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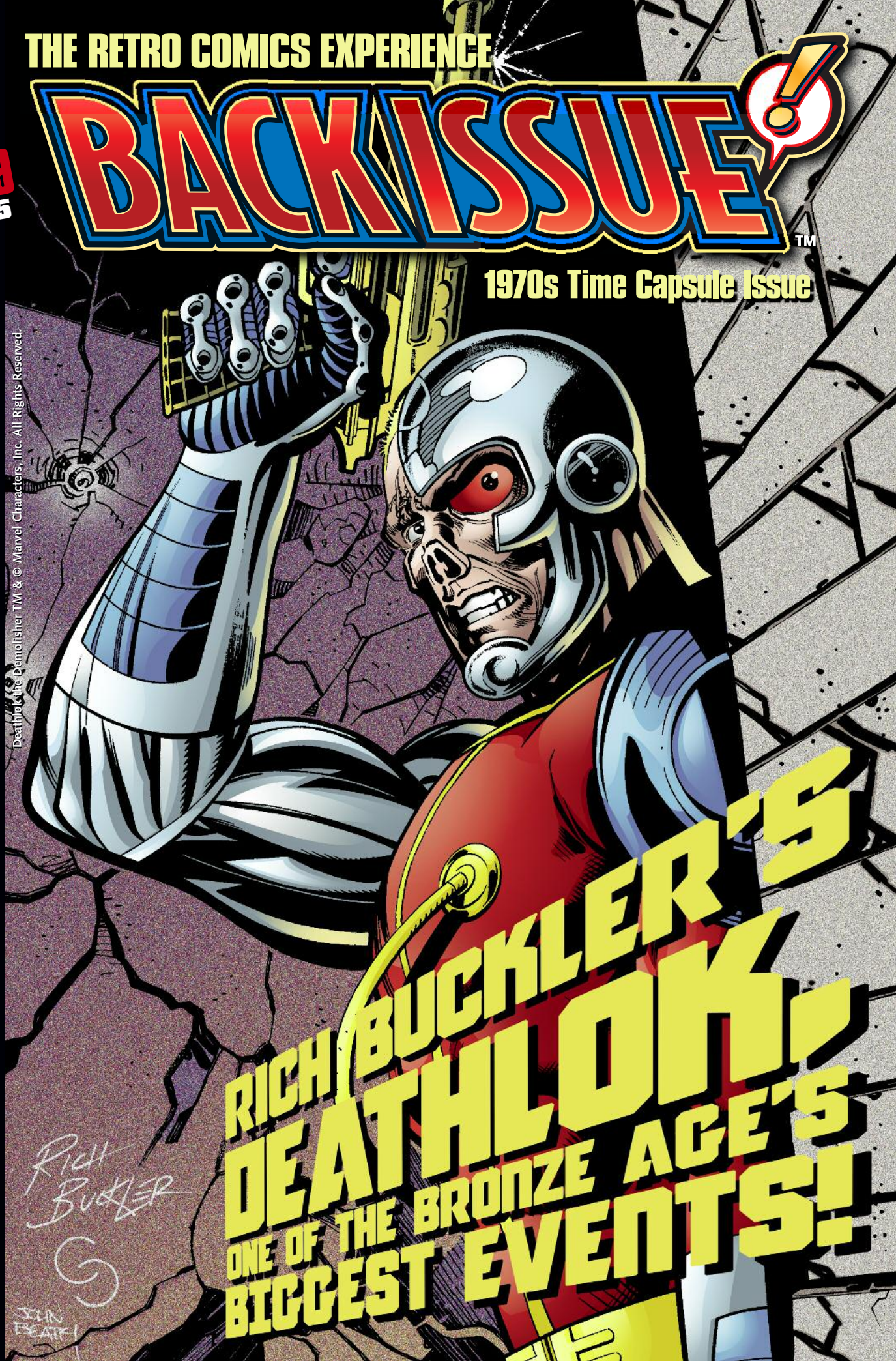
THE RETRO COMICS EXPERIENCE

BACK ISSUE!™

1970s Time Capsule Issue

- RELEVANCE IN COMICS
- PLANET OF THE APES
- KUNG-FU FIGHTER
- DC SALUTES THE BICENTENNIAL
- FOOM & AWODCC
- & MUCH MORE!



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BACK ISSUE
The Retro Comics Experience!

1970s TIME CAPSULE!

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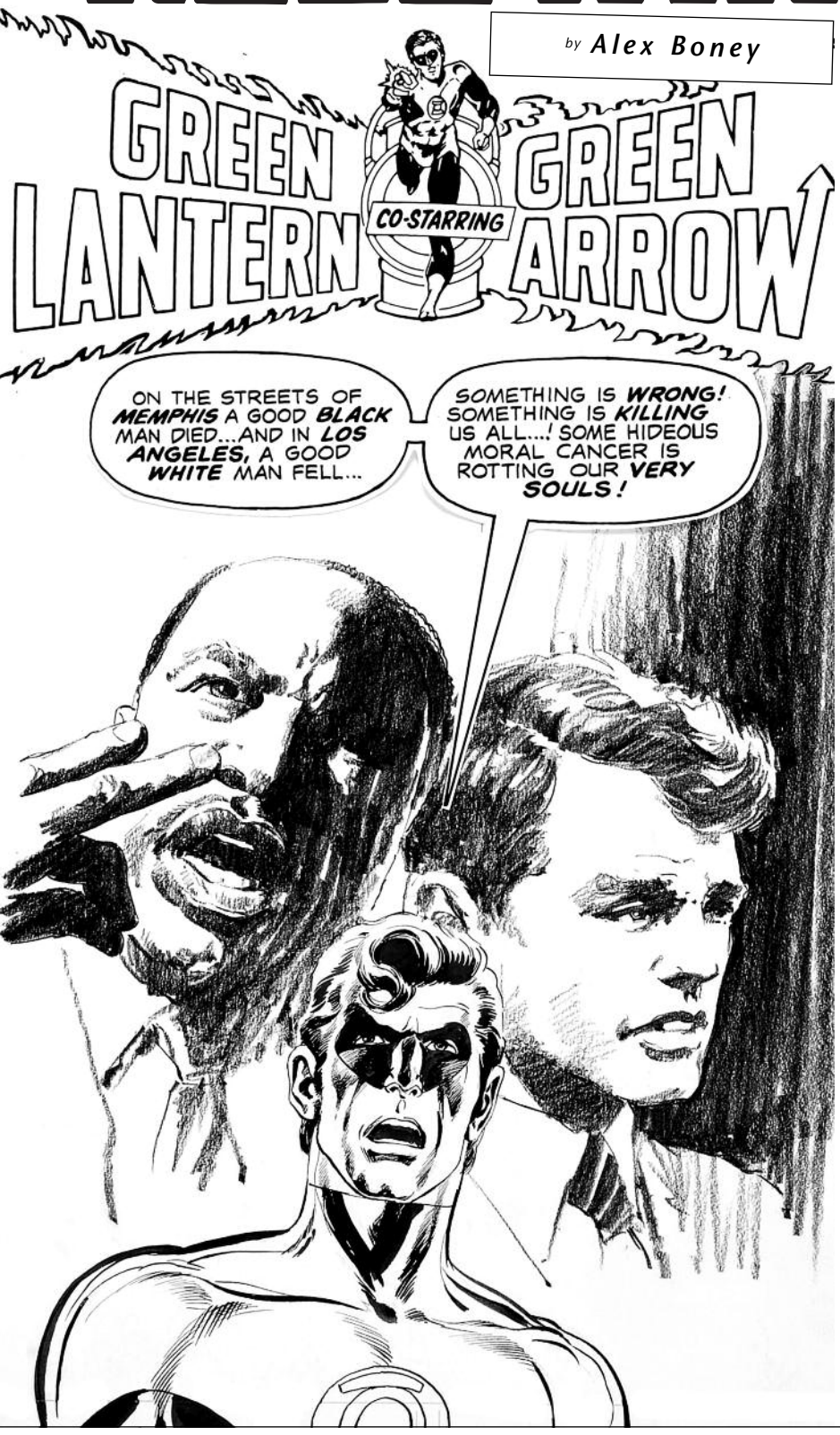
RELEVANCE IN COMICS

'70s FlashBack!

by Alex Boney



During the past 40 years, the term "Relevance in Comics" has become synonymous with "Green Lantern/Green Arrow." And with good reason. Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams' run on *Green Lantern* during the early 1970s marked the first sustained attempt to make social commentary the norm in mainstream superhero comic books. But while O'Neil and Adams' work was pioneering and influential, the creators were not the first—and certainly not the last—purveyors of relevance in comics. Comics have acted as a mirror for society for as long as the medium has existed, constantly reflecting the realities, trends, and developments of American life. But during the '70s, comics began looking directly at the social transformations that rapidly enveloped American society. And the result was a medium-wide genre shift that altered the distance between comic-book characters and the world their readers inhabited.

Some of the first "relevant" superhero comic-book stories actually come from some of the first superhero comics. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's early Superman stories were very much focused on their hero's connection to his adopted world. *Action Comics* #1 (June 1938) famously dealt with the problems of pervasive crime, domestic violence, and government corruption. But later stories also tackled social concerns like labor/mining safety (*Action* #3) and juvenile delinquency (*Action* #8). These early stories are not representative of comics' overall social awareness, but they do offer early examples of superhero comics demonstrating social awareness.

As the 1930s turned into the '40s and World War II escalated, superhero comics took a sharp turn toward adventure stories and war support. Readers were urged to "Buy War Bonds" and were given clear examples of exactly who the enemies of the world were. Besides the occasional war profiteer (who was always slightly foreign, anyway), this naturally did not include anyone from the United States. If comics were relevant in the '40s, it was only insofar as they were aware and supportive of America's war effort.

The nationalistic tone of superhero comics waned as the '40s drew to a close, and Atlas (eventually Marvel) and DC Comics generally steered clear of social concerns during the 1950s. Western, adventure, and science-fiction

"Comix That Give a Damn"

Original art by Neal Adams, intended for the front cover of the first of two 1972 *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* paperbacks. This art was instead used as the back cover, with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s image redrawn for print. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

Not-So Happy Days

The 1950s witnessed (below) the trailblazing racism parable "Judgment Day," published in *Weird Fantasy* #18 (Mar.–Apr. 1953), and (right) Dr. Fredric Wertham's scathing indictment against comic books, *Seduction of the Innocent*.

Weird Fantasy © 1953 EC Publications.

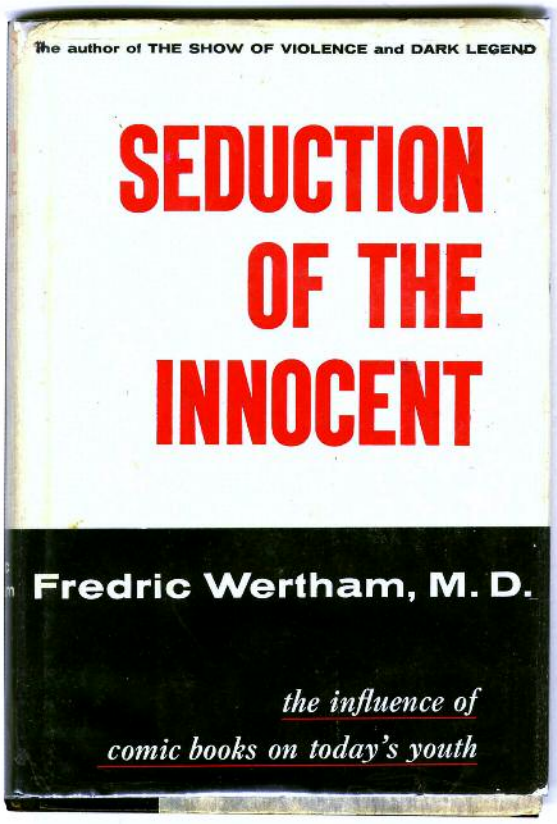
stories provided suitably escapist, non-confrontational fiction during a decade when American prosperity was on the rise. Even romance comics, many of which featured career women, were largely focused on women's heartache and fixation on men.

This ideological neutrality wasn't the case with every publisher, though. While William Gaines' EC Comics has come to be known primarily for its sensationalistic crime, horror, and science-fiction comics, the publisher also frequently delved into social issues. Probably the most famous of these stories is "Judgment Day," a sci-fi story by Joe Orlando, originally published in *Weird Fantasy* #18 in 1953. In "Judgment Day," a representative of the Galactic Republic visits a planet populated by orange and blue robots. An Earthman, Tarlton, has come to Cybrinia to determine if it is worthy of joining the Galactic Republic. As Tarlton tours Cybrinia, it becomes clear that the blue robots are subjected to menial labor and cruel treatment at the hands of the orange robots. It's a planet based on discrimination and segregation. As the story closes, Tarlton tells an orange robot that his planet is not ready to enter the Republic and, in the final panel, Tarlton removes his helmet to reveal a black man's face.

In 1953, "Judgment Day" was an anomaly—a comic book that confronted racial injustice with a direct social message that ran counter to the American mainstream. A year later, in the wake of Congressional hearings and the publication of Dr. Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, the Comics Code Authority was established to self-police the comics industry. While violence, drugs, and sexual content were the major concerns of the CCA, race was also an issue. When EC wanted to reprint "Judgment Day" in 1956 and submitted the story for approval, the CCA demanded that the company remove or alter the last panel—despite the fact that the last panel was the entire point of the story. The story was eventually reprinted in *Incredible Science Fiction* #33, but only after a protracted fight between Gaines and the CCA.

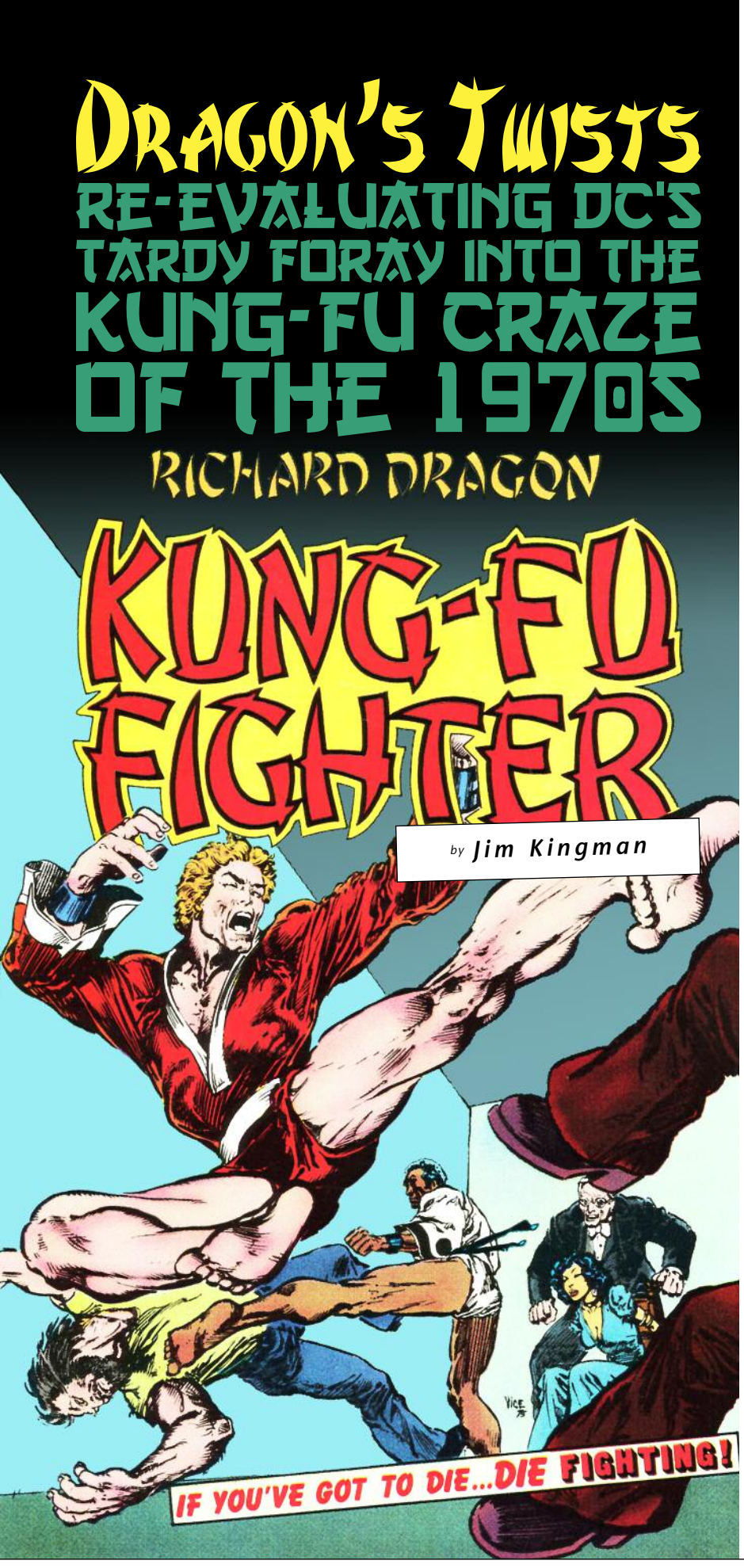
As the 1960s began, many of the social shifts and rumblings that had been glossed over in the '50s began to manifest themselves more clearly. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s march on Washington was held just months before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. The Civil Rights Act followed in 1964, but racial unrest was just beginning to boil over (especially in the South). America also began fighting the Cold War in earnest during this time. The Korean War had been waged relatively quickly and quietly during the '50s, but the Vietnam Conflict was just beginning in the early '60s. By 1967, America had placed nearly 500,000 troops in Vietnam. In some ways, the '60s ushered in an age of hope and idealism—a New Frontier for a younger generation. But in other ways, the decade visibly manifested the divisions and unrest that had existed in America for centuries.

Comics were not left untouched by these social tensions. Underground "comix" (either self-published or published by independent companies) pushed the boundaries of "suitable" content—drugs, politics, and sex—*without* the CCA approval label. Even Marvel Comics, which operated within the Code's restrictions, began to subtly reflect the new realities of a social



Dragon's Twists

Re-evaluating DC's Tardy Foray into the Kung-Fu Craze of the 1970s



Had the tranquility-seeking, martial-arts master Richard Dragon the ability to look outside the sequential four-color comic-book panels that told his story, no doubt he would have been greatly distressed by the tumultuous activity that went into his production, because *Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter* (*KFF*) was published during one of the most chaotic times in DC's 75-plus year history, which might help explain the many twists and turns his adventures took over the course of two and a half years.

In late January of 1975, *KFF* #1 (cover-dated Apr.–May 1975) arrived on the comics scene to capitalize on one of the great fads of the 1970s, kung fu. Unfortunately, the series debuted right when everyone was just about done kung-fu fighting. Not exactly expert timing, and that's not all the book had going against it.

KFF was one of a large number of comics of various genres that Carmine Infantino, then-publisher of DC, released to meet head-on Marvel Comics' wave of new titles, subsequently causing quite the saturation of funnybooks at the nation's newsstands and on comic-book spinner racks. The competition was fierce, especially for a new adventure character loosely based on *Dragon's Fists*, a 1974 paperback novel that a good number of people do not even recall seeing. "Kung-Fu Failure" seemed *KFF*'s epitaph.

All these years later, I give *KFF* a lot of credit for hanging in there as long as it did, because a good portion of the new titles published by DC and Marvel in early 1975, not to mention all of the fledgling Atlas Comics line, were canceled by the end of that year. *KFF* entered 1976 on a monthly schedule, just as Infantino was ousted and Jenette Kahn replaced him as publisher of DC. While monthly status lasted only five months, the book continued on as a bimonthly until the summer of 1977, ending with its 18th issue.

Alas, *KFF* is neither the highlight of Denny O'Neil's writing career nor his editing career. It's also unfortunate that O'Neil, who wrote all but two issues, is reluctant to look back on the series due to legal considerations regarding the title character. Still, I've always gotten a kick out of *KFF*. The series is entertaining, albeit relentlessly busy, incorporating kung-fu combat, strong character development, international espionage, escalating violence and tragedy, and a barrage of colorful villains, most having no training whatsoever in the martial arts.

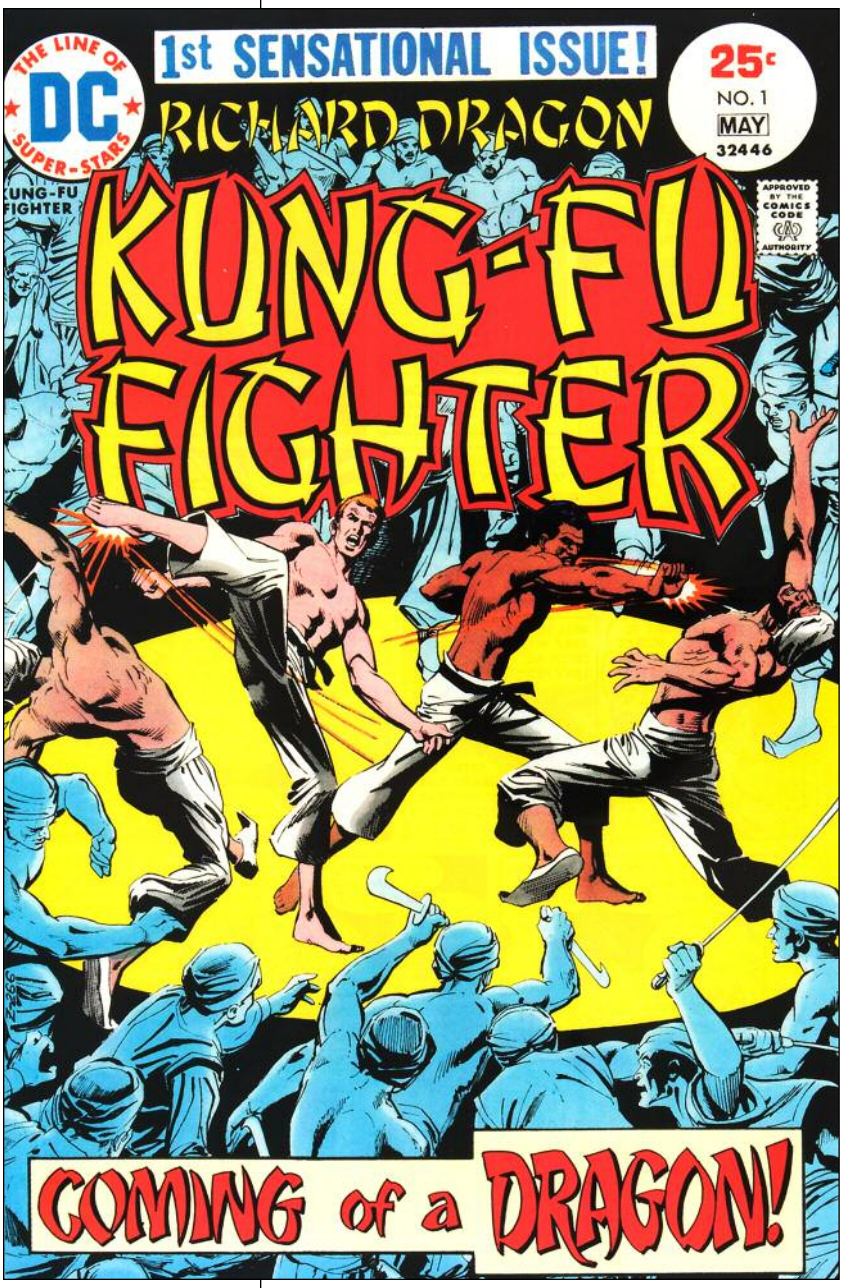
I became irritated with the book, however, during my initial research on the series due to the editorial miscues and oversights that seem to plague every issue of the title. There are peculiarities in plot, pacing, and production. In fact, it was a little bit frightening. To keep myself on track I broke *KFF* down into four complete phases, plus a brief initial fifth phase, and then the intriguing "coda," which in one fell masterstroke added some clarity to the series—because I swear, if you study *KFF* too closely, it will chop you down!

Foot Soldiers

Detail from the cover of *Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter* #2 (June–July 1975). Art by Alan Weiss and Al Milgrom.

Dick's Kicks

Dick Giordano's cover for *Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter* #1 (Apr.–May 1975), with the titular titan and Ben Turner taking on all comers.



ENTER RICHARD DRAGON

Richard Dragon was introduced in *Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter* #1's "Coming of a Dragon," the beginning of the series' first phase, as a brash young thief intent on stealing a Buddha statue from a monastery in Kyoto, Japan. He was intercepted by the O-Sensei, a master and teacher in the martial arts. Dragon attempted twice to attack the old master, but the O-Sensei easily subdued him. Richard then met the O-Sensei's pupil, Ben Stanley, who Dragon also attempted to attack, but that didn't go over so well for the troubled youth either. The O-Sensei offered to take Richard under his wing, and the downfallen youth agreed.

Thus began Richard's seven years of martial-arts training. When the O-Sensei told Dragon that he and Ben's education was complete and the two friends could now leave Japan to fulfill their lives, Richard was disappointed, but knew in his heart and mind what he hoped to achieve—to become a teacher of the martial arts, emphasizing discipline and tranquility. While this would be accomplished, Dragon was also beginning months of unyielding adventure and tragedy that would challenge his desire for tranquility, and the catalyst of all this arrived that fateful night in the person of Barney Ling.

The leery, manipulative Ling was the head of G.O.O.D. (what good actually stood for—Global Organization for Organized Defense—would not be revealed until the last issue of the series, in the final letters column), a trouble-shooting international organization affiliated with no one government, but headquartered in New York City, where, coincidentally—or maybe not—Dragon intended to open up his school for martial-arts training. Ling had come to the monastery to test Richard's and Ben's abilities and see if they were mentally and physically prepared to take on a mission involving the deposement of a slave trader in Sudan. Suspicious of Ling's overall goals, the friends grudgingly consented for this one mission. However, this was the start of Richard and Ben's months-long association with Ling, whether they liked it or not, or knew it or not.

The opening story arc was loosely based on the aforementioned *Dragon's Fists*, a 1974 paperback novel by Jim Dennis, a pseudonym for writer Denny O'Neil and artist Jim Beery. As Jim Dennis, O'Neil discussed the book in Marvel Comics' *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #6 (Nov. 1974), in an article entitled "How to Create a Dragon."

Aki, the international slave trader that Dragon and Ben confront in #1, is called an "Afgman," by nationality. I think O'Neil meant "Afghan." Little peculiarities like this creep up a lot in *KFF*.

Successful in defeating the slave trader and freeing his captives, despite Ben being shot at and grazed, Richard and Ben returned to Japan to prepare for leaving to New York, as depicted at the beginning of issue #2's "A Dragon Fights Alone." Upon leaving the monastery, they met Carolyn Woosan, the O-Sensei's goddaughter. They were subsequently attacked by a group of thugs, who were hired to kidnap Woosan. Learning this, Richard and Ben vowed to escort Carolyn home to New York and protect her. In protecting her, they would fail, and with her tragic death in the clutches of The Swiss—who sought out secret laser frequencies that he believed, mistakenly, Carolyn had knowledge of—a number of unfortunate events would increasingly plague Richard and Ben in the months to come, leading Dragon to despair, and his friend to much worse.

Introduced in issue #3's "Claws of the Dragon" was the Dragon's Claw, a jade charm given to Richard as a gift from the O-Sensei. Dragon wore the ornament around his neck. When he fingered it he was able to combine his mental faculties and physical strengths, channeling them throughout his body, raising his Ki force to a practically unbeatable level during personal combat.

Carolyn Woosan, who could not escape the clutches of The Swiss despite one ample opportunity, was misnamed Carolyn Wotami in the third issue.

The O-Sensei emerged as an ongoing spiritual presence in issue #4 (Oct.–Nov. 1975), speaking words of wisdom to Richard as the young martial artist meditated or leapt into battle.

Each of the first four issues employed a different artist or artists, with Leopoldo Duranona turning in a strong outing on issue #1. Jim Starlin, Alan Weiss, and Allen Milgrom provided a Marvel-esque rendition of Dragon and company for issue #2.

Jack Kirby was an unusual choice for artist in the third issue, as his bombastic style wasn't quite suited to the fluidity of kung-fu action. However, since Kirby was on the verge of leaving DC for Marvel, his heart

WE EXPECTED A FUTURE OF FLYING CARS, PUSH-BUTTON DINNERS, AND SILVER LAMÉ JUMPSUITS! INSTEAD WE BECAME THE NAKED PREY! ALL ON A TOPSY-TURVY WORLD WHERE MAN ONCE STOOD SUPREME...

BEYOND Capes!

PLANET OF THE APES™

by Michael Eury

Editor's note: *Portions of this article appeared, in edited form, in the book* Comics Gone Ape: The Missing Link to Primates in Comics *(TwoMorrows, 2007).*

Planet of the Apes ***exploits our deepest fears—that our evolutionary cousins, the ones we've kept in cages and in cute theatrical costumes, will one day revolt and make monkeys out of us all.*** Can you *blame* them, after *B. J. and the Bear*?

Planet of the Apes (or POTA, an acronym first coined on a Marvel Comics letters page, as Marvel UK scholar Rob Kirby reminds us) may be packaged as a sci-fi property, and its rich continuity of musty scrolls and pedantic lawgivers may attract the fantasy buff, but make no mistake about it, it's the ultimate *horror story*. Sort of like Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. We should have seen this coming. It's a madhouse! A *madhouse*!

Planet of the Apes is also the poster child for franchise expansion. It started with a somewhat maligned novel that limped toward becoming a surprise hit movie, which led to men in suits demanding more movies with apes in suits. And soon marched forth an invasion of POTA action figures, TV shows, records, lunchboxes, jigsaw puzzles, and comic books.

Let's test your POTA IQ: Can you name the first artist to draw Planet of the Apes in comic-book form?

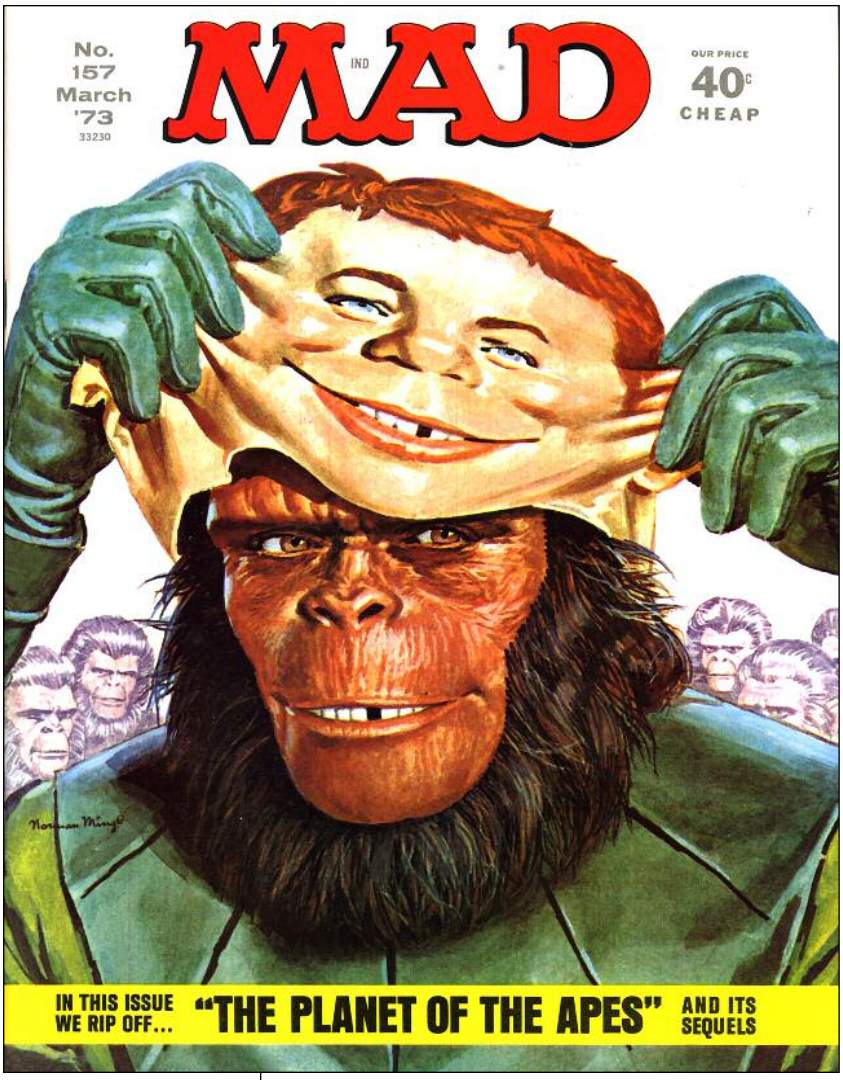
You might guess Mike Ploog, or George Tuska. Maybe cover painter Bob Larkin.

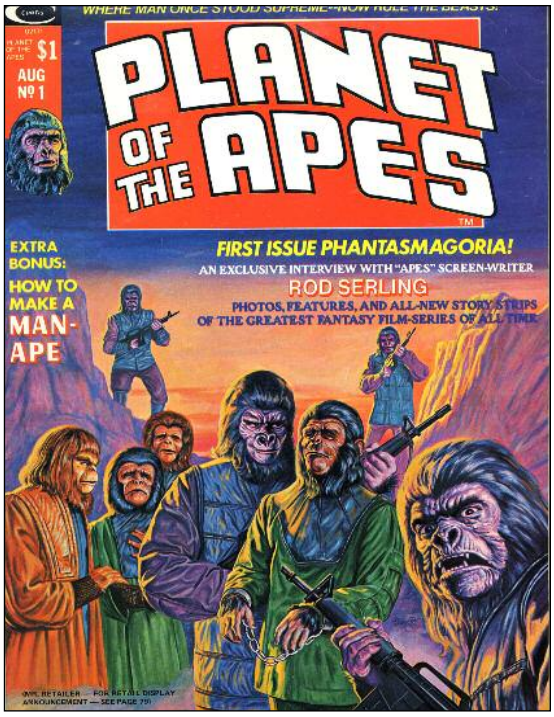
Wrong, wrong, and wrong again.

Before this question is answered, let's backtrack for a quick recap of the genesis of the world where apes rule and humans are hunting targets.

Man-Handled!

Original art by Ron Wilson for the cover of the UK edition of *Planet of the Apes* #75. Courtesy of Anthony Snyder (*www.anthonysnyder.com*).





Apes Rule!

Norman Mingo's cover to *MAD* #157 (Feb. 1973), comics' second Apes sighting. (right) The first issue of the Marvel black-and-white magazine *Planet of the Apes* #1 (Aug. 1974), with a Bob Larkin painted cover.

edgier material and were distributed beyond the spinracks housing the kid-friendly four-color titles.

Marvel's plan was to produce adaptations of the *Apes* movies *and* new material that expanded the film mythos, augmented by text and photo features that explored the cinematic versions of POTA. Thomas picked Marvel's go-to writer du jour, Gerry Conway, for the project. After crafting a brief outline for non-movie continuity, Conway bowed out of the project due to overcommitment. That problem was easily solved: Relative newcomer Doug Moench was assigned the *Apes* startup, because Thomas had observed "that Doug could use a series, could turn out lots of work, and was a good writer whom I saw as best suited to non-superhero work."

Doug Moench elaborates, "Gerry had written a paragraph or two broadly outlining his *Apes* intentions before realizing his schedule was already on overload. Something had to give, so he gave up the assignment not yet really begun. At the time, he lived on West End Avenue just two corners around from my Riverside Drive apartment on the same block, so it was easy to stop off that evening on the way home from Marvel. But rather than offering further input, liberated Gerry generously said, 'It's yours, have fun, go for it' So we began our friendship discussing other things, after which I went ape 'going for it.'"

That editorial reassignment was a mere bump in what would quickly become a rocky road to the first issue's release, as what Thomas calls "a couple of mini-disasters for the company" occurred. The ink was barely dry on Marvel's contract with 20th Century Fox when the licensor forbade the use of Charlton Heston's likeness, to avoid profit sharing with or a lawsuit from the actor. Penciler George Tuska drew a generic heroic figure as Colonel Taylor in Moench's first installment of the original movie's adaptation. Moench also introduced his long-running "Terror on the Planet of the Apes" storyline, drawn by Mike Ploog. Nervous over Fox's sluggish delay in approving issue #1, Marvel rushed the magazine to the printer—and was soon informed of Fox's objections to Tuska's Taylor being too Heston–like, despite the artist's precautions. Marvel was forced to shred the first print run, frantically redraw the Taylor faces in the adaptation, and return to press. Yet, at last, in the summer of 1974, the black-and-white comics magazine *Planet of the Apes* #1 (Aug. 1974) finally hit the stands.

HONORBOUND TO EXPAND THE FRONTIERS OF KNOWLEDGE

Curiously, despite 20th Century Fox's gorilla-fisted policing of the rendering of Taylor, their scrutiny of Doug Moench's original stories was a game of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil." As Marvel's *POTA* series progressed through its 29-issue run, the Counterculture writer ran amuck with offbeat storylines in the backup strip (which supported the film adaptations in most issues), covering a range of controversial topics and tiptoeing away from what the licensor probably wanted. By creative whim or deadline necessity, the writer occasionally sidestepped his initial serial, "Terror on the Planet of the Apes" (issues #1–4, 6, 8, 11, 13–14, 19–20, 23, 26–28), for the single tales or series "Evolution's Nightmare" (#5), "Kingdom on An Island of the Apes" (#9–10, 21), "Future History Chronicles" (#12, 15, 17, 24, 29), and "Quest for the Planet of the Apes" (a two-parter in #22). The majority of these stories were illustrated either by Ploog or by Tom Sutton. Will Eisner-trained Ploog's lush backgrounds and supple linework made Moench's *Apes* tales intoxicatingly seductive, yet at the same time, stark and haunting, while Sutton

FOOM and AMAZING WORLD OF DC COMICS

by Brett Weiss

STAND TALL! THOU HATH REACHED THE PEAK AND PLUCKED THE PROUDEST PRIZE! HANG LOOSE! THOU SHALT FLEE FROM FEAR NO LONGER, NOR SUFFER PANGS OF DOUBT! FACE FRONT! THE PAST DOTH LIE BEHIND THEE. THE BECKONING FUTURE NOW IS THINE! 'TIS TRUE! 'TIS TRUE! O, HOW PROUDLY WE PROCLAIM: THOU HATH JOINED MARVELDOM ASSEMBLED! THY NAME HATH BEEN INSCRIBED, NOW AND EVERMORE, IN THE BLESSED BOOK OF FOOM!

COME TAKE THY PLACE, BELIEVER, WITHIN THE HALLOWED RANKS. THE EYES OF FOOM ARE UPON THEE. THEY BEHOLD THEE WITH FONDNESS AND FAVOR. THE HEART OF FOOM EMBRACES THEE. THE HANDS OF FOOM CLASP THINE. FOR FOOM HATH SUMMONED THEE, AND CLAIMED THEE FOR ITS OWN! THOU HATH CHOSEN A CREED, A CODE, A WAY OF LIFE. AND BY THY CHOICE, AND BY THY FAITH, THE LEGENDS NE'ER SHALL PERISH! EXCELSIOR!

Stanlee

'70s FlashBacks

DC has billionaire industrialist superhero/playboy Bruce Wayne; Marvel counters with billionaire industrialist superhero/playboy Tony Stark. DC has lightning-bolt-motif super-speedster the Flash; Marvel counters with lightning-bolt-motif super-speedster Quicksilver. DC has the groundbreaking 12-issue maxiseries *Crisis on Infinite Earths*; Marvel lays the foundation for *Crisis* with the 12-issue maxiseries *Secret Wars*.

Indeed, it seems that whenever DC has an idea, Marvel invariably follows suit; and that whenever Marvel has an idea, DC invariably follows suit. During the early 1970s, when comic-book fandom was in full swing, each company published its own fanzine, with Marvel beating DC to the punch by more than a year.

Prior to expounding on Marvel's *FOOM* and DC's *Amazing World of DC Comics*, a little perspective is in order, namely a brief history of comic-book fanzines.

For those unfamiliar with the term, the word "fanzine" is short for fan-made magazine. Most fanzines of the 1960s were reproduced via such crude contraptions as the hectograph (a gelatin duplicator) or the Ditto machine (a spirit duplicator), the latter of which was commonly used by churches, schools, and other organizations to make copies (this was before the proliferation of the photocopier). Anyone over 40 will remember the wet, smelly, purple-printed pages associated with Ditto machines.

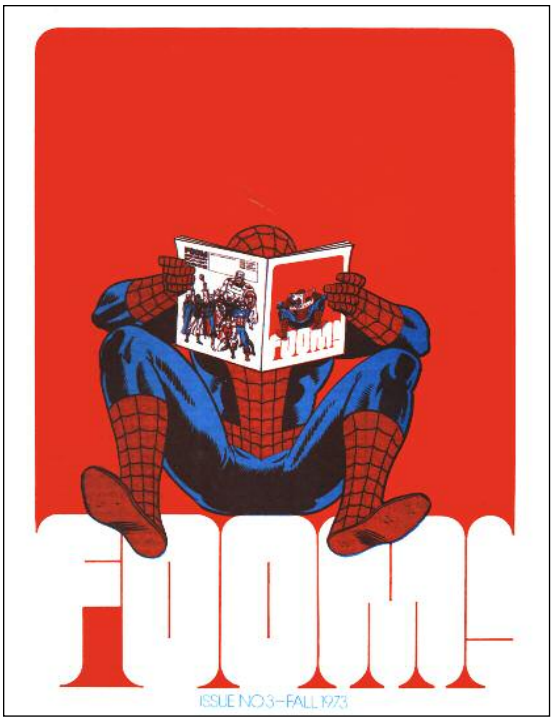
Science-fiction fandom began during the 1930s, but comic-book fandom didn't really get off the ground until March 1961, with the publication of Jerry Bails' seminal comic-book fanzine, *Alter-Ego*. Bails sent copies of *Alter-Ego* #1 to addresses published in the backs of such comic books as *Justice League of America* and *Fantastic Four*, and to addresses he found in earlier comic-book fanzines (what few there were).

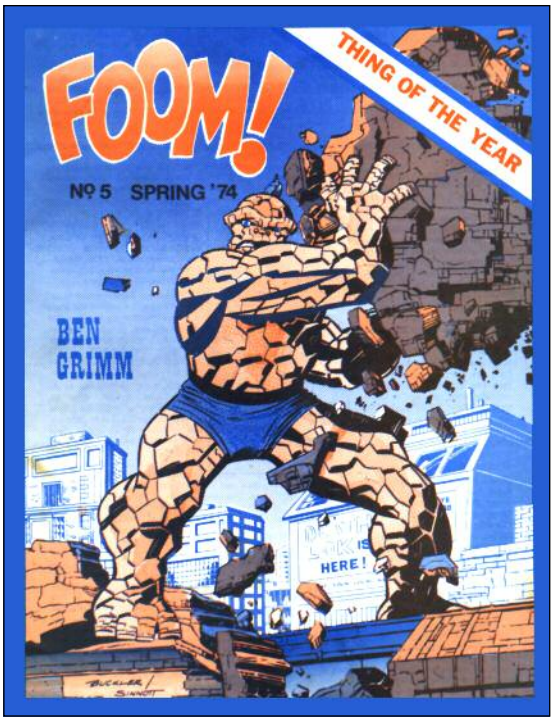
Shortly after the publication of *Alter-Ego* #1, Don Thompson and Maggie Curtis debuted their labor of love, *Comic Art*, a classy, highly influential fanzine known for publishing work by such legends as Carl Barks and Harlan Ellison. By 1963, comic-book fanzines, including such important titles as *The Rocket's Blast* and *The Comicollector*, were ubiquitous, helping educate, entertain, and unite comic-book fans across the country.

In 1964, super-fan Bernie Bubnis organized the first New York Comicon (widely considered the birth of comic-book conventions), further fueling the fire for fandom. Hundreds of fanzines were being published during this time, with Marvel and DC getting in on the act in 1973 and 1974 respectively.

Marvel's Mightiest

The legendary Jim Steranko illustrated this comin'-atcha poster of heroes in 1973 for Marvel's FOOM fan club. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

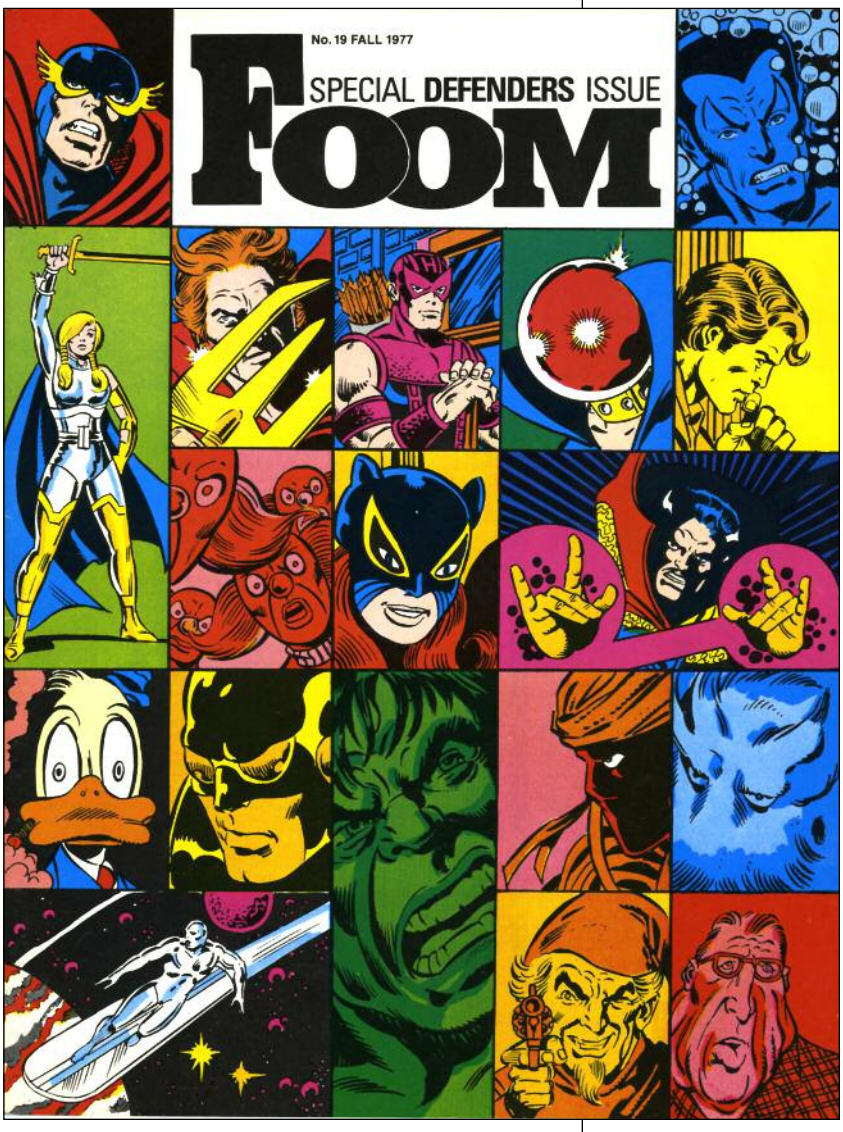




Make Room for FOOM

(left) Even Spider-Man reads *FOOM*, as seen on issue #3's cover. (right) It was clobberin' time for the ever-lovin' Thing in *FOOM* #5, while (below) the Defenders got the Marvel spotlight in *FOOM* #19.

BRETT WEISS: ***Whose idea was it to publish a Marvel fanzine, and who came up with the name?***
JIM SALICRUP: I'm not really sure, but my guess would be either Stan Lee, who loved the Merry Marvel Marching Society (the original Marvel fan club), or Jim Steranko, who actually put the first few issues of *FOOM* together (as well as designed the entire membership kit and original advertisements). Both men are super-talented and could've come up with the idea.
WEISS: ***What were some of your duties as contributing editor for* FOOM*?***
SALICRUP: Usually, I simply hung around whoever the *FOOM* editor was at the time and made lots of suggestions and did whatever they might've asked me. My proudest moment was suggesting artist Arnie Sawyer's great full-color portrait of Stan to be *FOOM*''s very first full-color cover. I later suggested that Arnie's Stan Lee portrait be used as a Marvel trading card, and it was!
WEISS: ***Did you enjoy working on* FOOM*?***
SALICRUP: Of course! I loved Marvel so much that I wanted to be involved with a magazine devoted to Marvel's fans that would take them behind the scenes at mighty Marvel. Stan Lee knew how important it was to really communicate with fans, and having a special magazine to do that was brilliant. That's also why I was editor of *Marvel Age* for eight wonderful years—to keep that special relationship going! Now, in the back pages of most Papercutz graphic novels [Salicrup is editor-in-chief at Papercutz], we try to run the same kind of fun features to communicate directly with our incredible fans.
WEISS: ***Steve Gerber, Jack Kirby, Roy Thomas, and Marv Wolfman are listed as contributing editors on* FOOM*. Did they have much direct involvement with* FOOM*, and do you remember working with them on the zine?***
SALICRUP: This was back when Marvel had writer/editors, and each of those guys was one—Jack Kirby was a writer/*artist*/editor! When gathering up the news on all the upcoming Marvel titles, we would run



DIFFERENT COMICS, DIFFERENT OUTLETS

A Look At Some Good Comics You Didn't Get to See On a Spinrack

by Jerry Boyd

'70s FlashBacks

Music, clothes, movies, and TV shows were changing rapidly in the early 1970s. Marvin Gaye asked the musical question "What's Going On?" in his seminal album in '71. The Carpenters had warbled the musical promise "We've Only Just Begun." The cast of the stage musical *Hair* summed it all up by announcing, "This is the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius." The US had successfully landed on the moon and safely returned its astronauts to the Earth. Hippie culture—their clothes, their turn-ons and turn-offs, as well as their politics—was everywhere. John Shaft, a super-bad black detective, had exploded onto theater screens nationwide in the cultural expanse of 1970 and '71.

Comic magazines had their own cultural revolution, as well. The new versions of super-people and their super-problems had captivated open-minded pop-culture analysts in the '60s. Underground "comix" distributed mostly on the West Coast presented their own comments about superheroes, societal norms, and alternative lifestyles, as seen in their mostly black-and-white efforts. Could the 1970s amplify on all of this burgeoning creativity?

Yes, definitely—and as new genres opened up, new venues/outlets were also explored. The reasons are apparent. New readers were sought out to add the growing excitement that sequential art had engendered in the previous decade. Even though comics sales reportedly sagged again after the cancellation of ABC-TV's *Batman* in 1968, many creators had not negated the idea of self-publishing, even though many decided to stay where they were rather than venture into that risky world.

Still, the industry *thrived on risk*—and some of comicdom's best went outside the usual perimeters and provided those of us who were willing to follow with some different kinds of comics in some different, yet interesting, outlets and venues. And we thank them for those efforts. Here are some of them:

BLOCK-ING OUT DRUG ADDICTION

The Block © 1971 Supergraphics Press
Written and drawn by James Steranko and published by Byron Preiss and Steranko

In 1970, Jim Steranko was thinking about making some new inroads into those areas in which comics were strangers. With his friend and business associate Byron Preiss, Supergraphics began as a company. Preiss came up with the idea of addressing the nation's burgeoning drug epidemic, a problem that had found its way out of the purview of jazz clubs and Counterculture hangouts it had previously been most associated with. In looking back on the project, he noted in *Comixscene* #4 (May–June 1973), "Despite a newly found profession as paperback illustrator, Steranko WOULD do another

Dr. Deadly's House of Comics

Neal Adams' cover for Aurora's *Monster Scenes* comic booklet of 1971. Note in the right background Vampirella, at the time a hot property for Warren Publishing.

came a beautiful, terrified "Victim" (that only makes sense, right?) and a deranged scientist, "Dr. Deadly" (and that makes even more sense). The ads for all this madcap mayhem showed up on the back covers of Warren mags and all over the place in mainstream comics.

Adams' work was inside the model boxes this time around. He drew a total of eight pages—four B&W instructional how-to and four sequential art pages in color showing where the Victim ended up after being abducted by Frankenstein. The Man of Many Parts took her to Dr. Deadly's of course, where he and his lovely assistant Vampirella planned … heeehee … experimentations.

Adams explains his involvement: "I run a commercial art studio. Our job is to accept assignments like that. But in this case, I believe we were recommended by [DC's] Mark Hanerfeld. I could be wrong. It's just that Mark was around a lot in those days, and he was acting like an expert to these companies.

"I did not lobby for it, but we would have if we had known about it first," Adams adds. "We don't actually lobby, our reps do what it called 'cold calling,' and visiting potential clients."

When I asked if those were the type of advertising projects he was interested in during the 1970s, Adams answered, "Not necessarily. But it's good to do comics of any sort, and to be paid four times as much as doing comics. Everything paid better than DC Comics! A spot illustration for a printer—a religious drawing of a Catholic church, even charity work for the March of Dimes, and others, paid more. In fact, organizations like that paid four to five times the going [comics] rates, and they apologized for not paying more but that they were 'were charities and they could not afford to pay top dollar.'"

Unfortunately, the Vampirella kit wasn't warmly received, but the overall sales of the Monster Scenes weren't fantastic, either. Parents complained about the torture devices in addition to their problems with the sexiness of the Victim and Vampi. Also, the Adams booklets weren't promoted as "treats within the treats." (If they had been, my Adams-happy generation would've bought the kits *then*, instead of spending big dollars getting them now!) The Adams booklets were pretty much the same, however, and only differed in the instructional how-to section that differed from kit to kit.

Still, though many of us fans missed them the first time around, it's somewhat nice to know that there's some more vintage Adams' Vampirella and related monster comic art out there to be had.

I'M CASPER—FLY ME!

***AstroComics* © 1970 Harvey Publications, in conjunction with American Airlines**
Written and drawn by various Harvey Comics staffers

Harvey Comics was also looking at new outlets. The Enchanted Forest crowd had dazzled youngsters in the '60s through various TV programs. The Harvey brass had to be thinking, "This is no time to let up."

In the early 1970s, the company wouldn't exactly leave the airwaves, but they would take to the air. For a few years, American Airlines stewardesses would give out free *AstroComics* to children on their flights. The books (regular-sized, by the way) featured Casper, Little Audrey and Melvin, Spooky, Richie Rich, Reggie van Dough (Richie's conniving Loki–like cousin), Little Dot, and Little Lotta. Though Hot Stuff and Nightmare made the covers, research hasn't turned up any interior misadventures of theirs in any of the issues.

In addition to a few puzzles as well, there were a few pages devoted to the makeup of the airplanes AA used and what made 'em go.

Mark Arnold, editor of *The Harveyville Fun Times!* fanzine, explains how it all began: "I asked Alan Harvey (son of one of the original publishers) a few years ago about this and he said basically that a lot of the promotional tie-ins with Harvey had to do with personal affiliations that Alfred Harvey had at the time (the 1970s). He was friends with the people who handled the Boy Scouts of America, UNICEF, Apollo 16, the American Dental Association, and obviously American Airlines. So, it wasn't any particular marketing plan on Alfred's part; he just interested his friends in high places in comic-book tie-ins, and they accommodated his requests. I suppose that once he secured a deal with American, he wouldn't pursue, let's say, United or some other airline in order to avoid a conflict of interest, and he probably got some frequent-flyer miles for his efforts."

It was a good idea. I remember my brother and I being pleasantly surprised at getting free comics on

Huggable Horrors

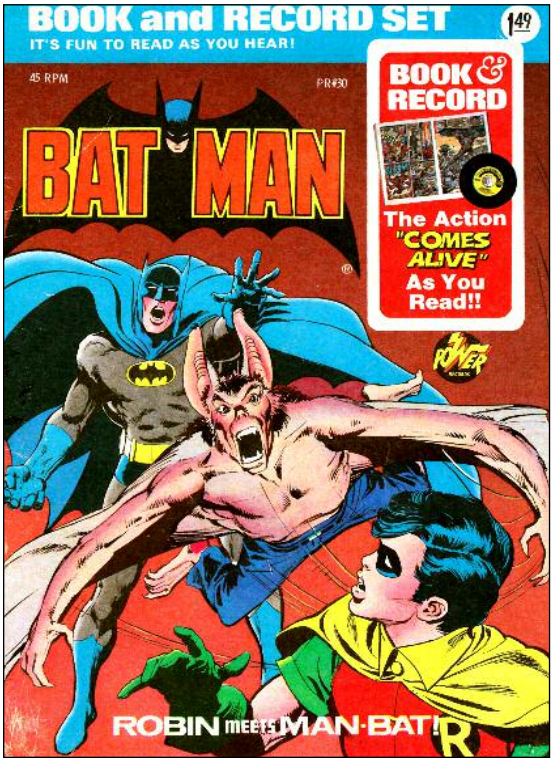
The back (and final) page from the *Monster Scenes* comic. These groovy ghoulies just want peace and love, man! Art by Neal Adams.

the Man-Bat's origin in *Detective Comics* #400 (June 1970). Both are sought-after collectibles today.

While many of the Power Records were truncated versions of the comics offered by the majors, other notable treats were the Star Trek productions (that also featured great Adams covers!). These came with surprisingly good sci-fi excursions with art by John Buscema and Dick Giordano, among others. Aside from the off-coloring of Lt. Uhura (she's a Caucasian blonde in at least two of the Star Trek records!) and Lt. Sulu (who's black in at least one!), the *Enterprise* crew fared nicely. Violence, particularly fistfights, was kept to a minimum, however. Don't expect "phasers set to kill" or intense do-or-die battles along the lines of the TV show. These products, after all, were aimed at children. After 1981, the series disappeared.

Once again, however, the marketing department of a company failed to properly get the word out about the new excitement it had created. If teenagers like myself, for example, in '76 had known that Adams, Giordano, and Buscema were doing all-new artwork for these records, we'd have been all over the kiddie sections of K-Mart, Woolworth's, and the other retail stores where they were sold! But a lot of collectors didn't know they existed, and if they did, they probably looked at the shorter comics stories in the Marvel ones, and assumed all of them were similar—stories taken from comics.

In one post on the aforementioned website, an observer commented, "I don't remember there being too many ads for Power Records in the comics (at least compared to Mego or other superhero toys), which is surprising, considering it had to be the exact same audience." In any case, all-new stickers should've been applied to the record jackets with all-new material. In *BACK ISSUE* #44, we found at least one Spider-Man record had an all-new issue and the Wonder Woman set came with new material, also. The Star Trek, the Six Million Dollar Man, Kojak, and the Planet of the Apes group all featured new stories and art—and for aficionados of those characters, they're worth the effort of "powering up" and going after.



LOOK, BABY—IT'S SPIDER-MAN!
The Amazing Spider-Man vs. the Prodigy!
© 1976 Marvel Comics and Planned Parenthood
Written by Ann Robinson, drawn by Ross Andru and Mike Esposito

Unwanted teen pregnancies soared to record highs in the 1970s, so Planned Parenthood, Inc. stepped in, contacted the Marvel brass, and they decided to use the very popular Wall-Crawler to convey to impressionable kids the dangers, problems, and responsibilities of those electing to have sex and children out of wedlock.

The Andru/Esposito pairing was a natural—after all, they'd governed over the main *Amazing Spider-Man* title of that era. This *Prodigy* booklet, close to digest size, was 16 pages in its entirety, printed in full color.

The Prodigy was a sinister space alien who crash-landed in New York State. The effect of his landing

A DC Spin-Off

The cover and an interior page from Power Records' *Batman: Robin Meets Man-Bat!* (1976). Art by Neal Adams.

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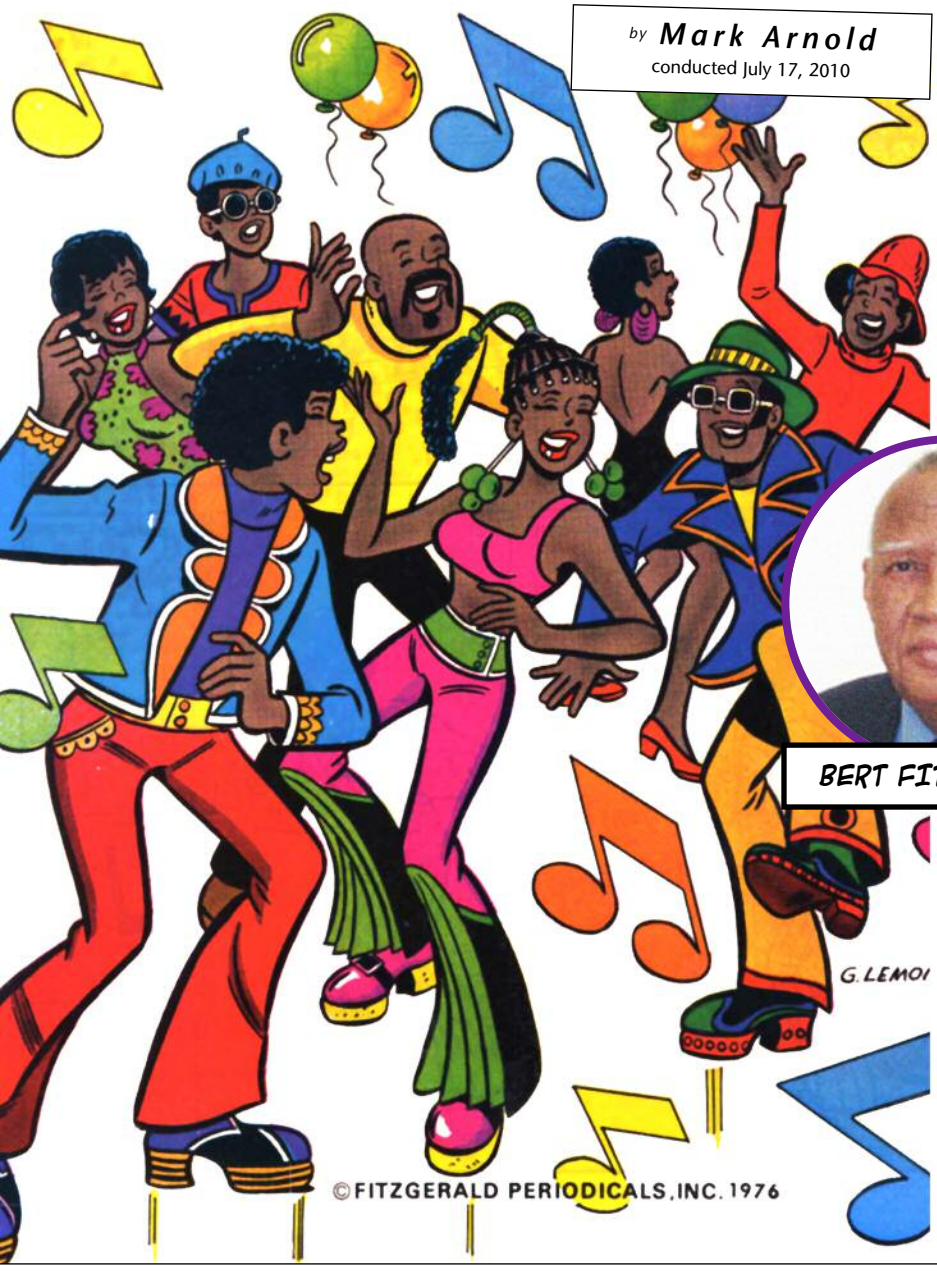
FAST WILLIE JACKSON™

The Golden Legacy of the "Black Archie"

by **Mark Arnold**
conducted July 17, 2010



Fast Willie Jackson was Fitzgerald Publications' attempt to produce a more racially diverse, hip, streetwise version of "Archie." *Fast Willie is the Archie–like character attending Mocity High School, a more urban setting than Archie's Riverdale. His close friends include the sexy Dee Dee and Maria Martinez, hip ladies' man Frankie, muscular Hannibal, radical Jabar, and class clown Jo-Jo. Other cast members include Maria's father Jose Martinez, fortune teller Sister Zola, Officer Flagg, deli owner Mr. Solomon, feminist teacher Jane Fronda, and Harry the wino.*

Fast Willie Jackson *lasted for seven issues from 1976–1977, and there was brief discussion of a spin-off series starring Dee Dee and Frankie. At the time of cancellation, Fast Willie was close to an animation deal with Filmation and sales of issues were at the break-even point. An eighth issue was planned but never published.*

Fitgerald Publications' publisher ***Bertram "Bert" Fitzgerald*** *was the writer of* Fast Willie Jackson. *Fitzgerald was born November 6, 1932, in Harlem, New York. He was a graduate of Brooklyn College with an accounting degree and also served in the Air Force. His interest in black history, reading, and comic books became a natural combination for an idea for a comic-book series,* Golden Legacy, *which spanned 16 issues over a ten-year period from 1966–1976.*

Fast Willie Jackson *artist and co-creator Gus LeMoine is believed to have passed away, as have virtually all of the Archie artists from the same vintage of the 1960s and '70s. Fitzgerald has not had communication with him in many years. A search for Gus' daughter, Geri LeMoine (who had a letter printed in* Fast Willie Jackson *#5), has proved fruitless and she may have passed on as well.*

In our discussion, Bert Fitzgerald talked in greater length about his proudest achievement, the Golden Legacy *comic-book series, that explored the world of African-American history at a time when such topics were virtually ignored in classrooms, much less comic books.*

BERT FITZGERALD

Fitzgerald experienced discrimination and racism in both his private and business lives, such as in his dealings with printers and distributors and occasional subject matter in the Golden Legacy *series. This spilled over into* Fast Willie Jackson, *and was one of the reasons why it took four years to get published.*

Fitzgerald has felt at times that he may have been under surveillance due to his alleged black activism. At the time he was preparing his 13th volume of Golden Legacy, *the biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., he knew that his phone was tapped. He would testify later in court that his "legs could be broken if he didn't stop publishing." This, coupled with a later copyright trial, had a detrimental effect on Fitzgerald. He had suffered two heart attacks during this time, but ultimately, Fitzgerald was the victor.*

Everything's Not Archie

The *Fast Willie Jackson* cast, detail from the cover of issue #1 (Oct. 1976). Art by Gus LeMoine.

'70s FlashBacks!

Reading by FIRESIDE

by Dewey Cassell

For many of us who collect comic books, there is that special, early memory of the first comic we bought off the newsstand, or that favorite issue we read over and over again until it was barely hanging by the staples. For me, that favorite memory is of a book, *Origins of Marvel Comics*.

It may be hard for those who don't remember Richard Nixon as president to imagine a time in which we didn't have trade paperbacks and graphic novels. Today, many fans eschew the comics themselves in favor of the collected volumes. But there was a time, before the Internet and eBay, when just trying to find a back issue of your favorite comic was a hit-or-miss proposition. A friend of mine tells the story of how, back in the early 1970s, he saw an advertisement from Richard Alf for a copy of *Amazing Fantasy* #15 with a "heavily taped cover, but intact" for $25.00. He saved up his money, doing extra chores around the house, and several weeks later mailed off the money to Alf, only to have it returned to him because the issue had already sold.

Reprints were also somewhat scarce at the time. Marvel Comics did have a few reprint titles, including *Marvel Collector's Item Classics*, which started in 1965, but it was canceled after 22 issues. *Marvel Tales* became a reprint title in 1966, initially including classic stories from *Journey into Mystery*, *Strange Tales*, and *Tales to Astonish*, then later focusing solely on reprints from *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Lancer Books was the first to publish a series of paperbacks in the mid-1960s that reprinted selected early stories of *The Fantastic Four*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Daredevil*, *The Mighty Thor*, and *The Amazing Spider-Man* in black and white and reduced size. But one of the problems with reprints was that they sometimes omitted panels or whole pages from the stories to make them fit the available space, and learning about the origins of your favorite characters was a challenge. It was not until 1974 that an opportunity arose to read the complete origin stories of the best Marvel characters in color and their original size.

When I asked Stan Lee what prompted Marvel Comics to start the Origins series of books, he replied, "Me! I had a zillion requests from fans to write a series of Origins books—and I thought it was a great idea and enjoyed writing them." But the Origins books were more than just reprints, as Lee described in his January 1974 Soapbox column, "…the great new ORIGINS OF MARVEL COMICS, the blockbuster book which features the entire early history of your all-time favorites … you'll have the unedited origin stories, plus more recent yarns, plus page after page of straight-from-the-shoulder secrets of who did what, and how we did it … we're also reproducing the actual cover of each magazine in which the origin stories appeared, thus making THE ORIGINS OF MARVEL COMICS the most complete history of Marvel's golden age ever published!"

Light My Fire(side)

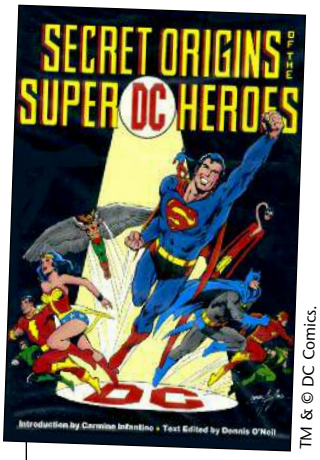
Origins of Marvel Comics, first published in 1974 with this John Romita, Sr. cover, ignited the publisher's popular reprint line with Fireside Books.

illustrated by Jack Kirby. *The Silver Surfer* was an original story featuring the Sky-Rider of the Spaceways doing battle with his old foe and master, Galactus. Asked why Silver Surfer ps because ditor. Also, prestigious

elationship g the same l, Fireside . In 1976, *trength and* o help kids uld be five *un Book*, a ng various arron. The *hty Marvel* supposedly ar's Steak nd Spider ed by Joe *hty Marvel* of Marvel displaying & Schuster *nty Marvel* reside also *the Marvel* n Buscema to provide detailed lessons to aspiring comic artists. A video (and later DVD) was made with the same title, starring Lee and Buscema. Then, in 1979, Fireside published *Marvel Word Games*, *Marvel Mazes to Drive You Mad*, and a collection of the best puzzles and games from the five "Fun Books" called *The Mighty Marvel Jumbo Fun Book*. In all, there were a total of 24 Marvel books published by Fireside.

Part of the charm of the Origins books, and what set them apart from the comics, was the covers. Each of the Origins books bore a beautiful painted cover in vibrant color, rendered by artists like John Romita, Bob Larkin, and Earl Norem. Sometimes the artist created multiple preliminary variations of the covers and the versions not chosen were often equally compelling. With the classic comic stories reprinted in color and the behind-the-scenes commentary by Stan Lee, wrapped between gorgeous painted covers, the Marvel Fireside Origins books were entertaining, enlightening, and unique.

Well, okay, not exactly unique. In 1976, DC jumped on the bandwagon with *Secret Origins of the Super DC Heroes*, published by Harmony Books in a larger size, comparable to the Marvel Fireside Hulk book, and including Golden and Silver Age origin stories of Superman, Batman, the Flash, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, Green Arrow, Hawkman, the Atom, Captain Marvel (Shazam!), and Plastic Man. Then, three years later, Fireside began publishing books for DC Comics, in a similar size and format as the Marvel Origins books. However, the DC Fireside books were organized around a theme, rather than one or more characters. The first volume, *America at War–The Best of DC War Comics*, was published in 1979 and featured classic stories from four decades about the Haunted Tank, the Unknown Soldier, Blackhawk, Enemy Ace, and Sgt. Rock, as well as one of the USS Stevens stories. Also included was a detailed introduction by Michael Uslan and a bibliography of DC war comics. The second book, published later that same year, was *Heart Throbs–The Best of DC Romance Comics*,



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Romita Rough Stuff

Jazzy Johnny's unused cover preliminaries for the *Sons* and *Bad Guys* Fireside editions. Compare these against the published versions seen earlier in this article and note the changes in characters' positions.

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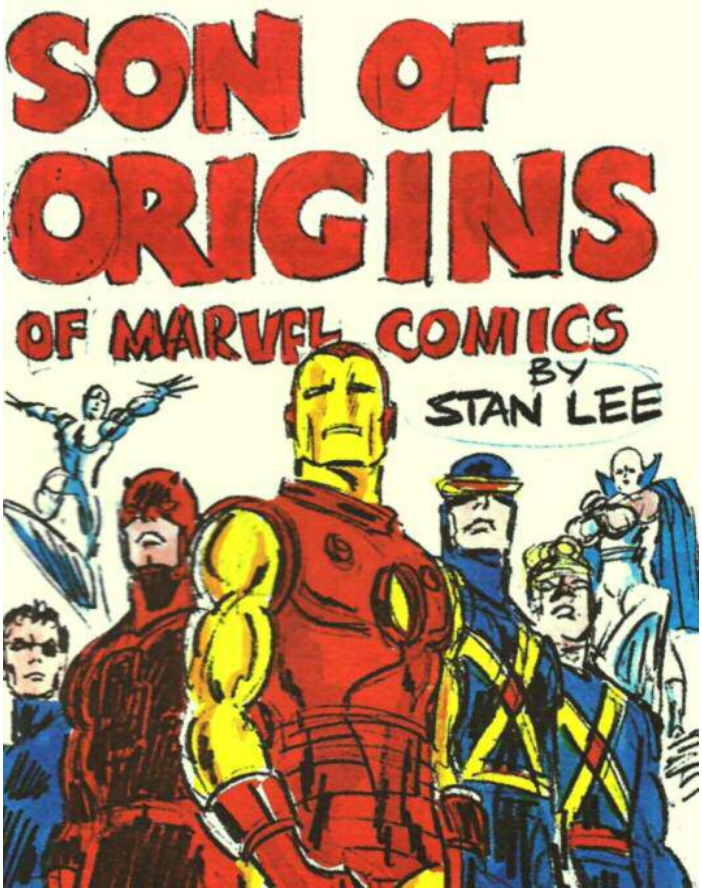

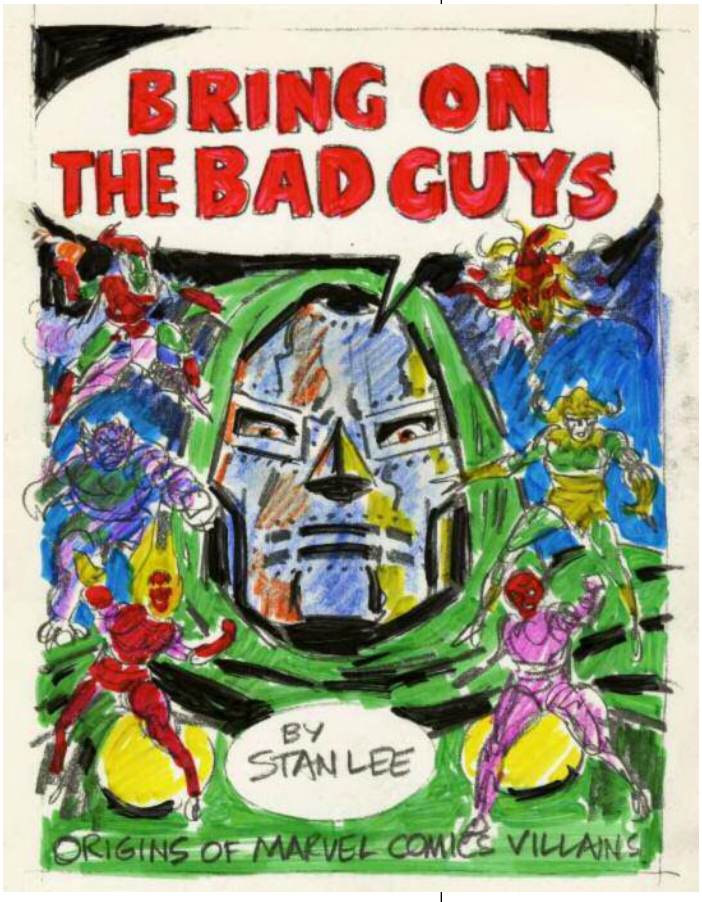

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