

DEADLY HANDS ISSUE, SPOTLIGHTING BRONZE AGE FIST-FIGHTERS!

BACKISSUE!



TWO MONTHS
July 2018
No. 105
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Iron Fist • Master of Kung Fu • Yang • Bronze Tiger • Muhammad Ali
Hong Kong Phooey & more! Featuring Adams • Byrne • Claremont • Englehart
Gulacy • Hama • Moench • O'Neil • Sattler & other top talent



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"You have made me alien, my father, raising me in a lost time, releasing me into a foreign world. I am like the dragon reborn long past his day... a creature nurtured in the world of myth, now forced to dwell in the realm of harsh reality."

— Shang-Chi to Fu Manchu, *Master of Kung Fu* #86 (Mar. 1980)

Anyone who was there knows that the 1970s were a strange and interesting time. You had disco, punk, the death of Elvis, blaxploitation, the energy crisis, sharks, political scandals, cocaine chic, porno chic, jiggle TV, posters, big-budget sci-fi flicks, dull cartoons, Billy Beer, and—I'm serious—for a while there, pretty much everybody really was kung-fu fighting!

Actor Bruce Lee essentially planted the seed for all this with his introduction of the fighting art of Jeet Kune Do into his portrayal of Kato, sidekick and chauffeur to the venerable *Green Hornet* in that short-lived but well-remembered TV series of 1966–1967. Lee tried to parlay his cult popularity into a TV series of his own developed at Warner Bros. but the studio, citing the unlikelihood of an Asian becoming a genuine star in the US, cast the decidedly non-Asian David Carradine as a half-Chinese monk roaming the 19th-Century American West. The project would eventually surface as a 1972 TV movie followed by the long-running series, *Kung Fu*. Rumor at the time was that a disappointed and frustrated Lee left the country.

Combining trendy Eastern philosophy with traditional cowboy-show tropes and the gimmick of Chinese martial-arts fighting, *Kung Fu*'s success made it inevitable that the studio would try to milk it. Around that same time, the movie *Billy Jack* became a surprise box-office hit. It was also about a philosophical, peace-loving man who could kick butt Asian-style. That was when someone at Warner Bros. decided to go straight to the source and release *King Boxer* to the American market.

King Boxer was a fairly typical good vs. evil martial-arts movie produced by the massive Shaw Brothers Studio in Hong Kong, which had already been cranking out such fare to great local success for 20 years by that point. Any comparison it had to the *Kung Fu* TV series, though, was completely incidental.

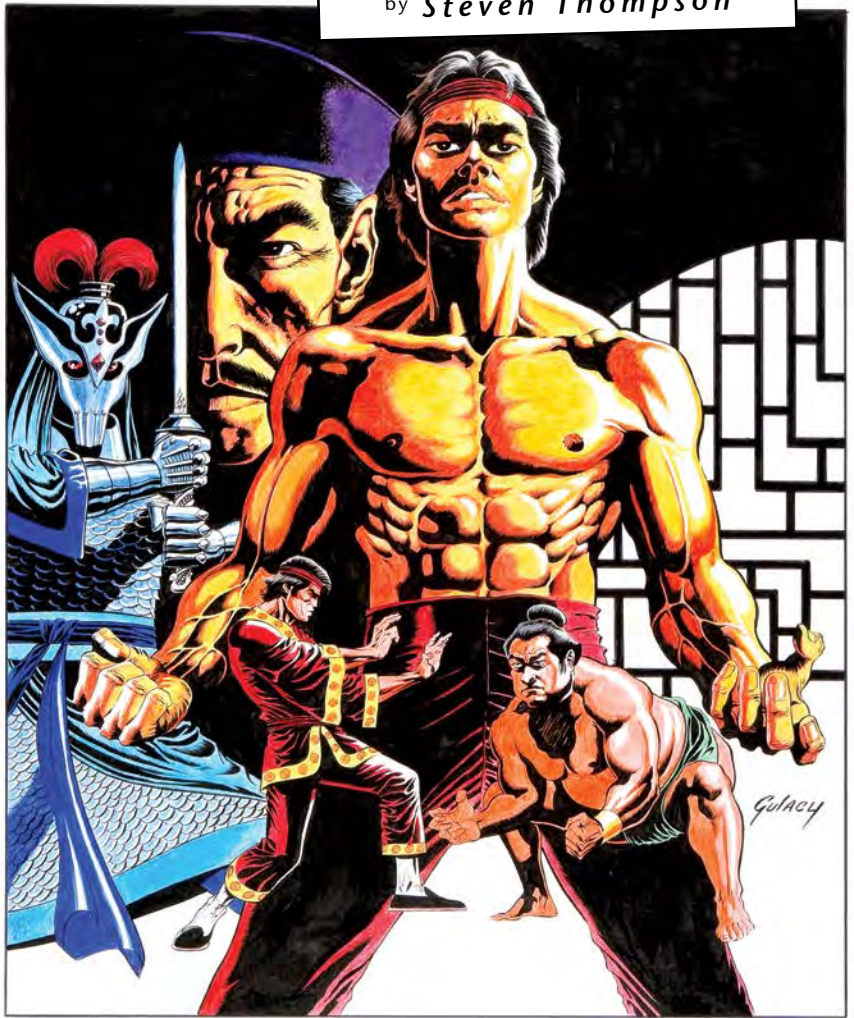
Retitled *Five Fingers of Death*, it was heavily hyped as a new type of thrill movie. Rather than laugh at its admittedly silly, bombastic title or its cheap, gory effects or the ridiculously unreal athletics involved, Americans, always eager to discover something fresh and tasty in entertainment, just ate it up... and wanted more.

With a huge industry already in place in Hong Kong making more and more "kung-fu movies," studios big and small began buying up all sorts of imported "chop-socky" flicks, giving them a quick English dubbing, and saturating inner-city theaters with them.

It turned out that Hong Kong was where Bruce Lee had fled, and that he had quickly become a star of these low-budget genre films throughout the Far East. With an "all is forgiven" air, Warner Bros. now coaxed him back with the promise of a series of big-budget, major release kung-fu films that would, at long last, move Bruce into the rarefied rank of superstar! But just weeks prior to the release of what was to be his star-making vehicle, *Enter the Dragon*, Bruce Lee suddenly, tragically, died.

MASTER OF KUNG FU™

by Steven Thompson



Mighty Marvel's Martial-Arts Master

An undated Paul Gulacy recreation of his cover to Marvel's *Master of Kung Fu* #51. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

Master of Kung Fu TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Fu Manchu © Sax Rohmer Estate.



THE INSIDIOUS DR. FU MANCHU

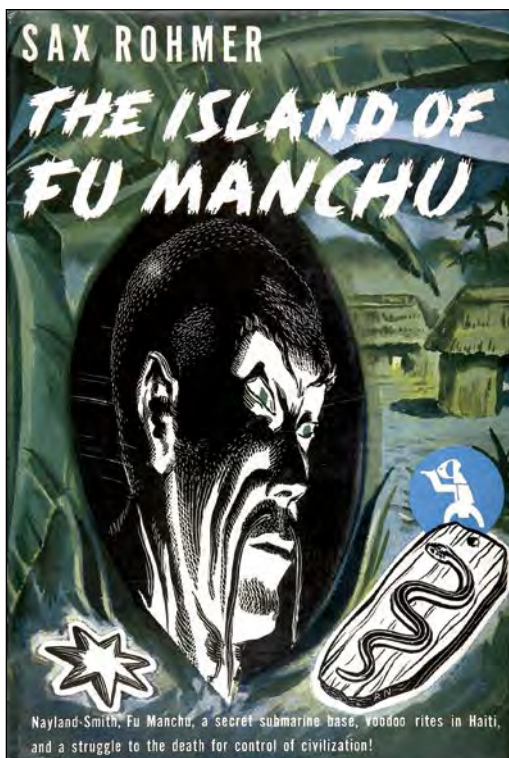
Bruce was long buried by the time the comic-book series *Master of Kung Fu* came along later that year, and by all logic the novelty of the martial-arts movie craze should have started petering out. Only nobody told that to Shang-Chi.

Until the recent *Master of Kung Fu Omnibuses*, the modern reader had no reason to believe the series had actually been as good as its reputation. After all, Marvel had never even reprinted it and the sporadic, half-hearted attempts at reviving the character of Shang-Chi depicted him as fairly dull and out of place in these more cosmically conscious times. One former creator described the modern version as looking like "a Chinese waiter."

The reason for the lack of reprints for so long, however, is rooted much deeper than an editorial whim. In fact, the main reason lies with something known for a century or more as... the Yellow Peril! You see, Shang-Chi's father was one of the original, pre-Marvel, pre-comics supervillains—the one and only Dr. Fu Manchu!

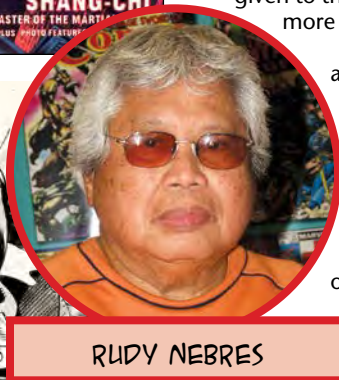
A quick history lesson is in order here. In 1912–1913, using the pen name "Sax Rohmer," British comedy writer Arthur Henry Ward serialized Sherlock Holmes-type chapters of a new character described in the American press of the day as "a mysterious Oriental whose resourcefulness and courage in the committing of crimes is enough to test the ability of the world's greatest sleuths."

Over the course of 13 official novels by Sax Rohmer, spread out over nearly half a century and in print constantly until more recent times, we learn that the villain heads a vast



Enter the Fad
(left) *Enter the Dragon* and (top right) *Billy Jack* were among the best of the trendsetting kung-fu flicks of the '70s. Poster and lobby card courtesy of Heritage. Sax Rohmer's insidious Dr. Fu Manchu, as seen in print (bottom) and on screen (middle right, with Boris Karloff in the role).

Enter the Dragon and *Billy Jack* © Warner Bros.
Fu Manchu © Sax Rohmer Estate.
The Mask of Fu Manchu © 1932 MGM.



RUDY NEBRES

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

Talented Hands on Deadly Hands

(top) Among Shang-Chi's cover appearances on Marvel's B&W *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*: issue #5 (Oct. 1974, cover by Bob Larkin) and 13 (June 1975, cover by Luis Dominguez). (bottom) Rudy Nebres' stark version of the Master of Kung Fu, from *DHoKF* #16 (Sept. 1975). Script by Moench. Original art courtesy of Heritage.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

the captured Reston, Petrie lectures Smith, and eventually everyone gets together to discover that Velcro was also stockpiling nuclear weapons!

Ohmigosh! Keep going! Issue #31 (Aug. 1975), "Snowbuster," begins with our third movie-poster splash before we're thrust right back into the action. As our protagonists make some heroic strides, Velcro sends his whip-wielding dominatrix girlfriend, Pavane, after them, even as a down-but-far-from-out Razor-Fist returns to the fight as well. Helicopters, tanks, and a climactic speedboat chase that ends with Shang-Chi using a "Hail Mary" pass all lead up to the fortress, with all its nukes and drugs exploding!

With fans still reeling from the excitement, the following month prove quite a letdown as Sal Buscema and Mike Esposito join Doug for what is called a "broodingly different tale of mystery, intrigue, and martial-arts action." Only a few panels of the latter show up, actually, as Smith, Shang-Chi, Reston, and Tarr take a cruise. There's lip service given to their returning from the Velcro adventure, but this reads more like an inventory filler.

It gave us a chance to catch our breath, though, and for Paul and Dan to get a little ahead. The next epic starts immediately in issue #33 (Oct. 1975). In short order, a gun-barrel-eyed robot wearing a hat attacks Reston, only to be tricked by Shang-Chi into shooting itself. Tarr recognizes it as the style of Mordillo, a secret assassin. As they plan what to do about him, Smith sets Shang-Chi up in a ritzy flat in Chelsea, where we meet the next major player of our series, "Little" Leiko Wu. In true Bond girl fashion, she is—within the bounds of the Comics Code—soaking naked in a tub and simultaneously getting a tan when Shang first sees her.

Described by Reston as one of Smith's best agents, in the months and years that follow, fans of this series will wonder, then, why she keeps getting captured so often by the bad guys. And why does everyone keep referring to her as "Little" Leiko when she seems a perfectly normal size, even taller than Shang here?

When asked how long she has known Reston, Leiko replies poetically, "Long enough for lovers to exalt and destroy each other." When asked how long he has known Smith, Shang tells her that he is "unaware of the time's passage." It isn't long before Leiko is kidnapped by Mordillo (See! I told you!) and taken to his... island fortress.

Another wonderful Moench title, "Cyclone at the Center of a Madman's Crown," greets us next time, adorning another enticing movie-poster splash. On the trip to the island, Mordillo has either dyed Leiko's hair red or it's a colorist's error. Upon arrival, she nearly escapes before being restrained by a new player—Brynocki, a little boy robot with a Harvey Comics face. If island-dwelling assassin Mordillo can be said to be reminiscent of *The Man with the Golden Gun's* Scaramanga, then Brynocki is clearly analogous to that film's Nick-Nack, the diminutive butler/sidekick played by Hervé Villechaze of *Fantasy Island* fame.

Arriving on the island, Reston and Shang-Chi are wearing cool skin-tight battle suits. Shang's red one would have been a nice permanent touch and well in keeping with superhero tradition, but it was not to be.

Evil robot toys are the main distraction keeping our guys away from Leiko, finally discovered in a giant rapidly filling hourglass.

Don't stop now! "Death-Hand and the Sun of Mordillo" eschews the movie poster, jumping right in with the killer taunting the captured heroes while Leiko is about to drown in sand. Luckily, Black Jack had been held back in reserve and arrives, dressed as one of Mordillo's killer robots, throwing him off-guard so Leiko can be saved. Yay!

Not wishing to see his plans for an interstellar killing laser fall apart, for help Mordillo turns to his new girlfriend—Pavane. Again. Not to comment on this girl's reputation or taste in men but... y'know?

As Pavane distracts the others, the increasingly insane Mordillo faces off with a determined Shang-Chi only to get zapped by his own lasers, ending with a poignant scene of Brynocki telling his "father's" skeleton that he'll fix him all up.

We also see how close Shang and Leiko have become in a very short time, much to the jealous consternation of Clive Reston who also harbors feelings for her.

How Paul Gulacy's MASTER OF KUNG FU™ Splash Pages Became Foreign Edition Covers

by Dave Lemieux

In the 1970s, *Master of Kung Fu* became one of Marvel Comics' top-selling titles when it was being produced by the team of Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy. At the time, however, the covers for the book were not being drawn by Gulacy, who was doing the interior art, but instead by Gil Kane and a few other artists. There are primarily two reasons for this: 1) Marvel wanted "all-out action" covers on the book, instead of Gulacy's stylized collage layouts that were reminiscent of James Bond movie posters; and 2) Gulacy reportedly turned in his artwork for the stories just prior to the publishing deadline, and did not have time to do the covers. It was not until after Gulacy left the book in 1977 that he was given the opportunity to produce four amazing covers (MOKF #51, 55, 64, and 67). One of these covers (#55) was used in 2016 as the variant cover for the *Master of Kung Fu Omnibus* vol. 2 hardcover.

However, Gulacy's splash pages (or title pages) to his '70s MOKF stories were truly spectacular and provided his version of the cover to

those issues. They were like an alternate or variant cover, done in the Gulacy style. So eye-catching was the art that when foreign editions of MOKF were published, the editors often utilized Gulacy's splash pages as the covers to those particular issues and on trade-paperback collections. This is hardly surprising if you want to sell comics by showcasing top-quality artwork. Gulacy splash pages were used as covers to editions of MOKF that were published in Canada, Spain, Mexico, Brazil, France, and Denmark. The titles of *Master of Kung Fu* in those foreign editions translated as follows: *Maitre Du Kung Fu* in Canada, *Kung Fu: Maestro De Artes Marciales* in Mexico, *Mestre Do Kung Fu* in Brazil, and *Kung Fu Magasinet* in Denmark.

Finding these rare appearances of Paul Gulacy "splash page" covers provides a glimpse of what it would have been like if Gulacy had produced the covers to some of those classic stories on the original MOKF series in the 1970s.



Maitre Du Kung Fu #9 from Canada in 1974 by Editions Heritage features as the cover the splash page from MOKF #18 titled "Attack!"



Kung Fu: Maestro De Artes Marciales #64 from Mexico in 1976 by MACC Division Historieta features as the cover the splash page from MOKF #34 titled "Cyclone at the Center of a Madman's Crown!"



Due to the success of the Kung Fu TV show and the three Bruce Lee movies, Charlton Comics editor George Wildman decided in early 1973 that he wanted Charlton to publish a martial-arts comic. Warren Sattler had been one of Charlton's regular artists since 1972, with work appearing in *Attack*, *Ghost Manor*, *Fightin' Marines*, *Ghostly Haunts*, *Haunted*, *Ghostly Tales*, *For Lovers Only* (which Sattler does not remember doing), *The Many Ghosts of Dr. Graves*, and *Fightin' Army*. During this time Sattler was never shy about letting Wildman know that he loved Western-themed comics and really wanted a Western comic assignment. Wildman wrote Sattler a letter sometime in early 1973 and asked the artist if he would be interested in drawing a comic book entitled *Yang* about a Chinese martial-arts character in America on the West Coast in the 1860s. Sattler made some preliminary sketches of his idea for the character—including the character's familiar outfit, as well as hair atop what would soon become his bald head—and went to the Charlton offices in Derby, Connecticut, for a meeting with Wildman and *Yang* writer Joe Gill. Gill asked Sattler to remove the character's hair, but otherwise both the editor and writer loved Sattler's concept for Yang. Either Wildman or Gill asked for a double-page spread in the middle of each story. Gill would write each story in two parts, and the second part would begin with a two-page spread, which would become Sattler's calling card for his work in *Yang*. Sattler suggested not to open with the splash page but to move it to page two, three, or four, mimicking the movies of the mid-1970s where they opened with the action in progress, then, after an opening scene, the movie title and opening credits would run.

When Wildman or Gill wanted something special in the art, they would call Sattler. Normally Sattler would open the envelope from his editor and read the enclosed script then draw the story. In the case of *Yang*, neither Wildman nor Gill told Sattler how to draw anything, with one exception, in *Yang* #7. Gill usually wrote his stories with five-panel pages in mind. Sattler said he usually would break down Gill's story into six or seven panels. As the book went along, Sattler made minor changes to the scripts if he felt the caption was too long or if he wanted to add a funny line.

Sattler loved working with Gill. He believed that Gill did his best work on *Yang*, as the prolific writer, who famously churned out reams of script pages for Charlton's titles, seemed to put more effort into the character of Yang than he did other characters. One beef the artist had with Charlton was that he had no control over the coloring. Sattler would put coloring notes on the original art, but the colorists ignored his indications. Many times the colorist on the cover was different than on the interior pages, and characters' cover and interior colors would often not match (see issue #9 notes).

Before Shang-Chi...

...*Yang* premiered, from Charlton Comics.

Detail from the cover of issue #1 (Nov. 1973). Cover art by Warren Sattler.

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THE WORLD OF YANG™

Charlton's '70s Martial Arts Gang: Gill, Sattler, and Kim

by Jay Williams

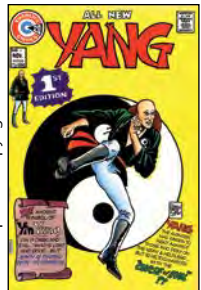


THE CHARLTON METHOD

Marvel, DC, and Charlton each had a “house” process in the production of the original comic art. In the Charlton method, the writer—usually the omnipresent Joe Gill—would type the story and the editor would mail it to the artist. The artist would usually pencil, ink, and letter each story and mail it back to Charlton.

For *Yang* covers, Sattler would read the story and decide on a scene from the story to use for the front cover. Sattler would then pencil and ink the cover. While looking at Gill’s page one, Sattler penciled the panel outlines and then penciled in the captions, word balloons, and dialogue. He would then repeat that for each page of Gill’s story. He would come back and ink the dialogue but would leave the panel outlines in pencil, as sometimes he would have something bleeding out of a panel. This technique gave him a rough idea in his mind as to what he was going to put into each panel. Sattler’s method was based upon some advice from Milton Caniff of *Terry and the Pirates* and *Steve Canyon* fame: “Get the lettering done first, and in whatever space is left design your picture around that.” Sattler would then pencil each page and then come back and ink them all. Once the art was complete, he would usually hand-carry the artwork to the Charlton offices in Derby.

Charlton was known as a comic company that paid much less than DC or Marvel. “My Charlton page rates were \$15 for pencils, \$15 for inks, and \$5 for lettering the interior pages, and \$25 for the cover,” Sattler tells *BACK ISSUE*. “I easily averaged completing two pages a day.” *Yang* was one of two projects Sattler simultaneously illustrated for Charlton, alternating between the two. “Because *Billy the Kid* and *Yang* were bimonthly, I was usually working one book or the other, along with some Charlton military comics and work for *National Lampoon*.”



Yang #1 (Nov. 1973)

The comics industry usually follows trends from successful TV shows and movies, and for once, Charlton was the first publisher to capitalize upon a trend when it released *Yang* #1 (cover-dated Nov. 1973), narrowly beating Shang-Chi, Master of Kung Fu’s first appearance in *Special Marvel Edition* #15 (cover-dated Dec. 1973). [Editor’s note: “Narrowly,” indeed.

According to the research of Mike

Voiles at *DCindexes.com*, *Yang* #1 was released to newsstands on September 1, 1973, and *Special Marvel Edition* #15 arrived on September 4, 1973. Given Charlton’s spotty and/or sluggish distribution, chances are, Shang-Chi was on the stands in some areas before *Yang*... but for the record, *Yang* technically did premiere first.]

Where did Warren Sattler get his martial-arts ideas for his illustrations? “Oh, they came from my second oldest son, Marc,” Sattler tells *BI*. “He began taking karate lessons when he was 16. He showed me moves I could use.”

Sattler remembers that Joe Gill asked for a karate move on the front cover of this issue, and that Wildman and Gill were thrilled with the final result, with the yin-yang symbol (Yang’s equivalent of Superman’s “S”) in the background and on Yang’s green jacket. (Sometimes when Sattler drew the yin-yang symbol, the black was on the left, and other times it was on the right. “I never paid attention to white being on one side and black being on the other,” the artist says, adding that editor George Wildman asked him to “watch that in the future.”) Sattler notes that he had nothing to do with the yellow background on the cover. He also feels that in his mind, in this issue Yang did not look right, but was not sure if anyone else noticed.

In the story, the central characters are Chung Yuan, the father of Chung Hui (Yang); Yang; slave trader Chao Ku, the evil antagonist; and Ku’s daughter (and love/hate interest for Yang), Yin Li. The basic story depicts Chao Ku having Chung Yuan killed. The deceased’s son, Chung Hui, attempts to avenge his father’s death and is captured and taken to America, where he becomes Yang.



Yang #2 (May 1974)

There was a six-month gap between issues #1 and 2, a delay that Sattler does not recall.

The cover features a very curvaceous Yin Li about to stab Yang. When asked about how he learned to draw female characters, Sattler reminded me that he spent ten years drawing teenage girls in the syndicated comic strip *The Jackson Twins* [working with

its creator, Dick Brooks—ed.].

Joe Gill provided very little guidance on what he wanted drawn in his stories, except he would note when a female character was crying. It was Sattler’s idea to create a trademark style by having crying characters turn away, with a tear running down their face, as shown in issue #2 on page 14, last panel.

Sattler contends that his artwork in the second issue is his least favorite.

Then and Now

(top) Young Warren Sattler at his drawing board.

(bottom) The artist today, standing before examples of the comic strip which inspired his artistry, *Terry and the Pirates*. Both photos courtesy of Steve Sattler.

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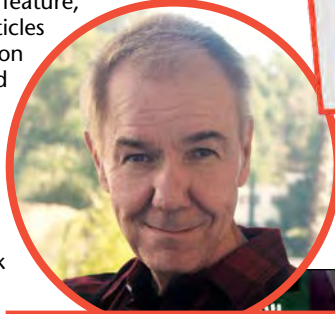
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By the time *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* premiered as a black-and-white Marvel magazine in 1974, kung-fu fever was already in full swing. The magazine ran for 33 issues until 1977, including a *Special Edition* (Summer 1974) and a one-shot *Deadliest Heroes of Kung Fu* spin-off (Summer 1975). Although both Shang-Chi and Iron Fist would often star in *DHOKF* and the “Sons of the Tiger/White Tiger” strip appeared in almost every issue, the magazine’s true star was probably real-life martial-arts hero Bruce Lee. Lee was featured on the first issue’s cover as well as covers for #3, 7, 14, 17, 26, 28, and *Deadliest Heroes*. Only Shang-Chi, whose strip was usually the main feature, appeared on more covers. Many issues included articles about Lee, barely a month passed without some mention of him in the letters page, and #28 was devoted entirely to Lee with a comic adaptation of his life.

KUNG FU GRIP

The kung-fu craze in America is considered to have begun with the 1972 debut of Lee’s first starring role in *The Big Boss* a.k.a. *Fists of Fury*. “[It] ...had the kind of impact on us that a truly great comic-book movie does today, liberating in its embrace of fantasy action and over-the-top heroics,” explained writer Gerry Conway in his introduction to Marvel’s *DHOKF Omnibus* vol. 1 (Nov. 2016). “Bruce Lee, on screen, was a superhero, doing impossible things with his body that seemed ripped from the pages of a comic book. He moved at super-speed, he struck with a force that was superhuman, he practically levitated with every leap. And the visual storytelling of the movie itself was like nothing seen in American films—spectacular stunts coupled with a dramatic intensity that made the average American ‘action’ film seem comatose. We were blown away.” No sooner had Lee burst onto the international scene as the newest screen action hero, he passed away at the age of 32 on July 20, 1973—just a month before the premiere of what most consider his greatest film, *Enter the Dragon*. Just like such film icons as Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, Lee’s death at such a young age (and under what seemed at the time to be somewhat mysterious circumstances) immortalized him to fans forever. “Bruceploitation” had begun, with everyone seemingly looking to cash in on Lee’s popularity in movies (as studios scrambled to find Lee lookalikes to star in imitation kung-fu films), books—and yes, even comics. “Roy [Thomas, Marvel editor-in-chief] wanted to do something in comics that would embrace the Asian martial-arts movie aesthetic,” Conway wrote, “but in 1972, there was just no vehicle to do so.”

However, the genre would receive increased visibility with the popularity of the American TV series *Kung Fu* (1972–1975), which starred David Carradine as Kwai Chang Caine, a half-Chinese/half-American who studied most of his life at a Shaolin temple in China, becoming a priest and master of kung fu. After killing the Emperor’s nephew to avenge one of his masters, Caine had a bounty placed on his head and fled to America, where he traveled through the Old West. Similar to the previous *The Fugitive* TV series (and later, *The Incredible Hulk* TV series), Caine encountered various strangers throughout his journeys and used his skills to help those in trouble. Because kung fu actually teaches one to avoid fighting when possible, the series focused more on philosophy rather than action, as one would expect. Another reason for this was because Carradine, unlike Bruce Lee, was not actually a martial artist. “It’s all faked, man, the fight scenes,” Carradine said in an interview in *DHOKF* #2 (June 1974). “They’re choreographed. I mean, I’m a dancer!” Carradine was featured on the covers of #4 and *Deadliest Heroes* #1 (fighting Lee). Many early issues included articles about the series until its success began to fade with its cancellation. With the popularity of martial arts on the rise, Steve Englehart and Jim Starlin created Shang-Chi, who soon graduated to his own comic, *Master of Kung Fu*. The success of that comic eventually led to *DHOKF*.

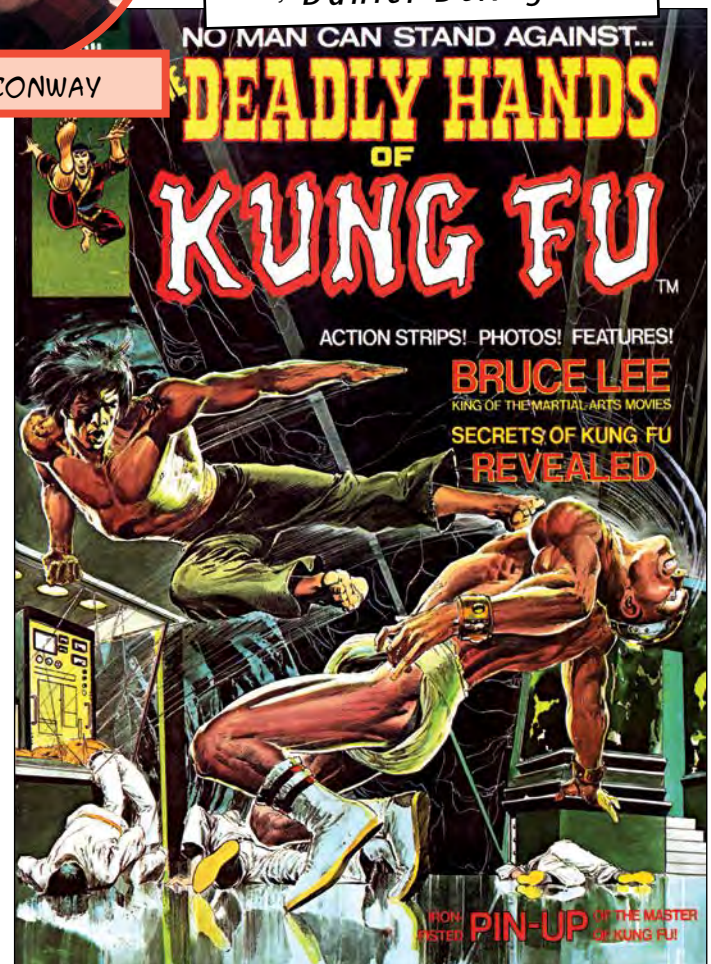


GERRY CONWAY

EVERYBODY WAS KUNG-FU FIGHTING

A HISTORY OF MARVEL’S THE DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FUTM MAGAZINE

by Daniel DeAngelo



Fast and Furious First Issue

Neal Adams’ riveting cover to *DHOKF* #1 (Apr. 1974).

For more awesome Adams kung-fu art, see the “Armor and the Martial Arts” interview with Neal later in this issue.

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KUNG FU HUSTLE

Roy Thomas says, "The creation of *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* (which some of us joked should've really been called *Deadly FEET of Kung Fu*) was inevitable, since Marvel was then in the process of doing B&W comics about most of the same subject matters it was covering in color comics. Kung fu seemed to lend itself to that approach." Editor/writer David Anthony Kraft, who worked on *DHoKF* throughout most of its run, recalls, "It was a great time period when I started, because you had a lot of freedom. Roy, Don McGregor, and I were the three people who oversaw all of the color comics! Over in the B&W department, Tony [Isabella] was editor and Chris Claremont was his assistant. As a courtesy—because sometimes we would proofread stuff, sometimes we would contribute story ideas or titles—they would list us in the editorial credits, so at the start I may have been listed even though I wasn't doing very much, but later on it was like musical chairs... we all switched positions, and suddenly I was working on the magazines as an associate editor. Eventually, I worked my way up to where I was actually editing a lot of the books." In addition to many articles, DAK wrote a regular column called "Fighting Arts Review," which previewed upcoming kung-fu films and books, from #24–32 (skipping #25).

In his own introduction to the *DHoKF Omnibus*, editor/writer Tony Isabella wrote, "We wanted [the B&W magazines] to be actual magazines that would combine our comics stories with informative articles on the title's respective areas of interest. But there was another reason for the union of articles and comics in these magazines. We didn't have the budget to fill our 68 pages with comics and nothing but. Our budgets allowed for roughly 30–32 pages of new comics stories per issue. This wasn't a problem for magazines like *Dracula Lives!* and *Monsters Unleashed*, because we could go to the Marvel archives and reprint good and even great [horror] stories from the 1950s and 1960s. *DHoKF* offered its editors no such opportunity to reprint old comics stories. Marvel had never published martial-arts comics before *Shang-Chi, Master of Kung Fu*..."

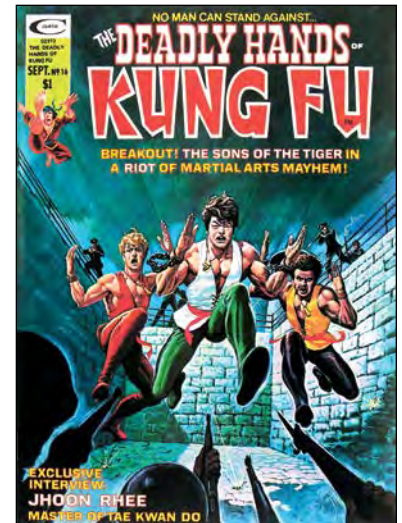
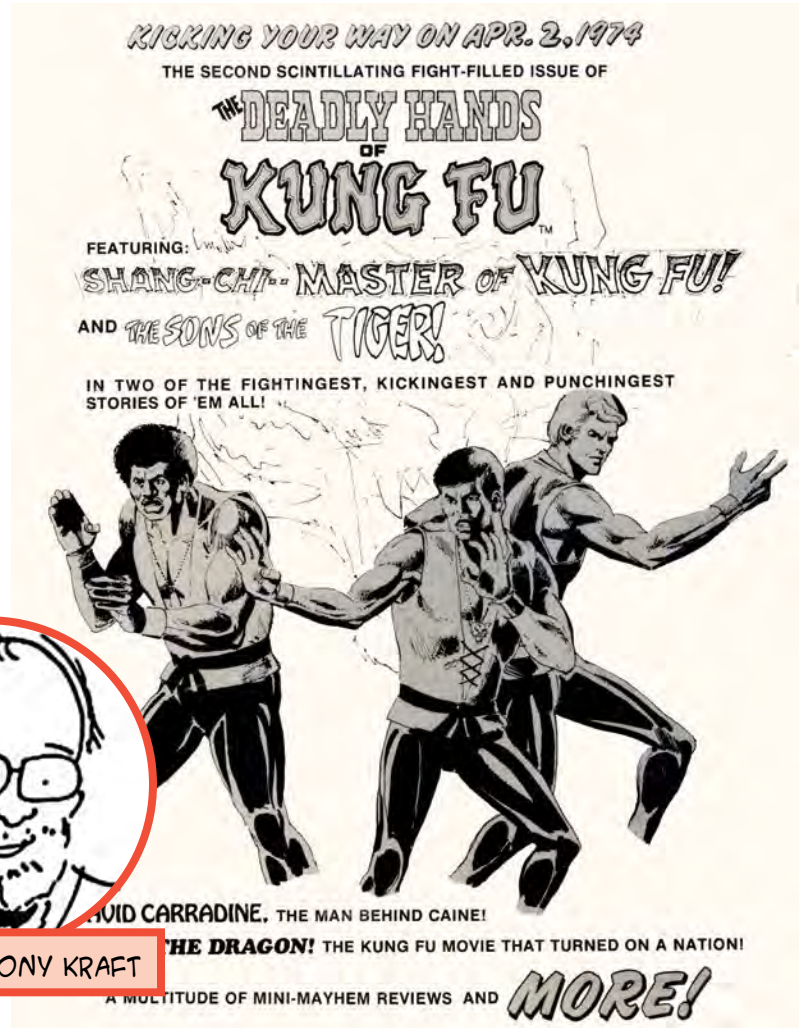
DHoKF definitely accomplished its goal, going beyond just reviews of martial arts-related films, TV shows, and books. It also included interviews with current martial-arts stars, articles about the history of kung fu and the use of weapons, and even reviews of martial-arts tournaments. In addition to kung fu, the magazine covered other martial-arts-related films, such as the *Billy Jack* kung fu/Western series, James Bond, sword and sorcery, and the Japanese Yakuza ("gangster" films). In addition to regular comic-book creators, Marvel sought out writers who were also considered "experts" in the field: editor/writer John David Warner contributed many articles as well as a recurring column called "Under the Pagoda"; martial-arts instructor Frank McLaughlin (creator of Charlton's *Judomaster*) provided a series of illustrated kung-fu lessons; and even Denny O'Neil contributed under the alias "Wan Chang O'Shaugnessy." Thomas tells *BACK ISSUE*, "Denny had used the name 'Sergius O'Shaugnessy' as a pseudonym at Charlton while he was still doing some writing for Marvel... and he revived that pen name from time to time. Guess an Asian adaptation of the name made sense, half as a joke, when he wrote for *Hands*." Even Marvel's own "karate kid," Ralph Macchio, started out writing fan mail to the letters pages of *DHoKF*. After meeting McGregor at a comics convention, Macchio was hired to assist Warner on the B&W magazines.

ENTER THE TIGERS

The first issue of *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* debuted on newsstands with a cover date of April 1974 with a painted cover of Bruce Lee by famed comics illustrator Neal Adams. "For whatever reason, they felt I had the drawing power to launch these magazines, and I never said no to them when they asked," Adams said in an interview with Arlen Schumer from *Comic*



DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT



Warriors Three

DHoKF's "Sons of the Tiger" feature appeared in almost every issue and scored these cover spotlights: (top) #1's back cover, with Dick Giordano art; (bottom left) #6 (Nov. 1974) by Bob Larkin; and (bottom right) #16 (Sept. 1975) by Luis Dominguez.

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Today, Iron Fist is a well-established character in the Marvel Universe, part of the New Avengers and even a television star, as one of Netflix's *Defenders*. Yet his publishing life has had its ups and downs, with moments of glory, death, return, and publishing hiatuses.

Let's explore the evolution of the character as seen by many of his creators from 1974 to 2017.

IN THE BEGINNING

As noted earlier in this issue, martial arts became very popular in the early '70s, and Marvel Comics capitalized on the trend in 1973 with the introduction of Shang-Chi, Master of Kung Fu. Master of Kung Fu's early appearances were successful and the House of Ideas wanted to expand its roster of martial-arts stars, with the idea of creating a character that would entirely belong to Marvel since Shang-Chi was linked to the Fu Manchu license. And that led to the creation of Iron Fist.

Roy Thomas and Gil Kane would oversee the creation of this new character. Thomas explains how he got the idea for Iron Fist: "We already had Master of Kung Fu, which Englehart and Starlin had brought to me, and I to Stan [Lee]. When I saw my first kung-fu movie, which had an 'iron fist' ceremony in it, I decided that would be a good name for a more superhero (i.e., Marvel) approach to a kung-fu hero. Stan agreed, and I immediately contacted Gil Kane to be the artist."

The Roy Thomas/Gil Kane team was a classic when it came to character launches or relaunched in the '70s: together they rebooted Captain Marvel; created Morbius, the Living Vampire (in *Amazing Spider-Man*); and introduced Warlock and Iron Fist in *Marvel Premiere*.

Gil Kane explained why the two worked so much together in the *FA* fanzine in 1986: "Whenever Roy had a new book coming up he would insist that he and I do it. So, we did the first issue of *Iron Fist* [*Marvel Premiere* #15] and many other debut issues, and it was Roy who insisted that I do most of the covers." (Kane would provide cover pencils for all but one of *Marvel Premiere*'s Iron Fist issues and for five of the first six covers of the hero's own title.)

The origin of the character would be inspired by the 1933 book *Lost Horizon*, written by English writer James Hilton, and the Golden Age comic book *Amazing-Man* from Centaur Publications. Roy Thomas offers, "Well, *Lost Horizon* (which I've never read—I've only seen movie versions) is an indirect inspiration... [as is] Bill Everett's *Amazing-Man* #5 (really the first issue), which Gil liked. Since I had only a vague idea of a Westerner who goes to the East and gains the 'iron fist,' [Kane] said he'd like to adapt a lot of elements of *Amazing-Man*, and that

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ROY THOMAS



in the Bronze Age and Beyond

by Franck Martini



Kung Fu Superhero

The high-kickin' debut of Iron Fist, in *Marvel Premiere* #15 (May 1974).

Cover art by Gil Kane and Dick Giordano, with alterations by John Romita, Sr.

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Claremont Arrives

(left) Chris Claremont's first Iron Fist issue, *Marvel Premiere* #23 (Aug. 1975). Cover by Kane and Bob McLeod. (right) Pat Broderick's version of IF, from *MP* #24's splash.

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A NEW TAKE WITH CLAREMONT AND BYRNE

It was the beginning of Chris Claremont's writing career, and to get this assignment "I just happened to be in the right place at the right time, I guess," he told the *Marvel Epic Podcast*. "I got a six-part *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* [story] with Iron Fist solo, so I was building a fairly extensive catalog of Iron Fist stories that wasn't mainstream color."

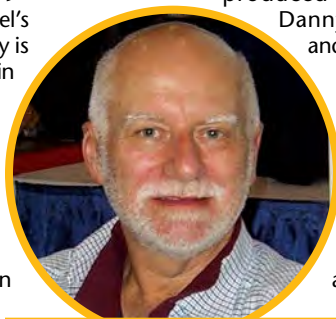
The six-parter appeared in *DHoKF* #19–24 (Dec. 1975–May 1976), one of Marvel's black-and-white magazines whose story is chronicled elsewhere in this issue. The art in these issues by Rudy Nebres is stunning and nicely serves the action-packed story of Danny fighting in a demonic dimension for a young woman named Jade. Weird dreams, encounters with his mother, and cleverly staged combat scenes are visible in those issues that appear to be out of Iron Fist's main continuity. Iron Fist had previously been spotlighted in *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu Special Album Edition* (Dec. 1974) in a story by Tony Isabella and John Buscema; then in *DHoKF* #10 (Mar. 1975) in a main story written by Isabella and David Anthony Kraft and drawn by Frank McLaughlin and Rudy Nebres, plus an origin retelling by Doug Moench and Don Perlin; and finally in *DHoKF* #15, which reprinted *Marvel Premiere* #16.

But when Chris Claremont took over the regular Iron Fist feature with *Marvel Premiere* #23 (Aug. 1975),

he chose a completely different path than his predecessors. And in a way, his take on Iron Fist contains many elements that he would also use on *Uncanny X-Men*. "The fundamentals of the concept had been established and to some extent had been dealt with in earlier issues [...], so we had pretty much resolved the uber conflict that started it, Claremont said. "So essentially it was taking this character that Larry [Hama] or Tony [Isabella] had produced and building up from that. We had Danny and Misty Knight and Colleen Wing, and everything after that was virgin territory."

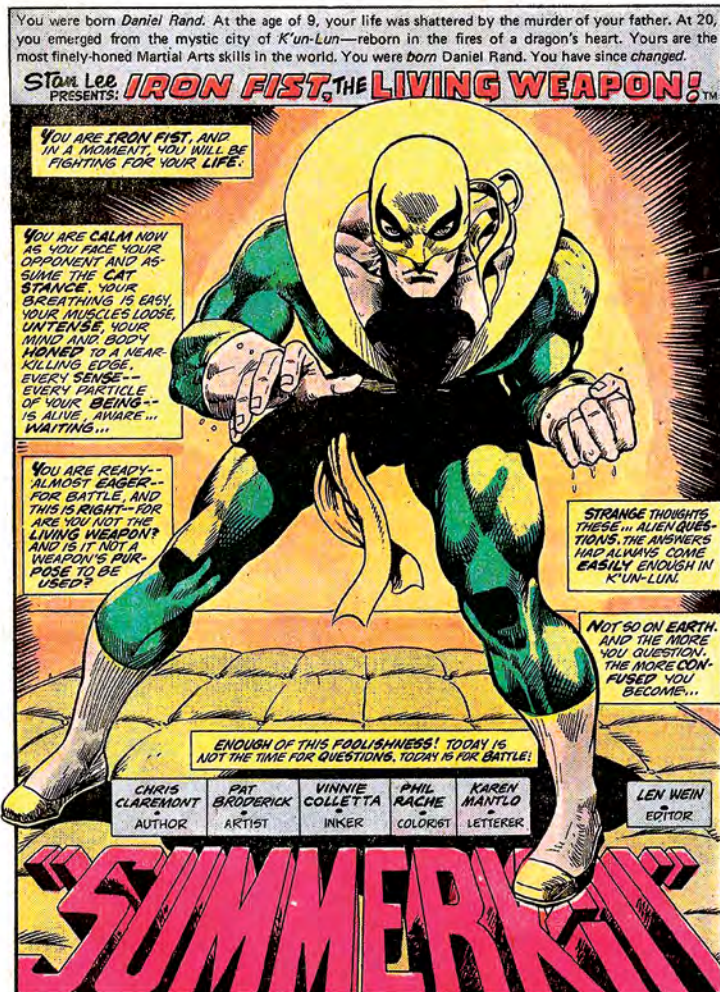
The book went indeed into new territories with the menaces Warhawk, in issue #23, and the Monstroid in issue #24 (Sept. 1975). The first few pages of issue #23 with Warhawk, a Vietnam veteran named Mitchell Tanner still believing he is at war and very likely suffering from PTSD, shooting people at random in a park, is especially chilling and even makes one wonder how that story got the Comics Code Authority seal. The elegant art by Pat Broderick (inked by Bob McLeod on #23 and Vince Colletta on #24) nicely complemented this new departure. Issue #23 also introduces Lieutenant Rafael Scarfe of the NYPD, who will become a recurring member of the supporting cast.

Those issues can appear as a warm-up for what's to come, starting with *Marvel Premiere* #25 (Oct. 1975). This issue is essential as it is artist John Byrne's first issue on the character and it features Angar the Screamer



CHRIS CLAREMONT

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Iron Warriors

(top) Gil Kane's cover preliminary (courtesy of Heritage) for *Iron Fist* #1 (Nov. 1975), inked by Giacoia. The soon-to-be white-hot team of Claremont and Byrne provided interiors. (bottom left) A sample of John Byrne's fight choreography, from *Iron Fist* #7 (Sept. 1976). Inks by Frank Chiaramonte, who also drew (bottom right) this undated sketch of Danny Rand, courtesy of Heritage.

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what we would see in Claremont's *Uncanny X-Men*, *Iron Fist* gives plenty of space to assertive women with strong personalities, purpose, and desires of being the equals of men. The character of Miranda in this issue is one example, but Colleen Wing and Misty Knight will prove all along Claremont's 15 issues that they are not damsels in distress.



And this will be proven even more with the two great *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* issues that showcase the Knight-Wing association (#32-33, Jan.-Feb. 1977), where Misty and Colleen embark upon a frantic, often sexy, non-Comics Code adventure in Hong Kong. These "Daughters of the Dragon" stories were written by Claremont and drawn by Marshall Rogers. Rogers explained in the *Daughters of the Dragon* reprint magazine in 2005, "I was in the offices one day and Chris came over and asked me if I'd be interested in doing a story with him about a couple of women called the Daughters of the Dragon. I said, 'Of course.' [...] I don't know what the decision-making was going on. Chris was pitching the job and he wanted me to work with him (for which I will always be grateful)." Claremont and Rogers would return four years later for an encore with the Daughters of the Dragon in *Bizarre Adventures* #25 (Mar. 1981).

Next, Claremont takes *Iron Fist* abroad, another common aspect with *X-Men*. If all previous issues took place in New York, *Iron Fist* #3 (Feb. 1976) sees Danny





HONG KONG PHOOEY, THE CARTOON

Most Hanna-Barbera fans and scholars consider the 1957–1969 period as the Golden Age of their shows, but there were a few bright spots later on for Hanna-Barbera. *Hong Kong Phooey*, which originally ran from September 7, 1974 to December 21, 1974, was one of these. There were 31 15-minute episodes produced for a 16-episode package.

Unlike most of the shows that Hanna-Barbera was creating at the time—basically variations on the highly successful *Scooby-Doo*, *Where Are You?* theme or sequel series to successes of the past like *The Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm Show* (*The Flintstones*) or *Yogi's Gang* (*The Yogi Bear Show*)—*Hong Kong Phooey* was kind of its own thing.

The show was originally to be called *Kung Phooey* and then *Kung Fu Phooey*, with animals running around in a human world in a premise loosely based on the primetime live-action series *Kung Fu* (1972–1975).

Once the format was finalized, the title star's alter ego, Penrod (Penry) Pooch, worked as a janitor at police headquarters with Sergeant Flint, Rosemary the switchboard operator, and their cat, Spot. When trouble happened, Penry became Hong Kong Phooey (HKP) by running into the vending machine, then jumping into the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet, with Penry getting stuck. Spot would hit the cabinet, and then HKP would emerge out the top drawer, bouncing onto an ironing board and sliding down a chute, then bouncing off a couch and landing in a trash bin outside. HKP would drive the Phooeymobile out of the bin, with Spot already in the car. With just a small Lone Ranger mask and an orange-and-white karate suit, no one knows that HKP and Penry Pooch are one in the same. HKP would often consult his manual, *The Hong Kong Book of Kung Fu*, for assistance.

In the series, Spot acted like a cat, didn't talk, and mostly walked on all fours, but he would pull HKP out of every jam he was in at the time. He would be the one that would make it all work out and make HKP look like a hero. Rosemary had a crush on HKP, and Penry was amateur inventor who sometimes broke the fourth wall by winking at or addressing the audience. The Phooeymobile could become anything HKP needed it to do—like a helicopter or a boat. The theme song to the show was very strong, with its catchy "number one super guy" lyric, and sung by Scatman Crothers, the actor/singer/comedian who also voiced Penry/HKP.

Cartoonist and animator Willie Ito was an integral part of the development and execution of *Hong Kong Phooey*. "It was during the Bruce Lee craze and H-B was well known for parodies, and jumping on the latest," Ito tells *BACK ISSUE*. "We were jamming on new show concepts, playing with character designs, and the natural thing was the kung-fu craze. Terrytoons had a show called *Hashimoto Mouse*, a judo character. Not that we imitated the show, it gave us a thought and idea. The idea was run by Joe Barbera, who gave the green light to develop.

"Rather than have a voice actor do an 'Ahh sooo!' [a standard, comical "Oriental" voice characterization of the day which is now considered offensive—*ed.*], we thought a uniquely unlikely voice might work. One night after work, the three of us on the project went to relax at the Hollywood Bowl, a bowling alley with a cocktail lounge. Scatman Crothers was entertaining that night. After his set, we invited him to join us at our table. We mentioned the project we were involved in and invited him to audition. We ran the idea by Joe and he liked to see how it'll work.

"Meanwhile, we were having R&R at the Imperial Garden's restaurant," Ito continues. "[Actor] Pat Morita was there, so we invited him to join us. We also offered an audition to him. Come Monday when we expected him to come in, he never showed. Few days later we ran into him again. We asked why he never came in and he had a conflicting audition.

HONG KONG PHOOEY

by Mark

Arnold



WILLIE ITO

Courtesy of Mark Arnold.



Number One Super Guy

From the archives of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com), a 1974 publicity cel for Hanna-Barbera's *Hong Kong Phooey*.

TM & © Hanna-Barbera Productions.

Looking back, it is very clear that Atlas/Seaboard Comics was not afraid to throw genres against the wall to see what stuck. Martin Goodman and his upstart company's group of creators published superheroes, Westerns, monsters, war heroes, barbarians, and even comedic teen comics. Why not add a bit of martial-arts mayhem to the mix? In the early '70s, it seemed that if Marvel had it, Atlas/Seaboard wanted it, and indeed by June 1975, the cover date of the one and only issue of *The Hands of the Dragon*, Marvel had found high-kicking success with *Master of Kung Fu* and *Iron Fist*. Indeed, if Marvel had a taste, Atlas/Seaboard and Goodman wanted a bite, so Goodman and his neophyte comic-book company dropped *The Hands of the Dragon* on a comic fandom eager for more hard-hitting martial-arts comic books.

To make sure that *The Hands of the Dragon* packed a punch, Atlas/Seaboard turned to writer Ed Fedory, artist Jim Craig, and editor Larry Lieber. Fedory did some work for Warren's *Creepy*, while the Canadian-born Craig was trying to break into comics with Marvel and not having a great deal of luck. As Craig tells *BACK ISSUE*, "I tried for months to get into Marvel... coming in on my own, and editorial would say, 'Okay, Jim what do you want today?' And I would say, 'You said you might have some inking for me.' And they'd say, 'No, we don't. Come back in a week.'"

"Atlas was a couple of blocks down the street from Marvel. So I went over there... and they go, 'Are you the guy Marvel sent over?' I said, 'Yeah, that's me.'"

The single issue of *The Hands of the Dragon* that was published makes it very clear that Craig had a natural talent for drawing realistic and frenetic martial-arts action. The man was such a natural at fluid and graceful martial combat that one would assume that Craig was a huge fun of the martial-arts craze of the era, but that was not really the case.

"When you walked through New York, there were all these Bruce Lee movies and on the radio, '[Everybody Was] Kung-Fu Fighting,'" Craig recalls. "I was so sick of kung fu. It was the last thing I ever wanted to do. But I knew I could do it." Craig's kung-fu ennui didn't stop him from giving Atlas/Seaboard's martial-arts almost-sensation his best, and there was still one bit of kung-fu lore that Craig had a fondness for: "I used to love the *Kung Fu* TV show when I was a kid. Whatever I do, I give it 110%. I make it my own and make it something I actually care about."

And Craig's 110% shows. When a brave explorer into comic-book history cracks open the cover of *The Hands of the Dragon* #1, he finds a mish-mosh of energetic ideas loosely held together, but still fun and earnest. The comic opens with an old Asian man journeying to China with his twin grandsons strapped to his back. Through exposition, the old man informs the reader that the babies were orphaned in the War and he was bringing them to a monastery in China. Suddenly, because Atlas/Seaboard sure liked its comic-book tropes, an (presumably) atomic bomb hits, eradiating the old man and the twins. Not many martial-arts sagas begin with the protagonists being bathed in atomic energy à la Hulk or Godzilla, but there you go. Not two panels later, the old man is attacked by a polar bear (this comic *moves*, you guys, let me tell you). The old man arrives at the monastery where it is revealed he was a former monk named Teh Chang. Chang gives his former comrades the twins, but sadly, one of the babes was severely burnt in the explosion.

A page later, the twins are grown. The burnt, deformed twin Ling "uses his strength to injure," while Wu Teh, the twin untouched by fire, "has grown tall and strong like the noble oak." The twins do battle for the first time as Wu Teh comes to the aid of a fellow acolyte. These pages are where Craig really shines as he renders every kick and blow with a pounding energy that defines the genre. Craig informs *BACK ISSUE* that he did not find his hard-hitting inspiration from TV or film or even from the competitors' martial-arts comics, but instead, much closer to home. "I had a neighbor kid who had all these kung-fu magazines... I took the gist of it."

And the gist and so much was there as evident by that first fight, a conflict that quickly escalated when the repugnant Ling grabs a weapon to kill Wu Teh. Grandfather Teh Chang tries to intervene but is accidentally (?) stabbed and killed by Ling. As the old man dies in his arms, Wu Teh swears

THE HANDS OF THE DRAGON™

by Marc Buxton



Martial Arts from Atlas

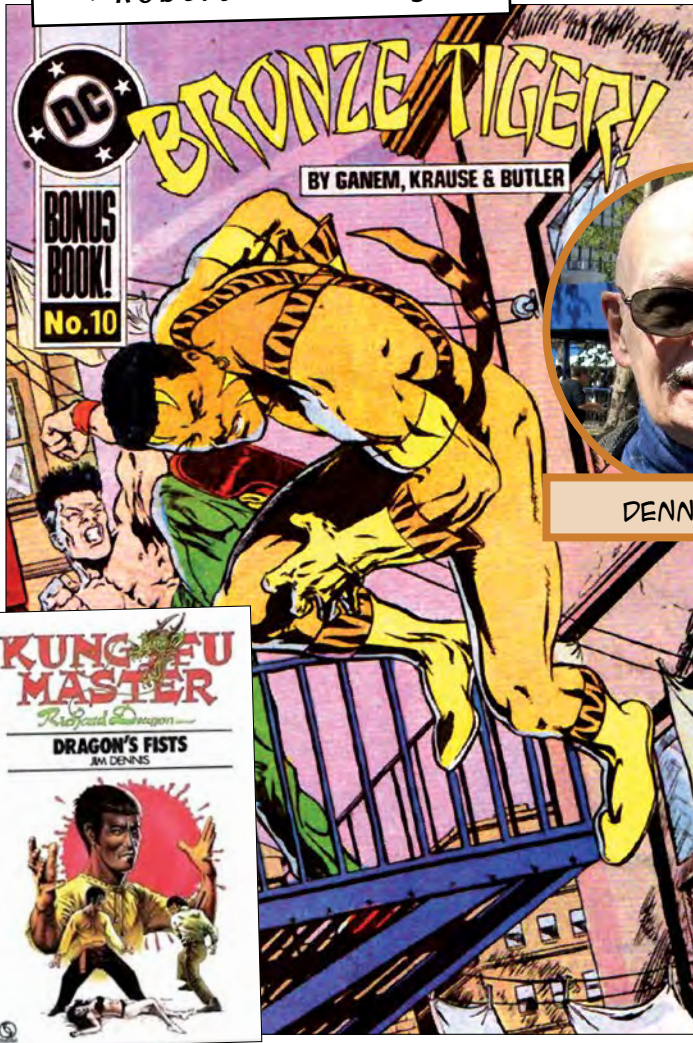
Artist Jim Craig's kickin' cover to the one and only issue of *The Hands of the Dragon*, #1 (June 1975).

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TRAIL ^{OF THE} TIGER

EXPLORING THE TORTURED HISTORY OF BEN TURNER, THE BRONZE TIGER

by Robert Greenberger



DENNY O'NEIL

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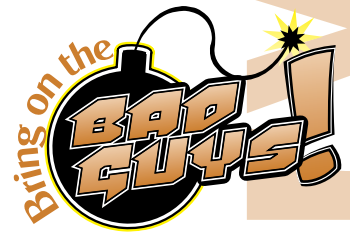
Man of Bronze

Cover to Bronze Tiger's solo outing in *Bonus Book* #10, which appeared inside *Suicide Squad* #21 (Winter 1988).

Cover art by Peter Krause and Fred Butler.

(inset) The novel where it all began.

Bronze Tiger TM & © DC Comics.



In the 1970s, Marvel Comics' management appeared to have its finger on the pulse of its readership, nimbly leaping onto trends. DC Comics, on the other hand, was nicknamed by its own staffers as "DC Misses the Boat Comics," launching titles in a genre after the fad had peaked. This was never truer than with the kung-fu craze, with Marvel offering up Shang-Chi and Iron Fist in 1973 and DC countering nearly two years later with *Richard Dragon*, *Kung-Fu Fighter* and *Karate Kid* [which we covered in *BACK ISSUE* #49 and 67, respectively—ed.].

Dragon was from writer/editor Denny O'Neil, adapting his own novel, *Dragon's Fists: Kung-Fu Master Richard Dragon*. Under the pseudonym Jim Dennis, O'Neil co-wrote the 1974 Award/Tandem novel with cartoonist Jim Berry (1932–2015). Intended as a series, based on the #1 on its cover, the novel never had sequels although it has received favorable notices through the years. The book introduces readers to Richard Drakunovski, the arrogant son of a US ambassador, who has been thrown out of numerous schools across Europe and Asia. The thrill-seeker exhausts legal experiences and winds up turning to crime, which is how he was in Hong Kong, attempting to rob O-Sensei in his dojo. The wizened O-Sensei effectively beats Dragon, literally knocking some sense into the younger man.

Drakunovski becomes his student, and over the next seven years trains with the O-Sensei. There he meets another student named Benjamin—no last name provided—but definitely written in the Richard Roundtree/Jim Brown mold. He also falls for the O-Sensei's daughter, Carolyn Wotami, so all the elements were there for a book series that would be comfortably placed alongside the *Destroyer* and *Executioner* series that were in vogue at the time.

BRONZE TIGER'S BRONZE AGE DEBUT

More than a year after Shang-Chi was introduced, DC Comics publisher Carmine Infantino ordered a martial-arts series and O'Neil, a DC editor at the time, had just the property. A deal was cut to license the characters and bring them to four-color, with Jim Berry dutifully credited, as the first few issues of *Richard Dragon*, *Kung-Fu Fighter* (RDKFF) loosely adapted the novel.

O'Neil made notable revisions to the premise, making Drakunovski more likable as Richard Dragon and evolving Carolyn Wotami into Carolyn Woosan, ultimately turning her into the more recognizable Lady Shiva. Benjamin gained a last name—Turner—and the book was off and running.

Unlike other titles of the era, *Richard Dragon*, *Kung-Fu Fighter* was light in tone and each issue fairly episodic with loose issue-to-issue threads and no connection to the DC Universe. At least at first.

The title had a wide variety of art styles in its early run, with work from Leopoldo Duranona, Dick Giordano, Jim Starlin, Alan Weiss, and even Jack Kirby. Eventually Ric Estrada took over the penciling or laying out the book and it moved nicely, looking great when Wally Wood inked a few issues. They made a terrific team, better known for their concurrent work on *All-Star Comics* [as you'll witness in next issue's *Justice Society of America* article—ed.].

Given the book's title, Richard Dragon was the main character, with Ben Turner serving as best friend, confidant, and sidekick. When Dragon decides to follow Woosan to New York, Turner tags along, and when Barney Ling arrives to recruit Dragon into the secret operation dubbed G.O.O.D., Turner is also included. Both teach at their Manhattan dojo and then globetrot on missions for Ling, who is never trustworthy. If anyone is in need of rescue or injured on the job, it's always Turner. During the title's short run, Turner wound up shot twice.

Since Dragon was falling for Woosan, Turner found himself a third wheel until he met and began dating Jane Lewis. Just as things started to look up for Turner, in RDKFF #10 (July 1976) he learned of his sister's death, the fourth death in a line of people who owned a prime logging estate in the Pacific Northwest. As the property's newest owner, Turner, accompanied by Dragon and Lady Shiva, goes to explore and exposes

Head Games

On Howard Chaykin's cover to (top left) *Suicide Squad* #1 (May 1987), we see the Bronze Tiger in his tiger headress. But as issue (top middle) #2's cover shows, artist Luke McDonnell (inked here by Karl Kesel) humanized the character's look by ditching the mask.

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The Beast Within

(top right) Turner's origin was explored in *Suicide Squad* #38 (Feb. 1990). Cover by Kevin Maguire and Geof Isherwood. (bottom left) A feral Bronze Tiger pose, courtesy of *SS* #65 (May 1992) cover artists Isherwood and Kesel.

TM & © DC Comics.

rage that he would spend a lifetime trying to control. He studied martial arts to channel his emotions, leading him to Kirigi, who proved to be cruel and useless in helping Turner learn to master his rage. Turner crossed paths with young Bruce Wayne, also studying under the Korean master. Instead, Turner took to the road, which led him to Hong Kong and the O-Sensei, becoming his pupil... before Richard Dragon showed up.

We went on to establish that after working for Ling and G.O.O.D., Dragon and Turner were recruited by King Faraday to work for the Central Bureau of Intelligence. This is where, post-Crisis, they encountered the League of Assassins.

The League, in turn, exacted revenge by killing Turner's fiancée, Myosh. They kidnapped and brainwashed Turner, riding the rage by pouring it into the Tiger's helmet. When wearing the Bronze Tiger outfit, Turner was a deadly assassin, but also, in later continuity implants, he passed on the O-Sensei's training to David Cain's daughter Cassandra.

The Tiger was involved in Kathy Kane's death, but depending on the continuity of the moment, she was or was not Batwoman. At this writing, the theory is that Kathy was infiltrating Batman's inner circle and faked her own death, absolving the Tiger... but no doubt that will change again,

Donna Olmstead.

Back in my telling, King Faraday learned who the dreaded Bronze Tiger really was and asked Rick Flag and Nightshade to rescue the tortured man and bring him home. Amanda Waller herself personally deprogrammed Turner and recruited him into Task Force X.

Whereas Flag followed Waller's orders more often than not, the Bronze Tiger almost immediately disobeys direct orders when the team journeys to Apokolips to save Lashina, who has fought alongside them since issue #3. On the other hand, Flo Crawley accompanies the team and dies on the mission.



JOHN OSTRANDER

WHEN

MUHAMMAD ALI

STOOD ALONGSIDE SUPERMAN, BATMAN, AND CAPTAIN AMERICA

by Michael Kronenberg

It's 1976, and Muhammad Ali, once a despised outcast in American society, has been exonerated by the US Supreme Court, recaptured the heavyweight title in a stunning upset of George Foreman, and is about to be immortalized as an action figure alongside comic-book icons Superman, Batman, and Captain America.

Ali's road to redemption was long and treacherous. In 1964, the former Olympic Gold Medal boxer stunned the world when he defeated the seemingly invincible Sonny Liston to win the heavyweight boxing title. The day after the fight, Cassius Clay renounced his "slave name" and announced he had joined the Nation of Islam. His name was now Cassius X (later changed to Muhammad Ali). In the eyes of much of the press and the majority of the American public, Ali went from being a charismatic, entertaining, and boastful young man (he was 22 years old) to becoming a danger to society. At a time when the heavyweight champion of the world carried considerable clout and influence, he became the most feared and hated sports figure in America. Ali continued to speak out boldly against racism and for segregation of the races, something that Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad preached about. From 1964 to 1967, Ali's lock on the heavyweight title seemed impenetrable. His skills, speed, and artistry in the ring had never been seen in the heavyweight division. No fighter came close to beating him or even threatening his reign.

When Ali was classified 1-A by the draft board and called up to enter the Vietnam War in 1967, he refused induction. His famous quote, "I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong," became a rallying cry for the anti-Vietnam War movement. Because of his religion, Ali claimed he was a conscientious objector; his request was turned down by the draft board. Sentenced to five years in prison and fined \$10,000 for draft evasion, Ali had to surrender his passport, was stripped of his heavyweight title, and his boxing license was revoked. Ali endured a three-and-a-half year exile from boxing, robbing him of his peak years as a fighter. During that time, he spoke regularly at college campuses throughout the country. He became a unifying voice for both the civil rights and anti-war movements.

In October 1970, thanks to the influence of Georgia's African-American senator Leroy Johnson, along with the economic influence of black businesses in Atlanta, and the fact that Georgia did not have a state athletic commission, Ali was able to procure a Georgia state boxing license. In the racially progressive city of Atlanta, Ali fought and defeated heavyweight contender Jerry Quarry. This set a precedent for other states to grant Ali a boxing license. New York followed Georgia and opened the door for the fight everyone in the world wanted to see—Muhammad Ali vs. heavyweight champion Joe Frazier at Madison Square Garden, the mecca of boxing. Meanwhile, some of the greatest legal minds were working pro bono to get Ali's draft evasion indictment overturned. They fought the indictment all the way to the Supreme Court. Ali's much-touted bout with Joe Frazier took place on March 8, 1971. Dubbed "The Fight of the Century," it was the first and only time two undefeated heavyweight champions met in the ring. Still regarded as one of the greatest sports spectacles ever, the bout lived up to the hype and Frazier won a hard-fought unanimous decision. Three months after the fight with Frazier, the Supreme Court overturned Ali's conviction.



World's Greatest Real-Life Hero

"The Champ," Mego's Muhammad Ali action figure, in the package.

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count

What is known for sure is that the man who would later be known as Count Danté did, in fact, train under Sensei Robert Trias, and was the co-founder and Mid-West Director of the United States Karate Association (U.S.K.A.). He eventually became the first (and youngest) fifth degree black belt in the history of

Deadly Hands Issue • BACK ISSUE • 67



COUNT DANTÉ

ARMOR™

AND THE MARTIAL ARTS

An Interview with



by **Peter Stone**

"I was a drawing painter who could paint kung fu. You were pretty much stuck with me."

— Neal Adams

In 1987, posters appeared in the subway tunnels of New York City featuring a figure clothed entirely in bright, silver, interlocking metal. He wore a bright red helmet and his word balloon said, "For you to live, I must die... but Armor will not die!" The red logo across the top read simply, "Armor," and above that read the words, "Coming Soon from Continuity." Commuters who saw it probably assumed it was an upcoming movie since it gave no indication that it was a comic book. It was Neal Adams' intention to assume Armor would be a movie. However, to hardcore comic-book fans, Armor had appeared in comic stores through the direct-sales market two years earlier. In 1987, Neal had just signed a contract for newsstand distribution with Kable News, and the Armor poster was an attempt to drum up excitement for the first issue of the new series.

In 1987, Neal Adams' Continuity Comics re-released the first issue of the martial-arts/kung-fu/alien-warrior/superhero epic called *Armor* through the massive newsstand venues of Kable News. It had the sense of a high-tech martial-arts movie, a space epic in the vein of *Star Wars*, and a bunch of superhero angst and combat. A victim of an alien slave-trader, Armor's real name was Jack Keaton, a teenage Canadian kid who had the potential to become a "Ten."

"A tenth-level Black Belt in any martial art is as far as you can go. You don't go to 11," states Neal Adams about Armor.

"Armor is martial-arts oriented. He is martial-arts oriented, and when you say he's a ten, the martial artists... they get that. 'Oh, you don't mess with him 'cause he'll just take you out.' He is a super-weaponized ninja whose body armor is basically weapons."

Armor's body armor contains practically any weapon the modern ninja might need. Examples run from throwing stars, nunchucks, a three-section staff, a bo staff, a spear to a bow (with arrows tucked neatly into his boots), a vast variety of blades which includes a sword that unfolds to its full length with the snap of the wrist, and even throwing claws which snap closed on an opponent's body part. Armor, claims his creator, is a master of all of them. Armor is a modern-day ninja trained in alien combat disciplines with the arrogance of a teenager and the brilliance of a master tactician.

"We assume that if you have two arms and two legs, martial arts is intergalactic," says Adams about the creation of Armor. The first eight issues were designed to be an epic, extended origin leading to last and eighth issue showcasing the final battle between Armor and Rage, the intergalactic slaver who kidnapped and trained Armor with the express purpose of selling him to the

NEAL ADAMS

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Sci-fi Kung Fu

A print of Neal Adams' stunning cover art from *Armor* vol. 1 #1 (Sept. 1985).

All artwork accompanying this article is courtesy of Neal Adams and Peter Stone.

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