RE-PRINTING THE BEST OF ISSUES 1-5

Crikey!

THE GREAT BRITISH COMICS MAGAZINE!

COLLECTED



ISSN 1754-954X

VOLUME 1

In Association with COMIC SCENE THE UK Comic Magazine

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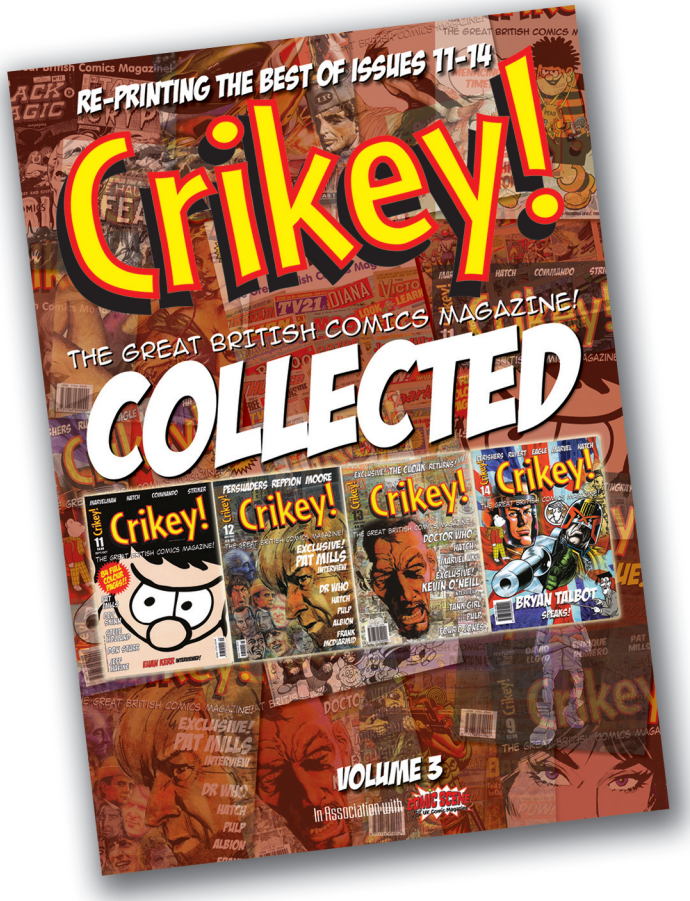

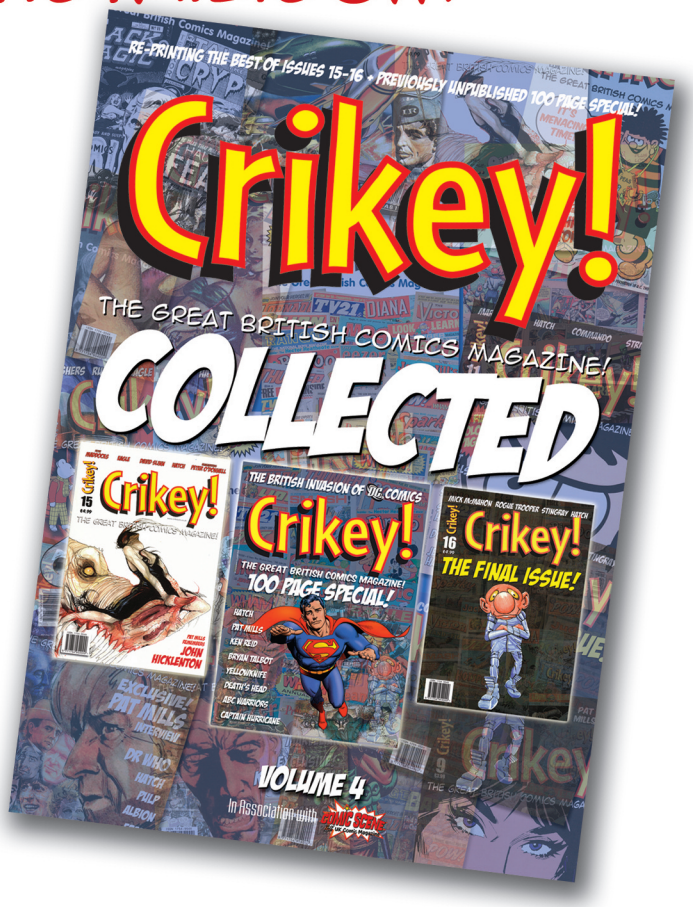

Crikey! WE'RE BACK!

Yes, we made it!

Crikey! The Great British Comics Magazine is back after almost a decade's absence!

You may recall that *Crikey!* took the British comics world by storm back in 1997 and became the most sought after comics magazine of its kind! (It probably helped that it was the only magazine of its kind at that time!) Yep, 52 black and white A4 pages, full of the best of British comics art and excellent articles by a variety of talented writers helped to get Crikey! off the ground!

Barely two years later, *Crikey!* went big time with issue 11 following the decision to really go for it: we went monthly, 84 full colour A4 pages and headlong into a major distribution network that saw *Crikey!* in Borders all over the UK. Then, we were devastated when that outlet went under leaving *Crikey!* high and dry and quite a few quid down.

So, with issue 13, we went back to our roots. Alas, finally, we were unable to continue past issue 16 and *Crikey!* ended a magnificent run. Since then, I've had a million (okay, 268) emails asking when, if, *Crikey!* was going to make a come back. That question is still waiting to be answered, so...

This first volume (of four) features the best of issues 1 - 5. I'm sure those out there who have read the articles before will enjoy reading them again and those who are new to the *Crikey!* experience, well...you have a treat in store.

When I decided to re-print these issues I had a couple of emails from people pointing out errors in some of the articles, and they suggested that I change them. While I understand their point, I decided against it, as this is a 'reprint' volume' only. So, those errors are still within the magazine. The only thing that has changed are omissions on the editorial/contents pages, where I have deleted any reference to articles that are not appearing, for one reason or another. Over the past few months I have tried to contact all authors of articles here within, but I couldn't contact some and I hope my reprinting their work is not an issue.

As anyone who has read *Crikey!* in the past will no doubt echo, there has to be a huge shout out for Tony Ingram (*Crikey!*'s former co-editor and head writer) in helping me prepare this first re-print issue. While Tony's contribution to the magazine is second to none, he only gets a few articles in this volume: you'll have to wait for volumes 2, 3 and 4!

Special thanks goes to Tony Foster at *ComicsScene Magazine* for cajoling me into getting this volume together; In fact, Tony has shown just as much enthusiasm for the magazine as anybody else!
I think you'll all agree that it's about time.

I hope you enjoy again, or for the first time, these reprints. British comics has such a rich history; a history that deserves to be passed down to the generations to come. Oh, and there's a few new extra pieces in this volume, too!!

And, as I said above, the answer to the question of *Crikey!*'s return remains unanswered...

Glenn B Fleming

Jenni Scott, writer of many girls' comics (her article appears in this volume in issue #4), has asked me to pass on her Blog URL where you will be able to access more up to date information on her vast contribution to Girls' comics.
https://jintycomic.wordpress.com/?fbclid=IwAR2yC-8w8h0P5jR_hF3NItl3O3mefEYwRZGkRVGPvKKCTg9QO_L2trpTpoU

Irmantas Povilaika is an expert on the work of the late, great Ken Reid and he has asked me to include information about two fantastic hard backed volumes of reprints he has produced on Ken's work. You can order them here: www.kazoop-comics-shop.com

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Crikey! THAT WAS GOOD!

Tony Ingram *is a legend in the* Crikey! *office in Ipswich. Good job really, though, as he is the only guy in that office. Tony tells us how he stumbled across* Crikey! *and eventually became part of the team in Manchester…*

I first heard about '*Crikey! The Great British Comics Magazine*' in Summer 2007, when I saw the first issue mentioned in the long running specialist magazine *Comics International*. I ordered that first issue, and the second, out of mild curiosity, and because, well, it was a magazine about comics history and nobody had really published anything like that for a while, but something about it spoke to me straight away; here was a magazine about comics being written by people who actually loved comics, with a passion; people with their own specialised interests within the field and were unashamed to say so, and to write about them in depth, showing a quite daunting amount of obscure and fascinating knowledge…in short, people not entirely unlike me!

I am, you see, a lifelong comics nerd and happy to admit it, and I'm seldom happier than when talking about comics, or listening to someone else do so…unless, of course, I'm actually reading them! I lost no time in contacting the editorial team, keen to let them know they had my support…and, possibly, because I'm an arrogant sod with a tendency towards pedantry, to pull them up on a couple of minor points. Which I guess makes it entirely my own fault that it was suggested I put my money where my mouth was and write something for it myself!

If I recall correctly, after initially submitting a rather tongue in cheek piece on Marvel's *Nick Fury* to *Crikey!*'s companion title '*Super Spies and Secret Agents*', my first contribution to *Crikey!* itself (which by its third issue had moved from quarterly to bimonthly publication, which may go some way towards explaining why the guys were so desperate for content that they were willing to give me house room) was a regular feature called 'Nutty Notions', in which, each issue, I dedicated a couple of paragraphs each to a selection of the more…unusual (by which, of course, I mean barking mad) strips to see print in British comics over the years, some of them pretty obscure. *Nutty Notions* was essentially a retooling of a feature called 'View from the Vault', which I'd used to fill space in my own self-published fanzine, the desperately amateurish *Comics Retrospective*. From 2003 to 2006. My first column was in issue #4, and oddly, people seemed to like it, so much so in fact that it retained its regular slot for the rest of *Crikey!*'s lifespan in print.

As it turned out, though, that was to be just the tip of the iceberg for me, as by issue #7 two thirds of the original creative team had departed, leaving editor/publisher/designer Glenn B Fleming in need of some help if he was ever to get any sleep. Suddenly, having begun by writing a fan letter to the mag, I found myself its lead writer and co-editor! This came as something of a surprise, though since it not only gave me a chance to write about comics but also to work with and interview some of the creators who over the years had become my personal heroes!

With issue #11, in 2008, *Crikey!* finally got the high street distribution it had always deserved, and with sales on the up, the future looked bright (as well they might, since we were now in full colour and almost double the page count).

Unfortunately, by the time issue #12 hit the stands, the country's economy was collapsing and the company responsible for that distribution collapsed with it. The company having taken a massive hit, we returned to our humble beginnings…which isn't to say that it didn't continue to maintain the hopefully high standards we'd always aspired to. Ultimately, though, issue #16 proved to be the last regular issue, with #17 already half completed but never to see print. It was a huge blow, and incredibly frustrating, but those three years remain among the happiest of my life, and the 13 issues I helped put together during the course of them remain some of the work I'm most proud of. Will *Crikey!* ever rise again?

Well, we are talking about the comics industry, and in comics, death is seldom permanent… ●





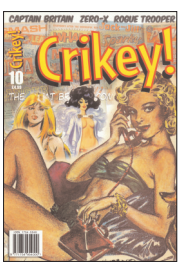




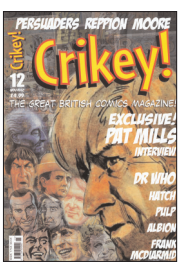






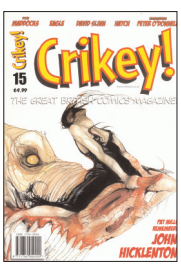


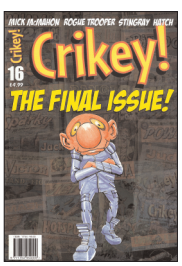






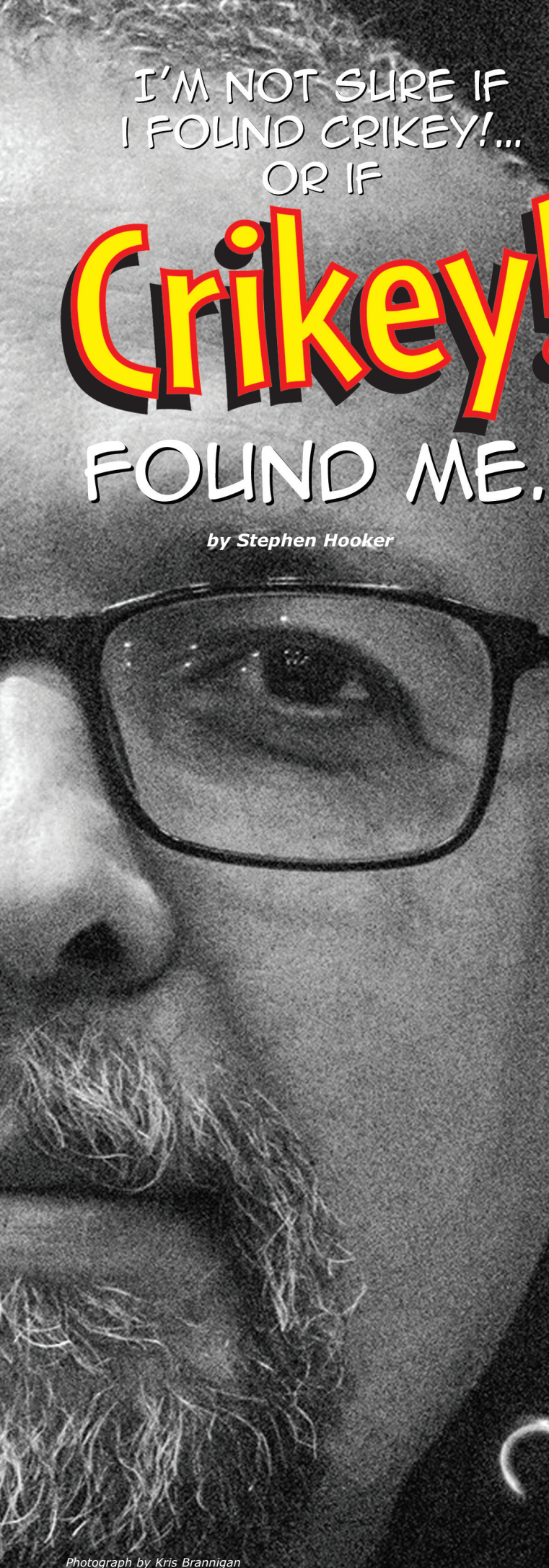






I'M NOT SURE IF I FOUND CRIKEY!... OR IF Crikey! FOUND ME...

by Stephen Hooker



Photograph by Kris Brannigan

Comic reading has always been part of my life, from around six years old to 36 years old I had a comic in my hand. By my mid thirties though, I started to fall out of love with the format. American comic books dominated my reading and as the 1980s marched on, buying comics had become, for me, not a joy but a reflex action.

I had drifted away from the British comic book scene, ending with Battle, Action and the much missed *Starlord*. The latter being infinitely superior to that *2000AD* upstart. *2000AD*, I had decided, from its very first, issue to boycott and laugh my head off when it finally folded. I had a sense in the late 1970s for what would and what would succeed in the provincial world of UK comic books.

Do I regret that? If course I do. Am I happy *2000AD* continues to be published to this day? Does the pope wear a pointed hat? Do bear's take their ablutions in woods?

But let's go back to my mid-thirties in the heady 80s. I stopped reading comics, too many gimmick covers. Too many speculators. And the stories seemed thin and treading water. There was Alan Moore, true, it just wasn't enough for me. I boxed my collection up and moved it around from house to house. eBay arrived for me in 2003 and I sold off vast swathes of comic books. The money was good. Except money doesn't have a Jack Kirby splash page, a duck trapped in a world he never made or 'Dominic Fortune'.

However, two thing seemed to happen at once, I started reviewing comic books for the much lamented Dez Skinn publication, *Comics International* and I found an American comic book nostalgia magazine scene, looking back and writing up the great days of USA comic books. The Silver Age and my own personal favourite, The Bronze Age were extensively covered. And I fell in love with the comic book all over again, not just from the past but from the present too.

And then, I wondered, all those UK comic books I had ignored, would there be something out there for them too? And not just a website but something a paper and ink I could hold with my own bare hands? And I was not only after nostalgia but I wanted insight too. I was older now too, the wrong, or for me, right side of 45. Characters like 'Captain Hurricane', 'D Day Dawson', 'Jason Stark', 'Hookjaw', 'Q Bikes', 'The Cat', 'Strontium Dog' and 'Ro Jaws' did not make me feel self-conscientious anymore.

But where to find them in that aforementioned paper and ink guise?

It turned out not to nearly as difficult as I thought. Looking for American comic nostalgia magazines lead me straight to *Crikey!*. It's whole UK comic centred covers were unmistakable.

The reading, once Glenn B Fleming took over the editorship a real and pure joy.

I was immediately drawn by the nostalgia certainly, and why should that be a dirty word; there's nothing immediately wrong with the past. It is, as has been said, a foreign country and people certainly do things differently there. *Crikey!* has that and it also has a love of the format, a tangible relationship with comic books. A sense of the fun of the format and, again, that love.

The feature which drew me in, and would become my first article, was the remembrance of buying a favourite comic book. The experience as good as the comic book itself. The feeling buying and reading a comic book gave.

I do not know if any magazine covering comic books to have installed this feeling into its readership and certainly this reader.

Crikey! reminded me, it is not just the mindless zombied collecting of comic books that matters. You have to love it and not just for financial gain. I have been there and done that.

And it's hollow.

Crikey! made me feel comic books again as a passion. And if I feel that way, read Crikey! and you will too.●

KEN REID!

Ken Reid's legacy is appreciated worldwide. Ken was one the great British comic creator/cartoonists, giving comicdom the likes of *Roger the Dodger*, *Frankie Stein*, *Faceache*, *Jonah* and the long running *Fudge the Elf*. Reid was born in Manchester (*Crikey!*'s hometown!) almost a century ago and saw his first work appear in the *Manchester Evening News*.

The *Crikey!* chat contacted Ken Reid aficionado *Irmantas Povilaika* to find out why Ken is so popular amongst comics fans all over the world...

After serving National Service, Reid back all the stronger with strips in Comic Cuts and Eagle. Legendary Dundee based comic publishers DC Thomson saw his worked and invited him to work on new strips for their comic, the ever popular 'Beano'.

Reid contributed strips to the Beano's 'sister' comic over the next decade and was teamed up with writer Walter Fearne for many of them.

1964 saw Reid leave DC Thomson for rival publisher Odhams Press, who wanted him not only to draw strips, but also write them for their new titles 'Wham!' and 'Smash!'. It was during this period of frenzied creativity that Ken came up with the 'soft horror' title of 'Frankie Stein' and took over 'The Nervs' from Graham Allen. 'Dare-a-Day Davy' was created for 'Pow!', one episode being deemed too gruesome for print and was held back by the editors. Strips such as 'Faceache', 'Creepy Creations', 'Martha's Monster Make Up' and 'Tom Horror's World' caused Ken to be named 'Best Writer' and 'Best Artist' by the Society of Strip Illustrators in 1978.

Ken, as any real artist would want, died of a stroke at his drawing board whilst producing a page of 'Faceache' in 1987 at the young age of 67.

"I was born in Lithuania when it was part of the Soviet Union and us kids barely knew what comics were–probably because the Soviets wanted to protect our innocent minds from Western influences…

I remember there used to be a bi-weekly children's magazine which had a three-panel story of a piglet with no speech balloons in each issue. There was also the odd strip in the national humour and satire fortnightly. But I always found the genre very appealing and must have mentioned it to my pen-pal Andrew from Shakespeare Middle School in Leeds with whom we corresponded for quite a few years at our good old English teacher's initiative. Andrew sent me two British comics–they were *Whoopee!* and *Tammy*. I remember I was very impressed with *Whoopee!*–it was an early issue from 1975, full of brilliant strips by excellent artists.

Having lived on a comic 'diet', my 10-year old self was overwhelmed by the idea of being able to follow weekly adventures of *Scared Stiff Sam*, *Frankie Stein*, *Lolly Pop*, *Bumpkin Billionaires*, *Spy School* and *Fun Fear*, etc. I found the idea to have your name printed and win cash prizes for sending in story ideas for strips like Scream Inn and World-Wide Weirdies mind-boggling!

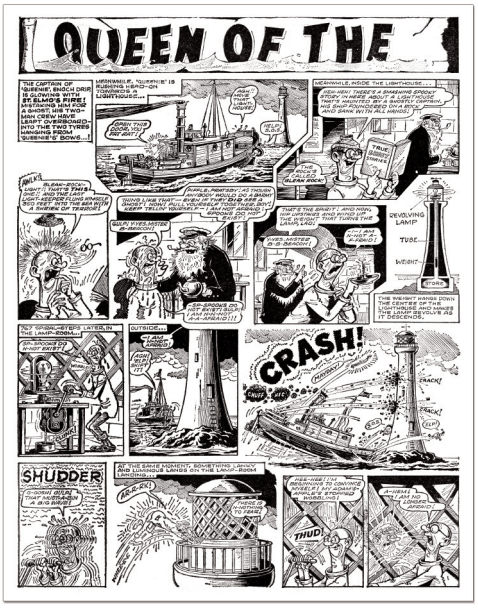


Irmantas Povilaika

"That particular instalment of *World-Wide Weirdies* (Mucky-Hand Palace) was the first time I saw Ken's work. I spent hours studying and copying the space monsters in the background…

That issue of *Whoopee!* inspired me to start drawing humour comics for my own and my friends' pleasure–cowboys, funny car races, space adventures. Two of my strips were published in the national school children's magazine–I even got paid quite handsomely for them! I am unsure about timeline, but it is possible that my first-ever published work appeared in the UK! I wrote and illustrated a fairy tale with captions underneath (in English), made it into a booklet and showed it to my English teacher. Without hesitation, she posted it to her colleague in Leeds and low and behold–some time later I received a copy of Shakespeare Middle School magazine (a Xeroxed b/w zine-kind publication) with my booklet printed inside!

"I was still cartooning in my early 20s when the Soviet Union began falling apart and Lithuania started making loud noises about independence. Periodicals suddenly started looking for fresh content and I approached the national humour and satire magazine with my drawings. They gave me the whole of the back cover immediately, and my comics appeared there regularly for three years or so - sometimes two or three pages in one issue. I was even



nominated the artist of the year once! Then other things in life took priority and I abandoned freelance cartooning, for good, unfortunately.

Surprisingly, some people still remember my comic work and I even have a section dedicated to my art in a Lithuanian comics fansite! I don't know much about the Lithuanian comic scene of today. I've heard they have conventions and the odd exhibition, but my impression is that Lithuanian comics are mostly of the 'artsy' variety which I am not a fan of –I believe in humour comics.

In 2007 the name of *Whoopee!* comic popped up in my mind quite by accident, and I looked it up on eBay. One thing led to another and I soon found myself collecting British comics and discovering their long and rich history which I knew completely nothing about.

"After I took up the new hobby of collecting comics, it didn't take me long to discover the genius of Ken Reid who is now my favourite British comic artist, hands down. I started collecting comics with *Creepy Creations* and *World-Wide Weirdies* in them, then found out about 'Faceache', 'Jonah', 'Ali Ha Ha', 'Big Head and Thick Head'. Finally I discovered Odhams comics and was profoundly impressed by the quality of Ken's work. I immediately decided I wanted nothing less than a complete set of *Wham!*, *Smash!* and *Pow!* with Ken's work in them. It took me quite some time, dedication (and money…) to complete the quest. Now I am a proud owner of a vast collection, with many complete runs of Fleetway/IPC titles, a full set of all Power Comics by Odhams Press, as well as a rich collection of the *Beano* and the *Dandy*. Being a completist, I can comfortably say I have all of Ken's printed comic work from 1958 till his death in 1987 (except for his work in the *Manchester Evening News* and competitions in the Irish edition of the *Sunday Express*)…

"For me, collecting is inseparable from researching, so I started reading things online and looking for books on British comics history. What struck me from the very start was how under-researched the heritage was, particularly compared to US and European comics. I was quite surprised that collected editions of the work of the best British cartoonists weren't available to buy. Reading people's posts and comments on various British comics blogs and forums, I noticed they often mentioned how they would love to buy this collection or that, so my impression was that there was a large gap to be filled. I tracked down the copyright owner and acquired the license to reprint what I consider to be one of, if not the, best cartooning to have ever been produced on the British isles. I am referring to Ken's work in Odhams comics–the five series that appeared in *Wham!*, *Smash!* and *Pow!*–'Frankie Stein', 'Jasper the Grasper', 'Queen of the Seas', 'Dare-A-Day Davy' and 'The Nervs'–THE POWER PACK OF KEN REID!



"Putting the books together was an exciting adventure and I enjoyed every minute of it. I am grateful to all those who helped me in the process both in Lithuania and in the UK. The artwork was scanned from the paper copies in my collection and cleaned with great care to make it suitable for reprinting. Poor paper and print quality of the old comics presented certain challenges. The thin paper of the early issues of *Wham!* produced a see–though effect on quite a few of the pages, and it had to be handled carefully to try and preserve the gray shading of Ken's art. The coloured pages of *Queenie* and *Dare-A-Day Davy* were also an issue but I think it was addressed in the best possible way. The books were successfully crowdfunded and printed this summer. I joined the blogging community in 2012 and have been running http://kazoop.blogspot.co.uk since then. Quite a few of my posts are dedicated to Ken's work." ■

Irmantas Povilaika, January 2019

Crikey! urges all fans of Ken's work to check out the two volumes of collected work produced by Irmantas!
You can purchase these great volumes here: https://www.kazoop-comics-shop.com/




EZQUERRA

CARLOS EZQUERRA

A LEGEND IN HIS OWN LIFETIME

TONY INGRAM TELLS US WHY...

As far as comics go, Carlos Sanchez Ezquerra (1947-2018) wasn't one of the biggest names on the largely American dominated world stage, but he should have been; certainly, the world of British comics would be a very different place today without him, and a much poorer one. Carlos, after all, came up with the distinctive look of Judge Dredd, probably the most famous and influential British comics character created in the last sixty years, and is still regarded by many as the definitive Dredd artist (even though, after the character's first actual published appearance was drawn by someone else, Carlos refused to touch him again for over two years).

But there was far more to Carlos than Dredd, or even his other most famous creation for the *2000 AD* stable, mutant bounty hunter *Johnny Alpha*, the *Strontium Dog*, who first appeared in *Starlord* in 1978 (as with Dredd, Carlos parted company with Johnny Alpha for a while on a point of principle, refusing to draw The Final Solution, the story in which the character was killed off; luckily, when Johnny eventually returned, Carlos returned with him). In fact, the genial, self–effacing Ezquerra had been drawing comics for over 45 years by the time he left us on 1st October 2018.

Carlos's career began in Barcelona, where he drew various Western and war titles before, like many Spanish artists of the time, venturing into the British comics market, which he did in 1973. Early on, he worked for Dundee based publishers DC Thomson on *Wizard* (for which he drew some amazing covers), but by 1974 he was firmly entrenched at IPC, where he contributed to various girls' comics as well as being one of the most successful and popular artists on the newly launched *Battle Picture Weekly*. Carlos co-created the long running character *Major Eazy* (reputedly based on James Coburn, though the strip's writer, Alan Hebden, disputes this)) for *Battle*, drawing over a hundred instalments of the strip; thirty years later, he came up with an updated version of the character, Cursed Earth Koburn, for the *Judge Dredd Megazine*. He also drew fan favourites *Rat Pack* for *Battle* (at one stage, *Major Eazy* was even incorporated into the strip), and, never being exclusive to one company, created the covers for all but one of the 25 issues of Marvel UK's war themed reprint weekly *Fury* (the first issue's cover was drawn by Dave Gibbons, instead).

But it was Carlos's work for *2000 AD* that really cemented his reputation as one of Britain's favourite comics artists; after co-creating Dredd, and then Johnny Alpha, he also lent his talents to such fondly remembered stories as *Fiends of the Eastern Front*, *Anderson: Psi-Division*, *Durham Red*, *The Mighty Tharg*, *ABC Warriors* and *The Stainless Steel Rat* (the latter based on Harry Harrison's novels) as well as rather less memorable strips such as *Janus, Psi-Division* and the revived *Rick Random*. He co-created the wonderfully comedic Al's Baby for the *Judge Dredd Megazine*, and the relentlessly serious *Third World War* for the short-lived mature readers title *Crisis*, though it tended to be in stories containing a strong element of humour that his talents really shone through; scenes like the one in which Johnny Alpha's Viking sidekick Wulf, on a time travel mission to abduct Adolf Hitler, silences the ranting Nazi leader by stuffing a sock in his mouth have stayed with readers for years!

In the 90s, while continuing to work for *2000 AD*, Carlos branched out into the US comics industry, collaborating with his frequent 2000 AD cohorts John Wagner and Alan Grant on *Bob the Galactic Bum* for DC Comics and later working on a variety of projects for a number of publishers (including *Bloody Mary*, *Hitman*, *Just a Pilgrim*, *Preacher*, *A Man Called Kev* and *Adventures in the Rifle Brigade*) with Irish writer Garth Ennis, whose particular brand of humour seemed to be perfectly complimented by Carlos's quirky style. Though he slowed down a little in his later years (when his work was often inked by his son Hector) Carlos, who was diagnosed with lung cancer some years ago, continued working until the very end, when an unexpected resurgence of the cancer finally took him from us at the absurdly young age of 70.

In 2015, Carlos was awarded the San Diego Comic Con Inkpot Award for Achievement in Comic Arts, but a much earlier tribute would likely have pleased him more; *Carlos Sanchez Robo-Stogie*, the robotic sidekick of Grant and Wagner's classic *2000 AD* character *Sam Slade: Robo-Hunter*, was named after Carlos, and that seems like just the kind of joke he'd have loved!

Carlos was still drawing *Strontium Dog* in 2018, just months before his death. Perhaps more than any of the many other characters he created, Johnny Alpha always seemed inseparable from Carlos's art; it just never seemed to look right when he was drawn by other people. It will be interesting to see if *2000 AD* decide to continue the series with a new artist, though, much as I like it, I personally rather hope they don't.

Carlos Ezquerra was simply irreplaceable.

Some people just are. ●



ART BY CARLOS EZQUERRA

THE Crikey! REVIEW

What do you get when Britain's premier writer/artist sets his mind to creating yet another masterpiece? Simple: you get 'Grandville: Force Majeure'.

'Grandville: Force Majeure' is the fifth and final part in the series of graphic novels from award winning creator/writer/artist Bryan Talbot. The story begins with an innocent fishing trip, a nightmare and a pile of spent cartridge cases as the reader is slowly, yet deliberately, drawn into this dark, sleazy, steampunk world. And, as with the all the other episodes, Detective Inspector LeBrock of Scotland Yard sets off on another murder investigation, this time, it seems, with the whole world against him.

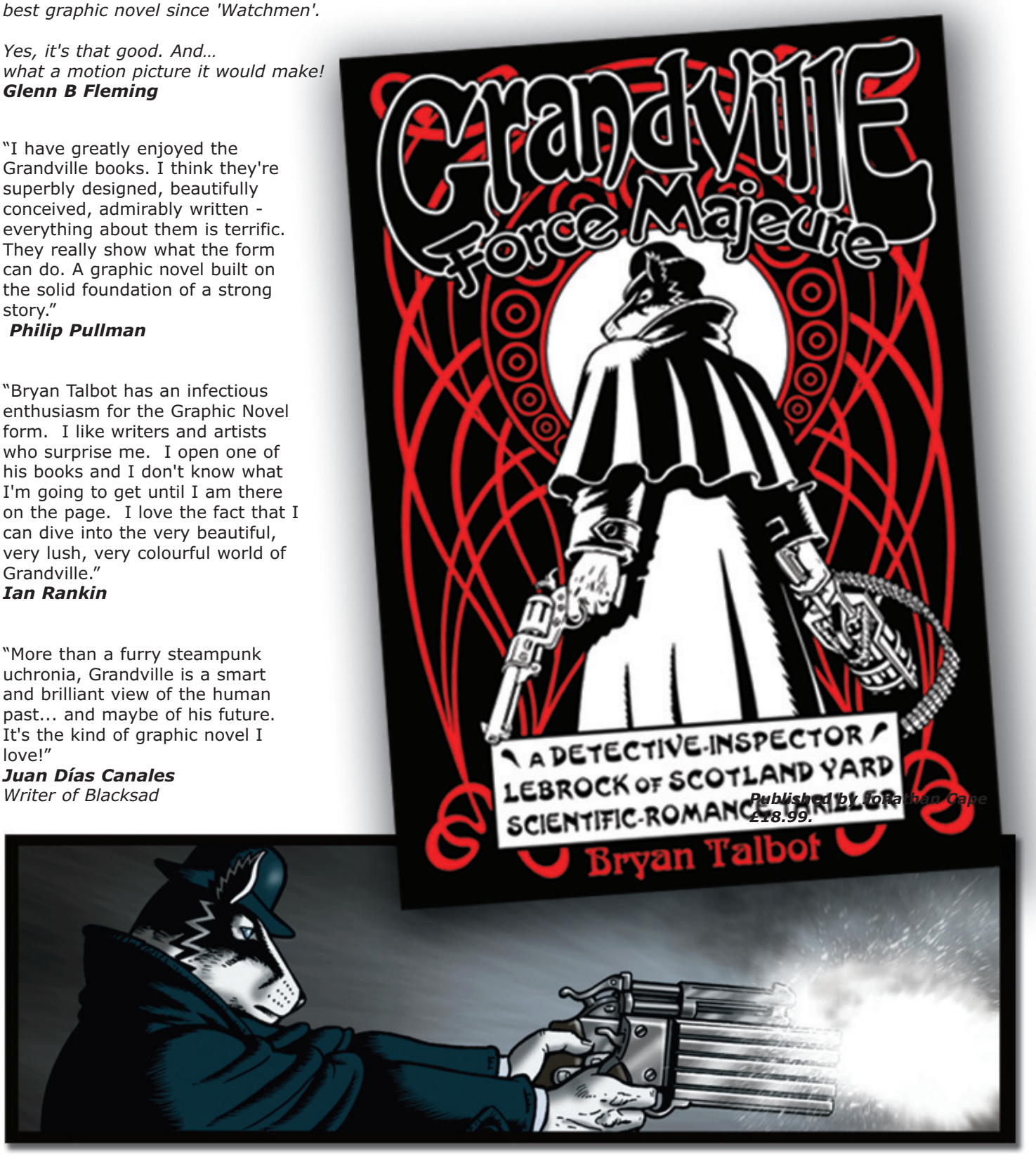
'Grandville: Force Majeure', coming in at a staggering 165 pages, is quite simply the best of the series and is the best graphic novel since 'Watchmen'.

Yes, it's that good. And…
what a motion picture it would make!
Glenn B Fleming

"I have greatly enjoyed the Grandville books. I think they're superbly designed, beautifully conceived, admirably written - everything about them is terrific. They really show what the form can do. A graphic novel built on the solid foundation of a strong story."
Philip Pullman

"Bryan Talbot has an infectious enthusiasm for the Graphic Novel form. I like writers and artists who surprise me. I open one of his books and I don't know what I'm going to get until I am there on the page. I love the fact that I can dive into the very beautiful, very lush, very colourful world of Grandville."
Ian Rankin

"More than a furry steampunk uchronia, Grandville is a smart and brilliant view of the human past... and maybe of his future. It's the kind of graphic novel I love!"
Juan Días Canales
Writer of Blacksad



Published by Jonathan Cape £18.99.

1st ISSUE!

Crikey!

Issue 1 £3.99

The Great British Comics Magazine!



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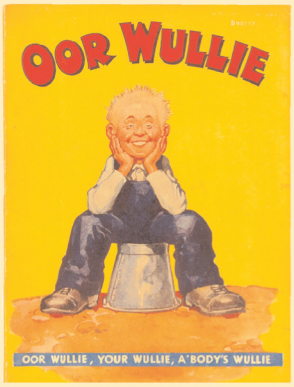



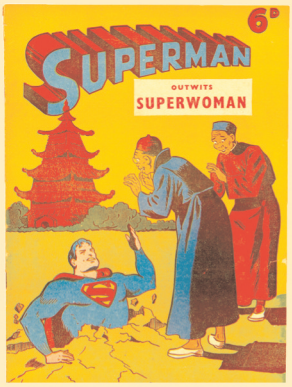







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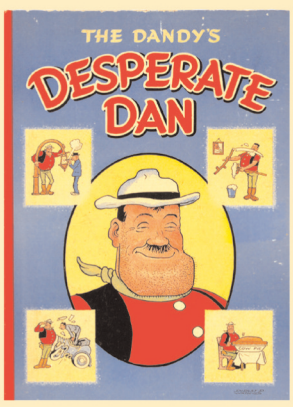





Editorial

Brian M Clarke — ***Editor***

Glenn B Fleming — ***Designer***

Tom Sweetman — ***Publicist***

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Well, here it is – the first issue of our homage to the excesses and successes of British comics. For a long time UK comics were largely ignored by fans but a look on the bookshelves suggests that all that is changing. Recent months has seen an explosion of books talking about or reprinting British comics and several great websites have sprung up to discuss and celebrate our comic heritage (take a bow 26pigs and britishcomics.com).

It seems that everyone is starting to talk about British comics. I look in jeweller's windows such as H R Samuel's and see tiny statues of the Beano characters. Lledo's Days Gone toy car collection features vans with Wham!*,* TV Comic*,* Hornet*,* Rover *and other titles on the sides. Getting back to books we have had Titan's hardback reprints of 'Steel Claw', 'Charley's War' and 'Spider' with more on the way. Even the American publishers are getting into the act. The comic book Albion (now collected in a trade paperback) featured a story arc with literally dozens of old British characters involved in a suitably weird tale of madness and mayhem. And just wait 'til you see what they did to Bad Penny! And of course there are the on-going reprints of 'Dan Dare' and newspaper strips such as 'James Bond' and 'Modesty Blaise'.*

So it didn't take a genius to work out that there was a lot of passion and nostalgia out there for British comics. We love comics. You love comics. The rest was easy.

Brian M Clarke
Editor

Writers this issue:
Helen D Bennett
David Britton
Brian M Clarke
Glenn B Fleming
Bob Norton
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Nutty Notions

by Brian M Clarke

Each issue of Crikey! will feature a selection of some of the lovingly bizarre concepts that have graced the pages of British comics in years past. To start us off we have an extra long bonus section that covers all genres, ages and periods. Ideas and nominations for future NNs gratefully accepted. Enjoy!



KING BERNARD (The Hornet)

Inspired by the film *Passport to Pimlico* (in which a London borough gains independence from England). This sports strip featured "Scrapland, the independent country set up by Bernard Briggs and his friend Alf Tupper, the famous runner". The political satire of the film was sensibly dropped in favour of sporting drama as the tiny state put forward its team for the European Amateur Nations Cup. Scraplanders were naturally pleased to count not only Alf Tupper amongst their population but also Adele Boyle, also known as Blooming Ada, "scrapland's one-girl team".



FISHBOY DENIZEN OF THE DEEP (Buster)

You know you're in good hands when your comic uses a word like denizen. You can almost hear the writer desperately flicking through the dictionary looking for something to go with the word deep. Fishboy the strip makes you realise that Robinson Crusoe just wasn't hard enough when he was cast away on his lump of rock. "Stranded on a desert island as a child and forced to get his food from the sea, Fishboy developed slightly webbed hands and feet and learned to breathe underwater as easily as a fish." Never mind all that

THE WHIZZERS FROM OZZ (Topper)

If my geography lessons involved travelling in a souped up space car to an alien world to collect "…various articles which the twins had to take back to (planet) Ozz as part of a space geography project…", then perhaps I would have paid more attention! The Whizzers, like most strips in British comics, started out as a pun (oh, how we laughed) but unlike many, managed to leave that quickly behind and develop itself into a tightly written quality adventure strip. The spaced out twins were called Krik and Krak. Their earthling friend, who you just knew wore a snake belt to hold up his rebellious black jeans, was called Willie Walker.





millions of years of evolution stuff, if an English schoolboy wants something bad enough, he'll just get it.

Of course, seeing as he kept his ability to use his lungs and live on land he was actually Amphibian Boy but that's not nearly as catchy!

STEEL COMMANDO (Thunder)

"During World War II, Lance Corporal Ernie 'Excused-boots' Bates, the laziest man in the army, was put in charge of a secret weapon known as the Steel Commando, because Ernie was the only man from whom the robot would take orders." Steel Commando was an eccentric combination of Captain Hurricane and Brassneck – but without the Captain's famous bad temper. Invariably Ernie would find his metal mate running short of oil somewhere in their adventure or in danger of rusting up. Makes you wonder what happened to all that wonderful technology, doesn't it.



DUSTY DAN (The Hotspur)

Here's a strange confluence of fate. Not only was a *Hotspur* writer desperate for a new concept – but when it landed on the editor's desk, he was so distressed that he accepted it! Dusty Dan was the adventures of "… a young Townport dustman…" with his handcart boldly emblazoned with DAN AND HIS VAN! What worked, however, was the opposition of Dan's mundane world and the *outre* characters encountered on his rounds. Like the time he met Chinese magician Wo Fu who gave Dan's boss Mr. Beaky twenty pairs of hands! And did I mention the magic dustbin lid?



BIRDMAN FROM BARATOGA (Smash)

It's a good job they added the bit about Baratoga – it's so easy to get these Birdmen mixed up (anyone remember Birdman from *The Mighty Heroes*?). "Captain Don Slater and his friend Birdman – the youngster who had been brought up by birds on the South Sea Island of Baratoga …" was the set up. Unlike Fishboy, Birdman hadn't found a way to super-evolve into his adopted species. Instead he had a



Crikey!



special cloak made out of bird feathers that allowed him to soar like a flying squirrel from the tops of trees, clifftops and out of sabotaged planes. He also had the Bob Dole habit of referring to himself in the third person, "Never has Birdman seen anything like this".

CHAIRMAN CHERRY (Princess Tina & Penelope)

Read a couple of girls' comics and you soon discover that the stories weren't always about wannabe dancers, riders and nurses – with a good dollop of orphans, the disinherited and vets thrown in. Spies, superheroines and time travelling adventuresses were also in abundance. And of course exciting stories about the world of Big Business. Take Chairman Cherry for instance. No, this wasn't about a girly leader of Red China. Instead "…when the president of the great firm of Hartlands died, he left everything to office-cleaner Cherry Chick. Now Cherry is CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD". It wasn't all adventures with business plans, monthly budget projections and management accounts, however. As you can guess from the company name, romance wasn't to be too far from young Cherry's mind.

And just for the record, Cherry Chick was no relation to that other Cherry businesswoman, Cherry Laing who ran a mobile chip shop in 'Cherry's Chipper' in *Judy* comic.

MY PAL ROPEY (The Beezer)

British comics have a long tradition of kids having secret pals. Kids, it seems, attract the strangest friends. And some of these pals are stranger than others. Take Ron Rodgers' aptly named ropey friend who was, literally, a bit of old rope. Blonde schoolboy Ron was the "…owner of an amazing bit of Indian faker's rope" that



does "…everything he told it to do." And as Ron explains, "so he's a mighty useful pal to have". Ropey never spoke – comics weren't that crazy – but he did coil into some pretty expressive shapes to let you know what was on his mind. Come to think of it, comics were that crazy!

CECIL THE STONE AGE SCRAPPER (The Victor)

Imagine you found a perfectly preserved 'stone-age caveman' frozen in ice. You accidentally crack the ice and, amazingly, the old geezer wakes up. What do you do? Contact the anthropology department at your local Uni? Get in touch the papers or TV to sell the story of the Incredible Iceman? Find a way to slowly introduce our ancient ancestor to the modern world? Well if your name is Pete Pringle and you're a boxing manager the answer is none of the above. You call him Cecil and set him on the road to becoming heavyweight champion of the world.



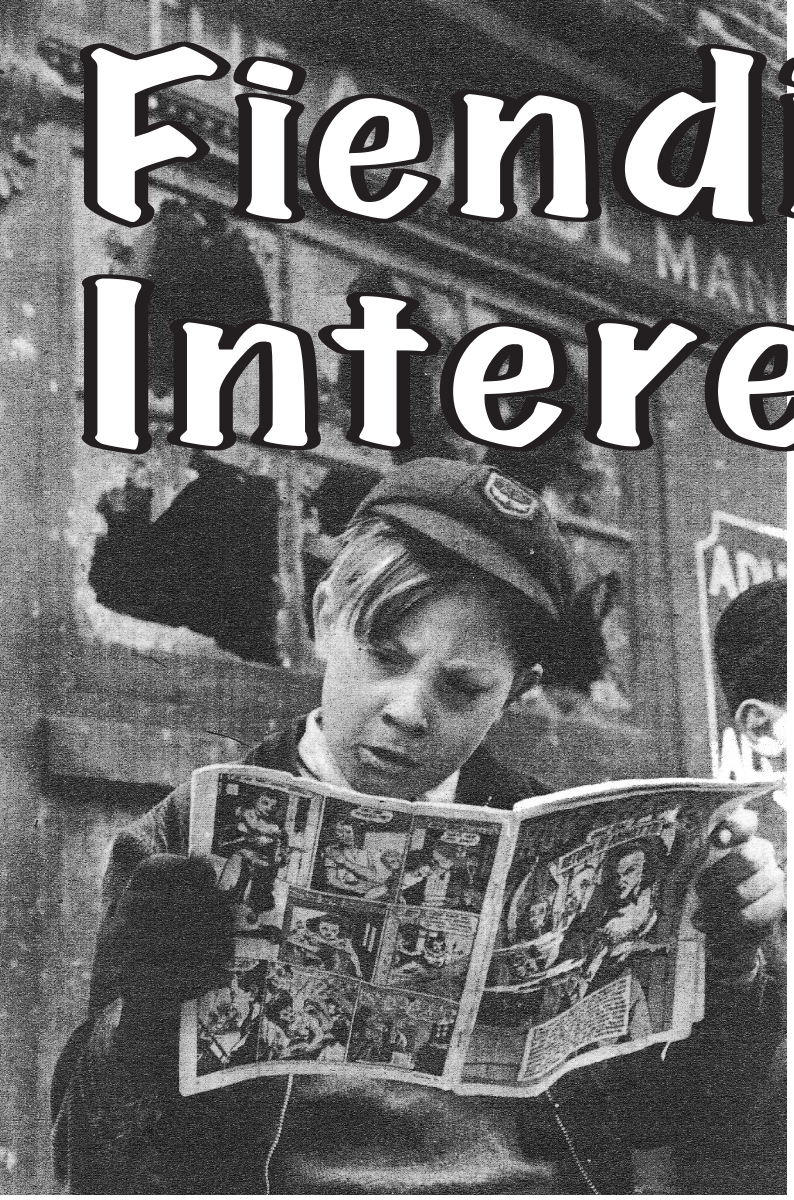


THE LIMPING MAN (The Hornet)

"During the Second World War, one of Britain's finest agents was Captain Spencer, better known as The Limping Man, because his favourite disguise was that of a cripple." Need I say more?! ■

Crikey!

Fiendishly Interesting



A Terrifying Tale of the British Horror Comic
By Bob Norton

Why do I find the black and white horror comics available here in the late '40s and early '50s so fascinating? They're gruesome, sexy, clever and damn difficult to find!! They represent the 'unacceptable face' of comics both here and in the States! Yet, although they shared the same fate in both countries – banishment - their demise was politically light years away in the UK from the Fredric Wertham inspired American campaign!!

The story of the American horror campaign has been well covered before in many books[1]. The British experience, however, has a less well-known and poorly understood history. It is this British horror campaign and the comics involved that forms the basis of this article.

The Comic Business in 1940/50's Britain

The TV series *The Long Firm*[2] showed the seedy side of '50s London life in the music business and the growth of 'soft-porn' magazines. British comics too, had their murky side and horror comics were at the forefront.

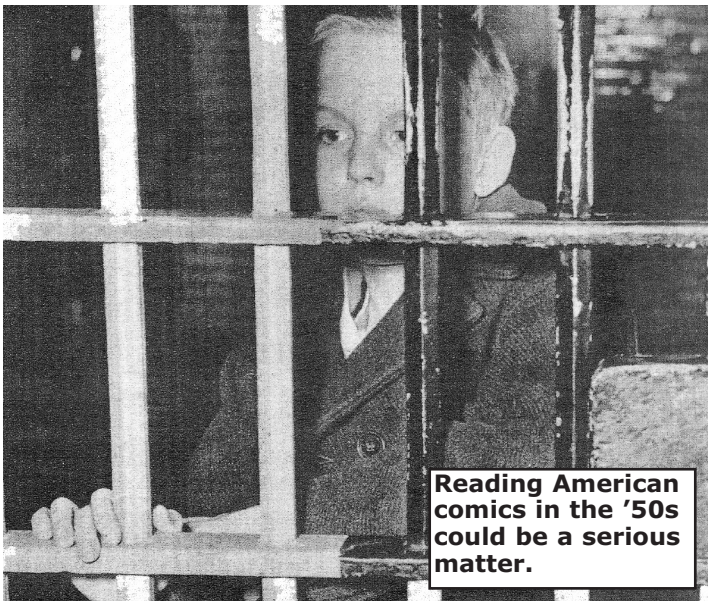
Before the Second World War American horror comics reached this country sporadically with unsold 'remainders' bought in bulk and sold in chain stores or market stalls. Some came in as packing material for other imports (which is why 'pence' stamped US comics from this period are often water-stained). Their circulation was not large, but even in 1939 George Orwell in his essay on boys' weeklies drew attention to their 'undesirable features'.

During the war American servicemen stationed over here were able to buy the comics through their canteens and Post Exchange (PX) stores while others were imported by American servicemen gathering in Britain for the D-Day landings. When they had finished them they often passed them onto local British families whose children welcomed them with open arms! After the war American publishers wanted to exploit this new market but because of import restrictions it was left to 'pirate' British publishers to spring up and take advantage of the demand from British kids by buying the rights to the US comics for £60 to £150 per issue, very little capital outlay and, therefore, well worth the risk!

Reputable UK newsagents never liked handling the more objectionable horror comics. They wanted comics that Mummy would like, (such as those produced by Hulton Press[3] from 1950 onwards - *Eagle*, *Girl*, *Robin*, and *Swift*) so most of the 'worst' comics were sold by the owners of little sweet shops and general stores in the back streets of our towns and cities as well as by street hawkers who sold them outside schools.

The 1950s British 'Horror Campaign'

Both the US and UK horror comics, especially the EC



Reading American comics in the '50s could be a serious matter.

originals and British reprints, contained cleverly constructed stories, often with a twist at the end, and with beautiful artwork by artists like Johnny Craig, Will Elder, Jack Davis and Graham Ingels. However, they also contained a large amount of gore (dismembered limbs, rotting corpses, and so on) which, although always integral to the plot and tongue in cheek, was typically presented in a fairly explicit manner. I suppose it was inevitable, therefore, that in a country where a comic was associated with good, clean fun, these comics would go down like a lead balloon with adults (kids loved 'em though!).

This adult opposition led to a campaign to have horror comics taken off the streets but the forces that brought this about in Britain were very different from those in the US. In America it was largely based on Fredric Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent*[4], whereas in the UK 'Seduction' was only published on 23 February 1955 by Museum Press, the day after the introduction of the Act that put paid to these comics over here.

Read Scare

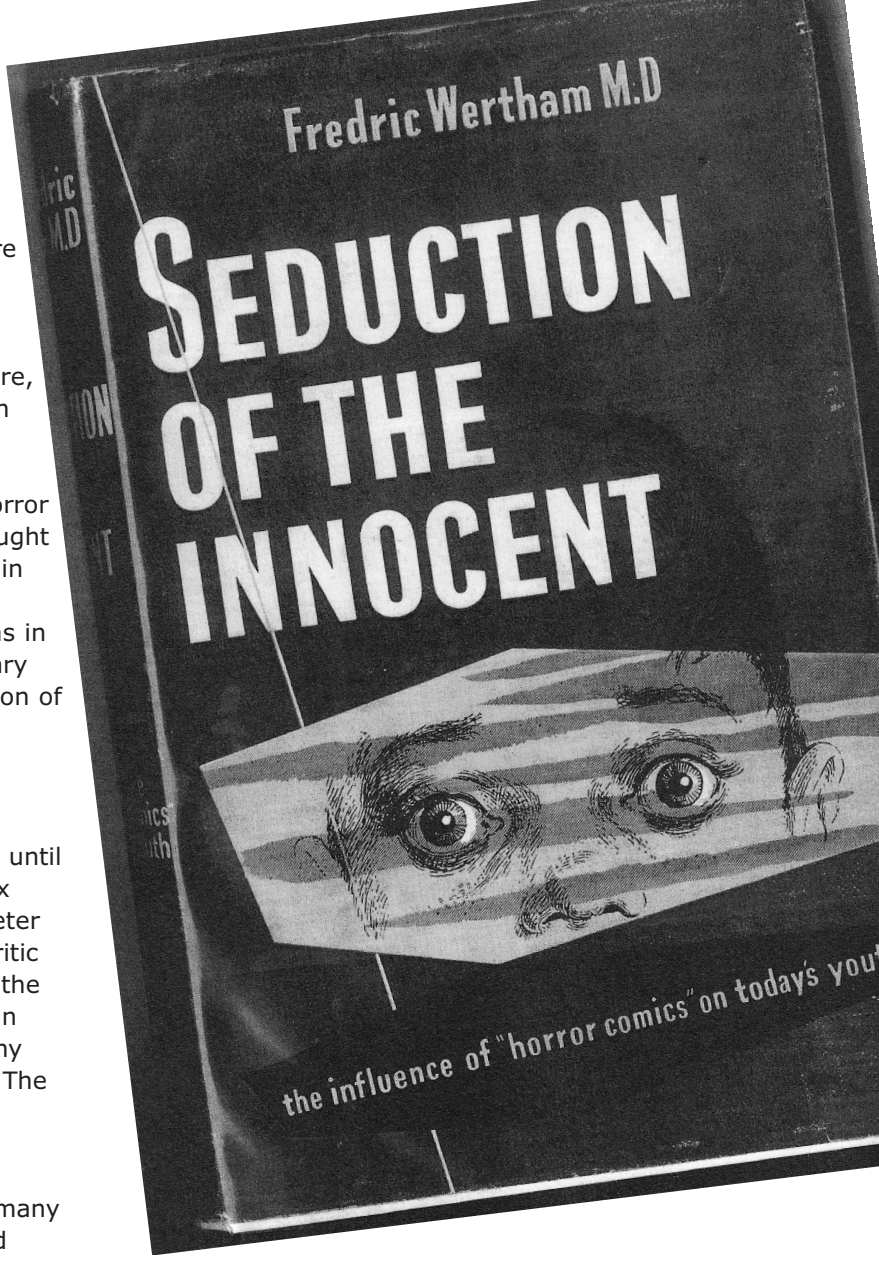
The roots of the British campaign date back to the immediate post war years but did not gather steam until 1952. George Pumphrey[5], a headmaster at a Sussex junior school was an early and vocal campaigner. Peter Mauger, a history teacher was another outspoken critic of the 'American comics'. Mauger was a member of the British Communist Party (BCP) which was running an anti-American campaign under the agenda that many aspects of British culture were being Americanised. The BCP condemned all American culture and Mauger in particular condemned American comics.

The involvement of the BCP goes some way to explaining why the thrust of the campaign was for many years against 'American comics'. As newspapers and other independent groups such as the NUT[6] became more involved, the whole campaign became narrower in its attack and was then aimed almost solely at horror and crime comics and the headline switched from 'American' to 'horror'.

Contrast the situation here with the US campaign where Wertham's book was pivotal. The Government shared his personal views but it was arguable that they had fears of their own brought about by the statistics highlighted in their research reports. The rapid boom in US horror comics and, in particular adults reading them, was alarming from a political point of view. Many comics in the EC line had forthright political themes and were sometimes anti-McCarthyite (Senator McCarthy was the man who led the witch-hunt against so-called 'Communist sympathisers' in a series of Senate hearings in the early 1950s).

So the UK and US campaigns were totally different in nature, indeed, at odds with one another in political terms. Alas the results were the same – the comics were banned!

In late 1954 the situation in Britain made it impossible for action not to be taken: the Home Secretary, Major Lloyd-George had received a draft proposal from the



Comics Campaign Council and the NUT had whipped up the House of Commons. The result was the publication of the *Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Bill* on 11 February 1955 which eventually became law as the 1955 Act of the same name.

UK Horror Comics and Publishers

In the US, the comics in the frontline of their campaign were the EC threesome of *The Vault of Horror*, *The Crypt of Terror* and *The Haunt of Fear*. Other minor US publishers such as Story Inc. who published comics such as Mysterious Adventures, were also involved but these fell far short of Will Gaines's high standards at EC and tended to trade humour for nastiness.

In Britain, different comics were involved in the campaign, although some shared the same names as their US counterparts. The most famous of the comics featured in the British campaign were the horror comics produced by EC comics in the US and reprinted by the Arnold Book Co. (such as *Tales from The Crypt* and *The Haunt of Fear*. Although aimed primarily at these British black and white editions of US comics, the campaign was also aimed at original British comics (such as *Bat Magazine* No. 2 published by Cartoon Art in Glasgow), and, to a lesser extent, original US titles which were thin

The British titles listed below (which played a key role in the campaign), were mentioned in newspapers, various speeches, magazine articles, an NUT filmstrip and various House of Commons Reports. They are taken mainly from those listed in the bibliography in Martin Barker's book *Haunt of Fears*[8] but I have extended the list to cover not only the comics but also other comics which, I feel, fall within the remit of a full collection.

Bat Magazine #1-3 (Cartoon Art)
Battle Action #5 (Atlas)
Black Magic #1-16 (Arnold)
Black Magic Album #1 (Arnold)
Crime Detective #1 (Streamline),
Crime Exposed #10 (Marvel)
Crimes by Women #1 (Fox)
CrimeSuspenseStories #20 (EC)
Down With Crime #1-6 (Miller)
Eerie #1 & 2 (Thorpe & Porter)
Ghostly Weird Stories #1 (Arnold)
Guns of Fact & Fiction #1 (Streamline)
Haunt of Fear #1 (Arnold)
Manhunt #1-4 (Streamline)
Monster of Frankenstein #1-5 (Arnold)
Planet Comics #1-5 (Locker)
Spellbound #1 (Cartoon Art)
Startling Terror Tales #1 (Arnold)
Tales from The Crypt #1 & 2 (Arnold)
True Crime #2 (Magazine Village)
True Police #1 (Cartoon Art)
Vault of Horror #1 (Arnold)
Voodoo #1 (Harvey)
Women Outlaws #7 (Fox).



Scarcity: surely comic collecting has to have high peaks to scale! – modern comics are firmly stuck in the lowlands in terms of availability - even 1960s American comics are relatively easy to find in this country now! But a multi–millionaire couldn't buy a full set of British 1950s Horror comics 'off the peg' as some of these comics are seriously scarce! Indeed some are truly rare, even Martin Barker couldn't locate copies of them all for his book and Vault of Horror #1 (Arnold) might not even exist at all as it was probably pulped prior to publication to avoid further trouble after an MP waved it in the Commons during a debate on horror comics!

Prices: difficult! The simple rule is if you see one for sale buy it! My experience is that comics can be picked up for as little as £1, or up to £30 for a single comic. Vault of Horror might fetch £500 if one were found! Will they appreciate in value? I'd say definitely! Although there is a much smaller fan base (hopefully larger after this article!) all the key elements are present: scarcity, great artwork, inventive stories and definitely NOT politically correct.

Related Collectables: there is a long list - from magazines like Picture Post;9 two issues of which printed articles about horror comics, the NUT filmstrip, *Seduction of the Innocent*, Barker's book, Pumphrey's works and the Clarke and Higgs cover book[10].

Happy hunting! ■



The main British 'pirate' publishers were:

i) The Arnold Book Company who published some of the most notorious of the comics in the British campaign as can be seen from the alphabetical list of comics on the facing page.

Arnold were connected to Thorpe & Porter and were probably a covert subsidiary set up to keep T&P away from bad publicity.

ii) L. Miller - passing of the 1955 Act led to ruination for publishers in Britain such as Miller, who unlike EC in the US, did not have second successful second string comics such as *Mad* to fall back on.

The only known case under the 1955 Act was against L. Miller & Co., the firm was found guilty and fined £250. Florrie Miller, the elderly wife of the late Len Miller, put the company into voluntary liquidation in the wake of the trial[7].

iii) Thorpe & Porter – publishers of the British titles 'Eerie' and 'Weird'.

iv) Cartoon Art – an interesting Scottish publisher whose comic *The Bat* ran to three issues and was, I think, the best original British horror comic of the '50s.



Notes and references

1. Tales from the Crypt - Digby Diehl published by St. Martin's Press 1996 gives a good account of the US horror campaign.
2. The Long Firm by Jake Arnott was originally a book before being adapted for BBC2.
3. Hulton Press were among other mainstream publishers (such as Gilberton & Co. who published Classics Illustrated) to escape censure.
4. Seduction of the Innocent by Fredric Wertham – this book was the main early driver of the US campaign.
5. George Pumphrey published many books related to the campaign eg. 'Children's Comics' in 1955.
6. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) issued a filmstrip in 1954 which featured several of the comics listed in this article.
7. This info comes from the book Gothic Horror in an excellent article by Steve Holland on p.277 entitled 'On Horror and Censorship'.
8. Martin Barker's book Haunt of Fears was published by Pluto Press in1984.
9. Picture Post – the two articles on horror comics were in the 17 May 1952 and 20 November 1954 issues.
10. Phil Clarke and Mike Higgs's great book Nostalgia About Comics (Pegasus 1991) contains all three Bat comics as well as many others from the early '50s.

on the ground due to import restrictions (such as *CrimeSuspenseStories* No. 20).

Simply The Best

Like all good things these comics had to end but what a fertile field they've left for collectors! Modern comics, underpinned as they are by big business, have arguably lost the 'edge' that even 1960s comics had! But 1950s British horror/crime comics on the other hand are peerless.

I'm not going into the morality of these comics, which I personally don't think should have been banned, but it was the first pop culture issue to affect British children after WWII. This has been seen again and again since the '50s with horror videos and more recently 'violent' computer games – but horror/crime comics were there first and as such have a key place in the social history of post-war Britain and, more importantly to me, they're the best British comics both to collect and read! ■

Crikey!

My Comicy Saturday

by Brian M Clarke


BLEEP!
BLEEP!
LATEST ROCKET TECHNOLOGY
CLANG!
BLEEP!
BLEEP!
BLEEP

As I say, it was unlikely to have been my actual first comic but for some reason it's the first one I can truly remember reading and I have a feeling I know why. Unlike nearly all the weekly comics I was exposed to, Casper was in full colour and in the compact American format. Two physical traits that impacted greatly on my formative reading experience.



After that, things become a bit of a blur for a year or so as far as comics go. I know that just after my ghostly experience with Casper and friends the family moved to England (my Dad had been sent to Ireland at the start of the war and was now coming back, looking for better paid work). We lived at a couple of short-stay places before settling into Baltimore Street in Newton Heath, Manchester. One of the memories I have from staying at one of the short-stay flats was reading a *Beano Annual*.

I can remember Biffo on the cover, about to crash a model plane into a basin of water (1956 edition). Funny the things that stick in a sick mind, eh.

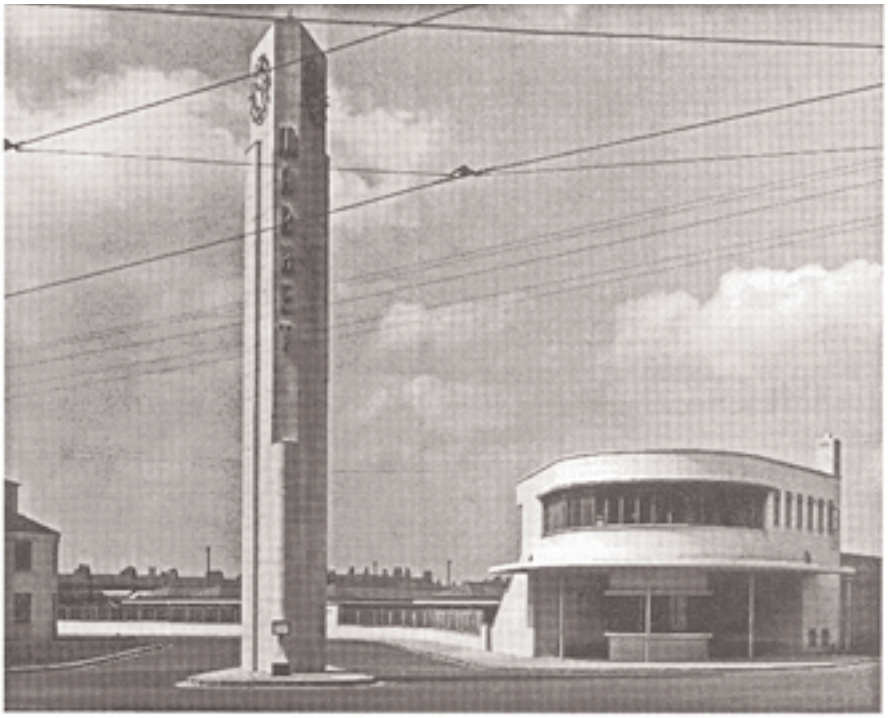
So we moved house and settled into our new neighbourhood. Strangely enough (but not all that strange to someone like you, dear reader), I can still remember where all the paper shops were. Even then, when I was six or seven, I knew that some papershops were good ones and some bad, my sole criteria for measuring their value being based on the range of comics they stocked. This would have been the time when I became a regular reader of *Beano* and *Dandy*. Occasionally I may have picked up the recently launched *Beezer* or *Topper* but in the main I stuck with the smaller comics.

I was already becoming a discerning reader and instinctively knew that comic titles had their own feel and for that reason always saw *Dandy* as second best to *Beano* and *Topper* second best to *Beezer*. The *Beano* always felt more accessible. More working class, I suppose. Was there a bias to public schools and suchlike in *Dandy*? (I know the *Beano* had Lord Snooty and his Pals but there might be an article there. I'll get reading.)

The *Beano* sucked me into my first science fiction serial – something about giant insects menacing England and a schoolboy with a peculiar habit and the ability to drive the giant bugs away whenever he appeared. His peculiarity was his keenness to make his own hair cream – perhaps a nod to the then Teddy Boy craze of using creams to create peaks and waves on their 'D.A.'. I learnt this fact about our hero in the first episode and every so often when there was a pause in the attack of a giant earwig against the school or ants overturning buses in the High Street, he would relax by brewing up another batch of his excellent hair cream.

It will come as no surprise to sophisticated minds to learn that it was the hair cream itself that drove away the bugs but to my youthful eye it was a startling revelation. I remember well reading the last episode, when the link is made and the army begins to use the formula for the hair cream to corner and defeat the insect hordes. I tried to explain to mum what had happened over the past 26 weeks or so and why this was such a momentous day. She listened but I doubt she had any idea what I was jabbering on about.

It was also for a science fiction strip that I fondly remember the *Beezer*. For 26 weeks or so the back page carried the on-going story of 'The Metal Eaters', giant spherical sponges from space that absorbed any metal they came into contact with. They started off no larger than a bath sponge but each time they absorbed metal they grew larger. As the story continued, the Metal Eaters grew to monstrous proportions and humanity appeared doomed.



The suitably SF-looking market I went to three or four times a week during the '60s.

Whereas my giant insect story hinted at the world of colour through its use of a red spot colour, my sinister sponges were in full colour. And they looked great! Okay, they were 'only' spheres of pink sponges (a post-war innovation for bath-time and mainly a middle class one, I think) but they looked brilliant on the page with their pitted surface and emotionless presence. My main memory from the story is of the hero trapped high above the ground in a helicopter (another recent invention) with sponges eating away at its metal. Brrr.

By this time I was firmly into the world of comics and like a 'Paper Eater' devoured as many as I could. Like most kids, I bought a couple of comics a week and either swapped or was given comics by friends and neighbours. Comics, it seemed then, were everywhere. No matter where you went, a small pile of comics had accumulated. All those places you went to as a child; dentist, doctor, barber, etc. would have their reassuring stack of adventure and laughter just for the reading. If you were a kid in the '50s and '60s you couldn't avoid being exposed to comics.



One of my local Cinemas - where I fell in love with the matinee shows and their mixture of cartoons, films and serials. Just like a comic.

Back to my story. At that time I was still a DC Thomson lad – and firmly attached to the funny papers rather than the new style older comics such as *Victor*, *Hornet* or *Hotspur*. And IPC/Fleetway comics such as *Lion* and *Tiger* were still a bit off in my future.

I was one of the few kids who didn't mind rainy playtimes at school, especially the longer dinner times. Games, toys and, more importantly, books and comics, would miraculously appear from cupboards and we would dip in and out of activities to our heart's content. Every classroom appeared to have stacks of annuals, summer specials and comics and I read every one I could get my hands on. As did everyone. All my friends read comics and knew the characters. It was just part of growing up.

But by the age of eight I was changing. For a start, I had decided to become an astronaut when I grew up and my love of 'space' was taking me over. (I simply assumed that by the time I was trained and ready for space travel Britain would have its own space programme. And besides, I had already started to build by own spaceship having been inspired by the adventures of 'Bleep and Booster' on *Blue Peter*.)

I watched 'space' on the telly, read about it from library books, played at it with friends (I was Steve Zodiac or Commander Dart whilst a friend of mine was always, inexplicably, Zoonie the Lazoon from *Fireball XL5*) and read about it in comics and annuals. You didn't have to look far before you found the Final Frontier in those days.



It was space, therefore, that brought me to TV Comic where I could get a weekly update on the continuing adventures of *Dr. Who*. By now I was crazy about the early Gerry Anderson shows and similar series such as Roberta Leigh's *Space Patrol* and *TV Comic* was a natural for me. Not only was it good to read but it looked different, too. It was printed on shiny paper, with lots of full colour and didn't fall apart so readily after multiple readings or swaps. Truly a comic for the Space Age.

Crikey!





The only drawback with *TV Comic* and related annuals such as *Supercar*, *Fireball XL5* and so on, was their cost. With most annuals being around 7/6 (38p), these other annuals came in at a whopping 9/6 (48p), 10/6 (53p) or even 11/6 (58p)! They may have sold well in richer parts of the country but they were not big sellers where I grew up. *Fireball XL5* annuals and *Supercar* adventure books rarely showed up in our swap piles.

When I was eight or nine, we moved again and I found myself living in Salford, just outside Manchester, where I would stay until my late teens. This is where my love of comics really took off and I crossed the line from reader to collector. Somewhere around the time we moved I received the greatest gift a comic nut can ever receive – a bike! Suddenly, the number of paper shops I could visit doubled, tripled – quadrupled! Instead of being held to the handful of papershops around 'our way', I could speed along roads and streets of the local area and easily visit twenty shops or so a week – plus market stalls and secondhand book shops for older, and cheaper, back issues. Heaven!

Saturday had now become my Comic Day – especially now that my parents were having the papers delivered and I was told I could add a comic or two to the bill. What began as a great luxury for me soon turned out to have hidden problems, however, as I couldn't keep to any one title for very long. I was (or so it seems) constantly asking my mum to change the comic on order, a task she obviously hated. I had started off quite well with the *Beano* (which I think was delivered on a Thursday) and possibly *Victor* on a Saturday. Then I fell in love with *Valiant* (still one of my favourites) and had the *Victor* replaced. A short while later I was hooked on Gerry Anderson shows and couldn't resist *TV21* – so another swap was made. This time I think the *Beano* was replaced.

This meant that my Saturdays (see how I've cleverly arrived at the point of this article!) would begin with my mum dropping two comics on to my bed and telling me to wake up. Well, with the adventures of 'Kelly's Eye', 'Fireball XL5', 'Steel Claw' and a host of other SF-influenced heroes awaiting me, sleep was the last thing on my mind. (The *Valiant* has a lot to answer for in my childhood. I remember being told off – i.e. almost murdered – for painting one of my best gloves white and drawing rivets on it. Mum wasn't too impressed with the explanation that it was my very own Steel Claw.)

Back to the comics. I still have fond memories of being lay in bed, chin on my hands, leaning over the edge to read my comics on the rug. This was the perfect reading position for me and worked for most comics. I say most because Reading Position Number One remained a problem for the over-sized *TV21*. No matter how I tried to place the comic on the rug, it was impossible to read a whole double-page spread without having to stop at some point and move the comic! The whole matter was made worst with the strips that bled across both pages, the design of which forced me to change position every couple of panels. The things a comic reader has to put up with!



Like all adults, you think back to those days and recall how many comics and annuals you read a week and wonder where you found the time. They were great times for reading comics and I'm so pleased that I was born at just the right time to catch British comics at their zenith and so universal in distribution and availability.

It wasn't long after this that I came across American comics and – even more importantly – other comic collectors. Not readers. Collectors! But that, as they say, is another story… ■

Me and my chums battling for the latest comics at the local comic shop!

Crikey!

The Crikey! chat

Ken Reid



Interviewed by David Britton

This interview took place in the artist's home in Pendlebury, Manchester – the home of Fudge and a host of other characters – in the summer of 1979, eight years before his death in March 1987. His mother, Mrs Reid, was present.

Ken Reid enjoyed a career as a children's illustrator for more than forty years.

The variety of comic book characters he created for Fleetway, IPC and DC Thomson have had as much effect on successive generations as the *Goons* in the ’50s, and *Monty Python* in the ’60s.

His most unique creation, the serialised strip adventures of *Fudge the Elf* was begun, ‘with artistic promise’, in 1937, in the Manchester Evening News, but did not reach maturity until Ken Reid's return from the Army in 1945.

Unfortunately, the strip was not syndicated and its readership remained largely in the North West of England.

In Fudge, Ken Reid created that unique kind of fantasy dream world that appeals both to adults and children, common to classics like Carroll's Alice, Barrie's Peter Pan or Tolkien's Rings.

In the comic strip format it is only matched in its consistent excellence and strangeness by Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo*.

David Britton: How did you first conceive the idea of Fudge?

Ken Reid: I originally thought of a strip with a budgerigar called "Budge"—"The Adventures of Budge"—but I just could not get the drawings right, so I thought I would introduce an elf with him, a form of semi-human character. I then had to think of a name for the elf that rhymed with "Budge". I went all through the alphabet until I came to "F"—"Fudge"—which sounded right. It was also the name of a toffee—fudge toffee—and, I found out later, it was also a newspaper term for a stop



Ken’s over-the-top visual style made Frankiestein in *Wham!* an instant hit.

press item: "Stop the press there's a fudge coming through!"

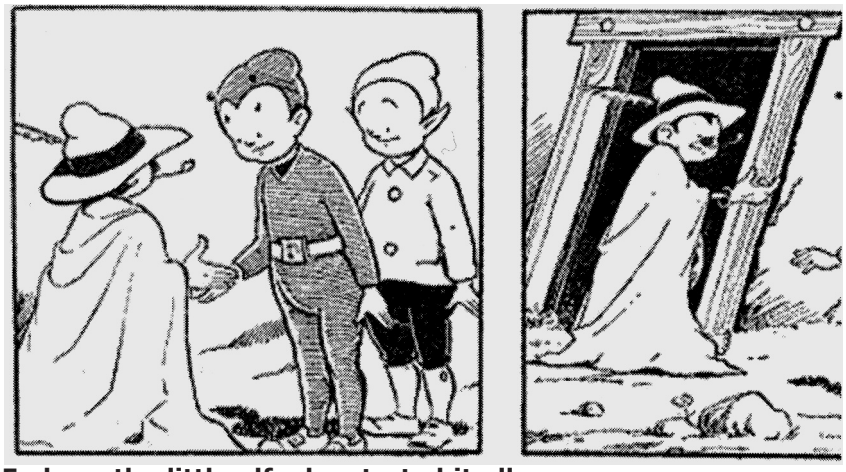
The drawings of Fudge were very different when I first began his adventures in 1938. He was smaller and rounder, not much bigger than the animals in the strip, and he grew up gradually over the years without me realising it. I started Fudge the Elf in late 1938 when I was seventeen, and he had not run for twelve months in the Manchester Evening News, my local paper, when war broke out.



DB: This seems an appropriate moment to ask you how you managed to interest the News in the Fudge strip?

Mrs Reid: When Ken was sixteen and seventeen years of age he used to go round the Manchester art studios with his folio of drawings trying to interest people sufficiently to obtain commissions. But work was very hard to come by in those days and Ken was getting despondent. It was always the same tale that he received, "We will let you know", but nothing ever came of it.

It was Ken's father who suggested that he try the News. But Ken was very dubious about doing this. The two of them did eventually go to the News building, which was then in Cross Street. They were stopped at the entrance by the commissionaire who asked if they had an appointment, to which Ken's father quickly replied that they had an appointment to see the Art Editor – who turned out to be a Mr Barton.



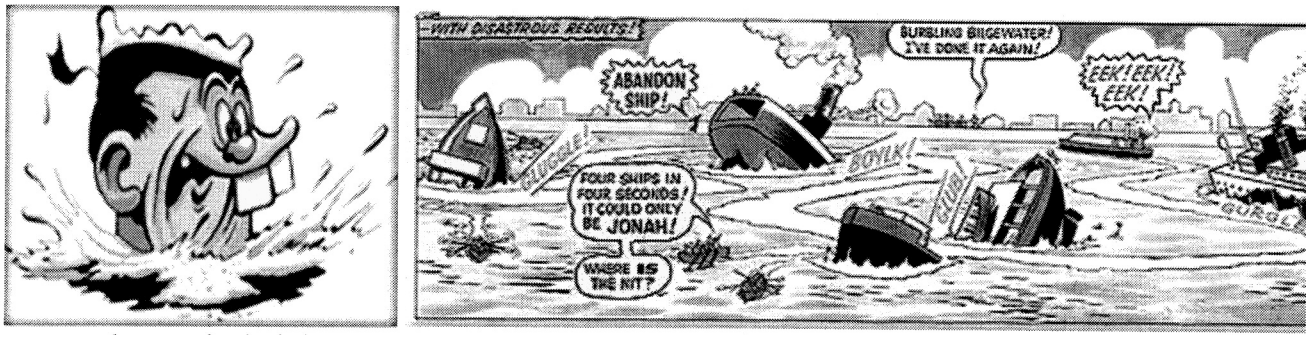
Fudge - the little elf who started it all.

Well, Mr Barton was very good. He looked through Ken's folio and was impressed. By a coincidence, he said, the News had been looking for an artist to do a children's strip. He told Ken that if he would like to submit a sample drawing his work would be considered, although he warned Ken that he could expect some very stiff competition from other artists. The strip had to have a story line, and up until that time Ken had only done artwork. He sent them the example he had promised and thought that that would be the end of it. There was nobody more surprised than him when he got word that the job was his if he wanted it!

KR: I remember before I started work on Fudge I took a small, rented room behind a shop in Water Street in central Manchester. The rent was 7/6d a week, and I converted the room into a studio. I used to travel to this one room every day on my bicycle from Irlam-o'th-Height where I lived at that time. (About a 40-minute ride – ed.)

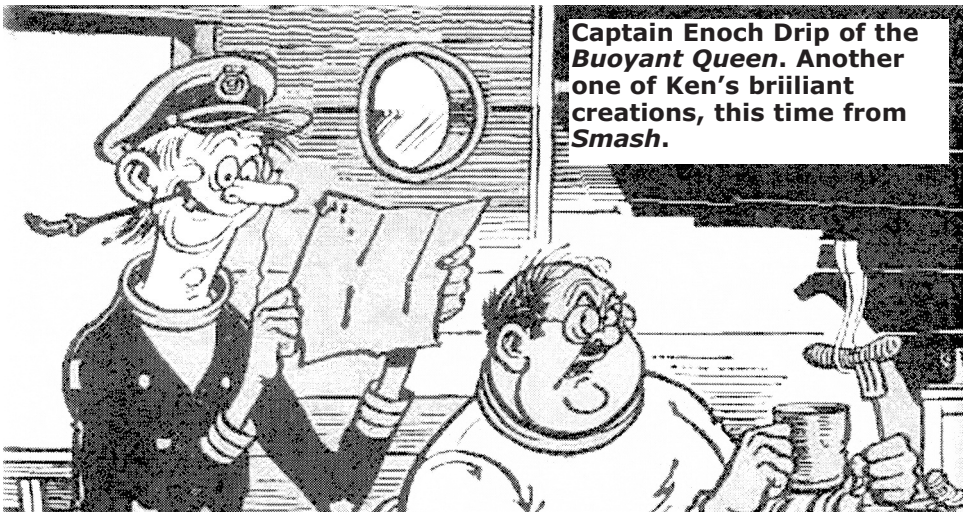


It was a handy place to try and build up a business in. There was a photographer's on the floor above and when they needed artwork with life in it they used to send it down for me to draw. When I started Fudge I no longer needed the office; I could do the work more easily from home. The whole building on Water Street was blown up during the war.



Jonah made his first appearance in *Beano* 817 (15 March 1958). He brought bad luck to everyone - except Ken, that is!

Crikey!



Captain Enoch Drip of the *Buoyant Queen*. Another one of Ken's briiliant creations, this time from *Smash*.

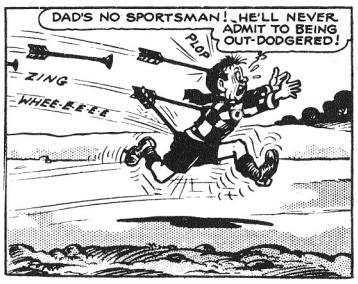
DB: Did you have a formal art education?

KR: I was granted a free scholarship to Salford Art School when I was thirteen. I suspect that if I had gone in for the full scholarship, with all the different subjects, I would have failed hopelessly, so I just did the art part and they passed me on that. Later, after the war, I attended Manchester Art College in the evenings.

Mrs Reid: Ken was always drawing, even as a very small boy. In fact Ken had a very serious illness when he was nine. We had returned from a holiday and Ken had been in the sea, which was very cold, and he became very, very ill. He complained of pains in the back and side. We called the doctor to him, who in turn called a specialist, and they both diagnosed that he had a tubercular hip, and that he would never walk again. They assured me that I would have to wheel Ken around in a spinal carriage for the rest of his life.



He was confined to bed for six months, after which his father consulted another doctor, a Doctor Glen of Eccles. Dr Glen worked very hard on Ken, who managed a very good recovery, but it took a very long time. All through his illness Ken continued drawing. His drawing pad was never far from his bed. Ken's father always gave him great encouragement, and was very pleased that Fudge was proving to be such a hit with readers of the News. (Ken Reid's father acted as his agent until his death in 1953 – DB.)



DB: How did the character of Speck come about? The Fudge stories in the newspaper always feature Speck very prominently and at times it seems that he is the dominant character.

KR: Speck was the adventurous one. Speck usually got them both in a mess. Speck was not in the strip when it first started. The strip had been running for about six weeks as a series, three-picture stories each night. The News then asked me if I could convert it into a serial, to encourage readers to buy the paper on consecutive nights to find out what would happen next to Fudge. It was then that I introduced Speck, so that Fudge would have someone to talk to.

Most of the plots that went into the storyline have their basis in everyday things. I think that you have a photograph of me looking at a tank of tropical fish (in the frontis-photo of Savoy's edition of *Fudge in Bubbleville* – DB), from which came the idea of an underwater adventure for Fudge.

DB: Speck featured prominently in the first strip that you did after the war. I always felt *Speck's Inventions* contained some of your finest artwork, and it was a great pity you didn't do this one as a book as you did with *Fudge in Bubbleville* and the others. Any particular reason why not?

KR: *Speck's Inventions* was probably the longest Fudge story that I did. It ran for almost twelve months in the News, and it would have been impractical to reduce it down to the same size as the annuals that London University Press did. All the Fudge annuals had to be edited down from their original published length in the newspapers.

DB: In what order were the original Fudge books released?



KR: The first book, *The Adventures of Fudge*, was done only as a book, written especially for the publisher, and not as a reprint from the News. It differed from the other books because it was largely text, with illustrations laid-out amongst the print.

The second book, *Frolics with Fudge* which was first published in the News, set the format for the rest of the books. *Fudge's Trip to the Moon* was the third, also first published by the News. (As were all the later titles – DB)

I remember I had to redraw certain illustrations for this book, for quite a few of the original frames had been lost. I drew the replacements while still in the Army, stationed at Bristol. I had to stop behind at night and work on the book while the rest of the men went out after duties. This is why some readers may detect a difference in style around the middle of the book.



DB: Which Fudge stories do you personally enjoy most?

KR: *Fudge and the Dragon* I particularly like, and I enjoyed doing Fudge and the Old Well, which only appeared as a newspaper strip.

DB: I recall you once told me that *Fudge and the Flame Fairies* contained some of your finest artwork, and that the original artwork for the whole story disappeared under mysterious circumstances that we shall not go into here.

KR: Yes. The editor of the News, Thomas Henry, also liked that one the best. Anything that was capable of producing flame, or even an electric spark anything that produced fire in any form—went on strike. Absolutely everything went dead – car engines fizzled out because no spark could be generated in the spark plugs, candles could not be made to burn. That was how the story began, and Fudge was given the job of finding out what the unrest was about – and to try to put matters right.

As I remember it was a very long strip, and now the original artwork is lost.



DB: Did you find that ideas came easier to you when you were working on the Fudge strips?

KR: It was easier then than it is now to come by ideas. Fudge was easier because once I got the general theme for the story, the skeleton of the plot, then I just added to it as I went along. Also, I did not have such a strict deadline. I had plenty of time to think.

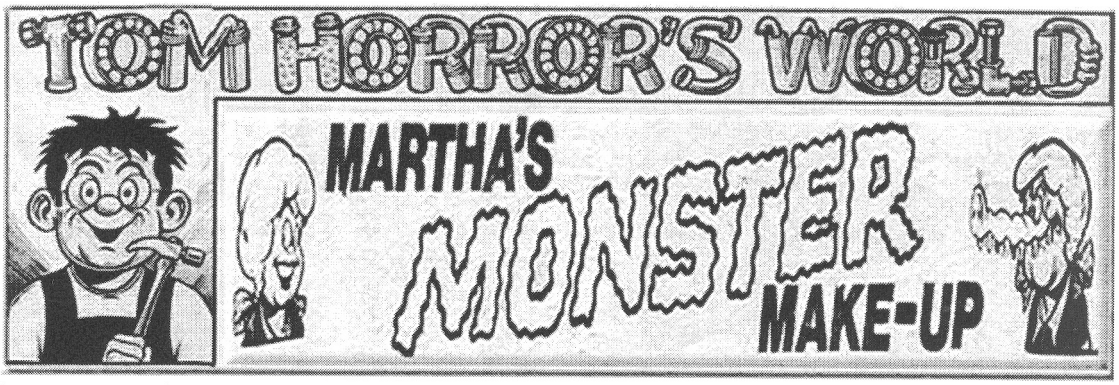
Later, in the 1950s, when I started doing strips for D C Thomson, time became more important. I used to work through the day until 1pm, then come downstairs and watch television until midnight. There was no ITV, just the one channel. Then I would start again at twelve and work through until 3 am.

DB: Who were your influences? Did Arthur Rackham, Heath Robinson, and the book illustrators of the turn-of-the-century have any influence?

KR: I remember Heath Robinson. But one of my earlier influences was Walt Disney, Snow White, etc. If you have noticed the cap that Fudge wears you will have noticed the similarity to Mickey Mouse's face. Fudge also had a Mickey Mouse figure in the very first drawings I did of him.



Ken felt increasingly under pressure with his comic book work.



DB: Did the films of Max Fleischer make any impression on you? *Gulliver's Travels*, the Betty Boop cartoons? Mike Moorcock drew parallels between Fleischer's work and some of the characters in *Fudge and the Dragon*.

KR: No, I don't think so, although I do remember them. I feel that Disney was the main influence.

DB: How did you get involved with the children's comics?

KR: I first started doing children's comics as such with *Comic Cuts* in the late 1940s. I remember one called Super Sam, and Foxy was another. Super Sam was on the front page. Both these strips were running when *Comic Cuts* folded.

I then approached Odham's Press who were doing the *Eagle*. I started negotiating with them for a strip I had done in full colour called Zooville. I had completed two pages of this, for which I was paid, when D C Thomson's came up with a more definite offer, which I accepted. What I didn't know at the time was that Odham's Press and the *Eagle* paid nearly double what D C Thomson could pay me. Anyway, I went with D C Thomson's and have been doing children's comics ever since. At Thomson's, Roger the Dodger was the first strip I worked on. Then Grandpa, which is still going, although another artist now does the strip. Angel Face was another, which I did for *The Dandy*. Bing-Bang-Benny, a little cowboy, also appeared in *The Dandy*. Ali Ha Ha and the Forty Thieves, Big Head and Thick Head, followed later.

In 1958 I began Jonah, which is the comic strip I am probably best known for. When I went over to Odham's I did the strips Frankie Stein, Jasper the Grasper, Queen of the Seas, and quite a few more.

DB: It must have been hectic …

KR: At one stage, in the late fifties, it certainly was. *Fudge the Elf* took three days. Two days on Jonah, and



Just a sample of the great facial expressions conjured up by Ken Reid during a lifetime in comics.

What follows is a reasonable attempt at a list of characters and strips worked on by Ken Reid. The list is complied from Ken's own recollections when interviewed by Dave and later research.

Some strips are not assigned to individual titles. If you can help, drop us a line at the electro-web-thingy.

In cases where characters were transferred or reprinted in another title, we have listed only the original comic (otherwise it can get very confusing).

Ali Ha-Ha and the Forty Thieves (Dandy)
Banger and Masher (Scorcher)
Big Head and Thick Head (Dandy)
Bing-Bang Benny (Dandy)
Creepy Creations (competition in Whoopee)
Dare A Day Davy (Wham!)
Faceache (Jet, Buster)
Football Forum (Scorcher)
Foxy (Comic Cuts)
Frankie Stein (Wham!)
George's Germs (Wham!)
Grandpa (Beano)
Harry Hammertoe (?)
Hugh Fowler (Scorcher)
Jasper the Grasper (Wham!)
Jimmy Jinks (Scorcher)
Jinx (Beano)
Jonah (Beano)
Little Angel Face (Dandy)
(The) Nerves (Smash and Pow)
Manager Matt (Scorcher)
Martha's Monster Make-up (Monster Fun)
Prize Picture (competition in Whoopee)
Queen of the Seas (Smash)
Roger the Dodger (Beano)
(The) Soccernauts (Scorcher and Score)
(The) Sub (Scorcher)
Tom Horror's World (Whoopee)
Triptoe Triers (?)
Wanted (competition in Whoopee)
World Wide Weirdies (competition in Whoopee)

Plus

Horse Clues, Horse Pics, Titles, Inn Signs and numerous others (The Sunday Express).



other work for both *The Dandy* and The Beano (Big Head & Thick Head; Ali Ha-Ha, and the 40 Thieves – DB) and amongst other work I was doing a competition page for the Irish edition of *The Sunday Express*.

DB: Could you tell me why the Fudge strip was discontinued in the News?

KR: The strip was finished in 1962. I had been ill, which was reported at the time in the News, and while I recovered they reprinted one of the earlier strips.

But the main reason I gave up the strip was because of an offer I had received from Odhams. The Odham editors had been up from London to see me and had made an extremely good offer to work exclusively for their journals. You see I had been doing children's comic strips for Odham's main rival, D C Thomson, since the early 1950s. I dropped the Fudge strips and gave up the work I was doing for D C Thomson.

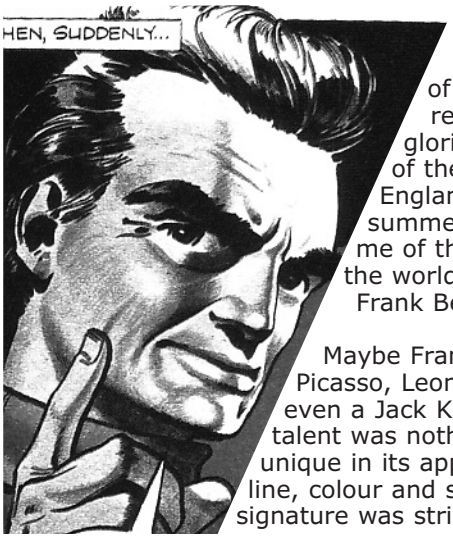
When I first began the Fudge strips I was paid 2 guineas a week—that was in 1938/39. After the war I re-started the strip at 5 guineas. It crept up gradually to 18 guineas by the time I finished. Odham's were offering me £30 per page—(twelve pictures)—against D C Thomson's £15 per page. Anybody would have changed over! ■

Special thanks to Dave Britton for permission to use this interview. Visit Savoy Books website for more on Fudge and other publications from Dave.



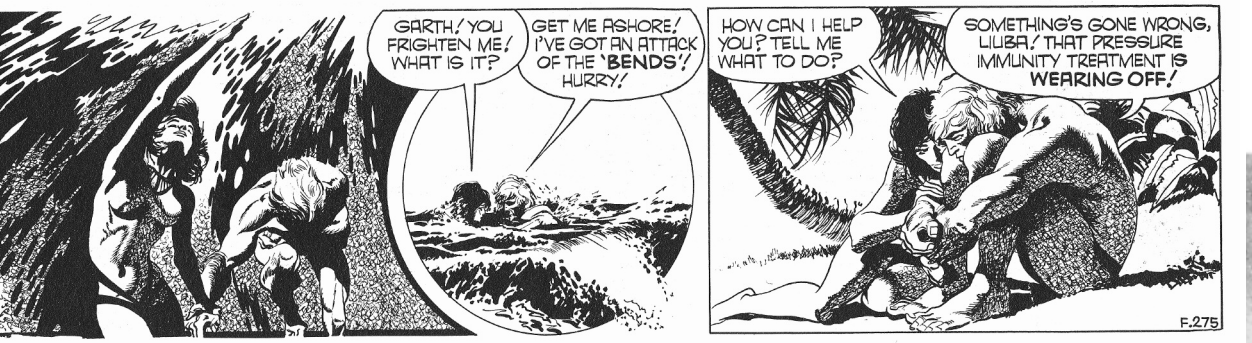
This is the first of what will be another regular slot in Crikey! *We each have a personal real-life comic hero, an artist, writer – or if you're really geeky, an editor or letterer – who transformed the way you enjoyed comics. This is the slot for you to let the world know who it was who set you along the road from average comic reader to comic strip nut. We start off with* **Glenn B Fleming***'s recollections of the great …*

FRANK BELLAMY



While the summer of 1976 is usually remembered for its glorious weather – one of the hottest in England's history – that summer will always remind me of the passing of one of the world's great artists: Frank Bellamy.

Maybe Frank wasn't Pablo Picasso, Leonardo da Vinci or even a Jack Kirby, but Frank's talent was nothing if not unique; unique in its approach to layout, line, colour and storytelling. Even his signature was striking. Bellamy, of course, will be forever remembered as the quintessential 'Thunderbirds' artist whose beautiful full colour work was seen in the pages of 1960s TV Century 21 - but his story didn't begin or even end with that strip.



A bit of background

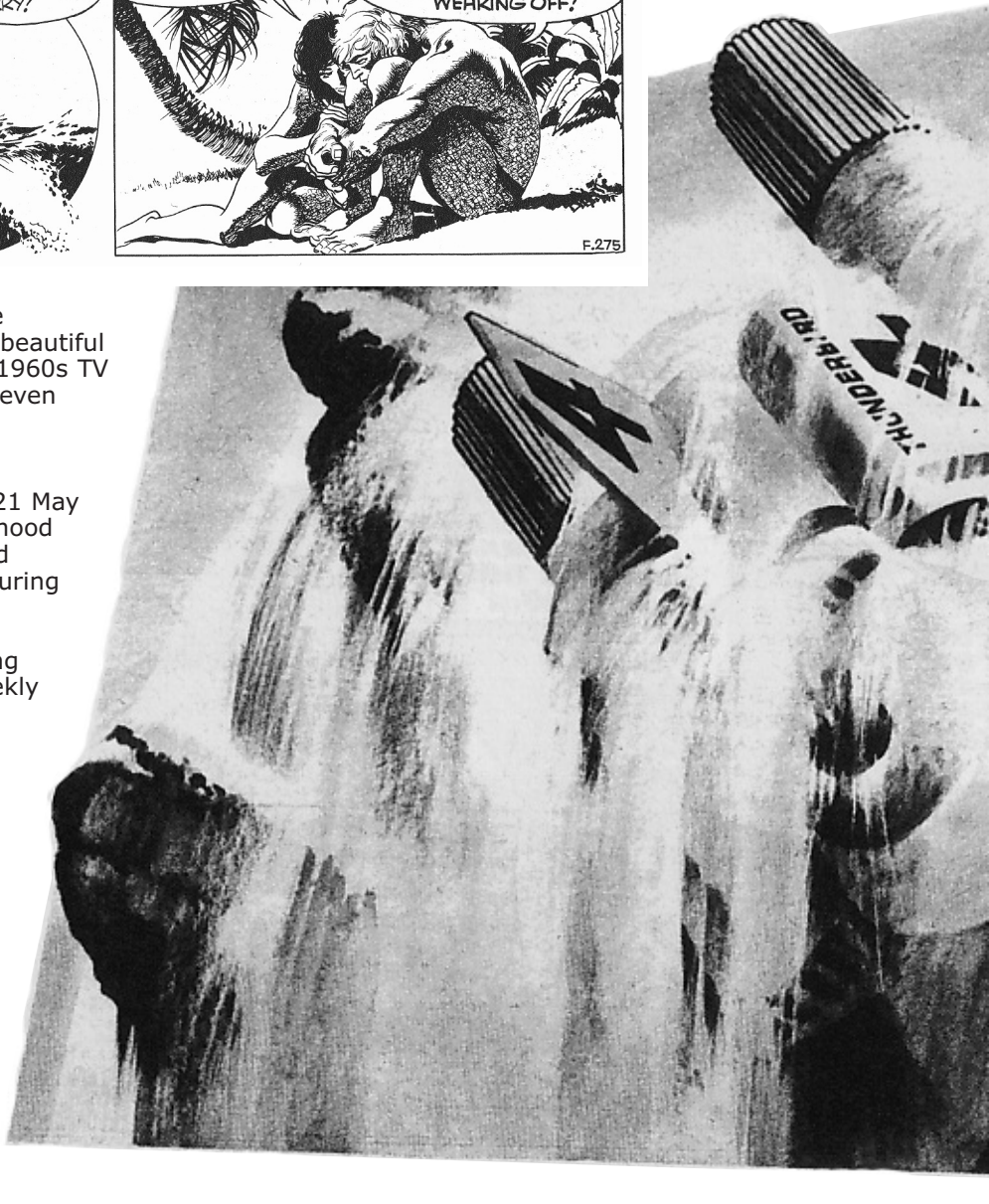
Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire on 21 May 1917, Bellamy had an unremarkable childhood and was later stationed in Bishop Auckland after being drafted into the British army during the Second World War.

It was here Frank met the future Mrs Bellamy with whom he had one son. During his tenure in the army, Bellamy had a weekly illustration published in his hometown's newspaper and following his demob in 1948, he worked in advertising for several years.

The Bellamys moved to London after the war and there they remained for the rest of Frank's life. It would be 1953, at the age of 36, that Bellamy's first comic strip appeared. Four years later he was working full time for The Eagle producing 'The Happy Warrior' (chronicling the life of Winston Churchill), 'The Shepherd King' (the life of the biblical King David), 'The Travels of Marco Polo', 'Heros the Spartan' and 'Fraser of Africa'.

Then Frank Hampson suddenly left 'Dan Dare' and Bellamy took over the strip. Frank produced 'full' artwork - layout, line, colouring even lettering the strip himself, something of a radical move in the early '50s British comics scene. He also changed the designs of the strip's spacecraft, uniforms and especially the layout of the pages thus causing a stir in the editorial offices at The Eagle.

Bellamy stayed on 'Dan Dare' for only a year and following artists were instructed to revert to previous incarnations of Dan Dare and produce the strip as Hampson had. Despite these artistic differences, Bellamy continued to work for Eagle until 1966, producing 'Montgomery of Alamein' (the life of Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery) and he also produced work for Look and Learn.





favourites (even my dad would watch them) and now we had them all together in one comic.

I would walk to school with my pal Paul Cook and every Tuesday we would buy our copies of TV21 and rarely speak to each other as we consumed the contents, instantly transported a hundred years into the future. We'd read it again at morning breaktime,



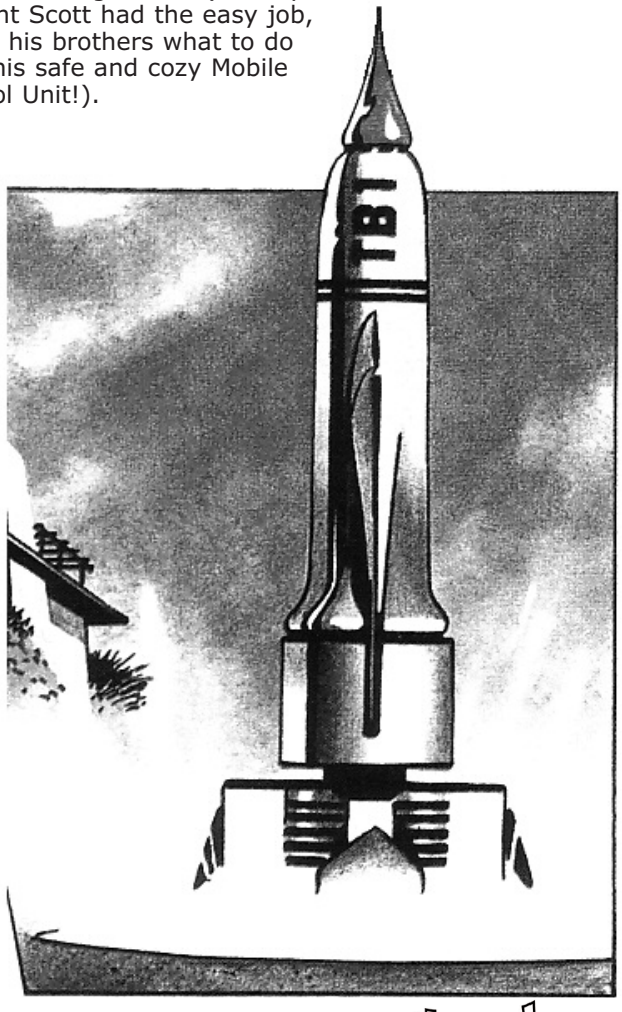
Andersonville

Then came TV21, 'Thunderbirds', Frank Bellamy and me. Though I was totally immersed with the exploits of everything Marvel Comics could offer, Gerry Anderson in general and TV21 in particular lent my 11 year-old mind yet another view of strange 'worlds'. Everybody loved Anderson's 'Supermarionation' shows; Supercar, Fireball XL5 and Stingray were all TV



lunchtime, afternoon breaktime and then on the way home, not speaking. And then again that night. Then we'd discuss it for the next week until the following Tuesday came around. I don't know how many kids my age (and above) were mesmerized by this comic, but my guess is it would have to be many thousands.

My world was split into many parts. Sometimes I'd be swinging on a web over Manhattan and then I'd be aboard Zero X fighting strange fire spitting rocky snakes on Mars and then I'd fall back to earth to save rhinos or help Virgil Tracy rescue people from a burning forest. (I always thought Scott had the easy job, telling his brothers what to do from his safe and cozy Mobile Control Unit!).



Crikey!



TV21 was a comic produced on nice, white, 'smooth' paper, in full colour (inside and out), showing us wonderful colours and incredible artwork. Painted artwork. Not like the masters or anything from the classics, but my favourite characters. Not coloured by using little dots added later over black and white artwork that always looked muddy and spoiled the line work (like Marvel and DC), but painted artwork where the use of the white of the page was evident by the lack of a line. Where all the colours could blend and complement each other. Gouache and vibrant inks were being applied lending the art texture and substance. As a kid, I couldn't even begin to copy these techniques (I hate that word – it reminds me of footballers). It was much later that I worked out how to apply them to my own work, so I am partly indebted to Frank for helping me get illustration work in later years.

Salivating

These strips were vibrant and alive; a real eye opener for me. This was our first glimpse of Anderson's TV shows as they were meant to be seen - dramatic, multi-layered and with a sense of purpose – not forgetting the striking explosions and the like.

Only Don Lawrence, with his 'The Trigan Empire' in Ranger competed against TV21. But, for me, good as 'The Trigan Empire' was and is, TV21 won hands down.

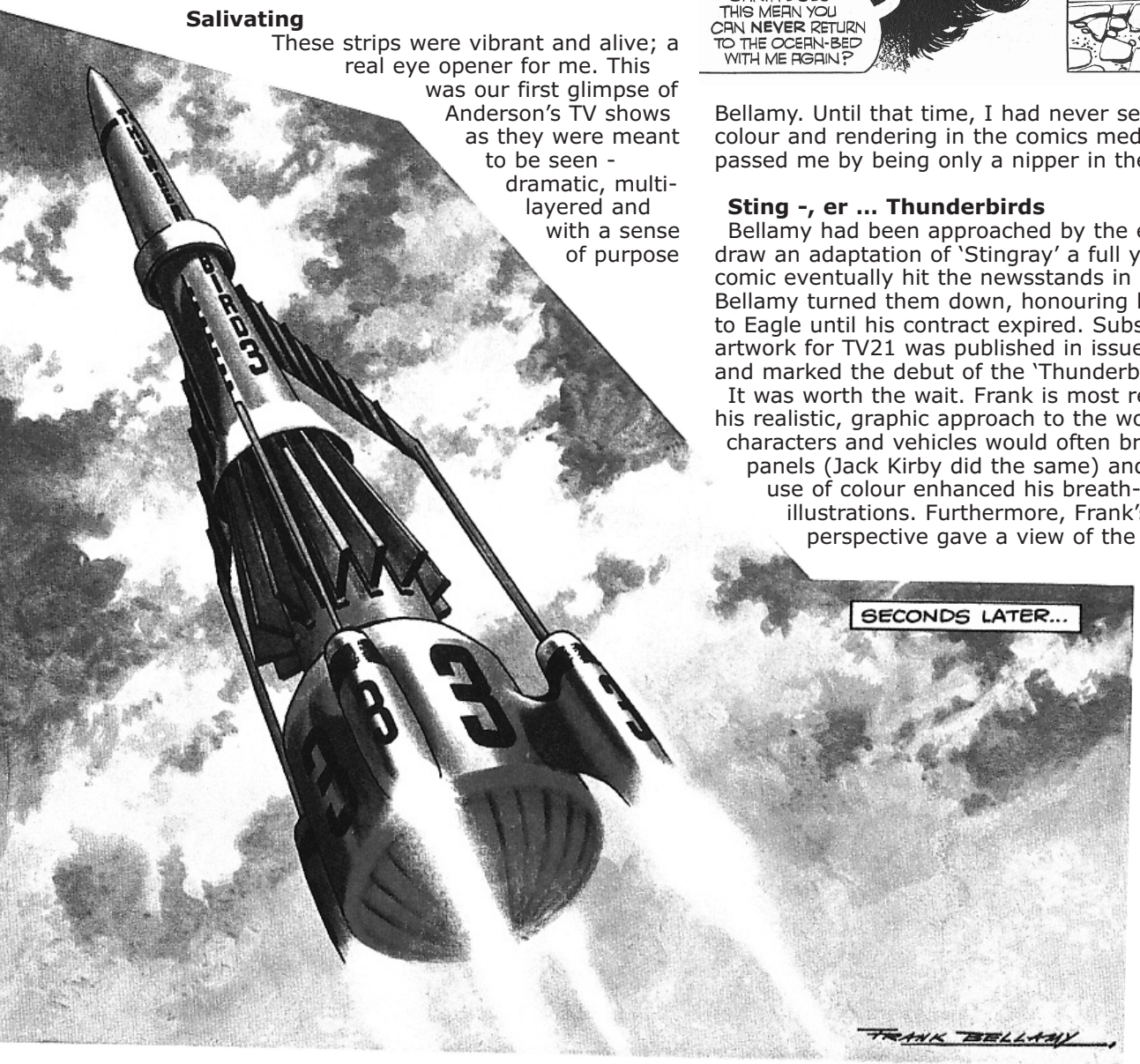
As an artist myself, producing my own comics for friends to read and my brothers to destroy, I salivated over the work of Mike Noble, Ron Embleton and Frank Bellamy. Until that time, I had never seen such contrast, colour and rendering in the comics medium (Eagle had passed me by being only a nipper in the late fifties).

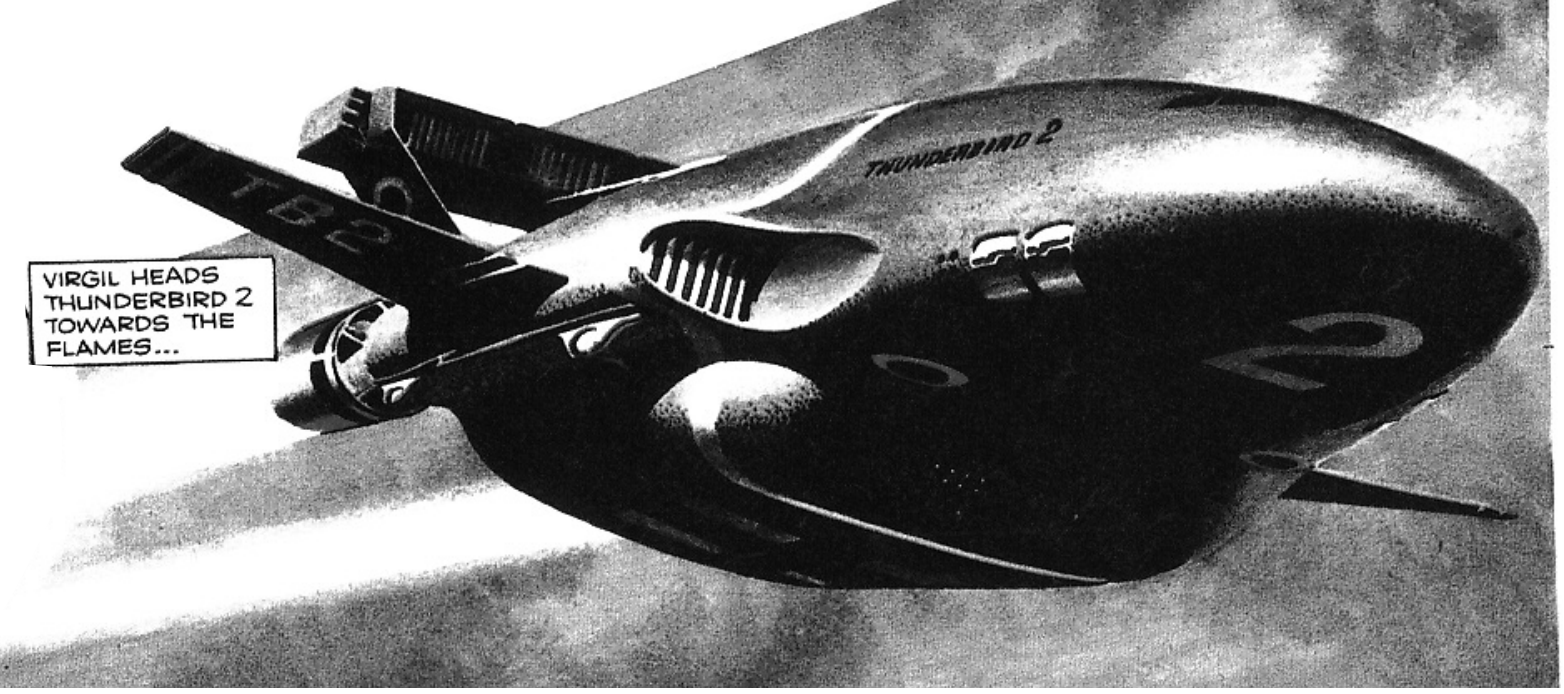


Sting -, er ... Thunderbirds

Bellamy had been approached by the editors of TV21 to draw an adaptation of 'Stingray' a full year before the comic eventually hit the newsstands in 1965. Typically, Bellamy turned them down, honouring his commitments to Eagle until his contract expired. Subsequently, his first artwork for TV21 was published in issue 52 (April 1966) and marked the debut of the 'Thunderbirds' strip.

It was worth the wait. Frank is most remembered for his realistic, graphic approach to the work. The characters and vehicles would often break out of the panels (Jack Kirby did the same) and his innovative use of colour enhanced his breath-taking illustrations. Furthermore, Frank's use of perspective gave a view of the Thunderbird craft





and buildings never seen before. Ever the perfectionist, Frank used plastercast models of the Thunderbird character heads as reference for his illustrations, moving as far away from a 'cartoony' style as he could, while still retaining the actual puppet characters' charm.

Grandeur

Frank's work in particular and Thunderbirds in general became both the standard and the flagship of the comic and many other publications tried their hardest to emulate both the grandeur and the fantastic artwork produced by Bellamy. None did.

Frank exclusively painted all the colour artwork for 'Thunderbirds' from 1966 to 1969, with the exception of issues 93 to 98. As the deadlines for the artwork became ever tighter, the strip was cut from three pages (the third page of every episode was produced in black and white using a tone wash) to two. This gave Frank more time to render, but less space to tell his story and denied us, the reader, of more artwork. Following his long haul on 'Thunderbirds', Frank produced the opening story pages only for 'Captain Scarlet' for five issues of TV21, all of which appear on the front cover. The interior art for these strips was handled by other artists and clearly, either editorial troubles or deadlines prevented Frank from producing the whole strip.

Frankly my dear ...

By late 1969, TV21's popularity was declining rapidly and it merged with Joe 90 comic. The boom times of the '60s, in all areas of life, was rapidly coming to an end and after only a few issues, Bellamy decided to quit the comic book industry completely. His last Anderson related strip was an uninspired black and white 'Thunderbirds' story in Joe 90 issue 4.

Bellamy moved on to provide illustrations for such notable publications as Sunday Times Magazine, where he produced the first colour strips to appear in that newspaper. He also provided an amazing illustration of











'Dr Who and the Daleks' for the Radio Times.

Just before then, in 1968, Bellamy provided the on-screen artwork for the demented comic strip artist in the weirdly fantastic 'The Winged Avenger' episode of The Avengers. His relationship with the production team was so good that he also designed the villain's costume and the set for the artist's studio.

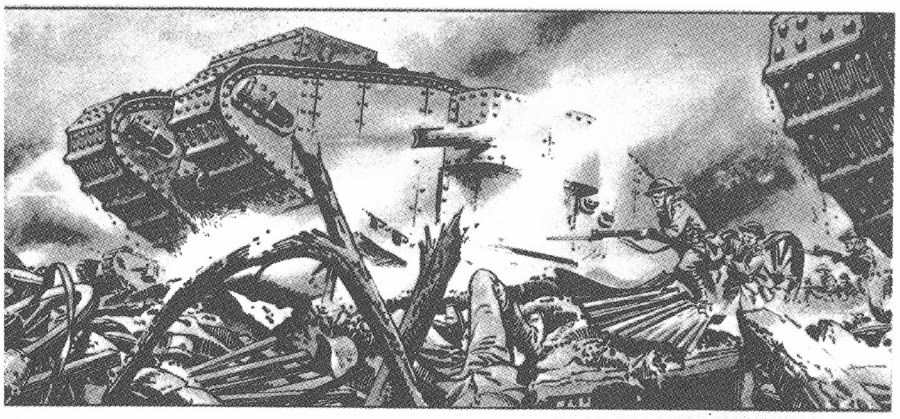
Bellamy finally settled into the newspaper strip series 'Garth' for the Daily Mirror in 1969. This was a strange period to be reading innocent comics strips. I was buying 'Garth' for the SF elements and fantastic Bellamy artwork (honest!) but was also being exposed to several naked ladies because of the 'flesh wars' between the newly launched Sun and the Daily Mirror.

Again, Bellamy used his knowledge of light and shade to produce stunning artwork in the tiny space allowed for the story. A single 'daily' would comprise not more than three panels in which to recap what had happened, move the story on and provide a cliffhanger.

Because of the nature of newspapers then, this artwork was produced in pure black and white with only cross-hatching or stippling for tone. Frank didn't have the luxury of colour blends to stun us with, so he did it with pen and ink. Some of Frank's best work can be seen in his tenure on 'Garth'.

Frank Bellamy was still working on 'Garth' when he died as a result of a massive heart attack on the 5th July, 1976 at the age of 59. I still mourn his passing and marvel at his vision, talent and spectacular pieces of artwork. His attention to detail - anatomy, human or otherwise, line, colour and storytelling abilities may have been equalled by a few, but were never surpassed.

In terms of slick line work, Brian Bollard comes close with his almost photographic rendering on Judge Dredd and though a truly great storyteller and letterer, Dave Gibbons' characters tend to be a little stiff.



The scratchy rendering style of Cam Kennedy is a joy to behold and his colour work, too, takes the breath away. But, in my opinion, none of these greats of comics come anywhere near Frank Bellamy who had all these talents rolled into one and more. These are the attributes, then, that lend themselves to the late, truly great Frank Bellamy.

As for me, I just wish I could draw as well as Bolland, Gibbons or Kennedy; if I could, this article might be about me … but, then again, I suspect it is. ■

Crikey!

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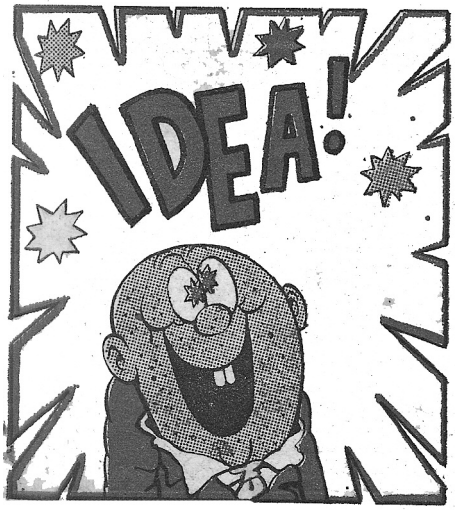
OPENS MIDDAY

WHAM!

The Funniest Comic in the World!

The idea behind this feature is dead simple (but you still need to pay attention at the back!). Each issue of Crikey! *will give space for a writer to champion a claim for a certain comic or type of product to have been the best of its type EVER! Future issues of Crikey! might have someone champion the Best Free Gift – EVER! Or the Best Girls' Comic – EVER! As soon as you get your thinking cap on you'll see that the list is endless.*

So get writing!



Wham! was born out of Baxendale's love for 'Little Plum', the mischievous (un)brave of the prairie. Or maybe it was born out of his unrelenting workload. Or perhaps his dream of creating a Super - Beano as Britain's first monthly comic. Or possibly it was the argument over what size drawings Leo should be presenting to the editor of the *Beano*. Of course, the real answer is all the above because big changes rarely have a single cause.

Those of you unfortunate enough to have never been exposed to the comic strip genius of 'Grimly Fiendish', 'General Nitt and his Barmy Army', 'Georgie's Germs', 'Danny Dare', 'Pest of the West' or the 'Humbugs' (to name but a few) have a good case from which to argue a retrial when you meet St. Peter at the Pearly Gates. You have been sold short in this life, my friend.

Roots

Wham! was the creation of Leo Baxendale, Britain's answer to Jack Kirby (but with more jokes and fewer forced perspectives). Its language, visual style and off the wall humour was a comedic cross between Hancock, *The Goons* and the manic mayhem of the Marx Brothers. It took the idea of frenetic free-for-alls to another level with its use of bizarre background creatures, editorial signs dropped into panels and the fact that *Wham!* characters were nearly always running either to or from something.

The road to *Wham!* might best be said have begun with a phone call Baxendale received around April 1962 from Harold Cramond, the editor of the *Beano* telling him he was off 'Little Plum'. This was a triple shock to the writer and artist. Firstly, the decision had come out of the blue, underlining the insecurity of a freelancer's life. Secondly, Plum was Baxendale's favourite strip and thirdly – and a fact that really got at Baxendale, it was his creation (even if it was a conscious swipe of 'Dennis the Menace').

Okay, Cramond had a good case for reducing Baxendale's workload – after all the artist/writer was consistently late with his artwork – but it was the way in which the strip had been taken from him that annoyed Baxendale. No discussion. No warning. Just a call from the publisher in Dundee and the strip was gone.

Trouble

The next step on the road to *Wham!* was probably Baxendale's decision to reduce the size of artwork supplied to DCT. He was finding it very hard keeping to deadlines, even with his 'Plum assignment' now in the hands of others. DCT artwork at the time was normally drawn twice-up – requiring the artist to fill four times the area as it appeared in the published comic.

Baxendale found this very time consuming and knew that his style didn't benefit from the reduction in size on publication. The larger size not only tightened up the linework but made it easier to draw minute background details. An adventure artist such as Paddy Brennan who drew 'General Jumbo' and 'Longlegs the Desert Wild Boy', benefited from this arrangement but for a humour artist with Baxendale's loose style it just made the job that much longer.

In an effort to save time, Baxendale changed the size from twice-up to 25%-up, meaning his four times area was reduced to one-and-a-half times the area. This was

a considerable time saving for the artist and should have allowed him to meet his deadlines without having to work 16 hours a day. He submitted a new-sized 'Banana Bunch' story to Iain Chisholm, the *Beezer* editor, and a new-sized 'Bash Street Kids' to Cramond at the *Beano*.

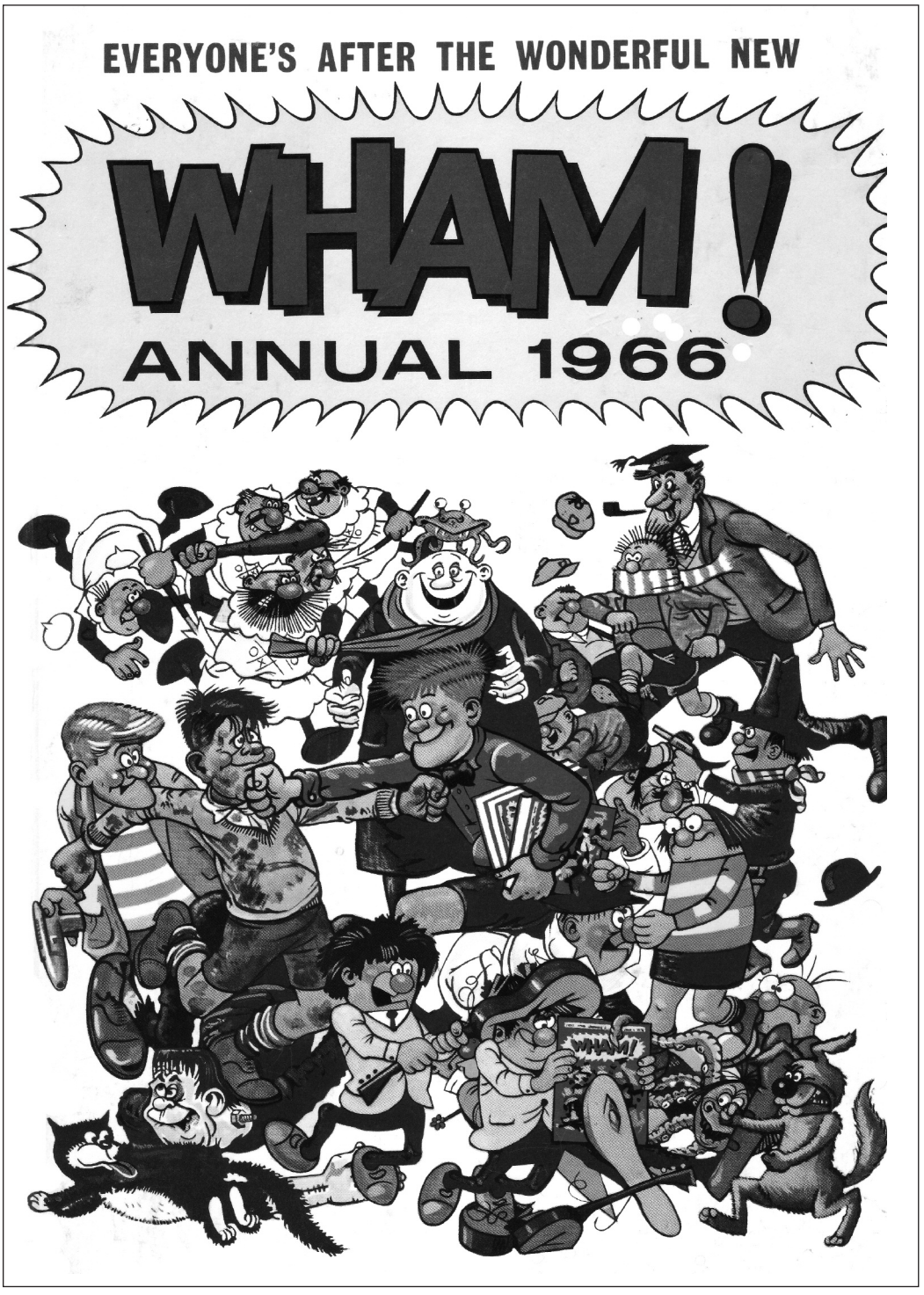
Chisholm reacted well to Baxendale's innovation, readily accepting the new size. Cramond's reaction was very different. There was no way he was going to accept the new size and he demanded that Baxendale redraw the story at the original twice-up size. Baxendale declined (to put it mildly).

And that's how Leo Baxendale left DCT.

Freedom

Now that Baxendale was free to freelance again he soon found himself talking to Alf Wallace and Albert Cosser at Odhams, where he found receptive ears to his plans to launch a Super-Beano. This was right at the start of what eventually became the Power Comics imprint with Alf and Cos doing their best to be half-and-half Stan Lees.

One immediate effect of joining Odhams to work on the new project was the sudden and dramatic increase in Baxendale's earnings. At DCT he had been earning approximately £4000 a year. That now doubled to £8000 – a very respectable wage in 1964 (about the same salary that the cast of *Coronation Street* received). Futhermore, the deal allowed him to sign all his work (something not allowed at DCT, except in the case of Dudley Watkins) and to be paid for any scripts he provided. This was another improvement from his DCT arrangement where the artist was encouraged to provide the script. (It was rumoured that invoices for these scripts still went through the accounts department but no payments were made to the artists, say no more, nudge, nudge, know-what-I-mean…)



Ahh, Christmas 1965. I spent that day with my chums from *Wham!*

Wham!

A format was beginning to come together and Baxendale was able to think about how much direct involvement he himself wanted in the new title – and which other artists and writers he wanted to work with. This was something he had high hopes for and he saw the new comic as a way to get a team of creators in place to move on to his ultimate dream, the Super-Beano.

With only rare exceptions Britain had a tradition of two-syllable words being used as comic titles – *Dandy*, *Beano*, *Eagle*, *Comet* etc. As one of the ways to signpost how different this project was to be, Baxendale wanted a short explosive word to get over the energy and madcap lunacy behind the new comic. It didn't take long before he realised that the best way forward would be to use a sound effect to get over the impact and



settled on *Wham!*

Something must have been in the air around that time – or maybe Baxendale took an interest in Pop Art – because in the same year Roy Litchenstein produced his 'two panel' Wham! paintings showing a jet fighter firing an exploding rocket. The 'sound effect concept' was destined to be carried further, of course, when Power Comics launched further groundbreaking comics like *Smash!* and *Pow!*

Creators

Now it was time to sit down and actually create the comic and what came out of the behind-the-scenes politicking and cajoling was a roster of some of the zaniest and most creative humour strips ever seen.

Baxendale wanted to poach DCT editor Walter Fearn, a man whom he respected not only for his precise editing and understanding of kids humour but also for his economical, punchy and highly inventive scriptwriting abilities. This was not to be, however, as a *fait accompli* had already taken place at Odham's head office with Albert Cosser having been appointed editor by Alf Wallace. Although Baxendale found Cos to be an excellent editor he always regretted the loss of Fearn's creativity and felt that *Wham!* would have been even zanier with his old friend on board.

Next came the most visible element of the comic – the artists. Baxendale had a definite vision for what *Wham!* should look like and that meant going after the funniest and most stylish of the artists in the business. Right at the top of his list was madcap Davey Law who drew (and mostly wrote) 'Dennis the Menace' (*Beano*), Beryl the Peril (*Topper*) and 'Corporal Clott' (*Dandy*). His deceptively simple linework underpinned a brilliant sense of storytelling and the ability to make the normal look ludicrous. A further consideration was that Law's artwork, together with Baxendale's own, had set the visual style for the Beano and if he was able to get Law involved in *Wham!* he would be that much closer to getting his long fought for Super-Beano somewhere down the line.

At that time Law was earning £13 a page, giving him an income of £65 a week. Baxendale felt that his offer of £30 a page would bowl Law over and win him to the new comic. He was therefore stunned when the artist thanked him for the offer but declined. What Baxendale didn't know at the time, however, was that Law was a kind of 'quantum-freelancer' – existing in two states at the one time, being both on staff and a freelancer working from home.

Like Dudley Watkins (best remembered now for The Broons and Oor Wullie) Law had once been a staff artist at DCT. Although he now worked from home and was paid a page rate, he retained a DCT pension and had the security of regular work.

Bizarre

Baxendale was more successful with his next artist, the lovingly bizarre Ken Reid (think 'Fudge', early 'Roger the Dodger' and 'Face Ache'), although it did result in Reid having a falling out with DCT where he had been drawing the sailor's nightmare 'Jonah'. At *Wham!* he created the visually stunning 'Frankie Stein', (inspired by the then success of *Addams Family* and *Munsters*) and the penny-pinching Scrooge wannabe 'Jasper the Grasper'. His highly exaggerated facial expressions and lunatic poses gave his artwork an eerie nightmarish quality that suited the damaged, losers-in-life characters he worked on.

Things were starting to come together for 33-year-old Baxendale – so the Great God of Comics decided to mess things up a bit!

Early conversations with Odhams (and not Oldhams, as I used to call them as a kid) had left Baxendale with the impression that *Wham!* was to be a 16 page comic. No, said the Great God of Comics – it's to be 24 pages, a whacking 50% increase in the planned-for workload. Things were getting dangerously urgent. After all, this was a weekly comic with specials and annuals also planned for later in the year.

Grimly and friends

It also meant that Baxendale would have to pull himself away from the big picture for a while and get on with thinking up new strips of his own. With Baxendale's love of pop culture it was inevitable that his strip ideas would reflect what kids were into.

His first idea 'Eagle Eye Junior Spy' picked up on the success *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and Bond movies. Like much of Baxendale's work, the adventures of the junior spy from MI5-and-a-half featured hilarious background details and a world full of oh-so-British clichés such as hot steaming tea, crumpets and cakes and eccentric loons.

His most successful creation by far was the Uncle Fester lookalike 'Grimly Feendish'. Feendish was a reinvention of a character called Moriarty that Baxendale had been drawing five years earlier in a series of cartoons. Moriarty was based physically on The Professor from the Ealing comedy *The Ladykillers* (not the rubbish remake by the usually brilliant Coen Brothers). Baxendale had given Moriarty a long pre-Tom Baker *Dr. Who* scarf but although the scarf looked great it didn't suit the prison camp thinness of the character. When a couple of hundred pounds was added to Moriarty, however, everything clicked into place – although those particular drawings never saw print. When looking around for new character designs, the old filing cabinet was opened and out crawled one of British comic's best loved nasties!



Several elements went into the success of Grimly. As well as the overall character design of Mr. Nasty himself, readers were treated to an array of bizarre backgrounds, giggly monsters and squishy, squiggly things that can only be described as, er, things. Entering Grimly's world was like having a nightmare with your eyes wide open.

For this writer, however, the best thing about Grimly was the absolutely over-the-top schemes the arch nemesis of decency and order came up with. Readers of a certain age will fondly remember Grimly's brilliant scheme to run a series of mini-conveyor belts under the newly installed parking meters in London to nick all the sixpenny coins…

Another creation was 'General Nitt and his Barmy Army'; a would-be conqueror set in medieval times. Nitt and his men would have weekly mass charges against enemy armies, resulting in giant panel mayhem as the two sides clashed. The short, bald tyrant with an explosion of nostril hair almost starred in the TV ad used to promote the launch of the comic. I say almost because the animators accidentally featured the enemy army in the ad, leaving Nitt and his ninnies out of the action. A delightfully *Wham!* irony in itself.

The gang's all here

Baxendale's love of large ensemble strips (Nitt, Bash Street…) showed up again in his next feature, 'Georgie's Germs'. Georgie himself was mostly passive as the strip focused on the legion of germs in his hair, nose, ears and wherever else Baxendale thought fun could be had (but all, of course, in the best possible taste). The Germs were under the command of besieged leader Dan Druff as he rallied his troops in their constant battle against Georgie's mum and her best attempt to wipe



them out with soap, shampoo and other forms of chemical attack.

Then next came the 'Tiddlers', a rather lame attempt at reinventing Bash Street but without the attention to character design that had helped make Danny and his classmates such firm favourites. Of all the Baxendale creations for Wham! this is the one that shows the least originality in both concept and execution.

With the pressure of deadlines now on, Baxendale went into fervent invention. In short succession he created 'The Whacks' (ever-smiling Scousers with eyes on making it as pop stars), 'Biff' (hard-faced red jumpered version of Dennis but without the menace), 'Danny Dare' (Dan Dare's number one fan with a wooden 'bogey' for a spaceship), 'Humbugs' (annoying twins with far too much energy), 'Pest of the West' (kiddie outlaw in the days of the Old West) and 'Footsie the Clown' (giant-footed simpleton with a great line in visual slapstick).

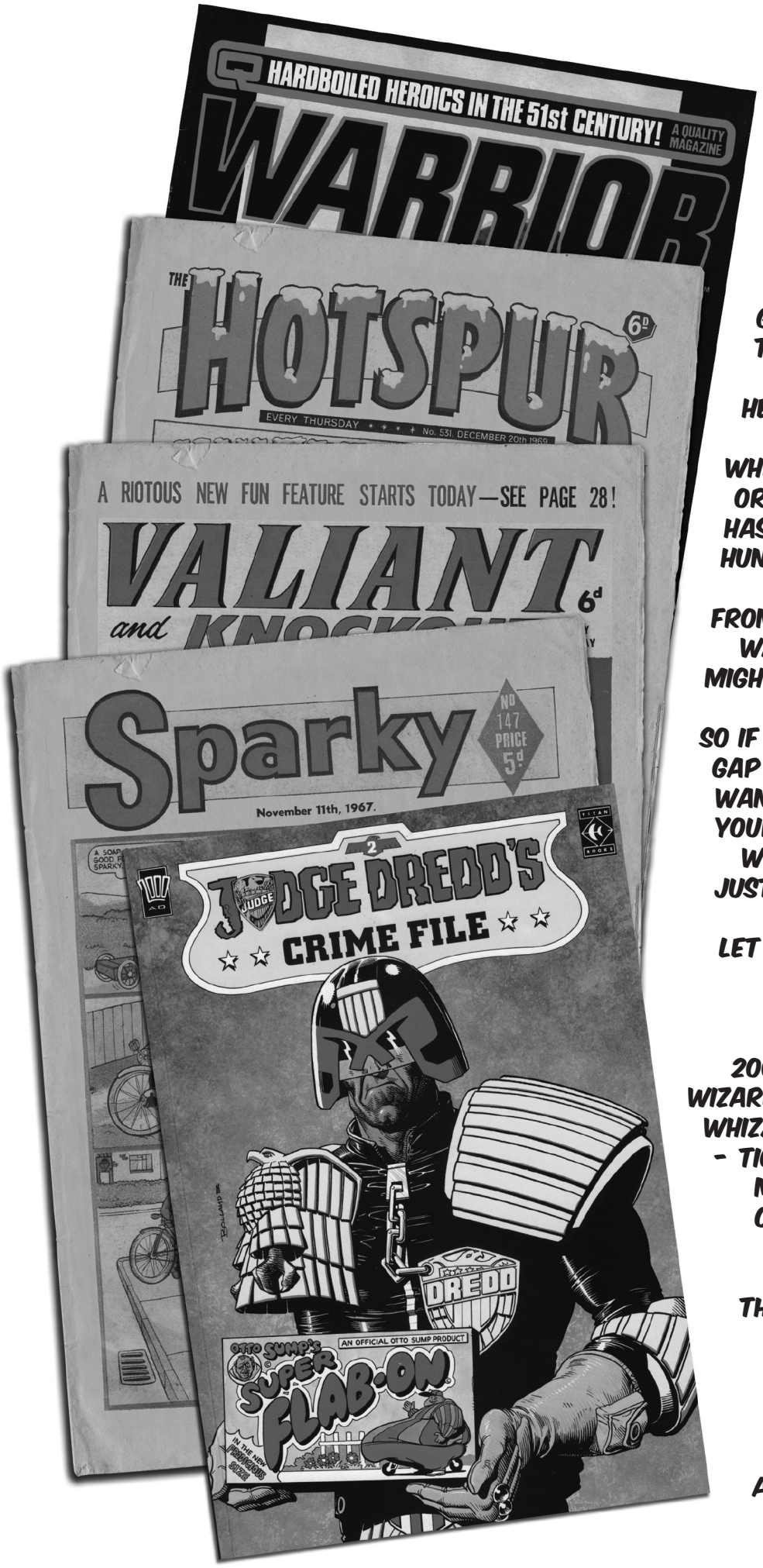
With such a roster of characters, *Wham!* needed to rely on more than just the overworked artists for script ideas. To kick start the ideas and to ensure that each story had an appropriate beginning, middle and end with its own satisfying pay-off, *Wham!* brought in veteran scriptwriter Walter Thorburn. Walter had worked with Baxendale on 'The Banana Bunch' and had proved himself on many occasions to be on the same wavelength as Baxendale's skewed Goons-ish world view.

Well, it made me laugh

Launched at a dearer than normal price of 6d (3p, or thereabouts; twice the price of the *Beano*) with a 500,000 copy distribution, *Wham!* sold reasonably well. At its higher cover price it didn't need to sell as many copies as other comics to be worthwhile for newsagents to keep on the shelf.

Wham! ran for four years until it merged with *Smash* in July 1968. During its run it managed to produce some of the best humour work ever to appear in British comics – including the almost 40 years since its demise. If you get the chance to pick up a couple of back issues (or the annuals) at your usual haunts, do so.

For fans of classic humour strips *Wham!* is unmissable. ■



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Um letters!

Being a first issue, we have no letters. So we got in touch with a few 'old friends' and asked them to put pen to paper, blanket to fire or just shout very loudly. For future issues of Crikey! let us know what you think about our 'zine, British comics, reactions to features or simply make us laugh.

Um Crikey!

In the 1974 *Sparky Annual* (published 1973) there is a 'Peter's Pipes' story wherein our titular hero blows his pipes to bring the Greek philosopher Aristotle to life. He does this to get the Greek Geek to write him an essay on ancient Greece. His cheating ways were not to work, however, as Aristotle writes the essay in ancient Greek! (Hee, hee.)

Here's the point of my letter. When Aristotle is brought to life, he utters the word eureka (I have found it). But that most famous of statements exploded from the mouth of Archimedes.

If you can't trust Peter's Pipes, what can you trust?

Insecure, Beanotown

Do any other readers' have a letter of complaint from books and comics published over a quarter of a century ago? If so, get in touch.



Um Crikey!

You miserable little perishers! You gone and done your flamin' first issue and not had a mention of the war strips that made British comics so good.

My pint-sized batman Maggot Malone agrees with me. Or he better 'ad if he knows what's good for 'im!

Hercules Hurricane (Captain)

Thanks, Cap! At the risk of sending you into one of your infamous rages – what do you think of the modern notion of pronouncing your name heh-ra-klees instead of the good old fashioned herk-u-lees? Blistering bulwalks, eh!

Um Crikey! *Gentlemen,*

One has been made aware that master Buster, of *Buster* comic renown, was indeed the son of the pleasure-seeking hedonist Mister Capp: he of the socialist working class newspaper the *Daily Mirror*.

I can't for the life of me imagine Mister and Mrs Capp actually producing offspring.

And yet there is the enigma of the flatcap…

Confused,

Snooty (Lord)



This is a strange question to answer. If one looks at the contemporary newspaper strip Andy Capp *it is easy to get the feeling that the strip existed in a time many years before its run ('50s – '90s).*

'Buster's Diary', the strip in which Buster appeared in Buster *(are you paying attention at the back), is clearly set in the period of the comic. And as Buster was supposed to be Andy Capp as a lad set in the '60s and the* Daily Mirror*'s Andy was also supposed to be set in the (then) '60s, we can only assume some sort of time travel or parallel universe. It's the only possible answer – it you don't count zero editorial attention to continuity. Oh oh! Fanboy alert! Fanboy alert!*

By the way – we think 'Buster's Diary' was the first strip to use the sound effect FTOOM.

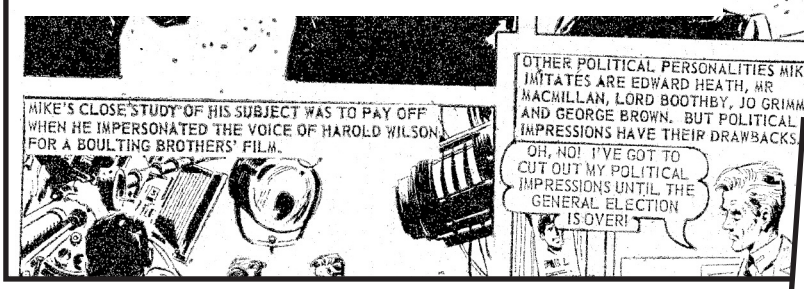
Um Crikey!

It was the in-thing in the '60s and '70s to have biographical strips telling the rags to riches story of celebrities. I seem to recall an awfully boring strip that told the tale of one-time pop nobody and Harold Wilson sound-alike Mike Yarwood. Am I mad. or did it really happen?

Mytek the Mighty

It happened in the pages of Judy*. As far as we know, it only ran for one issue. As it wasn't a serial it meant that no rights were required to tell the story and yet the young girls could still enjoy the thrill-a-panel story of Mike Y's rise to fame.*





Um Crikey!

DC Thomson must have been verry clever to use there komics to sell the Christmas Anuals. Do you know the 1st time they ever used the komic stories to sell the anuals????

Dennis Menace 4ever



Thanks Dennis. Remember even at 50-plus it's never too late to go back to school. (Walter left years ago, so you won't be embarrassed.)

We're not sure when the first attempt was made to use the strips to promote the annuals – as opposed to straightforward ads. We think it was the 10th November issue of Beano way back in 1956.

In that issue Biffo the Bear was so engrossed in reading about 'Prince Whoopee', 'Roger the Dodger', 'The Horse That Jack Built', 'Sampson and the Shipwreaked Circus' and 'Bird Boy' that he failed to notice all sorts of comical catastrophes around him.

Funny but effective marketing.

Um Crikey!

Woof-woof! We luv stories about dogs and them behaving bad. Just for a laff – has there ever been a comic strip about trying to make dogs behave well? Not that you'd catch us doing soppy things like that!

Bash Street Pups

And woof-woof to you, too! Although there were lots of 'How to…' type text features we're not aware of too many comic strips. The most famous (!) would be TV doggie dominator Barbara Woodhouse who appeared in Girl *(sister comic to* Eagle*) in '56 and '57. The strip ran for about a year and was written by Woodhouse and comics stalwart George Bowe.*

Um Crikey!

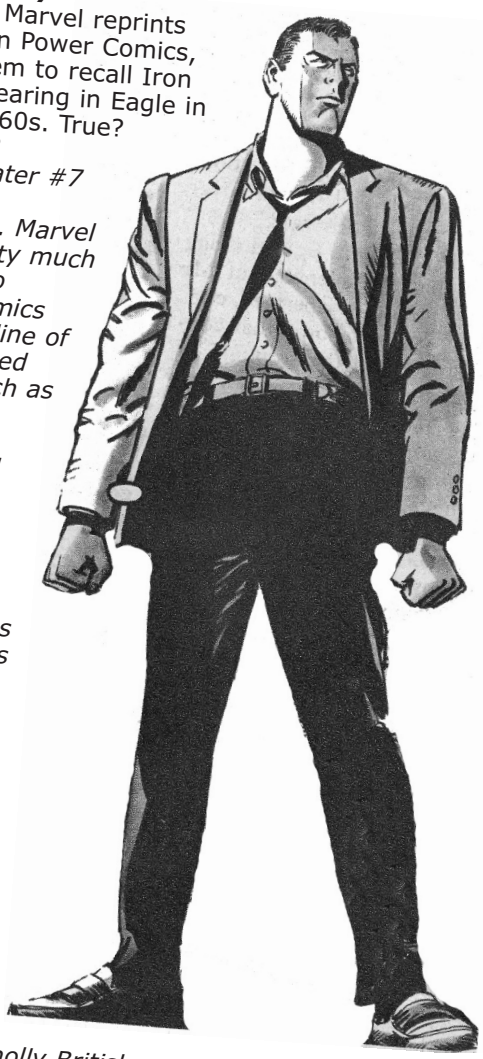
I know Marvel reprints started in Power Comics, but I seem to recall Iron Man appearing in Eagle in the late '60s. True? Not true?

Metal Eater #7

Not true. Marvel were pretty much married to Power Comics and their line of action-based comics such as Fantastic*,* Smash*,* Terrific *and* Pow*. The deal was semi-exclusive (i.e. not exclusive) as reprint strips still ran in Alan Class comics such as Astounding Tales, Creepy Worlds and Sinister Tales.*

An Iron Man did appear in Eagle *but he/it was a wholly British creation featuring a secret agent robot in human form called, well, yes –* Iron Man*. This appeared in the late '60s just as similar-sounding Tower Comics were on the racks. One of their leading characters was the super-spy* Dynamo*. Back in the* Eagle*,* Iron Man *was busy battling against an arched evil villain by the name of…* Dynamo*. Tower* – Power*.* Iron Man – Iron Man*.* Dynamo – Dynamo*.*

Spooky, eh?



That's it for this issue. If you want your thoughts, rants or humorous insights included in a future Crikey! get in touch soon. Contact thingies are at the top of the section.

Jackie Who?

By Helen D Bennett

It is a commonly known fact that a fourteen-year-old girl with facial spots and an emerging figure is in search of a steady boyfriend. It would naturally follow that a big sister should be on hand to help steer her through this emotional journey. If, however, she didn't have a sister to confide in, there was *Jackie*.

Jackie magazine was hailed as the young girl's 'Bible' and her dependable 'big sister'. But what did you do if, like me, you had neither? Well, you just got on with it. The Bible is a fascinating read and packed with sound advice and I would have adored a big sister, in theory.

As for *Jackie*, I didn't need that seemingly bouncy, precocious, go ahead girl who was preoccupied with her boyfriend and wore a 'cardi' with patch pockets she had sewn on herself, telling me how to do it.



Even if she was right. One look at the cover in its early days could tell me that. Who in their right mind could even stand like *Jackie*, pictured next to the title, except perhaps Una Stubbs dancing in the film *Summer Holiday*! Try it; it's hard.

Jackie Free

Is there another girl like me, who never bought, owned or read a copy of *Jackie*? I noted that it was very popular amongst friends at school. It was avidly discussed during break-time, mainly for two reasons – the letters page and its pop star content.

Both made me squirm.

The role models I had adopted were *Thunderbirds'* Lady Penelope, Blyton's Darrell Rivers at Mallory Towers, Austin's Elizabeth Bennett (no relation!) and Bronte's Jane Eyre. They would never have aired their problems to an agony aunt or hung posters of pop stars on their bedroom wall. They were all too well grounded, too sensible and getting on with their lives for such frivolities. *Debrets Etiquette and Modern Manners* might have been a more suitable equivalent 'Bible' for them.

It became apparent that many girls had a different attitude to me.

Cathy and Claire

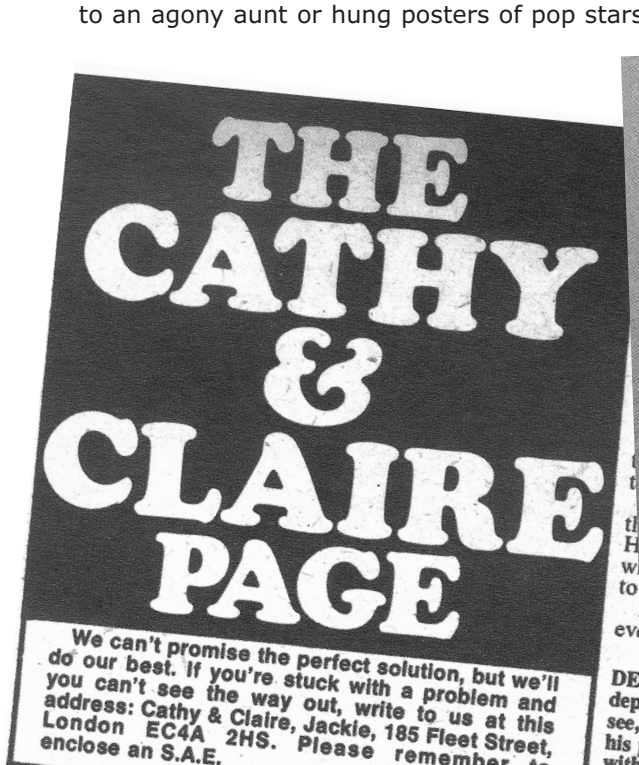
Jackies' confidantes, Cathy and Claire counselled and consoled a weekly stream of troubled teenage girls in the main. T hey delivered comforting but conservative, establishment wisdom, believing most often that parents were in the right.

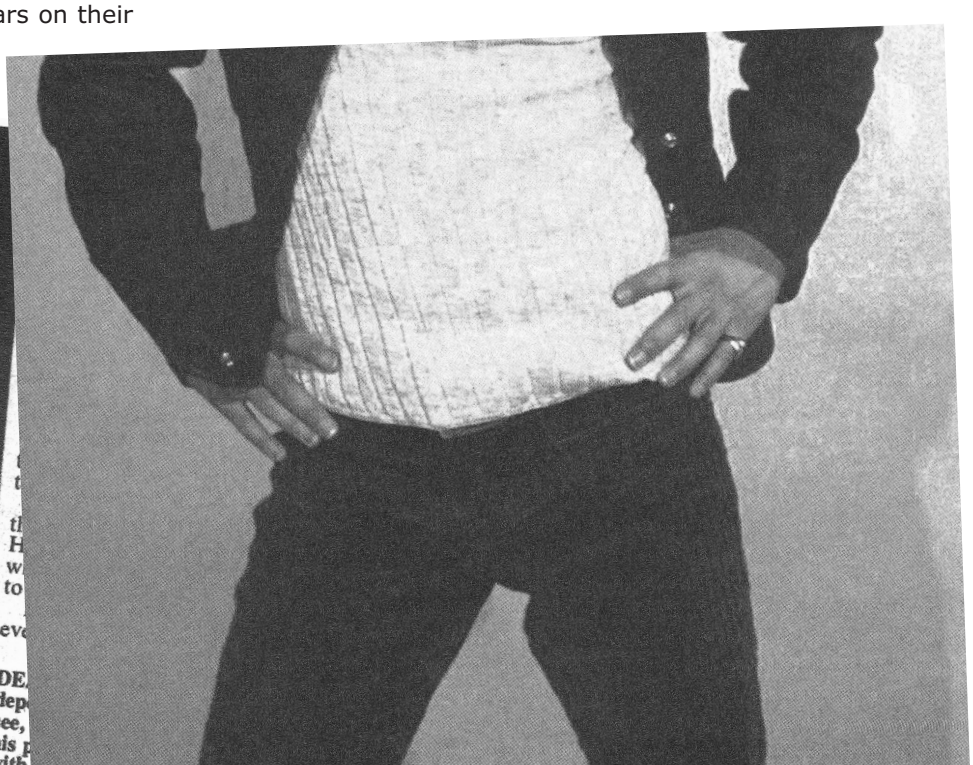
Now this is where I thought I was particularly smart; I cut out the middlewoman and went straight to my mother.

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

"What would you think if Glenn and I got engaged?" I asked casually one evening, while we prepared dinner together. I was sixteen and I knew the answer. Without a pause, "How ridiculous!" was sharply fired back. In a dozen words my dilemma was resolved and buried without trace. It saved so much time. Instant advice with no need to write a letter exposing my private life and providing entertainment for the world.

How could Cathy and Claire possibly compete with that? But then I was lucky to have someone to trust and I knew the boundaries of my small world well enough. Letters to *Jackie* showed that not every one did.









Pin-up Popsters

I recently came across a photograph of David Cassidy taken some time during the early seventies. The cheesy smile, awkward stance and thrust of his pelvis that said "look at me" was probably requested by the photographer and it made me feel embarrassed for him.

The whole experience prompted that strange *deja vue* sensation. I suddenly pictured a scene from 1973. It was the wardrobe door of a school friend, Jane, on which hung this same image. I now learn that *Jackie* had carried David's three-part, dismembered body as a centre fold, which had been lovingly reconstructed over as many weeks by Jane.

I felt embarrassed for her too. I could only imagine that this apparent act of misguided infatuation over one so smug was caused by a lack of male company, partly due to her only having sisters and compounded by attending an all-girls school. I, on the other hand, would never submit to such obvious girlish behaviour, opting to avoid any unnecessary teasing from my brothers and their friends. Far better to keep ones own infatuations under wraps and for boys I actually knew. Role models were not always that helpful. Nor was *Debrets*.

Classy Friend

After thirty-five years I find that *Jackie* had an influential role in our young lives but I will never know quite how much. Her ideas and advice will have filtered down undetected through her readers to the non-readers. You just couldn't avoid *Jackie*.

She was in your class at school.

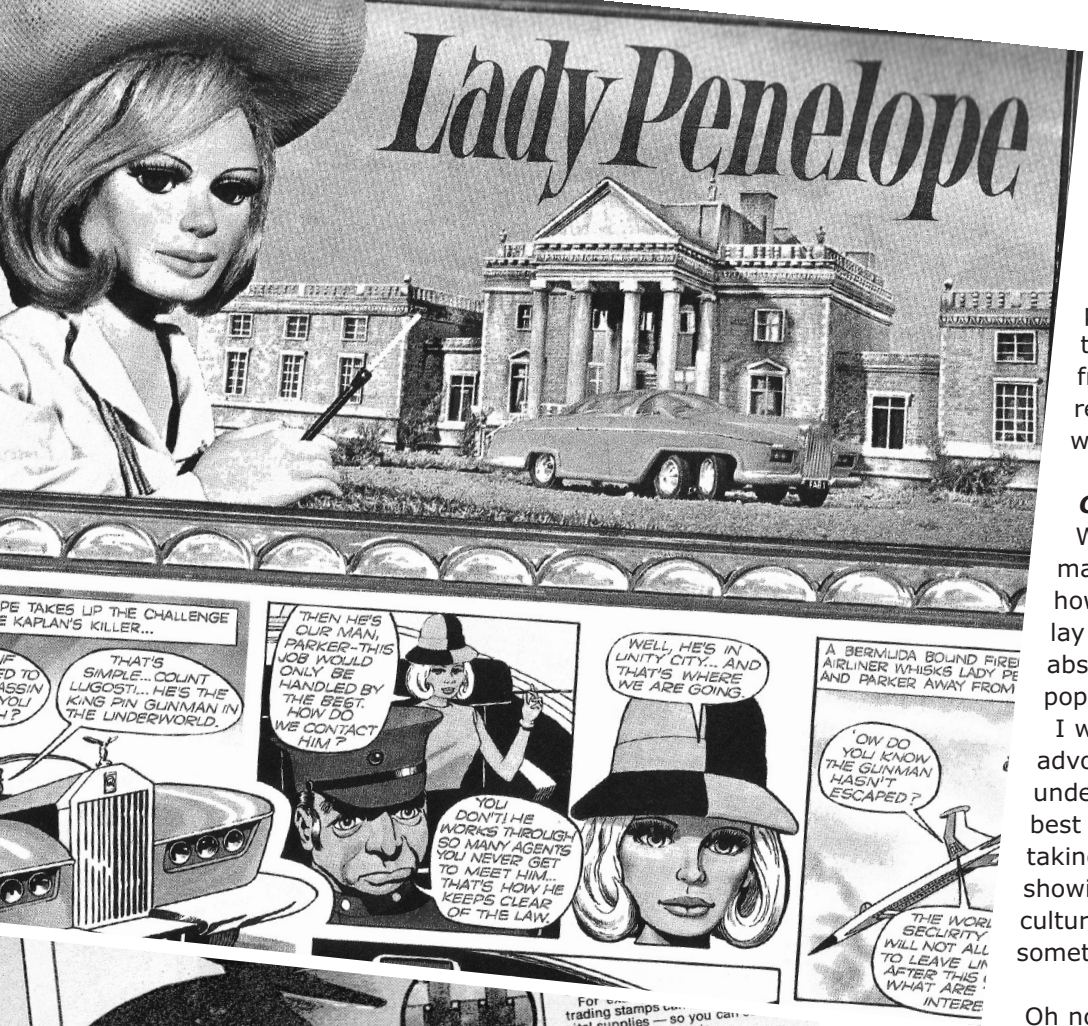
She went to your youth club.

She shopped in the same town.

She talked and was talked about.

I prefer to think of her not as a big sister but as a friend. She is the sort of childhood friend I am so pleased to meet by chance where we promise to call to





catch up properly but never quite make it.

Jackie has provided the loyal reader with the perfect grounding for a lifetime of women's magazine reading, and that is probably why it is something, like the chance meeting of an old friend. Never anticipated but relished all the same and leaving with the promise of return.

Osmosis

When I look back at *Jackie* magazines now I am surprised at how I did know something of what lay between its covers and have absorbed through some process of pop osmosis.

I was doing all the things *Jackie* advocated; talking to my parents and understanding that they wanted the best for me, coming home on time, taking a sensible approach with boys, showing a keen interest in popular culture, designing and making my own sometimes quirky clothes …

Oh no! Was I *Jackie*?

We probably all were!

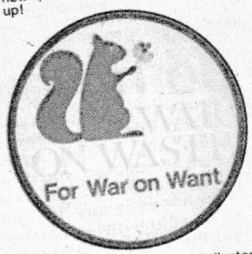


GET IT TAPED!

Sellotape, of course, is a paper product, too and here's a super way to brighten up your bedroom with a butterfly dressing table mat, made from, would you believe, Sellotape's "Brilliant Tape."

To weave the mat:

1. Cut a sheet of white cardboard large enough for your mat.
2. Now cover a sheet of white paper, (big enough to cover your mat), with strips of Brilliant Tape in assorted colours, carefully laying each strip right up next to each other.
3. When you've stuck down all the tape, cut the lengths of tape out with scissors — so that you end up with lots of strips of Brilliant Tape backed with white paper.
4. Take half the strips and lay them onto a table top — next to each other in a regular pattern of colours.
5. Now take the remaining strips and weave them in an "over and under" pattern, one at a time, through the other strips.
6. When you've woven all the threads carefully, lift them and stick them onto the cardboard with glue. When dry, cut out into a butterfly shape (it'll help if you draw the shape on the underside of the cardboard and use this as a guide to cutting) — and there you are! A shimmering, glimmering, sparkling butterfly!



trading stamps ... vital supplies — so you can ... important the cause is.

And you can help!

It's easiest if you can get together with a group of friends and organise collections — you'll be amazed at how quickly your "rubbish" mounts up!

Furthermore, for every collector, there's a super free badge, like the one shown here. All you need do is form a school group, or in fact any group — and let the society know who you are and how many badges you'll need.

Write to "War On Waste," 467 Caledonian Road, London N7 9BE for details of badges and for a poster giving information about where to send your contributions.

But please, DON'T send anything straight to the society, as there are different addresses for each separate item.

alling all animal lovers!

xt time you go out to buy tissues, have a look e 'Kleenex' range — and find out how to help must be everyone's favourite charity — the CA.

packs of Kleenex Tissues For Men (which are t for girls too!) are offering a beautiful silver- oured medallion, commemorating the 150th iversary of the RSPCA, for only 75p.

t the same time, you can collect the tear-off 20p chers on the packs and for every voucher you urn to Kleenex, they'll forward 20p to the RSPCA.

't that super?

n addition to that, at no extra cost, free gratis and r nothing! — each pack features a card giving help- h hints on one of a range of six popular pets.

So go on — spoil yourself with a box of super- zed tissues, and help a very worthwhile charity at the me time!



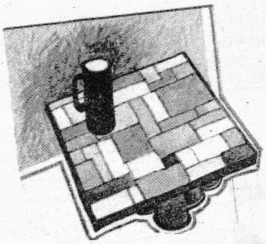


Table Topping

Fancy a quick change of furniture in your room? Then this little coffee table is easy to make, looks stunning and — shall we let you into a secret?

It's made from sweet papers!

Just take a piece of chipboard, the size you want, and cover it with sweet wrappers — the coloured silver paper kind — smoothed out carefully till they're flat. Glue them all down carefully to make a colourful collage, spray with varnish for a lasting finish, and sit the chip-board on a few Coke cans. Very cheap, very easy, and very nice!

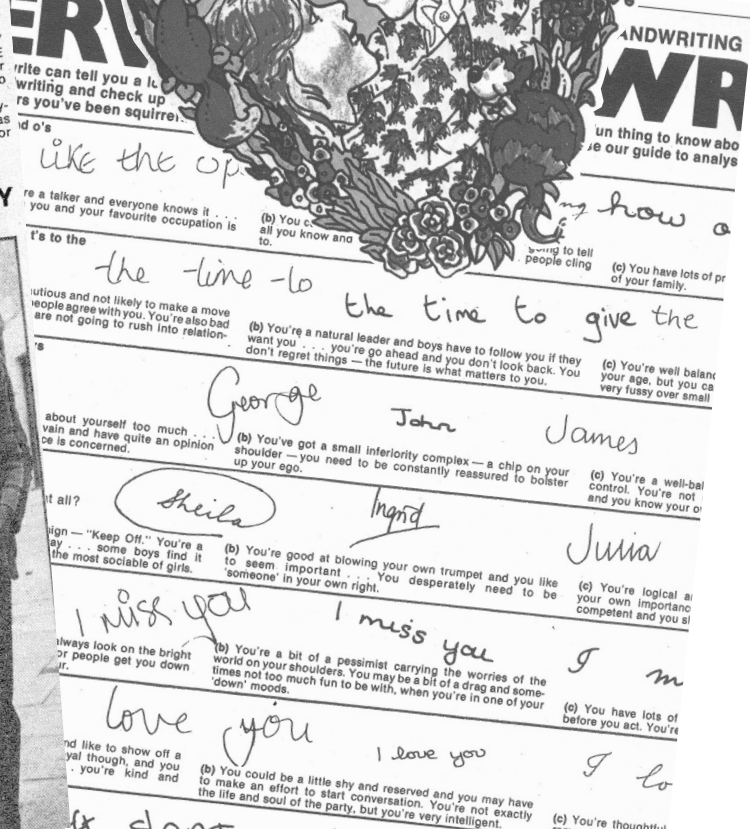
MEET THE DISHY DUSTMAN!









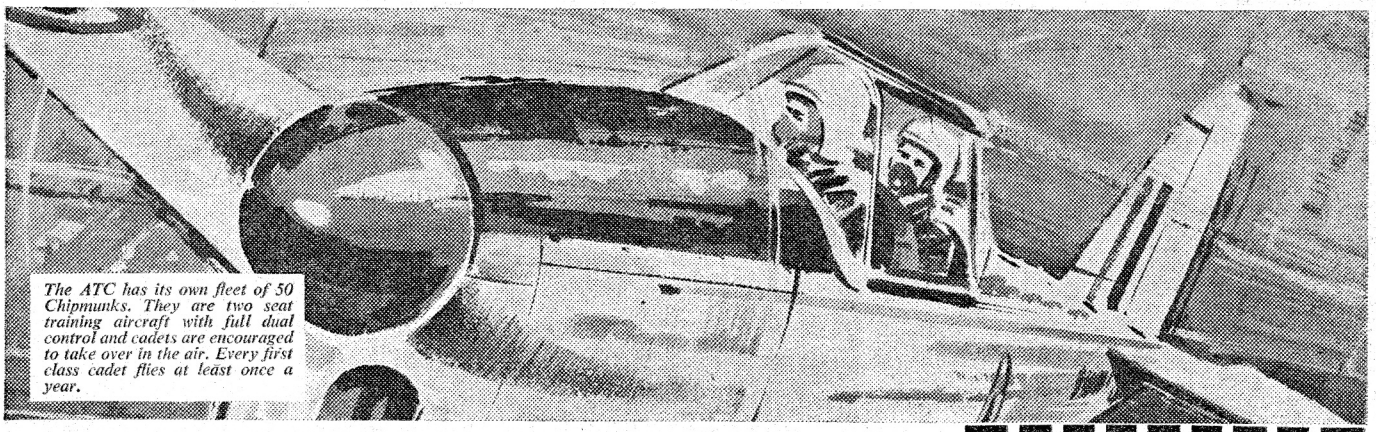


HERE'S A FINE FUNSET...!!



THEY'VE ALL GOT THEIR SPARKY ANNUAL! HAVE YOU?

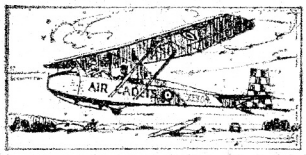
Remember ads like these?!



The ATC has its own fleet of 50 Chipmunks. They are two seat training aircraft with full dual control and cadets are encouraged to take over in the air. Every first class cadet flies at least once a year.

13-17? You could be an Air Cadet

Join the Air Training Corps and you've got a hobby that's really worth having. Here are a few of the things you can do.



Get your wings as a glider pilot. The ATC has 160 gliders, in 27 different gliding schools.

Learn about flying. You could even get a flying Scholarship of 30 hours flying training (including 10 hours solo) with a Civil Flying School.

Learn to shoot — .22 as well as .303. There is a Cadets' Bisley every year.



Travel and meet people. 1300 cadets visit the R.A.F. abroad each year. Cadets may also visit 18 foreign countries under the international air cadet exchange scheme.

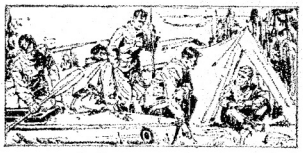
Make new friends by the dozen! The Air Training Corps is a voluntary youth movement whose programme is specially arranged so as not to interfere with school activities. There are Squadrons all over the country—more than 850 in all.

Prepare for your career. If you decide to join the R.A.F., it is an advantage to have been in the A.T.C. If you want a civilian career, most employers recognise the practical value of Air Cadet training.

Learn about engines, radio, radar, parachutes, dinghies, aircraft recognition—dozens of other things.

Visit R.A.F. Stations on annual camp.

Sport, from climbing to canoeing, from football to fencing—you name it.



Send now for this leaflet



To Wing Commander
G. K. A. Hollett, R.A.F.,
Headquarters Air Cadets
(694WV1),
Royal Air Force,
Brampton, Hunts.

Please send me your leaflet.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

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DATE OF BIRTH .....


Celebrating the very best in British comics!
Crikey!

Great 2nd Issue!

Crikey!

Issue 2 £3.99

The Great British Comics Magazine!



Thrills, Chills, Spills from yesteryear!

RADIO-active

Listen to the original shows from the Golden Age of Radio. These are recordings of the original broadcasts made from the '40s to the '60s – in some cases complete with period ads and station announcements. It's like having your very own time machine as the Theatre of the Mind transports you back to the action-packed, wisecracking and mysterious days of yesteryear.

Start your vintage radio library today. Over the months to come we will continue with some of the shows and introduce other genres such as western, variety shows and sitcoms.

No matter what your taste in storytelling – RadioActive will have something for you!



SUPERHERO
The Shadow
The peerless pulp hero brought to life in his own radio serial from the 1940s. Over ten hours of crime-fighting adventure and mystery with the man "who knows"!

Doc Savage
'The Man of Bronze' in two great radio serials complete on one disk. This recording features the seven part 'Fear Cay' and the six part '1000 Headed Man' - over six hours of super hero action and adventure.

COMEDY
Abbott and Costello
At the height of their fame Abbott and Costello attracted some of the greatest guest stars and radio's funniest writers. Over ten hours of comedy, nostalgia and Americana.

HORROR
Lights Out
One of the greatest radio horror-thriller shows of them all. Over ten hours of stand alone stories of macabre mystery and spine-tingling suspense.

SCIENCE FICTION
X minus 1
Perhaps the finest science fiction radio serial ever! Over ten hours of stand-alone stories adapted from the work of best-loved SF authors.

Space Patrol
Join Commander Buzz Corry and the crew of his spaceship in one of the earliest on-going SF serials. Over tehours of outlandish adventures in the spaceways of the Solar System.

CLASSIC MOVIES
Lux Theatre
"Live from Hollywood…" with adaptations of current movies from the '40s in radio form. Over ten hours of famous movies – often with the original stars – in 60 minute versions of classic films.

ADVENTURE
Escape
Brilliantly scripted half-hour stories written to take the listener to exotic, mysterious locales around the world. Over ten hours of crime and mystery with a twist-in-the-tale to keep you on the edge of your seat.

CRIME
Nick Carter
One of radio's most popular private detectives. Over ten hours of brilliantly crafted – and played – crime stories that give you the all the clues and challenge you to solve the case.

DRAMA
Theatre 5
A little-known anthology show that featured some of the great names from television and film. Over ten hours of crime, psychological drama, mystery, comedy and just about anything else the writers dreamed up in this free-for-all slot.

Each disc contains a selection of shows in MP3 format. Playback is by an MP3 player, computer or through most modern DVD players.

Buy more – save more!

1 disc -- £6.00.
2 discs -- £5.00 each.
3 discs or more – just £4.00 each.
(Postage & packing free.)

Send your cheque to: Sequential Media.

Please note – these shows are sourced from the original recordings and although we wouldn't release them unless they met our exacting quality control, some portions of the recordings may reflect the rarity and conditions of storage since originally recorded. A crackle here. A scratch there. We've listened to them all and can't wait to hear some more.

Crikey! Editorial

Brian M Clarke *Editor* **Glenn B Fleming** *Designer* **Tom Sweetman** *Publicist*

Contents:

Nutty Notions ***2-3***
Brian M Clarke once again looks through the box marked Crackers – and not just because Christmas is on the way!

The Crikey Chat - Terry Bave ***10-11***
Terry Hooper interviews the comic genius about his work during the past 40 years.

Our Ernie ***12***
Ray Aspen remembers one of the great characters from the start of comics' Golden Age.

Penelope & I ***14-16***
Helen D Bennett literally won the coat off Lady Penelope's back – and she has the photos to prove it!

My Comicy Saturday ***17-19***
Glenn B Fleming's contribution to our regular 'when I was young' spot.

By then, they were known as... ***20-22***
Steve Holland sorts out the who-owns-what history of British comics.

My Comic Hero - Ron Embleton ***24-28***
Glenn B Fleming outlines how the work of Ron Embleton had such a profound impact on his love of comics.

The First Spage-Age Weekly ***30-33***
Brian M Clarke recalls the story of *Rocket*, Britain's first true science fiction comic.

The French Connection ***34-35***
Marc-Andre let's us in on what happened to some of the UK comic strips once they crossed the Channel.

Last Man Standing ***36-37***
Colin Noble sends his report from the comics' war zone on the final stand of the *Victor*, last of the British war weeklies.

Um Letters ***45-48***
Crikey! readers have their say.

Gosh, blimey and, yes, Crikey!

It's been an exciting time for those of us slaving away in the Crikey! shed at the bottom of the garden since the launch of the magazine.

The feedback has been terrific with lots of pats on the back for creating a magazine that recognises the great strips and talented creatives who have worked in British comics over the past several decades. One thing that has come through loud and clear is a strong preference for *Crikey!* to widen the brief on what will and will not be included. We originally said that we were covering comics from roughly *TV Comic* (early '50s) to just before the launch of *2000AD* (late '70s). Well lots of people challenged us on that saying that we should include all British comics.

And we agree. So we shall.

Starting with this issue we're going to cover all aspects of British comics – no matter the period, genre or format.

If it's British, then let's talk about it.

We also received a few letters pointing out errors and omissions and, thankfully, including corrections. Which brings me to an important point.

British comics' fandom isn't as well organised as say American comics, telefantasy or science fiction fandoms. At the moment we don't have a definitive history of ourselves. It isn't widely known who we should praise (or blame!) when it comes to creating, writing and drawing the thousands of strips created over the past 100 years or so.

We need people to get involved with *Crikey!* If we occasionally get something wrong or leave something out – let us know. It's no good going home and telling the cat. Cats are rubbish at correcting the public record. Tell us. We need to know.

We sometimes need help in identifying artists. If we have left something uncredited and you know who the artist is – let us know. The cat might look like he's interested as you go on about Frank McDiarmid this or Sid Burgon that but he's not. We are.

For example, we received a couple of emails with the names of the artists we sampled for the 'Nutty Notions' feature in issue one. In the order they were presented, the identities can be revealed as;

- King Bernard – Tony Harding.
- Fishboy – John Stokes.
- Whizzers of Ozz – Paddy Brennan..
- Dusty Dan – Andy Tew..
- Steel Commando – Alex Henderson.
- Birdman of Baratoga – Felix Carrion.
- Chairman Cherry – Colin Merrett.
- Space Granny – Andrew Wilson.
- My Pal Ropey – Albert Holroyd.
- Cecil the Stone-age Scrapper – C D Bagnall.
- The Limping Man – Harry Farrugia.

See you in January!

Brian M Clarke - Editor

Our Crikey Chum of the Month is – Bill McLoughlin at DC Thomson for helping us get though a sticky launch and providing us with valuable support when we needed it. Thanks, Bill.

Writers this issue:
Ray Aspen; Helen D Bennett; Brian M Clarke; Marc-Andre; Glenn B Fleming; Steve Holland; Terry Hooper; Colin Noble.

Advertising rates:
Back cover in colour £250. Inside covers in colour £150.
Full page b/w £75. Half page b/w £45.
Quarter page b/w £30. Eighth of a page b/w one million pounds.
Please supply camera ready artwork on disk or PDF. If artwork is required, a charge will be made - please contact for details.

Note: *The closing date for booking ads for issue three is 3 December 2007.*

Crikey! is a Sequential Media publication.

Website: www.crikeyuk.co.uk

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Nutty Notions

Each issue of Crikey! features a selection of some of the lovingly bizarre concepts that have graced the pages of British comics in years past. Ideas and nominations for future NNs gratefully accepted through the Crikey! website (www.crikeyuk.co.uk), click 'contact' and away you go! Enjoy!



The Blind Flyers
(Hotspur 1968)

"The Blind Flyers, specially chosen R.A.F. pilots, had taken a drug which enabled them to see perfectly at night, but left them blind in daylight." This Cold War spies-and-airmen strip pitched our blind men against an evil foreign power – and various power-mad small-minded dictators with even smaller countries.

No matter how serious the problem, our heroes would always see them off.



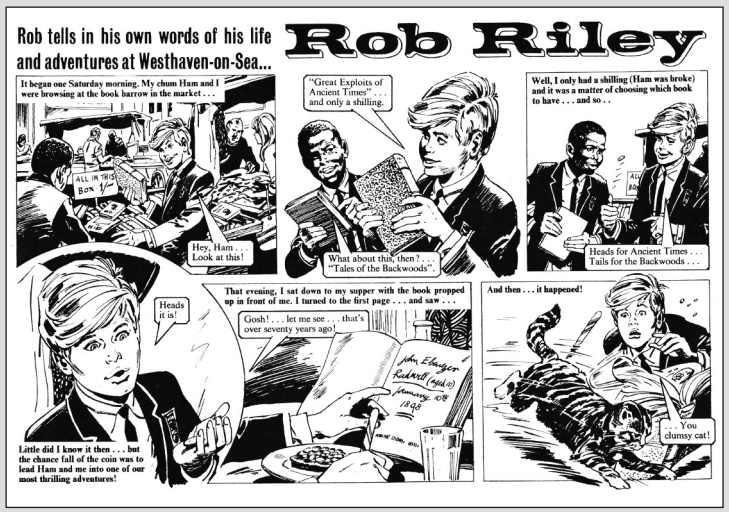
Sandra and the Stranded Ballet
(Judy 1968)

Poor Sandra Wilson! She's been lucky enough to win the lead in the Imperial Ballet Company's new production 'Pocahontas' but on the way to Russia (Boo! Hiss!) the plane is sabotaged (Hmm…) and they crash land in Greenland.

Nothing nutty in that, you say.

Well what would you do? You could prepare to get rescued. You might look for food and supplies. You may build a shelter. Or you could do what these thoroughly English young ladies did "…the dancers continue rehearsing in the hope that they will be rescued in time to perform in Moscow".





Rob Riley
(Look and Learn incorporating Ranger 1968)

Normally a strip such as Rob Riley wouldn't make it into a feature like Nutty Notions. At heart it's little more than the story of two chums falling into minor adventures and basically getting along with the world. What moves it into NN territory is the way the strip is sold to its readers.

"Rob tells in his own words of his life and adventures at Westhaven-on-Sea…"

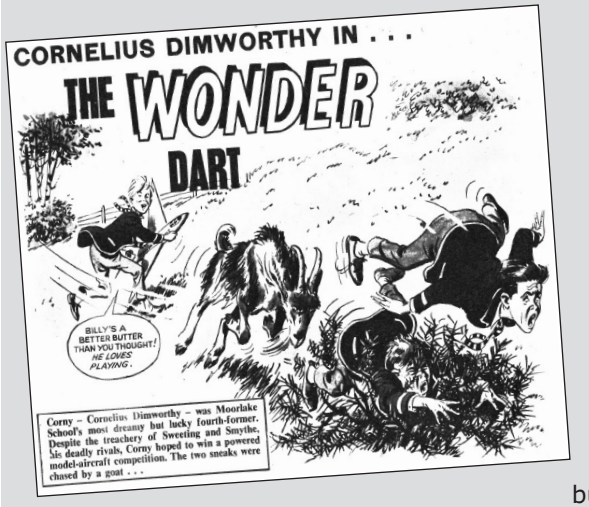
With a strapline like that you just had to keep on reading. Although most of the action and storytelling was run of the mill, the strip did have one interesting historical element – Riley's best friend Ham was black.



Brassy Cassy – the Oompah Girl
(Mandy 1968)

It's 1968 and music is in the air – and in this case it has a distinctly brassy sound. Cassy Redman is a 14-something schoolgirl trying to raise money to build a playground for the children of her hometown of Toddlewick.

The solution is obvious; form a brass band and win £3500 in a handy competition. So the search is on to find likely players who can take on their rivals for the grand prize. Will the kids get their playground..?



The Wonder Dart
(Eagle and Boys' World 1964-6)

Ah, the length a boy will go to in order to win the powered model-aircraft competition. Cornelius Dimworthy – Corny to his friends – was one of those boarding school kids who was forever getting into trouble for breaking minor house rules. The Wonder Dart told the exciting story of a determined boy and his high-tech model plane out to fly further and faster than the rest. Be still my beating heart!



Patty's Pie
(Diana 1965)

Life's hard and sometimes you have to go the extra mile to help out family and friends. Heroes and heroines are always making sacrifices and taking risks for the benefit of others.

Patty Lane "…hopes to bring prosperity back to the forgotten village of Faradale by winning an important cookery contest with the secret recipe for the once-famous Dover's Pie."

Well it worked for Bakewell.



Mr Bubbles
(Sparky 1969 –75)

Why don't we let our balloony buddy explain the set-up for himself?

"Hi, Folks! My name's Mr Bubbles and I'm a bubble imp. I live in a plastic bottle and every time someone squeezes it I pop out and give them three wishes!"

Created by Pam Chapeau, Mr Bubbles was one of those weird characters that you never knew if they existed for all to see or just in the mind of whoever squeezed the bottle that week. Everyone just seemed to accept the fact that a foot-high man-shaped pile of bubbles was talking to them.



Pete's Pocket Army
(Buster and Cor!! 1973-8)

Pete Parker – no, not that one! – had been "… adopted by six tiny aliens from the planet Liturnus who had been stranded after their spaceship crashed near the town of Whitford."

Written by Tom Tully and drawn by British comics stalwart Solano Lopez the strip followed the schoolboy adventures of Pete and his sextet of super-strong spacemen. Focusing on Pete's conflicts with bullies, winning football matches and just getting along at school the strip showed us exactly what it would be like to have a gang of micro-friends in our back-pack! ●



Left: Winker Watson (Dandy) 1991



Right: The Scareys of St Mary's (Whizzer & Chips) 1970



Draculass (Buster) 1976



Me & My Shadow (Whizzer & Chips) 1969

In all fairness this should be called The Art and Words of Terry and Sheila Bave! Before sitting down with Terry I was unaware of the part Terry's wife played in his work – showing just why these interviews are necessary. Here, then, is their story …

Terry Bave

By Terry Hooper

Crikey!: In the time honoured tradition of all Hooper interviews, I begin with the simplest of questions: where were you born – and I will not accept 'under a gooseberry bush'!

Terry Bave: Bristol. Yes! At the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

C: What are your first memories of comics? Were you encouraged to read comics by anyone in particular or was it just part of a normal kid's life?

TB: Very likely *The Dandy*, back in the Thirties.

C: When did you realise that you wanted to be a comic strip artist? Did you always want to draw humorous strips? And like the rest of us (Terry Hooper is a comic artist – Ed), did you fill up loads of exercise books with your own comic strips?

TB: Always! But it was not that easy to break into the business. Most work then was being carried out in-house.

C: So what titles/strips do you recall that inspired you?

TB: *Beano*, *Dandy* – American comics.

C: Can I ask; did you have any formal art training at all?

TB: No.

C: All right. So you got your style and work to a professional standard – how did you set about trying to get work in comics?

TB: I approached the editor of *Wham!* (Albert Cosser or 'Cos' as he was affectionately known by staff and readers alike. This would have been in 1967 – Hooper.)

I took over the ailing strip 'Sammy Shrink', revived it and progressed from there. I ghosted such favourites as 'Grimly Feendish' and 'Percy's Pets'.

When Fleetway took over Odham's Press (1969) I was invited by Jack Legrand – the managing editor of Fleetway – to assist in the preparation of a brand new title aimed at seven to 11 year olds – *Whizzer and Chips*, edited by Bob Paynter. I was impressed by Bob's enthusiasm and determination. I liked his ideas along with his genuine interest in the more traditional style of 'funnies'. We stayed with Bob Paynter for over twenty years producing many strips for many titles.

C: As readers will see when they check out your list of strips at the end of this interview! I do know, however, that you worked on 'Aqua Lad' and 'Andy's Ants' – later changed to 'Adam and his Ants'. Was the name change due to the popularity of the pop group Adam and the Ants? Also, can you tell us how yours and Sheila's creative process worked?

TB: To the name change – no.

I should point out to readers not familiar with British comics that changing a character's name to later fit-in with something popular is not unusual (Q-Bikes to Q-Karts for instance – Ed).

In my effort to produce new ideas and characters, Sheila and I held parties where we invited local children, along with our son Russell. We displayed drawings then tested out storylines to get a reaction and suchlike. Amongst those local children was a young lad, Steven, who was mad about collecting insects and that's where 'Adam…' came from.

In fact, in 1968-9, for *Whizzer and Chips*, we originally submitted 14 new and original characters with several weeks storylines. All were accepted by Jack Legrand who then offered me the opportunity to draw as many as I wished – or could!

At the start Sheila and I wrote much of our own material – which we had also done at Odhams. Then, as time went on, and due to the volume of output, we were supported by other writers. Many

Terry and Sheila Bave
Creating, writing and drawing comics since 1967!
(A) a Bave creation. (B) taken over from other artists. (C) Ghosted.
Wham!
1967 Shammy Shrink (B). The Tiddlers (B). Baby Whamster (A).
1968 Eagle Eye (C).
1969 Danny Dare (C).
Smash!
1967 Baby Smasher (A).
1969 Grimley Feendish (C). Percy's Pets (C). Big 'Ead (C). Bad Penny (B). Swots and Blots (C). Sam's Spook (C).
Pow!
1968 The Dolls of St. Dominics (C). Wee Willie Haggis (C).
Buster
1969 Tin Teacher (C). Big Chief Pow-Wow (C).
1970 Eager Beavers (A). 1976 Draculass (A). 1983 Good Guy (A).
1985 Pete's Pop-up Book (A). 1987 Mighty Mouth (A).
1988 Double Trouble (A). 1990 Melvyn's Mirror (B).
1991 Figments of Phil's Imagination (A). Imagine (A).
Whizzer and Chips
1969 Ginger's Tum (A). Pluto Dogs (A). Aqua Lad (A). Nipper (A). Parker the Parkie (A). Bob-A-Job (A). Hetty's Horoscope (A). The Champ (B). Me and My Shadow (A). Stowaway Steve (A). Little Saver (A). Karate Kid (A). Puddin' Tops (A). Scribbler (A).
1970 Jimmy Jeckle and Mister Hyde (A). Ringer Dinger (A). Scarey's of St. Mary's (A).
1973 Belle Tent (C). Smart Alec (B). Odd Ball (B). Sammy Shrink (B).
1975 Police Dog and Cat Burglar (A). 1976 Sweet Tooth (C).
1989 Tarman (A).
Cor!
1970 Andy's Ants (A). Donovan's Dad (A). Mike's Magic Mould (A).
1972 The Slimms (A). 1974 Hire A Horror (C).
1975 Val's Vanishing Cream (C).
Jet
1971 Bertie Bumpkin (A). Chalky (A), Knockout.
1971 My Bruvver (A).
1972 The Katts (C). Jelly Baby (C). Toffee Nose (C).
1973 Sammy Shrink (B).
Shiver and Shake
1973 Webster (A). Desert Fox (B). Shiver (C). Shake (C). Soggy the Sea Monster (C). Damsel in Distress (C).
Whoopee!
1974 Toy Boy (A). Snap Happy (C). Stoker the Ship's Cat (A). Fun Fear (C).
1976 Willy Worry (B). 1978 Frankie Stein (C).
1980 Calculator Kid (A). Blabbermouth (A).
Monster Fun
1975 Draculass (A). X-Ray Specs (C). Mummy's Boy (C).
1976 Gums (C). Art's Gallery (C).
Cheeky
1978 Calculator Kid (A).
Krazy
1976 Scaredy Cat (A).
Jackpot
1980 Ritchie Raggs (C).
Wow!
1982 Barney's Badges (A).
School Fun
1983 Top Class Comics (A).
Nipper
1987 Double Trouble (A). Mighty Mouth (A).
Gateway Magazine
1991 Goodtime Twins (A).
Beano
1991 Number 13 (C). Bash Street Kids (C).
1992 The Great Geraldoes (A).
1993 The Germs (C). Billy Whizz (C).
1994 Bottle Blue (A). When the Cat's Away (A).
1995 Ivy the Terrible (C). Bash Street Kids (C).
Dandy
1991 Winker Watson (B). Korky the Cat (C).
1998 Buster Crabb (A).

The Baves also supplied much work for annuals, summer and winter specials, fun-books and many other formats over the years.



Good Guy (Buster)1983

different writers over the years. When writing action and adventure there's a set formula to work with – life and death struggles *et cetera*. I think that it's much harder to write humour and go on being funny issue after issue. Looking at your credits, the workload must have been gruelling at times.

Much later – by the '80s – we struggled, often due to drying up and staleness. So it was vital to have support via the editor with new and varied writers, and we have had some superb writers over the years.

C: With the decline of the British comics industry has all the work dried up? If so, how do you fill your time now? I guess what I'm asking in an awkward way is – do you still draw strips for a living or just to keep your hand in?

For the past ten years we have been doing 'Winker Watson' in the *Dandy*, as well as various contributions to the *Beano*, Fun-size books, annuals, summer special – all for Thomsons.

Most of this material is scripted by Dundee editorial staff, although we have created one or two new characters (see credits below).

C: What materials do you use and how fast do you work?

TB: In the 60s and 70s I used art board, Bristol board, Ivorex board. I always used Stell knibs and Indian ink. I can complete a black and white double-page in a day – colour in an extra day. For colour work today I use Chromacolour. That's what I use on 'Winker Watson'.

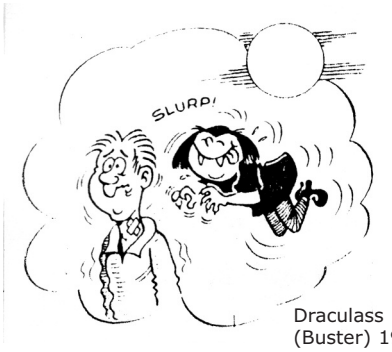
C: Looking back over the years – very prolific years, at that! – what were the best, worst and most embarrassing moments…?

TB: Embarrassing? Finding that I had missed out on a spelling or suchlike that had made its way into publication.

Worst? When the 'Ginger' strip appeared on TV's *Nationwide* in the '70s – due to a fireworks story. The fire brigade were not amused. Sheila and I watched, speechless.

C: I remember that! I thought at the time that it was just a we've-nothing-better-to-do-let's-do-a 'these irresponsible comics feature'! There had been much worse over the years!

C: Thanks for taking the time to answer all the questions. Anything you would like to add? Any future projects?



Draculass (Buster) 1976

TB: I am now 70 (Terry hooper's interview was conducted a couple of years ago. Terry was born in 1931 – Ed.), so two or three days work a week is very nice indeed! To work at home in an environment of our own choice, doing something that I enjoy doing work-wise can't be all that bad!

The comics have been good to me.

Having had so many fan letters over the years has been very heart-warming. Even today, after so many years, we still receive letters from adults who are now telling their children and grandchildren stories about our work.

All Sheila and I would say is; it's fun drawing and keep chuckling!●

Whilst putting this article together, we received the sad news that Terry Bave had passed away. He will be remembered for the joy he brought to millions of lives through his work.



Ray Aspden looks back to an almost-forgotten character who certainly deserves to be remembered.



Our Ernie appeared in Fleetway's *Knockout* from 1939-1960. Ernie Entwistle (no self-respecting Lancastrian spells it with an 'h', although the *Knockout* always did!) was originally inspired by Albert Ramsbottom - the lad who got taken to Blackpool, along with his stick with the 'orses 'ead 'andle, 'The best that Woolworth's could sell'.

The Pa with walrus moustache and the Ma of ample proportions shown in Hassall's illustrations of the Holloway Monologues were used in the strip, along with Our Albert's cap.



Ernie lived in Wigan; a town made infamously funny by, among others, George Formby, George Orwell and Uncle Joe's Mint Balls. The strip also embraced the fiction of Wigan having a pier.

Quite where the lettuce-obsessed, pet caterpillar Charlie came from is not clear, but he was in the strip by issue No.61. Denis Gifford believed the relationship between Ernie and Charlie was based on Pinocchio and Jiminy Cricket. Whatever his origin, Charlie always had a lot more common sense than Our Ernie ever did. If there was a button to push, a lever to pull, a wild animal to release or a machine hopper to fall into: Our Ernie would do it.

During the War years Our Ernie had several encounters with Hitler, or Tickler as he was called. There was also a sister in the strip in those years, but she played little part and eventually faded from view altogether.

Gifford credits Our Ernie with being Fleetway's first truly regional British comic character and the first to have his own catch phrases, rather than those borrowed from the wireless and used in *Radio Fun*. In the final frame Ernie would say, "What's for tea Ma?"; but there'd be some problem because of events in the strip and Pa, with an upside down clay pipe in his mouth (or sometimes it was tucked behind his ear) would utter the immortal line, "Daft I call it!"

Many hands drew Our Ernie; Hugh McNiell, A J Kelly, Gifford himself and Reg Parlett; as well as others whose names are sadly uncredited. Their work is now alas unobtainable, except in annuals from second hand bookshops or expensive auction lots. All of the artists brought a manic surrealism to Ernie's adventures. Along with the pictures and dialogue were rhyming captions; the sort of excruciating doggerel that's probably more fun to write than to read.

Whenever I revisit Our Ernie I have nostalgic memories of my own Lancashire childhood. It reminds me of scabs on grazed knees, summer shows in the pouring rain at Morecambe, *Children's Hour* on the wireless - and I have a little chuckle! ●

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Where it all began …



Penelope & I

By Helen D Bennett

It was an ordinary day at the tall, Victorian, red brick building that was my primary school. Outside, the September day in 1966 was cool and grey but inside the atmosphere was bright and familiar.

Today felt different though. It was hard to define at first and as time dragged I realised that my rising feeling of nausea would not allow me to stay much longer. My mother was called to take me home. Within a few minutes we were slowly walking past the small row of shops that separated our house from school. Normally we would call in at least one of them on the way back, my favourite being the newsagents. Its windows were tempting and colourful and crammed with stationery, sweets, greeting cards, small gifts and games, seasonal adverts for Christmas or ice-lollies and sometimes boxes of fireworks, but always comics and magazines.

I briefly but longingly gazed at one issue to the fore of the display just as I had done at each passing that week. It was *Lady Penelope* bearing its exciting free gift.

Later that afternoon, still feeling unsettled as my brother arrived home, I was asked if there was anything I would like; my mother was going to the shops. This was a wonderful opportunity, one too good to miss. Within half an hour *Lady Penelope* was handed to me. Not feeling well enough to read it, I simply took out the promised complimentary white handkerchief with its ornate, deep pink, monogrammed P in the corner and felt momentarily soothed.

Next morning, though feeling somewhat better, I was allowed the day off school. As I ate my breakfast I noticed the copy of *Lady Penelope* with that special thrill of remembering a forgotten treat. Quickly flicking through the pages in both directions in my usual haphazard way gave me a fair idea of its contents. I looked at the competition and felt fairly certain of my answers. I carefully filled in the coupon and with some reluctance, cut it out. It didn't seem right that I should have to spoil the magazine while it was still new.

I left the letter for posting to *Lady Penelope* with reasonable hopefulness. Back with my magazine now plus hole, I had all day to read about Penelope's mission with Parker, her manservant and 'burglar supreme'. Some popular television programmes appearing as stories included *The Man From U.N.C.L.E* and *The Avengers*. They were good television and in the main only on the screen once a week in the 1960s. Seeing and reading about them in a magazine was an inspired idea.

The *Lady Penelope Magazine* was a spin off from TV Century 21. In anticipation of the introduction of Thunderbirds to *TV Century 21*, the story of how Penelope recruits Parker and later how Jeff Tracy, creator of Thunderbirds, recruits Penelope is explained. In January 1966 Thunderbirds took off in *TV21* and *Lady Penelope* was launched as a magazine with girls in mind. Secretly or otherwise bought or borrowed, I know that boys read and enjoyed it too.

This was an opportunity to develop the Penelope and Parker characters and extend interest in what were initially minor roles in Thunderbirds. Penelope played International Rescue's London Agent and I always thought her appearances a little too fleeting. It seemed to be a common feature of animations around that time.

Thunderbirds' Lady Penelope Creighton-Ward, 'Penny' to her friends, was disarmingly beautiful and daring, cultured and chic, vulnerable but strong … and refreshingly, she didn't scream in a crisis. For girls these were wonderful attributes to aspire to. This Bond-style agent was exciting and challenged some entrenched stereotypes. Each action filled story reinforced her title strip 'Elegance, Charm and Deadly Danger'. Like the family motto, you could imagine it being toasted reverently with raised glasses and written in Latin beneath the coat of arms above the fireplace.

You could hear those low, unrushed, seductive, well-

Lady PENELOPE

167 FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.4
Telephone: FLEET STREET 9971

ELEGANCE, CHARM & DEADLY DANGER

7th October 1966

Dear Helen,

Guess what... you've WON!

I'm delighted to be writing this letter to tell you that you are one of the winners of the "Fur Coat" competition of Issue 36.

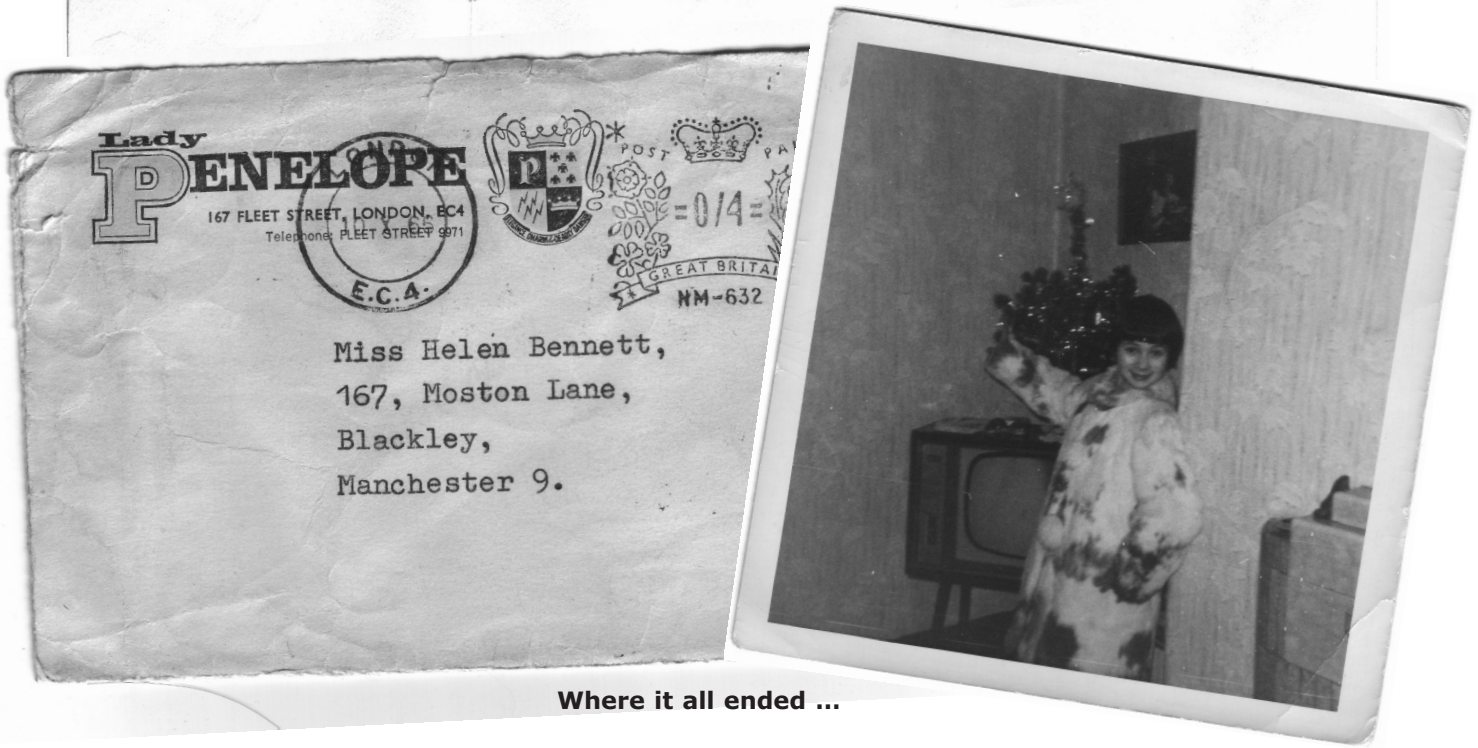
Congratulations! I have ordered your fur coat from Debsons in size 28" and will post it to you within two to four weeks.

I know you will look very nice in it, and I do hope you will continue to enjoy reading my magazine.

Very best wishes,

Penelope C-W

LADY PENELOPE



Where it all ended …









spoken words when you read of her exploits with robot master Mr Steelman and the enemy State of Bereznik or just chatting with the Tracy family.

But I could hear the words "… Helen, Guess what … you've WON!" Those were the words I read when her letter arrived for me. Lady Penelope had replied and the envelope and letter bore the unmistakeable heading. She had very good news; I had won a fur coat! This definitely ensured that I would continue to read her 'magazine' as she called it. I was hooked and would eat those girly FAB iced-lollies to prove my allegiance and invent a very exciting life for Sindy. Soon my name appeared in the comic and it felt as though I had achieved something quite important.

Some weeks later I was playing out when my mother called me inside. Expecting to dry the dishes, I walked back with some disappointment. Surprisingly on the chair in the living room lay a large, flattish parcel with my name neatly typed on the label. I opened it quickly, folding back layers of white tissue paper and pulling the soft fur up to my face. It felt lovely. We both laughed at the fur pompom buttons that were the size of large snowballs one of which was tagged with a glamorously written Debson's label detailing the care of Coney fur, rabbit fur, as I understand it. Within seconds I was running upstairs to look at it in the dressing table mirrors where you could see from three sides at once.

Animal rights activists had not yet reached Blackley in Manchester where I lived so I wore the coat both guiltless and guileless though it did attract quite some attention from strangers who would turn round for another look as I walked past. Who could blame them? Even the family dog was diverted from its fascination with the sheepskin rug in favour of this Coney delight. My family was very proud of me and I was hailed as lucky and went on to back a minor winner in the Grand National, 'Black Secret'.

I was encouraged to wear it to show family, friends and neighbours, on trips to town and parties and even to the local grocers' shop where the owners, George and Gertie Williams generously marvelled at it. They were still doing it, to my horror when I was fifteen, telling the other customers my story while we queued.

Just over a year later the school Christmas party seemed a suitable event to wear a fur coat and a new dress with the latest, up to the minute fashion accessory, bells which dangled on the ends of the tie belt. The party, the outfit, the unsteady feeling you have when you wear new shoes suitable only for dancing proved too much in the icy tarmacked playground and and I slipped uncontrollably onto my back. With bells jingling I realised the coat's days were numbered. I kept it until I was eighteen but I still love to come across my special letter and the photo of me wearing it, which I store with my keepsakes.

Lady Penelope *is fabulous and the stories, characters, memories and of course the fur coat were fantastic gifts to be given for which I am very thankful.* ●

My Comicy Saturday

by Glenn B Fleming



I was fortunate to have two older brothers when I was growing up, in fact I still have two older brothers who are now fully grown up - I'm just not sure about myself. When I was a kid, they both bought comics and so I could spend my own money on ice cream and sweets and other delicacies. Life was a lot simpler then and I had the best deal a kid could have. My middle brother Martin was always a soft touch and would even let me read his comics before he did - which is an indication of either great love for me or utter disregard to see how General Jumbo was shaping up that particular week. I wouldn't let anyone read my comics before I'd at least looked at them; maybe that tells you something about me.

Reading those early comics like *Valiant*, *Hotspur* and *Beezer*, with saucer-like eyes popping out of my head, must have been something to behold. Like all my school mates, I became the hero, whether he be a Roman soldier, a footballer or even a Spitfire pilot, in our play at school and after.

Most of the comics were bought on a Saturday, hence the title of this article, but some, like *Buster* and *Beezer* came out on Monday and Tuesday respectively. Sometimes my brothers and I had to wait until the following Saturday to buy them, the papershop owner keeping them under his counter for us. The back of that counter must have been either like the TARDIS or Aladdin's Cave; perhaps both - everybody's comics were held behind it, the shop keeper casually reaching down and producing the exact issue you wanted without even looking. Maybe he had special powers, or, more likely, he'd just finished reading it as you came in the shop.

Art for Art's Sake

As I was always drawing at school and home (drawing is the only thing I remember doing when I was small) it was invariably the artwork that caught my attention over the words. Even at that early age I always felt that the words were just scenery, added to put a name to a hero or villain, a place or situation. The words were never that important. If there had been no pictures at all, it would have been a book and, at that age, that would have been no fun at all.

That said, most of the artwork for the 'real' stories was always rather 'scratchy', without the smooth, even line of the cartoons. I didn't realize it then, but that was to do with light and shade and texture the artists were trying to put into their work - realism - and it's a shame the then printing process wasn't up to the standard of the artwork. I'd love to see those stories re-printed on better quality stock of paper sometime, but I have to doubt that will happen as artwork then was thrown away (can you believe that?) after the film had been made for the printing and therefore not much survives today.

Some of the actual storytelling was a little dodgy at times and the perspective occasionally slipped but on the whole those illustrations, scratchy or not, burned an indelible mark in my young head.

Payneful Memories

Lion's 'Paddy Payne' was always a favourite of mine, but not because he was a fighter pilot, but because the drawings were so good. The illustrations were always crisp and life-like as opposed to the cartoony efforts of most of the other stories. One Paddy Payne story I

(Below) TV21 artist Mike Noble shows just how to illustrate an explosion!









remember had him sliding down some wire, holding his cap over the wire to stop his hands being burned - "That's my favourite cap gone s'west..." he mumbled when he reached the safety of the ground. I can't for the life of me recall why he was sliding down some wire and not strafing some German convoy, but there he was, in glorious black and white, landing so softly Superman would have been impressed.

Although I regularly pored over and sometimes even laughed at 'Colonel Blink, the short sighted Gink', 'Keyhole Kate' and 'The Bash Street Kids', I never could cope with the words in the speech bubbles being type-set and not produced with 'real' hand lettering. Again, even at that early age I could tell the difference and preferred the 'real' stories.

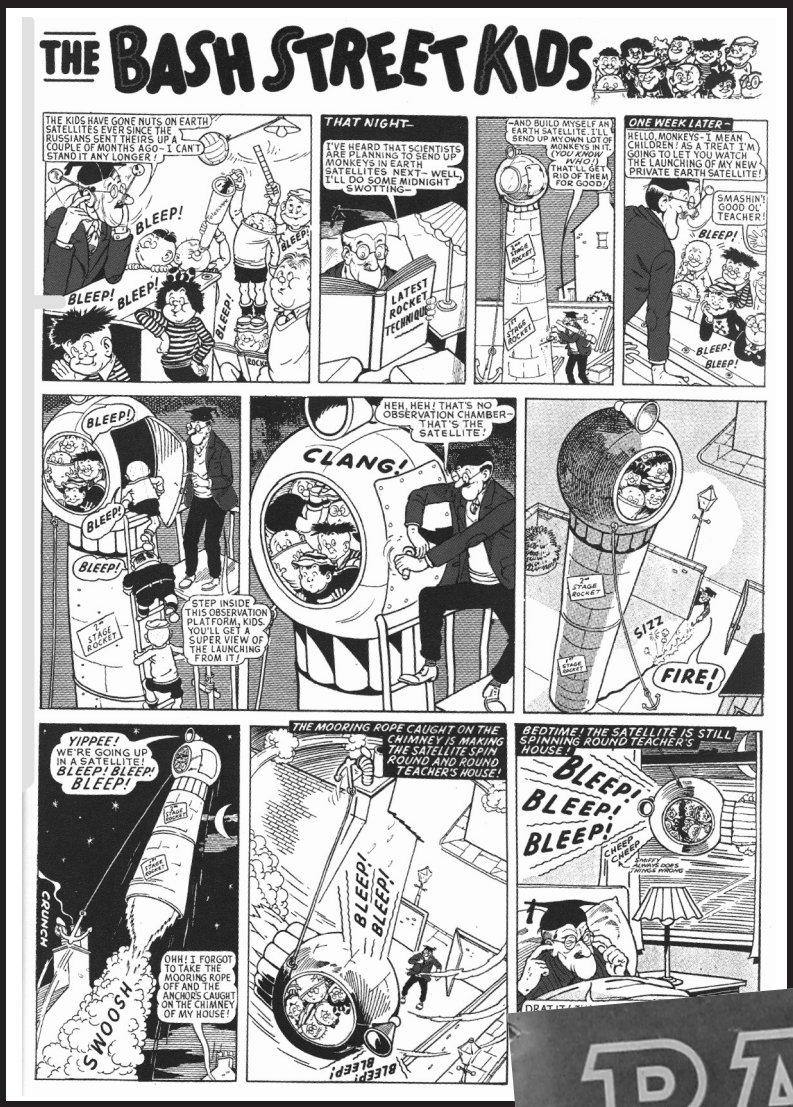
'Little Mo' was occasionally amusing if only that she reminded me of my little sister! Change that title to 'Little Jo' and my sister was suddenly a cartoon strip in the oversized *Beezer!* I've never been a fan of cartoons (even though in later life I have been paid to produce such work), but I enjoyed *Valiant*'s 'Captain Hurricane'.

Hurricane's Lexicon

'Captain Hurricane' must rank as one of the most un-PC strips ever produced. He was always fighting " 'Orrible little Nips!" or "Squareheads!" or "Blue chinned Eyeties!" Still, the strip did introduce us young 'uns to another language - my brothers and I and our friends could all shout "Gott in Himmel!" and "Donner Und Blitzen" as well as any 'Jerry' could.

It also taught me bad 'cockney'. Captain Hurricane's batman was called Maggott Malone and, at the sight of a Jerry Panzer, would proclaim Lumme!, which I thought was pronounced 'Loom"!

To think that barely ten years previously, Dr



Wertham was telling the United States Senate that comics were uneducational and turning the majority of American youth into juvenile delinquents! He was quite correct as I distinctly remember my brother and I asking my father (who'd been a paratrooper on D-Day) where we could buy a Panzer tank!

In 1964, at the age of nine, my friend Paul bought the first edition of *Ranger*. I was devastated. I had already spent my pocket money and had to ask my dad if he would get me the *Ranger* when he went to work. I knew my mum would give him hell because she reckoned we had too many comics anyway. My dad would always come through in times like this and I believe that is the role of any good father - to provide what the children need *and* what they want – and what more could you give a kid back then? That Monday, my dad pushed the *Ranger* under my eager eyes and whispered to take it upstairs and mix it in with the rest. I did, but he still got his ear bashed by my mum.

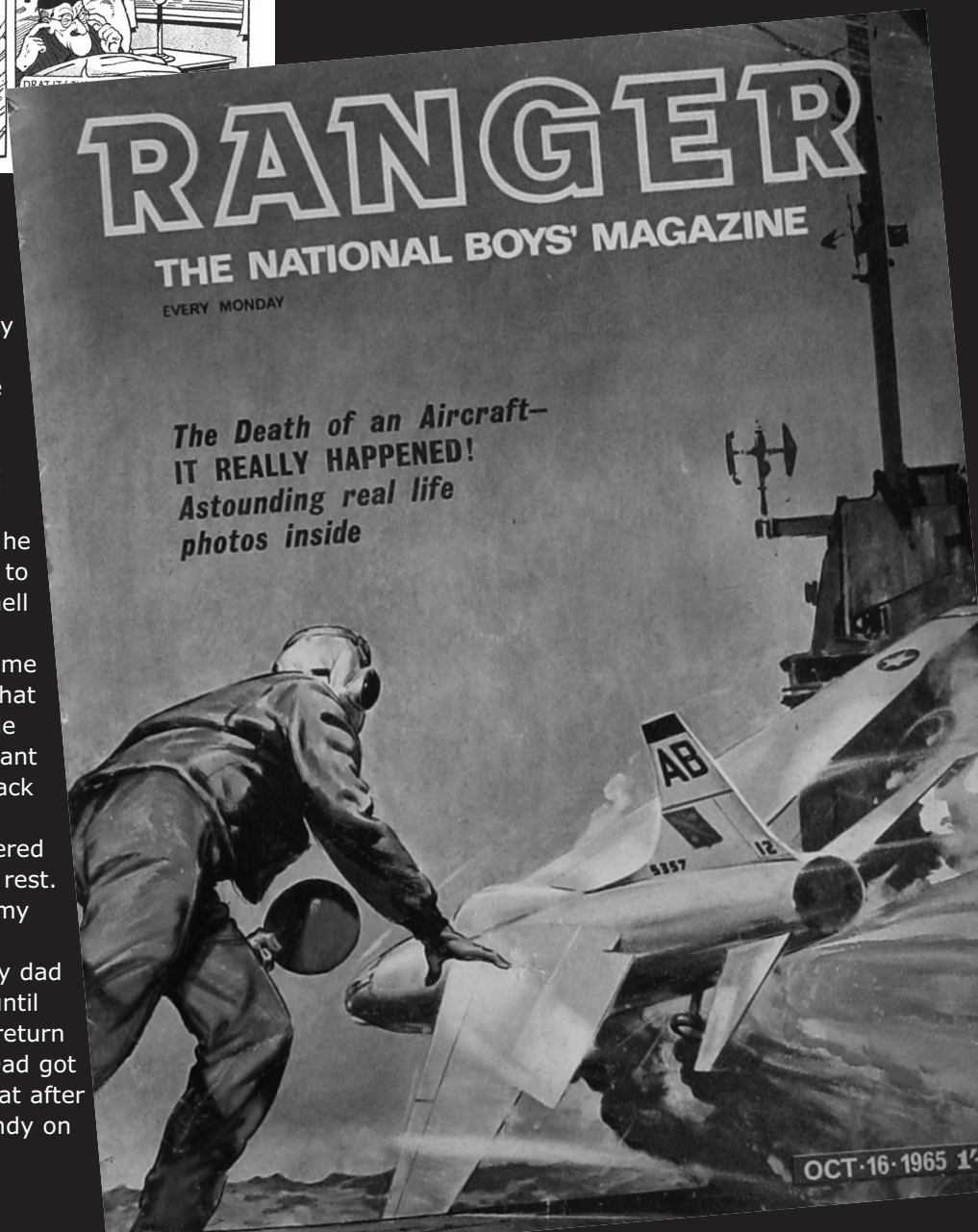
I remember how one particular year my dad told the newsagent to save our comics until we came back from holiday and on our return we had three weeks worth to go over! Dad got his ear bashed for that, too. I believe that after his perilous parachute jump into Normandy on D-Day, my dad was of the opinion that life was too short to complain that the kids had too many comics.

Proper Art

In that issue of *Ranger* Paul showed me was the awesome 'Trigan Empire', beautifully drawn by, I learned much, much later, artist Don Lawrence. His artwork was produced in full colour and I was amazed by it. Lawrence actually used paints on the artwork and when I mentioned this 'painted artwork' to my dad, he didn't know the difference between that and the other black and white stuff I'd catch him looking at when my mum wasn't around.

Around about then one of my brothers' friends introduced me to *Eagle*, though it didn't last for me - *TV21* came along and that was it - all my favourite Anderson shows under the same banner.

Those comics of the sixties were, to me, perfect: storytelling, composition, rendering and expression of colour. Tell that to today's artists and I bet half of them won't understand most of it - or am I showing my age? ●





Did you ever finish reading a comic and just wanted the experience to go on that little bit longer? Then you remember... you haven't read EVERYTHING. You haven't read all the ads! You MIGHT decide to collect stamps. And what's that funny bit of small writing telling you who owns the company who publishes the comic and where to buy it in Australia and something about South Africa?

If you have tried to follow the ownership history of British comics you're a better man than we are. Steve Holland IS a better man – but has he figured it all out?

By then they were known as ...

by Steve Holland

The title might be an odd one but it's a phrase I've come to loath. I know I'm going to have to use it in almost any article I write about comics that isn't about characters appearing out of Dundee where DC Thomson & Co. have saved me a ton of ink and explanation by sticking with the same name since they were founded in 1905.

My first childhood comics were published by Fleetway Publications. But when I got around to writing out that little coupon which would reserve you your comics each week at the local newsagent, they weren't Fleetway any more.

By then they were known as IPC Magazines.

In 1974 I swapped *Valiant* for *Speed & Power* (published by IPC Transport Press, just to confuse things further) but I never gave up comics entirely because I read *Vulcan* and *Action* over the next couple of years. 1977 saw the launch of *2000AD*, and 1982 brought *Warrior*. By the mid-1980s I was buying more comics than when I was a kid. But before long they weren't being published by IPC any more, they were from Fleetway Publications and I was a 'Fleetway kid' again. But only for a decade because by then they were known as Egmont Fleetway.



Harold Harmsworth

Confusing

When I started researching older comics from the 1950s and early 1960s things got even more confusing because I had to deal with Hulton Press, Longacre Press, Odhams Press. And they were all the same company, owned by the same people who were known as Fleetway Publications – which was owned by the company who owned the *Daily Mirror* – who had taken over the Amalgamated Press…

You see, the people who published the *Daily Mirror* had bought Amalgamated Press from the people who published the *Daily Telegraph* who had bought it from the people who published the *Daily Mail* who were the people who launched the *Daily Mirror*.

To put it another way, the guys who started the comics boom back in the late 19th century were called Harmsworth but were later called Northcliffe and Rothermere. Rothermere sold the company to two guys called Berry who were later called Camrose and Kemsley – and they sold it to a guy called Cecil King who was the nephew of Northcliffe and Rothermere, formerly the Harmsworth brothers.



Viscount Camrose

King didn't change his name, by the way.

He was succeeded by Hugh Cudlipp who only added a title (Baron) but who sold some of the comics to Robert Maxwell whose real name was Ján Ludvík Hoch.

Slow down, Poindexter!

Let's start again.

Alfred Harmsworth and his brother Harold were the founders of *Comic Cuts* and *Illustrated Chips* in 1890.

They also launched the *Daily Mail* in 1896 and the *Daily Mirror* in 1903.

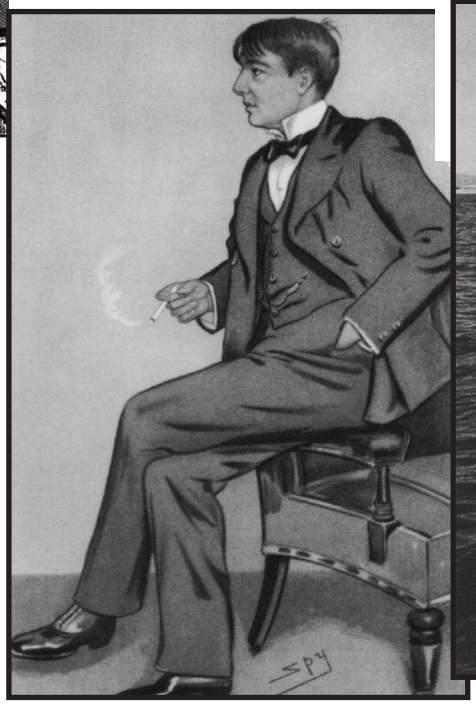
The Harmsworth Brothers also owned Answers Ltd., Pandora Publishing, Geraldine Press and various other subsidiary companies. It was the bringing together of these various subsidiary companies that created the Amalgamated Press in 1901.

Alfred Harmsworth became Lord Northcliffe in 1905 and flogged his shares in the *Daily Mirror* to his brother in 1913. He became Lord Rothermere in 1919.

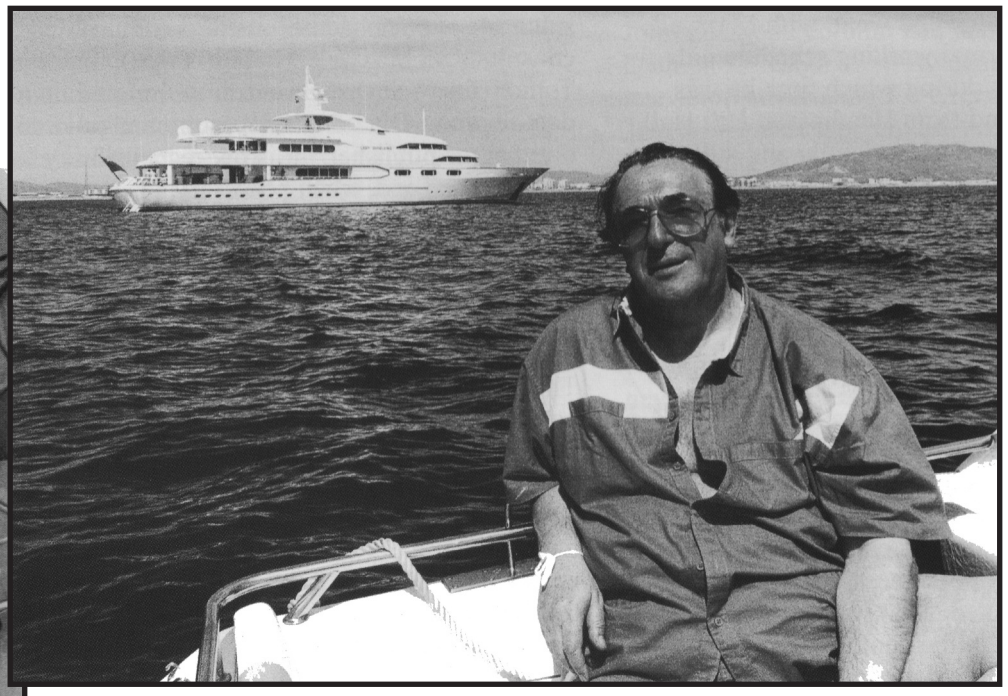
Rothermere's Daily Mirror Newspapers bought the *Daily Sketch* from Sir Edward Hulton in 1920.

Lord Northcliffe died in 1922. Lord Rothermere sold the





Northcliffe



Robert Maxwell

Daily Sketch to William and Gomer Berry of Allied Newspapers in 1925. The following year, the Berry brothers bought the Amalgamated Press.

In 1927, they merged various magazines published by Cassell (another company they owned) into the Amalgamated Press. William Berry became Lord Camrose in 1929 and his brother became Lord Kemsley in 1936.

Daily Mirror Newspapers, under chairman Cecil King, subsequently bought the Amalgamated Press from Camrose and Kemsley in 1959 and renamed the group Fleetway Publications.

Getting there ...

Now, Sir Edward Hulton had published the *Daily Sketch* until he sold it to Rothermere who offloaded it to the Berry brothers who published it through a subsidiary company of Allied Newspapers, founded by Northcliffe and Rothermere.

But by then it was known as the *Daily Graphic*, of course.

They sold that to Associated Newspapers, founded by Northcliffe and Rothermere who wanted a rival to the *Daily Mirror*, founded by Northcliffe and Rothermere, but it struggled for a while and was eventually merged with the *Daily Mail*, founded by Northcliffe and Rothermere.

But by then it was known as the *Daily Sketch*, of course. And that's how Edward Hulton junior got the money to found Hulton Press. Who published the *Eagle*. For a while.



Odd tale

Two months after Daily Mirror Newspapers bought the Amalgamated Press, Hulton Press was bought by Odhams Press. Odhams, founded as Odhams Ltd., had become Odhams Press when Odhams Ltd. merged with John Bull Ltd. in 1920. They published the *Sunday People* and *Daily Herald*.

In 1959, Odhams took over George Newnes which, by then, had absorbed C. Arthur Pearson. This meant there were two very large publishers vying for the lucrative women's magazines market and Cecil King suggested to Odhams' chairman Christopher Chancellor that they should rationalise the crowded market. Chancellor thought this might be an attempt at a takeover and approached Roy Thomson of Thomson Newspapers (who





Cecil King & George Brown

have nothing to do with D. C. Thomson) and suggested a possible merger. King reacted by making an outright offer for Odhams which was accepted in 1961.

Thus Fleetway absorbed magazines from Newnes and Pearsons, although the Hulton Press comics (who by then were known as Longacre Press) were kept as a slightly separate fiefdom, soon to be renamed Odhams Press.



Daily Mirror — THUR JULY 5 1945

FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE — ONE PENNY

DON'T LOSE IT AGAIN

Vote for them

WE reproduce on this page Zec's famous VE-Day cartoon. We do so because it expresses more poignantly than words could do the issues which face the people of this country today.

As you, the electors, with whom the destiny of the nation rests, go to the poll, there will be a gap in your ranks. The men who fought and died that their homeland and yours might live will not be there. You must vote for THEM. Others, happily spared, are unable for various reasons to have their right-ful say in this election. You must represent them.

Vote on behalf of the men who won the victory for you. You failed to do so in 1918. The result is known to all. The land "fit for heroes" did not come into existence. The dole did. Short-lived prosperity gave way to long, tragic years of poverty and unemployment. Make sure that history does not repeat itself. Your vote gives you the power. Use it. Let no one turn your gaze to the past. March forward to new and happier times. The call of the men who have gone comes to you. Pay heed to it. Vote for THEM.

Remember the issues. They are national not personal. Your own interest, the future of your children, the welfare of the whole country demand that today you do your duty and

VOTE

VICTORY AND PEACE IN EUROPE

"Here you are—don't lose it again!"

(Reproduced from our VE-Day issue without apology.)

Murdock and Maxwell

International Publishing Corporation Ltd. (IPC) was formed to implement the merger of Daily Mirror Newspapers and Sunday Pictorial Magazines Ltd. in 1963, although it wasn't until 1969 that IPC rationalised the various comics groups and they all became publications of IPC Magazines.

IPC had inherited problems: they relaunched the *Daily Herald* as *The Sun* but sales collapsed and *The Sun* was sold off to Rupert Murdoch who relaunched the title to compete directly with the *Daily Mirror*. The Daily Mirror Newspapers Ltd., Odhams Newspapers Ltd. and various other newspaper publishing divisions became IPC Newspapers Ltd. in 1968.

Industrial disputes in the late 1960s saw IPC's profits fall and the company was taken over by the Reed Group in 1970. Reed promptly became Reed International. Mirror Group Newspapers was created in 1974 bringing together all of Reed's newspapers assets whilst IPC Magazines retained all of the magazines.

The Mirror Group was sold to Robert Maxwell in 1984. In the early 1980s IPC had begun breaking down their juvenile magazines into groups to separate the successful girls' magazines from the ailing weekly comics. The latter, known as the IPC Magazines Youth Group, was sold to Maxwell's Pergamon BPCC Publishing Corporation in 1987 who renamed his new acquisition Fleetway Publications.

Phew!

Heir apparent

I'm sure that most of you will know what happened next. Maxwell was setting up a joint venture company with Fleetway and the Danish company Gutenberghus when he drowned.

Egmont took on the other 50% of the company and after various changes of imprint (Fleetway Editions, Egmont Fleetway, Egmont Magazines) the last surviving titles - *2000AD* and *Judge Dredd Megazine* - are now published by Rebellion.

So who is the son and heir of the original Harmsworth Brothers company?

Could it be Rebellion? After all, they publish the last surviving comic produced by IPC Magazines.

Well, no, because there has been so much shuffling of assets and name changes within companies for the last three decades that it's like playing "Find the Lady" with a very accomplished conman. What is now IPC Magazines Ltd. used to be called IPC Media Ltd. and what used to be called I.P.C. Magazines Ltd. (note the full stops) and who are now IPC Media Ltd., well, they used to be… bring those violins to a crescendo… George Newnes Ltd – the Harmsworths' great rivals.

Of course, during these changes, IPC Magazines were sold by Reed International (by then they were known as Reed Elsevier) to venture capitalist company Cinven who sold the company to Time Inc., the magazine arm of AOL Time Warner Inc.

However, it's all a bit of a shaggy dog question really because the original Amalgamated Press ceased to exist years ago. What the Berry brothers bought in 1926 was The Amalgamated Press (1922) Ltd., set up by Harold Harmsworth after his brother's death.

Maybe we could just start calling them Amalgafleetwipc. It would save a lot of explanation. ●

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ADVERTISEMENT



Before illustrating the award winning series Watchmen in 1980's, Artist Dave Gibbons had another job - as a male model! There is, however, absolutely no proof that the crossed legged guy is Dave's collaborator Alan Moore...

We each have a personal real-life comic hero. An artist, writer – or if you are really geeky, an editor or letterer – who transformed the way you enjoyed comics. This is the slot for you to let the world know who it was who set you along the path from average comic reader to comic strip nut. For details of how to send your suggestions, go to www.crikeyuk.co.uk and click on submissions.

This time around we have* Glenn B Fleming*'s thoughts and confessions about the great

Ron Embleton

Even as a 10-year-old, I could see that there was something rather special about Ron Embleton's artwork. The clue for me was the way he depicted, of all things, finger nails.

Ron would just paint them. Rarely using a hard line to show them. Most artists would either spoil their drawing by putting that line in and some would leave them out altogether. Ron? Well, Ron would just use a lighter shade of paint.

Stung

I first saw Ron's work on 'Stingray' in *TV21*. Titan's Terror Fish exploding from jagged panels. The almost tangible spray from Stingray's propellers and, notably, the double page, fully painted spreads.

Even before Frank Bellamy arrived in the *TV21* fold with his masterful depiction of Thunderbirds, Embleton was drawing the Anderson characters as 'real people'. Slowly falling under the spell of Marvel Comics from



Captain Scarlet ***races across the ocean in his Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle (SPV).***





America, I was enjoying these 'realistic' drawings and stories more than cartoons. The realism, rendering and characters seemed that much more accessible.

Astounded that an artist could paint a strip in full colour, rather than just in black and white, it did my little eyes no small damage - wide-eyed and almost legless, I was hooked and just couldn't get enough of this wonderful artwork.

Gifted

Ronald Sydney Embleton was born in London in October 1930. He was a tremendously gifted artist and illustrator whose work became much admired by just about everyone: fans, publishers and editors alike.

Ron submitted his first cartoon at the age of nine and, aged 12, won a national poster competition.



Following his successful run on *Stingray* (right), Ron took over the helm of Gerry Anderson's then latest production *Captain Scarlet and The Mysterons* (above and left).

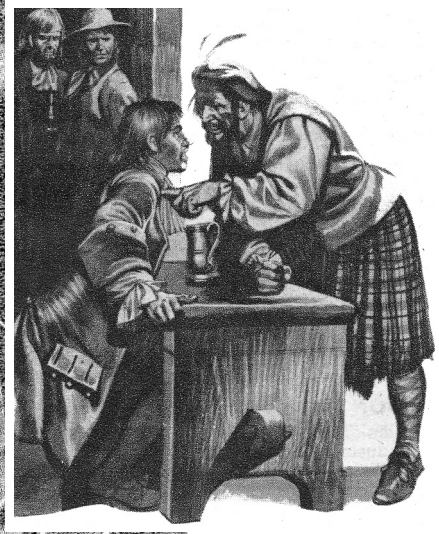
After training at the South East Essex Technical College and School of Art (studying painting under the guidance of expressionist painter David Bomberg) he worked in a commercial studio for six months during which time he began freelancing comic strips to independent publishers.

Embleton was one of those people who, apart from his first position, never seemed to be employed by anyone full-time, enjoying the freedom of freelancing his trade, choosing what to work on and when to work on it until his death.

Ron was just beginning to establish himself as he turned 18 when he was called up for his National Service. Embleton suddenly found himself deep in the jungles of Malaya, probably wearing some of the uniforms he had so neatly rendered and yomping through terrain as exotic as some of the strips he'd been working on!

Amalgamated

Leaving the army in 1950, Embleton set up his own studio with a school friend Terry Patrick and James Bleach, whom Patrick knew from life-drawing classes. The three quickly established themselves with various independent publishers - Scion, TV Boardman and Norman Light amongst others. Embleton also began contributing to many of Amalgamated Press' publications.



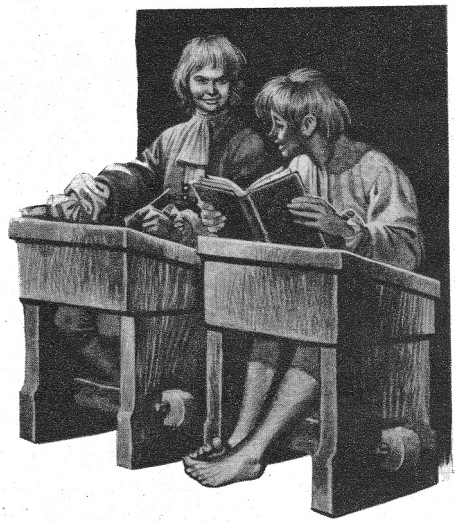
Even in those early times, Embleton was a busy and much sought after man.

During this period he drew strips for *Mickey Mouse Weekly* and *Express Weekly*, where he took over the artwork of 'Wulf the Briton'. This would prove to be a turning point for Ron. 'Wulf' had been drawn by many artists before Embleton's arrival and he immediately criticised the way the strip was written. So he did what anybody would do - he began writing the strip as well, pushing the character forward in a manner not seen before.

It was on 'Wulf' that he developed his techniques for working in colour, creating some 300 pages of meticulously painted artwork during a four-year run on the strip from 1956 to 1960. For me, it may be this strip that he will be best remembered for (or maybe it will be *Stingray*, but that was still several years away).

Express Weekly was printed in photogravure on good quality paper and was therefore able to do full justice to Ron's superb colour work. Aware of this process, Embleton obviously relished the chance to draw the full-page battle scenes that appeared on many covers of *Express Weekly* and as his research was second to none, this culminated in the finest renderings of warriors and such like. Not content with that, Embleton also lettered the strip, thus producing a 'complete' piece of artwork.

An example of Ron Embleton's stunning perspective work can be seen in this spot-illi from Look and Learn.



Historic

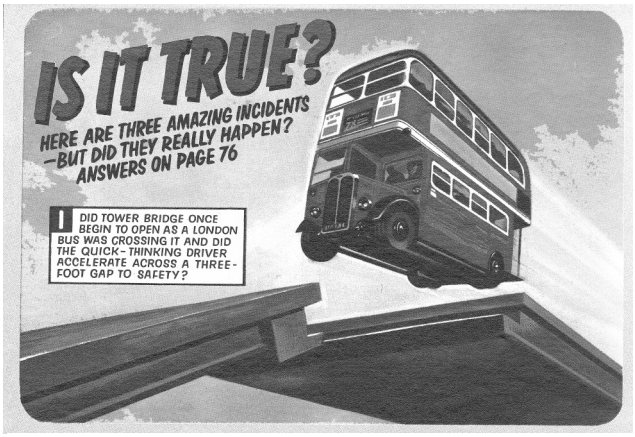
Embleton's love of historical characters and settings served him well with later strips, drawing 'Wrath of the Gods' and 'Johnny Frog' amongst others. Although Ron loved historical settings he was equally at home with adventure strips such as 'Biggles' and his science fiction rendering of 'Stingray' in *TV Century 21*.

Though he didn't particularly enjoy drawing the Anderson strips, Embleton was so well thought of by puppet master Gerry Anderson that he was later commissioned to provide the stunning artwork which appeared in the closing credits of ITV's *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*. Embleton also worked on the Captain Scarlet strip, though for me, his style was too similar to that of the Stingray years, fantastic though it was.

Looking and learning

Embleton was also a prolific contributor to *Look and Learn*, producing illustrations for numerous series. In 1969 he produced a fill-in story in the long-running 'Trigan Empire' strip. Embleton also produced illustrations for titles aimed at younger children and numerous books. He just couldn't stop drawing and painting and it was his painting that was coming to the fore.

In 1960, Ron was elected a member of the Royal Institute of Oil Painters and the National Society of Painters and Sculptors and his work was being exhibited throughout the world. By the early 1970s, he had moved completely away from comics work to concentrate on historical illustrations. He produced a series of paintings sold as prints for framing with titles like Children's Street Games and Old London Street Traders. He also painted a series of Characters from Dickens for *This England* magazine.



(Right) Another example of Ron Embleton's stunning figure drawing, again from Look and Learn.



(Above and below). More Look & Learn brilliance from the brush of Ron Embleton. Note the tones on the skin of the warrior above and rendering of the eagle's feathers…

Classic

In 1972 Embleton began a long association with Newcastle publisher Frank Graham and the union turned out to be extremely lucrative for both artist and publisher. Ron had met Graham in the late 1960s and sent him samples of his work, completely bowling Graham over with his paintings. Later, Ron provided over 140 paintings of the Northeast to illustrate Graham's publications.

Among this work are some 80 pictures of life on Hadrian's Wall during the Roman occupation. Embleton also produced 15 paintings of the Farne Islands and their bird life, local places and local characters. If this were not enough, he produced another 80 coloured plates and over one hundred black and white drawings for twelve booklets on Roman life which have sold more than 50,000 copies worldwide. One particular painting of life at Housestead Fort, produced and sold as a postcard, has sold more than one million copies. Total sales of his series of postcards of Roman life are well in excess of six million.

In 1984, Frank Graham produced a hardback volume entitled *Hadrian's Wall in the Days of the Romans* which is packed with Embleton's paintings and illustrations. Ron Embleton's illustrations are among the most authentic reconstructions of Roman life ever produced.



Stripped

In a sudden, but successful, return to the comic strip format in 1973, he produced the erotic satire strip (no pun intended) 'Oh, Wicked Wanda!' for *Penthouse Magazine*. This ran for the next seven years, showing us all that he could draw and paint the most beautiful of women as well!

This was followed by another erotic strip 'Sweet Chastity', this time written by Penthouse founder Bob Guccione.

Embleton was working on one of these strips when he died of a heart attack on 13 February 1988. He was 57 years old.

Realistic

Embleton was truly a giant of the comics, producing nothing but stunning art for any and all types of strips and spot illustrations.

Although I have yet to see it, a complete inventory of his work would make compelling reading as his early work spanned the crucial two post-war decades of adventure-strip development in this country.

British comics were 'growing up' in this period and significantly moving away from the generally poorly drawn '30s and '40s format to embrace a more American-led, realistic cinemamatic style of storytelling.

Cinema had become the template for mass media sequential art; close-ups, high and low shots, perspective, colour, shade and realistic rendering of human anatomy was suddenly employed in storytelling.

British comics (and, like me, their readers) would never be the same and Ron Embleton was at the forefront of that movement. Unlike the TV actor who rarely goes on to become a major star in film, Ron Embleton went from 'lowly' comic strip artist to renowned oil painter in a career that was tragically cut short.

Or maybe there was just nothing left for Ron to draw and paint. ●

Ron Embleton could draw anything - from Lewis Carroll's *The Walrus and the Carpenter* (below) to the battle of Agincourt (right)... and just about everything in between.





THE FIRST SPACE-AGE WEEKLY

Week Ending 12th May, 1956. No. 4.

A 'News of the World' Publication.

ROCKET

By Brian M Clarke

For the rest of the world the Space Age began on 4 October 1957 with the launch of the Soviet Sputnik – but for British comic readers it really began 14 April 1950 when issue one of Eagle *introduced us to our first proper space hero, Dan Dare. Since then 'the Pilot of the Future' has certainly had the lion's share of coverage when it comes to talking about British space heroes.*

Looking back at Eagle*, however, the space elements were pretty thin on the ground. It wasn't until six years later that Britain's first true 'space age' comic hit the newsstands …*



Blast Off!

Science fiction heroes and storylines have been a staple of comics from way back. Many were Flash Gordon clones in the style of Swift Morgan, Space Ace and Don Conquest. Some, like the bizarre Professor Radium from *Puck* in the early 1900s, were weird navel-gazing exercises about strange possible super-science inventions. There had even been titles devoted to scientific speculation such as *Modern Boy* (1930s). What there had never been, however, was a single title devoted in its entirety to science fiction adventures and fact.

Not until 21 April 1956.

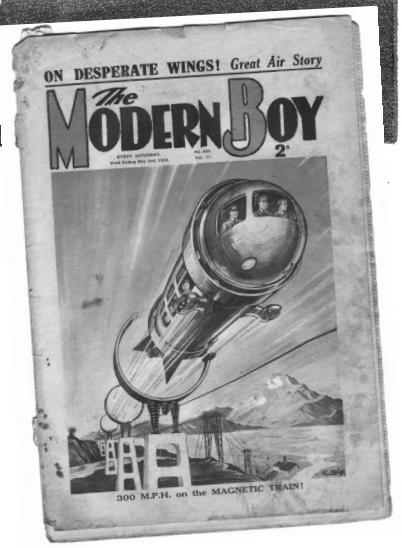
Edited by Battle of Britain flying ace Sir Douglas Bader, *Rocket* was an over-sized quality publication with one of the best logos ever to grace a comic cover. Published by The News of the World (stop laughing at the back!) it was a photogravure weekly with a mission to make space exploration and science intelligible, entertaining and profitable.

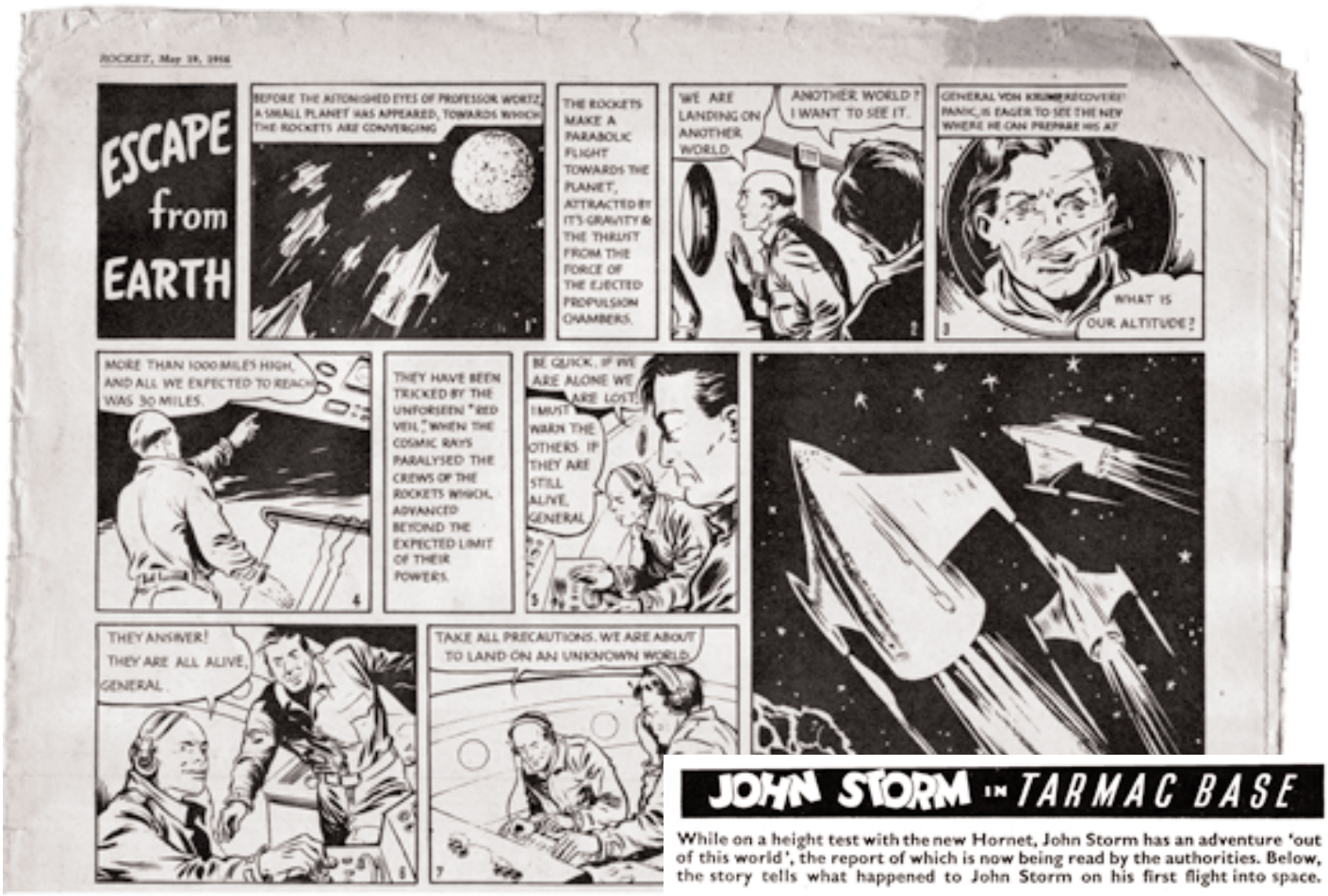
Captain Falcon

Rocket's equivalent of Dan Dare was Captain Falcon, chief of Moon Base Patrol. He began his *Rocket* space career in the Patrol Ship Beta but by issue two he had been upgraded to the more powerful Space Patrol Cruiser The Hawkins.

Created by Frank Black, the strip followed the juvenile SF formula of brainy super-pilot do-gooder taking two teenage trainees out to learn the ropes. And of course they had nicknames. Some a bit 'arder than others. 'Crash' Kale was all right for a space hero but not too many people might want to trust their lives to a cadet called 'Sparrow' Smith.

Captain Falcon's adventures may have been pulpy – fighting despots on the moon, conducting rescue missions on the jungle world of Venus – but the full colour artwork carried it off with verve and finesse. Artist Black opened up the page with large panel layouts that made the best of the space action. His composition could even find excitement in just a couple of talking heads. He had the ability to always find an action to be done even if the crew were just congratulating themselves on a bit of nice comet shooting.





(Above): The Seabed Citadel successfully located the awe and wonder of space travel to the weird depths of our own oceans.

According to British comics historian Denis Gifford Captain Falcon took "… its inspiration from *Eagle*, (and) came across as an insipid variation of Dan Dare". It's certainly true that Black's artwork lacked the verisimilitude of a Frank Hampson but by ditching the draftsmanship in favour of dynamic layouts and fast-moving, highly inventive scripts, 'Captain Falcon' remains an undiscovered classic of the Brits-in-Space period.

Strip Mining

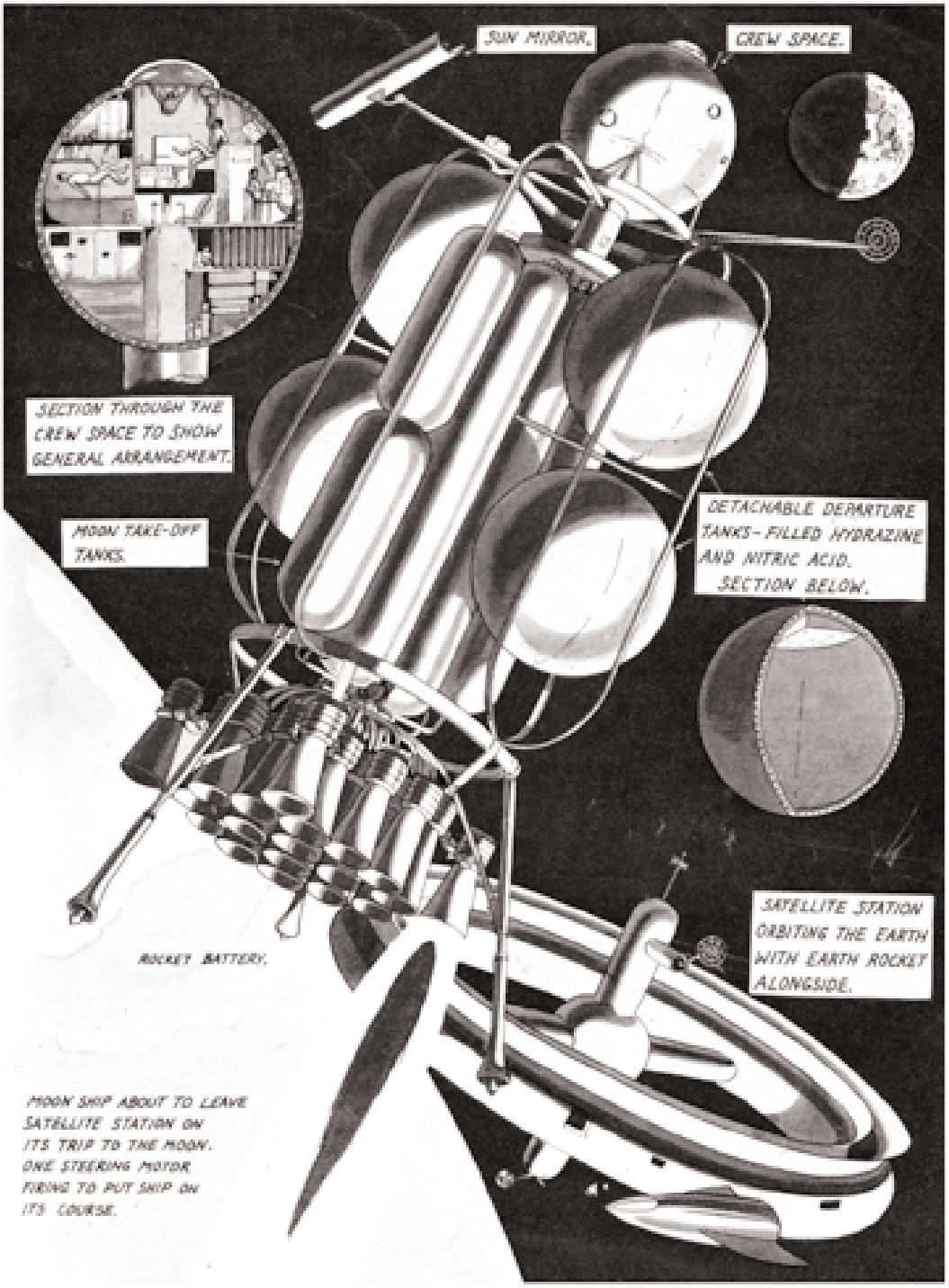
Rocket tried hard to give its young readers a taste of adventure and a sense of awe. To keep the costs down, the picture paper bought in older American material and either ran them with a border to compensate for the size of the US originals or cut the pages and resized them.

One such strip was 'Escape from Earth', an unidentified nine-panel half-pager with obvious newspaper roots. It told of a journey into space with as much science fact as could be reasonably dropped into a kids' strip without turning it into a scientific paper. Radiation, space madness and the effects of cosmic rays were discussed – and the dramatic results illustrated – in a nifty piece of space pulp. And we are only on page three!

Another imported space hero was 'John Storm', written and illustrated by prolific Dutch artist and writer Henk Sprenger. This was another newspaper strip, this time presented at a level of detail unusual in strip work for the period. The British 'John Storm' was known throughout much of Europe as 'Piloot Storm', itself a recently re-imagined version of Sprenger's popular aviation war comic *Arend Stork*. This is another hidden



(Above): John Storm artwork pulled off the trick of combining a retro Flash Gordon style with hints of the underground comics still a decade in the future.



***Rocket* had some of the best visions of space travel ever to grace a comics page (left).**

gem of comic strip history that richly deserves an English language printing.

The colour centre-spread was reserved for Mac Raboy's version of 'Flash Gordon' (top half) and Frank Robbin's strangely non-SF 'Johnny Hazard'. The imaginative use of split page layout gave these strips a graphic dynamism that lifted the action right off the page. It was probably the first time British readers had seen Flash Gordon in colour.

Another old favourite from the comics was William Ritt and Clarence Gray's 'Brick Bradford'. Like Gordon, kids would have recently cheered Bradford on in a serial adventure at the Saturday matinee and here he was in living colour. Using all the tropes of space opera, Brick took readers on exotic adventures to strange jungle worlds, hazardous quests aboard flying sky-ships and even spinning backwards and forwards through time.

The back cover serial, 'Professor Jack Ransom discovers The Seabed Citadel' was drawn and written by Ley Kenyon, an aqualung expert and a member of Jacques Cousteau's underwater team. Although the science may have been impeccable, the fact that it was drawn in mainly long-shots meant that it remained deeply impersonal. Just like the cold, dark world of the deep.

(Below): Artist Eric Parker often failed to nail the SF in William Temple's St. Rockets 'the science college of tomorrow'



Adding Texture

As well as the well-chosen adventure strips, *Rocket* also had a reasonable range of text stories. Again, in an effort to keep costs down some of the stories were little more than extracts used to fill space and sell books.

'Adventure with an Octopus' was one such



(Above):Clarence Gray's Brick Bradford proves that space could be a gay place indeed!

story in which an extract from Sir Arthur Grimble's *A Pattern of Islands* was given the proto-tabloid treatment by taking a rather run-of-the-mill encounter with a octopus and presenting it as a battle to the death with a deep sea creature.

Perhaps the best text story was Conrad Frost's 'The Jungle Space' a pulp adventure set on Mars. It had all the elements we have come to expect from juvenile SF fiction but told with breathless energy and an unusual attention to character detail. It also benefited from some great artwork by Winslade.

The other major text adventure was William Temple's 'St. Rockets'. Temple was well known for his Martin Magnus series of SF juveniles and his professionalism and knowledge of space shines through in every paragraph. Temple was a member of the British Interplanetary Society and was a one-time flatmate of Arthur C. Clarke. Such a background ensured that space fact must have run like a 'Blue Streak' through his veins.

Cut-aways

For this writer the highlight of each issue is the space-related cutaway on the inside back cover. Rendered with technical precision by J. Yunge-Bateman of the Royal Navy they provide a wonderful and inspiring insight to the vision of space travel then held by some of the foremost thinkers in the British Space Race.

The whole comic is evocative of a time when the fantastic promise of space appeared to be just a few bits of metal, a big engine and an heroic chin away.

Rockets Away

Editor Sir Douglas Bader wrote to readers from his 'observatory' in an orbiting satellite speaking enthusiastically about the promise of space. Interestingly for the period very little Cold War paranoia appears in the strips beyond the occasional presence of a foreigner from some un-named eastern country.

The science and space-fact may have been a little too heavy for its core market, however, as *Rocket* ceased publication after just 32 issues. Its short run has made it highly collectable and although issues can be picked up for around £4 to £5 each, time is running out if you want to get on board for *Rocket*'s new-found appreciation. This title is definitely on the up!

Sir Douglas Bader believed that "the new Elizabethan Age has found horizons wider than the first Elizabethans envisaged. The depths below our sea and the space round our planet form the immediate horizons which man is straining to cross".

It was his mission to bring the awe and excitement of space to the baby boomers for whom space exploration would become mundane in the matter of a few decades.

"You are joining what looks like becoming the largest Space Club in the world," he excitedly promised.

For some of us, that promise is still very much alive. ●

(Below): Escape from Earth's plot may have been childish – but its vocabulary and attempt to keep the science right raised it up a notch or two.



Crikey!

French artist and comic fan Marc-André was in touch with Crikey! *within a week of it's first appearance. After a couple of exchanges I suggested that he might like to put finger to keyboard and provide* Crikey! *readers with the inside story on how someone living in France became such a big fan of British comics …*

The French Connection

by Marc-Andre

I was born in 1960 and my parents were not fond of comics. Just imagine their faces when I told them, at 16, that I wanted to be either a burglar (really) or a cartoonist (I can say now that burglar – sometimes – pays more).

Well, I ended up as a graphic artist as well as doing comics and illustrations.

I had a subscription in 1967 to *Le Journal de Mickey* – which happened to publish 'Archibald Razmott' ('Eagle-Eye Junior Spy') and 'Matt Le shériff' ('Gunsmoke') in the beginning of the 70s (although 'Flash Gordon' by Dan Barry was my favourite).

But that was not my first exposure to British comics. My brother had a subscription to *Junior*, which was a cheaper reprint of the weekly *Tintin*; but, as with *Spirou* or *Vaillant le Journal de Pif*, they were not fond of translations of foreign strips at the time. Even if they had some, I couldn't have known. Comics (la bande dessinée) was bad considered, it was rubbish for many people.

The only other comic weeklies we could get were those sold by the travelling grocery van (every Thursday). He only had *Tintin* and the new format of *Vaillant* and *Pif Gadget* which my grandmother bought for a few months before reading in the *Catholic Press* that it was (oh oh) … communist oriented!

At the church they sold *Record* (many articles, few but good comics) and it replaced my Mickey subscription.



Pilote had already published some Frank Bellamy pages and the adventures of Jeff Arnold but it was a grown-up magazine and stayed unknown to me for some years.

We could only get other monthly and quarterly comics when on holiday, discovering so many revues, magazines, periodicals that we didn't imagine they existed. We could buy some *Pepito* (by Italian Luciano Bottaro), the new *Tarzan* monthly (with the debuts of the Manning tenure) and some others. The only thing forbidden were the petit formats (pocket sized comics) of which there were hundreds.

The first British comic story I remember reading when younger (1967-68) was 'Le Club des Trois' in the quarterly *Pim Pam Poum* (Lug Publisher) who, I discovered years later, was 'Our gang' by Dennis Mallet.

There they were! Kids doing absolutely mad things, something never seen in other comics! And some of the adults in the comic were nuts, as well, and I loved reading the pages, full of this kind of freedom. In this same comic magazine was 'Tracassin, mon journal au jour le jour' ('Buster') which had, later, a spin-off: 'Les rêves de Tracassin' (Tracassin's dreams – Buster's Dream World) in other mags from the same publisher.

Fiesta, *Albums Comiques de Kiwi* … this last one had other British strips, such as 'Pop' and 'Les Affreux' with nasty humoristic kids.

There were many other publishers that translated British comics; *Rin Tin Tin* (Sagédition) had 'Blackbow', 'Vengeance

Trail', 'Jeff Arnold' … *Les Pieds Nickeles Magazine* and *Bibi Fricotin Magazine* (Société Parisienne d'Editions) had 'Tass O'meil'('Lazy Sprockett' from *Buster*), 'P'tite Tête' ('Big head' from *Smash*) and so on. *Bugs Bunny* ran 'L'oeil de Zoltec' ('Kelly's eye').

In 1973, as I was a college boarder, my family moved from a 2000+ souls little town to a 417 (yes) one. Almost every comic I had was either lost, given away or burnt.

The pocket sized comics began to come home in the seventies, and I could read Barnabe in Vick ('Wacker' from *Smash*), 'Archibald Razmott' under another name, translated in a new publication, *Oooh!* (Editions Aventures et Voyages) which didn't last more than five issues, and many many others as for the publishers of the pocket sized comics, it was cheaper to buy in London or Dundee (or Barcelona, Milano, Buenos Aires …) than to have only French writers and artists. Many of those small publications only reprinted British comics, such as Battler Britton, Rangers or Navy that translated the Fleetway war titles. *Princesse* or such other that had every girl strip. There was 'Archie the Robot', 'Birdman', 'Jet Logan'.

But the money was not there and I discovered some of the titles only when on holiday or much later when I began to earn my own money but it was a bit late and the end of most of the publishing houses had begun. I could find some 'Captain Condor', 'Billy the kid', Buffalo Bill', Billy Brave', 'Matt Mariott', 'Knights of the Road'.

Later, in the '80s, *Aventures et Voyages* translated other IPC series from *Battle*, *Action*, *Tornado* and *2000 AD*: Charley's war, Death Race, Judge Dredd, Angry Planet, etc … just before folding their business.

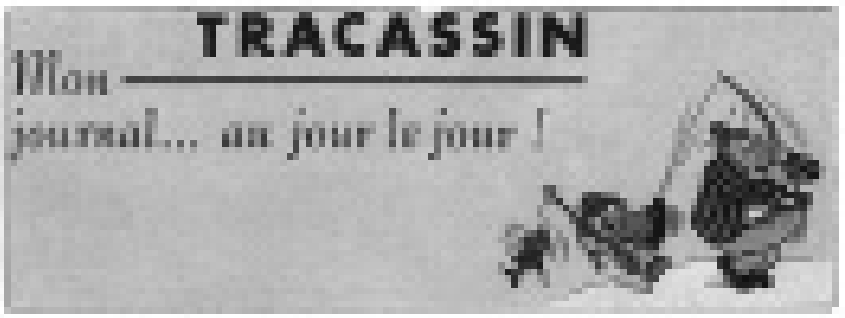
In the end of the '80s, I began writing articles about comics in *Hop!* and I could see in print my features about Frank Bellamy, Peter O'Donnell and others.

For the daily strips, still in the '70s, I could read for a short time 'Agence Una' (The Seekers) in *Centre-Presse*, the regional newspaper my parents subscribed to, but I think that James Bond, Modesty Blaise, and later Amanda were published in other national newspapers as FRANCE-SOIR.

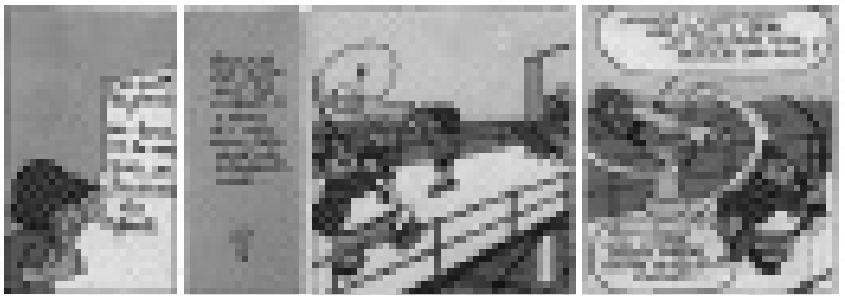
Well, that's all for memories! ●







(Right) Buster's Diary-with a *soupçon* of French.



(Top right) 'Our Gang' by Dennis Mallet.





On 25 February 1961, a new comic was launched by the venerable Scots company D C Thomson. It was The Victor, a mix of action, adventure and war stories aimed firmly at the ever-profitable 11 to 14-year-old boys' market. The comic followed the model proven by the 'new' Hotspur of mainly pictorial stories with a text story to keep the cost of employing yet another artist down, but even that economy was to pass with the quiet dropping of the last text story in 1971 (issue 540).

To help encourage parting with pocket money, the first issue came free with a squirt gun. And issue two had a set of sporting cards. But more importantly to this humble reader, this was the first time that the venerable True Story appeared on the front cover of the Victor. That story was "The One Man Army" which told the story of how Lance Corporal John Harman won the VC for his actions on 9 April 1944.

True Story was a feature that had appeared in various DC Thomson comics, but for the first time, it became a strong part of a comic's identity. For a lot of us, the real *Victor* died when the True Stories of Men At War was quietly dropped in December 1987 in favour of "The Goals of Jimmy Grant" (issue 1400) in order to boost falling sales.

Old Friends

The most notable character to grace issue one was Braddock V.C., a character that had a successful transfer from *Rover* and was beautifully transformed from text to illustration by Keith Shone.

Other characters that had successful transfers into the Victor were notably Morgyn The Mighty (from the *Beano* via the *Rover*), drawn by Ted Kearon and our own loveable Alf Tupper who was the iconic character most associated with the *Victor* (art by Pete Sutherland). There were other characters from related comics such as 'Cap'n Hand And His Mutinous Band', 'Figaro'', 'The Hillys And The Billys', 'Union Jack Jackson' but none were as associated with the *Victor* as Braddock, Morgyn and Tupper.

Alf Tupper is remembered with such fondness that thanks to Mike Shawfield's dedication, Alf has his own website www.toughofthetrack.net

New Friends

Original characters also made their mark, so the *Victor* wasn't a complete excuse for DC Thomson to exhume their back catalogue and re-package them for the '60s. The most notable of these were Wee Bandy, a cattleman who was a star striker for his local team in the 1960s.

Another was Joe Bones, an 'orrible solider happiest when sat in Cookie's kitchen, but an absolute genius at mountaineering in his bare feet. Thanks to the efforts of Lord Plimpton, he got plenty of chances to use this skill in various parts of the world during World War 2. And we mustn't forget Cadman, The Fighting Coward, from the First World War, who was a genius in getting his actions to be misinterpreted as heroic, despite being a greedy, manipulative, blustering coward, but his batman, Corporal Tom Smith knew the score. And although one of the best comedy characters, the Hammer Man, blacksmith Chell Puddock who was set in ye olde Englande and his good deeds would almost always backfire on him leaving him and Sir Jinks penniless. As the years passed they each left their mark on *Victor*.

There was an update to the logo in August 1973 and then, only five years later *Victor* was to save its first sister comic casualty. "Great News Inside!" meant that the revived Wizard had fallen below the mark of profitability and was swallowed up in July '78 with the publication of issue 906.

Few Wizard characters survived this merger and then only for a short period, but at least it gave the *Victor* editor a few more choices when he needed to fill a gap in the comic.

Last man standing

The Victor's greatest victory!

By Colin Noble

Crikey!

Teaser Time

There were many more characters that appeared in Victor, but that would probably take a 200 page book to sit and list them all, so as a teaser, I will list just a few of the stories and characters and then see how many more you can remember.

Toad In The Hole • Country Cuzzins • The Swordmaker • The Last 600 • Hork The Hunter • Boy Cross • Coldstream Guard Bob Millar • Shiwa Sands • The Wells of Marzuk • The Coonskin Grenadier • Stark's Soccer School • The Rocky Road To Spain • Dexter Must Die • Send For Saxon • MiddleMarsh • Crag Force • The Twister • Spy Squadron • The Rule Of Rogat, to name just a few.





In the next eight years, *Victor* was to absorb five more mergers as *Hotspur* (February 81 issue 1042), *Scoop* (October 81 issue 1078), *Buddy* (August 83 issue 1173), *Champ* (October 85 issue 1288) and *Warlord* (October 86 issue 1338) fell by the wayside to leave *Victor* as the last man standing in what used to be a flagship market for DC Thomson.

Victor itself was not immune to changes as the stories tried to be more edgy as the 1980s wore on. It wasn't enough to stop sales from continuing to fall. A last-ditch effort was made in April 91 to update *Victor* into a glossy format (issue 1573) with more features on sport and adventure stories. While the new look *Victor* seemed to rally, it was only masking more serious symptoms and on 21 November '92 we saw the weekly *Victor* make its final appearance.

Afterlife

Spin-off material was the perennial Christmas favourite annual which lasted a respectable 31 years from 1964 to 1994 and the Summer Specials putting in a respectable 26 years from 1967 to 1992 and an unusual Adventure Special in 1987.

So there we have a potted history of the *Victor*, the last man standing of the weekly adventure comic for boys. *2000AD* has moved on and is aimed more at an older audience these days. The last true comic that still caters for boys is *Commando*. ●

Thanks go to Ray Moore and Al Notton for their help in compiling this article and saving me from making any real obvious errors.

Um letters!

For future issues of* Crikey! *let us know what you think about our magazine, British comics, your reactions to features or simply make us laugh.

Um Crikey!

As a woman who loves a man who loves comics I wasn't initially sure that Crikey! was the best thing ever to enter my life.

We'd had talks aboutcomics. Spent an afternoon in Sheffield looking at comics. Who would have thought comic marts could be so... interesting. Or indeed so hard to find on the weekend of the snooker world cup thingy – bigger and better placed posters please, Sheffield Hallam!

There was an affectionate but intense pause in conversation when he revealed that some of the seriously erotic ones had a place in his collection. Cue much sucking in of tummy – which is hard when you are trying not to wear an expression reminiscent of nothing more than the fact that if you sucked a lemon it would be the lemon that winced – and off to Whitby for even more goth clothing; not that I am insecure or anything.

The discussion about if he moved in with me would I have to convert the attic because he needs to store his comic collection somewhere as he had a collection of about 10,000 and they needed a room of their own (take note – if I find all the dodgy ones on the top of the collection, the room will be locked forever and the key accidentally dropped down the nearest manhole!).

And now we had a comic about comics... cue huge sighs and much gnashing of teeth...

But I paid for a subscription because I thought it would make him happy (cue soft music and lots of ahhhhhs ... which doesn't have quite the same ring when it comes from a group of comic loving (mostly) men chuntering over Spider-man, X-Men (so it was a comic before it was a film(s) - as I live and breathe!!!) and for the sadder ones, Twinkle) but then I found the Misty article! Cue happy music, gothic ambience, thoughts of girl power and memories of being 11 and the desolation of finding out my mum forgot to get edition 11. Even then I thought the 'they didn't have it when I went to the newsagent' had a dodgy ring to it. And I never did find out what happened in the two strips that were ending in that edition. What did happen to the girl whose dad was in a debtors' prison who cut out silhouettes to make money and the one who was transported to Australia ... and now I find out you can get it on DVD!

Looks like we are going to need another box in that there attic conversion!

Keep up the good work, boys – I think you have a convert!

Di Stirling-Chow aged 40 and 3/4

This Crikey! thing could end up costing you a fortune, Di. First there's the subscription. Then there's the decision you must have made by now to start collecting Misty. What's next? Professional archival storage systems? Temperature controlled library? And that's before you even begin to think about collecting the original artwork. Did you know you could do that, Di? Now where has that girl gone?

Um Crikey!

Picked up a copy of your fine mag in the Bristol branch of Travelling Man today. Crikey! indeed! I feel a mag dedicated to British comics has been well overdue and I considered pulling one together a few years back, but I don't have the knowledge or the comic collection. So it was a pretty daft idea really. Glad someone with the knowledge and enthusiasm is doing the subject justice.

For a first issue it's an outstanding effort. It's a great-looking mag- the production values are great, the reproductions and layouts are crisp, clean and uncluttered. The Frank Bellamy piece in particular looks fab and I loved the Dr Droll pages.

A few suggestions/observations for you to do with you what you want. Much as I love the nostalgia pieces, as a child of the '70s they were all a bit warm and fuzzy for me, lacking a bit of grit and edge. Maybe that reflects that I grew up reading Action, Battle and 2000AD.

The pieces seemed a bit too lightweight for me- the Misty article for example. Hopefully moving forward you can encourage your contributors to really get stuck into the detail.

In terms of the fab illustrations used I would have loved to have known which issues they came from and who the artists were.

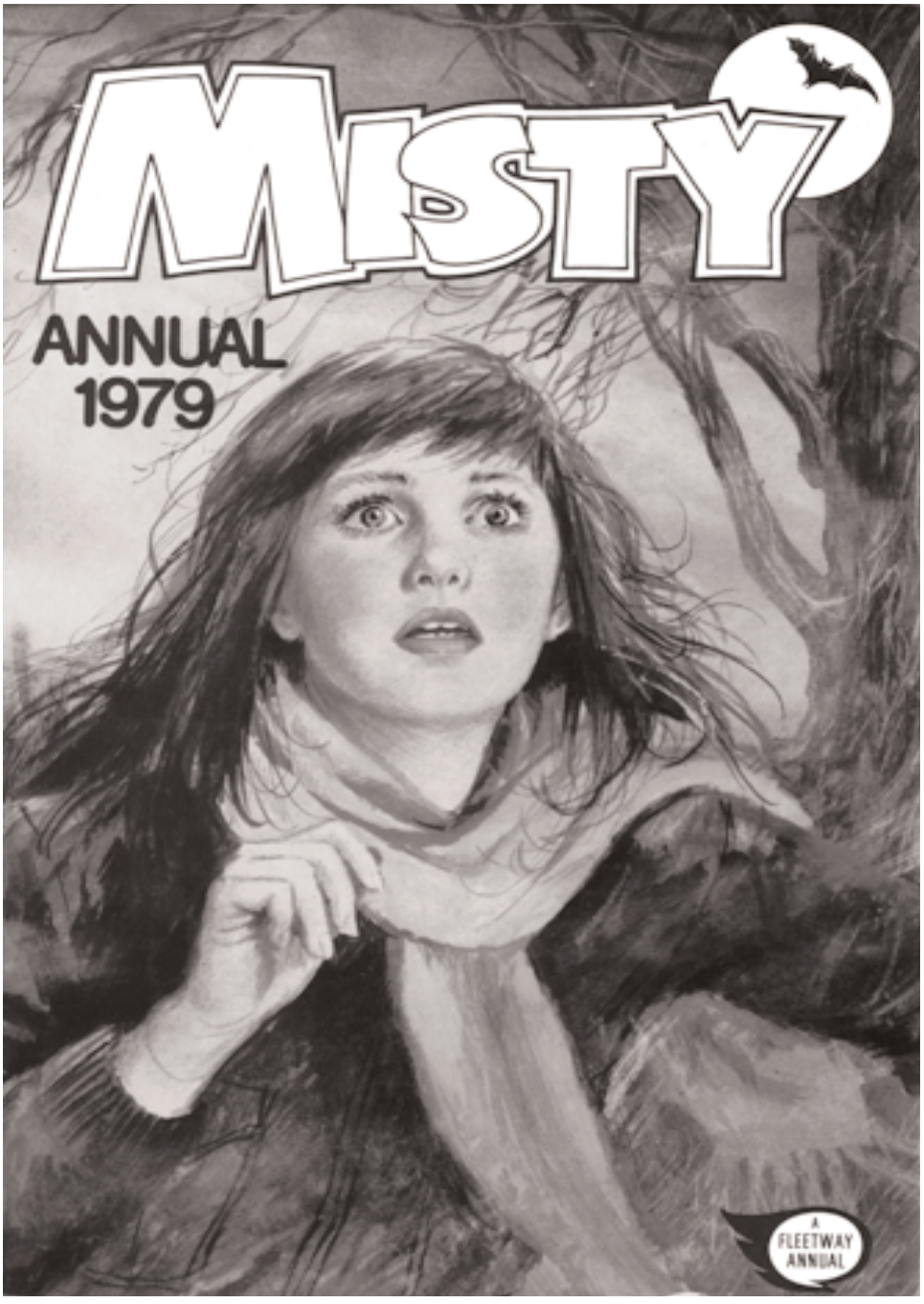
More checklists - if you're going for the collector's type market: Stuff I'd love to see- Monster Fun; Chiller Pocket Library; Near Myths and 'One Eyed Jack'. Tomorrow I'll chuck my own pubs in the post to you- Pulp Mania- the pulp fiction equivalent of Crikey!, dedicated to British paperbacks of the 60s and 70s. Only poorly bound copies left I'm afraid, so it may well fall apart in your hands! Hope you enjoy.

Really looking forward to the next issue of Crikey!, I think you have a real success on your hands.

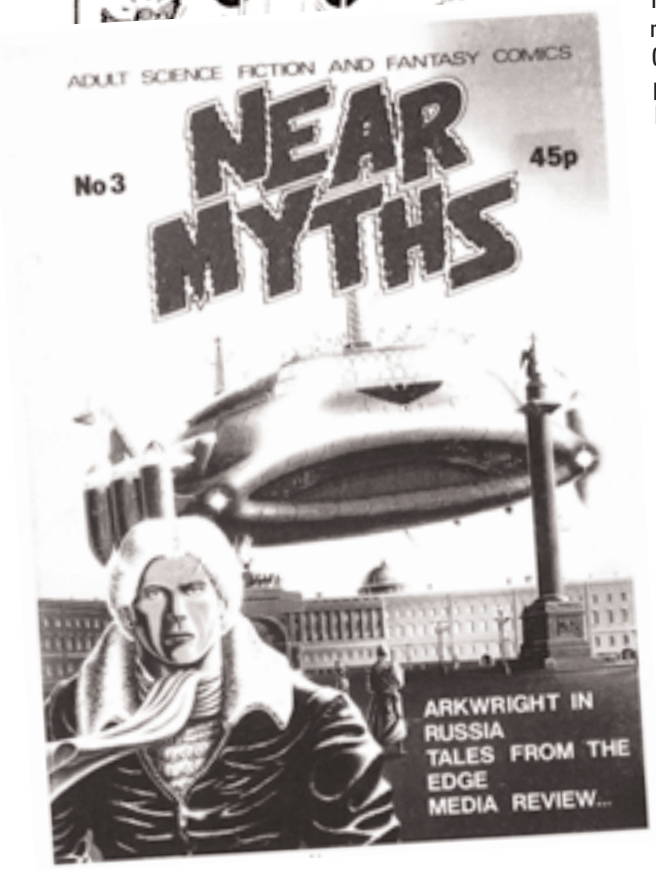
All the best.

justin@justin-cultprint.free-online.co.uk

Thanks for the kind words. You're not the only one to comment on our fluffiness. When setting up Crikey! we wanted to make it as accessable as we could to a wider public. The idea was that no matter what your level of knowledge, Crikey! would have something for you. That's why for the first issue we stayed away from too much trainpotter-ism. Now that we have several new writers







I was taught that the golden rule of graphic design is 'less is more'. Please give us complete frames/pages we can actually see to drool over in future issues.

Ray Aspden
Droitwich

Crikey! received lots of positive comments about its design and production values. But it has also received a few like yours, Ray. Sometimes it's difficult to decide between an enlarged section that is clearly legible and using a full-page that will be reduced to about a third. The close up shows detail, the full-page shows layout and story-telling.

We also had this idea of just glimpsing sections of comics to raise curiosity about the artist / character / comic. Looking back, I can see how it might frustrate more people than it inspires. Hopefully, this issue is more to your (and other peoples') taste. Stick around, we have even more changes planned for issue three ...

Um Crikey!

Just subscribed to Crikey! by PayPal. Congrats on issue 1. Great choice of illustration and a nice mix of nostalgia and scholarship in the articles. But ... Oh for some colour! The Frank Bellamy pages particularly scream for it, and a reminder of Frankiestein's sickly pallor would be a tonic. Also, a few more captions would help identify who, what, when and where - although no colours or appropriate words (especially in this PC age) are needed to point out the dubious delights to be found within the pages of Misty as displayed in page 33 ...

Thanks for a great first issue. I look forward to many more.

Dave – via internet

Nothing would give us greater pleasure than to get more colour into Crikey! The hope is that by issue three or four our print run will be large enough to allow us to absorb the cost of at least a colour section. We're also looking at selling more ads and as that money comes into the pot we should be able to use that to up the quality.

Um Crikey!

Great 1st issue!

Brought back many happy memories. Would love to see an article about Joe Bones – The Human Fly from Victor comic. Also in future issues actual complete stories from a different type of comic would be a fantastic addition.

All in all keep up the good work and looking forward to many more issues.

Tom Clarkson
Edinburgh

I guess you have already spotted the Victor piece in this issue - and there is another Victor article lined up for a future issue. Joe Bones lasted an incredible 11 years (1975-1986) – not bad for a lad who was just good at climbing.

Crikey! is the word!

I expected a magazine that styled itself The Great British Comics Magazine to be all about British comics. The parts that were about British comics were great. The Bellamy article read well and looked terrific. The Wham! piece was mostly good – what it needed was more Wham! pictures. And features like Nutty Notions is definitely the way to go – but with more info about the artists and writers and which comics the strips appeared in.

What I hated was stuff like My Comicy Saturday Morning. Who cares what it was like back then! And Devil in the Dark was too bad for words. Terrible writing about nothing.

I really want Crikey! to work and it will if you stick to the comics and the people who made them. Please, no more rubbish about staying up late in an old papershop. And if you have to, get a proper writer.

Carl Booth, Norwich

When we set up Crikey! it had a couple of jobs to do. Firstly, it had to amuse Glenn, Tom and myself and be something we would like to read and be proud of. Next, we wanted to use Crikey! to remind as many people as possible about our forgotten industry. All three of us have worked professionally in comics and we were proud of what our industry was like. We wanted to make Crikey! as accessable as we could for fans and the casual reader alike. We'd love to think that casual readers began haunting book and comic fairs and went on-line looking for old comics and annuals. But to get to that, the magazine has to be a comfortable read for everyone.

Um Crikey!,

Just a quick note to say how much I enjoyed your first issue which I was surprised but happy to find on the shelves of my local comic shop.

Lots of interesting articles. I particularly enjoyed the 'Toys' article (though strange not to mention Dolman in the text) and the 'Misty' article and I certainly look forward to more Nutty Notions.

I hope you'll find some space for the (occasionally maligned) Harrier Comics line which I felt were a fine example of British independent comics and from which a number of the best current British artists emerged (Grist, Campbell etc.). OK their action comics were a bit rubbish but the 'New Wave' ones were generally excellent.

Best of luck.

I eagerly await issue two.

James McRobert – via Internet

Harrier will feature in future Crikey! pages, James. Our designer Glenn Fleming worked with Harrier all those many years ago. I'm also friends with someone who was a mainstay of 'Harrier in the north' and I'll ask/bully/bribe him to share his memories.

One of the changes we're making at Crikey! is to open up the areas we cover to now include all aspects and periods of GB comics. It's something we heard from fans at marts, in letters and through comments on our website.

Um Crikey!

Having received your first issue of Crikey! I wanted to congratulate you on a great magazine. I can't imagine the work that needed doing to get it published!

The cover was brilliantly executed and summed up some of our nostalgic triumphs. As this is the first issue I expect you are trying to find your path, but I wonder whether the balance is weighted a little too much on the anecdotal autobiographical incidents. The walk to the sweetshop was a sweet (ugh!) story in the nineties but surely fandom has moved on since then?

Anyway allow me to wade in on a topic I know a little bit about - the Bellamy article.

• Ifelt the comments on Dan Dare didn't quite express joining the team, look out for more in-depth articles and more references.

But we're going to keep the fun stuff, too!

Um Crikey!

What a mess!

Bits of pages, bits of frames, some on a slant, some obscured by others, speech bubbles cut in half, extracts reduced the size of illegibility.

The same dreadful excess of graphic design is creeping into the annual DC Thomson reprints. Traditional strips are being computer coloured in softie, pastel shades; with individual frames ripped from their parent pages, enlarged and superimposed so as to obliterate part of the story.

the turmoil, I believe, Bellamy found himself in, but I'll leave better authorities than me to comment on that.

• "... and he also produced work for Look and Learn" again implies chronologically this was next; in fact he started with that comic in 1970.

• Avery basic error is the mention of Bellamy's first TV21 Thunderbirds strip. A quick search on the Net would have shown it was NOT April 1966 but in TV Century 21 number 52 published on the 15th January 2066 (the year being that clever device of a 100 years in the future!). See www.technodelic.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/Home.htm and my own www.frankbellamy.co.uk

• "As the deadlines for the work became ever tighter" refers to the drop from two colour and one B&W to just two colour pages. I have never heard why that happened and I note Shaqui does not appear to refer to it at all. Bellamy believed the drop (later on) from a single two-page centrespread to two separate pageswas for the foreign market which could not handle a centrespread as well.

(Fantasy Advertiser Vol. 3:50 November 1973 - 18 page interview with Bellamy conducted by Dez Skinn and Dave Gibbons.)

• Same comment with Bellamy's handling of the Captain Scarlet covers, I have never heard why he did just the covers but always thought (my opinion only!) that it was because they wanted his artwork on the cover to sell the comic!

• "Just before then in 1968, Bellamy" ... did the Avengers TV artwork.

Unfortunately the date is wrong again: "The Winged Avenger" artwork was done in Nov/Dec 1966 and the programme broadcast in the UK & US on 17/02/1967.

• Bellamy, in fact, started Garth on 12/07/1971, not 1969 as Glenn states! But I must thank Glenn for making the connection regarding the Sun/Mirror "flesh wars" - interesting point!

I hope you (and Glenn) don't mind me pointing these things out, but there is enough erroneous scholarship on the UK artists without more being produced. Finally, just in case you feel I've been too hard on Glenn, I did note that Glenn suggested his article was also not necessarily about Bellamy so much as about himself!

My last comment on Crikey! (you'll notice I did subscriibe to the full term available!) is that I felt the bad was outweighed by the good.

But my main gripe follows that of Steve Flanagan - gadsircomics.blogspot.com/2007/06/review-crikey.html) that I felt the cropped images with no credits were frustrating. Can we see more complete pages as examples together with credits, please?

All of these comments, of course, open up the charge of 'can you do better'? Brian, start asking those who are still with us whether they can contribute NOW before they leave us (I'm no spring chicken myself at 49!). My suggestions: Dez Skinn. Steve Holland, Lew Stringer, Norman Wright, David Roach, John Freeman etc etc etc. Then you have those collectors of art (Terry Doyle, Jeff Haythorpe etc), sellers of comics (Norman Wright, Jeff West, etc.) and if you have contacts, the originators themselves (John Burns, Mike Noble etc.)

Very best wishes for the future

Norman – via internet

This is exactly the kind of nit-picking we need, Norman.

The more fans like you who get involved with sending in features, suggesting ideas and pointing out errors, then the better Crikey! is going to get.

Um Crikey!

My copy arrived yesterday and I am enjoying revisiting old friends. Looks like we read much the same things growing up, as you are a about a couple of years older than me. I was lucky in that we had some good paper shops that sold every comic that was around, and when the US DC and Marvel comics started coming across they stocked those as well!

As far as newspaper strips were concerned, my parents got the Daily Mail, so I was glued to Fred Bassett - The Hound That's Almost Human! every week day.

TV was Space Patrol, Four Feather Falls, and later Fireball XL5 (I was a member of the Fireball fan club!).

When we moved from Stafford to Sheffield my parents made me sell my collection of comics, so a second-hand comic stall in the market got all my Beanos, Lions and Tigers ... and such gems as number one of The Amazing Spider-Man and The Fantastic Four, etc.

I was allowed to keep my Ranger and Look & Learns so still had 'The Trigan Empire', but I still felt like I was losing old friends - and for a half-pence each!

In Sheffield I did start again with Power Comics and the later Alan Class comics. And then came 2000AD! This was stuff that was as good (and in some cases better) than the US comics. All hoarded much to my parents' annoyance, need I add. I was in my last year of school by then, and a year later was working, so no longer had to rely on pocket money. And then came my discovery of the Sheffield Space Centre, who sold books, magazines, model kits – and comics!

The Tough of the Track was always a favourite. I remember two stories distinctly - one where he is the Olympic team for the small island of Tristan de Cuna and another one where, to get his running back to normal, he goes to Africa for a cure by a witch doctor. In the meantime he repairs an old railway while fighting floods, army ants, etc.



The great Alf Tupper

For someone who was useless at sport, Alf's optimistic "I've got two legs, same as them. I'll run 'em!" was a great morale booster, especially as he was a bit of a loner, too...

Ummmmm ... so much for a quick reply!

Anyway, expect a four issue sub by the end of the month.

Cheers

Brian H

- via Crikey! website

Some nice memories there, Brian. I was on the school running team and I loved chips – so Tough of the Track was kind of special for me, too.

Um Crikey!

Great mag. Great feel to it. Most of the features work for me – not sure about things like Helen Bennett's Jackie Who? Didn't seem to say anything beyond her liking her mum and being worried as a schoolgirl.

I bet people have told you this already but Buster from Buster comic wasn't Andy Capp as a kid – he was meant to be Andy's kid. I think they even called it 'Buster Son of Andy Capp' for a while. There was 'Buster's Dream

World' and 'Buster's Diary'. I love the informal style of the mag but can you add a bit more about the panels and pages you show. Dates and artists names would be great.

I still love the mag and as you can see, I have enclosed a subscription. Issue two in October seems a long way off.

Dave Shaw, Rippon

Thanks for the correction, Dave. You weren't the first (or last) to point out the Buster mistake. Red faces all round in the Crikey! shed. The more people who get in touch when we make a mistake, the better.

So what did we get wrong with this issue?

Um Crikey!

Many thanks for the copy of Crikey which arrived swiftly yesterday - very enjoyable reading. Presumably, as a new publication, you'll appreciate some feedback and knowledge about your readers, If you don't appreciate it, you're getting it anyway :-)

General feedback - good spread of material with excellent design (take a bow, Glenn), although some articles were a little superficial (e.g. the Bellamy piece which skirted over possibly his greatest work, 'Heros the Spartan', while giving the Anderson period much more attention. Good value, well priced - the main reason that I gave up Spaceships Away was the price. It couldn't be cheaper given its production values and potential sales, but my interst wasn't great enough in that particular genre to make it worthwhile for me. In short - I'll certainly be buying issue 2. Background on me (which colours the above and my preferences for the future): we're more or less contemporaries; I was born in 1953 - the first comics I remember are Jack & Jill and Playhour, followed by TV Comic. Later came Victor, then Valiant, and at one stage I was buying everything I could get my hands on -stuff like TV Express, TV Fun, Hotspur, Hornet, then Buster (more for Maxwell Hawke and Phantom Force 5 than Buster himself) Hurricane, Jag, the inevitable TV21, Boys World and Ranger. I was never a fan of Beano, Dandy, Beezer and Topper, though I had friends who bought those, their sister also introduced me to Bunty and Judy, while another friend bought Lion every week, following his older brother - and they'd kept the back issues! Lion in that period was probably the best of the lot - Capt Condor, Rory McDuff, Paddy Payne, Robot Archie, Sandy Dean's Schooldays and of course Karl the Viking. An older cousin had a stash of old Eagles, so I got to read just about everything there was. Then came the 'shilling comics' as our newsagent referred to the digests - Thriller Picture Library's John Steel and Valiant, Lion and Lone Star Libraries being particular favourites.

As you see, my favourites are the adventure strips rather than the humour of Baxendale and Reid (so seeing the title Crikey! and the cover made me a little nervous) but if you keep a balance, you'll keep me.

It would, I think, be helpful, to supply dates where possible for Nutty Notions and elsewhere (the ads for example, which are a nice touch)

By the early 1960s, I'd discovered American comics, predominantly DC's Superman line - Superman, Superboy, Adventure, Action, Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane and even World's Finest (missing a lot of superior stuff - since rectified - hey, I was 7-8 years old!), and by about '64, the new Marvel, which I caught around Spiderman 7, FF 13, Avengers 5, Sgt Fury 6 - and my world changed forever. Although I still dabbled with British comics (even the Power stuff to catch up on the Marvels I'd missed), it was never the same.

Having said that - again showing my preferences - the reprints of the Trigan Empire and the forthcoming' Karl the Viking' from the Netherlands are extremely welcome. If only someone could get the rights to Heros the Spartan.

So, that's this reader's bob's worth - good luck with this. I'll order No 2 soon.

Geraint Davies

Swansea ●

See you in 90 days. (Unless you bought this a week before issue three comes out. In that case, we might see you in seven days).



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FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF Crikey! ON SALE APRIL 2008

sequential media . com

Crikey! Editorial

Brian M Clarke *Editor* ***Glenn B Fleming*** *Designer* ***Tom Sweetman*** *Publicist*

Contents:

Nutty Notions **2-3**

Brian M Clarke once again explores the wackiest, zaniest comic pages he could lay his hands on … well, this issue anyway!

When Space was Ace **4-8**

The clue is in the title - and Mike Morley proves the point …

Let's look At … **9-11**

Brian M Clarke takes an all too close look at a fifteen issue (was that all there was?!) British phenomenon from the '80s - *Scream!*

Smashing Times **12-17**

Stephen Poppitt recalls the influence of one of Britain's best adventue and humour comics.

The Crikey Chat - Dez Skinn **18-23**

Mark Saunders chats with legendary publisher Dez Skinn about the '70s periodical *House of Horror* in a revealing interview.

My Comic Hero - Don Lawrence **24-29**

Don Lawrence: unsung, unappreciated, neglected? Not by Glenn B Fleming (another unsung, unappreciated and neglected artist)!

Adam Eterno **30-32**

Captain Storm takes a dip back in time to one of the best, yet little remembered heroes of comics.

Top 10 Annuals **36-39**

An extensive view of the UK's Rarest Comic Annuals - according to Bob Norton …

Um Letters **46-48**

Crikey! readers have their say yet again!

Crikey! chums…

It's been very busy here in the Crikey! shed. Not only have we been working hard on this 'ere issue of *Crikey!*, but we have also been preparing ourselves for our big launch across the pond in America and Canada. So a big hello to our American and Canadian pals!

Some of you new ones will have an idea already about British comics. Just to set the scene for those who know nowt, here's a very quick introduction to British comics.

Most were published weekly and were often in two or three page installments. Adventure strips were part of on-going serials (think Flash Gordon, Radio Ranch, etc but in strip form).

Some of them were bloody weird. As you will find out in the issues to come, there were lots of great artists and writers.

A single comic would have war, crime, humour, sport, SF, fantasy, historical and supernatural stories to make up the 32 or 36 page edition.

The rest you'll pick as we up as we go along.

Great news for all our readers!

From this issue we are converting to bi-monthly status. That means issue four will be on-sale in March.

Apology

Due to an editorial mix-up we mistakenly announced in our previous issue that artist/writer Terry Bave had died. I am delighted to say that this is completely unfounded and that Terry is indeed alive and well.

Our deepest apologies to Terry, his family and his legion of fans.

It was, as usual, all my fault.

We hope you enjoy this issue. Send your comments to the Crikey! website (www.crikeyuk.co.uk) or direct to me.

If you want to get involved with *Crikey!* send your ideas to the shed. Maybe you fancy doing your own Comicy Saturday …

Cheers,
Brian

Crikey! Chum of the Month is **Bob Norton** for being so generous with his time, collection and charm.

Writers this issue:
Captain Storm, Glenn B Fleming, Brian M Clarke, Mike Morley, Stephen Poppitt, Mark Saunders and Bob Norton.

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Quarter page b/w £30. Eighth of a page b/w one million pounds.
Please supply camera ready artwork on disk or PDF. If artwork is required, a charge will be made - please contact for details.

Note: *The closing date for booking ads for issue four is 1 February 2008.*

Crikey! is a Sequential Media publication.

Website: www.crikeyuk.co.uk

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Nutty Notions

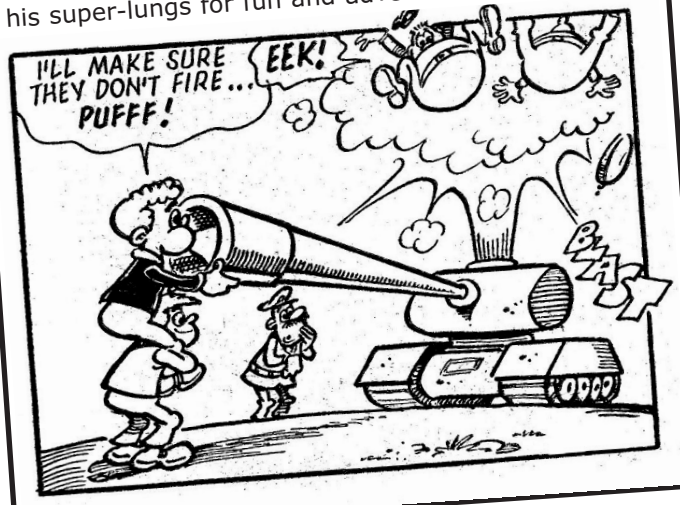
Each issue of Crikey! features a selection of some of the lovingly bizarre concepts that have graced the pages of British comics in years past. Ideas and nominations for future NNs gratefully accepted through the Crikey! website (www.crikeyuk.co.uk), click 'contact' and away you go! Enjoy!

Billy Blow
Buster 1981
Rob Lee

Comic characters come in all shapes and sizes with a wide range of abilities. Billy Blow certainly had a special power that set him apart because just like the Big Bad Wolf, Billy was very good at blowing. (Stop giggling at the back!)

Young Billy would blow anything that came his way in those innocent days.

Week after week artist/writer Rob Lee (who also gave us the decidedly weird 'Hi De Hi … Hi Di Hooo' in *Wow* – more about that in a future issue) came up with inventive ways for the breathy boy to use his super-lungs for fun and adventure.



Kid Chameleon
Cor!! 1970-4
Joe Colquhoun



The Kid was in reality an English schoolboy who had benefited from an unfortunate accident. A plane he was on as a baby had crashed in the Kalahari desert and by the time Tagasee the Wise One had reached him dozens of chameleon lizards were looking after him. As they licked the sickly baby a sticky fluid from their tongue coated his body with a protective skin.

As he grew, all reptiles became his friend and he learnt how to speak to them in a series of tongue-clicks.

In an effort get even closer to his reptile chums he even made himself a skin-tight lizard suit which enabled him to change colour at will.

And in case you want to know what language reptiles speak – Holko! Slikka! Yok, yok! are apparently popular phrases.



Danny's Tranny
The Topper

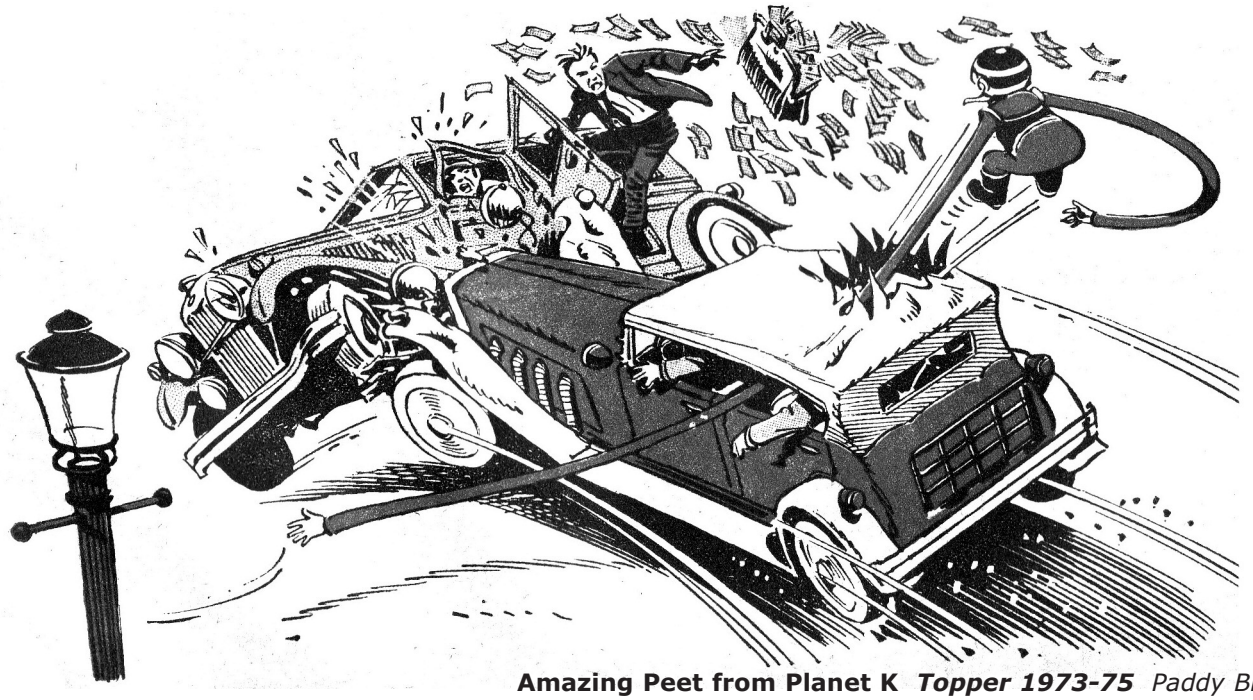
There was a time when no self-respecting teenager would be seen without their beloved transistor radio. Not only was it a lifeline to the world of pop, fashion and cool hip-speak – it was a badge of belonging to that great Youth Movement that swept the world.

Of course some trannies were better than others. Most gave you light, medium and long wave but Danny Wilson's gave him a lot more than bandwidth selection.

Danny's tranny (… in the words of Chandler Bing, 'Too many jokes!') allowed him to '… make objects larger, smaller, lighter than air or even invisible'.

Switch the dial to light wave and that cute rabbit became King Kong Bunny. Switch to VHF and things would simply vanish.

The only thing we didn't see Danny do with his radio was actually play music!



Amazing Peet from Planet K ***Topper 1973-75*** *Paddy Brennan*

'Banished to Earth for a year from Planet K' for stealing food from King Klute's royal fruitorium, 'the ever-hungry Peet is staying with the Stenson family of Rodford, England.'

As if that wasn't enough to kick-start the fun and adventures, Peet is under instructions to obey all orders given to him by Earthlings. On top of that, he's invented a home-made time machine and had the misfortune to expose himself and schoolboy Stan Stenson 'to a dose of unstable K-time waves – which means that without warning, they can be suddenly whisked through time!' And did I mention that he had unfeasibly stretchy arms?

Menace of the Alpha Man

Shiver and Shake 1974

Alpha Man was actually the baddie in this action-packed can-you-solve-it-first strip.

Penny Carter and Jamie Robertson are trying to capture the Alpha Man (in his alphabet super-villain costume) who had kidnapped Penny's scientist dad.

The weird bit came with Alpha Man's need to use certain weapons in his crimes. When the initial letter from each weapon was taken and rearranged into a word it would spell the crooks name. Not the best way to prolong your criminal career!

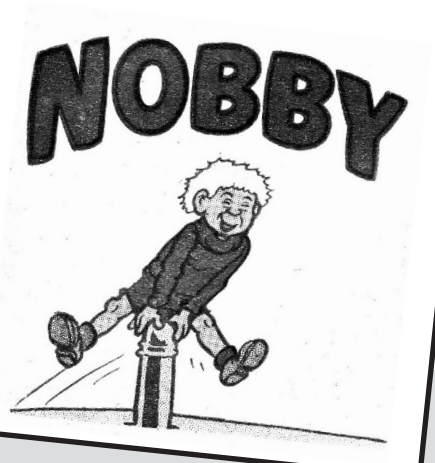


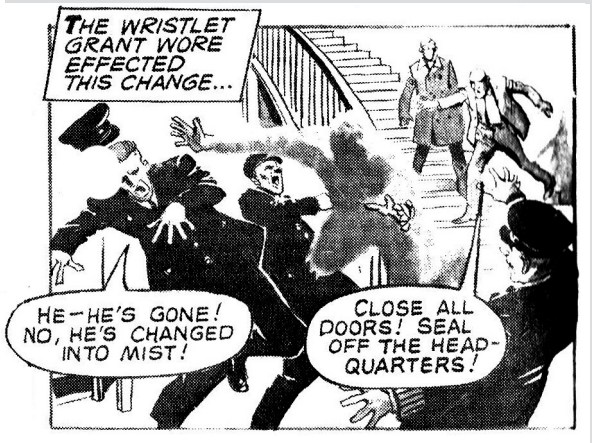
Nobby

Buzz 1974

To be honest, there isn't anything particularly nutty about the notion of Nobby. Essentially he was the *Beezer*'s Ginger with a change of hair colour.

There is, however, a certain juvenile delight in the design of the splash panel for young Nobby!





Grant (C.I.D.)

Eagle 1968

'Detective-constable Grant has the secret power of being able to change into Smokeman.'

Through the aid of a strange bracelet (explain that in the manly showers, Grant) he was able to become a man-shaped wisp of smoke.

It got him out of several jams okay but he always had to keep one eye open for office fans and, presumably, call in sick on windy days.



When Space

I first started collecting comics in 1952 when I was eight years old. My father used to come home from work on a Monday evening, bringing me the 3d Comet. Being already fascinated by anything to do with space or spaceships, I always opened up the comic to 'The Sky Explorers', artwork by Reg Parlett, where Professor Jolly and his nephew and niece Ann and Peter cruised through the Milky Way. The Comet with its bright red cover and brilliant lemon logo was the high spot of my week …

'The Sky Explorers' ran for many issues in full colour on the middle two pages and back cover and in their career they saved Queen Alva from the rebel Prince Grimbold, met the Sea-Folk and fought and beat the Hawk, a space pirate. They were also captured by monkey folk, battled against the Flame People and visited the planet Roma, whose inhabitants dressed like ancient Romans, and with the help of the good emperor, Nescitor, our heroes overthrew Cambusta, a wicked tyrant.

'The Sky Explorers' was later replaced by 'Dick Barton and the Flying Saucer Mystery' and a second Barton adventure 'Peril on the Moon'. When I was nine years old I left the complete run of *Comets* on a bus, on my way to visit a relative. I never did get them back.

Space Case

In the early 1950s, at around seven or eight years old, I bought up as many space comics as I could get my hands on from two local market stalls. Also on cold winter evenings, I'd 'borrow' 6d from my mother, having put aside a comic at the newspaper shop on my way to school, and run down the lane in the snow to collect it. On my return I would read it a page at a time under lamp-posts leading the way back home.

I have two 1/3d *Classics Illustrated* comics, 'War of the Worlds' and The Time Machine' in my collection. These made such a strong impression on me that I went out and bought Welles' book *The War of the Worlds* and began to discover science fiction literature as well as comics. I had also heard from a neighbour how good the George Pal movie of the story was. Being very young I could not get into this then X-rated film, so I hung onto her every word and re-read the comic.

Around that time comics were on sale at Woolworths. On market days my mum and I would visit town and I would choose a comic at that big shop. These were spread in glorious disarray on the counter tops, not neatly but all in a loose pile. All sorts of comics and books were mixed together and I remember my



was Ace!

By Mike Morley

excitement as I unearthed a 6d Swift Morgan Space Comic. This was issue 50 in the series and featured 'Swift Morgan and the Planet of Destiny'. The second tale was called 'Sam English, Museum Rover'. It has a superb cover With inside artwork by Denis McLoughlin.

The cover shows a large green-ringed yellow and orange-striped planet in the background. The terrain belonging to one of its moons is pictured below, in the foreground, and is coloured a vivid red, with craters and rocks and earthlike clouds above. From the right moves a large blue strangely-winged spaceship, its passengers and crew seen clearly through the front windows. A smaller red vessel is entering from top-right, and firing at the large blue spaceship.

Space Pace

The other comics we bought in Woolwoths were *Swift Morgan's Spaceways Comic* and *Roy Carson Comics*. These were printed in orange and contained one story featuring the title character. All were superbly drawn by Denis McLoughlin and published by T.V. Boardman/ Popular Press. The Swift Morgan titles all sounded like chapters from the space serials playing at the Saturday morning matinees: 'The Lost World', 'The Ancient Romans', 'The Ancient Egyptians', 'The Feathered Serpent', 'Atlantis', 'The Flying Saucers'. And the Roy Carson titles promised just as much two-fisted adventure: 'Smashing the Crime Wave', 'Meets Cheetah', 'Strikes Again', 'Verses the Marquis', 'The Cornish Smugglers' and 'The Educated Ape'.

One of the best films of the early 1950s was *When Worlds Collide* directed by Rudolph Mate. I saw this film as a child and a few weeks later was able to buy the Fawcett/Miller black and white 6d reprint comic (*Fawcett Motion Picture* comic 60, reprinted from the coloured American original issue 110). This comic vividly recaptured those frightening end-of-the-world scenes from the film and I am lucky to have this reprint in my collection today, as it brings back not only memories of itself, when I first had a copy, but also of that wonderful film.

Space Ace

A grand English-produced comic was *Spaceman*, *Comic of the Future* published by Gould and Light was available from the local newsagent. Each starred Captain Future and had a smashing cover by Norman Light and were original English comics, not reprints of American material.



Extremely well-drawn, these comics ran until issue 15. Each Captain Future story had a one-page intro on the inside front cover and showed splendidly detailed spaceships and spacemen in action. Issue 14 contained a story called 'Pets' about a group of aliens who keep human beings as pets. The inspiration for this tale appears to have been drawn from a lovely Wally Wood tale in E.C's *Weird Science* 12 called 'A Gobl is a Knog's Best Friend'.

A similar comic to *Spaceman* was *Star-Rocket*, another all-English production. One story in issue 2, which particularly impressed me as it paralleled the then filmic obsession for mutated and enlarge insect-monsters, was 'It Came from Uranus' with superb artwork by Ron Embleton.

One of my favourite 6d space comics was *Mystery in Space* published by L. Miller. Issue 2 has a grand cover which really excited me as a child, showing two helmeted spacemen and a gasping female at the controls of a spaceship. They are looking out into the wild, blue yonder where the earth has turned into an enormous cube. It's rolling around like some huge dice, with earthly continents instead of spots. At that time, as a small child, just the strangeness of that idea allowed all sorts of dreams and fantasies to emerge.

Those early 1950s comics really encouraged the opening up of our imaginative faculties. Most of the tales in *Mystery in Space*, reprinted from the American colour originals, concerned a problem or puzzle to be solved, hence the title and seemed, then, grand exercises in logic. A story in issue 3 titled 'The Interplanetary Merry-Go-Round' helped us to see that nothing is as clear-cut as it might first appear with the evil protagonist simultaneously being the benefactor.

Space Race

Miller also published the reprint *Space Adventures* which ran for five issues but numbered issues 50 to 55. A good deal of these English reprints appeared to have run for many more issues than was actually the case, often starting with issue 1 renumbered 50 or 51.

Space Adventures 50, a reprint of American edition 7 of that same series, has a super cover showing a crashed and ruined spaceship on Mars. Its two occupants, a man and a woman, stand at the side, having barely escaped from the ship. This was an illustration for the lead story 'Transformation', about a sex-change on Mars! Surely a first for British comics!

Sports Cartoon Comics published a good series of all-English issues with such titles as *Strange Worlds*, *Steve Samson* and *Captain Vigour*. *Strange Worlds* 8 has a nice robot story starring Hall Starr in 'The Mystery of the 14th Galaxy'. Each issue had a small union-jack on the front proudly proclaiming 'A British Comic'.



The Arnold Book Company introduced us to *Captain Universe*, another 6d comic. This excellent publication (in my opinion) only lasted for two issues. Issue 1 contained 'Captain Universe and the Horror Planet of Coactus' plus a detective tale and a western. Captain Universe seems to be rather similar to Captain Marvel, or as he was later called, Marvelman. His magic word was neither SHAZAM! nor KIMOTA! but the decidedly less inspiring GALAP!.

The lead story is a nice idea of minute spaceships gradually enlarging to disgorge horrible space monsters bent on destroying earth. Captain Universe eventually cremates their rapidly dwindling planet in the fires of 'the hottest star in the galaxy'.

Another comic that began and ended with issue 1 was *Space Worlds*, though this was a reprint from the American issue 6, published by Atlas. It was printed in black and white and red and contained tales of Captain Jet Dixon of the Space Squadron. The exciting lead story is 'Temptress of Jupiter' where a member of an expedition to the planet Jupiter is beguiled into removing his space-helmet by a voluptuous young woman and visions of gorgeous countryside. When he removes his space helmet, however, the planet's environment reverts back to all-consuming flames. It is then when we learn that the woman is the evil planet personified, confusing and finally destroying unwary and unwelcome visitors.

Space, er, Face

Pemberton's (W.D.L.) reprinted several issues of Lev. Gleason's excellent *Daredevil* comic. Issue 5 has a very well drawn Little Wise Guys story called 'Speed and Space', about an anti-gravity substance used to propel a spaceship to Mars, where The Wise Guys discover huge insects and very tiny humanoids.

'Twin Earths', an American newspaper strip, was reprinted over here as 10 issues of *Space Travellers*. The cover of the first issue shows a huge flying saucer against a black background. This comic has the continuing and varied adventures of a boy from Texas who stows away on a flying saucer from Terra, earth's twin planet. The cover to issue 2 shows two boys using portable flying machines, hovering over two large prehistoric-looking monsters.

Space Commando, *Space Commander Kerry* and *Captain Valiant Space Comics* were three more all-British productions. *Captain Valiant* was a Mick Angelo/Gower St Studios production published by the Arnold Book Company. Several of these were often stapled together and sold as 'bumper editions'.

'Speedsmith', 'Trouble Shooter' and the 'Now It Can Be Told' series were drawn by Denis Gifford. There were also many one page fiction articles, presented as true, showing aliens and spaceships and strange 'facts' from other planets.



Space Waste

W.D.L.'s *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* was again a reprint of an American original and ran for 11 issues. The first five or six issues were printed in sepia on white, the remainder in black and white. On comparing these 1950's reprints with the American Dell four colour originals, it is interesting to note that three or four pages are missing in the English edition. These were replaced by a short text resumé at the beginning of the story to fill in English readers with what was shown in strip form to fellow-fans in the States. On the front inside cover there was often a photo-article on the Space Academy. Presented as fact, the photographs added to its authenticity.

Another W.D.L. space comic was *Flash Gordon*. Despite his fame, it ran for only three issues. Issue 3 has a tremendous whole-page drawing of a massive doughnut-shaped space station crashing to earth in flames and is reminiscent of the film footage of the doomed airship Hindenberg. It even has tiny figures running madly to escape, just as in the real live airship situation.

John Carter of Mars, again reprinted by W.D.L. ran for only 2 issues. Issue 1 has a grand cover showing a rather weedy-looking John Carter fighting a four-armed green Thark. It seems a bit unfair really as John only has one sword and the Thark has four, but right is on our hero's side and John wins the day.

Another all-English comic was *Masterman*. The cover of one issue has a beskirted figure, looking rather like Alfie Bass, brandishing a sword at a fire-breathing dragon.

From 1951 to 1954 I used to spend the last couple of hours before bedtime with a large pile of comics on my arm, visiting every house in the neighbourhood, asking if there was anyone living there who had any comics to swop. I swapped hundreds of comics in this way. I'd read them in bed before sleeping and then re-swop them the next evening.

Just looking at the strange output of titles from British comics publishers and creators proves that even in the strange sub-genre of space comics, the British can out-weird the best of them!

Mike Morley will be back next issue when he discusses the eerie history of British black and white horror comics.

Don't miss it! ●

Let's Look at...



It may have lasted for only 15 issues - but that's all it has taken to create a legend of British horror comics greatness! Scream *launched with a free pair of green glow-in-the-dark fangs and* Ghastly McNasty *was the eerie editor of this weird weekly … It's sense of horror came from all eras - from the gothic setting of the '*Tales From The Grave*' feature to the futureworld environment of a wired and alive computer in 'The Thirteenth Floor'.*

Turn the page … if you dare!!!



Dracula File by G. Finley-Day (Script) and E. Bradbury (Art) - Drac's back and this time it takes on Cold War overtones with both the British and Soviet intelligence services involved.



Terror of the Cats by Simon Furman (Script) and J. Richardson (Art) - something has happened to our domestic cats, turning them into killer cats!



Nighcomers by Tom Tully (Script) and J. Richardson (Art) - brother and sister set out to investigate the deaths of their ghost-hunting parents. So they go to Raven's Meet, a mysterious haunted house …



Tales From The Grave by Tom Tully and S. Goodall (Script) and J. Watson (Art) - multi-part mini-series of mostly Victorian horror as related to the reader by the loathsome Leper.



Monster by Rick Clark - an Alan Moore pseudonym (Script) and Redondo (Art) - a boy and his monster (actually his mis-shapen uncle) on the run and looking for a cure for whatever it was that deformed his uncle in the first place.



The Thirteenth Floor by Ian Holland (Script) and Ortiz (Art) - Max, the computer controlling Maxwell Towers tortures and/or kills those who don't live life by his moral code. So watch out loan sharks - an ironic death awaits!



Fiends and Neighbours - a reprint from Cor! comic but it fitted in well and made for a nice change of pace. A normal family live next door to a family of monsters in a quiet suburban street.

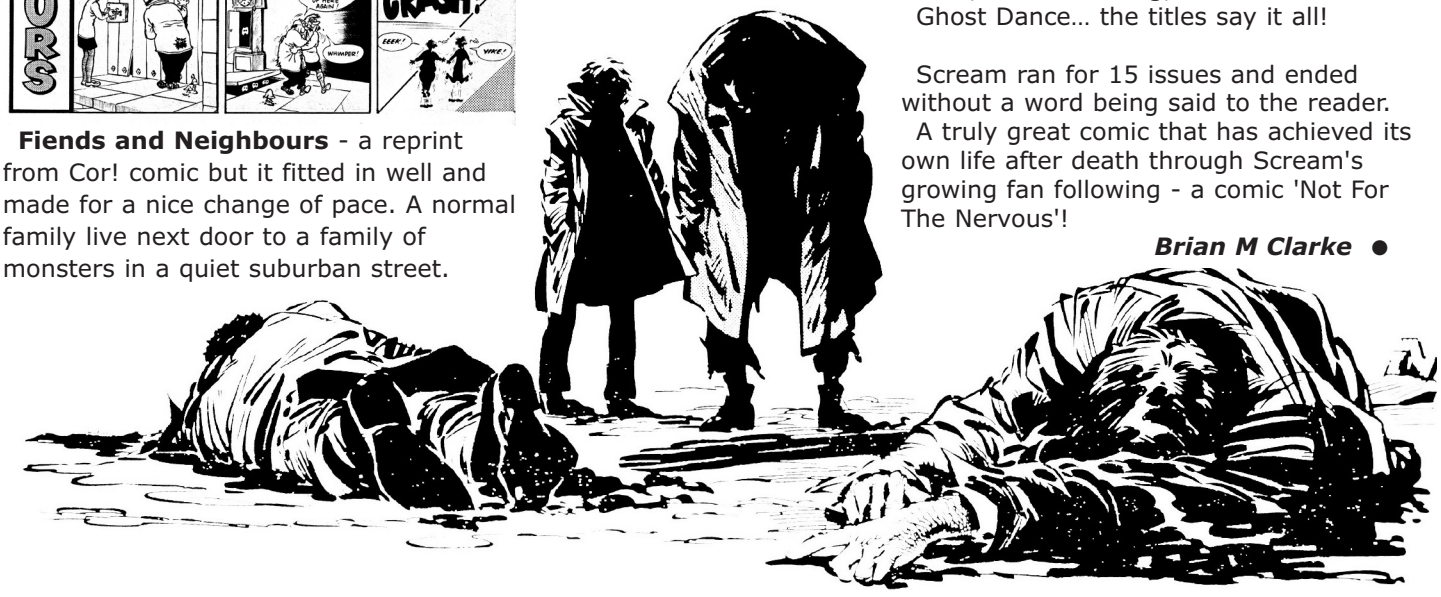


Lots of one-off and short-run series such as Drowning Pool, Ghastly Tales, Behind the Door, Sea Beast, Unlucky For Some, Out of the Fog, Blood Track Ghost Dance… the titles say it all!

Scream ran for 15 issues and ended without a word being said to the reader.

A truly great comic that has achieved its own life after death through Scream's growing fan following - a comic 'Not For The Nervous'!

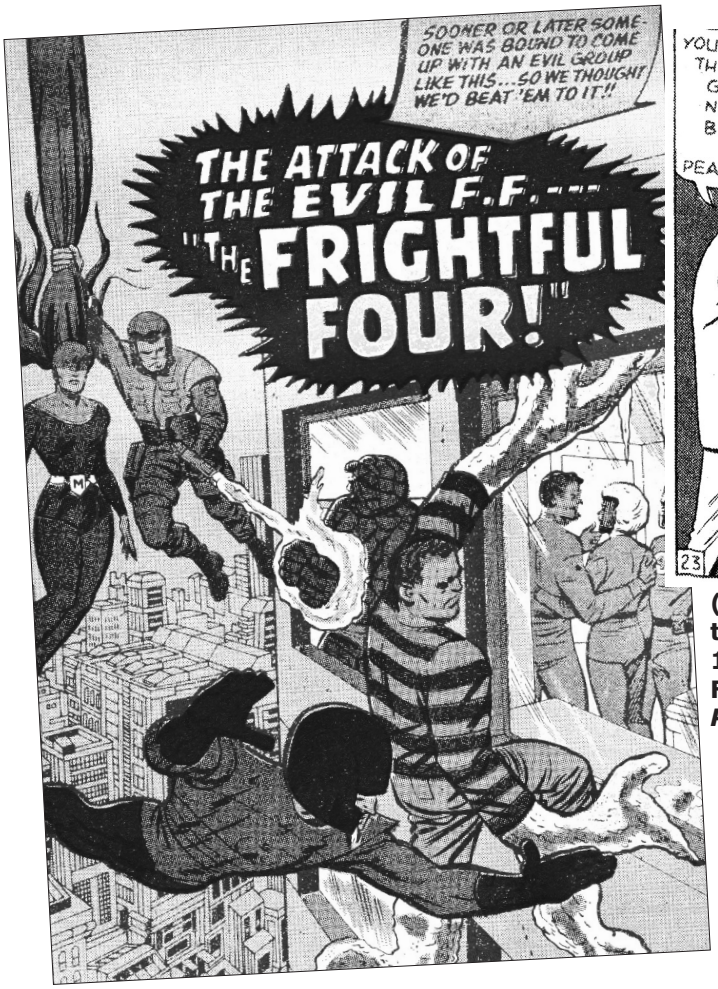
Brian M Clarke ●

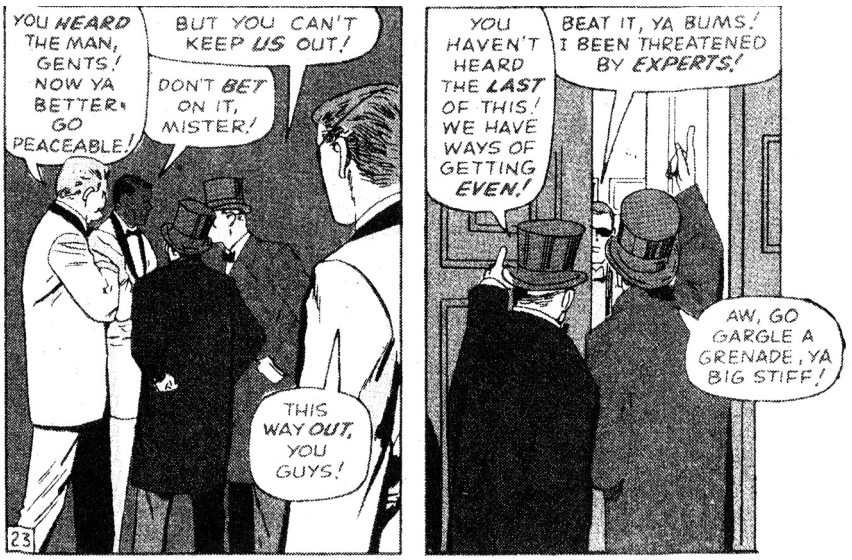


Smashing Times

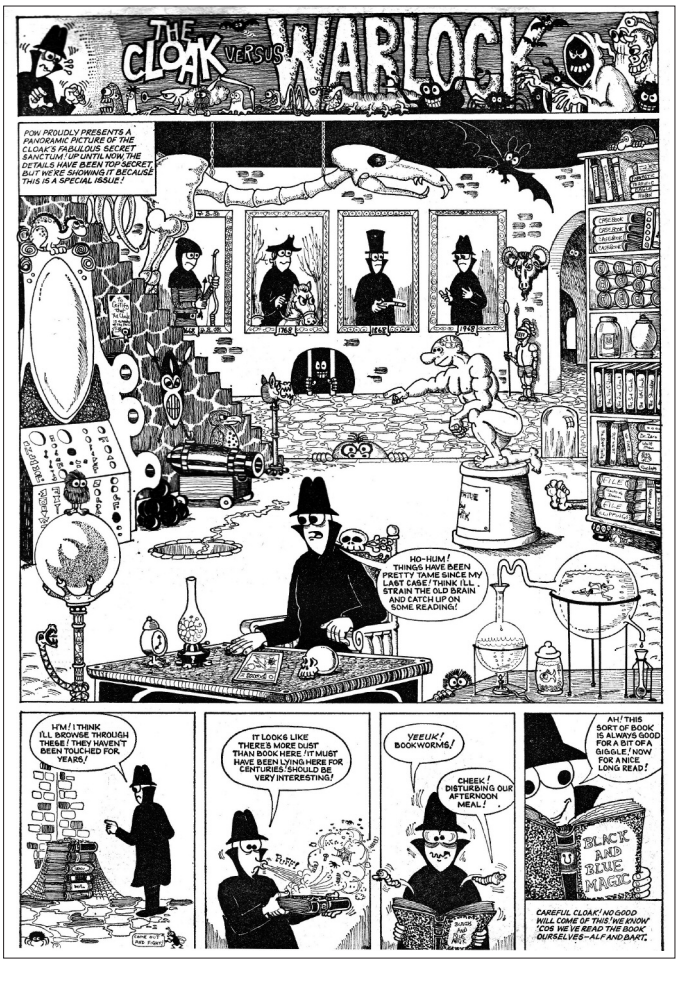
by Stephen Poppitt

Between 1966 and 1969, Odhams Press had the British rights to the American superhero strips published by Marvel Comics*. Odhams published several of those strips in their range of* Power Comics *and at their peak, in 1967, Odhams were publishing five* Power Comics *every week. However,* Pow, Wham, Fantastic *and* Terrific *were all destined to merge with their more robust sister* Smash *during 1968; and in the spring of 1969* Smash *was sold to IPC, and the last Marvel superhero strip,* 'The Fantastic Four'*, was withdrawn.*





(Above): Stan Lee & Jack Kirby are refused entry to the wedding of Sue & Reed Richards (*Wham!*, July 1968). Left): The first appearance of The Frightful Four (July 1968). (Below): The Cloak v. Warlock - *Pow!* 53 (Jan 1968).



Smashing Heroes

Superhero strips were the mainstay of *Smash* for its first 167 issues, the period when it was published by Odhams. The main superhero series in *Smash* was 'The Fantastic Four', which had a curious real-life role to play in the story of *Smash* itself.

By 1968 the 'Fantastic Four' series had reached the struggle against the Frightful Four, which began with the wedding of Reed and Sue. This was an epic tale in which nearly every Marvel superhero of the time appeared as a guest at the wedding, while Dr Doom arranged for every supervillain in Marvel's stable to attack the Baxter Building, where the wedding was taking place (originally presented in Marvel's *Fantastic Four Annual 3*).

At the end of the story, Nick Fury insulted Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (Marvel's writer and artist respectively on the story) when, in a very surreal scene, they too turned up as wedding guests. Turning away from the door, Stan said to Jack: "We'll show 'em - let's get back to the office and start working on the next issue."

The editor of *Smash* then cunningly re-arranged the sequence of events. In terms of Marvel's real publishing history they were not to meet the Frightful Four for several more monthly issues of the American continuity. In the UK *Smash*, however, the editor re-ordered the storyline so that in the following weekly issue after the wedding, the FF was 'Defeated by the Frightful Four', making a nice transition from Stan's threat into their greatest defeat.

This began a sequence of events which took them to the atomic isle where the Frightful Four strand them, and detonate an atom bomb from which only Sue's invisible force field saves the fantastic foursome. The FF find the radiation from the bomb has wiped out their super-powers. This propels them into a climactic confrontation with Dr Doom, where Daredevil leads the powerless FF against their arch-enemy.

Because *Smash* lost all its superhero strips when IPC took over, the 'Fantastic Four' had to be carefully handled. It couldn't just stop in the middle of the battle with Dr Doom and, in fact, it was tied up quite neatly. The Fantastic Four defeated Doom, but at the cost of losing one of their number, The Thing, to the Frightful Four. The battle to rescue him from the evil FF was the final Fantastic Four story in *Smash*, concluding in the last Odhams issue.

To a large extent it determined the timing of IPC's purchase, since it would have been impossible to shorten the Fantastic Four story, and equally impossible to continue it into the next story, which was a hugely long and complex plot that introduced The Inhumans, climaxing with the arrival of Galactus to destroy the Earth.

One point on editorial matters. As mentioned, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby wrote and drew Marvel's FF, and actually appeared as themselves in the wedding story mentioned above. Notionally, however, the editorial team for *Smash* was Alf and Bart (strictly speaking, the editors of the Power Comics were Alf, Bart and Cos). This must have made it very difficult for readers at the time, who must have wondered who the hell Stan and Jack were when they turned up in the story, since Alf and Bart were the ones supposedly writing the series!

It was a feature of the Odhams comics that all markings on the strips identifying Marvel, or referring to the names of Marvel's writers and artists were removed. A fiction was maintained that Odhams were producing the superhero strips across all five titles. This was, of course, many years prior to Marvel publishing comics in the UK themselves, which didn't happen until the 1970s.

Marvel's original page layouts were cut up and re-arranged, to get more panels on a page, so that a lot of story material could be squeezed into two or three pages of *Smash* each week. But the stories were presented mostly intact, losing only an odd panel here and there due to constraints of space. And they always managed a good cliff-hanger ending each week, even though they were usually ending only part-way through a Marvel issue.



'The Nervs' from *Smash* 45, December 1966.

Odd Ham Humour

There were a lot of humorous strips in the Oldham run of *Smash*, many of them survivors from *Pow* and *Wham*, with which *Smash* had merged.

Mike Brown's 'The Nervs' was a surreal strip about the little characters that inhabit a schoolboy called Fatty and showed them running their man-machine like a group of workers running a factory.

'The Man from BUNGLE' was a spoof of the popular The Man from UNCLE TV series. BUNGLE was a secret spy organisation for the British Government where The Man employed a wide variety of hugely unlikely secret gadgets in the fight against his humorous opponents.

'The Cloak' by Mike Higgs `was another secret agent strip, this time about a character whose ingenuity and never-ending supply of gadgets and odd weapons were matched by the odd - and some were very odd - enemies he fought. These included not only Death Shed (well, that's what it sounded like, but it was probably meant to be Death's Head!) but also 'Lady Shady, the shady lady'. The strip also benefited from a very unusual, idiosyncratic, drawing style.

'Wiz War' was a delightful half-page strip devoted to the feud between two wizards: Wizard Prang and his enemy Demon Druid. (Wizard Prang is actually RAF slang, from the Second World War.) They would fly around on broomsticks, zapping each other with spells - which turned the other into a toad, or something equally amusing. The best feature of the strip was the sign above Wizard Prang's door, which usually read 'Wizard Prang is … In' (if he was at home) or 'Wizard Prang is … Out' (if he was out and about). But when he had a bad time in the story, in the final panel the sign would make


THE WORLD BELIEVES NEWSPAPERMAN JIM JORDAN IS DEAD. BUT IN A HIDEOUT BENEATH HIS OWN MONUMENT JIM CARRIES ON HIS FIGHT AGAINST CRIME... CALLING HIMSELF THE SPECTRE.
AT NIGHT STALKS
THE SPECTRE
ONE NIGHT A FAMOUS ENGINEER DESTROYS THE BRIDGE HE HIMSELF BUILT... AND AN ARCHITECT GETS BUILT... AND AN ARCHITECT GETS BUILT... AND AN ARCHITECT GETS

The New Old Smash

When the ownership of *Smash* passed to IPC in the spring of 1969 the revamped comic contained a mixture of new British strips, which were mostly humorous, together with reprints from *Lion* such as 'Eric the Viking' - but strictly no superhero strips.

And not only were all the superheroes lost in the changeover, but the comic itself changed utterly.

As a symbol of the change a new cover feature appeared entitled 'Warriors of the World', replacing Leo Baxendale's 'The Swots and the Blots' (a reworking of his famous Bash Street kids strip). Happily 'The Swots …' survived, although relegated to the middle pages.

After 52 issues the 'Warriors of the World' cover feature ended, to be replaced by 'The Thirteen Tasks of Simon Test'. Each week's cover would feature a full-page splash advertising that week's Task, which Simon Test would be undertaking in a new adventure strip on the inside pages. Simon Test proved so popular that when he completed the original 13-week series (one task each week) he was given a new series of adventures, extending his hold on the cover indefinitely.

Initially, however, the lead strip was 'Master of the Marsh', a series in which Patchman, a hermit who lived in the East Anglian fens, became sports master at Marshside Secondary School. He was the only teacher who could control the kids, a group of little hooligans known as 'the monsters of the Marsh' (a male version of the fourth form at St Trinian's).

'Master …' began with humorous stories about the attempts of Knocker Reeves, the worst of the 'monsters', to get the better of the new teacher. It eventually transpired, however, that Patchman was secretly the guardian of a collection of relics left behind by Hereward the Wake, who had fought the Norman invaders in the fens during the 11th Century. In this respect the strip had an occasional tendency to veer-off in a science fiction and fantasy direction.

Another new adventure serial with humorous overtones was Salono Lopez's classic 'The Amazing Adventures of Janus Stark'. Stark was an escapologist in Victorian London who appeared to be simply an unusual act on the music hall stage, but who secretly used his extrordinary abilities to investigate crime. He had an unusually flexible bone structure and could squeeze out of an astonishing variety of tight situations, thanks to the training he received in childhood from his mentor, Blind Largo.

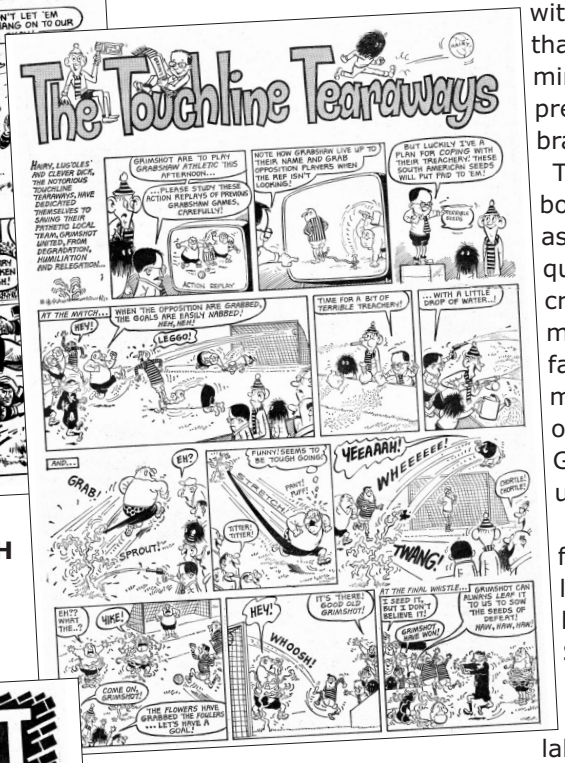
Another long-running success in the new *Smash* was 'Bunsen's Burner', an adventure yarn with comedic overtones. Ben Bunsen was the owner of a vintage car known as 'the Burner' because it was so old it was steam-driven! As with an old-fashioned stream train, it had a boiler that had to be stoked, and it ran on coal. Ben and his pal had to drive the Burner around the world, as a condition of Ben inheriting his uncle's fortune; but a rival claimant was secretly out to stop them.

'The Battle of Britain' featured secret agent Simon Kane who fought against the usurper Baron Rudolph, who had

Erik the Viking & The Battle of Britain from *Smash* Christmas Special 1969.







(Above): His Sporting Lordship from SMASH Christmas Special (December 1969). The Rebbel Robot from SMASH Christmas Special (December 1969) and the football mad The Touchline Tearaways.



seized control of Britain by the use of a secret weapon. This emitted a sound wave that paralysed anyone who wasn't protected against it. Rudolph had set up a police state; and his organisation was similar in its structure and uniforms to England in the Middle Ages, around the time of King John.

Runaway success

'Rebbels on the Run' was initially an adventure story about three brothers who's surname was Rebbel, who ran away from an orphanage to avoid being split up. But after a few months on the run, the strip took an astonishing turn and became a science fiction serial, with the boys discovering that their late father's mind had been preserved within the brain of a robot.

The robot became the boys' unofficial guardian as they embarked on a quest to track down the criminal who had murdered their real father. Much later, the man responsible turned out to be a Government undercover agent.

A very popular feature of the re-launch was the humorous 'His Sporting Lordship'. Henry Nobbins had been a building site labourer until he inherited the title of Earl of Ranworth and five million pounds. Before he could touch the money, however, he had to perform a number of sporting feats and in the process evade the nefarious attentions of Mr Parkinson, a rival claimant to the fortune.

Another offering with a sporting theme was the wrestling strip 'King of the Ring' featuring Ken King, a champion of the grunt-'n'-grapple game. At first the strip suffered somewhat in the credibility department because of the fact that King's manager had the rather unlikely name of Blarney Stone. Even the *Smash* staff must have thought this a bit much, as they chucked Blarney out of the series part-way through, and substituted a new manager with a less silly name.

One or two all-humour strips were introduced with the re-launch. One of these was 'The Touchline Tearaways', featuring three mad keen supporters of Grimshaw Rovers, a totally useless professional football team. As it was made up entirely of ailing and decrepit players it was perpetually in danger of being relegated. Each week the Tearaways would execute some scheme from the touchline to help the team win that week's match, usually involving a battle against officials from the League (who, not unnaturally, wanted to put a stop to the Tearaways well-intentioned cheating on behalf of the Rovers).

Sporting strips became the order of the day. New strips with a sporting theme included not only the above but also the humorous football strip 'The World-Wide Wanderers', about a League football team composed of eleven players drawn from eleven different countries. Possibly not so funny today.

Football manager Harry Kraft was a passenger on a ship passing through the Suez Canal. Ships from all over the world called there, and the crews conducted impromptu football matches to while away the time in port. Due to some foul-up or other, some of the crews had been stranded there; and constant football practice (as there was nothing else to do) had caused them to develop fantastic footballing skills. He shipped eleven of them, from as many different countries, back to England; and they used their highly unorthodox individual skills to play as a team in the old First Division.

World War Two strips were also featured in the new *Smash*. 'Sgt Rock - Special Air Service' was one of the strongest, and also one of the few non-humorous strips. It was used as a setting for war stories featuring paratroopers; and much of the time Sgt Rock only served the strip as a narrator, opening and closing stories that featured other characters. It became more tales-of-the-parachute-regiment than tales of Sgt Rock himself, presumably as a device for reprinting old war stories from other comics.

A very short-lived strip, which featured for only a few weeks after the re-launch, was the spoof World War Two strip, 'Nutt and Bolt, the Men From W.H.E.E.Z.E.' This was a reprint of an old strip, possibly from *Lion*. Its title certainly suggests it was born out of the earlier television popularity of *The Man From UNCLE*. It featured an English scientist, Professor Nutt: a boffin who invented secret weapons for use against the Germans; and his Army 'minder', one Sgt 'Lightning' Bolt.



Swots & Blotts and Sgt Rock both from *Smash* Christmas Special (December 1969).

A Valiant Death

After two years with IPC, *Smash* merged into *Valiant* in 1971, although the *Smash Annual* continued to appear for some years afterwards. Some strips survived into the new *Valiant*, such as 'His Sporting Lordship' and 'The Swots and the Blots', but most were lost.

Even with all of the changes IPC made, the new *Smash* had lasted only two years before being merged into *Valiant*. It must have been only marginally profitable in 1969, to decline into oblivion so quickly. IPC didn't even have the burden of the accumulated debts that were incurred on the four other Power Comics, so the situation must have been pretty bad.

The dates suggest that it was IPC's policy to give changes 12 months to bed down, then review the situation and take further action if needed. But the writing was on the wall for *Smash* because, ultimately, even IPC's flagship, *Valiant*, did not survive.

What it did leave behind, however, was a range of great characters, some superb artwork and many inventive storylines. Enough to keep collectors busy for many years to come. ●



Hammering Out the Horror!

Being thirteen questions of Gothic enquiry from Master Mark Saunders, magazine archivist and recorder of conversation, and Mister Desmond Skinn, an innovator, raconteur and erstwhile editor of the House of Horror periodical.

Mark: Did you and your editorial team decide which films to adapt, or did Hammer suggest titles to you? Did you have access to ALL the Hammer films you wanted to adapt?

Dez: I chose the movies to adapt.

I started with their initial '50s Dracula and Frankenstein as obvious foundations, although the lateness of the artwork for Curse of Frankenstein led to it being serialised across issues 2 and 3. Chris Wicking (Hammer script editor) and managing director Michael Carerras were my contacts. Working in Columbia-Warner House (only three doors away from Hammer House, in Wardour Street, Soho) meant I could liaise as much (or as little!) as I wished. Usually I liaised with Chris over lunchtime drinks in a local pub and with Michael over evening drinks in his office. It was a tough life.

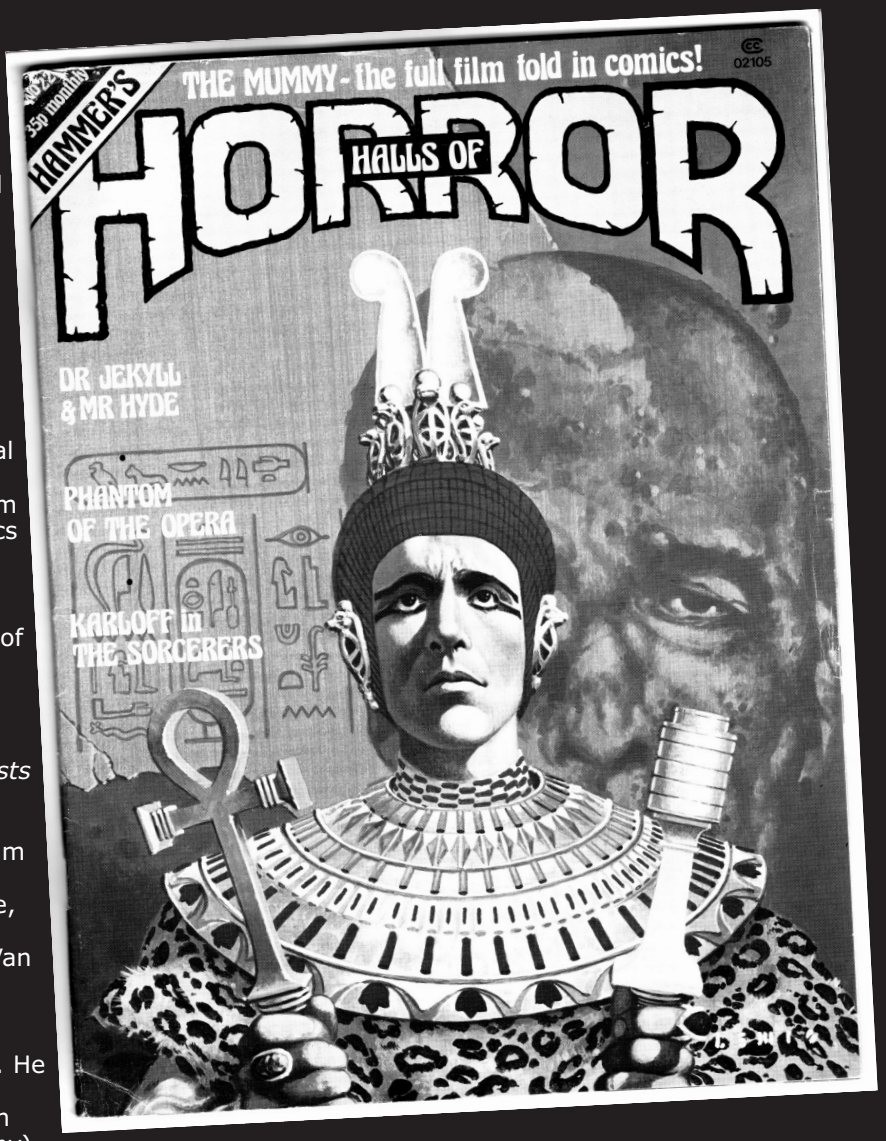
We'd be supplied with the script and cans of film usually, so we could screen it (me, the writer and the artist) in Columbia-Warner's top floor preview room. It was excellent because,



being a private viewing suite, it had small desk lights and an intercom to the projection booth, so we could rerun any bits we wanted as artist and writer frantically took notes.

The pitch I put to Michael was that the magazine and the film production company could have a great interaction, a symbiosis. We'd help them by promoting their new movies and they'd help us by providing access to their old ones. Sadly, despite the stillborn *Nessie* and *Vampirella*, the only genre movie they made after we launched was the problem-riddled and confusing *To The Devil a Daughter*. Their final picture being *Mutiny on the Buses* (not a cert for adapting!)

Apparently Michael had been approached several times previously with publishers wanting to produce Hammer magazines and had turned them all down. I think he liked my take on using comics to dramatically capture the atmosphere and provide a better narrative flow than a limited number of film stills could. It was helped by the fact that Chris turned out to be a regular reader of stuff I was already producing too! I think his blessing sealed the deal.



I assume your pool of artists came from their involvement on Quality Publications, or were artists brought in from elsewhere?

My team of creators had come with me in part from Fleetway (Steve Moore, Steve Parkhouse, Jim Baikiel, Les Lilley) plus through friendship and fanzines (Paul Neary, Dave Gibbons, Angus McKie, Brian Bolland, Martin Asbury).

John Bolton was a newcomer. His first strip (a Van Helsing in #4) was in pencil because he couldn't ink. It was such a tough job for the repro house that I told him he'd have to learn to ink his work quickly if he was to make a living in the industry. He did, and produced the splendid Dracula Prince of Darkness for #6, two months later! Similarly with David (*Quatermass*) Lloyd and David (*The Mummy*) Jackson. While both continued to work with me on *Warrior*, they were newcomers.

David Lloyd had been sending samples every few weeks for six months before a strip came up which I believe suited his 1950s, almost woodcut, style. Brian Lewis I knew through his stunning (albeit dated) Jet Ace Logan strips from the 1960s. His sample showed he could adopt the Spanish/Jim Warren 1970s approach so he became a mainstay.

Did the artists choose which stories they worked on? If not, how was the work allocated?

I chose the artist based on the script's requirements. I tried to produce a mix, rather than overdo the key Hammer characters, hence the bizarre SF strip, *Moon Zero Two* (#5, by Paul Neary) *Seven Golden Vampires* (#4, Brian Lewis) and *Dracula Prince of Darkness* (#6, John Bolton).

Were the artists able to see the films they were adapting, or did they work mainly from the scripts? Some of the adaptations differ in style from the films, as they appeared to have been based solely on the scripts, while others were almost photo-realistic, for example John Bolton's. Or was it perhaps a combination of techniques?

The artists got finished scripts with any refs we could lay our hands on. When adapting *Kronos* (#19), as there was no print available, Ian Gibson and I actually paid to go to a cinema in Portobello Road to see it. That was about all the refs Ian had!

I believe the artists were given the 'first draft' scripts to work from, which perhaps made the strips more 'definitive' expressions of the original intentions of the screenwriters? Were the artists working from actual scripts, or did Hammer provide you with transcriptions?

Sometimes we got finished scripts, pink pages and all (with the day's rewrites), other times we had the advantage of working with the original shooting script (*Vampire Circus*) before the censors got to work.

Who had the idea for Van Helsing's Terror Tales (VHTT), and was using Peter Cushing's likeness something he had to agree to?

Van Helsing's Terror Tales was my chance to both try out artists and to put something original in the mag. It's hardly an original concept, and one I repeated for *Doctor Who*, with 'Tales from the Tardis' and suchlike. I feel it balances out a comic/feature magazine, to start with the major strip, follow it with related features and genre movie news, then finish off with a short EC-style horror strip.

That had nothing to do with Hammer, except stealing the Peter Cushing character as a host. A few years later I was actually discussing with Richard O'Brien the idea of starting a title called Riff-Raff's *Shock Treatment*, taking his Rocky Horror Show character as a host, and the title of the sequel as the main logo. Van Helsing style strips, but with no major feature. Maybe that's why we never did it!

Likenesses? In the States you have the copyright on your image, your face. Over here it's different. While I met Cushing, Lee, Pitt and the rest, they really had no say over their faces being used. I've the greatest respect for the tolerance required by the US editors of the Star Wars, Buffy and Xena titles. They seem to have to go



Hammer and Corman to his name – almost completed an in-between Frankenstein script, explaining the inconsistencies between the end of the first and start of the second movie.

What do you remember of the 13 page 'Frankenstein/Werewolf/Dracula' strip from HoH #18, written & illustrated by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano? People have suggested to me that this had some connection with a 44 page strip already printed in Eerie (or elsewhere), or that it was taken from the comic which accompanied an LP soundtrack from the early '70s?

The Neal Adams/Dick Giordano strip was the mag's real exception! It had absolutely nothing to do with Hammer. Neal and Dick are both great friends of mine, and they'd done the strip for a record album. It had nothing to do with Jim Warren's *Eerie*/*Creepy* titles, except in appearance. Sadly, it got slated by our readers. It was a fill-in, but universally panned!

Do you have any particular memories of the artists you worked with on HoH?

Artist memories? Tons, but it would take a book to fit them all in. Let's just say they were an incredibly mixed bunch, from the gregarious to the pretentious, the timid to the overbearing. Editing them was an artform in itself. You had to be a chameleon, to adjust from ribald jokes to fine art between calls. Sometimes they'd appear through hoops to keep the actors and film/tv companies sweet. We just gave Hammer about two dozen printed copies. Unless it was something I was particularly pleased with, and took along to one of our sessions, they left me to it.

In fact, Michael thought we often did a better job of telling the story, or producing covers than the movies and their film posters! He actually used our original Shandor pencil pages (#8, John Bolton) to try to get backing for a new movie in New York. I had to tell him the storyline so he could explain the visuals, which were unlettered, but he ended up remembering something totally different to what I'd told him. Curse of the single malt, I guess!



Who generally would write the 'VHTT' stories? Did the artists perhaps write and illustrate their own (I notice Bernie Wrightson did), or was it the same writers who worked on the film adaptations? (I ask because some VHTT stories had credits, but most didn't).

Any lack of credit on VHTT was an oversight of mine. Generally the regular writers would pitch ideas to me for the backup strips; I'd select an artist later. Berni Wrightson and Dave Gibbons were exceptions (Dave also producing the #23 artwork under the pseudonym David G. Chester – his middle name as a surname.) The writing pool was to expand though. US writer Doug (*Master of Kung Fu*) Moench adapted Wheatley's *The Devil Rides Out* for John (Nikolai Dante) Burns to draw and Chris Wicking – having a few screen credits for

on panels together and make The Odd Couple look like identical twins. But there was a wonderful enthusiasm, shared by almost everybody which bonded us all together.

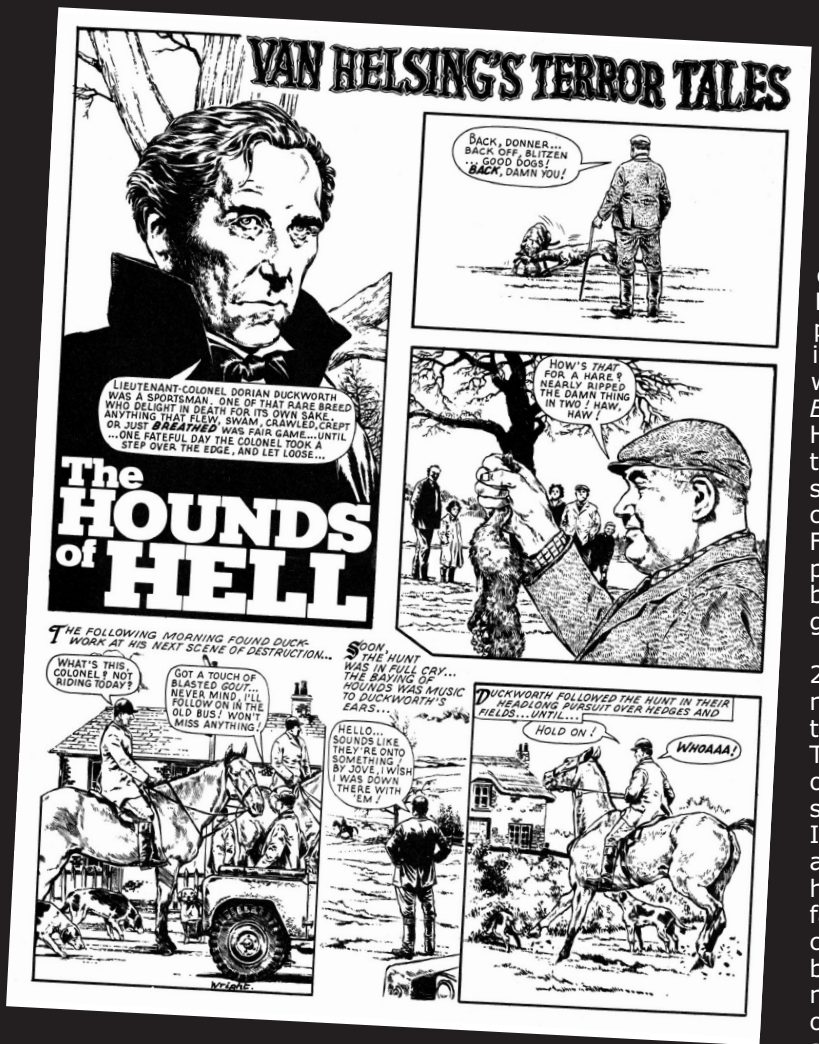
Why did the title change throughout the magazine's run? (The House of Hammer #1-18, Hammer's House of Horror #19-20, Hammer's Halls of Horror #21-23, and Halls of Horror #24-30) Did this, as I have assumed, reflect a gradual move away from a focus on Hammer, and more to horror in general?

Title change? OK, the big one. I'd met Jim Warren a couple of times. I was editing the UK *Mad* and *Tarzan* as well as HoH at the time, and about to start Starburst for my own company (I did it because my bosses didn't want another genre film mag, as well as my office's output including poster mags, HoH and the film-tie in Mad they also had *Cinema X* and *Cinema Blue*, put together by HoH news hound Tony Crawley). But they were interest in me reworking *Eerie* and *Creepy* for the UK, as – with Hammer about to produce *Vampirella* – the tie-in to Warren was a natch.

Now, Warren owned the scripts to his books, his Spanish partner Josef Toutain assembled the art. They each produced editions for their own territories, but the UK was a problem, so they decided to share the royalty. I somehow forgot the 2:00pm meeting and was sinking copious amounts of alcohol with Chris Wicking, celebrating a particularly good issue we'd received copies of that day.

Rolling into the offices around 2:30, I was hurried into a meeting with Warren, Toutain and my own MD and sales director. I was asked what I thought about a UK *Spirit* title, and, Yorkshire lack of tact exacerbated by too many bevvies, said exactly what I thought. As Warren was up for the entire 100% of this one he wasn't too pleased that I thought it was a time-locked piece of US hocum, beautifully produced, but I couldn't see it being commercial over here.





Dinner with Warren that evening didn't go too well, despite Peter Cushing joining us (they both favoured Browns Hotel when staying in London and it had been a pure coincidence that Cushing walked in while we were in the bar). HOH had only just started and while Warren was very flattering about the idea of me reworking his *Eerie*, *Creepy* and *Vampirella* titles, he wasn't mad about HOH. "I'm sure you'll be a great editor for my titles, but this horror mag of yours…You're just number 27." Not surprisingly I looked puzzled. "Look, 26 other guys have copied my title. You're just #27" he added, referring to Forry Ackermann's *Famous Monsters*, which he published. "I put photos of these copycat people on a board to throw darts at," he added (I sent him a 10x8" glossy the next day).

So, when he later discovered we were to export 200,000 copies a month of a US edition, he made his move. The US distributor, Independent News (I think they were called) didn't like the title *House of Hammer*. They said it sounded like a Do-It-Yourself woodwork kind of magazine, Duuuh. So, retaining the HoH acronym and sacrificing the original name to gain a huge sales boost, I switched to *House of Horror*, with the Hammer mention a smaller corner emblem. HHoH, I guess, really. Warren had been interviewed a few months earlier in a UK fanzine, *Comic Media News*, and was on their comp copies list. They released the news of our US edition being about to ship. Apparently he read it because in a matter of weeks he produced an ashcan compilation of old *Famous Monsters* material, called it *House of Horror* and got the legal requirement of 500 copies in stores to



retain the HoH logostyle, the best I could come up with was *Halls of Horror*, finally dropping the Hammer's part when we relaunched it in 1981.

As an aside, Milton Subotsky was always jealous of the Hammer mag and felt his Amicus company deserved similar treatment. But Attic of Amicus somehow doesn't have the same ring to it.

In issue #20, you stated (in your editorial) that a strip of The Devil Rides Out was in preparation by Doug Moench, John Bolton & Pat Wright, Chris Wicking was working on Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde, & Paul Neary was working on Revenge of Frankenstein. Were any of these strips completed? Do they lurk somewhere waiting for someone to print them? (Were they ever printed elsewhere?)

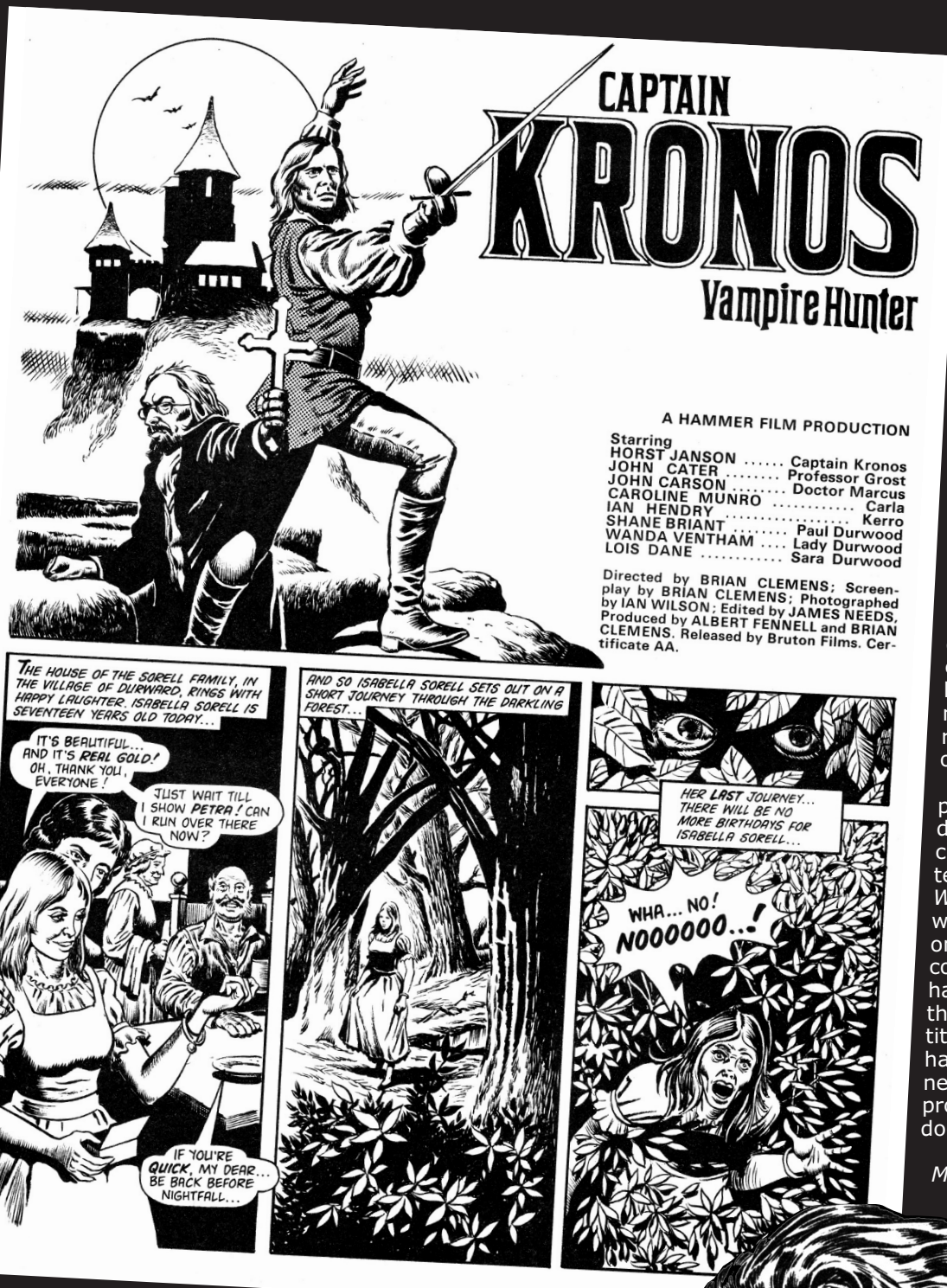
No they weren't printed, but we did tie up the Klove/Shandor/Van Helsing mess a few years later, as a tie in to the continuing Shandor strip in *Warrior*. (I added the H to Sandor, from *Dracula Prince of Darkness*, because I just loved the movie's Van Helsing substitute and wanted to make it our own. A monk on horseback with a shotgun makes a stirring image. In the same way, we (Steve Moore and I) took a theme out of *Doctor Who* to develop Abslom Daak. The idea in both cases was that if the title (HoH or *Doctor Who*) ceased, we could still use Shandor and Abslom Daak in other titles, so not everything would have been wasted. Hence Shandor in *Warrior*.

secure trademark on the name.

The first we knew was when we received the legal paperwork. By then 200,000 of a 'Best of' compilation of #1-18 were halfway between Finland and New York, and 200,000 of #19 with a US price cover black plate change were being printed to be out there a month later.

I couldn't see the problem, he was producing Forry's photo funnies, with Universal horror as backbone, we were doing comics versions of UK Hammer flicks. But he was a clever guy. He'd beaten us before we even started over there. The lawyer's letter was full of cease-and-desist demands, maintaining his HoH was a well-established title which a great deal of money had been spent on and how could we dare infringe his copyright. So, we had a serious problem. You can't simply pulp 400,000 magazines and stay in business (unless you're DC). I checked out opaque printing. There was a company which could block out the small 'House of' box in the middle of the logo on each copy, and replace it with any other words I chose. Thus changing the title and avoiding any legal hassle with Jimbo. But it would be time consuming and aesthetically unpleasing. So, I let Warren know how much it would cost us to avoid infringing his copyright and suggested that instead of us giving the money to a US printer we pay it to him to licence 'his' title for the already printed copies. We were going to put it out anyway, so perhaps he hadn't beaten us after all.

He took the money, but I then had to change the title again, so we could continue over there. Still wanting to



titles in the early 80s. Also, after Hammer Films, the hack and slash version of horror may have suited *Fangoria* style colour magazines but they weren't really my taste. I prefer my horror to be gothic fantasy, not sick sexist sadism. Or maybe I'm biased.

And finally – what are your thoughts now, looking back on HoH?

Looking back? Fascinating. I think most of the strips hold up remarkably well, with creators having, in some cases, produced their best work there. The feature layouts were pretty basic, but that was somebody else's job! I think the enthusiasm and tender loving care really shows, now I can look back and read them somewhat objectively.

I think you can see a pattern clearly (and the development of a team of creators), one which was a template for *Doctor Who Weekly*, then split into two with *Starburst* and *Warrior*, one all features, one all comics … but both somehow having a similar feel to them. It was an important title for me, my first real hands-on creation for the newsstands, and I'm still proud of it. And relieved it doesn't embarrass me.

Many thanks, Dez ●

After issue #24 (a reprint issue dedicated to the late Brian Lewis), the style and tone of HoH changed under the new editorial staff. Your involvement changed from Editor to 'Publisher/Editorial Director'. From that point on HoH seemed to go downhill fast, its strip content reducing down to half a film adaptation per issue, and no strip at all in the final (30th) issue. It survived the loss of your editorship by only six issues. Why did your editorship end?

Sorry you felt HoH went downhill after #24; thanks for the backhanded compliment. New editor Dave Reeder was maybe a more literate man than me. I fear I've always been crassly commercial. I'm a comics man who wanted to use Hammer as a way to sell comics to an older audience. To me Hammer was a vehicle for comics, not the other way round. Budgetary restrictions and lack of direction caused the death of the comic strips, with only the ones previously completed appearing in the second series. But the covers were pretty cool, weren't they!

My editorship ended because I was busy with other



ADAM ETERNO

The man who could not die!

by Captain Storm

As a kid growing up in the '70s, I was captivated by the adventures of the craggy-faced time traveller who fought against evil and injustice wherever and whenever he found it.

What made the stories so spectacular and unforgettable was the fact that he was almost immortal insofar that he could not be killed except by a blow from a weapon made of solid gold!

So it was that thousands of other comic readers like myself were regaled each week by tales of magic and mystery that took in everything from the Napoleonic Wars to the Incas to fights on Asteroids. Adam Eterno's adventures lasted only six years but like the man himself they remain timeless.

But where did he come from and how did he become what he was?



Time travel

To reveal the history of 'Adam Eterno', we ourselves have to travel back in time! It is 17 October 1970. And we are witnessing the launch of a new comic from IPC/Fleetway; *Thunder*.

Designed from the outset with a merger in mind, it only ran to 22 issues prior to merging with *Lion* on 20 March 1971. Before then it would introduce us to one of the strangest characters ever to appear in British comics – Adam Eterno!

The basic plot and background for this new strip was put together by IPC managing editor Jack Legrand, *Thunder* editor Geoff Kemp and assistant editor Chris Lowder (who would script many of the later stories).

Writer Tom Tully was brought in early on in the process to help flesh out their ideas and Artist Tom Kerr was enlisted to give the strip a mature, recognisable style. Later on Colin Page and Juan Giralt would take on artistic duties with the bulk of the work being done by Solano Lopez studio with the scripting duties being shared between Tom Tully, Ted Cowan, Chris Lowder and Donne Avenell.

Adam Eterno remains one of the top fan favourites of the period - being literally a character refuses to die!

Adam's eve

The first strip was set in a dank cellar in 16th Century London –1580, to be precise. Doctor Erasmus Hemlock and his young assistant Adam are staring incredulously at a bubbling potion they have worked on for many years – the famed Elixir of Life! Reputed to give whosoever quaffed it the Gift of Eternal Youth, the ancient alchemist deemed it not quite ready yet. Later that same night, however, the impatient Adam sneaked back to the alchemist's cellar and greedily gulped down the last drop of a strange greenish liquid.

The elixir would be a reward for his years of slavish devotion. Or so he thought.

Just then the Doctor appeared and when he saw what Adam had done he flew into a blinding rage. He cursed Adam with a second 'gift' – the Gift of Eternal Life – now only a blow from a weapon made of solid gold could restore him to his former self.

Adam simply scoffed at the old man's curse, driving his former master into a rage. The old man fell down a flight of stone steps, knocking over a flaming brazier in the process and setting the building on fire.

Adam at once repented and begged forgiveness, but it was already too late. As he carried his dead master outside he was met by the horrified stares of the villagers who had gathered to see what all the commotion was about.

They fled in terror when they saw Adam's master dead at his feet and realised Adam himself was left untouched by the fire. Adam fled in desperation and tried to make a new life for himself. But wherever he went, people despised him for his youthful looks and strange ways.

In retaliation, Adam, under the guise of a witchfinder, travelled the land and killed any sorcerers who were on the verge of discovering the Elixir of Life. As the years passed, Adam grew suicidal and in an effort to kill himself, joined the armies of the world, fighting in the Napoleonic Wars right up to the Second World War.

But only gold could kill Adam!



Oblivion

One day in 1970, when Adam was 421 years old, he wandered along a busy London road. Lost in his own misery, he did not notice the gold plated limousine of Greek Millionaire Hymis Metataxis which ploughed headlong into him.

Horrified, Thorg, the chauffeur, got out to check on the hapless hobo he had just knocked down, but to his

Stripography

Weeklies
Thunder (17 October 1970-13 March 1971)
Lion and Thunder (20 March 1971-18 May 1974)
Valiant and Lion (25 May 1974-16 October 1976)

Specials
Lion and Thunder Holiday Specials 1972-1973
Lion Holiday Specials 1974-1975
Valiant Holiday Specials 1975-1979

Annuals
Thunder Annuals 1972-1974
Lion Annuals 1975-1980
Valiant Annuals 1976,1978-1980

Reprints
Janus Stark 1-51. July 1973 – March 1983.
Reverie 1-3. 1983 – *ad hoc*.

Pastiches and Cameos
Stormwatch I #44
Jack Staff #11 (vol.2) thru #12
Albion 1
2000AD Prog 1519. 10 Jan 2007



An immortal who could move throughout time - a perfect recipe for adventure!

amazement found nothing save a tattered piece of cloth. Adam Eterno was gone!

But where did he go?

He had in fact been blasted into oblivion. Only gold could kill Adam and the car was only 'gold-plated'. Somehow Adam found himself in Limbo – neither dead nor alive in the normal sense of the word. Guided by the Fates, he was now doomed to wander up and down the timelines fighting wrongdoing where and whenever he found himself.

At first Adam resented this new form of the curse but in time dedicated his gifts to help others less fortunate than himself and decided to avoid gold rather than actively seek it out to end his life of centuries. Each time, he would find himself materialising in a new place and time, brought there to right some evil and only on successful completion of his task would he be mysteriously returned to Limbo, there to dwell in a dreamy state among the stars and moons of a billion years. And of course each story always featured an appearance of that by now 'dreaded metal', which came in a bewildering variety of guises.

Adam link

Lion teamed up with *Valiant* on 24 May 1974 for a nine month tenure during which time *Lion* would be dropped from the masthead (29 March 1975). *Valiant* went solo until it teamed up with *Vulcan* (10 April 1976). *Valiant* dropped the *Vulcan* masthead sometime in September, effectively going solo again until it, too, ended on the 16 October 1976 (one day before Adam Eterno's sixth comic birthday!).

Unlike some of the other characters, Adam Eterno did not cross over to *Battle Picture Weekly*. Adam's last original appearance was in *Valiant Holiday Special* in '79.

Such was and is the popularity of this amazing character that during and since his heyday, he has appeared in a variety of magazines and under a variety of guises.

From 1973 to 1983 he appeared in the French Language comic *Janus Stark*. Although these were reprints, he did manage to appear on the cover 20 times in all new illustrations (artists unknown).

He also made a guest appearance in *Reverie*, an Australian anthology which ran on an ad-hoc basis from 1983 to 1987. Eterno featured in the first three Issues in a reprint of *The Pirate Island*.

He has been pastiched and imitated in many other comics. On 10 January 2007 he appeared as himself in a cameo in 'Stickleback' in *2000AD* comic!

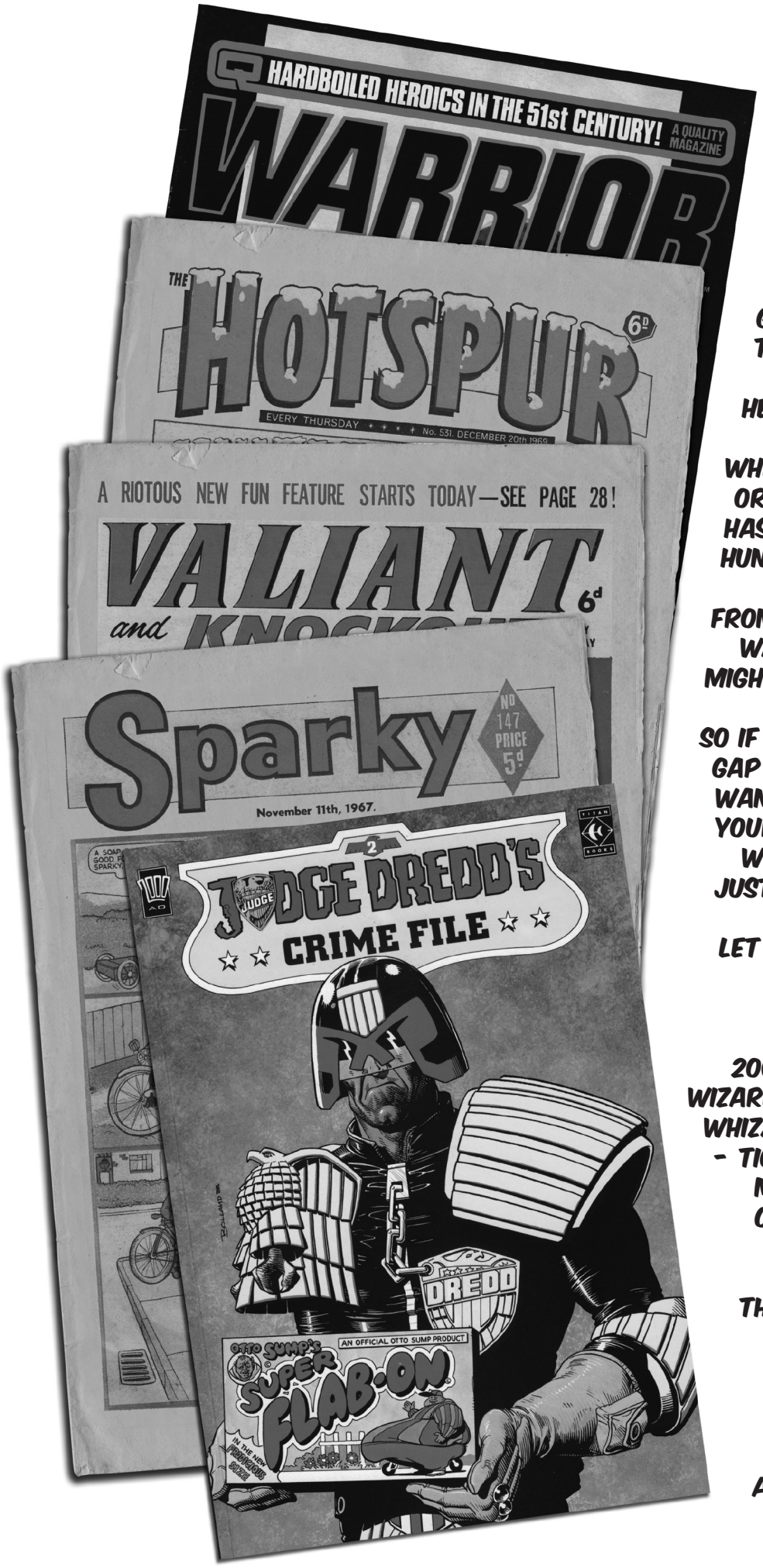
Where and when will this tragic hero - with his craggy face, tattered clothes, superhuman strength and trademark shoulder cape appear again? By Crom, only time will tell! ●

This has been just an introduction to Adam Eterno. If it has whetted your appetite please visit the AE tribute site at http://adameternoforever.tripod.com//index.html.

If you have any questions, come along to the forum group at:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/adameternoforever/

My thanks to the following for their contributions. Still many others wish to remain anonymous: Steve Laming (for kickstarting the whole project), Steve Holland, (Master Indexer), Mike Gage, Alan Wight, StellarX, Imbie, The various Yahoo Groups, The Forum members of ComicsUK.



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Each issue of Crikey! highlights the career and work of a major British comic artist. This time we look at the realistic fantasy work of …

Don Lawrence

By Glenn B Fleming

It's difficult to believe that almost half a century has passed since we kids were treated to the majesty of the strip 'The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire' and the artwork of the late, lamented Don Lawrence. For 11 years Lawrence illustrated writer and co-creator Mike Butterworth's strips, telling the tale of a long lost civilisation from the planet Electon.

As the story unfolded we saw a gyroscope-shaped spacecraft tumbling out of control through Earth's atmosphere, finally crashing into a Florida swamp. The crew is long dead but aboard the ship are thousands of books – an entire library, written in an alien language. Scholars from all over the world descend upon the United States in an effort to translate the unearthly language of the books in a quest to reveal the secrets of this perhaps long dead civilisation. One of these men dedicates his life to the cause and, when he is old and grey, finally cracks the code. What the chronicles reveal is one of the most outstanding sagas ever told in the medium of comics, running eventually to over 1,000 pages.

(Left) A staggering scene from *Erik the Viking*, beautifully capturin composition and storytelling … and just look at those horses! (*Smas The Trigan Empire*, (below), Lawrence went onto produce almost a











Empire Building

'The Trigan Empire' began in *Ranger*, the often under-rated comic-magazine hybrid from the mid-60s. *Ranger* was to last only nine months before merging with *Look and Learn* another educational title but with less emphasis on technology and boys' interests. 'The Trigan Empire' continued in *Look and Learn* until 1982, enjoying its success as one of the longest running features in the history of British comics.

Since exploding onto the comics scene all those years ago, 'The Trigan Empire' has been reprinted several times, yet there is still no full and complete account of the epic. Panels have been cut from some of the original stories and even entire pages deleted. The lettering has on occasion switched from hand to mechanical lettering. It certainly may have saved a few pages and therefore a few pennies but it didn't help the narrative!

Fortunately for the editors, there never were fixed titles established for the original Trigan stories and therefore the same story could be reprinted in different books under different titles, leading to confusion and some might say a little



(Above): Lawrence drew a superb version of *Tarzan*. This page appeared in *TV21&Jo90*, January 1970.

g Lawrence's sense of *sh*, May 1970). (Right) After 1,000 pages of *Storm*.



deception. Thankfully, the parts of the Trigan Empire that were drawn by Don Lawrence have been reprinted in luxury hardback limited editions in their original form with no editing. A number of partly completed and unpublished comic strips were published in the Netherlands.

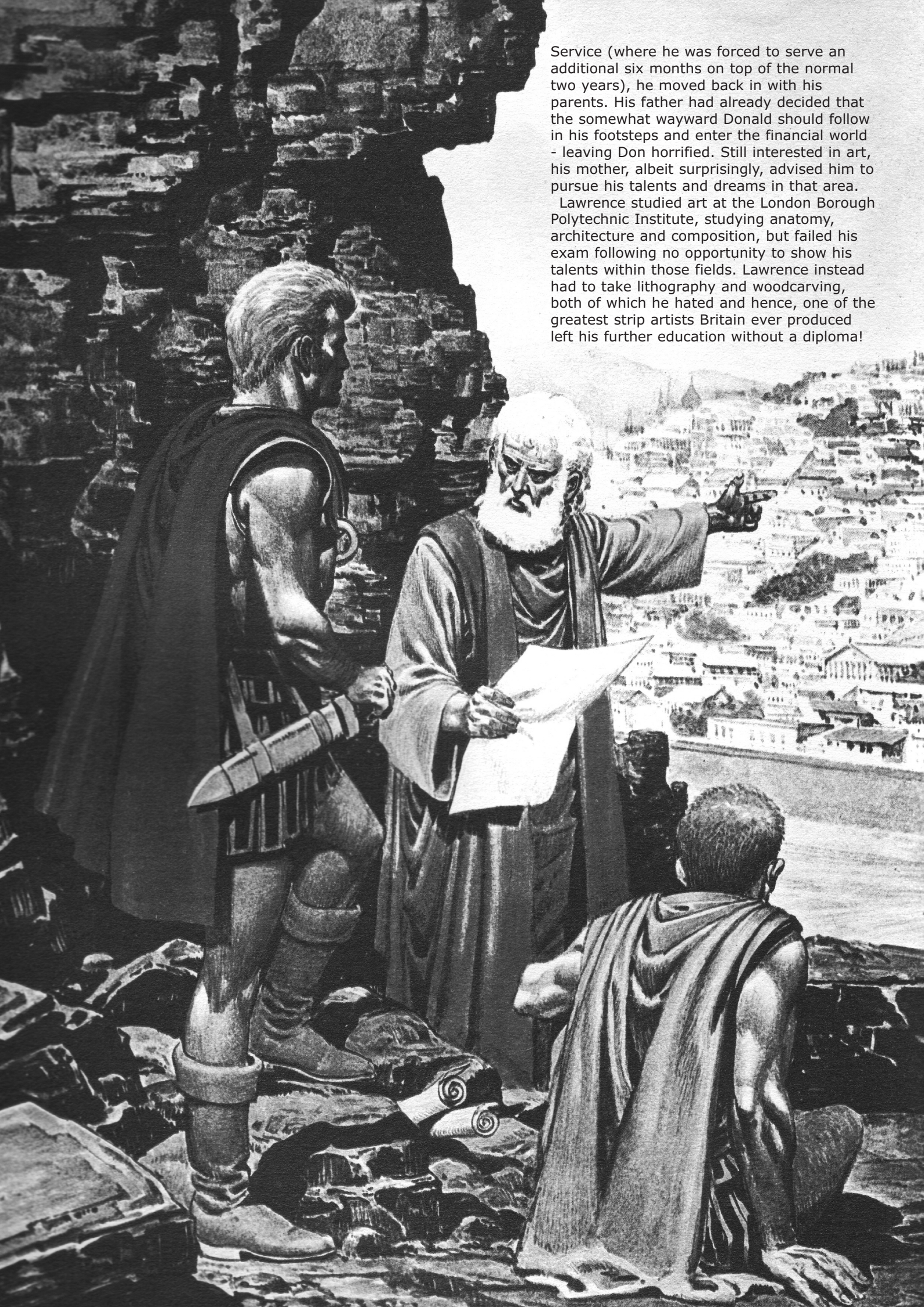
All that said, at the time of publication in late 1965 I was only interested in the artwork. That art was some of the best comic art this little boy had seen and is still some of the best he has seen to date. Don Lawrence's vistas were stunning; of truly biblical proportions and I have yet to see a comic artist depict stone and sand as well as Lawrence.

Before the Empire

Donald Southam Lawrence was born on 17 November 1928 in the suburb of London, East Sheen, the third child of Nellie and Herbert Lawrence. His other siblings were sister Pamela and brother Raymond.

Life in general was difficult for Don. Like millions of kids his age he was evacuated during the war, seeing his family on holidays and Christmas.

Despite these difficulties, Lawrence showed aptitude for drawing early on in his life and, following his National



Service (where he was forced to serve an additional six months on top of the normal two years), he moved back in with his parents. His father had already decided that the somewhat wayward Donald should follow in his footsteps and enter the financial world - leaving Don horrified. Still interested in art, his mother, albeit surprisingly, advised him to pursue his talents and dreams in that area.

Lawrence studied art at the London Borough Polytechnic Institute, studying anatomy, architecture and composition, but failed his exam following no opportunity to show his talents within those fields. Lawrence instead had to take lithography and woodcarving, both of which he hated and hence, one of the greatest strip artists Britain ever produced left his further education without a diploma!

In his third year of art school Don met Julia Wilson whom he married in 1954. The couple had five children before divorcing in 1973. Lawrence later married Elisabeth Ross in 1979.

Following a later chance meeting with fellow graduate Doug Marler, Lawrence decided that comic strip art was the career to pursue after Marler showed Lawrence the samples he was producing and, more importantly, getting paid for.

Miller Time

Lawrence, like every artist who has walked the earth, myself included, hawked his work around all the 'art' establishments in his local area and sent dozens of samples to agencies and editors in all areas of publishing. He eventually showed samples of his lettering (the last thing Lawrence wanted to work on) to Mick Anglo, who ran a studio involved in producing comic strips for magazines. Anglo was producing such strips as 'Ace Malloy', 'Captain Valiant' for Arnold Publishing and 'Marvelman' for Miller. Lawrence quickly became one of the top talents working for Anglo's studio and worked almost exclusively for Anglo for four years.

Working from home, Don drew the adventures of 'Marvelman' and various westerns such as 'Davy Crockett', 'Daniel Boone' and 'Gunhawks'. Although Lawrence was quite well paid - beginning on £1 per page for 10 pages a week (which soon increased to £2 per page), disagreements began. Anglo had complained that the last story Don had drawn was not up to standard. Lawrence retorted that his work was superior to any of the artwork produced by the studio and, although Anglo agreed, the spat ended their relationship as Lawrence resigned.

Go West

Lawrence moved to Odhams Press where he produced artwork for 'Billy the Kid' before moving onto 'Wells Fargo' and other western strips. I know Lawrence was never confident about his rendering of westerns and yet for me they rank amongst his best work.

Whilst drawing these westerns, Lawrence filled in occasionaly for Italian artist Ruggero Giovanni on 'Olac the Gladiator' in *Tiger*. Enjoying this kind of strip more than any other, Lawrence was offered 'Karl the Viking' (*Lion*) and the Saxon saga of 'Maroc the Mighty' both strips being written at that time by the acclaimed science fantasy writer Michael Moorcock.

Lawrence's skill in depicting all things ancient - body armour, swords, horses (though, apparently, Lawrence was never sure about drawing horses!), tough macho men and beautiful folds in cloth - were already beginning to show in his artwork. Yet all these stories were produced in black and white and it wasn't until his colour rendering of 'Karl the Viking and the Tideless Sea' (*Lion Annual* 1965) that Lawrence finally found his best medium.

Lawrence's peers were some of the finest in comics - Frank Bellamy, Mike Noble and Ron Embleton and although the standard was certainly as high as it might be, Lawrence held his own and worked on undaunted by others in his field.

The Empire Strikes

More colour work appeared in *Bible Story Magazine* and then he and writer Mike Butterworth unleashed

(Left) This scene from *The Trigan Empire* appeared as the frontispiece in Hamlyn's 1978 compilation of the series. Note Don's eye for detail on the folds and clothing, boots and rock formation.



(Above) 'Fireball XL5' from *TV21*. (Below) A scene from 'The Pirates of Pandarve' (1980), Lawrence's great work with Martin Lodewijk.





(Above) A scene from 'Truce with Hericon' (*Look & Learn 1967*)



(Above) These scenes from 'Revolution in Zabriz' (*Look & Learn 1967*) show Lawrence's expertise in establishing shot, perspective, drama, costume and the use of close up. Steven Spielberg eat your heart out!

'The Rise and Fall of the Trigan Empire' in the first issue of *The Ranger* (September 1965). Lawrence drew the Trigan Empire strip for the next 11 years, producing two pages a week, whilst continuing to work on other projects such as 'Oh, Wicked Wanda' and 'Little Annie Fanny' for the mens magazine Mayfair.

He also provided artwork – of a very different style! – for the classier *Boys World* and *Once Upon a Time* educational magazines.

Lawrence's approach to his work was amazing; he would write the time he presumed it would take him to draw each panel next to the panel - one and a half hours, half an hour, etc., then simply get on with it. At his peak, he could finish a complete full colour page, from blank page to finished art, in no more than eight hours.

The workload and his approach to it, took its toll on Lawrence's health. Like to the true pro he was, Lawrence battled through his illnesses and continued to produce outstanding artwork.

Empire's End

Don's commitment, professionalism and loyalty had never been questioned until his first appearance at a Comic Convention. In 1976, Lawrence was appalled to discover that 'The Trigan Empire' had been syndicated abroad without his knowledge and certainly without any remuneration. To add insult to injury, he was voted best artist in Europe - by fans he didn't know were aware of his work.

A devastated Don Lawrence departed his tenure on 'The Trigan Empire', leaving the saga unfinished.

Although Lawrence got work immediately with a new Dutch comic, he continued to harbour his sense of betrayal which in turn had a detrimental effect on his ailing health.

With his new venture ahead, Lawrence's new publisher insisted that all artists work with inks rather than gouache. This gave Lawrence even more problems, but being the professional he was, he mastered the inks and again produced stunning artwork. Years later, Lawrence found himself using his preferred gouache again - and, for some reason, his publishers never said a word!

A Storming Success

Lawrence found his next big success with *Storm*, based on a concept by Dutch writer Martin Lodewijk and written by, amongst others, Philip Dunn. The final 'Storm' serial (completed by Lawrence's former assistant Liam Sharp appeared in the magazine *Pandarve* published by the Don Lawrence Fanclub in 1999-2001.

Legacy

Throughout his career and apart from the many other art projects he drew, Don Lawrence drew 46 stories for 'The Trigan Empire'. Following that, he produced 22 volumes featuring Storm, each 48 pages plus cover, making at least another 1,000 pages.

These are all pages produced in full colour, using his pencil, gouache, inks and the white of the paper. Only the work of Bellamy, Noble and Embleton matched the quality of

Lawrence's 'Trigan Empire' and 'Storm'. I do not say these words lightly, nor have I forgotten Frank Hampson's work on 'Dan Dare'.

The loss of such an artist is immeasurable. I never met him, but I always felt he was drawing for me, showing me how to design and render the most impossible drawings, the most impossible angles.

Don Lawrence brought everything to a strip; he directed, photographed and lit the stage. He cast the actors, designed the sets, chose the locations. All this by a man who could never get the foreshortening of his characters arms right!

Lawrence worked on the strip up to his death from emphysema in 2003, aged 75. In those last years he had forged many friendships in Holland and received dozens of awards for his contributions to the medium.

As if all of his health problems were not enough, a botched cataract operation in 1995 had left Lawrence with almost no sight in his right eye and he soon lost his sight in that eye altogether. Following this, he had to teach himself new techniques in application, as he couldn't perceive depth.

Despite this, his heroes were tall and handsome with thick blond hair, toned bodies, were often adorned in togas and red cloaks. The baddies (in Trigan at least) were generally ugly, sporting thin moustaches with skin that would seem to turn green for a week before reverting back to its normal 'flesh' coloured tone.

The women?

The women were just so beautiful!

Don Lawrence was buried on 10 January, 2004 at the graveyard of St. Andrews Church in his beloved village of Jevington. Family and friends from all over the world came to say goodbye and although he never received the accolades he deserved in Britain, on the Continent he was hailed as a star. ●





Don Lawrence first drew Karl the Viking in 1960 in a strip called Sword Of Eingar starring Karl and his rival, Skurl. The pair had pledged to recover the 'sword' which had been stolen by the Saxon Earl Gyrth of Eastumbria.
The story proved extremely popular, prompting Karl's return in Karl The Viking, a strip that countered many myths about the Vikings with the hero and his army often fighting for good causes. The strip continued until 1965, when Lawrence began work on 'The Trigan Empire' for Ranger *magazine. In 1969* Smash *reprinted the strip and for some reason re-named it 'Erik the Viking'.*

Are these the UK's Rarest Comic Annuals?

By Bob Norton

This article isn't about the ten most expensive annuals published in the UK or the top ten most popular, it's about the ten rarest! The thrill of the chase and dedication are the major factors collectors need here, not just bags of cash! Your average City gent could pick up the phone and buy most if not all of the ten most expensive out of his performance bonus as an 'investment' and not leave the office (or miss the cash!). Not so the ten rarest.

Well-known great art and interesting storylines; these are the factors that fuel demand and turn rarity into the high cash values now being reached at auction for titles like the first Broons Annual*. My aim in this article is not only to discuss the better-known rarities but also to shine some light on the lesser-known ones on the UK annuals' scene. Sure, the ten rarest annuals and the ten most expensive do share the odd title in common, but rarity on its own is not particularly a merit!*

A few definitions are needed here if this article is to be objective – what does rare and scarce mean in terms of annuals? Come to that, what is an annual anyway? My definition is wider than you might think!

Comic Annuals

Let's start with what I feel constitutes a 'Comic Annual'.

Firstly, it needn't say 'annual' in the title or 'comic' either for that matter! In my definition, it must be published once a year, as a separate item and be related to a panel art comic or newspaper strip past or present, even if just published for the one year. This rules out both pull-out supplements to comics and annuals related to the purely text comics of the 1930s and before. The 'comic annual' doesn't even need a current weekly comic to support it and can contain reprint panel art material just so as long as it was reprinted from comics or strips and was published as a once-a-year separate annual.

The best-known and most common type of annual is that distributed in time for Christmas and usually on sale from about the end of August. These tend to be hardbacks though not exclusively so, as many card-covered annuals were produced. Indeed, some of these are in my list as their covers are so fragile they tend to get badly damaged and hence the annual thrown away.

My definition, however, also includes another type of 'annual', the paperback Summer, Spring and Autumn Specials as they are only published once a year as stand-alone items.

Rarity

There are two main causes of rarity. Firstly, rarity due to very few annuals being published in the first place (absolute rarity) and, secondly, due to wear and tear and wartime paper shortages/recycling, very few copies currently survive (relative rarity). The practical index of rarity from either cause being the frequency of occurrence in the marketplace on eBay and other recent auctions such as the Compal Comic Auctions. I believe one of the reasons UK annuals (and UK comics for that matter) are not as expensive as their US counterparts is that insufficient information is known about the numbers of individual titles which currently survive. Collectors don't know how rare a title they are bidding for really is, and so stop short of putting in realistic high bids. I have attempted here, for the first time in the UK (as far as I know), to introduce such a measure. This is adapted from one already used in the US for comics and I have called it Rarity Index Band or RIB for short.

Rarity Index Band attempts to estimate the number of each title that currently survives. This obviously cannot give an absolute number but I feel a reasonable first stab can be made. Here though, another factor rears its head to muddy the waters – condition. If the tool is to be useful then it has to be simple to use and I'm therefore going for a simple rule of thumb – the annual must be in 'British Grade A' – this approximates to US comic grade Very Fine and UK grade of VG++. It must have its original dustwrapper (if published with one). It must have its spine and be complete (price clipping is acceptable), be clean and have no major defects. Fine copies (where they exist) will obviously be a much smaller subset of the numbers I give below (I'd estimate around only 5% will be in Fine).

I have used the following three indices of rarity for UK Annuals:-

Rarity Index Band I [Very Rare] – 1 to 15 copies exist in VG++ or better.

This happens very infrequently and is mainly due to a change of mind by the publishers about releasing the annual.

Rarity Index Band II [Rare] – 16 to 39 copies exist in VG++ or better.

Wartime paper rationing and paper drives fuelled relative rarity of annuals printed in 1941 and 1942.

Rarity Index Band III [Scarce] – 40 to 79 copies exist in VG++ or better.

Better survival rate than category II but still scarce.

Rarity Index Band IV [Uncommon] – 80 to 149 copies exist in VG++ or better. Supposedly rare but most of the early to mid 1940s *Beano Books* (except 1942 which is Index III) would fall into this category in VG++ or better, judging by the number that keep coming up at auction!

The List

In my opinion the ten-rarest annuals, counting down from number ten to number 1 in order of increasing rarity, are as follows:

10 The New Adventures of Rupert 1936

The national institution that is the yearly Christmas *Rupert Annual* started in 1936 when the *Daily Express* published *The New Adventures of Rupert*, containing purely Rupert material – mostly reprints from the daily newspaper strip, but some original strips too.

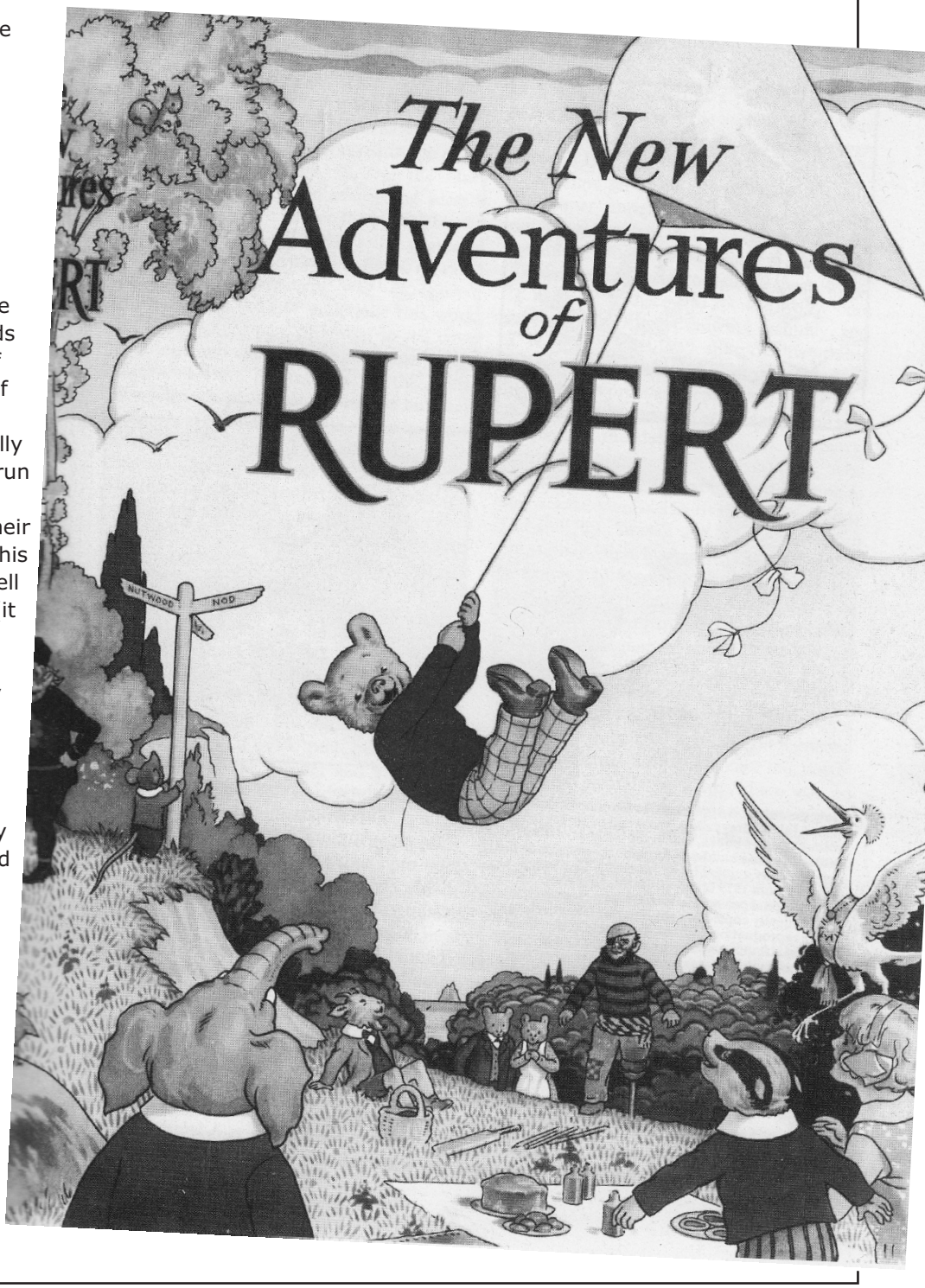
Crucially, the 1936 Annual had a dustwrapper featuring Rupert swinging from a kite, reflecting the theme of the first story (the boards had no illustration, unlike those of future years). The fragile nature of the wrapper, makes finding this annual in its original condition really difficult. My estimate of the print run of the 1936 annual is around 400,000 but most will have lost their wrapper by now. As the rarity of this annual with a wrapper is pretty well known and the content desirable (it being full of art by Alfred Bestall) prices reflect that, although as no absolute rarity was built in, it only ranks as number 10 on this list.

A Mint copy would need the original box and the plain tissue-paper over-wrapper that the 1936 annual came in, but there are only a handful of these in existence and no wonder!

Rarity Index Band III - 40 to 79 copies with the wrapper.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: around 70 copies with the wrapper.

Recent Auction Price: £1,540 in Nov 2005 Compal Auction.



My Top Tip from the list

Is there a 'sleeper' in the above list that is currently way undervalued? Well yes! I think it's number 2 on the list - the 1950 Radio Fun with the Tommy Handley cover. If you think about it, why should the 1973 Rupert be £23,000 when all they did was change the colour of his face and shoes! You might say Rupert collectors are completists and that's why but there's the difference with the US market at the moment: a rarity like this with its wartime links and great internal art would be very valuable there! Still, UK comics and annuals are very much on the up with the likes of the recent Comics Britannia series on BBC4, so who knows; it may be fetching £1000 plus in a couple of years! Of course the above list is only one guy's opinion, so if you know better and hopefully have the evidence to back up your choice then give us your feedback by the letters page or via the Crikey! website (www.crikeyuk.co.uk).

Top Ten

The most expensive UK annuals are mainly the early DCT annuals. Compal do get high prices for these books and their data is my main source, although it's hard to be definitive on which are the ten most expensive. Here's my list as of Xmas 2007 of 10 different most valuable UK annuals. They are in order of increasing auction price achieved over the last 5 years where they exist and all prices include 10% buyer's premium.

i) Magic Annual 1942 – none found in last 5 yrs but sure to be top 10!
ii) Magic Annual 1943 - £951 taped spine Compal – another top tenner!
iii) New Adventures of Rupert 1936 in wrapper - £1,540 Nov 2005 Compal.
iv) Beano Annual 1944 - £2,148 Compal.
v) Broons 1942 - £3691 Sep 03 Compal.
vi) Beano Annual 1940 - £3,872 Jun 2004 Compal.
vii) Oor Wullie 1940 - hardbacked version £4015 in Sept 05 Compal. A Fine example found in an Edinburgh loft, recently exchanged hands for £4,500!
viii) Broons Annual 1939 - £5390 in Sept 03 Compal.
ix) Dandy Annual 1939 - £6232 in the Sep 2006 Compal.
x) Rupert Annual 1973 (Brown Face) - £23,000 Dukes Auction Aug 2007.

9 Topper Picture Book 1956

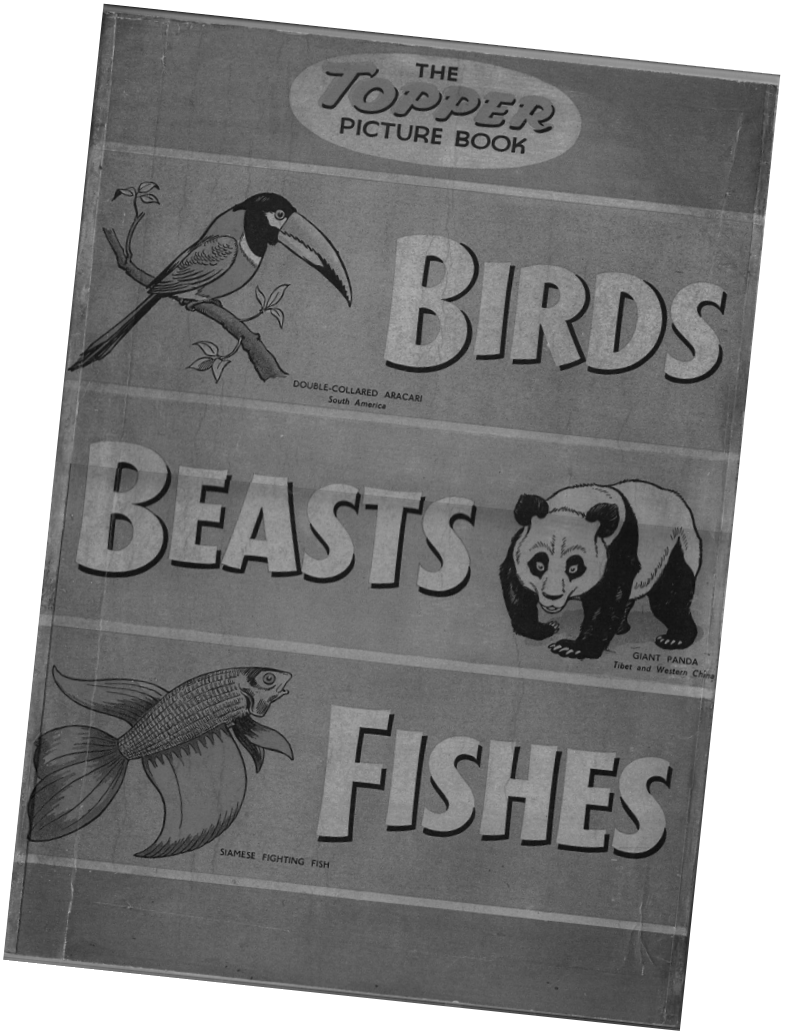
This is a strange annual. Produced as a large format (16”x12”) card covered book, the title only appeared once as, unlike 1963 *Dandy-Beano Summer Special* (discussed below), the concept was not taken further in following years.

How could a completist collector of DC Thomson (DCT) annuals leave this out of his collection? With the 1954 *Desperate Dan Annual* (RIB IV) and the first *Dennis the Menace Book* 1956 (RIB IV), I think this is among the top three most attractive DCT Annuals of the 1950s and due its large size and card nature one of the scarcest!

Rarity Index Band III - 40 to 79 copies in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: 60 copies or so.

Recent Auction Price: None found in last five years but around £100 for a VG++ copy would be a reasonable price (I paid £70 three years ago in a private sale).



8 Dandy-Beano Summer Special 1963

This falls within my definition of annual because it came out annually and is comic related – but for the Summer not Xmas!

This 32-page paper-covered bumper number included the work of leading artists at DCT including Dudley Watkins and is the only occasion the two famous comic titles have been combined.

The *Dandy-Beano Summer Special* was a real innovation - the first summer special issued as a separate item ever published! It had been thought of before, as early as June 1936, when as a pull-out supplement to the *Rover Story Paper*, DCT published the *Rover Summer Fun Book*, but this was not a separate specific publication and as such falls outside my definition.

This particular Summer Special is really scarce in any condition, and in VG++ is RIB II. Even the 1964 *Beano and Dandy Summer Specials* (after the titles were separated again) are RIB III and rarely come onto the market. It appears that being the experiment it was, there was a low print run and that factor, combined with its larger-than-comic size and paper covers means a low survival rate!

Rarity Index Band III - 40 to 79 copies in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate: Actual Number Existing: 50 copies or so.

Recent Auction Price: Two on eBay in the last 12 months fetched around £350 each!



7 **Magic Fun Book 1941 (#1) & 1942 (#2)**

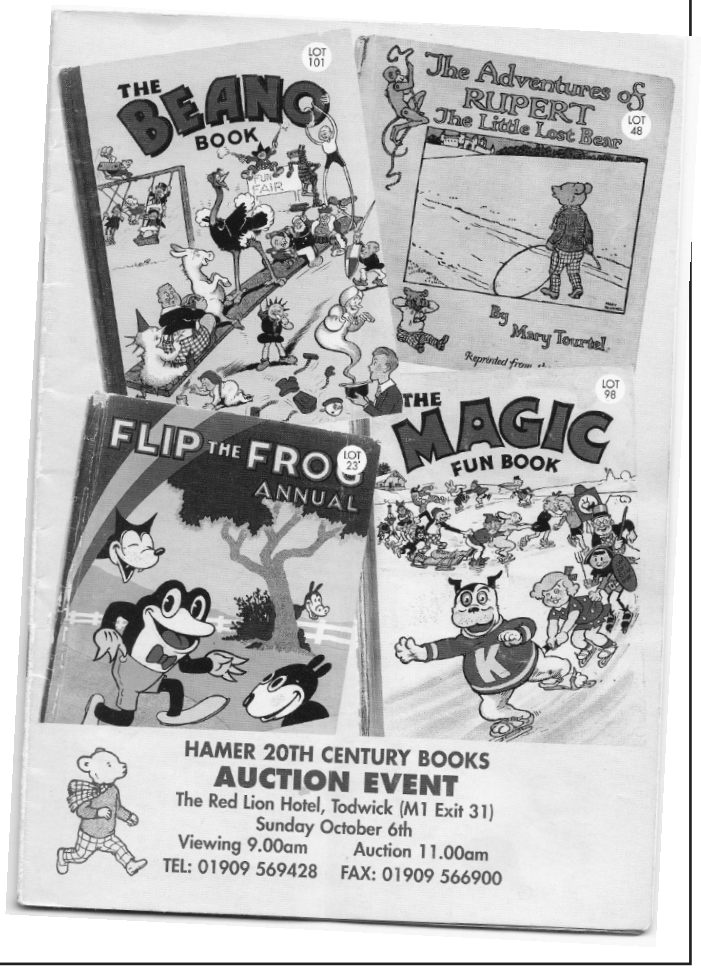
Encouraged by the success of the *Beano* and *Dandy*, DC Thomson issued the *Magic Comic* on 22 July 1939. Aimed at a slightly younger age group, the comic was similar to its companions but did not do as well, the last issue being number 80 - a rare failure for the successful Scottish firm!

When the *Magic Comic* was discontinued, the *Magic Fun Books* (as the annuals were called) also ceased publication, the characters amalgamated into those of *The Beano Book* and from 1943 *The Magic-Beano Book* appeared. Only two *Magic Fun Books* were ever produced, those for 1941 and 1942. Wartime paper rationing certainly reduced the numbers of these two annuals and this, together with wartime recycling, has really increased their rarity.

Rarity Index Band II: - 16 to 39 copies in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: roughly 35 copies of each annual. My guess would be the 1942 is slightly rarer as the comic was nearer to being wound up so fewer may have been printed.

Recent Auction Price: Compal Autumn 2007 Homepage quote: 'We have only seen a handful of *Magic Fun Books* come up for auction so they are genuinely rare. Consequently it was no surprise to see this #2 go for £951, even though it had its spine invisibly taped along the hinges.' No record of the 1941 annual being auctioned could be found over the past 5 years.



6 **Bunty Summer Special 1963/4/5 (#1, 2 and 3)**

Bunty was an all-picture comic for young girls, first published in January 1958 with an annual *The Bunty Book for Girls* issued in 1960. *The Bunty Summer Special* was spawned at the same editorial meeting where DCT decided to publish the 1963 *Dandy-Beano Summer Special*, *Bunty* being the most popular girls' comic in the DCT stable.

The early *Bunty Summer Specials* have become increasingly popular over the last ten years and are now very difficult to find, especially #1 (1963). The 1964 and 1965 are probably RIB III but 1963 may be RIB II. I only know of one copy but surely these were printed in reasonable numbers, so there must be more out there! 1969 is still quoted as the earliest *Bunty Summer Specials* in all the reference books.

Rarity Index Band II: – 16 to 39 copies exist in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: 30 copies of each but they haven't come out of collections onto the open market yet!

Recent Auction Price: the 1963 Summer Special fetched £136 on eBay Oct 2006. The '64 and '65 ones fetched £40 in a private sale earlier this year but these prices are way under!



End of Part One ●

The concluding part of Bob Norton's lucid and fascinating guide to the largely undiscovered and potentially confusing world of annuals will appear in our next issue. If you have any comments, additional information or just want to share your collecting anecdotes about annuals get in touch with us at the Crikey! shed.
Contact details are on Um Letters Page.

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Two years ago I, Tharg, brought you 2000A.D. — your planet's first comic of the future. Since then my alien mind has come to realise that it is not only heroes from the world of sci-fi that you Earthlets long to read about.

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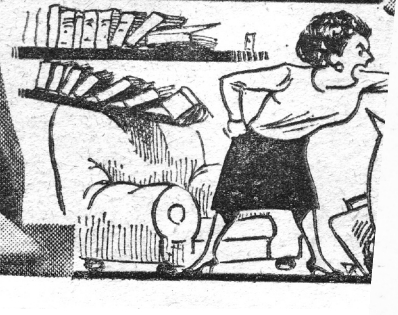
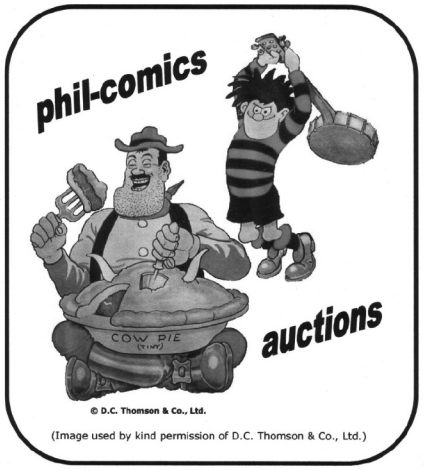




Years before Dave Gibbons found success with *Watchmen*, he had a whole other career in saving the universe and being a male model. Rumours that the chap at the top is Alan Moore are unfounded!



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Currently, over 100 subscribers enjoy the full colour newsletters containing interesting articles about the comics, annuals, characters, artists and editors, the publishers DC Thomson and more, written by ourselves and guest writers such as Ray Moore. A Letters to the Editor section, items for sale and competitions can also be found.
The subscription fee is just £9.95 for UK residents, who receive a membership card, Collectors' Club coaster and the next three newsletters.

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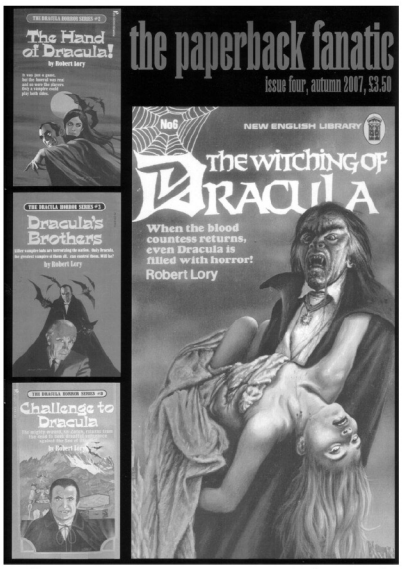

"Just been reading issue four of PF and it is brilliant!"
Brian 'Crikey!' Clarke

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Issue three has the ultimate study of Kung Fu in the pulps, an overview of Sphere's horror line, Dennis Wheatley's Library of the Occult and a look at sexploitation author Paul Tabori. 32 A4 pages

Special offer to Crikey! readers- all three issues for £10 post-free. Individual issues £4 each including P&P
Payment by paypal to justin@justincultprint.free-online.co.uk

The Drug Traffic! Voodoo! The Whores of War! Skinhead! Confessions of a Window Cleaner! The Rats!

Um letters!

For future issues of* Crikey! *let us know what you think about our magazine, British comics, your reactions to features or simply make us laugh.

Um Brian,

Really nice first issue, congratulations.

One little point, in an answer to a question from *Metal Eater #7* you say that the Iron Man who appeared in the *Eagle* was not Tony Stark but an original British character. No argument there, but then you go on to say that Marvel Comics had an almost exclusive deal with Odhams. Its interesting to note that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby did indeed make an appearance in *Eagle*. I have no idea how many issues they appeared in … but appear they did!

Peter Duncan

Belfast

A point well-made, Peter. And just to prove it, here is an image from the later run of Eagle *with the Norse God himself showing off his powers. There's something not right with Marvel appearing in* Eagle*. I think it's the culture clash of* Eagle*, the quintessential 'English' comic being host to the brash American style. It's also rather symbolic as it was the American comics that took so many of us away from our native titles. Our co-writer and designer Glenn B Fleming is actually working on an article that sets out to show that Jack Kirby destroyed the British comics industry.*

Crikey!



(Right) Lee & Kirby's Tales of Asgard (Eagle, March 1968).

Um Crikey!

I was really excited when I saw the first issue cover in *Comics International*. This type of magazine has been a long time coming, and I wish you every success with it.

One minor gripe – no copies available in Forbidden Planet in London. I hope this will be possible in the future, until then I will definitely subscribe.

In future issues I would love to see a feature or two on the classic British humour titles. I have fond memories of traipsing down to the newsagents every Saturday to pick up the following:

Buster, especially when *Monster Fun* folded into it, with 'Martha's Monster Make-Up', 'Faceache' and 'March Of The Mighty Ones'. A feature on the 'Leopard Of Lime Street' would be very much appreciated.

Whizzer and Chips. Many hours spent hunting down the 'invader' in each section of the comic!

Whoopee. I recall the back pages being amazing – with horrific images of famous landmarks. Can't recall the artist but I think he was the same one who drew 'Faceache'. Was it Leo Baxendale?

Along with *Krazy*, *Jackpot*, *Monster Fun*. It's a shame these died out when the teenager started being 'cool'. I still remember the excitement of the Christmas issues, with the snow covering the logos. Happy days.

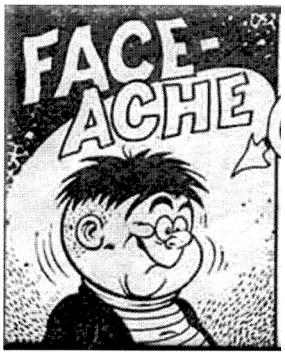
Of course there is so much you can cover. The adventure titles like *Battle*, *Tiger*, *Action*, and the DC Thompson titles such as Hotspur, and a personal favourite: *Crunch!*

A centrespread featuring a classic cover may a nice idea, or a collage of comics from a particular week in the 70s. I have often thought it would be great to see a typical newsagents' comics display from say, August 1978. Not only would there be the regular weekly titles but all the summer specials as well!

Best of luck with the title.

Paul Burns

prjburns@yahoo.co.uk



'Faceache' was by Ken Reid and he is indeed the chap responsible for your childhood fascination with famous landmarks coming to a sticky end. The feature was called 'World Wide Weirdies'. In the same title Ken also contributed the marvellous 'Tom's Horror World'.

As you will have seen in the editorial, Paul – the Crikey! fame continues to grow. Now that we are with Diamond Distributors we will be on sale throughout the known world! So watch out America, Australia, Canada, Latveria…

The classic cover is a good idea but before we do stuff like that we would like to build up sales enough to enable us to afford colour.

Um Crikey!

Just received the latest issue and it looks great. What a pro job after just two issues. And I like the mixture of nostalgia, fact and fiction, reproduced art and letters.

It's a great mix!

It even inspired me to take out a *Beano* subscription for the children, alongside my *Crikey!* sub, of course.

Best,

Piers.

Internet

Our Piers is a man of few words.

Um Crikey!

I'm one of those readers who read all kinds of comics as a kid and then drifted over to the colourful and, yes, superheroics, of the US product.

But the American comics are unreadable now and so I've been picking up a couple of old British comics and the wonderful Titan reprints. And I'm having the time of my life. And I don't think it's because I'm going back to comics I read as a child because lots of the ones I'm reading and enjoying weren't the ones I read back then.

So *Crikey!* is just in time for me. It gives me a guide to what to look out for and fills me in on writers and artists I'd never heard of before.

I do agree with the points made about the design in issue one, however and feel that issue two got it about right. Even if the 'Escape from Earth' image was repeated a page later but at a smaller size.

I'm here for the duration.

Alan Roberts, Derby

Welcome back, Andy. Over the past few months we've met many people at comic marts and events such as the Birmingham International Comics Show and the ABC Fair in London who are saying exactly the same about rediscovering British comics.

I think it helped that we launched at the same time as the BBC *Comics Britannia series, but whatever else is going on out there in comicsland there appears to be a strong move towards British comics.*

The duplication of the Escape… image came about when we were making the final amends. We wanted to move the image to match where it was mentioned in the text but in doing so, forgot to replace the original one. At least it shows you were paying attention…

Um Crikey!

Ho-hum! The train-spotters want their lists and dates do they. This is what I want:

Big pictures.

Variety.

Fun information.

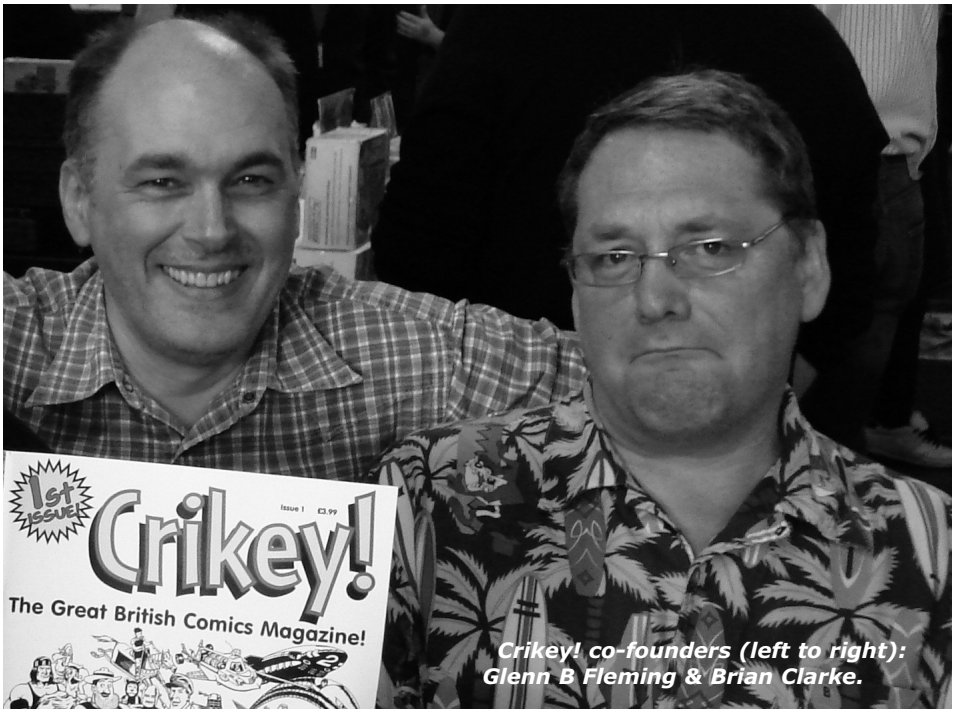
Things I've never heard about before.

Do all that and I'm a happy man.

Martin Knox

Peterborough

We've nothing against facts, Martin and whenever we can we want to credit artists and writers and, if we know them, give the dates and other facts about the strips we feature. But overall, I think we can meet your requirements.



Crikey! co-founders (left to right): Glenn B Fleming & Brian Clarke.

Um Crikey!

A copy of *Crikey!* finally made it through the disrupted mail system today, Monday, whether it's my subscription or contributor's copy I'm not sure.

Lots of good reading and references to characters both remembered and forgotten, as well as ones I'd never heard of. Great stuff, keep it coming.

Was it *Rocket* that had something about Atlantis on the back, with transparent diving suits which came down to the waist? I thought I had a sample copy, but I've obviously swopped it long ago as I couldn't find it. It's a small world, with your *Chum of the Month* being my one time *Starblazer* editor. I thought he'd left the comics for the women's mags.

Oops - my name spelt wrong on the contents page; I though I was safe with a Lancashire editor.

I thought the overall layout was a lot less frenetic this time. Perfectly acceptable - thanks.

There seemed to be a bit of antipathy towards personal nostalgia in the letters page. Personally I like to see comics set in their social background and would hate a more train-spotting list approach.

Ray

rayaspden@ukgateway.net

Ray commented last issue on the design of issue one saying he found the layout confusing and asking us to give "complete frames/pages we can actually see and drool over in future issues". It was a comment made by a few other critics as well and we'll glad to read that Ray for one is pleased with the changes. Of course, we then went and spelt his name wrong…

Ray also mentioned the battering we took in the letters' page over the amount of biographical and anecdotal material we included. I'm glad to say that we received a huge stack of emails and letters urging to keep the nostalgia elements at the core of Crikey! *We're currently running about 75% in favour of having big chunks of nostalgia served with their facts and figures.*

As you will see from the image at the below, the Atlantis story was indeed in Rocket*. It was part of the 'Professor Jack Ransom discovers…' adventure series, better remembered as 'The Seabed Citadel'.*



Um Crikey!

Thanks for the latest issue - more good stuff.

The Ron Embleton article cried out for colour, but I realise the cost implications and a mag like this should inspire us all to get out our old comics or to look around for some purchases.

I know that British comics are a lot more difficult to get hold of than their US counterparts, but old annuals (with plenty of colour illustrations by people like Lawrence, Bellamy and Embleton) are more common - check out charity shops.

Steve Holland's piece on ownership got a bit muddled (even more than the subject demanded) - is the 'Getting there' printed as written? 'cause it confused me (further).

And Steve didn't really get to the crux of the matter - i.e. the rights to reprint so many of our favourites are tied up so much that it's a nightmare (although the recent Titan books on *The Spider* and *The Steel Claw*, and the *Trigan Empire* and forthcoming 'Karl the Viking' show that it can be done).

To end, anyone remember a series of comic digests - mid 60s - *Top Three*, *Radar* and *Pecos Bill*? I think they were translated from originals somewhere in Europe and were a mixture of colour and b&w pages. Ring any bells?

Looking forward (already) to issue 3,

Geraint Davies

Internet

And you're in it. Again!

The Steve Holland piece appears to have either fascinated or killed cold anyone reading it. I think it all depends on the level and type of detail you want. As a trained historian it's perfect for me. But even in the Crikey! shed there has been looks of confusion. I remember Radar *and* Top Three*, Geraint – but not enough to say anything sensible or constructive about them.*

No change there, then.

Um Crikey!

I read comics but they are not my whole life. Keep the anecdotal side to the writing.

My favourite feature is probably 'Nutty Notions'. Maybe because it's an easy read and makes me smile. Another thing I like is the old ads. Find a few more and stick them in. I like my football so the 'Phew! What a Scorcher' article was perfect for me. Even the sub-titles were good.

You even had two articles that I almost skipped by but ended up liking – the one about British comics in France and the one about winning a coat.

Can't believe I read an article about winning a coat!

And then there was the Daleks.

Keep things simple and fun and I'll stay with you.

Andrew Burgess

Salford



I'm not a football fan but even I enjoyed the Scorcher piece. You can always sucker me in with a robot, a kangeroo kid or the odd bit of mind-control.

Hi Brian,

Crikey! What a brilliant publication.Thank you for sending along issue 1 of The Great British Comics Magazine! (I have just sent payment via PayPal for issues 2 and 3).

I didn't really know quite what to expect to see in *Crikey!* My first thought was that it was going to be a publication similar to DCT's *Classics from the Comics*, which I buy regularly. But no. What I got to see instead was page after page of superb news items, that remind me of yesteryear. And I must add that the print and paper quality used is first class (not to be confused with the Post Office's meaning of the words 'first class'!).

A bit about me: I am 42-years-old, and back in the 1970s I was a big fan of British comics, never really caring for the American Marvels & co. I preferred IPC's productions to that of DCT's. I had five paper rounds in the Seventies, and all the money I earned was spent on comics. Not only did I love reading them but, and this WILL sound weird, I also enjoyed sniffing the print and nibbling the paper! Now that was true love !

One of my favourite IPCers was *Roy of the Rovers*. Strangely, I was never a big fan of sport in the '70s but Roy, well, he was the 1970s Jesus. One thing I recall was the Roy Race Phone-in, or was it the Roy Race Phone line? Whichever, the comic invited readers to dial a London 01 number each week (no rip-off premium rates back then!) to hear Roy's spokesman/manager – some fella at IPC anyway, giving fans up-to-date info about Roy and Melchester Rovers! Brilliant!

And then there was 'na-na-na-na-na *Look-In*', so went the TV ad jingle. This publication was forever trying to get shot of Raleigh Chopper cycles in its competitions. I wanted a bike. A Raleigh bike. And it had to be a Chopper! How many times I sent off my entry details on postcards to win a Chopper. And how many times I didn't win that bike! My mam and dad's fault; they, for some reason, gladly bought me racing cycles, but refused point blank to buy me a Chopper. Was it the money? Wasn't their poor son worthy of being bought the coolest bike the world has ever witnessed?! I have still not forgiven my parents to this very day!

But back to the comics. *Cheeky Weekly* and *Krazy* were simply abnormal, especially the latter which, in my opinion, was way ahead of its time. The artists/writers must have fallen down to earth from another planet ! Absolutely hilarious! And I can tell you that I had more than a soft spot for Lily Pop! If only she had been the lollipop lady outside my school gates.

Buster, *Monster Fun*, *Topper*, *Beezer*, *Action!*, *Shiver & Shake*, *Whoopee!* – the list is endless. Alas, when we moved out of the house in 1986, which I had lived in from 1964 when I was born, I committed the ultimate crime. I threw away the hundreds of comics I had neatly stored in a spare room. All gone. Forever. I wish I still had them.

And finally – a recent survey concluded that many UK school kids are, in a nutshell, illiterate. Apparently they are unable to read. Lack of comics, see. Not only were comics fun, they were also educational. Kids these days are welcome to their computers and other gizmos. I'm just glad I was around in the 1970s to appreciate all that fine work found in the great British comics.

Doug Sharrard,

Leicester

When I worked at Fleetway Editions as an editor and writer I was on the next desk to Dave Hunt, editor of Roy of the Rovers*. He confessed to me during a lunchtime meeting around the local that he was the voice on the other end of the line.*

Sniffing comics and books isn't weird, Doug. Eating them – well that is something different.

See you next issue - don't forget we're going bi-monthly, so the next Crikey! will be on sale in March! See you then. ●

Crikey!

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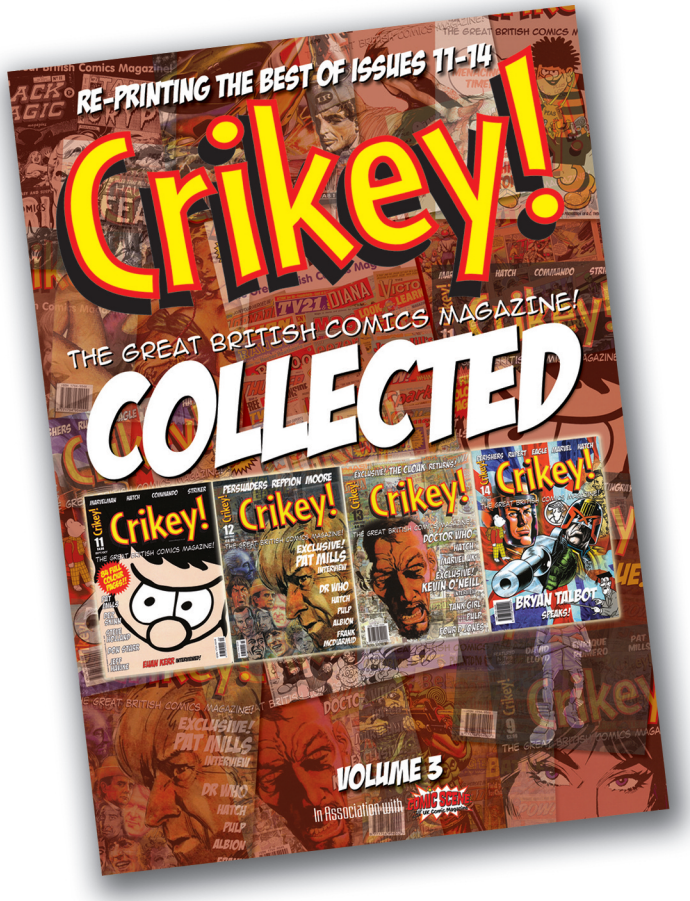

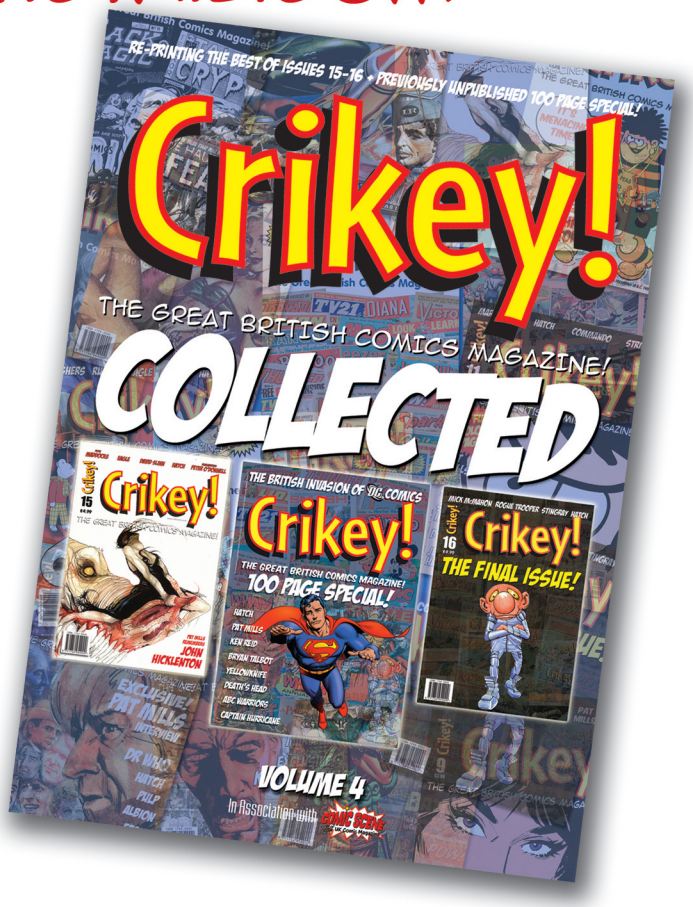

Crikey! Editorial

Brian M Clarke *Editor* **Glenn B Fleming** *Designer* **Tom Sweetman** *Publicist*

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Nutty Notions **2-3**
Tony Ingram provides the evidence to prove just how varied, weird and wonderful the British comic strip is.

Misty, Jinty and Tammy **4-9**
Jenni Scott examines the sociology of female identity as expressed in the pages of three of Britain's best-loved girls' titles.

Ian Kennedy in Space **10-11**
Brian M Clarke pays tribute to the Starblazer cover artist who most clearly defined the visual style of its nearly 300 issue run.

The Fab Fifties Horror Comics **13-16**
Mike Morley's series on British black and white comics of the Fifties looks at the much sought after horror titles. Part two of a three part series.

My Comicy Saturday **17-19**
Dave Gibbons puts his pen down in order to reminisce about his comic reading days in the 1960s.

The UK's Rarest Comic Annuals **20-23**
Bob Norton concludes his two-part countdown to unearth the hardest to find of all the British annuals.

Mike Noble **24-29**
Glenn B Fleming reveals another of his comic book art heroes as he discusses the career of one of our greatest illustrators.

Andy Capp **30-32**
David Robinson talks to the men who had the job of taking over one of Britain's most famous comic strip characters.

Captain Phantom **33-35**
Steve Holland discusses 'The Man of a Thousand Disguises' – one of Britain's great secret agents of the Second World War.

Let's look at ... Spellbound **36-39**
Brian M Clarke continues the series that takes a highly visual look at a short run comic title.

Countdown **40-45**
Stephen Poppitt traces the history of one of the best TVSF titles of the Seventies.

Um Letters **46-48**
Your views on *Crikey!*, British comics and whatever else takes your fancy. Plus the beginnings of what might prove to be some interesting fan discussions.

Crikey! chums...

I'm reminded of a comment made by Glenn – fellow *Crikey!* Chum and designer of our lovely pages. We had just received printed copies of issue one and were staring at it in almost disbelief. We'd been working on-and-off to get it published for the past two years and now we were holding a weighty copy with that just-printed smell.

We were getting all misty-eyed as we flicked through the pages, when Glenn dropped a challenge – "You know, in a couple of issues we'll be so far ahead of this that we'll be slightly embarrassed by it".

Glenn could already see the areas of improvement ahead and although we never even approached being embarrassed by our first issue (it's a first class attempt) we have never lost faith in where we want to take *Crikey!* More pages. Better paper. Colour pages. Slowly but surely, we're getting there and it's the reactions from fans and casual readers alike who are giving us the confidence to push ourselves to the max.

The reaction to *Crikey!* over the past several months has been overwhelming. Tom, Glenn and myself have gone from three fans working alone on a pet project to being in charge of something that really appears to have taken fandom by storm. It seems that almost every day someone new gets in touch with offers of collections that they can scan for us, articles to write or to provide transcripts of interviews.

Just compare the Writers' this issue… section from *Crikey!* 3 and 4. Not only do we have new writers (always welcomed) but we've even managed to get our very own fact-checker. Welcome aboard, Ray – we'll try to keep you busy checking stuff against the piles of reference works you have worked on over the years.

Furthermore, we are increasingly recognised by British comics professionals as the magazine to be seen in. We were really pleased when the amazing Dave Gibbons agreed to let us in on his Comicy Saturday Morning as part of our regular feature looking at how we grew up with the comics. Knowing that we have the support of people like Dave behind us makes all the hard work worthwhile.

The other great news for us (but not our home lives) is our decision to move from quarterly to a bi-monthly schedule. It means an extra two issues a year and allows us to make our subscription offer even better (see inside back cover for details).

British comics has a lot to offer fans and judging by the list of ideas and sample articles we are receiving I really can say; the best is yet to come.

Cheers,
Brian

Crikey! Chums of the Month are Pete Nichols and Phil Slatterley for providing some great images in our hour of need.

Writers this issue:
Tony Ingram, Jenni Scott, Mike Morley, Dave Gibbons, Bob Norton, Glenn B Fleming, David Robinson, Steve Holland, Brian M Clarke, Stephen Poppit.

Fact checking::
Ray Moore, Nigel Parkinson.

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Note: *The closing date for booking ads for issue five is 5 May 2008.*

Crikey! is a Sequential Media publication.

Website: www.crikeyuk.co.uk

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Nutty Notions

Each issue of *Crikey!* features a selection of some of the lovingly bizarre concepts that have graced the pages of British comics in the years past. This time round *Tony Ingram* proves that he has read way too many comics in his time… *Ideas and nominations for future Nutty Notions gratefully accepted through the* Crikey! *website (*www.crikeyuk.co.uk*), click 'contact' and away you go! Enjoy!*

The Day of the Giant (Victor 1975)
Art: Ted Rawlings

The 'giant' in question was a huge –and I do mean huge – toad. Hero Ben Gardner discovered that its poison contained a cure for radiation sickness (!).

Cue lines like "I had to try to save the toad from the nuclear bomb; the secret of the poison in its warts could save thousands of lives."

Do I really need to go on?



Danny Jones, Time Traveller (Hurricane 1965)
Art: Various artists

'Danny Jones possessed a fantastic old clock which could switch him back into the past.'

Well, of course he did. Doesn't everyone. Actually, as with a lot of these old sixties and seventies strips about kids with amazing gadgets, the most noteworthy things about Danny Jones, Time Traveller is not that he could travel through time just by winding back his clock, but that he was so totally unfazed by it.

Like the most admirable of lottery winners, Danny didn't even let the fact that he had access to something that could potentially have changed his life in the most incredible ways affect him at all! The dozy little plank!





Glasses of Glory (Victor 1977)
Art: Geoffrey Whittam

Young Charlie King was an ordinary kid, until he accidentally discovered a pair of field glasses dating back to the Crimean War.

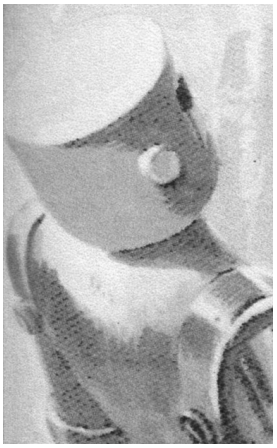
These were no ordinary binoculars, though; they'd had an exciting history, and every time Charlie (who, as luck would have it, is clued up about military history) put them to his eyes, he was able to view another chunk of the baffling bins' 'experiences'.

Educational? Certainly.

Barking mad?

Quite possibly – but the art was nice.





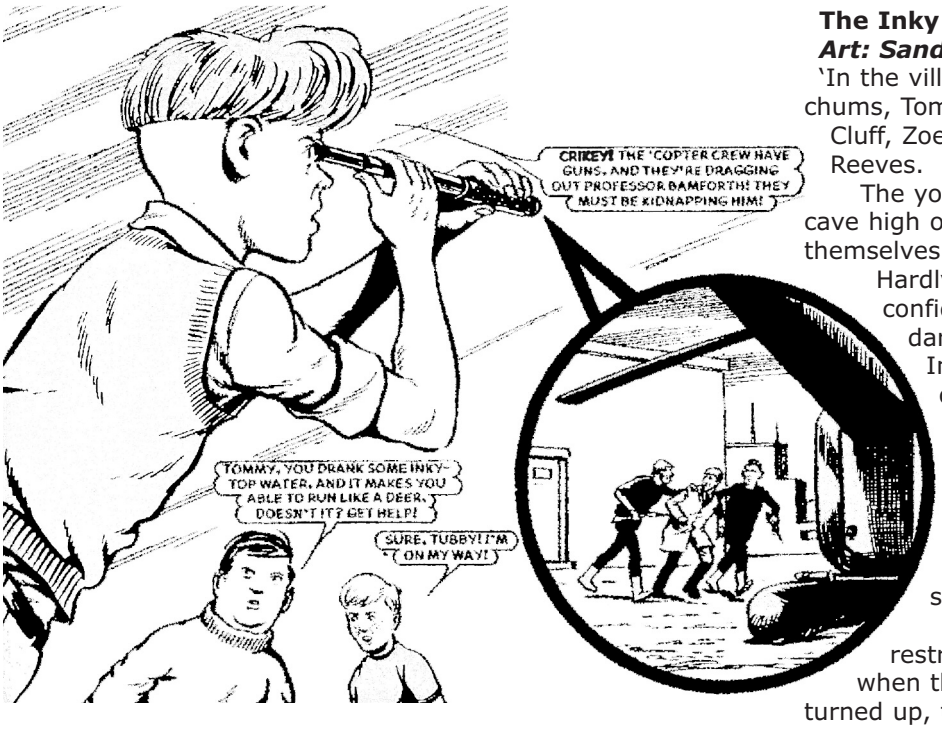
The Juggernaut from Planet Z (Hurricane 1964)
Art: Various artists

What do you do if the Earth is endangered by mad scientists, volcanic eruptions or other sinister disasters too big for conventional forces to deal with?

Well, if you're the Global Protection Headquarters in London, there's only one option open to you: You call in Dan Morgan, 'Scientist extraordinary', and Dan will, in turn, summon … The Juggernaut from Planet Z.

The Juggernaut was a mysterious, incredibly powerful but curiously clunky-looking robot which was quite capable of thinking and acting for itself.

It carried passengers, too, so wily old Dan could safely take all the credit for its actions! Not that he would …



The Inky Top Imps (Topper 1970s)
Art: Sandy Calder

'In the village of Arkside, in Arkdale, live six close chums, Tommy Armitage, Jenny Bamforth, Charlie Cluff, Zoe Oldroyd, Tubby Butterworth and Lanky Reeves.

The youngsters have a secret hide-out in a cave high on Inky Top Hill and so they call themselves the Inky Top Imps.'

Hardly an introductory paragraph to inspire confidence that amazing adventures and daring exploits were to come, but the Imps had more going for them than a damp den and a sissy-sounding sobriquet.

Their cave contained a magic spring, the waters of which bestowed awesome powers on the drinker; Lanky could leap like a kangaroo, for instance, while Charlie gained super-strength.

It's a testament to the kids' self-restraint that, while never found wanting when the inevitable crooks and ne-er do wells turned up, their principle use of the remarkable water was to wash down their freshly caught fish!

The £1,000,000 Challenge (Speed 1980)
Art: Eric Bradbury to begin, then uknown

Bullet Slick was a millionaire in love with Speed, until an accident left him in a wheelchair. Embittered at having never achieved his dream of being recognised as the fastest man on Earth, the arrogant Bullet issued a challenge to the readers of Speed the comic: dream up an idea for some speedy stunt that would impress him and you'd receive a cheque for £1,000,000.

Unfortunately, it wasn't a real cheque (aww), but Bullet would also pay 'up to five pounds each week' for the winning idea, in real money!

None of which would have come as much consolation to his long-suffering assistant, Wiley, who'd invariably end up testing out ludicrous inventions like the Cheetah Beater (stand up, master David Carroll, of London).

Naturally, Bullet was never impressed with the results, so he'd usually end up ordering Wiley to pay the fiver out of his own pocket for his failures – the stingy old misery!





The Last Six Hundred (Victor 1965, reprinted 1975)
Art: Jean Marie

'By 2065, Britain and the rest of the world had been overgrown by a giant fern which, though poisonous to humans, made animals and plants grow to many times their normal size. Six hundred people living on Portland Island believed themselves to be the last people alive'. Of course, they weren't but by the time we found that out, a generation of kids would never look at a fern in the same way again.

Our Sheriff's an Ape (Beezer Annuals and Summer Specials)
Art: Bill Holroyd and Bill Hill

Okay, Coyote Creek is, at first glance, your average Wild West town, prospering under the watchful eye of Sheriff Danny Blain. No surprises there. But Coyote Creek actually had two sheriffs, and the other one is … an ape, named Charlie.

You'd be forgiven for wondering what kind of nitwits would accept placing themselves under the jurisdiction of an officer of the law several rungs down the evolutionary ladder. Charlie seems to have been something of a hit with the law-abiding citizens of this strange little town, however, judging by how long the strip ran.

The really odd thing is the way Charlie fits in so well with the rest of the town folk!

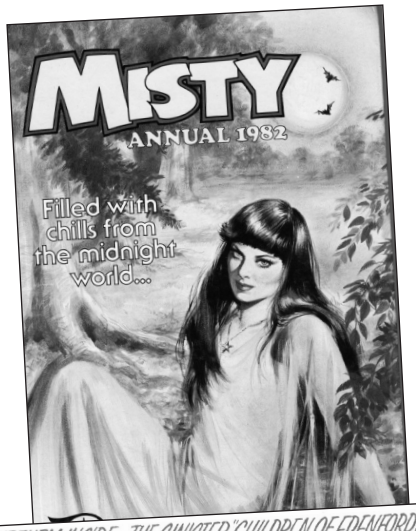


Jenni spoke at the Aesthetics of Trash Culture conference held in Manchester last summer. Her paper went down very well and in the discussion later I was able to convince Jenni to produce a version for Crikey! readers. Remember: it was originally written for egg-heads …

Misty Jinty Tammy

Female identities and socialisation

in the 1970s wave of British girls' comics







By Jenni Scott

If you are in your thirties or older, you will probably remember having a weekly comic delivered to your door or kept for you at the local newsagents. If you are younger than that, chances are that you will have missed out on this so thoroughly that you may not even know what I'm referring to – the grand tradition of the British weekly comic, a staple of life in the second half of the 20th century.

British comics were read by both girls and boys in huge numbers during the second half of the 20th century, with constantly proliferating numbers of weekly titles published for each gender.

The titles marketed at girls were a noticeably different group from those marketed to boys, both in the sorts of names used and in the focus of the stories. With no real overlap, overwhelmingly the kinds of stories published were separated by gender: boys' comics featured war and action stories, and girls' comics featured stories of pop music and (for older girls) romance. Many featured schoolgirl ballerinas, horseriders, or simply schoolfriends.

Changes

Today, that variety of titles available contrasts strongly with the very small numbers available on current newsstands – a mere handful, restricted to a tiny bit of shelf space and surrounded by similar-looking items that are vehicles for licensed characters. Sustained stories are vanishingly rare if present at all.

The one area in which a broader swathe of publishing remains is in the under-7s market, but otherwise at present comics can be more readily seen on the shelves of bookstores than in newsagents .

Print runs of that time also stand in stark contrast to today's print runs. The launch of monthly title *BeanoMAX* in 2007 has seen an initial print run of 120,000; whereas, to take one example of the print runs common in the 60s and 70s, IPC's *Tammy* sold in the order of a quarter of a million per week, with some titles being taken off the newsstands even though they were selling approximately 200,000 per week.

I will be focusing on those comics aimed specifically at girls, and particularly at three titles published by IPC (or Fleetway, as it was then) – the long-running Tammy (into which the other two titles eventually merged), Jinty, and Misty.

'Old Skool' girls' stories

The image many people have of the stereotypical girls' comic is that it features stories that are bland rather than exciting, and perhaps stifling rather than liberating. Typically people would expect stories about horse-riding, boarding schools, ballet – to include plucky schoolgirls defeating villains, true, but all in a very stiff-upper-lip kind of way. The obvious key example here is *Bunty*, the long-running predecessor and survivor of the main three comics under discussion here.

Looking at *Bunty*'s 'The Four Marys' would hardly disabuse a reader of this impression – it sits squarely in the middle class boarding school genre, with Marys Cotter, Field, Radleigh, and Simpson involved in stories fitting directly into the milieu inhabited by Enid Blyton. A synopsis of a story from 1959 reads:

'After the daring rescue of Miss Johnson, the hermit, from a



treacherous marsh, the Four Marys and the rest of the search party prepared to return to St Elmo's. The quaint old woman was in a dazed condition after her frightening experience.'

Comparing this to another Four Marys story from 1999, it is clear that not much has changed apart from the art style and other superficial details:

'The Four Marys, Cotter, Field, Radleigh and Simpson, friends at St Elmo's School for Girls, had discovered that a girl band, B True, who had bought property nearby, were being cheated by the agent, Jed Upton.'

Likewise, *Bunty* features its fair share of stories about ballerinas ('Lorna Drake', 'The Dancing Life of Moira Kent', 'The Phantom Ballerina' to name a few), sports ('Margie The Swimming Marvel'), nurses ('Katy O'Connor, Student Nurse'), and animals ('Selma's Sanctuary').

Despite these stories arguably 'living down' to expectations in terms of themes, they have remained extremely memorable over many years for those women who initially read the comic as girls:

'It is a pity young girls don't read comics anymore - I certainly saw some of the heroines as role models and was inspired by their adventures' – Jennifer

'I am 56 years old, living in Brisbane Australia, and can vividly remember when Bunty first came out. … I still have my happy memories' - Joan Fitches

'Just wanted to say that I am now 47 and Bunty was the 'fave' among me and my friends at about the age of 11-12. LOVED seeing it on your site - thought it was all but forgotten.' – Jopacey

Mandy from DC Thomson is similar in tone, featuring stories about horses, girl guiding, and the lives of various ordinary schoolgirls ('Penny's Place'). It also lasted a long time – over 24 years.



Creating and publishing girls' stories: the commercial context in Tammy, Jinty, Misty

The titles above, and other older comics or story titles such as *Girl* (the counterpart to the squeaky-clean boys' paper *The Eagle*) and *Mirabelle* (geared towards pop music and boyfriends), form the context in which the three titles under discussion were launched.

Like the more 'old skool' titles, *Tammy*, *Jinty*, and *Misty* have a number of features typical of British girls' comics of the time. The cover is brightly coloured, but the printing is on low-quality paper and there would normally be at most one other colour used in the inside pages. Each issue prints three or four pages of an ongoing story, where the whole story is told in around 10 – 14 weeks, with approximately seven different stories in each weekly publication.

Not all the stories are serialised parts of a whole – comedy stories, in particular, may have no overall storyline. These may be very short, perhaps only one page long, as a 'filler' item. Other fillers may be advice pages, crafts pages, letters pages, horoscopes, or 'storyteller' reprints from earlier years or other comics.

Woman's world

The stories themselves very nearly always feature a girl as the main character, possibly with some important male characters included . Generally they are set in a predominantly-female environment (such as an all-girls' school and even quite general environments such as a village are depicted as mostly female).

The character, and her special trait or background, is usually referred to directly in the title – 'Wee Slavey' for a hard-done-by Victorian maid-of-all-work, 'Bella At The Bar' for a gymnast, 'Left-Out Linda' for a girl who feels left out by her changing family circumstances, and so forth.

These characteristics are clearly linked to the commercial nature of the work. An intriguing and yet normally fairly explanatory title for each of various ongoing stories ending in a cliff-hanger week by week, with a colour cover allowing for promotion of the most successful story and possibly a free gift (particularly in the launch weeks of a new comic).

The characters are easy for the female readership to identify with, but with their own special characteristics that make the story exciting to read.

During this time, comics were made in something of a production-line atmosphere. Writers and artists were not credited (though by this time various artists had started to take to signing stories in inconspicuous locations, or in ways that would be difficult to remove). Individual recognition was normally suppressed. Artists in particular might well never meet other artists or the writers on their stories (though editors could often be writing stories as well as editing the comic).

Pat Mills, editorial creator of seminal boys' comics *2000AD* and *Action*, spoke about his involvement in the early days of *Tammy*, *Jinty*, and *Misty* in a 2004 interview held at the *CAPTION Convention*. The commercial pressures could, paradoxically, lead to a creative silver lining:

'… on another level, they [girls' comics] were very good for similar reasons to Charley's War in a way. They're on crap paper, it's a cheap-looking publication, so it's got to be good!'

Getting the best

Given the limited resources in publishing terms, it was crucial to get both 'great stories and superb artwork' and to keep a very close eye on the popularity index of the stories:

'…you had these popularity polls, often little boxes on the readers' page, and the readers would write-in which three strips they liked most – and sometimes, too, the one they liked least. … the editor … had graphs, with different coloured lines – they took it all that seriously!'

In the same interview, he is candid about the use of formulas in producing these stories:

'…We actually would sit down and say, when we were constructing a girls' comic or revising an existing one, 'Right, let's have the slave story', and the reason was because they were so popular with the readers! … we would have a slave story, what we called a Cinderella story, where the heroine's down on her luck. We'd have a friendship story'.

The reason for these formulas was a pragmatic one:

'Sometimes that formula didn't work, but most of the time it did… I'll give a couple of examples of when it didn't work, which really shows the difference between the sexes.

'Mystery stories – girls, love mystery stories. Say a school where there's a mysterious headmistress, and girls are disappearing, and other girls are turning up in the dormitory - this gets them going! And the explanation can be complete crap, and it usually was, and it doesn't matter!

'We tried this with male readers, we only did it once, and they hated it! That was 'Terror Beyond the Bamboo Curtain'… You could see the thinking; we had the sadistic Japanese commander of the prisoner-of-war camp, and prisoners are disappearing, and strange things are going on, and the readers *did not care!* They weren't bothered about the mystery, they just wanted to see the action! What was the Terror Behind the Bamboo Curtain? Who cares, bring on the violence! A female readership, even if you've got a mystery as simple as 'What's inside that box?', that'll keep them going for weeks! It's a fundamental difference between the sexes.'

On the British comics website 26pigs.com, fan and expert Briony Coote has produced a very thorough

Example story: 'The Children of Edenford'

The range of stories published over the approximately twenty-four combined years of the existence of these three comics obviously cannot be easily reproduced or summarised here. One particularly mad story must be the stand-in for all the other stories that deadline pressures, external cultural influences, and cynical young men produced over those years.

'The Children of Edenford' is the ultimate in anti-establishment thought. The main character, Patti, moves to the small village of Edenford when her father gets a new job – although it is very pretty and her parents love it (it is green, tidy, and very bourgeois), Patti hates it because the other children act strangely – in fact, they are too perfect to be true: 'But Mum … it's not natural to be as good as they are!'

Her fears are soon realised when, along with her friend, Jilly, they discover that the headmistress (Purity Goodfellow) is feeding her pupils a mystic drug discovered in India – a drug to make them perfect! This drug makes the schoolgirls into paragons (oddly, they seem to be all girls in the village – at least as far as can be seen in the story). They make ballgowns for their mothers and gourmet packed lunches for their fathers, do maths homework voluntarily, and tear down their pop posters ('Oh, I took them down. You know, pop music is a waste of time. It neither enriches the soul nor challenges the intellect.')

After finding the cure to this drug ('My hay fever has symptoms like a cold … and somehow streaming eyes and sneezes break down the conditioning that makes everyone so perfect') and many struggles against this imposed status quo, a show-down with the frighteningly insane-looking headmistress results. 'Prepare yourself for the temple of purity! The fire of righteousness there shall burn out your imperfections!'

In the end it is down to Patti, by herself, to fight back. (Even the parents have been turned into zombies – or as Miss Goodfellow says, 'Zombies! You dare call them zombies? They are model citizens … hard working, conscientious, kind, caring.')

In front of the large sacrificial pit that has been installed in the headmistress's inner sanctum, Purity Goodfellow intones solemnly: 'Behold the flames of purity … you shall give yourself up to them!' Patti replies: 'Not without a struggle, I won't!' In the ensuing melée, the headmistress is knocked into her own sacrificial pit, and dies refusing help from Patti's hands. In the last panel Patti stands next to her friend Jilly and says 'In a few days, we'll be like every other village … a mixture of good and bad. Edenford will be just human again!'



list of Common Categories For Serials In Girls' Comics, which gives many further examples of formulas .

Viva la difference

It isn't the use or non-use of formulas that makes *Tammy*, *Jinty*, and *Misty* different from other story papers of the time. Talking about the editor of *Jinty*, Mills clarified that there was a deliberate intent to make these titles work differently:

'Basically, you had an old regime, very stuck in their ways. And this applied right across the board, to humour comics – which I also wrote for – they were totally stuck in their ways, and Mavis [Miller], to her great credit, adapted from *June* and *School Friend*, which was somewhat old-fashioned, into the new style of thinking that we were all trying for, to upgrade stories for a new generation.'



The new style of thinking focused particularly on an anti-establishment message, subsequently also used to great effect on boys' comics:

'*Tammy* was a working-class girls' comic. It had a very heavy 'chip on its shoulder' kind of message … we took the thinking that applied to *Tammy*, and applied it to just about everything down the line that followed, whether it was *Battle*, *Action*, *2000AD* … the old thing that pervades girls' comics all the way through; elitism, and the struggle against it.'

This upgrading might be done with a serious or silly mindset:

'Generally, it was male writers in this field. I think Pat Davison is the only woman I can think of who genuinely had a better touch in the way she did this, she wrote far more from the heart, the rest of us were 23-year-old guys killing ourselves laughing as we wrote this stuff'.

In addition, current popular culture outside comics were taken into account while writing stories:

'Moonchild' was quite deliberately based on *Carrie*. When I talked about starting *Misty*, I said we should look at all the kinds of female adults' fiction that were around at the time, and we should do girls' comics versions of that. It was a deliberately calculated policy to do *Carrie*, to do 'Audrey Rose', which I did as 'Hush, Hush, Sweet Rachel', we never quite got around to doing





Flowers in the Attic, but it was definitely on the list - but most of those female mystery books that were around, we did good girls' comic versions. When *Misty* moved away from that, and got caught up in silly traditional stuff, that's when it lost its way.'

Though not directly mentioned by Mills in this interview, other stories included political or counter-cultural interests such as paganism ('Guardian of White Horse Hill'), the environment ('The Goose Girl', 'Forbidden Garden'), or even global warming or road-building ('Fran of the Floods', 'Jassy's Wand of Power', 'The Green People').

Despite seemingly obvious assumptions about the blandness of typical traditional girls' comics, we have seen that in fact they were crafted to a high standard, though subject to stringent commercial constraints in the shape of set formulas and the need to consistently and directly appeal to the target audience.

The stories in the 'old skool' style comics were not radically different in kind to the newer wave of comics launched by Fleetway in the early 1970s, and both kinds of comics inspired the abiding loyalty of their readership over the years of publication and in the years since they have ceased publishing.

The newer kind of story in *Tammy*, *Jinty*, and *Misty*, particularly with its anti-authoritarian angle, took the empowering theme of the older wave with its female-focused stories and added exciting and unusual elements. The suffering of the old-style characters, which is ultimately redeemed by their survival and triumph against all odds, is joined in these three 1970s comics to a madcap narrative whirl which created tales that still delight, astonish, and intrigue today. Indeed, a large part of that creative energy can paradoxically be traced back to those very pressures of deadline and other commercial realities. ●



Notes and References

Out of a list of comics available during the 60s and 70s, titles marketed specifically at boys included: 2000AD (1977-current), Action (1976-1977), Battle Picture Weekly (1975-1988), Boys' World (1963-1964), Commando Comics (1961-current), The Eagle (1950-1969) and (1982-1994), Roy of the Rovers (1976-1993), Starlord (1978), Valiant (1962-1976), Victor (1961-1992), War Picture Library (1958-1984), Warlord (1974-1986).

Titles marketed at girls included: Bunty (1958-2001), Diana (1963 - 1976), Girl (1951-1964), Jackie (1964-1993), Jinty (1974-1981), Judy (1960-1991), June (1961-1974), Mandy (1967-1991), Mirabelle (1956-1977), Misty (1978-1980), Romeo (1957-1974), Sandie (1972-1973), Tammy (1971-1984), Tina (1967).

List of comics and dates found in http://www.26pigs.com/comics.html and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_British_comic

Not that all comics were strictly segregated by gender – generally speaking, humour comics were more likely to have a broader appeal across the sexes. They might have a variety of male and female characters (Dennis The Menace and Minnie the Minx in the same comic), or strips featuring both boys and girls (the Bash Street Kids). It was also not felt by the kids that all comics were strongly gender-marked – boys and girls would both read and swop various of the humour titles, though for a boy to be seen reading a girls' comic would be beyond unusual and into the realm of suspicious behaviour. Girls, particularly more tomboyish girls, might read some boys' comics – the main example, however, would be 2000AD, with its science fiction content that was not readily available in other comics. Humour titles available at the time included The Beezer (1956-1993), Buster (1960-2000), Cheeky (1977-1980), Cor!! (1970-1974), Cracker (1975-1976), The Dandy (1937-current), Krazy (1976-1978), Monster Fun (1975-1976), Shiver and Shake (1973-1974), The Topper (1953-1990) and (to 1993 with Beezer), Whizzer and Chips (1969-1990), Whoopee! (1974-1985).

There has been a boom in nostalgia publishing of British comics recently, with mass-market reprints taken from Commando, June & Schoolfriend, Jackie, Battle Picture Library, Girl, and many others.



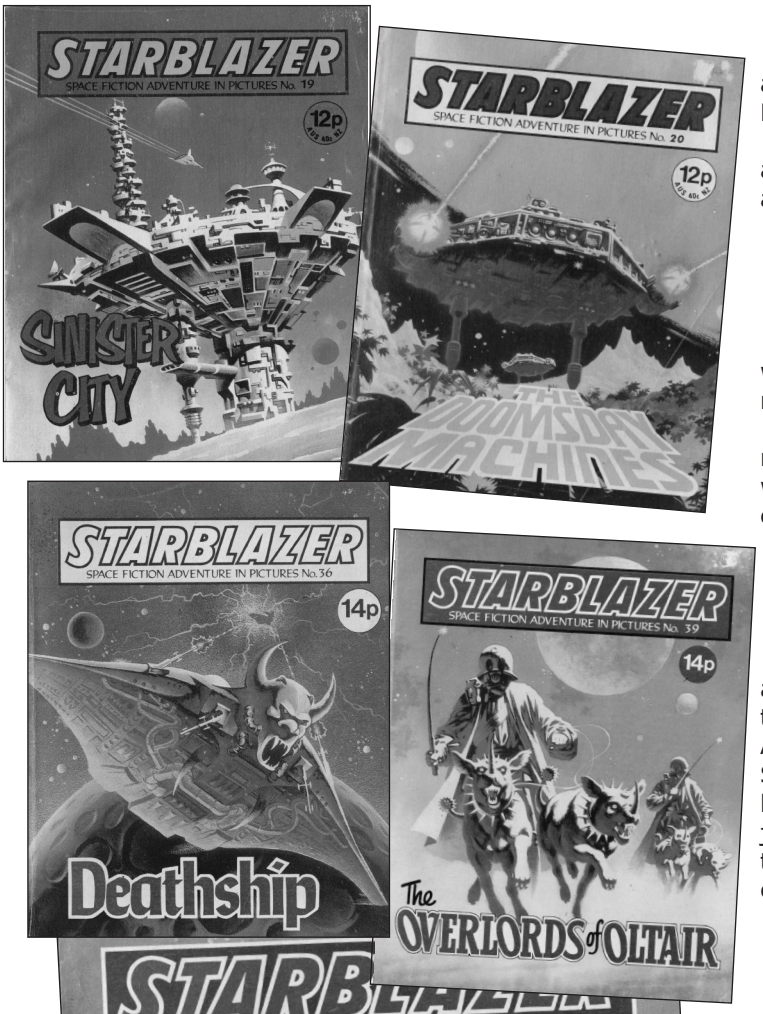
Ian Kennedy in Space

The Science Fantasy Art of Starblazer Covers

By Brian M Clarke

Starblazer totalled up a very respectable 281 issues between its launch in 1979 and its final issue in 1991. Under the excellent editorial guidance of Bill McLoughlin, it successfully evolved from Star Wars inspired soap opera to fantasy and from one-off stories to the introduction of several semi-continuous characters.

One of the most creative of the cover artists was the amazing Ian Kennedy and here are ten covers to give you a taste of Ian Kennedy's artistic prowess. We've split our selection between the early and late runs of Starblazer with a representative five covers from each period.



Sinister City – 19

Still very much in the thrall of Star Wars, this rebels and oppressors tale was written by *Crikey!* contributor Ray Aspden and illustrated by Spanish artist Olivera.

Kennedy's cover takes the power of the Death Star and converts its hard lines and futuristic technology into a sleek, believable fortress.

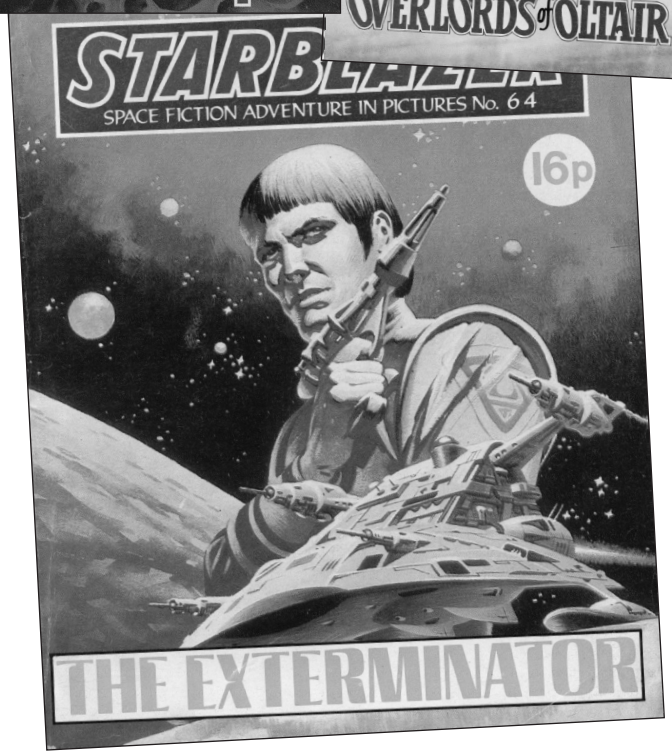
The Doomsday Machines – 20

Dave Dixon's tale of colonists on a weird jungle world with menacing technology was illustrated by Starblazer regular Jaimie Ortiz.

Kennedy's illustration continues the theme of mechanoid menace and technological terror through wonderfully detailed suggestions of real 'workable' engineering in the design of his attacking ships.

Deathship – 36

S. Neeld's outlaw-owns-an-incredibly-powerful-ship-and-knows-how-to-use-it story was brought to life by the stunning Enrique Alcatena on the inner pages. Alcatena was one of the best artists to work on Starblazer. Ian Kennedy's cover is another of those giant hunks of technology images but it packs a visual wallop just the same. Its demonic look plays perfectly against the supernatural colouring of its green and fiery orange exterior.



The Overlords of Oltair – 39

W. Corderoy's warning of space probes contacting the 'wrong' alien race is finely illustrated by Jaimie Ortiz in a story that still echoes many of the Star Wars tropes.

This is one of the few Kennedy covers to almost duplicate a panel from the story. It also allowed him to take a rest from machinery and spaceships.

The Exterminator – 64

Mike Chinn's comic strip pulp adventure has it all – frontier justice, outlaws, spaceships, a bad guy with a taste for medieval décor and, towards the end, a 'deathstar' of its own. It was all brought to life through the pen and brush of Enrique Alcatena.

Kennedy's cover is more evocative of Star Trek than Star Wars, although the angular design of the spaceship harks back to where it all began.

Beastworld – 221

A great Grok and Zero adventure from Alan C Hemus and dramatically illustrated by Enrique Alcatena. The good cop sent to penal world may be old hat and perhaps owed a lot to a recent and similar Judge Dredd story in 2000AD, but what it lacked in originality is made up for in action and character.

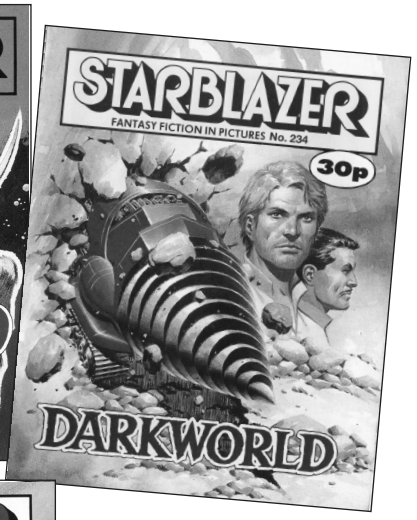
Ian Kennedy's cover takes what could have been a lifeless situation and animates it beautifully with whimsical detail.



Darkworld – 234

Alan C Hemus is back with a story of survivors of a nuclear war 500 years past coming out of their underground bunker city to explore the changing surface world. Illustrated by one of the best interior artists, Segura, its use of great page layouts and panel compositions give it an exceptional quality.

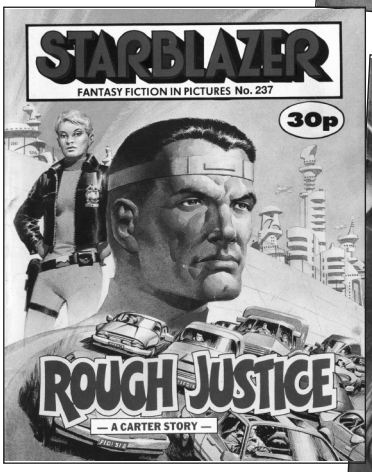
Kennedy's mole machine breaking through the surface has power, impact and believable design. No longer content just to let the hardware speak for itself, headshots of our heroes provide the human touch.

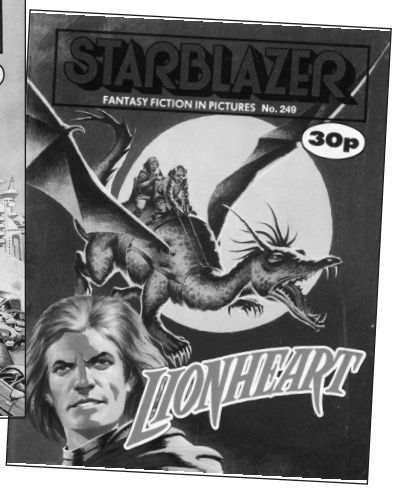


Rough Justice – 237

P. Alexander's Carter story (another one of the semi-regular characters) is a cop having to break in a rookie – and the rookie's a woman! Casanovas Jnr's artwork plays up the noirish aspects of the crimelord-taking-over-the-planet with panache and style.

One of the few Kennedy covers to feature a woman and even this played safe by making her look as boyish as possible. Except for a bit of telltale shading the rookie could easily have been a teenage lad.





Lionheart – 249

Comics editor Alan Cowsill cut his teeth on this fantasy tale of murdered kings, strange lands, dragons and a young man in training. Illustrated by Alan Burrows, one-time Red Dwarf Smegazine artist, it features more full-page illustrations than most Starblazers.

Moving from SF to fantasy obviously didn't phase Kennedy who turns in a moody cover.

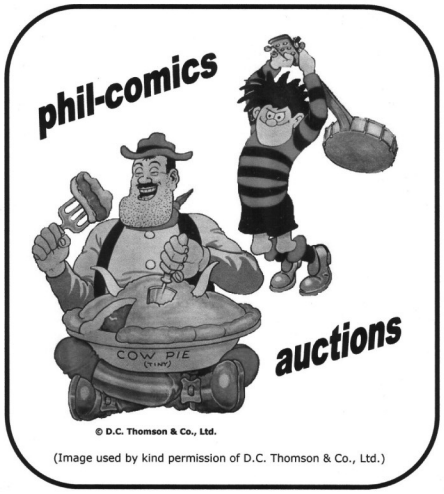
Revolt on Babalon – 253

This Alan C Hemus story is a mixed genre pastiche of Gor, Conan and Edgar Rice Burroughs with huge chunks of space opera thrown in for good measure. Weakly illustrated by Dave Willets, its heavy lines and lifeless characters do little to save an already uninspiring story.

Kennedy finds the right dramatic moment for the cover and even manages to feature two female characters. The design of the beasts must have been dear to Ian's heart as they are obviously tuskless cousins of the Beastworld mounts.



Starblazer was one of the best British SF&F comics and well worth hunting down. In the past year it has become less available at comic and collector fairs, suggesting that many more Starblazer fans are tracking them down. Depending on period – expect to pay anything from 50p to £2.00 a copy.



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Founded in August 2006, The Beano & Dandy Collectors' Club fills an important gap in the British comic collecting world. The club was set up to cater for collectors and enthusiasts of The Beano and The Dandy comics and annuals, focussing primarily on the years 1937 to 1975.
Currently, over 110 subscribers enjoy the full colour newsletters containing interesting articles about the comics, annuals, characters, artists and editors, the publishers DC Thomson and more, written by ourselves and guest writers such as Ray Moore. A Letters to the Editor section, items for sale and competitions can also be found.
The subscription fee is just £9.95 for UK residents, who receive a membership card, Collectors' Club coaster and the next three newsletters.

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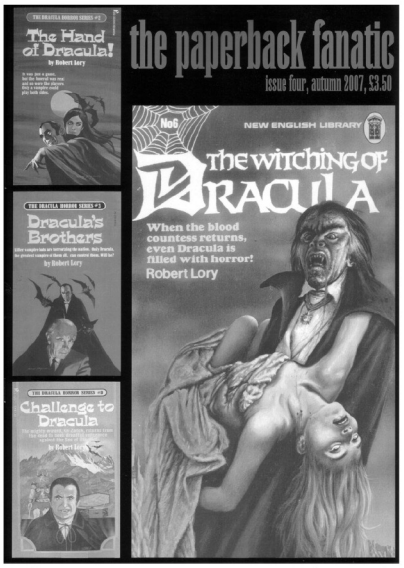

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Brian 'Crikey!' Clarke

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Dedicated to the wild and trashy pulps paperbacks of the 1960s/70s, each issue of The Fanatic is loaded with features and articles on horror, fantasy, SF and sleaze, all illustrated with at least one hundred crystal-clear reproductions of wild and weird cover art in each issue.

Issue five includes a huge overview on the blood-drenched and sex-saturated paperback 'Nasties' of the 1970s, a hack and slash through the Rivals of Conan, and an interview with legendary US sleaze author Bob Tralins. And of course, much more! 40 A4 pages.

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The Freak Show! Angels From Hell! The Sucking Pit! Bloodstone!

The Drug Traffic! Voodoo! The Whores of War! Skinhead! Confessions of a Window Cleaner! The Rats!

The Fab Fifties by Mike Morley

the Horror! the Horror!

Mike Morley started collecting comics in 1952 when he was eight years old. His father used to come home from work on a Monday evening, bringing him the 3d Comet – so the cover to this issue of Crikey! *has a particular relevance for Mike!*

Mike is the foremost expert on what has become known as the British black and white comics of the '50s. His book tracing the history of these fondly remembered but increasingly had-to-find comics is due out soon but for now sit alongside Mike as he takes a look back at these weirdly wonderful British horror comics …

Most of the comics from the 1950s ended happily on a note of optimism with some sort of moral that either over-stated or simply implied that 'people are wonderful', people need understanding and sympathy' or 'good usually triumphs over evil'.

Not so in the American E.C. comics line.

Their terrifyingly terrific line of horror comics had titles such as Tales from the Crypt, Haunt of Fear and Vault of Horror. They were eventually banned in the States and a similar fate befell the reprints produced in Britain.

Those marvellous comics were reprinted for a short time in England and sold for 1/- each (5p). They were thicker and scarier than most other comics and had such fantastic titles. Only a handful of the horror comics were published over here and ceased publication almost as soon as they began. (See Bob Norton's article 'Fiendishly Interesting' in *Crikey!* 1 for a detailed background on what happened to the horror comics in Britain – ed.)

Haunting

Frederick Wertham's anti-comics campaign and the publication of his book Seduction of the Innocent caused a massive clamp down on horror, weird and crime comics in the States. The parallel anti-comic movement here, launched by the National Union of Teachers, soon put a stop to those lovely back and white reprints.

These 1/- (pronounced one shilling – one-twentieth of an English pound note) comics usually reprinted one specific issue of each American title together with several more stories from other E.C. comics, most notably Crime Suspenstories and Shock Suspenstories.



The artwork is undoubtedly the best comic art in the history of the medium with such notables as Al Williamson, Frank Frazetta, Wally Wood and 'Ghastly' Graham Ingles illustrating some of the most shocking short stories ever.

The stories were intelligently written, always with a strong sting in the tale and often with a lovely downbeat ending. If evil was ever to be vanquished it was only by an even greater evil. Strange coincidence and irony were the order of the day.

They played with our expectations of fair play and justice. For example, in 'The Orphan' (Haunt of Fear 1) a nice little girl's evidence sends her mother and her mother's lover to the electric chair. But as the girl gives us a lovely wholesome grin and a wink in the last panel, we learn that it was she who shot her drunken father to pin the blame on her hated mother.

Horror – UK style

These tales of terror were introduced by three special characters – The Old Witch, The Vault Keeper and The Crypt Keeper. In an anthology comic without continuous characters, the host gave the title a sense of continuity – even if all the main characters were finished off in each issue!

The UK Tales From the Crypt reprints all four stories from the American TFC 40 plus four crime stories. It even has a non-EC boxing story called 'Rocky Steele'.

'Standing Room Only', a rare transvestite story, tells of a man who kills for money then disguises himself as a rather nice-looking woman – only to be caught she inadvertently enters the men's room instead of the ladies. Simple but effective.

Tales From the Crypt 2 reprints American edition 41. Both issues have wonderful Jack Davis covers.

Companion titles to these were the UK editions of Black Magic, Frankenstein, Ghostly Weird and Startling Terror.

Frankenstein ran for five issues with atmospheric Frankenstein stories printed from the American Prize and Frankenstein comics (with superb artwork by Dick Briefer).

That old ...

Black Magic ran for 16 issues as well as a Black Magic album. This bumper album was much thicker than even the fat 68-page 1/- comics and sold for an expensive 3/6 (three-and-six – three shillings and six pence, in old money). A Black Magic Album 2 was advertised but no copies appear to have been printed.

One of the stories in the Black Magic Album was the priceless propaganda tale 'When You Die' which extolled the virtues of being a free American citizen by comparing living standards with a trio of 'hell-planets'.



Each planet was a stand-in for political systems on Earth – one wold was a planet of slaves, another one where the public faced mass starvation and the third was so over-populated that there was only enough room for its inhabitants to stand packed shoulder to shoulder.

The unlucky aliens dream of a world with "The priceless gift of freedom… abundance of food… (and a) land which is big and roomy".

And just in case the reader didn't get the message (It's America, stupid!), the final panel shows the Statute of Liberty with the comment "How do you feel in America… where each day, you're living in Heaven!"

Another well-remembered tale opens Black Magic issue 11 (as well as gracing its cover). This was the superb Simon and Kirby giant bug story 'The Angel of Death'. The wonderfully atmospheric cover shows the shadow of a monster insect cast in black on to a bedroom wall as a terrified man holds a rifle to protect a young woman in bed.

Simon and Kirby (and fellow Marvel artist Steve Ditko) contributed several excellent stories to this title. They drew the dramatic lead story 'Man Eater' in BM 13 about a huge man-eating plant. These were exactly the kind of stories I loved.

Sometimes American reprinted stories would appear in more than one UK title. A case in point is The Heap story that appears in both BM 13 and in the 1/- Frankenstein 3. I guess they assumed no-one was going to be paying too much attention to what they published and where. It's something that has troubled UK comic collectors for decades as stories and characters migrated from title to title without warning.

BM 14 has 'Monsters on the Lake', a nicely moralistic tale of visiting saucer-men killed by fearful and savage humans. As he lays dying in the final panel the alien whispers a plaintive "Which were the men, which the monsters?"

Shocking stories

Two more nice 1950s 1/- horror comics were Ghostly Weird and Startling Terror. Both were published simultaneously by the Arnold Book Company and sadly only lasted a single issue each.

Both comics have covers by L.B. Cole and contain interior artwork by Jay Disbrow, one of my favourite artists of the period and one who is undeservingly often over-looked in comicbook histories.

Crime and jungle stories also featured in these titles but the highspot of Startling Terror was Jay Disbrow's 'Creeping Death'. This shocking story featured a lovely flesh-dripping one-eyed monster (accidentally created when spilled chemicals combined to gruesome effect). It reminds me very much of the 1950s movie The Blob with Steve McQueen.







Mother dies in the Electric Chair . . . 'everything worked out swell'.



The lead story in Ghostly Weird is Jay Disbrow's 'Death Ship', a story about a astro-explorer in deep space. Like many characters in these stories, he meets his end in a violent way when his spaceship explodes when the sun goes nova.

As mentioned elsewhere (Crikey! 1, for example) a public backlash against the perceived violence, brutality and horror of 'childrens' comics led to them being banned in the UK. Magazine articles with headlines such as 'How Do Horror Comics Affect Children?" and 'Should U.S. 'Comics' Be Banned? With the straplines Their sales are leaping in Britain, Do parents realise the effect they can have? did their damage.

My comics disappeared from the mainstream shops – but if you knew to look, you could still get those increasingly rare back issues.

And I'm still looking! ●

Next issue: In the concluding part of Mike Morley's fascinating and personal look at the fab comics of the '50s he takes a look at a very American genre – the superhero. Just wait until you see what we Brits did the men (and women) in tights!

This is our regular spot in which guest contributors reminisce about their halcyon childhood days of reading comics. The title is, of course, a bit of a swizz because most of us will write about other days besides Saturday. I just thought that My Comicy Saturday had a nice ring to it. So although Saturday was the Big Comic Day, writers can summon forth memories from any day of the week. If you want to join in the fun and reveal the origins of your addiction, get in touch. The more, the loonier! Send your submission through the website (www.crikeyuk.co.uk).

My Comicy Saturday

By Dave Gibbons

Dave Gibbons, has been playing a major role in the world of comics for over 30 years now. He began his comics career in 1973. His work has been and still is published all over the world. He has depicted the adventures of Superman*,* Batman*,* Dr Who*,* Dan Dare *and* Green Lantern*, amongst many others. He co-created the long running* Rogue Trooper *for 2000AD, where he also worked on* 'Harlem Heroes'*. He collaborated with Alan Moore on the legendary* Watchmen *for D.C. comics in 1986/87, for which he received a Hugo Award.*

Looking back I guess that Saturday was the top comic day of the week, although my comic buying wasn't limited to that one day. A friend of mine from school, Richard Williams (Taffy), and I always used to go around after school to the local newsagents that sold American comics. There were about four or five of them in our area.

One in particular had this guy who, when he realised we were really keen fans, used to save the bundles of imported American comics until we came in the shop as he knew we would be in there every few days. he used to actually let us cut the piece of string on the bundle of comics, which was a huge thrill. This meant that we actually got to see them before anybody else had looked them over.

They would be in great condition except for the few on the top and bottom that had been damaged by the tight string. If we didn't get them from there it was over to the spinner rack and that was always something of a crap shoot as there were four sides to the spinner rack and two of us who could only have two sides each.

It was complete chance as to whether the titles you wanted were on your side or whether your pal was going to get them. This left room for some serious swapping later on.

Fantastic Fourpence ha'penny

There was another place in St Albans that I remember as rather a strange shop. It was mainly a toy-seller but it had a shelf to one side where there were piled old comics that you could buy for half price. In fact the copy of *Fantastic Four* 1 that I own was bought in that very shop and still has a big fourpence-halfpenny (that's around 2p kids or 4 cents to our newly arrived American readers) sign scrawled across the cover. It rather detracts from its value but marks it as a genuine artifact of those times.



Fantastic Four 1 (November 1961). Art by Jack Kirby & Dick Ayers.

That's not my only memory of that place – there used to be a stall on the local market which sold all kind of things, paperbacks, mens' magazines and a few comics and I can remember being there one Saturday with my dad – and how's this for a Comicy Saturday – he pointed to a pile of comics and said, "Oh look, David – have you got that one ?" and it was a pile of twenty or thirty Fantastic Four number ones!

They were all in mint condition with no newsagent scribble on the front.

I often think if I had a time machine that would be the moment I would go back to. I'd like to go back there and pick some up. Well all actually!

Stamp Collector

I used to find myself out and about with my dad on a Saturday. I guess it was his way of trying to keep me busy and off my Mum's back. We regularly used to go to a market in Hatfield. It was called Eddie's Books. I remember the name because he had a big rubber stamp and everything you bought from him used to get the Eddie's Books stamp on it.

Everything was returnable at half price and I still have lots of comics from there have that stamp on them. I remember buying the *Mad Comic* reprint paperbacks from there. I took them all back and exchanged them at half price for the next one in the series and I probably went through them three or four times. I don't know why I didn't just bite the bullet and actually buy them in the first place. The result was that I had to wait until much later to get copies of these that I would keep.

I've talked about American comics so far but I wanted to set the scene for what Saturday was like. Of course there were British comics as well. There was a couple that I loved. I used to get the *Eagle* and rather than have it delivered to me I would walk to the newsagent and get it because I didn't want it folded in half and shoved through the door. My copy was always there because I had it reserved.

The man behind the counter used to rather humorously refer to it as the Ee – ag – Lee. He was some kind of ex-serviceman and that was his idea of a joke. I have many fond memories of walking down the road with my head stuck in the *Eagle*. There were of course the pages that I loved – mainly 'Dan Dare'.

I also have some vague earlier memories of my dad bringing back copies of the *Eagle*. He loved comics and science fiction and stuff like that so I think that buying them for me was just his excuse to look at them himself. I certainly remember being conscious of the *Eagle* before I could actually read it.

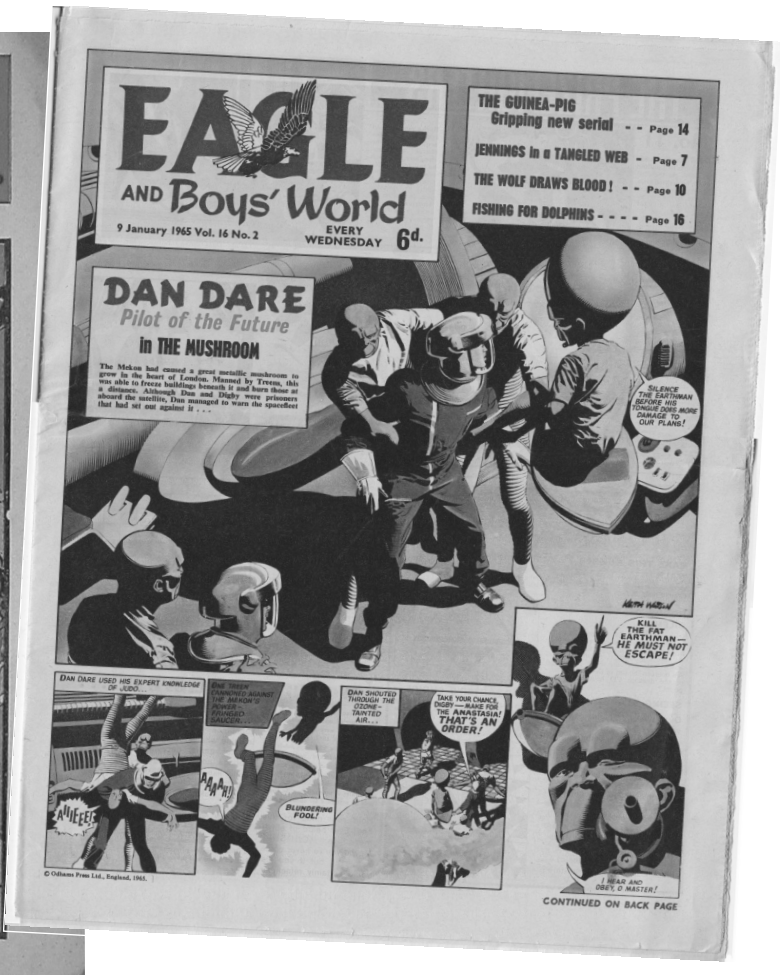
Mad Dad

The other comic that I have great memories of was *Lion*. Again I'd go and pick it up on the day it came out – I never waited to get them together. I didn't collect that one as I did the *Eagle*.

There were other odd things like *Rocket* (see *Crikey!* 2) and of course I used to get the *Beano* and the *Dandy* when I was much younger. I grew out of them later on although aunts and uncles would always get me a *Beano* book for Christmas and I used to quite enjoy keeping up with the characters in that way.

My dad brought home the very first issue of *Mad Magazine*. I never had it saved for me but would go out and buy it regularly. It was always a happy day when I





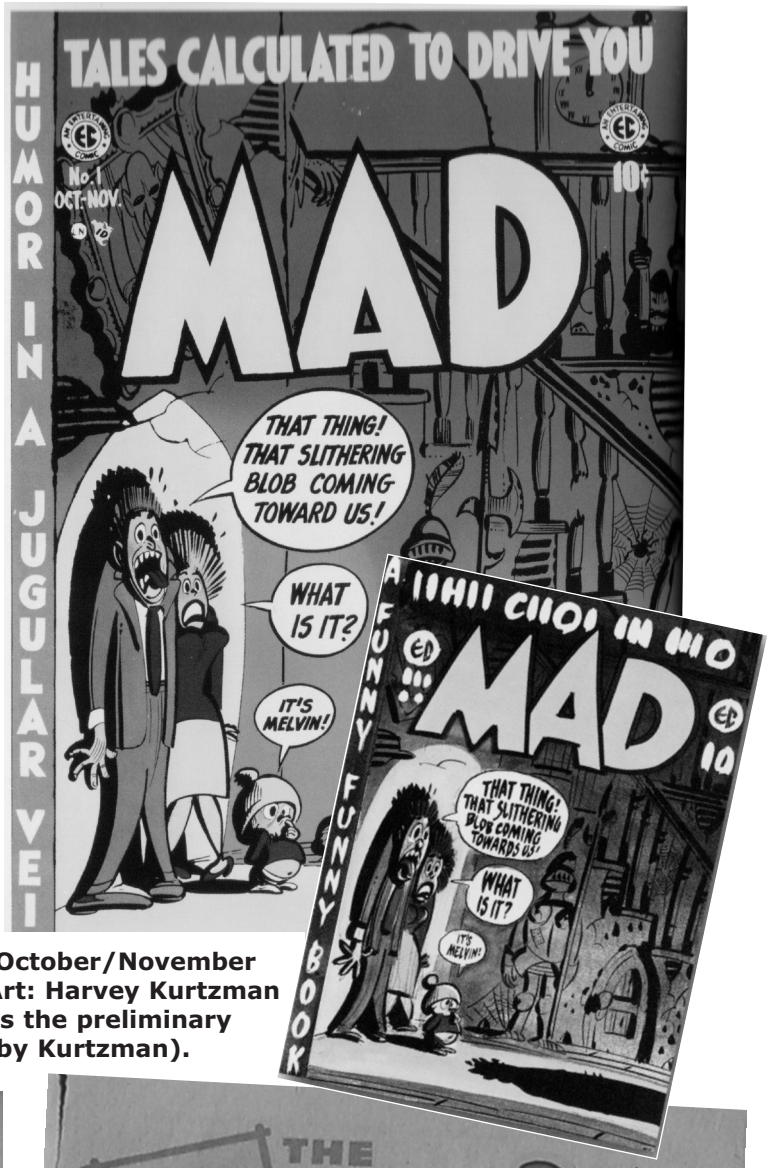
saw a new copy of *Mad* on the stand. Those are my memories of the day and the more I look back I think that my dad must have been pretty generous buying me so many comics although I would save up my pocket money.

The only other thing I would want to add about those days is what great fun it was. Nowadays people have a local comic shop and know months in advance what comics are coming out. They can reserve them and get back issues very easily. In the days when I was buying these things it was much more hit and miss. You might not be able to find an issue of a comic that you were really waiting for and the continued stories in British comics could be ruined if you missed a week.

You may even have found one you were missing in some out of the way place. I remember going on holiday once to a remote beach and finding a beach shop that inexplicably had multiple copies of *Fantastic Four* 21 and I believe *Sergeant Fury* 1, which had just never appeared on the newsstands where I lived. Somehow or other they had all found their way to this place at the seaside. The seaside would be a good place for selling comics I guess. Bored kids on holiday with plenty of pocket money.

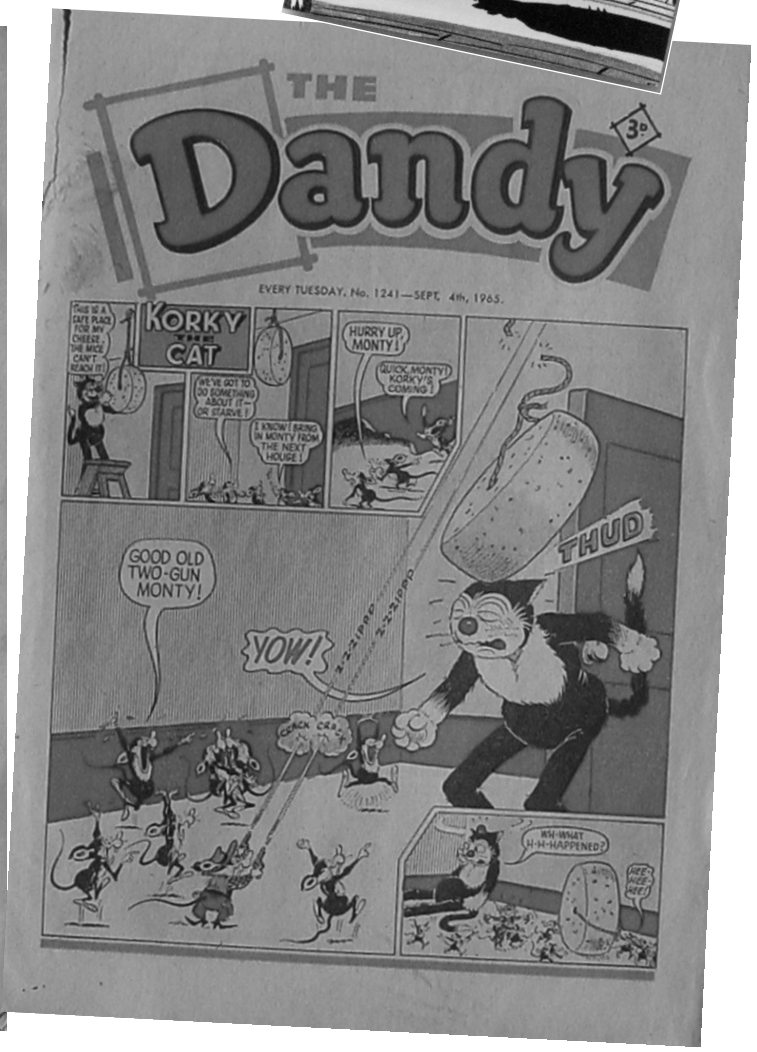
There was a great uncertainty about buying comics that seems to have disappeared. I've filled in many gaps in my collection and its great to have complete runs but I will always treasure the comics that I remember buying on a certain day, in a certain place and with a certain person.

On a certain Comicy Saturday … ●



MAD 1 October/November 1952. Art: Harvey Kurtzman (Inset is the preliminary sketch by Kurtzman).



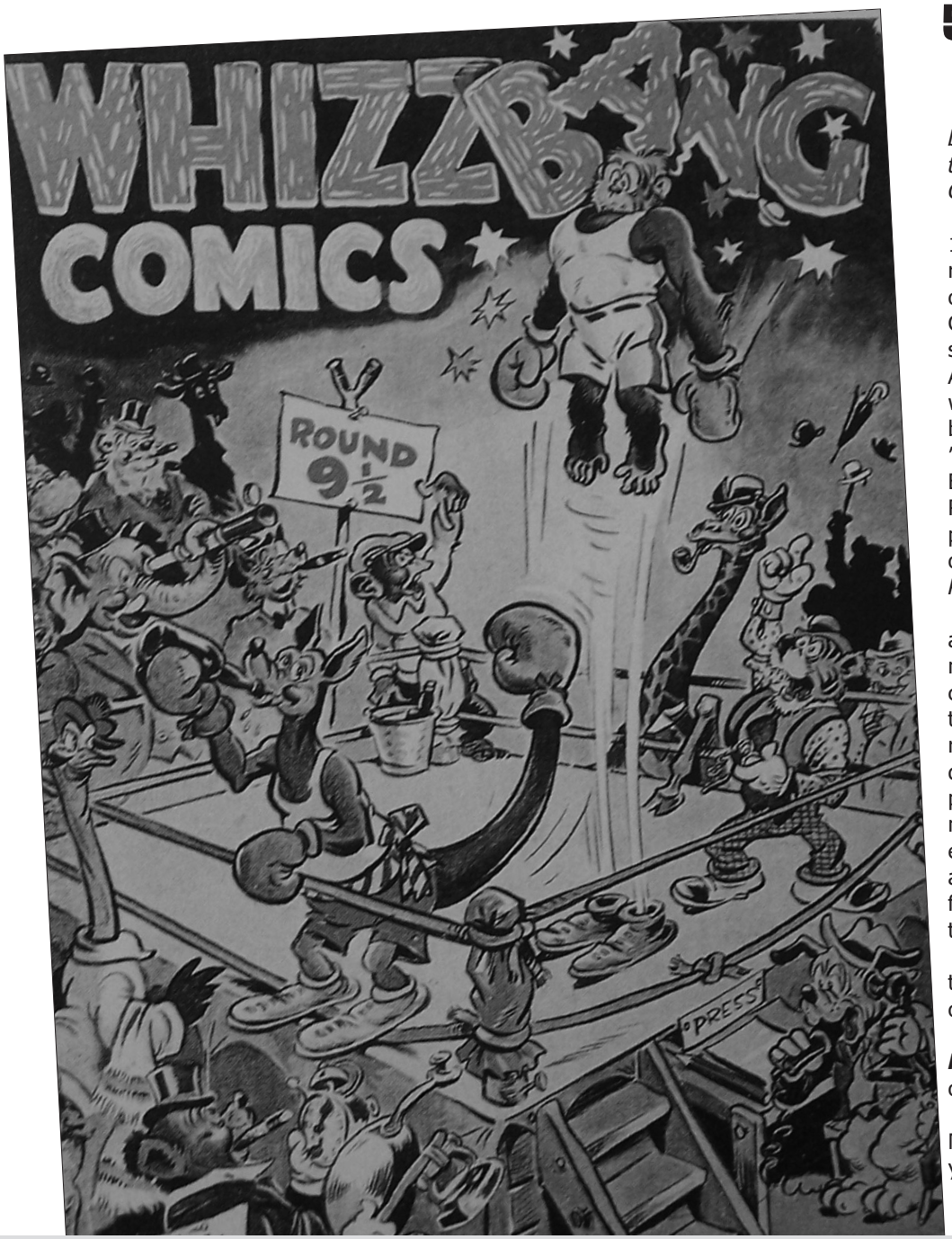


Are these the UK's Rarest Comic Annuals?

By Bob Norton

Part Two

In our previous issue, comic strip historian Bob Norton discussed the thorny subject of British annuals, their scarcity and values. Bob listed the first part of his top ten rarest annuals and this time round he completes his countdown to the hardest-to-find annuals on the British comics collecting scene.
(For a description of Bob's Rarity Index, see Crikey! *3).*



5 Whizzbang Comics 1942 and 1943 (1 and 2)

Two rare annuals published by Amalgamated Press were the bonfire night Whizzbang Comics in 1942 and 1943.

"Please Take Your Seats for 104 pages of Fun and Thrills" reads the caption on page one! Certainly, Whizzbang Comics had more than its fair share of reprinted material. Almost all of the comic strips were drawn by great comic book artists of the 1930s and '40s such as Roy Wilson, Bertie Brown, Ray Bailey and Reg Perrott and had previously appeared in issues of *Sparkler*, *Butterfly*, *Golden*, *Puck* and *Jolly*.

The annual was a lively addition to a contracting market: it's a pity so very few copies of either edition exist today. Due to the tightening rules on the use of paper during the war they had low print runs and the fact that most children's publications ended up in paper drives added to scarcity. Even finding a copy of the cover of the 1943 annual was tough!

Rarity Index Band II - 16 to 39 copies existing in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: 20 copies of each year.

Recent Auction Price: None known in past five years.

The most expensive UK annuals are mainly the early DCT annuals. Compal do get high prices for these books and their data is my main source, although it's hard to be definitive on which are the ten most expensive. Here's my list as of Xmas 2007 of 10 different most valuable UK annuals. They are in order of increasing auction price achieved over the last 5 years where they exist and all prices include 10% buyer's premium.

Due to a combination of factors that collectors will be instantly aware of, these annuals may be easier to find than the ten rarest I have looked at but they command higher prices. For now.

Magic Annual 1942 – none found in last 5 yrs but sure to be top 10!

Magic Annual 1943 - £951 taped spine Compal – another top 10er!

New Adventures of Rupert 1936 in wrapper - £1,540 Nov 2005 Compal.

Beano Annual 1944 - £2,148 Compal.

Broons 1942 - £3,691 Sep 03 Compal.

Beano Annual 1940 - £3,872 Jun 2004 Compal.

Oor Wullie 1940 - hardback version £4,015 in Sept 05 Compal. A Fine example found in an Edinburgh loft, recently exchanged hands for £4,500!

Broons Annual 1939 - £5,390 in Sept 03 Compal.

Dandy Annual 1939 - £6,232 in the Sep 2006 Compal.

Rupert Annual 1973 (Brown Face) - £23,000 Dukes Auction Aug 2007.

4 Super Coloured Comic Annuals 1, 2 and 3





These three are my personal favourites and each is really rare, probably Rarity Index I.

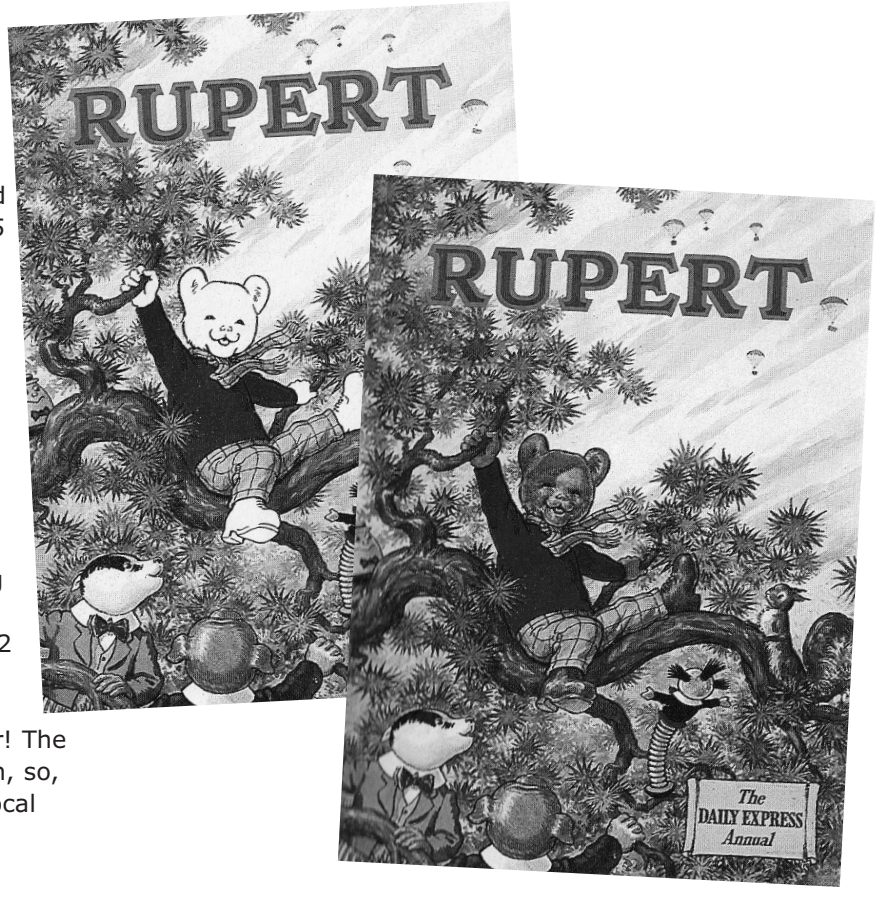
The 3d TV Boardman two-tone photogravure comics produced in the early 1950s and illustrated by Denis McLoughlin were the basis of these three mid-1950s annuals priced at 2/6. The annuals were composed of returns of these 3d comics from newsagents. Titles such as Roy Carson and Swift Morgan were bound with completely new card covers, again painted by Denis McLoughlin of Buffalo Bill Annuals fame. Besides the strip reprints, there were text stories featuring the same characters (plus 'Blackhawk') with featured spot illustrations in annuals 2 and 3 by McLoughlin. They had new endpapers and the first annual has a full colour original strip 'Swift Morgan and the Knights of the Round Table' which for McLoughlin' completists makes 1 very desirable.

Rarity Index Band I - 1 to 16 copies of each year existing in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: around 15 or so copies of each. As to which is the rarest of the three, arguably it's number 3, which I think has THE best cover of any UK annual.

Recent Auction Price: None found for any of the three.

3 The Rupert Annual 1973



The story behind this rarity is an odd one! Rupert was traditionally drawn with a brown face on annual covers. In the strips he always had a white face and, with the 1973 annual, Bestall had produced his traditional brown-faced cover. 12-15 proof copies were produced with Bestall's cover intact. Between proofing and printing, however, somebody in the Daily Express production department changed the colour of Rupert's face and boots so that they became white on the actual print-run, which at the time was over 100,000 copies! Alfred Bestall took exception to this and never submitted a Rupert Annual cover again, although his stories for the interior carried on until 1983.

Rarity Index Band I - 1 to 16 copies surviving in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: 12 to 15 proofs produced.

Recent Auction Price: Sept 07, two sold for £22,000 and £23,000 at an auction in Dorchester! The whereabouts of only five of these proofs is known, so, *Crikey!* readers, where are the others - in your local charity shop?

2 'Radio Fun Annual' 1950 with Tommy Handley cover

The normal 1950 Radio Fun annual has Wilfred Pickles on the cover – but this was not way it was planned!

The original cover was supposed to have had Tommy Handley, the 'famous and very popular star of 'ITMA' ('It's That Man Again' – the wartime comedy show!). Unfortunately, he died in January 1949! The annual cover would have been printed by this time, ready for sale in September. Obviously a replacement was rushed through. This is a really cool annual to find with its original Handley cover as a few sneaked out. I know of only three, so always give 1950 Radio Fun Annuals a thorough once over!

Rarity Index I: - 1 to 16 copies surviving in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: maybe half a dozen!

Recent Auction Price: None auctioned in last 5 years - I've only known one ever sold and that was to my friend for £40 about 10 years ago – a bargain!



1 'Classics Illustrated: Exciting Mystery Stories' 1952

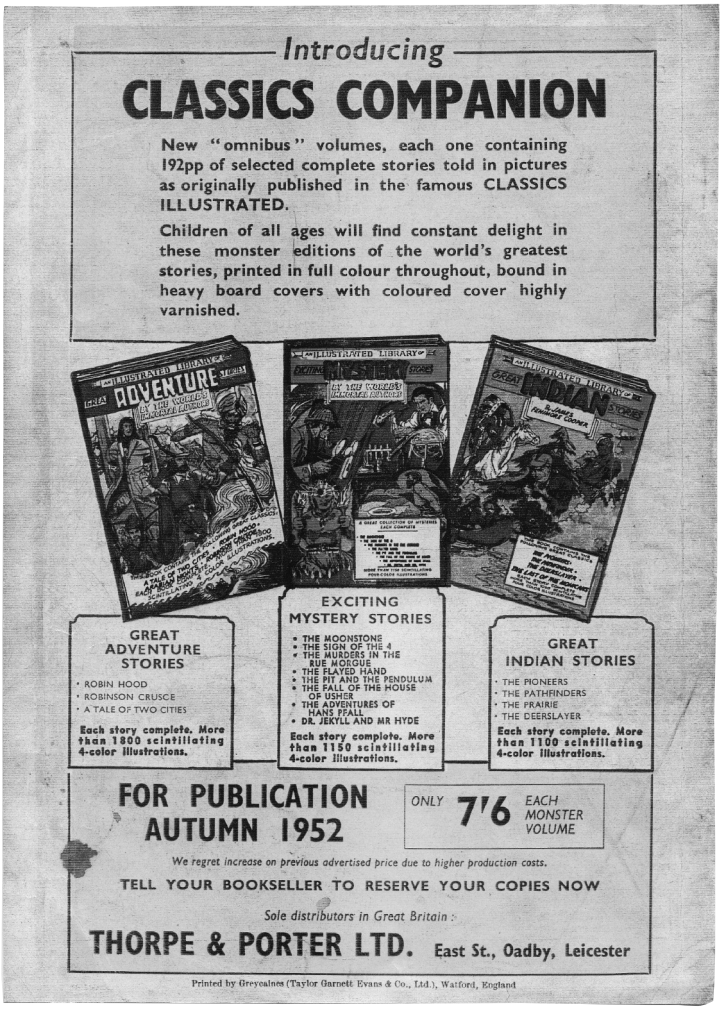
Now this annual is my tease! No known copy exists, yet it was advertised widely for publication in 1952 as part of a trilogy entitled The Classics Illustrated Library – all to be published together with Great Adventure Stories and Great Indian Stories – distributed in the UK by Thorpe and Porter.

The latter two annuals are RIB IV and come up from time to time but not the 'Mystery' title! So, does it really exist or not? Well, there is a parallel in UK comics as this question has been asked of two early 1950s British horror comics - Vault of Horror 1 and Black Magic Annual 2. Adverts in the 'Items Wanted' section of a recent Book & Magazine Collector (December 2007) confirm that dealers still believe these two exist despite many claims to the contrary – so why not this annual?

Rarity Index Band I: 1 to 15 copies exist in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing:
A tantalising one or two?

Recent Auction Price: Great Adventure Stories £48 March 2005, Great Indian Stories £61 same auction. No instances of 'Exciting Mystery Stories' (surprise!) – name your price if you find one! ●



This concludes Bob's look at the UK's Rarest Annuals - please feel free to comment via letter or the website!

My Top Tip from the List

Is there a 'sleeper' in the above list that is currently way undervalued? Well yes! I think it's number 2 on the list - the 1950 Radio Fun with the Tommy Handley cover.

If you think about it, why should the 1973 Rupert be £23,000 when all they did was change the colour of his face and shoes! You might say Rupert collectors are completists and that's why but there's the difference with the US market at the moment: a rarity like this with its wartime links and great internal art would be very valuable there! Still, UK comics and annuals are very much on the up with the likes of the recent *Comics Britannia* series on BBC4, so who knows; it may be fetching £1,000 plus in a couple of years!

Of course the above list is only one chap's opinion, so if you know better and hopefully have the evidence to back up your choice then give us your feedback by the letters page or via the *Crikey!* website: **www.crikeyuk.co.uk**

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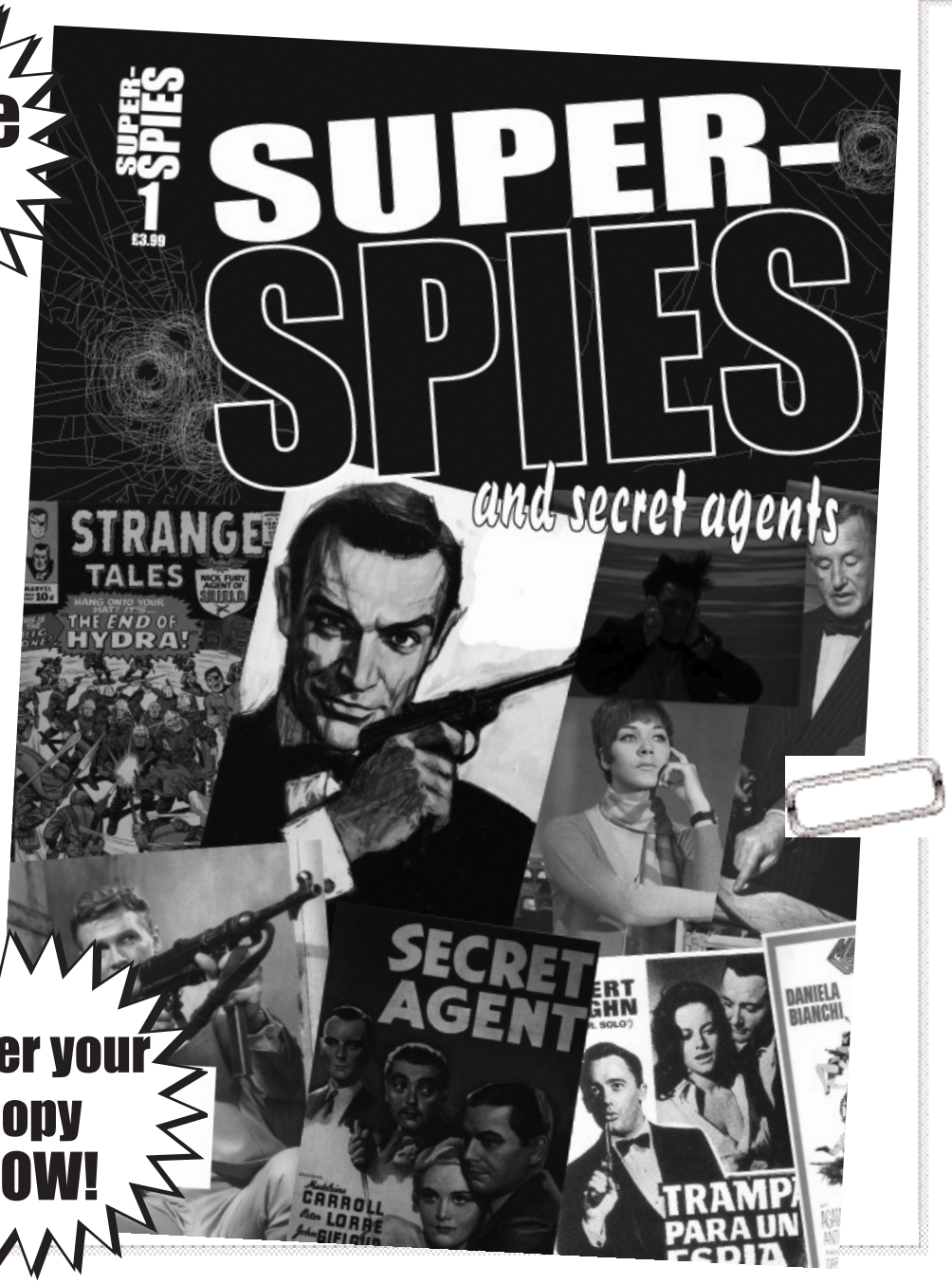


Order your copy NOW!

We each have a personal real-life comic hero. An artist, writer – or if you are really geeky, an editor or letterer – who transformed the way you enjoyed comics.

Glenn B Fleming has a number of heroes and this time round he gives us his reasons for making a hero out of ...

MIKE NOBLE

BY GLENN B FLEMING

As a child, Mike Noble spent all of his time drawing; people, horses, tanks, trees – anything and everything. This, of course, is not that unusual in a child, but young Mike drew better than anyone he knew did. Much better. Those people, horses, tanks and trees actually looked like people, horses, tanks and trees.

His mother knew early on that her little Mike was a talented artist, though she never knew that the greater part of Mike's talent lay in the fact that, in the days of his childhood, there were not many aspiring artists he could learn much from. There were not many comics or illustrated books he could study to learn his technique in figure drawing and the like. So, like all major talent, whatever their particular field, Mike became the visionary and honed his skills from good to outstanding through to exceptional with little or no outside help.

His use of colour is second to none in the comics medium and, like his equally talented peers, Bellamy, Hampson and Embleton, Mike forged ahead in his early years, experimenting and learning to apply that knowledge while producing some of the most outstanding British comic art of the 20th Century.

A Noble start

Mike Noble left regular education and attended the School of Art at the South West Essex Technical College, spending his days working on commercial art and life drawing rather than illustration.

As I look back at my own career, I seem to have followed a similar path - the difference being that I never got out of commercial art and, of course, I'm not the artist Mike Noble is. The disappointment of my not pursuing a comic art career is tempered by the fact that, maybe, I just wasn't quite good enough.

Noble's first job was in an advertising studio in High Holborn (London) and he has been quoted as saying that his first intentions were not to draw boys' papers or comics for a living, but to work in commercial art. This is the path he trod until 1947. Then, following his introduction into the art world as an office boy at Chelsea Studios, his country called and National Service became a reality in the shape of the army.





A fantastic display of Mike's illustrations from TV21.



(Above) Black Beauty and Jenny (Look-In Oct 1974).

(Opposite) Zero X Commander Paul Travers and his crew struggle to control their spacecraft ...

(Below) Fireball XL5's Steve Zodiac saves the day again (TV21 May 1965).

Fortunately, Mike managed to get into the Regimental Drawing Office whilst serving in Catterick. Mike would have to draw uniforms, caps, badges, helmets and all the typical Army hardware - but, strangely, not weapons.

The Noble art

Eighteen months later, he was honourably discharged from the army and went back to Chelsea Studios and realised that working in the commercial art world wasn't allowing him to use his most treasured natural skill: drawing. Disillusioned, Mike looked for another position, one that would give him the job satisfaction he craved, the opportunity he needed and the money required to live.

In 1952, a meeting with artist and illustrator Leslie Caswell changed Mike's life. Caswell was at that time producing work for magazines such as *John Bull*, *Woman* and *Woman's Own*. Caswell needed an understudy, but needed that someone to possess enough talent and experience to work on their own. Noble heard of Caswell's dilemma, collected samples of some of the work he had produced at Chelsea and put it all together in a portfolio. He also included all the things he liked drawing plus sketches from his stint at Catterick. This addition proved to be the key to his future. Caswell had served in the Royal Artillery during the war and upon seeing Noble's work on military hardware was so impressed that he offered him the job.

Mike found himself almost immediately working on a strip called 'Simon and Sally' for the relatively new *Robin* comic.

Caswell became Noble's mentor, showing him techniques in storytelling; the secrets of sequential art. Caswell impressed on the young Noble that the first figure should always be looking or pointing into the strip to guide the reader into the work, the importance of close ups and when to use them, composition and perspective.

The work was increasingly diverse and Noble was drawing babies one day and then cars driving off cliffs the next and then a love story the day after.

American comics were a big influence on Noble's art and it seems that wherever comics are, the impact of the great Jack Kirby is never that far away. Back then, Noble would rather have been drawing action stories than romance, but soon realised that a mixture of both might be needed in future work.

Noble thoughts

Leslie Caswell decided he'd move down to Cornwall and asked Noble if he might go with him. Noble turned him down for two reasons. Firstly, Mike didn't want to be in somebody else's shadow all his career. Secondly – he simply didn't want to move.

After Caswell's departure, Noble worked for *TV Express* (originally *Junior Express*, then *Express Weekly*) producing cowboy stories, revealing in his depiction of horses and stage coaches. Noble could draw anything well and as a boy had set himself the task of doing just that.

He rarely used models of any kind, preferring to work from memory and imagination, though he would be supplied with photos of cowboys and the types of buildings they lived in. As an artist, Noble would adapt and learn as he applied his skills, never daunted (as I was) by the huge expanse of the blank, white page.

Noble's art technique developed from these assignments; he would never use opaque white to 'whiteout' any mistakes, instead taking full advantage of the china clay surface of the board, running a fresh Gillette razor blade across the board to take out the black line, whilst leaving the surface smooth.

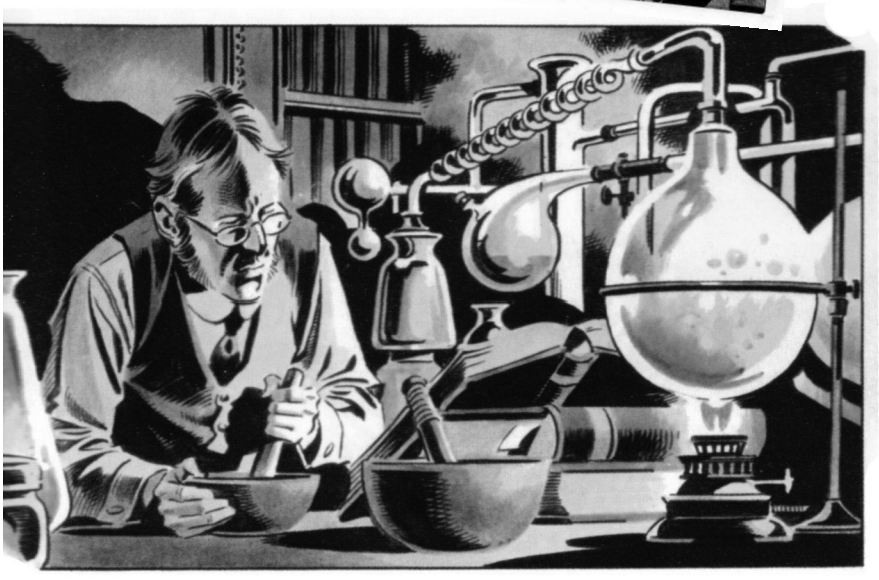
He'd get his scripts and lay them out roughly in pencil on the art board, working to the writer's instructions. Then he would tighten his pencils, drawing the strip fifty percent larger than the printed version before going to process black inks and therefore black line. Any shading would be produced from watered down black ink, appyling it as a wash.

His later colour work would follow the same process: watered down coloured inks to produce tone after the pencil rendering.

A Noble ending

In the late '50s and early '60s, Noble produced several cowboy strips. First the 'Lone Ranger', and then 'The Range Rider' came





(Above) The mysterious Mr Milner from The Adventures of Black Beauty (Look-In October 1974).



(Above) *Zero X* from *TV21* (Below) Mike's *Captain Scarlet* from *TV21* (June 1968) (Bottom) Watch out - Mother Dench is about! (*Look-In* October 1974).





under the Noble pencil. The 'Range Rider' was a popular western on BBC TV and the strip version replaced The 'Lone Ranger' in 1961.

Mike Noble was always working, turning out many strips, most in black and white, some in colour and a few in black, white and one other colour, each strip becoming another discipline, a fresh challenge, another way of learning and improving his art.

When the BBC cancelled The Range Rider, the strip was cancelled too, but Mike had already met someone who would be of greater value in his rising career: Alan Fennell, editor of *TV21*, home of the Gerry Anderson strips.

A Noble Fireball

Noble was already aware of the impact of Gerry Anderson's TV work. *Supercar*, *Fireball XL5* and *Stingray* were being aired and Mike had seen the strips in *TV21* and was impressed. With the ending of western strips like 'The Range Rider' in *TV Comic* in 1964, Noble's only offer of work was a cartoon strip, 'Beetle Bailey'. Noble had never worked on cartoons before, but welcomed the challenge and he also drew 'Popeye' during this period.

Noble learned that Graham Cotton, *TV21*'s 'Fireball XL5' artist had quit the strip and Mike, taking advantage of his friendship with Fennell, took over the strip, using his own understudy to help him meet tight deadlines. Mike then dropped 'Beetle Bailey' in favour of the 'Fireball XL5' work, which was more suited to his talents.

It would take Mike six days to produce two full colour spreads; two on the pencil work, two on the inking and the remainder on the colouring. Fennell encouraged his artists to employ new tricks to make the artwork more effective - explosions bursting from the panels, no hard line around those panels, to use the colour to its full effect.

A Noble future

Noble relished these briefs and, like, Embleton and Bellamy, portrayed the characters as 'real' people. He was supplied with photos of the respective marionettes for likeness: front views, side views, even photos of the back of their heads. He also used photos of the spacecraft, SF hardware and any buildings that may be featured in the series. He also used reference material sent to him from America depicting *NASA* rockets and space suits.

Noble put all this knowledge into the strips, making the hardware as realistic as he was able as the writers' encouraged Noble to use his imagination to the full. They would never fully describe uniforms, a planet's surface or the design of a

spacecraft and instead left it to Mike to visualise the extraordinary Gerry Anderson future.

It was a genre he came to love, especially as he found the work easier than drawing horses and stage coaches.

Noble loved to draw science fiction strips and stayed at *TV21* for many years, producing not only definitive renderings of *Fireball XL5*, but of 'Zero X' and *Captain Scarlet*. Far from being a 'job', Noble's love for these strips and his art shines through, drawing *Fireball XL5* from *TV21* issue 6 straight through to issue 108, 'Zero X' almost the same length, issue 105 through to issue 154 and then later from issue 197 to 241. Then came *Star Trek*, each strip produced to the same professional manner Noble lent all his work.

After this flood of work, Noble moved to *Look-in*, again drawing (in black and white) another Gerry Anderson TV strip in the form of *Space 1999* (though he never actually saw the TV programme!), *FollyFoot*, 'Robin of Sherwood' and 'Black Beauty' (those beautiful horses!) followed and Noble moved away from science fiction to a more 'realistic' side to his art.

Noble times

Just as colour had been phased out of Mike Noble's artwork in the early to middle '70s, so too were the washes he used in his '80s work, especially on his rendition of Worzel Gummidge. Noble decided he would change his style for this work, using rougher textured water colour board and employing black ink and black crayon for the tones. The rough board lent a grittier rendering to the work. Noble then worked on *The Tomorrow People*, *The Man From Atlantis* and later *The Famous Five*, adapted from another TV series on ITV.

In the early 1980s, a Japanese production unit produced their own science-fiction puppet TV epic called *Star Fleet*. Airing in 1982 in the UK, a strip version was licensed by *Look-In*, with Mike Noble as artist.

Mike Noble is now in his seventies and continues to work and produce wonderful comic strips. Like the greats Frank Bellamy, Ron Embleton and Don Lawrence, his work excites and delivers everytime. In years to come, like Bellamy, Embleton and Lawrence, Noble's clean style and impressive body of work will be at the forefront of truly great British comic strip artwork. ●



(Below) *The Adventures of Black Beauty*. Beautiful people, not so beautiful people and beautiful horses! (*Look-In* November 1974). (Bottom) *Timeslip* (Look-In 1971).

The Crikey! chat

andy capp

By David Robinson

Roger, Roger - The New Men behind Andy Capp

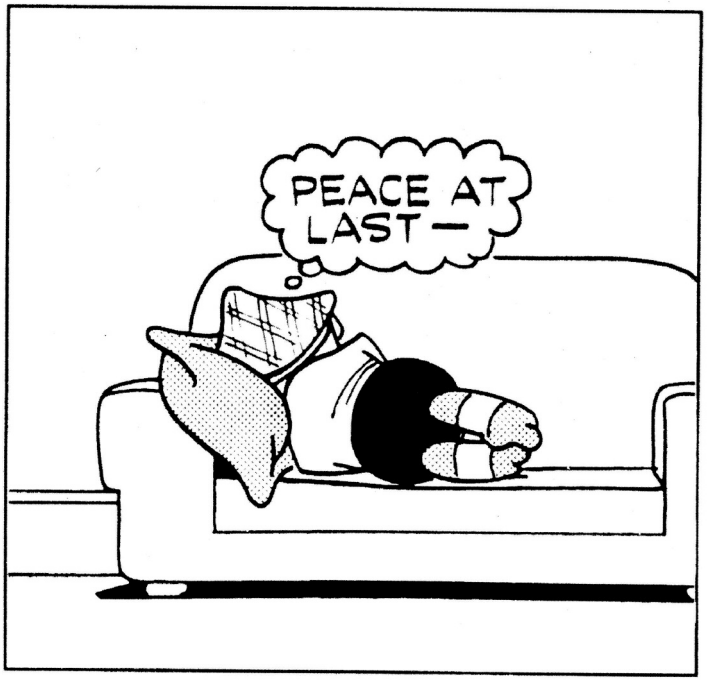
Fifty years old in 2007, Andy was touted as the father of Buster at the outset of that esteemed publication; and there are other interfaces, as we shall see…

When, during the late 1980s, I interviewed the late Reg Smythe, creator of 'Andy Capp' in the *Daily Mirror*, I delicately asked him whether he thought Andy would hang up his cap when Smythe eventually retired. Reg replied that he did not believe Andy would fade from the scene; and for the time being, at least, he has been right.

But Smythe's Andy Capp drawings are still in *The Mirror* every day, aren't they? Despite the increasing number of modern references to scratch cards, mobile phones and the like, surely the style of drawing is still Smythe's?

While Reg left behind a good year's worth of unpublished daily Andy Capps, it is difficult to believe that nearly ten years have now passed since the well-loved cartoonist sadly laid down his pen (in Hartlepool of cancer on 13 June 1998).

What is more, someone has achieved the seemingly impossible; successfully replicating Smythe's Andy so that the transition appears seamless.



Capp and Smythe

Andy's cap, like its similar-sounding owner, is one of the most instantly recognised graphic images in Britain – and in other places! Smythe's diminutive north-easterner has been one of the UK's most successful exports, also achieving the top three in the States and becoming "very big in the Yemen"!

Smythe (real name Reg Smith) quit school at 14 and survived army service before moving to London and taking a day job with the Post Office. Whilst there, he cut his teeth as a cartoonist, freelancing spot cartoons to trade journals: up to sixty contributions per week. With the help of a good agent, Smythe's cartoons eventually found their way into the *Daily Mirror* and the late, lamented *Reveille*, both difficult publications to break into.

'Andy Capp' began in the *Mirror*'s northern edition as an extension of Smythe's daily gag cartoons. The idea took hold, and graduated to the paper's national version in eight months.

Mirror men

When it comes to newspaper strips, the *Daily Mirror* has tended to be the British forerunner. Classic strips





range from 'Garth' through to Peter O'Donnell's brilliant 'Romeo Brown' (drawn by Alfred Mazure, then James Holdaway) and Bill Tidy's 'The Fosdyke Saga', to 'The Perishers', on which late co-founder Maurice Dodd worked with Bill Mevin until Dodd sadly passed on in 2005.

Apart from Capp, all of these items from that golden era of Mirror strips have petered away during the past twenty years, in favour of less traditional fare such as the somewhat computerised look of the football strip, 'Scorer' (reminiscent of the classic football strip drawing style established in *Tiger* by the late Joe Colqhoun for 'Roy of the Rovers').

From the remaining features, Ken Layson, cartoon and crosswords editor at *The Mirror*, plucked one creator each to replace Smythe, who both wrote and drew 'Andy Capp'. Scotsman Roger Kettle now writes the scripts, while Roger Mahoney - from Emsworth in Hampshire – is the new artist.

'Ken is a fantastic Cartoon Editor,' enthuses Kettle. 'He simply loves cartoons and goes to bat constantly for cartoonists. I owe him a lot – not least for the confidence he showed in my ability to write 'Andy Capp'.'

Beau and Horace

Roger Kettle, born in the Scottish Highlands in 1952, started at *The Mirror* writing 'Horace' (originally 'A Man Called Horace'), a strip based on a comical Lone Ranger lookalike and a send-up of the Richard Harris film title, A Man Called Horse.

Kettle's partner on 'Horace' is another Scot, illustrator Andrew Christine, who also draws Kettle's brilliant earlier creation, 'Beau Peep'.

This luckless legionnaire's Saharan confinement has now managed more than 25 years in the *Daily Star*, despite a brief hiatus a couple of years ago when an accountant recommended "pulling" the Peep strip (until complaints from readers prompted *Star* editors to reinstate Beau).

Kettle met Christine after taking up a journalism apprenticeship in Dundee with D C Thomson, legendary proprietor of a wealth of household names (*The Beano* and *The Dandy* continue to outstrip competitors on UK comics' sales lists). Roger eventually became a sub-editor on DCT's underrated *The Topper*, and among the late comic greats whom he ran across was David Law, self-critical (and largely unsung) creator of 'Dennis the Menace', 'Beryl the Peril' and others. Kettle also singles out Ken Reid, creator of 'Roger the Dodger' and 'Jonah' as a genius.

Roger now finds himself scripting both 'Beau' and 'Horace' six days a week, with 'Andy' managing the same quota, plus Sundays. 'It's not easy,' the writer admits. 'Writing nineteen strips in a week is not a problem, but writing nineteen strips *every* week is! But I'm not complaining. It's a nice way to make a living.'

Whereas Kettle originally learned to write scripts 'longhand', detailing in text the contents of each panel as well as the word balloons, he now does so visually, sketching out the episodes in rough. He learned early on, from the work of late, great practitioners such as Charles Schulz, of 'Peanuts' fame, and Don Martin in *MAD Magazine*, that a facial expression can be worth a thousand words. It sometimes irks the artist that Roger's dashed-off version may capture a required look more readily than a carefully executed pen-line (a common illustrative complaint!). Empathy is such that Roger can see exactly how the artist's depiction of a particular character will react in a given situation.

Kettle works from an office within his house in the suburbs of Dundee. He agrees that writing is a solitary profession, but 'I've been doing it for 25 years, so I'm used to it. I'd find it very difficult now to work in an office, surrounded by other people. My wife works, so





I'm around during school holidays. Therefore, a lot of the time, it's not that solitary!'

Summer hols can be difficult to snatch, and rarely extend beyond a week; RK counterbalances this by making sure that the trips are good ones. While neither of the Kettle offspring is a staunch cartoon fan, Roger's teenage daughter has become a useful barometer of whether an idea "works", or not.

Roger Mahoney

The new artist for 'Andy' also draws his rhyming partner, 'Mandy' (formerly 'Mandy Capp'), in the same paper.

Roger Mahoney, born in Portsmouth in 1933, studied art and design at the Southern College of Art. Early inspirations included Barry Appleby and 'The Gambols' in the *Daily Express*, which also introduced Roger to Giles, Osbert Lancaster and other cartoonists from the same paper. 'All of whom I consistently bombarded with questions,' adds Roger M, speaking of his early grounding as a cartoonist.

He later broke into *The Mirror*, first with pocket cartoons, then through Syndication International who were servicing his daily cartoon strip, 'Sammy', and a daily cartoon panel 'Agony is…' to the *Daily Record* and overseas papers.

Mahoney lives in a converted 1900s fever hospital in West Sussex, where his studio is a former mortuary! The whole Mahoney Mansions resides in five and a half acres of ancient woodland. He works mainly in pen and ink, and uses anything to colour his work in, including a computer. He relies upon attention to detail and good old-fashioned elbow grease to get the effects he wants.

'I think Ken Layson felt that, because I had taken over 'The Gambols' successfully, the requirements for drawing Andy were fairly similar,' Roger points out. 'I had always been a fan of Capp, and admired the artwork immensely. The economy of line and use of space were so disciplined.'

Mahoney's normal workload is to draw and letter four cartoon strips a day, including two non-Mirror items. 'I produce around twelve to eighteen jokes per week and draw up six of the best,' says Roger. 'Drawing Andy slows my normal drawing speed down from the speed of light to Mach 1! It is always easier to draw your own characters – which should flow off the end of your pen like handwriting.'

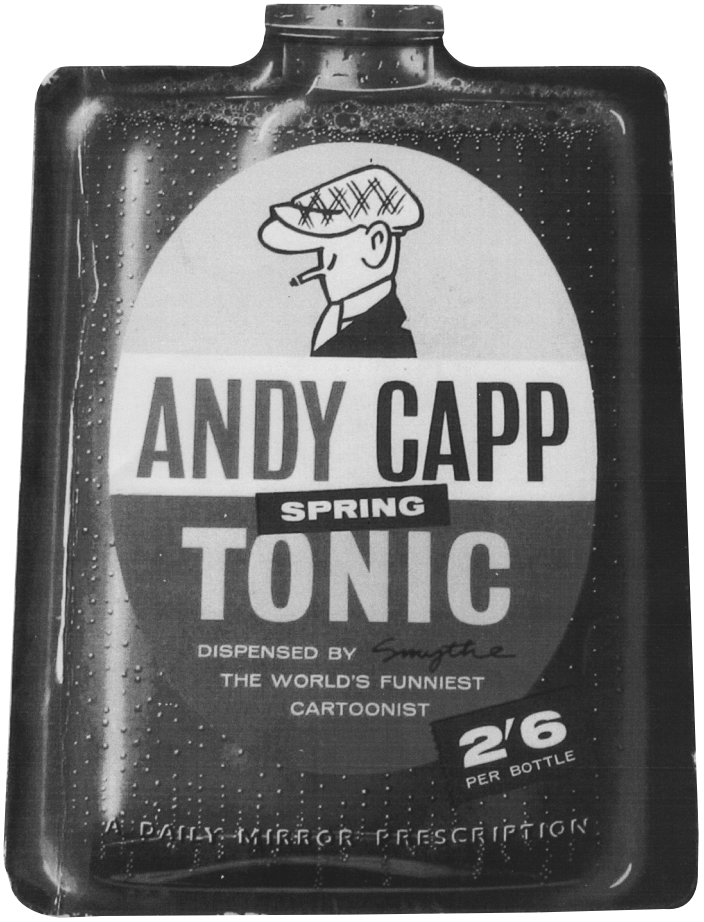
More Kettle

For Roger Kettle, taking over Andy Capp 'was a daunting task, as the other strips I've written over the years have been my own creations. Reg was from the North East of England, and I'm from Scotland; but I really don't think there's much of a difference in cultures; although I do write the word "pet" a lot!

'I've tried not to stray from the "feel" of Reg's Andy, other than the fights which used to take place with Flo.' These simply don't work in this day and age and Reg Smythe himself was toning this aspect down, along with the "softening" of Andy's extra-marital pursuits and the elimination of smoking from the strip.

'Reg had one particular touch which I love,' says Kettle. 'When Florrie left the house or the pub, he drew her putting on her gloves. Who would bother doing that? It's simple, effective and beautifully observed.'

'Being asked to write 'Andy Capp' was a great privilege,' Kettle concludes. 'He is, after all and without a doubt, the most famous and most successful British cartoon strip character of all time. I hope to do it justice.' ●



Described as "Britain's master spy", Captain Phantom parachuted into the pages of Knockout in issue 702 (9 August 1952) and fought the Nazi and Japanese menace through seven thrilling adventures before ceding his place on the centre pages to the space-roaming tales of the Family Rollinson.

Captain Phantom

The Man of a Thousand Disguises

By Steve Holland



Captain Phantom was the Knockout's first war hero in strip form, preceded only by 'The Laughing Spy', a text story that had appeared briefly in 1940. Written by John Newton Chance, the latter spy had been graced with the name Red Sword, who had previously appeared in the story paper War Thriller.

'Laughing spy' was another epithet given to Captain Phantom whose chief joy was to outwit the Axis forces whenever he could.

Secret spy

As the strip opens, the mysterious British spy is already a legend throughout Europe. The year is 1942, and Squadron-Leader Daunton is returning to an aerodrome in East Anglia after special service in the Middle East when he hears that his old friend, Flying Officer Ted Raleigh, has been missing for a month. Contacting R.A.F. Intelligence, Daunton learns that Raleigh had been sent on a special mission to discover the secrets of a new German Anti-Aircraft gun.

Daunton returns to his tiny London flat and proceeds to change… he is, in truth, Captain Phantom, a British agent so secret that even the intelligence services are unaware of his real identity!

Captain Phantom always works alone, believing "Every man was an enemy—until proved a friend," although his superiors have such confidence in him that he can call on any of the fighting services for assistance without notice.

Apart from a deadly sword hidden in a walking stick—and that only for the first story—Captain Phantom's chief weapon is his ability to quickly and completely disguise himself. Although not the subject of any discussion in the strips themselves, Phantom also proves himself



His powers of disguise are matched only by such bravery that hard-bitten Captains of the Royal Navy gasp "Gosh—Captain Phantom!" and hardened Commandos mutter "Gosh! He's a wizard!" Confident that his disguises will not be penetrated, Phantom has no fear of being dropped into the heart of enemy territory or strolling recklessly into a secret meeting with nothing more than his sense of humour to protect him. He was not the "laughing spy" for nothing – as he says to a German sentry after stealing his uniform and leaving him tied to a tree: "Sorry to leave you in your underwear. No doubt your rage will keep you warm." And with a cheery, "So long," he melts away into the night.

Action man

These occasional one-liners are a precursor to the kind of thing one now expects of James Bond, and some of Captain Phantom's stunts would not be out of place in a Bond movie. In the third story, he rides a motorcycle after a German transport plane and flings himself at the spars of the rising undercarriage. Capturing the plane he is set upon by German fighters yet manages to land the plane on one wheel.

An even more potentially terminal event was when he parachuted from a bomber only for a chute to wrap itself around the tail of a German fighter. Unable to control the plane, the German pilot plummets into a lake, dragging Captain Phantom after him. The plane smashes apart on impact but, with split second timing, Captain Phantom releases his harness, drops lightly into the lake and swims ashore.

Despite this, the Captain is no superhero. His great failing is to leave the enemies he is impersonating to be discovered, usually at the most inopportune moment, so that his disguise is penetrated; this he does consistently throughout all seven of his adventures, leading to some hair-raising escapes, not the least of which was during a secret German conference when he had to leap out of a window eighty feet above the ground, his death prevented by a Nazi flag jutting out of the Gestapo headquarters in the opposite building.

fluent in many languages: German, French, Burmese, Japanese and even the language of the South American republic of El Pesos; in a matter of seconds, he can mimic the voice and mannerisms of anyone he meets.

Making it up

Captain Phantom is the ultimate actor. "I have to be a man of a thousand disguises," he explains to a Dutch newspaperman in episode two. "My life depends on it. I am never without my little make up box. It is my best friend."

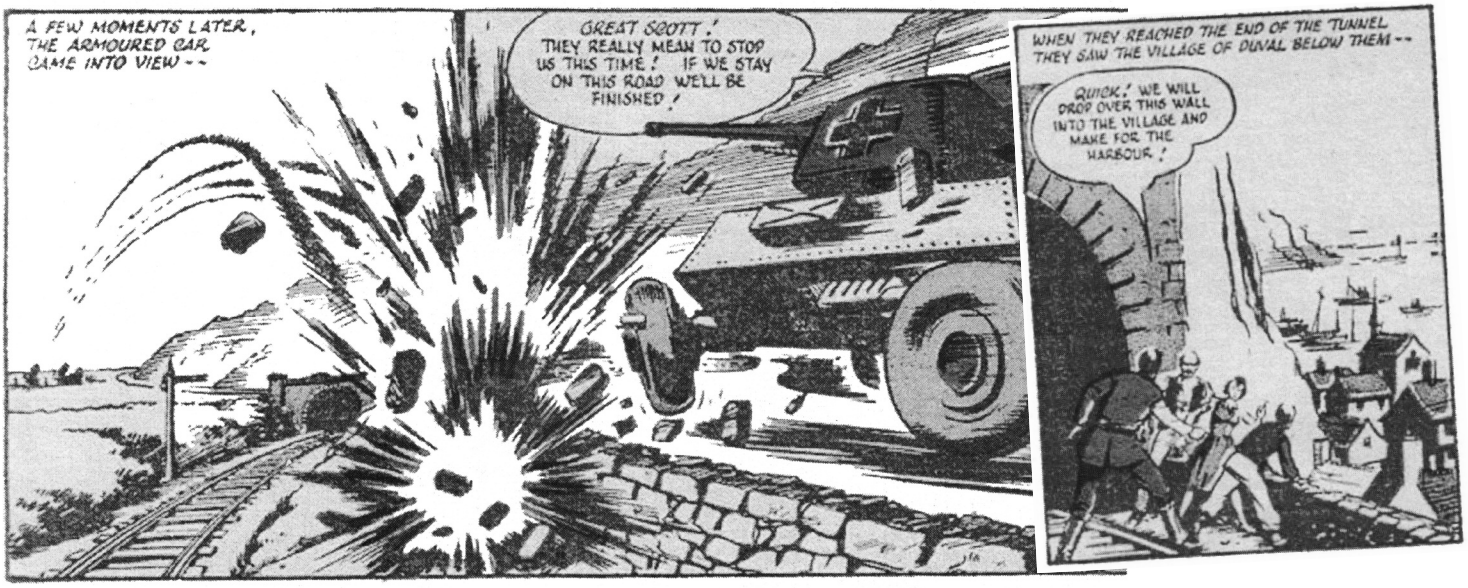
The make up box allows him to change his features so precisely that even a close colleague cannot see through the disguise. Small, waterproof and curiously concealed (the box is never removed from him when he is taken prisoner), the make up box allows him to disguise himself as a national of any country in whatever brief time he has available.

His make-up abilities extend to others and he is even able to convincingly disguise a young Burmese girl as a Japanese commander to fool the enemy.

Inventive

Surrounded by enemies, Captain Phantom can always find a friend, whether it is a family of French farmers or native workmen in Burma. One of his closest allies is a mysterious inventor by the name of General Hoo Sung, a somewhat stereotypical oriental who is always begging the pardon of his comrade for every humble act he performs.

Hoo Sung has created the Rolling Sphere, a monstrous armour clad weapon bristling with pom pom cannons which has a useful mechanical arm with the



strength to pick up a boat or pull the Sphere up a cliff face.

Having a machine like the Rolling Sphere at his disposal is vital to Captain Phantom in some situations since the Nazis are always on the verge of creating their own weapons of mass destruction, ranging from walking gunships known as sand-spiders to undersea aircraft carriers.

The final strip, set shortly after the war, sees a British company creating a giant jet bomber capable of flying halfway round the world to deliver its nuclear payload.

The creative mind behind these inventions—not just the weapons but the storylines themselves—was Ron Clark, himself formerly of the R.A.F., who had worked as a scriptwriter for G.B. Animation in the late 1940s. When the company closed down in 1949, he soon established himself at the Amalgamated Press, writing scripts for *Knockout*, *Sun* and *Comet* which were often drawn by other ex-animators—including Eric Bradbury, Ron Smith, Reg Parlett and Harry Hargreaves. Although not the creator of Captain Phantom, it was his scripts—often drawn out in rough rather than the usual typescript—that sent the Captain on his wildest adventures.

Artistic

The strip's main artist was Graham Coton, whose artistic training at Goldsmith's College had been interrupted by his own wartime service in the R.A.F. After demobilisation, he had applied to G.B. Animation but chosen not to take up their offer of work, returning to Goldsmith's instead. In 1950, obliged to find work, he had started to draw Kit Carson for the *Cowboy Comics Library*, although his interest in cars and aircraft was better served in *Knockout*, drawing two Sexton Blake yarns before being offered Captain Phantom.

After four adventures and eight months, Mike Western took over the strip for a single 12-week story. Western, unlike Coton, had accepted work with G.B. Animation and had then worked for Halas & Batchelor on *Animal Farm* before he rejoined former colleagues Clark and Bradbury working on *Knockout*. Graham Coton subsequently returned for the final five months of the strip.

The strip was clearly popular as, after only a few weeks in black & white, it moved to the prestigious centre colour pages. Colour is, perhaps, a misnomer as Phantom's adventures were not always enhanced by the red overlay. Poorly printed, the colour didn't always line up with the drawings and scraps of red speckled the printed artwork, adding little to the reality of the strip as everyone ran around in red uniforms, drove red vehicles and flew red planes. Even in the snowy wastes of Norway, the Commando group supposedly disguised as a Nazi ski patrol were given overcoats tinted in red by the overenthusiastic colourist.

Despite the crudity of the drawing—even artists with a fine future ahead of them have to learn their trade—and the patchy colouring, 'Captain Phantom' was an enjoyable romp. Four of the seven stories were resized and reprinted in the pages of *Thriller Picture Library* several years later with Captain Phantom donning his last disguise—and renamed 'Spy 13'.

Historical

The Captain Phantom tales are important for two reasons. Firstly, they marked a move away from the historical swashbuckling stories that had filled *Knockout* for many years, giving readers a more modern swashbuckler with a wartime setting. Although not a first, since the Second World War had been mined extensively in text form in comics and story papers from the moment Neville Chamberlain made his fateful announcement, but certainly one of the first in picture story format.

Secondly, it introduced elements of the fantastic that were to inspire some of the finest stories to appear in comics of the 1950s and 1960s.

It was still a long journey from 'Captain Phantom' to 'Kelly's Eye' (which appeared in Knockout *ten years later), but the first hints were there in the super-weapons created on both sides of the conflict and Captain Phantom's own "Gosh!" – provoking abilities. Given the scarcity of the original comics it is no wonder that he has been forgotten… making it a pleasure to have been able to shine the spotlight, albeit briefly, on the mysterious Squadron-Leader Daunton, a.k.a. Britain's most extraordinary spy, Captain Phantom.* ●

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Let's Look at…

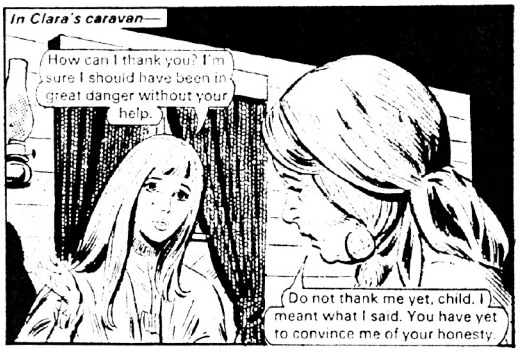


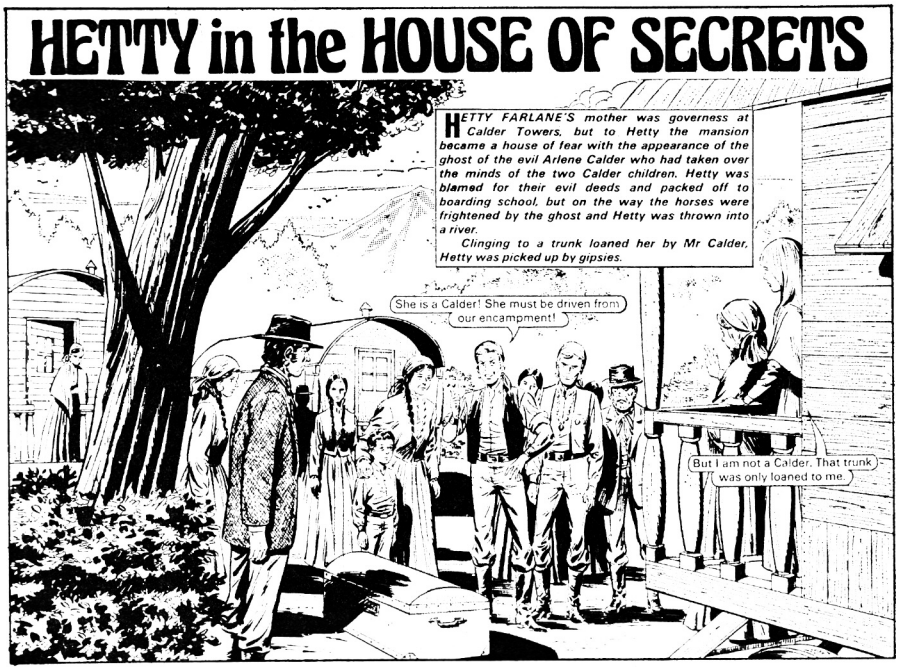
By Brian M Clarke

DC Thomson's entry into the spooky girls' comic genre lasted for an enchanting 69 issues. It left behind some fond memories for girls (and Supercats!) of a certain age … Spellbound *was launched 25 Sept 1976 and merged with* Debbie Comic *21 Jan 1978 (issue 258). The first issue came with a free Mystic Sun Pendant and introduced readers to sinister-sounding stories such as 'When The Mummy Walks', 'Spectre from The Flame', 'Nightmare', 'I Don't Want To Be A Witch' and the rather strange 'The Haunting of Laura Lee'. Not everything was spooky, however, and issue one also saw the start of space adventurer series 'Supercats'. Over the years dozens of strips came and went – read on to catch a flavour of Britain's first girlie spook comic.*

Hetty in the House of Secrets

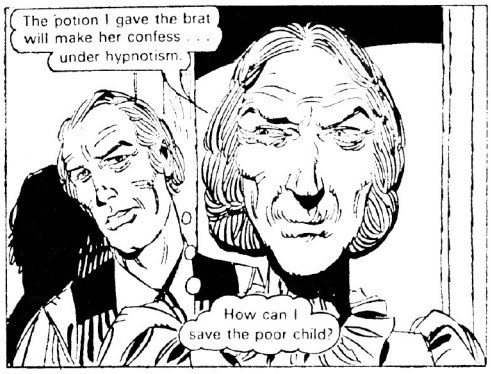
"Hetty Farlane's mother was governess at Calder Towers, but to Hetty the mansion became a house of fear with the appearance of the ghost of the evil Arlene Calder who had taken over the minds of the two Calder children."





Beware the Mystery Dolls

Orphan Vicky Martin has been sent to live in an eerie wax museum belonging to her frightening guardian Madame Venner. It isn't long until Vicky discovers that Venner can bring her weird waxworks to life – with deadly consequences.





Whatever Became of Betsy?

Sally Blair's best-friend Betsy Holbrook suddenly went away and Sal is determined to find out what has become of her. Betsy's grand-dad has told Sally that his niece is on holiday but Sal's suspicions have been aroused by the mysterious and – let's be frank, ugly – house-servant Watkins.

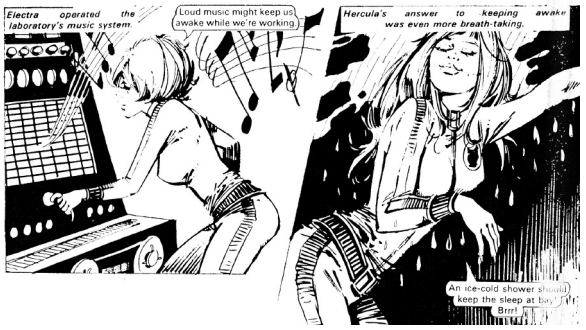


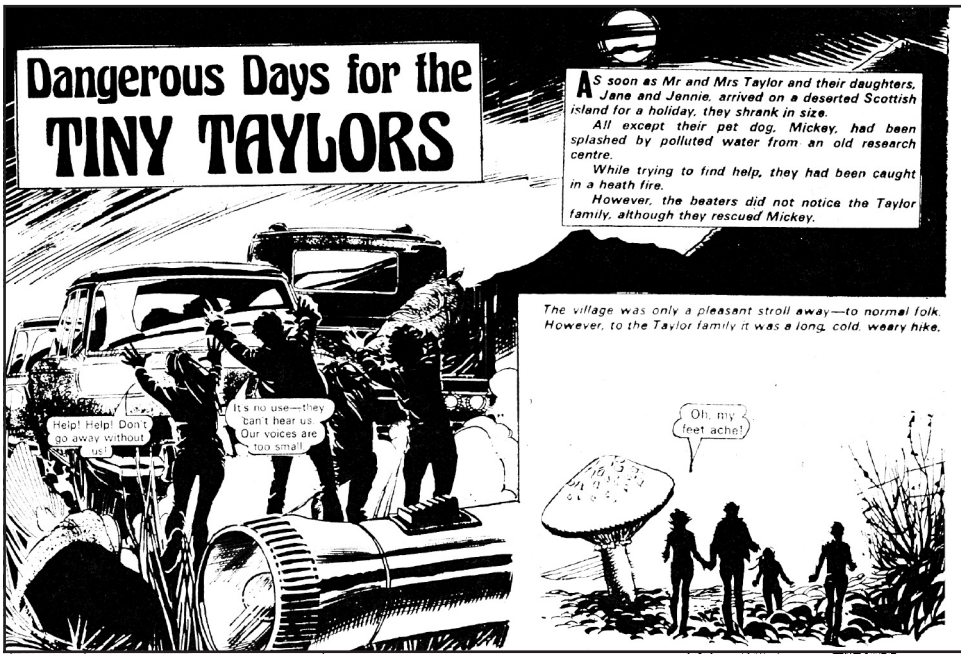




Supercats

The knockout strip that put the SF into Spellbound Fiction. Visually stunning artwork from one of the Spanish studios adds a dynamic open page design to the comic. The Supercats are four girls – Hercula, Fauna, Electra, Helen – in a super-science spaceship (The Kitten, what else) become one of the most popular fetaures of the comic. They even had their own Supercats' Club. Mixing science fiction, pop fashion and friendship proved a winner for the Supercats.





Dangerous Days for the Tiny Taylors

This strip wasn't the best advertisement for a holiday in Scotland – "As soon as Mr and Mrs Taylor and their daughters Jane and Jennie arrived on a deserted Scottish island for a holiday, they shrank in size." (It was the polluted water.)

It was unusual for Spellbound to have a strip that didn't focus entirely in female leads (Mr. Taylor tended to do a lot of the thinking) but it was an effective, if derivative, piece of action adventuring.





Man of Mystery

A series of one or two page self-contained stories. Or sometimes one-and-a-half pages. Most were silly with supposed ironic endings. Once you read a couple, however, you tended to know the ending by about panel six. The nasty man forcing the poor little girl into making vat after vat of porridge all through the night was only going to end up in one place, wasn't he!

Originally under the banner of the story teller Damian Drake, it was renamed from issue 24.



Paula

Complete the following sentence. "Paula Spencer, a brilliant young violinist, is terrified of…"

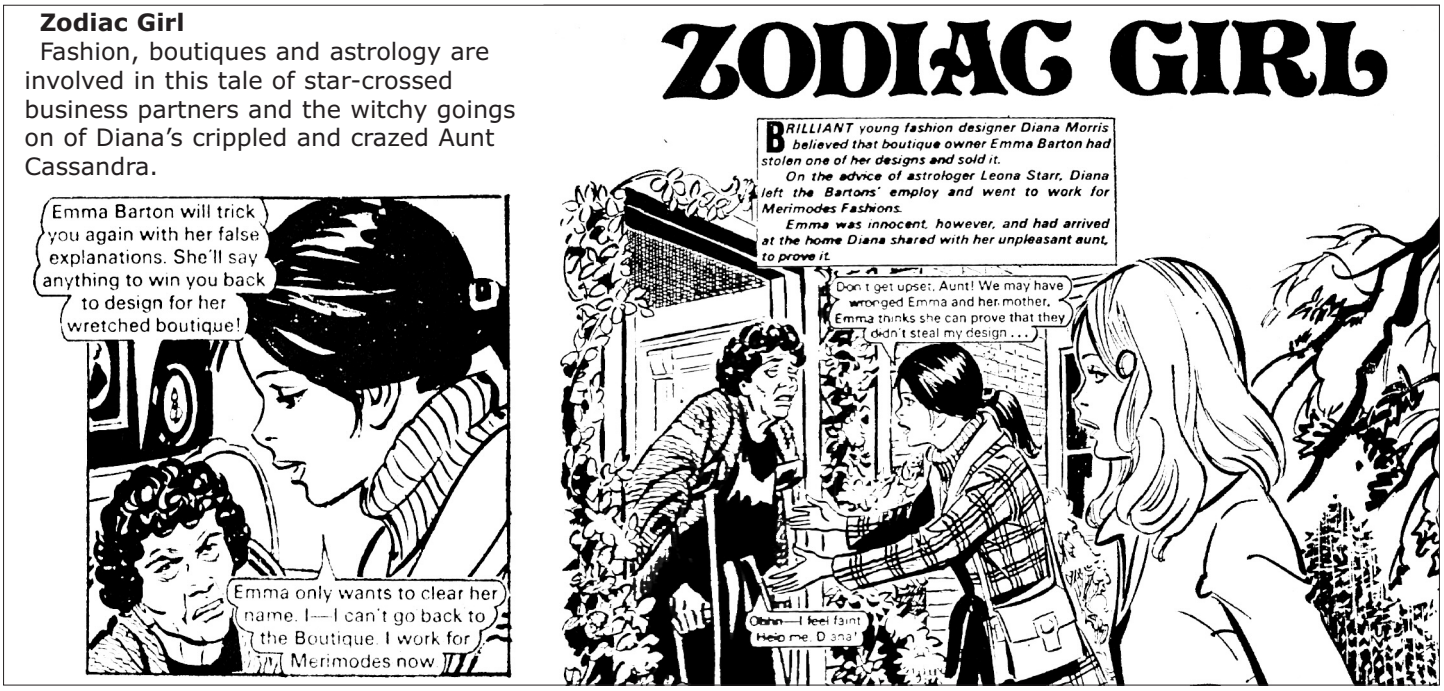
Of what? Zombies? The dark? Being left alone in a creepy old house to look after her mentally unstable father? None of the above. "Paula Spencer, a brilliant young violinist, is terrified of wasps."

Paula now has to overcome her fear of wasps as she struggles to once again play the violin.



Zodiac Girl

Fashion, boutiques and astrology are involved in this tale of star-crossed business partners and the witchy goings on of Diana's crippled and crazed Aunt Cassandra.

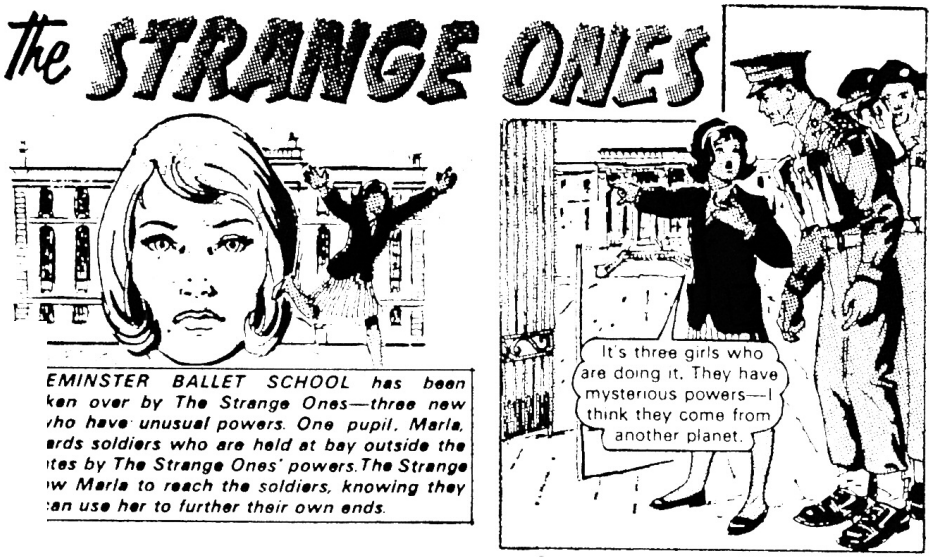


The Strange Ones

"Harleminster Ballet School has been taken over by The Strange Ones – three new arrivals who have unusual powers…"

One of the few stories to feature villainous girls as the antagonists. With obvious overtones of The Midwich Cuckoos, it never-the-less built towards several good suspenseful moments.





An anthology title such as Spellbound featured dozens of stories throughout its life. Our brief Look At… is intended to give you a good feel for the title. If you want to know more – well, that's why they have comic and book fairs and the internet. Happy hunting! ●

Countdown … Resumes Next Week!

By Stephen Poppitt

February 1971 saw the launch of a glossy newcomer to the British comics market, one with a strong emphasis on science fiction: *Countdown*.

The publishers, Polystyle, also produced the successful, but more juvenile, *TV Comic*. The new title mimicked the *TV Comic* format, which had also been used successfully by the Gerry Anderson inspired publication, *TV21*, in that it featured only strips that were based on television shows.

3 – 2 – 1

Countdown would later be known as *TV Action and Countdown*, and later still as just *TV Action*. Throughout its publication life, all its strips were based on TV shows, or in some cases on feature films.

The big difference between *Countdown* and its nearest rival, *TV21*, was that the strips in *Countdown* were not restricted to the output of a particular television company.

The new comic came with a new price, namely five new pence. In those still essentially pre-decimal days, this meant it really cost a shilling; quite a price hike compared to almost every other comic on the market. Most comics cost only 7d (3p) in 1971, so this was rather a shock for the buyer's nervous system.

In addition, *Countdown* only offered a meager 20 pages for its one shilling cover price, at a time when most other comics were 32 pages. This was doubtful economics, because *Countdown* was thus almost twice the price of most of its competitors but only two thirds the pagination, the combination of which would undermine the viability of the new publication from the outset.

On the plus side, however, it was full of colour. Prior to this, only *TV21* had offered so much colour. And *Countdown* also featured a strong use of photographs, a lot of them in colour too, which was another innovation 'borrowed' from *TV21*.

Aside from its impressive production values, however, *Countdown* suffered





(Right) Leslie Branton did a great job on the artwork for Hawii Five-0 (TV Action 70).

A very special *Crikey!* thanks goes to Pete Nichols and Phil Satterley for helping research the visuals for this article.



(Above)This wonderful Dr Who spread from Countdown *45 was drawn by long time comics collaborator Gerry Haylock.*

a major distribution problem, which nearly killed it off before it began. The first four issues were not properly distributed, so were very hard to find. Thereafter, random issues suffered the same problem; and this persisted for the first six months.

Space shot

The comic's 1971 launch coincided with the real-life Apollo moon missions, which fostered a great deal of interest in the space-race. As a result, a lot of factual features on the space missions appeared in the early issues, accompanied by a large number of photographs, even if many of these were in black-and-white. The real-life space missions had the front cover spot on the first issue, and sporadically after that for several months.

Countdown drew its title from the science fiction strip of the same name, drawn by John Burns, which was a major feature of the comic. The spacecraft and spacesuit designs in the strip were based on the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the strip was printed in colour throughout. It told of man's first deep space mission, travelling in a spaceship named 'Countdown' – a spitting image of the spaceship 'Discovery' in the film.

The name of the ship was contrived, to justify the title of both the strip and the comic; but not jarringly so. The most significant aspect of the strip was that it was based, visually at least, on a film and was the only strip in the comic that was not directly based on a TV programme.

As part of the count-down theme, all the ship's crew had number-designations: Captain Marc Zero, Bella One, Grant Two, Thelma Three, Felix Four, and Yoko Five. In the story, the *Countdown* crew have discovered intelligent alien life, and the seventh member of the ship's crew was an



(Above) John Burns' stunning artwork from the title strip, Countdown 15.



(Above): Italian artist Marco Capaldi shows his illustrative style of Robert Vaughn, star of the Protectors (TV Action 131).
(Below): A different style, but the same result: classic British artwork (Countdown 4, artist unknown).



*(Above) Jon Davies (*Countdown *4).*

alien, Bill, who was travelling back with them as the first alien ambassador to the Earth. Of course his real name was not actually Bill, but that was the nearest the ship's crew could get to pronouncing it!

The story began with the ship returning to the solar system after a lengthy voyage, and discovering that a military dictatorship has seized power on Earth. On learning of Countdown's return, the dictator launches a flight of deep space missiles to destroy them; and only the strange abilities of the alien, Bill, saves them.

It is decided to use the alien technology provided by Bill to transport one of the ship's personnel to the Moon, to try and win support among the lunar colonists for the establishment of a base to fight back against dictator Costra and his Z-Men.

The strip developed into a struggle between the ship's crew, in their hiding place among the asteroid belt, and Costra's forces on the Moon; with the crew receiving sporadic help from disaffected colonists.

Who goes there?

One of the main strips in *Countdown* was based on the BBC's *Doctor Who* TV series, which at that time starred Jon Pertwee; and the strip accordingly depicted Pertwee's Doctor. Polystyle already held the necessary licence to use *Doctor Who*, and a strip based on the series had been running in *TV Comic*, depicting Patrick Troughton's Doctor.

With art by Harry Lindfield, the new strip was quite a faithful visual representation of the Pertwee era, with the strip adopting a far more realistic style than had been the case in *TV Comic*. Cost dictated that the rights to use UNIT, Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart and the likenesses of Katy Manning and Roger Delgado were not initially obtained; although Delgado's villain, the Master, did appear in the strip later on.

The storylines of some of the earliest *Doctor Who* strips were of very high quality, particularly the second serial, 'Timebenders'. This opened with the Doctor taking a long walk on a windswept moor to think out a problem, and accidentally falling in with a group of Germans who seem to think World War Two is still in progress. A scientist in France, in 1940, has constructed a teleportation device to transport German soldiers across the 21 miles of the English Channel, to enable Hitler's armies to invade England; but no one has realised that the device has also carried them through time to 1971.

Another excellent serial was 'The Celluloid Midas', in which the Doctor is called in to investigate a BBC film unit on location, where the actors and technicians have mysteriously been turned into plastic. The story had overtones of the contemporary 1971 *Doctor Who* TV story, 'Terror of the Autons', which featured aliens who had complete control over anything made of plastic.

Its title was an allusion to the legendary King Midas, whose touch turned everything to gold. But in this case it was a mad scientist, a Professor Midas, who had developed a form of energy that turned people into his plastic slaves. Moreover, this energy was capable of being stored on film, and of affecting anybody who viewed the film; hence the reference to a "celluloid" Midas.

As a joke, 'The Celluloid Midas' strip

The World's First UFO

By an odd quirk of publishing, *Countdown* was launched as an annual, at Christmas 1970, not as a comic. The annual was published during the preceding autumn, several months ahead of the launch of the first issue, which didn't happen until February 1971.

In terms of *UFO*, the annual was even some way ahead of the TV series itself, as the strips featured certain aspects which would be dropped from the *UFO* series before ever it appeared on television.

For instance, the annual used character names that were changed before filming began, with Skydiver's Captain Peter Carlin named in the strips as, variously, Peter Karlin and Jon Karlin; and Moonbase's Lt Gay Ellis was referred to by the character's original name of Space Tracker Paula Harris. Also, Colonel Foster was identified wrongly as Major Foster.

These errors were repeated in subsequent strips throughout the first 12 months, once the comic proper was launched.

featured characters among the petrified members of the film unit whose likenesses were based on members of the *Countdown* editorial staff, including editor Dennis Hooper. Hooper had previously been the art editor on *TV21*, and he was one part of *Countdown*'s inheritance from that source.

Dickensian Who

The following serial, 'Backtime', had the Doctor arrive in Victorian England in 1863 and fall in with a Dickensian waif who was in all material respects the Jack Wild version of the Artful Dodger, from the 1968 film *Oliver*.

A significant fact of the strip was that the Doctor had no regular companion. Unlike the TV series, in *Countdown* he picked up and discarded acquaintances as he went along.

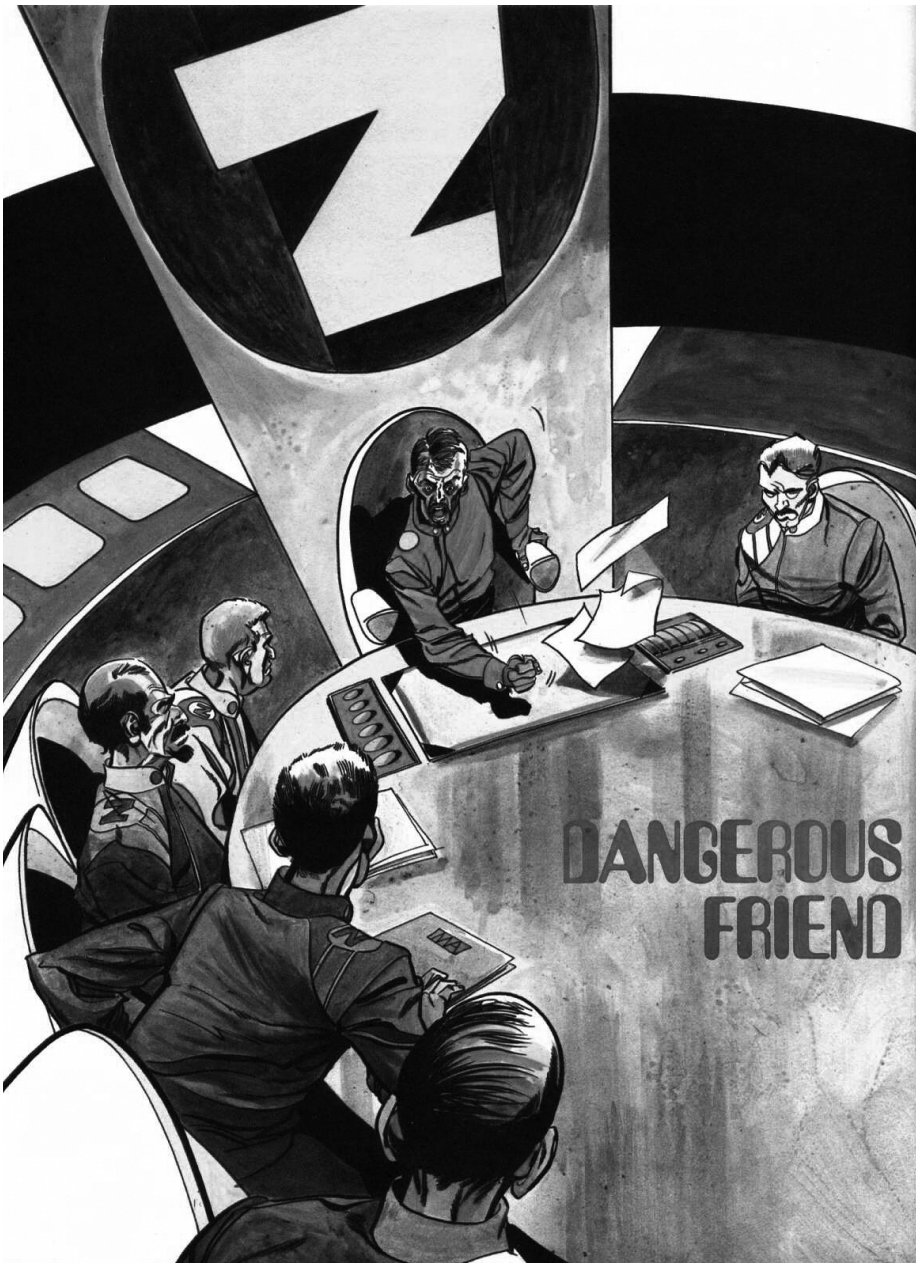
The Doctor absent-mindedly pays a cab fare in 1863 with a 1971 banknote and is arrested for passing "forged" currency. He breaks out of jail and goes on the run with the "Artful Dodger". To try to help his young friend find a new life, he takes him in the Tardis to America. But he forgets that it's 1863, and the Tardis lands them right in the middle of the American Civil War. Shades of the then-recent 1969 television serial, 'The War Games', in which the Troughton Doctor had spent several weeks trapped in the American Civil War zone!

Timeless

Another high quality storyline, "The Eternal Present", had the Doctor arriving in a place where time no longer exists. There is only the eternal present and therefore the Tardis cannot escape, as there is no longer a past or a future for it to travel to.

The Doctor finds a young Englishman called George stranded there, with a primitive time machine of his own, strangely reminiscent of the one featured in the 1960 film, *The Time Machine*. Only at the story's end do we learn that "George" is actually the novelist and inventor Herbert George Wells - who will later write up his experiences in the form of a novel!

A lengthy excursion to the planet Skaro to face the Daleks, with the Doctor assisted by a herd of prehistoric monsters, and entitled 'Planet of the Daleks', pre-dated by two years the *Doctor Who* television story of the same name. And it was partway through this story that *Countdown* was re-launched as *TV Action and Countdown*.



Ger-ry! Ger-ry!

But let's get back to when things were going much better for the title.

Polystyle were able to obtain a licence to feature Gerry Anderson shows in *Countdown*, as *TV21*, by then on its last legs, had relinquished its exclusive hold on those shows.

From its beginning, *Countdown* strongly featured *UFO*, the very latest Gerry Anderson series. For many weeks during the new comic's early months the *UFO* strip occupied the front cover. Strips

(Above) British comic veteran John Burns shows his talent in this fantastic panel from Countdown *Annual 1972 and (below)* The Persuaders *as illustrated by Harry Linfield (*Countdown *45).*





*(Above) Gerry Heylock shows his style and detail in his rendering of TV classic UFO (*Countdown *6).*



*Such a variety of strips and artwork: (Top) Dastardly & Muttley (*Countdown *6, artist unknown). (Centre): Autocat & Motormouse (*TV Action *73, artist unknown).*

based on *Captain Scarlet* and *Thunderbirds* also featured from the outset.

The *UFO* strip was drawn by Gerry Haylock, except for the very first issue, and was printed in colour. The strips were quite short, usually only two pages per issue, but looked beautiful.

Issue one's *UFO* strip introduced all the main SHADO vehicles and bases. It then leapt into a startlingly good five-part story about a journalist who blackmails a SHADO operative into giving him access to SHADO HQ in order to write a feature about the alien threat. He arrives during an emergency – just as an alien also infiltrates the base.

A follow-up strip, 'Too Old at 32', featured Captain Harris: a veteran Interceptor pilot (at the impossibly old age of 32!), whose reaction times almost lead to him failing a simulator test. Resuming duty on Moonbase, he's concerned that his slow reactions may unintentionally let a UFO through. His worst fears come true when his Interceptor suffers a mechanical failure that he's sure will be blamed on him; and the escaping UFO cripples SID, the Space Intruder Detector.

Harris's Interceptor crashes on the Moon, while pursuing a second UFO, and the injured Harris struggles across the lunar surface on foot, trying to reach Moonbase. Foster and Straker search for him in a Moonmobile, and he survives to report the presence of the other UFO. But without SID, Moonbase is an open target.

An indication of the early origins of this story is that the Moonmobiles are referred to as Moonbugs, showing that the writer was using pre-production documents for reference. The attack on SID was possibly inspired by the script (or a story outline) for the televised episode 'The Man Who Came Back', and Harris's struggle to survive on the lunar surface by the episode 'Survival'.

Boss

The story 'The New Boss' drew on many television episodes for its material. Straker's boss, General Henderson, is injured in a UFO attack and temporarily replaced by a new man, General Calper, who is secretly under alien control.

The use of mind control was also utilised in the televised episode 'The Man who Came Back'. The rendezvous at the ruins of a house that has been hit by a UFO recalls the episode 'ESP'. The scenes of Straker driving a racing car are similar to 'Timelash'.

The seven-part serial 'The Force Field' followed and for the first time there were significant departures from the TV format with a storyline based on all-out war between SHADO and the aliens. The aliens establish a forward base on Mars, and launch a massed UFO attack on the Earth. They're shown with a variety of vehicles that they didn't have on television; and SHADO Moonbase suddenly bristles with interplanetary missiles and additional Interceptors.

Whew!

Things get back pretty much to normal the following week, with 'Arctic Affair', where a dogfight over the Arctic icecap results in both an intruding UFO and Sky 1 crashing near an army communications base. The alien pilot finds he can survive even without his spacesuit in the freezing conditions – but both the alien and Captain Carlin are thrown into a cell by the suspicious army commander.

Exposed to the heated environment inside the base, the alien collapses. Carlin is forced to break them both out of the cell in order to ensure the alien's survival. But in the extreme cold on the icepack, Carlin himself can't survive for long.

A major departure from the TV series occured in 'The Snatch', where

Paul Foster is abducted by the aliens and taken to their home planet. This is in part based on the dream sequence of Foster being kidnapped by the aliens in the episode 'Ordeal' but the majority of the story, set on the alien planet, was far-fetched and completely unrelated to the TV series. It also suffered from many continuity errors, conflicting with established facts about the aliens as depicted on television.

Half way through 'The Snatch', artist Gerry Haylock left the strip, having recently taken over the 'Doctor Who' strip instead. He was replaced by Jon Davis, whose more stylised work was not well suited to 'UFO', and was a disappointment after Haylock's really beautiful art.



(Above) Gerry Heylock captures the likeness of actor Jon Pertwee and essence of Dr Who and his arch enemies the Daleks (Countdown 55).

All Change

Haylock made a brief return for two weeks in the next story, 'The Renegade', which probably utilised material commissioned from him prior to 'The Snatch', and was his final contribution to the 'UFO' strip.

Issue 38, where the first part of 'The Renegade' appeared, saw the first step in re-launching *Countdown* with a different format, as the sci-fi strips began to be sidelined. *The Persuaders,* an expensive ITC action series, had made its television debut in September 1971, and was introduced into *Countdown* with a full-colour strip drawn by Harry Lindfield.

This decision precipitated a 'musical chairs' routine, with the artists on the various strips all being reshuffled. Gerry Haylock was moved to the 'Doctor Who' strip to replace Lindfield, relinquishing 'UFO' to Jon Davis and others.

From then on 'UFO' was printed in black-and-white, a policy which lasted for the next 33 weeks, with the strip only returning to colour in issue 71. This was an obvious cost-cutting move, and suggests the comic was already experiencing those financial difficulties that would lead to a more radical re-launch four months later.

Beginning with 'The Renegade' the 'UFO' strip expanded from two to six pages each week, albeit in black-and-white. The former policy of running 'UFO' as a serial, with cliff-hanger endings each week and multi-part plots lasting six weeks, was abandoned. The new six-page format enabled a complete story to be presented in each issue but at the cost of reducing the story content by half, from twelve pages (spread over six weeks) down to just six pages all-told.

There was now no permanent writer on the strip, resulting in storylines of variable quality and causing the previously established continuity to fall apart. The more limited space for story development forced the abandonment of SHADO's secret status. Now, Mobiles were regularly tearing about the countryside in broad daylight. Yet, on some occasions, the stories had the aliens using SHADO's secret nature to claim that SHADO operatives were actually foreign agents. Inconsistencies of this type added to the strip's uneven quality.

In the SHADOs

If the writers were unclear about the format, so too were the artists. They were now being rotated, in order to produce the necessary six-pages a week. Without the restraining influence of a TV budget a much more futuristic 1980 began to be randomly depicted, with some of the new artists apparently under the misconception that *TV21* technology was part of the series.

With the final issue of 1971, number 46, cover dated December 31st, the comic was re-titled *Countdown for TV Action*, emphasising its new direction, as various action series replaced the original science fiction strips.

Countdown in effect ceased three months later at issue 58, with a further title change to *TV Action and Countdown*, and the loss of the glossy paper on which it had so far been printed – although the issue numbering from *Countdown* was retained.



(Above): Tightrope (TV Action 73, art by Stanley Houghton).

A further change of title a year later, to simply TV Action*, marked yet another relaunch, this time with an emphasis on American shows such as* Hawaii Five-0*.*

This relaunch was not a success either, however, and TV Action *merged into the much more juvenile* TV Comic *after 130 issues.* ●

Let us know what you think about British comics, Crikey!*, our features (our written ones, not our faces!) and anything else that might* Crikey! *readers.*

Um letters!

Um Crikey!

I tend to hoard rather than collect. I buy and keep comics I like but I'm not concerned if I have gaps in a run. I just have a few boxes of comics, mainly humour, stashed away in fitted wardrobes in our spare room. It keeps them safe and out of sight. It's not that my wife Jill is ashamed of them, it's just that they can look untidy.

Anyway, what I wanted to ask is this. I have several copies of the 1970s version of *Knockout*. It was launched in 1971 and featured some great characters and artwork. Not all of them were humourous. 'The Super Seven' was a great adventure strip. But anyway, was this a relaunch of the *Knockout* comic from previous years that I've seen mentions in various places?

Pete Timms

Barnsley



Pete – Knockout *was not a relaunch. It was a title that had passed over from the previous publishers (Amalgamated Press/Fleetway) in a convoluted set of deals that ended up with IPC Magazines having the rights by the early 70s.*

If you want more on that, go and check out Steve Holland's article in Crikey! *2.*

I was a big fan of Knockout for about a month. After reading four or five issues I suddenly had the feeling that I was more or less reading the same stories over and over again. So maybe just having sample copies rather than full runs is the best way to 'collect' these comics.

Um Crikey!

Perhaps I'd better introduce myself (Cue the James Bond theme). The name is Robson - Gordon Robson, and for about fifteen years I was a full-time freelance comic contributor (mainly as a letterer, but also sometimes an artist), working for companies such as IPC/Fleetway, Marvel UK and US, Redan, The Black Library and Usborne books. In fact, just about the only main British company I've not been involved with during my time is DC Thomson.

My full-time career came to an end about six or seven years ago, due mainly to the fact that there is no longer a comics industry to speak of in this country.

When I freelanced for IPC/Fleetway, for example, they had titles like *2000AD*, *The Magazine*, *Dice Man*, *Crisis*, *Revolver*, *Lawman of the Future*, *Wildcat*, *Eagle*, *Battle-Action Force*, *Tiger*, *Roy of the Rovers*, *Whizzer & Chips*, *Buster*, *Wow*, *Oink*, *Nipper* – not to mention comics libraries, summer specials and annuals.

Of course, not all these titles were published simultaneously. Some overlapped and some came in between. The point is, there was always something on the go.

So what of that lot today? *2000AD* is the only weekly comic of its kind left on the shelves (now owned by a games company called Rebellion - the comic, that is - not the shelves) and The Magazine is a half-reprint monthly publication.

As far as the comic companies go, there's no longer a 'Big Two' - in fact, there's not even a 'Big One' - as even the once-mighty DC Thomson comic empire is in decline. *The Beano* and *The Dandy* are the only surviving weeklies from their once vast stable of titles which at one time included *Topper*, *Beezer*, *Crunch*, *Spike*, *Buddy*, *Nutty*, *Plug*, *Buzz*, *Mandy*, *Judy*, *Bunty* and many, many more.

The Dandy's circulation has declined so alarmingly in recent years that it's been relaunched as a 21st century 'yoof'-style magazine, bearing little resemblance to the traditional comic-paper that you or I read as children (and in my case, I blush to admit, as an adult also).

Which brings me to my main point.

In re-lauching *The Dandy*, DC Thomson has, I believe, overlooked an important factor in the longevity of their two favourite titles - to wit: they've lasted so long because, essentially, they haven't changed too much (or, at least, any changes have been so gradual as to be imperceptible).

They remained immediately recognisable as the comics which many parents read as kids, and, out of a sense of nostalgia, parents would then purchase them for their own children until said offspring acquired the habit of buying them for themselves. Then, in the fullness of time, the cycle would begin anew.

It will be interesting to see if this will still happen to the same degree now that the comic has been forcibly mutated into a radically different product that up-and-coming-mums and dads will scarcely recognise. It now has to stand on its own merits,

without the safety net of nostalgic parents fondly 'passing the baton' to their children. This act of generational perpetuation can no longer be taken for granted. Dan must really be feeling desperate as he looks out from his new face and sees what's happening around him.

Another factor in the success of DC Thomson publications was that they were relatively inexpensive. The choice between a comic and a bar of chocolate was sometimes a major decision. But at least they were about the same price and you could afford one or the other.

Value for money? Let's make a little comparison here, just for fun.

The last issue of the old style *Dandy* comic cost 70p and had 32 pages. Of those, 25 had comic strip, but did not fill the full page on five of them, so it works out at 23 and a bit pages of strips, one puzzle page and seven pages of adverts, two of which are 'in-house'. Their was also almost a full page 'huge news inside' ad on the cover, along with the logo. Older readers will perhaps remember that this usually heralded the 'trump of doom' for their favourite title.

So, does it in this instance?

Well the new *Dandy Magazine* costs £1.20 (99p introductory price) and has 44 pages. This consists of 26 pages of strips, nine-and-a-half pages of ads (five in-house), leaving seven-and-a-half pages comprising a contents page, a two-page poster, a joke page, one-and-a-half pages of letters, two pages of introductions to the (fictitious) Dandy Staff (Office hours) and the cover.

A contents page?

In a comic? (A comic posing as a magazine, I grant you). The term 'space-filler' springs to mind, as it does in response to the Office Hours and poster pages. Give the readers some more strips to read for goodness sake, and get rid of the unnecessary stuff by cutting down to 40 pages and lowering the price.

Don't know about you, but I buy comics to read comic strips, not contents pages and 'filler' material. Do you realise, *Dandy* reader, that you're now paying 50p more per week (almost double) for just over two-and-a-half more pages of actual comic strip content?

C'mon DC Thomson, get rid of the padding and give us some substance for our shekels.

Gordon Robson,
Internet.

You've opened up a great debate, Gordon and one I would like to get Crikey! *readers involved in. What do people think about what Gordon has to say?*

I worked in British mainstream comics as a writer, editor and publisher. I was there at the start of the licensed comics revolution of the early 80s when suddenly licensed comics such as My Little Pony *and* Masters of the Universe *could sell between 80 and 85% of a print-run of around 160,000 copies. And at a higher cover price than traditional comics. What's more, they tended to be on better paper, often in colour and with more free gifts than regular titles. At a time when older readers were giving up comics in favour of magazines and games, licensed comics were seen as the saviour of the comic industry.*

For titles such as Transformers*,* Carebears *and* Disney Comic *it didn't matter where they were on sale and increasingly they were to be sold in supermarkets and other chains.*

And when barcodes and EPOS (electronic point of sale) came along it meant that comics were treated just like any other fashion item. You were only as good as last week's sale.

Supermarkets took up an increasing amount of comic sales and newsagents couldn't be bothered to keep up with the constant launch and cancellation of titles.

And Britain didn't really have a market for single character comics. Our strength was the anthology title. As a character's popularity waned, others would take their place and the comic would continue.

Now things appear to be glum for readers of adventure, humour, SF, war, crime and every other genre. So what's to be done? Albums, graphic novels and manga might be a way forward. But what do you think?

Um Crikey!

I seem to remember a comic from the 1980s called *Starblazer*. It was a pocket-sized comic (like *Commando*) and featured some on-going characters and lots of one-off stories. I'd love to know more about it.

Mark Watts,
Cardiff.

Starblazer *ran from 1979 to 1991 and was responsible for being into the business many new writers – step forward John Smith and Grant Morrison (as well as ye* Crikey! *editor). We intend to cover this seminal magazine in some detail in a future issue (see our short article on page 10 of this issue). Whilst largely ignored at the time, it has had a profound impact of the development of comics in the UK. Beginning life as a* Star Wars *inspired space opera comic it developed it's own sense of storytelling and roster of characters.*

More in a later issue.



Um Crikey!

I enjoyed *Crikey!* 2 very much. It still comes across a bit bitsy for me, through. A case in point is the football feature (Phew! What a Scorcher! – ed). Just as it gets going, it stops. Same with the war comic feature (‘*Last Man Standing’* – ed).

Can we have more substantial pieces mixed in with the shorter ones.

You’ll be pleased to see a subscription cheque enclosed, so you can tell I’ll still a happy customer.

Dave Roberts,
Liverpool.

*One of the things we went for with issues one and two was to ensure that we had a good variety of content. A bit like the anthology comics of old. Now that we have established ourselves we are including longer pieces where they need the space. To be fair, the features you mentioned were both devoted to a single title (*Scorcher *and* Victor*) and were written as overviews. But point taken.*

Crikey!

During the war children were told to empty their plate because men had died in the Atlantic in order to put food on the table. That attitude persisted in the post war period when food was still rationed and even now, despite the damage to my waistline, I can’t leave a meal unfinished.

In his wittty review of the post war years - *The Man Who Saved Britain* - Simon Winder highlights a telling passage from the first ever James Bond book. In *Casino Royale* (1953), when Ian Fleming wanted to portray 007 indulging in the height of privileged chic; he has Bond eating an avocado pear in a northern French costal resort.

“The sense of the exotic is won with a mere oily tropical fruit on the windswept Channel coast,” says Winder. An accurate portrayal of what was way out of reach for Joe Public in the years of austerity.

One side effect from the scarcity of all but basic foods was the institution of the treat. In these days of instant gratification it must be well-neigh impossible to give a child a true treat.

The Fleetway comics of the 1950s had a similar, simple view of what it meant to be given a treat. The ultimate reward for our comic chums was to be given a slap up feed. This would frequently occur at the Cafe Splendeed or the Hotel de Posh. As in *Casino Royale* there’s a bit of French to add class. On the table would be chickens, hams, and cream cakes; together with wobbly jellies and exotic fruit, with lashings of ‘champop’ in an ice bucket.

Enough food to feed a family of four for a month and still have change for the Saturday morning flicks!

With a favourite comic in his possession, the young reader didn’t have to wait for festive occasions, they could enjoy the sight of a treat almost every week: lounging by the sea front with monster knickerbocker glories.

Being rewarded with a Christmas hamper for some simple act of kindness, by an incognito millionaire.

Or out in the country with a picnic spread that must have taken a pantechnicon to transport - and no wasps, unless they were germane to the plot.

Outside the world of the treat and the slap up feed, everyday fare centred on pies and this is what the comic characters ate as well. The pies would come hot from the oven and in need of cooling. Never learning by experience, the cook would place the steaming dish by an open street front window. Whether any rogue ever stole a hot pie off a window sill in real life I somehow doubt, but it happened regularly in the comics.

To cries of, “Come back here, you pesky pie pincher!” some crafty cove with a broken nose and a five o’clock shadow, would leg it down the street with today’s dinner. The thief never got away with it, and if the pie got damaged there’d always be some reason why a rich philanthropist would want to replace it with a bigger one, or even with a slap up feed.

As well as pies, common folk in the comics are frequently seen enjoying a pile of mashed potato with sausages stuck in it or a Desperate Dan pie with a pair of horns holding up the crust.



The ultimate slap up feed was the Christmas dinner. A groaning board of Dickensian proportions was the tradition for the last frame of stories in that special edition with the snow across the title. As they raised their glasses of pop and pulled their crackers, the characters would look out of the frame and wish their readers a Merry Christmas.

Ray Aspden
Droitwich

Regular writer and Crikey! *Chum Tom Sweetman is preparing an article for a future issue on the twin topics of crime and punishment in the comics. It seems it was always a choice between a slap and a slap up meal!*

Um Crikey!

The annuals article in issue three is about the first time you have talked about prices. Is this something you want to do more of? At the moment prices are a bit hit and miss with UK comics.

David Green
Peterborough

If the writers include details of prices we will most likely leave it in. We don’t see ourselves as a price guide. You’re the first person to ask, David so I’m not sure how much of a demand there is for pricing information.

That’s it for this time round. Come back soon and see what we have in issue five. Crikey!
Ye Editor -- Brian

Crikey!

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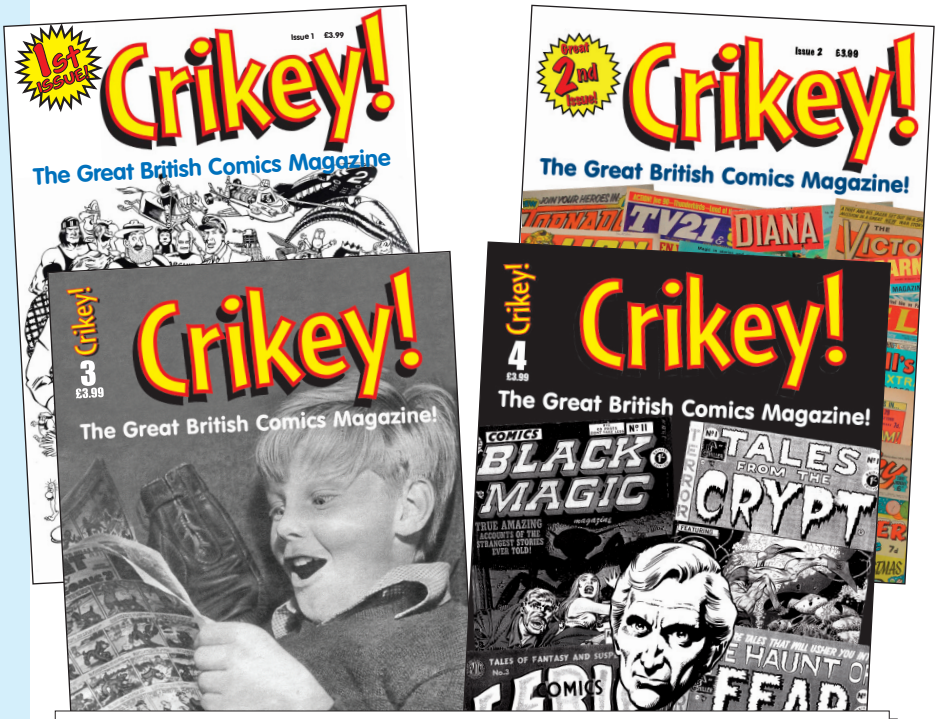



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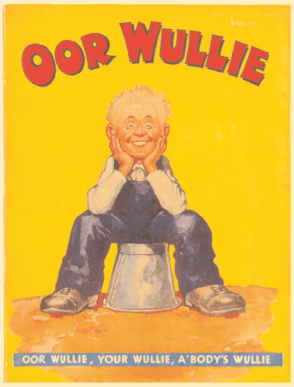



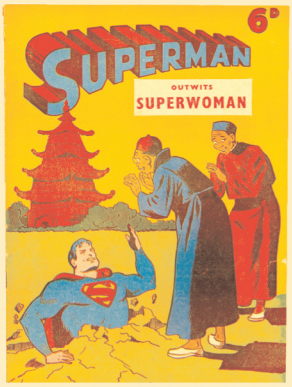







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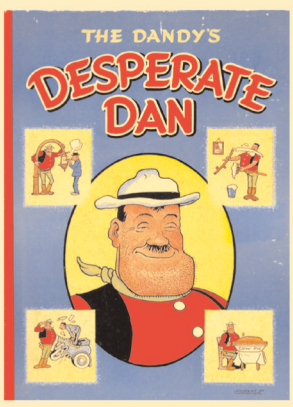





Editorial

Brian M Clarke *Editor* **Glenn B Fleming** *Designer* **Tom Sweetman** *Publicist*

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Tony Ingram's overview of Dan Dare, one of British comics most iconic heroes.

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Tony Ingram (!) takes us back to the Golden Age of comics - when we were 12.

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Tony Ingram - er, I mean, Glenn B Fleming - reflects on the most successful British war comic of all time.

Um, Letters **46-48**
Crikey! readers have their say.

Correction
Our article on Countdown in issue 4 mistakenly stated that UFO appeared in Countdown before it aired on television. This was incorrect. Our fact checker Ray Moore had informed us of the mistake but it was omitted during the editorial process.

Crikey! Chums…

Well despite a terrible battle with a bout of flu-mutating-into-a-chest-infection for ye olde editor, *Crikey!* appears to have survived the transition to bi-monthly status. The transition certainly gave the team something to do during the long winter months.

One of the slight fears I had when we talked about adding the extra two issues a year was being able to find a good variety of features and the writers who could deliver them. Well that has turned out to be the least of our concerns. There is literally not a day that goes by without a suggestion for an article or a completed feature arriving in the *Crikey!* shed. Bloomin' marvellous, it is!

One of the great things about increasing the roster of writers (besides sharing out the workload) is the diversity of voices and interests. There's nothing worse than a magazine having every article sounding the same or taking as its focus the same limited view of subject matter. With *Crikey!* we have, in just a few issues, enlarged our initial editorial policy to include annuals and newspaper strips and opened up our pages to include British comics from any period in our illustrious history.

We're also about to try our hand at themed issues.

Crikey! six (on sale July) will be a special DC Thomson issue and I'm pleased to say that we will be supported by DCT themselves in this endeavour. We have some great features planned and hope to use that issue to bring in more casual readers as we remind them of the forgotten fun factor found in British comics.

The sales for *Crikey!* continue to grow beyond expectation, with nearly a quarter of those copies on subscription. What's more, a sizeable number of our subs are from overseas and show that America, Canada, Japan, Australia, France and several Nordic countries each have an active interest in British comics. We comfortably expect our sales to climb over the summer and in consequence we are sitting down with our printer to discuss how we can convert rising sales into colour pages. Colour is the Big Target for the *Crikey!* Team and it would be one of the bestest Christmas presents for us if we could make our November issue (another themed issue – can you guess the theme?) a colourful spectacular. No promises, but you know we're doing our best.

In the meantime, find your favourite chair and spend the next hour or so with your *Crikey!* Chums.

Cheers,
Brian.

Crikey! Chum of the Month is Graham Holt

Writers this issue:
Brian M Clarke, Glenn B Fleming, Dave Huxley, Tony Ingram, Mike Morley

Fact checking::
Ray Moore.

Advertising rates:
Back cover in colour £250. Inside covers in colour £150.
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Please supply camera ready artwork on disk or PDF. Don't forget your fonts! If artwork is required, a charge will be made - please contact for details.

Note: *The closing date for booking ads for issue six is 20 June 2008.*

Crikey! is a Sequential Media publication.

Website: www.crikeyuk.co.uk

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NUTTY NOTIONS

Each issue of *Crikey!* features a selection of some of the lovingly bizarre concepts that have graced the pages of British comics in the years past. This time round *Tony Ingram* proves that he has read way too many comics in his time… *Ideas and nominations for future Nutty Notions gratefully accepted through the* Crikey! *website (*www.crikeyuk.co.uk*), click 'contact' and away you go! Enjoy!*

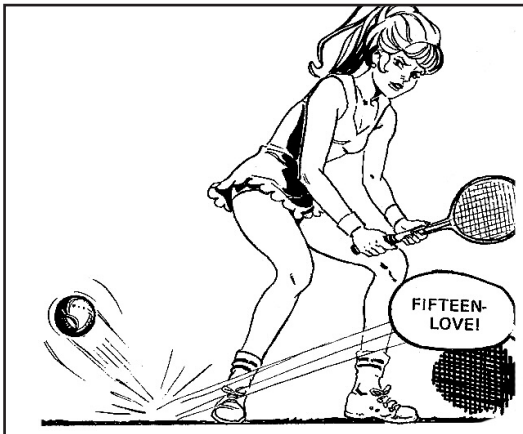


DARK DAYS FOR JO (BUT NO-ONE MUST KNOW) (TRACY, 1979. ART: XXXX)

Teenage gymnast Jo Torrance was a model of how to create a properly tragic girl's comic heroine – talented, pretty, and with a rather unfortunate tendency to unexpectedly go completely blind every so often!

The cause of Jo's recurrent bouts of blindness took a while to establish, but of course, that wasn't the important thing. The point of the strip was to show how plucky, ingenious Jo would use her wits to get through her routines without letting on to anyone that she couldn't see a thing!

Her mentor and confidant, the mysterious Wilson assisted by having her train blindfolded in a ruined barn, as you do if you want to win a national gymnastics championship. Good old Jo-an inspiration to us all or just barking mad? You decide!



JANE'S JEANNIE (LINDY, 1975.ART: XXX)

Jane Martin's life is the usual catalogue of woes, with a dead father, mother forced to work as a school caretaker, and an implacable foe in posh girl Cynthia.

Luckily, Jane has one friend – a genie named Jeannie (see what they did there?) who lives inside her tennis racquet and makes her a genius on the court.

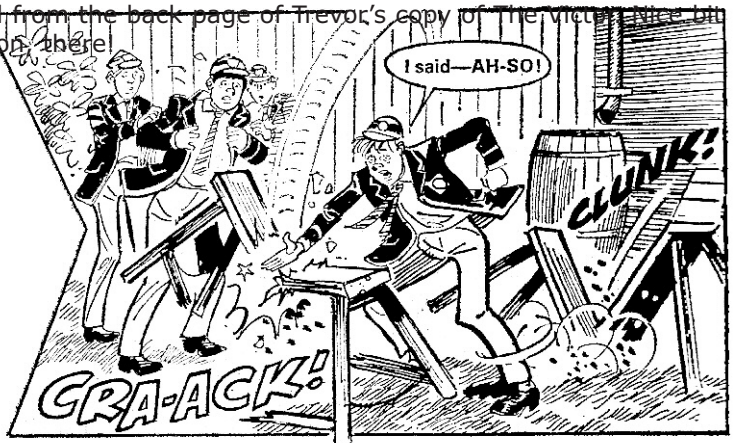
Lindy was not a long lived comic, and with stars like Jane and Jeannie, perhaps that's not so very surprising…

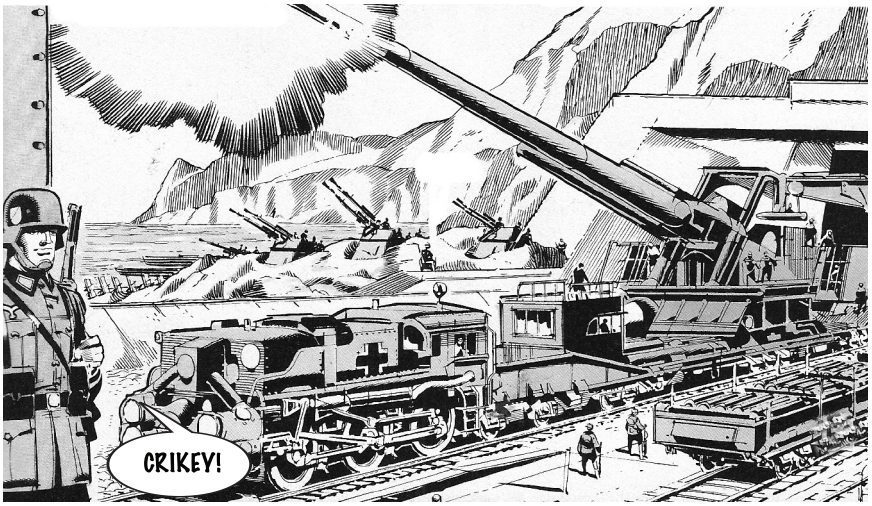
TAMMY SMARTS SCHOOLDAYS (TRACY, 1979. ART: XXXX)

Twelve year old Trevor Smart has to keep the family car repair business going while Dad's in hospital, but he's supposed to be at school. What to do? Naturally, Trev's twin sister Tammy has logical answer – she'll impersonate him at Merton Hall School for Boys until Dad is well again!

Much adventure, hilarity and potential embarrassment ensues (though rather less than would've been the case were Tammy a bit older, one suspects).

What's that? Why isn't Tammy also supposed to be at school? Anyway, an interesting strip, and I particularly like the scene where Tammy answers a history question by reeling off facts she's memorised from the back page of Trevor's copy of The Victor. Nice bit of promotion, there!





FLYING FURY (HOTSPUR, 1977. ART: RON SMITH)

Daring World War II aviators were a staple of British comics for decades, but Sergeant Fury (no relation) was a little more unusual than most. The mysterious flyboy not only led a charmed life but was able to pull off the most amazing feats and frequently turned up in the most unlikely places without explanation, just in time to save the day, even if he couldn't possibly have known it needed saving!

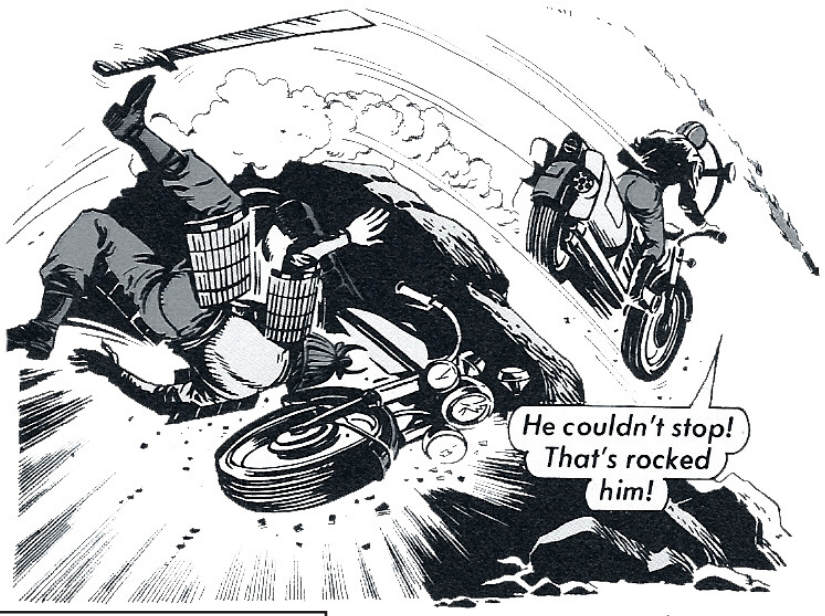
It was hinted at that that there was something unnatural about Fury's prescience, but as drawn by Ron Smith, nothing could have been more unnatural than that permanently fixed laconic expression…

X-BOW (HOTSPUR XX. ART: XXX)

Another of that peculiar breed, the British superhero. X-Bow (actually Crossbow, but it was almost invariably abbreviated) was a mysterious motorcycle daredevil who basically cruised around the country looking for trouble armed with, you guessed it, a crossbow!

X-Bow's x-bow, however, was one of those improbable gadgets only found in comics, firing a variety of tricked-up bolts in the tradition of the American Green Arrow or Hawkeye. Among his unlikely arsenal were a net bolt (which covered his opponents with a net, obviously), a lasso bolt, a grappling bolt for climbing buildings, a smoke bomb bolt, and even a "bug bolt" which planted a miniature receiver on his foes!

The most miraculous thing about X-Bow, in fact, is that he could get any of these ridiculously unbalanced things to fly straight!



BARRY & BOING (KNOCKOUT XXXXX ART: XXX)

One of the weirder aliens to infest seventies comics, apparently created by writer Scott Goodall,

Boing was a robot essentially made of springs who looked rather like the Michelin Man. He was befriended by young orphan Barry Bates, whose mission in life was to protect his springy chum from being recaptured by his cruel alien masters.

The big question that remained forever unanswered was why the aliens wanted the dopey looking Boing back!



THE HATEFUL HANDS OF HEATHER SMITH (TRACY, 1979. ART: XXX)

On a visit to an ancient castle, hapless Heather Smith fits her hands into prints left on the dungeon wall by an evil old witch who starved to death there, and from then on, Heather's hands have a hideous will of their own, making her do horrible things.

Can hopeless Heather overcome this strange affliction? Of course she can! Give her a big hand!



HARD HEARTED HARRIET (TRACY, 1979. ART: XXXX)

"Thirteen year old Harriet Bond was left to bring up her four brothers and sisters after the death of her parents in Victorian times. Soon afterwards, Harriet was stricken by an incurable illness and had only nine months to live."

Whew, some days nothing seems to go right!

Naturally, Harriet has to find new homes for her siblings to save them from the workhouse after she dies. Equally naturally, she decides to treat them all abominably from then on so that they won't be too upset when she snuffs it! And all the while, poor Harriet is crying inside. Ah. This comic's readership had an average age of twelve, y'know? Psychiatrists must have been making a fortune.





SOPHIE'S SECRET SQUEEZY (LINDY, 1975.ART: XXX)

Another unlikely tale from the pages of Lindy! This one concerned Sophie Sinclair, a seemingly normal girl who took orders from a bottle of washing up liquid.

Sophie's Squeezy bottle blew bubbles in which Sophie saw events occurring elsewhere, and from them figured out what she should be doing. The fact that Sophie's actions almost invariably helped everyone except herself was a bit of a problem, of course, but still less so than the fact that it never seemed to strike her as even slightly odd that she was being bossed around by a bottle of Fairy Liquid.

THE FAB 50's

SUPER-DUPER HEROES!

BY MIKE MORLEY

Mike Morley started collecting comics in 1952 and since then he has managed to amass one of the best collections of British black and white comics. This is the third instalment of Mike's fascinating and very personal view of those not quite golden but not yet silver-aged heroes.
Mike is the foremost expert on what has become known as the British black and white comics of the '50s. His book tracing the history of this fondly remembered but increasingly hard-to-find comics is due out soon but for now sit alongside Mike as he takes a look back at these weirdly wonderful British superhero comics…



SUPERMAN FIRST APPEARED IN TRIUMPH JUST A YEAR OR TWO AFTER HIS AMERICAN LAUNCH BUT HIS EARLY UK ADVENTURES ARE BETTER REMEMBERED FROM THE PAGES OF HIS OWN BRITISH TITLE.

Isn't it odd how certain things that seem to be everywhere as you grow up suddenly disappear! The Atlas comics, *Superman*, *Superboy*, *Batman* and *Superadventure* all seemed plentiful in the mid-1950s but, save for certain numbers which turn up with great frequency, most issues are now very hard to get hold of.

I'm lucky enough to have a British *Superman* 4 in my collection that reprints Superman's origins on the planet Krypton. I used to visit the local cinema on Saturday afternoons to watch the serial *Superman* and remember my joy at discovering issue 4 of that title and seeing my (then) hero in print, as well as on the screen.

Issue 34 contains the exciting 'Superman Vs "IT"' story and I well remember the creepy shiver that word gave to my spine – together with 'The Heap' to be found in 1/- *Airboy Comics*.

"IT" was a cigar-shaped being from another dimension. He's spinning frantically on the front cover and Superman's fist and policemen's bullets just go right through him. Those Superman reprints were somewhat taller than the usual comics of that period and were printed in Australia for distribution by London Atlas company.

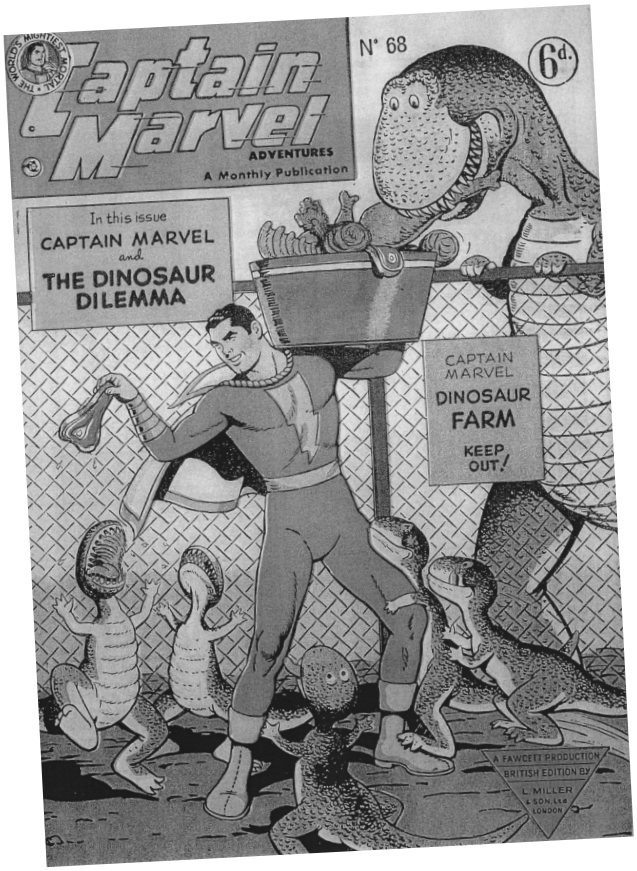
MARVEL COMICS

Previously, I've described Superman as my 'then' hero, because at that time I had not yet discovered my *real* hero – Captain Marvel.

When I did, I felt he was far more superior to Superman. Superman was, in a word, scientific. He came from Krypton and all his super-powers were explained logically and scientifically.

But Captain Marvel and Co. held that extra touch of magic.

I feel Superman is in essence a science fiction character, while the good old Marvel Family is pure





MARVELMAN/CAPTAIN MARVEL
AS MIKE POINTS OUT, THE WAY IN WHICH THE 'NEW' AND THE 'OLD' MARVELS REACTED TO POTENTIAL THREATS COULD BE VERY DIFFERENT.

fantasy. The simplicity of the linework in these comics by C.C. Beck has, in my opinion, never been equaled. Uncluttered artwork and yet vastly entertaining – Billy Batson and Co. were always in a fix. Always on the brink of yet another precipice.

In UK *Whiz* 74 'The Terrible Tourists', Billy is just about to be blown to bits but hooks his mouth-gag on the tin star of an alien sat next to him. This enables him to say, SHAZAM and change into Captain Marvel.

Whether hooked on pointed rocks, snagged lizards' teeth or trapped on the moving parts of some vast machine, Billy was always bright enough to find new ways of removing that mouth-gag.

Captain Mrvel saved the world, not once, but many times over. He dealt with such cataclysmic events as giant comets, showers of meteors, marauding space-bandits, ghouls and ghosts, flying saucers, magic spells and transdimensional aliens.

MARVELOUS FOES

Captain Marvel often fought his two arch-enemies Dr SiIvava and King Kull and in *Captain Marvel* 79 he fought them both together – and still won, in a story called 'Double Doom'.

Most of the early UK *Whiz* comics also contained another character whose exploits were heavily steeped in fantasy – Ibis the Invincible and his magic Ibistick. 'Ibis and Holocaust God of Destruction' in *Whiz* 79 shows Holocaust, a triple-headed monster, one head breathes fire, one a grinning skull, with the third being a hairy caveman's face.

After escaping, this massive giant is eventually re-bound in chains by Ibis who has the presence of mind to command that 'every link of the magic chain be as strong as the strongest link'.

A nice ending to the story is that Ibis and Taia, on their walk home, buy a newspaper from Freddie Freeman alias Captain Marvel Jr.

THREE-PART DISHARMONY

The Marvel Family stories were often in three episodes with a cliffhanger at the end of the first two parts.

Will the Marvel Family save the Rock of Eternity? (M.F. 76 'The Capture of the Universe').

Will they escape being crushed by the giant Crust-Cracker? (M.F. 81 'Marvel Family Battles the Crust-Cracker'). The Crust-Cracker was actually King Kull, the hairy old beastman – always for me a far more scarey villain than old Silvana.

Those three-parters were brilliant and we held our breath, quickly skimming through the couple of pages of cartoons separating each chapter to find out just how that incredible family had escaped yet again. It never failed and never palled. For me it is a tragedy as big as the demise of E.C. Comics that Superman won his court case and banished Captain Marvel and Co. to the land of 'has-beens'.

After all these years my pleasure in those grand comics is as intense as it ever was. Captain Marvel battling against King Kull as he is about to dissolve the whole world in 'The Liquid Horror' (C.M. 74) made geography and history lessons at junior school seem rather insignificant in comparison.

I think perhaps at that early age these stories brought home to us just how lucky we were; that our world could end, that the Beastman could be just around the



IMAGINE MIKE MORLEY'S EXCITEMENT WHEN HE CAME ACROSS THIS ADVERT FOR HIS FAVOURITE CHARACTERS IN COLOUR! THEY MAY HAVE COST 2/6 BUT FOR THOUSANDS OF BRITISH KIDS IT WAS MONEY WELL SPENT (OR NAGGED FOR).

corner and Dr Silvana could shrink us, or worse, wipe us all out. These tales of the imminent end of the world elevated our everyday existence to the stature of a small miracle.

HAPPY MEMORIES

Even coverless *Captain Marvel* comics were treasured. One coverless issue I had as a child was *Captain Marvel* 81 (I now have a copy with a cover). The lead story was 'Captain Marvel Battles the Space Aggressor' where, due to some cosmic misunderstanding, alien survivors thought we humans had destroyed their home planet. They sent a huge spaceship with an atomic flamer on the front to wipe us all out. The sight of this "mile wide swathe of destruction searing the face of the earth and roaring toward a city" in frame 5, page 2, will remain with me forever.

The themes in *Captain Marvel* and associated comics were nearly always cosmic in scope and rarely mundane. 'The Surrealist Imp' (CM 8) showed us the world anew as a surreal version of 'our' reality.

Captain Marvel's good and evil aspects are personified in 'Captain Marvel Fights His Own Conscience' (CM11). All these stories enlarged our views of what was possible and encouraged our collective creative imaginations.

WORD POWER

Captain Marvel Jnr. 66 shows Jnr. beating a big drum carried by bent-backed and sweating Silvana Jnr. with the words 100th issue on the side of the drum. This gives some indication of the complexities involved in the English reprints numbering system. As you can guess, our issue 66 was, in fact, a reprint of the American coloured original 100.

One of my all-time favourite Captain Marvel Jnr. stories is to be found in issue 72 – 'Captain Marvel Jnr. and the Ark From Space'. This exciting tale concerns a doomed planet far off in space that explodes – but not before two of its inhabitants escape with all kinds of strange creatures in an enormous wooden-looking Space Ark.

The aliens really looked alien and had strange-sounding names – Gizizki was one – whilst their home planet of origin was called Smorxx. You can imagine how refreshing it was to one who had only been reading the printed word for a few years to see that lovely double X and to try and get his tongue round those foreign sounding names!

More gobbledygook was to be found in 'Captain Marvel Battles the Unknown Danger' (CM 69). A small town hidden in the mountains, with streets of solid gold, contains survivors of the ice age and their 25,000 year old language has such words as 'neeb donga', 'Zodex wexxa', 'Kalla', 'ordo, ordo', 'zak' and 'zetna'. Delightful!

Captain Marvel Jnr. also had his difficulties with language in 'The World of Babel' (CM Jnr. 74). Silvana Jnr. makes a machine that transforms all communication into babel and consequently Freddy Freeman has great difficulty saying his magic words – Captain Marvel. They initially came out as Captlin Mardol, Claiptin Marjak, Calpitain Mardil and the wonderful Capshun Mariddle. Being a true hero, he manages to get his words right in the end.

The evil King Kull expanded the moon that caused dangerous freak tides to swell in 'Captain Marvel Meets the Ancient Villain' (CM 71). I remember looking rather apprehensively up at the moon on quite a few summer evenings after I read that one.

MORAL UNIVERSE

Like the best heroic fiction should, these marvelous stories ended on a happy note of optimism, usually with some sort of moral, either overtly stated or implied. Consequently, I grew up in a world where I was constantly reminded that 'People are wonderful', 'People need understanding and sympathy' and that 'Good usually triumphs over evil'.

I am lucky to have both the *Captain Marvel* and *Captain Marvel Jnr*. spiral bound annuals in my collection. In my imagination, the intervening years had swelled these two publications to gigantic proportions but when I eventually re-obtained them, much to my surprise, they were little bigger than the normal sized comic.

They were printed on thicker paper in vivid glowing colours, bound spirally with wire and cost a whopping 2/6d each. The Captain Marvel annual treated readers to such imaginative stories as 'Captain Marvel Fights

Silvana's Capsule Kingdom (another lovely 'shrink' yarn) and 'Mr Tawny's Bouncing Shoes'. Brilliant stuff – and it didn't stop there. Turn the pages and you found 'Captain Marvel and the Lost Island of Ice', quickly followed by the bonkers 'Captain Marvel and the Space Dragon'.

The *Captain Marvel Jnr.* annual had the highly visual 'The Acrobat's Death Trap', followed by the magical 'The Unlucky Buddah' and 'Captain Marvel Jnr. and the Magic Beanstalk'. Rounding out the issue was 'Captain Marvel Jnr. and the Flying Men' – it might not sound exciting but to my young eyes it was mesmerising.

The cover illustration showed Cap Jnr. apparently flying at us from out of a hole ripped in the cover – an eye-catching image that made up want to pick up the comic and dash home immediately!

The *Captain Marvel* cover was also a dramatic and unmissable scene to my young eyes as the mighty Mortal lifts a skyscraper to divulge a (very shrunken) Silvana.

Great times, indeed.



THE SUPER-POWERED FAMILY THAT SOARS THROUGH SPACE TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER!

BRITISH MARVELS

With the demise of *Captain Marvel* comics in America, Miller Comics came up with English substitutes in the characters of Marvelman and Young Marvelman. Each had their own comic, as did Marvelman Family where Marvelman and Young Marvelman were joined by Kid Marvelman. Although they tried hard with these titles, they never managed to capture the magic of the Big Red Cheese.

Some of the stories were actually re-drawn Captain Marvel episodes! *Young Marvelman* 40's 'The Wonder Car', is very reminiscent of C.M.Jnr. 72's 'Crime Chariot' with Professor Bob Boffin replacing Professor Edgewise.

Furthermore, some of the *Marvelman* strips were later re-drawn with the figure of Captain Miracle substituted and new dialogue added for several issues of Captain Miracle comics.

Marvelman and Young *Marvelman* both started at issue 25, taking over from C.M. 24 and C.M.Jnr. 24. *Marvelman Family*, however, started from issue 1 as there was no prior weekly *Marvelman Family* 1-23.

The early issues of *Marvelman* and *Young Marvelman* were the best for me as the accent still lay heavily on space and fantasy. Some notable stories were 'The Super Heat Wave' (MM 33), 'The Indian Rope Trick' (MM 36) and 'Marvelman and the Fishmen'. There was also the rather surreal story 'Marvelman and the Artist's Imagination' from issue 41 that really got to me. Even the more frivolous stories such as 'Marvelman and the Ugliasaurus' (MM 46) left a delightful feeling well after the comic put down – even if it was very similar to Captain Marvel 68's 'Captain Marvel and the Dinosaur Dilemma'.

The dinosaurs in the *Captain Marvel* issue were quite charming and the story told of Captain Marvel's successful efforts at relocating them back in time in to One Million BC and one felt rather sympathetic to the 'monster'.

In the revamped version, however, the dinosaurs are no longer quite so charming. They are re-christened uglisaurus and after Marvelman finds them a new home in the first four pages, the story goes on to develop into a 'goodies and baddies' saga with the uglisaurus being used by aliens to conquer earth.

It is interesting to compare the covers – Captain Marvel is feeding his dinosaurs on meat and veg and everyone is smiling happily. Marvelman, however, is punching his uglisaurus and people flee in terror. On reflection Captain Marvel did seem more benign than his English counterpart. What vast differences in attitude those few intervening years made.

WONDERFUL YEARS

I hope you have enjoyed my trip back to the Fifties and my necessarily brief look at the SF, horror and superhero titles I read and enjoyed.

They are wonderful publications that will repay with hours of pleasure anyone who searches them out today. I hope I have given you a flavour of what's out there – if you do decide to hunt them down, you'll be richly rewarded.

If you have any comments or questions about my mini-series of articles please get in touch. Send your letters to Brian at Crikey! and he'll pass them on.

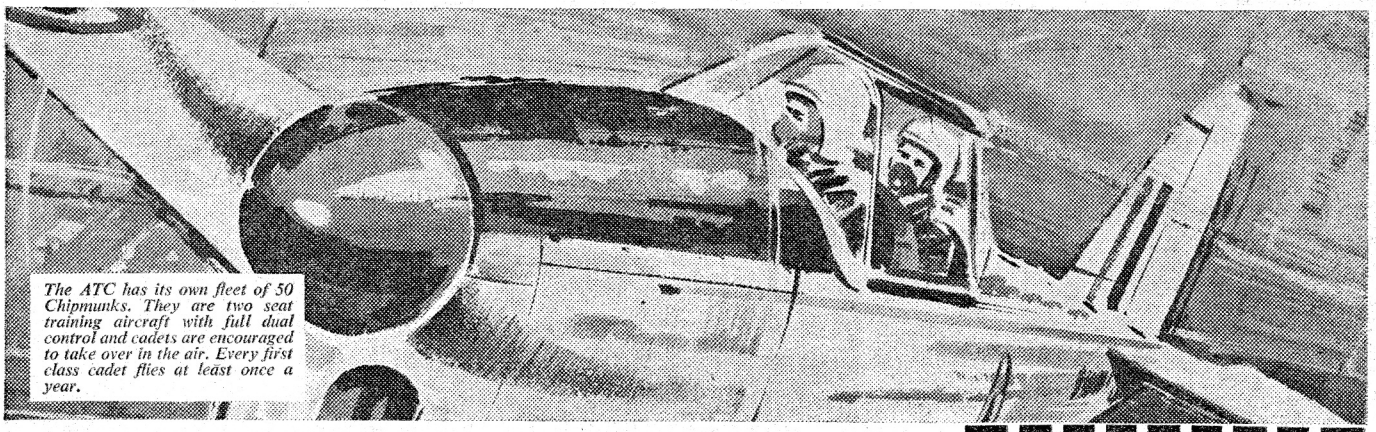
Thank you for reading. *Mike*. ●

HERE'S A FINE FUNSET...!!



THEY'VE ALL GOT THEIR SPARKY ANNUAL! HAVE YOU?

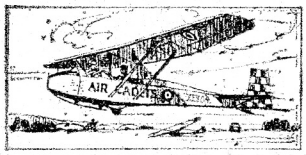
Remember ads like these?!



The ATC has its own fleet of 50 Chipmunks. They are two seat training aircraft with full dual control and cadets are encouraged to take over in the air. Every first class cadet flies at least once a year.

13-17? You could be an Air Cadet

Join the Air Training Corps and you've got a hobby that's really worth having. Here are a few of the things you can do.



Get your wings as a glider pilot. The ATC has 160 gliders, in 27 different gliding schools.

Learn about flying. You could even get a flying Scholarship of 30 hours flying training (including 10 hours solo) with a Civil Flying School.

Learn to shoot — .22 as well as .303. There is a Cadets' Bisley every year.



Travel and meet people. 1300 cadets visit the R.A.F. abroad each year. Cadets may also visit 18 foreign countries under the international air cadet exchange scheme.

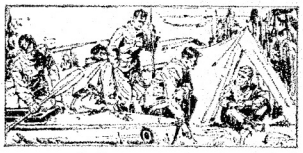
Make new friends by the dozen! The Air Training Corps is a voluntary youth movement whose programme is specially arranged so as not to interfere with school activities. There are Squadrons all over the country—more than 850 in all.

Prepare for your career. If you decide to join the R.A.F., it is an advantage to have been in the A.T.C. If you want a civilian career, most employers recognise the practical value of Air Cadet training.

Learn about engines, radio, radar, parachutes, dinghies, aircraft recognition—dozens of other things.

Visit R.A.F. Stations on annual camp.

Sport, from climbing to canoeing, from football to fencing—you name it.



Send now for this leaflet



To Wing Commander
G. K. A. Hollett, R.A.F.,
Headquarters Air Cadets
(694WV1),
Royal Air Force,
Brampton, Hunts.

Please send me your leaflet.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

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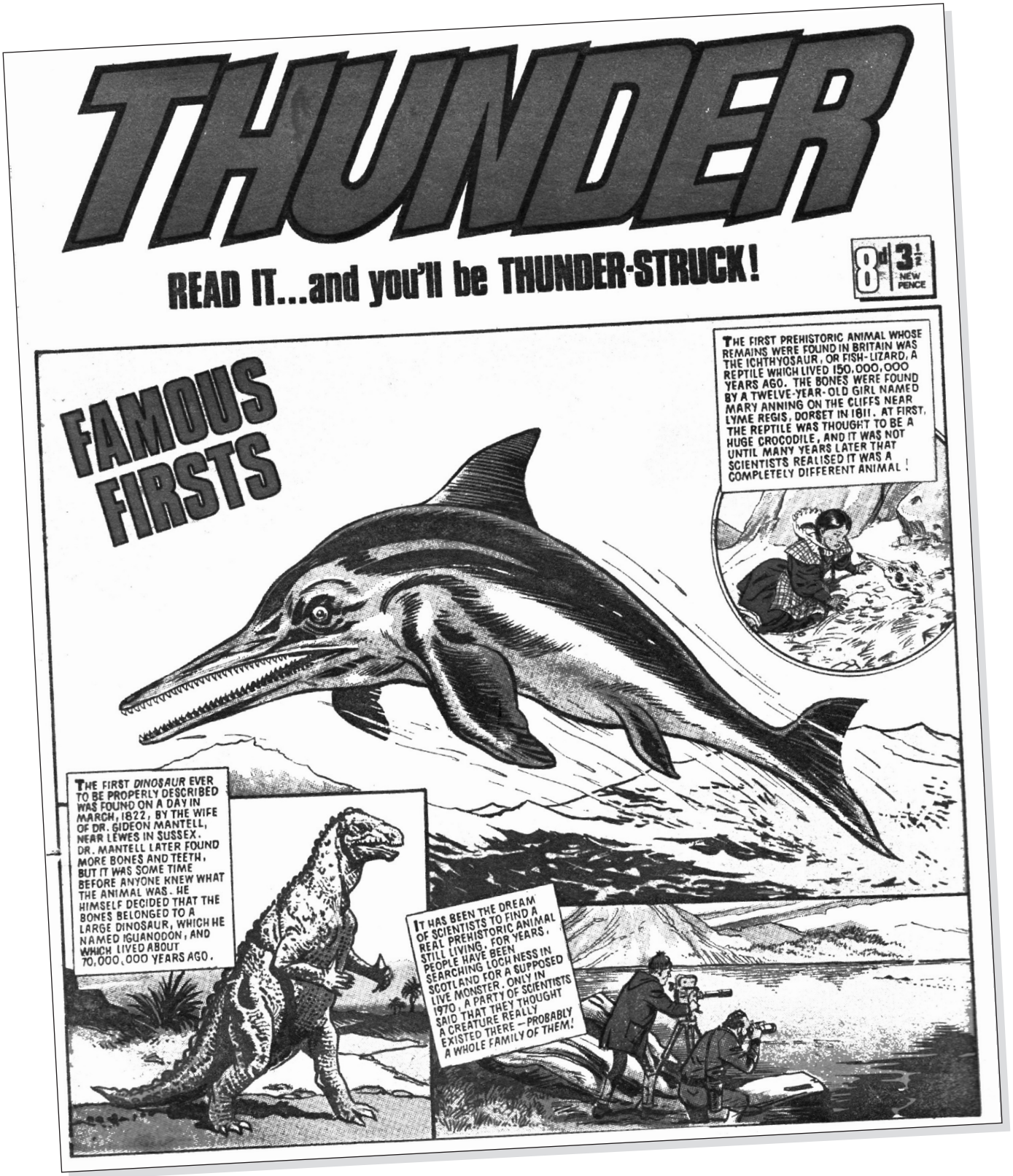
DATE OF BIRTH .....

LET'S LOOK AT...



IPC's under-rated action and humour title lasted for a disappointingly short 22 issues. During that time, however, it gave the comic world at least one classic character – Adam Eterno *(see* Crikey! *3)* – *and a couple of outstanding action stories.*

Thunder *was launched 17 October 1970 and merged with* Lion Comic *20 March 1971.*

The first issue came with a free 'Amazing Jumping Kangaroo' (Ozzie, from the strip 'Fury's Family' awaiting readers inside. The cover carried the boast – or was it a warning – 'READ IT…and you'll be THUNDER-STRUCK'. Although primarily a black and white comic, it did have red, blue and green (yes, green!) pages to add to the visual appeal. It even managed a four-colour centre spread.

After three issues of self-promotion on the covers it settled down to a regular feature – Famous Firsts. Not exactly the most exciting title but besides Thunder Wonder there probably wasn't much more to choose from.



Black Max
Artist – Eric Bradbury, Alfonso Font
At first sight this could be just another First World War strip, this time taking its inspiration from The Blue Max.

That wouldn't be *Thunder* material.

The wonderfully weird Back Max tells the story of Baron Maximillian von Klorr and his giant killer-bat, trained to tear British planes from the sky.

Brilliant action featuring one of Britain's best comic-strip villains.



Adam Eterno
Artist – Tom Kerr, Colin Page, Solano Lopez
The character who perhaps did more than any other to lift the reputation of *Thunder*.

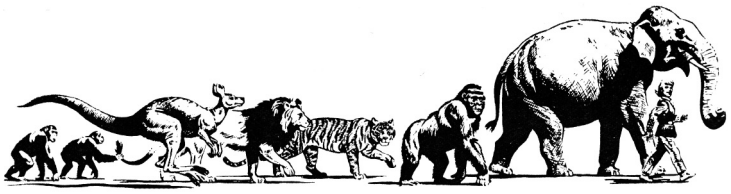
After quaffing a mystical potion back in the 16th century, Eterno is cursed with ever-lasting life. Only a blow from a weapon made of solid gold could end his eternal wandering.

To add to his troubles, Adam could find himself dematerialising and rematerialising throughout time in 'any century, any location'.



Cliff Hanger
Artist – Eric Bradbury plus unknown
The improbably named adventurer Captain Cliff(ord) Hanger and his 'blade-throwing Gurkha pal, Kukri' roam the world in search of thrills and rewards. The stories raced along as frenetically as the opening ten minutes of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

A nice bonus for readers was the challenge thrown out to them part way through the story to solve the way in which Cliff would escape from a trap or dangerous position. Quirky but nice.



Fury's Family
Artist – Denis McLoughlin
Fury is a teenage lad who works in a circus. Well he used to – after deciding that the circus was too cruel to man and beast he took himself and the animals away.

So with lion, gorilla, kanagaroo (remember the free gift) and other assorted animals Fury sets out on his own to live life in a hidden valley.

Although Fury could speak to all animals in their own language, he did have trouble with English and constantly referred to himself in the third person.



Dusty Binns
Artist – Geoff Champion
A light-hearted football story about young goal-keeper Dusty trying to make it big in the football world despite his background as a rag-and-bone man's son.

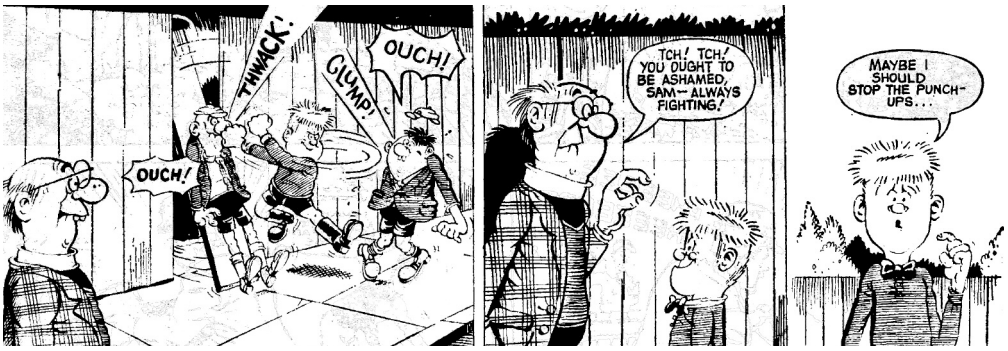
The football often took a backseat to the personal problems that beset Dusty as he tried to keep both sides of his life on the level.



Phil the Fluter
Artist – Mike Western, Mario Capaldi, Tom Kerr
Phil Taylor found a strange flute and soon discovered an eerie effect whenever he blew a note. Anyone and anything within the sound of flute became rooted to the spot – and remembered nothing thereafter.

It wasn't exactly *The Magic Boomerang* but was as good as.

Being a comic strip it could be difficult to show the reader when the flute's power was in effect and this was overcome in a neat way. As Phil occupied the colour section, anyone under the influence of the strange sound was drawn in black and white. The effect of coloured Phil in a back and white panel was terrific and really captured the reader's' eye.



Sam
Artist – Leo Baxendale
Another one-page strip from the time when seeing a bully smash soppy kids in the face was the height of hilarity.

This was a re-titled reprint of 'Biff' from *Wham! comic*.



Jet-Skaters
Artist – Geoff Jones, Ted Kearon
When Andy Jackson received four pairs of jet-powered skates from his American uncle they immediately formed themselves into the Jet-Skaters gang.

No matter how much the creative team tried, it was hard to pretend the strip was anything more than The Q-Bikes meets Enid Blyton.

Still, it had its moments.



Steel Commando
Artist – Mario Capaldi, Jack Pamby, Alex Henderson, Ted Kearon, Charles Roylance
The premise for the story may be wacky – world's first robot soldier is given to the laziest man in the British army – but it led to some wonderfully chaotic adventures.

Ernie 'Excused Boots' Bates developed a close bond with 'Ironsides' as they took on the might of the German army.

'Steel Commando' was one of those strips that managed to create the right balance of dangerous mission and improbable solution.



The Terrible Trail to Tolmec
Artist – Massimo Belardinelli, Feb '71 Alex Henderson
Superb boys' own adventure yarn that follows the progress of young Tom Taylor as he joins an expedition to the lost city of Tolmec.

Full to the brim with jungle adventure, giant creatures, back-stabbing helpers and a deepening mystery, this was definitely one of the best strips of its type.



Gauntlet of Fate
Artist – Felix Carrion
Another terrific strip with a great set-up – whoever wears the ancient gauntlet of Judge Flint is compelled to use its strange powers to bring to justice anyone who is outside the law.

What raised the strip ahead of similar ideas was the fact that the gauntlet could take possession of an innocent or guilty person and compel them to do its bidding. The end of each story left the gauntlet discarded, waiting for the next person to put it on…

Thunder *was a better-than-most comic and is well worth picking up if you find a few copies at the next car boot or comic fair. Our brief* Let's Look At… *is intended to give you a good feel for the title. If you like what you see, well, happy hunting!*

BRIAN M CLARKE ●

WHEREFORE WERE THOU, ROMEO?

BY TONY INGRAM

Girls' comics have gone through a lot of changes over the years, from the innocent horses and hockey sticks obsessed boarding school antics of Bunty *to the firmly teen orientated titles of the eighties. But even by the standards of 1957,* Romeo *was perhaps just a tiny bit dated, which is a little bit surprising given that its target audience was very definitely the older teenage miss, a breed then changing fast.*
Nonetheless, DC Thomson's now near-forgotten but surprisingly long running (887 issues from 1957 to 1974) romance title was popular. So, just why did the girls love Romeo*?*



On the face of it, the comic has little to recommend it. On first glance it appears to be just another girls comic of the late fifties, albeit a rather soppy one judging by the covers.

Early issues had a banner proudly proclaiming 'exciting love stories' or some variation thereof, above the title, along with the first half page (in colour, of course) of a story continued inside, typically entitled 'Romance with a Stranger', 'Love Me Always', often in offensively curly script which probably caused much derision from the unfortunate purchaser's younger brothers.

SNAPSHOT

Step inside, and things arguably get even worse but look a little closer, and you see a fascinating snapshot of a time when the attitudes of young women were changing, and sedentary old DC Thomson were trying very hard, in their own confused way, to change with them!

The stories were the usual mix of one-off and continuing serials, though unlike some of Thomson's other titles, *Romeo* heavily favoured the former.

Generally speaking, these short stories follow a single, simple formula with seemingly infinite variations: girl meets boy, girl loses boy, girl gets boy (or an even better boy). Or girl meets boy, girl decides he is not the boy for her due to a combination of an unfortunate misunderstanding and her own foolish and muddle-headed female thinking, girl gets boy back. More often than not, girl marries boy.

In the early issues, at least, the

'heroine' is usually attractive. Even poor, scarred Linda Moore in issue 6's 'Three Times He Sent Her Red Roses' is gorgeous despite her supposed facial disfigurement, which prompts shallow Craig to dump her since he 'cannot have a wife whose appearance would embarrass others'. Luckily, artist Vernon sees past the single black line drawn on her cheek to the beauty inside.

Attractive they be, but generally they remained ineffectual.

SILLY GIRLS

Attempts are made on occasion to have the girls assert themselves, but more often than not they are portrayed as rather silly, prone to going into hysterics at the drop of a hat, and really just desperately in need of a good slap. (It was the 1950s.)

ROMEO COMIC TAUGHT MANY A YOUNG LADY HOW TO BEHAVE IN POLITE SOCIETY





Even in the more adventure orientated serials (such as 'The Innocents in Paris', in which hapless tourist Sally is kidnapped by criminals who think she is a rich heiress) the role of the female lead is usually to be the victim, rescued by the square jawed hunk. Although the writers were not credited, it seems safe to assume that they were men, for the most part. What is curious is that the female readership seemed quite happy with the results of their efforts!

The comic was initially padded out with features apparently intended to educate

or 'improve' the readership, though some of these now seem not only dated but, in the case of a one-page feature on corsets through the ages, quite alarming. The picture of a grinning girl being spanked over the knee of an irate husband, her posterior protected by her corsetry, would now be more at home in a shrink wrapped specialist magazine than a comic, I suspect!

NAKED TIME

Then again, some of the strips feature implied or partial nudity, too-often used for comedic effect, as when Roman slave girl Rose and her lover, Rufus, go skinny dipping and have their clothes stolen by bandits.

At a time when such topics were taboo in boys comics, it appears the readership of Romeo were considered sophisticated

BEAUTY AND SEXUALITY WERE COMMON THEMES IN THE PAGES OF ROMEO





enough to deal with it! Or maybe the editors believed their readership's average age to be rather higher than it actually was.

THE SIXTIES

As the comic moved into the Sixties (absorbing *Cherie* along the way), the overall tone began to change. The heroines of the strips, while still not exactly Modesty Blaise, became rather more independent.

There were also a couple of continuing characters such as the accident prone but sassy Juliette, travelling the world with her long suffering tutor Hector, or the always on the make 'Three Girls in a Flat'. These types of stories became the focus of funny and sometimes even action-packed tales without the need for a strong male lead (Juliette's Hector was anything but).

Amazingly, the editors even seem to have woken up to the idea that not every story needed to include romance – unthinkable in the early editions!



EDUKASION

The educational features also began to fall by the wayside, replaced by more reader interactive material such as Ann Landers' problem page.

It was quite surprising in the subject matter it tackled and the uncompromising nature of the replies. When young Sandra writes that she likes a local boy but after 18 months still cannot pluck up the courage to say hello, Ann's curt response is to tell her that if she can't even do that, she doesn't deserve any help!

And when 'Homebound' confides that her sailor boyfriend is about to go to sea for two years and wants her to wait for him, the pragmatic Ann tells her to date other boys while he's away since it's foolish to sit around waiting.

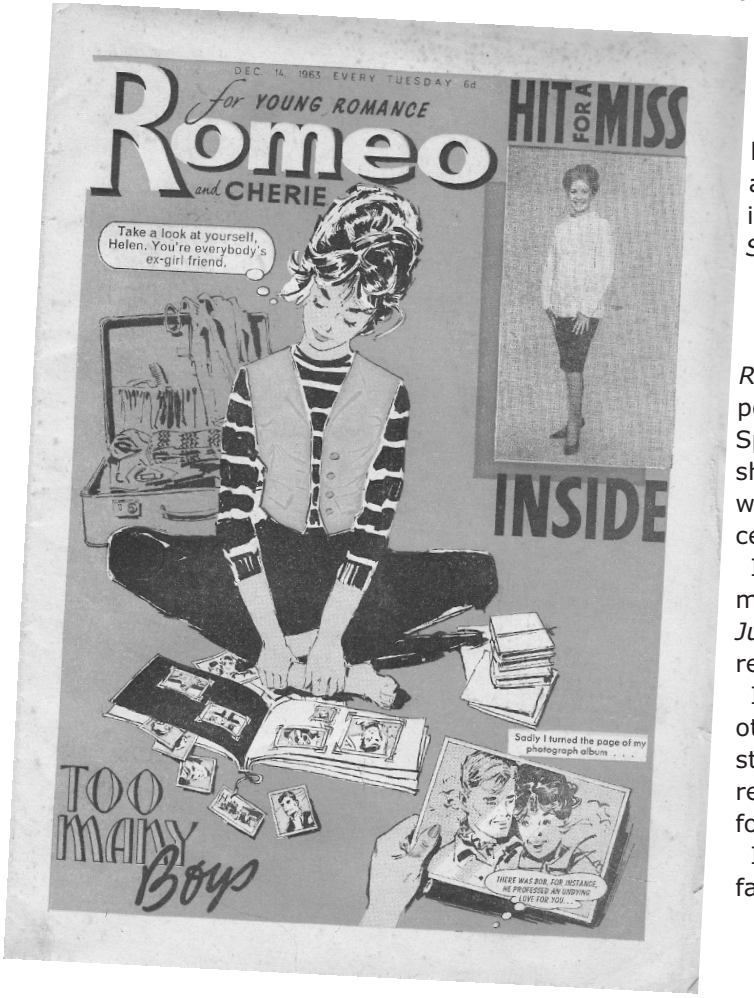
She is not, however, above doling out more traditional advice where needed; when chess playing Pat complains that her boyfriend can't handle her being a better player, she is advised to make deliberate mistakes to keep him happy.

On the whole, the problem-stricken young ladies were probably better off with the back page's 'Caroline, QC', who tackled a single problem each week in the style of Crown Court.

At eighteen (allegedly) the bewigged Caroline at least seemed more on their wavelength. Her advice to 15 year old typist Sally, worried about looking silly if she doesn't drink at the firm's Christmas party, is that she's underage but if she must drink, cider is the way to go if she doesn't want to 'be wheeled home in a barrow'.

Nonetheless, Ann was clearly the readers first choice; by May 1965, she had not only a two page column, but also a one page strip dramatisation of the week's most interesting problem – rather like a prototype for The *Sun*'s 'Dear Deirdre' photo stories!





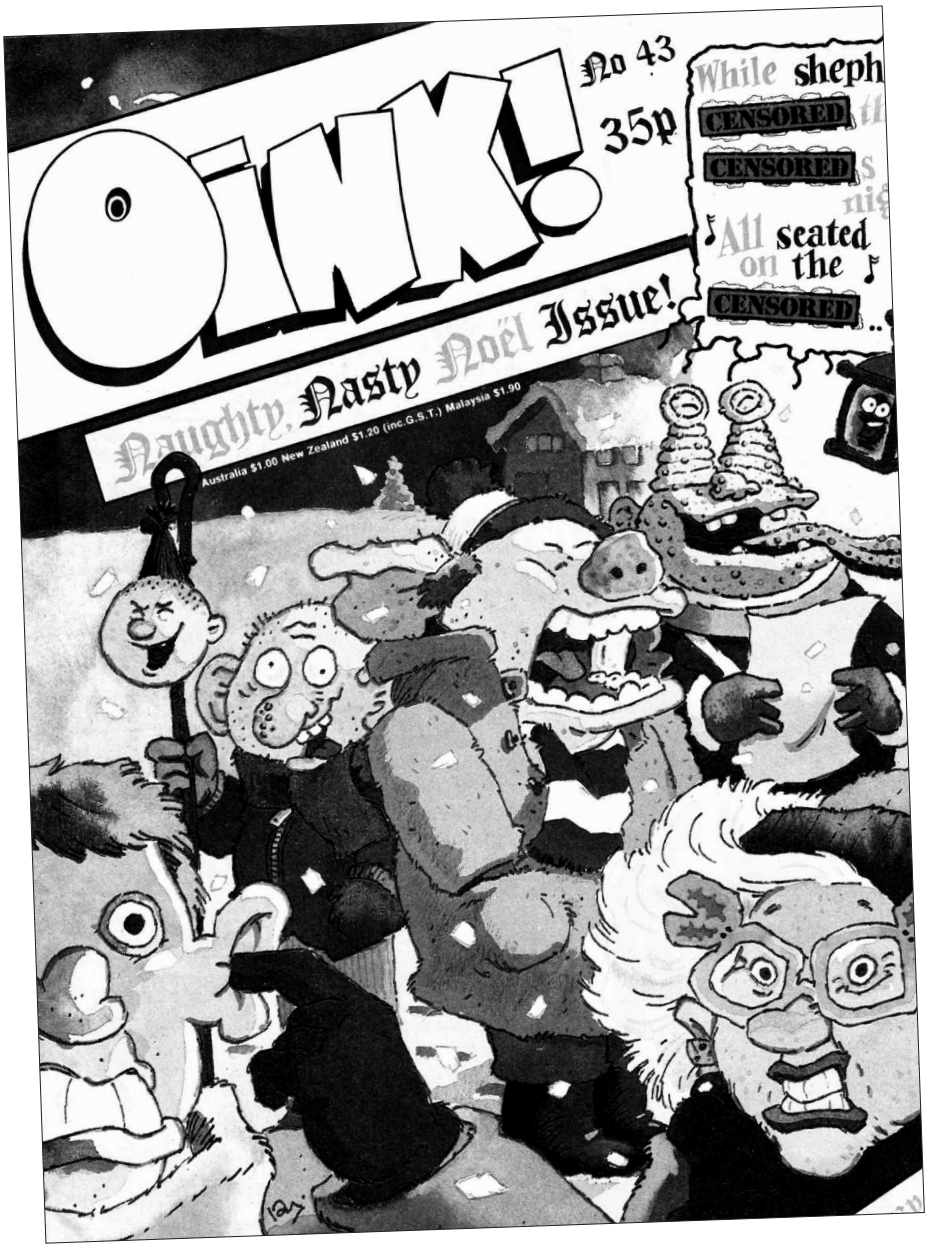
STAR-CROSSED

Like later, trendier titles such as the legendary *Jackie*, *Romeo* covered pop culture, too, with features on then popular stars such as the Moody Blues and Dusty Springfield. Dusty was interviewed by Allan Allyn when she responded to a less than flattering article he'd written on her: obviously, Romeo had at least one celebrity reader.

It's worth noting that later Thomson titles tended in the main to shy away from such things but then, *Mandy*, *Judy* and the rest were clearly aimed at a younger readership.

In many ways, *Romeo* was slightly ahead of its time, in others a curiously dated affair. It's a strange mix of styles, not quite one thing or the other. But for whatever reason, this strangely successful, now undeservedly forgotten comic had more than its fair share of fans.

It seems that in every generation, there are old fashioned girls who want a Romeo. ●



(ABOVE) NO CLUES ON THE COVER BUT INSIDE IS TO BE FOUND THE FRIGHTFUL 'HAMFORMERS'

TALES FROM THE PIGPEN : WORKING (BRIEFLY) FOR

BY DAVE HUXLEY

OINK!

Sometime in July 1987 I sent some artwork to Oink!*, a comparatively new comic my sons had been reading. Up to this point I had toiled away at money-losing 'alternative' comics since 1977 and nearly moved into mainstream comics (nearly having an agent – twice – nearly working for British war comics, nearly working for French dirty, sorry, erotic comics , working (briefly) for* Ally Sloper *and* Backstreet Heroes *– the outlaw biker magazine from Altrincham).*

In *Oink!* I saw the possibility of perhaps making some money from my obsession with comics. I had my interest in them reawakened by a mature student friend of mine, Jess Hand, when we were studying Fine Art in 1970. I'd rushed home and dug out some old copies of the *Eagle*, *TV Express* and *Buffalo Bill Annuals*, and realised that what I had thought as a kid – that they were really good – was right all along. What finally clinched it was that my tutors loathed comics and their bastard off-shoot, Pop Art. After I just about got my degree I didn't pick up a paintbrush for many years, but instead doodled away at my largely unsaleable comics.

Oink!, I thought, might just be a mainstream comic that could be interested in some of my work. It was advertised as being for readers 'from eight to eighty' and seemed to bring a little of the irreverence (although obviously not the language) of *Viz* to a younger audience.

First published in 1986, it was the

brainchild of *Private Eye/Punch* artist Tony Husband and writers Mark Rogers and Patrick Gallagher. It was published by Fleetway in London (although the creative team was based in Manchester).

This may have helped to give the comic an individual character, as alongside *Viz*-like characters like Tom Thug, Horace (Ugly Face) Watkins and Billy Bang there were columns by eccentric Manchester comedy legend Frank Sidebottom. Combined with the drawing talents of artists like Banx, Haldane and Tony Husband, who had worked in various satirical magazines and overseen by 'editor' Uncle Pigg, this gave the comic a distinctive feel that was unlike anything in the kids' market at the time. I particularly enjoyed the parodies in the comic, such as 'Ham Dare' and the annoying busybody 'Mary Lighthouse', characters clearly aimed at the more mature readers of the comic who might remember Dan Dare or realise who censorship campaigner Mary Whitehouse was. Little did I realise at the time that it would be this latter character that would help to bring about the premature demise of the comic. But more of that later.

Shortly after I sent my unsolicited artwork I had a phone call from Tony Husband saying that they wanted to use it. He probably thought my reaction was blasé, but in fact I was just stunned. So in *Oink!* no.36 there was my artwork, appearing as a full colour poster in the centre of the comic, for ironically, after all my problems with 'art', I had produced a painting rather than a strip. Given that *Oink!* was obsessed with pigs and pig puns I had painted the Mona Lisa with a stupid grinning pig face. It may have lacked Leonardo's chiaroscuro and the ensuing enigmatic smile, but I think I'd managed to sort out the problem he'd had with the landscape in the background. I tried painting trotters in but reverted to putting human hands at the bottom of the pictures, so you ended up with a portrait of a grinning pig in a dress with human hands. The boys at *Oink!*, as was there wont, had added some puns, calling the picture 'Mona Lisow', by 'Leonardo de Pigci'. Encouraged by this I sent off some more ideas. Some were rejected but 'Hamformers' (my pun, I'm afraid), which was based on my struggles with my sons' Transformer toys, made it into issue 43. It also gave me the chance to put Alan and

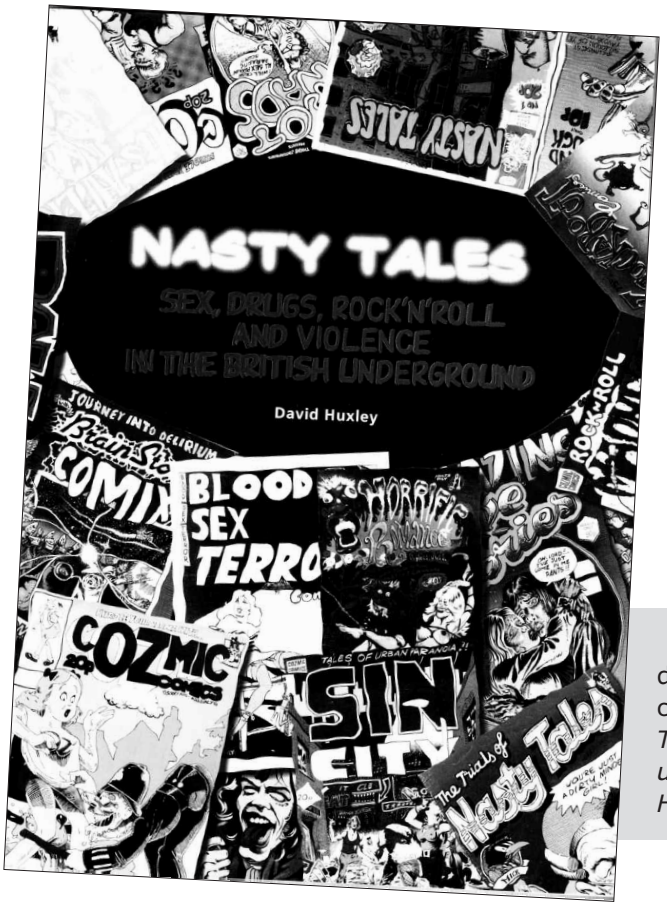




(ABOVE, RIGHT): HORACE (UGLY FACE) WATKINS – OINK! 43.
(RIGHT): WALLY OF THE WEST; HARRY THE HEAD; ZOOTOWN; BILLY BANG – OINK! 55



(ABOVE) TOM JOHNSON DESTROYS OINK!! (SORT OF).



John into the strip, looking suitably impressed by the complicated £64000 nuclear powered toys. In reality they both seemed rather unimpressed by their appearance in a nationally (indeed internationally) distributed comic. After another poster ('The Statue of Piggery'-geddit?) I had some more ideas in the pipeline including more famous portraits as pigs (I think I was hoping to make a career out of historical pig parodies) and James Pong, the smelly pig secret agent, but by 1988 the comic was defunct.

The seeds of the comic's demise had been sown as early as issue no.7. A one page strip from that issue 'Janice and John and the parachute jump' was reported to the Press Council as being 'an attack on family values'. In fact the strip, by Tom Johnson, was a parody of the impossibly nice 1930s story strips and educational books which presented a twee, idealised vision of childhood and family life. The twist here is that a mother has tampered with her husband's parachute, causing him to injure himself and their children (who he lands on) so that she can have an easy life watching television while they are in hospital. Called to London to defend the comic the *Oink!* crew discovered that the mother who had reported the comic was a member of Mary Whitehouse's pro-censorship organisation. Added to that, her son, who she apparently feared was being corrupted by the comic, was fifteen years old. It looked as though making fun of Mary was coming back to haunt them. The Press Council ruled that although the comic was in bad taste, it was not guilty of the charge. However the fallout from the case destroyed the comic. Conservative retailers like W H Smith moved what was still a mainstream kids' comic to the top shelf alongside *Viz*, which led to a fatal decline in sales.

Oink! helped me through a minor financial crisis (for a poster you got paid as writer and artist for two pages) so that's one reason that I look back on it with some affection. Examining issues of the comic now it remains very impressive – lively, unpredictable and consistently funny, particularly when it is at its strangest. Unfortunately, however, *Oink!* is finally another missed opportunity in British comics – an innovative comic ultimately destroyed by vindictive people representing the most reactionary side of the British character. ●

Note: To put the story of *Oink!* in context, and to discover the sad story of British 'alternative' comics you can do no better than to consult Dave's book *Nasty Tales: sex drugs, rock n roll and violence in the British underground (shown left)* Critical Vision*, an imprint of Headpress.*

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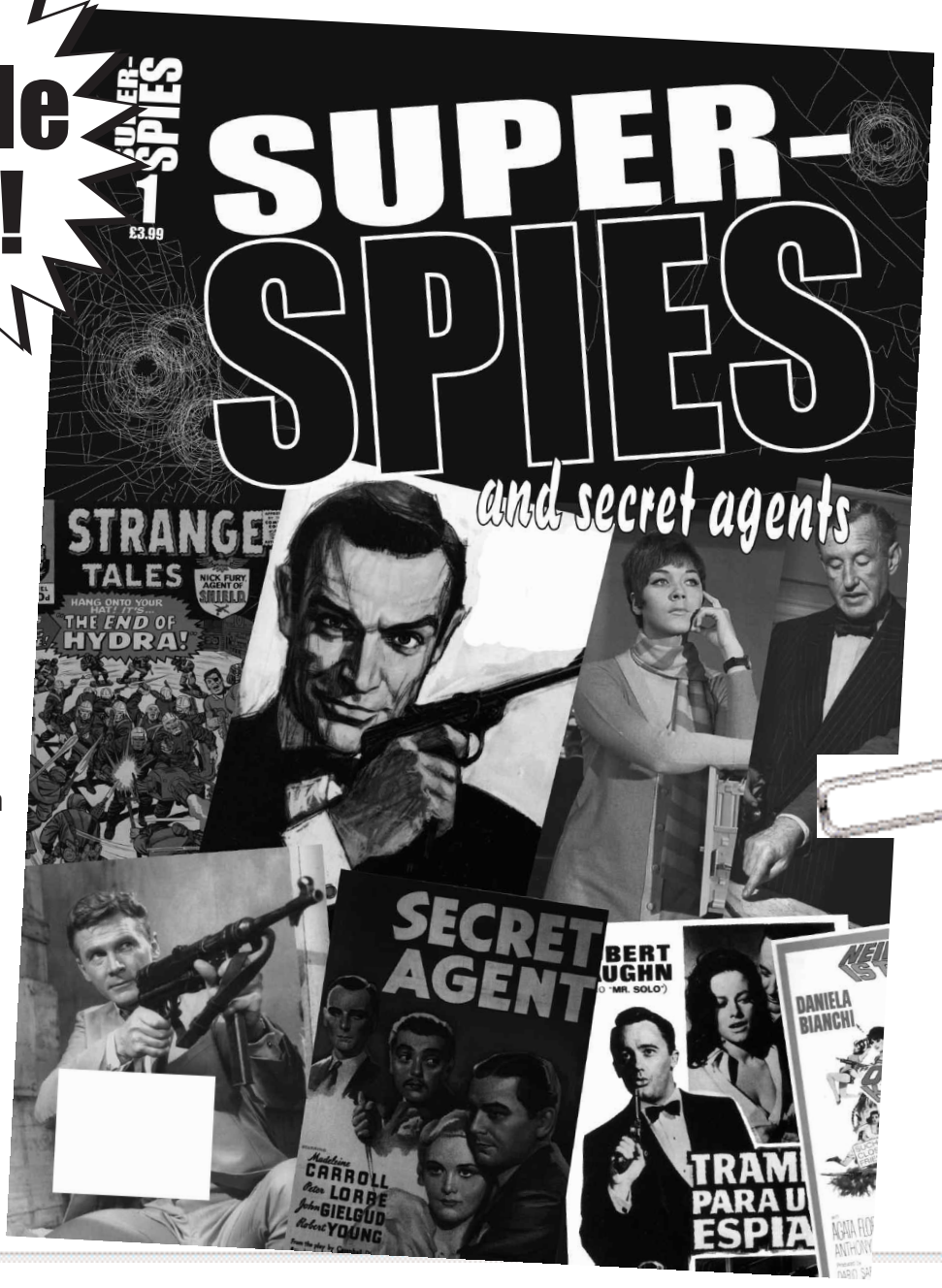

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Each issue of *Crikey!* highlights the career and work of a major British comic artist. This time Glenn B Fleming takes a personal look at the detailed character work of...

FRANK HA



The story of Frank Hampson begins and ends like many an other artist and writer throughout history - with triumph falling toward tragedy, covered with bitterness born of lost opportunity.

As with Don Lawrence, Frank Hampson was largely ignored by the British public for decades. Indeed, in an uncanny parallel with Lawrence, it was Hampson's Continental audience who showered upon him the many accolades his work deserved, culminating in 1975 when he won the 'Yellow Kid Award' at the bi-annual Comic Convention in Lucca, Italy.

STRAIGHT-TALKING

Frank Hampson had a simple approach to his work; that in comic strips the dialogue should be easily understood and the illustration be clear and precise.

Hampson applied these storytelling aspects to all his work and certainly to his greatest creation: Dan Dare Pilot of the Future. To say that Dare was innovative would be an understatement; nothing like it had appeared in the somewhat staid British comics before and its impact was as instantaneous as it was noticeable.

Even though he was the consummate artist, Hampson would never let a good drawing get in the way of telling the story. He didn't want his audience to dwell on the strip before it had been read - go back and look, yes, see the illustrations, composition and perspective, yes, but read the story first.

Hampson himself always maintained that the drawings should enable the reader to glide through the story effortlessly, not hinder them.

ART HISTORY

Frank Hampson was born to Robert and Elsie on 21 December 1918, in Audenshaw, Manchester. His family moved to the seaside town of Southport three months after his

AMPSON



birth and Southport became his hometown. He had a younger brother (killed in the Second World War) and a sister. He went to King George V Grammar School when he was eleven and got his first regular commission drawing sketches aged 13 working for *Meccano Magazine*. He enrolled full-time with the Victoria College of Arts & Science in the spring of 1938.

The following year, another one-time struggling artist called Adolf Hitler sparked the Second World War and the Royal Army Service Corps conscripted Hampson where he was later commissioned, reaching the rank of Lieutenant.

He married his wife Dorothy in 1944. At the end of the war and now almost 28, with a family imminent, Frank worked freelance although work was scarce.

CHRISTIAN

A few years later Marcus Morris, a local vicar in Southport, was looking for an artist to illustrate a magazine he was editing called *Anvil*.

Morris' intention was for his publication to be more than just a parish magazine; he had ambitions to make it a national monthly Christian magazine. In early 1949, worried about the lack of morally positive reading material for young children, Morris wrote an article in the *Sunday Dispatch* about how American horror comics were corrupting Britain's youth (see *Crikey!* 1).

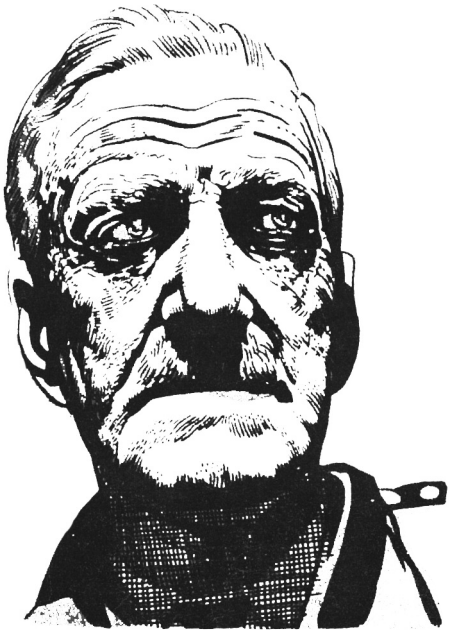
Morris contacted Frank and they began planning a strip entitled *Lex Christian*, a fictional chaplain based in the East End of London. Morris had all but sold the strip to the *Sunday Empire News* when tragedy struck as the editor Terence Horsley was killed in a gliding accident.

The deal fell through and Frank again found himself adrift.

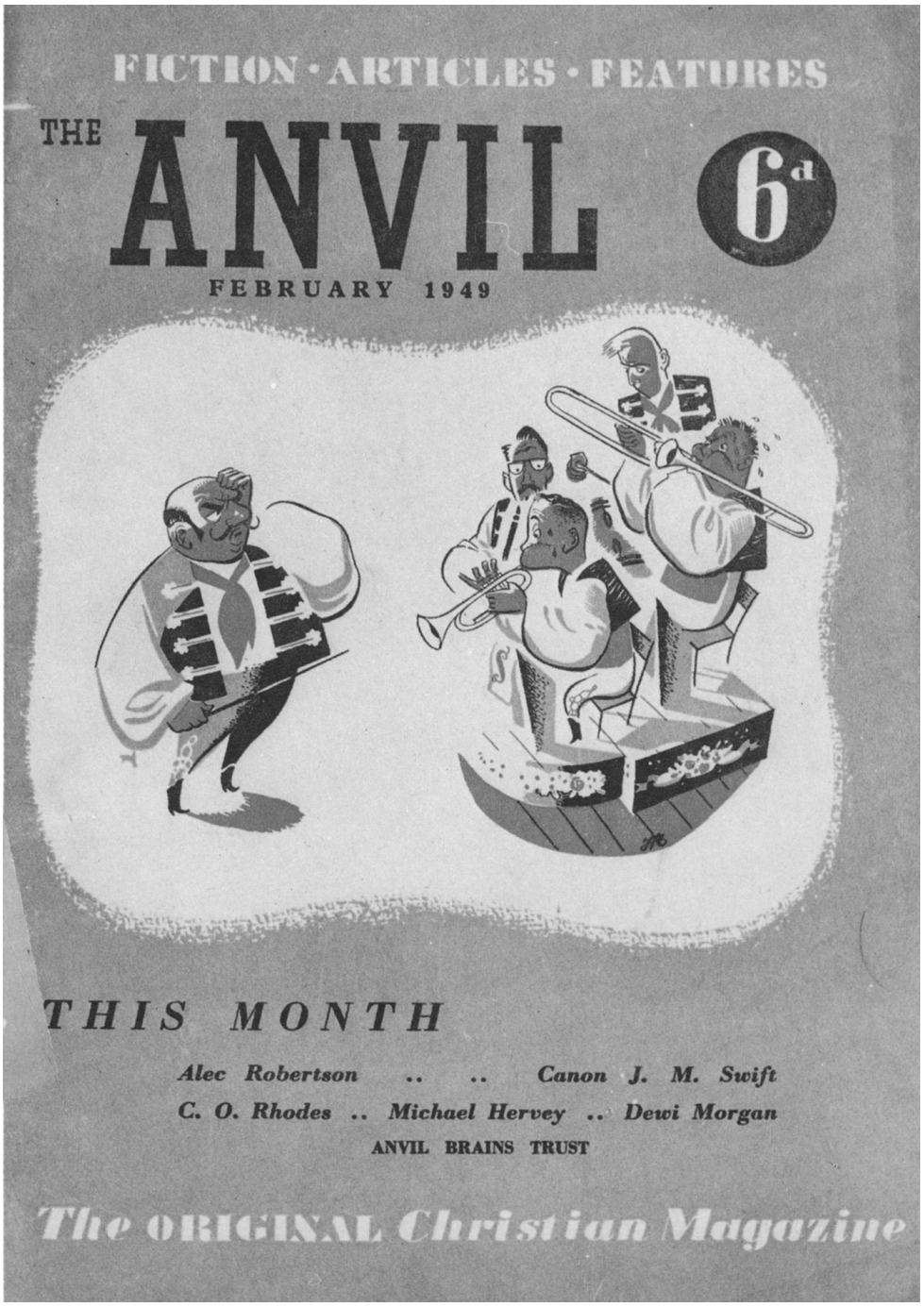
EAGLE HAS LANDED

Frank was now even more pressed financially, and was tempted to go freelance in London - which would have broken the link with Marcus Morris. Marcus decided to employ Frank on a full time basis and over the next few months Frank's dream began to take shape.

Unleashed and brimming with ideas, Hampson single-handedly









(ABOVE) THE ANVIL : WHERE IT ALL BEGAN.
(TOP, LEFT) ROBERT HAMPSON, FATHER OF FRANK, DOUBLES AS DAN'S COMMANDING OFFICER: SIR HUBERT GUEST.
(LEFT) THE MEKON.
(BELOW, LEFT) HAMPSON'S GREATEST CREATION: DAN DARE.

created a new strip: the characters, plots, stories and illustrations were prepared solely by him. Dan Dare was born. All the group needed now was a title for the new comic and that came from Frank's wife Dorothy who had the last-minute idea of calling the comic *The Eagle*.

Morris, bowled over by Frank's vision, hawked the samples around Fleet Street, eventually finding a publisher at Hulton Press. On 14 April 1950, the first issue of *Eagle* hit the newsstands and Dan Dare was launched upon an unsuspecting audience. The comic's success was undoubted and for the first time Frank could begin to feel creatively fulfilled; he was being well paid, felt valued and his artistic frustrations were gone. *The Eagle* was truly flying.

DEADLINES

This initial surge of success, however, was to be short lived as problems arose within the first few weeks.

Eagle was published every week and therefore needed a rate of supply that Frank could simply not maintain. The strain of producing

fine artwork and high standard stories to killer deadlines began to tell on Hampson.

Frank himself had set a policy that no artist was to do more than one page of artwork a week – although Frank had sometimes been producing five pages of Dan Dare plus contributing to other strips.

Frank drafted in other artists to work under his direction - Harold Johns, an old school friend was an obvious choice and Eric Eden, an expert at airbrushing was also brought into the fold. Other artists were hired: Joan Porter, Jocelyn Thomas, Greta Tomlinson, Bruce Cornwell and Tommy Walls. The deadlines, however, remained relentless.

In the summer of 1950 the team worked in an old bakehouse in Southport, trying to keep ahead of the work. Hampson was meticulous with detail and would spend any amount of time working on his art. The passing of long hours meant nothing and he expected his staff to have the same stamina and dedication. That said, this band of artists, with Frank's vision fixed to the forefront of their minds, shared his passion and the workload. But the strain began to tell; on Frank more than anyone.





SICK OF IT

Throughout 1951 Frank was unwell and unable to produce any artwork for long periods. During 1952 he was forced to take several breaks on the insistence of his doctor, again restricting his output.

The consequences were that he had to leave the writing and drawing of the Dare adventure 'Marooned on Mercury' to Harold Johns. Johns was competent enough, but he wasn't Hampson. Johns filled in again at the end of 'Operation Saturn' a year later. It wasn't a situation Frank was happy with but he knew it was the only practical solution.

To further drive a divide between Frank's



way of work and the way *Eagle* was developing, the team moved from Southport to a studio in Epsom, Surrey.

GUEST ARTIST

To enable Hampson to illustrate the characters as accurately as possible, members of the studio would pose for photographic reference. The photos would be used to create the scenes Frank had in mind. Robert Hampson, Frank's father, was one of the studio models and was used as the direct facial model for the character of Dare's commanding officer Sir Hubert Guest.

From 1955 to 1959, the studio set up was in full swing, producing what is recognised by most fans as Dan Dare at his best. At any one time there may have been up to ten people working on two pages of Dan Dare artwork - an expensive, but effective, way of working.

CHANGES

The times were changing and within a few months the whole feel of working and and reading *Eagle* would be different.

Hulton Press were bought out by Longacre. Morris ceased acting as editor of the *Eagle* and moved on. Clifford Makins, the new editor found Frank difficult to work with. The studio system was threatened.

Frank had produced only two pages of art in the past several months and, not surprisngly, Longacre were not happy with this arrangement. As their relationship deteriorated, Longacre eventually terminated his contract. Frank Hampson formally left *Eagle* on 1 May 1962, losing all rights to any stories, characters and artwork he had produced in the previous decade - including his rights to Dan Dare. Frank was never to work on Dare again, the strip falling into the more than capable hands of Frank Bellamy (see *Crikey!* 1).

PHENOMENON

Hampson had been caught between opposing publishing forces: Odhams/Longacre Press had bought out Fulton and, in an obvious move to save money, decided that Hampson's meticulous and expensive approach to drawing the strip using models should be halted.

Despite these obstacles, Hampson retained his integrity (and, it must be said, his arrogance) and carried out his duties and contractual agreements though he was becoming increasingly ostracised by editors at Longacre. His plan was simple: he would pay for the studio and models out of his own money. Longacre in turn seized new strips Hampson was creating for them and locked them in its vaults. No-one would see them for almost three decades; Hampson never would. Longacre itself was bought out by the Daily Mirror Group in 1961.

After nine glorious years working for Fulton Press on the best produced strip to ever appear in boys' comics up to that date, it was over. Dedicated to the point of obsession, Hampson, battered and bruised from his experiences in producing the strip planned to take a year off in an effort to overcome his disillusionment, not to mention the need for a long, belated holiday.

Hampson was exhausted and, apart from his failing health, the stories themselves were losing their sparkle and innovation. Perhaps 'Dan Dare' was all but dead, perhaps it was time for both creator and character to move on. Hampson's rest took him to Israel and, unable to rest completely and against the advice of his doctor, Hampson began his research on a strip he'd had in his head for a while: 'The Road to Courage', a story about the life of Jesus Christ.

'The Road to Courage' was timed to end at Easter 1961.



(ABOVE) LADY PENELOPE GETS THE THE FRANK HAMPSON TREATMENT! (LADY PENELOPE COMIC) (FAR LEFT) MORE STUNNING PAGES FROM THE EAGLE

END PAPERS

Ask most people who know of Frank Hampson and they will say that he was another victim of corporate greed. That he was robbed of the accolades which should rightfully have been his. That he had been thrown onto the scrap heap when Longacre, blinded to his genius, no longer knew what to do with him.

Of course, it may be that Hampson himself was responsible for his own downfall. Working so hard on his creation during the early years that his health was permanently damaged; unable to restrain himself from a self imposed workload and that he seemingly didn't make any effort to keep his copyrights, remaining graciously and gratefully employed on a 'work for hire' contract.

Whatever the case, Hampson's resentment to his publishers was only matched by the dizzy heights that Dan Dare achieved. Things were so bad at one stage that Hampson even attempted suicide. After fighting cancer in his later life, a stroke claimed him in 1985.

Incredibly, Hampson's star shone barely ten years, but his impact is still felt throughout the comics medium to this very day.



FRANK HAMPSON



By special request, I'm casting my mind back to the rosy days when comics were king and used to sell in their hundreds of thousands. When kids loved reading as opposed to staring at television screens and, nowadays, being transfixed by moving images on computers.

I joined Amalgamated Press in 1957, direct form RAF National Service, and started my 'apprenticeship' in the business by doing the menial office tasks, which included making the tea.

The first rung of the ladder was on *School Friend*, the first girls' picture-weekly to top a million copies an issue. There were five editorial staff to produce the 28 pages, and that didn't include anyone on the art side.

It was a happy, fruitful period, during which I learned all the basics and, eventually, I was fortunate enough to become editor as those above me either retired or moved on. However, in early 1963, as the all-purpose comics' editor policy began to be implemented, I was moved to the boys' department under managing editor Jack le Grand, and attached to *Valiant* and editor Sid Bicknell, who had just taken over after the *Knockout* merger.



THE Crikey! CHAT GIL PAGE REFLECTIONS OF A COMICS EDITOR

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO GORDON ROBSON WHO PUT IT ALL TOGETHER.



I always remember seeing - a revolutionary move at the time - this free bar of Sharp's toffee as a cover-mounted gift. It can't have been the sole reason of course, but I know that the re-vamped title took off in a big way.

Apart from running reprint picture libraries, my responsibility was producing Captain Hurricane scripts. Great Days!

It was not until the end of 1968, early '69, that the old *Smash* from Odhams was brought into Fleetway and I was asked to edit a relaunched version at very short notice. In all honesty, if my memory serves me correctly, the majority of the stories were actually 'given' to me. Because of time constraints and, no doubt, budgetary reasons, we re-used some Fleetway material and committed what was really a cardinal sin - changed the titles of the stories and the names of the characters! As if eagle-eyed readers couldn't spot them.

All I had to do was put the whole thing together by deadline time.

In those great comic times, something was always being worked on at Fleetway, just in case the powers-that-be had to combat something produced by our great Dundee rival DC Thomson.That buzz word today, 'marketing', was literally unknown. If they launched a title we immediately combated it with one of our own, or vice versa.

As managing editor under Leonard Matthews, Jack le Grand

(renowned for his ex-glider pilot's colourful language) always seemed to be involved, using the considerable creative talents of Ken Mennell. Ken was a superb new story ideas man and I think he was responsible for finding and nurturing script writer Tom Tully, who wold eventually become the foremost contributor of those days.

Together with the outstanding artistic talents of Solano Lopez and his studio in Bueos Aires, and other quality artists like Mike Western, Eric Bradbury and Geoff Champion, some wonderful dummies were put together. A great many of them never saw the light of day, for a variety of reasons and were eventually broken up and their contents dispersed among existing titles.

In this case, the new *Smash* was the fortunate recipient of some classic strips from a then controversial 'horror' title named *Blackjack*, which was never launched.

To this day I can remember that each story from that dummy that went into another title shot straight to the top of the readers' popularity polls that we used to run. How successful could *Blackjack* have been if it had appeared in its own right?

Apart from it being the age of the gimmick, the style of the comics in the '60s was to take a real-life character from the past as a role model and exaggerate him. Hence 'Janus Stark' was based on escape king Harry Houdini, and 'Master of the Marsh' on Hereward the Wake. They were both lead stories in *Smash* after being given the Tully/Lopez treatment and both were immensely popular.

What else can I remember of the *Smash* of over thirty years ago? Certainly I used to write the 'Famous Fighters' cover feature for *Valiant* which Geoff Champion drew. Now we rehashed that for *Smash* as 'Warriors of the World', a quasi-educational informative approach.

Steve Holland lists most of the new *Smash* stories in his index of Power Comics, but as editor I can enlarge on some of them.

'Bunsen's Burner', drawn by Eric Bradbury and written by Ken Mennell, was never one of my favourites. I was never into old cars for a start. Certainly the readers didn't seem to be too impressed, so it was a short-runner.

'World-Wide Wanderers' by Don Avenell and Sam Fair was a very early attempt at a United Nations soccer team send-up, and whilst still a practicing soccer player







I was never totally impressed with the action. That being said, our readers loved it. Mind you, the average *Smash* reader was not really into sport in a big way.

Ken Mannell was much more at home with the sinister 'Cursitor Doom' (another *Blackjack* item), and his scripts were greatly enhanced by Eric Bradbury's superb gothic horror approach.

'Rebbels on the Run' by Tom Tully and John Stokes never hit the high spots, but 'His Sporting Lordship' turned out to be a classic. Writer Ted Baker, whose lovely tossaway style has been the secret of some of the best stories of their kind in our business, combined beautifully with Doug Maxted. The biggest surprise, when you look back, is that so few of the writers and artists actually spoke to each other! The editor was the middle man! Certainly the readers loved the ludicrous plots and the way Doug Maxted drew them.

'Janus Stark' simply ran and ran. I used a great variety of writers and a cluster of different artists to follow the Lopez approach. It was not a serial, more a series, with two and three parters. Slightly unusual then but the master of mystery and suspense set in Victorian times wriggled his way out of some marvelous set-ups.

'King of the Ring', if I remember correctly, was already running in the old *Smash* and was one of those that was incorporated in the relaunched title. Certainly it was another Ken Mennell strip.



If you add to that package the funnies like 'Bad Penny', 'The Swots and the Blots' – I was privileged to work with the legenedary Leo Baxendale for the first time – and Mike Brown on 'Wiz War' and you had forty pages of a variety comic that was no doubt worth its cover price of seven old pence!

With the gift of hindsight, the new *Smash* was pretty similar to *Valiant* and the other boys titles produced in that era, but it was great fun to work on. I had a lot of laughs with my then assistant Tony Power, who went on to magazine stardom via Leonard Matthews' Martspress with Paul Raymond's *Men Only* empire.

I can also remember that all my friends outside the business used to think I was strange because I loved going to work on Monday mornings!

Whilst I was the editor of the new *Smash*, there were quite a few other stories worthy of a mention that I am proud to have been associated with.

'The Pillater Peril', another *Blackjack* story, was written, unusually, by Fred Baker and drawn by the brilliant Carloz Cruz, an artist who put more detail into an episode than any other artist I've ever encountered.

One of my long standing friends in the business, writer Angus Allan, was behind anther successful character, 'Simon Test' and the Thirteen Tasks he had to pass. Again, Eric Bradbury brought his inimitable style to the series. Angus's great pal, Scott Goodall, always wrote popular stuff, and he was the







writer of 'The Birdman of Baratoga' with a foreign artist named Felix Carrion.

Then I managed to link up Angus and Carlos Cruz in another lighthearted series about a genie, the title of which was 'Moonie's Magic Mate'. That went well.

After a brief spell I moved across to the first licensed publishing that IPC had ventured into - Disney! It was a different way of life but in retrospect, a move forward. Between 1972 and 1977 I experienced a world far removed from the 'own brand' of comics I'd been used to.

Then, after two and a half years of constant travelling and buying foreign art for the IPC Youth Group, I was brought back inside and made managing editor of all the children's comics, then structured into boys', girls' and humour groups.

The business started to change drastically in commercial terms. IPC stopped launching comics so often as readers stopped buying so many. After all, what was the point in spending £350,000 to launch a comic when it didn't last a year and you don't get your money back?

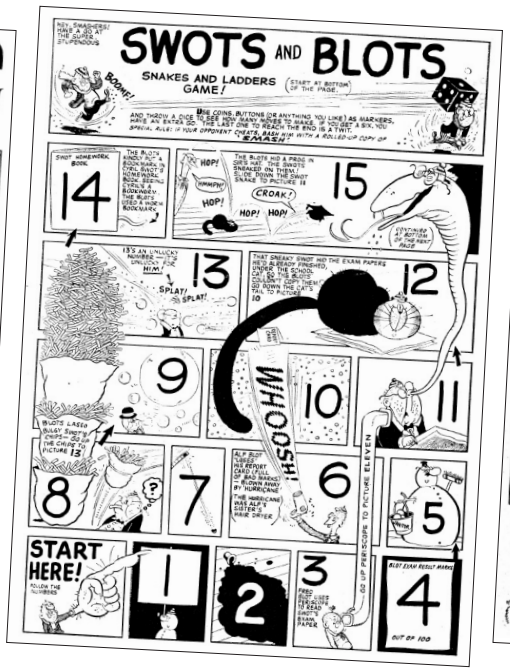
Then, as we all know, along came a guy named Robert Maxwell. His offer to buy the Youth Group was attractive to IPC, so we were expendable. Fortunately, when he disappeared off the end of his boat, Gutenburghus of Denmark (now re-named Egmont) were waiting in the wings to snap us up.

The secret of survival for those who are interested? Be in the right place at the right time, even if you don't know when or where that is - and keep your fingers crossed!

Gil Page - Executive editor, Egmont Fleetway Ltd. ●













DARE THE FUTURE!

BY TONY INGRAM

THE LIVES AND TIMES OF DAN DARE



Given how long the British comics industry has existed, it is perhaps surprising that there are so few truly iconic British characters; that is to say, characters immediately recognisable to the non-comics fan.

Judge Dredd is one, and of course there is Desperate Dan and the perpetually annoying Dennis the Menace.

All three have been in continuous publication since they first appeared, with Dredd the baby of the family at a mere 31 years old. There is one more, though he has had a rather rockier road to travel. 'Born' on the 14 April 1950 in the first issue of *The Eagle*, he is, of course, Dan Dare. But who is Dan Dare?

The question isn't as easily answered as you may at first think…

SKY-PILOT

The 1950's were a time when people knew what was what. Manners were as important as morals, and by God the people of Britain had both. They could be justifiably proud of this since, if you believed the directors of a hundred more-or-less interchangeable war films, they had just finished defeating the Nazis single handed and they expected their fictional heroes to behave in a certain way. (Okay, maybe the Yanks had helped a bit – but they were rather coarse, all the same.)

The stiff upper lip, self deprecating wit and utter, blind

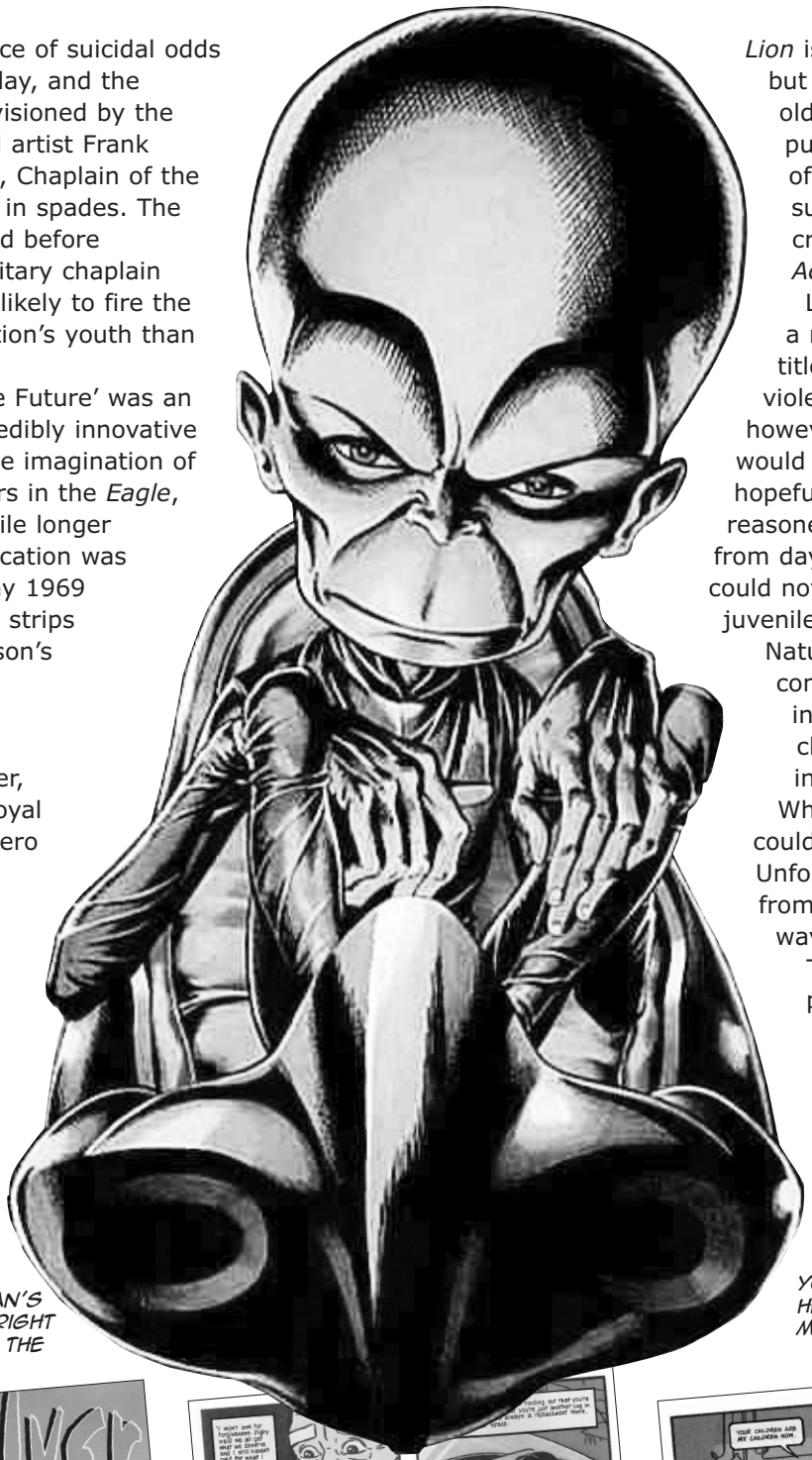
determination in the face of suicidal odds were the order of the day, and the character originally envisioned by the Rev. Marcus Morris and artist Frank Hampson as 'Dan Dare, Chaplain of the future' had all of these in spades. The 'dog collar' was dropped before publication, since a military chaplain seemed somehow less likely to fire the imaginations of the nation's youth than a dashing Colonel.

'Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future' was an intricately plotted, incredibly innovative strip which captured the imagination of readers for twenty years in the *Eagle*, and then for a little while longer when that august publication was absorbed by *Lion* in May 1969 (though sadly, the *Lion* strips were reprints of Hampson's earlier material).

SPACE (GENTLE)MAN

Dan Dare the character, aided and abetted by loyal batman Digby, was a hero in the classic British tradition; unflappable, scrupulously fair, resourceful and always more than a match for the likes of the malevolent Mekon and a horde of other decidedly un-British alien menaces.

Fast forward then, to February 1977.



Lion is no more. *Eagle* is naught but a treasured memory of older comic fans, but IPC publications are on the point of launching *2000AD*, a successor to their much criticised 1976 effort, *Action*.

Like *Action*, *2000AD* will be a more anarchic and violent title for a more anarchic and violent climate. Unlike *Action*, however, most of the strips would be set in the future and hopefully, the publishers reasoned, far enough removed from day-to-day reality that they could not be seen to promote juvenile delinquency).

Naturally, though, the new comic needed a hook, an instantly recognisable lead character to draw readers into this strange new world. What more natural choice could there be than Dan Dare? Unfortunately, 1977 differed from 1950 in a number of ways.

This was, as has been pointed out, a rather less genteel time. Punk was in full swing, the Sex Pistols had arrived, and heroes were expected to be just that little bit rougher and tougher. To an audience used to Clint

RIDING HIGH: EVERY HERO NEEDS HIS VILLAIN AND DAN'S PROVED TO BE JUST THE RIGHT MIX OF THE ORIENTAL AND THE TEUTONIC FOR THE 1950S.

YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD HERO DOWN – DAN DARE MAKES YET ANOTHER RETURN.









THE SECOND COMING – A DAN DARE FOR A VERY DIFFERENT KIND OF FUTURE.



Eastwood's nameless drifter and dirty detective, the squeaky clean Colonel Dare of old would no longer quite cut it. A rethink was clearly in order and thus was born Dan Dare mark II.

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

The Dan Dare we met in *2000AD* issue 1 was utterly unrecognisable.

Now transplanted to the future by that old stand-by suspended animation, Dare had also been facially reconstructed after an accident and awoke, not only a man out of his time, but a man without even his own features to link him to his past.

In fact, as initially drawn by Massimo Belardinelli, this Dan had a somewhat freakish appearance, though thankfully later artists – most notably Dave Gibbons – gave him a much-needed makeover, although he still more closely resembled Clint Eastwood than the Dare of old.

Now Dan Dare in name and distinctive weird eyebrows only, this new version was understandably embittered by his experiences. He even took to swearing in times of stress, something the old Dan would never have done (though fortunately, futuristic curse words such as 'Drokk' and 'Stomm' were unlikely to incense mothers too much if repeated by their comics reading offspring

His disaffection was probably worsened by the fact that nobody at *2000AD* had the faintest idea what to do with him. An initial attempt to turn Dare into the leader of a kind of intergalactic version of the Dirty Dozen and send him on a quest to basically explore strange new worlds





DARE GOES ON A BREAK 'FOR A WHILE'.

and shoot their inhabitants was not a resounding success.

Leading a group of borderline psychopaths such as the monosyllabic Russian Big Bear and the trigger happy Hitman was a somewhat untenable position for the formerly old-fashioned space hero. It therefore came as no surprise when his Space Fort was lost with all hands and Dan was left to perish in the vacuum of space.

FORGOTTEN DARE

2000AD hadn't quite given up on the old man yet, though. In 1980 he returned to the galaxy's greatest comic, having been unexpectedly saved from certain death by none other than his old foe the Mekon!

'Dan Dare: Servant of Evil' saw an amnesiac Dare at first conned into aiding the dome-headed tyrant then, his memory restored, proclaimed the saviour of an alien race. Now kitted out in a flashy red costume and gifted with Eternicus, the Cosmic Claw (a semi-sentient glove which fired ray beams), Dan Dare mark III was, horror of horrors – now a quasi-superhero! This, of course, was also an untenable position for an old-fashioned space hero.

Though by no means a bad strip, it lasted only a few months and ended with Dare, old ally Sondar and a rather strange woman with a pet pterodactyl flying around in space somewhere, swearing to return and defeat the Mekon.

We're still waiting.

EAGLE AGAIN

In 1982 IPC resurrected *Eagle* and needless to say you can't have *Eagle* without Dan Dare.

This new strip, though more modern, closely resembled the Dare of old, anarchy in the UK having proven surprisingly transitory. This is ironic, since the lead character was not in fact Dan Dare, but Daniel Dare – great-great-grandson of the original!

With Dan senior long dead and now ret-conned into being a 1940s pilot transported into the future (an attempt to tie the strip into a proposed TV series which never materialised), Dan junior carried on his ancestor's battle against injustice and green slimy things until 1989. He even encountered the original Dan in a time travel epic along the way (though the *2000AD* version was never referenced).

Eventually, falling sales led to an attempt to reinvigorate the strip by returning to 'untold adventures' of the original Dan, drawn by one of the old *Eagle* artists, Keith Watson. The strip drifted along until *Eagle*, now demoted from weekly to monthly, was cancelled in 1994.

MEANWHILE…

In July 1990, however, another short-lived title had hit the newsagent's shelves. *Revolver* was an adult orientated comic, a deliberate attempt to exploit the newly established adult collectors





market, and its lead strip, called simply 'Dare', was a deliberate subversion of traditional heroic fiction.

In this, the bleakest Dan Dare strip yet, the original Dan, now retired, learns that his government has willingly got into bed with the Mekon.

Ultimately, a disillusioned Dare kills them all (including himself) by detonating a fission device. It is futile to even speculate on what, if any, ending Frank Hampson and co had in mind for Dan Dare from their vantagepoint in the '50's, but the chances are this wasn't it! (Following *Revolver*'s cancellation, the final episode appeared in *Crisis* 55.)

VIRGIN BIRTH

And now, Dan Dare is back courtesy of Virgin Comics. So, is he the same Dan Dare? If so, which Dan Dare? At first glance, the new version is as different from the original as the '80s or '90s incarnations (though he physically resembles *2000AD*'s Dare).

Will he be more successful than other reinventions of the character? Who knows? But one thing seems certain; Dan Dare has kept on coming back in one form or another for over fifty years. He's unlikely to quit now, or ever.

After all, it just wouldn't be British! ●

(TOP LEFT) DAN'S UNIQUE CHIN IS NOT AS UNIQUE AS YOU MIGHT THINK!

(BOTTOM RIGHT) BRITAIN'S MOST FAMOUS SPACE-TRAVELLER MEETS BRITAIN'S MOST FAMOUS TIME-TRAVELLER.



MY COMICY SATURDAY

BY TONY INGRAM

There seems to be a general feeling that by the 1970s, the British comics industry was in decline. From my point of view, as a child of the Seventies, that certainly never seemed to be the case.

It's difficult to say when I first got into comics: they've been with me as long as I can remember, though I do know that my grandmother, who looked after me most of the time, pretty much taught me to read with comics. That would have been about 1974 (I still have some of the early issues of *Mighty World of Marvel* and *Spider-Man Comics Weekly* from that year, though the *Busters* and *Toppers* that I much preferred at that age are long gone).

I do know, though, that by the time I was about six or seven, I had already more or less made the leap from reader to actual fan. By the long, hot summer of 1976, I looked on the regular trip into Penge, sometimes on a Saturday when the market was on, sometimes (in school holidays) on a Tuesday when the fish stall was there, as a real treat. Why? One word: Fosdicks!

ROOM IN THE GLOOM

There were other shops, of course. The corner store in Stembridge Rd, which sold Alan Class reprints like *Sinister Tales* and *Creepy Worlds*. The shop around the corner where, in later years, you could pick up out of date comics cheap if you didn't mind the black felt tip cross on the corner of the cover. But Fosdicks was the largest paper-shop in the area. In fact, it was rather more than that, it was newsagents, bookshop, stationers and toyshop combined, and to my young eyes, for several years, it was heaven on Earth.

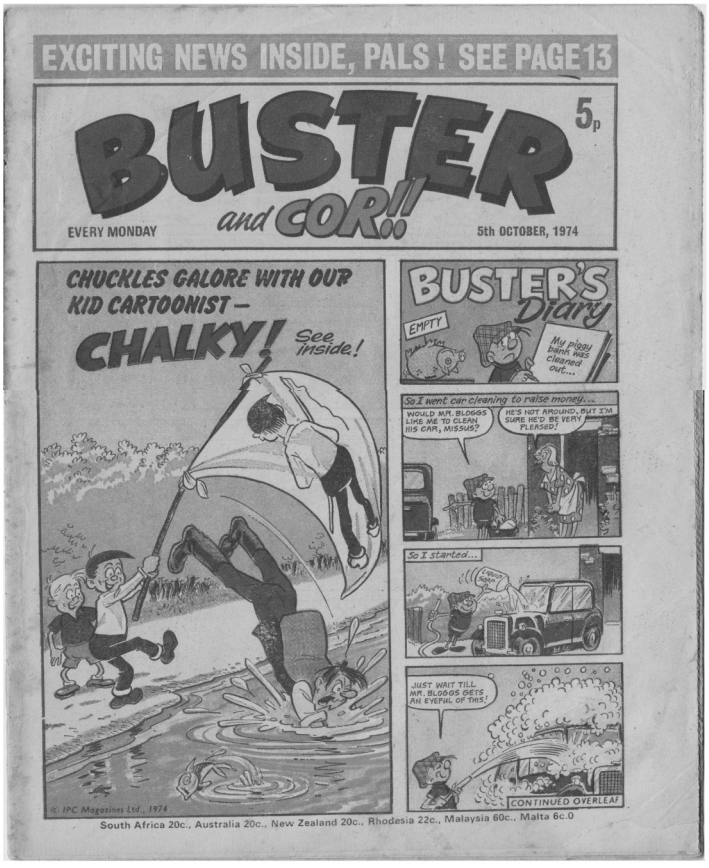
Situated near the top end of the high street, just past Woolworths and sandwiched (appropriately enough) between two bakers, it was from the outside not much to look at: a rather old fashioned shop with a brick frontage with dirty windows through which one could peer into the gloom.

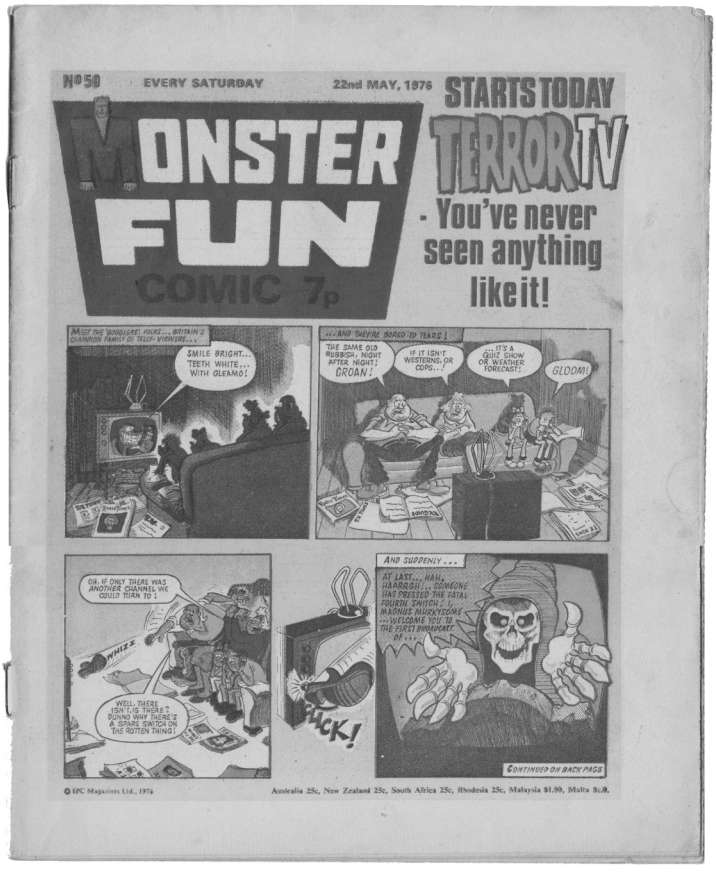
Once in its cavernous interior, though, it was a different story! By the door on the right were the newspapers and below them, my main reason for anxiously pulling at my poor old Nan's sleeve to hurry her up to Fosdicks when she was pondering the merits of a new non-stick pan in Woolies, the comics!

Buster, *Whoopee!*, *Whizzer & Chips*, *Monster Fun* (a favourite of mine, though I only caught the tail end of its run), *Topper*, *Beezer*, *Dandy*, *Beano* – all those brilliant humour titles with their weird characters forever living in a world which, if I'd only been old enough and aware enough to know it, was already a little out of date and fast disappearing. A world of genial coppers on bikes and wrathful dads wielding slippers.

FORGOTTEN WAR

Victor, *Warlord*, *Battle*, *Hotspur* and *Commando* must have been bought at one time or another though the war comics were never really my thing. (I still have vague memories of yellowing stacks of them on a chair





in my Nan's back bedroom, which later became my 'comic room', totally taken over by my first collection).

Valiant appealed to me more (though I was a little young for it), and *Tiger*, before it became all sports, and later on the wonderful, glossily irresistible *Starlord* (starring my then favourite characters, glowing eyed bounty hunter Strontium Dog and his Viking sidekick, Wulf). – all 70s issues.

That led me on to *2000AD*. Later on came *Tornado*, and *The Crunch* (a DC Thomson comic which, frankly, rather disturbed me).

Then there were the Marvel comics – *MWOM* and *Spider-Man* and, in late '76, wonder of wonders, *Captain Britain* (in colour) and later on *Star Wars Weekly* and *Doctor Who*.

Once I was in Fosdicks, glued to those couple of rows of brightly covered treasures, poor old Nan couldn't drag me away. Not unless my attention was distracted by some of the shop's other treasures - like the spinner rack!

MAKING MY HEART SPIN

The spinner rack was on the other side of the door as you came in. The top tiers were out of my reach, but in any case contained little of interest to my eyes – the odd specialist magazine (including some which should probably have been on the top shelf opposite, but we won't dwell on those).

The American comics, those few that got through at least, occupied the lower tiers. Though I didn't know it at the time, distribution of these books was low in this country, and what we did get were mainly second string titles – *The Defenders* or *Nova* rather than *Spider-Man*.

Still, if I wanted to read *Spider-Man*, he had his own weekly. So it was no hardship that the American books, exotic because of their small size and full-colour, gave me only what more discerning readers may have considered to be lesser characters (I still have a soft spot for these second rate losers as a result).

DC was rather more even handed - ok, it was usually *Men of War* or *Jonah Hex* but you would still frequently get *Superman* or *The Flash*.

Then there were the other odd titles which Nan would sometimes bring home for me if I was ill, but which I'd normally never bother with – *Archie*, *Hot Stuff*, *Casper the Friendly Ghost*. The American books were great, a taste of far-off lands and a society I couldn't really imagine, and when every few weeks Fosdicks would get a new delivery, I'd disloyally turn my back on the weeklies.

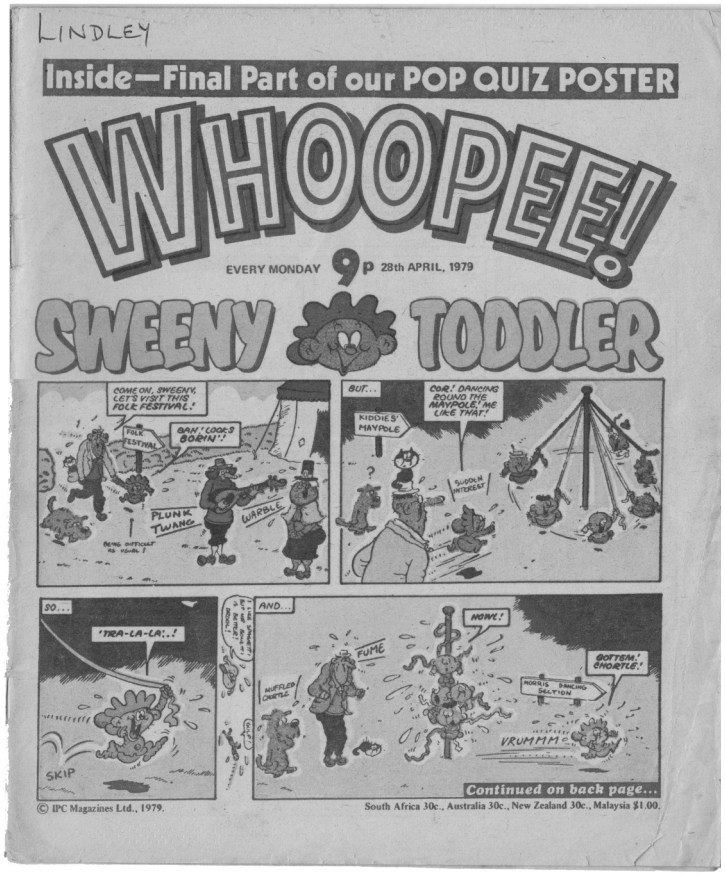
CONSTANT COMICS

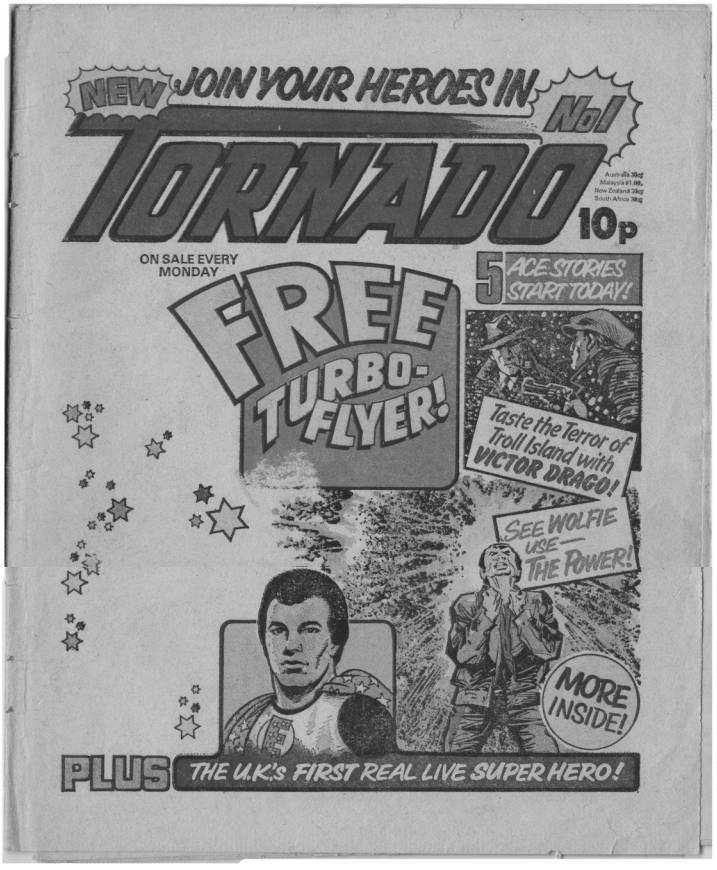
Still, the home grown stuff had one major advantage: consistency. The superheroes were all very well but you rarely got the same titles delivered each time. You'd pick up say three consecutive issues of *All Star Comics* starring the Justice Society of America, get really into the on-going story and the next month, be left trying to work out who the Hell Kamandi was!

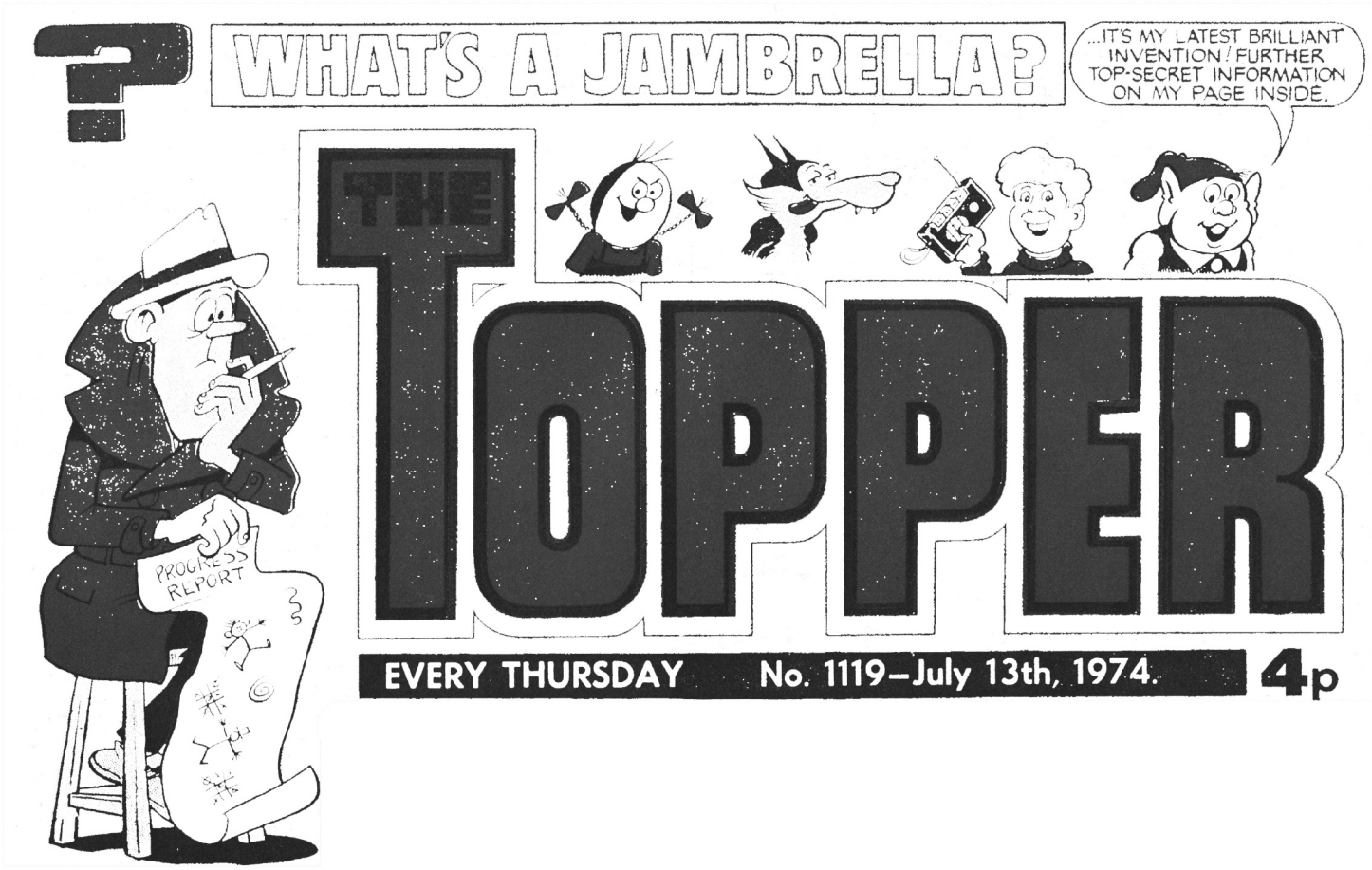
At least with 'Johnny Cougar' in *Tiger* or the wonderfully grisly 'Planet of the Damned' in *Starlord*, you knew you'd get to read the next instalment!

The spinner rack disappeared one day (given that little boys were always hanging off it and spinning around, and being shouted at for doing so, I can guess why) and after that American comics were relegated to a dusty pile on a lower shelf by the Exchange & Marts, until the shop had its big refit in about 1980. Somehow, despite being cleaner, brighter and more attractive, the new-look shop with its shelves, strip lights and floor length windows was rather less enticing; less character, I suspect.

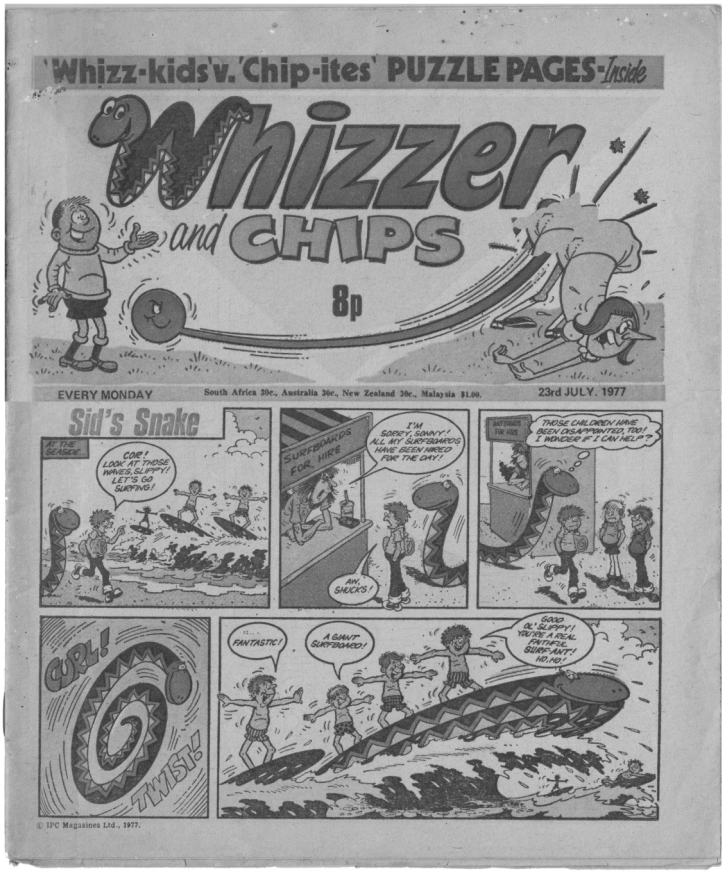
By that time, of course, they'd been taken over and







were concentrating more on the papers and the stationery side, so many of the other treasures that would routinely catch my eye and, if Nan was in an indulgent mood, very occasionally come my way were gone. Treasures like the Kalkitos rub down transfers, the Target *Dr Who* paperbacks and the enticing but usually expensively unobtainable Mego action figures. Ah, well.



In the run up to Christmas the annuals would arrive on a table in the middle, near the sweet counter. *Beano* and *Dandy* books every year, and *Spider-Man*, but also others based on TV shows like *Planet of the Apes* and *The Six Million Dollar Man* (mostly from Brown-Watson although World Distributors published the inevitable *Dr Who Annual*). Strangely enough, there would be annuals of comics that were no longer being published – *Hurricane*, for instance, had an annual in 1974 (still got it!) despite having ceased publication in 1965, well before I was born, after a run of only a little over a year!

I always felt this was a rather curious move when I considered the matter later on. The readers of those comics would for the most part long since have moved on to other things. Those of us at the right age to receive them as Christmas gifts, it was most odd to be reading an annual with a title we'd never seen, featuring characters who, aside from that annual outing, hadn't been seen in years and likely never would again.

Still, there was something strangely compulsive about them. I always wished someone would bring back Typhoon Tracey!

The thrill of acquisition, the sheer agonising pleasure of having to choose which few of the seemingly endless ranks of comicy treasures to take home! I'd say you couldn't beat it, but I'd be lying. Because once home, there was the pleasure to come of spreading out by the fire and just disappearing into the worlds of favourite characters for a few hours until teatime.

Now that was the greatest thing of all! ●

Commando

THE BRITISH AT WAR

BY GLENN B FLEMING

Commando *comic began life in the summer of 1961, created and launched by DC Thomson. The series was published in a compact format, only 7 by 5½ inches, an actual pocket comic which could easily fit into a jacket pocket to be carried around and savored later: on the bus home or in the playground when the football had been confiscated. And in vast quantities when sold through the NAAFI stories (Navy, Army, Air Force Institute). For a mere one shilling (5p by today's money!) the reader certainly got their value for money: 68 black and white pages of artwork with around 135 panels per issue and all surrounded by a glossy colour cover.*



COVER STORY

The covers were always striking: general mayhem and fighting, soldiers snarling, bayonets thrusting, grenades exploding - and that was just on the stories depicted on land. Many of them are outstanding works of art and if you ever get the chance to view them at their original size – larger than A3 – you'll see exactly how much work, care and detail went into them.

The let down was a common one for British comics: unlike their American counterparts, the 'script' was always 'typeset' in some awful impersonal font. It's almost as if the finished story artwork was returned 'naked', like some 1920s silent movie before the junior used a gallon of Cow Gum to paste down all the dialogue and captions.

The American way seemed the best, didn't it? – where the lettering looked like an integral part of the work, slick and reader friendly. Thankfully, though, the editors rarely (if ever) used sound effects in Commando comics and they were the better for it.

COMMANDO COVERS TOOK A FROZEN MOMENT OF ACTION AND PRESENTED IT AS EMBLEMATIC OF THE CONFLICT AS A WHOLE. UNLIKE THE MODERN COLLECTION OF STORIES (SEE OVER), SHOOTING WAS RARELY WITNESSED.

WAR STORIES

The stories were simple affairs and have followed a similar theme through the nearly 50 years of publishing. The Allies were often portrayed as heroes, of high moral fibre (though there were some exceptions), fighting sometimes impossible odds for the sake of good against evil. British soldiers had courage, were patriotic and more than willing to lay down their lives for their loved ones back at home in 'Blighty'.

Americans were usually seen as brash and reckless, but would generally come through in the end.

'Jerry' was the ultimate baddie; ruthless, murderous, uncaring and usually stupid when the chips were down. In these enlightened times we are led to believe that we didn't fight the Germans but the Nazis - not so sure about that.

If our boys were fighting in Burma and those far off exotic places, the adversary would obviously be the Japanese. The Japanese were shown to be even more ruthless and murderous than the Germans.

Two stand alone issues of *Commando* were produced

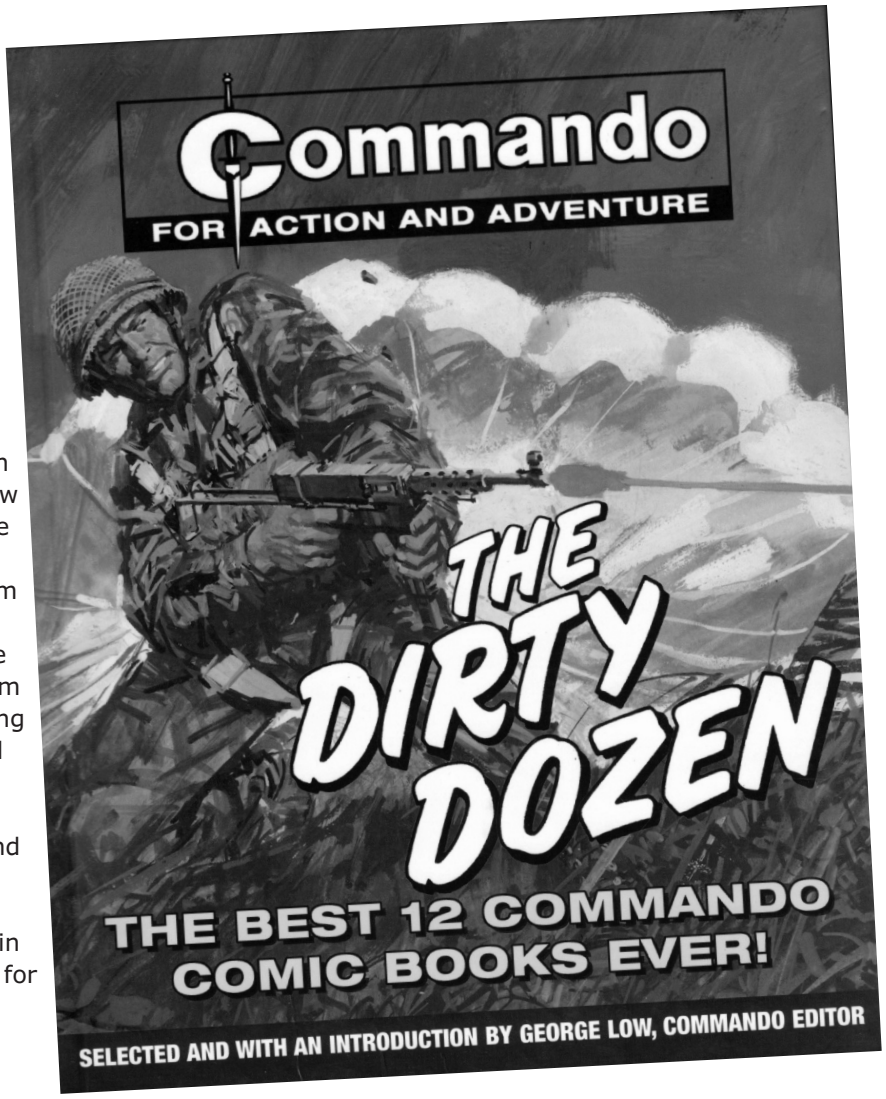
every month, giving us our bi-weekly dose of death and destruction - but it was okay! We were only watching the demise of Jerries and, occasionally, the odd Jap!

THE WAR SPREADS

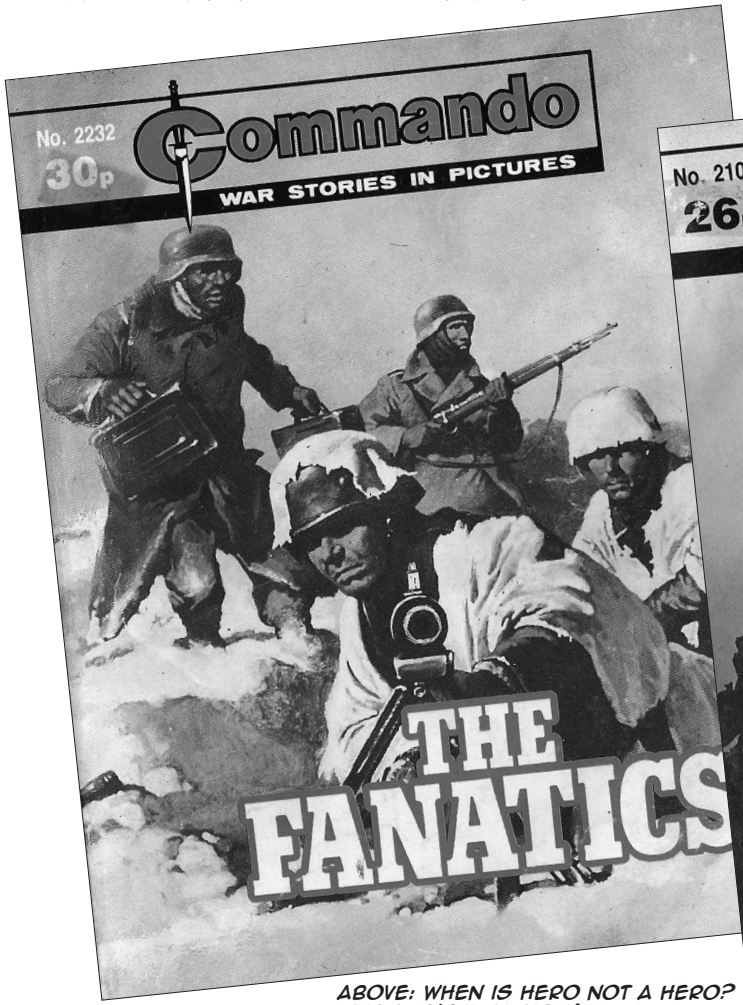
The formula obviously worked and DC Thomson began publishing four titles a month.

There have been many complaints throughout the years regarding the portrayal of the 'enemy' - the Germans. These complaints include one from the then German Ambassador to Britain who demanded to know the reason behind Britain's obsession with the Third Reich.

George Low, editor of *Commando* comic from 1963 to date states that DC Thomson were always mindful of the way the Germans came across. Indeed, a German TV studio called him and asked why and how he could be publishing these stories in this day and age. Low replied that the writers' were always careful in how they portrayed the Germans. Some of the German characters were seen to be heroic and that they began using those 'heroic' German characters early on in the series. From a business point of view, Low also argues that in writing the German perspective the potential for storylines increased.

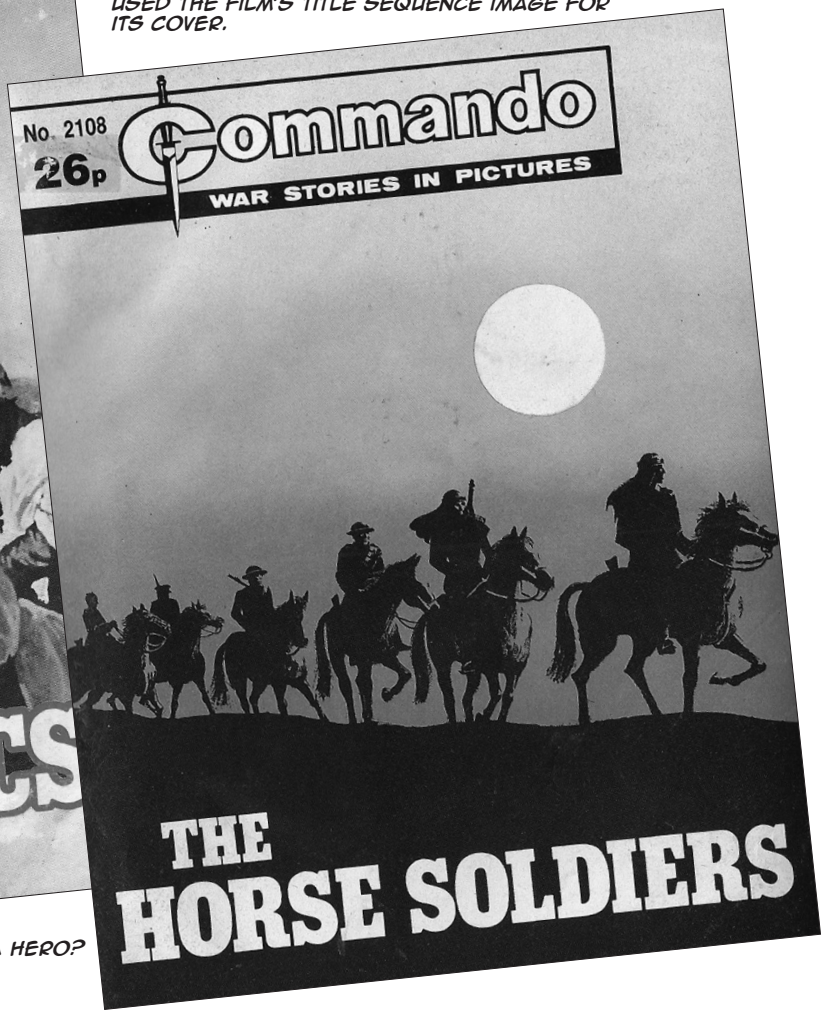


ABOVE RIGHT: THE RECENT CARLTON REPRINTS BROUGHT NEW COVER ARTWORK AS WELL. THIS BEAUTIFUL PAINTING IS BY JORDI LONGARON.



ABOVE: WHEN IS HERO NOT A HERO? WHEN HE'S A FANATIC!

BELOW: ISSUE 2108 NOT ONLY TOOK THE TITLE OF THE HUGELY SUCCESSFUL JOHN WAYNE FILM, BUT USED THE FILM'S TITLE SEQUENCE IMAGE FOR ITS COVER.



OTHER TIMES

Indeed, stories have appeared set in a wide variety of war theatres and settings including Roman times and the recent Gulf War. The First World War with its unfortunate concentration on trench warfare provided fewer opportunities for heroic fight-and-move-on stories but the Second World War is a different matter.

Low maintains that the sheer size of the Second World War provides a 'massive canvas' in which to portray the stories. Another significant factor is that there is less moral ambiguity associated with the origins and conduct of that war – it is much more easy to see it as a war between good an evil than with many other wars.

Editor Low also maintains that the code of honour, always so prevalent in the early books, is still as valid today. With his audience more 'clued-up' and sophisticated than ever before, the writers and artist must maintain a high standard when producing the magazines: places and times must be accurate, as must the detail in weaponry, uniforms and setting.

GROWN-UP

These magazines have come of age in their own way and, whilst they are not everybody's cup of tea, they still sell, so somebody must enjoy them. In fact, *Commando* is a true champion of British comics and one of the longest surviving titles in our history.

Though some of the early stories may appear to be crude and rushed, they still mark the beginning of a genre that has shown no signs of ending. Former Education Secretary Alan Johnson stressed the usefulness of both comics and adventure stories for introducing increasingly reticent working class boys to reading for pleasure.

I suppose there may be exceptions, but basically anything that gets a child to read more can't be a bad thing, can it?

Commando is the country's sole surviving war comic, making it to an unprecedented 4000 issues.

We are left with a legacy that contains an amazing amount of stories and artwork not to mention death and defiance, heroism and cowardice, stupidity and murder.

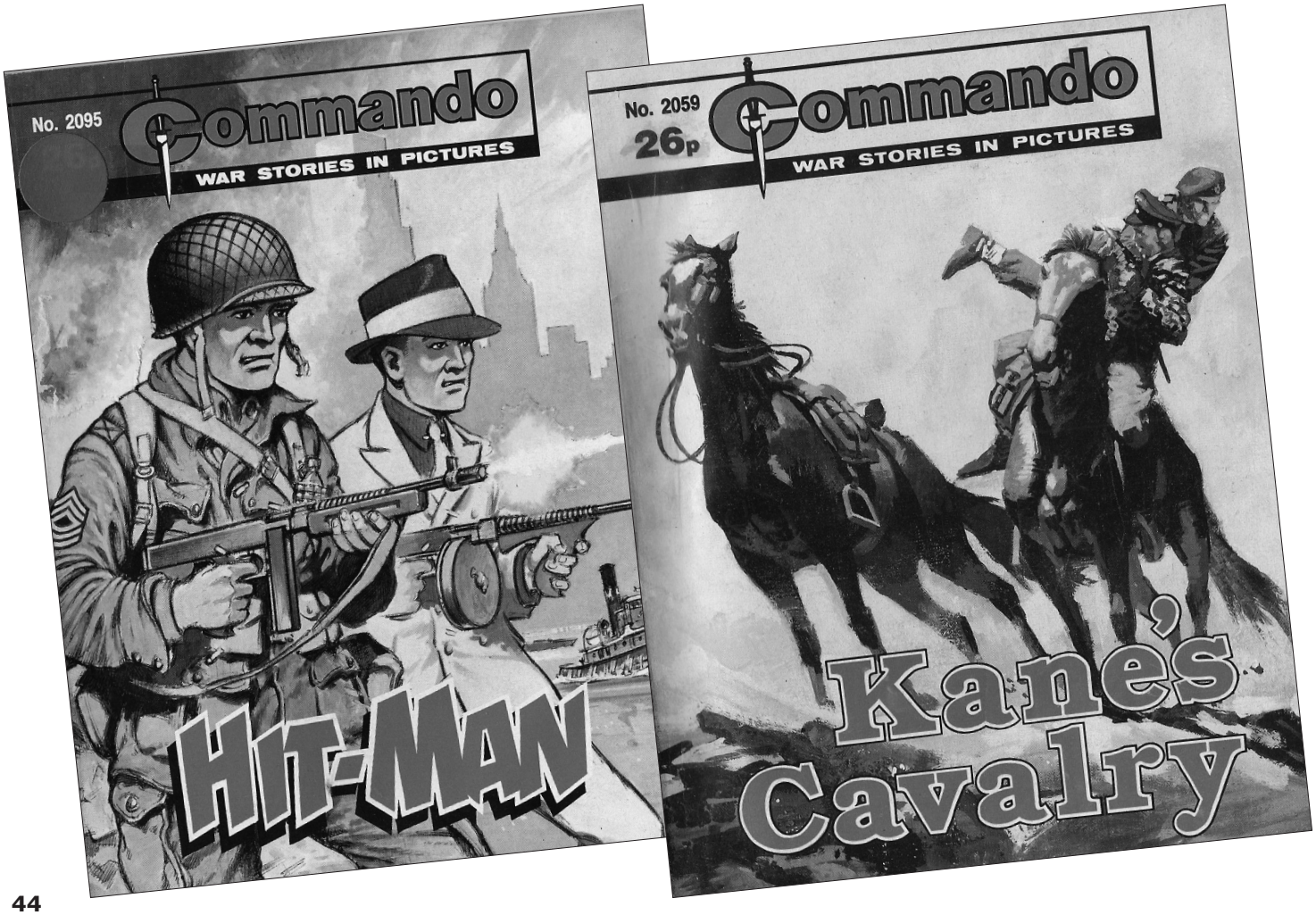
The appeal of the 'war' comic lies in those personal connections we make with war and warriors. Those of us with a father who fought in the Second World War had a link with that dark time. Those same fathers would rarely speak of the atrocities they had witnessed and maybe even caused.

We read comics like *Commando* with a gung-ho attitude of heroism unabated. We knew full well that we could kill or maim as many Germans or Japs as we liked, yet still be safe in our bed, snuggled up knowing dad was downstairs or across the landing, ready to save us from the evil horde as he had all those years before.

It has been touted that we, the Brits, find it difficult to let go of these times, to move on into a more peaceful, forgiving time. I get a bit worried at times. With political correctness so rampant today it is surprising that these magazines are still on sale.

THE YEARS SHALL NOT AGE THEM…

Apparently, to own all 4000 issues of *Commando* would require shelving over 12 metres long to store them. This is one of those strange facts people throw up every now and again. Still, it's an amazing piece of trivia. More to the point, over 140 writers worked on the 4000



issues alongside 100 cover artists and over 120 interior artists. That's a lot of drawing and a lot of words!

The stories covered sand, sea and sky and even the jungles, mountains and forest. *Commando* remains in print, although 50% of its content is reprinted - "driven by a mix of economics and practicalities," says George Low.

Suitable writers and artists seem thin on the ground and appear to be unable to maintain the required level of accuracy.

Thankfully, DC Thomson has opened up their archive and Carlton Books has already published two best-selling *Commando* compilations with a third on its way.

The war comic is still fighting.

Still enduring.

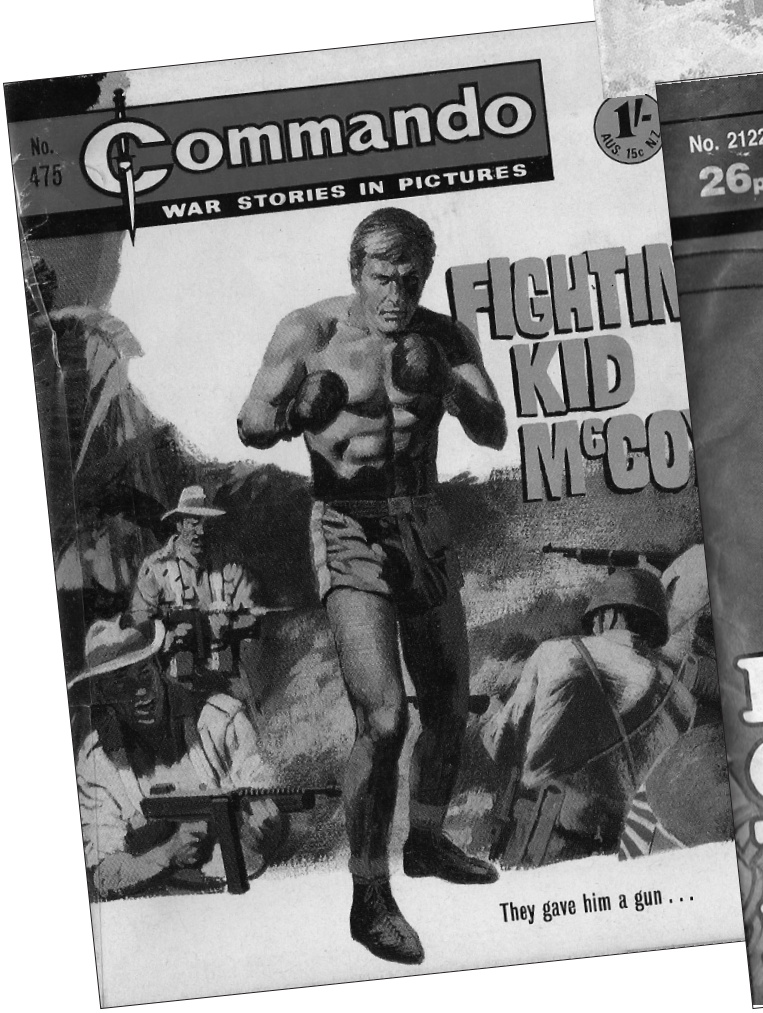
Still British. ●



ONE OF THE STRONGEST ATTRIBUTES TO THE COMMANDO SERIES HAS BEEN THE FANTASTIC COVER ARTWORK FROM A VARIETY OF ARTISTS.

UNUSUAL SETTINGS, STRONG CENTRAL CHARACTERS AND UNEXPECTED HEROES HAVE KEPT THREE GENERATIONS READING COMMANDO.

THE TITLE OF ISSUE 2243 SAYS IT ALL.





UM LETTERS!

*For future issues of **Crikey!** let us know what you think about our magazine, British comics, your reactions to features or simply make us laugh.*

Hiya *Crikey!*,
Just received the latest issue and really enjoyed the interview with Dez Skin about *House of Hammer* (*Crikey!* 3) which I thought, and still think, is the best horror mag ever produced, much better than the American counterparts.
I've still got every issue in mint condition and all stored neatly in the *House of Hammer* binders which I bought at the time. I even had two letters of mine published in the mag, one in issue five and one in issue six which I am pleased about.
The artwork to the film adaptations in the Hammer mags were second to none – amazing, really lifelike, my favourite being for *One Million Year's BC* by John Bolton. I was hoping that John would cover the film *She* in a later issue (I had a crush on Ursula Andress), but to no avail. I was gutted when the mag folded and have always wondered what happened, but the interview with Dez has put me straight.
I've managed to purchase two pages of original artwork which appeared in the Hammer mag by the artist David Jackson for the film adaptation he did of *The Mummy* (issue 22). I've got the title page and page three.
I am a big fan of the Hammer films and although only 15 years old at the the height of Hammer-mania, I managed to sneak in to my local cinema to see the 18 certificate films which I am now snapping up on DVD.
Keep up the great work with *Crikey!*, you're onto a winner.
Regards
John Pugh, Internet

We received a lot of positive mail about the Hammer article. When Mark Saunders sent us his article it raised questions about what is it that Crikey! *should cover. Since starting* Crikey! *we have slowly spread our wings from the initial idea of comics from the '50s to the '70s to our current editorial policy of 'if it is in strip format and it's British, let's do it.'*
I'd be interested in what people think of the Andy Capp newspaper coverage in our previous issue. Can Garth and Jeff Hawke be far behind?

Hello,
Just received the latest issue of *Crikey!*
What a treat it is – and very professional looking too. As a fan of the American Warren comics it was also interesting to read the thoughts of Dez Skinn. Also of note was the *Scream* feature. Interesting to spot art by Ortiz, who was almost certainly the same Ortiz who worked so prolifically for Warren.
Love all the reproduced art too. Keep up the reproduction! (if you know what I mean).
Regards,
Piers, Internet.

That's two issues running that you've made the Um Letters section, Piers. This could be a new career for you.

Um *Crikey!*
(I feel seven years old just writing that bit!)
Crikey! certainly seems to be rapidly evolving, which I think is mostly a good thing. Mostly? Well I'll get to that in a moment.
Although I don't collect annuals – I buy a few if they are at the right price – I must say I enjoyed Bob Norton's look at rare annuals. Seems odd to run it in two parts but what do I know. Interesting stuff and it might make my fortune at the next car boot.
When taken with the Broons article 'Golden Broon' (nice but in my opinion over-written) in issue 2 do I detect a move away from purely comics? It's your magazine so I suppose you can cover whatever you want but just be careful that you don't drift too far away from what you say on the cover about being a British comics magazine.
At the moment I really like the other kind of articles but if I'm honest what I really want is stuff about what I think of as British comics. That's the mostly bit I mentioned above.
At the moment it's a great sit down with a slice of toast and a coffee read.
Graham Phillips, Peterborough.

Crikey! *will always be a comics 'zine, Graham. Occasional pieces on annuals and newspaper strips may appear but the bulk of the pages will focus on what we say on the cover.*
Crikey! *is here for the long run and somewhere in our future is colour and a higher pagination. With more pages the occasional not strictly comics feature might find favour.*

Hi Brian,
Congratulations on *Crikey!* issues 1 and 2. I bought both issues through Ace Comics with whom I've been dealing with for many years. A superb magazine with high production values.
I'm hoping you'll do an in-depth feature on Topper's 'Whizzers from Ozz' strip and would love to see some analysis of TV Century 21's Gerry Anderson universe. It seemed to me that the comic tried to form a continuity between the different shows in a way the TV shows never did.
I believe that you are going to feature some articles on another old favourite of mine, *Lion* comic. I have done two features on *Lion* for the Comicsuk web site. I wonder if you would consider using either of them (totally free of charge) in your magazine. One is an historic overview of the comic.
I've contacted Alan Notton and he is OK with your using either article if you so wish.
Keep up the good work.
You've a reader in me as long as you continue publishing
Steve Laming, Internet

Thanks for offering your Lion *article, Steve. I would love to run an article on the 'King of Picture Story Papers' but if we did, I would prefer it to be one commissioned for* Crikey!
This isn't a hobby with millions of participants. We're a rather close-knit group of fans and readers and although we reckon that over 50% of our readers are relatively new to reading/collecting old British comics, I feel it would be wrong to reprint material that is freely available once people know their WWWs.
As for Paddy Brennan's wonderful 'Whizzers of Ozz' with space aliens Krik and Krok – it sounds a great idea. I'll start asking around to see feels ready to tackle the strip with some of the worse haircuts in comics history!

Bonjour *Crikey!*

At last I could read *Crikey!* issue 3 and found it was another interesting and improving one.

I specially liked the Dez Skinn interview (I have some of the *Warrior* mags, and I try to get the others, but the prices are going higher and higher!). I also enjoyed the article on Don Lawrence and those about *Scream* and *Smash!*

Once more, it lacks some credits for the pictures but, again, I think it has improved. I could read, on the net, some bad critics... perhaps they are right, but they should be indulgent: they don't know how difficult it is to edit a real magazine on real paper with real deadlines and printers to deal with.

You know, even *Hop!* (116 issues), gets some jealous comments when a new issue is published.

A bientôt,

Cordialement,

Marc-André, Internet.

Marc-André is a French cartoonist and comic publisher with his own successful comic strip magazine Hop! *He wrote about British comic reprints in France in our issue 2.*

The battle with naming names (and issues and numbers) is slowly being won, Marc-André. I'm pleased that you like the improvements we've made to the title and value what you have to say about us.

We respond to all criticism – good or bad – and take what we can from those comments to improve Crikey! *Issue by issue we expand our team and that brings new levels of expertise into the fold.*

Hello Mr. Clarke,

I have really been enjoying *Crikey!* It's a publication that is long overdue, in my opinion.

When I first got hooked up to the internet a few years ago, I did try and find a contact e-mail for you because I had really enjoyed what you did as editor of *Superman Monthly* and *Batman Monthly*, both published by London Editions.

When I saw *Crikey!* on the shelves, I was naturally interested in the publication – then I saw the name Brian M Clarke. I wanted to speak to you since your tenure as editor on the London Editions titles.

Crikey! is everything I want it to be - and more. I grew up with US comics, but let's never forget British comics, eh? I am a huge fan of *Eagle* (the 1980s version), *Roy of the Rovers*, *Tiger*, *Scorcher*, etc. US comics are great, but a lot of UK comics have been just as great, if not greater. I am glad we have a magazine that will look at British comics.

It's a title that I look forward to receiving. It has facts and information, but also passion. It's great to read facts about old British comics but also to read editorials and analysis is just as good. There are magazines out there that look as though they're just put together by some corporation in order to sell merchandise or advertising but it's clear to me (and everyone else, I'm sure) that *Crikey!* is about passion. It isn't just another title in the portfolio of some big corporation, it's a title backed up by passion. Thank you for it.

Getting back to your London Editions tenure on the *Superman* and *Batman* titles, you cannot possibly imagine how grateful I am to you for your editorship of those titles. Those titles were more than just reprints of US Superman and Batman comics - they were more akin to magazines featuring comic strips, but also a lively letters page, articles, features, etc. Clearly put together and edited by someone with passion.

The *Superman* and *Batman* Fleetway titles were an important part of my childhood and an absolute pleasure to read (I wasn't reading many US comics in the late 80s, so the London Editions titles were the only way to read Superman and Batman adventures).

I still remember 1988 and looking forward to both *Superman* Monthly and *Batman* Monthly and how lively the letters pages were. I felt that your contributions to the letters page were akin to a friend communicating with other comic-buying friends. Perhaps you cold have taken the easy way out and just reprinted US titles

Um *Crikey!*

I've read all the *Crikey!* issues so far and will probably sign up for a sub sometime soon.

I know that if readers don't write in then their voices don't get heard so I thought I put my vote in. I really liked the Steve Zodiac piece about the Kennedy assassination (*Crikey!* 3). It was a very unusual angle for a feature and something I knew absolutely nothing about. It was great to see how a kids' comic tied into a world event like that. So my vote is for more like that (whatever that is!).

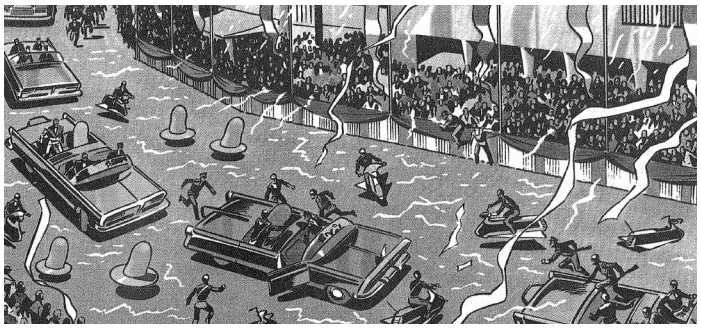
The only problem I have with *Crikey!* is that I read about stuff but haven't a dog's chance of ever finding it to buy for my own little collection.

James Norton,

Internet

It's a frustration that hits many of us, James. After working on Mike Morley's brilliant mini-series looking at Fifties black and whites I've been spending more than I should at bookfairs and events like the ABC Fair in London (Google to find out more – you won't be disappointed). Quite often you find that its availability rather than money that's the problem. I've been to many bookfairs and found hardly any comics on sale but then, when you do find some, they are only a couple of quid each.

I agree that we should do more of what you like!





Echoes of Dallas: Art imitates life as the Kaplan is assassinated in a motorcade (left) while US President John F Kennedy meets the same fate in November 1963.

and done nothing else, but you made *Superman* and *Batman* Monthly more than just reprints, you made them something else.

Regards

Stephen Cosmic 2000, Internet.

My London Editions' days seem so long ago that it's odd when a letter like yours arrives, Steve.

We also tried a more adult DC reprint title called Zones. (Swamp Thing, Shadow. I think it also had Blackhawk.)

I think Titan and Marvel have the right approach with their smaller but bigger pagination format.

Um *Crikey!*

I have been collecting British comics for decades and buy anything I can find on them. For that reason, and that reason alone, I buy *Crikey!*

You've published a couple of letters from people saying that they prefer the softly-softly nostalgic stuff and to have the comics placed in context.

They're bloody comics – how much context do you need?

Give us some lists and up the factual content. Names, dates – I'd be happy with several pages just listing the stories from each title.

I understand that you have to have big pictures to sell but don't skimp on the detail.

Allen White, Leeds

We are increasing the amount of references we provide, Allen – but we won't ever turn Crikey! *into pages of lists.*

There are already some brilliantly researched fan publications that go into the detail you mention and I'm sure that you would find a visit to the Book Palace website well worth your while.

Um *Crikey!*

I presume Captain Storm is one of the *Crikey!* editorial team writing under a fake name.

Well, no matter who it was – the *Adam Eterno* article (issue 3) was great. It was a great issue overall and the *Nutty Notions* are getting better and better but for me it was *Eterno* that set the mag off.

Thunder was the first grown up comic that I got on a regular basis and I still have several of the actual ones I bought 30 odd years ago. I bet I'm not the only reader who spent time going through the boxes in storage for a weekend visit back to his childhood.

I probably have no chance of tracking down the holiday specials – but I can give the annuals a good try.

Mark Gilbert, Exeter.

Captain Storm is a pseudonym – but not for anyone in the Crikey! *shed. The Cap writes about comics on fan sites and wanted to keep that name for his article.*

The Eterno *article appears to have gone down well from talking with fans at events and suchlike.*

As for those holiday specials – it's going to be a difficult search because we left them behind on the trains and coaches. Too late to search the rubbish bins now.



Um Brian,

Some belated comments on *Crikey!* 3 - another enjoyable issue, and good to see that you're able to distribute further afield (U.S. and Canada) and increasing frequency. Success.

It was good to feature giants like Bellamy, Embleton and Lawrence in early issues so as to emphasise the highest standards of British comics but hopefully you'll be able to return to them in more depth in future.

And while not wishing to disrespect any contributor's contribution, I did feel that the 'Smashing Times' article was deeply flawed. Nostalgia is a personal thing and relies on fallible human memory. It's important to get things right in a magazine of *Crikey!*'s caliber. Some articles of a personal nature, such as 'My Comicy Saturday' don't have to be totally accurate, but I'd argue that the main features should be researched as fully as possible.

Starting with the first sentence (page 12), 'Superhero strips were the mainstay of *Smash* for its first 167 issues', there's a distortion of the so-called 'Power Comics' saga. Like its sister comic *Wham!*, *Smash* began as a 'Dandy/Beano' humorous strip comic. It was the first to start reprinting Marvel stuff, sparingly at first (with I believe, the second, rather than first, issue of the original Incredible Hulk). By the time *Pow!* arrived (with Spider-man prominently featured), the line had become 'Power Comics', but still with a humour/Marvel mix. Not until *Fantastic*, then *Terrific*, did the comics become predominantly Marvel reprints.

Page 13 - as far as the FF chronology goes, the editor of *Smash* did not jump ahead to reprint the Frightful Four issues following the Wedding story. These issues (FF 36 onward) were originally published in the American comics before the wedding story (FF Annual 3, published between FF43 and 44).

Page 15 - under IPC, a number of the adventure strips, including 'Erik the Viking' and 'The Battle for Britain' were reprints of Lion strips 'Karl the Viking' and 'The Battle FOR Britain' (????). It would be helpful to note this. IPC of course had a history of recycling plots and whole strips, often renaming the characters, going back to the early 60s or further.

As I say, I take no pleasure in pointing these errors out, but let's get it right.

One point that struck me was the role that the 'Power Comics' might well have played in killing the British weekly comic. By introducing many to the wonderful world of Marvel, it primed an audience for the wider distribution of these stories IN COLOUR. It would certainly explain the collapse of the other 'Power Comics' - why buy split-up b&w Marvel reprints when the real things - in colour and with longer stories - were readily available? (1968, the year of collapse, was also the year of Marvel's first major expansion). Just a theory.

Best,

Geraint Davies, Internet.

You're becoming such a regular letter writer, Geraint, that we should think about giving you your own column!

Just because an artist has been covered in Glenn's on-going series of UK Comic Greats doesn't preclude them from not being featured in a future article. Glenn's trying to provide an overview of each career, leaving the finer detail to be covered by future writers.

Your comments on the Smash *article are welcomed. It's that spirit of interaction that keeps* Crikey! *alive. There's little point in people spotting mistakes and sniggering in secret as they pass little messages to friends. Let's get in it in the open. If people pick us up on mistakes, we'll do our best to publish the corrections – but people have to tell us first.*

That's it for now. Remember: we love to receive letters. See you in July.

Crikey!

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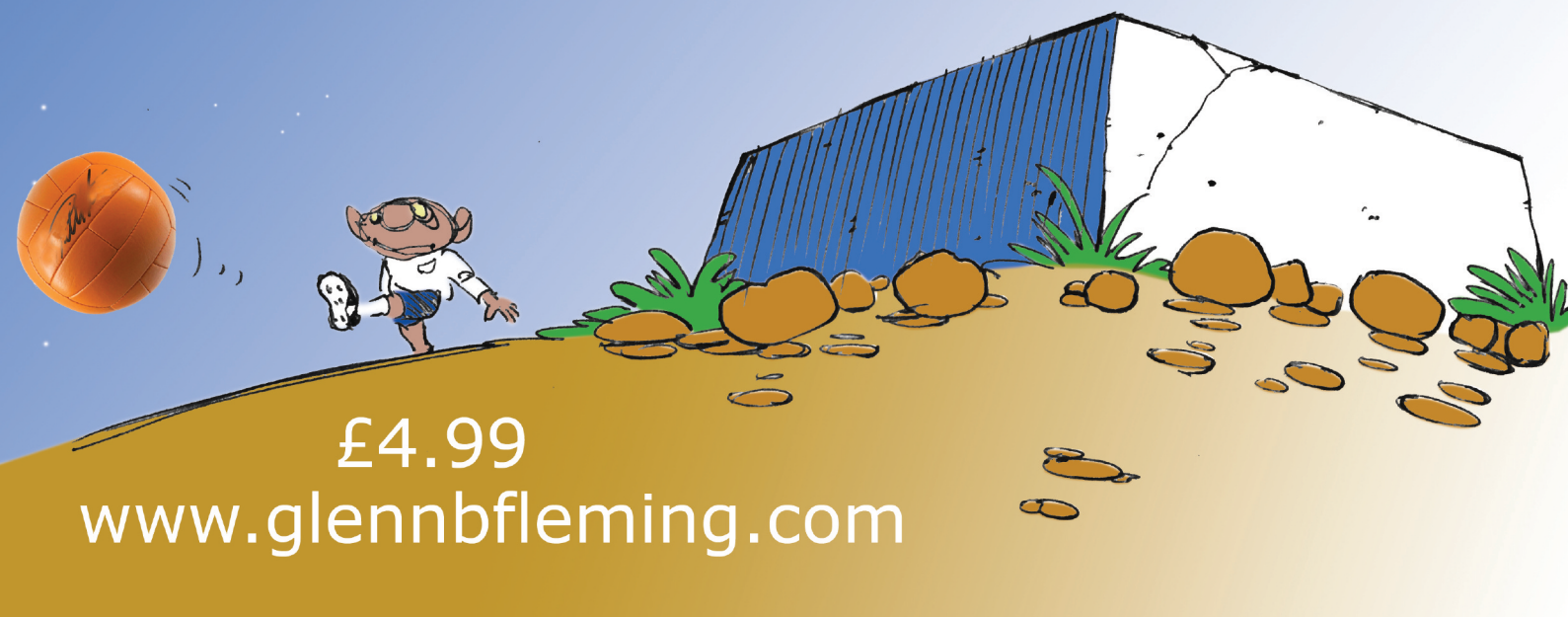

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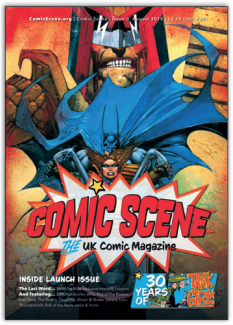











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