



RIP MIKE WIERINGO (JUNE 24, 1963 - AUGUST 12, 2007)

THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE

NUMBER 2

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The Original Universe is published 6 times a year on a bi-monthly schedule. Sample issues are available for \$3 Canadian, about the same cost as many comics. You can also subscribe at a cost of \$12 per year.

The zine is also available free for *The Usual*. The Usual consists of several options:

- i) **LOC (Letter of Comment):** This is the most common method, and recommended even if you use the other methods as well. This is simply a letter to the editor giving feedback on the issue itself, maybe feedback to other contributors as well. This letter can be sent in e-mail.

There are two content rules: a) try to be interesting. B) don't start a fight with another or several other members. I simply won't publish those.

- ii) **Cover art:** I always appreciate this. Keep in mind not to use copyrighted characters without proper attribution, and keep art to PG-13 at most.
- iii) **Interior art:** "fillos" are a longtime tradition for zines: small illustrations to break up sections of text.
- iv) **Articles:** if you write something to share with fellow readers, I'll print it. Please keep article submissions clean.
- v) **Zine trades:** If you produce a zine, I'll be glad to exchange a copy of this one for yours.

To remain on the mailing list you have to contribute *The Usual* at least once every 2 issues. Failure to do so gets you bumped from mailings. You'll be reminded if you're close to that point.

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Next Deadline: **November 12.**

About the cover:

Jarek from **Tellos**, the series created by Mike Wieringo and Todd Dezago at **Image Comics**. The copyright and trademark belong to them and Mike's estate: it's creator owned.



EDITOR'S CORNER

Welcome to the second issue of *The Original Universe*. This issue has new readers as well as returning ones, as well as our first LOCs (Letter of Comment). I'm tinkering with the format a bit in the hopes of providing more content. Even though I say sample issues cost 'less than an actual comicbook' (especially here in Canada), the comicbooks have more pages. I can't peer into the future; I shoot for that, but I can never predict if I get there until I do my zine layout.

Last issue I talked about getting ready for my high school reunion. It happened August 4th.

One of the first things that happened: a lady came up to say "Hi". I didn't recognize her, but we'd been corresponding in e-mail and on our alumni message board for a few months!

I was very emotional after I got inside: I came to a display devoted to tributes to the departed. I saw Mr. Itchaporina on the list; he was my first computer teacher in my high school days. I then saw James "Scotty" Sheridan; he was the director and writer of the musical I was in graduation year, and a friend.

Finally I saw the name of one of my friends in high school, and 23 years faded back to nothing. I was present waiting for the ambulance back then, and his death haunted me for 11 years.

Fortunately, seeing some of my former teachers, and my principal and vice principal (both now retired) got my mind back on a more pleasant track. As I re-met old classmates I was fully on the happy side. Some looked as I remembered them, but I still found myself often looking to their name tags. I'm one of the people who could easily be recognized; except for my goatee and long hair, I haven't changed a lot (well, I don't have the afro I had back then either... fortunately). A few marvelled at the fact that I had no gray hair, in itself rare for men at 40. Mind you I was the only guy in my family to have so much hair at 30 as it is, so it fit.

(As an aside: the friend I mentioned above said I was 'well-preserved'. I don't really like that description though... it makes it sound like I was pickled in special chemicals or have a portrait in the attic like Dorian Gray.)

Each class year from 1981 to 84 were called up to be photographed, then the teachers and faculty in attendance. All the photos are also up on the alumni site. I copied many of them to my system; along with those I took I now have a good collection in Picasa.

I was surprised when I saw one of my former teachers, Mr. Northrup. During school we always thought he looked like David Suzuki (for American readers Suzuki is one of our country's greatest minds); now he's much slimmer than he was and has a much shorter afro. He joked about how he considered walking up to Suzuki to ask him if people often said he looked a lot like Ed Northrup. Heh.

A former school friend drove me home after, which was a good thing: my mom doesn't have night vision, and I left after midnight.

Those of us who attended raved about it on our message board. One of my classmates apologized for seeming morbid but he didn't believe any of us would see each other again. I intend to prove him wrong. I hope to visit as many people as I can over the next few years.

About a month before the reunion I e-mailed one old friend to wish him a happy birthday. In school I was the front man for a band (he was the basist) in a variety show.

I learned that 7 years after I graduated from Animation at Concordia University he began in the same thing, getting his degree in 2000. Holy serendipity Bat-Man!

We did something different in my building September 1st: 38 of us (12 non-tenants) got on a bus to go to the Brome Fair in Lac Brome (in the Eastern Townships in Quebec).

We've always organized parties for the holidays, and gone to the Montreal casino one time, but tenants were bored and wanted to try something new. This trip was definitely something new, and 38 people on a bus that could hold 42 was fantastic. We were ready to go into deficit (I forgot to mention: I'm the secretary on the tenant committee); this will be our first time in the black for an event.

It's safe to say we had a good time there. I even bought myself a cowboy hat. Well, it's the right shape, but I don't think cowboys ever wore army camouflage colors.

Follow-up on the Chris Benoit story: what he did was still horrible, but it wasn't due to steroids as the scaremongers thought (on one of my local newscast they even said a steroid called testosterone was found in the house. Whoever wrote that was a moron). It was likely caused by brain damage due to his actions in the ring over the years.

Anabolic steroids are still a very bad thing to take, and murder can never be forgiven — but at least one cause is now proven wrong.

I've now taken a step into the very early 21st century: through eBay I bought a Palm Pilot.

I've had a PocketPC since 2003, but it gave up the ghost over a year ago. When I priced another online, it wasn't financially feasible for me. This was.

It's actually much slimmer than what I've grown accustomed to. I can't have a desktop image like I had with the other (or I just haven't figured out how yet) and now I'll have to learn the Graphiti language as well - but having one for under \$100 is worth it.

When I looked at the deadline for issue 3 (November 12th) I realized something: it's smack dab in the middle of NaNoWriMo.

I've taken part since 2002, and I now have 4 completed bad novels to my name (well, not really bad; they have sparks of potential that would shine with editing). This year I'm shooting for my 5th. Of course, the trick is not to get distracted by anything else... with 2 months before my next issue of this zine I'll be banking materials!

Every year I've tried my hand at a different genre: espionage/technothriller, space opera, YA fantasy, modern day SF thriller... this year I'll be following Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' - not in length, but as a soap opera with many characters.

To get ready I've been building up family trees in my personal wiki (www.tiddlywiki.com to get your own). I've been writing stories about the ancestors - it's not breaking the rules of the competition; none of them are part of the novel save their names as a small bit of color.

I really need folks to send me “fillos” (filler art) both to break up the walls of text, and to help to fill thy empty white spaces in this zine!

Last minute news: I just took my older cat to the vet. He’s lost a lot of weight quickly, and he’s had a few accidents on my bathroom floor.

The morning before I brought him to the vet I saw his inner ears were yellow. I hoped I was imagining, but the checkup proved my concerns: it’s jaundice. His liver isn’t functioning.

He’s still far too spirited and agitated to consider putting him down, but he is over 18. I was just hoping he’d have a dignified end. Still, he’s been part of my life for so long I just broke down.

I planned to start prose this issue, but news took precedence. The more you read, the more you’ll understand why. Well, the cover gives it away right off.

TRIBUTE TO MIKE WIERINGO - JUNE 24, 1963 - AUGUST 12, 2007



The cover for this issue was influenced by the news: on August 12th of this year comicbook artist Michael Lance “Mike” Wieringo died from a heart attack. Mike was a mere 44 years old; he was a vegetarian and exercised at a gym regularly. According to his close friends, he was actually healthier than most folks.

I’ve read online the reactions of these friends. Mark Waid waxed deeply how it made no sense, how he and ‘Ringo had plans for new launches for both Aquaman and Captain Marvel in the future. Todd Dezago (a close friend and co-creator of the *Telos* series) spoke of how ‘Ringo was one of the nicest people he knew. Actually many other creators have also said he was one of the nicest people in the industry.

I never had the opportunity to meet him in person, I was just a fan of his work, so my memories of him will be far more on that end.

My first encounter

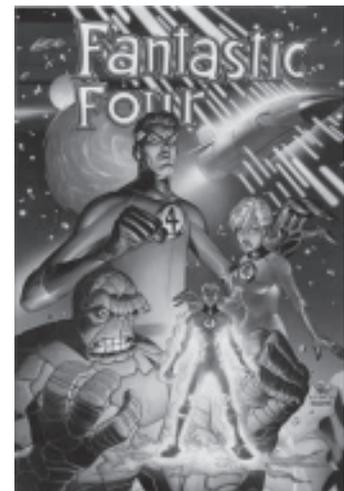
I first encountered ‘Ringo(his nickname and how he signed his covers)’s art on his run with Mark Waid on *The Flash*. Volume 2 I loved his style for the mixture of cartoonish figures with traditional styling as well.

I saw his work before without realizing it. He drew the covers of several **DC** titles, and did a story for Justice League in the “Bwahaha!” era. I didn’t realize he also drew a **Rogue** mini-series for **Marvel** at the time.

Thanks to wikipedia I learned he was also the co-creator of **Impulse**.

His real Marvel Days

Then he moved over to **Marvel** for much more: along with Mark Waid he worked on the *Fantastic Four*. I gave up on that title before Tom DeFalco’s run, and there was fan anger when they were temporarily dumped from the title (it didn’t last long because of the furor).



Outside of covers, he had a stint on Peter David's *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man*. The series storyline was hampered by **The Other** storyline (PAD really couldn't transform his plans for it. He wasn't allowed to), but 'Ringo's art was still great.

He went back to drawing covers after that, and we didn't really hear much about him until this sad news.

Bibliography

Justice League Quarterly #11 (lead story, 1993)

Justice League Quarterly #12 (backup story with female Dr. Light and Ice)

The Flash Vol 2 #80-92, issue 0, covers to #100, 118-124

Flash 80-Page Giant #2 (cover)

Robin(a short run, concurrent with the next one)

Rogue #1-4 (Marvel)

(For Malibu)

Firearm #0

Godwheel #2 (back cover + story)

Spectacular Spiderman #8-31 (except for 8 issues, Marvel)

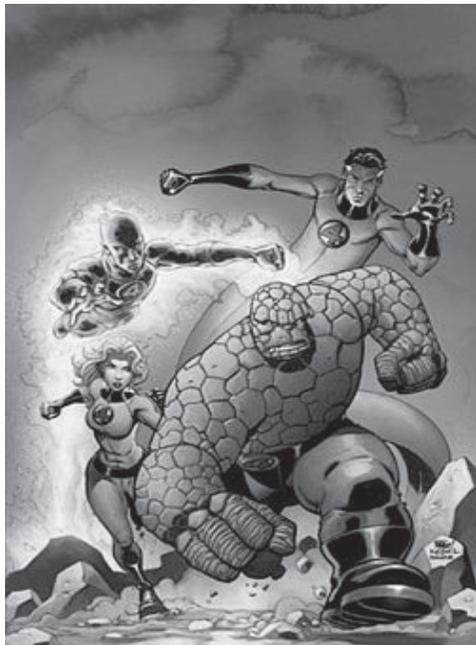
Tellos #1-10 (creator owned, Image and Gorilla Comics for 3 issues , writer: Todd Dezago)

Adventures of Superman #592-600 (DC Comics)

Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man (Marvel, interiors, 1-5, 8-10)

Fantastic Four (#51 start, drew 27 of 36 issues, ended the run in January 2004 with issue 507 [the series went back to its original numbering] Marvel)

Nolen-Weathington, Eric, and Mike Wieringo. Modern Masters Volume 9: Mike Wieringo (TwoMorrows Publishing, 2006)



The Fantastic Four drawn by Mike Wieringo. This and cover on previous page are trademarked and Copyright of **Marvel Comics**.

WHO'S A SKRULL?

by Matthew Surridge

Bendis is currently masterminding a plot unfolding through Marvel's line of books, a story about a Skrull invasion which has already happened; he's hinted strongly that the war is already lost, that Skrulls have infiltrated and taken over, that some of the heroes and the villains of the Marvel Universe are actually Skrulls and have been for a while. The whole storyline is supposed to come to a head in 2008. Until then, the question will echo: who's a Skrull?

Supposedly, there's considerable co-ordination on this question. Again, supposedly, it will end up clearing up lots of continuity and other issues at Marvel, although everybody who's spoken about it has been clear that Tony Stark is not a Skrull, and that Civil War will not be undone by this "silent invasion" storyline. But some have theorised, for example, that beginning the storyline by unveiling Elektra as a Skrull, but not saying how long the impersonation has gone on for, is a way of luring Frank Miller back to Marvel — since bringing Elektra back from the dead without his permission infuriated him, now we have a continuity implant that allows everybody to be happy. It seems clear, at any rate, from Bendis' interviews, that he's been working on this storyline since he took over the Avengers a few years ago.

So ... who's a Skrull? And who cares?

My guess, for what it's worth — and I'm behind in my comics reading by a couple months — is that Tony Stark found out about this invasion some time ago. That the registration act was a Skrull initiative; but that Tony decided to try to twist it to his own purposes. That Mr. Fantastic (a traditional enemy of the Skrulls, and a member of the super-secret Illuminati heroes) is in on it with him; registration, and the arrest of unregistered heroes, is all a cover for Tony to analyse each hero and see if he or she is actually a Skrull. That the great rift between the Marvel heroes came about simply because Captain America (and others) really wouldn't trust Tony, who actually did have everybody's best interests at heart. That Nick Fury went underground because he couldn't trust a Skrull-infiltrated SHIELD. That the New Warriors, positioned as the hip, cool, rebels against the registration act are actually a Skrull creation — which explains where the supposedly-dead-but-perhaps-actually-Skrullish Night Thrasher comes from. And so on.

Who do I think is a Skrull?

Dum Dum Dugan; gives Fury reason to go underground, he came back easily from a near-fatal injury in Wolverine: Origins, and he's been popping up more in the past few months than he has in the past few years.

Storm; she's been acting out-of-character for a while, in my opinion, but what if that's deliberate? What if the machiavellian Black Panther decided to keep his enemies as close to him as possible, and married her knowing she's a Skrull? What if she betrays her Empire, and what if this explains why the Watcher was at their wedding?

Doctor Strange; Bendis loves using Doc, and his powers have been acting wonky lately (more so than usual). Did he get replaced? Did the throwaway lines in the first issue of the Illuminati mini-series about the Skrulls having Doc be investigated by some priests have a particular resonance?

Steve Rogers: Maybe that's why he resisted Tony so hard and so long. He didn't shift back to a Skrull form immediately after he died, as far as we know ... but something weird's going on with his body, since Tony had a duplicate made to lure the New Avengers into a trap, and then showed Sharon Carter that Steve's body had changed dramatically, rejecting the super-soldier serum. What if Steve was actually a Skrull all along? What if that sets the scene for his later return to life?

Shang-Chi; because ... well, okay, this is just because I really think he's been not acting particularly Shang-Chi-like in Heroes For Hire (as opposed to his excellent characterisation in the criminally underrated Wisdom mini-series), and I really hope that gets wiped out somehow.

Now, having said all that ... so what? Is this really a gripping story? What's the point of it, if it's just going to be, well, heroes against aliens?

The answer is, there are no guarantees. Anything could be excellent, or could be terrible. But I do think, deliberately or not, Bendis is on to something with this idea, something that cuts to the heart of Marvel characters. And that is: identity.

Look at Marvel, and you realise there aren't a lot of duplicate characters or legacy characters in their universe. DC can have a couple Flashes, a corps of Green Lanterns, and various Atoms and Hawkmen and the like. One Mister Terrific or Starman dies or retires, another one takes over. That doesn't happen so much at Marvel; the only character I can think of that fits that bill at all is the Human Torch, one of the first Marvel characters, created before the universe had established its identity (there's that word again). I think this is because of the nature of the Marvel characters.

I think it's impossible to imagine a Spider-Man who isn't Peter Parker. Or a Hulk who isn't Bruce Banner. Or a Wolverine who isn't ... well, Wolverine. If somebody who isn't Steve Rogers becomes Captain America, or somebody who isn't Tony Stark becomes Iron Man, that somebody is in for a miserable time; they don't fit the mold. What makes those characters work isn't their costume or powers; it's those things contrasting with their personality, the essence of their character.

It's often been said that DC's traditionally been about plot, and Marvel about characters. I think that shows through in the way that Marvel characters have something beyond a costume and power portfolio to them. Not to say that DC characters are necessarily less fully-realised than the Marvel ones, but I do mean that I think that the personalities of the DC characters are less fully integrated into their personas; they don't shape their powers. It's almost a cliché that the personalities of the individual members of the Fantastic Four determined what their powers would be; I don't know that you could say that about any group at DC.

So, having said all that about character, about identity, about the importance of identity to Marvel characters ... a storyline that threatens that identity cuts to something at the core of the Marvel characters. Of course, that's only one aspect; the issue of trust is another one, a greater one in terms of the interaction between characters. But in terms of the thematic aspects of the Marvel universe, I think Bendis has hit on something key, something central.

We shall see how it plays out.

COMIC COMMENTS

All-Flash and Flash 231 Reviews

In *All-Flash* we got to see that Wally is a far better man than many of us, me included. Inertia showed how he was a real nasty piece of work. In retelling Wally said something to the effect that he wanted to kill Inertia there, but was restrained by the fact that he was just a kid.

Wally got revenge in a non-fatal way, and one that will likely keep this villain around (he's out in the open after all). It was still chilling.

I liked the art here. It was mildly stylized – just enough not to be standard, but visually interesting.

Issue 231: I didn't like the artwork here. I like Daniel Acuna's art, and really dug it in *Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters*, but I think this series needs a more realist art style.

The story itself brings some interesting ideas to ponder. Why his kids aged to tweener age when they were infants before, why they have super-powers not related to speed, and why Linda is OK with them getting into heroing and even hints that it was expected for them. There are many potential story seeds to draw on here!

Except for the art on 231, these were a hit for me.

The Ongoing Sinestro War

I like the visual irony of planet Mogo having a miniscule insect as a partner. I was sorry to see one of the 'lost Lanterns' killed already, but it's a given that many Lanterns we know or recognize will die, or there won't be a real emotional impact to this event.

With what I've read about the changes to come, much of the status quo ultimately will change: GLs will be allowed to use deadly force against any survivors of the Sinestro Corps. Also, Kyle Rayner will again be a Lantern, so the Ion situation will be resolved.

This whole storyline is really a hit with me so far, and has yet to disappoint me.

Shooter back on the Legion of Superheroes

Issue 37 of the current series will bring back a writer who made history with it 41 years ago when the Legion was still part of *Adventure Comics* (#346. Yes, I'm working from an article on the Newsarama Website [www.newsarama.com] for my figures). Shooter is known for stories with Karate Kid, Universo and the story of doomed Ferro Lad among others.

This could be a good thing. Jim Shooter was the founder of **Defiant** comics, **Valiant**, the man behind a fascinating revamp of Solar, Man of the Atom – not to mention huge pieces of Legion history – and he was a teenager at the time!

It could also be a bad thing. Most of the product from his **Broadway Comics** imprint wasn't that good... and the less said about *Warriors of Plasm* the better. His time with **Marvel** comics as EIC had a lot of good (especially in his view, if you talk to him at a convention). Some people don't think so well of him. Granted, you'll always have people with bad things to say about their bosses. That's just human nature.

Jim Shooter will be working with artist Francis Manapul. The book will look great (sorry, I can't print the image. Legal stuff...), and the characters may eventually end up in costumes that look right to my fellow longtime fans. Shooter says any changes will happen organically. He's said he'll be working with the current continuity.

The new series has had flashes of greatness by Mark Waid, but has been disappointing as well. Hopefully Jim Shooter can bring back a third period of coolness in his run.

One major negative to the series of late (on top of mediocre writing), and in the *Teen Titans* as well:

Where have the good artists gone?

Both of these series have been a tryout for new artists it seems. Problem is: they don't seem very good at it.

To be fair: they may be quite good on their own. Their styles just don't suit either title.

I'm wondering if this is just a sneaky tactic to make readers enjoy the next artists more?

Thunderbolts Follow-Up

In the latest issue the team is just using the threat of Venom chewing off an opponent's limbs for intimidation. It isn't even being used as a negative or having any negative repercussions.

This just reinforces my essay on my opinion on post-Civil War **Marvel**... this will be one of the articles I'm banking away!

MOVIE VIEWS

There aren't many films here this time. Just as well; there's already a lot of content for this issue!

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest

This film is a little stretch to give a comicbook link: in the *Watchmen* series Alan Moore came up with a different comicbook genre as the most popular, since the world had real superheroes. The genre most popular: pirates.

The first film in this series was a major hit. This second one...

I'll start with a Paula Abdul tactic (trying to find something good): the computer animation for

Davey Jones' tentacles was excellent.

Now I'll use Simon Cowell's style: this was awful.

One of the big problems with film trilogies: the second film often doesn't have the magic of the first. The first sequel to **The Matrix, Reloaded** is a prime example. Well, both weren't very good, but I digress.

Another problem with second films: they are often just set-ups for the next film. That's the case here. **Back to the Future 2** suffered of this years ago (it only made sense with the third film), with only **The Empire Strikes Back** an exception.

This one followed the former curse. It set up the third film, without a beginning, middle and an end to its story. It starts with a corrupt British officer trying to make Orlando Bloom do his bidding, then this character is forgotten by the end.

This film also suffered from serious logic lapses. At the beginning of the film Kiera Knightly is going to marry Bloom's character - then she tries to jump Captain Jack Sparrow. They had no chemistry before, and they still didn't here.

I read an opinion on what doesn't work in this film, and I agree with it: Captain Jack worked in the first film because Johnny Depp was just playing over the top and having fun. Kiera and Orlando on the other hand seem to take their roles too seriously, especially in this film, even though they are loosely based on a fun ride in Disney parks. They just feel too stuffy here.

I've been hearing views that the third film is much better. I hope these views are right!

This film is a 2-disc set, the second disc filled with documentaries on the making of the film. I

found them interesting, but far too short.

300

This film I don't even have to try hard to fit into a comicbook comparison: the film is from a graphic novel written and drawn by Frank Miller.

The story is based on a legend from Greece: the emperor of the Persian empire, Xerxes, has taken over the rest of the known world, and now wants to absorb Greece. He sends an emissary to King Leonidas of Sparta to ask for surrender, which Leonidas strongly refuses (he kills the messengers in fact). The oracles say the army can't mobilize now (as we find out, they're bribed to say this), so the King says he's going for a walk with 300 men as his retinue, thus keeping the army at home.

Leonidas plan is to stage a barricade in a pass where the Persian army can't get an advantage, and 300 men can defeat much larger armies. For several days, they do just that, until betrayal gets them overrun. Still, the legend of 300 courageously standing ground and for freedom against a much larger force brings courage to those who come after them.

Like **Sin City** many scenes in this film come nearly verbatim from Miller's work. It's also another film in which most of the visuals (except for the actors of course) are actually virtual, computer generated. Much of this film was actually shot here in Montreal in the dead of winter; to look at the little these actors wear, you'd think it was summertime.

This film was stylish and graphically phenomenal. Because of the style, that it has a lot of gore it isn't too gruesome to watch. It was still enough to warrant an 'R' rating though.

The virtual filmmaking here works well. This is now 2 films in a row using it that work well.

Series View: **Countdown**

(Granted there is a goodly amount of series to go. Months worth, in fact. No plot spoilers here... just an opinion.)

General fan opinion has been very negative on this series, despite what **Dan DiDio** said in an interview on NEWSARAMA. I can already see what isn't working:

1. Art: Jesus Saiz work is excellent here. So is the art by Jim Califiore. The others however don't appeal to me, and likely to others either. It says volumes that I don't even remember the names of the other artists in fact. I just see ugly artwork and draw a blank at that point.
2. The spine of the DC Universe? Failure!: Originally it was claimed that a month of this series is a month in the DCU. Problem is the parts of other series used are all over the place. Much of the Karate Kid (no not Ralph Machio!) stuff has been bouncing around from month to month. Again, Dan DiDDio tries to cover this with the excuse of "DC time being fluid". I just say that DC time has become sloppy. If this is supposed to tie together events all over the universe then more time is spent by readers scratching their heads as they try to figure out when an issue is happening rather than appreciating how it fits.
3. This is the start of another event: once they get to issue 25, the title is intended to change to *Countdown to Final Crisis*: DiDio said that *Infinite Crisis* was Act Two of Three, so this is now the set-up for Act Three.

I don't yet know what *Final Crisis* is intended to fix (there is a mention that

time is still broken), but otherwise I hoped *Infinite Crisis* left a status quo for us to get used to (a multiverse, fifty two possible worlds).

Granted the change is just speculation on my part; we have yet to see what plans are, and these might not be touched. Still, it's been less than 2 years, not enough time to get used to changes. We don't need more. Especially what changes *Countdown* will ultimately bring.

A lot of the grouching on that could be due to the semi-mythical concept of "event fatigue"; fans who are tired from too many 'big events' in a short time. Someone added up all of the series spin-offs, one-shots, as well as the series it's based on. The result was a huge number of comics. That isn't a reason for fans not to like *Countdown* itself granted. Bad art, questionable writing (the Rogues are now cocaine snorters?)... those are valid reasons.

HEY KIDS: LETTERS!

Lloyd Penney
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August 30, 2007

Dear Jeff (from Jonquiere):

Ah! My first inside joke! - Jeff

Got me an e-copy of *The Original Universe 1*, and thanks. Now, I am not certain of how much I can comment on. I'm not a comics reader, so no promises. I will say something on what I can.

Word is what allows me to work on so many zines. I figured that if I was ever to create a zine that I wanted, Word was the best. I've also got QuarkXPress v5.0 in case I want some more graphic oriented. I am learning something about Adobe InDesign CS2 at a some training I'm getting for a freelancer position, and it looks pretty good, too. I figure for what I want to produce, Quark would be sufficient. The CUFF trip report Yvonne and I produced some years ago was a mix of Word and Quark files.

As an animation grad, you probably go to Cartoon Brew regularly. I'm there most days to see the interesting stuff Jerry Beck and Amid Amidi put there regularly. SF? We won't be able to get to Con*cept this year; my regrets, but we are also saving to go to Corflu next year in Las Vegas. I expect my next convention will be Ad Astra next spring.

I'm Google searching for Cartoon Brew. Never heard of it. Jeff

The more I read about professional athletes, the more I find out that many of them (can't paint them all with the same brush) are wife-beaters, fathers of multiple illegitimate children, abusive toward their families (and ultimately, towards themselves), criminally involved and worse... Michael Vick takes the cake. Yet, our children are brought up to see these people as role models. This may explain a lot of society's woes. A marvelous line from *Babylon 5* sums it up..."Worst case of testosterone poisoning I've ever seen..."

How was the high school reunion? I had one in 2001 at my high school in Orillia, Ontario. I saw a few teachers I knew, and some people I knew...only one other person from my year bothered to show up. When I asked if the rest were elsewhere in the world, I was told that most of them still live in town, and didn't want to come.

I spoke of that in my editorial. - Jeff

One comics question I will ask...how many Flashes are there now? New, classic... this character could assemble a League all on his own.

There are only 4 Flashes: the original Jay Garrick, Barry Allen (died in the first Crisis), Wally West, and Bart Allen (RIP). Many speedsters. - Jeff

I believe I met the fellow who signed his letters T.M. Maple all those years. In some ways, he gave me some direction for all the letters I write. I think his letters appeared in the letter columns of the original *Captain Canucks*, and Yvonne owns those.

I think the San Diego Comics Con wrapped up just a short time ago, as did the former SFX, now called Fan eXpo, here in Toronto. Such a show doesn't attract me at all. One thing I do know is that as I write, today is the first day of Nippon 2007, the first Japanese Worldcon. I hope it is everything promised and more; I know of a bout a dozen fans here who are there, and I hope they are loving every minute of it. I know how much some of them saved to go, so I hope they are not disappointed.

All for now; I got the page anyway. See you with the next one!

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

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Hi, Jeff.

I had a lot of fun reading the first issue of *The Original Universe*. It's good to see your stuff again; good to get your perspective on the current comics market. I've been fascinated for a while by the comics blogosphere, the variety of commentators, of voices - it's great to be able to

include your voice in the mix of writers I follow.

Note my head swelling. Ego boost! - Jeff

More on the blogosphere below. First, some quick thoughts on specifics from issue one.

I was interested in your description of the writing tools you use. I always liked ClarisWorks myself, but these days I use WordPerfect - the ability to see the tags in the text is sometimes quite useful. Anything in particular about Word that stands out for you, or is it a question of compatibility with your DTP program?

(Incidentally, nice layout for the zine; very smooth, very easy on the eyes, with a good balance of white space.)

Congratulations on the Script Frenzy and Writing Month wins. Question: do you ever have issues sticking to just 50 000 words? That is, do you find yourself sticking closely to your outline, or does doing that much work in that little time cause the story to expand?

My novels have always gone a few thousand words past 50K, and I use extremely loose outlines (5-10 lines). - Jeff

I enjoyed your overview of 52, a series I liked more than I expected. I found myself getting into the DC universe without the security blanket of Superman, Batman, or Wonder Woman; it felt like more things could happen, like the characters had more of a chance to either succeed or fail, without the Top Three overshadowing them, bailing them out, or both. I was a bit disappointed in the way the plot threads came together at the end - or the way they didn't. Most of the Earth-based stuff holds together, but the space heroes never connected up, it seemed. I actually wonder if material was shifted around or cut from the series - I've seen speculation that Darkseid supplied both Luthor and the Chinese government with the technology to create super-heroes, which would tie those plots closer to each other and to the Crime Bible stuff. If he was also behind Lady Styx, then things become very tight indeed. It also might explain why DC's become New Gods crazy of late, with various characters popping up in Blue Beetle, Birds of Prey, Hawkgirl, Firestorm, and Action (to name only the ones I can think of offhand) as well as Countdown and, of course, Jim Starlin's upcoming Death of the New Gods.

The brief reviews were a good read. A couple thoughts: Does it seem to you that DC doesn't know what to do with the Legion? They've got an ongoing series featuring one team, then have a completely different group from an older continuity show up in a high-profile crossover between

the JLA and JSA. Plus, when they hired Jim Shooter to take over as writer, they apparently gave him the option (which he declined) of rebooting the Legion yet again ... On another note, you mentioned that Venom in Thunderbolts is difficult to empathise with - I agree, but I wonder if that's maybe the point. I hope it is, anyway ... With respect to Spider-Man, I don't know whether it's going to stay dark. Marvel have been talking up the "Brand New Day" story, which launches the thrice-monthly experiment, as having a back-to-basics approach. We shall see what that means.

Now, if you'll indulge me, I have a couple of general thoughts on comics I'd like to throw out.

As I say, I follow the comics blogosphere. Places like savagecritic.com, www.the-isb.com, and many other. Lots of info in there; lots of opinions. But it struck me not too long ago that there's something familiar about those opinions; or, at least, about the attitudes behind the opinions. Put simply, I felt a lot of the time like I was reading the letters page of The Comics Buyer's Guide from 20 years ago.

CBG was not a great magazine, but it was sporadically interesting. It was a mainstream-oriented comics magazine with price guides, a shipping list, and columnists like Peter David, Tony Isabella, and Mark Evanier (all of whom now maintain an online presence). It also had a long letters column where comics fans could write in to sound off about anything on their minds - controversies in the field, creator's rights, storylines, politics, anything at all. It was highly variable but usually interesting, at least to a younger fan, as I then was.

It seemed to me then, and to some extent still seems to be the case today, that there were a small group of what I will reluctantly call "elite" fans who wrote in to CBG, and often to many other comics. In many ways "elite" is an ugly word, and I don't want to use it in its full sense here. What I want to say is that these writers were likely more literate than the average fan, probably older, perhaps more interested in the medium's history or at any rate more prone to looking back nostalgically on great comic runs of the past; they a) thought about comics enough to formulate interesting opinions on them, b) had enough facility with language to write coherent grammatical prose setting out those thoughts, and c) did so and then mailed off the results. I suspect a) and b) were unusual among comics fans, while c) was quite rare.

There's an obvious similarity in there to the contemporary comics blogosphere. Regular bloggers fit the template outlined above. Probably more comics readers think more

often about comics and are capable of writing about them - given changes in comics pricing and the comics market, as well as an older average age among readers - but going on to write about them, especially on a regular basis, is rare. So: bloggers = letter-hacks. Seems obvious enough. But what interests me is the way both groups are out-of-step with the overall mass opinion of the people who actually buy the books.

The way I remember it, the CBG letters pages were filled with negative opinions of the X-Men, and of writer Chris Claremont. Critics complained about his dialogue tics, his tendency to allow sub-plots to dangle or stretch on for far too long, and the general air of melodrama the book was drenched in. As I understood the argument, the book was darker than other comics on the stands, which was often considered bad enough, but it also took itself exponentially more seriously. Worst of all, the book sold like gangbusters; meaning that there were a ton of spin-offs on the stands, and that other writers tried to imitate Claremont. The whole thing was a long way from the silver age; a long way from what comics used to be like.

That's my recollection, flawed as it might be. Now, take the previous paragraph; replace "The way I remember it, the CBG letters pages" with "The way I read it, the comics blogosphere" (and change the tense throughout the paragraph to match), change "X-Men" to "New Avengers" and "Chris Claremont" to "Brian Bendis." It all pretty much fits. Not that I'm not saying these opinions, then or now, were entirely wrong. I do think there's some validity to the criticisms, and I do think Bendis and Claremont are oddly parallel as writers. But I wonder if this points up a difference between the fan's way of approaching comics and the general reader's.

One difference I've heard of Bendis: he doesn't spell well supposedly. - Jeff

What I want to suggest is that most people, when they look for a story - even stories filling the need some people (inaccurately) call "escapism" - look for a story that has an emotional heft, a darkness, a sense of seriousness about itself. Consider writers like Stephen King or George R.R. Martin, whose books are filled with murder, rape, general grimness, and which are nevertheless bestsellers; consider the popularity of TV cop shows since the inception of the medium, and how those shows have gotten darker and more self-consciously weighty, from Adam-12 to Hill Street Blues to Law and Order to CSI (or then again just look at the difference between Battlestar Galactica as it was and as it is). Now consider how super-hero comics have gone the same route. Spider-man was and is a more troubled, neurotic character than Superman. Wolverine was and is more troubled than Spider-Man; the X-Men more troubled

than the Fantastic Four. Now the Avengers bid fair to be more troubled than the X-Men ever were. General readers love it. The stuff is gripping to them.

Comics fans ... maybe not so much. And this is what I'm getting around to. People who become fans of a particular genre often become fans of a particular approach to genre. Nothing wrong with that. But it means people who got into comics because of 1940s Superman stories would not be receptive to 1960s Spider-Man stories (and early Marvel Comics drew a lot of criticism from the then-proportionately-smaller comic fan section of its audience). People who got into comics because of 1960s Spider-Man stories would not take the 1980s X-Men well. And people who got into the 80s X-Men are not taking so well, on the whole, to 21st-century Avengers stories.

Which is really one feature of a lot of comics fans: they like the stuff they grew up with. Retailer Brian Hibbs mentioned in a column he wrote for Newsarama.com not too long ago, just as an aside, that the early 1990s Death of Superman story was not, on the whole, very good. He was surprised to get a massive fan response telling him that yes, really, it was; not only the whole storyline, but the actual death issue itself, were passionately (though often politely) defended by the people who commented on the column. Personally, I don't agree with that assessment; but then I also don't agree that the original Secret Wars was a terribly good story, and nowadays a lot of online fans point to it as an example of a crossover done right.

With all that said, I do think there's something here beyond readers responding to the comics of their youth. A lot of online critics respond very positively to the ineffable, indefinable quality they call "fun." Usually, that's identified with a clever deployment of traditional comic-book craziness: superintelligent kung-fu zombie monkeys versus giant Nazi robots with jet-packs and ray-guns! Nothing wrong with that, not at all; but it stands out dramatically from what the mass of readers seem to want in their books, to judge by sales figures. Things like: Characters taking themselves seriously. Darkness, against which heroism stands out all the more dramatically. A sense of danger.

I'm exaggerating all of these things. But I think there's a real core of truth here; I think there's a real division of sensibility between the hard-core fans, who like the comics they grew up on, who like the tropes and ephemera and nuttiness of traditional high-energy high-imagination comics, and the mass readership who want from a comic the sense of involvement and of vicariously-experienced danger that they get from a book or a TV show.

I don't think either of these attitudes is right or wrong. But I think they're different demands. And that's something to bear in mind when reading a critic, or when comparing sales figures to online chatter.

That's one of my thoughts on comics. I have another, and it also involves Brian Bendis.

Bendis is currently masterminding a plot unfolding through Marvel's line of books, a story about a Skrull invasion which has already happened; he's hinted strongly that the war is already lost, that Skrulls have infiltrated and taken over, that some of the heroes and the villains of the Marvel Universe are actually Skrulls and have been for a while. The whole storyline is supposed to come to a head in 2008. Until then, the question will echo: who's a Skrull?

Supposedly, there's considerable co-ordination on this question. Again, supposedly, it will end up clearing up lots of continuity and other issues at Marvel, although everybody who's spoken about it has been clear that Tony Stark is not a Skrull, and that Civil War will not be undone by this "silent invasion" storyline. But some have theorised, for example, that beginning the storyline by unveiling Elektra as a Skrull, but not saying how long the impersonation has gone on for, is a way of luring Frank Miller back to Marvel - since bringing Elektra back from the dead without his permission infuriated him, now we have a continuity implant that allows everybody to be happy. It seems clear, at any rate, from Bendis' interviews, that he's been working on this storyline since he took over the Avengers a few years ago.

So ... who's a Skrull? And who cares?

My guess, for what it's worth - and I'm behind in my comics reading by a couple months - is that Tony Stark found out about this invasion some time ago. That the registration act was a Skrull initiative; but that Tony decided to try to twist it to his own purposes. That Mr. Fantastic (a traditional enemy of the Skrulls, and a member of the super-secret Illuminati heroes) is in on it with him; registration, and the arrest of unregistered heroes, is all a cover for Tony to analyse each hero and see if he or she is actually a Skrull. That the great rift between the Marvel heroes came about simply because Captain America (and others) really wouldn't trust Tony, who actually did have everybody's best interests at heart. That Nick Fury went underground because he couldn't trust a Skrull-infiltrated SHIELD. That the New Warriors, positioned as the hip, cool, rebels against the registration act are actually a Skrull creation - which explains where the supposedly-dead-but-perhaps-actually-Skrullish Night Thrasher comes from. And so on.

Who do I think is a Skrull?

This section became an article - Jeff

Now, having said all that ... so what? Is this really a gripping story? What's the point of it, if it's just going to be, well, heroes against aliens?

The answer is, there are no guarantees. Anything could be excellent, or could be terrible. But I do think, deliberately or not, Bendis is on to something with this idea, something that cuts to the heart of Marvel characters. And that is: identity.

Look at Marvel, and you realise there aren't a lot of duplicate characters or legacy characters in their universe. DC can have a couple Flashes, a corps of Green Lanterns, and various Atoms and Hawkmen and the like. One Mister Terrific or Starman dies or retires, another one takes over. That doesn't happen so much at Marvel; the only character I can think of that fits that bill at all is the Human Torch, one of the first Marvel characters, created before the universe had established its identity (there's that word again). I think this is because of the nature of the Marvel characters.

I think it's impossible to imagine a Spider-Man who isn't Peter Parker. Or a Hulk who isn't Bruce Banner. Or a Wolverine who isn't ... well, Wolverine. If somebody who isn't Steve Rogers becomes Captain America, or somebody who isn't Tony Stark becomes Iron Man, that somebody is in for a miserable time; they don't fit the mold. What makes those characters work isn't their costume or powers; it's those things contrasting with their personality, the essence of their character.

It's often been said that DC's traditionally been about plot, and Marvel about characters. I think that shows through in the way that Marvel characters have something beyond a costume and power portfolio to them. Not to say that DC characters are necessarily less fully-realised than the Marvel ones, but I do mean that I think that the personalities of the DC characters are less fully integrated into their personas; they don't shape their powers. It's almost a cliché that the personalities of the individual members of the Fantastic Four determined what their powers would be; I don't know that you could say that about any group at DC.

So, having said all that about character, about identity, about the importance of identity to Marvel characters ... a storyline that threatens that identity cuts to something at the core of the Marvel characters. Of course, that's only

one aspect; the issue of trust is another one, a greater one in terms of the interaction between characters. But in terms of the thematic aspects of the Marvel universe, I think Bendis has hit on something key, something central.

We shall see how it plays out.

Take care,
Matthew

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September 10, 2007

Salutations to myself would seem a bit schitzophrenic, if not a bit egotistical — so I won't. :)

Wow, I managed to put out a zine with few typos. Amazing. As my friend Budgie commented some time ago in COMICOPIA, we've all learned to speak fluent tyop.

The Sinestro War is still producing some excellent stories. I look forward to it every month. GREEN LANTERN and GREEN LANTERN CORPS are at the top of my reading pile every month.

I'm getting the first LOCs in for this zine. It's a good start! I look forward to the day when the LOC section is the most vibrant part of the zine.

JAB

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Hi Jeff,

I really enjoyed your premiere zine! I find your format is concise and easy to read, very enjoyable overall and kudos to you.

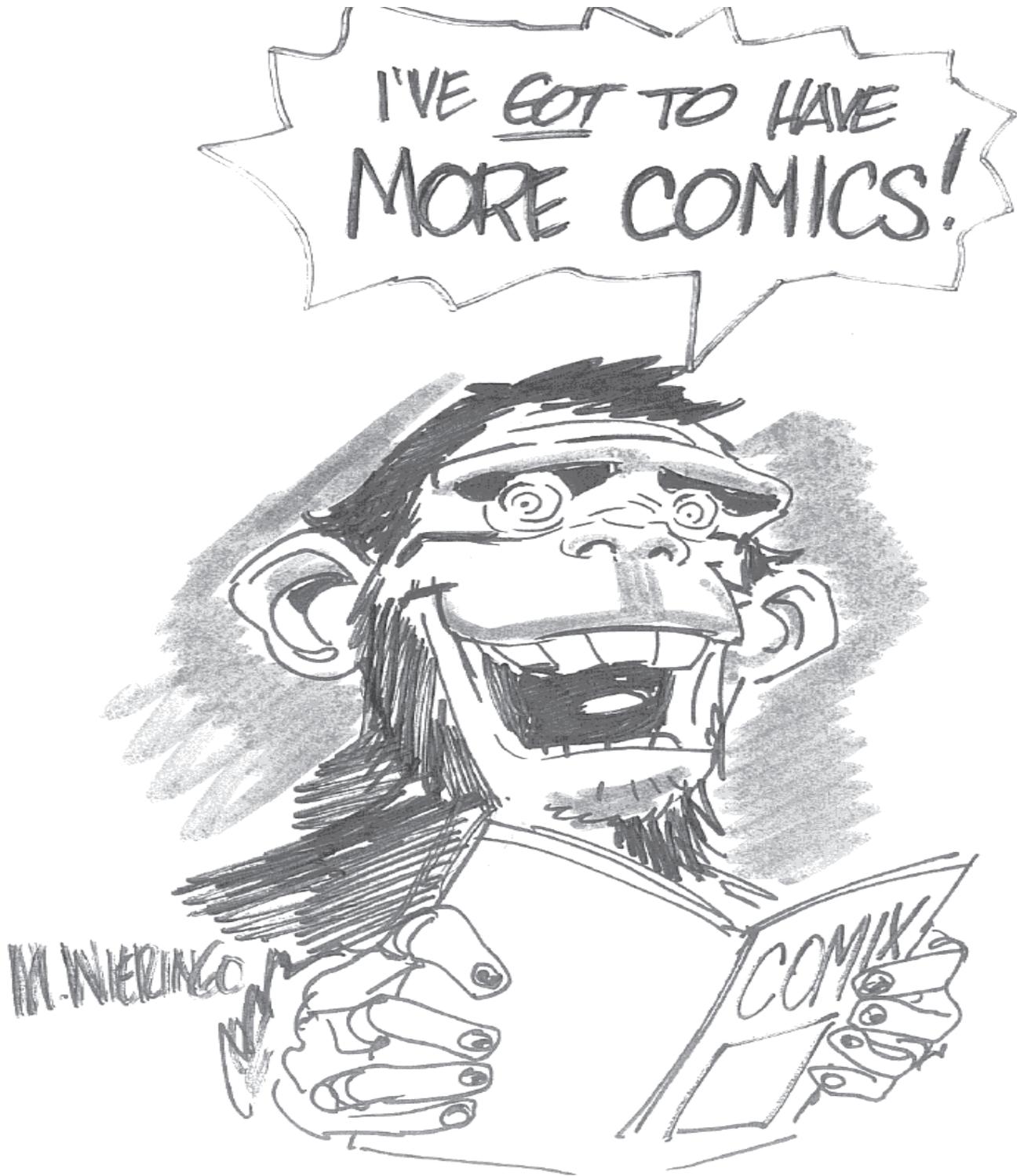
General thoughts:

I've recently read some of the John's run on Flash, and am amazed at how entertaining the stories are. I like the fact that he has a respect for both pre and post-Crisis continuity, and is able to weave disparate threads into a satisfying yarn.

I had some doubts about the return of the DC multi-verse, but part of me enjoys the idea that some cool elseworld's concepts will be able to crossover with 'New Earth' characters; should make for some interesting stories.

Ok, I gotta get off my butt and write an article for you, and provide some artwork!

Greg



A sketch by Mike Wieringo.

TODO LIST FOR 2008

- Paradise City Comic-con, Toronto
- Write More Mutants and Masterminds works
- GenCon 2008 (it would be my first time there since 1993, and my first ever in Indianapolis)

TODO (HOPEFULLY!) SOMEDAY

- San Diego Comicon

ZINE EXCHANGES

The H*S*S* Reader Olivia A (PO Box 47023, Chicago, IL 60647) 40pp mini: I loved the envelope this came in! I'm a pacifist, but this envelope was made from an ad for the US Army. It was very colorful and probably the best thing I would do with a recruitment ad. :)

This zine was one very much in the quirky vein of the zine scene, with an eclectic mix of film director interviews, music reviews, a travel journal, comix art, and a crafts tutorial. It has few letters, but that will come.

Just the page count alone made me envious. Maybe someday this zine will be up there.

Great Things and Blasphemies and Other Stories by Matthew David Surrige. 45pp plus covers.. This is actually a chapbook of stories written by Matthew, not a zine per se. I'm still reading it (zine and NaNo prep), but it was interesting reacquainting myself with Matthew's passion for hockey, and the gothic style of the stories I've read so far.

You have __ issues left for The Usual. Then you're off the mailing list. Please avoid that sad fact.