

*THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE*



**(BELATED) HAPPY HALLOWE'EN!~**

2009 AURORA AWARD NOMINEE

ISSUE 10

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

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

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

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

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

- v) Zine trades: If you produce a zine, I'll be glad to exchange a copy of this one for yours.

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

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Next Deadline: **January 12.**

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**About the Cover:** This image was an ad for my main article here on *Blackest Night*.

(c) 2009 by **DC Comics** or **DC Entertainment**.

## EDITOR'S CORNER

Anticipation was a few weeks ago as I write this, I still need some cash for mailing what issues I couldn't give out in person — but I want to get issue 10 out earlier, so I'm starting the zine early.

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The building Anticipation (the Montreal Worldcon) was held in was HUGE. There were so many rooms on one floor alone that it was tiring just to get around it.

Unfortunately I didn't see everyone that I'd hoped to. I saw Matthew (who was at work blogging the event), his lady Grace, a friend I hadn't seen for many years (Casey) ever since she moved to Ottawa... I also saw Lloyd and many of the folks I've only known until now as names in zines I'm in as well. Unfortunately I missed Bill Willingham completely (I'll find another way to interview him), Dr. Gregory Benford (I last saw him at Con\*Cept in 1992) and my friend Mur Lafferty, in from North Carolina. I got some books signed, and I have a few room party stickers on my badge.

I still consider this a very successful Worldcon for me, because of all the people I did meet, a sale of a zine and a gift to the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) winner from the UK of a zine.

I did chuckle though as my name was spelled wrong on my badge. Boman is often misspelled as Bowman - but here I was named 'Jeffery' instead of 'Jeffrey'. The irony was delicious!

Next year Worldcon will be in Australia, but I won't be there. Too expensive for my blood,

and without winning the Canadian Fan Fund (CUFF), not feasible.



==

Oh yes, the other successful part: members of the zine who were there already know - [ and readers of my Livejournal online too - but we are the winners of a 2009 Aurora award, Fan Experience (Fanzine) category!

We not only were the only local to win (I checked the list on the Locus SF site to be sure), not only is it rare to win the first time nominated... The Original Universe is also the first time a comicbook-based property has won.

Hopefully more — and better — comicbook properties will now be up for nomination and win in the future, but we'll always be the pioneer.

- Not to mention the worst kept secret of this zine. :)

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My sole regret: I was not there to get the award at the ceremony. I fell down hard in my apartment that morning, hard enough that I couldn't get back up on my own. I spent most of the day in an appropriately-named hospital waiting room for X-Ray results.

BTW: anyone who doesn't see the ties between comicbooks and science fiction... well, there was a panel devoted to that (which I missed), and I'll discuss it a lot on our Website as well.

Fortunately I didn't break anything... always a concern because I have severe osteoporosis. I did get a small muscle tear in my left arm though. It's healing (slowly), but my arm does still hurt. The doctor offered me stronger pain killers, but I declined. I don't have an addictive personality, but I didn't want to risk proving that right.

I don't want to steal all of its thunder, but I will share one important bit: Julius "Julie" Schwartz was a beloved editor at DC Comics. He was before that the first literary SF agent.

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I was home before the Award Ceremony began, but I was too wiped out to go. I'd paid for the banquet before, and that's a pity... but my well-being is more important. I got my trophy the next day anyway. I've also seen the ceremony in clips on YouTube now.

The zine is now featured on efanazines.com . I still don't like electronic publications much, but it will make it possible to get more exposure for the fanzine, and hopefully more readers.

==

At first the Webmaster (Bill Burns) was leery of deviating from "pure" SF zines (my friend Chris Garcia talks about wrestling too, so I see a lot of similarities). I listed the SF ties to comics including what I mentioned above, and submitted a sample issue.

It's just as well that I wasn't at the ceremony: while talking to the above-mentioned Casey about the win the next day I was still too emotional to form words that could be understood. I wouldn't have had an intelligible acceptance speech.

He'd met Julie and he's friends with author Ted White who recently also wrote comics (Sword of Atlantis I think?), and liked what he saw of TOU. So, we now have an archive there.

I wrote it down online instead. That could be understood then.

==

I created a business card for the fanzine, as there are too many addresses (e-mail, Website etc.) for folks to remember otherwise.

I'm attempting to create a slogan for us. I put a contest up for it on the Facebook fan page, but if any of you have ideas you can send them to me in e-mail also.

For the moment I have a line that sums up what I think I do:

"Life is like a box of comicbooks."

==

Changing gears: as a University Recruiter in Ottawa, my youngest sister has already seen much of the world. Last year she got her teacher certificate.

She's now got a 2-year contract to teach — in Egypt. She's on the other side of the world now. She hopes to visit this X-Mas, but we'll see.

It's strange: I just wised her a happy birthday (Aug. 29) on Skype, since she isn't here.

==

As I mentioned in e-mail, my old computer Lugosi IV flared out on me. When I brought it to a friend for repair I learned that it actually burned out. He ended up building me an entirely new PC. Lugosi V has an Intel dual core and 2 GB of RAM.

I have to buy a newer and higher capacity Hard Drive for it (hopefully in learly December) and 2 months later I still have a lot of software to reinstall, but after over 7 years I now have a new computer to do it on.

==

Because we need a passport now to cross the border into the USA (I have an aunt in my second home Burlington, and Rosh Hashana is in late September) I got one. I didn't pay for a rush order but I still got it in 8 days!

==

This trip would have also lead to a disappointment: the Montreal Comic-Con is the same weekend that I'd be gone.

I was really looking forward to seeing the guests, and I get a constant stream of updates about it on Facebook. This changed

the Friday a week before; my dad has no choice but to attend a meeting for work that Sunday, and that would mean far too much driving, so we went the next weekend (Yom Kippur) instead.

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[There's a 1-day Montreal Comic Con 1<sup>st</sup> weekend of December too. I'll have a report on that next zine.]

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By the time you will read these words NaNoWriMo time has come and gone.

It blows me away how quickly a year passed by, but this will also be one of my last 4 to make an even decade, and my hope to make my fifth win out of 7 tries.

Now that I have my netbook functioning, I hopefully won't have anything hindering me this time. (I never got to use it though. Oh well.)

My idea is still just a brief sentence in my mind. I said last year that I planned a thematic sequel to last year's try, but I won't work on it anymore until just before NaNo starts.

In the end I wrote 35288 words. Not a 50 K victory, but still a lot. I won't try any flavor of fantasy again though; I think that hindered me.

This issue will have a lot of the recent big news, as well as a spotlight on Blackest Night. A lot of it is old news by now, but still newsworthy!

### **RAMBLINGS OF A COMIC COLLECTOR**

Comics today suck.  
by Gregory Woronchak  
I know, classy. And subtle <g>.

The first comic book I stumbled upon was at a local depanneur in 1983; it was either Incredible Hulk 269, or Fantastic Four 239, my memory is fuzzy.

Regardless, I was hooked. Big time.

As an adolescent, I was a voracious reader; comic books combined words with pictures in an awesome package. I felt like I'd accidentally stumbled upon a secret and special club, and soaked up the colorful characters, epic battles, and sense of history pervading the comics I bought in bunches. At 60 cents a pop, even on an allowance, I was able to buy several titles, even if I had no clue who Wolverine was.

It was a simpler time. And comics were better.

Folk who started collecting in the 90s or 00s will roll their eyes and write me off as a senile old fart who pines for yesterday. Although they'd be mostly right, I do think that comics before the speculator boom of the last decade had some elusive element that is sorely lacking nowadays: innocence.

Super-heroes weren't deconstructed, dissected, or laughed at; they simply were. Stories were goofy and unrealistic, but also poignant and dramatic, without condescending or smart-alec winks at the readership. Heroes acted heroically, villains were evil, and the damsel-in-distress was saved.

Today, writers who have no clue about (or choose to disregard) the rules or strengths of the genre produce multi-issue arcs of agonized anti-heroes facing 'real' threats. Scripts that would be more appropriate for

episodic television are being given to artists who use two-page spreads to tell a story that requires half a page. Story-telling and clarity are sacrificed for detail overload, pretty pictures that are vacant, lifeless, and static, the exact opposite of how comic books should look.

The good old days featured collaboration between writer and artist; plots were discussed, the artist drew up a storm (respecting deadlines), and the action packed pages were scripted for maximum effect. New concepts and characters popped into existence monthly, rather than old stories being regurgitated ad infinitum.

Comic books were happy to be comic books, not some form of high brow literature.

And I was happy to read them, allowing myself to escape to wonderful worlds of fantasy.

Comics today no longer make me feel that way. They're badly paced, boring pamphlets produced by marketing departments looking for the next sellable 'event'.

The response will be: well, you should stop reading them, if you feel that way. And that's what's happened.

But I can't help missing the comics that so captivated me as a young man, lamenting that they no longer exist.

Next issue: why old comics are better than today's book.



### **Blackest Night is Here!**

The big DCU event is about half way done now, and to say that it's hitting and to say that this event is hitting big would be an understatement.

This was originally intended as an event for the Green Lantern titles only, but the concept of a Lantern corps in which the dead rise would cover far more territory than just those two titles alone, and it most definitely does just that. This article will deal with the facts that we now know.

I planned to ask if any of you could help me to get a full set of Lantern rings, but on Dec. 6 I bought a set.

### **Prelude**

In the setup for the event we learned that the villain Black Hand would be a spearhead. Black Hand was a silly villain created by Gil Kane and John Broome. His name (William Hand) is a tribute to creator William (Bill) Finger.

Originally he was a super-genius who created a rod that harnessed energy residue from a Green Lantern ring. He faced GL several times, but was never really taken seriously as a villain. When Hal Jordan was the Spectre, Black Hand actually had one hand turned to coal, to make his name more accurate.

His origin was changed for this series. Now he's the son of a mortician and coroner, and his power rod was actually given to him by the Alien Atrocicus to start the events of the Blackest Night prophecy.

Meanwhile the Guardian on Oa known as Scar, supposedly due to damage caused by the Anti-Monitor during the Sinestro Corps War cemented the final events that began the final rise of the Black Lanterns. Based on the start of hostilities on Agent Orange (Larfleeze), Scar may have started the draconian new laws of the Guardians (they were decided on by several, but Scar could have lit the fuse).

To finish the set-up steps, William Hand murdered his entire family, then killed himself (I'll explain why later in this article).

***Blackest Night: Tales of the Corps:*** This 3-issue mini-series had short stories about the individual color corps, stories of varying quality. There were no stories of the Sinestro Corps, but that makes sense; they were devoted a Tales series in *Green Lantern* already.

Only the Green Lanterns get 2 stories, every other just one: the origins of Saint Walker are given for the Blue Lanterns; the origin of Bleer the Red Lantern; a story of Carol Ferris's latest recruitment as a Star Sapphire; a tale of a greedy sentient being into the Orange Lanterns; a puzzling tale of the Indigo tribe. Puzzling because it uses an invented language with no translation, so we still don't understand their workings.

The two GL stories explain things unknown about two major characters: we learn that Kilowog wasn't originally a hard-nosed drill instructor, and that his word 'poozer' actually came from *his* instructor. In the other tale we learn that Arisia is a rarity in the Corps: a Lantern from a long line of ring wielders in one family. Soranik is the daughter of Sinestro, and Princess Iolande follows an older brother, but they too are rare.

### Nature of the Black Lanterns

The slugline of the series is that "The dead will rise". All of the Black Lanterns are dead - which explains why Black Hand had to die first to lead them. This could potentially make them the largest group in the War of Light.

It seems that to become one they have to be restless dead. Don Hall (the original Dove of Hawk and Dove) could not be raised in the Corps because his spirit is "at peace".

At first I thought they were too intelligent to be zombies, but at a DC panel at the Baltimore Comic-Con a DC editor *did* say they were that, just as a new take on zombies.

Many heroes and villains have died in the DCU, and many of them are now coming back. At first, I thought these powers overkill, but I think I understand it now: black rings give them flight and environmental support (with them being dead I couldn't really call it LIFE support), and they seem to be sentient mood rings (seeing the colors and emotions in others), but they seem to have no other powers of their own (they ARE using the emotions to charge up, but we don't yet know for what purpose. We do know that they are absorbing emotional residue the way that Black Hand did with Green Lantern ring energy). Except for that what they come with to start with is it.

### The Series

**Blackest Night #1** starts on Hero Day, a new holiday in the DCU similar to Remembrance Day, only focussed on remembering fallen heroes (and in a secret meeting for the

Rogues Gallery villains). This is the narrative theme for every living hero to begin with, with most teams and solo heroes getting together all over the globe.

Heroes, villains and normal people rise from the dead, some of them to kill heroes and then make them new members of their corps. Off the bat are undead of Ralph and Sue Dibny. This brought us the disturbing visual of a zombie Elongated Man, nose twitching as he says, "I smell a mystery!" Brr...

Issue 2 also has the scene of the ring trying to raise Don Hall and failing because he's "at peace". It does raise Hank "Hawk" Hall though #3 was disturbing.

This issue also cemented the fact that B-Ls have to remove a victim's heart to make them rise in their corps. That's different from the idea of zombies wanting brains. It also fits with their Oath.

B-L Aquaman shows how truly nasty his powers can be. We also see the debut of an undead JLA, B-L Pariah (why?) and they get the Spectre. That's a major power boost!

#3 shows that these bodies don't have the personalities and feelings of the folks we know (as if the fact that they are all evil wasn't proof enough). "Ralph" is destroyed, and "Sue" doesn't even react. The Ron Raymond Firestorm does something truly vile, but doesn't feel a backlash from affecting organics.

The leader of the 'Indigo Tribe' revealed that all of the ring colors are needed to create 'white light'. That makes more sense; white lanterns as a concept would be more of a Klan supremacist thing and not worth having in the end.

A team of villains have risen from the League crypts. Doctor Light is just a head on a candle thanks to the Specter, but we don't see that here. More reason to think these aren't the real bodies.

Issue 4 finally revealed the “big bad” behind all of these events: Nekron.

“Who?” you may ask. He rules Limbo in the DCU, which could make him one of the most powerful entities of the Underworld. He first appeared in a 3-issue *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps* series in 1983. That series was one of my favorites then, but his visuals were made by artist Joe Staton (of *E-man* fame). He was a prolific and talented artist - still is, far as I know. His style is very cartoony though, so he looked more silly to me than menacing.

He appeared again in brief cameos over the years as another almost joke villain. Geoff Johns and Ivan Reiss have made him scary too.

### Green Lantern Events

I have to say that I’m surprised that the Kyle Rayner Green Lantern has so far only faced one resurrected love in Jade. I have issues with writer Ron Marz “character growth via constant death” approach, but due to it anyone that Kyle loves is ultimately doomed (watch out Soranik!). I suspect that before the end of this event he’ll also encounter his mom, his flame Alex, and a thousand other lovers and relatives.

The series helped us to learn more about the other color corps and plot points. A major heroine in the Green Lantern Corps is actually the daughter Sodam Yat, the Daxamite GL bestowed with the Ion powers, is currently embedded in the sun of his planet, a point that will very likely be revisited soon.

### Blackest Night: Superman

The villains keep teasing the idea of making Jonathan Kent one of them. We’ll see if they do next issue, or if he’s also at peace. **Note:** this never was used.

One of the villains risen is The Psycho Pirate, an emotion manipulator. A perfect choice for a Corps that absorbs them! They also have power in the ruined surprise of Kal L, the original Superman who died in *Infinite Crisis*. The original Lois Lane is also back.

The Black Lanterns have also come to New Krypton; Zor El is now back and fighting his daughter Kara (Supergirl).

This mini-series isn’t the heavily criticized ‘red skies’ crossover that many were criticized for during *Crisis on Infinite Earths* during the 1980s. There are elements that tie into the *Blackest Night* storyline, but not reading it won’t detract from the main tale either.

### Blackest Night: Batman

Black Hand is carrying a skull supposedly from Bruce Wayne (though Bruce likely isn’t really dead) so this series really made sense.

This series led me to first believe that the risen dead are just the forms of who we know and not their spirits: Boston Brand rises as a Black Lantern, but Deadman is still around and can’t possess his own body.

The series starts with the graves of the Wayne family desecrated, leading Dick Grayson and Damian Wayne to investigate as Batman and Robin. Deadman comes to them then.

Several dead Batman villains rise. I only recognize 2: Magpie I didn’t remember being dead; the Ventriloquist died in *52*. Chucky-excluded, I’ve not seen an undead puppet. I found it funny.

Like the Superman title above this isn’t essential to the main story but just has a few small clues.

After snapping his neck, Wonder Woman will meet Max Lord again. I haven't read WW for a long time, but I will read this mini.

## Blackest Night: Titans

As much as Kyle Rayner is known for character death, the Titans are worse. If a new young hero made their debut in the DCU and was offered a slot on the Titans they would be wise to refuse.

This 3-parter led to the discovery that Don Hall could not be raised because he was "at peace". It also brought the two creepiest images to the storyline: issue 1 had Terra's zombie-state hidden by the mental illusions of BL Lillith, leading to Beast Boy kissing her. Issue 2 brought us the zombies of Teddy and Robbie Long, Donna Troy's ex and son killed in a car accident. I think they made a ret-con here though; I remember Donna's son being about 5 when this happened.

There's another death; with magic very different now, I suspect there'll be no replacement for this character.

A dead Titans team ends issue 2, same as the JLA are facing. Again, there are a lot of victims to fill this....

Issue 3 wraps up the story with more proof that Dove has the "white light". Obviously not enough though for more than a few creatures.

## Things to Come

There are some stories and events to come:

Booster Gold saved Ted Kord last year; now he'll face a zombie version.

The R.E.B.E.L.S will meet B-Ls in space, including Pariah. I thought him a useless character before (thus my reaction earlier). I hope Tony Bedard does more for him than just being a crying zombie. So far he hasn't been any better.

Hal Jordan will meet himself from his days as the Specter too, leading me to believe more that he's in a new body now. I haven't re-read *Rebirth* in ages... is that what happened?

Sadly, Superboy Prime is also going to meet BLs. Granted, he has many deaths on his hands alone though... it has happened in *Adventure Comics*. I unfortunately got this one.

The Justice Society will face the originals of some of the team. So: Mr. Terrific vs. Mr. Terrific, Dr. Midnight vs Dr. Midnight, Sand vs Sandman. No mention yet if the Atom is returning, but if he does will he face Damage or Atom Smasher? (He did. Currently Damage was a victim).

In an unusual bit: Prince Kofu and Chay-era (sp) will also rise - the beings the Hawks are supposedly reincarnated from. Maybe this means the Hawks are no longer them on New Earth?

Several one-shot issues of series now gone will be done, among them *Starman* and *Hawkman and the Atom, The Question* and *Suicide Squad*.

## Things That Should Happen

They probably will before the end. When you read this, they may have already:

Pariah will show up, so Harbinger should too.

There are many dead 80s JLI characters.

Waverider is also gone. A zombie who can travel through any reality? That's disturbing. (I just read Rip Hunter's bulletin board and it says 'Waverider is alive', so he may not be here.)

The current Green Arrow was made while the original had died. Maybe he'll rise too. (He did in issue 5)

There are still many twists to come in this story, and even some of these words will be wrong.

### **Blast from the Past: The Kree/Skrull War** by Justin Mohareb

They sure did stuff differently back in the Silver Age, didn't they?

I picked up a trade paperback edition of the Kree/Skrull War story from Avengers 89-97. The story has been referenced frequently in the past, but I've never had the change to read it.

One of the highlights of this story arc has got to be the art. It's done by the Buscema brothers and Neal Adams, and if you need more Silver Age than that, you're not gonna find it. The Buscemas produce some classic Silver Age visuals to their parts of the story, while Adams' tight lines provide a nice contrast.

The storyline is also an interesting reflection of the era. It's a loose story, with various threads tying it together. Ronan the Accuser, of frequent appearances these days in Annihilation and the War of Kings, makes a few appearances, as does a Kree Sentry and the Inhumans and the Skrull Cows.

The Avengers in much of the series are an interesting mid-period iteration, composed of Vision, Scarlet Witch, Quicksilver and Goliath II (Hawkeye on Pym Particles). During the course of the adventure, Captain America, Thor & Iron Man all make appearances, and in the end they get to take all the credit for saving humanity.

I'm tempted to check out the Skrullburgers FF issue (or the Skrull Kill Krew trade) to see if the fact that the Skrull Kow Kwartet were disposed of in this series garners a mention.

What's odd is that this story doesn't take place in the midst of the Kree/Skrull war. In fact, it takes place entirely on Earth, with Ronan trying to pull off a few strange plans that involve devolving humans and recruiting Inhumans, and the Skrulls breaking up the Avengers. Admittedly, the Skrull plot seems to consist purely of some Skrulls pretending to be Captain America, Thor & Iron Man and saying "we're disbanding the Avengers! Right now! So get out!"

Of course, the finale of the story seems to be that the Avengers don't have anything to do with it. Sure, they beat up on Ronan, although Kree technology tends to explode at random, so who knows if he had a chance of doing anything other than turning some Alaskans into Neanderthals. What was amusing was that he seemed to flip from blue to pink Kree almost at random.

The Kree/Skrull War's greatest quirk seems to be that the whole point of the thing was to get a human (any human, really) to the Supreme Intelligence so he could supercharge their brain and disable the Skrull and Kree armadas. Rick Jones just gets used because he's convenient.

What he planned to do AFTER that is a question the story never really answered, since freezing them won't really interfere with their ability to make war, unless he freezes them permanently, and then it's a case of Hey, Kids, Genocide!

There are oodles of great bits in the stories. Ant Man spends ten pages exploring the Vision's innards after the android is attacked by Skrull Kows, accompanied by a trio

CONTINUED



## MY TWO SIDES

Walt Disney corporation has purchased **Marvel Comics** for 4 billion dollars. This has been a news story on TV, and it's one that people will talk about for a long time to come.

There has been a lot of discussion about these happenings. Many analysts with far better opinions have shared their views. Here are mine, with a bit of Devil's Advocate thrown in:

### *Why It's a Good Thing*

With **DC Comics** behind Times Warner, they have the financial backing to put titles out that make a creative impact more than a sales one. So titles like **R.E.B.E.L.S** and **Jonah Hex** have had time to develop an audience, rather than be stopped right away due to initial sales not living up to hopes.

**Marvel** as a separate company has had to cut titles within a few brief issues if the profits weren't immediately high enough. The last incarnation of **Moon Knight** is an example: critics raved about it, some fans loved it, but it didn't sell enough and got cut.

That same lack of bottom line worry has allowed **DC** to experiment in ways that **Marvel** couldn't; something like **Wednesday Comics** for example would be seen as too much of a financial risk to even attempt there. Odds are that - despite mocking about **Marvel** characters being sanitized - the content won't change. Disney owned Miramax. Fans were shocked that mature content like **Pulp Fiction** came out from a kid-friendly company. They don't slap their company name on a product unless they intend to change it to their standards, and I don't think they want to ruin this one.

I heard a view on the **Comic Geek Speak** podcast about this merger that makes sense: there aren't many role-

models for guys in the current Disney product. Lots of princesses and other female leads, but most of the menfolk are lifeless characters. It's a good thing for girls to have more models to identify with, but there needs to be a balance (I know: also a bad deficit for superhero books). This merger will add this.

### *Why it's a bad thing*

Monopolies are bad. Times-Warner owning both **DC Comics** and Ted Turner's enterprises was already a bad thing. Vince McMahon of **World Wrestling Entertainment** purchasing most of his competition has meant a lack of innovation, complacency instead of interesting properties. Add the investment nature of these companies and you also get sanitized bland work to placate shareholders.

The same here, with Disney also owning the ABC network and other things. I suspect that they own FOX as well now, considering how FOX News is now on my local ABC affiliate.

(Granted FOX ruined Firefly and many other genre properties, so if they were hurting I won't shed a tear.)

If Disney does make changes in their product after all, it could suffer the same way.

Like the Muppets, the rights and licensing to competing companies mean that Disney really won't have true control for several years. Hasbro has a contract to make TV shows for a while yet, Spider-Man is currently tied to Sony, X-Men are tied to another company Iron Man as well... they don't have full control yet.

**Boom!** studios currently has rights agreements for existing **Disney** properties like the Muppets and Cars from **Pixar** (I know the writer). I don't think those contracts will be the least bit affected. Mind you, it does mean that those properties aren't really in house.

So, we won't yet see what this merger really means. In a few years, we may be pleased or angry; we'll see.

(Justin, continued)

of ants named Crosby, Stills & Nash (gaaaaah, the hipness, it burns).

Pym's mental instability is readily obvious in these pages, as he wanders around the android's body performing a steady monologue.

Goliath gets served with a summons after he goes to rescue an Avengers supporter who's being harassed by one of the random mobs that tend to show up at Avengers Mansion to chastise them for whatever current ill they're being blamed for (usually harbouring aliens or mutants or mutant aliens or alien mutants).

And, for some reason, SHIELD has a satellite with rockets that'll get you to Pluto in half an hour or so. That, kids, was new and exciting for me. When did that go away? Carter era budget cuts? Nick Fury name checks the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers (burning hipness... continues).

We also get a couple cameos by Annihilus (who is made a bitch in short order, twice, once by the Junior Avengers and once by Rick Jones' Brain, which would be a bitchin' band name).

Aside from the flaming hipness and the fact that the action of the story seems to be located somewhere far off of Earth, the story is an enjoyable one. There's glimmerings of the future Vision/Scarlet Witch romance (is it still off? Back on? Are both of them dead? Isn't the Vision just a giant iPod for the Young Avengers are this point?), and the war arc winds its way through a series of shiny adventures in a variety of neat locales (the defrosting north, Attilan, and the SHIELD satellicarrier).

The characters, in classic Silver Age form, are mostly reactive. Ronan does something in the far north, Jr. Avengers react. Skrulls perpetrate shenanigans in upstate NY, the Avengers react. It isn't until the end, when half their members (including mascot Rick Jones, and why do they take him everywhere again?) have been kidnapped by various factions that the Avengers decide to get out there and kick some ass.

And, thanks to the Supreme Intelligence putting Rick Jones' brain into overdrive, that trip was un-necessary. The Kree Skrull War is kind of flat as an iconic comics 'happening', but I did pick it up instead of a copy of Secret Invasion, so that's got to count for something.

## MOVIE VIEWS

Credit due: my friend Alan J. Porter (scribe of the *Cars* comic, among many other things) came up with a column in *Comicopia* many years ago tying life into comics. I think it inspired the style of this column.

I have watched many films since Anticipation ended:

**Caprica (DVD):** Battlestar Galactica has several comics out through IDW.

**Caprica** is a prequel to the BSG series set about 50 years before. It is set on the colony of the same name from a time when there was racism for other colonies such as Tauron.

That's the colony of origin of the Adams (real name Adama) family. The father (played by Esai Morales from **Jericho**) is involved with the patriarch of the Greystone family (played by Eric Stoltz from **Mask** and many others). In a terrorist bombing they lose a wife and daughter (Adama) and a daughter (Greystone). Greystone runs an electronics firm, and after discovering his daughter's skilled virtual reality avatar project tries to incorporate it into a robotic form called a CYLON.

Yes, this prequel is in part the origins of the Cylon race. It also has the origin of monotheism (one god), and the origin of classic lines, such as the original cylon expression, "By your command."

This DVD is the first episode of the TV season, but it also has elements that will be cut for censorship reasons: there are many topless girls in the decadent V club (a VR hangout for teens like Myspace and Facebook on the Internet). This isn't meant to be on HBO or Showtime, so those scenes will be cut.

Taurons are designed as film noir types wearing fedoras and suits. They also speak ancient Greek. They are more like the alleged Sicilians in practice.

Visuals for **Caprica** are incredible, taking the stuff learned from BSG. Caprica looks like a futuristic Rome.

Script-wise, this first episode doesn't match the back cover blurb. It talks of the two families feuding, but here they get along fine. I guess a feud will brew later on.

This was an interesting lead to a new series.

**Robot Chicken - Star Wars II (DVD):** Seth Green is very familiar to us. Starting as Oz on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,

then as Scott Evil in the *Austin Powers* films, the voice of characters on **The Family Guy** TV show, and the co-producer of this TV show. He's a very proud uber-geek, parodies comicbook properties often. He's one of us.

This appeared first on TV (well, there's also a version with more stuff here) as their second parody of this property. It contains a slew of scenes poking fun at the films. There are fun skits like Jar-Jar as the 'celebrity' of a Geiko TV ad (complete with the normal person commenting that she's easier to understand, a fun running storyline of the Emperor actually loathing Darth Vader, and Boba Fett actually getting a decent spotlight. They even got Billy Dee Williams to voice some funny scenes for Lando Calrissian.

One of my favorite scenes is a theatre musical number with ghosts of Yoda and Obi Wan talking to Luke Skywalker about all the stories they had told differently to him.

The episode plus the extended version takes less than an hour of the disc, so there are a lot of extra materials to balance that out. As well as extended versions of some scenes we learn about all of the voice actors (as well as hear their extended ad libs), see the show's premiere at the Skywalker Ranch, see how goofy that Seth looks in a production meeting, plus many more things.

This was a fun show to see. The enjoyment in making it shines through, and that it's very funny to boot is a huge plus.

**Ultimate Avengers 2 (DVD):** This is the sequel to the first film, and it still continues its kid-friendly approach to the Ultimates, something that still feels strange.

The alien race from the first film, the Chithauri, are found in the isolationist nation of Wakanda. Not surprising this is the debut of the Ultimate Black Panther, who's given more visual powers. It seems that one of the aliens was a Nazi villain that Cap fought during WW 2 - and still is. We see the family history of the Panther, and the genesis of T'challa in the role. Giant-Man meets a fate unlike the series, and there are other happenings in the film that feel odd (Steve Rogers and Natasha Romanov [the Black Widow] start a fling? Did something like this happen in the book? It feels strange).

This film was released in 2006, and I haven't heard about another sequel; it's most likely the final one, no more to come.

The film is mostly 2D animation, only a few ships and aliens in CGI. That makes sense: comicbooks are 2D, so 3D animation would look strange. Also, while most animation these days is CGI, the style I learned is much less expensive.

This lower expense allows this film something I haven't seen on any CGI projects: a gag reel as an extra. The voice actors take a few brief minutes to say some strange things and the animators can whip out a few motion cels in a few hours, or even just re-use what they've already done. Many of the gags are juvenile potty humor, but a running gag about Iron Man and a nearby rib restaurant is gold.

Other extras include an interview with Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch. This is the first time that I've seen what they look like! I've heard some of what they said before, but there were new things for me as well; some of Giant-Man's actions were put into perspective. His beating of the Wasp still leaves me sour on the book, but now I know his (poor) rationale.

There are sneak peeks of other Ultimate line films I haven't heard about since also. I think the line is kaput.

**Wall-E (DVD):** This film won the Animation Oscar earlier this year. PIXAR also made **The Incredibles**, often called the best Fantastic Four movie made, so this is a link to comicbooks.

People call this an ecological film, and I can see why: mankind has left Earth due to overloading it with trash. It has fled on a spaceship to the stars while robots clean up. We learn during the film that a 5-year trip was initially planned, but it turned into 700 years instead.

Wall-E is one of those robots. They've developed emotions; he's lonely, and after watching an old musical for centuries he's looking for love. When the robot Eve-A comes to Earth from the ship, thinks he's found both.

A plant is found on Earth, meaning that it's safe to return. Eve heads back to the ship to let them know, and lovestruck Wall-E follows. We learn that after 7 centuries mankind has become obese and lazy (everyone uses a power-chair to get around). We also learn that the people never intended to return. In the end they do, and man plans to be active again.

Visually this film is a feast. It bugs me that only Americans seem on the ship, with a small few African Americans. After 7 centuries man should have more cultural variety and mixing.

There are only 2 deleted scenes and 2 short documentaries. It isn't as disappointing as **Desperaux** was, but as a DVD I was disappointed.



Last year's Montreal Comic-Con had some cool guests, but the convention itself was lacking. The attendance was very low, leaving it very much a comics ghost town. It was too much like the "ShapiroCons" of the past here; until the late 1990s, a man named Elwin Shapiro ran a series of 1-day shows here. They were always 2-room affairs: a large dealers' room and a small one for 2-3 artists to sign books. There was nothing else to them.

Several attendees (me included) gave suggestions to the organizers, and they took them to heart, making this a much livelier show. They were given a suggestion to bring in stars from movies and TV; Lou Ferrigno is here this year (looking great!) as is Jeremy Bullock, the original actor for Boba Fett. They were suggested to get *anime* people; they got voice actor Bruce Swail, a guy with a lot of credits to his name (I saw him in Montreal when he was the voice of Nightcrawler in **X-Men Evolution**). They were asked to get other media pros; they brought us The Honky Tonk Man from the wrestling world and representatives from Eidos Software in video games. There were also many, many comicbook people, including Darwyn Cooke and Mike & Laura Allred (I'll have interviews with both) as well as Gabriel Morrissette, Bernie Mireault, Geoff Isherwood, and returning folks like Steve Molnar (I hope I got his name right this time Dario!), Wes Craig and Kat eventually "Red" Bradley, Herb Trimpe (I'm also interviewing him) and Dale Eaglesham. Tom Fowler also returned. I also met new ones such as Michelle Laframboise (she also won an Aurora), and local talent Jose Holder.



The Honky Tonk Man. He's cool, he's cocky, he's bad.

Eidos software also brought a booth, showing the new Batman: Arkham Asylum game which looks great. P-Brane, a publisher who was also at Anticipation was also here. I encouraged Yannick Paquette to come on the Sunday; he plans to come both days next year.

Mark Shainblum was listed, but it was the same weekend as Rosh Hashana, so he celebrated that instead. That's understandable; he's religious where I'm not. Also Michael Golden and Mark Texiera had to cancel, but they were at the December one, which I'll talk about in the next issue.

There was also a booth for QuebecLUG, the folks in this province who create elaborate Star Wars displays with Lego.

The mixture of things led to — according to their Facebook — a tripling of attendance from last year. So long as they keep improving (they only had a few panels on the Sunday) they may have even more in the future. This is a small conention compared to FanExpo, but it deserves to grow!



## COMIC THOUGHTS

### DC Comics changes too

On the heels of the Disney-Marvel merger, Times Warner announced their intention to form a new company called DC Entertainment to maximize the company's library of character's, both well- and lesser-known, for TV, movies, and videogames.

Most of what I've seen from DC of late has been animated (that's my field, so I'm not complaining), excellent shows like **Batman**, **Batman Beyond**, **The Brave and the Bold** and both **Justice League** series. If we get more good movies like **Batman Begins** and **The Dark Knight** out of this, so much the better.

Paul Levitz has been EIC and publisher for the company since 1992. Some people don't like him, so they'll be happy to know that his position will change to that of a consultant and writer. That may seem like a demotion, but it's one that will be a huge boon to many of us, as the next point will show.

The company swears that this has been in the works for years, but the timing is questionable.

### More LSH Goodness

After issue 6 of *Adventure Comics*, Superboy will no longer be there. The Legion will be THE feature of the book.

That makes sense. Such a large cast deserves more than an eight page co-feature.

Paul Levitz will return to write the series. As I said I feel bad that Levitz no longer is E-I-C, but he was the writer for great tales like *The Great Darkness Saga*. If he can continue to write such great stories for the Legion in the future then us readers all win.

Also, he won't allow goof-ups like in the first issue of the new book: the names of Night Girl and Shadow Lass were reversed.

Where are former Legion scribe Geoff Johns and artist Francis Manapul going to? Both will be on the new *Flash* series that starts after *Rebirth*.

### Final Issue of *Legion of 3 Worlds*

There were some good things in here, some not.

Among the good was having the different Legions be in different multiverse universes. So the 4 people who like the last incarnation now know it exists on Earth Prime. The first youngster Legion (batch SG3) are now in another - and the one we old-timers knew as the original are officially on 'New Earth'.

They now have a new villainess, as the White Witch has now succumbed to black magic and become the Black Witch. She needed a more interesting character change, and it also makes Blok have more to do.

I'm non-plussed about XS on the team (with Bart back, his sibling makes sense I guess) but Gates will be a fun addition. Like many, I look forward to scenes with him and Quislet. That's dialog gold!

The Time Trapper is only Superboy Prime in one version. I guess it made sense to merge two characters disliked by many (me included), but giving Prime any more importance bugs me.

One major plus: Prime is de-powered for now. This won't last unfortunately, and he's still an annoying character, but at least he's gone for now, and got what he deserves: Lori, the girl he's pined over forever, loathes him.

Now for the not so good things: first the delay between issues was rough. George Perez art is fantastic, but a 3-4 month wait between issues is still very tough to take.

Second is the fact that Superboy Prime (as I said before) will be back, and soon. There's already a tie-in planned to *Blackest Night* that will bring him back. This will just be

proof that you can't keep a bad villain down any more than a good one.

Thirdly comes as no surprise: I'm upset with having some of the original post-boot Legion dead. The latest incarnation I have no emotional ties to, but I liked characters like Kinetix. I know that their deaths were just a part of the story drama, but it still stings.

So: I have feelings both good and bad about the title.

### **A Different View on Wizard World: Toronto**

I spoke with several creator friends about this acquisition at the Montreal Comic-Con. First off, I should clarify that its actual name is "Wizard World Toronto / Toronto Comic-Con".

Last issue I gushed about this, but some of my friends thought otherwise.

First was the point that Wizard is supposedly not doing well financially (in the current economy though who is?), so getting more to purchase makes no sense right now.

Second: there's a fan backlash for their shows. Some folks aren't pleased with the Chicago one for instance.

I still hope to go, but maybe it's not so big a deal. I'm realizing that I may not be able to afford a trip next year, mind you.

### **In Praise of Wednesday Comics**

It's so far the shortest of the weekly series from DC at 12 weeks, but what a great concept! Folded it's the size of a regular comicbook, but it unfolds to the size of a newspaper broadsheet, like their Sunday funnies comic sections. Wednesday is the weekly day for comicbook shipments, thus the name. The one negative about the series to me I thought of while talking to Matthew about it

at Con\*Cept this year: it's on newsprint, and newsprint decays quickly. This makes it very difficult to store.

There are 12 weekly serials of one page. What's even more amazing about them is the array of creators. Paul Pope's version of **Strange Adventures**

and Adam Strange is quirky and different. Jose Garcia Lopez meshes well with Dan DiDio on **The Metal Men**. The story is a slow, but Neil Gaiman and Mike Allred are producing a fantastic **Metamorpho** series (plus: according to him the originals were HUGE). **Supergirl** by Joe Palmiotti and Amanda Conner is pure fun.

**Batman, Superman** and **Wonder Woman** are dull to me. **Green Lantern** is actually so-so to me as well. **Kamandi** is a bit ghoulish, if the Dave Stevens who wrote it is the same one who died last year. A few weekends ago I heard **The Flash** strip described as in the style of the old **Mary Worth** strip, and artist Karl Kershl said that was an intentional approach; I also got that feeling. The **Catwoman-Demon** strip bores me, as does surprisingly **Sgt. Rock**. Great Joe Kubert art, but blah story.

That's part of the strength of this project though, that it offers something for everyone.

### **The New Justice League Line-Up**

It was recently announced on the Newsarama Website. James Robinson is bringing many characters from the **Cry for Justice** series (Green Lantern, Green Arrow, Atom [Ray Palmer], Congorilla) and the rebuilt Doctor Light 2, the Guardian from **Action**, a new trinity (Donna Troy, Mon-El and the Dick Grayson Batman), with Cyborg and Starfire from the **Titans** joining. That team is getting gutted it seems.

Starfire is puzzling. She turned down an invite by Vixen (I don't believe she's part of the new line-up), so her joining now seems petty. Plus she makes for the fifth Titan on the team. That team will now only have Raven, Red Arrow,

Beast Boy and maybe Wally West, barring a huge membership drive too.

James Robinson is a terrific writer and Mark Bagly is a solid penciler at least. They could pull this off.

### Small Press Idol

Like *American Idol*, this was an elimination contest by independent comics by an online site called Dimestore Distro to find one as best. Regardless it gave an opportunity for more small press comics to get exposure.

I pre-ordered the eventual winner, issue 0 of a series called *Faction*. I'm hoping to have it for review here before this issue goes to print. The publisher sent a Facebook message out to fans. It seemed that it wouldn't win a week before the deadline, and encouraged the message readers to get it. In the end the title won; I can't help but wonder if this was a deliberate ploy.

Regardless, I think Small Press Idol was great for exposure. There's already talk of trying this again next year; I hope they do. I think it was a great idea.

### Various Comicbooks in Bullets

Lightning round time!

- *Magog* hits me like a super-powered *Punisher*, but without the initial appeal of that character. I suspect that this book will be like Giffen's version of *Suicide Squad*: DOA.

- **Marvel Comics** got the rights to reprint Mick Anglo's *Marvel Man* series from the UK, the copy of *Shazam!* that was different in the end and was the genesis for *Miracle Man*. It's not
- Metallo has now been introduced on **Smallville**. The Justice Society has been announced for this season too (I think by Geoff Johns). More comicbook properties on screen is neat to me!
- While a new name hasn't been announced, a new look will be given Wally West as a co-feature in the new *The Flash* title.
- Tom Denerick penciling a third JLA tale with the Royal Flush gang is hopefully meant as a joke. Otherwise, it's a dig by **DC**.
- So far Bill Willingham's version of the Justice Society is on the bubble for me. Eclipso has been a major villain in the DCU for many years. Now he's another nearly generic villain as part of a swarm? Someone didn't do their research!

HEY KIDS:  
LETTERS!

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September 20, 2009

Dear Jeff:

First of all, once again, congratulations on winning the Aurora Award for Fan Achievement (Fanzine)! Much deserved, and an indication that Canadian fans still know how to produce fanzines. And now, some comments on The Original Universe 9. (Issue 10 should have 2009 Aurora Award Winner! on the cover.)

### Issue 11 will - JaB

I thought the Montréal Worldcon was great fun, and one of the best Worldcons I've ever been to. I've since learned about the problems with programming and some people's

inability to work with others, but I don't think the attendees saw all this, so that was fine. This was one time I wish the convention had been longer than five days. I enjoyed the fanzine lounge, mostly because I didn't get what I wanted to get, but we made it work, anyway. We often had as many as 13 to 15 people in the lounge, and it was great to see that sense of community in such a small area. There was also the Aurora banquet, and I wish you'd been able to get to it to accept your award. The best of all was to be a part of the Hugo ceremonies (and the pre- and post- parties), and actually hand out a Hugo award. So many old friends, lots of new ones...that always makes Worldcon for me.

### **I wish I was there too. - JaB**

I don't look my age either, Jeff. Most people think I'm in my early 30s or late 40s. That just reinforces the idea that 50 is just a number. The name Fred Hembeck is a blast from the past. I cannot remember where I saw his artwork, though.

I've seen both Narnia movies, and have enjoyed each one, but perhaps not enough to actually go and buy the DVD when it came out. I know the third movie is in production, Voyage of the Dawn Treader, I think, and I'd need to check the Narnia movie website to see when it's expected in the theatres.

Have you heard anything about when the Paradise Comicon will be? Part of my job with Ad Astra this year is to find as many conventions as possible to send flyers to, and I haven't heard anything yet about Paradise's date. I knew about the change in ownership, but I do need a date to fit it in with the schedule. It will be interesting to see if Hobbystar decides to take on the new owners with new comic conventions on the same or nearby weekend. Hobbystar has been predatory that way in the past. (Checked online...it looks like the convention is cancelled for 2009, and will be relaunched in 2010 as a Wizards convention. Comic conventions are becoming a little too corporate for my liking.)

Ad Astra 2010 will be April 9-11, 2010. Wish there was some way for you to come down. I don't think Liana is on the BoD for this year; I haven't seen her at a meeting yet. I this Liana and Steven are trying hard to get more work, and I have heard about another Ed the Sock project.

I think I may have gone as far as I can with this, Jeff. Gotta look at dinner, and get going with that, and then get ready for this coming week. I hope there will be a call about an

interview soon. Take care, thanks for another good issue, and see you with the next one.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

==

A lot has happened since the last issue, but the biggest news around here is of course TOU winning of the Aurora award at Worldcon (more on that later). So a big congrats to you for that accomplishment.

Upon hearing that Wizard has bought out the Toronto Comicon, I too wondered what the impact will be. I too had a great time at the one Paradise comicon I attended (and spent most of the time with you) and was hoping to attend another one in the near future. Hopefully the high standards will remain. You lamented the lack of a big show in Montreal. Well the pickings are even slimmer here in our nations capital. Hopefully things will improve in the future both at your end and mine. I saw some pictures and even a bunch of videos from the recent 2 days comicon in Montreal and it looked like a big show. I think I'll try to be at next years event.

### **It's worth it. - JaB**

I noticed that in your Editor's corner you mentioned that you are now using Google Docs to work on the zine. I too have become a recent convert and as a reciprocal irony, I'm using it to write up this LOC. The convenience to jot down notes using any internet connected device is amazingly convenient and I can take a few minutes anytime to add to a work in progress at any time. While we sometimes curse the impact of cyberspace to the hard copy written form, it does sometime make things easier.

The big news in the comic world of late was the Walt Disney acquisition of Marvel. The initial horrific sensations that ran through my blood took a while to calm down, especially as I delighted in the many funny images that were being produced by many comic artists putting their comical pairings to pen and ink. I guess the world won't come to an end after all. It could actually work out well in the end IF the Disney folks leave to artistic team and don't over commercialize. They say that that is the intent, but only time will tell of course.

Better news came in the form of the announcement of the green lighting of the Green Lantern movie. (Pardon the pun as I'm sure I'm not the only one who thought that one up.) GL has been a long awaited character to get his Hollywood due. But that of course will all depend on the

outcome of the quality of the flick. Which brings me right into *The Spirit*. The dismal failure at the box office and harsh reviews could not dissuade me from watching this movie, but I did have brace myself for the inevitable brain flogging. How could the movie be that bad? Sure Frank Miller is no director, but as one of the most celebrated comic writers of all time, surely the story itself would be good. And he did get credit for co-directing *Sin City*, although we all know that was again really for the work he did on the comic. But the art in *Sin City* was a large part of it's success and clearly Miller adapted the same style for *Spirit*, so it could not be that bad, right? Well, yes it could. *The Spirit* IS a feast for the eyes but there really isn't much of story to back in up. And inexplicably, the writing falls flat for the most part. The result is that even actors like Scarlett Johansson and Samuel Jackson can't carry off some of the lame dialogue. I'm still glad I watched the movie, but much of little enjoyment I got was finally being able to see Will Eisner's seminal character come to life. I can't imagine any non-comic fan enjoying the movie. Too bad.

For comic reading since the last TOU issue, I've read up to volume 5 of "Y the Last Man". I also took the opportunity to have artist and Montreal local Pia Guerra sign my first volume at *Anticipation*. The biggest surprise read was a copy of Kevin Smith's *Spiderman/Black Cat* "The Evil that Men Do". Notoriously famous not for the comic content itself but because of the incredible span of publication delays that encompassed years, not just months, I expected that the fanfare would be betrayed by a mediocre story. But once again, Smith was true to form and I thought the writing was brilliant. A thoroughly enjoyable story if not controversial due to its very adult subject matter. After finishing *Essential Tomb of Dracula V1*, I'm now reading *House of Mystery V1* showcase. I've always loved these juvenile targeted horror comics as a kid and it seems I enjoy them just as much as an 'older' kid as well.

I was glad to meet Matthew at *Anticipation* and although we did not talk much, I noticed that he attended many of the comic related panels as I did. I can't say I learned to much about comics at those discussions, but they at least confirmed that I've been reading all the right ones. In fact it seems that I've already read most of hatother people consider 'must read' material.

As I write this, Con\*cept will open sometime later this evening, but alas I will not make it down this year. So I hope you're having fun there as you read this.

Dario

==

Greetings, Original Universe!

Congratulations on your Aurora Award win! Don't suppose you'll be at KeyCon next year to serve as a presenter?

**I may not have enough cash to go. - JaB**

This is mainly a "keep up the good work" note, but I was also wondering about possibly starting a dialogue on convention experiences and fandom news. What do they like? What don't they like? What would they like to see more of? With new cons sprouting up all over the place, somebody needs to start collecting this information, or else we'll all continue to stumble around in the dark.

Thanks, and congratulations again.

Regards,

Liana K

==

Hi, Jeff.

Hope you're doing well. Congratulations again on the Aurora Award! I'm getting this LOC to you late, I'm afraid; I was knocked out by a bad cold this past week. Though in a way that was a good thing, since that cold led to the subject of this here letter. See, I felt so groggy much of the week all I was really up for was reading old *Avengers* comic books. I started at the beginning, and just kept on going, up through the end of the Roger Stern run, closing in on 300 issues. Along the way, I noticed a few things.

To start off with, it was surprising to me how well the book held together for much of that time. It's not *Cerebus*, but it had the feel for a good while of something with a real unity to it — mainly because there was a theme which kept recurring, of heroism and what it means to be a hero. You've got characters like the Swordsman, Mantis, Tigra, the Beast — even Spider-Man, in a guest appearance in the Stern issues — struggling with what it means to be an Avenger, to be a hero (interesting that the book's subtitle for a good while was "The Earth's Mightiest

Heroes”). Rick Jones in the Kree-Skrull War and Michael in the Korvac Saga are both human beings who struggle with divine powers. Above all, of course, you have Hank Pym, who keeps joining the Avengers, breaking down, dropping out, and then coming back again for more. Somehow, though, it never really feels redundant.

The truth is that it’s tempting to think of the title, over the course of dozens and hundreds of issues, as a family saga: the family of Hank Pym. Hank marries the Wasp; creates Ultron, who creates the Vision — using the brain patterns of Wonder Man, brother of the Grim Reaper — and the Vision marries the Scarlet Witch. How many Avengers plots and sub-plots came out of the interactions of those characters? Hell, the current Marvel Universe is still being shaped by the Scarlet Witch.

Anyway, this being said, there’s not a whole lot that’s notable about the book for the first, oh, fifty issues or so. Even the Lee-Kirby stuff from the first 15 or 16 issues of the book have a thrown-off feel to them. Lee re-uses shtick from old Spider-Man books; Kirby’s art is uncharacteristically perfunctory, lacking backgrounds and scope. Things don’t get any better once the founding members leave and Cap ends up leading Hawkeye, Quicksilver, and the Scarlet Witch. You can see why Lee might have thought the change would be a good idea; get the guys with their own books out of the way, and build something distinctive in this title, setting up subplots among characters who aren’t tied down elsewhere. But somehow it never quite clicked.

One thing I was surprised to note in those early issues: There’s a persistent meme in Marvel these days that the original Avengers were a fractious, squabbling group — which is true enough — and that it took Captain America to forge them into a cohesive unit. This is, not to put too fine a point on it, utter garbage. Cap was just one of the gang when Thor, Iron Man, and company were around. It was when they left that he took on a stronger role, as the voice of authority to younger heroes. That’s a major enough role to have; it’s annoying that people want to play Stalin and rewrite the past to make the character more than he actually was. But then, that seems to be a habit with that character in particular.

So, anyway, after Kirby left Don Heck became the main Avengers artist for a good while, and, well. He was really not in a situation that played to his strengths. He was not a pen ciller who flourished in the Kirby-centric action-oriented formula of early Marvel. Some have said that he’d have made a really good romance artist; from what I’ve seen in his *Iron Man* work, I can believe it. Sadly, *Avengers*, where it was one costumed character and

battle-scene after another, really didn’t give him much to work with. Every so often you see a really nice, expressionistic panel — a close-up of a face, or some such — but otherwise it’s a lot of stiff, unconvincing figures and plodding panel layouts.

(I wonder whether he might have found a better role at DC, whose superhero books were shaped less by Kirby and more by a conservative house style suited to artists like Wayne Boring and Curt Swan. Conversely, was there a DC artist who might have been better off at Marvel? Bruno Premiani, maybe?)

Looking at Heck draw Quicksilver, you can really see the limitations of his imagination. Quicksilver’s super-speed never really has any kind of visual pop to it; the character, as a result, is lackluster. Now, that said, it seems to me few Marvel artists — maybe none until John Byrne — ever really seemed to work out a visually dynamic way of presenting super-speed. Which may be why Marvel never had a major speedster character. Kirbyesque physicality is great for strongmen types like Thor or the Hulk, but doesn’t display sheer speed to any great advantage. As a contrast, look at DC’s Flash as drawn by Carmine Infantino — whose art style made you feel the sheer velocity of the Flash’s power. It makes you wonder whether Marvel would have a credible speedster if Infantino had been at Marvel during the prime of his career — but then it also makes you wonder what would have happened to the Silver Age super-hero revival if Infantino hadn’t been there to draw the Flash at its beginning. Does the birth of the Silver Age owe as much to the individual talents working on that book as it does to any pent-up desire for the return of the super-hero genre?

Getting back to the Avengers ... Roy Thomas would take over for Stan Lee with issue 35, and he’d last through to #105, which is a good long run. It took a while for him to get his feet under him — I’d say until at least #50 — but once he did, the book began to get bigger and bigger, with more and more really wild ideas. Also a bigger and more interesting cast of characters. The stories, in fact, would grow bigger and weightier all the way through the Englehart run which followed Thomas, reaching its apogee with Jim Shooter’s Korvac saga. That storyline probably also marked a high point in terms of the number of costumed characters in the book, as more and more characters joined the Avengers or at least allied with them for a time. The Korvac story ended up bringing in the active Avengers, a lot of inactive Avengers, the Guardians of the Galaxy, Captain Marvel, Ms. Marvel, and a ton of cameos from the likes of Spider-Man, Doctor Strange, the Silver Surfer, and so forth. It almost reads like a harbinger of modern group comics, where it seems (as my friend Tom

Crippen once observed to me) that super-heroes exist only in a context of other super-heroes — more and more characters get crammed into a single issue or story, giving perhaps some sense of value for money, but removing the feel of heroes interacting with ‘civilians’ and the non-powered world.

But let’s get back to that run by Roy the Boy. Besides the scope, there’s an energy to it that Lee didn’t really have, an unabashed fannishness that gives it an awkward charm. There’s an early issue — 37, I think — that had this immortal line of dialogue from Cap: “We’ve got to abide by our Avenger code ... and, that code forbids us to harm any living being — or allow one to come to harm!” You have to imagine Thomas got a kick out of rewriting Asimov’s laws. Or, in *Giant-Size Avengers* #1, there’s a caption box about the Whizzer that says: “We’d explain just how our guest can plow thru the likes of Iron Man and Mantis ... but, you’ve already read that old hurricane-driving-a-straw-thru-a-solid-oak-tree stuff elsewhere ...” Which, again, is cute comics in-jokiness.

On the other hand, the grasp of real-world stuff is simply embarrassing. Lee introduces, and Thomas brings back, a Klan-like hate group called the Sons of the Serpent. In Lee’s initial storyline, though, it turns out the SotS are led and organised by a villainous foreign (Asian) communist agent. So American responsibility for American racism is displaced onto an external source of wickedness. Thomas reintroduces the group, but reveals that the new leaders of the Sons are a white racist and black racist (both of whom have active careers as TV pundits), acting together to foster hatred. Which is, how shall we say, awfully convenient. It suggests that the racial situation in America — in the late 60s, no less — was at a rough parity, such that racial issues can be dismissed with an airy “faults on both sides” handwave. Arguably even worse ... the black racist guy? Is not actually racist. I didn’t notice anything he actually said in the comic on panel that suggests he’s a hate-monger in the way the book (more precisely, other characters in the book) insist that he is.

On another note, the book is just as anti-communist as you might expect for the era, and then some. Complete with weird Vietnam analogues which manage to be both ham-handed and clueless — Avengers go to poorly-defined Asian country, overthrow evil communist regime, are greeted as liberators. It’s almost freaky, especially since the understanding of communism boils down to an international conspiracy; that is, Lee and Thomas — and even Englehart, at times — were obviously under the impression that all communist states were under the control of Russia. So that a Chinese official is able to give

orders to the Black Widow, at the time a Russian agent. Vietnam and China are consistently confused horribly. It’s an odd window on the American mentality of the times, when communism (even among people who ought to have known better) was believed to be a transnational phenomenon, rather than an ideology adhered to (more or less) by certain national governments, which themselves were often at loggerheads.

While I’m reading real-world stuff into old funnybooks ... it’s hard to miss the fact that, while there are a very few super-powered females, none of them have any kind of strength-based powers, and almost none of them are any good at close-in combat — the Wasp’s sting is really puny, and even the Black Widow is much more of a behind-the-scenes-manipulator than the martial-artist she’s become in the decades since. The Scarlet Witch and the Enchantress both have vaguely-defined magical or semi-magical powers — and that’s pretty much it for super-powered females, until #83, when Medusa guest-stars. It kinda says something that the most physically dangerous female hero of early Marvel attacked by means of prehensile hair (bear in mind that Sue Storm’s force fields and Marvel Girl’s telekinesis were both much, much weaker then than now). Valkyrie is introduced in the same issue Medusa guest-stars — well, technically, it’s the Enchantress posing as Valkyrie, who doesn’t become a ‘real’ character until some time later — and even then, Val isn’t a fighter; she spends the issue standing around making hilarious speeches about male chauvinism (I can’t tell whether Thomas meant the speeches to be so hilarious).

I’m reminded of a comment by Austin Grossman, author of the super-hero novel *Soon I Will Be Invincible*. He observed — and I’m not entirely sure I agree with the observation, but it bears thinking about — that super-heroes are largely defined by some trauma to the body. Mutants have their body change with no warning. Spider-Man gets bitten by a radioactive spider. The Fantastic Four are blasted by cosmic rays. And so on and so forth; it all, says Grossman, gets back to some damage to the body, which becomes transformed into power. So, with that said, I wonder (and this is purely my own extrapolation) if the avoidance of female super-types in early Marvel (and I suspect DC, but I’m talking about the Avengers, here) has to do with an uneasiness with the female body on the part of the writers? If you don’t have female front-line fighters, then you don’t have women relating to the physicality of super-hero action the way that males do. More precisely, you don’t have to imagine the physicality of the female body the way that you do the

male body. I dunno if this is the case, but it seems to me a possibility.

(Incidentally, I haven't checked publication timelines, but I'd guess that the first straight-up female fighter-type at Marvel would be Sif, who Jack Kirby re-imagined as a warrior-goddess. Which she never was in myth. Actually, Sif was a fairly minor presence in the surviving corpus of Norse mythology, to all appearances some kind of earth-spirit or corn-spirit with long flowing golden locks as a symbol for wheat. Kirby sees her as a black-haired battle-goddess, a proto-Big Barda — and I wonder if Barda was named in part from the notorious WWI-era artillery gun "Big Bertha"?)

Anyway ... overall, the Thomas issues seemed to get better as they went on, wilder and stranger. Relatively speaking; there were wilder and stranger things being published even at Marvel. But Thomas kept adding new ingredients to the stew, is I guess my point. The cast members he brought in made for a more interesting book, as a lot of them were fairly distinctive for the comics of the day. The Vision in particular is intriguing; too often handled as a generic superguy over the past couple of decades, it's worth noting that when he first popped up, he was a real mystery-man, complete with a mystery origin (shades of Wolverine), for some years after his first appearance. Even after that was cleared up in the mid-70s, he remained a distinctive character for some time, with a wide range of powers (density control, flight, optic blasts) which he used with precision and intelligence. His proclivity to thoughtfulness helped distinguish him from the characters around him. His odd self-awareness of himself as a machine, as not quite human, also gave him a ready-made subplot.

That continued after Englehart took over, and the relationship between the Vision and the Scarlet Witch was established. It was a logical and coherent step forward for the character and the title; Englehart made the soap opera work by linking it tightly with the action, building a fast-paced book. The stories got a degree or two richer, and kept expanding. A new character named Mantis, and the reformation of an old villain called the Swordsman, led into an expansive sub-plot about a Celestial Madonna, itself a springboard for the biggest battle with Kang so far — and, as it turns out, the last big battle with Kang in the main Avengers title for something like ten years.

Then Englehart left, and the book drifted through a few crossovers — Englehart himself having done perhaps the biggest crossover in comics to date, the Avengers/Defenders War, which went through three issues

of *Avengers* and three issues of *Defenders*. What you begin to see at this point is the *Avengers* title becoming a sort of home base for the Marvel Universe; because the Avengers were Marvel's premiere team, they tended to get wrapped up with whatever major plot-line was going on at the moment. So they get drawn into the conflicts between Doctor Doom and the Sub-Mariner, or the desperate battles against Thanos.

Then Jim Shooter comes on the book, and writes perhaps the biggest and best Avengers storyline to this day: the Korvac Saga. Through a slow build, dragging in guest stars and surprise villains and mysterious sub-plots, Shooter builds to a climactic battle in which everybody except Thor dies (they got better). It was, in a way, the culmination of everything interesting in the title for the past hundred-plus issues: cosmic revelations, an army of super-heroes, intricate plotting, cute character bits in the margin. Unfortunately, there was nowhere for the book to go afterward but down.

It's worth noting, though, that the seeds of Civil War could be said to be planted during the Korvac Saga and in the issues right after. Henry Peter Gyrich, an annoying agent of the US Government, starts determining who can and can't be an Avenger, insisting on maintaining fingerprints and proof of IDs (though, oddly, not a record of secret IDs). This caused real controversy too, to judge by the letters pages. In practice, it was vaguely hilarious; the Avengers couldn't follow "standard procedure", even when they wanted to. Personally, I think a lot of the bad feeling about Civil War among fans actually boiled down to that; super-heroes should be the kind of characters that just don't fit easily into categories, that don't follow procedures, that are not professionals. At any rate, in the long run, the US Government's relationship with the Avengers would be a plot element in many later stories — people tend to forget that the only plot reason Spider-Man didn't become an Avenger back in #237 or so was that the National Security Council forbade it. (Oh, and speaking of Civil War, it is interesting that when the Vision decides to try to conquer the world, one of the first things he does is try to set up Avengers groups all across the US and get the position of Avengers' chairman established as a cabinet-level post. Again, things that come to fruition after Civil War.)

But, ominous foreshadowing of plotlines explored thirty years later to the side, the Korvac saga really was the high point of the title. After that story, the book just sorta ... drifted. The decline was slow, with some cute character stories leading up to (the poorly-conceived, poorly-

plotted) #200, but it really just sputtered along for a few years through what amounted to a series of fill-in writers. Even when some good ideas were thrown in, notably when Shooter came back for a second run on the book, much of the character and plot work seemed poorly constructed or poorly paced.

The mental breakdown of Hank Pym, for example, was a good idea, shoddily done; Pym's collapse came way too fast, and the reaction of the other Avengers made no sense. Hell, even his own actions go beyond "nervous breakdown" into "utter incoherence". Specifically, at one point he builds a robot to attack the Avengers so that he can defeat it and look good ... except the Wasp finds out about it, leading him to hit her ... then he goes ahead with the plan anyway, *and she accompanies him* to meet with the Avengers *knowing what his plan is*. It's a scene that makes no sense. Then in the next issue you get Jarvis telling Captain America not to try and help Pym because that's not the American way ... or something.

There's almost a sense that the comic's trying to move ahead and bring in new, darker tints to the super-hero genre, but without really knowing what it's doing. You take the Molecule Man two-parter, #215-16; there's some nice character work with Tigra in it, and some interesting dialogue with the Molecule Man, the ostensible villain, who ends up, well, agreeing to try to work out his issues through therapy (there's a concern with mental instability in a lot of Shooter's work here, I guess). The idea sounds like something out of *Mad*, a satire of super-hero comics — but it works, because Shooter's scripting and dialogue is odd enough that the odd ending flows naturally. Only the structure of the issue is off; the key dialogue with Tigra and the Molecule Man is tossed off in a panel or two, for example. A lot of the character groundwork gets sacrificed to watching Captain America dodging giant things made of assorted molecules.

Generally there's a lot of work around this era done by talented people whose stuff here just doesn't click. J.M. DeMatteis has some nice ideas in scripts that don't really cohere on a plot level. David Michelinie, who writes a good Iron Man, just doesn't work out on this book, though he does create the Taskmaster, one of Marvel's more distinctive characters of the past thirty years. Carmine Infantino and Gene Colan have some nice atmospheric panels in issues that mostly show why they're not quite right for the title. In other words, it became a generic comic — a weakness of the Shooter era at Marvel, which tended toward blandness.

(Although there are some freaky things that happen around the edges. Shooter introduces She-Hulk as a member, then lightly mocks her as, how shall we say, unfeminine. Which at least is vaguely ironic given the pin-up treatment she gets these days. But Moondragon rapes Thor, and there's no kind of subsequent reference or repercussion; it's strange.)

At any rate, after Shooter's second run Roger Stern takes over, beginning a widely-praised run on the book. I have to say it's one of the more boring widely-praised runs of anything I've ever read. To start with, it takes Stern a while to get up to speed, and Al Milgrom's art doesn't help much. I take no joy in that statement; I remember Milgrom's inks over Jim Starlin's pencils, and I wish his own pencil work could touch that dynamic quality and design work. But it doesn't. I used to think my problems with Milgrom's art came from the quality of his linework, but looking at these issues it doesn't seem to matter what inker was on him. Now, there are some things he does quite well; he doesn't cheat on his backgrounds, for example, and his characters are clear, though not distinctive, in their body language and acting. Probably too much so; there's no subtlety to them. And his facial expressions don't really work. He varies his angles and perspectives, but overall his compositions aren't very dramatic or inventive. And his design sense is fairly generic. All of this is just my opinion, anyway, but in the end you have an artist who I'd like to like better than I do, but whose work seems curiously devoid of excitement.

Stern's scripting is somewhat ... soporific ... as well. No doubt his stories are better than much of what came right before, but his Avengers are still curiously earthbound, with a notable lack of epic feel to the title. There's a kind of deadly professionalism to the book that replaces wild invention and big ideas — as I said, the hallmark of Shooter-era Marvels. You read a few issues of Shooter, Englehart, or even Thomas, and you know something about the guy who wrote the book; something about what they think, what they feel. Not so Stern. Englehart can get in some good political digs in his issues, and even Shooter mocked Gyrich's mandating "government policies"; Stern has the Avengers blandly rescuing Ronald Reagan just like ... well, like any super-hero group rescuing any President. It's horribly generic.

Now, that said, Stern definitely has his moments. It's just that it tends to be in the form of slow character development rather than well-plotted mind-expanding epics. Particularly, while Chris Claremont was getting all the praise for having well-rounded female characters in *X-Men*, it's notable that Stern really brought out the Wasp as a leader, and built up the new Captain Marvel as a strong

character — and, ultimately, a leader of the Avengers in her own right.

Oddly, much as you can see the roots of modern team books in the proliferation of costumed characters in the 70s titles, you can see a harbinger of modern books in Stern's first major storyline, "Unlimited Vision", in which the Vision goes crazy with power and tries to conquer the world. Firstly, you've got the internecine warfare among heroes that was such a prominent feature of *Disassembled*, *House of M*, *Civil War*, and to a lesser extent even something like *Blackest Night* — the idea that one of the scariest villains the heroes can fight is another hero. It works on a basic character level, but it does point up what I was saying about a kind of claustrophobic or even incestuous brand of storytelling; the absence of the new.

On an even bleaker level, the character who goes bad is the Vision — the book's emblem of the non-human, of the truly alien. It's an annoying characteristic of contemporary books, I find, that the new and the strange and the alien are treated with suspicion; there's a fear of what is different, which is actually an odd thing to see in books that are by definition about characters who are exceptions from the norm. The plot seems to have meant to herald a new status quo for the character, making him more "human" and emotional — which is to say, removing from him everything that made him special and unique, turning him into just another costumed superdude.

(To say nothing of the fact that on a practical plot level, it seems that by this point of the book, every time the Vision tries to phase through somebody or something, there's a shield or feedback effect that stops him or knocks him out. It's a symptom of the repetitiveness of the book's action scenes.)

(And on yet another random note ... geez, a lot of stuff was wrecked in Stern's run on the book. Never mind the Vision's character — the Skrulls lost their shape-shifting ability, the Savage Land was destroyed, and Xandar was wiped out. A lot of distinctive stuff was erased unceremoniously, and not much brought in to replace it. Captain Marvel/Photon, Nebula, Terminus ... um ... a new female Yellowjacket ... oh, Jean Grey came back from the dead. So, you know. There's that.)

That Vision storyline is also, of course, an example of the *Authority/Squadron Supreme/Marvelman* plot, in which a hero takes over the world to run it better. My thought on this plot in general is that it really only works when the

## Next Issue

**This issue will be hard to top, but I'll try! Next issue will include (I hope):**

- chapters 5&6 of *Avatar: Rebirth* (to try to catch up);
- future interviews with comic professionals;
- Contributions by fellow members again;
- letters;
- a cover by Michael Golden (I commissioned it, so I have it already in-hand).

**See you in a few months.**

possibility is real that the world-conquering hero actually can create a better world than the one we know — as is the case in *The Authority* and *Marvelman*. The Marvel Comics examples are more timid, more conservative.

So you end up with obvious, boring plots like this one — and this particular example makes less sense than most, as a character who plans to control the world by being smarter than everyone else repeatedly makes elementary errors of judgement and constantly acts in a notably stupid manner. The result is a desultory, rambling story absent of any emotional affect.

There's a concentrated aura of dullness that settles in on the book. The 250<sup>th</sup> issue is a double-sized issue, uniting two teams of Avengers against a bad guy named Maelstrom. Who never did develop into a credible threat. In general, the book turns into a sort of central clearinghouse of the Marvel Universe, where aimless plot threads from other books (what happened to Spider-Woman? What about those Dire Wraiths? Hey, Thor, why's it snowing all over the place?) come to be summarily wrapped up or else wearily shuffled forward. The characters in the book aren't really affected; in fact, compare it to the adventure and character-based angst of

the contemporaneous X-Men books, and you see why the mutant titles were Marvel's flagship of the time.

**This is why I still disliked Maelstrom in a recent storyline in *Guardians of the Universe*. - JaB**

The book gets a jolt of energy when John Buscema takes over art, inked by Tom Palmer. The Avengers start going back out into space, and Kang comes back in the form of a council of parallel duplicates. Which, actually, points up a bit of a problem for the book (and it's a problem I think most Marvel books still face): the need for exposition. You want to have Kang as a bad guy? You need to explain his shtick, his history with the Avengers ... that takes up pages and pages of a comic. Same thing goes for any longstanding villain. Or longstanding hero. As these characters develop larger and larger backstories, it becomes a major juggling act figuring out what information to put in a book and what to let slide. In the end, I suppose, you end up with something like *Avengers Forever*, which I greatly enjoyed — but which is basically a twelve-issue run through old storylines, polishing them up and trying to establish simplified status-quo for a number of classic characters in order to make them more usable.

Anyway, probably the highlight of Stern's run was the Siege of Avengers' Mansion storyline, when a small army of super-villains managed to take over the Avengers' headquarters. It spanned a number of issues, it was well-plotted, and ... well, it was a good action story. There was nothing new or inventive about it, but it hit the bases and hit them hard. What I'm saying is that in its sheer competence it reinforced what the title had become — a standard super-hero punch-up title. The highlight of the storyline didn't come during the fight scenes, but after, as Captain America sorted through the wreckage of his personal effects, and as Jarvis the butler argued with himself about returning to duty after being tortured. Good character moments, but not so much integrated into the action, much less integrated into the big-ideas style of classic Avengers storylines.

**Bendis will soon have a Siege too. - JaB**

So ... that's what I saw in the old-school *Avengers* title, at least through a sinus-cold haze. Hope some of these ramblings were of interest to you. If it's all right with you, I think I'll post them on my blog — [misrule.blogspot.com](http://misrule.blogspot.com). Take care, and see you around!

==

Dear Jeffrey,

It took me less than two months to read your zines. Maybe I'm beginning to catch up with my reading, though computer problems set me back quite a bit.

You mentioned your own computer problems in #8. My hard drive needed replacing. Although it was working fine for the moment, it was obvious that

it was getting flaky judging from the problems I'd experienced since this summer. It took longer to replace than expected, so I was without my

computer for ten days; my computer being a laptop, I didn't want my husband to attempt the replacement. It's taking me a lot longer to catch up with

everything I fell behind with during that time.

The greatest sin that you mention about writers I guess applies to any project. I'm usually pretty good about finishing them, but I have to admit

that I've started writing projects that were never finished. I'm just no good at plotting.

**I also have a few long unfinished. - JaB**

According to you, I haven't joined the late twentieth century yet. I still don't have a mobile, but I do intend to get an iPhone next year; I just

don't know yet how soon after the first I will be able to get one. Finances are really tight right now. I'd like to pay off all the credit cards first.

Carrying a credit card balance is quite unusual for me, and I'm not comfortable with the situation.

I finally caught up with THE DARK KNIGHT on cable, and I did not care for it at all. There wasn't enough story.

HELLBOY II was a good story, but I have no familiarity with the written product.

I bought the last LEGION OF SUPER HEROES series, but I have to admit that I'm a bit disappointed with the story—too much politics. I'll just enjoy

my archive set of the original Legion stories.

I have to admit that my reading of comics is quite limited. First I found Little Lulu fandom, and that was it for a while. Then I finally succumbed

to the charm of J. Michael Straczynski, and I've been reading everything he's been working on since BABYLON 5. Occasionally I pick up other series,

such as the LEGION or a couple of the Star Trek ones.

By the way I really hated the total negation of Straczynski's story line in the Spiderman saga.

Not as many comments on #9.

I really identified with the cartoon on p. 6. When I was a little girl, I lined all my toys up against the wall when my mother told me to put them

away. For some reason, she didn't see things my way.

Unlike Dario Sciola, I was lucky enough to visit the Ackermansion twice. It was quite impressive. Forry even showed me the gold fixtures in the

bathroom! I also visited him in his mini-mansion but not to take a tour. This was when his health was already failing, and we attended his Halloween

open house just before we moved to Arizona. I also managed to send him a last birthday card shortly before his death. I'm sure that he is greatly

missed by many people.

Dario requested what I was going to—the separator between LoCs, and I see you've implemented it. Maybe one of these days, I'll have time for fillos.

We're still settling into our new house, not to mention that I'm still catching up from the recent computer hospitalization. There's a lot of

catching up to do from the period during which we were building the house and moving. Trying to catch up and return to a more pace of life is a challenge.

I should be able to send my next issue of FELINE MEWSINGS your way—probably toward late November unless holiday stuff gets in the way.

—

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==

Steve Green

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Hi Jeffrey, First off, many congratulations on your well-deserved Aurora. Sorry you couldn't make it to the awards ceremony, but I can assure you the announcement was greeted with loud and widespread approval.

**I even more wish I could have been there to hear it. - JaB**

Interesting interview with Fred Hembeck. I share his slight bewilderment at many of the more recent developments in the Marvel Universe, though we part company on his refusal to accept the resurrection of Bucky Barnes. After all, Captain American was himself hauled out the grave after best part of a decade (although his 1950s incarnation has since been retconned to remove any confusion), as was the Sub-Mariner and the Human Torch (the latter recast as the Vision, having effectively been replaced by the youngest member of the Fantastic Four). Bucky's reappearance in the guise of the Winter Soldier was actually rather better handled than most of Marvel's 1960s necromancy. *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* is among Kevin Smith's least successful projects, although it's a welcome reminder of Elizabeth Banks' comic presence. How long must this poor girl cool her heels in relatively obscure movies (*Slither*, *Role Models*) before the Big Time comes knocking? Great to meet you in Montreal, by the way. I had a terrific time both before and during the worldcon, and will be covering the entire month's adventures during my eventual TAFF report. (There's a

new eastward race in progress right now; full details at [taff.org.uk](http://taff.org.uk).) Kind regards — Steve =====

Jeffrey Allan Boman

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Hi gang! Even though I write a lot here already, I also LOC — so you hopefully read me again. :)

Issue 9 had some great content, but less pages than I liked. Hopefully this current issue is longer!

To the LOCs:

**Lloyd:** I voted for you and encouraged others to for the Auroras. Sorry it wasn't enough. / The trophy is also nicknamed the Cheese Shredder, and I can see why. It's barely near reach now for my safety. :)

Re: Emru... he did get the bone marrow transplant. His wife Vicki shared a photo of it. The thing was he had an even rarer condition called Monosomy Seven. Because of it he couldn't easily go into or stay in remission. He wasn't in it at the time. I've had another doctor tell me that things hit back with a vengeance if you aren't in remission and that's what happened.

It's a year later now. It hurts a bit less, but it still stings.

**Dario:** Morrison's run on *Doom Patrol* was strange, but the writer who followed him (Rachel Pollack I think) was awful. She doesn't write comics anymore (thank Ghod), and I don't think we'll ever see a trade of her work either. / My one gripe with CGS: the sound level of their shows always seems low to me.

Anticipation was fun. I didn't realize until then just how large the Palais de Congres really was!

Me: With so much content and NaNoWriMo here I have to defer Avatar prose until after. I'm now up to 23 fans on the Facebook page now.

That wraps up issue 10. Read you all for 11!

JaB

**We have a forum on the Web now: <http://touzine.forumotion.net/forum.htm> . It has very little activity right now, but hopefully you'll help to change that soon.**

# Remembering George Tuska

April 26, 1916 - October 15, 2009

George Tuska drew stories for *Crime Does Not Pay*. During the Silver Age he pencilled (often as a fill-in) many series at **Marvel Comics**.

Never a flashy artist, he was dependable and prolific.

He retired from regular art in 2000 to his home in Manchester, New Jersey. He died near the stroke of midnight. He was 93-years young.



## ***TODO LIST FOR 2009***

- Con\*Cept 2010
- Finish the zine Website
- Finish my Mutants and Masterminds updates
- Kindredspace
- Pitch a project to Polymancer Studios

### ***TODO SOMEDAY***

- Keycon 2010, Winnipeg (maybe I'll win a lottery)
- Toronto Comic Con
- San Diego Comic Con

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS, WHATEVER YOU  
CELEBRATE!**

*You have \_\_\_ issue(s) left for The Usual. Then you're off the mailing list. Please avoid that sad fact.*

*If you're a subscriber you have \_\_\_ issue(s) left of that.*