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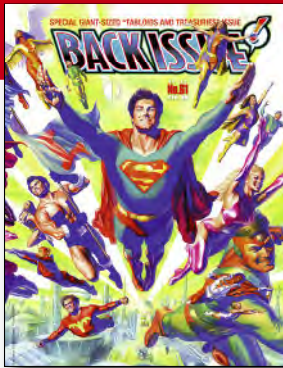
No. 2, Summer 2013



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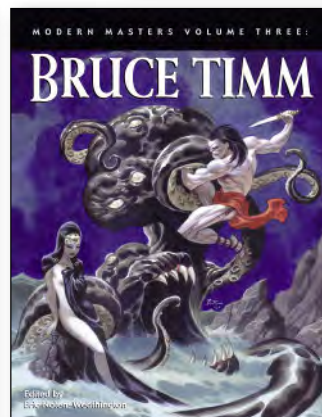
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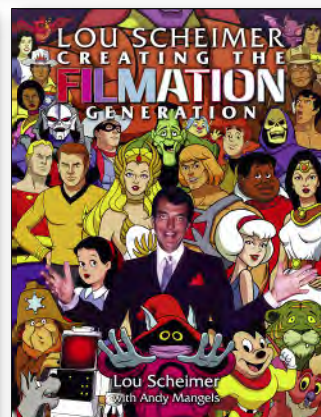
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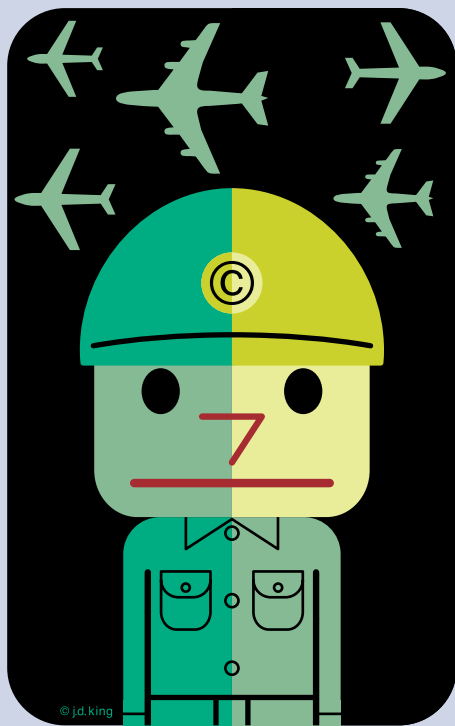
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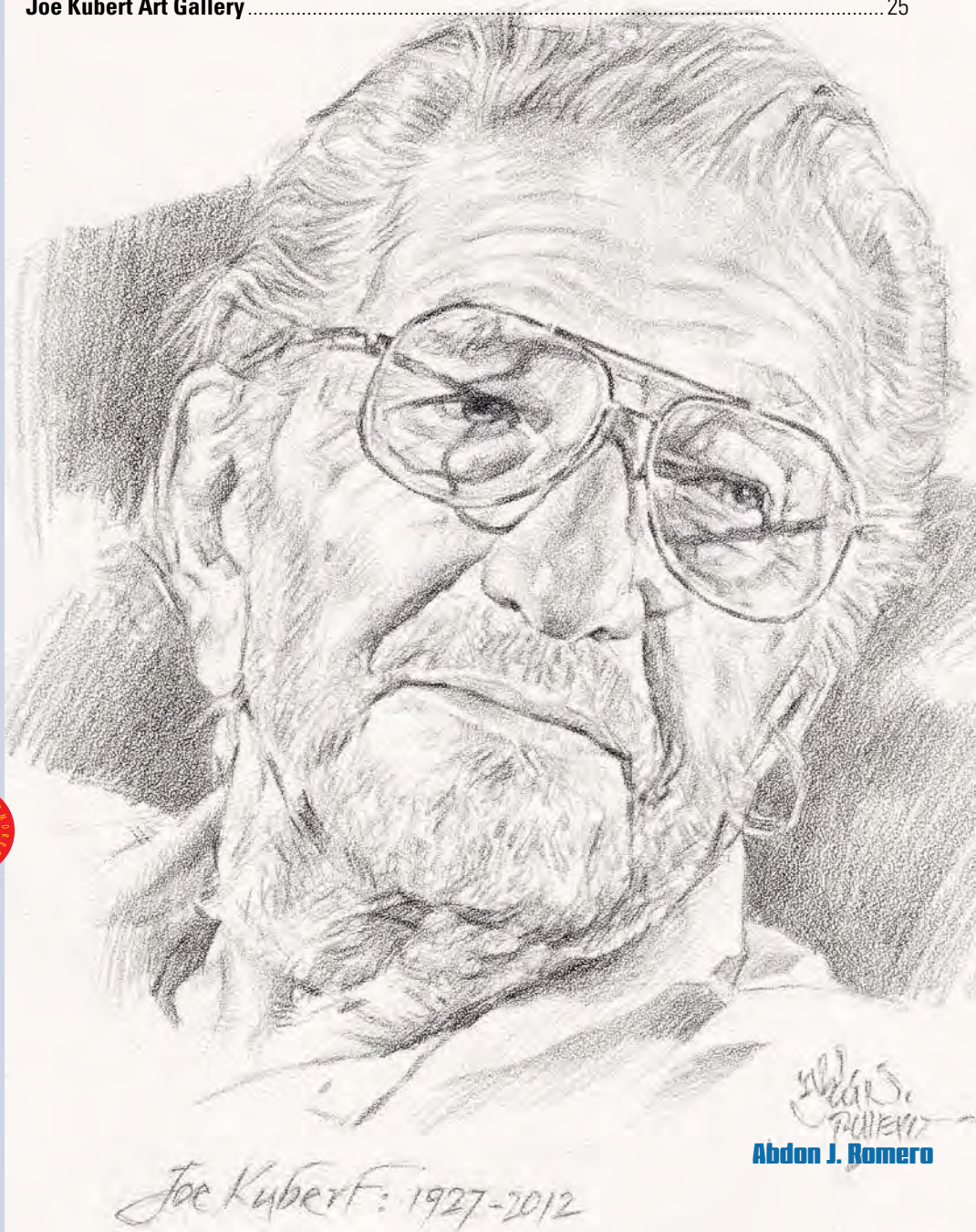


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Summer 2013 • The **New** Voice of the Comics Medium • Number 2

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**Comic Book Creator™** is published quarterly by TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Dr., Raleigh, NC 27614 USA. Phone: (919) 449-0344. Jon B. Cooke, editor. John Morrow, publisher. *Comic Book Creator* editorial offices: P.O. Box 204, West Kingston, RI 02892 USA. E-mail: jonbcooke@aol.com. **Send subscription funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial offices.** Four-issue subscriptions: \$36 US, \$50 Canada, \$65 elsewhere. All characters are © their respective copyright owners. All material © their creators unless otherwise noted. All editorial matter ©2013 Jon B. Cooke/TwoMorrows. *Comic Book Creator* is a TM of Jon B. Cooke/TwoMorrows.

**Abdon J. Romero**



# Coming of Age in the New World of Comics

S.C. Ringgenberg shares an interview from 2002 with the comic book master

Conducted by STEVE RINGGENBERG

**S.C. Ringgenberg:** Now, you've told this story many times in the past, but if you wouldn't mind repeating it for our readers, talk about how you get into comic books in childhood.

**Joe Kubert:** Well, I'd always read the comic strips in the newspapers, and I guess that's where it started, because there were no comic books when I started reading the cartoons in the newspapers. This was back when I was a kid. Let's see, I was born in '26, which meant that we're talking about maybe, '29, when I was three or four years old. I started drawing when I was two, as soon as I could hold a pencil. The comic strips in the newspaper [were] *Tarzan*,

**Below:** Ye Ed believes this is a page of early Joe Kubert artwork from Harvey's All-New Comics #10 [Sept. 1944] tale "Witches Kill At Daylight, though the wunderkind did have another entry in that ish, "Murder At the Terminal." Courtesy of Bill Schelly.



when Foster was doing it, and Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon*, and Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*. All those strips really kind of gave me the push, the impetus. They were so great to look at. That was what I wanted to do.

The drawings I did as a child emulated the muscle guys and the super-people — Superman and so on. Eventually comic books came around — I was about 11-, 12 years old when comic books started to appear. It happened while I was still going to junior high school. I was probably in seventh or eighth grade. I was living in Brooklyn at the time and a friend was related to the people who started the MLJ Publishing Company, forerunner of Archie Comics. And he knew the stuff I did, he knew the drawings.

It's a funny thing, when you're a kid and you do drawings, you're suddenly popular with all the other guys, simply because to them it's like magic if you can draw a picture. And so, this friend of mine suggested, "Look, my uncle," — I think it was Silberkleit who he was related to — "puts out these comic books, Joe. Why don't you take your drawings up and show, and maybe you can get a job up there."

Now the MLJ Company was situated on Canal Street in New York. I lived in Brooklyn, in East Flatbush, at the time. And so I said, "Gee, that sounds great." I took a bunch of drawings I did and, of course, I only guessed at what the [a professional comic book page] looked like. I had never seen an original drawing. I had no idea of what they looked like. I'd never seen anything prior to print, and so I put together a bunch of drawings on whatever paper I had and got on a subway, which at that time cost a nickel. I was about 11 or 12 at the time.

I went up to the office there; no pre-announcement or anything, and they were the kindest group of people in the world. They helped me, people that I met at that time — Mort Meskin, Harry Shorten, and Charlie Sultan — a whole bunch of people who were working up in the bullpen for MLJ, doing things like *Pep Comics*. I met Irv Novick up there at the time. I met Bob Montana up there at the time, when he had just started doing "Archie" for the comic books. And they helped me in every conceivable way: they'd check over my drawings, they'd spend time with me. It was just, you know, it was great. Here's this obnoxious kid coming up unannounced kind of barging in and... "I want to show you the stuff I'm doing." And they were very, very kind, and that really was the beginning of it.

**S.C.:** You were working alongside Irv Novick in the '60s and '70s. You knew him a long time.

**Joe:** Yeah, yeah. And as I said, Irv remembered me as an 11- or 12-year-old the first time I came up to MLJ, and Irv was one of the guys, he gave me my first lesson in how to draw a German helmet. But this was the way these guys were, the friendliest, nicest bunch of people you can think of. And I feel that they went out of their way to help me, to show me how to draw correctly. One of the first jobs I did was inking on Bob Montana's "Archie," when he had started that. Now, letting a kid like me... well, it was just thrilling for me. And that's the way it got started.

**S.C.:** For how long were you getting little lessons from people like Irv Novick or Mort Meskin before you actually did professional work?

**Joe:** Probably about a year or so, because I got my first





©2013 Bob Bean.

job, I think, [when] I was about 12 or 12-and-a-half, something like that. And that was when I had just started high school. While I was attending the High School of Music and Art, probably in the first year, a friend of mine, Norman Maurer (who was my partner when we were putting out the 3-D books and so on) and I would go up to all the publishers. We would forget to go to school that day, and would instead make the rounds of all of the publishers, showing them our stuff. And that's the way we got started.

We picked up a little job here, a little job there, and again, these people were very kind in showing how to correct our work. But it was kind of a hit-and-miss thing. When we were lucky enough to be able to speak to an artist or an editor would have time to show us some stuff (which happened more often than not), that was the way both Norm and I acquired the kind of knowledge necessary to do this stuff. Because there's no way to learn [on your own] how to do the kind of drawing necessary to reproduce in comic books, and there's a special way of doing that. You can't just do pencil drawings. It's not just a matter of ink drawings. You couldn't do dry-brush, especially when I first started because the printing procedures were so crude compared with what's going on today. Unless the artwork was prepared properly, half the stuff would not even reproduce, and even at that, when you put color on top of it, the registers were so far off that you'd have a, you know, yellow and blue, which would produce green, you would have a half-inch edge or a quarter-inch edge of the color because the register was so far off, more often than not.

**S.C:** Did you catch grief from your parents for skipping school?

**Joe:** Oh, well, I don't think they ever knew. [laughter] The only time they found out was towards the end of the year, when my teachers would send a note home, "Joe is doing poorly." In retrospect, I don't even recall that they reported the fact that I played hooky more times than not. I just really don't recall, but I know that when my

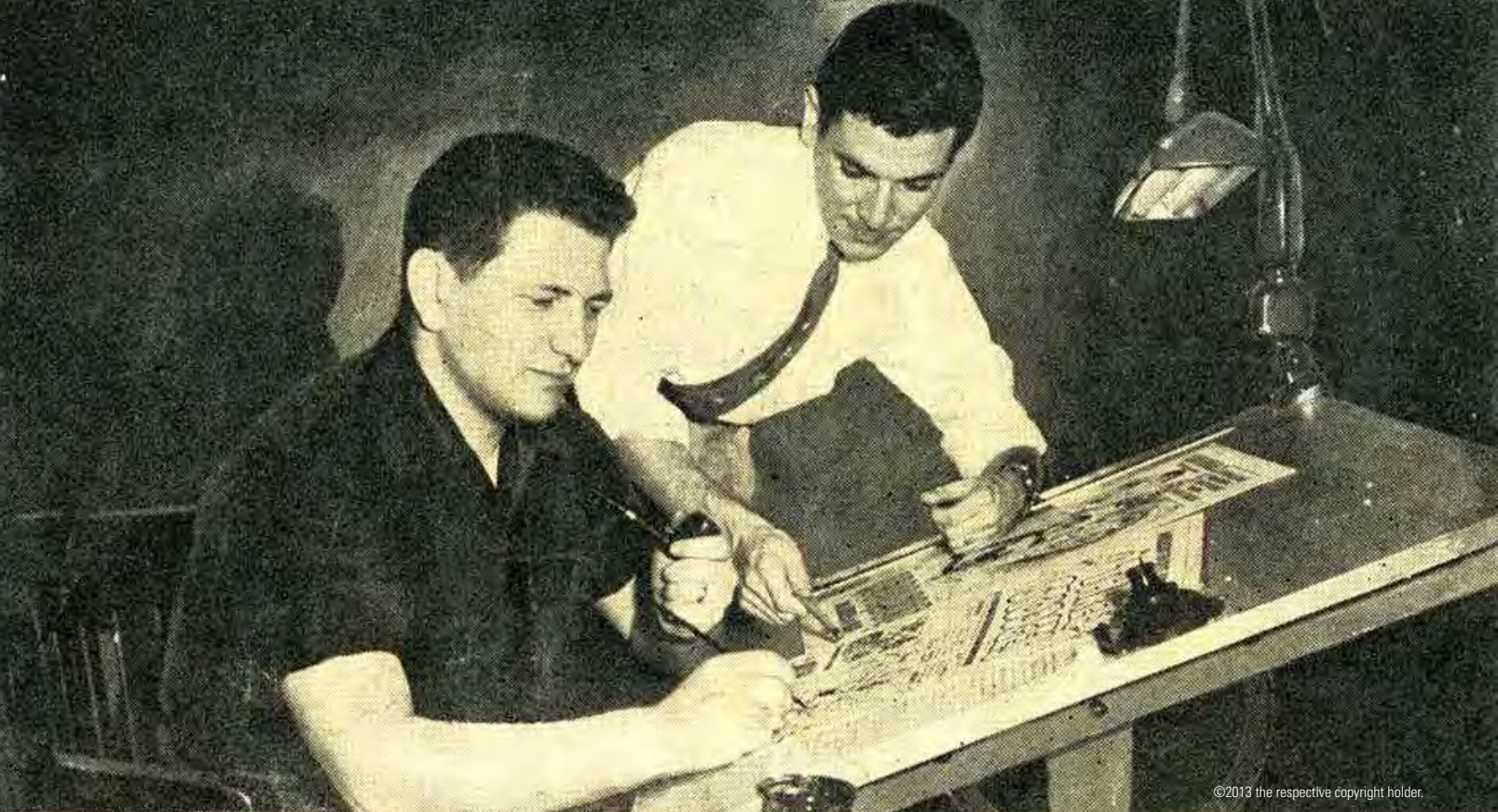
**Top:** Oldtime Kubert compadre and TKS instructor Bob Bean rendered this portrait of his friend at work in 2003. Courtesy of Bill Schelly.



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**Left:** Cover detail from Bob Bean & Joe Kubert's Meet Miss Pepper #6 [June 1954], actually the second (and last) ish.

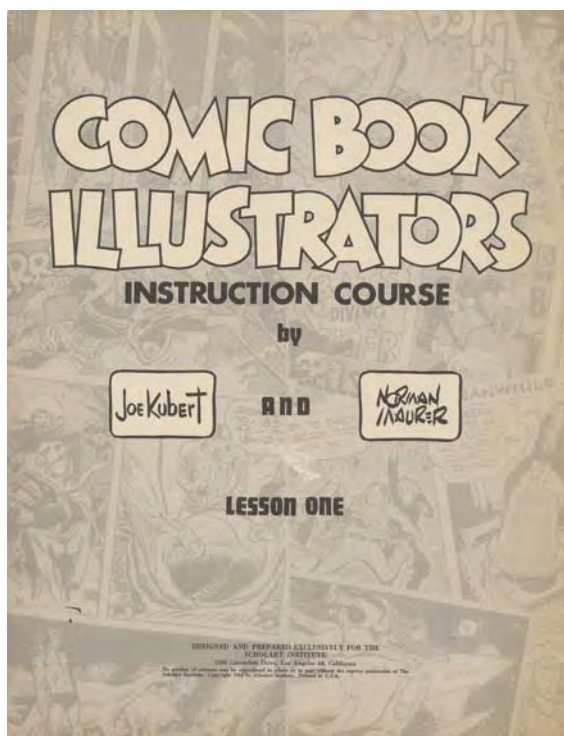




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**Above:** The '50s comic book team of Joe Kubert (sitting) and Norman Maurer in a publicity shot that appeared in their *St. John's* publications. Courtesy of Bill Schelly.

**Below:** Contributor Shaun Clancy shared a wealth of Kubert art instruction items, including this cover from the ill-fated 1950s course offered by Joe and Norm.



grades started slipping because I just wasn't in the school, I got pounced on at that time. And I really had to get to work. In fact, I did have to lay aside all my carousing into the publishers' offices and looking for work. I had to really buckle down and do my schoolwork, which I did, and I finally graduated.

**S.C.:** During the summer you were free to pursue the cartooning, right?

**Joe:** Yeah, yeah. And in the summer was when I was able to pick up the jobs like working up at Will Eisner's office at the time that he was doing *The Spirit*. This, of course, was prior to the war, prior to Will going into the Army. But the job I got up at Will's was just erasing other people's drawings and cleaning up, sweeping up the place. But, again, it was an

opportunity to learn, to see, and to find out from the guys who were the pros, just how the stuff should be done. Also, further on, before I became a senior — I think I was still a junior in high school — I was inking on *The Spirit*. I was commuting up to Stamford, Connecticut, where — this was when Will was in the Army, actually, I think was maybe '41 or '42, something like that — what's-his-name was doing the penciling on *The Spirit*.

**S.C.:** Lou Fine?

**Joe:** Lou Fine was doing the penciling, Alex Kotzky was inking and I was inking, and we were turning out *The Spirit* magazine. But this was the job I was able to get during the summer. So, during the summer, instead of commuting to the High School of Music and Art, which was on 135th Street in New York,

I commuted up to Stamford, Connecticut every day.

**S.C.:** Since you were a kid, and the least experienced artist, what sort of stuff would they have you inking on the strip?

**Joe:** On *The Spirit* strip? I guess I was doing everything. I was doing figures. I was doing the backgrounds. Kotzky may have been doing the faces. I really don't recall. I don't recall any kind of a real separation [of labor]. I think we were both inking the whole thing.

**S.C.:** Were Lou Fine's pencils tight?

**Joe:** Oh God, I was such a naïve kid at that time that I wasn't even frightened working over Lou's pencils. They were beautiful and I recall he used a mechanical pencil. And, instead of one simple line, his work was sketchy. In other words, you could see the foundation of the drawing, and then he'd tighten his drawings on top of those foundations. But it's easy to make a mistake and ink the wrong pencils, which I guess I didn't do too much of because they didn't fire me right away.

**S.C.:** Well, in those days, when you were doing assisting like that, would you bring all the money back to your family, or did they let you keep some of it?

**Joe:** That's an interesting question. My parents, of course, came to the United States. As a matter of fact, I was born in Poland. I was two months old when my parents brought me. The way people from the old country lived was... I have four sisters, incidentally... whenever I or my sisters went out to work, the money we made went into the pot and the pot-keeper was my mother. She was the exchequer and none of us even considered holding any money back from her. I mean, this was the way it was supposed to be. As a matter of fact, I never cashed a check of my own until I got married. Because, as long as I was in the family, as long as I was with the family, my money went into the pot. And, whenever I needed anything, whenever I needed any money or if I had to go out, or whatever it was, if I had to buy a car, I got it from my mother.

**S.C.:** Joe, let me backtrack a bit. Now, before you worked for Eisner, I know you had worked in the Chesler shop.

**Joe:** Right, but that was not really working. That was the kindness of Harry Chesler, who allowed me (and, I guess, several other guys at one time or another [but it was just me] at this particular time) to come up to his studio. There were



about a dozen artists up there. He had a stable of these guys up on 123<sup>rd</sup> Street in Manhattan.

**S.C.:** Was this on the East Side or the West Side?

**Joe:** This was on the West Side.

**S.C.:** Was Chesler's studio layout like? Can you describe it?

**Joe:** [Laughs] It was an old ramshackle building, [laughter] a little elevator that shook and creaked up the three stories that composed the entire building, and you could just about squeeze one or two guys into that elevator at any given time. It was the kind of place... I can almost remember the smell of it. Not that it was a bad smell, but you could smell the wood, you could smell the ink, you could smell the paper. Harry wasn't on the same floor. The artists were up on the third floor. I believe it was on the third floor. Harry himself was on the second floor. The ground floor, which was the first floor, I don't recall anything down there at all. That was where the first landing of the elevator was. But the top floor, which I think was the third floor, was where the artists were. All wood; you could feel the boards creak under your feet as you were walking. It was that kind of a... It was old at that time, and there like were maybe two or three windows... on the floor in which the artists worked, where you could look out on 123<sup>rd</sup> Street, on the main drag.

And there are perhaps apocryphal stories about the guys, or Harry, himself, when he had trouble paying the electric bill, asking the guys to plug into the telephone pole for electricity, to keep the lights on so the guys could see while they were drawing. I have a feeling — and I've heard this from several guys who worked for Harry at the time — that that was really true. That they extended a wire outside the offices, where the artists worked, and plugged it into the telephone pole, and that's where, at one time or another, they derived power to be able to get lights, to be able to continue drawing.

But, anyhow, what Harry did was allow me, after school — when school was over at, say, 2:00 or 2:30, he let me come up to the office, come up to the place where the artists worked, set up a table for me, gave me a script (that at that time he had no intention of using) just for me to practice. And he told the other artists to help me, to correct my work whenever they'd have a chance, which they did. And that's what I did while I was going to school. After I got out of school at 2:00 or 2:30, I'd come over to Harry's for about two hours, and I'd get home perhaps 5:00 or 6:00 at night after I did a bunch of drawing for Harry. And Harry, for that, would give me five bucks a week, which, at that time, was a hell of a lot of money for me.


**S.C.:** That seems uncommonly generous considering Chesler's reputation.

**Joe:** Well, I've heard all kinds of stories about, all kinds of negative stories about Harry, none of which I ever experienced myself. He was the kindest, the nicest guy. In fact, I bumped into Harry when I started the school here. I don't know if you'd heard about that.

**S.C.:** No.

**Joe:** Well, unbeknownst to me, Harry had moved out to New Jersey and bought a bunch of property here. I hadn't seen Harry... this was, you know, after high school and after having worked up at Harry's place. I was up at the Chesler studio for one year or so, I started getting work and there was no reason for me to continue going up to Harry's. I was getting work and I was able to do it at home. When I started the [Kubert] School here, in '76 — which was, I guess, maybe 25 or 30 years later, we're living here in Dover, and my wife is at a picture-framing place, getting some stuff framed, and some man comes over to her, seeing my name on the package that she picking up, and asks if this Joe Kubert, if this is an artist. And she said, yes, and this guy say to her, "Well, I'm Harry Chesler. Joe used to work for me." And he followed her home, over to our house, and I recognized him immediately. This was the same Harry Chesler for whom I worked 30 or 35 years before. Harry lived in Succasunna, which is two, three miles west of Dover. Harry had bought

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a bunch of property here, when property was really low in price, and was doing very, very well. He had bought a bunch of houses and stuff, and was doing very well in the real estate business. We got together, and when I started the school, he gave me a lot of advice as to what I should or shouldn't do. I remember a terrific Christmas party we had at the school when the school first opened. We invited all the guys who had ever worked up at Harry Chesler's place — like George Tuska — anybody who was still alive, anyhow. And we had a great time. Great Christmas party.

**S.C.:** What was Harry Chesler like? What did he look like?

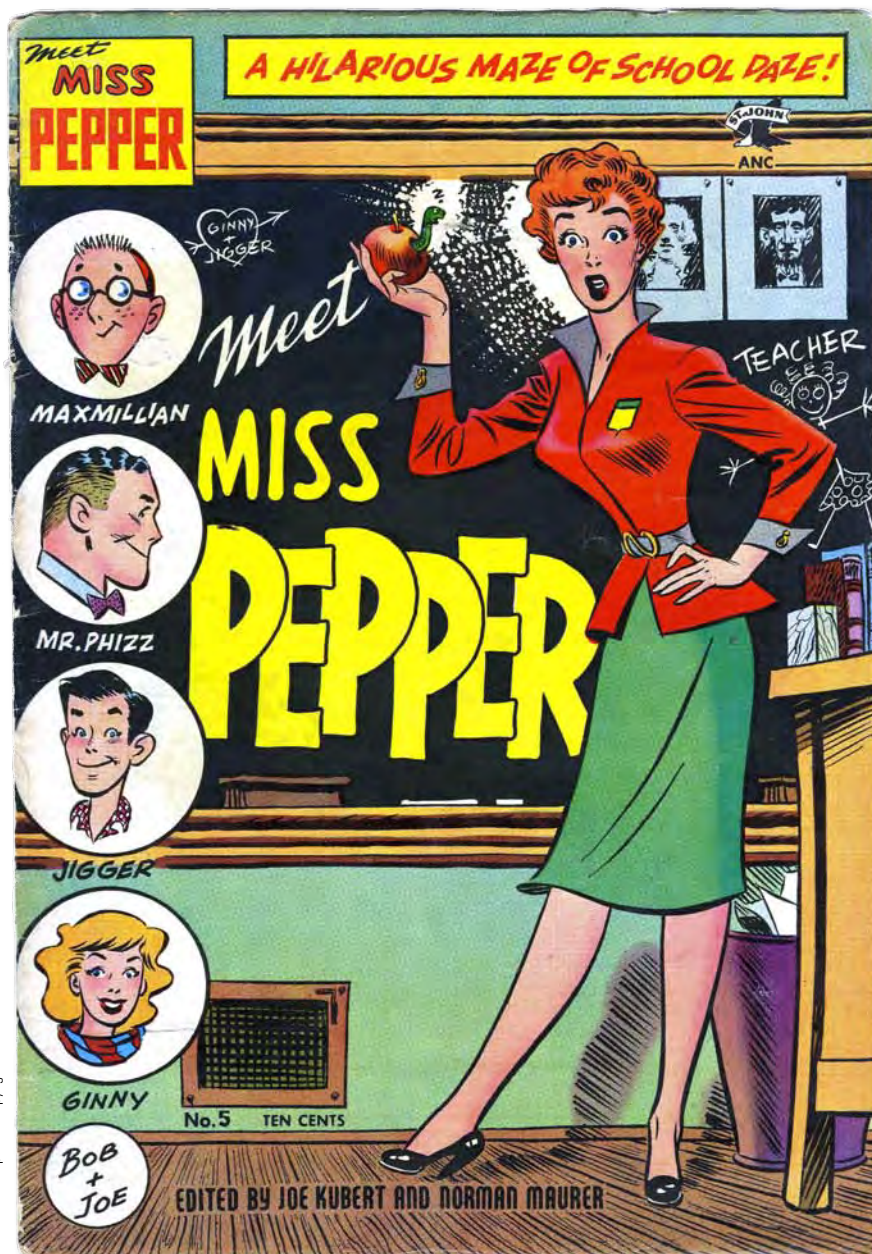
**Joe:** Harry was a kind of short, stubby guy. He was a dinosaur. He came originally from the advertising business. He always wore a fedora hat and had a little half-smoked cigar in his face all the time. Always wore a suit, tie, jacket and a vest. And that cigar would roam over his face from one side of the mouth to the other as he spoke to you. He would hook his thumbs into his vest as he'd talk to you. He was, as I said, the prototype of the little advertising executive, little hustler, that he had had the experience doing. But, as I said before, he was one of the kindest guys I'd ever met.

**S.C.:** Who was up at the Chesler shop at the time you started getting lessons and helping out?

**Joe:** Well, George Tuska, another guy whose name was

**Above:** Anticipating their co-creation 3-D comics would be a selling point for their art instruction course, Joe and Norm Maurer promise a three-dimensional component to the lessons in this house ad appearing in their early 1950s comic books. Courtesy of Bill Schelly and Shaun Clancy.





**Above:** No apologies from Ye Ed for sharing yet another dazzling image from Bob Bean & Joe Kubert's adorable Meet Miss Pepper two-issue series. This is the first ish's cover (labeled, for whatever reason, #5 and dated April 1954). What a knockout! Umm... the cartooning, I mean! Courtesy of Heritage.

Harry, Rube Moriera, Charlie Sultan...

**S.C.:** I've heard the name Charlie Sultan before in other contexts. What did he do? What was he most known for?

**Joe:** It's hard to say, because Charlie, I don't think any of the guys who did the stuff up there did anything that you might consider notable. Harry [Chesler] packaged comic books for different publishers. Anybody could say that they were a publisher as long as they could get a comic book packaged from Harry. Harry would provide these publishers with whatever kind of comic book they wanted to put out. If it was humor, he had a bunch of guys writing and drawing, and put the whole thing together and he would deliver not only just the artwork, but also the finished color plates for the price. These things were, you know, pushed out on factory style kind of a basis. And the stuff that the guys were turning out... I mean every one of the artists who worked up there doubled and tripled in brass. One week they'd be working on humor, the next week they'd be working on something that you might call horror or adventure, and the stuff would be churned out, book after book. And none of them were, I think, of, you know, of any [memorable] nature. They were extremely forgettable material... I'd rather put it that way.

**S.C.:** Would the artists on staff be paid a regular salary?

**Joe:** Yes. That was the advantage: Harry would pay them every week. They wouldn't be paid a freelance [page rate]. But I remember stories of some of them, and again, I don't

know how apocryphal this might be, but I'm told by some of the guys who worked for Harry, that Harry would, come payday — I think Irwin Hasen worked for Harry at one time, but not while I was up there — but they would say, when they came up to get paid, Harry would say, "How much do you need this week?" [laughter]

**S.C.:** Did you ever work for Victor Fox?

**Joe:** No. I may have. I know that I was up to Fox, but I don't recall having done anything specifically for them. I don't remember, I really don't remember.

**S.C.:** I know Fox had a reputation for having the best-looking covers and the worst-looking insides in the business.

**Joe:** I just don't remember.

**S.C.:** Following your year or so up at Chesler's shop, where did you go next?

**Joe:** From that point on, I kind of worked freelance. I did work for Jerry Iger up at his place. That must have been a summer job because it was still while I was going to school. It must have been after I worked up at Will Eisner's place for the summer, and Will might have suggested that I [go there] because Eisner and Iger had a working arrangement between the two of them. I don't know exactly what that was. Will probably recommended that I go up to Jerry after I left him.

**S.C.:** So, when you were still in high school, you were working professionally.

**Joe:** Oh, yeah, yeah. For a long time. While I was still in high school, I was working for All-American Comics. I was doing "Hawkman" at that time. Shelly Mayer was my editor and I was doing that for a couple of years before I went out of high school.

**S.C.:** Do you remember much about [All-American Comics publisher] Max Gaines?

**Joe:** Oh, yeah. I met him a couple of times, but you got to remember that I was still a kid, a very young guy, maybe 15, 16, something like that, and I kind of stayed in the background. I think I may have met Max Gaines once or twice, and may have spoken to him maybe that length of time, but that's about it.

**S.C.:** I know that All-American eventually got absorbed by DC.

**Joe:** That's correct.

**S.C.:** Shelly Mayer, now he's a real classic figure in the business. How was Shelly to work for as an editor?

**Joe:** Wonderful. He was probably as close to being a mentor for me than anybody I can think of. He was just a terrifically patient guy and he taught me a hell of a lot. A fact that might be of interest to you is that DC has just set up a \$5,000 scholarship here at the School in Shelly's name.

**S.C.:** That's great! I'm glad to hear that.

**Joe:** Yeah, yeah.

**S.C.:** When you took over "Hawkman," you must have been familiar with Sheldon Moldoff's work preceding you.

**Joe:** I had seen the work, yeah.

**S.C.:** Did you like Moldoff's approach much?

**Joe:** Well, Shelly Moldoff had his modus operandi, which was actually utilizing a lot of [Hal] Foster and [Alex] Raymond's artwork as a guide to go by. I liked that because it was similar. I mean it was kind of aping both the artists that I always admired.

**S.C.:** Did Foster continue to be an inspiration to you?

**Joe:** Always. Always. When he went on to Prince Valiant, the stuff only got better. It was terrific. I always loved his work and still do. I think the older I get the more I come to appreciate it.

**S.C.:** It really seems like Foster was really the best artist who ever worked in the medium.

**Joe:** Well, it's hard to say. To give an accolade like that to any artist, I think, is difficult because quality is really in the eye of the beholder. There are some people who would look at Foster, who would say, "Well, gee, it looks nice, but there are other artists who are better." I hesitate to put an appellation like "he's the best" or "he's the greatest," because art



is really judged by the people who are looking at it. To me, Foster was terrific, Raymond was fantastic, and Caniff was just great. All three of these guys worked in different styles. Their styles were really, really differed greatly, but I appreciated each one of them. They were just beautiful.

**S.C.:** Now, it seemed like, looking at your work, especially as it went on, that you were influenced by the way that Caniff spotted his blacks.

**Joe:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And I think I probably picked up more from a guy like Lee Elias, who worked very similar to Caniff's style. When Lee came in and started doing, I think he was doing "The Flash" at the time, the one thing that really got me was, I discovered that inking like Caniff came to me a lot more quickly. It was a lot faster doing that style of artwork than trying to emulate Foster or Raymond. And so I adapted, especially when I did "The Flash." I found it a heck of a lot easier, and a heck of a lot quicker to do when I applied myself using more of the Caniff style.

**S.C.:** To speak of layout and storytelling, who do you think had the biggest influence on your approach to that?

**Joe:** Probably Shelly Mayer. Shelly Mayer was a proponent of good storytelling. That, to him, and to me now, are the most important factors in being a cartoonist. We are communicators. We are storytellers, and you can do the most beautiful drawing in the world as a cartoonist, but if it doesn't tell the story, you're not doing your job as a cartoonist. You may be designing some really nice wallpaper or some great tapestry, but you're not being a cartoonist. A cartoonist is a guy who is communicating, trying to put into picture form a story, a drama, whatever the components of the story is. He's trying to put that together in a graphic form. And that's what I constantly try to do, and that's what I learned from Shelly. Shelly's the kind of guy who said, "Well, the characters in the story have to look like the kind of characters who are doing what you're having them do. They have to react emotionally, you have to see it in their faces, you have to see it in the way they move, and they have to be different-looking." And all those things really, they made sense to me. They just made sense.

**S.C.:** One thing I think is very important in storytelling is body language.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**S.C.:** What you were just saying about character reacting to what the other character is saying.

**Joe:** Yup, yup. And I was lucky enough when I was working with Bob Kanigher. And Bob was writing the stories and I was drawing them, and he paid particular attention to that. And we've often commented that, when guys are running, they run differently. They all don't run the same way. When a guy reacts to whatever position or condition that he's in, he reacts depending on the kind of person, the kind of character he is. And that should show in the way you depict them graphically.

**S.C.:** Joe, you were too young to serve in the military during World War II, right?

**Joe:** Right.

**S.C.:** What were you doing during the war years?

**Joe:** Well, that was an advantage for me, I guess, because, and one of my biggest breaks was one of the worst things that happened for the rest of the world. But, for me, the war was terrific, because a lot of the guys who would have taken up the jobs that I was doing, getting the jobs in with comic books, were in the Army. They were drafted, they were off, and so the publishers needed people. Because comic books were selling like crazy during the war, especially to the armed forces, and 64-page comics magazines were selling like they were going out of style.

**S.C.:** So during the war years you were going basically from being a student and freelancer to then to being a full-time freelancer at that time. Did you ever consider doing anything but being a cartoonist?

**Joe:** No. Never.

**S.C.:** Wow. That must have been cool to know exactly what



you wanted to do from such a young age.

**Joe:** Well, you know, I never thought about it. I never considered what I might do otherwise. I guess I've always felt that if I couldn't make a living doing cartooning, I could do anything that I put my mind to. I don't care what the hell it was, if it was digging ditches or anything. Anything I had to do, I would do. But, as it worked out, I never had to resort to anything else because I was always able to make a living doing that which I always wanted to do, which was cartooning.

**S.C.:** Well, during the war years I know the rates weren't that great. Were you able to make a pretty good living?

**Joe:** I made a good enough living so that, you know, when I was single, before I got married, I worked when I felt I needed dough. I would often afterwards take off or just not do anything until I felt I needed some more money. It wasn't as if I was working every day or that I felt I was locked in... the only times when it perhaps got a little rough was when there were deadlines on the work that I was doing. And, invariably, like most of the guys, I would leave everything for the last day, and have to pull a couple of all-nighters before I was able to finish the work. But I never thought about that kind of... you know, we're talking about I was maybe 17-, 18 years old at the time, and nothing in the world bothered me. Absolutely nothing.

**Above:** Joe Kubert's dynamic Viking Prince cover for the last issue featuring his and Bob Kanigher's good Prince Jon, The Brave and the Bold #24 [June-July 1959].





**Above:** Joe Kubert's cover art for the 1990 hardcover collection *The Greatest 1950s Stories Ever Told*, featuring a number of characters Joe was closely associated with at various stages of his career with DC Comics, his main port of call.

**S.C.:** In those days, what would you do for fun when you weren't working?

**Joe:** Oh God, I've always been into sports a little bit and I always liked to play ball if I wasn't at home working. I'd get some basketball games going or be playing football, or things like that. What else? I'd go into the city. Jeeze, I really don't remember. And my folks and my sisters... we were pretty much family-oriented, and a lot of the time, a lot of the spare time, we'd be spending with family.

**S.C.:** Did you ever hang around much with other cartoonists that you'd met?

**Joe:** Oh yeah, but that was later on. I set up a studio when I first became involved with St. John Publishing, when I

started putting out those books. I had gotten a studio in New York — this is before I went into the Army — on Park Avenue, which sounds great, but it was a little skinny building amongst all the other beautiful edifices, and me and Carmine [Infantino] were up there... a guy by the name of Hy Rosen and Alex Toth was working up there a while, a bunch of guys. And there were a bunch of other cartoonists who were located close by and we'd get together very often. But that didn't happen until I was, I guess, close to my 20s.

**S.C.:** Tell me, what was Alex Toth like in the old days?

**Joe:** He was a very fastidious, terrific young guy, who did outstanding work, who was admired by everybody who saw him work. He was a good guy, a good kid.

**S.C.:** During the war years and then in the period following, you were working for DC during that time, weren't you?

**Joe:** Yeah.

**S.C.:** Did you have any other accounts?

**Joe:** Oh, yeah. I used to keep myself busy and I've told the students here, as well, that it's very important for anybody doing freelance work to make sure that they're working for at least two or three other places at the same time, to never put all of your eggs in one basket, to always put a couple of your fingers elsewhere, just in case one went soft or one wasn't doing so well. You could always kind of push for the others.

**S.C.:** So, tell me about what you were doing in the post-war years. Which characters and companies were you with?

**Joe:** Oh God, post-war... Well, the first company that I became involved with after I got out of the Army — this is during Korea and it's in the early '50s — it was the St. John Publishing Company. I had done work for them. I had packaged books for them prior to my going into the Army. And they were happy to get me back at the time when I got out, and that was the time when my buddy Norman and I formed a partnership and started putting the books out, and come out with the 3-D, the 3-D *Mighty Mouse* comic book.

But when I started there, the comic book business was hit by the Kefauver Hearings [on Juvenile Delinquency, which blamed comics for adversely affecting the nation's youth]. Everything flattened out and I then went up to DC and got involved with a lot of the characters Bob Kanigher, who was the editor at

the time, was writing. That's when "Sgt. Rock" first started. That was back in the mid-'50s.

**S.C.:** Can you tell me a bit about the three stories you did for E.C.? I know that unlike E.C.'s regular artists, you only did the three jobs.

**Joe:** Yeah that's because I don't think Harvey really liked the work that I did.

**S.C.:** Really? So, how did you get up to E.C.?

**Joe:** Well, I knew of the company being around and, as a matter of fact, during the 3-D days, Willie Elder, one of their artists, was up at our place when we were putting out the 3-D books, doing the 3-D work, the 3-D kind of work which



helped E.C. convert some of their books from the '50s into 3-D work. I knew the guys. As a matter of fact, Al Feldstein and Harvey Kurtzman were graduates of the High School of Music and Art. Norman and I had gone to there (though Norm graduated, but I didn't; I graduated from a school in New Jersey). Norm's brother Lenny, who worked with us, also knew the guys up at E.C. — Kurtzman and all the rest — and it was just a natural progression for me to go up there and make the rounds, fleshing out in case stuff would soften up at St. John's. When St. John's went down the drain, I had to set myself up a whole new schedule to work, and one of the places that I had looked at, one of the places I went to was E.C.

**S.C.:** And what did you think of the E.C. product?

**Joe:** I thought they were beautiful. I thought they were great.

**S.C.:** Was there a particular reason why you worked with Harvey Kurtzman and not with Al Feldstein?

**Joe:** Well, not any particular reason, but the stories that I was doing were probably more suitable for what Harvey was editing.

**S.C.:** Well, I've seen that during the '50s you did some horror jobs elsewhere.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**S.C.:** Of the three stories you did for E.C., do you have a particular favorite?

**Joe:** I hardly even remember them.

**S.C.:** You did a D-Day story about combat engineers.

**Joe:** I don't remember that one.

**S.C.:** There was one about John Paul Jones.

**Joe:** I remember that one.

**S.C.:** And there was the one about pearl divers.

**Joe:** Yeah, and I remember that. I think the pearl divers story was the first story I did, if I'm not mistaken.

**S.C.:** Did you find it constricting to work with Kurtzman's tissue layouts?

**Joe:** Yes, I did and perhaps that's what showed in the work that I did. Maybe Harvey felt that he didn't want to continue with me. And incidentally, Harvey was a very good and dear friend of mine. The fact that he didn't feel that my work was suitable had absolutely nothing to do with our own personal relationship.

**S.C.:** So even after Harvey said, "We can't use you, Joe," you continued to be friends?

**Joe:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

**S.C.:** That's nice that you were able to stay friends with him. A lot of guys might've gotten mad and just walked out.

**Joe:** Well, I'd been in the business long enough to have been able to adopt a professional attitude and to recognize that when is somebody is not happy with my work it has nothing to do with me, it's just that he doesn't like my work. And there are others who do like my work and that's fine. The one who I'm always trying to please with the work I'm doing is me and if some like it, that's fine, and if some don't like it, that's fine, too. But it has nothing to do with our personal relationships.

**S.C.:** How do you think the work you did for E.C. stacks up to your other output at the time?

**Joe:** I like the stuff I was doing. I liked the stuff. I try my best on every job that I do and if I was not satisfied or happy with the work that I've done, I wouldn't have handed it in, or I would have crawled away someplace. But I did the best that I could. I did the best that I felt that I could at the time.

**S.C.:** It seemed like the war stories you did with Bob Kanigher a little later were less realistic and more character-driven than Harvey Kurtzman's.

**Joe:** Well, they were different. As a matter of fact, Bob gave me a hell of a lot more freedom with the scripts and the work that I was doing with him than I was able to get working with Harvey. It felt a lot easier and apparently Bob liked my stuff, always did, and the more he liked it, the more freedom he gave me, the more I enjoyed doing it.

It's like I said: not everybody's going to love you in this

world [laughter] and not everybody's going to love the work you do. And I accept that.

**S.C.:** When you were working with Kanigher, you said he gave you a lot of freedom. Would this involve changing dialogue occasionally?

**Joe:** Definitely.

**S.C.:** So you would rewrite Bob's dialogue?

**Joe:** Oh, I would not rewrite; I might add some stuff. I might extend some stuff, but the term "rewrite" is like changing the story. I would never do that. I would never change or alter a story. But I might add some additional panels; I might script some panels, condense several panels into one. I might add a line of dialogue or extend a line of dialogue. Yeah, he permitted me to do that.

**S.C.:** And would sometimes you'd be drawing a scene and something might occur to you, like what the characters would say in that situation, say?

**Joe:** Yeah, if I felt that it would, by extending it by a couple of words might fulfill... might be more apt as to what the character would say... yeah, I would do that. And Bob would let it stay and giving me that freedom allowed me a lot more room to put in those things that I felt I could add. Apparently Bob was pleased. So it worked out well for both of us.

**S.C.:** Having worked with "Sgt. Rock" for so long, can you

**Below:** Awesome Joe Kubert cover for Our Army at War #177 [Feb.-Mar. 1967]. Courtesy of Bill Schelly.







**Above and next page:** Cover and short-short story by Joe Kubert for the debut issue of his delightful war-slash-horror comic, *Weird War Tales* [Sept.–Oct. 1971]. Though he would turn over editing chores on the title to Joe Orlando after seven issues, Kubert's run is superb stuff!

sort of hear his voice in your head when you're reading over the scripts?

**Joe:** Oh, yeah. A character like that, after so long, after adapting to it as long as I have, kind of almost writes itself in terms of what he would do or what he wouldn't do under certain circumstances. Absolutely. His characteristics are really spelled out very clearly.

**S.C.:** Considering the amount of work you did with Bob Kanigher, that's probably one of the longest runs on any character by any artist.

**Joe:** That's true. If I'm not mistaken, I think it went over 30 years, was published for over 30 years.

**S.C.:** Yeah, you had *Rock* fighting the war many times longer than the real war. [laughs]

**Joe:** Several times. [laughs]

**S.C.:** Joe, you've done a lot of war stories. Is there still any type of war story that you've wanted to do, but haven't attempted?

**Joe:** Well, it's funny you should bring that up. It's not one perhaps that I've wanted to do, but as it's worked out now I'm doing another *Sgt. Rock* book right now that Brian Azza-rello is writing. It's going to be 120 pages in length. It's going to be a hardcover. It's going to be over-sized, and I'm just starting it right now.

**S.C.:** Is the large printing size going to affect how you do the art, or are you just going to do it standard size?

**Joe:** I don't think so.

**S.C.:** Joe, you've seen a lot of changes in the way the art was done, do you prefer doing large-size originals or the 11" x 17" that's the current standard?

**Joe:** I don't know. I guess you adapt or you can get accustomed to almost anything. I had always preferred to working large. I was accustomed to working larger because I could



project and kind of figure out what the stuff is going to look like when it's reduced in size. The larger size, of course, was twice-up; the smaller size is about a third-up. You adapt and, no, I've not found any real difficulty with that.

**S.C.:** Are you able to work faster in the smaller size?

**Joe:** I don't think so. I was able to work; I was able to work pretty good, at a pretty good rate, full-size. So I don't think that the size makes that much difference.

**S.C.:** How do you approach drawing a page. Describe how you go from blank page to finish.

**Joe:** Normally, when I read through a script, I will make some thumbnails, some very rough thumbnail sketches to see how — not so much for designing the page, but to see how I want the panel sequence to work, to make sure that the dramatics are clear and effective, and so I'll make a small thumbnail sketch per page before I start out, and then I just get right on to the big paper.

**S.C.:** Okay, well I'm going to fast-forward here: You established your school in 1976. When you started, did you ever think it would still be going 26 years later?

**Joe:** No. Absolutely not. I think it's amazing to me that it's lasted and done as well as it has.

**S.C.:** In 26 years, how many students have you turned out?

**Joe:** Oh God, I don't know. I don't keep count really.

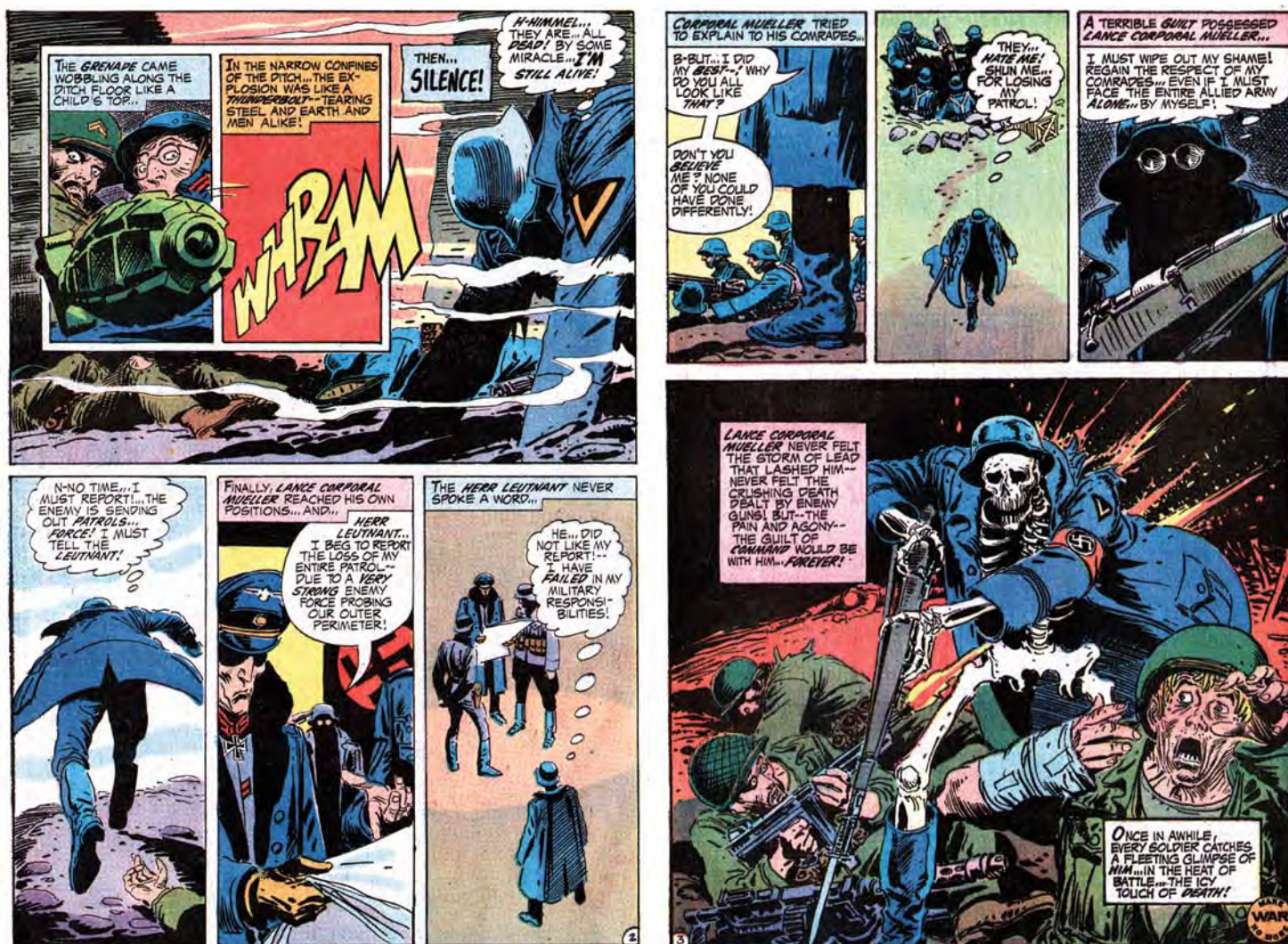
**S.C.:** Well, what would be a typical class size in a particular year?

**Joe:** Well, we usually have anywhere... for the last 20 years or so, we've had a complement of perhaps 150, 200 students per year.

**S.C.:** Didn't you buy an old high school?

**Joe:** Yeah, we have the old high school here in town. It's the same school my sons — all my kids, my sons and my daughter — had attended when they went to high school. And it





was the last place in the world I ever expected to own.

**S.C.:** That must seem odd to your sons to be going there for your school.

**Joe:** Yeah, well, both Adam and Andy attended the mansion, where the art school was at the time. Adam and Andy have their studios here and they're teaching at the school now, so they're... it is a little strange, I guess. I think they've become accustomed to it.

**S.C.:** Did you want your sons to become cartoonists, or was that totally their choice?

**Joe:** No, no, no. To me, it's just a miracle not only that they've turned out to be cartoonists, but they've turned out to be as good as they are. They're terrific. They've gone, at this stage of the game, for what they're doing. I think they've gone way beyond anything that I've tried to do at that same age.

**S.C.:** Do you enjoy working with them?

**Joe:** Very much so. It's my greatest pleasure. Whenever I have an opportunity, and whenever it works out that they want me to do some inking or something where I can help them out, it's my greatest pleasure.

**S.C.:** It really seemed early on that Adam's work resembled yours a lot.

**Joe:** [Laughs] I can't speak to that. I really can't. [Laughs] It's hard for me to say. I can't speak to that. I probably... I guess, like other artists have influenced me, I'm sure there are a lot of people, including me, who have influenced both Adam and Andy.

**S.C.:** Among all the people you've had as students, who made the biggest impression on you as far as their talent?

**Joe:** There have been a number of them, and I would hesitate to say for fear that I'm going to leave some names out, but there've been some really terrific guys who have come

out of the school. But what I admire more than anything else amongst these people, it's probably one of the precepts of the school itself: the attitudes, their motivation, their complete dedication to what it is that they want to do. And I can't begin to tell you the problems that a lot of these guys have with money, with being away from home for the first time, the kind of pressures that they're under, doing the kind of work that they have to do in order to be able to attend the school. Some are putting in heavy, heavy hours and, because of money problems, having to work at the same time, which is really a drain on them. And they've still done it, they've still worked at it, and still they've come through and done really, really well. That I admire more than I can tell you.

**S.C.:** I saw from the interview you did that you've taken over the P\*S magazine contract.

**Joe:** Yep.

**S.C.:** That must be a great training ground for your students.

**Joe:** It's terrific for the students. But it's really fantastic for me, especially since Will Eisner is the guy who started the magazine 50 years ago! Before I had taken the magazine on, I had spoken to Will about it and I talked to Murphy Anderson (who subsequently, after Will, took it over) and it's a big, big kick working on this stuff, especially after guys like that.

**S.C.:** Now, P\*S is a monthly, correct?

**Joe:** Yes.

**S.C.:** And it's just for military?

**Joe:** Sixty-four pages a month. I think that you can pick it up generally. They have a website. Civilians can acquire it. But essentially it's a manual, a series of stories that tell the guys in the service how to maintain their vehicles, their firearms... you know, all the mechanical stuff that they work with, how to keep them in working order.

**S.C.:** What do you base the stories on? Does the Army send





**Above:** For the DC Special #12 collection of Viking Prince stories, Joe Kubert enticingly redrew some material for the 1971 [May-June] reprinting, including the splash page for this story that originally appeared in *The Brave and the Bold* #16 [Feb.-Mar. '58]. Courtesy of Bill Schelly.

**you out manuals?**

**Joe:** The Army sends out the material, the initial material. They have ten editors down in Redstone Arsenal, down in Alabama, that supply us with the essential material, the information that they want to disseminate. We, in turn, convert that into stories, into illustrations, into humorous things that make it easier and more enjoyable reading for the guys that they want to disseminate this information to.

**S.C.:** Do you ever take the students out on field trips, like to Fort Dix to look at tanks or anything?

**Joe:** No, they supply us with all the reference that we need in picture form, but the students at the school here do go out on trips to museums, to Frank Frazetta's museum here out in Pennsylvania. That we do. But no, the guys who work on the Army magazine do not.

**S.C.:** How many students are working on it right now?

**Joe:** Oh, I don't know the number off-hand.

**S.C.:** Is it a large number, or...?

**Joe:** No, not really. And none of them are permitted to work on it if they're not doing well in school. First priority is what they came here for and that is to work, to learn through the subjects that, through the ten-course curriculum that's given here. And, unless they're doing well in those classes, I don't care how good they are, they can't involve themselves on anything outside, with which I have anything to do.

**S.C.:** What do the students do on the magazine? Are they doing pretty much doing everything?

**Joe:** Yeah, sure. All kinds of different stuff, penciling, inking, layouts, working on computers, doing the coloring... everything.

**S.C.:** Do you try to give your students the same kind of all-around background you acquired?

**Joe:** That's the whole idea, sure.

**S.C.:** So you expect your students to be half-way decent letterers, for instance?

**Joe:** It's got to be that way 'else there's no insurance that they'll be able to make a livelihood over an extended period of time. But, anyhow, what we try to do is to give them enough a varied education so that should any part of the business slow down, if the publishers have more pencilers than they know what to do with, then our graduates can be inking. If the publishers have more inkers, then our graduates can be penciling and doing layouts. If the publishers need coloring, if they need more people to work on computers, if they need lettering, if they need any of the parts of the business for which a talent is necessary, that's what we teach here in the ten-course curriculum. But, most important, what we do tell our students is, "Hey, you have to be working on attaining a professional attitude." That is, when they come out of here, they have to know what the business is about, how to speak to people, how to work in a professional manner, how to handle deadlines, which is critical with any guy coming into the business. That's what we're pushing in the courses that we give.

**S.C.:** Let me let you wrap up here with one last question.

**Joe:** Sure.

**S.C.:** Will the *Tex Willer* album you did in Italy be published here in the States in English?

**Joe:** I hope so. I know that it's in the process of being done right now. I think there's publisher that's going to be doing it, but I hate to say because I don't think it's been a set deal yet. Leastways, I haven't been told about it, but I have done four separate covers for the four chapters that were in that Tex book and that's

so the foreign publishers, there are a number of foreign publishers that will be publishing it, as well, outside of Italy, that is.

**S.C.:** Was it fun getting back in and doing a Western again?

**Joe:** Yeah, it was. The only bad part about it, the only sad part about it is that it took me five or six years to do it. I had told the publisher, Sergio Bonelli, who had the patience of three saints, that it would take me at least three years to do it when I accepted the job. Of course, I've been involved with a lot of stuff and this was 224 pages of material.

**S.C.:** Were you squeezing in the pages when you had time?

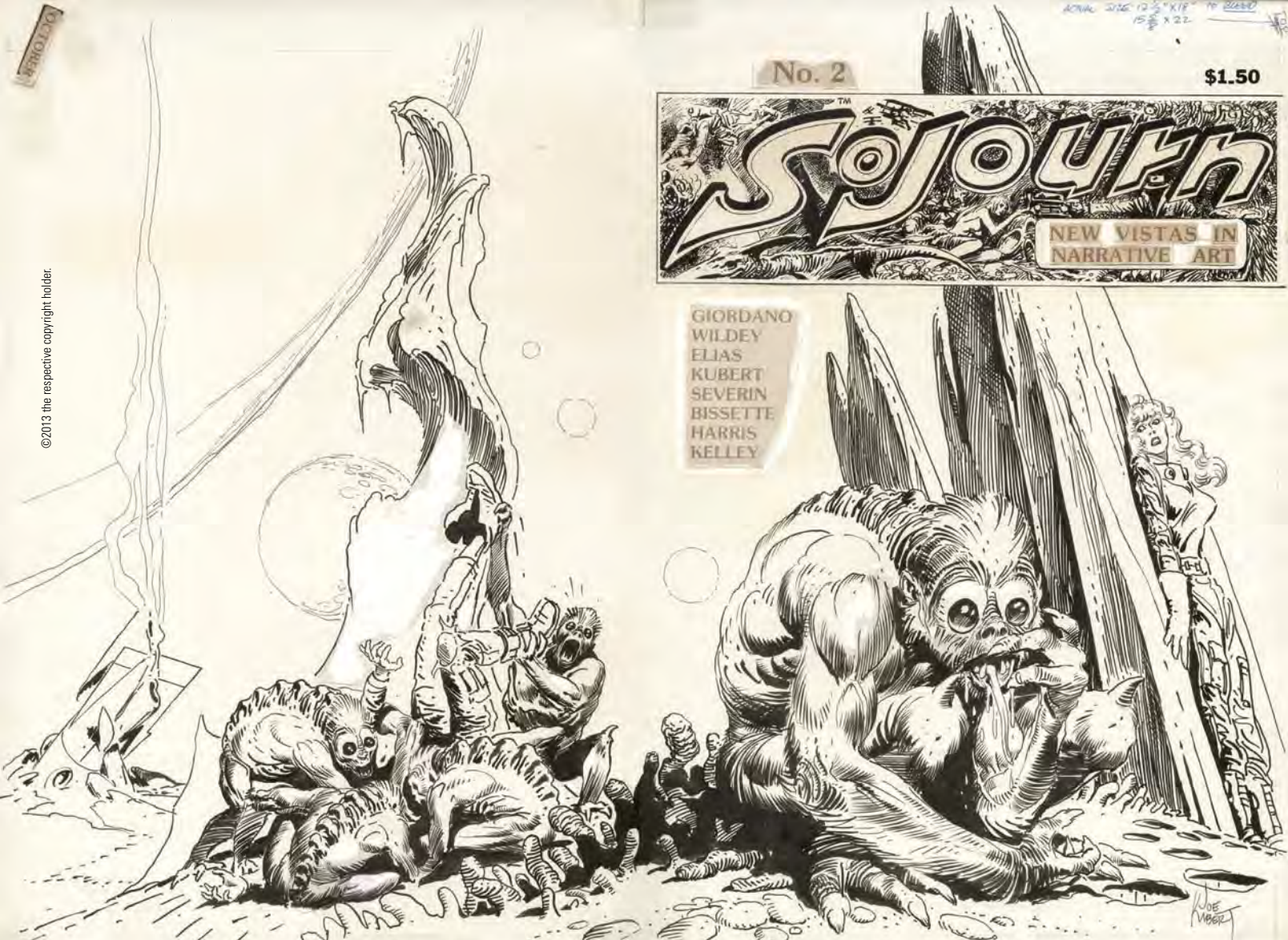
**Joe:** Oh yeah, exactly. And so it took me, under those circumstances, about five or six years or more to finish the whole thing.

**S.C.:** Yeah, I look forward to seeing it.

**Joe:** It looks pretty good, I think.







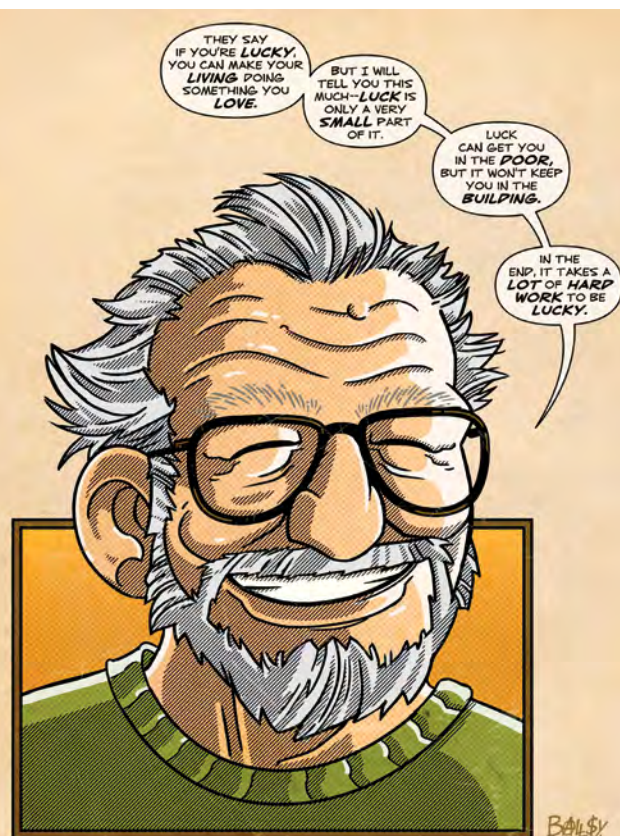
**Above:** The master proved he could out-macabre even Steve Bissette and Rick Veitch with this horrific Sojourn #2 cover. Original Joe Kubert art scan courtesy of Pete Carlsson and TKS.  
**Below:** Three photos from the 1970s of Joe Kubert instructing his students at the nascent Kubert School. The pic at center includes the renowned artist Al Williamson. Courtesy of PC & TKS.





# More Tributes in Memory of Joe

Words and pictures from friends, peers, students and fans about the comics master



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## Phil Balsman

have on so many. Without him and his school, I wouldn't have my career. That's the easy one, the simple one. I also wouldn't have my very best friends in the world, people I met at his school or met in my career, the career that I have because of all the things he taught me. I met my wife at his school — I have the life I have because of Joe Kubert and it is an amazing life. Thank you, Joe. Thank you.

## Brian 'Duke' Boyanski

I had the privilege to meet the Master *twice*...! The first time, I was honoured to be a lone guest on the old school premises in Dover, New Jersey, in late July 1980, where Joe and Muriel Kubert treated me royally, showing me around, introducing me to Adam and Andy, who were still in pre-comic book drawing phases of their lives.

In Joe's studio, I was shown lots of his original drawings... plus he patiently gave me an interview whilst I was wrote everything down, not having any recording device on me...! All I can remember going through my head was, "I have to return here as a student," and Joe was generous with his encouragement after seeing the sorry excuses for my drawings and comics pages that I somehow found the courage to show him. So, after a whole day spent in Casa Kubert, I was driven to the bus stop to get my ride back to New York City, bedazzled with the prospect of studying how to draw comics soon — but alas, that wasn't supposed to happen... or was it...?!

## Richard Arndt

I only met Joe Kubert once, in 2010. I was impressed by his willingness to interrupt his busy schedule for an interview. As impressive as his own actual work history was, equally notable was his willingness to speak up for and praise other creators he'd worked with. Joe was a man who looked and moved like a person 20 years younger and, like any true artist, he was most excited by the next project, the next job, the next day's work. You can learn a great deal from a man like that. The comics field and his students at the Joe Kubert School were lucky to have him.

## Phil Balsman

What Joe did for the world and comics will be a topic of discussion for generations beyond ours. I can only relay what Joe gave me and, in a small way, illustrate what an effect one great person can

Seventeen years later, I was living in London as a struggling comic book artist, full of cocky attitude and frost in my insecure heart, when Joe honored Ye Olde England as the main guest of the UK Comic Art Convention, where I reintroduced myself — and he's remembered me! For the duration of the UKCAC 1997, Joe had a work shop of sorts — compressed two-day curriculum demonstrating how his educational system works and, you've guessed it, I was the most eager beaver involved and enjoying the next best thing to being the actual Kubert Student. We talked, he shared the wisdom, kindness and generosity complimenting my art, and retelling the story of his and Norm Maurer's visit to Alex Raymond when they were in high school. I was so light-headed and honored that I managed to forget I was allowed to take home Joe's large easel drawings done for the demonstrational purposes! Someone more concentrated, cool-headed and less starry-eyed is probably still the proud owner of those beauties.

We have exchanged several "snail-mail" letters and just a few emails, including one on Facebook. I always felt I might be imposing, hence my reluctance to pester Joe with "howdys" and such, just to remain in touch.

I've adored the paper his pencil had touched, the very comics I was privileged to read and cherish — along with



Sgt. Flock TM & © DC Comics Art ©2013 Sal Abbinanti



# Remembering the Master

those by his prodigiously talented sons, Andy and Adam. When he passed away, I felt the loss usually experienced when a family member dies.

As they say, he shall remain most sorely missed. The comics medium — and *all* of us — owe The Man. Big time.

## Emi Yonemura Brown

Working with Joe was a lot more than a job: it was an education. Before working at Tell-A-Graphics, I had heard stories in class about how tough Joe was as your boss, more-so than when he was just your teacher. I was nervous the first time I had to present a layout to him for editing. I thought, "Man, is he going to see how novice I really am? Is this even good enough to show him?" The thing I learned quickly about Joe is that he never stops being a mentor. I think teaching came naturally to him because he genuinely wanted to see you succeed. Every layout you'd bring to Joe turned into a new lesson. He'd take the time to compliment your strengths, adjust your weaknesses, and then ask you how you're doing, how your family is, how your career is going. "What are you working on now?"

He never stopped encouraging me and always treated me like he saw something special in me. Joe was like that; he could inspire with a smile and make you feel like the whole world was open to you, even if your layout was full of mistakes or your under-drawing was just plain awful.

At Tell-A-Graphics, I also had the privilege of doing flat colors under Joe's comic work. When you have to "read" every line he put down you start to learn the genius in even the simplest of strokes. There was always something to learn from Joe, whether it came from him or his work. I was only at Tell-A-Graphics for half a year, but what I took out of it will stay with me and encourage me for the rest of my life.

## Nancy Collins

Sgt. Rock, Enemy Ace, Tarzan, Tor, Hawkman... you name it, he drew it at some point in a very long and influential career. But perhaps his greatest contribution was the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon & Graphic Art, which produced such talents as Stephen Bissette, Kim DeMulder, Dave Dorman, Karl Kesel, Adam & Andy Kubert, Tom Mandrake, Eric Shanower, Timothy Truman, John Totleben, Rick Veitch, and Thomas Yeates.

## Dan Duncan

Joe Kubert's art has — and always will be — an inspiration. But his passion for education gave me an opportunity I will forever be grateful for. An opportunity to surround myself with like-minded individuals who have since become friends and impossibly-talented colleagues. The opportunity to practice my craft, focus my ambition, and start achieving my professional goals. I like to think that I could've done all of this on my own, but I'm glad I didn't have to.

## Patrick Ford

I was on Cloud Nine when I saw Joe Kubert's *Tarzan* previewed in [the fanzine] *ERB-dom*. Kubert was my favorite comic book artist when I was a kid, having been a big fan of the DC war comics. I actually stopped reading comic books around 1965 because I became interested in the ERB revival, read all the Burroughs books, collected Frazetta covers, subscribed to ERB and Robert E. Howard fanzines, and it was the Marvel *Conan* comic book which got me looking at comics for the first time in five years, around 1970. The Kubert *Tarzan* followed not too much later and I loved it — and still do love it. Kubert measures up and *Tarzan* is a pretty intimi-



Thom Buchanan

©2013 Thom Buchanan

dating stage. To me the ultimate Tarzan artist will always be J. Allen St. John, but Kubert doesn't pale in his shadow, nor do Foster or Frazetta.

## Louie Joyce

I think my first encounter with Joe Kubert's work was in a *Justice League of America* #200 reprint I had when I was younger (and still have). Even in an issue filled with so many great artists, his work stood out to me, and that image of Superman and Hawkman locked in fierce battle especially sticks in my mind. So much energy and grace in his linework.



**Below:** Joe Kubert and Brian 'Duke' Boyanski in the summer of 1980. Pic courtesy of Duke.



Louie Joyce



I read in an article that he started drawing on the sidewalks of New York when he was young, and his neighbors would buy chalk for him to draw with. That served as the inspiration for my tribute illustration [seen above], as Joe himself has served as the inspiration for countless people since he first put chalk to pavement.

## Chris Kalnick

It's funny how sometimes you don't realize how much someone has impacted your life until you hear of their passing. This was definitely the case with me regarding Joe Kubert.

Thirty-five years ago, fresh on the heels of its groundbreaking first year class, I was one of the second-year students who attended the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art. The school was small compared to today's incarnation, with something like 25-30 students returning from the first year, and Joe only accepted around 50 for the incoming second-year class. The students ran the spectrum from the intensely-focused-and-disciplined-artist/storyteller to the recent goofy-high-school-graduate-not-really-knowing-what-the-hell-they-wanted. A lot of us fell in between.

I don't need to expound on how amazing the school was, its atmosphere, its creative energy, etc. Suffice to say, there was nothing like it at the time. Plenty has been written about the school over the years. Even if it wasn't your intention, you

were bound to learn some amount of craft there... not only from Joe and the teachers, but from the other students as well. Everyone ate, drank, and breathed comic art. The place swam in it. Those who were there know what I'm talking about. Their life experience and their art is a little richer for it.

There are many more XQB's than I who have had longer, deeper, more extended relationships with Joe, and they have their stories to tell and feelings to share. My relationship with him was somewhat brief, but what I can tell you about Joe is that he was no-nonsense. He shot from the hip. You knew if he liked something or felt it worked... and you knew if he didn't. He commanded respect, personal and professional. My personal talks with him were few, but they definitely left an impression, as I'm sure his conversations did with the majority of his students. My last talk with Joe is forever etched in my mind, for it was sad in nature. It was about my leaving the school and Joe expressed his disappointment. For a cartoonist... not an easy moment to shake.

Joe opened his unique school and, by doing so, opened the doors for a tremendous amount of artists who may not have otherwise had the opportunity, support, and camaraderie to develop their skill. If it wasn't for Joe, I wouldn't have developed my craft or the sense of identity that I have today. I wouldn't have made the professional friends I have now. And my youngest daughter wouldn't have grown up in my studio to become an accomplished young artist herself. Joe passed away the day after my daughter left home to attend Ringling College of Art and Design as an illustration major. The coincidence of it is not lost on me... and his legacy seems so much more poignant, his influence so much more obvious.

You are respected, Joe. I know for a fact that you will be missed. Thank you.

## Pav Kovacic

I once read an interview with Joe where he mentioned that the way his house was laid out he had to go through his sons' bedroom to get to his studio. It was just a little aside that was part of a longer anecdote, but that detail stuck with me and became the genesis of this story, written several years ago, which is not intended in any way to be factual—it was just a chance for me to imagine living and working in the Glory Days of comics.

Thanks for sharing your amazing talent with us, Joe. You will be missed but never forgotten.

## Blame It On Errol Flynn

It was almost 9:30 when the front door to the small New Jersey bungalow swung open and Joe walked in, carrying a leather art portfolio and a bundle wrapped in brown paper.

"Muriel! I'm home!"

"Quiet. You'll wake the children." Joe's wife, Muriel, threw a dishtowel over her shoulder as she walked in from the kitchen. "You know how hard it is to get them to bed when you're not here."

"Oh, damn. Sorry. I forgot how late it was."

With a quick kiss Joe handed his things to Muriel so he could take off his jacket. "What's in this package?" she asked.

"They were throwing out a bunch of old art boards at the office. I thought the boys would get a kick out of looking at them. Most of 'em are junk, but there are a few nice *Superman* pages by Curt Swan in there." Joe headed towards the kitchen. "What's for dinner? I'm starved."

"Chicken and dumplings. I've been keeping it warm for you. I hope the chicken hasn't dried out, it was good when the boys and I ate." Muriel hung Joe's jacket in the front closet before following him. "Why are you so late getting home?"

"Carmine cornered me on my way out. He needed to vent and I became his exhaust pipe."

As they passed through the living room, Joe saw that



the news was on the television. The big story was Mickey Mantle's upcoming 2,000<sup>th</sup> game the coming Saturday. Joe quickly calculated that he had drawn at least twice that number of comic book pages in his career. Maybe someday they would have Joe Kubert Day at Yankee Stadium.

"What was it this time?"

"Oh, everyone at the office is going crazy because Stan Lee's got a new book over at Marvel with another one of his weirdo characters that's selling like gangbusters. 'Spider-Man,' this one's called. He's a little nebbish who gets bitten by a radioactive spider and ends up crawling up walls and shooting webs out of his ass or something like that."

"Joe!"

"I don't know. All I know is that Weisinger's driving Carmine up the wall, wanting to know how we're going to compete with that, so now Carmine's driving *me* up a wall. Sometimes I wonder if taking the art director job was a mistake. When I was just freelancing I didn't have to deal with all of this crap."

"The problem is, you took the job and still do freelance work at night. I keep telling you that you can't do both." Joe knew where this line of conversation was going as he sat down to his dinner. Muriel leaned against the sink, arms crossed, "I don't know why you stay with these comic books. You could be making more money in advertising and you wouldn't have to work 80 hours a week."

"If I worked in advertising, I'd be drawing packs of Chesterfields and Pepto-Bismol bottles all day. No thanks, I'd hang myself inside of a week. By the way, the chicken is not dry, it's perfect."

Joe's compliment temporarily deflected Muriel, who grabbed her towel, turned with a sigh, and went back to drying the dishes. Joe went back to his dumplings. He knew she was right, but he also believed what he had said. He knew plenty of artists who had been lured into advertising by the money, only to come back to comics a year or two later.

As his friend and fellow artist Gil Kane always said, "Blame it on Errol Flynn." Just about everyone working in comics at that time had grown up during the Depression, and they all had fond memories of the times they could scrape together the money needed to spend a Saturday afternoon at the cinema. They enjoyed the serialized exploits of cowboys, interstellar explorers and G-men, but most of all they loved the swashbuckling features starring screen idols like Errol Flynn.

Every time Gil, Joe and the others put pencil to paper they were trying to recreate the feelings of wonder and joy they felt while watching *Captain Blood*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and *The Sea Hawk*. The fact that Joe was only 12 when he got his first paying job drawing comics made these childhood connections even stronger.

By the time he was finished with dinner, the tension between Joe and Muriel was gone. Muriel had no complaints about Joe as a husband or father. It just upset her to see him work so hard for so little reward, especially now that two of their boys, Adam and Andy, were showing an interest and a talent for drawing comic books themselves. She made Joe a pot of coffee to fuel his late night work session before going off to bed.

Joe's studio was in a small room over the garage. Due to an architectural mystery the Kuberts were never able to solve, Joe had to go through Adam and Andy's room to get to it. When he was only doing freelance work, it wasn't a problem since he worked during the day when the boys were at school. Now that he had to take the train into Manhattan and put in a full day at the office, there were many nights when he didn't sit down at his drawing board until after the boys were already asleep.

Tip-toeing into their room, coffee Thermos and portfolio in hand, Joe looked in on his sons. Andy was the youngest of



Art ©2013 Pav Kovacic.

the two and took after his father physically. He was short and stocky and enjoyed playing baseball as much as he enjoyed comic books. Adam was fairer and slighter, and had been wearing glasses since he was six. He was the dreamer of the pair.

On the desk that the boys shared Joe noticed that Andy had been copying from the anatomy book that Joe had given them. Both boys impressed him with their desire to learn the

Howard Bender



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**ARTIST SPOTLIGHT:  
JOE KUBERT**



JOE KUBERT HAS BEEN A PROFESSIONAL CARTOONIST FOR OVER 60 YEARS AND HAS DRAWN ALMOST EVERY COMIC BOOK CHARACTER IN EXISTENCE. IN ADDITION TO DRAWING, HE HAS BEEN AN EDITOR, PUBLISHER, WRITER AND LETTERER.

HE IS THE FOUNDER OF THE JOE KUBERT SCHOOL OF CARTOON AND GRAPHIC ART, INC., WHICH HAS TURNED OUT MANY OF TODAY'S PROMINENT CARTOONISTS.

FIND OUT WHAT JOE'S DOING TODAY AT [www.kubertworld.com](http://www.kubertworld.com)



# FLASH GORDON

By JIM KEEFE

11-10

Artwork: JOE KUBERT  
[www.keefestudios.com](http://www.keefestudios.com)



Above: Courtesy of Jim Keefe, a Sunday newspaper Flash Gordon episode rendered by Joe Kubert.

craft. He tried to give them lessons whenever he could to help direct their energies, but they managed to fill up reams of paper with their drawings with or without his guidance. He felt a swell of pride mixed with a little bit of regret at the thought of his sons following him into such a demanding career.

Joe clicked on the big fluorescent light on his drawing table and sat down with the script he brought home from the office. The story was about the Viking Prince, a minor character from one of DC's older titles that Joe thought had the potential to become a lead feature. He was a Viking warrior who had offended the gods by falling in love with a Valkyrie and was cursed with immortality, thus denying him entry into Valhalla.

Joe was working with Bob Kanigher, the writer who had first created the character, and both of them were excited about the new project. Joe had been building up his morgue files with Viking reference and had even rented a 16mm print of *The Vikings* with Kirk Douglas. He would stop the projector whenever he found a shot he liked and Muriel would quickly snap a picture of it before the heat from the bulb melted the film.

Now, as he read through the script, doodling layouts for the panels and pages in the margins, he felt his enthusiasm drop a bit. He thought about all the furor at the office over the new books Marvel was putting out. Even though Stan Lee was the same age as Joe and the rest of their contemporaries, he seemed to understand what the kids today were interested in, what scared them, what got them excited. Even college students were starting to read Marvel books. They said the stories were "hip" and "cool."

DC comics had never been hip or cool; they were the comics that parents felt safe giving their children to read. It had been a long time since Superman had fought the Nazis or even a monster from outer space. These days he kept

busy fighting off Lois Lane's matrimonial advances and taking care of his stable of super pets. Joe was glad that he'd never had to draw Beppo, the super chimp.

"Dad?" Lost in his thoughts, Joe didn't know how long Andy had been standing in the doorway between the boys' room and his studio. "Andy, jeez, your mother's going to kill both of us if she finds out you're up."

Andy walked over to his father's drawing table and into the light. He was carrying the drawings Joe had seen on the desk. "I wanted to show you my drawings. I wanted to make sure you saw them."

Joe picked Andy up and set him on his lap and then spread his drawings out on the table. "I saw them on my way in here. You did a wonderful job. Do you remember some of the muscle groups I taught you? What's that one called?"

"That's easy, it's the biceps."

"Okay, Mr. *Gray's Anatomy*, how about this one?"

"That's the... pic... pec... pictorial muscle!"

"Pectoral," Joe corrected him.

Andy knit his brows and repeated the word quietly several times. Satisfied with his critique, Andy gathered up his drawings so he could see what his father was working on. "What's this, Dad?"

"Oh, just a story about a Viking."

"Is he a good Viking or a bad Viking?"

"He's a good Viking, a very brave warrior." Joe had Andy stand up so that he could take some drawings out of his portfolio. "Here, you want to see what he's going to look like?"

Andy plopped down onto the floor, cross legged. "Yeah. Does he have a sword?"

"You bet." Joe joined Andy on the floor so that he could spread all of his design sketches out. He had drawings all of the main characters, including the Norse gods, as well as some ideas for Viking ships, sea monsters and frost giants. He went through each one, explaining who everyone was and how they figured into the stories. Each drawing



produced more questions from Andy, and soon Joe found himself retelling the entire origin of Jon, the Viking Prince.

Just as he got to the part about the curse from the gods Joe noticed that Andy was rubbing his eyes and taking longer and longer to blink. "Alright, you. I've kept you up long enough. Time to get you back into bed."

"But I want to know what happens to Jon, the Viking."

"Tomorrow. I promise I'll be home for dinner and then I can tell you and your brother the rest of the story together." Joe scooped Andy up off of the floor.

"Promise?"

"Viking's honor." Andy was already asleep before he reached the doorway. Joe put him in his bed and tucked him in. The clock on the wall said it was quarter past one. "Muriel's going to kill me when she finds out about this."

Joe sat back down at this drawing board, poured himself a cup of the now lukewarm coffee and got back to work. He didn't think about Stan Lee, or Spider-Man, or angry publishers for the rest of the night. He was too busy dreaming about swashbuckling adventures on the high seas.

## Seth Kushner

I had the honor of spending some time with Mr. Kubert back in 2008 when I traveled out to The Kubert School in Dover, New Jersey, to take his portrait for my book, *Leaping Tall Buildings: The Origins of American Comics*. He was 81 at the time and sitting over his art table drawing when I arrived at his office. I took a peek over his shoulder as he rose to greet me and those famous Kubert lines were unmistakable on the page. I was nervous, as one might feel when meeting a legend, but Mr. Kubert put me at ease.

Joe Kubert began working in comics when he was only 12 years old and he continued doing so for the rest of his life, putting his iconic stamp on such works as "Hawkman," "Sgt. Rock," *Tor*, and many more. When my *Leaping Tall Buildings* partner, Christopher Irving, interviewed Mr. Kubert, he made the very apt observation that Kubert's recent work did not look like the work of someone at the end of their career, but instead he looked to be at the height of his career. This is clearly evident in his more recent books; *Jew Gangster*, *Fax from Sarajevo*, *Yossel* and *Dong Xoi*.

Joe Kubert left an indelible mark on the comics industry and he will be greatly missed. His legacy lives on through his sons, Andy and Adam, both successful and talented cartoonists in their own right, as well as through the hundreds of students he taught at The Kubert School.

## Robert Miskovic

I had a unique opportunity to not only have Joe Kubert as an instructor, but also a boss and a mentor.

I started working for Joe in the Fall of 1998, my first year at the Kubert school. I worked my way from the "World of Cartooning," making boxes, all the way to Tell-A-Graphics, where I "flatted" pages for various projects of his. Artistically, I didn't feel challenged and, after ten plus years of working for Joe, I resigned in search of becoming a "real" artist.

It was the 2011 holiday season and this would be the last time I would see Joe. I stopped by his office for a visit and he was interested in the fact of whether or not I was happy with my choice of being a cartoonist. I told him that I was working a full-time job to pay the bills, but I was doing a bi-monthly strip that was being published. His response? "That's great." Then I added it's only bi-monthly and I don't get paid for it. Joe then asked, "Are you happy drawing it anyway?" I said, "Yes." Joe then looked me in the eye and smiled, and he said, "That's great. I'm happy for you." That was my final lesson learned from Joe: He taught me *why* he drew comics — he simply *loved* what he was doing.

## Xurxo G. Penalta

Joe Kubert left us a huge legacy in the thousands of printed pages he produced, but he also served as a marvelous example of an always-challenged artist, developing and evolving ever more precise, more impacting and expressive work through every decade. In the end, his seemingly unstoppable progression was detained only by his health. Joe's insatiable ambition, for me, might be most valuable lesson he has left for us.

Deeply moved by the sad news of his passing last August, I drew two pieces — one on the very day he died, the empty Sgt. Rock helmet and the legend "artist's artist"; another during the week that followed, with some of the characters he worked on and some he created, on a white, nondescript field mourning his passing, yet with the sergeant stepping forward, toward the empty portion. This is the one I prefer, as it is more emotional. [Xurxo's favored tribute piece appears on pg. 127 of the CBC #2 print edition.]



Dan Duncan



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Art ©2013 C. Michael Hall.  
Colors by Dustin Evans.

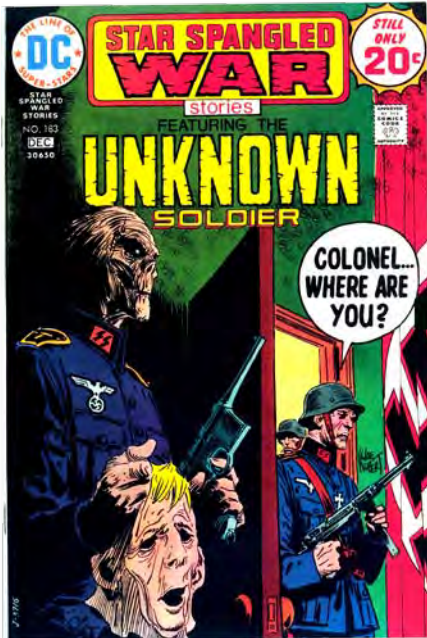
C. Michael Hall & Dustin Evans



## David A. Roach

It was those hands that really stick in my mind.

As a student back in 1986, I somehow managed to persuade my art college that it was imperative I visit America as research for my third-year thesis on comic art. In all honesty,



TM & © DC Comics.

it was a flimsy excuse to fly to New York and visit some friends, but part of the trip included a visit with Joe Kubert in his Dover, New Jersey school. It was a hot dusty day and much of it is now lost to the ravages of time, but a few things do stick in the mind: My confusion at nobody expecting me when I turned up at the door; the enormous *Prince Valiant* original in the hallway; chatting with Joe for what felt like hours (a chat ranging from Raymond vs. Williamson to Hugo Pratt, Victor De La Fuente, and the great Europeans). But, more than anything else, it was his hands that made the biggest impression. Although I towered over Joe — I was, and still am, somewhat on the skinny side and clearly someone who had never done a hard day's work in his life — by contrast, Joe was strong, powerfully built, and with enormous hands, which looked like they could crush rocks — and possibly had.

And that is so clearly reflected in the work he produced. Be it *Tor*, *Sgt. Rock*, *Tarzan*, "Enemy Ace," *The Punisher*, or any of the many features he worked, his art was always so powerful — so vibrant and masculine. His ink lines themselves were confident, expressive, so utterly alive and wonderfully descriptive. This wasn't work that subtly seduced the eye with delicate rendering or finely wrought details, it jumped off the page and hit you right between the eyes like no other artist I can think of. Joe's career must have been the longest in comics history, spanning the very earliest days of the sweatshops right up to his own self-titled comic book from DC, which was still running after his death. Consequently we all have our own particular Joe Kubert favorites which have informed our appreciation and understanding of the art form. For me, it was the more obscure corners of DC's mid-'70s output. I was too late for his "Sgt. Rock," I knew Kubert more as a cover artist for the many books he was editing, and there always seemed something dark, brooding and enticingly oppressive about his many covers that filled DC house ads. I'm thinking of things like *Ragman*, that strangest of '70s super-heroes; *Rima, the Jungle Girl*; *Tor*; those gorgeous covers for *Unexpected* and *House of Mystery*; and his *Unknown Soldier* covers, which mixed war and horror so thrillingly.

If there's one image that most wholly encapsulates the unique power of his work it is for me his cover to *Star Spangled War Stories*

#183. A German soldier calls through an open doorway, "Colonel... Where are you?" while the Unknown Soldier lurks in the shadows, a mask hanging limply in his hand, revealing his hideously shrivelled cadaver-like face. Kubert was a master of the attention grabbing composition and the unforgettable concept and this one has stayed with me for decades. When I first saw the image, it was as a tiny page filler, probably in an issue of *Kamandi* (my favorite comic of the time) and I was both captivated and repulsed. It took me years to find a copy, by which time it had assumed the status of a holy grail, and if I could have any single page from his illustrious career it would have to be this one.

After our meeting, I returned home to the UK and some months later I had almost forgotten about our chat when an invitation to study at the school came through the post. It seemed I was signed up as a first-year student and term was to start in a few weeks time. I never went. In fact, I don't think I even replied and, from time to time, I wonder what would have happened had I flown back to Dover and studied under the great man. But, by the time the letter came through, I was already drawing for *2000AD* and thought I knew it all. Almost three decades on, I'm still drawing comics and I still have so much to learn, but the chance to study with a legend has gone. Joe was a one-off, a unique voice and a giant of comics, we won't see his like again.

## J.J. Sedelmaier

I always loved Joe Kubert's art and remember as a kid being struck by how unique his drawing technique was. The sketchy energy and dark, adult tone set itself apart from the majority of comic book artists back then. It reminded me that there was room for artwork that didn't conform to the industry's norm, and Joe's distinct style helped me appreciate the importance of standing out with a recognizable "stamp" of your own... After I became involved with the animation industry I would often get visits from ex-Kubert School students who were well prepared after their stint at his school in Dover, New Jersey. It was a pleasure to finally meet Joe several years ago and be able to tell him how wonderful I thought his work was, but also congratulate him on providing a solid foundation for his animation students!

## Gerry Talao

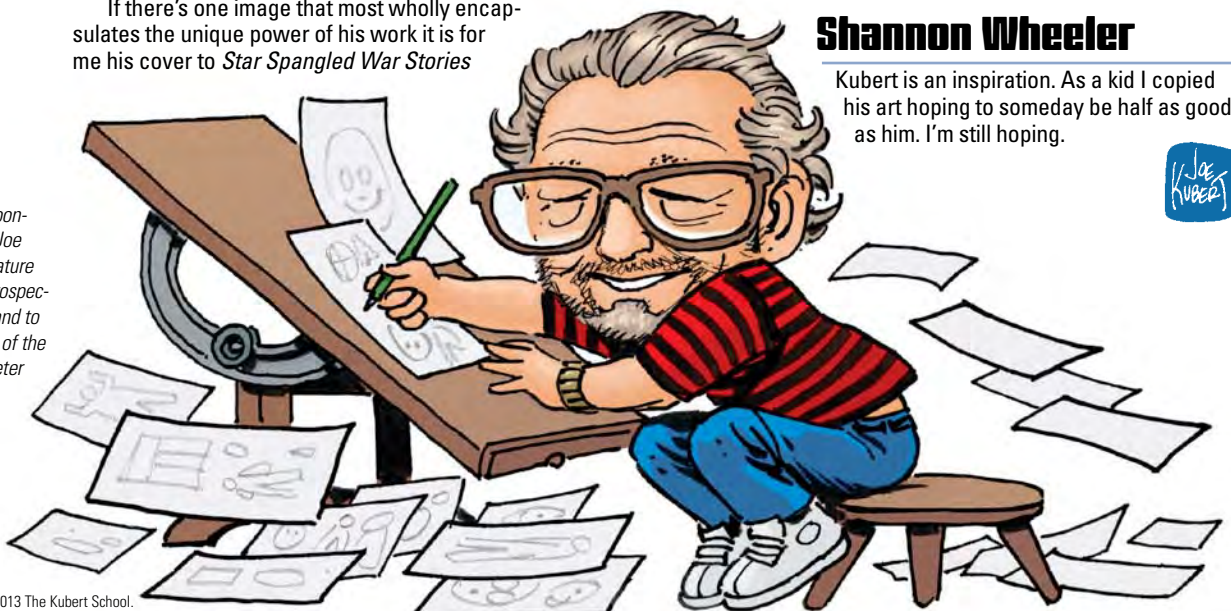
Joe Kubert was one of the best when it comes to the field of comics! His illustrations are the finest in layout and mood, and the storytelling is easy to understand and memorable. He is the creator of the Unknown Soldier and, during my time on the strip, he also did most of the cover designs. He possessed an amazing talent!

## Shannon Wheeler

Kubert is an inspiration. As a kid I copied his art hoping to someday be half as good as him. I'm still hoping.



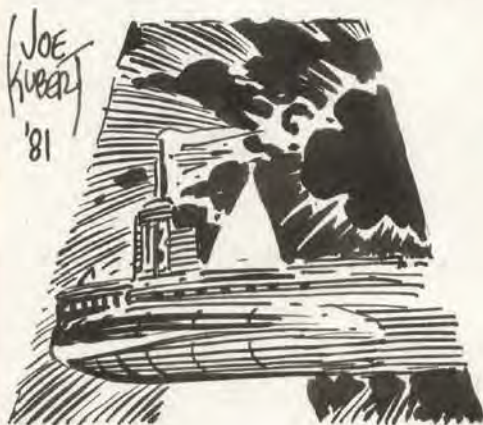
**Right:** For his "World of Cartooning" correspondence course, Joe Kubert developed a self-caricature to light-heartedly introduce prospective students to the program and to the Kubert School. Here's one of the Kubie cartoons, courtesy of Peter Carlsson and TKS.



Art ©2013 The Kubert School.



# Joe Kubert Art Gallery



**This page:** Chilling Joe Kubert cover for the digest-size DC Special Blue Ribbon Digest #21 [May '82]. All images in this original art gallery — unless otherwise noted — are courtesy of Peter Carlsson and the Joe Kubert archives.

**Next page:** Joe's G.I. Combat #161 [June '73] cover.



G.I.  
**DC**  
COMBAT

Featuring

THE **HAUNTED TANK**

**20c**

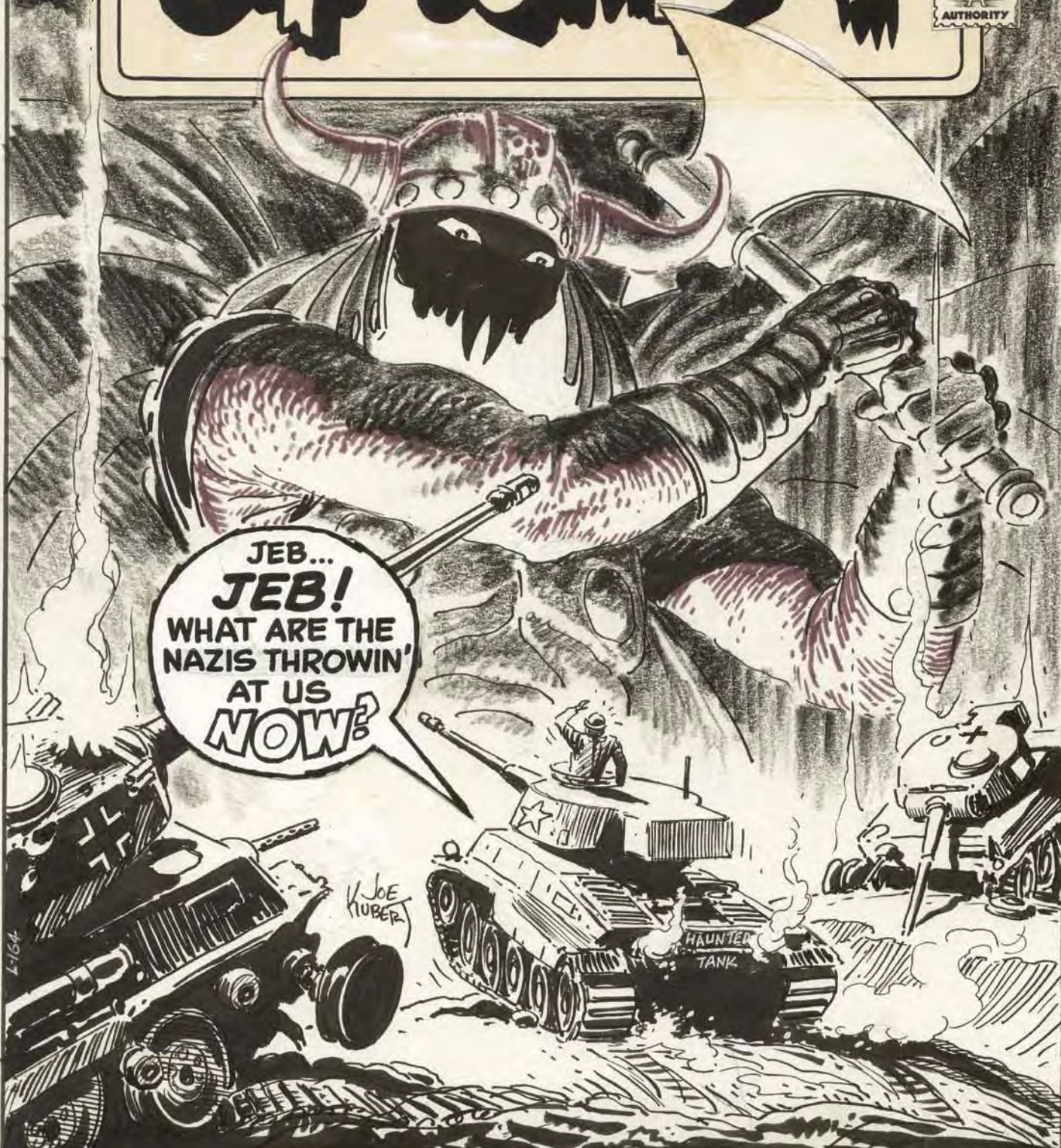
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MAY  
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# G.I. COMBAT

APPROVED  
BY THE  
COMICS  
CODE  
AUTHORITY

JEB...  
**JEB!**  
WHAT ARE THE  
NAZIS THROWIN'  
AT US  
**NOW?**

K. JOE  
HUBER



YELLOW TS

BLACK TS

BLUE TS





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DC FROM  
BEYOND THE

# FROM BEYOND THE UNKNOWN

ASTONISHING!

EARTH'S  
FRIENDLY  
INVADERS

\*\*\*\*\*

STARTLING!

"YES,  
VIRGINIA  
THERE IS  
A MARTIAN"

\*\*\*\*\*

AMAZING!

"The  
PHANTOM  
SPACEMAN"

\*\*\*\*\*

FUTURISTIC!

"QUEST  
of the  
STAR-  
FLOWERS"

\*\*\*\*\*

FANTASTIC!

"The  
MONSTER  
THAT  
FISHED  
for MEN"

**THIS** IS HOW EARTH SEES  
THE FIRST ALIEN SPACEMEN  
WHO LAND ON OUR PLANET!

**BUT...THIS IS HOW THEY  
REALLY  
LOOK!!!**



WILL EARTH SEE THROUGH THE HOAX BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE?

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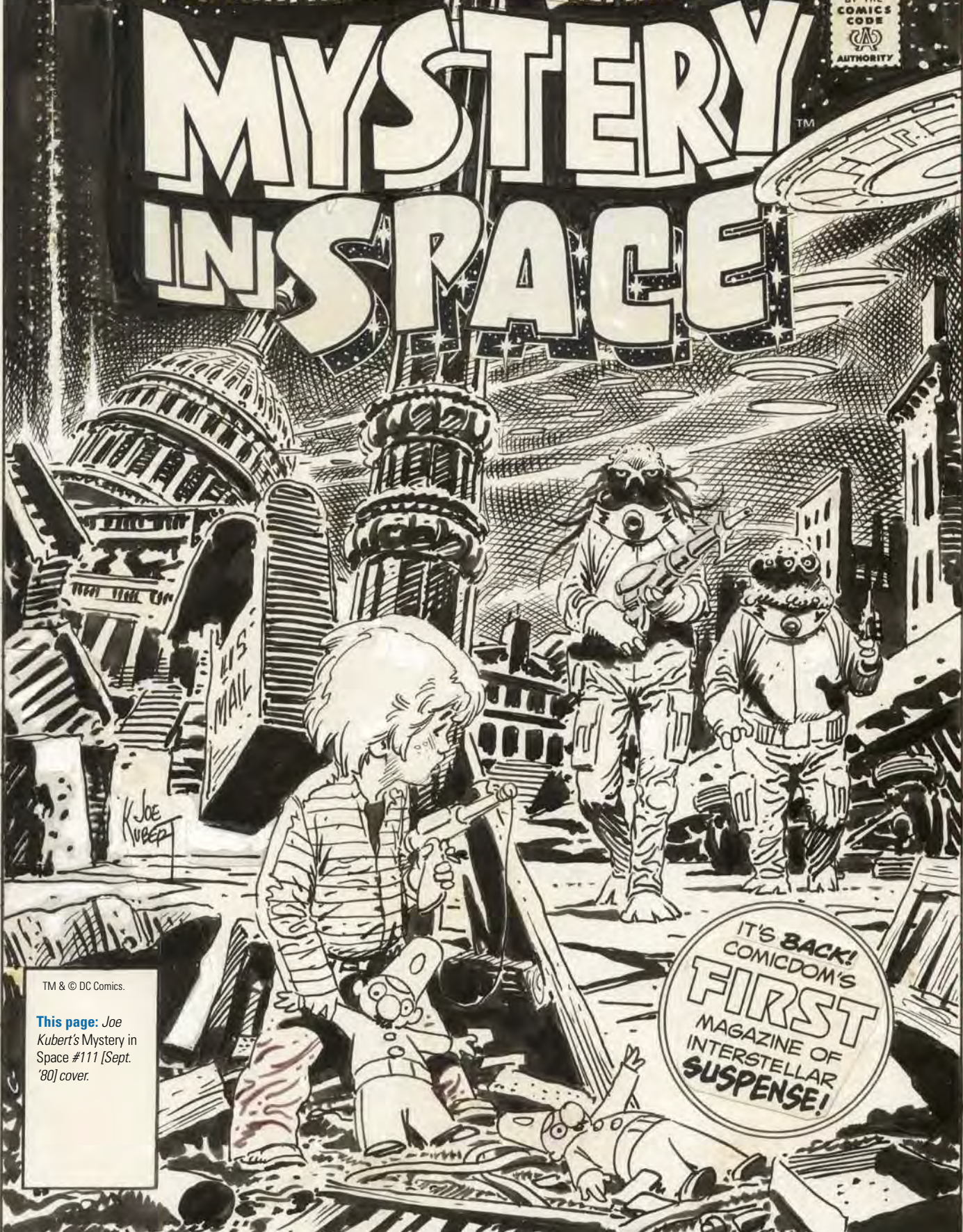
NO. 111

SEPT.



IN THE INFINITE DARKNESS THEY ARE WAITING!

# MYSTERY IN SPACE



TM & © DC Comics.

**This page:** Joe  
Kubert's Mystery in  
Space #111 [Sept.  
'80] cover.

IT'S BACK!  
COMICDOM'S  
**FIRST**  
MAGAZINE OF  
INTERSTELLAR  
**SUSPENSE!**

\* RAVING SAVERS LITE ON BOTTOM, PAGE 107

\* TOM SAVERS ARE GARY COOKED.

EDITOR:  
BLUE TS

YELLOW TS

RED TS

BLACK TS



This page: This Joe Kubert cover was originally intended for Battle Classics #3, a casualty of DC's 1978 "implosion," though it was reproduced in Cancelled Comics Cavalcade.

YELLOW TS

JOE KUBERT

BLACK TS

RED TS

TM & © DC Comics



BLUE TS



YELLOW TS

RED TS



# DO YOU DARE ENTER... THE HOUSE OF

# MYSTERY

**50¢**  
ALL NEW!  
NO. 290  
MAR.

APPROVED  
BY THE  
COMICS  
CODE  
AUTHORITY

**BEGINNING:  
AN UNFORGETTABLE  
NEW SERIES...  
"I...VAMPIRE!"**

**This page:** Breathing Joe Kubert cover for House of Mystery #290 (Mar. '81), the first issue to feature the "I, Vampire" series.

JOE KUBERT

C-526

☐ BIPAD NO. ☐ INVENTORY NO. ☐ CODE SYMBOL ☐ MONTH

COLOR - NIGHT SKY -- POWDER HIGHLIGHTS ON FACES, GIRL'S LEGS (THIGH) & SHOULDER

WEIN BLUE TS



\* ~~FOR THE FIRST TIME~~ ~~A SERIES~~ "SEARING BATTLE SAGAS OF WORLDWART  
~~SEARING STORIES~~ AS SEEN THROUGH ENEMY EYES,



And THIS  
 15 WTC

IN ~~DOORWAY~~  
 IS WOMAN  
 LUGGING YOUNG  
 BOY -- FATHER  
 IS DEAD ON  
 FLOOR.  
 BUILDING IS  
 SHOT-POCKED,  
 ETC.

\* WE DARE TO BE  
 DIFFERENT!

THIS NAZI  
 w/HAND  
 AGAINST  
 ANOTHER M.G.

NAZIS IN FOREGROUND,  
 M.G.'S POINTING AT  
 WINDOW

This page and next: For the innovative "enemy P.O.V." war comic book Blitzkrieg, editor Joe Kubert designed the first issue's cover, dated Jan-Feb. 1976, and his breakdown sketch is shown here, with printed cover inset at left. On the next page, courtesy of Heritage Auctions, is a repro of the original art for the same issue.







BLITZKRIEG



WE DARE TO  
BE DIFFERENT!

25¢  
NO. 1  
FEB.  
32417



# BLITZKRIEG

SEARING BATTLE SAGAS OF WORLD WAR 2  
AS SEEN THROUGH ENEMY EYES!

DO NOT  
SHOOT,  
HUGO!

ORDERS  
ARE ORDERS!  
THEY ARE  
ENEMIES...  
AND THIS IS  
**WAR!**

1<sup>st</sup>  
DC  
ISSUE

JOE  
HUBER

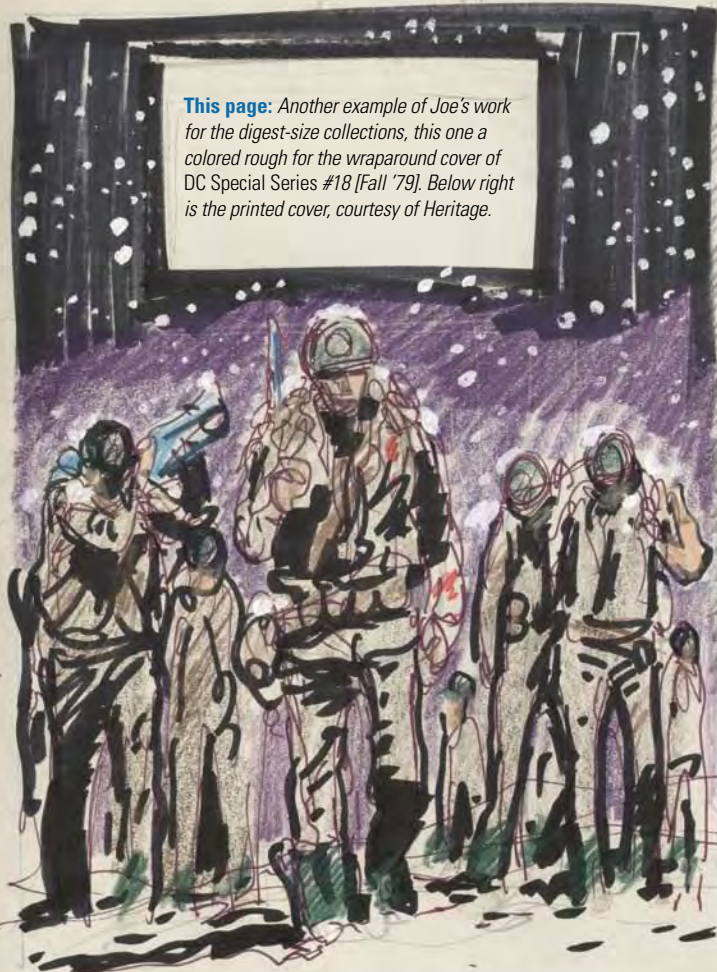




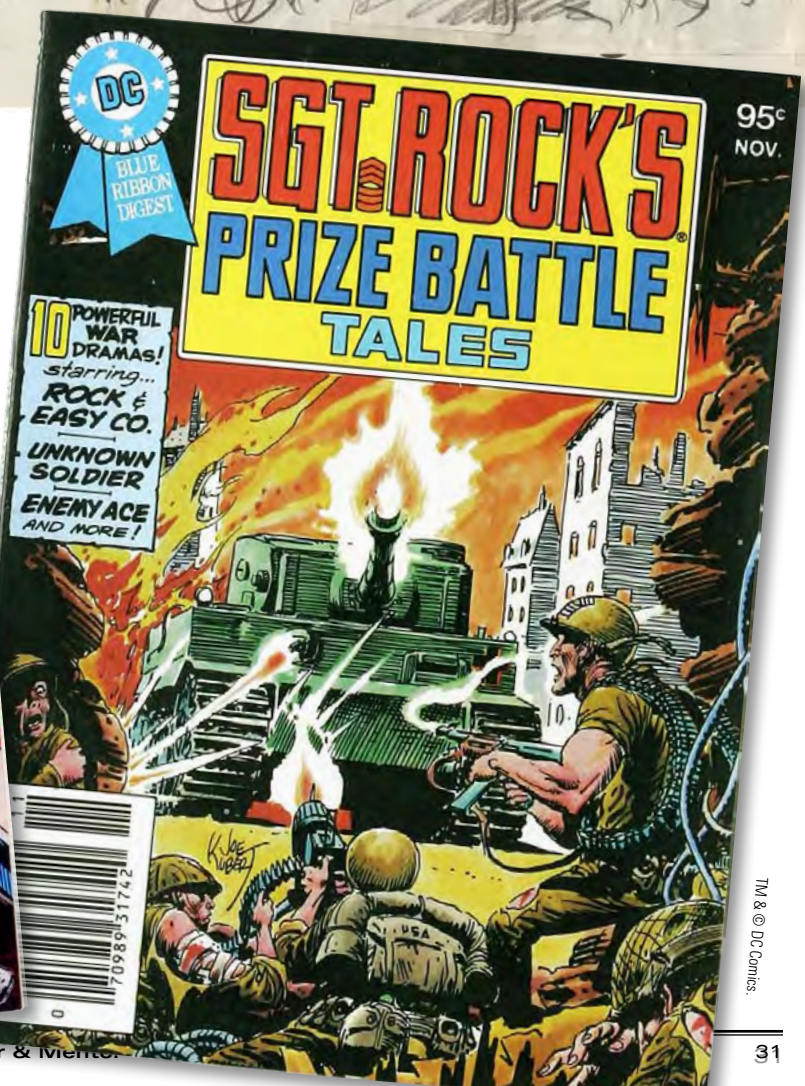
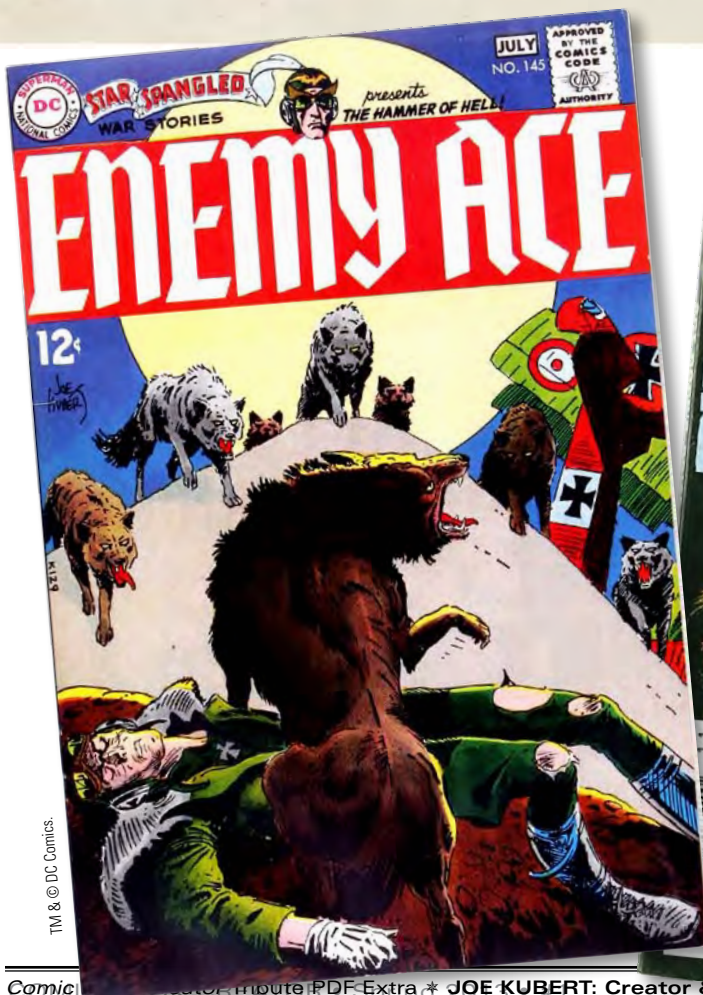
**This page:** A slight "cheat" for a gallery devoted to Joe Kubert, here is DC art director Carmine Infantino's sketch for "Enemy Ace" cover on Star Spangled War Stories #145 (June-July '69), which was adapted by Joe Kubert for the final printed cover (seen on the next page). Kudos to our pal Pete Carlsson for digging up this treasure! And Godspeed to the late former publisher of DC Comics, Rouge Enfant, who passed away earlier this year.



**This page:** Another example of Joe's work for the digest-size collections, this one a colored rough for the wraparound cover of DC Special Series #18 (Fall '79). Below right is the printed cover, courtesy of Heritage.



REVERSE SIDE LEFT HAND





ART: JOE KUBERT  
 SCRIPT: ROBERT KANIGHA  
 LETTERS: ADAM KUBERT  
 COLOR:



**This page:** Whimsical entry for DC Sampler #1 [Nov. '83]. On the panel immediately above, that's (from left) editor Murray Boltinoff, artist Sam Glanzman, cover artist/editor Joe Kubert, artist Frank Redondo and writer Robert Kanigher up against the wall!



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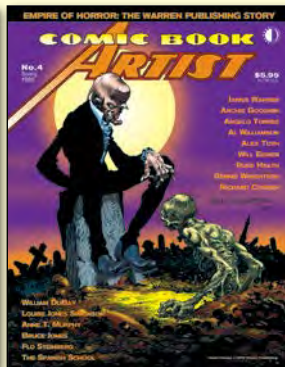
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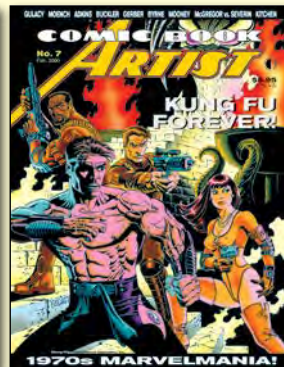
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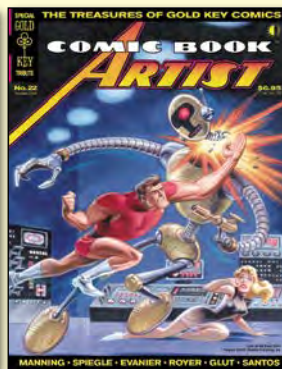
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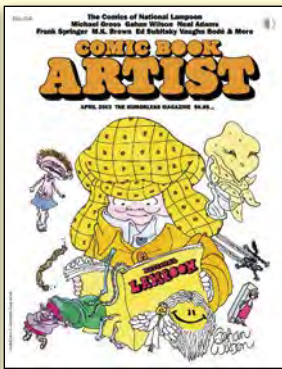
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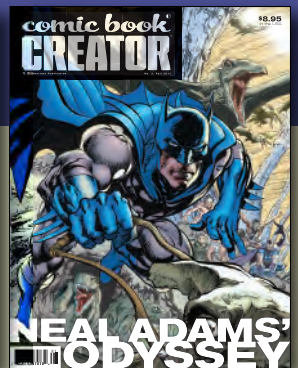
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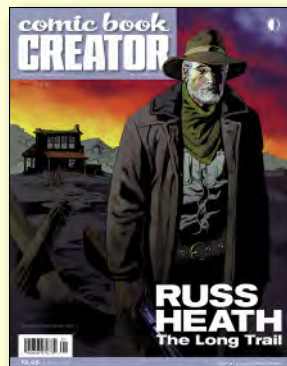
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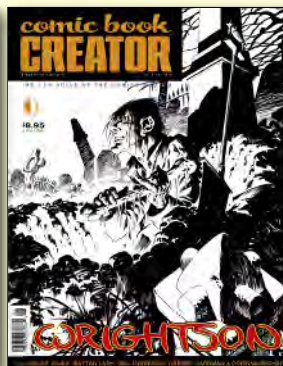
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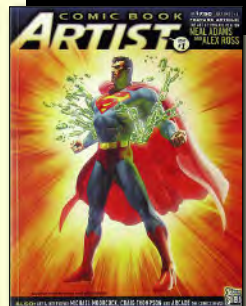


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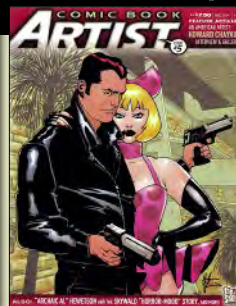
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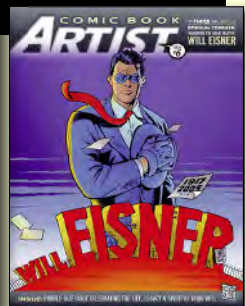
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