

*THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE*

*NUMBER 6*

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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](mailto:theoriginaluniverse@gmail.com)

My Snail-Mail address is

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

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

Credits in Editor's Corner.

### LOCs:

Percy M. Hodge, Lloyd Penney, Dario Sciola, Jeffrey Allan Boman, Matthew Surr ridge

### **Contributors:**

Matthew Surr ridge, "SDCC News Snippets"  
Justin Mohareb "Double Dipping at the Comics Rack"  
Gregory Woronchak, "Ramblings of a Comics Collector"

**All characters (c) to their respective companies.**

## EDITOR'S CORNER

Here's how much I'm trying to get the zine on a faster track: it's not even my time to the convention yet, and I'm trying to get as much done before I leave as possible. I'm hoping to just have the Letters section and my convention journal left to do when I get home, so that I can get it out to you all within two weeks at the most! So, let's get busy:

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First off is the first goodie for this issue: our first original cover art... and a good start in my opinion!

This cover is drawn by Shawn Surface. Here are his words on it:

**"KUDU-MAN** is a champion and protector of all living things on Earth, coming to the aid for those who fall prey to the harsh, and unspeakable cruelty of the Human race, he fights a never ending battle against the most devastating creature to ever inhabit this planet...**MAN!**

**KUDU-MAN** will premiere in the summer of 2009.

-created, written, and drawn by Shawn Surface and produced by **Groovy Graphics Press**, an imprint of the **SURFACEARTSTUDIOS**.

-my official website is: [www.surfaceartstudios.com](http://www.surfaceartstudios.com)  
Additional galleries: [www.surfaceart.deviantart.com](http://www.surfaceart.deviantart.com)  
[www.comicspace.com/surface](http://www.comicspace.com/surface)"

Thank you Shawn!

I found him through advertising on Comicspace ([www.comicspace.com](http://www.comicspace.com)), asking for artists for future zines. Proof that some of my hard work on advertising for here is paying off! As I mentioned before we're now in a zine library, I've been getting new members/readers... it isn't yet a flood of riches, but it has definitely begun well.

This won't be our only original cover. More people are coming forward with offers (for spot interiors too), and I'm also hoping to get a lot of illustrations – as well as photos and interviews – at the PCCC!

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Speaking of promotion, I created a Fan page for the zine on Facebook. If you use their Website, the URL is:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/edit/?id=47479215439#/pages/The-Original-Universe-fanzine/47479215439>

The page is so far thin on content (it will have a lot of photos from the con very soon though), and at the moment it needs more Fans to get noticed; right now

Justin and myself are the only ones. It'll grow though, and hopefully get a lot more content very soon.

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On the family front: my nephew Adam had his elementary school graduation June 20<sup>th</sup>. My sister and I are blown away that he's 12 now and finished with it.

His height also blows us away. The photo is from a dance with his mom Randy. She's 5'2"; he's still growing and 5'9" already. Next to my dad and his, he's already one of the tallest people in my family!

Randy told me he has a girlfriend now and even got her phone number at the dance. My little buddy is really growing up!

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There were many sad goodbyes in the past few months. Fortunately no professionals in the comicbook field passed away (June 28, 2008: I just learned one did. I spoke too soon), but we did lose some greats in other fields. These two meant something to me:

**Erick Wucjik:** He designed many roleplaying games for **Palladium** and one that gave me many pleasant memories, the **Amber Diceless Role-playing game**. In 1992 I went to

my first GenCon when it was still in Milwaukee. Erick was there, and I have some of the first **Amberzines** autographed by him.

He died from liver cancer, something he had announced last year. He at least got to celebrate his 57<sup>th</sup> birthday before he passed away.

**George Carlin** (71): He influenced many comedians, and had a legion of fans.

Some people will know him from his recent appearances in several of Kevin Smith's recent films, but he had a long career before that. He was a master of playing with words. In fact he was famous for a routine on "7 words you can't use on television". Some of those words are used now, and his comedy style may seem a little less wild today (although still pretty raunchy!)... Still he was a pioneer and improver in many ways of this style, and he was pretty cutting edge in his day.

He died from a heart attack. He had a history of heart problems, but several have said the death of his wife a while ago may have contributed as well.

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On a much less somber note: after a decade of using **Pegasus Mail** for my e-mail application I've moved to **Thunderbird**. **Pegasus** is no longer being updated (the programmer made no money off it; I don't fault him for this), and it was getting too buggy... so I've moved on.

It will take me awhile to move over all of my old e-mail address books and stored messages, but so far I'm finding it a worthwhile change.

I also just discovered another thing I'll have to fix: I haven't received any mail from my Yahoo! E-mail Groups for weeks. I discovered that the built-in spam blocker has been taking them all. Now I'll train it what's good.

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Now for some hopeful news about my friend Emru:

(For new readers who don't know the name or the story: Emru Townsend, a friend of mine for nearly 2 decades was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia late last year. With him being of African Caribbean descent, the number of similar donors in the databases is very low, something many of us are trying to chane.)

A potential bone marrow donor has been found for him. There are still a few hurdles to get over, but all of us who are Emru's friends are just sending hopeful vibes his way.

Meanwhile many of us are trying to bring more ethnic diversity to the databases. In Toronto for example a lady named Carolyn is also trying to find a match. She's Asian, a cultural group with low numbers of donors as well. Hopefully that will improve soon too.

Not that any of us are stopping. Even if this works out for Emru, there are still other people who need matches. Hopefully the pressure given by those of us in his 'army' will help that along.

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On the writing front: so far I've had no word further from that producer I mentioned last issue. Hopefully I'll hear from him after I get home.

Because of trying to get the bulk of this zine ready before Toronto I didn't get my **Hunters Inc.** edits done yet either. Sorry Percy! \*g\*

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I'll save the third part of ~~Avatar~~: **Rebirth** for next issue. This one already has a lot to enjoy!

One of my surprises will also be with next issue. I couldn't get them made before my Toronto trip. Now they'll be ready for the con here in Montreal in September instead, with some to offer here as well.

## ***SDCC NEWS SNIPPETS***

Matthew Surridge

*I originally had these for issue 7, but some of them would be old by then, I'm glad Matthew saved us from that!*

As I write this, the San Diego Comic-Con (or Comic-Con International, or whatever it's calling itself this year) has just finished. Tons of news. Neil Gaiman's writing a two-part Batman story (according to rumour, titled "Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?"). Mike Grell will be writing a new *Warlord* series in 2009, which is neat. The Legion of Super-Heroes will turn up on an episode of *Smallville*, which is something I've been expecting almost since the series began. C.B. Cebulski, who I've never really warmed up to as a writer, will be writing *Infernus*, a follow-up to *Inferno* — a twenty-year-old X-Men crossover which I never really thought of as crying out for a sequel.

Abnett and Lanning will be writing *War of Kings*, a story about a conflict between Black Bolt and Vulcan, the third Summers brother who's currently running the Shi'Ar empire. Vulcan's an interesting character, and, to me, points up where Superman-Prime fails. He's like Prime in a

lot of ways — teenager artificially aged, vastly powerful, sadistic — but the way he's been manipulated and used by external forces feels right, and his back-story has more real tragedy in it than Prime's. I don't think he's a classic Marvel villain, at least thus far, but to me he's more interesting to read about than Prime.

Valerie D'Orazio will be writing a new *Cloak & Dagger* story. She's maybe best known for her Occasional Superheroine blog, and her arresting series of posts "Goodbye to Comics." She used to be an editor for DC comics; I'm curious about what her fiction will be like. DC has announced that they'll be integrating the Milestone characters into their line of books, which is nice to see; those characters have been languishing in limbo for quite a while. They've also acquired the Archie superheroes — the Fly, the Shield, and so on — and those guys, too, will be worked into the DC universe.

#### TRIP REPORT

**JULY 11, 2008 -14: PARADISE CITY COMICON  
JULY 12-13, 2008**

Actually counting my travel days, it was really the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup>.

**July 11<sup>th</sup>:** I woke up before 6 AM. Part of the reason for that besides excitement and to check all my packing was to spend more time cuddling Squeaky. 4 days is the longest time that she's been alone since my trip to GenCon in 1992. She was only a few months old then, but she was alone in a new home. My sister Randy came to feed her then, but ended up bringing her home so that she'd have company.

I'd already arranged for a neighbor to come feed her while I was gone, and to come see her a bit. I knew she'd be OK, but I still worried a bit. After cuddling her some, I said my goodbyes and went downstairs with my bags for my ride to the train station.

This train ride was a first for me: the train left late. I have taken it to Toronto on 5 other occasions, none with delays. Between a long wait to get out of town and a long stop in Brockville, 45 minutes were added. 6 hours was long already; the extra time didn't help. A train that was supposed to leave by 9:40 AM didn't arrive at TO until past 3:45 PM. Good thing I can sleep anywhere!

Another cab to my friend and host Ron Kasman and I was finally ready to set up (yes Lloyd, you know him... he said he was there when you proposed to Yvonne). I brought him bagels from Montreal (Toronto style is like small tires). At the house I saw my friend Gabriel Morrisette, Ron's wife Marg, and their cats Little Paul and Minerva. I thought Minerva was 19 when I was there for Torcon in 2003. I was glad she was actually 17 now.

I got there just in time for a BBQ supper. As it was the whole weekend it wasn't too hot or muggy outside. I called mom to let her know I arrived OK, settled in in the basement apartment (Gabriel lived in it for about 14 months over 16 years ago), then got my beauty rest for the start of the con the next day.

#### SATURDAY

The basement place at my friends was cool & comfortable. I felt nostalgic for my former apartment there, with the humidity and damp air. I lived in a semi-basement place back 6 years ago...

The first thing I did was to put zines on the freebie tables. I winced when I saw some design gaffes in them, but I suspect folks just grabbed them and threw them out later. If they net us even 1 new member I'll be amazed.

One promotion I grabbed was a plastic Green Lantern ring. I'm a big fan of that character, so it was a no-brainer for me to get that ring. :) I still wear it.

At the con I met my friend Dario. He's new to this zine, but not to me; I've known him for over a decade since our days on a local BBS (Bulletin Board System. Most if not all of you here remember these dial-up ancestors to the Internet.) I've also been part of a tradition meeting up with him every year at Con\*Cept (our local science fiction convention. I helped run it from 1993-99. I took a breather from it then until 2005).

Dario is a big fan of the Planet of the Apes, so his biggest wish of the convention was to meet all the creators of the *Revenge of the Planet of the Apes* folks there as possible.



In the end he did get to see them all, but I'm getting ahead of myself...

The first artist I met was **Kent Burles**. He worked on *Apes*, pleasing Dario. I met him originally on Facebook; the first thing I mentioned there was how I fondly remember the

*Adventurers* title he drew. He said then that he wished he'd drawn it now, after he'd improved. The work he showed had a very Jack Kirby feel to it, something he found very flattering (I meant the flattery, if you're wondering). He was a Montrealer for many years, so we shared a few city stories.



Next I said hi to **Leonard Kirk**. I've known him for many years at many cons both local and out of town. It was a no-brainer for me to see him!

**Steve Molnar** was next. I have to admit I don't know his work very well, but he worked on *Apes*, and Dario wanted to meet him. That was a good enough reason for me.



The artists were actually in all of the convention. There were two rooms, 1 at each end, with a central set of tables in between. **Salgood Sam** was the first person we saw there. I met him here in Montreal in 2005; I have him as a friend on Facebook, but he uses a drawing for his profile picture so I didn't recognize him at first. He also worked on *Apes*, pleasing Dario.

In one of the rooms were tables for **Team Epic**. This is a live action Canadian super team whose shows are available on the Web (<http://teamepic.tv>). Unlike many Canadian productions in the media, this one is very well-made. The directors use green screen for top-notch effects, the writing and the acting are all done well. I'm hopefully going to write a feature about this property soon. Meanwhile, check out the episodes online. You won't be disappointed.

Next up I saw **Francis Manapul**. He's been at many conventions in the Toronto area, but of course with me being a Legion fan I had to see him. ☺ We traded e-mail addresses; hopefully I'll have something with him here in a later issue.



**Valentine Delaroca** was an artist on *X-Factor*. I didn't read that title for many years (no mutant titles for many years in fact), but his pages on display were great.

I also took the time to ask **Gabriel Morrissette** for an autograph doodle. Granted

we were staying in the same house and saw each other all the time there... but this was a longtime tradition for me. Besides, he was in the same area at the con.

I almost forgot: he drew a fantastic backup story in *Apes*, so Dario was glad to see him.

One other person in that area I didn't remember by name: he draws an independent comic called *Black Bastard* (he's also of color). I saw him here in Montreal in 2003. For dress-up and gimmick he got an A+. I bought a comic then; for art and story it got a D-. Hopefully he's improved since then.

We went to lunch at a local Quiznos. That's a weird thing for a comicbook convention write-up, but I'm mentioning



it for two reasons anyway: it was my first time eating at one and unlike most fast food places the spicy hot sauce on the buffalo chicken pizza I had WAS actually spicy! That earns high praise from me, because I like spicy food.

The only negative: we really had to go far to get to it.

Some of the Suicide Girls were there. I didn't see them, but Dario did. He mentioned that they didn't even know about Wil Wheaton's recent article on their site.

I saw **Liana K** getting a Dawn costume fixed up, and her husband '**Ed the sock**,' He's a Canadian pop icon, she's ours. I got a signed photo from him. I last saw them at the



PCCC in 2006, so mostly I just wanted to say hi. I also set up an interview with them for Sunday.

After lunch I only saw a few more artists (I got money from an ATM before and bought a Team Epic baseball cap too). Two of them had long lines for commissions, and as far as I knew then both would only be there that day.

First, I saw one of the independent folks in the centre aisles: **Paul Jorge Thomas**. I bought 5 issues of his comic. I always try to help local guys when I can.

**Dale Keown** was there for the Saturday only. He had a line-up for commissions, so I just got an autograph from him. I didn't want to make folks who were waiting a long time wait too much longer.

I could see why they were waiting so long, and why Dale no longer does monthly books: he seems a perfectionist, and labors over detail. That's not in the least bit a slight; he draws fantastic stuff. It just takes some time to see the finished product.



I'd mentioned to Paul that he was there, and he wanted to at least shake Dale's hand. Paul's roommate manned his table and he joined me.

Dale was also one of my contacts on Facebook. I wore the Pitt t-shirt that Gabby once gave me specifically for him to see.

**Richard Pace** was right next to him (he's also an FB contact). I last saw him in Toronto in 1996 and we'd had a spirited panel discussion. Francis Manapul came up to talk with him about projects. Richard mentioned a neat, very possible one. I won't jinx it by describing it now though.



Richard drew the neat comic I show here at the end. I've grown used to him as a writer so I'd forgotten he was a great penciler too! I had a chuckle though: he turned to Dale Keown and said "Race you!" Of course he was long finished. 😊

**Herb Trimpe:** Herb was a longtime artist at **Marvel**, but badly treated in the end; I'll interview him at another convention. He had a lot of difficulty with the border from the US to Canada and originally I thought he'd also be there Saturday only. He also had a line-up of commissions,

so I just asked for his autograph. To my surprise he gave a Hulk sketch with it!



This wrapped up my first day. I still had a lot of people I hoped to see Sunday, but I did a lot this day too!

## SUNDAY

I got all 5 of the zines for “Ed”. I didn’t think I had any left, but I did hold on to a set (I gave one set to my host along with a dozen bagels as thanks.

Ed couldn’t be there, so I gave the zines to Liana instead. I was hoping to interview them together, but that’ll happen at another con instead.

Once I came in I saw that Herb Trimpe was actually going to be there that day as well; good thing, since he was a Guest of Honor. He already had a long commission line; I’ll see him here in Montreal in September instead.

This was a shorter day, and I spent more time with the folks I approached. I saw:

**Pat Oliffe:** He’s really become a regular at **DC Comics**... yet he didn’t have a line-up. That’s a real shame, especially since he drew the recent **Four**



**Horsemen** mini starring the big 3 (Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman).

I steered Dario his way since he was looking for artists who drew Superman (Dario told me the story, he’ll tell you all in his own time). Actually Pat just drew Supes for that miniseries. I tried, at least.

**Cary Nord:** I have to admit: I knew his name but I couldn’t say off-hand what he’s drawn lately. I got his autograph though.

**Tom Fowler:** Dario had seen him Saturday, but we saw him again. I’m glad I did, and not just for the sketch he drew me.

He currently works on **MAD Magazine**, but also worked on **Apes** (which is why Dario saw him). He filled me in on some of Will Elder’s past that I wasn’t sure about (his history with **EC**), easily topped any convention sketch stories that I’d heard before. His were stranger! He also told us about a (false) fire alarm at the hotel around 5 AM. He had a baby to bring down many flights of stairs. It made me glad I didn’t stay there!

Kent Burles was near him, so we spent more time talking about his old / my town, and he helped me to track down the next person I was looking for:

**Ramon Perez:** Finally!

Some background: he was also at this con in 2006, and he confirmed for me then that he was the same-named guy who drew art for the **Mutants and Masterminds** RPG. When I saw his name on the guest list, I brought some of the books for him to sign. I got my autographs, and also bought his latest graphic novel/sourcebook for the **RIFTS** game. This isn’t an RPG zine, but some of you may share my dislike for **Palladium** stuff. Regardless, I bought it for his art.

He also drew the second-to-last storyline in **JSA Classified**. I commented that mine had a strange double-printing. He confirmed for me that they were all like that. He didn’t like that look either, but what the publisher wants you can’t control.

**Sam Agro** was next. He was another **Apes** guy, but he is also a penciler for a new company called **Crystal Fractal Comics**. They gave a sampler from their premiere at the convention. There’s a large space on the back cover for a sketch. Dario got one with his **Apes** link fulfilled at the show (only one artist had to cancel out). I took a gamble and ended up missing him. Oh well... next show!



**Yanick Paquette** currently draws the new *Young X-Men* comic. He recognized me (I think from my Facebook profile photo), but likely also from some of the old 1-day shows here in Montreal before he was successful. Gabriel always gave him advice then; he calls Gabby his mentor now.

**Harold Wong** is the writer for adulated series *After the Cape* 1 & 2. I haven't read it yet, but I'll track it down soon.

**J Torres** won a Shuster award for his writing on *Titans Go!* In 2006, and he hasn't stopped since. He not only wrote some of the Degrassi manga books, he's also the regular writer on *Superman and the Legion of Superheroes* (I know: a comicbook based on a cartoon about a



comicbook property already... my brain hurts too), has a trade for a **Wonder Girl** series he wrote!

We talked about Degrassi (he said the producers now think they made a mistake killing a character last year) and about a guy we both know (Dwight Williams, artist on the indy title *Local Hero*).

My last part of the con I interviewed Liana K on my MP3 voice recorder. This issue is loaded enough, and I'd take a lot of time to transcribe it.; I'll do so next issue.

After the con ate at Ron's house, checked that I'd packed everything I had to, then' went to bed early. I knew I had to be up early for:

### **Monday**

...my ride to the train. What followed was a long, dull train ride. Better I leave it at that.

### **Conclusions**

I wish the convention had been a day longer so that I could see more of it, and wished I'd taken more pictures. I had a lot of fun though.

I thought this would be the last of this convention, but they just lost the Shuster Awards. There was no less enjoyment because of that.

My energy and funds will go to Anticipation, the Montreal Worldcon next summer. I might be back for the one in 2010 though!

## SOME CONVENTION SKETCHES

(They're separate so that you can enjoy them on their own)



Francis Manapul



Gabriel Morrissette



Richard Pace



Herb Trimpe!

## MOVIE REVIEWS

**The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe (DVD):** Wow, that's a long name!

I read the Narnia series when I was a 13-year old, before I first read *The Lord of the Rings*. I think like Lewis Carol with his stories of Alice in Wonderland, this was C.S. Lewis's watershed... his stories of Venus didn't compare – but I digress. This is a movie review (fantasy can be a popular genre in comicbooks when done well), not a book review.

I found this film, like the title, was too long. I know they had to set up the world for viewers who've never read the books, but because of this the film felt tedious.

During the worst bombings of WWI, the four Pevensie children are evacuated to English country for safety. Playing hide and seek the youngest girl Lucy finds a portal to another world in a wardrobe. Her siblings soon come to this world – Narnia – where they learn that a prophecy says they would come to save the world from evil.

C.S. Lewis was a devout Christian, and this story is full of Christian symbolism. Just having Aslan die and be reborn was a pure Jesus bit.

Actually the sight of a dead Aslan struck me in a different way: after Boots dying here 7 months ago, seeing another dead cat was rough.

On the positive side: Oscar winner Tilda Swinton plays the villain of the story, the evil Jadis who calls herself Queen of the land and blankets it in snow. She's good at playing otherworldly beings it seems... first Gabriel, now this! James McAvoy (of **Wanted**) here plays a faun named Thomas. Liam Neeson portrays the voice of Aslan the lion well.

The cinematography here was quite good, and the effects / CGI was excellent... the film just didn't work for me. I'm hearing good buzz for **Prince Caspian**, the current film based on the next book. Hopefully the filmmakers have learned from this one.

**Death Proof (DVD):** I looked at the Wikipedia entry on what this represented: grindhouses existed in America from the 1950s to the 80s. They featured exploitation films, eventually to become (in some instances) adult film theatres.

That makes the link to comicbooks. Not the adult film link (I try to forget the **Eros** line), but the exploitation/b-movie link. Let's face it: Power Man Luke Cage was purely blacksploitation at first.

**Death Proof** is the Quentin Tarantino half of last year's **Grindhouse** double feature. Psychotic killer Stuntman Mike (Kurt Russel) drives a heavily tricked-out car across America with the sole purpose of using it to kill groups of innocent women. He succeeds the first time, but the second group he tries (Rosario Dawson, Zoé Bell and Tracy Thomas) end up getting him.

That may seem very thin as a movie plot, but that's it. This may have worked for the early days of film, but these days it leaves us with too many questions. Why is Stuntman Mike so evil? We'll never know. Why does this second group of ladies become bloodthirsty after surviving Mike's attack? It makes no sense either.

The film is done in the style of old and unreliable media, so there are grainy scenes, cuts as if some of the reels are lost, and a sequence in black and white as if the color filters are missing. All of the cars are out of the 1960s and 70s; this and the film style makes for very strange anachronisms, especially with characters using Ipods and texting on cell phones.

Bonus features here come on a separate disc. A movie trailer explains the story slightly better, and a few mini-documentaries let us know more about some of the legendary Hollywood stunt-people involved here – but there are no deleted scenes, and the whole bonus disc was done in less than 90 minutes. Like the film it left me wanting more.

The Grindhouse films barely lasted a month in theatres. Based on this half I see why. Not Tarantino's best offering, in my view.

**Enchanted (DVD):** This film also falls under the umbrella of fantasy, but it's also a musical and a romantic comedy. Theoretically this is a "chick flick", but even though I'm male I enjoyed it. I'm also proving how not all heterosexual men avoid Broadway style, since I'm not gay and I liked it. I also cried like a baby throughout the film... yes, I eat quiche. Your point?

The plot: from the animated world in a kingdom called Andelusia a girl named Giselle (Amy Adams) is going to marry Prince Edward (James Marsden). His step mother Queen Narissa (Susan Sarandon) to protect herself from replacement banishes Giselle to Manhattan in our world. She's befriended by divorce lawyer Robert (Patrick Dempsey). In a world where here constant singing and befriending of many local creatures seems weird, as well as her belief in Happily Everafter, she does find our world ultimately good for her.

A Disney film, this has a lot of Easter Eggs. Many elements come from the library of titles, like **Snow White**, **Cinderella** and **Beauty and the Beast**. Several of the songs were nominated for the Oscar as well.

The bonus features here included a few deleted scenes (with explanations why), a few mini-documentaries, and some interesting facts (it seems that some of the older men in the park number were in **West Side Story!**). I suspect that more features are on the Blu-Ray version... I don't have such a machine, so I can't say yes or no.

## **DOUBLE DIPPING AT THE COMICS RACK**

by Justin Mohareb

Okay, let me start by getting this out of the way: I enjoyed the Annihilation line. I liked the first Annihilation series, and I liked Conquest only a little less. The larger Marvel universe is an awesome thing, and when it isn't being completely Terra-centric (Oh, look, the Skrulls are invading Earth. Again.) there are some neat stories to tell with space gods and alien armadas and all that fun.

But. Okay, here we go. Marvel just fraked me. Probably not for a lot, ten bucks or so, and they've ripped me off for a lot more in the past by producing shitty comics in general (see: Ultimates line).

But this latest example is just a bit too annoying, even for them.

As I said, I enjoyed Annihilation. Fun series.

Annihilation: Conquest brought it down in scale a bit, and gave us some Star Lord, Bug ( of the Micronauts, asanova of the Microcosm!) and Rocket Raccoon goodness (and a Brown Guy Who Died First, joy).

The story wove its way through a set of miniseries eaturing the new Quasar and a new character, Wraith, as well as the core Annihilation: Conquest miniseries. It also featured Nova, now being featured in his own series.

And that's where I got frakked.

You see, after enjoying Annihilation so much, I got into its ancillary book, which was Nova's new series. Being Johnny Clever, I decided I'd just get it in trade paperback format. Yay, me! The first half of the Nova trade dealt with him returning to Earth and finding out what the Status Quo was after Civil War (answer: Characters messed up, setting not visibly different).

So he leaves, and goes to visit the Kree galaxy where the events of Conquest are happening. He gets involved with them, and goes off to have a new adventure.

So, that's three issues on earth, four issues in Spaaaace having adventures.

So, I then get Conquest book 2. Included in it are Wraith 1-4, Conquest 1-6 and... Nova 4-7. Wait. 14 issues, four of which I already have?

So, yeah, I buy a hardcover that contains previously digested meat, as it were.

But wait: it gets better. Nova's adventures continue after issue 7, you see. He goes off to the homeworld of some techno-organic guys(and, yes, we get to see Warlock) and has adventures there. These adventures are summarized in the pages of the Annihilation: Conquest 2 hardcover.

They, in fact, sound very interesting. Why, then, are they not included in the pages of the Annihilation: Conquest 2 hardcover?

Because if they gave us that story, we wouldn't have to uy the second Nova trade paperback.

Super classy. Thanks a ton, Marvel.

At least it isn't one of those overly slim hardcovers that seem to be the rage today. You can sometimes luck out and get them at BMV or TheBeguiling for \$10, but it seems dumb to be selling three or four issues of story in a hardcover. A single tale written that way might be palpable (might!), but the worst is when they put a fragment of a larger story (I'm looking at YOU, Sinestro Corps War!).

On the other hand, I bought the entirety of Marvel's Messiah Complex in hardcover, and it was both confusing and not that interesting if you haven't been nipples deep in the X-Men mythology for most of the past decade. But I hope I can divest myself of that on ebay.

I have a LOT of stuff to get rid of on eBay. Apparently, over the past decade I actually bought a bunch of Ultimate books, because I don't frakking learn.

## RAMBLINGS OF A COMIC COLLECTOR

by Gregory Woronchak

DC: Trapped in the Silver Age?

I was wrong. Big time.

A few years ago, I complained in an APA I was part of that I missed the Silver Age. I believed that comics would be improved if Silver Age storytelling and concepts somehow reappeared.

Seeing Geoff Jones and Grant Morrison harping on stories from that era and dragging forgotten continuity into the spotlight forces me to realize how wrong I was.

The results are confusing, contradictory tales that feel old fashioned, or attempt to make goofy old stories make sense. Comics, by very nature, are a fantasy medium, and have no business 'making sense'. Heroes clad in colourful costumes is escapism, stylized symbols of good vs. evil, a new mythology that shouldn't take itself seriously. For these very reasons, I think fondly on Silver Age stories, as well as their wild, unpretentious imagination. I haven't been as fond of contemporary attempts to revisit stories from the past.

As a matter of fact, it saddens me to see childhood concepts and characters 'reinterpreted' or 'rebooted', while clinging to continuity baggage. 'Robin Dies at Dawn' was a fun, goofy tale; I don't see the need to find a way for it to 'work' with today's Batman stories. Instead of creativity and originality, many DC books today are simply rehashing old material, while screaming how cool and radical the 'new' approach is.

I'm being unfair to Geoff and Grant, since their work is still beyond most pros published today. I guess I just wish they'd stop looking back at stories that they remember fondly, and trying to have them work in today's comics. Perhaps Thy Kingdom Come and Batman R.I.P. will go down as two of the finer stories of the modern era; I'll get back to you in a few years if I find myself 'wrong' yet again.

## COMIC COMMENTS

### Give Gene Colon Some Well-Deserved Help



Here's the story: a few months ago he was hospitalized with major liver damage. He's out of the woods for now, no one knows how much longer he has... but the medical costs alone are heavy.

Many different things are being done to help him: first, the Hero Initiative is trying to help. Fan and author Clifford Meth has gathered together many other creators for items to auction for Gene through comiclink.com, the proceeds to go toward Gene's bills. The list of creators so far is impressive:



Neal Adams, Daniel Best, Doug Braithwaite, Norm Breyfogle, Randy Bowen, Ed Brubaker (who has given his notebook for his current run on Captain America), Adam-Troy Castro, Ernie Chan, Paty Cockrum, Peter David, Rufus Dayglo, Tom DeFalco, J.M. deMatteis, Tony Dezuniga, Pat DiNizio, Harlan Ellison (Harlan is a huge comicbook fan, though he's known more in these circles for his lawsuits against Gary Groth and DC Comics over The Shadow), Garth Ennis, Mark Evanier, Neil Gaiman, Sam Keith, Joe Kubert, Erik Larsen, Bob Layton, Jae Lee, Jim Lee, Stan Lee, David Lloyd, Tim Mandrake, Leah Moore, Albert Moy, Michael Netzer, Josh Olsen, James A. Owen, Tom Palmer, Greg Pak, Mike Pascale, Richard & Wendy Pini, Jim Salicrup, Bob Shreck, Dave Simons, Gail Simone, Walter and Louise Simonson, Joe Sinnott, J. David Spurlock, Jim Starlin, Roy Thomas, Juan Torres, Andrew Wildman, Marv Wolfman and Ash Wood.

If any copies of this are left, we can help by buying copies of a book written by Meth and illustrated by Colan (*Meth, Colan & Other Theologians*) all proceeds to go to Colan and his family. More info can be found here:

<http://theciffordmethod.blogspot.com/2008/05/meth-colan-other-theologians.html>

I was surprised to learn from the story that Gene has been involved in the field of comicbooks for over 60 years now. His many years on **Marvel Comics** properties many of us know, as well as his later work at **DC** (*Night Force* is one

of my favorites). I didn't realize his career had been so long though.

I'll try to buy a copy of this book after the con. I hope you can do so as well.

### **Final Thoughts on Countdown**

The series is over for awhile now. Some (not many granted) issues were entertaining, but the series had a **major** problem that I learned about when *Final Crisis* began: it didn't properly setup events in that series!

The entire "Death of the New Gods" plotline contradicts Grant Morrison's story (he has said he started his months in advance). In *Countdown*, Orion finally kills Darkseid. Too bad Darkseid was still alive in *FC*, while Orion is dead and in a dumpster at the start of the latter.

Both Percy and I commented on how the Challengers of the Unknown haven't seemed to keep up with their intentions to watch the Monitors in the end. So far, events in *Final Crisis* have been supporting that notion. If the Atom also doesn't acknowledge it in the upcoming *Justice* series, it will be even more the case.

### **Is Dan DiDio Going To Be Axed?**

The above-mentioned gaffes have led both me and Percy to suspect that he'll be pink-slipped.

There's a theory that Jimmy Palmiotti will replace him. When Jimmy was on a DC panel at Wizard World Chicago with Dan recently, Dan asked the entire panel if they'd want the job of EIC. Jimmy just said "no comment", adding more fuel to the fire.

If that happens, Jimmy is both a good friend and former business partner of Joe Quesada, the EIC at **Marvel**. Many of us have been displeased with Joe's editorial decisions; hopefully this wouldn't mean the same thing if it happens.

### **Speaking of Final Crisis...**

[These comments may contain spoilers. Read them at your own risk.]

In #1, the Martian Manhunter got whacked. That's an appropriate way to say it; Batman described his execution as gangland style.

In the same issue that that was said, Barry Allen returned. MM was more of a signpost for the Silver Age granted, since he was the first original character created back then.

With Barry Allen now back, along with Bucky at **Marvel** (two characters editors swore were gone for good)... well, it just adds to less concern (by me at least) of the finality of Jonn J'onnn's death.

I remember reading about the shock of Menton dying in the original *THUNDER Agents* comic. It was all the more poignant because other agents have used his gear, but the original never returned to life. I sometimes miss the days when a character dying meant something.

### **The Classified Books Were Cursed**

*JLA Classified* was a title I was intending to drop from my reserve. It often had stories that didn't interest me with hero rosters even less interesting, and sometimes bland art.

It had a storyline written by Roger Stern (whose work I like) and art by John Byrne... after which it was cancelled.

It started with an excellent arc by Grant Morrison and Ed McGuinness, but it never lived up to that promising start.

*JSA Classified* I thought was better: first, it dealt with the characters now instead of in their past. There was more focus on some of the characters rarely used in the main title. The art was generally better, the writing as well... yet it had ITS final issue last month.

Ah well. 2 less books per month will put a few more dollars in my pocket. Shame about the JSA one though...

### **Two Good-Byes**

We lost two comicbook pros in the past few months, one a legend in the field, one too young but in a way a winner:

**Will Elder:** He was one of the founding fathers of *Mad magazine*, worked at **EC** and co-created the *Little Annie Fannie* series in **Playboy**.

As I mention in my convention report, I also learned of his history with **EC**. I don't believe we have many of those legends left now.

**Mike Turner:** At the start of August many were shocked at a vital young creator who finally succumbed to cancer at the age of 37.

He first came to the public with his title *Fathom* and his company **Aspen**. At **DC** he drew the covers for *Identity*

*Crisis*, **JLoA** and reintroduced Supergirl in *Superman / Batman*.



He had parts of his body surgically removed. Several people talked of him being on crutches.

This won't be a sad, maudlin memorial. In the tributes to him from creators who spoke about him on **Newsarama** one thing resonated with me: he won. He had every right to be bitter and angry about his situation, but every person online spoke of him being an optimistic and cheerful soul.

I often anthropomorphize illnesses. When you don't let them break your spirit, they lose. That seems to be the case here.

### **Remember the Titans (When they were worth reading)**

I'm a fan of the Teen Titans. The Marv Wolfman-George Perez *New Teen Titans* was in many ways historic and enjoyable.

Too bad *Titans* isn't.

How can I list all the reasons why? I'll try:

#### 1) The Writing

I've never been impressed by Judd Winnick's writing. He had an annoying habit in *Green Lantern* of "building character" by having characters always talk about the music they like. Even after years Kyle Rayner stories were still pity parties. That was the whole point of the *Circle of Fire* storyline years ago: another series for him to say how little control he had over being GL.

(I loathed Ron Marz' run on those books, so for me to be down on his successor...)

In *Titans*, he's ignoring continuity in favor of all the characters being exactly how they used to be years ago. Geoff Johns brought Raven back as a teenager, and a mini-series about her just wrapped up. Suddenly, she's an adult again? She just had a romantic relationship with Changeling; this version doesn't seem aware of it. Also: aren't Flash and Arsenal in the *JLA*? Are they now like Wolverine at **Marvel**, able to be on multiple teams at once?

This change in Raven goes into the next problem:

#### 2) The Art

Ian Churchill is drawing this series with the worst elements of the **Image** style: the women all have similar over-endowment, put in major cheesecake positions.

Raven again gets singled out for this. Perez drew her with a dancer's body. In issue 3 of this series she wore her "evil Raven" costume from her seduction to Trigon in the first deluxe run, only this time drawn like bondage gear – and she now had double-D cups. It's not sexy; in this case it's annoying.

Issue 1 of this series was awful. I hoped it would improve with more. It hasn't. I'm cutting this title from my reserve, and I suspect many people will. I don't know why DiDio even allows this to be published... what a waste and a shame.



Ed the Sock

**AN INTERVIEW WITH:** Thom Zahler

*Last issue I raved about the title **Love and Capes** here, and I found Thom online. I immediately thought to interview him for the zine. Here are the results:*

Me: First off, Thom (I'm a Legion of Superheroes fan, and I use a Star Boy avatar on a forum, so I'm predisposed to your name [g]) I'll begin with a question that seems simple to me, though the answer may not be: what made you decide to create the first Super-Hero sit-com, as you called it in your FCBD promo?

Thom: My Mom's not a Legion fan, but she liked spelling Thom with an "H" because she said it'd keep people from calling me "Tommy", which she disliked as much as I've come to. She also once told me it was the Irish way to spell it.

Me: Philistine. :) [I don't rag on moms]

Thom: I, on the other hand, am a Legion fan, and it was cool to have a brown haired, brown eyed superhero named Thom in comics.

"Love and Capes" has had so many sources it's hard to keep it clear anymore. It's become like when you meet that dream girl (no Star Boy reference intended) and all your stories become "...and if that hadn't happened, I never would have met her". But, the big thing was that I was working on my Raider series and got to volume #3, where Raider met his female counterpart, with whom he shared a Batman/Catwoman relationship. I had more fun writing the banter between them than anything else. I filed that away.

Then there was a contest on the Bravo network, something kind of like "Project: Greenlight" but for sitcoms. I wrote one about a couple having a cross-state

relationship called "Long Distance", which is now available on my site and on Wowio.com. I really liked writing that.

After Raider #3, I was looking for a new project. Something different, something that I could do in 24-page increments as opposed to the 100+ page Raider tomes. Something more fun. I definitely wanted something a little more cartoony than what I'd be doing. And then it all kind of clicked in a chocolate and peanut butter moment. I'd always loved sitcoms, "Mad About You" being one of my favorites. I'd certainly loved superhero comics. I even liked chunks of "Lois and Clark", and thought the relationship stuff was far better than the superhero stuff. So with that sitcom template, complete with keeping most of the job off-camera, I did "Love and Capes" as a one-shot I could take to Comic-Con in San Diego.

After the reaction to #1, it was clear I couldn't stop it there. When I was working on #1, I had a plan for a six-issue "season". So, once I decided to do the second issue, I was in for six. I've got another six-issues planned out for this next cycle.

Me: You mentioned having a lot of influences (I knew the answer would be more complex than the question). I noticed in the free issue you drew influences from DC Comics (Superman/BatMan/Wonder Woman types, pre-marriage Wally West Flash, the JLA satellite...). Based on your

story comparison and your own love for the LSH, are you trying for a direct archetype copy, or just the spirit?

Thom: I think the answer is somewhere in between. I'm definitely using the Silver/Bronze age as my template, but I try to make the characters original, complete characters as much as I can. So, while Crusader is the all-super powered character, like Superman or Captain Marvel, he's definitely not either one of them. Darkblade is the dark avenger character, but he's nowhere near as tormented as Batman.

The only real exceptions have been Major Might and Arachnerd. Major Might is pretty heavily based on Captain Marvel, but that stemmed off of me trying to figure out who Amazonia would date to make the Crusader



jealous. The answer was obviously someone a lot like Mark. So, looking for a Superman knockoff leads you to Captain Marvel. (And he's not a knockoff, exactly, I know, and the Marvel Family are among my favorite characters, so don't take it as a negative.)

And the Arachnerd, I must admit, was partially a marketing ploy. For the first FCBD issue I did, the one coming out in conjunction with "Spider-Man 3", putting some sort of spider-connection on it seemed only natural. But it also played into my meta-textual feelings about Superman and, by extension, Crusader. I think Superman gets no respect as a hero. There are a bunch of people who think he's a boring boy scout, a passe character and that Batman and Spider-Man are cooler. I obviously disagree. So my feelings about that lack of respect have transformed into Mark's feeling disrespected, and his recurring jealousy of other superheroes' popularity.

One of the advantages of using these archetypes is that it speeds up the storytelling. Once you know the Crusader is a Superman-type, I don't have to give you a litany of powers or backstory. You get it. So I can then move on and tell my story. Especially having 24 pages every three months, it allows me to cover a lot of ground without getting bogged down in exposition.

I do try to make the characters as real and as textured as I can from the template I start with. Amazonia is a pretty complicated character: Does she still love Mark? Is she just spiteful? And there are character dimensions and history that are only touched on. A perfect example there is Doctor Karma, the Doctor Strange/Doctor Fate archetype. There's a joke about Crusader paying him with an "Invisible Man" DVD that wasn't available in the United States. (At that time. It's available now. Behold the power of "Love and Capes!") Hopefully it's a funny joke,

but that came about because of a whole back story about Doc Karma's powers being limited by not being able to use them for his own benefit. So, he could use his magic to ward off a demon attack to protect the earth, but not to teleport to England to buy a region 2 DVD.



That's a hugely long answer, so let me try to sum it up: The old 70's World's Finests, where Superman and Batman were pals who hung out... that's the reality I'm trying to evoke. I'm using archetypes to do it, but for the most part, I'm not using copies.

Me: (Note to self: I have to pick up the older issues in Trades very soon, since I began with this year's free one)

I guess people will still think of Mark and his love that Lois and Clark vibe anyway. Their mistake.

There's been a longtime debate about the chase being more interesting than the catch. They cite the last seasons of Moonlighting and Lois and Clark itself as evidence... forgetting comicbooks like Maze Agency where the question wasn't "Will they?" but "WHEN Will They?". From what I've read so far, you also prefer going with the latter...

Thom: "Lois and Clark" is a good example, since

"Moonlighting" was plagued with off-set problems. To me, the thing "Lois and Clark" did wrong was they didn't change the focus of the show. If you're going to get them married in the course of the series, you need to stop doing "Cheers" (the relationship part) and start doing "Mad About You." But they didn't. They just kept trying to prolong things, and when they did get married, well, it was a letdown.

Mostly, I think you have to have a plan.

"Love and Capes" is all about the RELATIONSHIP. Whether they're dating, engaged or married, that's largely irrelevant. And each stage of that cycle has its own quirks and challenges. Still, the focus of the book is that relationship.

“Love and Capes” never had the chase, so I didn’t have to worry about losing that. Even so, I think shows and stories can avoid that if they have a direction. I think “Friends” could have kept Ross and Rachel together if they’d started doing “Mad About You” with those two characters and transferred some of the dating jokes to the others. Chandler and Monica got together and the show didn’t suffer a bit.

A show or a story can always morph over the run, too. “Seinfeld”, which was a show about the little weird things in everyone’s life became a story about an alternate reality where people cut Snickers bars with knives. You could have changed “Mad About You” into “Mad About Baby.” They didn’t, and honestly if I were them, I would have ended the series a year earlier with the birth of the child.

If all you’ve got is the chase (or any singular aspect) you’re not well-served to lose it. But, if you’ve got a rich enough story, you can change part of it up and still keep people aboard. And, if you do decide to have The Catch, as a writer, you’d better darn well know what those characters will do after that.

For “Love and Capes”, I’ve got a plan. Hopefully it’s a good one.

Me: Changing gears a bit, you have a more cartoony style of art. Did you have artistic influences? Or do you also have Animation studies under your belt like me?

Thom: I’m a graduate of the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art, so I’ve got a decent foundation in both cartooning and animation. I went into the cartoon-graphics program after the first year, though, so that was the limits of my animation training.

Growing up, the first two artists I learned to recognize were Curt Swan and Kurt Schaffenberger, both Superman artists at the time. Later I found Kurt’s Captain Marvel/ Shazam stuff. When I started out, I was planning on more typical superhero stuff, so I went towards Neal Adams, George Perez, Jerry Ordway and those guys.

Growing up, when I tried to do bigfoot cartoony stuff, I copied Charles Shultz, Don Martin and Fred Hembeck.

I’m a freelance artist as well as a comic book guy, too, and found a lot more work doing cartoony stuff in that world. As my style started to evolve, I was clearly influenced by Bruce Timm and the Batman Animated gang, Darwyn Cooke and “The New Frontier”, Steven Silver and Claire Wendling. I started really liking people who could do less

with more. It’s harder to keep stuff simple, but I really like the way it works.

Me: I also believe you self-publish this, correct? If so, we both also have some know-how on this subject... (Granted, he has more of it than I do...)

Thom: Yup. “Love and Capes” is my third self-published project. I did the first three “Raider” graphic novels, a scriptbook of that sitcom pilot, “Long Distance”, and then “Love and Capes.”

My publishing company is named after my maternal grandmother who was one of the big influences on my life. She was the one who told my Mom, “Don’t worry about Thom. He’ll do fine with this,” when Mom was worried about me going into comics. Maerkle is my Mom’s maiden name. We’re Irish-German, which is why it’s a German name with an Irish logo.

I didn’t want to name it “Thom Zahler Art Studios” or something like that, since I wanted to leave myself room to publish someone else’s stuff. The closest I got to that was facilitating and publishing the “Women Do and Say the Dumbest Things” book that I designed for the morning radio show hosts on WMJI here in Cleveland.

Me: One thing I’ve learned over my 41 years on this mudball (\*wheeze!\*) is that when you least expect something to happen, it does. You may well publish the stuff of others before you know it.

I’ve been raving about Love and Capes in my zine since Free Comic Book Day. Could you add more reasons for other readers here to get it (other than you could use more sales)?

Thom: What, more sales and throwing my success in the faces of my ex-girlfriends isn’t enough? Okay... how about a top five:

1. It’s fun. In a world with so many Crises and Wars and Invasions, wouldn’t you like to read a comic that makes you feel good?
2. If you’re a guy and your girlfriend/wife/significant other doesn’t read comics, this is the one they will like. It’ll be your gateway into getting them into the hobby.
3. Just about every issue is done-in-one. Complete stories. Beau Smith will be proud. (Caution: May not apply to issues divisible by eight.)

4. It's NOT a parody. It's a humor book, and it has fun IN the superhero world, without making fun OF the superhero world.

5. Harlan Ellison. Mark Waid. Tony Isabella. Douglas Wolk. Johanna Carlson. When's the last time that group agreed on anything? Answer: Love and Capes!

Me: That IS a great group to get praise from! I was already sold. I hope other readers here are as well.

Thank you for your time on this interview Thom. I appreciate it.

Thom: Thanks for doing the interview. It was fun! Thanks for doing the interview. It was fun!

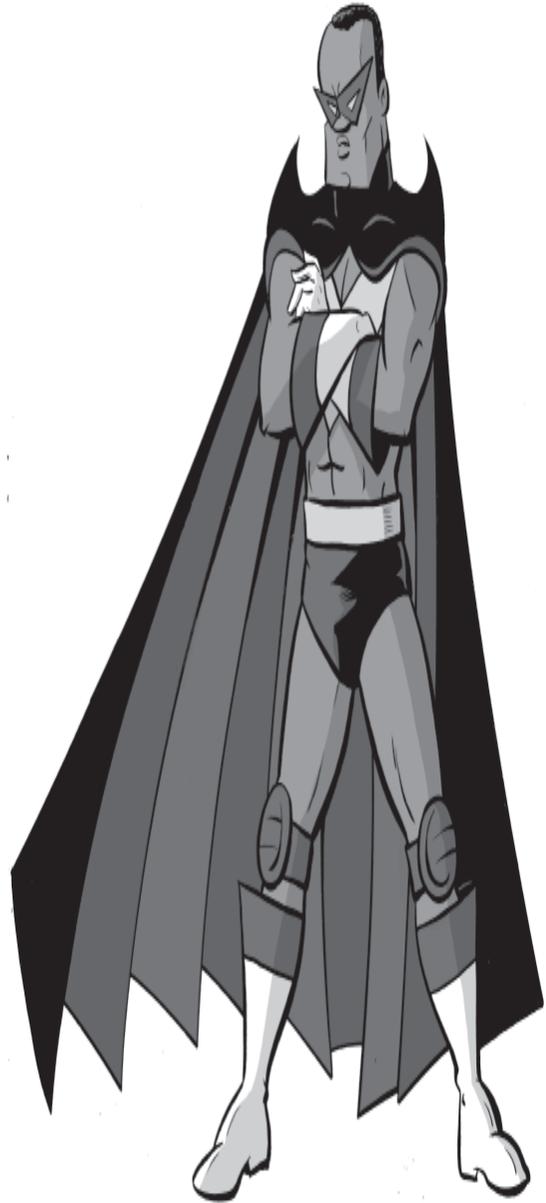
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Here's Thom's info-sig, if you'd like more (like me):

**Thom Zahler**

Thom Zahler Art Studios  
66 East Shore Blvd.  
Timberlake, OH 44095  
www.thomz.com  
p: 440.269.8653 • f: 440.269.8035

*Be sure to get **Love and Capes #7** absolutely free on Free Comic Book Day. And check out my new **Powerful Women** sketchbook, too. All available at [www.loveandcapes.com](http://www.loveandcapes.com)*



# HEY KIDS: LETTERS!

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

June 7, 2008

Congratulations on getting out another issue, Jeff, what with all the other writing commitments you currently have on your plate. And if you really have two scripts and a novel involving “twens” with personal problems, you don’t need counseling...you are your own armchair analyst.

*Actually it’s just one script. - JaB*

Keep up with your networking. It’s not always “who you know”...but knowing the right people never hurt.

In my opinion, **Avatar: Rebirth** needs some work. I think at double the length, you’d be only scratching the surface of the potential of that “training scene” alone. And I’m not quite sure why the Avatar “*reluctantly*” made Billy the offer. The Avatar had been withing a host from 1999 to 2002. Why did it reluctantly have to make Billy the offer. Was time running out? If it was because Billy was dying, you mean to tell me that in the interum 3 years it never came across anyone else who was dying?

I just had significant problems with the wording of that one paragraph.

*Short answer: keep reading. All will be answered. - JaB*

Meanwhile...over in the mainstream comic books...

I have cut everything Spider-Man related from my reserve lists. Not for any economical reasons but because I won’t support Quesada’s raping of the Marvel Universe. Hopefully, if enough people take a stand, their bottom line sales will reflect this.

Another title that I started picking up but will most likely drop soon is Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman has had many ups and downs in recent years. When the series was resurrected after the first Crisis, George Perez took Wonder Woman back to basics and started the character from scratch as an Themysciran (Amazon) emissary of

peace to “Man’s World” and firmly entrenched her story-lines and the menaces she faced in the rich depth and breadth of Greco-Roman myth.

But she’s gone through many hands since then, including John Byrne who re-introduced the concept of the ((shudder)) “invisible jet”. She’s been replaced twice (once by a red-headed Amazon from another Amazon Tribe, and once by her own mother), died and became a Goddess (The Goddess of Truth) and eventually renounced her godhood and became a mere mortal again.

Through it all, for over two decades, they kept true to the character concept of an Ambassador from another culture, with no “secret identity”.

Then along comes the last crisis, in which Wonder Woman is tried in the World Courts for killing Maxwell Lord on international television (on EVERY channel thanks to the Brother I satellite). She subsequently has to escape custody in order to save her people from a simultaneous attack by Brother I’s OMAC soldiers and the U.S. Military (don’t ask!).

At the end everything, when the dust has settled, there is no more Themysciran embassy on U.S. soil and Wonder Woman adopts a “secret identity” as secret agent Diana Prince, working for the DEA investigating and policing super-humans (her first subject being, of course, Wonder Woman).

Then throw in a plot by Circe and Hercules to steal the Amazon’s power and now Wonder Woman only possesses her powers when she’s in costume and, when out of costume, she possesses no powers whatsoever.

This last bit written, of course, by someone who knew nothing about the character when she was hired to write for the title. In the end, she transformed this great multi-layered strong female warrior, one of the three cornerstones of the DC Universe and turned her into the main character of a poorly written sexist T&A jiggle show from the 1970’s.

You’ve come a long way, Sister...NOT !!!

Don’t get me wrong, I was a big fan of the T&A jiggle show back in the day (when I was a hormone-driven teenager) but now I cringe whenever I come across one of these terrible episodes in syndication.

All hope was lost for this character until DC Comics announced that Gail Simone was going to be taking over this character.

For those of you not familiar with Gail Simone, she has done fantastic work mixing humor, adventure and melodrama in titles such as *The Secret Six* and, of course, *Birds of Prey* where she has done a fine job writing strong, realistic, believable female characters such as Black Canary, Huntress and Barbara Gordon/Oracle. All very “human” characters with wants, needs, personalities, strengths and weaknesses of character that make these characters relatable and fun to read. When I heard she was taking over *Wonder Woman*, I was ecstatic. Unfortunately, she has been left with such a mixed up state of affairs with this character that it is clear she is floundering, trying to find a new “voice” for this character.

And she’s not doing so well.

I think Gail Simone would be better off going back to work on *Birds of Prey* and DC would be better off leaving *WW* on the shelf until they can find a writer with a plan to remove all the B.S. “clutter” that her past writers have created and go back to the clean “roots” established by George Perez. Because, frankly, this is one character who is now a total confusing mess.

I think a major problem is that the comic giants are at a loss with many of their characters.

We all know what Quesada has been doing over at Marvel (turning the Marvel Universe into a fascist state, killing off Captain America the symbol of everything truly heroic, undoing 30 years of Spider-Man’s history and character development, just to name but a few) but DC is also pulling things out of their @\$es and then acting all surprised when it turns out to be Sh!t !

Among DC’s recent incomprehensible moves: The aforementioned conversion of *Wonder Woman* from strong iconic female to 70’s TV T&A fodder; the restoration of Superman to his pre-(original)-Crisis levels of being ridiculously powerful to the point where all other characters are a moot point; and the plan to kill of Batman — one of their historically strongest franchise properties — just to compete with Marvel’s assassination of Captain America.

And then, of course, there is the restoration of Barry Allan to the DC Universe.

As you pointed out, Jeff, Barry’s Death wasn’t just some pointless move to eliminate him to make way for newer versions of the character (as with Green Lantern and Green Arrow). Barry’s death actually MEANT something. To many, the Barry Allen flash symbolized the start of the

Silver Age of comic books (when in fact *The Martian Manhunter* was the first new Hero of the Silver Age) and having him die to save the Universe was not only a great way to send off this character and a symbolic gesture for the passing of the Silver Age, but it also served as the ultimate example of Heroic Sacrifice and created a hero for everyone to look up to as a standard (someone who *wasn’t* Superman, for a change). It also adds a dash of “mortality” to DC’s characters. While characters seem to be coming back from the dead left, right and center (Hal, Ollie, Donna, Carter, etc.) the fact that Barry stayed dead sent the message that characters can die and, if their sacrifices are important and noble enough, they will die.

Every time that writers bring back old characters, they cheapen that character’s “death” and make their sacrifice irrelevant and makes it harder and harder for readers to care in the future when characters “die”. Yaaawn....okay who’s got the pool as to when character X-Y-Z will be coming back? What’s that, they’re already advertising his return in this month’s issue of “Previews”? Oh well....

I’m hoping that his “resurrection” will be as brief as Batman’s “death” will inevitably turn out to be.

*Ironic how the eulogy for Martian Manhunter in Final Crisis #2 mentioned hope for a resurrection. - JaB*

One thing that Marvel is doing right these days, are their non-Earth titles including their latest offering: *Guardians of The Galaxy*. I’m really looking forward to seeing how this series turns out. It’s got two of my favorite characters (Gamora and Drax) on the roster so you can be sure I’ll be picking this up in the foreseeable future. Also loving Rocket Raccoon. He’s awesome!

As for your comments on *Countdown*, well I said my peace on this topic last issue and I don’t feel like wasting any more of my life to this topic so....onwards...

Cloverfield

I didn’t see this movie.

When I first saw the ads, I very much wanted to see this film but some critical reviews by some people whose opinions I value made me not want to see this film. As it stands, I will simply await it’s arrival on The Movie Channel and catch it there. But I will use my new toy (and XGA DLP projector, to project it up on my wall for the full “big screen” experience. :)

LATER THAT SAME EVENING..

Well, I watched Cloverfield tonight...and I gotta say, I was underwhelmed. Kinda sorry now that I actually paid the \$4.99 to watch this on Pay-Per-View rather than waiting a month to see it for free. Even more sorry when I realize that there's tax added to the \$4.99.

Technically, I saw where they were going with this film and I understand the whys and the wherefores of using the "camera" angle (no pun intended) but I think they made a huge mistake by having the camera handled all night by the "douchebag" (their words, not mine, but who am I to argue).

His stupidity and idiotic dialogue made you want HIM to get eaten at any moment and really interfered with any empathy one tries to build up for the characters.

About the only characters I had any empathy for were Rob and Lily (which is too bad because I'm sure I was supposed to empathize with Rob and Beth as they were the two main romantic leads of the piece).

As I said, Hud is a douchebag and that character just begs for someone or something to kill him early in the film. Unfortunately we have to wait until the end for that happy occurrence (sorry for the spoiler, there!).

Marlena is so odd and off-putting that her sudden death just makes you go "M'eh."

Jason (J.J.) seems like a relatable character but he bites it so close to the beginning that his presence in the film is almost non-existent. The same can be said for Beth whose is there at the beginning and there at the end but missing throughout so much of the middle of the film, you just don't have time to develop and warm and fuzzy feelings for her.

And let's face it, bringing a date to the going-away party for someone who's in love with you is a pretty cold and heartless thing to do.

Which leaves Rob and Lily.

Rob, the hero of the piece who rushes back into the heart of the city to rescue the woman who tore out his heart and Lily, the strong female lead who has already lost her man (Jason) but won't abandon his brother (Rob) no matter what the cost. Rob is all she has left of Jason and she's not going to let anything happen to him.

Is it any wonder I could relate more to Lily than I could to Beth? More's the pity considering the whole point to this movie was the love story between Rob and Beth (the

monster(s) is(are) really just a plot device creating the adversity they must overcome to be reunited).

But getting back to the camera work for a moment, the reels of footage of feet and floors was both monotonous and frustrating at the same time. However, the night-cam shot was almost enough to make up for all of that as it had the right impact at the right time.

But I think the key plot hook of the "camera" work was the snippets and glimpses we get of the tape that was being taped over. I think if we'd seen more of this, it would have helped to let the viewers empathize with Rob and Beth as the couple-that-should-have-been.

There was just so much opportunity for character development, to show these characters bonding under these surreal and horrifying circumstances that was just left unexplored due to the film's less-than-90-minute running time.

I think if they had added another 20-30 minutes of dialogue and character interaction, this could have been a movie highly regarded by the critics (and the fans) instead of the lacklustre commentary that it has received almost universally.

In my opinion, this could have been a really good film. Maybe not a great film, but a good film. But they should have spent a little less money on special effects and a little more on film for the camera so they could have extended the character pieces by at least another half hour.

*Wow, I bow to your greater powers of critique. ;) - JaB*

...AND NOW BACK TO OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED LETTERS OF COMMENT...

And that's pretty much all I have to say about Issue 5...other than the fact that I am very much looking forward to Issue 6.

Keep up the good work,

Percy

Lloyd Penney

1706-24 Eva Rd.

Etobicoke, ON

M9C 2B2

July 7, 2008

Dear Jeff from Jamestown:

Many thanks for the 5<sup>th</sup> The Original Universe. Wish I could whomp up cover art like that, but I'd be in the artist's list instead of the letter column. Anyway, here's the zine, and here's the loc.

I notice from the list at the front that there's at least three names I recognize, and I'll peek at the locol to see that all five correspondents are Canadian. Not many zines can make that claim.

*I like this too. And we have even more Canadians now! - JaB*

I've never participated in NaNoWriMo or Script Frenzy, but then, I can't sit down and type all day long. Perhaps I just don't have the concentration for it. I seem to have found my niche in fanzines, and I'm satisfied with it. What's in the zine from Tennessee?

*It's mostly a perzine. - JaB*

I have never been an athlete; never was involved in sport when I was little, never showed any interest or promise, and even if I had shown interest, it's unlikely my parents would have been able to afford the equipment or fees. I've had to be fairly independent in this. Perhaps having shown some athleticism might have come in handy for me as I approach age 50, but I can't regress and edit my life, as much as I might want to.

Avatar chose wisely...today's comics and SF fans would be more than likely to accept super-powers or proof of aliens than most, would do it by just saying, "Cool." Avatar has the typical superhero morality, though...use your powers only for good, and not for revenge, no matter how sweet it is. (Is he registered with le Régie de Superhéros et Pouvoirs Surhumain?)

Wall-E is a great movie. Saw it once and loved it, and want to see it again, which I rarely do with movies. Die hard animation fans, cranky critics, anti-Disney and Pixar

people...well, they love it too, and some say it's the perfect movie. It only stayed at #1 for a week, but it's still doing well, and I can see it doing better than Finding Nemo and The Incredibles.

The letter column...perhaps I should get that swab done to see if I might be a match for Emru. Next weekend is both Polaris 22 and Paradise Comics Comicon, so we'll both be in Toronto, some clicks apart. Enjoy the comicon, and we'll be assisting with a birthday party Friday night at Polaris. If someone with the comicon now works with Hobbystar, then it is done. I know so many people who simply will not attend a Hobbystar event.

*Much as many of us would avoid Creation Cons if they still came to Canada. - JaB*

The taping at the International Academy of Design and Technology...it was a radio play version of the story The Drop by John Christopher, taken from the March 1955 issue of Galaxy Magazine. Don't know why or how they decided on that story, but it is a good one, and bless their hearts for it. I hope that the final product will be ready soon; I will be getting my contributor's copy soon, and they must provide a complete, ready-for-sale copy to their professors for a final mark.

Along with Wall-E, I got to see via DVD My Big Fat Greek Wedding. Not SF or comic, but for anyone who has ever had anything to do with a wedding (Yvonne and I hit 25 years in late May), it would be funnier if it wasn't so true. Having to deal with meddling families and friends is a pain, and I remember what we had to do to mingle with a family of Ontarians of Newfie descent (mine) and a family of Ontarians of Québec descent (Yvonne's). What a pain that was...

I don't know of many people around here that go to the Motor City Comic Con in the Detroit area, but it's a huge show, and it's easier than going to San Diego. It's a good bet that the Marvel Handbook is never going to be a school textbook, but if they're going to write Canadian history, they should at least get it right.

Yvonne and I travelled to Windsor to visit with friends, and to take a tour of the Crown Royal bottling plant in Amherstburg, just across the river from Michigan. When we were in Windsor, we stayed once again with Momcat,

and finally got some pictures. Momcat is a very affectionate tabby, and she's the one we almost took home. She is 15 years old and still very kittenish, and we are taking every visit as if it will be the last one.

Anyway, time to go and get this to you for the deadline. Take care, and enjoy your trip to Toronto in a few days.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Dear JAB,

Thanks for adding me to your distribution list and for sending me issues 3 and 5 of TOU to get me started.

Covering two issues like this I've got comments spread out among the many sections, so my comments may sound a bit disjointed, but here goes anyhow.

Glad to hear that you are now a Ubuntu Linux adoptee. Linux really is the way to go and while I've not fully divested myself of Windoze myself, I'm the resident Linux geek at work and a proponent of all thing

open source. Just remember that SELinux is your friend, so no matter what you do, do not turn it off (but Permissive mode is OK for starters).

Not completing your goal of 50K words for NaNoWriMo 2007, may be a bit of a disappointment at first. But look at it another way. You've still reached that goal 4 times more than myself and even entering it without finishing is yet another attempt that I cannot count myself as having tried. In other words, the attempt is an accomplishment in itself, so kudos for that.

*Thanks. - JaB*

My favorite section by far is the "Comic Thoughts". As a onetime naysayer of the medium (I'm ashamed to say that

I once considered comics juvenile without really giving them a chance), I've become a great fan

of just about every type of comic out there from the Superhero staples, to the indie self published one-shots. In fact, it is the very diversity found in comics that I now enjoy as I find it can be any and all things

at once. But with so many titles out there, it is hard if not impossible to keep track of it all, so your reviews help out in that area. I found your tribute to the late Steve Gerber especially poignant as I recently

picked up a few old issues of Howard the Duck myself for old times sake. While I am slowly catching up with all that missed over the years (I have read mandatory titles like "The Watchmen", "Maus", and other

'classics'), I am as interested in older material that may be of interest as I am of the latest new titles. So do feel free to give feedback on some of your favorite comics of yesteryear from time to time. Help this old dog learn a new, um old, trick.

*We'll all here hopefully help. - JaB*

My comments regarding movies reviews mirror those I have for comic commentary with the exception that I have always loved movies. It's not as hard keeping up with movies these days, but there are more and more genre and comic derivative movies coming out so it does take some time to absorb all of them in a timely fashion. While the comic inspired movies always make me cringe a bit when I hear that Hollywood wants to take a stab at them (visions of failures like The Punisher and even the recent Superman Returns come to mind), thankfully most of the offerings of late have been respectful of the source and are positive additions. The success of Spiderman on the big screen seemed to be hard to top, but this year both Ironman and The Dark Knight have demonstrated that Spidey was not a fluke. Now if only Hollywood can do the same with my beloved "Planet of the Apes" and give it a REAL revival boost, I would be in heaven.

*Right now a sequel to the new Punisher (Thomas Jane, not Dolph Lundgren) is being filmed. - JaB*

You'll notice that I've neglected to comment on Avatar: Rebirth. This is because I prefer to read stories in large doses and not snippets. So I'll wait until I've got more in my hands before I dig in. All the more

incentive for you to keep up with the progress.

*I intend to.* - JaB

One last thing I'd like to mention. My 'to do' (in my lifetime) list also includes that San Diego Comicon virtual checkbox. I don't know if that wish will ever be fulfilled, but I keep hoping. Then again, there

have been other checkboxes on my To Do wishlist that I never thought would come to pass that have, so maybe San Diego is not just a pipedream. Perhaps I'll see you there one day. Wouldn't that be something?

A la prochaine.

Dario

Jeffrey Allan Boman  
6900 Cote St-Luc Road #708  
Montreal, QC H4V 2Y9

July 30, 2008

Hi gang!

Me talking about anything else of my life after already doing so in this zine would be redundant, so this LOC will just be replies to your letters instead!

**Lloyd:** I've heard a LOT of good press for the Iron Man film. I'm even more eager for the DVD! // Re: blood samples for bone marrow... the testing is even less intrusive, as I described. // Re: PCCC and Polaris... a shame that both you and Justin were at the latter. // Re: Comic character trademarks... the entire **Nestor** hero line are in the public domain. **Dynamic Entertainment** is using them for their **Project: Super-hero** titles, and Alan Moore wrote a series with them in 2003. The interpretation is copyrighted, but the characters they're based on can't be. // Re: Transformers question... the second film is being shot now. The logic you mentioned: too much thought for the makers! // I've bookmarked the Cartoon Brew site now. // See you at Con\*Cept!

**Percy:** My teeth still hurt at mention of Vista... // Re: Hunters Inc.... appreciate another sale. I don't know how they would fit into your game though, except as adversaries. // Re: JMS and One More Day... I wasn't calling his original writing sloppy. What he was forced to

do couldn't be his best work though; when you aren't happy with what you're doing, it shows, because your heart isn't in it. // I'm actually wondering, since I don't read it, is Joe even on **Thor** now? // Mandarin hinted at in **Iron Man**?? Now I'm even more eager to see it!

**Justin:** Welcome to the zine! // I think I'll drop **Booster Gold** soon after Geoff Johns leaves it. I disliked Dan Jurgens as a writer ever since the last issue of his debut **Sun Devils** ages ago, and he never really grabbed me in the original Booster title. Maybe he's improved; I'll see... / / I looked for a trade of **World War Hulk** at the con. No luck, unfortunately.

**Matthew:** Those bits of mistaken Canadian stuff from **Marvel** are upsetting, but not really surprising. As well as the "House of Lords" gaffe that I mentioned here they had Northstar and Aurora in **Alpha Flight** using what are swear words here in Quebec. While tabernacle and host aren't bad words in English, the French equivalents here are. // That Ed Brubaker is a **Marvel** exclusive upsets me enough. I think exclusives have actually harmed comics anyway by limiting great creators from playing around with all of the available characters – only the ones at the company they're signed to. // Even PAD showed some character growth in **Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man** when he had Peter teaching at his old high school.

**Me:** My ToDo lists will finally change a little here!

See you in 60,

JaB

Matthew Surridge

5154 Sherbrooke Street West, apartment 1

Montreal, Quebec

Canada

H4A 1T4

Querent@gmail.com

Hi, Jeff.

Hope things are well with you. Six issues of *The Original Universe* already — congratulations! That's a nice stack of issues. Hope it keeps running for a good while longer!

Good to hear about you reconnecting with your producer. One hears horror stories of all sorts about projects being trashed by non-creative higher-ups. Glad you guys have got past that. I hope the piece you and he are embarking on bears fruit.

Avatar is turning into an interesting story. The disembodied intelligence teaching the boy how to be a super-hero is interesting; vaguely like Firestorm or the current Nova, but definitely distinct from those. It also gives a good reason for the whole secret identity concept.

On to comics news:

I have mixed feelings about the return of Barry Allen. I'm going to assume there's already plans for Wally — along with Jay Garrick and the rest of the Flashes — but I certainly agree that the revival tends to weaken the original *Crisis*. I can remember my father pointing out to me a newspaper article about the death of the Flash and Supergirl. Which means it was maybe the first comic-book death to make an impact in the mainstream media.

I dunno ... comics companies tend to argue that bringing a character back to life doesn't weaken the original story, which is always still there. And that's true, but I think it ignores the way a mythos works. Within the context of the DC Universe and its history, you could always say that *Crisis* was important — even if the continuity it rewrote was in turn rewritten — by saying that was when the Flash died. You can't say that any more, meaning that *Crisis* is now that much closer to being just another crossover story.

The really interesting thing, to me, is as you mention there's literally a whole generation of comics readers who weren't alive when *Crisis* was published. Anybody under 22, more or less. It's pretty safe to say that people under 25 and possibly even 30 won't have any memories of Barry Allen as an ongoing character. Given that, I really wonder what the reaction to his revival will be.

Incidentally, you note that the media is talking about DC in a way it hasn't since the death of Superman; it's funny, but I hadn't thought of it that way. It's quite right, of course, but I hadn't realised it had been so long since DC got that kind of media attention (well, maybe the Bane/Batman back-breaking thing got them a bit, but that was much the same era anyway).

The *Legion of Three Worlds* story looks interesting, but I'm wary of Johns' tendency to cripple characters. I also don't care much for Superman-Prime as a bad guy; I find the best villains tend to be ones who we can empathise with to a limited extent. Doctor Doom's the classic example

— a thorough-going villain, but one with a spark of nobility. On the other hand, a character like the Red Skull is so dedicated to a specific noxious ideal that he becomes a personification (in the best comic-book tradition) of that ideal; so that character gains some heft out of that.

Put it this way: somebody once said that we tend to emphasise with characters that are either likeable or interesting — well, the best villains are interesting, and, for me, Superman-Prime just isn't. He's a parody of a certain fan mindset, and that's fine. He is what he is. But I just don't find that makes for an interesting character.

On another note, like you I enjoy the cosmic side of Marvel, and I quite like *Guardians of the Galaxy* so far. It's a nice change of pace. For a while I've felt that Marvel's cosmic events have been less "cosmic" and more "space opera." Which is not bad, but it seems like there's less of a focus on the sense-of-wonder and radical ideas of stuff like Starlin's *Warlock* or even Kirby's *Thor*, and more of a focus on space battles and things blowing up real big. *Guardians*, along with *Nova*, is heading back in the other direction. Plus ... I can remember reading the first appearance of Rocket Raccoon in *The Incredible Hulk* back when I was really young, and it's a blast seeing him being (slightly) reinterpreted and reused.

On the other hand, *Countdown* was just a complete misfire. It seemed to me not only bad on its own terms, but also a poor fit with the rest of the DC Universe. It certainly failed as a lead-in to *Final Crisis*; Grant Morrison's said in an interview that he had no connection with the series, and had no say on what went on in either that book or the *Death of the New Gods* miniseries. With the result that some of the plot elements of those series conflict with *Final Crisis*. In fact, I'd go so far as to say *Final Crisis* makes sense only if you ignore *Countdown* altogether.

I'd like to sound a note of agreement with Percy Hodge over the *One More Day* story in *Spider-Man*. I have to assume it's going to be revisited somewhere along the line; the secret communication between Mary Jane and Mephisto almost assures that. But I wonder how that'll work; people seem to be getting used to the *Brand New Day* stories, and bringing back the *OMD* plotline could just reopen old wounds. We'll see.

Personally, I'd agree that the pre-*OMD* stuff was more interesting than *Brand New Day* because the characters and situations were evolving. I will say that *BND* has been entertaining — but looking over the writers and artists involved, it'd be pretty hard to imagine that group not producing a book that was entertaining at the least. Marvel claims to be satisfied with the sales so far (not that

they'd be likely to say otherwise); we'll see what happens as it goes along.

*Part of this LOC is an article elsewhere in this zine. – JaB*

Finally, I note that with Tony Stark now headlining the new *Invincible Iron Man* title, the original *Iron Man* book will be taken over by, and re-titled for, *War Machine*. This interests me, since it kinda follows the pattern of *The Incredible Hulk* becoming *The Incredible Hercules*. Basically, it's a backdoor launch of a new title. It's a novel approach, at least — except insofar as it recalls Marvel in the 1960s working super-heroes into its monster books, with Thor taking over *Journey Into Mystery* and the like.

In this marketplace, launching new series is incredibly difficult; Marvel may have come up with a sneaky but effective way to give a new title a built-in audience. But then, *Incredible Hercules* is (I think) really one of the best books out there, which probably hasn't hurt its sales figures. Greg Pak's done an excellent job working Greek myth, super-heroes, old Marvel continuity, and new characters into an exciting and surprising story. It's funny — a recent scene with Ares and Wonder Man was probably the most hysterical thing I've seen in a super-hero book this year — and it's clever. So ... we'll see what happens with *War Machine*.

Well, I've rambled on too much already. Thanks for bringing us *The Original Universe*, and I'm looking forward to seeing more!

Take care,

Matthew Surridge

*That wraps up a long LOC section in our biggest issue so far!*

*See you in about 60,*

*Jeffrey Allan Boman*

## Coming in issue 7:

Lots of stuff again!:

- \* Avatar: Rebirth Part 3 finally
- \* A Conversation with Liana K
- \* some goodies for the issue originally planned for this one.
- \* letters!

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

With issue 7, it would be cool to have a large letters section again (hint, hint)

\* \* \*

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

## WAHF

Gregory Woronchak, Justin Mohareb (both with articles) Olivia Arrow (with zines), Peter Halasz.

## ***TODO LIST FOR 2008***

- Write More Mutants and Masterminds works
- GenCon 2010, maybe (Anticipation in Montreal 2009 comes
- Montreal Comicon Sept. 6-7, 2008

## ***TODO (HOPEFULLY!) SOMEDAY***

- San Diego Comicon (the fires out now)

## ***ZINE EXCHANGES***

Seeing how other zines just tell you how to get what's listed without reviewing them, I'm trying to follow suit.

**React to Broken Dishes** Editor/ Publisher Olivia Arduini. Contact Olivia (hssreader@hotmail.com) for more information.

**Heart:** Editor/publisher Olivia Arduini. Contact: hssreader@hotmail.com

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