. Even the way they walk, with their little kneeless legs.

Darwyn: Hell, yeah. Hanna-Barbera is just a commercial distillation of the UPA style from the '50s. So it was stylistically appropriate for the book.

On top of that, it's probably the funniest and most absurd of the heists. The idea of these guys, with suits full of money and a big guy just getting on a plane with a gun... It just felt like, "What the hell. Go for it." And then, by the next one, I made a decision to pull right back, to get closer to the style I used for the book so that the reader doesn't get too uncomfortable.

Tucker: And lead them right back into the Parker narrative.

I do have to say, if I had a complaint, that last heist has my only one. That's the part of the book where Westlake has that line, "They believed in machine guns." I love that line.

Darwyn: Hey, man, a lot of good lines end up on the floor! For what it's worth, I spent hundreds of hours with this prose, and losing any of it can be really heartbreaking. It's very difficult in that aspect, because he didn't waste words. It's not like there's a lot to cut. But, when it's a scene involving physical action, you know, I have to step away from the narrative. I figure it's my job to visually translate the narrative, and let his dialogue shine through. But, in the scenes where I set up the narrative to carry a flashback or carry a sequence... there's not a lot of adaptation to be done. A little prudent editing, but his prose is perfect.

Tucker: What was it like performing plastic surgery on Parker visually so soon after coming up with him? Did Donald ever mention anybody besides Jack Palance, any ideas for what a post-chop Parker should look like?

Darwyn: Palance was Westlake's only visual reference. When I changed Parker, the idea was always to use plastic surgery as a metaphor for his emotional regression. He's meant to look like a rawer, more stripped down version of himself. There was no one specific in mind here – it was more an exercise in imagining what could be done to alter the face I'd already designed. I thought about the surgical procedure back in 1962. Chemical peeling and less nuanced procedures just took my imagination to a more cut up, severe looking version of the man from *The Hunter*. His jaw, and most importantly, his eyes, are the same. The rest is meant to reflect a man drained of things like remorse and compassion. A loveless, unadorned man.

Tucker: There are only a few more days before the world gets a taste of *The Outfit*. How are you handling things?

Darwyn: Man, I'm forcing myself to relax. It's always a weird week, that last week before a book drops. You've been done with it for a couple months, but you still don't know if it's any good or not yet.

Tucker: Who has seen it so far?

Darwyn: Some of the usual suspects. My editor, Scott Dunbier, as well as everyone at IDW. George Gustines at the *New York Times*, Geoff Boucher at the *L.A. Times*. Everybody in f*cking Britain.

Tucker: Yeah, I saw that reviews had started pumping out of there. I'm guessing that wasn't planned?

Darwyn: Nope! Over here, Diamond holds the actual release a week so that bookstores can have a fair shake, because bookstores get it a week later. That apparently didn't get through to Britain.

Tucker: Selling them early in Britain still has to be a better problem than what happened when *The Hunter* was released in the U.S.

Darwyn: Yeah, I know.

When *The Hunter* came out, it was right around Cinco De Mayo and they had one of those "heightened terrorist activity" alerts going on. So the container with the f*cking shipment of books was stuck in the port. They held it for "inspection," and we didn't have copies of the book for the first ten days. Meanwhile, there's the *New York Times* review sending people looking, and nobody could get a copy. Hopefully we'll have what we need this time.

Tucker: And after that, there was a pretty long period of time between when the first printing sold out and the second printing arrived.

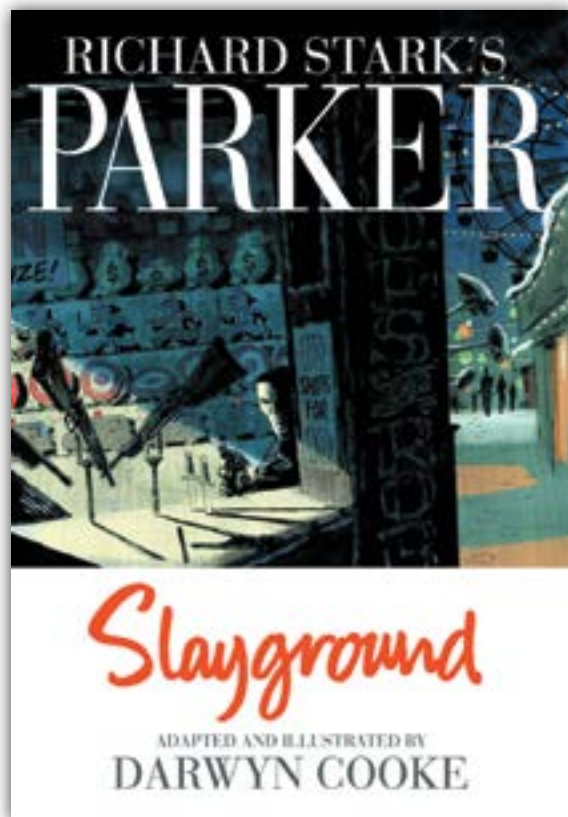
Darwyn: Yeah, nobody expected what happened there. Nobody did. We literally printed 40% of the pre-orders as overage, which is pretty unusual. Over at DC, they usually stick to a 10% overage. Ted [Adams, IDW's CEO] took a pretty courageous investment by overprinting the way he did, but they were gone within a week. Nobody expected that. We had to start all over again in Korea. That delay hurt, too.

Tucker: Do you know how much you overprinted this time?

Darwyn: Hopefully enough, right?

Tucker: Well, and you hope people know what they can sell this time.

Darwyn: Yeah, I don't know how they factor out their thresholds or what they expect. You just want to have copies in stock. At the same time, selling out in a quantity you didn't expect isn't a bad thing. [laughs] What's most import-



Above: The fourth and final volume of Cooke adaptations of Westlake's Parker books was *Slayground* ['13].

Parker

Below: In the later '00s, a series of prints were released by IDW to foster buzz for Darwyn's series of Parker adaptations, a task which the cartoonist surely relished.



RICHARD STARK PARKER DARWYN COOKE 2009 IDW PUBLISHING



Darwyn Cooke's *Parker: The Hunter*

Book Launch • 7pm Thursday August 6th

Signing between 8 and 9pm • The Frigate, 1581 Barrington Street



Above: Darwyn had a book launching soiree in 2009 at pal Calum Johnston's Strange Adventures comic book shop, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. **Below:** The character known simply as Parker (no first name is ever mentioned) was introduced in the 1962 paperback published by Pocket Books, *The Hunter*, by Donald E. Westlake (under a penname).

ant is that the sales are enough to make it viable to continue publishing them. It certainly isn't going to make me rich, but that's not what I care about. I just want it to be viable.

Tucker: You're not saying that the success of *The Outfit* determines whether or not IDW will publish a third and fourth book, are you?

Darwyn: Oh no, IDW is committed to all four. It was just a question of whether I was going to have to draw the f*cking Flash or something to make a living while I do them. [laughs] That's the rub. It's all good.

Tucker: You used the phrase, "We can only do four" when you spoke with Tom Spurgeon prior to the release of *The Hunter*. Does that mean you can only do four books because that's all you agreed to with the Westlake family or that you only want to do four?

Darwyn: I don't know that necessarily. One of the big things about this kind of work is not committing to too much. Right now, I feel like he's a character I could stick with for a long time. At the same time, I've got two more of these books to do. My plan is to finish the fourth one for my 50th birthday. At that point, I don't know what my head space will be like. If it's still chugging along, I'd certainly be amenable to doing more. Maybe I'll agree to do another two of them five years later. I'm not sure what it means yet, but I feel like there's a big shift going on as I come up on this milestone.

I'll have to wait and see how Parker fits into that. Maybe I'll do *The Mourner* in 2448 someday, I don't know. I can tell you that it's not wearing on me, working on this character. I can see him being a part of what I do for a long time. Maybe not constantly, but he's going to be there.

Tucker: What's the nature of your relationship with the Westlake family on the project? Do you deal with them at all, with the story or anything?

Darwyn: Well, no. They seemed very happy with the way *The Hunter* turned out. It was a really proud day for me when the *New York Times* covers it. See, in Donald's house, that was the paper. Shortly before he died, I had linked him to a bunch of the press that the project was getting, and he wrote me back and said, "That's nice. Tell me when the *New York Times* covers it." So the day they did cover it, his wife, Abby, emailed me to tell me how thrilled she was. That meant a hell of a lot.

They've been great about this one, too. They signed off on *The Outfit* with complete support. They haven't changed anything, but they don't really get involved on that level. I think we have their trust.

Tucker: How did it differ doing this one without Donald Westlake around? [Westlake passed away in December of 2008.]

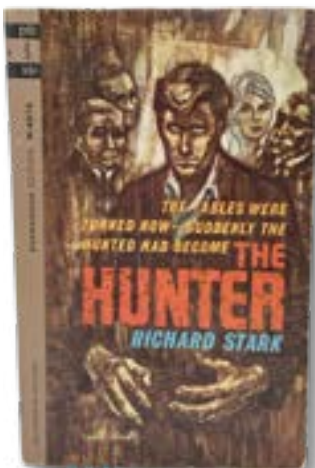
Darwyn: It sucked. I really relished the fellowship, that he was going to be able to guide and collaborate with me and help put it together on a certain level. It was a drag. There's certain things I came up against while working on *The Outfit*, things that were in the book that I definitely thought would benefit from a change. I wish he'd been around to discuss those. I think I could have convinced him, because the changes were based on character, on key things that were based on the characters. It would have been wonderful for him to have been able to provide the dialog for the new scenes. Who knows. I have no idea whether he would have liked *The Hunter* or hated it, right? If he'd been down with what was going on, than I would have loved to work with him on this one.

And now, every time I step away from the book, what I've got in front of me... I do my best, but I can't help but feel that there's a certain amount of subtraction. It's a little less pure, because I ended up with scenes that I wrote, and I'm writing *his* characters. I can't help but think they would have been better with his help.

Tucker: Did you talk with Donald about those feelings when you were working on *The Hunter*?

Darwyn: I didn't want to be a pest. He was an older guy, you know? I tried to think about it as if it were me, if there was some young guy making, God forbid, *New Frontier* motion comics or something, and he was a total fanboy... that would drive me up the wall. So I just said to him, "Look: as far as I'm concerned, if you're wondering, I think the books should take place in the period in which they're written. That's going to allow me to maintain as much of the prose as possible. The minute I update these stories for cell phones and alarm systems, all that kind of stuff, I'll have to re-write the entire books. I've got to maintain as much of the prose as possible. Maybe you can help me out when we get into a spot, to re-write and fill the gaps."

That seemed to make him happy. From that point on, his



tone seemed different, you know? He just seemed a lot more on board after that, he understood that I was working more as an editor than a writer, that I just wanted to bring this work to a new medium. It's not like I read the books and said "F*ck it! How about 20 killers and a big f*cking gun at the end of *The Hunter*? They're flying out with guns blazing!" Anybody can do that. "He needs a dog! He needs a girlfriend!"

Tucker: *Hey look, the Punisher showed up!*

Darwyn: Yeah! That's where adaptations fall apart. When they can't resist that kind of stuff. "Lee Marvin's gotta have a girl. Let's have him f*ck Angie Dickinson. We're paying her this much to be here." Sticking to what Donald did, as much as I can, that's the way I had to go. With *The Outfit*, there were things I played with, but when I look forward to *The Score*, it all seems pretty straight ahead. It's all in a neat little box, there's no real continuity to deal with.

Tucker: *The book doesn't have the words "f*cked up" in it, does it?*

Darwyn: No, that's added. I don't go overboard with it, but these books were all written at a time in an era when you just couldn't use that language. So, when I have a scene where I'm writing a little bit of dialogue, I'll usually throw one salty word in. There's maybe four of those spread amongst the books, just to give it a flavor. The complete absence of them seems somewhat suspect. Just using it here and there as an accent reminds the reader that, yeah, that's who these guys are.

Tucker: *These books do seem to be as close to a pure adaptation as the stories have ever had.*

Darwyn: Absolutely. There are things – well, spoilers ahoy! We're only doing four books, and Donald had 20 books to roll out that huge cast of characters. We only have the four. And in the next book, *The Score*, we have 12 guys to deal with.

So, I'm looking at that scene in *The Outfit*, where Parker stops at that hotel all the criminals used, so he can spread the word about hitting the outfit. It's a fine scene as it is, but you know what, I'd rather insinuate characters like Grofield into the book earlier, so I can familiarize readers with him, Dan



Wycza, as well. If I can introduce the characters to the readers now, and give them a sense of ownership, they can come into the third book and recognize a couple of the guys from the last book. And, because there's only four books, there's a couple of spots in *The Outfit*'s original text where the specific characters Donald used weren't really important, so why not put a couple of guys in the comic that will be showing up in the next one?

Tucker: *I just read The Handle, the island casino one, and I really got into Grofield, almost as much as Parker. So turning that page in your Outfit, and seeing that character washing off the sign, bullsh*tting around at his goofy theater – I loved that guy, I felt like you really nailed him.*

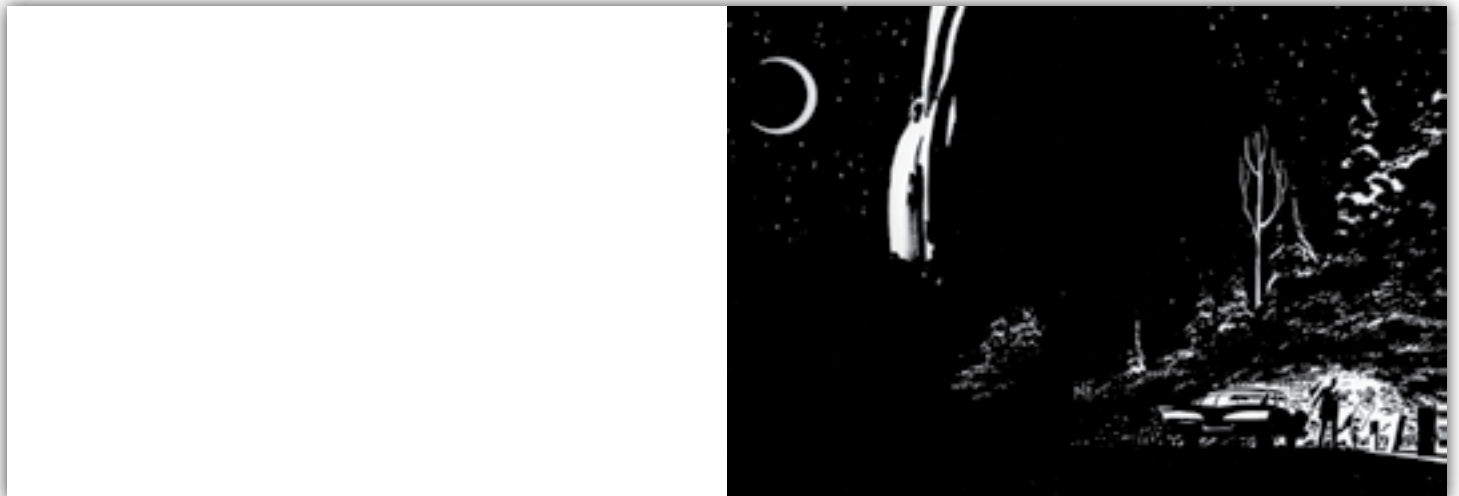
Darwyn: Yeah, I didn't catch him the way I wanted too. I wanted Burt Lancaster in *Vera Cruz*. I got Burt Lancaster in *From Here To Eternity*. He's not swarthy looking enough. I want Grofield just a tad swarthier, not quite as clean cut as he ended up. That was just a first thought. In the next book, I'll try to do better by him.

Tucker: *I'm curious about Grofield – you changed his name just a little bit? You took the "i" out?*

Darwyn: You know what, I'll just cop to it right now. That was a complete mistake on my part! Just a blunder, a total blunder. And it's funny, because there's a website, The Violent World of Parker, and Trent gave it a quick review. He nails the reason for it, he said, "[Cooke] changed Grofield to Grofeld. I can't imagine why, but I don't think it will bother many people because that's how most people say it anyway." And that's exactly what it was! I'm just hand-lettering onto my page, and in my head, it's Grofeld. Nobody caught it. So, yeah, it was just a complete screw up, and I'll just cop to it now rather than come up with an elaborate lie.

Tucker: *When did you actually catch it?*

Darwyn: When Trent pointed it out. [Tucker laughs] See, because to me, it just looked right! [laughs] On some sort of spastic level, I'm dyslexically lettering it over and over again, so it just looked right over and over again. I guess now the big question is whether it becomes Grofield or stays as Grofeld in the next book.





Tucker: What went into the changes you made with Bett Harrow's appearance?

Darwyn: I wanted to leave it open. It's part of this game I'm playing... Is the casual reader going to be worried about how important she's going to be? Is it because some of us who know the book and know the way these things are put together that we think "she's there for a reason"? I don't really know. I just wanted to leave it open, I guess. And I didn't like the fact that *The Outfit* ended with Parker and Handy acting like Archie and

Reggie. It's basically them going "Off to another adventure. Together!"

Tucker: "Handy, you're my best friend."

Darwyn: I'll tell you one thing: I didn't want to end the story with him going back to Bett, because that really implies something. That was important to me, so that's why I decided to go with that scene in Lake Tahoe for the end. We infer that he's going back to Miami, but I don't really want to imply that he's in a big hurry to get back to Bett. There could be a room full of women right down that road. Maybe he'll hang there for a bit. Parker needs to be alone.

I don't know how far we should go into this, but – should the story really close the way that it does? With Parker leaving Quill alive? A guy who works for the bosses, and now he's the only one who knows what Parker looks like? Would Parker let that guy live? I don't think so. That would have been the one thing where I would've been brave enough to

say something to Donald. There's nothing about Parker that explains that decision. In *The Jugger*, he goes up to kill an old man who is a friend of his. It's hard for me to imagine a guy like that letting somebody like Quill live. It's so wildly out of character.

Tucker: And Quill doesn't show up again later on in the series, he never uses the information he has against Parker in later books.

Darwyn: No. If he had, I would've had to leave it alone.

Tucker: So you're just tying off a loose end. Same thing Parker would do... How long does it take to put these books together? What's your process like?

Darwyn: Well, the process, the part where I'm actually producing the books is shorter than most people would think. But a hell of a lot of time goes into figuring out what I'm going to do before I get started with the actual drawing. Like, killing that scene in *The Outfit*, where Parker and Handy buy a getaway car from the hillbilly – I didn't just decide "Okay, strike that scene." There was a week of back and forth on that, character design, exploring the scene because it's got a lot of possibilities. Page count wise, is it less important than something else? Yes, it is. It still takes time to make that choice. Figuring out the heist section, things like that, it can all take an inordinate amount of time.

But when I'm more or less fully prepared, I sit down and I do what I'm calling "live off the floor." That's penciling straight ahead, right onto the boards, lettering it and inking it, no white-out. If there's a problem with something, I black it in. I'm trying my hardest to execute the artwork the same way Westlake made the scenes work. He sat down every day until it was time to finish it. And then the next day, he'd sit down and do it again. He didn't work off of an outline.

Tucker: Yeah, I've read enough of those books now to grasp how crazy that is. Making it up as he went along – that's just insane to me, it's amazing.

Darwyn: Yeah! It's stupefying. To a great degree, I'm trying to replicate that method myself, to leave it up to me and the brush. It leads to good and bad things, that method of leaving things as they stand. Anyway, that's the long set-up. The answer is – three-and-a-half, four months of actual work. Before that, there's six months where I'm doing thumbnails and character designs, re-reading the book, and watching Robert Duvall [in *The Outfit*].

Tucker: Of course. You know, I think that's why I didn't think too much about the loss of that hillbilly car scene. It's one of the parts of the Duvall *Outfit* that's they completely nailed. It's so perfect.

Darwyn: [Laughs] Yeah, it was definitely gone only because of length. Blending in the "Getaway Face" stuff, something had to go. And while that sequence is one of the better written chapters, it's one of the least necessary. The guy gets a car. There's not much else about the character that we aren't going to see in other spots.

Tucker: How did you feel about *The Outfit* movie? I felt like it just wasn't "my" Parker.

Darwyn: I never pictured Parker bald, with a belly, and wearing a wife-beater.

Tucker: Or sticking with a girl after she betrays him.

Darwyn: Well, Westlake really enjoyed that movie.

Tucker: Oh, it's a cool movie, don't get me wrong. All those John Flynn movies from that period are. I don't know why they're all unavailable, but those movies are all awesome. That period of time where he made *The Outfit*, *Rolling Thunder*, and *Defiance* – the guy couldn't miss.

Darwyn: It's funny, because all the guys I know that are say, compadres, we're all within about five years of each other's ages, and there's a dense band of us. And we all grew up in that era of cinema. It was awesome. To be 13 or 14, nihilistic, to have fascist responses to violent action – that's fantastic! That was a great time to be a young guy going to see action movies. They weren't cluttered up with a lot of regret, or emotion.

Above: Darwyn's portrait of author Donald E. Westlake, who died before the release of Dar's adaptation of *The Hunter*. **Previous page:** At top is the first Parker illustration Darwyn produced. Note the inscription dedicated to Scott Dunbier, Dar's close buddy and his IDW editor. At bottom is a spread from the Parker: A Portfolio of Words & Pictures by Richard Stark and Darwyn Cooke.

Next three pages: Spreads from the second Words & Pictures portfolio – both portfolios were given to retailers as incentives. **Below:** Promotional poster by Dar hyping the second of his Parker books.



Tucker: Oh yeah, and they aren't catalogs. That's one of the most noticeable thing to me when I watch the action movies of today. John Flynn movies were never about the clothes they wear, they're not about being attractive, nobody is styling their hair before they get down to business. It's the way Westlake described Parker to you, that they're "carpenters." They go out to perform jobs.

Darwyn: Exactly. Warren Oates in *Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia*. [laughs] The kind of guy who actually goes into a department store and actually thinks that white suit, and those white shoes – that those are the sh*t.

Tucker: Those sunglasses too! [Darwyn laughs] How about Warren Oates in *Cockfighter*, going up against Harry Dean Stanton? Nobody is going to make a movie like that anymore, nobody is going to play that kind of story seriously. It's all irony and satire, there's no willingness to commit to the idea of taking cockfighters seriously, telling stories about guys who care only about using birds to settle scores.

Darwyn: Yeah, I have hope for that direct-to-DVD market one day, for it to be the place where that happens again. Because you know, there was some great shit, movies like *Pocket Money*, with Lee Marvin and Paul Newman, or *Emperor of the North*. That sh*t would never get made today. For good reason, maybe. But I've always enjoyed these things, where you see people trying to build stuff, really reaching for it.

Tucker: There's a purity of creation to those movies. Sam Peckinpah was able to get away with it after a while, when people got scared of him. He was a lunatic cokehead, but he had that kind of commitment to his own vision, the power to force his own ideas out there. That kind of power doesn't seem to exist anymore.

Darwyn: I don't know how true that is. I think there's a half-life to the story, that the truth is classified for a certain amount of time. Every now and then, they'll let it sneak out. Did you read Jane Hamsher's book about the making of *Natural Born Killers*?

Tucker: The book about working with Oliver Stone, where they get really high and head out to find locations?

Darwyn: Yeah, it's the middle of the night, they're in a limousine, they eat a bunch of mushrooms and go to a Kentucky Fried Chicken. I don't know if it's really that different anymore. I think everybody just keeps their mouth shut about it until you start to falter. You know how society is, it's like Stephen King's *Long Walk*, where they wait until they see the guy stumble a bit, slow down... and then everybody pounces. [laughs] So who knows. One day Oliver Stone will be on CNN, defending himself against a whole rash of crazy sh*t.

Tucker: What's the promotional cycle that you have to go through for something like *The Outfit*? How would you say it differs from what you had to do for *The Hunter*? It's clear from your conversation with Tom Spurgeon that you were suspicious of whether or not the book was going to find an audience, whether or not people were going to take a chance on a \$24.99 hardcover, that kind of thing.

Darwyn: Yeah, you certainly go into it with your convictions and your instincts, right? I didn't want to break out of what we refer to as the mainstream just with a creator-owned book that might have done pretty well, but wouldn't have been financially viable. I've got a deliberate way I'm going through this, and I knew in my gut, that if there's one thing that I love, that's really f*cking great, that really turns me on and probably hit the strata of readers that wouldn't maybe pick up one of my comics necessarily, the Parker stuff was the thing. It seemed to me like a perfect fit, because you're taking a readership – a very committed readership – from an author and a genre, and you're bringing them into what you do. And I thought, sh*t man. I think this can work! But you never know, right? It's all subjective. It's all in your own head. So yeah, there's a certain amount of concern about it.

As far as promoting it, IDW did a hell of a job with *The Hunter*, in terms of getting it out there, and making sure it had that profile, and enticing retailers. I think they did an amazing job. And – I think the notice for the most part – other than the Spurgeon interview, and a couple other little things... I'm not on the net chatting a lot. I'm an old man, so I'm going to use an old phrase here that I learned from Warren Ellis one time on a gramophone. Signal To Noise. There's just so much stuff out there that I've sort of... I've learned from a few key people, and a lot of good friends that sometimes, it's better not to be talking all the time. That way, when you do, people might actually want to listen to you.

Tucker: Don't flood the sites with repetitive boilerplate interviews, boilerplate press releases.





COOKE ON THE ART OF CRIME

I HAD BEEN A LONGTIME READER OF CRIME FICTION BY THE TIME I DISCOVERED PARKER. I REMEMBER THE THRILL OF REALIZING THAT THIS GENRE I LOVED HAD FINALLY GIVEN ME A CHARACTER TO RELATE TO. PARKER STANDS DIRECTLY IN BETWEEN THE IRRATIONAL PSYCHOSIS OF THOMPSON AND THE FLORID ROMANTICISM OF CHANDLER. PARKER IS THE RATIONAL MAN TAKEN TO THE EXTREME CONCLUSION. IF PRAGMATISM CAN BE CONSIDERED AN ART FORM, PARKER IS THE GRAND MASTER.

Darwyn: That's sort of where a lot of the frustration came from, Tucker. Site A would see that Site B got ten questions. So the kneejerk was to email me to get an interview, and then they'd send me back the same ten questions. And you know, it's like – it's already out there. Just go cut and paste the other one. I much prefer to have a more involved discussion about it. People who want to look like pretty pictures, there's pretty pictures to go along with the article. There's always a soundbite to take and put on YouTube and make my life a living hell for ten days.

Tucker: Yeah. [laughter]

Darwyn: Yeah. But at least it's within the context of a larger piece.

Tucker: I know when IDW sent out those advance hardcover review copies of *The Hunter*, that was almost as big a thing amongst the people who got those as it was to actually read the book. Nobody does that sort of thing. You might get a copy from DC Comics of something that shows up in a manila folder and is all beat up, there's those advance black-&-white proofs, but for something that unique to show up – that was pretty audacious.

Darwyn: Yeah, again... This is why I've never been a company guy. I'm a person guy. And that person is [IDW editor] Scott Dunbier. He was able to look at what I was doing, and see everything I'm vibing, and I'm saying, "Okay, I want this gauge paper, I want this color, I want it to look like a book, I want the kid in Barnes and Noble to open the book and put it in the mystery section, because that's where it looks like it belongs." And I think Scott picked up on that, and he's thinking that if you're reading it like a book, we should do an advance review copy, because that's an old school book thing. So... fantastic.

In many, many ways, Scott is responsible for all that attention we got. The idea of doing a press conference in San Diego to announce *The Hunter*, on Wednesday, as soon as it opens – nobody does that! And so the press were able to go to a conference, for them. And, of course, that motivates them to want to get it up on the site, right away. And we sort of stole the news cycle for the show, by getting out in front of it. With something that's really easy to do, but nobody thinks to do it. I put all the energy into the book, and he comes up with all these great ideas on how to push it.

Tucker: It's funny, because one of the things that I hear from a lot of cartoonists now is that they refer to their publishers merely as printers. They're not publishers. The stuff you're describing – that's what the publisher should be doing, right?

Darwyn: That's an oversimplification, but... to a certain degree, there's a bit of truth to that. But a certain type of publisher attracts a certain type of editor.

Tucker: Right.

Darwyn: That just hasn't been the case for me at IDW. Ted's got a vision and an approach to the way he does things. Conversely, he's got an ability to let Scott do his thing. But definitely, I know from a creator's standpoint, their editor is their number one guy. He's their guy.

Tucker: You were already talking about merging the "Getaway Face" story into one chapter of *The Outfit* months before *The Hunter* was even released. Was that something you had realized while working on *The Hunter*? As soon as you were finished?

Darwyn: No, the original idea was just to do the first four books, because there is a continuity to them. By *The Mourner*, the continuity is pretty much done, too. You can pick up any of the books after those four and more or less read them on their own. There are neat ways they connect though, like the Grofield book that comes out of *Slayground*, where they share the first chapter, but then it goes off and takes on a completely different dimension. They locked things together, but never in a way that would keep you from enjoying them on their own.

So the idea was to do the first four. But when you think about it, you think, "Sh*t man, that would kind of be a shame! Because there are stronger, more definitive books. What's the point of the first four?" To get a clear picture of the character. So what's necessary to do that? One of the reasons I can be considered difficult to work with is that I think it's a fluid situation right up until they switch on the printing press. Which is to say, better ideas come along and take time to incorporate. Nothing's necessarily carved in stone. We said we'd do the first four, but let's take a step back here. So then there was a gentle period over a few months, talking people through that idea and why it made more sense. *The Hunter* came out, it did well, and by then everybody felt like, "Whatever you think is best."

Tucker: When you say "talking to people," do you mean IDW? The Westlakes?

Darwyn: Yeah. Talking to Scott, this gets through to Abby and Paul [Westlake], and that's probably done by Susanna over at Literary Management. But, again, I think I was blessed in this regard, I feel real lucky. Donald was supportive of this, and everybody was aware of that. It wasn't broke, it didn't need fixing, so they just let it go. Hell, even at this point, I'm wondering: should I do *Slayground* in 24 pages? Like a bullet to the head? Do *Butcher's Moon* as the last one?

Tucker: Wow.

Darwyn: *Butcher's Moon* is the closest to literature. I definitely see why he couldn't write another one for a long time after it. It's sublime. *Slayground*, although it is tied for my favorite because of its virtuoso nature, the premise behind it... *Butcher's Moon* completes the story started in *Slayground*. I think it picks up a plot point from *Slayground* and finishes up the initial run. And I'm wondering if I shouldn't finish up on the last book. Because *Slayground* is one of those stories that could be done in a short number of pages and be incredibly effective. There's just not much... you know the premise, right?

Tucker: *Trapped in the carnival, doesn't have a lot of ammo, right?*

Darwyn: Well, it's incredibly involved. By this point in the series, you have to wonder if Westlake's a bit of a sadist, right? With what he's put Parker through.

Tucker: Oh yeah, The Sour Lemon Score is... Jesus.

Darwyn: Exactly.

Tucker: *When he's sitting by the pool, and the guy across from him gets blown away. The rape. It's so over the top.*

Darwyn: *Deadly Edge* is over the top too. That's the one right before *Slayground*. I think they reflect the times a bit, those Peckinpah years. Tom Jane, barking at the moon.

Tucker: Well, if you're going to tighten something up, it's clear that the thing Westlake liked to tighten up in those books was the violence. He'd lay out everything that goes into a job; you'd see the crew walking into those rooms, catch them picking up those guns. The one that I've read a few times now that sticks out is *The Seventh*, the way they spend the entire book building up to the one confrontation, when Parker is finally going to catch up with the impotent ex-boyfriend. All the stuff that goes into it – the kid ruining the heist, the entire gang turning on each other and dying, and then he finally finds the guy. Chases him up flights of stairs, dodging those sheets of glass, and then Parker's standing there, and the guy's crying, and... one sentence. Parker executes him. There's no catchphrase, there's no jokes. It's just a task to be carried out.

Darwyn: Yeah, there were a couple of critics who referred to *The Hunter* as "bloodless." That the violence is antiseptic. I don't think those people have read the book. It's a reflection of the character, of Westlake, that they never dwell on this stuff. Even at the end of *The Outfit*, I make a lot more out of the death than there is in the book. In the book, Parker pulls the trigger, the guy clutches his chest, and he slumps over. Those moments of violence are non-events in the book. They're simply there to punctuate or catalyze another set of hurdles. That really works in the books, but to a certain degree in the graphic novels, you want to feel these guys get shot. It's why I have him strangle Mal Resnick in nine panels, blocked off in a wide shot. It's because those scenes are completely emotionally dislocated in the books. They never have anything to do with emotion. There's no passion behind them, it's ruthlessness and efficiency. I didn't want to get sexy with it. [laughs]

Tucker: *The one thing that gets repeated throughout the books, besides structural stuff, is that he consistently mentions the dangers of enjoying that kind of violence. Most of the time when it comes up, it's about torture, but he's regularly presented as being someone who has no craving for violence. It's not why he's in this business.*

Darwyn: Again, this is the benefit of having a few exchanges with Donald. One of his concerns was that I understood that Parker doesn't operate out of anger. He never commits a violent act out of anger. He does it because it's the expedient thing to do. It's the practical thing, a survival mechanism. *The Hunter* is the place where he expels all of that violent energy, and from there forward, you're watching an emotionally dislocated guy making decisions based on his survival and what's best for him. There's no point in glorifying the violence, because it isn't the point. He's kind of like Howard Roark, another character that I dig. Parker's just f*cking oblivious to what



COOKE ON DESIGNING PARKER

ONE OF THE MORE UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE PARKER PROJECT WAS THAT I HAD TO DESIGN HIM TWICE. AFTER HIS PLASTIC SURGERY, I WANTED PARKER TO LOOK LIKE A MORE SEVERE VERSION OF HIS FORMER SELF. I THOUGHT ABOUT CHEMICAL PEELING AND MEDICAL PROCEDURE IN THE SIXTIES. I WANTED HIM TO LOOK CUT UP AND PULLED TIGHT ACROSS HIS BONY SKULL. HE ALSO UNDERWENT A BRUTAL HAIRCUT, TO EMPHASIZE THIS BLUNTNESS OF CHARACTER. A LOVELESS, UNADORNED MAN.



Above: Evocative full page, the opening of Book Two, in *The Hunter*.

Below: Single illustration full page from *The Outfit*, where Parker's surgically altered face is revealed.

you're feeling. He doesn't think "bad" or "good" of you. He doesn't think of you at all.

Tucker: I don't remember which book it is, but there's one with a girl who can't get over the fact that he constantly views her with no emotional reaction. She needles him, he doesn't react. He doesn't love her, hate her, anything. He's completely numb to her.

Darwyn: I think that's a big part of why he's such a compelling character. Any reader can template anything they want onto him. Even a contemporary reader, even though there's a lot of misogyny being templated on him right now. And that's valid. They don't shy away from that in the books. But he remains a compelling character, even in different social times.

Tucker: It's something that comes

up a lot. That's a consistent fascination, it reminds me of the way you described young men having fascist tendencies. Those kind of characters, masculine characters that don't permit any type of emotional reaction to interfere continue to engage audiences. Characters that aren't faking the disconnect, because they're fictional, so they don't have to fake it. People in charge of not having feelings. They don't get upset, or lustful, or angry – emotional states don't dictate their behavior. The guys you see in every Michael Mann movie ever made.

Darwyn: There you go, that flips my switch. The movie that changed the way I see all this shit was *Thief*. I saw *Thief* in the theater when I was very young, and it just blew my f*cking head apart. That Tangerine Dream music, the cinematography, the whole approach to it. Some of the dialogue feels a little purple now, like when you're re-reading *Dark Knight Returns*. But man, that f*cking movie re-energized my entire interest in this stuff.

Tucker: The heist in that is your classic Westlake style heist. Ripped off from reality, copied as realistically as possible. Mann apparently hired real safecrackers to program that scene, the one where they burn through the vault with that... I can't remember what you call it. Some kind of carbon fiber, maybe...?

Darwyn: Yeah, the burning bar. It's an arc-welding stick, but it's gigantic. But, man, that guy. He's used that like three times. I loved his show *Crime Story*. I loved it.

Tucker: Even in things like *Last of the Mohicans* or *Jericho Mile*, when Mann's out of his comfort zone, he always returns to those same Stark-like characters. Tasks are treated as craft, everything is technical. His guys always sacrifice emotional life in the service of whatever it is they do.

Darwyn: Well, these characters make decisions in a fair exchange within themselves. It's saying, "I'm not a good enough person to be true to those things." So they'll be true to the one thing, they find that one thing, whether it's sheriff, ordained minister, or safecracker. I know that, for myself, a huge part of what fascinates and attracts me to these books is the notion of a guy who has figured out how to operate parallel to society. Without having to take a lot of the sh*t that comes upon him. To me, that was a huge part of the attraction. I love the notion of Parker, this guy who is smart enough to have this life set up in Miami and he just ventures out three or four times a year to do his thing. And then he comes back quietly, to live his life. Outside of all the bullsh*t that everybody else has to deal with. I thought that was an incredible concept when I was younger and just reading the books. The kind of guy who doesn't answer to anybody but himself – I just found that admirable. Again, he's a fictional character.

Tucker: That's gotta be part of the reason it remains attractive though, that's why it survives. You look at the world today, and it's a place where being a jack of all trades is the goal, you're supposed to have your toe in everything, to have a relationship with everything available. Characters like Parker, living outside the mainstream, wholly committed to one thing, to being a perfect heist man – it's against what's expected, it's become an ideal. In a way, I feel like Grofield is more representative of who we are now, someone who has and pursues all kinds of different interests.



Darwyn: I don't know that what you're saying is necessarily true. I think Grofield represents what any normal human being would get involved in this for. They want to live the life they want to live, and this is how they finance it. To them, that's just their vocation. Their passion is racing cars, performing in theater. With Parker – there's nothing outside of the job. That's what makes him the backbone of the story, what holds it together. He does the job and he goes and sits on the beach until he gets too bored to sit on the beach. And then he goes and does another job. He's got no real life outside of it. The other guys represent all of us, on one level or another.

Tucker: See, I think that what makes him more compelling to us. That he's so inhumanly focused, whereas we're bent to human distraction. That lack of life makes him "better" than the rest of them. He's perfected the things that the rest of them can't. Grofield is always getting hurt, and Handy wants to open a diner. To all of that, Parker just shrugs. "We'll see."

Darwyn: Oh, he sees all those things as a sign of weakness, but not because he's superior. Again, the reason it's seminal is explained in *The Hunter*. This is a guy who has been in love. He got up and got married. He had a honeymoon. He had friends. And what happens to him in that book wipes all of that out. So when he's looking at Handy, when he's looking at Alan [Grofield], it's all through the prism of what you get if you don't control that side of yourself. So, yeah, any sort of human attachment for him is completely factored out.

Tucker: He already knows where those things are going to end up.

Darwyn: Yeah, I think he views every relationship as a foregone conclusion. Another reason he's so fascinating is because it's impossible to see anything that he believes in. Other than his ability to take advantage of other people's greed, his skill, his craft. You sit and think, "There's got to be more to this guy." But Westlake was clever enough to leave that for you to think about.

Tucker: It's similar to why Robert DeNiro fails in *Heat*. He's great at his job, allows for nothing else, and then he falls apart when he tries to chase his revenge, get the girl, head off to the beach.

Darwyn: Yeah, I gotta say... I feel like you youngsters talk about that movie as if you've discovered something, and I think you give it way too much credit. I remember sitting there thinking it was just a bloated statement, that it was just too long. And it's miserable, too, because there's just no way that Al Pacino would've f*cking got him at the end! That movie ended the wrong way. Obviously, DeNiro would've killed him dead in that little runway chase thing. The one that took an hour. God. Yeah, I'm not down with that one as much as other people.

Tucker: I'll love that shoot-out in the streets forever.

Darwyn: Oh, yeah! Oh, the movie has some great stuff. But it's too long.

Tucker: I'll give you that it's too long. But I have a hard time sh*t-talking movies I saw right after I got my driver's license.

Darwyn: Oh, yeah, I know. *Death Wish*. I could sh*t-talk that movie all day long... but I really can't. I loved it once, and it's like an ex-wife or girlfriend. What's the point in sh*t-talking it? You loved it once.

Tucker: After seeing the large format of The Man With the Getaway Face comic that you and IDW put out, I started to wonder if you're going to end up with a bunch of new versions of this series down the line.

Part of the culture nowadays seems to be a constant cycle of reproduction, reprinting, and new formats. But when I look at these Parker books – they're weighty, heavy books. There doesn't seem to be any sacrifice, down to the designs on the actual book under the dust jackets, and I can't help but hope that this is it. That there isn't some cheapy softcover omnibus coming. These are the books, this is how much they weigh.

Darwyn: Oh god, Tucker Stone's precious little life!

Tucker: Pretty much!

Darwyn: [Laughing] Yeah, well. My editor is the guy who came up with the Absolute format. Scott loves nothing more than playing with the stuff after he gets his hands on it. So yes, much to your horror, you'll probably see the thing in different formats and configurations. None of them will be done without the idea of making things special in a certain way. It's not going to be cut-rate.

Tucker: Will it be your thing too? Do you get to have a complete hand in it?

Darwyn: Scott is kind enough to give me a free hand. They send the books to Korea, and they do the proofreading, and the design department helps me with a few little things. But every page is designed by me, the covers are designed by me, the colors are picked by me.

Tucker: The prints on the endpapers?

Darwyn: All of it. I used to be a graphic designer, so I can't help myself. I tend to have a really strong idea of how I want the look and the feel, so it's just easier for me to do it than to explain it some poor f*cking kid.

Tucker: What are your plans while you're waiting to start on the next Parker book, *The Score*?

Darwyn: Well, there's a lot of stuff I get offered that is actually pretty good work, but its ground that I've already covered. So when something comes in and I haven't done it, like – there's nothing more fun than bashing out a pin-up of some cool looking characters. I just did a *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* variant cover for one of the issues of that relaunch, and, hey, I would never draw a *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* book. But to draw them all once, sure. Great fun. *Weird War Tales* was a book that I loved as a kid, so Joey had me on the sentimental level. And it was kind of divorced from everything else, so I could do something fun and make it absurd. So yeah, you like to have those things come in. They're nice



Above: Darwyn's infatuation with Westlake's amoral, unrepentant criminal antihero continued beyond the graphic novel adaptations with the artist planning to illustrate the Parker prose novels. While never realized, Dar did create some amazing illos. **Next page:** IDW did promote the illustrated edition of *The Hunter* with this poster. **Below and page 55:** Sculptor Jesse Farrell created these Parker pieces upon being inspired by Dar's graphic novels.



little palate cleansers.

I can sort of tease the fact that I'm talking to DC about something ambitious. But things move at a glacial pace there, so it's premature to get into. I hold out hope that we'll all get to work together again. For me, it's very important that I've factored out as many variables as possible before I lock into anything. I think it's allowed me to work on quality stuff that's at a certain level.

I'm not going to be working hard the next year. It's going to be a lot of recharging, cutting down trees and painting. Hanging out with Miss Marsha. Right now, it feels like I did those two novels back to back. There was a little time in between, but it really felt like boom-boom-boom. So I want to take a step back, do a couple of other things. That'll make me miss Parker. It sounds like an old shopworn cliché, but it's a lot of fun to work on him. There's very few days where it's like, "Oh, f*ck me."

Tucker: You'd talked about doing a digital strip at one point, right?

Darwyn: Yeah, the next thing you see from me will be a digital book, in between *The Outfit* and *The Score*. I'm still trying to work it out, I'm doing a lot of research on it right now. Getting back up to speed on some things. I'm not sure how long it will be, but it will be exclusively digital for an indefinite period of time. That's probably the number one thing I'm going to be concerned with. It will probably be 48 pages, a romance story. It's got a bad ass plot driving it, but it's definitely a big romance. That's probably going to be my creative focus until I get around to doing *The Score*.

Tucker: Will it be through a publisher? Or do you plan to set up a site and do it yourself?

Darwyn: That's what I'm exploring right now. There's going to be a big announcement in New York about a big media concern getting involved in this stuff. But if you look at it, most of them are going through comiXology or something like that, basically middlemen. They take a piece. The question becomes, "What do you get for that piece?" Do you get more exposure from being with them? More promotion? Is it more accessible to a broader audience? Because to me, that's what it's all f*cking about, trying to reach more people. Fighting this whole contraction that's going on. Every project that I do now, it's about that, how you reach more people. And so right now, I'm asking what would be the best way. I can do it direct, I could do it through comiXology and that's certainly going to be enough for people who want my work, but what about the somebody else, who might not already know about it?

Tucker: It's not about pleasing the people who are already at the party, but finding more people for the party. Not pulling the same money from the same group over and over again, expecting them to fund and support every comic that's available.

Darwyn: And that's an almost impossible thing to do, within that market.

Tucker: You released *The Hunter* direct through the IDW app, right? How'd that go?

Darwyn: I believe it's available in a couple of different spots. People certainly haven't any trouble accessing it in that way. I remember when the *Transformers* film came out, the IDW app was all over the top ten. The public



doesn't seem to be having trouble finding this stuff. With *The Hunter*, I think they did a really great job. I'm not objective, I look at it and know that it's something other guys did – it's not bad, but it's not all mine.

Tucker: I'm curious to know if you're interested in doing more stuff where yours is the only name in the credits, more work with your own characters, your own creations.

Darwyn: To a certain degree, I don't know if that's important to me as it is to some. I think a lot of people around me find it a lot more important than I do. A lot of it, too, if I'm brutally, sincerely honest, is that I've got the opportunity to work with Donald Westlake, the writer, or Darwyn Cooke, the writer. That's it, okay? I've always looked at myself as a director. I was a magazine art director, I was an agency art director, I've been a production designer, I was a storyboard artist, and an animation director, and... I've never been that concerned about that notion of "sole creator." I think more like a film director, I tend to see stories that I love, that I think would really work in the medium that I

love. I explain this to [Ed] Brubaker all the time. You got a choice of writers, Richard Stark or Darwyn Cooke.

So I don't know. I do a lot of shorts, and I've certainly written up a lot of stuff like that. But there's circumstances that come up, you know? When I'd finished my issue of *Solo* at DC, that was going to be it for quite a while. I was starting to put together a lot of stuff that I had in mind for myself, things that were all mine. And that's when I got the call: "There's this Will Eisner thing."

And it's the last thing in the world that I wanted to do. But it's kind of a weird situation, because I can remember being in high school and tracing those panels. I can remember when I was younger, it used to give me a pain to think that I would never get to draw this character. Eisner's the only one who gets to do it. And all those old memories are buried, and then they give you this call and it's like, "Hey, we're doing this." Now I'm not just thinking about doing it, I'm thinking about what happens if I don't do it, that somebody else will get a hold of it and do it, and ultimately, I end up taking on that responsibility, that challenge. Because it was tough.

That's two years right there that I hadn't planned. But when you're looking at something you love so much, and you know they're going to pull the trigger on it no matter what, you end up involved. It sets you back a little bit, but during that time on *The Spirit*, I took a look at how things sell. What's breaking out, what's breaking through, and by the time I got to the position to go out on my own, I thought it would be smart to take somebody cool with me here. To work on the Stark books, the Parker stuff – I feel different, more like a film director than I do when I write a Batman story. Because there, I am writing it, even though it's someone else's character. But I actually have to sit down and plot it, conceive it. I consider the Parker books somewhat differently and, again, I'm hoping that I've built a certain readership over time that'll follow me over, and hopefully it'll attract a certain number of new readers, and hopefully, between all of these things, they'll be enough readers to sustain what I do, if and when I get my act together.

You gotta keep in my mind that you're talking to a 47-year-old guy. I gotta have my sandwiches. My heat. My phone, my gasoline. I starved most of my adult life, but I'm at a point now where I have to consider my responsibilities to my wife, my life. I can't just go off on a flyer on something that isn't going to make any money for three or four years. It's baby steps, I guess. And the other thing is, yeah, I love working with good writers. There's a lot that are better than me.

That being said, I do have a couple of stories that I want to put out there. And the first one is an ideal fit to go at in this new, digital way. I'm also constantly dealing with the fact that I'm "the retro guy," that I'm this old-timey guy. So I want to do something contemporary, something that sets that on its ear a bit. The new format makes that kind of ideal.

So I'm doing it, I guess. But I'll tell you, from my standpoint, it's a lot easier to draw than write. I find writing to be completely soul-crushing. A horrible, horrible process of embarrassment and shame. There's nothing more horrible than having to read your own work.

Tucker: Can you describe why it's important to you to have everything in this project be under your control?

Darwyn: I guess it's the mindset of the art director. It's sort of a horrible taint to get in your blood. You're walking down the street, and you're seeing some girl thinking, "Those pants aren't cut for her body type," and "What's that dude doing wearing that shirt; doesn't he realize it makes his skin look green," and "God, that building sucks," and "Who the f*ck thought that copper was a good color for a car?" [laughter]

So you find yourselves always thinking that way, thinking things could look a little cooler, a little better. And for me, the greatest experience of things like books is that, when you pick up a book you love, one where every detail has been attended to, and all of it is in harmony from a design standpoint, everything is there in service of the book. The old *Mister X* books were one of the first times I felt like it was ever really done, full bore. You could see graphic design applied to a comic in a way that was completely sophisticated. It cemented the proposition, to see something that was totally separate from all those comics that had ads for seed packages and bicycles with banana seats.

I'm happy with stuff that I've sent in, but I can remember seeing the finished product and thinking, "Oh, I would've done this differently," or "What a garish logo." The Parker books were my opportunity to make it as perfect as possible. And I get to love that feedback, when somebody mentions liking the way the whole thing looked, when people compliment the package.

I'm looking at the book right now – I just rip the dust jacket off, just looking at the book – and I'm thinking that if it was a softcover, with that Marvel Pontiac design*... What's the point? The back was all covered in nonsense? I'd still be proud of the book, but... It wouldn't be finished. It wouldn't be mine.

Tucker: Beyond the design, what's the mission statement behind doing absolutely everything in these adaptations?

Darwyn: One of the things that's rarely discussed in this industry is the marriage between content and execution when you're cartooning the whole thing. I don't write dialogue until I'm finished. I can sit at a blank screen, writing dialogue for myself, but why? I know the basic scenes, the plot, the emotional pitch. The 20 minutes I spend drawing the person emoting are a time when I can run

*Tucker suspects Darwyn was making fun of the Marvel trade dress, though I remain baffled. Anyone with a correct answer earns themselves a CBC "Yes Prize"! – Y.E.

through 20 different lines. And half the time, you'll get the drawings finished and realize you don't nearly as many of the words as you thought you did. You end up with something that's more organic because it's created in a more organic way. With a script, it's cut and dry. It comes in, gets drawn, it goes out the door. Then a different point of view takes it and goes away with it.

Tucker: Do you have a response to those criticisms you mentioned, the "retro-guy" stereotype?

Darwyn: You become distinguished for certain things, to start with. I think in terms of any sort of entertainment or popular culture, that's bound to happen. Hopefully it's something you're comfortable with. As for whether it's relevant or not? In the long run, absolutely.

If you look at the bridge in time between *The Hunter* and now, it's about the same time difference between the Wild West dying and John Ford making those great Westerns. It's about the same amount of time. And comics are a really weird substrata of entertainment where this kind of thing is somehow viewed in a particular light. When you look at filmmakers, people don't look at *L.A. Confidential* and criticize it for being "retro." Because it's a f*cking period piece. We seem to attach that word retro to what we'll call pop culture if it looks backwards at all. But if you make a movie, and it's set 50 years ago, nobody gets up in arms about it not taking place together. I don't know. *Catwoman* and *The Spirit* took place in the here and now. There's certain aspects of my style and approach to storytelling that are specific, but I don't know that they'd seem out of date to the average citizen. To the audience for the Big Two, for what's coming out every Wednesday for the last eight years. But in a bookstore...? On a bookshelf...? In ten years...?

All this stuff that's being generated right now is going to look specifically dated. I think my work will still stand. I think it's easier to tell certain types of stories in a retro time period, to tap into that sense memory of a society that believes the past was a simpler time. It's also a lot easier to do allegorical work. I don't know. I love drawing that era, which may explain why I gravitated toward my approach on *Frontier*, or why I'm attracted to the Parker books. I want to leave it intact, so that means it gets set in 1962, so that's what we're doing. I think, in the future, the work will look a little more timeless. Most of what I've done can be collected into complete stories, finished books, graphic novels. I think it will outlast some of the contemporary stuff, but that could just be my ego talking.

I don't know, man. None of that really gets to me. It's very unlikely I'm going to do another story that takes place in that era, outside of the Parker stuff. I can see maybe one down the road. But that's a long ways off.

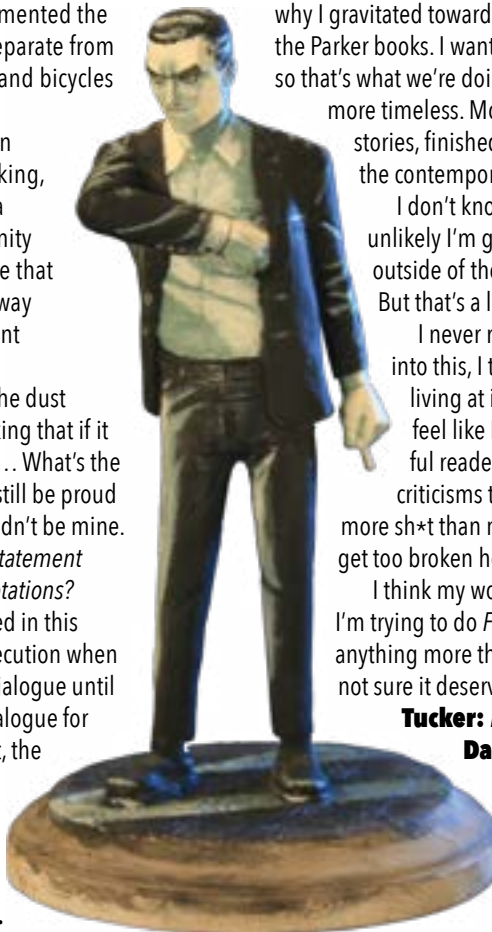
I never really thought I had the broadest reach. When I got into this, I thought the best I could do was make a humble living at it and get enough work to stay at it and enjoy it. So I feel like I'm way ahead of the game. I have a strong and faithful readership, and it's hard to worry about that. In terms of criticisms that are leveled – there are a lot of guys who get way more sh*t than me. There's a lot of stuff that I think sucks, so I can't get too broken hearted about the fact that some people think I suck.

I think my work gets off easy. But on the other hand, I don't think I'm trying to do *Fun Home* or *Infinite Crisis*. I'm not reaching for anything more than telling you a good story in an inventive way. I'm not sure it deserves that much awe or ire.

Tucker: I think it deserves a fair bit of awe.

Darwyn: God bless you, young man.

TUCKER STONE has written about comics for multiple publications, including *The Comics Journal*, where he won an Eisner in 2018 for his editorial work. He lives in Minnesota with his family, where he is currently writing a book about the obsessions of Garth Ennis.



Darwyn Cooke on Some Other Stuff

Excerpts from a comic con panel talk with the cartoonist discussing a controversy or two



Above: Darwyn Cooke self-portrait.

Inset right: Woefully neglected in this issue is Dar's version of *The Spirit*, which ran between 2007–08. This is his cover art for #12 [Jan. '08].

Below: Hardcover first edition of Donald E. Westlake's *Parker* novel, *Butcher's Moon* ['74], the 17th entry in the series, and the entry Darwyn wanted deeply to adapt as his last graphic novel starring the character.

[Editor's note: As there were projects not discussed in the previous interviews, what follows are excerpts from an April 5, 2015, WonderCon spotlight panel discussion hosted by Ron Richards, Josh Flanagan, and Conor Kilpatrick, where Darwyn Cooke shared some fascinating insights, his remarks made a little over a year before his passing. – Y.E.]

PLANS FOR PARKER

There will be more *Parker*. Again, I'll get you a straight up answer. I was so excited about the *Parker* work and so thrilled to be doing it and it actually was successful. I was supposed to do four books over eight years. That was the contract and I ended up doing four books in four years. And the problem was, by the time we got to the fourth book, there's a point where you start to become that thing that's just there and all the excitement or anticipation had gone out of it, I think... So I thought, "You know what? It'd be a good idea to put the brakes on for a couple of years and just let people maybe miss him a bit before we get back to it."

And I am not sure there might be two more; there might only be one more and then who knows what the future holds because, frankly, I can see Parker and I getting along for as long as I can hold a pencil. But he will return, but it probably won't be 'til 2016.

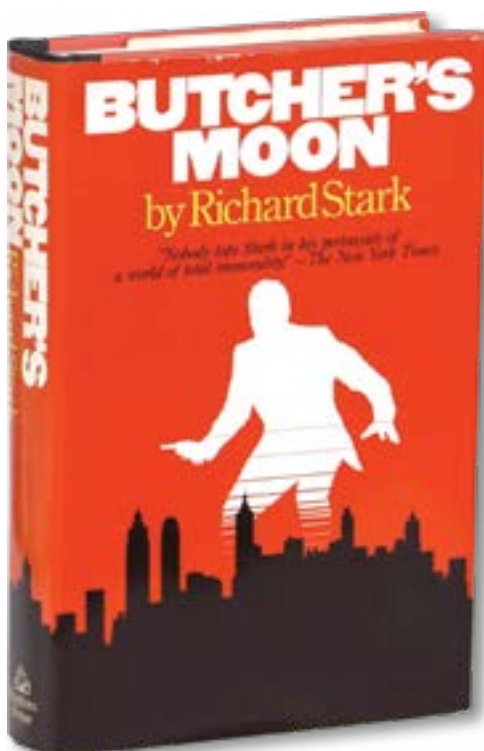
Slayground is an interesting book. It's my favorite book out of the entire series because it's the one book where we see Parker in these books in all kinds of situations, pulling all kinds of robberies, but *Slayground* is the one book where he's left alone with nothing but his wits, and he's trapped in a spot where there are two groups of really bad people trying to find him and kill him and he's got nothing but his brain and the things he can find on the ground to pull him out of it. So it's an amazing book, but it didn't have the depth of character or backstory or the need to be as long as the other ones. And the last one I'm going to do is going to be *Butcher's Moon*, which is probably the masterpiece out of the books and you can't do *Butcher's Moon* without *Slayground* because they connect. *Butcher's Moon* addresses things that happen in *Slayground*. So I knew I had to do it, but I thought this is more of a roller coaster ride than it is a complex or layered piece of work. So I decided to go with something shorter and faster.



THE CARTOONIST AS ENTERTAINER

I refuse to call what I do art. I think I'm an entertainer. If there's art to be found, someone else can sort that out later. If you end up good at something, then that's what you do, that's who you are. You tend to get typecast – and I'm not bitching about that, I feel very lucky – but you do. You tend to not get offered work unless it's something you've done before. DC never calls me up to do anything different. They call me up when they need a Silver Age riff or an old-timey thing and, other than that, I get offered crime work... Grant Morrison wanted me to work on *Multiversity*. So, of course, he offered me the story of the Golden Age heroes... And I wrote him a very nice thank you. "I'd love to work with you someday, but I'm not doing anymore of that and I've already done it"... I certainly don't want to be that guy and I am that guy, so trying to break out of that mold can be difficult and the crime stuff is just, it's my favorite type of fiction, my favorite type of film...

I was lucky that when I did get my second chance to get back in this business, I had a lot of understanding of the way things work and, getting back into comics, I was reading everything about everything and it became clear that, at the time I was breaking in, it's a writer's medium and that



the writers controlled the books and the approach and the way things were being done. And, at that point I had only considered being an artist, but I thought, "You know what? I should try to write as well because if I can, then I'm going to be able to control my destiny a little better." Usually you break into the business and then they'll give you a book like *Blue Devil* to do for a year and you cut your teeth on that and you're given a script and you draw it and you hope you're going to get something better.

And I was already an old man and I thought I've got to find a way to leap past that part of this. So by writing my own material, it gave me that much more control and the ability to guide what I did. I sort of did it because it just seemed like the smartest way to get where I wanted to go as quickly as I could and that has a lot to do with it. But yeah, working with a great writer is a real pleasure and I was lucky early on I got to work with Brubaker on *Catwoman* and we're great friends to this da. That was just a perfect combination, the two of us. And the other guy I got to work with back then that really impressed me was Peter Milligan on *X-Force*...

Even if the guy's not in the room with you, like when I did *The Spirit*, I'm working with Will Eisner. I'm not trying to abandon his work; I was trying to find a way to bring that to a new audience so even though he wasn't there, he's kind of there at the table with me and the same is true with *Parker*. It's not like I wrote that stuff out of my head. I'm working with another writer's work and while we may not be on the phone talking about it because I don't have a phone for the dead, he's there with me. We are collaborating. So, actually, if you really look at it, I don't think I've done very much work on my own.

[Darwyn is asked what label he would give himself.] A cartoonist. I love that word. There's this real dick in the business, a writer I know – a real dickhead – and, god, we got into it about all of this one time through the email and he sent me an email saying, "Who the f*ck do you think you are?" Blah, blah, blah. "What gives you the right to..." blah, blah, blah? Who the f*ck do you think you are? And I just wrote back, "I'm a cartoonist, asshole. I do what you do plus four times more than that. I have an entire skill set and lifetime of ability that you don't even understand. You're a writer. I'm a cartoonist. That's who I think I am."

CREATOR-OWNED

[Doing creator-owned work] It's just been a matter of delay after delay after delay. If we go back to, I think it was 2005, when I did *Solo* for DC... If you look on the back cover of solo, you'll see a picture of Slam Bradley walking away into the distance and that was going to be my last mainstream book. At that point, I was going to go into creator-owned and start doing my own work and the problem is they keep dangling these shiny things in front of you. And I remember I was, like, three weeks into getting my own thing together and I got the call saying, "Look, we're doing *The Spirit* and, if it's not you, it's going to be somebody. And it was like, "God, I can't let this go." And you also get into this ego thing, like, "It's got to be me, whoever else does this is going to screw it up."

So next thing you know, two years go by, and then there was the whole *Watchmen* sh*t show, right? And again,

it was like something I'd never thought of doing, but once the opportunity came up, it was such a monumental challenge that it was like hard to say no to it. And *Parker* was my first step into this area we're talking about

and again, I'm a pragmatic guy and I know a lot of friends who do incredible creator-owned work and, at that point, in '08, '09, you'd see them doing these brilliant books that were selling 3,000 copies, 4,000 copies. And I thought, "If I'm going to break into this area, I'm going to go in there with somebody and that's when the *Parker* thing all pulled together in my head. I thought if I can go into this with Donald's audience and my audience between the two of them, we can probably not lose money on the thing.

And so that was my first step and I got so carried away with *Parker* that these other things have kind of just been sitting and percolating and there have been things that just didn't happen. I had a story idea about four years ago that I have it sitting at home and I loved the thing and I came up with the idea and I thought, you know, I'm not the guy to draw this. Paul Pope's got to draw this. Paul's a buddy of mine, so I send him the story and he writes me this long email back, telling me how great he thinks it is. And, at the end, he says, "I really hate drawing cars and motorcycles, so no, I'm not going to do it."

These things end up sitting around and accumulating. Actually, *Revengeance*: four years ago, Tim Sale phoned me and wanted me to write a book for him and I'd come up with this story that I thought was perfect for him and he loved it and, Tim being Tim, he said, "I just got to finish up *Cap[tain America]* for Marvel and we'll get right on this." So last week a buddy saw him at Emerald City and he said, "Tell Darwyn I'm almost done [with] *Cap* and then we're going to get to that." [This] was five years ago and when I realized it's like now or never I'm going to do this when I looked at everything I had, that was the story that



Above: *Revengeance* was a mini-series initially conceived of being written by Darwyn and drawn by Tim Sale. The story was about "a young, liberal, nonviolent sort of party guy who ends up having something so horrible happen... He's going to find who did it and kill" the perpetrator, as Dar told a convention crowd. But Tim couldn't commit, so the three-issue series was to be drawn by Darwyn. Alas, illness prevented the Image title from being finished. Here are two versions of the cover for #1.

Below: Promotional art for *Revengeance*, a storyline set among real-life establishments in Darwyn's hometown of Toronto, Ontario.





Above: Darwyn character designs/promotional art for his *Before Watchmen: Minutemen* [#1-6, Aug. '12-Mar. '13], the controversial mini-series he wrote and drew.

Below: Drawn by Florida neighbor and pal Amanda Conner, Dar wrote *Before Watchmen: Silk Spectre*.

appealed to me the most and I told Tim, "So, man, I'm taking this one for myself."

Revengeance, I think the title kind of indicates that I'm not taking it entirely seriously. I don't know if anybody out there has read the Mickey Spillane book, *I, the Jury*, the first Mike Hammer novel. The whole book is about him swearing he's going to find the guy who did this horrible thing and he's going to kill him and [*Revengeance*] is basically the

same story except it's the story of a young, liberal, nonviolent sort of party guy who ends up having something so horrible happen, he makes the same promise. He's going to find who did it and kill him. The thing is he hasn't got any clue how to do that. And so the whole book is his odyssey to try to become a guy who's tough enough to track this person down and kill them. He hasn't got any clue how to go about it. And it's incredibly dark. The ending of it is horribly dark, but, on the way, I like to think there's going to be a lot of hilarious stuff about this milquetoast kind of playboy-kid becoming this hard and badass.

It's set in '80s Toronto. It's a classic write-what-you-know scenario. I grew up in Toronto and my 20s were

in the '80s, and I was a magazine art director and graphic designer, and I thought, "You know, what a perfect backdrop for the story." And so there's a lot of me in it and, what I did was, I just kind of subtracted everything decent about me and made everything bad about me twice as bad and that's kind of how I got my character and once I put them into that world that I know I could see all the potential and how I could make it work.

BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER WATCHMEN

[*Before Watchmen* is] a sensitive topic, let's face it. It was the first time I'd ever been on the ass end of the internet deciding you're evil and my takeaway from it is: it's really easy to think that 40 people on the internet, on the whole planet, [determine the discussion] would probably be my takeaway. There were guys that just beat on that, night and day, for a year and, if you look at it, every day my wife would get up and she's reading these things... "Die in a fire," "You ought to be..." And you think, "Wow, it's amazing the degree to which a certain vocal minority are able to color your opinion of yourself or effect your approach to the work you do."

Outside of that, and it doesn't matter what I say, everything I say here, I'm going to take sh*t for it one way or another. I always loved *Watchmen* as a book, but I never thought it was all that, the greatest book. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I thought it was immensely brilliant deconstruction, but it was never the Holy Grail to me. I don't think I ever looked at it that way as the project evolved and you see, for some people, it means a great deal to them and the fact that you're not able to see it the same way they do can be really problematic.

I've never given five seconds thought to what Alan Moore thinks. I'm just being honest. I think Alan, maybe on a good day, could step back and see that a lot of the things he says maybe are a little hard on the rest of the industry,





but no, I never stopped to think about that. What I did stop to think about was, and I did say no. I said no for two years, I believe, because I just couldn't imagine anything I could do that would measure up, not just to the book, but the book's cumulative reputation in the industry and Dan [Didio] pursued me for a couple years about this. Every time I'd see him, he'd bring it up again and I'd say no again. And then I remember there was this day and I don't know anyone who's read *Minutemen*, I'll spoil it for those who didn't:

[SPOILER ALERT!] I came up with the notion that Hooded Justice was killed by The Comedian and it's The Comedian who was behind all the really bad stuff that happened to the Minutemen. And, when I had that idea in my head, then it all clicked over and I went, "Holy Jesus, this will work." And then I actually phoned Dan up and I said, "If this is still on the table, I'm in."

They wanted me to write *all* the books at first. I said, "Absolutely not." And we got to a point where they actually wanted me to do three of them and even that was too much. I managed to get Joe Straczynski to take *Nite Owl*. They'd wanted me to do *Nite Owl* and that left *Silk Spectre* and, generally, when I don't want to do something, I'll make an irrational demand to try to get myself out of it. And so, when they came to me about that, I said, "Okay, I want to do it like a '60s romance comic when she's like 15, 16. It's going to take place in Haight Asbury. There's going to be a lot of drugs and I'm not going to do it unless I get to do it with Amanda Connor and you're going to have to pay her to co-write it because I need a woman's voice to make this work." And I thought this will kill it because Amanda won't touch this thing. She's one of my best friends. It was like a calculated risk. And they said, "Wow, great idea." And Amanda said, "Wow, great idea." And so, I was like, "Okay, I guess I'm doing *Silk Spectre*, too." But that's much more Amanda's book. I think it was her first time out writing a big book, so

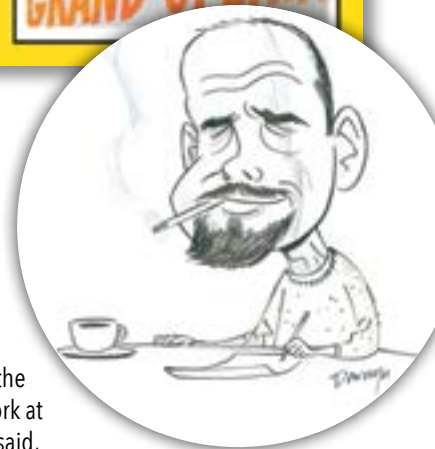
I thought if we were there co-writing it, that would allow her to relax and really be able to get into it.

MARVEL'S MISADVENTURE

Basically, do you guys all remember a line of books called *Marvel Adventures*, like their kids' line? Marvel got in touch with me, solicited me to develop that line for them and I did. And I put together a strategic deck, a business plan, the line of books. I brought in the other guys [artist collaborators]. I have so much artwork at home, you would not believe it. They took it all. They said, "This is fantastic. This is amazing. This is a home run." And then they never called me again and they handed it off to a bunch of other guys and that was the end of my relationship with Marvel. And yeah, as long as Marvel is who it is right now, I can't. I can't work for them.

[As a final question, Darwyn is asked what drives him to work in comics.] There's nothing like comics and I've spent enough time in Hollywood when I worked at Warner Bros. that I know what it means. If you're going to commit to a movie, that's five years of your life and it's probably going to be five crappy years of your life and the movie may never get made and, even if it does, it might be garbage, and I am no spring chicken. So, with comic books, I'm able to create that kind of fully realized experience without having to go to all that miserable trouble. Comics is like the only place where one man can sit down and put an entire visual story together all on his own and get it out to market for less than, like, \$80 million.

[To close, Ron Richards declares: "And clearly Darwyn Cooke is one of the greatest creators and we're all lucky to have him in comics."] 🍁



Top: More Before Watchmen: Minutemen art. **Above:** Self-caricature by Dar. **Below:** Bone's Spidey art for a kiddie project never pub'ed.



Dar's Canadian Comrades Recollect

We keep the testimonials all-Canadian as the Superman Club and other pals remember

LOOK

[Editor's Note: *In preparing this special Darwyn Cooke issue, instead of asking for reminiscences and tributes from the entire comics community, I thought to narrow the field a little, and keep it to just Canucks. In keeping with CBC's expanded theme that included additional Canadian subjects, I decided to ask for contributions from just his fellow countrymen, those who were part of the Toronto comics community (and another from a Halifax buddy, plus a special Scottish lass). Some submissions were written, though a few were derived from phone chats I conducted, then edited and included here with the participant's approval. Special thanks to Michael Cho who shared a list of names of Cooke buds to contact, and to Janet Hetherington, who solicited a few contributions for this issue. – Ye Ed.]*

Mark Askwith

Darwyn Cooke's death on May 14, 2016, shocked the comic book community, and nowhere was that grief more visible that day than at the Toronto Comic Arts Festival.

Darwyn was not only a frequent presence at TCAF, but he was a symbol of what Canadian cartoonists could achieve on the world stage. That morning, the first day of TCAF, his death transformed the Toronto Reference Library into a site of collective mourning, remembrance, and gratitude.

Although best known for his mainstream comics and graphic novels, Cooke strongly supported the broader comics community, including independent and alternative creators. His admiration for clear storytelling, strong design, and respect for comics history aligned closely with TCAF's mission to elevate comics as an art form.

I was covering the Festival for SPACE, the Canadian science fiction and fantasy channel, that morning, a few hours after I learned that Darwyn had died. Although I'd attended every TCAF, many of them with Darwyn, nothing prepared me for the grief. The Festival was held at the Toronto Reference Library that year, and not only had Darwyn and I spent hours together there, but Darwyn told me that his father, a construction foreman, had installed the glass windows.

That day, many of Darwyn's friends shared deeply personal memories of Darwyn with me, both on camera, and privately. Con-

versations at tables, panels, and informal gatherings frequently turned to Cooke's influence. His career was an inspiration to many cartoonists navigating the space between independent publishing and mainstream markets.

Michael Cho, Bryan Lee O'Malley, and Peter Birkemoe all emphasized Darwyn's role as a bridge between communities. He moved fluidly between animation, mainstream comics, and literary graphic novels. That versatility resonated strongly at TCAF, which prides

itself on inclusivity across genres and styles. His death prompted reflection not only on his body of work, but on the standards he set: clarity of vision, respect for craft, and a belief that comics could be both entertaining and meaningful.

In the years since, his legacy is still present at TCAF through discussions, panels, and the sales of his books. For many of us, Darwyn's death marked the loss of a role model who embodied artistic excellence, integrity, passion, and an unwavering belief in the power of comics.

[Mark later shared with Janet Hetherington a more personal remembrance, which follows.]

The first time I visited his home he showed me the first chapter of *The New Frontier*. I was impressed. We talked a lot about our love of the DC war books. When Darwyn mentioned that he was researching the Mercury missions, I lent him my *Life* magazines, a copy of a book about the Mercury astronauts called *We Seven*, and a slew of NASA videos.

Darwyn's home was a Man Cave. A whole room was devoted to his G.I. Joe collection. He had several pieces of framed comic book art, including two stunning original Alex Toth pages hanging above the living room couch. On the crammed bookshelves were dozens of comic book reprints and graphic novels.

We spent countless hours discussing our mutual love of animation, illustration, and comics. We enjoyed many of the same creators, especially Will Eisner, Alex Toth, and Jack Kirby, and we discussed how they had explored the unique storytelling possibilities of the medium. These creators were among the first to acknowledge that the reader is in control of the pace, so the reading experience is very intimate. The page is valuable real estate, and every panel, every gutter, every word balloon should, and must, contribute.

MARK ASKWITH is a writer, interviewer, and TV producer who has covered science fiction, fantasy, and comics for over 30 years. He created award-winning TV show *Prisoners of Gravity* and is a founding producer of SPACE, Canada's national science fiction channel. Having interviewed many creators, including Stan Lee, Will Eisner, Jack Kirby, Alan Moore, Terry Gilliam, and Margaret Atwood. His graphic novels include *Silencers* and DC Comics' authorized sequel to *The Prisoner*.



Below: Mark Askwith (left) and his buddy Darwyn in an undated pic. **Inset above:** Another Darwyn Cooke self-caricature.



J. Bone

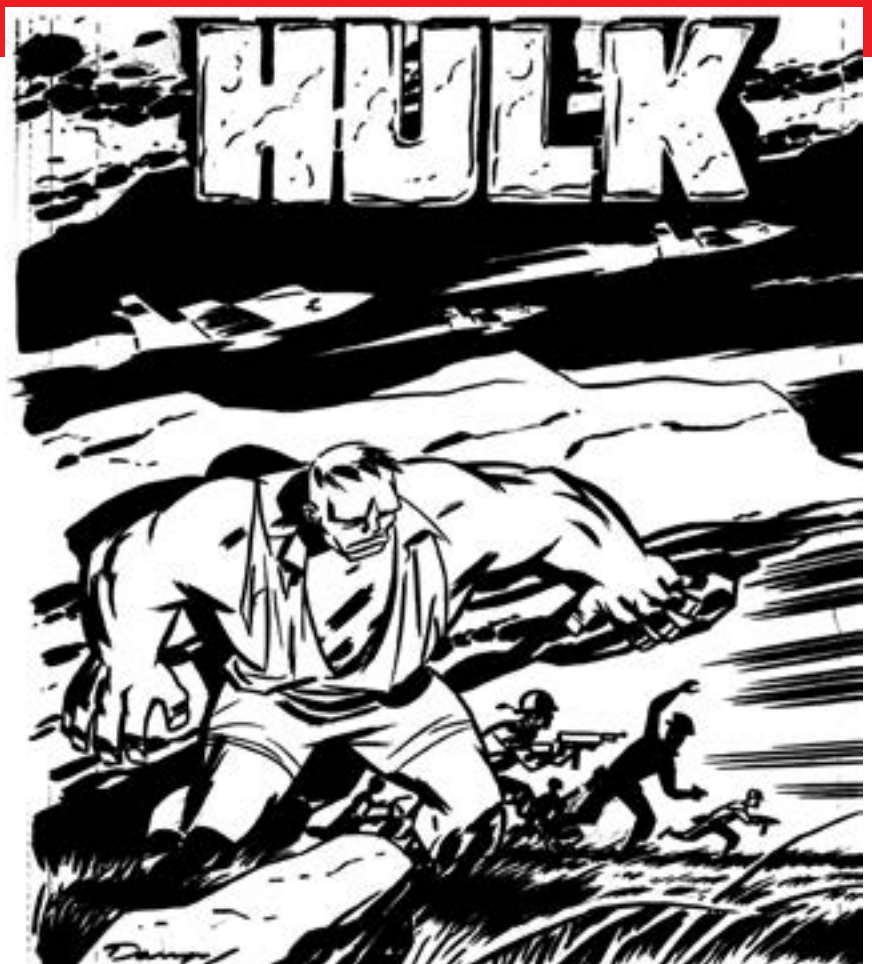
I used to work in animation and I heard about Darwyn because people had been sharing some of his early work. Somebody had photocopies of that Batman story ["Deja Vu"] that he ended up redrawing for *Solo*. So I knew about him through that and then I met a guy at a comic book shop who said, "Hey, you know who you should meet? Darwyn Cooke." And so then I met Cooke through a mutual friend, Steve Manale. They had just started a studio together, and that's when we hung out, I got to learn from him, drawing, dealing with editors, all that kind of stuff. Darwyn had already gone down to work on *Batman Beyond* for Warner Bros. and *Men in Black* for Sony, and then came back to Toronto. At the time I met him, he was working on *Batman: Ego* and he had the rough pitch together for *New Frontier*.

Did we hit it off? I think so, yeah. Darwyn is a tough guy to get to know, but I'm also a sarcastic ass. I remember that I made a few jokes at – not necessarily at the expense of his artwork – but I made jokes about it. And I remember he turned to Steve Manale and said, "Who invited this asshole?" And I was like, "Oh God, this might be the end." But, for Darwyn, that was like, "Nope, you're in."

He was tough and he was strict about his own art and he wanted you to be equally true to your own work. When it came to art, he was *never* late and he wouldn't accept you being late. And he taught me not to make excuses. If I'm going to be late because of some reason, tell the editor when the work is coming in. Don't give them your bullshit excuse, whatever it is. It doesn't matter what the excuse is. Just let them know when they're going to get it if you're going to be late. So I learned that from him, but the main thing was just don't be late, just do the work because usually you're given enough time. So I learned discipline and all of that from Cooke.

But, personality wise, he was tough, he was gruff, and all of that stuff. But, like most of those gruff guys, there was a soft heart underneath there. Sometimes he might say something that would piss you off, but he would always call the next day to say, "Hey, I know the thing I said upset you. I'm sorry about that." And, yeah, I think that was a thing that not a lot of people saw with Darwyn, because it was so easy to just go, "Oh, this guy's a tough talker, rude, offensive, all of those things. I never want to see that guy again, I never want to talk to him again." They never got the apology. So he could sit and reflect and go, "Oh, yeah, I upset that guy." But, genuinely, there were also people that he was like, "I don't give a s* about I upset that guy. Screw him." And there are stories of that out there.

Still, even though you were his friend or someone he perceived as in his circle of friendship, when it came to professionalism, he was always like, "Always be professional, and don't take my friendship for granted when it comes to the work." Everybody had a falling out with him at some point in time and it comes down again to professionalism



because, well, I certainly pissed him off. I was his friend, but there was a time where I was like, "Oh, I'm going to be late with this thing." He's like, "Don't do this to me. Just don't be late because you're f*cking me if you do that." I was like, "Oh yeah, but I'm your buddy. I'm allowed to be late." No.

Cooke saw comics as very unprofessional because people had the attitude, "Oh, well, a book is late." He was like, "Well, no, if the book is going to be late, you fire the guy who made it late and you make the guy who can bring it in on time, he should be the star." But that's just not the way it worked in comics. And I know that was always a thing for Darwyn... not necessarily a sticking point, but certainly a problem he had with comics as a whole industry.

The first work we did together was I had inked him on some production artwork. He was doing licensing art for DC, a bunch of super-hero poses – Batman, Martian Manhunter, Superman, etc. – and he had me ink those as a test. "Was I good? Did we work well together? Could I meet the deadline?" All those sort of things. And then we did the Spider-Man Valentine's Day story in *Tangled Web*. I

Above: Darwyn channeled his inner Jack Kirby for this presentation art. Rendered to pitch a series of children's books starring the Marvel characters, it was one of a number of concepts that were accepted by the House of Ideas but later plundered for a similar project, without credit or remuneration to Dar and his friends. **Below:** Jay Bone (left) and his buddy, Dar, at the 2007 Toronto Comic Art Festival.





was working on a black-&-white indie book at the time called *Alison Dare*. There was a scene with ninjas, so I asked Darwyn if he would ink my pages while I'm inking his *Spider-Man* story. We worked on that together. Then, I think, maybe our next project was probably me penciling the *Spider-Man* Christmas book with Darwyn inking. We might have done *Wolverine/Doop* in the middle of that. I can't quite remember what the order of events there, but it was all in a short period of time. I know Darwyn did a fill-in on *X-Statix* or *X-Force* (whatever it was at the time) that was just fully him and *Wolverine/Doop* came out of him talking to Peter Milligan about just doing something fun. He loved drawing Doop and I love inking that book. And then he was on *The New Frontier*.

I was part of that Marvel pitch that I know is gossiped about on the internet. Darwyn had a group of us, a bunch of Toronto artists, and he pitched Marvel on a series of kids book we were all going to work on. These were books for 10-year-old to pre-teen readers. So I was part of that. I was doing *Spider-Man* (in adventures like in *Spidey Super Stories*) and also a teen version of the Avengers with the X-Men as their rival high school. Darwyn had an idea about the Hulk, the one he was going to draw. I can't remember whether Hulk lost his memory or what the deal was, but basically Hulk was Bigfoot in the forest and a bunch of Boy

Scouts find him and they go on boys adventures, that kind of idea. There would be no attention to continuity. It was just about adventures. And there were a few other projects in there, as well.

Then we didn't hear back from Marvel for a few months and we saw in *Previews* all of the things that we pitched, but being done by other artists. So Darwyn then saw [the editor] at a convention (I don't remember which), walked up, dumped a beer in his lap, and said, "You

know what that's about." And that was it. He never worked for Marvel again. He previously had a good relationship with those guys, but don't screw him over. Be true to your word. The excuse we got from Marvel was, "Hey, we had multiple pitches coming in. Yours just happened to be similar to what we were already doing." That's what we were told. So it's like, "Ahh, okay, so *that's* how it works." I know the pitch for *New Frontier* was quite a process, as well. They were trying to make *New Frontier* fit in continuity. Where was Wonder Woman at the time and all that kind of nonsense.

When he lived in Toronto, every Wednesday we'd go to the comic shop and then go for lunch. So there was like a whole stretch of years of just... It started out with just Darwyn, our friend Steve Manale, and I occasionally coming, and then it grew, with Michael Cho and Chris Stone, who worked with Darwyn helping





SUPERMAN CLUB 2005

Published in Canada.

him do photocopies, FedExing, and all that. So it grew to be a bigger group and, every week, we would go to the Dragon Lady comic shop and then go for lunch at this pub that was just down the street. This was until he moved to Halifax and then it was harder to socialize with him unless he was coming to town for a convention or visiting family.

I only visited him twice at his Halifax house because it was a trek to get out there. He was just done with the city. He was with Marsha by then, his soon-to-be wife, and they had dogs. He just wanted property, a place to go walk with the dogs – not retire, because he never retired – just live a little easier. The locals were maybe more his type of people, too, I think. There's a no-bullsh*t attitude to country folk and I say that coming from a small town myself, I know what the small town people are like and I think that was something Darwyn really appreciated. When I went to visit him once, I met his friends and they were absolutely who I expected them to be, just a nice older couple, no-bullsh*t, and just a fun hang.

The one thing I recall Darwyn teaching me – I'm trying to remember exactly how Darwyn phrased it, because it's been a while since I thought of it – was, basically, when you're sitting down in front of the page and you're about to ink, he would say, "Be a man." And that just meant get in there and make mistakes or be confident that you know what to do. I still have trouble just going in with inks on rough pencils. I like tighter



pencils, which Darwyn always gave me. But, sometimes, I wasn't heavy enough on the shadows for him and I know he would go in and touch up things, like really push a shadow heavier. So the thing I learned from Cooke was: just get in there and draw it.

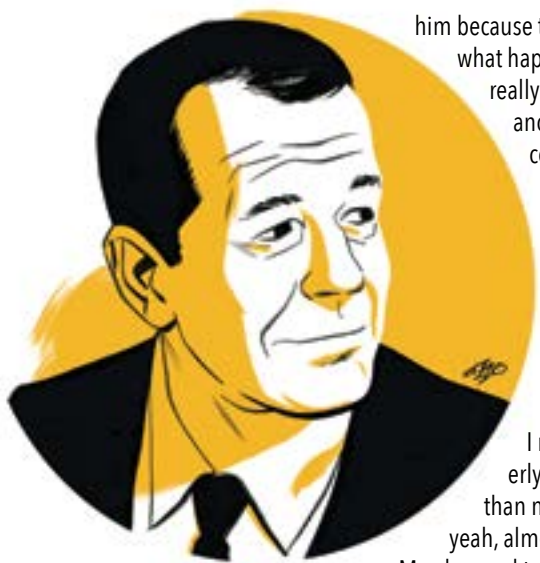
I have a quote on my wall here from Walter Simonson that says, "You have to draw it anyway, so you might as well just sit down and do it." I wrote that down because it reminded me of Cooke's "Be a Man," but it was a less gendered way of saying the same thing. It's saying, "Just sit down and do it. Do the work."

I started out doing black-&-white independent comics because I was just a young guy meeting up with other hungry creators. We didn't think we had the option to do what Darwyn did, which is go, "No, I'm going to do a *Batman* book right out of the gate." But he also had years of experience ahead of us. There was more going on, but he saw what I was doing as like, "Why are you coming in the back door of comics? Why don't you just jump right into it?"

Because I only knew the indie career way, like Mike Allred, where you just go, "Oh, you make your own book," and then Marvel and DC come knocking on your door.

But Darwyn being Darwyn took the approach of, "I'm knocking on the door and telling them I'm doing a *Batman* book and then I'm going to do *Spider-Man* and then I'm going to do *New Frontier*." So what I'm getting to is he built up this audience that loved Darwyn the creator. They would follow him to whatever book he was working on. So he knew when he started the *Parker* books that a percentage of those people were going to go with

Thanks,
Pal!
♡D



Darwyn Cooke
1962 - 2016

Above: In tribute to his friend and mentor, Michael Cho created this portrait of the artist. **Previous spread:** As a going-away present to the "Superman" of the Superman Club, members contributed gag strips to a booklet Darwyn was gifted. Here's the cover, back cover, and interior strips by J. Bone. Both Jay and Michael Cho (whose strips from same are on the next spread) assured Ye Ed. that the other member submissions are too off-color to print! **Inset right:** Dar created this T-shirt art for Free Comic Book Day in 2011. **Below:** An outtake from Darwyn's DC Comics portrait shoot.



him because they loved Darwyn and that's what happened, but the books are also really good and so there would be another audience that's going to come in and go, "I love crime fiction. I hear these are really good." There's two audiences coming together and one of them came over with Darwyn from the super-hero stuff.

I think our connection was maybe a little more like an uncle to a nephew, I think. I never thought of him as brotherly, even though he was bigger than me and could be a bully. But, yeah, almost more in a partner sense.

Marsha used to joke that if Darwyn wasn't with her, he would be with me. We would be a couple. [laughs] I'm like, "Yeah, but Darwyn doesn't swing that way." But I knew what she was getting at, but it's like we just would talk. Mostly he would talk for hours and hours, and then do it again two days later.

After he died, I wish I had paid more attention to what he talked about because, when you get used to somebody, whatever, it's that familiarity thing which is certainly normal. It's human to sort of take a thing for granted though I never want to say, "Well, I took Darwyn for granted," but I knew him for so long that, after a while, it's like, I get it. He's special to people and now that he's gone, there's more of a legend that builds up, but to me and Steve Manale and Mike Cho, he was just the guy we hung out with. I'm sure Jimmy Palmiotti has the same sort of thing. It's like this was just his buddy. So you forget, "Oh yeah, he's a legend now." He came in to comics and just did stuff that was so immediately special, but I also know that to me he was just Darwyn. So those are two things that I have to connect in my mind now when I'm talking to other people about Darwyn the person vs. Darwyn the artist. I never want to spoil anything for anybody. If they want to think Darwyn was just this amazing, wonderful guy, that's great because that is true.

Darwyn was ten years older than me. I just looked it up because I'm now the same age he was when he passed away. The anniversary of that was just last week and it did hit me. I was like, "F*ck, I'm now the age that Darwyn was when he passed away." It's hitting me.

J. BONE – Jason to some, Jay to others, J. to us – is a Toronto-based illustrator and comic book artist written who shared the 2007 Joe Shuster Award for "Best Artist" with chum Darwyn Cooke. In 2023, he and writer Kevin Conroy won an Eisner Award for "Best Short Story," for their *DC Pride 2022* collaboration, "Finding Batman."

Kevin Boyd

I knew Darwyn well. We first met in 2003, when I asked him to come to my convention. At the time I believe he had just finished *Batman: Ego* and was planning out what would become *DC: The New Frontier*. He started appearing at Toronto area art shows with presentations of his New Frontier ideas and graphics and it was amazing to see him detail his

ideas and bring them to the page in his unique style. While he opted not to be a guest of the show, he came down and hung out for most of the weekend.

I see a lot of parallels between Darwyn and Wally Wood. Both were genius-level artists who understood comics "on a molecular level" and who were also rare human beings of strong convictions and opinion. Darwyn Cooke let you know where you stood with him, and if he agreed with your choices and decisions. I highly value my interactions with Darwyn... there's a very Forrest Gump quality to my meetings with him. I would see him in and around all of these exciting things that he was doing, and he'd offer insight into the things that I was doing.

KEVIN BOYD is director of the Joe Shuster Awards and public relations director for Fan Expo HQ. He is also a proud Canadian comic book collector, fan, and historian.

Michael Cho

I met Darwyn 20 years ago, when he had moved back to Toronto and was sharing a studio space with another friend, Steve Manale. This was around the time he was just doing *Batman: Ego*, and Manale was saying, "Hey, you should meet my buddy, Darwyn. You guys will get along because you guys have similar interests." He liked Kirby, he liked the newspaper strip artists, and all that kind of stuff that I did.

Then I was at my local comic shop, The Beguiling, here in Toronto, and on the wall they had put up the original art for *Ego* because they were having a little exhibition of the pages. I saw these and I was just floored because I thought, "Oh, these are like what I'm doing," but they were just so much more advanced! And they were bolder. So I was determined to meet this guy. The next day, I went to the studio with a copy of *Batman: Ego* and I showed it to Darwyn, and everyone was laughing because I think I was the first person ever to ask him to sign the book, because it had just hit the



Darwyn Cooke portrait © and courtesy of Michael Cho. Used with permission. Photo © DC Comics. Super Friends TM & © DC Comics.



shelves. So he signed it for me, and then we started chatting, and then he showed me his collection of original art.

We were friends ever since despite some ups and downs. And, when Dar lived in Toronto, we had a little club where we'd get together every Wednesday. A lot of us in this club of cartoonists lived or worked within a ten-block radius of each other. We were on College Street and Dar's house was only a few blocks away. My apartment was only a few blocks away. J. Bone lived a little further away. And then there was the R.A.I.D. Studio here in town, with cartoonists like Ramón Pérez and Andy Belanger, and so forth. Jay Stephens would come to town for this. And we would just get together at our local comic shop, Dragon Lady, a great store whose owner collected Caniff and Roy Crane originals.

So we would meet at Dragon Lady, pick up some comics, talk sh*t about whatever's on the stands or in *Previews*, and then we'd go for lunch at the same restaurant each week, which had horrible food, but had a really nice waitress who would always be very cheery. Her name was Donna and she would always bring us cake and things like that just for free. And it was like a little club of cartoonists, you know, and Dar was the ringleader, because he's such a larger-than-life figure. Sometimes we'd share our work, sometimes we'd trade our work, and sometimes we would ink stuff together, collaborate or things like that.

But Darwyn never, for example, specifically showed me how to ink or anything like that. The most memorable piece of advice he gave me was, one time, he was telling me about how he inks curves, because a long curve with a brush is a really tough thing to pull off, without wiggling, and it takes some confidence. And he'd tell me, "When I do that, I take a deep breath, and then say to myself, 'Be a man.' And then I just hit it." And, to this day, whatever, I have to draw a long curve with a brush, I still sit there, take a breath, and I go, "Just be a man, Cho." And then I hit it and it always works. So I think about him whenever I do that.

I still get the comparisons to Darwyn and I don't mind them, but I work in a lot of different styles and it does rankle a little bit when I'll do something that is completely painterly or something, and someone will say, "Wow, it looks like Darwyn." I'll go, "What?" Oh, you know, like that makes no sense. But, a little while ago, Darwyn's wife, Marsha, told me that for all the comparisons I get with Darwyn, he also evolved because of me. Because I had, at the time, a much more dry-brushy, looser type of illustration style that I did as well. And I would do these paintings of street scenes, and things like that. I gave some of those to Darwyn, and he saw a lot of those as they were being drawn. And Marsha was saying that seeing that kind of stuff helped him evolve from the early sort-of Bruce Timm-style to where he eventually

Above: For his issue of *Comic Book Creator* [#30, Apr. '23], Michael Cho shared these pix of (clockwise from top left) the Superman Club, with Dar in hat; Michael (left), Dar, and Marsha Cooke; Dar (left) J. Bone, Brian McLachlan (standing), Marsha, Claudia Dávila, and Michael; Dar (left), Adrian Alphona, Michael, and J. Bone. **Below:** Dar and Michael.





This spread: Michael Cho described to Ye Ed. that these strips were part of the Superman Club booklet: "That Dar strip has a funny history. We (our little club of Toronto cartoonists) put together a little ash-can comic for Dar when he moved to Nova Scotia. It had funny strips about him from all of us. Bone, in particular, had a funny batch. Most of the contributions are totally not fit for sharing. There're maybe 10 copies of that comic in the world. My contribution was called 'Cooke for Hire,' by the way, and was obviously a parody of Johnny Hazard/Steve Canyon [adventure comic strips], etc." Below, courtesy of Calum Johnstone, is the Cooke letterhead.



ended up toward the end. I didn't know that at the time, but Marsha told me and I was like, "Oh, I didn't realize it worked in that direction, as well." Because I would always get the Darwyn comparison.

We did learn from each other as artists who saw each other's work regularly and commented here and there, and also were inspired by each other's work. Darwyn had a very strong sense of professionalism in that he was absolutely committed to not blowing deadlines, responding to emails, and things like that, and that was something that resonated with me because I came from the magazine world rather than comics. I was surprised how loose and informal everything was in comics, particularly the way people treated deadlines. And Darwyn came from magazines, as well, as an art director. So we were both in agreement about that.

There were a few times where Darwyn tried to demonstrate how to deal with things in the professional world but, to be honest, I took them as poor examples. I learned Darwyn's idea of how to deal with being treated poorly, which came about when he mentioned his admiration for Joe Kubert (or whoever it was) hanging an editor out a window by his tie for altering his artwork. Darwyn admired that, but I was, like, "Buddy, you can't do that in the 21st century." I can think of four far better ways off the top of my head to get what you want that resolves the conflict for both sides. Subtle negotiation was not his preferred tactic. He approached things from a very old-fashioned way in both his professionalism and his reactions to slights while I had a

slightly more diplomatic approach.

Was he a man out of time? That's a complicated question because, while he was very much of the '80s – like me, enjoying punk and post-punk music – he loved '50s stuff and, by the time he had become a fully formed adult and dropped his teenage/early adult influences, he made himself into a person who really appreciated mid-century modern. So he was a very retro guy. He wanted his house designed in a particularly mid-century modern kind of way. The glasses in his kitchen had to be of a certain kind. He re-finished his tabletop and made as much of his own furniture as he could. So I guess you could say he's of both worlds, but I think he was like a lot of people who came of age in the '80s, who looked to the '50s and '60s for inspiration. That was a part of the era he came up in, too.

Like I said, one thing that differentiates Darwyn from a lot of other people was that he came into comics with a fully professional background, so he knew how to meet his deadlines and deliver work as promised, how to achieve the work he envisioned, and he was always capable of defending himself and the integrity of the project he's working on. If you're 25, you just take whatever job you get offered and you're learning the ropes, but he's coming into comics at 40, having worked in magazines, animation, and advertising, with a professional background, so if he's setting out to work on a large project, he knows what he's getting into and has an idea of some of the pitfalls that could come his way, and he knows how to advocate for himself.

I recall, during the making of *New Frontier*, there were several times where that project could have gone a totally different way. They wanted to swap out a bunch of characters and put in these alternative characters for continuity reasons or whatever, and Darwyn kept fighting for his vision of it until the point where, I think it was Paul Levitz who said, "Let's get rid of all these changes. Let's make this book the way it was supposed to be made from the beginning." And Darwyn, being old enough, was the kind of guy who could fight for that and hold his ground, where a younger person maybe with less experience would not have.

I thought the *Parker* books were fantastic, the best idea he had in ages because *Parker* was what he should have been doing all along. You know that story about like how Frank Miller came to New York in the '70s with a bunch of detective noir type of comic pages but never got any work, so he decided he'd draw some super-hero stuff, right? It's like that with Darwyn. He wanted to do crime stuff. That's the stuff that really moved him. The Westlake novels were his favorites, so this was a dream job. I mean if you asked him what were the things he wanted to do in comics, it was *The Spirit* and crime comics. So the *Parker* stuff was a labor of love. I thought he grew a ton in doing that and established himself as the Darwyn Cooke that we know.

About the *Before Watchmen* controversy: You know what? He's gone now for ten years, so I'm going to tell you the truth: Alan Moore made *Watchmen*, everybody loves *Watchmen*, Dar loved *Watchmen*. He respected it, but what he didn't like was that Alan Moore was saying something

to the effect of, "These are my characters and how dare you compromise them by reviving them and reanimating their corpse against my wishes." Darwyn's feeling on that was, "Well, *Watchmen* is essentially the Charlton characters that you did your own little take on. So why can't we do our take on yours then?" As much as he respected Alan Moore, he found that a little bit disingenuous. I'm not saying I agree with him, but I'm just saying that was what he expressed to me.

Regarding creator-owned comics, he always had ideas for those. I know there's a bunch of ideas in his sketchbooks and on his hard drive that are unmade, pitches and some artwork or a script... While he did want to do his own stuff, he's a pretty smart guy, so I think he wanted to launch with something like *Batman: Ego* because he's coming back from animation and having worked on *Batman Beyond* and *Batman: The Animated Series*, I think he probably wanted to like start with a bang. I met him when he had just finished *Ego*, he was working on *Selina's Big Score* and *Catwoman*, and then he went to *New Frontier*. I remember throughout that *New Frontier* time and then there was *The Spirit*, and that was a dream gig that he eventually realized was a lodestone. I remember he was over the moon when he got that gig, because Will Eisner picked him. Eisner was still alive at that time and, according to Darwyn, he said, "I want this guy to do it." That's what Darwyn told me. And he was such a fan of *The Spirit*. He knew it all by heart. But the thrill wore off for him after a little while of working on the book.

After *The Spirit*, he started doing the *Parker* stuff, but



Above: Darwyn toasting the release of his Parker Martini Edition at the Halifax, Nova Scotia, launch party.



Below: The two concluding strips by Michael Cho created for the "ash-can" collection gifted to Darwyn.





Above: Limited edition Parker bookplate created by Darwyn to benefit the Hero Initiative.

Below: Darwyn smiling for the camera while visiting the Strange Adventures Comix & Curiosities shop, in Halifax, owned by Calum Johnston. Cal says this was their old location and to note his "COMXGUY" license plate on wall.



he did have other creator-owned projects that were about to come out. One of the famous ones is *Revengeance*, a creator-owned series he was going to do just before he did that series with Gilbert Hernandez, *The Twilight Children*. *Revengeance* was about Toronto in the '80s and it was going to be like a David Lynch surrealist story for Image. But then DC came back with a really sweetheart offer for him to do anything he wanted at Vertigo, with any author he wanted, and he said, "If you can get me Gilbert Hernandez, I'd do it." So he took that one on. I really wish he'd done *Revengeance*, because that was ode to the Toronto of the 1980s and was filled with locations and call-outs that all of us Toronto cartoonists knew.

So, in the files after he died, there was *Revengeance*, and he and I were going to do a story about Japan.

We also had artwork and pitches for a young adult graphic novel called *The Big Blue* where I did half the artwork for the pitches and he had other artwork and it was a sci-fi story about kids in a ghetto who find a crashed mech and then rebuild it.

Dar was, for the rest of us in that club, our older brother. You know what I mean? The one who went to the Army, got a job, and the rest of us are all just sitting around playing football and smoking weed or something... He's that guy.

But he was one of us, he sh*t-talked as much as all of us and Lord knows Wednesdays was just a lot of cracking on stuff and joking about each other and things like that, but he was just one of us. He never tried to put himself above anybody else, never ever tried to pull rank, but at the same time he wasn't a fool and knew who he was.

Darwyn knew his position and he knew where he stood in the industry and he would go out of his way to share the rewards of his success with his friends. Like for example, he'd be saying, "Hey, I've got a place in San

Diego this year and if you guys need a place to crash, you have it. If I'm going to this con and if there's a bunch of parties or industry people that you want to meet, come along to the party, I'll get you in." That kind of thing. He was never a gate-keeping kind of guy or a guy who was there to celebrate himself in front of a court of hangers-on. He wanted friends and liked the company of peers. Like any true artist, when he hangs out, he does not want sycophants. He wants the company of fellow artists that he respects, and they're all moving forward in a sense of community in that regard. Dar was not the kind of guy to be saying, "I'm hanging out with my two collector guys tonight who spend a lot of money on my work and these four fans who love everything I do and will light my cigarettes for me." That's not who Darwyn was.

He was an incredibly generous friend and he was never afraid to share with others for fear that they would take work from him or something like that. He loved when people he admired and were friends with achieved success. He was never jealous of other people's success and, with people who were younger that should get more recognition, he tried to support them and get them work.

I think one of my very earliest jobs at DC was a *Before Watchmen* cover during that era, and earlier I worked on that *New Frontier Special* because that one was a spin-off out of a larger project that was trimmed down and he wanted his friends to work on that. And he asked me like, "Would you draw it or if [Dave] Bullock draws it, would you ink it?" And I was like, "Oh hell, yeah, if Dave draws it, I'll ink it, absolutely." He was always trying to get work for friends, definitely.

Another way Darwyn opened the door for his friends and showed his generosity was the "Marvel High" pitch, which was a series of kids comics that Brian McLachlan, Steve Manale, and J. Bone was to be a part of. I wasn't around for this one, but my understanding is that Marvel stole the best stuff out of the pitch and then killed it. They just took the meat off the plate and left him with the bill, so it was pretty bad, from what I heard. And Darwyn, God bless him, like I said, he doesn't take any sh*t. I was not there at SDCC when he poured the drink on so-and-so. But Darwyn put together the pitch in the first place because Bone, Brian, and Manale were already working in children's comics and YA stuff and he wanted to get work for them, too. But that was the end of his Marvel work and it's a shame because that *Spider-Man Tangled Web* story he did...? Damn, that thing was good and I would have loved to see him do more Marvel stuff. But he was like Alan Moore in that way. "That door is now closed."

It's been 10 years since Dar died and the stories about him keep getting wilder and more legendary, because Dar was that kind of guy. I've heard crazy tales that I know are total exaggerations. But sometimes, they're true. With the passage of time, I'm less reluctant to tell you the unvarnished truth about the man as far as I've known him. I don't feel the urge to soften his image, for fear of ruffling anyone else's feathers. He was unique, he was crazy talented, he had a wicked temper and was a hell of a good time. He was a true, great friend, and he was also a tough guy to be friends with sometimes.

In December of 2015, my son was born and I knew that

Dar had come back from England and there were some issues. He was feeling very tired. And a friend of mine told me, "Hey, you might want to give Darwyn a call." But, because we had a newborn, I couldn't find the time (you always had to clear out three to four hours to talk to Dar on the phone). And then, about maybe three weeks later, a friend said, "You should call him now." And I think it was Bone who explained, "You need to call him now and here's what the deal is." And so I called him that day and told him, "I'm coming down on the first flight over to see you. Manale and I are gonna come see you right away." And that's what we did. I only stayed for three days because I had a newborn and I had to go back, but we kept him company. And then, after I left, I know Paul Pope came down and hung out right after I left. So that was nice, as well. And he had a whole run of visitors coming to his place, friends that he cared for, like Cliff Chiang. Dar was also willing to see anyone from his past and sort of make his peace with them.

The press found out that he was sick just before he passed, but we knew six months ahead of time because he wanted to keep that private, so he was having friends come by and stay. And Jimmy Palmiotti was in town and God bless Jimmy. Jimmy was there every night watching movies with him and just talking dumb stuff and cheering him up in that way that Jimmy does. Jimmy is sunshine, like Brooklyn sunshine. While I was there, I also inked a couple of things for him that were on his drawing board just to get it done.

Do I think about him? All the time. Every day. And, if you ask every one of his friends, they'll say the same thing. I was in Montreal last week, May 14th, and I'm signing at a comic shop and I know what day this is. This is the date he passed away. And, whenever all of his friends get together, I'm telling you, man, it's 10 years now and it doesn't roll off the tongue in the first few sentences, but... somewhere throughout the night, we're telling Darwyn stories again. So, yeah, he's never gone. The day he passed, at least four friends that I know, myself included, had dreams about him. And I think it was his way of letting all of us know it was going to be okay.

In my dream, he was smiling. And his last words to me were, "It's always sunny over here, pal."

MICHAEL CHO was born in Seoul, South Korea, and raised in Canada. He graduated the Ontario College of Art and is today a renowned freelance illustrator (work which received Canadian National Magazine Award nominations) and comic book artist/graphic novelist. He recently worked with author Chip Kidd on *The Avengers in The Veracity Trap*.

Calum Johnston

I recall being introduced to Darwyn's work with Catwoman and Detective Comics, and just enjoying his stuff and hearing about him from some of the Toronto folks. Then, when New Frontier came out, it was just spectacular stuff and I mentioned to some people I knew in Toronto to tell him, "Hey, if you're coming out east sometime, I'd love to have you visit my comic shop [Strange Adventures, in Halifax, Nova Scotia]." So word got to him and we connected. He came out for a signing and gave a terrific talk... The [first] time he was able to come out was in January, when it can be pretty damn cold! While it wasn't great weather, the turnout

was terrific. He had a really fun time and even did a school visit to my daughter's class. J. Bone was with him and it was around the time he and Bone did the Tangled Web comics for Marvel.

We just struck up a friendship after having met a few times during different events and running into each other at conventions. Then he wound up looking at moving east because his wife, Marsha, was from Newfoundland originally, but she spent a lot of time in Halifax. Darwyn grew to very much enjoy the east coast area and he spent a couple of days here as Marsha knew lots of the spots around... Halifax is a good size city and he can be in a really remote rural area on the water, on the ocean, that's an hour's drive, but you're always moving on the road; there's little traffic. He picked up a place out here and fixed it up. It's an amazing spot. The man's studio was incredible.

So he was a good friend and we hung out quite a bit. We'd chat on the phone all the time just about different things and he loved G.I. Joe – that was his real love – the old 12" Joes. That was one of the passions we shared, because I lost so many of my Joe's in backyards through Montreal and he lost so many of his through backyards in Toronto. As a retailer, I'm dealing in secondhand books and toys at times, so once in a while, it's like, "Darwyn, you got to come check this out. I got a box full of loose G.I. Joe stuff." And he would have just the best time going through and saying, "Hey, this is the handgun from this set and this is the boot from that set. Oh, I need this tunic."

In his Nova Scotia studio, he had all this cedar shelving built in an L shape in his studio and I was like, "Are you putting in a sauna?" But it was actually just a display for his Joes. It's two walls in his studio space and he got glass doors and they're pretty much from floor to ceiling, and it just displays all his favorite Joes in their outfits – the paratrooper, the astronaut, scuba diver – just amazing stuff. And it was right across the room from where he drew on a big flat desk and he was able to always look over and see his favorite stuff. Plus his studio was full of just these amazing pieces of artwork on the walls, just tons of paintings that he picked up over the years, some pieces by Mike Allred and Evan Dorkin. He had some Toth and a Kirby piece, just some really fun stuff.

Darwyn was very much like a big brother and we had a lot of similar stories. I grew up in Montreal, he grew up in Toronto. We had the same kind of roots, going around to earn money to collect comics, trading with friends, and we had a lot of similar tastes and just enjoyed each other's company.

I got to be his "booth babe" a couple of times at shows in



Above: Calum Johnston had Darwyn and J. Bone come visit his daughter Addison's Halifax, Nova Scotia, grade school class to give an impromptu art lesson. Calum revealed the session devolved into kids sprawled on the floor drawing and Dar doodling alongside the youngsters. Addison is the little girl in red pants at Dar's knee in this photo who has grown to establish for herself a career in animation, currently an animation posing supervisor at Copernicus Studios.

Below: Calum's daughter, Addison, and friend as depicted by Darwyn.





Above: No doubt to tantalize his fans as well as psyche himself up in the process, Darwyn created these icons indicating the order of his proposed run of Parker graphic novels, ending with the adaptation he planned as his final effort featuring the anti-hero, Butcher's Moon.

Below: For Calum Johnston's 40th birthday, Darwyn drew up this celebratory illustration for his Halifax comic shop proprietor pal.



Florida and Toronto, just to talk to people at the table while he's signing or drawing stuff, with me answering questions, moving people along, un-bagging things, just trying to be a help. I got to observe that Darwyn was always such a gracious guy and a real character. But, of course, there's been lots of tales about him, over the years, where he's just been blunt. I mean, he's a professional guy. He came into comics late in life as far, as doing it as a profession, and he could be blunt when people were rude.

Ever heard the tale of the guy who insisted on having a Batman sketch after Darwyn said he wasn't doing any more Batman sketches...? At one show, Darwyn put up a sign at a show – and this is the third day of doing free sketches and taking donations for the Hero Initiative – and he was just tired of drawing Batman. So he puts up a little sign that said, "Anything but Batman." It's a bit of a gag, right? But one guy is just so indignant, insisting on Batman, and, Darwyn, he didn't even get really rude. He was laughing about it. He's like, "You can't believe what's going on," and he still said no. So, as the guy storms off, Darwyn shouts after him: "Hey, remember to always tell the story that you turned down a free Darwyn Cooke sketch!"

He had a nice rapport with children. That time he came with J. Bone, I arranged the publicity. We've done some advertising and one of the local TV stations wanted to do a segment on the morning show. I told Darwyn, "How about I bring you to my daughter's school and you could do an art class with kids in kindergarten to grade one?" So the TV crew came and there was a dozen or so kids, and Darwyn and Jay talked about just how they make a living. They drew on a

big whiteboard and the kids were shouting out, "Draw Harry Potter!" "Draw Harry Potter getting eaten by a snake!" "How do you draw Spider-Man?" Then it just degenerated into everyone sitting down and the kids lying on the floor drawing, and Darwyn is doodling with some kids, showing them how to draw cars. It was hilarious.

Darwyn would also come to our Free Comic Book Day events and Strange Adventures won a Diamond Award for having crazy FCBD events because we didn't even have it in the store after the first two or three years. We rented a church hall down the street because we'd have a line down the block and we'd go through our own backstock and collections, and then order lots of the special FCBD stuff and then we'd have local artists do drawings for kids, and Darwyn would be there just knocking out sketches for kids.

I heard that for one FCBD, at The Silver Snail, in Toronto, he was doing drawings for kids and a little kid comes up to him and says, "Can you draw SpongeBob?" And Darwyn just looks him straight in the eye and goes, "Let's find out." He got some reference and does a good drawing and the kid looks at it, gives him an affirming nod, and Darwyn said later, "That was the best approval I've gotten in years." He was always really good with kids. He just spoke to them like people.

I knew he had lots and lots of ideas that were never realized. There was a great story that he's pitched to several artists – I know he was talking to Paul Pope about doing this – and then the last idea was because they had such a great time working or he enjoyed doing Twilight Children so much with Gilbert was the idea was he has this story of

the end of the world. It involves the giant nickel in Sudbury and a little bit of Miracle Mile, and the idea was maybe Gilbert would draw it from Darwyn's script as a sort of reversal of what they did on Twilight Children.

With Marvel, Darwyn wanted to do so many more Spider-Man tales, as he and Jay had ideas for every holiday. After the Valentine's Day tale and the Christmas issue, there would be a St. Patrick's one and then other holidays. Just stories themed around a holiday weekend for a series of one-shot comics. And remember the cover he did for *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* with Captain America...? Can you imagine an Invaders mini-series by him? He would've just knocked it out of the park! He loved all the Marvel characters. You remember that month-long run of Darwyn's covers at DC? The Nightwing one started out as a Nick Fury drawing! But what happened with his whole idea of the "Marvel Kids" pitch ended the relationship because they just took it away and didn't pay for any of it, and he wasn't even looking for anything for himself. He was like, "Look, friends of mine put a lot of work into this. Give them a kill fee." And they're like, "No, no, we're not using it." Then they wind up using so many of the stuff from it. That just soured him on them entirely.

I know he wanted to get to the [Parker] *Butcher's Moon* adaptation. It was going to be amazing. He had to get *Slayground* out there first, in order to get to *Butcher's Moon*, but you've seen probably in some of the Martini Editions, he had sort of iconography done for all of the volumes and he started in on the paintings for more of the prose reproductions of the novels. He was just so happy to be working in the world of Richard Stark/Donald Westlake and he had so many more ideas for it. At one of our launch parties, we did up pens, little retro click pens as if they're from the Tourism Bureau in [The Score locale] Copper Canyon. We did up martini glasses with Parker on them. He just loved that kind of stuff. He did up a little enamel pin of the silhouette of Parker.

Darwyn loved to promote his projects – the lobby cards, prints, little portfolios they did, retailer incentives, all those things – and he was SO into trying to market things and approach things in a different way. *The Man with the Getaway Face* having the different editions of it. It wasn't a money grab... I'm sure it made money, but it was a very inexpensive way to get the thing out there and it made a mark. It was this giant oversized comic and people



This page: At top, Calum Johnston had this poster made up after the passing of his good friend to promote the first "Darwyn Cooke Days" celebration at his Nova Scotia comic book shops. Above is, from left, Canadian artist Ken Steacy, Calum, and the big guy himself.

were like, "What the hell is this?" And it was so short, but it was still a really good, concise tale and all it does is make you go, "Well, I want to read more of this!"

With *Before Watchmen*, he knew it was going to be a bit of a controversial thing and he had some really cool ideas. Then, working with Amanda Connor, she was the one who came up with that idea of the Comedian getting the happy face button from Silk Spectre in the mini-series Darwyn wrote and Amanda drew. He really enjoyed the collaboration and you should realize *Before Watchmen* also helped pay his mortgage – he had a house in Florida and his house in Nova Scotia – and he put a lot of work into them both. He built on decks and little extensions and a shed. He was incredibly handy.

I stayed in his Florida place, in a beautiful location, in Safety Harbor, near Tampa. Which he chose largely because he knew Jimmy Palmiotti so well – Jimmy and Amanda – so it was like just hanging out with pals, and so many different people would come through Orlando from different shows then they'd drive through to Safety Harbor and hang out with those guys for a bit. I got to go down and be his booth babe at a show in Orlando and it was a really great time.

What do I remember best? Just that Darwyn was a really decent guy who loved what he did. He was incredibly talented and was always willing to share. He'd be in the shop looking through some books, somebody happened to be picking up one of his books, and I said, "Hey, would you like that signed? The guy's handing right over there." He'd come over, chat with a person for a little while, autograph it, and they'd just have a wonderful discussion. It just gave everybody a thrill who met him.

One time, he's doing a signing in Florida and someone asked for a Batman drawing. He was drawing it and said, "Oh, I made the cape too big. It's going to take a while to black this in." Then he just hands the guy a big marker and says, "Here, you black in this part here." And so the guy is sitting down and drawing along with Darwyn on this Darwyn Cooke drawing.

And, for me, the biggest thrill in my life was getting a dedication – "This one's for Cal" – and mention in the "thanks" page in *The Outfit* and then show up as one of the heist-men in *The Score* as "Dan Wycza"!

I got a sense of that Darwyn was having a health issue right around January of the year he passed. I was down visiting him because he had just



Brian McLachlan

Superman Club was our weekly Wednesday meetings with Darwyn at the Dragon Lady comic shop. After we groused about the latest releases, we'd go for lunch at the Diplomatico patio or Southside Louie's, depending on whether we wanted sunburn or heartburn. Darwyn was the elder statesman, the big brother, the mainstream pro, who welcomed the younger generation at his table. We got a first hand look at his process. At Dragon Lady, he didn't just point us to comics and artists we should know, he set an example. He bought paper nostalgia as reference. We saw his drive to make his period pieces authentic, down to the wristwatch.

At lunch, Darwyn would talk to use about his latest projects. Sometimes straightforward descriptions of his plans. Sometimes he'd just talk about something, and we wouldn't know was part of his work until we saw it in print. Like the time he launched into a lecture that we never would have the guts to go to war and fight for our convictions. That we were pussies for not taking up arms. (Darwyn often talked as if he was part of the Greatest Generation, not a teenage punk rocker). But it was just him using words that would end up in *New Frontier*, discussing the Korean war. We can't be sure if he was trying out material on us, like a comedian, or if he was just so wrapped up in his work that he carried it with him. Either way, the stories he wanted to tell were alive within him.

His comics storytelling was the best in the business, but hearing him tell his stories (and talk about how the ideas he was exploring or wrestling with) in person, there was even more palpable energy. He lived for stories and we were lucky enough to witness that first hand.

Darwyn could draw in many styles, but his signature style was solid construction finished with loose, bold energy, which complimented his inner fire. He told us he chose that style so he could still draw the same way as an old man, without a dip in quality he saw in other older artists. Of course, maybe he drew fast and loose to get lots of work done, wondering if his time might be as limited as his dad's. Not something he'd admit to us, but I wouldn't be surprised if it had weighted his decisions. He saw more of the puzzle than most of us. Whether it was comics, career, or a girl one of us was seeing, he could be maddeningly right.

One time, at the airport, he shook his head at me for wearing a hoodie. At the time my only button up shirt was Hawaiian. While he enjoyed poking fun at us for dressing and acting too immature, this was a lesson in practicality. He wore a suit to the airport because "You'd be surprised how much smoother things go for you when you're dressed nicely." This was the lesson from a teenage punk. Be a rebel when it mattered, but know when to use the system to your benefit.

I got to work with Darwyn on a one-page comic for the Toronto Comics Art Festival. I was to write it, Darwyn pencil it, and Michael Cho would ink it. We had a month. I turned in the script quickly. Weeks went by but nothing. The thing was, Darwyn didn't like my script. And rightly so. I was ten years his junior. He was a much better storyteller and a wiser one. But instead of telling me, he asked Mike to tell me to rewrite it. Mike told Darwyn to do it. Finally Darwyn called

Above: Dar poster art for 2015 Montreal Comicon. **Below:** FCBD 2005 Comic Festival cover by Dar.



gotten the diagnosis of cancer. He went to the doctor just to check out a pain and turned out it was worse than just a pulled muscle, and that it was being dealt with. We went to several chemo sessions and I was helping take care of the dog, while he was going through this. And then it started to turn around, there were times when he showed progress, but then it just got worse and worse.

I know the tenth anniversary of his leaving us was just recently, but I'd rather acknowledge his life. We always put on a little sale in the middle of November each year to remember his birth, when he came into our world. We call it Darwyn Cooke Days and we celebrate great comic books that he put together and the work that he did just because I hate to be reminded of his passing. As they often say, "F*ck cancer!"

CALUM JOHNSTON is proprietor of the Halifax, Fredericton, and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, shops, Strange Adventures Comix & Curiosities, a chain dubbed "Canada's Oddest Comic Book Stores." A retailer since 1992, Johnston celebrates the life of his friend when his shops host "Darwyn Cooke Days" in honor of Dar's birthday every November 16.

me, with about three days to the deadline. So the piece ended up being pretty much what Darwyn wrote. I punched it up a bit with some gags. Darwyn wasn't a gag writer. His comedy came from seeing things in the world and shaking his head at them. He saw the absurdity and laid it out for us. That was how he was funny. He wasn't a clown, or a joker, but a teller of funny truths and stories. Anyway, Dar and Mike drew the hell out of it, and delivered it like pros. I had heard Darwyn was hard to work with, but here I saw one reason was he was gentle and kind. He didn't want to break a young kid's chops after offering him a break. I saw his humanity pouring out through that. Why would this blustery, super talented artist be afraid of me? Because he could empathize, and genuinely cared for me and the rest of our group of Superman Clubbers. His stories are a testament to that ability to place himself in many different people's shoes, and he was no different with real people.

I also saw that he was hard to work with because he didn't let himself be walked on. He worked for the big companies. He didn't see a need to create a new version of an archetype when you can use an existing one and have your work reach a wider audience. Writing these stories, Darwyn respected that he was playing in their sandbox with their toys. But he was prepared to leave the playground if they had too many nonsense rules. Through Darwyn we didn't just learn about making great work, we learned about the dark side of the business we were entering. He helped expose us to what it could do, while also trying to shield us from it. He was generous to anyone who was gracious and polite to him, and tried to open doors where he could. He felt bad when the door slammed on one of our toes but it was a learning process. He stood up for us and himself, even if it meant burning a bridge.

For an amazing writer, Darwyn had some befuddling turns of phrases. Once, on a car trip to an American comic convention, he barked from the back of the van for someone to "lift an igloo flap." For about five minutes we shrugged our shoulders and whispered to one another, "What the hell is he talking about?" Eventually he angrily clarified, "Crack a window back here!"

That was the same trip where the border guard asked us where we were heading. "To a comic convention." "You all part of some club? Some Superman club?" "Yes. That is it." "Okay, go on ahead." We had learned how to get across the border without riling security. As soon as we were over we decided that would be what we called ourselves. When Darwyn left for Nova Scotia years later, we still met for lunch every Wednesday for a few years. But we stopped calling it Superman Club. The Superman had left, so we called it Jimmy Olsen club.

By working on books with characters like Superman, the Spirit, Catwoman, and Parker he's gained a kind of immortality. He will be remembered, enjoyed, and studied by artists, writers, and comic fans for a longer than any of us



Above: Ken Meyer, Jr.'s portrait of Darwyn Cooke. **Below:** At a signing for *The Score* at Calum's comic shop, Darwyn drew this caricature of his buddy.

will live. And, like a regular mortal, he will live in on the lives he touched. Though the wisdom he shared, the frustrations and laughter he gave us, the wild stories we won't share with the world, but will hold close to our hearts. It's still hard to believe he's gone. But of course, he's not really gone. "What Would Darwyn Do?" is a question many of us will ask for the rest of our lives, not just when we draw, but when we interact with others. What Would Darwyn Do at this service? He'd say something from the heart, get drunk, and have fun with his friends. And tomorrow he'd get up and get back to work, and draw his heart out.

BRIAN McLACHLAN, who describes himself is "part writer, part artist, all cartoonist," is author of the award-winning *Draw Out the Story: Ten Secrets to Creating Your Own Comics* and he teaches illustration at Humber College. His testimonial here was first read at Darwyn's memorial. Look for his video on YouTube on "How to Draw Crowd Scenes," which notes Dar's *Comic Book Artist* cover as a supreme example!

Ramón K. Pérez

I met Darwyn when I worked for Speakeasy Comics, a small Canadian indie publisher, and they were working with him on a variety of projects. I was working on the series *Spellgame*, producing the interior art, while he was doing the covers. It was a series about a rat-pack styled sorcerer, with an undead sidekick, working in Vegas – so it was right up Darwyn's alley! The Speakeasy publisher, Adam Fortier, was part of what we dubbed the Superman Lunch Club, where Darwyn was, of course, Superman.



Below: When he was selling his personal comic book collection, Dar created this authentication bug.





Above: Spellgame #2 [Nov. '05] cover by Darwyn, and published by the shortlived Speakeasy Comics.



Above: Superman Club pin from 1966. **Below:** Southside Louie's, where the Superman Club would break bread every Wednesday after buying comics at Dragon Lady.



Also in the club were Mike Cho, Jay Bone, Jay Stephens, and a variety of other local artists who would join every Wednesday for lunch. I got sneakily inducted into the group through Adam Fortier and Speakeasy, and that's how I first met Darwyn on a social level.

The lunches were great. We would hit up Dragon Lady, the local comic shop, which had your classic comics, but also a lot of vintage ephemera, like Time magazine, art books, and so much more. We'd show up every Wednesday for the new comics and mill about, picking up books, and whatever else caught our fancy. Afterward, we'd hit up a local pub down the street and probably enjoy a two- to four-hour lunch where we'd talk comics, career, and a little bit of everything, really. I don't think work got done on those Wednesdays!

The waitress was Donna, and she opened up her own place afterwards, called the Caledonian, which still exists today. She was our regular

waitress and was definitely part of the family. She was a legend. She treated us very well, as the pub wasn't that packed on Wednesday afternoons. So we would oftentimes be the biggest group – if not the only group – in the pub after the lunchtime rush. And we'd take up anywhere from a minimum of six tables, up to a dozen, especially if there were visiting artists or people in the neighborhood doing us that day. It really grew over the years. Donna kept us in freebies – shots, cake, all kinds of stuff – and she was definitely part of the family and part of that Wednesday moment that we all shared. It really was a special time in Toronto.

I'd been living in the city for maybe six to eight years by that point, and I hadn't really met a lot of people in the comics industry. So the Superman Club was really a kind of gateway drug into meeting local artists, the creative community, and Darwyn's friends. I'll always cherish those days.

Darwyn was definitely the Superman of the Superman Club. When he moved out to the East Coast, up to Halifax, we jokingly renamed our get-togethers the Jimmy Olsen Club because our Superman had taken off for Nova Scotia.

With Darwyn gone, the scene definitely evolved. He was the tie that bound, so to speak. The comic shop closed, people grew up, started families, lives got busier, and we drifted apart. The Jimmy Olsen Club dissipated, especially after the comic shop closed – and these days we only really gather after a convention or special event. Geez, I think I last saw Mike Cho a year ago... But we try to stay connected. When we do manage to connect, it's always a joy to catch up, and it's as if a day hasn't gone by.

RAMÓN K. PÉREZ is an established award-winning cartoonist, illustrator, and designer, and is the current creative director of RAID Studio, Toronto's Royal Academy of Illustration & Design – see his interview about RAID's *Blitz*, Canada's "creator-first" comics magazine – with a

long list of credits in the comics biz. His collaboration with writer Chip Zdarsky (interviewed herein, too!), the Skybound horror series, *Stillwater*, is being produced as an Amazon Prime Video streaming series.

Donna Wolfe

I'm originally from the Highlands of Scotland, and I came to Canada in 1998. I'd done a gap year in Australia and then I arrived just to travel, basically, but I stayed. Early on, I got a job waiting tables at a Toronto pub and pizza place called Southside Louie's, on College Street, and that's where the guys would come in on Wednesdays.

So, when I first came to Canada and started at Southside Louie's, I really didn't know anybody and those guys used to come in once a week and they sort of became family. They were just lovely. They were interested in me and gave me tips about where to go and things to do. We all became friends and we always had a good laugh.

Darwyn, I loved him. He was just lovely. He told it how it was – I'm very much the same way – and we got on really well. And, after he moved to Halifax, he would come back every year for a big show, and he'd either visit and see me or make a point to ask the guys, "Hey, how's Donna doing?"

All the guys, they'd always keep in contact. I was really lucky in those days. They were just starting their careers and were doing really well and Toronto was an exciting city at that time. I'm young, meeting new people for the first time, and they brought me into their group and it was a really nice period in my life and they were just good people.

And, to be honest, they were also good tipplers. They looked after me pretty well and they all made my job fun. Plus, to tell the truth, they weren't really only customers, they were *friends*, and I got to know them and watch them getting started in their careers. Honestly, I didn't realize how successful Darwyn was or how any of the guys were doing, but none of them were big-headed. They played down what they did and I didn't realize how talented they all were.

After I left Southside Louie's, my husband and I started a new restaurant. We realized one of every four Canadians is of Scottish heritage, but there wasn't anything all-Scottish in Toronto, so we opened the Caledonian, which offers nothing but Scottish food and drink. We were lucky in that we did things right and we opened at a time when people were looking for what we were offering.

And the guys, they followed me when I opened up the new restaurant and, at my first party, Ramón [Pérez] came and invited everybody. They were just supportive, *really* supportive. They were genuine people, I'd say. They were awesome. They're all great guys.

DONNA WOLFE is owner, with her husband, David, of the Caledonian, aforementioned Scottish public house and whiskey bar, located on College Street. Called the "best Scottish pub in Canada" and "the only authentic Scottish pub in Toronto," the establishment boasts 750 different Scotch whiskeys and a menu offering authentic dishes, including haggis. When I called during the World Cup, she said, "Business is crazy busy! There's a line out the door and up the street!"



THE FIRST CANADIAN CELEBRITIES I WAS AWARE OF WAS THE COMEDY TEAM OF WAYNE AND SHUSTER, FREQUENT GUESTS ON THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW.

I LATER LEARNED FRANK SHUSTER WAS A COUSIN OF JOE SHUSTER, CO-CREATOR OF SUPERMAN.

FRANK'S DAUGHTER, ROSIE SHUSTER, WROTE FOR THE ORIGINAL SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, AS WELL AS MARRYING FELLOW CANADIAN-- AND SNL CREATOR--LORNE MICHAELS.

SNL'S NOT READY FOR PRIME TIME PLAYERS-- INCLUDING CANADIAN DAN AYKROYD--ONCE TEAMED WITH MARVEL'S AMERICAN HERO, SPIDER-MAN.

MARVEL SOON INTRODUCED WOLVERINE, THEIR FIRST CANADIAN HERO

THEN, BRITISH BORN, CANADIAN RAISED JOHN BYRNE CHRONICLED THE EXPLOITS OF CANADA'S FIRST SUPER TEAM, ALPHA FLIGHT.

I RECALL ENJOYING THEIR ADVENTURES, BUT AS AN AMERICAN, I ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT THE NATIVES THOUGHT.

SO, WHAT DO YOU FELLAS THINK OF ALPHA FLIGHT?

THEY'RE A BUNCH OF HOSERS!!

TAKE OFF, eh!

MAYBE I SHOULD'VE ASKED THAT NICE LADY IN THE LEOPARD-SKIN PILL-BOX HAT INSTEAD...



Four Founding Comics Creators

Recognizing the Canadian comic book contributions of Stables, Dingle, Furness, and Rae

by IVAN KOCMAREK



Above: John Stables – who would use the clever nome de plume, Jon St. Ables – became art director at Maple Leaf Publishing, which boasted a handful of comics titles, including Bing Bang Comics, Lucky Comics, and Rocket Comics.

Inset right: Stable's best-known creation was adventurer Brok Windsor, seen here in the splash page of his debut adventure, in the longest-running Maple Leaf series, Better Comics V3 #3 [May '44].

Below: The first issue of Better Comics, cover dated March 1941.

[Editor's Note: Realizing a mere 160-page issue devoted to luminaries of Canadian comics – with nearly half of the publication focused on a single talent – leaves little room to be comprehensive and zero chance of covering more than the merest fraction of those who contributed to the comics of the Great White North. So, without (too much) apology, what follows in the remainder of this issue is coverage of a wildly diverse group of creators and publishers arbitrarily selected by yours truly, folks I have long had an interest in learning more about. To begin, Canadian comics historian Ivan Kocmarek gives us a look the form's start up yonder. – Ye Ed.]

The first Canadian comics were born out of a war and lasted only a little longer than that war itself. They were war comics in the truest sense of the word. Over a year after joining in the fight against Nazis in Europe, Canada had become concerned about its down-turned economy. In December of 1940, Canadian Parliament enacted the War Exchange Conservation Act, which stopped products it deemed unessential to the war effort from coming into Canada from the U.S. Parliament didn't want our dollars going south for things like comic books and candy bars when they could be made at home to bolster our own war-time economy.

By the time 1941 arrived, there were no new American comics on our newsstands, and some enterprising Canadian printers and publishers anticipated this and, by the start of February, our own Canadian comics started appearing on shelves. Four main comic book publishing houses were established over the next couple of years in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. However, these companies didn't have access to proper (and more expensive) four-color printing equipment and, of the 800 or so individual comics produced over the six-year window (1941–46), about 85% of them had only black-and-white interiors. In this short survey, I want to look at the main creator/art director from each one of these four companies, though not one of them were born in Canada.



JOHN STABLES/MAPLE LEAF

John Stables [1912–99] was born just a couple of days before Christmas, in Ulverston, England (coincidentally the birthplace of comedian Stan Laurel). His family came to Canada when he was seven and they settled in Winnipeg. Stables left school after grade nine and, by the time of his late teens and start of the Great Depression, he began to find sporadic work in newspapers, magazines, and in a variety of commercial art and sign-painting fields in and around Winnipeg. He took his talents to Victoria, British Columbia, in early 1942, where, in the middle of May, Stables married his Winnipeg sweetheart, Esther Anne Biggar. Later that year, on a trip with his wife to Toronto, he met Harry Smith, Vancouver bookstore owner and owner of the fledgling Maple Leaf Publishing company and Harry encouraged the cartoonist to come and work for him when the newlyweds returned to British Columbia.

By mid-'43, Stables moved with his wife from Victoria to Vancouver to work in comics. He was 30 and, like most of the country's comic creators of that era, Stables wrote, penciled, inked, and lettered his stories himself. He quickly started signing his comic book stories and covers as Jon St. Ables and



began creating characters, such as Naval officer Bill Speed in *Rocket Comics* and cartoony caveman, Piltown Pete, for *Lucky Comics*. But his crowning creation was Brok Windsor, who appeared first in *Better Comics* V.3 #3 [May–June '44].

Brok was a Canadian doctor who begins a Buck Rogers-type life when, while on a canoe trip vacation, he wakes up on an island with a technologically advanced indigenous civilization. The rest of the series recounts his perils and adventures as he makes his way back home again. Brok ran for 15 issues of *Better Comics*, right to the end of the title's run and Stables did all of its covers. (This entire series has been reprinted by Hope Nicholson in her *Brock Windsor: 1944–1946* [Bedside Press, Winnipeg, 2015].)

After the war, Stables took over from Vernon Miller as art director for the company and became bitterly disappointed after Canadian comics crashed out by the end of 1946. Eventually, in 1949, Stables moved his family – by now, he had two sons: Jon born in Vancouver in '46 and Thomas Brock born in Seattle in '54 – to California to look for work, but his efforts for left-leaning publications caught up with him and he would be forced to return to Canada. The Stables family yo-yoed between Canada and the States until 1958, when he became a U.S. naturalized citizen and settled in Seattle and – this is true – he formally changed his name to John Brock Stables. The comics creator died a few short hours before the turn of the millennium in Anacortes, Washington.

ED FURNESS/DOUBLE "A"

Edward Albert Furness [1910–2005] was born in Brighouse, Yorkshire, England, which is halfway between Manchester and Leeds. His family moved to Welland, Ontario, in 1920, when the lad was ten, and soon settled in nearby Dunville.

Like many Canadian artists who ended up working in comics during the war, Furness attended the Ontario College of Art, in Toronto, where he graduated in May '33. He then toiled for a Toronto animation firm and, when that ended after a couple of years, Furness worked across the northeastern U. S., designing department store window displays.

When war broke out, Furness and his wife, Nell – they were married in October '37 – returned to Canada with his intention of enlisting, but he was diagnosed with an ulcer and flat feet and the Canadian Army wouldn't take him.

Early in 1941, Furness friend Syd Stein, who was then drawing the *Robin Hood* daily strip for the *Toronto Evening Telegram*, introduced Furness to Ted McCall, an editor there and creator and writer of that strip. McCall had recently convinced Toronto magazine distributor Harry Sinnott to get into publishing comics in the wake of the new ban on American comics. Sinnott formed Anglo-American Publishing and released *Robin Hood Comics*, in March '41. McCall had just come up with a new character he called "Freelance" and needed an artist. On the strength of some sample drawings, Furness got the job, and *Freelance Comics* #1 came out with a cover date of July–August 1941. While *Robin Hood Comics*

was little more than chopping up and reprinting the dailies in comic book form, *Freelance Comics* consisted of all-new and original material.

Freelance got his name from those unaffiliated and mercenary medieval knights who were lances free of any affiliation to a lord. He had no super-powers, relying instead on superior strength, agility, and guile, and was pledged to fight injustice wherever he found it. His outfit consisted of a red top, jodhpurs, and boots, reminiscent of a Mountie without hat and topcoat. In fact, he looked quite like Quality's Captain Triumph, who first appeared in *Crack Comics* #27 a couple of years later. Freelance began fighting Nazis across North Africa, then battled his way into Europe and eventually the Pacific Theatre. He was perhaps the most popular character to come out of Canadian wartime comics and certainly had the longest run.

Anglo-American was a comic book publisher quite different from the other Canadian comic book publishers because of two developments. First, it settled on an assembly line comic book production method. Furness served as main layout artist and the other working artists became specialized in rendering aspects like backgrounds, secondary figures, main characters, and lettering. At the end of this process, there would be a final clean up and the pages would be ready for printing. At the three other main companies, most of the artists individually handled the job of creating a comic story or cover from script to finish. Second, Sinnott, who had been a major distributor for American Fawcett publications in Canada



Top: Freelance Comics #33 [Sept. '46]. **Above:** Anglo-American Publishing art director Ed Furness.

Below: Grand Slam Comics V3 #10 cover detail.





Above: Initially published by Hillborough Studio, *Nelvana of the Northern Lights*, created by Adrian Dingle, was the first female Canadian super-hero. **Inset right:** Besides *Nelvana*, Dingle's other creation of note was "The Penguin," the mysterious, dapper hero (introduced in *Wow Comics* #15 [Oct. '43]), seen here in a Bell Features house ad.

Opposite page: Clockwise from top right is *The Adventures of Canada Jack* ['45]; Educational Products art director George Menendez Rae; the rare French language, Montreal-based '40s comic, *Nos Héros Canadiens*, included here with apologies as an example of a French-language Canadian comic book, a category woefully overlooked in this retrospective; and *Canadian Heroes V2* #5 [Sept. '43]. *Je suis vraiment désolé, mes amis.*

Below: John Adrian Darley Dingle, art director for Bell Features.



before the ban, made an arrangement with Fawcett, at the end of 1941, to keep their brand alive in Canada by redrawing American scripts using Canadian artists because, while the ban did not allow the reprinting of U.S. comics in Canada, it didn't cover redrawing of scripts by the Americans. Fawcett began publishing titles like *Whiz*, *Captain Marvel*, and *Spy Smasher*, as well as feature Fawcett characters in the anthology titles, *Three Aces Comics* and *Grand Slam Comics*.

Besides visualizing Free-lance, Furness also created other heroes for Anglo American, such as Don Shield, who had a shield strapped to his chest that could project a Reverso Ray that made time

go backwards of anything it struck; Dr. Destine, a detective modelled on actor William Powell; South Seas adventurer Red Rover; and a cowboy called the Purple Rider. After the comics, Furness became a freelance commercial artist and in 1948 joined Southam Printing, in Toronto, as art director. Southam printed such publications as the *Eaton's Catalogue* and *TV Guide*, and Furness was employed there until 1966, at which point, with some partners, he bought out Gilchrist Printing, working there until he retired in 1982.

In retirement, Furness took up fine art painting and pursued this passion until his death in 2005. He is buried next to his wife in his hometown of Dunville, Ontario.



ADRIAN DINGLE/BELL FEATURES

John Adrian Darley Dingle [1911-74] was born in the Welsh seaside town of Barmouth, but his family emigrated to Oakville, just outside of Toronto, when he was three. He attended the Ontario College of Art in 1931, and soon established himself a portrait painter in the Toronto area by 1937.

When American comics were banned in Canada, he decided to form the Hillborough Studio Publishing Co., on Grenville Street, in Toronto, in late spring 1941, and put the first issue of *Triumph-Adventure Comics* out, with a cover-date of August, 1941. This issue was most notable for Dingle's creation of the super-heroine, *Nelvana of the Northern Lights*, who was an Inuit demigoddess sprung from the union of Koliak, god-King of the Northern Lights and an Inuit woman. *Nelvana* could fly at the speed of light, call upon her father for help in times of peril and make use of his powerful aurora ray that melted metal and disrupted radio signals. She appeared on the comics scene a full three months before *Wonder Woman* in *All Star Comics* #8.

Hillborough Studio folded after *Triumph-Adventure* #6,

but, a couple of months later, Cy Bell's Bell Features and Publishing Ltd., located just a dozen blocks away, hired Dingle as a new art director, then took over the title, shortening it to *Triumph Comics*, and made *Nelvana* the Queen of Canadian comics. (Her tales have been collected in *Nelvana of the Northern Lights*, co-eds. Richey and Nicholson [CGA Comics, 2014].)

As art director, Dingle had his own office area in the Bell Features plant while other artists in the Bell stable worked from home, bringing in work for him to approve, which he often did by writing his initials, "OK A.D.," somewhere along the top margin of the original page and then the artist would get paid. The art director loved fine art painting far more than his comic book work and his office walls was adorned with many of his works. But few fine artists could make a living just off painting at that time in Canada. But Dingle never denigrated his comic book work, as he valued it for teaching him to work under the pressure of deadlines, for drawing directly from the imagination, and honing a sort of mental retention where he could see something and later draw it from memory, a skill he regarded as very useful for a painter. He did regard his five-and-a-half years in comics as a genuinely happy time.



Dingle's other notable creation for Bell was the Penguin. Having nothing to do with the Batman villain, the character was a smart, upper-class, tuxedo-wearing hero with full-head penguin mask with a foot-long beak clumsily protruding from the front. He never revealed his secret identity though his 15-issue run in *Wow Comics* and Dingle re-worked him as the Blue Raven for a full-color story after the last issue of *Wow*.

After his time in comics, Dingle went on to a successful career in portraiture and landscape painting, as well as finding work in newspapers and magazines. He also taught painting extensively around Southern Ontario, and was among the most prolific Canadian painters of his time and belonged to

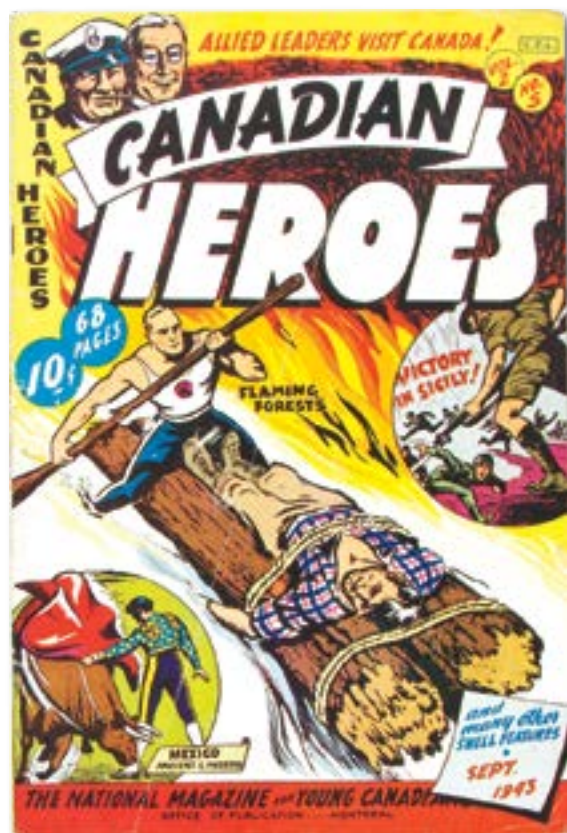
the Royal Academy of Arts, Ontario Society of Artists, Ontario Institute of Painters, and was a fellow of the International Institute of Arts & Letters.

Adrian Dingle died three days before Christmas 1974 due to complications from an operation treating his esophageal cancer. He was only 63.



GEORGE MENENDEZ RAE/EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

George Menendez Rae [1906–92] was born in the New York City borough of Brooklyn, derived from Spanish and Irish stock. His family emigrated to Toronto, in May 1913, and by '21, when Rae was 15, the family was living in Peterborough, Ontario. Later, Rae moved to Montreal, where he married Rowena Turner. It was during this period – between time spent in Peterborough and then Montreal – when Rae must have received some formal art training, as when he joined the newly formed Educational Projects, in Montreal, the man was an accomplished artist.

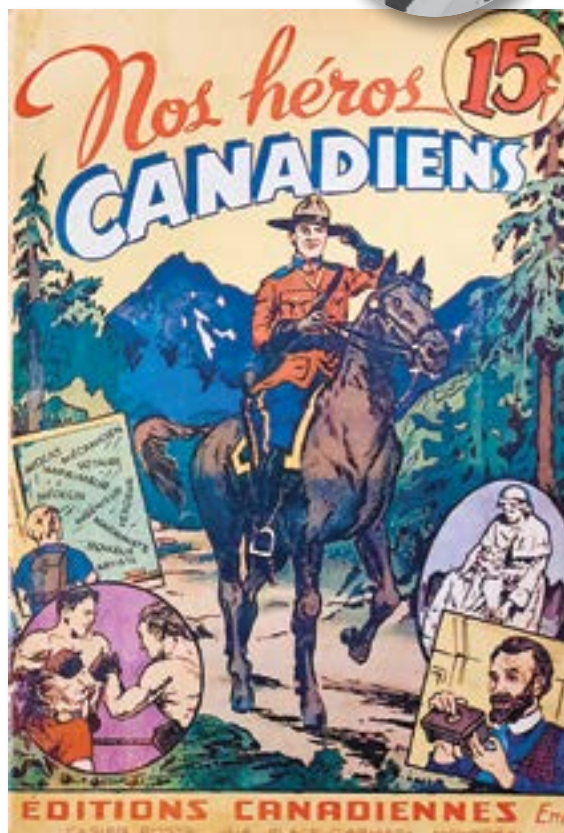
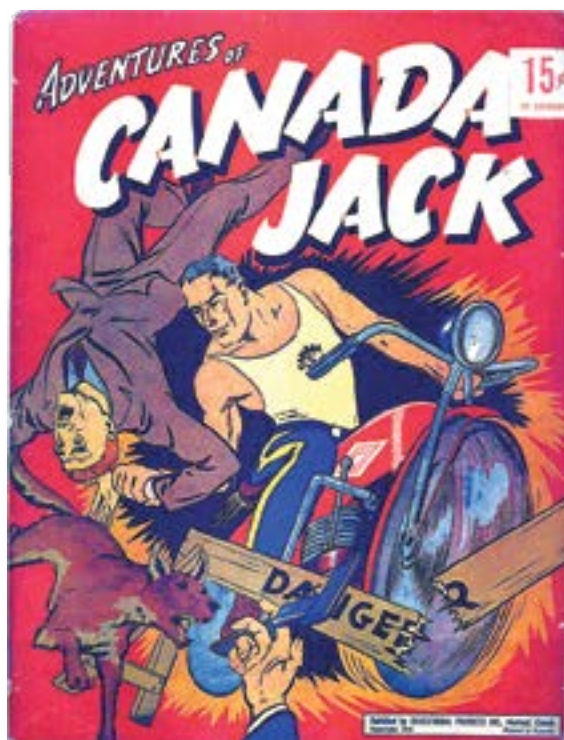


Educational Projects was formed by Montrealese Harry Halperin and was last of the four major Canadian comics publishers to come onto the scene during the war. Halperin's intention was to produce wholesome, patriotic comics that were educational and character building – much along the lines of what *Real Heroes Comics* and *True Comics* were meant to do below the border. The company put out one ongoing title, *Canadian Heroes*, which first hit the stands in September 1942, intentionally released when kids were returning to school. This series ran for 30 issues, until 1945, and Rae rendered most of the covers. There were also two oversize compendiums of his work called *Action Stories of the Mounties*, in 1944, and *The Adventures of Canada Jack*, in 1945.

Rae became art director and main cover artist for the company and is best known for working on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police stories and creating the title's main fictional hero, Canada Jack. Rae's lines were always strong and clean, and he produced some of the best artwork in Canadian wartime comics. After his time in comics, Rae went into graphic arts and painting in and around the Montreal area, working for clients that included the *Montreal Star* and *Montreal Gazette*. He served as art editor for *Family Herald* magazine, and also created some freelance calendar and paperback cover art. Rae worked in oils, watercolors, and acrylics, and his paintings now hang in corporate boardrooms and private collections above and below the border. In the 1960s, he moved to St. Bruno, still close to Montreal, with his second wife, and Rae began exhibiting his work in the Montreal area, eventually becoming president of the Arts Club of Montreal. Rae passed away due to a coronary aneurysm on April 1, 1992, at the Montreal General Hospital. He was 85.

Future Canadian comic book creators such as Dave Sim, Richard Comely, Gene Day, Ken Steacy, Katherine Collins, Seth, and so many more, owe so much to these first Canadian comic book trailblazers. We shouldn't forget about them or those first Canadian comic books. The field didn't begin with the Canadian fanzines of the late '60s and '70s, nor with *Orb* magazine, or Sim, or Comely's *Captain Canuck*. The comics of Canada began with industrious individuals toiling within the limits of a black-&white wartime world over 80 years ago. 🍁

IVAN KOCMAREK is the author of *Heroes of the Home Front*, the 300-plus page history of the artists of Bell Features wartime comics. A renowned historian, he is also a proud champion of homegrown WWII-era comics from the Great White North.



Canada's Comics Honors Its Own

Janet Hetherington looks at the Joe Shuster Awards celebrating the creators up north



Above: Joe Shuster in a '70s photo.

Inset right: Poster for the ninth annual Joe Shuster Awards ceremony, in 2013. Characters depicted include Superman, Cerebus, Mr. Minster, and Captain Canuck, all products of Canadian imaginations.

Below: Tom Grummett's Hall of Fame award. Note how the design is based on the Superman #1 cover.

by JANET HETHERINGTON

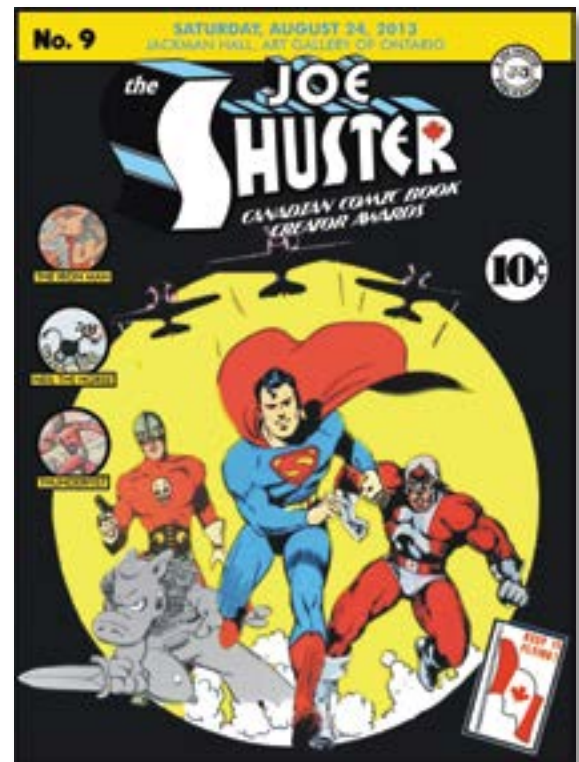
You might say Canadian comics creators are Superman's secret weapon: creating great stories that blend seamlessly into existing comic narratives (especially American comic books), as well as boldly inventing new comics and characters.

To recognize Canadians who create comics at home and abroad, the Canadian Comic Book Creator Awards Association organized an awards presentation named after one of the most famous comics creators with Canadian roots: Joe Shuster, co-creator of Superman.

The book, *Superman: The Ultimate Guide to the Man of Steel*, recounts that Shuster grew up in a Jewish family in Toronto, son of a tailor who could not afford to buy the boy expensive drawing materials. Shuster earned cash as a newspaper delivery boy for Toronto's *Daily Star* and scrounged drawing paper from discarded rolls of wallpaper. Shuster and his family later moved to the United States, settling in Cleveland, Ohio, where he teamed up with Jerry Siegel, and their partnership led to the birth of Superman – the world's first super-hero – debuting in *Action Comics* #1, in 1938.

"Superman could be perceived as having qualities that Canadians identify with, especially when interacting with Americans... Clark Kent being a secret immigrant from a benevolent peaceful society, he acts for the greater good of humanity," observes Kevin Boyd, executive director of the Joe Shuster Awards, who also works as the comics relations coordinator, programming for Fan Expo Canada.

"Is there something particularly Canadian about Clark Kent?" asks comics enthusiast Alan Neal, host of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio program, *All in a Day*. Then, answering his own question, he replied, "Don't show off, put on your glasses, and act polite, but when we need to, we get our cape on. And hey, if you don't look carefully, or listen too carefully, Americans, you just believe we're one of you... not knowing all those special talents and skills we've got."



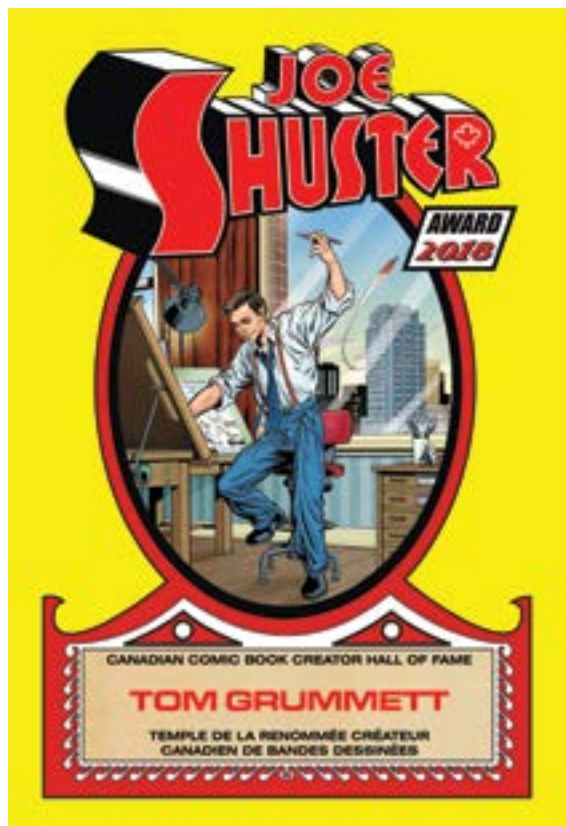
Adds award-winning artist Ken Steacy, "Superman has traditionally stood for positive values which Canadians certainly do endeavor to embrace and demonstrate, both at here home and abroad."

JOE SHUSTER AWARDS: THE ORIGIN

Boyd was involved in the formation of the Joe Shuster Awards from the very beginning, after he and others saw a need to raise the public profile and recognition of creators in Canada, as it already did with music (the JUNO Awards), movies (Canadian Screen Awards), as well as actors and performers (Canada's Walk of Fame).

"Way back in 2004, we started having conversations about creating a Canadian comic book award," Boyd recalls. "In the early 2000s, there was a noticeable Canadian presence in the comic book industry with many of the top artists and writers working having a Canadian connection. We'd never really had a nation-centric comic creator awards program before, but the concept was not unique, and it was a popular part of most areas where Canadians were prolific in the arts such as music, books, television, and movies."

Boyd continues, "In late 2003, the store, Paradise Comics, and I launched a three-day convention that focused on bringing the classic comic book creators of the industry to Toronto. They were the kind of creators we wanted to see that were not going to the larger regional show at that time, which would



become Fan Expo. It was a really amazing time of growth in fan conventions and a revival of interest in comics history.

"I wanted to develop new content ideas for the Paradise show with input from people in the community. [Orb magazine publisher and comic show organizer] Jim Waley came in with a list of ideas he'd brainstormed before the meeting – one of which was quite simply 'Comic Book Awards' – and I thought that had some potential."

Boyd continued to discuss how that might work with an expanded group that included Waley, Boyd friend Tyrone Biljan, former publisher and retailer David Darrigo, as well as producer/writer Mark Askwith, the former Silver Snail comics retailer and head of SPACE, Canada's national science fiction and fantasy channel.

"There was a growing realization that the Canadian contribution to comics should be acknowledged," agrees Askwith. "Some key mainstream creators were Canadian, such as John Byrne, Tom Grummett, Dave Ross, Ty Templeton, and Stuart Immonen, to name a few."

Askwith also notes that independent comics spearheaded by Drawn and Quarterly, Renegade Press, and Aardvark-Vanaheim were supporting groundbreaking work by such Canadian creators as Dave Sim, Chester Brown, Seth, R. G. (Rick) Taylor, Michael Cherkas, and Julie Doucet.

Boyd says that, because there were very few real Canadian comic books, they decided to honor creators who are native to the country and excel in the areas of cartooning, writing, illustration, and more, as well as create a Hall of Fame. To achieve this, the non-profit Canadian Comic Book Creator Awards Association was formed.

PERMISSION GRANTED

Naming the awards in honor of Man of Steel co-creator Joe Shuster seemed the right and natural thing to do. "We felt that Joe was the spiritual father of what we wanted to honor, the Canadian creators who had an impact on the comic book industry and popular culture," Boyd says.

However, the first order of business was to retain legal use of the Shuster name. "We did receive permission from the family of Joe Shuster, through their estate agent at the time, Michael Catron," notes Boyd. "He worked as our go-between at the time with Joe's sister, Jean Shuster-Peavy, and her son, Mark Warren Peavy."

Still, the Joe Shuster Awards and its Canadian Comic Book Hall of Fame recognize Canadian creators of all stripes and, as the nation is a bilingual country, both English and French creators are celebrated. "There is an amazing and vibrant comics industry in Quebec," Boyd says, "One of the benefits of working on the awards, which do recognize French language comics and creators, is learning about this parallel industry to North American English comics that has an obvious connection to Franco-Belgian traditions."



THE MAKING OF A CANDIDATE

The huge pool of talent from which to select candidates from can make the awards nomination process a challenging one, especially when it comes to Canadian Comic Book Hall of Fame inductee, as only a limited number is chosen per year. Identifying those creators qualified to receive the honor requires much due diligence.

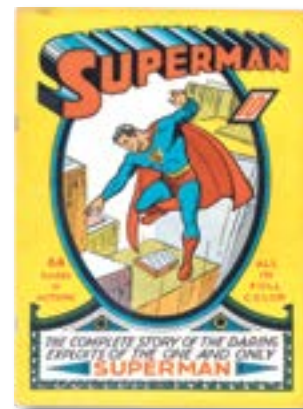
"We assemble a group of Canadian comics historians and fans and let them pitch their top three potential inductees into the Hall of Fame," Boyd explains. "Then we compare what everyone brings to the table and then debate who from that list should be selected. My job is to throw into that ring anyone they might have missed that I felt [should not be] missed. Sometimes they agree with me, but the discussions are quite lively and informative."

The list of Hall of Fame inductees reflects just how influential Canadian creators have been. The first year alone featured such legendary inductees as Shuster himself and Hal Foster.

"I was very surprised to learn that the brilliant cartoonist of *Prince Valiant*, Hal Foster, was Canadian," confesses Askwith. "I was listening to a CBC radio program and Arn Saba profiled him. In 2004, when we were discussing the Hall of Fame,



This page: At top is an awesome illustration by Tom Grummett portraying a young Joe Shuster at the drawing board. Observe how the artist's pose resembles that of Joe's co-creation, the Man of Tomorrow as visualized on the cover seen below of *Superman* #1 [Summer '39], the figure drawn by Shuster – said to be Photostatted from Action Comics #10 – with design work by Leo O'Mealia. Inset left is awards logo.





This page: Above is the poster for the 2006 Shuster Awards ceremony, which was illustrated and designed by our cover artist, Darwyn Cooke. Below is Darwyn displaying the trio of Shusters he received in 2007, the top three prizes – respectively for cartoonist (for *The Spirit* #1), writer (for *Superman Confidential* #1–2), and artist (shared with J. Bone for the *Batman/The Spirit* one-shot).



somebody mentioned Win Mortimer, a DC artist who drew *Batman* and *Superman* in the 1940s, and that surprised me. I had no idea."

DIANA SCHUTZ: EDITING THE GREATS

Another inductee is versatile comics editor and translator Diana Schutz, who was honored in 2009. "I was born in Montreal, in 1955," Schutz says. "About ten years later, I made my first comic, with purple ink on a bright pink notepad! A Nancy Drew story, I think."

Schutz, who currently lives in Portland, Oregon, began editing comic books in 1985, when she was hired at Comico: The Comic Company. Schutz is perhaps best known for the comics and graphic novels that she edited during her 25-year tenure with

Dark Horse Comics. She says that it's difficult to choose which projects are her favorites. "I'm proud of (almost) all of them, for different reasons," she muses, "but my heart was always in creator-owned comics."

Schutz has worked with many great creators, including Matt Wagner, Frank Miller, Stan Sakai, Harvey Pekar, Larry Marder, Paul Chadwick, Dave Stevens, Doug Wildey, Barry Windsor-Smith, Jeff Smith, and innumerable others.

Since 2014, Schutz has found further fulfillment as a translator. "I began using my knowledge of Romance languages to edit international material in translation, such as *Blacksad* and *The Manara Library*, later becoming the *Blacksad* translator along with my partner, Brandon Kander, another Montrealer," says Schutz, adding that translation has proved to be a successful career in retirement, one that has garnered her several Harvey and Eisner Awards.

Schutz's latest project is translating the seventh volume of *The Mæbius Library* for Dark Horse – *The Depressed Hunter*, featuring Major Grubert, star of "The Airtight Garage."

Being a Canadian Comic Book Hall of Fame inductee is intensely personal for Schutz. "It sure made my parents

happy," she confesses, "which is important to me, especially now that they're gone. I'm the child of first-generation immigrants. My mum was Ukrainian and my dad was German, but they'd both passed by 2023, when I was voted into the Eisner Awards Hall of Fame, in the United States, so I'm inordinately pleased they were still alive for my Hall of Fame recognition by the country they chose for their home."

Schutz also notes that she is the first woman to be inducted into the Shuster Hall of Fame. "Through the years, I've become more conscious of the value of that sort of representation," she says. "Though I didn't realize it at the time, the path that I was carving for myself in comics was also creating a passage for other, younger women to follow. I believe we have a real responsibility to those generations of women who come after us, and I hope that my own induction into the Hall of Fame represents another door opening into comics for women – and for Canadian women, especially."

KEN STEACY: MR. VALUE ADDED

Multifaceted artist Ken Steacy was also inducted into the Hall of Fame, in 2009. Steacy, who resides in British Columbia, says, "I was born on a Royal Canadian Air Force base, in Zweibrücken, Germany, to Canadian parents. Dad was a fighter pilot and Mom was a home economist."

Steacy's visual storytelling career spans a half-century as writer, artist, art director, editor, and publisher. He has chronicled the exploits of *Astro Boy*, *Iron Man*, *Harry Potter*, and *Star Wars*, in addition to producing his own intellectual property. "I've been creating comics ever since I could push a pencil," he explains.

The artist takes pride in his work on *War Bears*, a graphic novel created with Canadian author Margaret Atwood; *The Sacred and the Profane*, produced with co-creator Dean Motter; *Night and the Enemy*, collaborating with writer Harlan Ellison; *Tempus Fugitive*; as well as *The Awesome Adventures of Victor Vector and Yondo* (published by Steacy's own imprint, Fractal Comics). He is currently working on a graphic novel that explores the invisible subculture of military brats.

In addition to his Hall of Fame recognition, Steacy has received both an Eisner and an Inkpot award. "I don't consider myself a 'Canadian comics creator,'" Steacy admits, "rather a comics creator who is Canadian, one who is deeply grateful to be a citizen of our magnificent country. I have done comics with a distinctly Canuck flavor, but have not limited my scope to telling just those stories."

Steacy also shares his knowledge with young artists. From 2012–21, he taught "Comics and Graphic Novels," at Camosun College, in Victoria, British Columbia, a program he co-created with wife and visual storyteller Joan Steacy.

For many years, the artist has appeared on "Desert Bus for Hope," an online fundraiser for Child's Play, a registered charity dedicated to improving the lives of children in hospitals worldwide. For his contribution of collectibles, commissions, and original artwork, he is proud to have been bestowed the nickname of Ken "Value Added" Steacy.

RONN SUTTON: RESPECTING THE CRAFT

Artisan artist Ronn Sutton, who provides pencil portraits of comics professionals for each issue of *Comic Book Creator* magazine, says that being inducted into the Shuster Hall of

Joe Shuster Awards Canadian Comic Book Hall of Fame Inductees

Joe Shuster

[1914–1992]

Co-creator, artist, Superman

Leo Bachle

(a.k.a. Les Barker)

[1926–2003]

Creator, Johnny Canuck

Adrian Dingle

[1911–1974]

Creator, Nelvana of the Northern Lights

Hal Foster

[1892–1982]

Creator, *Prince Valiant*; artist, *Tarzan* comic strip

Ed Furness

[1911–2005]

Creator, Freelance

Rand Holmes

[1942–2002]

Creator, underground comix character Harold Hedd

Jon St. Ables

[1912–1999]

Creator, Brok Windsor

Owen McCarron

[1929–2005]

Artist, Marvel Comics; Canadian comics publisher, *Comic Book World*

Win Mortimer

[1919–1998]

Artist, DC, Gold Key and Marvel Comics

Dave Sim

[1956–]

Creator, Cerebus the Aardvark; co-founder, publisher, Aardvark-Vanaheim

Albert Chartier

[1912–2004]

Creator, Onésime

Gerald Lazare

[1927–2021]

Creator, Nitro, The Wing, The Dreamer and more

Jacques Hurtubise

(a.k.a. ZYX)

[1950–2015]

Co-founder, *Croc* magazine

Gene Day

[1951–1982]

Artist, Marvel Comics; prolific self-publisher

Ted McCall

[1901–1975]

Writer/creator, Men of the Mounted, Robin Hood & Co.

Pierre Fournier

[1949–2022]

Creator, *Aventures du Capitaine Kébec*; co-creator, Red Ketchup & Michel Risque

Stanley Berneche

[1947–]

Creator, Captain Canada

John Byrne

[1950–]

Artist, DC, Marvel, Dark Horse *X-Men*, *Superman*, etc.

George Menendez Rae

[1906–1992]

Creator, Canada Jack

Réal Godbout

[1951–]

Co-creator, Michel Risque and Red Ketchup

Ken Steacy

[1955–]

Artist & writer, DC, Marvel, independent comics

Diana Schutz

[1955–]

Editor, *Comico*, Dark Horse

Richard Comely

[1950–]

Co-creator, Captain Canuck; founder, Comely Comix

Dave Darrigo

[1954–2024]

Co-creator, Wordsmith; publisher, Special Studio

George Freeman

[1951–]

Artist, Captain Canuck, Marvel, DC, First Comics

Serge Gaboury

[1954–]

Quebec cartoonist

Deni Loubert

[1951–]

Co-founder/publisher, Aardvark-Vanaheim; publisher, Renegade Press

Jean-Claude St. Aubin

[1951–]

Artist, Captain Canuck, DC

Chester Brown

[1960–]

Creator, *Yummy Fur*, *Louis Riel*, *Paying for It*

Todd McFarlane

[1961–]

Creator, Spawn; co-founder, Image Comics

Murray Karn

[1924–2018]

Co-creator, Thunderfist

Vernon Miller

[1912–1974]

Co-founder, Maple Leaf Publishing

Arn Saba/

Katherine Collins

[1947–]

Creator, *Neil the Horse*; prolific comics historian

Cyril (Cy) Vaughn Bell

[1904–1990]

Founder, Bell Features

Edmond Good

[1910–1991]

Creator, Rex Baxter; artist; publisher, Good Comics

Ty Templeton

[1962–]

Creator, *Stig's Inferno*; artist & writer, *Batman Adventures*

Doris Slater

[1918–1964]

Artist, *Grand Slam Comics*, *Three Aces Comics*

James Waley

[1951–]

Publisher, *Orb*; co-creator, The Northern Light

Tedd Steele

[1922–1994]

Creator, Wolf Savage, Rock Thunder, Pvt. Stuff, Speed Savage

Ley

(a.k.a. Shirley Fortune)

[1921–1998]

Artist, Maple Leaf Publishing

Fred Kelly

[1921–2005]

Creator, Mr. Monster

Mark Shainblum

[1963–]

Co-creator, Northguard

Darwyn Cooke

[1962–2016]

Artist, writer, *New Frontier*, *Richard Stark's Parker*

Jack Tremblay

[1926–2018]

Creator, Crash Carson

Gabriel Morissette

[1959–]

Co-creator, Northguard, Angloman; artist

Lovern Kindzierski

[1954–]

Colorist; writer, Marvel, Renegade Arts Ent.

Julie Doucet

[1965–]

Cartoonist, creator, *Dirty Plotte*, *My New York Diary*

Stuart Immonen

[1967–]

Artist, *Superman*, *Spider-Man*, *Nextwave*

Sid Barron

[1917–2006]

Artist, Educational Projects

Jacques Goldstyn

(a.k.a. Boris)

[1958–]

Contributing cartoonist, *Les Débrouillards*

David Boswell

[1953–]

Creator, Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman

Tom Grummett

[1959–]

Artist, Marvel and DC; *Superman*, *Superboy*

Al Hewetson

[1946–2004]

Writer and editor, Skywald

Dale Keown

[1962–]

Creator, Pitt; *Hulk*

Ken Lashley

[1967–]

Artist, Marvel and DC; *X-Men*, *Excalibur*, *The Flash*

Gerhard

[1959–]

Artist, *Cerebus the Aardvark*

Seth

[1962–]

Creator, *Palookaville*

Bernie Mireault

[1961–2024]

Creator, *The Jam*

Ho Che Anderson

[1969–]

Creator, *King*

Denis Rodier

[1962–]

Artist, DC, Milestone Media

Ronn Sutton

[1952–]

Artist, illustrator, *Elvira*, *Carson of Venus*

Fame provides validation for years of producing creative work that reflects a high level of craftsmanship.

"I was born in Toronto and now live in Ottawa," Sutton says. "My first published comic story was in 1970. In the decades since, I have drawn comics of literary adaptations, horror, romance, humor, detective, and TV characters among others. I have worked in all aspects of comic creation: writer, penciler, inker, letterer, colorists, sometimes performing just one of those tasks, sometimes doing them all. With my current Edgar Rice Burroughs assignments, I pencil, ink, hand-letter, and add 'old-school' Zip-A-Tone to the pages."

Sutton is much inspired by the work of such comics predecessors as Hal Foster, Al Williamson, Wally Wood, Gray Morrow, Alex Raymond, Bernie Wrightson, Joe Kubert, Alberto Giolitti, and the ongoing work of Thomas Yeates and Michael Wm. Kaluta. "My interest in creating art all comes from reading comics as a kid," Sutton says.

"I am probably best known for the nine years that I drew *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark*," Sutton says. "In 2012, I penciled and inked the *Lucifer's Sword* MC graphic novel, written by 50-year member of the Hells Angels, Phil Cross. For the past ten years, I have been drawing weekly online comic pages for Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., of *The Man-Eater* and *Carson of Venus*," the latter a project Sutton has been wanting to work on since his youth.

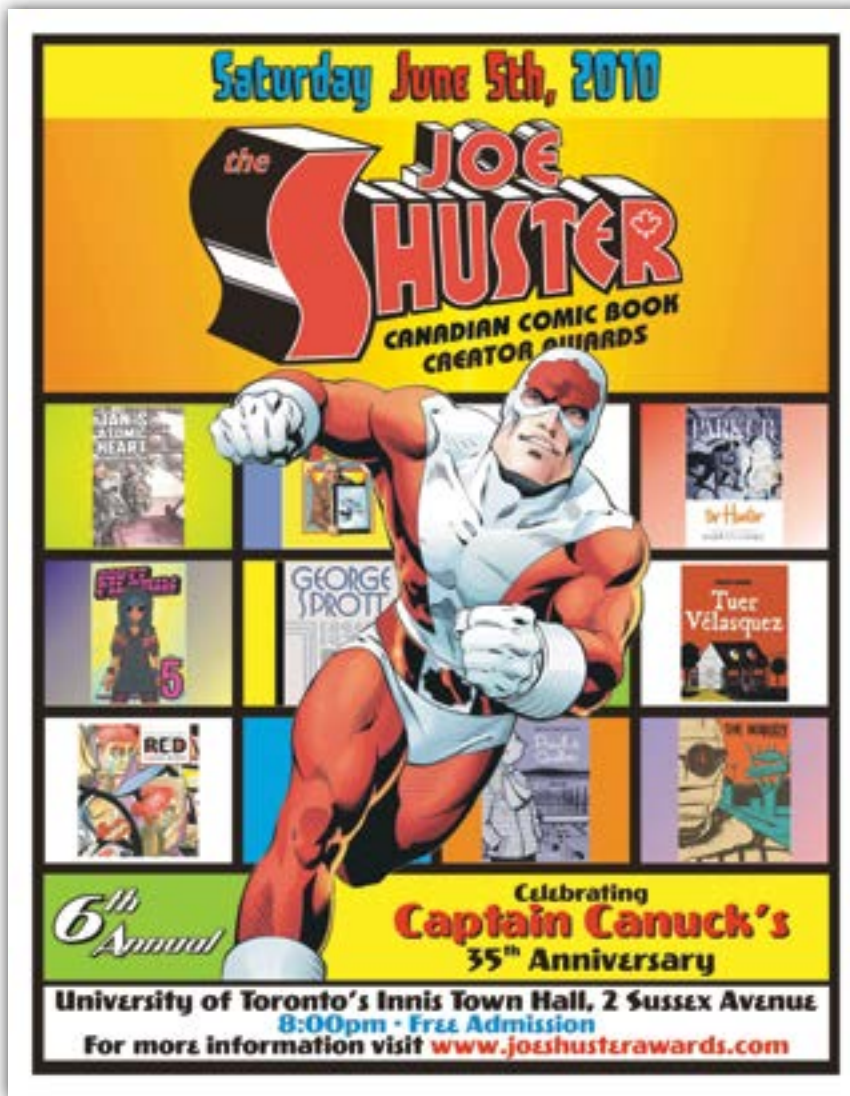
In addition to comics, Sutton has worked in animation, served as magazine designer, provided art for television, and was courtroom artist for the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper for many years.

Sutton says that he was completely blindsided by his 2022 Hall of Fame award. "I had no inkling it was coming my way," he offered. "It is an incredible (near baffling) honor to be considered in the august company of the extraordinary Hal Foster, among others. Receiving the award bolstered my self-confidence to know that others, besides just myself, care about the art I'm producing."

CANADA STRONG

Boyd says that while his job with Fan Expo Canada does not leave time for him to do volunteer work on the Shuster Awards as much as he'd like, it does provide him with access to new and exciting Canadian talent. "One idea I like is doing another round of Hall of Fame inductees in 2026," he says.

"Looking at the last 20 years or so it is clear that Canadian creators have been creating some of the best comics in the world," comments Askwith. Offering an extensive list of names that included Fiona Staples, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki, Ryan North, Chip Zdarsky, and Jeff Lemire, Askwith admitted,



"My current favorite is Kate Beaton. Her *Ducks* is a masterpiece."

"So much talent from Canada," agrees Neal. "I will not get started on Tom Fowler's art because I will never shut up. The remarkable Kate Leth, born in Ottawa. The Tamakis. Ryan North. Jeff Lemire, of course. This is too hard to pick faves. My daughter loved the comic, *Swimteam*, by Johnnie Christmas, and then I read it and was just unable to put it down, and had no idea it was by a Canadian."

"Recognizing our own homegrown talent is a way of encouraging a homegrown industry and keeping our Canadian talent from looking elsewhere for that recognition," comments Schutz.

"Despite being neighbors and sharing a common border with the United States, we are neither Americans nor America's shadow," Sutton says. "It is important for Canadians to recognize our own unique identity, culture and art. That we write books, draw

comics, and produce music that has genuinely unique point of view reflecting a Canadian outlook. We should support our own artists."

HIATUS AND RENEWAL

While the Shuster Awards shine a light on the legacy of Canadian comics, like so many other endeavors, the organization was affected by the recent worldwide pandemic. The lack of volunteer support staff, plus the fact that executive director Kevin Boyd shifted to full-time convention work in 2021, has meant the Awards have been on hiatus. The website – joeshusterawards.com – was updated last year to include Hall of Fame inductees up to 2024.

Though busy with his extensive FanExpo work, Boyd continues to oversee the Awards when time permits. "I am pleased to see the names of Canadians on many comics and graphic novels these days," he said. "Recognizing Canadian contributions remains the key focus of the Joe Shuster Awards and the foundation we laid in 2004–2020 has seen a lot of interest in the work of Canadian creators. I also see it in the artist alleys of the Canadian shows, a strong sense of achievement and community."

The plan for this year is to revisit operations in October, when Boyd's schedule opens up to work on it with advisers, with a minimum of three additional Hall of Fame inductees in 2027.

JANET HETHERINGTON holds a degree in journalism from Ottawa's Carleton University. A comics writer/artist and produced screenwriter, Janet's work appears in *The Secret Loves of Geek Girls*, *Gothic Tales of Haunted Love*, *Honey West/Kolchak the Night Stalker* #1, *Love in Tights*, and creator-owned series, *Eternal Romance*. For six years, she scripted the *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark*. Janet frequently collaborates with partner artist Ronn Sutton.

Visit joeshusterawards.com for more information.



50
YEARS

The Coming of Captain Canuck

Richard Comely on the creation (and resurrections) of his True North super-hero



Above: Richard Douglas Comely, the man who brought to fruition the great Canadian super-hero. 2006 photo by John Lemesurier.

Below: The good captain by George Freeman.



Previous page:

The Defender of the Dominion takes on an American icon in Tom Grummet's cover art for 2025's Captain Canuck Summer Special.

Conducted by JON B. COOKE

[Interviewer's Note: Like I said in this issue's editorial, I've had a love for Captain Canuck since issues of that Canadian-made comic book first made it to newsstands in the U.S. of A., back when I was 16. Sure, the title was an oddity, but there was also an earnest passion within the initially crude effort that fascinated me, plus the series improved decidedly over the sporadically released issues, especially when the great George Freeman took over the artist reins. So, 50 years after #1 debuted in my local news store, I'm delighted to finally showcase my late 2025 talk with the hero's co-creator and longtime publisher, Mr. Richard Comely! – JBC.]

Comic Book Creator: Good to meet you, Richard. I first got in touch with you in the late '90s, as I always wanted to devote a feature to Captain Canuck. So please tell me your story. Where are you from originally?

Richard Comely: Originally, I was born in England. My parents immigrated to Canada with me and my brother Peter. I was born in 1950 and we came in '53, and were in Ontario for a year-and-a-half. And then my parents contin-

ued westward until they ran out of money, in Manitoba. They were headed for British Columbia...

CBC: Why did your parents move to Canada?

Richard: Oh, lots of reasons. England, in the early '50s, was still pretty bombed out and they were still on rations after the war until 1955. My parents wanted to own their own farm and that did not seem possible in England. And they were young... it was a "Go West, young man" kind of thing.

CBC: What did your dad do for work?

Richard: My parents were living in Horton-cum-Studley, which is about six miles out of Oxford, and they were working on a farm. My mother was training horses, jumpers, they came to Canada, where they worked on farms. They bought a farm in Manitoba, 40 acres, in 1957 (and I believe they paid \$2,500, total). Now, Manitoba prairies are still cheaper than anywhere else in the country. Winters are pretty tough. You'll get 40 below, typically, at least once during the winter. So, anyway, my father worked on farms, then he was an auto mechanic... My mother taught ballet and other types of dance when she came to Canada. And then she became an occupational therapist at an institution in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

CBC: So you grew up on a farm, pretty much?

Richard: Oh, yeah. When we first came to Manitoba, I was four and I was there until I was almost 18. Then I moved to Winnipeg. I had started painting signs when I was around 13, and I taught myself how to do lettering... And so I was able to make money doing signs and then I worked part-time at a sign shop during high school. I did that for about three months after graduation and then got a job as a crest designer, and I eventually got into embroidery design and fashion design. Winnipeg and Montreal were big garment industry towns in Canada back up until sometime around in the '80s...

CBC: What's a crest designer?

Richard: Well, you might call 'em patches.

CBC: Oh, okay. So embroidery and...

Richard: Right. Most of them were for sports – baseball, hockey, whatever – and I would draw them and then make the pattern from my drawing... I had a very interesting boss who I could write a book about, J.D. Schachter... There were times when I would be hurting myself from laughing so hard and other times I'd want to put my hands around his throat.

CBC: When did creativity start to bubble up in you? Were you drawing at a very young age?

Richard: Yes. I remember, as a 12-year-old, deciding that I would be an artist of some sort when I grew up. I was encouraged by a lot of people, so I kept at it. I did portraits, I did caricatures at malls and resorts. I worked as a graphic

designer for a while – this was long before computers, of course – and I designed signs. I did drawings for newspaper ads and also designed how the sign would look. And these were signs that had to be spray painted and fabricated.

CBC: Logo design?

Richard: I did some of that, too. I liked logo design and, yeah, lemme think... what else did I do? I didn't do comics.

CBC: Did you read comics as a kid?

Richard: No, I didn't. I mean, I did only sporadically and I didn't buy them or bring them home... maybe one or two... But I used to read them when I went to other places that had comic books. It would be *Tarzan*, war comics, *Dennis the Menace*, whatever. I liked comics. I did like to draw in a cartoony style and also the style of super-heroes and adventure comics – quasi-realistic, with some exaggeration... more or less trying to be realistic.

CBC: Did you read comic strips in the newspaper?

Richard: Yes, I did. Fortunately for me, when I was 11, I was able to attend the Allied Art Club, in Portage la Prairie, and the guy who headed it up was sheriff of the town. (sheriffs in Canada don't function the same as they do in the United States; they don't wear a gun; they're more like the British version of sheriffs.) Jack Hazard was his name, long gone, of course. So I was able to attend and I was the only kid in the class. They were all adults and they didn't offer instruction other than one student to another. And always encouraging. I remember he helped me find a subject for a cartoon, and that was printed in the local newspaper. So that was kind of a big deal for me. I was 11 or 12 at that time.



CBC: Was it transformative to see your name in print?

Richard: Yeah, to a certain degree, it was, and I've come to appreciate Jack's thoughtfulness long after the fact. So I realized fairly early that I wanted to be a commercial artist. I tried, in my early 20s, to be a fine artist, and I had a showing in Winnipeg, and I sold two pieces. I got maybe \$20 bucks for one and \$30 for another. So I realized I couldn't make a living like that.

CBC: How would you characterize your upbringing? I realize you're in a rural environment. Was it hand-to-mouth, tough for your family? It's not easy to make a living by farming.

Richard: Well, we certainly weren't rich, by any means. We were poor immigrants when we came to Canada, no doubt in my mind of that. The third farm that they worked on in Canada was expropriated to expand the Toronto airport and, rather than look for another job, they decided to continue west, because it was their goal to get to western Canada, British Columbia. My father bought a 1946 used panel truck and a trailer. They sold most of their stuff, loaded what they kept, and then just headed west. My mother wrote a book on it, *Going West with Annabelle* [1976].

My mother was a writer, using her pen name of Molly Douglas. When World War II broke out, in 1939, my mother was 11 and she no longer attended school. They were living in greater London at the time, and going to school was just way too hazardous. She claims that her

Above: Richard is apprehended in Calgary, Alberta, by his creation (costume worn by friend Mike Jackson) in this 1979 publicity photo, which was promoting the second coming of Captain Canuck after a years-long hiatus. **Inset left:** True, Richard's first effort at comics was a bit crude (never mind the figure shamelessly swiped from a Wally Wood *Dynamo* splash page!), but Captain Canuck #1 [July '75] exuded its co-creator's unabashed enthusiasm. **Below:** "Classic" C.C. Club emblem drawn by the great George Freeman.





Above: Clockwise from upper left, in a photo labeled, "The cottage on the prairie," a couple – not Richard's parents – photographed in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba; Molly and her growing brood, dressed in their Sunday best for Easter 1962, with Richard second from the left; brothers Richard and Peter in 1966 (note Peter's sweatshirt!); tiny tots Richard (left) and Peter when the Comelys lived in Toronto. All photos from Molly's account of the family moving to western Canada, *Going West with Annabelle* [1976], dust jacket seen at center. (Annabelle, by the way, was not the name of one of Richard's siblings, but that of a goat!). **Below:** Richard as a teen.



father handed her *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* and said, "Read this." And, according to her, that was basically her schooling.

She wrote romance stories and lots of nonfiction articles, and her first book, *Going West with Annabelle*, did very well for her. She sold it to a British publishing company and it came out in paperback in North America. *Reader's Digest* bought it and condensed it, and it was sold in Australia, England, and Canada as a serial. So she got a lot of mileage out of it and wrote two sequels based on the success of it.

CBC: Was it fiction?

Richard: No. While I'm sure there was some creative latitude, it's a story of us coming to Canada.

CBC: Who's Annabelle?

Richard: A goat!

CBC: [Chuckles] Not "with my kids," but "with my goat"!

Richard: Right! There's a funny bit in the book: when they get to Manitoba and neighbors ask her, "How are the kids doing?"...

CBC: I see where this is going! [Laughs]

Richard: And my mother says, "Oh, they're fine. I keep 'em tied up in the barn and make sure they have enough straw." [Laughter] The neighbors are getting ready to report her to social services! (British people don't call their children "kids"; that's a North American thing.)

CBC: Funny! Did you get an allowance as a kid?

Richard: Yes, I did, starting maybe around 11 or 12. Peter and I, one of our big jobs was cleaning the barn and shoveling manure to spread and fertilize the fields. And we did other stuff, too... cutting wood... My brother and I used to drive a tractor 20 miles hauling hay. As a family, we'd be out there clearing brush, burning it, and all that.

CBC: Are they nice, wholesome memories?

Richard: Oh, yeah! I think sometimes you don't really

appreciate what you have until you get older. My parents bought a pony when I was probably around 10 or 11. Then later on we got a horse, and I rode almost every day. For a couple of years, I would enter riding competitions at the summer fair. I did a fair amount of riding, though we didn't have a saddle for the first couple of years, it was all bareback. When you've got a saddle after riding bareback for so long, I mean, my goodness, you can do all kinds of tricks! Get the horse galloping and, while you're holding onto the horn, jump on. All kinds of other tricks like that, because riding bareback takes a little more leg muscle control and balance, whereas, saddle, you don't have to worry so much about stuff like that.

CBC: In school, were you a popular kid? Did you get attention for your creativity?

Richard: So the first year I went to school, it was about a two-mile walk and we would make that walk in the winter as well as the spring. Most of the kids walked to school. Apparently, it was in grade one when I started to sound like my friends, when I started to sound like a Canadian because that's when I got exposed to other kids.

CBC: So were you creative in school? Was that recognized?

Richard: Yeah, I liked to draw. I was encouraged even by the teacher. In high school, I would do drawings for the yearbook, that kind of stuff. And I did a comic strip probably in grade 11 called "Bazooka Man," probably only two or three strips. It was about a friend. Ken Forzuka, whose nose would transformed into a bazooka as he rode a motorcycle and dealt with his nemesis.

CBC: Was that in the school paper?

Richard: No, it was for fun. I don't think we had a school paper.

CBC: You had a part-time job when you were in high school?

Richard: Yeah, at a sign shop. I started out just sign

painting myself, with about three or four customers in town – discount store, grocery, convenience store, etc. – mostly making price signs. And so I had three or four customers and then a younger guy took over the sign shop in Portage la Prairie and I ended up working for him.

CBC: One of the reasons for my questions is to discover the origins of your creativity, but also importantly, I sense from your life and career ambition. Where did that come from?

Richard: You're asking me questions I've never thought of. I don't know.

CBC: Did you want to get away from the prairie? Did you say to yourself, "I'm not going to be a farmer"?

Richard: No, I don't think so. I certainly liked living in the country but, no, I didn't have aspirations to be a farmer. None of us children did. In fact, my parents' farm was only 40 acres, a small farm operation. My father worked jobs as well as ran the farm and so did my mother. They had a very small dairy operation for a while, and they actually started out milking goats. Goat milk is a specialty, and people with various health conditions are better off drinking goat milk than cow milk. And, in fact, we used to get teased at school. I would be either called Goat or Goat King. I didn't like it at the time, but I chuckle about it now.

CBC: Were you college bound?

Richard: No. I did try to get into a fine art course. I tried to get a bursary, but couldn't get it. I assumed I'd go to the University of Manitoba and take fine arts. That's the only course of action I could envision, but I couldn't get in. So, for whatever reason, I worked as a crest designer, and then I did embroidery design for the same company. Then, in 1970, thanks to a friend by the name of Les Ames, I won a bursary to attend Red River College, in Winnipeg. They had a relatively new course called advertising art; I took the first term, but didn't go back. The main reason was I started to get more work doing fashion styling for one of the factories where I would be their main designer, and they

were talking about sending me to England and Paris for the fashion shows. But that never panned out in the end and I just ended up doing other stuff. And that was in '71, and it wasn't long after when I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I met Ron Leishman at church and he's the guy who got me going on the Captain.

CBC: So what was your entrance into the church? How did it happen? Had you been exposed to Mormonism before that?

Richard: My wife and I have similar childhood experiences. She is also the oldest of six. Her parents immigrated to Canada around the same time as mine did. But my wife was born in Canada. Her parents came from Germany, mine from England, and we both, as children, attended different Protestant churches. I don't know if it happened in the States, too, but people from the Church would come out and basically solicit out in rural areas or in the town. "Would you like your children to attend church? We'll pick 'em up on Sunday." And that's how I attended the Mennonite Brethren Church and I attended the United Church with my neighbor, George Wolf, and went to Presbyterian summer camp. And my wife had similar experiences with some of the same churches and then a few different ones. Then two missionaries came to my door in the spring of 1971.

CBC: Did you have a strong belief in God growing up?

Richard: I don't know. That's a good question. I don't know if I thought about it. I'm sure I had a belief, but I didn't think that much about it as an adult. I wasn't attending church, but I would listen to people like [evangelists] Garner Ted Armstrong and Billy Graham and think about it. So missionaries came to my door and they asked if they could teach me about what they believe, and I invited them to do so. The very first time, I had a lot of questions and I started asking questions, and I knew what they were telling me was true. I just knew it. I just had this overpowering feeling come over me that what they were telling me was true. And they answered questions that I'd been asking even as a



Above: Richard's religion is spotlighted in this Latter-day Saints magazine from 2017. **Below:** Advance notice of the soon-to-debut Guardian of the True North, in the Toronto Star of February 4, 1975, which notes Richard's ambitious plans. **Bottom:** Documentation of the Comelys 1953 arrival in Canada.



Name of Ship "SCYTHERA"										Date of Departure FEBRUARY, 20th 1953.											
Steamship Line THE CUNARD STEAM-SHIP CO., LTD.										Where Bound HALIFAX, N.S.											
NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF BRITISH PASSENGERS EMBARKED AT THE PORT OF SOUTHAMPTON.																					
(1) Contract Ticket Number.	(2) Port at which Passengers have contracted to land.	(3) NAMES OF PASSENGERS.	(4) CLASS (Whether 1st, 2nd, Tourist or 3rd).	(5) AGE OF PASSENGERS.								(6) Last Address in the United Kingdom.	(7) Profession, Occupation, or Calling of Passengers.	(8) Country of last Permanent Residence.*						(9) Country of Intended Future Permanent Residence.*	
				Adults of 15 years and over.										England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland	Other Parts of The British Empire.		Foreign Countries
				Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female										
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373748		GALLAN FEROY.		72															CANADA.		
DO		GALLAN IONA.		53							DO	H'WIFE.	1						CANADA.		
DO		GALLAN CHRISTOPHER.		17							DO	OPERATOR. CARSTAN	1						CANADA.		
373942		COMELY CHRISTOPHER.		26							UPPER THROUGHAM, THE CAMP, NR STROUD.	HARDSMAN	11						CANADA.		
DO		COMELY MAUREEN.		25							DO	H'WIFE.	1						CANADA.		
DO		COMELY RICHARD.					2				DO	CHILD.	1						CANADA.		
DO		COMELY PETER.								9 12	DO	INFANT.	1						CANADA.		
387284		COBB LEONARD.		28							44, NOBLEY ROAD, LITTLEMORE, OXFORD.	CHECKER.	1						CANADA.		
296765		CASHMORE JOHN.		29							6, MURLAN DRIVE, WEST HOENWICH, STAFFS.	TYPIST.					1		CANADA.		
431093		CARRON SYDNEY.		35							118, SUNNING VALE ROAD, BIRMINGHAM, ENGS.	DIRECTOR.	1						CANADA.		



the '60s yourself in any fashion? You say you drank and smoked...

Richard: There was the hippie look back then, with longer hair. One of my designs that I came up when I was working as a fashion stylist at Jay-Dee Products was two-tone bell bottoms, with embroidery on the outside. These are 26" bell bottoms, very popular in the late '60s/early '70s. So one of my styles was where, below the knee to the bottom, they were a different color than the top part, and that caught on.

CBC: I remember that...

Richard: I used to be going down the street and I'd see

12-year-old – "Where does God come from? What's he like? Why are we here? And what's going to happen to us?" That kind of stuff. Then I continued to study with them and I was baptized a member of the church. And I'm grateful, to this day, for those two missionaries. I mean, they changed my life dramatically. I was a smoker, a drinker, with habits like that, and I immediately changed.

CBC: You were born in 1950, so doing the math, the Summer of Love was 1967 and you were 17. Obviously, rock 'n' roll had a big effect on your generation and all that. Did you experience

and one was a major during WWI, and they won numerous medals. And I had four uncles who fought in WWII, two of them didn't make it home. And one of them, my uncle Eric, who did make it home after spending three-and-a-half years in a P.O.W. camp, died as a result of his injuries 12 years later. So I felt my family had done more than their bit. They were all British, obviously.

But no, I had never thought about joining the armed forces in Canada. I did know a few people who joined the armed forces in Canada, which is not as big, not as revered, I guess, as in the U.S.

CBC: When you were growing up, were you proud to be a Canadian? Was there a distinction to being a Canadian as opposed to your southern neighbor?

Richard: Well, I didn't think a lot about that, to be honest with you, because I actually wasn't a citizen until I was 34 years old. Obviously, I knew I was born in England and what happened was, in 1982, I went to vote and they said, "You can't vote, you're not a citizen." I was in shock. Before then, British-born or British subjects could vote in Canada because the country was part of the Commonwealth and we were still under the British constitution. It wasn't until Pierre Trudeau decided to patriate our own constitution and British people who had immigrated from England could no longer vote until they became Canadian citizens. And I immediately decided I needed to apply to be a citizen because I had no thoughts of returning to England. My life was in Canada. I mean, my goodness! Anyway, I applied and became a citizen.

CBC: In America, during the Vietnam War, for any number of people of a certain generation, Canada was a sanctuary. Your country represented peace and was a place of safety for an entire group of people who did not want to go to Vietnam. Did you get a sense of that – "We're a more peaceful country than the aggressive United States"?

Richard: Well, for a long time, I and other Canadians have this attitude that Americans are much more gun crazy than Canadians, and statistics will bear that. I come from a country – that being England – where the police don't even carry guns. And if there's a situation where you need armed police, then that officer would be called upon. But no. Growing up, we went through three states to get to Western Canada as a toddler, as a four-year-old. The only state that I visited as a teenager was North Dakota. And that was a bit of an adventure, I guess I remember going down and looking for differences. A few things are different – their mailboxes are a different color, they have a different flag – but not a lot else. They're really pretty much the same, but things like bearing arms is very much an American thing that isn't so much so in Canada. My wife found this website that shows a number of people shot every day in the United States, an entire country of 350 million people with a lot of people doing the shooting. But Canada statistically is safer and less gun crazy than America. It's just a fact.

But, at the same time, my wife and I love going to the United States. We've always had wonderful experience with Americans. They're always friendly and great people, and we try not to say anything that would ruffle feathers while we're down there.

CBC: These are not normal times, Richard. So did the art-

people wearing them, though I didn't want to wear 'em myself. No, I don't think I was deep into that, but I lived through that period. I was, more or less, a pretty typical teen. I was 20 when I joined the Church.

CBC: I know the Vietnam War didn't involve Canada, but did you think about national service yourself? Did you feel any obligation towards Canada at all?

Richard: No, there was no conscription in Canada, no draft, obviously, for the Vietnam War. There was none of that in Canada. I mean, we would hear about what was going on. Both my grandfathers and four of my uncles all served in World War I and World War II, my father's father and his brother were both captains,



work of Peter Max and this new explosion of pop art coming out of the U.S. and Europe, did that appeal to you?

Richard: Absolutely! I remember discovering Peter Max while I was working at Jay-Dee Products, and some of the design work I did was very much inspired by what I saw in Peter Max's work. I loved his look back then and it had a kind of cartoony feel to it, with exaggerated characters and forms, and there was his use of color. It appealed to me a great deal. I like that look of the lettering, the form fitting lettering. Yeah, all of that stuff in the late '60s, early '70s.

CBC: Did you get exposed to underground comix?

Richard: I saw a few of them... Robert Crumb... I saw the imagery and I saw the comix, and yeah, I liked the look, "Keep on Truckin'," and that exaggerated foot coming forward, that kind of stuff, because at Jay-Dee Products, we were always trying to be trendy with embroidery design and crest work, so we were always looking for what was popular. So Peter Max, Crumb... I liked the look of it. I'd try to copy it in some way and still make it different.

CBC: Why don't you tell me the story of meeting Ron and how did that prevail? Ron was already in the Church?

Richard: Yes. So, sometime in '71 (I don't remember exactly when), I met him at church. He had also attended Red River College. I had seen him in the hall. He was in the year ahead of me, so I didn't know him, but I'd seen him. I saw him at church, and I said, "Hey, I've seen you!" That kind of thing. And we became friends almost instantly.

And Ron has a cartoon style that's very distinctive. He has a website called *Toonaday.com*. He's been

doing that for 29 years. And I have seen his cartoons all over North America, maybe even in England. If you go to his website, you might say, "Hey, that looks familiar."

And so, anyway, he was a cartoonist, so we were both kind of in the same field and we would get together. He said to me, "There should be a Canadian super-hero." And it was something I hadn't thought about, and I just thought, "Yeah, that sounds right." So we talked about it for a couple of years. Every time we'd get together, we would talk about it. And I envisioned us working on it together one day, although Ron did not, and he still doesn't draw in a super-hero style. Cartoon style, that's what he focused on.

CBC: Who came up with the name Captain Canuck?

Richard: I would credit Ron for that. We were going to call him "Captain Canada," but there were three other people using that name. Ron suggested Canuck. I think it works better anyway; it's a better name than Captain Canada, which is still used. There was a Captain Canada out in Newfoundland, which had an interesting design. There was also a Captain Canada that was a cartoon character, a guy who wore moose horns, which was goofy and a syndicated college newspaper strip. So it seemed to me that Captain Canada already was taken... I still get asked to this day, "How come you didn't

call him Captain Canada?"

Well, we couldn't. And Captain Canuck works better. And Canuck is a term that goes all the way back to the late 1800s. And there was "Johnny Canuck" during World War II, for example.

CBC: You had not been exposed to U.S. super-heroes, had you? Other than mass media stuff?

Richard: Oh, yeah, of course, I had. I was well aware of Superman, Batman, and Captain America, all of those guys. And, really, we saw Captain Canuck as Canada's answer to Captain America.

CBC: So you knew about the Marvel Comics Group?

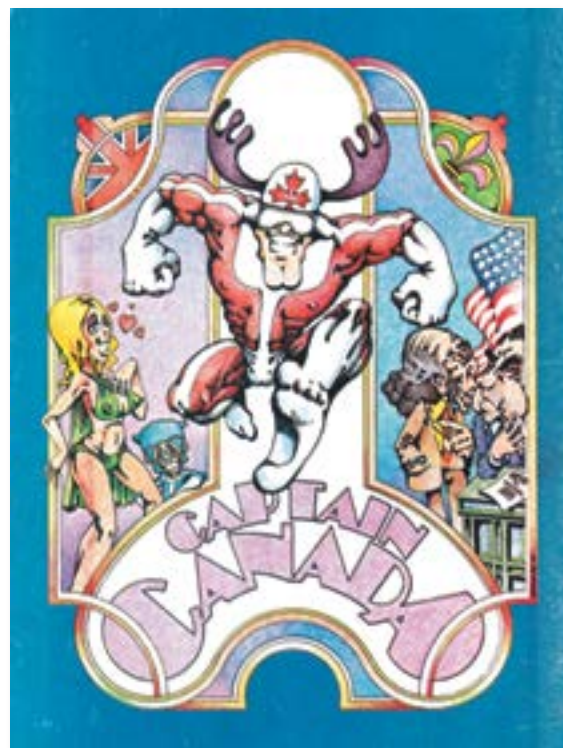
Richard: Yeah, I saw them.

I picked them up every now and then. In 1973, I started to get serious about the idea. Now, at that time, Ron was working in western Canada. He decided he wanted to serve on a mission for the Church, and I couldn't fault him for that. There's no paid ministry in the Church. Missionaries have to support themselves for their two-year stints. And so he needed to raise some money to be able to support himself for the two to two-and-a-half years that he'd be serving in Belgium and France. So I didn't see much of him, but every time he was back in town, we'd get together and talk. So, in '73, I realized I need to pursue this alone. And that's when I started to look at distribution, printing, production... all the aspects that I felt needed to be dealt with when I published

it. I did consider working with another publisher, but never thought of Marvel or DC. I never considered approaching them, and I didn't. The only company I approached was Harlequin Romance, based in Toronto.

CBC: Why Harlequin?

Richard: Because they published magazines, as well as books. And I sent them four pages of the comic book and they liked it. A representative met with me in Winnipeg, and they were definitely interested in publishing it. I was happy to hear that. But then the bookkeeper at Jay-Dee Products said, "No! Don't go with that. They're going to own the rights and you'll just be working for



This spread: Clockwise from above is Stanley Berneche's back cover of Fuddle Duddle #4 ['72], which introduced the satirical character, Captain Canada; another Captain Canada debuted in the Newfoundland Herald in 1979; pastiche of Captain America #100 cover; text page from Captain Canuck #1; Ron Leishman figurine of his co-creation, Captain Canuck, and the future Toonaday.com cartoonist, at 19 years old.





Above: Over the decades, Richard has retained an impressive talent at getting media attention, particularly when his signature character was introduced in 1975. Here is a photo that appeared in Binghamton, New

York's Press & Sun-Bulletin, on July 27 of that year. **Inset right:** Richard also found inventive ways to reduce his inventory, including creating "Special Collectors' Packs," which he successfully sold wholesale to retail stores. (He followed up this pack with another that also included remaindered #3 copies.)

Below: Among Richard's initial investors was his then-employer, J.D. Schachter, whose Jay-Dee Products manufactured "crests" – patches – including this iron-on from circa '78.

them, and they'll be able to fire you if they don't like you" etc. And he said, "You can get some government funding to start a publishing company." Though I never did get any government funding, he sent me on that course to a do-it-myself kind of thing. And that's when I really started to look at comic books in a serious way.

CBC: So you were buying them off the stands and looking through them?

Richard: Yes.

CBC: What'd you get out of them by looking over the American comics? What was the things that stood out to you? Were they good?

Richard: I think so. One of the places I used to go was a bookstore that sold used

books, and they also sold comic books that had the part of the cover torn off. I think they were a nickel each and I'd buy those up. So what I was focusing on was how to tell the story with pictures and words – the basics and drawing the figure in action.

I'd already been figure drawing for a while, but I knew I needed to improve in that area.

And sequential art, I needed to understand how it should work. So that's what I looked at 'em for. I would read them and think, "How is this working? When do they use close ups and when do they use wide shots?" All of that stuff.

CBC: So was it when you two thought of the name Captain Canuck, you realized that this is a commercially viable idea?

Richard: Yes.

CBC: Did you have dreams of grandeur? Did you think that you were going to be able to make your own fortune?

Richard: Basically, I felt there was potential. There was this undercurrent, a subconscious undercurrent in Canada where Canadians were starting to come into their own, realizing that they were separate from the United States, realizing that they were Canadians, basically, and become a little more patriotic and a little more focused on the fact that we have our

own country. It was all, I think, connected with the centennial of Confederation in 1967 that got that ball rolling.

Then, sometime in the summer of 1974, my parents co-signed a loan for \$8,000 for me to start my venture. And my brother Robin John came to work for me. I realized I couldn't just have one title and that you had to have a few different books. But eventually, because I was doing everything myself, that idea went out the window pretty quick. I just couldn't do it all.

CBC: Were you going to do Jonn as a companion title?

Richard: Yes, and Catman was the other title. But then I found out there already was a Catman out there, and we dropped it. So I started in late summer of '74 working on it. I rented office space. First, I realized I needed to find sources of income for this operation, and I focused a lot of energy and time on trying to sell advertising space. I spent a lot of effort, only realizing afterwards that it was a lot of wasted energy and expense. I mean, I did sell some advertising space, but most of my ads were "per inquiry," a term used back then, which was you got paid by the number of people responding to the ads. And some of my ads would generate as few as maybe 30, 40, or 50.

So, a lot of effort went into securing those ads and that's what I had Robin John helping me with. Then I was getting ready to write and illustrate the first issue, with a lot of trepidation, because I had very little foundation in making comics. So it was jumping into the deep end of the pool and not knowing for sure if I could swim. I finished it probably in February of 1975 and it was on the stands by May.

CBC: Who designed the logo?

Richard: I did. I designed the logo and it's still being used today. I probably spent at least two full days on it. That's all hand drawn.

CBC: Good job, Richard! You shrewdly generated a huge amount of publicity, with many newspaper articles that recognized you, as you said, really tapped into something.

Richard: Yes, it did. I knew I needed to get as much free advertising as I could, with no budget to promote the comic book – to run ads and market it – so I sent out a press release. I remember talking to a PR agency in Winnipeg and they were very kind to explain to me how to go about the process – writing a press release, mailing it out to media, etc. – and I followed their instructions and got great results. And my timing was right, though I had no idea it was right. It just turned out that way.

CBC: But you tapped into something that was more than





just luck, right?

Richard: Well, if I would've done it 10 years earlier, I don't know if I would have had the success I had. I don't know.

CBC: It's interesting that you mentioned the centennial. If I'm not mistaken, the Canadian flag, as it presently is, was adopted in 1965, in anticipation of the centennial, right?

Richard: Yeah, yeah. In 1965. In fact, I contributed a design, though (of course) it wasn't used. Canadians were invited to submit what they thought would be a good flag design. I know I submitted at least one idea, but I don't remember what it looked like anymore. All those things – the flag, the Centennial, the Expo – were building towards this sense of Canadian pride. Still, to this day, much of our media, much of our entertainment comes from the United States and even more so back then. Then, around that same time, Canadians started to think, "We've got to create our own culture. We're living off of American culture way too much." So government started to fund cultural events, cultural projects, etc. I never got a dime from the government.

CBC: Some of your peers in the '70s, in the then brand-new burgeoning comic scene in Canada did, in fact, receive government funding. There was Orb magazine with Canadian super-hero Northern Light.

Richard: Orb came out around the same time as *Captain Canuck*. And I became aware of it, sort of, after the fact, because it was based in Toronto. In fact, I know the guy who created it or one of the people behind it, James Waley. And they only did a few issues.

CBC: I remember I was eight years old at the time of Expo 67, but I do remember things were happening up in Canada. I grew up in the Hudson Valley, in New York, and, of course, the Montreal Expos baseball team came out and I still think that the Canadian flag is the most beautiful flag in the world. Did you look at that and think, "I'm going to use the flag as

motif for a super-hero costume"?

Richard: Well, the red maple leaf is ubiquitous, the symbol Canadians have adopted. And, yeah, it just seemed – red and white – a no-brainer so that didn't take much thought as far as using for the costume. The original costume was mostly Ron [Leishman]'s thinking. When George [Freeman] came along, he made some changes to the costume that we liked.

CBC: So, the practical aspects of doing a comic book: you're doing a singular title. What did you look to as an example of doing this? Was it the American model that you wanted to emulate?

Richard: Well, basically, yes. I was looking at pretty much only American comic books. I did see some British ones and I remember some of the art in some of those were painterly kind of artwork and that really was impressive. But, no, I didn't really know of anybody else who had done anything like this. I didn't know about Orb, which was published out of Toronto, and that was a group effort, which didn't do well enough for them to continue. I don't know how many issues they got out...

CBC: I think six. They had government funding. That's what helped them, though they published on an erratic schedule. It was also considerably different. Yours was one character and it was ambitiously in color. Theirs was black-&-white.

Richard: It's been so many years since I've seen a copy, and I probably only saw the first issue, and I did not know that they got government money. How come they got government money? We're socialists up here...

CBC: The funding didn't last that long. You started *Captain Canuck* right at the beginning of the direct market. I mean, it really wasn't even viable yet. It was just starting to happen with Phil Seuling out of New York and Bud Plant in California.

Richard: I don't know how I discovered Phil. I think it was in '79, when I went to see him for the first time when I flew to New York. I went to World Color Press because that was who we were dealing with and I took a subway to Brooklyn. I remember coming up to the street level, walking behind two kids, and they were probably 10, 11, 12, and they had a thick Brooklyn accent. I felt like, "Where am I? This is a foreign country!" And Phil Seuling also had a very thick Brooklyn accent, which was all very charming, and it definitely made me feel like I was in another world.

At that time, one thing that was advantageous for me was, though there were only a few comic book stores in Canada – in Winnipeg at the time, Doug Sulipa's Comic World; Harry Kremer's Now & Then Books in Kitchener, Ontario; The Silver Snail in Toronto; and I think there might've been one in Vancouver at that same time... But, you're right: it was a very, very beginning of that whole direct market thing. And, in fact, in the case of Doug Sulipa, in Winnipeg, he bought comics primarily right from the distributor. So he went to the distributor and bought it straight from them wholesale. That was the regional mass market newsstand distributor we're talking about, in Winnipeg. At that time, there were 35 of them in Canada, and they covered the entire country. Every store in Canada was supplied by one of those 35 regional



Above: Faux cover for promo sheet Richard handed to potential advertisers. **Inset left:** Captain Canuck #3 [Mar. '76] cover. **Below:** The Dominion Defender beckons the reader. All art by Richard Comely.





wholesalers, who were fed by national distributors. So that was the structure back then. It was all newsstand distribution. It was the same in the States.

CBC: Who did you deal with for national distribution?

Richard: They were based in Oakville, Ontario, and there were about three companies in Canada at the time, and I can't remember the name of the company I dealt with.

CBC: Generally speaking, you dealt with the national distributors, right? So was it eye-opening for you to learn that, for instance, the discount that you had to give to them... I mean, these were on a return basis, I would assume...?

Richard: Yes, all guaranteed sales basis. I first contacted them in 1973. This is when I was exploring, doing the research – "How am I going to get it printed? What was the print run? Where do I distribute it? Who do I

phone me, saying, "We've sold out! I want more copies!" So I phone the distributor, but the problem was, I learned, it just wasn't viable to service stores with a 35¢ item. I learned later on that Doug had a line that went for blocks to buy a copy. People just lined up and he sold probably 1,000 copies on the first day.

Doug is still in the business. I visited him about a year ago on our way to British Columbia, and I toured his warehouses and it just blew me away. He's got a million pieces of stuff, and the aisles are very, very narrow just to make more room for shelving! It's just amazing how much stuff he's got. And he's been at it, my goodness, for over 50 years!

He's probably one of the biggest and best sources of *Captain Canuck* in the world, because he would buy not just from me, but from a bunch of other people, too. He bought from jobbers, for example... I don't know if I told you this, but before we moved to Cardston, Alberta, I still had a whole bunch of copies of the first three issues in storage and I didn't know what to do. A jobber came along and offered me something like 2½¢ a copy and I took it. I kept a whole bunch of #1, shipped them out West with us, thinking eventually one day that they'd be worth more.

When we moved to Calgary, I met Larry Shapiro, owner of United News, the regional wholesale distributor for Calgary. He turned out to be a wonderful support and a great friend. In 1980 or beginning of '81, I ended up working in his building.

CBC: How did you determine who was going to print this thing? You had a different color process than that of typical comic books, right?

Richard: Well, Winnipeg's one of the major cities in the country and it had some pretty big printing companies. There were three major printing companies I approached,

Above: At top, Richard, ever the charmer, persuaded an AMC car dealership in the late '70s to loan him a Pacer to drive around; Richard and Jean-Claude St. Aubin in recent years; Richard flanked by Claude (left) and George Freeman in '80.

Inset right: Canada's first comics hero named Canuck debuted in Dime Comics #1 [Feb. '42]. This splash from #5 [Oct. '42]. Art by Leo Bachle. **Below:** The artist at work.



go after to try and sell advertising space?" – all of that stuff. That's when I contacted a national distributor, and he said, "Sure, we can distribute that. We would be interested." I can't remember why I went with that particular company, but they were encouraging and they gave me a breakdown of how it all worked out.

I got a 10% advance and that was very helpful. I think the first issue shipment was 120,000 copies. The copies went to all the 35 regional wholesalers in Canada and the border states, New York, Michigan... apparently Michigan got copies first on their newsstands, according to comic book historians. And there was Ohio, and I'm assuming maybe Western states, as well. I don't have a complete list of the states that received copies; the distributors said they were doing it more at the beginning on an experimental basis.

CBC: We got them here in Rhode Island, so I presume New England was among the regions receiving copies.

Richard: They may have. Back to direct sales: Doug Sulipa was only about 18 years old at the time. He started his comic book store, I discovered it, and then met Doug, and he was a great support. He ended up buying thousands of copies – 4,000 or 5,000! – of *Captain Canuck* #1. So, when the first issue came out, his was one of the first stores to have them on the shelf, and it was also being distributed to convenience stores and drug stores, etc. But his advantage was he had them in quantity, while other stores sold out. Your typical outlet had maybe 10 copies on the rack (or whatever) and it really did well, so stores in Winnipeg were



Johnny Canuck TM & © the respective copyright holder. Splash page courtesy of Ivan Kozmarek.

Will Captain Canuck become a genuine comic-book hero?

By Brian Brennan
(Herald Staff Writer)

A priority mission of Captain Canuck — the country's new superhero — could be to destroy the forces of evil that put American comic books on Canadian shelves.

That's the way Richard Comely, 24-year-old Winnipeg artist who produced the first edition of the new Canadian magazine for youngsters would like to see his change little comic-book publishing around.

Mr. Comely, president, cartoonist, writer and editor of Comely Comics, was in Calgary this week to find out why a local distributor kept only 1,000 and returned 400 copies of the first edition of Captain Canuck.

At a news conference in his



to obtain funding from the Alberta Opportunity Company, a Crown corporation that grants loans to stimulate growth in rural areas.

The artist lived in Calgary for five years, and said he would like to move Comely Comics to Alberta, to continue publishing Captain Canuck.

Mr. Comely, who was born in England and moved to Canada when he was two, worked as a freelance artist and apartment caretaker, before he and an artist friend, Ron Leishman, conceived the

Captain Canuck idea three years ago.

"No Canadian comic book had a superhero. We thought it was kind of a drag," he said.

Mr. Leishman subsequently lost interest in the idea, when he left for Europe to serve a two-year mission with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons).

Mr. Comely, who is also a devoted member of the church and was married to the Alberta Temple in Cardston — was left to carry on the

project. He was assisted by his wife, parents and friend Dave Abbot, 21, who works for Comely Comics as advertising sales and business manager.

Mr. Comely said Captain Canuck, set in Canada in the 1960s, when "predicaments of Canada becoming the most important country in the world become a reality," is directed at readers in the 11-to-16-year age group.

The artist deplores the fact that some American comic books fail to respect stand-

ards set by the Comics Magazine Association of America Inc., and he said Captain Canuck will adhere to a code imposed by the National Cartoonist Society about 20 years ago.

"We believe good materials exist all over. We believe parents and as emotionally disturbed children, that most young people are instinctively attracted to that which is wholesome."

Inspired by this code, and by his religious beliefs, Mr.

Comely aims to it that Captain Canuck, the hero, "gives thanks to God from time to time." In the first edition, after discussing Communist invaders and warring off a missile attack on the Pyramids, Canuck declares that "God was helping us."

CABARET WINDJAM
FROM THEATRE
SHERATON SUMMIT
262-7091

THE CHARACTERS SEEM FAMILIAR

The first edition of Captain Canuck, it might be noted with some irony, seems to be largely American-inspired.

When one takes away the physique, a Phantom costume and a Maple Leaf on his belt buckle, is described as the top super-agent of Canadian International Security Organi-

zation.

An interesting feature of the new comic book is the way photographs of the famous men, taken from Na-

Palisade Arts **BLAND HYSTERIA** by John Palmer
13, 8:00 p.m.
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Here comes our Captain Canuck!

By SHARON FRYDE

For the first time, a Canadian comic book is being published in Canada. It's called Captain Canuck.

Mr. Comely's original superhero distribution problems here... are again deflated and says he would like to see in publishing the country's first comic book.

Comely is the author of 20 Little Red Riding Hood stories in the Canadian version of the comic book.

The idea for Captain Canuck had been sitting in my head for three years," said Comely. "Finally last October I decided to do it."

And work he did. The result is a 64-page comic book, packed full of the trials and tribulations of the Canadian hero.

There was a problem. The first edition of the comic book was to be published from his old home town.

"I called to the Alberta Opportunity Company at 1-800-999-9999 and was informed in moving the whole operation to Calgary."

in the side of the comic book, the series stands in Winnipeg (the artist, however) jump before scheduled, Captain said, "The 'let us bring us'."

Comely says the children's comic book is a really well-written, and the new superhero comic.

"There were complaints here the lack of diversity of the comic book," he said. "I don't like to do this as the comic book," he said.

All the action of the above items of the new superhero comic book is set in Canada during 1960.

The Captain himself wears a Phantom costume and a Maple Leaf on his belt buckle, is described as the top super-agent of Canadian International Security Organi-

Beef fat study surprises

WINNIPEG (CP) — A study by the University of Manitoba says that the use of beef fat in cooking is a good idea.

The study, which was conducted by two researchers in the department of food and nutrition, found that beef fat is a good source of vitamins and minerals.

A study conducted by two researchers in the department of food and nutrition, found that beef fat is a good source of vitamins and minerals.

Although beef fat is considered a relatively saturated oil, it is a good source of vitamins and minerals.

the world, even more so than today. He is a law enforcer but I don't intend him to win every case.

"Captain Canuck will be Canada's moral arbiter, in a sense."

Written and drawn in conjunction with Ron Leishman, a Mormon missionary in Belgium and France, Captain Canuck will demonstrate the moral principles of his two crea-

tor's end of the Second World War, when paper import restrictions created barriers for foreign comics.

Called the Great Canadian Whites, the naive comics were printed in black and white and were largely reprints of the American product.

When import laws were relaxed, American comics

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Spidey beware—here comes Canuck

By Michael Kraus

Can a Canadian with only above-average intelligence and strength compete against a spider-powered teenage newspaperman from New York?

Richard Comely, 24-

year-old president, head artist, writer and editor of Comely Comics thinks so.

"Yes, Captain Canuck can compete with other comics like Spiderman because we don't intend to overindulge in violence or

delve into monster or scary themes. There is a great need in Canada for an all-Canadian comic book."

Captain Canuck — also known as C.C. — is the hero of the new comic

book, set in the 1960s, that will be available on Ottawa newsstands in the next week.

Wearing red tights and a cow-d decorated with maple leaves (perhaps to avoid confusion with his American counterpart, Captain America, from whom the costume, if not the name, was obviously borrowed), C.C. towns Canada righting wrongs and clearing

the world, even more so than today. He is a law enforcer but I don't intend him to win every case.

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Meet our own superhero: Captain Canuck

By BILL KOKESCH
of The Gazette

Criminals — Beware! Is it Jerome Choquette, Albert Liassak, or Jean Dutil?

No, it's Captain Canuck, Canada's first crime-fighting superhero vigilantly standing on guard for the Canadian maple leaf.

Montreal will never be the same.

Armed with comic books and T-shirts, Richard Comely, Captain Canuck's creator and publisher, introduced the superhero and his brand new comic book to Montreal this week.

Comely, 24, first thought of creating the superhero three years ago in Winnipeg. "I was sick of having to get up

Comely, along with co-partner Ron Leishman, are Mormons, otherwise known as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

"There is an influence of my religion on the story-line for sure," says Comely. "Violence and immorality are working their way into the American comics and there is plenty of material in them that kids shouldn't be reading."

"There will be violence in Captain Canuck too, because I'm not anti-violence. If you are fighting evil there must certainly be violence. But violence shouldn't be the main story line."

Captain Canuck doesn't have superpowers. Instead he makes use of technological advances to fight evil.



The world of comic books

Gentle Capt. Canuck zoks the superheroes

By BILL HOLDEN

WINNIPEG (CP)—If the plans of Richard Comely are fulfilled, fans of Captain Canuck will be able to wrap his well-muscled torso around their necks, plant his

his anti-violent stance from American readers has been particularly favorable.

"They like the puritanism. They're glad to see I've been conscientious about the content I put in it."

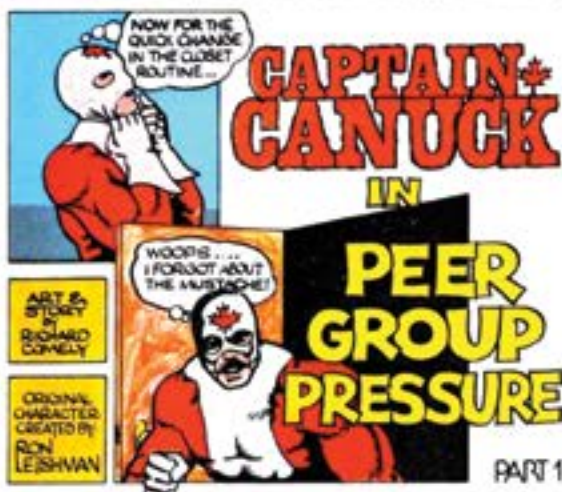
appearing on the newsstands. Issue No. 2 appeared last month; the third is scheduled for mid-December.

"The reaction has been tremendous. The comic book

successful. I had faith it would work out. There were disappointments and frustrating moments when I thought it would be over the next day, but I guess it's the same in any business."

something I just want to get out of the way. Once it's done, I want to return to just drawing and writing."

One lesson the fledgling businessman learned was to expect the unexpected.



Above: Panels from Richard's first attempt at a CC story. **Previous page:** A few of the many articles focusing on the Captain and Comely.

and one of them was willing to give me terms, some credit, and that was a big plus, and the salesman was really helpful. I was looking at comic books and understood how they were printed, and I learned how they prepared the color. It was all photo masking, and I did some of that with a few of the pages because it was a cheaper process and a process that I could do right there, in my office. The back cover [of #1], for example, is just hand-cut Rubylith for those colors. In fact, I made a mistake. I forgot to put yellow behind the magenta on the costume. That's why it looks so maroon.

CBC: One hundred percent magenta.

Richard: It's just pure magenta, right. So I needed color separation work done. I went to an engraving company, who were a wonderful help back then. We wanted to come up with a method that was better than what the Americans were using. They had flat color that was 85 dots per inch [resolution]. We wanted to go with a finer dot arrangement and we ended up with, 135 dots per inch; we experimented with different things. I tried doing color, doing it the pencil, then doing the color, and then putting a fogged acetate over top of the color and being able to see and doing inking on that. So basically the colors – magenta, yellow, and cyan – were done with a stat camera using the filter method to get those three colors... I'm still experimenting in that first issue. I've got about three different methods in there that I'm trying.

Eventually, the method that worked the best was that we did the artwork, pencils, inked it, and then taped a sheet of acetate and using a vinyl acrylic copolymer paint (the same paint animators use), using a brush, we painted the color... We put the color

where we wanted. We could use graded tones, we could use any color we wanted to. We got better at it with future issues. That's why I was able to easily put photos in there. A lot of those photos came out of *National Geographic* magazines. I wrote to them, I wrote, "I hope you don't mind." And they wrote me back, "It's alright."

CBC: What's also impressive is you have real-world advertising.

Richard: Right. That ad for the metal [plaques] was our own, as we found a source for those. We didn't buy them, but we found somebody who would supply them as we got orders and we could make some money. Same with the patches. That was my old boss, Jay-Dee Products, who made the patches. We had one of those ubiquitous ads that was in every comic book in the world, the one with X-ray specs.

Again, we only made money with the ads per order, and I might've made \$50 with that ad, and that was probably one of the better ones. Some of 'em I made \$20, \$30. We only made money when they made a sale. But I just spent way too much time and energy trying to sell ad space, because, at the time, I thought this is going to be the main source of income. This is going to fill any gap we have.

I knew it was going to be tough with mass market distribution. I only got 40% of the cover price. I knew that, even if we sold really well, the distributor was pretty upfront with me and said if 50% sold, that would be really good. And, with the first issue we did, I think we hit 55% of what was distributed.

CBC: Did you have publicity on national television? You got a line of people out of Sulipa's store, so they had to have heard about it from somewhere that this,

Richard: I think the *Winnipeg Free Press* was the first one to do a story. Then the *Winnipeg Tribune* also did stories. In fact, I knew the editor really well. So it was as soon as the first issue got out there, it was the first item on the evening news, a big story about *Captain Canuck* hitting the newsstands and then the newswire services picked it up.

As I mentioned, a public relations company gave me a lot of free advice, basically schooling me in what I needed to do to get the word out. He said, "What you really should do is go to the top cities – Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa – and do press conferences there, so I did. It wasn't cheap to fly and to rent a room to have a press conference, but it got tons of coverage going. Tons!

CBC: You say you sold about 55% of the run of #1, even at 35¢ each, this when American comics were 25¢ a copy.

Richard: Well, there were maybe 199,000 copies printed. The cover price of 35¢ and I actually had a few extra pages in that first issue including cover, I had 40 pages, so that's how I justified the 10¢ increase. And that was a bold move on my part to put 35¢ cover price on it, but it didn't hurt sales at all.

CBC: The first issue is 44 pages plus cover. A bargain!

Richard: There you go. Something like 120,000 copies went out to all the stores in Canada and some to those states. Of that, approximately 55% sold. Now, what was very generous of a number of distributors was they shipped back the unsold copies at no cost to me, and I was very grateful as that was very, very kind of them. And that's why I had a bunch of copies to sell in the future.

From those returns, I probably sold at least 10,000 cop-

ies to Doug Sulipa and maybe two other dealers back then. So I still ended up with, at least, probably close to 70,000 copies on my hands. And that's when I decided to do 50,000 collectors packs, with #1, #2, and the 3D diorama, and a 50¢ coupon (for what, I can't recall). There was a company in Winnipeg that employed handicapped people, and they did the handwork of filling these packs, which weren't real easy to fill either. It eventually worked out. They never did get up to 50,000 completed because there was a flood in their warehouse, and something like 20,000 copies of #2 were destroyed.* And so they might've bagged 20,000. But this sold very well in stores.

CBC: And what was the retail on that?

Richard: That was \$1.49. What I ended up doing is I put #3 inside this pack, so it made an even better deal. And then we put a 79¢ cover price on it and put 'em out, and they went to [Alberta resort town] Banff and all these tourist places, and they sold every single bag. Every single bag! And that's very rare because they *always* had returns on everything, but with this, they didn't. But it was a killer deal. You got three issues, a 3D diorama. I put another sticker in there indicating the value of it, and they sold out. Every now and then, you'll find collectors who will have a few.

CBC: The first issue has a cover date of July 1975, then #2 is November '75, and March '76 for #3. It looks like you anticipated coming out with #4, but instead you did this oversize limited edition thing, black-&-white, and it's a skip of three years.

Richard: What happened was we ran out of money. We couldn't print #4 because we didn't have any money left. We were finished, though it was ready to go.

CBC: With #2, was there a depreciable amount of sales and returns just increased? Could you see the writing on the wall?

Richard: Well, #2 did not sell as well as #1, which is very typical. I went to a different printer for #2 and I had to pay them up front. They were cheaper than the first printer. [Discussion of color printing processes at different printers.] Again, I printed 200,000 copies. I didn't need 200,000 copies, but I just wasn't smart enough to figure that out. I don't know what the sales were, though I think that the sales might've been 30% [sell-through] with 70% returned, which is more typical of a comic. Returns were *really* heavy. And, again, I got copies shipped back to me unsold, and a lot of those ended up going to the jobber before we left Manitoba. So, in August of 1976, we moved my family – at that time, I had three children, and my daughter was still a baby – and George [Freeman] and [Jean] Claude [St. Aubin] also moved with us to Cardston, Alberta. They got an apartment in the town of Cardston, which, at that time, it had a population of less than 4,000. We rented a house about two miles out of town of Cardston, and the Rocky Mountains are right there to the west of us.

*The *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* cites the number of copies of *Captain Canuck* #2 destroyed in Winnipeg at 30,000.



CBC: This is during the initial run?

Richard: Yes. Issue #3 was on the newsstand before we moved. We ran the newspaper in Cardston, which was founded by [Charles] Ora Card, who [LDS leader] Brigham Young sent to Canada. Cardston had the only Latter-day Saints

Temple in all of Canada. My wife and I were married there. While we were there on a second trip just to attend the Temple, the offer was made. "Why don't you move here and run the newspaper?" It was a case where we would run it and then give the owner of the newspaper a percentage of what we made. So that's what we did. It was a weekly newspaper with a circulation of 2,000 copies.

CBC: Was it a Mormon paper?

Richard: No, it just a regular newspaper. I, a Mormon, was running it, and the population of Cardston was probably 70% LDS. You couldn't buy liquor in town, and I remember a little grocery store where you couldn't buy cigarettes. But it was a lovely town. I got to know a lot of people because I did

Above: The companion character, Catman, never quite got off the ground at Comely Comix. **Inset left:** Ron Leishman created Jonn, a back-up feature in *Captain Canuck*, starring a sword-wielding hero.

Below: The *Captain Canuck* diorama, rendered by George Freeman.





Above: The first issue of Richard's Westwind News featured George and Claude's illustration. **Below:** Two of Richard and Evelyn's eight children sporting CC T-shirts in '75.



all the ad sales. I went to all the businesses to sell the ad space. George and Jean-Claude did the paste-up. They also did a lot of cartoons. I wrote all the articles, too. It was called the *Westwind News*... We enjoyed the experience, but we couldn't make enough money from the newspaper, even though I had the ad revenue up to record sales, there was myself and my two artists, and I had no other source... I was hoping that we'd be able to find another investor or another source of income so that we could also continue with the comic book series. We were there only for five months and then, in February, we realized that during the winter months, our ad revenue was even lower. It dropped off considerably. That's when I realized this isn't going to work. So we just moved up to Calgary.

By then, Ron was back from his mission, so he lived for a couple of months with George and Claude. Then Claude and I got

jobs as commercial artists in Calgary, and George moved back to Winnipeg, where his family was. Then Ron ended up going to school in Lethbridge [Alberta] and I started looking for investors. I found partners in '78 and we got it going again in early 1979 under CKR Productions.

CBC: How did you pitch it? Did you say, "Okay, it didn't work the first time..."? Was the emerging direct market part of it?

Richard: The direct market wasn't really going in '78. It was still an up-and-coming kind of thing. We still had to mostly deal with newsstand distributors, the regional distributors. I put together a business plan and basically promoted the fact that the future potential was there. I'd become quite aware of having to reduce my printing costs. I knew this by #2, that printing costs in the States were much lower for comic books because they were all printed by World Color Press. They dominated the printing of comic books and they were less than half the cost.

I also needed to go after licensing in a more vigorous manner. So I had a few licensing deals, the T-shirts with Tam O'Shanter, who gave me a \$5,000 advance, which, back then, was a *lot* more money than it is now. And I felt that we could go after more licensing deals, reduce the cost of printing, etc., and that we could make it work. And the potential was very, very good for an animated TV series. I had a business plan with projections on that, as well. So I projected the future income and, of course, my projections were very favorable.

I found a member of the Church who had a cement company to become the primary investor. Ernie was himself a relatively new convert to the Church and he had a pretty good business, with a stable income. Then he insisted on bringing in a friend to be the business manager. I wasn't crazy about the idea, because I didn't think we needed a business manager. He was a guy who had managed a warehouse kind of thing. That was his credential.

CBC: Was this Ken Ryan?

Richard: Yes, Ken Ryan. Both those guys are long gone. Ernie died when he was 70, and that's 30 years ago, something like that, and Ken, not long after that. Ken was a fairly heavy smoker, so I think that quickened his demise. But we got *Captain Canuck* going, which again got good media coverage, and I did #5 mostly myself. That's when I realized I couldn't do everything, I couldn't turn out a magazine all by myself, to do every aspect of it. Then I convinced them we needed George and Jean-Claude to come back and work with me.

CBC: Let's talk about meeting George and Jean-Claude. How'd you meet those guys?

Richard: George walked into my office one day just as I was finishing the pencils for #2. He just knocked on the door and said hi, came in, showed me his work, and as soon as I saw it, I said, "Wow! I like this!" So we chatted and he left. I was ready to make an offer to him almost immediately. I really was impressed with his work. About a week later, I wanted to talk to him again to see if he'd be willing to work with me, but he didn't leave any contact information. [chuckles] All I knew was he had mentioned that he worked for a tombstone engraving company. [Jon laughs]

So I phoned a half-dozen tombstone engravers and they all said, "We don't know a George Freeman." He'd been

actually working at [parts store and mail order business] Princess Auto, I think, doing their catalog. Anyway, probably four days after I tried looking for him, he just walked into my office again and I said, George, "I've been looking for you!" I made him an offer. I said, "Would you consider working with me?" He said, "Yes." He was very interested in working with me on the comic book. That's really what his passion was and he's a terrific artist. Many people recognize the fact that he is a terrific illustrator.

CBC: He certainly is!*

Richard: So now we're working together and he inks #3 Then, in early November of '75, I come home and there's

I had a feeling when I met Ken. I hadn't known Ken at all. I just remember meeting with him and thinking, "He's got zero background in this kind of stuff. And not even a lot of interest in the medium... Well, zero there, too." But his friend, Ernie, had wanted him, and he had nothing else to do at the time, I guess. He came in and I did not feel good about it, but Ernie insisted that he had to be a part of the team. And so it just didn't work out very well. It was very frustrating. He was doing things that I thought

I were a big mistake. He was older than I was, and he just had, "Who are you, kid, to tell me how to run this?" kind of attitude. And it just did not work...

CBC: So did you quit or did they run you out?

Richard: They ran me out, really, is what happened. So it started to come apart. For example, I literally had to sneak out of the office. One of the other problems with Ken was no salesman. He just had zero experience in that department, and I just knew that we could get some licensing deals. So I went to Eaton's.

Eaton's department stores were big in Canada, the biggest chain of department stores in the country. (I met my wife, Evelyn, in Eaton's in Winnipeg, on the eighth floor!) So I had a meeting with Eaton's, and three of their stores got on board, and were really excited. We made a whole bunch of T-shirts for 'em, and they bought a bunch of comics, etc.

When I first started *Captain Canuck*, Eaton's approached me for their Winnipeg store to do a signing. Hundreds of people showed up for it. And they bought thousands of copies to sell. I also had posters at that time, so they sold posters in the store. Then I went to Eaton's in Calgary and made a similar deal. Then that brought in the Moose Jaw and Regina stores. Ken



This page: Inset top is Ernest Kaszas [1934–2001], president of Kruger Concrete Products, the "K" in CKR Productions. Above is the "C" – Richard Comely – and "R" – Ken Ryan. Inset is the limited edition CC #4, an oversize signed and numbered version in 1976. Below is the cover to the same, released in August '79. Art by George Freeman.



this young bearded man throwing a football with my younger brother Tim. I get out of the car and Claude walks up to me and says, "I come to help you." He knew maybe five other words of English besides that – hello, goodbye, whatever – and he has a thick French accent. And, of course, I said, "Okay." And he stayed with us for a night or two, and then he and George shared an apartment, so it worked out great. Claude was doing some inking, still learning, and helping with coloring, which he was very capable of doing. Coloring is a bit labor intensive. Each page was a little painting in itself, and we just made it all work.

CBC: Jean-Claude was a humorous cartoonist?

Richard: Right. He still is and he's been working on a project beautifully done. He's learned how to do coloring with Photoshop. He's working on a comic called *Luke Warm*, a spoof on *Star Wars*. It's got a humorous look to it, a space comedy kind of thing. And his humor to me seems very French... but he is French, 100%... and it's beautifully done. He is working on it in his own time. He's got probably 50, 60 pages of it done.

CBC: Jean-Claude drew "Chaos Corps"... So CKR Products was C for Comely and R for Ryan. What's K? That was Ernie?

Richard: Yes, Ernie Kaszas. Ken Ryan only had something like 10% of the business, so he invested a little bit, too. But

* Full disclosure: along with Al Milgrom, George inked Ye Ed. (a huge Freeman fan) and brother Andy's *Prime8* [2001] comic book one-shot.





Above: A surprise bonus in the August '79 edition of Captain Canuck #4 was Dave Sim's "Beavers" strip, inked by Gene Day. "The Beavers" appeared in Star*Reach's funny animal title, Quack, and in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record newspaper as a weekly strip before Sim gained fame with his Cerebus the Aardvark independent comic book series. **Below:** There were hopes for Jean-Claude St. Aubin's satirical super-hero series, "Chaos Corps," to spin off from its slot as Captain Canuck back-up in #4 and earn its own title, something never to be.

resented the fact that I went out and made these deals, and all I'm trying to do is get some licensing happening. Then the wheels started coming off in 1980.

Ken ended up signing up with a distributor that ripped us off. Then our meetings got heated and it got very tense there. They were squeezing me out in many ways, and it was a relief. When we had the breakup, the fact I wouldn't have to be going into that office every day and dealing with Ken and his antics was a big relief. I wasn't happy about the way things were ending, but that was a positive side of it.

Ernie basically turned over the operation to his friend, and the three of us would meet at times. But Ernie was so dependent on Ken, he basically turned over his authority and trust to Ken handling the business end of it. One of the things they wanted me to do was give up all my shares, because they had somebody else who would buy them,

and that would bring them in some more money. They were already threatening me in early 1980. Then they got some more financing, and that kind of cooled things down. But it came to a head in July, 1980.

I wanted some kind of a settlement with them and asked for \$4,000 and some items. I didn't get the \$4,000, and I didn't get many of the items I asked for either. And I would pop into the office and say hi to George and Claude, who were still there. They produced, we were just working on #12 or 13 when I left, and they finished that off. Then they did #14 by themselves.

CBC: And so that was that, right?

Richard: Basically, by the end of 1980, they were totally out. No more money to work with. It was a slow death from there on. I knew it wasn't going to last, but I stayed in touch with George and Claude. I didn't have any hard feelings towards them, even though I kind of felt that they could have maybe said, "Oh, if he's going, we're going" kind of thing. That kind of loyalty. But I didn't fault them for wanting to hang on as long as they could.

The other thing that was going on that was somewhat annoying was Ken – who was always on the outs with me – even though, in the office, he was kind of tense, he always was sidling up to George and Claude being oh-so gracious to them and promising them whatever they wanted. It was just a little nauseating seeing that going on. It was so obvious... the behavior. But, anyway, by January of 1981, they closed the doors and just ended the company.

CBC: So you still had a stake? You did not sell your shares?

Richard: Well, that's fuzzy because nothing was really done about that, because there was supposed to be a settlement. I was supposed to get some money. So none of that happened. It was just things just kind of fizzled and nothing was really done.

CBC: So who owned the intellectual property?

Richard: That was kind of in gray area, too. But after a few years, according to my contract, it just reverted back to me. The other thing that happened was the company was dissolved. It was a limited corporation, so it was discontinued. It was no longer listed or registered as a company anymore, no longer an entity anymore. And, after a couple years, the rights returned to me. I went to a lawyer years later and double-check that, and that was the case.

CBC: All good.

Richard: Yeah, it was all good.

CBC: In that second incarnation, between #4-14, did you go to San Diego Comic-Con and hobnob with other publishers? Or did you keep to Canada?

Richard: No, I did



not. I was aware of them, but just superficially, I guess. The very first time I went to San Diego Comic-Con was 1983, and I went with Todd McFarlane and his dad, and this was when Todd was just trying to break in.

CBC: A famous Canadian comic book guy! [The conversation turns to Richards post-CKR stint as comic book colorist.]

Richard: At the time, I was also doing coloring using our acetate overlay method. I was doing it for about three other companies, all American companies. I went to San Diego for two purposes: to talk to some more publishers about doing coloring for them, and I did actually pick up one that had a Disney license. So I was coloring some Donald Duck prints or posters (or whatever). I had another project that I was trying to launch, *Alien Angel*, so I was trying to get some support on that or find a publisher to work with, whatever...

CBC: Then, in 1993, *Captain Canuck* was reborn. Was that, "Hey, I'm going to go back into comics after two tries"?

Richard: Let's back up. In 1985, we moved to Ontario. I started doing children's books around that time, as well. And I was hired by a group out of Winnipeg, Saul Zitzerman and some other guys. They paid Wayne Gretzky \$10,000 to do a Gretzky animated special, which they would hopefully develop into a series, so they paid me to write the story and they also wanted to do a comic book series at the same time, which I thought was a good way to go. Two projects supporting each other.

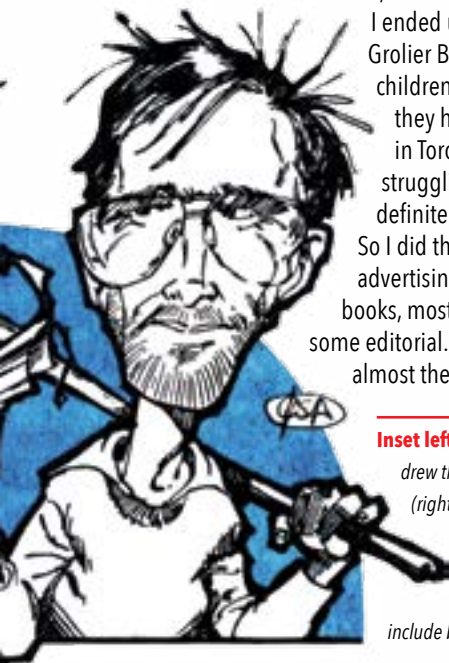
Zitzerman's wife was a wannabe writer, Zelma Zitzerman, and she gave me an outline for a children's book. I wrote the story, illustrated it, and it did okay. We self-published it and it sold well. So she thought, "Okay, let's do more." *The Polka Dot Fence*, starring triplets Tommy, Timmy, and Tyler, was the first one, and then *Trumpet the Elephant* was the other one.

I knew we were struggling in Calgary. I wasn't getting enough work and I knew that I would do much better if I could be near Toronto, the biggest city in Canada. My brother lived in Cambridge, an hour west of Toronto, so we decided to move to Cambridge. Our eighth and last child was born there.

I was working with Zitzerman and I was also picking up other work, other illustration work. Then

I ended up doing work for Grolier Books. I did a lot of children's books with Grolier, they had an editorial office in Toronto. We were still struggling, but it was definitely better in Ontario. So I did that, basically a lot of advertising, a lot of children's books, mostly that kind of stuff, some editorial. And I did that for almost the next seven years.

Inset left: Jean-Claude St. Aubin drew these caricatures of himself (right) and George Freeman for the editorial in *Captain Canuck* #8 [Mar. '80], written by Richard, that include biographical info.



[After I later noted I had neglected to ask about a 1982 comic book Richard produced, he emailed this excerpt from a forthcoming autobiography.]

I came up with the idea for a sci-fi sequential art series I entitled *Star Rider and The Peace Machine*. I felt the title was inspired. My story stars a scientist who travels back in time from the future to stop a global nuclear war before it begins. If the premise sounds like *Terminator*, my *Star Rider* hit newsstands in 1982, two years before *Terminator* was released.

Neil Fifer started helping me market *Star Rider and the Peace Machine* at the get-go. I was in the process of setting up a company and talking to prospective investors. My approach was different this time. I was looking for small investments from people who believed in me and what I was trying to do. Most of my investors contributed only \$1,000 in exchange for shares. One invested \$500. I ended up with seven investors. My main partner was a printing company in Grafton, North Dakota. The Morgan family-owned Associated Printers had agreed to print a number of the early issues in exchange for the largest stake in *Star Rider Productions, Ltd.* This endeavor was still a gamble, but not a risk that would break the bank for anyone.

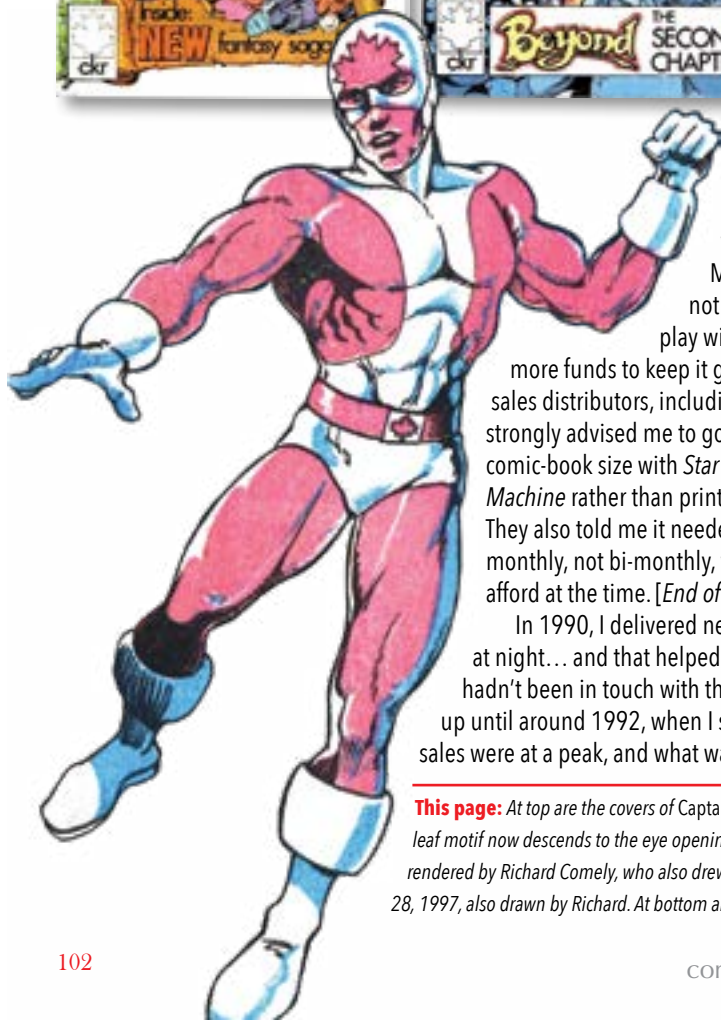
The first issue was released in early 1982... [direct market distributors] ordered copies to supply the comic book stores they catered to. The Schanes brothers, who owned Pacific Comics, were among my most valued supporters.

Newsstand sales of *Star Rider* were disappointing. 60,000 copies of the first issue were printed. I stopped work on the series after #2 was released, with a similar quantity printed, once I saw the sales report for the first issue. I needed strong sales from the start to survive. I had to make some changes



Above: Exhibiting Freeman's glorious artistry throughout was the odd and charming one-shot published in 1980. **Below:** After CKR, Richard briefly published a science-fiction comic book series, *Star Rider and the Peace Machine*.





before I could continue, and my bare-bones funding was now depleted.

My investors were not interested in a long play with them investing

more funds to keep it going. The direct sales distributors, including Bill Schanes, strongly advised me to go to a standard comic-book size with *Star Rider and the Peace Machine* rather than printing magazine size. They also told me it needed to come out monthly, not bi-monthly, which I could not afford at the time. [End of excerpt.]

In 1990, I delivered newspapers... mostly at night... and that helped financially... I hadn't been in touch with the comics industry up until around 1992, when I saw comic book sales were at a peak, and what was going on with

investors and speculators, who were buying up, like, 100 copies of every #1... So I started working on *Captain Canuck: Reborn*, which is a whole different character. When that came out, there was 17 or 18 direct market distributors – this was a few years before Diamond was the last one standing. I thought, "Okay, the industry's doing well. This would be a good time to do it again." And I found an investor to back me, and this time he got some government no-interest loan. This investor turned out great, though I'm pretty sure he ended up losing some money. But I was able to recoup some of his losses when the National Archives wanted to buy the original artwork for the original series.

So [former CKR partner] Ernie Kaczas had almost all the original artwork – but not the first three issues – and I contacted Ernie and said, "You've got all this stuff in your warehouse. It's been sitting there for more than 10 years." I made a deal, bought everything he had for \$10,000 – boxes of comics, posters, and the original art. He seemed to be happy to make that deal and I sold all of the original art to the Archives for \$11,000.

This page: At top are the covers of *Captain Canuck* #5–12 [Sept. '79–Dec. '80], featuring the altered mask of the titular star – note how the maple leaf motif now descends to the eye openings – nicely designed by George Freeman, who provided pencils and inks on the #6–12 covers. CC #5 was rendered by Richard Comely, who also drew the splash page detail at left. **Opposite page:** Inset top is the Canadian edition of *Time* magazine, Apr. 28, 1997, also drawn by Richard. At bottom are the first three of six sample *Captain Canuck* newspaper strips drawn by George Freeman in 1980.

CBC: Good job, Richard!

Richard: And the other bonus: I was able to put together complete sets of the original series and sell those. There's an ad in the *Reborn* series.

CBC: The publisher is listed as *Semple Comics*. Who's that?

Richard: I didn't want to call it *Comely Comics* anymore; I wanted a fresh start. So I'm trying to come up with a name – *Thunder Comics*, *Power Comics*, names like that might sound a little corny... We get the *Toronto Star*. There's a front-page story about a young man by the name of [Paul] Semple, a 22-year-old photography student, who was stabbed to death trying to protect two complete strangers, a woman and her daughter. He gave no thought for his own safety. And, while I was trying to come up with a name for the publishing company, I decided to call it *Semple Comics* as a tribute to this brave young man.

CBC: *Captain Canuck Reborn #0* has 16 pages. That's small.

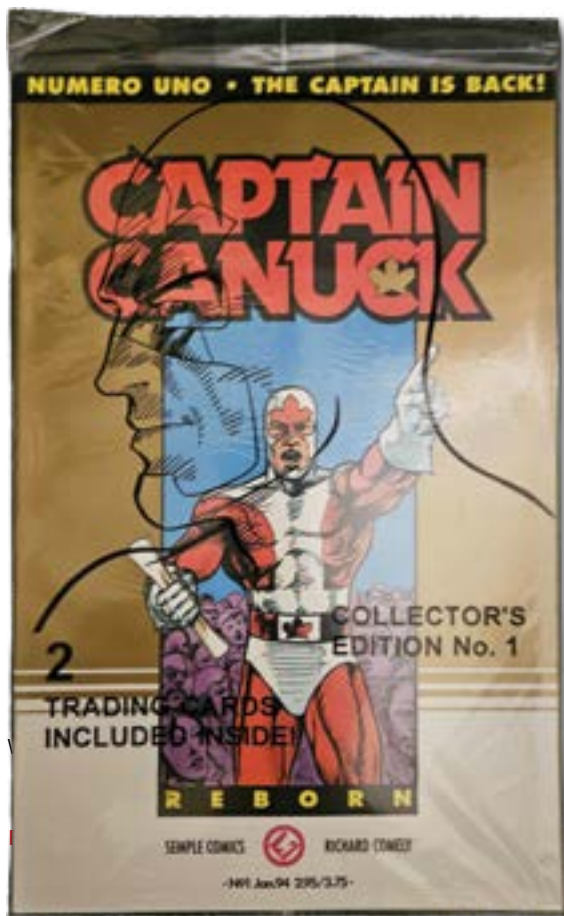


Richard: I did #0, 1, 2, and 3. I did three editions of #1. The regular newsstand version was green; the polybagged gold "Collector's Edition" included two trading cards; and there was a gold unbagged "Collector's Edition."

CBC: Now, #3 came out significantly later, right? Years later, in 1996.

Richard: In '95 and '96, I did a newspaper strip that was carried in only 11 newspapers, all Canadian. So this issue is comprised of two stories reprinting the strip. What I ended up doing... I was really late with #3. By then, I'm out of money. A printer that I approached decided he was going to print it for free. Just a good guy. He printed 8,000 copies, no charge, and he printed my trading cards. I was late – *really* late! – for my *Diamond* solicitation. They ended up only selling about 1,000 copies. I told all the newspapers that were carrying this strip they would get copies for promotional purposes. They could do whatever they wanted with them. They each got 400





Above: In typical early '90s fashion, Richard polybagged Captain Canuck: Reborn #1 [Jan. '94], a "Collector's Edition" that included trading cards. **Below:** At left is Captain Canuck: Unholy War #1 [Oct. '04] and, right, Captain Canuck: Legacy #1 [Oct. '06]. The former had a four-issue run; the latter just one.

copies. So a lot of copies went to the newspapers, and then the rest of the copies were bagged. I purchased some cardboard displays to assemble for store counter tops, and they looked pretty good. I ended up putting together between 250–300 display units and I had a lot of bagged sets, then I made a deal with a Toronto distributor, who bought 'em all at something like 70% off. And then they took those displays and sold them to the stores, non-returnable. They made a little bit of money, plus it was an easy operation. So 4,000 copies went to the newspapers, 1,000 went to Diamond, probably another 1,000 went into those display units. Today those go to collectors for something like \$400!

CBC: [Sighs] *Too dear for me! Then the good captain comes back in 2004.*

Richard: Yes! Riel Langlois, a writer, approached me and he wanted to license the rights to publish a *Cap* series. My initial concern was what was it going to look like. He sent me the script and it was good. He had an artist attached he was going to work with, but that apparently didn't pan out. I was happy to do this, but it had to look professional. If the art didn't look professional enough, it just wasn't going to be good for the brand.

So, eventually, he brought his brother on board as

artist. I wasn't crazy about his brother's art, but it was good enough. And then he got better with each issue. They did three issues of *Captain Canuck: Unholy War* and he sold 'em on direct market. He did well and actually made a little bit of money. He wanted to do a fourth issue, and those were all eventually collected. And he got good media coverage when he did that, too.

CBC: *What was this? Was it religious? I mean, it's called Unholy War.*

Richard: No, not religious. I've never actually talked to him about religion... *Unholy War* was a motorcycle gang. It is well-written. I remember. By the third issue, the character meets the real Captain Canuck. The premise is he is a Mountie and Reil uses the name Semple for his character, too, which I liked. So he's in Royal Mounted Canadian Police tired of due process. He becomes a vigilante, makes his own costume, calls himself Captain Canuck, and goes after the bad guys the way he wanted to, with no restrictions. That's basically the story's premise. After that, the next one I did was *Captain Canuck: Legacy*, which came out in 2006.

CBC: *I haven't heard of this.*

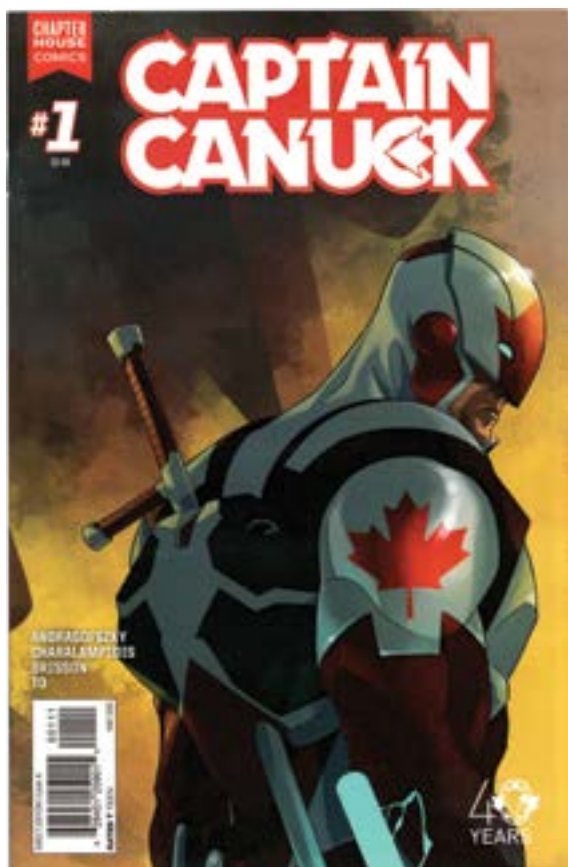
Richard: I was teaching at that time and one of the reasons I did it was because I had helped develop a college course about writing and illustrating comics and children's books, but we mainly focused on comic books. So I did *Captain Canuck: Legacy*, which is about Tom Evans, but it's a different Tom Evans. Tom Evans is a Mountie with a son who's 18 years old, Tom Evans, Jr. And so the teenager ends up working with the *Reborn* Captain, Darren Oak. Eventually – spoiler alert here! – young Tom Evans, Jr., would eventually take over the role of Captain. So Darren Oak is inspired by the original Captain in a comic book series to put on the costume because he needs to expose a conspiracy that his older brother is involved in, to create a one-world government. He needs to expose that and dons a costume to hide his identity, and at the same time attract attention to his message. The plan included bringing in a bunch of illegal weapons into Quebec and using mercenaries to spark a civil war, a French against English kind of thing.

When I came up a second issue in 2011 [*Captain Canuck: Legacy* #1.5], I had a meeting with Fadi Hakim, who had first contacted me in 2009. In the beginning, he wanted to license the name for his [Toronto-based] Lakeview Restaurant kids' menu, naming a sandwich he'd already created, a peameal bacon sandwich called the Captain Canuck. And then his interest in the property just grew from there. Fadi saw the potential, and he's a good businessman, the best partner I've had in over the whole 50-year period.

When I did *Captain Canuck: Reborn*, the investors were great people, and it was just a matter of me not wanting to lose money. Things did not look promising going forward, and we just mutually realized that we needed to not continue publishing until we could figure it out. But, anyway, Fadi has got a much better head for stuff, the business end of it, and he's been great. So I eventually signed a licensing agreement with him, in 2013, and then we published the 2014 summer special.

The regular series followed almost a year later. George, Claude, and I worked together again, after 33 years, on the 2014 Summer Special. George worked on the *All New*





Classic Captain Canuck four-issue series. The 2015 *Captain Canuck* series that went on for 13 issues, it's still going, actually, but not on a regular basis. Have you seen the animated web series?

CBC: No.

Richard: Oh, you've got to see that! Oh my goodness, there were five episodes. Each episode is only three minutes long and, in those five episodes, it covers the whole story arc, and I have a cameo in the first episode. I'll say no more!

Fadi crowdfunded that, which really brought out a lot of the older fans, too. And then, a couple of years ago, I sold him the rights in a deal where he paid me over about a four-year period.

CBC: Was it a handsome arrangement?

Richard: I'm happy enough.

CBC: This has been fun, Richard! Thanks. Anything to add?

Richard: Lots has been happening with Captain Canuck, so I'll send you highlights. But I admit I'm excited about the Captain Canuck non-alcoholic beer that's coming from Henderson's Brewery, starting on Canada Day – July 1, 2026!



VISIT THE LEV GLEASON STUDIOS YOUTUBE CHANNEL to view the *Captain Canuck: Fool's Gold* webisodes and also check out www.levgleason.com to see the latest CC stuff, including a new 2026 issue of Captain Canuck Crime Stoppers.



Above: Evelyn and Richard Comely posing together at a comic convention in 2023. **Inset far left:** Kalman Andrasofszky's cover for Captain Canuck #1 [May '15], the start of a mid-'10s reboot for the character, which ran for 13 monthly issues. **Inset left:** Captain Canuck non-alcoholic beer.

Comely's Captain Canuck Addendum



As the interview mostly focuses on the era of Richard Comely supervising his signature character, here's an update on Canuck-related developments in recent times:

In Oct. 1995, the Canadian Post issued a commemorative stamp honoring Captain Canuck and Richard Comely. In 2018, the Royal Canadian Mint released a CC \$20 silver coin, and there's been a good amount of CC merchandise made available, including T-shirts, action figures, keychains, mugs, wallet, coloring book, and even a Vancouver transit card bearing the good captain's likeness appeared this past spring.

Richard suggested a photo of Comic House publisher Fadi

Hakim be included in this feature. "The reality is that Fadi played a more important role than just about anyone," Richard said, "and he certainly deserves the recognition."

Importantly, a Captain Canuck television documentary is currently in production as many interviews with fans have been conducted at comic cons this year, with plans to shoot in Winnipeg, the birthplace of CC, in October. Also coming around that same time is the debut of the *Captain Canuck: Reborn* trade paperback collection. (Previous CC collections include two hardcover compilations published by IDW in 2009 and a 375-page original series compendium in 2011, plus Chapterhouse released a collection in 2016.)

Richard also wanted to mention he's been delighted with some other CC-connected items, including the CC: *Tell the Story Activity Book*; the *Captain Canuck Crime Stopper* issues pubbed in 2017, penciled by Tom Grummett, inked by George Freeman and Richard, with colors by George and Laurie. (238,000 copies of the first ish were distributed!)



Inset far left: Fadi Hakim, Comic House publisher. **Inset left:** CC postage stamp, 1995. **Above:** Responding to rhetoric threatening Canada coming from the White House (and commemorating the 50th anniversary of the hero's start), Richard drew this cover with CC's response to the U.S. president.

James Waley's Absorbing ORB

The revival of comics in Canada started with the "Horror-Adventure-Sci-Fi-Fantasy" Mag

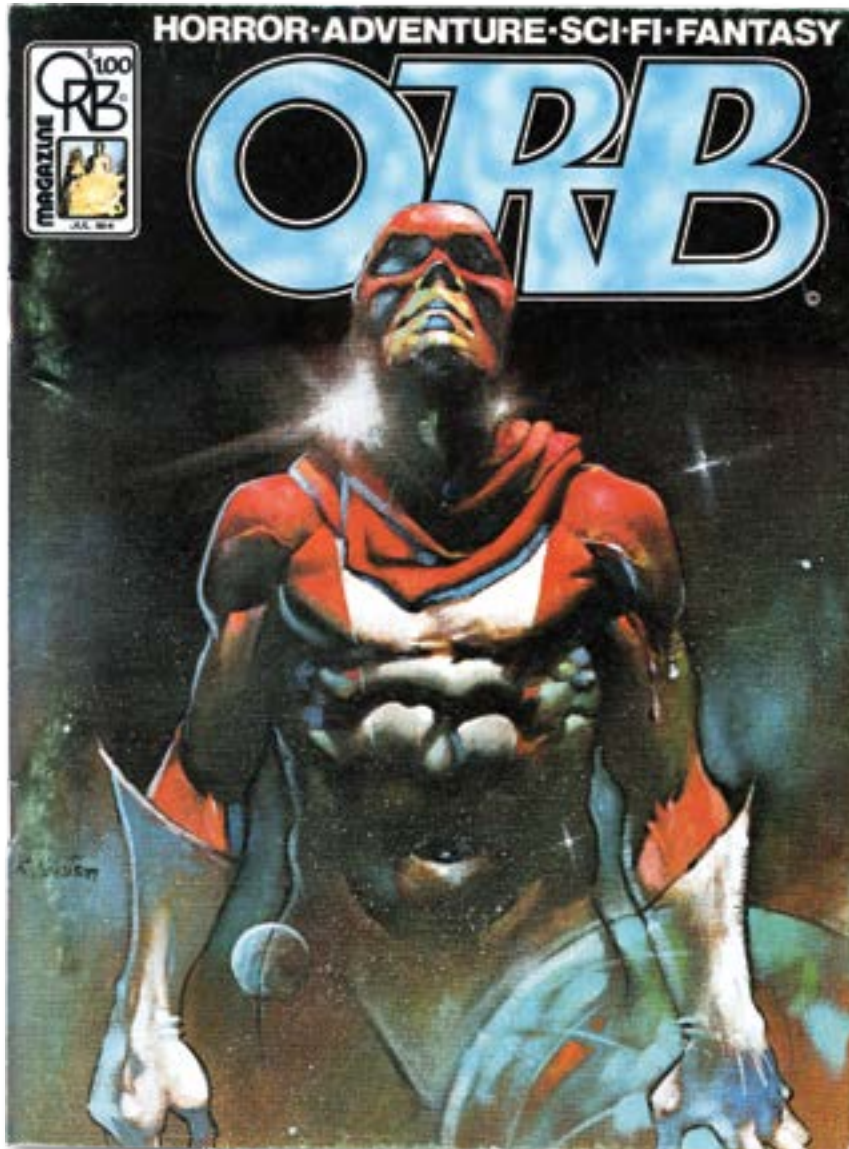


Above: James N. Waley.

Below: Orb Magazine #2 [July '74].

Conducted by JON B. COOKE

[Interviewer's Note: *To be technical, Orb Magazine predates Captain Canuck's mid-1975 debut, as the first issue of the science fiction/fantasy/adventure comics anthology magazine first saw the light of day in April 1974, though its hero, the Northern Light, would receive far less press coverage than Richard Comely's creation. Still, the emergence of the six-issue series, conceived and edited by James N. Waley, was an important development in the maturing of Canadian comics, as it was a showcase for burgeoning homegrown talent. But let's hear the Orb story from the man himself in this interview conducted late last year. – JBC.]*



Comic Book Creator: *Where are you from originally?*

James Waley: Windsor, Ontario, just across from Detroit.

CBC: *And when did you start getting interested in comics?*

James: Well, I can still remember, as a kid, there was a secondhand shop in Windsor that sold everything... books, comics... and picking up some of my first comics there, at that time. It was pretty far from where I lived but, back then, parents were a lot freer as far as letting kids just wander around and go anywhere. I remember my first memories of comics, and the ones I picked up were *Jimmy Olsen* comics – the "Turtle Boy" story and that stuff – and that got me interested. I was always really fascinated with the Hanna-Barbera animated shows, especially *The Flintstones*. And I remember making up all kinds of characters of my own based on the *Flintstones* stuff. Actually, in grade school we did a string puppet show that I wrote and put together, a crime thing with *The Flintstones*, and I came up with a character called Al Castone, and his crony was Goon Granite. My mother made a nice little hat for the Castone character.

In high school, I was getting more into drawing and doing my own comics, just stuff I was kicking around on my own, and I did a character called Tremor, a sort of horned character, and I did a few pages of that. Then my interest was going into artwork and I applied to the Ontario College of Art, in Toronto, and got accepted there.

At the time, at the Ontario College of Art, there were two separate streams. There was commercial art and there was fine art, and I went into commercial art. Really, when I went to the school, there was not really much in the way of acceptance of comic book work. Most of the people I was dealing with were interested in us going into advertising work and that sort of stuff, and they really frowned on comic book stuff. Like it was, "Ugh, comics are second-class material."

CBC: *When you were a child that there any realization there were Canadian comics that once existed?*

James: No. I don't believe that I was aware of the World War II comics until the '80s or maybe early '90s, as a matter of fact. I just really did not know much of that history. When I first found out, there were two things I felt about them. One, they were either brutally amateurish or, two, pretty slick and amateurish. There was a guy, Leo Bachle (also known as Les Barker), who actually I got to know and be really good friends with, and he admitted his stuff was pretty crude. But then there were guys like Murray Karn, who did a strip called "Thunderfist" that was really slick, really well done.

But I'll tell you one thing that I keenly remember: when I did start finding out about the comics in the '40s in Canada, I heard about "Nelvana of the Northern Lights." If I had known about that in the '70s, when I was doing *Orb Magazine*, I probably would not have called the character,

the Northern Light. Because stuff like that really bugs me, when there's an overlap of stuff that's not necessary... I mean, to me, it's not being imaginative enough to come up with something that's not distinctly different, but I've got to live with it.

So I went to the Ontario College of Art and met John Allison, who did the cover of *Orb* #1 and a couple stories, and we became friends, and I met Ron Van Leeuwen, there at the time, and who went on to do the Silver Snail and *Andromeda* comics and distribution. But the two years that I was at the art college, 1970 and '71, in the second year, there was a guy by the name of Roy Ascott who became the president of the school. And Roy really shook things up in the school... [Ascott's changes resulted in James leaving Ontario College of Art. — Ye Ed.] So, basically, I dropped out the second year, went back to Windsor for a year, and then, at Sheridan College, in Oakville, they were starting up a course in doing comic book artwork, so I convinced my parents at the time, "I'd like to go." And I started the first year of that course at Sheridan. Unfortunately, the first year, it was what I would always describe as in its "embryonic stage" and it was really unformed. The guy who started the course was an English teacher, Walter Hanson. The sense I got from Walter was he was an overage fanboy who basically wanted to bring in Bernie Wrightson and Neal Adams, and all these other people to get books signed by them, and to wine and dine them, and do stuff with him. I mean, he wanted to put together a good course, but that was a big chunk of his motivation for it.

CBC: Sure, why not!



James: Exactly. For the year I was there, I got involved with the student magazine — called *A Magazine*, just the letter "A," a very Canadian name! — and I was the art director for that, putting together different comic stuff in there with different students. And that really gave me the publishing bug, so me and a number of other students that were in the course at the time — Paul McCusker, Matt Rust (who became my senior editor), Alex Emond, and John Allison (who I'd met at the art college) just decided, "Why not do this?" So we pooled our funds and put out the [Orb] first issue.

CBC: You said Sheridan College, right? All of a sudden my mind flashes to Jim Craig informing me that Will Eisner

visited and they put out a Spirit tabloid. Is that so?

James: That's right. Will did this oversize story, published by Tabloid Press, at Sheridan.

CBC: That's cool! Was Jim Craig a part of this?

James: Jim was in a year after me, but I had heard about Jim and then Jim had gotten in touch with me. [Jim would become a regular contributor to Orb. — Y.E.]

CBC: Did you see Will Eisner when he guest lectured over the course of a school year?

James: No, I didn't. The first year that I was there, the main people I can recall coming at that time were editorial cartoonists. There's Graham Pilsworth and some guys in Canada who are really well-known editorial cartoonists. I don't recall meeting any of the big [comic book] names. They came after I was there — Neal Adams, Bernie Wrightson, and others. I missed that wave of people that came there.

CBC: Did you do any fanzine work? Did fanzines exist that you had known about?

James: I wasn't involved in them. And actually two of the guys that came on doing stuff for our magazine, Vince Marchesano and Art Cooper, were doing fanzine work in Hamilton, which is where I live now. And they had been doing fanzines for two or three years — *Comic Canada*, *Canada's Best*, and *Spectrum*, which was this little two-inch by two-inch publication. And the reason it was tiny was because Vince was working for a hospital at the time doing photographic work for them. For some reason, they had re-



Pow! Canadian comics hit us with new heroes

By KENT POTTER
Star staff writer

Orb magazine, the first regular Canadian comic book since World War II, is celebrating its first birthday.

It's a comic book of horror, adventure, science fiction and fantasy. Johnny Canuck and Dime of the Midnight have given way to the Northern Light, a super hero who lives in Toronto and likes to adventure on Mars.

James Waley, 25, who founded Orb with 10 other "comic drunks," lives in an apartment above a hardware store on Bloor St. W. The apartment also serves as art studio and head office for Orb.

Originally Century Comics, then Punk Publications, Orb got rolling last year with a \$5,000 grant from the Ontario Arts Council, the first such grant to be awarded by the council.

A 1,000-copy run of Orb's first issue was rushed into print in time for the Canadian comic convention at York University in January 1979. Waley and the other founders didn't formally set up shop until last March.

Since then Orb has grown steadily. Last December the print run was 7,000, and next month, when Orb becomes a bi-monthly, there will be 15,000 copies.

No organizers have applied for a \$10,000 grant from the Canada Council, but expect to receive just \$7,000 to \$8,000 from the federal agency later this month. But they aren't really planning to start in May and a third one featuring magic, dwarfs, elves and other fantasies.

Its organizers have applied for a \$10,000 grant from the Canada Council, but expect to receive just \$7,000 to \$8,000 from the federal agency later this month. But they aren't really planning to start in May and a third one featuring magic, dwarfs, elves and other fantasies.

What does Orb contain? Well, besides the Northern Light, there's Kadaver, Waley's own character, described by his creator as "an anti-hero, a sort of a freak." In the next issue, Kadaver will do battle with a character called Salvation who kills babies for fun.

Hardly Rags Roney or Superman is it. But that's the idea. "Superman is the ultimate out-

dated character," Waley says. "He should have been put in a multiple punch bag."

Waley, publisher, editor-in-chief and art director, said most of Orb's readers, like its writers and artists, are in their teens or early 20s.

"This medium is really coming into its own and is being respected as an art form," Waley says. "A lot of people, all kinds of people, are really into comics."

As a big Waley avidly read Superman and Batman, then graduated to more sophisticated comics such as *Iron* and *Spartan*, he'd read about 100 every couple of months.

Tried his hand

He tried his hand at comics, and even drew a page of a story in about 15 days.

Waley took a three-year commercial art course at the Ontario College of Art, then studied cartooning at Sheridan College for a year.

"They trained you for something that you had to go off to the States to get a job," Waley says. "There was no reason why we couldn't start our own magazine here and stay in Canada."

Orb now has about 30 freelance artists who also do commercial art work "because to me can live by doing comics alone at \$10-a-page."

Most of Orb's artists were too young to have read Canadian comics during their few years of popularity. During World War II, the federal government placed an embargo on "non-essential imports," including comic books.

Twenty million comics, with names such as Johnny Canuck, Dime of the Midnight and Northern Light of the Northern Light, were sold in Canada during the war.

All heavily patriotic, with titles such as *Through*, *Action*, *Wow* and *Cometblasts*. They were the focus of the young culture in Canada.

But they were printed in black and white and were rather amateurish and couldn't compete with the slick U.S. comics that flooded across the border after the war.

"A lot of it just couldn't stand up to the American product," says



JAMES WALEY
Founded Orb comics

George Henderson, owner of Mercury Lane, a comic book and magazine store on Markham St. "There's still some sporadic attempts but Orb is the first one that looks like it's going to catch on. Orb compares very well with the American comics."

Sells for \$1

Orb, with up to 70 pages, 10 in full color, is sold in Canada for \$1 and a small number are distributed in the U.S. Although Waley hopes to eventually publish up to a dozen comic books the Canadian industry is big compared with the U.S.

Marvel Comics, one of the two publishers that dominate the U.S. market, publishes more than 200 titles.

Orb already has received some letters from comic book lovers.

About 30 per cent of Orb's artists are Canadian, such as William Fajen, a 1972 radio advertiser who did the cover of the December issue.

Other than the month-end though, there's little to distinguish Orb as a Canadian magazine.

Waley says Canadian magazines don't have to depend on "teeners and maybe teens and stuff like that."

"When people look at Orb, it's understood it's Canadian," he said. "I want Orb to stand up on its own on the newsstands. I don't want people to buy it just because it's Canadian."



KADAVER, an anti-hero character, created by James Waley, comes to arrange the killing of his

father by protection rackets. Kadaver was a pessimist until destined for destiny in drugs.



Above: Front page of *The Spirit* [1973] one-shot, published by Tabloid Press, Sheridan College, in Oakville, Ontario. The story, written, drawn, and colored by the character's creator, Will Eisner, was a five-pager printed at (yes) tabloid-size and was executed by the sequential art master and premier graphic novelist as part of his guest lecture series at the college.

Previous page: Partly re-constructed clipping of an *Toronto Star* article, from Mar. 8, 1975, announcing *Orb*.

Inset right: Mike Ploog art adorns the cover of *Gamut* #1 ['75].

Below: James art directed *A Magazine*, a campus humor publication, during his time at Sheridan College.



production in that tiny little format. It turns out Steranko got a bunch of them and was really thrilled with all these little publications, but that's a whole other thing.

CBC: Were they narrative stories or...?

James: They were pin-ups and some short comics stories. That sort of thing.

CBC: How did you catch the bug? Was it the tactile nature of doing production – paste-up and all that?

James: Yeah, when I did *A Magazine*, just seeing... I mean, the whole idea of just seeing yourself in print really is just... [pauses]

CBC: It gives meaning?

James: Yeah! It just really gets to you. And when I saw those magazines come out, it just made me want to keep thinking about publishing. Remember the old movies

where a bunch of kids put on a show? It was a "Let's do our own show" sort of thing. Just a bunch of us starting to talk about it and we thought we could do something like this. So we did.

CBC: And what was it initially? Did *A Magazine* have any fannish content to it?

James: Well, yeah, it had a comic strip section – a comic funny page – and then feature illustrations through it. The covers were always something that I threw together with different people. My thought was always to write and illustrate my own stuff when I started up *Orb*. As it went on, I wrote and illustrated the "Kadaver" stories in the first two issues. But as *Orb* continued, more and more people, like Jim Craig and others, were coming on board who were just so much better artists than me.

I never wanted *Orb* to be a vanity project where it had to have my work in it, so I pulled back from that. I started scripting stories for other people, started laying out stories for people, and I stopped doing my own full artwork. I still get needled by both my kids, to this day, that I should have stuck with it more, but it just didn't feel comfortable to me to impose my stuff on our readers just because it was my magazine. It just didn't seem fair.

CBC: But you were good at what you were good at: bringing a magazine together.

James: I felt more comfortable doing that, pulling together a team of people and coordinating the material. And I thought my taste, as far as what was good in the magazine, would help it advance, and that's the whole reason. I art directed myself out of doing full stories by myself.

CBC: You fired yourself, is that it?

James: Yeah! And I don't regret it. I mean, I do regret it in the sense that I wish I would've pursued my own artwork.

And I still, to this day, when I write scripts, I'll block out the story visually. I'll do little rough breakdowns. But I think I would've been happier if I had pursued my artwork more, because I just feel sometime, when I'm working with an artist on something, I want to be that pen, I want to be that pencil. I know a lot of times, the artist feels, "Whoa, back off! I'm doing this." So there has to be a nice balance there and sometimes it doesn't always work out.

CBC: *Orb Magazine* was the publication you guys organized after *A Magazine*. What was the plan there? Did you have any kind of business plan whatsoever?

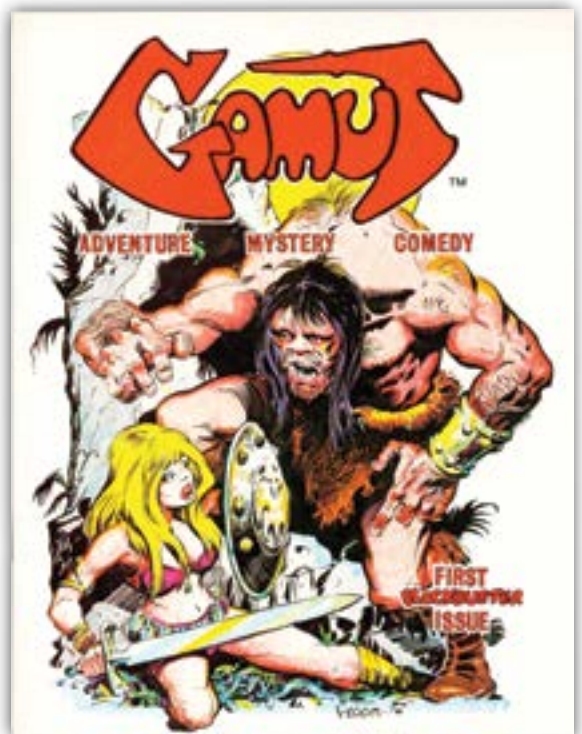
James: Geez, business...

CBC: I mean, how are you going to be distributed? How are you going to be printed? How are you going to pay?

James: We got two grants, one from Ontario Arts Council and one from Canada Council, and we got those both in the same year. (I can't remember if it was the second or third year or second or third issue.) When we got back to them the next year – I can't remember if it was Ontario or the Canada Council – I couldn't get an answer from the person I wanted to reach. So I talked to the person in charge about applying again, and I'm saying, "We want to apply for Canada Council Grant for our comic book magazine." And then there's a pause and he says, "We don't give grants for comic books." And I said, "Well, we got one last year." Then there's another long pause and he says, "Well, that must've been a mistake." So we never did get another one after that. We were always looking around for investors and that sort of thing.

It's funny. Today, the Canada Council has a grant specifically devoted to graphic novels and comics. And, in fact, I think [Canadian graphic novelist] Chester Brown got a grant of around \$25,000, which paid for his making the *Paying for It* graphic novel. So I always say to people, the grant was for research – your tax dollars at work. More power to 'em!

CBC: Did you want *Orb* to emulate any American or European publications? Was there anything you aspired to be like?



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stuff together – but they're not equipped. Their work is entirely digital, out in the cloud somewhere.

One thing that upsets me right now, doing *The Northern Light* series that I'm going to be relaunching, the artists I work with are totally digital. I'm trying to convince 'em to at least do the covers on physical paper. I love the tactile feel of original art, and there's a secondary market which they're totally missing out on...

CBC: After you read Jimmy Olsen and, as you got older, were you into American super-heroes at all?

James: Oh, yeah! I mean, still to this day... for years, I've been picking up the *Previews* catalog just to keep up, flipping through, and looking at what the different companies are doing... I never was really a collector, per se. I would refer to me as more of an accumulator. I buy what I like, and it doesn't matter to me if I have from the first issue to the last issue, in full sets, or whatever. I buy what I like. I still pick up the occasional comic there. I like *Saga* and other things that are coming out. Still, I was always more a Marvel guy than a DC guy, though it waves back and forth. I mean, as long as it's good, I don't care what company it comes out from. I was never just focused on one company. But Marvel always

Inset left: Pin-up of James Waley's macabre character, Kadaver, rendered by Bill Payne. James reveals the inspiration for his creation was rock performer Alice Cooper.

Below: Page from *The Northern Light*'s debut story in *Orb* #2, drawn by John Allison and written by T. Casey Brennan.

James: Well, probably, Warren magazines were the ones we were really looking at, and Warren was the template in the sense that we would be a black-&-white magazine-size publication with a color section in the middle. That was always our goal, and that's what we did towards the end of doing it. I thought Warren was the high watermark, at that time, as far as North American comics. I loved the content, I loved the variety of stuff. When people talk about *Orb*, they say it's a science fiction comic or a fantasy comic, but we tried to do a whole range of stuff and not really focus in on any one thing. And, sure, Warren was basically horror, but there was a lot of science fiction stuff in the mags, too.

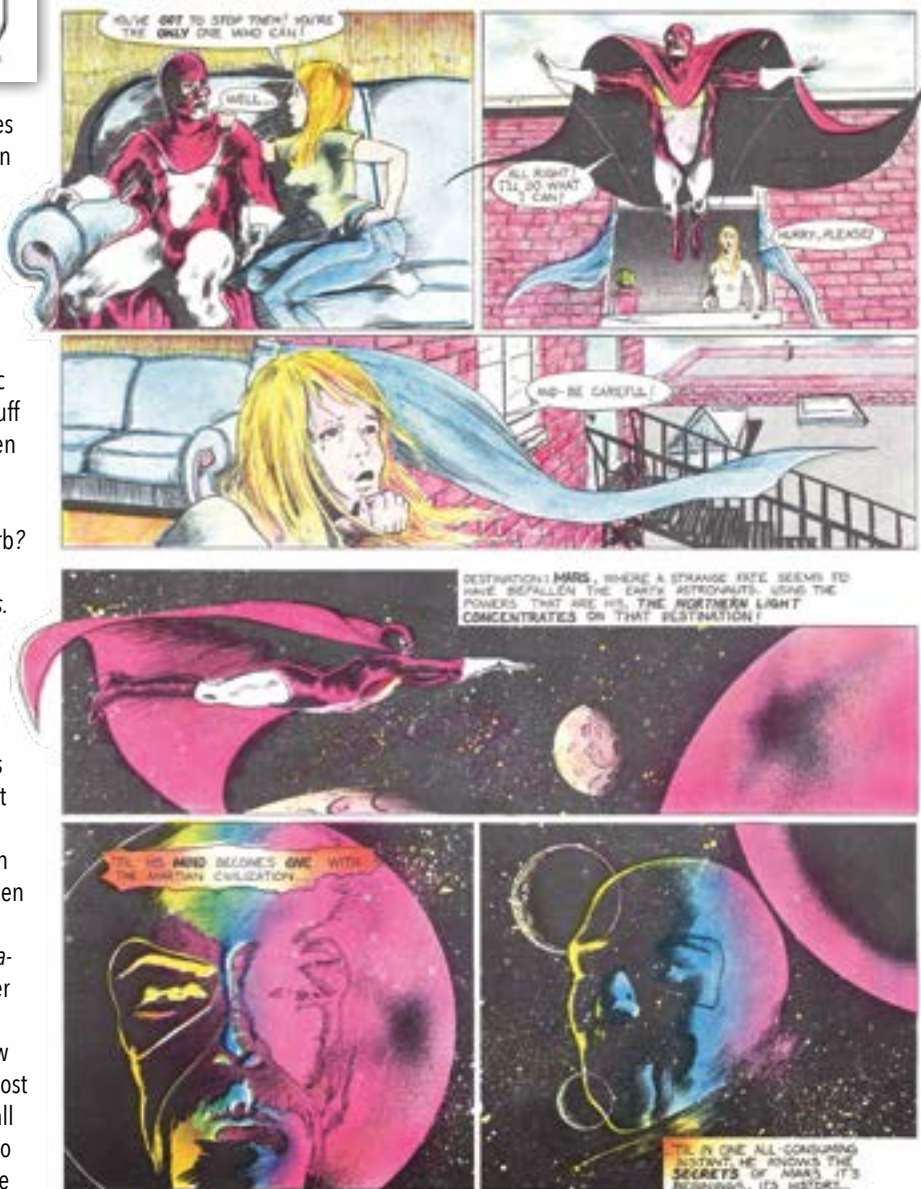
CBC: Any idea whether Jim Warren ever saw a copy of *Orb*?

James: No idea.

CBC: You guys were among the few who did color inserts. Like you said, Warren did for a time, with that tonal color separation that Richard Corben developed for them.

James: When the second installment of "The Northern Light" was done in color, we created the overlays of different gradations (80%, 20%, or whatever). John Allison's first one, as far as I know, was all airbrush stuff and I don't think it was full color. I'm pretty sure it was done, as you mentioned, like how Corben did it, with spray airbrush on layers at different gradations, different tonal values. Corben became such a master at that...

When we did *Orb Magazine* and when we did *A Magazine* at Sheridan, we were cutting and pasting with rubber cement, and all this stuff. It makes me feel bad in a way for a lot of the young students coming up in the field now working in comics, going through art college, because most of the stuff they're learning is all digital. And, when this all crashes, a blackout hits, they don't have these elements to work with – to get out a damn X-Acto knife, cut stuff, paste





Above: Example of Orb senior editor Matt Rust's humor work, these panels depicting his parody of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot detective character, Harlot Percolateur, a cast member of Matt's recurring feature that began in Orb #1. Reader response to such absurdist material in Orb was so negative, James said, that plans were made for Matt to helm his own funny magazine, Tilt.

Below: Incidentally, it's important to point out that Orb went through some format changes during its brief run. Issues #1 and 4-6 were magazine-size and #2-3 (the latter seen here, drawn by Bill Payne) were modern comic-book dimensions, though they sported higher grade interior paper, as well as sturdy card-stock covers. The other issues had newsprint interiors. Except for #1, all issues of Orb additionally featured nicely-hued color sections.

thrilled me more. I mean, Jack Kirby! I don't think anybody over the years has touched what Jack was capable of.

CBC: How did *The Northern Light* come about?

James: John Allison came across the [Warren writer] T. Casey Brennan script. I knew that Dave Sim had interviewed T. Casey for *CANAR*, the Comic Art News And Reviews fanzine, in Canada – and this was a year before *Orb* came out. T. Casey had actually come up to Kitchener-Waterloo, and stayed at Dave's parents' place, where Dave was living at the time, and did the interview. Now, the year of *Orb* first came out, in 1974, there was a guy, Bill Paul, in London, Ontario, and Bill put out a publication called *Andromeda*, published in a tabloid format, more like a news sort of thing. It wasn't all comics; it had stories and coverage of stuff and reviews.

So Bill Paul was well-known for having these great parties at a house that he had inherited from his parents. T. Casey supposedly came up to one of those parties, out of the blue. I believe it was John Allison who told me, telling me he either met T. Casey at a convention or he met him at one of Bill Paul's parties. Now, *E-Man* from Charlton had come out in 1973, by [writer] Nicola Cuti and [artist] Joe Staton, and T. Casey did a spec script for *E-Man*, sent it to Charlton, and Nicola Cuti and the people at Charlton got back to him, and said, "Sorry, we're doing this in-house. I write it; Joe

Staton draws it. We don't need any scripts." I guess T. Casey was sending stuff around to a lot of places. So John got a hold of the script and it was a very generic super-hero story.

When we got the script through John Allison, I'm on the phone with T. Casey and we had to change the name of it – obviously it couldn't be *E-Man* – and, initially, T. Casey suggested "The Phantom Canadian." So I'm on the phone, putting my hand over the mouthpiece, and I'm asking my wife at the time, "He wants to call it 'The Phantom Canadian.'" She says, "Nah, that's crap." So I said to T. Casey, "Any other thoughts?" He says, "The White Light." So I put my hand over the mouthpiece again, and I said to Sharon,

"He wants to call it 'The White Light.'" And she said, "No, call him 'The Northern Light.'" So I said that to T. Casey, and he said, "Yeah, okay." So, when my ex-wife came up with the name, she wasn't aware of *Nelvana* in the Canadian comics in the '40s, but that's what we went with.

Those first two stories are the first two chapters that were in *Orb* #2 and 3. After that, when Jim Craig and I started doing it and we basically abandoned the stuff that was in those first two parts. And now, in the relaunch that I'm now doing of the character, we deal with that story as a bad science fiction movie that was based on *The Northern Light* that was unapproved. So it's not canon.

CBC: That's a neat way to integrate the old stuff. That's cool.

James: But did you see what happened with John Allison? John had done a story in the first issue of *Orb* called, "Devil's Triangle," that he wrote and illustrated. Then he did the first part of "The Northern Light," in #2, and he was really starting to feel his oats, so he didn't want to do the second part. This is when Jim Craig came on board, drawing the second chapter. John went on to do a story called, "Half-Life," in the third issue, which he wrote and illustrated and was reprinted the next year in [Marvel's] *Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction* #5 [Sept. '75]. At that point, John was feeling his oats so much that he literally sat down and talked to me and Matt Rust, my senior editor, and said, "If I'm going to continue on with *Orb*, it's got to be an all-John Allison book. It's got to be all my stuff, or I don't want to be involved in it anymore."

To that, I said, "I don't think so. See ya." So we parted ways then. But John went on to do stuff for *Andromeda*, did a little bit here and there, and then he went on to be do special effects, starting a company out in California. He won a [1981] Emmy for his work on [documentary TV series] *Cosmos* by Carl Sagan. He did artwork for that. Then he went on to work on a Pamela Anderson series [*V.I.P.*, 1998-2002].

CBC: I remember "Half-Life" in *Unknown Worlds*.

James: And they censored a little part in there. In *Orb*, when we initially published it, there was a suggestion of a blow job that was in silhouette. And Marvel actually focused in on it, some tiny little thing in one panel, and they censored that.

CBC: When did you become aware of Captain Canuck?

James: Well, I became aware after *Orb* folded. *Captain Canuck* came out in 1975, we came out in 1974. *Canuck* had three issues with Richard Comely doing the artwork and the writing, and then they went on hiatus after three issues, and came back with #4. I was aware of what they were doing and was impressed with the initiative to do it, and I was impressed with the way they were doing the coloring and stuff... I was really, really impressed with George Freeman's art... And, in fact, when *Captain Canuck* started up again, with George Freeman doing the artwork, that's when they actually got into the origin of Captain Canuck and how he got his powers. There was a real eerie similarity between what happened with *The Northern Light* and what happened with *Captain Canuck*...

I give Richard a lot of credit. He always kept the character out there visible in the public eye. Also, being that it was kind of a Captain America knock-off in a sense and wrapped in the flag, it was always going to get more recognition than *The Northern Light*. I never wanted *The Northern Light* to be





James: Well, that's probably from T. Casey Brennan, because he was doing work with the Donahoe Brudders for *Power Comics*, and he probably put me in touch. *Power Comics* #4 [Nov. '77] had The Northern Light that was originally intended to be the color insert in *Orb* #7, a little mini comic. Actually, Jim Craig, who illustrated that story, he drew



it not much bigger than about 8.5" x 11" original artwork, because he knew it was going to be reduced and it still held up pretty good at that size. We got paid for it, which is saying something, because I heard a lot of people were not getting paid for their work in *Power Comics*. The Donahoe Brudders were also a distribution outlet, at the time...

CBC: So tell me about *Gene Day*. What does he mean to you and what's the message of his story?

James: Well, Gene got in touch with me. He was always sending out submissions to everybody to get published and I can't say enough good things about Gene. I mean, Gene was one of the only people I knew who would do work for the smallest publications anywhere or for Warren or Marvel, and he would put the same amount of effort and work for either, regardless. He always said, "I signed my name to it and I stand behind it." Others might say, "You pay me only this much, this is all you'll get." Not Gene. You're not going to get a quick sketch from Gene, which was probably to his detriment. He'd probably be around today if he didn't work 24/7 every day.

CBC: So he worked himself to death, you think?

James: Pretty much. I mean, he smoked like a chimney, drank endless cups of coffee, was always at the desk, working 24-hour shifts, sometimes three or four days without any sleep. And then, the notorious thing, which I'm sure you've heard about, is the whole thing of when he went down to Marvel to work on something over a weekend and Jim Shooter wouldn't pay for a hotel and Gene wouldn't fly. So he went down by train, but he stayed in the Marvel offices overnight for a couple nights and they shut the heat off at night. So he was freezing in there. He did not have the best health and Gene died of a really massive heart attack.

But, like I said, there was nobody I could depend on more than Gene and nobody who loved to do the work as much as Gene. He was so devoted to it. But he never thought he really measured up and nobody measured up better than Gene. His brother called me and told me he had passed, but the family did not know a lot of Gene's connections in the business. So they called and asked me if I could notify these people and tell them that Gene had passed. So I spent that day calling about two or three dozen people and telling them, and that was, without a doubt, the longest and hardest day of my life at that time. It was just like tearing a scab off every time when talking to the next person.

CBC: Oh, people must've been aghast. I remember that was huge news in the comics press, because he was so young and so incredibly prolific and just everywhere. How do you assess the *Orb* days? What do they mean to you?

James: Well, if there's anything that I take away from *Orb*, it's that I feel a lot of pride in that the magazine had a small part in launching a lot of top talents. Ken Steacy, Ronn Sutton, Gene Day, Dave Sim... Dave was my senior editor for six or eight months. The story that he was going to be do for us, that I assigned to him, was *Ali Baba*, that eventually got published through Caliber Press, in 1992, as *Ali Baba: Scourge of the Desert*. A lot of the DNA of what he was going to do with *Cerebus* was in that initial outline that he did for *Ali Baba*.

If there's anything that *Orb* did, it was to pave the way and maybe be an influence on the magazines that

followed – *Andromeda* magazine, Peter Hsu's *Quadrant*, Bill Marks' *Vortex* – proving that publications like *Orb* could be produced in Canada by Canadians. In that way, if that little pebble dropped in a pond ripples out from what we did, I'm pleased with that, I'm proud of that. And the whole thing of who came from Canada – Todd McFarlane, Stuart Immonen, John Byrne, and so many other people – sometimes that gets overlooked. And, in Canada, we can be so self-effacing, we don't blow our own horn.

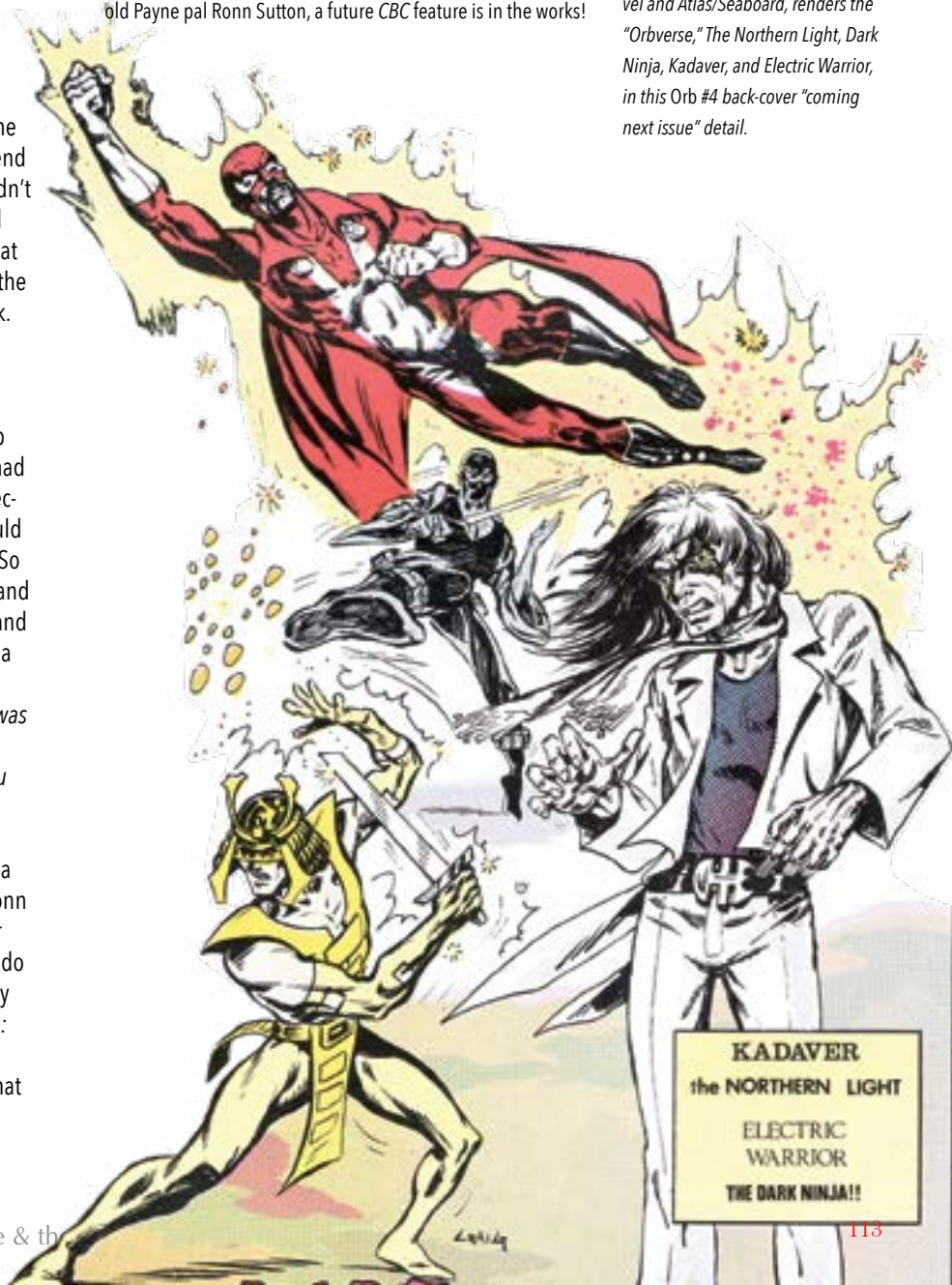
CBC: Tell me about Bill Payne, *this other amazing artist in *Orb* I never saw before.

James: I can't think of any artist I've worked with – and I'm pleased and honored to have worked with *many* amazing creators over the years – who was a more unique and authentic talent. Drawing to him was as natural an act as breathing! As noted in that *Toronto Star* article, Bill was a disk jockey for a time at a local radio station and he also had an interest in filmmaking, and I have no doubt if he went on to pursue some aspect of that as a career he's probably one of the best in the business!

*So impressed is Ye Ed with the art of Bill Payne that, with help from old Payne pal Ronn Sutton, a future *CBC* feature is in the works!



Above: Gene Day produced this self-caricature for his profile in *Orb* #4 [Dec. '75]. **Below:** Artist Jim Craig, who would freelance for Marvel and Atlas/Seaboard, renders the "Orbverse," *The Northern Light*, *Dark Ninja*, *Kadaver*, and *Electric Warrior*, in this *Orb* #4 back-cover "coming next issue" detail.





Above: Spectacular Orb #6 page drawn by the brilliant Bill Payne.

Inset right: Jim Craig's pin-up of *The Northern Light* appeared in *Power Comics* #4 [Nov. '77].

Below: Northern Light ashan.



In fact, upon meeting Bill at the 1972 Cosmicon convention, at York University, Neal Adams commented to him that he'd heard that Payne was "Canada's Neal Adams"... and Neal wasn't far off the mark! Bill had begun to work for DC in 1973 and would go on to do a little over a dozen stories for them (mainly in their horror anthology titles, like *House of Mystery*) up until 1986 and that, along with his *Orb* work would be the bulk of his comics output... There was a time he and I had planned to work on a "Kadaver" story together and he began roughing out a story page and did a pin-up illo of the character, and it would have been *spectacular*, for sure! Why this didn't end up happening, I can't recall, but I think it may have just come at the tail end of the *Orb* run, when things started to fall apart for the publication, so it was lost in the chaos of those final days.

CBC: I see on the back cover of *Orb* #6, "Bludd" was intended for #7, but ended up as an issue of *Charlton Bullseye*. Did other stories intended for *Orb* see print elsewhere?

James: Once *Orb* folded, two stories went on to Mike Friedrich for his *Star*Reach*, "I'm God!" [#7, Jan. '77] and

Imagine, "Anticipation" [#1, Apr. '78], both by Dave Sim (writer) and Fabio Gasbarri (artist). *Imagine* #1 also had "The Garbagemen," written by Gene Day and drawn by Fabio, an amazingly unique comic book artist, someone I've lost track of, but I believe he's gone into fine art instead over the years, working for an art gallery. "Shawn of the Ruins," written by George Henderson, with art by Gene (layouts) and Jim Beveridge (finishes) was in *Andromeda* #2 [June '78].

And, of course, as you noted, the "Bludd, the Ultimate Barbarian" story intended for #7 ended up in *Charlton Bullseye*, in 1982, when Charlton was soliciting creators to submit free material for that title.

Gene had drawn and scripted the first chapter of that story – and he inked the cover penciled by Vince Marchesano – but, as Gene was busy at Marvel at that time, he left it up to us to finish the story. So I scripted the final two chapters, which were drawn by Peter Hsu (chapter one) and Vince (chapter two). Tragically, Gene passed away in that same year, 1982, and never got to see a printed copy of that story which he so masterfully started (incidentally, based on an idea and character design I provided to him).

[Postscript: Upon Ye Ed. recently asking for news on a Northern Light reboot, James revealed, "Just in time for the fourth annual Cartoon Foundry event, in Hamilton, on June 28, for which I'm both an organizer of and guest at, there'll be a signed, limited edition of the first issue of *The Northern Light* relaunch mini-series currently at the printers.

"After that, I'll be finalizing discussions with a couple publishers who might be willing to take it on, or I may end up going the crowdfunding route instead. Strange times in the comic book business these days, indeed!"



The Northern Light, Orb TM & © James Wiley/3rd Act Productions. Pin-up art courtesy of Jason Schacter.

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Dean Motter's Andromeda Reign

Jackie Estrada shares candid photos featuring her friend and frequent SDCC guest



Above: Dean Motter in the 1980s in a photo portrait by Patrick Harbron appearing in Flare magazine.

Inset right: Andromeda magazine was derived from a same-name fanzine dated July/Aug./Sept. 1974, which was mostly devoted to a 23-page story by Dean, one produced for his college senior project.

Below: Andromeda fanzine's publisher, Bill Paul, also produced a well-regarded zine called Media 5. Here's Dean's comic-themed cover for the fourth issue.



Conducted by JON B. COOKE

[Interviewer's Note: Now that I think of it, I've known Dean Motter since the earliest days of Comic Book Artist, when I chatted with him about The Prisoner in #6 [Fall '99] and later regarding Mister X for #15 [Nov. '01], so it's always a pleasure to talk with the talented artist/designer. In 2023, I interviewed Dean about his comics magazine work and we covered Andromeda, the impressive Canadian black-&-white that spotlighted science fiction story adaptations into comics form. While American-born, the gent – based in Georgia, last I heard – made his initial impact in the Great White North, and his contributions to the Canadian comics scene of the '70s fits in nicely this ish. – JBC.]

Comic Book Creator: Can you tell me the backstory of Andromeda?

Dean Motter: Back in the '70s, I was living in Toronto and I was a customer at the Silver Snail comic shop. The proprietor was Ron Van Leeuwen, and he also started up one of the first distribution networks in North America, which he called Andromeda. He named it after a fanzine* that I had done in college, in London, Ontario, but he adopted it first for the distribution network he was setting up. Then he decided that he wanted to enter the sort of underground/ground-level comics arena and wanted to publish some-

* Dean is referring to the contents of the Andromeda fanzine, a tale called, "Celestial Circuit Circus," a 23-page tabloid-size science fiction/fantasy story he created as his senior-year independent studies project at Fanshawe College, in London, Ontario.

thing along the lines of *Star*Reach*, who I'd also done some work for. Ron approached me about acting as editor/designer/art director for the book, though he had an active hand in that, as well. Ron was the instigator and he went out and secured

the rights to several short stories by noted science fiction writers like James Tiptree, Arthur C. Clarke, A.E. van Vogt, and others. Then he approached local Canadian artists to adapt the various stories.

I would act as *Andromeda's* art director, assemble the magazine, and get it to the printer, and then Ron would take care of distribution, and it took off. You should realize this was before graphic novels adapting noted SF work and fantasy work had become popular. This is one of the earliest efforts that I recall to follow in the footsteps of the old EC Comics, where they'd taken the stories of Ray Bradbury and adapted them as comic-book stories. And *Andromeda* ran for six

issues [Sept. '77–Nov. '79], and it got quite a following, so he was able to sustain respectable sales and print run.

Arik Khan [#1–3, Sept. '77–June '79] came about when we were approached by Franc Reyes, the Filipino artist who had recently immigrated to Toronto and who'd done a lot of komiks work in the Philippines. *Arik Khan* was his own property that he developed. He'd written the first issue and Ron fell in love with that right away and said, "I'll publish it," and he published that under the *Andromeda* banner and that went for three issues. I've been following Franc for several years since and I know he made a reboot a couple times in various forms with other publishers, but that was how the *Andromeda* line came to be. We had illustrators like Paul Rivoche in one of the early issues and he did a couple of covers for us. John Allison did a story ["The Man Who Walked Home," #1] for us by James Tiptree.

It was quite a development. There were other Canadian comics in the works at the time. There was a small community in Toronto that was especially active. *Orb Magazine* was also publishing black-&-white comics and *Captain Canuck* was emerging about the same time, as well.

CBC: Do you recall who designed the logo for Andromeda?

Dean: I did. When I was doing *Andromeda*, I was working full-time for [publisher] Holt, Reinhart and Winston of Canada, doing children's books. I was moonlighting, doing comics and rock 'n' roll magazines, at that time. I had access



to some production facilities, like a stat camera and light table, and things like that, at my day job. So, after hours, I would spend a few hours here and there and create the logos for the various comics that I was working on. I was also working at Holt when, a couple years later, I got involved with Vortex Comics, which is where we launched *Mister X* and I was still able to continue my logo design work in that realm, as well.

CBC: Can you explain *Andromeda*, the fanzine?

Dean: Oh, the fanzine I did came out about a year-and-a-half before the *Andromeda* magazine: it was published by an outfit called Media 5, in London, Ontario, in 1974. At that time, Bill Paul published a tabloid fanzine called *Media 5* and also published *Andromeda*, which I'd done as my project for college for my senior year independent studies project. I spent the year doing it and it was a tabloid format, and today the fanzine is very hard to find. The story was basically a pastiche of all kinds of artistic influences that I had in college, more a gallery of inspirations and swipes and things like that. I was being influenced by Kirby and Neal Adams and also the classical studies that I was doing in school, figure drawing and symbolist artists. It was my first attempt to combine elements of what I learned along with comics.

The story was a kind of a space opera. It was influenced by a lot of comics and art history that I was studying at the time, somewhat hard to describe these days, but you could see the influences. For a young college kid's first effort to get into print, it was very, very meticulously done.

CBC: How many issues did you do?

Dean: Just the one.

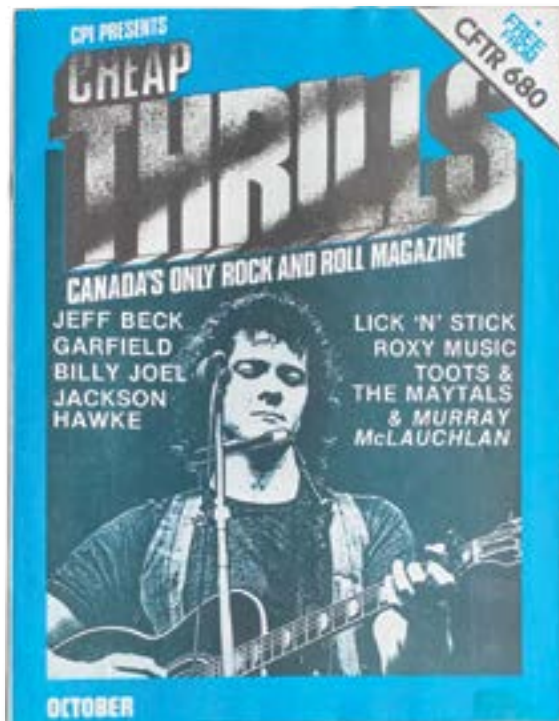
CBC: Had you had a longtime interest in comics, science fiction, and the like?

Dean: Oh, yeah. I grew up an avid follower of not just Marvel and DC, but also Gold Key, Dell, and all the others at

the time, mostly in the '60s. Plus, at that time, I started seeing those little ads in the back of the comic books and sending away for fanzines, and I started collecting *Rocket's Blast/Comiccollector* and a few others. And, when Steranko burst on the scene and had his Supergraphics, I sent away for 'zines mentioned in *Comixscene* and collected all those. Steranko was a major influence on my artwork at the time (and even today)... So, yeah, during my whole adolescence, comics was one of the things that I spent most of my time on.

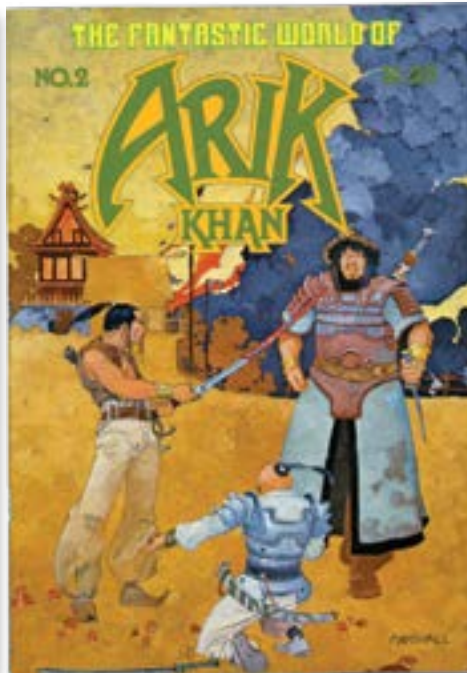
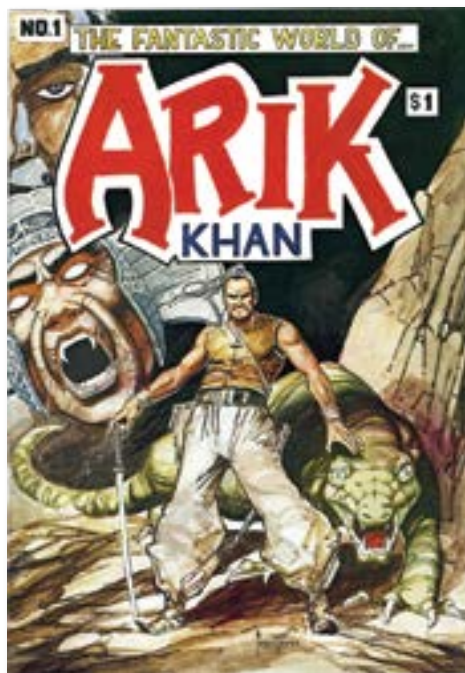
CBC: Now what made Ron Van Leeuwen think that you'd be a good editor?

Dean: Well, besides being a regular customer there, I was also at the time art director and designer on a rock 'n' roll magazine, *Cheap Thrills*, given out by Concert Productions International at all the concerts. Once a month, they published this newsprint magazine they'd give away for free and it would have the calendar of all the concerts they were promoting, along with interviews, articles, and advertisements concerning rock 'n' roll and New Wave, and all kinds of contemporary music of the period. It also had some comics material. I was the art director and production artist on that mag and Ron knew this. We all had connections in this very small community in Toronto because everybody shopped at the same comic shop – as well as the same science fiction bookstore, which was across the street, called Bakka Books.



Above: Dean received a crash-course in layout and production while working as art director of the rock 'n' roll giveaway, *Cheap Thrills*. This is the Oct. 1976 ish. **Inset left:** In the one-shot *Andromeda* fanzine, this is the tabloid's first page, art by Dean. **Below:** The *Cheap Thrills* art director's love of the comics form ensured that comic strips were a regular feature in the monthly mag. Here's one of Dean's Dark Disco comic strip episodes.





Above: Covers of the three issues of Arik Khan, Andromeda's sister publication published by the Silver Snail. From left, #1 with art by Franc Reyes; #2 with art by Don Marshall; and #3 with art by Tom Nesbitt.

Below: Silver Snail advertisement illustrated by Robert MacIntyre, reproduced from Andromeda #4 [Dec. '78]. As seen, the full-pager sports a portrait of Arik Khan.



So we all knew each other and, when Ron decided to put the magazine together, he knew he had to have somebody who knew their way around a production schedule, knew how to assemble the typesetting, do the paste-ups, and get everything ready for press, and make sure that everything went to the color separator or film house or whomever, but also somebody was familiar with producing magazines. Plus he recognized I was a good customer at the store, so Ron knew my taste and we got along quite well. We were good friends.

CBC: Sorry to be going backwards like this, but where did you learn your publication production skills?

Dean: Well, I learned that during *Cheap Thrills*, the rock 'n' roll magazine.

CBC: How did you get that gig?

Dean: Just through a mutual friend I had met at a comic show. I volunteered since I'd had some production experience doing *Media 5* magazine and the *Andromeda* tabloid, in London, Ontario. I basically learned it all on the job – became familiar with how to set type, how to work with type galleys, paste up mechanicals, and things like that – so I had a fair amount of on the spot training that way. I didn't have any formal training. My learning was by doing the work.

CBC: Were you a quick learner?

Dean: Oh yeah, but it was also very intense because we only had a limited amount of time – at night and weekends since we were working

with other people's facilities and resources – to put the magazines together. So it was fairly intense working around the clock and over weekends across a period of a couple of weeks. I would say, if it didn't interfere with my schoolwork, that was a full-time gig at the time and *Media 5* magazine – I don't even know if it's got a page on Wikipedia or anything like that [It doesn't. – Y.E.] – but certainly Canadian comics fans from the 1970s will remember it as one of the more visible Canadian fanzines at the time.

CBC: Did those who owned the production facilities, where you worked nights and weekends, know what you were doing?

Dean: Sure. They were the parents of editor and publisher Bill Paul, who passed away a couple years ago, unfortunately. But his parents ran a company that did magazines for a real estate concern. He just talked them into letting us use the place for the weekend a couple of times, here and there.

CBC: Do you see any influence from *Métal Hurlant*, at all?

Dean: Oh, yeah. In fact, because we're in Canada, we got *Métal Hurlant* long before the States did, because French magazines were regularly imported into Canada on a large scale basis. When *Métal Hurlant* and *Pilote* magazine first became visible in North America, it was in Canada, I would say a full year or two before the copies started showing up in the U.S. So we had a bit of a head-start. The [comics] albums by [Jean] Giraud and [Philippe] Druillet were coming out and were carried by the Silver Snail comic shop. So we were all poring all over those at the same time.

CBC: Did *Métal Hurlant* look like a revolutionary magazine, something you had never seen before? What was the experience of encountering it?

Dean: Those us who could read any French, pored over the stories, but mostly the magazines were just being bought for the artwork by English-speaking fans who didn't know what the stories were about, but they didn't seem to much care. They just loved seeing the artwork. I remember collecting all those books myself and it was a real eye-opener. The amount of freedom that the French, Belgium, and German artists seemed to be enjoying... there didn't seem to be any counterpart of that in the States at the time.

CBC: Did you see *Andromeda* as filling a niche in Canada as being inspired by *Star*Reach* and *Métal Hurlant*?

Dean: Yes. I think a lot of the comic book artists who wanted to work on *Andromeda* – and even on *Orb Magazine* – they were all being influenced by the French imports to one degree or another, as they all saw what was possible in terms of actually getting that kind of work out in front of people, so that they would indulge some of their wilder tendencies.

I got more technical. I think in the first story I did for *Andromeda*, I was aping Moebius as close as I could. I was fascinated by his technique, aping his fine line technique with the repetitive panels as close as I could. I don't know how I did it because, as I look back on it now, it was so labor-intensive, spending way more time on the page than was practical. But it was a great learning experience. So the width and breadth of possibilities those French magazines and books provided for us was very, very energizing.

CBC: Were there any continuing features in *Andromeda* or were they all standalone stories?

Dean: They were all standalone. There were some issues where one- or two-page features were included or six- or eight-page features in them. I don't recall if we had any complete full issue stories, but some were quite long. I remember John Allison's story in the first issue, "The Man Who Walked Home," by Tiptree, was a long-form story and I remember I did a story, "Process" [#2], as a long-form story, as well, but they all varied. There was no set format for those.

CBC: Was it expensive to get permission to adapt the stories?

Dean: At that time, no. The comic book rights to do these stories were considered by the literary agents to be virtually worthless. It was just kind of found money for the agencies. So the cost for getting the rights from authors proved negligible, something you could never do in this day and age. Even later on, as soon as 1980, when it became more commercially viable to adapt existing works, by then they knew that the comics rights were worth something. But, back in the day, adapting short stories for comic books just did not seem to be a concern, and the agents were polite and cooperative, but they honestly didn't care that much.



Additionally, the authors or agents really didn't have very much to say in terms of approvals or anything. They just licensed the rights and waited for the check.

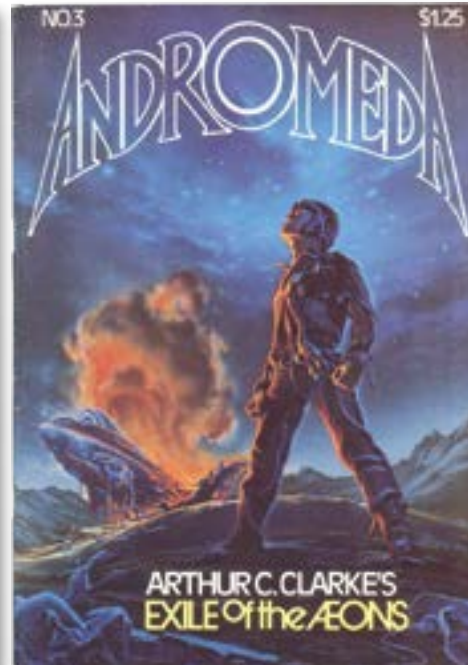
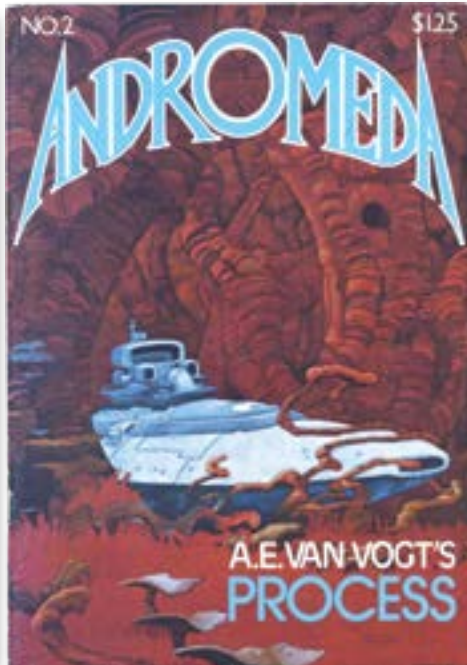
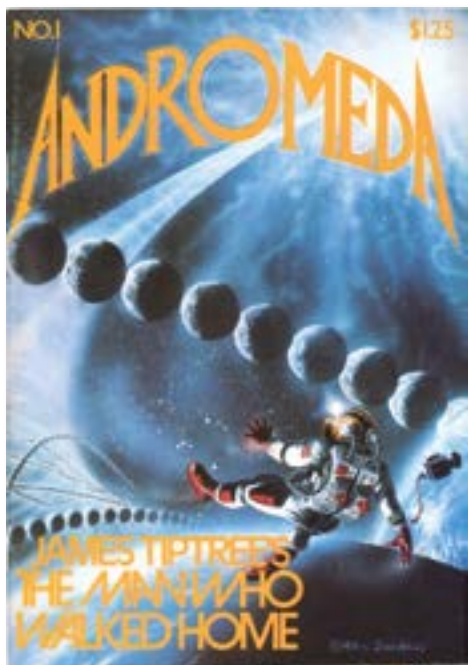
CBC: Did you pay special attention to the covers? Can you talk about that process?

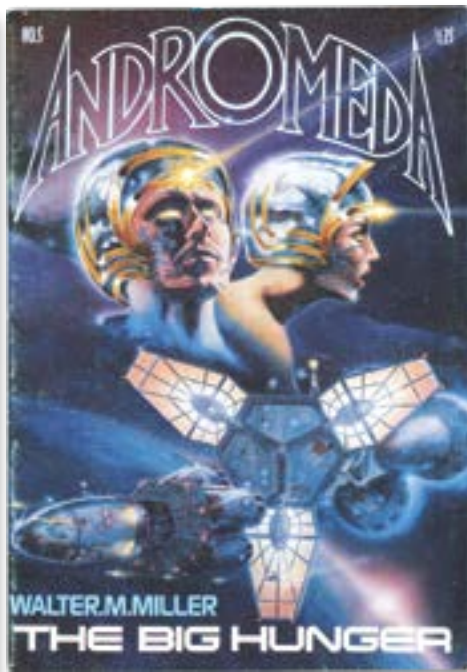
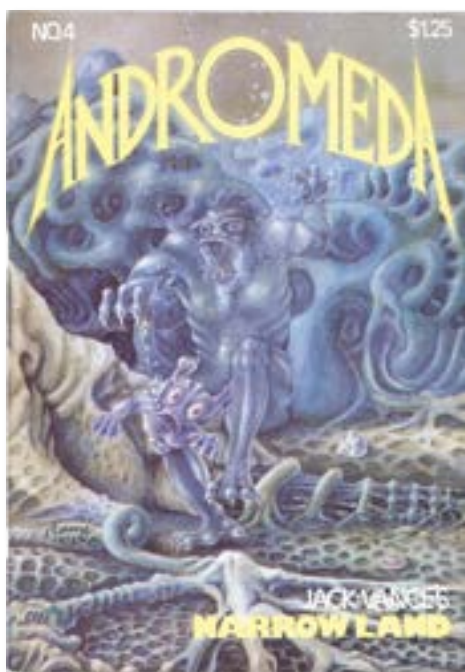
Dean: Sure. Ron and I would meet before each issue and discuss which of the artists who had approached us would be good for the cover. In some cases, it was artists just doing single illustrations and some artists were doing the entire story, but we would simply look at each issue and make a decision based on what we had in front of us. So, sometimes, it was obvious, like with Paul Rivoche's story, in #3, "Exile of the Eons," by Arthur C. Clarke. Paul had been working on that in Ottawa for a long time, I guess the better part of a year (though it could have been longer), and he had come to Toronto a few times and showed us the work in progress, and it was easily decided that he'd be the perfect cover artist for his

Above: This photo of Dean (left) and Silver Snail owner and *Andromeda* publisher Ron Van Leeluwen at his comic book store accompanied an article, "Meet Arik Khan," *Toronto's Globe and Mail* [Sept. 14, '77].



Below: First three covers of *Andromeda* magazine – #1 [Sept. '77], art by John Allison; #2 [June '78], art by Don Marshall; and #3 [Sept. '78], art of Paul Rivoche.





Above: Covers of the final three issues of *Andromeda*. From left, #4 with art by Ramy Bar-Elan; #5 with art by John Allison; and #6 with art by Tom Nesbitt. **Below:** Originally rejected by *Orb Magazine*, Dean and Ken Steacy's "The Sacred and the Profane" serial appeared first in *Star*Reach* and was later revamped for *Epic Illustrated*. The collection [1987] was graced with Ken's wrap-around cover seen at bottom.



issue. Same with John Allison on the first issue but, for other issues, we just drafted the covers from artists who had, again, approached us. I know Don Marshall did the cover to the issue that I did illustrations for, "Process," by A.E. Van Vogt [2, June '78]. He did a beautiful cover for that.

CBC: Was *Andromeda*'s frequency quarterly or bi-monthly?

Dean: It was basically whenever we could get it together. [chuckles] We tried to get it out bi-monthly, but I don't know if we ever managed that. [They did not. – Y.E.] We didn't work toward the production deadline, per se, until it got time to reserve press time. Since this is the nascent days of the direct market, distribution wasn't as organized as far in advance as it is today, so we could afford to get into the distribution pipeline with much more limited notice than contemporary publishers do nowadays.

CBC: In retrospect, how do you look at the run? Are you proud of what you did and proud of the work that was in there?

Dean: I'm quite proud of it. I'm proud of not just the work, but also in the fact that we broke open a market. We were instrumental in independent publishing. We managed to

get ourselves racked in comic book stores in North America alongside DC and Marvel books. The only other title that really had that kind of penetration was *Star*Reach*. There were a couple other titles that were coming out at the time – *Cerebus the Aardvark*, *Elfquest*, and a couple others – so it was just the beginning of the direct market and we were one of the first that got shelf space.

CBC: Can you give a brief description of *Arik Khan*? Was it a barbarian story or adventure?

Dean: It was a barbarian adventure, right out of Franc Reyes' brain. He'd been carrying around this thing. So when it arrived on our doorstep, it was practically finished. He was just looking for a publisher and, I think, he approached some Filipino publishers prior to us, but having left that country, I don't think he had as much interest in such a limited market. So again, as soon as we saw it, it was done so professionally and it was about the time that the *Conan* comic book from Marvel was coming out and doing well. So we knew there was a market for sword-&-sorcery barbarian type material and that's what *Arik Khan* was. It had an Asian flavor to it. So it was a little bit different from the Viking type of books that were coming out from Marvel at the time.

CBC: *Andromeda* was magazine size?

Dean: No, they were standard comic-book size. They fit on the shelves, and in the plastic bags and long boxes. They were put together to be competitive with comic books.

CBC: As a creative person, did you feel the pull of the United States at all, that you could get more work down there? Were you looking at a professional career that you wanted to work for the big publishers?

Dean: Yeah. As a matter of fact, Ken Steacy and I had done a story serialized in *Star*Reach* comics, "The Sacred and the Profane." It was quite popular and it ran for seven installments through seven issues and got two covers. *Star*Reach* seemed to be the obvious place to publish it,* but when Marvel launched *Epic Illustrated*, which was their answer to *Heavy Metal*, they approached us to license it as a reprint. They said,

* As a matter of fact, "The Sacred and the Profane" was first pitched to *Orb Magazine*, but the editor deemed it not mainstream enough.

"Can we reprint your material from *Star*Reach*?" And both Ken and I said, "Well, we'd love to do it, but we'd like to redo the serial from scratch, using color, rewriting it, utilizing typesetting instead of hand lettering." We were quite ambitious about doing something that will compete with *Heavy Metal* and *Métal Hurlant*. And Marvel said, "Yeah, let's do it." So we went about recreating "The Sacred and the Profane." I rewrote it. Ken and I collaborated on new plot elements. Ken re-illustrated it with one of his earliest airbrush endeavors and it was quite intense. And we ran that in *Epic Illustrated* for several issues and it did quite well. And it opened up the U.S. market for both Ken and I, and I started getting work from Marvel, and so did Ken. Our careers in the mainstream comics business were taking off.

CBC: To backtrack a little, why did *Andromeda* stop at #6?

Dean: Well, our sales had slowed down a bit and Ron wasn't interested in putting any more money into it at the time. He was making enough money

off the store and off the distribution of other material. He didn't have the time and my time was being taken up with other endeavors. I was doing more and more record covers and concert promotions. I was getting very, very busy in the music business that my time was becoming scarcer. *Andromeda* had always been a labor of love and a spare-time after-hours moonlighting kind of project. I didn't put much money off it. Ron and I were both doing it as a labor of love.

So our profit margin was pretty meager. We wanted to make sure the artists and writers were properly paid, but the profits on the sales were enough to keep it alive and keep it into distribution, but it just became commercially kind of questionable unless we got a larger reach and made it a more expensive magazine and unless I found a way to come up with more time to spend on it and run it, as well. We've done our work and we made our mark and it was time to move on.



Paul Rivoche Corrects the X-Record

[By pure happenstance, my old friend Paul Rivoche dropped me an email while I was finishing up this ish, and I offered him some space to help clear up some misconceptions regarding his role in the creation of Mister X. – JBC]

This is to address/correct/comment on long-standing persistent misattributions regarding my role in the 1980s *Mister X* project. Over the years, this has solidified into a fixed, but distorted, narrative. So, for those interested, a brief overview:

Regarding distortions, here is one example, of many. The "Mister X" Wikipedia page's extensive "revision history talk" reveals signs of many "narrative alterations," e.g.: "This is an old revision of this page, as edited by KipleyToons at 06:39, 12 February 2011 (**Earlier references to Rivoche's contributions had been scrubbed. Many citations exist to his co-developing the project with Motter; see noted comics historian Paul Gravett, also *Publisher's Weekly*, etc.**)"

I object to now being portrayed (particularly in 2008's Dark Horse Archive edition) as merely "one of the many *Mister X* illustrators," hired to draw a project Dean Motter had supposedly already fully created and designed. In reality I **CO**-created it and was responsible for many of its most striking aspects. This fact has now vanished from the "official history" – whereas earlier it was partially acknowledged.

Secondly, my common representation as "guy who quit & made it late" is inaccurate: better to call me the "convenient fall guy" for the abundant inherent problems that'd accumulated – problems that would have manifested anyway, as later experienced by others.

About its genesis, Dean Motter had *only* a striking painting (mysterious detective in art deco setting) and a title when I arrived. That's it! A decent bare skeleton, but a complete concept/premise wasn't fleshed out as necessary for an ongoing comic book series. I was brought on *precisely* to rectify this deficiency, and I did! His painting was merely "a cool image," but lacked the numerous foundational/iconic elements it later became famous for.

Note, predating my involvement, Motter has never shown any evidence of an already-built full script, extensive notes/sketches, model sheets and development bible – as would be expected. Nothing preexisted besides his painting and basic notion of a film noir-style detective in a "retro-futurist" city.

I'd just come off a lengthy stint as lead background designer for the 1980's cult classic animated feature film, *Rock & Rule*, and fresh from immersion in designing architecture/settings, working on storytelling, world creation, etc., I eagerly brought those skills to building the *Mister X* project. In short, I wasn't involved to simply illustrate something already finalized, but to create/develop the entire concept from a raw starting point.

Some of my contributions:

- Designing (**not merely illustrating**) the posters, covers, & many other items – Motter or staff added type afterwards
- I insisted that Mister X shouldn't be a typical "Sam Spade gumshoe" film noir detective (boring), as Motter initially urged
- I proposed that he was the city's troubled architect & that the city generated problems (with Motter later phrasing this as 'psychetecture')
- I added hovercars (Möebius/Bladerunner influence), robots, Art Deco poster influences (Tom Purvis, Ludwig Hohlwein, etc.)
- The architectural elements weren't Tom Wolfe/Bauhaus, as stated by Marks – they were mine, originating from my studying Art Deco architectural design work by Hugh Ferriss, illustrations by Will Hollingsworth, etc.

Looking back, I realize that it was a vastly overambitious venture for all parties.

Why?

Because the basic functional business elements needed to ensure success weren't there:

- No **full** scripts/bible were pre-written; I was only handed an incoherent ballpoint-on-foolscap "Marvel Method" style outline to begin from!
- There was no supporting team – no vital staff/infrastructure: no letterer, colorist, no dedicated editor besides Marks – no true "comic book company" existed!
- Motter wasn't a full-time comic writer/creator, had zero prior experience writing an ongoing comic book series, and was far more committed to operating his album design studio than focusing on writing/creating Mister X!
- This hampered everything!
- I was green, unready to handle all these deficiencies alone – nor should I have agreed to participate; but was too young/inexperienced to realize this and object!

So Bill Marks's characterization of me "going down a creative alleyway and never coming back out" is simplistic, inaccurate, and unfair. Left solo with the problems described, I nevertheless labored to rectify them. Disagreements continued – my objections re: the non-script, Motter's casting of Mister X as a drug addict, his odd inclusion of nuns, and more. Everything stalled, and subsequently I departed.

The above has briefly outlined facts that, quite mysteriously, other parties involved have either forgotten – or are stubbornly unwilling to acknowledge. These years later, I only claim proper, rightful credit for my verifiable contributions as the co-creator of the lauded **Mister X**.



Katherine, Arn, & Neil the Horse

A candid conversation with the self-proclaimed "one and only purveyor of dancing comics"

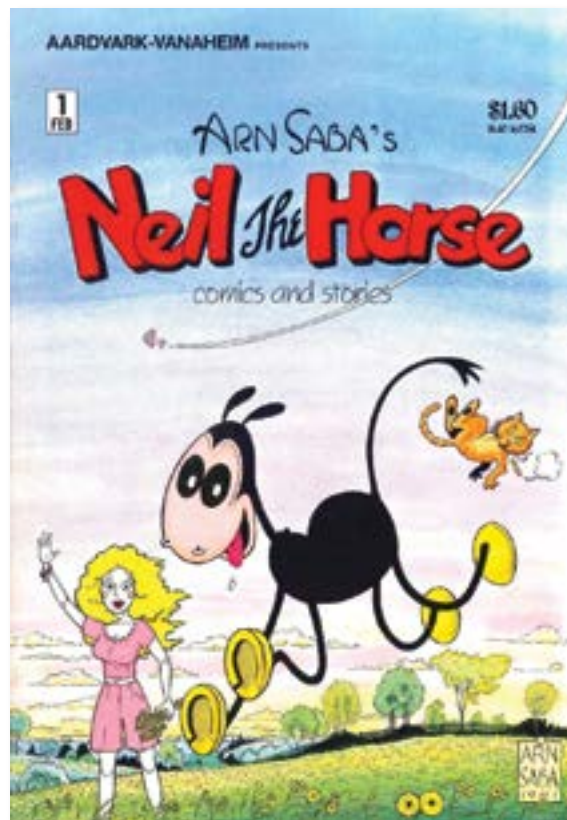
Conducted by JON B. COOKE

[Born Arnold Alexander Saba, Jr., Katherine Shannon Collins created one of the oddest and most charming comic book series of the 1980s, Neil the Horse. As the Canadian-born cartoonist wrote in a collection, "There was certainly no great clamor for musical comic books, no crowds in the streets with torches and pitchforks, demanding singing and dancing animals," but perceptive comic book aficionados of that period recognized the independent, black-&-white title, with its zany mix of Fred Astaire footwork and Carl Barks funny animal antics, was a completely original endeavor. The series was also a worthy and witty tonic in that decade of grim and gritty, death-obsessed comics. I've always been fascinated with Katherine's positive efforts and, after interviewing her for my Charlton Companion, I was determined to include the artist in this Canadian special. Though in ill health, Katherine consented to a pair of interview sessions. Thank you, Katie. – JBC]

Comic Book Creator: Let's start at the start, if you don't mind. Where are you originally from? What's your family background?

Katherine Collins: Where I'm from is right here, Vancouver, British Columbia, and I've lived in many different places, but ended up back where I started. I always hate to say this, because it sounds like I'm boasting, but I grew up in a wealthy family, which I didn't realize at the time, but it was a really strange experience. I was indoctrinated with the things that rich people are supposed to believe about the world.

I am the eldest of four and, interestingly, we all rejected that [class] status, though we never even discussed it amongst ourselves. When we grew up, we all just went off and became penniless, doing what we thought we really wanted to do. Though we were being pressured to enter the business world and become businesspeople, none of us wanted to do that.



Of my two brothers, one worked first as a cowboy for many years and then decided he wanted to start his own organic vegetable farm, which he did very successfully. And then my other brother is a musician, and I have a sister, who has never known what she wanted to be, but the one thing she is not is rich, and she's not in business. And then there's me, who is completely insane. [laughter] So it's been a very odd life so far.

CBC: Where did the family wealth come from?

Katherine: My grandfather on my father's side, Saba, came over from Lebanon in 1895, at the age of 14, to join his brother, who was already here. They started Saba Brothers, a wildly successful women's fashion and fabric store, and they became millionaires. It doesn't exist anymore, unfortunately, but they were amongst the very wealthiest people in Vancouver, in the 1920s and '30s.

My father was born in Vancouver, and I'm not sure whether it was a conscious decision on anybody's part or not, but I didn't get any Lebanese influence, any Lebanese culture, though maybe a little bit of the food, but that was all. The other side of the family was McBain, who were very lovely people. The Collins and McBain families were sweet and lovely... Somehow it happened that I was raised as a sort of British-Canadian, which was very easy in those days. It was a very British country.



Above: Katherine Collins, the former Arn Saba, was inducted into the 2017 Giants of the North Hall of Fame as pioneering cartoonist and comics journalist. Here she is giving her acceptance speech at the Toronto Cartoon Arts Festival. **Inset**

right: The first ish of Neil the Horse Comics and Stories #1 [Feb. '83].

Below: From left, Arn in 1951 and 1990, and Katherine in 2009.



CBC: Did you go to private school and all that?

Katherine: No, I didn't go to private school, thank God. But luckily, despite the British influence, it wasn't a snobby family at all, just regular people.

CBC: What year were you born?

Katherine: Nineteen forty-seven.

CBC: Were you experiencing American culture as a kid?

Katherine: In Canada, it's impossible to avoid the huge influence of America but, at the same time, Canada was (even more than it is now) very, very British. We were mostly influenced by British culture. I was taught in school that everything American was terrible and everything terrible was American... At the same time, it was like being awash in American culture because we really didn't have a Canadian culture. I remember, when I was in my teens, when I was trying to figure out how to be a writer and ultimately cartoonist, the one thing I knew, or at least I felt I couldn't do, was to set any fiction in Canada. That was just a foolish idea because nobody would be interested. Canada was just a minor blip on the map. Luckily, that's changed a great deal, but it's taken most of my lifetime for it to change.

CBC: Were you more British than American?

Katherine: Oh, more British, very much so.

CBC: Did you have exposure to British children's culture?

Rupert the Bear, Doctor Dolittle by Hugh Lofting, that material?

Katherine: Those are two of my favorites. I still collect *Rupert Bear* books every year, and loved them, as well as *Doctor Dolittle*. At the same time, luckily I was exposed to Walt Disney comics by Carl Barks. My mom was a cartoonist herself and cartoon collector, and she was the one who brought Carl Barks into the house and read them to us. She also had collected newspaper strips – *Terry and the Pirates* in the '30s and '40s. So I read Milton Caniff in the '50s, way ahead of anybody else in my generation. Along with Disney, I got the best of both.

CBC: I know that, in the '40s, during the war, there was a ban on importing American comics in Canada. When you were growing up, you could you buy U.S. comics?

Katherine: Oh, yeah. That ban ended immediately when the war was over. Somebody opened the floodgate and, by the time I was aware of comics, you never would've known that there had been a comics industry in Canada. It was by then completely gone.

CBC: Did you follow comic strips on a daily basis in the paper?

Katherine: Yes, absolutely. We got all the American ones. There were no Canadian newspaper strips at all when I was growing up (and I don't think there are any now either). Apart from Carl Barks, I was really more interested in the newspaper strips, and that's what I wanted to do as I grew up. So I was starting to focus on trying to be a cartoonist because what I wanted to do was a newspaper strip.

CBC: What strips inspired you the most?

Katherine: It's a very schizophrenic set of influences because they're Caniff and Barks, the two that influenced me the most and that I love the most. Other than that, there was this huge smorgasbord of other kinds of comics. Lots and lots and lots, but there was very few that I really cared about very



much. I read them, I followed them, I enjoyed them... *Prince Valiant*, *King Aroo* – which was very nonsensical, kind of a cheap version of *Krazy Kat*. There were other ones... but, when I was nine years old, I started trying to draw a newspaper strip, and, for two years, I drew all the time. I drew six dailies and a Sunday page every week of this strip that I had invented. I wanted to see if I could keep up the pace. A cartoonist had to keep up, so you can see where my focus was.

CBC: What was the strip?

Katherine: It was... I guess I'd call it a pretty obvious copy of *Terry and the Pirates*. I was trying to do an adventure strip. I wasn't pleased with it. When I was maybe 20 years old, I still had all those old strips, and I threw them in the garbage can. I didn't want anyone to ever see them. I didn't want anybody to see them. I didn't want to look at them myself.

CBC: Bad, Katherine! As a historian, I say, "Not cool!" [chuckles]

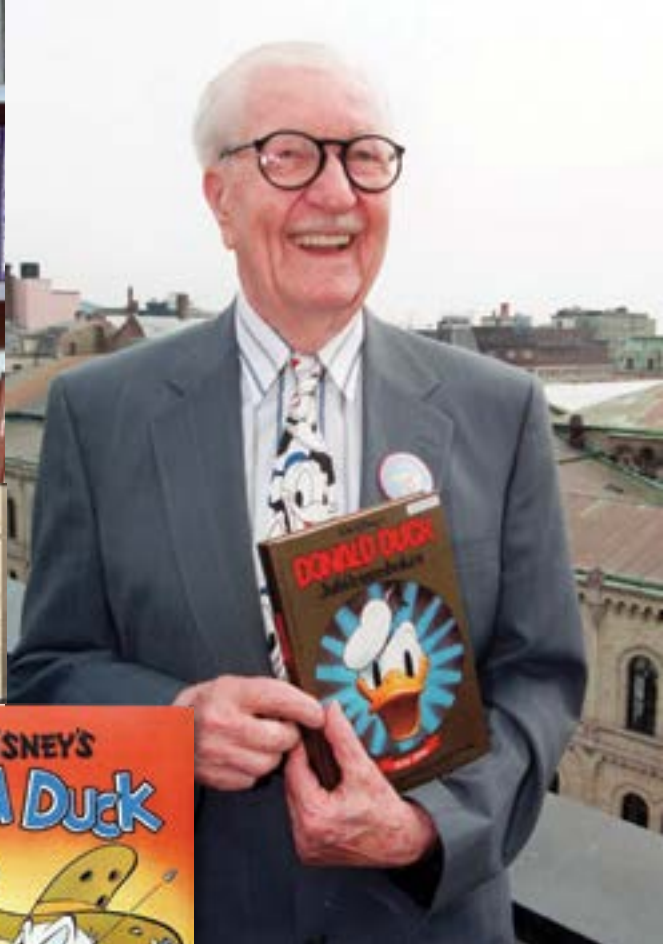
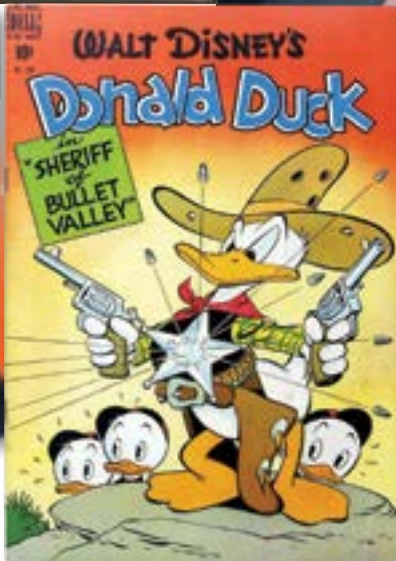
Katherine: I was wanting to present myself in the best light.

CBC: Can you be specific about *Terry and the Pirates* and its overriding appeal? Did you identify with Terry?

Katherine: No, I didn't identify with any of the characters. What I liked about it, although I couldn't have said at the time, when I was a child, but I can see now that what I liked about it was the richness of the interaction between all the characters. Not just Terry and Pat, but all the incidental characters, all their friends and enemies who they met. And it was just so well depicted. It was something that you could really dig into and look at and read in depth and enjoy. It wasn't like reading *Rex Morgan* or something, all these cardboard characters.



Top: Inscribed commission of Neil the Horse and Mam'selle Poupée by Katherine drawn at the 1984 San Diego Comic-Con. **Left:** The great American dancer/actor/singer/choreographer Fred Astaire, in his prime as a Hollywood movie super-star, replete with tux, top hat, and cane, who possessed the grace of an angel.



Above: Counter-clockwise from top left is brilliant cartoonist Floyd Gottfredson; a 1934 Mickey Mouse comic strip by F.G.; a Terry and the Pirates vintage booklet based on the art of strip creator Milton Caniff; Four Color #199 [Oct. '49]; and the great "Duck Man" (and artist of Donald Duck comic seen here), Carl Barks. **Inset right:** Katherine's mother, Allison McBain, early '70s. **Below:** Allison's Cory in Oz [87].

It was real human fiction...

CBC: The narrative and the way that they talked to each other was very influenced by Hollywood movies. Were the old Hollywood movies an influence on you at a young age?

Katherine: No, I never really been a movie fan. I'm still not; I never go to movies. I don't have a television either. I never have had much interest in Hollywood, apart from Fred Astaire, apart from musicals. Other than that, I never really cared about movies, at all.

CBC: When did the musical influence come in?

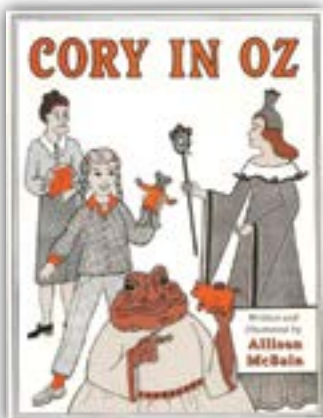
Katherine: In my memories of earliest life, the movies I always enjoyed were the musicals, any musical, just the idea of people singing and dancing, especially when they're in the middle of a dramatic situation, and suddenly people would start singing and dancing. I thought that was wonderful. But then it's strange to say I did not discover Fred Astaire until I was about 30 years old, and I just was knocked flat when I saw him and the way he could dance! And that's what propelled me into depicting musicals in my comics.

CBC: That's a lot later than I had imagined.

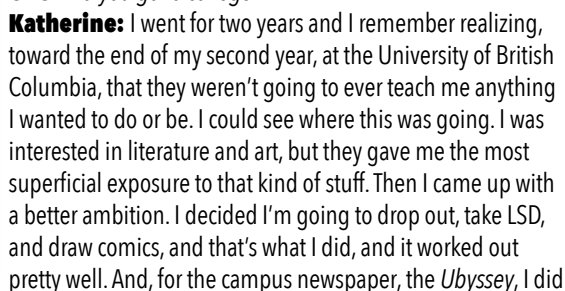
Hammerstein, so we went to see *South Pacific* and *The King and I*, and all that sort of stuff. My grandfather McBain, who was my real father figure, who influenced me and taught me how to be a person, he loved somewhat lighter fare in musicals. He would take me to all the Danny Kaye movies, like *Hans Christian Andersen*. So I was being constantly being taken to see musicals, which was fine with me. I loved it.

CBC: Did you want to perform yourself?

Katherine: Yeah, but I didn't have any illusions that I had any particular talent for singing and dancing, although I did it for fun around the house. But later, after I discovered Fred Astaire, I actually took dance classes for eight years. I studied jazz dance, went to class five days a week, in my 30s. It was much too late to become professional. But I did some semi-professional (I guess that would be called) musical theater when I was in my 20s. I joined a group of children's entertainers, a group called Circus Minimus, which we pretended was a circus. We structured the shows almost all for children and as if it were a circus. We had animal



Katherine: Easy. It wasn't a problem, but it was odd in one way. I didn't ever have any personality that we would now recognize as being gay because I'm not gay and never was. I don't have any attraction to men, at all. But nonetheless, I wasn't very male either. I've never played a sport. I've never even watched a sport. I've never seen a single game of any sport. I have no idea what goes on, nor I have any interest in knowing. I wasn't rough and tumble with the other boys, and I wanted to be a girl, and I knew that, but I didn't have a hope of it, of course. But, whenever I had the chance, I would interact with and make friends with the girls.



This page: Clockwise from above is a contemplative Arn Saba during the college years; Nov. 23, 1965, Ubysssey editorial referring to his Moralman strip; Nov. 23, 1965 Moralman; and strip published in the Nov. 9, '65, edition of the University of British Columbia paper.





a twice-weekly comic strip, *Moralman*.

CBC: What was the conceit? What was *Moralman* about?

Katherine: He had no super-powers and no real competency at anything, but he wore a super-hero type costume suit with a cape and a big M on his chest, and he would go around just telling people what to do and condemning them for their behavior because there was a lot of that in the '60s. There was a lot of that happening on campus at the time, of divisions being drawn between the progressives and the not very progressive. Lots of people were telling each other what they should be doing, and so that's where that came from.

Moralman was a continuity strip because I never have been able to write punchlines, so the humor in them was more in the situations that cropped up than in funny lines.

CBC: When did you go into the university?

Katherine: I started in 1965. Starting in the summer of 1966, me and Alan, my longtime best friend (who dropped me when I transitioned), we spent a whole year on our bicycles, bicycling around Europe, staying in hostels, and just seeing what there was to see. We traveled as far north as Norway and as far as south as Southern Italy. It was a wonderful experience.

CBC: Did you make it to swinging London?

Katherine: Oh, yeah! That's where we started. We flew in from Canada to London. Here we were, two 19 year olds, who weren't exactly embraced with enthusiasm by any of the glamorous crowd. The Beatles weren't waiting for us. But I remember going to Carnaby Street and just seeing the scene of all these very fashionable, very peculiar people, and it was great to see. Then we bicycled and spent a great deal of time in England because we were Canadian-English Canadians. What we became more attracted to and more able to participate in was traditional English life. We were really thrilled by the very peculiar ways of the British, just the traditional stuff, like the weird names of places and the odd language that people use just as normal English language...

CBC: These were bicycles, not motorcycles?

Katherine: Yes, we were great bike riders. I continued to be a bike rider up through my 30s, too.

CBC: What was that like? Did you have some pretty perilous moments in the English countryside? I mean, they have very narrow back roads!

Katherine: Yeah, we were on the back roads. There were very few highways in England at that time... We would study maps and guide books and so on, and we wanted to see it all by the back roads, because that's where the interesting stuff was.

CBC: Did you go to Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall?

Katherine: We didn't get up as far as Hadrian's Wall, but we slept overnight at Stonehenge. I've got a photograph of myself very drowsy looking with the morning sky behind me. I'm sitting on the ground looking completely dazed.

CBC: When did you start drawing? Was it as a little child?

Katherine: Oh, yes, absolutely. I started trying to devise comics as far back as I can remember, holding a pencil.

CBC: Was this pretty much Disney influenced stuff?

Katherine: That was amongst the things, but I guess my very earliest memories of what I was trying to draw, there was no particular style at all. [chuckles] It was just childish scrawls, really. But as I drew a little bit more, I was being influenced by Carl Barks and other Disney things.

CBC: Did you share your drawings with anybody?

Katherine: My mom was a cartoonist herself, so I would ask her for tips on how to do this and that, and then I would show her the results. And she was very encouraging, very helpful.

CBC: Was she a professional cartoonist?

Katherine: No, but she would draw things for... I lived in a neighborhood called Kerrisdale, and so she would draw and write for the *Kerrisdale Courier*, and she did things at that level all of her life. But she did write and illustrate and have published an *Oz* book. She was a huge fan of the *Oz* series, and she had them all, I think. And I was awash in the *Oz* stuff as well, because of my mom. All her life, she read and drew comic stuff.

CBC: You were exposed to *Oz* even before seeing the movie?

Katherine: Yes. I've only ever seen the movie once, when it was on television for the first time, in 1958. I've never watched it again because it's not really an *Oz* story.

CBC: But it is a musical, Katherine.

Katherine: I saw it in 1958 and that was enough for me. It never really caught my imagination, for some reason.

CBC: I presume your mom has passed away.

Katherine: Yes. She died on January 1, 2008.

CBC: Did you get her *Oz* books? Did she still have them?

Katherine: Yes, I've got some of *Oz* books, and my sister has some. So they're still in the family... I should mention, if I'm not changing the subject too much, that my mother's grandmother was also a writer and cartoonist, so that'd be my great grandmother. She was the Collins in the family, and that's where I got the Collins last name when I transitioned to female gender in 1993. Her real name was Mary, but she was always known as Dolly Collins. And I still, I've got some of her work. I've got one set of cartoons that she did, but mostly I've got oil paintings that she did, and I never met her, unfortunately. She died before I was born. But my mom and Dolly were very close. My mom always spoke with real enthusiasm about her grandmother. The reason I chose Collin's last name was because I wanted to connect that far back in the family to the creative women in my family. And I thought, "Well, I could have connected to the McBain last name to my mother, but I'll go back another couple of generations and connected to the Collins." That's where I got that last name.

CBC: What did your mom think of your cartooning?

Katherine: Oh, she was a big fan, very, very encouraging. I think she didn't necessarily understand what I was trying to do by putting dance and music into the cartoons. I think that kind of left her behind. But she couldn't have been more encouraging, though...

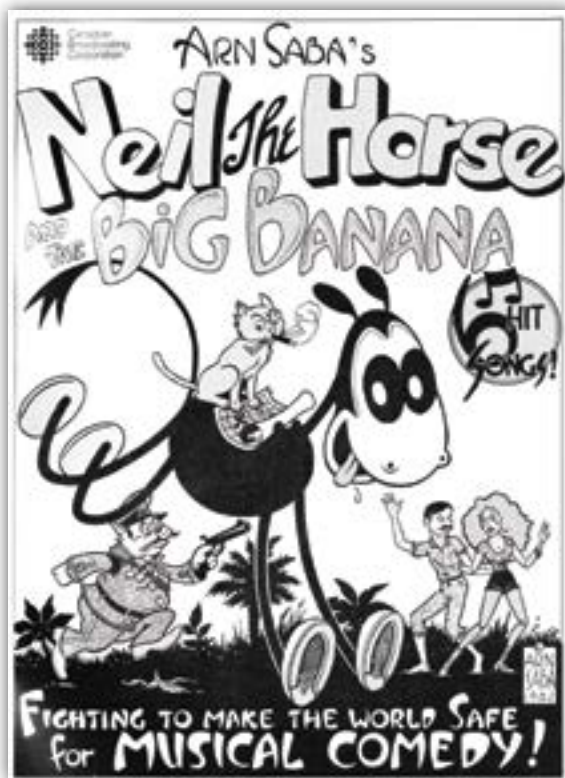


Top: The Second Magenta Frog, an underground zine published in 1972, co-edited by Arn Saba (who drew the cover) and sometime creative collaborator Gordon Fidler.

The first ish was published in '70. **Above:** Eureka Street was a shortlived comic strip that appeared in Canadian papers in the late '70s/early '80s. A few of the episodes were reprinted in Neil the Horse.

Below: The four-legged dancing steed and his catchphrase adorns a Neil the Horse pinback button.





CBC: Was the plan always for you to be a comic strip artist?

Katherine: That and a few other things. I did have a long period of time, while I was developing and preparing *Neil the Horse*, when I also was a radio producer, writer, and on-air person for the CBC radio network, in Canada. And it was easy for me to talk, easy for me to perform, and be funny, and have fun. I did that, but I never lost sight that the real thing was to be a cartoonist. And I did a lot of radio shows about cartooning, and I really enjoyed doing it. There was a show host named Don Harron whose program I went on a lot, and I had a lot of fun doing it, but luckily, the timing was good because after he retired from his show, the show was taken over by Peter Gzowski, who was beloved by the public because his on-screen image was folksy and friendly. But, in real life, he hated me because I was not masculine enough. I was living as Arn Saba, but he could tell that I wasn't a heavy drinker and I wasn't into sports. And so he kicked me off the show. But, luckily, it was when *Neil the Horse* was just really getting going. And I realized that I was wasting my time being on the radio so much. I was on TV a bit, too... I've got recordings of my radio shows, almost all of them. But they've gone from the public exposure. And whereas the cartooning... you're interviewing me today, years and years after I did the cartoons, and that lasts much longer. I was very glad that I was able to switch over.

CBC: Did you listen to radio as a kid?

Katherine: Yes, but not with any particular focus. I was into pop music, so I was on the scene when rock 'n' roll started in the '50s. I was totally into it. Then, in the '60s, I was completely enthralled by the Beatles.

CBC: Did you first go on the air in college?

Katherine: No, it was after college. I was just starting to develop *Neil*. It was about 1974 or '75, in Vancouver, in the local CBC station. (CBC is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and it's nationwide.) I was interviewed about *Neil the Horse*,

and, because I had so much fun talking, I asked if I could do some segments for the show. So I started going around town reviewing strange things. I went out to the Pacific National Exhibition Fair in the fall every year where they have all the midway rides and all the buildings full of local artisans. And I reviewed the terrible, weird food they had there – corn dogs and all these really rich desserts. That kind of thing. I went around having fun and going on air with it. That got me started. Then I moved out to Toronto, in 1977, and I'd been doing a lot of the local radio stuff. Then I went to the CBC network programmers and they took me on. I started reviewing comics on air on the national program. And that's how it started.

CBC: Did you interview cartoonists?

Katherine: Yes, I did – a lot! I interviewed many cartoonists over the years. I was given the money to travel to the United States and interview Hal Foster, Milton Caniff, Floyd Gottfredson, and John Dirks, the son of Rudy Dirks, and lots more. I can't remember all of them offhand, but I did a lot of programs about them. I would go out and interview these people, and then I would bring the tape back to the station and put together a program about each cartoonist. And I would adapt their strips into little radio comedies. I have this huge collection of comics at old strips, so I would go through them and find ones that would adapt well to audio, and then I'd get some actors to come in and we would make audio versions of the old strips.

Ultimately, I sent the interviews to *The Comics Journal* and they transcribed and ran them all. I was told that my interview with Harold Foster was the best interview anybody ever did with him, whatever that meant. And it was also the last one conducted before he got too old to do anything... My interview with Caniff was very well received, too.

The Arn Saba/Katherine Collins collection is at the Billy Ireland Library, at Ohio State University, and they have all my tapes and transferred them to digital, which is a good thing.

CBC: I see you were on a CBC TV show called *McLean at Large*. Is that true?

Katherine: It was a TV afternoon talk show. I was just scrambling for money and I had managed to get a niche into the CBC radio where the host of this radio show and I really liked each other, and we had a lot of fun. He loved cartoons, and so I was in like Flynn there, but I thought, "There's this TV talk show, so maybe I could get on that one, too." I was just trying to get as much money as I possibly could because nothing paid all that well. I was more busy as a cartoonist... I was on a few times on this afternoon TV talk show...

CBC: Let's talk about *Neil*. Where did *Neil* come from?

Katherine: He came out of the blue. Actually, the *Neil* that we know now developed slowly over a few years. I decided, in about 1973, maybe '74, the time had come for me to try to create a professional level comic. At the time, I knew it was kind of futile, but I still wanted to do a newspaper strip, despite it being the end days, the last days, of really good, well-developed newspaper comics. I thought, "I'll give it a shot." At the time, I was working once a month in the office a magazine here, *Pacific Yachting*. I was the production person. I would go in and take all the components and turn them into a magazine every month. That's how I was making a living. Thus I had lots of time of my own and I started creating different comic strips.



Above and below: Two more buttons, these featuring *Neil's* co-stars. **Inset left:** Poster promoting the five-part Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio musical serial, *Neil the Horse and the Big Banana* [1982]. **Bottom:** Arn Saba on stage as the titular character in the *Circus Minimus* production of "The Emperor's New Clothes," performed in Vancouver, in Jan. 1975.





Above: During his years producing *Neil the Horse Comics and Stories* – 1983–88 – Arn was hustling to earn money to pay for his associates who assisted on the title. Among his gigs was to appear on the CBC TV program, *McLean At Large* (fuzzy screenshot seen here). **Inset right:**

Arn also wrote regularly for the *Sunday* magazine supplements of Canadian newspapers, sometimes on his favorite subject of cartooning. This piece was featured in *Weekend Magazine* in 1977. **Below:** Arn had his radio interviews transcribed and printed in *The Comics Journal*.



We would do a few pages of each one, like a Sunday page, I guess, trying to decide if they were going to work... "Could I make a comic strip out of this?" I went through a number of them, some that had really good aspects to them, but I could tell that they weren't going to just take off and become a real comic strip. Finally, I thought of Neil, although it was quite different at first.

I remember the moment when Neil came to me in a fairly well-developed form. I hadn't drawn it at all yet. I was walking down the street in my neighborhood where I lived at that time, an area called Deep Cove, in North Vancouver. Beautiful area. I was living right across the street from the ocean. And I was walking home from the magazine thinking, "What comic could I do?" And, suddenly I had this vision. It appeared over my head – didn't really, nobody else saw it – but I pictured it as if I had dialogue balloon over my head as I walked down

the street with Neil and Soapy, the cat, and their relationship together. And I thought, that seems like a really good cartoon strip. Then I finished walking home. I still remember exactly where I was on the street, which block I was in – I looked at a map the other day online, looking at the Google street view thing and I found my old neighborhood – and I looked at the spot on the road where I was when I had the vision of Neil.

At that time, I was reading a weekly called *Golden Funnies* – and this was before the *Menominee Falls Gazette* started – which reprinted a lot of old strips. They were running a strip

I'd never seen before, the earliest *Mickey Mouse* comic strips by Floyd Gottfredson, and they had really impressed me. I loved the drawing style and the wacky stories. Because I was so impressed, that's when I started to create Neil. I made up a lot of drawings, created Neil's look, which is still to this day, rubber-hose funny animal. And, at first, *all* of the characters were rubber-hose funny animals, but I moved away from that pretty fast because there wasn't enough variety. Then, after a lot of planning and sketching and so forth, I started to do the very earliest *Neil the Horse* comic strips.

And so I drew a bunch of them, six months worth or something, and started to try to sell 'em. I made up a sample booklet, printed it up, sent it out to every single weekly newspaper in British Columbia, which was a lot of newspapers, like 50 or so. I was touring around BC with Circus Minimus at that



time, and as we toured around, I used this rented car to visit all the newspapers that I had sent the sample book to, and I got 30 subscribers. So off I went sending them a new strip every week and that lasted for three years or so, something like that.

In the midst of that period, I decided to move to Toronto, because, at that time in Canada, you couldn't really do anything in media of any kind – magazines or journalism or book publishing or anything – unless you were in Toronto. Vancouver was just a backwater and it stayed that way 'til the late '80s. I moved to Toronto in March of 1977 and continued sending out the strips.

While I was still in Vancouver, I joined up with a bunch of other cartoonists after I had been contacted by Jeff Wakefield, creator of *Bubblegummers*, and he and a bunch of other cartoonists had started their own weekly strip syndicate, Great Lakes Publishing, GLP. And so I joined up with them and, at some point, I decided that the weekly *Neil the Horse* pages that I was doing – they were big strips and weren't little daily size – I decided to switch over to daily size, gag strips, essentially. But I realized I had no talent at all for jokes, the kind of joke that needs a punchline. I absolutely have never – to this

day – been able to write a punchline. And so I just did these really weird comic strips, which you can see in the [Collected Neil the Horse] book there. They were surreal instead of funny.

As I used to say at the time, I said, they symbolized comic strips; they weren't really comic strips. They were fantasies and visions and just excursions into strange ideas. And that's what I kept on doing for a number of years. I started doing that in '78, I guess, and kept doing those until 1981 or '82. And then I started having opportunities to do Neil in comic books format. But I was really reluctant. I wanted to still do newspaper strips. I had to accept syndication was not going to happen. I finally said, "Okay, I'll do comic book format." And that's what I did.

I'll tell you one other thing: at the same time I was doing the Neil the Horse newspaper strip and then, early in my comic book format days, I developed another strip called Eureka Street, which was completely different. It was sort of commentary about the real world. I had been inspired by the old Moon Mullins comic strip, which was about these people who all lived in a boarding house. I got the characters all living together in a communal house and I got the strip into a weekly newspaper. I don't think I did very many, maybe 20 of them or something, and then the newspaper went out of business. So Eureka Street stopped, but I liked it a lot and I'm still proud of what I did. Then I started doing Neil in comic-book format you covered that when you wrote about Charlton Bullseye in your [Charlton Companion] book. That was one of the stories I did to try to show off Neil in the comic book format.

CBC: I read in a Toronto Star article about The Potato People. What was that?

Katherine: I kept having all these different ideas for other comic strips and/or cartoon properties, of one kind or another. There was the Theatre Beyond Words company, down in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a little town near Niagara Falls, and I saw some of their shows, and they had this family of characters called The Potato People. They were mimes. It was this family – a mother, father, and Nancy Po-



tato, and a bunch of other Potatoes... I was charmed by them and asked if they'd be interested in letting me adapt it for a comic strip. And they said, "Yes, of course." Then I did a bunch of samples, but it finally didn't happen because I just had too many ideas going on. [Assistant] David Roman used to always marvel and say, "You have so many ideas."

CBC: Did you have other concepts you hoped to do?

Katherine: As I said, Eureka Street was a comic strip that I actually started and the first version was called Grand Hotel. It was contemporary satire on life in the 1980s, about youngish people navigating the tides of modern life. And so I did maybe a dozen strips in a newspaper, in Toronto, and then it went out of business. So that ended that. And I think, at that point, I was getting busier and busier with Neil.

My Neil stories were becoming more elaborate and ornate and detailed, and also I was beginning to think about the ani-

Above: Looking quite thinner than his character design, Neil the Horse debuted in a Sunday-page style comic strip in 1975. Here's the first installment of that continuity series.

Below: Upon joining the Great Lakes Publishing newspaper features comic strip syndicate, Arn turned his property into a daily strip-formatted gag effort, often with trippy and hilarious results. Note the 'shrooms to the south of Neil in this nicely rendered 1978 comic strip.





Above: Neil and his curmudgeonly feline friend, Soapy, make a cover appearance for the ambitious 1980 Comics Annual, projected to be the start of a once-a-year omnibus of Canadian comics. Alas, this was the single edition to appear, notable for including the first comic-book appearance for Neil and company.

when I was doing samples for myself of comic strips to see what I thought would fly, and then I hit on *Neil*, and that was that. But I did the first version, *Grand Hotel*, and I was younger then. I was still in my 20s. That would definitely have been a hippie soap opera. So I guess I carried over that idea of it into *Eureka Street*.

CBC: Were you familiar with underground comix when they were coming out?

Katherine: Yes, absolutely! I subscribed to the *East Village Other* when I was living in Vancouver, in 1968, '69, '70. They were running Crumb and all the really hot underground cartoonists, so every week I would get a jolt of their comix. And, when I first started doing *Neil*, I thought of it as sort of in that vein – I wanted to be outrageous and shock everybody – but I had no talent for that at all. It soon developed into what it became, which was much gentler, funnier, and sweet.

CBC: Were you disowned by the family?

Katherine: No. I'm sure they would've liked to, but no, my father was a just a hideous man. Instead of disowning me, he just became more and more hostile toward me. We eventually tried to have a friendly relationship, but he just couldn't understand

me at all. I didn't, at that time, try to revise *Eureka Street*, but I really enjoyed doing that, although it was difficult for me because the main character of *Eureka Street* was a woman who, basically semi-subconsciously on my part, is based on how I felt. I really was this young woman who was an artist, and her name was Katie, which is where I adopted the name Katherine. And I thought, I better own up to it. I better try to be that character in the *Eureka Street* comic...

CBC: You described it to a newspaper as a hippie soap opera.

Katherine: Oh, did I? Well, I guess it's true. When I first did it, that version I created before I hit on *Neil the Horse*, there was this period of time

me at all. I'm not surprised. No, but I was never disowned. I aspired to it, but it never happened. [laughs]

CBC: So there was no inheritance? You said you and your siblings remained poor.

Katherine: Yes, my father pretended and aspired to be a businessman, but he was really bad at it. He inherited a bunch of money from the family, the rich Saba Brothers fortune. He worked in the store for a number of years, but finally decided he wanted to be his own man, but he just had no talent for business at all. And he just got more and more broke. So there was no inheritance to be had. And, finally, he was living on a reverse mortgage in his fancy-schmancy house, the one I grew up in, and he died completely broke...

CBC: How did you get hooked up with *Aardvark-Vanaheim*?

Katherine: They were from Kitchener, Ontario, a small town not too far away from Toronto. And I had done a number of comic-size pages of *Neil* stories for a publisher [Potlatch], who put out a series called the *Canadian Children's Annual*, several really nice collections. He also published the *1980 Comics Annual*, and I did some *Neil* pages for him. And then somebody decided to have a gallery showing of Canadian comics, so my new comics were exhibited and [A-V publishers] Dave Sim and Deni Loubert saw that show and contacted me. At that time, they were highlighting other cartoonists besides Dave in the back of *Cerebus*. They did three issues with *Neil* as back-up. Then they asked if I wanted to do a comic book. And I didn't say no. I thought that sounded like a good idea.

I had moved to Los Angeles temporarily and, for some reason, they were out in L.A. and we had a meeting. That's where we talked about doing the *Neil* comic. And I should mention, in relation to Los Angeles, that I had hooked up with a very, very good fellow, a man named John Gertz, owner of *Zorro*. He inherited the copyright to *Zorro*, which had been neglected, and there were publishers all over the world creating their own *Zorro* comics and not paying him anything. There was no one to pay it to. It seemed that copyright had been completely abandoned, but he inherited it. And he went around the world saying to them, "I own *Zorro*. You going to have to give me money if you're going to publish *Zorro*." And he did very well with that, and he's a multi-millionaire now.

I forget how I contacted John initially, but after he thought it over for a while, he said, "Okay, I'm going to help you promote *Neil the Horse*." He tried very hard to get me into some lucrative deals. We tried very hard to get *Neil* animated, but that was at later stage. Anyway, he was living in San Francisco, and I would go out from time to time and start scheming whatever we could scheme up. But we never succeeded, unfortunately. But I still see him from time to time. I like him very much. He's a really good guy.

And so I went out to L.A., I think, just to make contact with the larger cartoon community, which was there in Los Angeles. I was just trying to promote myself up as high as I could. And so I kept going back and forth living in both Toronto and L.A. And I did that for most of the 1980s while I was doing the *Neil* comic book, which was fun. And I liked L.A. It was really weird. Los Angeles is a really strange place, but this was at one of the heights of its culture. It was really booming in the '80s, and I just really enjoyed being around all the completely gauche strangeness of the city.

CBC: How did you make a living at the time?



Above: The back cover of The 1980 Comics Annual featured this zany illustration of *Neil the Horse* by Arn.

Katherine: Damned if I know!... But I was making gigantic amounts of money, which is how I supported myself while I was doing *Neil the Horse*, and that's how I would hire people like David Roman and Barbara Rausch, and that's how I would travel around... It turned out that I was a really good businessman, and I'm very proud of that. My father couldn't do it himself, but I seemed to inherit the instinct for running a business from my Saba grandfather. And so I was really successful.

I also wrote for Toronto newspapers, too. I wrote for *Today Magazine*, a *Toronto Star* Sunday supplement, and I also contributed a bunch of articles about pop culture characters for the *Globe and Mail's Weekend Magazine*. The first one was Mickey Mouse for the 50th anniversary, whatever it was. And then I just went on and did a bunch of things like that... I was occupying my mind, complete trivia nonsense, but that was a fun time, a fun period of my life.

And I was also doing the radio programs at that time. I was doing all these things all at once, doing *Neil the Horse*, doing *Eureka Street*, doing newspaper and magazine articles... but, man, I was busy. I had so much energy. I look back now and I think, God damn, I wish I still had that energy! Now I have so little energy now, it's really galling. I still have lots of ideas. I could do all that stuff still with the ideas I've got. I am constantly thinking of ideas for *Neil* stories and other comic strips, and I would love to do it all still. I could go forever, but my body can't go forever.

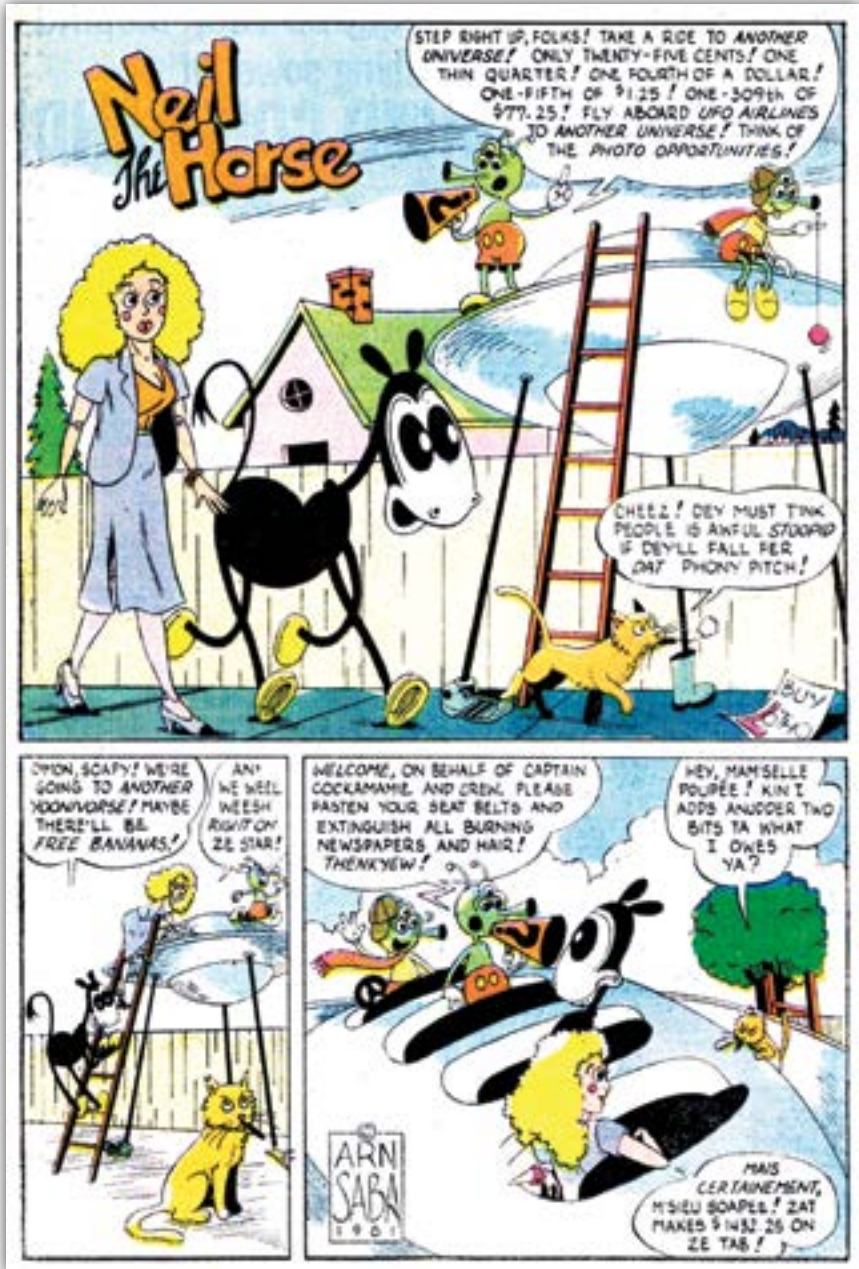
CBC: How was it working with Aardvark-Vanaheim?

Katherine: Oh, it was great. They had the most wonderful editorial policy, which was to let me do exactly what I want and not bother me. It was great because Deni was editor of the offshoots, not *Cerebus*, but all the other comics they were publishing. And, when they broke up, she took the comics and started *Renegade*. She was a really wonderful publisher because she had zero input. I could do whatever I wanted, exactly how I wanted when I wanted, and they gave me the creative freedom to develop *Neil* as I did. And, pretty early in the run, I had been knocked flat by Fred Astaire... the only man I've ever fallen in love with, just struck dumb by his talent.

As a result, I started putting dance in the comics. I think it was in the second issue or maybe the third, and then it went from there. I just got more and more into dance, doing dance myself, and drawing dance and making them part of the stories, and writing the songs. I'd always been writing songs and singing them to people who didn't want to hear them. And so I put songs into the comic book, of course, from the very first issue, I think. And so I stepped off into this completely different unknown territory, which was doing musical comedy comic books.

I remember thinking very hard about it: "Is this a very good idea? Should I do this?" Because it had never been done. As I always say, it was the first and last musical comic book, and my slogan is, "Making the World Safe for Musical Comedy." I wrote a musical play, which was presented on CBC radio nationally. We presented it over five episodes on CBC and, in that play, that's where the expression came up. Poupée said it, "Making the world safe for musical comedy." And I adopted that as my slogan. I played the part of Neil the Horse in the radio play, and then I sold tapes.

Then, in 1986, I produced another tape. This had no story, and this was just a bunch of songs. I had 12 songs or some-

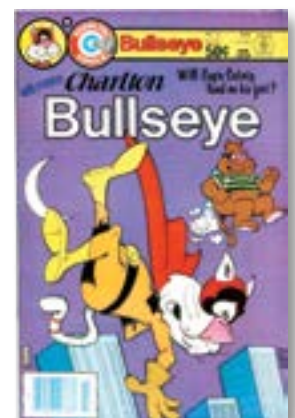


thing like that of the Neil characters singing my own songs, of course. And I sold those tapes, as well.

CBC: Did you play piano?

Katherine: No, I don't play any instrument at all! I don't write down music either. I just make up the songs in my head and I sing them into the tape and someone will write them down for me. I invented the song completely, melody and the words, and sometimes the idea for the arrangement. But I have absolutely no talent at playing instruments at all. I've tried, but you've never seen a musician more terrible than me.

It's important to include that I'm the one and only purveyor of dancing comics, I would say that's an important thread. One writer said that, unlike most depictions of dance in comics, which basically just show people flailing around, what I did, and this is absolutely true – especially when Fred Astaire was in the stories – I would actually create the choreography through the drawing. They would do this and they would do that, and it was very clear exactly what they were doing and how one move led to the next. I was really serious about depicting real dance. So that's just a little detail.

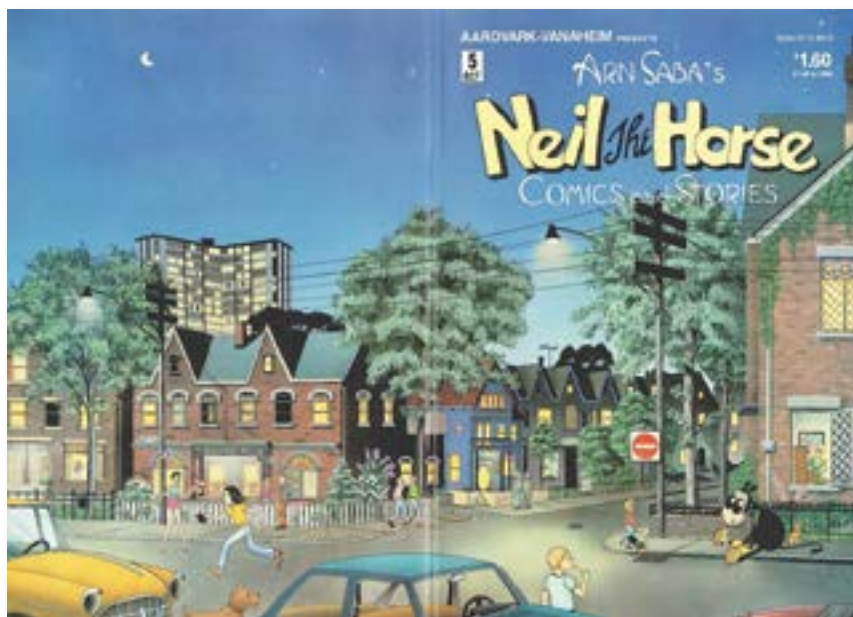


Above: Though payment was only in printed copies, Arn jumped at the chance to have his Neil the Horse appear in Charlton Bullseye. At top is his splash page. Above is the cover of #2 [July '81] by Tim Fuller.



Above: For Neil the Horse's run at Renegade Press, Arn devoted a pair of issues as tribute to his dancing idol, Fred Astaire, who is depicted here gliding his way across a two-page spread, a prime example of the cartoonist "creating choreography through the drawing" (to quote Katherine herself).

Below: Worth appreciating are the wonderfully evocative covers gracing the Neil the Horse series, including this wraparound beaut – #5 [Nov. '83] – penciled by Arn and evocatively painted by Brad Francis.



CBC: I remember hearing that Fred Astaire would insist that the cameraman frame the dance sequence to include him from head to toe, to include the full figure in the shot. You did the same in your panels, correct?

Katherine: Yes, absolutely! I'm depicting Fred Astaire! You have to depict the whole body because he was dancing with his whole body. So, yes, definitely. I wouldn't cheat Fred (I always refer to him as Fred because we're on a first name basis. Well, I am anyway. When I was living in L.A., I used to live near his house when he was still alive, so I always thought I should just go over as a friendly neighbor, bring him over a tin of chocolate chip cookies or something.

CBC: Can you talk about Barbara Rausch?

Katherine: First I'll say as a person I really, really loved her. She died way too young. She died of cancer in 2001. I met

her when I was living in L.A., at a Comic Arts Professional Society monthly meeting, and we became friends, and she was such a good artist for fashions, and she immediately had the idea that she should contribute clothing styles for [Neil the Horse character] Mam'selle Poupée, which was a good idea since I have no talent for fashions at all, even though I come from the Saba Brothers fashion family! We just had a lot of fun, and we'd laugh our heads off working together.

CBC: Who was Gordon Fidler?

Katherine: He was a schoolmate of mine and we started doing creative projects together. We made a movie together, which people really liked, *Dancing Nigel*, and I played Nigel.

The story didn't really have a story, it just was an hour-long sequence of vignettes, and I've been trying to get a copy of it... But, anyway, we just did a lot of stuff together, several movies and a couple of books. Nothing that I really considered very good. Probably the best thing we did was our first thing, the little *Dancing Nigel* movie. And our books had extremely uneven quality of content, but my drawing was just getting to be pretty good by the time we made those books, which was in the late '60s.

CBC: You did the publication, *Magenta Frog and The Second Magenta Frog with him*.

Katherine: That's right. I wouldn't recommend anybody bothered to get copies and read them. Most of it is just garbage, really. Not good at all, but just the very beginning of my being able to draw pretty well.

CBC: Tell me about David Roman, please.

Katherine: He's fairly prominent in the production of *Neil*. When I was just starting to do the comic book, he was the brother of my friend Howie, and then my friend said, "Oh, you should meet my brother, David. He was really into comics." I did, and we instantly hit it off as comic fans. And then, when I started doing *Neil the Horse*, he wasn't involved at first, but he was very interested in watching what I was doing. And then, after I moved to Toronto, without telling me he was coming, he showed up in Toronto, too, saying he'd come to become my assistant. My first thought was, "Oh my God, how am I going to pay this guy?" That was the reason I started doing all the magazine articles and not the radio. I wanted to do the radio, but I had to suddenly start making extra money to pay David...

CBC: What became of him, do you know?

Katherine: He is still living in Toronto, and after I moved away from Toronto and started living all over the place, he stayed there and became very annoyed with me for having left and more or less abandoning him... I left in order to be



in California to make it easier to promote *Neil the Horse* for animation. But, as far as David was concerned, I was supposed to come right back, if the animation didn't fly, and I was supposed to start doing comics again with him. But I didn't. Instead, unfortunately, my transgenderism got in the way. I didn't anticipate this but, once I had transitioned, as they call it – I don't like that term – the entire comics industry turned against me. I was blacklisted. And so there was no more *Neil the Horse* comic book to be done. And so David blamed me. He thought that I had abandoned *Neil the Horse* and him, whereas there I was suddenly in California with no cartoons to do so. Anyway, complicated story.

CBC: You transitioned (for lack of a better term) in '93 or '94?

Katherine: It takes a little time. It was over about three years. I guess I took the first tentative steps, in '92... Early August of 1994 is when I had the big surgery... Now, not every transgender person wants to have surgery or is able to afford it, but I did, and my therapist later told me – Dr. Bill, I called him, I wish he was still alive – that I went through the whole process faster than anybody else he'd ever seen because I was so eager and I had no qualms, no doubts... I just stepped up and said, "I want to get going right now and do it." And so that's what I did. So I hold the land speed record for transsexualism. [laughter]

CBC: How old were you?

Katherine: Quite old. Nowadays, people don't usually start at such an advanced age. I was 45 years old when I met Dr. Bill and got going on the process.

CBC: When did that desire to change genders start gestating? How far back does it go?

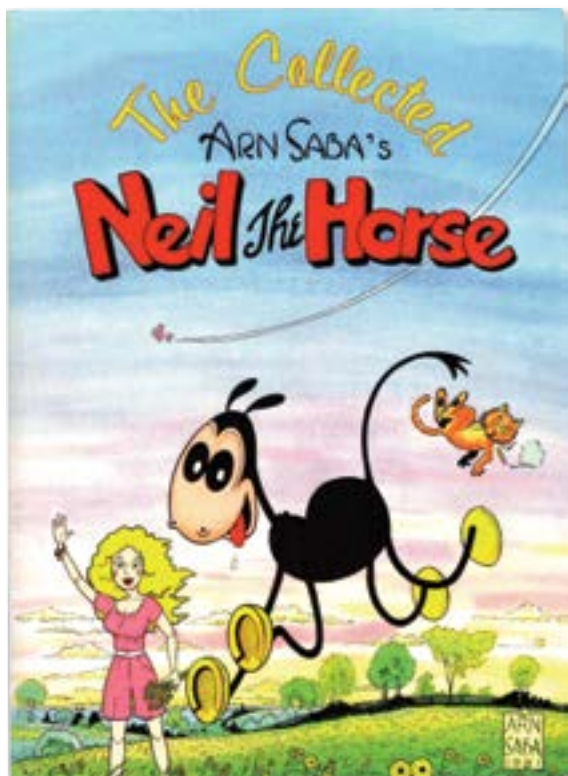
Katherine: When did I realize or feel strongly that I should be female? I was about four years old and it went on for years and years and years and years because there was no reference to it. There was no internet, you couldn't go buy a book about it, the library didn't have anything. There was just a no reference to find out what does it mean if you think you feel like you're the other gender. I told my mother, and she was always very receptive and sympathetic but, of course, she didn't know what to do either, so there was nothing I could do...

I had to start from the very basic question of: "What's going on here? What am I supposed to do about it?" I had

read a book, one book by someone who had transitioned, and so I knew that it was possible... I discovered, by the early '90s, when I was getting into it, I realized there were surgeons all

This page: Items shared by Katherine include the panoramic vista above and image labeled page six of the *Neil the Horse* graphic novel.





Above: In 2017, Conumdrum Press, a publisher out of Nova Scotia, released *The Collected Neil the Horse*, a mammoth compilation of the comic book and comic strip appearances of Katherine's creation. **Inset right:** The gang honky-tonkin! **Below:** Arn in 1979.



Unfortunately, Deni's Renegade Press went out of business. That's why I stopped. I no longer had a publisher. **CBC:** Did you go to San Diego Comic-Con, at all? **Katherine:** Oh, yes. I was a dedicated attendee, but at that point, when Deni went out of business, I decided that it was an opportunity for me to try to develop the animated *Neil the Horse*. That's what I put my energy into through my transition. But actually, at the same time, towards the end of the animation development, I began to think of what would I like to do in comics again, and I did have an idea that I think could have worked, except for the fact I was being blackballed. My idea was I've always been very slow at drawing, unfortunately, I'm a very fast writer. I have been a very slow drawer, and so I thought, "Well, I had tried few examples of this." I could do rough drawings and layouts for pages and get somebody who was much quicker to do the drawing, but I would make sure, I would oversee the drawing carefully to make sure it was in the style that I wanted.

This was in the early '90s, a time when people began to utter the magic words, "graphic novel." In those early days, a graphic novel was a double-sized comic book. Most comic books were 32 pages, so a graphic novel was 64 pages. (That wasn't really a graphic novel; it was just a long comic book.) But I thought, "This could be fun. I'd like to do long comic books." I

over the place...

CBC: I think, when you were roughly five years old, Christine Jorgensen very famously became the first transitioned person in the United States. Did you look at that when you got older and recognize that she was a pioneer?

Katherine: I certainly knew about her. Certainly, all through my young life, I was aware of that, but I looked at it as a one-off. It didn't seem to me to be an example of what I could do. It was presented as so incredibly weird and amazing and strange and somewhat repugnant that it didn't seem to offer me any alternatives that I could recognize.

CBC: You did 15 issues of *Neil the Horse*, correct?

Katherine: Yes and then,

was developing this plan, but it all had to be canceled when I transitioned because I was regarded as a freak, a pervert, and somebody that nobody should have anything to do with on any level whatsoever.

CBC: Did you have people treat you disparagingly or was there whispering...?

Katherine: I mean, a lot of people wouldn't speak to me at all. They would just turn their backs or run away when they saw me coming, and when I would send an email or letter, I would never get an answer. It was just a non-starter and that went on. I didn't give up on getting published in comics until I decided, around the end of 1995, when I realized I had to give up, I had to stop. This was not going to bear fruit, and so then I had to start thinking, "What else am I going to do?"

CBC: The paradigm shifted in, arguably... you would recognize it better than me... the mid-'aughts regarding LGBTQ issues. An entire culture had arisen within comics itself that today would be called "woke" (or whatever), but that is very friendly towards the trans community.

Katherine: Oh, absolutely, yes. If I had been available at that point, I would've been one of the first, they would sign up. But, after that 1995 realization, I packed up all my comic stuff, my huge collection of books and comics, dismantled my studio, and put all of that in a storage locker, and just had to turn away from comics. It was so painful, and so, if I did anything creative after that, it was writing, but I didn't do very much of anything. I was really, really down. I was convinced that I was through, I was convinced that nobody would remember me, nobody would remember *Neil the Horse*.

It was still in that phase, in 2005, when I moved back from San Francisco to Vancouver, where I still am, where I grew up, and I was just getting more and more depressed. I did take up a completely different profession for a few years. I had become interested strangely (and I don't even know why), I became interested in people with mental disabilities, and they often come with physical disabilities, and I wanted to work with them. I thought, "That's not going to conflict with my interest in comics." I didn't want to be reminded about comics.

When I got up to Vancouver, the first thing that happened to me when I got there was I was diagnosed with leukemia, which was very dramatic, and so I had to live in the hospital for six months isolated, couldn't have people come in except those wearing masks. But apparently I recovered because I didn't die. As I like to say, I failed to die. So I was still alive.

Then I found out by — I didn't seek this out — but I found out that I could get welfare money to rebuild my life after having had leukemia. This is my introduction to the miracle of Canadian semi-socialism, which I still take advantage of today. I went to school for a year-and-a-half, took courses about being a social



worker, working with disabled people, and then I got a position doing that. I started volunteering as I was finishing up the education, and it turned out, in the long run, the volunteering part was much more interesting and fun than working. I did that for a while, and then volunteering... I did that for only nine years. I had to leave the job in 2016 because I started to become severely disabled myself.

In the meantime, I was still brooding over what happened to my cartooning career. I felt, after 20 years of being tossed out of the comic business, and because I never saw a mention of my name or *Neil the Horse* online, it was like I never had happened. I was completely forgotten. At least that's what it seemed like to me... The, in 2013, I started to get emails from back east, from Toronto, and I didn't read them, I could tell there was something to do with comics and some organization that wanted me to do something or other, and I was so browned off and sickened by what had happened to me. I just didn't want to even think about comics.

Finally, I got a phone call from Robin McConnell here in Vancouver, who said, "You better read those emails. They're trying to give you an award." And I thought, "Oh, an award. That doesn't sound too bad." So I read the emails and, by gum, they *were* trying to give me an award! They wanted to put me into their Canadian Comics Hall of Fame. This was a group known as the Joe Shuster Awards.

But, by the time I read the emails and talked to them a bit, it was too late for me to plan to go out there to their ceremony and accept the award in person. Then I made a video of thanking them and they played that at their ceremony, and I got a Joe Shuster award... So that kept me willing to be alive. I guess I'm not completely forgotten.

Then, four years later, in 2017, I was given another award, the Giants of the North Award, from the Doug Wright Organization. For that, I had enough warning and was able to get out to Toronto and accept the award in person, and they were such nice people. Those two awards and the flurry of attention that came because of them, that has kept me alive. I was willing to stay alive because I realized that my cartoon career was not for nothing. It was: I am remembered. People like you occasionally will interview me. And when they got the 2017 award, that's also when the big book was put out, too. I feel I've got a tiny little spot somewhere in the history of cartooning and people who like my work *really* like my work a lot, which also helps me a great deal...

CBC: Can you share about that *Neil the Horse* graphic novel? What was it about and what was going to happen in it?

Katherine: Actually, there exists a very rough pencil version of the graphic novel. Somebody could publish that if they really wanted to. The story is of my three main characters, finding this old theater and start putting on their own shows. They promised to buy the theater for \$1,000 down payment, but they didn't even have the \$1,000. Then the story goes on with them putting together a show and also physically fixing up the theater, and there's a ghost living in the theater, Joe Hoo, a performer from back in the old days, who is constantly butting into their business and telling them what they should do... so there's all sorts of twists and turns in the story. Oh, there's a big real estate tycoon who also wants to get the theater... he tries to get in their way and do everything he can to destroy their hopes and so on and so forth... and there also

would've been a bunch of songs in it, of course.

CBC: I think *Neil the Horse* is one of the most charming comic books I've had the pleasure to read – the earnestness behind it... the throwback to the '30s (my favorite era, period), and the "Let's put on a show!" aspect. That's really what it's all about, isn't it?

Katherine: Something that I have always strongly tried to refute is the idea that Neil as a property traffics in nostalgia. I'm not fond of nostalgia. There have been booms for nostalgia at times, and it seems like people want to pretend that they're living in the 1930s and they want everything to be exactly as it was in the '30s. I have no interest in that whatsoever. My stories, my characters, are all about living in this world now, but my strange idea is that it is a good way to live in *this* now, which is becoming more horrible by the minute, this very difficult era, and bring in song and dance.

I've always loved musicals, both stage and movies, because I like the idea that when people want to put an idea across, they sing and dance and *everybody* can sing and dance. I just love the idea that people could break into song in the middle of a conversation. And so that's my recommendation to the world. I think we need to all learn how to sing and dance and express ourselves through song. I mean, it's completely unrealistic, obviously, but that's my message to the world. But not that we need to pretend we're living in the 1930s, not at all. We need to pretend we're living in the 2020s, and we need to sing and dance. So I just want to make that very clear. It's a big different idea than saying it's a nostalgic property because it's not meant to be nostalgic at all.

CBC: I saw this quote, and I cannot think of a better quote about you, which is from you describing yourself as the kind of person who puts comic strips on the radio and dancing into comic books. That said, I'm also impressed with how many newspaper articles were written about you over the years.

Katherine: Well, I was always scrambling for publicity.

CBC: You're good at it.

Katherine: I guess I was a colorful character. When I was being Arn Saba, I was very conscious of performing my whole life. Every day out in the world was performing because I wasn't really a man. I wasn't really Arn Saba. And so now, I just walk around in my neighborhood (when I can walk) and I'm just a nice old lady. I'm not colorful and unusual anymore. Not usually. Well, sometimes I am...

THE COLLECTED NEIL THE HORSE is an absolute bargain at 360 pages for \$25, and the book is heartily recommended by your ever-so humble editor. Please visit the publisher at conumdrumpress.com. Just prior to this issue going to press, Ye Ed. learned from Katherine's friend Robin McConnell that a collection of *Eureka Street* is in the works!



Above: Quill & Quire, a magazine devoted to the Canadian book trade, cover-featured Katherine in their May 2017 issue, which included a 3,300-word article on the legendary cartoonist. **Below:** From the "Neil Goes to Hell" story, in *Neil the Horse Comics and Stories* #1, reproduced from the original art by the cartoonist formerly known as Arn Saba.



Riding the Vortex with Bill Marks

Toronto's William Paul Marks the third on his wild journey in avant garde comic books!



Above: After careers as comic book publisher and race car driving, Bill Marks is today a film producer who also continues to dabble in comics – for the fun of it and for his kids – with diverse movie credits that include *Casino Jack*, *Trailer Park Boys* films, and *Hallmark Christmas* movies, all under the umbrella of Vortex Productions. **Below:** Bill got his start as a teenager publishing the fanzine, *Miriad*, covering geek culture in the late '70s/early '80s, before the phrase was even invented. #5 had Cerebus on the cover.

Conducted by JON B. COOKE

[Interviewer's note: *If the choice of features in this special all-Canada ish appears arbitrary, that's because that absolutely is the case, with all selections being made by my personal curiosity that has nagged me over the years. The stories behind important Canadian publishers Aardvark-Vanaheim and Drawn & Quarterly, to name just two, are well known, and I've got an okay grasp of their histories. But some, like Vortex Comics, an imprint strikingly designed with an eclectic array of cutting-edge titles, was urging me to dig in and find out more, so I did. Here then is my conversation with the Vortex publisher, charming and ebullient Bill Marks, conducted in two sessions, in July and August of last year. – JBC.]*

Comic Book Creator: *Where are you from originally?*

Bill Marks: Born and mostly raised in Toronto, I grew up in the suburbs and had a pretty normal, middle-class upbringing. My dad sold coffee for a living to a small company back then called Tim Horton's, which is a huge franchise in Canada now. I went to school, bought a car when I was 16, and learned to fix cars. My first car was a 1967 Ford Country Squire, then I had a 1966 MGB.

CBC: *What year were you born?*

Bill: 1962.

CBC: *So when did comics come into play for you?*

Bill: Well, I guess I've always read them as a kid. When I was probably six years old, our next door neighbors owned a newsstand and comics were sold returnable back then. So they would strip the covers off the comics, send 'em back for credit from the distributors, but we would get the comics with no covers on them – stacks and stacks and stacks of 'em! This was 1968 and they were all sorts of Marvel Comics – *Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four*, all that great stuff – and the amazing thing for me, I remember, was for the first time walking into a comic book store, which was Bakka Books, the first real comic book store in Toronto. The comics section was run by the guy who later

founded the Silver Snail comic book store, Ron Van Leeuwen. So, before the Silver Snail, Ron had a little counter in the back of Bakka Books. I remember walking in and seeing the covers of all these comic books that I had been reading as a kid, but never knew what the covers looked like!

CBC: *Do you remember what price Canadians were paying for an American comic book in the late '60s?*

Bill: The early ones I was getting were probably 15¢. By the time I was buying them with my own paper route money, they probably said "Still Only 25¢" on the cover and that would've been in the early '70s.

CBC: *Did you note that there wasn't really much offering of Canadian-made comics?*

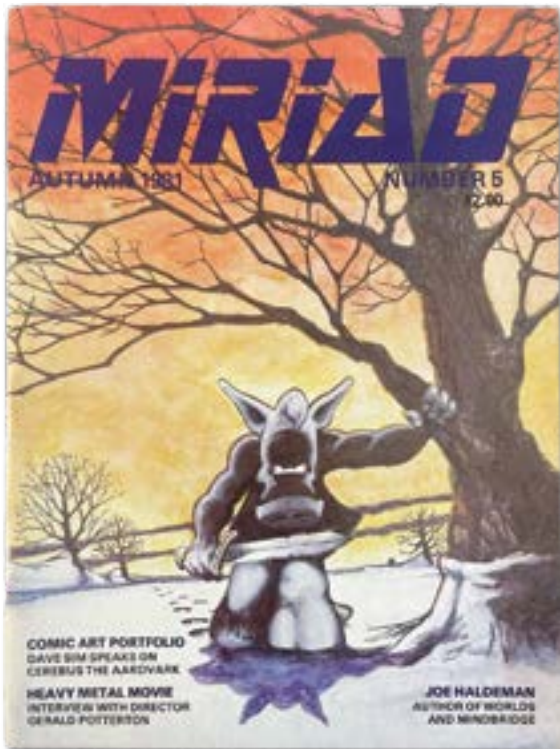
Bill: Well, yes, and then, when Richard Comley did *Captain Canuck*, I remember going, "Oh, that's a cool idea!" Then I think it was Mark Shainblum (who I kind of knew when I was a teenager, ironically) and he came out with a comic called *Northguard*. . . He published a few Canadian-themed comic books at the time. And then, much later, I became friends with a guy named Michael Hirsh, who founded a very successful animation company named Nelvana, named after one of the earliest Canadian comic books, "Nelvana of the Northern Lights," which is what one they called "Canadian whites," which was before my time, but not before Michael's time.

CBC: *So did you know of the "Canadian whites"?*

Bill: Yeah, they were enthusiastic, though the stories were pointless. Little bit of fighting Johnny Canuck fighting Nazis and just copying what was being done in the States and kind of badly. . . The artists of the "Canadian Whites," they were just kids basically tracing stuff they saw in the funny papers. So it wasn't very well drawn. I don't know the economics of that part of the business very well, but I'm sure they weren't paid particularly well. And I think it was just every publisher got a quota for paper rationing during the war or right after the war and said, "Hey, I can print something on this paper and people will buy anything because there's rationing." They were pretty rough, but so was a lot of early stuff. . .

I think if you saw in the Golden Age comics, that the Canadian whites had been more than a blip, you would've seen the professionalism spin from artist to artist and writer to writer in that world. And that's what we saw in the 1980s, in Toronto, when I was first publishing comic books.

I think the first issue of *Vortex* came out in 1982, and I think my first fanzine came out in 1978. And, yeah, I was pretty young and pissed a lot of people off. I was quite young and brash. But, by '87, '88, you had Seth and Chester Brown, and Joe Matt learning from one another. Joe Matt was watching what Chester was doing, and Chester was being watched by Seth and these gangs of artists just all started spinning up one another, doing better and better and better stuff.



And whether it was, and then you see some people from Montreal jamming. I remember an artist named Julie Doucet was doing beautiful work in the '80s, with her mini comics and stuff. I think you hit a critical mass with people all connecting with one another. Then there were guys I was working with – Paul Rivoche, Ken Steacy, Dean Motter, Ty Templeton, Klaus Schoenefeld – the list is long of all these guys who were all around the same age. Some were a few years older, some were younger, and they all just started to spin each other up and do good work. It was great to see.

CBC: Did you view Montreal as being its own distinct scene as compared to Toronto?

Bill: No, there was nothing going on in Montreal. Julie Doucet was it, though there was a pretty good comic book store in Montreal called Capitaine Québec, at the time. [Drawn & Quarterly founder] Chris Oliveros was probably still a kid in high school, and he came along much later. Really, most of the Drawn & Quarterly artists were either self-published or were Vortex artists when Chris came along and picked them up. When I started to move out the business, Chris picked up Seth, Chester Brown, Maurice Vellekoop, and they all started with Vortex. Chris just kind of picked up what we'd left lying on the street and getting rotten in the sun.

In the early days, we'd optioned *Mister X* for a Hollywood movie with the guys who wrote *Top Gun* and we got very distracted by that. The movie never got made, by the way, but we saw the whole Hollywood thing and did that and then... it's funny, I was telling you earlier, I always loved cars and I bought an old race car and started racing and loved car racing and really just wanted that to be what I did. So I went on what was called at the time the Escort Endurance Challenge. I did several years on that circuit doing endurance racing.

So, because of my racing, I got to know a bunch of the people at NASCAR, and Vortex had one of its more successful lines, which were the NASCAR comic books. We published *The Legends of NASCAR* comic for a few years and that was a massive business for us. So we had this funny company that was publishing *Mister X*, Howard Chaykin's *Black Kiss*, Chester Brown's *Yummy Fur*, and *The Legends of NASCAR*, all at the same time. And, really, the only unifying factor was it was stuff I liked.

It's kind of funny: there's a filmmaker named Ron Mann who did a movie back in the late '80s/early '90s called *Comic Book Confidential*, the first major documentary about comics. He was a Toronto filmmaker and it was his first big documentary. So the Hernandez brothers, who were doing *Mister X* for me at the time, were in it. And Art Siegelman, Robert Crumb, and Chester Brown were big parts of it. Later on, Ron made a lot of great movies and he started a company called Films We Like, and I always liked that. I always thought of Vortex Comics as "Comics We Like," and it didn't matter whether it was Howard Chaykin doing soft core porn, or comics about Dale Earnhardt and Richard Petty, or Chester doing crazy autobiographical stuff or Bible comics, or Ty Templeton doing this great comic he did back in the day was called *Stig's Inferno*. So our line was across the board.



Mister X, being this very slick, color, glossy thing, was quite influential back in 1983, when we did it. But again, it was all just, if I liked it, we did it. It was a funny business back then. I mean, we were in early through no act of genius, just good luck and timing. I met Phil Seuling back in probably 1979, and a guy named Bud Plant, who I also met in the late '70s. This was back when Comic-Con in San Diego was still in a church basement.

Phil basically did the whole East Coast distributing comic books, and Bud did the whole West Coast distributing comic books, and I got to know both of them. And so, when I started Vortex Comics...

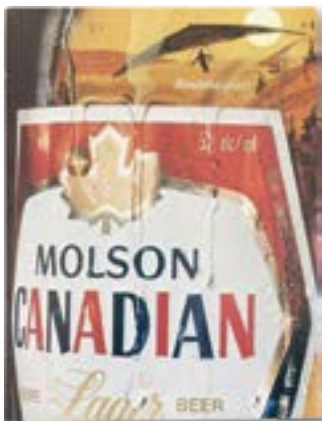
you gotta figure it was like '79 when I started really trying to develop the first Vortex magazine, which was published in 1980. There really weren't alternative comics, there was leftovers of the undergrounds, there was *Cerebus*, there was *Elfquest* and not much else...

CBC: There was Jack Katz's *First Kingdom*...

Bill: But *First Kingdom* was not of the quality that *Elfquest* and *Cerebus* were, which I hate to say it because it was sincere, but this was before *Love and Rockets*, before *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, before *Mage*... Eclipse and Pacific Comics were still just starting, and Fantagraphics wasn't publishing comic books yet. They were still just doing *The Comics Journal*. So early days,

Above: What, Bill cocky? The Vortex publisher hams it up in a publicity photo that accompanied his Comics Interview #40 ['86] feature. **Below:** Of course, it was the trendy series *Mister X* that put Vortex Comics in the limelight, a post-modern, noir-ish, and remarkably designed title featuring the enigmatic, drug-addicted titular star. Cover of #1 [June '84] by Paul Rivoche.





Above: The back cover of *Miriad* #5 [Autumn '81] sported a full-color Molson beer advertisement, a lucrative achievement Bill attributes to dumb luck, though doubtless the brewery executive was impressed with the sheer chutzpah of teenage Bill Marks. The sale of prominent ad space to such a prominent corporation got *Miriad* the attention of movie studios. **Below:** Covers for the initial 10 issues of *Vortex*, the flagship title that debuted in late 1982, featuring artwork by an extraordinary array of Canadian artists, plus one from a supremely talented cartoonist from Los Angeles.

the guys at Last Gasp were still going strong, but were still very much the San Francisco underground world.

CBC: Can you tell me about your fanzine?

Bill: The fanzine was called *Miriad*, and it first came out around '78. This guy, Kevin Davies, and another artist had published the first issue of *Miriad* together, and it was black-&-white and nicely printed. It was just stories drawn by the two. I remember I met Kevin because he had stacks of old *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines he wanted to unload cheap, and I bought them from him. We got to know each other and we became friends, and then the other artist didn't want to do *Miriad* anymore, so I stepped in with issue two.

The dumbest luck of all time happened when we were trying to sell ads. I said, "If we're going to make this happen, we've got to make some money, so we're going to sell ads." We got ads from local comic book stores, Dungeons and Dragons stores, and some of the Toronto book publishers bought ad space in *Miriad*. But the big stroke of luck was when we walked into the Molson brewery and said, "Hey, do you want to buy an ad in our little magazine?" We called it a magazine! And the guy at Molson liked us. He was a regional marketing guy and he just said, "I got some money to spend and I like you." We were too young to even drink, but we successfully sold an ad to Molson Brewery!

I love this story: this guy, who was the regional marketing guy at Molson back in the day and who went on to become Molson's CEO, he's a guy with good taste, so he bought an ad. But then he said, "We don't have any black-&-white ads. Can you do color?" So our answer was, "Of course, yes! Of course we can do color!" [laughs] But we knew *nothing* about color printing! We knew *nothing* about color separations back then,

which were so expensive to do in the day. So this was all expensive stuff, but Molson offered us a couple thousand bucks for the ad, and that paid to basically print the magazine.

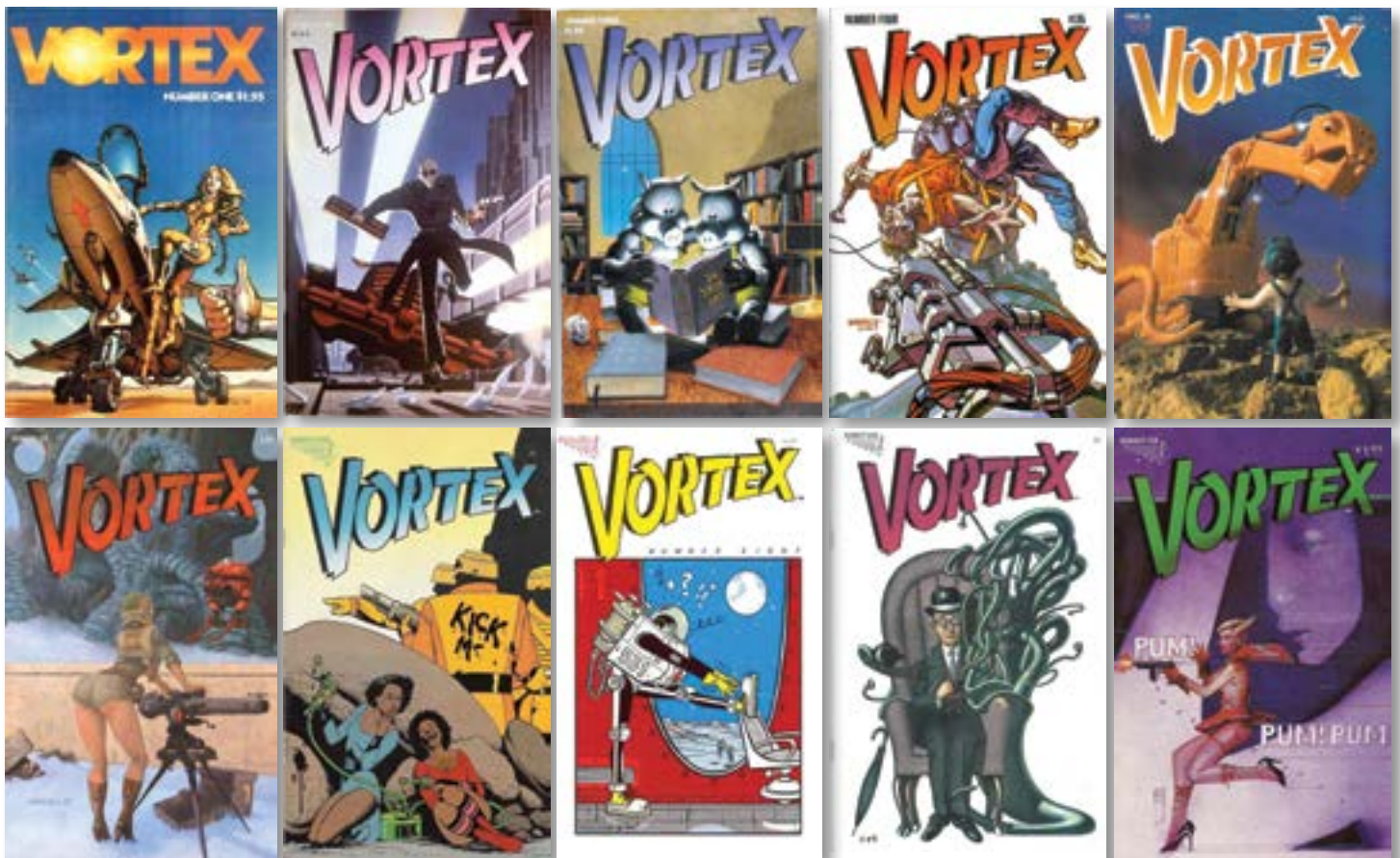
We went to glossy color. Issue two has black-&-white fan art on the cover, with some fun stuff inside. But issue three is glossy color magazine. I think we ended up doing eight or nine issues of *Miriad* over the course of a few years. And, now having a glossy color magazine, all of a sudden I could go to the movie companies saying, "Hey, do you want to buy an ad in our glossy color magazine?" So we started getting ads from Columbia Pictures and 20th Century Fox, and they would advertise upcoming movies.

But more importantly, the movie studios would send us all the press materials for upcoming movies, so *Miriad* featured news and stills from brand new movies that no one had ever heard of because they hadn't come out yet. There was *E.T.* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, David Cronenberg's *Scanners*, and the list goes on of all of the great science fiction movies that were coming out in that period from about 1978-85. And so *Miriad* was full of that material...

CBC: This is the testament to your personality, right? I mean, how you are able to get these things. Did you have an outgoing personality that got positive responses from people?

Bill: I think of myself that, if I believe in something, I will be passionate about that thing, and I think people respond to sincerity and passion, and I think that was all it was about. I was a teenage kid, but I loved what I was doing and was really had that fan enthusiasm that you could have when you were a teenager. Remember, there's no internet, there's no media, there's no, there wasn't even VHS rentals yet...

CBC: So with *Miriad*...



Vortex TM & © Vortex Comics, Inc.



I think I'll publish a comic book this time." And a lot of artists, top and up and coming artists would come into the Silver Snail to buy comics. So I knew a few people like Ken Steacy and Peter Hsu, and later Ty Templeton, and others who would end up contributing to *Vortex*. And so I decided to publish an anthology comic book, and [then-girlfriend and future fantasy author] Tanya Huff wrote the story in the first issue and an artist named Peter Hsu drew it, and Ken Steacy did the cover. So we published *Vortex* #1.

The name *Vortex* came from standing in the front door of the Silver Snail comic shop with Tom Stormonth, as I said, "What am I going to call this magazine?" I was just a teenager, so I came up with all kinds of horribly pretentious names for it (most of which I thankfully cannot remember). Across the street from Silver Snail, there was a little row of stores (all gone now). One was a pizza place called Pizza Pizza, another was a clothing store called Fab, a hip '60s clothing store, and the third was a juice and espresso bar called Vortex. And Tommy turned to me and said, "Well, what about calling it, 'Vortex'?" I go, "That's a great idea! Let's do it."

So Vortex was named after a juice and espresso bar at the corner of Queen and Beverly Streets, in Toronto. And the joke was later, when we were having a lot of problems with censorship of some of our more risqué comics, we decided to create a second brand and call it Fab Comics, named after



Above: Young Bill mugs for the camera in another pic. **Inset left:** Dave Sim skewers Bill by depicting him as "Bill Mox" in *Cerebus* #92 [Nov. '86]. **Below:** The great Harvey Pekar gives Bill a thumbs up in *American Splendor* #15 ['90] one-pager. Art by Chester Brown.

Bill: Let me share just one more story before we get into Vortex Comics. When I was 16, there was a science fiction convention in Toronto called Alpha Draconis, which I thought was totally cool, and I really liked it. But, in talking to people, I was told there's not going to be a Beta Draconis or a Delta Draconis, and nobody wants to run the next convention. Now this speaks exactly to why I've done what I've done with my life: I said, "Well, I'll do it," and everybody looked at me and said, "You're just a 16-year-old kid. You can't do that." I thought, "Why not? How complicated can it be? So we ran this convention in '78 called Ozymandias... It was successful in a lot of ways, but then the politics amongst the fans complicated it.

We did a special issue of *Miriad* for the convention... But, yeah, the whole thing with the comic, the fanzine, the convention, and all of that stuff...? I was just a guy who would say, "Well, why can't we do that?" I wouldn't say, "Oh, that can't be done." I was too young and stupid to know it couldn't be done, so I just went and did it, and it worked. It worked or *Miriad*, it worked for the Ozymandias convention, and it eventually worked for Vortex Comics.

What happened with *Miriad* was I was no longer enjoying Kevin's company anymore more than anything else. A lot of hard work went into putting out *Miriad*. I dropped out of high school by that point in time and I was looking for something to do. I was working part-time at the Silver Snail comic bookstore, at that point, just as a cashier.

There was a guy who worked for Diamond Distribution for years and years and years, but he worked at the Silver Snail there. His name is Tom Stormonth, who now owns a bookstore in Gananoque, Ontario, Beggars Banquet Books. But Tommy was the manager of Silver Snail at the time, and I was a part-time cashier, and I was talking to Tommy, saying, "I got to publish something. I really enjoyed publishing, but





Fab, the clothing store next to Vortex. And if we ever had to go by a third company, I was going to have to call it Pizza Pizza Comics. [laughter]

CBC: How did you see Vortex at the beginning? Was there something you were looking at you wanted to emulate or was it just the best Canadian stuff you could find?

Bill: It was aspirational. It was *Heavy Metal* magazine. It's was, "Can I do something like *Heavy Metal*?" Obviously we couldn't afford color, and I made it comic-book size, not magazine size. It was easier to get it racked in the comic book stores. And just the economics of comic book stores were better than the economics of magazine stores. I could teach a course in that.

CBC: You learned a lesson from Andromeda, and that was very smart of you, I would think, to format it to fit the comic racks.

Bill: Right. The bestselling issue of *Miriad* was the one we did about Dave Sim and *Cerebus*, the *Aardvark*. It outsold every other issue of *Miriad* we ever did, and that's how I discovered the economics of direct sales in the comic book marketplace.

CBC: Now, was it through that issue when you first encountered Phil Seuling and Bud Plant?

Bill: That's exactly it. And, to show you how naive I was, I'd seen in the front of *Elfquest* a statement saying it was distributed by Seagate Distribution, which was Phil's company. And because I was a naive kid, I assumed this is a vast international organization. So I grabbed the Toronto phone book and I'm very disappointed to learn there is no Seagate Distribution

in Toronto. But things move fast and I asked around, and I got Phil's number and I phoned him up. He actually bought earlier issues of *Miriad* magazine than the *Cerebus* issue, and so did Bud. But it was that *Cerebus* issue that really cemented my relationship with both Bud and Phil. [Discussion turns to the American Splendor #15 [1990] story, "A Tribute to Bill Marks" – Y.E.]

CBC: What was the gist of Harvey [Pekar]'s story?

Bill: Well, Harvey's story was a one pager, and it's basically he picks up the phone [to talk with Chester Brown]... And then the [third to] last panel is Harvey saying, "I should do a story... paying tribute to the much maligned Mister Marks." It was called, "A Tribute to Bill Marks." It was really nice. He was really generous. We became good friends 'til the end of his life. Really, really nice guy. Cleveland and Toronto are very close together, so I would see Harvey and Joyce with some frequency and just always really enjoyed Harvey's company. And I can't thank him enough for having written that cartoon, because, of course, the guys at *The Comics Journal* would do anything they could to publish bad stories about me because the Hernandez brothers were working for me on *Mister X*, and they didn't want them working on *Mister X*. They wanted them working on *Love and Rockets*, and they saw me as a threat. So *The Comic Journal* published five or six very negative articles about me over the years, all of which are cited in Wikipedia somehow.*

CBC: So there is a direct correlation between the success of the Dave Sim issue of *Miriad* and you contemplating using the direct market?

Bill: One hundred percent, yes. One, there's a direct line from A to B there. Bud Plant said to me, "You should just do a *Cerebus* cover on every issue of *Miriad*."

CBC: How long were you black-&-white interiors? Was that throughout?

Bill: Well, we went back and forth. So *Vortex* was always black-&-white. When we brought out the first *Mister X* comic book in 1984, it was supposed to come out in '83, but the art was delayed and delayed and delayed. So, in '84, *Mister X* came out in full color. It was full-color glossy, and the only other full-color glossies at the time that I'm aware of were *Epic Illustrated* from Marvel. And Frank Miller had just done *Ronin*.

So we were a very rare company there. *Mister X* was always full-color glossy for the 14 issues of its first run. And then, *Black Kiss*, we did black-&-white with color covers on purpose. It's always b-&-w interiors for *Black Kiss*, mostly to save money on color separation costs, which were ruinously expensive back. The *NASCAR* comics were all full-color. *Yummy Fur* was b-&-w, as was *Stig's Inferno*. Before Klaus Schoenefeld died, the first issue of *Kelvin Mace* was b-&-w, and the second was full color. *Doc Chaos* was full-color. *Badlands*, written by Steve Grant, was color.

CBC: I've always been struck with how handsome the *Vortex* books were, having a consistently sophisticated presence in the titles that made them a step up from anybody, really, in the business. I don't know if *Kelvin Mace* would have typi-

* An index for *The Comics Journal* references a two-page article headlined, "Hernandez Brothers leave *Mister X* over payment dispute" [#101, Aug. '85], *Mister X* review [#105, Feb. '86], and Bill's comments during a "Creator vs. Corporate Ownership" convention panel discussion [#137, Sept. '90].

Above: Gorgeous *Vortex* #11 [Jan. '85] cover rendered by Jaime Hernandez. **Below:** Toronto Star article from Oct. 20, 1988, that includes a photo of Bill, garbed in a *Mister X*-shirt, sitting in the Silver Snail comics store between an inflatable Spider-Man and *Mister X* cardboard stand-up (only his torso and legs visible). The story relates that the first issue of *Black Kiss* had a print run of 30,000, and had appreciated in value from \$1.55 to \$15 since the summer – well, at least at the Dragon Lady comic shop in Toronto.



cally appealed to me, but the design of it was so appealing, I picked it up. Is Dean Motter a major part of that? Or where did this graphically appealing sensibility come from?

Bill: Dean was the creative voice of that sophistication.

There's no question about that, but we also stepped each other up in a really good way. I was a very brash young kid and Dean was probably 30 years old at the time. Dean had been the art director at CBS Records Canada for many years and started his own company, which I ran, called Diagram Studios (later called Modern Imageworks). And we did probably 200 record album covers together and won several Juno Awards for album designs for bands like Triumph, Loverboy, the Nylons, and Anvil... Over 200 album covers back when albums were vinyl. And because we had the design studio, we had the facilities and the eye to what could be done.

CBC: Did you just let Dean be Dean or were you involved?

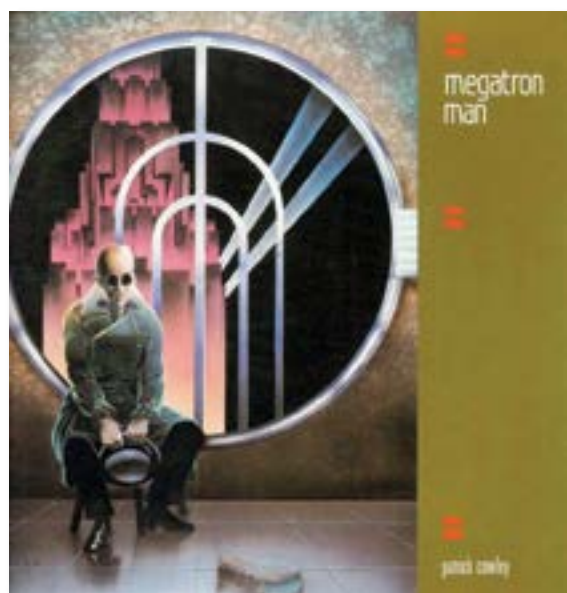
Bill: Well, I think we were all a part of it. We had a studio together, but Dean was the main voice, no question about it. We also had really good designers in their own right working there. Mitzi Hamilton did a lot of the opening spreads in *Mister X* and *Black Kiss*. A lot of that was Mitzi's work, but Dean was the voice. But there was some really cool stuff happening in publishing at the time. So you had two magazines out of London, England – *The Face* and *i-D* – and they had really cutting edge graphic design work. And then, out of New York, you had Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine really defining a lot of stuff graphically. And we were part of that scene, especially part of the London [England] scene. You notice, at a certain point, a lot of the artists and writers working for *Vortex* were all based in London.

In the early days, we would go over to the comic book convention in London, with Seth, Chester, and Dean, and meeting people there, including young Alan Moore and young Neil Gaiman. In fact, I think one of Neil Gaiman's first published stories was a little *Mister X* short story ["Heartsprings and Watchstops," *A1* #1, 1989] that Dave McKean illustrated. I remember this guy who owned the Forbidden Planet store, Mike Lake, he collected Ferrari and I loved cars. So Mike lent me a Ferrari once, and Chester and I drove up to Alan Moore's place in Northampton, spent the night there... But another great influence on what we were doing at *Vortex* – and he's



Above: An unpublished *Mister X* test page, penciled by Paul Rivoche and inked by Dean Motter. After the Hernandez brothers left the title, Bill and Dean briefly toyed with the idea of Dean taking over the book altogether but Dean couldn't afford time away from his graphic design studio, thus they decided on Klaus Schoenefeld and Ty Templeton for the art chores on *Mister X* #5 [Aug. '85], the first after *Los Bros.* left.

Inset left: The album cover of the Canadian pressing of Patrick Cowley's *Megatron Man* vinyl record featured Dean's painting, which would spark the genesis of *Mister X*.



not with us for a long time now – was Lou Stathis. And Lou had been an columnist at *Heavy Metal* and then an editor at *High Times* and *Reflex*. And so Lou was a big part of what we did in the early days *Vortex*, as well.

CBC: *Vortex* focused on a niche audience. I mean, it certainly wasn't the super-hero crowd, maybe arguably a more *Heavy Metal* crowd, but nonetheless, it wasn't a niche that would make you rich... or did you think that maybe you could?

Bill: No, never. In fact, when the various booms happened – the b-&-w comics boom, the Image Comics boom – when all those booms came along... even early days, when the Pinis were making a lot of money off of *Elfquest*, and Dave Sim was making a lot of money off of *Cerebus* at the time, *Vortex* wasn't necessarily a part of those boom periods. Quite honestly, I made a fortune off of the *NASCAR* comics but, at no point, was that, "Oh, I'm going to get rich doing this. I'm doing this because I love it." And, in many ways, when I saw what happened with Todd McFarlane and what happened with



Above: Prior to the regular series launch, Vortex produced this beautiful Paul Rivoche poster as a promotional teaser. Three more followed before Mister X #1's debut.

Below: Poster promoting a Mister X story arc, "The Radiant City Story," sent to comic book shops in 1989. Evocative artwork by Paul Rivoche.



Eastman and Laird, while I certainly had mixed feelings of jealousy and admiration at the same time, it's like, "Wow, look at what these guys have done." I never imagined that comic books would possibly be something like this, let alone the Marvel Comics movies. But I had a belief back then and I still have that belief now and it actually guides everything I still do to this very day: do something you love, do it sincerely, and you'll find an audience. Maybe that audience will be huge or maybe that audience will be just enough to keep you doing what you love doing.

CBC: Did you start a family?

Bill: In 1986, I married Deborah [Glencross] and my two kids, Max and Mercedes, were born in '87 and '88. Deborah worked at Vortex, lettering and coloring on

Mister X and other comics. Our kids have written comics over the years and movies and other things, too. Neither of them are in the business at the moment, but they were weaned on comic books.

CBC: What's really interesting is the eclecticism of the output of the different titles that you had at Vortex. I read an interview where you said you were better off as a publisher than as an editor. Is that true?

Bill: That's true. I generally had editors working at the

company. Ty Templeton did the job for a while, as did Ken Steacy. Lou Stathis did the job for a time... Over the years, if they had good taste and I liked them, I gave them the freedom to find material.

CBC: How did you vet the titles you were coming out with? What was the process? Was it through the editors where you'd get potential titles or would people pitch you directly?

Bill: Mostly people pitched me directly, certainly in the early years. It could be as simple as Ty Templeton coming into the office, showing me some stuff, and me saying, "This is great," and he'd put it in Vortex. (And it turned out Ty was the fastest cartoonist alive, like Jack Kirby-fast!)

He started a regular comic for us within a year, *Stig's Inferno* and Ty's roommate was Klaus Schoenefeld, and Ty and Klaus showed me *Kelvin Mace*. I was like, "Yeah, this is great!" And, around that point, I made Ty editor of Vortex for a while.

In comics, *Mister X* appears first on the cover of Vortex #2, but his first appearance was actually on an album cover for [Patrick Cowley], on this painting by Dean Motter. Paul Rivoche had seen the painting and did his own version of it as an idea for a comic book. But the painting existed long before there was anything even remotely like a comic book. But I saw that painting in Paul's studio one day and said, "Let's put that on the cover of Vortex." So that was on the cover of #2.

I got to know Dean and Paul, and we actually agreed to make *Mister X*, the three of us together, and Paul worked on it quite diligently for well over a year. We've released all those beautiful posters to promote it. We have great orders for it, 30-40,000 copies for the first issue. It's a color book. So you needed high order numbers, but Paul just went down a creative alleyway and never came back out.

So, after a year of waiting for #1 of *Mister X*, we finally decided to move on from Paul. I reached out, Ken Steacy had gotten to know the Hernandez brothers, and he reached out and I talked to them, and they agreed to come on. They actually said that it's like, "Wow, we've been waiting for this comic book for over a year. We're really excited to see it and now we're doing it." So then they did it.

CBC: How would you characterize the origin of Mister X? Was it organically brought together?

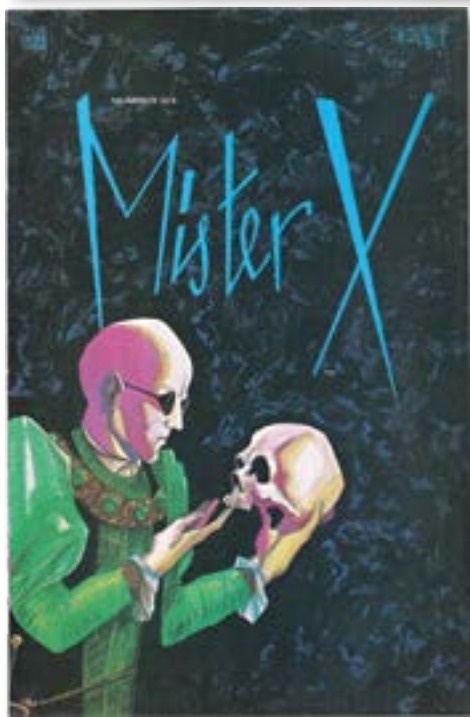
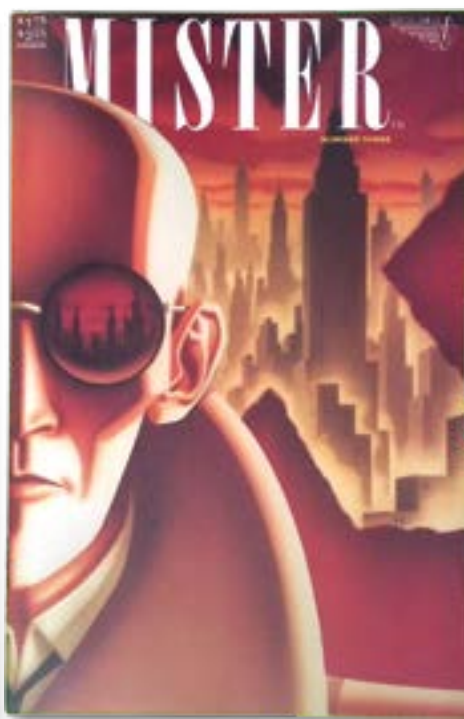
Bill: So Dean did the first painting, and Paul and Dean jammed on an idea for this comic. Dean had a Tom Wolfe book, *From Bauhaus to Our House* ['75], a fairly short book that was influential on *Mister X*. I think Dean was very fortunate because he had studied with Marshall McLuhan at the University of Toronto. Dean also collaborated with McLuhan's son Eric on many works over the years. So I think McLuhan's ideas about media and culture had a big influence on Dean, which had a big influence on *Mister X*... I think *Mister X* took from various things that were happening in the culture and it was really Dean and Paul came up with the idea. But Dean certainly came up with most of the architectural aspects. Dean was a big architecture nerd... And eventually some of the art that Paul did for *Mister X* got published as back-up pieces in the collections, and the work was beautiful.

It's interesting: Brendan McCarthy also worked with us for a number of years on different things, and you see his magnum opus, as far as I know, is the *Mad Max: Fury Road* ['15] movie... Unknown early history of Vortex: if you look at one of the Vortex magazines, there's a cartoonist in there named Joe Haidar, who ended up becoming one of Disney's top 2D animators, culminating with his creating *Hercules*.

CBC: You released a batch of posters for Mister X well before the first issue. In retrospect, would you have waited?

Bill: Yes. We released the posters anticipating four months of poster releases before the first issue of the comic showed up. I don't remember the actual months, but the first poster said an August 1983 release for *Mister X* #1, but the issue didn't come out until June the next year. It was delayed to the point distributors wanted to redo the orders, and it became commercially very, very harmful...

CBC: So too much hype way too soon?



Bill: Too much hype way too soon. I mean, certainly, by the time it came out, everybody was excited for it and it lived up to the anticipation because the Hernandez brothers did a great job. Their four issues were beautiful. Ty and Klaus's issue was good, though not as beautiful as Hernandez brothers issues. The Seth issues took a while to find their legs, but once they did... obviously Seth's gone on to incredible success. And then, sadly, just at the very end of the color run in *Mister X*, we gave an unknown cartoonist a shot and it just was awful, and that killed the first run of *Mister X*.

CBC: Klaus Schoenfeld died young.

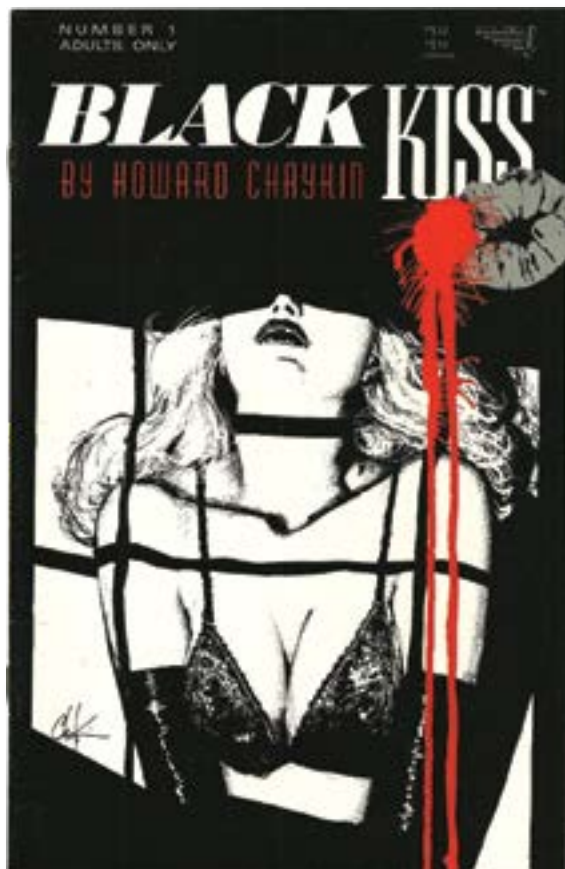
Bill: Yes. He died, I think, at the age of 23, from a heart attack while out jogging one morning. I spent a fair amount of time with his parents after he died. He had had a surgery for a hole in his heart when he was an infant, and he had what was called an enlarged heart, but he was a pretty athletic guy. He and Ty Templeton, my wife Deborah, Maurice Vellekoop, Dan Milligan, and a

bunch of other people who worked with us came from the Ontario College of Art together. They were all basically in one cohort. We were very lucky. So many great people came out of OCA at that time...

So, anyhow, I met Klaus through Ty, and we all became fast friends. Klaus was best man at my wedding and he had a very lucrative job working in advertising, made a lot of money doing what they called animatics back then... He did a lot of that work right out of art college, but he loved comics and wanted to do comics. Klaus came in with *Kelvin Mace* #1, which we published and it did really well. And then Klaus and I went down to San Diego for the Comic-Con and this company in Paris was publishing *Mister X* posters as art prints for the French market and they were also publishing Moebius's stuff. We became friends with Moebius's wife and she invited us to their place in Santa Monica, where we stayed with them for a few days. Moebius was impressed with Klaus's talent and they became friends.



Above: After becoming pals with Moebius, Klaus Schoenefeld channeled his art for Kelvin Mace #2 [Feb. '86]. **Below:** Black Kiss #1 [June '88] by Howard Chaykin.



And then, when we got back to Toronto, and we were going to publish *Kelvin Mace* #2, which was going to be black-&-white, following up on the success of #1. And Klaus comes in the office with this complete Moebius comic! [laughs] Which was just beyond beautiful and, it was so gorgeous, we decided to do it in color because it really demanded it. And it's funny, because we probably lost money on it in color. We would've made a lot of money with it in b-&-w, because the first one did so well. And then shortly after that, Klaus died and that was the end of that. We published a memorial edition of *Kelvin Mace* #1, and used the money to fund a scholarship at OCA that was given out for, I think, about 10 or 12 years before

its endowment was depleted.

CBC: So tell me about *Black Kiss*. How did that come about? Did Howard Chaykin come to you?

Bill: I'd known Howard socially for a number of years. He was a big fan of *Mister X*, and he liked what we were doing

– *Yummy Fur* – and, our personalities, we're a similar type of character, Howard and I. Somebody once described us as Howard would spit vinegar and Bill would just spit spoiled wine. So we were good friends for a long time. I still actually consider Howard to be a good friend, though I haven't seen him in many years. It was a lot more fun before he went on the wagon, and I think he's been clean and sober for a long time now. He was also a voracious reader of *everything*. He introduced me to writers like Jim Thompson, whose work I was not familiar with.

Lou Stathis was the big influence on Howard bringing *Black Kiss* to Vortex. Howard had been back and forth between New York. He's a New Yorker, but lived in L.A. because he was writing the TV show, *Viper*,

or something like that. I think he was getting frustrated in TV and Lou met with him and said, "Well, Howard, we'd all been huge fans of *American Flag*. Now, are you ready to do something really dangerous? Why don't you come to Vortex?" And Howard says, "I have something in mind and it's really dangerous."

So we negotiated the deal for *Black Kiss*, which was good for Howard, as he controlled the rights and got 'em back, which is why other publishers have subsequently published *Black Kiss*. I only had the rights to publish *Black Kiss* for a period of 10 years, but no movie rights or anything like that. And that was a fine deal for all of us. We at Vortex were good at marketing and promotions, one of our real strengths. So we were able to promote *Black Kiss* by saying, "Howard Chaykin is making the most dangerous comic book ever." Then Diamond refused to carry it. Eventually they backed down on that, but the news of Diamond refusing to carry it just made people even more interested in it. Quite honestly, it was the best thing that could have happened to promote the comic.

Then I came up with the idea of, "Why not actually bag it at the printers?" At our graphics company, Dean and I did that with album covers, using all kinds of packaging, graphics, and mailing out PR things and stuff. So we knew a lot of the technology available on the line at printing plants. You literally could start with blank paper on one end and have a comic book stapled, trimmed, and wrapped in plastic at the other end of the same press line. We originally worked with Ronald's Printing, but they got scared of the [sexual] content after a while. And I had to find a new printer, so we reached out to a friend, a really nice guy who was art director of *Penthouse Forum* magazine, and asked, "Where does *Penthouse* print? We need somebody who's not going to stop printing our magazines because of the content." We moved our printing from Ronald's over to company down in the States, where we printed the remaining six or eight issues, and, as part of that deal, *Penthouse Forum* actually ran some pages of *Black Kiss*.

CBC: I presume *Black Kiss* sold really well, right?

Bill: At its peak, *Black Kiss* might've sold 130 or 140,000 copies. Remember, it was just 16 pages, self-cover. It wasn't a 32-page comic. I wanted to keep the cover price down. So we brought it out monthly. And the nice thing, we were able to get it out monthly, which we never were able to do with anything other than *Yummy Fur* and maybe *Stig's Inferno*. There was always huge gaps of waiting for artists, waiting for me to have enough money to pay the printers for various reasons. But there were always gaps in our production schedule, and I think the exceptions were *Yummy Fur* and *Stig's Inferno*, and then the one we were able to release a new one every month without failure was *Black Kiss*.

CBC: What was the thinking? Was there ever a 16-page comic book beforehand? Was it to work within Howard's schedule?

Bill: I wanted to keep the cover price down. I wanted to bring it out monthly rather than bi-monthly. So it was a factor of, "Okay, with it 16 pages instead of 32, we could charge \$1.25. And if you're a buyer at the newsstand and comics are \$1.50, and this is \$1.25 looks like a value, even though it's sealed in plastic." And then, the other thing is, by making it 16 pages monthly rather than 32 bi-monthly, we were able to build a momentum with it that we wouldn't

have done with a bi-monthly schedule.

CBC: So it was a success story to the end?

Bill: So much so that, after [the regular run of] *Black Kiss*, we released three 52-page collections called *Big Black Kiss*, and then we released, in a graphic novel format, *Thick Black Kiss*, and then we released a hardcover version called *Hard Black Kiss*.

CBC: Just kept up the innuendo, eh? [chuckles]

Bill: Yeah, we had a lot of fun with those, and the stores liked them. They sold and everybody seemed pretty happy with the whole thing. And, quite honestly, in a post-*Breaking Bad* era of crime stories, the story of *Black Kiss* is pretty mild. And, in an era of ubiquitous internet pornography, the pornography in *Black Kiss* is pretty mild, too. So it's funny how times have changed.

CBC: *Yummy Fur* came to you as a new title, right?

Bill: Chester had been self-publishing mini comics under the imprint of Tortured Canoe, which gave no address, no indication of who was doing them. Some of the stuff was signed CWDB,* but we didn't know what that meant at the time. And the author of the *Yummy Fur* mini comic, and there were eight or nine of 'em from Tortured Canoe. And so I had started seeing the mini comics appear in shops in Toronto, most notably, a really good magazine shop called Pages... I remember bringing them into the office one day and showing to people, saying, "Guys, this stuff's crazy! This is so good. Who the hell is doing this?" And so we had made up all kinds of hypothetical stories about who Tortured Canoe would be... So the word came out, and Chester just came into the office one day and said, "Hi, I hear you're looking for me."

It was at the time, post-*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and I think Dark Horse had just had their first big hit with a thing called *Boris the Bear*. And that was the beginning of what the black-&-white comics boom. *Cerebus* was already at issue #50 or 60 by then. But, all of a sudden, these b-&-w comics just were everywhere, and I see the height and nadir of the boom being *Boris the Bear*. But that's what got Dark Horse started...

When the b-&-white comics boom began, I could use toilet paper inside two covers and it'd probably sell. So we were able to experiment with a bunch of things that might not have had a commercial opportunity otherwise. And *Yummy Fur* was one of those things. *Those Annoying Post Bros.* was definitely one of those things, as well. That also came to us from Lou [Stathis], his connection to Matt Howarth. And

* The cartoonist's full name is Chester William David Brown.



so, at the height of that, we were able to publish a lot of interesting material because the stores were buying anything that was a b-&-w comic book, hoping it would be the next collectible.

CBC: And *Yummy Fur* was a step up from the tidal wave of garbage that came out during the boom.

Bill: There was a company in Ottawa called Aircel Comics, I think they were doing something called Elflord and they were making a fortune off of that utter garbage.

CBC: I didn't know they were Canadian... So, can you speak to the long-running *Those Annoying Post Bros.*? How did that come to you?

Bill: That came through Lou. Matt Howarth was this crazy genius... and so he was doing the *Post Bros.*, which we did. And then he would did this thing called *Savage*

Henry, which we brought out during the b-&-w boom because you could sell anything and why not have two titles from the same artist? Nobody was faster than Matt Howarth. So writing, drawing, churning the stuff out, we were printing it as fast as he could draw it. And I really liked the *Post Bros.*... So Matt was just, he was a great guy and very interesting human being, who was good to talk to... and I just loved Matt's stuff. We published a ton of issues with the *Post Bros.* There wasn't really until the *NASCAR* was in full swing. And then we lost the rights to the *NASCAR* comics, and, at that point, we were fairly heavily invested in that. And then, by the mid-'90s, the industry was dying.

We didn't have the *NASCAR* comics anymore, which was the thing that was keeping us alive, and so [*Savage Henry* and *Those Annoying Post Bros.*] went off to Rip Off Press. They continued to publish it for a time, I believe, which was a loss. And then Chester went off to Drawn & Quarterly in Montreal. Seth hadn't worked for us for a while, and he was doing stuff for D&Q, as well. And so I think by '94, there just wasn't a way to make a living publishing comic books anymore...

If anything, one of the things that irritated me the most about the industry back then is that professional publishers were not seen as a serious commodity, a valued thing. There's always somebody willing to do the work for free. And if you were associated with anything successful, "Oh, you were riding on the backs of the artists and writers," as opposed to being their partner and their collaborator. So this was in an industry that didn't, I really feel, appreciate somebody who took the risk and who did a lot of hard work was bringing to the table. So, it was, at that point in my life, real easy to leave the industry.

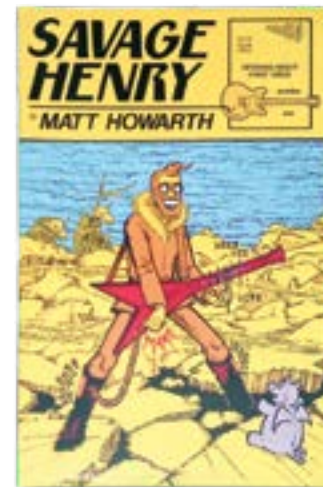
CBC: Were you bitter?

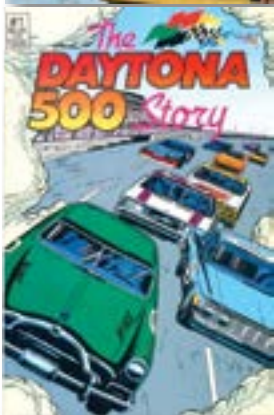


Above: Lapel pin produced by Graphitti Design. **Inset left:**

Yummy Fur #1 [Dec. '86], the first of 24 issues Chester Brown produced with Vortex. The title continued for eight issues at Drawn & Quarterly.

Next page: The trio of *NASCAR* licensed comics Vortex published in the early '90s, which utilized the talents of Herb Trimpe, Dan Spiggle, and Don Heck, among others. Plus a pic of Bill from Comics Interview #40. **Below:** Inaugural issues of Matt Howarth's Vortex titles, *Savage Henry* #1 [Jan. '87] and *Those Annoying Post Bros.* #1 [Jan. '85].





Bill: No, not bitter, but every bit of enthusiasm I had for what was possible in comics was pretty dead by the mid-'90s.

CBC: The Comics Journal reported on alleged non-payment to the Hernandez brothers for their Mister X work. By accounts, they finally got paid in 1988. How did you process that? And how did that affect your reputation within the business?

Bill: All of that? It hurt my reputation. I think it really hurt my reputation, and I think it was done with intent by [Fantagraphics publishers] Gary Groth and Kim Thompson. I think they saw me as a competitor. They saw that I was publishing better stuff than they were publishing in many cases. And they saw me as a threat because Hernandez brothers were working for me as well as them. And so they intentionally smeared me and, okay, they had the power to do it. And it hurt my reputation a lot.

And it's the funniest thing: I think I told you last [interview session], it's like one little article in *The Comics Journal* says I was eight months late paying a bill, which was true. I didn't have the money and they left and I needed to keep the comic book going. So I was paying the new artists instead of them, and eventually I raised the money to pay them with and I did. So I lived up to my commitments. But the article never said that. The article said they left for non-payment and Harvey Pekar writing, "A Tribute to Bill Marks," saying, "Oh, Bill paid me on time," that didn't get as much ink. Like people say, "If it bleeds, it leads," right?

CBC: I reckon. When you were asked about controversial things, you were being frank, you were being candid. You were saying, "Yeah, I'm late with this" and "There's some merit to what they're saying," though you still defended yourself. You have this candor. I wonder, if you look back at it, in retrospect, and think, "Maybe I should have zipped my lip a bit more"? Like the nickel comment in *Comics Interview*,* you made a little joke that nobody would get if they hadn't read *The Comics Journal* piece. That was unnecessary for you.

Bill: It was. I was a brash young man and I didn't like people – still, to this day – don't like people telling me what to do. [laughs] And, in terms of the interviews and the quotes, it's like there was definitely no love lost in my attitude towards all of those guys. Though the guy who did the interview, I considered a friend at the time, a guy named Tom Heintjes, who I quite liked and it's why I was completely unfiltered with him, and he even, I think, offered to not print some of that stuff, but I said, "Go ahead, I don't care." And, in retrospect, was that a mistake? Yeah, absolutely. But do I care? No, didn't care then, and don't care now. You've got to live your life the way you believe is right. And for me, that's

* In the *TCJ* #101 article, Gilbert Hernandez said, during a visit to the brothers, Bill dismissively "tossed a quarter at me and said, 'Here, here's your money.'" Bill told *TCJ* he couldn't remember the incident and blamed it on having "sucked down a couple of cases of Stroh's [beer], I might have just done it as a joke – I didn't mean to hurt Gilbert's feelings." In *CI* #40, Bill said, "Obviously there has been an article that casts some doubt upon the integrity and financial solvency of Vortex Comics. The article contains factual information. I have spoken with the fellow who wrote the article – since its publication – and, you know, told him that he certainly did present the facts, but I felt they went on a bit. Yes, I owe the Hernandez brothers some money. Yes, they have been paid every nickel they are contractually obligated at this time. Yes, I will be paying them in the future the rest of the money they are owed."

pissed a lot of people off. I can't tell you the number...

CBC: Now, to be frank, you had said that Howard Chaykin before his recovery was a lot of fun to be with and less fun to be with afterward. Was your candor alcohol fueled?

Bill: I don't know. No, I think it was much more ego fueled. A very brash ego from somebody who... I think, if I look back on it, I feels like, "Hey, I'm doing a lot of good stuff here and nobody seems to care." That's probably how I felt back in the time. "I'm doing some really good stuff here. I'm making a difference. I'm getting stuff out into the world that wouldn't be out in the world otherwise, and nobody seems to give a sh*t, and some people seem to hate me for it, and if you hate me, f*ck you." That was always my response: go ahead and hate me. I don't hate you. I really just don't care.

CBC: But the proofs in the pudding that it's what you published and in a really interesting, fascinating line of comics that almost, they're not related to one another, other than that their creators are really just letting their freak flag fly, just letting it out and just doing what they want. To me, you've done good.

Bill: Thanks. I know that, in retrospect, at the wise old age of 63 and would say, if you look at the movies I've made, it's exactly the same – *Casino Jack* with Kevin Spacey, or *Forsaken* with Donald and Keifer Sutherland, or *Anything for Jackson*, a small little horror movie we made five years ago, that is fantastic. Or the two David Bezmozgis movies I've made... about the Jewish community in Toronto in the '80s and '90s. And I love having made those movies.

CBC: What was your favorite aspect of *Vortex Comics*?

Bill: What was really my fondest memory of all of the things that we did would be, when Chester would have completed a new issue of *Yummy Fur*, he would bring it to me in large paste-up for each panel to paste onto a board to create a page. These were almost *Prince Valiant*-size pages. And I would sit down with Chester, not knowing and not having a clue what he was going to bring me, and I would read it and he would watch me read it. And generally I would go, "Wow, Chester, that was great!" Once or twice, I may have made a comment like, "I think we can get away with that." And I think one time I might've asked him to change something and I probably regretted having done so. But that would be my most positive memory from publishing the comic books: just Chester bringing in a new issue of *Yummy Fur*.

CBC: Do you have anything else to say about *Vortex Comics*?

Bill: I was glad to have done it. I'm glad I'm still publishing comic books to this day. If you go to vortex-comics.myshopify.com, and you can see the new comics that we're putting out. They're very self-indulgent. None of them are going to change the world. Two of them are written by my children, so that's fun. They're both good writers, so I wanted them to have a chance to see their work in print. My daughter has written and produced a feature film and my son has ghost-written a number of novels, but I thought it'd be fun for them to have their own comics. So we have one called *Queen of Skulls* that Mercedes writes. We have one called *Chaos Breaker* that Max created and writes. *Queen of Skulls* is based on a fascinating period in Portuguese history. And then we have one called *Dr. Awesome Woman*, where an actor and producer that we like to work with came to me and said, "We'd love to create a comic book around these characters." I thought, "Let's do it"... but for the most part, few noticed them at all.



Reid the Milkman's Tough Love

An appreciation of the quirky, delightful comic book cartooning of Canada's David Boswell

In all started in heartbreak... "Heartbreak Comics,"* that is, the comic strip by Ontario-born cartoonist David Boswell, which introduced his most memorable character, Reid Fleming, the World's Toughest Milkman, two-fisted and cantankerous star of comics that added so very much to my comics reading in the '80s. What made an impact about Boswell's ongoing story of a combative dairy delivery guy was that it was so damned funny, never mind breathtakingly original.

The Slings and Arrows Comic Guide called Reid Fleming, "a great comic creation, bridging the gap between the underground and slacker generations" and Canadian comics historian John Bell wrote in *Invaders from the North* it was a "manic masterpiece," but Boswell, who initially focused on the star of his "Heartbreak Comics" strip, Lazlo, the Great Slavic Lover, thought his signature character was a once-only concept.

In an interview with Joe Sacco, Boswell revealed, "I had Reid in my sketchbook when I came out to Vancouver, but nobody had seen it, and it was only meant as a one-off anyway." A single page emerged from that sketch and was described by Sacco: "The Man of Milk beating up someone for making fun of his milk truck, pounding down a bottle of rye as he zooms off, pouring milk into a customer's goldfish tank, and then threatening, 'Seventy-eight cents or I piss on your flowers!'"

*Yes, nerds, I'm aware that the comic book, *Heartbreak Comics*, actually followed Reid's first issue; I'm talking about the same-named comic strip that appeared in Vancouver's *Georgia Straight* underground newspaper, got it? So back off already!



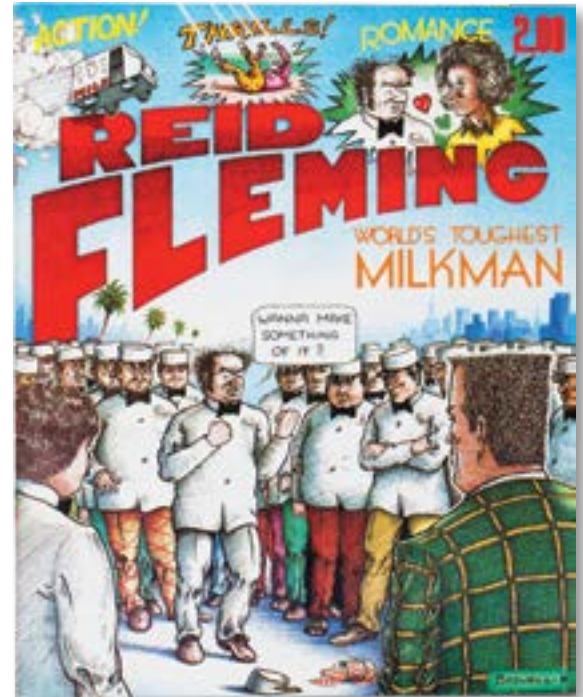
Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milk Man, Heartbreak Comics TM & © David Boswell.

Boswell said of that page: "It's the cornerstone of the entire Reid Fleming personality. It's tough to continue in some respects because everything is summed up in that one page." And yet, if the entire saga of the milkman to date is any indication, like sequences have been played and replayed in endless variations, along the way never betraying the character's beloved cult status ever since.

Not long after Boswell self-published *Reid Fleming* #1, Hollywood started throwing option money his way, first with SCTV's Dave Thomas hoping to make a film adaptation, and while too bad for Boswell that fame and fortune has thus far eluded him, we're all better off keeping the pugnacious working class stiff just in the funnybooks.

What had made *Reid Fleming* such a unique comic book since the '80s boils down to the excellence of the Boswellian production's entirety, combining the utter absurdity of its storylines and subplots and the artist's inimitable style, from meticulous crosshatching to elongated lettering. It's instructive, too, to learn from late, great Comics Reporter Tom Spurgeon, who had the opportunity to interview Boswell at TCAF one year: "Re-reading [*Reid Fleming*], I was reminded how little in the way of narrative fussiness there is in what Boswell does, how he avoids the tried-and-true technique of suggesting a greater reality than might actually exist on the page. I find that brave as far as general creative choices ago, to kind of put it out there, full-blast, beginning to end, nothing held in reserve. It also became clear to me while diving back into his comics that Boswell is one of the funniest set-piece makers and dialogue-honers to ever work in comics."

I remember well what a jolt it was to experience *Reid Fleming*, *The World's Toughest Milkman* (the title alone made it irresistible!) for the first time, to marvel over how such an offbeat, idiosyncratic series was here, in my hands, seemingly made just for me. As I stood in front of the comic shop wall racks, I'd swear there was glow emanating from the comic book, representing a shining proof that the art form was capable of boundless promise. But, truth be told, what I recall most of all was standing there laughing my butt off!



Above: In 1980, David Boswell self-published Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Mailman, maybe the funniest comic book and lead character to have emerged from that decade. **Inset left:** Boswell followed up with Heartbreak Comics in 1984. Soon Eclipse Comics was reprinting both titles. **Below:** The cartoonist himself in 1998.



— Jon B. Cooke



Chip Zdarsky's Amazing Double Life

Where we analyze the various personas of the Canadian comic book writer/artist/humorist

by JON B. COOKE

[Interviewer's Note: Certainly the delightfully amiable and unassuming Steven Murray, a.k.a. Chip Zdarsky, is one of my favorite Canucks, partly due to the fact I interviewed the writer/artist at length for my short-lived ACE: All Comics Evaluated magazine 11 or so years back. There's also the fact that, on very short notice, he cheerfully consented to, not one, but two interview sessions for this article and, well, I love his work on Sex Criminals (the title that launched his comics career in earnest), all of his humor stuff, and the Public Domain series, with its spin on creator rights and corporate ownership. Plus he's a good egg. Funny, too. So let me introduce you! – JBC]



Above: Chip Zdarsky's initial claim to fame is as artist of Sex Criminals [#1, Sept. '13], cover by Chip, the humorous crime series described as "Bonnie and Clyde meets The 40-Year-Old Virgin." **Below:** Chip's cover of Public Domain #8 [Sept. '24], a series he writes and draws.



Finding the real guy is no easy task. Like there was that time Steve Murray's little brother, his plus-one as a guest at San Diego Comic-Con, was trying to get his attention while Steve was signing at his artist alley table. "He was standing, like, maybe 20 feet away from me," Steve said. "Then he turned to get my attention and he went, 'Steve! Steve!' But I didn't lift my head at all. I didn't even register it, but as soon as he said, 'Chip!' my head shot up. I'm like, 'What?' I didn't respond to my real name at a comic convention and it unnerves me in normal day-to-day life with family and friends when somebody calls me Chip."

The man's professional alter ego is, of course, Chip Zdarsky, a persona the Alberta-born gent adopted for a life as comic book creator. "My God," he exclaimed, "like when I first saw a therapist and I told her about the Chip Zdarsky stuff! I swear she started licking her lips, just counting the dollar signs in her eyes, with her thinking, 'This guy's going to be with me for a while!'"

Steve's original intention was to keep his invented personality distinct and separate from private life, but Chip Zdarsky's success made that impossible. "I think, 'Oh,

whoa, that's weird, because those two things in my life should never meet.' But I'm more easy with it now, because Chip gets recognized in the street, and my parents and my wife are a bit more accommodating of it all now." With a chuckle, he added, "My mom and dad now proudly proclaim themselves, 'Mr. and Mrs. Zdarsky,' when they come to my signings."

As for the distinction between them, Steve said, "Obviously Chip and Steve are very similar – I'd be creepy if they weren't – but I crafted Chip as an online character. He was a bit more of a sad-sack funny guy, whereas, in reality, I was pretty well put together. In the early days of comic conventions, I'd wear a cowboy hat and fake glasses to really kind of give the character a bit more distance from myself."

MADE IN CANADA

Before delving into Chip Zdarsky's raison d'être, I asked about Steve Murray's early years. "Born in Edmonton, I spent my first few years in Stony Plain, Alberta," he shared, "and then grew up in Barrie, Ontario. Life started off very rural, basically farmland, and then it was suburban in Barrie, an hour or so north of Toronto. My first comic shop was there – Beaver Comics (a very Canadian name) – and it was the best. It was an old dentist office which these two guys turned into a comic shop. All the new issues were in the reception area and all the back issues were in the procedure area, and it was still very obvious that it was an old dentist office."

As for what got Steve addicted to funnybooks, blame it on Jim Shooter and Mike Zeck. "I was buying them at drugstores and then, when I got hooked on comics, it was *Marvel Super-Heroes Secret Wars* #7.* And the problem with that was, I'm realizing, 'This is issue seven! Well, where are issues one through six?' And that's when I realized there was such a thing as comic shops and I started hunting down previous issues of that series in these weird basements until the aforementioned Beaver Comics finally opened and I had a *real* comic shop in my town. Yeah, it was life-changing – a whole place dedicated to the things that I loved!"

As an older brother and dedicated fan of the House of Ideas, Steve hatched a scheme to keep abreast of the Distinguished Competition. "My thing with my little brother was, he's three years younger than me, and so I was into Marvel Comics, but I also wanted to read DC Comics. So I got my

* Yes, Steve Murray actually used the full, official name for a comic book series referred by most everybody else in fandom as simply *Secret Wars*, proof of his comics-geek bona fides!



Marvel Super-Heroes Secret Wars TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Sex Criminals TM & © Matt Fraction and Chip Zdarsky, Public Domain TM & © Chip Zdarsky.

brother to buy DC and then I would read them. I even went so far as to, when I started to get into the *Overstreet Price Guide*, pricing comics, I convinced him to let me look after his comics to 'protect' them, so the entire collection just resided in my bedroom, so I could read them whenever I wanted. It was great! The perfect plan!"

As for drawing, Steve explained, "I was always drawing, but I never really considered it as a possible job. Maybe I did in grade eight or nine, when I started to kind of do my own fan comics." Those homemade efforts were, he said, "Really sad ones, where I had a version of myself, a little character named Andy, who was much cooler than I was, but looked just like me and all the girls really liked them. They happened to look like girls in my class. I would do these comics about Andy going on all these cool adventures and gaining super-powers and finding bad guys and having to choose between the girls in his class. Yeah, it was super-sad, truly super-sad comics."

He continued, "And then, in high school, like most comic creators when they were in high school, I would start a comic that I would never finish. I did a few pages of a 'Spider-Man in the Future' comic – and this is before *Spider-Man: 2099* – I maybe got as far as three pages in. That was my trajectory: three pages into these giant epics that I would just abandon."

"So, by the end of high school, I was pretty much disabused of the notion that drawing could be a job, so I went into graphic design because I believed, 'Oh, *that's* where you make money doing art.'" But, after attending the program for a year, instructors told Steve he drew too much to be a graphic designer. "So then I went into media arts and lasted for three days when I realized I wouldn't be doing anything visual, and I then did art fundamentals for a year, and then illustration for three years. I could have been a doctor with all my schooling!"

In illustration school, Steve was explicitly instructed not to pursue sequential art. "They didn't want to see comic book work, nor fantasy stuff or anything that even hinted at genre stuff, because they were focused on picture books, editorial art, and advertising work. So me and a few guys in that program, we would secretly doodle our own comics on the side for fun. Now, the funny thing is, decades later, that program very proudly references myself, Ramón Pérez, Jeff Lemire, and Kagan McLeod as program graduates, now embracing the idea of comics as, it turns out, one of the only things you could do where you could make money!"



UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Asked who were his biggest influences as he toiled away as a wanna-be comic book artist, Steve said, "Oh man, that's such a hard one. It changed so much over time. John Byrne was the big one when I was young, because I was essentially copying his work and he was important enough to me that I followed him over to DC for *Man of Steel*, but you lose those influences as you go on and then it changes. Kevin Maguire was a *much* bigger influence the older I got, especially when I was leaning more towards humor stuff. In college, Dan Clowes was massive and I think you can maybe see a bit of his influence in my work, as well. It's hard. Being asked about influences feels more like a question for other people than for the person who's being influenced because I can't see it. When I draw, I just see bad drawings in what I'm doing."

About the Canadian scene Steve said, "As a kid, I knew John Byrne was Canadian. That was huge for me as a kid, just knowing that. And then, when I moved to Toronto as a young man, you heard the stories of the alt comic legends in town, like Seth, Chester Brown, and Joe Matt, and sometimes you get a sighting of them at the Beguiling comic shop. It was very exciting. And you knew that now-defunct comic publishers came and went in Toronto, but it wasn't really until I started the [RAID] studio with my friends that I really got to know exactly how many people in Toronto were in comics and then through TCAF [Toronto Cartoon Art Festival] as well, because I was really supported by the Beguiling, especially in my early days. And when they launched TCAF, I was kind of a part of it from the start, and that's when you meet all the other comic creators who are all struggling and scrimping and saving to put out their zines, whether it's like Jim Zub, Jeff Lemire, or Ramón Pérez. It was a cool little community and it still is... Toronto's great."

Above: Chip, photographed by comics colleague Gerry Duggan.

Inset previous page: The cover of Marvel Super-Heroes Secret Wars #7 [Nov. '84], the comic book that turned Steve Murray into a collector. Cover art by Bob Layton.

Inset left: The old location of Toronto comic book store The Beguiling at its former location in Markham Street. Today, it resides on College Street, where Ye Ed. visited in 2018, and it remains a superb purveyor of alternative comics, you betcha! **Below:** Jesse Farrell's relief sculpture of Howard the Duck is based on Joe Quinones' design of the character created for the Chip Zdarsky-scripted HTD series in 2015.





Above: Though officially never on the ballot, Steve Murray ran a spirited campaign for mayor of Toronto in 2010, which he played up in his National Post newspaper column.

Inset right: Chip produced an all-ages series, *Monster Cops*. This is the cover of #4 [Oct. '06]. **Below:**

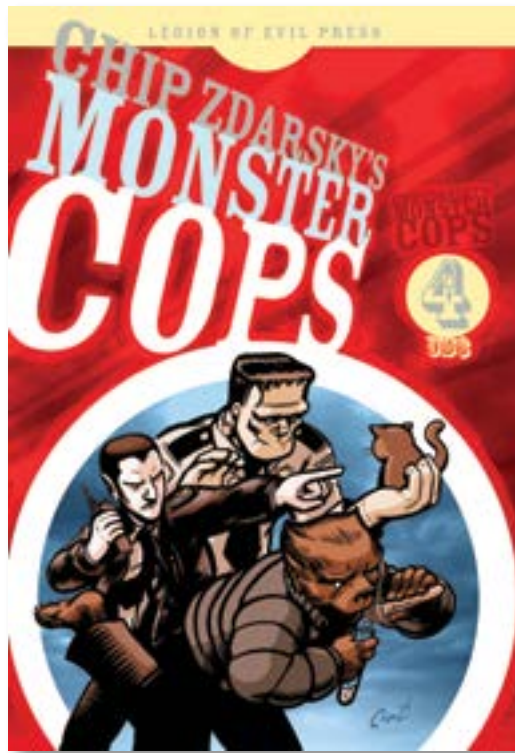
Steve poured his many talents into his newspaper gig as "graphic columnist," a job title he bestowed upon himself. This illo accompanied his 300th column titled, "Extremely Bad Advice." How many Murray self-caricatures can you spot?

As for any interest in comics as he got older, Steve said, "You go through the phase of where, in high school, I was still collecting comics, being a Wednesday warrior, buying mostly Marvel and then started to get into Vertigo when that launched and I enter my Goth phase where I have my own Ankh necklace and my black trench coat. But then, when I went to college, I just didn't have the money. There was no comic shop near me and I didn't have the funds. So I basically stopped at that point and it was on the other end of college, when I got to Toronto, where I start to get into Dan Clowes, Chris Ware, and that kind of stuff."

THE MAKING OF ZDARSKY*

After college, Steve became the cartoonist, columnist, and unofficial mascot for Toronto-based newspaper, the *National Post*. "But I was also doing work for

* While your humble correspondent did not cover Steve's post-college years and transition (if you will) into Chip Zdarsky in this chat, we did talk about it for the 2015 *ACE* interview, quoted a little here.



The Globe and Mail, which is their competing newspaper. There was a conflict that arose in which I stupidly did an illustration for one paper slamming the other paper." As not to incur further grief from his day-job editor but still moonlight, Steve created his now legendary persona.

"I stole the last name from a friend's ex-girlfriend, who was really cool, but he broke up with her and we all hated him for doing so. So, it was an 'in memoriam' thing, taking her last name." Selecting Chip as a first name was in homage to *Peanuts* cartoonist Charles Schulz's "Sparky" nickname.

Steve worked for 14 years at the Post as their "graphic columnist," a position he created.

"Basically, I could do whatever

I wanted for them. I was the guy they would send out to the nudist colonies or get me to scale a building dressed as Spider-Man or... you know, go to a sex club and do a story about being there. Or run for mayor! I ran for mayor in 2010!"

(Remember *The Hunt of Red October* movie scene, where this Russkie is speaking his native language and the camera zooms into his lips and suddenly we hear his lines spoken in English...? Well, from hereon in this feature, we're referring to Steve as Chip, so when you hear Chip, think Steve, okay?)

The Zdarsky persona appeared prominently in Chip's participation with online message boards, where he became reacquainted with the comics world and interacted with those in the business, like Kurt Busiek and Mark Waid, and some destined to become pros, like Matt Fraction and Kelly Sue DeConnick. Around the turn of the millennium, he co-founded Toronto's RAID collective. And then Chip hit the road promoting a collection of his college comic strip, *Prison Funnies*, and then *Monster Cops*, an all-ages title, where Zdarsky made his real-life debut on the con circuit.

FRIENDS WITH FRACTION

Like Steve Murray's, Matthew Fritchman's invented name would become a professional moniker in the comics world after using it in online forums. Thus came Matt Fraction, a name synonymous with superb comics writing, and one linked with Chip due to the pair's hugely successful collaboration.

Asked if he learned anything witnessing his pal's career, Chip replied, "Oh, 100%. I became friends with Matt during the Warren Ellis forum days, when I was working at the newspaper and, I saw Matt putting his comics out and getting hired by Marvel and doing smaller titles and working his way up. And I talked to him almost every day about it. Seeing his and Ed Brubaker's trajectories at the same time definitely taught me to not get too emotionally invested. As in never look at the companies as being family. How do I say this...? Just don't get your heart broken by it. Put your heart somewhere else



is the main thing. And also, especially with Matt, the biggest lesson was you don't have to move on to the next *big* thing. Matt was most miserable, I'd say, probably working on *X-Men*.

"The first time I actually met Matt in person was at a convention where he was promoting *X-Men* #500 [Sept. '08]. It was this big anniversary issue and he was down. It was not a good experience for him being in a room full of *X-Men* fans, having to answer all these questions. But what did he do after that? *Hawkeye*! Which was like a nothing character, really. And it was given to him as almost an apology for when *Inhuman* fell apart and they were like, 'Okay, well, we'll give you a *Hawkeye*' (or whatever). And then he took this tiny character, this tiny book, and made it massive and made it amazing."

And verily, around the same time as *Hawkeye*, there came *Sex Criminals*, the story of Suzie and Jon, who both gained the power to freeze the clock when they climax. So, to save Suzie's library, the couple start to hold up banks. Debuting in September 2013, the title was a prominent success for Image Comics and life-changer for the writer and artist team.

"It's a weird thing where, when we first started talking about making it, Matt and I, we were figuring out story and it started off as a dick joke book. Our solicits even sounded like that when we announced it. And then, as we started making it, it kind of turned into more of a relationship/sexuality book. And so Matt warned me, he said, 'We're going to get three issues and we're going to have to beg Image to do two more, so we can get a collection out of this,' because we both understood that people were not happy with the name. When it was announced, there was definitely weird push-back on the title, which was Matt's idea but, in the long run, it turned out to be a good name, a kind of a marketing hook."

The result of the continuing success of *Sex Criminals* has given Chip the ability to pick and choose subsequent

endeavors. He said, "Frankly, *Sex Criminals* is the thing that makes that all possible because that was my first big book and it's the kind of book that kept paying me because I own it with Matt. So my mortgage was taken care of and it afforded me the ability to say no to projects if they weren't the right ones." He added, "*Sex Criminals* is the thing that is going to pay me probably forever, especially with a TV show coming out." (Indeed, Amazon Prime Video has an eight-episode series currently in production.)

MARVEL MAN

For all of the reward it's given him, *Sex Criminals* was a grueling assignment for Chip.

"I'm a bit of a control freak on the book. I pencil, ink, color, letter, do the covers, design the letters page, write stuff

on the letters page," he said. So its little wonder, given the opportunity by Marvel, his main focus in comics for the last decade has been on scripting.

"Look, I recognize I'm probably a better writer than an artist," he admitted, "and I'm a better writer than I am a designer, and I'm a better designer than I am an artist. So that's usually the order in which I get work." Is he cool with that? "Drawing's never been an instinctual thing for me," Chip continued. "It was a means to an end to tell a story or to impress someone or... so, yeah, I'm not instinctually a good artist, that's for sure. I have to really work hard at it and use a lot of reference and make sure everything's correct."

"I did 31 issues of *Sex Criminals*, drawing and coloring, and it was really hard work, taxing on my body. So I don't feel sad that I'm not drawing more because it is so labor intensive. But I also have, in the back of my mind, that when I'm through this phase of my life of writing a lot for Marvel, that'll probably transition to writing and drawing a book for myself traditionally, not even digitally (because I've been digital for the last 10 years). Just being able to take the time with it and not hurt myself the way I did on *Sex Criminals* would be nice."

Starting in 2015, Chip has written a whole bunch of comics for Marvel, including runs of *Howard the Duck*, *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man*, *Daredevil*, and *Captain America*. He's helmed the *Spider-Man: Life Story* mini-series, as well as the Marvel "event," *Devil's Reign*. For Archie Comics he scripted *Jughead* and spent two years writing *Batman* for DC. And, as of this summer, he's at the reins of another Marvel event, *Avengers: Armageddon*.

"When *Sex Criminals* took off and then Marvel took interest in me and I started writing for them, I remember telling my wife that this is a thing that will last five to 10 years before either people don't like my stuff anymore or I've ended



Above: In 2023, *Sex Criminals* celebrated its 10th anniversary, which was commemorated with a Complete Edition trade paperback. Poster art by Chip.

Inset left: Miles, the son of Domain creator Syd Dallas, flashes back to his pop's basement studio – shades of Jack Kirby! – as he ponders his past and father's legacy. From Public Domain #1 [June '22], written and drawn by Chip.

Below: The fourth printing of *Sex Criminals* #1 was start of a series of prank covers Matt Fraction and Chip (seen here) called "Brimception."





Above and inset right: Chip has conceived and written two Marvel events, Devil's Reign, a Daredevil-centric series, was a major cross-over happening that featured Wilson Fisk, the Kingpin, becoming mayor of New York City and outlawing super-heroes. The other arc, Avengers: Armageddon, a five-issue limited series dubbed "the origin of the end," commenced just as we were going to press, and chronicles Red Hulk becoming the ruler of Doctor Doom's Latveria. Devil's Reign #1 [Feb. '22] cover by Marco Checchetto; Avengers: Armageddon #1 cover by Dike Ruan. **Below:** Currently on order by Ye Ed. is the Zdarsky Comic News collection, which compiles the 18 issues of Chip's zany store giveaway he released between July '24-Dec. '25.

IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN Throughout his mainstream comics career, Chip has kept up his creator-owned projects, such as *Kaptara* with old RAID Studio-mate Kagan McLeod and *Stillwater* with ex-RAIDER Ramón Pérez, the latter soon to also be a TV show. And, perhaps the project closest to his heart, there's *Public Domain*. With the aid of podcast Mangasplaining, Chip was flabbergasted to be instructed on the incredible diversity of subject matter in Japanese comics and that got him thinking. "What struck me was [diverse manga] felt like those came from a place of the authors like, 'I'm into this. I want to do a book about it and that's it.' Very straightforward... So I sat back and thought to myself, 'Well, what am I into? What are my hobbies and interests?' And I had the sad realization that my only interest is comic books – specifically comic-book history. I read your magazine, all sorts of books just on comics history, any creator interview out there, like the *Modern Masters* books I love. I'm fascinated by the history of the industry and the variety of characters within that."

up doing all the characters. There's very few writers that kind of go back to characters in the same way. Mark Waid is the big one. He's written *Flash* – what...? – three, four times now. But, for the most part, you have your time with each title and each character. There's only a few really kind of big ones and then when that's done, it's like, 'Okay, well, what now?' You can see it, but there's only a handful of writers working today that have been doing it for like 40 years. For the most part, you get like five to 10 years and I've been super-lucky.

"I think I'll manage to get to 15 years before people are sick of me and then I wrap it up. Then you just get off the stage, which I think is hard for a lot of people but, because I've been a comics fan for so long and am friends with people in the industry before I was in the industry, I can see the phases they go through and the hurdles that they've encountered, and I can better prepare myself emotionally for it."

IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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But instead of doing "the cliché hack thing of doing a comic about comics," Chip said, "I wanted to make sure it felt different. So *Public Domain* was kind of my answer to that." The series, about the co-creators of the world's most successful super-hero franchise and the effect on them and their families when a contract is discovered that radically shifts the paradigm, was started as a Substack endeavor. Today, Chip has finished two story arcs and has a spin-off series, *The Domain*, all for Image Comics.

"I'm working in spurts on *Public Domain*... slowly working on volume three, but these two years right now are so Marvel heavy that it's always just like it's a thing I get to late in the evening and maybe I'll draw a panel and I'll be like, 'Okay, all right. Well, that's enough for today.'"

"But *Public Domain* is the main thing that I've been doing that feels very much my story, but I have so many dumb little ideas for novels or paintings or comics that are kind of screaming at me to finish my



career so I can retire and just do those. It's weird. Comics is a weird profession because you don't really know how much time you have in the industry."

Of the series, he said, "I want it to be something a bit more than do a book that takes companies and collaborators to task for the way people have been treated. Ultimately, it's a way for me to tell a story about people and present a kind of human drama. I've got complicated views on the industry and how people are treated."

THE THREE FACES OF STEVE?

Your trusty interviewer was compelled to ask if Chip had any secret desire to create a project under his birth name. I mean, if Chip Zdarsky becomes the household name he's doubtless destined to become, none of Steve Murray's childhood pals or buddies from his teenage years would recognize who was the actual man behind it all, right? Wouldn't that be a bummer?

"No, I love that fact!" Chip chirped. "I always feel like having a pseudonym is very beneficial to keep your ego in check because it's not me that's done this. It's not Steve Murray that's done anything; it's this Chip Zdarsky guy. And conversely, if people are, say, sh*itting on me online because they don't like a comic book I did, well, if they're sh*itting on a guy named Chip, it's not me. It's very separate from me. So I don't get the ego boost of it, but I also don't get the slings and arrows either. I think it's helped me be healthy."

Having learned Steve (or is it Chip?) has employed a third pseudonym, Todd Diamond, a moniker he (they?) uses for some creative endeavors, your confused correspondent nevertheless hesitated to ask the obvious: did other personas lurk within the corporal being of one Chip Steve Murray Todd Diamond Zdarsky? Does even he (they?) know? 



Ramón Pérez is Putting on the Blitz

"The Official Magazine of Independent Creators" explodes out of a Toronto art collective

by JON B. COOKE

In July of last year, my Canadian comrade in comics history, Ivan Kocmarek – who scribed the "Four Founding Comics Creators" piece this ish – was eager to share that a new expanded edition of his sold-out *Heroes of the Home Front* ['18] was scheduled to be published, along with Ivan's "Gerber-style book of all the 800 or so covers of comics that came out in Canada during WWII." The publisher of these Kocmarek books is RAID Press, and Ivan introduced me to umbrella outfit RAID Studio's creative director, Ramón Pérez, who offered to send me a copy of RAID's newest publication.

When *Blitz* #1 arrived in the mail from the studio's Toronto digs, I was stunned with the full-color 80-Page Giant-Size slick presentation. In my email to Ramón, under the subject header, "Are you effing kidding me????," I gushed, "Jumping jiminy, Ramón, *Blitz* is freaking amazing! I am aghast at everything about it – the diversity of content, unapologetic love for *all* comics, wild design, oversize splendor, opulent presentation, and so much to absorb! Just incredible." Today, I continue to stand by that assessment!

So Ramón and I finally connected to talk about RAID Studio and *Blitz* (as well as discuss his friendship with Darwyn Cooke – see Ramón's testimonial on page 73) and the cartoonist enlightened me to the quarter-century history of RAID, as well as offer a snapshot of the current scene of comics in the Great White North, particularly in Ontario (where apparently anybody who's anybody in comics knows one another!), as seen through the RAID prism.

THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ILLUSTRATION & DESIGN

With a chuckle, Ramon explained RAID's origins and the meaning behind its acronym. Founded in 2002 by comics creator Chip Zdarsky (he whose feature precedes this very article!) and three others – Cameron Stewart, Ben Shannon, and Kagan McLeod – "Who all went to Sheridan College, which is where I went," Ramón said, "but I was a few years ahead of them... they were the original Founding Four. I came in and replaced Kagan around 2006. So the studio was founded in 2002. I came in 2006 because Kagan had gotten married... So he stepped down and I was the first official replacement member."

The acronym? "Chip and the early guys named it the Royal Academy of Illustration & Design, which I thought added a tongue-in-cheek, classier-than-they-deserve-to-be attitude, but I liked the name and, when the original members left, I asked permission to keep it going and they gave me the thumbs up. Next year, 2027, will be our 25th anniversary as a studio going continuously. I think we're probably one of the only bullpen-style studio in North America that I'm aware of."

By 2009, all the original members had departed and Ramón was running RAID from then on. What exactly is RAID, you ask? "Those four gents founded RAID because they just wanted a place to kick back, work together, not be stuck at home, have the same social atmosphere that you have in a university or college, right? Almost like a bullpen, if you will, at the old Marvel Comics. That's kind of what it is to this day, though it's grown. When we were in our old space, when I took over, we were in an older brownstone building and we grew to about 18 members.

"Then, in 2018, we moved to our current location and we're on a main floor now and we have a we have a public-facing gallery and cafe, with the studio tucked in back. We showcase local and international artists, as well as independently produced books, comics, and that sort of thing. And, behind that gallery space, we have about a 4,000 square foot co-working section for creatives. So we're not as comic-centric as we used to be. We have a lot of people who work in film, television, animation, and folks who are just design entrepreneurs, but there is a kind of tie that binds, as a lot of us create comics." Today, the collective numbers about two dozen, Ramón said.

AND THEN CAME BLITZ

Ramón is, of course, a trusted hand in the comics game, having freelanced for the Big Two since the '00s and he's accumulated a nifty list of



Above: Jim Mahfood, the main featured artist in the issue, provided *Blitz* #1's cover art. The *Blitz* logo and entire publication are designed by Ramón K. Pérez. **Below:** The one and the same representing RAID at a comic show. Ramón is also *Blitz* publisher, and María Luigia Donati and Allison O'Toole are the editors, with managing editor Darcy Shea.





Above: Cover for Blitz #3. **Inset top:** Ramón provides caricatures of the RAID collective. **Below:** The Blitz #1, Ramón's 1993 effort. **Bottom:** Spread in #1 by Chris Baldie.



credits rendering mainstream books, whether Wildstorm's *Resistance*, DC's *The Flash*, or *Wolverine and the X-Men* for Marvel, and more. But his independent/ creator-owned projects are significant, whether working with Chip on *Stillwater*, as well as his own properties, *Butternutsquash* and *Kukuburi*.

The cartoonist's – and RAID's – dedication to creative independence is exemplified with the 2017 launch of RAID Press, which has grown beyond publishing a single studio anthology to serving as imprint for graphic novels, art books, and experimental works. And, as of late, it's entered into the magazine scene with *Blitz*,

RAID's remarkable "creator-first comics magazine," which launched in July 2025.

"So *Blitz* began as just a jump-in-the-deep-end-with-two-feet kind of idea. I was approached by Mike Kennedy of Magnetic Press to collaborate on a crowdfunding campaign where he would do something through Magnetic and then RAID would do something to kind of complement what he was doing. Like an art catalog featuring lots of publications and excerpts and interviews with artists that he works with through his publishing house. I was like, 'Okay, we'll do the same.' And then, as it evolved, I said, 'You know what? I really miss *Comic Shop News*, *Direct Currents*, *Wizard*, *Marvel Age* – all these magazines from the heyday of collecting comics in the '80s and '90s. How come there isn't one that exists anymore?'"

"Then we started thinking about things like *Deadline U.K.* and maybe we could put together a magazine that showcases up-and-coming, as well as established talent, people who are doing it their own way, self-publishing, crowdfunding, maybe going through Image, which would be the highest bar that we

would go. We wouldn't really talk about DC or Marvel. That's other people's business. We would want to talk about really the creators who are carving out their own path and getting their ideas out there by whatever means possible. So that was the impetus for the idea and we really wanted to balance it out with some nice articles, overviews, and original comics content spotlighting both established people and people on the rise... We're still finding our exact footing for the magazine. I think it's going to continue to evolve as we search for its pure voice, but we've been super-excited about what we've put out so far and it's being very well received, so we're excited about that."

THE SECRET ORIGIN OF BLITZ

With its third issue imminent, *Blitz* is a gorgeous presentation published on a schedule that's sort of quarterly and more than once every six months, filled with interviews, essays, short comics stories and strips, and instructive features, including a multi-issue examination of "Wally Wood's 22 Panels That Always Work," and historical looks, all infused with a Canadian sensibility and a love of the entire breadth of comics, the pages beautifully designed by Ramón. Curiously, *Blitz* has a same-name predecessor that dates back to the '80s.

"When I was growing up in the Toronto suburbs," Ramón revealed, "there was a comic shop called Unicorn Comics and they had kind of an indie magazine called *Blitz*, and it was very much like your typical black-&-white zine... And, in my college years, I approached the owner and said, 'Hey, would you mind if I resurrected *Blitz*?' So, in 1993, we did an original comics anthology through the comic shop and it showcased four different creators, myself included, though it lasted only one issue. I even glued tinfoil to the logo to create foil variants, very, very old school and hands on!"

"So, when we launched this magazine, it just seemed like a perfect name to bring back and it went well with RAID. Technically, it's volume three, I suppose, but we've labeled it volume one officially to keep things simple. But it is kind of me taking that banner from my childhood and keeping it going. I mean, of course, the current *Blitz* is very different from the original magazines but, for me, it's going back to the roots of me stapling and gluing foil to covers to make these zines and get them out there. It really does hearken back to that Do It Yourself attitude."

Still the effort is not just limited to a single mag, as Ramón and fellow RAIDers are creating ancillary projects, like the series – sporting a branding that's an instantly recognizable pastiche of a classic '80s comics title – *The Official Handbook of the Creator Universe*, which was planned for release alongside *Blitz* #1, but has been understandably delayed.

"After talking to more and more creators, *Creator Universe* is ballooning and growing, which is exciting because one of the first things I loved as a kid was *The Official Handbook to the Marvel Universe*, obviously what I'm riffing on. So it's become a larger project as we go through and connect with more creators... Plans were to release it with *Blitz* #1 and 2, so we've made note of anybody who bought those issues and, when it finally comes out, they'll receive copies." So, as yours truly eagerly awaits that mailing (and contemplates devoting a CBC piece to the effort upon arrival), let's all make our own effort to support RAID by gettin' *Blitzed*!

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a picture is worth a thousand words

from the archives of Tom Ziuko

Back in pre-digital 1984, I colored a number of pinup pages in *Superman* #400, including this John Byrne delight – this is my original color guide, colored by hand with Dr. Martin dyes on Strathmore paper. Little did I know that it would portend my future.

A scant two years later, John would jump ship from Marvel to DC, taking over the Superman franchise titles. I lobbied hard and won the assignment, and for the next few years I got to collaborate with my fellow Canadian descendant – living in Niagara Falls, I'd known of John's work since our nascent days as aspiring artists in the 1970s, through mutual comic fan friends in Toronto and Buffalo.

I recall a meeting with John and editor Andy Helfer where we discussed our plans for this new incarnation of Superman. I declared that I had hated that Superman's hair was colored the exact same solid 100% blue as his costume. It looked ridiculous, and this had infuriated me since childhood, and I was going to remedy this injustice.

So, ever since my run on *Superman*, for the last 40 years, his hair has been colored with a combination of the three color plates – red, yellow, and blue – hopefully providing a more realistic tone.

His hair is black, not blue.
You're welcome!

– TZ

Superman © DC Comics

