



The World of **TWOMORROWS**

Celebrating 25 Years of the Future of Fandom



Edited by
John Morrow & Jon B. Cooke

NFA



The World of TWO MORROWS

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The Kirby Collector: To Honor the King



John Morrow

Editor, *The Jack Kirby Collector*, Morrow #2

Born: 1962

Residence: Raleigh, North Carolina

Vocation: Publisher, TwoMorrrows Publishing

Favorite Creator: Duh!

Seminal Comic Book: *Kamandi* #12

John's lifelong appreciation of comic book creator Jack Kirby leads him to produce a modest Kirby fazine in 1994—and, in turn, inadvertently starts a publishing enterprise.

One Morrow's Early Daze

Jon B. Cooke: *Dude, where are you from?*

John Morrow: Montgomery, Alabama. I haven't been back much since I graduated from Auburn University. It was a great school experience, though I can't say I particularly miss Alabama. My mom still lives there and my dad did until he died a few years ago. As time goes by, you don't go back as often. I have two older brothers, Bob and Paul, in Atlanta and a younger sister, Janet, in Birmingham. My deep South roots are very strong, which might explain why I never heard of *The New Gods* before I saw an ad in *The Comics Buyers' Guide*.

JBC: *Is anybody else in your family creative?*

John: My mom is a musician—I guess I got that from her. From ninth grade on, I was convinced I was going to be a band director. I went to music school for two years and realized, "Wow, I can make this pitiful amount of money doing something else, and not have the hassles of being a band director." So I switched majors halfway through college, and transferred to Auburn and got my art degree. I met my wife Pam—she was recruited right out of college by a large ad agency here in North Carolina.

Pam graduated a quarter before I did, so I followed her here to North Carolina. She helped me get my foot in the door at the big agency where she was working, and I started picking up freelance illustration and design work with them, and our advertising career took off from there. We both hated working for agencies because the pay was horrible and the treatment was usually bad, but it was an amazing learning experience.

Auburn got their first Apple computers the quarter after I graduated, so our school training was all conventional graphic design and advertising skills. I didn't know a computer from a telephone back then, and I remember picking up one of my first jobs as a freelance designer for an art director who was out on his own, and had an early Macintosh computer: A Mac SE/30. He said, "You've gotta see this thing!" It had a tiny black-&-white eight-inch screen, not even grayscale, right? He said, "Look what this can do!" He showed me how you clicked



Right inset: Poster promoting *The Jack Kirby Collector*, given to retailers in 1995, and printed at the same time as *TJKC* #6—another financial risk that, early on, paid off for TwoMorrrows.



The Jack Kirby Collector

First Issue: 9/7/1994

little dots and you could create perfectly smooth line-art drawings.

Back in those days, we had French curves and Rapidograph pens for doing that by hand. When you tried to draw a precision black line-art logo for somebody, it was painstaking and always frustrating for me. To see what he did on that computer... it was very primitive by today's standards, but I thought, "This has potential."

JBC: *These were Bézier curves? Vector art?*

John: Yes, probably *Adobe Illustrator* version 1.0. I could immediately see how this could be a great time-saver. I had no clue it would evolve into what we have today—it's become our whole lives. Every time I went in there to pick up a job from him, he'd show me a new thing he could do with it, and I remember coming back and talking to Pam about it. Pam hated cutting Rubylith and Amberlith to make color separations. They had grunts at the big agencies who would do that for you, but I had to do it myself as a freelancer. So when I saw this

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR

on the computer, I thought, "This has potential to eliminate the need to cut that film." We used to drop off mechanical boards at the local camera shop to be shot. You'd have to drive over there, leave the artboards, pick them up a day or two later after they had time to shoot them; it was a long process. That was when modems first came into play. What were they, 1200 baud or some incredibly slow thing? I thought, "Wouldn't it be cool if one day, I could drop off the art there and they could send it back to me through the telephone like a fax?" I didn't yet make the connection that one day I'd be sending it both directions, or that I would be able to scan it myself, like I do now.

Computers changed what we do, and now we can't live without them. But in those pre-computer days, Pam taught me how to hand-kern typeset galleys. You glue it down on a mechanical board and with an X-Acto knife and T-square, you cut a



little trench below and above each line, and then you cut out the whitespace between letters where the typesetter didn't bump them tight enough, and slide it over in the trench. Spacing the letters more evenly visually makes a better-looking, more professional headline. But that ad agency she worked for took it to the next step. They hand-kerned the tiny body copy when they'd get it back from the typesetter; their mechanical boards had hundreds of X-Acto knife cuts on a single newspaper ad, because they would go through and hand-kern every single letter of the body copy, not just the headline. It was insane, but Pam taught me how to visually look for poorly kerned type. She is a super-detail person. That was eye-opening for me.

I wouldn't have lasted in their production department, though—I was much more suited for freelance work.

I remember going in for my first freelance job at her agency; I'm right out of school. The art director says, "We need this billboard illustration done; can you do this?" I was doing airbrush at the time and I said, "Sure, no problem." It was to be a winter scarf that flowed across the whole billboard, with parts of it hanging off the ends, and it had a Piedmont Airlines logo on the scarf. So I stayed up all night working on this illustration. When I brought it in the next morning, he said, "This is perfect, exactly what we want." I'm thinking, "Great, I'm gonna get paid!" He saw me sort of just standing there and said, "Okay, send me an invoice and I'll get it processed." I said, "Huh? A what? What's an invoice?"

The guy thankfully took sympathy on me and sat me down, and said, "This is how it works." They didn't teach us the practical business end in art school—they just taught us the art end! So he said, "This is what an invoice looks like, and you submit it to me, and you get your money in 30 days." "Thirty days?! We have to pay rent next week; what are we going to do for the next 30 days?" But I started getting the hang of it; understanding how it works, reading a lot of books about how the whole advertising industry works for freelancers. So Pam worked full-time for her agency and I worked freelance, and, after two years of that, I was doing most of my freelance work for one small agency that couldn't afford me anymore. I was doing so much work for them, that it was cheaper for them to hire a full-time person to do what I was doing, but they gave me first dibs on the job. I was stuck: "Well, if



Above: Long before comics, John got hooked on pinball. Here he is, seven years old, with his first machine, at Christmas. Today he owns a commercial one and used his knowledge of the game to write an intro for DC's *In The Days of the Mob* collection of Kirby stories.

Below: College graduation from Auburn University led Pam Morrow to a large advertising agency.





house. That was a really smart move. That's where we had our first child, Lily. Working at home, having a baby there, worked out great. Then, we realized after a couple of years, "We are the youngest people in this old neighborhood, and there's nobody for our daughter to play with." That's when we moved to North Raleigh to a more conventional neighborhood, and raised our kids there with a neighborhood swimming pool and playground.

JBC: Did you build the house?

John: Yes, in 2004, we built the house here specifically with work in mind. It's a great location for us, especially with raising kids. Now that we do less advertising work, it's way bigger than we need, but it's still a great place for us.

JBC: You mentioned you had a subscription to CBG; were you involved with the fanzine community? Did you have stuff published at all, or publish anything else prior to TJKC?

John: Not really. That was beyond me. I learned this whole publishing thing by the seat of my pants. I didn't have anything to go on, except I'd read some issues of *Comics Interview*, *The Comics Journal* and *CBG*. But like I mentioned, *The Comic Reader*, and the original version of *Alter Ego*, the mimeograph 'zines from the '60s, I'd never seen those. I knew they existed and knew there was a rich history of fan publications going all the way back to the '60s, but I never had the opportunity to see them.

JBC: So the only model you really had was company newsletters? Was *The Jack Kirby Collector* an echo of anything?

John: It's not. It's an echo of our advertising work, if anything—not that it's designed like an annual report, for instance. I didn't look at *Comics Interview* or *CBG* or *The Comics Journal* for inspiration at all, except for maybe the enthusiasm that went into them, but not the look. That's probably good—even if you look at the first issue of the *Kirby Collector*, the typography is pretty clean, simple, and readable, whereas in a lot of the earlier fan

stuff, they weren't trained; it was basic typesetting. I had a little leg up in terms of producing something; even though *TJKC* was photocopied, it looked professional, and that gave us a boost early on. Although we were trying to do the best work we could based on our training, it wasn't like, "Oh, we're going to build an empire." We just had to do this right. Seriously, we had no inkling that anything would come of *The Jack Kirby Collector*, except as something to do for fun until it died out.

Meeting Jack

JBC: You didn't have a passion for print? I mean, I just had to do a magazine, had to do a fanzine, had to do something in print. I was crazy about print, and comics were a part of it. Had you not done that, could you have done a fanzine or periodical on the French horn or something else in your life?

John: I don't think so. It was simply because Kirby died and I had gotten to meet him in 1991. That was my goal: I just wanted to shake Jack's hand and tell him I've enjoyed his work. Finally, in 1991, we were doing another direct mail piece for the swingset company, and we hired a freelance illustrator to do the cover. He did amazing cut-paper illustration—I found out he was located in Los Angeles. We're a small business, self-employed, and everything that can, needs to be made a business expense; you have to keep your taxes down. I could justify flying out to meet him for the project, and then finally getting to go to San Diego Con.

So in 1991, for our working vacation, we went there, and had our meeting with the illustrator for the swingset mailer. We had a day to kill and I finally got to go to Comic-Con and meet Jack Kirby. Pam had no real interest in going to the convention. She wanted to hang out in Old Town San Diego and go to all the shops—that was a fun side trip for her. So while she hung out in Old Town, I went to Comic-Con. Back then, you could show up, buy a ticket and go in, not go online six months beforehand and hope beyond hope that you might get lucky and score a ticket for it. You could get an affordable hotel room the same day, too. It wasn't such a big deal then. So I drove into the parking deck, went up, paid for my ticket, walked in, and tried to find out where Jack Kirby was.

I'm looking around—even then it was the biggest convention in the country, but back then the hall was walled off. They didn't use the whole convention center. Where the wall was, is roughly where our booth is now. When you're there next summer, stop where our booth is and see the three million booths beyond us—that's all new since 1991.

I found out Jack Kirby was going to be at the Genesis West booth. I went over there and talked to a guy who was hanging out at the booth, who said, "Yeah, Jack will be back later." I didn't know who this guy was; it may've been Greg Theakston, but it definitely wasn't Mike Thibodeaux. He had a portfolio of art there and I was flipping through it. I remember one specific piece: It was a Kirby pencil rough on 8½" x 11" typing paper, regular old white paper, for the *Forever People* #8 cover, the "Billion Dollar Bates" issue, and it was \$50—a really beautiful loose pencil drawing, and you could tell everything going on

was trying to hide my shame.

JBC: I think you were being kind not telling me because you knew I would be crushed. We were in constant communication at the time. We had no inkling we were delving too far. We were thinking about history and not family relations so much.

John: Or politics. That's where it became obvious to me that we're marching into some political minefields...

JBC: Because Jack doesn't come off that well in that story. It's a humiliating story that Jack had to go through. But it's an important story because it predates the Marvel Age that he started with Stan. It was one of the main reasons he went to Marvel.

John: Absolutely, if Jack hadn't gone through that, he never would have ended up at Marvel and Fantastic Four never would have happened.

JBC: I still don't think people understand the implications of that, to be honest with you.

John: Well, if they read the *Stuf' Said* book, they'll understand. I think a lot of people do, largely because of that article, though. Even in the Kirby Unleashed biography of Jack and any other fanzine biographies, up to that point, there were hints to it, like there was a "dispute with DC." That was the most I'd ever seen. Once that article was printed, it was like "The cat's out of the bag." But to Roz and the Kirby family's credit, they never held it against me, and were always supportive of the magazine.

JBC: Credit where credit is due: Joe Simon in *The Comic Book Makers* had given the location of the court and specific dates, so I had my intrepid younger brother Andrew run down to White Plains, make copies of all the transcripts and send them to me. It blew us away.

I think another important aspect of the Kirby Collector was that you included an interview with Kirby in every single issue, right? Hasn't that been one constant?

John: Anytime I could, I tried to include an interview. I've missed a few issues, but it was my intention to have some kind of interview with Jack in every issue. I also wanted to include a photograph of Kirby, not just from the '80s, but the '60s or '70s. When someone picked up a copy for the first time and said, "What is this?" I wanted there to be actual words by Jack and a photo, so they'd know what he was really like. That was very important to me. It seems kind of simplistic, but that's what I wanted to do. Here I am at issue #75, and I still have at least four more full Kirby interviews I've never run. Somehow they keep turning up. Stan Lee did about a million interviews—so many interviews that I've found for the *Stuf' Said* book—but for Jack to



have done as many as he did? He sat at home at his drawing board and drew all the time, but he did an awful lot of interviews. He had a distinctive way of talking and a distinctive way of trying to get his point across. There's a lot of depth in what he said—which sometimes left you scratching your head. It's kind of a puzzle sometimes...

JBC: To say the least. There may have been depth, but clarity? Maybe not!

John: Well, I discuss that in *Stuf' Said*. It's excerpts from all these interviews. I was able to take out the most concise things and use those.

JBC: It's always difficult for me to follow his train of thought. He's never easy to quote. As a writer, I know it's very difficult to find a usable Kirby quote.

When did you start seeking material that had substance to it, that was really talking history—as opposed to just discussing comics series and what had already been published?

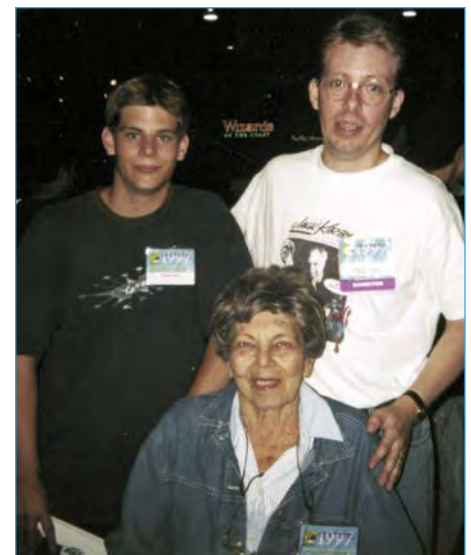
John: That was #6, because the Fourth World was always my favorite Kirby work.

I didn't know how many issues we'd last, taking a gamble actually printing them and not Xeroxing. I thought, "I'm going to get to the bottom of this whole 'Fourth World' thing. Why did it get cancelled and how was Jack originally going to handle the ending? Was he going to have Darkseid die? Was he going to have Orion die? That later *Hunger Dogs* graphic novel—is that really how he planned to end it?" I couldn't believe it was. It wasn't a very satisfying ending to me. I'm glad he finally got to do it, but it didn't feel quite right. I set out with my

Above: At John's first con as a publisher (HeroesCon 1995), he had the thrill of hanging out with both Chic Stone (left) and Dick Ayers (right). That's Nick Cardy, Murphy Anderson, and Julie Schwartz behind Ayers. What a line-up!

Previous page: "The day I nearly killed Roz Kirby!" said John. "I planned to send this 1995 April Fool's flyer to subscribers, to encourage them to sign Dr. Mark Miller's petition to get Marvel to credit Jack for his creations. I ran it by Roz first, and the day she got it in the mail, I get a call: 'John, you almost gave me a heart attack when I saw this!' She didn't read my cover letter first, and thought the headline was real! I subsequently removed the credit gag in the final April Fools flyer—but today, it's no longer a joke!"

Below: John with Roz and Jeremy, at San Diego Comic-Con, in 1997.



THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR

it, they just don't—for whatever reason, they got burned out. They're not actively transcribing for us or writing articles or doing layouts, but I still hear from them from time to time. It's still gratifying to know we haven't burnt bridges—we've built them. That's what we're still trying to do... and it all goes back to Jack Kirby.

The Future

JBC: *It's been a long trip. It's 25 years, a significant milestone for any company. Maybe what we're doing is insanely self-indulgent, but it's good! I'm glad I pushed you to do this book. It's important to me, too. It's the most creative and productive time in my life. Here I am turning into a senior citizen now.*

I've never been as energized in life as I am now; there's so much to do! And I'm not going to do everything with TwoMorrows and you're not going to do everything with me, and we'll be proud of one another. I look at Stuf' Said and I know I so wanted to be in that book, but it's okay, because I know I can make it into other projects of yours.

John: You largely, but also George Khoury, Michael Eury... so many of you guys have shown me stuff in comics and pop culture I had no exposure to. I'm looking at our new magazine *RetroFan*—

I just sent #4 to the printer—and other than the *Shazam!* TV show, I don't think there is a single thing that's covered in that issue, that I was personally exposed to as a kid. I didn't watch *Star Trek*, I never cared about Harvey Comics, and Ray Harryhausen—these were not on my radar. But I'm fascinated reading about this stuff and fascinated seeing the enthusiasm these guys have for that, because it was a big part of their life.

JBC: *One thing I definitely want to get into print: I've worked with a number of publishers before, but I never worked with somebody as committed to paying people like you are. You pay your people on time and accurately! Every month I've gotten a check from you over the years from the books, and that's remarkable because there are many almost-crooks and full-blown crooks in this business.*

John: Thank you. I take that as the nicest compliment of all. I wish my dad were around to hear that. That would impress him more than the quality of

the work... that I pay my bills on time. I think that would make him very happy. When we were kids—because we didn't have a lot—he always harped on "money, money, money... you don't waste it!" I'm very frugal to this day because of it. I'm glad to hear that. For any of our contributors out there who ever got a check a few days late—pay attention!—it's usually not my fault. Sometimes I get busy and I don't get the checks out as quickly as I want, but not

because we're not going to pay you! Sometimes we get sidetracked... an editor forgets to tell me who to pay... my kid gets sick... Carmine threatens to sue us... "The check's in the mail." Really!

JBC: *You know what's interesting, and I believe this is true for you: The very last thing I did for CBA, every single time, and it's true today, is my editorial. One of the reasons for it has to do with talking directly to the reader and saving the last word for him or her. I'm very grateful*

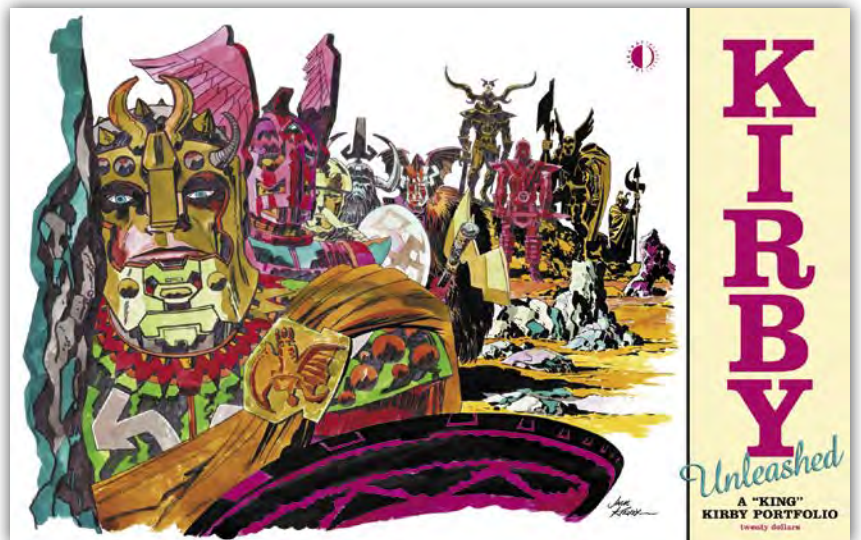
for Stan Lee, to be honest with you, because the way he communicated with the reader made the connection so warm. It was cozy and nice and



Top and bottom: In 2008, John produced the 200-copy limited edition *Kirby: Deities* portfolio, assembling all of Jack's original New Gods concept drawings; it was an immediate sell-out. And by tracking down the original art, he remastered the fabled *Kirby Unleashed* portfolio in 2004. Along with *Kirby 100*, *Kirby Five-Oh!*, *Stuf' Said*, and *Dingbat Love*, these are publications John is most proud of.

Center: An original pencil drawing from Jack Kirby's 1970s sketchbook, gifted to John by the Kirbys.

Previous page: Original ads that ran in *Comics Buyer's Guide*. John's first missed deadline came, he said, "When I couldn't properly finish my Fourth World issue for *TJKC* #5, and pushed it back to #6. It was worth the delay!"



“A Kirby Collector for the Other Guys”



Jon B. Cooke

Editor, *Comic Book Artist*

Born: 1959

Residence: West Kingston, Rhode Island

Vocation: Freelance graphic designer

Favorite Creator: Jack Kirby

Seminal Comic Book: *Jimmy Olsen* #133

The Jack Kirby Collector's surprise success paves the way for a follow-up *TwoMorrows* magazine—Jon B. Cooke's award-winning *Comic Book Artist*.

Right inset: “If memory serves,” said Jon B. Cooke, “this placard was created to promote *Comic Book Artist* magazine just before Neal Adams offered to ink an unpublished penciled Batman piece, the results of which saw print as *CBA* #1.” The illustration was derived from Joe Kubert’s cover art for DC’s *Strange Adventures* #219 [Aug. 1969].



Comic Book Artist

First Issue: 3/21/1998

Kid Cooke

John Morrow: Mr. Cooke, where were you born?

Jon: Kingston, New York. We lived in Westchester County. At the time, it was the highest per-capita income county in the United States. It’s a suburb of New York City, the exact town Don Draper from *Mad Men* “lived” in, a show which perfectly captured that time and place. We were not as wealthy as our neighbors—we rented—but my siblings and I grew up around high-income, well-off people.

JM: Isn’t that also where Prof. X’s mansion was?

Jon: That was next door. Yeah, but they wouldn’t let us Cookes in. [laughter]

JM: You weren’t “mutanty” enough.

Jon: I was the fifth of six kids. I have a little brother, Andrew. Comics were a part of the whole culture in the ‘60s. I remember *Batmania*. I read *Richie Rich*, *Gold Key Comics*, *Lois Lane*... I do remember the first time I bought a brand-new comic off the stands. I have a distinct memory of being nine years old and buying *Captain America*, the one where he’s smashing through the Dec. 8, 1941, *New York Times*.

JM: Oh wow! So was that Cap #109? [Jon nods] That was your first comic? Really?

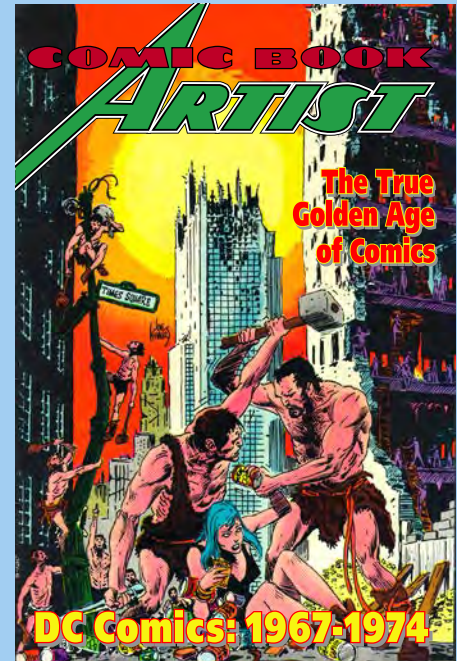
Jon: No, that was the first new one I remember buying with my own money. I’d buy them used, like *Classics Illustrated*, in Ossining. My oldest brother collected Marvels. I thought Marvels were a little off-putting. The best word that comes to mind was Kirby looked “grotesque.” I’m telling you: the Kurt Schaffenberger/Curt Swan DCs were much more welcoming: slick, neutral... probably neutered.

JM: Safe.

Jon: “Safe”! That’s a perfect word. Marvels were, “Whoa!” Something was going on there. I think I was kind of repulsed—or probably “repelled,” is a better word—by Jack’s drawings. But I remember Jack’s style and I remember Ditko. Stan Lee was a household name at home. Marvel was big—my sister loved Ditko’s *Doctor Strange*—but my brother would not allow us to look through his comics. I believe he had started with *Fantastic Four* #1.

JM: [Chuckles] So, they were prized possessions in the house.

Jon: Well, his possessions. Richie would not allow us



COMING IN 1998 FROM THE PUBLISHER OF THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR.

to look at them, so he’d have to be out of the house when I’d sneak up to peek. When I was probably four or five years old, I remember seeing *Ant-Man* and thinking, “Wow, this guy in the helmet is really cool, and he’s small like me!”

But, as I grew older, with Marvel, I was put off by the “to be continued” at the end of stories. By the time I was turning 10 or 11, I thought, “What a rip-off! They’re forcing me to buy the next issue. I’m going on strike against Marvel.” I remember *Tower of Shadows* #1, the Steranko story. But I was not a comics fan. I was a reader. It was just a part of life. You watch dumb afternoon TV, you cook up *Creepy Crawlers*, and you play with *Major Matt Mason* toys. But something happened that changed me.

JM: When did it switch over from you being just a casual reader, to an obsession? Can you point to a

COMIC BOOK ARTIST

certain issue, series, or character?

Jon: Yes, I can. I don't know whether the memory is truthful or not—though I have since persuaded myself to believe it—but we lived in Europe for a year. My mother got divorced and she and her two youngest children—Andy and I—went to live in Ireland, England, and France for about a year.

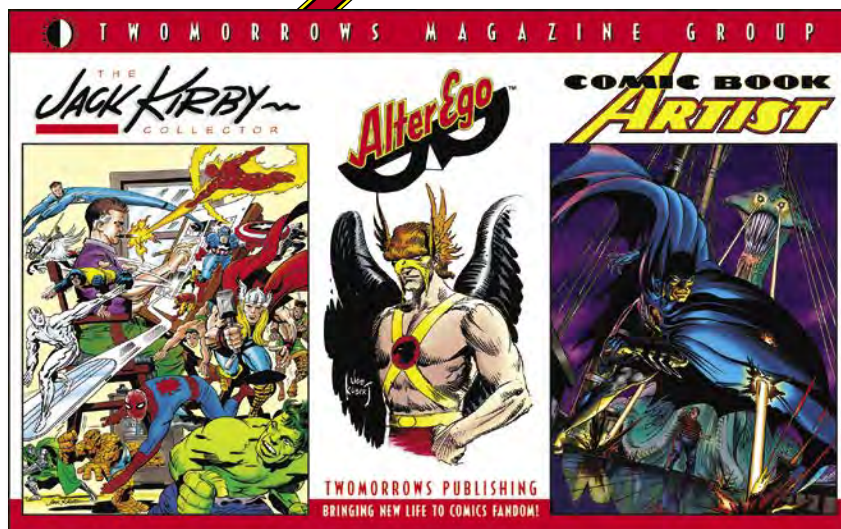
JM: How old were you?

Jon: It was 1970, so I was eleven and Andy was nine. It was the absolute, most important life-changing event that happened, because though we didn't go to school, we still received a profound education, one that led me to pursue a creative life. My mom took us to all these historical sites and she would allow us to buy one comic book a day. In a way, we were homesick, so comics helped us feel connected. In that isolation and being in new places, we quickly became comic book fans. We branched out from American comics and bought British comics, as well. Plus we made up our own comics.

Before my mom got divorced, she was a suburban housewife raising six children smack dab in the middle of the '60s. After the break-up, she became a hippie, pretty much. It was very freeing. She was really proud of us for just being creative and would let us seek our own muse. Andy and I would make our own comics and tell each other stories before we went to sleep. We'd act out *Star Trek* episodes and be scared by *The Outer Limits*. It was a lot of fun.

JM: Is that why you are closer to Andy today?

Jon: Well, yeah, but we were also the two youngest, so it's natural we paired off. Andy went to Colorado for a couple of years in the latter '60s to help with his severe asthma. He came back to this hippie family! [laughter] He was this straight-laced little kid with a suitcase and a buttoned-up shirt: "Who are these people? What am I getting into?" We had a really good time and he was soon converted into a long-haired kid. We were very close and have been very tight ever since. We created our own comics to entertain each other. He created *Mighty Boy* and I created *Atomic Man*, basically our own respective riffs on *Superboy* and *Captain America*. We even dreamed up our own imaginary publishing company:



Anglo-American Publications, AAP.

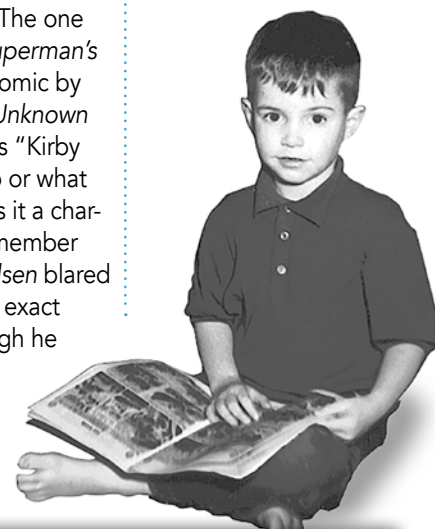
JM: Were they a team or in separate stories? "*The Adventures of Atomic Man and Mighty Boy*"?

Jon: No, no. I was an older brother and was going to do things my way. [chuckles] We had very demarcated interests in comics. I was very much a *Captain America* kid and he was a *Spider-Man* kid. More importantly, he was into *Mister Miracle* and I was into *New Gods*, he was into *Kamandi* and I was into *The Demon*. With brothers, everything is competitive; you are constantly trying to out-do the other.

That comic book you asked me about? The one that changed me from reader to fan...? *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #133, the first '70s DC comic by Jack Kirby. I had seen *Challengers of the Unknown* just prior to that and remember seeing this "Kirby is Coming" blurb. I really had no idea who or what Kirby was. I wondered, "Is Kirby a thing? Is it a character? Is it a new series coming out?" I remember having no idea. And then, when *Jimmy Olsen* blared "Kirby is Here!"... boy, was he! I share the exact same reaction as Walter Simonson, although he was obviously older, in having my mind blown by that single comic book. I think he was in college when it happened to him. For me, I was 11 or 12, and my jaw dropped to the ground. "Oh. My. God!

Above: TwoMorrows banner produced in 1998 for the San Diego Comic-Con convention booth, in the first year of *Comic Book Artist's* existence, during which Roy Thomas' legendary fanzine, *Alter Ego*, was a flip-side mag in *CBA*.

Below: Jon as a seven- or eight-year-old, which puts this pic at around 1966 or '67. He looks to be reading a DC war comic book.



1998: COMIC BOOK ARTIST



There is so much going on!" People peg that as a criticism; I beg to differ, kind sir! It was like the floodgates had opened and I loved everything that was going on—even as corny as these hippies, the "Hairies," and the Outsiders in the "Wild Area" were.

JM: This is the difference between you and me: we're three or four years apart in age. You got into underground comix, which I never did.

Jon: That took a little bit of time.

JM: So, you weren't seeing them while they were new?

Jon: Yes, I was, but I was very young. It's really amazing to think how much happened to my brother and me in a short amount of time. I did not see *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #133 the exact month it was published, but in the following fall when I found it in a London newsagent stand, three or four months after U.S. release. It was—for a lack of a better term—a remaindered copy that had made it to England. I don't want to really get into it; but back then you could get DC back issues from the '60s *en masse*.

We moved from England to Paris and, every day, we went to Brentano's, the English-language bookstore, where there were new comics on the stand. All of a sudden, I'm seeing *New Gods* #4 after I had just seen *New Gods* #1 in England. "Wow! What has happened between these three issues?" I was totally obsessed... and that was also when Neal Adams and Bernie Wrightson were hitting their stride. The time between when we became comic fans and went to Phil Seuling's first convention really wasn't that long. It was just a year-and-a-half between *Jimmy Olsen* #133 and July 4, 1972, our first New York Comic Art Convention. Nowadays, I just marvel at how quickly it happened. A massive change had taken place. We became huge fans of all comics.

JM: What year were you actually overseas?

Jon: It was 1970–71. By September of '71, we returned to the States and were back into school. It was the start of the 100-Page Super Spectaculars. I can mark my life by all these dumb comic book things. [chuckles] We were quite poor at this point.

JM: You were at your first Seuling convention early on.

Jon: Right. Jack Kirby was there. I was 13 years old by then and Andy was 11 and we were pretty young. We had seen an ad in one of the *Creepy* or *Eerie* magazines. We said, "Wow!" and talked our mother into letting us take the bus without her. My sister lived in New York City and we stayed at her apartment. We would stay up all night at the Seuling cons to watch movie serials until we passed out under the seats on the carpet! It had a huge impact. I can't describe how wonderful it was because these giants were all around. Jack was there and I shook his hand. By then, I was in awe. He meant so much to me; I can't even describe it. I had a dysfunctional relationship with my own father, and Jack (in a way) was a surrogate father, at least creatively. He shared more with me, much more than my own flesh-and-blood father had shared. That sounds sad, but it was good. As you know, John, I'm emotional about Kirby. He means a great deal to me. I love him.

JM: You saw the ad in an *Eerie* or *Creepy*. When did you first affix yourself to Warren's output?

Jon: Probably around then, but we always looked through everything on the stands that even remotely looked like a comic book.

JM: When did you learn about Warren as a personality?

Jon: It was probably at that 1972 convention. He was a character. This is back in the day where all of these incredible luminaries were just standing around. You've mentioned Jim Steranko being in his white jumpsuit. And, yes, there he was, holding court with rabid fans! Andy and I hung around Michael Kaluta and Bernie Wrightson at their table, and they used Andy as a go-fer to get coffee. We used their table as home base! They were really, really nice to us, while to fans... they weren't rude, they certainly weren't welcoming typical fans to sit behind the table, but for some reason, they liked us and let us join them. They were rock stars to us!

The undergrounds came along because our mother was single. She was dating and made friends with a group of young people in their 20s. This will sound more provocative than it was—it wasn't a commune, but we hung out at a house where a bunch of unmarried young people lived together. There was a pile of comic books there. I always made a bee-line for comic books in any form or fashion if they were around. If there were words and pictures, I went for it, and there were some undergrounds and they knocked



The Alter Ego Trip of Rascally Roy Thomas



Roy Thomas

Editor, *Alter Ego*

Born: 1940

Residence:
St. Matthews,
South Carolina

Vocation: Freelance
Writer/Author/Editor

Favorite Comics Creator:
Stan Lee

Seminal Comic Book:
All-Star Comics #25

Roy Thomas was a founding member of comics fandom in the 1960s, and his *Alter Ego* fanzine was a pioneer of its time in documenting comics history. In 1965, he became Stan Lee's right-hand man and a key writer at Marvel Comics, eventually serving as editor-in-chief. But, as retirement from his pro career beckons, he returns to his first love, and relaunches *Alter Ego* at TwoMorrows in 1999.



Alter Ego

First Issue: 7/1/1999

Roy the Boy

Jon B. Cooke: Roy, was it comics first as far as publications/ periodicals go that caught your interest? Did you like magazines, in general?

Roy Thomas: Of course. I was probably four-and-a-half or something like that (and I was involved with things other than comics) when my parents—mostly my mother—bought me Little Golden Books. I remember one called *A Day in the Jungle*, around that same time, with animals (including a black panther, and I loved black panthers) going around looking for somebody in the jungle. There were a couple like that which I read over and over until I memorized them. My mother also read them to me. They helped me learn to read, too. (And thank heavens they taught me to read upper and lower case letters; the comics were only good for the upper case letters.) But, I don't know what else I read except the Little Golden Books. There weren't as many children's books back in the early '40s.

JBC: What was the seminal comic book that got you going? Was it *All-Star Comics* #4?

Roy: *All-Star* #4? Hey, how old do you think I am, Jon?! That was 1941! [laughter] No, the first *All-Star* I would've seen could have been #24, but was probably #25, the first one I definitely remember.

JBC: Was that the one that launched you into fandom?

Roy: It launched me into reading comics as a kid, but I know that by the time I saw *All-Star*, I'd already seen a couple of comics with Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, and a couple of the other characters. It wasn't like that was my first comic and right from the start, I saw this comic with seven characters... but what blew my mind about it was I had seen these characters in separate stories and here they were all together and I didn't see that anywhere else in comics I was buying, and unfortunately when I went looking, I didn't find it again either. They didn't do that with the Timely Comics, except for a couple of issues that I may not have even seen. There was *The Marvel Family*, but they were pretty much the same character, just multiplied.

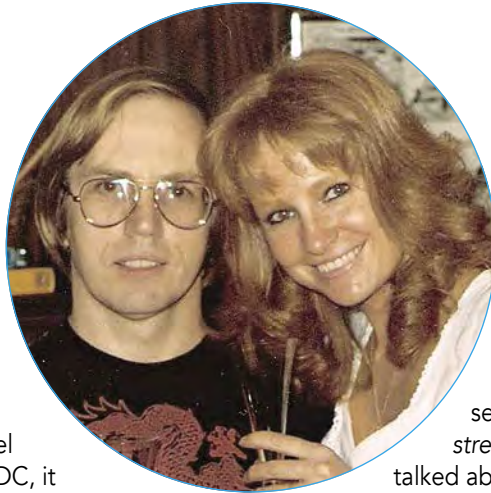
There just wasn't anything quite like *All-Star*

Comics. That was the comic that got me started, as much as anything, but the individual comics, too, got me interested. My second favorite comic would have been *Flash Comics*, because it had The Flash, Hawkman, Johnny Thunder, and later The Atom. Within the next year, I encountered Captain Marvel and that crew and the Marvel books and, to a lesser extent, most of the super-heroes. I just didn't have enough dimes. My parents didn't have much money and probably shouldn't have bought me as many comics as they did, but thank heaven they did!

JBC: I remember talking to Jerry Bails about this and I've always been fascinated with your obsession with the Justice Society of America. It was obvious to me as a reader back in the '70s and '80s, especially with your *All-Star Squadron* and even prior to that. I wonder, and tell me if this is true: Is it that you saw a shared universe with these characters, and that was the epiphany so many people had with Marvel Comics in the '60s?

Roy: I specifically remember telling someone—and I don't recall if it was a neighbor or my little sister (she would have been only one or two at the time)—maybe somebody who saw one of the comics, and I remember having to explain, at the age of five or under, that what I liked was that all the characters were together. That's a little four-year-old's version of a shared universe. Then *The Marvel Family* appealed to me, as they were a somewhat shared universe. They had their separate series; they got together, even if they were so much alike. I always wanted that to happen with the Marvel characters, but I don't know if I ever saw the two All Winners Squad issues [*All Winners Comics* #19, Fall 1946, and #21 Winter '46-47], as you'd think I'd remember them, because I was five or six when they came out. So, yes, it was that shared universe; that's what appealed to me.

By the time Marvel proper started [in 1961], DC already had a shared universe, as Superman and Batman had been together for years in *World's Finest Comics*, and Julie Schwartz had been doing that for years. He had Flash and Green Lantern cross over by that time already.



Left: Roy and wife Dann, the night before their wedding in 1981.

Below: Roy holds an original copy of *Alter Ego* Vol. 1, #1, at the “Golden Age of Fanzines” panel at the 2011 Comic-Con International: San Diego. Panel participants included moderator Bill Schelly, Jean Bails, Roy Thomas, Richard Kyle (behind Roy in the photo), Paul Levitz, Pat Lupoff, Richard Lupoff, and Maggie Thompson.

Fantastic Four #1 came out in August of 1961. By that time, I think there had already been two Flash stories with Green Lantern. That became the shared universe for me, too. It was really the DC shared universe first and then the Marvel; it's just that the Marvel passed up the other one. At DC, it became very clear, very quickly, that only the Julie Schwartz universe and that Superman/Batman thing were together, and the rest of DC comics seemed very compartmentalized. Even the ridiculousness of Superman and Batman being minimized and sometimes appearing minimalized on the *Justice League* covers was kind of crazy. Within about a year, Stan was doing it right. He was having the characters in the same universe. This was way beyond even *All-Star*.

JBC: If you had an issue of All-Flash Comics and an issue of Flash Comics, you'd choose Flash because you were getting a bargain because it had more characters in it?

Roy: Oh, yes. *All-Flash* would have been further down the list. My favorite character, based mostly on visuals more than stories, though I liked the stories too... was Hawkman, who appeared in *Flash Comics*, but not in *All-Flash* or anything else. I liked Green Lantern, too, probably more than the Flash. But I liked all those characters in varying degrees.

JBC: So, have you thought about it? You came out with four volumes of *All-Star Companions*... is it sentimental? Is it the stuff has substance? What is it?

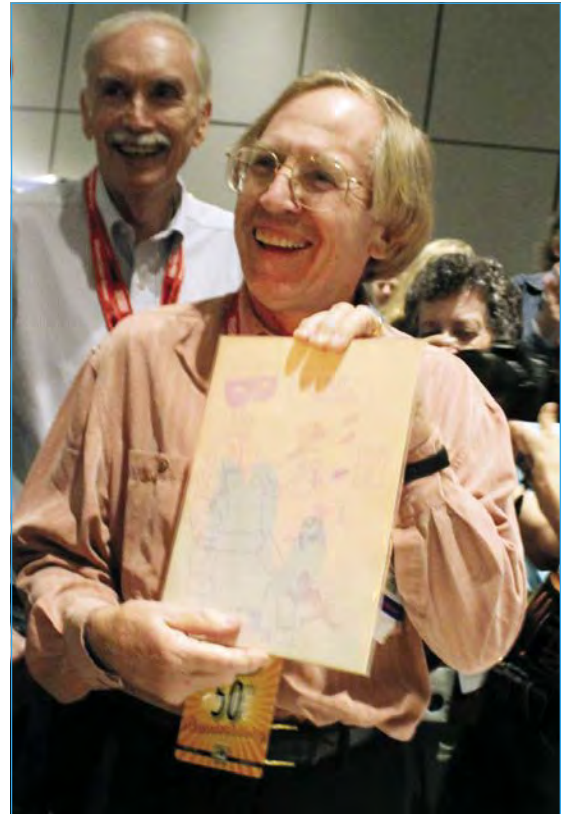
Roy: It's based on several things, I think. One is partly sentimental. I'm interested in the history of comics, but I'm aware of the fact that *All-Star* isn't automatically one of the best comics out there in terms of quality. At times, it had better than average art. After all, in the height of it, when I was reading at five, six, seven years old, it had Carmine Infantino, Joe Kubert, Lee Elias, Irwin Hasen,

Alexander Toth, all working on it. I could tell that it had better art than many comics I was reading. When I did *All-Star Companion*, I suppose it was largely out of sentiment. But an old *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* talked about *All-Star* #3 as being up there with the very top breakthrough titles by bringing in that kind of shared universe in the same way as the Human Torch/Sub-Mariner stories were doing around the same time. I felt it was a title with history and lineage—from *All-Star Comics* through the Julie Schwartz revival in *Earth-Two* and through my own work and so forth—and that's the

first 50 years between 1940–90 (from then on, I totally lose interest; I see it having almost no connection anymore to the old comics).

JBC: If you could only pick one comic artist, would it be Joe Kubert?

Roy: It's always been Joe Kubert because of a combination of his Hawkman from the '40s, even more than the '60s—even though I like them both—and then his *Tor* in 1950, which I think was his best work. It would probably be Kubert, but when I look at it, I have to realize, too, that right up there with him, even if I didn't know it always, was Kirby. From the time I was at least about six or





Left: From left to right, a powerhouse gathering of talent: Irwin Hasen, Roy, John Romita, Sr., and Stan Lee at the 1995 Chicago Comic-Con.

so, whenever I saw the names “Simon and Kirby” on anything, I didn’t know who they were or who did what, but anything that said “Simon/Kirby” on it was exciting. There would be Stuntman and that wonderful Kid Adonis story that was all by Joe Simon in a Kirby vein (with this character called Superior Male, who was a take-off on Superman... came from another planet to have a fight with this boxer). I almost never bought Kubert’s war comics, even though I loved the art in them, and I didn’t buy Kirby’s romance comics or *Black Magic*. But I was always aware of the fact that these two were the very best.

JBC: What was the first fanzine you encountered? Did you see science-fiction fanzines at a young age?

Roy: No, I encountered them when Jerry Bails was getting started on *Alter-Ego*, and he sent me the first three issues of *Xero* from the Lupoffs, which Julie Schwartz had loaned him, which unfortunately went lost in the mail when I sent them back to Julie. [laughter] I felt bad about that for many years, although I don’t think Julie cared that much.

So, *Xero* influenced me right away and what I was trying to do for *Alter Ego*. But it was February 1961, practically the same time as when I helped start *Alter-Ego*.

JBC: Wasn’t there mention of fanzines in the letters columns?

Weren’t there letters columns in *MAD* comics?

Roy: I think there were, but they didn’t really inspire fans to get together exactly, although they might have in some cases. They were mostly just comments about the comics. I had never heard of science-fiction fandom until Jerry sent me *Xero*; although it was called a science-fiction fanzine, it was more than that.

JBC: You know the first fanzine I ever saw—which blew my mind—and it was just the fact of it, was *Locus*.

Roy: I’ve got some copies of that. *Locus* was like a newszine.

JBC: The idea you could put out something yourself that looked this primitive in a certain way, it was pretty inspiring.

Roy: Well, *Alter-Ego*, God knows, was pretty primitive with that spirit duplicator, those first three issues—but Jerry had ambition. By the fourth issue, he was already into offset printing. “Hey, we’ve reached Nirvana now!”

JBC: How did you first encounter Jerry? Was it through the letters columns?

Roy: No, I was sent his address by Gardner Fox.

JBC: How did you get in touch with Gardner Fox?

Roy: Julie sent me his address. He must have talked to Gardner. I can’t imagine he would have sent me the address without it. What happened was: I wrote three pretty much identical letters at the same time, as sophisticated as I was at the time—19 or 20—to the “editors” of *Green Lantern*, *Flash*, and *Justice League of America*. One of those got printed in *Green Lantern* #1, and, of course, they all went to Julie. Right away, I was writing to him about *All-Star* and wondering if they had copies around they could sell—God knows I had no money—and he told me that Gardner Fox was the guy who wrote quite a few of the *All-Star Comics*, like the first 30-something of them. He said, “You might want to write him,” and gave me his address in Yonkers, so naturally, within 15 minutes, I wrote him a letter. He wrote back and said that six months or a year ago, he sold them to a young guy from Missouri named Jerry Bails, who was now in Detroit with a



If You Worked in Comics, You Deserve to be Remembered



Jim Amash

Interviewer,
Associate Editor
of *Alter Ego*

Born: 1960

Residence:
Greensboro,
North Carolina

Vocation:
Comic book artist

Favorite Creator:
Jack Kirby

Seminal Comic Book:
Too many to choose from!

A major component of *TwoMorrows'* version of *Alter Ego* is its relentless search for the life stories of creators from comics' past. Few have done more to find and celebrate those unsung heroes than interviewer Jim Amash.

Below: *TwoMorrows* books Jim has co-authored—just a few of hopefully many more to come!

The Acme Years

Eric Nolen-Weathington: *How did you first hear about *TwoMorrows*? The Kirby Collector?*

Jim Amash: I met John back in '86, when I was working at Acme Comics [the Greensboro, North Carolina comic book store] and we had Jack Kirby as a guest at our convention. John found out about it a couple of months or so after it happened and was really upset. I remember when he came in, and he was asking about Kirby. He was so sorry he'd missed it. It was killing him, you know? He drove all the way from Raleigh to Greensboro, just to hear about the convention, so I thought, "Well, that guy likes Kirby." [laughter]

ENW: *That's about an hour and 45-minute drive.*

Jim: Right! That was the first time I met John, but the first time I heard about *The Jack Kirby Collector* was from Bob Millikin, who used to work for Acme Comics after I left and became a comic book artist. He heard that there was a *Kirby Collector* magazine that was going to come out, and I think I got John's phone number and called him, and John was surprised that I remembered him. I didn't remember him by name, but we had talked when he came in the shop, so I remembered him. And because he knew I was a big Kirby fan, he gave me a comp copy, and then gave me comp copies after that! Of course, I was thrilled about it. And I contributed to the magazine some over the years. I contributed some photographs, a few Kirby pencil pieces that nobody had seen. Well, one had been seen in the

Jack Kirby Masterworks, an unused splash of Black Panther. I wrote a couple of small articles and I did interviews with John Severin, Mike Royer, and Joe Sinnott, all about inking Kirby. I may have done one more, but it's hard to remember after all this time.

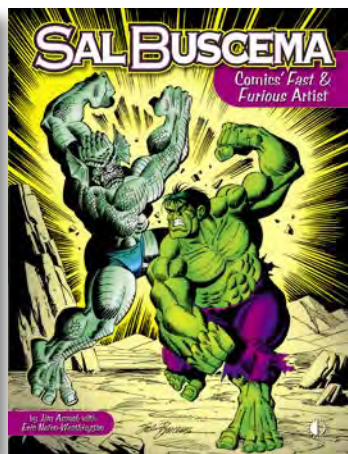
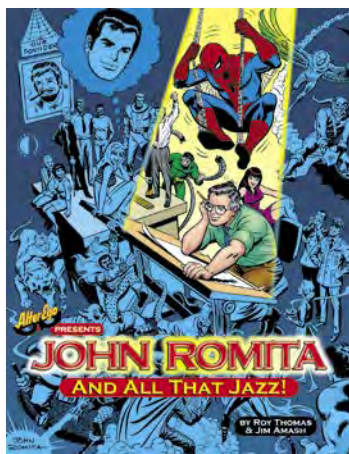
ENW: *Was that the first time you ever interviewed someone, or had you done interviews at the shows you ran?*

Jim: I'd interviewed people at the shows. And then I'd interviewed a few people in the APA [Amateur Press Association 'zine] that I was in. I'd interviewed Alex Toth, too. Alex was the first formal (even if it was kind of informal) interview I ever did. We talked every single night, sometimes more than once, and we talked about interesting stuff, I felt, and he felt that too, otherwise he wouldn't have talked to me. [laughs] He was not always a patient man, you know. [laughter] Anyway, I wanted to do an interview, and also kind of have a record of our calls, but the problem with that was Alex got really uptight about it, and I wasn't getting the kind of answers that I had hoped to get. But I did get an interview out of it, and then later I called him and filled in a few things. That was the first interview I conducted that was not done at a convention.

ENW: *And when was that?*

Jim: That would have been about 1990. I published it in the APA a year or two later, and then Jon Cooke reprinted it in *Comic Book Artist*.

ENW: *And, just for context, at what point did you start working professionally as an inker?*



Jim: Nineteen ninety-two.

ENW: Okay, so you were talking to guys before you even broke in to the industry.

Jim: Well, Acme Comics put on a convention every year, so I got to know a lot of people through the years. You know me: I'm a guy that's easy to talk with, so I'd go to a couple of other conventions and meet people and talk with them, and before I knew it, I knew people! [laughter] I wasn't trying to make connections to get into comics by knowing all these people. In fact, none of the people I met at conventions got me into comic books. They helped me, because I would send my work out, and Alex Toth would criticize my work, and very gently—certainly a lot more gently than he criticized other people. I accused him, "Alex, I think you're kind of soft on me because you like me." His thundering answer was, "Like hell I am!" [laughter] "I'm not cutting you any slack! I just think you're better than you think you are. At least you're doing honest work. You're not trying to be showy; you're trying to tell a story."

There were other people: Gray Morrow, Pat Boyette, Steranko, Dan Barry. I could spend some time on how Dan Barry taught me things about figure drawing and stuff like that. He was very important for me to understand some things: composition. I have a bachelor's and a master's degree in fine arts, so I had an easier time breaking into comics because I had an art background, and I was doing fine art before I was doing comic books. And I had a couple of cartoons published in *Amazing Heroes* way back, sometime in the '80s.

ENW: I didn't know that!

Jim: I forgot about that myself. [laughter] Tom Heintjes, a buddy of mine, had gone to work for Fantagraphics and became editor of *The Comics Journal*. One day he just said, "You ought to submit a couple of cartoons to *Amazing Heroes*." I did and they were accepted. I remember one of them was an editorial about how Marvel had treated Kirby by not wanting to return his artwork, and making him sign that long form. I knew Jack, and I certainly was going to do something about that, and I did what little one man who's not in the business could do, which is complain. [laughter] I always told my customers about it.

Years before I got into comics, I'd tell people what I believed about the Lee and Kirby creation process, and that Jack was, at the very least, the co-creator, which sometimes Stan would say that, and often he didn't. And when he gave a deposition in the Kirby Family v. Disney lawsuit, Stan claimed he created everything, which was not true.



ENW: No. [laughter]

Jim: Anyway, I became, not a frequent contributor, but I contributed some to the *Kirby Collector*, and I actually got to know John.

Working With Roy

ENW: When did you first encounter Roy Thomas?

Jim: I believe I met Roy in '93. Somebody was putting on a small show in Charlotte and knew what a Roy Thomas fan I was, and thought it'd be cool to sit us next to each other, which really was great. We had a great time. Immediately started talking—two big talkers at the same time. [laughter] Nobody else got a word in. I got to ask him some questions, informally, of stuff I was interested in, and he asked a little about me, and that's how Roy and I got to be friends, I mean literally from that moment on! And then, of course, later Roy started doing *Alter Ego* on the flip-side of *Comic Book Artist*, and then *A/E* became a magazine on its own again after many years of lying dormant. I didn't contribute to the earliest issues, because there was something about Roy that I didn't realize. I was talking to Bill Schelly at the San Diego convention about him, and he said, "You've got to understand something with Roy: unless Roy knows that you know a lot about something, the best way, if you want to do something for Roy, is to approach Roy." I'd been waiting for Roy to approach me, but I guess he was so busy, because he was still doing comic books, running the farm, running the magazine—you know, having a real life. [laughter]

I'm sure I wasn't on his radar when it came to the early issues, so I took Bill's advice and called Roy, who said, "What do you have in mind?" I said, "There are two guys that really need to be interviewed. One is Vince Fago, because he was the main [Timely] editor when Stan Lee was in

Above: A recent HeroesCon (Charlotte, North Carolina) encounter between Roy Thomas and Jim. Photo by Heidi Amash.

Below: 2011's *Alter Ego: Centennial* (a.k.a. *Alter Ego* #100) featured the first extensive interview with Jim about his work documenting comics history.



The *Fever* Dreams of George Khoury

George Khoury

Author, *Kimota!*:

The Miracleman Companion, *True Brit*, *Image Comics: The Road to Independence*, *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore*, *Comic Book Fever*

Born: 1971

Residence:

Princeton, New Jersey

Vocation: Freelance
Writer/Author/Editor

Favorite Creator:
Alan Moore

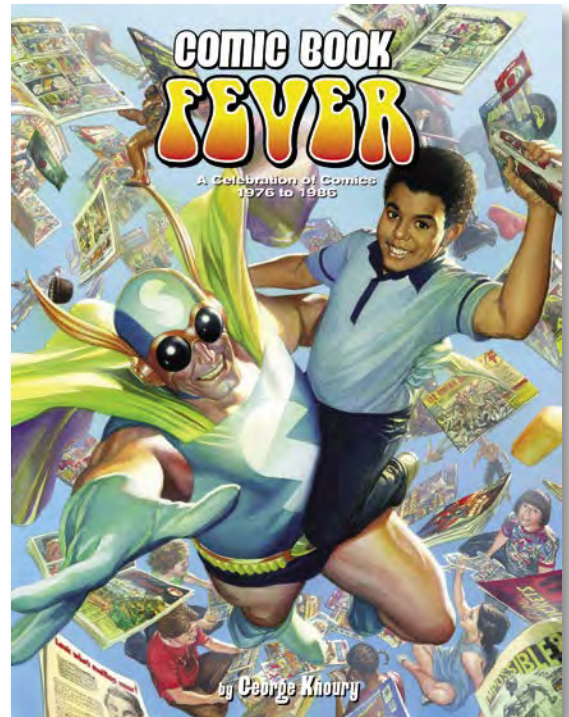
Seminal Comic Book:
Star Wars #68

Author George Khoury goes to great lengths to help TwoMorrows reach new audiences—even traveling alongside CBA editor Jon B. Cooke to Northampton, England in 2002 to visit Alan Moore.

If there's a Cousin Itt listed in the *Official Handbook of the TwoMorrows Universe*, that would be moi.

Like Itt, I've been sporadic in my guest appearances over the last three decades and I only speak when spoken to because I tend to drag a conversation on much too long and no one wants that. Outside of a few members of the TwoMorrows family, no one seems to understand my high-pitched gibberish or why I do the things that I do. It hasn't been easy being this misunderstood, but please know that my aim is true and that every word I put down for TwoMorrows Publishing was done purely for the love of comic books. Because I wear my heart on my sleeve and can't imagine living in a world without my favorite medium.

My road to TwoMorrows began in 1995, when I was a Marvel intern "Zombie," during my senior year of college. I had arrived at the "House of Ideas" after having spent two years working in a small financial firm where I had slowly realized that management didn't see any potential in making me a full-timer, despite bestowing various empty promises. Looking for something fulfilling for myself and my future, I applied for an unpaid editorial internship at Marvel Comics with the high hopes of finding a learning experience and mentorship



there, but got neither from my four-month investment. Feeling disenfranchised, I went back to my dead-end job at the firm, continued searching for solid employment, and even made the costly mistake of taking Master's of Business Administration classes in the hopes of making me a more attractive job applicant to potential employers. (Spoiler: it didn't.) When life kicked back, I suddenly felt that I needed an outlet to bring some joy into my life when I needed it most: through writing.

All throughout the early and mid-1990s, I had a subscription to the *Comics Buyer's Guide* and it was there where I first saw something about John Morrow and *The Jack Kirby Collector*. The death of Kirby had affected everyone. I still remember where I was where I first saw this somber news on the front page of *USA Today*: paying for lunch at the Saint Peter's College cafeteria. To later read about how such a somber moment inspired someone to celebrate the life of their favorite comic book creator, with a passionate fanzine authorized by the Kirby estate, was right in my wheelhouse.



The Art of Making Draw! Magazine

Mike Manley
Editor, *Draw!*

Born: 1961

Residence:
Upper Darby,
Pennsylvania

Vocation: Comics,
animation, and
newspaper strip artist

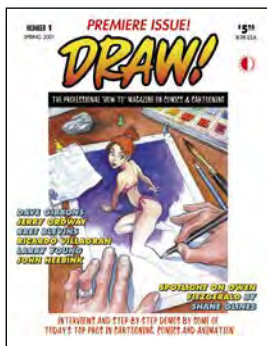
Favorite Creator:
Jack Kirby

Seminal Comic Book:
The Kirby Jimmy Olsens

Furthering TwoMorrows' trend of having its fan publications produced by professionals, a new line of "how-to" publications starts taking shape with the introduction of *Draw!* magazine, edited by top comics artist Mike Manley.



Inset right: Mike Manley, set up in Artist's Alley, in 2005, to promote his own Action Planet self-publishing imprint, as well as his various *Draw!*-related publications.



Draw!
First Issue: 3/1/2001

A Sketchy Start

Jon B. Cooke: *What's your middle name, Mike?*

Mike Manley: Cole, like Nat King Cole.

JBC: *Where are you from?*

Mike: I'm from Detroit, Michigan; grew up and lived there until I was 13. Then I moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan. I lived there until I moved to Philly in the summer of 1984. I've been out east since then.

JBC: *Did you have creative people in your family?*

Mike: Yes. Actually, my grandfather was what you would now call a "display letterer." He was a commercial artist. Back in the day before computers did everything, he used to do the hand lettering, like in the supermarket... big signs. He worked all over and had several accounts: car dealerships, supermarkets. My mom was artistic. She used to draw and paint and my dad is a fantastic photographer. There are definitely artistic inclinations in my family.

JBC: *Is your father professional or amateur?*

Mike: Amateur. I think he wanted to be a photojournalist at one time, and he still takes a lot of great photos. He has Instagram and Facebook accounts, and he's won a lot of awards.

JBC: *What's your father's name?*

Mike: Pierre. Mom's first name is Nancy.

JBC: *She was being creative when painting?*

Mike: Yeah. I must have been early teens, when I remember she was taking art classes at a local community college for a while. Looking back, there were always a lot of reproductions of art on the wall at home. There was always art around. They'd take us to the art museums around Detroit.

JBC: *You have siblings?*

Mike: Yeah, two brothers. My middle brother is Dave and my youngest brother is Marc.

JBC: *Are they creative?*

Mike: Yes, Dave is a musician and my brother Marc has dabbled in everything from music to photography. My family is very creative.

JBC: *What was the subject of your father's photography? What made him outstanding?*

Mike: He did a lot of landscapes and human interest. He has boxes of photos of us as kids—whatever struck his interest, but he's taken tons and tons of great landscape photos. One award he won was for a dog looking in a window or a door, waiting for his master to return. I remember that as a kid.

JBC: *The subject of your mom's paintings?*

Mike: I remember her doing pen-&-inks and I remember still-lives.

JBC: *What kind of upbringing did you have? Suburban? How would you characterize it?*

Mike: Middle/working class.

JBC: *What did your dad do?*

Mike: Initially, he worked for the board of education and then for the post office. Originally, he was a mailman and eventually inside as a clerk.

JBC: *Your mom was a housewife?*

Mike: Yeah, she was a housewife and a good mom; she didn't have a job outside the house until I was in my mid-teens—pretty much like a lot of people who grew up in my generation.

JBC: *That's when the latchkey generation began.*





This page: Above is young Mike (circa 1971, in Detroit) honing his artistic skills, and meeting idol Jack Kirby at the 1983 San Diego Comic-Con. Below is *The Phantom* by Mike, a current assignment.



Mike: Yeah, in the '70s and '80s.

JBC: Did you have newspapers in the house?

Mike: Yes, the *Detroit Free Press* and, later on, the *Ann Arbor News*.

JBC: The accompanying comic strips... did they impress you at all?

Mike: Thinking back, yes. Probably more as a kid—*Peanuts*, *Wizard of Id*, and *B.C.*—those are what I remember. I remember looking at Steve Canyon, when Caniff was still doing it. I remember thinking the way he would draw mouths was a little weird, an odd style to me as a kid. *Flash Gordon* and *Steve Roper and Mike Nomad*—I remember those as a kid, but I got more into reading the strips probably from Scholastic. They'd have those reprint books in school. You could get these Charlie Brown reprint books. I think I saw that stuff more through there and I was probably into comics and stuff because my dad was into comics. He would tell us about the comics he read as a kid. He read *The Spirit*. I didn't know any of that stuff at the time. He liked *Popeye* and *The Phantom*, which is ironic because that's what I do now! He's more excited about me doing *The Phantom* than maybe anything else.

JBC: [Chuckles] What's the first comic you remember?

Mike: There are probably others I read before this, but there's one I read that fascinated me. It

was a *Superman*, and on the cover there's some guy made out of crystal laying in some kind of sarcophagus. I was trying to find it and eventually I found a copy online. That's the first comic; I loved *Superman* as a kid. It was probably my favorite comic book, although I loved *Batman*, but I liked *Superman* the most.

JBC: Were you exposed to the TV show at all?

Mike: Yeah, I watched *The Adventures of Superman*, and like other kids growing up in the '60s, I watched the *Batman* TV show. For us, a big thrill was we could go over on Sunday night to my grandparents' house and watch their color TV. I remember the transformative experience of being able to see your favorite TV show in color! It was so shocking and dramatic! My favorite show was *Lost in Space* and I remember seeing an episode in color and seeing the robot's claws were red. "His claws are red? That's so awesome!" I was so used to seeing everything in black-&-white, so seeing in a whole other dimension was pretty cool. Like everybody, I loved *Space Ghost* and *The Impossibles*, and *Frankenstein Jr.* was one of my favorites. It's pretty horrible to watch now and *Space Ghost* is pretty horrible, too! There were some nice drawings and some terrible drawings. The stories don't



DRAW!

including delivering work to the clients. I worked for him for a couple of years and I learned a lot from him.

When I went to Washtenaw Community College, I wanted to learn how to draw the figure better. I originally wanted to go to art school, but my parents didn't plan for it. Nobody said, "Okay, Mike. This is where you want to go; this is how you go about applying for it. This is how you apply for financial aid." There was nothing there for that. It was not something that was planned. Dad said, "Oh, you can go to Washtenaw," and I was there, but they weren't teaching me anything—the paste-up, all that commercial process—I had already been doing that stuff. Why am I going to pay somebody to teach me something I already know how to do? Wanting to know how to draw the figure and paint better—they weren't teaching all that. There was a live model, but the teacher wasn't coming around and saying, "This is how you put the bones in, proportion, this or that."

I got frustrated and quit and followed the path of self-learning all the way until I went back to college at 45 to finish my undergrad degree and, in 2013, I started and finished my master's degree. I came back to it because I was teaching. I started teaching in the early 2000s, not too long after I started *Draw!*, which led me to teaching because a friend of mine, Charlie Parker, who does a lines and colors blog, was teaching at DCAD, Delaware College of Art and Design, and they were looking for somebody to teach storyboard class, which is what I was doing at the time. I went down and talked to the Dean and the head of the animation department. I showed them my stuff and the magazine. They hired me and I started teaching. After I started I thought, "I really like teaching," so I decided at that time because people said, "If you want to teach, you need to finish your degree."

There are two ways of teaching in America: you can be famous and they don't care if you don't have a degree because you attract people to the school, or you have so much experience—I had more experience than anyone at the school as far as animation and comics. But, if you want to go on now, part of the issue, what's destroying everything is they make everybody get these degrees, but they don't pay that much. So, you pay \$80,000 minimum to get your Master's, but nobody's paying you \$80,000 to teach! You're lucky if you get \$30,000–40,000. Nobody gets tenure anymore.

I started the magazine and I teach because I remember how I was as a teenager—really desperately wanting to do this job. Really desperate out in



Above: Friends for life: Mike with Jamar Nicholas and Bret Blevins.

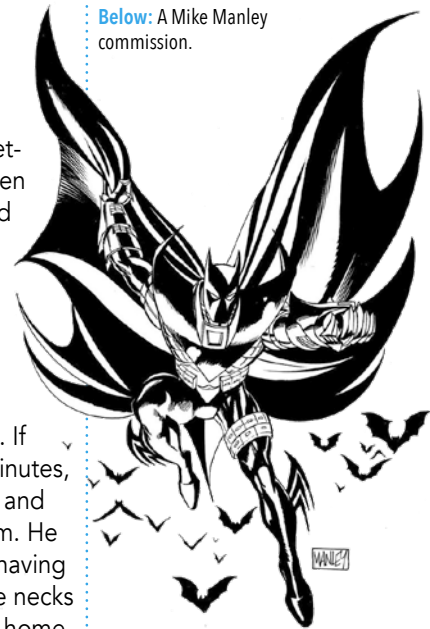
Below: A Mike Manley commission.

the wilderness. You're haunting any bookstore, any library, hunting down any process. How do you do this? How do you draw a figure? So the magazine comes out of me, as a teenager, trying to figure out, "How do I achieve my dream, living in Ann Arbor, Michigan?"

I'm going to a couple of shows a year, meeting people—some of whose art you don't even like! I tell my students, "You go to a show and maybe this guy isn't your favorite artist. *I prefer Neal Adams or John Buscema and I'm meeting Keith Pollard!*" (Nothing against Pollard—I'm just using him as an example—he wasn't my favorite like Frazetta or Moebius, or something like that.) But this guy's successful; he's working in the business. If you're lucky enough that he gives you five minutes, you write down what he says. You be serious and be thankful." I remember an incident with him. He was looking at my stuff and he said, "You're having trouble with your heads. You're not doing the necks right." I wrote it down and when I went back home, I wrote on a piece of paper, "Not doing necks right." I stuck that above my drawing board. That's the thing... I'm going to lick that. I'm going to learn to draw my heads better.

JBC: Do you look at it where that boy who wanted instruction led you to being an instructor and editor of a how-to magazine? Is it a straight line?

Mike: I think so. The desire to learn as a student, even though I'm a teacher—I still have that desire to improve myself as a student. When I meet a young student coming in, I can clearly put myself back in their place—where they were. Having the desire, saying, "I want to do that." Everyone has a dream and then there becomes the reality of



Below: A fourth *Best of Draw* volume was planned, but was shelved due to low initial pre-orders.



Monster Mash and More Pop Culture Fun

Mark Voger

Author, *Hero Gets Girl!*, *The Dark Age*, *Monster Mash*, *Groovy*, *Holly Jolly*

Born: 1958

Residence: Ocean, New Jersey

Vocation: Newspaper Features Writer, Page Designer

Favorite Creator: Ross Andru

Seminal Comic Book: *Metal Men* #22

There's more to life than comics, and *TwoMorrrows* looks to capitalize on fans' broader pop culture influences, with Mark Voger leading the way.

Inset right: Kurt and Dorothy Schaffenberger, in images which only saw print in black-&-white during *TwoMorrrows*' pre-color days.



Hero Gets Girl!: The Life and Art of Kurt Schaffenberger

Published: 11/1/2003

My generation of comic book fans got in through a weird side door—the 1966 TV Batman played by Adam West, and all of the brain-twisting hoopla that went with it, the toys and trading cards and Pop Tart premiums. Everything was Batman in '66. You had to be there.

This got us reading comic books, which were sometimes as crazy as the TV show. I preferred the 1950s Batman stories reprinted in 80-Page Giants and paperback digests, over the contemporary *Batman* comic books published at the time. The older stuff seemed more like the TV show. The artwork was more cartoony, in a good way. A Dick Sprang-drawn Joker still holds a strange fascination.

Of course, we little punks wound up falling in love with the comic book as a medium unto itself.

In '66, I was an eight-year-old South Jersey boy scraping together pennies, nickels, and dimes to buy comic books at two establishments, chiefly: the Woodcrest Drug Store and the Berlin Farmer's Market. I read everything from Harvey's kiddie stuff (*Little Dot*, *Hot Stuff*, *Sad Sack*) to DC (*Flash*, *Justice League of America*, and my favorite, *Metal Men*) to Marvel (which one friend complained was "hard to read" because they squeezed in so many words).

This era, from '66 to '69, remains my personal Golden Age. To this day, when I see "go-go checks" on the cover of an old DC book, I figuratively salivate.

I segued into the Warren horror books (*Creepy*, *Eerie*, *Vampirella*) and, during my college daze, the sex- and drug-obsessed underground comics, particularly the work of Robert Crumb. I'd pretty much stopped buying contemporary comics, but I kept an eye on them.

Then something happened in 1989, when I was a married career guy of 31. Tim Burton's movie, *Batman*, was coming out in June, with Jack Nicholson playing the Joker in a then-novel casting coup. (For better or worse, here was the film that ignited the renaissance of super-hero movies.)



This triggered something in me—a sort-of return to my childhood, when we used to safety-pin towels around our necks as capes, and "played Batman" in adjoining backyards, swinging off of tree branches as we re-enacted fight scenes from the Adam West TV show.

Well, I was no longer swinging from branches, but I began buying up vintage comic books from my youth. Reading those old books was like stepping into a time machine.

The difference this time was that I began identifying, studying and contrasting the styles of the various artists. When I was a child, I loved the

The Origin of Euryman and the Birth of *Back Issue*

Michael Eury

Editor, *Back Issue*

Born: 1957

Residence:
New Bern,
North Carolina

Vocation: Freelance
Writer/Author/Editor

Favorite Creator:
Dick Giordano

Seminal Comic Book:
Detective Comics #350

As *Comic Book Artist* moves to a different publisher, TwoMorrows needs a new title to replace its top-seller on the schedule. Based on having previously worked with pro writer and editor Michael Eury, John Morrow knows he is a perfect fit to edit the new periodical, *Back Issue*.



Who He Is and How He Came to Be

I was born on September 28, 1957, in Concord, North Carolina. My parents were periodicals readers: Dad, a baseball fan, loved *The Sporting News*, and Mom adored movie and celebrity magazines. The newsstand was a weekly stop for our family, where I was drawn to the racks of colorful “funnybooks.”

I initially read comics based upon familiar TV characters, but once the Adam West-starring *Batman* premiered, on ABC, on January 12, 1966, when I was barely eight, I was captivated. With *Detective* and *Batman* as my gateways, my next discovery was *The Brave and the Bold*, the Batman team-up book which would ultimately become my all-time favorite comic title and my introduction to many other DC characters. Fast-forward to September 1967 and the premiere of the *Spider-Man* and *Fantastic Four* animated cartoons, on ABC, on Saturday mornings. Those series’ respective comics became my welcome mat for reading Marvels.

By the time 1970 rolled around, I was entering my teens and had “aged out” from the fold. That didn’t last long. I was 13 and my baby brother, John, was five when *Batman* #232 [June 1971] was brought into our home. Whether Dad selected it for us or little John pointed to its bright green cover or I on a whim wanted another Batman fix, I don’t recall. This was the now-iconic Denny O’Neil/Neal Adams issue that introduced Ra’s al Ghul. Its blend of intrigue and excitement and its photo-realistic Neal Adams artwork captivated me. I read the cover off of it—and after a brief nap, my passion for comics was reawakened!

Soon I was reading many DCs and Marvels—and soon, some Charltons and Atlas/Seaboard. I also bought the various comics reprint books that came

out in the 1970s, studying their text pages and learning about comics history.

In the tenth grade, I began cartooning, writing and drawing my own gags, and comic books about

my teachers, plus lampoons of DC and Marvel characters. I’m sure I wasn’t the only kid to come up with a “Green Flashlight,” but since streaking—running nude in public—was a fad back then, I might’ve been the only one drawing The Flash as “The Flesh” (luckily, his super-speed and my limited ability kept his naughty parts a blur). But it was my homemade super-hero comics that cultivated a degree of fandom at Concord High School, since they starred my classmates as caped crusaders. One kid with a long neck who was nicknamed “Weasel” became Weaselman, with a stretching neck inspired

by Elongated Man swipes. Another kid notorious for hurling spitwads became Wonder Wad.

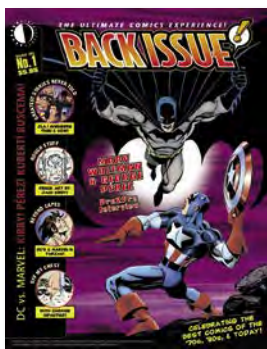
During my junior year, I started writing fan letters to Murray Boltinoff, the editor of *Brave and Bold*. In January of 1974, I bought the brand-new *B&B* #112, a 100-page issue teaming Batman and Mister Miracle. In its “B&B Mailbag” was printed my name, with my appeals for future Batman co-stars. My first DC “credit”!

I really wanted to work in the comics business, but since its hub, New York City, might just as soon have been another planet for a kid from small-town North Carolina, I chose my second love—music (I was a trombonist)—as a career path. In the late 1970s, I obtained a bachelor of music education degree at East Carolina University.

After college, I briefly taught middle and high school band—and hated it. I left my job and wafled for much of the 1980s, along the way working as a record store clerk, cable TV subscription salesman, producer/talent/cameraman at a public



Right: Mickey Eury, age 8, was destined for greatness, based on that steely look of determination on his face.



Back Issue

First Issue: 11/19/2003

BACKISSUE

access station, and singing telegram messenger! At this time, I started to establish a fandom profile by joining APAs like Interlac and the newly minted CarolinAPA. Fantagraphics launched *Amazing Heroes* magazine around this time. In its earlier years, I had two "Silly Covers" cartoons published, one an issue of *Superman* with Red Kryptonite turning the Man of Steel into Slim Whitman, the other an issue of Marvel's *Dennis the Menace* with Galactus summoning Mr. Wilson as his new herald. I was also writing a lot of letters to comics, mostly DCs, with many making it into print.

In July of 1984, at Monkey Business Singing Telegrams, I met my wife-to-be, Rose. Less than two years later we became a couple, and in April 1986 we headed from Charlotte, North Carolina, toward the mecca of comics production, New York City. We had only \$1,700 to our name, a crappy Chevy Chevette that couldn't make it up a steep hill (heck, it could barely clear a speed-bump), and a U-Haul loaded with long boxes of comics. We couldn't afford to live in New York, though, and ended up within striking distance, in the Wilmington, Delaware, area, near some college friends of mine who were in grad school at the University of Delaware. I worked part-time in a video store, did a little performing with a comedy troupe, and started to do some freelance writing for local newspapers, while continuing to produce 'zines for APAs. I also produced a newsletter for a local comic shop.

One of my Interlac APA pals—Mark Waid—had recently become the editor of *Amazing Heroes*, and, in 1986, I submitted to him a review of Joel Eisner's 20th anniversary book about the *Batman* TV show. Mark published my article and gave me more assignments. With *Amazing Heroes*, I wrote numerous preview articles, hero histories, and creator interviews, and began to make industry contacts.

Joining the Ranks of the Pros

Another score was an over-the-transom piece I did for Marvel's Jim Salicrup for *Marvel Age* magazine, a spoof of coming attractions (such as an X-Men/Michael Jackson crossover—hey, it was the



Above: Michael and future wife Rose, up to monkey business in 1985. Coincidentally, that's an un-inflated Superman mylar balloon on the background wall!

'80s!) that appeared in #28 [July 1985]. Jim liked my sense of humor and offered me the chance to write scripts for "Peter Porker, the Spectacular Spider-Ham," which was, by that post-Star Comics period, the back-up in *Marvel Tales*. I wrote a handful of Spider-Ham stories, including ones introducing the Punfisher (Charlie the Tuna meets the Punisher) and a Spider-Ham/Forbush Man team-up. Big fun! (I'd love to write Spider-Ham again...) *Marvel Tales* #205 [Nov. 1987] contained my first Spider-Ham story, a professional milestone. Jim Salicrup was a great encourager, and I'll always be grateful to him for affording me my first pro credits.

Since I was mostly paid for my *Amazing Heroes* work with Fantagraphics products (where I discovered the wizardry of E. C. Segar's *Popeye*), the Marvel work, for which I signed work-for-hire vouchers, scored me my first freelance paychecks. Rose worked as a medical receptionist and I still kept my freelance video-store job, but money was tight and our big meal out each week was at a local pizza buffet. I began to venture out to other publishers, writing a few *Underdog* and *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures* scripts for Spotlight Comics... but they went under and my work went unpublished (and uncompensated). I also remember pitching

Below: A proud papa to the 2019 Eisner Award for "Best Comics-Related Periodical/Journalism."





At this time, I was also assigned a revamp/revival of *Who's Who*, which, alongside designer Keith "Kez" Wilson, we re-imagined in the looseleaf format. As *Who's Who* editor I got to work with, albeit briefly, just about every artist in the biz in the late '80s and early '90s. Amazing experience. When my officemate—coincidentally, Mark Waid!—left DC, I inherited from him *Legion of Super-Heroes* (which had recently been rebooted into its controversial "Five Years Later" phase), plus mop-up on the final issues of *Secret Origins*.

In early 1990, my DC career took a detour, as Dick Giordano, the editorial director, offered me the newly created position of "assistant to the editorial director." How could I say no? I got to work closely with Dick and his aide, Pat Bastienne, traveling extensively, meeting creators, promoting the company at conventions, writing the "Inside DC" house column, and learning about the executive side of the company. Other than *Who's Who*, my titles were reassigned. I learned so much from Dick—particularly, how to nurture and encourage talent and creative visions—and found in him a fantastic mentor and friend.

My biggest "Gosh, wow!" fanboy moment in this position came as I (along with Rose) accompanied Dick and Pat to Los Angeles, in December 1990, to host DC's Holiday Party for West Coast freelancers (I had never seen pink and blue spray-painted Christmas trees until that visit... and haven't seen them since, now that I think of it). The party was a blast, but the activity I'll never forget was being taken on a V.I.P. tour of the Warner Bros. television and film studios. We first visited the office of Howard Chaykin, who was working on *The Flash* weekly series at the time, then were led onto other sets, where I strolled along some familiar back-drops. We visited the set of the family drama *Life Goes On* (yes, I opened their refrigerator to see what was there), and when asked if there was any set I'd like to visit, I naturally said, "*The Flash*!" There we got to observe the taping of a special-effects scene where John Wesley Shipp, in costume, very patiently hoisted Amanda Pays over his shoulder and ran in place, take after take, for what became a super-speed scene. That night we had dinner with Gil Kane (yes, he did call me, "My boy!"), Howard Chaykin, and Dick and Pat.

Back in New York, on the job I had hoped that my editorial colleagues would perceive me as someone from the inside of the department who was their voice "upstairs," but, truth be told, my promotion disrupted my relationship with some of the editors. I was too immature, too unsure of myself, and too, well, nice to toughen up to grow into the potential Dick had seen in me, and, over time, I grew unhappy and asked to return to the editors' pool. By 1991, I was an editor again, returning to *Legion*, developing *Legion* spin-offs, and developing other projects like *Ambush Bug Nothing Special* and *Eclipto: The Darkness Within*.

Also, at this time, an undiagnosed, untreated progressive hearing loss was adversely affecting my ability to understand and perceive verbal information. As a result, I was speaking and/or acting inappropriately at times, mishearing or not hearing what was being said to or around me. Between this burden and my



A Masterful Time with *Modern Masters*

Starting out With Comics & Sci-Fi

Jon B. Cooke: *Where are you from, Eric?*

Eric Nolen-Weathington: I grew up in a small town called Winterville, population about 1200.

JBC: *Did you have creative people in your family?*

Eric: Sort of. My family is of mostly Irish/English descent, and on my mother's side, they were tall-tale tellers; great storytellers. My mom played guitar and piano. Some of my immediate family probably had some talent, some writing ability, but never did anything creative professionally. There were a lot of teachers in my family. My mother was a teacher and became a principal in an elementary school. Two of my aunts were teachers, my grandmother was a teacher, and a bunch of my cousins became teachers. I grew up in more of an educational environment than a creative one.

JBC: *What did your dad do?*

Eric: He also started out as a teacher. He taught and coached at the middle-school level. He gave that up pretty fast and joined the family business, which was the only grocery store in our small town. My great-grandfather had started it back in the early 1900s. My grandfather took it over, and then my dad, aunts, and uncle took over when he retired. Most of them lived on the same street, so I saw lots

of family every day.

JBC: *What was the name of the store?*

Eric: It was Weathington's Clover Farm. Clover Farm was a small chain of independent grocers, on a similar level to Piggly Wiggly or IGA. I've come across the Clover Farm brand here and there up and down the East Coast, usually in small towns.

JBC: *Was the town you lived in a backwater?*

Eric: No, it was about ten miles from Greenville, which was the county seat, and had East Carolina University, so it was a college town. It wasn't completely podunk.

JBC: *Did you have brothers and sisters?*

Eric: I have a younger brother. I was the oldest child in my family and the oldest grandchild on my mother's side. That was a weird place, because on my father's side, I mostly had cousins much older than me. My father was a surprise baby and far younger than his brothers and sisters. There was a big gap; my older cousins had all gone off to college before I was old enough to interact with them on a regular basis. There were two cousins in town who were a couple of years younger than me who I hung out with. On my mother's side, I also had a gap. My cousins were either much older or much younger. I didn't really have anyone my age to play with.

JBC: *What kind of kid were you? Bookish?*

Eric: I started reading when I was four. Being in that gap, I spent a lot of time by myself. The first thing I remember reading, or told I was reading, was *Highlights* magazine. Then, in kindergarten, I remember getting up in class to read *Rudolf, the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. In the first grade, I read all *The Hardy Boys* books.

JBC: *You read those in the first grade?*

Eric: Yeah. The library had about 20 of those *Hardy Boys* books, so I read all that they had. I started going to the third-grade reading class when I was in the first grade, once a week. I read comics as a kid too, of course. The first I remember was a *Gold Key Tweety and Sylvester* comic. And then I had a few DC comics that came trickling in over the years—*Justice League* and *World's Finest* 100-pagers, stuff like that. It's hard to remember which issues I had

Eric Nolen-Weathington
Series Editor,
Modern Masters

Born: 1970

Residence:
Mebane,
North Carolina

Vocation: TwoMorrows
office manager

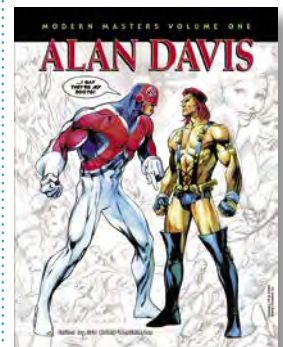
Favorite Creator:
Alex Toth

Seminal Comic Book:
DC Special #29
(*The Untold Origin of the Justice Society*)

Having proven to be a diligent worker who keeps TwoMorrows' office running smoothly, Eric gets the opportunity to spearhead a new line of books on current artists—and he comes through with flying colors.



Below: Eric says, "I'm pretty sure this was Christmas of 1979. I'm in my Superman pajamas, holding a knock-off *Star Wars* blaster (*Space Wars*, maybe?), and you can see an unopened Batman utility belt sitting in the background, which I would wear with my Batman Halloween costume from that point on (and not just at Halloween)."



Modern Masters
Volume 1: 4/23/2003

away from anything resembling mainstream comics. I wasn't quite ready for that. I got into some of those guys later.

JBC: Did you contribute to any fanzines?

Eric: No, I wasn't thinking that way. At that point, I had met very few creators. There were some local artists working in the area. We had Richard Case come in for a signing when the first *Doom Patrol* collection came out [1992]; he was the artist. I met him and got a page of *Doom Patrol* original art from him. When the first *Sin City* book came out [1992], Frank Miller came to the store and did a signing. I went to the airport with the owner of the shop to pick him up and we all went to lunch. Then he did a signing at the store that day. So, I met Frank Miller—I had comic book experiences, but I was not a small-talk kind of guy; I didn't like doing all the talking, so that kind of thing wasn't something I thought about until I started working for TwoMorrows.

JBC: Was it exciting to meet Frank Miller?

Eric: Yeah, it was cool. He was on a whirlwind tour. The thing I remember was that he was pretty nice, but I was low man on the totem pole. We had two shops, one in Chapel Hill and one in Raleigh, where I worked, and the owner and my manager were there. I guess I was somewhere between "just" an employee and "assistant manager." I did assistant manager type of things, like employee schedules and ordering. I was making \$10 an hour, so I deferred to the guys who paid the bills to do the talking. I didn't talk to Frank; I was more just a fly on the wall. It was cool though. I'd never done a lot of conventions; I hadn't gone to any up to that point. HeroesCon was driveable, but still fairly far away. The idea of having to try to get off work, drive down there, and spend the money—that was beyond my budget at that point.

JBC: Did the comic book shop work appeal to you? Was anything about the comics culture drawing you in? What was the name of the shop?

Eric: Foundation's Edge. It's still there, named after the Isaac Asimov novel. My manager bought the store while I was there, and there was a point when he was looking for a partner, and he found someone. If I'd had the money, I would have tried to go in with him to buy the shop. I was into it enough to contemplate that because I hadn't found anything else demanding my attention. So, yes, I was into it, but I was still trying to figure out what I wanted to do long-term.

JBC: When did you meet your wife?

Eric: At the comic book shop. Donna's boyfriend was a customer, so she started coming in with him



and then she started buying her own comics. After she broke up with him, we started hanging out, and that was that.

JBC: When did you get married?

Eric: Nineteen ninety-five. I quit the comic shop about three months after we got married and took a "real" job. [laughter] Marriage spurred me on to find something that paid more.

JBC: How many kids do you have? How old?

Eric: We've got two. My son just graduated college, he's 23 and my daughter is 13.

Finding TwoMorrows

JBC: You were obviously familiar with TwoMorrows?

Eric: Yes. I joined the company in 2000. I never bought *The Jack Kirby Collector*, but *Comic Book Artist* started coming out and that was something I was interested in. I started buying that. Then *Alter Ego* split off and I started buying that, too. I was interested in the Golden Age and Silver Age guys and to some extent, Bronze Age guys.

Above: Alan gifted Eric with the cover he drew for the book, along with this cover layout.

Below: Cliff Chiang drew this on the inside front cover of Eric's personal copy of *Modern Masters* Vol. 29, along with a very kind note, an homage to one of his childhood favorite comics.



Creating Chronicles with Keith Dallas

I don't think I ever told John Morrow that my first experience with TwoMorrows Publishing wasn't an issue of *The Kirby Collector* or *Comic Book Artist* or Roy Thomas' *Alter Ego* or even Michael Eury's *Back Issue*. It was *The Legion Companion*. In 2003 my lifelong appreciation of comic books had led me to writing news articles and reviews for Silver-BulletComicBooks.com (later renamed Comics-Bulletin.com). As such, I was always on the lookout for new comic-related books to spotlight, and Glen Cadigan's comprehensive history of my second-favorite DC property perfectly fit the bill. Over the long term, my purchase of *The Legion Companion* altered the course of my writing career. In the short term, though, it was a book I couldn't put down. As if the interviews with such fabled Legion creators as Paul Levitz, Keith Giffen, Dave Cockrum, Mike Grell, and Jim Shooter weren't engrossing in and of themselves, the volume was also a visual feast: page after page after page of Legion-related artwork, including dozens of never-before-seen private commissions. Long before I finished reading *The*

Legion Companion, I came to a near-fanatical determination: I was going to produce a similar volume about my favorite DC property: the super-hero I had adored since childhood, The Flash. For the record, I have no "favorite Flash." It doesn't matter to me if the hero running across the page is Jay or Barry or Wally or Bart or even that John Fox guy. I just love the concept of "the Fastest Man Alive." (Truth be told, the reason why I love the concept so much is because running was the one athletic activity I excelled at when I was an awkwardly skinny kid. The Flash reassured me that "strength" wasn't just measured in the size of one's muscles.) So if there was a book that I was meant to write, *The Flash Companion* was it, but my problem in 2003 was that I didn't really have the résumé to convince John Morrow (or any publisher for that matter) to trust me with a book-length project. At the same time, I knew I would be forever kicking myself if I didn't at least throw my hat into the ring. So I spent the next three years continuing to write, refining my *Flash Companion* pitch, and crossing my fingers that John Morrow didn't tap someone else to write the book in the meantime.

Finally, in 2006, I felt it was time. I hadn't seen any TwoMorrows press release promoting the impending publication of a *Flash Companion*, but I knew I couldn't risk waiting any longer. By way of introduction, I emailed John a detailed *Flash Companion* outline. As expected, John wanted to know how many other books I had authored. I admitted that this would be my first, but to prove to him my ability to handle the project, I directed him to all the articles I had written and all the interviews I had conducted up to this point. If they weren't enough to convince John that I was his man, then it just wasn't meant to be. A week later, John responded. He was impressed enough with my work that he gave me the green light to get started. (Interestingly enough, I soon learned that Michael Eury already had designs on producing a *Flash Companion* for TwoMorrows but he was too busy handling other tasks at the time, so he graciously relinquished the project to me.)

Nothing quite beats the elation one gets when

Keith Dallas

Series editor, *The American Comic Book Chronicles*

Born: 1969

Residence: Sound Beach, New York

Vocation: College Professor

Favorite Creators: Keith Giffen, Carmine Infantino, John Byrne, and Alan Moore

Seminal Comic Book: *Watchmen* #1

Publisher John Morrow had long wanted to produce a complete overview of comics history. So, when Keith Dallas pitches a 1980s history book to him, it seems like the person to tackle such a herculean task had been found.



The American Comic Book Chronicles

First Volume: 11/1/2012

CBA (Sort of) Returns: Comic Book Creator

[We join John Morrow and Jon B. Cooke in mid-conversation, continuing from the Comic Book Artist interview on page 83.]

John Morrow: We built—largely through CBA—our own competition. People saw CBA and said, “We can do our own magazine.” How many mags cropped up between the time we started CBA and now that are not around any more? Wizard’s gone—it wasn’t direct competition—CBG, Comics Now, Comics Journal... well, the Journal’s essentially gone. People are a little bit jaded and more used to getting the info, and also getting used to seeing unpublished art at Heritage Auctions—you didn’t have that when CBA started. Comic Book Creator is every bit as good as CBA, and the color is a great addition, but people have easier access to this kind of stuff now, so it’s a little harder to sell.

Jon B. Cooke: I think there’s also an audience attrition. There’s also this strange dearth of interest, though we retain a certain type of fan who likes this history stuff, the material that stretches back. TwoMorrows now has a quarter-century of our own history. I think that kind of fan base is loyal but pretty small. There’s also a newer generation who expects everything for free—the “Napster effect” that hurt us all, ultimately. With TwoMorrows, our base is “we break even.” You’re the one who set up the model and you don’t seem to expect super-sales. You certainly welcome stellar returns, but slow and steady wins the race.

JM: It does, but at the same time, the elephant in the room is we are getting older and I have to put two daughters through school, so it would be nice to have the old sales numbers we used to have for CBA #1, and needing two and three printings to help make ends meet. That would be really nice. It’s been 25 years and the recession was a tough time for us—late 2007–09. You saw it when you came back, Jon. “Wow, these are the numbers now compared to 1998, 2000?” We have to set our expectations realistically.

The other thing is, when we made the shift to full-color, that set us up. It’s hard to go back. There’s probably a business model where we could take CBC and do it in black-&-white, with a lower cover price. Would that make you more money?

It might make you more money. It might make us more money, but it wouldn’t be a satisfying experience for us or the reader, so I don’t think we’re going back to that.

Jon: No! There’s also a new discipline.

We have to stick to a regular page-count, no deviation.

JM: If we were black-&-white printing now, we could make exceptions occasionally. Diamond wouldn’t care as long as the price was the same. They don’t care if you give them twice as many pages. They only care if you change the cover price or give them fewer pages than you solicited.

Jon: We can’t go to black-&-white. I don’t think the readers would stand for it.

JM: I don’t either. It’s such a better experience in color. Comics are a colorful medium... After coming off your great Kirby issue, CBC #1, you did the Joe Kubert issue, your tribute to Joe [CBC #2]. People really responded to the heartfelt nature of that. They saw it as your love letter to Joe. It may not have been the most commercial choice for a second issue...

Jon: [Laughter] Especially making it a giant trade paperback. That was weird!

JM: It was weird, but it needed to be done and we don’t mind doing weird stuff here. We don’t have some corporate overlord that says, “You can’t do that.” You come up with a crazy idea, and I’m like, “Can I make this work financially?”

So, the one thing that puzzles some readers with CBC is you’re not showing a bunch of super-heroes on the cover. Explain your thinking about that.

Jon: Well, I have an interest in featuring artists promoting their own creator-owned stuff, if they have it. Did you think I had some philosophical motive?

JM: Well, we talked about it. You didn’t want to be beholden to Marvel and DC because it is a different world now. You wanted people to feature their own work. We went into CBC knowing this wasn’t the most commercial work. I can’t think of a single thing over all these years that we went into for a commercial reason; that’s always been a factor, because you’ve gotta make ends meet, but can you think of a single project you’ve done where “We’ve

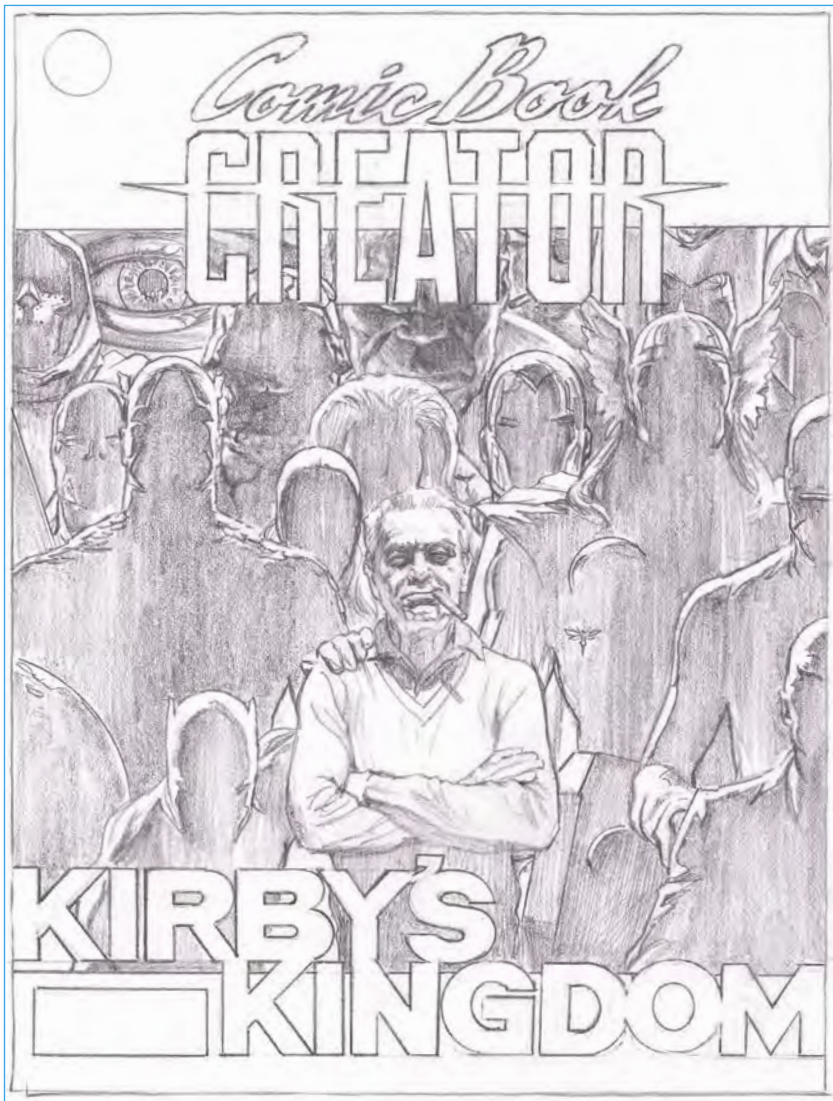


A measured return by Jon B. Cooke to TwoMorrows meant it was inevitable he’d do what he does best: a new ground-breaking magazine about comics.

Above: Renowned illustrator Drew Friedman produced this caricature of Jon B. Cooke for the CBC editor’s business card and promotion during the “Year of Weirdo” events as he toured in 2019 to support *The Book of Weirdo*, the cover of which Drew... ummm... drew!



Comic Book Creator
First Issue: 5/6/2013



Above: Alex Ross' pencil rough for the cover of *Comic Book Creator* #1, including a really cool—albeit unused—concept for the CBC logo.

Next page: Cooke and Morrow ham it up after Jon receives the Inkpot Award during his "Spotlight" panel at the 2019 Comic-Con International: San Diego. Photo by Kendall Whitehouse.

got to make a boatload of money!" was the reason we're doing it?

Jon: I knew that the Adam Hughes issue of CBA was going to do well, but it was the excitement of loving his art. He was an equal fanboy in his own way and wanted to be a part of it, and gave us such a delightful cover.

JM: Right. And we certainly didn't mind that the issue sold great!

Jon: No, but that wasn't the intent, as you say. It

was because he deserved it!

JM: Same thing with CBC.

Jon: I'm not the most commercial-minded fellow... I want to make a really good reader experience. I want the reader to have no doubt that we gave it our all, in whatever it is. If I'm entrusted by a columnist, if he gives me that material, I'm going to do the best I can do to make him look good. If there's one thing I'm very gratified about, my columnists have said, "Just do your typical job and I'm happy with that." It's an "attaboy" that I really want. Again, I never thought about things commercially. It's instinctual; I love it all. There aren't many people like me out there who love it all, but I do! I am as enthusiastic about Mary Fleener's work as I am Alex Ross'. That's just how I am.

JM: I am so glad we got *Swampmen* out, making it part of CBC. That's a clever little twist I came up with for Kirby Five-Oh! and *Alter Ego: Centennial*. When we want to do some special thing like that, we make it a regular issue of the magazine, but we also consider it a book, as well. We're getting two possible distribution avenues. That is a commercial consideration that we take on. We've got a built-in audience for it. The subscribers get it, so you've sold that many copies up front, so that is a commercial consideration, Jon. We could have done *Swampmen* as just a book, but it really fit the venue of CBC, so considering it the sixth issue, I thought it was a great fit.

Jon: I have always wanted to do a regular summer annual, and it's the closest we got, which is okay by me. We did have that fantastic Frank Cho cover. The unfinished *Swampmen* was a sore point for a period when I just bagged out delivering it in the '00s, but I was able to score some redemption by getting it done and it's a good issue. And you're right: it's not an issue, it's a book, and it's about to sell out.

There are ideas I have about '70s comics... when I saw the *American Comic Book Chronicles*, I had a burrowed frow... or a furrowed brow [chuckles]; this is a subject area I wanted to go into, and I will, in my own way. "Keep ye eyes peeled," as I say.





In 2018, a full-blown pop culture magazine was in the offing, and Michael Eury was ready to tackle it.

RetroFan: The Crazy, Cool Stuff We Grew Up With

In June of 2018, TwoMorrows released the first issue of a new quarterly magazine edited by yours truly, *RetroFan*. Its tagline, “The Crazy, Cool Stuff We Grew Up With,” defines its subject matter, but

to fine-tune that into a more specific demographic, our primary focus is pop culture of the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s.

RetroFan is sort of the *Back Issue* magazine of content other than Bronze Age comic books. But it’s far from an alternate flavor of *BI*. While ye ed’s voice and nostalgic sensibilities may provide *RetroFan*’s pulse, it’s the contributors and their vast and eclectic interests and areas of expertise that make each issue a groovy grab-bag of everything from a Jaclyn Smith interview to a *Jonny Quest* flashback to a history of Captain

alize, but it started a dialogue with John in which we brainstormed *Mythmakers*, a series of soft-cover books to be written and edited by me that would be the writer/editor/executive equivalent of Eric Nolen-Weathington’s *Modern Masters* artist spotlights. I lined up the first eight subjects: Len Wein, Roy Thomas, Paul Levitz, Mark Waid, Marv Wolfman, Karen Berger, Mike Richardson, and Kurt Busiek. Each consented and I was preparing my interview questions for Len.

Then came a snag when Len hesitated, as he was considering writing his autobiography. There was also my concern about market saturation from TwoMorrows, since Jon B. Cooke’s *Comic Book Creator* was launching. In May 2013, John Morrow and I agreed to pull the plug on the *Mythmakers* project.

There was an additional reason for *Mythmakers*’ cancellation: My mother was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, on Mar. 15, 2013, and her caregiving became a family responsibility for the next four years, until her passing on Mar. 15, 2017 (four years to the day from her diagnosis). Watching Mom wither away was difficult, but it was a blessing to be able to provide loving care for the woman who had given so much of herself to me.

During the last year of Mom’s life, I was involved with the research and production of my most recent TwoMorrows book, *Hero-A-Go-Go: Campy Comic Books, Crimefighters, and Culture of the Swinging Sixties*. I didn’t realize it at the time, but surrounding myself with warm memories from my comics-crazed childhood with *Hero-A-Go-Go* provided solace, taking me back to an era when my mother and father (Dad passed in 2004) were young, happy, and vital. *Hero-A-Go-Go* also allowed me to build an excellent relationship with its designer, Scott Saavedra.

After Mom’s passing, when my life was returning to normal, I was ready to put a new project back on the table. So John and I dusted off the old “Retro Magazine” concept.

One of the toughest challenges we had was settling on a title. “Retro” websites, conventions, T-shirt companies, video game magazines, you name it, had locked in “Retro Magazine” and other similar names.

Then one day John suggested to me, with a



Action (just some of the content in #7, the nearest issue to date).

You ask, “How did *RetroFan* originate?”

RetroFan almost started back in 2012. Back then—Ihumble editor of both *Back Issue* and the mag in question—was juggling multiple jobs, including the executive direction of a nonprofit organization whose demands were becoming more than I could manage with my existing editorial work of *Back Issue* and writing books. I was weighing options, and one of them was to leave the nonprofit position (which I did). That would free up some time to start up a second publication, a “Retro Magazine,” with TwoMorrows. Yet when I finally slowed down my pace I realized the time wasn’t right for me to launch a new, ongoing magazine.

But I was ready to take on something new, and pitched it to John Morrow: writing a biography of Len Wein and Marv Wolfman. That didn’t materi-

Above: Publisher John Morrow had a ball for two years, scooping up back issues of some of the worst 1960s comics ever, to loan to Michael Eury for *Hero-A-Go-Go!*



RetroFan

First Issue: 6/13/2018



Left: Michael Eury being interviewed in 2018 for *Comic Culture*, a broadcast produced by students at the University of North Carolina, at Pembroke. **Inset center:** The incomparable Scott Saavedra, layout guru of *RetroFan*.

having more than I can manage for any single issue! But believe me, that's no complaint... what editor wouldn't want an army of talented writers? The downside is, with only 80 pages in a quarterly magazine, occasionally our regular contributors will rotate off for an issue,* but their dedication to the magazine and unique perspectives are crucial, and so long as they want to be *RetroFan* writers, this will be a home for them. Same with the guest writers, although practicing the "Patience is a virtue" dictum is crucial since I now have a backlog of material to keep us going for a long time to come—and new ideas are pitched regularly.

RetroFan is being distributed to comic shops and sold through the company website, as you'd expect of any TwoMorrrows publication. But it's also available at Barnes & Noble and we're working to get it onto other newsstands. This is a risky venture, but a valuable one in an effort to attract a broader commercial audience than currently exists within TwoMorrrowsWorld. I've received lots of mail from people who stumbled across *RetroFan* at B&N... and have connected with a few of my new guest contributors there, too.

As with *Back Issue*, I'm dedicated to *RetroFan* and am behind it for the long haul, even while other publishers may be shying away from print. These days, every time I read the paper or watch the news I'm bombarded by bleakness... retreating to 80 pages of the crazy, cool stuff we grew up with isn't such a bad place to visit!

— Michael Eury

* As of this writing, *RetroFan* has increased frequency to bi-monthly status—six times a year!

background in Hollywood visual effects—and like the other columnists started as a fan, most notably of monster and sci-fi cinema. We brought in *Hero-A-Go-Go's* Scott Saavedra as designer, and off we went... until things started to go wrong.

Our first issue cover, spotlighting our premiere issue's celebrity subject, Lou Ferrigno, went through several permutations. Licensor fees were too pricey for us to depict the TV Hulk and Lon Chaney, Jr. as the Wolf Man, and we were denied use of Filmation's *Star Trek* on the cover. Then, as the deadlines for #2's manuscripts were rapidly approaching, personal matters led to the unexpected departure of two of my columnists, Martin Pasko and Ernest Farino, and their material had to be reassigned late in the game. Wondering if I, like the tomb raiders from *Jonny Quest*, had unleashed the Curse of Anubis, minus the shambling mummy, I asked my wife, "Rose, is this magazine cursed?" She assured me that these were growing pains that I'd get under control.

And I did. I was sorry to lose Marty and Ernie, but that gave me the chance to allow our designer to become a columnist—Scott Saavedra is a really fun guy, as readers of his old *Comic Book Heaven* series know. Then I recruited pulp master Will Murray as a columnist. With Mangels and Shaw!, that was still a formidable line-up of columnists.

Soon, both Marty and Ernie were able to return to the magazine—hooray!—and #1 and 2 encouraged a flood of queries from freelance writers wanting to contribute. Weird, that in a short window of time, ye ed went from needing contributors to



Above: Rose Rummel-Eury, reporting for duty as Lady Action at one of Michael's many personal appearances. She's even helped man the TwoMorrrows booth at pop culture events!