



THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE

NUMBER 3

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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: **February 12.**

About the cover:

That graphic should be self-explanatory, but I still talk about it in the Editorial section.

Editor's Corner

Welcome to the issue! Lots of stuff happened here, both good and bad, for me to cover:

Firstly, I'm really sorry about all of the errors that crept into last issue. The zine is still a "work in progress" as Matthew called it. I'm just hoping I learned from the mistakes.

I'll be checking the master copy carefully from now on to make sure that I'm not missing any parts of the text, so that I don't need to send you a corrected PDF file in e-mail afterwards.

Also, I am giving my current print shop one last chance with a different way of producing the graphics. I saw that their printer didn't grayscale the images before printing, so all of the images came out murky. If the new process doesn't work, I'll have to try a new place.

Speaking of this zine, I really need art help for future issues. I need art for the covers, as well as some mini illustrations ('fillos') to help to break up the walls of text.

These fillos may be reused in other issues over time.

I'm on a new contract at the same agency. I volunteered at the Action Centre for about 5 years helping in the computer class. One year we had a different teacher who didn't really speak English, so I was the translator also. November was a bit more difficult for me financially, as the previous work contract was over. As a result I was missing a chunk of my budget that I'd grown used to.

I started a new contract the last few days of the month though, at the same place. Even better it's an open ended one; so long as the organization likes my work, it will be renewed every year.

Being a volunteer for so long really paid off for me in the end!

NaNoWriMo 2007 has now wrapped up, and this will be the first time in 5 years that I haven't made it to the 50 K "finish line"...

I was close at 46,528 words though. At least 10,000 of those I wrote in the last week alone. I had a lot to deal with this year (some of it in the next piece), and it contributed to me not making it.

I did win on moral grounds though: this past year I learned how to generate spontaneous text in **Word**; 10 minutes before the end, I was tempted to use it to make it to 50 K.

My self-esteem stopped me. If I won without doing the work for it I would have felt ashamed of myself. There were other reasons to avoid doing it also.

I do intend to finish this novel though. After this zine, a LOC for another, and corrections for one of my freelance projects I will work on the other nearly 4000-words. I worked with these characters long enough that I can't leave them hanging.

It would have been nice to claim I had 5 wins in 5 attempts, but I am content with sleep on a clear conscience.

I put off writing about this for awhile, but I guess I should get it over with:



R.I.P. Boots Boman 1989 – November 22, 2007.

This was the major reason I had difficulty getting my NaNo-novel finished: taking care of my older cat.

Back in late September I brought him to the vet because he had dropped a lot of weight. The morning of the visit I also noticed that his inner ears were yellow.

I hoped I was imagining the worst, but I wasn't: he had jaundice. His liver had stopped functioning properly and bile was going through his system. That caused the yellowing.

He wasn't in pain, so euthanasia wasn't a needed option. I'm not rich, so the animal hospitals in Montreal (at \$200 an hour!) for radical treatment weren't an option either. All I could do was to bring him home and keep him as comfortable as I could, which meant many feedings during the day and lots of love.

I had to close him out of my bedroom in October. He thought my bedding was his litter box, and when 2 of my 3 comforters needed a wash because of that fact, that was it.

He made messes outside his litter box all the time, and his back paws were a mess he didn't clean up. I took this to heart, and realized it was time. I made an appointment with my vet to have him put down.

He didn't make it: I couldn't find him at first on the 21st. I looked harder and saw why: he was lying on my living room floor, unable to stand by himself. I brought him over to his supper. He ate about half then was too tired to continue. I brought him to his litter (he'd already made a mess on my floor which I cleaned up) and he just wanted to lie down in it.

I made an earlier appointment to have him put down, and called a friend to come with me, as I'd likely be emotionally trashed after. He didn't survive the night though: by the time my friend arrived, he was gone; he wasn't breathing anymore and was getting cold.

We wrapped him up in an old towel and bagged him up; she has a semi-farm, and she would give him a proper burial on it. In the spring I want to visit it.

Taking care of him then recovering from my grief took me out of my writing rhythm – but I will still finish the book. I want to dedicate the volume to him.

Meanwhile I'm back to caring for my 14-year old calico Squeaky. It's just the two of us again like we were 12+ years ago – except for me snuggling her more.

On a far less somber note: my computer is again dual boot, XP and Ubuntu Linux. I'm truly getting my geek on!

I had my system like this at the start of the year, but thanks to a power short during an upgrade, not to mention a lack of knowledge on my part, my Linux partitions went unused until I got it fixed up last month.

Because of a hardware crash last year, I used Linux on Live CDs for months; I grew more accustomed to the OS, though it really isn't that different from **Windows**. I also found which flavor of the OS that I liked enough to use regularly, and that's Ubuntu. Apparently there are about 500 different varieties to choose from; my other choice (Simply Mepis) was too difficult to use without wiping out everything on my PC, so I didn't use it. I do have it on a USB key though, so on any PC I can boot from a USB

drive, I can run it – and like a Live CD, except that as soon as I remove it, any changes or file saves I do are only on my drive.

I can see why Microsoft hate Linux: as well as being free like air, there are updates and bugfixes **daily**, not once in awhile like Windows. Plus it loads up in maybe 15-20 seconds, something you only get in Windows before you add anything to the startup.

This being the issue for holiday time, I wish you all happy ones whatever you celebrate. I'm moving my deadlines over to the next month, which unfortunately is closer to my former APA, but this zine has a different clientele.

This issue also won't have any movie reviews. Thanks to no distractions from my novel, I only have 1 film to review. This feature will return next issue, when I have more.

See you in 60,

JAB

COMIC THOUGHTS

Like previous issues, this will also follow-up on things I've spoken of before:

COUNTDOWN TO FINAL CRISIS

With issue 26 the series (*Countdown*) finally been given the title of what it was counting down to (as if we didn't already know) , and with that and events in the book it's pretty sure that Superman Prime will be involved. His actions have been beyond loathsome (issue 24 I've heard referred to as 'a snuff film on paper') and he's also been the focus of the series of late.

They also had two of the more talented artists each draw an issue apiece: Scott Kolins and Ron Lim. They immediately came back to the people they have been using to date.

Paul Dini is really using this series for his darker concepts. First we had the Rogues snorting cocaine, now we get 'Prime literally destroy an earth, then torture Myxyp1tk. I shudder to think what comes next in his mind. The man behind some great all-ages animated series is now getting really dark. Brrr!

COUNTDOWN TO MYSTERY

The main feature for this is the new **Dr. Fate**. Originally, this was slated as its own series; I actually solicited it, in fact.

What we will be reading here are the issues that writer Steve Gerber wrote. As I read an interview with him on **Newsarama** I found out why, and I'm not complaining:

He has very serious health problems. In fact, he's on a waiting list for a liver donor. I'm not insensitive to that, and I don't know anyone who would be.

Steve Gerber is the creative force behind some of the quirkiest comic characters and concepts in comicbooks. You can't say his name without mentioning **Howard the Duck**, but he also co-created **Omega the Unknown**, created **Foolkiller**, **Stewart the Rat**, **Destroyer Duck** and many others, was a series editor on the **GI Joe** and **Dungeons and Dragons** cartoons, wrote episodes for **The Batman-Superman Adventures** and also co-created **Thundarr the Barbarian**. He really had his hands in a lot of stuff!

He has his own site on-line: <http://www.stevegerber.com> .

The series itself is different. Although the new **Dr. Fate** shares the name of the original, they aren't related. He also had no familiarity with magic to begin with. He's a down-on-his-luck bum learning slowly about the powers he has been given – so we're learning with him. That's a refreshing approach.

ANNIHILATION CONQUEST

I really enjoy cosmic stories. When a company builds up entire interstellar cosmologies, you really need big storylines for them. They don't really work well one-on-one.

This goes against my general malaise with **Marvel** right now, but I greatly enjoy these series. I was disappointed when Annihilis was behind the **Annihilation** story last year (as a villain I think he's already had too much play), but the storyline was interesting. The last Nova, the death of Quasar, the Super Skrull, Ronan and Drax being interesting again, Galactus actually getting beat up.., there was a lot of story in what was essentially a 23-part story.

Now a sequel, and this time using villains we'd never have expected, and pulling in characters we never would have anticipated either (Rocket Raccoon? Mantis? Bug from the Micronauts?) Add in a completely new character

(Wraith) and the new Quasar a Joan of Arc type... this is already a fun story! Plus: will Gamora break free when she sees Adam Warlock again, can the Phalanx be stopped, will Nova be able to purge the virus from his system, will Moondragon ever have a human form again... more plot threads, so I won't list them all.

There's a lot of potential story here. I never thought I'd say this, but: good job, Keith Giffen.

(Granted this all changed with the revelation of another overused villain as the head of this all. I just read it.)

Some capsule comments:

New X-Men: I started to read this when it began and was called *Academy X*. I was interested in what new characters could develop from it.

That said: I'm considering that I may soon drop it from my reserve. Several times now it has suffered from a major problem: the crossover events. It doesn't get to have its own 'voice' as a series as it just becomes another chapter in whatever crossover. All individuality falls.

Ironically I dropped every mutant title nearly a decade ago; Joss Whedon's *Astonishing X-Men* brought me back to some of it. Now it may lose me a bit again.

Supergirl is Gone: As of the latest issue of *Supergirl and the Legion of Superheroes* she has been sent back to her own century (I'm guessing during the *World War III* storyline) with no memories of her time in the future. Next issue the new Jim Shooter run starts.

I'm still stunned that he was initially offered a complete reboot. I think he realized that Legion fans would flee at the concept having another one (5 or 6? It's a haze now...), so he turned the idea down. I'm guessing and putting thoughts in his head, granted... I wonder if I'm even close to the truth?

Gary Frank drawing Action Comics: currently the oldest continuing series (more than 758 issues now!), hot artist Gary Frank is now drawing it (he may have an exclusive contract; I'll have to check. For his first 6 issues

there's a story with the classic Legion. Adding that to my reading was a no-brainer decision. :)

While I'm a fan of his art though, I didn't like his interpretation of the characters' first meeting. The Legion trio looked like adults next to a 13 or 14-year old Clark. When Clark wondered of Saturn Girl had a boyfriend in this version it felt a bit creepy to me.

RAMBLINGS OF A COMIC COLLECTOR.

My first comic was off a spinner rack at my local 'depanneur' (Quebec version of 7Eleven), I do believe it was Incredible Hulk 270.

I'm not quite sure why I decided to spend my allowance on it, but I've been hooked ever since. I soon after discovered the **Fantastic Four** (239 was my 'first') and **Daredevil** (183), and *lots* more. **World's Finest** Dollar comics blew my mind, so many story pages for a buck! **Detective Comics** 509 also

stands out in my mind, on account of the riveting story and beautiful art by Don Newton. I think it was then I became a DC fan forever.

Man, it was a good time to collect comics. Creators like Miller and Byrne were producing simply terrific work. There weren't a gazillion titles and mini-series spin-offs to keep track of. Sure, distribution was touch-and-go (you never quite knew *what* was gonna be on the rack any given week, so I tended to buy stuff simply because it seemed cool), but that was part of the fun: hunting down issues to keep up a collection. I remember my frustration when an issue ended on a cliff-hanger, since I wasn't sure if I'd be able to find the next issue at all.

One fateful day, I was introduced to a local comic book store. I was absolutely *stunned*; walls *full* of comics, *bins* of comics, *old* comics that I'd missed.... it was simply *amazing*. I spent way too much in a too short period of time <g>.

Eventually, I got tired of the stuff being published; the speculator nineties hit, and I almost dropped comics for good. Sure, MacFarlane and Leifeld were putting out some interesting work, but the stories were



derrivative and boring. The whole Image thing and Bad Girl fad left a sour taste in my mouth, and I turned my attention backwards, starting to hunt down issues from the 1970s. I discovered the incomparable Neal Adams, which lead to my desire to draw comics myself (I'm certain I'm not the only one he's similarly inspired <g>). I aslo discovered the jam-packed **DC 100 page giants**, which reprinted stuff from the sixties along with a new story.

I then began collecting Silver Age books (thanks to Ebay). Man, the stories and artwork may seem simple by today's over-sophisticated and decompressed standards, but they have *heart*. It's obvious the joy and professionalism that went into each issue, and the feeling becomes contagious. Holding a ratty copy of a Lee/Romita **Spidey** is a wonderful feeling, one I don't get from any book published today. Reading a Kirby **FF** drives home the fact that comics can be home to simply *epic* story-telling and concepts.

That isn't to say all modern comics suck, of course; I can always rely on Morrison, Bendis, and Johns to deliver solid entertainment when their books hit the racks (too often delayed, unfortunately). Today's artists have access to tools that make their work very slick and professional, but again, the drawings don't have that same energy Kane, Aparo, Simonson, and so many others imparted so casually to their art.

I still collect a few books, and I guess that's the whole point of this rambling personal history: *love* comics <g>!

What is the Bomanverse?

I began writing about this approximately 9 years ago in **Comicopia**: a self-contained universe of heroes and villains, all inspired by other great heroes. Some names I used in my RPG past, now in prose.

I got one story done (for Silhouette I & II), and only wrote the first chapter of another (Statik) just months before 9-11 (she's based in New York city); I didn't want to work further on it then.

I also wrote 6 chapters on Avatar, but these (and new stories about the folks before) I'll rewrite for this zine with the hopes of writing them better with a few years more experience.

There's another character (Imagik) that I want to write.

My hope is that in 3 years I'll have them all built up for a team-up for my NaNoWriMo novel in 2 (yes, my plans go long-term). At the least I'll have prose in this zine!

Avatar Rebirth

Part 1

Chapter 1

June 15th, 1999

"It's quite simple, really: tell me what I want to know Avatar, or your life is over."

The words lacking in panache still held menace. The speaker was a tall man with oily salt-and-pepper hair, his moustache the same color. He wore a solid black suit with a white lab coat over it.

The recipient of this veiled threat was strapped into a wooden chair. He (it was definitely a man) was wrapped from head to toe with wires and connectors leading to a machine with levers and antennae crackling with energy. The man had long blond hair and was dressed in a silver one-piece bodysuit. It was definitely not the clothing of any ordinary being; the person named Avatar was definitely far from it.

The man in the chair (Avatar) spoke through gritted teeth. "Nothing you do to me Professor Malick will force me to reveal anything!"

The person called Professor narrowed his eyes and frowned. He folded his arms on his chest, drawing the folds of his overcoat closer. "My records show that you've been around for several centuries now. The average human doesn't live a full 100 years. You have some trick to longevity that the rest of us don't." He stroked his moustache, a few hairs breaking off into his hand. Almost as if to torment him with his own mortality, the hairs were more white and silver than black. "I must know what that trick is, and I need to know NOW!"

Avatar squirmed in his trap trying to squeeze his way out. He felt foolish letting Malick trap him like this - but the notion of revealing the Rules to him were more disturbing than pride. He saw another option, but it was one rather bothersome.

“You’re considering leaving me, aren’t you? I wouldn’t hold it against you if you did.”

The voice in his mind was that of his Host, John Foster. Avatar shared his body and mind.

“That’s a cold-blooded option John, one that would likely result in your death. I won’t be a party to murder.”

In their joined mind, Avatar felt a smile. *“You forget how you found me. Die again, here? If you hadn’t made me the Offer I would have been already dead about 20 years now.”*

“A monster like this Malick... if he ever knew how our partnership worked, found a way to bond with such power... the forces of Evil could tip the scales in its favor, and a lot of good people could be hurt. That would be far worse.”

Avatar shook his head in his mind. *“Still: such an option is no option as far as I’m concerned. We have to find another way!”*

There was a sigh, then a sensation like a breath being released. *“You aren’t willing to do this, but I am.”*

Before Avatar could stop it, his right hand twitched, pantomiming a move as if pulling on a lever; in itself hard to do in restraint. As his hand moved, a lever on the chair’s control panel similarly moved. “Professor Malick, I will tell you this.” The words came through teeth still grit. Avatar realized what his Host was doing; he tried to fight it, but couldn’t thwart a stronger will. “How I live, how I even exist... that is a mystery you will never have an answer to!” The lever on the panel came down fully, tripping an electrical switch. Power flowed through the wires, death like a speeding vehicle.

“NO!” Avatar saw this all in horror, but it was too late. The voltage crackled through his body, causing it to jerk and twitch. An acrid smell of burning flesh filled the air. As his spectral essence left his Host, he tried to at least take away the pain. He already mourned John Foster, but couldn’t do anything else.

Professor Malick covered his eyes as a near-blinding light covered the figure in the chair. A harmonic wave of sound filled the air for a moment, then it and the light dissipated. All that remained was a charred body in the chair, dressed in what looked like a jacket

and slacks. The hair on this body (Malick wasn’t a doctor, but the lack of breathing in this body was a definite sign that it was dead) was shorter than before. Most of it was blackened, but it seemed brown around that. One thing was definitely certain: whatever the Professor had hoped to glean here was gone.

Professor Malick barked out a curse, then reached for a button near a speaker grill on a wall. “Send someone here now for... garbage disposal.” He looked to the burnt corpse in a chair.

His studies had shown that the powers of this Avatar wandered. How he didn’t really know, even if this theory was correct — but it was the only way he could explain Avatar looking so different in shape and size in all his appearances.

If this theory proved true, he would find it again, and try to get the secrets once more.

March 5th, 2002

“Billee! Come out and play-ay!” Nick’s dad had recently rented a cheesy film called ‘The Warriors’, and for some reason this line came to him when he and his gang started looking through lockers for their target.

Billy Combers hid, hoping to will himself into invisibility. No such luck; that was a power in one of the comics he’d read over his 14 years, often hidden now in his binders for the less interesting classes he had in his grade 9 classes here at Lyndon Johnston High... but he knew such things weren’t real.

Nick and his bullies had been terrorizing Billy and his friends for months, often getting lunches at their expense. The school had a fairly dilligent hall monitor squad, but they seemed to always miss Nick and his actions. Billy hoped for that lack of dilligence to change now... again, no such luck.

Billy didn’t even look up, but the shadow filling the light streaming in the open locker was easy to guess. “Found you!” Nick pulled Billy toward him with a tug of his shirt. “Today is french-fry day Billy... so where’s my money for it?”

“I... I don’t have anything today. Sorry!” That wasn’t true; Billy had his few dollars rolled up in his right sock. “I guess you’ll have to let me go, try someone else, right?” He tried to look friendly and hopeful. His

look of optimism faded quickly though as Nick scowled and shook his head.

The bully dragged him toward a nearby bathroom, with the rest of his gang following and snickering. A few other kids were hanging around — no hall monitor near, of course — but none of them lifted a finger to stop this. None ever did.

One of the gang kicked a stall door open, and another rolled up pieces of toilet paper to fill the bowl. Billy knew what was coming, and struggled, trying to squirm away - but Nick's grip was too tight for him to get out of. He stopped struggling, resigned to his fate... just as one of the kids pushed the flush handle, and Nick and one of his gang just dragged him toward the toilet bowl...

A few minutes later, Nick and his gang sauntered out the bathroom door, laughing and giving each other playful jabs. A little while later Billy stumbled out, pulling wet chunks of toilet paper from his brown hair. The few other kids around skirted away with looks of disgust on their faces — but Billy felt one gaze locked onto him, nearly burning a hole through his skull. He looked up to that gaze, hoping it wasn't one he hoped not to see... but it was: the staring was from Suzie Bearhart, the one girl he always hoped wouldn't see his torment - and also the one who often did. Her light blue eyes held a look no young man ever wants to see from a pretty girl: pity. Fortunately for him, the look didn't last long. The bell for next period rang, and Suzie just shook her head, turned to get to (Billy ran the schedule through his mind; they had the same classes) Math. Billy stared at the back of her head, her long sandy-blond hair tied back in a pig-tail.

Nothing he could do now... he just tugged the last crumpled paper from his head, then rushed toward his locker to get his books and hopefully make it to class before second bell rang.

+++

Ms. Whirger, the teacher, handed out the results of their last test. "Most of you did well on this test class... but some of you disappointed me!" She said this as she put Billy's test on his desk - complete with a big red "F" on its front.

Billy looked at this letter grade morosely. He had studied, really he had - but he saw it just wasn't enough in the end.

"Class, I need all of you to have your tests signed by your parents, then brought back to me tomorrow. I want to be sure they all know your performance."

Billy already had a mental picture of what that would be like. He wasn't really looking forward to how close the scene he imagined was to what his mom would really do.

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The cafeteria buzzed like a nest of bees. Several kids pointed at Billy. His poor math test results were a topic among his classmates; his swirly misadventure among others.

His friends sat around him, many of them other victims of Nick and his gang. Some of them offered words of consolation - but he'd needed more than words before. When he needed help, fear kept them away.

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At the end of the day he walked home, dragging his feet the entire way. He really, *really* wasn't looking forward to bringing that test to his mom... he really didn't need another bad scene after what he had already had that day.

He started to cross the street, not noticing nor paying attention to the red light in front of him. Mom always tried to teach him to look before crossing, but he never did. Fortunately Linwood tended to be a quiet road.

Not so today: a car barreled down, with Billy not really paying attention. The driver began to honk his horn frantically, his tires screeching as he tried to stop. A traffic guard waved her STOP sign furiously and futilely at Billy while pantomiming a motion to step back, hoping it wasn't too late.

It was: the car was able to stop when it hit Billy. He went flying from the impact, pain flashing through his body from the impact. Before he landed blackness claimed him...

+++

... but he awoke in a place of unfocused light and form. He heard a voice tinged with frustration before he could attempt to focus on its focus:

“This is the youngest ever! Surely I can’t give him The Offer?”

The voice belonged to a tall man with long blond hair. Whoever he spoke to wasn’t visible.

Billy mustered all of his intelligence to say something:

“Huh?”

The tall man looked around. His lips pursed together and his eyes narrowed. He nodded at something Billy couldn’t hear, but wasn’t happy about it. “Yes, Michael, I know full well why I have to make this Offer. I know this child was taken before his allotted time... but this is still much to ask...”

Billy finally got his bearings. “Ask what? Who are you and where am I?” He looked around, but all he could see was gray.

The blond man turned to him. “I’m sorry, Billy. I wasn’t ignoring you. My name is... well, you may call me Avatar.”

Billy’s eyes grew wide with recognition. “Avatar? I’ve heard of you! Grandpa told stories about you all the time!” He futilely tried to look around them again. “What brings you here though, wherever here is?”

“This is an Afterlife.” Billy looked confused by the ‘an’, so Avatar explained: “There are many beliefs in the world, so there is one for each of them.”

He frowned and continued. “You were... hurt by a moving vehicle. When a life – like yours – seems to be over early I can make an Offer.” He continued, anticipating what Billy would ask next. “To be on Earth I need a host – in return the host can use my abilities. This is The Offer...” He looked around again to speak to his invisible companion again. “- but my Hosts are usually already adults!” He seemed to be listening to some words. “Yes, there was the one during the Black Plague, but even they were nearly 18!”

This was a lot for Billy to process, but he knew that thanks to the Gulf War he was all his mom had — and he might have a good idea what to do now... “Let me get this straight: I’ll be okay, back where I was. In return, you get to be... down there?” He pointed down to his feet; Avatar gently grabbed Billy’s hand and made it wave around. He didn’t let Billy guess the actual direction.

Avatar then nodded. “Basically that’s the Offer.” Billy did not even blink.

“Well, that isn’t a tough choice to make then... what do I have to do?” He put out his hand again.

Avatar hesitated for a moment, then took it. “You just have, Billy.” Everything grew dark again.

+++

When Billy opened his eyes again he was on the sidewalk on Linwood, surrounded by people: other kids gawking from behind a police cordon, the crossing guard, EMTs (was he gone that long? If not, they came in a hurry!)... and sobbing a few feet away, his mom.

He heard a huge sigh of relief as he opened his eyes. It came from the crossing guard. The EMTs moved faster when they saw he was still alive. “Blood pressure normal, no external bleeding, no idea of any internal... slowly young man!” Billy was made to take his time sitting up. “You may have a concussion at the least. “ His mom saw him sit and gasped, then ran over, her tears not stopping, but now from relief rather than grief. “We need to bring you to the hospital for observation.”

One of the ambulance techs got a gurney from their vehicle, while another asked a few questions to gauge Billy’s sense of where he was. He mumbled a few answers, then was lifted gently into the gurney and was strapped in before being hoisted into the waiting ambulance. His mom got in with him. The doors were closed and they were soon on their way.

“Don’t worry, you’re fine.” The voice in his head answered the question of him just hallucinating. *“Just let them do their testing. Don’t call attention to us...”*

+++

States away, a light on a computer console flashed. “We found him Professor. The energy signature is back!”

“Excellent.” Professor Malick sat back on a swivel chair. His hair was grayer from what had been a 3-year wait. “Continue to monitor. I knew he would return. All I wasn’t sure of was when!”

He stared off for a moment. “Looks like I will get to continue my last conversation...”

REGISTER OR NOT: WHO CARES?

Or: Why I dislike Civil War

There have been some good books since **Marvel Comics Civil War** series (*The Initiative* for one), but there's much about that series that have me shying away from **Marvel** more:

REGISTRATION

First is this idea: all heroes have to register with the government or they're criminals? One second they are selflessly risking life and limb to help their fellow man. Suddenly if they aren't registered they are outlaws? Wow, that makes helping others so worthwhile, doesn't it? </ sarcasm>

I mentioned *The Initiative* before. The series is a good read, in major part thanks to writer Dan Slott, but a major part of the premise confirms my worst concerns about Registration: in the very first issue, it was said that thanks to Registration everyone who signed on is drafted to form the largest army of supers in the world. In other words, the reason many didn't join the Pro-Registration side has been justified.

IRON MAN

I could write an entire article just on him... when *World War Hulk* was first announced, the series was claimed to do "a lot to fix him for fans".

I wasn't interested in this series, so I passed on it – but do they really think this character can be redeemed now? Let's see what he's done:

- OK'd the creation of a Thor clone that messed up and killed a friend;
- Sent friends and other heroes to a prison in the Negative Zone!
- Thanks to Registration and Nanites recruited many of the worst villains into an Army;
- Used that to make the Thunderbolts a team stocked with villains like the Green Goblin and Venom;
- Indirectly led to the death of Steve Rogers, the Captain America we've all grown up with.

Looking at what he was responsible for, I don't think anything done now could redeem him. A Futurist he's been called; a Fascist is what he is now in many eyes.

This has been my problem with the *Mighty Avengers* because of this: I love Frank Cho's art, but in many ways

this is the Fascist hero team now, even if Iron Man isn't the full leader.

THE THUNDERBOLTS

I've spoken about this in several issues and I've already mentioned them in this piece, but I can't say it enough: this new version of the team post-Civil War really bothers me. Where it was interesting before to read the attempts of villains to reform, now it's villains only slightly less nasty thanks to science (Nanites), but they are still brutal and nasty.

I'm usually a fan of Warren Ellis' writing, but I may soon be cutting this title from my reading pile. I'm not enjoying these changes.

These things are just the tip of the iceberg. As the host said on the SciFi Dig podcast (Aaron): the fact that the story didn't get resolved in the miniseries was bad enough; I think it's worse.

HEY KIDS: LETTERS!

Lloyd Penney
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October 27, 2007

Dear Jeff (from Jumanji):

The Original Universe 2 is here in all its paperzine glory, and many thanks. Great to see you again in Montreal for Con*cept and the first Anticipation meeting. I'm going to make this a quick loc, well before deadline, and see if I can lead the local.

No problem there! I actually didn't attend the Anticipation meeting myself, just the room party. I'm long out of the con-running game. -JAB

Remember I said in my last loc that we wouldn't be going to Con*cept? Guess I lied, hm? Yvonne and I had a lot of discussions about going because of Anticipation, and we decided to do one last Worldcon. I've offered to run their fanzine lounge, and Yvonne will be working either finance or programming, or maybe both. Anyway, we really did enjoy ourselves, and hey, Cathy Palmer-Lister got herself

an Aurora Award for her efforts! Good for her, and congratulations to all the Aurora winners in Québec.

I cheered for that win, and I'll have several issues of this zine for that lounge. There are many SF comics, so it should fit! - JAB

I've been reading that when it comes to pocket computers, Palms are considered bottom of the barrel now. That hasn't stopped me from getting lots of use out my Palm Tungsten E2. I have all the graphics you wanted, and will be sending them to you soon. Hope you have a function that can use them!

Unfortunately my Palm OS doesn't support it, and I haven't found an upgrade available. - JAB

Every day, I check out www.cartoonbrew.com... Hope you're enjoying it. There's always something to see, and sometimes, FPS Magazine is mentioned.

Your to-do list...there is a chance I might be at the Paradise Comicon in Toronto next year. I was promoting the Sectarian Wave project at Ad Astra, and may be doing it there as well. No decisions made on that yet. Perhaps a little closer to Montreal is the Motor City Comic Con in the Detroit suburbs. I gather it's a pretty big show, too, but not as big as San Diego.

You couldn't pay me to go to Detroit! Paradise is my hope for next year. - JAB



Wind it up, get it ready to go. Not a big loc, but I keep hearing that all locs count. Let's hope this one does, too. Take care, and see you next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

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December 4, 2007

Who's a Skrull? And who cares?

The article was excellent but, alas, I fall firmly into the "who cares?" camp.

I have been a faithful Marvel Zombie since the 1970's and have supported the various creative administrations, both good and bad, as part of the natural evolution of the genre. But even my loyalty has been put to a test. Suffice it to say, in my opinion, the asylum is being run by the inmates.

Typically the post of Editor-In-Chief is a position held by someone who has a grasp of writing, continuity and what the job of an Editor is supposed to be. An Editor's job is to keep the writers from getting out of control.

Joe Quesada, an ARTIST for Pete's sake, has let the writers run rampant. Writers who have no respect for the history these characters have developed over the last forty years and obviously no consideration to the readers who have faithfully stood by these characters just as long.

The story-line doesn't bother me so much as the fact that just about all of the characters are acting out of character. The worst and most obvious case of this being Captain America. The Captain America in this story-line is the same one who kicked a fallen Bruce Banner in the face; not the Captain America who has represented everything good and honorable in the Marvel Universe for the last seventy years.

What with Reed Richards endorsing an elimination of due process and building a gulag in the Negative Zone (a place he has worked hard to keep everyone out of since the sixties).

This travesty of an "event" led to J. Michael Straczynski leaving the Fantastic Four after being mandated by Joe Q.

to have Sue Storm blindly follow her husband no matter how much she is personally against the SHRA.

Similarly, is it a coincidence that JMS's final work on Spider-Man will be the editorially mandated One More Day story-line in which Joe Q. is finally granted his greatest wish...the break-up of Mary Jane and Peter Parker.

I don't like this likelihood either. - JAB

After close to 50 years, Joe Q. will be the man responsible for bringing down the house that Jack & Stan built.

I, for one, do not intend to stick around and watch Marvel Comics become the new Image Comics and a resurrection of the Iron Age of the 1990's.

So...who's a Skrull?

I don't know and I no longer care as I have stopped reading Marvel Comics except for Annihilation, the one title that seems to be ignoring all of the madness in the rest of the Marvel Universe and telling stories no less gripping but built on logical character development and extrapolations of events that have come before...not creating new outlandish interpretations of events and personalities in conflict with the rich history of the Marvel Universe.

The Sinestro War

I have loved almost everything about this series. The only thing I'm not liking about it is how Superboy-Prime has begun to overshadow the Sinestros as the real threat that needs to be stopped. I initially liked the fact the The Sinestro Corps was recruiting the worst of the worst and the baddest of the bad as the ones who can inspire the most fear (even trying to recruit Batman at one point) the way Superboy-Prime has dominated the story-line of late has really taken the focus away from where it belongs: on the Sinestro Corps itself.

Don't forget: thanks to the Siegel/Shuster estate lawsuits, the character is called Superman-Prime. They claim all rights to SuperBOY. - JAB

With that being said, I think this series has had the best build-up and execution of a growing menace leading to all-out war since the Darkseid War in the pages of past incarnations of The Legion of Super-Heroes.

Speaking of which...

Shooter back on Legion of Super Heroes

Not sure how I feel about this...

Universe it might be interesting to see what an "old school" writer like Jim Shooter can do.

On the other hand, I've seen some of the other stuff he's done in his other imprints and been less than impressed.

Warriors of Plasm... the less said, the better. - JAB

And then there's the fact that they've removed Supergirl from the mix and sent her back to her own time in the present. She was the thing I liked best about this series. After the series got off the ground as a hard edge series about super-powered teens thumbing their noses at "the establishment" Supergirl was a nice bit of the truly heroic to inspire the rest of the team to being better than themselves. That, plus the idea that she thought it was all a dream made for some truly humorous moments.

You liked it? The M in your name stand MUST stand for THE Mikey? After all, he likes anything! ;) - JAB

With her removed from the title, I'm not sure I have a reason to pick it up anymore.

Countdown

As a fan of the original 52 series, I was looking forward to the new series Countdown. And, initially, I was quite pleased with the series. Now I'm not quite as much of a fan as I once was.

The thing that made 52 such a positive thing for me is that it told stories about "second-string" heroes that were given a chance to shine in the absence of DC's Holy Trinity of Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman (or as I like to call them: The Dark; The Light and The Balance).

Although the series lost track of it's original purpose (to explain just what happened to the DC Universe(s) in that missing year) and had to resolve the one of the main story-elements in one of the last issues, they told some solid character-driven stories about these characters and made us realize just how crucial ALL of the characters are in the DC Universe as part of the greater tapestry that provides the background that frames the "BIG" characters' earth-shattering adventures.

Then along comes Countdown, whose main purpose seems to be to take all of the theoretically incoherent plot threads of all of the regular ongoing titles and somehow

provide a common link to tie them all together. Because of this, the character-driven stories sometimes have to take a back seat and the cohesiveness that 52 had just seems to be missing from Countdown.

I think if they had had a few less tie-ins to the monthly titles and just focused on telling the stories as they relate to the main event which is coming closer and closer with each issue, they would have a much superior product.

But that's just my opinion. And I'd love to hear other people's opinions on these very same topics.

Percy M. Hodge

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Re: Who's a Skrull? I still think Luke Cage is one. Granted the New Avengers seemed clean, but as of the final issue of Bendis *Illuminati* series, we learned that most detection methods don't work right now, so he may still be one.

Lloyd: Re: Athletes as cads... more and more I hear bad things about so many. Professional wrestling has been full of real messed up people for many years. Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart was said to be abusive, Jake "the Snake" Roberts is a drugged up mess, and these are just two examples. There's a lot of messed up people. // Re: TM Maple... the tribute website I linked to is gone. I know he was in Ottawa when I contacted him months before his heart attack. Here's info on him from another site:

"He originally signed his letters "The Mad Maple," but when Jim Shooter became Editor-In-Chief of Marvel, he instituted a policy in which Marvel would not publish letters from letter writers using pseudonyms (which isn't a half bad policy, really). Editor Tom DeFalco got around this by abbreviating The Mad Maple as T.M. Maple."

I've learned that he also had a comicbook fanzine in the 1980s. More famous shadows to follow! I guess I'm trying to follow him the way you've followed on letters. Have you topped his 3000 yet? // Re: San Diego con... after the recent wildfires, I'm in no rush to attend it just yet either.

Matthew: Re: your comments on my zine layout... I'm glad I've learned some things about layout over the years. // Re: Novel Writing Month... you did very well at it yourself this year. Congratulations! // Re: 52... I read that the space heroes storyline was loosely based on Homer's

Odyssey. I agree with you that the resolution was rushed. / / Re : New Gods characters... they are likely everywhere due to the current « death of the Fourth World » storyline. / / Re: "Does it seem to you that DC doesn't comics used to be like."... hmm... I'm suspecting this sentence got mangled in my layout gaffes on #2. Sorry about that. // Re: CBG... I could never really get into this publication myself. // Re: the darkening of comics... personally that's something I haven't liked, specifically because of what you said about escapism. I don't read comics to be reminded of the horrors that we already live. // Re: The Death of Superman... I agree with Brian Hibbs. The "Funeral for a Friend" storyline after was pretty good, but the Death storyline was not that good for me either.

Greg: Re: Geoff Johns... it amazes me that he even managed to take a 90s character like Booster Gold and made him interesting. I wouldn't be surprised if he wrote the Booster portions of 52 (he probably did, and this was said - I'm just not near the article about it to check). // Re: the new multiverse... it's been disappointing how most of the worlds we've seen (except the 'classic' ones) have been based on the Elseworlds or just variations of the Justice League characters. Diversions so far have been rare. That said: I did like the Joker of Earth 3, and his last word (Rosebud) I got a kick out of.

I hope I gave you all food for thought!

JAB

<p>We also heard from: Olivia Arrow, Tom Davidson, Laurent Castelucci, Peter Halasz, Ainsley Yaegar and Jay Willson.</p>



Happy holidays,
whatever you
celebrate.

- Jeff



TODO LIST FOR 2008

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

TODO (HOPEFULLY!) SOMEDAY

- San Diego Comicon (when the fires are all quelled)

ZINE EXCHANGES

None this issue. Maybe next.

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