

HEROES OF TOMORROW ISSUE!

BATMAN

June 2020
No. 120
\$9.95



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Steve Lightle
GW'19

Mon-El history • Legion of Super-Heroes:
Five Years Later • STEVE LIGHTLE's
Legionnaires • MIKE GRELL's Starslayer •
Manhunter 2070 • Paradox •
Sonic Disruptors • Space: 1999



Volume 1,
Number 120
June 2020

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BACKISSUE

Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!



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BACK ISSUE™ is published 8 times a year by TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614. Michael Eury, Editor-in-Chief. John Morrow, Publisher. Editorial Office: **BACK ISSUE**, c/o Michael Eury, Editor-in-Chief, 112 Fairmount Way, New Bern, NC 28562. Email: euryman@gmail.com. Eight-issue subscriptions: \$89 Economy US, \$135 International, \$36 Digital. *Please send subscription orders and funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial office.* Cover art by Steve Lightle. The Legion of Super-Heroes TM & © DC Comics. All Rights Reserved. All characters are © their respective companies. All material © their creators unless otherwise noted. All editorial matter © 2020 Michael Eury and TwoMorrows. ISSN 1932-6904. Printed in China. FIRST PRINTING.

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UNCOMMON VALOR

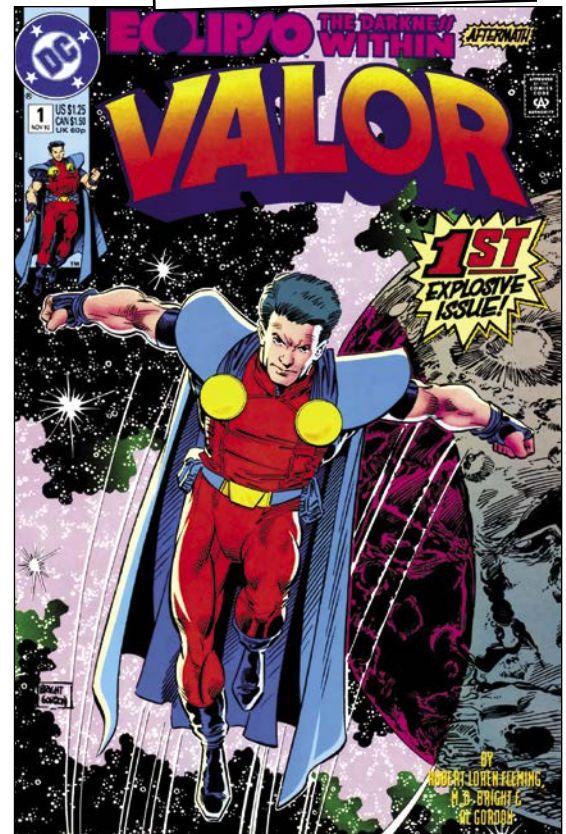
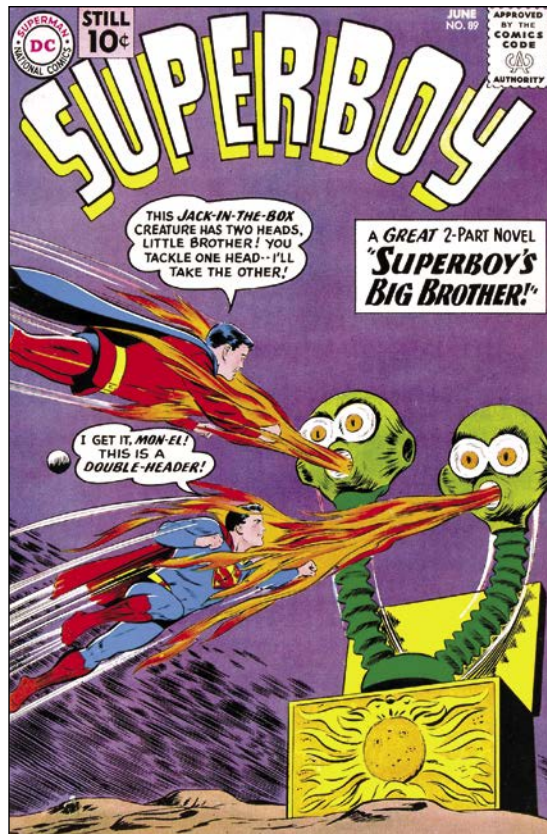
THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY'S BIG BROTHER

by John Wells

C'Mon... Who is This Guy?

From his debut as "Superboy's big brother" to his own series and beyond, DC Comics' Daxamite do-gooder has seen his share of reboots. (left) *Superboy* #89 (June 1961) cover by Curt Swan and Stan Kaye. (right) *Valor* #1 (Nov. 1992) cover by M. D. Bright and Al Gordon. Unless otherwise noted, art scans accompanying this article are courtesy of John Wells.

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For an orphan, family was everything. That was certainly true for Superman, whose heart leapt when an alien visitor crashed on Earth with documentation from his Kryptonian father Jor-El. The stranger suffered from amnesia, but Superman was convinced that Halk Kar was his older brother and brushed aside any evidence to the contrary. Eventually, though, the alien's failure to manifest superpowers on Earth led to a near-fatal electrocution that serendipitously restored his memories. Halk Kar was, in fact, a native of the planet Thoron who had made an emergency stop on Krypton decades earlier. Jor-El had hastily repaired his craft before the planet was destroyed, but the impact of its explosion was enough to place Halk Kar into suspended animation as he hurtled to safety. With his head clear, Superman's "sibling" resumed his journey home to Thoron.

THE KID FROM DAXAM

Written by Edmond Hamilton and drawn by Al Plastino, late 1952's "Superman's Big Brother" (*Superman* #80, left) was ripe for reassessment by 1961. By this point, editor Mort Weisinger was regularly refurbishing old plots for new stories and the tale of Halk Kar got its turn in *Superboy* #89 (on sale in April 1961). Like his predecessor,

the amnesiac Mon-El (found on a *Monday*) wore a costume with a color scheme that was roughly the reverse of Superboy's—red shirt and leggings with blue cape and boots—but Robert Bernstein and George Papp's story departed in meaningful ways.

For one thing, Mon possessed Kryptonian-class powers. For another, Superboy's elation over having a big brother turned to suspicion and he feared that he was being played. Determining that Mon was unaffected by kryptonite, the Boy of Steel decided to fake a meteor shower with lead boulders painted to resemble Green K. Sure enough, Mon-El collapsed, but Superboy's "gotcha" evaporated when he realized that his counterpart's agony was real.

Recovering his memories, Mon explained that he was a native of Daxam who had made a stopover on Krypton and met Jor-El before traveling on to Earth in suspended animation. Exposure to lead was lethal and, unlike kryptonite, removing the substance wouldn't make things better. Desperate to avert the death sentence he'd rendered, Superboy projected Mon-El into the immaterial Phantom Zone. One day, the Boy of Steel vowed, he would rescue his "big brother" and an editorial comment promised "a 3-part novel featuring Superman's return to the Phantom Zone."

Over the next year, Mon made a few guest-shots (*Action Comics* #284, 288; *Adventure Comics* #293; *Lois Lane* #33; *Jimmy Olsen* #62), but that three-part novel never materialized. Instead, salvation was delivered in a feature that hadn't even existed in 1961. After three years as recurring players in the Superman universe, the 30th Century-based Legion of Super-Heroes was given its own series in July 1962's *Adventure Comics* #300 and Mon-El emerged from the Phantom Zone in the inaugural installment to destroy a Luthor robot who threatened the team.

Legionnaire Saturn Girl had devised a treatment for Mon's lead poisoning, albeit short-term enough that he quickly had to seek sanctuary in the Zone again. A permanent cure—employing a bit of Green Kryptonite—was synthesized by Brainiac Five in *Adventure* #305 and Mon-El was finally able to rejoin the material world as the newest member of the Legion of Super-Heroes. The victory was tempered by the fact that it had taken Mon a millennium to get there and flashbacks touched on the horrors he endured in the Zone as ghostly Kryptonian criminals tormented him.

Characteristic of Silver Age comics, that wasn't something that was dwelled on. Instead, Mon-El emerged as an even-tempered presence in the Legion, whose coping methods with centuries in limbo may have endowed him with a degree of serenity. Fans could infer more from tales like a flash-forward in 1967's *Adventure* #354, where an older Mon-El was said to have left the hubbub of the team for the solitude of space and colonizing worlds for new generations.

Within the Legion, he was also part of a trinity, joining Superboy and Ultra Boy as members who possessed essentially the same set of powers. Ultra Boy's point of distinction was that he could only access one ability at a time.

Mon-El belatedly acquired a real name—Lar Gand—courtesy of an E. Nelson Bridwell-scripted text page in 1966's *Superboy* #129. That same write-up included another sharp observation.

"One of the things I most appreciate about Mon-El's story is that it contains a great example of retroactive continuity," Mark Waid tells *BACK ISSUE*. "In subsequent stories, it was revealed that Green Kryptonite was the critical element in the serum that prevented Mon-El from dying of lead poisoning. But years after *that*, when the origin story was reprinted in *Superboy* #129, it was editor E. Nelson Bridwell who realized and noted something interesting. There's a scene in which Superboy exposes Mon-El to Green K in order to find out whether or not he's Kryptonian—but the Green K was in a lead box, which should have poisoned Mon-El but had no effect! In other words, the Green K-as-a-cure gimmick was accidentally 'established' in that very first story only because the editor and writer made a mistake, and no one but Nelson even noticed!"

Future *Legion* editor Michael Eury was wonderstruck by another Silver Age issue. "Mon-El was in the first Legion story I read as a kid: 'Mordru the Merciless!' in *Adventure* #369 (June 1968). That remains, to me, one of the all-time best LSH tales, a raw, riveting story by Jim Shooter that had the Legion's two most powerful members, Superboy and Mon-El, running for their lives."

Joining the heroes during a grim siege in the 20th Century were Duo Damsel and newcomer Shadow Lass (Tasmia Mallor). By the time the story was over in issue #370, romance had sparked between Shady and Mon-El. Even this happy development caused speculation about Mon's future: According to the aforementioned issue #354, Shadow Lass was destined to die saving the Science Asteroid.

In 1969's *Action* #384 (by Jim Shooter, Curt Swan, and Jack Abel), Mon's own demise was foretold by Dream Girl. On Daxam, Eltro Gand—a descendant of Lar Gand's older brother—tried to impersonate Mon-El but wound up killing him instead by inadvertently depriving him of his anti-lead serum. Desperate to make things right, Eltro used a Daxamite device to revive Mon at the cost of his own life. (The unit first appeared in a 1963 tale wherein Protty died to resurrect Lightning Lad.)

WILL THE REAL LAR GAND PLEASE STAND UP?

Mon-El lived on to be elected Legion leader in 1970's *Action Comics* #392 only to have the feature cancelled out from under him with that very installment. When the LSH returned in *Superboy* with Cary Bates as primary writer, Mon was noticeably more vulnerable. The seeming death of Shadow Lass shook him deeply (*Superboy* #183) and he later confided to Saturn Girl that he had no desire to remain Legion leader. "I... might crack under the pressure and strain of another term," he admitted in *Superboy* #190. "I guess I've just lost confidence in myself." An encounter with Tharok and Validus reignited Mon's sense of responsibility, restoring the confidence he needed to accept a second run as team leader.

"Mon was never quite the same" after his resurrection, fan Margie Spears declared in issue #5 (Fall 1973) of the *Legion Outpost* fanzine. "The normally quiet, gentle, considerate Mon-El suddenly became bossy, cold, impatient, and unsure of himself." She argued



Mon-umental Moments

(top) Mordru spooks the Legion in *Adventure* #369 (June 1968), by Shooter/Swan/Abel. The Mon-El/Shadow Lass relationship had its beginnings here. (center) The new Legion leader! From *Action* #392 (Sept. 1970), by Bates/Mortimer/Abel. (bottom) Mon slaps some sense into the Teen of Steel in a fan-frustrating scene from *Superboy* #225 (Mar. 1977), by Levitz/Sherman/Wiacek.

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MARK WAID

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BITS OF LEGIONNAIRE BUSINESS*



by *Legion Lad*

Well known for its multifarious membership, the Legion of Super-Heroes has its own legions of fans who are just as plentiful, with numbers expected to soar even further now, in the wake of the Legion's recent relaunch after more than five years' absence.

The fervent collectors among them aim to acquire every issue that features Legion-related content, even hunting down stories with the most tenuous connections: mere mentions of the Legion or its members, cameos of Legion-related characters or alien races, the use of the Interlac language, right down to the Legion flight ring that Booster Gold uses. And much like the Legion's sinister scavenger the Hunter, there's a sub-set of these fans that prefers to narrow the quest down further, focusing their searchlights on Legion-related memorabilia and paraphernalia.

The pursuit of such treasures can be daunting, but encouragingly, there's a known, finite amount of such items (which will obviously increase as new product gets released), thus ensuring a definite target to aim for. Compare this to such long-standing characters as Superman or Batman, for whom the amount of licensed material over the decades has been so ubiquitous that it's nearly impossible to make a list of every known souvenir.

This article details the main Legion-related merchandise and non-mainstream comic publications that were released up the end of the 1980s, the era which *BACK ISSUE* covers.

It's important to note that the article covers only official DC Comics licensed product in the USA, so you can ignore all the homemade shirts, cosplay flight rings, custom bling and things, and oddities from foreign countries that have been mass produced over the years.

For a more comprehensive listing of Legion collectibles up to the present, see the reference at the end of this feature.

*The phrase "Bits of Legionnaire Business," as long-time Legion fans know, was the name of the letters column in *Adventure Comics* which fans could write to and suggest possible new members or applicants for the group. It's also an apt description for this article, which details many of the diverse bits and pieces of merchandise related to the Legion that have been released over the decades.

But for many years, it was also the name of the Facebook page run by the author, which archived and indexed all Legion-related comics and collectibles: www.facebook.com/bitsoflegionnairebusiness.

All Legion of Super-Heroes images accompanying this article are courtesy of Legion Lad. Superboy, Supergirl, and the Legion of Super-Heroes TM & © DC Comics.

TOPPS SATURN GIRL COMIC BOOK FOLDEE (1966)



Ostensibly a baseball and generally sports-themed card manufacturer, the Topps Company also sidetracked into non-sporting fields.

In 1966, it released its innovative Comic Book Foldees series, a set of 44 cards that came in the form of foldable triptychs. By flipping and folding the perforated components of each card, the user could mix and match various characters and create up to nine oddball new ones. Although the set included many comic-book heroes—hence its name—it also included historical and sports figures.

The card that interests us is Number 16, which features Saturn Girl drawn by the legendary Wally Wood, the only time he illustrated a Legion character. She is described as "The Legionnaire," and shares her card with Pork Chops "The Pig," and Ulysses S. Grant "The General," thus rendering possible humorous manipulations such as Saturn Girl "The Pig," or Ulysses S. Grant "The Legionnaire."

The cards came in two sizes, one only slightly larger than the other. If you're a completist, you'll likely want both versions.

7-ELEVEN SLURPEE CUPS (1973)



In the early '70s, the 7-Eleven convenience-store chain encouraged customers to drink their Slurpees from a range of white plastic cups with images and short biographies of various DC Comics characters printed on them.

Licensed from DC, a total of 60 characters were featured, including six Legionnaires: Brainiac 5, Chameleon Boy, Cosmic Boy, Lightning Lad, Mon-El, and Saturn Girl. You could also get cups featuring Superboy and Supergirl, who despite featuring on the vessels in their own right, were of course Legion members at one time or another. As well, honorary LSH members Jimmy Olsen and Lana Lang had their own cups, although neither was shown in their Elastic Lad or Insect Queen superhero guises. The images for all the cups were lifted directly from the comic books; in the Legionnaires' case, they were illustrations by Dave Cockrum originally used on various profile pages of the *Superboy Starring the Legion of Super-Heroes* title. In contrast, Marvel Comics produced exclusive art for the cups when 7-Eleven licensed their characters for use a couple of years later.

Frustratingly, back then customers would only get what the store would dispense when they ordered their Slurpees, and could not pick and choose the characters of their choice.

As a word of warning, the images on the cups are not resistant to wear and tear, so if you have them as part of a collection, avoid washing them or storing them in direct sunlight.

AMAZING WORLD OF DC COMICS (1974-1978)

DC Comics' excellent self-produced fan magazine of the mid-1970s ran for 17 issues, featuring articles on DC characters and their creators, and was exclusively available through mail order. Incorporating a mix of text articles, strips, regular columns, and comics features, the publication accommodated an interesting assortment of Legion-related content.

Issue #2 depicted a group of characters including Invisible Kid and Mon-El. Issue #12 used Legionnaires on its cover and delved into how the Legion fit into Kamandi's universe; a regular column for Legion fans was introduced, named "The Legion Outpost"; and a visit to the DC offices by a group of Legion fans was famously chronicled. Interestingly, a competition for possible Legion applicants and members resulted in three entries eventually being accepted as Legion Academy students: Crystal Kid, Lamprey, and Nightwind.

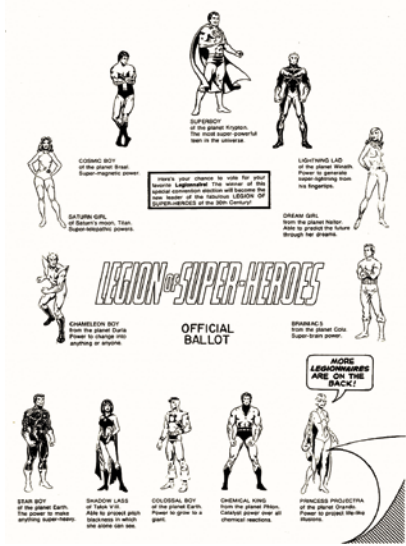
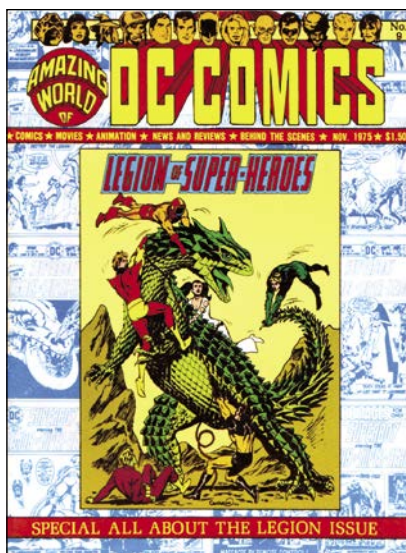
But undoubtedly the best known of the AWODCC Legion issues was the ninth, which devoted its entirety (apart from plugging upcoming comics) to the futuristic fighting force. Sporting an exclusive cover by Dave Cockrum [which was repurposed as the cover for *BI* #68—ed.], the issue included a checklist of all members; a history and description of Legion Headquarters; features on the Legion's members, equipment, constitution, allies, enemies, and policies; and various articles on topics such as time travel and planets in the 30th Century. It also included a hitherto-unseen page that was excised from *Superboy* #212, which focused on Matter-Eater Lad's lack of confidence in his abilities.

AWODCC #9 was edited by Neal Pozner, who had produced the original manuscript as a fan publication, which impressed DC Comics enough for them to buy and publish it. Neal subsequently worked for DC as a production designer and group editor. Curiously, the company did not provide illustrations for the issue. Instead, many repurposed images were used to portray the Legionnaires, including several apparently lifted from bodybuilding magazines. [Editor's note: In an AWODCC article in *BI* #100, DC Comics' Paul Levitz theorized that Pozner himself manipulated images to illustrate the special edition.]

LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES VOTING BALLOT PAPER (1976)

DC Comics held its inaugural (and so far only) Super DC Convention in February 1976, at New York City's Hotel Commodore (taken over by the Trump Organization that year itself and duly converted into the Grand Hyatt). With so many fans attending the three-day event [also chronicled in *BI* #100—ed.], DC decided to ask them to elect a new leader for the Legion.

Ballot papers featuring all the Legionnaires were made available to attendees, who were asked to circle their preferred leader on the form as well as write down the character's name in the



space provided, and placing them in various Legion ballot boxes placed around the venue.

Random forms were drawn at regular intervals throughout the sessions and door prizes awarded, with the fans' choice announced on the last day. Superboy was the clear winner, with Wildfire coming in second. But because the Boy of Steel was only a part-time member, Wildfire was named leader, and duly sworn in in *Superboy* #225, Paul Levitz's first Legion story as writer. Element Lad came in third, and surprisingly, [little-seen Legionnaire] Tyroc placed fifth.

Measuring 8.5 x 11 inches, the double-sided ballot papers were accompanied by a survey form compiled by "the DC staff," asking fans a series of questions about what they liked and disliked about DC Comics, with three lucky participants winning pieces of original art.

While many fans filled in the ballot papers, those with more collectors' instincts kept a few for themselves. There are probably only a handful of these unmarked papers left today.



DC COMICS CALENDARS (1976-1978)



Full 12-month calendars in their own right issued by comic-book companies are nothing unusual these days, even if they appear to be only released at the publisher's whim. But at the dawn of the '70s, such items were non-existent, appearing only occasionally as novelty pieces within the pages of comic books.

The first DC Comics calendar that has any sort of Legion connection appeared in DC's *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-34 (*Christmas with the Super-Heroes*), which featured a standard 12-month listing of dates for 1975, embellished on the periphery with images of various DC characters, including the Legion. This Murphy Anderson illustration also adorned the covers of the four-issue *Legion of Super-Heroes* series, which reprinted various stories from the *Adventure Comics* era.

The following year was a momentous one, with the United States celebrating its bicentennial, an event that seemed to inspire the production of a beautiful 1976 calendar featuring DC's characters, with monthly spreads gloriously illustrated by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano, including the now-iconic Legion fly-by scene. Even more interesting was the calendar's citation of the birthdays of various DC heroes and supporting cast members, featuring all Legion members and the Subs, many of whom had not been previously established. (Never mind that Legionnaires who were not from Earth would not

MANHUNTER 2070™

FlashBack!

by Steven Thompson



As anyone who's been paying a lick of attention knows, the DC Universe has Manhunters out the proverbial boom tube! There's the original Paul Kirk Manhunter, the green Martian one, the one with the dog, the Simon & Kirby one, the later Kirby one, the pirate one, the metal-masked one, the giant robot ones, the Simonson one, and even an old *Star-Spangled Comics* feature entitled "Manhunters Around the World"!

You'll be glad to know this article isn't about any of them.

No, this article is about a white-haired bounty hunter in outer space named Starker, Manhunter 2070, who only appeared three times back at the very beginning of the Bronze Age in the final original-run issues of *Showcase*. Or did he?

Starker's creator was artist Mike Sekowsky, who, of course, had plenty of experience drawing aliens, demons, and monsters during his long run on *Justice League of America*. Sekowsky was going on three decades in the business by the time he did *Manhunter*. Like many other comics artists, though, his work had grown to be more and more stylized (and sometimes a little sloppy) over time and in the wake of Neal Adams' ultra-realistic *Batman*, the fans of that period deemed Mike's artwork unsophisticated. In a 1996 interview in the *Central New Jersey Home News*, longtime DC inker Joe Giella stated, "Mike was a

pleasure to work on. He was a terrific artist. I mean, you know, he drank a little bit. And then later on his work style did deteriorate, but he was always very talented."

Sekowsky wasn't just an artist, though. In fact, as DC Comics began its big period of change in the late '60s and early '70s, where artists were being given more power and creative freedom, many of the old guard were controversially put out to pasture, but not Mike. Along with the likes of Joe Orlando, Carmine Infantino, and Joe Kubert, Mike took several floundering titles off in directions that would have been unthinkable just a year or two earlier. Sekowsky's *Metal Men*, for example, were no longer just wisecracking, bickering robots fighting other robot menaces. No, theirs was now a dark and gritty title, with our heroes on the run for murder, wearing human disguises much of the time.

The biggest change of all came in Sekowsky's controversial "New" *Wonder Woman*, done initially with writer Denny O'Neil, which found the classic, star-spangled Amazon Princess all but retconned out for several years, replaced by a karate-kicking Emma Peel clone named Diana Prince who was mentored by a tiny, blind, Chinese character with the unlikely name of I-Ching who served as *Wonder Woman's* version of John Steed. [Editor's note: See *BACK ISSUE* #17 for the full scoop on the "New" *Wonder Woman*.]

Sekowsky's Space Stalker

Starker—a.k.a.

Manhunter 2070—
as seen on the
Mike Sekowsky/
Dick Giordano
covers to 1970's
Showcase #91–93.

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MANHUNTER'S SHOWCASE

Being the editor as well as the writer/artist on *Metal Men* and *Wonder Woman* gave Sekowsky an almost unprecedented amount of control from DC, which he also brought to the final two story arcs of the company's long-running *Showcase* title.

Showcase was on its last legs at that point. The experimental comic had debuted in 1956 as a means of trying out new series without having to apply for new second-class mailing privileges every time. It had amassed an impressive track record early on, essentially creating the Silver Age by introducing readers to Flash, Green Lantern, the Atom, the Challengers of the Unknown, Adam Strange, the Inferior Five, and more. (Perhaps the most forgotten issue of *Showcase* was #5, Nov.–Dec. 1956, shown at left. It featured a series of short stories



MIKE SEKOWSKY

© DC Comics.

about international policemen, given the overall cover title of... *Manhunters!*)

By the late '60s, although the new characters like Nightmaster and Jonny Double were still well done, the big hits for *Showcase* had stopped. Sekowsky edited the last two trilogies before the title took a long break. First up was *Showcase* #88–90's "Jason's Quest," a hip, modern tale of a young motorcyclist seeking to find himself. The final series of the Jason's Quest run echoed back to issue #5 with a short story titled "Incident on Krobar 3," featuring "Manhunter 2070."

Starker's initial appearance actually comes one issue prior to his technical debut. It's in a three-page preview (inked by Dick Giordano) that's actually a mini-episode all its own. We're introduced to the deep-space setting, the background, and the character. Essentially, it's a Western in space, with aliens as the bad guys and Starker the good-hearted, white-haired bounty hunter with a mysterious past played by... James

Coburn? Lee Marvin? Leslie Nielsen? Hard to tell. Sekowsky was never a realist. Maybe a combination of all three. *Manhunter 2070*'s tall and lean and cool, all dressed in black here. Oh, and we also meet his faithful steed... err... robot, 17001, a.k.a. Arky, with a repository of all known criminals in five galaxies listed in its computer memory.

Starker's first full adventure occurs in *Showcase* #91 (June 1970). "Planet of Death," with better-than-normal inking by Vince Colletta, gives the reader a more proper introduction to our protagonist as well as the two young ladies who act as arm candy to him. Perhaps at the suggestion of the Comics Code Authority, lip service is given to him chaperoning his investment counselor's daughters, but one girl hangs on his shoulders while he's gambling, he's gone for a week and they pined for him while he was away, he calls them "my pets," and is just generally played as if he ain't chaperonin' nothin'. Nudge, nudge, wink, wink.

The girls are still with Starker for his second full issue, *Showcase* #92 (Aug. 1970). In fact, the entire issue (inked by Frank Giacoia) has him recounting his origin to them, explaining how he became "the richest bounty hunter around" by killing off the space pirates who had kidnapped him when he was just a boy.

All of this was in preparation for his third outing, *Showcase* #93's (Sept. 1970) delightfully titled and nicely drawn (by Sekowsky with Giacoia) "Never Trust a Red-Haired Greenie," in which our Manhunter teams up with his own quarry on a quest that leaves him unconscious on a planet, about to be beaten to death by some Neanderthal types.

How he got out of that spot we will likely never know, because all that was left was the call to readers to write in if they wanted to see more of *Manhunter 2070!* And apparently, they didn't.



Are You Ready for Manhunter 2070?

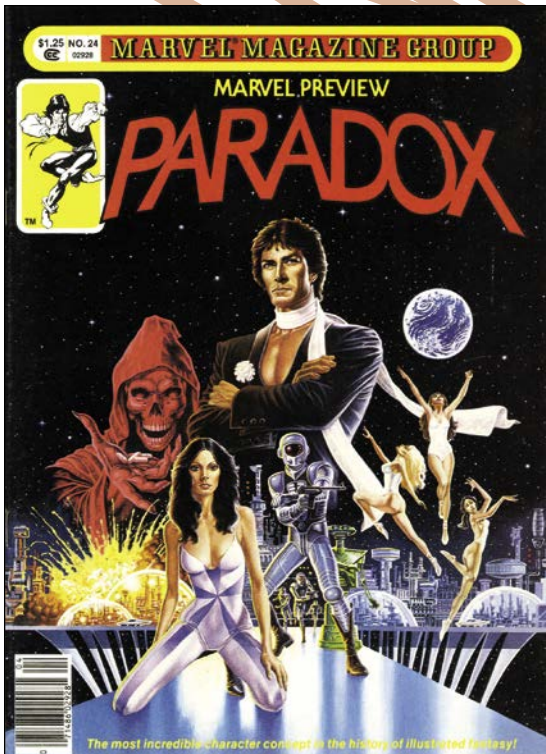
Teaser page 1 (of 3) from *Showcase* #90, the final issue starring "Jason's Quest."

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THE WORLD OF PARADOX

ONE-HIT
WONDERS

by Cecil Disharoon



Paranormal... Paradox

Paradox's two blink-and-you'll-miss-them appearances: *Marvel Preview* #24 (Winter 1980), cover by Paul Gulacy, and *Bizarre Adventures* #30 (Feb. 1982), cover by Jeff Easley.

TM & © Marvel.

What would the most unpredictable agent of the late 22nd Century be like? Writer Bill Mantlo found his creation amid a futuristic setting: breadbasket Earth and her solar system colonies of gene-engineered industrial classes. Here began the question, *Who is Paradox?*

I wish Bill could tell us that, and any number of things.

If Bill Mantlo is ever able to tell us, he would need a neuro-scientific breakthrough. A rollerblading accident in 1992 left Mr. Mantlo unable to communicate due to severe head trauma. His brother Michael Mantlo maintains a Facebook page where you can read about Bill's struggles to survive on life support, and the website *BillMantlo.com* allows the writer's fans to contribute to his medical needs.

Bill, now best known as the creator of Rocket Raccoon, put a lot of his life into his fantastic stories, including Paradox. His characters often spoke about hope.

Paradox's creation apparently pre-dated Mantlo's work on *ROM: Spaceknight*, where the Dire Wraith race shape-shifted in united infiltration; *ROM* #1's December 1979 cover-dated first issue went on sale approximately September 4, 1979.

Paradox is an ideal of individualism—his motivations are all his own. However, the powers-that-be need devil-may-care, dancing, bisexual

Paradox to play the role of spy, to learn the connection between the bizarre pyrotechnic drug trend that claims an immolated ambassador.

From my discussions with the artists who drew this obscure Marvel character's scant two stories, the memories of Paradox's creation present... a paradox.

First I spoke with **Mike Vosburg**, who drew the Paradox sequel, with finishes by Joe Jusko, printed in the Marvel black-and-white magazine *Bizarre Adventures* #30 (Feb. 1982), which went on sale on or around January 26, 1982. Yet this job, by the artist's recollection, precedes the start of his work, following artist John Buscema's premiere, on *The Savage She-Hulk*. Since Vosburg's *She-Hulk* run began with #2, with a March 1980 cover date and approximate on-sale date of December 11, 1979, according to Mike's memories his Paradox story was produced in 1979.

I next talked with the visual originator of Paradox: **Val Mayerik**. His collaboration with Mantlo on Paradox's debut saw print in the black-and-white magazine *Marvel Preview* #24 (Winter 1980).

1975 photo © Marvel.

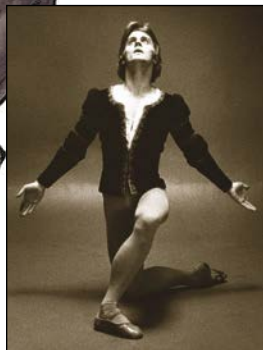
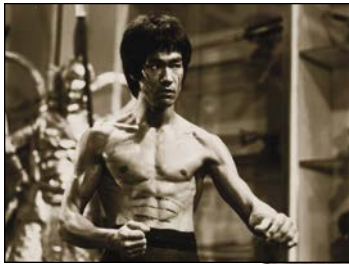
Lastly, I spoke with **Joe Jusko**, inker of Mike Vosburg's pencils on the Paradox sequel.

What follows are my interviews with all three Paradox artists, starting with the first artist on the character, Val Mayerik.

— Cecil Disharoon



BILL MANTLO



Float Like a Butterfly...

Val Mayerik drew inspiration from (inset top) martial artist Bruce Lee and (inset bottom) Mikhail Baryshnikov in his design of (main) Paradox. This art was used for the corner box of *Marvel Preview* #24 and for promotion. Art and photos courtesy of Heritage.

Art TM & © Marvel. Lee *Enter the Dragon* photo © Warner Bros. Baryshnikov photo by Max Waldman.

CECIL DISHAROON: *Tell me about the creation of Paradox.*

VAL MAYERIK: The inception of Paradox came entirely from Bill. I believe it was 1980 or 1981. Bill and I had been friends when I lived in New York. I had left New York and he called me. I was living in Cleveland, Ohio. He said, "I've got this idea and you'd like it. It's about a guy in the future. He's a dancer and into martial arts." I said, "That sounds good."

Bill sent me the script and I drew it. That's about it. I really didn't have any role in coming up with the idea. I finished the idea by creating the character—finishing off the character in terms of what he looked like.

DISHAROON: *Sounds like once it got into your hands, it moved pretty fast. How long did you work on it before it saw print?*

MAYERIK: Well, it was a full-length magazine... It was close to 50-some pages, wasn't it?

DISHAROON: *Yes! It was the entire issue.*

MAYERIK: It must have taken me two or three months. Back then, prior to the digital age, of course, when you could send scans in to be lettered and colored and so forth, I did the pencils. Those were sent to Marvel; they lettered it, and sent it back to me. Then I finished with inking and toning it. What now seems a laborious and arduous process, to me was a pretty good way to work. It must have taken me at least two months to pencil and ink all that material.

DISHAROON: *You can see that Marvel was trying to use the magazine format to open the field to more prestigious creations, where they could go outside the boundaries of the Comics Code and color comics market.*

MAYERIK: Yeah, that was after they developed the Epic [creator-owned] comic line, which was pretty exciting at the time. It gave artists and writers a lot more flexibility.

DISHAROON: *It must have meant a lot that Bill would call you up and offer you the opportunity to work on something outside the Marvel Universe as we typically know it.*

MAYERIK: Yeah. Bill and I met years earlier when I moved to New York City, and had apartments in the same building. We socialized, but never had a chance to work together. As I recall, I might have inked a *Micronauts* job or something like that or something long before that, but nothing significant. We always wanted to work together, but nothing came up. Then when I left New York, about a year later, Bill gave me a call.

DISHAROON: *Paradox is an interesting study in some ways. The character was meant to break several taboos... or what constituted a taboo around 1980. Also, his entire strategy—the success of his strategy—depends on not being predictable.*

MAYERIK: I'm not clear—what do you mean by "taboo"?

DISHAROON: *By taboos, for one, Paradox, the character, as far as I know, was the first openly bisexual character Marvel published. Also, he's a gene-engineered offshoot of humanity: his abilities comes from being a part of the less-privileged class. As he solves his initial case, the revolution that he's helping stop begins to change his mind by his second episode. And we glimpse an array of unusual tactics, to hint at his disregard for playing it safe.*

MAYERIK: Right. You're getting into nuances of the plot I've forgotten, I have to say...

DISHAROON: *You've been busy since then. [laughter]*

MAYERIK: We didn't get very graphic with the bisexuality. There was some mention of it or some hint of it. There was an erotic scene that went on between he and a female character. When I initially penciled it, I had depicted bare breasts and buttocks, which Marvel bristled against and told me to change it—"just cover her up, even if just minimally." Even though they were trying to go outside boundaries, there were still limitations with what they were willing to do on that level.

Other than that, it was quite an unusual character. I modeled the character after Mikhail Baryshnikov...

DISHAROON: *Ah-ha!*

MAYERIK: ...his facial features. He was a dancer and also had martial-arts skills, as well. I kind of combined Baryshnikov with Bruce Lee. That was the genesis of the physical rendering of the character.

DISHAROON: *You did an excellent job depicting the character. He appeared to us as a celebrity, and celebrities are generally considered frivolous. What a great cover: He can take the forms of these different colonists.*

Earth is where food is grown, which makes it the central political power of their solar system-wide group of colonies. They use the usual conditions of those planets to foster different parts of their manufacturing, so they don't have pollution on Earth. The problem is, if you aren't on Earth, you don't have the same kind of life. The Moon's levels represent the social strata that pervade the solar system.

MAYERIK: Yeah, it was pretty creative. Bill had a lot of ideas in that vein in terms of the haves and the have-nots. He was always looking for a vehicle, which expressed that without being overly political.

SPACE: 1999

FlashBack!

by John K. Kirk



Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's *Space: 1999* (1975–1977) was only one of the many iconic sci-fi television productions they created (their TV series included *Fireball XLS*, *Stingray*, *Thunderbirds*, and *UFO*, among others), but arguably was their most recognized.

Co-starring the husband-and-wife team of Martin Landau as Commander John Koenig and Barbara Bain as Dr. Helena Russell, as well as Barry Morse as Professor Victor Bergman, *Space: 1999* was the most expensive series the Andersons produced, one of their few live-action shows, as opposed to the "Supermarionation" puppet shows for which they were internationally known. [Editor's note: See our sister mag *RetroFan* #4 for a look at one of those series, *Thunderbirds*.] Television's *Space: 1999* included a multitude of supportive media efforts with toys, novels, audio dramas, and two ancillary comic-publishing initiatives that included early comics work by talented creators like Joe Staton, Nick Cuti, and John Byrne.

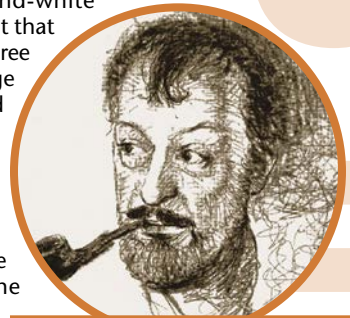
AS SEEN ON TV

The two *Space: 1999* comic series created between 1974 and 1976 were both published by Charlton Comics, the small publisher of periodicals in Derby, Connecticut, known for its 24/7 printing-press operation and its eclectic variety of mostly low-budget magazines.

The first was a bimonthly black-and-white *Space: 1999* comics magazine, a format that included three visual stories along with three text-only stories. It was edited by George Wildman and Gray Morrow and featured the art of Morrow, Vincente Alcazar, Pat Boyette, Dick Ayers, and Carlos Pino. Writers on this magazine were Mike Pellowski, Nick Cuti, and Charlton's most prolific scribe, Joe Gill. This was a publication aimed at a more mature audience, with its lack of color and the emphasis on text; in fact, adults and young adults were the target audience of all of the comics-related magazines published in the 1970s by Charlton, Marvel Comics, and others. [Editor's note: The B&W *Space: 1999* title was included in *BACK ISSUE* #88 in an article exploring Charlton's magazines of the 1970s.]

Like its black-and-white sibling, Charlton's *Space: 1999* full-color comic book included the editorial efforts of Wildman and Morrow. Along with the talented creators previously mentioned, it saw the work of legendary artists Joe Staton and John Byrne. It was also written by Cuti and Pellowski.

The premise of the comic naturally mirrored that of the television series: a surge of electro-magnetic radiation caused the stored nuclear waste on the Moon to explode, with the resulting kinetic thrust propelling our natural satellite out of Earth's orbit. After leaving the solar system and entering a black hole (and a number of space warps), the Moon was long gone with no chance of returning home to Earth's demesne. Moonbase Alpha was adrift in the cosmos.



GRAY MORROW

Portrait by Michael Netzer.



NICK CUTI

Hey Kids Comics Wiki.

Gonna Party Like It's 1999

Covers to *Space: 1999* #1 (Nov. 1975)–6 (Sept. 1976). Issues #1 and 2's covers painted by Joe Staton; issues #3–6's covers penciled and inked by John Byrne, with Byrne watercolors.

Space: 1999 © ITC Entertainment Group Limited.

The first issue of the comic included a truncated version of this origin story from television, setting up the premise for original adventures to follow.

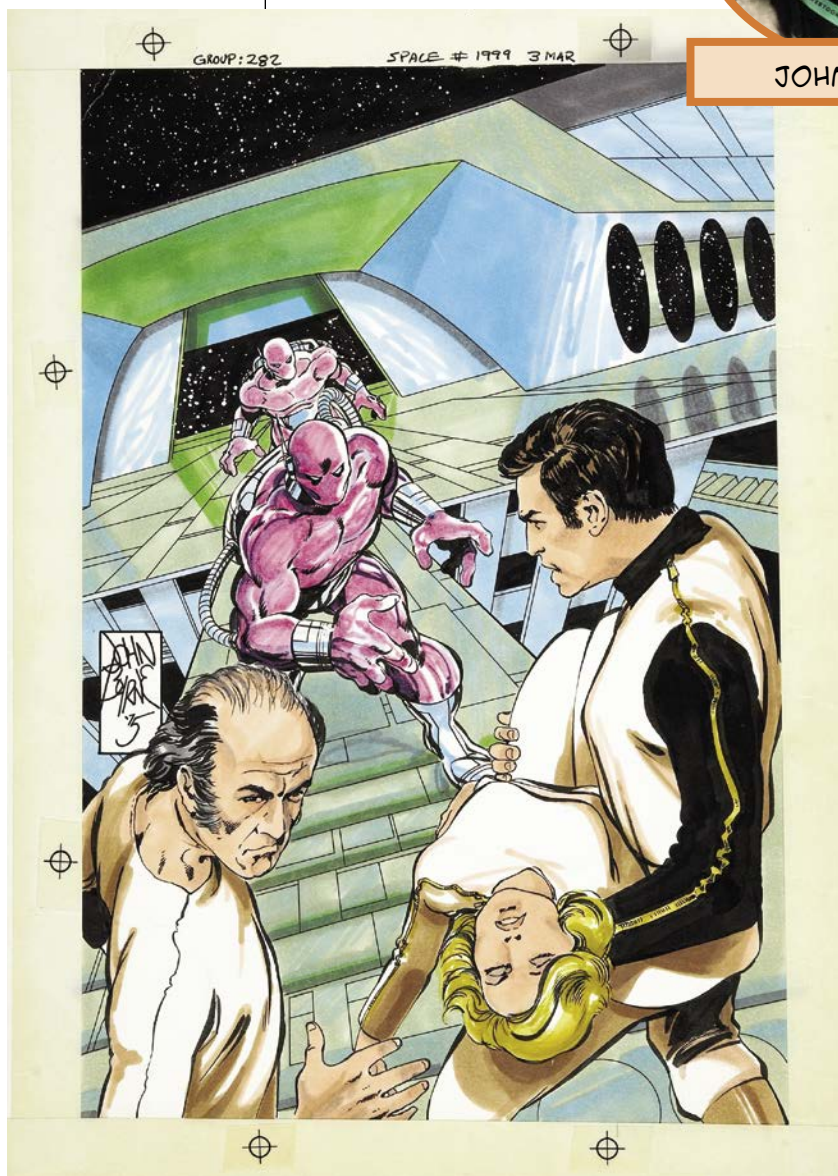
From a publishing point of view, the purpose of the two *Space: 1999* comics seemed fairly straightforward: to support the profile of the *Space: 1999* television show as far as its younger audience was concerned. It was part of what we would regard today as a multimedia initiative that included a syndication of the series in multiple countries, including Great Britain, various European nations, the US, and Canada, as well as countries in South America. There was a *Space: 1999* toy line from Mattel that was released around this time, along with vinyl recorded audio dramas from Power Records in Britain and North America. Despite its success in many other countries around the world, the hopes of landing an American audience for *Space: 1999* was key to the show's success.

Charlton's promising acquisition of the *Space: 1999* property was based on the success and profile of previous Gerry and Sylvia Anderson series. With the emphasis on additional publicity initiatives, it seemed like a good risk.



JOHN BYRNE

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.



Art editor Gray Morrow recounted his initial introduction to the project at the 1982 *Space: 1999* convention:

"I was contacted by Gail Munn, who was the agent for ITC [a.k.a. Incorporated Television Company, the *Space: 1999* license holder], to come for a private screening of this fabulous new series that was going to appear on television here in the States. She wouldn't tell me at the time what my part in it was supposed to be; she wanted to build up a little suspense. I went and met the English representative and watched what I thought was a pretty damn good show, which I guess was the first episode. Then they asked me if I'd be interested in doing a *Space: 1999* comic book, and we went from that. When you're working with a two-dimensional medium and you're trying to compete with a three-dimensional one, your best shot is to make the stories wilder or [farther]-out. In other words, attempt to do something they couldn't do on film, at least not inexpensively. I don't know how successful we were. I knew the writer Nick Cuti was very enthusiastic and worked very hard on making [the comics] as entertaining as possible."

AN ENERGIZER FOR CHARLTON

The mid-1970s was a period of great excitement for Charlton Comics. Along with the creators previously mentioned, other artists and writers had joined the fold, affectionately known as the "CPL (Contemporary Pictorial Literature) Gang". [Editor's note: See *BACK ISSUE* #100 for more about the CPL Gang.]

Recruits during this period included the likes of Bob Layton, Roger Stern, and Mike Zeck. Under the editorial leadership of George Wildman and Nicola "Nick" Cuti, Charlton's titles experienced a massive revamping that saw the decline of a good deal of their romance titles, but a surge in horror anthologies and science-fiction television tie-in books. *Space: 1999* was one of these titles and one, given the sense of anticipation around the show, in which Charlton had invested a great deal of hope.

Nick Cuti shares with *BACK ISSUE* his recollections of that period:

"At the time—I recall it was the early 1970s—Charlton was beginning to take its comic-book division very seriously. With the hiring of George Wildman as editor, they had found a very creative and dynamic leader. Before then, Charlton had treated the comic division as fodder to keep the presses rolling. Then we began to receive the rights to the shows *Six Million Dollar Man*, *Emergency!*, and, of course, *Space: 1999*.

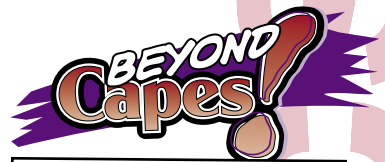
"Joe Staton was our premiere artist, and after the demise of *E-Man* we needed to give Joe work," Cuti continues. "So I wrote the first few issues of *Space: 1999* with Joe in mind. Since *Space: 1999* was created in England,

"Nightmarish" Premiere

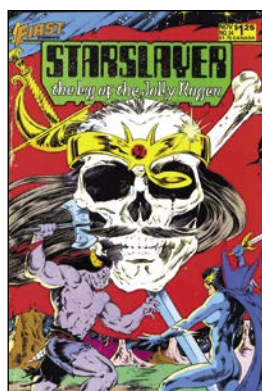
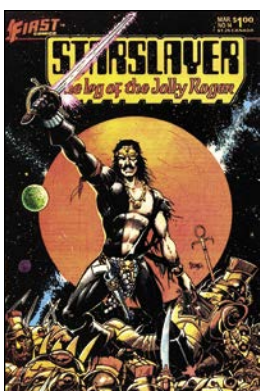
Original cover art to *Space: 1999* #3 (Mar. 1976), John Byrne's debut as artist on the title. He found licensor approvals of celebrity likenesses to be a burden to the project. Scan courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com). (inset) *Space: 1999* #1, the black-and-white comics magazine.

Space: 1999 © ITC Entertainment Group Limited.

MIKE GRELL'S STARSAYER THE FUTURE OF COMICS

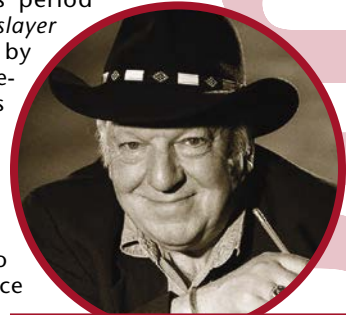


by Ed Lute



While there have always been smaller publishers such as Archie Comics and Charlton Comics, when most people think of comic-book publishers, they think of the "Big Two": Marvel Comics and DC Comics. This was especially true during the Bronze Age. If comics creators wanted to work in the field, they usually worked for Marvel or DC. This began to change during the late 1970s and early 1980s with the rise of independent publishers.

It was during this period that Mike Grell's *Starslayer* premiered, published by Pacific Comics, an independent. The series was originally supposed to be released by DC Comics, but this didn't end up happening. Pacific wouldn't even be the last publisher to handle the series. Since Grell owned the series he could move it from one publisher to another, and that's what he did.



MIKE GRELL

Dr. Dan Yahniun/Mike Grell.

Mike Grell and *Starslayer* were at the forefront of not only independent comics publishing but creator-owned material.

BACK ISSUE looks at the *Starslayer* series, how it originated, its move from DC to Pacific then to First Comics and finally to Valiant, and how Grell and this series helped to set the stage for the future of comic-book publishing.

FROM A WARLORD TO A STARSAYER

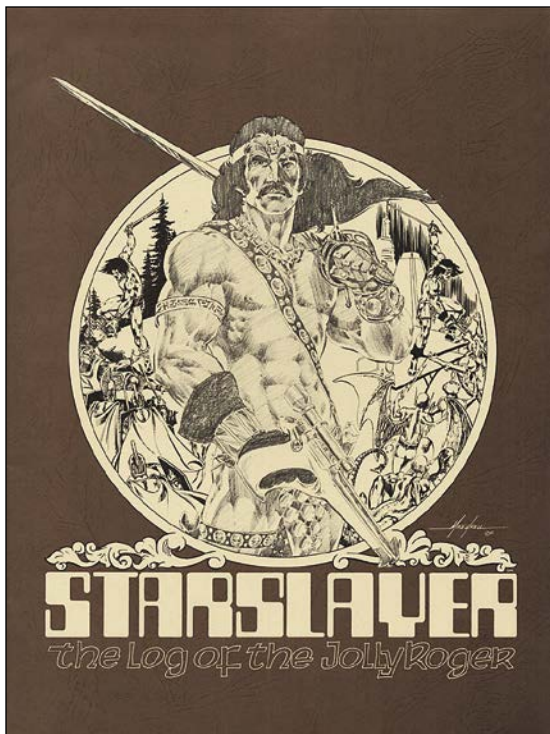
Grell's *Warlord* originally premiered in DC Comics' *1st Issue Special* #8 (Nov. 1975) before moving into its own self-titled series a few months later. The series revolved around a modern man named Travis Morgan who was thrust into the prehistoric, hollow-Earth fantasy world of Skartaris.

With *Starslayer*, Grell wanted to do the opposite of what he did in *The Warlord*. This time Grell transported Celtic warrior Torin Mac Quillon from the time of the Roman Empire under Caesar to the distant future. Grell tells *BACK ISSUE*, "Originally, *Starslayer* was supposed to be published by DC as a companion book to *The Warlord*. It was conceived as the reverse of *The Warlord*. *Warlord* was a modern man in a primitive society while *Starslayer* featured a primitive man in a futuristic world. It evolved into something more over the years."

The first issue of the series introduced Torin, his wife Gwynth, and son Brann. While defending his village, including his wife and son, from an invading Roman army, Torin was about to die upon Roman spears when he disappeared in a flash of light. The onlookers thought that he had been favored by the gods and saved.

For a series called *Starslayer*, the first issue didn't offer much in the way of sci-fi. That didn't matter, though, because although readers bought the comic thinking they would get a science-fiction tale, they were treated to the tale of a Celtic warrior who was battling to save his family and tribe from the invading Roman hordes. It wasn't until the last few pages of the issue that readers were given the first science-fiction aspect of the story,

Starslayer TM & © Mike Grell.



due to circumstances beyond Grell's control, DC didn't publish *Starslayer*.

In 1978, DC Comics launched the oft-reported DC Explosion, which was an initiative to offer readers comic books with a higher price point (50 cents compared to 35 cents) but with added pages, resulting in more value for their money. The initiative also was enticing to retailers because they would make a bigger profit on these higher-priced books. DC not only planned to increase the page count of their current books but produce new comics in the expanded format. With some of the new titles, DC planned to produce more diverse material. DC was going to go beyond superheroics with Mike Grell's sci-fi epic *Starslayer*.

However, the initiative didn't take off due to market oversaturation and inclement weather-caused distribution problems, and the new titles didn't see print until years later, if at all. Thus, the DC Explosion became known as the DC Implosion, with many titles—and a few DC staffers—being unceremoniously axed.

"The book was greenlit at DC Comics until the Implosion happened," Grell recalls. "It had already been announced. I had the concept and pitch done. Back then, that's all you needed to get something greenlit at DC—a concept and a solid pitch. It was cancelled along with a lot of other material."

Most of the DC work that was cancelled or shelved because of the Implosion saw print in two issues of *Cancelled Comics Cavalcade*, a makeshift publication to preserve copyright that presented the comics in a black-and-white photocopied format that never saw release to the public. However, Grell's *Starslayer* wasn't included in these issues. According to former DC Answer Man Bob Rozakis, "Pretty much anything that had completed art went into CCC. Projects that were only in the script stage (my *Duela Dent/Harlequin* series and *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #18, for example) did not." This wasn't the end for *Starslayer*, of course, as Grell would take the project on what at that time was relatively unexplored territory.



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Tamara

PLATE 3

PACIFIC COMICS

Pacific Comics was formed when brothers Steven Schanes and Bill Schanes began selling comics via mail order in 1971 through publications such as the *Comics Buyer's Guide*. The brothers eventually opened brick-and-mortar retail stores. By the end of the 1970s, the Schanes brothers saw an opportunity to start publishing their own comics through the direct-market system.

Prior to the rise of comic-book retail stores and the implementation of the direct-market distribution system, comics were usually sold at newsstands, convenience stores, and pharmacies, where the comics could be returned for credit if they weren't sold. Independent distributors shipped the comics to these outlets. The direct-market system enabled comic-book retail stores to bypass independent distributors and order merchandise direct from the publishers at a deep discount but on a non-returnable basis. The direct market enabled publishers to not only get their product into fans' hands through the stores but also to offer more mature-themed series that couldn't be sold on newsstands.

Grell recalls, "Bill [Schanes] had heard about *Starslayer*. So he and Steve approached me and said they were getting into comic-book publishing and they'd be interested in publishing it at Pacific. They told me that I would own my own characters, so that's what sold me. I liked the idea of having the copyright on my work. I remember thinking at the time this would be the future of comics."

Portfolio Premiere

Fans feasted their eyes on Grell's *Starslayer Portfolio* in 1981. Shown here are its cover and Plate 3, featuring Tamara. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

TM & © Mike Grell.

MIKE BARON'S SONIC DISRUPTORS COMICS INTERRUPTUS

by Thomas Powers



MIKE BARON

For those of us who were reading Mike Baron's dystopian rock 'n' roll, science-fiction comic *Sonic Disruptors* in 1987–1988, a great shock occurred when issue #8 never arrived on the stands since DC Comics had pulled the creative plug on this 12-issue maxiseries. Thus, like Gerry Conway, Roy Thomas, and George Pérez's *JLA/Avengers* and John Byrne and Terry Austin's *The Last Galactus Story* in *Epic Magazine* before it, Baron's *Sonic Disruptors* languishes in the annals of frustratingly unfinished 1980s comic stories.

Fortunately, Mr. Baron was kind enough to grant me an interview via email that provides his insight on the kinetic world of *Sonic Disruptors*, its tragic cancellation, and the comic's potential awesome return in the form of *Ethyl*.

– Thomas Powers

THOMAS POWERS: Mike, could you please share how you came up with the concept for *Sonic Disruptors*?

MIKE BARON: First came the name. It just sounded great. The idea of a pirate radio station orbiting Earth is a natural, inspired by pirate radio stations that used to broadcast across the border from Mexico (Wolfman Jack) and pirate radio stations on ships off the coast of Britain.

POWERS: That last part sounds like the plot of Richard Curtis' 2009 film, *Pirate Radio*. Have you seen it? If so, then did you notice any thematic similarities in the film to *Sonic Disruptors*?

BARON: No, but I have always meant to. I will dial it up.

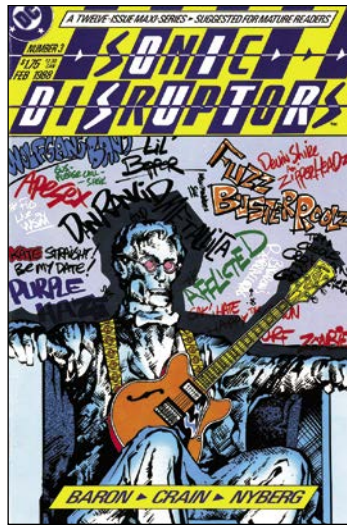
POWERS: What was your writing process like for this comic?

BARON: In those days, my writing wasn't very scientific. I would sit down with a pen and a blank page and

For Those About to Rock

Cover and title page from *Sonic Disruptors* #1 (Dec. 1987). Story by Mike Baron, art by Barry Crain and John Nyberg. All scans accompanying this article are courtesy of Amanda Powers.

TM & © DC Comics.



Unfinished Composition

The Crain/Nyberg covers to *Sonic Disruptors* #2–7. Note the ironic imagery on #7's cover, which was fated to be the book's last despite its conception as a 12-issue series.

TM & © DC Comics.

imagine a compelling opening scene. Then I would proceed like an inchworm, panel-to-panel, always asking myself, "What happens next?" That's the essential question in all fiction. "What happens next?" By proceeding like a blind man with a cane, it forced me to make each panel count. Of course, I was also thinking about the middle and the end and the dynamics of the story. The story must never remain static, or there is no story.

POWERS: As you crafted this story that's quite a dynamic one, how did you collaborate with artist Barry Crain and interface with editor Mike Gold?

BARON: Barry is a great artist, did a wonderful job, and I would work with him again. And Mike is a great editor who gave me free rein. I would be happy to work with him again. Alas, Mike is retired.

POWERS: Why is Sheik Rattle Enroll your lead character?

BARON: The story demands that the rebel in the sky is the protagonist.

POWERS: And he's a deejay playing outlaw rock. On the subject of rock 'n' roll, how did it shape this book?

BARON: Well it's a love letter to rock 'n' roll, and, of course, the Sheik was patterned on Frank Zappa, whom I respect. I saw Zappa once in Eau Claire with Flo and Eddie. What a tight band that was! Zappa left behind a huge body of music. *You Are What You Is* is my favorite album of his, a double record, of course, as were most of his records. He recorded constantly.

POWERS: You also introduce the Republic of Rock in issue #2 (Jan. 1988). How did you come up with the idea of an island where outlaw musicians could come together?

BARON: Thomas, I don't know! These things just come to me. Just kidding. The music of my youth was filled with politics, anthems, and dreams of a better world. Particularly, Jefferson Airplane's album *After Bathing at Baxter's*, Country Joe and the Fish, and the Mothers of Invention.

POWERS: In issue #5 (May 1988), the Republic of Rock is also the setting of a raucous battle of futuristic rebel bands. What were your thoughts behind this competition that you called the Gross Out Contest?

BARON: That's an idea I've had for a long time, and I wrote it up as a short story. Unfortunately, it was too gross to reproduce. I doubt I even have a copy. I might do it again. It's a funny idea, inspired by real life. It's also another idea I've been dragging like a trailer throughout my career, inspired by bands like the Fugs, the Stranglers, and, of course, Ozzy Osbourne, who famously ate a bat onstage.

POWERS: That's pretty cool. Moving on to the outer-space aspect of *Sonic Disruptors*, what influenced your concept of the Little Bopper, the orbiting pirate radio station from which the rebels broadcast their forbidden rock 'n' roll?

BARON: Outlaw radio station as a satellite. Of course, today it would need some kind of defense system, because many governments would be trying to knock it out of the sky. Can't have unregulated news, y'know. Might reflect badly on the ruling parties.

POWERS: Concerning Cannabis Superiosis (or "Green Bopper"), the giant marijuana plant we see growing inside Little Bopper in issue #2 on page 3, how did your stance on drugs (i.e., decriminalization/legalization issues) influence your writing of the book?

BARON: I have always supported decriminalization of marijuana. I live in Colorado now, where it is legal. I have always written high. I still do—although to my shock, I find that I don't need to get high to write. The writing remains the same. It's just easier when I'm stoned. As for harder drugs like cocaine and heroin, I just don't know. I have libertarian tendencies, but I've seen the harm those drugs can do. It's one of those areas of human activity that slips snakelike between messy human nature and dry policy. Where those drugs are easy to get, you have disaster. Like San Francisco.

POWERS: Also around this time (1987), how did your political views at the time affect how you wrote the character that is President General Nuke Oosterhaus?

BARON: My politics were jejune and scattered, but the story itself channels every leftist trope imaginable. It practically wrote itself. Nuke is an amalgam of the fantasy authoritarian fascist you'll find in any Third World country.

FlashBack!

LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES



TOM BIERBAUM

Facebook.

FIVE YEARS LATER...

ROCKIN' THE PARADISE

by Jim Ford

Five Years Later... the Legion of Super-Heroes has disbanded.

Five Years Later... United Planets (U.P.) members Braal and Imsk are at war.

Five Years Later... in *Legion of Super-Heroes (LSH)* vol. 4 #1 (Nov. 1989), the new creative team of Keith Giffen, Tom and Mary Bierbaum, and Al Gordon forged a narrative direction distinctly different from the colorful utopian future of the previous series, which ended three months prior. This new *Legion of Super-Heroes*, with its nine-panels-per-page structure, subdued color palette, and dystopian tone, was closer in texture to *Watchmen* than to *Superboy*.

Starting in 2009, Tom Bierbaum committed his recollections of writing the *Legion of Super-Heroes* to his online blog, "It's OK, I'm a Senator," a quote from Tenzil Kem, the former Matter-Eater Lad, in *LSH* (v4) #13 (Nov. 1990). Tom and Mary (T&M) Bierbaum were given "dialogue" and "story assist" credit for most of their time writing with Keith Giffen, who earned "story and pencils" credits. "Keith and we spent several hours on the phone mapping out his plans for the universe and what had happened in the five-year gap, so that he and we felt like we knew where we were going and could write something that would tie together over the long haul," Bierbaum reported on his online blog.

Inker Al Gordon also received "story assist" credits. "I was intimately involved in the book from 'before the beginning,' even before T&M were approached," Gordon tells *BACK ISSUE*. "Keith and I were helping Paul [Levitz] finish his long run as writer on the *Legion* (third series), and he had asked Keith, since Keith's last DC contribution was such a hit ([the *Justice League* series from 1987,] which I also worked on), what he wanted to do next, and Keith said, 'the *Legion*.' Paul sighed and approved it. Then for eight months or a year, Keith and I would chat on the phone about what we wanted to do with the Legion. At some point Keith told me he found these two writers who were

a team (and married) and that they knew more about the Legion than any sentient entity in the galaxy, and T&M came on board.

"At one point in the gestation, Keith said we all needed to create two characters each," Gordon recalls, "and I created Celeste Rockfish and Kent Shakespeare," who first appear in *LSH* #6 (Apr. 1990) and 12 (Oct. 1990), respectively. "Keith did Vrykos," the vampire, who first appeared in *LSH* #3 (Jan. 1990) and was supposed to become a Legionnaire, "and Ivy," the little girl who speaks to plants, who also appeared first in issue #12, and never did become a Legionnaire, "and T&M created Devlin O'Ryan," cub reporter also in issue #6, "and Kono," in #2 (Dec. 1989). "I love Kono," Gordon adds.

"We felt cursed. Utterly cursed," inaugural *LSH* editor Mark Waid tells *BACK ISSUE*. Printing errors delayed the first issue by one week, and there was a particular problem with the *LSH* promotional material drawn by Giffen. "We produced a four-page black-and-white advertising flyer for comics stores to generate interest before issue #1 came out, but when it was shipped, it had been folded inside-out, so all anyone saw looking at it was a bunch of building rubble. Who on Earth is going to pick that up and say, 'That looks interesting'? That was wasted money."

"I remember our poor editor, Mark Waid, getting questioned by us about every little edit he made on this issue," Tom Bierbaum reported. "We labored over every word and really didn't want to change a thing."

The story is told in a dense nine-panel-grid format with flashbacks to the Legion's past freely intermingled with news events and nightmares, characters identified almost covertly, unattributed snippets of conversation, and blood spattered and pitch-black panels. It was an aggressive storytelling technique that demanded the full attention of the reader.

Not Your Father's LSH

Detail from the startling opening page to *Legion of Super-Heroes* vol. 4 #1 (Nov. 1989), where provocateur Keith Giffen and his creative cadre began to slowly reveal what had happened since we last saw the Legion.

TM & © DC Comics.

"I think this one issue had the most planning and deliberation of any comic we ever worked on, and in a positive sense," Bierbaum wrote. "This one was labored over because we were all about as enthusiastic as could be about launching this new take on the Legion universe... Overall, I can see how people both thought this was a very confusing comic and also a very good comic. It's very challenging, but it's also really exciting to see the Legion universe thrown up in the air so radically and with such ambition."

Three text pages accompany issue #1 and text pages continued as a feature until they were largely phased out after issue *LSH* #35 (Nov. 1992). The Bierbaums set dates to the events of the Legion's past, imagined from a starting point of this series that takes place in 2994 and counting backwards, with the Legion being founded in 2973. The first text page details the great economic collapse of the United Planets in October 2989. The second is a call by the Earth President to dismantle the Legion of Super-Heroes on April 13, 2990. The final text page is the official letter by Legion Leader Brek Bannin, formerly the hero Polar Boy, announcing the disbanding of the Legion of Super-Heroes on July 6, 2992.

"It was really interesting to write the text pages during this run of the *Legion*," Bierbaum wrote. "I don't know if it worked the same way for a lot of readers, but to us, it really gave the universe a feeling of authenticity to see these documents representing different voices and points of view and giving some real insight into who to believe and who not to believe in this universe. And boy, after ten years as a reporter for the *Orange County News* and *Variety*, it was really an enjoyable change of pace to write a news story where I could make everything up."

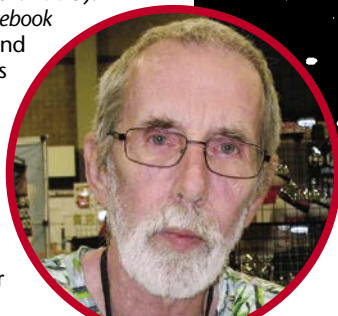
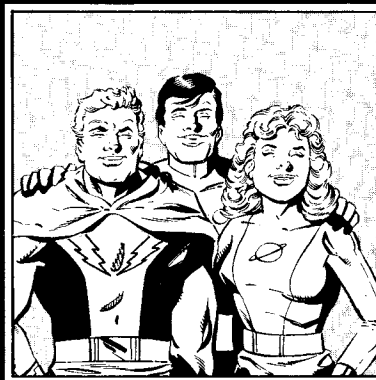
Mentioned, almost in passing, is "Black Dawn," a tragedy that befell the Legion during the five-year gap that is one of the untold stories of this series. "In a nutshell, [Legion villain] Dr. Regulus went insane and was going to cause the sun to go off in a nova-like explosion," Bierbaum reported. "Wildfire saves the day and sacrifices himself." Part of this story would be told by the next creative team of writer Tom McCraw and pencilers Stuart Immonen and Christopher Taylor, in *LSH* #52 (Late Nov. 1993).

The *2995: Legion of Super-Heroes Sourcebook* (Mayfair Games, 1992), written by Tom and Mary Bierbaum, contains further details on "Black Dawn," and other events that occurred during the five-year gap.

"Keith immediately worked Mary's character, Kono, into a key role," Bierbaum wrote about *LSH* #2 (Dec. 1989). "Some people saw her as an intended replacement for Tinya (Phantom Girl) Wazzo, but that was never our intention. Mary thought of an interesting power that happened to have some similarities to Tinya's and I think Keith just coincidentally put her on Rimbor as a shady Sklarian pirate-type. She was a natural for Jo's band of smugglers." Jo Nah, the former Ultra Boy, falsified a criminal past in *Adventure Comics* #316 (Jan. 1964). "And her uppity feminist point of view worked well with Jo, a very formidable male but also someone who had no trouble getting along with very assertive women."

Roxxas, the raving mad butcher who killed the inhabitants of the planet Trom, leaving Element Lad the sole survivor of his race in *Adventure Comics* #307 (Apr. 1963), kills Legionnaire Blok in *LSH* #3 (Jan. 1990). "I think a lot of people, myself included, didn't particularly like the idea of killing off Blok... I had a fondness for the guy who was originally introduced as a villain" [in *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes (SLSH)* #253 (July 1979)] "and just kind of glommed onto the group

There were three of them.
Three teenagers.
And they had a dream.



KEITH GIFFEN

for no particular reason... I regretted losing Blok less than I'd have regretted a lot of other characters that might have bitten the dust in that story."

Mon-El is haunted by voices in *LSH* #4 (Feb. 1990). "There was a story where Mon-El died," in *Action Comics* #384 (Jan. 1970), Bierbaum noted, "but was brought back to life by one of his descendants, Eltro Gand, who sacrificed himself and resurrected Mon-El with a device similar to the one that revived Lightning Lad years earlier," in *Adventure Comics* #312 (Sept. 1963). "A prominent member of early Legion fandom, Margie Spears, had theorized in an old *Legion Outpost* fanzine," from issue #5 (Fall 1973), reprinted in the *Best of the Legion Outpost* (TwoMorrows Publishing, 2004), "that these devices didn't actually revive anyone, they just put someone else's life and soul into the body of the recently deceased. Keith liked that idea, so we went for it." The Time Trapper, creator of the Pocket Universe that birthed Superboy, also haunted Mon-El. "I think the

Legionnaires Three

House ad page from the problem-ridden *Legion* promo flyer. Art by Giffen and Gordon. Scan courtesy of Jim Ford.

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A View from the **LEGION OUTPOST**

**Greatest
Stories**
NEVER TOLD

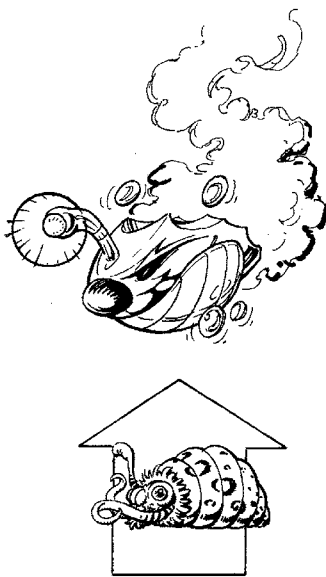
An Interview
with

STEVE LIGHTLE

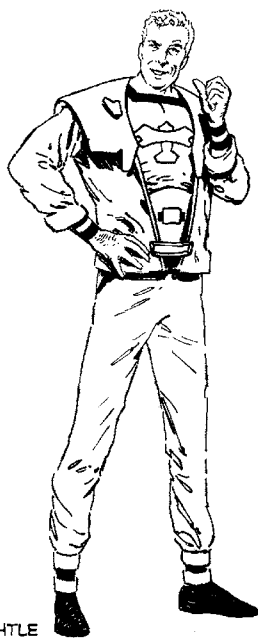
by **Michael Eury**
transcribed by Rose Rummel-Eury



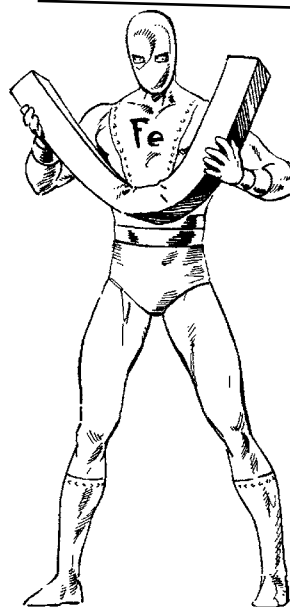
SUPERBOY*



QUISLET



MARLA LATHAM



FERRO LAD

ARTWORK, COPYRIGHT, 2014, STEVE LIGHTLE

Lightle's Legionnaires

These characters were intended to be among the cast of Legionnaires stationed at the Legion Outpost. "Superboy" was actually a new character named Neutron. Courtesy of Steve Lightle.

Art © Steve Lightle. Legion of Super-Heroes TM & © DC Comics.

It wasn't the first time I was bowled over by a new Legion artist. I was a kid reading *Superboy* back in the early 1970s when an unknown artist named Dave Cockrum, along with his mentor, Murphy Anderson, first illustrated a backup tale starring DC's future team of teen heroes; Cockrum would soon re-popularize the Legion of Super-Heroes feature and help it usurp the magazine's pages from its titular star. I was also there when his Legion successor, Mike Grell, made a similar leap into becoming a fan-favorite.

Fast-forward to 1984, when *Legion of Super-Heroes* (formerly titled *Superboy*, then *Superboy Starring the Legion of Super-Heroes*, then *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes*) launched a new #1 issue by its 1980s team supreme, Paul Levitz and Keith Giffen, in DC's glossy, flashy new "Baxter" paper format, available exclusively in the nascent direct-sales market (and by mail subscriptions). The existing *Legion* comic, still available via traditional newsstand distribution, was renamed *Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes*, and for its first year ran new LSH stories, then the next year began reprinting (under new covers) the stories published the year prior in the Baxter *Legion* book.

With the fourth issue of the Baxter *Legion*, Giffen stepped away from plotting and penciling to plotting and layouts, with a new guy by the name of **Steve Lightle** taking residence in the Legion Clubhouse as the series' new penciler. Lightle's art was a wild departure from Giffen's style, echoing some Curt Swan and Dave Cockrum nuances while standing firmly on its own with crisp rendering and storytelling. Clearly, this was a guy who loved the Legion and had the artistic chops to pull off its cumbersome cast and extraterrestrial landscapes and hardware.

Steve's stay on *Legion of Super-Heroes* was short-lived but influential. Soon he went on to draw a *Doom Patrol* reboot, then went on to other projects including amazing cover work for both DC and Marvel. But when I assumed the *Legion* editorial chair some 30 years ago (Yikes! Where did the time go?!), still being a fan of Lightle's *Legion* work I approached him about returning to DC's future franchise. Our mutual plans weren't realized for several reasons, but in this interview, conducted by telephone on September 3, 2019, we share with readers the story of a Legion series that *might* have been...



STEVE LIGHTLE

Facebook.

– Michael Eury

Honorary Legionnaire

(top) Lightle in the 1980s. (bottom left) In his first Legion issue, #4 (Nov. 1984), Lightle was required to draw the death of Karate Kid—(bottom right) but Steve planned to return martial artist Val Armorr to action in his proposed *Legionnaires* book. Inks by Larry Mahstedt.

TM & © DC Comics.

MICHAEL EURY: *Let's go back some 30 years, to 1990, 1991, where I, as a young editor at DC Comics, got the Legion of Super-Heroes assignment and we connected shortly after that. Let's backtrack and figure out exactly when we met... or first talked.*

STEVE LIGHTLE: You remember talking to me at a convention—Chicago, right?

EURY: *That's what I was thinking, but you have no recollection of that.*

LIGHTLE: I have no recollection of that meeting...

EURY: *...I'm glad I impressed you so much. [laughter] But we soon talked on the phone.*

LIGHTLE: I remember you saying that you had an idea for a Legion book and you wanted me to be the regular artist on it. I said I didn't think I could do a regular monthly book again—I didn't want to, and you said, "I've already got this great idea and I've spoken to Dan Jurgens about you and he alternating issues." Somehow your first contact may have been with Dan. I'm just speculating because my memory is nothing to brag about at this moment.

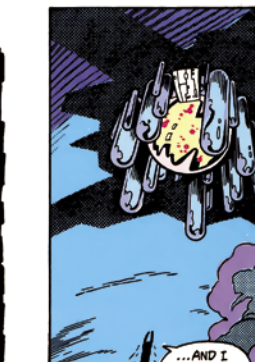
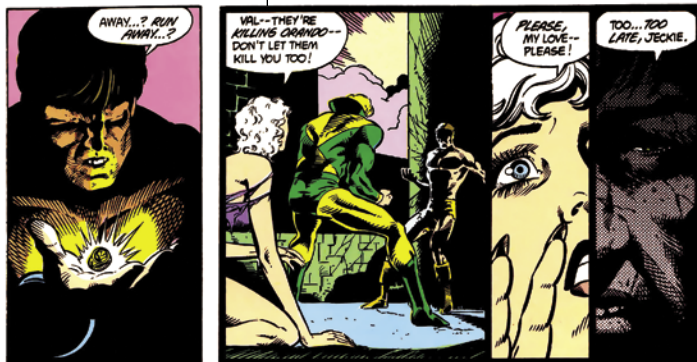
EURY: *Well, we are talking about the minutiae of any given workday that happened some three decades ago. The timeline is probably more along the lines of 1991, instead of 1990, because it was around that time that I had re-inherited Legion after my first stint on it, since for a year I was in management at DC as Dick Giordano's assistant.*

LIGHTLE: I think the first time you contacted me was when you had first gotten the Legion. I remember you quickly exiting that because you had other business to attend to and then you contacted me a year or so later when you had gotten back to the Legion. The specific project you're talking about didn't come to be until that second contact.

EURY: *Exactly. Keith Giffen's "Five Years Later" version of the Legion was unfolding at that point, and I'll give it kudos for being ambitious and being a hard-hitting, sci-fi vision of dystopia in DC's future. Of course, some people, including people in the editorial office whose positions were higher than mine, felt that version strayed away from the utopia and the hopeful vision of the Legion. I was planning to produce some lighter Legion books that would complement Keith's darker version. That's where our paths would have crossed, because I wanted to work with you since I enjoyed your work with Paul Levitz on Legion in the 1980s.*

LIGHTLE: I had a great time on it, too. I have really fond memories of that. It was nice to contribute to something that I'd been a fan of since I was a little kid.

I think that I probably saw the Legion before I was capable of reading it. Same thing with *Doom Patrol* and *The Flash*. These were books that I had seen before I was able to read and I was so enthused about what *could* be happening. I wanted to learn to read to find out what I was missing.



WEIRD! WONKY! What the--?! The DEFECTIVE COMICS Story ... and the Secret Origin of the Sketch Card



by Mark Voger

It's an underwhelming tale involving pornography, serial-killer comics, a Goth-metal band, and the mercifully brief emergence of bottom-of-the-barrel "talent," set amid the Great Comics Boom of the early 1990s...which inevitably culminated in the Great Comics Bust of 1993.

I was just a guy who, since I could hold a crayon, dreamed of becoming a comic-book artist, but instead became a writer-designer for newspapers. Not a complaint. The work was good, and after all, I was no Ross Andru.

But there I was in January 1993 at Jacob Javits Center in New York City, hawking my oh-so-cleverly-named Silver Age "spoof" comic book, *Defective Comics*. I was a guest at the booth of Comic Zone Productions, an indie publisher based in my home state of New Jersey, which honed a niche doing parody, pornographic, and serial-killer comic books that would make Estes Kefauver spin in his grave like a construction drill.

(One, a bio of convicted serial killer John Wayne Gacy, featured a cover self-portrait of Gacy wearing a clown costume. Inside was an ad for Gacy's original paintings, with sales benefiting his defense fund. You can't make this stuff up.)

Comic Zone was run by Rich Rankin, an artist who operated a comic shop of the same name. (Rankin was a prolific inker for DC and Marvel.) I had already illustrated two books for Comic Zone, both of them "adult" spoofs. I justified these sleazy ventures by comparing them to the

work of my hero, R. Crumb. I convinced myself. "I'm doing this in the tradition of the underground."

Still, since my byline appealed to no one, I coined a *non de plume* es

"blue" assignments: Mad M, When Rankin, to my eternal non-porn comic-book idea an actress who paid her dues, finally landing a legitimate less-enlightened time.)

Meanwhile, back at the Javits Center, I was situated directly across from the band Gwar (who were pushing their new album). These guys were lunatics and were decked out in full-body paint. I was loudly pontificating in character.

A female Gwar member, Slymenstra Hymen, wrapped her arms around the throat of fellow member Tech. I was trying to get a word in for a walk, like a dog, on all fours. I was a shirtless Mr. Destructo could handle it.

Folks passing by at the Javits Center were in a gawk at this circus. As a result, I got some bonus eyeballs. I was just a guy who, since I could hold a crayon, dreamed of becoming a comic-book artist, but instead became a writer-designer for newspapers. Not a complaint. The work was good, and after all, I was no Ross Andru.

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BACK ISSUE #120

HEROES OF TOMORROW! Mon-El hero history, STEVE LIGHTLE's Legionnaires, and the controversial Legion of Super-Heroes: Five Years Later era. Plus SEKOWSKY's Manhunter 2070, GRELL's Starslayer, Charlton's Space: 1999 tie-in, Paradox, and MIKE BARON's unfinished Sonic Disruptors series. Featuring the BIERBAUMS, BYRNE, GIFFEN, MAYERIK, SIMONSON, TRUMAN, VOSBURG, WAID, & more. LIGHTLE cover.

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