



THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE

NUMBER 8

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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.

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Next Deadline: **March 19, 2009.**

Credits in Editor's Corner.

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All characters (c) to their respective companies.

EDITOR'S CORNER

Here's how hardcore a tech geek I am: as I type these words, my PC is down due to the power supply burning out. Instead of just sitting around I took my wireless keyboard and my Palm Pilot to start.

+++

I have to start with this: NaNoWrimo 2008.

First off: congratulations to Matthew Surridge for his sophomore year win! I didn't think he would make it at first, but he came from behind for an epic victory.

Also to friend Patricia Flewwelling (Margo Lane on the forum) for completing a trilogy with over 175 thousand words, making her our local hero for 2008. Years ago a guy in LA said he completed 3 books, but I saw the proof here.

This was a tough year for me due to the news I e-mailed to you, but Emru became the newest muse for me, refusing to allow me to quit because of him.

I ALMOST won this year, making it to less than 1400 words away - but exhaustion zapped me out 90 minutes before the deadline time. It was a victory though, on several levels. Firstly, I wrote more than 20 K words in 8 days. It also gave me the notion for next year's novel, one thematically a sequel.

Yes, I'll be doing it again next year. NaNo celebrated its first decade this year; I plan to do it for a decade myself. That means I have 4 more to go.

This year's novel though? I'm not finished yet, so I'll soon finish this draft. The greatest sin that a writer can commit is to not complete what you've started.

NaNo this year had some positive results: we now have a regular writing group stemming from it called Hypergraphia. As I write these words we just had our first write-in meeting.

+++

Before I work on it and next November's, my PC is in the shop. This makes the tenth time since I got it in 2002.

Folks who've followed me all that time will remember these all-too-many headaches. 2 years ago, a friend of mine confirmed my theory about the headaches: they are thanks

to technician incompetence at the stores we brought it to. They often put sub-standard parts with planned frequent breakdowns, leading to more need for repair and the expense involved

While I realize that bringing it to a store defeats that situation, it's at a different company right now, and this will be the last time. After Anticipation, the Montreal Worldcon in August 2009 I will begin to save up for my friend to build me a new machine (he's sick at the moment as I write this). I know he does good work, and unlike the stores, his work lasts.

Update: My system was back repaired January 3rd. It was a case of a defective power supply, as I thought.

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Member Gregory Woronchak produced the cover for this issue. I've known him since he first joined COMICOPIA many years ago, when he was still a student at Dawson College here in Montreal. He now does a lot of work in the animation industry.

He also does other illustration work. He was a featured artist for DANGER MAGNET, a PDF-based RPG magazine. I e-mailed him about it when I saw his name in its Halloween issue. :)

+++

At holiday time this year, I finally joined the late 20th century: as a gift I now have a cell phone.

I'll only use it for emergency calls, granted (cell calls are too expensive for more), but having it is still a relief! I've customized the screen with a photo of my cat Squeaky; the camera phone photo isn't great though, so I'll try to put a better one.

+++

Happy 2009! Right now (Jan. 2) I'm at my youngest sister's house in Ottawa. She has a Wii, and I was just playing it against her and my mom. Both of them kicked my butt on it. I may work as Tech Support, but I'm crap when it comes to game systems.

We got to talk with my other sister in Montreal and my aunt visiting one of her daughters in Cleveland via my sister's laptop, Webcam and Skype. With a Webcam, videophones are now a reality — and thanks to Skype, extra long distance fees are no longer an issue.

I got myself a good Webcam to do this on the 4th. If you want to Skype me, my account is **notinnhl**.

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My nephew had his 13th birthday after Xmas. I don't have any photos, but between the time I saw him last year before his elementary school graduation and even Canadian Thanksgiving 2008 he had already changed a lot! The photo I showed here no longer reflects him.

I was there a few days after he was born; I have photos from that time (I already reassured him that none of them are embarrassing). I'm a bit stunned — so saying that my sister is bummed out as well is an understatement.

+++

I got my royalties at the end of the year for Hunters' Inc. For a book published more than 2 years ago (especially one no longer sold once 2nd Edition Mutants and Masterminds rules were published) I didn't expect any, so this was gravy. It isn't a lot (\$2.98 USD) but it was more gratifying than anything.

When I have my PC back I intend to finally correct the stats for the second edition version, then redo the stats for my as-yet unpublished sequel book A Mystery Wrapped in an Enigma. When that is done, I'm trying to interest my publisher in making my Kindredspace SF setting under the Savage Worlds rules. I think I would have an easier time designing them there. If he goes for it and it sells well, I have Children of the Grass waiting in the wings, and my potential screenwriting project...

When do I sleep? What's that?

+++

In the category of "I must be a masochist": I've been the moderator on a forum devoted to pro wrestling on The Bob Freeman forums. The users there are immature cyber bullies and similar tripe. One or two of them (mainly me and Bob) actually post about the topic. I've had several twinks banned from the forum, deleted a lot of crap, and had some downright dumb situations. The latest: I blasted Dubya recently from the WWE Tribute to the Troops show. I had one guy swear that as a Canadian I have no right to say anything about the President, that history will show him as the best ever, etc. Did I mention that every second word was swearing?

I can already hear you ask why I even bother devoting the energy to it. Well, I've thought the same thing. I've spoken of my frustration with it on my Livejournal, Percy has heard

me on the Midnight's Lair forums, Dario on The BBS at the End of the Universe ones... with my PC down, I didn't intend to go back, but I did go to check it out when I got my PC back.

To quote Al Pacino in Godfather III: Just when I thought I was out, they pulled me back in! The same person cursing me out wanted me to come back. I caved.

Hopefully if this system fails again I'll be strong enough to just leave.

+++

I bought a book on living on the income of freelancing. Unfortunately it all deals with copywriting, a field I don't work in.

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This will hopefully be an issue with a lot of content, so I'll let you get to it! I was upset that last issue felt so thin. Hopefully, this zine will make up for it.

Why do I love Matt Fraction so much? OR A Daily Dose of Iron

by Justin Mohareb

Iron Man

Okay, love's a bit of an exaggeration. But over the past year and a bit he's gone from "guy I don't know" to "guy whose stuff I will buy sight unseen".

He's done some neat things, including the sadly deceased The Order, a superhero book that reads like an examination of reality tv & celebrity culture, and an independent book that reads like "What if... Mick Jagger was Nick Fury's Son in a hyperscientific world of adventure and espionage and just a little subliminally suggested incest?", Casanova.

My two favourite books of his were his run on Immortal Iron Fist, on which he shared plotting duties with Ed Brubaker, and his new Iron Man series.

I think my personal obstinacy is one of the biggest driving forces for my newfound fanboyishness. I've seen too many really, really dumb people trashing on his work. The dumbest was the reaction to his description of his Iron Man villain, Zebediah Stane, as an "open source villain", as compared to the proprietary way Stark handles the Iron Man technology. He used buzz words, you see, to explain the story he was going to tell.

This got filtered through the Internet Idiot Stream (IIS) to mean that Iron Man's new archvillain would be fighting him with Unix. To quote the kids, the stupid, it burns.

The series was very entertaining, taking Iron Man around the world to fight Stane's terrorist network. It did include a new iteration on AIM (Supervillain thinktank/Beekeepers Advanced Idea Mechanics) as AGM, Advanced Genocide Mechanics, with their leader MODOG, the Mental Organism Designed Only for Genocide. MODOG got thrown into space, which was kinda funny.

He also introduced a Philippine superteam (whose name escapes me), which makes them the sixth country in the Marvel U to field a national team, after the US, USSR, UK, China, and Canada. Oh, and Apartheid era Not South Africa. Did Hauptmann Deutschland keep his team of West German supers together after the fall of the Berlin wall? You have to love any team that includes a guy named Zeitgeist. And the Japanese probably had one, too, with Wolverine in it. And possibly Latveria. And... Okay, yeah, there's a lot of Marvel countries with national superteams.

The story line was interesting, although since it's woven into Marvel Continuity, there was at least one cliffhanger that really, really wasn't (and had, in fact, been done 20 years prior). Stane made an interesting villain, although I think that since Iron Man fought his father six months ago in continuity we must consider abandoning the story as horrible, or I could just vent on Marvel Time another time.

I know that some people don't like his Punisher series, but those seem to be entirely composed of hardcore Punisher fans, and anyone who refers to the character as "Frank" in casual conversation loses a lot of leverage in any debate. I did read the World War Hulk crossover issue, which had very little to do with the WWH shenanigans.

The Iron Fist series was also very fun. It's only flaw was that it was obviously (and some would say gratuitously)

written for trade paperback. There are several flashback/historical issues that aren't being collected in the main trades, but are expected to get their own book later.

The Fraction & Brubaker's last arc, The Seven Capital Cities of Heaven, took the core Iron Fist concept and just pushed it forward a bit.

Brubaker and Fraction have heavily expanded on the Iron Fist mythos. They've expanded on the historical Iron Fists, and made Kun Lun one of the seven cities of Heaven (plus one of The Other Place). So the Seven Capital Cities

includes a kung fu tournament, reminiscent of Mortal Kombat in a non-sucky way, to see which heavenly city will be the leader, as it were. Add in a Hydra plan to destroy them using a magnetic bomb train, and you get a lot of fun.

They also wove in backstory featuring Orson Randall, an earlier Iron Fist who was a two fist, double barreled pulp hero of the old school.

At this point, anything Fraction's worked on is either carte blanche Buy or a heavy look at. What's odd is he's a guy of my generation, but his work seems to be very energetic and fresh, instead of playing continuity rugby like a lot of other enjoyable work out there. I like that. His ear for characters and dialogue is also a plus.



Avatar Rebirth

WHAT CAME BEFORE:

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...

Billy was ready to abuse the powers he'd been given by using them to attack Nick and his gang. Avatar stopped it immediately. Punishment - and training -- was coming

NOW

Billy found a real test

"Perfect! This is just what we need."

He'd found an old factory building with large cogs, and old fan blades, out in the open from a time when safety from harm wasn't as important.

"I have unlocked your powers now." They lie still bothered him, even if he felt it was necessary.

Billy concentrated for a moment. His clothing and features changed: his hair became blond and long. His clothing changed to a mauve single leotard.

"Now fly around the obstacles. Try the flight plan I've shown you in your mind."

Billy lifted off the floor. He started to fly the path – slowly at first. He slowed down even more when he bumped into a fan blade.

"You can turn on your protective shield before you fly." Billy's brow furrowed for a moment. A sparkling field appeared around his body. *"Now try it again. You will not be harmed by anything around you."*

He did just that. He lifted himself off the ground and again followed the path – still slowly, but this time without hesitation. He weaved around the gears and blades. He veered toward one of the blades, but as Avatar had said, they didn't hurt him. There was a loud clanging as it struck his field. The blade tip shook and bent away from him, but there was no impact.

Avatar was pleased. Billy had a pleasant feeling wash through his body. *"That was good. Now, fly it again. Repeat it until I say that you are ready to stop."*

Billy stated to fly it, faster this time. He was able to veer around obstacles more easily. He repeated it, and each time he was able to make small turns in the air with more and more confidence. He felt pleasure in his mind grow with each pass.

"This is the best that you can do right now with training. You will only learn more when you have to fly. I do not hope for that to happen too soon though, for that would mean you would likely be in combat. I do not want to put a child into a war zone."

"I'm not a kid Avatar. You worry too much."

"Perhaps. Regardless we are now done. Land back at the proper site to power down." There was a wave of disappointment that washed across his face, but he did as he was told. Shortly after his appearance rippled back to what it was, his clothing again becoming his jeans, t-shirt and windbreaker. His face and hair was his own again.

It was time to get back to the real world. Billy heard six words he dreaded. *"Time to get back to school."* He began to shuffle back, again slowly.

Outside of the city, the sinister cloud of dark energy appeared. It had found its destination through the power spikes in the region.

It knew where its adversary was now. It just needed one other important element to achieve its task: a host. As energy alone it couldn't manifest fully on this plane, couldn't touch Avatar. To do that it would need solid hands.

Through its searching was what it thought was a solution. It headed there now.

"Professor, we have an energy reading now."

The tech sat in front of a bank of computers in Professor Malick's new offices.

As he had told the rental agent, he only had one other employee with him. Mind you, there wasn't really room for more; he had had other underlings move in these large banks of computers and his surgery lab, and they took up most of the free floor space. The satellite relay tower and computer were so large that they dwarfed the man sat at them.

"Watch for another energy spike then attempt to triangulate a location." The Professor ran a hand through his beard and saw strands of gray. It was time dye it black again. He didn't have a mirror handy, but he suspected his hair would need it too. One of the headaches of aging...

He couldn't stop a predatory grin from spreading over his face. "We'll have you again soon, Avatar. This time you will give me what I want." Sure enough, a gray hair was near him on the floor. "It can't be soon enough." he muttered. "Well?" he turned to his employee. "what are you waiting for? Get to it!"

Billy's mom looked him over when he got home from school. He had a welt developing on his right cheek.

"What happened?" Her voice was full of concern. As she asked she studied the mark on his face in the light. It was already turning a bluish-purple.

He gently pulled her inquisitive fingers away. "Don't freak out mom. I just met a basketball too close in gym, that's all. Nothing for you to worry about. I got taken to the nurse right away."

"But the school didn't call me..."

"It happened so fast. Plus, the accident was so not a big deal. the school didn't want to make you worry about it."

She didn't look very pleased by that answer. "Well... I better make sure that dinner doesn't burn, but if you want to talk about this some more, we can do so later."

Billy watched her leave to the kitchen. When she had gone, Avatar spoke in his head.

"Basketball? Is that what you call being punched in the face these days?"

'Don't find that funny right now. You could have stopped it anyway. If I could use my TK, it wouldn't have been a problem to have Nick's fist miss me, or I could have used that protective shield to soften the blow. He'd be so busy with his sore knuckles, I don't think he'd even notice the air in front of me sparkling. Even a little assistance would've helped, but did you give me any? Nooo...'

"You did this yourself, by abusing use of these powers for personal benefit. If you had not been so willful, then you would not be in such a dilemma."

'Well, your sense of... well, I guess goodness... really helped today. Because of it, Nick Malick got to bully me again -'

"WAIT." One word, but so loud in his head that he couldn't ignore it. *"What did you call him?"*

'Nick. You've heard that name before...'

"Not that. His last name."

'Malick. Why does that matter? A bully is a bully, no matter his name.'

That was true, but that name... it brought back a memory from long ago...

August 11, 1958

The surviving members of the Vanguard of Victory stood together on a hill in a clearing miles from Chicago, Silhouette's stomping grounds. They were far enough

from other people that they could safely be in civilian clothing.

Two of them had large wooden crates near them: Joseph and Marlene Brewster, Powerhouse and Meteorite. Joe was tall and blocky, a nonchalant air on his innocent face (despite the horrors of Europe during WW II, that hadn't changed) and his buzz-cut brown hair blowing in the breeze. The matron of the team, Marlene, was a little less tall. She had long blonde hair tied back.

"So your minds are set on this?"

That was Alexander Walburton, Silhouette. He was tall and thin, a man with light brown hair. "I have ties here, so I have to stay. You, however...?"

Joe nodded. "Ya know we have a promise to keep." He looked to a clay urn on one of the crates. That was the ashes of Toma Winga, the Magician. "We said we would bring him home... while we do, me an' Mar' wanted to make a fresh start, get away from tha' real ugly stuff here." He turned to the other figure, the librarian Frederick Mierden. "Tha' invite is on tha' table ta' join us Avatar."

Frederick had been given the Offer when bank robbers had shot him during a trip to cash a check at a local bank.

He smiled then shook his head. "*Your* offer is kind... but mine requires me to stay where I'm needed by my superiors. That is here."

Joe nodded, but had a very serious look on his face while he did. "Don't forget: ya have enemies now, but they got families too. Someday you're gonna be faced with them too."

"I have known that for lifetimes Joe. I am here when they are not. Many descendants have come after me for centuries, and I have always survived them. You don't have to worry."

"Well, as long as ya know. I tried. We will visit sometimes." He turned to his wife and the crates then nodded. She studied a spot in the open air in front of her, then lifted a charm in her right hand. A beam left it. Where it landed, a small dot of light appeared and began to grow larger. It became a disc of light, but one that made no sound; in fact it was the quietest and calmest area around them.

With the charm no longer needed she put it in a shirt pocket then took the clay urn in her hands. She walked forward into the disc of light. She turned back for a moment to mouth a goodbye, then she was gone.

Joe lifted the strap of a crate in each hand. Each one had to weigh at least a half ton, but he didn't show it. He just smiled sheepishly at his friends before he too walked into the disc to disappear. It closed behind them a minute later.

Joe and Marlene had brought Toma home. They were in Skandara now.

Professor Malick must have had family... a wife or maybe a sister? He or she (no. The same last name would be a brother, so he) must have had children. Could this Nick be a grandson or great nephew... ?

'Avatar, where did you go just now? One minute you were asking about Nick, then you vanished.'

He composed his thoughts, again hiding them from Billy.

"Nothing. It is nothing to concern you. Just a memory... you better go to your mother before she worries even more."

Billy shrugged, then did just that.

"Well? Where is my target?"

Professor Malick stood over his seated staff member. The man was seated at his computer display terminal. The professor stood above him.

"I don't have him yet sir. He hasn't used his powers again since we traced him earlier. We don't have the data we need for triangulation."

The Professor sneered. "That is not acceptable. Find another way to get the proper information at once! But first, get me a strong black coffee."

The computer operator wondered both how to complete this task as well as at the boss's priorities. Professor Malick just saw this employee sit and stare. "Well! What are you waiting for - permission? I asked you for a beverage. Go get it!"

The operator was more qualified than such a task required, but he knew the penalties of not giving the Professor what

he wanted - and there was nobody else here to back him up either. He got up to get to the small kitchen area with haste.

Professor Malick watched his employee go with a scowl. "Good hirelings are difficult to find," he muttered.

A black cloud, small but radiating great power, appeared in front of him. Before he could register his surprise, a voice manifested in his mind.

"You want to catch Avatar. I can help you."

"Who or what are you, and how can you know what I want?"

"Your desires have echoed through space for many years. As to me I am... a friend. That is all you need." It let its words seep in. *"For now, all that you really need is to accept my help. Agree, that's all you need to do."*

The voice had a tinge of malevolence, but the Professor ignored it. All he really heard was a chance to finally succeed.

"I agree to our mutual benefits. What next?"

"Not much. Just a transfer into my new Host." The entity surrounded Professor Malick and shrank, absorbing into skin.

The Professor had flashes of understanding now: Avatar wasn't a physical being. That was why he could be around for centuries! He didn't age; his hosts did!

This understanding was followed by a sense of hunger, a feeling soon sated; he felt as if **he** was the meal... consumed by his companion. He felt a few seconds of protest, then he vanished. At least his personality did... his body was still present. His eyes were darker though.

Professor Malick's assistant returned with a mug of steaming liquid. "Here's what you asked for, sir."

He was a little puzzled. "What? Oh yes." He took the mug, not seeming even the least concerned by the warmth of the liquid. He smiled, generally reason for associates to get nervous. "We had better get back to work now..."

NEXT

Dark Avatar is here, and lives up to that name.

MOVIE REVIEWS

This is a banner crop of films!

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End (DVD): Wow, that's a long title! Unfortunately the resulting film and plots were also too long...

In this third part of the story, the heroes have to bring Captain Jack Sparrow back from the dead. That's not too complicated. They have to meet a pirate king in Singapore (played by underused Chow Yun Fat), then go with the aid of his map to the End of the World, retrieve Jack... then the film gets messy.

They convene the Pirate Court to deal with an English admiral trying to end them, to deal with the supernatural Davey Jones, the legendary sea goddess Calypso, Keith Richards shows up out of the blue at the Court and Jack calls him "dad", all 3 of the top characters (Jack, Will and Liz) cross each other repeatedly, Calypso is revealed, we find the fate of Davey Jones, a new captain replaces him, the story is wrapped up (sort of)...

Visually, this film is stunning. **Disney** films generally are. Story-wise though... why is Captain Jack's dad at the Pirate Court? It was fun to see him, but it made no sense. Why was Calypso brought back to our world when she disappeared from the story after? Why do the heroes try to double- and triple-cross each other ad nauseum with no payoff? That just helped to over-complicate the plot for me.

I found the extras a bit thin, but there was a fun blooper reel. It being a **Disney** film, it was clean as far as content.

If you hadn't yet read my comicbook link to pirate films: Pirate comics are throughout **Watchmen**.

The Forbidden Kingdom (DVD): Martial arts have a long history in comics, not just due to Karate Kid in the Legion and the various Judomaster characters, but also in the now legendary *Master of Kung Fu* series, *Richard Dragon*, even in the *Dragonball* series' from Japan.

This film had many things going for it for me to begin with. The Monkey King legends from China are some of my favorites, and some of my other favorite films have come from it (Stephen Chow's 2-part *A Chinese Odyssey*). Both Jackie Chan and Jet Li are in this. The fights are coordinated by Yuen Woo-Ping, another legend of the genre...

This film follows a physically weak American guy Jason (Michael Angarano) obsessed with kung fu film classics. He finds a legendary staff belonging to the Monkey King in a video store/pawn shop in Chinatown. He gets knocked out by local punks and awakes in ancient China, where he has to rescue the Monkey King (imprisoned in stone for 500 years by the malevolent Jade Warlord, and learns the true meaning of kung fu along the way. He's joined and trained by the drunken kungfu master Lu Yen (Jackie Chan), a mostly silent monk (Jet Li, also as the Monkey King), and the revenge seeking Golden Sparrow (Crystal Liu Yi Fei).

The film also has nods to other kung fu classics: one of the villains is the Bride With White Hair, and one fight was a tribute to Jet Li's Once Upon a Time in China hero Wong Fei Hong. The only thing missing was to set some of the film in an apothecary and it would be a complete homage!

All the elements added up to a fun film. The fight choreography was breathtaking, and the film had a lush appeal.

This disc had no special features, just the movie.

Superhero Movie (DVD): Like all the similar 'comedies' of the past few years I tried to avoid this, but friends told me it was actually better than the others. I got a previously viewed copy at Blockbuster for 8 bucks.... Now I'm wishing I listened to my original opinion. This was a major waste of my time!

Nerdy Rick Riker (Drake Bell) is in love with Jill Johnson (Sara Paxton), who happens to be dating the captain of the football team at their high school. Rick's parents are dead (we later learn due to his clumsiness), so he's being raised by his Uncle Albert and Aunt Lucille Adams (Leslie Nielsen and Marion Ross). On a

school science trip he is bitten by a radioactive dragonfly and gains powers because of it - except initially the power of flight. A chief scientist there Lou Landers (Christopher MacDonald) also gains powers to leech life from others for 24 hours and becomes a villain named the Hourglass.

This film is a parody of *Spider-Man* with elements of *X-Men*, and elements of mythology from the Fantastic Four and Batman. It offers some gags that'll already be dated in a few years (Barry Bonds, Enron), some tasteless jokes (un-funny farting gags, a brief necrophilia and a pedophilia one, endless damage to physically-disabled Stephen Hawkins, making fun of homosexuality, the blood-drop splatter from Spider-Man replaced with a lot of peeing)... and most important to me: except for two gags (J. Jonah Jameson revealed as an insane asylum patient as the paper shares their building and the death of Tom Cruise, an actor I despise) it simply isn't funny.

I checked the comments about this on IMDB. Several pointed out the film isn't appropriate material for its PG-13 rating; it is more an R film. I would rate it 'S' for... well, you could guess what it stands for.

This film was written and directed by Craig Mazin of *Scary Movie 4*, and has a few actors from *Airplane*. That's the film all these recent spoofs have tried to emulate, but they all fail. The Zucker comedies never relied on intolerant stereotypes for humor (they had a routine about 'talking jive', but didn't use other traits of African Americans for 'humor'), and the film also can hold up two decades later as funny. These garbage films won't last two months, let alone years.

As far as extras go this one has a small selection of deleted scenes and a short interview. No surprise the interview subjects speak as if this was a great film; I've never heard an interview about how the film was awful to work on.

Iron Man (DVD): From bad to fantastic, and I own this!

This film is the origin of Tony Stark as Iron Man. Many elements have been altered (the scientist Stark created the original suit with a fellow prisoner of terrorists in Afghanistan) or moved around (Obadiah Stane is now a co-founder of the Stark company with Tony's father, Rhodey is there from the beginning), but they all contribute to an entertaining film. The effects were breathtaking to watch, and the changes - like Jarvis now being the home AI - didn't detract from my enjoyment.

I found an Easter egg on the disc: a mini-featurette on the filming of Stan Lee's cameo. I think this was one of his funniest appearances. ☺ There are also several in the movie itself, but I'll have to watch it again to find them all. Percy mentioned the Mandarin's rings for instance; I missed those.

As an extra feature are several alternate versions of scenes. The longer ones are interesting, but I can see how they would bog this film's pace down. There are also some deleted scenes that while fun would have also slowed down the film.

I got this as a special edition with a comic digest of the first 4 issues of the Marvel Age incarnation of the character. The art for this version is slick, but to me it loses some of the energy of the original as a trade-off.

The Dark Knight (DVD): Continuing my direct superhero experiences is this film. I heard many raves for this one, but I would have bought it anyway, as I do with all superhero or comicbook-related films (the exception being *Rise of the Silver Surfer*. That one I won't own or want to).

In this film Batman is more entrenched in Gotham City. The Bat symbol light is now there, he gets mentioned by local news sources, etc. There are vigilantes that dress like him too. He doesn't approve; at first I was wondering why Batman uses a gun, and the "copycats" were, not him.

The Joker appears in the city, a crazed maniac with genius planning abilities (the late Heath Ledger). His plots and manipulation drives the film.

Gotham has a crusading DA named Harvey Dent who acts in many ways as the law equal of Batman. Yes, he becomes Two Face, but I won't spoil the how and why. Suffice to say it's a part of the film. By the end, Batman is hunted. By the way, not for murder. Joker is still alive, like in the comics.

I like how he's never given a definitive origin here, just some half-baked stories. Except for in Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* we don't have one either.

Maggie Jillenhall didn't have a lot of screen time as the Rachel Dawson character, but her brief times were still way better than Katie Holmes in the first film. I had a crush on her in the **Dawson's Creek** days (wish I'd known someone like her in my own school days), but once she got hooked up with Tom Cruise I lost interest in her. Even then I realized she wasn't a good actress though.

The Joker... better scribes have waxed profusely about Heath Ledger's final performance. Well, they were right. He pours off the screen.

As an action film, a lot of the plot was more cerebral, likely going over the heads of most. I read a review that said the film was too long; likely this was why.

This disc was also just the film, not even an Easter egg to find. Disappointing.

Hellboy II: the Golden Army (DVD): Making for a trifecta of films here based on comicbooks, this featured a character created by Mike Mignola.

Director Guillermo Del Toro uses the Hellboy character, but for this film he created the story himself. He's already taking huge license from the comicbook already (my conversation guest Liana commented at Con*Cept 2008 how Liz Sherman in the comic would *never* act as Hellboy's love interest), and here he used visuals similar to those in his film **Pan's Labyrinth**. The result was a fantastic visual feast, and some ideas both amusing and terrifying (the creature called the Tooth Fairy for instance has that name because it swarms on a victim and devours everything but the teeth). Story-wise though, some of it was wrong. Having the characters leave the BPRD, for example, seems wrong. Why the characters leave makes no real sense; the character they despise isn't so bad.

Barry Manilow gets some props in this film. Like it or not, he's an icon of the 20th century.

The disc has several featurettes about the making of the film, some deleted scenes, and a few angles of the filming of several key scenes. I didn't look hard for Easter Eggs, so there may well have been some that I missed.

The Notorious Bettie Page (DVD): I bought this film to give tribute to this icon.

I don't think actor Gretchen Mol (now on the TV show **Life on Mars**) completely captured Bettie's look. She's a great actor, but her face seemed too long. There were a few segments where she worked, but they weren't many.

Her horrible events in life (sexual molestation by her father, the gang rape) are shown happening, but not in graphic form. Her pinup days are, including nudes, and for those poses they aren't lurid.

The director made an artistic choice to only use color in the segments dealing with her annual trips to Miami. This choice made for an interesting choice.

This film won an award at the 2005 Toronto film festival, but while the visuals were nice, but the film didn't really delve into her thoughts, just surface details. Bettie was quite private about these details too, so I guess that's appropriate.

The extras are featurettes on the making of the film, as well as a piece of rare film about Bettie in action. It shows how innocent she seemed disrobing.

I already explained Bettie's significance to comicbooks, and the film link is the same.

COMIC COMMENTS

GEOFF JOHNS TO LEAVE JSA

He's announced that he'll leave the series with issue 26 of the current series. He's also noted this was the series that he's been with from the beginning, when David Goyer didn't interest me as co-writer. I think *Stars and S.T.R.I.P.E.S.* was his first title; please correct me if I'm wrong.

He has said it was a tough cut for him to make, but with so much devoted to the relaunch of *The Flash* and the upcoming Blackest Night storyline upcoming in *Green Lantern*, he felt it was a cut he needed to make.

This really has me conflicted. I want the other series to work well (OK, not necessarily *The Flash*. I've already spoken of my issues with bringing Barry Allen back), but what really matters is who will take over as writer and artist (Dale Eaglesham is leaving along with Geoff). The replacements haven't always clicked. I like Walt Simonson, but dropped his *Hawkgirl*, for instance.

SPEAKING OF THE FLASH...

It has begun. Issue 247 was the final issue of the Wally West incarnation. It ends with Dan DiDio writing on the last page how he always wanted to bring Hal Jordan and Barry Allan back.

Now I've really enjoyed all the GL books (except for the throwback personality for Guy Gardner in his 2-part maxi-series) ever since *Rebirth*, but I think we didn't 100% need him back. Ron Marz and Judd Winnick's version of Kyle Rayner wasn't appealing to me (character development by either supporting cast death or talk about music, constant "I have a lot to learn!" stories), and the way Hal was ruined for Kyle to come in was upsetting – but other writers managed to make him an interesting character.

Flash... well, again I won't repeat myself.

I was concerned that the current series was doomed when Tom Peyer was announced as the writer. He's a pretty good author, but DC have unfairly made him their 'fat lady', the writer assigned a doomed series a few months before cancellation. *L.E.G.I.O.N* was an example (I had two letters published there). In this case it was cancelled two issues after he left... now Wally will likely only be in *Titans*. I guess the title gets a brief reprieve from my cancellation list now.

NON-COMIC GEOFF JOHNS

As well as producing the script for the Legion appearance on *Smallville* (I want that flight ring now!) he'll make other TV appearances as scriptwriter, in the least likely show:

Robot Chicken.

It seems that he's a big fan of that show, and he's already written scenes that didn't make the final cut on the show... but he made it for the season premiere this time.

It will be strange seeing his work with clay and dolls. ☺

Bettie/ Betty Page Remembered



April 22, 1923 – December 11, 2008

If you're thinking she doesn't have ties to comicbooks, or her name isn't familiar to you: first, the late Dave Stevens based the Rocketeer's girlfriend Betty on her. **Eros** comics based several minis on her, though her photos were not graphic like that comic line usually was.

Bettie Mae Page was born in Nashville, Tennessee as one of 6 kids. Three of them were girls, and all of them were molested as children. When she was a young adult she was gang raped, another situation that would make me desire to punish the scumbags, but time likely already has.

She moved to New York City for a change in life, where she became a model for camera clubs, really a cover for nudity and pornography photos of the time. She was known for just posing nude with no hesitation. She did hundreds of photos clothed and not then, but she always seemed to have an innocent charm, not looking cheap or tawdry at them.

She met Irwin and Paula Klaw, taking many photos and film in bondage gear, again not really looking sleazy at it. She made several artistic nude pictorials for Bunny Yeager on her annual trips to Miami, Florida. She made her own costumes for these shoots, being a talented seamstress. During this time she also came to the attention of Hugh Hefner. She was the January 1955 *Playmate* for a young **Playboy** magazine.

She earned the nickname 'Miss Pinup Queen of the World' in her day. Many soldiers of the time had photos of her. Her days as a fetish/bondage model led to the Kefauver hearings of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in 1957. In part it led to her leaving this part of her life behind.

The larger reason was her conversion to Christianity at a Baptist church in Miami. It led to her eventually acting as a missionary in Africa. She worked full-time from then with Rev. Billy Graham.

Decades after she stopped modeling, after Dave Stevens work, a cult following grew for her again. As she aged, she insisted that no photos be taken of her face. She didn't want to disrupt the myth with how she looked now.

One story of her death says she had pneumonia. Another cites a major heart attack. Regardless the 'Dark Angel' (as she's also called) is gone.

For her childlike innocence in photos regardless of her poses, for stirring the imaginations of many, her pioneering (not knowing it) of female sexuality in avenues she never thought of, for pioneering corset and footwear used by celebrities today... for many reasons she will be deeply missed.

ADVENTURE COMICS (SANS COUNTDOWN TO)

The *Legion of Superheroes* title ends with issue 50, but the Legion will not long be retired... I don't know *which* incarnation will exist then (so far I only have the first 2 issues of *Legion of Three Worlds*), but one of them will star in a new title with an old name: *Adventure Comics*.

DiDio mentioned this book in a recent column. The most interesting thing about this title: the LSH started in a title by that name. That may well be a clue to which team will star in it.

HOPEFULLY NOT THE THIRD ONE THOUGH

In wrestling (at least in WWE) there's a tradition: when a performer leaves the fed, they lose their last match. They are made to look weak, less appealing, so that they can get better in their new jobs.

Legion of Superheroes 50 seems to have followed that tradition, though there's one big difference: here we actually paid good money for a bad send-off.

I heard from other fans that this was bad; unfortunately that week of my reserve was already packed up the week before I got there, so I had to deal with it. The reviews weren't kidding – this was a stinker!

The writing and art team were not the normal ones, Jim Shooter and Francis Manapul. Shooter has earned a lot of bad karma for other actions, but he did write some great Legion stories as a youngster, and he had brought new interest to a title that had earned much derision of late. Francis is a tremendous artist.

Neither one was involved in this issue. I don't know if it was in protest, but with the script credited to 'Justin Thyme', the possibility is likely. The 'art' is credited to Ramon Bachs, and it is some of the ugliest pencils that I've seen since my days at **Frostbite Comics** (that was so bad it miraculously never got to press). The 'writing' not only has nothing to do with the blurb last issue, it also uses a *dues ex meshuginah* plot element to solve things in the end.

If *Adventure Comics* uses such garbage it'll be off my list quickly – and I suspect that issue 50 here will be retconned faster than *Countdown* was.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON FINAL CRISIS

Not completely, granted... *Legion of Three Worlds* is running very late and won't be finished for some time yet. Still, the main series is finished.

First off, it wasn't technically a 7-issue series. The 2-issue *Superman Beyond* contained important plot elements for it. Apparently there are no plans for it to be included in the collected version. That's too bad; readers will be confused by major parts of part 7 because of this.

Wonder Woman really got a bum rush here. Except for a brief few panels in issue 7, she got to be the mindless Patient Zero for the Anti-Life virus. With her always treated as part of the DC Trinity, that was a huge disservice.

The black Superman from the multiverse also a US President was a nod to a joke comment by President Barack Obama. He quipped that he was rocketed as a baby from Krypton.

Some of the results of *Final Crisis* are there on the page: the Monitors are no more, Hawkman and Hawkgirl are dead again (actually, I just read a Q&A about that with Dan DiDeo. He said they're just recovering from a rough battle) and most of the Jack Kirby characters are now on their own world away from the 'New Earth' DCU. Some results were clearer thanks to the Grant Morrison 'exit interviews' on Newsarama.com: the full multiverse is back; without Monitor interference there are now once more much more than 52 available. Grant has first crack at them though.

I don't think *Final Crisis* is everything it was touted to me, but at least we won't have to deal with Monitors or Darkseid anymore!

DARK AVENGERS

A teaser image for the new *Dark Avengers* title has appeared in **Marvel** titles. My initial impression was that Wolverine was being illogically added. I was fooled by it. In fact, I originally used this section to rant about it.

The team has now appeared in other titles. Who I thought was Iron Man is actually Iron Patriot: Norman Osborn in a suit combining Iron Man and Captain America. Wolverine,

and Spider-Man and Ms. Marvel on the team are phonies, with Venom portraying black suit Spidey, Moonstone as Ms. Marvel, and someone else (Bullseye maybe?) imitating Wolverine. Only Sentry and Ares on the team appear genuine.

The idea seems to stem from the original *Thunderbolts* premise: villains pretending to be heroes. The difference being that these villains are unlikely to seek to improve.

This is yet another title that I won't pick up. The idea that the **Marvel** Universe forgot the Green Goblin and that Osborn shot an Atlantean delegate during *Civil War* – and was filmed at it – but suddenly have forgotten all of his evil now is already an intelligence affront... but also both Spidey and Wolvie are now anti-registration rebels, yet no one finds it strange to have them on a pro-reg team? Also: the Sentry knows Osborn's evil history. For him to go along with this just makes him look dumb too.

(Watch him turn out to be a fake too. Won't I look foolish!)

A REPRIEVE FOR THUNDERBOLTS

The title isn't yet on my reserve chopping block, because of the new series writer Andy Diggle.

I've been following Andy ever since he started a Delphi forum in the days that he wrote *The Losers* at **DC**. I like his writing voice, and he shows skill at providing interesting twists and turns in a plot.

I'm dropping another title in its place, mentioned below.

VARIOUS COMICBOOKS IN BULLETS

I haven't done this in a long time: a list of points about comics too short for their own sections.

- The title that I'm dropping: *Ultimate Fantastic Four*. I haven't enjoyed it in many months.
- *Astonishing X-Men* I also dropped, as I said I would.
- The *Ultimatum* preview blew me away. Everything in every Ultimates title tied together.
- Fans haven't liked Jeff Loeb's work at **Marvel** ever since though. I've heard nothing but complaints ever since.
- *Beanworld* is back! One of my favorite series of the 80s is back!

- **L.E.G.I.O.N.** is back – sort of. Tony Bedard is helming a new series called **R.E.B.E.L.S.**, a new outlaw force run by Vril Dox. I was a fan of the former series, and I like Tony’s work. Another for me to try.
- I don’t think this was just as part of the **Batman: RIP** storyline, but **Robin**, **Nightwing** and **Birds of Prey** have all been cancelled. In the case of **Birds**, I guess the series couldn’t survive without Gail Simone!
- Another series that didn’t survive without a top writer: **Checkmate**. Greg Rucka left, and at the end of a Bruce Jones storyline, the title ends. Sad. **DC** had a little variety with it.
- **Love and Capes** 9 was in my latest comics batch. Entertaining reading to me. It also announced that issue 10 (complete) will be given for Free Comicbook Day this year. I know I’ll be getting it.

HEY KIDS: LETTERS!

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October 25, 2008

Dear Jeff from Djellalabad:

Many thanks for The Original Universe 7, handed to me directly at Con*cept 2008. It’s the best way to get (and distribute) your zine. This year’s Con*cept was a very good time, and Cathy Palmer-Lister was run off her feet, but I think everything worked. I have the time, so time for a loc. Hopefully I won’t always have a zine ready just for a convention though. - JaB

I already deal with the Royal Bank of Canada, but I wouldn’t mind getting my hands on one of those ASUS Eee minicomputers. The Palm Tungsten E2 and keyboard I often use are very handy, but because these are two separate units, it can be a little rickety. A single unit like the Eee would be fun. Does it have a slot for an SD card or USB drive?

Yes, both. - JaB

I know that Tamu Townsend was so worried for Emru, and I am relieved to hear that he got a good donor and a marrow transplant. Was Tamu at Con*cept?

Briefly. - JaB

Ah, the Comicon was held at Place Bonaventure. We could see that from our room’s window at Con*cept. Place Bonaventure and the Hilton were also accessible from the Central Station. Yvonne and I took the train up from Toronto for Con*cept, and it was a great ride.

I haven’t seen either movie you review, but I will agree that Pixar makes great animated movies. I can’t wait for Wall-E to come out on DVD.

There are tiny little comicons in Toronto whose advertising seems to consist of a classified ad in the Toronto Star, but anything bigger is SFX Fan eXpo and Paradise Comicon, and that’s all.

The programming at Con*cept sure got trimmed down, didn’t it? I don’t know how many panels you were eventually on, but I was on two, both on the Sunday. This was Lee Knight’s first attempt at doing programming for a convention, and I think she did pretty good. It was a big change for her after many years of being in charge of con suite and green room at Ad Astra. We did go on the tour, rescheduled for Saturday at 6pm, and while there’s lots of room for a big convention, it will need signage. The second and fifth floors are big and perhaps a little non-descript. The fanzine lounge will be in the open concourse area on the second floor.

I was on five. - JaB

I think I’m about done now. Con*cept was our last convention for the year, and we are making some tough decisions about where we go next year, given that the Canadian dollar is dropping like a rock against the US dollar. On the other hand, that will make going to Montreal a lot more affordable for American fans, as long as they care to get a passport.

At the last Progress report we had 2050. - JaB

Take it easy, good to see you last weekend, and see you in the funny zines.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

.

Its LOC time again JAB.

I hate to bring up another typo, but there were no less than 4 instances in which artist Steve Molnar was spelled Molnaro in TOU#7. I have to bring it up since not only did you say he remembered and asked about me at the Montreal Comiccon, but he’s a Planet of the Apes artist and weape fans have to stick up for one another.

Not a typo. An error on my part. - JaB

It was nice again seeing you at Con*cept at which I had a great time again this year. I did not spend to much time at panels on the Saturday as I opted for lots of time in the dealers room, winning far more than I rightfully should have at the auction, and of course catching the Masquerade. I usually come away empty handed from the auction, but I guess they caught me in a giving mood this year and it's always for a good cause of course. What is usually a slow sunday finale ended up being a full day of interesting panel discussions. I did note the distinct downturn in attendance this year and hope that it's only a glitch for some reason. Of course next year, we have the Big One. Can't wait for that.

As promised, I started reading Avatar now that I've collected a few issues and could read a bigger chunk at one sitting. I like it so far and it reminded me a bit of Hal Clement's great novel "Needle", with a bit of Heroes superpowers thrown in. Do you have the whole story already all written up and just feeding us now and then or are you writing it up as we go along following a breakdown? In either case I'm looking forward to seeing Billy getting back at Nick and the bullies. We all know its coming.

Parts 1 and 2 I rewrote from originals. The rest is new. - JaB

As you mentioned in the issue (and as per your Facebook status changes), good luck with this years NaNoWriMo. Here I am trying to keep up with simple tasks like commenting on a 'zine once a month and you're writing thousands of words day in and day out. Hope you can make it 5 out 6.

Unfortunately I didn't. - JaB

Speaking of Facebook, I see by the wall postings on the "Help Emru find a Bone Marrow Donor" group (and from an update from a mutual friend) that despite finding a match and having the operation result in successful transplant, he is not well. My understanding is that the situation is serious unless things turn around quickly. I wish him and his family all my hope and prayers that he wins his battle.

It ended sadly. - JaB

Another 'friend' of ours, and indeed friend of every fan of Horror and Science Fiction who is also fighting a losing battle is Forrest J. Ackerman. Uncle 4E is well known to us older fans who grew up with Famous Monsters under his editorship, but even the 'younger' generation have been inspired by him over the years. As GoH at Con*cept in 1997, I was simply thrilled to have been able to meet the

legend. I shared many a fans dream of one day having the fortune to visiting his Famous Ackermansion filled to the rafters with every type of collectible imaginable and priceless bits nostalgia. And to be so open hearted and unselfish with his amassed treasure as to allow anyone who cared to visit to just walk in is inspiring. Multiple websites and many personal friends of his are reporting that he has congestive heart failure and has opted to not seek medical intervention, but to be home and enjoy his last days. The only happy aspect of the situation is that once he goes on he will be with his many friends like Lugsli and Karloff who have already made the journey and are surely waiting for him on the other side. As for the Ackermansion, I was saddened when it was scaled back a few years to the mini-mansion he still lives in today. I nearly did go visit the mini-mansion when I was in Los Angeles in 2006, but that was during the Worldcon and 4E was at that event (naturally) so, ironically, it was the one few times that I could not visit the mansion.

You were fortunate to see the Ackermansion. - JaB

I'll put in my 2 cents worth of recent DVD viewings as I happened to have had a mini Hulk-a-thon with my son in which we watched both "The Hulk" and "The Incredible Hulk" movies, which should be right up the alley for this zine. Now I had watched "The Hulk" before and knew that in many respects it was failure. I was hoping that watching it again would lead me to find some redeeming qualities that I may have missed the first time, but that was not the case. I was then lead to believe that last years sequel (or franchise restart attempt as many have called it) was superior and was going to be a movie I was going to enjoy. But I failed to see the problem with my logic. While it is true that the sequel is much better than the first movie, I was still quite disappointed with it, which is a testament to how bad the first one was. Even beautiful Liv Tyler could not save this movie for me. The FX were superior to be sure (especially for the look of the Hulk itself), the story was more coherent and most of the acting was fine, but it was just not a great story and fairly one dimensional. We'll have to see how this and Ironman all play out in the upcoming Avengers movie that we are constantly being teased with.

You mentioned that I have a namesake on "So you Think you can Dance" and thus assume that I would be watching that show. Sorry to disappoint, but it would take a lot more than that to make me watch that kind of a show. What few shows I do find the time to watch are shows like Heroes and Fringe. There are a few other genre shows I would like to watch, but schedule and lack of free time quash those hopes.

The eventual winner was a Montreal guy. - JaB

Dario (who knows darn well he can't dance but can live

See ya in issue 8.

Hi Jeff,

I really enjoyed the latest zine, well done (as always). My favorite article was the local con report; the guests must have been fun to chat with, and I enjoyed the little sketches sprinkled throughout the issue. I used to check out downtown cons frequently, but have lost interest over the years (especially since it's easier to find back issues on Ebay).

The guests were fun. - JaB

Hopefully, if I ever get my self-publishing concepts started, I'll eventually be there at a table schlepping my wares <g>.

Continued good luck with the zine, and Happy 2009!

Greg Woronchak
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Hi, Jeff!

First off, I've said this to you in person, but I want to express my condolences for Emru's passing. Now then, about The Original Universe. Number 6 first, then number 7.

Nice cover on 6. I like the framing, I like the character design, I like the sense of space and background over the character's right shoulder. Nice detail without being overwhelming, and slick-in-a-good-way inks. Just a really good traditional-comics-style illustration. Good work, Shawn, and it got me to check out the Surface Art Studios web site.

Shawn generously offered more art in the future. - JaB
Jeff, good idea on the Facebook site. I've checked it a couple of times for news on the zine; it's a useful page to have.

I've looked for you there with no success. - JaB

You note the passing of George Carlin — one of the interesting things about that guy is that he managed to maintain his credibility, his position on the edge, over almost four decades. It's hard to think of many comedians

who've managed that. So many seem to either come to bad ends, or else just burn out.

Looks like a busy time at the Paradise con. Did you get to any panels? Nice to see Herb Trimpe still involved with comics. Cary Nord drew a bunch of Dark Horse's Conan comic; the first series, when Kurt Busiek was writing it. Very nifty stuff, I thought. Appropriately, given his surname, he's Canadian. (Hmm ... according to Wikipedia, he drew Secret Invasion: X-Men, as well.) Hey, I remember looking at the JSA Classified arc Ramon Perez drew — his art really, really impressed me. I liked the storytelling a lot, and I liked the different styles he used. Fine stuff.

Ramon is also a cool guy. - JaB

Double Dipping at the Comics Rack: I can see your problem, but some of the double dipping here is going to be difficult for Marvel to avoid. If they want to have all the Annihilation stuff in one place, they have to put the Nova issues in there. If they want to have all the Nova stuff in one place, they have to put the Annihilation cross-over in there, too. So, yeah, people who buy both get the



same stuff twice over. I dunno what the answer is; maybe refrain from publishing Nova except as tie-ins? Have Annihilation as an ongoing, starring Nova? Avoid having tie-ins? The latter would be my favourite, but apparently a lot of fans don't buy books unless they tie in to or otherwise influence other books.

(And why they didn't put more Nova stuff in the Annihilation books ... it seems the publisher's idea was that those issues weren't part of the Annihilation event. Dunno how well that worked out in practice, but the single issues didn't have the crossover banner, and weren't marketed as part of Annihilation.)

Greg — I tend to agree with you with respect to the Silver Age stuff. Or, at least, DC's Silver Age. Marvel's stuff is such a core part of their identity I don't know how much they can, or would want to, get rid of. But DC made a big push a couple decades ago to erase all the older, 'sillier', stuff. Then they turned around and brought it all back. On the other hand, not all the Silver Age stuff was gold (to

scramble a metaphor), and it's possible that a few decades from now, people will be looking back at the best current stories with the same fondness people now have for the Silver Age. I just don't think "Thy Kingdom Come" or "Batman: R.I.P." will be among them, myself. At any rate, I thoroughly agree with your main point, as I take it: superhero comics need more original thinking in their stories. I have to wonder whether work-done-for-hire contracts play into this, consciously or subconsciously. Glad to read on-line that Gene Colan seems to be getting better. His Tomb of Dracula work is still stand-out stuff to me. Generally one of the under-rated greats of comic art, I think. (Jeff, you mentioned that Harlan Ellison had launched a lawsuit against DC over the Shadow — could you elaborate on this? I went looking for info about this online, and couldn't find anything.)

It hit Michael J. Kaluta, but I'll have to look it up. – JaB

I think Countdown has more-or-less been officially re-conned into non-existence. There was an interview with Morrison online where he basically disavowed all knowledge of or responsibility for DC's publishing choices leading up to Final Crisis. On the other hand, speculation about DiDio being fired clearly remained just that, speculation; one of those weird rumour-surges that come out of nowhere, take over the internet for a week, and then vanish. Some of that had to do with Secret Invasion beating Final Crisis in sales, some of it had to do with Chuck Dixon being effectively fired from DC. Then there was the Palmiotti "no comment" thing, apparently a joke that got misinterpreted.

Steven Grant had an online column where he speculated that the continuity issues might have been a result of a "culture of secrecy" at DC — editors not communicating, apparently a long-standing problem at the company, from what Grant says. Grant also made the point that when viewed in real terms, DiDio's overall performance as editor-in-chief was almost certainly quite acceptable to his superiors. DC is profitable, and more profitable than it used to be. (He also noted that Palmiotti would be an unlikely candidate to replace DiDio if he was fired; DiDio essentially came in as a hiring from outside comics, according to Grant, representing a new corporate direction for DC, away from strictly comics and toward an identity as a media company. So, by Grant's reasoning, putting Palmiotti in charge would be a step back toward a comics-centred company, something Time-Warner likely doesn't want for their comics division.)

I've found it difficult to get into Final Crisis, with its irregular publication schedule. And the sense, even by the writer, that the events in it aren't ... well ... final. Barry Allen

Coming in issue 9:

Lots of stuff again!:

- * Avatar: Rebirth Part 5 (I hope)
- * interviews with other pros.
- * More Movie Reviews and Comic Thoughts
- * letters!

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

As I promised in e-mail, you'll get a special soon with my conversation with Liana K.

With issue 8, it would be cool to have a large letters section again (hint, hint). Also, some art from artist members would also be good.

back from the dead, the wink-and-a-nod mention of "resurrection" in the Martian Manhunter's eulogy ... it has the effect of making the story feel shallow. The audience may well know how a story is going to end, but to remind the audience that they know is ... well, it's a risky proposition.

Meanwhile, I've begun wondering when character deaths were dismissed so cavalierly. I know it used to be said about Marvel that only Uncle Ben, Captain Marvel, and Bucky were really forever dead (um...) — but it seems to me that when I was a kid, most of the characters being resurrected were villains, which is slightly different than bringing back heroes who died in a significant story. I'm talking about characters like the Swordsman, Ferro Lad, the original Thunderbird. I may be wrong, but to me the tipping point in terms of bringing back heroes was the "resurrection" of Jean Grey, a major character who had died in a fan-favourite story. After that, the need for more product, nostalgia, and the need to keep trademarks viable led to an end of any sense of stability in character death — Iron Fist,

say, could be brought back with nobody batting an eye. Anyway, that's my perception; what do you think? Also not a fan of what I've seen of the new Titans series. Winick's writing isn't terribly imaginative, and seems to lack any sense of resonance; whatever happens to these characters, however superficially emotional, doesn't appear to touch them deeply. And, yeah, the art is doing nothing for me. The style is reminiscent of Angel Medina, but I find Churchill's art excessively stylised. That is, I've got no problem with highly-stylised art, but here I think the style is getting in the way of character expression, of making the story work.

Percy: About the Wonder Woman thing ... I agree with you that DC missed the boat, but I think I disagree about where. Getting Jodi Picoult to write the book was a real coup, commercially, or should have been. People outside of comics, women who wouldn't normally think of picking up a comic book, know the name. The women who run my local public library know her name. Hell, my mom knows her name. But leave my mom out of it and go back to the librarians: they run a pretty nice graphic novel section. Jodi Picoult on Wonder Woman ought to have been a no-brainer for them. For a potential audience new to comics. But ... it didn't work. The stuff wasn't very good. Partly that may have been because Picoult was trying to grasp a new medium. Partly that may have been lack of editorial support, giving her a new status quo to work into the book. Part of it was certainly making her cope with crossovers during what turned out to be a very brief run, meaning that the story had no real ending. Any way you slice it, the mess that run became was a missed opportunity. Mind you, the mess started before then. As I recall, the relaunch of the book was delayed ... then the first few issues were late ... and the concluding part of the first six-issue storyline got shoved back into an annual ... and, if I'm remembering correctly, somehow the same villain was used in both that series and Picoult's run. Just a lot of errors, all along the line.

I guess the story elements that bother you didn't leap out to me. I mean that I didn't perceive them, possibly because I'm kinda slow sometimes; for example, could you elaborate on how the character was reduced to a "T&A jiggle show"? Having powers only when in costume seemed to work for guys like Iron Man, Thor, and Captain Marvel. (Mind you, I note that Terry Dodson drew some of the issues, so the art alone might be the problem here.) With respect to comics companies being at a loss in what they do with their main characters ... I think there are definitely signs of that at DC, Wonder Woman being a prime example. The "Batman R.I.P." situation — where they teased a major change for the character, didn't deliver, then said the real ending for the book is coming in an upcoming

issue of Final Crisis — could be another. But I'd argue that Marvel's been doing really well by many of its main characters, certainly in terms of sales, and in many cases creatively as well.

I think Brubaker's run on Captain America has been excellent; probably the best mainstream comic of the past few years, to me, at least on a consistent basis. His handling of Daredevil has been solid as well. I personally like the ideas behind Civil War (if not always the execution), and I liked seeing the "Armor Wars" version of Tony Stark back; and Matt Fraction's new Invincible Iron Man book is winning much praise, overall I think deserved. I'm a bit on the fence about Straczynski's Thor, but I respect the fact that he's trying something new there, and so far it's working.

I think the X-books are coherent, at least, in that each book seems to have a clear direction. That's unusual for that line. The Avengers books are interesting, at least. And, surprisingly, Marvel's crossovers, the overall direction of their universe, seems to be coherent and have a sense of movement. I didn't care for Secret Invasion, but at least it moves things from point A to point B; it seems to open up some new story ideas.

Not everything's great — I don't get why Jeph Loeb's Hulk book is so popular, for example, and the Ultimate Universe is looking pretty uninspired. But then again, some of Marvel's 'lesser' books are pretty impressive; Incredible Hercules is a gem, Ghost Rider has its moments, even Iron Fist has managed to change writers without much of a step back (I don't know how long that'll hold up, but that's how I see it at the moment).

I suppose what I'm saying is that overall I'm impressed with Quesada's tenure as editor. Certainly, comparing where the books are now to where they were when he took over, just in terms of the general level of writing, art, and production (notably in colouring), I think he's really done a lot of good there. Far from perfect, yes, but that's human endeavour in general. Really, as a company, and given what they are, Marvel seems to be moving in the right direction ...

... And then, of course, there's Spider-Man. I don't know what to make of that book. Like almost everyone, I didn't care for "One More Day". And the arguments claiming a need to dial things back didn't make a lot of sense to me. On the other hand, many of the Brand New Day stories have been really solid. Except ... when you put guys like Dan Slott and Mark Waid and John Romita Jr on a book, you maybe expect more than "solid". Sales continue to slip. And there's an inescapable feel of a title retreading its greatest hits to the book. So ... we'll see what we'll see.

(Here's an open question for anyone who wants to take a stab at it: When was the last time The Amazing Spider-Man was an unequivocally good book? By "unequivocally", I suppose I mean: what was the last run positively received by fans while it was being published? Before "One More Day" was Straczynski's run, which even aside from "Sins Past" had the divisive idea of Spider-Man's origin being influenced by a mystical totemic power. Before that was the Byrne-Mackie reboot, which followed from the clone saga. And before that was Todd McFarlane. Was that the last consistently decent run of Amazing? Or maybe the Roger Stern issues before that? I'm just throwing this out. What do you guys think?)

Dario, you were asking for recommendation of classic comics. My question is, what kind of stuff do you like? There's a lot out there — some have called this "The Golden Age of Reprints." If you like superheroes, most of the Silver Age Marvel stuff is available, and a lot of it is really fine; I particularly recommend Kirby Fantastic Four, Kirby Thor, and the Lee/Ditko Spider-Man. In terms of other super-hero work, I like the Kirby Fourth World series, the Englehart/Rogers Batman issues from the seventies, the Goodwin/Simonson Manhunter run, and definitely the Simonson Thor run (and his take on Orion for DC a few years ago). I personally would go for the Wolfman/Colan Tomb of Dracula, but it is somewhat of its era. Oh, and if you liked Watchmen, I'd suggest V For Vendetta as well. In terms of more recent stuff, I enjoyed Warren Ellis' Planetary, and I think I might have liked his Authority run if I could ever get ahold of the beginning. I thought Brian K. Vaughan's Runaways was excellent. As I think I said up above, I think Ed Brubaker's current Captain America run is the best thing going in mainstream comics at the moment. In terms of non-superhero stuff ... hmm. I'll take the easy way out and list some titles, then some specific creators, okay? So. Sandman, Love & Rockets, From Hell (hard to go wrong with Alan Moore, as far as I'm concerned), Age of Bronze, Zot! (Early work by Scott McCloud; just got reprinted in a nice thick trade paperback), Cages (if you can find it). Creators worth checking out: Seth, Chester Brown, Eddie Campbell, Jason Lutes (especially Berlin, a great historical fiction set in the eponymous city between the World Wars), Dan Clowes, and James Sturm. That's off the top of my head.

Hope that helps. In some ways, I'm a bit behind the times — alt-comics these days tend to be very trade-paperback oriented, which tends to up the prices on them quite a bit. So there's a lot out there which I still have to investigate. Jeff — Good point about exclusives being possibly harmful to comics. I wonder how they play out in the lives of the pros — on the one hand, it sounds like you've got a steady source of income, but that's still dependent on the company actually giving you a book to do. Then again, a

lot of the time it seems that "exclusive" is code for "exclusive only with respect to Marvel and DC", so maybe that helps.

Okay, now, on to comments for number seven. Again, a good cover; nice ink-wash effect on the mountains in the background (don't know if that's what was used, but that's what it looks like). The figure seems a bit stiff, but the sash is a nice touch. Hard to make out what kind of outfit she's wearing. I'd be interested in seeing what this illustration looked like before being reproduced; I suspect some of the effects on the wings might have got lost in photocopying.

I'm not impressed with the guy who photocopied for me. I wouldn't be surprised. - JaB

Sorry to hear about the problem tenant. Quebec has some really lax laws on animal cruelty. A lot of people who ought to be in jail aren't, and something (I feel) has got to get done about this soon.

He's gotten even worse. More next issue. - JaB

Sorry also to hear that the producer didn't get back to you. More and more I feel that the trick to writing is to keep many things going at once; if something falls through, you have other projects on the go. It means dividing your attention, but it also can help keep you absorbed and interested in what you're doing.

I think I'd rather comment on Avatar when more of it's in print, and I can read the whole thing at once. Or is it meant to be serialised?

It's in several chapters. - JaB

I liked the convention sketches!

And I liked the beginning of Legion of Three Worlds. That Perez art was really nice. I'm totally with you on the Superboy-Prime thing. On the other hand, I have no particular problem with the Legion not being teenagers. I got into the book with the post-five-year-gap relaunch, so I have an affection for the idea of an older Legion. Agreed with you on Ellis on X-Men. He does have his dialogue tics. I find his text very smooth, though, so it doesn't get to me as much. The art has some really nice rendering and page design, but I'm not sold on the storytelling — those pages look nice, but sometimes don't move the eye too smoothly over the page. (And for what it's worth, as I understand it, the book is a part of regular continuity, but takes place at one specific point, rather than fitting into ongoing events in the other books.) With respect to Geoff Johns crippling characters — I know his stuff mostly through Infinite Crisis, where Risk had his arm torn off in issue 4, and Judomaster had his back

broken. Generally not a series I cared much for.

Many readers don't. - JaB

Well, I guess that's about it for me, and probably more than enough, too. Talking comics is fun!

Take care,
Matthew Surridge

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February 14, 2009

Hi folks.

I still felt disappointed by what seemed a thin content issue. Hopefully what you're reading now is better!

Olivia: I'm still trying to figure out why your friend called this piece 'Gymnasty'... the gym part I can guess has to do with what seems a gymnastic vault, but there's nothing nasty-seeming about it. :) The reproduction is something I'll watch more carefully from now on; it bothers me that the reproduction was off-angle for your piece. That wasn't fair to you!

Dario: I seem to have many mistakes when it comes to POTA titles and creator names! / I got Dark Knight on DVD, and reviewed it this issue.

Lloyd: Recently I've been finding people on Facebook that I even went to elementary school with. In fact I'll be going to a reunion for that school in August 2010. That date matters to me like the Olympics that year don't. / Re: Ron Kasman: I've also been adding Friends that I've met through him. Some of them have even joined my zine Fan Page. / Re: convention policies... your views aren't heretical. I know folks who've attended Ad Astra for many years not even attending panels, let alone not finding out about the guests! / Re: The Shuster Awards... Cecil Castellucci won one in 2008. I've known her for many years, but she must be extremely busy right now... she has yet to get back to my e-mail congratulations. / Re: Worldcon space... well, the tour didn't happen when initially planned, but another is being arranged for me.

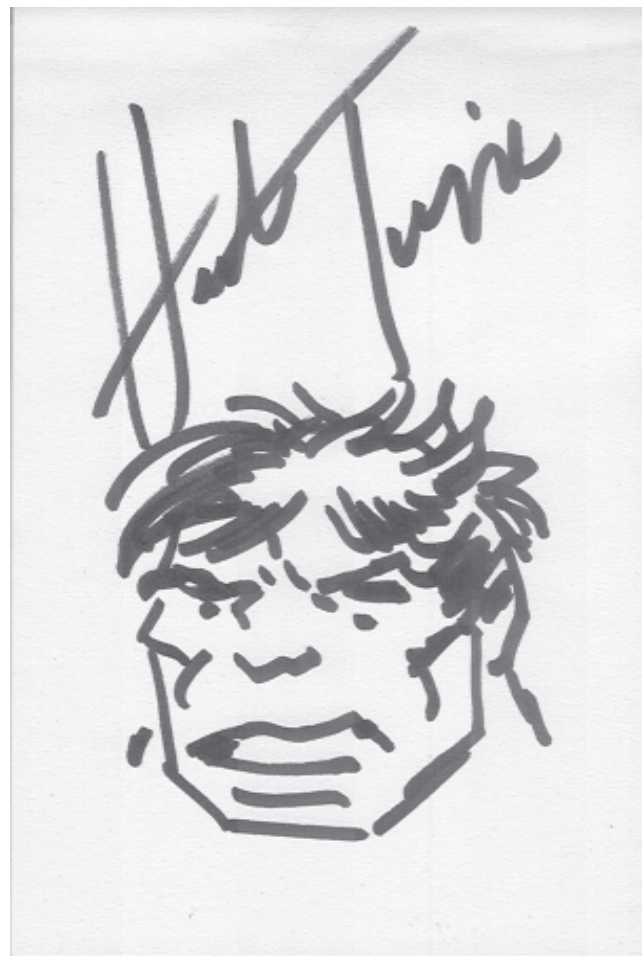
Well, my LOC this time is a bit short, but there's a lot more stuff to read here anyway.

Read you all in issue 9,

JaB

Wow, this issue is long (you're just part of it, Matthew, not the reason)! You'll read me again in a few weeks in a special.

JaB



TODO LIST FOR 2008

- Write More Mutants and Masterminds works
- GenCon 2010, maybe
- Con*Cept 2009 (if there are any guests left!)
- Anticipation 2009 (I cast my votes for both the Hugos and the Auroras.)

TODO (HOPEFULLY!) SOMEDAY

- San Diego Comicon (someday)



**Emru Patrice Lumumba
Townsend**

Nov. 11, 2008

**RIP. You're missed by many, me included.
(From Montreal at a film showing in 2006)**

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