

THOR



STARK



CAP



www.richardmanphoto.com



HAWKEYE



WIDOW



BANNER

# JOURNEY PLANET 22



# Journey Planet

## Editors

James Bacon

Aurora

Celeste

Chris Garcia

Linda

Wenzelburger

Feel free to  
eMail

Comments to  
[journeyplanet@gmail.com](mailto:journeyplanet@gmail.com)

Cover - Photo shoot by Richard Man (<http://richardmanphoto.com>)

Models -

Captain America - Karen Fox

Thor - Rhawnie Pino

Tony Stark/Iron Man - Jennifer Erlichman

Hawkeye - Sahrye Cohen

Banner - Linda Wenzelburger

BlackWidow - Hal Rodriguez

Page 1 - Real Life Costumed Heroes Purple Reign and Phonenix Jones!

Page 3 - Editorials - James, Linda, Chris (Photo by Jean Martin, Art from Mo Starkey)

Page 7 - Getting to Know the Sentinel of Liberty: Two Books about Captain America  
by Chuck Serface

Page 13 - Resurrection and Death in 69 Pages- Simonson and Goodwin's Manhunter by Joel Zakem

Page 16 - Days of Wonder, Trailblazers in UK and Irish Comics Fandom by James Bacon

Page 22 - My Imaginary Comic Book Company by Chris Garcia

Page 25 - Crossing Over: Five Superhero Books for Sci-Fi Fans By Donna Martinez

Page 27 - The B-Team by Reid Vanier (first appeared at  
<http://modernmythologies.com/2014/09/10/the-b-team/>)

Page 30 - Andy Warhol in Miracleman #19 by Pdraig O'Mealoid

Page 35 - Warhol & The Comics by James Bacon

Page 43 - An Interview with Mel Ramos

Page 45 - Superman by Hillary Pearlman-Bliss

Page 46 - Playing at Heroes - Superheroic RPGs and Me by Chris Garcia

Page 49 - Misty Knight by Sierra Berry

Page 50 - Comic Book Movies and Me by Helena Nash

Page 53 - Getting to Know the Princess of Power: Four Biographies of Wonder Woman  
by Chuck Serface

Page 62 - The Mighty World of Me by Helena Nash

Page 63 - Knickers to Batman by Esther MacCallum-Stewart

Page 65 - Instant Fanzine

Featuring Tonya Adolfson (aka Tanglwyst de Holloway), Ric Bretschneider, Warren Buff, Karen Burnham, Ivana Delač, Emma England, Meg Frank, Luis Gonzalez, Anne Gray, Brian Gray, Niall Harrison, Irena Hartman, Adria K, Jackie Kamlot, Michael Lee, Ruth Leibig, Guy Lillian, Trixy Loup-wolf, Esther MacCallum-Stewart, Jim Mann, Anton Marks, Marlin May, Helena Nash, Brian Nisbet, Van Nolan, Diane O., Pdraig O'Mealoid, Carole Parker, Igor Redic, Erin Riggsmith, Erica Schott, Chuck Serface, Keith Smith, Melissa Taylor, Anna Warren Cebrian

Back Cover - Mo Starkey



## EDITORIAL - JAMES BACON

Many thanks Readers, many thanks Contributors, many thanks all.

A Hugo nomination is an incredible thing, it is invigorating, it is humbling, it is powerful, it is motivational and it is showing recognition for work that has been done.

Without our guest editors and legions of contributors, many of whom must loath that instant fanzine email, but so many who reply so eloquently, so eruditely with alacrity and patience, and our article writers, giving their time for nowt, without you all, we would not be much, so you all share in this fabulous honour.

I am proud to have won a Hugo once.

It makes me cry as I write this when I think of what my Dad said, - 'is there a cash prize son?, is there a resale value?, how will we buy the beer?' his gleeful teasing, knowing he'd cause indignation, but still happily fetching a Spaten beer for me to drink with him in celebration, for he knew what it was to me.

Or how my pal Mick O'Connor demanded I bring it into my home convention of Octocon, 'get it get it, bring it in, of course, bring it in, we all want to see' and how he had gathered so many in the bar for my return. Jesus.

I am the fourth Irish person to win a Hugo. (Anne McCaffery - Irish Citizen, Walt Willis, James White) I am the only one who was born in the Republic of Ireland. It means so much, it is part of me, and I am proud of it. I see it every day. I love it and adore it.

And I will always be proud of the Hugo's and of moments like Easter, when a room full of people applauded, smiled, and congratulated me, it is such an honour, such an important and precious thing, and I am so damn lucky.

I feel so lucky.

This year the Hugo Awards have had more press than usual, sorta defenestrated the idea that a Saturday announcement isn't great and as a nominee, one must watch on, and it has been interesting times.

I think I can say with certainty, that the Hugos matter and that people care about them. That is good.

I expect there could be changes to the Hugos, but that is OK too, that have changed many many times before and will again.

You see, they existed before me, and they will exist after. We are lucky, us bunch of marauding fans, lucky that our own recognise us so mightily, lucky that dozens of fans, hundreds even, spend hundreds of hours preparing and working on the Hugos, lucky that Worldcon hosts such an amazing show, spending tens of thousands of the extravaganza, honoured that thousands have paid a portion and then desire to watch the ceremony.

Gosh, it is hard work. It is ferocious on those who have to work it all.

My Hugo is next to my Nova. They sit side by side. I love them both. They sit next to a Hip Flask, from Irish Fandom. I love them all. All equally part of me. I can not measure importance, that is unfair, inequitable. So I do not.

I am very proud of the work we did, with Helen Montgomery, Colin Harris, Alissa McKersie on the Sports and Dr Who issues of Journey Planet last year. I hope many more fans find them as enjoyable as I did, I hope we gain more contributors and readers.

I love reading what people think, stealing their innermost thoughts, and thinking about them, and I think we had some wonderful contributors. Like we have here.

My thanks to Linda and Aurora for a great issue. I was blown away by the amazing amount of engagement we had with the instant fanzine. It is more than 5 or 6 responses! and I was pleased with the articles. Chris has been under the kosh, and so, his working on this has been a real act of determination and commitment. Thanks Chris.

You are all great. Fandom is great, and the Hugos are great.

I will sit with pride, with honour this year, at the Worldcon in the knowledge that our readers appreciated what we did, liked what we did and elected to honour us with a Hugo nomination.

Thank you for that honour. Thank you for something as special as the Hugos.

Thank you.

# Editorial - Linda Wenzelburger

*You want me to what, now?*

To say I was blindsided by the offer to guest edit this issue would be an understatement. I would not have thought of myself as a go-to person on the subject of superheroes. I still don't. But I do have an ever increasing love for this genre and I enjoy discovering new-to-me characters as well as delving into the history of how they have evolved over time.

I almost declined the offer, but in the end succumbed to the allure of the challenge. This is a fanzine, after all, and I am most certainly a fan!

I am extremely grateful to all the people who stepped forward to contribute to this issue. As editor, I get the special privilege of reading everything before the rest of you, and I have to say there are some amazing pieces in this issue.

My first exposure to superheros was thru television. While my mom did supply us with comic books, we were pretty much limited to Archie and Disney titles. So Adam West as Batman, Lynda Carter's Wonder Woman, Bill Bixby as The Incredible Hulk - they were my first supers.

When I was older, on a whim, I picked up *'The Dark Knight Returns'* by Frank Miller. Wow.. this was certainly not the Batman I grew up with. I proceeded to seek out and devour more Batman and branch out into other titles. At some point, probably due to the fact that I was reading some of the darker stuff, there came a point where I just set comics aside.

Years passed and I eventually cracked open the covers of comics again. Being surrounded by people who appreciated good stories and could suggest titles to me was a big plus. Without those recommendations and reviews from people I trusted, I may never have rediscovered superheroes - at least not in comic form. Even if I hadn't started reading comics again, there is no way I could have ignored the slew of top notch superhero movies.

You would think that, as a costumer, I would have delved into becoming a superhero early on. But a lot of my costuming is not so much about the clothes, but about the character. And I never felt that I was worthy of taking on the mantle. But last year, I was determined to take on the challenge of becoming a super and set my sights on Wonder Woman.

But not just any Wonder Woman. I chose the Elseworlds one shot *Amazonia*. Really, was there any other choice for someone who tends to lean towards historical costuming? That outfit ended up becoming personally symbolic for me on so many levels. And it continues to grow and evolve along with me by bits and pieces, which seems ap-



propriate.

On a different note, as we are putting this issue to bed, the Smithsonian has just opened their MOOC 'The Rise of Superheroes and Impact on Pop Culture' thru the edX platform. I'm trying to figure out how many people have signed up for this massive open online course, but the best I can come up with is that the class home page on Facebook already has 2349 likes and the class has only been open for 8 hours.



I'm really looking forward to hearing more about the history of comics, meeting comic lovers new and old, and exploring the current upswing in the visibility of superheroes in our society. If you get a chance, hope over and join in on the class. At the very least, the initial reading list is pretty phenomenal and if you want to get really involved, you can hook up with other students and writers and create your own superheroes and stories.

And as for learning and exploring, I hope that you find this issue to be as enjoyable to read as I have. In particular, the responses to the instant fanzine have been much more insightful and eye opening than I could have dreamed.

Again, my heartfelt thanks to James and Christopher for the trusting me with a guest editor spot, to Aurora for being my co-conspirator and to all of our contributors for making this issue possible. Special shout out to Richard Man, Karen Fox, Jennifer Erlichman, Rhawnie Pino, Sahrye Cohen, Hal Rodriguez and The Pita Bite restaurant in Mountain View, CA, for all indulging me with the Avengers schwarma shoot.

## Editorial - Chris Garcia

I really want to thank Aurora, James, and Linda for all their great work. I did much of this layout while sitting around Lucille Packard Children's Hospital, and as is often the case, working on the zine kept my mind off the darker place where minds tend to wander when they're in hospitals. It was also a lot of fun to get to see all the art they have on the walls here, especially the train-related stuff!

I have a long history with both Super Heroes, and living in my own head, which plays a role in a couple of the pieces I've written for this one. I love 'em, always have, and if I had to pick it would be a tie between Flash and Plastic Man. They're both awesome, and as much as I love things like *Doom Patrol*, *Blood Syndicate*, *The Defenders*, *Doctor Strange*, *The Justice League*, *Capt. Carrot and His Amazing Zoo Crew*, and *Powers*, I've always loved Flash's wit, and being really fast is really cool! I love the comedic potential of Plastic Man. They were what drew me to comics, though these days with the exception of things like *Sex Criminals*, I'm just about solely on to non-fiction comics. My favorite comic of recent years is *Bone Sharps*, *Cowboys*, and *Thunder Lizards* about the [Bone Wars](#). I seldom buy super hero comics; super heroes are my friends at the movies now!



# CAPTAIN

NO.  
57

10¢

# AMERICA

JULY

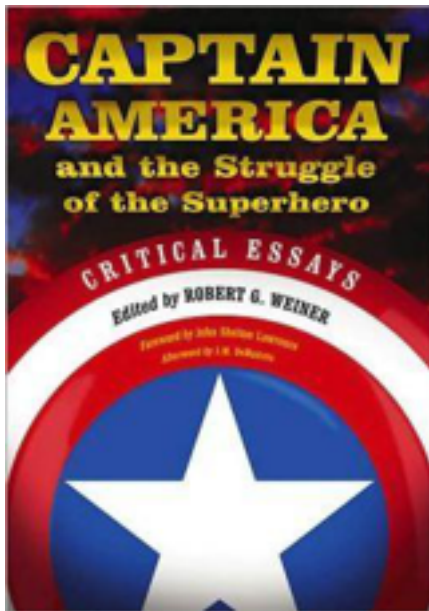
COMICS



1

GETTING TO  
KNOW THE  
SENTINEL OF  
LIBERTY: TWO  
BOOKS ABOUT  
CAPTAIN AMERICA  
BY CHUCK  
SERFACE





“It's one thing  
to steal... and  
quite another  
to steal from  
Captain  
America.”

I wept openly while watching *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. There I sat with my popcorn and my water bottle, suddenly shedding gigantic, happy tears after nearly two hours of fist pumping and cheering internally. What finally broke me occurred after Hydra had obliterated SHIELD. Those SHIELD agents and employees who weren't Hydra suffered the worst confusion and doubt. Whom could they trust? Was the person next to them a Hydra infiltrator? Surely today they would die, since no possible plan existed for survival, until . . . a confident yet soothing voice resounds from the public address system. “This is Captain America,” he begins, and audience members witness actors skillfully portray the transition from panic to relief to resolve. Captain America not only saves the day, he inspires loyal SHIELD agents to action, because no one doubts Captain America. That's why I wept. Captain America will never betray us.

Favorite moments involving Captain America entered my mind as I drove home from the theater: his resisting arrest and escaping from SHIELD at the beginning of *Civil War*, and when he helped excavate the craters formerly called the World Trade Center after 9-11. Captain America has fallen and risen, and fallen and risen again. He always rises. A scene from Steve Rogers' childhood within Rick Remender's recent story, “Castaway in Dimension Z” shows why. His mother taught him that you always stand up, no matter the adversity. He took that lesson to heart, and now he rouses many to follow suit. Often I catch myself humming or singing the following:

When Captain America throws his mighty shield,  
All those who chose to oppose his shield must yield!  
If he's lead to a fight and a duel is due,  
Then the red and the white and the blue'll come through,  
When Captain America throws his mighty shield!

Ridiculous, I know, but many a rotten day has been turned around thanks to the spirit embodied in those lyrics.

Recently, I read two books -- one an anthology of critical essays and the other a survey of Captain America's ethics -- that have increased my knowledge and appreciation of the Captain America phenomenon enormously. Both offer materials that acknowledge Captain America has grown from comic-book superhero to cultural force. What follows are impressions I garnered from each. Hopefully, you'll read them and share your findings with me. All citations refer to the book under discussion in the moment.

#### **I. *Captain America and the Struggle of the Superhero: Critical Essays* edited by Robert G. Weiner**

The subtitle “Critical Essays” doesn't nearly describe Robert G. Weiner's anthology, composed of sections entitled “General History,” “World War II,” “Racial Issues,” “Psychological Profiles,” “Comparisons of Captain America with Other Characters,” “Political Interpretations and the Death of Captain America,” “Literary Interpretations,” and “Guides.” Yes, each section contains critical essays, but the topical breadth and detailed analyses throughout will amaze even the most devout Captain America scholars. One might substitute “critical” with “dissective” to gain a more accurate idea.

Weiner outlines differences between Captain America and Superman, conveying what he and his contributors want readers to understand about Captain America over the decades:



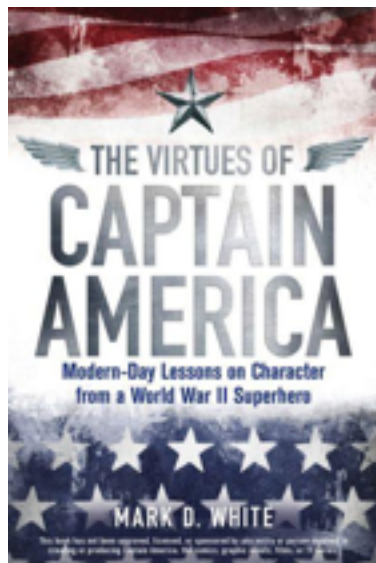
“I’m 95. I’m not dead. It’s hard to find someone with shared experiences.”

*While Superman always strives to do what is right, the differences between Superman and Cap are twofold: Superman represents the immigrant who comes to America, and finds the American dream – Captain America is the American dream. Superman projects a kind of Boy Scout mentality and purity that Captain America does not have. Cap sometimes fails, and he knows it; he is not always the Boy Scout. (10)*

Captain America is no two-dimensional patriot. Although cloaked in Old Glory, he represents ideals – liberty, democracy, freedom, and equality -- essential to the American dream, not necessarily to the American government. At two junctures, he forfeited his title, becoming Nomad and the Captain, after determining that staying Captain America would challenge his ideals. More recently, he stepped outside the law during the epic *Civil War* that pitted hero against hero over the Superhuman Registration Act, costing him not only his uniform and shield, but his life . . . only temporarily, however. In short, to defend the dream Captain America will stray beyond the law.

How far will he stray? Two writers explore that question, the first by comparing Captain America to the Punisher, and the second by detailing when he has resorted to lethal force. The first, Cord Scott, author of the essay, “The Alpha and the Omega: Captain America and the Punisher” – notes how both hero and anti-hero represent different aspects of America:

*The character of the Punisher represents the antithesis of Captain America (Cap), but at the same time represents a darker part of the American psyche. He is the one willing to do anything necessary to rid the world of bad people. To do that, one must be willing to compromise their values and ethics for the “greater good.” Whenever the two have “teamed up” the situation and forces allayed against them are truly evil. But what is the greater good in this case? Do the Punisher’s means (willingness to kill, a seemingly cavalier attitude towards due process and civil liberties) justify the end of a safe and secure America? That is the complexity and meaning of the two characters. They both seem to represent America in some form. (126)*



So Captain America plays Alpha to the Punisher's Omega. Weiner places Captain America below Superman on the purity scale while Scott places him above the Punisher. He's no angel; he's no devil. He's human, albeit one with unwavering principles and a moral compass that transcends black-and-white law, pointing always true north. Captain America breaks the law only when the law threatens higher, universal ideals, or when innocent lives need protecting or improving. His methodology, however, more resembles Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thomas Jefferson's, not the Punisher's.

The second writer brings lethal force into the equation. In "Stevie's Got a Gun: Captain America and His Problematic Use of Lethal Force," Phillip L. Cunningham, enumerates episodes where Captain America has killed opponents. In *Captain America 321*, Captain America is forced to shoot a terrorist planning to open fire on a crowd of bystanders. Although justified, he feels deeply guilty. Another episode happens two decades later, after 9-11, and now our hero regains the "soldier instincts" Joe Simon had instilled during the Golden Age. Cunningham summarizes *Captain America (Vol. 4) 21*:

*In "Homeland: Part One," Homeland Security agents arrive to retrieve Captain America to serve on a military tribunal for Fernand Hedayat, a terrorist being transferred to Guantanamo Bay before standing trial for terrorism and treason. En route, their car is attacked by assassins trying to prevent Captain America from serving on the tribunal. As the assassins wound the agents, a plainclothes Captain America, who divulged his identity as Steve Rogers to the general public in Issue 3, grabs one of the fallen agents' sidearm; kicks the car door, and fires at their assailants. He apparently shoots one of them, forcing the assassin to drop his machine gun as the assailants' van speeds away. However, in this instance, Captain America shows little remorse save for a brief pause as he picks up the assassins' discarded weapon. (187)*

Mark Gruenwald wrote *Captain America 321*, and Robert Morales wrote "Homeland Part One." Cunningham allows for different authorial approaches to the character, but he also reminds us that a post 9-11 market and society demanded a more soldierly Captain America, not so much a superhero, and thus he exhibits regret but much less guilt in the second scenario. I don't see Steve Rogers devolving into a red-white-and-blue Punisher. Contemporary writers approach his World War II and other combat exploits more realistically than writers before 9-11, but Captain America, the Steve Rogers Captain America, has lines he will not cross. Other versions, especially John Walker, have operated under different guidelines.

Other than the essays already mentioned, I appreciated Mark R. McDermott's exploration of Roy Thomas's work on *The Invaders* and *The All-Star Squadron*, and Jackson Sutcliff's "The Ultimate American," in which he describes the Ultimate universe variant of Captain America as "less of an inspiration than an action hero; instead of John Adams, he's Sylvester Stallone." (121) Also included are pieces about *Marvel Zombies*, eugenics, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and Captain America and the Jewish-American experience. If you desire a one-stop, portable Captain America 101, Weiner is your best bet.

## **2. *The Virtues of Captain America: Modern-Day Lessons on Character from a World War II Superhero* by Mark D. White**

Ethicist Mark D. White has edited volumes for Wiley-Blackwell's "Philosophy and Pop Culture Series" dedicated to Superman and Batman. This time, however, he's writing his own book.

Entries to Wiley-Blackwell's series characteristically explain philosophical concepts using images from popular culture for illustrative purposes. White does so here as well, although he has ends

“Not a perfect soldier, but a good man.”

beyond helping the general public understand difficult ideas. He asks the nation, “Can Captain America help us achieve greater unity and civility?”

White studies virtue ethics. He clarifies other branches of ethics, utilitarianism and deontology, and then explicates his chosen focus:

*To recap, virtue ethicists consider that good acts are those performed by good people (rather than the other way around), so the emphasis is on virtuous character traits instead of the actions that result from them. But simply saying that someone (like Captain America – remember him?) possesses virtues like honesty and courage doesn’t tell us what that person is going to do in any particular situation. Even if a person is generally honest or brave, there can be many factors in a given circumstance that will affect how a person reacts to it. The virtuous person has to sort through these factors, using his or her practical wisdom or judgment to come to an ethical choice that expresses his or her character. On occasion, an honest person may lie and a brave person may flee danger – but if they are truly honest or brave, we can assume there were important considerations that steered their judgment elsewhere. (15)*

White analyzes only Steve Rogers, the Captain America of Earth-616, the main Marvel Universe. He makes no mention of Colonel America from *Marvel Zombies*, or the Captain America from the Ultimate universe, or other figures from Earth-616 who have donned Captain America’s uniform. Only Steve Rogers possesses the virtues White hopes will model unity and civility to his reading audience.

Before identifying Captain America’s virtues, however White must answer questions about how various writers have interpreted Captain America over the decades. He agrees with situationists who assert that “the idea of a consistent, unified character is a myth” (35). Writers who have reinterpreted Captain America are tantamount to factors that guide real-world people to act in varying ways depending on situations. I, for example, am far less kind after business meetings than after finishing a good book. At heart, however, I’m still Chuck. I still contain the virtues that define me in general. The same can be said for Captain America. Various authorial styles have not changed his essential nature.

Captain America consistently exhibits five basic virtues: courage, humility, righteous indignation, sacrifice and responsibility, and perseverance. Additionally, he’s impeccably honorable and maintains unparalleled integrity. White catalogs the same stories as Weiner’s contributors to support his points. White too wants readers to understand that Captain America is no black-and-white thinker. Often circumstances force him to use judgment:

*Captain America’s basic principles may be black-and-white, picking out right from wrong and good from evil. But these principles alone do not determine his actions, for there are often several right or good things to do in any situation, and many times these options have aspects or consequences that are wrong or bad. Cap needs to use judgment to decide which principle, duty, or virtue is the one he should pursue in any given situation – and this judgment is hardly black and white, not in the 1940s and not now. (124)*

Here White echoes the arguments advanced by Weiner and his colleagues. Captain America must step outside the lines sometimes to defend his ideals. He must administer judgment.

Finally White reaches his punchline, his answer to the question, “Can Captain America help us achieve greater unity and civility? The short answer is yes. The long answer involves realizing that despite how divided America has become -- Republicans standing against Democrats, and conservatives vying against liberals – everything is not lost. White’s goal, then, is twofold:

*I had two goals in mind when I set out to write this book. First I wanted to show how Captain America's virtuous and principled ethics, so often mocked for being anachronistic and "black-and-white" are actually timeless and nuanced. If we do live in more complicated times, then a moral code like Captain America's, one that applies time-tested ideals to novel problems, is exactly what we need. At risk of mangling a metaphor, we don't need to reinvent the wheel – we just need to learn how to steer it over new terrain. (178)*

Americans, regardless of ideologies or party affiliations, honor justice, equality, and liberty. White thinks we've "forgotten how united we are, and once we remember that, the divisions that do exist will begin to heal. It will take work, of course – a lot of work" (194). Yes, Professor White, a lot of work and faith that everyone truly honors justice, equality, and liberty. That's why we need Captain America.





## RESURRECTION AND DEATH IN 69 PAGES - GOODWIN AND SIMONSON'S MANHUNTER BY JOEL ZAKEM

As comic book durations go, *Manhunter's* was fairly miniscule. There were only seven episodes (or, as they were tellingly indicated, "chapters") totaling 69 pages of story and art. All but the final chapter were back-ups and, to graduate to the front of the book, Manhunter had to share his final chapter with a more well-known character. Still, when I am asked to name my all-time favorite comic book series, the seven-issue run of Archie Goodwin's and Walter Simonson's *Manhunter*, which initially appeared in *Detective Comics* during 1973 and 1974, is apt to lead the list.

While the first superhero comics I read were published by DC, by 1973, when *Detective Comics* # 473 appeared, most of the comic books that I read were being published by Marvel. Among the few DC heroes that I kept up with was Batman, which is why I purchased that issue of *Detective*. I no longer own that issue (since I, perhaps foolishly, sold those original issues when I purchased the 1984 full-color *Manhunter* reprint) and have no recollection of the lead Batman story. The eight-page Manhunter back-up story, however, still sticks in my mind.

One thing I like is that this version of *Manhunter* was a self-contained entity with a definite beginning (though the readers did not discover the true beginning until chapter 3) and end. Hence, the use of the chapter motif.

*(I realize that, in its infinite wisdom, DC has attempted to revive the character of Manhunter on more than one occasion. Since, however, I do not believe that they could add anything to what occurred in the initial Detective Comics run, I have never bothered reading any of these revivals. Therefore, this piece will only cover those seven chapters.)*

In the introduction to the aforementioned 1984 *Manhunter* reprint, Goodwin states that he created Manhunter to be "something that would fit (however loosely) within the 'detective' format of the book, but contrast vividly in terms of mood, character, and artistic style with the lead [Batman] stories;..." In many ways, he, along with Simonson (who provided pencils and ink for the entire saga) succeeded, especially in a visual sense. Manhunter, clad in bright colors, certainly provided a contrast to the dark and somber mood that had become associated with the (post TV series) Batman. Rather than being based in a single location, such as Gotham City, Manhunter traveled to various exotic locations. Additionally there was a bit more humor in Manhunter, and Simonson utilized panels of varied size and shape, which helped give Manhunter a somewhat frenetic pace that fit the eight page format.

# MANHUNTER THE COMPLETE SAGA!

by Archie Goodwin  
& Walter Simonson



(I should note that I had first encountered Simonson's art in a science fiction fanzine, namely Linda Bushyager's *Granfalloon* # 15, where he provided a portfolio based upon William Hope Hodgson's "[The Boats of the Glen Carrig](#)")

Manhunter also featured a super power that Batman lacked. As explained in Chapter 3's origin story, Manhunter was gifted with the ability to heal himself quickly. (Wolverine, who had a similar healing factor, debuted in *Incredible Hulk* about a year after the first appearance of this Manhunter.)

In other ways, however, Manhunter did feature some similarities with the earliest versions of Batman, if not the Batman of 1973. In addition to being a master of various styles of hand-to-hand-combat, Manhunter carried, and often used, a gun, and he wasn't averse of killing his enemies. Even when, as set out at the end of the first chapter, some of the people Manhunter kills looked exactly like Manhunter.

Chapter 1 ("The Himalayan Incident") also contains the first clue as to Manhunter's origin. Goodwin gave Manhunter the name "Paul Kirk," which was the same name that Joe Simon and Jack Kirby gave to their Manhunter, who had first appeared in the early 1940's. While some of the Simon and Kirby Manhunter stories had recently been reprinted in Kirby's "New Gods," if I had noticed the name being the same, I probably assumed it was an inside joke or a homage.

In Chapter 2 ("The Manhunter File"), however, it was revealed that there was a definite connection between the two Manhunters. Paul Kirk goes to a Swiss bank, where a fingerprint check reveals that although Kirk appears to be a young man, he had the same fingerprints as the Simon & Kirby Paul Kirk. According to this chapter, that Paul Kirk allegedly died in 1946 (favorite line: "Let's just say the thought of all that interest accumulating kept me young").

As noted above, Manhunter's origin was finally revealed in Chapter 3 ("The Resurrection Of Paul Kirk"). To satisfy the continuity junkies, it was revealed (in 8 short pages) that, in 1946, a fatally wounded Paul Kirk was rescued by a Illuminati-type organization called "The Council," placed in cryonic suspension until he could be healed and improved, and trained to head The Council's enforcement branch which is made up, in large parts, of Kirk's clones. Of course, as revealed in Chapter 4 ("Rebellion"), Kirk eventually rebels against The Council's plans and, together with Interpol agent Christine St. Clair, goes on the run.

My favorite Manhunter story is Chapter 5, "Cathedral Perilous." Manhunter and St. Clair investigate a church in Istanbul where The Council has set up one end of a matter transmitting station. At the same time, a family of stereotypical American tourists (harried father and mother with very active child in cowboy hat with cap gun) has wandered into the church. The contrast between Manhunter and St. Clair purposely playing hide-n-seek with The Council's forces while the tourist family is inadvertently doing the same brings out the humorous elements of Goodwin and Simonson's storytelling, while advancing the storyline to its inevitable conclusion.

In contrast, Chapter 6 ("To Duel The Master") is more of a transitional issue, with 4 of its 9 (rather than the usual 8) pages consisting of an elaborate fight scene between Kirk and Asano Nitobe, the man who trained him. By that time, Goodwin knew he would be leaving the book (and DC), and it was decided to end the series in a cross-over with *Detective's* star, Batman.

Saying "if you can't be pretentious in a last issue, when can you be," Goodwin titled *Manhunter's* final chapter "Gotterdammerung." The story starts with two killings, the second occurring at (stately) Wayne Manor. Batman arrives (from the scene of the first killing) too late to stop the second and while the assassin and his associate escape, a gun is left behind. Using his investigative skills, Batman traces the gun to Kolu Mbeya, the arms manufacturer who had outfitted Paul Kirk. It

turns out, however, that it was a set-up, but Manhunter surprises the assassin who has Batman in his sites. This leads to the characters first meeting when, highlighting their different methods, Manhunter shoots the assassin who is requesting mercy from Batman, later noting that the assassin was palming a knife he could have used on the Caped Crusader.

Instead of using this as a jumping off point to a fight between the two heroes, Batman and Manhunter talk things out and Manhunter fills Batman in on The Council and his mission to destroy it. Batman volunteers to assist, but Manhunter refuses the offer, saying “you’re not a killer, and this is a killing mission.”

The story continues with Manhunter, Christine, Nitobe and Mbeya flying to The Council’s main base, where they get pinned down on the runway, only to be saved by, you guessed it, Batman, who had followed them. Batman joins with Manhunter’s group to storm The Council’s headquarters. Realizing that the only way to end The Council’s plans is by using a self destruct helmet, Paul Kirk blows up the headquarters, all the Council members and (apparently) himself in one final act, while his companions and Batman escape.

And that should have been the end of Manhunter. Not willing to let dying heroes lie, however, DC has revived Manhunter, utilizing some of Paul Kirk’s surviving clones, on several occasions. As noted above, I had no interest in reading any of these revivals, hoping to leave my memory of Goodwin and Simonson’s creation intact.

While Manhunter’s life was short, it was well-honored. “The Himalayan Incident” won the Academy of Comic Book Art’s Shazam award for Best Short Story in 1973, a year in which Simonson, in a tie with Jim Starlin, won the Shazam for Outstanding New Talent and Goodwin won for Best Writer. Goodwin won another Best Writer Shazam in 1974, and “Cathedral Perilous” won Best Short Story and “Gotterdammerung” won Best Feature-Length Story that year.







# HEROES UNLIMITED

5



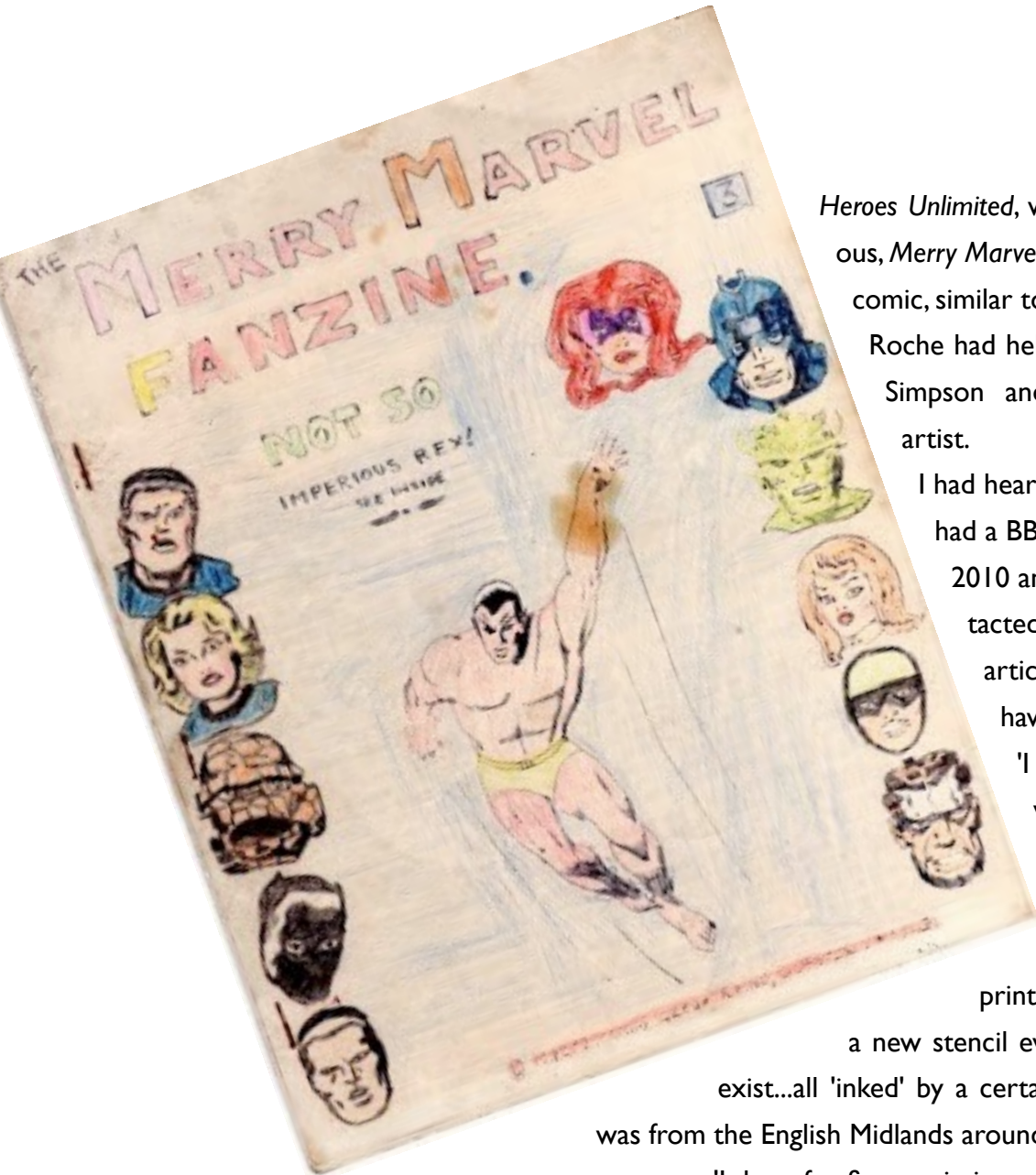
## DAYS OF WONDER, TRAILBLAZERS IN UK AND IRISH COMICS FANDOM BY JAMES BACON

### **Irish Comic Zines - Merry Marvel Fanzine, Heroes Unlimited and Tony Roche**

Ireland has always had somewhat of a trailblazing reputation when it comes to fan activities. Walt Willis's *Enchanted Duplicator* and Hugo winning *Slant* are seminal works in the world of science fiction fanzines.

In another corner of the world, one that read comics, a man from Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, Tony Roche started the first comic fanzine in the UK and Ireland. *Merry Marvel Fanzine* launched in 1966.

It ran for three issues, and then Tony launched *Heroes Unlimited*, feeling that focusing on Marvel alone was not a great tactic, but letting the 35 subscribers know that there would still be no shortage of Marvel Content.



*Heroes Unlimited*, which ran to seven issues, ended in 1969. Tony was industrious, *Merry Marvel Fanzine* was announced in the letter pages of a humourous kids comic, similar to the beano, called *Wham*, issue 140 in February 1967.

Roche had help from Peter C Phillips and Peter Simpson, Ges Cleaver, Ken Simpson and Paul Neary, who would later become a professional comic artist.

I had heard about the Irish fanzine, though, thanks to Jarvis Cocker who had a BBC Radio 4 show that made mention of the fanzine, in 2011 or 2010 and it's Irish origin and that Paul Neary had worked on it. I contacted Paul Neary, in 2012, explaining I hoped that I would get an article together, of course, I always knew I would, but three years have flown by, anyhow, Paul said:

'I have to say that I cannot remember how I became involved with Tony Roche (from Dublin, as you say) while he was putting together issue two of his *Heroes Unlimited* fanzine.'

'I do remember drawing a bunch of disembodied heads for the second issue cover in 1967 or so ....which was printed by a method so primitive that it needed to be copied onto a new stencil every few issues....so several different variations of that cover exist...all 'inked' by a certain fan helper...the name Ges Cleaver sticks in my mind...he was from the English Midlands around Birmingham, as I recall.'

'I drew for five or six issues of *Heroes Unlimited* and some of this has been posted on the internet...principally a *Captain Remus* episode from issue 7...'

'--I enclose a few images from HU 6 and 7'....and that early cover.'



## Meanwhile in England... Ka-Pow! and Steve Moore.

The first UK Comic fanzine was Ka-Pow by Phil Clarke and Steve Moore - which came together from those gents meeting at the 1965 Worldcon, Loncon 2, and there were two issues in 1967 and 1968, printed with a spirit Duplicator. Merry Marvel Fanzine just piped them to the post.

I got a chance to meet Steve Moore at an Alan Moore event, in 2013 and Padraig O'Mealoid kindly introduced me. We were soon talking about fanzines, Loncon 2, and James White whom he had met and knew, and fandom, in a way I had not at all expected. The two of us were chatting away and it was great. I really felt here was a fan who understood and got what I was at, although of course, I had at this stage read hundreds of pages of Steve Moore comics in a variety of comics from 2000AD to Warrior.

Padraig was interviewing him, so any questions I had were in essence already answered. Steve and Padraig subsequently gave me permission to quote from that interview, which gives us real insight into the early days of Comics fanac in the UK.

*Q: You were part of the very first wave of British comics fandom, I believe. How did that come about, and how did you become involved in it?*

Well, first I was involved with British SF fandom, which was long established ... from before World War II, I believe. I think it was about 1964 (maybe 1963) that I joined the British Science Fiction Association (BSFA), probably as a result of seeing an advert in something like *New Worlds*. At the time there was quite a thriving London 'scene', particularly Friday evening meetings at the flat of a woman called Ella Parker, who lived in Kilburn, which I started attending regularly. I made a few contacts there and, while it might be too much to say I got to 'know' them, I at least got the chance to meet and hang out with authors like Mike Moorcock, John Brunner, Kenneth Bulmer and E.C Tubb; and sometimes to share the tube back to Charing Cross with the charming John Carnell. Big thrills for a 15-year-old kid ... though obviously I was too young to really make a connection with the professional writers.

It was through the BSFA that I got to publish my first fanzine, *Vega*. Things were pretty primitive back then ... no computers, no printers, not even any copy shops. The height of amateur printing technology was the Gestetner machine, where you typed on plastic stencils which were then placed on an inked drum and printed from there. If you wanted to reproduce illustrations, you sent them away to someone who'd make 'electrostencils' for you. The BSFA ran something called the Publishing And Distribution Service, where you cut your own stencils and sent them in for printing (by future author and critic Charles Platt, who had his own duplicator). I don't think there were more than about ten members of PADS at the time, but the idea was that you got a few copies of your fanzine for your own use, and there were also copies printed off for the other members, so you'd get an envelope full of everyone else's fanzines as well.

Frankly, *Vega* was embarrassingly awful. The first issue was six pages long, the second and third eight pages. Having no contacts, I wrote the whole of the first two issues ... mainly stories and book reviews ... though by the time I got to the third issue a couple of other PADS members had taken pity on me and contributed stories. But by then even I couldn't stand my own magazine any more, so I knocked it on the head ... which was probably a relief to all concerned. But looking back, I can see a beginning there: I didn't so much want to write *about* SF, I actually wanted to produce it, which was something that carried over into my comics fanzines. Not long after that, I

started building up a nice little collection of rejection slips from magazines like *New Worlds*, but never sold a story at the time.

Charles Platt also published a very classy (and very fat) fanzine called *Beyond*, which was where, in early 1964, I first read an article about the exciting new Marvel Comics that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were producing, so I went out and picked up a few, and after that I was lost. For the rest of the 1960s I was collecting everything in sight ... mainly Marvel and DC, though I'd look at just about anything ... and as it was relatively easy at the time, I soon managed to pick up everything I wanted back to the time when American comics were first imported. But I was always picking up stuff as a 'reader' rather than a 'collector': it was very nice to have a brand new copy of something, but as for older stuff, so long as I had a copy I could read I really wasn't fussed about condition and the idea of going out and buying comics as an investment and storing them in mylar bags would have just struck me as ridiculous. Later I picked up some older stuff from the 40s and 50s, but again condition wasn't that important to me, and with that stuff I was much more interested in SF comics than superhero material.

Anyway, my first involvement with comics fandom really came about when I met Phil Clarke at the World Science Fiction Convention in London, in 1965. We were a couple of 16-year-olds and hung out that weekend, and from that developed a close friendship that lasted several years. At the time, of course, everyone basically kept in touch by letter, but every now and then I'd go to Birmingham to see him, or he'd come to London to see me. And before too long we'd decided to produce a comics fanzine together. I think we might have seen a couple of American examples, but at the time there was nothing over here.

I then acquired a Roneo spirit duplicator, which is just about the most primitive form of printing you can get. Essentially, you'd have a 'master' sheet of paper with an attached ink sheet attached, like carbon paper, facing the back of the master. So you'd then type or draw on the master, and you'd end up with a reversed ink impression on the back of it ... the standard ink being purple, though you could get other colours. The master would then go on the drum of the duplicator and be dampened by pure alcohol, which would dissolve just enough of the ink to print the image or text. It was hand-cranked, one page at a time, smelled appalling, and was good for maybe 50 or 60 copies per master. And, of course, if you left the pages in direct light for too long, they faded horribly. So that's what I printed *Ka-Pow* with.

Frankly, my memories of this period are pretty vague now. Hunting out the old issues of *Ka-Pow*, it became obvious to me that we'd prepared masters of interior pages for a first issue, which are dated April 1966, but this was never published ... though obviously I ran off at least one print from them, as I still have it. I suspect we just weren't happy with it. But we eventually released the first, much improved issue in July 1967. As far as I know, that was the first British comics fanzine, though Tony Roche's Marvel-oriented *Heroes Unlimited*, published in Ireland, was a little earlier. By then we'd met a pretty good fan artist from Durham called Ken Simpson (though I'm not sure if he ever made it professionally), who contributed a cover and a strip called 'The Cat' while I, under the absurd delusion that I might be able to draw, did a strip called 'Nite-Man', and there was a text-story called 'American Eagle' by 'John James', which I think was me (at least, it was a pseudonym I used later when contributing an article to the men's magazine *Game* about women fighters in kung fu movies), although it could have been Phil and I together. I suspect it was just a move to make it look like we had more contributors! And Phil and I both did articles about old time British comics. The line up was pretty much the same for the second issue (February 1968), except the article (on

Tarzan strips) was by Gerald Cleaver. That was printed on the Roneo again and, frankly, large parts of my copy are now unreadable!

The third and last issue (August 1968) was all litho, which again I think was a first for this country, and featured strips by Mike Higgs, Ken Simpson and John Hudson (I'd learned my lesson by this point). I don't know why we stopped ... I suspect we may just have run out of steam. I was eventually involved in a couple more fanzines, but they come a little later in the story.

### The First British Comic Convention.

Tony Roche mentioned the idea of a gathering in Heroes Unlimited, and the idea of a convention in which Steve Moore was heavily involved again hard info here from Steve Moore:

*Q: You were involved in the first British comics conventions as well, I believe?*

The first two, yes. The first one was at the Midland Hotel in Birmingham in August 1968, and the organising committee was Phil Clarke, his then girlfriend Kay Hawkins and myself. Being on the spot in Birmingham, Phil and Kay did most of the actual organising, while I helped out with publicity (mainly through Odhams' Power Comics line) and printing with my 'trusty' Roneo. I'd already printed off a couple of personal sales-lists for Phil called *The Comic Fan*, which we then turned into two issues of *The Comic Fan Special*, which was our news-bulletin, and also listed comics (mainly Phil's) that were being sold to raise money for expenses. Looking at the second issue of this, I see there was going to be a convention booklet, which I wasn't going to be printing, but if I still have a copy of that, it must be somewhere in the loft.

I remember very little about that first convention (for many years I thought it had been in 1967!), though I recall the hotel as being big, old and gloomy. I think there may have been about 50 or 60 people there, and a few 'non-attending' members. There was the usual stuff: movies, panel discussions, auctions, but I only know this from looking at the bulletin, not from memory! It was all very small scale, and modeled on what we knew of SF conventions, but we had a good time and that was how it all started. I'm afraid I'm one of the guilty men ...

Anyway, I obviously hadn't had enough, as I got involved with the second one as well, at the Waverley Hotel in London, the following year. This time the committee was Frank Dobson, Derek Stokes, Alan Willis (of whom I remember nothing whatever), and myself. It was bigger, more organised ... and again I remember virtually nothing about it, though this time that was mainly because I was in a blind, exhausted panic through



most of the weekend, trying to make sure that everything worked. And that was enough organising for me. I went to the third in Sheffield, and I think to another one at the Waverley. And then I'd really had enough of conventions in general, and entered my 'reclusive phase' ... which has lasted for about 40 years so far!

Tony Roche subsequently reviewed the convention in *Heroes Unlimited*. It should be noted, that Roche had been to New York for SCRAP a comic convention, in 1968, something that surprised me, but he spoke of seeing Stan Lee amongst others, so his review of the First British Comic Con is interesting as although he mildly laments the lack of creative talent there, he talks highly about the friendliness.

Tony had received many pages of original artwork to be given away at the Birmingham convention from Dick Giordano and Carmine Infantino from National Comics, with original work by Steve Ditko and Neal Adams amongst others. The programme seemed slightly disorganised, and he mentions how Steve Moore was surprised to be on a programme item by reading it in the programme book. There was drinking, chatting and a dealers room, and auctions to ensure that the event broke even. The highlight was seven fans who entered the masquerade in comics costume. Roche had suggested that Dublin might be a better venue for a comic con, but as Steve Moore attests, it was to London.

Soon though *Heroes Unlimited* ended in 1969, and Tony Roche and these fanzines were to become an enigma only known by a number of fans, or heard of as an aside.

### **Notes:**

Harry McAvinchey has done an incredible amount of work, getting images and whole zines online, <https://paddykool2.wordpress.com/comics-comix-and-fandom/> he even has a link to the Full issue of *Merry Marval Fanzine 2*, <http://www.calameo.com/read/00274690234ada4f74160> and an article on the first Convention:

<https://paddykool2.wordpress.com/comics-comix-and-fandom/1968-the-first-u-k-comic-convention/>

Tony Roche resurfaced, on Harry's webpage web page:

*Tony Roche says:*

June 28, 2014 at 10:35 am

Dear Harry. Tony Roche here. Great to see all my back pages on your blog. I have been retrieved from oblivion by Peter Hansen and will be appearing on a panel about the early years of British Comics Fandom at the Film and Comic Convention in Earls Court, London on Sunday July 13th at 2pm. It would be great to see you there, and if you could be accompanied by a copy of HU4 (which I no longer have) that would be even better. Best, Tony.

Phil Clarke wrote about the First comic Convention in *Crikey* number 8, a magazine about comics, which is edited by Glen Flemming.

Thanks to Steve Moore and Pdraig O'Mealoid, Eugene Doherty, Paul Neary for help with the content and Harry McAvinchey for his web pages.



## MY IMAGINARY COMIC BOOK COMPANY BY CHRIS GARCIA

I am enough of an only child to have developed the imaginary world thing. You know, no brothers or sisters, so you create mad-strange worlds that you play in when you're on your own. I don't have the imagination to build very complex worlds; I have the kind of imagination that allows me to build strange organizational structures. While other kids might create caves, trolls, swords, dragons, I invented companies, histories, movements, jargon. I had friends who would play Wrestler, where they dreamed their matches, playing out their matches on the playground, in their front yards. Me, I played promoter. I would create huge events, Supercards, with major wrestlers battling over championships. I would do the play-by-play in my head while I was on the swings or on top of the backyard fort my Pops built me. I would create elaborate title histories and make little audio documentaries that I would play out on the little radio inside my head. I would then do Fantasy Booking, planning out matches and programs, entire events. That was my version: non-fictional-style commentary on a world that never existed.

And so, I didn't play Superhero; I never created Supers whose identities I would assume with a towel tied around my neck, jumping from fence posts to simulate flying. Nope, I created a comic book company – Z&Z Comics!

I was 8 when I came up with the idea. I remember it well. I was still not a good reader; I would pronounce the name of one of my favorites, *Doctor Fate*, as 'Doctor Fat-Ee', but I was in love with comics. *Captain Carrot and His Amazing Zoo Crew*, *The New Teen Titans*, *Doom Patrol*, *The Human Target*, *Jonah Hex*, and on and on. I loved them so much, but I never played Superman. No, I played the equivalent of DC Comics. I created characters, and along with the, the background, the stories of their creators, the troubles the imprint faced. I kept this up until I was 13 or so, I guess. I can remember when we moved and I was swinging on the swings in the middle of our new complex, going over the publication history of Z&Z Comics.

And so it went like this – Z&Z was founded in 1955 (the year both my parents were born) by Jules Klenner and his high school best friend, Toby Fress. I have no idea how I came up with those names, but I did. Klenner was an artist who wasn't smart enough to get into college, but who could copy anything he saw on the page. Fress was a guy with a giant collection of old movies and a printing press. While they were in High School, Fress printed copies of Klenner's doodles in comic book form. Klenner would start with writing a letter. Then he would draw a Superman-like guy using it as a weapon or a shield or to solve some strange problem. They sold this to their school friends, and made enough money to pay for the paper, which allowed them to start their business. That first hero was later named Alphabet Man, in an almost Electric Company-esque level of bad hero conceptualization. He'd walk around (rule number one of Z&Z – No One Will Fly!) and if he saw a major problem, he'd create a gun from a letter 'j' or a boomerang from a 'v' or a prison from a series of 'l's. Lame? Yes, but remember, I was young.

Klenner would release a new comic every week, sometimes two if he got on a roll. He would sometimes write the same story twice, but give two different sets of illustrations to it and sell it twice. Fress named the company Z&Z because... well, I never came up with that. I just liked the sound of it, I guess.

Fress created his first character a little bit later. *Dinosaur Destroyer*. Not a guy who destroyed dinosaurs, but a dinosaur who did a lot of destroying. It was basically Godzilla, only smaller. He was a good guy, fighting villains like The Badman and BirdMonster (yes, with the capital-M in the middle!). He would stomp the bad guys, and at the end of every issue, there'd be a piece about real dinosaurs drawn by Fress.

They started hiring young kids who could draw to create comics. There was Mickey V, a German kid whose characters were all reformed Nazis. I think I came up with him when I was like 12 and we'd studied World War II. His most popular comic was called "The Kind" and it was a group who would travel from city to city doing good deeds. I remember that I had seen this cool last name that started with V and used it, but then I started mostly thinking about other pieces of the world and I couldn't remember what his full name was. I kinda think it might have been Verlander, but who knows? It was all in my head, after all.

There were others. The Cleaner, basically a magic-powered janitor, was popular, and his creator, a woman named Felicia Long, was the richest of all the people who worked for Z&Z and gave all the proceeds of her creation to charities. *The Loner* was basically *Kung-Fu*, only the guy was a white dude who didn't know kung-fu. Growth was a powerful hero who could make anything other than himself grow or shrink. He fought against the most interesting villains, Nightmare (and a wrestler used that name years later!) and Shockra (who I think would be seen as a racist character these days) and The Horseshoes Champ (a REALLY GOOD Horseshoes player) among others.



It wasn't just super heroes, though. There were Space Comics (*To The Moon*, *The Space Monsters*), detective comics (*Mysterious Comics*, *Jeffrey Lopez: Ghost Detective*), and a lot of Westerns, though almost all with the Indians as the good guys. I remember the story behind *Ohlone Comics*. Mikey Castro was the kid who came up with the idea and told the stories of what happened to the Ohlones after they were taken from their traditional villages. These were mostly adventures, though I remember coming up with the idea that Castro drew a love story when he wanted to propose to his girlfriend. I think I came up with that idea a few days after my first kiss. In fact, it may have been while I was walking home from that park...

The Speedtrap family of comics was Z&Z's biggest line. They were a family of super-fast people who had to fight villains from the dangerous evil group "MAXIMUM" who were all various types of robots. There were a dozen comics in the Speedtrap family, all drawn by the same woman named Caroline Paret. She was a wonderful artist, and I imagined her as the backbone of Z&Z comic whose books were like *Superman* or *Batman* because they spread out. I spent a lot of time coming up with the stories behind stories, about how the Speedtrap comics were 'controversial' because they depicted romance and passion along with the comic violence. What, I was like 10 when I came up with this! It was the centerpiece of the entire Z&Z Universe.

The thing is, I was a kid who spent a lot of time on his own, and I couldn't draw or write stories or do anything well enough to make it worthwhile. The one thing I could do was make backstory, create settings out of batches of stories. Why do I love *The Blair Witch Project*? Because of everything that surrounded the story of the film, all the backstory they created. The film itself's OK, but the story of the story IS the story, and that's the really important thing. To me, making up the characters, their costumes (and the only things I ever drew out were their masks!), and the adventures was so limited, I could only do so much with that, but the stories of the ways they came about were so much more interesting to me. I guess I was always meant to love documentaries, because even if I had a narrative in my head, I wanted to know what universe that narrative was created in, and maybe that's actually my super power.

So, maybe I was planning on all that fake non-fiction I wrote for *The Drink Tank*. My brain works in weird ways, and while I can never remember where the Pyrex pans go in the kitchen, or to turn out the lights, I'll never forget that issue 17 of *Jeffrey Lopez: Ghost Detective* was the cross-over issue with *The Horseshoes Champ* that sold out every issue in comic stores. Of course, it helps that when I thought that up, I was swinging on the swings at Briarwood Elementary, watching the really little kids play soccer on the most beautiful of all cloudy days that ever happened. That's the sort of thing you remember forever.



## CROSSING OVER: FIVE SUPERHERO BOOKS FOR SCI- FI FANS BY DONNA MARTINEZ

As the Comics Track manager for Arisia, part of my job is to keep my eyes wide open for comics that appeal to all types of readers. Naturally this includes some fannish cross pollination to help get more people in to comics. So if you're a Sci-Fi fan and you're wondering where to start, here are some recommendations to help you take the leap into world of comic book super heroics.

### **Ms. Marvel**

Written by G.Willow Wilson

Art by Adrian Alphona and others

Ongoing series published by Marvel Comics

Believe the hype! This book is exactly as good as everyone says it is. The new Ms. Marvel, Pakistani-American teenager Kamala Khan is endearing in her pursuit of being Jersey City's number one super-hero. She's a Peter Parker for a new era, dealing with familiar teenage woes and worries while going up against mad scientist supervillains as she adjusts to her newly discovered super powers. Writer G.Willow Wilson does an excellent job of capturing Kamala's voice and Adrian Alphona's art is well suited to Ms. Marvel's active imagination and super-shape changing abilities. The best part of *Ms. Marvel* is in its accessibility, it's a book for all ages that reminds us all that comics can be fun again.



### **Silver Surfer**

Written by Dan Slott

Art by Mike and Laura Allred

Ongoing series published by Marvel Comics

*Silver Surfer* comes from the dynamite era of comics in the 1960's when Jack Kirby and Stan Lee were churning out one hit title after another. The Surfer has seen many adventures since his introduction in 1966 but few stories have humanized the character the way this current book does. The story starts when the Silver Surfer is called upon to be the champion of an Earth girl he's never met, Dawn Greenwood. From there the story unfolds into one of the best unexpected romances in comics. The art by Mike and Laura Allred provides a gorgeous interstellar backdrop that harkens back to a golden age of comics illustration with a style that's both classic and fresh. Be warned, this story will draw you in but it could end up breaking your heart.

### **Empowered**

Written and drawn by Adam Warren

Ongoing series published by Dark Horse Comics

What started out as a string of sexy superheroine-in-distress private commissions has evolved into one of the best indie superhero comics of the decade. Creator Adam Warren, the talent behind the first original English language (OEL) manga *Dirty Pair*, describes his main heroine as being "never lucky but always plucky" for her ability to get knocked down and get right back up again. *Empowered*, aka Elissa Megan Powers, often finds herself on the receiving end of a lot of bondage-themed humiliation, not to mention the barbs she gets from her own super-powered teammates. But she's still dedicated to being the best hero she can be and because of this she can rise above any negativity the hero life throws at her. And Warren himself is no slouch when it comes executing beautifully detailed art, but his ability to turn standard superhero tropes on their heads is what keeps making *Empowered* an exciting read.

### **Supreme: Blue Rose**

Written by Warren Ellis

Art by Tula Lotay

Seven issue mini-series published by Image Comics

The current incarnation of Supreme, Rob Liefeld's ersatz Superman, is right in line with other radical revisions of other Liefeld properties like *Prophet* and *Glory*. In this series Warren Ellis takes the Lois Lane stand-in, Diana Dane, and puts her center stage when she's hired by charismatic businessman Darius Dax to investigate an interdimensional phenomenon that seems to be rewriting history itself. What unfolds is an interesting play on the concept of universe-wide reboots and retcons that tend to plague mainstream comics. The art, however, is definitely not your average mainstream "house style". Tula Lotay's blend of soft pastels and dreamlike watercolor effects bring home the disorientation that the characters are feeling as they try to solve the mystery at hand.

All titles in this article can be found through finer comic shops in your area and online through services like ComiXology and through their respective publishers' websites.

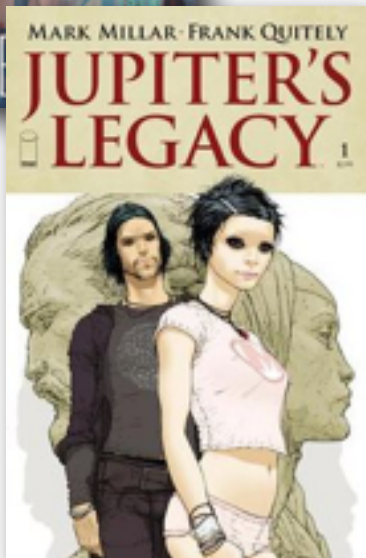
### **Jupiter's Legacy**

Written by Mark Millar

Art by Frank Quitely

Five issue mini-series published by Image Comics, currently available in trade paperback

The question of "What if Superheroes existed in the real world?" is a question that's been asked and answered many times to varying degrees of success, but in *Jupiter's Legacy*, Millar and Quitely ask the question "What's it like to have to live in the shadow of Superhero parents?". The story follows super-siblings Brandon and Chloe, two twenty-somethings who grew up with heroes for parents. Neither of them really lives up to their parents' expectations. But when their equally super-powered uncle goads Brandon into taking definitive action to seize his father's legacy, terrible decisions are made and tragedy rips the family apart. At this point most stories of this type would end on a down note, but *Jupiter's Legacy* concludes with a hopeful eye towards the next chapter of the story.





## THE B-TEAM BY REID VANIER

FIRST APPEARED AT

[HTTP://  
MODERNMYTHOLOGIES.COM/  
2014/09/10/THE-B-TEAM/](http://modernmythologies.com/2014/09/10/the-b-team/)

As a rule, superhero mythology – and mythology in general – tends to embrace extremes. The world’s greatest detective, the fastest man alive, even the King of the Sea – all of these titles imply the superlative nature of the heroes they describe (Batman, Flash, and Aquaman, respectively). The same applies to the villains – the world’s smartest man (Lex Luthor); the man who mastered absolute zero (Captain Cold) – but more importantly, the paradigm of good and evil is itself a structure that imposes extremes and limits the grey area in between. And while those extremes often form the most powerful and potent metaphors, they radically dehumanize the characters, making it easier to draw literary or mythological significance but serious damaging a reader’s ability to see themselves as those characters.

There is another problem. In a world full of the best and brightest, where every character has a distinct metaphorical significance to the mythology, where even those who seem average still possess incredible abilities or moral character, finding a true everyman is exceptionally difficult. But within the DC Universe, as within real life, there is a scale of usefulness on which even superpowers are judged. In *Countdown to Infinite Crisis*, Maxwell Lord describes the phenomenon of “nuisance-level” metahumans – people whose powers are so innocuous or useless that they either pose no threat or they may not even realize they have powers at all. According to Lord, this group includes “kids who can bend spoons and the little old lady in Topeka who keeps hitting the Powerball”, and numbers greater than a million individuals, but more importantly, the existence of the “nuisance-level” metahumans opens the door to a whole range of powers that vary in both degree and usefulness. And though the idea was best articulated by Maxwell Lord, it began many decades earlier in the form of the Legion of Substitute Heroes.



Above - Polar Boy is rejected by the Legion of Super-Heroes - DC Comics

Below - Infectious Lass demonstrating her powers to the Legion - Superboy #201, DC Comics

The Legion of Substitute Heroes, from left to right: Night Girl, Stone Boy, Polar Boy, Chlorophyll Kid, Fire Lad, and Color Kid – *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes* #243, DC Comics

The Legion of Substitute Heroes, also known simply as the “Subs”, is a 30th-Century team of meta-humans who were, as their name implies, denied entry into the full Legion of Super-Heroes. And while other super-teams have denied entry to various heroes before (Booster Gold was denied Justice League status following the death of Ted Kord), what makes the Legion of Substitute Heroes unique is that as opposed to an issue of attitude or reputation, their membership was almost exclusively denied full Legion status due to the so-called “uselessness” of their powers.

The team’s original roster included: Polar Boy, who founded the team and served as its leader, Fire Lad, Stone Boy, Night Girl, and Chlorophyll Kid. In all cases, their powers were deemed to ineffectual or unwieldy for the full Legion. Polar Boy, for example, could generate intense cold and project ice, but his control over this power was dubious at best. In the case of Night Girl, her incredible super-strength only takes effect in darkness. Similar limitations applied to other team members: Stone Boy could turn himself to stone, making him largely invulnerable, but could neither move nor retain consciousness (he did eventually gain limited mobility); Chlorophyll Kid could induce the rapid growth of plants but could not control them; and Fire Lad’s ability to breathe fire was deemed to be too uncontrollable. Later additions to the team contributed to the team’s reputation (both in-universe and in publication) as ineffectual or incapable: Porcupine Pete could inaccurately fire projectile quills from his body, Color Kid could change the colour of objects, and Infectious Lass could transmit any infection, though she could not control her level of contagion, making her a threat to ally and enemy alike.

In its early appearances, the Legion of Substitute Heroes was portrayed as incompetent

and incapable, functioning as comic relief in Legion stories. The team would ultimately prove itself, defending the Earth while the full Legion was occupied off-world, but as much as that and future stories would vindicate the Subs as useful heroes (some would eventually qualify as full Legionnaires), the impact of their mythology is weighted just as equally in the failures that characterized their early adventures as in the victories of their subsequent tales. Through their bizarre and inconvenient powers, as well as their lack of cohesion as a group, the Subs became the perfect representation of the fact that, among the gods and devils of the DC Universe, there were ordinary (or slightly more/less than ordinary) people who still could have an impact on the course of history.

In the context of mythology, traditional





Above - The Legion of Substitute Heroes, from left to right: Night Girl, Stone Boy, Polar Boy, Chlorophyll Kid, Fire Lad, and Color Kid – Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes #243, DC Comics

logic dictates one of three outcomes for a wannabe hero who is spurned by their idols or mentors: they accept rejection and fade into the background, they earn their mentor's respect by improving or conforming to what is required of them, or they turn against their mentors in a villainous act of spite. The Legion of Substitute Heroes is unique in this regard; their mythology turns in a completely uncharted direction, with the unqualified or unfit "heroes" taking a backseat while remaining in relative spotlight, working on their own lesser terms out of spite (or rather, a desire to prove their mentors and idols wrong) without upgrading their powers or abilities, or switching or compromising their morality. Moreover, for most of the Subs' membership, their "powers" are merely a function of their respective alien heritages. The entirety of the races from which Polar Boy, Infectious Lass, Stone Boy, and others hail possess those heroes' powers, meaning that despite having powers in relation to humans, the membership of the Subs is largely composed of beings who, in the context of their own races, are completely ordinary.

What makes the Legion of Substitute Heroes so unique and so resonant is their incredible, unabashed normalcy. They are not, for the most part, extraordinarily powerful, nor extraordinarily intelligent. In some cases, they are not even particularly good at working together. Even compared to non-powered "civilian" characters, they appear to lack a strong mythological basis for existing; characters such as Commissioner Gordon, Amanda Waller, and others still conform to archetypes of morality and character in a way that the Subs do not. But where the Subs are similar to those great and resilient characters is that they too have a desire to affect the world (or worlds) around them. In spite of their lower position among the superpowered, they are not deterred from pursuing justice, freedom, and other ideals. In other words, they are just like us – they each have a dream and a vision of what the world can be. And just like us, their perseverance and dedication pays off.

The Legion of Substitute Heroes is one of the DC Universe's most clever mythologies, disguising the ordinary and the unspectacular as a colourful and bizarre group of misfits. They represent the diversity of ability and opportunity present in society as a whole, and their victories, however meagre, are a signal that any person and any action, no matter how insignificant they may seem, can bend the course of history.

I LIKE BEING A MACHINE.

NOW MY EYES ARE CAMERAS, RECORDING ALL THEY SEE.

AND THE COMICS. THAT WAS WHAT I READ, WHEN I WAS A CHILD:

AND THIS IS A COMIC-BOOK WORLD.

SUPERMAN AND POPEYE AND NANCY AND UNCLE SCROOSE.

**ANDY WARHOL IN MIRACLEMAN #19 BY PADRAIG O'MEALOID**

YES.

I THINK OFTEN ABOUT MINE.



Right, some random thoughts and observations on Andy Warhol in *Miracleman* #19.

This story, like most of the stories in Neil Gaiman's Golden Age arc of *Miracleman*, is based on something briefly mentioned in Alan Moore's earlier run on *Miracleman*. Actually, what Gaiman did with these is very similar to what Moore was planning to do with *Yuggoth Cultures* (which eventually mutated into the Avatar project called *Yuggoth Cultures and Other Growths*), originally:

After Dave Mitchell of Oneiros Books asked Alan Moore to contribute to a *The Starry Wisdom*, a collection of new writings inspired by H. P. Lovecraft, Moore came up with the idea to do an entire book, to be called *Yuggoth Cultures*, based on Lovecraft's *Fungi From Yuggoth* cycle of poems. Unfortunately, Moore lost the only copies of most of the pieces he had written for the book in a London taxi cab. Moore submitted a short story entitled *The Courtyard* as his entry for *The Starry Wisdom*, but suspended work on *Yuggoth Cultures*. 'So the project went 'on hold,'... I kind of shoved in it the back of a drawer and forgot about it,' he told Avatar editor-in-chief William Christensen in an interview included in *Yuggoth Cultures and Other Growths* No. 3. The two other surviving pieces from *Yuggoth Cultures*, the poems *Recognition* and *Zaman's Hill*, were included in the 1995 book *Dust: A Creation Books Reader*.

(That paragraph yinked from here:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan\\_Moore's\\_Yuggoth\\_Cultures\\_and\\_Other\\_Growths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Moore's_Yuggoth_Cultures_and_Other_Growths) )

The idea was, with *Yuggoth Cultures*, to 'culture' slivers from the original work, to grow them from a small piece, and see what resulted. This is pretty much exactly what Gaiman does with these *Miracleman* stories, so it'd be interesting to know if they ever discussed that particular strategy for telling stories.

On one of the last pages of Moore's *Miracleman* #16, he visits the 'underworld' below Olympus, which is run by Mors, a Qys\*. Mors has the ability to bring back the dead, at least in some form. But, so far, only the ones who died in the last eighteen months. Now, we know that this story is set in July 1987, and that Andy Warhol died in February 1987, so the 'We only just got Andy Warhol' comment seems a bit overly dramatic. But that's just me being picky. If I wanted to be really picky, I could point out the bit where *Miracleman* says, 'Mors, you've made this place look wonderful... the grass, the mist, the hidden lighting...' I mean, are they chatty interior decorators, or Gods made flesh...?

We also learn from here that Warhol suggested making multiple copies of himself, which Mors agrees to. Sadly, Gaiman didn't pick up on the bit about them ganging up on Truman Capote in debates, though. Still, you can't have everything.

(Note all that high-falutin' classical references creeping in: Oneiros Books and Olympus, both Greek mythological references, and Mors, a Roman one. None of yer knuckle-draggin' fanboy stuff here!)





Anyway, onto Gaiman's actual story in **Miracleman** #19. There are several things that I noted, reading it. So, in no particular order:

There's the number 6, which immediately suggests the TV series **The Prisoner**. Not only is the Andy Warhol that is narrating this story Andy Warhol #6, but at the very end, when Mors is hanging up the lifeless machine that had been Emil Gargunza, we see five other lifeless 'corpses' on the rack as well, suggesting that this Gargunza was also #6. So, it's easy enough to see that, particularly in the case of Gargunza, but really in the case of any of the reanimated people, they're prisoners, and that there are precautions set in place to prevent them escaping, again particularly in the case of Gargunza.

Copies. Why pair Gargunza with Warhol? Presumably Gaiman was looking for some way to examine Gargunza in that set of stories for the **Golden Age**, and Andy Warhol is actually a good fit for that. Both, in the end, were interested in making copies of things - in Warhol's case, pretty much anything that he could paint/print and call art, and in Gargunza's the crashlanded Qys, to eventually be a receptacle for his own being. Even Mors the Qys is in the business of making copies, replacement bodies for the dead. And Andy Warhol is constantly talking about making things like prints and t-shirts, which are themselves multiple copies of an original work.

Comics. We know that Gargunza got his final inspiration for creating a team of superheroes from picking up a copy of a **Captain Marvel / Marvel Family** comic in the staff canteen at the whichever ministry he was attached to (in about the middle of Alan Moore's **Miracleman** book II). And Gaiman has Warhol describes the life he has now as 'A comic book world' whilst talking about the comics he read as a child. Warhol was certainly influenced by comics, as evidenced by several things - this photograph of him and Nico as Batman and Robin, for instance: [http://www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/13\\_Frank\\_Bez\\_Nico\\_and\\_Andy\\_as\\_Batman\\_and\\_Robin\\_1967.jpg](http://www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/13_Frank_Bez_Nico_and_Andy_as_Batman_and_Robin_1967.jpg)

Mothers. Both of them were overly-attached of their mothers. Warhol's mother was the one who referred to as Andek, as Mors does here - and let me point out here, the presumably totally pointless fact that Mothers is an anagram of The Mors - although Warhol gets annoyed when Gargunza calls him that. It's possibly also worth mentioning that we don't know what gender Mors is, although there's a general acceptance of a male identity - on the very first page of the story, Andy Warhol says 'I don't know how he can tell the difference...' so we simply assume a male persona, but this isn't necessarily the case. After all, would a female persona not better suit someone trying to bring to life the recently lost? So Mors seems to have a particular maternal relationship with Andy Warhol, and perhaps this Andy Warhol in particular.

Sexuality. Neither Warhol nor Gargunza ever got married, as far as I know. We know that Andy Warhol was gay, but we don't really ever get a proper handle on Gargunza's sexuality. We know that the gang leader he worked for when he was 14 tried to rape him, and that he in turn raped the gang leader's girlfriend in front of him, but neither of these necessarily point to anything definitive. Gargunza doesn't, for instance, have the usual trapping of a mad genius in the jungle, which is the buxom young ladies in half-nothin' waiting on him hand and foot, but that's also as likely to be that he's not a super villain stock character-type of baddie. He does seem to be attended by one rather large man-servant, but we can't really read much into that, either. In the end, his remarks about Warhol might be illuminating, where he calls him an 'inane bleached faggot,' although at that he wouldn't be the first gay man to be a homophobe, either.

There is also, I suppose, a contrast being drawn between Andy Warhol and his Day-Glo modern world, his Pop Art, on one hand, and the Mors-run underground, which is all Gothic and classically inspired, on the other. Warhol and Gargunza both want to do modern things, futuristic things, but they are stuck in, ultimately, The Past. A science-based Past, but The Past none the less.

Neil Gaiman pointed out in George Khoury's **Kimota! The Miracleman Companion** that the Andy Warhol story is really the story of Persephone, trapped in the Underworld. He even, he said, put in the Pomegranate. And he has Winter Moran mention one of the alternative versions of Persephone, Proserpine, when she's talking to Gargunza.

Actually, speaking of copies / different version of things, we also have a hint of that in different bits here being from different mythologies - Roman and Greek, specifically, in this instance, but it fits in with the general idea of copying and change in this story.

Also worth mentioning, maybe, is Divine, who is at the John Belushi concert with Glen. I'm presuming that this is meant to be Harris Glenn Milstead, known as Glenn, who is Divine's male counterpart. So we have an interesting sub-idea of bringing back two different versions of the same person.

Gaiman also mentioned somewhere that he was having dinner with Lou Reed at some point, and Lou accused him of robbing from **Songs for Drella**, the Lou Reed / John Cale album about Andy Warhol. Gaiman said he didn't, but had been listening to it a lot while he was writing that story, none the less, so was certainly influenced by it, but only in the general tone of Andy Warhol.

So that's a few thoughts for you to be going on with! Anything you need to use, no problem. Just say something nice about me in the acks.



[\*I did once see someone saying online that Qys should be pronounced Quiche because, being shape-shifters, they weren't 'real men.' This'd be a reference to the 1982 (supposedly humorous) book *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*. There are vast numbers of reasons this isn't true, of course, not the least of which is that Moore's first mention of the Qys pre-dates 1982 by some years...]





## WARHOL & THE COMICS BY JAMES BACON

I am standing in the Norman Rockwell Museum enjoying both Rockwell's art and that of famed comic artist Alex Ross. There is a phenomenal exhibit on and I am in awe. There has been a lot of thought and effort put into the galleries, the choice of art, and Ross himself has been incredibly generous with insight, information and rarities.

Surprise came when I find out that the exhibit had been made happen by The Warhol: The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. An Alex Ross picture of Warhol flying with swans adorned the guide for the exhibit, and I was mildly stunned. I had already been so pleased that The Rockwell was doing this that this extra connection took me aback.

It utterly confused me. Up to this point, the relationship between Pop Artists and Comics had been, in my mind, one of misappropriation, earning millions from comic art that was not their own, not caring about where the actual piece originated and brushing the comics connection away.



Not this. Not support and not a vehicle to highlight and showcase comic art in a wonderful way.

My review of the exhibition in 2013 made a connection for me with Jesse Kowalski from The Warhol. I reconnected to ask some questions for this article, and was pleased to get some info, and found out, ironically, that Kowalski was moving to The Rockwell as curator.

As I stood in western Massachusetts, I came to understand that Pop Art has different connections to comics, and that in the case of the legacy of Andy Warhol, it is a beautiful one.

Andy Warhol was a comic book reader. As a child he liked and read comic books:

'His brother Paul showed him how to put wax over the surface of a comic strip, turn it over on a piece of paper, and rub the back in order to transfer the image. Although the wording came out backwards, Andy was always excited by the results'

His brother, Paul Warhola, confirmed this: '...- and back in about 1935 the only entertainment we had was theatre. Andy was too young for that then, but spending days with him I did a lot of drawing and tracing. What do I mean by tracing? I used to get colour comics and rub them with wax, most likely from a candle and then turn them over and get a spoon and 'iron' them onto a clean piece of paper. Andy always showed a lot interest in that. And also in movie stars, from a young age.'

Well now, I just found this such a wonderful and interesting piece of information. Deriving art from existing art, this occurs on so many levels. In many ways, comics themselves are reinventions that are continually being updated by new creators. The art of doing a cover in a previous style is well practised, and of course, transforming art into more art, is in itself also enjoyed by



most. Where the line between homage and respect or disrespect and misappropriation occurs is dependent on so many things.

Yet here Paul Warhola offers such a fascinating insight. To imagine that Andy Warhol was playing with reproduction of comics even as a child. I suppose many children play with comics, colour them in as I did with black and white versions of Asterix, or cut them out and create collages, but even so, it is a lovely connection.

I understand Andy Warhol read *Buck Rogers*, *Flash Gordon* and *Little Orphan Annie*. The Warhol does not have any of the comic books from his childhood, but they do have a large collection of Big Little Books, (<http://www.biglittlebooks.com/learning.html>) which feature Buck Rogers, Tarzan and Flash Gordon amongst others. Each page of words is accompanied by a facing page with an illustration.

Comics do not seem to feature in what is recorded of Warhol's life until he was living in New York in the 1950's. But again, to my surprise, here we find a reader of comics.

Elaine Finsilver was a flatmate with Andy in 1950 in New York, in an apartment at 74 West and 103rd St. where various people from Carnegie college hung out. She has said : '...I have a vague recollection of him [Warhol] reading comic books. I could be wrong. He was not a heavy reader.'

A vague recollection is good enough for me, but then we have tangible evidence, from the Warhol, that they have 'at least 30-40 comic books in the collection, from the mid-1950s to late 1960s. Mostly *Batman* and *Lois Lane* books.'

Warhol was a designer, and earning serious money for his work. In the summer of 1955, he was hired by Gene Moore to provide content for windows of the department store Bonwit Teller in New York.

There is some lack of clarity at exactly what time Warhol then created his comic based artworks. The pictures are noted as being from 1960, but I have read that in the end of 1960 Andy Warhol was possibly too busy to have created them. They are dated, so we will have to assume they were from 1960-61. Regardless, by 1961 he had a selection of artworks and they were publicly displayed in the windows of Bonwit Teller in April.

The images vary, some just take the shapes of the comic character from a panel. Others are clearly total reproductions of a panel from a comic. In 1960, he painted Popeye, Superman and Dick Tracy.

According to Kowalski, 'These were synthetic polymer paint on canvas, which Warhol used for most of his paintings from the early 1960s through the rest of his career.'

The Popeye was an outline in Blue, 108.5 x 98.7 cm so quite a big piece, later, cited as 1961 the original Popeye comic book panel cut out was also put onto a canvas, and there is graphite and watercolours paint drops on the canvas, a second piece of art, or indeed third from the one item of comic art, which was by Bud Sagendorf.

The Superman panel was huge, 67 x 52 inches. He is blowing at a fire and we do not see his logo, but the colours are strong. PUFF in big letters was a feature of this piece of art. Again this same panel, cut out of the comic features in another piece, the panel cut out with another and on canvas entitled Superman Collage #15 blue and red paint drops. The panel was from a 1959 Superman comic and that original art was by Kurt Schaffenberger. Schaffenberger worked on Superman and Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane amongst many other titles.

There were two versions of Dick Tracy, one had a green back ground and the other had red. Repeating a work in different colours would be something that Andy Warhol would revisit at a

later stage. A *Little Big Book of Dick Tracy* was found in Time Capsule 21 from 1967. The original comic strip appeared on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1951 and was by Chester Gould.

In 1961, Warhol painted a Batman logo, Nancy and the Little King. Nancy was mostly a direct reproduction, slightly unaligned, with her words somewhat obscured, but they read “Brr. My snow suit isn’t warm enough – I’ll put on a sweater too.” and originally by Ernie Bushmiller. The Little King was similar to Popeye in that it was a block colour in the shape of the character and originally by Otto Soglow.

Interestingly, the Batman logo, which was in red, had hatching on one side and was not used in Bonwit Teller. Kowalski tells us ‘The marks in the painting are found in many of Warhol’s earliest works – this was the infancy of Pop Art and I believe he used this technique to bridge the gap between Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism with this new form.’ The logo was one that Bob Kane had done many years before for the covers of Batman.

So why comics? Well here is the man himself talking, from an excerpt of an interview that appeared in *Cavalier*, a men’s magazine, in 1966.

Cavalier: What were the first Pop Art things you did?

Andy Warhol: I did comic strips and ads. A great many artists were working on different ideas at the same time. Things just fell together to create the Pop Art movement.

Cavalier: Why did you start with comic strips? Were you interested in them as an entertainment medium or, as some intellectuals regard them, a kind of illustrated modern mythology?

Andy Warhol: I don’t know. Just as comic strips, that’s all. They were things I knew and they are relatively easy to draw or, better still, to trace. I also did movie stars - Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Troy Donahue - during my ‘death’ period. Marilyn Monroe died then. I felt that Elizabeth Taylor was going to die too, after her operation. I thought that there were a lot of people who were going to die - like Troy Donahue.

Then suddenly these artworks stopped. The Lichtenstein effect had occurred and the

knowledge that Roy was doing something similar had a huge impact. Andy Warhol wanted to be original, as ironic as you may find that, he was a genius in his own way and wanted to do his own thing.

In 1961, as well as Lichtenstein, another ‘Pop Artist’ also did some work on superheroes. Mel Ramos from Sacramento, who had an incredible gift of drawing beautiful women coming out of corn cobs or sitting in martini glasses, also did a number of super hero images,



“The idea  
is not to  
live  
forever,  
but to  
create  
something  
that will.”  
Andy

with his Batman being cited as a 1961 work. Lichtenstein, Warhol and Ramos shared an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1963.

It would be unfair to think that comics had not been a source of inspiration for art up to this point, and there were no shortage of artworks derived from comics, or artists who incorporated comic strip imagery into their paintings prior to 1960.

Philip Pearlstein did some awesome Superman paintings in oil, and there is one from 1952, this is in an expressionist style and is very colourful. Pearlstein went to Carnegie college with Warhol and later was better known for his nude life work, one of which entitled 'Study for Model with Superman, Nefertiti And Gargoyle' again features Superman but was watercolor on paper in 1998.

British artist John McHale included two comic book images in his 1953 Transistor collage series, a Romance comic featuring on the wall of one in particular. Peter Blake painted the first of two paintings with the same title, *Children Reading Comics* in 1954, with one of the Children holding a copy of *The Eagle*, and she also has an eye Patch. Back to the US San Francisco based artist Jess Collins used *Dick Tracy* comic strips for his eight part series Tricky Cad produced from 1954 to 1959, and another New York artist Ray Johnson, who lived with Andy Warhol incorporated images from comics into a number of his collages. He is also known for mail art.

So the uniqueness is interesting. Yet, somehow Warhol captured people's imagination, and that is what is needed. Tom Wolfe has a pretty healthy skeptical viewpoint, that it is all about a select group of curators, who get to decide what is great and not, and that it utterly lacks any democracy at all. Reviewers, buyers, and the media follow like a pack, as he says 'The notion that the public accepts or rejects anything in modern art is merely romantic fiction. The game is completed and the trophies distributed long before the public knows what has happened.' I adore Wolfe's take on modern art, I also have to contend with the problem that I really like a variety of artistic things that no one else really likes, so it is very conceivable that, in turn, the people who like modern art are not sycophants, but just like it.

In a way Warhol was seeking artwork to help him take that step into a different genre of art away from design, and although he had worked on comics, he was suddenly put off them.

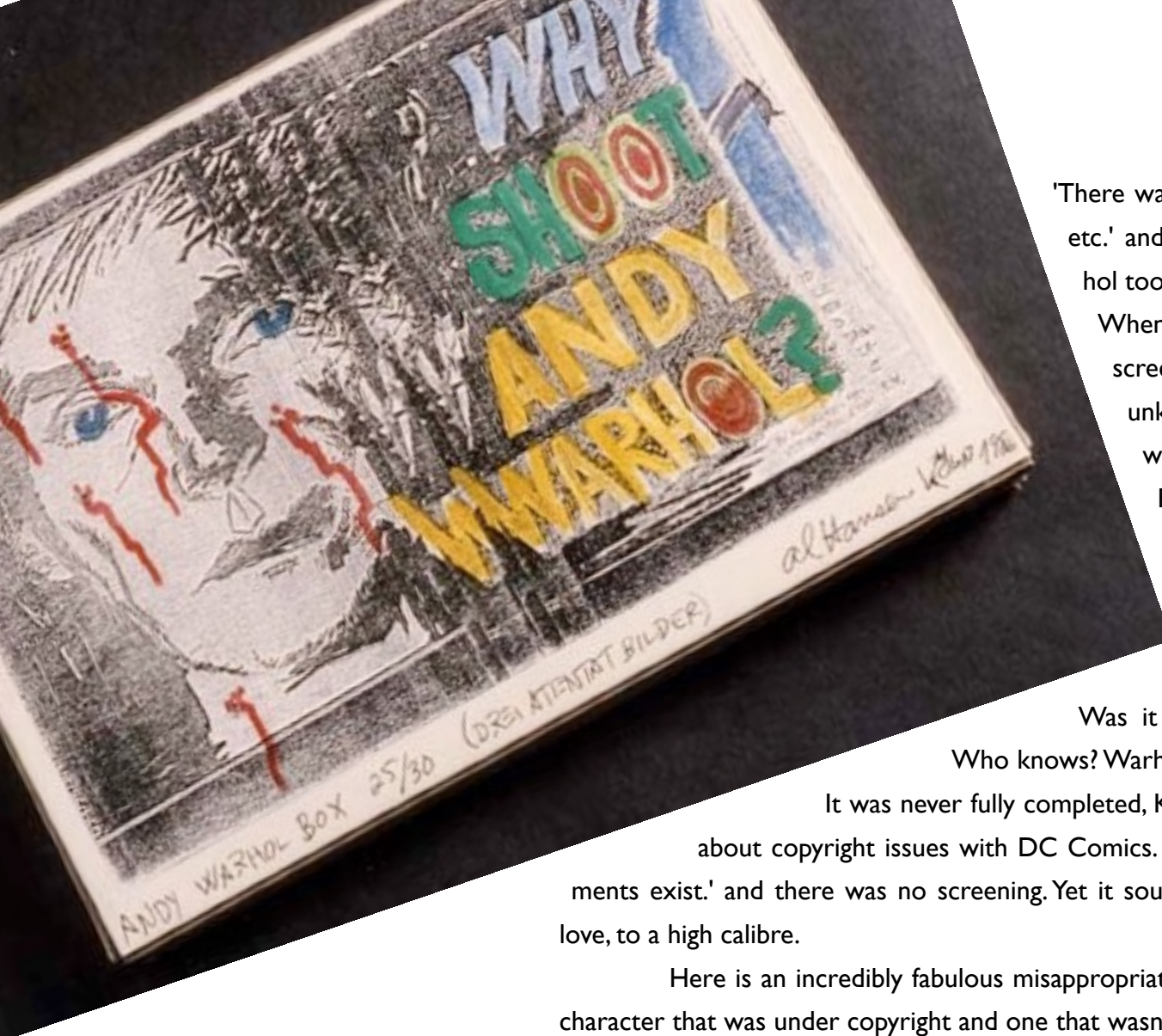
The timing of Andy Warhol's work and that of Roy Lichtenstein is for some a bone of contention. Did Lichtenstein copy Warhol, was he truly original. In fairness the enlargement of the B Dot was new, and is something I often seen cosplayed, and it makes me smile when I do, despite my feelings about Lichtenstein's work.

Ted Carey is heavily quoted, about the timing, and seeing the Roy Lichtenstein work in Leo Castelli's and telling Andy, while there is some lovely inconsistency from Lichtenstein saying he saw the Bonwitt Teller window, after he had started painting, but then giving a date of doing his paintings as after the window had existed, creating a wonderful contradiction that detractors can hold onto.

Yet this is how the Campbell Soup cans came about, so at the stage Andy leaves comics as a form of art. He went on to do other things, yet he would not leave comics altogether. Even having been burned in a way, I would have thought that an artist would not return to the elements that ended up proving such a disappointment.

But in 1964, Andy Warhol filmed *Batman Dracula*. If one looks at the effort that went into this project, it was more than just a bunch of friends working on something. According to Kowalski,





'There was a script, costume design, lighting, make-up, etc.' and there is a general understanding that Warhol took his film work really very seriously.

When I was in The Rockwell Museum, there was a screen showing some footage of this previously unknown to me film. This film, in black and white, pre-dates the 1966 TV series and Batman appears to be 'campy' - isn't that just wonderful- and was played by actor Gregory Battcock, who was a friend of Warhol. One wonders just how much fun there must have been going on there.

Was it a precursor to the light 1966 TV series?

Who knows? Warhol was in New York and so was DC Comics.

It was never fully completed, Kowalski explains, as 'Warhol was concerned about copyright issues with DC Comics. It was left unfinished, so only unedited segments exist.' and there was no screening. Yet it sounds like a project that was a real labour of love, to a high calibre.

Here is an incredibly fabulous misappropriation, while transforming the original. Taking a character that was under copyright and one that wasn't and mashing them together. I love the idea. I love that he did this, that he wanted to have a *Dracula Batman* movie. Like so many shorts on YouTube now - original, unique and full of brilliance, and I, as a reader, somehow accept and even encourage this.

In 1991 DC comics, in an Elseworlds series called *Batman & Dracula: Red Rain* by Doug Moench, Kelley Jones, and Malcolm Jones III featured a more alternative encounter between the two characters, and this was followed by two sequels, *Batman: Bloodstorm* and *Batman: Crimson Mist*.

As well as Warhol's unauthorised film, there was a *Batman Fights Dracula* (1967) film reportedly made, but Warner Brothers knew a good thing when they saw it, and released *The Batman vs. Dracula* in 2005 a direct-to-video animated kids movie, based on *Red Rain*.

So Warhol did what DC comics would do anyhow, and considering how to take Warhol's efforts, it is such a personal contradiction in what is acceptable, the line between respect and theft is like the advancing line of the retreating German army in 1945, a bit of a lie to themselves, yet isn't it alright to have a hobby and create a film for no profit, which is what Warhol did.

Subsequently, another comic connection raised itself, as if Warhol and comics were two artistic elements that would forever have unusual connections.

The Batman TV series had an episode, entitled 'The Clock King's Crazy Crimes' (aired Oct. 12, 1966) This episode has a lot of Pop Art references, with Gotham seeing it's first Pop Art exhibition at the city Gallery.

Artist Progress Pigment is the Clock King in disguise. Wearing sunglasses, trench coat, and tie the costume is exactly that of Andy Warhol in his blue self portraits from 1964, and behind the Clock King are his self portrait also in blue. His lines are also telling, as Warhol had been deemed the 'Pope of Pop Art'. Pigment even says "I am Progress Pigment, the king of pop art and apostle of its culture." and as if to somehow truly turn everything on its head, as Pigment is very unhappy with some Pop Art renditions of Batman.

Apart from Warhol, other characters do appear to have been based on others from the Factory. This episode is not at all pleasant, and no one knows whether or what Warhol thought. If anything.

One wonders who was using who at this stage.

A year later, in 1967 Frank Bez had a photo shoot with Andy Warhol and Nico for the August issue of *Esquire*, where Nico was portrayed as Batman and Andy as Robin. This seems like costuming or cosplay to me, and is beautiful. It is also highly unusual, as Kowalski again explains 'I can't imagine he enjoyed it. He was very controlling of his image and this is a very unusual instance.'

Yet the images are strong and they both look superb. I am unsure if he enjoyed it or not, but he was professional enough to look like it is very natural.

In a 1971 interview he was asked; 'back in 1961 or 62 when you and Rosenquist and Lichtenstein all were working very independently of each other but evolving a same kind of attitude, does that seem odd to you that you all began to look at the world in the same way.'

'Ahhhm, I just think we read a lot of comic books, and it just happened to come out then, because comic books make things the way they are really today, the way things happen in New York now is like being in a western movie.'

The next time that comics appear, is was when Superman reappears in the Myths series from 1981, a series of images. Such as The Witch, Uncle Sam and Mickey Mouse.

While I was at the Rockwell museum, a lovely element was seeing Warhol's Myths Uncle Sam from 1981 next to Norman Rockwell's Uncle Sam 1947 (advert for Schenley whiskey) and a 1997 Uncle Sam promo piece by Alex Ross for San Diego Comic Con.

Sotheby's had a number of auctions of Andy Warhol's belongings after his death, in April 1988, and there were six sets of auctions. One of these auctions was for his 'collectibles'. The catalogues, and anything in them, are an incredible price now, but I will eventually get to see them!

It is hard to know what else The Warhol in Pittsburgh has, for they possess 610 'time capsules' - boxes which Andy Warhol created, and sealed as a way to keep the ephemera and things that came into his life and move them on. He had thought they themselves would be pieces of art. Instead, the Warhol is slowly but surely going through and cataloguing their contents and it will be interesting to see what else was in his 'time capsules'.

Warhol passed away in 1987, and in 1989 there was considerable concern at the finding of further comic book collages. A page from the catalogue of Warhol's 1989 show at the MOMA shows four of seven collages that turned out to be fakes.

'The authenticity of 19 Superman collages by Andy Warhol has been called into question by two comic book experts who say the Superman Cut-Outs didn't appear in print until years after the date on the artworks..... The discrepancy was noted by comic book experts Arlen Schumer and Richard Sheinaus during independent visits to a Warhol retrospective at the Mu-



114. Untitled, 1960-61  
Watercolor, pencil, and cut newspaper pasted on paper,  
136 x 129 (33.7 x 29.5 cm)  
Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York

115. Untitled, 1960-61  
Watercolor, pencil, and cut newspaper pasted on paper,  
136 x 116 (34.9 x 29.3 cm)  
Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York

116. Untitled, 1960-61  
Watercolor, pencil, and cut newspaper pasted on paper,  
143 x 109 (37.5 x 27.3 cm)  
Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York

117. Untitled, 1960-61  
Watercolor, pencil, and cut newspaper pasted on paper,  
15 x 116 (32 x 29.8 cm)  
Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York

“Warhol  
got it. Art  
isn't art if  
it's easy  
to  
defend.  
That  
defense is  
what  
makes it  
ART!”  
Chris  
Garcia

seum of Modern Art in New York that from Feb 5 to May 2.

'I remembered that Jack Abel did not start inking Superman until the late 1960's, maybe 1969 and I thought, hold it, something is wrong here', said Schumer

In October 1989, another group of Superman comic book collages, which Stavitsky describes as identical in style to those at MoMA, showed up at a Binoche et Godeau auction in Paris. Paolo Dal Bosco, an Italian dealer, bought four of them for \$63,800. Several months later, first Binoche, and then Dal Bosco received letters from the Warhol estate, which said that the collages were fakes. Dal Bosco brought the auctioneers to court, which did not admit the estate's letter as evidence. The case is still pending. (1989)

Indeed. Artists using what was known as the 'Warhol Effect' multiple images in different gaudy colours, was used on a Comic Book cover of Promethea and 2000AD, while issue 19 of Miracleman by Neil Gaiman featured Andy Warhol sufficiently, that we solicited a separate article on that to accompany this, from comic scholar Pádraig Ó Méalóid.

What is known for sure is that Warhol liked comics, just like he liked money. And soup. So in his own way of creating art, he used things that he liked.

The legacy that he leaves behind, when it comes to comics, is one of a person who did not disrespect the medium. We will never know what route he may have gone, were he not to have known about Roy Lichtenstein's work, but given how he frequently changed what he was doing, I think it is unlikely he would have stuck with just comics.

Making a movie though just puts him into an altogether different category. This was serious stuff, despite it being known that there would be a copyright issue. That sort of creative desire could only come from a person truly enjoying the experience, and for me again, makes me question how I view him.

Now, nearly thirty years after his passing, The Warhol, with their tangible effort to recognise comics, and bringing the Alex Ross exhibition not only to their own museum but to The Norman Rockwell as well, speaks loudly. I loved the exhibit. Perhaps the most delightful items were a selection of Charlie Brown characters as the Justice League in crayon on paper, slightly changed names such as Clent Suped-uped-man, and an indication of his humour as he has Charlie Brown, former member of the Peanuts League, a reference to Snapper Carr, and all done at the age of 10.

Yet do we look at Ross in any way except as a comic book artist?

Sure, Warhol may have been many things, but he did his art his way. It is not for me to decide what is good or bad art for anyone else, just for me, I discern and indeed, offer my opinion on comic art, on art in general, and know what I like and dislike, and the cost of a piece, or the rarity of an artist has not been a factor for me.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH MEL RAMOS BY CHRIS GARCIA

San Francisco's deYoung Museum is a great place to spend an afternoon. You go downstairs, enjoy the temporary exhibit, maybe walk through the New Acquisitions area, enjoy the Contemporary Gallery you've been through a dozen times before. Now, after a while, you'll need to use the restroom, and you'll almost certainly go to the one on the first floor. As you're walking there, you walked passed a painting, directly across from the door to the Men's rest room, is a painting. It's the image of arguably America's Greatest Hero on a field of yellow.

It's Mel Ramos' *Superman*.

Ramos is often noted as one of the most significant Pop Artists of the West Coast. His images of nudes with common objects like cigars, martini glasses, and cigarette packs are legendary. His works are in major collections around the world, including the MoMA

in New York. He works first gained notice in the 1960s, and he's managed to remain prolific in the five decades since.

On every visit to the deYoung, I'd spend time looking at that painting and after looking into it, I discovered that Mr. Ramos was not only still alive, but also one of the few of that wave of Pop Artists who is still working... and answering eMail!

**Were you an avid reader of comics as a kid? Have you kept reading?**

No, I was not avid, I am more interested in them now and I have a small collection of vintage editions from the 1940's and 1950's

**What effect did comic books have on the development of your artistic style?**

In the late 50's early 60's they (comic books) rescued me from the abyss. I was suffering a severe case of painter's block and I was trying to make knock offs of de Kooning's women paintings. I never imagined that I was going anywhere doing paintings seriously. It then occurred to me to do something that was not so serious so I did a painting of one of my favorite super heroes, SUPERMAN.

The next thing I knew, there was a world wind in the art world that came to be known as POP ART which I became associated with.

**Can you think of an image from comics that actively influenced your artistic direction?**

There were many, Wonder Woman, Sheena, Black Cat, to name a few.

**Some have criticized Lichtenstein for use of blown-up comic panels as fine arts pieces without credit to the original artist. What's your take on that?**

I have no problem with Roy Lichtenstein and his strategy for making art. You must remember that Roy's work was a lot about the Art of Appropriation.

You wouldn't expect Cezanne to give credit to the person who arranged his apples.

**What weight do you put on your superhero images within your total art production? How important would you say they were?**

The super hero paintings that I did in the early 1960's were very important to my career as a painter as they gave me recognition within the "art world"

**One of your most iconic images is of Superman. What role do you think he plays within the pantheon of American heroes?**

I think he is Number #1 He was capable of flying with inhuman speed, repelling bullets, etc, etc.

**What images from your early work do you frequently re-visit?**

All of it. Especially the series called "The lost paintings of 1965"

**Is there a place for comic book illustration within the world of the Fine Arts?**

I am sure there will be comic book illustration within the world of Fine Arts if not already. There are some very talented comic book illustrators out there.



"IF I HAD TO CHOOSE A SUPERHERO TO BE, I WOULD PICK  
SUPERMAN. HE'S EVERYTHING THAT I'M NOT."  
~STEPHEN HAWKING~

From the producers of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Game

# MARVEL SUPER HEROES™

## BATTLE BOOK



**PLAYING AT HEROES -  
SUPERHEROIC RPGS  
AND ME**

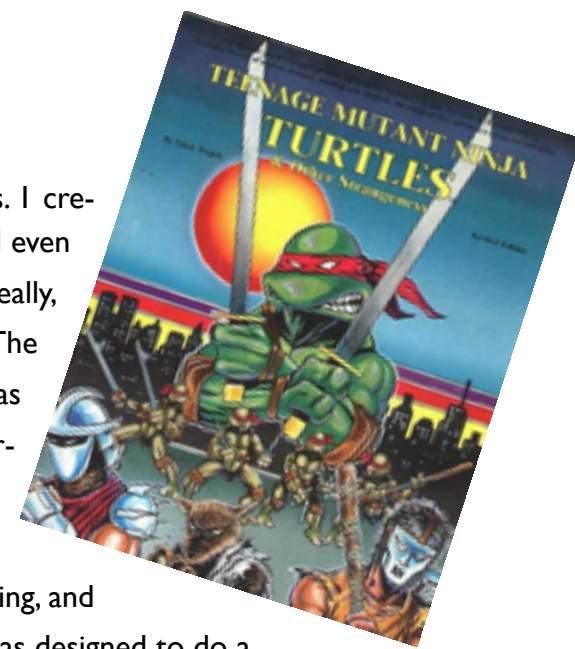
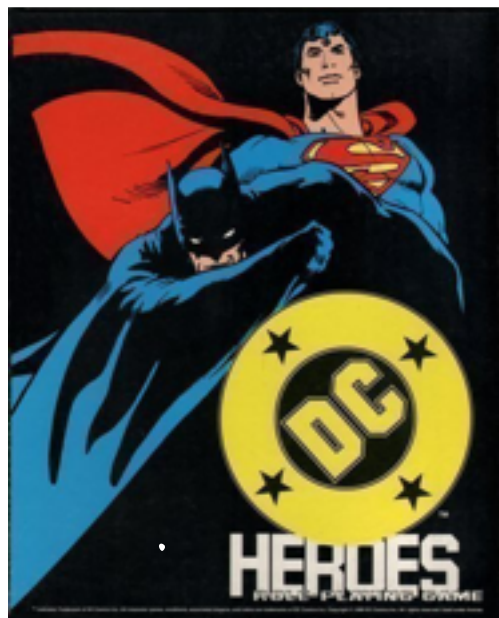
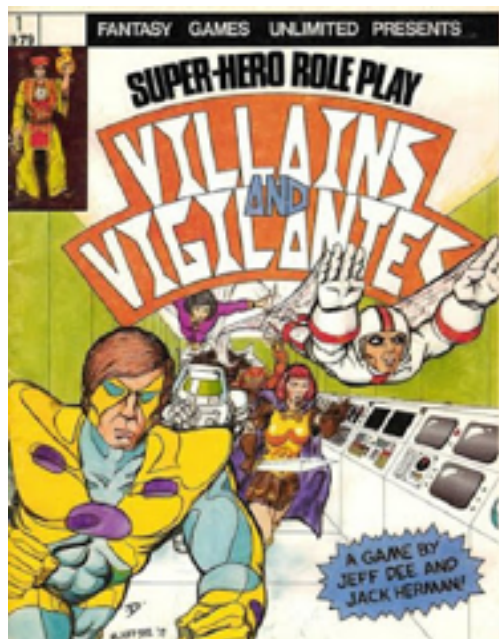
**BY CHRIS GARCIA**



TSR, Inc.  
PRODUCTS OF YOUR IMAGINATION™

All Marvel Characters and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks of the Marvel Comics Group. MARVEL SUPER HEROES and MARVEL SUPER VILLAINS are trademarks of the Marvel Comics Group. © Copyright 1984 Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

The names of characters used herein are fictitious and do not refer to any person living or dead. Any descriptions including similarities to persons living or dead are merely coincidental. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and PRODUCTS OF YOUR IMAGINATION are trademarks of TSR, Inc.



I never got into D&D beyond rolling up characters. I created hundreds of them: Cedric Coldiron, Greta Adlestar, and even Markus The Over-Powered. I still have a lot of them, but really, the reason I didn't play was that I wasn't into the setting. The Dark Ages? Yeah, not my favorite. *D&D Oriental Adventures* was a lot of fun, but really, I am just not made of Tolkeinian interaction.

On the other hand, Superheroes are totally my jam.

My friends Sam, Andy, and Charles all loved role-playing, and the preferred system was Palladium. The Palladium system was designed to do a bunch of different kinds of gaming, starting with Fantasy, and later expanding into science fiction (*RIFTS*), horror (*Beyond the Supernatural*), comic book (*Teenaged Mutant Ninja Turtles*), and Spy (*Ninjas & Superspies*). None of these caught my attention, though. It wasn't until we started playing *Heroes Unlimited* that I really began to pay attention.

*HU*, as we called it, was all about designing and playing as Superheroes. You had various different types, all based off one of the major supers from the comics. You have Magic, Experimentals, Robotics, Psionics, and so on. It was fun, though we never really played it as Superheroes - it was more like we'd play spies. It was a lot of fun, and it got me down the path towards more Super Role Playing.

For Christmas one year, my Mom bought me the role-playing game *Challengers*. It was much different. This one really set the world up, even giving you a set of Governmental organizations. The rules really sorta guide the possible storylines, but they're still OK. It was very superhero-ish, and that was nice, but ultimately, it wasn't great.

That same year, I bought myself a used copy of the fourth edition of *Champions*. This has become the best-known, and perhaps best-loved, Superhero Role-Playing System. I created exactly one hero for our few *Champions* campaigns - Edge. Note - This was before Adam Copeland ever started using the moniker Edge in the WWE. She was a Mystic/Weaponmaster. Her weapon was a small, slightly curved sword, which gave her great abilities so long as she was holding it, and while she could throw it, she lost her special powers when she lost contact with it. The adventures were more open-ended, but they were also very comic bookish, which I really enjoyed. We had an adventure which was an excuse to kill of our characters. Edge survived, largely by murdering two other characters and using their bodies as shields. Maybe I should have mentioned that she wasn't exactly the best of heroes.

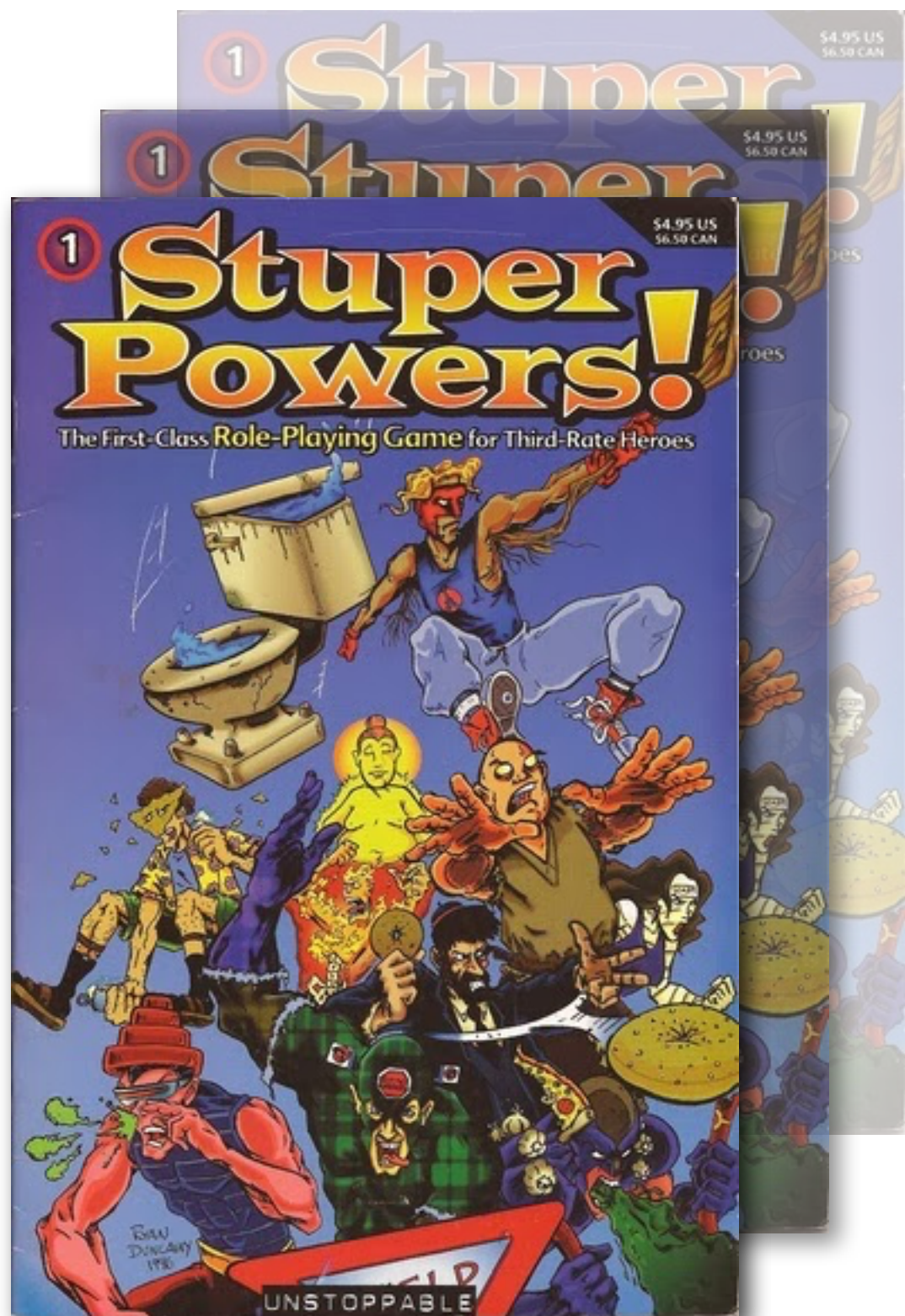
The ones that had the most draw for me were the ones that were officially licensed. There was the TMNT RPG, the DC and Marvel role-playing games, the Smallville game, Street Fighter, all of 'em had the same problems: great characters, great art, weak game play, and stiff scenarios. Well, the *DC Heroes* game was good, but the scenarios were pretty tight.

The more 'open' a game system with superheroes, the more I fall for it. GURPS, the Generic Universal RolePlaying System, had one called *Supers*, which was a fair-bit of fun. *Villains & Vigilantes* made me incredibly happy, as was *Mutants & Masterminds*. They were both of the "Blank-&-Blank" generation of role-playing games along with *Mazes & Monsters* and the like. The games were all so much fun because they had a looser structure, and while gameplay ranged from straightforward to downright convoluted, the worlds they allowed game masters and players to create were amazing. While I didn't play nearly enough, they did make me love superheroes, and understand the ways in which a character interacts with its environment and each other.



And that's what Super Hero Role-Playing games do - they almost always force you into a situation of Super Team. Very few folks play role playing games with a GM and a single player. It's almost always adventuring groups, which means that you're making a hero team, a Justice League, an Avengers, a Watchmen. As a guy who has always loved teams, that's one of the biggest draws of the Superhero RPG, that you get to create a Superteam, with the help of a bunch of other people. That sort of super heroics is what made me love comics as a kid, and it's probably why I loved Superhero RPGs.

There is one recommendation I will make if you're both a comic geek and a fan of RPGs. Get your hands on a copy of *Godlike*. It's a game where the setting is a bit tighter, but the idea is so strong. The world of *Godlike* is an Alternate 1939 to 1945. It's WWII, and there are superheroes. That would be enough, but the way the game is played, with all the dice rolled at once, is smarter than your average RPG, and the while the mechanics are wonderful, I could read the source material and game book over and over and over again.





## MISTY KNIGHT BY SIERRA BERRY

Until a few years ago, I was lead to believe that the only black female superhero that existed was Storm. She was the only one that I would be given to ever identify with. She was the only one that I would have to share with so many other black girls who'd pined for their own superhero to identify with. It wasn't until recently that I'd discovered Misty Knight.

Beautiful dark skin all adorned in red and a bionic arm ready to fight. A majestic afro that changed sizes based on which artist had the honor of putting her to paper. She was tenacious, daring, and strong. She had a vibrant confidence that kept her running with men like Luke Cage. She took charge of things, even putting men like Tony Stark and Steve Rogers in their place.

When I first discovered Misty Knight, I'd wondered why she had been thrown to the side, barely seeing the light of day. I felt like I'd discovered a brand new invention that needed to be shown to everyone. Instead, it seems like every chance that Misty Knight gets to shine, is ripped from underneath her. I pray that someday, someone will put Misty Knight on the map and give Storm a run for her money.



## SUPERHERO MOVIES AND ME BY HELENA NASH

I was always a Marvel kid, growing up. DC comics in the 70s, with their Superman robot doubles and Bizarro Loisses and multi-coloured Kryptonites, were just a bit too old-fashioned for me. Marvel was modern and somehow more real, as far as any superhero comics could be, with their argumentative rock men, wisecracking wall-crawlers and angry adamantium-clawed mutants. They were just *cooler*. I remember practising folding my middle and ring fingers into my palms and making *thwippy* web-shooter sounds, then flipping my hands round the other way up and pretending to cast the Roving Rings of Raggador at the other kids in the school playground.

So you can imagine how excited I was when they made the first *Spider-Man* film in 1977. Spidey wasn't my favourite hero - that was probably Hulk (oddly, I never felt right calling him *The Hulk*; I felt, like his teen sidekicks Rick Jones and Jim Wilson, that the jade giant was my friend, so just 'Hulk') - but I'd read enough of his adventures, reprinted in Britain in the weekly black and white comic *Super Spider-Man and the Titans*, to be thrilled at seeing the wall-crawler in a film.

For years, like many British comic publishers, Marvel UK had been in the habit of launching new weekly comics for the initial boom of extra sales, then later merging less successful titles into their more popular sister publications. Thus *The Titans*, a landscape format anthology of old Avengers, Fantastic Four and Sub-Mariner tales, was merged with the mellifluously-named *Super Spider-Man with the Super-Heroes* (I never quite understood why he was 'Super' Spider-Man) to form *Super Spider-Man and the Titans*. So now you know.

The Spidey stories I'd read were weird and wild 70s tales from the likes of Gerry Conway and Ross Andru, featuring ghostly gangsters, murderous spider-mobiles and my favourite tale - a locked room mystery where the killer turned out to be (*spoiler alert*) W.H.O, a wall-sized homicidal computer. So eight-year old me was fairly vibrating with keen when my mum took us to our local cinema - the hoary old Embassy in Waltham Cross whose resplendent blue and purple neon frontage could be seen as far away as the Little Chef on the A10 - to see Webhead for his big screen debut.

My review? It was... OK I guess.



To be fair to the movie itself, it had been hard to get into the mood when *Spider-Man* was part of a mismatched double-bill, as was common in those olden days. So we first had to sit through 90 minutes of *You Light Up My Life*, a teary romance about a struggling singer played by Frenchie from *Grease*. Ironically, all these years later, I can still sing the first few bars of the title song, which is more than I can say for the bland 70s wah-wah of the Spidey movie, which sounded like the background music to every single *Starsky & Hutch* episode. Some bright spark at the cinema must have decided that Didi Conn singing her little heart out was the perfect aperitif to *Spider-Man*, them both being American films and all.

*Spider-Man* was... alright. It starred a grown-up Von Trapp kid from *The Sound of Music*, who did a decent Peter Parker. And he looked OK in the red and blue costume, apart from the peculiar mirrored eyes. But, eh, I dunno. He didn't say much as Spidey, and certainly didn't make jokes as he swung around mocking the baddies, like in the comics. And the baddies themselves were just ordinary crooks in bad 70s suits. Oh, and three guys in black martial arts gear who chased him around with sticks. There were no proper supervillains with metal arms and goblin gliders and funky costumes. There was a bit of wall-crawling, which was pretty good for time (i.e. better than Adam West bent double in the *Batman* TV show), but the webbing looked rubbish, ranging from 'flimsy gauze' to 'obvious thick nylon cord from my dad's camping gear'.

But hey, it was *Spider-Man*, in an actual film. I couldn't really complain. Surely this was just the start of all my favourite comics appearing on the big screen. Except, not so much. Of course there was blockbusting *Superman the Movie* the following year, and on TV we had *The Incredible Hulk*, now remembered more for its haunting end theme 'The Lonely Man', than for its less than super action (reputedly, the show's low budget decreed that Lou Ferrigno's Hulk could only make two appearances per show, presumably due to the now-forgotten 'green body paint' shortage of 1978).

But that was kind of it, barring the increasingly poor *Superman* sequels (I never recovered from the ill-conceived casting of Richard Pryor clowning around in *Superman III*, though strangely the sequence of that woman getting roboticized by the maniac computer at the end still haunts me). There was the disappointing *Howard the Duck* (1986) of which I can only remember the embarrassing song at the end, the rubbish *Captain America* (1990) featuring an Italian Red Skull, and of course *Batman* (1989), a film series that like *Superman* before it seemed to peak with its sequel and then go markedly downhill from there. Apart from three so-so *Hulk* TV movies featuring the ageing Ferrigno and Bill Bixby, that was pretty much it for Marvel at the movies.

Meanwhile, the world of actual comics was going through a renaissance with titles like *Watchmen*, the *Dark Knight Returns*, *Secret Wars*, *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, Frank Miller's *Daredevil* and *Elektra Lives Again*, The Phoenix Saga in *X-Men*, Walt Simonson's *Thor*, and the classic Masters of Evil storyline in the *Avengers*. Did we get any of that magic replicated on the big-screen? Did we - to misquote Pete Postlethwaite - bollocks. The closest thing to a Marvel movie at the time was a stop-motion *Micronauts* film I made with my dad's super-8 cine camera using my Baron Karza action figure.

Fast forward to right now. As I type this, we are but five days away from the premiere of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. And as with all Marvel movies since *Spider-Man* back in 1977, I just can't wait. So no change there, but the difference this time is that I can reasonably sure that a) it won't be mildly (or desperately) disappointing and that b) the rest of the cinema-going world might just agree with me. For this is the age of the Great Marvel Movie, or more specifically to lift a term from a recent *Saturday Night Live* sketch, the era where Marvel Can't Fail.

Who'da think there'd be a time when *Guardians of the Galaxy* - an obscure spacegoing team comic from 1969, would be one of the most successful movies of 2014, both commercially, and amazingly, critically? Who'da think that Groot (a creature of wood that feeds on wood, to quote his villainous debut in *Tales To Astonish*, 1960) and Rocket freakin' Raccoon would have become household names? *I am Groot* t-shirts? Kids dressing up as Rocket for Hallowe'en? What strange parallel world have I stumbled into, where ordinary folks know and care about characters that were once the secret specialist subject of only the uberest of geeks? Last Christmas I was even able to buy a crocheted Baby Groot pot plant. Strange Days.

You can draw a line tracing the slow but steady rise of the Great Marvel Movie, from *Blade* - coyly shy of its comic origins, through *X-Men* and *X2* (we won't speak of *The Last Stand*) with its Shakespearean heavyweights playing Xavier and Magneto, to *Iron Man* with its game changing post-credits sequence ('I'm here to talk to you about the Avenger Initiative') that paved the way for the shared Marvel Cinematic Universe.

And how cool is that idea of the MCU? There's never really been anything like it before. Linked movies, all inhabiting the same world. Not as a series of increasingly poor sequels, but a genuine shared (with the introduction of the *Guardians of the Galaxy*) universe with shared heroes and villains, and storylines that criss-cross from one movie to another, and even into *Agents of SHIELD* on TV. Imagine if United Artists back in the 60s had made a series of individual westerns starring Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen and Charles Bronson respectively, *before* bringing them all together in one movie called *The Magnificent Seven Assemble*. How cool would that have been?

What if you could travel back in time, say 20 years or more, and tell a comic fan - maybe your younger geek self - that there would come a time when there would be a movie of the Avengers and it *wouldn't* suck? And they wouldn't be fighting crooks in bad suits or ninjas with sticks, but proper supervillains and aliens and Loki and everything. And the Hulk wouldn't be throwing stuntmen into sugar glass one at a time but Punching Spaceships In The Face. And that there were plans afoot to do the Inhumans and Captain Marvel and even Iron Fist, for the love of Stan. Your younger self would think you mad.

It's funny, I sometimes feel a bit weird about comic movies being so successful, like now that everyone's in on it, it's not our secret guilty pleasure any more. If I can have a conversation at work with a 30-year old woman about the Kree tinkering with human DNA, then comics have most definitely gone mainstream. Which is cool, even though I do sometimes feel like Piggy in *Lord of the Flies*, shouting at everyone that I was here first, I was here when he found the conch (or in this case, Namor's fabled Horn of Proteus).

Of course, like any neurotic True Believer, I worry about sequelitis and shark-jumping, with clunkers like the *Fantastic Four* films (Doom playing Marco Polo - ugh), *Spider-Man 3* (emo-Pete's dancing - wince), *Wolverine: Origins* (what they did to Deadpool - yecch) and the duller episodes of *Agents of SHIELD* still fresh in comic-fans' minds. But this is a great time to be a Marvel comics fan, when the term 'superhero movie' has become a genre in its own right, and shows like *Daredevil* and *AKA Jessica Jones* coming our way on TV.

I can only hope that the shark is still a way off, that there are more great movies to come (Alan Moore's *Captain Britain*, anyone?), and I wonder where the genre is going next. My eight-year old self and I can't wait to see.

Dr. Marston,  
 Lapped these two out  
 in a hurry. The eagle  
 design to handle as  
 in perspective on  
 while he doesn't  
 up clearly -  
 shoes look like a  
 topographer's.  
 I think the idea might be  
 patented as a sort of  
 an contraption.

Peter

Pat

I think the gal with hand up is very cute. I like her skirt, legs, hair? I think she's probably will work out. See other suggestions enclosed for Seagle & Brugers I suggest many work better in enclosed. No interest in stripes - red + white. With eagle above a below breasts as per enclosed? I want it to be like a crown - see suggestions enclosed. I think it's a game waster - don't remember. I think it's a game waster - don't remember.

HeritageComics.com



GETTING TO  
 KNOW THE  
 PRINCESS OF  
 POWER: FOUR  
 BIOGRAPHIES OF  
 WONDER  
 WOMAN CHUCK  
 SERFACE

Last December, many Facebook friends shared this photo with me:



Meg from the blog *Happy Looks Good on You* hand-crafted these ornaments for her husband, Curtis, to celebrate Christmas 2011. Her blog entry details her process, and the comments resound

with praise and awe. Not one person asked, “Why Captain America and not Wonder Woman?” Captain America is more than worthy, of course, but he belongs to Marvel Entertainment, and he’s an Avenger, not a Justice League member. Why the substitution?

My best guess: nothing but male heroes for Curtis. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, I and other neighborhood boys frequently played “Justice League of America,” drawing lots to decide who would play whom. Never was there a Popsicle stick representing Wonder Woman. We were *men*, after all. And forget about recruiting a girl. Girls don’t like comics, right? No, how very wrong.

Granted, Meg’s blog features party hints and home décor. Her readers differ greatly from those frequenting *Jezebel* or *The Mary Sue*. Still, someone should have asked, “Why not Wonder Woman?” The experience I relate above provides one answer. In 1970, I wouldn’t have blinked at this omission. Now I want my Wonder Woman ornament. I want no Justice League without Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman every time! In fact, I might make ornaments next year, but mine will be the Avengers – Black Widow, She-Hulk, the Wasp, Captain Marvel, and, in the spirit of crossing corporate boundaries, Wonder Woman. A few smartasses will say, “But, Chuck, that’s the poorly named A-Force.” No, my friends, that’s the Avengers.

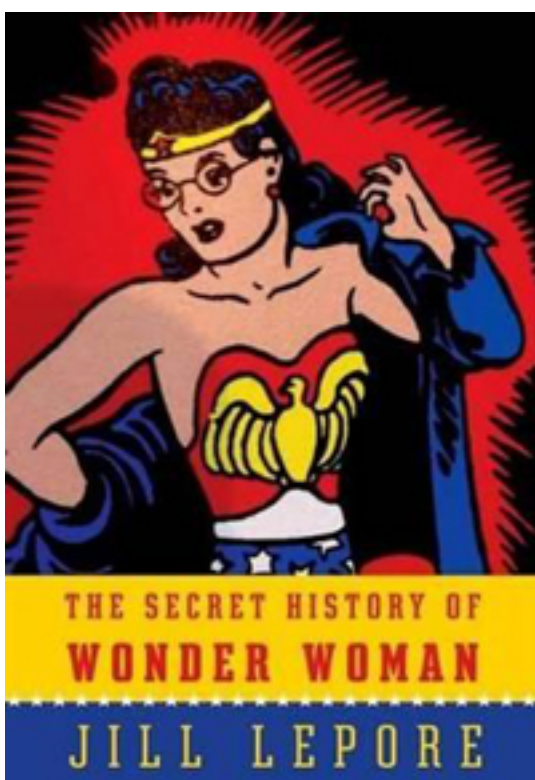
I largely ignored Wonder Woman until the mid-1980s, when George Pérez reignited her for DC’s new post-Crisis universe. No more was she the two-dimensional figure on *Super Friends* or the semi-campy, satin clad Lynda Carter. Pérez imbued her with power. He introduced a marvelously rich version of Paradise Island, now Themyscira, and paid much respect to Greek mythology. Sure, I knew as all fans do that Wonder Woman always bore a mission, to bring Amazonian virtues to “Man’s World,” but for the first time in my estimation she seemed able to complete the job. Pérez, bless him, unleashed a mighty badass onto the world! Now I realize that Pérez dipped into the Golden Age, into a vision that were occluded after her creator had died.

This memory and my contact with those ornaments inspired me to revise my views regarding Wonder Woman, and I began exploring past eras, which then reminded me why she never really grabbed me until Pérez. During my childhood, Wonder Woman fared poorly. Her stories were laden with gooey romance and insipid plots. No mystery, then, why I passed on her and picked up *Doctor Strange* at my local Stop and Go market. Surely the deficits weren’t due to poor writing and scripting only. What had happened? And how had she survived?

Four recent studies contain the answers to these questions and so many more. These aren’t encyclopedias, concordances, or outlines. Instead, each delves behind the scenes, presenting history, biography, social commentary, and critical interpretation to explain why Wonder Woman matters and why she endures despite cultural ignorance, damaging market trends, and wrong-headed creative decisions. I now present these volumes to you. I cite heavily throughout this article, because my journey represents not so much review as it does reading notes. I focus on what stands out for me. Each informs abundantly on the various illustrators who contributed to Wonder Woman titles, but I lean toward discussing writers and history. Finally, unless otherwise noted my citations refer to pages from the book under consideration in the moment. Now, let’s meet Wonder Woman.

### **I. *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* by Jill Lepore**

Harvard historian Jill Lepore’s account blends biography, feminist history, and early twentieth-century psychology to reveal underlying elements that went into the creation of our favorite Amazon. The secret history, then, becomes the history of William Moulton Marston – psychologist, femi-



nist, and, creator of Wonder Woman. No fanboy, Marston wanted more than to create enduring superheroes. He infused Wonder Woman with purpose. Through her, Marston would deliver his message of a feminine Utopia to young audiences across America.

Lepore includes all the major players and inspirations that would lead Marston to Wonder Woman. Readers meet his wife, Sadie Elizabeth Holloway Marston, and his assistant-companion, Olive Byrne. The three lived polyamorously, producing children, maintaining a family, but keeping the relationship secret. Byrne's aunt, Margaret Sanger, who founded Planned Parenthood, deeply influenced Marston's attitudes toward women. Also important was the suffragist movement at Mount Holyoke, where Elizabeth Holloway Marston -- who stopped using her girlhood name, Sadie, as an adult -- attended college. Lepore outlines the importance of Amazons from Greek mythology to women pursuing higher education: "By the time Sadie Holloway packed her bags for Mount Holyoke, in 1911, an "Amazon" meant any woman rebel -- which to a lot of people, meant any girl who left home and went to college. "New Women," they were called, and they meant to be as free as men: Amazons all (17)."

Marston studied psychology at Harvard, hardly a feminist-friendly campus. One professor, Hugo Münsterberg, greatly opposed women's education. Marston later transformed him and his attitudes into the great villain, Dr. Psycho, who plagued Wonder Woman throughout many adventures. Lepore reveals more about how the interplay of college experiences and Wonder Woman stories:

*Much of the action in Wonder Woman comics takes place at "Holliday College": the name's a mash-up of "Holloway" and "Holyoke." Once, disguised in a varsity sweater with an H on it -- an unmissable allusion to a Harvard varsity sweater -- Wonder Woman attends a lecture at Holliday College given by Dr. Hypno. Holliday College is full of sinister professors with names like "Professor Manly" whose chief villainy is their opposition to feminism. Wonder Woman's arch-nemesis is Dr. Psycho, an evil professor of psychology whose plan is the "to change the independent status of modern American women back to the days of the sultans and slave markets, clanking chains and abject captivity." (26)*

Fair enough. Marston injected elements from his life into Wonder Woman. So did Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the creators of Superman. What separates Marston from Siegel and Shuster or other creators such as Gardner Fox, Jack Cole, or Will Eisner? Again, Marston strove to initiate a feminist Utopia based on his psychological theories.

In November, 1937, Marston announced a prediction -- one day women would rule the world. A matriarchy was inevitable:

*"Women have twice the emotional development, the ability for love, than man has," Marston explained. "And as they develop as much ability for worldly success as they already have ability for love, they will clearly come to rule business and the Nation and the world." There would be a new race of Amazons: "The next 100 years will see the beginning of an American matriarchy -- a nation of amazons in the psychological rather than the physical sense," he predicted. "In 500 years, there will be a serious sex battle. And in 1,000 years women will definitely rule this country." (170)*

His audience most likely thought Marston had left the planet, and one easily could understand why. During the 1920s, he, Elizabeth, and Olive took part in meetings with Carolyn Marston Keatley, the leader of a "cult of female sexual power -- specifically a "clinic" involving 'Love Leaders,' 'Mistresses,' (or 'Mothers'), and 'Love Girls'" (119). Lepore uses the term "cult" when describing these meetings, and explains how Marston's later formulations of dominance and submission emanated from such earlier experiences.



Yes, “dominance and submission,” which provokes notorious questions about Marston’s early bondage imagery. What did this say about his feminist Utopia? Years later, his son Byrne opined that his father only meant these representations metaphorically, since he’d “never seen anything like that in our house” (237). Marston employed this recurring trope to symbolize woman’s throwing off the chains of male oppression. Then the bondage of males, with Wonder Woman’s truth-forcing lasso, stood for male submission to female love, the stronger power. Nonetheless, Marston did admit to the allure of female bondage. Editor Dorothy Roubicek especially objected to the bindings. Marston’s reply reveals what he wanted others to perceive:

*As for the charge of sadism: “Binding or chaining the fair heroine, in comics strips, or the hero like Flash Gordon et al, is not sadism because these characters do not suffer or even feel embarrassed.” Wonder Woman teaches the enjoyment of submission to loving authority: “This, my dear friend, is the one truly great contribution of my Wonder Woman strip to moral education of the young. The only hope for peace is to teach people who are full of pep and unbound force to enjoy being bound to kind authority, wise authority, not merely tolerate such submission. Wars will only cease when humans enjoy being bound. (238)*

Humankind must bow not only to authority but to *loving* authority, to *kind* authority. Additionally, humankind must enjoy it.

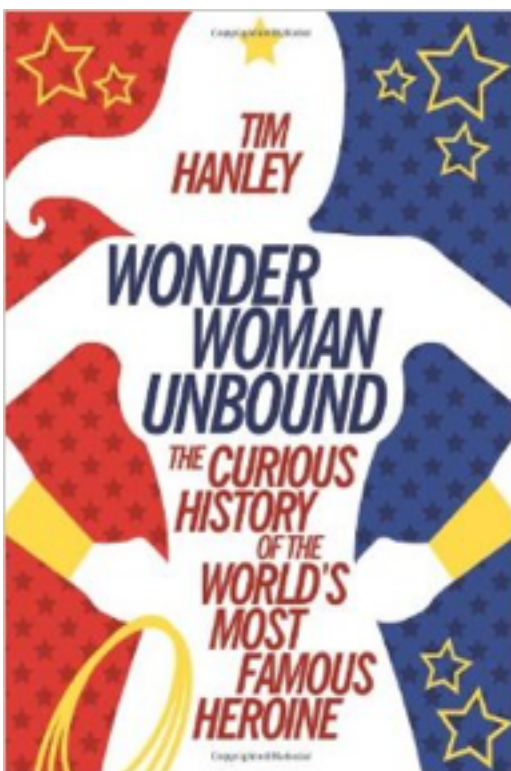
*The Secret History of Wonder Woman* ranks among the best books I’ve read so far this year. Lepore weaves feminist history, psychology, anecdotes about the comics industry during the Golden Age, all profoundly influential to Marston. Was Marston a huckster? Lepore provides evidence for this conclusion, but her dispassionate tone throughout allows for other interpretations. Yes, she covers Marston’s role in developing the lie detector as well. She enjoyed unprecedented access to Marston’s private correspondences and records. In the end, the “secret history” is Marston’s history, so Lepore stops at Marston’s death by cancer in 1948. Other recent studies, however, would chronicle developments related to Wonder Woman over the ensuing decades.

## **2. *Wonder Woman Unbound: The Curious History of the World’s Most Famous Heroine* by Tim Hanley**

Hanley’s volume has netted decent press coverage for reasons other than his book’s punning title. *Wonder Woman Unbound*, of course, conveys the author’s intention: to free Wonder Woman’s history and share it with interested parties everywhere. It also refers to the recurring bondage element that so fascinates any soul studying the mighty Amazon. Hanley goes deeper. He applies informal science to show how often bondage imagery appeared in early issues of *Wonder Woman*.

Remember that above I mentioned Marston’s claim that Wonder Woman’s bondage scenes are no different than those occurring in, for example, Flash Gordon stories? He doesn’t address frequency, however, so Hanley handles that by comparing Wonder Woman to Captain Marvel, who, according to Trina Robbins, got tied up more than any other hero. To support her point, Robbins counted incidents where Captain Marvel, as Billy Batson, is tied up within the first ten issues of *Captain Marvel Adventures*. Then she compared this total to the number of times both Batman and Robin are bound in the first ten issues of *Batman*. The unfortunate Captain Marvel wins the prize with two times more. Hanley replicated this experiment, replacing Batman with Wonder Woman. He even graphed his results. Here’s what he found:

*Wonder Woman’s lowest percentage of personal bondage in Wonder Woman was the same as Captain Marvel’s highest percentage of personal bondage in Captain Marvel Adventures. When your*



"If the prospect of living in a world where trying to respect the basic rights of those around you and valuing each other simply because we exist are such daunting, impossible tasks, then what sort of world are we left with? And what sort of world would do you want to live in?"

worst is the same as the other guy's best, that's a substantial amount. The averages show the same divide; Captain Marvel was tied up about 2 percent of the time in his books, and Wonder Woman was tied up 11 percent of the time in hers. Captain Marvel doubling Batman and Robin's personal total was fairly impressive, but Wonder Woman trumps Captain Marvel more than five times over. (45-6)

Hanley then specifies why Marston excessively utilized bondage, mirroring Lepore's description of the psychologist's utopian prediction discussed above, adding more that divulges the self-promotional tactics leading many to dub him a huckster:

*For Marston, bondage was about submission, not just sexually but in every aspect of life. It was a lifestyle, not an activity, and he used bondage imagery as a metaphor for this style of submission. In 1942, Marston conducted a fake interview with his domestic partner, Olive Byrne, for Family Circle magazine. Byrne used the pseudonym "Olive Richard" and pretended to be a casual friend of Marston and his ideas behind her. The article was called "Our Women Are Our Future" and it allowed Marston to spell out his theories on the coming matriarchy. Byrne, still upset over Pearl Harbor, asked Marston, "Will war ever end in this world; will men ever stop fighting?" He replied, "Oh, yes. But not until women control men." (47-8)*

After Marston's death, these features vanished from Wonder Woman. Other authors cover what happened next more completely, which I'll consider in later sections.

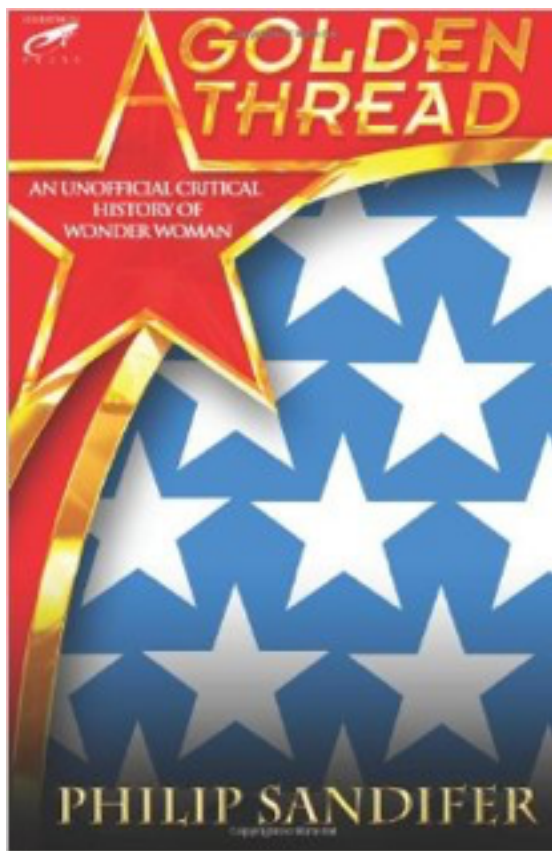
But Hanley, it seems, shares my enthusiasm for the Wonder Woman who burst forth directly after DC's universe-altering *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. In 1987, George Pérez would instill a feminist flare to Wonder Woman, presenting arguably the most powerful version, one moored firmly to Greek mythology, and somewhat inspired by her Golden Age roots:

*Pérez's new origin story for Wonder Woman had a framework that was similar to her Golden Age origin and retained a feminist message, but it was also more involved. The story began in 1200 BCE, when the Olympian goddesses finally and enough of the constant war and violence of mankind. They proposed a new female race of humans who would be "strong . . . brave . . . compassionate" and set an example for the rest of mankind. (228)*

The goddesses journeyed to Hades, to Gaea's womb, where the souls of women slain by men resided. These became the Amazons. The goddesses "told them they were a 'sacred sisterhood,' a 'chosen race – born to lead humanity in the ways of virtue'" (229). Hippolyte, the first to emerge, became queen, and since her soul was pregnant upon death, she longed for a daughter. Next, Hippolyte fulfills this need. She molds Diana from clay and the infant receives gifts of power and virtue from various gods and goddesses.

Golden Age sidekick Etta Candy returns, now an Air Force lieutenant and enjoying a relationship with Steve Trevor. Pérez blends also real-world issues with mythological threats to Wonder Woman's mission in Man's World. How could I not love these augmentations to a character long enervated due to societal trends, artistic misfiring, and outright sexism? After Pérez left the title in 1990, Hanley feels that *Wonder Woman* again lapsed into mediocrity.

*Wonder Woman Unbound* is the most chatty and accessible of the four books in this review. Hanley's title pun sets a tone he continues with chapter headings like "Focus on the Family, or Superman Is a Jackass." Hanley's cheek has been well honed over years writing for his blog, *Straitened Circumstances*, and for his monthly column on *Bleeding Cool*, "Gendercrunching." The same wit permeates his output here.



### 3. **A Golden Thread: An Unofficial History of Wonder Woman by Philip Sandifer**

Sandifer's unofficial history contains chapters dedicated to specific instances from Wonder Woman's life, beginning with her origins, then on to her adventures during World War II, later exploring the controversial I Ching period in which she loses her powers, and finally examining Brian Azzarello's recent interpretation. Sandifer holds a Ph.D. in English Literature, focusing on film and media studies, so, of course, he devotes significant time to the Amazonian princess on television and in other media as well.

Why psychologist William Moulton Marston created Wonder Woman, his psychological theories, and all that bondage interests Sandifer too. We now know that critics and observers have discussed Marston's predilection for bondage, his role in developing the lie detector, his long-time polyamorous relationship with two women, and his theories of personality. Fans also understand that Marston concocted his character to illustrate and promulgate his views on women, which are central to his utopianism. Sandifer summarizes this purpose as follows:

*She's not just a popular response to Marston's psychological theories, nor is she just a product of his fetishes. Rather, she's part of a concentrated effort to advance a technocratic worldview that comes not from the hard sciences but from the field of psychology at a point when it was caught between two competing approaches. She's more than propaganda; she's the most populist edge of a broad and thoroughly considered philosophical system. (52)*

Readers once again see that Marston hoped Wonder Woman, the embodiment of his feminist Utopia, would convey a liberating message to our real-life man's world.

Sandifer moves beyond Lepore, however, by detailing Marston's personality theory, called "DISC theory," and by conveying how later professionals reacted to Marston's output. The first, deeming Marston a "brilliant huckster who managed to fool DC Comics into letting him slip his kinky propaganda into their comics," comes from Les Daniel's authorized history of Wonder Woman. Grant Morrison presents the opposing view. Sandifer quotes from Morrison's *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us About Being Human*, where Morrison declares that after Marston, "The erotic charge left the Wonder Woman strip, and sales declined, never to recover. Once the lush pervy undercurrents were purged, the character foundered" (54-5).

Next, Robert Kanigher – who wrote and/or edited numerous characters including the Flash, Batman and Lois Lane to name a few -- took over writing duties for *Wonder Woman*. Thanks to edicts stemming from the Comics Code Authority and a retail shift toward romance comics, Wonder Woman suffered just as Morrison remembers. Kanigher did reinstall her vitality briefly in the mid-1960s, but more on that below when I regard Joseph J. Darowski's critical anthology.

Then in 1968, beginning with *Wonder Woman* #178, Kanigher left and Dennis O'Neil introduced the I Ching era and stripped Wonder Woman's powers. The Amazons' magic has run out, and they retreat for another dimension to renew themselves. Wonder Woman, however, elects to remain behind, forfeiting everything, not only her abilities, but her costume, her invisible plane, the works. Even Steve Trevor is shot and killed. What makes Sandifer's analysis of this era interesting is his willingness to defend it:

*The "fannish critique is deeply undermined by how good some of the people involved in this period actually are. O'Neill is a rock-solid comic-book writer with a number of classic runs to his name, and a reputation for dealing well with progressive issues. The final two issues of the era were written by*

“Go in peace my daughter. And remember that, in a world of ordinary mortals, you are a Wonder Woman.”  
Queen Hippolyte

*Samuel Delany, one of the best-regarded science-fiction writers in the country, and who is particularly famed for his treatment of gender and sexuality. (105)*

O’Neil’s *Batman* and *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* are legendary. Like Sandifer, I’m an enormous fan. Unlike Sandifer, I don’t think he fared very well with *Wonder Woman*. All greats have questionable moments. Even Gustave Flaubert, who penned *Madame Bovary*, stumbled with *Salamambo*.

In 1972, the I Ching era ended abruptly when Gloria Steinem demanded that DC sack the entire creative team working on *Wonder Woman*. Sandifer recounts Delany’s take:

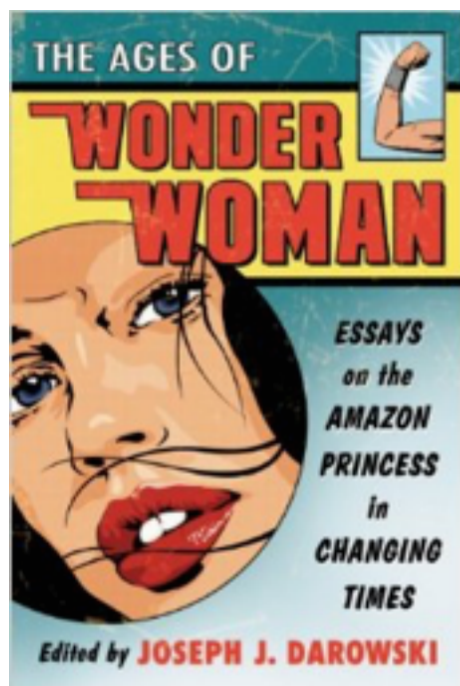
*In Delany’s account, [Steinem] didn’t read the issue. Instead, she asked what happened to the costume, and implored DC to consider the importance of Wonder Woman as an image. The next day, apparently, the edict came back to restore Wonder Woman’s powers and pull the plug on Delany’s arc. (123)*

Sandifer admits that Delany wasn’t an eyewitness to this occurrence, and perhaps his account might be a bit self-serving. Steinem and Warner were preparing to launch *Ms.*, the famous feminist magazine, the first issue of which featured a now classic rendition of Wonder Woman on the cover. Additionally, Steinem had written several essays to accompany an anthology of Golden Age Wonder Woman stories. She may not have read issues of *Wonder Woman* produced at that time, but she did have experience with Marston’s writing, with the period in which Wonder Woman reflected the psychologist’s vision for a feminist (as he saw it) Utopia, before Robert Kanigher eliminated these elements in reaction to 1950s America, and to appease the Comics Code Authority and market trends that leaned sharply toward romance comics. Steinem’s outrage exploded against women’s containment throughout the 1950s, how they were relegated to submissive roles in relationships and pinned to the home. Perhaps Sandifer doesn’t understand that Steinem wasn’t just reacting to the comic, but to what it represented about the state of women in general.

While Sandifer strongly criticizes Steinem’s actions as well as flaws in second-wave feminism – for example, oversights regarding women of color and transgendered women – his stance in no way indicates a male backlash. Sandifer’s name might seem familiar, and for good reason if you’ve been following the Sad Puppy/Rabid Puppy brouhaha. His recent blog entry in reaction to the 2015 Hugo Award nominations published on his website and quoted in *Entertainment Weekly* and *The Daily Telegraph* shows unequivocally where he stands politically.

Instead, Sandifer defends what he sees as O’Neil’s craftsmanship. No backlash against women is was intended. Nonetheless, O’Neil’s watered-down Wonder Woman doesn’t play, because it’s difficult to see anything other than backlash when you remove a major heroine’s potency. Unfortunately, Delany, no White male oppressor, took the brunt and lost his job. His plans for Diana might have been worth exploring. Fans will never know.

Sandifer’s history covers all major developments and disasters in the life of Diana, and he’s never shy about adding passionate commentary while walking us through all her iterations in various media. Although writing for a general audience, his voice mostly reveals his background in literary criticism and scholarship. Other voices from other disciplines provide different perspectives, like those included in the next book up for discussion.



#### 4. **The Ages of Wonder Woman: Essays on the Amazon Princess in Changing Times** Edited by Joseph J. Darowski

Joseph J. Darowski, a professor of English at Brigham Young University, gathers an impressive array of academics from various fields – literature, sociology, media studies, and history – who explore how changing trends in American culture have impacted creator efforts at various times. That Darowski includes so many authors, each tackling a different period in Wonder Woman’s history, enhances the usefulness here, because the narrative becomes dialogue instead of monologue, with competing viewpoints generating the aura of a symposium rather than a lecture.

The authors in Darowski targeting the 1950s and 1960s provoke the most scrutiny. Above, I mentioned how Wonder Woman’s feminist potency waned during the Robert Kanigher era. Sappy romantic themes dominate his stories. Additionally, Wonder Girl and Wonder Tot enter the scene, further weakening the title’s punch. In his essay, *Containing Wonder Woman; Frederic Wertham’s Battle Against the Mighty Amazon*, Craig This outlines causes for these insipid stories, citing from Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent*:

*Anti-comic book crusader and psychiatrist Frederic Wertham, however, saw Wonder Woman in a completely different light [than Marston]. “Wonder Woman,” wrote Wertham, “is physically very powerful, tortures men, has her own female following, is the cruel, ‘phallic’ woman. While she is a frightening figure for boys she is an undesirable ideal for girls, being the exact opposite of what girls are supposed to be” (Wertham, 34).*

*This being “opposite of what girls are supposed to be” became the basis of Wertham’s argument and attacks against Wonder Woman. Wertham’s attempts to censor and limit the appeal of Wonder Woman and her feminism fall into the broader theme of containment, particularly the “domestic containment of women” in the 1950s. (30)*

Wertham’s anti-comic screed led to the oppressive Comics Code Authority. The Comics Code’s encroachment blended with Kanigher’s creative decisions brought about a containment of Wonder Woman that mirrored the containment of women in 1950s society, the relegating of women to filling submissive roles in society. Indeed, Kanigher “worked hard to show that Wonder Woman was a heterosexual, interested in men [especially Steve Trevor], marriage, and family” (38-9). Craig This concludes:

*Wonder Woman emerged in the 1940s just as America entered World War II. As women entered the war production in various capacities, the image of Wonder Woman spoke to the promise of the future for women: strong, independent and career-minded. When the war ended, Fredric Wertham fought to contain that image of the strong, independent career-minded woman for he felt it threatened the American family and American society. His attempts to contain Wonder Woman forced her, like so many women during the 1950s, to struggle with the tension between family and career. In the end, Wertham may have contained the symbol of the 1940s Wonder Woman – strength and independence – but the 1950s Wonder Woman – having to choose between marriage and career – spoke to and inspired another generation. (39-40)*

“Spoke to and inspired another generation?” That inspired both girls and boys to absorb the images of women in comics affected by containment trends in society, by Wertham’s pogrom, and by market trends favoring romance comics over super-hero comics? It’s no mystery then why Gloria Steinem and others reacted so strongly when in 1968 DC decided to pull the plug on Wonder Woman’s physical powers. When comics speak, more than a few choose to listen.

By the mid-1960s, Kanigher quickly abandoned romance. Wonder Girl and Wonder Tot, collectively known as the “Wonder Family,” vanished too. With her contribution, *Retiring Romance: The Superheroine’s Transformation in the 1960s*, historian Francinne Valcour provides possible answers for this change:

*By the mid-1960s significant factors brought the 1950s perception of women’s ideal as wife and mother into question. By eliminating the Wonder Family and placing emphasis on the superheroine’s mission and Amazon skills, the comic book reflects the changing role of women in American society. (66)*

The American zeitgeist shifted, fans strongly criticized the Wonder Family, and so Kanigher “enacted dramatic changes that transformed *Wonder Woman’s* emphasis on domesticity and romance into stories high-lighting the title character’s Amazon skills and adventures” (67). Had Kanigher experienced a road to Damascus moment and embraced gender equality? No. Again, culture and market forces ruled the day. Kanigher stopped writing *Wonder Woman* in 1967, handing the reins to O’Neil who introduced the I Ching period starring the powerless Wonder Woman I discussed above, and so much for her return to Golden Age glories.

Darowski’s contributors understand that *Wonder Woman’s* strength and feminist oomph have risen and fallen throughout her career. These contributors address more directly society and market forces, however, in addition to the creative milieu infusing collective energies over the decades. The academic language that permeates each essay might turn off readers, but I appreciate the more serious approach. Individuals seeking facile fanboy or fangirl writing need not peruse these pages. As with the other three books I’ve outlined, herein lies enthusiasm combined with careful thought. I’m now better acquainted with *Wonder Woman* than ever before. Should you decide to follow suit, I hope you enjoy getting to know her as much as I have.

“Of all people, you  
know who I am...  
who the world needs  
me to be. I’m  
Wonder Woman.”

# The Mighty World Of Me

## Baby's first comic

The first comic I can remember reading was The Mighty World Of Marvel issue #136.

1975

I was 6.

(Also known as MWOM.)

On the cover was a picture of a giant green man called Hulk.

He was surrounded by lots of little people.

There was a man with weird long wobbly arms...

... and a man on a rope...

... and a man on fire...

... and a man with a shield.

And right down the bottom, between Hulk's giant legs there was an orange rocky thing, who turned out to be called Thing.

YA CRUMB BUM.

The title of the story was:

**WHO WILL JUDGE THE HULK?**

I had no idea who the Hulk was, or who would judge him.

To be honest, I wasn't very that sure what 'judging' was either.

But it had something to do with being surrounded by tiny, strange looking people.

Inside MWOM #124 there was a black and white story about a man called Bruce who was sweating on a plane.

A man wearing dark glasses next to him was trying to keep Bruce calm...

...but he was too slow with something called a sedative.

And Bruce turned into Hulk, right there in the plane!

Then they were all in a court and Hulk didn't like it and he went mad.

HULK THINKS WHOLE PUNY SYSTEM IS OUT OF ORDER!

(Not actual dialogue.)

At least I think that's how it went.

It may have been another comic altogether.

It was all such a long time ago.

But whichever comic it was all those years ago, I was hooked.

Then, and forever more, I would be... a Marvelite.



## KNICKERS TO BATMAN BY ESTHER MACCALLUM- STEWART

*'Don't take this the wrong way, but Primark are doing these' (photo attached).*

This isn't the first time I've had an e-mail like this. Amusingly, this one is on a bcc list, so it's clearly gone to several other people (who for common decency, the sender wants to keep unnamed and out of sight). It means I'm not alone. I open up the image and wonders spill out.

I'm walking down the road with a friend and trying to work out appropriate personal space with him. We're close, but not holding hands close (although that would be quite nice). He's also a lot taller than me, so I'm doing that weird walk-double-step of the 'short person with a dumb ass limpy foot' in order to keep up. Because of this, we keep bumping into each other, which is a bit awkward. He turns and points to a girl that's just passed us. We bump into each other again. The girl is wearing a top with a silver Superman logo on it.

'I used to think, yeah, these people might be my friends. You'd want to go up to them and say 'Hey! We're mates; we both like that thing'. Now...ahhh... It's everywhere. She's probably just wearing it because she thought it was cool.'

I'm in Brighton, heading to a dress shop. It sells 1950s style dresses made in B-Movie prints. Importantly, the shop vary their top to bottom sizing, so if you have a fat arse, and small boobs, or big boobs and a fat arse, or are stumpy like me, or are made out





of willow twigs and have cleavage, or all of those things in between, then there will actually be something that fits you and makes you look like a god-dam hero. I went to a wedding in the last dress I bought, and I stamped about in it all day on Sunday at Loncon, and I wore it to give a paper in Copenhagen. It's got all the starry universe within. It's great.

This makes me sound like an idiot. Specifically, a really shallow clothes horse form of superficial 'look at me' idiot. But there are several things in play here; things about our culture which show that attitudes to fandom, being a fan and also getting over that horrible stereotype – that nerds are badly dressed recluses – are starting to dissolve.

Of course, nerds have been sexy for years, and this is known. But the integration of nerd culture into mainstream fashion is something that's crept up on us and is now a huge part of our cultural lives. Importantly, it's okay to be sexy, and our choice of body shape, sexuality, gender or preference make us wonderful, desirable people, but we

aren't really used to seeing that as part of our worlds. I hope, very much, that making nerd culture part of this world will also help these nasty preconceptions to disappear.

There are issues with the fact that we can head down to the shops and buy Gryffindor sweats (fyi, no Slytherin in stock or in the underwear section at my local metropolis – are you trying to tell us something, Primark?). Primark have bought several large, trademarks images and are touting them around as much as they can. This Yule period, they were selling Harry Potter, Frozen, Batman, Breaking Bad and Despicable Me products – most of these for adults as well as children. For the less well-known franchises (rather like B-Movies, it looks as if they got several other names and were ordered to promote them as well), there's more explicative text. There's a T-shirt that says 'I'll be Back. (The Terminator)', and they are also using iPhone emoticons for more random t-shirts which need a familiar logo. So first, we have the shameless, endless reselling of franchises and trademarks.

Secondly, oh gods. This is Primark. Whilst the pajamas are great and the nylons look good first time around, they are horribly mass produced. Squaring buying a really cool thong with the 13 year old who probably had to make it under vastly unpleasant, dangerous and exploitative conditions it isn't really a good thing. There are many, many places (Etsy included) who do lovely things for a little more. It's worth saving up.

Third and lastly. Yes, some trademarks are endemic now. One thing that comic art has done for years is produce amazingly dominant symbols and images. At some point, these moved slowly into the mainstream and people realized that not only are these really, really cool, but they look great. The Batman symbol is iconic, it's very obvious and it's incredibly noticeable. So yeah, my friend is going to be constantly bumping into me looking at those images, but there's something rather cool about knowing that even if that girl has never read a Superman comic, she's still going to look great in it.

But for me, it's not the t-shirts, or the dresses or cute jumpers or comfy pjs; it's the knickers. I like knickers. I spend a lot of money on knickers, nylons and underwear, because for me they are important. Good underwear is sexy, comfortable, dirty and fun. I buy it for myself and for the people I want to be with. I wear it at work and I wear it when no one is looking and when I'm cycling and when I really want to be with someone. And with Batman, it also becomes rather amusing. I rather like the fact that I can celebrate my sexuality with geek underwear, because comics have had that escapism ingrained in their female characters for years. Those characters are also sexy, comfortable, dirty and fun. The fact that we can celebrate it though underwear, and that this is becoming an important part of our lives, is really important.

Onwards

A STORY IN CARTOONS  
OF

# DETECTIVE DAN

SECRET OPERATIVE NO. 48.

10¢

STICK 'EM UP,  
TWO FINGER,-YOU'RE  
UNDER ARREST!



FIRST PRIZE  
**\$50.00**

SECOND PRIZE \$10.00 | THIRD PRIZE \$5.00

10 \$2.00 PRIZES 10

You Can Win! 28 CASH AWARDS You Can Win!

THESE PRIZES WILL BE PAID TO THE BEST SOLUTIONS TO

## THE WHITE CAT MURDER

CONTEST \$100.00 IN CASH PRIZES YOUNG and OLD CAN ENTER

FIRST PRIZE  
**\$50.00**

SECOND PRIZE \$10.00 | THIRD PRIZE \$5.00

15 \$1.00 PRIZES 15



## Instant Fanzine Spotlight - Helena Nash

### My First Superhero

I guess that must have been Hulk. OK, the Hulk if you want to be all formal. I suppose he counts as a superhero, since he had his own weekly Marvel comic (black and white UK reprint The Mighty World of Marvel) at the time, but then so did Dracula and Planet of the Apes. In the comics I first read, Hulk stories consisted mainly of him getting shot at by the US Army, causing innocent bystanders to flee in terror and battling equally muscle-bound monsters like Rhino, Abomination, Zzzax (I had to check the spelling) and the excellently-hatted Xemnu the Titan. Hulk didn't go much for crime-fighting or making the world a better place.

If Hulk did occasionally save the world, it was more as a by-product of him accidentally pulverizing a bad-guy's doomsday weapon in the middle of their fight, rather than by any conscious intention to do good. This was the era of the 'Hulk-Smash' incarnation - a childlike titan who just wanted to be left alone, but yet was continually hunted and hounded (a term used almost every issue) by those that would seek to capture him, revenge themselves on him or simply prove that they could beat him. That latter motivation was inevitably doomed, because, as was often roared by the jade giant himself, 'HULK IS THE STRONGEST ONE THERE IS!'. Right on, Hulk baby, as his 70s sidekick Jim Wilson might say.

Hulk was a great character for a young reader like me. He wasn't that complicated - a child-like loner with Unearthly Strength ('increases to Shift X when he rages') and not too much back story (in the days before Joe Fixit and Skaar and Doc Green). And he was easier for me to draw than, say, Spider-Man, whose webbed costume always proved to be a challenge. With Hulk, as long as you had a green and a purple crayon, you couldn't really fail, although in one very early drawing I did of him he appeared to have the face of the late Norman Wisdom.

The best thing about Hulk was his own special Hulk-speak, which consisted of referring to himself only in the third person (a classic comic device; see also Dr Doom) and giving everyone else their own unique Hulk nickname. Thus Spider-Man was 'BUG MAN' or more often 'PUNY BUG MAN', the

Thing was of course 'ROCK MAN' and so on. For years I thought that the superhero Valkyrie was called 'SWORD GIRL'\*.

\* 'HULK APOLOGISE FOR REDUCTIVE AND SEXIST LABELLING.'

### My Favourite Female Superhero

I found this a much harder question than I ought to have. By rights I should be offering up a character that I've followed closely over the years. Someone like Kitty Pryde, who started as a bit of an audience-identification figure in the X-Men, and very much the underdog in her early stories. She had to use every bit of ingenuity to survive encounters with Sentinels, the Hellfire Club and other-dimensional demons. Issue #165 of Uncanny X-Men, when she and her fellow mutants are facing an awful death thanks to the alien Brood eggs inside them, has a wonderful sequence of Kitty facing her impending death-by-body-horror with a very real sense of grief, outrage and finally bravery. She was



also a bit of a skinny teenage geek like many of her readers, and seemed to speak for them in the moving 'four-eyed flat-chested brat' speech that closed *New Mutants* #45, following the suicide of a bullied student. Kitty was just like us in a lot of ways.

Or maybe I should say it's a character that's grown and matured over the years, someone who's bucked gender stereotypes. Somebody like Susan Storm Richards, the Invisible Woman of the *Fantastic Four*. Originally the Invisible Girl, she was inevitably the hostage of many an early FF villain, starting with the Sub-Mariner in issue #4 and Dr Doom straight after in issue #5. But when I was regularly reading the FF in the 80s, writer-artist John Byrne saw the potential both in Sue's powers and her strength of character. A classic story-arc from issue #279 to #284 showcases just how cool her forcefield ability is, and also marks her long overdue change of name to the Invisible Woman, no longer the token girl hostage.

Maybe I should choose a solo female character, someone who started out in their own on-going series, rather than as 'the girl in the team'. Someone like Dazzler - no, shut up, her early comics are actually alright, actually. There's one where she absorbs all the energy of Black Bolt's sonic shout and uses it to blind Galactus, I think. OK, better example then - Jessica Jones from *Alias*. Now there's a complex, 'real' female superhero character with a great back story, cleverly inserted into existing

Marvel canon retroactively by writer Brian Michael Bendis.

But you know what? None of them are my gut-reaction Favourite Female Superhero. When I thought about it, really sat down and thought about who I love the most, she wasn't a Marvel character like the others. She wasn't even someone that I've read a lot of. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that Supergirl is my favourite female superhero purely because of one single issue, and that's

not even her own comic. It's Crisis on Infinite Earths #7, popularly known as the 'Death of Supergirl', in case the cover left you in any doubt.

When Superman is ambushed by the all-powerful, universe-destroying Anti-Monitor, he screams in agony. His cousin Supergirl is the only one who can hear his cry over the pitched battle, and she lays into the Anti-Monitor without hesitation. She freakin' rescues Superman. And then proceeds to mightily wail on the Anti-Monitor single handed, even though she knows it means her death. That's a proper superhero right there, female or otherwise. And all this while carrying off a tricky headband-and-hockey-skirt costume combo. Beautifully scripted by Marv Wolfman and drawn by the legendary George Perez, I fell in love with Supergirl and then had to mourn her all in the same issue.



## Question 1 - Who was your First Super Hero?



*Irena Hartman*

Sailor Moon and Buffy. I saw them both on TV, as a kid. I was somewhere between... I don't know, 8-10-12 yrs old?

Sailor Moon is... well, Usagi (the girl behind the frilly skirt) is. Confused, messy, butter fingered, gawky. She keeps being late for school. She has people that she does and doesn't like. She is so far from perfect. And because of that, she felt like a real person.

And she has a talking cat, how awesome is that?

\*And\*, she is Sailor Moon. She fights for justice, always doing the right thing. She is brave. Her friends her brave. (Sailor Mars, the temperamental girl with a knack for fire? I think she's the part of the reason why I tend to burn stuff in my own short stories.) She is (spoiler alert xD) princess Serenity. She has a crush on Tuxedo-Mask. And all her battles with her enemies were carefully connected to something happening in her real life. And oh boy, the epic over-the-top season finale was really epic and over-the-top.

Sometimes, I'm sorry I never finished watching the series. I grew up. They stopped showing her in Croatia (and worse, they started dubbing her in some point, I hated it. Even then, I could see how bad the translation and voice-actors were).

But, that's the time I found Buffy.

Buffy... Hm. I still love Buffy, I even rewatched her a couple of years ago, all 7 seasons. But back then... I don't know. Now that I think about it, the reasons why I liked her and Sailor Moon where somewhat similar - although I don't think I ever thought about like that on conscious level, you know? They were both human. And trying so hard to be something more.

Buffy's life wasn't easy. She felt tired, often used, lonely. But still, she kept fighting. She had her ups and downs. Even tried to give up - because, when did you save the world enough times? And eventually, she would do it one more time. Just one more time. And then again.

On a personal note, maybe that resonated with me because my childhood was in some ways less than perfect. And her imperfection and being human and still ultimately not giving up was encouraging in some ways... I don't know. She was strong. Strong enough, anyways.

Today, I see how cruel and good a writer Joss Whedon is. And I love, love, love his dialogues.

Whedon-speak is his trademark, usually seen all over his work.

And of course, both TV shows were fun. Wouldn't have watched them if they were boring ;) There are some great BtVS episodes - Once More With Feeling, a musical episode. Hush, an episode that had nearly none dialogue. There's this one episode where Whedon makes us believe that Buffy is really a patient in a mental institution, and that all her Slayer adventures are really figment of her imagination... Oh, how I hated him for it. I felt betrayed. The end of the episode is left open for the interpretation - and that's the first time that I \*chose\* to believe that some part of a show is canon and that some other part isn't. That she \*is\* a Slayer, and not some locked up crazy person. And yet, it still twists my guts just to think about that episode. It was great. The whole show was. Still is.

*Erin Riggsmith*

I am told that I loved He-Man and I vaguely remember a coloring book I had around kindergarten, but my first superhero, that I truly remember adoring, was Michelangelo from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. But if we are going for a more humanoid hero, I remember the Tim Burton Batman movies as thrilling and just a little bit too scary for me as a kid, but I never would have admitted that and risked it getting vetoed by my cautious parents.

*Anna Warren Cebrian*

I loved Wonder Woman. Even had her underoos as a little girl (photo might be submitted of 5-year old me, if you plead)

*Anton Marks*

Fantastic Four, The Incredible Hulk and Batman.

*Brian Gray*

Batman. (My parents sort of randomly doled out our first two comic books--my brother got Supes, I got Bats. In the long run... I won that lottery.) The first superhero title I collected, once I had my own pocket cash, was either Karate Kid (of the 24th century LSH) or Firestorm, it may have been a simul-tie.



*Esther MacCallum-Stewart*

Almost certainly someone from a book. I think it's a tie between Super Gran and Jack Bagthorpe's Dog Zero. Prior to that, almost certainly the Fat Controller from the Thomas the Tank engine books, although I think he's more a cross between The Penguin and The Kingpin, really.

*Erica Schott:*

Does Loki count? He's the first real superhero-verse character I took a particular liking to.

*Anne Gray*

Photos of me in my underoos indicate that was Wonder Woman. :) I also remember watching the TV shows, both animated and live action. Super Friends shows I particularly remember involved Wonder Woman, Aqua Man, Superman, and the WonderTwins. WonderTwin powers, activate! Of all of these I only ever had a toy of superman. \*sad face\*

*Chuck Serface*

I'm the fifth of six children, and my two oldest brothers were teens when I began retaining memories. At age 3, I frequently rummaged through their bedroom. One day I entered their bathroom and found magazines, "entertainment for men" we adults call them. Interspersed within this tawdry stack were several tattered Silver Age comics, the one nearest the top featuring Metamorpho the Element Man. How instantly captivating were those illustrations by Ramona Fradon. She rocked my world. Miss June 1968 only wishes.

*Ric Bretschneider*

Likely it was Superman, but as I recall it was in Jimmy Olsen comics. But it may have been Superboy, but in Legion of Super Heroes comics.

*Carole Parker*

First one I knew was Super Man. George Reeve was the star.

*Ruth Leibig*

My appreciation of superheroes is straight emotional reaction so I admit to not spending much of time analyzing why I like them. My first superhero was Spiderman. I love the wisecracking. I don't think the movies quite get that right.

*Marlin May*

The first superhero I remember really liking was Aquaman. This would have been when I was 7 or 8. However, if mythological characters are considered, around the same time period, I could not miss an episode of "The Mighty Hercules".

*Guy Lillian*

Of course, SUPERMAN, thanks to George Reeves' epic TV program and the Fleischer cartoons, broadcast every day on Los Angeles TV a summer that I visited my grandparents with my mother. I knew about BATMAN, too, from reading 52-pp WORLD'S FINEST comics as a true whelp -- or having them read to me. I really got into superhero comics when I found a copy of an early FLASH in a stack of magazines in my grandmother's house. HOOKED.

*Diane O.*

As a kid, Big Bird on Sesame Street. He was awesome. His super power: Everyone enjoys talking, playing, being with him. Adults, kids, puppets, everyone. Nice, too. Past kindergarten, Batman.

*Luis Gonzalez*  
Superman (TV)

*Ivana Delač*

It's difficult to decide between She-Ra and L' Archer Blanc aka White Archer, from the French comic of the same name.



*Jim Mann*

Superman, though soon followed by the Fantastic Four

*Keith Smith*

Tintin. This may seem like an odd choice, but I have enduring memory of discovering Tintin in my local library at age six (don't get me started on the systemic dismantling of library services) and I thought he was awesome: he traveled the world, fought bad guys, solved mysteries, foiled plots to overthrow governments, went TO THE MOON, and had what most people would consider an odd sense of fashion. He seemed like to superhero to me at the time.

*Emma England*

Wonder Woman was my first. She is my last and always. I even wrote an article about her and it's being republished in a Feminist Companion to the Bible series (Yes, really, see: <http://www.bloomsbury.com/us/a-feminist-companion-to-tobit-and-judith-9780567656032/>).

I got into her through the television series when I was a child; I still have a mug I was given at the time and nobody is allowed to touch it but me! I wanted to be Wonder Woman so badly, I'm pretty sure I also wanted her, but I was too young to realize it at the time. Certainly over the years she came to represent empowerment in political, emotional, and sexual ways for me. It wasn't until I got into my 30s did I start catching up on the comics in a more completist manner, not that I own them all alas. I have nonetheless read every last one of them up to the New 52. Over the decades Wonder Woman has been treated badly but the New 52 series has changed her origins story, her politics, her relationship with Superman and her general relationship with the world. None in a good way. Wonder Woman is no longer a feminist icon and I want nothing to do with her. Give me the Wonder child made of clay any day

*Niall Harrison*

Almost certainly either Bananaman or Superted. Looking up air dates, Superted came first. Great moons of Spot! And let's not forget Supergran either, although she was a bit later in the '80s.

*Jackie Kamlot*

Wonder Woman.

*Adria K.*

Isis. I watched the Saturday morning TV show (1975-1976). I had the Isis doll, too. Isis and my Wonder Woman doll did a lot of crimefighting together in my backyard. Yes, it is possible that Isis influenced my desire to become an archaeologist (because the idea that a high school science teacher would be on a significant dig and find something awesome just seemed silly).

*Val Nolan*

Superman. Not because I was born in the 1930s (though get off my lawn!) but because those were the first comics I happened to read as a kid. And, thankfully, Superman back then stood for something more than high collars or grimdark screen adaptations. He was about helping people. He was about doing the right thing. Which is why I dislike when people say he's boring. Yeah, talking someone off a ledge is more "boring" than punching the building, but it makes for a weightier story, a story that will last.

*Karen Burnham*

Nightcrawler, from X-Men

*Igor Redic*

Batman - from the 1966 show, they showed reruns of it on Croatian TV in the early 90's. I still hum the tune occasionally.

*Warren Buff*

An ER nurse handed me a Spiderman comic when I was two. I'm pretty sure that was my first.







*Michael Lee*

Spider-Man, as part of the Electric Company as a very young child. He both terrified me and fascinated me.

*Melissa Taylor*

Hard to say, I've been watching cartoons all of my life, but I have two which really stood out to me. A-Ko from Project A-Ko was one of the first superheroes to leave an impression when my big brother bought the anime home and watched it with me, and she kickstarted my love for anime and manga. In terms of Western superheroes, Green Arrow was my first. I picked up Green Arrow: Year One in my local library, I loved the art by Jock so much and I was intrigued by the character. After being a manga fan for so long, it was my first real introduction to Western comics.

*Trixy Loupwolf:*

batman

*Padraig O'Mealoid*

The first superhero I can remember is Spider-Man, who was being reprinted in black and white in Odhams Press's POW!, which was part of their Power Comics line. Apparently they also had Nick Fury, but I don't remember him at all from then. They also produced FANTASTIC, which had the X-Men, another early favourite. Spider-Man had that wonderful Steve Ditko art, which is still the brilliant. The 'net tells me that would have been around 1967, so I would have been seven years old. Most of my comics reading was UK comics, so I suppose I could try to make a case for Desperate Dan, or Pansy Potter, the Strongman's Daughter, if I was feeling particularly contrary, but you've caught me on a good day!

## What superhero comics have you really enjoyed and why?

*Esther MacCallum-Stewart*

When I worked in a comic shop during the late 1990s I read pretty much everything going, and this left me with mixed feelings about superheroes. Gen 13 and Witchblade were big favourites then because they were obviously pastiche, and if you are going to make jokes about pearl necklaces, you should probably do it in style. Although they were also very heavy on the boobage, there was a witty undertone to both of them that I enjoyed. Both comics also seemed to be skewed more towards a general audience in terms of storylines. I still have a crush on Ian Nottingham (even though he did get a bit emo and/or creepy in later story arcs).

Because of what was being published at the time, I've always had a soft spot for Generation X, X-Factor and some of the Uncanny X-Men - in particular the attempt to introduce new and less stereotypical characters. This didn't always succeed (Chamber...oh gods why?? WHY!!!?). I liked Grant Morrison's run on the series, which started just after I left the shop. However, this also meant that I got exposed to a lot of dross. I actively dislike Superman (dull, although the Metropolis G/N was ace). I avoided Batman because it was going through a tits and ass phase, and tbh, I don't think there's much left in that franchise. Both Catwoman and Wonder Woman during that period were unimaginative, and again, not really written with a general audience in mind. This was also the period where Vertigo was really taking off, so Sandman, The Books of Magic, Preacher and Hellblazer were in full swing. I also remember a superb Judge Anderson series in 2000AD illustrated by Steve Sampson.

This largely meant that most of the comics I read and enjoyed actively rejected superheroes (and also, I got so bored of selling the same dismal crap to people that anything novel was worth reading). If I were going to pick one however, without cheating too much, I think my favourite hero during this period and onwards remains Usagi Yojimbo. Stan Sakai has a lot to work with and all of the characters are well represented. There's a good gender balance, with interesting characters and Usagi himself does troubled hero without too much angst. There's a lightness of touch and sense of humour that some of the larger franchises aren't able to use. In addition, he owns a dinosaur called Spot, and his greatest line of all time is 'WHERE ARE MY SWORDS?!' (which is quite often how I feel after reading a particularly stupid e-mail, or sometimes, just getting out of bed). What's not to like?

*Brian Nisbet*

So many, but I absolutely adore the Planetary series. It combines some very powerful people with a decent amount of pulp (one of my favourite genres) and messes around with a some DC stuff.

In a similar vein I like The Authority quite a bit, apart from its couple of dodgy stories.

I suspect my favour comic/story of all time is Age of Apocalypse. I read through all of the comics, crossing over again and again, when I was a much younger man and adored the story and characters. I never really thought you could tell a story like that in a comic and it blew me away. Of course it also features perhaps the finest Wolverine moment of all time.

And so many more, but then I just start listing every comic book I've ever read, which defeats the purpose a little.

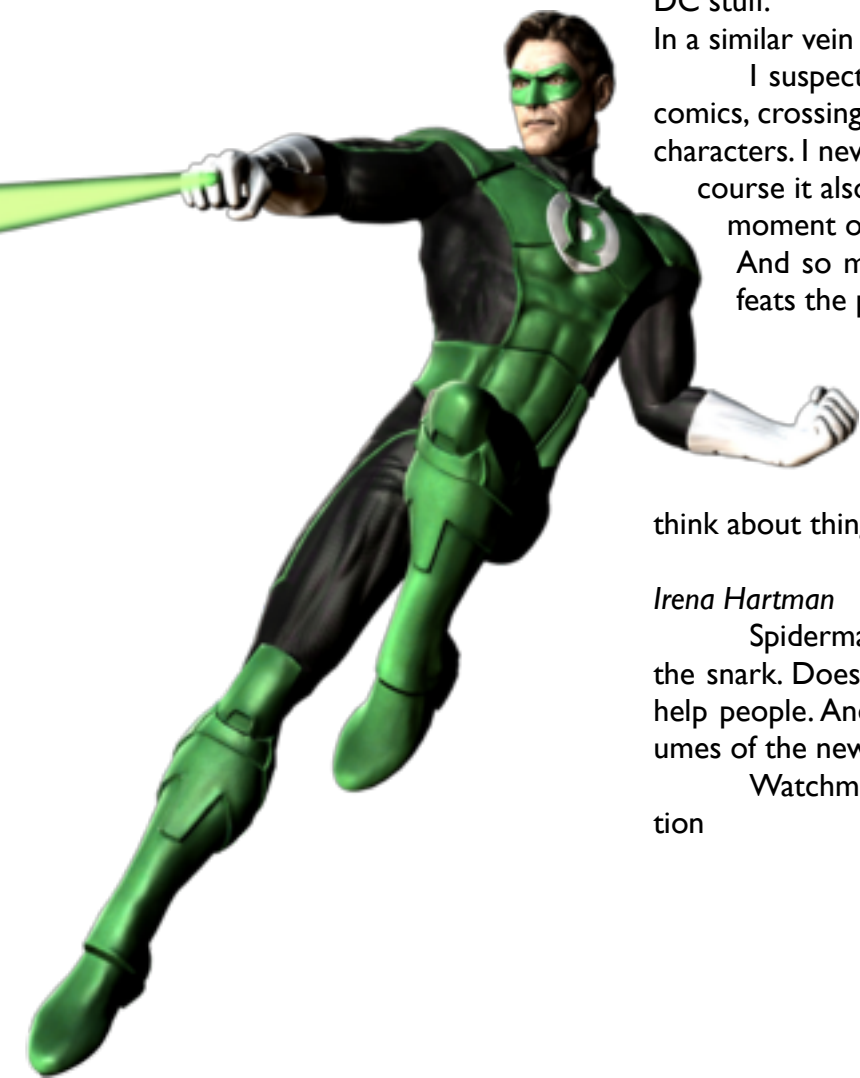
*Meg Frank*

I've really loved Saga recently. The levels of sass really make my day. It's adult content, not in a sexual way - though that subject is included, but in a heavy level of conversation way. I like that it's not just a quick and easy read, it's made me think about things going on around me.

*Irena Hartman*

Spiderman. Because I read that one first, as a kid. But I don't remember much apart from all the snark. Does Constantine count? He really isn't a superhero in traditional sense, but. He does help people. And I've enjoyed the comics quite a bit (even though I read only the first three volumes of the new edition, not the the old originals).

Watchmen? Because Watchmen? It's a good comic. Watchmen? Oh. That is a difficult question



I saw that movie and wanted to read the original material, and saw that it was much more complicated. Some things were darker. Rorschach was still disturbing in a way only he can be. But I still feel that much of the politics went over my head. I think I was both too young to read that and was missing too much of the context. Same applies to V for Vendetta - I picked it up because of the movie. And again, it was more complex, more serious. (I really should read them again.)

But, reading those was an eye-opening experience for my perception of comics. Graphic novels, that is, because that is what those really were. They were serious, dark. I struggled with Watchmen, both story and the language, and yet, I couldn't put it down. I wanted more. And Alan Moore tends to put much of his philosophy in his work. There are so many lines that one can stop and think about, when reading those comics. And I did.

Top 10. Top 10 is funny! It twisted the trope of superheros - normal, vanilla humans are a minority. People have all kinds of powers and they use them in all kinds of ways. It felt like Moore was trying to make fun of the genre, but funnily enough, it worked. It was fast-paced procedural with weird, unique characters and silly plots. I loved it. It was a different side to Alan Moore for me. (I'm lucky that I have a friend owning all of those, and that I had the chance to read so many of Alan Moore's stuff.)

And Promethea. Uh, Promethea. She... she is possessed by this goddess. In a way, she *is* a goddess. The theme of that deep, primordial female power is strong in this graphic novel. There is strength and oh. So. Many. Ideas.

And Moore really goes all the way with the philosophy, which was fine up to the point when I started to feel that all that hijacked the story about the girl, mortal underneath all that. And I wanted to know more about her. So, honestly, I have some sort of love-hate relationship with that graphic novel. I do respect Promethea and I did read everything I could get my hands on because of standard superb writing and I wholeheartedly recommend it to everyone... But I didn't like her as much as the rest of the Moore's stuff that I read.

(Please keep in mind, I'm writing all this from memory - and my memory really isn't that good. But the feel of those comics is, and that's what I'm trying to convey.)

There was probably something else that I've forgot.

(I love the Sandman, but he isn't a superhero, even if we stretch the definition.)



*Erin Riggs Smith*

Starman, by James Robinson and Tony Harris. The leather jacket was truly 90s, but it was more than just slapping a jacket on Thor or Superboy. It told a wonderful story about family and legacy, while bridging the 90s back to the Golden and Silver ages of comics. It was written with keen awareness of the comic's history, and it ran with it. It was also written before the era when TPB were king, so some stories were one or two issues. Sometimes it's fun to just tell a short story, instead of make every arc TPB length.

*Anna Warren Cebrian*

I tend to not read superhero comics because I find them too formulaic and annoying, in that they never, ever die. How thrilling can a comic really be if you know the main character will never, ever, ever really die? Which is probably why I like Iron Man. I enjoy Tony Stark's humanity.

*Anton Marks*

Black Panther, Batman, X-Men, Spawn, Hulk, Blade, Justice League ect. They all have their appeal. Batman for instance has a grimy street appeal coupled with his grit, intellect, savvy and resources. Black Panther represents for Africa in a big way.

King, figure-head, genius and the richest man in the world. He views the world's ills from the pragmatic perspective of his people's survival but threaten his friends outside the confines of Wakanda and he will be the first one beside you in battle.

*Brian Gray*

For straight-up heroics, in the moms-and-apple-pie-and-aren't-heroes-great vein, I loved Invincible for many a year. It was a great exploration of growing up a super, and for a long time, chock full of interesting storytelling. Not only did the kid know his dad was the most powerful being on the planet (and couldn't tell anyone), but he had to grow up with his own powers, explore the deepest possible betrayal, come to grips with his own responsibilities and loyalties, deal with love and loss, all while he transitioned from a sock'em-cold-send'em-to-jail young hero to a bitter and scared let-the-bodies-lay-where-they-may warrior. Depth, range, female characters who were actual women (and their own, non-male-centric, non-misandry story arcs!), sensitivity, and a

“I can remember reading the first issue of Superman. It wasn't magical. I remember the first time I read Batman and saying 'Now THAT is a hero!'"  
Forry Ackerman

great art style for the story. I lost interest somewhere around issues 90-100 when it seemed to turn more into a gore-and-body-count fest with a slew of "Who's Hating Earth Now?" storylines.

For a more real-to-earth exploration of the issue of "what happens when supers are WMDs" (which I first saw broached in Miller's *Dark Knight Returns*), it didn't get much better than *Stormwatch: Team Achilles*. It had a great starting run, but ended far too soon. The writers were very much grounded in the the ideas introduced in *Stormwatch* (especially by Ellis at the end of that run) about the importance of considering the ramifications of supers' actions on ordinary humankind, and that escalation was not always the best answer. By limiting the ensemble to either (mostly) ordinary humans or a few limited-power superheroes, the writers drove home the real-world idea that limiting damage and fallout from superbeing conflicts was the best outcome, probably informed by actual conversation with special operations teams. Plus, Stuart Immonen's art on the first six issues hooked me hard and fast.

That, and they slagged Putin from orbit. Can't beat that.

However, hands-down, I'd have to say that *The Tick* is my all-time fave. Gorgeous, surreal, chaotic, utterly infused with a gonzo sense of abandon and fun solely for the sake of having fun (in a world that doesn't bat an eye at absurd superheroes AND villains), I love it as the best piss-take on all of superhero comics.

*Erica Schott:*

I haven't read very many, I'm more of a movie-goer, but I've really enjoyed the new *Captain Marvel* and *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. I particularly like the issues where they have to tackle logic puzzles or ethical dilemmas, because they make me think about what I would do in such a situation.

*Tonya Adolfsen here, aka Tanglwyst de Holloway*

My favorite superhero tends to vary from week to week it seems! I love what the Marvel Cinematic Universe is doing, intertwining their heroes and stories so they are all connected. Everything from a blind lawyer in Hell's kitchen to a semi-immortal federal agent to an orphan from Earth in space is overlapped as if this were a real world! It's like everyone's actually really experiencing the same things, like we do here.

Think that's not true? Then tell me what color is this dress?

Our real world has so many connections to the rest of humanity that people in Jabuti, Africa have an opinion on *Twilight*.

That is my favorite thing about the MCU. It is always cool to hear people on the street in a show, movie, or comic refer to the "Incident in New York 2 years ago". When giant flying dragon worms attack a major city, folks kinda notice!

For decades, my generation was raised with no temporal knowledge bananas in our serials. Oh, they COULD have done it. But then they would have to ignore the fact that all these Joes were never trained in Basic to shoot for center body mass, apparently. They'd have to acknowledge that if Superman can fly so fast as to go back in time to rescue Batman from a T-rex, he can certainly fly 20 feet to pull the Hall of Doom back down into the damned swamp.

But there's more here now, stuff as inspiring as any ink and storyline, because it has transcended the page and gone into our real life world.

Like Christopher Reeves, who was so much of a Superman that when he was paralyzed from the neck down, he never stopped fighting for those normal folk who were suffering. When he passed the torch to Tom Wells in *Smallville*, I was in tears. (BTW, next time someone says "allergies" or "road dust", say, "Oh. See, I'm over here actually crying because I'm not a heartless bastard." Trust me. It helps.)

Recently, Robert Downey Jr was on hand to give a kid a 3D printed prosthetic arm. A) RDJ! B) Delivered personally! And C) A FRICKIN WORKING PROSTHETIC ARM THAT WAS PRINTED! Talk about a superhero.

This isn't rare. Over and over, we are seeing, and being a part of, groups or projects or solo endeavors where superheroes dressed up as regular people are visiting children's burn units as the entire cast from *Avengers*, or marching in protests against sexism and racism as *Wonder Woman* and *Green Lantern*. Nathan Fillion raises hundreds of thousands of dollars for clean water on his birthday. Cosplayers form charity groups that supply *Make-a-wish*. And my friend Dartanian Richards, who tied his own wookiee suit, joins parades and charity drives all over Salt Lake City.

My favorite superheroes are the ones who lift off the page and walk among us, helping, healing, and giving hope. I am so blessed to know so many of them personally.

*Ric Bretschneider*

Probably all-time favorite has been The Fantastic Four. They're a cohesive family, even though they're entirely different. There's a real message there.

*Igor Redic*

Batman - I always liked that he was smart and well prepared first and physically powerful a distant second. Green Lantern - love the idea of having a ring creating constructs but also, the oath gets me every time I hear it. Also, pretty much anything that Alan Moore wrote - yes, Watchmen but also Tom Strong, Promethea and especially Top 10 - while Watchmen deconstructs the entire genre (in a masterful way), Tom Strong and Top 10 reconstruct it and are great, fun stories that respect the reader's intelligence. And Promethea, well, sometimes I like my superheroes to go all meta and you don't get more meta than Promethea (no, even if you're Animal Man written by Morrison). Do we count John Constantine among superheroes? :D

*Melissa Taylor*

Well, Green Arrow: Year One was a great intro for me, Jock's art was so dynamic that it really drew me in.

Jaime Reyes' Blue Beetle (the first version, not the reboot!) is a fantastic series - my friend recommended it and I'm really glad she did. I really enjoyed the art by Cully Hamner, but Keith Giffen and John Rogers really excelled at creating a young character I could relate to. The scenes with Jaime's family and his struggles when things don't go well for him are amazing and emotional, so I can't rec this series enough!

I also really love Nextwage: Agents of H.A.T.E. which is by Warren Ellis and Stuart Immonen. It's so funny, and Immonen's art is lots of fun. I love the characters chosen for this book (it was my intro to Monica Rambeau and Elsa Bloodstone, who are still some of my favourites!) and I'm still surprised when I read other books with them in and they aren't so funny or sarcastic.

My last pick for this would be X-23, written by Marjorie Liu. There are a few artists involved in this series, but I think they were all fantastic. The main reason I enjoyed it so much is that Marjorie works in a supporting cast of Jubilee, Wolverine and Gambit, who are favourite characters anyway, but I loved seeing all four of them come together as a kind of family and watching X-23's character grow and change in response to that and the things she goes through. I think it's a real hero's journey, well-written and with intriguing twists thrown in.

*Chuck Surface*

I'm a nut for magic-using or mystical superheroes. Doctor Strange, Doctor Fate, Zatanna, the Spectre, even Brother Voodoo and Dr. Druid - I don't care. I love them all. I once borrowed my brother's collection of Jack Kirby's The Demon, planning to never return them. He did eventually get them back, the bastard. Beyond the magic-users, anything from Jack Kirby, Jim Starlin, or Jim Steranko reigns mightily in my heart.

*Carole Parker*

I really liked the original X-Men series. They had a teenaged girl who was \*Jewish\* and had curly-wavy hair almost like mine. Plus, they were good stories.

*Guy Lillian*

FLASH, of course -- the first comic in my true appreciation of the genre and the situs of my first published letter of comment. Remember the silly cover of Flash being turned into a puppet? And thinking, "I've got the strangest feeling I'm being turned into a puppet!?" Check out the lettercol. Never looked back. Julie Schwartz, I owe you everything!

*Ruth Leibig*

I now read a lot in the Batman universe. It is darker than my usual style but something about the fight against that darkness appeals. I also love Astro City because they explore different aspects of a universe where superheroes exist.





*Karen Burnham*

I liked X-Men for awhile, then dropped out and picked up weirder comics like Sandman

*Luis Gonzalez*

X-Men since they had real problems.

*Warren Buff*

Loads of them. Top Ten was probably my favorite, though -- it managed to keep the characters compelling and the action moving while packing in loads of references and chewing the scenery. Starman was another favorite, again because the characters and action were all well done.

*Michael Lee*

Oh, so many. Growing up work by John Byrne, Chris Claremont, Len Wein, and Marv Wolfman were hugely influential. Right now I am very fond of Brian Bendis, Kelly Sue DeConnick, and G Willow Wilson. I've generally been a bigger Marvel fan than DC fan. I am always happy to see either the Fantastic Four or X-Men done well.

*Anne Gray*

I recently really enjoyed Terry Moore's superhero story, Echo. I wanted it to keep going. Warren Ellis' Freakangels series was also pretty awesome. Both stories are about people who unexpectedly end up with powers and experiences that change them but also leave them as flawed human beings. They also both involve the main characters' lives becoming more intertwined with other peoples' lives as they rise to the occasion and learn more about what they can do. Involving smart capable women was also a plus.

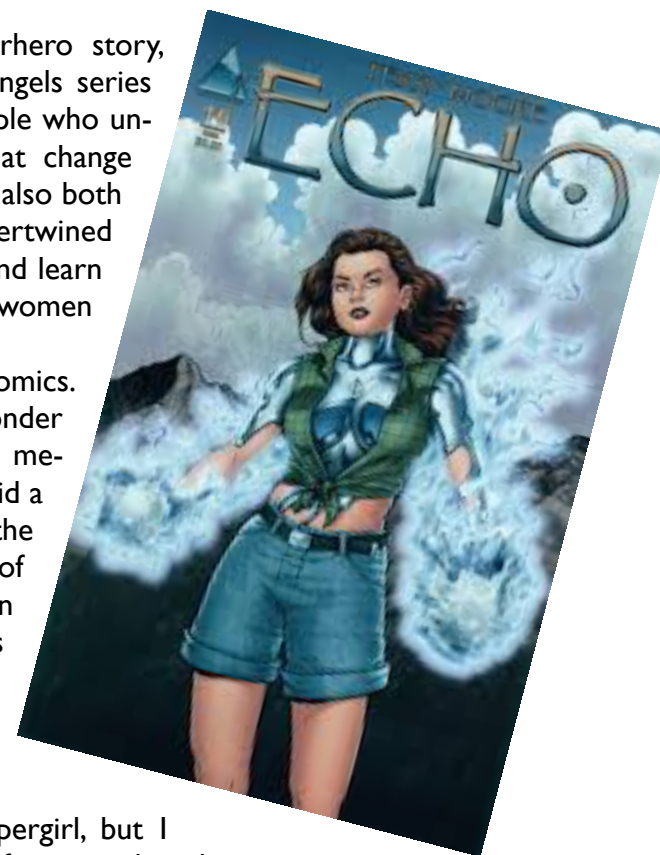
My 4-yo daughter Rosie is starting to get into comics. In a golden book she has called Flower Power, Wonder Woman and Batgirl pair up to fight Poison Ivy after a meteor increases her powers. I think Courtney Carbone did a great job with the short format in finding ways for the super friends to work together. She also included lots of fun wordplay. Rosie also has an issue of Superman in which Wonder Woman saves him and takes him to his fortress to recover after Lex Luthor (whom she also catches) temporarily turns Superman into some sort of Alien. I like how the super friends help one another.

Rosie is also starting to get interested in Supergirl, but I haven't found any books appropriate for her age group featuring that character. The costumes are all over the place, but not the stories. Rosie has a wonder woman costume, and most of a Batgirl one, and some Supergirl components. Stories that provide us with a basis for interactive roleplay are really appreciated. Toys would also be good. I'm working on getting Rosie some Batgirl and Nightwing action figures from the New 52 series.

We just got the first trade PB of the new Ms. Marvel by G. Willow Wilson, and that is as good as I'd heard. Plus it was something we could read to Rosie.

*Marlin May*

I enjoy all sorts for very different reasons. I've enjoyed "The Authority" because of the strength of the storytelling and for the inclusion of central LGBT characters. I enjoyed "Freak Angels" once again because of the strength of the storytelling (Warren Ellis, so awesome storytelling is a given), the artwork, and the fascinating re-imagining of a classic SF story, "The Midwich Cuckoos" by John Wyndham.



*Val Nolan*

No surprise that I rank Morrison's All-Star Superman fairly highly as one of the purest takes on the character. But I also have a lot of time for Hickman's recent Fantastic Four run in terms of how it mixes the high-concept sci-fi storylines with the breakfast table discussion of what feels like a real family. I found something really awesome in that balance. Actually, I must go back and re-read that run soon. It's great.

*Ivana Delač,*

I loved the above mentioned L' Archer Blanc, but also Batman, Silver Surfer, He-Man and Phantom. As a grown-up, I got hooked on the more "anti-hero" type of main characters, for instance John Costantine from the awesome Hellblazer comics.

*Jim Mann*

I really first got into comics in the early to mid-1960s, when the Fantastic Four really lived up to its tagline of the World's Greatest Comic. I liked it a lot because of the combination of interesting characters (no other comic character was like Ben Grimm) and the very science fictional universe the FF lives in.

*Jackie Kamlot*

I don't really read comics but I've always loved superheroes in other media. I grew up watching Batman on television, as well as Wonder Woman, Doctor Who and The Bionic Woman (who I would argue was a true superhero).

*Adria K.*

I really enjoyed the early Wonder Woman comics--as a child, I appreciated the themes of teamwork, justice, love, truth. When I was a young adult, I connected with her struggle to have a meaningful relationship with Steve Trevor, whose expectations didn't match hers.

The Dark Knight Returns is what got me reading comic books as an adult. I came across a friend's copy and was enthralled. It was so different from everything else I had read, and it was such a reflection of the attitudes of the times. That led to Watchmen, which led to The Sandman, which led to Hellblazer, which led to...yeah.

I like the Black Widow comics--I like spy stories, and she's such a badass.

More recently, I love the new Ms. Marvel run. It's a unique take on the "reluctant superhero" story, and I'm fascinated by its presentation of her experiences as a Muslim American.

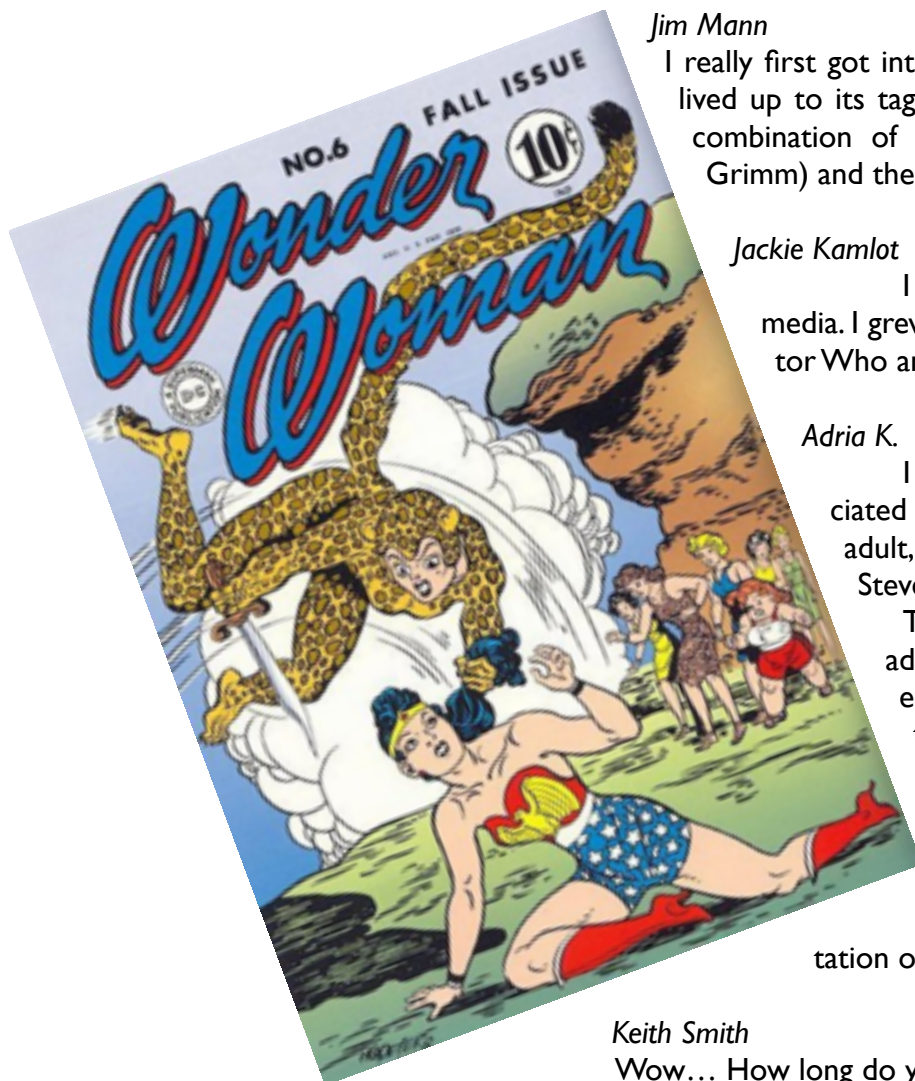
*Keith Smith*

Wow... How long do you have?

In my teen years I really liked Zenith (2000 AD) because, well, how can you not? He's flawed but grows into the part and has an awesome set of abilities - including flight.

In fact, I generally preferred the British superheroes of Eagle (e.g. Dan Dare) and 2000 AD (Judges Dredd and Anderson, Rogue Trooper, etc.) to the American options Marvel and DC provided, that said I did like Iron Man.

Thinking about it, I note that superhero comics I tend to enjoy most are those of people who don't have either superpowers or superhuman abilities, they are "only" normal humans doing extraordinary things. If Batman can be a superhero, then the rest of them can too.



“There's a notion I'd like to see buried: the ordinary person. Ridiculous. There is no ordinary person.”  
— Alan Moore, Watchmen

Unfortunately I don't have time to read much print comics / graphic novels these days, but Dark Horse's Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Masamune Shirow's Ghost in the Shell deserve special mention. When I do read comics these days it tends to be the occasional bit of Manga because the weekly chunks are easy to squeeze into a free moment. Examples: Naruto, Bleach, others.

*Niall Harrison*

I've read very few superhero comics in the grand scheme of things -- I've only ever been an occasional reader of comics in general, really. But I did read a fair bit of X-Men in the '90s, and have quite strong memories of X-Cutioner's Song and the Onslaught crossover. I read enough that I was always a little sceptical of the films -- it seemed to me that TV, not cinema, was the ideal medium, that you couldn't have the sprawl and serialisation that super-soaps required on the silver screen. I'm still not sure we've yet had a great superhero show marketed as such -- Buffy and Angel were both superheroes and both great, of course, but that wasn't their selling point.

*Trixy Loupwolf:*

wonder women

*Padraig O'Mealoid*

I've read a lot of superhero comics in my time, and enjoyed at least some of them. I did make a decision to give it all up, though, in 2006. I had for quite some time had a problem with that kind of storytelling, where in the end nothing really changes, as the character has to ultimately remain a viable commercial property, so no real change can happen. The last storyline I was actually taken with was Brian Michael Bendis's Daredevil run, from 2001 to 2006. But as soon as he finished that, the next writer in just set everything back to the default, and effectively all the emotions I'd felt, and intellectual commitment I'd given it, were thrown out. That was the end, for me.

But, to end on a more cheerful note, Alan Moore's Watchmen and Marvelman / Miracleman (don't even get me started on all of that with the names!) stories are both the pinnacle and final word on superheroes, for me. None other need apply.



## What type of adventures or scenarios would you like to see superheroes in?

*Erica Schott*

It's always a lot of fun for me to see heroes handling day-to-day activities: paying bills, trying to get grass stains out of uniforms, and such. It's little things like this that make them more relatable to us mere humans.

*Ric Bretschneider*

I like the group put into a new environment where they have to figure out how things work, then figure out how to get home. The Fantastic Four do this all the time, but arguably so do The Challengers of the Unknown, The Justice League, The Legion of Super Heroes, The Avengers...

*Marlin May*

Any and all sorts. Anything which sheds even more light on the human condition.

*Carole Parker*

How about one where they save the world but don't destroy a city or planet to do it?

*Luis Gonzalez*

Alternate histories

*Padraig O'Mealoid*

Ones they can't get out of?

*Ruth Leibig*

I like when the regular people are overwhelmed and giving up and the superhero comes and picks up the fight which inspires the regular people to help overcome the super-problem.

*Iv Ivana Delač,*

I love stories that have something to do with magic, or supernatural creatures. I also love stories that are in some aspects "larger than life" (aka saving the world from some horrible danger), and I especially love emotional-based stories, good character drama, stories about sacrificing something for the greater good, etc.

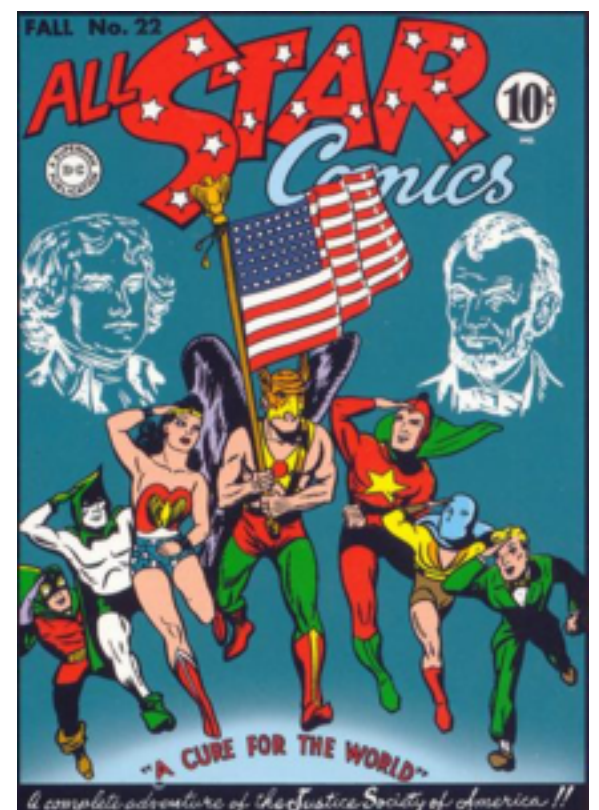
*Chuck Serface*

I like adventures that test not only heroes' physical abilities, but their spirits as well. The recent Captain America arc entitled "Castaway in Dimension Z" epitomizes what I mean. The villain Arnim Zola maroons Cap in Dimension Z, where he struggles to survive for 11 years while raising Zola's son as his own. He faces endless physical battles, sustains traumatic injuries, and survives mostly through a lesson his domestically-abused mother had taught him about adversity. "You always stand up," she'd told young Steve Rogers. That's his moral core, really, and it endures through test after test.

*Jim Mann*

I'm fond of well constructed, consistent universe building scenarios (what we saw in the Guardians of the Galaxy movie), but good, consistent world building and characters acting within that in general is good. The recent run of Captain Marvel was also a good example.

I also like it when the scenarios can combine seriousness with humor. Examples of this are the better runs of Deadpool and the new Ms. Marvel.



*Keith Smith*

I honestly can't think of a scenario that I haven't seen a superhero in at some point. High stakes, do-or-die, and occasionally don't-and-actually-die - are fun to read though.

*Melissa Taylor*

I'm actually a sucker for a more domestic aspect to superheroes! I'm not a fan of prolonged angst (especially for silly reasons), but I do love to see the struggle between balancing superheroics and the toll they take on personal relationships. The Gauntlet run of Spider-Man really ran that balance well – there are a couple of scenes in it that genuinely hit me hard.

I also like team-ups! Particularly groups coming together and figuring themselves out, as in the latest Defenders run and the later issues of the Red She-Hulk by Jeff Parker.

*Adria K.*

I loved The Winter Soldier movie--putting a sincere, genuine hero in the modern world. I'm tired of anti-heroes, I want more Captain America. I can't wait to see the updated take on Civil War in the MCU--I'd like to see superheroes dealing with issues of security and surveillance.

*Diane O.*

Give me superheroes that function on a global scale without embodying colonial idiocy, religious judgment, etc. Show that people can and do work together, without violence or threats, treat each others as equals, despite the color of their skin, religion, government, gender, orientation, etc.

Read some of Nnedi Okorafor's books. How about a cab driver in Lagos Nigeria that helps change the mind of homophobic people, stop the killings and anti-LGBT violence? How about aliens that mutate / mesh with sea creatures, come ashore to stop environmental pollution? How about a child from a mixed religion family bring opposing religious groups together at barbecues, barn raisings, building homes, digging wells, because it strengthens the community and is fun?

How about superheroes in the Peace Corp, Doctors Without Borders, etc.? Figuring out how to preserve the planet intact. i.e. Amazon rain forests, dying species, etc. Superheroes embracing the differences, no fuss, no biggy. Just life and people trying to coexist. Now THAT would take some serious super powers.

Give me superheroes that try to fix broken systems, overcome ignorance, hatred, etc. People are surrounded by dysfunctional situations, no solution for the ills around them.

*Karen Burnham*

Non-cliche ones

*Igor Redic*

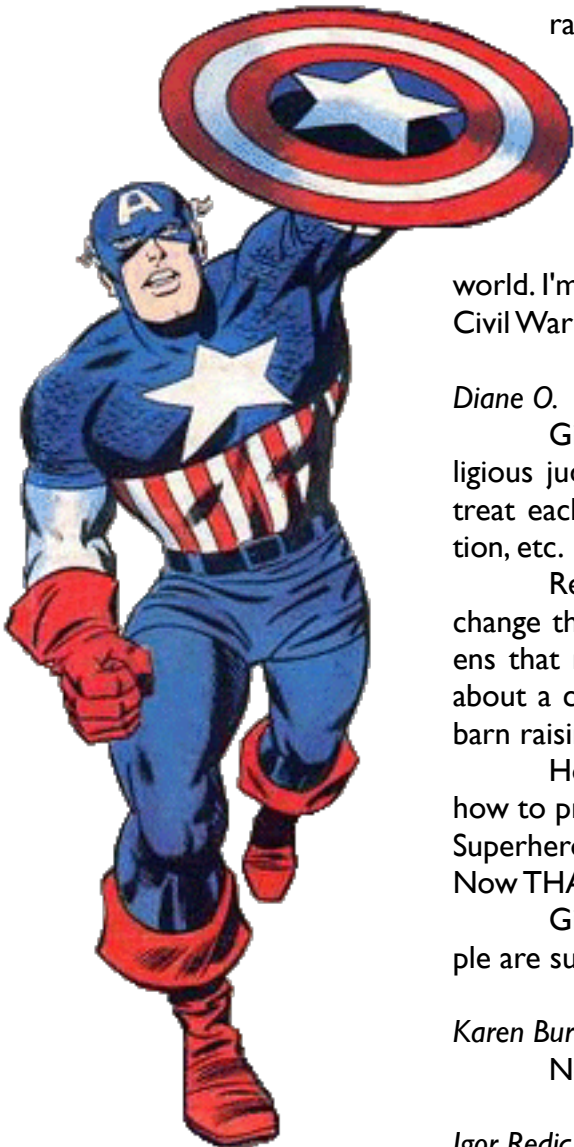
This is what I've figured out in the last few years: it doesn't matter to me if the story is low-stakes (e.g. let's save a kidnapped kid) or all-the-stakes (reality is breaking down (again) quick someone call the Justice League!) because a good writer and a good artist will make me read both types of stories cover to cover without stopping for a pee break. So for me, anything goes, as long as it's well written

*Michael Lee*

Almost anything. One of the joys is that you can run from very down-to-earth crime drama to fantastic space opera.

*Guy Lillian*

I loved the Earth-Two stories -- as I said after reading "Flash of Two Worlds", the Golden Age revivals taught a generation of comics readers that their fathers had been boys once, too.



*Val Nolan*

I like science-fiction scenarios but I like the ones that (allegorically or not) deal with real world problems. Obviously you need a touch of imagination there because superheroes can't actually stop, say, Climate Change, but maybe they can stop something like Climate Change. Maybe they can make real-world problems seem a little more surmountable; maybe they can get the reader thinking about their own behaviours. After all, superheroes have always been part of real world discourses (who among them didn't punch Hitler?) but that relationship seems to have changed over time. Superheroes seem to look inwards, into the depths of continuity, more than outward into the world these days. Which in a sense is understandable as things like the melting of the ice-caps or racism or famine or child soldiers are big, complicated, often ugly issues. But where are kids and teenagers and, hell, even twentysomethings going to learn about these things if not from comic books? The news? Too heavily mediated by vested interests. Superheroes on the other hand, despite mostly being owned by big corporations at this point, have mostly retained their potential to explore issues like these without really being noticed. I'm not saying that every superhero comic has to be a didactic exercise or a Morrisonian magic spell, but, you know, I'd like to see them existing in less of a vacuum. Unless that vacuum is outer space, in which case go for it!

*Luiz Gonzalez*

Retro-realities/futurism, for example mechs in WWI.



*Anne Gray*

I really like storylines where they have to solve a puzzle, and where they work together, especially ones that take advantage of their particular strengths and powers, and tell us more about them.

*Warren Buff*

Sometimes, I really like seeing the slice of life stories. There was a Punisher story sometime in the 90s (during the period when there were far too many Punisher titles) that featured Frank Castle going to the grocery store. Of course the place got held up and he had to take out a gang of thugs without his arsenal, but in the end, it was about a trip to the grocery store. In that regard, Astro City was a lot of fun.

*Jackie Kamlot*

When I was younger, I preferred more fantastical adventures with cool special effects and lots of aliens.

I still like that today, but I appreciate a deeper storyline with moral implications that challenge the

characters. I want to be engrossed in the story as well as dazzled by the graphics and special effects.

*Trixy Loupwolf:*

surnatural ( like artefact indiana jone kinda thing)

*Brian Nisbet*

I have very simple desires in this regard. I like it to either be over the top cosmic, incredibly powerful people doing cool things or reasonably light. So I'm a big fan of Invincible, which marries the two. I can appreciate Batman: Hush or the Long Halloween, but in the end I come back to

“And Super  
Heroes come  
to feast  
To taste the  
flesh not yet  
deceased  
And all I know  
is still the beast  
is feeding.”

Rocky Horror  
Picture Show

bright colours either saving the world or cracking wise. Or both. See previous references to Spider-man.

*Meg Frank*

I love space exploration. The visualization of new worlds is something I'm really interested in, and I love to see that in comics.

*Irena Hartman*

Oh, I don't know. I love twisting the known tropes. Dark and brooding is usually a winning combination, but gets old after a while.

Unusual superheros, that's what I like. Less than perfect. That's where all the love for Alan Moore comes from.

You know, what happens if... A superhero wakes up one day without his superpowers? Loses her superhero job because there's a whole bunch of better superheros? What if you have some really useless powers (cooking eggs with your mind, only eggs and nothing but the eggs)?

And day-to-day coping with all the messy life stuff. Does Hulk order his clothes in bulk?

Classic origin stories are classic for a reason, but like most people, I like to be surprised from time to time. Question is - is there room in the superhero genre for something new and unseen?

*Erin Riggs Smith*

I love stories that challenge the moral codes of heroes and their villains. If everyone is mindlessly fighting, it's not as much fun as when they have a purpose or a higher moral sense guiding them.

*Anna Warren Cebrian*

I have a dirty mind and can only think of unsuitable answers to this.

*Anton Marks*

I enjoy the hard science fiction concepts or the saving the planet kind of comics but I'm really passionate about superheroes battling evil on the rain soaked gritty streets of the city.

*Brian Gray*

In general, I greatly enjoy storylines and arcs where heroes are unable to use their full range of abilities and powers, and they're hampered for some clear, solid, rational reason. Now, not all heroes are ingenious, clever, versatile, or flexible, but they're also never truly alone, no matter the stereotype.

*Esther MacCallum-Stewart*

Ones with women in them who aren't pointing their asses at the camera all the time. However, since I'm not a fiction author, I don't feel like it's my place to tell those people how and where to locate their stories.

## What situations should superheroes explore?

*Anna Warren Cebrian*

Ones that reflect modern culture and society. Why live in a world that is just stereotypical bad guys from other planets or science experiments? Why not the Bullying Parent and their sweet child, who is turning into a jerk because of their example. Or the struggling teacher with not enough support from the parents and school? Or the single mom who can't make ends meet and the Dad has disappeared and won't pay child support? Or the Vet who won't get mental illness help they need from the VA and they lose their minds?

*Anton Marks*

No subject should be taboo as long as it's portrayed with respect.

*Brian Gray*

I think we could do with more examples of supers dealing with what keeps them human, and more importantly, sane. Both low- and high-power supers handle tremendously stressful, incredibly traumatic situations on a weekly basis, yet they stoically and grimly stand up to it all and take it. How do they maintain families? How do they come down from the adrenaline? Why do they throw themselves back into it all? I think that these sorts of pieces let us more fully appreciate what these characters are more frequently seen doing, instead of letting the readers just blithely surf along on a 4-color brainwave.

With Whedon overseeing the whole movie shebang, and some wonderful actors, Marvel has started to explore these sorts of issues, usually in the quiet moments, with some exquisite timing and scripts, before getting back to what supers do best (and what folks are paying to see!).

*Esther MacCallum-Stewart*

If they don't do it butt first, I'd be happy. More seriously, superheroes have fairly limited avenues. They encounter bad guys or organisations and they fight them. I have no real problem with this - it's what superheroes do. However, it's the way in which these stories are played out that is more important, not the action itself. Since superhero comics are essentially soap opera with additional fighting, they should do what soap does and represent contemporary concerns in an exaggerated manner that the audience can identify with. This therefore means that although the situations themselves don't really change, superheroes should include more representative depictions of actual people behind those characters, and consider how these can be worked into a story with lots of fighting. And sex. I'm more than happy for there to be lots of sex. Comics are still so squeamish about this and I'm really bored of seeing \*that\* kiss panel. And yes, it is possible to do this without doing it butt first.

*Melissa Taylor*

I think superheroes can be used to explore any situation and how well that works depends on the creative teams. I think they can be really useful as metaphors for real-life issues, or even used to directly explore a situation - I think All-New Ghost Rider by Felipe Smith and Tradd Moore has been a great exploration of someone caring for their younger brother, even with the complications being a superhero thrown in to that.

*Ric Bretschneider*

There should be no limits to what superheroes explore. There's nothing more boring than issue after issue of the same situation. Daredevil has suffered from that on and off, and to be honest so has Batman. Daredevil in the Savage Land (out of his Hell's Kitchen environment) would be cool.

Batman in Outer Space (Not an Imaginary Story! Not a Dream!) would be a nice run.



“I just wanted  
all the wars to  
be over so that  
we could  
spend the  
money on  
starships and  
Mars  
colonies.”  
— Grant  
Morrison

*Anne Gray*

Possibilities are endless, but I do like situations in which they interact with regular humans. Not just in a romantic sense though.

*Niall Harrison*

I don't think you can really say "should" about superheroes any more than you can about any other type of story. But if the question is, what are superheroes well-suited to -- the obvious answer is moral decisions, heightened situations that reflect basic moral principles that we all have to deal with in more quotidian ways. That, and punching things so hard they explode.

*Jackie Kamlot*

I like when they explore larger than life situations. Something that takes me out of my real life, but if it can relate to real life situations, that is even better. You can deal with alien races where the story can stand on its own, but if someone chooses, they can interpret real life meaning from it. Or not.

*Chuck Serface*

I'm tired of the multi-title, world-changing, epics that appear once or twice a year. I prefer situations contained within a single title. For this reason, I've begun reading more comics from Image, Dynamite, and Dark Horse. I don't mind plots that take several issues to flesh out. I just don't have the money or time to invest in much of what DC and Marvel Entertainment have been producing recently.

*Warren Buff*

I've tended to prefer seeing superheroes exploring tough moral choices where there's no single obvious answer. Take the issue of *Swamp Thing* where the Floronic Man merges with The Green, and the JLA look down and realize they don't have any viable solutions. There was another great moment when Kyle Rayner had absorbed pretty much all of the Green Lanterns' power, and had a talk with Superman about what to do with it. And of course, the entire Marvel Civil War storyline covered the subject well.

*Michael Lee*

I think they're adventure stories at their core, and when we're talking about graphic storytelling you want things that uniquely work in that medium. I think they're good for exploring coming-of-age stories; and each new generation has a new generation.

*Igor Redic*

The perils of inadequate clothing. If the world of the comic is 'just like our world', then explore the repercussions of having superheroes in your city and country. But also, go wild and really out there with premises - gorillas with jetpacks can still be made to work today. As long as the story either resonates with the reader's experience or perception of the world OR just makes him pump his fist and go 'Damn, that was awesome!', you're doing a good job.

*Marlin May*

What situations? Any and all. Whatever makes for a good story.

*Keith Smith*

This depends on the target market. There is a reason why so much of *Shōnen Jump* has a lot of School Life(ish) in it, and Max... doesn't.

I don't think anything is off the table as long as the writer can make it interesting.

*Ivana Delač,*

Abandoned or forgotten worlds, mysterious artifacts, supernatural creatures - and personal stuff (secrets, issues of abandonment, loneliness, betrayal etc.)

*Jim Mann*

Over the years they have explored most situations in some fashion. I like to see them explore how their characters deal with the situations they are in, the powers they have, and the impact of that on those around them.

*Trixy Loupwolf:*

unknowns ( the unknown ) or apocalyptic zombie etc

*Brian Nisbet*

Real life, which I realise is somewhat of an oxymoron. Gender, sexuality, race, becoming role models for the world, their entire market.

*Meg Frank*

Every kind?

*Irena Hartman*

Not being superheroes. So that they could understand us puny mortals. Gaiman deals with this nicely - Death (yea, yea, not a superhero but bear with me) takes a day in mortal world every year. I think this is important.

*Erin Riggs*

Superheroes, like any good sci-fi, should make us think, and should show us a better world. They should encourage diversity and inclusion. They should tell stories that test and challenge our morals.

*Padraig O'Mealoid*

Ones where their actions have permanent and unalterable consequences.



**Is there anything you dislike about superheroes or fans of superheroes? Explain what you mean and how you would fix that?**

*Brian Gray*

Dislike about superheroes: 4 things. Same solution.

A. 4-color mindset and 4-color morality, that is that the superheroes can use such tremendous powers without ever dealing with repercussions, without ever really spending much time thinking about what's going on before just diving in to the next fight. That there's nothing but the Right Now, there's rarely a Tomorrow.

B. Power-creep and the Suddenly Deep Connections, which are that heroes either have a power that nobody ever knew about before that issue but the hero treats like no big deal, or that if the hero has a problem, it's always the fault of a previously unrevealed, long-standing link between the hero and someone else, usually a villain.

C. Girlfriend in the Freezer Syndrome, AKA women as the ultimate disposable accessory. On a par with the rather obnoxious "How Small a Piece of Clothing Can We Get Away With?" issue.

D. The next threat is always bigger, always worse, always escalating.

Solution: train your goddam writers and artists! Screen for some that have an idea how the real world works! Make sure writers have taken at least one class in script-writing for theater and another in either Shakespeare or Ancient Playwrights! Make sure the artists understand average human anatomy, and have models of all body types to use for a reference point! Find writers and artists that know women are people!

Dislike about fans: There is a minority of fans who inform the stereotype of "knuckle-dragging, sexist, under-socialized troglodyte" so lampooned by popular culture for so many years. I encountered more of them when I was younger, but I find them increasingly rare today... in person. I think that many of them have found geek-friendly communities online, which has no doubt helped many of those individuals find their way out of the morass, which should in time see that swamp dissipate and evaporate. What's left, of course, grows ever more concentrated, leaving us with a potent funk, not only of unwashed laundry, but also stagnant philosophies and decaying ethics. Keep an eye on them, but don't engage with them. They'll have to find their own way out.

*Esther MacCallum-Stewart*

Largely because of the time spent working in the comic shop, I became very aware of the massive gender disparities in comics. Despite attempts to change this, there are some ingrained aspects of the genre that I really abhor. Superheroes too often become a medium for everyday sexism and exhibit some of the worst characteristics of the comic book genre. This ranges from the obvious body dimorphism (male and female) that comics still perpetuate, to habitual use of character and world building elements that cement female characters into a secondary role. Unsurprisingly, I find this both irritating and boring to read. For example, the recent response to Ms Marvel has been horribly tempered with comments that compare her to a female Peter Parker or make a big statement about how unusual she is. This should not be the case, and in addition, people should not be making this comparison, it's demeaning and insulting to the authors. Kamala Khan is a character in her own right - a really good one. She is not a poor woman's version of Spiderman. Similarly, the ruckus around a female Thor was completely inappropriate, but indicative of how far behind mainstream comics are in terms of representation. In short, both of these characters should have been emerging when I was selling comics in the late 1990s, not now.

It also infuriates me that there is a longstanding trope whereby male superheroes get powers that physically enhance them (Strength, x-ray vision, manipulation of physical objects, elemental powers etc.), but women tend to get ones that mentally enhance them (psychic, telekinetic, teleportation). This spills out into their physical appearance - men with physical powers usually become strong and buff, and the changes to their body enhance their maleness, and the women with mental prowess simply retain their idealised, largely similar bodies, which conform instead to an idealised form of overly sexualised femaleness. There are rarely any inbetweens here. A good example is The Beast. He's super intelligent as well as having the powers of well, a beast, and yet this is used to positively enhance his body. He has several romantic attachments during the course of his story arc. Wolfsbane/Rahne has similar shapeshifting powers, yet is portrayed as coming from an abusive background. When her shapeshifting powers manifest, she finds them deeply disturbing, and also considers them a barrier to having romantic relationships (because she perceives herself as grotesque).





“Do not offend the chair leg of truth. It is wise and terrible.”

## Spider Jerusalem

This leads to the second part of this formation. Women with physical manifestations of their power are often depicted seen as aberrant, dangerous, troubled and usually villainous (see - the entire Mystique storyline in the X-Men movies). Women rarely get strength or brute force - instead this becomes 'agility'. So for example, Wonder Woman has super strength, but this is often played out by her being fast and lithe, rather than brutish. If a woman gets a physical power, it tends to either physically mutate them - in which case they are depicted as bad guys (Marrow, Lady Deathstrike), or it's something isolating that mentally cripples them (Rogue's ability to steal other powers). In most cases these characters are either evil, presented as somehow broken mentally and physically, have really, really shit powers (Jubilee and Dazzler), or are just presented as secondary to their male counterparts (She-Hulk, Supergirl, Batgirl). There are some exceptions to this (Oracle, Wonder Woman), but they are incredibly rare and often the result of fairly tokenistic changes to their characters down the course of their character evolution. Women with strong powers also get sidelined a lot - Storm and Jean Grey become the teachers of Xavier's Institute, for example - no more field duty for you, dangerous women!

Overall, women are horrendously objectified in superhero comics to a depressing level, and although there are efforts to change this, it's very hard to unsee this after it's happened. It's also particularly marked since so many other comics do not do this, and haven't done so for years. In short, superheroes are still a problematic area for the representation of women despite efforts by authors and creators to change this.

*Brian Nisbet*

I think the constant return to the white, cis male centred or focused story is a huge issue. Just as there's a huge issue with people objecting to race, gender, sexuality etc. being a more important part of the story. I think that the opportunity is there now for all media to explore those themes, to realise that a large part of their market *\*isn't\** white and cis male and to go for it. Make the characters more complex, stop reusing boring, clichéd story-lines and just go for it.

Including women in the merchandise lines from day one would be nice too. But not just in sexualised poses. Actually making merchandise for women would be nice too.

Oh, yeah, and really, we don't need more origin stories in movies for superheroes who've already had them a million times. We get it, his parents died, we're very sad...

*Meg Frank*

I do find myself annoyed about the gate keeping aspect of comic fans. You don't have to be super knowledgeable to enjoy something. The discover faze of things is just as important as the upholding part of fandom. Both are necessary. I wish I could find a non confrontational way of reminding people of that more easily.

*Irena Hartman*

Well... not really. I mean, I prefer layered characters, I don't like when they have one dimension and nothing else but that one dimension of being a superhero... but that's not the case anymore, is it? And there's nothing to dislike about the fans of something, anything. Fans of anything are awesome. Geeks especially. As long as they are not mean to fans of something else

*Erin Riggsmith*

What I dislike about superheroes is that death can be trivial. A character can die, but the fans will roll their eyes and sigh, "They'll bring him back." The sense of consequences and drama are diluted by this cheap trick. It is not an easy problem to fix, because while one writer could honestly intend for a character to stay dead, a different writer or an editor might decide otherwise down the road. Or a reboot might make it all null and void. It can only be fixed if all the writers and editors agree to stop, and that is not likely anytime soon.

What I dislike about fans is some can be very elitist. "If you don't read the comics, you're not a true fan." "If you haven't read the comics since before the movies, you aren't a true fan." If you ever utter the phrase "not a true fan," please listen to yourself. Really think about what you are saying. Let's enjoy that more people are interested in the characters we love. Let's be happy that there are movies and shows, even if they are not panel to panel, flawless adaptations of the comics we read and loved. Let's be happy we have so many options now!

*Erica Schott*

More women! More diversity! Way too many superheroes are white guys. It's getting better, but slowly, and there's a lot of ground to cover.

*Ric Bretschneider*

Fans tend to think in immature absolutes, and express their opinions that way. It's embarrassing. One little thing they don't like about a story or character change and they're raving about how everything that has gone before has been ruined. Grant Morrison is a real speaker of truth on this subject, I won't paraphrase too deeply but he reminds us that if we don't like this story, we still have the old ones and there will be new ones.



*Adria K*

The hyper-sexualization of women, and the Girlfriend in the Refrigerator. Every time I see a superhero in high heels it destroys my suspension of disbelief and knocks me out of the story. And sure, storytelling is about conflict and overcoming it--but it's just cheap and lazy to use girlfriend/wife death as the motivator. (I'm sick of rape-as-origin-story, too.)

As for fixing that--I don't know. It seems like some (very loud) male comic book fans can't enjoy stories about women heroes unless those women are presented as spank-bank material. They can only imagine the false choice of "high heels and boob window" vs. "wearing a burka." I think

our society is changing--we're more and more ready to see women as people, not as objects, and comic books will reflect that.

*Marlin May*

No, not particularly, except for the refusal of a vocal minority to accept female characters drawn in a way that's biologically possible and costumed in a manner that fits the demands of their profession.

*Luis Gonzalez*

There's just a current over-saturation at this time in the media.

*Ivana Delač,*

I don't like when a superhero has over-hyped powers, because that makes them less human and believable. I also don't like deus ex machina mechanisms (for instance, the appearance of new superpowers in the exact situation they are needed), because they often seem like a lazy writing. And, most of all, I hate all the sexism regarding superhero costumes - too much naked skin when it comes to heroines annoys me to hell and back.

*Anna Warren Cebrian*

I'd make them have stories that actually end. And I'd like to know more about how they think. Their inner thoughts can't all be pure.

*Anton Marks*

Superheroes reflects something of its creator which is not always obvious. A creator will write from a perspective they are familiar or passionate about. A great creator will embrace uncertainty and inject his creation with humanity but come at it from a different angle. I find some creators unwilling to step out of their comfort zone and so you have a superhero that is stuck in a kind of limbo cursed to tread the same tired old tropes. This malaise too is a subset of their fans who are content and unwilling to rock the creative boat for fear it will take them out of their comfort zone. Growth cannot happen They throw around words like canon, story arcs and character origins to justify stagnation and a lack of ambition when they should be experimenting with all the

cool tools in the sandbox that is the human experience. Creators should not be creating in a vacuum I think as well as opening your eyes and seeing what's happening in the world and your immediate communities, engage with your dynamic fans. Co- create it's the way forward.

*Carole Parker*

Fans of superheroes can get obnoxious and rather snotty if you don't agree with them. I would like to see more women superheroes like Mrs. Incredible where she doesn't have to be such a physical badass to get something done.

*Jim Mann*

I dislike it when superheroes get so powerful that they can do just about anything, as that really can hurt the story. I always thought one reason DC killed off the Flash in the first crisis was that Barry Allen had gotten too powerful. He could vibrate his atoms and do just about anything. In one comic, he managed to track down a criminal by vibrating in such a way that he could see invisible footprints. Superman can have the same problem.

*Anne Gray*

At this point it's a little tricky trying to teach Rosie about the classic superheroes, because they've been rebooted so often. We basically have to pick a narrative we like while knowing she's going to run into fans who have a very different idea of what that character's about. The oversexualization of female superheroes in comics is also a concern. When Rosie asks me to draw a character and I do a google search for her and some of the images in the top search results are bondage porn (either drawn or RL folk in costume), it's frustrating. That's not a problem with the fans though, it's an issue with the technology. Targeted searching just hasn't developed as well as I would have expected by now.

*Chuck Serface*

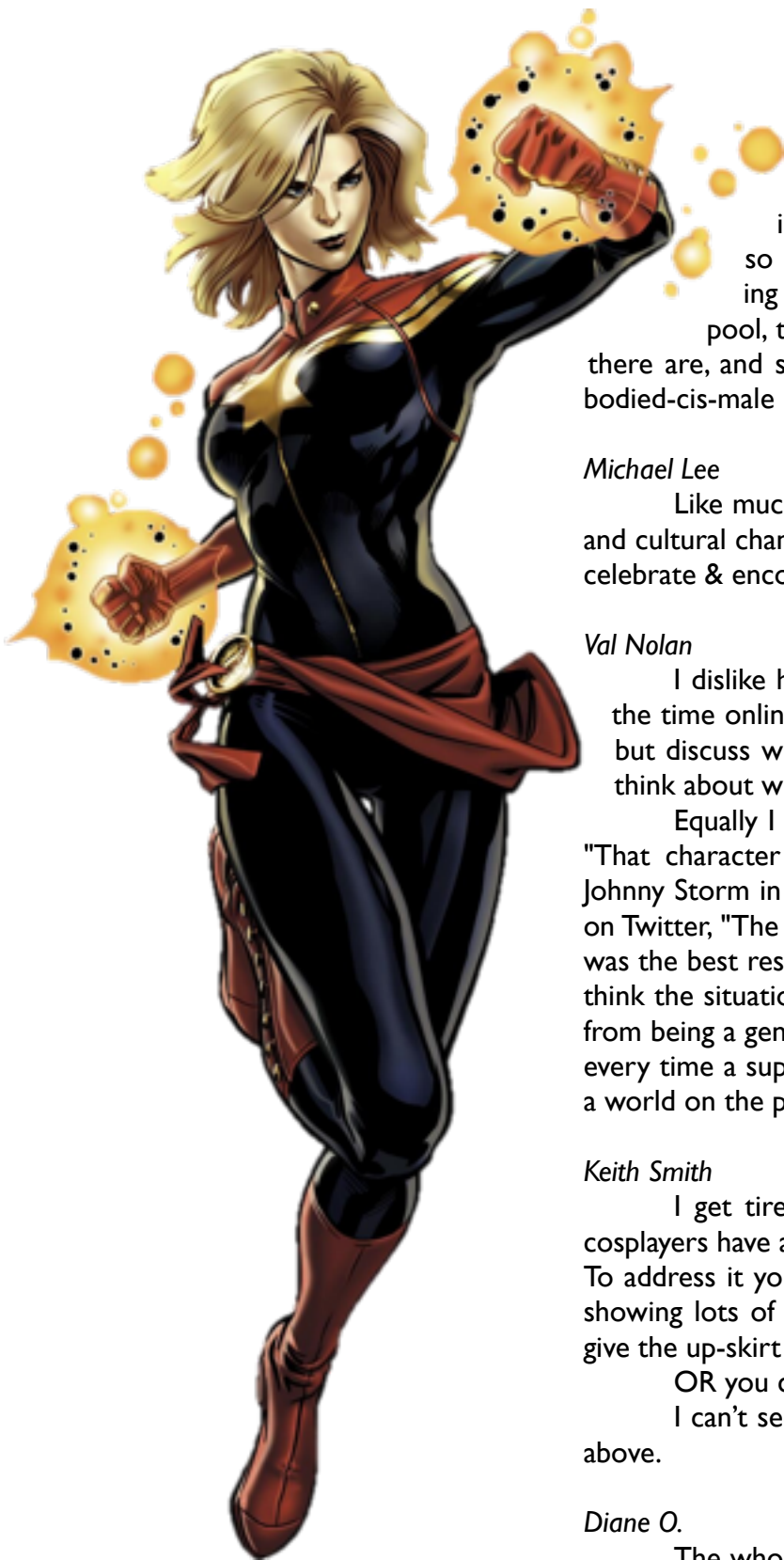
Elitist terminology like "trufan" and "geek cred" disturbs me, because it hinders communal bonding. Know-it-alls, whether intentionally or not, kill the party. They shut people down. To fix such behaviors, I monitor myself for pretention and avoid labels like those I mentioned above. I prefer inclusion rather than exclusion every time.

*Melissa Taylor*

Superheroes are just tools being used to tell a story, so ultimately any issue I have with them is actually down to the creative teams behind them. I suppose as a genre I do get really bored with runs or stories that go on forever or the lack of exciting new stories. Sometimes it feels like you end up with a thousand Batman titles, not because each creative team has a fantastic story to tell, but because DC knows Batman always shifts copies. Or you have a comic that's got terrible pacing and lots of filler, because it's an on-going and not a mini-series so they need to stretch out the storyline. I'd rather have shorter runs and tighter stories than stories which span three or four volumes, when they could have been done in one. I know that it's down to companies wanting to make a profit, but I wish they'd be braver in choosing to put quality above quantity.

The other main thing I dislike about superheroes and their fans is that they exist in a really problematic culture. If you just look at one issue – say sexism, any attempt by companies to improve their output and create stories with well-written women and a variety of female characters is met with a of hate and furor by a certain subset of fans (and creators, sometimes). And that's just for companies that actually do try – if you look at DC's New-52, it was pretty dire in terms of female characters (both the amount of them and how they were portrayed). There is a real issue with people being hostile to comics being more in-





clusive and diverse, and I'm not sure what the solution is. I think Marvel are doing a good job of proving that diverse titles are profitable and aren't just tokenism, so I hope that this keeps up. I think one major improvement would be to keep bringing in and promoting diverse creators – the bigger and more diverse the creative pool, the better the comics produced will be (just look at how many great webcomics there are, and so many are created by people who don't necessarily fit the straight-white-able-bodied-cis-male bracket).

*Michael Lee*

Like much of geeky popular culture, comics culture is struggling with representation issues and cultural changes. It's a never-ending struggle, and there isn't a single fix. You just go ahead and celebrate & encouraging the culture that you would like to see going forward.

*Val Nolan*

I dislike hate-reading/watching. I dislike the blanket "This sucks!" discourse we see a lot of the time online. Fair enough you don't like something (not everyone is going to like everything) but discuss why. At least try to think about what the creators were attempting; at least try to think about why the decisions were made the way they were.

Equally I dislike the hysteria associated with superhero casting for films and TV shows; the "That character isn't black! You've ruined my childhood!" hysteria. The racist nonsense about Johnny Storm in the new Fantastic Four movie is a case in point. Though as someone pointed out on Twitter, "The Fantastic Four have always been about family and family is different nowadays". It was the best response to that which I read (I can't recall who said it, sorry!). Which is to say that I think the situation is slowly changing as fandom becomes more inclusive. It's obviously a long way from being a genuinely safe space for everyone yet but it's getting there and it comes a little closer every time a superhero reader supports a writer or an artist or a title working towards depicting a world on the page which looks as diverse as the one around us in reality.

*Keith Smith*

I get tired of all the fanservice - especially in female superhero costumes. Witchblade cosplayers have a special kind of bravery!

To address it you could simply cut it down; does the story really call for a picture of the woman showing lots of side-boob? or the ever popular near-ground level perspective that doesn't quite give the up-skirt view? I suspect the answer is no.

OR you could punt for parity - crotch shots and the like.

I can't see either happening any time soon though. I refer back to my target market point above.

*Diane O.*

The whole canon v. non-canon deal. The criticism, constant comparison - this is better than that, that doesn't do this, etc. Especially re: movies.

How they idolize these uber healthy, strong, powerful, intelligent superheroes who do incredible things - and then neglect their health.

For Pete's sake, dial it back. Stop fixating and competing. Enjoy it for entertainment's sake, then get off your ass and do something to take care of yourself.

If you want to make it real, go back to school, study science, engineering, etc., invent something. Change the world.

Wake up and look around. Do you know more about Hans Solo than your own kids? your partner? your friends? your parents? your kids' friends?

People invest so much money, time and effort in make believe characters, to the point of ignoring real every day people in their life, people that could be stellar kids, inspiring neighbors, partners in business, etc.

I would love to see fans do a comparison: What makes superheroes special, what makes them, the fans, individual, special. How do they function in difficult situations.

*Jackie Kamlot*

The notion that that superhero is static. That she/he can never change, whether it be their clothes or personalities. Fans can get super critical if a character deviates even slightly from their version of them. Doctor Who is my most relevant example. The show has changed to reflect the times of the writers and to bring in new viewers. Some fans of the "Classic" Who just can't handle that and refuse to watch, and are often super critical w/o having watched, the new episodes.

*Warren Buff*

I dislike lazy writing for fan favorites. Wolverine and Batman are the two worst for this. When Wolverine is just a ridiculously tough to kill guy with claws, he's can be interesting. But when he's a samurai/ninja/secret agent badass who can beat anything, he's boring. Similarly, when Batman is a great detective who uses darkness to his advantage and brings a few gadgets to the table, he's pretty compelling. When he's a samurai/ninja/fighting machine who planned for everything already, he's boring. Stick to the core of the characters, and they're worth reading. Give in to fan favorite invincibility, and I can't stand them.

*Karen Burnham*

Endless cross-overs! I think this has gotten better, but when you had to buy a dozen titles to follow one story, that was annoying

*Igor Redic*

Superheroes going dark and gritty for no reason but because it's 'trendy'. Writers confusing 'dark and gritty' with 'punches people and becomes a jerk' (Frank Miller I'm looking at you). Flat characterization when you can have a real person under the hood. Sudden idiotic changes just because the writer or exec has a hairbrained idea he won't let go off (Joe Quesada and One More Day, DC's decisions in the last decade regarding everything from the umpteenth reboot to treatment of female characters). Female superheros becoming weaker when paired with a male superhero (Black Canary often lost her badassness when she teamed up with Green Arrow). Go for diversity. Not for diversity's sake but because superheroes should reflect the world we live in - just like any mythology. And this world we live in has such different, wonderful people in it. As for fans, I'd really like all the 'superhero comics are for boys, girls go away you don't understand them you just like them for the muscles' people to shut up, pull their heads from their asses and start behaving like human beings instead of cliches. And stop making horrible threats to women writers and artists.

*Trixy Loupwolf*

5-nly skinny or cute super hero no chubby one that are cool chubby are cool too ^^ they only shown not the best one hehe

*Keith Smith*

I get tired of all the fanservice - especially in female superhero costumes. Witchblade cosplayers are brave!

To address it you could simply cut it down; does the story really call for a picture of the woman showing lots of side-boob? or the ever popular near-ground level perspective that doesn't quite give the up-skirt view? The answer is no.

OR you could punt for parity - bulging crotch shots and the like.

I can't see either happening any time soon though. I refer back to my target market point above.

*Padraig O'Mealoid*

I think I've covered my dislikes for superheroes already. As for fans: there's still a huge preponderance of male as opposed to female fans - this isn't surprising, I suppose, as they started off as essentially male adolescent power fantasies, although I believe this is changing. But some changes need to continue to happen, I think. At the same time, it's not a milieu I voluntarily put myself in any more, so it only bothers me intellectually, rather than in actual real life.

*Guy Lillian*

Jesus! I could go on for weeks



## Who is your favourite female superhero and why?

*Brian Nisbet*

Ultimately it has to be Wonder Woman. Clever, passionate, powerful. Able to go toe to toe with Batman & Superman while being a much better person. As the (can't be quoted enough) line from Mercedes Lackey in the foreword to Gail Simone's book "When you need to stop an asteroid, you get Superman. When you need to solve a mystery, you call in Batman. But when you need to end a war, you get Wonder Woman."

*Meg Frank*

I'm curious as to why you specified female superhero?

The Invisible Woman. Be still my beating heart. I'm super excited to see the F4 movie this year. :D :D

*Irena Hartman*

Buffy (TV-show Buffy the Vampire Slayer... buuut there IS a comic. And it is canon.) She is... smart. Confident. Sassy. Independent. Strong. A good friend. Passionate. A great rolemodel.

*Erin Riggsmith*

Wonder Woman. She is fantastically strong, but she can be very diplomatic. She is brilliant, encouraging and accepting. She is capable of forgiveness, but she is also capable of making very tough calls in the interest of the greater good, such as when she killed Max Lord.

*Erica Schott*

Captain Marvel. She works well both alone and in groups, she's highly intelligent, and she has a space kitty. Who doesn't love space kitties?

*Val Nolan*

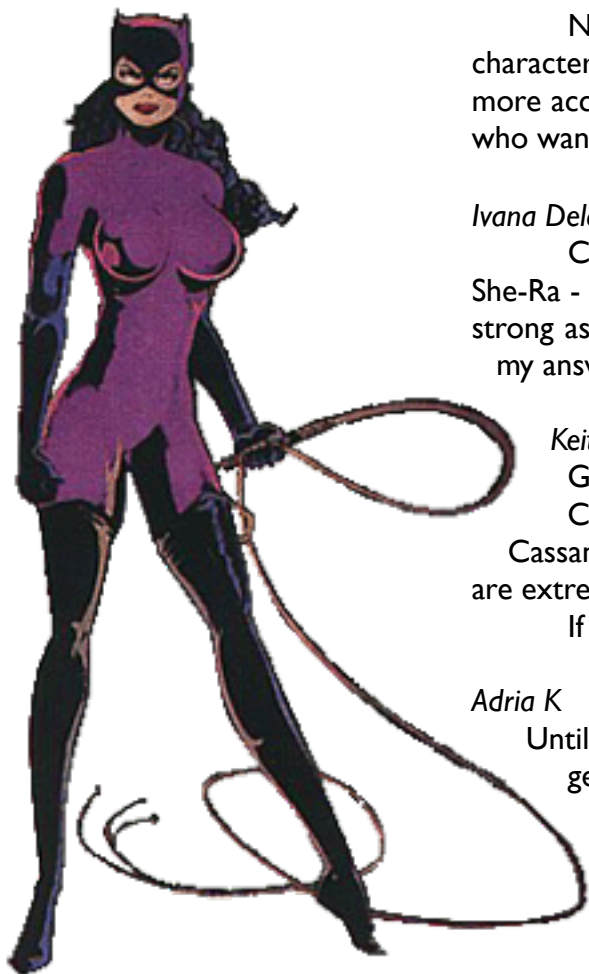
I really like Black Widow when she's written well. Because the character isn't just one of the world's best fighters, she's the world's greatest spy. The crucial difference is the sense of strategy, the application of knowledge, the sense of out-thinking an opponent over protracted stretches. Black Widow at her best is awesome because she's always three or four steps ahead. Do you remember that issue of Warren Ellis's Secret Avengers where she has to change the timeline with minimal disruption to history? It takes her weeks of subjective time to change a single moment! She's running three or four different operatives in three or four different time periods. And when her complicated plan finally comes to fruition, no one either notices or cares. And that's the way she likes it; just let her get on with her job because she knows what she's doing.

*Melissa Taylor*

This is really hard! There are lots of great characters – but even my favourite character can be terrible if the writing doesn't work!

But I have to say, Jubilee! She's been my favourite since the 90s cartoon and the god-awful Gen-X film, so I've loved her for a long time. I think she's a fantastic character and I like her personality, and the development I've seen of her through X-23, Wolverine and Jubilee and the recent X-Men run has just made me like her more. She's a kind, positive character and I used to be so in love with her firework powers. She's still pretty neat as a vampire though!





*Ric Bretschneider*

I'm going with Vampirella. Why do you think?

No, seriously though. The old Warren magazines had sweeping stories with great support characters and a solid and self-assured female lead who could deal with the big bads. She's a bit more accessible and frankly more interesting than Wonder Woman, who paradoxically is a warrior who wants to bring peace to "man's world."

*Ivana Delač,*

Catwoman - because she is mysterious, clever and doesn't walk around half-naked. Also, She-Ra - because when I was a child, I dreamed of having a sword and a winged horse and to be as strong as He-Man, but without all those bulky muscles ;) Unless Xena counts - if she counts, then my answer is the Warrior Princess :)

*Keith Smith*

Gez... this is tough.

Can I pick two? They are: Major Motoko Kusanagi (from Ghost in the Shell) and Judge Cassandra Anderson (from Judge Dredd). Both are strong but seem somehow accessible, they are extremely intelligent, supremely capable, and win far more often than they don't.

If I can only have one, then go with Motoko.

*Adria K*

Until recently, I would have said Black Widow. Her competence and ruthlessness, her ability to get back up every time she gets knocked down--yeah. But the new Ms. Marvel is so awesome that she's moved to the front of the line. Kamala Khan is a great character.

*Karen Burnham*

Storm, hands-down

*Jim Mann*

It's a toss up right now between Captain Marvel and Ms. Marvel. The former is a very powerful character whose stories involve some of my favorite kind of universe building. And the latter is just one of the most interesting and fresh characters to come along in several years. And both are written well enough that they feel real, not like cardboard cutouts that put on costumes.

*Ruth Leibig*

My favorite female superhero is Batgirl/Oracle/Batgirl since she was a superhero, then got injured and then used her brain and knowledge to still be a superhero.

*Niall Harrison*

At the moment I'm all about Captain Marvel; Higher, Faster, Further, More was the best comics trade I read last year. (Not, as I say, that I read huge amounts.) Fierce, funny, and bold. But as a '90s X-Men reader I'm always going to have a soft spot for Jubilee; she was my entry into that world in some ways.

*Michael Lee*

Kitty Pryde, because she was a young superhero character that joined the X-Men right as I started reading as a child. She was both easy to identify with and also the perfect fictional crush.

*Anne Gray*

hmm. I guess my favourite female superhero right now is Elastigirl. Mom; superhero; lover, etc.

My favourite kick-butt female action hero is the character Geena Davis played in The Long Kiss Goodnight. She wasn't a superhero but she was kind of amazing - like Zoe in Firefly; multidimensional and strong. Good with weapons.

Wow. 1996. That was a long time ago. There's a reason Geena Davis has a foundation studying the representation of gender in the media (<http://seejane.org/>). Awesome female characters are really under-represented. There are all kinds of terrific female superheroes in comics. I mediated a panel on them at Philcon this past Fall; it was a great hour of enthusiastic discussion! (need to write that up one of these days). But almost none of them have been featured well in film.

*Warren Buff*

Going back to Top Ten for this one, I really loved Irma Geddon. There was just something about the combination of an "Aw, shucks" demeanor and a personal nuclear arsenal that really made her perfect for that book.

*Carole Parker*

First reaction is Wonder Woman, but second thought says Kitty Pride of the X-Men. She experiences teenaged doubt in the original series, and we see her grow up and not be perfect.

*Jackie Kamlot*

WONDER WOMAN. Because she is intelligent and kicks ass. And doesn't need to rely on her looks to do so. At least that is my interpretation.

*Igor Redic*

Any female superhero from Young Justice - especially Artemis and Miss Martian, both for their determination and tenacity and Artemis for her strength of will during her internal conflicts and Miss Martian for never completely losing her innocence and idealism. Once again, Promethea, for enduring the trials and accepting her fate but adding her own terms to it. Silk Spectre II from *Watchmen*, a complex and conflicted character who still doesn't give up even in the darkest hour.

*Diane O.*

Do not have any. What is out there doesn't resonate with me.

*Marlin May*

One of my favorites is Jenny Sparks, the spirit of the 20th Century, from "*The Authority*". No skimpy cloths, brainy, powerful, authoritative. What's not to like? ;-)

*Chuck Serface*

Well, recently I've written at length about Wonder Woman, and Zatanna is a magic-using character . . . but I apologize. Теперь я люблю Наталья Альяновна Романова, of course, otherwise known as Черная Вдова, or the Black Widow. When she first appeared in *Tales of Suspense* #52 (1964), the world was experiencing the Cold War, and many villains appearing in Marvel Comics reflected Western attitudes toward Communist bloc countries. At first, Natasha fit right into that mold, a Soviet spy masquerading as a ballerina, until she later traded sides and became a hero.

Currently, Nathan Edmondson and Phil Noto are doing a fantastic job portraying her . Spy, SHIELD agent, and Avenger – what's not to love?

*Luis Gonzalez*

WWII Wonder Woman just because of Linda Carter.

*Guy Lillian*

Black Canary. And do you have to ask?

*Trixy Loupwolf*

wonder women cause shes like normal and think ^^ cute but not too much just ok regular cute like regular girl ^^





**What is your favourite superhero cosplay - why - and do you have a photo of you as it?**

*Erica Schott*

Right now, Quicksilver (*Days of Future Past* movie variant). I meticulously researched everything to make the costume as accurate as possible, down the exact sneakers worn on screen (which I bought) and his watch (which I didn't - the little klepto has expensive taste, and I don't have \$1000 to spend on a watch!). Although many parts of it are purchased I made the jacket and the Stereobelt from scratch, which were both exciting challenges.

*Carole Parker*

I don't cosplay at this point because I do not feel that I have the appropriate body for it. Maybe when I get down to a - for me - healthy weight, I'll do it.

*Diane O.*

Sorry. Pushes a few buttons on my soap box control.

*Anne Gray*

Heh. My daughter has recently been pushing me to cosplay with her, but I'm not sharing any pictures of me from that. Outside of actually \*playing\* Buffy the Vampire Slayer in a shadow play at Penguicon for a couple years, I don't recall dressing up as a superhero since I was a kid. Rosie's fave superhero to cosplay has of course been Elsa from *Frozen*, but I have also made her an Incredibles costume, with which she has played both Elastigirl and Violet. I'm frustrated with the costume industry's failure to provide anything for Batgirl suitable for kids in the purple and gold outfit, so I might have to make that outfit for her sometime soon (since it's awesome).

The Incredibles are good role models I think, because not only do they work together well and creatively, they also love each other fiercely - even when they are upset with each other, and they work through their own fears as well as other interpersonal issues. I was a little frustrated with the female version of the Incredibles costume once I took a good look at it, so you will note I did not replicate the black panties or spandex thigh-high boots-with-heel in the costume I made Rosie.

Superheroes do not need thigh-high boots to kick butt!



*Adria K*

Favorite superhero cosplay--Maria Hill. (Unless we count Emma Peel, which we totally should because there are totally *Avengers* comic books.)

*Jackie Kamlot*

I do cosplay, but I've never done a superhero.



*Ivana Delač,*

I have never cosplayed a superhero - well, at least not a classic one - but I have cosplayed (the female, punk version of) John Costantine and that is probably the most fun I had cosplaying so far :) I was in character for more thime than I thought I would be, and I enjoyed the slight alterations I made for the character I cosplayed (i.e. the haircut). When I cosplay, I don't like to make an exact copy of the costume and the character, but to alter it a bit, which is what I loved about this cosplay. Photo attached :)

*Luis Gonzalez*

No superhero, just your average villain, Imperial Officer or Redshirt

*Trixy Loupwolf*

catgirl -why; just becose shes cool and has secret identity haha and is agile woot run on roof haha yeah for cat -no cosplay but i has costume of me in catgirl anime ish like hehe more comfortable

*Anton Marks*

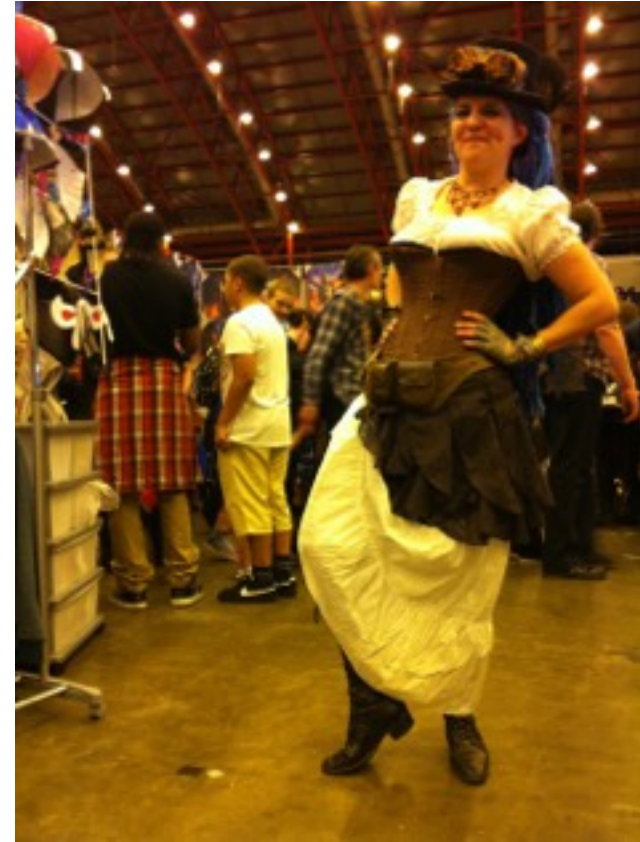
I don't cosplay but if I did, Black Panther and Nick Fury would be my favourites. It's obvious, they're just cool.

*Brian Gray*

I haven't ever cosplayed as a super, but you should ask Anne about the photo of her as Von Pinn from *Girl Genius*...

*Esther MacCallum-Stewart*

I cosplay Victoria from Brian Kesinger's *Otto and Victoria* series - not really a superhero unless you count the Octopus wrangling, and had Roxy Spaulding's hair for several years before I went the full pink (image of her to the right)



**JOURNEY**  **PLANET**

JAMES BACON

SIERRA BERRY

AURORA CELESTE

CHRIS GARCIA

RICHARD MAN

DONNA MARTINEZ

HELANA NASH

PADRAIG  
O'MEALOID

HILLARY PEARLMAN  
BLISS

CHUCK SERFACE

MO STARKEY

LINDA  
WENZELBURGER

JOEL ZAKEM

