



GEEKGASM MATERIAL!

THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE

NUMBER 5

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The Original Universe is published approximately 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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Contact: My e-mail for this zine is theoriginaluniverse@gmail.com

My Snail-Mail address is

Jeff Boman
6900 Cote St-Luc Road #708
Montreal, QC H4V 2Y9
CANADA

Next Deadline: **July 12, 2008.**

About the cover:

The different Legion of Superheroes characters (c) and (tm) 2008 by **DC Comics**. Art (c) 2008 by **George Perez**.

LOCs:

Lloyd Penney, Percy M. Hodge, Justin Mohareb, Matthew Surridge, Jeffrey Allan Boman

EDITOR'S CORNER

Time to get things hopping!

I didn't complete Script Frenzy this year. I got to 53 of 100 pages.

Getting it started was a chore for me, especially not having the support group like we have for NaNoWriMo: we had 5 participants (more than we had last year! Well, with only three of us posting wordcounts pretty much the same), all in different areas of town. As a result we had NO Municipal Liaison, NO coffee meets. It proved far more difficult to get motivated as a result.

The really weird weather we've had this April also didn't help: major summer-like weather for over a week, then normal spring cool ever since... because of it I've been sleepier than usual. As a result if I got 3 pages done in two days it was a miracle.

I began to formulate a story outline 3 days before the competition began but it was based on a concept that I've had in mind for years: Real Hero. A geeky tween is brought to a fantasy world to save it from a dark lord. Reason: he actually pushes stubbornly forward, regardless of the consequences to himself. Ultimately he is intended to succeed by breaking a phobia.

In 2 scripts and a novel already I've had my tween protagonists breaking through personal problems and getting confident. I think it's safe to say that it's my niche... and that I may need counselling on my own childhood!

My work on outreach for this zine is starting to bear fruit: as well as netting more readers/members, TOU is now in a zine library in Tennessee! That will hopefully bring in more to our fold. Keep your fingers crossed.

By the way, you'll notice something new for this mailing: address labels. Being able to quickly peel them off their backing and putting them on the envelopes should speed up my mailing tasks a bit.

I still have to work on the paper alignment so that no labels are crooked, but it's a big step forward!

I've also been meeting comicbook editors/writers/artists through various social networking sites. That will hopefully bring some benefits to this zine in terms of interviews and other content. I was disappointed that #4 was the least pages yet; I'll do my best not to have that happen again now, at least anytime soon.

Speaking of the networking: on my professional one I've reconnected with the producer I wrote an animation screenplay for in 1990.

Here's the story: I wrote a 12-minute short back then called *Napoléon and Fortuné*. It was in the style of *Ren and Stimpy* and *South Park*, only many years earlier. When I saw the storyboards, I saw my script had already been changed, and in many ways not for the better. Most of the changes made no sense.

This is a common situation in film. All that mattered to me was that I'd been paid; I washed my hands of the rest.

A few years later I saw the finished film on TV5, a channel from France. The characters names were the same, but the actual product was something entirely different. Instead it was a completely illogical farce. Fortunately my name wasn't anywhere on it.

I learned in e-mail that my producer was also early in his career then, and got steamrolled over as well. The end result cost him thousands of dollars and ultimately his company.

He made me a proposition now. I won't jinx it by stating it exactly now, but it'll hopefully work out. I haven't worked in Animation in too long. It's time to change that.

A while back I joked that my nephew and nieces were so tall that my sister was raising a basketball team. It turns out that I wasn't far from the truth: my nephew Adam is on his school basketball team now!

That was a huge surprise to me. Adam is like me in that he isn't a fan of sports or much in the way of physical activity... however it seems he enjoys that particular game. He enjoys it enough in fact that when he starts high school in the fall, he'll try out for the team there.

My sister Randy isn't yet sure what school he'll go to yet; the ones she's researched so far are very rough places. Hopefully she'll find the right one soon.

Regardless: we've never had a jock in the family before. I was in peewee hockey many years ago, but the less said of that time, the better. It wasn't my shining moment. This will be very different, from what Randy has told me.

While this is issue #5, chronologically it will be the first year of this zine. Numerically 6 will be it (and I'm hoping it'll be more special), but I want to take a moment to crow about getting here.

May TOU have many more years to come!



Avatar Rebirth

PREVIOUSLY=

In 1999, the evil Professor Malick tried to torture the secret of Avatar's seeming immortality from him. John Foster, then the host of the Avatar entity, chose to end his life rather than reveal the secret. He died while Avatar fled.

In 2002, school student Billy Combers was killed in a car accident. Avatar reluctantly made him the Offer to be his new Host; Billy was the youngest person he made the Offer to.

Billy was a little freaked-out by the whole situation, but knew he was all his mom had ever since his dad died during the Gulf War. He had an idea what to do next also...

NOW=

"Concentrate."

Avatar's voice came from Billy's head – but no one else could hear it.

His mom drove him home from the accident site, one eye firmly on him the entire time. She was almost worried that his survival was a dream, and that he would disappear if she wasn't looking.

When they got home Billy headed towards the computer in the living room, but his mom stopped him.

"The only place you're going is to your bedroom young man, until I have supper ready. There, I know where you are at all times."

He opened his mouth to protest, but the voice in his head stopped him.

"That will be a perfect time for us to practice the basics of the abilities that you have now. Go along with it."

Billy stood in front of the mirror above his dresser.

"First, picture me like this." An image appeared in Billy's mind. *"Concentrate on this."*

Billy pictured the image he saw. He looked into his mirror and saw himself changing. He gained height, his features changed, and his hair grew long. His clothing changed into a one-piece tunic, dark purple in color.

He noticed one thing: his hair color didn't change. It was a lot longer, but still brown.

"I thought it would be better to keep your hair color to throw off any longtime adversaries."

Billy spoke. To outside viewers, he would seem to be talking to himself. "Wouldn't that give them a chance to figure out who I am then? I know: a lot of folks have brown hair... still, this could narrow their search a little bit."

Billy heard a sigh in his head. His hair color changed to blond as in the image.

"Practice this change a few times. You need to be ready to do this at a moment's notice, if the situation calls for it."

Billy stared at his face in the mirror and concentrated on it. His face and clothing changed between his own and Avatar's four times. After that, Billy felt Avatar's satisfaction.

"Now we will go over the other abilities you now have. First, look at the stuffed creature on the drawers." Billy looked to his left. He had a stuffed bear with a robotic symbol on it (his mom once said it was for a robot army called the Autobots. He didn't know them, so he just took her word for it). *"Now picture lifting it. See what happens."*

Billy concentrated on it. In his mind he pictured it rising. That's exactly what it did: the stuffed bear slowly lifted in the air a few inches.

Billy smiled. "I have telekinetic abilities now."

"You already know?" Billy felt disappointment. *"I'm used to more excitement from my Hosts."* Despite the feeling, Avatar continued. *"You have other abilities tied to that, although they aren't really abilities that we can*

practice here. I will try to find us a more wide-open place to do so: you now can build up a shield from damage, and you can fire a bolt of similar energy. That is one I hope you won't need to use for a long time."

"There's one more ability that we will practice in full then, but we can work on some basics here: flight. We can at least work on levitation a little..."

Billy was already floating a few inches off the ground before Avatar even said it. There was an exasperated sigh in Billy's head while he said a single word: "Neat!"

"You will need the time to refine these abilities. Hopefully you won't need these abilities soon, but it doesn't hurt to be prepared."

Billy nodded. He already had an idea what to do with the little he'd learned already though.

In a some place of darkness, something stirred. It was less a corporal being, more a force. If another could sense it, they would feel anger and ferocity from it – as if the flashes of light and loud noises from a dark cloud didn't give hint enough.

A voice boomed out of the cloud: "He's back." Two small words, but they said a lot, if you knew their import.

The darkness compacted into a smaller cloud. With a rush of air, it disappeared.

"Man, did you see how wide that kid's eyes got when he saw us, and did you see the big wet spot we caused?"

Nick and his group of bully boys were gathered together in a group at the foot of a building's stairs downtown. They went over a bunch of events. Lukas Lasser chuckled at this one.

"Man, I thought he would jump out of his skin and then run to his mommy! We at least got what we needed?"

Nick nodded. "Tomorrow is pizza day in the caf, and we're all gonna be able to treat ourselves!" The crew of three other guys cheered at this.

They were all so focused on their business that they didn't notice the trashcan behind Nick begin to float.

Billy had floated to a point just behind a nearby alleyway just a few seconds before. He studied the can intently, and it began to rise in the air shortly after. Nick would get quite a dousing of junk very soon...

...except that the can stopped and slowly descended to the ground again. Billy next heard an angry voice in his head.

"Is THIS why you accepted the offer – for dumb pranks?"

Billy was a bit ruffled. "I've been tortured by these punks for a long time." Even though the words were only in his mind, their frustration came through.

"When I said you needed practice, I did not mean this way, regardless of any issues you have! Go back home now. We will deal with this later."

Billy trudged away, dejected. He looked back. Nick had dodged a bullet, and he didn't even know it.

NEXT:

Billy's punishment, and Professor Malick gets closer.

(From now on it's all new. Outside of a rough outline, I haven't written it yet.)



COMIC COMMENTS

A slew of things to discuss here:

The First Cut Wasn't the Deepest...

- but the next two were.

As I said last issue I've cut *Amazing Spider-Man* from my monthly comicbook reserve list. Unlike that one, two more cuts weren't based on displeasure, just on my cost/reading ratio, and with a thought toward storage space:

I've been buying both *Shonen Jump* and *Shojo Beat* (the American versions) since they both began. I think they both offer a great amount of manga content for a reasonable price - and reading both meant I'm in touch with both my masculine and feminine sides.

The problem is: I've fallen more than a year behind on reading them both. They have become a pointless expense for me, and one that takes up too much space.

So reluctantly I've cut them both.

Barry Allen is Alive! So?

I'm not spoiling this for anyone. By the time you read these words it'll be old news - and it was already made a big deal in the newspapers.

In *DC Universe 0* he was reborn, erasing one more of the significant events of the original *Crisis* 23 years ago.

There has been talk of the DCU getting lighter soon. I'm wondering if this is part of it?

As someone who began to collect comics during the

Silver Age, I'm a little pumped. Barry Allen is my Flash. This really messes up many things however:

First and foremost, his death was as I stated one of the most significant event from the original Crisis. His death marked the official end of the Silver Age and the pass to the modern one. Bringing him back really cheapens his sacrifice.

Second, what about Wally West? He grew by major strides as the Flash character, and much of his growth stemmed from Barry's death. He grew as a person, he grew as a hero. Does he become the 'Kid Flash' again now? I think this will lead to him being a regular member of the new Titans team, but I'm hoping I'm wrong. He deserves more. Tom Peyer is now the current writer on his series. Mr. Peyer is a good writer, but he's often been brought in just before a series is ended, like *L.E.G.I.O.N.* years ago. I'm hoping that isn't the case now as well. Otherwise, things really look bad.

What about the idea of the speedster legacy? There's been the idea that speedsters in the DCU eventually burn out - as Max Mercury and Johnny Quick did. Likewise, Wally mentioned the 'sacrifice' that comes with the lightning, mentioning both Barry and Bart. All these deaths could now be cheapened if the writers aren't careful.

One good thing to come of this: the mainstream is talking about DC again, something it hasn't really done since the Death of Superman.

Note: I just read an interview with Geoff Johns about this title on *Newsarama*. He was coy about whether this arrival was permanent or temporary.

At the moment, despite the press coverage though, this will only matter to longtime readers. Newer ones won't even have an inkling of who Barry is.

More Legion Stuff!

I can never get away from this concept it seems. :)

Well, it is one of my favorites, so that makes sense.

Another huge fan of the Legion is apparently George Perez. He'll be pencilling *Final Crisis: Legion of Three Worlds*. That isn't an error — he'll draw the current Legion, the Adult one of recent *Action* fame, and the last incarnation from Abnet and Lanning.

I guess this should be no surprise, Perez drawing hundreds of characters per page. :)

I wonder if this storyline will ultimately solve the continuity mess that the different LSH retcons has made?

RIP Jim Mooney 1919 - March 30, 2008



He fits in with the Legion stuff; he was viewed as one of the revered artists on the series.

He was an artistic freelancer who knew Stan Lee as far back as the days when **Marvel** was known as **Timely**. After his work on the *Legion* and *Supergirl* he had runs on *Spider-Man* for his friend Stan.

He died of a long illness (un-named) after his wife

Anne passed in 2005.

Another legend gone. One I'll always think fondly of.

Guardians of the Galaxy

Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning (DnA) are helming this new series.

I was leery at first, remembering Jim Valentino's run with the concept years ago. That series used the original characters; I just learned that the new series uses a new team as well, a new team of characters from *Annihilation: Conquest*.

It's no secret that I like the cosmic side of the Marvel Universe (minus over-used characters like Annihilus and Ultron). DnA are fantastic at writing space material as well, so that's just icing on the cake.

Countdown Ends, But Not Even With a Whimper

The final issue (#1. I know that feels weird) has finally come out, but the Challengers deciding to monitor the Monitors just didn't feel like a big deal.

The storylines mostly didn't wrap up except for Mary Marvel remaining a villain (well, I guess she is). Kamandi and the original OMAC concept now exist on one Earth, Monarch just vanished from the storyline, and Jason Todd is still a jerk - but overall the ending elicited an "Eh."

The monitoring idea is already not happening, since Donna Troy is busy with the Titans, Kyle Rayner with the Green Lantern Corps, Ray Palmer with the upcoming James Robinson series *Justice*. It could well be that like the results of *52* happenings were under wrap and not occurring in the DCU until now, but it still seems a problematic result.

This series was originally intended as the spine of the

MOVIE REVIEWS

DCU, but by the halfway mark that idea failed, so it was given up. The end result, as many have said (me included) were a mess.

DC will soon attempt a new weekly *Trinity* (starring **Superman**, **Wonder Woman** and **Batman**). Hopefully they'll have learned better.

Free Comic Book Day 2008

I missed the first one but I've made sure to take part in it every year.

Logistics/scheduling kept me from going to more than one store this year, but the two books I got had reactions from me each of a different type:

Love and Capes: Billed as the first superhero sitcom.

The art style is very cartoonish, but the dialogue really shines to me. This series is published irregularly, and the earlier issues are collected in softcover.

The free give-away is an entire issue. I like this one enough that I'm considering adding this to my reserve.

The Death-Defying Devil-Man: This was a preview for the *Project Superpowers* series from **Dynamite**. It uses the **Nestor** heroes, characters in the public domain that anyone can use. Alan Moore did a mini-series back in 2003 in fact.

This book had a great Alex Ross cover; that's why I got it. The insides though... a 12-pager of talking heads about their mission to defeat the evil Claw, and Devil-Man isn't in a whole page of it! The characters who are in it don't even get named so they're just mystery costumes. The rest of the book is filled with ads for other projects at **Dynamite**.

I was very disappointed by this offering. I won't get the series.

Script Frenzy led me not to see a lot of films this time. I'll catch up next issue.

Cloverfield (DVD): J.J. Abrams of *LOST* fame was the producer for this film. He'd seen the way Godzilla was a big phenomenon for Japan, and wanted to start something similar for the USA.

I don't think he quite succeeded here. It's a good film, and both the effects and camera work are interesting, but Clover lacks the charm and likeability of the radioactive lizard from Tokyo. This creature is just a malevolent force of destruction.

One thing I really didn't like: ever since 9-11, seeing Manhattan destroyed (even in make-believe form) makes me very uneasy.

From a more analytical writer viewpoint: the idea that one monstrous creature (and its "helpers") could destroy all of Manhattan and the military is more than a little hard to swallow.

The attempt to make a film that seemed shot from a single handheld mini-camera was interesting. Before I saw this film I heard that the shakiness of the camera was a bad thing for people with motion sickness. Compared to *Blair Witch Project* this was steady. Plus the story wasn't silly like that one (there are sticks and stones! I'm so scared!).

The special effects for the destruction were well-done. The sheared-off head of the Statue of Liberty was used in the promos, but the destruction of several buildings and the Brooklyn Bridge were both very powerful as well.

While I liked this film I have to say that it was very bleak. Many of the protagonists (all played by unknown people) are dead by the end. That's part of where Godzilla is better: the monster is more sympathetic, and the heroes usually survive.

This movie was good, but I don't realistically foresee a franchise from it.

(There was also a Godzilla comicbook from **Marvel**. That's the comic link here.)

HEY KIDS: LETTERS!

Lloyd Penney
1706-24 Eva Rd.
Etobicoke, ON
M9C 2B2
May 2, 2008

Dear Jeff from Jericho:

*Darn... I used that one already in **Alexiad!** - JaB*

Got your e-mail reminding me about writing a letter for The Original Universe 4, and it was on my short list of zines to be answered shortly, honest...

While I remember, have you seen Iron Man, and what have you heard about it? I am not a comics reader, but I am knowledgeable enough to know that it's about time there was an Iron Man movie, and Robert Downey Jr. was an odd choice to play Tony Stark, but the movie seems to be doing well at the box office. Comments?

I'll see it when it comes out on DVD. I don't see movies on the big screen. JaB

I know Tamu better than I know Emru, but Tamu did let me know via Facebook that Emru has leukemia, and that he is looking for a suitable bone marrow donor. I hope that donor can be found soon. I am not sure how donors can be found...getting a bone marrow sample is an invasive procedure. Can suitability be found through a blood sample instead?

They determine it from a cotton swab in the mouth. No needles needed there. - JaB

Last time I had my blood checked, both my HDL and LDL levels are high to very high. My doctor figures I have naturally oily blood. Works for me, although I do have to

start adjusting my diet if I want my clothes to fit properly again.

To the best of my knowledge, the Paradise City Comics Con in Toronto is on the same weekend as Polaris. This might be the kiss of death for both conventions to be competing with each other. I must check those dates again, and I'd suggest you do the same. I prefer the train, but if you can get yourself a lightweight chair, flying should be no problem.

This may be the last PCCC anyway. One of the bigwigs has gone over to the competitors at Hobbystar. - JaB

When it comes to comics, the characters may be copyrighted, but the backstories aren't. I guess whoever takes over the character can change entire personal histories because the readership continually changes. How many times has some of Superman's history changed? It seems some of that history is graven in stone, but minor characteristics change, for comics, and the two television shows recently shown, Lois and Clark and Smallville. Poetic licence, I guess. Deux ex meshuginah...I like that, and puts it very neatly.

A question I shouldn't ask...if in the Transformers movie, Megatron has been tracking the Allspark since the 1800s, what did the Transformers transform into back then? Most of them are based on 20th century vehicles and machines. I've already seen mention of a second movie in the papers recently.

When we went to Vegas, it was warm here, and Vegas was 90+ degrees Fahrenheit. When we returned, it was cold here, and I think the drastic temperature change has affected us. Found a good reason why you don't want to go to Jamaica...480 murders there the first four months of this year.

125 Mb is a small amount of capacity, but it does us fine for small files. Every week, I work on a document for the Globe and Mail...I do it at home, e-mail it to my address at work, and copy it onto my thumb drive as a back-up. Twice now, the document I e-mailed to myself evaporated, and I've had to go to the back-up. The 4Gb drive will come in very handy shortly. I have seen 8Gb models, and I also know that Panasonic makes high-density 8Gb and 16Gb thumb drives and SD cards.

The Palm I am currently typing on (I am in the lobby of the

CBC building in downtown Toronto right now...I hope to get this to you late tonight) is my second Tungsten E2. I think the power supply failed, and with the warranty, it cost me less than \$100 to get it fully replaced. However, I still have the digitizer fix programme, just to make sure. Should this unit fail, I may have to look into getting a Blackberry. I am very used to having a personal organizer with me.

Yvonne and I will be at Con*cept this year, too. Yvonne will be doing the same kind of space, science and technology track she has done at Ad Astra. The heads of programming at Con*cept are Chris and Emily Knight, also of Toronto...they live about seven bus stops north of us. There's the possibility they might travel with us to Montréal in October. I've already mentioned you to them as being willing to do a fanzine panel with me...how about it? I recommended Cartoon Brew to you because Emru Townsend sometimes shows up there...CB did something about Emru's leukemia.

I've bookmarked the link now. - JaB

I have a taping at the Ontario College of Art and Design at 6pm...afterwards is work, and then, I can get home so I can send this loc to you. Take care, and see you next issue, and definitely in the fall.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Percy M. Hodge
2111 Girouard
Montreal, QC
H4A 3C4

May 11, 2008

The day before the deadline for Letters of Comment, I know, but as a man much smarter than me once said "If it wasn't for the last minute, nothing would ever get done."

So, without further ado, here are my comments on issue # 4.

EDITOR'S CORNER

My sympathies on your computer woes.

I had a different yet similar problem with one of my machines recently. It was fixed in under two weeks but

then it took another two months for me to get my machine back. It was a comedy of errors which included, amongst other things, the fact that the person who worked on it took an impromptu two-week vacation in Cuba and then had his car impounded for unpaid parking tickets with my machine in the trunk.

At least I had my new Vista machine to keep my on-line and active during those two months and I shall forevermore ensure that I always have to machines so that if one ever goes down, the other will keep my going.

Who would have thought Vista would be good for anything? - JaB

I'm looking forward to your 2nd Edition version of Hunters, Inc. As I have pretty much dried up on ideas for my M&M campaign, I'm looking for any inspiration I can get. You have a guaranteed sale here. If you need someone to pre-read it and give you feedback, I am at your disposal. I even promise to buy a copy anyway. ;)

I may go through you for playtesting. - JaB

COMIC COMMENTS

One More Day

I have to say, as a loyal fan and supporter of JMS, I was a little taken aback by your comment of "*In this case 'controversial' is just double-speak for sloppy writing.*"

Now, if by "sloppy writing" you mean "heavy-handed, no-talent, editorial interference overriding the natural talent of the author to the point where said author (J. Michael Straczynski) asked to have his name removed from the final issue" then I agree. Otherwise, you and I will have to agree to disagree.

I'm also a fan of Joe's. I met him, BTW. The last time I went to PCCC, in fact. - JaB

JMS made me want to read Spider-Man again after many years of web-free comics by making the character fresh, interesting and evolving. Joe Quesada has said for many years that he wanted to get rid of Mary Jane as Peter Parker's wife, and he has finally gotten his way. Furthermore, he has totally regressed all facets of the character to a point 30 years ago when Quesada was reading the title. So, in other words, Joe Q has regressed

the character to the point where it is now the character he remembers instead of the fully developed character that legions of talented writers have created since then. I'm sorry, I read all those stories when I, too, was a lad. I have not interest in reading those same stories all over again.

I whole-heartedly look forward to JMS's potential new projects now that he is no longer under exclusive contract to Marvel. First Joe Q meddled with JMS's successful run on Fantastic Four, leading to the JMS's departure from that title. Then he meddled with JMS's successful run on Spider-Man, leading to JMS's departure from that title as well. I predict that, within the year, Joe Q will want to meddle with Thor driving JMS off of the one mainstream Marvel title he is currently working on.

Let's face it, with JMS writing so few Marvel titles these days, it's no wonder he couldn't stick to an exclusive contract. The man's gotta eat, right?

Jim Shooter's New Legion

It's still too early to tell how things will pan out, especially in light of the fact that The Legion of Super Heroes will play a major role in DC's next big "Crisis", but I gotta say that I am not hating what he's doing with the title so far.

Countdown

Well, I gotta say, I was completely disappointed and dissatisfied with how Countdown turned out.

It started out strong, with lots of promise, focusing on the B-List characters of the DC Universe. This was both a strength and a weakness of Countdown's predecessor, 52. In 52, the writers got so obsessed with telling great stories and turning not-so-great characters into NEW great characters that they lost their focus and had to compress all the big events of the 52 weeks of 52 into a few short issues. It was great character-driven story-telling...but anti-climactic when it came to "The Big Picture."

Like I said, Countdown started out strong, developing B-List and supporting characters from big-name titles...but quickly devolved into a thinly-veiled (and thinly plotted) tie-in book forcing you to go out and buy a dozen mediocre mini-series if you wanted to understand what was going on in the DC Universe related to all of Donna/Kyle/Jason's multi-universe quest to find Ray Palmer. If you just stuck to the pages of Countdown, you were left wondering "What was the point of that?" and "Where are

they going with this?" and "Whatever happened to...?"

And then there were a slew of mini-series that you were conned into buying that really had nothing at all to do with the "Countdown" aside from the word "Countdown" worked into their title.

Aside from the title's blatant excuse for a marketing ploy, I would have to say that the three weakest and most disappointing things (to me) were the following:

- 1) How easily Darkseid was able to turn Mary Marvel back to the dark side (unintentional pun there) after she finally struggled to free herself from the darkness, redeem herself and get re-empowered by the Gods of Ancient Myth. She didn't even hesitate to take Darkseid up on his offer; making her whole struggle for redemption empty and meaningless.
- 2) The fact that, in order to actually find out how the mini-series Death of The New Gods ends, you have to pick up a copy of Countdown to see the final showdown between Darkseid and Orion. If you just read The Death of The New Gods, you're left on the last page going WTF?!?
- 3) Soooo...after Donna Troy, Kyle Rayner and Ray Palmer make a big show of telling the entire collective of The Monitors that "We'll be watching you!" (which, in itself, is laughable because a single Monitor could probably mop up the floor with all three of them...let alone 52 Monitors) the three characters then go right back to their regular lives in the mainstream DC Universe. Kyle appears monthly in The Green Lantern Corps, Donna will be appearing in the new Titans title, and Ray Palmer...ummmm...well, heck, he's The Atom for Pete's sake...what's he going to do against The Monitors. That scene was empty, pointless and laughable.

Great minds think alike here. :) - JaB

Like I said, this series started off with a lot of potential to equal the greatness that was 52 while learning from it's mistakes and making an even better product. Instead it devolved into an empty, hollow shill for a dozen mediocre and somewhat pointless mini-series.

I, for one, am embarrassed on behalf of DC comics.

Rest In Peace

As a long-term fan of many of Steve Gerber's creations

(my favorite being Howard The Duck, who was only written properly when written by Gerber himself) I too was sorry to hear of his passing. The same holds true for Dave Stevens.

As we grow older, the heroes of our youth (the actors, athletes, writers, directors, etc. that we admired) grow older as well and we will continue to find them, one-by-one, appearing on the obituary pages. It's a sad, sad, reality of getting older.

Although, at 52, Dave Stevens was taken from us far, far too young. Although, for the great ones, any age is "too young".

MOVIEREVIEWS

Bon Cop Bad Cop

A solid thumbs-up from me on this movie and it's recommended as a must-see for anyone who wants to understand the relationship between Ontario and Quebec.

The Prestige

A little weak at times and definitely NOT Christian Bale's best performance...but an entertaining little film overall and a cautionary tale on obsession.

Transformers

I may be sounding redundant but this film, too, was weak at times on both story and plot. I think the biggest problem with this film was that it was conflicted at times as to whether it wanted to be a "kid's film" or an action-adventure flick for older teens and up. But it was entertaining, nonetheless, and proved that CGI has progressed to the point that even giant robots that turn into cars can look believably real. I think my only real complaint about this film was that some of the action sequences were so fast (probably to cover up potential flaws in the CGI) that, at times, it was actually hard to follow what was happening on screen.

Fantastic Four - The Rise of The Silver Surfer

The less said about this film, the better.

Constantine

I have little to add on this movie as you have pretty much summed up my thoughts on this film perfectly. The same can be said for **Lost In Translation**; especially the part where you say the film could have been longer so that the story could have been developed more. It's just a shame that Bill Murray didn't win the Oscar he was nominated for in this film. This could have been the only time in his career that he was treated as a serious actor, and his one and only shot at one of the Academy's little golden statues.

Future Reviews...

Now, of course, in the next issue, I fully expect a thorough review from you on Iron Man. This movie, the first film released solely by the newly-formed Marvel Studios, will make or break the new film studio that Marvel has leveraged itself so heavily to open. From my point of view, I can't see too many ways it could have been better.

As you'll have read, sadly no. - JaB

One of the few shortcomings in the movie was that I thought Terrence Howard didn't have enough screen presence to do justice to Rhodey. But he pulled off a passable performance anyway. I can only imagine how strong this character could have been if cast with someone else in the role.

If someone had suggested to me to cast Jeff Bridges as Obadiah Stane, I would have told them they were crazy. I would have been wrong. He practically oozed corporate sliminess in this film.

Gwyneth Paltrow, I think, captured the essence of Pepper Potts if she had been written as a strong, modern, independent woman of the new millennium. I think the only scene she failed to be convincing was in the "dance scene" but I blame the writers more than I blame her. That scene was a little weak dialogue-wise and needed some work.

Someone tells me that Jon Favreau, the director, was also playing the part of Happy Hogan (Stark's original chauffeur/bodyguard from the 1960's era of the comic). Even he did a good job.

And then there was Robert Downey Jr. Robert Downey Jr. wasn't "playing Stark"...Robert Downey Jr. **WAS** Stark.

The material was respectful of both the original 1960's material by Stan Lee as well as various modernizations that have occurred in the 40 years since. They hit all the key points and did so without making it look like it was forced. I even like how they took the original Asian name of Yin

Seng, the name of the doctor that saves Stark's life and helps him build his first armor, and morphed it into "Yinsen" to fit with the more modern setting of the middle east.

As origin stories go, it starts with a bang (literally) and doesn't stop running from there.

As for potential for sequels....an organization that calls itself "*The Ten Rings*"?!? We know *The Mandarin* can't be far behind.

And with S.H.I.E.L.D. being introduced in this film, we know Nick Fury can't be far behind, either. Of course, if you wait around until after the credits (unlike me) you won't have to wait much longer at all. ;)

As the first totally-in-house production by Marvel, they have set the bar high. Not only for this summer's crop of super-hero movies, but also for all of their own future productions. It will be a tough job to keep them all at the calibre of this film...but if they do, there will be a lot of happy theatre-goers and comic book dweebs like me.

If you only go see one film about a spoiled rich kid in powered body armour this year, **THIS IS THE MOVIE TO SEE!**

Oh yeah, and in case you hadn't guessed by now, I really liked this movie. But, even more important that my opinion of the movie, a self-avowed comic geek, the fact that a friend's wife was there (who thinks comics are silly) thought that this movie was a great movie as well, proving that it can appeal to 'mainstream' viewers as well. In my opinion, if all of Marvel's films turn out as good as Iron Man did, Marvel Studios will rule the summer time box office for many years to come. :D

Percy M. Hodge

Justin Mohareb
799 Secord Ct
Milton, ON
L9T 3T3

Jeff:

Yo. Thanks for the copies of TOU. I hope the rest of the run can run without any obituaries.

I wish – but no one is immortal. - JaB

Quick movie thoughts: Bon Cop, Bad Cop was a fun buddy comedy, and I think that a buddy comedy about the

two solitudes was a good idea.

It was well performed, and competently written and directed, but that's about it. Gary Bettman jokes are a killer.

Transformers disappointed me a lot. Too much humans, not enough transforming robots. Michael Bay does like his awesome, though?

Constantine was a good movie. It was actually a very poor adaptation of the comic, but a good film on its own. Anything that gives you Peter Stormare as Satan is enjoyable.

My comics buying habits have been in flux lately. Primarily because I have gotten a new FLCS and I'm working to break them in. I've gotten into trade reading, but have also started reading more DC stuff.

I dove head first into the Sinestro Corps War, and loved it. My only complaint? The Anti-Monitor's appearance seemed almost gratuitous. He should have done something.

World War Hulk, BTW, was way better than it had any right to be. The ending was not totally satisfying, but unless they were going to actually affect the Marvel universe, it's what they had to do. And the climactic fight scene was terrific.

Otherwise, it drew me in better than almost any other book in recent memory.

I gave up on Countdown after several issues; I read 52 the entire way through, and have continued with Booster Gold and the Metal Men mini-series (although I need to sit down and read the MM all the way through, as that book is dense)

Have you read The Twelve, btw? I'm enjoying it quite a bit, and it does violate my new rule of "if it's numbered, read the trade". That's more a guideline than a rule. I do have to thank that guideline to thank for me missing One More Day. What a fiasco that was.

Nope. I'll read it in a TPB. - JaB

This weekend I'm off to Motor City Comic-Con. The show is a strange one, but I go and do some shopping and get one or two autographs (this year I'm getting an autograph from Mick Foley) and the wife gets some more autographs herself.

Thanks for TOU. I will get you a piece on some TPB's I've

read recently.

Justin Mohareb

Matthew Surridge
5154 Sherbrooke Street West, apartment 1
Montreal, Quebec
Canada
H4A 1T4
Querent@gmail.com

Hi, Jeff.

Hope things are going well with you. It's been fun reading *The Original Universe*, and watching it evolve with each issue. Hope to be reading it for a long while to come!

I'm hoping for more evolution soon (how's THAT for a tease?)! - JaB

An odd point of interest (well, of interest to me): last month, Marvel came out with the second issue of their *Marvel Atlas*, a handbook-style reference covering all the real and fictional countries in the Marvel Universe. This issue covered North and South America; the first article was about Canada. It's an odd kettle of fish.

To begin with, it lists Montreal as the provincial capital of Quebec. Which it isn't. But leave that aside.

The article has an entry on the history of Canada, which begins as follows: "The land of Canada was colonized by France in the 16th century, but England also laid claim to the territory, and after defeating the French in 1759 won the country in 1760." Boy, where to begin? 'The land of Canada' didn't exist as such, in name or in current form, until 1867. That sentence passes over the history of French settlement and exploration in North America, including the founding of places like Detroit and New Orleans. It also gets the starting date of the French presence in North America wrong; they were making plans in the 16th, but didn't start actual colonisation till the 17th.

Then, this business about the English laying claim to the territory — well, maybe (actually, there was an incident in the 1620s where a couple of Scottish adventurers took over control of New France for England for a brief time), but based on what? It's an odd thing to mention, given

how little space there was in the entry.

Then the bit about defeating the French in 1759 and winning the country in 1760 — I have to assume that refers to the battle of the Plains of Abraham (1759) and then the following battles which resulted in the English consolidating their control (1760). Which would be technically correct, although it's an unusual way of phrasing things. And it ignores the fact that the English didn't officially gain control of Quebec until the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763.

Having said which, the makers of the Atlas do get major praise from me for the following sentence: "During the War of 1812, Canada fought back invading forces of the USA." In a wholly unexpected move, this brief summation by an American source of the Canadian experience in the War of 1812 is actually fundamentally accurate. Way to be, Marvel.

(But, uh ... "Although the country retains the UK's queen as their monarch, they are largely independent"? Look, just because we didn't fight a revolution doesn't mean ... ah, forget it.)

Then again, we get somewhat-more-opinionated-than-they-probably-thought-they-were-being statements like: "Quebec's quest for a separate identity — or outright separation — from Canada inspired the FLQ terrorists of the 1970s, and fractured attempts at forging a national identity." Which kinda blurs the distinction between 'Quebec' and 'Quebec nationalists,' and begs the question of what kind of existential crisis the country's been living in for thirty years and change; from the context, the makers of the Atlas clearly don't really see any national identity as having been forged in the time since. Which is I guess an arguable position. But I don't know whether they meant to take it.

Then there's a map of Alpha Flight's base of operations, apparently located (under CSIS headquarters) in "Ottawa, Ontario Province, Ontario." Which is odd phrasing.

Finally, it's interesting to note how powerful stereotypes are. Looking over the list of notable residents, one finds a lot — a *lot* — of natives, French-Canadians, hockey players, and RCMP officers. Which says something about how stereotypes have a habit of recurring in popular culture, I suppose. I begin to grasp, in a way which I

previously had not, complaints about African-American characters always having a ghetto background.

*I think it was Alan Grant, a Brit, who penned **Apha Flight** over a decade ago. He wrote about country matters in our “House of Lords”. Can you say lost? - JaB*

In other, more annoying, news — Matt Fraction and Ed Brubaker are leaving Iron Fist. Which is depressing, since that’s a damn fine comic. A friend of mine suggests this is a byproduct of the exclusivity deals those writers have — that it doesn’t make economic sense for Marvel to keep high-priced talent on low-selling books. Which is a worrying thought, if true.

It’s pretty much a truism that mainstream comics are editorially-driven, more so perhaps these days than ever before, given the number of crossovers and the finicky continuity of modern books. So that means that whoever’s writing a major book — like *X-Men*, say, or *Superman* — will have less freedom to plot than somebody on a more ‘minor’ book. Like *Iron Fist*. Which means, to me, that having a star writer on *X-Men* is almost a waste; they’re not going to be able to bring the whole package of talent to the table, given that certain things have to be done in such a way as to fit with the rest of the universe and certain other things won’t be allowed because the characters have to sell underwear and be licensed and so on and so forth.

Really good writers — sticking with *X-Men*, I’d use both Morrison and Whedon as examples — are able to get around this in terms of the reading experience; they’re good enough, that is, to make you think that anything can happen even if, really, not that much does.

For all that people are still arguing over the ‘changes’ Morrison brought to the book, I always felt most of those changes were largely cosmetic. Compare and contrast what Alan Moore did on *Swamp Thing*. Or Brubaker and Fraction did with *Iron Fist*. You just can’t go that far when you’ve got people worrying about “the franchise.”

And since I’m on the topic ... why do people worry about franchises so much? Consider: once a story’s been told, a situation established, then it is in a sense always going to be there. Even if the character moves on, and his situation or character concept changes, the earlier idea can always be brought back. What I mean is that Spider-Man started out as a high school kid, moved on to college, dropped

out, got married ... as his life went on, as much as Marvel resisted it, the character ended up in different contexts. All of which, instead of being gone forever, are still there to draw on.

Marvel’s always had projects recalling Peter Parker’s days in high school. They keep revisiting that era, that situation. Consider *Ultimate Spider-Man*, which is entirely based on that setting. The ‘real’ Spider-Man has moved on. But the idea of him as a high-schooler still persists, and still has life to somebody, if only to the Marvel editors. So they commission projects set during that time. This is all fair enough.

What I’m saying I don’t understand is why Marvel and DC largely fear changing their characters, moving them out of their familiar contexts. My point is that the old settings will always be there, just like high school for Spider-Man; you can always set a story during those ‘eras,’ and run with it from there. In fact, given this, it would seem to me that the mainstream companies would be better off putting their characters through as many changes as possible, in order to create as many different settings for them as they can.

And, if they ever go too far, they can just have the character make a deal with the devil and rewind back to some earlier point. Just thinking out loud, there.

Take care, Jeff, and talk to you soon.

Matthew SurrIDGE

Jeffrey Allan Boman
6900 Cote St-Luc Road #708
Montreal, QC H4V 2Y9
CANADA
theoriginaluniverse@gmail.com

May 11, 2008

Hi folks!

A slight observation and plea here: the issue that you’re reading right now has more pages in large part because there are many more letters. When there’s more to reply to than just between Lloyd and myself, it makes this section — and the zine by extension — more vibrant. Let’s keep it up in future issues!

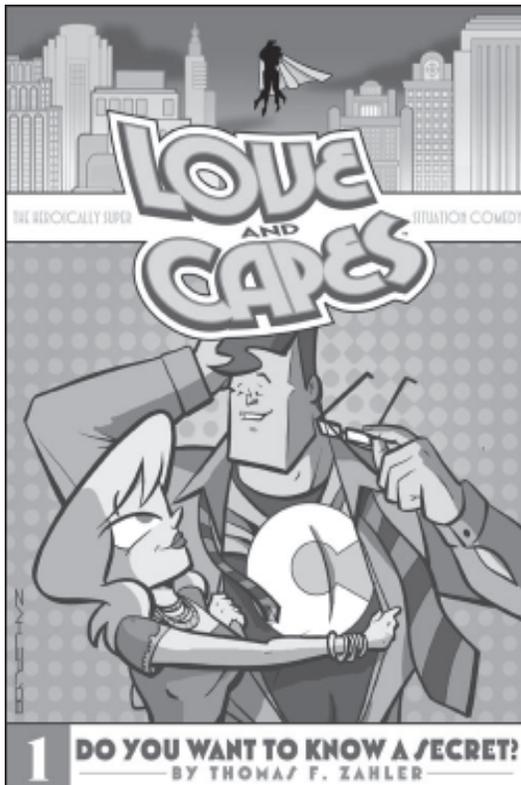
Lloyd: I guess I have to stop the mental comparisons to my former APA. It came out nearly like clockwork. / I'm also posting bulletins on Comicspace to get some art submissions. No nibbles yet, but I'll keep trying there too. / Re: Boots... it's been more than half a year that he's gone, but the day doesn't go by that I don't miss that cat. Squeaky doesn't remember him specifically by now, but she still remembers having company. She's often lonely. / Amazingly, I have 3 1 GB keys on my all the time. One I bought at The Source, the other two on eBay. Those two cost me far less combined. I never buy electronic stuff at that store anymore. / Modern character interpretations were due to Frank Miller's slant on Batman in *The Dark Knight Returns*. It sold well and got much critical success, so everyone has tried to emulate it. / Re: Civil War and Reed Richards... I think the entire premise stemmed in part from the 'Dubya' crap.

(Speaking of Civil War: Mark Millar, the author of it, is now writing the Fantastic Four title. In issue 556 he had many heroes from the Con- and Pro-Registration sides battling a villain together, no questions asked. That's irony for you!)

That wraps up issue 5. I realized that the deadline date for everyone is also the start of PCCC. I suspect I'll have a convention write-up in here!

See you all next issue,

JaB



Coming in issue 6:

Lots of stuff for issue 6!:

- * Avatar: Rebirth Part 3
- * A convention journal for the Paradise City Comic Con
- * a currently secret interview with a pro artist/writer
- * some goodies for the issue
- * letters!

Of course, there may be other stuff by other members.

With issue 6, it would be cool to have a large letters section again (hint, hint)

* * *

Love and Capes (c) and (TM) 2008
by Thom Zahler Art Studios

WAHF

Gregory Woronchak, Olivia Arrow,
Peter Halasz, Hannah Clemens, Jay
Willson, Shawn Surface

TODO LIST FOR 2008

- Paradise City Comic-con, Toronto (I'm booking the trip soon!)
- Write More Mutants and Masterminds works
- GenCon 2010, maybe (Anticipation in Montreal 2009 comes first)

TODO (HOPEFULLY!) SOMEDAY

- San Diego Comicon (the fires out now)

ZINE EXCHANGES

Frothy #1 Editor/Publisher Hannah Clemens. This seems a perzine (personal zine) from a resident of Tennessee. 20 pages + covers. E-mail froth@hannahrama.com for cost or trade information.

This was before you were born: Editor/publisher Katie Haegle. This is a chapbook of stories she inherited from her parents and grandparents. 29 pages. This and other zines in her distro (distribution) are available through her Website: <http://www.thelalatheory.com>

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