comic book CREATOR™

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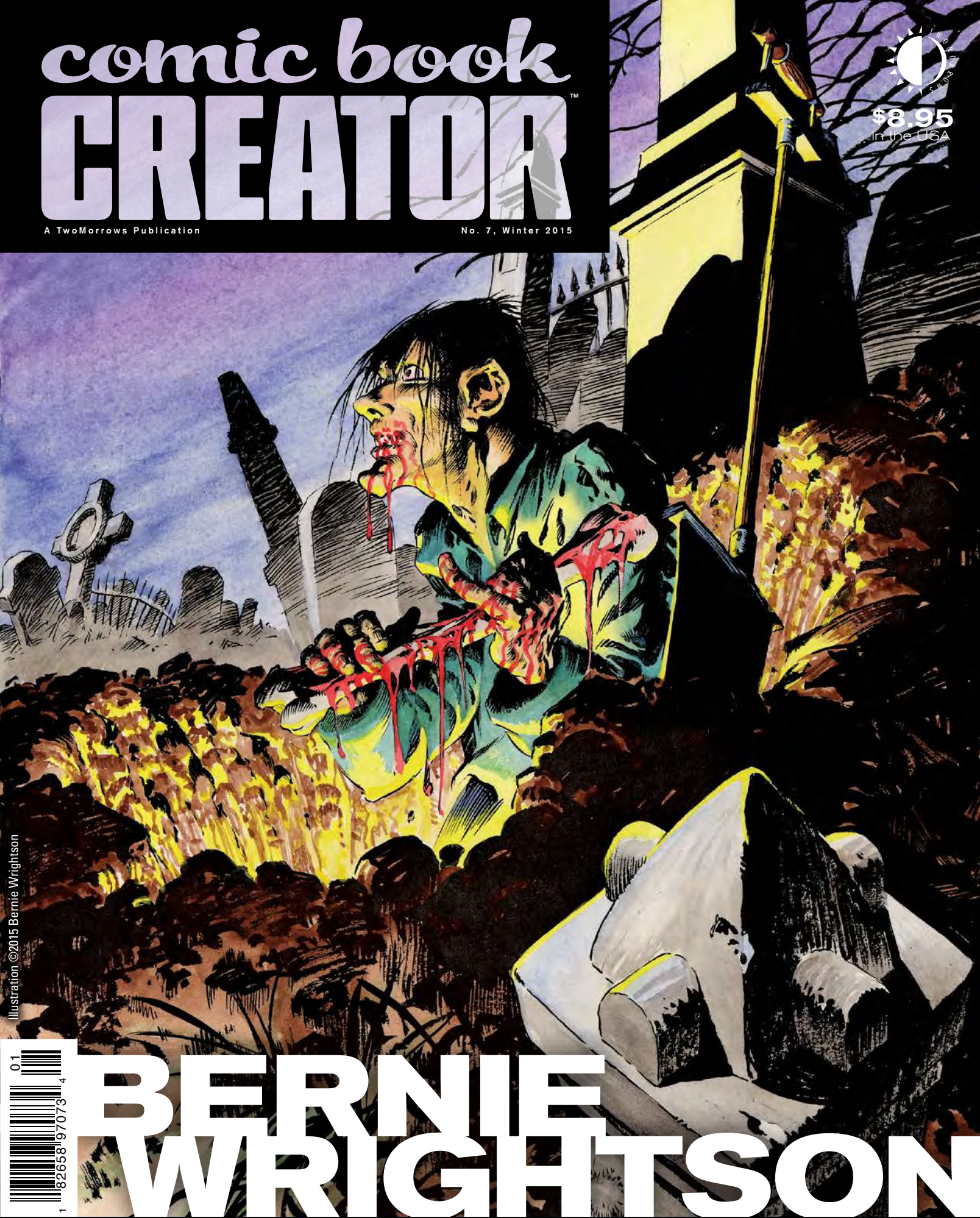

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BERNIE WRIGHTSON

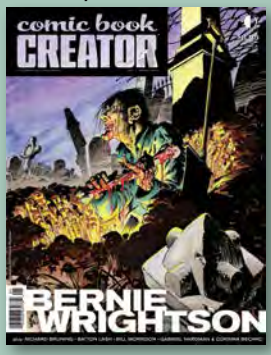
plus: RICHARD BRUNING • BATTON LASH • BILL MORRISON • GABRIEL HARDMAN & CORINNA BECHKO

ZOMBIE WOODY
CBC mascot by **J.D. KING**

About Our Cover

Art by **BERNIE WRIGHTSON**

Color by **TOM ZIUKO**



In 1974, **BERNIE WRIGHTSON** drew a number of monster images for Phil Seuling that were compiled as a coloring book — *The Monsters: Color the Creature Book*. The artist said in *A Look Back*, "Out of the thousands which were sold, I have only seen one person who actually colored the whole thing. But the idea for getting 16 drawings for four dollars made it a poor man's portfolio." Thanks to Steve, Rich, and James Pascoe at Cool Lines Artwork for the scan. Visit them at *coollinesartwork.com*. — **Y.E.**

COMIC BOOK CREATOR
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comic book CREATOR™

Winter 2015 • Voice of the Comics Medium • Number 7

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ABOUT OUR COVER'S COLORS: Just as our front cover was drawn by Wrightson during the 1970's for his *Color The Monsters* coloring book, the color art printed here also dates back to that heady, halcyon decade — colorist Tom Ziuko added his watercolors to the piece (not dyes, which accounts for the painterly feel), and it was subsequently included in the portfolio he brought to the Big Apple in order to seek work in the comics industry as a colorist. As Ziuko's three decade-plus career will attest, he was successful. (For another Wrightson/Ziuko piece, turn to our last page for T.Z.'s "A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words" entry!

Right: *Detail from Bernie Wrightson's "Freaks" print, which* CBC *borrowed when we met the artist at the 2014 Heroes Con in Charlotte, North Carolina, last summer. We confess to a bit of photo manipulation.*

Editor's Note: *Alas, we had hoped to include a talk with author Jill Lepore on her bestselling book* The Secret History of Wonder Woman, *but that will have to wait, along with the Bruce Jones interview (which would've been a perfect complement to the Wrightson interview, given the pair had memorable collaborations), but the cover subject's interview herein demanded the space. Thanks to all for understanding.*

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Dark Knight Aesthetics

The exquisite craft of American comic book design as pioneered by Richard Bruning

by GEORGE KHOURY *CBC* Contributing Editor

Inset right background: *Frank Miller's silhouette from his cover of Batman: The Dark Knight Returns #1 [1986].* **Below background:** *Renowned designer Milton Glaser's DC Comics logo, introduced in the latter '70s, during the early Kahn era at the House of Superman.*

Entering the '80s, comic book publishers had been catering their goods to audiences in exactly the same fashion since the Golden Age. The men in charge didn't over-think things; they didn't tamper with success or simplicity when the formula worked its job and sold copies. If putting a gorilla on a cover moved titles, readers got more gorillas on the covers. Outside of gimmicks and the trends, the aesthetics of the books themselves were almost an afterthought. It didn't help that the general public's perception of all comics made it a disposable medium for kids only, a hopeless notion that stood for decades. Back then, you'd be pressed to find someone, including a great number of those who toiled in the field, who thought of the medium as high art. This was strictly a business. No one ever bothered to think of the overall presentation and the experience of comic-book reading as a whole, one where every single element contributed to a sense of rhythm, structure, and style.

The rise of the direct market set the course for change in the industry. Gone were the days when the majority of customers matured out of reading comics to never return. By the necessity of evolution, the medium needed to realize that its consumers were clamoring for material with some sophistication to entice. And it was the year 1986 when began an era where great comics, those with complexity and texture, started to get invaluable acclaim from the general public and mainstream press. Beneath all of the raves and excitement, emerging practically unnoticed, was the overnight transformation of the design and presentation of the actual comics themselves. Outwardly, the look of the magazines had evolved and accentuated the reading experience for all with their remarkable ambition. At DC Comics, the man behind the curtain who helped these advances and was a ubiquitous influence was Richard Bruning, a key pioneer in the design of comics.

Below: *Two comics titles that contributed significantly to the notion that the year 1986 was the greatest in the history of American comic books. Art director Richard Bruning helped the books to achieve a level of sophistication by endowing the respective series with modern design methods, including the use of typography on their covers. On the left is* Batman: The Dark Knight Returns *#1 by Frank Miller and, at right, is* Watchmen *#1 [Sept.], art by Dave Gibbons.*

"I grew up wanting to be a comic book artist," says Bruning. "I virtually learned to read off of comics at a very young age and then started drawing when I was probably about six or so. And my goal was to be a comic book artist, which largely meant back then to be a super-hero artist because that was pretty much all there was in terms of comics at the time. I pursued that fairly religiously in terms of practicing and working to get better but then in my mid-20s or so, I was getting frustrated with my ability (or lack thereof). I just wasn't as good an artist as the guys that were professional that I admired a lot. Like P. Craig Russell or Jim Starlin at the time, or Barry Smith. I just didn't think I was going be good enough. By fate, I was working at a small store that needed graphic design work and, because I was the "artist" on staff, they wanted me to do it. I was like, 'Well, that's design and stuff. I've never done that before. But I'll give it a try.' And I tried it and I actually found I took to it like a duck to water. I really enjoyed it and I understood pretty quickly what graphic design was supposed to do in terms of being a problem-solver and a communication tool. "

In 1979, the self-taught designer's affinity for design led him to launch Abraxas Studios; the same year he landed a part-time position at Big Rapids Distribution's back-issue comic department. Later on, Bruning accepted a job offer from Milton Griepp and John Davis, the duo who formed Capital City Distribution when Big Rapids went under, in 1980. He became the graphic designer and editor of Capital Comics (the distributor's publishing unit), where he oversaw the making of fan-favorite titles (*Nexus, The Badger,* and *Whisper*) and created the look for all things Capital (logos, advertisements, and so forth). His sleek design sense did not go unnoticed by the rest of the industry. Without an enormous budget or resources, the editor made his independent efforts look just as good, if not better, than the publications coming out from Marvel and DC at the time.

Nowadays anyone who has spent an hour at the Apple Store assumes they're a designer, but Richard Bruning learned his craft in the trenches. "The great thing about the Capital books was the changes the industry was going through and the fact that I had no idea how you were supposed to do it. I also had the support of my partners, Milton and John, who were largely the business and money end of things. Milton was very much involved in the marketing, as I was. We didn't know what the rules were, so we made 'em up as we went along. I just wanted to make the best-looking comics that didn't talk down to the readers. So ultimately, it turned out that the work I did at Capital, DC saw it."

After Capital Comics ceased its publishing operations in 1984, and a brief intermission in San Francisco, the young artist accepts the position of art director at DC Comics and relocates to New York City, in April of 1985. At the time, there were only a few graphic designers in the entire business, among them the late Neal Pozner, DC's first design director and Bruning's predecessor.

"[Pozner] worked on *Ronin* and *Camelot 3000*," remembers Bruning. "He was one of the first to come in and do graphic design for comics, for which I give Jenette Kahn a lot of credit. She's the one who realized that graphic design was an important aspect of comics publishing. At that point, it had never been recognized as mattering much at all: just slap a logo on it and there it goes. So they offered me a job

Twenty Years of Terror!

Bongo editor & cartoonist Bill Morrison recalls legendary *Treehouse of Horror* issues

Conducted by JON B. COOKE *CBC* Editor

[*Bill Morrison is the creator, writer, and artist of Roswell, The Little Green Man, but is likely best known for his work on The Simpsons and Futurama. He is also a co-founder of Bongo Comics, where he served as creative director for innumerable years. Ye Ed and Bill hit it off back in the late 1990s, and together they had high hopes to jointly produce a faux "50 Years of Radioactive Man" April Fool's issue of* Comic Book Artist, *but Simpsons licensing thought better of the idea, daggnabbit! Ever since then I've wanted to get the talented feller in these pages and we're delighted it has finally come to pass in the guise of a discussion about 20 years of* Bart Simpson's Treehouse of Horror. *Bill was interviewed by phone on Nov. 21, and he copy-edited the transcript, which was transcribed by Steven Thompson. —* **Y.E.**]

Below: *Bill Morrison's painting graces the cover of* Treehouse of Horror *#6 ['00].* **Bottom:** *Matt Groening, Steve Vance, and Bill Morrison sign copies of Bongo's first release,* Simpsons Comics & Stories *#1 [Jan. '93] at an L.A. shop.*

Comic Book Creator: *Let's start at the start. We're gonna talk about the* Treehouse of Horror, *but if you don't mind, I'd like to start with when you first got into comics and where did you grow up?*

Bill Morrison: I grew up just south of Detroit, Michigan, in a town called Lincoln Park and I guess my love affair with comics began with the *Batman* TV show. I was aware of comics before then because I had some older friends and cousins who had comics. But *Batman* really hooked me and I can remember my dad taking me down to this family bookstore, a mom-&-pop kind of place. This was in the days before comic shops and they had a couple of spinner racks. (No Marvel for some reason, which I thought was strange… though, at the time, I didn't know what Marvel comics *were* but later…) They had lots of DC comics, Dells, and stuff like that, and I remember my dad buying me a copy of *World's Finest* #164, with Superman and Batman. That was the first book I ever owned and I was crazy about pretty much anything with Batman. I discovered the Justice League and the characters that were members of *that* group. You know, *they* knew Batman, so they were okay with me. [*laughter*]

I saw the Marvel cartoon shows so I was sort of aware of the characters and my best friend had a copy of *Fantastic Four* #42, though he didn't collect comics and this comic book was always sittin' around in his basement. If I got bored, I would every so often pick it up and thumb through it. I just remember at that age thinking, "These characters are *so* boring! They don't have capes or masks, and they all have the same uniform except for this big rock guy who's just wearing underwear." It wasn't until I was about 12 when I recognized that Marvel was cool. My sister had a friend who came over with this pile of old comics who said, "My brother is getting rid of these and I know you like comic books, so I thought you might like these." I was, like, "Aw, they're Marvels… okay. I got nothin' else to read right now." But I was now at that age where I was, like, "Holy crap! These are great!" [*laughter*] So from then on I was a Marvel guy, although I'd still get back into DC from time to time. *Now*, of course, I love everything. The older I get the more I realize that the comics that I dismissed as a kid, some were really incredible.

CBC: *Did you clue in to specific creators?*

Bill: Probably not until I was that specific age, around 11 or 12. I remember cluing in to Neal Adams, Bernie Wrightson, and Steranko. I was starting to draw more seriously at that point, so I think I was paying closer attention. Certainly, in my younger days I was aware of the differences. I could identify artists I liked and artists I didn't like, although, especially with the DC books back in the early to mid-'60s, you didn't always see credits or signatures so I wasn't always aware of who's doing what. But, yeah, as I got to be a little bit older, I definitely had favorites and started seeking those artists out quite a bit.

CBC: *Back in 2003, you had a short autobiographical story published, "My Life As a Bat," by Dark Horse. What was the gist of that?*

Bill: I was asked by Diana Schutz at Dark Horse to participate in this book. Basically the idea was let's do an autobiographical comics collection by people who don't normally do autobiographical stories. I'd read a lot of autobiographic stories and I thought, "I don't know. Most of those stories are always kind of weighty, deep, and introspective, and I don't know if that's really in me. I feel like I want to do something light and fun." I asked if that was cool and Diana said, "Yes, anything, as long as it's based on something that happened." So I just started thinking about my obsession with Batman as a kid and I realized there were funny stories and I could get a lot of comedy out of that. I also tied it in with when the 1989 Tim Burton movie came out and Batmania

started coming back. It's a two-part story that ties the earlier obsession in with the later obsession.

CBC: *Did you aspire to be a comic book artist when you were young?*

Bill: Oh, yes. I knew I was going to be an artist from probably about age 3. I don't remember too much about that, but my sister — who is 11 years older than me — told me that she sat me down at the kitchen table one day to teach me how to draw. And she drew a stick man and said, "I'm gonna be gone for about 10 minutes and, while I'm gone, imitate what I did. Then I'll come back and see how you did." So I looked at what she had done and I realized people aren't sticks. They have a width. I recognized that her drawing didn't have very much detail, so I added in a lot of detail in my version. And I think because she was a teenage girl and very excitable, she came back and looked at my drawing and just flipped out! "Oh my God! You're gonna be an artist! This is incredible!" To me, at that young age, I pretty much believed whatever she told me, so I just always thought I was going be an artist some day because my sister said I was. My thinking didn't really go too much beyond that.

Once I got interested in comics, instantly I had an application for that idea in my head that I'm going be an artist. Before comics, I didn't really know how I would apply that, but then once the comic book bug bit me, it was, like, "Oh, yeah. This is it. *This* is what I'm gonna do!" And it really wasn't until probably some point during art school I started doing some thinking. "I'm getting close to having to work as a professional. Will I really be able to be a comic book artist?" And I started looking at the reality at that time — which would have been early '80s. Back then, you really had to establish yourself in New York to be a comic book artist.

People think this is funny because I grew up in Detroit and, you know, the reputation Detroit has for being dangerous. But to me, the idea of going to New York was dangerous, even though I lived in Detroit! I was, like, "I don't know if I want to live in New York. I don't think I can do that." And I'd never *been* there, either, so it was sort of an unfair pre-judgment on my part. Years later I finally visited New York I thought, "This place is *great!*" What was I so afraid of?

I ended up getting the opportunity to come out to California and here the kind of jobs that were available were mostly about working in the movie industry and animation, so I really went in that direction. It wasn't until I hooked up with Matt Groening and he wanted to start Bongo that I finally realized that dream of drawing comics.

CBC: *Do they have a merit badge for comic book art?*

Bill: I think they do now! Somebody told me they do. They didn't back when I was a Boy Scout.

CBC: *You were actually an Eagle Scout. Are there any other Eagle Scouts in comics?*

Bill: Not that I'm aware of. I know there's a national registry, but I don't think people really put it on their resume…

CBC: *Well, it* is *quite an achievement!*

Bill: Yeah! It is! I think unless you're at a cocktail party and you're comparing childhood notes with somebody, it's not often that you even find out that somebody else was a Boy Scout.

CBC: *You're noted for doing a BSA mural, correct?*

Bill: That's right. It wasn't actually a mural although the people I did it for keep referring to it as a mural. It was really an illustration that they enlarged it and made it into a print. You know how companies do these wraps, like they can wrap a van with artwork or photos or whatever?

CBC: *Yep.*

Bill: They wrapped this RV that was donated to this Scout organization in Detroit that I did the thing for and it was really a cool project dreamed up by this guy Frank Mallon, a volunteer Scout leader that my dad knew. I met him through my dad. (My dad was involved in Scouting right up until the time he passed away.) So I met Frank and he knew I was an artist. It was funny because I don't think he knew anything beyond the fact that I drew *The Simpsons*, but he kept talking to me. Every time I would see him when I'd go home and visit my family, he'd start talking to me about this project that he wanted to do — an illustration that represented 100 years of scouting. This started probably ten years before the centennial. I remember just thinking, "Oh, that's a nice idea. It's probably never going to happen." So I would be very polite, but I was also non-committal about it. But he was really tenacious and stayed in touch with me even after my dad passed. As it got closer to the centennial, I started realizing, "This guy's really serious. He really wants me to do this." So I did the painting and his vision was to get

Above: Roswell: Little Green Man *is a creation of writer/artist/editor Bill Morrison! The six-issue mini-series was published by Bongo in 1996 and it appears in Mexican as well as German editions.* **Below:** *Life of the party Morrison flashes us a toothy grin. Mr. M. is renowned as frequent host, with lovely wife Kyre, at the annual Will Eisner Comics Industry Awards, held ever year at Comic-Con International: San Diego. And catch him at the Bongo booth, at the con! Photo courtesy of Bill Morrison.*

The Batton Lash Story

Part one of the *CBC* interview with the cartoonist creator of *Supernatural Law*

Conducted by JON B. COOKE *CBC* Editor

Inset right: *Caricature of Batton Lash by Rubén Procopio of Masked Avenger Studios, drawn for CAPS (Cartoon Art Professional Society).*

Below: *Though we do not discuss any of Batton's professional comic book material in this, part one of a career-spanning interview, never mind the Bongo Comics work (including the spot-on scripting of* Radioactive Man*), we assuredly cover the cartoonist's formative years and artistic influences in detail herein. Bill Morrison, who contributes this image of the Simpsons' comic book super-hero, informed us this figure was drawn before Mr. Lash's scripting tenure.*

[*Back in the later 1990s, when Yours Truly first attended Comic Con International: San Diego, a fast friendship was formed with the creator of* Wolff & Byrd/Supernatural Law, *Batton Lash and, even during the years I didn't make the summer sojourn to southern California (where Brooklyn-born Batton has established permanent residence with wife Jackie Estrada), we still managed to keep in touch. This interview, which took place on Nov. 23, is the first of two planned sessions with the artist/writer, was transcribed by Steven "Flash" Thompson and B.L. edited the piece for clarity. — **Y.E.***]

Comic Book Creator: *Where are you from, Batton Lash?*

Batton Lash: Brooklyn, New York.

CBC: *Were you a creative youngster?*

Batton: I've been drawing for as long as I remember. I made my own homemade comics. I've told this story before: when I was a child, there used to be decks of cheap playing cards all around my home. The backs of the cards were blank and I used to draw my comics on them. I recall those decks of cards came from the five & dime, which I guess was the precursor to today's 99¢ stores.

CBC: *Did you clue into comics and strips early?*

Batton: I remember reading *Dick Tracy* and *Popeye* in the *Daily News* and *Journal American*. My father got a big kick out of *Dick Tracy*, so we used to bond over that. My earliest memories of comic books were *Superman, Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen*… you know, the Mort Weisinger stuff. I think my mother would buy me those because she remembered them from when *she* was a kid. Even though she wasn't a comics fan, she remembered *Superman* and she would often tell me how, when she was vacationing on Lake George as a kid, a friend came up to her with the first issue of *Batman* and said, "Look! This is something new. Take a look at this." She always remembered and described that bright yellow cover to me many times.

CBC: *What was it about comics that you enjoyed? Did they become an immediate fascination? Were you a reader?*

Batton: I think it was an immediate fascination. I read books as a kid because I had to write book reports (my grammar school made everything interesting a chore!) and I didn't become a voracious reader until I was a senior in high school. But I did enjoy reading and I liked comics because it was words and pictures. I didn't put that together then, but, looking back, I can see that was the appeal. I like that they told a story from panel to panel.

CBC: *Did you clue in to* Donald Duck *or the other comics that were really popular then?*

Batton: Some of my contemporaries remember the *Donald* and *Uncle Scrooge* stories making a lasting impression, but I don't. I don't even remember any "funny animal" comics as a young child. The closest I came to funny animals were the Little Golden Books. Just about all the comics I remember reading involved detectives, super-heroes, or monsters. The funny animals I read were in the comic *strips*. I remember reading *Scamp* (the Walt Disney strip) and *Mickey Mouse*. But they didn't have the same appeal to me as a "people" strip. I don't know why. Paging Dr. Freud! [*laughter*]

CBC: *Were you too late for E.C. Comics?*

Batton: Oh, yeah. They were long gone by the time I was into comics. You know I was too late for E.C., and when I began reading comics, there were no Marvel super-heroes, so the Marvel comics of my early childhood were the monster stuff, which I *loved!* Mark Evanier once asked me what was the first image of a Jack Kirby comic I could remember and it was *Tales of Suspense #* 16 [Apr. 1961]. It was this giant robot being descended into a city from high above. I just remember being fascinated by the perspective and the enormity of this monstrous robot and, of course, the Kirby cast of characters, you know, his "stock company" of city dwellers all looking up in panic. That's the earliest Kirby drawing I can remember. Another early Kirby memory was "The Glob" [*Journey into Mystery #*72, Sept. 1961] – this gooey, dripping thing chasing some poor guy in a castle. I was taken by how moody it was! I loved those monster comics, especially those odd five-page stories in the back of each, which would eventually have a large impact on me.

CBC: *A lot of those stories were done by Steve Ditko.*

Batton: Ditko! Yes! Who would turn out to be my all-time favorite artist.

CBC: *And what was it about Ditko that appealed to you?*

Batton: Well, even before his *Spider-Man* work, I think what appealed to me about Ditko's work is that the people looked like [*laughs*] the people outside of my doorway! When I was a kid, before my parents moved into the house that I eventually grew up in, my father was a mechanic and we lived behind a store next to the garage he worked at, on Flatbush Avenue. My siblings and I would sit in the store window and look at the buses and people walking by… and the people that Ditko drew looked like *those* people! [*laughs*] So he had a very interesting style that I could relate

to. While people in the *Superman* comics, as much as I loved that stuff, they wore suits and ties and I rarely saw people in suits and ties. Even the gangsters wore suits and ties in a *Superman* comic. Yeah, I rarely saw life like that. They looked like people on TV. Sure, Ditko's people wore suits and ties, but when he drew an old lady or a fat man, they looked like people I'd see outside my window.

CBC: *Did you have a TV in the house as a kid?*

Batton: My childhood is divided into two sections: living behind the store and then the house. I remember a TV on top of the refrigerator behind the store. I vaguely remember *The Adventures of Superman*. *Ruff and Reddy* and *Courageous Cat* I can remember. I think I was in bed by the time the adult shows were on. But I do recall seeing the Marx Brothers in *The Incredible Jewel Robbery*. That was the brothers' last appearance together, but my introduction to them!

When my family moved to the house, oh, it was non-stop TV! We had a TV in the basement where we would watch *Million Dollar Movie*, which was great. That was in those pre-DVD times when if there was a monster movie or a thriller or some sort of crime or gangster movie, *Million Dollar Movie* would show it every day, twice a day. So if you wanted to catch the best part of *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman* you can just figure out when that's coming up and watch it every day. Growing up, I watched the usual shows that people of my age watched: you know, *Man From U.N.C.L.E., The Avengers*, that sort of stuff.

CBC: *Did you go to movies with any regularity?*

Batton: Oh, yeah! I remember the first movie I ever saw in a movie theater was *King Kong Vs. Godzilla* and that was 1962. And it was a very big deal for me because while I had seen movies on TV, I'd *never* seen one in a theater, on the big screen. So that was pretty exciting! I had a godmother who was sort of my mentor. I come from a family of five kids. My parents were wonderful parents, but they couldn't devote much time to us individually. They would *try* to spread the love around, but they couldn't put too much attention on one child or the other one would feel slighted. But I had a godmother who took me under her wing, you could say. She was a weekend artist and was interested in the arts. She saw that I liked to draw and even though I don't think comics were her interest, she liked that I was interested in it so she would take me to museums and galleries in Manhattan. A real highlight was when she took me to Radio City Music Hall, where we'd see movies like *Jumbo*, things like that. And the stage show was just spectacular! I got my introduction to culture — such as it was! — via my aunt. I know this is a roundabout way of answering your question on movies, but I don't remember my parents ever going to the movies until *Jaws* came out, because they were too busy being parents! They were blue-collar people and worked like dogs to support five kids. But *Jaws* caused such a sensation that I remember my father saying, "We've gotta see what this is all about!"

CBC: *What was your godmother's name?*

Batton: Ann. She just turned 89. I'm just glad that she's still with us. She actually used to read my homemade comics! I now send her my printed comics. She was my first fan, really. She used to write fan letters that I would transcribe into the letter pages of my homemade comics.

CBC: [Laughs] *How nice! She indulged you by bringing you to* King Kong Vs. Godzilla?

Batton: No, actually I went with a school friend at the time. But it was always exciting when I'd come home from school or something, and my mother would say, "Oh, Aunt Ann wants to know if you'd be interested in going to the city with her this weekend" (That's what we called Manhattan. It was always, "the city."). Whether it was Radio City, a museum, or a play, my reaction was always "You bet!"

CBC: *Did you have artistic aspirations at a young age?*

Batton: I drew for as long as I remember. It's funny, I'm trying to think back where I first realized that people *drew* the comics that I was reading. I recall looking at Wayne Boring's Superman and realizing that his Superman looked different than the other Superman drawings in the same comic! I remember being in grammar school when someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up and I think I *did* say an artist. But I went to a Catholic school and that really wasn't encouraged. Looking back, I think the expectation for everyone was to find a trade and go into that. It was pretty much a working class area, so the arts weren't really something they devoted a lot of time to. I remember there was an art class every Friday from 2:00 to 2:45. So we had 45 minutes that we drew circles and that was it. [*Jon laughs*] But, again, I think I always wanted to draw and when I found out that people actually got paid for doing that, I said, "That's for me." But I can't pinpoint what year it was. I don't remember being interested in anything else, at least as a child. When I got older I had to broaden my horizon and figure out, "What do I have to do in case this doesn't work out?"

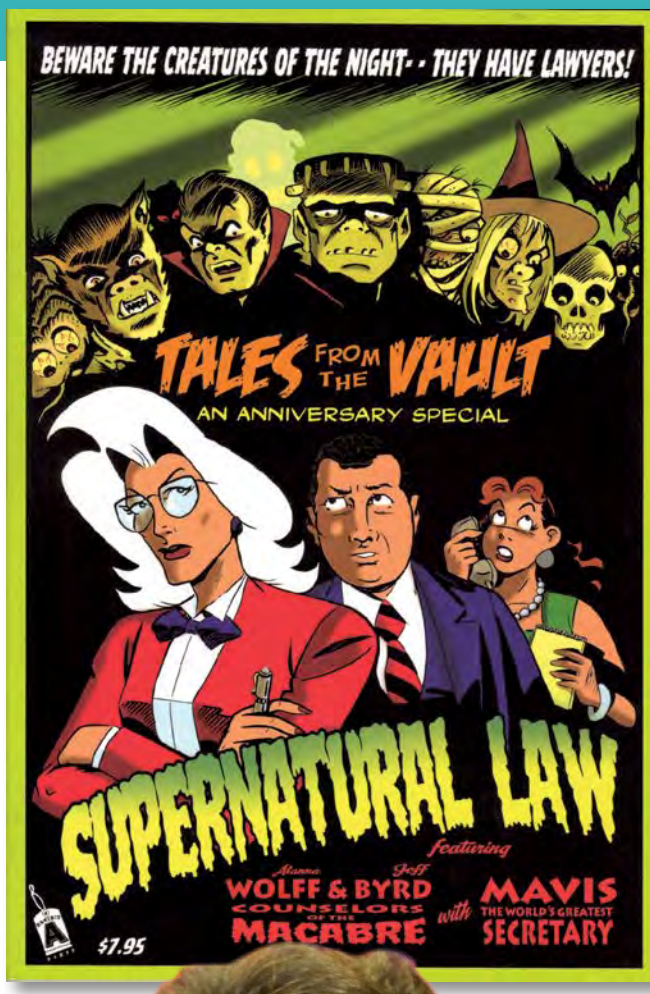
CBC: *Where are you in the lineup of your siblings?*

Batton: I am the oldest, so I'm the example.

CBC: [Laughs] *Are there any other artists amongst your brothers and sisters?*

Batton: No, and that's the odd thing. My brother, he likes horror movies. I grew up with him, watching the monster movies, but he was never into comics. And my sisters — I have three sisters — they're not particularly interested in comics or anything like that, none of the monster stuff. The eldest of the three sisters was into the *Man From U.N.C.L.E.* when we were tweeners, but that was the extent of her genre interest.

CBC: *When the*



Above: Supernatural Law *is surely Batton's most renowned work. Here's a promotional poster.* **Left:** *Portrait by Kendall Whitehouse. Pic taken at Comic Con International: San Diego last year.*

THE BERNIE WRIGHTSON INTERVIEW

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke • Transcribed by Brian K. Morris • Portraits by Greg Preston

Bernard Albert Wrightson was born four days before Halloween 1948, in the city of Baltimore, Maryland, a town boasting such disparate native luminaries as H.L. Mencken and Billie Holiday, Frank Zappa and Edgar Allan Poe. Bernie (who would drop the "e" during his early career for a reason we'll learn) would be deeply affected by Poe's macabre tales of mystery and imagination and the four-color horror offerings of Entertaining Comics, as well as monster movie "creature features" then all the rage during his youth. As a teen, the germinal artist would be dispatching spooky drawings to *Creepy* magazine and Frazetta-inspired illustrations for myriad fanzines, displaying a facility of talent that gained notice not only by fandom, but also top executives at DC Comics. In 1969, barely into his 20s, Bernie was producing "Nightmaster" in *Showcase*, assisted by new-found friends Jeffrey Jones and Michael W. Kaluta. From there, with an ability growing at a breathtakingly exponential rate, the artist emerged as one of the true super-stars of American comics and remains today among the most admired of all creators. This interview was conducted in Bernie's studio in the outskirts of Los Angeles over a two-day span, January 21 & 22, 2004.

Comic Book Creator: *Bernie, what's your ethnic background?*
Bernie Wrightson: I'm mostly Polish, from my mother's side. Her maiden name was Stankowski, but my actual name is from my father's side of the family. He was of English and German extraction with some Polish (though I'm not sure from at what point exactly). I'm mostly Polish, maybe 85 to 95 percent.
CBC: *Had your ancestors been over here in the United States for a long time?*
Bernie: My maternal grandmother — my mother's mother — came over in the early part of the 20th century, in the years just before World War I.
CBC: *She was a part of that immigration influx?*
Bernie: Yes, she was part of that big wave from middle Europe. My father's side of the family is a mystery. Nobody really seems to know when they came over, so they might have been settlers here in 1700s for all I know.
CBC: *Where did your mother's family enter the states?*
Bernie: Well, they came to New York City first, as everybody did in those days. They came through Ellis Island, then went to Baltimore. I think that's because they had relatives already there or people they knew.
CBC: *When was your mother born?*
Bernie: She was born in 1925. There were all girls in her family. She was in the middle of five girls.
CBC: *Did you have a lot of cousins, growing up?*
Bernie: Quite a few, yes, on both sides of the family.
CBC: *Were they all in Maryland, in the Baltimore area?*
Bernie: Yes. Most of them still live there now.
CBC: *What did your mother's parents do for work? What was their vocation?*
Bernie: As far as I can remember, my grandmother never worked. She stayed home and took care of the family. My grandfather worked at a canning plant in Baltimore, though I don't know what he did, exactly.
CBC: *Did he have a trade in the old country?*
Bernie: I don't know. We never really talked much. He was a kind of a surly, non-communicative guy and very ill-tempered.
CBC: [Laughs] *Curmudgeon?*
Bernie: Uhh, yeah, though maybe a few steps beyond "curmudgeon." [*laughs*] We were always kind of scared of him, and he spoke practically no English. When I was very young, up until nine or ten years old, I spoke very fluent Polish, but I've long since forgotten the language.

Above: *The artist as a very young person. On top, with his father, Bernie Wrightson at eight months old, in 1949. Above is the boy in the Spring of 1953.* **Below:** *Another son of Baltimore was the great writer of the macabre, Edgar Allan Poe.*

CBC: *Polish was spoken regularly around your house?*
Bernie: Yes. My mother and father were born, raised, and went to school in the U.S., but my mother was bilingual, as she came from a Polish family. Whenever we were around my maternal grandparents, we spoke a lot of Polish.
CBC: *What was your father's job?*
Bernie: When I was really young, he worked at Bethlehem Steel in Baltimore as a steelworker. And then he moved on to an arm of Bethlehem, Eastern Stainless Steel. When the steel mill closed down, he became a city bus driver in Baltimore for maybe twenty years.
CBC: *What was his education?*
Bernie: He went to about the third grade, I think. My mom made it all the way through high school. She was very proud of that because, back then, a high school diploma was like what a college diploma is today.
CBC: *As a child, were you read to?*
Bernie: No, not at all, really. I grew into a love of reading all on my own. My family didn't read at all. We didn't have any books in the house.
CBC: *Did you have newspapers?*
Bernie: My dad was an avid reader of the *National Enquirer*.
CBC: *This was back when it was a "freak" paper, right?*
Bernie: Yes, and it was when there would be a center-spread with a sequence of photos of a horse getting hit by a train, you know…
CBC: [Pained] *Ohhh.*
Bernie: …and there'd be all these horse pieces laying on the track and stuff. [*laughs*]
CBC: *And young Bernie would look at that occasionally?*
Bernie: Oh, yeah! [*laughter*] Somewhere between Ralph Kramden and Archie Bunker, that was my dad. He had a lot of opinions. Most of what came out of his mouth, he didn't know what he was talking about, but he could back it up because it was in the paper. "It was in the paper! I read it in the paper!"
CBC: *In the* Enquirer?
Bernie: Right. [*laughter*]
CBC: *Did you read daily newspaper comic strips?*
Bernie: We had two papers in Baltimore, the *Baltimore Sun* and the *News-American*.
CBC: *And what strips were you looking at?*
Bernie: Oh, I loved the adventure strips. When I was young, we had *Flash Gordon*, *The Phantom*, and *Buz Sawyer*. I loved *Buz Sawyer* because [cartoonist] Roy Crane used that Duo-Tone board. It was just so pretty to look at, like these little paintings in those little squares. The Sunday paper, of course, had *Prince Valiant*. I enjoyed *Flash Gordon*, for the longest time.
CBC: Flash Gordon *by Mac Raboy?*
Bernie: Yes, this would have been in through the '50s and early '60s.
CBC: *Do you have brothers or sisters?*
Bernie: No, I'm an only child.
CBC: *As far as you know, were there any creative types in your extended family?*
Bernie: You know, my dad doodled, though I wouldn't really call that drawing, but he liked to doodle. I remember being really, really young — still a baby, really — and he would doodle little pictures for me of little stick-figure animals and things.
CBC: *Did your parents talk about the trappings of their own childhoods at all? Your father didn't get much chance to be a child, did he?*
Bernie: No, he grew up during the Depression and told me stories about his childhood. His father, my paternal grandfather, had a produce truck and that's what he did for a living. So my dad told me stories about he would get up really early with his father, before the sun came up, and they would drive out to the farm and pick beans all morning for three cents a bushel, and then put the beans on the truck and take them into town and sell them. And that was his typical day. The story went that he only made it to the third grade because he had two older brothers, and they only had one pair of shoes, they were so poor, right? So the shoes just got passed down from one brother to the next. And by the time they got to my father, the soles were all gone and he couldn't wear them, and they wouldn't let you go to school barefoot. He couldn't go to school. That was his excuse.
CBC: *Did you get the impression that your dad had a difficult time as a kid?*
Bernie: You know, he must have had a tough childhood. It *had* to be tough during those years, growing up during the Depression. When he was 18 or 19, the war was on and he went into the service, joining the Marines. He always said that he went in because the food was so good; and he knew that if he went in the Marines, he would get three meals a day. But beyond that, he never talked about how hard it was growing up. He always had a joke.
CBC: *Was he a happy guy?*
Bernie: Very happy-go-lucky, yeah.
CBC: *Were your parents demonstrative in their affection towards you?*
Bernie: Oh, yes, absolutely.
CBC: *Did your father see action in the Marines?*
Bernie: He was eventually stationed in the Philippines. He was in the South Pacific all through the war though he never talked about any experiences. I only know that he went in as a private and came out as a private, never advancing in rank, so he spent his whole tour as a grunt. He had a tattoo on his right arm of a cross, like a gravestone cross with roses twined around it, and a little banner on it that said, "My Buddy." I remember looking at that as a kid and asking him, "Who's your buddy?" All he ever would tell me, he would just say, "It was a guy I knew in the war. It was a friend of mine in the war." So I never got the story behind it and he never talked about it.
CBC: *Otherwise, he pretty much talked about anything?*
Bernie: Otherwise, yeah, he would talk about anything, except about his time in the service. He just didn't want to talk about it and I think it was similar when, years later, the guys who came back from Vietnam. They didn't want to talk about it. They just wanted to put it all behind them.
CBC: *Did you listen to the radio at home?*
Bernie: Oh, absolutely. You know, one of my favorite programs was *Lights Out*, which was like the radio version of *Tales From the Crypt*.
CBC: *This was before* Tales From the Crypt?
Bernie: Well, a lot of the old E.C. horror stories had been influenced by the old radio shows, such as *Lights Out* and *Inner Sanctum*, which I listened to a couple of times, and they were half-hour horror stories, radio plays, and just great stuff. The only one I still remember hearing as a kid that just scared the sh*t out of me was one that took place during the French Revolution. It was about a guy in prison and he was going to the guillotine. I can't tell you the story exactly except for the ending where the guy was a doctor, or a scientist, or something, and he believed that life did not end at the moment that the blade came down and cut your head off, and

my first convention. I went to the World Science Fiction Convention, in New York, in 1967. The guests of honor were Frank Frazetta and Hal Foster. That's where I met Frazetta. I also met a lot of guys who do fanzines. A couple of guys from Chicago did *Spa-Fon* and *Squa Tront*.

CBC: *John Benson?*

Bernie: John Benson I knew pretty well, yeah. He lived in New York. He lived in New York. One of these guys was Helmut Müeller, and there was another guy named Bob Barron, who did an Edgar Rice Burroughs fanzine in the '60s. Müeller, I think, was the guy who did the *Spa Fon* or *Squa Tront*, and I did some spots and stuff, and I think maybe an interview. I was just a kid. I hadn't had anything published yet to speak of, but it was great!

CBC: *This convention, did it open up the world to you?*

Bernie: I not only met Frazetta at this convention, I met Jeff Jones, Michael Kaluta, Al Williamson, Dick Giordano.

CBC: *You were aware of Frazetta and Foster obviously, but these other guys, did you have any idea they existed?*

Bernie: Jeff had had a couple of stories printed in *Creepy* so I knew who he was. Kaluta, I had no idea. He was just another fan, but we just kind of fell in together and just spent the whole weekend at the convention and carousing around in New York. I'd never been to a convention before. That was my first convention. I had about half of my little mind blown.

CBC: *You didn't have much of an interest in science-fiction, did you?*

Bernie: Not really, no. I went to this thing because this friend of mine told me that Frazetta was going to be the guest of honor. I thought that means that anybody can meet him and I could get like an autograph.

CBC: *Now did you, in fact, meet him?*

Bernie: I did. He was in a ballroom, sitting at a table next to Hal Foster, and it was two big lines of people going up to see these guys with items to be autographed. I was waiting in line and thinking, "Wow, that's Frazetta!" He was signing and, with a ball point pen, doing these little sketches. I don't think he'd ever been to a convention before. I don't think at the time he knew how popular he was.

CBC: *Was this his first introduction to fandom?*

Bernie: It might have been. I think he was pretty freaked out by it, obviously very flattered and excited that everybody seemed to know and love his work. He didn't have any work with him and he went back home that night — he lived on Long Island — and filled his car up with paintings and brought them back to the hotel and had a private show of his paintings in his hotel room.

CBC: *Now were you surprised that he looked like one of his own paintings?*

Bernie: I would have known him in a second. I realized it was him when I first saw him at a distance. I just would have said, "My God, that's Frazetta," because he looks like his subjects. He looks like a —

CBC: *A James Bama cover!*

Bernie: Yeah, he looks like a boxer or a ballplayer or something.

CBC: *Was he nice? I mean obviously, most of the fans were in the line were not artist-types.*

Bernie: No, he was terrific, just a great guy, very friendly, very affable. I think subsequently, he became more cautious and eventually, he just stopped doing shows. I think all the attention really freaked him out.

CBC: *Were you surprised as well that so many people had showed up for him?*

Bernie: It didn't surprise me. I'd started going to this little gathering that I was telling you about and they all knew who Frazetta was and we'd sit around and talk about his work. So it was starting to spread, this whole Frazetta thing. By the time I went to this con in New York, one of the first people I met there was Jeff Jones, who had some work on display.

CBC: *Had his work appeared in* Flash Gordon *yet? Had he done King Comics?*

Bernie: I don't think it had appeared yet. I think he was still working on it at the time. He had some paintings on display and, up to that point, I didn't know that he painted. All I'd seen of his were a couple of stories in *Creepy*, pen-&-ink stuff, so I thought he was a comic book artist. He had some of his paintings there and I think he was just breaking into paperback covers. But, like I said, I knew him from the Warren stuff and we met, and he seemed very surprised that he had any fans at all. [*chuckles*]

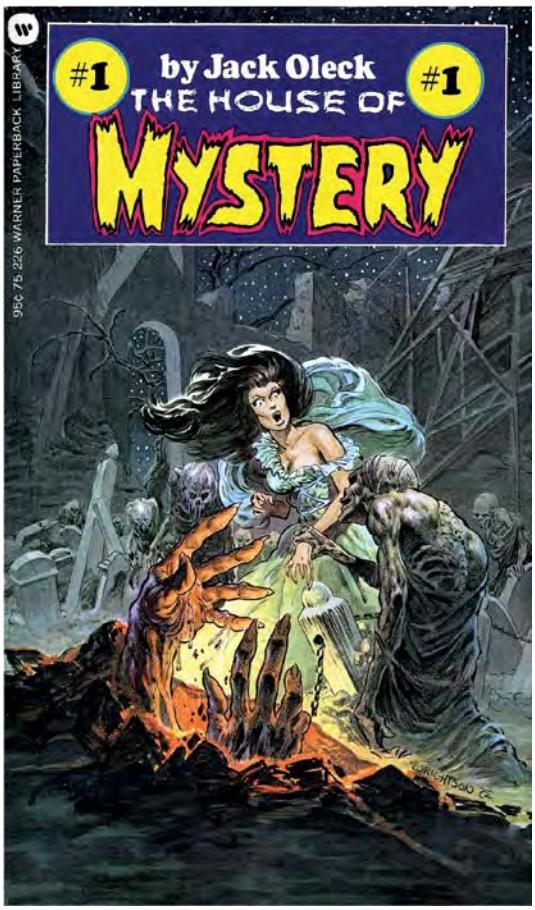
CBC: *But he was only a few years older?*

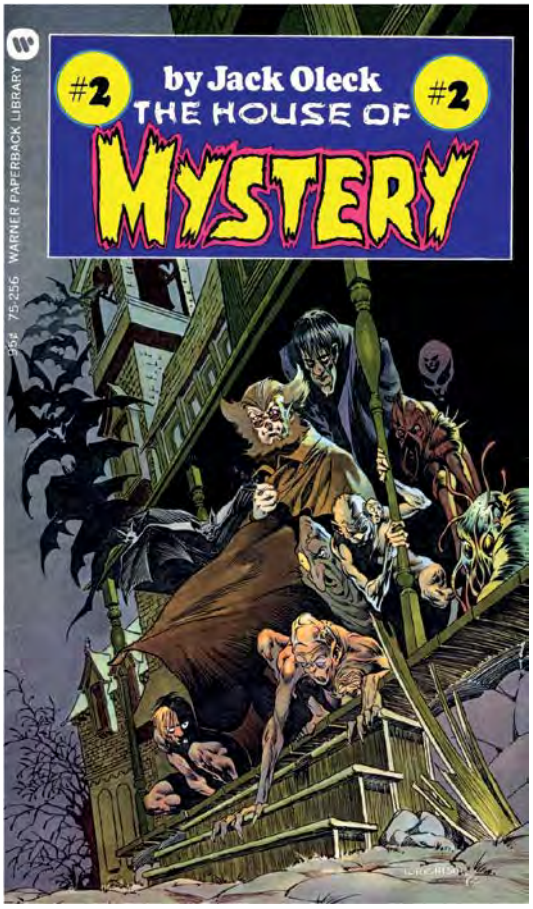
Bernie: Yes, Jeff is about five years older than me. And I met Kaluta. We were just a couple of fans. He came from Virginia, right over the river from D.C., so probably a little more than an hour from Baltimore. Michael's a year older than me.

CBC: *Was it a big show?*

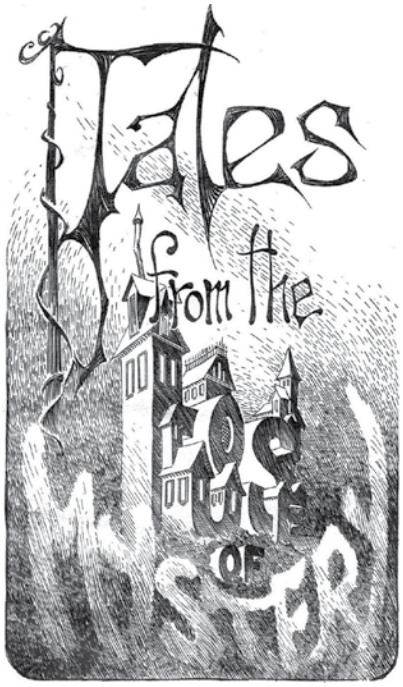
Bernie: It was, yes. It was not as big as it is now, of course. It was certainly the biggest thing I'd ever seen. And I went back to New York the following year for a comic book convention, one of the first Phil Seuling shows.

CBC: *So you hit it off in a very friendly way with these guys?*





This page and previous: *Bernie would draw up introductory pages for the DC mystery titles as a challenge for the writer to figure out just what the host would say, in this case (previous page, upper left), Len Wein on the* HOM *#219 [Oct. '73] intro page. Bernie's paintings and frontispieces also graced the two paperback prose anthologies published under the* HOM *logo.*



Above: *This 1975 illustration by Bernie Wrightson is certainly a beauty but we're unsure whether it was part of an aborted calendar project by the artist. This piece, courtesy of Heritage, was auctioned off in 2009.*

Bernie: Oh, immediately, yes. And we all had the same thing in common. We loved comic books and we loved Frazetta. Jeff was a little older, but the rest of us, we were all under 20, we were kids, and what more did you need? And from my part, I hadn't really met that many other artists so it was a real thrill. It was, "This is cool; we're all the same."

CBC: *Did you feel as if your life may have changed?*

Bernie: No. That wasn't really until the following year, when I went to the comic book convention and I had samples with me. I'd done this story for a fanzine that was published by a friend of Kaluta's in Virginia. I'm trying to remember the name of this thing. Was it *Graphic Showcase*?

Between the time of the '67 sci-fi convention and this comic book show in '68, I did this story. It was seven or eight pages called "Uncle Bill's Barrel" and Kaluta had, I think, at that first show, introduced me to the guy who did this magazine, so I was in contact with him and I did this story for him. And I don't think it was published yet, but I had the original pages and I was showing them around at this comic book show. Kaluta had become friends with Al Williamson during that year. Kaluta took me over to meet Al and I showed him "Uncle Bill's Barrel," and Al showed it to Joe Orlando, who showed it to Dick Giordano, who showed it to Carmine Infantino, who at the time was the editorial director at DC. And this was even before it was called DC. They were still National Periodical Publications, right? They were the guys who published *Superman* and *Batman,* so yeah, of course I knew who they were! And I knew Carmine from "Adam Strange," right? And Carmine looked at it and he said, "Hey, kid: you want to draw comics?" Carmine was great, he reminded me of a type of tall Edward G. Robinson. He had the cigar and everything. He was just a really, really sweet man. I didn't know any New Yorkers and it was like all these guys talk really fast, they got the accent and everything, half the time, I didn't know what anybody was saying. I'd just kind of nod stupidly. Everybody was Italian, you know? I grew up in a neighborhood where everybody was Polish. And here it's like the Italian National Guard or something. It was great. Everybody's name ended in a vowel, you know? [*laughter*]

CBC: *And this was really right at the beginning of the renaissance at DC Comics when Carmine took over as editorial director, and instituted the era of artist-as-editor.*

Bernie: Yes, I think it was around that time and, of course, I had no clue at the time. It's just dumb luck I happened to be in the right place at the right time and showing my work to the right people.

CBC: *Now by this time, did you see original art pages? Did you start observing how to do it?*

Bernie: Yes, now I was seeing this stuff and I had seen some of it at the show the year before at the science-fiction convention because there were some comic book people there. There were dealers there selling original pages. I saw these and thought, "Oh my god, these things are big." So I realized you work at that size and then it's reduced photographically.

CBC: *This the days of the "twice-up" art boards?*

Bernie: Right. So I was looking at old "Adam Strange" pages, old Kubert pages like *Tor* and "The Viking Prince." Stuff like that. And this stuff was *huge*, just huge. And *Prince Valiant* pages, which were like the size of a wall, you know? I mean I think he worked on full sheets of Strathmore for the Sunday pages. These things were just enormous!

CBC: *Did you meet Hal Foster?*

Bernie: I did, yes.

CBC: *Did you notice the differences between these two guys? Frazetta was a rugged he-man type and Hal — ?*

Bernie: Yes, Hal was like somebody's grandfather or something. There was a big age difference too.

CBC: *Old guard and new guard.*

Bernie: Frazetta was like a boxer. You feel the energy coming off this guy.

CBC: *Did you ever go up to his hotel room?*

Bernie: I did later, yes. But when I went up to get his autograph, I had brought some work of my own, little drawings I'd done. I hadn't done, really, any comic-book work at that point, but I had some drawings of barbarians and stuff. I had it in this little cardboard folder and Frazetta said, "You an artist?" I said, "Oh, yeah." He said, "Let me see." [*excitedly*] Frazetta wants to see my stuff! I opened it up and it was embarrassing because it was all Frazetta rip-offs. And I know the guy's going to look at it and he's going to sue me. He's going to rip me an assh*le, you know? But he was great, he was terrific. He was very gracious about it, and just, "Oh, this is very good. How old are you?" and all this stuff.

There was one piece that I had done for a guy back in Baltimore whose name was Jack Chalker and he was a publisher. He did a book of sword-&-sorcery stories. I can't remember if they were all like Robert E. Howard or a collection of other authors or what it was, but I did the cover for the book. It was a hardcover and I did a black-&-white, ink piece, but it was a total Frazetta rip-off. It was this wizard standing on a cliff top like conjuring and these kind of creatures and things in the mist. That was one of the pieces that I had with me and Frazetta really stopped at that one. A lot of the other things were pencil sketches and stuff, but this was finished. And he really liked that piece. He just stopped at that one because it was like one of the better pieces in there. Frank said, "This is gorgeous. This is really beautiful." I was like 18 and just cocky, and I said, "Well, if you like it that much, do you want it?" He said, "Are you serious?" And I took his pen and I signed, "To Frank Frazetta, with awe and admiration," or something like that, and I gave it to him. He said, "Gosh, this is great. Thank you." He was genuinely grateful that I would give him this drawing.

There were people in line behind me, so I moved on. And sometime later in the day, I ran into Kaluta and he said, "Hey, Frazetta's having a gathering, a little get-together, in his room tonight and he wanted me to find you and ask if you wanted to come there, and he's going to have some of his paintings." I said, "Was he kidding? Of course I'll go." I don't know how Michael found out about it. To this day, I don't know how he got the invitation.

CBC: *Was Michael more outgoing than you?*

Bernie: Michael was a lot more socially savvy than I was. Michael was a lot more extroverted than I was at that point and, yeah, much more outgoing.

into Aladdin's cave, full of treasure. So we talked with this guy, I think we went out to dinner, and by the end of the day, he had changed his plans from a book featuring the ten top fantasy artists to just the four of us. And, in the course of one afternoon, we went from four guys who just needed more space to work into The Beatles of fantasy art [*laughter*], which always kind of bothered me because whenever you're The Beatles of *anything*, *somebody's* got to be Ringo.

CBC: [Laughs] *Did you guys call yourself "The Studio"?*

Bernie: That was just what we called the place. When it became apparent we were going to do a book about the place, we tried to think of a name, something to call ourselves as a group. You know, like a rock group. Barry hung a long sheet of brown butcher paper on the wall and we just started writing titles. Some of them were serious, some of them were stupid and silly like "Monkey Pie," and this went on for a while until we couldn't agree on anything. And when I say we couldn't agree, we couldn't agree on *anything*. The beginning of *The Studio* book was the end of The Studio itself because of just all the fighting and disagreement what this thing was going to be. What went into it, how it was going to get laid out, and just butting heads over every detail of this thing. By the time the book came out, there was no Studio any more.

CBC: [Laughs] *A moment in history. Do you think the book captured it succinctly?*

Bernie: It captured a moment. That book is a very grand snapshot of, literally, a moment, maybe several months.

CBC: *But it really solidified the essence that's very important to people.*

Bernie: Oh, yes. The book has become something bigger than The Studio itself ever was.

CBC: *It's a legend. It's never been reprinted?*

Bernie: I don't think so.

CBC: *What did you think of it?*

Bernie: I thought it was great.

CBC: *Did Roger do the logo?*

Bernie: No, Barry found a guy in New York. He designed the logo and for the outrageous sum of $400 we all had to pony up.

CBC: *What do you mean you had to "pony up"? This wasn't a publisher expense?*

Bernie: No, we paid for it. I can't remember if it was like a reimbursement deal or what, but we had to pay the guy who did the logo.

CBC: *When you looked at this, did it come to the point where this was a business proposition? Was it always, "Hey, let's split the cost, we'll share the space." Was there any thought to like, "Wait a minute. We could be — not a corporation — but a business."?*

Bernie: No, we never thought of that. I don't think that ever would have come up. I don't think that would have been a viable issue.

CBC: *But it would make sense, right?*

Bernie: We were four very different headstrong individuals. I'm not just talking about Barry. *All* of us were. We all wanted to do exactly what we wanted to do.

CBC: *Did you develop any sort of rock-star attitude at all in your time?*

Bernie: I think so. I think we all did. I think we all got a bit of an attitude being there. We knew it was special, we really did. You know,

Above: *Odd freelance job by Bernie done for* Esquire *magazine.* **Below:** *Page for* NatLamp.

getting to the end of a paragraph and having to go back and re-read it because I didn't know what the hell she meant. And I was very disappointed because I thought, "My god, this is *Frankenstein*. That's where all this stuff supposedly came from. What were they thinking?" So I put it down and went back to it a couple of years later and finally got through it. I was so intrigued that I went back and immediately re-read it because this is something much larger and much deeper and more complex than the movie. There's something else going on here. This is the story about an abused child. This is a story about a parent not taking responsibility for his son and not loving his son. That's what I took away from it. What was I, 14 or 15 at the time?

CBC: *When did you come up with the idea of doing an adaptation of* Frankenstein*?*

Bernie: I was 12 or 13 when I thought about doing it.

CBC: [Laughs] *That* was *a long time.*

Bernie: I wanted to do it as a comic-book adaptation.

CBC: *And not the* Classics Illustrated *version?* [looking through the book] *How many plates did you do in this?*

Bernie: There's forty-some in there. There's 44, 45, or something like that.

CBC: *And how many plates did you actually draw, whether you completed them or not?*

Bernie: Oh boy, maybe ten or 15 more. And then there were some false starts. Some of the pictures, I had to fight with them and I didn't get it quite right the first time out, so I'd scrap it and start over.

CBC: *Now when did you see Franklin Booth's work? Was it Krenkel who introduced you?*

Bernie: Krenkel introduced me to Booth stuff, so that would have been the late '60s or early '70s.

CBC: *Is that why you've dedicated it to him?*

Bernie: Yes. Also, this came out probably less than a year after he died.

CBC: *Now what was your philosophy? Were you very secretive about this or did you show this to other artists, the guys in The Studio?*

Bernie: No, anybody who wanted to see it, it was right there. It was never a secret. What I didn't have was a publisher.

CBC: *You did it without a contract?*

Bernie: I did it without a publisher and it was because I had this idea that I wanted and I was going to put the book out myself and it was because I'd been in the business long enough to know that if I was doing it for a publisher, I'd have to make concessions. I couldn't do it exactly the way I wanted to do it. I wanted to do it as an old-fashioned illustrated book, black-&-white, no color. This stuff is going to look like woodcuts or engravings. It was supposed to look like it could have been done at the time it was written because that's what I was into.

CBC: *Did you collect old books with the plates?*

Bernie: I didn't collect them myself, but I had access to them through Kaluta, Krenkel, and the guys who actually did collect them.

CBC: *What books did Booth do?*

Bernie: He worked in a lot of different places. He did book illustration, magazine illustration, advertising work. Sometimes he didn't even do an illustration. He would do a decorative border or something. He was all over the place.

CBC: *Did your exposure to Booth make you decide to use a pen?*

Bernie: Well, I had flirted with pen-work from the time I started drawing. Then I just found that I preferred working with a brush. I think it was mostly because I used a lot of heavy shadows in my work. So there was a lot of area that needed to be covered and I always hated drawing around the block area with a pen and then going in and filling it in with black with a brush. I felt like I was doing a coloring book or something. And I just like the line, especially for comics work. I really preferred the line I got from a brush… that nice, juicy thick-and-thin.

CBC: *So with* Swamp Thing *#10, you started working with a pen?*

Bernie: Yes, that was more for a change of pace than anything else. I just felt that after all that time working with a brush, everything was starting to look the same. Working with a brush had become too easy, so I was looking for a challenge. I just wanted a change, so I switched to a pen for a while.

CBC: *And you really started going full-time with a pen with the Warren work?*

Bernie: That's where I really started getting into it and you can see it with "The Pepper Lake Monster" and "The Muck Monster." There's a lot of pen in that.

CBC: *And "Jenifer" was a typical wash story?*

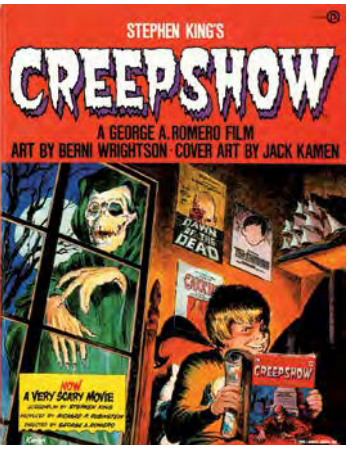
Bernie: Actually, "Jenifer" was gray Magic Markers.

CBC: *Were you happy with the results and reproduction?*

Bernie: I'm very happy with it, yes. God, I thought it looked gorgeous.

CBC: *"Jenifer" was an awesome story. Did you enjoy work-*

Above: *Good question for a future issue of* CBC*: Just who was Susan K. Putney, writer of the Bernie Wrightson-drawn Spider-Man graphic novel,* Hooky*, published by Marvel in 1986? The artist gives some clues in this interview. C'mon, people, let's get cracking! What we* do *know is that she and Bernie produced a delightfully icky Spidey tale (recently collected in* Spider-Man: The Graphic Novels *['12]).* **Below:** *Out of the blue, and giving a tremendously tight deadline, Stephen King called up Bernie to ask if he would draw the interior of the* Creepshow *comic book adaptation. In the actual movie, this book's cover artist (and E.C. alumni) Jack Kamen, was artist on the comic book framing sequences. Kamen scoffed at the offer to draw this 1982 book, but Bernie and then-wife Michele Wrightson finished the King-scripted 64-pager in a mere three months.*



CBC: *It's meaningful to you.*
Bernie: Oh absolutely. You know, from the moment I saw Boris Karloff just kind of lumbering backwards through that door and turning around, it was just a lifelong love affair. It's just total obsession. "Wow, this is *it*. This is just the most awesome thing I've ever seen."
CBC: *When's the last time you've drawn any Frankenstein drawing or any version thereof?*
Bernie: Oh god, four or five weeks ago.
CBC: *Frankie is still with you?*
Bernie: Oh yeah! I still watch the movies on DVD now and I watch them with the commentary.
CBC: *Do you like* Frankenstein *better than* Bride of Frankenstein?
Bernie: I like them both. I like the first three. I like all the ones with Karloff. I enjoy the others also. You know, *Ghost of Frankenstein*, as silly as it is. *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* is a really good movie. I saw it a couple of years ago on the big screen. They had a revival at a theater in Glendale. I saw it [*chuckles*] with an audience of children. It was great. People brought their kids.

This movie is as old as I am. It was made the year I was born, and the movie still does exactly what it's supposed to do. It scares the kids and tickles them in equal parts. I had more fun watching the kids in the audience than I did watching the movie. It was great. It's just a perfect blending of those great monsters and they have that bawdy vaudeville humor.
CBC: *After* Frankenstein*, you went back to the commercial realm? What was your return to comics?*
Bernie: It was *Creepshow*. Technically, you can say that. I did *Freak Show* with Bruce Jones right after *Frankenstein*, but that was serialized in *Heavy Metal*. But when *Freak Show* was completed, I did *Creepshow*.
CBC: *Now had you been exposed to* Métal Hurlant *or was it through* Heavy Metal?
Bernie: Yeah, I'd seen *Métal Hurlant*. It was easy to find in New York. You could get all the French comics.
CBC: *What did you think of Mœbius and Druillet?*
Bernie: Oh, I loved those guys. I thought they were great.
CBC: *But you were resistant to the Spanish artists, right?*
Bernie: The Spanish guys, I don't know, the stuff that they were doing at Warren, with a few exceptions, there were a few guys there I thought were doing some pretty good stuff.

CBC: *Did you like Esteban Maroto?*
Bernie: Esteban was a little… He was a little trendy for me, kind of '60s psychedelic, trippy.
CBC: *Who did you like?*
Bernie: I can't think of their names now. It's not like these guys weren't any good. Most of them, I thought, were brilliant draftsman, but there was nothing about their work that really grabbed me. There was

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out of that.
CBC: *Who is*
Bernie: Well,
Sternn is a liar and that's what he does. I could make something up and I could make up something about who he is, but it would just be a lie.
CBC: *Was he built out of your caricatures of Superman, visually? Because I recall at conventions, you would do a cartoony Superman face with a big chin.*
Bernie: No, I think that's just coincidence. I'm going to tell you exactly where Captain Sternn came from. Vintage 1963, when the movie *The Great Escape* came out. My friends and I all saw that movie. Back then, there was no ratings system or anything. A cool World War II movie and we *loved* this movie. All my friends were *nuts* about Steve McQueen. "Aw, yeah! It was so cool when he got on that motorcycle, jumping over the barbed wire, and all that!" But the guy I really related to was the James Garner character, the scrounge, the con man. Look at Captain Sternn and look at James Garner from that movie, and Captain Sternn is my cartoon version of James Garner, even down to the uniform, and that was like an unconscious thing. When I was drawing this guy and coming up with this character, it just felt right that he should be dressed this way. It wasn't until a few years later that I realized, "My God, I know where this came from."
CBC: *You know, 24 hours ago,* [checks watch] *almost to the minute, Howard Chaykin said to me that* American Flagg! *was based on James Garner.*
Bernie: No kidding! [*laughter*] Yeah, James Garner, he was a stand-up guy, he was the hero from our generation. He was the hero with a sense of humor, pre-*Indiana Jones*.
CBC: *With Captain Sternn, did you have high hopes for that? He really pre-dates his appearance in… ?*
Bernie: *Heavy Metal?* It was like a lot of things that I've done, it had a few false starts. The stuff in the *Look Back* book was like of some of the earliest Captain Sternn stuff that I did. It was typical of me to start drawing a comic book when I didn't have a story. "Okay, I've got this cool idea for