

COMICS 101:

How-To & History Lessons From The Pros!

Writing Tips

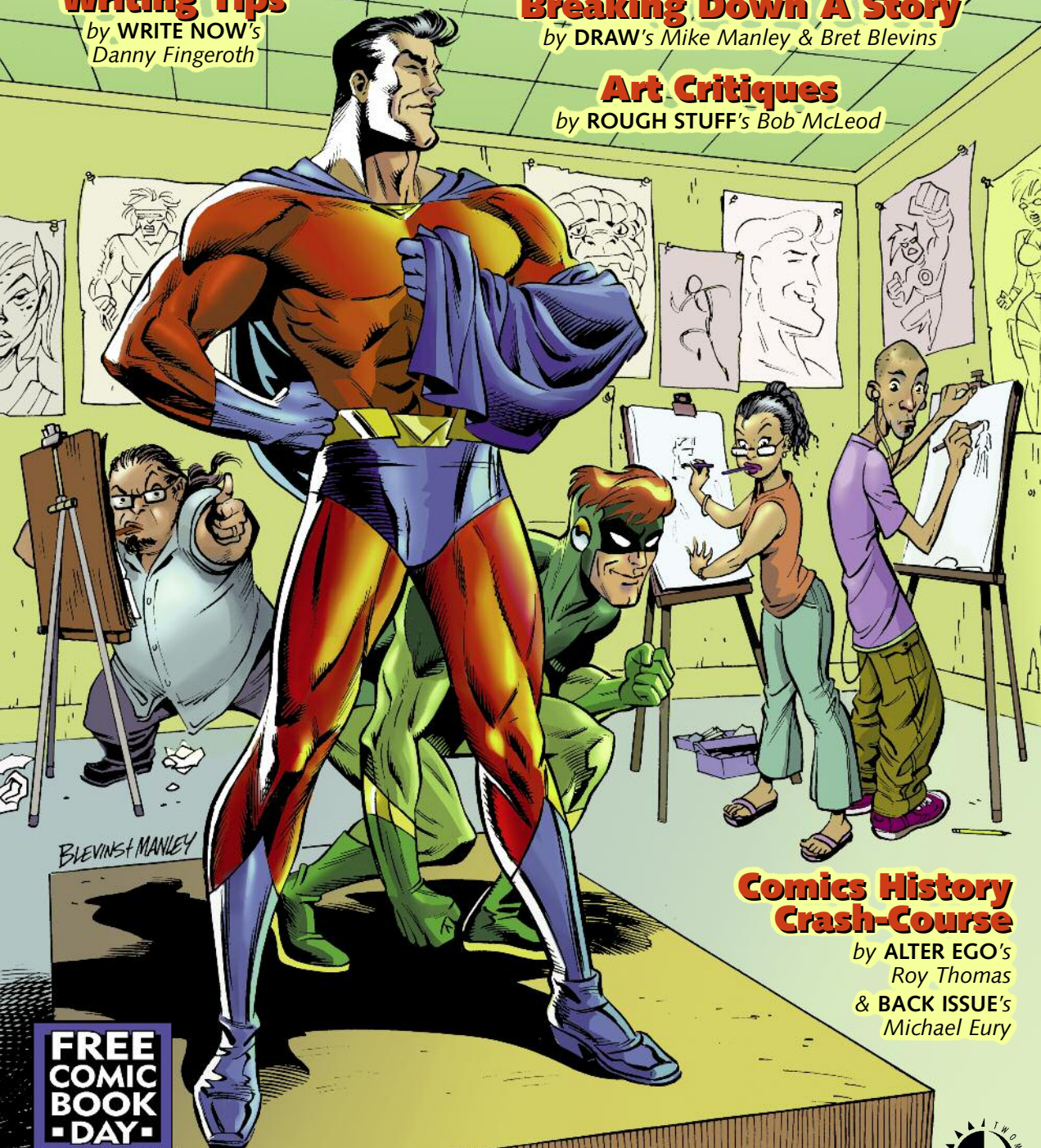
by WRITE NOW's
Danny Fingeroth

Figure Drawing & Breaking Down A Story

by DRAW's Mike Manley & Bret Blevins

Art Critiques

by ROUGH STUFF's Bob McLeod



Comics History Crash-Course

by ALTER EGO's
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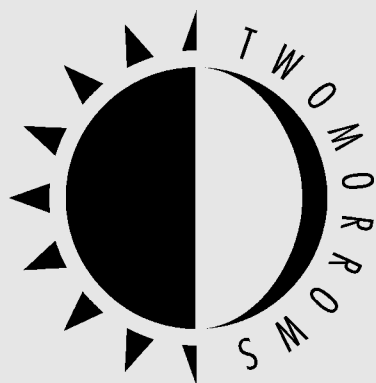


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Since 1994, **TWOMORROWS PUBLISHING** has been celebrating the art and history of comics with its award-winning line of magazines and books about comics. By covering all aspects of the creative process, and documenting the fascinating history of comics, we've established ourselves as the industry authority on the inner workings of the medium.

Now, for **FREE COMIC BOOK DAY**, we've tapped the combined knowledge of our magazine editors to assemble this all-new 32-page comics primer, created just for this giveaway! In it, **DRAW!** magazine's **MIKE MANLEY** and **BRET BLEVINS** (both key artists for DC and Marvel Comics) will walk you through "Figure Drawing Basics" and "How To Break Down A Story"! **ROUGH STUFF** magazine editor (and veteran comics inker) **BOB McLEOD** provides "Art Critiques" of promising newcomers (see how your work compares)! **WRITE NOW!** magazine's **DANNY FINGEROTH** (also a major Marvel Comics writer) reveals "Writing Tips" for potential comics authors. There's even a "Comics History Crash-Course", assembled by **ALTER EGO** magazine editor **ROY THOMAS** (former Marvel Comics editor-in-chief and top writer) and **MICHAEL EURY**, editor of **BACK ISSUE** magazine (and former DC and Dark Horse Comics editor). These top professionals cover the basics of comics art and appreciation, making it a must-have item for fans old and new. And TwoMorrows is proud to offer it **FREE** from your local retailer.

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JOHN MORROW
Publisher

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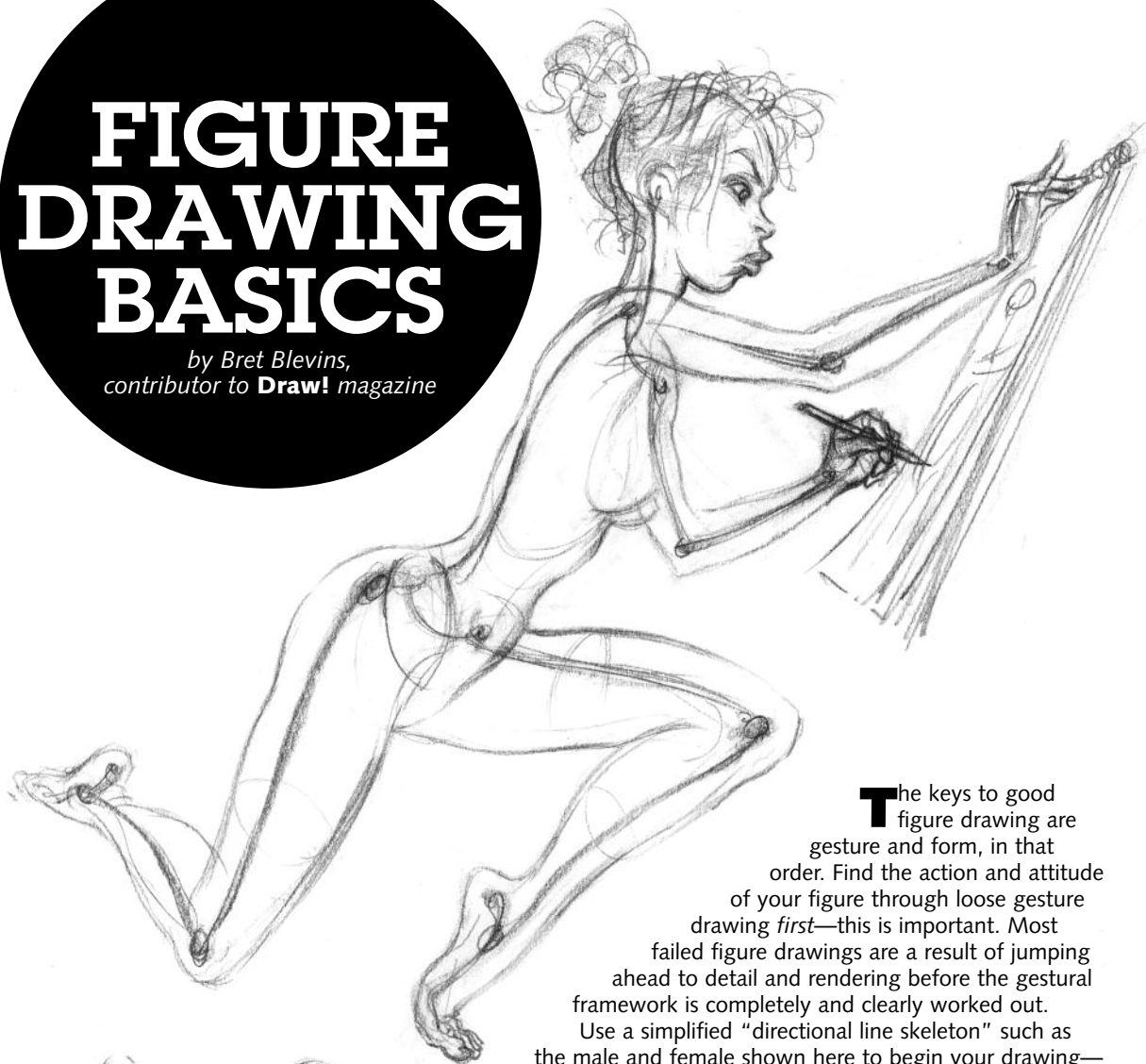


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FIGURE DRAWING BASICS

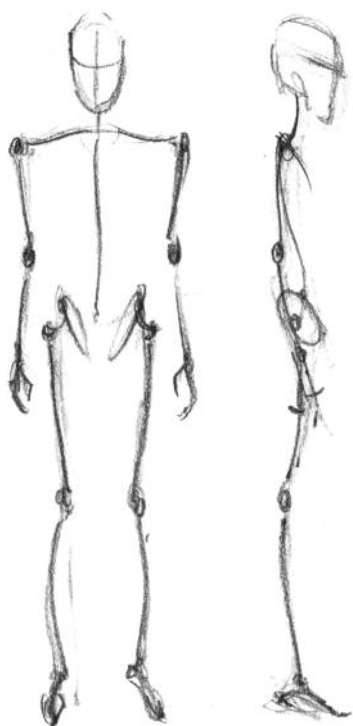
by Bret Blevins,
contributor to **Draw!** magazine



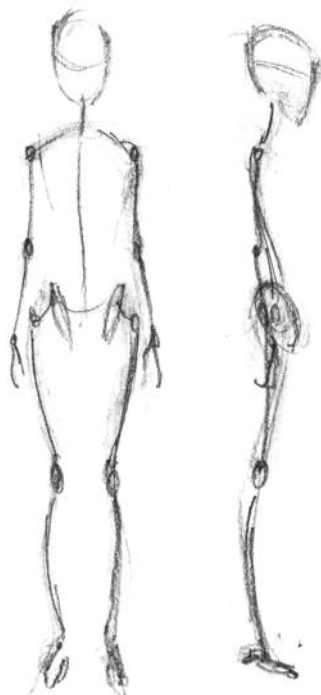
The keys to good figure drawing are gesture and form, in that order. Find the action and attitude of your figure through loose gesture drawing *first*—this is important. Most failed figure drawings are a result of jumping ahead to detail and rendering before the gestural framework is completely and clearly worked out.

Use a simplified “directional line skeleton” such as the male and female shown here to begin your drawing—although extremely

simple, these skeletal tools establish an enormous amount of crucial information in the first phase of bringing your figures to life. They contain all the basic proportion and structure relationships of the body, as well as underlying anatomy rhythms and form details—note that the fundamental typical differences between male and female are already obvious in these “wire frame” designs, the joints that control the movements of the various parts are clearly indicated, and even structural facts such as the absence of a single straight line are evident. (No bone in the human body is perfectly straight—each large bone and the spinal column have a distinct characteristic curve.)



MALE



FEMALE

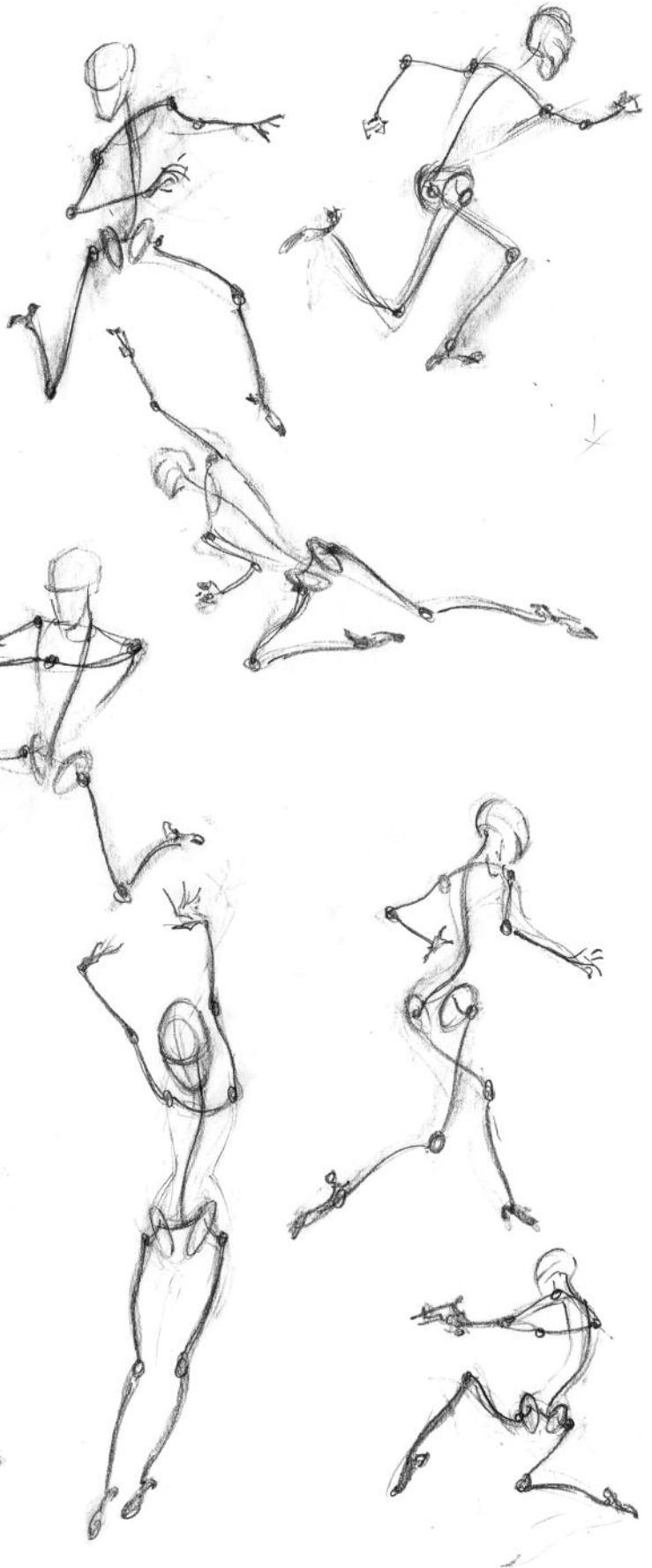
As you begin your sketch, concentrate on capturing the attitude and intention of the personality you are drawing—never draw “a body”, draw *what he or she is doing*. Although it can be difficult, don’t allow yourself to think about the complex forms of surface anatomy and other details at this stage—keep your mind on using your line-skeleton to express as much about the personality and action of your figure as possible before you move to the next stage. Most of the problems of pose, proportion, and creating a clear silhouette of your figure are much easier to solve in this initial phase than it is after the image has become a heavy mass of detail and rendering.

Study the set of sample wire frame gestural sketches shown here and notice how easy it is to complete the figures in your imagination—all the basic information is clear and easy to grasp at first glance. A few tips to keep in mind are obvious in these drawings, too:

The male is more angular, the female accents curves.

In active poses (running, leaping, crouching) the limbs alternate direction—if the right arm is forward the right leg is back and vice versa—this is a natural physical law of balance and makes the action of your figures convincing. This principle also adds grace and movement to any pose.

These wire frame tools automatically force you to think about all sides of the figure—including the parts that won’t show in your final image. This helps enormously in establishing the figure’s three-dimensional solidity in space and also makes it easier to ensure the correct proportion of body parts that will eventually be partially obscured by other forms in the finished drawing.



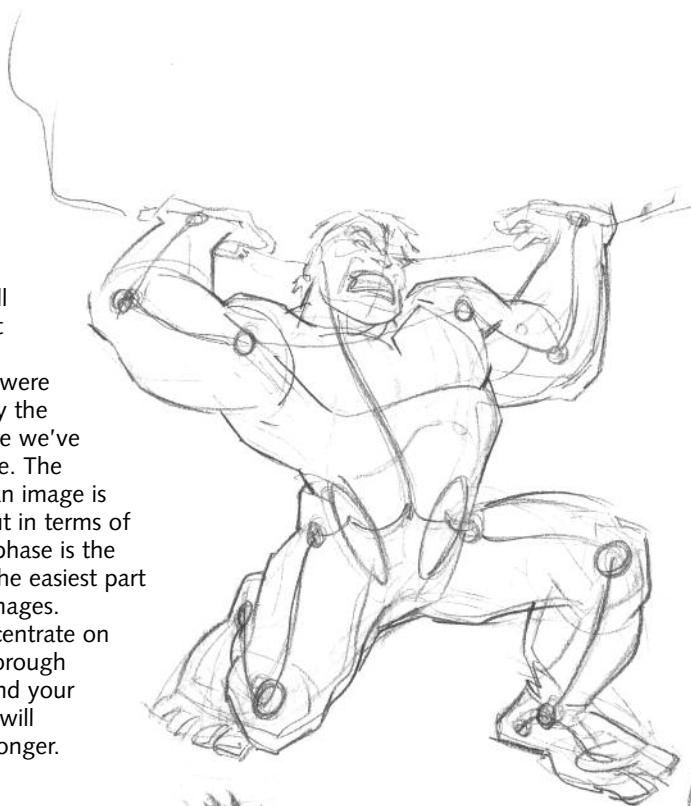
The next stage is "building" the forms of anatomy and solid flesh over your wire frame gesture—a simplified mannequin of body forms is shown here. The most important element to remember is to *draw transparently*—complete your forms by "drawing through" to the opposite side, as if your figure was made of malleable glass or plasticene. The other key is to establish the **centerline** of each separate form, either by actually indicating it in the drawing or holding an awareness of it in your mind. You can see center lines indicated on the forms of the exploded mannequin—these reference marks clarify the depth and breadth of space that the figure occupies, sharpening this awareness of physical solidity in your mind as you draw. This awareness is suggested by the arrows—your forms are always moving through space in three directions—up and down, left to right, front to back.



Notice in these drawings that every important aspect of structure, gesture and attitude has been "nailed down" using the simple mannequin forms—now it is comparatively easy to render these forms with surface detail. You will encounter no structural confusion as you embellish—every part of each figure is clearly placed, in correct physical balance and proper proportion.

It is a simple matter to adapt the wire frame and mannequin designs to fit any character proportion; massive or thin and any variation between the two.

The two rendered figures have been fleshed out with anatomy, light and shade, texture and other finishing details—each too large a subject to cover in this short space. But in essence they are just “dressed” wire frame-and-mannequin structures—all the important elements of these figures were established by the understructure we’ve discussed here. The polishing of an image is important, but in terms of process that phase is the veneer, and the easiest part of drawing images. Learn to concentrate on building a thorough foundation and your final artwork will always be stronger.



Bret Blevins is a regular contributor to TwoMorrows' **Draw!** magazine, and an art instructor at Yavapai College. He is an accomplished comic book artist, animation storyboard artist, and painter, having done work for Marvel, DC, and Dark Horse on **Batman**, **Superman**, **Spider-Man**, **X-Men**, **Hulk**, and **Star Wars**, plus storyboards for Warner Brothers' **Superman**, **Batman**, **Batman Beyond**, **Static Shock**, and **Justice League** cartoons, as well as **Tarzan** and **Atlantis** for Disney.

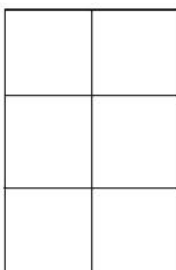


HOW TO BAKE A COMIC BOOK PAGE IN THREE EASY STEPS

by Mike Manley, editor of **Draw!** magazine

I see them all the time: fresh-eyed artists. They may approach me at a con, or as a student in one of my classes, and they always have a story they want to draw, often a huge *Lord of the Rings* multi-verse epic. Sometimes they even have a few half-drawn pages where they've usually gone and drawn all the fun, cool or easy stuff, leaving the rest of the page or pages half-drawn. Their pages are covered with partially penciled panels, with figures floating or even entire panels left blank. They've skipped ahead, avoiding that part they haven't figured out yet, so they can't *show* me the story—nope, they have to *tell* me the story. "You see, this is where Vortex enters into the space station to have his showdown with Wolverine's twin brother." Of course there is no space station to be seen.

Comics are a visual medium; we have to see, to read visually what's going on. We can't have the artist standing there narrating to us to fill in the gaps. The worst case is that on some pages the young artists have even sometimes gone in and



inked up something while the rest of the page remains unfinished: A big no-no!

And why is this a common factor in so many aspiring or young storytellers' work, you ask? Well that's because in their enthusiasm they've skipped a huge step in the process of storytelling, and just like a baker who leaves out crucial ingredients in a cake recipe, the result after all their labor is an inedible lump—and in the case of comics, unfinished, unreadable stories, pages with holes that sideline the work, and eventually cause most artists to lose enthusiasm and probably abandon the story. Like the baker leaving out a crucial ingredient, by skipping a step, the artist didn't work the story out first; they didn't break down the story first into a series of panels, or what we call a layout—and only once that was done with the details of exactly what is happening, proceed to the next step, drawing the final pages.

The formula for a successful comic story, no matter the subject or style, is basic and simple; but as they say, "Simple is hard". Young artists always want to skip steps, jump ahead to the fun part, the exciting part, but a story isn't exciting unless you build up to the excitement. Another thing that often vexes the young artist is leaving enough space for word balloons and captions, so often the art gets cramped, and figures and background details have to fight for space.

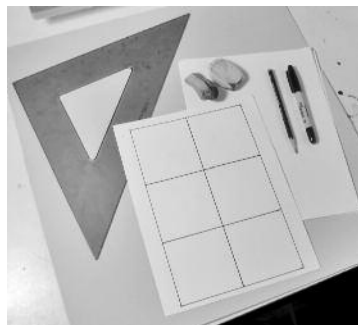
THE RECIPE

So here is my simple recipe that should help you make better comic pages, and better stories. I've used it to help people who've never drawn a comic be able to tell a story. This is also something all comic writers should do so they also have a good idea of how their story is paced and how much room their script takes up visually; the real estate they have to play with on a comic page.

Before you leap in and run along like crazy, start simple. Try and boil your story down into no more than a few sentences; if you can do that—focus on a clear beginning, middle and end—you will have a good, solid story. Very often writers will figure out the end first and then work their way back to the beginning.

Next, buy some cheap copy paper from the local Staples, Office Max, etc. Sharpen a few pencils; get an eraser, triangle and a black Sharpie or similar marker.

Then draw a six-panel grid layout like the example shown; you can do this for each page or do it once and make copies of it. The purpose here is to break





STEP 1: Work out your story using the simplest drawings you can do. They can even be stick figures for this part; the point here is not to do great drawings or fall in love with rendering tricks; we just want to draw out our story, and see what happens.

As you draw out your story, draw the balloons with all the dialogue, sound effects and narration as well. If you have writing, you need to see how much space the dialogue and narration take up along with the drawings—what I call *the visual real estate*.

The idea here is to work out the story in as clear and simple a way as possible and to give you a clear idea of what is happening and how the story flows. If something isn't working well, no problem; grab another sheet and redraw it. By doing these simple drawings you are not committing hours of labor, only to scrap it, or doing a great drawing that just doesn't work.

Once you have your entire story worked out in your stickman style, you are ready to go to the next phase: To do an actual layout.

STEP 2: Some artists will work directly on the final board from this stage, but I suggest for you beginners to do a layout at printed comic size of what your final page will look like. Here you can adjust panel sizes and shapes very easily because now you know exactly what story you are telling and what you have to draw. You may at this point also need to gather reference for places and things like cars, trucks, buildings, etc. As you can see, I played around with camera angles from what I had on my initial stick-figure layout, which made the final page more dramatic, but I did this after the specific actions (story beats) in the story were broken out into panels.

STEP 3: Once the layout is done, you can go on to do the final pencils, and then once they are done, final inks.

At right is the finished penciled page. Since I followed the recipe, not skipping steps, when it came to draw the final page, all I had to do was concentrate on doing the best, most exciting drawing I can do.

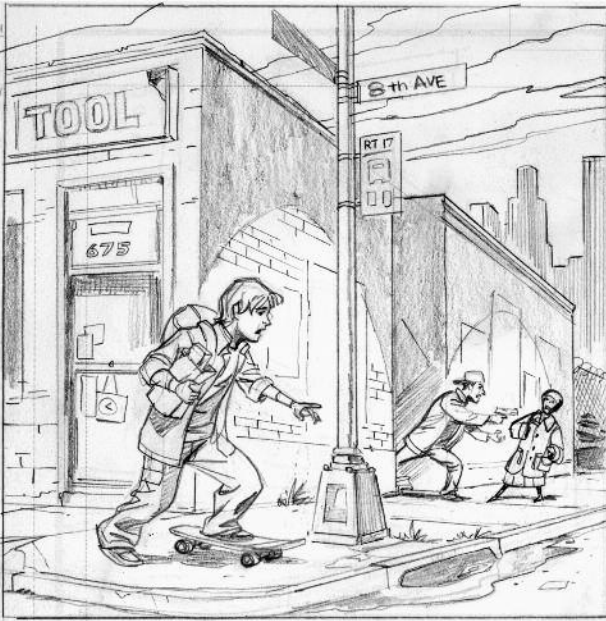
DON'T SKIP STEPS!

Complete each stage. I know it will be tough; you'll be tempted to jump in a draw the fun stuff first—but if you follow the recipe I've given you here, I guarantee you will end up with your entire story finished and told instead of half-drawn pages filled with missteps and wasted effort.

Now go draw some comics!

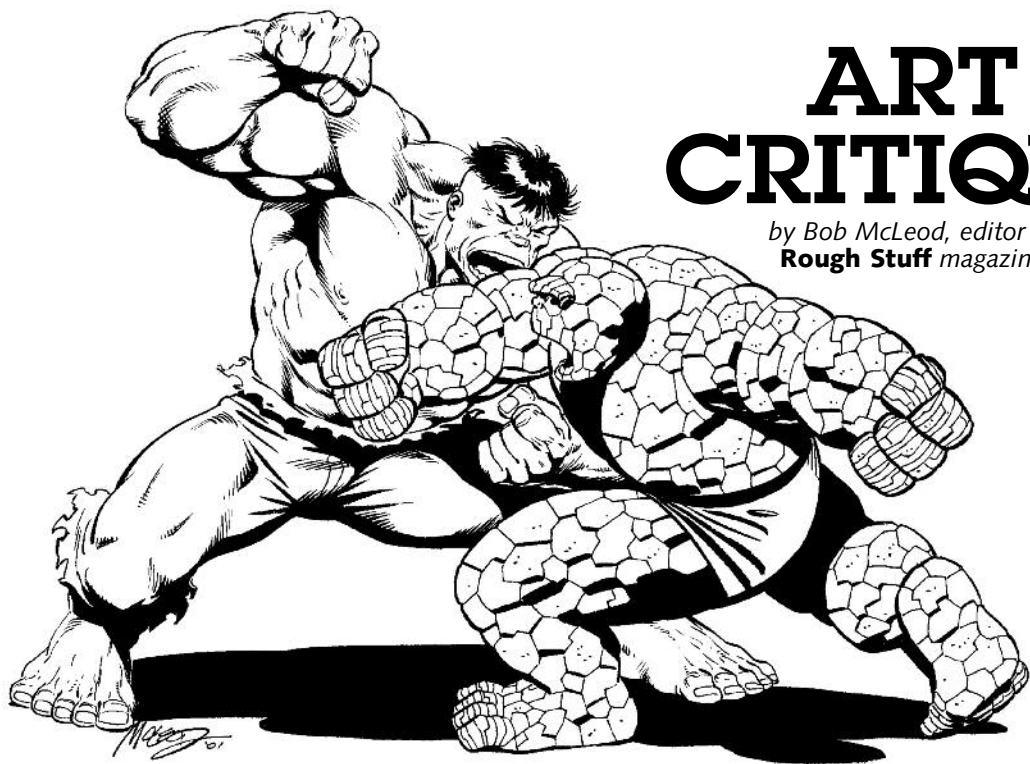
Mike Manley is editor of *TwoMorrows' Draw!* magazine, and an art instructor at Delaware College of Art and Design. He has drawn for major publishers like Marvel, DC and Dark Horse, including titles such as *Batman*, *Captain America*, and *The Power of Shazam!*. He's been an animation storyboard and background designer on Kids WB shows *The New Batman/Superman Adventures* and *Batman Beyond*, *Spy Groove* for MTV, *Spawn* for HBO, and ABC's *One Saturday Morning* and *Clerks: The Animated Series*. Manley currently works for Disney as a storyboard artist.





ART CRITIQUE

by Bob McLeod, editor of
Rough Stuff magazine



Hulk, Thing TM & ©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Many beginners struggle with the same problems, and I think it's often very helpful for them to see a critique of someone else's work. Keith Grachow sent me this very nice *Fantastic Four* sample page and bravely consented to having it critiqued here.

Keith, I really like your sample very much in some areas, but not so much in others. I'll begin with what I like: It's rare that I see a sample page with so many backgrounds, and that's vital to creating a professional level page. Backgrounds require a knowledge of perspective and set design that most beginners lack, and don't spend nearly enough effort on. Your panel layout is easy to follow, and your storytelling is clear, even without a script. These are not minor accomplishments. I also really like the personality you're giving your actors. Yes, I said actors. The characters in a comic book need to be good actors to tell an interesting story, and it's up to the penciler to keep them from being too wooden. I also like the way you're moving the camera, and varying the distance with close-ups and long shots. I like that you've attempted some dramatic lighting, with the cast shadow in panel 2.

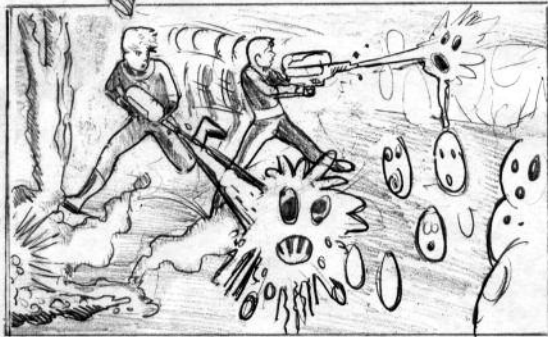
Now for what I don't like so much: Comics are first and foremost about people. You simply must study anatomy more and improve your figure drawing. You show a nice, natural feel for figures, but you still don't really know the basic muscle groups and how the figure moves. In panel 2, Franklin's pose is awkward. It often helps to get into the pose yourself and see what feels natural. You've also drawn his legs too long for his body. It's also always a good idea to consider the silhouette shape of your figures. Your Torch in panel 1 has an awkward shape with his arm parallel to and equal in size to his leg. Contrast it with my Torch figure's silhouette. The Torch's hands in panel 4 are too exaggerated. The

distance between them is not sufficient for them to vary in size so much. There are times when you'll want to exaggerate the foreshortening like this to make a more dynamic pose, but don't do it on small figures like this.

When drawing established characters like the FF, you need to be able to draw them similar to the way you're used to seeing them. That face on the Torch in panel 1 is just not Johnny Storm. That's not his nose. Franklin is OK, but inconsistent from panel to panel. A better understanding of the skull and facial features will enable you to keep your faces looking more consistently like the same person. I know from experience that the Thing is a bit of a pain to draw, but you do have to take the time to draw all those bricks, and there's a certain interlocking way of drawing them, if you want to do them properly. And the Thing's anatomy is not based on a normal human's, as you're attempting. He's much more rounded in every body part, and has no neck. He only has three fingers, with much bigger feet and hands.

When you draw a figure throwing a punch, you want to have him put his whole body into the punch, so have him leaning forward much more. The figure being punched needs to be knocked for a loop, not just knocked slightly off-balance, as yours is. Think of Charlie Brown upside-down with his socks knocked off by a batter hitting the ball at him. This is where you need to study Jack Kirby, or John Buscema. They've done your homework for you, and all you need to do is imitate what they do. Always exaggerate action!

Beyond being able to draw, what makes a page look professional is thinking more about where you place the various elements in a panel. Unless the background is the dominant element in a panel, which doesn't apply in any of these, begin by placing



the figures. You want to focus on them in a more deliberate way.

In panel 1, the Thing figures are shoved up near the panel border, while empty space is left below the Torch. The Thing figures need to be moved down away from the border.

In panel 2, you needlessly crop off Franklin's head. Heads and hands are usually what we want to see. If you must crop something, crop off his knee. But why not get the whole figure in, as I've done?

In panel 4, you barely get Franklin's head into the panel. I like using him as a framing device to focus on the Torch, but he needs to be more in the panel.

In panel 5, your figures are on the left and your backgrounds are on the right, dividing the panel in two. Torch almost appears to be bumping into a building. You need to center the figures in the panel, then design the backgrounds around them.

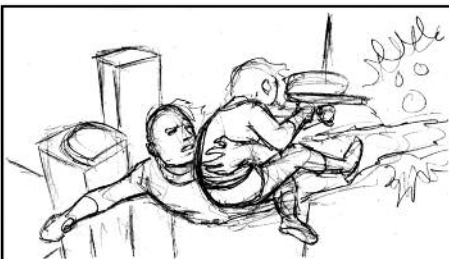
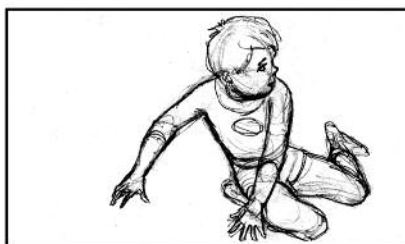
Panel 6 is too heavily weighted on the left with large forms. Reed can be moved over a bit, and Torch can come in from a different angle to better balance the panel. Invisible Girl looks squeezed up against the panel border.

Rather than carefully arranging your figures, you've painted yourself into a corner. When placing figures, and main background elements, into a panel, try to group them, rather than thinking of them as separate forms. In the same way that you want your individual figures to have an interesting silhouette, you also want to group your forms into a pleasing shape. Look how the figures in my panel 6 form a united arc.

Another important thing to consider is leading the reader's eye. In panel 1, your Torch is taking us right off the page. Better to turn him around and lead us to the next panel. Similarly, in panel 5, I'd rather see him flying toward us and the last panel, instead of toward the right panel border and off the page.

Panel 3 looks unfinished. What is that on the right and the upper right? Otherwise, this panel is good, but keep in mind speech balloons need to go somewhere.

Finally, it's always better to design your elements



using diagonals, rather than horizontals and verticals. The gun in panel 4 should be angled rather than parallel to the panel border.

Keep studying and you'll get there. Thanks to Keith for sharing his page with us. Readers who want to submit a page for a critique in future issues of *Rough Stuff* should e-mail a 300dpi scan to me at mcleod.bob@gmail.com or mail a photocopy to:

Rough Stuff Critique
P.O. Box 63

Emmaus, PA 18049

Bob McLeod is the editor of *TwoMorrows' Rough Stuff* magazine and is the author of the book **Superhero ABC**. He's best known for co-creating the *New Mutants* for Marvel Comics with writer Chris Claremont, and is one of the top inkers in the comics industry.



TOP TEN TIPS FOR WRITERS

by Danny Fingeroth, editor of
Write Now! magazine

If you're reading this article, you probably have written stories at some point in your life. Maybe someone even told you that you wrote something really good. Maybe it really was. Maybe you did it a second time and a third and got more positive reactions.

And you said to yourself: "This'd be cool to do for a living. It'd sure beat having a *real* job!"

Well, while writing—if you're truly the writer type (meaning, among other things, that you enjoy spending a lot of time alone in a room facing a computer screen when your friends are out partying)—is indeed more fun than most jobs, there's no question that there's a lot of work involved in being a writer. And the hours go way beyond 9-to-5 Monday through Friday. And most writers, even reasonably successful ones, usually have some kind of job, or several, in addition to their writing.

Another thing to consider in choosing the writing life is how you will feel when the thing you currently do out of passion and inspiration becomes the thing you must do whether you feel like it or not.

But if you're determined to pursue a writing career to whatever extent, here are some tips for how you might make your life as a writer of comics, animation, and various sorts of genre writing easier and more rewarding, in all senses of the word. Some of them are creative advice, some are hard-nosed business tips, and some fall into territory that's partly both—because as a professional, the creative and the business aspects are often totally intertwined. If you're serious about making all or part of your living as a writer, you have to be able to use all those parts of your brain—or at least know enough to delegate the things you can't or don't like to do to someone else.

And so, without further ado, here are my top ten tips for writers...

10. LEARN STORY STRUCTURE.

Ever notice how two people can be recounting the same event, and yet one of them makes it seem exciting and the other dull as dishwater? A big part of the reason for that is *structure*. The person who tells the compelling version knows when and how to introduce elements of the story.

Every story needs structure. Maybe avant-garde, minimalist writing doesn't, but that is writing with a purpose other than that of most fictional storytelling. Most stories, certainly most genre stories, are intended to entertain or to educate, sometimes both. Over time, we have learned that the most effective ways to do this are with structures that humans respond to. People seem to like to be led down familiar paths of story. They like to be *surprised*, too. Knowing how to balance familiarity with surprise is a big part of the writer's job. Knowledge of structure is an important tool to balance the familiar and the surprising.

This is not brain surgery. A nursery rhyme has structure. A joke has structure. You may have learned structure, as I did, in 8th grade. It essentially means your story has to have a beginning,



a middle, and an end. This may seem ridiculously obvious, but read through a bunch of comics and see how many of them *don't* have these elements satisfactorily presented.

Of course, structure is a pretty malleable thing. Trends in different eras may dictate that stories be longer or shorter, that individual comics may be part of a longer “arc,” that will make up one longer story, and so on. But no matter the length or means of presentation of a given story, it will still utilize the same elements of structure.

Robert McKee's book *Story* and Dennis O'Neil's *The DC Comics Guide to Writing Comics*—as well as my and Mike Manley's *TwoMorrrows* book *How to Create Comic From Script to Print*—are all good places to learn more about structure.

9. A STORY HAS TO BE ABOUT SOMETHING, SO MAKE SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOURS IS ABOUT.



One of the great comics (or anything) themes was stated for the first time in Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's *Spider-Man* origin in *Amazing Fantasy* #15.

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I'm not referring to “plot” here. I'm talking about what is commonly known as the “theme,” “message,” or even “moral” of a story. (And when I discuss “theme,” I'm referring to something that makes a point about some aspect of life, not the meaning that's synonymous with “topic.” For example, the theme of *Spider-Man* isn't “responsibility.” It's “with great power, there must also come great responsibility.”)

Now, you may be saying: “Hey, I'm no

moralist. I don't want to write propaganda for any particular point of view. I just want to tell crackling good yarns.” Guess what: there's no such thing as a story without a message of some kind. You may not even be aware of the message, but if there weren't a message, it wouldn't be a story. Just sitting down to write a superhero comic means you think (or at least want to convey) that certain kinds of vigilantism are okay—unless your story is about how they *aren't* okay. The message doesn't have to be profound. “Crime does not pay,” can be the theme of your story, and is the theme of most superhero stories. Just be aware that themes will be interpreted differently by different readers. Your intended theme may not be the one readers get. That's part of the fun of writing.

Since your story is unavoidably conveying some kind of message—maybe more than one—you should try to be aware of what is. You may not even know what it is until you finish a first draft or at least an outline. But once you've gotten to that point, make

sure the story says, to the best of your ability, what you want it to. Hopefully, your message will be subtly put across, unless you're writing for very young children. If you're in control of your craft, then your characters and their actions—and reactions—will convey what your message is without anyone having to say it directly.

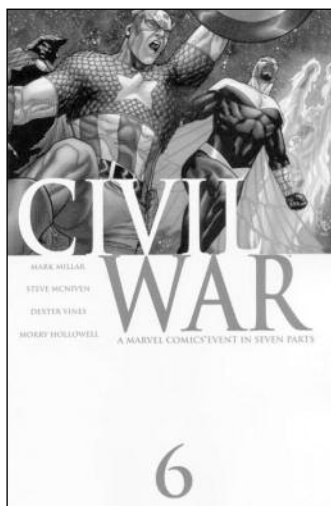
8. CONFLICT IS THE HEART OF ANY STORY, SO KNOW WHAT THE CONFLICTS IN YOURS ARE.

One definition of a story is: *somebody wants something, and someone or something else keeps*

him or her from getting it. That “someone or something” is the *conflict*. How the protagonist (or hero) of the story deals with it is what makes the story interesting and exciting.

If a story were about a day where nothing went wrong and nothing was at stake, it wouldn't be much of a story. The thing that makes a story *about* something is the conflict.

Conflict can be:



Issue #6 of Marvel Comics' recent *Civil War*, a limited series that involves conflict on several levels.

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Physical or external. For instance, two characters battling. Under this could be included emotional arguments or intricate psychological conflict between two people. Also, external obstacles—hurricanes, bombings, etc.—would be forms of physical conflict.

Internal. This involves a character at odds with him or herself. For instance, an alcoholic desperate for a drink, but knowing if he takes one he will be lost, must choose between need and desire.

Personal. Has aspects of the first two types. For instance, one partner in a romantic relationship may want to get married, the other may not.

Robert McKee, in his book *Story*, says: “Choice must not be doubt but dilemma, not between right/wrong or good/evil, but between either positive desires or negative desires of equal weight and value. True Character can only be expressed through choice in dilemma. How the person chooses to act under pressure is who he is—the greater the pressure, the truer and deeper the choice to character.”

In other words: *conflict defines character.*

Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's *Spider-Man: Master Planner* trilogy has one of the more elegant mergings of external, internal and personal conflicts. In it, the thing that *Spider-Man* needs to save Aunt May is the same thing Doc Ock needs to rule the world.

Try to introduce your story's conflict(s) as early as possible. That way, your reader becomes emotionally involved with your characters from the beginning. And that's a good thing.

7. IT HAS TO BE GOOD—BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT!

Don't worry about whether or not what you're writing is the most original or wonderful thing ever done. Look how many non-original and non-wonderful things get produced and published. Not that you should ever not strive to do your best work, but in many ways, finishing something is the most important thing.

And you can't stop at one. Whether your work is accepted or rejected, you have to keep producing completed works. Especially at the beginning, the work you do will probably be imitating someone else's style or even plots. That's fine. That's how you develop your own voice. (Of course, don't ever try to pass someone else's work off as your own. That's plagiarism.) Journey through the stages of imitating those writers you admire and you'll arrive at your own voice without even realizing it.

But don't keep yourself from starting or finishing a piece of writing because you think you're not being original or clever enough. Get a first draft of whatever it is done. Then you can go back and revise it, but don't revise it forever. Eventually, you have to consider a thing finished and move on to the next thing.

6. DON'T JUST WRITE COMICS.

Take a look at the credits of the comics you most recently bought. Then dig some up from ten and twenty years ago. How many of the names from back in the '80s are the same as the ones now? Hardly any. That should be a clue to you. Even if, against the odds, you break in, and even more against the odds you become a regular writer for a company, and even a fan and critical favorite, your odds of staying regularly employed as a comics writer for more than ten years are pretty slim. It has little to do with your talent. Most writers get *better* as they age, although there may be a drop-off in youthful passion.

Think of comics—and animation, movies, and so on—as something like the music business, and of the writers and artists like rock musicians. Someone may be at the top of the charts for a couple of years, then lose heat and end up playing small clubs or leaving the business altogether, even though they may be performing as well or better than when they were big.

As a writer, you have more options than that musician. Maybe you're not considered in demand by editors in the majors and can't afford to work for the low rates at a smaller company. You can self-publish, of course, and that's something many people do. But you can also make sure you learn how to write screenplays, teleplays, novels, non-fiction, advertising, and so on. Humans need and love to communicate with other humans, and words are, of course, a major way we do that. As a writer, words are your tools. Learn to use them in a wide variety of ways so that you're never left holding the bag when you or the type of thing you do go out of fashion.

5. DON'T JUST READ COMICS.

There's a big world of written material out there. If you just read comics, your own work will read like an imitation of other people's work. The more you read, the more you'll learn about a whole range of topics that will subtly and/or overtly affect your own work.

Read fiction and non-fiction, genre fiction and "literature." Read about science and history. Read about topics you never even thought of. Read screenplays and stage plays, read memoirs and how-to-write books. Read everything you can get your hands on. The more you put in your brain, the more data your subconscious (or unconscious—I never could keep the difference straight) will have to process into writing, and the more you'll feel like you might want to try your hand at other types of writing, as well. Of course, as with using the Internet, don't let reading be an excuse for not writing.

And don't just watch movies or TV shows in your favorite genre. See all kinds of movies and shows. With cable TV, video stores, the Internet and services like NetFlix, the entire history of TV and movies in all genres and about all subjects is readily available to you. Make use of this amazing point in history where all these resources are available to you. Your competition sure is.

Being a cultural omnivore will also help you see what's gone before and what's over the horizon. Human nature and conflict may be eternal, and so is story structure—but the way a culture addresses and handles these topics at any given point in history means that you have to keep aware of what's happening and try to intuit what will be happening, and where your own unique point-of-view fits into the picture.

4. CARE & FEEDING OF EDITORS.

"Who is this editor person, anyway?" you may ask. "Why should my creative vision be subject to anyone's meddling and tinkering?"

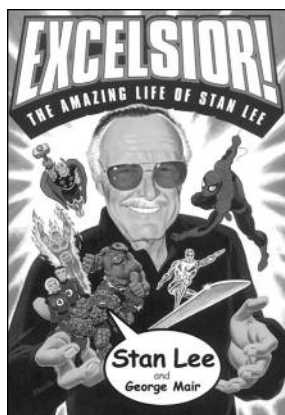
Needless to say, things aren't that simple. And what makes it even less simple is the fact that the editor's role is so amorphous. It varies from company to company, person to person, relationship to relationship, comic to comic. Editors represent the creative people to the business people and the business people to the creative people.

The editor has to look at a submitted piece of work and decide if it's what the company he or she represents wants to publish. Oddly enough, the editor also represents the reader. If the imagined reader in the editor's head isn't interested in something or doesn't understand something, the editor may demand it be changed or may even reject it outright.

Bottom line: The editor's job is to make sure something of as high quality as possible appears on newsstands or in the bookstore when it is promised.

In companies where the stories are corporate-controlled (anything dealing with big-name properties like Spider-Man and Superman), the editor will:

- Assign work.
- Put together creative teams.
- Approve, suggest, or even mandate certain story and character points.



Autobiography of a man who helped define the role of the comics editor.
Excelsior! The Amazing Life Of Stan Lee by Stan Lee, with George Mair.

©2004 Stan Lee and George Mair.
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This may seem “unfair,” but the editor is the guardian of the character and has to look out for the interest of the franchise.

- Accept or reject the work you do.

This includes asking for or demanding changes to your work. You can politely argue with the editor's decision, but ultimately, it's just that—the editor's decision.

In a situation where the material is “creator-owned,” things are different. This is where you're hired to write and/or draw stories that are based on your own properties (although you'd better read your contract carefully—ownership's irrelevant if you sign various rights away). In such a situation, the editor here may have more of an advisory role and not be empowered to make you do anything with the story or characters that you don't want to do. This will all depend on what the deal you signed on for is. However, if your work violates certain standards the publisher has, they can probably simply refuse to publish your work.

3. TODAY'S ASSISTANT IS TOMORROW'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF.

Always be nice to assistants and interns. They can champion your work when their boss is too busy to notice it. They can make sure your invoices get processed as quickly as possible. And they are the editors of tomorrow. They won't forget who treated them well—and who treated them badly—before they were promoted.

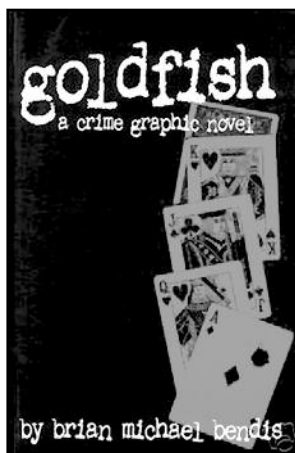
2. GET YOUR WORK OUT THERE!

Once upon a time, the major companies had “farm teams.” Staff people or persistent (but non-threatening!) fans would be given the chance to write for them. Usually they'd start with short back-up type stories, or what used to be called “inventory” or “fill-in” stories to be used when the regular team on a series couldn't make their deadlines. This method of in-house development of talent has pretty much gone the way of the manual typewriter. Perusing the credits of your favorite comics, you can see that most of the writers are people who already have reputations as novelists or screenwriters or TV writers or who have a body of comics work that was put out by a small publisher or even by the writer and artist themselves.

So don't waste your time writing the twelve-part epic that will “fix” the Marvel or DC Universes. If those companies think their universes need fixing,

they already have staffs of people they can turn to for ideas. What you need to spend your time doing is writing your work and then somehow getting it published. This entails hooking up with a good artist to draw it. You can find an artist at a comic convention, at an art school, or at websites like www.digital-webbing.com and www.drawingboard.org. And make sure they're good. A bad artist will drag the level of your story down, while a good one can elevate it. You may have to actually pay someone to draw your story. If you're dead serious about your work, you will somehow find the money to do that. You can get people to work for free, of course—but you may end up getting what you pay for. Even a well-intentioned collaborator will tend to do paying work before he does your freebie, even if you promise him a piece of the ever-elusive back end. Comics conventions—including alternative festivals like SPX or the MoCCAfest—are good places to get your work seen and to meet other folks putting out their own comics, including artists you may want to work with.

Once your comic is done, try to get a small publisher to publish it. They won't pay you much, but you'll probably get to retain the rights to your work. Be sure



Marvel mainstay Brian Michael Bendis first rose to comic book prominence as the writer and artist of such crime noir series as Goldfish.

©2007 Brian Michael Bendis

to read any contract carefully, though! The worst of both worlds would be signing away the rights to your material for low-end money and also not controlling it!

But the important thing is getting your work out there. Don't negotiate like Donald Trump with a small company whose owners have to work day jobs to follow their publishing passion. And if no one wants to publish your work, publish it yourself. It's not as expensive as you'd think to publish a black and white comic. It's

even cheaper to put together a nice looking photo-copied version. The hard part is getting it distributed. But your idea here is not to sell a million copies, although, of course, it's always great to have people read and respond to your work. Your goal—assuming your endgame is more than just having a copy of the comic you can hold in your hand—is to have a finished, professional-looking body of work you can show to a comics editor or publisher or to a movie or TV producer, or to an agent. If they like your work, they may want to buy it, or may give you a shot at one of their properties.

Putting your comic up on the Internet is another option for getting it out in the world. You can put it on your own website or try to get it on one of the many webcomics sites, such as www.moderntales.com. (See *Write Now!* #12 for a comprehensive article about webcomics by T. Campbell.)

1. GET A LIFE!

Everybody has their own risk comfort level. But the more life experience you have, the more material you'll have for your writing. If skydiving and traveling to exotic locales aren't your idea of a good time, you can still shake things up a little. If you live in the city, take a trip to the country, and vice versa. Go to a museum—even a museum that deals with some subject you think you have no interest in. Take some time to talk to the people you encounter on your everyday errands. Go for a week without using the Internet! (Gasp!) Walk instead of driving. Try some new kind of food you've never eaten. Learn a new language. Take a course in something totally out of character. Dress differently. Interview an elderly relative or acquaintance.

Bottom line, if you aim to spend all or part of your working time writing about people other than yourself, then you'd better learn how and why other people do things. Every writer needs to spend significant time reading and writing. But don't forget that words, even the best-written ones, are just a reflection or simulation of life. They may inspire, inform, entertain, educate—but they aren't a substitute for actual experience. The more of a life you have, the better your writing will be.

Anyway, those are ten important things to know about writing for comics and related media. Actually, I gave you multiple tips within each one, so it's a lot more than ten. That's okay—I'm a generous guy. I hope they're helpful and maybe even inspire you to get more and better writing done.

I'd love to hear what you thought of them—and what you did with them! You can write me c/o TwoMorrrows at 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614, or e-mail me at: WriteNowDF@aol.com.

Write away!

Danny Fingoerth is editor-in-chief of TwoMorrrows' **Write Now!** magazine, author of **Superman on the Couch**, and co-author of **How to Create Comics From Script to Print**. He was Group Editor of Marvel's Spider-Man line

and has written numerous comics series, including **Darkhawk** and **Deadly Foes of Spider-Man**. He teaches comics writing at New York University and The New School.



PAGE SEVEN

1—On one of the four story buildings in the square, on the rooftop – a blast of smoke appears as Nightcrawler teleports in, with someone in tow. They're both just silhouettes, though, so we can just make out the shape of them.

SFX: BAMF

2—From over Nightcrawler's shoulder as he looks across the square, seeing the building that was blasted on the previous page, which is now clearly on fire. The other person he's with stands behind him, and we can only see his shoulder or arm or something.

NIGHTCRAWLER: That building is full of people...

NIGHTCRAWLER(linked): I must get them to safety.

3—Same angle, seeing the burning building across the way, but now Nightcrawler looks back at us, his brow furrowed, and the guy we don't see responds, holding up a hand, gesturing for him to go ahead.

NIGHTCRAWLER: I'm afraid you'll have to handle this on your own for a few minutes.

WARPATH: Not a problem.

4—Biggest panel on the page. Now we finally see Warpath, as he leaps off the edge of the rooftop. A crazy running leap, but the kind where you land feet first, not a dive. This is a cool shot, showing his new outfit, etc, and he's got a grim smile on his face. If he were Wolverine, you'd know exactly what pose I want, so just think about that. Oh, and don't make Warpath too huge. Just have him be a little over 6 feet tall, or so. Taller than the others, but not a giant.

WARPATH: I'm a bit out of practice, anyway.



An example of a professional comics script and the pencil art drawn from it, from Uncanny X-Men #475. The writing's by Ed Brubaker, and the pencils are by Billy Tan.

X-Men TM & ©2007 Marvel Characters Inc.

Comics History Crash-Course



At the All-Time Classic New York Comic Convention held in White Plains, NY, in 2000, artist Russell Rainbolt stands in front of the gargantuan color-splashed mural he was painting—which featured the greatest characters of the Golden Age of Comic Books. This shows less than half of the mural, which measures 20 feet by 60 feet—and yes, there were some Silver Age icons in evidence, too! Photo courtesy of Joe Petrilak.

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ALTER EGO'S BRIEF HISTORY OF COMIC BOOKS (The 1930s To 1970)

by Roy Thomas, editor of *Alter Ego* magazine

IN THE BEGINNING

The roots of comic books reach as far back in time as primitive man's drawings in caves in France and Spain. The newspaper comic strip, direct ancestor of comic books, goes back at least to *The Yellow Kid* in 1896... and one-panel cartoons with balloons appeared even in the publications of ol' Ben Franklin. "Comic books"—real books, that reprinted comic strips—were being sold by the first decade of the 20th century.

Was the magic year perhaps 1929, when Dell Publishing Co. put out a dozen issues of a newspaper-size collection of original "comic strips" called *The Funnies*? Or maybe 1933, when Eastern Color Printing Co. produced magazine-size reprint giveaways like *Funnies on Parade* and *Famous Funnies*—and salesman M.C. Gaines discovered kids would actually pay for the darn things? Or even 1935, when Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson started *New Fun Comics*, the first regularly-published comic book featuring original material instead of strip reprints?

Be that as it may: it was 1938 when things really started happening. By then, there were both newspaper-reprint comic books (*Famous Funnies*, *Popular Comics*, etc.) and all-new comic books (*More Fun Comics*, *Detective Comics*, etc.)... but the newborn industry was still waiting for something to come along and really put it on the map.



Funnies on Parade (1933)—considered the first true "comic book."

That something was a guy called Superman.

THE MAN OF TOMORROW—HERE TODAY!

Major Wheeler-Nicholson had lost his company, National Allied Publications, to Harry Donenfeld, his printer. In '38 Donenfeld was already publishing *More Fun* (formerly *New Fun*) *Comics*, *New Adventure Comics*, and *Detective Comics*, and was ready to launch a fourth title, to be called *Action Comics*.

That's when a bunch of dailies from an unsold newspaper comic strip called *Superman* got their chance at the spotlight. They told the story of an alien who grew up to be Earth's champion, hiding his true identity beneath spectacles as reporter Clark Kent. *Superman's* creators, writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, were already doing other series for Donenfeld's company, now called Detective Comics, Inc. (a.k.a. DC)... but the newspaper syndicates had universally rejected *Superman*. M.C. Gaines (remember him from 1933?) was now working for the McClure Syndicate; and, at the urging of his teenage editor, cartoonist Sheldon Mayer, he sent *Superman* to DC's editor, Vin Sullivan.

Sullivan needed a lead feature to persuade young readers to part with a Depression-era dime for the new comic—and he decided *Superman* was it. Thus, in the spring of 1938 (with a June cover date), *Action Comics* #1 went on sale—and there on its cover was a scene that went way beyond cops shooting robbers, or even *Tarzan* and *Buck Rogers*. A fierce-looking man in a red-and-blue acrobat's costume, complete with cape, was hoisting an automobile over his head, as bystanders fled in



Action Comics #1 (1938) introduced the world to Superman—and vice versa—and by 1939 he was starring in his own title. Ere long, his creators, writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, were being lionized in the mainstream press, as per this vintage photo from the 1940s. ©2007 DC Comics.



A page from an never-published 1940 Superman story that would've introduced Kryptonite, the Man of Steel's lone weakness. ©2007 DC Comics.





"The Bat-Man" was a loner on the cover of 1939's *Detective Comics* #27—but had picked up a boy partner by the time of 1940's *Batman* #1.

©2007 DC Comics.

panic. There was no mention on the cover of this fearsome character's name—let alone whether he was good or evil. There was just that huge Art Deco title—*Action Comics*—above a drawing that certainly lived up to the name!

By the time the 13-page "Superman" story inside (hastily pasted together from those unsold newspaper dailies) ended on a cliffhanger, the kids of America had a new hero. It took some issues for Donenfeld to realize what was selling his new comic, but once he did, he quickly issued a one-shot reprint comic featuring the first several stories, under the title *Superman...* and it soon quickly became a regular publication. Siegel and Shuster had their hands full, and before long a small army of artists was working under them producing tales of this strange being with powers far beyond those of mortal men.

The rest of the country soon sat up and took notice—not of the character's boundless possibilities, let alone of the imagination of his creators, but of the piles of money he was making for *Detective Comics, Inc.*

LOOK! UP IN THE SKY! IT'S A BAT...

Bob Kahn, who drew for DC under the name "Bob Kane," liked money, too. Who doesn't? By 1939 he was drawing humor features such as "Peter Pupp," but felt he was getting nowhere. So when editor Vin Sullivan suggested he try making up a hero "like Superman," Kane conceived the idea of a "Bat-Man" who fought crime in yet another red-and-blue acrobat outfit, but wearing a domino mask and sporting batlike wings.

Only thing is, Kane wasn't really a writer. So he got a friend, Bill Finger, to script the actual story. Finger, the new hero's uncredited co-creator, suggested a mask with bat-ears, a more somber blue-and-gray color scheme, and other changes, making him a true creature of the night. Sullivan liked "Bat-Man" and made it the cover feature of the 27th issue of *Detective Comics*, dated May 1939—only one month less than a year since Superman had flung his first flivver.

"Batman" (as the name was soon spelled) was an instant hit, and soon starred in his own solo mag. Only, by then, he *wasn't* a solo act any longer. Finger and Kane (aided by art assistant Jerry Robinson) gave Batman a kid partner named Robin, an act which altered the feature from its grim beginnings into one wherein man and boy slugged hoodlums while bantering back and forth. Youngsters lapped it up, and Batman was soon second only to Superman in DC's pantheon.

THE SUPER-HERO EXPLOSION

The same month Bat-Man made his debut, another costumed hero made the scene: Wonder Man, in *Wonder Comics* #1, from publisher Victor Fox. This red-and-yellow-clad hero was so similar to Superman that DC sued—and Wonder Man quickly faded into the mists of history.

Other publishers quickly saw the light: to publish a colorful "mystery man" (as they called them in those days), you needed one *different* enough from Superman that there was scant basis for a lawsuit. Martin Goodman's new Timely Comics launched *Marvel Comics* #1, starring Carl Burgos' Human Torch (who could turn to flame) and Bill Everett's Sub-Mariner (who lived underwater). MLJ's *Pep Comics* #1 introduced The Shield, the first hero to wear patriotic red, white, and blue, as the spectre of World War II loomed. The Blue Beetle in *Mystery Men Comics* wore chain-mail armor, and sometimes wielded a pistol. Writers/artists/partners Joe Simon and Jack Kirby created *Captain America Comics* for Timely, starring a



Both Wonder Man (from *Wonder Comics* #1) and Captain Marvel (who debuted in *Whiz Comics* #2, Feb. 1940) could leap tall buildings at a single bound, just like Superman—but the Man of Tomorrow had better lawyers.

Captain Marvel TM & ©2007 DC Comics.

red-white-and-blue hero who soon left The Shield and all other super-patriots in the shade. A mild-mannered chemist at the Pines/Nedor company drank a potion and became The Black Terror, his outfit emblazoned with skull and cross-bones. Quality Comics launched the diminutive Doll Man, and soon the infinitely stretchable Plastic Man.

Fawcett Publications, though, ventured into the field at



A super-hero explosion! The covers of Wonder Comics #1 (1939)—Marvel Comics #1 (1939)—Pep Comics #1 (1940)—& Captain America Comics #1 (1941). © respectively: the respective copyright holders; Marvel Characters, Inc.; Archie Comic Publications, Inc.; Marvel Characters, Inc.

the turn of 1940, in the initial issue of *Whiz Comics*, with Captain Marvel, who was very much like Superman in terms of powers. His “difference” was that he was actually a young boy, who shouted the magic word “Shazam!” and turned into the World’s Mightiest Mortal. DC decided that Captain Marvel was nonetheless a rip-off of Superman, and sued Fawcett for copyright infringement. The bitter legal struggle lasted for years—during which period Fawcett’s *Captain Marvel Adventures* became for a time the best-selling comic book in the world—but in 1953 Superman won out, Fawcett folded its tents, and Captain Marvel was no more.

The above, of course, are just the iconic tip of the iceberg. At one time or another during the 1940s, there were literally *hundreds* of super-heroes of one stripe or another.

In the meantime, Donenfeld had long since decided that, if Superman were to be copied, *his* company should be the one doing it. Thus, in 1939-40, DC and a new sister company, All-American Comics (in which Donenfeld was partnered with M.C. Gaines), launched a virtual army of super-doers: The Flash and Hawkman in *Flash Comics*... The Spectre, then Dr. Fate, in *More Fun Comics*... Sandman, then Hour-Man, in *Adventure Comics* (the “New” had been dropped)... and Green Lantern and The Atom in *All-American Comics*. In late 1940, they even combined these eight heroes in the first super-hero group ever: the Justice Society of America, in *All-Star Comics*. And in late 1941, DC/AA launched *Sensation Comics* #1 (cover-dated Jan. 1942), starting another mutation in the super-hero concept: Wonder Woman, who soon outdistanced all co-ed competitors to rival Superman and Batman in popularity.

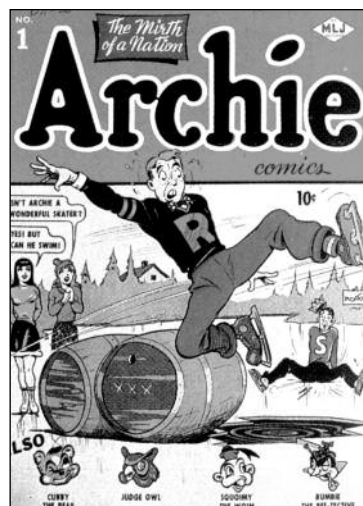
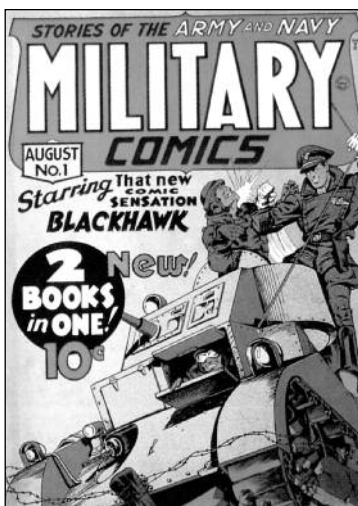
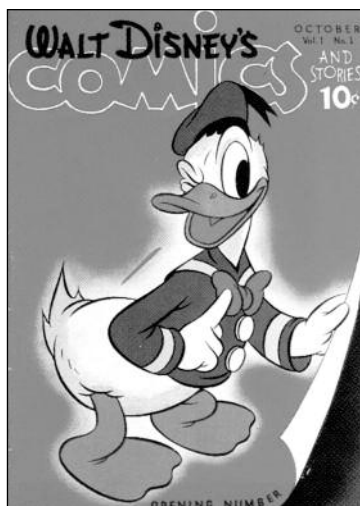
The situation was pumped up to the max by a little event called the Second World War. America got fully involved in it on December 7, 1941, when Japanese aircraft attacked US military installations at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Within days, the USA was at war with imperial Japan and her Axis allies, Hitler’s Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Fascist Italy.

These were terrible times for human-kind—but glorious ones for the American comic book industry. Paper was in short supply during wartime, but any mag that reached the newsstands was snapped up by a legion of kids and young men in uniform, looking for an idle hour to kill.

And who could have possibly made better foes for Superman, Captain Marvel, Captain America,



With All-Star Comics #3 (1940), eight of DC’s greatest heroes—after Superman and Batman, of course—joined forces as the Justice Society of America. Wonder Woman debuted in All-Star #8 at the end of 1941, then leaped into the first issue of *Sensation Comics*. ©2007 DC Comics.



Donald Duck's first comic book bow occurred in Walt Disney's Comics and Stories #1 (1940), Blackhawk's in Military Comics #1 (1941)... while Archie Comics #1 (1942) premiered after the Riverdale teenager had been jitterbugging in Pep Comics for a year. ©2007 respectively Walt Disney Productions; DC Comics; Archie Comic Publications, Inc.

and their ilk than the hated Nazis and Japanese?
To the rest of the planet, it was World War II.
But to comics readers, it was a Golden Age.

CHANGING TIMES— AND EC COMICS

During this period, there were a growing number of popular comic books in genres besides the super-hero. Dell initiated funny-animal comics, most of them licensed (from Disney, Warner Bros., etc.). In 1941 MLJ began a backup feature about the humorous antics of a teenager—and soon “Archie” took over first *Pep Comics*, and then the entire company, which changed its name to Archie Comic Publications. There were few real “war comics” during WWII, but colorful aviators like Quality's Blackhawk and Hillman's Airboy filled the skies with machine-gun fire.

After the war, much of the excitement about super-heroes had faded. In the second half of the 1940s they began to drop by the wayside, to be replaced by other genres:

Westerns, featuring cowboys and Indians... mostly cowboys.

Crime comics, often based on “true police cases,” led by Lev Gleason's *Crime Does Not Pay*.

Love comics, starting with 1947's *Young Romance*, by the Simon & Kirby team that had conceived *Captain America*.

War comics, especially after North Korea invaded South Korea in the summer of 1950.

And horror comics.

EC (Entertaining Comics) didn't initiate the trend toward tales of terror and the supernatural. But in the early 1950s EC took the lead with its beautifully drawn and gruesomely written *Tales from the Crypt*, *Vault of Horror*, and *Haunt of Fear*. EC also gave crime comics a more grotesque twist, in *Crime SuspenStories* and *Shock SuspenStories*. Their two

science-fiction comics, *Weird Science* and *Weird Fantasy*, had a sinister bent, too. Working with writer/editor Al Feldstein, publisher William Gaines soon turned the small company he'd inherited from his father (the late M.C. Gaines) into the envy of other comic book moguls—and the object of many a do-gooder's hatred. In 1952 Gaines and writer/editor/artist Harvey Kurtzman also midwived *Mad*, which began life as a color comic.

The first half of the 1950s saw an explosion of horror comics, working hard to outdo each other in depicting fear and loathing, few with the good writing and art the EC comics had. The result was a rising cry—half grass-roots movement, half orchestrated campaign—for censorship of comic books. Even Congressional sub-committees investigated the lowly comic book, and didn't much like what they saw. And right in the forefront of the crusade was a psychiatrist named Dr. Fredric Wertham, telling them where to look and what to see.



EC's *Crypt of Terror* #17 (1950) was actually the first issue of what was retitled, with issue #20, *Tales from the Crypt*—the archetypal horror comic. *Mad* #1 (1952) started out parodying horror and other comics genres, but was soon lampooning everything!

©2007 respectively by William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc., & E.C. Publications.

Eventually, something had to give—and what gave was the comic book industry.

THE COMICS CODE YEARS

By the end of 1954, most of the major publishers formed a self-governing group: the Comic Magazine Association of America. Their censoring body was called the Comics Code Authority. The written-out Code spelled out what could and couldn't be done in a comic book: no more vampires or werewolves... no titles featuring the words "Horror" or "Terror"... no disrespect for authority, parental or otherwise... no sexual suggestiveness... no overt violence.

Comic books were reined in, neutered, homogenized. Many publishers abandoned the field, unable to compete in this new and blander arena. EC soon dropped all its comics except *Mad*, which it converted into a black-&-white 25¢ magazine—to great success. DC—now rechristened National Periodical Publications—and Dell, with its lucrative movie/TV licenses, led the comic book pack. Yet, increasingly, the comic book industry seemed to those in it like a dying field. It appeared unlikely that ever again would comic books make any waves in the larger ocean of society.

And then, in 1956, there came... not a wave, but a ripple.

It was called *Showcase* #4.

DC SPARKS THE RETURN OF THE SUPER-HERO

DC's publishers and editors, casting about for new projects, decided to try a new super-hero, since comics readership was assumed to totally turn over every five

years or so, as kids reached puberty. By then, in the entire industry, only three solo super-hero stars survived from the WWII years: *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Wonder Woman*. DC needed a feature for an issue for *Showcase*, a comic which spotlighted a different genre in each bimonthly edition, and someone suggested

reviving the most popular of DC's vanished stars: The Flash. Editor Julius Schwartz was put in charge of *Showcase* #4 (which went on sale in July 1956, with an October cover date); with writer Robert Kanigher and penciler Carmine Infantino, Schwartz devised a new, more streamlined version of the Fastest Man Alive. Over the next three years, The Flash appeared in a mere four issues of *Showcase*. But in 1959 *The Flash* was awarded his own magazine, ten years after the original *Flash Comics* had died.

That same year, Schwartz enlisted writer John Broome and artist Gil Kane to update the next most famous defrocked hero, Green Lantern, in three issues of *Showcase* in a row, to gauge popularity more quickly. Within a year, a new *Green Lantern* #1 followed. Meanwhile, Archie Comics signed Joe Simon (working with his ex-partner Jack Kirby), and the result was a revamped Shield (who didn't last

long) and a far more successful *Adventures of The Fly*, a hero with vaguely insect-like powers.

It was DC, though, that played the trump card. In the late 1940s, Schwartz had edited comics starring Flash, Green Lantern, and the Justice Society of America super-hero group. Now he retooled the latter concept, as well, with a jazzier name. Superman, Batman, Flash, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, lesser lights Aquaman and The Martian Manhunter were combined in the *Justice League of America*. This new combo was given a three-issue trial in a *Showcase*-



Beginning at the turn of 1955, the Comics Code Authority's seal of approval had to appear on virtually all comic books for decades—except on self-regulated, squeaky-clean Dell and its successors, and on Gilberton's Classics Illustrated adaptations of literary masterworks.

The Comics Code seal is TM & ©1977 Comic Magazine Association of America.



DC Comics led the way in the 1956-1960 super-hero revival, with *Showcase* #4 (1956) & #22 (1959), then topped it off with *The Brave and the Bold* #28 (1960). ©2007 DC Comics.

type comic called *The Brave and the Bold*—and it was an immediate smash beyond even *The Flash* and *Green Lantern*! There soon followed new versions of other DC heroes such as *Hawkman*, *The Atom*, and *The Spectre*. Partly because a number of “oldtimers” in their 20s and 30s picked up such comics largely out of nostalgia, these comics gained a slightly older average-age readership than fellow DC mags featuring Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman.

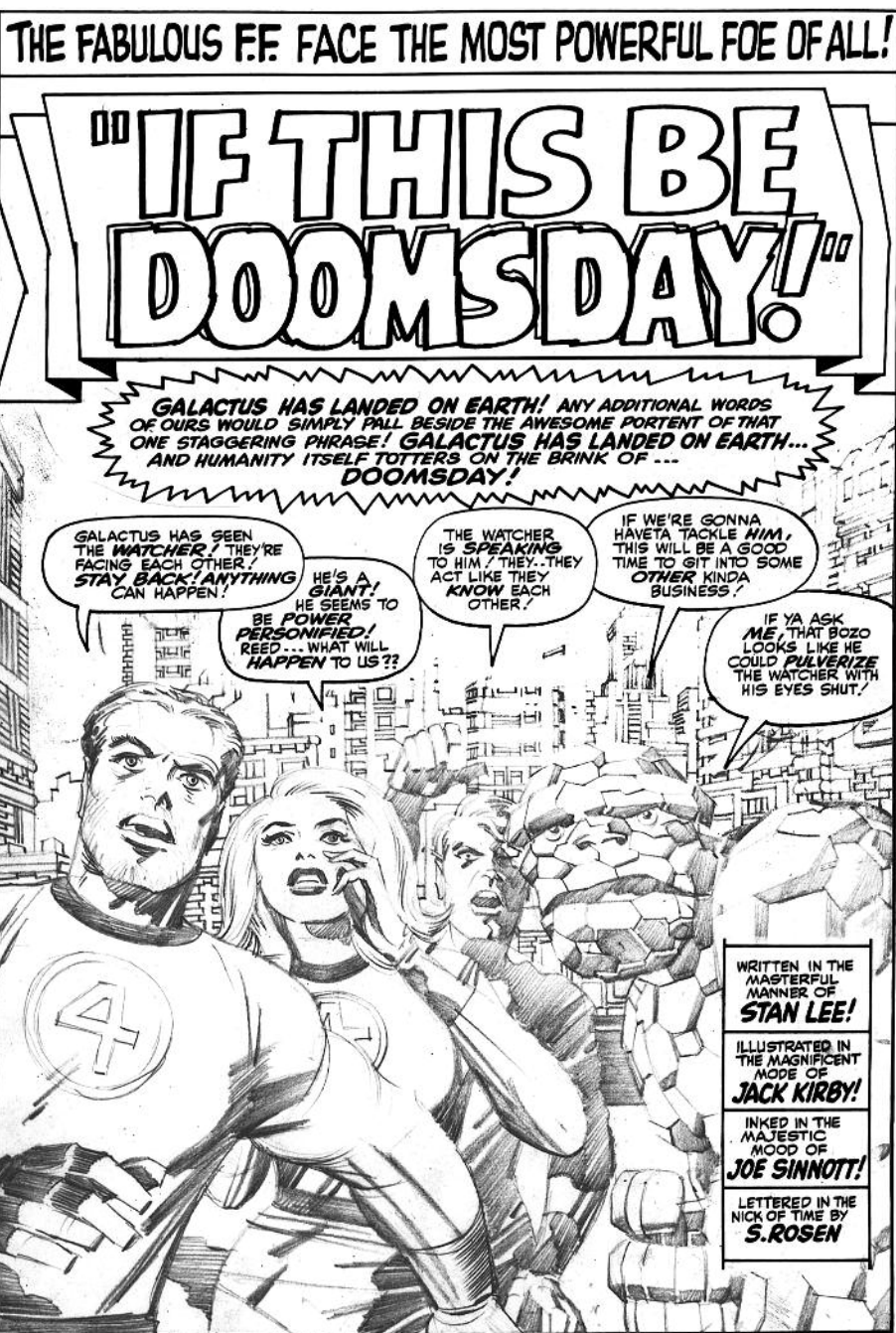
But, in spearheading this revival, DC Comics also ran afoul of the Law of Unintended Consequences. It roused a sleeping giant.

THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS

Actually, at the time, Martin Goodman’s Timely Comics (occasionally called Marvel Comics in the late 1940s) looked less like a giant than like a comatose dwarf. The collapse of its distributor circa 1957 had left it with only a handful of titles, distributed by its far larger rival, DC, through the latter’s company Independent News.

But Goodman learned, while playing golf with another publishing bigwig one day in 1961, of the strong sales of DC’s new *Justice League of America* title.

Next day, he directed his longtime editor (and chief writer) Stan Lee to introduce a super-hero group comic, pronto! Lee, who was thinking of leaving the field, came up with *The Fantastic Four*. With its more realistic characterizations and particularly the monstrous “hero” known as The Thing—and augmented by the action-packed artwork and additional story elements supplied by artist Jack Kirby—*Fantastic Four* swiftly changed the way comic books were written and drawn. By 1963, Timely Comics had become the Marvel Comics



OPENING SHOT: ON ROOF OF TRAYER BLDG., THE FF WATCH

The *Fantastic Four* movie sequel “*Rise of the Silver Surfer*” is based on the Stan Lee/Jack Kirby story that introduced the character in *Fantastic Four* #48-50 (1966). Here’s Kirby’s pencil art, with Lee’s script already lettered in ink, for the first page of #49. *Fantastic Four* ©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Group for keeps, and, with stories by Lee and art-plus by Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck, had introduced such breakthrough concepts as *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Thor*, *Iron Man*, *The X-Men*, *The Avengers*, *Dr. Strange*, and others—as well as bringing back Golden Agers Human Torch, Sub-Mariner, and especially Captain America. Lee proudly proclaimed “The Marvel Age of Comics” on covers month after month, and gave DC a competition for super-hero dimes it hadn’t known for a decade and more.



writer Arnold Drake and artist Carmine Infantino and brought to full fruition by scripter Jack Miller and illustrator Neal Adams. Marvel, in its turn, looked around for non-super-hero fields to conquer, starting with acquiring the rights to a 1930s pulp magazine hero who was newly popular in paperbacks; *Conan the Barbarian* #1, written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Barry Smith, was published with an October 1970 cover date. Other companies, such as Tower with its Wally Wood-generated *THUNDER Agents*, and Archie with its campy “Mighty Comics Group” revival of 1940s heroes, tried to gain a foothold on the super-hero hill; but Marvel and DC were the twin kings of that hill.

Still, perhaps it was less a mountain than a volcano, with fluid molten lava forever shifting beneath the feet of the two principal players. By the late 1960s, DC stars such as Neal Adams and Gil Kane were doing an increasing amount of their work for Marvel... and in 1970 there was an even greater seismic

Marvel Comics began its second climb to success with *The Fantastic Four* #1 (1961), followed in 1962 by *Amazing Fantasy* #15, which introduced everybody's friendly neighborhood *Spider-Man*. ©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Marvel's mutant approach to comics gained it an audience slightly older than DC's—e.g., several Marvel fan clubs were started on college campuses—without relying heavily on the nostalgia factor. The average age of comic book readers was slowly going up, and by 1970 was probably in the mid- to late teens.

THE REST OF THE '60S

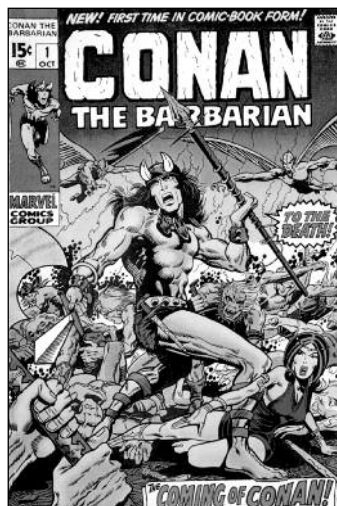
While America was changing in the garish light of the murder of two Kennedys and Martin Luther King, the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights movement, comic books both reflected and occasionally influenced that change. Marvel introduced additional concepts that would move and shake the comic book world, such as Lee and Kirby's outer-space sentinel *The Silver Surfer* in a 1966 issue of *Fantastic Four*; two years later he got his own extra-size comic. DC fought back with livelier concepts such as *Doom Patrol*, *Metamorpho*, and, most of all, *Deadman*. The latter was created by

shock when Jack Kirby abruptly left Marvel to draw and write a new line of titles for DC.

The period now hailed as comics' “Silver Age”—which began in 1956, and which may (but need not be) considered as ending around 1970—was coming to a close.

The history of comic books was poised to enter a new phase...

Roy Thomas is the editor of *TwoMorrows' Alter Ego* magazine and is the author of *The All-Star Companion, Volumes 1-3*, as well as other books examining comics history. He began his career in comics as Stan Lee's right-hand man at Marvel Comics in 1965, becoming their star writer in the 1970s, and eventually editor-in-chief of the company. He still writes numerous comics today.



The Silver Age closed on a series of high notes, with such key moments as the debut of *Deadman* in *Strange Adventures* #205 (1967)—a solo *Silver Surfer* comic (1968)—and *Conan the Barbarian* #1 (1970).

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SO, WHO'S THIS "KIRBY" GUY?

by John Morrow, editor of
The Jack Kirby Collector magazine

Jack Kirby (1917-1994) isn't known as the "King" of comics for nothing; it's due to his amazing output during a 50-year career as a comic book creator that began in the late 1930s. His ideas and innovations in the field are innumerable, being creator or co-creator of Captain America, the Boy Commandos, Romance comics, Kid Gang comics, the Marvel Comics Universe (including the Fantastic Four, X-Men, Hulk, Thor, Silver Surfer, and more), the New Gods, and many others. After departing the comics field in 1978 to pursue a career in animation, he worked on such TV series as *Thundarr the Barbarian* and *Super Friends*. He then came back into comics to produce the first comic sold exclusively to the then-new comic book shop market in 1981, which launched the way comics are mainly sold today—through the kind of comic book store where you probably



A 1960s drawing by Kirby, depicting many of the Marvel Comics characters that he co-created with Stan Lee. Characters TM & ©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.



**Support the
Jack Kirby
Museum:
[www.
kirbymuseum.
org](http://www.kirbymuseum.org)**

picked up this Free Comic Book Day publication.

"King" Kirby was, and continues to be, a major influence on the writers and artists from the Golden Age of the 1930s and '40s, up through today's comics. He pioneered numerous innovations in how artists draw comics, including the two-page splash (where two side-by-side pages are drawn as one large image, for extra impact), "Kirby Krackle" (the glowing blobs of energy that artists draw in nearly every outer space or "cosmic" scene in comics), and the outrageous perspectives and camera angles that artists use to add dynamism to their pages.

His creations are nearly countless, as are the number of pages he drew in his lifetime. While many artists have trouble drawing a single page each day, Kirby was known to pencil up to five a day when the need demanded it, and each was a work of art. He worked for nearly every publisher in comics history, and even self-published his work back in the 1950s, before it was in vogue like it is today.

No other creator left such an indelible mark on the comics industry, so perhaps it's fitting that no other creator has an ongoing magazine devoted to their life and career. It takes that level of creativity to produce a body of work that could sustain such a publication, after nearly 50 issues, with no end in sight.

John Morrow is publisher of TwoMorrows Publishing, and editor of their **Jack Kirby Collector** magazine, which began as a 16-page hand-xeroxed newsletter, and has now morphed into an internationally-distributed tabloid-size magazine, celebrating the life and career of the "King" of comics. Although he's honored to rub elbows with top comics pros like the ones that edit the company's other magazines, he never actually worked in the comics field before starting TwoMorrows Publishing in 1994.





Wolverine TM & ©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

THE BRONZE AND BEYOND

by Michael Eury,
editor of **Back Issue** magazine

Free Comic Book Day. There was a time when there was no such thing. Nor were there comic shops.

It's *true*! Comics were mostly sold in metal spin racks found in convenience stores and newsstands. Distribution was scattershot: To get all of your comics you had to huff it to multiple locations, hoping you'd find what you were looking for. And even if you found your favorites, they might be dog-eared from kids' grips or yellowed and brittle from being displayed too close to the window.

Welcome to the 1970s...

In *Back Issue* magazine, which I'm proud to edit, we take readers to the '70s and the '80s, and go behind the scenes of the comics published during those years. *Back Issue* is your fast-paced, data-loaded, one-way ticket to the era when comic books transformed into what you know today.

Since many of you weren't reading comics back then (not surprising since you might not have been alive), allow me to walk you through a quick tour.

THE BRONZE AGE

It was 1970, and for comic-book readers, reality was changing.

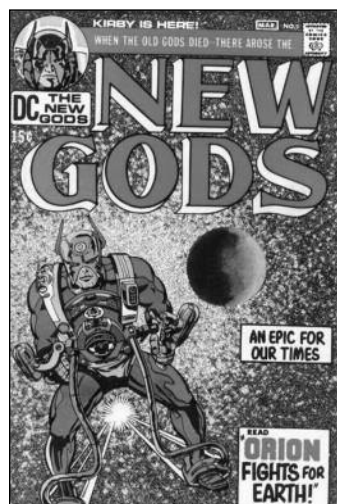
For months, DC Comics readers had been teased by promo lines announcing that "Kirby is Coming!" For you newbies, that's Jack "King" Kirby, the artist who co-created Captain America, the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, and the X-Men. There were some things in life you just didn't question, and Jack Kirby being a Marvel Comics man was one of them. So Kirby jumping ship to competitor DC was as big an event as anyone could imagine.

Unfortunately, Kirby's first DC projects—*Jimmy Olsen*, plus his own creations *Forever People*, *New Gods*, and *Mister Miracle*—didn't set the market ablaze as DC had hoped. There are many theories why Kirby's so-called "Fourth World" failed after a few short years, but the characters he introduced to DC—such as Darkseid, Orion, Mister Miracle and Big Barda, and later, the Demon,

Kamandi, and Omac—energized the often-bland DC Universe and remain vital to the company today.

Kirby's move to DC aside, from the chairs of comics' head honchos, things looked bleak in 1970, the year that began the era now known as the Bronze Age. The bottom had dropped out of the TV *Batman* super-hero boom of the mid-1960s and publishers, reeling from declining sales, scratched their heads and pondered, "What do we try next?"

Their answer: *Try everything!* The 1970s was the decade of excess, after all, when there was no such thing as "too much" and nothing we, as a culture, wouldn't try. Hair got longer, music got louder, bras got burned, movies got bloodier, drugs got mainstreamed... and Mom wore pantsuits while Dad sprouted



Jack Kirby's *New Gods* #1 (1971) launched his "Fourth World" series of comics. ©2007 DC Comics.



Writer Dennis O'Neil and artist Neal Adams ushered in a new era of "relevant" themes in comics with *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #76 (April 1970). ©2007 DC Comics.

muttonchops. Marvel and DC also got “with it,” trying new genres, new ideas, and new formats, all in a hungry pursuit of the one thing there could *never* be too much of: money.

In their quest to find the next big thing, the first place publishers looked was *outside* of comics. Marvel licensed author Robert E. Howard’s most famous savage hero in 1970, and while *Conan the Barbarian* #1, written by Roy Thomas and drawn by newcomer Barry (Windsor-) Smith, didn’t instantly ignite the comics world, before long the series developed a growing audience, and proved to publishers that they could sell material other than caped crusaders, lovesick all-American teens, and cartoon mice. Sword-and-sorcery comics soon cut a swath through the stands, with licensed acquisitions like Kull and Red Sonja joined by original characters including the Warlord, Claw the Unconquered, and IronJaw.

In 1972 DC released its first issue of *Tarzan* (#207, continuing the numbering from previous publisher Gold Key), sort of a distant cousin to the sword-and-sorcery comic. Writer/artist/editor Joe Kubert produced some of, perhaps *the*, finest illustrated Tarzan stories ever, timeless stories recently reprinted in hardcover



Taking his name from a Western hero of the Golden Age, the new Ghost Rider debuted in Marvel Spotlight #5 (Aug. 1972).

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by Dark Horse Comics. The Lord of the Jungle leapt to Marvel a few years later.

Tomb of Dracula (TOD), first seen in early 1972, was not a licensed property, but might have been had Bram Stoker’s 1897 vampire novel not fallen into public domain. TOD and Werewolf by Night, which preceded it into print by two months in *Marvel Spotlight* #2, were Marvel’s response to the 1971 lifting of the Comics Code Authority’s prohibition against the depiction of vampires, werewolves, and the undead (although Morbius the Living Vampire, who debuted in October 1971’s *Amazing Spider-Man* #101, was first out the gruesome gate), and spawned one of the decade’s most popular trends. Frankenstein, Swamp Thing, Man-Thing, the Son of Satan, Brother Voodoo, and the Living Mummy were among the macabre protagonists in 1970s—and mystery anthologies, like DC’s *House of Mystery*, were also popular (and were a training ground for new talent).

No ’70s-born horror hero was hotter than the hellspawn Ghost Rider, first seen in *Marvel Spotlight*



Johnny Blaze transforms into the Ghost Rider, as drawn by artist George Tuska in the '70s. Ghost Rider TM & ©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

#5 (Aug. 1972), which added another craze—motor-cycle stunt riding—to the mix. Of course, you now know that Ghost Rider was the star of a 2007 motion picture featuring Nicolas Cage—but what you might *not* know is that the actor was weaned on Bronze Age comics and chose his stage name from Marvel’s own Hero for Hire, Luke Cage, another product of the ’70s.

Fu Manchu, the fictional “Yellow Peril” mastermind created by Sax Rohmer in 1913, brought his claw-fingered menace to comics in *Special Marvel Edition* #15 (Dec. 1973), the first appearance of his created-for-comics son, Shang-Chi, better known as the Master of Kung Fu. Marvel’s response to the TV hit *Kung Fu* (1972–1975)—which itself was television’s response to the trend of Hong Kong-born martial-arts movies and their patron saint, Bruce Lee—*Master of Kung Fu* became a long-running success for Marvel (most notably under writer Doug Moench and artist Paul Gulacy’s tenure), and encouraged imitators including Iron Fist and Richard Dragon, Kung Fu Fighter.

Another 1970s trend was pulp heroes. Old classics like Doc Savage, the Shadow, and the Avenger were introduced to comics audiences, and the newly created Dominic Fortune and the Scorpion mined this pulp vein.

Beyond the world of pop lit, Marvel found mass media a ripe market for exploitation. Rock stars KISS became super-heroes, even fighting Dr. Doom (premiering in a magazine-formatted comic featuring the audacious stunt of mixing the band’s blood with the printer’s ink!), and comics based upon popular sci-fi films *Logan’s Run*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Godzilla*, and 2001: *A Space Odyssey* invaded the racks. DC was less ambitious in adapting cinematic properties, although its “DC TV Comic” line, including *Welcome Back, Kotter*, is noteworthy if for no other reason than the utter strangeness



Star Wars #1 (1977) went on sale before the movie debuted.

©2007 Lucasfilm

of it all.

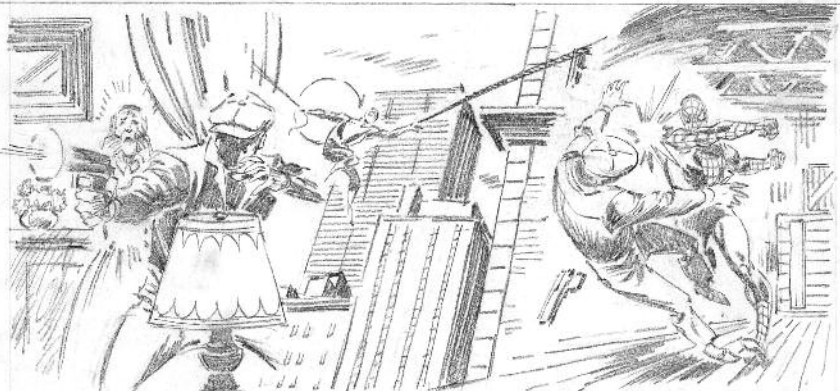
No 1970s screen property was more popular as a comic book than *Star Wars*, which premiered a few months before the May 25, 1977 release of the film, an anticipation-building maneuver brainstormed by Jedi master George Lucas. Roy Thomas was at the writing helm, and as he told *Back Issue* in 2005, Lucas “had in mind the idea of Howard Chaykin as the artist.” *Star Wars*’ success title paved the way for other popular late-1970s Marvel titles based upon sci-fi and toy properties, such as *Battlestar Galactica*, *The Micronauts*, and *Rom: Spaceknight*.

Chaykin as Lucas’ go-to artist illustrates another hallmark of 1970s’ comics: the emergence of young talent. Comics publishing houses had been the exclusive domain of stuffed shirts in elbow-patched tweed jackets, but while looking outside of the field for new properties, the medium also looked *within* its fan base for the next talent wave. The transition, however, was not without its bumps in the road. As one of the “long-hairs” who broke the barrier, writer Denny O’Neil revealed, reflecting upon his visits to DC’s headquarters, that he was “told by one of the functionaries not to walk past the Big Boss’ office ‘looking like that,’ to take the long way around.”

Among the artistic newcomers of this era were Neal Adams and Jim Steranko, who demonstrated that comics storytelling was not restricted to stodgy panel layouts. Following their lead, new artists stormed the medium, daring to do things differently, with Frank Brunner, John Byrne, Dave Cockrum, José Luis García-López, Michael Golden, Mike Grell, Frank Miller, George Pérez, Mike Ploog, Marshall Rogers, Bill Sienkiewicz, Walter Simonson, and Berni(e) Wrightson among their number.

Not to rest on their laurels, established talent became energized by this exciting new climate: John Buscema, Gene Colan, Gil Kane, Stan Lee, and John Romita, Sr. produced some of their best work in the 1970s, as did Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson with their “Swanderson” pairing on *Superman*.

DC and Marvel took chances with traditional characters. Batman was retooled from a campy crime-



An unused Ron Frenz page, still in pencil, from *Amazing Spider-Man* #275 (April 1986), recapping Spidey’s origin. Spider-Man TM & ©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

fighter to a brooding “creature of the night,” and two of the main architects of that revamp, O’Neil and Adams, returned the Joker to his homicidal roots in *Batman* #251 (Sept. 1973). That creative duo also collaborated on the award-winning, provocative *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, which explored “realistic” terrain such as prejudice and drug abuse.

Gerry Conway made two substantial contributions to *The Amazing Spider-Man* while writing that title: the shocking murder of Spidey’s love Gwen Stacy in issue #121 (June 1973), and the introduction of the “villain of the month” who soon became a mega-star—the Punisher—in issue #129 (Feb. 1974).

The Incredible Hulk #181 (Nov. 1974) introduced



From his first appearance in Hulk #181 (Nov. 1974), Wolverine went from secondary character to one of Marvel Comics' most recognizable.

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a squat, scruffy scrapper named Wolverine, whose atypical violent nature caught readers by surprise. Wolverine was one of several mutants gathered and/or created for a revival of the X-Men—which had, believe it or not, limped into near-obscure as a reprint title—with 1975's *Giant-Size X-Men* #1, which also introduced soon-to-be-stars Storm, Colossus, and Nightcrawler.

Superman: The Movie's elevation of the comic-book film to blockbuster status in 1978. While the innovations of 1970s publishing rebuilt the industry from within, the non-comics retailing of its characters cemented their statuses as cultural institutions.

THE SORTA, KINDA "MODERN" AGE

Until recently, most comics collectors regarded 1980 as the beginning of the Modern Age. Last time I looked, Kenny Loggins was no longer at the top of the charts and *Dallas* wasn't TV's number one show, so calling 1980 "modern" is a stretch. *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* has expanded the Bronze Age into the mid-'80s, and depending upon whom you ask the subsequent periods are the Copper Age, the Diamond Age, the Dark Age, and/or the Modern Age. Ouch! Does this make your head hurt like it does mine? Let's drop the labels, then, and just look at the highlights...

Perhaps the most influential innovation of the

With new properties, new talent, and new characters (including Jonah Hex, Howard the Duck, and Firestorm) bombarding the reader at a dizzying pace, little stability was to be found in the shapes of the comic books themselves. New formats seen during the 1970s included the 48-page (52 counting covers) comic, 100-page Super Spectaculars, 80-page "Dollar Comics," 10 1/4" x 13 1/4" tabloid-sized comics (home of the 1976 mega-event *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man*, DC and Marvel's first superhero team-up), black-and-white comics magazines, and digests (Archie Comics' digests remain a durable fixture today, and the digest itself has morphed into a popular format for manga).

The graphic novel was also born in the 1970s, thanks to Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978). The biographical "comix" found in the underground comics movement motivated Eisner to return to the fold after a hiatus, and at a time when he could have easily retired, Eisner essentially recreated the art form by producing this pioneering collection of intensely personal stories.

The final, but widest-reaching, breakthrough of the Bronze Age was merchandising. While popular comics stars had long been licensed for various products, comic-book characters became household names during the 1970s due to a ubiquitous barrage of Saturday-morning TV cartoons and primetime live-action dramas, action figures, records, coloring books, 7-11 Slurpee cups, iron-on clothing patches, Halloween costumes, and other items, culminating in



Sin City creator Frank Miller drew this meeting between Batman and his creation Elektra in the mid-1980s.

Batman TM & ©2007 DC Comics. Elektra TM & ©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

early 1980s was the way the comics were sold. During the late 1970s comic-book shops trickled into existence, providing a “one-stop shopping” source for the previously harried comics fan. In the early '80s publishers tested this “direct sales” market, where the comics were ordered in specific numbers on a non-returnable basis (as opposed to the traditional newsstand method, where distribution was unreliable and unsold materials were returnable): Marvel released *Dazzler* #1 and DC released *Madame Xanadu* #1 directly to comics shops, and their warm reception led publishers to cater to direct sales as the way to sell comic books.

Independent publishers—usually, anyone *other* than Marvel and DC—began to flourish in the '80s under this new mode of distribution. Most of these companies have faded into history, but throughout the decade names like Capital, First, Pacific, Eclipse, and Comico appeared; today, only Fantagraphics, founded in 1976, and Dark Horse Comics, which launched in 1986, remain active.

From those independents, however, premiered a slate of innovative titles that excited readers and introduced new talent to the medium. Some of the '80s greatest indie hits: Bill Willingham's *Elementals*, Matt Wagner's *Mage* and *Grendel*, Mike Baron and Steve Rude's *Nexus*, Dave Sim's *Cerebus the Aardvark*, Dave Stevens' *The Rocketeer*, the Hernandez Bros.' *Love and Rockets*, Mark Evanier and Sergio Aragones' *Groo the Wanderer*, Mike Grell's *Jon Sable, Freelance*, Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg*, and Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Mainstream comics got a shot in the arm in the early 1980s when Frank Miller took over *Daredevil* (technically, Miller started as the *DD* penciler with issue #158, cover-dated May 1979, before ascending to the role of writer/artist). Miller showed that gritty realism could work under the scrutiny of the content watchdogs the Comics Code. Perhaps the most significant highlight of his run was the introduction of breakout character Elektra (*Daredevil* #168, Jan. 1981), continuing the Punisher/Wolverine trend of anti-heroes with ambiguous motivations.

Under the creative guidance of writer/artist team Chris Claremont and John Byrne, *X-Men* became a fan-favorite, growing into a franchise that, throughout the '80s, included *Wolverine* (whose first solo outing was a popular 1982 miniseries by Claremont and Frank Miller), *New Mutants*, and *X-Factor*.



Many of the themes of the recent X-Men movies have their origins in the 1970s and '80s X-Men comics.

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DC Comics, which had for years trailed Marvel in sales, released a hit in 1980: Marv Wolfman and George Pérez's *New Teen Titans*. This merger of Titans old and new (media stars Cyborg, Raven, and Starfire were introduced) became DC's best-selling title. On its heels was Paul Levitz and Keith Giffen's collaboration on *Legion of Super-Heroes*.

In 1982 Marvel released its first

issue of *G. I. Joe*, based upon Hasbro's “Real American Hero” reworking of the classic military action figure that debuted in 1964. *G. I. Joe* was a textbook example of multimedia exploitation: Simultaneously striking were a TV cartoon, toy line, and Marvel's title. Marvel's *G. I. Joe* was incredibly successful and lured a new generation of readers into the fold.

An influx of British talent brought a harder, sometimes more dystopian edge to American comics books in the 1980s. American reprints of the UK's *Judge Dredd* introduced many readers to imported creators like Brian Bolland and Kevin O'Neill, who would soon rise to acclaim on US titles, mostly from DC. No Brit captivated American readers like Alan Moore: from his cerebral *Swamp Thing* to his occasional brilliant forays into the Superman mythology, Moore elevated comics writing to new heights. From this trend evolved the “mature readers only” title, which, at DC, ultimately grew into its Vertigo line.

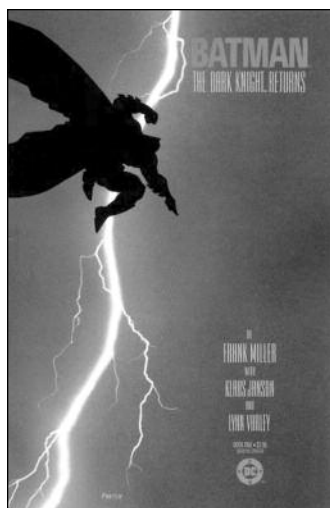
The big-event crossover was born in the 1980s, as Marvel's first attempt at uniting all of its heroes—1982's *Marvel Super Heroes Contest of Champions*—gave way to 1984's smash *Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars*; over 20 years later, *Secret Wars* is best remembered for the first appearance of Spider-Man's black costume, which we now know as the alien symbiote that became *Venom*.

Bolstered by the success of *Titans*, DC handed that series' Wolfman and Pérez the keys to the kingdom: *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, the 1985–1986 12-issue maxiseries that overhauled DC's lengthy history into a streamlined continuity. Supergirl and the Silver Age Flash (plus a score of second- and third-stringers) did not survive the “housecleaning” event, which brought together virtually every character from DC's 50-year history.

No single year of the 1980s packed more wallop than 1986: DC followed up *Crisis* with a Superman revamp (*Man of Steel*, by John Byrne) and a new Flash and Justice League, followed shortly thereafter by Wonder Woman. (Sort of sounds like what happened last year after *Infinite Crisis*, doesn't it? Trends,

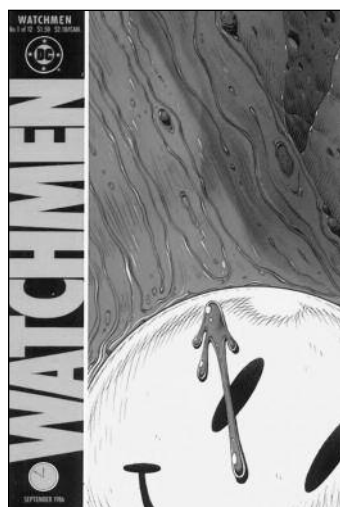


DC Comics started a revitalization thanks to the Nov. 1980 relaunch of *Teen Titans*. ©2007 DC Comics.



Writer/artist Frank Miller brought national attention to comics with his reimagining of Batman in his 1986 mini-series *Batman, The Dark Knight Returns*.
©2007 DC Comics.

Miller's sequel, 2001–2002's *The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, did not live up to the artist's original epic). After surveying Batman's future, in 1987 Miller, with



Writer Alan Moore redefined comics with his 1986 *Watchmen* mini-series with artist Dave Gibbons.
©2007 DC Comics.

including comics revamps, usually happen in 20-year cycles). The most lauded of 1986's comics were Frank Miller's "future Batman" *The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' "super-hero deconstruction" maxiseries *Watchmen*. *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* took familiar men-in-tights concepts into unfamiliar and often startling terrain, so raising the bar that some might argue these series are unmatched (most critics agreed that

Joining new distribution venues and new directions in storytelling as 1980s innovations was an upgrading of comic-book production techniques. Throughout the decade, the process improved—but not without mishaps, such as the garish "flexographic" process of the mid-'80s that marred early issues of DC's

Who's Who—and by decade's end comic books were produced with enhanced computer coloring techniques on glossier, whiter paper.

With trailblazers like Miller and Moore proving that creator-driven series could be hits, publishers courted the industry's next wave. A new flock of creative talent rose to prominence in the late 1980s, including Erik Larsen, Adam Hughes, and Rob Liefeld. By the time DC published writer Neil Gaiman's fantasy opus *Sandman* in 1989 and Marvel released *Spider-Man* #1 in 1990 as a showcase for Todd McFarlane, it was clear that the creator was now king.



Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man* #1 (1990) stands today as one of the best-selling comics of all time.
©2007 Marvel Characters, Inc.

and their writers and artists, have the comics of the '70s and '80s to thank for their very existence. Those decades, which I call "the *Back Issue* era," are bursting with behind-the-scenes stories that are, at times, as interesting as what you might read on the comics page—and are available for you every other month in *Back Issue*!

Portions of this article were originally published in *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, 36th Edition (2006). Reprinted by permission of Gemstone Publishing. Quotes

for this article originally appeared in interviews in *Back Issue* magazine and the book *The Justice League Companion*. The author wishes to thank Dennis O'Neil and Roy Thomas for their participation.

Michael Eury is the editor of *TwoMorrows' Back Issue* magazine and is the author of the just-released *Comics Gone Ap! The Missing Link to Primates in Comics*, as well as other books examining comics history. His career includes tenure as an editor for DC Comics, Dark Horse Comics, and Comico.

The 1990s also witnessed some groundbreaking events, including the defection of McFarlane and company from Marvel to form Image Comics; a speculator's boom that later fizzled and threatened to wipe out the business; the "death" of Superman and the breaking of Batman; and lots of other dark stuff that fed into the comics universes you are reading today. And while you're enjoying and collecting current comics, remember that they,

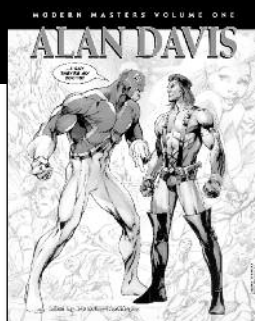


The first issue of *Spawn* (1992) signaled a big change in the comics industry, as Image Comics rivaled DC and Marvel Comics for dominance. ©2007 Todd McFarlane.



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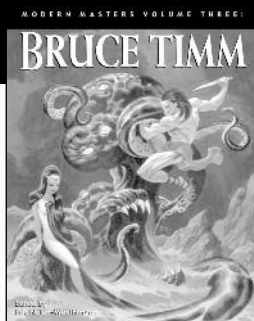
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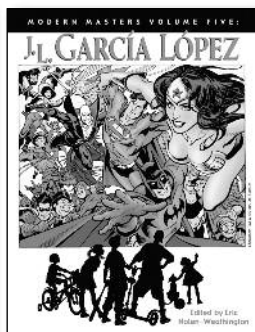
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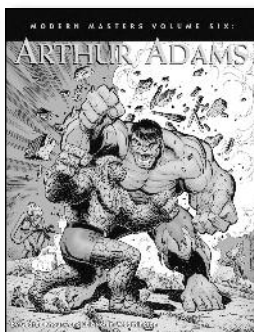
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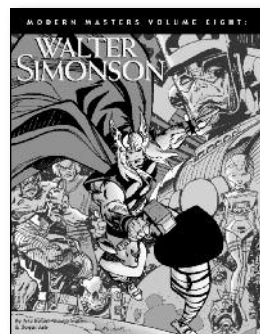
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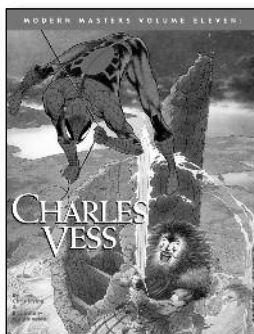
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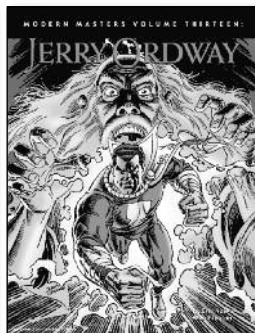
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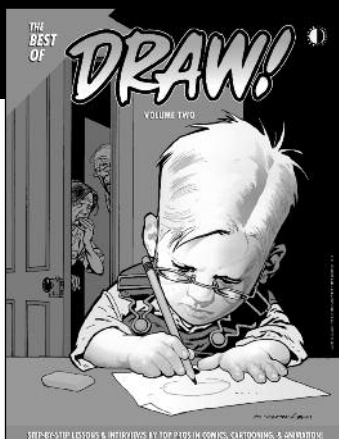
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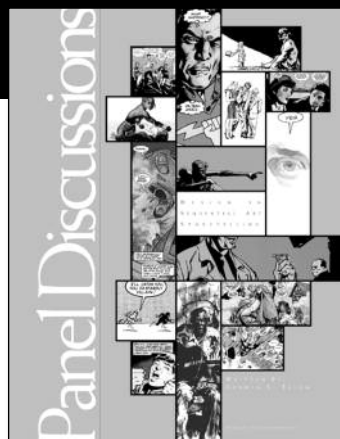
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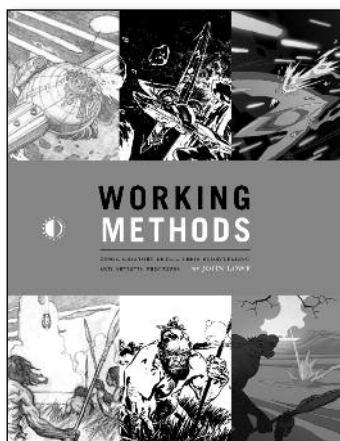
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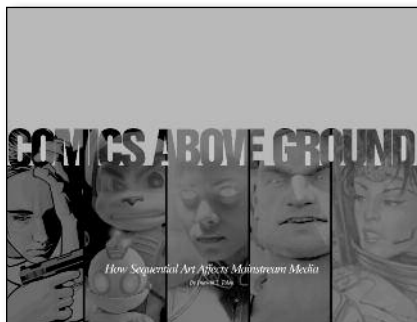
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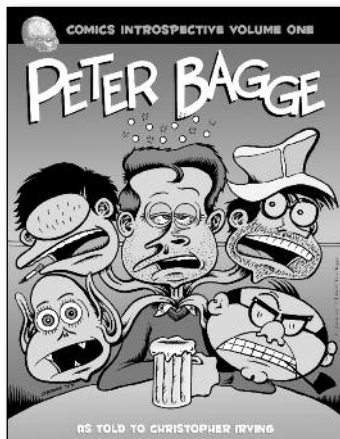
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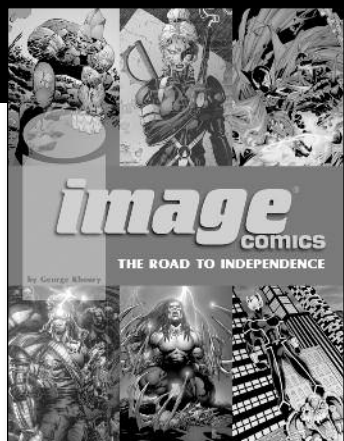
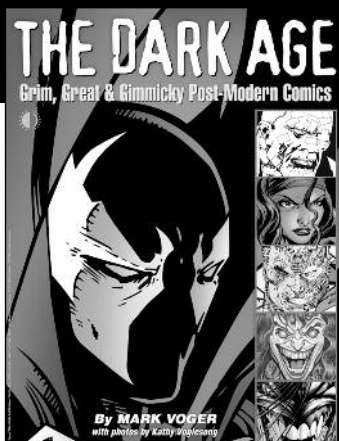


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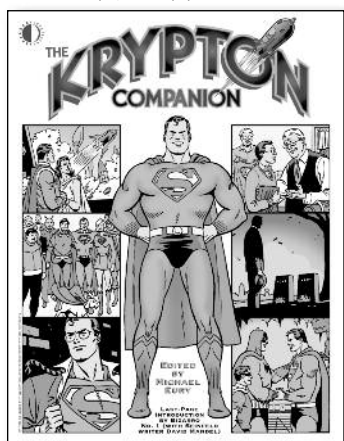
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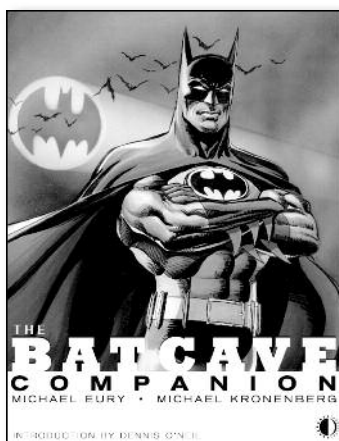
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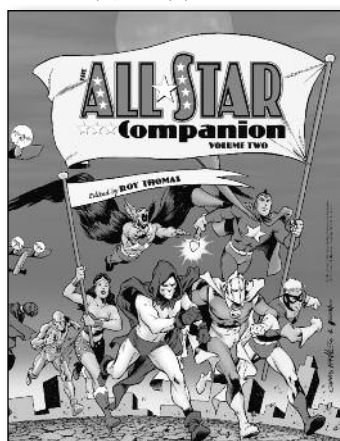
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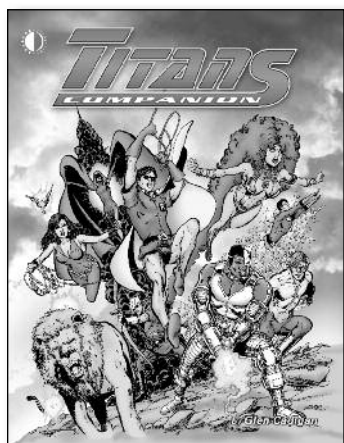
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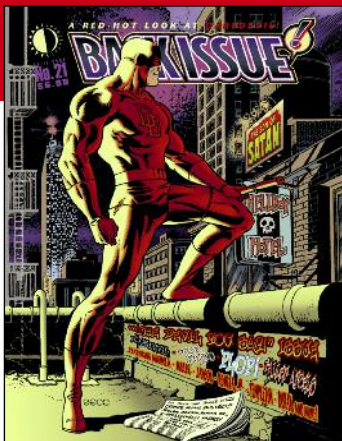
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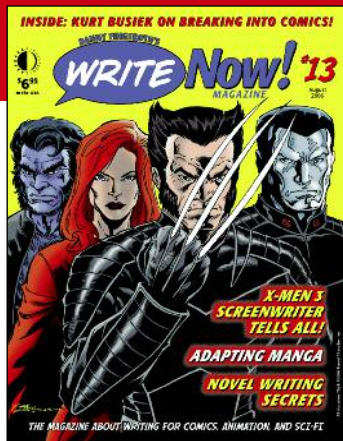
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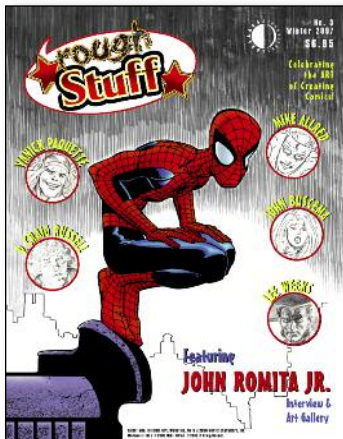
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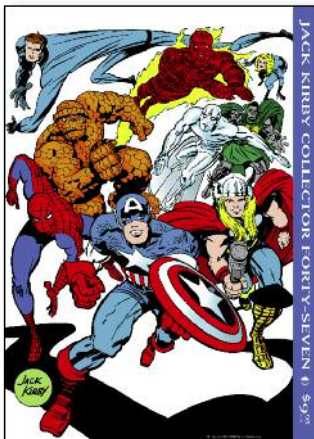
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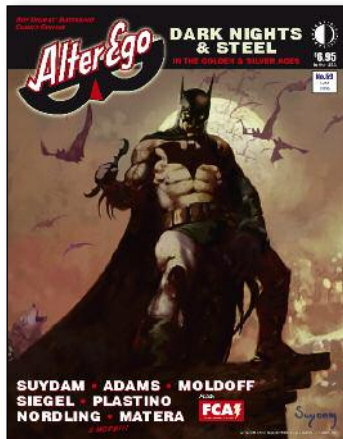
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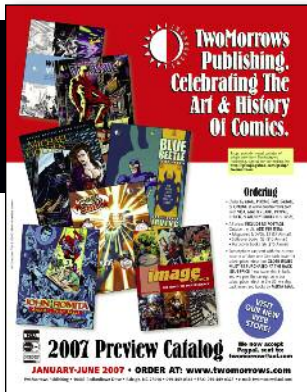
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