comic book CREATOR™

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STEVE RUDE

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE DUDE

Contains mild nudity for figure-drawing demonstration; suggested for Mature Readers Only

Cover art by Steve Rude

also: MARY FLEENER • NEAL ADAMS' JUNGLE MAN • RICH BUCKLER

WOODY IN SUMMER
CBC mascot by **J.D. KING**

About Our Cover

Art by **STEVE RUDE**

Colors by **GLENN WHITMORE**

Above: Steve Rude renders his greatest co-creation, Nexus, and solo creation The Moth for a cover that also features the artist's studies and warm-up sketches as background. These routine exercises reveal not only a remarkably disciplined creative mind, but serve as evidence of the great illustrators and art instructors who have invoked a tremendous influence on The Dude, very prominently the author of *Figure Drawing for All It's Worth*, Andrew Loomis, the great 20th century illustrator.

COMIC BOOK CREATOR
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comic book CREATOR™

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Right: *A detail of Steve Rude's cover painting for* The Nexus Omnibus *Vol. 3 [2013], featuring his most revered creation, that interstellar executioner of human mass murderers co-created by Mike Baron.*

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A History of Fleener

Part one of *CBC*'s chat with the longtime artist and comics' newest graphic novelist

Interview conducted by JON B. COOKE *CBC* Editor

[*With the coming of her very first graphic novel,* Billie the Bee *(due early next year from Fantagraphics),* CBC *finally has a timely excuse to feature a two-part interview with the superb "cubismo" cartoonist, Mary Fleener. Though Ye Ed has been pals with the artist/musician since she conducted a Marie Severin interview for* Comic Book Artist *back in the early '00s (as well as becoming a major participant in the comprehensive survey by yours truly of R. Crumb's comics humor anthology,* The Book of Weirdo, *coming soon from Last Gasp), not enough was known about her background, so we're delighted to remedy that in this first of a two-part talk! —* **Y.E.**]

Comic Book Creator: *Hi, Mary!*
Mary Fleener: Hi, Jon!
CBC: *So, where are you from? Why don't we talk about your early years?*
Mary: I was born in Los Angeles and my mother is an L.A. native, so I'm second generation. We moved to West Covina when I was a child, and then moved to West Vancouver, in British Columbia, then six years later, we moved back to the Los Angeles area.
CBC: *Are you an only child?*
Mary: No, I have a brother, Dennis, who's seven years older than I am. He was born in 1945.
CBC: *What's your mom's name?*
Mary: My mother's name is Catherine Virginia.
CBC: *And she's from L.A. originally. Was she creative? She was involved with Disney, right? What's her story?*
Mary: She was a child dancer in a group called the Meglin Kiddies, and some of the other little girls that were in her dance troupe were the Gumm Sisters, and the youngest of the Gumms was a girl later known as Judy Garland. The troupe would perform in the theaters back in the '20s, before the movies would start and do a little routine. My mom was the same age as Judy — six years old.

My grandmother was very talented, as well. She sewed a lot of the costumes for them. You know, they didn't have stretchy fabric back then, so it was pretty difficult to make costumes that kids could move in, and of course, all the sequins and spangles had to be hand sewn. As she got older, she didn't like the way she was being looked at and treated by men, because Hollywood was evil. [*laughter*] So she got into art and got out of dancing because it creeped her out. She's told me some stories that were just scary and disgusting. It's a good thing she did leave… My grandparents were always around and protected her, because they knew what it was like… you know, the stories of Fatty Arbuckle and scandals like that. I grew up hearing all these terrible stories about Hollywood because my grandfather worked for the health department, and where they lived was just a couple of blocks from where they found the Black Dahlia.

CBC: *Wow!*
Mary: Yeah! So I really have L.A. roots, you might say.
CBC: *Do you remember what year your mom was born?*
Mary: Oh, of course. She was born in 1922, and she will be 97 this January.
CBC: *Wow again!*
Mary: Yeah, I know! And after she graduated from high school, she went to Woodbury College and majored in costume design. I have all her drawings that she did from that time, with the ladies who looked like Loretta Young and Bette Davis. She was really very talented, and how she ended up at Disney was this: she married my father when

Left: *Mary Fleener posing for* The Artist Within *photographer Greg Preston. For this session, Mary appeared with cartoonists Roberta Gregory and Joyce Farmer in the latter's studio.*
Inset above: *The cover of Mary's first graphic novel,* Billie the Bee, *to be published in February by Fantagraphics. The book is discussed in next issue's concluding interview installment.*

Portrait by Greg Preston

Inset right top: *Mary's mom, 1943, at age 21. This photo appears in* Ink and Paint: The Women of Walt Disney's Animation *[2017] by Mindy Johnson (seen above).* **Inset right center:** *A 1942 drawing by Catherine Nunes. Mary shared, "They had sketching sessions frequently and one day they had a whole band of mariachis playing and she did this quick sketch of the conductor.* **Bottom:** *While working on* The Three Caballeros, *she'd often find drawings on her desk. The signature is "Jack Hunter," who she doesn't recall.*

she was 19, and he immediately was sent over to North Africa. He got to talking with some guys he met on a train, and they worked for Disney, and he said, "I'm going off to war and my wife will be moving in with her parents and she's going to need something to do." So they said, "Tell her to bring her portfolio down." She did and she got the job. But she only worked at Disney for two years, from 1941–43, because when my dad came back from the war, he showed up in a taxi with his uniform on, came to the studios, she introduced him to everybody, and then off they went to Florida. And she left her career behind, became that's what women did: they went with their husbands, became housewives, and had children. My brother was born shortly thereafter. [*laughs*] It didn't take long! And I was born seven years later.

CBC: *What did she do at Disney?*

Mary: Well, she started off as an inker and, after a month-and-a-half, she was promoted to animation department and worked with a guy named Johnny Bond. She did work on military training films, which were very top secret. In fact, I've got her copy of the loyalty oath she had to sign. If you divulged anything you were working on, you could get ten years in prison or a $10,000 fine! Then she was up in a little room where she would do stuff for *The Three Caballeros* [1944]. There she traced cels that were used in live action with animation. And it sounded like it was a great place to work. Many times, the Dixieland band, the Firehouse Five Plus Two, played in the courtyard where people had lunch. I'm not sure what the training films she worked on looked like, or what they were about, or anything like that. She doesn't remember. At her age, there are only some things she's really clear about.

My mom's in remarkable shape. We go shopping, and she gets her vitamins — they're on the bottom of the row — and she just bends down and picks them up. It's remarkable she's that clear of mind and healthy. She has a pacemaker, but she's doing okay.

CBC: *What is her maiden name?*

Mary: Her maiden name is Nunes. My great-grandfather was Portuguese, so it was probably pronounced "noon-yez" in the old country, but changed when he came here to America.

CBC: *And what was your dad's name?*

Mary: Fleener. [*laughs*]

CBC: *I get that part, Mary.*

Mary: His first name was Cecil. Like *Beany and Cecil.*

CBC: *Where was he from?*

Mary: He's Iowan, born on a farm with five sisters, and he got up and milked the cows at three in the morning and worked all day, and, when he was old enough to join the Navy, he got the hell out of there. I don't know Iowa very well, but he's always told me, "Don't go there. You'll hate it. It's all flat." They were very poor… they were *very* poor. I've seen pictures of him and his siblings sitting on a porch, dressed in plain clothes, and for Christmas they would get one orange each. That's the only time they'd ever get an orange was once a year. I've seen pictures of when the locusts would come in and eat all the crops, all these bugs in the sky, and he said my grandmother would run out and try to swat them with a broom. It's just big, black clouds of bugs just waiting to devour everything. Horrifying.

CBC: The Good Earth*?*

Mary: Yes, very much so, and my grandmother was strict Baptist, no drinking, no smoking, no dancing. But my dad's father, he was a three-packer-a-day, didn't go to church, probably drank a little bit, so they were opposites. That didn't stop them from having six children. [*laughs*] Maybe even more, because she I think lost a few, as was pretty common back then. So my dad made it to 97. He died three years ago.

CBC: *And they remained married how long?*

Mary: Seventy-five years.

CBC: *That's amazing!*

Mary: Yeah, it is amazing, because… there were raised voices in our household. [*laughs*] Let's leave it at that!

CBC: *And what brought him to California? He met your mom out in L.A.?*

Mary: They met on a train, and she was with her mother, and they were very formal. I think the first letter he wrote her was addressed to "Miss Nunes," and then she wrote back to "Mr. Fleener." [*laughs*] She was showing me those the last time I was up there, and it was all very prim and proper like it was back then. And they went on, he courted her, and they got married and had a big Catholic Church

after that. But, anyway, so that's what I studied were those. We didn't have comic books. Romance comic books were really popular, but they had Frederick's of Hollywood ads in the back and my mom thought those were too sexy for me to see. Too provocative! And I did start drawing sexy ladies and everything right away because, okay, *Mighty Mouse*, and *Mickey Mouse*, and all the animal shows, there was always like this sexy girl character going, "Hi, baby." The Marilyn Monroe type… and that was the thing. Sex was everywhere! They had Jayne Mansfield, Brigitte Bardot on the TV, in every magazine, and the women had the tight waists, and they had those pointy bras. My dad had a pile of *Playboys* right next to the bed! And my mom was worried about Frederick's of Hollywood? I mean, it was laughable.

So, yeah, no comic books. We didn't have allowances. We didn't have money to buy comics.

CBC: *So you got into comic strips, what, when you were six or eight? Pretty young?*

Mary: I remember it being before kindergarten, before I could read even. I just looked at the pictures for hours, but I could "read" *The Little King* easily!

CBC: *Did you copy them?*

Mary: I traced them. [*laughs*] But that was the one thing I would get me in trouble with my mom. That was a no-no. If you're going to draw, you draw it all by yourself.

CBC: *Oh, really?*

Mary: For tracing!

CBC: *At 11, you were selling Tijuana Bibles? Mary F. Fleener!* [laughter]

Mary: Yeah. And my mom caught me in the act. I only did maybe ten of them, but, hey, it was three bucks, four, maybe a couple bucks. Remember candy bars were really big and they only cost a nickel then, right?

CBC: [Laughs] *That's great. So did you, was TV in your house early on?*

Mary: Yeah, we always had a TV, but it was always all the intellectual stuff, and the big show *21st Century*. God, they did nothing but talk about World War II when I was growing up on TV constantly. And then my dad was the dictator of the TV, so he watched Mitch Miller, Lawrence Welk… *You Bet Your Life* with Groucho Marx was the family favorite. I was totally influenced by his subversive humor. I still enjoy those shows. We weren't allowed to watch Saturday morning cartoons. She thought sitting around watching TV was bad, so we had to go outside and play. But every once in a while, there were the Fleischer Brothers cartoons, and they blew me away. Those were the freakiest things, and they still are the freakiest animation strips on earth. I remember I sat through about two hours of these when my mom wasn't home, and my grandmother was babysitting, so I could watch all the cartoons I wanted. And they were just weird. And everybody was always bouncy because of the music, and I thought that was so weird that characters were like, "Bump, bump, bump, bump," all the time.

CBC: *Were you a tomboy?*

Mary: Oh, yeah! And I didn't consider myself a tomboy, I was just… You know, it's funny. I was talking to my mom about this last time I went to visit her that I hated girls' clothes. I still hate girls' clothes. I haven't worn a dress for 30 years. I wanted to wear pants, and I wanted robots, and I wanted science things. I hated dolls. But I didn't want to be a boy. I just didn't like that stuff. So I guess I got a tomboy label. But I wanted long hair, and I wanted to wear makeup and soon as I could, and I liked jewelry, and some girly stuff — you know, it was different, because back then you had to wear skirts to school, and it was the petticoats, and… ugh. It was just awful. Girls were still wearing the full skirts with the petticoats, and the little barrettes and all that crap. And so that was what was neat about moving to Canada. It was

Above: *This early example of Marys comic strip work from* Prime Cuts *#5 [Nov. 1987], the first anthology in which she appeared, after* Weirdo. *About the story's subject matter, as timely today as when it first appeared, Mary said, "As long as we get our cheap labor, nothing will ever change."* **Below:** *Mary's* Madame X from Planet Sex *strip appeared in* Weirdo. *This panel is from #14 [Fall 1985].*

"Campesino" © Mary Fleener.

Lord of the Jungle Man

Gary Buckingham chats with Neal Adams about his Tarzan-inspired Illustrations

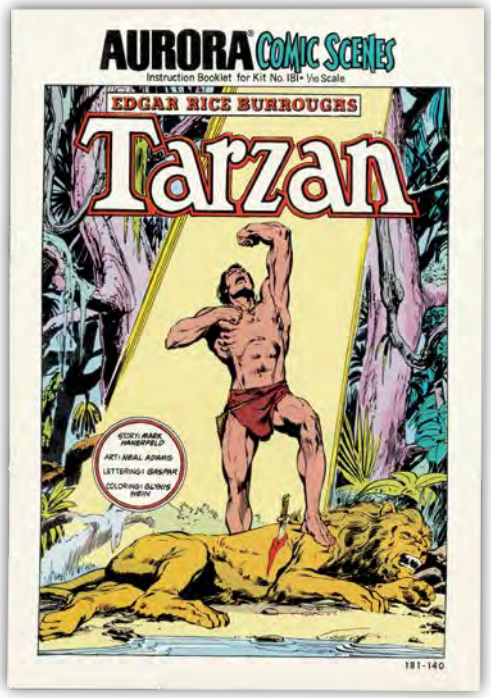
by GARY BUCKINGHAM

This interview originally appeared in *The Burroughs Bulletin* #92 [Fall, 2014].

This page: *Above is Neal Adams illustration that was used for a Ballantine paperbacks box set. Inset right and bottom are the cover of the Aurora "Comic Scenes" mini-comic included in their Tarzan model kit, art by Neal Adams.* **Next page:** *Hand-colored limited edition print of Neal Adams' Jungle Man and primate companions. Courtesy of Mike Conran.*

[*Neal Adams has been a professional illustrator since 1959. Many consider him to be the best comic book artist in the modern history of the medium. He has produced thousands of illustrations for comic books and strips, book covers, commercial advertising, and even designs for amusement parks. Unquestionably, his art depicting DC's Batman, Green Lantern, and Deadman and Marvel's X-Men and Avengers are some of the most sought-after issues in the decades-long existence of those characters. Still prolific after more than 50 years, his art is available from his website,* www.nealadams.com. *He continues to work the comic book convention circuit, readily accepting commissions and producing exceptional work, including new sketches of his Jungle Man.*

Which leads me to explain matters a bit: Of course, the character of Tarzan was created by Edgar Rice Burroughs and remains the property of ERB, Inc. While some of Neal's artwork has been used to professionally depict Tarzan of the Apes (as exemplified by the Ballantine paperback editions of the Tarzan *novels [1975–79], which included 12*



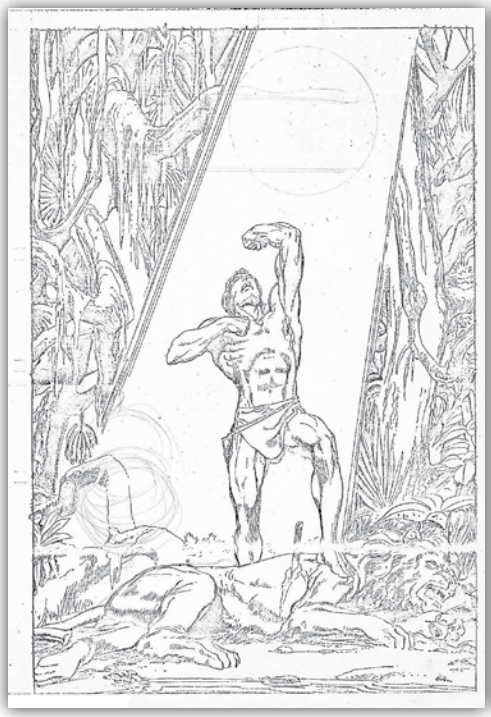
covers using his art), all of his work presented here are of Neal's "Jungle Man." Like the rest of us, the artist is a fan of Burroughs' work and is influenced to a greater or lesser degree by those stories. If the reader chooses to remember the Jungle Man as representative of Tarzan, that is one interpretation.

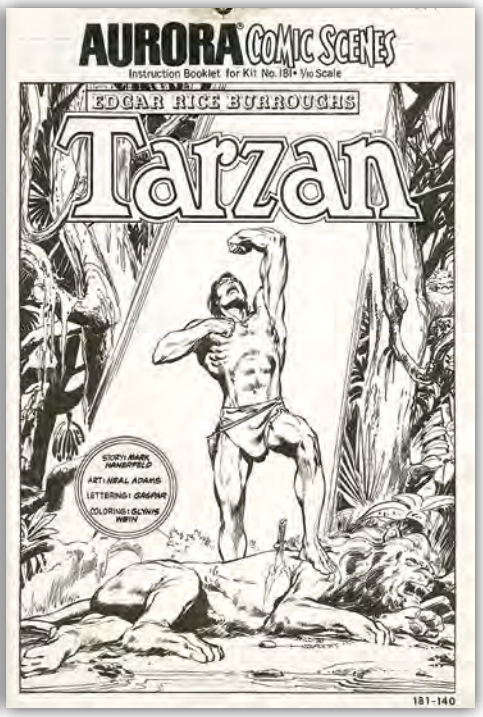
Neal was interviewed on June 23, 2013, at the Albuquerque Comic Expo.

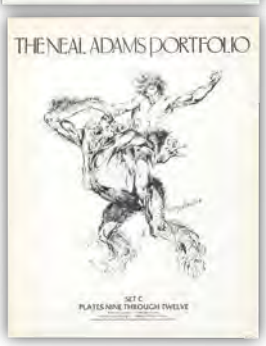
—Gary Buckingham]

Gary Buckingham: *At what age did you first learn of the stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs and in what setting (books, movies, comic books, etc.)?*

Neal Adams: Well, I watched *Tarzan* movies from Johnny Weissmuller on; I don't think that I missed anybody in-between. And I also worked at Coney Island as a young teenager. These penny machines, the two-penny machines in Steeplechase Park, where they played old Elmo Lincoln movies [1918–21]. Flip cards — they were animated, but were on cards — I looked at them through a kind of stereoscopic card. So I saw some of those. I'm trying to think of his name, the guy with curly hair who was an athlete in college, decathlon winner [Glenn Morris, 1936







Olympian gold medalist]. I've seen a ton of *Tarzan*s. I'd love to have seen all the old *Tarzan*s, but I think they are gone. I saw maybe a half-minute of Elmo Lincoln. I'd want to see a whole Elmo Lincoln *Tarzan* movie.

But, in junior high school, I began to read *Tarzan* novels. Of course, I fell in love with those, as anybody would. I would give them to my friends; after I read one I would pass it around. They're terrific. For some people, they're not great literature. But to me, they're classic, like reading Batman or Sherlock Homes.

Gary: *What was your first professionally published depiction of an ERB character — possibly the Tarzan Aurora ["Comic Scenes"] Model Kit?*

Neal: No, it wasn't that.

Gary: *I found in* The Neal Adams Treasury *#2 [1979] an intended "1960s NBC* Tarzan*" illustration. Was that ever published?*

Neal: It was never published. It was a failing of mine. I didn't realize I was actually in the running to do the ad. I thought they were hiring me to do comps [comprehensive layout—closely mimics a final creation of an illustration, for approval by decision-makers] or something for the Ron Ely TV show. Why would they give a 19-year-old the opportunity to do an illustration like that? I sort of blew it because I wasn't taking it seriously or maybe I was too humble or whatever it was. I did very tight sketches for it, but I never got to do it. That was the first year of that television show. The *Tarzan* television show came out at the same time as the *Star Trek* show [1966]. They both came out at the same time, and I got to pick which one I was going to do. I really failed on doing the illustration, although I started on a nice path, but they decided to use a more professional artist. I had a great time on it.

Gary: *So what was the first time you were professionally published with a Burroughs character?*

Neal: Probably when I did the covers for the Ballantine Books.

Gary: *Perhaps the Aurora model kit [1974] and the Ballantine Books ['75] art were done in the same time-frame.*

Neal: Probably in the same time; people were used to me doing that very athletic kind of character in *Batman*. The people that had me do those Jungle Man covers (that people called Tarzan) wanted the very kind of athletic character that I drew. Probably around the same time.

Gary: *What was your first fan magazine depiction of a Burroughs character [1972's* Heritage *semi-pro 'zine, #1b]?*

Neal: Maybe. [*Shown final page of silent five-page story.*] Obviously, I did in this a John Carter, Flash Gordon, and a fantasy Tarzan.

Gary: *Which leads to my next question: how did this* Heritage *#1b five-page story come to be illustrated? This last page of the story also includes a Thark lying prone.*

Neal: I decided to do a little story, a fantasy, of transporting the body of Tarzan to Mars. For no reason that I can excuse; it just seemed like a good idea. I believe that there were five pages. And I got to do fantasy characters that I didn't think I would get the opportunity to do. You know the idea of doing a Thark was great. It was also a fan magazine. It wasn't the matter of doing a job or a license or anything, it was a matter of fantasy that never happened in any of the books. I just put this conglomeration together and it turned out pretty good.

Gary: *So that's Flash Gordon and not Carson Napier of Venus?*

Neal: Nope, it's Flash.

Gary: *In the color* Neal Adams Portfolio*, 12 plates were included [in three sets of four plates each]. Eleven of them were used as covers in the 1975 Ballantine paperback editions of Tarzan novels. How did it come about that the "Ant Men" plate was not used on a Ballantine book, and a 13th illustration that was not in your portfolio was created*

Art © Neal Adams. *Mediascene* TM & © James Steranko/Supergraphics.

The Days of Deathlok

Part two of *CBC*'s epic chat with the late Rich Buckler discusses his "Demolisher"

Above: *The debut of Deathlok the Demolisher, perhaps the greatest creation of Rich Buckler's career, was an explosive event during the mid-'70s when the dystopian series first appeared, in* Astonishing Tales *#25 [Aug. 1974].* **Inset right:** *Rich Buckler commission art featuring Deathlok.* **Below:** *Cover detail of the man/machine, pencils and inks by Rich Buckler, from* Astonishing Tales *#26 [Oct. '74].*

Conducted by MICHAEL AUSHENKER *CBC* Associate Editor

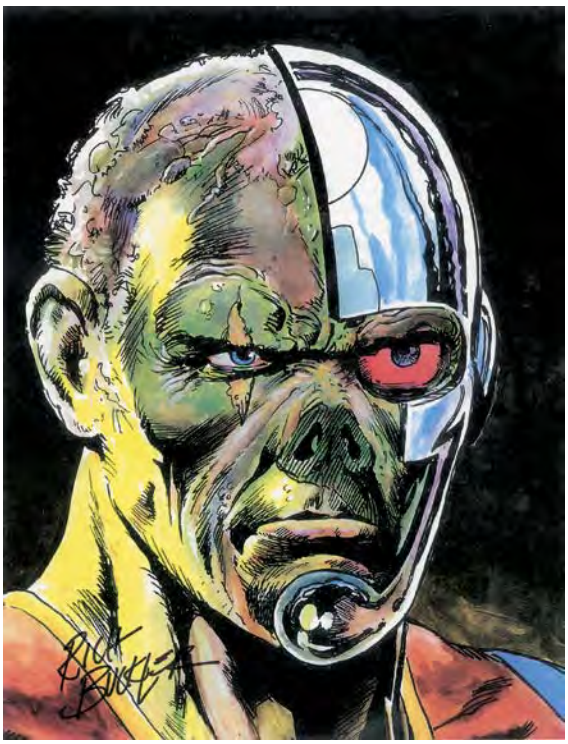
[*Kirby. Ditko. Eisner. Kubert. Wood. Romita. Buscema. Colan. Adams. Wrightson. Miller. Their names are legend, their art — pioneering, foundational and vital. Growing up in the Bronze Age, we all knew and loved the work that these great pillars of mainstream comic books blessed us with; the meat and potatoes of 20th century American comics.*

But then there was the candy! Those solid, sometimes underrated or under the radar, unabashedly fun artists who churned out issues for Marvel and DC, and kept those spinner racks spinning. Stalwart guys like Frank Robbins, Ross Andru, Tony DeZuñiga, Gerry Talaoc and, most certainly, Rich Buckler.

Even though rumors spread that Buckler had been ill in recent years, it was still a mighty, Kirby-fisted gut punch when I learned on May 19, 2017, that he had passed, age 68. I had long followed Buckler on Facebook, where the penciler, inker, painter, and instructor extraordinaire often shared his most personal moments, from his private paintings to his favorite convention run-ins.

I originally interviewed Rich Buckler for the "Men of Steel" issue of our sister publication, Back Issue *[Nov. 2007]. My mission: to learn what the F was up with that Deathlok the Demolisher series in the early 1970s — perhaps the funkiest, oddest, bleakest, and most downright prescient series Marvel had ever published. In fact, that was all we discussed in a phone conversation from Buckler's New York home. It was easily—and I'm not just saying this honorifically — the most electric of my sundry conversations with creators for TwoMorrows Publications because Buckler told excellent anecdotes filled with vivid detail, acerbic wit, and, above all, blunt candor. Buckler may have emerged from the hippie era, but he was truly punk in spirit. So you're in for a treat because the following interview, conducted by email a few years before his death, is nearly as spellbinding and illuminating as listening to the man talk.*

It's no accident that, before he famously embellished Frank Miller on Daredevil *and* The Dark Knight Returns*, Klaus Janson was at his best inking Buckler on those "Deathlok" and "Black Panther" features. That's because, like Miller, Buckler was a very gifted, cinematic storyteller, and, for sure in the post-apocalyptic sci-fi of* Astonishing Tales *and social-justice fiction of* Jungle Action*, he could also be pioneering, foundational and vital. Perhaps it's time we place "Buckler" in that top tier of surnames.*—**M.A.**]



Comic Book Creator: *Arguably, you are best known for your work with Doug Moench on "Deathlok the Demolisher"; your dream book,* Fantastic Four*; and your run with Don McGregor on "Black Panther." But what do you see as your crowning run?*

Rich Buckler: At the top of my list would be my run on *Astonishing Tales* with the character I created called Deathlok. But I say that with one caveat: It was creatively rewarding overall, but I'm saying that while overlooking all the frustrations and silly nonsense that happened on that series.

This was, some 40 years ago, but my memories of those times are still fresh. Probably all of my favorites are fan favorites too. So, that would include my penciling on *Fantastic Four, The Avengers,* and "Black Panther," definitely.

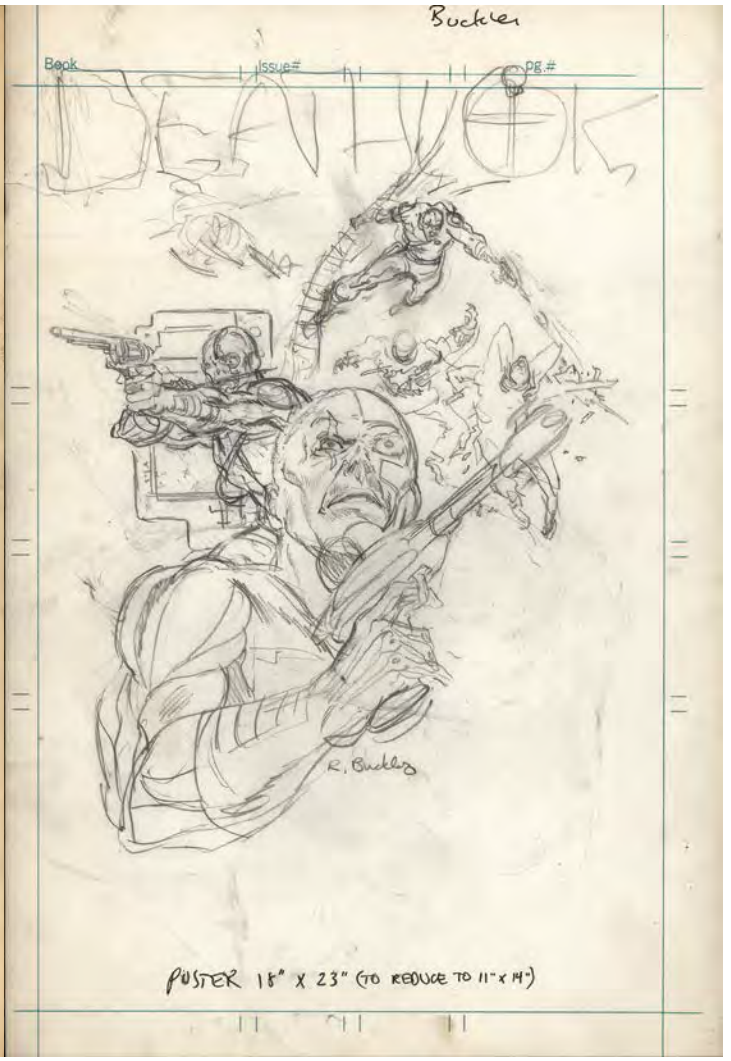
Also my later collaborations with Roy Thomas, at Marvel in the late '80s, *Saga of the Sub-Mariner* and *Saga of the Original Human Torch.*

CBC: *What about your DC work?*

Rich: I'm especially proud of the work I did with Roy on *All-Star Squadron.* Also my run on *World's Finest*, the *Superman Versus Shazam!* tabloid, and the *DC Presents* appearances of Captain Marvel. All of my work with Roy Thomas, as a matter of fact!

CBC: *Any other work you would single out?*

Astonishing Tales, Deathlok the Demolisher TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



my story notes in the margins, like I just said, and the writer would build on that. Or, I would just write the story as I drew the pages.

The artists who were working the "Marvel way" in those days were all drawing their art pages like they were silent movies. No dialogue or narration. Just pictures. And literally, the pictures had to tell the story.

I'm sure most fans aren't aware of that aspect drawing the comics. At Marvel, the storytelling part of the drawing was crucial, so the pencil artist's job was to work up the visual storytelling. The panel arrangement and page layout, and so on, that was all worked up from a short typewritten story summary. Things like story pacing, "acting" of the characters, the action sequences, and how the scenes played were essentially the artist's domain.

After the story was given a solid and clearly delineated visual structure, only then did the writer add the words to the penciled comics pages. That's how I worked on *Fantastic Four, Thor, The Avengers,* and "Black Panther" — on all of the Marvel work I drew.

That's how all their artists worked. So actually the pencil artists like Jack Kirby or John Buscema or Gene Colan or Herb Trimpe were in a very real sense "co-storytellers." Nobody worked from a full script. Nowadays at Marvel it's all full script, I believe.

CBC: *What about over at DC?*

Rich: Over at DC Comics, things were quite different. Their artists worked mostly from a full script. At Marvel, I often got my story plot from the writer. At DC, the editor gave you the script. A comic book script would be something that resembles a screenplay or a film treatment with dialogue included. I have gone into more detail on this in my book *How to Draw Dynamic Comic Books*, by the way.

So, at DC Comics, the page and panel descriptions, dialogue and captions, that was all written out on typewritten pages for the artist to follow. The artist would pencil in the writer's dialogue and captions on the art pages as a guide for the letterer.

CBC: *Which did you prefer? The Marvel method or the DC way?*

Rich: I preferred the Marvel method, but I could work both ways. Not all comics artists can. However, whenever I was working from a script, I always interpreted and elaborated on what was written, rather than follow everything to a "t."

The work that I did at DC with Roy, that was done "Marvel style." Also, that 72-page tabloid size *Superman Versus Shazam!* comic I drew in collaboration with Gerry Conway — also "Marvel style."

CBC: *Do you see yourself as a writer, too?*

Rich: I'm not known to comics fans as a writer. That's not because I don't know what I'm doing. I started out writing my own stories as well as illustrating them. I just didn't do a lot of it. And the same goes for inking. I could ink my own work, and I did ink my own work and the work of other pencil artists whenever time permitted.

I'm known mostly as a penciler because that was my focus. The pencil stage of comics production is the most challenging and engaging, but for me it's also the most creatively satisfying. Incidentally, it is also the most time-consuming.

CBC: *American comic books have always perpetuated this assembly line process.*

Rich: Let's examine those categories for artists for a moment: like "layouts" or "breakdowns," or "penciler" or "inker" or "embellisher." Ever wonder about that? That all started with Marvel and DC in the early super-hero days. "More, better, cheaper, faster," anyone?

Those are designations for specialized compartments of comic book art production that were imposed on comics creators. Not so much because every artist specialized. It was mostly done for the purpose of maximizing production.

That whole system, when you think about it, is very artificial and really not very intuitive or exacting. Nor is it even preferable from an artist's standpoint. I can see where it made business sense. One guy could be penciling while another artist did the inking, there would be time overlap, so doing it that way sort of compressed production time. That was done so everyone could work in an assembly line fashion and keep busy all the time. If that description sounds anything like a "sweat shop", well, that's only

RUDE'S RU

By the time this epic interview sees print, it'll be just over a year after Steve Rude sent yours truly an e-mail suggesting I come out West to his Arizona homestead, some 2,600 or so miles from my East Coast digs. "You can see things as they really are," the comic book artist wrote in his Aug. 21, 2017, missive, "the environment in which I work, all the material I've collected over my lifetime that I use for that work. You'll be able to see it all for yourself in a way that phone interviews alone can't really compete with. [Certain] respected peers… hide from the world. That's not me."

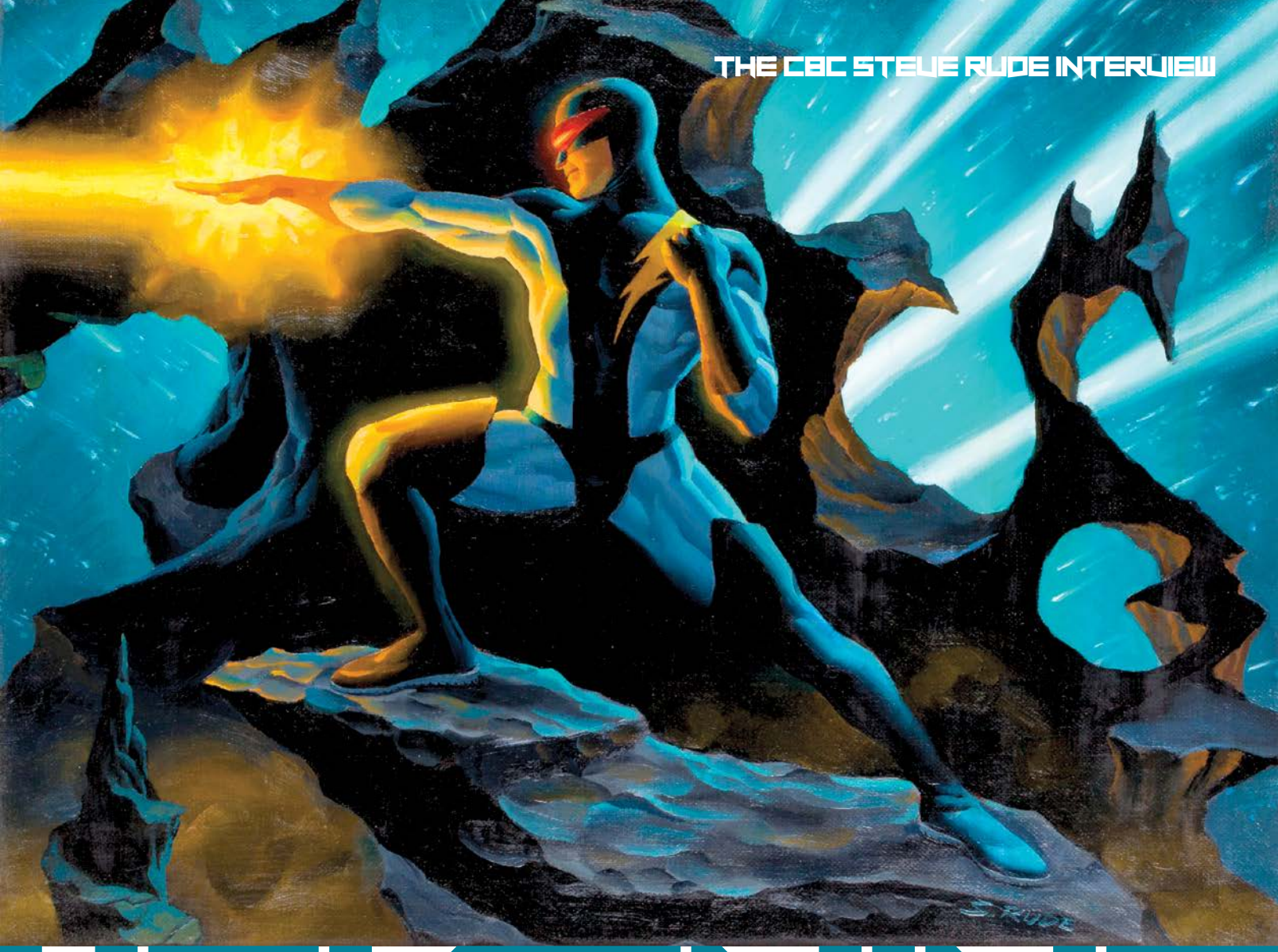
After yet another tumultuous year at Casa Cooke, I was finally able to find the time to travel — albeit on a whirlwind journey! — as I combined the trip with a side jaunt to Michelina Severin's Colorado home to scan a huge and breathtaking array of original art and family photos, for a biography of her father, the great artist John Severin, which I am co-writing with Greg Biga (to come from TwoMorrows sometime in the near future).

So, on a Friday in late June, with the welcome help of pal Steve Ringgenberg (with whom I'm collaborating regarding the next issue of ***CBC***, the Frank Frazetta celebration, which Ringgenberg will be co-editing, as well as a few other projects), I found Mr. Rude out in the open and in plain sight, awaiting my arrival as we pulled in, a host ready, despite the 115°F temp and merciless sun, to take his guest through "A Day in the Life of The Dude."

In less than 17 hours, I'd be flying back home to Rhode Island, but the insightful experience was a rich one and just might prove to be a timeless and important look into the life of a true artist.

Portrait photography © Greg Preston.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY JON B. COOKE



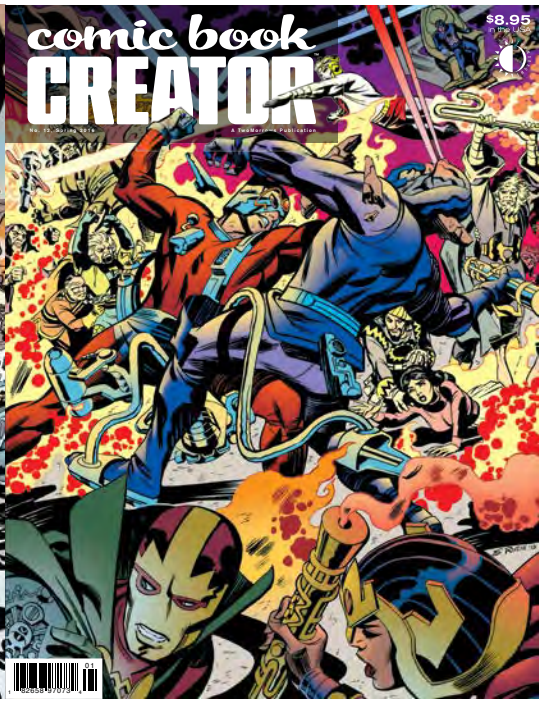
AWAKENING

Born on New Year's Eve 1956, in Madison, Wisconsin, Steve Rude early on discovered the TV animated series ***Jonny Quest*** and ***Space Ghost***, and soon enough the dynamic artistry of Jack Kirby, and his path was set. Mix in an affection for the Fleischer Brothers' Superman cartoons and admiration for great American magazine illustrators of the past, young Rude sought an education in art at the Milwaukee School of Art and Design and from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, always yearning to learn more.

Of course, the young artist's first significant break came with the 1981 debut of Nexus, the intergalactic executioner of mass murderers, a co-creation of Rude and Wisconsin-based writer Mike Baron. Visually, the series was heavily influenced by the work of Alex Toth, Doug Wildey, and Kirby, and Rude's astounding ability was recognized early on at the 1984 San Diego Comic-Con, where he was given the Russ Manning Promising Newcomer trophy at the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards. Since then, the artist has won numerous Eisners and is widely considered to be one of the very finest adventure artists in the field of comics.

Rather prolific as of late, with DC Comics assignments that have included work on their Hanna-Barbera line and plans to take on a regular title, Rude lives in the outskirts of Phoenix, Arizona, in a 4,800 square-foot home with a spacious studio open to the rest of the house, with his wife, Jaynelle, two teenage children, one cat, and a pair of beloved "blowhards." We join Rude, comics historian Steven Ringgenberg, and yours truly as we chat while reclining on living room couches in late morning. — **JBC**

TRANSCRIBED BY STEVEN TICE · PORTRAIT BY GREG PRESTON



Above: *A bunch of Steve Rude's recent work for DC Comics has been inspired by Jack Kirby, including Steve's variant covers for* Convergence *#6 [July 2015] featuring the Fourth World characters, and* The Kamandi Challenge *#8 [Oct. 2017]. For good measure we include Steve's great cover for our own* CBC *#12 [Spring 2016].* **Below:** *The Dude inked Kirby for the cover of* Amazing Heroes *#100.*

with people. Especially kids, because kids don't care about putting on airs or nonsense. They just want to know that you actually care…

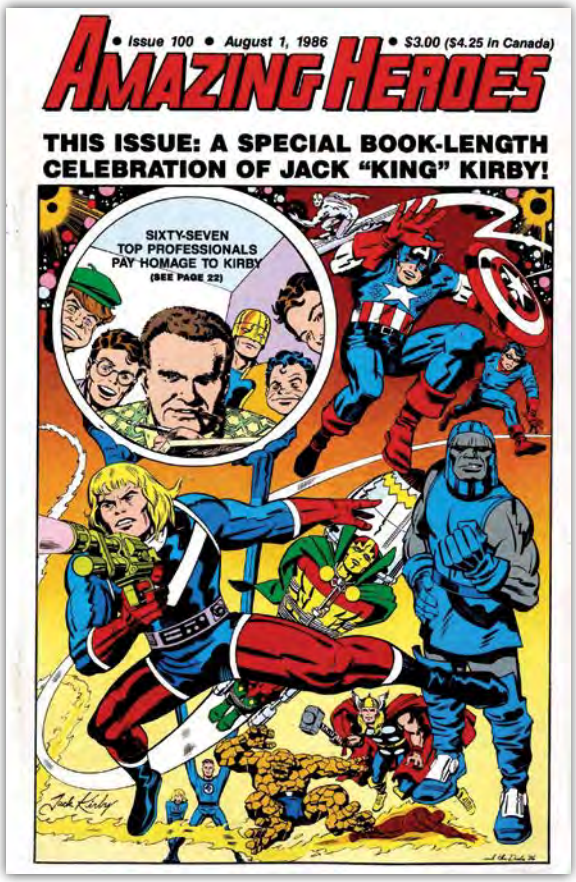
SCR: You're actually listening, yeah.

Steve: [*Pointing to their small half-beagle/half-dachshund*] Her real name is Chloe. Super named her that. So I started making up names, just came out of nowhere, like blowhard. Well, the original blowhard is over there on the wall. [*Points to painted portrait of dog*] That's Ram.

CBC: *The beagle?*

Steve: Right. Ram, I think I called her that for "rambunctious," but I don't remember.

SCR: Why do you call dogs "blowhards"?



Steve: Because of Crapran. [*Points to large dog*] That's Crapran over there. She used to roll in crap, so I used to call her "Crapran." The bus with a bunch of little keeves [*kids*] used to pull up outside our house, and I would let Ram out to bark at the little keeves. And Ram would stop barking and turn around and look at me like she was looking for my approval.

SCR: "Am I barking well enough?"

Steve: Yeah, right. So, one day, I came across the word "blowhard," so I started calling Ram "blowhard," for being kind of a blowhard. And now the name is just a name, when you think about it. And then, the funny thing is that everyone around me calls them blowhards now. The girls at the gym, they all call them blowhards.

CBC: *It catches on.*

Steve: Oh, yeah, it does. Every blowhard around here is a rescue blowhard.

CBC: *So do you go to the animal rescue place?*

Steve: Yeah.

SCR: Jessica picked her out, right?

Steve: Super did, yeah. All the dogs that you see in Arizona are rescues, it seems. [*Indicates large dog*] We got Bigness, I call her "Bigness."

CBC: *The German shepherd?*

Steve: Yeah, and she was abandoned in this neighborhood out of nowhere. And when we eventually traced her to the people who owned her over in Mesa, which is on the other side of Phoenix.

SCR: That's got to be, like, 60 miles away.

Steve: Oh, at least. And we tried to contact them, and there was no response from these people at all. But that's how we found out her name, which is Shadow. I call her "Shob" or "Shobby-Shob," or, when her leg was hurt, I called her "Hobble-Shob."

CBC: *You made fun of the poor dog's injury? C'mon, Steve!*

Steve: Hobble-Shobble. That's what I called her. But she was walking around the neighborhood, and [*Chloe*] Flowhard's sort of barking like crazy. I opened the door and saw Shob out there. "Come on in." The test was to see if Flowhard liked Shob. And they got along great, and the only time they fight is over the bones, and I call them the Bone Wars.

CBC: *Bone Wars.* [laughs]

Steve: Yeah, just like Cupcake Wars, except this one makes more sense.

CBC: *It's much more exciting.*

Steve: Yeah, it's more exciting, and they're always fighting over the bones. But that's the only time they fight.

SCR: Back in the turn of the century, when paleontology was kind of in its infancy, there were diggers and scientists who would fight over the skeletons. They'd call them bone sharps.

CBC: *Sharps? Like card sharps?*

SCR: Yeah. You should ask Mark Schultz about that, because I think that's his wheelhouse, you know?

Steve: It sounds like you were saying "sharps," but it's "shark"?

SCR: No, sharps.

CBC: *Yeah, that's for various card sharps.*

SCR: Sharpshooters.

CBC: *There is "card shark," too, which is probably derivative of that. Because you'd think, logically, it'd be more like a predatory kind of thing. But it's "sharp," card sharp.*

[*Later the talk turns to Steve's odd naming of things.*]
CBC: [To Steve] *You should have a glossary for all of your odd phrasing. Like, the top 12 or 15, or something. We could include it as a sidebar.*
Steve: Well, I sent this girl up in Canada a glossary.
CBC: *Oh, so you do have one?*
Steve: Well, I didn't make copies of it, but yeah. There was, like, 15 different phrases or words I use on there. I figured I'd better get people used to them before they freak out or something… When we found this house down here, and this is the reason we moved in, it's like a dream house. That's how huge it is. This is almost a mansion in L.A. terms, and it's just got all this room, and the studio…
[*Jaynelle asks what plans are there for lunch and SCR announces he will need to leave soon. The conversation shifts back to dogs.*]
Steve: I finally concluded when I was 18 that blowhards are far superior people. You almost never find a human being that treats you like a blowhard does.
SCR: Well, Mark Twain said that the dog is virtually the only creature on the planet who will love you more than you love yourself.
CBC: *Mm-hmm, but they can also become as damaged as the damaged person they love.*
Steve: I know people who have the traits that a blowhard could have, but it's incredibly rare to find in a human what is routinely found in a blowhard.
CBC: *I think it's like meditation, like, really, having a practice of living in the moment. Because I think that's the beautiful thing about dogs is that they're* always *in the moment.*
Steve: Well, [*points to Chloe*] Flowhard was found underneath a car with her brothers in the summertime. It is so hot in the summertime.
CBC: *As a litter?*
Steve: I think so. I know Flowhard had a brother, and we tried contacting the people who had her brother. They never got back to us. That's another real huge complaint I have about people: their sense of irresponsibility is so profound nowadays that I almost don't even know what race we're talking about anymore. I mean, they've traditionally always been irresponsible, but lately it's almost like an epidemic. But Shob and Flowhard are both rescues. Shob was abused, obviously, because she's afraid of everything.
CBC: *This is the German shepherd?*
Steve: Yeah. As I've told you, those were other people we tried to get in contact with, and they never even contacted us. They never even got back to us. So you're left with a mystery of why people do what they do or don't do what they do, all the time. And because I'm a person that can't stand not knowing why people do what they do, it drives me a little nuts to know that they just blatantly ignore a request for finding out something that's going to help the blowhard's life. They obviously just dropped her off in the middle of nowhere. Now, why they picked here, I have no idea. But this area is a dumping ground for blowhards.
CBC: *Oh, really?*
Steve: Yes, it is. I mean, everyone who has blowhards here, they're all rescues or strays. And they were actually dumped off here like Shob was. No accounting for that.
SCR: People suck.
[*The conversation later turns to favorite inkers.*]
Steve: Comic book people talk about inkers like physicists talk about Copernicus. [*laughs*]
CBC: *Yeah. And I was with the daughter of one of the greats, John Severin, just yesterday. And I'm going to go visit another great very soon. I have to see Joe Sinnott.*
Steve: Yeah, I called him on the phone not too long ago, and he's so old that he can barely hear, so I hope it goes well when you go see him.
CBC: *Well, I'm going to go see him for a Sunday brunch.*
SCR: Well, everybody raves about John Buscema, but I thought he was never better than when Tom Palmer inked him.
CBC: *That depends. Did you ever see him ink himself?*
SCR: Just here and there, like little illustrations.
CBC: *Yeah, right, he did a Conan illustration. He also did that big barbarian or Viking or whatever it was, this huge*

Above: *Early January of 1987 brought a truly delightful comic book, Mister Miracle Special #1, written by Mark Evanier, penciled by Steve Rude, and inked by one of Jack Kirby's finest embellishers, Mike Royer. This is the original cover art for that issue, with art by The Dude.*

Inset left: *Darkseid and Son by Steve Rude, 1992. The artist has always held Jack "The King" Kirby in highest esteem and Rude frequently returns to the legendary comic book creator's concepts and characters, and endless fount of inspiration.*

guy with a huge beard.

SCR: I know what inkers are like: it's like religion and politics when you talk about inkers in comics. Everyone's got their take on it and they're almost violent in defending who they like and who they can't stand.

CBC: *There's a constant argument about whether Mike Royer or Joe Sinnott are the best Kirby inkers. I'm a Royer guy. I belong to the Church of Mike Royer. He would do these really thick lines for the captions. It almost seems arbitrary. We could see them right in there. This seems arbitrary, but it always helps, for me, it always helps the story.* [Steve nods.]

Steve: And I'm the same way about everything, too. The older you get, the more firm you seem to become in your opinions about things, and I'm getting more firm all the time with those opinions. It seems inevitable.

CBC: *I also think, as we get older, the work becomes devoid of sentimentality and nostalgia… at least for me. It stands or falls on its own merits. For me, Kirby stands. This stuff is great. And I was lucky that his genius hit me when I was 12, when it became an emotional thing, but now, I can look back at it with detachment and realize this stuff is truly great. Kirby is. He's the greatest.*

Steve: It's the wonderment of a lifelong process of observing things and knowing what you like even more than when you were…

CBC: *You have more to compare it to.*

Steve: Yeah, you just, you become more cemented in your tastes in life, and that's part of the fun of being a comic book fan.

SCR: I like the same stuff I always liked, but I cast a wider net now. Some artists I've learned to, like, really enjoy, like Bill Everett. I was never that into him, but now I love it.

CBC: *He was a great inker on Kirby, too.*

SCR: He was a wonderful artist. Everett was one of those guys who could literally draw anything.

CBC: *You know what it was for me? It was the full page in Steranko's* History of Comics, *the Sub-Mariner fighting the Human Torch by Everett. That was it. I loved his work immediately.*

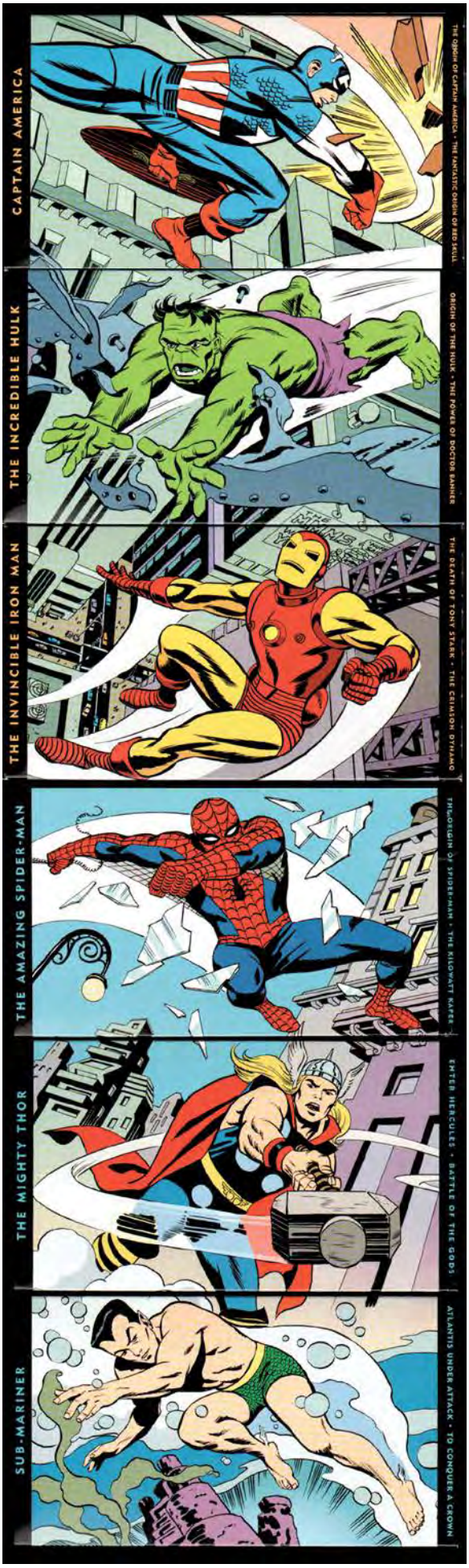
SCR: Yeah, that was the first piece of his that I really noticed.

Steve: [*To SCR*] You know what was a shame? You went to all that trouble at your old place to kind of reorganize your work here again, and then you had to move all this stuff out of there, and now you're in a new place that's kind of small. What a tragedy, huh? Moving is the most traumatic thing. I hate moving. It's like the worst thing imaginable.

CBC: *I moved so much as a little kid, you're right, it was traumatic. Now I've been in the same place for 25 years.*

SCR: You lived in Europe as a kid?

CBC: *Yeah, for a year, and it was stimulating in its way, but it was also very lonely. But part of it, that's why comics became important.* [To Steve] *And that's something I wanted to talk to you about: what is collecting? For me, I recognize it as collecting*



is I don't want whatever I possessed not to go away. I'm afraid it's going to go away. And, if I don't have every one of something, I'm not complete or less than. It's a strange kind of…

SCR: It's a compulsion.

Steve: It is that. It's all that, and the fact that I just met an animator who worked on the original *Space Ghost* when I thought there was nobody existing anymore shows you that there's always another rock that hasn't been turned over yet. So being a collector is a never-ending thing. You will always hopefully find something that's going to stimulate you.

CBC: *But you'd think it's going to be finite. I mean, in the sense of… comic books are numerical. You* have *to have one, two, three… so when you're a real intense collector, right, you've got to get whatever is missing. I'll never forget, when I came back from Europe, I missed two months of Kirby's Fourth World books, and it was like, "Oh my god, I've* got *to get the one with the Guardian and Superman on the cover with Goody Rickles!" I had to get that. I had to go to New York, to the Seuling comic con to get one and I had Jack sign it.*

SCR: Well, I think if you're going to have an obsession, that's a good one to have. It's just…

CBC: *It can get out of hand.*

Steve: It's just… it's like you said, and it's just plain fun. And it forms your personality and gives you a basis on which you compare your own deeds in life to the great deeds of what the comic books have taught us, either in looking at them or reading them.

[*The conversation later turns to discussing two once prolific and now reclusive artists.*]

Steve: That's the great thing about comic book lore: you can figure out what's going on with a guy who never wants to get back to anyone…

SCR: I heard [*Artist A has*] kind of gone off the deep end a little bit.

Steve: I wish I knew what was going on with these people.

CBC: *With some, I think there's a dichotomy very often of having an enormous ego and simultaneously having a self-loathing that is almost crippling… I know it sounds like…* [pauses]

SCR: A paradox.

Steve: I understand that completely. I hear that all the time about a lot of artists.

CBC: *I call it feeling like you're the piece of sh*t you want the rest of the world to orbit. I can be like that. I've certainly got a degree of narcissism, of thinking that "I'm important" and yet "I'm a piece of sh*t" at precisely the same moment.*

Steve: I heard a great definition that relates to that. It was about writers. How did the quote go? Egomaniacs with low self-esteem. [*laughter*]

SCR: That's good. I hadn't heard that before.

CBC: *That's so true!*

Steve: I love just totally disarmingly honest things like that, because it's so funny. People, these are the things like I

like to reveal about myself are the weird things, because otherwise it's just the same old crap that you get from everybody that talks to you about stuff, and you don't learn anything new. Your brain isn't stimulated into different avenues, so how can you learn things?

CBC: *It's revealing that we're vulnerable. It's interesting. Being reticent is not sharing. It's not interesting, you know? I think it's an old axiom: identify, don't compare. You need to identify with other people.*

Steve: Where'd you hear that one?

CBC: *I belong to a group and that's one of the axioms that they have, which is that it's very important, if you go to a meeting, to listen to something that you can respond to rather than saying, "I'm* nothing *like that person." Because there's a commonality for all of us… it's about love and it's about being esteemed.*

SCR: I was just going to say, I honestly feel sorry for shy people. I feel like they miss out on so much, being so reticent…

Steve: Weren't we shy when we were younger, though?

SCR: I wasn't.

Steve: I was shy.

SCR: My dad said of me years later that I never met a stranger. Because Steve called up the example of living in the barbershop after coming back from Japan, and I sat there in the barber's chair and just chattering away, "Yeah, we just came back from Japan," blah, blah, blah.

Steve: Yeah, I can totally see that.

SCR: And I guess that's one of the reasons why I've been a pretty good interviewer: because I'm not afraid to talk to people. I'll talk to anybody.

Steve: Yeah, you're really good about that. That's why you're a really good teacher, but except your talents are wasted there, because you have a non-appreciative audience. [*To Jon*] You know, you mentioned the group you belong to. I have these weird thoughts when I hear certain things that they trigger interesting thoughts in my head. If anyone who has a problem, say like with drinking or something, because I can't stand alcohol. I just can't stand the taste of it. It tastes like vinegar or something. If you could take somebody with a problem, a serious problem that they can't control, and they were able to, like, transplant a part of someone else's brain in place of the problem area of that person's brain, you would never want to ever drink again, because you'd feel about it like I do. And then you could, I could transplant something from your brain into mine that I have a problem with, and it would suddenly vanish like that, because it doesn't exist anymore.

CBC: *I absolutely agree, but I think that's the divine spirit, personally. I think there is something that is beyond me. For instance, when I had my first son, my first child, I loved this creature that was coming from my wife. I didn't know this creature. I mean, I understand that Darwinian survival instinct, you want to protect your own, but at that moment I just recognized a higher power. I just started to believe right off… it's not easy to put into words what happens.*

Steve: Well, 12-Step groups always talk about that higher power thing, don't they?

CBC: *It's a spiritual thing. It doesn't have to be "God." And it's certainly not anything religious.*

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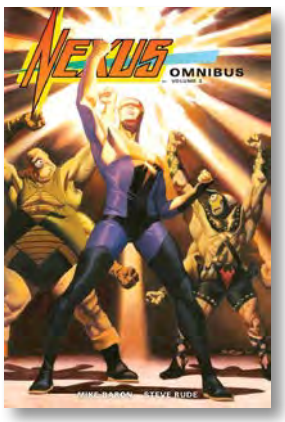
Previous page: *Steve channels Kirby done for a Marvel cartoon collection.* **Left inset:** *Painted illo by Steve.* **Above:** *Steve's Kirby-inspired page (with inks by Al Milgrom) from* The Incredible Hulk Vs. Superman *[July 1999].*

Above: *Steve Rude does his take on Paul Gulacy's* Nexus *#1 [1981] cover art for the Nexus Archives [Vol. 1, 2006].* **Inset right:** *Nexus action figure.*



but it shows you how, when you're looking for answers about people and how they perceive things, how drastically different they can be from person to person. This guy's a victim. This guy sees it as an advantage, and uses it to their advantage.

CBC: *That begs the question: do you believe in predestination?*

Steve: I have a sense that there are forces at work. Period.

CBC: *You were an agnostic before and now you're an atheist…?*

Steve: Yeah.

CBC: *Have you sensed, perhaps, even supernatural forces at work?*

Steve: Yeah, I do. Yeah.

CBC: *You would think that would be the other way around… that you'd go from atheist to agnostic…*

Steve: You would. You'd think.

CBC: *You're nothing if not a contradiction.* [laughs]

Steve: I'm sure Mark Twain had something to say about that, if I could only remember it.

CBC: *If we weren't contradictions, we'd have no reason to do interviews, huh? That's it, it's the perplexing, scratch your heads vibe. Right? People do that.*

Steve: Contradictions might be something for other people to figure out, but they all tie in somehow. They all have some kind of internal sense to them. The reason I believe in supernatural things — well, preternatural things — is because I've experienced them. And when you actually experience something, it's hard to refute it. People who don't believe in little green men have never seen them. But if they did, instant change. Well, I don't want to be as shallow as that. Just because I haven't seen them, just because I haven't stepped in an empty elevator shaft, doesn't mean I know what's going to happen if I do.

CBC: *What?*

Steve: That's called human stupidity.

CBC: *To look at things from a Biblical perspective, I wonder sometimes whether it matters or not, for instance, to believing that Jesus rose from the dead as opposed to* know *that he rose from the dead (which is ultimately unknowable). The tomb was empty. There were no witnesses to it, but the tomb was empty. So this extrapolation of, "Oh, then he must have risen from the dead and gone up." Which begs the question whether it's the perception or the fact that matters? Because the perception can be absolutely profound. The existence of little green men don't necessarily have to be real. The perception can provoke a person. If they're a catalyst for change or something that can be positive, what does it matter if it's real or not?*

Steve: Yeah, I kind of go with the perception side of things. If you're not there, if you're the only guy there to see the little green men, that's all that matters.

CBC: *Right.*

Steve: I don't know who it was, Descartes or somebody, who thought up that "tree falling in the wood" thing, but that's what it goes back to. If you weren't there to hear it, it's kind of a "so what?"

CBC: *Right. It's "man's search for meaning." Knowing things. From what we were talking about. This is exactly why we're here. Why I flew to Arizona is the search for some meaning.*

Steve: That's right. It's why I needed you to come here.

CBC: *You needed me to come here. I needed to come here. For one thing, okay, I have an artist friend who always pushes me for instilling meaning into* CBC. *"What's it about? What are you doing with the magazine? What's your quest?" So I'm always scratching my head, not really knowing. Am I searching… Again, it's what I already told you about. Now I recognize it. Why do you do the things that you do? Does it have meaning? I'm not the one to judge that. I guess the reader is the one to judge that. Hopefully I'm asking the right questions.*

Steve: If you're not one to judge things with your own life and perceptions, who else should?

CBC: *Well, I do judge things.*

Steve: Well, that's what I mean.

CBC: *But I don't have to verbalize my judgment. Okay, I suspect the motivation of my interview subject. I suspect it. Hopefully through the questions I ask and the answers they give, we can be a little bit closer to the truth. For instance, what we're talking about now, predestination, we're talking about the nature of fear in our lives. That's not a usual topic for a comic book artist interview.*

Steve: I noticed that.

CBC: *It imbibes it with meaning, for the very work that we do; for the very work that I do.*

Steve: My comment about the [Artist A] thing is always insisting that you explain yourself to him. [Artist A] can go to hell. You don't have to do anything that anyone else tells you what you should be doing. I used to pull this on my wife. I'd say, "Well, Jaynelle, you must have thoughts on it. I want to know what you feel about it. You have to tell me something." And she goes, "No, I don't." And ever since, I've thought about that. All I was doing was causing her a lot of unnecessary pain. So I stopped doing it. She doesn't have to do anything that I tell her I think she should be doing. And neither do you. And neither do I.

[Artist A] is like your in-laws. [*Jon laughs*] A lot of pressure with no positive outcome for it.

CBC: *Turmoil. I just move along by instinct. You know why? I make obligations and I have to get a job done. So I work my project. I can't work in a factory. I can't. I have. I've done it in my life. But I can't do the same thing over, and over, and over again. It's always going to be a project that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. And, oh, there it is. I can look at it. And it's like I gave birth to it or whatever, and then the post-partum depression, but then I'm, "Oh, I've got to do it again." So I'm going to keep moving, keep moving like a fish. So it's that a can have such huge expectation of, for instance, doing an* [Artist B] *issue or something, but maybe I don't get the answers that I want, but I don't have time to sit there and bemoan it. I need to move on, because I need to do the following job.*

Steve: That situation you just told me about, with [Artist B], is one of the most frustrating I've ever encountered, and will ever encounter, in my life. To ask questions and never get an answer. That has everything to do with the interview subject. And that drives me crazy.

CBC: *Was it the same thing with Jaynelle?*

Steve: No. No, it's actually not.

CBC: *Why?*

Steve: I get an answer from Jaynelle.

CBC: *Just by the sake of her saying that?*

Steve: Well, by however she chooses to answer it, whether it's a glimpse or an actual statement. The [Artist B] situation, to me, resembles something of evasiveness, and I don't like that, because evasiveness means fear. When you're fearful, you're cowardly inside. Keep your cowardice to your 20s, to your teens. That's when you're meant to have all these flaws. The purpose of going further in life is to banish the garbage from your life, and fear, for the most part, for a huge part, is only there to screw up your life and hold you back. So smart people realize that it's got to go. If you're going a dream young, which you already know, achieve more than what you're capable of at the moment, you've got to open up the garbage can and get rid of some of that stuff, because it doesn't serve any purpose. Well, if it doesn't serve any purpose, then you're neurotically hanging on to it by choice. Get rid of it and find out what you're really made of.

CBC: *What purpose do you say?*

Steve: Whatever's ahead that you couldn't learn if you were free. It's so obvious.

CBC: *Maybe four times so far you've used the word "coward."*

Steve: Yeah, cowards. I can't stand cowards.

CBC: *But who's to say who is a coward and who isn't?*

Steve: Oh, that's easy. Are you kidding? You just talk to people and they tell you what they can't do. "I can't do this because." That's one of the reasons you tell a coward.

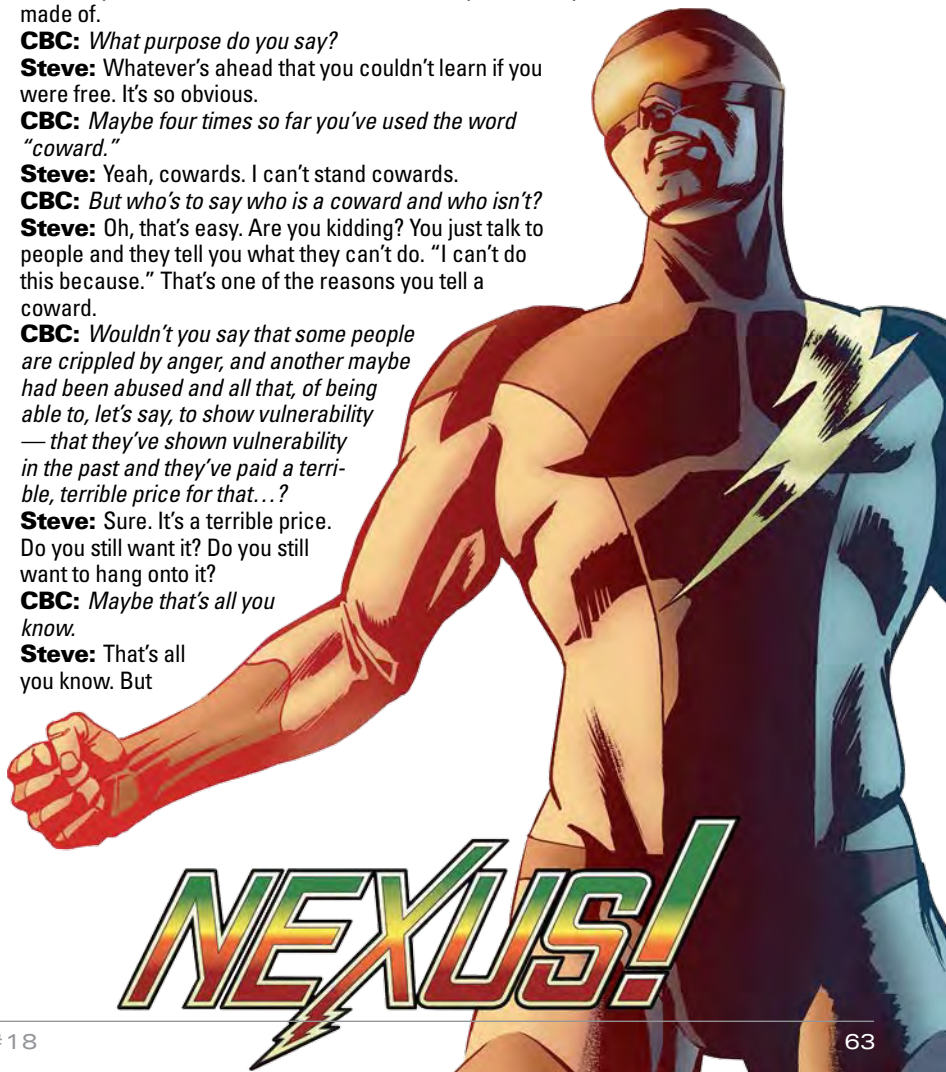
CBC: *Wouldn't you say that some people are crippled by anger, and another maybe had been abused and all that, of being able to, let's say, to show vulnerability — that they've shown vulnerability in the past and they've paid a terrible, terrible price for that…?*

Steve: Sure. It's a terrible price. Do you still want it? Do you still want to hang onto it?

CBC: *Maybe that's all you know.*

Steve: That's all you know. But

Above: *The* Nexus *"Newspaper section" lasted for six issues in 2015–16 and, at a ginormous 17" wide by 22" high, they are truly a joy to behold! Here, reproduced woefully tiny, are the opening pages for three.*
Below: *Panel detail from #6 of the "Sunday funnies" edition.*



and I have other, stronger preferences that I lean towards.

CBC: *Your time is valuable…?*

Steve: Well, I don't think about my time being valuable. I think about my personal taste.

CBC: *But you're not wasting time, too, right?*

Steve: Anything I look at is not a wasted moment.

CBC: *So what do you think of Bernie Wrightson?*

Steve: His early work was virtual genius.

CBC: *His '70s stuff and* Frankenstein*?*

Steve: Yeah. His later work did not compare. His apex was *Frankenstein* and I'm pretty sure Bernie would back those sentiments.

CBC: *I think we all know, 99% would say that, right.*

Steve: Yeah. But I don't care about the 99%. When you bring up the majority thinking, that's a red flag for me. Do you know what that really means to me? It means whoever you've talked to has consented to go with the popular opinion and doesn't really think for themselves.

CBC: *What I'm talking about is: I ask this question almost ever single creator is, what do you think of Harvey Kurtzman? And basically kind of what I'm going around to is what you think of Robert Crumb. And it's not because of my litmus that I'll go off and say they're the two greatest geniuses, along with Jack Kirby, that comics have ever produced. This is my context, I guess.*

Steve: Yeah, it's a context to help you orient yourself to other people's work…

CBC: *And how we're going to talk about a conversation and stuff like that, because there are whole other genres, for instance, of autobiographical comics, that are huge right now. I think they can be worthy of near-literature if not literature, themselves. It's a part of the world, the comics world. But I'd love to know what Steve Rude thinks about this stuff.*

Steve: Well, I'm not a collector any more of comics.

CBC: [Indicates a corner with some boxes] *Well, that's your entire collection, right?*

Steve: Yeah, that's my collection. And the things I learn from now, I might happen to see something, say I'm up at the offices at DC, they might hand me off some free comics and I'll look at them, and I'll page through and very quickly discern if there's something I can learn from them or not. If there's not, I give them away or throw them out. They don't have any purpose to me if they're not useful in a way that I need things to be useful to me. But I'm perfectly aware that there are incredible creators out there, but, you know, it's like the bands of today. When we grew up in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, that's all I need. Everything I need to look for, that I found enjoyment out of, was found in those three decades.

CBC: *Yeah, it's interesting, because you appear to be a curious man by nature. We've been talking about curiosity. For me, it's always being curious. Because we just went through lunch and we got through some intense conversation back and forth out of a curiosity to know each other, I think. That's how I felt.*

Steve: I like exchanging ideas with people. That's how I look at it. To me, the focus in life should be the positive and forward thinking, and I happen to get most of my enjoyment from past achievements. I mean, there's thousands of years of past achievements compared to the paltry ten or so years that I haven't really been a fan of comic books. So, clearly, just common sense has drawn me to a past of unequaled achievements, and things I can learn more from than anyone working contemporaneously in whatever business they're in. There's a lot of current illustrators… My favorites are the people that are influenced by the people of the past or I don't have any interest in them at all. I don't have any interest in computer art. I mean, zero. I see it. Big deal. It's not my path. My path is this and this. Not this and this. It's not my thing, man. You have to know what you're here for in life. That way you don't waste a lot of time. But if I were to sit here and tell you that, oh, I'm so versed in everyone working in the business today and I keep up with every little thing, that's not at all the truth.

CBC: *Do you go to San Diego anymore?*

Steve: No. No, I have very limited interest. I mean, if they invited me as a guest, I guess I would try to go.

CBC: *If they paid your way.*

Steve: Yeah. And it's not even so much as that. The hotel would be needed. I was a guest one year and it was just wonderful, but at that point it was so massive that you feel suffocated in the environment. So instead of having fun, you're not having fun. It's an ordeal. If I were to go again, it would be strictly as a fan, and I'd just walk around and say hi to the people that I want to say hi to. I like meeting people all the time at shows. I love walking up to people that I haven't met before and looking at their work, trying to find something good to say about it. That's fun for me. I like doing that. It doesn't mean I'm fans of their work. It means at the moment I'm seeing what's going on at the show, I appreciate the fact that they're forging a life for themselves in a career that they love. That's what I like doing. I admire people like that. Everyone I meet at a show is trying very hard to be good at what they're doing, and I really like that.

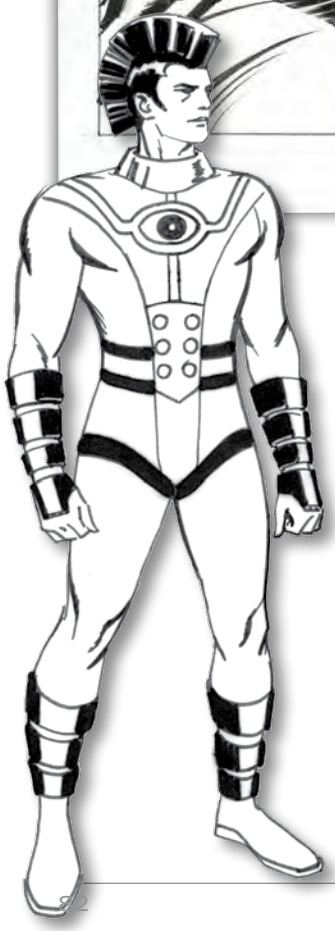
CBC: *And you know the power of encouragement.*

Steve: I know that it comes natural to me.

CBC: *When we worked out, you were encouraging to me.*

Steve: The world has enough bad things that I certainly don't need to be one more guy who's telling somebody what they can't do or making them feel bad. The world does that on its own. The world needs more people to give the opposite context to what most people experience, which is

Above: *The Dude teaches that even with realistic renditions of characters, "cartooning all breaks down to the same simple process," whether it's Disney's iconic Snow White or Hal Foster's epic noble Round Table knight, Prince Valiant. Steve's instructions were about how simple lines are the foundation on which to build an image and he proved that master illustrators, such as Foster and the Disney animators, used the same process to flesh out their characters. The* Prince Valiant *panel is from January 5, 1947. "That's Earl Jon in the center," shares Brian Kane, author of* The Definitive Prince Valiant Companion *[Fantagraphics].*



something negative. That is a lasso you want to be h
do for people just to make them feel bad when they'
so hard to do something good.

CBC: *Like you don't need to hear that sh*t from Ar
Goodwin.* [laughs]

Steve: Well, who knows what kind of mood Archie
in and that kind of thing, you know? But that's how I
the purpose in life. You do things for yourself to fulfil
purpose in being alive and being an individual, and t
you have some sense of the purpose of that, then yo
start aiding others.

CBC: *Have you ever mentored anybody or do you t
your temperament might preclude… ?*

Steve: No, my temperament is pretty good about t
but I got to the point where I realized that everything
showing people wasn't necessarily helping them. Th
weren't learning from it. They were just kind of stagn
and running on a treadmill. You were saying someth
lier that I need to kind of… I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was something about is my view the only view?

CBC: *For you, yeah.*

Steve: Well, what more is there, really? How can you be in someone else's brain?

CBC: *Well, in the sense of, like, Jack liked this person and, when I looked at on the surface, I didn't really find it appealing, but because Jack likes it, maybe I'll give it more of a go. Instead of being immediately dismissive, perhaps, I might give it a chance. And that can lead to the joy of discovery, that curiosity can lead you down some really interesting, totally unknown paths, right?*

Steve: If I see something that warrants it, I'll give it all due consideration, but the idea that somebody can look at something and not make up their mind whether they like it or not is, to me, a fence-straddler. It's like being an atheist. You're not committed to one or the other. You're playing it safe in the middle of the road, and you know what happens when you stand in the middle of the road.

CBC: *Watching a Sam Peckinpah movie, for instance, which, on the surface, is needlessly violent. I'm talking about* The Getaway. *The first time I saw it, I thought, "Oh, it's…"*

Steve: The Steve McQueen one?

CBC: *Yeah, and I did the same thing with* Badlands, *by Terry Malick, of seeming this movie of seemingly grotesque characters who had no redeeming qualities about them doing these senseless, violent things, but seeing it again, and seeing it with a different point of view, it becomes lyrical in its way. My first impression was not my lasting impression. I'll give it a second thought.*

Steve: Well, that's probably a better way to be than the way I am. I'm not saying someone has to be like me, I'm saying that's the way I am.

CBC: *There's no fairer answer than that.* [laughs]

Steve: Yeah. You know, the purpose of life is to get to know who you are. And I know what I won't watch. I know what I'm going to get something from. If I happen to see a movie about somebody who's torturing somebody, I turn it off. It's not a requisite of life for me to finish that movie because I might learn something at the end. There are other movies that can give that to me that…

CBC: *You don't have to go through that, right.*

Steve: Yeah. I'd rather be like the way I am right now or acting the way I am. I know enough about what I like and
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om. He was a monster.
ge or soft pedal
hey were reality, but at the same time, there was no knife through the eyes going on or axes through the head, was there? That's my point. It's filtered through him.

My work is filtered through me. And I don't need to see extreme examples of something that other people insist I may learn from, or I should watch it because 99%