



Journey Planet



Journey Planet

Welcome to Journey Planet presents: Heroes Unlimited 8

Forty-nine years in the waiting and the making, we present to you, our good readers, an incredible zine of fantastic proportions and wonderful content.

It was with great trepidation and some caution that we set out, Tony Roche, Merlin Roche, Pádraig Ó Méalóid, Chris Garcia, and myself, to bring together this next and final issue of *Heroes Unlimited*. For me, it was truly an honour, to be able to have a hand in a fanzine that holds such historical and personal importance for so many.

A zine, a simple outpouring of appreciation, which allows fans and professionals to engage, to talk about the things they love, and investigate and discuss elements connected to the arts, in this case, the art that we know and love as comics.

We have been exceptionally lucky, as a team, we were continually surprised by how willing those who had been touched by *Heroes Unlimited* and indeed *Merry Marvel Fanzine* were to re-engage, and to connect and be part of this final issue. For me, it was staggeringly brilliant that I could work with pals on a fanzine that connected across nearly five decades, and to watch on as professionals who loved *Heroes Unlimited* so much willingly gave their time to the undertaking, while also enjoying reading voices new to me, talking about new voices in comics. It was altogether a lovely experience.

And then to post out, and hand out the heavy issue that was *Heroes Unlimited #8*, and to see the impressed look from fans, and shop keepers, and professionals, and the realisation that I had and continue to be part of something very special indeed, and that I am very lucky and grateful to all involved—my co-editors, all the contributors and the fans—who support us, and think that what we do is good.

It was a special day when I was with Pádraig and we handed over the issue to Alan Moore, in person, who went on to make me two cups of coffee, and it felt, oddly, so warm and friendly, and reminded me of nice afternoons with my late pal Mick O'Connor. It was a special day when I sat in a bar with Karl Asaa from **Orbital**, Rob Hanson, and David Hine, and handing out issues and chatting, and popping into see Nora and hand her an issue in **GOSH!**

And it was a special day in Monkstown when I unloaded the zines, and Tony looked on, astounded by how much carry-on one person could get onto an airplane, as kilos and kilos of *Heroes Unlimited #8* were stacked on his kitchen counter and likewise in San Jose with Chris, as I handed over hard copies, to be greeted with thanks and a smile.

And so now, friends, we share this zine more broadly. We cannot and could not ever do you all a paper copy, we do apologise, but you can hit print on this issue or enjoy it as a PDF, and we hope you do, our intention was to enhance this issue of *Journey Planet* with additions, and we have had correspondence, extra articles and letters of comment since *Heroes Unlimited #8* that complement the work completed.

While this sees the closing of a chapter, and in many respects, the piece that Tony wrote about meeting Stan Lee, is poignant now, and so we have added in part of the interview that Tony did with Pádraig, it is also fitting.

~Editors~

James Bacon, Chris Garcia, Pádraig Ó Méalóid,
Anthony Roche, Merlin Roche

The book will not, nor never can, close, while some may have felt that *Heroes Unlimited* was forgotten for some time, it could never have been forgotten, and indeed based on the interactions that I have witnessed, was not forgotten, for something as simple as a zine can be and is important, and its memories, importance, and impact never lost, and so as we say that we hope you enjoy this final issue of *Heroes Unlimited* presented to you, I can only thank all of our kind and generous contributors, and those who helped to make this happen, my fellow co-editors and of course to Tony Roche, who deemed that doing a final issue was a good idea.

It certainly was.

James



Letters of Comment? journeyplanet@gmail.com



Letters of Comment

From: Harry McAvinchey

Hi Tony.

Just a note to thank you for the copy of *Heroes Unlimited #8* which arrived, as promised, in yesterday's post. I actually had no real idea that you planned to produce another belated issue some fifty years later because no one had mentioned it. Pádraig had begun an interview with me via e-mail for a while but he seemed to peter out at some point without mentioning what he intended to do with it or even mentioning where it might end up. He never mentioned a *HU #8*. I figured he was doing something for *Journey Planet*. He did mention finding my website paddykool2 which is where the *Merry Marvel Fanzine* material for the Dublin SciFi 2019 thing was found, I believe. I am assuming that this will be the last hurrah for *HU* as you have not provided an address for comment or critique. I'm now wondering how many copies have been printed and how it is to be sold, or distributed, given it has no price or further info. There may be some modern comics' fans who pick it up casually and might wonder where they might locate the previous seven issues of this fine modern magazine, little knowing that they are fifty years too late. There are no printing details but I was pleasantly surprised that it is something of an upgrade on those old stencilled copies of yore. Since your last e-mail I harboured the slightly daft notion that you would enter that old fusty attic, clearing the cobwebs as you went, to finally haul the grimy old stencil-printer from beneath the rubble of torn papers and detritus and super-heroically will it to life once again. Part of me wanted it to be printed in the bilious blue ink of old and side-stapled in that old, odd pre-decimal imperial size paper. Let's say, on reflection, that when I tore open the envelope and exposed it to the light, dismissing the fantasy of it having possibly been astray and castaway, languishing in the dusty corners of some sorting office of An Post or the Royal Mail this past half-century, that this new issue has appeared finally as a suitable 'tombstone' for a much-loved teenage fanzine, which to my mind along with its predecessor *Merry Marvel Fanzine*, really started comics fandom in Ireland and the UK. It was always the most substantial and dare I say, 'literary' comics zine of its time.

If seen as an albeit very late full-stop, *HU #8* still managed to admirably carry on the tradition and completed the story in some fruitful style. Replete with a Paul Neary cover and back cover too, for completion of the fifty year circle, plus a sprinkling of spot illoes from Ken Simpson and some very famous faces. I remember being unable to afford that 'Snow Leopard' poster which now serves as the back cover these fifty years later, but I still have the sales-flier that was sent out with (I think!) the last zine. I believe it cost some six old pre-decimal shillings. The sadness and acceptance that Ken Simpson, Peter Simpson, and Peter C Phillips are no longer with us makes me wonder what also became of Ges Cleaver and Robert Poole and their unstoppable teenage imaginations. I managed to somehow save all those fanzines from the 1960s ... all, that is, except for the couple of big, blue foolscap pages that made up *Merry Marvel Fanzine #1*, which I traded away in a moment of weakness to a very insistent young comics hustler some almost forty odd years ago, who also relieved me of a tranche of my lesser-loved, second-line Marvels, in various pushy deals. Fortunately I had the good sense to keep fair runs of the early to mid-period Kirby *Fantastic Four* and the Ditko *Spider-Mans*. I note that you sold all your stash to Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick and are now struggling to re-build a semblance of your former collection. Well they couldn't have gone to a better man, eh? ... The man who put Che on a thousand student walls!! The prices for old comics are now crazy, of course. Now and again I will buy an odd

on Heroes Unlimited #8

lost issue to regain that magic of a parcel from the past being delivered through my letterbox but even the least of those comics retain quite a price tag. The thrill is still the same, if not quite so wide-eyed! Who could have imagined that such a small cult of comics lore could have developed into the huge industry that comics has spawned a half-century later?

I identified completely with Alan Moore's feelings about all of this. His story really does feel, in part, like some of my own experiences in those younger years... not everything, of course. Mine took me from those late 1960s northern Civil Rights marches and the social upheaval which coincided with the ending innocence (temporarily) of the fanzine world, working, loving, and playing initially amidst the bombs, murders and mayhem of Belfast and Armagh in those late 1960s-early 1970s before the eventual escape to Art College in Leeds and Manchester, where I also continued to dabble in the psychedelic world Alan describes in your interview and eventually revived my love of that fannish association. There were fallow periods to follow, of course, dictated mostly by the trials of raising a family, but these past twenty years has seen me trading, buying, and selling old comics on eBay at times, which sustains the collector-bug.

Your revised memories, a lifetime later, of the 1960s comics convention and your latest comparison convention reportage were fascinating reads. I wondered what your thoughts on Stan Lee might be compared to what you and all of us thought of him as teenagers. Then, he seemed like a favourite uncle. There has been much dispute over the years about his relationships and doings with both Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. My feelings are mixed on the topic obviously stained by the love of those artists' seminal work. He is now an iconic presence while the two artistic comic masters who literally drew the Marvel visions are both now gone, almost lost in cultish obscurity. Also I never knew exactly how that first letter you wrote, proclaiming the start of something very new and unique for Marvel fans, actually appeared in the old Power comics. Obviously (now...not then...that I come to think of it! Ha ha!!) It couldn't have happened so sweetly without some kind of 'fix' being on the agenda. The fix was in...And there it was!

That was new and revelatory news for me...and how you got that rare Marvel sweatshirt too (in a time when printed 'anything' were rarities...especially printed sweatshirts with Marvel characters featured... most of us at this side of the pond had to make do with those iron-on transfer jobs given away free in the new Power comics).

Without that letter featuring your address none of the rest that followed could possibly have happened at all. There would have been no real connection...Imagine!!

The interview with Alan is my favourite part of the fanzine so far. I'm still reading some of the other features as I type. There was nostalgia there but also revelation. Alan is a unique sort of individual with a very creative and interesting mind. I've picked up on facets of his work over the years but I would imagine that this is his most complete interview to appear anywhere. Wouldn't you know that it would feature in the all-time greatest fanzine.

I'll leave it at that for now, Tony.

Maybe this isn't the end of the road at all for us old comicanesers eh?

Again, many thanks and all good things,

Harry

From Dr. Sharae Deckard

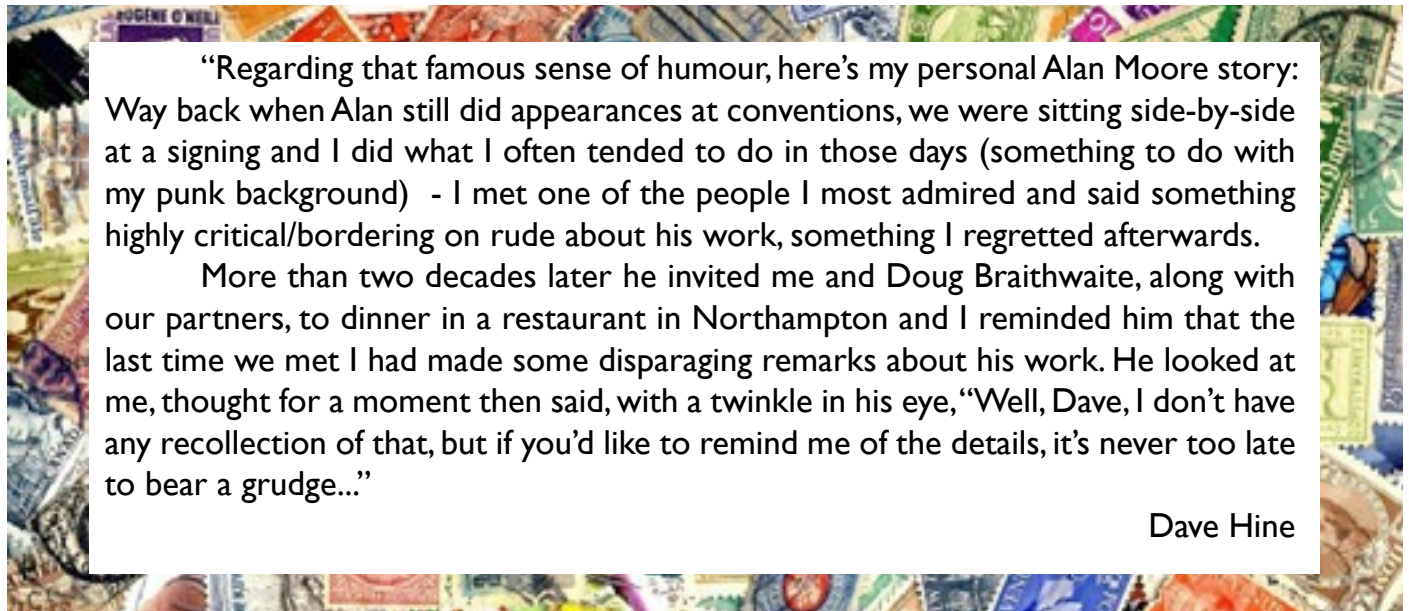
Hi Tony,

Just picked up my copy of HU8 yesterday from the office-- delighted to be in and to read such a fantastic issue.

The Moore interview is *amazing*-- I can't believe how detailed and open it is, and all with Moore's signature wit and intelligence. Really stellar material. Really enjoyed the other features too, esp. the piece on Dunsany, the roundtable with women comics artists, and the Bacon piece.

Just curious-- how did you distribute this anniversary issue? To your old contributors list from the days of yore? Or to new ones? And are you planning to go to the Dublin Comic Con or World Con in 2019 in any capacity?

All best, Sharae



Dave Hine

From Dave Hine

Hi Tony,

firstly, I do hope your health has improved. I was sorry to miss you on Tuesday. It was a pleasure to meet up with James and Pdraig (and also to meet Rob Hansen) in London. I now have copies of Heroes Unlimited #8 and have just finished the Alan Moore interview, which is clearly the highlight of the issue, though the Paul Neary cover is pretty nifty too.

Alan's lucid and detailed answers are enlightening and almost entirely devoid of rancour, though I do still feel that he has a blinkered perception of today's comics. There are so many marvellous comics and graphic novels being produced now that his tendency to dismiss the entire medium without actually reading many can be a little irritating. But that's a minor element in a long and thoroughly enjoyable interview. Congratulations on asking all the right questions.

All in all a very worthy follow up to #7. I haven't read the whole thing yet but there seems to be a nice balance of articles. I'm particularly looking forward to the Lord Dunsany piece.

All the best, and do let me know next time you are in London.

On the Passing of Stan Lee

by Anthony Roche

As fans, comic book fans, there were few who did not lament the passing of the great Stan Lee. It was a sad moment. It was a moment that Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby were also frequently mentioned and importantly remembered.

Yet. Yet. It will undoubtedly have been felt hardest by our own Tony Roche. The professor who wrote to, was encouraged by, met, and was so engaged by Stan Lee. That is a different impact. Stan Lee has left an indelible mark on modern comics and film, his creations are huge, and known worldwide. While so many people will feel touched, and loved Stan Lee as fans of his work, it is Tony who turned enthusiasm into fannish creativity.

*To try and understand the loss, the context of what Stan Lee was, in regard to the small piece of fannish history that was Merry Marvel Fanzine and subsequently Heroes Unlimited, I have extracted some of the text from the interview Pádraig did with Tony for Journey Planet #31. This is just to indicate the connection, and as a reminder that great creators often make so much time for fans, but also to illustrate the connection and why **Team Journey Planet** appreciate greatly the loss that Tony feels.*

Excerpts from an Interview with Tony Roche by Pádraig Ó Méalóid

[...] in May of 1962, the Hulk arrived.

*The Hulk had many of the features of the usual super-hero comic but with an unparalleled originality in their development. Yes, there were super villains to combat (an indispensable core component of the genre). But the chief focus was on the struggle within the central character, the Jekyll and Hyde relationship between the rational scientist Bruce Banner and his rampaging alter-ego, the Hulk. There was a psychological complexity here beyond anything at DC. And that complexity meant it was no longer possible to wrap everything up within the one issue. The continuity between the issues, the way the overall narrative developed from one to the next, even if the individual villain got defeated, meant that the reader was hooked. Certainly, this one was. And the artwork had a raw power, a visceral immediacy beyond the classical restraint of DC, directly confronting the reader in a way that scarcely could be contained within the confines of the panels. And, then, almost a year to the day after the Hulk appeared, he disappeared—without trace or warning. It was only later I learned that the title was cancelled after six issues, owing to poor sales. I didn't know this at the time; and given the uncertain and haphazard distribution of American comics in Ireland, it was always possible that *The Incredible Hulk* was still appearing in the US but for whatever reason was no longer being shipped across the Atlantic.*

*So I continued to keep my eye out for *the Hulk*, while lamenting his disappearance. Then, almost exactly another year later in April of 1964, my patience was rewarded when I saw the name reappear in the following blurb on the cover of a comic book called *Fantastic Four*: 'a*

' I couldn't care less who the Fantastic Four were; but the Hulk was back. I bought the title, took it home and read it. The cover had claimed rather hyperbolically that this was 'The World's Greatest Comic Magazine!' and by the time I finished reading, I was inclined to agree with them. This was the occasion of my Pauline conversion to Marvel Comics, one that would have profound consequences in the years ahead. I had just turned 13 in April of 1964 and was at the age where most boys of my acquaintance stopped reading comics. I might have

followed; but instead I went in deep, thanks to *Fantastic Four* #25. It was clear that *FF* had the same writer and artist team as *The Hulk*, now clearly identified and heralded as Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The two elements the writing contained that DC lacked were emotional complexity and wit. The former I was already familiar with from *The Hulk*; this was equally evident in *FF* in the often fractious relationship between various members of the group. Just one example of the title's originality within the super-hero genre was the way Stan Lee took the cliché of the teenage sidekick and in the figure of Johnny Storm created a more developed character who kept trying to assert his independence and whose hot-headedness (ha!) made it difficult to contain him within the dynamics of the group. But the thing I valued most in Stan Lee and his writing was his humour. It's best exemplified for me in a Spider-Man story which starts with Peter Parker trying to wield a needle and thread to sew the rents in his costume and his wryly wondering whether other superheroes have to deal with the same problem. Jack Kirby's art was even more developed in *FF*; it now had an epic quality in the staging of the encounter between the Hulk and the Thing across a recognisable New York.

Unlike the cover of *The Incredible Hulk*, the cover of *Fantastic Four* now revealed that this was a product of the Marvel Comics Group. In case the reader didn't get the message, two of the cover's five blurbs expanded on it: 'A Marvel Super-Spectacular!' and 'Bringing the Marvel Age of Comics to a Lofty New Pinnacle of Greatness!' This reader got the message and rapidly sought out the other Marvel titles in my local newsagent. There were eight others: *Spider-Man*, *The Avengers*, *Daredevil*, *The X-Men*, *Thor*, *Strange Tales*, *Tales to Astonish*, *Tales of Suspense*, and *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*. Over half of the nine titles, extraordinarily, were produced by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (the Lennon-McCartney of the comics era). And it's clear from looking at the titles published in April 1964 just how much of a roll Marvel were on. There was the extraordinary Steve Ditko on *Spider-Man* and (buried in the back of *Strange Tales*) Dr. Strange. *Avengers* #4 that month promised the resurrection of the World War II Captain America from an iceberg (and a guest appearance by another 1940s revenant, Sub-Mariner). *X-Men* #4 not only supplied Magneto but the twin debut of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch (as villains). There was a new title that same month, of a blind super-hero called *Daredevil*.

And so on.

Over the next few years I avidly followed Marvel Comics as its consistent and interrelated universe continued to expand. (I still kept up with DC.) The letters' pages had been personalized so that the more formal 'Dear Editor' was replaced with a first-person address to the comics' prime creators: 'Dear Stan and Jack.' And those readers' letters drew personalized and witty responses from Stan himself (or so we were led to believe). I was dying to join in the conversation. There was only one problem. Marvel Comics appeared in Ireland three months after the US. Any letter I sent (quite apart from the issue of its quality) would be regarded as out-of-date and hence passed over. I began to consider subscribing—but the cost was exorbitant. In the end, I managed to scrape together the shekels to subscribe to *Fantastic Four*, now firmly established as my favourite Marvel title. In due course, back came the first issue of my subscription. I still remember taking off the wrapper and beholding *Fantastic Four* #45 (December 1965), 'Among Us Hide... the Inhumans!': not only a fine issue in its own right but the opening of an extraordinary run of unparalleled creativity by Lee and Kirby that began with the Inhumans, brought back Galactus to destroy the earth, introduced a major new character in his envoy, the philosophizing Silver Surfer, and concluded by introducing the Black Panther, the first black super-hero. And I was guaranteed not to miss a single issue of this magnificent unfolding sequence, since I had subscribed. The pressure was on. At almost exactly the same time, someone turned out the lights and Marvel Comics (for a time, at least) stopped being distributed in Ireland. There was nothing for it. I took my Post Office Savings Book, to which my grandparents had contributed a considerable sum, withdrew the entire amount and used it to subscribe to the remaining nine Marvel titles. My parents found out a short time later and I thought I'd be murdered. I must have made a good case and impressed them with my love of comics, however, because they not only forgave me but actively encouraged my interest. And I could now start sending in letters of comment to the various titles...

[...] now that I could send in Letters of Comment to the various Marvel letters pages, would any of them be considered good or interesting enough to publish? I had no idea. There was only one way to find out, so I started writing. In the end, I was successful in having five of my letters published, which I regard as a pretty good number. The first was in *The Avengers* #36 (January 1967), an analysis of #32, 'The Sign of the Serpent!', a strong anti-racism story written by Stan Lee and drawn by Don Heck. In the main, since I was a word person, my comments tended to concentrate on Stan's scripts, but there were always appreciative comments on the

artwork also. Another letter was in *Strange Tales* #151 that very same month (December 1966). In it, I noted that other writers had been coming on board in recent months (Roy Thomas, Gary Friedrich and Denny O'Neil—a fine Irish name—among them) and that increasingly less of the stories were written by Stan. Was he, I queried, going to retire? The response was emphatic: 'Our Leader' may get run out of town on a rail, he may do this, he may do that, but no way is he going to retire. But more and more writers arrived and four or five years later Stan would give up writing comics and hand over as editor to Roy Thomas. During 1967 I had three more letters published—two in *Sgt. Fury* (I no longer have the issues so don't know in which issues they appeared) and one in *Not Brand Echh!* #6 (February 1968). I don't remember at this stage whether I was particularly targeting their more marginal comics (*Nick Fury*, rather than *The Fantastic Four* or *Spider-Man*) to increase the chances of getting my letters published; or whether I wrote ten such letters a month and they picked their favourites. The latter seems a virtually impossible task, even for an enthusiast like me; so I'd say it was probably only two or three. On each occasion, I received an airmailed yellow postcard which read: 'Congratulations! Your letter has been chosen and will appear in *Strange Tales* #151 [or whatever]. Stan and the Gang.' The last, and my favourite, was the letter which was published in *Not Brand Echh!* #6. NBE was Marvel's satire mag, in which they spoofed their own heroes and those of Brand Echh (as they referred to DC/National). The letter is the only one I still have; I like the letter's efforts to be funny and I love the way the response by Stan (or whoever) really plays up to my Irishness. Here it is:

Dear Stan,

Recently a weapon was unleashed in the United States which was more deadly than an H-Bomb. This scourge has made its presence felt and so I decided that, in the interest of humanity, I would make a full investigation of this horrendous malefactor which hides its true identity under the guise of a magazine called *NOT BRAND ECHH* which, in effect, is subtly brainwashing the American people. Taking my portable tape recorder into the streets, I asked different comic fans their reaction to this new menace. Melvin T. Schnook, fanzine editor: 'Aaargh! What is it?' Dr. Freddy F. Bales: 'This is truly a masterpiece of literature and is a good example of the heights to which graphic art can attain. It plumbs a pseudo-theological world and plunges the reader into a phantasmagoria of mind-staggering memorabilia.' Then I told him it was supposed to be funny! I learned that Stan Glee had been promptly kicked out of a comicon when the fans had read *BRECHH*, and Zack Kurvy had been unceremoniously dismissed from the Cartoonists' Union. My comments on NBE? Marvel has done it again!

And the reply,

But done what again? From the tone of your multiloquent missive, Tony, we kinda get the idea that, if merry Marvel went out of business, you'd want the newspapers to carry the story in the "Civic Improvements" section! C'mon, pal—admit you're just puttin' us on from way over there in County Dublin! Otherwise, we're just liable to go off the deep end and take our vengeance in the one way it'd really hurt—namely, we won't let the Hulk march in the next St. Patrick's Day Parade! (Or, who says this isn't the Marvel Age of Rollickin' Revenge?)

The fact that my first two letters were printed in the very same month I started a fanzine, *The Merry Marvel Fanzine*, does not seem to me a coincidence. I obviously wanted to air my views on Marvel comics, and doubt that I would have done so in a fanzine without this show of confidence and support for a fifteen-year old from the folks at Marvel.

[...] The best thing we ran, in my view, were two articles by Peter Simpson comparing Stan Lee, first to Shakespeare, then to Charles Dickens, in a convincing and learned way. Volstagg from Thor's Asgard and Shakespeare's Falstaff were compared as cowardly braggarts, and so forth. Marvel in general, and Stan in particular, loved these; I had a letter from Flo Steinberg (his Girl Friday) asking for an extra copy of both to go in Stan's special scrapbook...

[...] in 1968 because I spent that summer, once I had finished my Leaving Certificate exams, in New York. I attended the SCARP2 Comics Convention in the Statler Hilton over the July 4th weekend. At the comicon, I met an extraordinary range of comic book professionals. I had my first meeting with Stan Lee, introduced by Roy Thomas when he and I were talking 'Stan! Come over here and meet Tony! He's from

Ireland!' I couldn't believe it—the already legendary Stan Lee was being brought over to meet lil ol' me. A pleasant three-way conversation ensued and the result was an invitation for me to visit the Marvel offices in ten days' time, the first of several I made over the summer. While in the US, I undertook a series of interviews with comics professionals of real achievement to run in *HU*: Al Williamson and Dick Giordano were two of them. And an interview was certainly set up with Stan Lee, who agreed readily to my request and who was at the top of my wish list of interviewees. Here's the strange thing: I believed and had a strong memory of doing the interview with Stan at Marvel and running it in *HU*. But when I opened up the Pandora's Box of the *HU* archive in 2014, after forty-five years, no such interview was to be found. Then I remembered; the interview had been set up in the Marvel offices for a Friday in August. But Stan had a conflict and had to postpone; apologies all round and when would I like to do it? There was only one problem: my return flight to Dublin was booked for the following Sunday. So the interview never took place. But I imagined it so intensely that I thought it had...

[...] I had one more meeting with Stan Lee that's relevant to the clear distinction I was drawing in 1969 between literature and comics. I graduated (with a First in English) in 1973 from Trinity and the following year I went to live in the US and took an MA and PhD in English at the University of California at Santa Barbara (selling my entire comic book collection to the great Irish artist, Jim Fitzpatrick, on my departure). In 1980, Stan Lee visited Santa Barbara from LA (to which he had just moved) to carry out a book signing session of *Son of Origins*. When I went along and reintroduced myself, he didn't remember me – why should he, given all of the people he's met? After the official proceedings were over, five or six of us hung out with Stan to shoot the breeze. He and I were deep in conversation about something or other when suddenly a dawning look of recognition appeared in his face: '*Wait a minute – wait a minute! I remember you – you're the guy from Dublin. You used to write to us ALL the time! What are you doing in Santa Barbara, Tony?*' So I told Stan that I was at UCSB finishing a PhD in English: '*You see, Stan, I was determined to get to the US, whether through comics or literature.*' Quick as a flash, Stan shot back: '*Tony, ya mean there's a difference?*'

Stan Lee, 1922 – 2018

By Michael Carroll

Stan Lee was the first comic-book creator whose name I knew. I was about six and a half years old when I was given my very first superhero comic... this one:



That's *The Mighty World of Marvel* issue #5, dated November 4, 1972. So a little over forty-six years ago. By some miracle, my copy is still intact, which can't be said for most of the comics I owned at that age.

I think I was vaguely aware of both Batman and Superman at the time, but that was about it for my knowledge of superheroes (unless we count Tarzan, Zorro and the Lone Ranger as superheroes, but that's a whole different argument), so this comic really made an impact on me.

Inside, there are three stories, all reprinted from earlier US Marvel comics...

The Hulk: “*Banished to Outer Space*” — 10 pages

Originally printed in *The Incredible Hulk* #3, September 1962

Writer: Stan Lee

Penciller: Jack Kirby

Inker: Dick Ayers

Letterer: Artie Simek

Spider-Man: “*Duel to the Death with The Vulture!*” — 15 pages

Originally printed in *Amazing Spider-Man* #2, May 1963

Writer: Stan Lee

Art: Steve Ditko

Letterer: John Duffy

The Fantastic Four: “*The Menace of the Miracle Man*” — 9 pages

Originally printed in *Fantastic Four* #3, March 1962

Writer: Stan Lee

Penciller: Jack Kirby

Inker: Sol Brodsky

Letterer: Artie Simek

Some liberties have been taken: the *Fantastic Four* story, for example, is only the first half of the original tale, the third page was completely omitted, and some of the dialogue has been tweaked. And of course on most pages the original colours are gone, too, replaced sometimes by green spot-colouring.

At six and a half years old, I didn't know or care about the changes. I was absolutely blown away by the characters and stories. The Hulk? Terrifying... but also touchingly human. Spider-Man? Instant hero-worship. Fantastic Four? There's a guy on fire, a rock-monster and a woman who can turn invisible — what's not to love? A whole new universe was opening up in front of me, and I loved every iota of it!

That issue of *MWOM* featured a special message from Stan Lee: I remember devouring that as much as I did the comic-strips. I didn't know who he was — other than that his name was on all the stories — but I felt that he was talking to me personally, cluing me in on what had been going on.

The Mighty World of Marvel became my first regular comic, though it was only a few months before Spider-Man — my favourite — branched off into his own comic, *Spider-Man Comics Weekly*, so I followed him there (my pocket-money didn't usually stretch to more than one comic per week).

When *The Avengers* was launched in September of 1973 I ignored it at first because Spider-Man wasn't in it, but then I happened to get a copy of issue *The Avengers* #13, and, well, sorry, Spidey, it was awesome, but the Avengers have Quicksilver, Giant-Man and Hawkeye. There ain't no beatin' that!

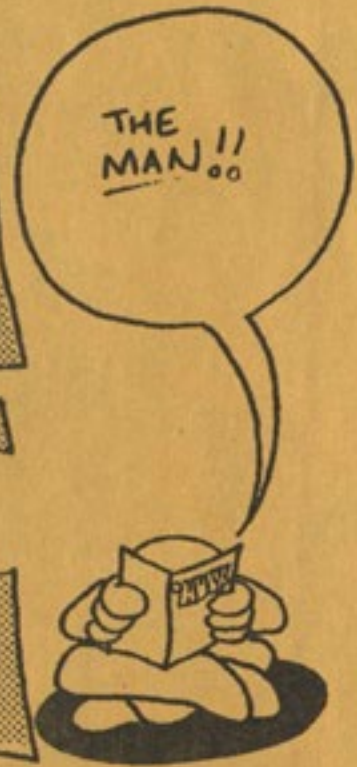
My love for Marvel comics knew no bounds for the next few years, and I was always particularly excited when I chanced upon an actual US Marvel import—longer stories and in full colour! Wonderful stuff!

And Stan Lee was there at the heart of it all, introducing new issues, filling us in on what's happening elsewhere in the Marvel universe, sometimes going off on an entertaining but informative tangent in his regular Stan's Soapbox column.

So long, Stan. You always came across as a friend, as someone I could trust to entertain me without talking down to me. You made me feel as though I was part of the Marvel family, and to a lonely kid who was small and weak for his age and otherwise felt like an outsider, that meant a lot.

ANNOUNCING!

STAN LEE



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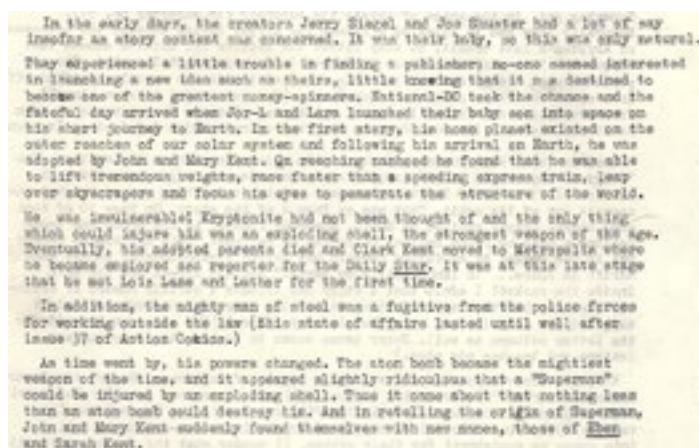
**On the Persistence of Memory, or How
HU #5 Influenced LoEG: Tempest
by Alan Moore and Tony Roche, and Pádraig Ó Méalóid
(compiler and Eminence Gris)**

When the prospect of *HU #8* loomed, Pádraig Ó Méalóid suggested I interview Alan Moore. I thought it was a great idea and within 24 hours the answer came: 'Alan Moore gives green light to interview with Anthony Roche.' Alan and I met up in London to plan out the interview in September 2017, after a charity event to raise money for a proper headstone to be erected over the grave of the visionary poet-artist William Blake and his wife Catherine. Alan and I greeted each other warmly backstage after a tour-de-force performance of *Angel Passage*, his prose poem about Blake. He went on to tell me how *Heroes Unlimited* had 'set the agenda' and how, several weeks earlier, he had drawn on a detail from Peter C. Phillips' article on Superman in *HU #5* for the final volume of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which he was working on during the time of our interview. After finishing the day's writing, Alan checked his copy of *HU #5* and found he had remembered Pete's Superman article word perfect across almost five decades.

(From Tony Roche's introduction to his interview with Alan Moore in *Heroes Unlimited #8*)

That period, of getting in from school around five o'clock and looking anxiously towards the mantelpiece where any post for me that had arrived after I'd set out in the morning would be propped behind the repurposed WWI artillery shells that my grandmother used as vases, probably commenced an addiction that has lasted the rest of my life. To this day there is a thrill to receiving books or magazines that I've sent away for—these days it's mostly obscure old poetry magazines from Will Shutes at Test Centre—that has never gone away or grown less satisfying. I remember when that first copy of *Heroes Unlimited #5* turned up in its manila envelope how I immediately plunged into it and remained immersed for the next couple of days. I remember there was a Superman article by Peter C Phillips, which was where I recently recalled a salient fact from to include in the final volume of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

(Alan Moore, talking about his first introduction to *Heroes Unlimited*)



In the early days, the creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster had a lot of say insofar as story content was concerned. It was their baby, so this was only natural. They experienced a little trouble in finding a publisher: no-one seemed interested in launching a new idea such as theirs, little knowing that it was destined to become one of the greatest money-spinners. National-DC took the chance and the fateful day arrived when Jor-L and Lara launched their baby son into space on his short journey to Earth. In the first story, his home planet existed on the outer reaches of our solar system and following his arrival on Earth, he was adopted by John and Mary Kent. On reaching indeed he found that he was able to lift tremendous weights, race faster than a speeding express train, leap over skyscrapers and focus his eyes to penetrate the structure of the world. He was invulnerable! Kryptonite had not been thought of and the only thing which could injure him was an exploding shell, the strongest weapon of the age. Eventually, his adopted parents died and Clark Kent moved to Metropolis where he became employed as reporter for the Daily Star. It was at this late stage that he met Lois Lane and latter for the first time.

In addition, the mighty man of steel was a fugitive from the police forces for working outside the law (this state of affairs lasted until well after issue 37 of Action Comics.)

As time went by, his powers changed. The atom bomb became the mightiest weapon of the time, and it appeared slightly ridiculous that a "Superman" could be injured by an exploding shell. Thus it came about that nothing less than an atom bomb could destroy him. And in retelling the origin of Superman, John and Mary Kent suddenly found themselves with new names, those of Bob and Sarah Kent.

The detail Alan Moore told me about is from an article entitled 'The Superman Family' in *HU* #5. For some reason, the article is uncredited, whereas we always ran a writer's credit on articles. But Alan (correctly) intuited that it was by Peter C Phillips, since it was a piece of research on a Golden Age DC-National series of titles. Across the span of fifty years, and drawing on his encyclopedic memory, Alan recalled that for a brief period the names of Superboy's foster parents underwent a temporary change. At first they were John and Mary Kent. Eventually and permanently, they were Jonathan and Martha. But for a brief period they were the more exotic Eben and Sarah. (Pete underlined the names for emphasis). In *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* Volume 4 Number 2 (dateline August 22 2018), a film featuring Superbaby and his parents is being made in which the actress referred to as Miss Desmond says to her husband when she discovers the supertot: 'Why, look, Eben! It's a little baby!' I even suspect that Alan showed Ken Simpson's wonderful accompanying illo featuring Superbaby and the rest of the 'family' (Superboy, Supergirl and Superman) to LEAGUE artist Kevin O'Neill.

Anthony Roche



HEROES UNLIMITED



BECAUSE YOU
DEMANDED IT!

NEARY '13

Heroes Unlimited #8- Dublin 2018

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Heroes Unlimited #8- Dublin 2018

Editor-in-Chief: Anthony Roche

Co-Editors: James Bacon, Chris Garcia, Pádraig Ó
Méalóid, Merlin Roche

This issue of *Heroes Unlimited* is dedicated to the
memory of Peter C Phillips, Ken Simpson, and Peter
Simpson

Front Cover Main Illustration: Hunter by Paul
Neary

HU Front Cover Logo by Merlin Roche

Because You Demanded It! caption box by Todd
Klein

Inside Back Cover: Phoenix by Ken Simpson

Back Cover: Attack of the Snow Leopard by Paul
Neary

EDITORIAL

or

HOW WE GOT FROM THERE (HU #7) TO HERE (HU #8)



In the last paragraph of the contents page for *Heroes Unlimited* #7, which appeared in the Summer of 1969, I apologised for the length of time it had taken me to produce this issue and said that I had ‘already started planning #8 [a lie], which should be out in a “mere” three or four months’ time – i.e. by the end of October (1969).’ That issue never appeared. Instead, here it is, a ‘mere’ fifty years later. So— what happened? Well it’s not quite true to say that college happened. I had been in First Year Economics in University College Dublin 1968-69 and hated the subject; instead, I poured everything I had into producing *HU* #6 and #7. In that summer of 1969, I managed to persuade my father to let me start college over again by studying English at Trinity. My father eventually agreed to support me in this new move but admonished: ‘I make one stipulation: you must do very well.’ That was it; I drew a line under comics and fanzines and went off to college to study English Language and Literature. (For efforts to keep *Heroes Unlimited* going after my departure as editor, see this issue’s ‘Readers’ Raves and Roastings’ column.)

And there it lay, for many years. In January 2014, I was two years from retirement when I was approached by a guy called Peter Hansen who wanted to know whether this Professor of English at UCD was any relation to the Tony Roche who had published comics fanzines in the 1960s. Guilty as charged, I responded. Pete was a close friend of Phil Clarke, whom I knew back in the day. Phil had co-edited the British comics fanzine *KAPOW* with Steve Moore and also organised with Steve the first British Comics Convention in Birmingham in September 1968 (I was there and had reviewed it in *HU* #6). Pete Hansen was working on *A History of British Comics Fandom* with Phil Clarke and wanted to interview me about the *Merry Marvel Fanzine* and *Heroes Unlimited*, which we did via Skype. He then invited me to be a member of a panel on the Early Days of Fandom at the London Comicon in July 2014, along with Phil, himself, and Dave Gibbons, renowned *Watchmen* artist. I attended and while waiting to go on stood in the Green Room holding the seven issues of *HU*, with Paul Neary’s cover for the last facing outward. A fifty-something Londoner, who resembled a member of Duran Duran, suddenly looked agog, sat up, pointed and said, ‘That’s the cover of *Heroes Unlimited* #7. That changed my life! Who are you?’ I stammered, ‘Tony Roche’ and he replied, ‘You’re Anthony Roche, the editor???’ and we embraced. This was renowned scripter and comics artist, Dave Hine, who had read *HU* as a thirteen-year-old schoolboy and decided on a future career in comics (Dave gives a wonderful account of the whole thing in this issue, as well as contributing a strip which he both wrote and drew).

And there it may have rested. Except for the fact of Dubliner James Bacon, who had been searching for me ever since he heard Jarvis Cocker mention an Irish comics fanzine with art by Paul Neary on a BBC radio documentary in 2008. James is the driving force behind the (ultimately successful) bid to hold the 2019 Science Fiction Worldcon in Dublin. As part of that bid, the second issue of *Merry Marvel Fanzine* was posted on their blog in February 2016 (God knows how they got hold of this ‘carefully annotated and lovingly

preserved copy' of *MMF #2*—I no longer have any copies of my first fanzine). I figured it was time to come out of hiding and, armed with my talismanic seven issues of *HU*, presented myself at the desk at that year's Dublin Octocon and asked for James Bacon. As if magically on cue, the smiling, bewhiskered figure of James walked in and we warmly conversed. James then said that I needed to meet Pádraig Ó Méalóid (how right he was) and the three of us converged in Dublin the following month—November 2016—for the first of many meetings. Along with Chris Garcia, they run a fanzine called *Journey Planet* and proposed a special issue on *MMF* and *HU*, which was to include an interview with me by Pádraig. The impressively produced *JP #3* I appeared in jig time. Then, in February 2017, Pádraig suggested that the time was now ripe for *Heroes Unlimited #8*. I responded with derision. Pádraig, however, is nothing if not persuasive and quietly replied: 'We would help'—which I knew meant that he, James, and Chris would present *HU #8* under the banner of *Journey Planet*. I at once realised it was a brilliant idea and off we went on an eighteen-month journey which has resulted now in the ultimate (and final) issue of *Heroes Unlimited*. I was immensely aided throughout this process by the wise counsel of our fourth co-editor, my nineteen-year-old son, Merlin Roche, who is studying to be an animator.

Pádraig Ó Méalóid wasn't done yet. Two months later, he suggested that I interview Alan Moore for *HU #8*. I found the prospect exciting and full of promise, but thought it would never happen. Instead, within twenty-four hours of the request, back came the reply: 'Alan Moore gives green light to interview with Anthony Roche.' In the course of rummaging through my boxes of *HU* memorabilia, I had come across the most extraordinary, witty and wide-ranging letter from a fifteen-year-old Alan Moore from Northampton (you can see the original letter in this issue's letters column.) When I met Alan in London a few months later, he greeted me warmly and said of *HU*, 'Tony, it set the agenda.' And so began the four-month process of my sending Alan three questions a month and his sending me the extraordinary replies you will find in our interview. He had told me he was really looking forward to our interview and it seems to me that he gave himself to it as to few others because it was for *Heroes Unlimited*. The discovery of the impact *HU* had on a slightly younger generation of fans who went on to contribute mightily to the comics biz has been for me the most surprising and delightful aspect of the past few years.

There's a downside to everything. And the saddest aspect of reviving *Heroes Unlimited* has been to discover that many of the contributing editors, artists, and writers are no longer alive: artist Ken Simpson, writer Peter C Phillips, and writer Peter Simpson. This issue is dedicated to their memory. It meant all the more, therefore, when I heard back from artist Paul Neary, a reply which included a 2103 illo of Hunter for the cover of *HU #8*. Paul also gave permission for 'Attack of the Snow Leopard' (which had been a limited edition poster in 1970) to be the back cover. With those Neary illustrations in place, I knew there would definitely be a *Heroes Unlimited #8*. Paul also said he hoped to come over to Dublin for Worldcon in 2019. It would be great to have a reunion after all these years and—who knows?—maybe even a *HU* panel.

It has meant a lot to me to bring my two worlds together—the early days of comics and the later days of academia. My former PhD student Patrick O'Donnell, a Dubliner now resident and teaching in the US, contributes on Lord Dunsany. My friend and colleague in the School of English, Drama, and Film at UCD, Dr Sharae Deckard, contributes on women in comics, the single greatest development in the field in the fifty years since *HU* last appeared. This is matched by Pádraig Ó Méalóid's interviews with eleven women who have been involved significantly in comics in different ways. And Dr Eamonn Hughes of Queen's University Belfast contributes a piece on the great Belfast science-fiction writer Bob Shaw. In Easter 1969, I attended the Science Fiction Con at Oxford, where I had the pleasure of meeting Bob Shaw and his friend and fellow Belfast science fiction writer, James White. When they saw *HU* on the stand of my pal Derek 'Bram' Stokes and saw the editor was from Dublin, they were keen to meet me. Bram told them I was around and so we met. I am thrilled to have the piece on Bob Shaw, and James Bacon's memoir of James White in this issue.

In its last two issues, *HU* broadened out from an exclusive concern with comics to also consider fantasy, science fiction, and horror. This issue has followed that template. It also gives pride of place to an interview with a leading comics professional. Like those earlier interviews with Al Williamson and Dick Giordano, in the interview with Alan I was talking with somebody I considered a friend; and that tone marks all three. The issue itself would never have happened without the friendship which has developed between myself, James Bacon, and Pádraig Ó Méalóid. *Heroes* all!

ANTHONY ROCHE
July 21st 2018, Dublin

Women in Comics

by

Sharae Deckard

Women have always been in comics. They have been artists, colourers, inkers, and letterers. They have been editors and publishers, like Jenette Kahn, who initiated the 'DC Explosion' during her reign, reinventing classic characters like Superman in the 1980s and encouraging DC Comics to push new boundaries in subject matter under her leadership, or Peggy Burns, who champions the feminist workplace at Drawn & Quarterly. And, as I will demonstrate, women have been auteurs and creators since the very beginning of print comics, innovating and influencing the early development of the medium, even though their work has often been consigned to obscurity in public memory, or erased from conventional accounts of comics history as an exclusively male preserve.

I. Challenging 'Stag Privilege': Early Women Cartoonists

As early as the 1760s Mary Darly wrote, illustrated, and published the first book of caricature drawing in England, *A Book of Caricaturas*, heralded by Nicola Streeten and Cath Tate as an origin point for British comics. Similarly, in the nineteenth century, Britain's first ever recurring comic character, Ally Sloper, which would later go on to influence Charlie Chaplin's 'little tramp,' was co-developed and illustrated by the multi-talented actress and cartoonist Marie Duval in the magazine *Judy*. During the Great War, British female artists produced propaganda comic postcards to spur on the war effort and keep spirits up. In North America, only a year after the famous publication of RF Outcault's full-colour *The Yellow Kid*, widely regarded as the first US comic strip, female cartoonist Rose O'Neill published her own comic in the September 1896 issue of *Truth*. Over the next decade, comic strips by women including Louise Quarles, Grace Kasson, Kate Carew, and Grace Drayton proliferated in magazines and Sunday pages of newspapers across America, teeming with cupids, dimpled cherubs, and Kewpies, O'Neill's signature character. In Japan, *shōjo* children's magazines aimed specifically at girls first appeared in 1903, showing the first origins of the wide-eyed doll-like aesthetic associated with what would become *shōjo* manga, or comics targeted at young women, even though the first significantly successful female manga artist, Machiko Hasegawa, would not rise to prominence until 1946, and women artists would not gain dominance in the field until the mid-1960s.

In the 1920s in the US, the cute kids of the Edwardian period gave way to zany ladies and gorgeous flappers with strong opinions, whether the tumbling locks and voluminous gowns of Nell Brinkley's art nouveau 'Brinkley girls' or the clean, modern lines and sass of Ethel Hays's art deco styled Sunday pages featuring Flapper Fanny. In the UK, suffragettes increasingly used cartoons and visual media to help influence public opinion, and women cartoonists flourished in newspapers, although their work was often signed under a surname, leaving their gender undisclosed.

In the 1930s, the economic crash saw the end of the light-hearted flappers and brought a new focus in US women's comics on irrepressible orphans and poor-but-upbeat households in Depression



strips. In this decade Dale Messick, who would go on to become the unofficial 'dean' of women's comics, first began plying her art. In the 1940s, Messick broke big into action strips with *Brenda Starr*, her comic about a fast-talking women reporter with a Rita Hayworth-esque mane of red hair, and a fashion sense as sharp as her wit. *Brenda Starr* inspired a huge female readership from its first publication until its cancellation, but it was far from an outlier.

Throughout the WWII period, US women cartoonists were employed by multiple comic book companies, writing action heroine stories of female spies, daredevils, and commandoes. As many American men were drafted and went off to war, the number of women in the comics industry tripled, taking advantage of the new space offered for female comics artists writing on war themes. Eight months before William Moulton Marston's Wonder Woman strode into the world in her indestructible bracelets, Tarpe Mills's pantherskin-clad Miss Fury stalked into the limelight for her 1941 debut, thus stealing the crown for first major costumed action heroine—created by a woman, nonetheless. Neysa McMein's svelte action heroine, Deathless Deer, an ancient Egyptian princess resurrected in America, appeared soon thereafter in 1942.

Like Dale Messick, Tarpe Mills had adopted a more gender-ambiguous pen name, attempting to thwart the sexism of an industry that despite the multiplication of professional women in its ranks, still perceived female cartoonists as only good for authoring 'cute' strips about kids or romance, rather than action, trying to confine them within particular genres. This gender inequality could also be seen in the all-male National Cartoonists Society (NCS), founded in 1946 in the US, which prohibited female members, despite the fact that women cartoonists had been active for fifty years in print by that point.

In her invaluable history of North American women cartoonists, *Pretty in Ink*, Trina Robbins reproduces the sublimely sardonic letter sent to the NCS in 1949 by Hilda Terry, creator of the popular newspaper teen girl comic strip *Teena*:

Gentlemen:

While we are, individually, in complete sympathy with your wish to convene unhampered by the presence of women, and while we would, individually, like to continue, as far as we are concerned, the indulgence of your masculine whim, we find that the cost of your stag privilege is stagnation for us, professionally.

WHEREAS there is no information in the title to denote that this is exclusively a men's organisation, and WHEREAS a professional organisation that excludes women in this day and age is unheard of and unthought of, and WHEREAS the public is therefore left to assume, where they are interested in any cartoonist of the female sex, that said cartoonist must be excluded from your exhibitions for other reasons damaging to the cartoonist's professional prestige, we must humbly request that you either alter your title to the National Men Cartoonists Society, or confine your activities to social and private functions, or discontinue, in effect, whatever rule or practice you have which bars otherwise qualified women cartoonists to membership for purely sexual reasons.

Sincerely,

The Committee for Women Cartoonists

Hilda Terry, Temporary Chairwoman (quoted in Robbins, p94)

The NCS justified the exclusion of women on the grounds that their presence would hamper the ability of men to talk profanely in club meetings. Terry would go on to break the gender barrier at NCS, fighting for entrance after being nominated and then blackballed; her first act when she finally became a member was to submit the names of her women cartoonist friends.

Despite these breakthroughs, when WWII ended, there was a backlash to women in the US comics industry, as men took back their action comics and women were sent, in Robbins's words, 'back to the kitchen,' consigned to more 'traditional' female genres such as teen and romance comics. The infamous Comics Code, spurred by the publication of Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, had a particularly devastating effect on the participation of women in the US comics industry. As most comic book publishing companies went bust, unable to withstand the stringently conservative and prudish censorship laws, women artists and writers were the first to be fired. By 1974, there were only two women artists professionally employed by mainstream comic publishers in the US. By and large, women comics artists were forced into the underground, while the two big studios, with their emphasis on action and male superheroes, would come to the fore in the mainstream.

In the underground, women comics artists like Alice Kominsky-Crumb and Trina Robbins, both guiding forces in the *Wimmen's Comix Collective*, which published the all-female *Wimmen's Comix* anthology from 1972 to 1992, would reinvent the medium as a vehicle for feminist self-expression, self-consciously challenging the form and content not only of mainstream artists but of the male first-wave of underground cartoonists. From menstruation to masturbation, their comix explored female embodiment, exploded social taboos on representation, and rejected the glamorisation and sexual objectification of women. Kominsky-Crumb's work was not only sexually explicit and intensely confessional, but visually challenging in its deliberately inconsistent aesthetics, in which linework varied between realism and expressionism, and her own self-representation bloated or shrank in its proportions in concordance with different effects, sometimes in the same panel, leading some critics to deride her art as 'primitive.' This work would pave the way for later generations of queer and feminist cartoonists and for the autobiographical innovations of long-form, independent graphic narrative memoirs such as Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*. However, women cartoonists in the US, despite this flourishing underground, remained excluded from the mainstream in the mid-century.

II. 'Higher, Further, Faster, More': Contemporary Women Superheroes

This history of foreclosure, marking a traumatic hiatus in women's professional participation as creators in mainstream comics, contrasts sharply with the efflorescence of *shōjo* manga in Japan in the 1960s-1970s, where the Year 24 Group of women *mangaka* revolutionised the genre, conducting radical experiments in content and form, inventing new visual syntaxes, subject matter, and subgenres, revolutionising the size and shapes of panels, introducing montage-style page layouts, and developing iconic shorthands for complex interiority and emotion. *shōjo* was the source of the most cutting-edge experimentation, earning both critical praise and national popularity, and spurring forward the entire manga industry into new realms of innovation.

Contrasting differing histories of women in comics in transnational contexts reveals the extent to which both the representation of female characters and the participation of women creators, artists, and writers have been hugely shaped by political and economic forces. In Japan, the market for readership of *manga* for and by women was never in question, and only expanded from the mid-century onwards, in contrast to the dominant myth in the US that persisted from the 1950s onwards—and still remains pervasive in many circles today—that comics were by and for boys. This myth is partly bound up with the confusion of *genre* for *medium*. The genre of superhero comics was long dominated by male characters and heroes, intimately bound up with the celebration of particular kinds of heteronormative American masculinity. Even European adventure comics from the Franco-Belgian tradition of *bande dessinées* like *Tintin* and *Astérix* primarily featured the exploits of boys and men. But, as demonstrated above, these were not the only genres in comics, only the ones to become dominant in the post-war period, and only in particular national contexts. Furthermore, they were genres which women had previously been active in the shaping of, before being pushed out of the industry. Characters from the 1940s like Miss Fury and Deathless Deer, though almost wholly forgotten by readers today, point both to an alternative matrilineal tradition of women cartoonists, and to what could have been a different trajectory for the development of women superheroes and action genres, one which has thankfully been redeemed in the contemporary efflorescence of female superhero, action, SF, and fantasy characters in the twenty-first century.

Although female readership of comics has always been difficult to measure, recent studies suggest that it has exploded in the past two decades, with over 51% of fans on social media sites for comics identifying as women (according to an MTV News article, and Hillary Chute). Comic conventions teem with women, whether as fans and cosplayers, or artists and writers. At the same time, mainstream female superhero characters are achieving commercial success for the big studios. While as late as 2010 Marvel had no female-led titles, by 2016, it had twenty.

Marvel's *Ms Marvel*, written by G Willow Wilson, a novelist, comics writer, and journalist, has been one of the company's top sellers since its debut in 2014. The series stars Kamala Khan, a sixteen-year-old Pakistani-American with Inhuman heritage growing up in Jersey City, who takes on the mantle of Ms Marvel after Carol Danvers (in Kelly Sue DeConnick's fabulous reboot, *Captain Marvel*) relinquishes the title to become Captain of the Avengers. Without abandoning cracking plots and innovative action sequences where Kamala bends and stretches her infinitely elastic limbs with unbridled joy, testing the limits of both her physical and subjective flexibility, *Ms Marvel* combines the attentiveness to the quotidian experiences of female adolescence and the

challenges of high school that has helped give rise to a whole genre of YA comics focusing on girlhood with an intersectional consciousness of the challenges faced by young women of colour and of Muslim faith in the United States. Meanwhile, DeConnick's *Captain Marvel: Earth's Mightiest Hero* (2016) has spawned a ferociously loyal readership amongst the 'Carol Corps,' with her bold, wise-cracking, high-flying pilot-turned-hero, who wrestles with her leadership responsibilities whilst seriously slayin' in the skies.

In Danvers and Khan, it is difficult not to see echoes of Joss Whedon's *Buffy*, who became such an icon of ass-kicking female power and collective solidarity in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and who crossed over with immense transmedial success to the comics series published by Dark Horse. Women superhero characters and protagonists with strong inputs from women writers and artists are more visible than ever on the big and small screen, from Wonder Woman's Amazonian battles to Jessica Jones's noir investigations of the aftermath of trauma and domestic abuse on Netflix. Marvel in particular has shown a willingness to capitalise on this new popularity by commissioning a slew of imprints and series by women writers and creators, who work in the dominant genres of superhero, action, and SF comics, but challenge their conventions from within.

In the wake of the planetary blockbuster that was the first Black Panther film, the acclaimed Nigerian-

“Women superhero characters and protagonists with strong inputs from women writers and artists are more visible than ever on the big and small screen, from Wonder Woman's Amazonian battles to Jessica Jones's noir investigations of the aftermath of trauma and domestic abuse on Netflix.”

American writer Nnedi Okorafor known for her vibrant Afro-politan sf has been commissioned by Marvel to write a three-part comic series, *Wakanda Forever*, focusing on the Dora Milaje—Okoye, Ayo, and Aneka—whose fierce portrayals were standouts of the Hollywood film and whose power comes from their matriarchal tradition of warriors. Fans of the Black Widow—still awaiting a Natasha Romanov-helmed solo movie—can read Marjorie Liu's *Black Widow: The Name of the Rose* (2011), the first Marvel solo title authored by a woman of colour. The mini-series offers a feminist reimagining of the character, which charts her transition from an idealised sex object trained only to obey orders and never to make choices for herself to an empowered adult whose strength lies not in physical prowess or supernatural powers, but in her own resilience, intellect, and extraordinary willpower. Natasha's morality is layered and situational, always negotiated within the pressure-cooker of a patriarchal social order and an oppressively paternalistic US state, without the advantages of social capital and gender privilege possessed by a hero like Tony Stark.

In DC comics, fan-favourite writer Gail Simone is author of *Batgirl* and *The Movement*. In 1999, Simone famously spear-headed the website *Women in Refrigerators*, highlighting the disproportionate tendency of women characters in comics (and TV and film spinoffs) to be brutalised, raped, or killed. This includes the trope of disposable women, who exist in storylines only to be attacked or violently killed in order to spur forward plots, or to provoke the anguish and personal development of male protagonists. The term 'fridging' comes from a storyline in *Green Lantern*, after the villain Major Force literally stuffs the corpse of Kyle Rayner's girlfriend, Alexandra DeWitt, into a refrigerator, thus motivating Kyle's revenge plot. However, even superchicks who were more than Mary Janes or ornamental girlfriends were statistically more likely than male characters to be subjected to brutal deaths, depowering that stripped them of their abilities, mutilation and maiming, or violent sexual assault, all for cheap shock value.

Simone's own work both refuses the tropes of expendability and sensationalist violence against women and challenges notions of cathartic violence and revenge in favour of a greater emphasis on affective development and complex interiority. The root of her *Batgirl*'s heroism is not primarily the masculinist conception of action, where physical violence is perpetrated on a villain, but rather Barbara Gordon's ability to work through personal traumas, grief, and depression. Similarly, in her five-issue *Legends of Red Sonja* anthology, published by Dynamite in 2014, Simone assembled stories by top female writers from fantasy, comics, and gaming, including Mercedes Lackey, Tamora Pierce, Devin Grayson, Nancy Collins, and Marjorie M Liu, contained within a wrap-around frame narrative. Within the anthology, the ferocious She-Devil was transformed from barbarian cheesecake-in-a-chain-mail bikini into a more Homeric hero, generating epic

legends of her achievements throughout the ancient world. Writers wryly lampshaded the exploitation aesthetic of the original while insisting on Sonja's ingenuity and intelligence and embracing her right to articulate her sexuality on her own terms.

III. Monstrous Non-Compliance: Indie Comics and the Fantastic

While, as I have suggested above, women writers and artists are increasingly visible in superhero and action genres published by big studios, this visibility still exists in tension with sexist portrayals of women, a lack of diverse representation of different ethnicities, and tendencies towards sensationalist sexual violence, as in the controversial comments by *Kick-Ass* writer Mark Millar defending his depiction of rape as akin to a decapitation, or the assertions of comics creators in the 2013 press tour for the PBS docu-series *Superheroes: The Never-Ending Battle* that readers are 'not interested' in women and people of colour as characters. Another source of recent public controversy was France's Angoulême International Comics Festival in 2016, which did not include a single woman on its shortlist for the Grand Prix. However, there has been a flowering of huge numbers of female creators in manga and indie comics. Creator-owned comics have pioneered many of the most exciting developments in Euro-American contemporary comics, both in aesthetics and content, giving rise to a multiplicity of styles and subgenres, with a particular efflorescence of the fantastic and the speculative.

Two of the creators I have already mentioned, who also happen to be my own fangirl favourites, Marjorie Liu and Kelly Sue DeConnick, are prime examples of this creativity. The creator-owned *Monstress* (2016), written by Liu with art by Sana Takeda, is visually exquisite, blending art deco intricacy in minutely detailed panels with steampunk mechanical horror to render a dark fantasy vision of a post-cataclysm universe dominated by feuding matriarchal cultures. *Monstress* effortlessly melds Western and manga comics conventions, particularly in its creation of monsters and magical-halfbreeds such as the eponymous monstress protagonist, Maika Halfwolf, whose internal body-dwelling entity is a hairy, tentacular monster reminiscent of both Lovecraft and *Urotsukidoji*. The mythopoeic world-building and character development are extraordinary, fully exploiting the possibilities of long-form pacing, while the series' unapologetic portrayal of gruesome violence is bound up with its sophisticated and frequently transgressive exploration of notions of the feminine monstrous. This is feminist horror commingled with gothic, fantasy, and science fiction in a world that could not be further away from the bam-pow action thriller aesthetic of Liu's *Widow* title.

Likewise, Kelly Sue DeConnick's and Valentine De Landro's co-created *Bitch Planet*, self-described as an 'SF kidney punch,' is a day-glo feminist exploitation comic and instant classic. A mashup of 1950s and 1970s genre conventions, the neon-pink comic offers a modern feminist take on women-in-prison flicks by depicting the battle for survival of the female inmates of a galactic prison planet for 'gender non-compliance.' Explicitly citing Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea of 'intersectional feminism' in the discussion guide at the back of the first volume, *Bitch Planet* explores such topics as incarceration and the growth of the prison industry, systematic racism, heterosexism and transphobia, queerness and body image, and the gendered division of labour, as well as the potential for resistance within the system, but all couched in a thrilling plot revolving around the action-packed competition of a team of women prisoners and a subsequent uprising. The textual sophistication and formal excitement of *Bitch Planet*, its audacity of vision, brilliant use of chromatics, and its unabashed current of righteously political rage, again mark it as startlingly original in contrast to the more mainstream fare of



Captain Marvel. See too DeConnick and Emma Rios's fantastic feminist reimagination of the western genre, *Pretty Deadly*, chronicling the story of Deathface Ginny, the Reaper of Vengeance.

Rebooted faerie tales, feminist gothic, and fantasy are all genres in which indie women creators have excelled and attracted loyal audiences. Delineated in precise black-and-white line drawings, Linda Medley's *Castle Waiting* (2012) retells the tale of Sleeping Beauty from those on the fringes of the action. Medley's voice is quiet, focused on quotidian details, injecting banality and pathos into the everyday experiences of fairytale characters. She uses whimsy and subtle irony to offer a feminist critique of conventional fairytales, while portraying Beauty's abandoned castle as a quasi-utopian refuge for a gathering community of characters who have fled troubled pasts and the aftermath of the wars catalysed by the actions of leading characters or by the patriarchal institutions of medieval society. Noelle Stevenson's effervescent webcomic *Nimona*, published as a hardback in 2015, follows in Medley's path of the reimagined medieval universe, but without *Castle Waiting's* reticent tone. It stars shapeshifter Nimona as the pretend sidekick (but actually opponent) of supervillain Ballister Blackheart as they negotiate a medieval but weirdly high-tech society populated by mad scientists and chivalry-gone-wrong. High-energy and frequently wacky, the comic offers a more 'butch' take on the superchick, while deconstructing the power-fantasies and wish-fulfilment arcs that are so rife within the genre. Partly inspired by Angela Carter's feminist gothic in *The Bloody Chamber*, Marian Churchland's more contemplative *Beast* (2009) reinvents twin myths, Beauty and the Beast and Pygmalion and Galatea. Its protagonist, Colette, is a sculptor trying to recover from a toxic relationship and to survive as an artist in a state of economic precarity; she takes on a commission acquired by her father, her unreliable agent, to carve a portrait of a mysterious male benefactor out of a block of marble. Instead of Pygmalion's emphasis on the myth of male creative genius—wherein the literally objectified woman is rendered flesh so that the male artist can copulate with her—*Beast* imagines the struggles of a female artist to find her own voice, to embrace

“Instead of Pygmalion's emphasis on the myth of male creative genius—wherein the literally objectified woman is rendered flesh so that the male artist can copulate with her—*Beast* imagines the struggles of a female artist to find her own voice...”

a generative creativity and acknowledge her own burgeoning, often dark, sexual desires. Fittingly, the delicate clear-line style of the earlier sections gives way in the last pages, when Colette rushes back to complete her sculpted beast and embrace the monster, to a thicket of black, dense scribbles, as if the erotic forest of the unconscious were exploding over the page.

Indie comics for YA audiences have likewise embraced fantastic and speculative aesthetics to depict experiences of girlhood and the turbulent transitions of adolescence. *Lumberjanes* (2015), created by Shannon Watters, Grace Ellis, Noelle Stevenson (creator of *Nimona*), and Brooke Allen, depicts the madcap antics of the scouts in Miss Quinzella Thiskwin Penniquiqui Thistle Crumpet's queered summer camp for 'hardcore lady-types,' as they battle three-eyed talking foxes, vampires, yetis, and mysterious conspiracies to pit Boy Scouts against girls in the woods surrounding their camp. The plot is frenetically paced, full of zany and often absurdist humour, matched by exuberant art that happily mixes horror, fantasy, and manga conventions with an American sensibility. At the same time, the focus on the team as a collectivity eschews the heroic individualism of many comics genres, while still carefully subjectivising each of the different girls and their various emotional and physical challenges. It flawlessly passes the so-called Bechdel-Wallace test with its ample examples of communication between cis- and transgender girls of different ethnicities, and features a lovely sub-plot turning on a girl-on-girl crush.

Vera Brosgol's long-form graphic novel *Anya's Ghost* (2011) is more gothic, less full of relentless cheer, turning on the anxieties of a nerdy teenager who is a Russian émigré, tortured with anxiety about her body, embarrassed by her family and her ethnicity, and alienated at school. After falling down a well, she becomes possessed by a ghost, who seems at first to be a potential best friend with the ability to give Anya exceptional powers, but later, it becomes clear, is only feeding on Anya's anxieties and draining her energies, and must be exorcised. The comic combines compassionate, self-deprecating humour with a sensitive refusal, again,

of fantasies of wish fulfilment and revenge that rely on the notion of exceptional powers or the creation of simple black-and-white enemies to be vanquished through violent action. The two-toned muted violet and black palette captures the increasingly creepy unease of the plot and the brooding, bruised psyche of the lonely teenager, while the pacing of the panels is reminiscent of early silent cinema.

IV. 'Autobifictionalography': Non-Fiction Graphic Narratives

Perhaps the most visible work of women comics creators in the global literary market has been in the realm of non-fiction or, in the words of the Eisner category, 'reality-based work.' Most often these are in long-form graphic narratives, whose blending of autobiography, memoir, or documentary genres belies the market sobriquet of 'graphic novel' often clumsily foisted upon them. Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, first published in French in 2000, is a case in point. It is one of the best-selling graphic narratives in history, with over one million copies in print, but is far from a novel. In a black-and-white, minimalist style with flattened perspective that combines German expressionism with the aesthetics of ancient Persian miniatures and friezes, the graphic memoir chronicles Marji's upbringing in Tehran, where she suffers the violence of both the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. The narrative is relentlessly personal and simultaneously political, exploring the autobiographical traumas incurred by war and the more private violence of gendered oppression.

As comics critic Hillary Chute has observed, the comics form lends itself to *Bildungsroman* explorations of growth and subjectivity. This enables artists to layer and juxtapose multiple moments of time that capture the nonchronological experience of memory, using cross-discursivity between word and image to frame dialogues between split or developing selves, and evoking a diary-like intimacy, often directly using handwriting to externalise internal feelings. For these reasons, it has proved particularly powerful for female cartoonists.

“All of these texts share an unapologetically homiletic sensibility, seeking to rewrite known histories, recuperate marginalised figures, and reinvigorate the political imagination of the present.”

Filipina-American Lynda Barry invented the term 'autobifictionalography' to describe her own work, drawing attention to the blurred lines between autobiography, fiction and memoir in *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2002) when she asks: 'Is it autobiography if parts of it are not true? Is it fiction if parts of it are?' Barry's genre-defying texts like *What It Is* (2008) juxtapose memoir, collage, and workbook, thick with material mementoes and accumulative debris of memories past, scrawled over in personal handwriting, and feature expressive, exaggerated line drawings full of vigour and life, while her panels move back and forwards between experiences of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to evoke her palimpsestic sense of selfhood.

Alison Bechdel's memoirs, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), and *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama* (2012), are perhaps the other most famous examples of memoir next to Satrapi's. Bechdel was already a queer comics pioneer with *Dykes to Watch Out For*, America's second ongoing queer comic strip, and the origin of the famous story, *The Rule* which became the basis for the Bechdel Test standard of gender quality in popular culture. *Fun Home* took Bechdel's art to a new level, an intricately-crafted work of seven chapters with impeccable framing, exploring the fallout of her closeted homosexual father's suicide and her own experiences as a lesbian coming of age in rural Pennsylvania. The memoir is cerebral and literary, full of inter-textual allusions to authors such as Proust and Joyce, informed by gender studies and queer theory, and deeply sophisticated in its complex spatio-temporal aesthetics, while remaining intensely moving in its evocation of loss and estrangement.

The literary autobiographical memoir or historical memoir is a powerful subgenre of women's graphic narratives. Mary M Talbot's *Dotter of Her Father's Eyes* (2012), with art by Bryan Talbot, is a prime example, combining a feminist recuperation of the coming-of-age of Lucia, daughter of James Joyce, a brilliant dancer who was later incarcerated in a mental asylum, with the childhood of the author, Mary M Talbot, herself the daughter of the eminent Joycean scholar James S Atherton. Talbot ingeniously contrasts the experiences of two women thwarted by gender expectations and domineering fathers in gritty postwar Britain and swinging Paris in the 1920s. she uses Lucia Joyce's story to question myths of female madness and male genius, while revealing the ways in which James S Atherton's distance and sexism had shaped his daughter's own difficult coming-of-age. In their next collaboration, *The Red Virgin and the Vision of Utopia* (2016), the Talbots would chronicle the life of the forgotten revolutionary socialist hero of the Paris Commune, Louise Michel, who was called 'The Red Virgin of Montmartre.' The book's palette of two-toned brown and sepia is punctuated throughout by brilliant bursts of red, in a flag, or in the crackle of Michel's skirt on the barricade, that capture her utopian spirit, battered but never quelled, even after her removal to a penal colony in New Caledonia.

This same desire to chronicle the obscured histories of past revolutionary women animates Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter: A Graphic Revolution* (2017), interweaving the stories of her Soviet grandmother with her own adolescence, Sharon Rudahl's *A Dangerous Woman* (2007), a painterly graphic biography of Emma Goldman, and Kate Evans's stunning *Red Rosa* (2015), chronicling Rosa Luxemburg's life and death in a rich melange of words from her own diaries and letters. All of these texts share an unapologetically homiletic sensibility, seeking to rewrite known histories, recuperate marginalised figures, and reinvigorate the political imagination of the present. A similar sensibility can be seen in the burgeoning genres of activist comics, travelogues, and comics journalism by women creators. These include milestones such as Sarah Glidden's *Rolling Blackouts: Dispatches from Turkey, Syria and Iraq* (2016), which adapts Joe Sacco's style of comics documentary to offer her own 'docu-memoir' in 'narra-toon' form of the effects of the Iraq War on refugees across the Middle East.

Less well-known, but demonstrative of the interest of documentary comics in capturing the everyday with a keen eye for class and socio-economic differences, are Dublin artist Sarah Bowie's minicomics such as *Worse Things* (2015) and *Mall Life* (2015), which, like their epigraph from Patrick Kavanagh, celebrate in loose pencilled lines the quotidian experiences of northside working-class people 'wherever life pours ordinary plenty,' from the Jervis Street shopping mall, to the Lidl discount grocery store, to the Abbey Street Luas stop. An important example of activist comics is *The Real Costs of Prisons Comix* (2008) in which Lois Ahrens brings female graphic artists together with representations from prison inmates of their experiences of mass incarceration in an unjust carceral system, in an effort not only to use the powerful didactic capabilities of comics to politicise and narrate injustices, but to make visible the political writing and comix of prisoners. As she explains in her preface, Ahrens was inspired by her encounter in Mexico with women reading photo novellas, which were cheap to produce and buy, and were frequently passed on from hand to hand between readers, just like comic books in the US state prison system, and became inspired to revision comics as a form of visual resistance.

As I have tried to suggest in this all too brief survey, women creators have been a fixture in comics since its very inception, and continue to be vibrant, vital participants in an art form that only continues to grow in popularity and creativity across the globe. They are at the heart of innovations in style, subject matter, and form, and have been met by an ever-expanding audience of female and male readers alike. Comics have always been broader than just the superhero or action genres, and women continue not only as creators of dynamic female superheroes, but of many other kinds of leading ladies, whether political revolutionary heroes like Louise Michel and Rosa Luxemburg, or the quieter triumphs of complex female protagonists of their own life-stories, like Marji, Alison, and Mary. Heroes unlimited, indeed.

Further Reading:

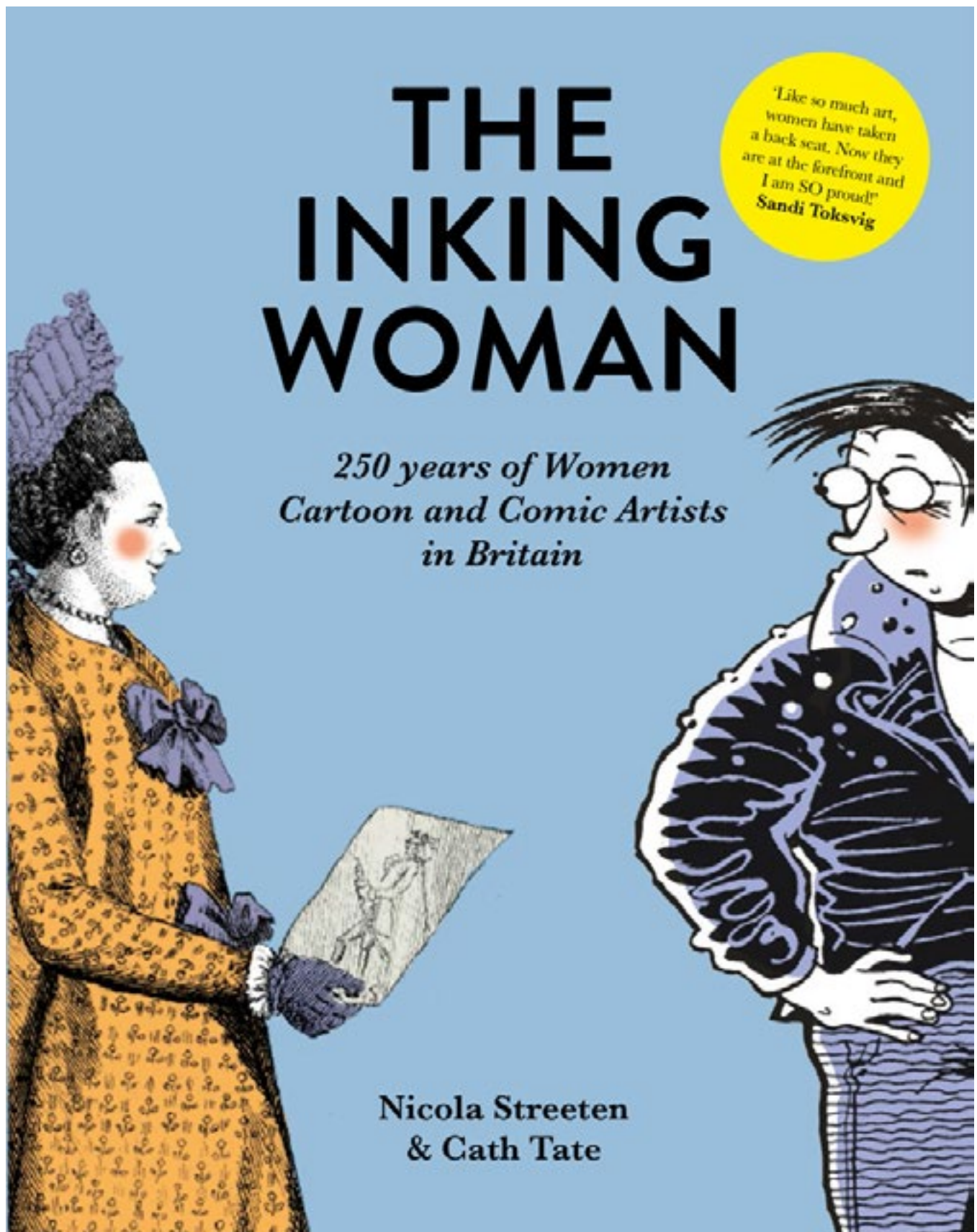
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Convention Reviews- Then and Now

by Anthony Roche

THE SCARP COMIC CONVENTION—NEWYORK—JULY 1968

I
Attending one's first ever comic convention is quite an experience in many ways, particularly when it just happens to be about the biggest and most publicised of all. Such was the case with the SCARP (Society for Comic Art Research and Preservation—I think!) Comicon which was held this year in New York over the July 4th weekend.

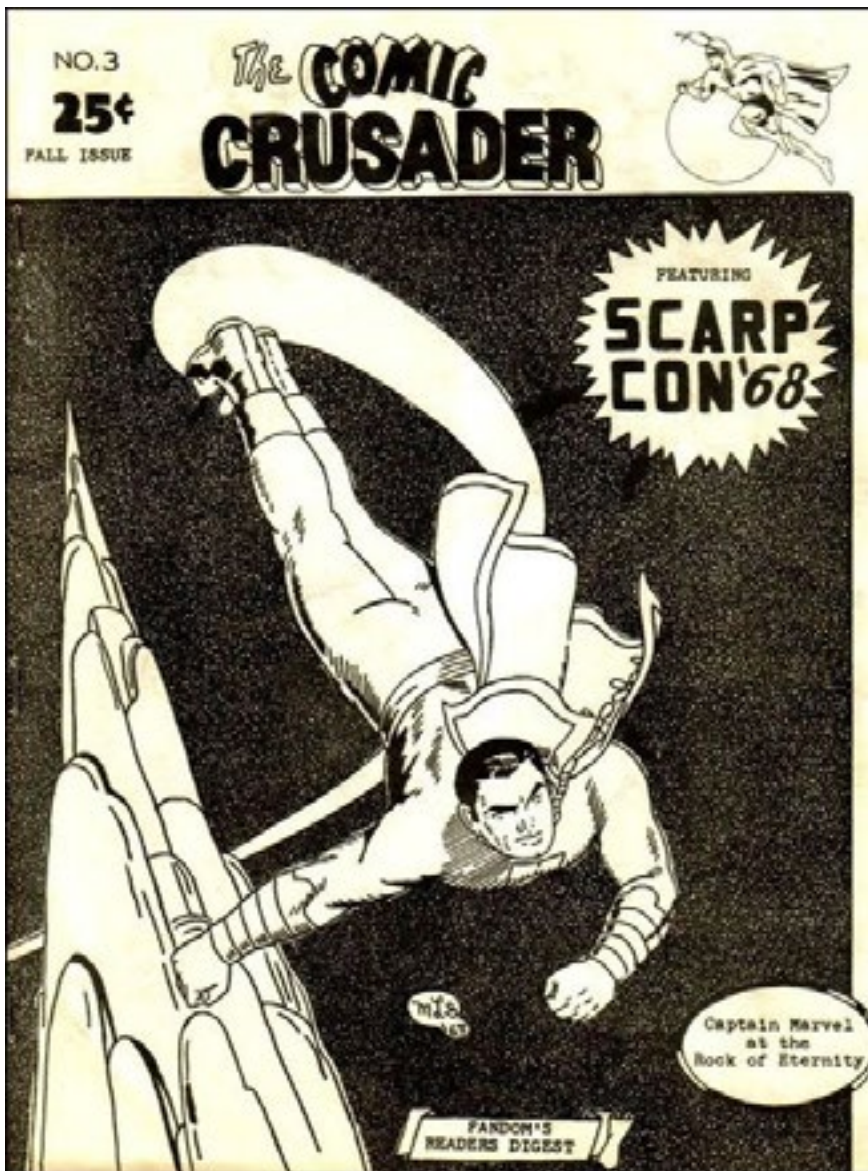
Far too many fan reviews of conventions start off with something like 'I caught a bus at 9.46 am, arriving at the Statler-Hilton at 11.42. I then took the fourth elevator on the left-hand side to the seventeenth floor, where I found out that the Con was being held on the eighteenth, etc, etc.' So we'll skip all that unnecessary rhubarb and suffice it to say that on Thursday morning, I had registered for the entire length of the four-day Con.

Needless to say, there were more dealers in attendance than the Statler-Hilton has rude staff, so I spent some time browsing through the Golden Age 'Classics' that littered the place and—golly gee, fans, I actually managed to glimpse a copy of *Batman #1*!! Quite overcome by this, I lay down for several minutes to let my ecstasy abate. I had committed myself to a policy of 'Browsing, NOT Buying', but eighty dollars later, I concluded that my will-power was non-existent. No, the American dealers' prices aren't as bad as they're made out to be—they're worse! Luckily, there were youngsters in attendance who could be persuaded (by fair means or foul) to part with some of their magazines. Seriously, though, many of the comics were fairly priced but, even when getting a reasonable price, you can still wind up penniless and destitute after a quick whirl around the tables.

First item on the agenda (and a note of appreciation to organiser Phil Seuling for providing an excellent programme throughout the four days) was a talk on 'The Comics—Past, Present and Future' by Chairman Mao—sorry, I mean Chairman Stan (Lee, that is), resplendent in beard and smile. Stan proved himself to be an excellent speaker, fully capable of holding an audience's attention. The talk covered familiar ground, telling how a bolt from the skies struck Stan and Jack Kirby in 1961 and how they decided as a result to write comics, not only for the kids, but also for the college crowd. All of this we've heard before, but the talk did shed some interesting light upon such topics as Marvel's policy of continued stories. Stan then answered questions from the audience and, another point to his credit, did not back down from answering such touchy posers as why Steve Ditko left Marvel.

Some of the other panel discussions were interesting—others weren't. One of the less successful ones had as its topic 'The Role of an Editor' and as its speakers: Wally Wood, Gil Kane, Roy Thomas, Dick Giordano, Joe Orlando, some gent from a comic-strip syndicate, and Stan (Stan who?). Wally informed us that he didn't believe in the existence/role of editors, anyway, and then went back to sleep. Gil got drawn into a futile argument on the violence portrayed in 'His Name Is... Savage!'. Roy gave us a lengthy explanation as to why the latest issue of his great fanzine *Alter-Ego* was two years late. The man from the syndicate told us of the many connections between the two industries and, after all, weren't we one big happy family—oyes. Joe, Dick and Stan all had pertinent comments on editors and such. Although it livened up at times, the panel was bogged down all too frequently by irrelevant discussions, mumbling and a general feeling apparent among some of the speakers of 'What the hell am I doing here, anyway?'

The Alley Awards were presented by Mark Hanerfeld, editor of *On the Drawing Board*. Carmine Infantino had already been given his award at the DC offices, since he could not attend, so the only 'celebrity' present was Stan (what's his surname again?). Stan accepted one for himself as Best Writer of the Year (he also won for Best Editor, but perhaps they figured that he only needed one physical award). He also took two on behalf of Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott as best penciller and inker respectively. A few minutes afterwards, Stan dropped (and broke) one of the statuettes while trying to make a point demonstratively to some fan. He claimed it was Joe Sinnott's that fell! Later in the day, I approached Roy Thomas, with whom I had exchanged letters about the comics he wrote for Marvel and about articles that discussed his work in *Heroes Unlimited*. When I introduced myself, Roy immediately called out: 'Stan, come over here and meet Tony! He's from Ireland!' I have to admit my knees buckled at the thought that the great Stan Lee was being summoned to meet 'il ol' me. We had a relaxed three-way conversation and it ended up with me being invited to visit the Marvel offices on a Tuesday afternoon, ten days later.



After the first day, quite a few fans and pros lost interest in the Con and didn't religiously attend all the speeches and panels. The one event of particular note was the dinner held to honour two men who have contributed much to the comic-strip medium. No, not Lee and Kirby (Stan had already left for good, anyway) but Will Eisner, creator of *The Spirit*, and Burne Hogarth, artist of the *Tarzan* strip during the early fifties. I had an enjoyable meal with the members of TISOS—can't remember what that stood for [*The Illegitimate Sons of Superman—Ed*] but it was a group of fans, many of whom would turn professional in the years ahead: Marv Wolfman, Len Wein, Mike Friedrich, Mark Hanerfeld, and what seemed like dozens of others; during the dinner, I was sworn in as a member of TISOS and felt suitably honoured, not least because I was the sole Irish Catholic amidst all of those New York Jews. I listened attentively to Mr Eisner's short, sweet, predictable but enjoyable after-dinner speech. Mr Hogarth's speech was prologued by Maurice Horn, a dapper Frenchman full of praise for Mr Hogarth and his many talents. Mr Hogarth's speech urged those present to increase the level of comic art from what it was to what it could be, and rather denigrated the comic art of the

previous twenty years (a fine thing to say in front of hundreds of avid fans!). In the Question-and-Answer session which followed, Will Eisner said he had no plans to revive *The Spirit*. Someone commented on his dream-like artistic quality and asked if he got his *Spirit* story ideas from dreams. He replied: 'Well, to answer your question, no, I'm not on pot.'

Talks were also given by Milton Caniff (of *Terry and the Pirates* fame), Lee Frederick (scripter of the *Mandrake* and *Phantom* syndicated strips) and Charles Biro (remember the infamous *Crime Does Not Pay* comics?), But for me the most anticipated and interesting discussion was that given by two of my all-time favorite 'pros', artist Al Williamson and scriptwriter Archie Goodwin, on the hazards of collaboration. They should know what they're talking about, as they've worked together on stories for Jim Warren's *Creepy* and *Eerie*, *Flash Gordon*, and the *Secret Agent X-9/Corrigan* comic strip. They answered questions on these and other matters pertinent to the comics industry, Archie providing most of the answers and Al the laughs. All in all, it was a bright, lively session that I really enjoyed. Al promised that next year he and Archie are going to trot out straw hats and canes, and do a soft-shoe shuffle (God forbid!).

While serials were being shown for the fans, the pros were given a cocktail party and, with the help of one Mr Williamson, yours truly was lucky enough to attend. It was great fun for myself and Wayne DeWald (another fan, editor of *Comic Comments* and a great guy) to match the names of the pros with the people present. They were all friendly and I felt they enjoyed the idea of a cocktail party so they could get away from the fans and be amongst themselves for a while. Eh, well, perhaps I should have said—to get away from *most* fans! That evening, in an act of extraordinary generosity, Al Williamson and Dick Giordano (DC editor and artist supreme) took a party of twelve people each out to dinner in the hotel—Wayne and I were part of Al's party and were also invited to visit his lovely wife Arlene (who letters the *X-9* strip) and himself in their home in the Catskill Mountains the day following the con.

With the rare exception, the pros were very open and easy to get on with. I particularly enjoyed talking to Steve Skeates (writer), Dick Giordano (artist/editor), Stan Lee (writer/editor), Roy Thomas (writer),



Charles
Boecklin



To Tony
From
Will ESNER

To Tony
From your Pal
Gene Colan

Archie Goodwin (writer/editor), Al Williamson (artist), Neal Adams (artist), 'Jumbo' John Verpoorten (Marvel's production manager—he makes the Hulk look like Ant-Man!), Denny O'Neil (writer) and several others. Most artists, despite the fact that Phil Seuling had specifically asked them not to, willingly did drawings for as many fans as possible. I had followed Wayne DeWald's advice and had armed myself with an artist's large drawing pad. I ended up with wonderful illoes of (amongst others) Daredevil by Gene Colan, Hawkman by Murphy Anderson, me by the more comic artists (Joe Orlando and Henry Scarpelli, artist of *Swing with Scooter*), Metamorpho by Sal Trapani and Flash Gordon by Al Williamson; plus the autographs of Will Eisner and Archie Goodwin. Jim Steranko and Neal Adams, both brilliant, were the Young Turks, the new kids on the block, and were probably subject to more art requests than anybody else. Jim Steranko flat out refused to do them. Neal Adams responded to my request with 'Not now, later;' I asked him again the following day and he replied 'Not now, later.' At which point, I thought I would desist, the man clearly did not want to draw me a picture, and was entirely within his rights to do so. About 2 am that night, however, as I sat alone on a sofa quietly reflecting on the day's events, Neal Adams padded by. 'Hi, Tony—do you still want that drawing?' Did I what? I immediately produced my pad, Neal sat down at a table, produced his black pen and began drawing. I stood to one side, just behind his right shoulder, so I could see what he was doing. As he etched the first few lines on the page, I was at a loss: was it a cliff face? Then, as the drawing developed, the features of Deadman (the strip he was currently drawing for DC) emerged from the stone. This is probably what makes the New York Comicon the best there is: the proliferation of pros.

The next day was Sunday, and the last one of the Con. I made up for the previous night, which I had talked away with my friends in TISOS, by sleeping on in the morning and then ambled casually into the Statler-Hilton around twelve-thirty. I was in no hurry, as the first, and only, event that day in which I was interested was a talk on 'How to Draw for the Comics' by Jim Steranko. As the snazziest leprechaun of them all had spent the previous night wowing those left from the day's activities (both of 'em!) with card tricks, I knew I'd arrive before him... and I did. After a shaky start, the show really got rolling and took up most of the afternoon. But, unlike 'Monsieur 'Ogarth', Jim's turn was witty, interesting, and a heckuva way to spend a Sunday afternoon with a talented character.

At four o'clock, men from the hotel came to pack away the dealers' tables, despite the fact that Phil Seuling had hired them until eight o'clock that evening. They 'politely' informed him that orders was orders, 'gently' gathered the tables and left. After that, the Con more or less collapsed, so Wayne and I withdrew to go over the previous four days.

The New York Comicon was an entertaining experience, and I put down the one or two points that aggravated me mainly for accuracy (but more because I like saying nasty things about people!). The atmosphere was tremendous and the events memorable. I hope this rundown gives the people involved in the British Comicon something at which to aim.

[Revised and expanded version of report originally published in *HU #7*]

For more illustrations from the 1968 SCARP Comicon, including the Neal Adams of Deadman referred to in this report, see pages 110, 111 and 112.



Chicago Comic and Entertainment Expo (C2E2)- April 2017

And so, forty-nine years later, here I am heading to my second American comics convention in Chicago on 21 April 2017. I have been at a couple in Ireland and England in recent years, so am not completely unaware of the changes that have taken place. Above all, attendance at comicons is no longer 99% male, as it was in 1968 (let's hear it for the redoubtable Irene Vartanoff, DC Comics' champion supreme), but they are now so thronged with female as well as male participants and fans that percentages become irrelevant. What has encouraged me to travel to this Chicago comicon is the decision earlier in 2017 that yes, Virginia, there *would* be a *Heroes Unlimited #8!* What had brought the Chicago con to my attention was the fact that I was tracking Stan Lee's promised appearances at US comic conventions in 2017. I was determined to make contact one more (last) time with Stan, possibly even interview him, since he had been the single greatest inspiration for the two fanzines I had produced in the 1960s. It soon became clear that an interview in 2017 would be unlikely and that the most I could hope for was a brief meeting. Stan Lee was born in December 1922 and at the time of the Chicago con was a staggering ninety-four years of age. His stamina, verbal articulacy, and energy have all seemed unstoppable over the decades. But even the redoubtable Stan Lee must bow to the demands of time, and this was becoming evident as 2017 unfolded. His Comicon appearances that year were billed as the last ever. His hearing was poor and his eyesight was deteriorating. Then, suddenly and shockingly, Stan's con appearances for March 2017 were all cancelled owing to poor health. His name was removed from the Chicago Comicon lineup. But I decided to persevere in my decision to attend—it would still be an interesting experience, and the coverage would sit nicely with that of the '68 SCARP Con in *HU #8*. Then, ten days before the event, an amazing thing happened—Stan Lee's name was back on the programme. He had said on Facebook that when he got a bad bug his doctor had counselled cancelling the March dates and resting up. Stan had done so but had every hope and intention of recuperating sufficiently to carry out the rest of his promised 2017 programme of appearances. Apparently, this had worked. At Chicago, Stan Lee would be doing photo opportunities but no signings; a Q&A with him was replaced with a no less interesting Stan Lee and Frank Miller one-on-one discussion about their careers.

“What has encouraged me to travel to this Chicago comicon is the decision earlier in 2017 that yes, Virginia, there *would* be a *Heroes Unlimited #8!*”

I arrived in my Chicago hotel late on Friday, rather tired after the eight-hour flight from Dublin. Friday April 21st was the first day of the Con but I decided to rest up in my hotel room and go down to the Convention refreshed the following morning. Things were scheduled to begin at 10.00 am (rather late, I thought—academic conferences get going by 8.30 or 9.00); but when I arrived there at 9.30 there was already quite a bit of activity before the official events got underway at 10. As my taxi made its way to the con, it experienced extremely heavy traffic. I asked wasn't this unusual for a Saturday morning (rather than a working day). The taxi driver explained it was caused by people heading to the con. It was at that point the sheer size of the numbers attending began to sink in. The press had reported an expected attendance of 70,000. 700 fans had been at the SCARP Con in '68 so fifty years had seen a hundred-fold expansion; what was once a niche interest was now clearly mainstream. I was struck by the number of families attending, especially on the Sunday; and how well the con coped with such numbers and catered to those families. And as mentioned the huge numbers of women as well as men, made even more noticeable by the extraordinary cosplay costumes. I cannot remember anyone in costume in '68 in New York; though at the first British comicon in Birmingham later that year seven hardy souls vied for a Fancy Dress prize dressed as their favorite superhero or villain (the X-Men Cyclops of R Lythe and Red Skull of Gerald Cleaver were outstanding). Hardly anyone in Chicago opted for a villain but there was a diversity of superheroes and a notable number of Captain Americas (patriotic, I guess, and hence unsurprising in Donald Trump's America). The women tended towards more colorful and self-designed costumes rather than those modelled on characters. The movies also make their marks on conventions these days, especially where the guests who attend and sign autographs are concerned, and a goodly number of cosplayers dressed all in white as various Star Wars characters. Big comics conventions are no longer held in hotels but rather in convention centres. The Chicago locale was a super

example of the genre, with Level Three (effectively, the first floor) given over to dealers, artists' alley, cosplay central, a gaming area, autographing, and epic photo ops; the talks and panels were then in a series of stages and rooms on the next floor.

I scarcely had time to get a coffee and a Danish before I had to hurry along to the Stan Lee-Frank Miller event on the Main Stage. Miller was the big guest at the con, appearing in a series of sold-out events across the three days. The organisers probably figured he could 'carry' Stan if the latter was in bad shape. Unsurprisingly, the main hall was already full up when I arrived at 10.30. The surprise was there was no extra charge to attend the individual events. The total for three days' attendance was \$100, whereas I calculated the San Diego con total as \$1,000 for their three days. (The reasonable pricing was one reason so many families were attending.) The organisers' response to the numbers was to open up the room next door and stream the live interview into it—an excellent idea and I soon found a good perch. As the clock ticked past eleven o'clock and the screen remained blank, I began to worry about Stan's physical condition and what sort of state he was currently in; would he be brought on stage on a stretcher? At 11.15 things came to life and the young interviewer (who was never identified but did an excellent job) introduced Frank Miller and Stan Lee. First, on came Miller, a silver fox, slim and bearded, in his late 50s, I would say. Then, unbelievably, Stan strode on stage unaided and took his seat beside Miller. He looked well, the way he always did, and was full of irrepressible energy. And so began a full hour of lively chat, a bit like a Dean Martin roast as hosted by the late Don Rickles, with each of the guests praising or taking sideswipes at the other guy, either engaging in dialogue or speaking for a time about their individual achievements.

Frank Miller began by telling a great story about how he was producing comics at home from a really young age and so his father, who was a travelling salesman, decided to bring him to the offices of Marvel Comics when Frank was eight. Miller was a country boy and this was his first time in a city, not just any one but New York City. The visit to Marvel sounded exciting and when he met with Stan Lee the latter told Miller that he was talented and that his work showed great promise, that he was not quite there yet but should keep going and one day he would reach the required standard. (At which point Lee chipped in: 'You're still not quite there yet.') In speaking about the Dark Knight Batman, Miller twice used the word 'spooky' about the character and of his desire to make Batman older, finally settling on fifty years of age. The fascinating thing he said about Daredevil was that here was a superhero whose main feature was a physical impediment (blindness) rather than a power.

Stan Lee told stories he has told many times before but managed to make them sound fresh. The most interesting was the earliest, where he went into fascinating detail about the office to which he was assigned when he first started working for Marvel (essentially as an office boy) while still a teenager. In that office, the comics wing of the publishing organisation, there were only two people present, but what a duo: Jack Kirby and Joe Simon (though Simon always signed his name first, because he was older, Stan reckoned). Lee was largely confined to jobs like pasting; but after a while he was drawn on to improve the writing of Simon and Kirby's strips when it turned out he had a flair for dialogue. Then it struck me: that's what he always did. Roy Thomas's recent book on Marvel reproduces a page of original artwork from *Fantastic Four* #79 which shows Jack Kirby supplying not only the artwork but notes which Lee then improves as speakable and well characterised dialogue. Stan also spoke once more of his publisher Martin Goodman's objections to a superhero based on a spider: people don't like spiders, they'll object to the general ickiness, etc., followed by Goodman's turn-around to claim credit when Spidey's first appearance in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 sold more than any other Marvel title that month. And finally one more time on the Hulk changing colour, from grey to green, in the early issues of his title; with the suggestion that green was a more logical colour for someone who had been hit by radiation.

There was quite a bit of mutual ribbing between the pair. At one point, when Frank Miller was going to take over the talking for a bit, Stan Lee handed over by remarking: 'Go get 'em, tiger'. To which Miller riposted: 'Sure thing, Mary Jane!' This gender swap seemed to appeal to Miller, while leaving Lee absolutely nonplussed. Stan began talking about his legendary cameos in the Marvel movies and Frank asked him about his cameo in the upcoming *Thor: Ragnarok*. Perhaps mindful that in the recent *Thor* comic books, Jane Foster has taken up Mjolnir, the enchanted hammer, Miller asked: 'Are you going to play Sif?' This was the one point in the hour when Lee's hearing difficulties really caused problems. 'Since? What do you mean 'since'??' When Miller painstakingly explained that he was referring to the Norse female deity Sif, Lee just stared at him. But talking about his movie cameos really brought Stan to life. He revealed that he had two, not one, cameos in the about-to-be-released *Guardians of the Galaxy 2*. Two weeks later, I saw the movie back in Dublin and waited patiently for the second cameo at the end of the closing credits. In both, Stan is injected into the storyline (very much as himself), sitting on a stray planet in a spaceman's outfit talking to some other astronauts. In the second, while he is gabbing, they get up and leave, at which point Lee plaintively cries: 'Come back—I have so many stories I still want to tell!'

After an hour's talking, Frank Miller and Stan Lee both sounded as if they could have gone on a lot longer. The session was one of those events that people who attended will never forget. I still had my appointment for 5.45 later that day with Stan the Man. In the meantime, those dealers' tables were out there, beckoning. Having sold all of my Marvel comics to Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick in 1974, I was not about to buy them all over again, now that my interest had renewed. Instead, I undertook to purchase the first 101 issues of *Fantastic Four*, the extraordinarily long run of a series all of which were written and drawn by the same writer and artist, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. But I soon found that early issues of the *FF* (up to #50, say, the first four or so years) all went for a king's ransom. As was explained to me, the print run for Marvel titles was low in their first years, significantly expanding in the mid-1960s. I decided to content myself with *FF* numbers 50 to 101. Over the last couple of years, looking in London and Dublin, I hadn't done too badly, with 22 issues acquired. The only problem was—the prices kept escalating madly. Where I got *FF* # 54 (mint) in London for £34 last year, six months later the same period issues were anywhere from £50 to £100. When I discussed this with Pádraig Ó Méalóid, he explained that my serial buying was single handedly affecting the market and driving the prices up. At first I scoffed at this. But in Chicago I bought ten issues of the *Fantastic Four* (all Lee-Kirby issues, in the 80s and 90s) for only \$10 each, a total of \$100 for ten issues, not for two issues. And the following day I snapped up a copy of *Fantastic Four Annual* #2 featuring an origin story for Doctor Doom from 1964 (the year I started saving the title) in good condition, for only \$45. I should have gone mad and bought everything I needed because, if Pádraig's theory is correct, by next year my buying will have driven *FF* prices at the Chicago Comicon sky high.

My one other 'appointment' with 1968 on the Saturday in 2017 was to seek out Neal Adams in the

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Artists' Alley. I didn't have far to look. He was seated at the front, with his name in big letters, accompanied and assisted by his wife. I introduced myself and told him the story of how he had finally drawn me that wonderful Deadman full-pager at the SCARP Con almost fifty years earlier. I remarked he must have been very young on that occasion since he still looked pretty good. Neal Adams was one of the 'Young Turks' in 1968, him and Jim Steranko, the first new artists to break into the superhero game in the late 1960s; most of those involved in the Silver Age all dated back to the Golden. Neal replied that many of the other newcomers came from other professions whereas he came straight in from high school. Jim Steranko had been a professional magician for a number of years, at which point I remembered the dazzling card tricks Steranko had performed for us one evening in 1968. Writer Denny O'Neil had been a crime journalist, which is why Adams thought O'Neil's comics scripts were so realistic. This point was reinforced by the purchase I made for \$100 at the Neal Adams stand: an absolutely beautiful hardcover reprinting of the extraordinary run of Green Lantern/Green Arrow comics that writer O'Neil and artist Adams produced for DC between 1970 and 1974. That run marked a new level of realism in such issues as the one revealing Green Arrow's ward, Speedy (a classic teenage sidekick up to this), as a hopelessly addicted junkie. Neal Adams signed this volume for me with a flourish and I went away a happy man.

And so to my rendezvous with Stan Lee at 5.45 pm. I had expected around another ten or so people to be gathered for the session. Instead, to my shock and consternation, I was faced by anywhere between five hundred and a thousand people queueing for their photo op with the Man. I couldn't see how it could be managed and thought of walking away. But then I reflected I had paid my \$100 for the opportunity and so decided to stand my ground. The crowd was calmly and efficiently divided into lengthy rows and slowly but surely each row emptied as its turn came. I decided to make the most of my time, since I knew I would literally have only a few seconds. As I entered the screened-off area and approached Stan, I said: 'I have come all the way from Dublin, Ireland, to meet you.' To which, quick as a flash and with a mischievous grin and excellent hearing, he riposted: 'I would have expected no less!' A quick, mutual (and expressly forbidden) hand shake and then it was out the door, to be presented with a nice, shiny photo of the pair of us. I look really happy

and Stan looks very well preserved for a ninety-four-year-old. But then, with all the money he's making from photo opportunities at these conventions he must be paying for and getting the best possible medical care. I had come to Chicago to meet Stan one last time, and had done so—a Lee whose inexhaustible spirit was absolutely undimmed. Tomorrow I would move on from Stan Lee, Neal Adams, and the 1960s to confront the present.

But Sunday morning I had one more rendezvous with 1960s comic books—or so I thought. The

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leading movie repertory cinema in Chicago, the Logan Theater, was holding a series of weekend screenings of the various Batman movies during the month of April to coincide with the Con. They had kicked off with *The Dark Knight* and on the actual weekend of the Con were screening the 1960s *Batman* movie with Adam West and Burt Ward. This was still my favorite: it was the series I saw when I was a teenager; it was the most colorful and wittiest—and had the most amazing lineup of guest stars playing the various villains (Vincent Price as Egghead!). The screening was due to begin at 11 am so I arrived at the movie theater at 10.50. I had to say it looked very closed up for a film that was due to start in ten minutes and when I looked up at the billboard I saw the reason why. The screening of *Batman* was scheduled for 11 o'clock that night, not 11 in the morning. I had got my times wrong, and had consequently warped my time travel. That was the opportunity for the *Batman* movie used up—I wasn't coming back to a far-flung location late that night, twice in the one day. The message was clear: get back to the Con and get caught up with the present.

When I arrived at the Convention Center at 1.10 pm I was just in time to attend a panel entitled 'Creating Kickass Characters,' so I signed up to get my ass kicked. The blurb read: 'Poison Ivy, Catwoman, Squirrel Girl, Ms Marvel—how have female comics characters changed over the years and why? We analyze some of our favorite and not so favorite character makeovers and celebrate some new ones.' All of the members of the panel were women writing comic books: Amy Chu (*Poison Ivy, Red Sonja*); Shawna Benson and Julie Benson (*Batgirl and the Birds Of Prey, The 100*) and Joelle Jones (*Lady Killer, Mockingbird*). The panel was lively, starting off slowly but gathering momentum rapidly, with all four of the speakers contributing. The main focus of discussion was how they represented violence in the comic books they created. The disappearance of the Comics Code Authority has obviously seen a considerable escalation in the degree and kind of violence in comics, with considerable increases in blood and psychopathy. The women spoke of their various aesthetic approaches to the subject. It's striking that in the *Batgirl and the Birds Of Prey* 'Who is Oracle?' series written by Julie and Shawna Benson in 2016 (I presume they are sisters and should have asked how they handle the writing chores between them), on the third page of the first episode, Batgirl describes the various techniques she uses to despatch three petty criminals: 'the jawbone's the toughest, least breakage, most nerve damage; a direct hit to the diaphragm to knock the wind out; a good old-fashioned sweep of the leg.' Quite a step beyond BAM! POW! KER-AASH!

I next tried to find the stand for the Science Fiction Outreach Project. This was because James Bacon

had told me to do so when he heard I was going and, further, that I should get my photo taken with Helen Montgomery; and James's advice on attending cons is second to none. But my search revealed that their stand wasn't where it should be and had someone else in its place. Rather defeated, I went for lunch and the healthy salad bar option this time, not the pizza slices I'd been munching endlessly the day before. I was rewarded for my (belated) virtue. As I sat eating lunch my gaze was caught by a woman two tables in front of me wearing a blue Science Fiction Outreach Project T-shirt. I introduced myself to her and when she had finished her own lunch she brought me to their stand and introduced me to Helen Montgomery. Helen explained that the Project—a very welcome blaze of sci-fi in the midst of all that comics material—was a non-profit organisation seeking to attract comic book readers to science fiction (and ultimately to the World Cons) by giving them free books. Helen reminded me that she and I had met the year before at the Dublin Octocon; and then her friend took a photo of us both. Neither of us could confirm at that stage that the World Con was going to come to Dublin in 2019 [it is] but we both thought it likely and the probability informed our chat. The talk between us mainly focussed on the two late, great Belfast science-fiction writers, James White and Bob Shaw. With regard to my free book, Helen went off and returned with Bob Shaw's 1975 novel, *Orbitsville* (one of a trilogy, it turned out). I went away delighted with the meeting and my free book, which I devoured over the course of my week in the U.S.

A few more purchases from dealers (including that copy of the second *Fantastic Four Annual* from 1964). Then I intended going to the stand in the name of the one Irish artist I had come across—Declan Shalvey. But first, with only \$20 in my pockets, it was time to head for the nearest ATM (there were quite a few in the hall, as you can imagine). I tried three in succession and they all refused to give me any money. I reeled off to Declan Shalvey's stand and the first thing he did was to show me where, on the back of my Bank of Ireland card, in very small print, was the phone number I should call to help me with my difficulties. (I did so as soon as I got back to my hotel and the problem was sorted in minutes. Thank you, Declan!) It did mean, however, that I was unable to buy any of the wonderful artwork and books Declan was selling at his stand. I vowed to rectify this soon and did so at the Dublin Comicon in August 2017, where Declan and I met up again and I got hold of *Moon Knight: From the Dead* (Marvel) and *Injection* (Image) with their vivid and arresting artwork. But what Declan and I discussed at the Chicago Con was then then-upcoming (in September 2017) comic, *Savage Town* (Image). This had two distinctive and unusual features. The stories would be written, not drawn, by Declan Shalvey (Philip Barrett would handle the art) and those stories would be set in Ireland. Even more interestingly, *Savage Town* was to be set in Limerick, where the characters would speak a distinctive Hiberno-English idiom, a kind of Limerick argot very different from Standard English. Declan was eloquent and persuasive on the reasons why: 'I wanted to get the reader into that world. Perfect English was not right. They would speak in Limerick slang.'



As I left the hall to return to my hotel at around 4.30 pm and get my money problems sorted, I noticed that the Convention was wrapping up. The final image was the same one as in 1968: a bunch of heavy guys snapping the tables shut as fast as they possibly could. Admittedly, everybody's money is probably pretty well spent at that stage. But I prefer a more relaxed and celebratory closure to a comicon, such as you still get at the smaller ones, whether it's the first British Comicon in 1968 or the first comicon in the Irish Midlands, hosted by Martin Moore in Laois in June 2017. These always end with an auction to either make the comicon's ends meet (Birmingham) or to raise some funds for a local charity (Laois). People usually donate something for auction (in my case at Laois, a rare copy of *HU #5*, which Martin himself bought) and they scrape up their last few sheckels. But the big names are at the big cons, and when they depart, it's over. Chicago will stay with me for the amazing people I met: Stan Lee, Neal Adams, Helen Montgomery, and Declan Shalvey.

Troubled Souls

by James Bacon

How does someone, as a comic book fan, reconcile a disparity between the opinion of the writer or artist of a work, with their own views? It's hard to be a fan and then disagree with the creator. Never an easy place, but then it wouldn't be art, humans as individuals find art, enjoy art and dislike it, which creates a diversity of interest, and there's passion and enjoyment wrapped in there, and comics is art.

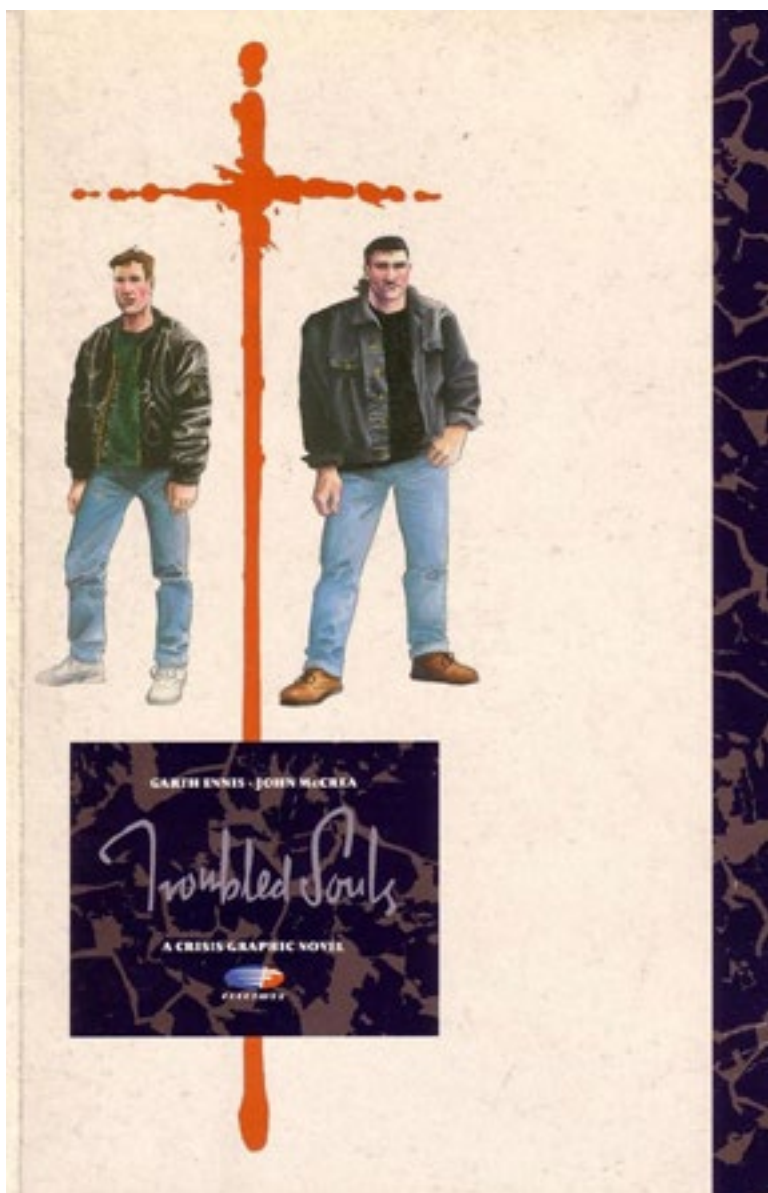
The politeness and pleasantness of comic book professionals whom I have met always trumps cold words on pages, so I have never encountered any dismissal or negativity when I have complimented their comics, or indeed proffered works to be signed. Steve Dillon and myself had a lovely moment, where we both realised that I had bought some comics because he was the artist, and he had drawn them because it was work, and neither of us liked the story, that much. Yet the comics were kindly signed, and likewise, I have seen Alan Moore sign many comics, indeed, it was touching in the Prince Charles Cinema to see a fan close to tears, clutching a battered and beloved *V for Vendetta*, and Alan graciously and courteously signing.

Twice, I have had polite comic—no three times—I have had nice comic book writers urge me to give a story, a title, a go, sometimes another go, and I have been pleasantly pleased and indeed, had no issue correcting my view, and did so.

As a fanzine editor, I often feel there is a recording of history going on, one is placing onto record thoughts, ideas, and recollections, where honesty for me is vital. I want to express matter genuinely, and with the passion and love that I have for them. As a reviewer, I am only interested in the works that interest or excite me, I have reviewed dozens of comics for *Forbidden Planet* and *ComicBuzz*, and have only been critical of two comics in those fora, *Before Watchmen* and *New 52 Our Army at War*. They deserved it. And my issue about *Before Watchmen* has become more intense, as I lament the utter waste of huge talent, especially Darwyn Cooke, who drew one and wrote two of the stories. Wouldn't that have been better as a couple of Parkers, or another *New Frontier*? So wasteful of amazing talent, although maybe he wouldn't have felt that.

Troubled Souls by Garth Ennis and John McCrea is one of many comics that are favourites. I genuinely struggle to choose top tens, or things like that, yet it has been an important work to me.

When I came to *Troubled Souls*, it had already been and gone in its original format. I was finding Garth Ennis in *2000 AD* and, as my reading broadened, I soon picked up *Crisis*, where it appeared fortnightly, but it was back issues, which were easy to find in 1990, and I did that thing, where I read them in order, and Mick O'Connor, a shop worker in Phantasia in Dublin, did that thing where I got them way cheaper than I should have, and so I thought *Third World War* by Pat Mills and Carlos Ezquerra was amazing, and then, as I got to issue #15, with a fabulous Eve cover by Simon Bisley, the new story that I found, which was about Northern Ireland, sorta stopped me. This was expected amongst my older friends, all of whom had picked up the Fleetway edition when it came out and indeed, it was oft mentioned that there were issues with the binding.



We simply had not had a realistic story about the Troubles in comics. Yet here was a good one, one that in 1990 made sense, seemed right, believable, and was beautifully illustrated, and had that empty hollow sad end to it that was so very human.

The pace was unlike anything I had read really—the first panel, so grey and yet the protagonist, Tommy talking about the dole, because in Ireland in 1990 the dole was such a real career prospect—and then a simple encounter with a patrol, and his nuanced disdain for the British Army patrol, and the underlying issues of racism within the army, and the sectarianism of the situation, all succinctly portrayed in two pages. The artwork by John McCrea develops somewhat, the first page is fine, but the colouring improves page by page, and I often wonder what media John used.

In eight pages, we meet Tommy's love interest; his own insecurity and lack of confidence; his mate Dougie, who is a bit of a hilarious wise guy; and we see Damien—and suddenly, discreetly, and with a probable sense of urgency, the Troubles land on Tommy's lap, when some RUC officers enter the pub, and Damien is taken away by them.

It felt so real, genuine, and I was hooked.

John McCrea had opened his own comic book shop down the back of a record shop, in his own words,

By the time I opened a shop, the Troubles had eased off little bit, the Troubles were there, and people had jobs and lives and a lot of the time the Troubles never impacted people at the time. They were not over, though, for into the shop would come local Loyalist paramilitaries asking for donations. And Garth Ennis was a customer who bought *Concrete* and *Cerebus*. Garth was from Hollywood, a very pleasant and prosperous area east of Belfast City, a little untouched by the Troubles.

The Ennis attention to detail was present, the weaponry the soldiers and RUC had, was spot on, the Land Rovers, the uniforms, probably unsurprising as McCrea lived in it, but the attention to detail is amazing in the art, forging a strength of belief into the story.

An element that I love about Garth Ennis is that he is honest, he is not afraid to look at the darker parts of the world and perhaps reflect them in his comics, with honour, or satire, or at times in brutal visceral vividness. Although he has written over 1,000 comics, covering a variety of genres, I often feel—and it is a personal feeling—that he is placed in a 'schoolboy humour' category, or 'violent superhero grotesque' pigeonhole, and not truly explored.

He is just a good story teller.

Where a eulogy of *Troubled Souls* potentially starts to go astray, is when one considered how Garth himself feels about the comic, and this then throws the spanner into my enthusiastic engine's works. During an interview at the Imperial War Museum's 2011 Comics and Conflict exhibition, Garth told Alex Fitch that when he wrote *Troubled Souls*, he just wanted to write comics:

I should be frank and say—and this is partly with hindsight really—what *Troubled Souls* represented was a nakedly ambitious attempt to jump start my career, by whatever means necessary. If it had been deemed that pink people from Pluto was the way to go, I would have got straight to work on my pink people from Pluto story, but Northern Ireland it was. *Crisis* was a political comic. That was an obvious angle and that's what I wrote. Very little of my own background is in TS—I grew up in the suburbs, a quiet little town outside Belfast, the kind of upbringing most people would recognise and while what was going on in Northern Ireland was always part of the back drop of one's life, it wasn't the reality for me as it was for people who had to live in ghettoised parts of Belfast in semi-warzones in south Tyrone and south Armagh.

It is this frankness that makes him so interesting, but it is also for me the perfect reason to write a story—'I wanted to be a comic writer so, I wrote anything that would get me published, and crikey, it was published, and people have enjoyed it since.' The harsh analysis of time has not at all taken away from it.

So many artists and creators look back at what is called by others a seminal work, and they just shrug and explain that it was done quickly, that it was just to earn cash, or to get the job done. Sometimes there is no high-level analysis or massive work that can be written about everything that came together just at the right time to help the artists forge this masterpiece. It just worked right.

And that is the problem. I read *Troubled Souls* now, and next year it is 30 years old, and really it is the Troubles, as best a story can tell. The interaction that Tommy has with family and friends seem realistic. His da and brother felt proper real, his old man ingrained in his view, his brother Andy heading across the water to find some work. It felt real at the time, when I read it, and the Peace Process felt a far way off, and when

Fleetway produced the graphic novel, and on the back quoted the *Belfast Telegraph* saying 'Troubled Souls is a hard-edged and realistic tale straight from the streets of the city,' I didn't take that as lip service, as the *Belfast Telegraph* would not make a statement like that lightly.

The comic itself is beautiful. The RUC men's faces, slightly greyed and with no eyes, seem to have a faceless sinisterism about them, a Sterling submachinegun ensures the seriousness of the situation is not lost. There is a feeling of a mix of pencil work and watercolour, which improves with each episode, and as Tom gets more entangled with Damien, so the colours and artwork becomes more crisp and bright.

Tom learns about Irish history and this is a lovely couple of pages, where his own notes work to add context to a collage of images, and yet he is caught in a personal dilemma, and it is a serious one, life altering, and he has doubts. There is a lovely sequence where Tom mentally challenges himself to justify or figure out what the hell he is involved with and what is going on, while a bonfire rages on the 12th of July, something that can be done adeptly in comics, as he appears silent and the boxes and lettering in brackets easily indicating the self-doubt and unsureness, and this continues, and it again feels right, the human subconscious going over and over, self-doubt and insecurity, and stress, quite rightly all adding to the pressure on one.

Meanwhile, the art style is fabulous, as Liz, who Tom is now going out with, is both stunningly drawn and becoming much more important to the story, but then she ends up being in harm's way, a harm that Tom is responsible for, and the urgency and care for her is balanced against the self-hatred of watching someone die. There is of course pain for Tom. The scenes in Rathlin Island are lush in their portrayal of its natural beauty, and later with Damien and Tom holed up together, further depth is given to Damian, family is key here, and

“It is to the literature, to the stories, that we look to remind ourselves of a situation, and yet with Northern Ireland there is a dearth of stories. It is like a barren waste ground, burnt, scorched, with nothing there.”

one wonders how many wrongs we've read of and if it will ever be right. McCrea deploys some amazing black and white pencil work at this stage and it creates a closeness and intimacy that sets the scene so very well, he repeatedly deploys styles and uses materials that enhance the story, some cartoonish styles to tell some grotesque recent history, and the last three chapters the art work is so polished and cleanly done, and the story comes to its conclusion in parts, and we have scenes that are powerful, and inevitable, and human, and horrible, and just damnably sad.

If this is a naive work, a low standard historical story, then so be it, but it's perfect with that, and that's the problem. The story rends you apart, you see into the Troubles, it's an easy and yet tough read, and yet it is not embedded in some specific incident or historical moment, but capturing the essence of the whole fucking place, and the time, and it does a really bloody fine job of sharing a story set in a murky, dastardly time for Ireland.

The Troubles started in 1968, and the death toll peaked in 1972 with nearly 500 people killed that year. The seventies were extraordinarily brutal, and between 1973 and 1976 the toll was between 250 and 300 a year, then it went to around 100 a year, dropping to a low of 57 in 1985, but for 1988 it was 105, and 1989 was 75 and, when I was reading it, the ninety-six people who died seemed all too real, all too horrible, and all so distant from Dublin, where I was immersed in comics, science fiction, and the ideas of going to conventions. It seemed far away, and by the time I was dating a girl in Portadown it was all quiet and coming to an end.

It is to the literature, to the stories, that we look to remind ourselves of a situation, and yet with Northern Ireland there is a dearth of stories. It is like a barren waste ground, burnt, scorched, with nothing there. Does one claw around then in desperation for stories, to legitimise the humanity behind the horror? Do I cling onto any old story that floats up? Not at all, I don't have a copy of Leon Uris's *Trinity* in the gaff, but I do have *The Web of Spiderman #22* and there, one may call into question authenticity and veracity of storytelling. I do not feel that *Troubled Souls* lacks for anything.

Ennis is quoted in the *Irish Times* as saying 'I ought to be completely clear and say that, with hindsight, what *Troubled Souls* really represented was naked ambition. It was a direct attempt to get published. And that was the road that seemed most likely to lead me to success.' Yet I do not see any reason for there to be an issue with having such a bald and brazen reason for writing a story, it doesn't need to be a heartfelt personal mission to be great literature, it just needs to be a good story.

The central conceit of the comic is the concept of a young Protestant who is jaded, relatively normal, and not connected to the Troubles, and a hard-core Republican who is fighting actively, but who sees Tommy as a person who he can take advantage of. Circumstances and coincidences have to line up for the story



to work, the self-doubt and blackmailing feel real enough, but that is a reflection on the characters. Ennis does the characters well, and indeed some of the sidebar characters ended up in their own, very different series.

Could the situation really have happened? I am not so sure that a Provo would have had the compassion and understanding of Damian, and an innocent like Tommy would have kept everything together, and the ending is unfortunately fortunate in its occurrences, but what the story does is show the reader that it is not at all simple. And this is why it works so well, in this comic. The story could be analysed and deemed contrived, but for me, the setting, the accuracy, the language authenticity, all allow for an easy suspension of disbelief that readily enables the plausible enjoyment of the plot.

The complexity of the Troubles, the ways that lives can get mixed up, the nature of the asymmetric war, where there is not a simple polarised binary situation, and the human personal struggle in an authentic setting is vivid and brilliant. The Troubles were untidy and messy for people, it was hard to know what was right and what was wrong and everything was a bloody mess, and with Tom, we see a protagonist caught up in exactly that type of mess, full of questions and self-doubt and all when the best things of life should be occurring.

Garth Ennis introduced an Irish character called Kit to *Hellblazer*, and she was incredible, and really proved that

John Constantine was an eejit, as he rightly lost someone who was loyal, a true love, and who was brilliant, who walked away and fortunately escaped from the nightmare that was the *Hellblazer*. Kit starred in her own right in a standalone comic, *Heartland*, drawn by Steve Dillon. This is, in my opinion, a very deep and thoughtful reflection on life in Northern Ireland, but seen from the periphery of a family, rather than the main scene, and so, I place it high on my list of comics and works, yet it doesn't match *Troubled Souls* for me, when it comes to the Troubles, but as an example of how Ennis can really tell characters' stories, it is quite amazing.

Twenty years ago, in an interview in *The Comics Journal*, Ennis said in regard to what he got right: 'Well, I got the right artist for the job. Although Johnny had had almost as little experience as me as a professional at the time, no one but an artist from Belfast could have drawn that story.' John McCrea's artwork, well it is some of my favourite work by him, and while that is indicative of the impact the comic had upon me, I found his style continually readable, strong line work, with definite shades, and a serious ability to change his style sufficiently for a variety of settings. This agility is on show with *Troubled Souls*, where it feels like watercolours, there is the lovely epistolary work, black and white work, where I wonder if pastels as well as pencils and ink were used, and then some cartoonish panels, to emphasise the funny side too.

Glenn Fabry, whose beautiful full colour work would adorn many comics covers by Garth—*Hellblazer* and *Preacher* especial favourites for me—did the cover of issue #22 of *Crisis*, with a British Soldier in riot gear, SA80 ready, with the title Falls Guy, and it is stunning image, and then, on the rear cover of issue #27, the final part of *Troubled Souls*, as a final farewell, another soldier, brutal looking in darkened, tense pose, a frightening prospect to meet on your street, bids you farewell.

Further on in the *Comic Journal* interview Ennis said 'It was brutal cynical opportunism, really. Although once I started writing the story, it was very much a case of writing what I wanted to write, my point of view on the whole thing. The whole thing happened like a whirlwind, I first started talking about it to Johnny McCrea on my 19th birthday, and a week later we were



on a plane to talk to Steve (McManus) and that was that.'

I suppose that, as fans, we like and appreciate things that creators look on and ponder about—could it have been better, could it have been more nuanced—and I put this comic up there, with *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *Harry's Game*, *Casualties* by Seamus Heaney, and *Alternative Ulster* by Stiff Little Fingers, as just a fine work that came from the Troubles and seemed to leave me with feelings and emotions about it all.

I was lucky to encounter Garth Ennis, John McCrea, and Steve Dillon in 1991, and it led me to expanding my comic book reading, at the encouragement of Garth, who showed me a Glenn Fabry *Hellblazer* Cover, and that was of great importance to me, and they were and have always been good, happy to sign, to sketch, and pleasant in person. I have great memories of them, and love to see John and Garth, briefly as it is, at cons, when I can. Steve unfortunately has passed away, but has been so well remembered and I wrote extensively about that wonderful man, in *Journey Planet*.

Garth Ennis is without doubt Ireland's most popular and successful comic writer. Since 1989, Ennis has had stories published in over 1,000 comics, he writes characters beautifully, has a wickedly dark sense of humour, and is a personal and private person, who now lives in the US and whose comic *Preacher* is now a successful TV series. Following *Troubled Souls*, he wrote a hilarious comic, *For a Few Troubles More*, which starred Dougie and Ivor, who were interesting sidebar characters in *Troubled Souls*, who were quite a change to Tom's predicament, and yet there is much in there about Northern Ireland that resonates. Garth wrote a Judge Dredd Story, *Helter Skelter*, in 2002, returning to *2000 AD* and part of that arrangement was that the rights to *Troubled Souls* and *For a Few Troubles More* would return to him, so he could continue the stories of Dougie and Ivor, a wonderful pair of ejits, and has done in the comics, *DICKS*.

There is a page of *Troubled Souls* in the collection of the Cartoon Museum in London. John is currently drawing *Dead Rabbit* for Image Comics, a creator-owned comic, which I cannot wait for, and is out any day now, and I continue to read Garth with his latest offering, an issue of *World of Tanks*, Citadel, with art by PJ Holden, and quite excellent.

Troubled Souls is a seminal work, a comics work, on the Troubles in Ireland.



Notes by James

Troubled Souls by Garth Ennis and John McCrea was published in *Crisis* #15-#20 and #22-#27, and was reprinted in the *Troubled Souls* trade paperback by Fleetway in 1990

Alex Fitch of Panel Borders (panelborders.wordpress.com) spoke with Ennis in the Imperial War Museum during their *Comics and Conflict* exhibition, and you can hear the full 70-minute interview here: archive.org/details/PanelBordersGarthEnnisBattlefields

There is a continually updated Garth Ennis bibliography on Micheal Karpas's enjolrasworld.com, in the Bibliographies section

The Comics Journal September 1998 features a long interview with Nick Hasted: tcj.com/the-comics-journal-no-207-september-1998/

Addendum. I picked up *Dreaming Eagles* in hardback form, a story of the Tuskegee Airmen which I already had in single issues, it is a lovely series. This hardback contained extra stuff.

Garth wrote a fabulous afterword, which shows his love and appreciation for historical accuracy. He spoke of meeting Dr Roscoe C. Brown, of the 100th Fighter Squadron of the 332nd Fighter Group USAAF who had shot down an ME262 over Berlin. Garth spoke of his practice of getting hardware correct, and how in this instance he wove some real historical figures into his fictional characters. Garth had flown in a two seat P-40N and wrote eloquently of the return that pilots faced after the war, and bringing us back to today, a beautiful recounting of a visit to Washington. Such attention to detail and appreciation of history must jar hard with what went into *Troubled Souls*, maybe as I reflect I understand more, yet I still love *Troubled Souls* all the same.

The Irish Contribution to Fantasy: Lord Dunsany By Patrick O'Donnell

**'Dunsany is a man of genius, I think... I want to get him into 'the movement''
WB Yeats, in a letter to his father in 1909**

'The care of Dunsany's reputation currently rests in the hands of the fantasy community, since the Irish critical establishment continues to regard him with a stony silence—whether it is because of his Unionist stance, or his aloofness from the Irish Renaissance, or the occasionally unflattering treatment of the Irish found in some of his work.' Thus state two slightly mystified American Lovecraft scholars in the Introduction to a book recording their ten year quest to assemble a Dunsany bibliography. So vast is the material involving Dunsany's fifty-year career that they insisted their bibliography was merely 'preliminary.' What is genuinely surprising is that the innovative and pioneering Anglo-Irish fantasy author, poet, essayist, novelist, and playwright, Lord Dunsany, Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany, of Dunsany Castle in County Meath, Ireland, and Dunstall Priory in Kent, England, is not fully embraced as canonical within the Irish Literary Revival. His work has been 'either scorned or deliberately ignored by those who should have been acknowledging it as a distinctive contribution to the national literature.' (*Lord Dunsany: In the Land of Time And Other Fantasy Tales* by ST Joshi, Penguin Books, New York, 2004, Introduction, xxii) Dunsany is unquestionably the most important Irish fantasy writer in terms of influence on British and American fantasy authors across both the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly JRR Tolkien, HP Lovecraft, Arthur C Clarke, Ursula K Le Guin, Neil Gaiman, and George RR Martin.



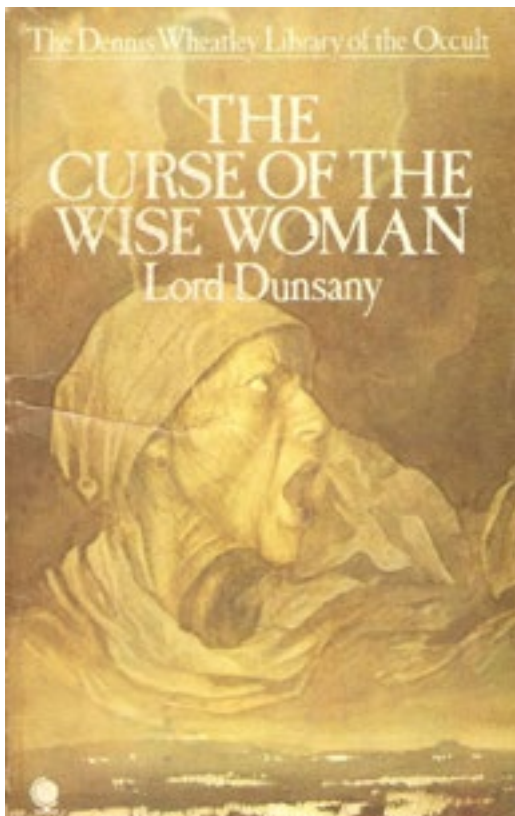
Dunsany was born in London in 1878 and passed away in Dublin in 1957. He was subsequently buried in Kent. He was an Anglo-Irish aristocrat who arguably takes six literary pigments (one Jewish, one Greek, two Irish, one British, and one German) and blends them together to create his cosmic wonder tales. First, the Old Testament as presented in the King James Bible provided for him a vivid fund of archetypal imagery and lyrical phrasing. Homer's *Odyssey* articulated for him the necessary vision of the rivers of myth and fable. An Anglo-Irish misanthropy and exploration of fantasy lands were rooted for him in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Next, the mythic imagination of Yeats and AE (George Russell) urged on him the possibility of a lyrical search for esoteric spiritual imagery. His study and devotion to the British Romantic and Victorian poetic imagination provided him with a critique of materialism, mechanization, and modern urban homogeneity. Nietzsche's fables, phrasing, and bristling energy critiquing orthodox images of religion offered inspiration, particularly from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Dunsany's fables draw from these sources to remake the universe as a holy aesthetic vision in which a Gothic doom is paradoxically working with a Romantic evocation of Nature's beauty.

A scholarly and comprehensive biography is much needed as English author Mark Amory's lacklustre and error-pocked 1972 biography, *Lord Dunsany*, treats Dunsany's Irish contexts with superficial and scant detail. Amory's biography is notorious for not mentioning the actual day or month of Dunsany's birth and jumbling the chronology of his publications. The need for Irish scholarship to place Dunsany in his literary and socio-political contexts is only made more acute by the unintentional errors of serious-minded American fantasy fiction scholars. For example, the revelatory Penguin Classics anthology *In the Land of Time and Other Fantasy Tales* (2004) which revealed the breadth of Dunsany's achievement over five decades was edited, introduced and annotated by the eminent Lovecraft biographer and Dunsany bibliographer and scholar, ST Joshi, who offered the following eyebrow-raising summary of the Easter Rising: 'Dunsany was seriously injured during the Dublin riots of 1916.' An Irish scholar would have been more aware of the significance of the Proclamation of an Irish Republic.

Yet the family had extraordinary roots in Ireland, as his biographer underlines: ‘There had been Plunketts living at Dunsany Castle, twenty miles north-west of Dublin, since 1190’ (*Lord Dunsany* by Mark Amory, Collins, London, 1972, p8). The Castle can make the claim to being one of the longest continuously inhabited residences in Ireland. But Dunsany’s allegiances were primarily with England, the Empire, and the Union. ‘Their values and friends came largely from the English upper classes. . . In a rebellion their instinctive loyalty would be to the government of Westminster.’ The hybrid Anglo-Irishman Dunsany would crisscross repeatedly between Ireland and England and be permanently caught in between both. Ireland was the emotional hub as the site of the ancient family seat and parental proximity, but England and Englishness loomed large in his imaginative formation as the place of education (where he would be uprooted into boarding school), of Empire (where he would be trained to be an army officer) and power (where he would unsuccessfully try for a political career).

Through his childhood and adolescence Dunsany’s mother had disdained newspapers, instead encouraging her son to read the Bible. He was particularly steeped in the Old Testament with the Book of Genesis as a clear source for his direct and vivid archetypal prose. Dunsany absorbed a kind of slow-stepping, dignified, and stately rhythm in his prose from his constant attention to the Bible. In adolescence, he worked his way through the collected tales of Edgar Allan Poe, deepening his style with Gothic dread. At Eton he absorbed both a conventional commitment to British imperialism and a classical curriculum in which Homer’s *Odyssey* stood out for him. Its celebration of the intertwining rivers of myth and fable, of strange exotic lands, and an all-encompassing realm of the gods, was acknowledged by him as a primary fountainhead to his inspiration. Horace (sections of whose *Odes* he learned by heart) was supplemented by his reading of the British Romantic poets: Blake (with his own strange and august pantheon of beings), Keats, Shelley, Byron, Coleridge, and Wordsworth. Their lyricism would add an inner luminosity and myriad colors to his Biblically-inflected prose poetry. Finally, the great Victorian poet Tennyson’s *Arthurian Idylls of the King* with its enchantments, magic swords, and inevitable doom provided a model and influence.

The military training of Sandhurst followed Eton and after his father’s death in 1899, he enrolled as an officer in the Coldstream Guards. Dunsany was shipped to Gibraltar where his imagination was fired by this exotic vista: ‘Firmly holding that Tangier is of the East, he came to feel that this first glimpse was the basic inspiration of his finest work’ (Amory, p34). He was posted to South Africa during the Boer War, where he met Rudyard Kipling. Weary of military routine, Dunsany left the British Army in 1901. Back in Ireland, fox hunting and shooting every type of creature and bird occupied him from 1902-1903 after he accepted the Mastership of the Tara Hunt and enthusiastically careened on horseback across the Meath countryside. The topography of the Irish countryside was as important to his lyrical imagination as any of his African vistas.



Lengthy descriptions of the hunt and shooting and the bogs with ‘the beauty of one evening hallowing the moss and the heather’ of the surrounding countryside all feature in his autobiographical Irish novel, *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (Longmans, Green and Co, New York, 1933).

Undoubtedly privileged within an Anglo-Irish upper class social round, he filled out his time back in Ireland with cricket, chess, crossword puzzles, and charades on the 1,400-acre estate with its capacious and centuries-old library. He successfully courted and married Lady Beatrice Villiers in 1904. While he made an unsuccessful attempt as a West Wiltshire Tory candidate in the same year, his love of writing tales was encouraged by his new English bride. Through his uncle Horace Plunkett, who ran the Irish Co-operative Movement, he met both Yeats and Lady Gregory in 1896 and also worked closely with George Russell from 1897 in the Irish Co-operative Movement. The catalyst for writing his first book of tales may well have been Dunsany’s acquaintance with AE who had visions of gods (albeit Celtic ones).

Dunsany as an Anglo-Irish author was the first original

creator of a complete modern fantasy cosmogony: the Pegāna Mythos. He did so in his self-financed work, *The Gods of Pegāna* (1905), which was a sensation and established his reputation. Dunsany never had to self-finance a book again in his fifty-year career. The basic premise of the book is the complete unknowability of the purpose of the universe as the ultimate god, MĀNA-YOOD-SUSHĀĪ, is put into a state of cosmic dreaming by Skarl the Drummer after creating the smaller gods. Once Skarl ceases his drumming, the ultimate god will awake and all will cease. This is the terror felt by the smaller gods for they and all of the universe are but dreams in the mind of the ultimate god:

But when at the last the arm of Skarl shall cease to beat his drum, silence shall startle Pegāna like thunder in a cave, and MĀNA-YOOD-SUSHĀĪ shall cease to rest. Then shall Skarl put his drum upon his back and walk forth into the void beyond the worlds, because it is THE END, and the work of Skarl is over.'

Dunsany followed this with his second Pegāna book, *Time and the Gods* (1906), in which Time becomes more fully the scourge of the gods themselves. But doom and the void, key motifs combining dread with a Nietzschean sense of the cosmic Absurd, are already indelibly established.

Dunsany's formal involvement with the Irish Revival began with the publication of his tale *Time and the Gods* in the first issue of *Shanachie* in 1906. It was followed by another tale, *The Fall of Babbulkund*, in the Christmas 1907 issue of *Irish Homestead*. He published *The Sword of Welleran and Other Stories* (1908), which melded visually exquisite exotic cities in strange fabled lands with narrative trajectories of Gothic doom. Dunsany began visiting the luminaries of the Irish Revival, attending gatherings of poets at AE's home, and began hosting Yeats, Gregory, and AE at Dunsany Castle from 1909. But unlike such cultural nationalists as Yeats, Dunsany did not support the break with England. This opposition to Irish nationalism would see him marginalized and written out of the narrative of the Irish Literary Renaissance.

Initially, there was an enthusiastic rapport between the Dunsanys and the personalities behind the Irish Literary Revival. Both agreed that Yeats was a genius, and Dunsany wrote to his wife: 'AE is a marvelous genius' (Amory, p.63). By March 1909, he was writing with a sense of awe: 'I have been among great men.' It was to Yeats that Dunsany owed his subsequent blossoming as a dramatist. Yeats wrote to his father in 1909: 'Dunsany is a man of genius, I think... I want to get him into 'the movement'' During a conversation in 1909 in the Kildare Arts Club, Yeats invited him to write for the Abbey Theatre. Dunsany's first Abbey play, written at breakneck speed in one afternoon, was presented in April 1909. The one-act play, *The Glittering Gate*, continued the Nietzschean skepticism towards religion already evident in his two Pegāna books. It depicted two burglars trying to break into the solid gold gate of Heaven and discovering nothing within only 'Stars. Blooming great Stars' (*Five Plays*, Lord Dunsany, Grant Richards, London, 1920, p91). An unexplained cosmic laughter erupts around them from an off-stage source. The play's comic male duo, who are endlessly popping bottles of beer and waiting for a cosmic revelation that is disappointed, make it seem a work that may have influenced Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

It was followed by *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior* in 1911. Both plays were successful and, in the void left by the death of Synge in 1909, Yeats seemed to have found a new voice for the Revival. However, Dunsany and his wife believed the latter play was plagiarized by Lady Gregory in her *The Deliverer* (which was presented at the Abbey two weeks before Dunsany's play and their suspicions deepened when neither Yeats nor Gregory attended his opening night). They termed Gregory the Bad Old Woman in Black (after the title of one of his stories), and his enthusiasm for the Revival chilled.

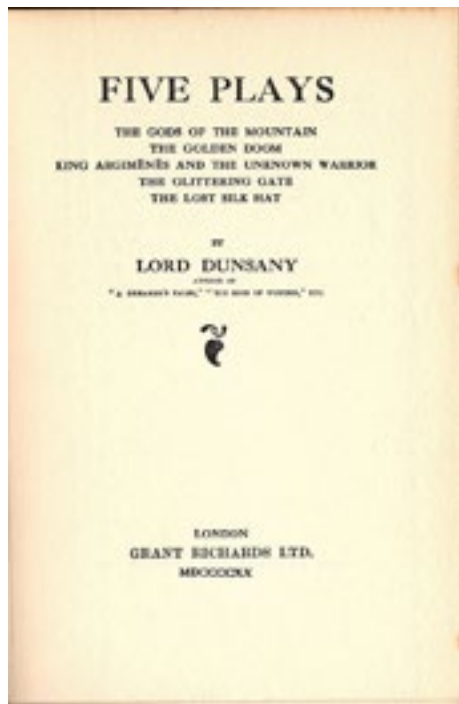
His biographer lists several 'small reasons' why Dunsany couldn't simply join the Irish Renaissance group: the Castle was too far from Dublin, his politics were too Unionist, his culture was too English, and he had no real love for Irish literature, mythology, or the Irish language. More importantly, he was too independent and 'had not the character to fit easily into any group, particularly in a subordinate position' (Amory, p83). There could only be one commanding officer of the Irish Literary Revival, and that was Yeats. Oliver St John Gogarty, who was a devoted friend of the Dunsanys and a frequent guest at their home, wrote an astute assessment of how envious Yeats was of Dunsany's status and pedigree:

It would be a mistake to think that the rivalry between Dunsany and Yeats was a literary one. Far from it. Yeats had no rival to fear among contemporary poets. It was not so much rivalry on Yeats' part... as it was envy. Yeats, though his descent was from parsons, dearly loved a lord. He was at heart an

aristocrat, and it must always have been a disappointment to him that he was not born one... This then was at bottom the cause of the failure of friendship between Dunsany and Yeats. (Amory, p75) While he would remain friends for life with Oliver St. John Gogarty, James Stephens and Padraic Colum, Dunsany's relationship with Yeats and Gregory soured and deteriorated by 1912. In that same year, in an ironic twist, Yeats presented *The Selected Writings of Lord Dunsany* from his sisters' Cuala Press with an Introduction that sounded a note of profound appreciation and affectionate regret:

Had I read *The Fall of Babbulkund* or *Idle Days on the Yann* when a boy I had perhaps been changed for better or worse and looked to that first reading as the creation of my world; for when we are young the further from common life a book is, the more does it touch our hearts and make us dream. We are idle, unhappy and exorbitant, and like the young Blake admit no city beautiful that is not paved with gold and silver. (Amory, p78)

Dunsany transcended his irritation at Yeats and Gregory with prolific industry. *The Book of Wonder* (1912), *Five Plays* (1914), *Fifty-One Tales* (1915), and *The Last Book of Wonder* (1916) appeared and consolidated his reputation. The intervention of physical force Irish nationalism created a further distance between him and the Literary Revival with the Proclamation of the Irish Republic on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, initiating the Easter Rising in Dublin's GPO. Dunsany was raised to the rank of Captain in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and hurtled into the city with his chauffeur. He was caught in the crossfire of a rebel ambush on his way to Amiens Street railway station and was hit near the eye. The nationalists allowed him to be taken across rebel lines to receive medical attention at the Jervis Street Hospital where he spent the week being ministered to by nuns.



But if Dunsany's standing in the Irish Literary Revival was becoming more problematic, a larger recognition in America was demonstrated by the first of two Modern Library editions beginning with *A Dreamer's Tales and Other Stories* (1917), which was a combination of the earlier collections *The Sword of Welleran* and *A Dreamer's Tales*. Padraic Colum's Introduction depicted Dunsany as a 'fabulist' rather than a conventional fiction writer—someone who traded in wonder and myth. It is clear from this 'Introduction' that Dunsany was comfortable with being regarded as an Irish fabulist rather than a Yeatsian protégé. Another Modern Library edition, *The Book of Wonder* (1918), combined *Time and the Gods* with the earlier *The Book of Wonder*. The increased prestige of these editions was cemented by Dunsany's successful lecture tour of America in 1919. This was made legendary because HP Lovecraft attended the Boston lecture in October. Lovecraft would prove to be the most influential devotee and imitator of Dunsany's cosmic tales and it is Lovecraftians who fuelled the varied Dunsany

revivals of the 1970s and the 1990s.

During the Irish Civil War (1922-23) Dunsany Castle was briefly threatened. But the family's status amongst the locals as benevolent landlords meant it wasn't torched and word-of-mouth spread, insisting that it be left alone. A quartet of gunmen come to assassinate the owner of the estate in the opening pages of Dunsany's autobiographical 1933 Irish novel, *The Curse of the Wise Woman*, showing his awareness of his precarious Anglo-Irish condition in the new Irish Free State.

Darrell Schweitzer's critical study *Pathways to Elfland: The Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Owlswick Press, Philadelphia, 1989), the first complete survey of Dunsany's writing in all genres, argues that the rhythms of his career involve 'working extensively in one literary mode (short story, play, novel, etc) to exhaustion' (Schweitzer, p5). The 1920s saw Dunsany move from tales and plays to writing novels. He began with the slight *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* (1922) but peaked with the classic work *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924), which featured the Anglo-Irish theme of power moving from one ancient regime to a new unsettling order. It depicts the land of Erl's men approaching their lord, 'the stately white-haired man in his long red room.' They do so to replace him even though, as their spokesman tells him, 'For seven hundred years the chiefs of your race have ruled us well... And yet the generations stream away, and there is no new thing.' The lord asks what they

“Padraic Colum’s Introduction depicted Dunsany as a ‘fabulist’ rather than a conventional fiction writer—someone who traded in wonder and myth. It is clear from this ‘Introduction’ that Dunsany was comfortable with being regarded as an Irish fabulist rather than a Yeatsian protégé.”

want and they reply, ‘We would be ruled by a magic lord.’ Dunsany followed this novel with two more, *The Charwoman’s Shadow* (1926) and *The Blessing of Pan* (1927).

In the 1930s the call of Ireland proved irresistible. His old antagonists, Yeats and Lady Gregory, set up the Irish Academy of Letters in 1932, which initially created a two-tier membership structure. Academicians did creative work with Irish topics while Associates didn’t, but were instead of Irish descent or birth. Dunsany was irritated to be assigned only an Associate membership. In response he wrote his most autobiographical Irish novel, *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933), which Joshi considers as ‘probably his finest.’ The novel could basically be seen as Dunsany’s *cri de coeur*, declaring passionately that he had become (and perhaps always was) as-Irish-as-the-Irish-themselves in response to living in the Free State, where the authentic status of the Anglo-Irish was questioned or denied because they lacked nationalist, Irish language, and Catholic moorings.

The premise of the novel involves a Dunsany persona, Charles James Peridore, now living in an unnamed Central European country, who remembers the Ireland he grew up in fifty years ago. It was ‘a beautiful and happy country’ and ‘not a sad and oppressed country, as some say.’ Like Dunsany in his youth, Peridore is an Irish country gentleman’s son who lives on an extensive estate. The catalyst for the plot occurs when four Catholic gunmen invade their hall. His father mysteriously vanishes. The men threaten to burn the house but are abashed when a piece of the True Cross, a family heirloom, is produced, clearly establishing that this is a Catholic landholding family. His father had spoken out on an unspecified political issue and so has been condemned. The son, left alone, is initiated into hunting on the bog which becomes an all-encompassing symbol that reveals the essence of Ireland:

But it [the bog] lulls him and soothes him all his days. It gives him myriads of pieces of sky to look at about his feet, and mosses more brilliant than anything short of jewelry.

The Dunsany persona’s reverential memories of shooting geese and going on fox hunts—essentials of Dunsany’s Anglo-Irish upbringing in a British Ireland—become for this Catholic version of Dunsany a way of claiming an identity aligned with Ireland itself. First, the character is halted because ‘the cry of the curlew seems to me to be the voice of Ireland’. His guide, Marlin, in teaching him how to shoot snipe on the bog, warns him that his mother is a Wise Woman (a witch) and that he has sinned because he has dreamed of Tír na nÓg, the country of the ever-young from Irish mythology, where he wishes to go instead of the Catholic Heaven.

‘It’s morning forever over all the land of youth... I had preferred Tír na nÓg to Heaven.’ ... For him there would never be anything but that most heathen land.

The Wise Woman, who seems like an archetype of Mother Ireland, tells him she sees an Ireland with a fabulous future of glorious cities trading proudly with all the world’s nations. Here, the fabulous visions of Dunsany’s earlier tales are transposed to an Irish setting, one that insists on the bog with its metamorphoses of weather and its birds (snipe and geese) that are hunted or that journey between Ireland and Tír na nÓg. The persona (in his dreaminess echoing Dunsany’s view of his younger self) finds in his guide’s belief in Tír na nÓg a way to again transcend the socio-political map of a mundane Ireland,

It is strange indeed that talking of Tír na nÓg seemed to strengthen its frontiers... He [Marlin] was so clearly a citizen of Tír na nÓg, and yet he lived here on the solid land that is mapped; and the thought of him linked the two lands, as that sunlit stretch of water out by the bog’s horizon seemed to link them whenever I saw it.

He hears that the son has been guided by a rainbow and has left for the land of the 'everlasting morning'. The son asks the Wise Woman to curse the industrial company that has come to cultivate and destroy the bog. Through doing so, they will save the 'heart of Ireland'.

The novel ends with the witch's curse creating an apocalyptic storm that swells the bog itself with sufficient force to sweep away the manifestations of modern progress and allow the bog as the 'heart of Ireland' to be saved. The Wise Woman's identity as an archetype of Mother Ireland that is beyond the conventions of Irish Free State nationalist ideology is clearly seen at the climax of the novel when she immerses herself in her ritualistic curse,

Lovingly she spoke to the bog, bending down to it over the mosses, crooning to it and softly beseeching it; but what she said to it I do not know, for she was talking now that language that seemed older than Irish, which I had once heard her use before, and which certainly was no language that men speak now.

The major concerns that sounded from the beginning of his career are present in *The Curse of the Wise Woman*: a tragic sense of doom and Gothic enchantment; a Blakean critique of the satanic mills of materialistic industrialization; and a determination to evoke the Homeric rivers of fable and myth. These are combined with a post-Irish Free State 1930s sense that Lord Dunsany's imagination had found a redeeming narrative construct of Irishness in the character's possession of the True Cross, in his being moved by meditating on the beauty of the bog, hearing the curlew's cry, seeing the vision of Tír na nÓg, and saving the bog from destruction. Any critique of Anglo-Irish inauthenticity is transcended.



ALAN MOORE

Interviewed by Anthony Roche

In late 1968, I received a letter discussing the contents of *HU #6* from 17 St. Andrews Road in Northampton. It was the most brilliant, precocious, witty, and well informed letter I ever received about *Heroes Unlimited*. Its author was a 15-year-old Alan Moore. When I broke open the *HU* archive (or Pandora's Box, as I like to term it) in 2014 for the first time in 45 years, this letter came to light and I realised who its author was—for even in the ivory tower to which I had removed myself for most of the intervening years as a student and university teacher of English Literature, the name of 'Alan Moore' had reached me as the writer who revolutionised the comic medium with such iconic works as *Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*, *Swamp Thing*, *The Killing Joke*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *From Hell*, *Lost Girls*, and many others. I began catching up on his writings and realised what I had been missing – a preternaturally gifted writer who expanded the boundaries of the medium with wit, ferocity and tenderness. When the prospect of *HU #8* loomed, Pádraig Ó Méalóid suggested I interview Alan Moore. I thought it was a great idea and within 24 hours the answer came: 'Alan Moore gives green light to interview with Anthony Roche.' Alan and I met up in London to plan out the interview in September 2017, after a charity event to raise money for a proper headstone to be erected over the grave of the visionary poet-artist William Blake and his wife Catherine. Alan and I greeted each other warmly backstage after a tour-de-force performance of *Angel Passage*, his prose poem about Blake. He went on to tell me how *Heroes Unlimited* had 'set the agenda' and how, several weeks earlier, he had drawn on a detail from Peter C.



Phillips' article on Superman in *HU #5* for the final volume of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which he was working on during the time of our interview. After finishing the day's writing, Alan checked his copy of *HU #5* and found he had remembered Pete's Superman article word perfect across almost five decades. He also said how much he was looking forward to our interview. We agreed we would do it via e-mail rather than by phone, since there was a lot to cover, and I said I would send him three questions every month and conclude with some final questions on his 2016 novel, *Jerusalem*, an 1175-page *magnum opus* that I brought to our meeting for signing. Within its pages was the original letter from 1968, signed 'Alan Moore X (his mark).' When Alan signed my copy of *Jerusalem* in 2017 with the same 'Alan Moore – his mark,' I knew we were off to a good start.

Heroes Unlimited: Please fill me in on the fifteen-year-old Alan Moore who wrote such an extraordinary letter to me about *HU 6* in late 1968, both AM in general and in relation to comics.

Alan Moore: From what I remember of 1968, I'd been fourteen years old for most of it, and in retrospect it had been quite an eventful year. I was living with my mum, dad, brother, gran and budgerigar down in our terraced paradise on St. Andrew's Road and walking the mile or so up to the Grammar School each morning, passing the mental hospital where, unbeknownst to me, Lucia Joyce resided throughout my school years. I'd been in my third year at school for much of 1968, and had pretty much given up on education after realising that I wasn't going to be top of any class where many of the other students had been to preparatory school. Academically, I was swilling around the very lower reaches of the class exam results each year, but I wasn't much



bothered about this because the rest of my life was so enjoyable: I was starting to become a proper socialised teenager, and had already somehow acquired a really lovely sixteen-year-old girlfriend before immediately messing it all up by being a fourteen-year-old idiot who knew absolutely nothing about anything. Still, all of the gorgeous summery psychedelia that was swirling around the pop charts at that time seemed to have encoded itself into the sunlight beating on the worn Boroughs' pavements, and the world felt pretty good. On Sundays, with school still another day away, I'd listen to John Peel and Tommy Vance's *Top Gear* (I'd previously been a massive Pirate Radio devotee, and had joined Ronan O'Rahilly's paramilitary-sounding FRA or Free Radio Association right

after Postmaster General Ted Short had taken Caroline and London and the rest off the air) up in the little bedroom I shared with my brother, one of its walls covered in a collage of Sunday magazine images that had been there since I'd seen Lindsay Anderson's electrifying *if...* some months earlier. Later, I'd perhaps watch *Wild, Wild West* and the Alex Toth-designed *Lone Ranger* animated show on television before turning in and listening to *I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again* and the Stuart Henry Show on the transistor radio, followed by sleep and the frozen-eared walk to school the next morning.

Other than the aforementioned really lovely girlfriend—we'd exchanged school scarves and everything—the most important thing in my life around then was probably comics. During the preceding year I'd discovered all sorts of mind-spinning things like my first purchased copy of *Oz*, a wealth of science-fiction, sword-and-sorcery or horror writers that were utterly new and unfamiliar to me, and my introduction to Mike Moorcock's *New Worlds*, getting Jerry Cornelius when I'd been expecting Elric. This introduced me, at that tender age, to William Burroughs's startling and initially bewildering *The Soft Machine*. I'd avidly absorbed all of the fantastic television of the period, *The Prisoner*, *The Avengers*, the compelling *Callan* and forgotten little shockers like *Big Breadwinner Hogg*, seen a few brilliant films and soaked up all the glorious Sixties pop music that I could lay my ears on. But it was my interest in comics, something that had been a consistent thing since the age of five (British comics) or six (American comics), that was at the forefront during 1968.

For one thing, I'd started the year with the receipt of George Perry and Alan Aldridge's massively influential *Penguin Book of Comics* as a 1967 Christmas present (along with *Sgt. Pepper*), and had therefore received a relatively broad crash-course education in the medium with which I was already besotted. For another thing, as a compulsive reader of Odhams' Power Comics line I'd been alerted that one of their junior editors, 'Sunny' Steve Moore, was co-organising the first British Comics Convention in Birmingham. This had been my first awareness that such a thing as British comic fandom actually existed, and at the time it felt like a doorway into a wonderful and impossible dream (I would remind you that I was fourteen). I'd become a non-attending member of the convention, entitling me to all the convention literature, and in an early promotional leaflet (with a lovely methylated violet cover by the sublime Mike Higgs) I'd discovered ads for a number of fanzines—I'm pretty sure *Heroes Unlimited #5* was amongst them—and also an ad in which Steve Moore had, unwisely, included his home address. Within weeks I'd become first an entry-level stalker and then a regular correspondent of Steve's, and had sent off for as many of those tantalising fanzine titles as I could afford.

That period, of getting in from school around five o'clock and looking anxiously towards the mantelpiece where any post for me that had arrived after I'd set out in the morning would be propped behind the repurposed WWI artillery shells that my grandmother used as vases, probably commenced an addiction that has lasted the rest of my life. To this day there is a thrill to receiving books or magazines that I've sent away for—these days it's mostly obscure old poetry magazines from Will Shutes at Test Centre—that has never gone away or grown less satisfying. I remember when that first copy of *Heroes Unlimited #5* turned up in its manila envelope how I immediately plunged into it and remained immersed for the next couple of days. I remember there was a Superman article by Peter C Phillips, which was where I recently recalled a salient fact from to include in the final volume of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. There was the first episode of Paul Neary's Phosphor/Captain Remus strip, and an article on the MLJ line from the late Haydn Paul,

someone who would go on to become a very close and valued friend. I was suddenly involved in a previously unsuspected world of people who had the same interests as me and who knew their Curt Swan from their Jack Kirby. And of course each new fanzine that arrived would introduce me to a host of subjects that I could enthusiastically seek out. I'm not sure if it was *HU* #6 or #7 [it was *HU* # 6—*HU*] that contained the EC feature, but that had sent me out to the library to secure a loan of Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, which had inadvertently led me to Jack Cole, Charles Biro and Matt Baker's *Phantom Lady*. It was an ever-expanding world of delight that at the time was thoroughly intoxicating and made my neurons fizz excitedly, a full year before I discovered hashish and marijuana.

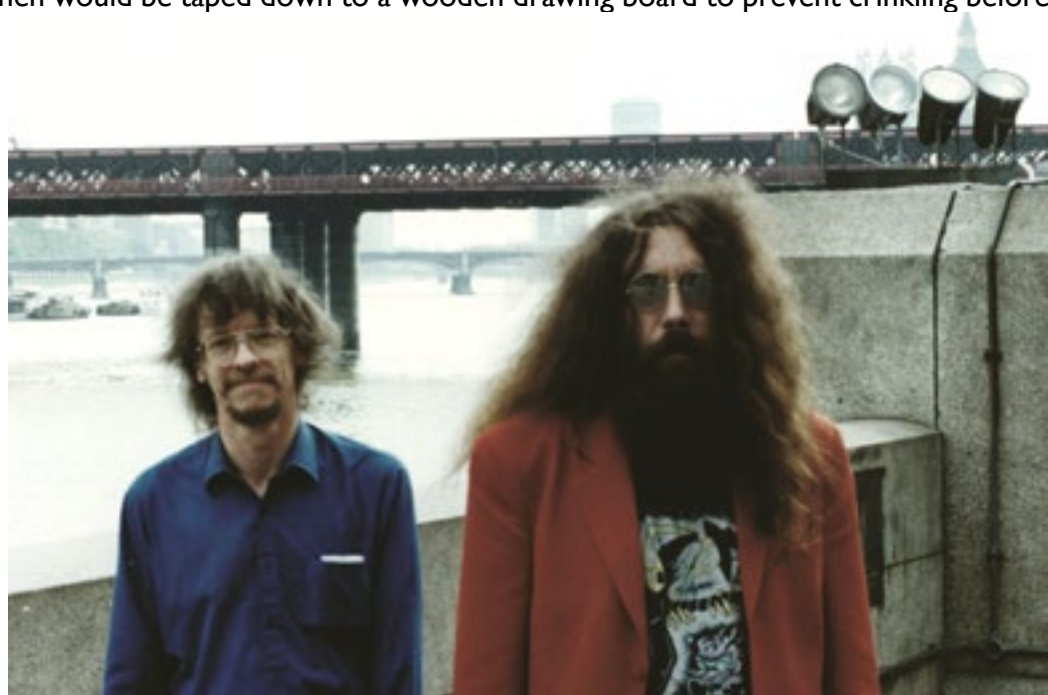
When I wrote you that letter—which I had completely forgotten about until glimpsing it at the Great British Blake-Off—I would imagine that I was probably hoping to impress you (as a major figure in the world that I was constructing in my head at the time) as well as to convey my genuine appreciation for another tremendous issue of *Heroes Unlimited*. Back then, all of this stuff meant everything to me.

I only wish I could remember what I actually said in that letter. If you reproduce it alongside this interview and it just says **BATMAN IS GOOD** in pink wax crayon I'm going to be mortified.

[You, and Alan, may read his letter about *HU* #6 in this issue's letters page—*HU*]

HU: I'd like us to talk about Steve Moore (no relation). Steve was a good friend with whom I corresponded regularly and stayed with once in Shooter's Hill. It is to Steve I owe the publication of a letter I wrote to *Wham!*, one of the Marvel reprint comics that was coming out from the UK. Steve got that letter on to the letters page and made it letter of the week (for which I won a Thing T-shirt). The important detail is that it promoted my first fanzine, *Merry Marvel Fanzine* (about to go out of existence due to a lack of readers), to a UK comics audience and printed my home address in full and in italics. As a result of that letter, I received an astonishing 35 replies and the ground was laid for the expansion into *Heroes Unlimited*. Steve did this despite the fact that he and Phil Clarke would already have been planning the first issue of their own fanzine, *Ka-Pow*. That's the way it was in those early days of fandom—cooperation rather than competition. So, enough about me—please tell me why Steve Moore mattered to you.

Alan: My only problem with this question is not knowing where to begin or, indeed, end. I corresponded with Steve from the age of fourteen—he'd have been eighteen at the time, and luckily had an arrested sense of humour to the point where he actually found my letters funny—and finally met him for the first time at the second British Comicon, at London's Waverly Hotel in the summer of 1969. After that I'd be visiting him up on Shooters Hill a couple of times a year or, less frequently, he'd be up to visit me in Northampton. On those visits to his house I was treated to a genuinely informed introduction to the world of comics, fantasy, science fiction, fan publishing and so much more. We'd be sitting together in a fug of cannabis smoke and incense fumes while he showed me beautiful pages of McCay's *Little Nemo* or perhaps some new stippled masterpiece from an Underground maestro like Dave Sheridan. Sometimes we'd do something creative—I remember one of Steve's favourite techniques was something he called 'drawing on water,' where a page of paper would be first soaked in a shallow tray of water, then would be taped down to a wooden drawing board to prevent crinkling before we made a few random marks on it in ink, usually black but sometimes red. We'd then go away and smoke a couple of joints while waiting for it to dry, and then would return to it with an altered state of consciousness and a couple of technical pens with which we would emphasise any particularly lovely visions we could see in the fractal diffusions of the coloured inks. An awful lot of my basic aesthetic thinking on the possibilities of the comic strip grew out of



this fertile period and our long, speculative conversations. Steve was visiting Northampton for the weekend in late 1971 for an LSD excursion and an Arts Lab-organised gig by Principal Edward's Magic Theatre at the local Carnegie Hall, just before I was expelled from the Grammar School on the Monday of the following week. For a few years after that the visits and letters were a little less frequent as I was adrift in the world of menial work and the beginnings of a family. As I recall, it would have been around the mid Seventies, say around 1975, that Steve and I fell into a pattern of more regular contact, and this was where our already agreeable relationship started to become much more energetic and productive.

For one thing, Steve was doing some of his best work to date around this period, and we'd have lots of exchanges about the exciting possibilities of the comic strip medium. Also, the ideas flying around at that time were quite heady and intoxicating: punk was exploding into being (although that always meant more to me than it did to Steve), Steve was contributing to the then-fledgling *Fortean Times* and was introducing me to fascinating books like Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's *Illuminatus!* trilogy, and I was soaking up a giddy rush of modern writers thanks to the excellent list at Picador Books when they first emerged onto the shelves of our then-plentiful bookshops. It was around 1977 when, following Steve's sterling example of ten years earlier, I decided to quit my job and make my living by writing or drawing, probably in the comic world.

“In my heavily biased opinion, Steve Moore is probably the single individual most responsible for the creation and development of the British comic strip scene, along with all the medium-changing ideas that emerged from it.”

(At this point I am becoming aware that I'm probably going to end up answering most of your next question as well, but have elected to press on regardless.) I was perched in a newly-made house on the emergent firetrap sink-estates of the town's newly-created 'Eastern District' with my first wife, Phyllis, and, from February 1978 our first daughter, Leah. I was getting nowhere with the epic SF saga that I was planning to write and draw for *2000 AD*, because...well, if you don't know the first thing about writing or drawing comics, it's probably best not to start your career with a ridiculously ambitious project for a publication that already has plenty of seasoned and talented artists and writers. I had, however, managed to secure a bi-weekly full-page comic strip in an Oxford underground newspaper, *The Backstreet Bugle*, this being a cynical Paddington Bear parody called *St Pancras Panda*. I did around a dozen episodes of it, which was a much more practical way of getting a grounding in drawing, writing and meeting deadlines than any amount of pipedream space-opera could have been. During this period, when I was probably proudly showing my latest pages to Steve, he came up with the idea that we could perhaps collaborate on a strip together for an English music fanzine devoted mainly to the American west scene and named *Dark Star*. Thus we came to create the four one-page episodes of *Three Eyes McGurk* and his *Death Planet Commandos*, with Steve scripting and inking and me providing the insanely detailed everything-to-prove pencils.

The completion of *Three Eyes McGurk*, along with my work on *St Pancras Panda*, had given me a sense of (probably false) confidence. Thus it was that in the spring and summer of 1978 I began to make a concerted effort to achieve a paying career in the comic strip medium. It had occurred to me that rather than try to compete with the already-professional talents on something like *2000 AD*, a better idea might be to submit some potentially ongoing ideas to publications not necessarily known for comic strip material, like the music papers. This resulted in me drawing and writing a couple of half-page weekly strips for British music weekly *Sounds*—first an absurdist private eye strip titled 'Roscoe Moscow' and then a science fiction parody called 'The Stars My Degradation' which resurrected some of the characters from *Three Eyes McGurk*. At some point during all this, I realised that I could draw neither well enough nor fast enough to make any kind of sustainable career as an artist, but that I had probably learned enough about timing and comic-strip storytelling to make a go of it as a comic writer. Once again, it was Steve who I turned to for advice, and it was Steve who went ruthlessly through my first efforts with a red marker and taught me all the basics of the craft. And once I'd made the transition to full-time comic writer, the same profession as Steve, our personal and professional relationship shifted up another notch. During the period where we were writing for Dez Skinn's *Warrior* we were co-enablers, daring each other to new excesses of storytelling or conception, and that probably characterised our working relationship for the rest of our lives. But of course, comics weren't the only element of the friendship between me and Steve.

As is probably better documented in *Unearthing* and elsewhere, in the closing months of 1993, inspired by Steve's startling metaphysical relationship with the Greek moon-goddess Selene, I decided to announce that I'd become a practicing magician. Thus began one of the more interesting stretches of our work and our

personal relationship as we attempted to practice magic and to arrive at a working theory of the subject. We formed a non-existent magical order with a ridiculously grandiose name that nevertheless produced more inventive and beautifully crafted albums than many bands, and our friendship became stronger than ever. He was very probably the best friend I'll ever have, he was the best man at me and Melinda's wedding, he was my guide and mentor in the most important areas of my life, and there isn't a day that passes when I don't think of him or chat with him. In my heavily biased opinion, Steve Moore is probably the single individual most responsible for the creation and development of the British comic strip scene, along with all the medium-changing ideas that emerged from it. He was a man of tremendous will, vision, and dreadful luck with women. I miss him terribly.

HU:What was your involvement in British comics fandom? How did you break into writing for British comics and with what goals?



Alan: I remain eternally grateful that my main engagement with British fandom was right at its inception. At that second British con I attended in 1969 at the Waverly, my first con, there were probably less than a hundred people there, and with the exception of a handful of outliers, nearly all of them were under twenty years old: they, we, were kids with a consuming interest in the comic medium, and that interest was generally progressive and forward-looking rather than founded largely on nostalgia. This was probably because of the crucial several-year gap between the founding of American comics fandom and the advent of the British phenomenon, and also because of fundamental differences in the times and temperaments of the separate founding fathers. In America, comic fandom seemed to have crystallised around Jerry Bails and his fanzine *Alter-Ego* in the very early Sixties, a venture largely organised around Professor Bails's fondness for the 'Golden Age' superheroes of his 1940s childhood. I personally like to think of the founding date of British comic fandom as being May 1st, 1967, the day Steve Moore started his new job with Odhams publishing. [Co-incidentally, the first issue of *Heroes Unlimited* appeared in July of 1967—HU]

Even if nobody else shares my opinion they would surely have to agree that British fandom commenced some time during the psychedelic rush of the later 1960s, and that the agendas of its founding fathers were far more progressive and much less interested in nostalgia than their American counterparts. For one thing, all of these American characters, even those from the 1940s, were entirely new to us. We weren't nostalgic for EC comics so much as enthralled by all the progressive possibilities they suggested.

Also, returning to that 1969 convention, the attendees were comic fans rather than superhero fans, and the vast majority there would have prized an issue of Warren's *Creepy* or *Eerie*, or perhaps Wally Wood's magnificent *witzend*, far above the superhero material on offer. The atmosphere was enchanting and, yes, this was because I was fifteen, but it was also because none of the big comic companies, or even the small ones, could see any economic sense in attending an event with an audience of less than a hundred schoolboys and teenagers. Thus, the convention was a genuine gathering of like-minded enthusiasts rather than a cynical trade-fair where a huge captive audience is paying to be advertised to. Similarly, there were very few professional artists attending—but the ones that were there seemed touchingly amazed and delighted that anyone was interested in their work. I remember the immortal deity that was Frank Bellamy, a truly lovely and self-effacing man, passing around his masterpieces amongst the assembled convention-goers and us all trembling with awe

and trying not to drool on a Garth original. I suppose what I'm trying to say is that British fandom back in that period seemed an entirely healthy enterprise, with healthy aims and attitudes that were entirely to do with a pure love of this neglected medium. Back then, when comics were the last place one would seek fame or money, this undiluted love was the only real reason for being interested in comics, and the fan culture of the time reflected that important central tenet.

My own involvement in fandom, while fairly crucial to me, was probably rather minimal. I attended a couple of further conventions, and was corresponding and visiting with Steve Moore or Haydn Paul on a fairly regular basis. But my contribution to fanzines was scant, partly because a lot of my energies were being channelled into the Northampton Arts Lab and my own poetry zine *Embryo*. I remember doing a couple of things for the fairly rudimentary fanzines of a thirteen-year-old entrepreneur I'd met at that second British convention—a dreadful attempt at an article on HP Lovecraft and some inept pen-and-ink illustrations—before landing a slightly better article on Street & Smith's pulp hero The Shadow with Trev Goring's worthy *Seminar*. Beyond that, I probably contributed most to Dave Sutton's horror fanzine, *Shadow*, where I contributed various short stories, poems and ropey spot illustrations.

My initial contact with fandom waned and vanished in the early seventies when I was more engrossed in putting together a workable life for myself. My interests had become considerably broader and included a lot more than comic books. When I started working professionally as a cartoonist and sometime music journalist on *Sounds*, I attended a convention to see what the field was like in the later seventies. Although I found it interesting there was a very definite shift in tone and focus from those first British conventions that spoke to an increasing commercialisation of the medium and a consequent decrease of that experimental and progressive spirit that had been in evidence a decade earlier.

This was my passage into the comic field and, eventually, into comic writing. To me, it didn't feel like a passage from fandom to professional work, largely on account of that long period in between where I'd developed other interests and started to raise a family. It felt more like a developed adult realising that one of the pleasures of his youth, and his vast retained knowledge of the subject, might actually prove an asset in his attempts to provide for his wife and child. I initially thought I could perhaps make things work as a kind of underground cartoonist, but ten years later and in the wrong country. Mind you, I was also still interested in things like prose writing, song-writing and music and performance, and although practical considerations had led me towards comics as my main field of employ, I've kept up a healthy interest in all those other areas throughout my career. In brief, since those early teenage years it has never been exclusively about comics, and I would imagine that my comic work has always been much the better for that diversity of interests, just as my prose writing is probably greatly enhanced by things that I've learned while writing comics.

When I became a comic professional, my agendas were almost completely unchanged—although hopefully more sophisticated—from the ideas that had circulated through early British fandom and my conversations with Steve Moore. In a nutshell, the thrust of those ideas was that the comics medium was a thing of splendid accomplishment and glorious potential that deserved a wider and more serious audience who appreciated its myriad possibilities, and that the best way to attain such a state was probably the creation of experimental and progressive comic strips that would expand the medium's capabilities and thus its audience. Although not worded or conceptualised quite so succinctly, this has pretty much been my attitude to comics since I was fourteen and I've never seen any compelling reason to change it, although arguably the world surrounding me has changed to the point where my position is no longer relevant in the same way it was. This is one of the reasons I am currently working to conclude my career in the medium.

Back in the early Eighties, when I was working professionally for British comics, I attended numerous conventions and involved myself to a degree in the fanzine scene of the times. These things seemed like good ways of keeping in touch with the field I'd found myself working in, and the experiences back then were often enjoyable. As time progressed and I began to realise that my career was placing me in a relatively unprecedented position, I withdrew from both conventions and fanzines, both of which phenomena had changed into different things since my initial rush of teenage enthusiasm, whereas my own agendas had remained essentially unaltered. I suppose that in many ways, my last couple of decades in the comic field have been conducted from the same perspective as one of those ninety year-old WWII Japanese servicemen holed up in the jungle and refusing to believe that the war was ever over: all these superhero movies don't actually exist, and the posters and merchandising are just black propaganda that's meant to weaken my murderous resolve.

HU: Setting plays an extraordinarily prominent role in your stories. You have set stories in the US (I'm particularly thinking of the impressive rendering of Deep South American speech in *Swamp Thing*) and in England (from a dystopian London in *V For Vendetta* through to your home town of Northampton in *Jerusalem*). Are all settings equal to you, or do you have a preference and what differing possibilities does each offer?

Alan: The older I get and the further I progress as a writer, the more I come to think that place is almost everything. This question, however, gives me an opportunity to examine how I ended up in this admittedly extreme position. I suppose all of my earliest published attempts at narrative—St Pancras Panda; the *SOUNDS* strips; Three-Eyes McGurk and so on—were all fantasy or science fiction narratives of one sort or another. This was also true of my earliest comic writing assignments with *2000 AD* and *Doctor Who Monthly*, which suited me down to the ground for a couple of reasons. Firstly, in the late Seventies I was a much more enthusiastic fan of science fiction and fantasy literature than I was of comics, and thus had something of a feel for the material. Secondly, although I didn't realise this consciously at the time, it has to be said that science fiction is to some extent a pleasantly undemanding practice slope for the fledgling writer: while it's true that you will be expected to come up with startling and original ideas, other areas are less arduous in that if you're writing a story set in a fantastical far future or extra-terrestrial environment then you will be making up the details of that environment as you go along and will thus largely be spared the need for research or reference. This approach got me through all those early Future Shocks, Time Twisters and miscellaneous *Doctor Who* shorts. But when I moved on from one-off short stories to my first continuing series, I had something of a re-think.



For one thing, I found myself writing *Captain Britain*, *Marvelman* and *V for Vendetta* at the same time, and was starting to become conscious of being part of a progressive and energetic British comic scene. In handling three very different takes on the super-heroic figure, I felt I should go out of my way to set them in a recognisable England as a reaction to the growing ubiquity of America as the only conceivable backdrop for a superhero or fantasy adventure story. Remember that even in that revolutionary bastion of the English comic scene, *2000 AD*, the most popular characters seemed to be set in America. (Or perhaps, with the comically incongruous English references like the Barbara Cartland Block turning up in the America-based Judge Dredd, set in that same Anglo-American hinterland where Dudley Watkins's Desperate Dan took place, with its cactuses and its Dundee gas-lamps and pillar-boxes.) Referencing Denmark Street in *Captain Britain* or Shooters Hill in *V for Vendetta* felt faintly fresh and radical at the time, believe it or not.

When I shifted to working on *Swamp Thing* with DC, it seemed to me I needed to up my game, in that I was less confident of being able to conjure a believable and authentic modern America I had never at that point set foot in. I began by asking what seemed to me to be the obvious question that someone taking over a book called *Swamp Thing* might reasonably be expected to ask: 'So which swamp is he the thing of, exactly?' The puzzlement with which my enquiry was greeted was, I suppose, instructive with regard to my growing understanding of American comic writing practices. In short, they didn't know, and weren't even sure why I was asking. When I finally received a vague 'either the Everglades or maybe in Louisiana,' I chose Louisiana as the most interesting locale, probably by virtue of being a big fan of the area's music, from Fats Domino to Dr John. With this decided, I researched the hell out of Louisiana. This was of course before the Internet when, as you'll no doubt remember, we had to direct all of our questions to a painted sheep's skull that we referred to as Thog, God of Answers, and sometimes had to kill rabbits and stuff if we wanted to avoid all the buffering and get our answers quickly. Nevertheless, I somehow managed to find out pretty much everything about Louisiana by my primitive means, despite such massive drawbacks as its being in the most well-publicised and well-documented nation on Earth, as well as the nation with the briefest and most easily-assimilated back story.

It was when we started to get readers' letters in asking how long I'd lived in Louisiana I realised that almost nobody in American comics had ever been interested enough in the American landscape or American history—familiarity, I suppose, breeding contempt—to the point where they'd paid any previous attention

to the country their stories were happening in. Realising the depth of atmosphere and texture this sort of approach could provide, I rapidly adopted it for most of my subsequent comic work. In *Watchmen*, for example, we used an isomorphic street-plan of New York to make sure we were getting the city's geography right, even in our altered parallel world. When I did the issues of *Swamp Thing* that were set in Gotham City, I absorbed all of the city's fictitious history that I could find, in order to treat it with as much authority as I'd been able to treat Baton Rouge or New York. It might even be that fictitious cities demand more rigorous research than real ones, in that you're having to do a lot more extra work in convincing the reader they exist.

“Are all settings equal? Ideologically, I'd like to think they are and will probably continue to act as if that were the case until it is proven otherwise.”

After I'd finished working for DC in the late Eighties, there were a couple of works which, while not place related, were probably significant in the development of my working processes. These were the 'Shadowplay' strip that I'd written for CIA exposé *Brought to Light*, and the Gay history piece I'd compiled for *AARGH*, 'The Mirror of Love.' Both of these strips required research on a level I'd not attempted before, in the course of which I realised that I found the process quite satisfying and addictive, which meant that most of the serious works created after that point involved a lot of obsessive research.

My first serious attempt at a fully-researched study of a specific place was in the aborted *Big Numbers* series, the collapse of which left me a little frustrated and with a need to put my ongoing research-mania into other, hopefully more viable vehicles. This accounts for the place-centred nature of *Voice of the Fire* and *From Hell*, and to a lesser extent of *Lost Girls*, where though Melinda and I were more concerned with getting our new model of pornography right, that included paying attention to the Bodensee area of Lake Constance where the story was set. With *From Hell*, having discovered the psychogeographic writings of Iain Sinclair, I'd realised there were ways of investigating a landscape that were at once more arcane and more sophisticated than the experimental modernist approach I'd tried with *Big Numbers*. These methods seemed to be based upon a kind of postmodern system of divination-through-research and divination-through-walking-the-territory, and worked towards the construction of an immaterial 'essence' of the place concerned, with all of its history and dreams and fanciful associations intact. It was partly through finding myself in this new philosophical territory during the writing of *From Hell* that I made the decision to become a practicing magician on my fortieth birthday, nearly a quarter-century ago.

Once magic had entered the picture, it coloured everything. This certainly applies to the conclusion of *From Hell* and *Voice of the Fire*, and for much of its construction I was even viewing *Lost Girls* in alchemical terms. I was also visited with the compulsion to create a series of site-specific works as part of my expanding magical practice, with these manifested as the multi-media 'Moon & Serpent' performances and CD releases executed between 1994 and 2000. With these—intense bursts of rich performance poetry—I learned more about the poetics of place than I'd managed to accrue in all my previous published work. With the first two performances, in London's Bride Lane and in that Victorian courtroom in Newcastle, the element of place was necessary to the construction of the pieces, but was perhaps secondary to the occult material in the first performance and the biographical material in the second. By the time we'd reached the third and fourth outings, *The Highbury Working* and the Holborn-located *Snakes and Ladders*, we were focussing solely upon the location and what could be deduced/divined/dowsed from it, with the result that here I was focussing upon the psychogeographic aspects—which is attempting to wring poetry from place—to a more intense degree than I'd managed before, and came to understand the fundamental processes more fully:

Firstly, you immerse yourself in the minutiae of the district through research and, if possible, a visit or two. Next, you sort through that minutiae looking for facts that 'rhyme,' and that may lead you closer to an identification of the area's essential character. Essentially, you're studying a geographic location as if it were a multi-layered text from which you, as a kind of metaphysical critic, are trying to extract the meaning. As an example of what I mean in my use of the word 'rhyme' above, I could cite the processes that led to *The Highbury Working*. During my research, I'd noted that doppelgangsters Ron and Reg Kray were connected to the Highbury area through their associate Jack McVitie's disruption of Dorothy Squires's Tempo Club residency, while at the Highbury Barn during its tenure as one of London's 19th century 'pleasure hills,' the world's first nominated 'Siamese twins,' Chang and Eng, were exhibited. Added to this is the double-headed nature of the Hackney Brook, an underground river that rises from two separate sources beneath Holloway Road. You can see the implication of a dual nature, a certain unsettling freakishness, and resonances of both the literal and

figurative 'underworld.' Recreational drug-use seemed to also be an element in Highbury's atmosphere of the phantasmal, with Coleridge's opium-addled jaunts down the Holloway Road, with Aleister Crowley's use of heroin to subdue his asthma/panic attacks when he was living in Highbury, with the amphetamine-based 'courage pills' resorted to by the Arsenal team in a 1920s cup final, and with the Preludin addiction that presumably contributed to brilliant maverick record producer Joe Meek's eventual descent into paranoia, murder and suicide. Meek's occult experiences, tenuously connecting him with Crowley, included an iron key placed in a Bible which was then closed and held shut, whereupon the key allegedly turned by itself, with no hand to guide it. Whether truth, fabrication or a Preludin hallucination, the image of the key is congruent with the Roman goddess of both horse-racing and the underworld, Epona (from whom we derive our word 'pony'), as worshipped by the cavalry officers stationed at the Roman garrison on Highbury Hill, who is said to hold a handkerchief—for starting a horse race—in one hand, and an iron key—to unlock death's mysteries—in the other. When me and Steve Moore visited the area for an on-the-ground reading, we were delighted to find a 1990s dance venue called Po Na Na's which was at least linguistically connected to Epona. And of course, a further suggestive link with the underworld equestrian goddess came with my discovery—in the only book in my library connected in any way with football, a book about football stadia purchased specifically for this Highbury project—of the alleged skeletal horse buried beneath Arsenal's Highbury stadium. There were dozens of other incidental connections as well, but the above should give a fairly comprehensive idea of the processes involved in the construction of the work.

The 'character' of Highbury that I deduced from the above details seemed to me to be predicated upon delirium, freakishness, crime, and a pronounced underworld aspect to this ostensibly elevated and breezy neighbourhood. What was striking was the very different character of Holborn and specifically Red Lion Square, as investigated in our next piece, *Snakes and Ladders*, which seemed to be a place redolent of physical and spiritual resurrection, of loss and mourning and revelation, even though located in the same city and less than a couple of miles away. I suppose this indicates that psychogeographic focus is a matter of scale, and that while one could meaningfully come up with a psychogeographic reading for the entirety of the British Isles, one can also read an individual city, or a specific district in that city, or even an individual house in that district. Maybe even a single room in that house, although that might be taking it a bit far to the point where you could end up with a psychogeography of molecules. Nobody wants that.

The final Moon & Serpent event/release was the William Blake piece, *Angel Passage*, which was less psychogeographic than psychobiographic in its execution and intentions. This proved useful as a stepping stone leading to one of my favourite ruminations on place, which is the baroque Steve Moore biography *Unearthing*. As I composed *Unearthing*, the almost unique (in modern terms) biography of a man who lived his entire life in a single residence, from birth to death, I came to realise that any study of Steve would be incomplete without a study of the physical location from which he had emerged. Thus, painfully slowly, I came to an understanding that psychogeography and psychobiography could not really be considered as separate and discrete: a portrait of an individual is not complete unless considered in the context of the place and time that he or she was produced by, and similarly we cannot understand a place without attempting to understand all of the human narratives that have wound their ways through that place.

Fairly obviously, much of the above culminates in the Byzantine proletarian sprawl of *Jerusalem*, where although the psychogeographical analysis is not foregrounded and is buried amongst the family history, the consideration of poverty, the Eternalism, and the berserk fantasy, in some respects the whole book is an attempt to apply psychogeographical ideas to fiction in a new, more immersive and comprehensive manner. I was attempting to load so much into that book, and I reasoned that only a strenuously-realised skeleton of place could support all that narrative weight. In a sense I was reaching for a kind of totality in psychogeography, where a place was considered in terms of both the historical big names and events that it had been involved with, but also in terms of the 'smaller,' more intimate and private lives of the ordinary people who made up the majority of its population. I also wanted to give dreams and legends and rumours and folklore an equal status with the conventional history of bricks and mortar and flesh, in order that this massive component of actual human experience might not be suppressed. Our delusions are as important in shaping our narratives, or those of the places we inhabit, as our established facts. In fact, that's where most of the art comes from.

Are all settings equal? Ideologically, I'd like to think they are and will probably continue to act as if that were the case until it is proven otherwise. On the other hand, I'd hesitate to dismiss Iain Sinclair's suggestion that some places are psychogeographically dead and devoid of any energy or meaning whatsoever. Perhaps, as a compromise between the two outlooks, I might posit that in such extreme and moribund cases, intensive psychogeography could work as a defibrillator?

HU: For me, *Watchmen* was very much about the differing pathologies of those who felt compelled to dress up and perform in public as super-heroes. How did you get to that in your reading of superhero comics?

Alan: My childhood devotion to the superhero as a source of wonder and a kind of booster-drug for the developing imagination was pretty much spent by the time I'd passed through early British comics fandom during my teenage years. As I remember it, the fan consensus during that period was fairly critical of superheroes anyway, since to a certain extent they were seen as being responsible for the medium's strictly-for-kids image and thus for hindering the field's development. If you look back on the mainstream comic books that were deemed fan favourites during that period—Neal Adams and Arnold Drake's *Deadman* or Jim Steranko's *Agent of Shield*, for example—you'll generally find that these were narratives that were diametrically opposed to the predominantly bland overall agendas of the comic industry. This may have been the beginning of my theory that genres only really work adequately when they are being broken. I don't think I was alone in my growing disinterest in superheroes, and can remember when Steve Moore first publicly announced that he was withdrawing from comic fandom because he felt it was becoming more interested in the contents of Batman's utility belt than it was in the gloriously diverse medium of comics itself.

My critical appraisal of superheroes had probably first arisen even before my early fandom days, with my exposure to things like Harvey Kurtzman's superhero parodies in *Mad*, particularly Kurtzman and Wally Wood's *Superduperman*, along with my first glimpses of Will Eisner's *Spirit* which, with its focus on ordinary human lives and its strenuous resistance of most of the tropes of the super-adventure comic, could be read as a criticism of the rest of the genre. Thus, when I was first working in that genre with *Marvelman*, I was naturally going to attempt a critique by placing a naïve 1950s British Captain Marvel knock-off in a relatively realistic and cynical 1980s England. What I was saying, in essence, was that these characters could never work in any emotionally and psychologically real situation, and that if by some means they ever *could* exist then their existence would make reality into a nightmarish and absurd horror. (In my work on *Captain Britain*, a character and continuity owned by Marvel Comics, this approach didn't seem appropriate, and so I concentrated upon cramming as many fun science fiction ideas into the series as possible, in an effort to recreate the simple sense of wonder that such characters had first inspired in me.)

When I was first asked to work for American comics—probably on the strength of *Marvelman*—I was fortunate enough to be offered the poor-selling *Swamp Thing* as my first assignment. Not that I'd ever had a massive amount of interest in the character, but at least it was a fantasy/horror/supernatural character (in fact, DC's last remaining published character of this type) rather than a superhero. This meant I had much greater freedom when it came to formal experiments, subject matter and depth of characterisation than I would have if I'd been assigned a popular superhero book with acceptable sales figures.

From the start, I reasoned that the character would stand a better chance of success if he were given a thorough conceptual overhaul, positioning him as a well-realised science fantasy figure with access to all of the fantastic genres, be they horror, science fiction, fantasy or even the superhero genre. I also thought it might be advantageous to situate the character right in the middle of DC's sprawling continuity, rather than in a supernatural backwater away from the main action and reader attention. I realised that to do this while retaining the decidedly non-superheroic atmospherics of *Swamp Thing* would mean viewing those more mainstream characters through the stylistic lens of my horror/science fiction narrative, which I thought might be interesting. After all, that was pretty much the technique I'd applied to superheroes with *Marvelman*. To this end, I included a cameo by the Justice League in an early issue—just a page or so—in which I presented them as shadowy figures watching impotently from above the world and established that in *Swamp Thing* we were prepared to go anywhere within the realm of DC continuity and that we would probably reimagine that continuity to make it fit with the aesthetic we were developing on the book.

Of course, working within a continuity of ongoing characters owned by the company meant that while I could be relatively radical in my approach, I still had nowhere near the absolute freedom that had been



mine with Marvelman and couldn't really develop my critique of the superhero tradition. With the advent of *Watchmen*, that changed. I could create a study of superheroes that would have far more scope than Marvelman had allowed, and would be doing it from a more thought-through perspective. My intention was to create a several-decade superhero continuity from scratch, using stock superhero figures and situations, but reimagined and characterised using the techniques I'd developed while working on *Swamp Thing*. I reasoned that this approach would call upon me to answer two fundamental questions, both arising from my desire to treat superheroes as if they existed in the real world: firstly, what would they be like, psychologically and emotionally, if they existed in reality? And secondly, what would reality be like if they existed in it?

Answering the second question led to the skewed alternate history of *Watchmen*, while answering the first led me to its cast of—in some ways—dysfunctional adventurers. In Marvelman, I'd only had one or two massively powerful superhuman characters to deal with, whereas in *Watchmen* we had one authentically awesome superhuman and then a whole range of non-powered costumed characters, each of whom demanded their own personality and their own pathology. With Doctor Manhattan I decided that rather than the Nietzschean *Übermensch* model I'd explored in Marvelman, an extreme version of almost Buddhist detachment might be more interesting. With the Comedian, I took an off-the-peg American patriotic character and gave him what I thought to be a more likely political outlook for such a character than Captain America's vague liberalism, reasoning that figures like that would be less likely to be battling Batroc the Leaper than they would to be assassinating a democratically elected head of state or organising a military coup in some Marxist republic. The Silk Spectre, along with her mother and predecessor, was an attempt to embody some of the observations I'd made in my earlier 'Invisible Girls and Phantom Ladies' essay for British Marvel and depict the side-lining and objectification of women characters: her mother has only taken up crimefighting, under advice from her male manager, as a publicity move to aid her career as a model and aspiring actress. The younger Silk Spectre has almost no agency, and is made uncomfortably aware that she's only kept around because she's the most important character's girlfriend. Even her name expresses only fragility and a tenuous and wraith-like presence. Ozymandias, a standard comic book 'perfected man' type, gave me a chance to investigate narcissism as a motive for wanting—or perhaps needing—to save the world, and allowed me to play against my own political tendencies by making the most liberal character into a credible mega-villain. The remaining characters, Nite Owl and Rorschach, were effectively two different extrapolations of the Batman-type. Nite Owl is perhaps more like the 1950s Batman, or like someone who grew up reading adventures like that – he's essentially a big kid who's rich enough and inventive enough to afford all the cute toys of the superhero lifestyle, like the secret lair and the cool owl-themed vehicle. You have the feeling that he'd have loved a canine pet with a mask if 'Owldog' hadn't sounded like such a stupid name. The character is essentially motivated by nostalgia for his childhood, and is thus potentially the character whose psychology most closely resembles that of at least part of the readership. Rorschach was an attempt to depict the most probable psychology for the more contemporary 'dark creature of the night' Batman, a justice-obsessed vigilante motivated by extreme childhood trauma. I noted that this seemed like a much more typical motivation for a serial murderer than for a caped crusader, and took my cues for Rorschach's Carl Panzram/Son of Sam stylings from there. After all, while our world and its foreign wars have created a large population of children who've witnessed their parents murdered in front of them, to the best of my knowledge none of them thus far have become bat-themed avengers, although a number of them have almost certainly gone on to become emotionally dead killers.

All of this was to suggest that the superhero, in any real-world application, is not psychologically or emotionally viable; maybe not even possible. This will not, of course, prevent people from trying, especially in a society that currently has a dream-life composed of wall-to-wall costumed adventurers and, according to a CIA survey I heard cited, has an average emotional age of twelve. I note with some alarm that recent developments in CRISPR gene manipulation and legal loopholes have allowed home experimentation by people eager to, say, switch off the gene that limits muscle mass, or the gene that restricts our vision from seeing into the ultraviolet and infrared reaches of the spectrum. One of these self-experimenters is providing home kits for others on the internet. Don't get me wrong—I'm not at all worried about a race of superhumans arising to subjugate humanity; more concerned about an epidemic of the self-disabled, a group of pot-luck genetic disasters who are no longer able to walk, let alone fly, and who are all trying to live the superhero dream by being the one standing near the chemistry set during the lightning storm. As my mate, Joe Brown, was saying on the subject, 'If only someone had written a book warning us of the dangers of this superhero stuff.'

HU: *From Hell* and the early volumes of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* are both set in Victorian London. And it has a strong presence in *Lost Girls* with Wendy and Alice and the art of Aubrey Beardsley. Why are you so drawn to that place and time—in general and as a source of narrative possibilities for comic books and graphic novels?

Alan: Well, I can certainly see how this perception might have arisen, but I assure you this is a perspective illusion born of working practicalities rather than of any pro-Victorian proclivities. With *From Hell*, the initial idea had simply been to focus on the details of a real-life murder, and a number of other potential killers and time periods—such as Dr Buck Ruxton in (I think) the 1930s—were considered before finally opting to concentrate on the Whitechapel murders of 1888. This, of course, demanded an intense focus on Victorian London. With *Lost Girls*, on the other hand, once Melinda and I had decided to make Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy our protagonists, I decided to make their original publication dates a guide to each woman's chronology, and thus to her age. Looking at the three characters with an eye to having them meet when Dorothy would neither be too young nor Alice too old, a window of opportunity between 1910 and 1915 seemed ideal, and the first performance of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* along with the outbreak of the First World War made 1913 seem optimal. Of course, with Alice and Wendy's flashback sequences, set decades earlier, an embracing of the Victorian period was inevitable, and as for the majority of the *White Book's* contents being based upon Victorian artists or writers such as Beardsley and Wilde, I suppose that was chiefly because the erotica of that period seemed to us the most comparatively attractive and sophisticated.

With *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, an idea that grew directly out of *Lost Girls* ('Hey, I guess if you can include different authors' characters together for a postmodern approach to pornography, maybe you could do the same thing for an adventure narrative!') the focus was on the overall project, a stupendous mash-up of all the world's fictions since almost the dawn of literature. The Victorian period, with its abundance of memorable fantastic characters, seemed a good place to start, and 1898 was originally chosen because I wanted Bram Stoker's *Mina Harker* as my principal character, and thus needed the narrative to be set a couple of years after the publication of *Dracula* in 1896. When Kevin noticed that HG Wells's *War of the Worlds* had been published in 1898, this seemed too good an opportunity to miss and so we stayed with the Victorian period throughout that second volume. Although we obviously had a massive amount of fun with our 19th century line-up, it had always been our intention to move on, hence the appearance of portraits depicting the 18th century incarnation of the League in volume one, and our citing of future 20th century adventures of a revised group of characters, or of Jenny Diver/Janni Nemo, in our *New Traveller's Almanac* in volume two. While I can't speak conclusively for Kevin, I suspect the historical period we both had the most fun with so far was the England of 1958, as presented in *Black Dossier*, possibly because this gave us a chance to visit a fiction-enriched version of the landscape of our childhoods.

So, no, although the Victorian era is immensely interesting and wonderful fun, creatively speaking I wouldn't want to live there. It rather reminds me of my friend, the comedian Andrew O'Neill, and his robustly-titled fanzine *Fuck Steampunk*, where he deplores the fashionable pretence of being 'posh people from the past.'

HU: "*Lost Girls* is a beautifully written and drawn work of art. *Lost Girls* is pornographic. There is a profound and intimate connection between those two statements. Please comment. Earlier in our interview, you referred to what you and Melinda were doing in your collaboration as 'our new model of pornography.' Could you elaborate?

Alan: Tracing the origins of *Lost Girls* in my own work—Melinda would obviously have a different story to tell, based on her own processes—it seems to me that this was the culmination of a number of ideas that had struck me since I'd begun work in the medium of (predominantly) boys' adventure fiction. Principal amongst these was my observation that most people in the real world were clearly of the opinion that violence was generally an unenjoyable business whereas sexual relations were immensely pleasurable, although you would never have suspected this from looking at our culture. I realised that, whereas it was perfectly acceptable for every issue of every adventure comic book to be concerned with usually violent conflict, the idea of a regular comic being entirely about sex was pretty much unthinkable. This was the thinking that led me to formulate issue #34 of *Swamp Thing*, where we managed to show what comics were potentially capable of when liberated from thirty years of the Comics Code Authority: a coherent and contextually justified issue-long erotic encounter which I think worked beautifully and held the readers' attention without being in any way prurient or demeaning to either of the characters. Of course, if you give me an inch I will, characteristically, be looking around for an interesting mile. It occurred to me that while managing a single all-erotic issue of an ongoing mainstream comic book was certainly some kind of accomplishment, it really wasn't essentially very different from the other novel one-off issues that we'd attempted during our run on *Swamp Thing*, like for example the Walt Kelly tribute 'Pog' or the strange experimental issue based around John Totleben's eerie collages. We'd demonstrated we could do certain things for a single issue without damaging the continuity of the book, but it was equally obvious that none of these 'special issues' were viable as longer continuities in themselves, and would have to remain as lovely occasional novelties in a book like *Swamp Thing*. This struck me

as unsatisfying, especially with relation to the expression of sexual material.

It would have been around this time that I started to give some serious thought as to whether it would be possible to base a serious long-form work entirely on sex. I realised that in order to be a serious work, it would have to be talking about something important. Sex could never be all of the story, any more than violence could be. For a long time, my thinking was stalled on the issue of how any truly serious subject could ever be addressed through a narrative that was, from beginning to end, intended as sexually arousing. I also realised that to be considered a serious work, what I was proposing would have to contain all of the things that are to be found in any field of literature with the single exception of pornography: the work would require a plot, a meaning, a well-researched setting, and credible characters with credible motivations. Working in the comic medium added further complications, and I'm embarrassed to say that when I thought about this longer erotic work I was thinking entirely of having a male artist as my collaborator. That was the unfortunate mindset of the comic industry in those days, and I had never worked with a woman artist because, in the mainstream industry at that time, there didn't seem to be any.



The thinking around *Lost Girls* finally came together when I was invited to submit an eight-page erotic strip for a proposed anthology entitled *Lost Horizons of Shangri-La*. Whereas I'm assuming that many of the other potential contributors were artist-writers, I realised that I was going to have to find someone to collaborate with. It was at this point I had my saving stroke of inspiration. Having for many years been a huge fan of Melinda Gebbie's underground work—I think technically she was the best of the Underground artists, and I don't think that needs qualifying with reference to her gender—and having met her once or twice since she'd relocated to London, I suddenly realised there was no earthly reason why I couldn't ask her if she'd like to work on this project with me. The idea of working on an erotic piece with a woman suddenly solved a lot of the problems about the tone of the proposed work that had been dogging me. I'd feared that with a male collaborator an inevitable stale locker-room aesthetic might come to dominate the piece, but the idea of collaborating with a woman changed that dynamic entirely. I remember dimly wondering whether any previous erotic work had ever involved collaborators of both genders. And if not, why not?

As it turned out, Melinda had been invited to contribute to the book as well, and liked the idea of collaborating with me on what would have been sixteen pages between the two of us. We met to talk about the idea or, more properly, to talk about our lack of an idea that felt worthy of this proposed collaboration. I'd previously had a kind of demi-notion concerning the fact that JM Barrie's *Peter Pan*, with its flying sequences, might lend itself to some kind of Freudian reading, although what the end result of that idea would have been I really can't imagine. It didn't seem to lead anywhere particularly interesting. Luckily, when we were in the initial stages of kicking ideas around, Melinda mentioned that she'd always personally liked the dynamics of a story with three engaging female protagonists, such as in her 'My Three Swans' strip; always a personal favourite of my own. Somehow this random notion of three female leads cross-fertilised with my own moribund Peter Pan idea, and I asked myself the obvious question: 'If Wendy from *Peter Pan* was one of these three women, who would the other two be?' I doubt there's a person in the western world who couldn't have immediately answered that question, and its blinding obviousness was part of why it hit me like a thunderbolt. It was one of those all-too-infrequent ideas where, as soon as you have it, you already know how spectacularly good this could turn out to be.

As I started to apply myself to the logistics of such an intertextual fable, I started to realise what a lot of other narrative gold was on offer. For example, it struck me that if we were going to have these

three fictional women occupying a single story, it might not be a bad idea to start by working out simple chronologies to their stories, based on the assumption that the supposed events in their tales must have at least occurred before the books written about them by Lewis Carroll, JM Barrie and L Frank Baum. From this, trying to determine a period when they might have met when they were all just about sexually active, when Dorothy wouldn't have been too young nor Alice too old, I determined that the optimum period would have been around the 1913-1915 mark. This immediately suggested the First World War, the tail-end of Art Nouveau and the first performance of Stravinsky's epoch-defining *Rite of Spring*. In excited conversation with Melinda, we realised we could oppose the sensual beauties of the imagination, from a period when those beauties were of a particularly splendid vintage, with the screaming imagination-negating horror of the war that brutally announced the modern world.

We further sharpened our focus on what it was we were actually doing, namely attempting to create an unprecedented work of the erotic imagination in a culture where there were a great many explosive issues surrounding such an attempt. From the start, we decided to present *Lost Girls* as a work of pornography, rather than hide behind the more socially acceptable term 'erotica,' which seemed to us a middle-class evasion. Also, etymologically, pornography (drawings or writings concerning wantons) seemed to me more honest and precise than erotica (pertaining to love). It isn't love that we're considering when we read erotic material, is it? It's sex, and sexual fantasy. Other issues demanding consideration were the two likely main arguments against the book's existence, one coming from the purveyors of tabloid panics concerning anything of a sexual nature and the other, more importantly from our perspective, coming from contemporary feminism and its position regarding pornography. Our approach regarding the first argument was to try and make the book as breathtakingly beautiful in its art and its writing as we possibly could, in the hope that this would provide our 'social and artistic merit' get-out-of-jail card. Our approach concerning the second argument was carefully to consider the writings of feminists we respected upon the subject. Most helpful here were the opinions of Angela Carter and, perhaps more surprisingly, Andrea Dworkin. Carter's book *The Sadeian Woman* allows itself to imagine a possible form of liberating pornography without the defects she has identified in the existing field, while even the avowedly anti-pornographic Dworkin allowed that a non-oppressive form of pornography was theoretically possible, even if she didn't believe it would ever be attained. Neither of these seemed to us an argument that such a form of pornography should not at least be attempted.

In trying to forge a kind of pornography that was designed to appeal to both men and women, it became clear that creating pornography women could respond to was the major hurdle we faced, since men can apparently become aroused by a glimpse of a single grainy grey page-three image of an anonymous moonlighting stenographer's nipple. Of course, we realised that by creating *Lost Girls* we were essentially presenting a new model for pornography, under the basic assumption that culture can either have good pornography (if such a thing proved to be possible) or it can have bad pornography. Historically, 'no pornography' is not an option. However, we also came to realise that, in proffering our new model for pornography, we were being unintentionally disingenuous. I mean, it took us between sixteen and eighteen years to complete it, and I would imagine that finding a male-female team with talents equal to Melinda's and my own can't be that common an occurrence. Perhaps more importantly, why would anyone seek to dignify pornography with such a work when you can obviously make a lot more money by franchising *Twilight* slash fiction with a fraction of the labour or invention?

No matter. We achieved exactly what we set out to achieve, and the response from the world beyond the mainstream comic field—which was the only world that we were really concerned with—was everything we could have hoped for. I have never before been stopped in the street by women, memorably at least two sets of mothers and daughters, and been able to have a sane and sober conversation about the aesthetics of pornography, as if stultifying social shame wasn't, y'know, a thing. And there are times when I find the fact that we worked on *Lost Girls* for all those years, not knowing what sort of world it would emerge into, only to have it come out during an ongoing paedophile panic and to receive not even the threat of censure, to be downright eerie.

HU: In each Sunday's *Observer* newspaper, a prominent figure from the arts world chooses seven arts works which are meaningful to them. In the issue of 15 October 2017, the 45-year-old theatre director Rupert Goold listed his choices under the categories of Podcast, Graphic Novel, Dance, TV, Theatre, Book and Restaurant. His choice of Graphic Novel was *The Ballad of Halo Jones* by Alan Moore and Ian Gibson, about which Goold wrote as follows: 'I've been revisiting this Alan Moore graphic novel that transformed my teenage years. Halo Jones is a cross between *Blade Runner* and *Sex in the City* and it was the first imaginative world that seemed totally unique to me, a feminist sci-fi that put character ahead of idea or concept.' What amazed me about this account was that I had never heard of *Halo Jones* and, while clearly Goold's account showed that *HJ* had achieved cult status, it did not feature in any of the accounts of Alan Moore's seminal works I had seen.

Thankfully, the three years of *Halo Jones* had just been put back into print in the *2000 AD Ultimate Collection* in its original black and white. I read it and found Goold's remarks absolutely on the money. *Halo Jones* created an incredibly detailed and inventive future world, not unlike *Blade Runner* and *Clockwork Orange*, but a million miles from the misogyny of those two movies in the representation of its funky heroine and her perspective on life and the universe. In the absolute centrality of the character of Halo Jones to the strip and her close friendship with a succession of women across a range of narrative worlds, would it be fair to call *Halo Jones* feminist? She ages from 18 to 35 in the three books we have, but the arc originally envisioned by Alan was intended to span nine books and to bring Halo up to eighty. The break in her life story at the end of Book Three was deeply shocking to this reader, as it must have been to her *2000 AD* readers back in 1986.

Alan: I suppose *Halo Jones* always had feminist intentions. But while I'd describe myself as a feminist I understand that some strands of feminism would have a problem with describing any male-created work as feminist, and so as a result I would prefer that people label the strip as they see fit. Its actual origins, at whatever point in the

early-to-mid 1980s that actually was, were brought about by the then-recent termination of all the British girls' comics, an extinction event that, whatever the failings of girls' comics might have been, I saw as being a bad thing. It seemed to me that the only comic left on the British market that had any kind of female readership at all had to be *2000 AD*, which raised the idea that it might be possible to establish a strong female character, an ordinary young woman of the far future, amongst the comic's regular roster of (however well written or drawn) tough guys with blasters. As it turned out, the *2000 AD* readership weren't at all resistant to the idea, and for a while it was one of the most popular strips.

Putting Halo Jones together—even the name combines something celestial with one of the most common and ordinary surnames on the planet—I was conscious that if it was really going to be a strip about an ordinary woman, then I would have to make her milieu both extraordinary and realistically detailed to compensate and to hold the reader's attention. That was partly behind the decision to open the first episode *in medias res*, with the reader dropped into the middle of a futuristic news bulletin concerning things of which they cannot possibly have any knowledge, but which gives an impression of a realistically detailed culture, however alien it may appear at first glance. Even things like the naming protocols of the 'Proximen' from Proxima Centauri (still apparently the best bet for us contacting alien life, as I understand it) seemed important to include, however unimportant to the actual story they may have been. They were providing part of the credible texture I felt was one of the strip's most important elements. The language and slang of Halo's future world was an effect that I'd certainly been interested in since reading Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, and possibly since even earlier. As I recall, it was Steve Moore showing me the original Spanish-language editions of the magazine *Dracula* that awakened an interest in the odd properties of comic narratives where I either didn't or didn't fully understand the language the characters were talking in. The undecided state of the narrative, a kind of linguistic quantum superposition, lent it a quality which convinced me that the beautifully drawn strips in *Dracula*—by Esteban Maroto, Enric Sió and the like—must be the most sophisticated and enigmatic narratives in the comics world. My crushing disappointment on reading the English NEL translations was painful, but taught me an important lesson about how languages we do not speak affect our perceptions as readers. There is probably no better way of immersing a reader in an alien world than by forcing them to



become acquainted with its language.

The mostly female cast of characters in *Halo Jones* just evolved from the narrative, rather than being a conscious matter of positive discrimination. I wanted Halo to be unattached, to be defined by herself rather than by whose girlfriend she might be, and this seemed to suggest her sharing a house with other women, and the idea that most of her friends would probably be women. To be honest, any man in the strip kind of had to earn his place in some way, and there had to be a purpose—even if only a satirical purpose—behind their inclusion, otherwise why not give the role to a woman? I genuinely like the dynamics of a strip with lots of women, there being something noticeably different from the dynamics of a male-centric story. The current and final volume of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, for example, has made me realise that at this point in the book's evolution we probably have one of the largest and strongest female casts in comics. Our third issue is even styled like a British girls' comic of yesteryear and contains nothing but strips focussed on the book's numerous women.

Although *Halo Jones* is (along with all the strips in this set of questions, apart from *Lost Girls*) unfortunately one of the many works I feel I've had to disown, I remain very proud of it. We introduced a lesbian character to British boys' comics in a way that was heart-breaking rather than prurient; we made the idea of warfare shocking and new for the readers by showing it happening to platoons exclusively composed of women; we did a whole book about a shopping expedition; and the only man that Halo has a relationship with in the entire series is justifiably murdered by her at the end of the third book. I'm still not sure if this makes it a feminist work or not, but I'd be happy to accept that classification.

HU: *Promethea* is for me the closest of all of your writings to my own imaginative concerns. The shared theme is the incursion of the mythic world into everyday contemporary reality or, to put it another way, the co-existence of two worlds, the here and the there. It started in *Heroes Unlimited* numbers 2 and 3 with a prose story entitled *The Phoenix*, where the spirit of a pharaoh from ancient Egypt suddenly came to occupy the psyche of a contemporary museum curator. It continued in my thesis, which was about how the Celtic Otherworld (aka *Tír na nÓg* or the Land of Youth, referenced in *Promethea*) underlies the world of modern Irish drama. My most recent book, *The Irish Dramatic Revival 1899-1939* (Bloomsbury, 2015), has a photo of WB Yeats's supernatural play, *At the Hawk's Well*, on the front cover and concludes with a chat between myself



and contemporary Irish playwright Conor McPherson about ghosts and the uncanny in Irish drama. Looking back on the *Phoenix* and the other stories I wrote for *Heroes Unlimited* (admittedly, I was only 16) it strikes me I had great ideas but with absolutely no idea about how to develop them in any meaningful way. *Promethea* is I think a work of your maturity, where a great idea is matched by the brilliance of its execution. It speaks of the esoteric and finds a fictional means to channel many of your key imaginative concerns. Could you comment? It also has a female heroine (*Promethea* rather than the more usual *Prometheus*) and the connectedness with other women that I think links the three works I am asking you about this time around. [Every month, for four months, I e-mailed Alan a set of three questions on his work. This was the third such set.]

Alan: The way that *Promethea* came into being was somewhat strange. I'd been working various titles for an outfit known, embarrassingly, as *Awesome Comics*, and had been able to find work for a number of people like Rick Veitch, Jim Baikie and Melinda. When that company suddenly folded, I thought it would be best to try and pitch a line of comics to some other company that would allow me to continue working with at least some of the people who were my personal friends, and would also be bringing in work for those people. Anyway, having decided that creating a raft of titles was my best option, I was somewhat stuck as to what those titles should actually be.

Then, one night in the late twentieth century, I was thumbing through an old workbook before retiring for the evening, perhaps looking for a bit of blank space to jot some passing thought down. On one of the pages—presumably another such midnight jotting, from possibly years before, that I'd committed to paper and then completely forgotten about—was a list of titles and character names that looked very much like the raft of titles I was looking for. Although I couldn't remember coming up with any of the names, some of them immediately suggested a certain sort of character, or a certain sort of approach. The first name on the list was Tom Strong, which sounded like the omni-competent Superman-type figure you might want as the linchpin of your continuity, but with an undertone of the pre-Superman characters featured in the pulp magazines and dime novels. Another name, Top Ten, sounded like some kind of team book, although at that stage there

was no more to the idea than this. Greyshirt suggested a kind of plainclothes adventurer, perhaps occupying the same sort of territory as Will Eisner's Spirit, while Cobweb—a name I later realised I'd used before, in *Captain Britain*—sounded like a diaphanous glamour character after the Phantom Lady. The name Promethea implied some sort of female lead, perhaps occupying the same position in the continuity as Wonder Woman, in relation to Tom Strong as the Superman figure. So, with this handful of names that weren't even really concepts, we set up the deal, assigned artists and got to work beating the characters into shape.

I remember having decided that Promethea would be a super heroine working in a magical environment, as I felt that my experience as a magician afforded me a possibly unique approach to such a character: not so much Wonder Woman as a female Dr. Strange, but one informed by a background of first-hand magical experience. I still didn't have much more than the name, and I recall making a false start on issue one, producing eight pages of typed material that, frankly, seemed dead on the page. I threw it out and started again. Thinking through this second attempt, I first wondered whether there was some necessary element I'd neglected to include in my first draft, although I couldn't think of any. I next wondered if there might be some *unnecessary* elements that I should have included, which was a much more productive line of enquiry. I realised that a semi-dysfunctional superhero team called 'The Five Swell Guys' were completely unnecessary,

“...to at least spare myself a little pain when it's announced that Promethea is now a member of Captain Carrot and the Zoo-Crew”

but sounded like a lot of fun. The same went for the Painted Doll, the **TEXT**ure news-screens, the flying cars and all the rest of the strip's seemingly superfluous trappings. With these additions, the narrative seemed to come alive and I could get down to the process of shaping the work into the vehicle I wanted it to be.

In the course of those first couple of issues, the essentials of the concept fell into place. Most prominent was the self-referential loop of creating a fictional character who self-identifies as a fictional character, albeit one that has some agency in the non-fictional world. This gave us the character's back story and origin, as well as generating the coterie of previous Prometheas and an imaginal space for them to exist in, the Immaterialia. I was starting to understand that Promethea was some sort of emergent spirit of the imagination, and with the faculty for imagination being the obvious doorway into magical understanding in both the Kabbalistic system and ordinary common sense, I realised that the character was perfectly situated to explore magical ideas for (hopefully) the entertainment and edification of the readership. It was only some months later, incidentally, that José Villarrubia pointed out the similarities to Helene Cixous's work, *The Book of Promethea*, in which the titular figure is described as both imaginary and 'a heroine of the imagination.' This was a bit of a shock, and felt slightly spooky: two authors both creating a character with the same name that appears to be a fictional figure who can nonetheless in some way transcend her imaginary status. I'm sure this is just the ordinary madness of writers, or maybe just of me, but there are times when you almost start to suspect that you're transcribing something that already has its own pre-existing reality. Thinking about it, those occasions are probably more frequent if you've already built a self-referential loop into the concept that makes it difficult to prove that it *isn't* on some level real. That's just an observation.

It wasn't until we were a couple of years into the strip that I thought to ask someone who'd had a proper education—inevitably, this would be the long-suffering Steve Moore—what the word 'Prometheus' actually meant. Steve explained that the 'Pro' prefix meant, loosely, 'before,' while the 'methe' part of the name related to 'mentation' or thought. Thus, I realised, both Prometheus and its feminine equivalent Promethea are names that mean 'forethought,' which is to say the capacity for imagination. I also learned that Promethea is the name of a species of moth and, following this chain of evocative etymological (and entomological) associations, remembered that the Greek word 'Psyche' meaning mind, or spirit, or consciousness, or all three, was originally their word for a butterfly. It also seemed tenuously to link up to the word 'image' (and thus imagination) through the word 'imago,' defined as an emerging form. I'm not making any grand supernatural claims for any of this, but mention it as an example of the subjective atmospheric that came to surround the strip; essentially a feeling that with all of this corroborative detail, we were probably on the right track, even though what we might be on the track of remained (and remains) a more difficult question.

As the strip progressed, I began to see a way in which we could provide a highly entertaining and at least rudimentary education in magical concepts while still telling a fast-paced and absorbing story. (As a sidebar here, I've heard a number of critics repeat the idea that *Promethea* was a purely didactic work which didn't actually have a plot or a narrative, which is a criticism I don't really understand or recognise. It may not have had a traditional superhero plot, but I certainly spent an inordinate amount of my time with that

series working on *something*.) I thought it safest to start with basic ideas that could then be unpacked in more detail at a later date, such as the importance of the four symbolic 'magical weapons' and the necessary human qualities that these symbols relate to. I felt if I was going to encourage people to explore the world of magical ideas, however gently, then it was only responsible to at least first give them the basic safety demonstration. As we progressed through that first year of the book, we moved on to explore a few more sophisticated concepts, for example Tantra, while still keeping foregrounded the action-based plot with the Temple, the gangster Benny Solomon, his Goetic demons, and the Painted Doll.

With issue twelve, I figured we'd done our necessary groundwork and it was now time to shift the strip up a notch, both in terms of its elucidation of magic and also in terms of innovation in its comic storytelling techniques. I also wanted to give the readers a taste, if possible, of the super-connected neurological state I associate with magical practice—a demonstration of what I call magic, if you like. I hit upon the broad idea for the construction of that issue during a consideration of my tattered copy of 'Magic Theatre' OZ magazine. That was the issue where, instead of, say, reprinting a Robert Crumb strip on a single page, they had it running through the entire issue with a panel on each page. They also included Eadweard Muybridge's stop-motion naked figures strolling through the issue, a page and a step at a time, while declaiming a text borrowed from somewhere in the form of word balloons. This basic idea of semi-connected narrative strands running simultaneously through an entire issue seemed to me an interesting way of attempting a comic narrative, so I started to gather my materials. Noticing that a comic, minus the ad pages, is twenty-four pages long and that there are twenty-two cards in the Major Arcana of the tarot deck, I decided to make the progression of the cards, in order, into the backbone of that issue's narrative. This meant I had to connect the cards into some sort of narrative. I opted to try and connect the cards into an account of human history, at least as seen from a perspective of western magic, reaching from the primordial nothingness of the quantum vacuum and the 'Big Bang' up through prehistoric human development to the fall of Rome, the Dark Ages, the Renaissance, the Age of Reason, the First and Second World Wars and finally the modern world, poised on the brink of apocalypse or revelation.

Please note I'd committed to this approach before I'd known that such a mapping of tarot onto human history was even remotely possible. The same thing was even more true of a second strand I'd decided to throw into the mix, this being the rearrangement of Scrabble tiles into twenty-two anagrams of Promethea that would in some way relate to the progressing tarot/history narrative or to the dialogue (I'd decided it would be nice to do it in verse) that accompanied and explained that narrative. What I'm saying here is I didn't know there were twenty-two appropriate anagrams of the nine-letter word Promethea when I committed to that issue. I was treating the entire piece as a magical operation, which meant I was in the possibly delusional mindset which believed I was being directed to create this work, and that whatever entities were doing the directing knew a lot better than I did whether it was possible or not. In other language, this is simply trusting one's artistic processes, even when it doesn't necessarily seem rational to do so. Throwing in the Aleister Crowley/Fred Karno joke about the imaginary mongoose seemed to round the concept off nicely. The overall issue seemed, at least to me, to promote the kind of neurologically fizzy state I'd wanted the book to have. I'd also done something in the material world that, in my opinion, I couldn't have achieved without a belief in magic, thus suggesting that magic may be advantageous *whether it's really there or not*. Sorry about all these lapses into italics, by the way. I realise that it's a bit like having a really intense person leaning right into your face and hissing something with unfathomable insistence and urgency.

After issue twelve, of course, I elected to feature the Kabbalistic road-trip as a way of exploring one of the most comprehensive magical systems of ideas in its entirety. By this point, in my evolving magical practice, I'd explored some of the lower spheres of the Kabbalah to my satisfaction, but realised that if I was going to describe these realms with any authority I was going to have to 'visit' almost all of them in person. (I say 'almost all' because I'd already decided that a visit to the sphere of godhead, Kether, would be psychically suicidal even if it proved to be possible.) In this way, *Promethea* became in some ways a coded account of my own progress with the Kabbalistic system, even though that progress was chiefly being made in the name of researching *Promethea*.

It was towards the very end of those researches—on a very busy night when I had already been introduced by Steve Moore to his goddess and love-interest Selene, as documented towards the end of *Unearthing*, and had later been informed by a disembodied voice which was nevertheless my own that I was now a Magus, a kind of magician-philosopher—I was suddenly struck by a clear understanding that *Promethea* would conclude with issue thirty-two, which would be an extra-long thirty-two page comic story. This would be constructed in such a way that, while it would read as a linear comic narrative, it could also be unfolded or reconstructed into a double-sided psychedelic poster. It was at this point I decided this was more than enough magical excitement for one evening, and went to bed. The next morning, after Steve and his invisible girlfriend had departed back to Shooters Hill, I wrote the whole of the Chokmah issue of *Promethea* (was

it issue #23? [No, it was #22—HU]) in around five hours, and the next day I typed it all up in a further five hours, the fastest I've ever completed an entire full-length issue, and a characteristically Chokmah-like spurt of creative energy.

I moved on into the final apocalyptic arc of the book, with the Iraq war unrolling in the real-life background and began to move closer to that final thirty-second issue, still with the conviction it would be a thirty-two-page narrative that converted into a pair of equally coherent poster images, and still without the faintest notion of how I was supposed to accomplish this. Again, I enlisted the help of a grown-up in the form of Steve Moore. Steve, despite being a delusional moon-worshipper, had a typically practical and common sense approach to my clearly irrational and unworkable projects, and patiently folded a sheet of paper into a booklet of thirty-two little rectangles before going through them with a ballpoint pen and numbering each of the folded pages before unfolding the sheet and giving me a glimpse of the scale of my logistics problem: many of the pages would be upside down, and pages right next to each other in comic form would be widely separated in poster form, and vice-versa. Frankly, at this juncture, the problem looked impossible to both of us.

However, once again, to have accepted the impossibility of the task would have been an unthinkable breach of the magical programme we were both committed to. If the gods had stated this was how the final issue of *Promethea* was meant to be then I had to believe there was some way of accomplishing this feat, and that it was just a matter of having the patience (with an approaching deadline) and the insight to discover it. Within a day or so, I'd realised that I could capitalise upon the difference in the way we read a comic narrative to the way we 'read' a poster image, one of the main differences being focal length: a book or a comic you hold in your hands to read, whereas you can appreciate a poster image from across the room. It occurred to me that, if we used an Impressionist approach to the two poster images, this would break into fields of psychedelic stippled colour on the individual pages, upon which we could superimpose our comic strip narrative in a filigree of line artwork that would not disrupt the imagery of the posters, but would be perfectly lucid and coherent for the comic-strip reader with the book in his or her lap. This was the major breakthrough I needed, and once I'd worked out how to construct the narrative so it would have a meaningful sequence in whichever form it was being read, I was able to add further relatively easy embellishments, like the little units of additional information on various subjects that we connect with wandering lines of ankhs or stars. Even more than with issue twelve, I see that final issue as a demonstration of what the benefits of a magical mindset can be, irrespective of the ontological status of magic's proliferating serpent-gods, moon-goddesses, spirits, and demons.

Despite the fact that I no longer own a copy of that work and, this interview concluded, will not really be thinking about it again (to at least spare myself a little pain when it's announced that *Promethea* is now a member of Captain Carrot and the Zoo-Crew), I remain very proud of what we accomplished on that book. It went a long way towards confirming a theory I'd had for a while, namely that comics might almost be the perfect medium for transmitting magical ideas (which are essentially ideas about consciousness), Claudio Monteverdi's similar ambitions for opera notwithstanding. The Pentagon apparently demonstrated the comic-strip form is the most effective means of conveying information in a way by which that information is likely to be retained. I had wondered whether this might be because of the way in which the medium combined words and images. My reasoning was that the word is, for all intents and purposes, the main unit of currency employed by what used to be termed our left brain, while the image is similarly the main unit of currency for our pre-verbal 'right brain.' My subsequent hypothesis was that the act of reading a comic might bring both 'halves' of our mind into focus upon the same task, thus perhaps accounting for the comic strip's ability to imprint its information so thoroughly and deeply, and therefore making the medium an excellent one in which to discuss matters of consciousness itself. Thinking back to what we accomplished on *Promethea*, I'd say we put forward a pretty convincing argument. As to the predominantly female nature of the strip, that was just the way the narrative worked out, but I'd say that was entirely appropriate in that, as I see it, magic is in itself a female phenomenon just as all magicians are male, irrespective of their biological gender. I'll tell you what—we can talk about all this stuff in the interview I do for the first issue of your new *Occultism Unlimited*. How's that?

HU: Good idea! I would like to move to the last section of our interview by discussing your 2016 novel, *Jerusalem*. In what ways did the Irish novelist James Joyce and his daughter Lucia contribute to the book? ['Work in Progress,' 'Round the Bend,' etc.]

Alan: I've been relatively infatuated with Joyce since reading *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* while still at school. I had come to think of him as one of those few writers who are in a literary stratosphere of their own—at least according to my personal values—due to the fact they are producing language that is somehow *about* language. Along with William Burroughs and a handful of other authors, Joyce was strenuously engaging with the act of writing itself. He was at glorious play in the word, and it is this ecstatic, ludic quality that I think

is the very best of him. Certainly, it's a quality I've aspired to in my own writing, and Joyce has always been a radiant example.

With that said, however, the importance of James and Lucia Joyce in *Jerusalem* was something that emerged from the conditions and the processes of that book as I wrote it. I don't want to say that their presence in the work was accidental, although in many ways it was, but rather that I've long since included accident as a necessary part of my creative workings. As for how the pair's inclusion in the novel came about, right back at the beginning *Jerusalem* wasn't so much a book as it was an ambition, a worryingly vast cloud of potentiality that appeared to be as big and complicated as it was woolly and vague. I knew it was going to be about my natal neighbourhood and its history, including that of my family, and that there would be a myriad other tales emerging out of these core narratives that would require examination. I had a notion



that the novel's centrepiece would be my younger brother's choking incident, and that this would allow me to explore the hypothetical otherworld that he might, as a fictional conceit, have possibly experienced on that occasion. I think I already had the hugely presumptuous title 'Jerusalem' in mind, and with it an awareness that the visionary William Blake was somehow of importance to my gradually emerging narrative, whatever that turned out to be. Other than the above, I genuinely didn't have a clue, at least not consciously.

I'm not entirely sure of this, but I think that I may have written the first chapter—later designated as the prelude—as a way of feeling I'd made a start upon the work, even without a clear idea of what the work was going to be, and that I may have done this before I went on to generate thirty-five chapter titles and used them to give the then-formless piece some kind of attempted structure. As I recall, I had a feeling that my childhood dream of industrious angel-carpenters working through the night with God as foreman might be a good place to start the undertaking, as it would establish a couple of the main characters and their milieu while also giving a sense of the book's eccentric spiritual underpinnings. Most of all, it would introduce my naïve infant assumption that God and his angelic host would, of course, be working class people, a spiritual/political idea that had begun to seem more interesting and more radical the more I thought about it. So, with all these things in mind I sat down at the typewriter-with-a-screen (I'm far too heavily into denial about this fucking century to refer to the device as a word-processor) and did an experimental paragraph or two, in the course of which I made a number of important decisions about how I wanted these opening chapters to be: bog-standard past tense and third person or, in a word, accessible. This seemed to work out well. The opening paragraphs gradually became the first third of that initial chapter, which then continued through its next two sections and began to imply an overall structure for the book. If I ended this first chapter with the Mick character turning up at his sister's exhibition, I could describe the exhibition itself in my final chapter and thus provide a sturdy set of bookends for the intervening narrative, however long that narrative turned out to be.

It was probably around this juncture I began to consider a title for this first chapter, later to become the prelude, and decided on 'Work in Progress.' As a title, that both described the long-term construction project of the angelic carpenters and my own position, poised apprehensively at the very start of what was beginning to feel like an enormous undertaking. I was not at this point aware that *Work in Progress* had been the working title for *Finnegans Wake*—my spellchecker's just tried to make me add an apostrophe—and remained oblivious to this fact until my great friend the writer and prison habitué Ali Fruish pointed it out to me. Semi-simultaneous with this revelation was my being made aware that Joyce's daughter Lucia had been an inmate at St Andrew's Hospital in Northampton during all those years when I'd been pursuing my doomed education at the grammar school next door. Next thing you know, Melinda had visited Kingsthorpe Cemetery on Bloomsday [June 16th, the day on which the whole of Joyce's epic novel, *Ulysses*, is set] where there were maybe a dozen people come to pay tribute to Lucia. Amongst them was the woman who'd been Lucia's nurse back in her St. Andrew's days.

Given the peculiar and frankly occult state of mind that authors, or at least this author, tend to

find themselves in when they're working on a novel, the coincidence of having unwittingly chosen 'Work in Progress' as my opening chapter title and of Lucia's presence at St Andrew's Hospital came to seem heavily weighted and potentially incredibly useful, not least because a chapter focussing upon Lucia Joyce would make my choice of that title seem much more forethoughtful and intelligent than it actually was. Amongst the getting-on-three-dozen chapter titles I'd concocted was 'Round the Bend,' during which I'd had the nebulous idea of talking about the strand of reputed madness that existed on the Vernon/Vernall side of my paternal lineage, with Ginger/Snowy and with Audrey, along with the potential fourth-dimensional overtones that 'Round the Bend' might have as a title (the fourth dimension, when I was at school, was described as a dimension at right angles to the other three). It seemed this might be a good place to talk about Lucia Joyce, during which discourse I could probably talk, as well, about all of the things I'd originally intended for the chapter.

As I may have already mentioned, at or near the start of the *Jerusalem* process I'd originated a stream of thirty-five appropriate-sounding titles, then had decided this would work out neatly if I had an epilogue, a prologue, and then three sections of eleven chapters each. Relying only on intuition, I'd chosen 'Work in Progress' as my opener and 'Chain of Office' as my tailpiece, then divided the remaining thirty-three titles into three separate 'books.' I next arranged each bundle of eleven chapters into what seemed, again intuitively, their most attractive order. This sorting and haphazard structuring process was most probably carried out halfway through writing 'Work in Progress,' and I simply stuck to that (relatively arbitrary) order of chapters, writing one at a time until, after ten years, the book was finished. According to this list, 'Round the Bend' was the third chapter in Book Three, and while at that point my only information about Book Three was that it was going to be called 'Vernall's Inquest' (an obscure term, possibly referring to some kind of boundaries-tribunal, that only existed in the Boroughs of Northampton and from which I derived the name Vernall as a substitute for the family name Vernon), and that it was probably going to be in the present tense for reasons that at the time weren't clear to me, that nevertheless seemed the right place to situate this as-yet-theoretical Lucia Joyce chapter. You may have noticed that while I've described how James and Lucia came to be in the book, I haven't really been as forthcoming about what they were doing there.

Essentially, what happened was that, as I progressed with *Jerusalem's* writing, I also progressed in my understanding of what the novel actually was, and what it was about. This is an under-appreciated fact about writing and writers: we don't have ideas and then write them down, but rather the ideas emerge during the act of writing, almost as if writers were only some sort of necessary implement in the process of ideas having themselves. Anyway, with *Jerusalem* I'd started to notice some of the potential themes and motifs that were arising spontaneously from the subject matter. William Blake and the Blake/Parry hymn 'Jerusalem' were there right from the start, of course. But then I realised I had John Bunyan in the mix, both through his involvement as a roundhead soldier in the Civil War and his renaming of Northampton as Mansoul in his book *Holy War*, and that John Bunyan had written the stirring 'To Be a Pilgrim.' I noticed that John Newton, author of 'Amazing Grace,' was a prominent figure in the Henry George chapter, and already knew that the crucial Philip Doddridge had written 'Hark, the Glad Sound!' Later, when I found out about James Hervey, I was unsurprised to find that he, too, had hymns to his credit. This seemed to me like rather a lot of hymnists to suddenly pop up unplanned in a book by someone who was certainly not a Christian, and whose anarchist antipathy to *all* religions was a matter of public record.

My curiosity aroused, I investigated further and learned that Northamptonshire had been, if not the first place, one of the first places in the country—or presumably the world—where hymns had been sung by chapel congregations, defiantly, instead of psalms chanted in Latin, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First. Realising that, in those times, there was absolutely no distinction between the spiritual and the political, I started to consider the Lollards, one of the many radical religious groups gathering around Northampton during Cromwell's revolution. They'd originated in the (I believe) 14th century around the incendiary figure of John Wycliffe, who had translated the Bible into English and had thus laid the ground for Martin Luther and all sorts of consequent trouble. It struck me that one of the things I was talking about in *Jerusalem*—which already contained stretches of probably impenetrable Northampton dialect, the exploded speech of the angels or 'builders,' and the whimsical wordplay of the dead children in Mansoul—was the evolution of English, after Wycliffe, as a sacred language in which matters of the highest spiritual importance could be expressed. This seemed to lead directly to the writings and the politics of jailbird John Bunyan, and from him it seemed possible to trace a line leading through all the other hymnists on my list, and through his *Pilgrim's Progress* to the development of English poetry and literature in general; through William Blake to poor, magnificent John Clare. From Clare, his life and his incarceration in St Andrew's Hospital already familiar from *Voice of the Fire*, I conceived it might be possible to suggest a link, through Lucia Joyce, between traditional pastoral or Romantic poetry and the modernists who followed from it in the early 20th century, a movement of which Lucia (as a dancer) and her Babbo [James Joyce] were at the very forefront. In short, it seemed I could connect all these things up into a tradition of spiritually-charged or even apocalyptic English writing that would also provide

the context, reaching back to John Wycliffe, in which I ideally wished *Jerusalem* to be understood. So, after three pages of wearying self-justification, I hope that it will be clear to everyone that the sex scene between Lucia Joyce and John Clare was not at all gratuitous, serving as it did to symbolise the sacred/linguistic lineage and union outlined above. The same thing goes for the sex scene between Lucia and Dusty Springfield which, obviously, suggests a further union between modernism and pop culture.

(Another incidental but, I feel, potentially important element was hearing Joyce was familiar with the idea of recurrence, as expounded by Nietzsche, Gurdjieff and others [Vico], and that these ideas fed into his single eternal day in Dublin, which, whether true or not, seemed to relate to the somewhat different conception of what I understand is called Eternalism in the pages of *Jerusalem*.)

HU: Joyce said that, if Dublin were ever destroyed, it could be reconstructed out of the pages of his novel, *Ulysses*. I think a version of this could also be claimed for *Jerusalem*, but with one crucial difference. In your novel, the heart and soul of Northampton have ALREADY been destroyed, by so-called 'urban development,' which puts large parking lots where whole communities once lived. But the details of that lost Northampton can be reconstructed from the pages of *Jerusalem*, through the memories of individual characters and the travelling through time, especially in the 'Mansoul' section. Was that a motive in the writing?

Alan: I know exactly what Joyce meant by that statement. But I'd have to say he was either speaking in an inexact way to make a jocular point about the incredible verisimilitude of *Ulysses*, or he was wrong. The way I see things, the nuclear holocaust or whatever that might potentially destroy Dublin, the Boroughs or any of the places that we love has always already happened: the absolute obliteration of the past is perpetrated not by town planners or a North Korean warhead, but by the ordinary and unconsidered processes of time. During the writing of *Jerusalem*, at one point I stopped and asked myself what I was hoping to achieve with the book. I thought of the best practical outcome as being the one in which Northampton Council crawl on their knees to my door and say, 'Alan, we've read *Jerusalem* and we've realised that we're hopeless bastards and have been so since the 13th century. Thanks to ridiculous advances in modern technology, we are going to atomically reconstitute the Boroughs down to its last doorstep, its last clump of rosebay willowherb, its last nostalgic albino dog-turd. Everything will be exactly as you remember it.' Of course, I quickly realised this would be the most grotesque situation imaginable, a horror out of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* or WW Jacobs's *The Monkey's Paw* that would leave me actively praying for that North Korean warhead. The past is gone. The past is always gone, and attempts to recreate it in the material 3D world are always tragic, horrible, and a misguided betrayal of the present and the future. When it comes to the 4D world of the novel, however, that's a different story (one of my earliest intimations that there might be something fourth-dimensional about books came when I was crouching in an attic in Hanbury Street, listening to 'Spatterphysician' John Latham croak an explanation for his theories about books and time: 'And when the book is closed, that is a completely different kind of time'). I think Joyce was selling himself and his work short by suggesting, however jocularly, that a destroyed Dublin could be rebuilt using *Ulysses* as an IKEA instruction manual. In my opinion, Dublin (and everywhere else) is already destroyed, the moment those events, those atmospheres, those memories are over, and its genuine rebuilding is in the pages of *Ulysses* itself. This is one of the things that art is for, and in the 'afterlude' chapter of *Jerusalem*, 'Chain of Office,' I have my gorgeous and wise surrogate Alma Warren explain that there was never any chance of her work 'saving' the Boroughs, except in the all-important ship-in-a-bottle sense. With writing, with art, we have the extraordinary ability to circumvent the material processes of time. We've been doing this since we first took that aurox we saw yesterday and, with pigment and a cave wall, made it eternal. In this sense, then, this sense of preserving vanished moments in a honey of language and imagery, it would be fair to say that this impulse was a major contributing motivation in *Jerusalem*; perhaps, at the start, the biggest and most compelling motivation. It also seemed to make a nice fit with the central ideas about Einsteinian time in the novel—getting the book to keep all these places and these people and these instants safe in exactly the same way I believe a solid, block-universe space-time is already doing itself. This is, I think, what John Latham meant when he talked about the three kinds of time implicit in a book: there is time as it is experienced by the characters in the book (where ten years might have passed between the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next); there is time as it is experienced by the reader of the book (where those ten years pass in the turning of a single page); and finally there is the book when it is closed, a physical block universe of its own where events that are weeks, decades or centuries apart from each other in the narrative are only a few thin paper pages, scant millimetres from each other in the closed volume. A book, a lucid metaphor for the human experience of time, is in itself the immortality of the thing it describes, rather than the blueprint for that thing's reconstruction. Victorian London is, for the most part, completely gone save for a few buildings, its underlying social attitudes and Jacob Rees-Mogg. Yet we have no need to rebuild it because Dickens has already taken care of that.

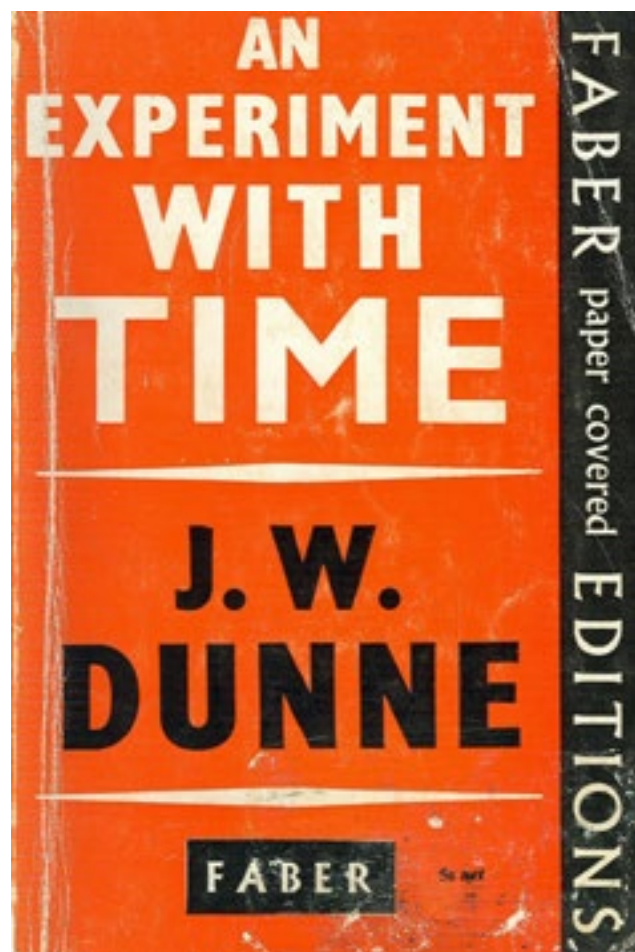
HU: Probably the most ambitious task undertaken in the writing of *Jerusalem* is the representation of the afterlife in the 'Mansoul' section. Some writers have done this in the past—Dante and Milton—but their cosmogony is Christian. A writer who represents a very different form of the afterlife is the poet/occultist William Butler Yeats ['Wellaim Bettler-Yetts'], in his 1937 prose work, *A Vision*. How did you come to conceive your version of 'upstairs' and what are its prime constituents?

Alan: It's difficult to remember exactly what order ideas occurred in—largely, I suspect, because the creative process is neither linear nor chronological. But I think the Mansoul section came together from a number of convergent directions. The central anecdote of my younger brother choking to (apparently temporary) death on a cherry-menthol Tune cough-sweet had both haunted and intrigued me since the actual occurrence it describes, although I couldn't really conceive of a vehicle in which that story would have a place or a purpose. When I began to piece together my position regarding the nature of time, after having danced around the subject in my work for decades, I realised that the Eternalist stance, one of endless unwitting repetition in a universe conceived of as an eternal and unchanging solid, would be impossible to describe affectingly in a realist register, just as I also realised that much of the political weight of *Jerusalem* would be carried by its social realism. A realist novel expressing the ideas of Eternalism could, presumably, only be a realistically-told life story of a single character, which would then be repeated, word for word, for as many times as it took the readership to get the point. While I admit that I've put my audience through a lot over the years, I would not in all conscience expect them to sit still for that. Weighing all this up, it seemed to me that what the book required was a *fifth-dimensional* perspective from which all this complex fourth-dimensional business could be seen and understood in overview. This approach, I felt, would surely call for some appropriate afterlife fantasy element. I thought such an element might provide a kind of glittery, psychedelic wrapping-paper for the central idea. But rather than this being for purely decorative effect I could make it serve a dual purpose by using the creases and folds of that wrapping paper as a home for all the other narratives I wanted to cram into the work. This seemed like a workable premise, and I quickly realised that my brother's mystery ten minutes being driven to hospital in a 1950s fruit & veg truck offered a fictional space in which I could unpack days or weeks of narrative time and all of the notions I wanted to include.

So, having opted for this fifth-dimensional-heaven approach, I had to sit down and think about how I was going to go about constructing such a contentious artefact as an afterlife. Having found that it's generally a good idea coming up with a name or a title to act as the speck of parasitic worm faeces that a pearl can accumulate around (I'm afraid that stuff about the grain of sand was a marketing ploy by De Beer's to avoid using words like 'parasitic,' 'worm,' or 'faeces' in their advertising), I elected to borrow John Bunyan's 'Mansoul' as the official designated name of this over-Boroughs I was starting to imagine. It's a name that had seemed magnificently resonant and appropriate since I'd come across it while writing *Voice of the Fire* all those years earlier. Some of Bunyan's initially obscure lines had come to have more meaning for me in the intervening decade, notably his remark about there being five gates to Mansoul. I'd realised this was a reference both to the five senses being the 'gates' of the soul and also to the fact that Northampton previously had gates at its four cardinal points, and also a fifth gate, the 'Dern Gate' (today a performance venue) to the southeast. Bunyan's description of Mansoul as being 'the very seat of war' also gathered a lot of weight as I began to think about the conflicts Northampton has been central to, the wars that have been started or ended in this county: Boudica's probable grave after her failed rebellion against the Romans; Hereward's unassailable fenland Anti-Norman terrorist enclave; starting point for the Crusades; end-points for the War of the Roses and Cromwell's revolution (in which Bunyan was a soldier, garrisoned just down the road at Newport Pagnell); even as Hitler's planned capital and command centre following a successful invasion of Great Britain. This all seemed like rich material I could use. So at least I had a name, even if I had very little to hang on it at this point.

As for the (meta)physical nature and appearance of Mansoul, I assumed it would be best to think it through from a starting point of its dimensionality, using Victorian pioneers like C Howard Hinton and E Abbott Abbott as a rough conceptual guide. It seemed to me that, after Abbott, our perception of higher dimensions would be very much like that of a two-dimensional being (Abbott's Mr A Square) transplanted to our apparently three-dimensional world. A square has only area, and thus cannot conceive of volume (assuming, after Abbott again, that squares can conceive of anything). Thus I reasoned, semi-poetically, that my higher world might be like this world, but projected or folded up into something much bigger, as if our world were a two-dimensional facet that was actually merely a face of an unimaginable cube. This translated to the opening vision of Mansoul, the gigantic endless corridor known as the Attics of the Breath. This was essentially a massively supersized and CGI-enhanced version of Northampton's long-gone and much-missed Emporium Arcade, probably the most beautiful Victorian arcade of its kind in the country and, thinking about it, probably still available to look at on YouTube somewhere. I imagined the endless rows of apertures looking down into 'the jewellery' of

on I'd decided that my God figure would be kept offstage (except for an appearance in a child's dream in the prelude), and would only be referred to as 'the Third Borough,' an old Boroughs term meaning a rent-man with overtones of a policeman, unknown outside the Boroughs and believed to be a corruption of the Saxon term 'Frith Bohr,' meaning a tithing-man. I'll admit I also chose this name because of its association with the divine Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, another god-like character who is kept offstage throughout the greater part of that novel, just like GK Chesterton's Thursday or Beckett's Godot. The angels and archangels, suggested by my childhood dream as recounted in the prelude, were reimagined as divine working men with working men's pursuits, like their destiny-deciding game of macro-billiards. Interestingly, although I'd decided that my leading archangel was going to be the archangel Michael, due to his misidentification with St Michael and subsequent statue on the roof of our guildhall, it wasn't until I'd contrived and written the first of my angelic billiards sequences that I noticed the statue appears to be holding a shield and a billiard cue. The demons seemed like another necessary inclusion, since even though my deeply religious and intensely superstitious maternal grandmother never suggested that we might encounter angels as we went about our business, in her Christian cosmology there were devils everywhere. I managed to connect all these levels of transcendental beings to a context of higher geometry by having one of the angelic characters say of demons to one of the human characters: 'They fold up into you. You fold up into us. We fold up into Him.'



It also occurred to me that any real working-class vision of an afterlife, Christian or otherwise, would be classless. Its hierarchies, if it had them, would be purely based on supernatural provenance or on personal merit. I thought that, by introducing the twin notions of a 'ghost seam' (to accommodate all of the ghosts in the narrative and the reported ghosts inhabiting the Boroughs itself), and also a sort of opt-out clause whereby people weren't compelled to dwell in Mansoul if they felt more comfortable in the muffled monochrome of the ghost-seam, with fourth-dimensional Eadweard Muybridge after-images following them everywhere, I might open up some potentially interesting possibilities. There was the notion of 'rough sleepers,' spirits with ethereal low self-esteem who did not feel they were good enough to ascend to the ringing and colour-saturated avenues of Mansoul, like real-life Boroughs derelict and moocher, Freddy Allen. It also occurred to me that a classless heaven might not sound like a very attractive alternative to those who'd built their lives upon having a certain social standing. This led to the idea of the ghost-seam appended to Northampton's middle-class suburbs being relatively much more populous with phantoms than impoverished areas like the Boroughs, and the attendant notion that this might be why aristocratic mansions are such a favourite location for English ghost-stories: a shuddering aristocratic revulsion for the idea of a classless afterlife might well lead to our stately homes being crammed to the rafters with generation upon generation of toff apparitions.

The most significant element of the conception probably fell into place with my formulation of the Dead Dead Gang. I'd realised that if the second book was to be a linear recounting of my brother's adventures in the fifth dimension during his breathless journey to hospital, having my brother shepherded around eternity by a bunch of responsible adult wraiths would not only remove any sense of agency from my brother as a character, it would also rob the second book of any real fun, a quality I desperately wanted this otherwise potentially difficult book to possess. Conceiving that a gang of afterlife urchins might be Michael's escorts immediately opened the possibility that some of these ghost children might have actually lived to adulthood or even old age, but might simply prefer, in their afterlives, to be as they best remembered themselves, when they were happiest or most fulfilled. (This consideration also led me to the god's-gift image of a perpetually exploding suicide bomber, forever experiencing his moment of glory.) The gang's unusual name, as with an awful lot of the most inventive stuff in *Jerusalem*, came from a dream I'd had nearly forty years ago, about a gang of ragamuffin ghost-children with that name. In the dream I remember a fraught encounter with these sinister phantom children, and then, in a kind of twist-ending epilogue to the dream, finding an Edwardian

children's book in a Suffolk second-hand bookshop that had *The Dead Dead Gang* as its title and an illustration of one of the ghost-waifs—a boy wearing a long coat and a top hat or a bowler—as a gold inlay on its green clothbound covers. The membership of the gang was comprised of real living or dead people whose narratives I wanted to include, such as Phyllis Painter, little Bill and Handsome John, and a couple that I'd invented, such as Drowned Marjorie and Reggie Bowler. Once I had these characters to explain this multi-dimensional realm to Michael and thus the readers, from their simple, childlike, and possibly misinformed perspective, the worlds of Mansoul and the colourless ghost-seam seemed to fill themselves in, with all of their Puck's Hats and (real life) characters such as Tommy Mangle-the-Cat intact.

The inclusion of characters like the demon Asmodeus or the archangel Michael allowed me to retain a helping of Milton and Dante's cake while also eating it in the form of my run-down and secular working-class paradise. I think we can all agree that such dual-purpose confections are the best kind of cake by a long run.

HU: To me, time is not chronological and linear but cyclical and repetitive. So, in conceiving an eighth issue of *Heroes Unlimited* fifty years after the previous one, I have sought to keep two years to the fore, 1969 and 2017/18, with everything significant that occurred in between simultaneously within reach, to be summoned as required. Your open and generous answers to my questions have very much been true to that temporal spirit. So my final question, the 2018 one, deliberately recalls, and rounds upon, our opening. Please fill me in on Alan Moore in his sixty-fifth year, the man and the writer, who has just published a revolutionary novel in *Jerusalem* and written what he insists is his last ever comic, Volume IV of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. My final question for you, therefore, is the one posed by Yeats in his late poem, 'What then?':

What then, sang Plato's ghost, what then?
'The work is done,' grown old he thought, / 'According to my boyish plan;
Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught, / Something to perfection brought';
But louder sang that ghost, 'What then?'

Alan: Hmm. Good question, Plato's ghost.

As regards me in my sixty-fifth year, contrasted with me approximately half-a-century ago, I think that's very much a game of two halves: looked at in one light, I hardly appear to have changed at all, while looked at in another I'm pretty much unrecognisable. I was considering this just recently after reading Maggie Gray's excellent *Alan Moore: Out from the Underground*, which is, in my frankly arrogant opinion, one of the most insightful books in the exciting genre I refer to as 'me.' What Maggie does is to take a close look at all of the early pre-comic-writing material I've previously been too embarrassed by to allow the commercial reprinting of, such as my contributions to the poetry fanzine *Embryo* and the various Arts Lab magazines, along with my early work as a cartoonist in *Dark Star*, *Cyclops*, *Back-Street Bugle*, *NME*, *Sounds*, the *Northants Post* and so on. My reasons for having previously ignored most of this material come down, principally, to vanity. I was mortified by my lack of ability in that early work, and probably more embarrassed by my political mistakes: my sensibility largely formed by the underground press of the 1960s, I felt one of the main battles was against Victorian prudishness and sexual repression, and that producing comics with as much sex and nudity as I could get away with was practically my countercultural obligation. Only later did I come to see that such imagery and material had inbuilt oppressions of its own, largely in its depiction of women, and as a result decided that erotic material needed to be much more carefully considered. Another regrettable feature in some of that early work is my notion, after Crumb's Angelfood McSpade character, that grotesque racial caricatures were calling critical attention to such racist depictions and not merely propagating them. This, again, is an attitude I've seriously re-thought in the years since, but I'm sure you can see why I've felt uncomfortable about too much attention being paid to such sometimes questionable material.

The reason I changed my mind and cooperated with Maggie on the book to the best of my ability was that I've come to have a certain contempt for creators who like to foster the illusion that they emerged full-blown from the head of Zeus. Francis Bacon's insistence there were never any preliminary drawings for his paintings...except for the multitude found in his studio after his death...is one example. Jack Kerouac's legendary spontaneous typing of *On the Road* on a roll of lining-paper as endless and unreeling as the road itself, rather than the actuality of working from first drafts and notebooks like an ordinary human being, is another. I recalled how tremendously encouraging it had been for me, as an aspiring cartoonist, to study Rick Griffin's originals at his Roundhouse exhibition in the early seventies and realise what a lot of white-out and re-drawn panels pasted over the originals there were; to realise that my idols made all the mistakes I'd assumed were simply products of my own inadequacy. I felt it was only right I should allow people to see my work when it was, in my opinion, largely unmitigated shit, simply to make it clear this is how every creator starts out, beset by limited abilities, wrong-headed decisions and terrible uncertainty. At this point, I was

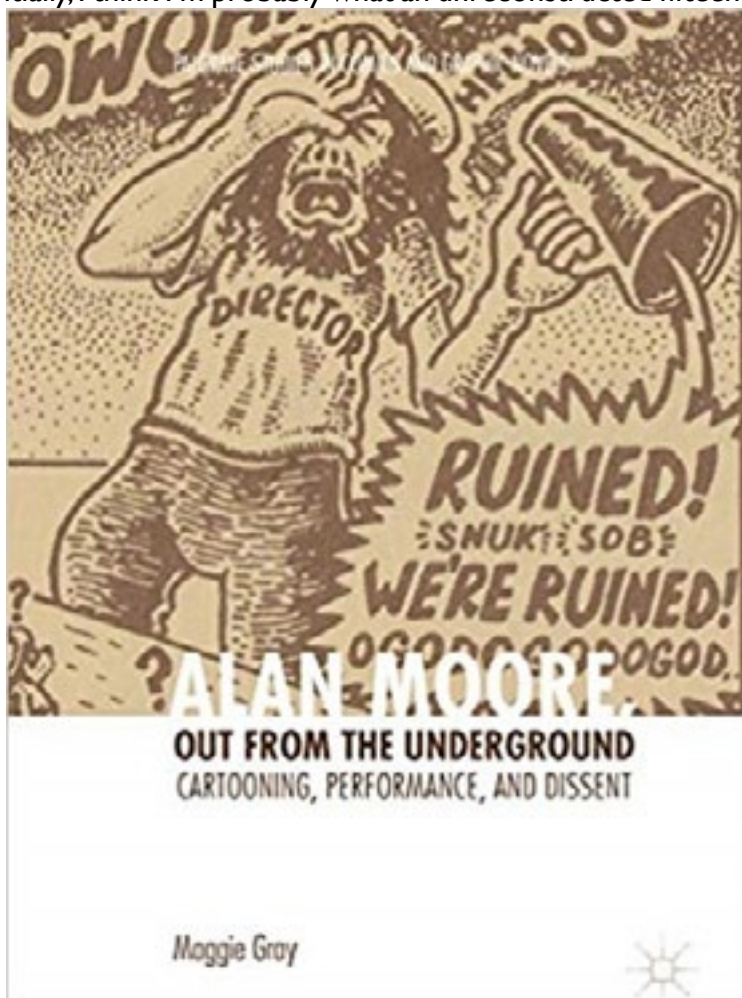
expecting this dissection of my back catalogue to be a painful experience for me personally, and thus felt I was being tremendously noble by giving it my blessing.

As it turned out, the book is a complete revelation. By insisting on viewing this material in the social and political context of its time, Maggie has made some very lucid points about how these early pieces informed my later work and career decisions in a way that even I found surprising and illuminating. In fact, after reading it, I was left with a very strong sense of some of the unwavering continuities in my life. Despite the fact I feel my beliefs and processes have become more refined, considered and sophisticated over the last fifty years—as you’d hope they might—I have to admit my essential position and my agendas have remained embarrassingly unchanged during that period. Essentially, I think I’m probably what an unreconstructed fifteen-year-old aspiring beatnik looks like if, disastrously, they have been somehow allowed to pursue their own programming through to its end, bitter or otherwise. Like many of us, including Wellaim Bettler Yetts with his ‘the work is done... according to my boyish plan,’ I realise I have become exactly the unlikely figure I fantasised and speculated about being when I was a fifteen-year-old boy with a head full of new-wave science fiction and cannabinated nonsense—somewhere between Mervyn Peake’s resentment-driven and sociopathic Steerpike, Michael Moorcock’s zeitgeist-assassin Jerry Cornelius, and Peter O’Toole’s dissociative messiah in *The Ruling Class*. This reminds me of Bokonon’s dictum in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*, we should always be careful who we pretend to be because one day we’ll wake up and find that’s who we are.

So, on that level, I imagine my entire career could probably have been predicted from a close enough reading of the nebulous agendas of the psychedelic left during the late 1960s. Compared to who I was then I may be an enhanced model, but I think it’s still the same intrinsic design. Given my first teenage communication with you, ending with ‘Alan Moore, his mark,’ and my signing the same thing in your copy of *Jerusalem* at the Blake event last year, I think you can see this is at least true of my adolescent sense of humour.

But I think this immutability is only true of my external and visible self, in my behaviour and my actions: the things I do, and write, and say. How it feels to be me, on the other hand, has changed a great deal. For the fifteen-year-old, the life to come was entirely based upon hypothesis rather than upon experience. The fifteen-year-old was hugely excited about comics as an art form, their possibilities for dissent and for the dissemination of radical political or social ideas. He saw America as an exciting country bursting with modern concepts and, in the enthusiastic rush of the 1960s, believed a better world, if we all put our shoulders to the wheel, was not only possible but imminent. He believed that the entrenched powers of the earth would be forced to give up their fiefdoms if it were incontrovertibly demonstrated there was a better, more intelligent, more beautiful and more humane way of doing things. Frankly, he was an impossible fucking idiot and if I could get my hands on him today I’d give him a bloody good hiding.

After I’d beaten him until he wasn’t ethereally lovely any more, I’d explain the following. The comic medium, in its modern usage, was a medium created, disparagingly, for a working class who were perceived as being semi-illiterates unable to follow a story if it didn’t have pictures to help them understand it. And, with *Ally Sloper’s Half-Holiday* over here and *Hogan’s Alley* in America, the first modern cartoons and comic strips were entirely preoccupied with class issues and the social types presumed to be what the working-class would probably be entertained by. Thus the plethora of tramps, alcoholics, gamblers, hillbillies, and deadbeats that made up the cast of most early American newspaper strips, where even Chic Young’s *Dagwood* and *Blondie* was originally a class-based comedy focussed on the young playboy heir to an aristocratic family and his lowly-born flapper girlfriend. In the newspaper strips over here we of course had the sterling example of working-class wife-beater Andy Capp and, even through to the later 1960s, there was a pronounced



working-class element in a lot of British newspaper strip fare. For example, the Peanuts-aping Perishers strip in the *Daily Mirror* had a cast of plainly working-class kids—one even lived alone in an abandoned railway station—as opposed to the middle-class suburban children of the original, produced at a time when America had undergone its massive ‘merger to the middle’ in the 1920s and had relocated its comic strip characters accordingly: the social differences between Dagwood and Blondie had now been ironed out to create a comfortably middle-class couple. Then-abundant British children’s comics had always been aimed at an audience of working-class youngsters, right up until the advent of *Eagle* in 1950, that most middle-class and, with the exception of Dan Dare, Heros the Spartan, and Fraser of Africa, most soporific of English weeklies.

Seizing my younger self by his straggly, bum-fluff sideburns I’d headbutt him to get his attention and then say the following: ‘Listen, you well-intentioned buffoon. Your ambitions to have the comic medium respected to the same degree that other media are respected will result in exactly that, and your subsequent realisation that in today’s commercial environment, no medium is respected. What were you thinking? Worse than that, your efforts to achieve this end will be instrumental in an area of culture that was originally intended as the sole province of working-class people and especially working-class children being gentrified and lifted out of that class’s range of interests, while also being lifted out of its economic reach. You will come to realise, you poorly-coiffed poseur, that this gentrification of the audience is also reflected within the comic book industry itself, with almost all the characters currently flooding our screens having been originated by working-class creators who had their work stolen from them, protested, and were legally crushed. In fact, the great majority of these characters are the creations of just *one* authentic working-class genius, Jack Kirby who, with Marvel Entertainment having made somewhere between seven and ten billion dollars from his purloined characters, is according to Jarrett Kobek’s *i hate the internet* a victim of the single biggest theft from an individual in human history.

‘Furthermore, when you finally get around to developing your half-arsed notion that ‘It would be cool if you did a story about the Mighty Crusaders where the ginger-haired Shield gets pulled dead out of a river in the opening pages, and the rest of the book was about working out which of his fellow superheroes had murdered him,’ its reception will massively accelerate this gentrification process. Worse, a gusher of misguided headlines declaring that “comics have grown up” will provide convenient cover for people who wish to continue reading *Green Lantern* into middle or old age without being thought emotionally retarded. The ‘graphic novel’ will become the equivalent of studio loft apartment in our gentrification analogy. The damage you will inadvertently do to a culture that you love pales into insignificance, however, beside the result of that rewriting of what are acceptable standards for adult entertainment. Convinced by the inclusion of the word ‘novel’ that this is now a medium for grownups, a large part of the audience will extrapolate from there and conclude it’s okay to be forty and still obsessed with Batman. This will contribute to a general infantilization of Western society as, faced by a future whose immeasurable complexity is more than they’d bargained or prepared for, people retreat into the comforting safety of their 20th century childhoods and gather that childhood’s toys and icons about them as a bulwark against the chaotic changes of the world. This will prove to be more than an aesthetic problem, with hundreds of thousands of apparently normal adults lining up to see Superman’s digitally-shaved moustache in the Justice League fiasco, and a CIA survey into the average emotional age of Americans arriving at an answer of twelve years old (this, however, was a while ago. I was reading in *New Scientist* the other week that they’d applied grade-school reading averages to the content on Reddit in an attempt to learn how much the level of political debate in America had plummeted over the last couple of years. The results from three or four years ago were found to be 7th grade, which is the expected twelve years old. Results from the last couple of years, however, suggested that the reading age was now equivalent to 2nd grade, which is to say six years old).

‘You will only comprehend this when you notice that in the year 2016—when the British people have elected to leave the European Union in favour of some kind of petrol-hoarding Mad Max dystopia and the American people elect something that you, with your ‘Ooh, that Edward Heath, he’s a fascist,’ could not possibly imagine—six of the twelve biggest-grossing cinema releases are superhero movies. Your unease about the doctrine these übermenschen are promoting will not be alleviated during America’s subsequent rehabilitation of the swastika. In fact, it’s going to get a lot worse. You will eventually appreciate that America is almost entirely a middle-class nation that has relegated its poor to a white-trash underclass and that, despite having only recently avoided Bush vs Clinton, Round Three, refuses to believe it has an aristocracy. You will further acknowledge your naivety in trying to map America’s political system on to that of the UK in an understandable if dopey attempt to understand the former, and your formulation of the Democrats as being equivalent to the Labour Party while the Republicans were equivalent to the Conservative Party was spectacularly wrong: the Democrats are the Conservatives, while the Republicans increasingly appear to be the Nazis. America hasn’t had a functioning left wing since its brutal response to the Red Scares of 1919 and the McCarthy era (two viciously-implemented Red scares and absolutely no Nazi scares, you’ll note). This

is how, during an American television interview, a spokesman for Donald Trump—he's the something-you-could-not-possibly-imagine I mentioned earlier—will be able to dismiss negative comments in *The Guardian* by saying 'you have to remember that *The Guardian* is a loony-left, right-wing newspaper.' Because America doesn't have a left wing or even necessarily understand what a left wing is, it is unable to perceive itself as being right wing, since there is apparently nothing to be to the right of. You will observe, given the great reticence of almost everyone in the industry to intervene when a great talent and a good man like Jack Kirby is robbed and ruthlessly disposed of, the courage of the comic world's artists and writers is generally in inverse proportion to that of the brave, noble, wise, slender, underdog-defending characters they spend their lives cataloguing the adventures of. And you will go on to assume that a major function of superheroes, for a large section of their audience and an equally large section of the professionals who detail their exploits, is as cowardice compensators, perhaps a bit like the gun on the night-table that American professionals will tell you they don't know how you Brit-guys can sleep at night without.

'In short, you will come to feel as if you have unwittingly contributed to an infantile and dangerous doctrine that has already submerged the Western world in Third Reich sensibilities—and learning that the lyrics to your satirical fascist hymn in *V for Vendetta* are reverently reproduced on the Stormfront website, frankly, isn't going to help—and which may yet result in either a thermonuclear or environmental holocaust. *Happy now?*'

Anyway, when the surprisingly weak and vulnerable fifteen-year-old boy I'd just beaten up and intimidated was broken down to a weeping, pleading, abject wretch, the psychological equivalent of matchwood, that's when I'd change tactics. I'd genially offer him a handkerchief so he could mop up some of the tears and the blood from his broken nose which would be cascading over his khaki ex-military jacket with the two-fingered stars-and-stripes peace sign and Mr Natural 'Keep on Trucking' patches—and then I'd put my arm around his shoulder and try to cheer him up, so it hadn't been an entirely negative experience for him.

'Come on,' I'd say, 'I know you're not a bad lad at heart, whatever the authorities, close family members, and many former collaborators may say about you in the future. And don't be downhearted—even though you may potentially end up destroying the whole world through your naked ambition to write a superhero story that was sort of okay, there's an upside to all of this. After the crushing disgrace of your expulsion from school as a drug-dealer in about two years time...no, don't stiffen and try to pull away, this is for your own good...after your expulsion you will of necessity develop a very resilient and adaptable persona, by which I mean you'll go a bit mad. No, no, hear me out. By your fortieth birthday, this will have been exacerbated to the point where you have some sort of florid public breakdown and announce, ridiculously, that you're a wizard who worships a second-century serpentine glove puppet with hair like a Hitchcock blonde.'

Obviously, by this point, he'd be terrified again. But I'd assuage his fears, perhaps with a chloroform pad secreted in my jacket pocket for just such an eventuality.

'Okay, now don't lose consciousness, listen to what I'm saying. The upside is when you've been a magician for about twenty years, after you've seen one of your creations leak into reality and spark an Arab Spring that eventually turns into a horrific Syrian bloodbath, you will eventually come to realise that in the human narrative there are no endings or conclusions, but rather an endless and possibly predetermined flux of event and repercussion, so that good things lead to bad things that lead to good things and so on, just as in any competently composed story of any worth. You will reduce this notion to that of working-class archangels playing a stupendous game of fourth dimensional billiards in the twelve-hundred-page novel you'll spend roughly a seventh of your mortal span working on, where you will also argue your way, rather brilliantly, around the whole concept of meaningful death and pull off some really fancy word-stunts in the process. So, blow your nose and pull yourself together. When you're out of A&E, none of this will seem so bad.'

Following that emotional roller-coaster ride, we might conceivably share a lingering glance and each notice how massively sexually attractive the other was, and then I suppose we might, y'know, have a bit of a roll about. And after that, I'd track down Plato's ghost—probably at astral 1970s sex-and-cocaine club Plato's Ghost's Retreat—and I'd answer his (for some reason) sung question with the (possibly yodelled) retort: 'whatever I get time for.' At the moment I'm anticipating this will include a feature film, the completion of *The Moon & Serpent Bumper Book of Magic*, the completion of my John Dee opera and probably a bunch of other stuff. A statistically unlikely demise will subtly underline *Jerusalem's* thesis of recurrent lives and our occasional fore-knowledge of them: then, after an indeterminate period, an awareness I am thinking while crawling under the living-room table at our house in St Andrew's Road in around 1955. And the rest, eternally, is history.

HU: Thanks a million, Alan.

Alan: Those were a great set of questions, Tony. I should mention as a footnote that the fourth and final volume of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* encapsulates, in its way, a similar fifty-year trajectory through

English life and comic-book culture to the above questions and answers. I think you might enjoy it.

Anthony Roche would like to thank Alan Moore for the patience, time, energy and commitment he gave to answering my questions; and to thank Joe Brown and Pádraig Ó Méalóid for helping it to happen in the first place.



READERS' RAVES AND ROASTINGS

Alan Moore, 17 St Andrew's Road, Northampton MM1 2SD

Dear Tony,

Enclosed is 1 shilling payment on the last *HU* and 3 shillings for the next.

I like the new format *HU* and don't think you need have any worries about 'losing old readers by the wayside' simply because you are extending your field. The change, I think, is a long awaited and much needed one. However, (I betcha knew that was coming) I think your proposed inclusion of pop, science fiction/fantasy and films should be thought about, before you enter into it. I've got a few suggestions on how you should develop these particular fields.

First, pop music! I'm all in favour of you reviewing the latest LPs, singles, etc, but it should be done in an informative way. There's no sense in running around like a certain well known BBC1 personality (6.25 on Monday, if you hadn't guessed) shouting 'Groovy, fantastic, great, fab' at the drop of a platter. You should list the tracks on the particular L.P./single, giving a bit of info on each—if you stuck to that pattern, you couldn't go far wrong—except in the arguments about who's going to shell out the two quid for the next LP for review!

Secondly, fantasy/fiction books. Since Ray Bradbury, JRR Tolkien, Brian Aldiss and Eric Frank Russell, among others, seem to be the nation's darlings at the moment, you have my vote here as well. It would be nice to see a review of the new and even old, science fiction/fantasy books. It would be even nicer to see [Paul] Neary's and [Ken] Simpson's interpretations of Conan, Elric, Frodo, John Carter, etc.

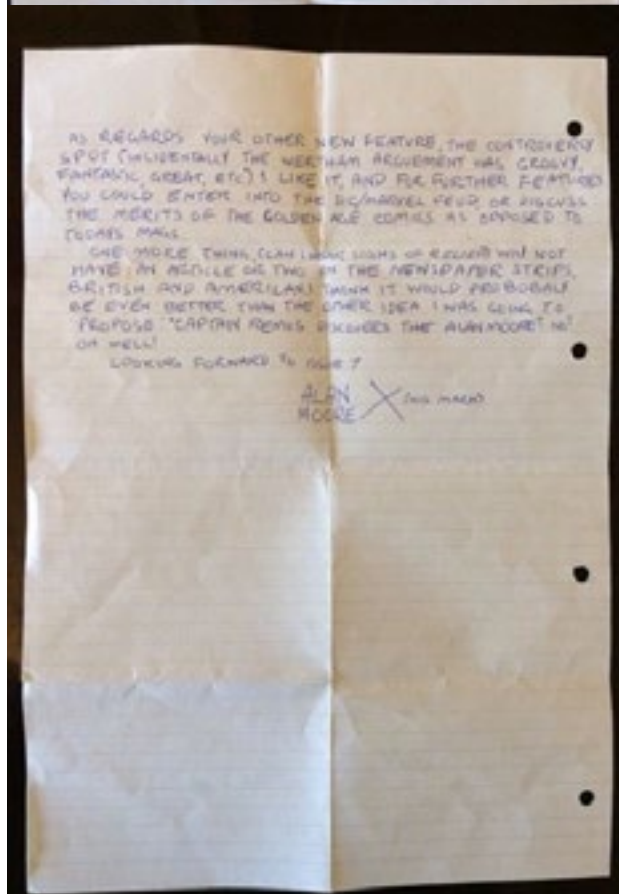
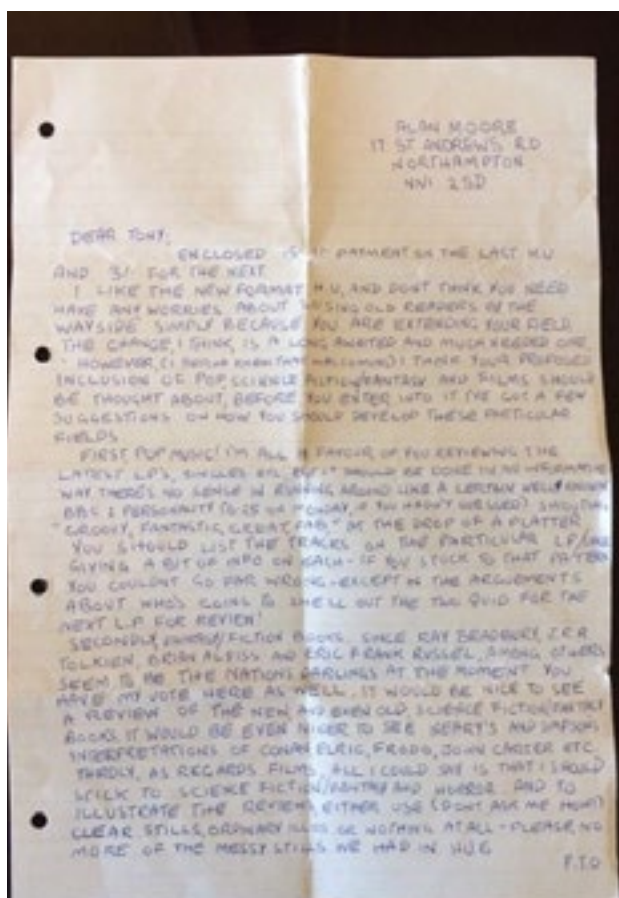
Thirdly, as regards films, all I could say is that I should stick to science fiction/fantasy and horror. And to illustrate the reviews, either use (don't ask me how!) clear stills, ordinary illos or nothing at all—please, no more of the messy stills we had in *HU* 6.

As regards your other new feature, the controversy spot (incidentally, the Wertham argument was groovy, fantastic, great, etc.), I like it. And for further features you could enter into the DC/Marvel feud, or discuss the merits of the Golden Age comics, as opposed to today's mags.

One mor thing (can I hear sighs of relief?). Why not have an article or two on the newspaper strips, British and American? I think it would probably be even better than the other idea I was going to propose: 'Captain Remus Discovers the Alan Moore!! No? Oh, well.

Looking forward to issue 7.

ALAN
MOORE (his mark)



(1968 answer): I'm glad you approve the new direction(s), Alan. With regard to the addition of science fiction features, I hope you enjoy the articles on SF writers Bob Shaw and James White in this issue. I'll pass your suggestion re. Captain Remus on to Paul!

(2018 answer): What a great letter, Alan – sorry we took so long to print it. And now that you've read it for the first time since you sent it to me fifty years ago, I trust you enjoyed it and were relieved to find that the fears you expressed about it in our interview were unjustified: 'I only wish I could remember what I actually said in that letter. If you reproduce it alongside this interview and it just says BATTMAN IS GOOD in pink wax crayon I'm going to be mortified.'

In June 2018, I received an e-mail from Dave Hine in which he asked whether I knew anything about an ad he had run in one of his fanzines early in 1970. (For an account by Dave of the fanzines he created at that time, see the article accompanying his strip elsewhere in this issue). The ad from Dez Skinn had read: 'BIG NEWS---- HEROES UNLIMITED HAS NOT BITTEN THE DUST! Britain's very first comic fanzine has a final issue still to come. only you won't order it from Tony Roche but from... Dez! Anthony and Dez have put their heads together and come up with a final issue of HU. It won't be *Heroes Unlimited* but... *Oracle* No. 13 presents *Heroes Unlimited*. And there's more: after this final issue, *HU* and *E!* are joining up to form a new landmark of a fanzine... *Eureka Unlimited!!!* Yes, the next issue of *E!* will also have many contributions from the *HU* staff under the editorial supervision of *E!* editor Dez. All offset litho. Order now... cost 3/6 inc. P&P'

Well, this was news to me: I remembered nothing of such a plan. But I decided to check the *HU* Letters Archive (a large lidless shoe box) and this is what I found:

DEREK G SKINN, 116 Western Road, Goole, Yorkshire.

Dear Anthony,

Now hold on there, Anth. If you think you can just polish off *HU* with an ad in *Fantasy Advertiser* saying it's finished and a like announcement in *Oracle* you're off your head!

Initially, I didn't intend to tell you of this but it appears I'll have to clue you in. *Oracle* 13 will be a double issue – it will be *Oracle* 13-14. This may even stretch to a triple issue (it'll help me catch up on the monthly schedule if it spans three months), dependent upon the quantity of content. There's something I'm doing in *Oracle* that will take up about ten pages that I am keeping a secret from you, but I would like your assistance on the remaining 35 or so pages (if it is a triple issue). The theme is (for the whole issue) *HU – THE DEATH OF A GIANT* or something like that. The content will be all centred around *HU*. This, though I've tried, I cannot do without the *HU* editor so HELP. Here's a rough idea of the content (with your permission):

COVER (old *HU* cover? If you've any old stencils, which I could use, with the *O* title logo imposed thereon).
My Editorial.

HU/MMF Checklist (all articles, strips, you've done from *MMF* 1 onwards).

The best article (in your opinion) that has appeared in *MMF* or *HU*.

The best article that you have on hand that was to be for a future *HU* and a Fanzine Favorites from your own hand. Then we could have your Raves and Roastings column.

Your epitaph to *HU*.

My epitaph to *HU*.

THE LAST WORD – by Anthony, with any final thanks and wishes you may like to put as your last printed words for fandom.

THAT, then, is my idea. Here's the advantages of it. You could send this *Oracle* presents *HU* issue instead of sending them their sub money back. It would allow you one final issue (as *HU* 7 was not intended to be a final issue) without the work, as I'll get it put together and printed. In fact, excepting the ten mystery pages, editorial, news and epitaph, it will be your issue.

Let's hear what you think as soon as possible, as I do have a deadline (though somewhat elongated) to work to! Hey, you could even review *O* in your Fanzine Favs, something I've never had the nerve to do, on my own mag in its own covers. Let's hear it from you – SOON!

Best,
Dez

P.S. No, I aren't through withcha yet. As 99% of your ex-staff are friends of mine, too, and have done articles and art for me (Ken Simpson, Paul Neary, Rob Paul, Ges Cleaver and Haydn Paul) what do you think to the idea of a fanzine called *Eureka Unlimited*? You can say what you like, Anthony, but though 99% of them are u.s. [utter shit], I sure come up with plenty of ideas! In fact, any time you feel like being active in fandom, just give me a whistle and you can always have a place in any Derinn fanzine.

Well, I have to say I have no knowledge of this letter whatsoever. But Dez clearly sent it and I clearly received it. And I would certainly have replied to it, and promptly, since I was urged to in it. I imagine that I sent a courteous but firm reply, declining the invitation. I had just been accepted into the Honours English programme at Trinity College, Dublin (with a late application!); and was drawing a firm line under my fanzine and comics activities.

But had the special issue of *Oracle* ever appeared? Or the promised *Eureka Unlimited* follow-up? There was nothing for it but to go straight to the horse's mouth. So I e-mailed Dez and got the following twenty-four hours later:

Hi Tony!

Much quicker than writing letters, this internet stuff, eh?

Oddly, as I pride myself on having a seriously good memory (hence my nostalgic website, with over 150,000 words of reminiscing), I have no recollection of such a letter. Would have been interesting, though...

I look forward to hearing about *HU 8* in the fullness of time. What's the odd 50 years between friends?

Best,

Dez

So now we know—it never happened—until now, that is!!!

A final word on the above, and much more, in a late letter from the late and much lamented Peter C Phillips, *HU* contributor and co-editor:

Peter C Phillips. 58 Chamber Road, Oldham, Lancs.

26th July 1970_

Dear Tony,

Nice to hear from you again after such a long absence... and yes, I did call you a few names... most of which I can't remember now.

Paul [Neary] told me about your dropping *HU* just before Christmas and we eventually called a meeting at Leeds to discuss the possibility of carrying on where 7 left off. Unfortunately, circumstances prevented me from getting there and it seems now that Dez [Skinn] will do the Special and that will be that.

Additionally, around the time you ducked out, similar thoughts were coursing through my mind. I was somewhat fed up with fandom and the never ending articles I churned out when I would rather have been writing some stories either for comics or paperbacks. To write a good story you need more time than fandom articles allowed. I was none too enthusiastic about the comics either and must confess that I started messing around with the stamp collection again and seem to have become hooked to the extent that I don't even bother cruising the second-hand comic stalls or perusing trade ads.

Earlier this year, however, I submitted two articles to Dave Womack's *Utopia* which I didn't like and wish he hadn't bothered with and also contributed to Ian Penman's *Armageddon*. I did an article on *Green Lantern* which has been well received from advance reports and have followed this up with an in-depth article on *Green Arrow* for the same 'zine. I don't think much of it but Ian considers it to be the best article I've written to date.

I now seem to be getting pulled into *Armageddon* even more and Ian has offered me the position of Co-Editor, sharing expenses by typing up my own stencils so that he doesn't get the chance of hacking pieces out. In addition, he has taken over *Oracle* from Dez and all news and reviews will be run in that rather than *Armageddon*.

We are also considering running Virgil Palmer [*HU*: a prose story by Pete] but have to work out a way

of overcoming problems such as *Armageddon* readers not having read *HU* 4. And we are also working on a strip cartoon with a new artist by the name of Jim Marshall. He is not connected with Fandom in any way and, according to Ian, has a style somewhat like Neal Adams.

I am really sorry to hear that you have discarded DC! Many of their characters are now more realistic than were Marvel's in their hey-day. I would at least recommend you to the new *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* book which really shows what comic books are all about. Funny really, but since Marvel dropped so many of what I considered their best titles [*HU*: this would include *Dr Strange*, *Shield*, and *Silver Surfer*], I have drifted away from them. I still buy them, but with little interest.

Anyway, that's all I can think of at the moment. It really was nice to hear from you again and don't make it too long between the next missive!

Bestest,
Pete

Watchmen—A Tattered Love Letter

by Pádraig Ó Méalóid

I bought a book today that I already own a copy of. Actually, I own several different copies of this one. It's Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen*. After being released as twelve individual comics, starting in September 1986, it was pretty much immediately repackaged as a single-volume paperback edition—the fancier hardback editions, and all sorts of nonsensical stuff involving slipcases would all come later. This particular volume was published by Titan Books in 1987, and a quick squint at the indicia page leads me to believe it is, as far as is possible for a book like this to be, a first edition. It's even possible that the Titan version predates the American DC Comics edition, as this was often the case, back in those early times. As well as that, *Watchmen*, when it first appeared, was one of the very first of what we would now recognise as a graphic novel, a woolly and under-useful catchall phrase that has none the less become ubiquitous since.

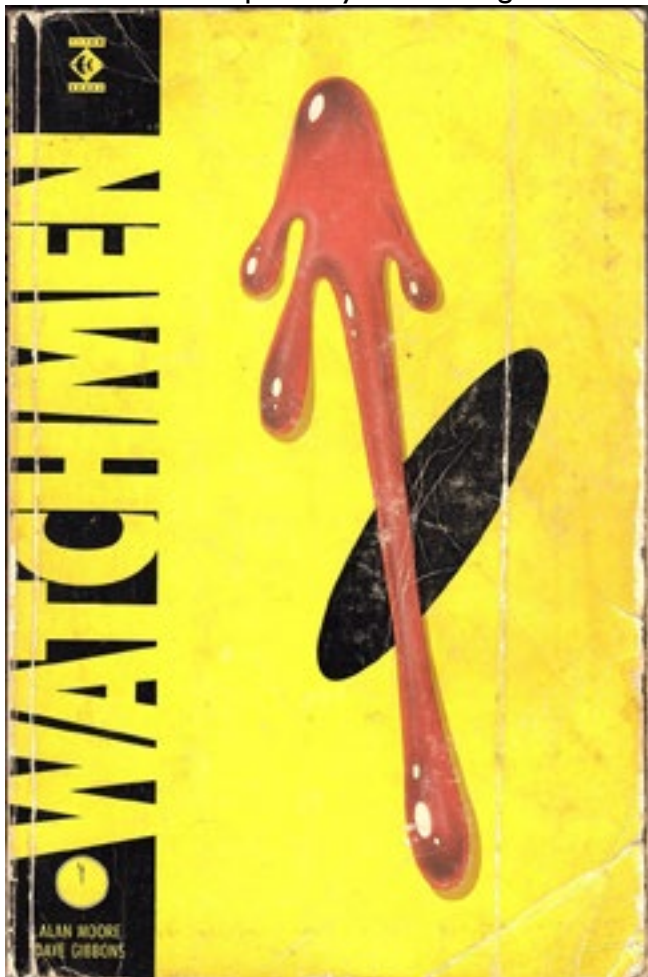
Besides being an early—possibly the earliest—edition of *Watchmen*, there's also the fact that there's a handwritten price on an inside front page, in the amount of £6. There was a time when I could recognise the handwriting of every second-hand bookseller in Dublin, and this was no exception. It was the handwriting of Stephen Lord, onetime owner of the second incarnation of Dandelion Books, which would inhabit three different premises on Aungier Street in Dublin City Centre between 1988 and 2004, before closing down, like virtually every other secondhand bookshop in the city, those days. And it's where I worked as, eventually, the shop manager and sole fulltime member of staff for eight years, until 1997.

That edition of *Watchmen* came out in 1987, and Dandelion Books opened to the world in 1988. Within a few years I had taken over everything in the shop, including pricing the incoming secondhand stock, and, adding to that the fact that it was priced by the owner in Irish Pounds / Punts, in the time before I took over, means it was probably sold through there round the very beginnings of the 1990s, and probably handled

by me, at that.

So I just couldn't resist buying it when I saw it on a trolley waiting to be shelved in Chapters Bookstore on Parnell Street this afternoon. There will be photos eventually, to show how worn this is, hopefully by constant rereading. I am, now, at the very least this book's third owner: there was the original purchaser, who presumably sold it in to Dandelion Books (I do remember one person selling up all his belongings to go try for a new life in Australia—a thing that happened often enough to be noticeable in the shop—who sold us a copy of *Watchmen*, which was quite a rare thing, then and now, and it is entirely possible that this might be that one), then there would have been the person who bought it from there for £6 in the late eighties or early nineties, who may well have kept it these past twenty-five years or more, before selling it on to Chapters, from whom I have just bought it. There may even have been other owners, other transactions, in between.

It brought back a slew of memories, of the days when the graphic novel shelf in Forbidden Planet—itsself only open in Dublin since late 1987—only had *Watchmen*, *Dark Knight Returns*, *Maus*, and later *V for Vendetta* and *Stray Toasters*, and those were the days that Forbidden Planet had their loveliest premises in Dublin, before they moved



out of Dawson Street. It came from a time before the terrible film adaptation, before DC Comics and their corporate masters, Warner Bros, decided that they would choose to interpret their contract with the comic's creators to allow the property to remain forever beyond their reach, before *Before Watchmen*, and before Alan Moore finally disowned the work, to preserve his own sanity. It's a copy of the book which comes from a purer, a better and more hopeful, time in comics. And, in a strange sort of a way, a relic of myself.

There were other memories, of time spent behind the counter in Dandelion Books, where friends would always drop in, and where my struggle with alcoholism finely came to a head, and I gave it up, for good, twenty something years ago now. And there were fond memories of the gang I hung out with, talking about comics, and drinking beer, and generally living a better life than we knew.

Some of them are gone now, left us in that most permanent of ways there is, through death, but with a decent handful or two still left, some of whom I still get up to all sorts with, although the planning is more likely to be done over pots of tea than foaming pints, these days.

And that's why I had to buy that copy of *Watchmen*.

Those Still Living: James Bacon, Michael Carroll, Larry Cloake, Gerry Doyle, Robert Elliott, Patric Kickham, Danny McMonagle, Johnny McMonagle, Steve Malone, James Mason, Kenny Penman, Geri Walsh, Julian West, and many others.

The Faithful Departed: Gerry Conlon, Mick O'Connor, John Joe O'Dowd, Des O'Flanagan, Derek Tighe, and others, all missed, and all their memories cherished.

This piece, in a shorter version, was originally a post on Facebook, where it attracted a number of useful and not so useful comments, of which I've reproduced a small number below.

Kenny Penman, co-owner of the Forbidden Planet International group, who own the Dublin shop mentioned, said 'Dawson Street was our loveliest shop by far. I found it, I fitted it, I stocked it, I hired the staff, I electrocuted myself stripping it bare, I bribed the telephone engineer up on the green £300 to get our phone fitted when we were told we would have to wait 5 months!! I lived in town for about 8 months and then for a couple of years later. I loved it all! So exciting back then. I was in our current one at the weekend—near broke my heart—I know it is going through a complicated re-fit but it looks so down at heel. Well, hopefully straight soon. In those days the runaway best sellers, from memory, were the Calvin and Hobbes collections which went gangbusters. Back then we sold 1800 copies of *Viz* a month (was it monthly, maybe 10 times a year) and 350ish *X-Men*, and just the occasional toy—changed days (rather sadly for a still died in the wool, comic and book fan like myself).'

Igor Goldkind, who worked for Titan Books in the 1980s, said 'I remember that edition and the 200 press copies I mailed out with press release. It was the day the Earth left its orbit for a little wander.'

Larry Cloake, old friend, co-worker in Dandelion Books, and the first gay man I knew, said 'Is that the copy you used to bang the counter with when you were trying to emphasise the importance of my first purchase of said graphic novel and I, of course, completely ignored you and bought the Tom of Finland retrospective that still adorns my shelf, pride of place. But you did eventually browbeat me into buying a copy that is still lurking somewhere beside a Garth Ennis or two. And as for moving the shop one Sunday with shopping trolleys. Do I remember? Will I ever forget? And thanks to you I still love a graphic novel. Not that I see many of them down here in the wilds of Longford. Unless of course it's a beat up old copy of *Meatmen!*'

Julian West, another old friend, and the man who first brought *Watchmen* to my notice, said 'I'm glad you finally got a copy of *Watchmen*. You should read it, it's very good. I think I said so when it came out.'

FIRST STIRRINGS

by Rob Hansen

There used to be a saying in science fiction fandom that 'It's a proud and lonely thing to be a fan,' and for those who imagined themselves the only fan in their location it could be lonely indeed. The birth of the first SF fan groups in the 1930s gradually changed that, but what of comics fans? There's enough of an overlap in interest between the two that SF fandom offered them a home, but it still wasn't comics fandom.

When the 23-year-old Brian Lewis went along to the inaugural meeting of his local group, the Medway Science Fiction Fan Club, on Thursday 28 August 1952 he soon became a valued member, contributing artwork to its clubzine *The Medway Journal*. Before the end of the decade he would begin working as a professional comic artist, so had there been a comics fandom in 1952 it's possible Lewis might have sought that out instead. But it was to be another decade before comics fandom in these islands began slowly stirring to life.

In mid-1961 Roger Peyton was a solitary collector who imagined himself to be the only SF enthusiast in Birmingham. Then he encountered Cliff Teague, another SF reader, serving behind the counter of a book stall at New Street Station. The two decided to form a club, the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, and to hold regular Sunday meetings at Teague's place. Expansion was not easy, however, as Peyton recalls:

Getting new members was a very slow process—the first was Dave Casey who became a hermit, never leaving his room at home when his parents were rehoused—he just sat in his room, refusing to talk to anyone, re-reading his Eric Frank Russell books over and over again. Then came Mike Higgs who was more of a comics fan than an SF fan...

Nevertheless, Higgs was soon contributing cartoons to most of the British SF fanzines of the time, signing himself Mik.

While there was no comics fandom in the UK for fans to involve themselves in, there was in the US. There had been an earlier fandom in the 1950s devoted to EC Comics, but this newer incarnation began when Jerry Bails contacted readers whose letters had appeared in the letter column of DC's *The Brave and the Bold* #35, the first to print readers' full mailing addresses. This was dated Apr/May 1961 but, as was the practice at the time, appeared on the newsstands three months prior to this. Some of those readers were active in SF fandom and put the word out about *Alter Ego*. DC comics editor Julius Schwartz loaned Bails his copies of *Xero*, an SF fanzine published by Dick and Pat Lupoff which had recently featured a series of pieces on comics that would later be collected and published as the book *All In Color For a Dime*, and Bails wrote to everyone in their letter column as well. Soon, he was receiving two or three responses daily from people interested in subscribing. The first issue of *Alter Ego* appeared in March 1961. Thus was comics fandom born in the US.

It would not be surprising if, when fans this side of the Atlantic learned of *Alter Ego* and other fanzines that followed in its wake, they wanted to get involved too. In fact it's recently been claimed that one Mark Anthony Warner of Sevenoaks in Kent published *Search* in May 1963. If true, this would have been the first comics fanzine produced over here, and it being distributed mainly to fans in the US would explain why it remained unknown to comics fans who came later. Nor was the UK the only country where the American example would inspire others, as Dave Gibbons discovered when he found fandom in June 1963:

It was a letter in the *Eagle*, which I now got every week, that led to my first involvement with fandom. The letter was from one John Wright in South Africa, and invited anyone who was interested in

collecting comics to order a magazine he was publishing, called *The Komix*. I wrote off the same day and, seemingly months later, got back a purple-inked mimeograph letter, one side of which was covered with pictures of super-heroes. I sent off an International Money Order and, after weeks of rushing home every day from school in anticipation, finally received the first and second issues of *The Komix*. I'd only ordered and paid for the current, second issue but, with a generosity that was typical of early fandom, John Wright had sent me one of his remaining copies of #1, too. I was agog at the insight into the history of superhero comics that these issues provided. Most importantly, I realised that there were people out there who were just as enthusiastic about comics as I was. I had discovered my tribe!

A powerful feeling many of us have experienced. Gibbons remained involved for several years, corresponding with American fans and even became a charter member of Jerry Bails's Academy of Comic Book Arts, until one day when...

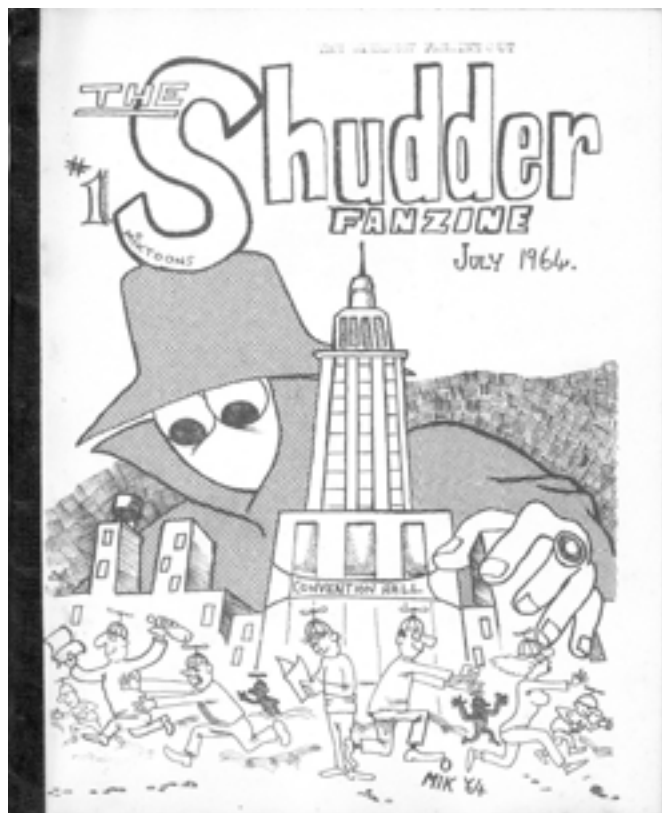
...quite suddenly, I lost interest. I shelved my childish hopes of one day working in comics, having become convinced that it was a virtual impossibility for anyone from the Home Counties of England to get work drawing for publishers in New York. Besides, I was now more interested in girls, music and Lambretta scooters.

In July 1964 Mike Higgs published the first issue of his fanzine *The Shudder* which, though an SF fanzine, included a text piece on American comics and gags featuring the title character, whose name was an obvious play on The Shadow. The same character—now renamed The Cloak and with the addition of a mouth—would later feature in the comic *POW!*, beginning with issue #18 (w/e 20 May 1967), in stories written and drawn by Mike, and was even featured on the cover of some issues. The 1965 Eastercon—the UK national SF convention—was run by the Birmingham Group and Mike was responsible for the Programme Book, which featured a cover and many internal illustrations by him.

But Higgs wasn't the only comics fan in Birmingham looking for others at this time. There was also Phil Clarke, who appeared around 1963 and says of this period:

In the early '60s I started going down the market, in the city centre—what they called the rag market—which was all second-hand goods and things including two or three comic stalls. There I met a few other people, which was great; they were there every Saturday, I was there every Saturday and we'd go off to a local café and have a chat and then sometimes we'd nip to the news theatre

to have a look at the cartoonies. Then, in 1964, one of these guys said he was going down to London to a science fiction meeting. In those days science fiction fandom was big in relation to comic fandom. They had all these meetings and things at people's houses; they stayed overnight and generally they had a fairly good time. So, I joined this guy and we went down to London—hitchhiking in those days...



The person he hitchhiked to London with was Cliff Teague. Their destination was a house (since demolished) on Westbourne Park Road in the Notting Hill area of the capital. As for who lived there:

Charles Platt, the sci-fi writer, had this lovely house in London—not a big mansion or anything but one of those with the steps up the front that you see. I met a few people there including Steve Moore. I ended up spending most of my time talking to him; mostly about comics in general.

He told me there were a lot of comics you couldn't get in the London area, which I thought was amazing because I thought everything was in London. He couldn't find some in London, I couldn't get some in Birmingham, so we said that we'd stay in contact, which you tend to do but never happens, but we did keep in touch. I used to go loads of places with Steve. I'd go down there on the weekend on the train.

Born in 1949, Moore and Clarke were both 15 years old when they met, and their friendship would prove a significant factor in getting comics fandom in the UK started a few years later. As for exactly when their first meeting took place, Charles Platt—who was still a fan at this point—moved into his Notting Hill flat in September 1964 and stayed there through to mid-February 1965, when he relocated to Hampstead. The housewarming party at his new place on the 27th of that month that Cliff Teague was once again at also attracted SF pros John Brunner, Michael Moorcock, and JG Ballard. At this point, Platt was publishing the fanzine *Beyond* which, as well as featuring Mike Higgs cartoons in its pages, often sported covers by Dicky Howett. The seventh issue, in October 1964, included an article by Roy Kay on Marvel Comics.

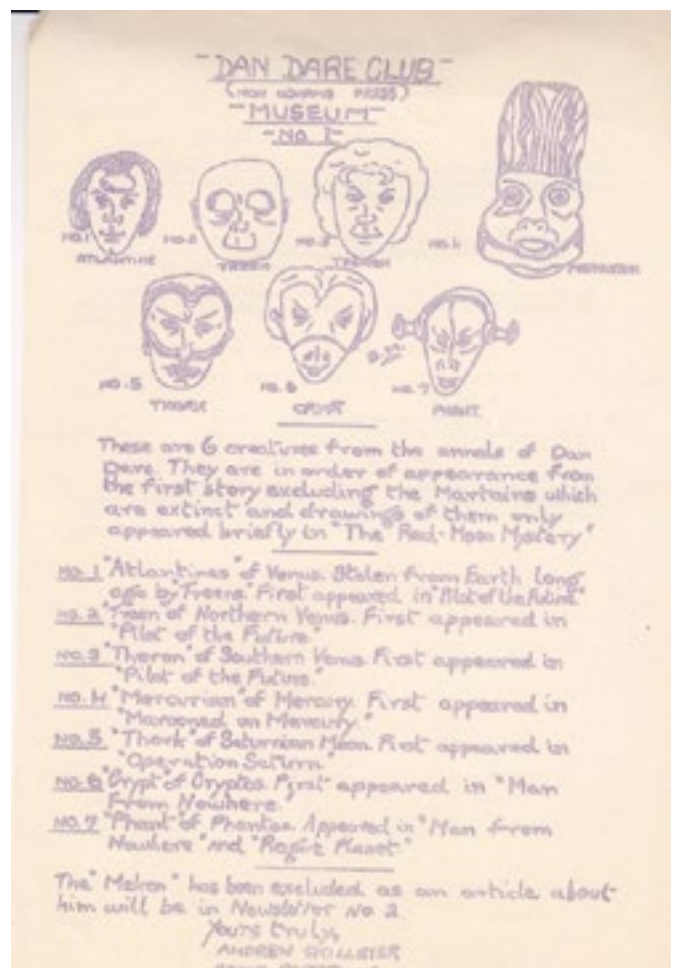
The next development was the appearance in autumn 1964 of the first *Newsletter of the Dan Dare Club*, produced by Eric MacKenzie and Andrew Skilleter, then aged 15 and 16 years old respectively. As to how the club came about, Skilleter recalls,

It was heading for the mid 1960s, I was captivated at the time by the way Dan Dare was re-energised by Keith Watson's art and David Motton's storylines. I was a huge fan of Keith's art and then along came All Treens Must Die in 1964 which was the icing on the cake. Dan back in two pages of colour with the Mekon, Treens, Venus, and the Anastasia. It was simply fantastic at the time and it was this that inspired me to do something. I guess there must have been other factors but I can't recall the sequence of events. Certainly Eric MacKenzie got in touch but I imagine we must have formed the Club together. We were certainly ignited by the same passion. Robert (Bob) Bartholomew and later the *Eagle* staff were supportive and unbelievably printed a nice little plug for DDC on *Eagle's* letters page!

In its initial form The Dan Dare Club newsletter saw six issues, the final one dated September 1965.

Exchange and Mart appeared weekly between 1868 and 2009 and was the first publication in the world dedicated to classified ads. It was a very cheap way of advertising your wares nationally, and numerous people including Dez Skinn and Frank Dobson began selling comics through its pages. At some point in 1965, Dobson created his own adzine for comics fans, *Fantasy Advertiser*. Though it was duplicated on quarto paper, usually with what appear to be lithoed card covers featuring artwork by people like Steve Moore, it was initially just a sales list and wouldn't develop into a true fanzine until later.

LONCON II, the 1965 World Science Fiction Convention, took place over the 27-30 August weekend in the Mount Royal Hotel, Marble Arch, London. It was only the second to be held outside the North American continent, the first being the 1957 Worldcon which had also been held in London, at a hotel barely a mile away from this one. Some 350 people attended, including Steve Moore, Phil Clarke, Mike Higgs, Stan Nicholls, and Derek 'Bram' Stokes. Meeting other comics fans would prove decisive. Explains Clarke:



From there, it started to build slow but sure until '66-'67, which was the sort of fanzine era. Steve got himself a spirit duplicator, which was his pride and joy. He churned out loads of things on it.

This included three or more issues of his SF fanzine *Vega*, at least one of which was distributed through PADS, the British Science Fiction Association's pseudo-APA.

In January 1966 the Dan Dare Club newsletter relaunched as *ASTRAL—the Journal of the International Dan Dare Club*. Following the six issues of the original *Newsletter*, this second volume of publications saw eleven issues to September 1966. *ASTRAL* volume 3 began in December and would run monthly for a dozen issues before it ceased publication with the November 1967 issue. There would be a four-issue revival of *ASTRAL* as a fanzine in 1970/71, but with no new Dan Dare material being produced interest waned and the club faded away.

In January 1967, Bram Stokes launched his mail order business *Vault of Horror*, which would eventually become *Dark They Were and Golden Eyed*. Around this same time up in Harrogate, SF fan Ron Bennett was contemplating his future. In his long-running SF newszine *Skyrack*, he would soon announce:

As some readers will know I have of late been trying to establish myself as a book and magazine dealer. Because of an impending move which involves a new job working for the Ministry of Defence I hope to be in a position whereby I will be able to obtain material not usually freely circulated in this country, particularly American pulps and older magazines and pocketbooks. If there is any item for which you'd like me to keep an eye open on your behalf do please let me have your want lists. There will of course be no obligation to buy, you'll merely have first refusal on any such material obtained. Collections purchased. Trades welcome.

Though his initial intent was clearly to focus on SF, Bennett obviously found a source of cheap comics following his move to Singapore since he quickly started listing these for sale in the pages of *Fantasy Advertiser*.

And so all the pieces were finally in place for a fandom dedicated to comics to form on this side of the Atlantic. All that was missing was the initial spark, a spark that would soon be supplied by people already toiling away in Birmingham, London, and Dublin...

Source Notes & Acknowledgements:

Brian Lewis in *Medway*: fiawol.org.uk

Roger Peyton details from *THEN: Science Fiction Fandom in the UK, 1950-1980* by Rob Hansen, (Ansible Editions, 2016)

Alter Ego details from *The Golden Age of Comic Fandom* by Bill Schelly (Hamster Press, 1995)

Platt housewarming *Skyrack* #76 (Mar 65)

Bennett quote from his *Skyrack* #94 (Aug '67)

The following details are all from various articles in *FANSCENE* (ed. David Hathaway-Price, 2018):

Phil Clarke from article by Mike Conroy, pp9-13

Dan Dare Club from articles by John Freeman and Richard Sheaf, pp114-120

Dave Gibbons quotes, pp152-155

Details of *SEARCH* by Peter Hansen, pp156-160

If you want to read the full pieces—and you really should—*FANSCENE* can be downloaded here: davidprice5.wixsite.com/classicukcomicszines

SOMETHING IN THE POST

by David Hine

I still vividly remember the summer morning when my mother called up the stairs to announce that something had arrived in the post for me. Most of the mail came for my father or 'The Occupier,' so it was an unusual event. I suspect my hands were trembling slightly as I carefully opened the brown envelope to reveal the priceless contents. I find it impossible to define the feeling I have now, holding that copy of *Heroes Unlimited* #7 in my hands again after all these years—forty-nine of them! It was the summer of 1969 when I ordered the magazine from Anthony Roche and it is now the summer of 2018. Back then, I was pretty sure we would all be taking our holidays on the moon by the time the 21st Century dawned, though I don't think I ever imagined how digital technology would develop and change our lives. It was all about the print. I loved to hold a comic book in my hands, turn the pages, read the stories over and over, lose myself in the fantasy.

Comics weren't my only interest. I became obsessed with science fiction when I saw the first episode of *Doctor Who* on TV and consumed everything sci-fi related from that moment. TV, comics, movies, novels—if it was fantasy I was into it. At school I encountered a select few other oddballs who had similar interests and by 1969 our mutual obsession with escapism had narrowed focus onto American comics and particularly Marvel and DC comics. This was the true golden age of comics for us, the period when the creators were getting name-checked and the editors were talking directly to the fans. It brought the whole process of creating comics closer to us. This was a world we could get involved with. I don't know how I managed to get the address of Tony Roche. *Heroes Unlimited* was the first fanzine I ever ordered and I think I must have seen an advert for it in a fanzine I borrowed from one of my fellow collectors.

We lived in the English West Country and I have no idea how that fanzine made it into our orbit but all it took was one. The comic fanzine community expanded in a viral fashion. Every 'zine carried adverts for, or reviews of others, with details of addresses and prices. *Heroes Unlimited* was one of the more expensive and probably stretched me financially, but once I had the envelope open I was instantly convinced that this was the best three shillings I had ever spent. The articles were great, even the record reviews—The Moody Blues! The Mothers of Invention! Above all, the art was superb. Paul Neary's unique design sense and use of tones proved to be one of the biggest early influences on my own art and indeed on my choice of career. There was something about the fact that this had been drawn by a **fan** that opened up the door to the possibility of doing this as a living. Ordinary human beings could write and draw comics! People like me!!!

And that was it. At the age of 13 I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I would make comics—that and nothing else. I didn't care if I starved and lived in a one-room garret for the rest of my days. Being a poor starving artist actually seemed like a pretty good career choice if I could spend those days writing and drawing. I immediately sent off for other fanzines—*Aspect*, *Orpheus*, *Oracle*, *Fan-Fare* and later the really weird stuff like *Crucified Toad* and *Bognor Regis*, featuring the depraved and wonderful art of David Edward Britton.

More importantly I had decided, with a few friends, that we would make our own fanzines. The first was *Zodiak*, printed on a very dodgy old spirit duplicator that was barely even legible. After that we decided we would have to upgrade. There was a brand new duplicator in the school office and we decided to have a crack at using that. We had to get the headmaster's permission and we suspected that he would be reluctant to encourage us in our obsession with comics, so we lied. We told him we were going to put together a magazine about science fiction. That sounded a lot more respectable. Arthur C Clarke was a former pupil and had even organized a competition with the school for the best review of the recently released *2001: A Space Odyssey* movie, with a signed paperback copy of the book as first prize.

We were right. The head had no problem with science fiction. Unfortunately he decided to test our knowledge of the genre. My tastes ran to Ballard, Moorcock, Ellison, Delaney, Dick, Aldiss and others of the New Wave ilk. Our headmaster wanted to know what we thought of Fred Hoyle, Jules Verne, HG Wells, John Wyndham, and the like. I tried bluffing it with my vague knowledge of a few movies based on Wells and Verne and having read *The Midwich Cuckoos*. I don't think he was fooled but he gave us the go-ahead and we promptly unleashed *Zodiak* #2, *Synopsis*, and *Megaton* upon the world, or at least on the dozen or so people who foolishly stumped up two shillings for the amateurish ramblings of a handful of kids who had a lot more enthusiasm than ability. Stuart Briers, who went on to be a highly respected commercial illustrator, was the editor and contributed most of the drawings and they were the highlight of the magazines. I contributed articles and short stories, including a stream-of-consciousness effort, which Stu chose to cut off halfway through to save space. He didn't think anyone would notice.

In spite of every effort by parents, teachers, and society in general to put me off, I never lost the ambition to make comics. I went to Art College, learned to draw tolerably well and went on to make a career as a comic artist until the mid-nineties, when my son was born and comics started to look like an untenable way to be making a living. Sixty- or even eighty-hour weeks at the drawing board to scrape an average living seemed perfectly sane until then, but being a stay-at-home father as well... I had a choice between giving up comics or my sanity and for a few years, I chose to keep my sanity. Not that I went for a 'normal' job, but freelance commercial illustration paid something like four times the hourly rate that I was making in comics.

From 1995 until 2003 I drifted away from comics and never really went back to drawing them. Instead I began a new career as a writer. I had written a few of my own stories, including three series of Mambo for *2000 AD* and then in 1993 I published my first full-length graphic novel, *Strange Embrace*. Although it didn't sell well when it came out from Atomeka Press, it did make an impression on Richard Starkings, one of my former editors at Marvel UK. In 2003 he offered to reprint it as a collection and that led to my first big break as a writer, when I was invited to write for Marvel Comics by editor-in-chief, Joe Quesada, after he read the collected *Strange Embrace*.

I was initially reluctant as I had long outgrown any interest in superhero comics but Joe was very accommodating and suggested I submit some ideas for stories that weren't overtly superhero oriented. I had been interested for some time in a trial in the USA of three teenagers who had been found guilty of murdering three children. The defendants were convicted with no real evidence against them, and in fact the verdict flew in the face of a lot of evidence that suggested they were not guilty. I had seen a television documentary that presented the evidence and they had clearly been found guilty almost entirely on the grounds of being 'anti-social' and liking heavy metal music.

I assumed the verdict would be appealed and they would be released. But the case was a good one to adapt as a fictional courtroom drama featuring Daredevil's civilian identity of lawyer, Matt Murdock. My intention was to write a story that highlighted the absurdity of a major Western democracy continuing to execute its own citizens in the 21st century. I was given the go-ahead and the story became *Daredevil: Redemption*, a six-part series that won me a nomination for the prestigious Harvey comic awards. More than two decades after my first professional comics were published I was nominated for Best Newcomer.

In the meantime the West Memphis Three, as they had come to be known, continued to languish in jail in spite of public protests and support from all kinds of celebrities. They were finally freed in 2011 after serving 18 years for a crime of which they were innocent. It was largely the interest of Peter Jackson, director of *Lord of the Rings*, who produced another documentary about the case, which finally brought enough pressure to bear to have the men freed.

During the time that the comic was being published, I was in contact with Lorri Davis, who had married the lead defendant, Damien Echols, while he was in prison. She was sending Damien copies of the comic as they were being published, to his cell on Death Row. In 2005 I was put in contact with a woman called Jade Dodge who planned a benefit comic to raise money to help the West Memphis Three defence fund. I came up with a strip called *American Boy*, which I wrote and drew, while Richard Starkings supplied the letters. Unfortunately the comic never appeared and the strip has been languishing in a drawer ever since. Reading it through again, it struck me that the message of the story comes through as strongly now as it did thirteen years ago. Now more than ever, America is indeed afraid of its own citizens, afraid of its youth, afraid of the truth.

Recently, at a comic convention, I spotted a man with a copy of *Heroes Unlimited #7* under his arm and assumed he was a fellow fan. I probably scared the life out of him when I literally pounced on him yelling 'Oh my God! *Heroes Unlimited!* Best fanzine ever!' or words to that effect. He politely thanked me and introduced himself as the editor. And suddenly it was 1969 all over again and, though we had never met, I felt like I had just run into a very old and dear friend. We have since continued to meet and correspond and I was delighted to hear that *Heroes Unlimited #8* is finally going to see print—almost half a century late. It is a genuine honour to be invited to contribute and an enormous pleasure to see *American Boy* finally published in the magazine that was so influential on me when I was thirteen years old—an impressionable youth, easily led astray. I was indeed led astray and continue to wander the path less travelled. In the words of my headmaster, in his final school report: 'David is completely unrealistic about his career.'

David Hine
29th June 2018



I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND TO THE REPUBLIC FOR WHICH IT STANDS. ONE NATION UNDER GOD, INDIVISIBLE, WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL.

"WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOU?"

ALL-AMERICAN BOY

STORY & ART 2005 BY DAVID HINE • LETTERS BY COMICBOOKFONTS.COM



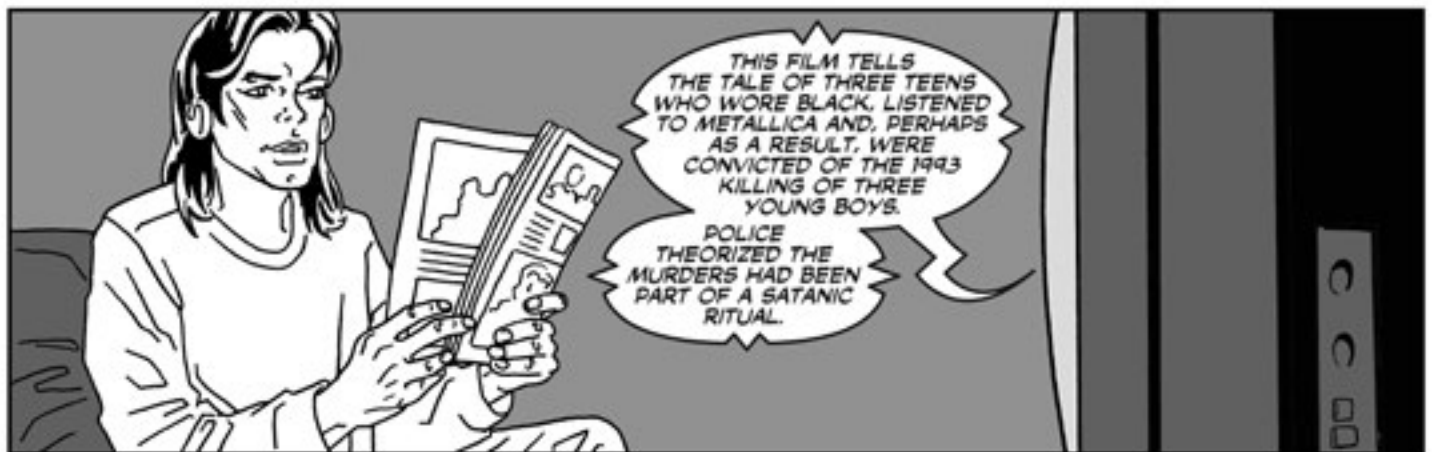
"YOU USED TO BE SUCH A GOOD KID. I WAS PROUD OF YOU."

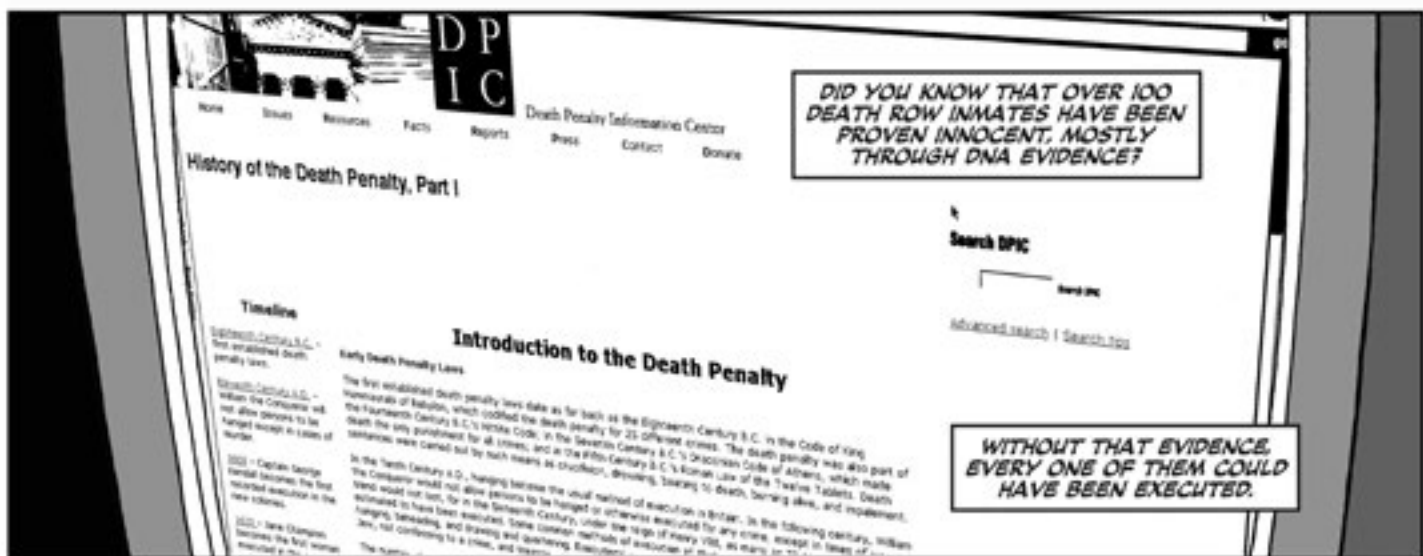
"WE BROUGHT YOU UP RIGHT, ME AND YOUR MOTHER. WE GAVE YOU GOOD VALUES. WE TAUGHT YOU RIGHT FROM WRONG. WE TAUGHT YOU TO RESPECT PEOPLE AND RESPECT YOURSELF."

"NOW IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE TURNED YOUR BACK ON EVERYTHING."

"YOU KNOW WHAT? PASTOR BLAKE SAID A PRAYER FOR YOU SUNDAY. RIGHT ALONG WITH MAVIS PRITCHARD'S HIP OPERATION AND THE FALLONS' RETARD SON, HE SAID A PRAYER FOR YOUR SOUL TO BE SAVED FROM SATAN'S SNARES."

"I COULD HAVE DIED FOR SHAME."







YOU'RE RIGHT. I LOST MY FAITH IN A FEW THINGS. BUT I'VE GOT MY VALUES.

THEY JUST AREN'T THE SAME AS YOURS.

VALUES? THAT WALL REPRESENTS YOUR VALUES?

PRETTY MUCH.

"THERE IS NOT ONE POSITIVE THING UP THERE."

"THE ONLY THING THOSE PEOPLE PREACH IS NEGATIVITY. THEY WANT TO TEAR EVERYTHING DOWN."

"THEY WANT TO DESTROY EVERYTHING DECENT AND GOOD AND POSITIVE."



"YOU KNOW WHAT THE TRUTH IS? THOSE PEOPLE ARE ANTI-AMERICAN. THEY HATE THIS COUNTRY AND EVERYTHING IT STANDS FOR. AND THAT GOES FOR YOU TOO."

"I'M GIVING YOU ONE DAY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT WALL. FREEDOM OF SPEECH IS ALL FINE AND GOOD, BUT THIS IS MY HOUSE AND I'M DRAWING A LINE."

"YOU'VE GOT A CHOICE. YOU TAKE THAT TRASH OFF THE WALL BY TOMORROW OR I'M COMING IN AND TEARING THEM DOWN FOR YOU."







I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND TO THE REPUBLIC FOR WHICH IT STANDS. ONE NATION UNDER GOD. INDIVISIBLE...



"...WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL."

I LOVE THIS COUNTRY.

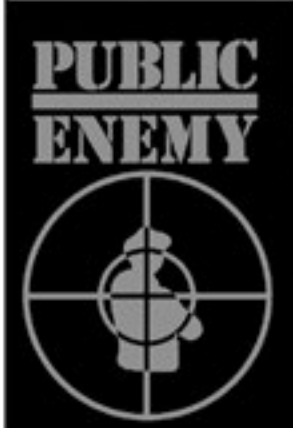
I LOVE MY COUNTRY SO MUCH I WANT IT TO BE BETTER THAN IT IS.

SO IF YOU DON'T LIKE MY KIND OF PATRIOTISM, I'VE GOT JUST TWO WORDS FOR YOU...

YOU WANT ME TO SPELL THAT?

FREE THE
WEST
MEMPHIS
THREE
WWW.WM3.ORG

THERE ARE CURRENTLY 3,400 PEOPLE AWAITING EXECUTION IN THE USA. MOST PRISONERS SPEND OVER TEN YEARS ON DEATH ROW, WITH THE DATE OF THEIR EXECUTION CONTINUALLY BEING DELAYED AS THE APPEAL PROCESS TAKES ITS COURSE. SOME MIGHT CONSIDER THIS "CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENT." WHICH IS A VIOLATION OF THE 8TH AMENDMENT TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION.



James White

by James Bacon

James White was a generous, quiet, gentle, man, possessing a soft Irish accent, a welcoming smile, and a mind that was continually telling stories that were about healing, about the journey of seeking peace, finding true humanity in all, disregarding the alien, respecting the commonality of sentient life, conquering fear, hatred, and anger, and seeking not just simple acceptance, but mercy, assistance and aid, through kindness and careful actions and thoughtfulness amongst intelligent life forms.

Healing, his work was about healing, healing fissures between peoples, healing mental health issues, doctors, medics healing all the wounds, recognising trauma and understanding it and giving his characters time and space and the challenge of working through and beyond what ailed them. In many respects there was detective work of the medical mind going on.

James was born in Belfast on 7 April 1928. He spent then some years in Canada, returning to complete his schooling in Belfast from 1935. James worked initially in tailoring, and was a member of management in the Co-Op department store. He moved to Shorts Brothers in the '60s. Shorts were a Belfast-based plane maker, and he was promoted from a technical clerk to publicity officer, and worked for the company for sixteen years, leaving in 1984.

A science fiction reader who found and loved the genre in 1941, in 1947 he found another Belfast fan, Walt Willis, and so began a time of high productivity of fan activity for what would become known as Irish Fandom. Willis became an incredible fan writer of the highest calibre, and James White at the time, desiring to be an artist, joined him to edit *Slant*, a seven-issue fanzine that ran from 1948 to 1953. White would do linocut art for the zine, and his first words in print were to disagree and make clear that sentiments expressed in the fanzine were not those shared by the Art Editor. Although both gentlemen had passed on when it occurred, *Slant* won the 1954 Best Fanzine Hugo Award, in 2004.

White explained why the fan connections were so important to his writing career,

We were really religious about *Astounding*. Then Campbell got hit with this anti-nuclear-war bug, and for a period in the late '40s, month after month, the stories were all about atomic doom. We were getting fed up with it, and we said, 'Why don't we write the kind of story we would like to read?' So Bob Shaw and I went off and did this, more or less as a joke. It took nearly a year to write *Assisted Passage*, because the group was so keen on science fiction, we wouldn't let any of the others get away with anything corny. So what an editor would have found to complain about in a first story, we had already taken out because our friends and severest critics had done the work for them. The influence of Walter Willis, who in this very quiet way was a perfectionist about writing, ensured that story number five or six sold before I ever got a rejection slip, and for Bob it was the same. It was a great training.

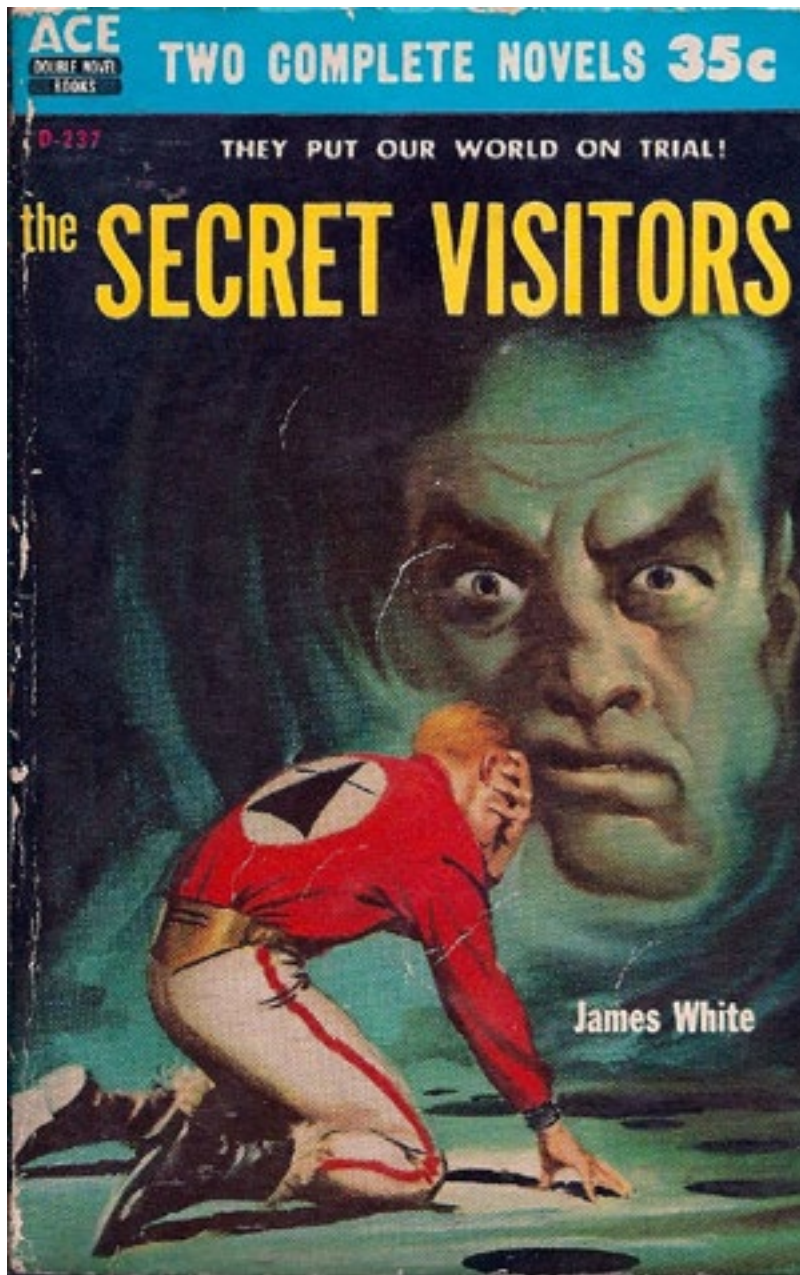
(*Locus*, March 1993)

His earliest professionally published work, *Assisted Passage*, appeared in the British Science Fiction periodical *New Worlds* #19 in January 1953, edited by John Carnell, and was about an alien being helped, while his second work *Crossfire* in *New Worlds* in May 1953 looked at a bomb disposal team, who make a first contact. In four short years, by 1957, White had twenty short stories published and one novel over three issues of *New Worlds*. He had been published by *Nebula*, *Astounding*, and *Science Fantasy*, as well as *New Worlds*, but the Carnell publication was where the mainstay of this early work appeared. Then the 17,000 word novelette *Sector General* appeared in *New Worlds* #65 in November 1957 and so would begin a medical drama that would last for forty-four years. James explained,

The *Sector General* series started in 1957 as a one-off idea for a novelette. It was published in *New Worlds* in September '57. The editor said it sounded like an interesting proposition, aliens treating human beings in

hospital, and would I like to do another one? So I did another one, then another. The reader response was good. I did the first five, which were then published as the *Hospital Station* collection by Ballantine in 1962. Then I did for John Carnell at *New Worlds* a three-part serial called *Field Hospital* where the hospital got involved in a war.

1957 had already been a good year, with White seeing his first book, *The Secret Visitors*, published as half of an Ace Double, the novel that had been serialised as *Tourist Planet* in *New Worlds*, being published in August. Doctors had already featured in his stories, but the world of Sector General went on to capture the



imagination of thousands of readers.

For me, this period was an incredible time for James's short story writing, some of my favourites of his appeared at this stage, interlaced with Sector General stories. His SF was varied, but left an indelible mark, stories that reached out for me were, *Tableau* (*New Worlds* #71) *The Ideal Captain* (*New Worlds* #74) *Dogfight* (*New Worlds* #81) *Occupation: Warrior* (*SF Adventures* #7) *Grapeliner* (*New Worlds* #88) and *Deadly Litter* (*SF Adventures* #13), all of which were republished in the collections *Deadly Litter* (1964) and *Monsters and Medics* (1977). *Tableau* was actually a part of the overall Sector General timeline.

At the same time, John Carnell wanted more Sector General stories and so the *Trouble With Emily* (*New Worlds* #77) *Visitor At Large* (*New Worlds* #84), O'Mara's *Orphan* (*New Worlds* #90, retitled *Medic* in *Hospital Station*), and *Outpatient* (*New Worlds* #95) continued the story of this vast intergalactic hospital. While stories continued to flow apace, appearing in *New Worlds*, Betty Ballantine noted and bought these stories, which were published as *Hospital Station* in 1962 by Ballantine Books, and republished by Corgi in 1967. The stories were all stand-alone, so they were not directly interconnected, but given the setting, brought the concept that readers would love together.

Sector General caught the imagination of professionals and fans alike and it grew.

There were twelve books in total in the series. Fans wanted to talk about it, and the system that James White had created. In 1964 in the Peter Weston edited *ZENITH* #5 there was the Edward F James article on James White's Sector General stories. White's bibliography was published by Galactic Central in 1984, while perhaps the ultimate item was the Bruce Pelz and Mark Olsen edited *White Papers*, published by NESFA Press in 1996 to coincide with James White's Guest of Honour status at that year's Worldcon, LA Con III. The collection of work was beautifully presented, with fiction, fan writing, and fan writing about Sector General, including a timeline and classification system, indicative of the love for his series.

There is just something amazing about Sector Twelve General Hospital. This vast hospital, built by co-operative species, was an intergalactic centre of excellence in healing, with hundreds of levels—384 to be exact—to accommodate and provide a stable environment that any being could live comfortably in. The complexity of providing for beings who breathed water, breathed chlorine, or lived in a corrosive fog, before

one even thought about crystalline methane-based life forms, who needed to stay in a freezing environment, or the doctor who breathed superheated steam and must be in multiples of earth gravity, is both ingenious and compelling, as these creatures not only need help, but work together to help one another. Gravity, heat, cold, and size were all at issue here, and White successfully conjures up unbelievable life forms, who one is then dramatically drawn to, as the physicians and diagnosticians and nurses fight to save them. As the adventures strayed from the main hospital, further life forms, such as those on the planet Meatball, which was the size of a continent, were encountered. For all this White developed a categorisation system, utilising four letters. These letters quickly inform one of the needs and type of creature one is dealing with.

Humans are DBDG. The first letter denotes physical evolution, the second the type and distribution of limbs and sensory equipment, which helps work out the brain and major organ location, then the third and fourth refer one to the metabolism, gravity, and atmospheric pressure needs, while being linked to physical mass and exterior protection. So Etlans, Nidians and Orlians are also DBDG, although the Nidians and Orlians are four foot tall and covered in fur, and look like a Teddy bear, while the Kelgias with a category of DBLF are like (to us) a furry caterpillar. The system stretched wide, to suit the story. And so we followed some favourites, who as initially described would be clearly alien, this would disappear as the challenges were faced and character came through.

O'Mara was an interesting character, who one met very early on, and who was an all-seeing Chief Psychologist, while the young Dr Conway with Nurse Murchinson were initially great to follow, but the characters interweaved, as we travelled or met new travellers arriving at Sector General. Education and learning were a feature of the ongoing diagnostic and detective process, and to help the doctors, they had 'educator tapes' which they would download into their brain, but they'd also have to manage the personality of the exceptional doctor, which presented hilarity at times. Senior Diagnostician in charge of pathology Thornnastor—a massive creature with six elephantine feet—was quite the juxtaposition with Dr Prilicla, who was a dragonfly-like being of great fragility, that extended mentally as it had empathetic abilities, and each book as we progressed brought new characters, new aliens, and they diversified greatly, which in itself brought life to the series. War did come to Sector General, but the way that comes about and is resolved, while watching how medics show and given genuine care to all combatants, is wonderful.

All the time, the issue at hand is saving life, no matter how unusual, horrible, or grotesque a reader might find that life form. This is crucial, hatred of the other is just not allowed, one must overcome any 'unnatural' feelings that would create prejudice or bias, for xenophobia is not just not allowed, under any circumstances, it is a moral outrage. Although things can go dreadfully wrong—and, indeed in *The Genocidal Healer* we meet a character who has just done that exact thing, caused genocide—there is nearly always a solution to both the ails of the characters and those being tended to, and we follow them gladly. White also has a deadpan and dry wit, a great sense of humour, and while playing with characters, he also involved the real world, the Friends of Kilgore Trout, a Glasgow Science Fiction club, were immortalised as the FOKT category, from Goglesk, who naturally formed angry mobs when grouped together, and who smelled of musk and spearmint.

And in a wonderful way, it all loops around somehow. I was stunned by the eleventh book, *Mind Changer*, published in 1998, over forty years after the first story. *Mind Changer* took us back over the life and times of the rough acerbic Chief Psychologist O'Mara, as he deals with the current problem, being in charge of the whole hospital, but not for long, just long enough to train his replacement. He'd always been there in the background and I liked him, although feared for characters who came into contact with him, and his character was always on the edge of the stories, but crucial at many points, and suddenly so much became apparent in this book, so much became realised and understood. What are the greatest challenges a psychologist can face, and what length of dedication do medical professionals go to in their lives, always working on something that they feel passionate about? It answered so much but also was for me a perfect ending.

James White's approach to Sector General—the main messages, urging peace over war, acceptance over hatred, integration and co-operation over segregation and fighting—come through at all stages. He lived through the Troubles, indeed they did impact the social goings on. As mentioned in *Then* by Rob Hansen: 'In Belfast, around mid-1970, Bob Shaw and James White were responsible for the birth of a new fan group. They met at White's tavern.' By 1974 the group was no more, as James White noted 'Mainly due to Bob's absence—his humour and fatherly presence was greatly missed—and that our wives and/or sweethearts worried when we went into the city centre at night where more and more pubs were being attacked, the numbers attending

shrank to a handful. Republican extremists bombed Loyalist pubs and vice versa, and the pubs who didn't mind who they served were hit by both sides.'

White was a middle-class Catholic, whose best fannish friend, Walt Willis, was a middle-class Protestant. These details seem lacking in noteworthiness, until one is reminded in a fanzine article of Walt advising James to best get back to Andersonstown in Belfast in the '70s, as the noise of the Belfast troubles was such, that it raised a concern. They were visiting Oblique House on the Newtownards Road, The Willis residence, one last time and James White wrote a piece entitled *The Exorcists of IF*, referring to Irish Fandom and Oblique House being an epicentre of fannish activity for some time. As James wrote:

Suddenly a savage crashing detonation rattled the windows and a misshapen finger of smoke poked slowly into the night sky. Very faintly came the chatter of automatic weapons, the snap of a high-velocity rifle and the distant braying of an ambulance. But the voices from the past were there too and louder than ever. 'Sounds like your side of Town, James' said Walter in a worried voice. 'It will be dark in an hour, and you would be safer back across the peace line before-.'

While James had been writing well before the Troubles began, he was well aware of the historical issues, to think that Northern Ireland's difficulties, violence, and sectarianism had no impact on his work would be to overlook one of Northern Ireland's artistic voices that focussed so passionately on commonality amongst humanity. His writing is unique in its approach to difficult and complex problems, and his ability to lace together a very emotive and considered solution for the readers.

While the Sector General books were quite brilliant, James also wrote a number of very strong and impressive standalone novels. Two that stand out are *The Watch Below* and *The Silent Stars Go By*, both brilliant works.

The Watch Below is set during the Second World War, and a Merchant oiler ship, not carrying oil, is torpedoed, but it finds neutral buoyancy, just like containers do on our modern high seas, just below the surface, and as nearly all abandon her to what they think is a watery end, a dreadfully claustrophobic and frightening situation is faced by five of the occupants, who find themselves in this floating coffin, and they must survive. This runs in tandem with the plight of an alien race who are likewise facing a dreadful plight, as they face a parallel problem billions of miles out in space. It's a brilliantly written and classic novel in less than 200 pages.

The Silent Stars Go By was ably explained by James for *Locus* magazine,

It's an alternate history where it's the Hibernian Empire that covers the globe, not the British Empire. Basically it's a Hibernian scholar traveling in the Mediterranean, who meets up with Alexander, takes sketches of his steam-jet engine, and brings them back to Tara in hopes that he will amuse the High King with it. The High King sees the potential, and precipitates a premature Industrial Revolution which makes Ireland militarily unassailable from Europe. It's Saint Brendan the Navigator who discovers the New World in 600-something. He, unlike the Spaniards and Portuguese, will not agree to exploit the Native Americans. Because of this policy, which gets him into lots of trouble at home initially, trade and mutual peace pacts are signed between most of the main Indian nations and Hibernia. This evolves into the Hibernian Empire of the West—but it's actually more like a loose federation. By 1492, the Hibernian Empire and the other technologically advanced countries in the world are sending out the first starship to a new world.

And with that setting the adventure aboard the starship Aisling Gheal, with Healer Nolan, begins, although this is a plot thick with religious intrigue, the deceit and betrayal continues to the new world.

As a professional writer, he was incredibly welcoming. He had a personal policy of always making space at the table, following meeting a young fan at Faircon, who indeed, he literally welcomed and this yielded great fruit, with many fans going on to honour and recognise his work through their efforts. Interestingly, Peggy White, James's wife, spoke of how a young fan at a Glasgow convention was an especially nice memory, and this memory is told by twice Worldcon Chair Vincent Docherty, but from a youth's first con perspective.

A guest of honour in 1996 at LA Con, his spirit and fun was infectious, and he came back to Ireland and to the National SF Convention in Dublin, Octocon, and proudly wore the Sector General Scrubs he had been presented with at LA Con. At LA Con III there was a whole Sector General pantomime of gigantic proportions portrayed in his honour, as he ran with fans all dressed as emergency personal to assist a

crashed spaceship. He also was a mediator, and when some fans were barred from Octocon, he wrote to the subsequent committee to consider lifting it, and sharing forgiveness. A small thing, but important.

I mentioned earlier that I ended with *Mind Changer*. This was the eleventh book in the series, and there is a twelfth, *Double Contact*. I did not read this final novel in the series, as by the time I had it in my hands, James had passed away and so I resolved to leave it on my shelf, to follow the next great adventure when I needed to, when I felt that I would want cheering up, or want to follow Dr Prilicla on his expedition to answer distress beacons, with unknown species, who've nearly ended it for one another. To feel cheered by the inevitable positivity and good nature of a James White Sector General story, to always know that I have not run out of his stories, and so it sits on my shelf. Waiting patiently, in a good humoured way.

I shall end with James White himself,

The stories I write are very unlikely to happen. It's just that Northern Ireland is a very frustrating and dangerous and tragic place. The people are very nice, regardless of whether they're Protestants or Catholics or whatever. But it's these poisonous few, who keep it all boiling over and won't allow anybody to settle. Most of the stories, I write about the sort of characters and the sort of world that I would like to live in. I'm trying to escape from reality. If you're the writer, you're the boss. It's your party.

Notes

Quotes taken from:

Locus Interview, Full Time Hobbyist, March 1993

Then by Rob Hansen: ansible.uk/Then

Links of Interest:

Slant: fanac.org/fanzines/Slant/

Hyphen: fanac.org/fanzines/Hyphen

Various articles mentioned can be found on:

The James White Information site, Sector General: sectorgeneral.com

The White Papers: nesfa.org/press/Books/White



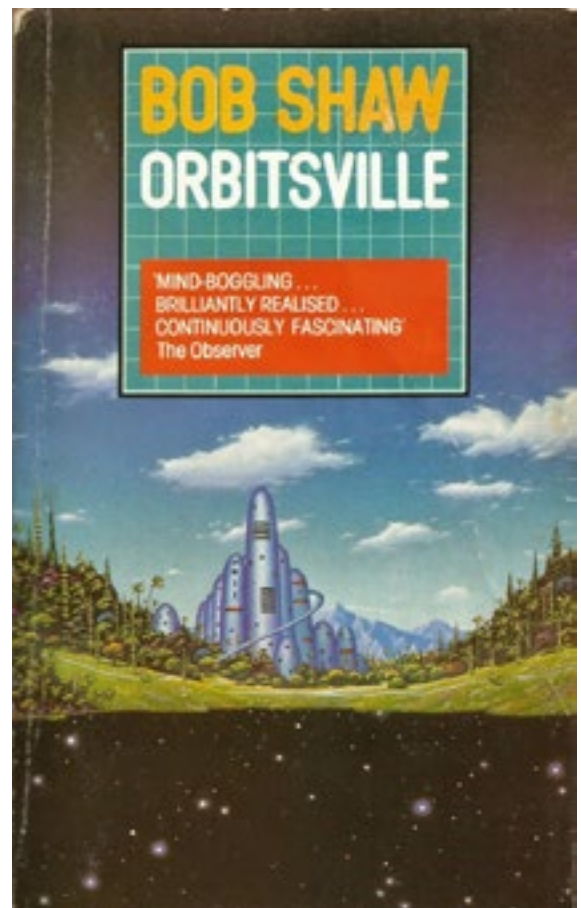
Escaping the ‘endless Sunday afternoon’: Bob Shaw’s Science Fiction by Eamonn Hughes

Belfast has a long, if intermittent, history of producing science fiction. The richest period for Belfast science fiction came in the decades between CS Lewis in the 1940s and Ian MacDonald in the 1990s, with the work of the friends and sometime colleagues James White and Bob Shaw. The Belfast that both White and Shaw grew up in was still marked by its industrial history and it in turn marked their work and lives; both were employed in the surviving offshoots of these industries. Shaw’s first encounter with science fiction was a release from that strict Presbyterianism which found its dullest expression in a strict sabbatarianism: the ‘endless Sunday afternoon’ mentioned in several of his novels as the epitome of boredom—see, for example, *The Ceres Solution* (London: Gollancz, 1981, p76). Shaw’s use of the phrase seems to remember the peculiar horrors (especially for a child) of a culture in which, infamously, the swings in playgrounds were padlocked on Sundays. In this context it’s no wonder that science fiction was an eye-opener for the young Shaw and a way of thinking beyond the strict boundaries of prescribed thought that marked Belfast.

Shaw’s background doesn’t need rehearsing for science fiction fans, since a large part of that background was his own continuing stance as a science fiction fan. After his childhood discovery of science fiction and the alternative it provided to the ‘endless Sunday afternoon’ of Protestant lower-middle-class suburban Belfast he quickly became involved in Irish fandom along with Walt Willis and James White. For much of the 1950s Belfast was a hub for science fiction fans as this trio produced and contributed to fanzines such as *Slant*, *Hyphen*, and *The Enchanted Duplicator*. Shaw was a regular attendee and a popular speaker at conventions which, along with the brio and engagement evident in *How to Write Science Fiction*, demonstrates that he never lost his own sense of being a fan.

Science fiction was for Shaw an escape from the restricted culture into which he was born, a way of providing a perspective on it, and a way of thinking beyond it. This accounts, at least in part, for the first thing that has to be acknowledged about him: his sheer range as a writer, as if the promise held out by science fiction of new ways of thinking would only be betrayed by too firm an adherence to some one aspect of the genre. In *How to Write* he notes that ‘the genre’s unique element ... is *otherness*’ though ‘it has to be *specific otherness*. A true science-fiction story has as its keystone an imaginative element which cannot be properly expounded in any other literary form.’ While acknowledging the limitations of this, as of any, definition of the genre it is important to point out the generosity and inclusivity here—Shaw, having started as a fan and become a writer, genuinely wants to help others along the same path, so he is averse to any more limiting definition that would put others off. While we can say that much, though by no means all, of his writing falls into the sub-category of ‘hard’ science fiction it is difficult to put one’s finger on what makes a typical Shaw novel once one has made the almost standard comments about the clarity and purposefulness of his writing style, and such preoccupations as with sight and perspective. What I mean by this is best illustrated by thinking about those occasions when he moved beyond his more usual stand-alone novels into sequences. Even the fact that more often than not he works in stand-alone novels is a sign of this range.

The *Orbitsville* books (*Orbitsville*, 1975, *Orbitsville Departure*, 1983, & *Orbitsville Judgement*, 1990) are without doubt ‘hard’ science fiction but they play what, in *How to Write Science Fiction* (London: Alison and Busby, 1993) he calls the Secret Game (pp75-77). That is, they break a number of scientific laws, but do so with knowing winks to the reader and sufficiently plausible, and typically meticulous, accounts of how



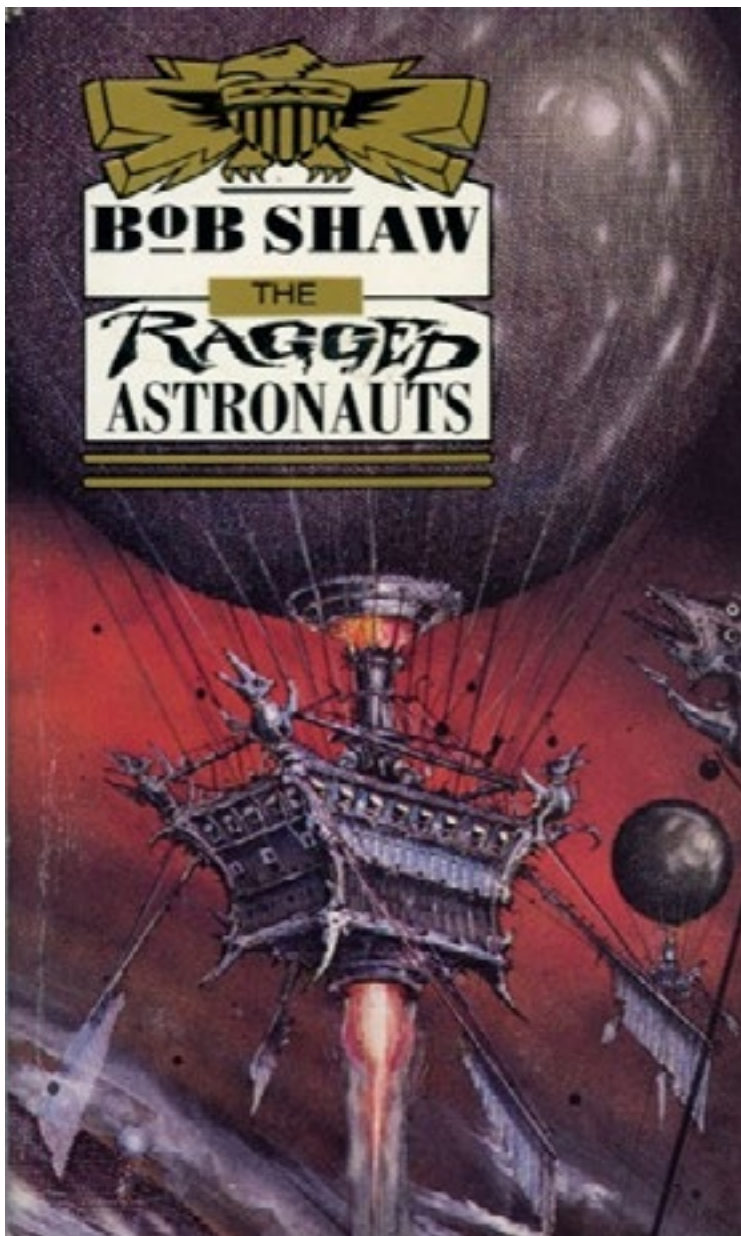
his impossible technologies might work. The starting point for society in these books is a form of monopoly capitalism in which the grotesque Elizabeth Lindstrom, through her ownership of Starflight—the only means of travel between an overcrowded, devastated Earth and the only other habitable planet yet discovered, Terra Nova – exercises autocratic control. The discovery of the enormous structure called Orbitville—‘It was the most insubstantial object imaginable—a film of enigmatic material with a circumference of almost a billion kilometres and a thickness of only eight centimetres’ (*Orbitville Judgement*, London: Gollancz, 1990, pp182-3)—and its massive resources of land lead to her downfall. But rather than this being a cause of celebration, the first volume ends with a glum view of what this means for humanity:

Time is a measurement of change, evolution is a product of competition – concepts which were without meaning or relevance in the context of the Big O. Absolved of the need to fight or flee, to feel hunger or fear, to build or destroy, to hope or to dream, humanity had to cease being human.
Orbitville p141

Having stretched his imagination as far as he could, it's as if Shaw comes to the realization that all he has produced is a super-sized version of the Belfast suburban life from he was trying to escape. *Orbitville* concludes with the re-instatement of the ‘quietness of the last long Sunday ... over an entire region of space’ (*Orbitville*, p142). Shaw, who, as both science fiction writer and practical engineer, is aware of the principle of mediocrity, seems here to be expressing the anxiety that his own background may after all be typical rather than exceptional. In the second volume, *Orbitville Departure*, Shaw deals with this problem by almost completely ignoring the ‘Big O’ as the novel is set largely on an increasingly abandoned Earth and on a spaceflight back to Orbitville. This flight arrives just in time for a moment of transcendence involving the disappearance of Orbitville from the known universe. As a consequence humanity restarts space exploration and the novel ends with the launch of the first space exploration ship in 200 years. In a jokey acknowledgement of the corner into which Shaw has painted himself, *Orbitville Judgement* begins in a complacent market town called Orangefield, its name taken from the part of Belfast where Shaw grew up. We discover that Orbitville had not simply vanished at the end of *Orbitville Departure* but had rather been displaced into an anti-matter universe. The final volume moves towards a reversal of all that has gone before: Orbitville is first broken up into 650 million earth-sized planets, and these are then returned to the known, material universe. This leads to what may, once again, seem to be a rather down-beat ending as Nicklin, the hero of the novel, declares: “‘You can trust work ... Work isn’t fickle. Work never lets you down.’” (*Orbitville Judgement*, p216). Belfast is, however, still the measure of the universe here: the working week is to be preferred to Belfast’s endless, dull Sunday afternoons.

The novels centred on Warren Peace (*Who Goes Here?*, 1977 & *Warren Peace*, 1993) could not be more different. They refer to almost every science fiction cliché one could think of for comic purposes (something that Shaw is more likely to engage with in his stories rather than his novels), delighting equally in knowingly bad puns (such as the central character’s name) and the parody of science fiction tropes. The society in these novels is a militarized one in which disobedience is all but impossible, and yet propaganda is treated with withering disdain. Individual regiments of the Space Legion are privately sponsored so the equipment available to soldiers depends on the profits of the sponsoring businesses: Warren’s first uniform is, therefore, nothing more than a helmet and a cricketer’s box. The faster-than-light flight in the books seems to be based on an inversion of Zeno’s paradox, and time travel is primarily used to stop sweatshop workers taking overly-long toilet breaks. Shaw’s imagination, usually given over to helping the reader’s suspension of disbelief, is largely devoted here to a rapid-fire series of calamities that befall the hapless hero even after he has ceased to be human and become a kind of cosmic supercop. If the Orbitville trilogy places Shaw in the company of, say, Larry Niven and Iain M Banks, then the Warren Peace books align him with Robert Rankin and Douglas Adams.

In the *Ragged Astronauts* sequence (*The Ragged Astronauts*, 1986, *The Wooden Spaceships*, 1988, & *The Fugitive Worlds*, 1989) Shaw moves to a setting more akin to sword and sorcery. His depiction of a society here is organized on feudal and caste lines. It is, nonetheless, a society that develops forms of space flight before it has engaged with metal-working or developed steam power, much less become industrialised. Although we can read these books as being both ecologically-minded (the forced migration of the first novel arises because of an avoidable ecological disaster) and opposed to the power of organized religion (the major social change over the trilogy is the deposition of the priestly caste and the banning of religion), what



really drives them forward is the idea of the quest. Toller Maraquine and later his grandson, Toller Maraquine II, are troubled figures born into privileged but constraining circumstances. They exhibit a restlessness and need for glory unlike almost all of Shaw's other protagonists. However, it is this restlessness that drives the plots and leads to some of Shaw's most meticulously plausible descriptions of a technology centered on hot air balloons and wooden spaceships. (The varnished linen from which the balloons are made and the elaborate rigging they require may well remember that Belfast, prior to its industrialization, was a centre of the linen trade and that the Belfast Ropework Company would become the world's largest ropemakers.) As quests, these books can be read as adventure yarns and as such they have all the prerequisites: an impetuous and swashbuckling hero, sadistically autocratic villains, beautiful maidens, and unrequited love. The always practical Shaw provides hints that this is an alternative universe (conveniently for the 12-fingered Kolcorronians the value of pi is exactly three) but even so there is something radical happening here. Shaw seems determined to imagine how a pre-modern and traditional, almost to the point of stasis, society could produce a technology of space flight. In other words what would science fiction, in the absence of modernity, be like? This trilogy, as the publication dates suggest, represents Shaw's most concerted effort. Compared to the fifteen or sixteen years for his other sequences, this trilogy is published over a three year span and

the conclusion, in which Overland, one of the paired planets on which most of the action is set, is accidentally displaced into another universe seems more like an achieved end point than is the case in the other sequences. Instead of the erasure of *Orbitsville Judgement* or, it has to be said, the diminishing returns of *Warren Peace*, *The Fugitive Worlds* ends with teasing references to Overland now being in the solar system as if Shaw had done all that he could with the imaginative terrain of the Land/Overland system.

The *Orbitsville* and *Ragged Astronaut* trilogies are deeply at odds with each other, with the *Warren Peace* books providing a form of light relief in which the contradictions are presented as comedy. Yes, the universe is wonderful but its wonders are merely the sources of calamity for the hero because, in this case, the principle of mediocrity simply means it is calamity that is universally replicated.

If Shaw saw science fiction as form of escape initially from his dour suburban upbringing and then in turn from the outbreak of political violence in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, it is not completely removed from the society and culture which produced him. Jack Fennell in *Irish Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014) has written on some of the ways in which his work can be seen to engage with the political situation of the North (pp165-170), especially the entrapment within history. Science fiction fandom, like many other sub-cultures that have come under increased scrutiny in recent years, was another of those places that seemed to exist outside the sectarian divisions of Northern Ireland. Even so, Shaw, like many others in the 1970s, saw migration from the North as necessary for the safety of his family. As Fennell points out, many Shaw protagonists simply want to be left alone. Utopias are more likely to be found than created in his work, and have, as *Orbitsville* demonstrates, their own problems. Even so, Shaw's work carries traces of his socio-cultural origins which are worth exploring, not because they can give us access to some

overarching system within his writing but because the oppositions and contradictions they reveal can let us see the parameters within which Shaw worked. They also of course let us see some more of the range of Shaw's work in his many stand-alone novels.

There is an admirably practical side to Shaw. He makes it very clear at the start of *How to Write* that he is proud of the fact that over a forty year career 'I sold every word that I wrote' (p10). In turn, his definition of writing is that it will 'always mean "writing and getting published and receiving money for one's hard work"' (p11) Certainly his output over his career was substantial enough that it is easy to notice his approval of Nicklin's declaration that 'You can trust work'. This approval of the Protestant work ethic comes across in other ways too. Denny Hargate, a central figure in *The Ceres Solution*, is glad to have 'the blessed knowledge that he was putting more into the system than he was taking out' (p38). Many of Shaw's heroes, as others have noted, are loners, often uneasy with domestic life, and most are inventors, engineers and those who can turn their hand to anything. In *Orbitsville Judgement* some of the technology appears to be almost magical but, even so, 'It was a product of greasy-overall engineering, a spanner-and-screwdriver technology, involving a host of control systems—mechanical, electrical, hydraulic—among which a twentieth-century artificer would have felt reasonably at home.' (p206) Even Toller Maraquine, who has turned his back on his philosopher-scientist caste in favour of a military way of life, cannot break free from this practicality. In *The Wooden Spaceships* he travels to the third planet in the system, Farland, which is more technologically advanced than his own society. His glimpses of life through gaps in the canvas cover over the back of the truck in which he is secretly travelling reveal that 'craftsmen everywhere—masons, carpenters, smiths—came up with universal practical solutions to universal practical problems' (p272).

There is a part of Shaw, however, that still wants the universe to be full of wonder. In this regard he jokingly referred to his career as a matter of 'Mammon and the Muses walking hand in hand...' (*How to Write*, p11). The society from which Shaw comes is often stereotyped as one which sees Mammon as a sufficient reward for hard work, but Shaw's writing counters this limited view by, in the first instance, often relying on poetry. References to individual poems and poets pepper his work to the extent that one comes to look for the poetic reference which Shaw often uses to provide the emotional shape of his narrative. In an early novel, *The Two-Timers* (London: Gollancz, 1969) which is about time travel and alternative worlds (and contains a crime narrative as well) he rather overdoes this. The novel contains references to Oscar Wilde, Swinburne, Hildegard of Bingen, and James Elroy Flecker. Flecker re-appears in *Orbitsville* (p94) when his *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* is quoted to provide perhaps the most benign account of Shaw's endless Sunday afternoon:

... that calm Sunday that goes on and on:
When even lovers find their peace at last,
And Earth is but a star, that once had shone.

The best instance of this kind of quotation in Shaw's work is in *Other Days, Other Eyes* (London: Gollancz, 1972), which contains his most famous invention, slow glass. The first of three 'sidelights' to the main narrative is the story in which slow glass made its first appearance *The Light of Other Days*, its title taken from nineteenth century Irish poet Thomas Moore's *Oft in the Stilly Night*. In *How to Write* (pp58-63), Shaw explains just how long it took him to get from the original idea to a story which would be a satisfactory vehicle for it. He also explains that by making a poet, Garland, his central figure and having him quote from Moore's poem he was able to avoid having to explain how slow glass worked. Of course he was also able to invoke the poem's languorous melancholy in that initial story. But in the novel as a whole this nostalgia gives way to a deepening sense of the consequences of slow glass, just as the poem shifts to a sense of being trapped in the past and ultimately to an obsession with death.

If this provides an example of how Shaw can make use of an individual poem it does not exhaust Shaw's interest in literature and culture. One of the consequences of the panicked conditions in which the migration from Land to Overland happened was that no books or paintings were taken with them. In *The Wooden Spaceships* Toller at one point finds Berise Narrinder, a female Skycaptain, sketching, and she explains that she thinks everyone on Overland has a duty to explore their artistic natures: 'A race needs an armature of culture to support every other aspect of its being, and we no longer have one.' This absence explains why Overland feels empty. This is an important enough point for Shaw to repeat it in *The Fugitive Worlds* (p73). He

has also provided other instances of a similar situation. In *Fire Pattern* (London: Gollancz, 1984) we are told that for a group which has been transplanted from Earth to Mercury:

Recreation of former lives was an almost universal pastime ... In one form of the pursuit, a group who had common knowledge of a place on Earth would spend many hours drawing a wall-sized picture of it, filling in a wealth of detail, arguing pleasurably over the exact wording of a store sign or the shape of a light pole. (p132)

Shaw's fullest account of the importance to be placed on a full and rich culture appears in *The Palace of Eternity* (London: Gollancz, 1970). In this novel humanity is under attack from the Syccans, whose only aim seems to be complete annihilation. The central figure of the novel, Tavernor, has escaped from his past as a childhood survivor of a Syccan attack. This is followed by a stint in the military and a period as a weapons designer to the planet Cerulea, unofficially referred to as Mnemosyne because it has become an artists' colony. Tavernor makes his living as a handyman and is initially at odds with the artists who dominate the society. However as the novel progresses Tavernor allies himself with the artists against the military and is eventually killed. In Part 2 he is reborn as an Egon, a cloud-like consciousness into which all life turns after bodily death. These beings then gather around their home worlds in a cloud of accumulated consciousness. Although this cannot normally be accessed by humanity in its physical state there are certain circumstances, such as artistic inspiration, which can draw on this species genius. Egons, though potentially eternal, can be killed, specifically by the wings of Federation spaceships. Mnemosyne, surrounded by the fragments of a long-past collision of the planet's two moons, has therefore become an artists' world because it is the one place that spaceships cannot operate. The paradox is that the Syccan animus against humanity is caused by this human destruction of vast swathes of its accumulated consciousness which is the very thing that humanity needs to draw on for its defense. Shaw, the technically-minded 'hard' science fiction writer, begins to blur at a moment such as this.

While much we have so far considered links Shaw's work to the history of Belfast's industrial science fiction, this is a moment when CS Lewis comes back into the account. Both the *The Palace of Eternity* and *The Ceres Solution* have instances of what could be called silenced planets, like Earth in Lewis's trilogy. This similarity does not survive much scrutiny but it does lead us to those areas of Shaw's work in which cosmology, or even metaphysics, come into play. I've already noted that Shaw has little time for organized religion, and reference to two characters reinforces this. In *Orbitsville Judgement* much of the plot is driven by the actions of Corey Montane who believes that Orbitsville is the work of the Devil and founds an evangelical cult. Similarly, in *The Wooden Spaceships*, Jop Trinchil is the leader of his own religion which he runs through 'raw force of personality' (p38). No Northern Irish reader can, I think, escape what seem in both cases to be disapproving references to Ian Paisley.

Shaw's work still exhibits a consistent concern with metaphysical matters. Forms of telepathy appear in many of his novels and are often linked to creatures like *The Palace of Eternity's* Egons. In *Orbitsville Departure* the Ultans are beings of pure mind while in *Orbitsville Judgement* there is an intelligent being which is actually a sentient Galaxy. Shaw proposes the theory of mindons, that mind is part of the material universe and a force within it. Similar matters are also raised in *The Ceres Solution* in which the Mollanians travel along lines of influence which they can 'skry' between 'nodes'. Something similar was already present in Shaw's first published story. Aspect, which appeared in *Nebula* in August 1954.

The most consistent working out of these ideas appears in *A Wreath of Stars* (1976), probably Shaw's finest single novel. Its central figure is another of his solitary handyman heroes, Gilbert Snook, 'the human neutrino' (p146). His name is appropriate to a comic character, and, like Warren Peace, he is a fool of the universe, hurled hither and yon by arbitrary calamity. The appearance of Thornton's World, an anti-neutrino planet, 'a kind of ghost world' (p151), 'just as real as the Earth, but at the same time ... less real than a rainbow' (p157) forces Gilbert to confront 'the idea of two separate realities' (p156). Another anti-neutrino world, named Avernus, is then discovered inside the Earth. Gilbert, who turns out to be telepathic, is able to communicate with Felleth who learns from him that Avernus, having already suffered tidal waves because of Thornton's Planet, faces inevitable destruction. The Avernian proposal to transfer from their world to Earth is turned down, but Gilbert is forced to transfer to Avernus. The discovery is eventually made that the predictions of the destruction of Avernus are wrong. We leave Gilbert finally being accepted by the Avernians and with the promise that transfer between the worlds may become easier. In the midst of all of this we learn

that the Avernian greeting 'deep peace of the running wave' is 'the first line of a traditional Celtic blessing' (p229). While such attributions are always dubious, this does point us to a deep narrative structure for Shaw's more metaphysical concerns. The poet Paul Muldoon has written about Irish literature in ways that are remarkably applicable to Shaw's work:

This idea of there being a contiguous world, a world coterminal with our own, into and out of which some may move ... might be traced back to the overthrow of the Tuatha Dé Danaan by the Milesians, for ... the Tuatha Dé Danaan are literally driven underground ... They are made invisible by virtue of the *féth fiáda* ... the magic mist ... that hangs about them ... crossing over, into a fairy realm ... usually involves some kind of time warp. The idea of a parallel universe ... offers an escape clause, to a people from under whose feet the rug is constantly being pulled ... some deep-seated sense of liminality ... was, and is, central to the Irish psyche. (*To Ireland, I*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000, pp7-8)

The discovery of Utopia in the Orbitville novels leads back ultimately only to Belfast suburbia, and the quest of both Toller Maraquines ends, as quests do, with a homecoming to 'that cosy solar system [which when I was young] was more familiar to me, and more dear, than the geography of my native Northern Ireland' as Shaw puts it in *How to Write* (p74). This does not stop Shaw from sending his imagination ever outwards in search of the wonders of the universe. It's for this reason that if I have a favourite Shaw character it is the comparatively minor figure of Blaize Convery in *The Two-Timers*. He is introduced to us as a policeman who simply cannot let unsolved cases go. As readers we know that he is right about murder being part of what he's dealing with, but in order to solve the case he would have to know about time travel and parallel worlds theory. A crime writer could well have developed him as a series detective, but in Shaw's hands he stands instead almost as an emblem. He is the ordinary hard-working man, observant, clever, intuitive and empathetic who will doggedly pursue a problem until he finds incontrovertible proof that it is insoluble. If Toller Maraquine has the imaginative reach to want to see all that his universe has to offer, he also has the privileged background that allows him to exercise that reach. Convery is a more typical Shaw hero: overmastered by the strangeness of the universe, but also ultimately undeterred by it.

11x11 or Women In Comics Part II

In the May 1981 issue of the *Society of Strip Illustration Newsletter* there was a Q&A feature, where the then editor, David Lloyd, asked five, inevitably male, comics writers of the time the same seven questions, in an attempt to get an overview of their impressions of the business at the time. It was a good format then, so it should still be a good format now. So, what we did was, we asked eleven women working in different ends of the world of comics eleven fairly broad questions, to see what *their* opinion of the field is. These are their answers...



Heroes Unlimited: Where and when were you born, and where do you live now?

Karen Green: I was born in Jackson, Michigan, in 1958. We moved east in 1969, and I've lived in New York City since 1978.

Melanie Gibson: I was born in Sunderland, in the North-East of England, in 1963. After a long series of moves around England, Wales, and the North of Ireland, I now live back in the North-East, in South Shields.

Hannah Means-Shannon: At the risk of sounding overly anxious, I actually give out very little information of this kind in a public forum. An over-arching reason is that most of this kind of info is used for online security and opens one up to hacking. As someone who's received unwanted online attention connected to fandom, and someone who's been threatened with doxxing, I post as little personal info as I can. These are weird times, since, by contrast, I have no problem telling people what kind of milkshake I'm drinking from day to day. But I work online, so I accept these situations and try to be smart about them.

Annie Parkhouse: I was born in Rye, in Sussex, but moved to Carlisle when I was about 2. My mother's family lived here.

Kate Charlesworth: Barnsley, South Yorkshire; Edinburgh.

Maggie Gray: I'm a Londoner—born, raised, and somehow clinging on. I was born way back in 1983 and for some perverted reason my parents decided to call me Maggie.

Suzu Varty: I was born in Gateshead, in what was then County Durham, just over the river from Newcastle upon Tyne, in February 1949.

One of my early memories from those days in Herbert Street was when they were putting electricity in the street. I would have been 3. The cable spools were enormous, and the workmen dug trenches down the middle of the pavement to install cables. I have a strong memory of holding a Superman comic whilst watching the workman screw in the light switch and demonstrate the new lighting. Magical!

I live in Jesmond again now, a Newcastle suburb I first moved to when I was 17, after me mam died. Went to Birmingham in 1970 with my daughter and husband. Came home in 1984 to live in Gosforth for many years, and the last 15, here in Jesmond Vale. Green, beautiful, with acres of parks and a river at the bottom of this Edwardian Terrace. Only 20 mins of walking, or 5 mins on the bus—with my trusty bus pass—into town. Great neighbours, loads of arty stuff going on nearby. Seaside 25 mins away. Northumberland, Cumbria, Edinburgh on the doorstep. You can keep your London!

Mary Talbot: I was born in the Lancashire mill and mining town of Wigan, in the mid-fifties, when the coal and cotton industries were both still going strong. Haven't lived there since the early seventies.

Nora Goldberg: I was born in Chicago and now live in London.

Sarah McIntyre: I was born in Seattle, in the USA, and I've been living in South London for nearly 20 years.

Maura McHugh: I was born in the USA, and I live in Galway, Ireland, now.



Heroes Unlimited: What's your connection to the world of comics?

Karen Green: I created and maintain the graphic novels collection at Columbia University, and for the past seven years I've also been collecting comics-related archives (creators, editors, publishers, etc). In 2016, I was made Columbia's first ever Curator for Comics and Cartoons, and moved into the Rare Book & Manuscript Library. I've written a monthly column called 'Comic Adventures in Academia,' as well as forewords to three books; co-produced the documentary *She Makes Comics*, teach a summer course on close-reading comics, and spoken about comics all over the world.

Melanie Gibson: I'm an academic who writes about comics and someone who has been involved in some comics practice initiatives, such as setting up the Comics Laureate role. I have also been involved in the British Comic Awards and various conventions/festivals including Thought Bubble, Wonderlands and LICAF [Lakes International Comic Art Festival].

At one point I used funding from a National Teaching Fellowship Award I was given to support the development of academic comic conferences such as Comics Forum, which is linked with Thought Bubble in Leeds.

I'm seen, much to my amazement, as one of the initiators of comics scholarship in Britain.

Hannah Means-Shannon: I started writing about comics as an academic about 7 years ago, and for the past 6 years or so have worked in comics-related fields as a journalist, editor of journalism, and editor of comics.

Annie Parkhouse: I'm a balloon letterer, and have done a little bit of everything during the 48 years I have been in the business. Sometimes it's a bit 'all hands to the pump' when something needs doing.

Kate Charlesworth: Crossed over from illustration via Women's and Lesbian & Gay (no LGBT acronym back then) cartooning to Comics in the '80s—invited to contribute to Don Melia's *Strip Aids* anthology—comic book in response to misinformed/hateful attitudes of media.

Maggie Gray: I guess my connection is that I research and write about comics—I'm an academic working in the broad field of comics studies, from an art & design history perspective. I'm particularly interested in the history and politics of UK comics, and did a PhD on Alan Moore's early work. That eventually became a book focused on the very earliest strips that he drew himself (while also being a poet, musician, playwright, illustrator etc), called *Alan Moore, Out from the Underground: Cartooning, Performance and Dissent*, published by Palgrave.

Suzy Varty: I've been aware of and exposed to the medium of comics all of my life. I read stories in comic book form, and the vocabulary and shorthand of that world feels comfortable to me.

I was part of an underground magazine when I first moved to Birmingham in 1970, where we published fellow Geordie Hunt Emerson's comics for the first time, Hunt and I both went on to be closely involved in Birmingham Arts Lab in the 70s and early 80s. Hunt became the designer at the Lab before it moved into town. A small shop was part of new premises for the Arts Lab in Costa Green, and Hunt, Martin, and Dave the print set the shop up, and Hunt began to produce comics under the Ar:Zak imprint. I was the token woman in Ar:Zak, contributing to the comics from the beginning.

I was also involved in a women's art network in the 70s, and helped produce a magazine which was printed by the press, and the lads suggested I do a women's comic. Tricky in 1976, cos there weren't many female comic artists around at the time, but I managed to get enough contributions to produce *Heröine*, which was the first British women's comic. I also did the first micro-comic, based on a little A6 book I'd made. We couldn't afford to die cut the hearts from the 4th page, so I hand cut 1,000 hearts from the flat printed sheets before collation, breaking only one, so I still have a paper bag of 999 black & red hearts here in my studio...

Heröine was ready in time to be sold at the Women's Liberation Conference in Ladywood in Birmingham, Claire Short's constituency. The plenary session was concerned with insistence that the only way to be a feminist was to be a political lesbian. This was heavily opposed and the running battles up and down the Ladywood ensured that this was the last Women's Lib Conference.

I did comics for Wimmin's Comix, Kitchen Sink Comics in USA and contributed to the Knockabout women's imprint, *Fanny*, here in England as well as Sourcream Comics, and in Suuri Kurpitsa in Finland. I have had work exhibited at the Comics Art Gallery in New York, Cartoon Art Gallery in SF and the Amos Anderson Art Museum in Helsinki. Trina Robbins has me in the history books she's written—*Women & the Comics* and *From Girls to Girlz*—as the mother of the First British Women's comic.

I have been Artist in Residence 18 times since 1999, using the comics medium in many ways in loads of different settings.

I have made soft books & banners, a comic on a billboard for Tyne & Wear Development Corporation. I was Festival Director of Newcastle International Comic Festival for Visual Arts Year 1996. I have contributed cartoons for several books—I contributed to *Nelson*, which won an Eisner for best anthology in 2013, as well as the Book of the Year Award at the British Comics Awards. Arts Council England have awarded me travel bursaries to travel to Russia and Comicon's 40th anniversary in San Diego.

Nora Goldberg: I work as a book and merchandise buyer for Gosh Comics. I work for publisher Knockabout Comics, and do freelance work for comic publishers. I run a website called Books2Screen.

Sarah McIntyre: When I started out, I was trying to get into illustrating children's picture books, and studying MA Illustration at Camberwell College of Arts. Comic artist Ellen Lindner was on my course, and got me making comics and posting them on LiveJournal. Eventually I started meeting up with other people in comics, making mini comics and going to events. At one of them, I met Paul Gravett, who hooked me up with David Fickling, and that started me making a weekly strip, Vern & Lettuce, for *The DFC* (which is now *The*

Phoenix Comic). David also commissioned me to illustrate a picture book at the same time, so I owe Paul a big debt of gratitude.

Maura McHugh: I've been reading comics all my life, and I've written a number of titles for a variety of publishers, the most recent was a Judge Anderson story for *2000 AD*.



Heroes Unlimited: How did you first discover comics?

Karen Green: I think it depends on how you define 'comics.' First came newspaper strips and gag cartoons in *The New Yorker*; then my brother's *MAD* magazines. There were also Bible comics at my pediatrician's office. But my real immersion came when I got braces on my teeth, and discovered the hundreds of *Archie* comics my orthodontist kept stocked in his office.

Melanie Gibson: They were amongst my first reading. I read a lot of annuals as a child (*School Friend* along with *Girl*). My mum was very young when I was born in 1963, and we both lived with her mother, so my first reading experiences came from those annuals of the 1950s, plus *Teddy Tail* and *Rupert Bear*.

When my dad was on visits home, he used to bring me DC comics. *Flash*, *Batman*, and *Justice*

League, plus *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* were favourites in the 1960s and into the 1970s. In the 1970s my school library had a lot of *Lucky Luke*, *Asterix* and *Tintin* and one of my dad's friends used to buy me Franco-Belgian albums. I got into the *X-Men* in mid-70s and went all Marvel. Slowly got familiar with books beyond the mainstream in the 1970s and then, when Vertigo appeared, got very much into that.

I also met some interesting views for liking comics. On taking a *Batman* comic into infant school as my favourite reading (aged 5 or 6) I was told by my teacher to 'go home and get a proper book' which cemented a sense of injustice regarding the medium very early on.

I was also known as 'the girl' in one comic shop I used, as I was, apparently, distinctive in being female.

I had a partner, for a while, who didn't like me reading comics any more than they liked me listening to metal (unfeminine, improper).

Plus, was thrown out of one feminist group for liking superhero comics.

All of this served to make me very aware about gender in relation to comics, and in comics.

Hannah Means-Shannon: Like many people, I had a kind of 'passive' relationship with comics growing up in that they were around the house and part of the pool of reading shared by my siblings and I. I took them for granted as interesting but didn't really seek them out religiously. Due to my academic studies as a medieval scholar particularly focusing on the phenomenon of hero worship, I came across scholars studying comics as an adult and what started as academic research soon grabbed my attention as a reader and a fan.

Annie Parkhouse: Every year, when I was a kid, I used to spend the summer holidays at a caravan park on the coast. There was a gang of us about the same age who used to share comics. The mother of a friend used to buy American superhero comics for us. At home I read *Rupert* annuals and *Beezer*. Another friend had *Topper*.

Kate Charlesworth: *Beano*, *Bunty*—then, a teenager recovering from pneumonia, someone gave me half dozen DC Comics.

Maggie Gray: I was addicted to the *Beano* as a kid. I wanted to be a Bash Street Kid, although I was probably

more like Walter the Softy. That was followed by the wilderness years of *Bunty* and the *Just Seventeen* photo-strips—by the time I was growing up the great UK girls comics tradition was in its death throes. Then I borrowed my brother's *Preacher* and got hooked again, only this time I wanted to be Tulip.

“I recall tiny B/W Ruperts by Alfred Bestall. I adored the three kinds of reading that went on in these stories. The drawings set the scene magically, the rhymes were fun, and the narrative below added the rest. Clever.”

Suzy Varty: I had Mary Mouse books as a child. Cheque book format, black plus a colour, 3 frames per page, lovely drawings, but I think they were small stories, rather than 3 framers with a punch line.

I always had *Rupert* annuals, and perhaps we took the *Daily Express*, cos I recall tiny B/W Ruperts by Alfred Bestall. I adored the three kinds of reading that went on in these stories. The drawings set the scene magically, the rhymes were fun, and the narrative below added the rest. Clever. I so loved the variety and ethnicity of Rupert's friends, and he had great adventures. I had Superman comics early on. They came into the Tyne as ballast on the ships from USA, I understand.

The *Beano* was a big part of my comics life, along with Rupert, The Broons, Oor Wullie, the *Dandy*, with an occasional *Beezer*.

I was always keen on making my own comics, writing the stories, drawing and making little books, stitched together as I still often do...

Later, it was glossy comics like *Eagle*, aimed solidly at boys, but still good, followed by *Girl*, which was v jolly! *Bunty* was a highlight of the week. I especially loved the paper dolls on the back of the comic.

Teenage girls were then directed towards magazines. I remember *Honey* starting in the mid-60s and *Jackie*, with its photo stories. Later, I was into comics like *Conan the Barbarian* and other mainstream titles for a while.

We had the *Beano* again when my daughter was young, and the early underground comics felt like coming home to me. There were UGs coming out of London with cartoonists like Chris Welch, Ed Barker, Savage Pencil, and UGs from California by Crumb, Shelton and then *Wimmin's Comix*!

Trina Robbins had stayed with me in 1977 & contributed to *Heröine*, the women's comic I produced at the Arts Lab Press in Birmingham, and I met lots of women comic artists when I visited Trina in 1978 in San Francisco. Lee Marrs, Sharon Rudahl, Caryn Leschen, et al.

Mary Talbot: Like most people my age, really. I used to read *Bunty* at home, as well as my brother's *Eagle*. At the neighbours', across 'the backs,' I enjoyed their *Beano* and *Topper*, and maybe *Dandy* too. Later, Bryan introduced me to Peter Parker and his Aunt May (i.e. Spider-man).

Nora Goldberg: I have a strong memory of this huge wicker chest my grandparents had in their flat. Inside were piles of paperback kids albums (French comics). It was my treasure chest. I would read *Spirou*, *Spike and Suzy*, *Lucky Luke*, and *Tintin*.

Sarah McIntyre: As a kid, my whole family read them in the funnies section of *The Seattle Times*. (Full colour on Sundays!) And I always pestered my mother to buy me *Archie* comics at the supermarket checkout. My favourite comics then were *Calvin & Hobbes* and *For Better or For Worse*.

Maura McHugh: In small town pre-Internet Ireland, prior to specialised comics shops, you got British comics from the newsagents. My first comics were the likes of *The Beano* (Minnie the Minx and The Bash Street Kids were my favourites), and later, *2000 AD*. I started reading American comics more regularly when I lived in the USA. The series that prompted me to start seriously collecting comics again was *The Invisibles* by Grant Morrison.

Heroes Unlimited: How did you get started in comics?

Karen Green: I'd been reading various kinds of comics throughout my life, with probably the most influential being my subscription to *Heavy Metal* in the 1980s, where I discovered European comics. Then I had a 12-year drought while I did my BA, MA/MPhil, and MLS; when I came out on the other side, I wondered what was happening in comics, and discovered the explosion of graphic novels. When my desire to read them finally outstripped my ability to pay for them, I convinced the Columbia University Libraries to let me begin a collection in our stacks (I came up with less selfish arguments for it, though).

Melanie Gibson: I worked as a librarian in the 1980s and 1990s before becoming an academic and was puzzled by the lack of graphic novels in libraries. I got involved with changing the profession's perspectives, with piloting collections for young adults in the very early 1990s, and then was involved in writing the Youth Libraries Group publication *Graphic Account* in 1993, which talked about developing collections for 16-25 year olds. It was youth libraries which were the breakthrough point, hence lots of collections for young adults came first. It took longer to get folk convinced about collections in adult libraries. Long, slow, process of change.

I started to get hired to run training for staff in library services and schools, and then for colleges, plus did a lot of public events promoting the whole medium. This meant I needed to read everything I could lay my hands on, fab, good, bad, or indifferent. Both sets of events relied on me carrying a collection of 50-70 books with me. This was especially important for library services tied in to contracts with a single supplier, as if they could say they had seen material in enough quantities that library suppliers didn't stock, then they could go to a specialist instead.

Hannah Means-Shannon: I attended some workshops on writing and editing comics, where I met people who made comics for a living and I went to a couple of book launches. While attending one, I was asked if I might write an article about the event afterward to be published online, which was a big first for me. I'd never written anything journalistically before, but I gave it a try. Due to the nature of the internet, and whatever other factors are beyond my knowledge, the article went 'viral' overnight and I woke up with a number of people asking me to write more about comics events. That led to writing reviews and taking a bigger interest in editing comics, eventually, too. Professionally, that's included writing for online sites TripCity.net and The Comics Beat, then working as editor-in-chief at BleedingCool.com, acting as an editor at Dark Horse Comics, and currently running Comicon.com and editing comics for a couple of different outlets.

Annie Parkhouse: I'd finished my 'A' levels and was looking for a job. My mother worked for a local printworks who printed many of the IPC comics. (They also printed *Oz* and Scientology books.) The managing director took me to London with him to meet some of the editors. I was offered a job on *Boys' Juveniles*, even though, at 19 I was considered too old. Most people began at 16 as post boys or girls. Initially I worked on production, making sure that artwork was print ready, correct and clean. That's when I had to learn different styles of lettering to make corrections. I started on *Lion*, then *Jet*, *Thunder* and *Valiant*. Eventually I was doing so much lettering on top of the day job I had to leave or be burned out.



Kate Charlesworth: See above. Then there was Alan Moore's *AARGH*—Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia—and after that, Carol Bennett's and Cath Tate's imprint published by Knockabout—the 'Fanny' comics. I contributed to some and (nominally) edited the two 'Dyke's Delight' issues.

“so it was either William Blake or comics, and I went with comics.”

Maggie Gray: In terms of writing about comics, it started at uni when I had to write my final year dissertation. I was studying a combined English and Art History degree and it had to be a 'bridge' between the two—so it was either William Blake or comics, and I went with comics. I wrote about *Sandman*, the 1980s 'adult revolution', and why the term graphic novel is shite. It was a lot of fun—especially getting in a rickety bus across the Yorkshire countryside to go to the British Library depot at Boston Spa and read obscure books about comics. I decided to keep going from there and worked on superheroes and the early Cold War for my MA. And somehow that turned into 10 years of researching and writing about Alan Moore...

Mary Talbot: A few years ago, I took early retirement from academia. I've been married to Bryan Talbot, the graphic novel pioneer, for a very long time, though we'd never really worked together professionally. One evening, after a glass or two of wine, he suggested that I have a go at writing a graphic memoir, that he would illustrate. I've been writing for graphic novels ever since. That graphic memoir, *Dotter of her Father's Eyes*, went on to become the only British GN to receive a major literary award, so I guess I got something right.

Nora Goldberg: I always read comics as a child, a combination of classic French comics and Archie comics. I knew I wanted to go into publishing, and had rediscovered comics in university when I had started looking for work. Thankfully I was able to get an internship with a comics publisher, as well as working in a bookshop managing the graphic novel section.

Sarah McIntyre: I think the first comics I made were hourly comics and travel comics. But my strip for *The DFC* was the first time I was paid for it.

Maura McHugh: It's quite simple: I was chatting to Rob Curley of Atomic Diner Comics one day, and he asked if I was interested in writing one of his titles, *Róisín Dubh*.



Heroes Unlimited: Did you always know you wanted to work in comics?

KAREN GREEN: I'm still not 100% convinced that I DO work in comics, but, no, I never envisioned that I would end up here.

Melanie Gibson: I never dreamt that I could work in the field. I had no idea what I wanted to do as a kid, well, except for knowing that I didn't want to be a teacher (see above).

Hannah Means-Shannon: Not at all, though I've been a self-professed writer from a very young age and have always found books to be incredibly important in my life. I think it was a matter of finding out more about myself creatively that allowed comics to really impact me as an adult and choose comics as the creative field I wanted to be most involved in.

Annie Parkhouse: No. It was an opportunity which arose, though I knew I wanted to work in the arts.

Kate Charlesworth: No, it had never occurred to me. As I couldn't draw as well as Curt Swan it was obviously impossible. (I was barely 15).

Maggie Gray: Not really. I did art at A-level and wanted to be an artist, but decided to study art history first to find out what that meant (I'm still trying). But as soon as I found out there was such a thing as comics scholarship and met others in that academic community (who are all lovely and brilliant), I felt that was the kind of work I wanted to keep doing.

Suzy Varty: I knew I felt comfortable with the medium, and I was lucky to live through a time when we could invent & instigate if we so desired. I was never drawn to the mainstream of comics and its working practices, so working the way I have has been great.

Mary Talbot: No, not at all. One person with precarious earnings was enough. I wanted to earn a good salary!

Nora Goldberg: No! I always loved books, but I never thought it could be a job. I think when I was little I wanted to be Jacques Cousteau.

Sarah McIntyre: No, I thought every comic had to have a funny punchline, and I could never think of them. I didn't realise comics could be in a lot of different genre and didn't always have to be funny.

Maura McHugh: When I was a kid I couldn't even envision that you could become a comic book writer. Once I began writing regularly it became an ambition of mine, but initially I concentrated on prose and screenwriting.



Heroes Unlimited: Do you have a favourite genre in comics?

Karen Green: I don't, really. I don't favor superheroes, particularly. But I like anything that's smartly written and beautifully drawn.

Melanie Gibson: Nope, but I do like the new comics for kids and teens, across genre, a lot. Everything from *Phoenix*-related titles, *Lumberjanes* and *Ms Marvel* to Tillie Walden's *Spinning*.

I still read everything I can lay my mitts on/afford, just to keep up. I usually buy ShortBox for instance, as it brings me new experiences as well as reinforcing some favourites.

Hannah Means-Shannon: As a reader I'm particularly drawn to horror, science-fiction, and noir elements, though due to my academic background I find superhero comics really fascinating as well.

Annie Parkhouse: No. I've worked on pretty well everything. Advertising, children's, girlie mags. The quality of writing and artwork, rather than genre are important to me.

Kate Charlesworth: Not really. Indie comics... Wit, style...

Maggie Gray: I'm too indecisive to have a favourite genre and I'm pretty broad in my comics tastes. For the last few years I've been bingeing on gekiga manga—all the work by people like Yoshihiro Tatsumi, Shigeru Mizuki, Tadao Tsuge etc. that Drawn & Quarterly have been publishing, along with Breakdown Press's translations of artists like Katsumata Susumu and Sasaki Maki. After xmas I also gorged on the whole Dark Horse run of *Usagi Yojimbo* in the Saga editions, so I'm clearly in a Japan-related comics phase. Space Usagi in the last volume, *Legends*, is the shit! Therefore if I *have* to choose a genre I'm going for anthropomorphic rabbit samurai in space.

Suzy Varty: I love the curious way that comics and 'serious' subjects marry so well. I love the educational possibilities of comics. I love autobiographies in comics.

Mary Talbot: I don't think so, but I have to like the style of the illustration. I do like beautiful books, whatever they're about.

Nora Goldberg: I have really eclectic taste when it comes to reading. I always want to give everything a chance. It's more of a question of what I don't read. I usually gravitate towards political, history, genre, and queer comics.

Sarah McIntyre: *Calvin & Hobbes* are still my favourites, but no, I don't really have a favourite genre; I like reading whatever looks interesting.

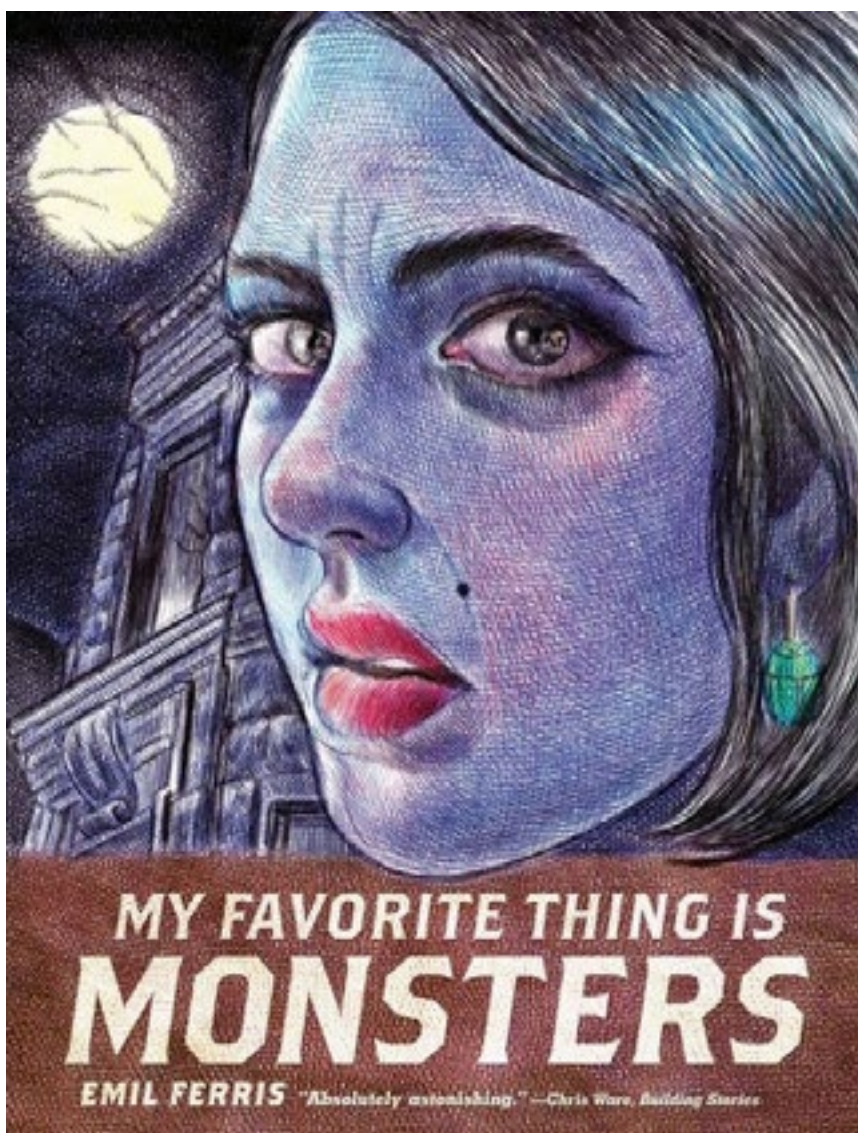
Maura McHugh: I'm an omnivore when it comes to comics: I like everything in the medium, and I aim to read widely across publishers and countries. I'll always have a soft spot for anything horror-related, as that's my favourite genre across all media.

Heroes Unlimited: Who was the most recent creator you were excited to meet?

Karen Green: Lewis Trondheim! I got to interview him and his wife, Brigitte Findakly, at San Diego Comic-Con, for their Spotlight Panel. Thrilling!!

Melanie Gibson: I'm always excited to meet a creator. I was working in a school last week and got to catch up a bit with Graham Dury of *Viz*, who is a lovely guy.

Hannah Means-Shannon: A couple of months ago, I trawled through the gigantic artist's alley at Emerald City Comic Con to find Kyle Starks, who is both a writer and cartoonist, responsible for the Image series *Rock Candy Mountain* and *Sex Castle* and the Oni Press graphic novel *Kill Them All*. Starks is an amazing comedic composer of dialog and fight scenes that leads to just dazzling work. I usually find I've met a good number of comic creators in passing, but I had never met him, so was very pleased to



chat with him and have my book signed. I found him to be even more hard-working and dedicated to comics than I might have imagined, and though creators differ in their approaches to their work, I found that he had a very specific vision and goal for each of his projects. In other words, I got the feeling that everything he did was carefully composed and therefore even more impressive.

Annie Parkhouse: Meeting Ian Kennedy was a thrill, and what a lovely man. It was fantastic to meet Simon Fraser and Robbie Morrison. I'd lettered Nikolai Dante for 15 years, but never met them.

Kate Charlesworth: I was thrilled to meet Joe Sacco a few years ago—and I've been delighted to meet loads more since.

Maggie Gray: I teach critical & historical studies to BA Illustration Animation students at Kingston University, where a colleague—illustrator / ceramicist / comics artist / legend Nick White—set up a Kingston School of Art Comic Club, that I help run (ksacomicclub.tumblr.com). Recently Sarah Lippett (crayonlegs.com) came to talk to us about her work, including her brilliant comic *Stan and Nan* about her grandparents, as well as her next book *A Puff of Smoke* which looks amazing. That was really exciting!

Suzy Varty: Not meet, cos I've met her several times, briefly, but I spent time with Posy Simmonds at Thought Bubble and Wonderlands. Lovely, also, to meet Rachael Smith, who is doing a good variety of work.

I was excited to meet the Hernandez brothers in Angoulême, Spain Rodriguez in USA, Gilbert Shelton & Robert Crumb, Chris Welch.

Most pleased to have met and spent time with my fave poet, Yevtushenko...

Mary Talbot: It was a pleasure to meet Pénélope Bagieu recently. Bryan and I appeared with her at an event at the Institut français in London. Her collections called *Culottées* have just come out in one volume in English as *Brazen*.

Nora Goldberg: I very luckily end up meeting so many creators because of my work. I very randomly end up touring around an exhibition with François Boucq and his wife. They were both so lovely, and funny. I really admire his talent.

Sarah McIntyre: Perhaps Boulet? I love some of his online experimental stuff and sketches.

Maura McHugh: Two of the most recent would have been Gail Simone and Chris Claremont. I also had the privilege to interview Posy Simmonds at Thought Bubble a few years ago, and she was wonderful.



Heroes Unlimited: What's the best new comic work you've read recently?

Karen Green: Given the accolades it's gotten, it seems pretty tired to say that it's *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*, but it's SO GOOD. I also very much liked the first collected volume of Tom King's and Gabriel H. Walta's *The Vision*.

Melanie Gibson: *Beneath the Dead Oak Tree* by Emily Carroll and Viv Schwarz's *Cat & Bag* via ShortBox. I really liked *The Park Bench* by Chaboute (Thanks, Page 45).

Hannah Means-Shannon: *Skyward* is a fabulous newer comic from Image Comics by writer Joe Henderson, who has also been the showrunner on the TV show *Lucifer*, and artist Lee Garbet. They posit a world with extremely reduced gravity and this leads to stunning visuals and very interesting plot complications. Likewise the all-ages comic *Lucy Dreaming* from Boom! Studios by writer

“It goes to show you can make comics about anything and literally everything.”

and musician Max Bemis and artist Michael Dialynas of the long-running series *The Woods* really surprised me with its use of humor and seriousness in approaching a youthful character. The story is particularly dynamic because it deals with the underlying tropes of storytelling, since the main character Lucy inhabits the kind of collective unconsciousness of stories each night, inhabiting heroines in adventure stories, before waking and having to be a 12 year old again. Bemis' writing is also very funny and insightful.

Annie Parkhouse: I have a soft spot for *Survival Geeks*. It's so light-hearted after all the death and destruction. That's why I loved Nikolai Dante too. Neil Gooze draws it beautifully. [Both published in *2000 AD*-- HU]

Kate Charlesworth: I loved Rob Davis's *The Motherless Oven* when it came out, and I've still not read the sequel. Looking forward to Hannah Berry's *Livestock* too.

Maggie Gray: I don't keep up with new releases as much as I used to—*Saga* is the only thing I still collect in singles. The best comic I read last week was actually made by one of the graduating Kingston Illustration Animation students this year, Joe Brooke (joebrookedraws.com). It's called *Ôrcshir'* and is about a young orc who has to undertake a traditional initiation trial of strength. The wider themes are really timely, the world building is rich in detail, and he's got a great eye for using scale on the page for dramatic effect—definitely one to watch.

Another comic I read recently that blew my mind was Jens Harder's *ALPHA ...directions*. It's a few years old (and a lot older in the original French edition) but I picked it up because I was reviewing Thierry Groensteen's book *The Expanding Art of Comics*, which discusses it in detail. It's the first volume of a work that will eventually cover the entire history of the universe to the present day—*ALPHA* covers the period from the Big Bang, through the birth of the solar system and the evolution of life on Earth, up to the emergence of modern humans. And most of the images aren't new but taken from a whole range of existing visual materials (photographs, films, art, illustration), reproduced in Harder's drawing style. It goes to show you can make comics about anything and *literally* everything.

Suzu Varty: *Wired up Wrong* by Rachael Smith, *Red Rosa* and *Threads* by Kate Evans. Also *Sally Heathcote*, *Suffragette* and *Dotter of Her Father's Eyes* by Mary Talbot and Kate Charlesworth. I don't keep up in that sense.

Mary Talbot: Neither a comic nor new work exactly, but a recently published book about comics and cartoons. *The Inking Woman* includes a great collection of feminist humour strips and postcards, as well as a section on the 19C cartoonist Marie Duval. The Victorian humour is fascinating, though sometimes totally mystifying.

Sarah McIntyre: Probably Tor Freeman's animal comics, such as *Welcome to Oddleigh*. I also had a good giggle reading a couple of the *Phoebe and her Unicorn* books by Dana Simpson.

Maura McHugh: I think we're in an amazing creative period for comics at the moment. I love *Monstress* by Marjorie Liu and Sana Takeda, and *My Favourite Thing is Monsters* by Emil Ferris.

Nora Goldberg: SO MANY! I always hate when customers ask me that question, because it depends on what genre you're talking about. I'd say some that really stayed with me were—*Analog* by Gerry Duggan, David O'Sullivan, & Jordie Bellaire, *Sabrina* by Nick Drnaso, *Young Frances* by Hartley Lin and *The Girl on The Other Side* by Nagabe.

Heroes Unlimited: How have changes in technology impacted your work process?

Karen Green: The technology I use to do my job hasn't actually changed that much. But I will say that the rise of downloadable digital comics has complicated my job; if that's the only format in which they're available, I can't add them to my collection, as we have no place to store them and no way to circulate them legally.



Melanie Gibson: Not really, although being able to get feedback quickly really helps. Lovely for academics.

Hannah Means-Shannon: I was always a hand-written person at university and in creative writing and continued to be until I fell into the world of comics. That quickly changed because the pace of life just didn't allow for the luxury of making multiple copies of my writing, so everything was typed on a computer thereafter. I also moved from writing drafts offline to writing articles directly onto an online publishing platform, moving even more quickly, but this enabled me to keep up with the periodical pace of comics publishing, which brings us dozens of new titles on a weekly basis.

My computers got lighter and smaller the more comic conventions I attended and reported on, and though I have a desktop computer, I now rarely use it even for comic editing. The smaller computer wins out. I have a large-screened smartphone where I do about a quarter of my correspondence, in fact, related to comics. One tech experiment that I haven't continued was the use of a smart watch. I loved it at first, since it kept my hands free from constantly checking my phone for e-mails, but when your watch can 'tap' you urgently every time a message comes in, that can begin to feel too chaotic.

With a larger phone I can organize and prioritize my tasks better and also keep from getting too stressed out. I still keep manual lists of tasks in various notebooks because hand writing tasks and marking them off helps me process how I'm going to accomplish them and acts as a memory aid about what has indeed been done and what remains to be done.

Annie Parkhouse: No inky fingers. I was very reluctant to switch to a computer after hand lettering for about 25 years. I still use it as a tool, emulating the hand lettering process, rather than embracing all the stuff the software can do. The downside is that I only receive low resolution jpgs rather than the real artwork I used to see.

Kate Charlesworth: Yes- I seem to spend more time on screen than at the drawing board. I wish my brain was quicker.

Maggie Gray: This is probably more one for the creators, but digital technology has had a big impact on comics scholarship, in terms of making resources available, and allowing for different kinds of research methods and new ways of sharing our work. For example, Julia Round has made a searchable online database of *Misty* as part of her research for a forthcoming book *Misty and Gothic for Girls in British Comics*. I'm very much a print person and really interested in the material qualities of ink on paper. But it will be interesting to see the further uses that not only comics artists but researchers can put new technology to, including the possibilities of VR, AR, etc.

Suzy Varty: I worked in computing after I left school in 1965, but came late to the technology, coming on board when the iMac first appeared. I found colouring a whole lot easier in Photoshop, but mainly I liked the

way I could try things out much faster on screen, especially text & sizing. To me, comics should be done by hand...

Mary Talbot: Same as every other writer, I imagine. I use the internet for research a lot, though by no means exclusively; I don't use longhand any more, apart from note-taking.

Nora Goldberg: Not so much I think. Creators are obviously experimenting with comics and technology, but graphic novels are such *objet d'arts* that the physical takes precedent.

Sarah McIntyre: One thing that's surprised me is how much book data affects artists' careers. It's not something we see, because unlike booksellers, we don't subscribe to Nielsen BookScan. But artists are being left out in ways that are hurting us hugely, and a campaign I set up in 2015 called *#PicturesMeanBusiness* is trying to highlight the problems we need to fix. It breaks down into two separate problems: some publishers aren't providing accurate bibliographic information on their books because it's easier to only add the writers' names, not the illustrators' names. So illustrators get left out of awards lists, reviews, selling websites and media publicity. That problem's fairly easy to fix by encouraging publishers to enter better data because it helps increase the searchability of their books and hopefully they can sell more.

The other problem is sales data: right now people can automatically find out how much money a writer's books are making, but not an illustrator's. So if a picture book or comic sells well, shops will naturally order more books by that writer. It makes it very hard for artists to apply those bestselling credentials to books they do solo, or with other writers. And it makes bestselling lists much less diverse than they could be, because everything's pinned to a few writer names.

Also with technology, there's a lot more sharing of images on social media, and *#PicturesMeanBusiness* encourages publishers and writers to credit their illustrators when they post their images online, or do a big 'reveal' of new cover artwork. With the campaign, we try to show them how everyone wins, and they attract a wider fanbase and more shares by crediting artists properly. We're also trying to get more illustrators of highly illustrated books credited on the books' front covers. Declan Shalvey is doing something similar with his *#ArtCred* campaign, and that's much more focused on comics, whereas *#PicturesMeanBusiness* focuses more on illustrated books, particularly children's books. But there's a lot of crossover.

Maura McHugh: I've grown up with technology so it's always been part of my work process. What's easier is communication and sharing of files, and being able to keep in close touch with your team who are often spread out across the world. The huge bonus is when it comes to research, and finding images/videos to send to your artists for reference.



Heroes Unlimited: Was there ever a moment where you considered leaving the field of comics?

Karen Green: NOPE.

Melanie Gibson: Not really, simply astonished I get to help make things happen in the world of comics.

Hannah Means-Shannon: There have been a number of times I have considered leaving comics, but I soon realized that was par for the course among my friends, also, and talking about it with them has been helpful to me. Coming from academia, which is far from perfect, I entered the field of journalism and publishing and I found that there

was often a lack of professional decorum and politeness, particularly when it came to social media. That initial realization was a number of years ago, and by now it surprises no-one that social media is a warzone and is often dominated by negativity, sadly. Add to that the events of ‘Comicsgate’ and the sense of antagonism against progressive elements in comics and it’s easy to see why comics can be too nerve-wracking as a field for many people.

However, a love for comics, and a determination to pursue positivity for the sake of the medium has kept me going. Comics is also a difficult field in which to find employment and make a living, and that brings with it its own challenges. Many people leave comics for that reason, and that’s understandable. I’ve been lucky enough to find full-time employment in several different jobs and realizing that I’ve been lucky to be able to work in a field that I care about is something that keeps me working with determination in comics, too. I’ve had a lot of great opportunities and I hope to make the most of them.

“Comics is also a difficult field in which to find employment and make a living, and that brings with it its own challenges. Many people leave comics for that reason, and that’s understandable”

Annie Parkhouse: There were moments when I thought the comics would leave me. The market took a plummet and I came back from holiday once to discover that 3 American publishers had gone bust overnight. I’ve always tried to have a back-up plan. I’ve worked as a ceramics technician and teacher at the local art school, an architectural librarian, bookseller and therapist, sometimes all at the same time! It’s allowed me to ride the ups and downs of the industry.

Kate Charlesworth: Not really. More like wondering if *it* was going to come back to me.

Maggie Gray: After my PhD it was hard to find academic work. There’s a lot of hourly-paid temporary contracts about but getting a permanent post is tough. I worked for a few years in a comics shop—the one and only Mega-City Comics in Camden Town—and then in a library before I got enough bits and pieces of teaching to live off. During that period I thought about leaving academia and therefore comics research. Although I probably would have carried on somehow—there are great independent scholars out there and so much work is done outside the academy, by critics, journalists, creators, fans, curators, publishers, etc.

Suzy Varty: Na. Never.

Mary Talbot: No, but I can understand why people would. The pay’s rubbish!

Nora Goldberg: All the time. There still isn’t any money in comics.

Sarah McIntyre: Well, I sort of have. I mean, I make them for fun, but *The Sunday Times* recently discontinued printing *The Funday Times* with my Shark & Unicorn strip, so I’m only doing illustrated books now. But there’s a lot of crossover; I end up doing comic workshops with kids all the time, and a lot of my illustration work has comic elements. I’ve recently come out with a picture book called *The New Neighbours*, featuring my Vern & Lettuce characters; it was great to bring them back, I’d missed them.

Maura McHugh: No.

Heroes Unlimited: Do you have a new project coming out soon? If so, what can you tell us about it?

Karen Green: We have a new archival acquisition coming in, but I can't announce it yet. Sorry!!

Melanie Gibson: Well, being an academic, my stuff isn't that exciting, but my latest is <http://maifeminism.com/lets-hear-it-for-the-girls-representations-of-diverse-girlhoods-feminism-intersectionality-and-activism-in-contemporary-graphic-novels-and-comics>.

I'm working on three articles and a chapter about a range of topics at the moment including how childhood and animals are linked in comics (focusing on Grant Morrison's *Joe the Barbarian* and Bryan Talbot's *The Tale of One Bad Rat*).

Hannah Means-Shannon: My main job is editing and writing on the comics and pop culture news site *Comicon.com*, which publishes many articles daily, but I also act as managing editor for Waxwork Comics, where we have a quarterly anthology horror comic called *House of Waxwork*, and we're putting together upcoming issues at the moment. That comic celebrates horror traditions from old EC and Warren publications, but brings to them a modern twist and innovative art styles, as well as an accompanying vinyl or digital soundtrack. I've also been editing a six-issue series to appear from Black Mask Studios that's very challenging and interesting and look forward seeing its progressive ideas invade comics when it's eventually released.

Annie Parkhouse: I'm lettering 2 parts of a trilogy for Renegade Arts, written by Lovern Kindzierski and painted by John Bolton. It's an adult fairy tale. The artwork is a delight to see. Part 2, *Hope*, is on sale now, the 3rd part next year. Todd Klein lettered Part 1.

Kate Charlesworth: *A Girl's Guide to Sensible Footwear*—coming out in June 2019 from Myriad Editions, 320 pages. What began as an LGBT+ history (emphasis on the 'L') of the UK from 1950 to the present day has become more of a personal memoir than I'd originally intended. But that's been all to the good.

Maggie Gray: I've got chapters in a couple of academic books coming out next year—one on *The Ballad of Halo Jones* in a collection about *Comics and Violence* (edited by Ian Hague, Ian Horton, & Nina Mickwitz), and one on Ar:Zak and the Birmingham Arts Lab in a volume called *Comics and Critique* (edited by Thom Giddens) which Suzy Varty and Hunt Emerson generously agreed to be interviewed for. I'm hoping to continue looking into the relations between comics and performance—I'm giving a paper about Moore and music at Graphic Brighton (graphicbrighton.wordpress.com) which this year is all about comics and music. And I'm working with Ian Hague to see if we can set up a research network focused on comics and sound—which would cover the relationships between comics and music, as well as spoken word, radio, even theatre, animation, and film, along with historical and digital integrations, the sounds created in physically manipulating comics, and even the possibilities of comics made of sound... It's early days at the moment, but anyone interested should definitely get in touch .

My Sixties
my newcastle



Suzy Varty: Not soon, but I'm working on a memoir about the 60s. My 60s in Newcastle. Exciting times. I got a bit fed up with young people accusing us baby boomers of stealing their future, and being only about sex n drugs n rock n roll...

We were political and aware and active. I've done the writing, and research to check and expand my historical memory, and I've just starting wrestling with structure and the drawing... wish me luck!

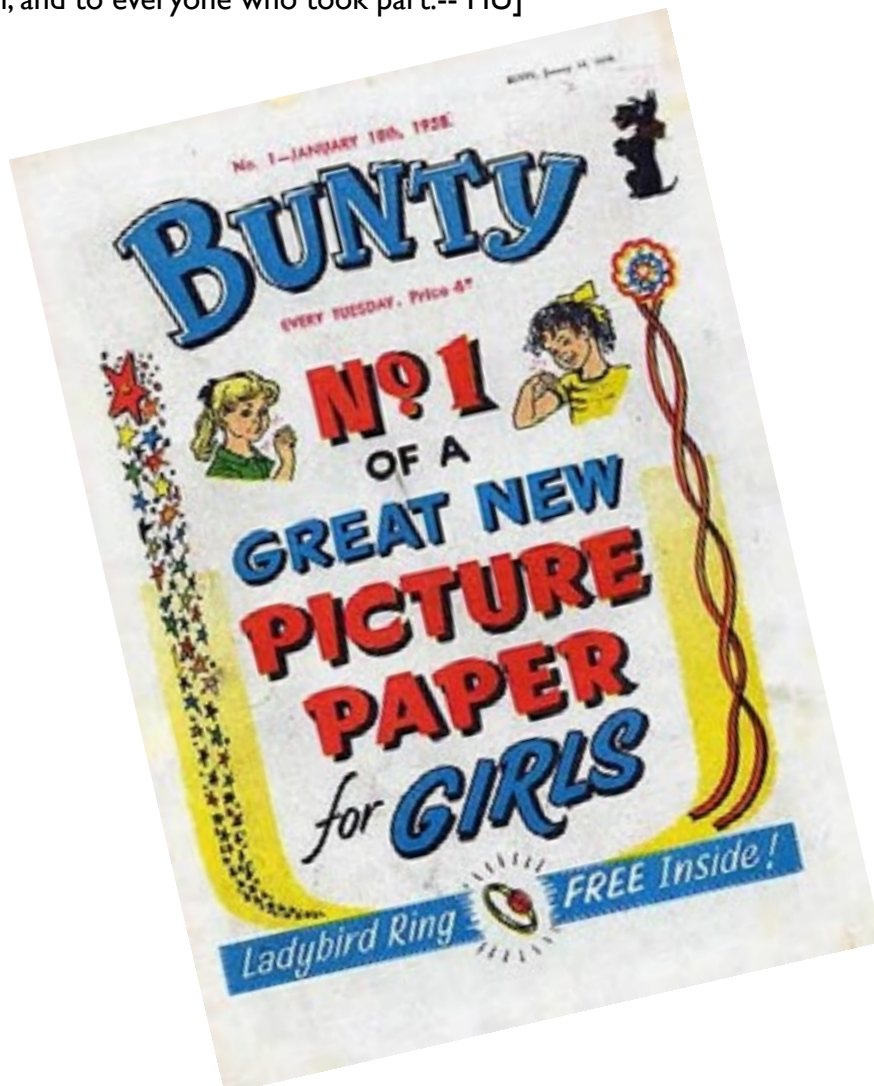
Mary Talbot: Bryan's currently working on the artwork for our newest collaboration, a GN called *Rain*. In contrast with what we've done together before, its protagonists are fictional and the setting is modern. There's nothing fictional about its subject matter, though, unfortunately. Flooding in the north of England in 2015 is at the heart of it and it's about environmental issues: climate change, pollution, moorland mismanagement, and so on. We're hoping it'll come out next year.

Nora Goldberg: I'm working on a website Books2Screen, which looks at books being adapted into TV and Film. It is also a literary scouting agency of sorts, with a strong focus on comics (obviously).

Sarah McIntyre: Yes, it's an illustrated book with chapters called *Roly-Poly Flying Pony: The Legend of Kevin*, with my friend Philip Reeve. It's about 200 pages long, hand drawn in ink and then given one colour digitally, and it comes out at the beginning of September. Page 45 and Gosh Comics are usually great about stocking our Reeve & McIntyre books, even though they're not technically comics.

Maura McHugh: I'm working on a new comic book project at the moment, but I'm afraid I can't talk about it yet.

[Questions mostly by Pádraig Ó Méalóid, with help and guidance from Karen Green and Carol Connolly. Thanks to them, and to everyone who took part.-- HU]



A Final Few Words from Chris Garcia

I'm the odd-man-out. I'm the American in a sea of Irishmen. I'm the DC Kid among the Marvel fans. I'm the tragically under-read among the hyper-literate. I'm used to it, and though I've read comics all my life, I can say I've spent the last decade with a particular, and quite narrow, kind of comic reading. I only buy and read non-fiction comics, or comics about the history of comics. Rick Geary's *Treasury of Victorian Murder* and *20th Century Murder* series of true crime graphic novels, memoir and biography comics, and buying the few remaining Paradox Press *Big Book of <Fill in the Blank>s* that I never managed to buy are my major purchases. Yeah, I snack on single issues of a lot of stuff here and there, but non-fiction is my meal these days.

Working on this issue, I've learned more fanzine than from any other single endeavor of my life.

It's not just the Alan Moore interview, as thorough and incredible a personal and intellectual view of an individual as it is, but it's also the words from the amazing Women in Comics piece, about James White, about Comics Fandom, about *Heroes Unlimited* itself. The only article that went over ground I was familiar with was the Dunsany piece, and while I'd read his work years ago during a festival of devouring Hodgson and Robbins, I'd no idea about the depths, or the connection with Yeats.

My job here was layout, putting things where they should go. It's arguably the easiest job, all you gotta do is make a lot of boxes fit on a page, but in this case, it was also the most fun. I got to read work that had been filtered through amazing sensibilities of Anthony, Pádraig, Merlin, and James. I got the first crack at the cream on top, and it has been amazing.

The largest chunk, that Moore interview that Anthony Roche conducted, not only gave an incredible depth, but it reminded me that 1) I need to do an issue of something about Swamp Thing, and 2) the man is a philosopher whose Lyceum exists in the pages of his comics. To read him talking about how he developed into the person he is, how that came to his work, how he developed into the magician he has become, was an education in and of itself. Then, in the portion of the zine that I sweated the most over, some amazing creators and comics professionals give us views into their stories. I never would have thought I'd be a part of a zine that featured words from the great Suzy Varty. Having first encountered her work at the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco, and then again in my deep dive into the works of Trina Robbins, of Sally Cruikshanks, of Alison Bechdel, and so many other amazing women creators of the 1970s and 80s. And in addition to her words, there's Maura McHugh. And Sarah McIntyre. And actual academics who deal with comics. An amazing crew!

Most folks who know me are aware that I'm a curator at a museum, and when we're creating a new exhibit, there's a mantra: if a story won't change someone's view of the world, it better be bringing in a sponsor. I can say, without question, that this has 100% changed my view of comics and especially of Irish fiction. While just pairing the words 'Irish' with 'fiction' instantly reminds me that I'm only on page 56 of *Finnegans Wake* after nearly 30 years, I am walking away from this zine with James White, Bob Shaw, and Dunsany in my pocket.

I give my thanks to Anthony for letting me come along, to Pádraig for doing so much to bring *Heroes Unlimited* back after 50+ years, and to James for being pretty much my non-identical twin. We're two guys ruled by our passions, and though those passions are often different, I can't say that this issue hasn't brought me a new one I can share with him!

Art From the 1968 New York Comicon from the Collection of Anthony Roche





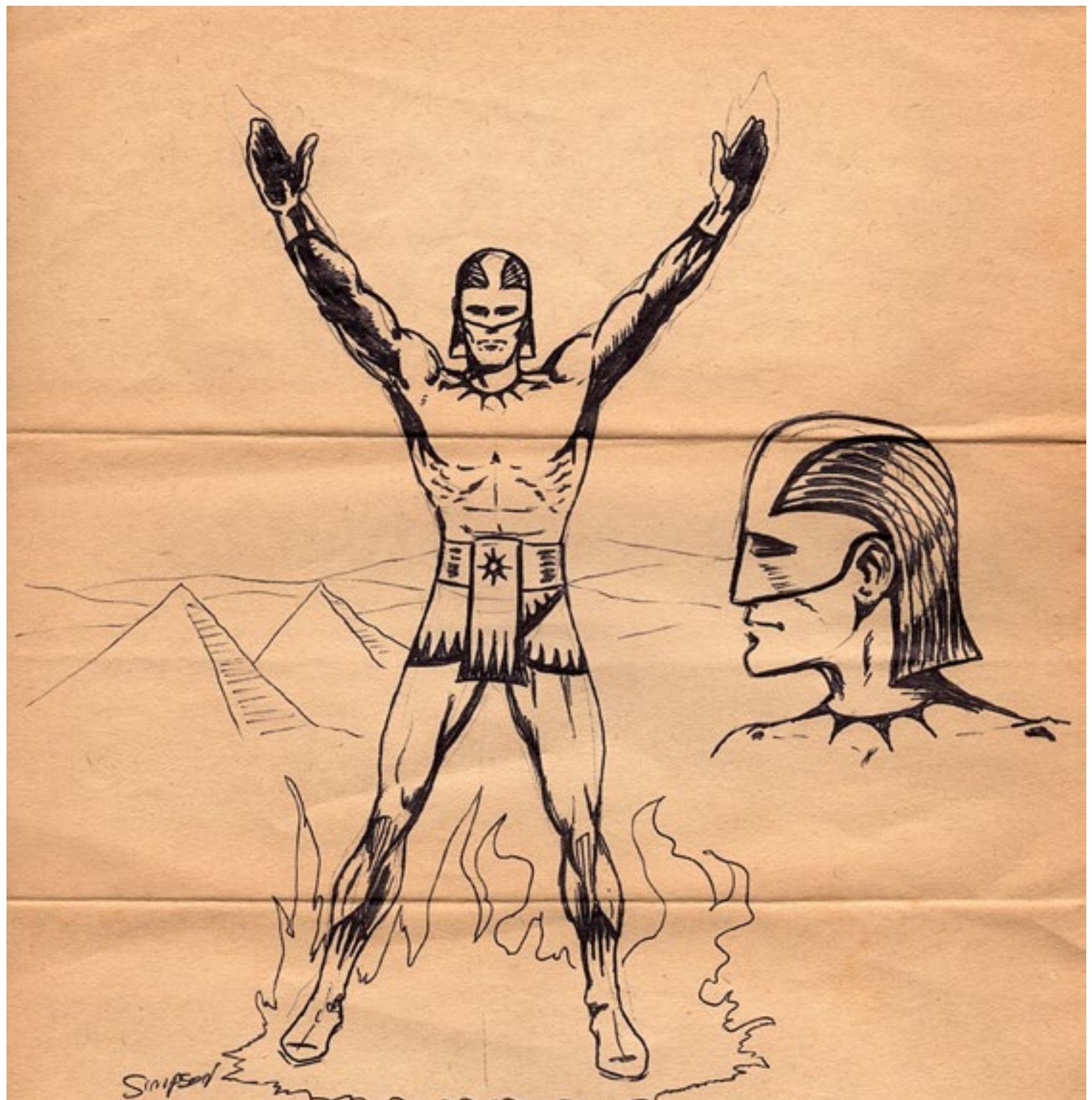
Jason
with best
wisdom

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C. Williams



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LARRY
LIVIE





Scrapped

THE

PHOENIX

HOPE YOU DON'T MIND? I JUST HAD TO! ONE THING THOUGH - WHAT DOES A PHOENIX LOOK LIKE! PUT IT IN YOURSELF! HUMP!
(HOPE YOU LIKE MY RENDERING?.. Ken.)



"Attack of a Snow Leopard"

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