

DITKOMANIA

#91

\$2.00





Speedball illustration by Jim McPherson.

EDITKORIAL

The first issue of **DITKOMANIA** that I ever contributed to was #33 (Oct. 1992), where I expressed a low regard for Ditko's most recent mainstream effort, **Speedball**. When I revived DM with #64 (March 2008), I wrote an article reappraising Speedball, having found that the series had grown on me over the years. (DM #64 also included a long checklist of Speedball's Ditko-era appearances, which I found handy to refer to when composing this new issue's opening article.) As I re-read Ditko's *Speedball* stories this time around, I found still *more* things to enjoy and comment upon. Instead of relying on our memories of the comics that we liked (or didn't like) when they were new, it can be rewarding to revisit them from time to time with a fresh perspective, to see if they still hold up, or discover things that we missed the first time.

Back in the 1980s, after all, the art in those comics was considered to be "*later Ditko*" (and thus deemed inferior to the beloved and desirable eras of "*early Ditko*" and "*peak Ditko*"). Time has altered our definitions, however, and in 2013 (the 60th anniversary of Steve Ditko's professional comics career, which began in 1953), Ditko is still going strong, producing new work. We now know that the 1980s are the **middle** of Ditko's career, not as late as we had once imagined. In addition, Speedball's appearances in later Marvel comics (which **Richard Caldwell** writes about in this issue) has resulted in a fanbase for the character beyond the purview of the traditional Ditko fan/collector.

This issue marks the long-awaited return of **Tom Ahearn** to our pages. Tom (along with Brian Waters) drew "*The Last Tim Boo Ba Story*" serial that ran in several issues of DM in the mid-1980s. Tom has supplied me with many new illustrations to use in future issues. Tom drew this issue's back cover (colored by **Mort Todd**) depicting Speedball, as well as a few illos inside. The original B&W version of the back cover was printed recently in *Tetragrammaton Fragments* #228 (the UFO newsletter, also published by me; ordering info for that is in the UFO Checklist near the end of this issue). Welcome back, Tom!

Javier Hernandez (www.javzilla.com) drew and colored the front cover of this issue (based on an original color guide by **Fester Faceplant**). The back inside cover was drawn by

UFO member **David Branstetter** (www.strawmancomics.com). The front inside cover (and a Killjoy illustration elsewhere in this issue) was drawn by **Jim McPherson**. The Speedball illo on the next page was drawn by **Martin Hirschak**. *My thanks to all!*

As with last issue, I listed DM #91 on **Kickstarter** (www.kickstarter.com), a site which allows projects to receive money from those who are interested in helping to fund the project. This issue would have been published regardless, of course, but it did bring in a lot of money that allowed me to add more pages and have a color cover without adding any extra cost to those who are already subscribers. It's still the best buy to **subscribe to DM** (\$10 for 4 issues in the USA, postpaid), and I encourage all readers to subscribe directly so as to not miss an issue. Kickstarter is also a good way to help bring in new readers, Ditko fans who have never bought an issue of DM before. If you would like additional information about Kickstarter, I wrote more about it in *T-Frags* #228.

I especially want to thank the following individuals who contributed the most to this issue's Kickstarter fund-drive:

**Michael Ambrose, Aaron Caplan,
comcartboston, Stephan Friedt,
Ted Haycraft, Batton Lash,
Donnie Pitchford, and Jonathan Ross.**

Next issue is planned to be released by September 1st and will likely have a **Gorgo/Konga** theme (depending on what submissions I receive). If anyone would like to send in a review, article, illustration, or letter of comment, you can email me at robimes@yahoo.com or write the mailing address printed below. *Thanks!*

-- Rob Imes, EDITOR.

DITKOMANIA #91

FIRST PRINTING: June 2013. This is the **PDF** edition of DM #91, originally published by Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195 USA. Email address: robimes@yahoo.com **PRICE:** \$2.00 (plus \$1.00 for P&H in the U.S.). Speedball, New Warriors and Spider-Man are TM & © 2013 Marvel Characters, Inc. The Creeper TM & © 2013 DC Comics. Killjoy, Mr. Quiver, and The Screamer © 2013 Steve Ditko. All articles and fan art in this issue is © 2013 their respective creators.

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SPEEDBALL

THE MASKED MARVEL



HIRCHAK
2012

WHO WAS THAT MASKED MARVEL?

by Rob Imes

Unlike the creative origins of Spider-Man, where the names of a few outsiders have been proposed (by themselves or others) as having had a hand in various aspects of its genesis, the path to publication for Speedball has rarely been retold. In a 2004 interview, Jim Shooter claimed that Speedball had originally been developed by Tom DeFalco for Marvel's New Universe line circa 1986, but went unused when Shooter took control over the line. DeFalco replaced Shooter as Editor-in-Chief in April 1987, and was in a position to further develop and approve the leftover Speedball concept. DeFalco and Ditko had previously worked together on Marvel's *Machine Man* series (#15-19) in 1980 which was done in a style reminiscent of the early Lee-Ditko comics. Although DeFalco is credited only as a co-plotter of a few of the early Speedball tales, from the first he has been listed as Speedball's co-creator (along with Ditko).

Blake Bell's book *Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko* (Fantagraphics, 2008) included four detailed landscape-sized pencil drawings by Ditko depicting Speedball and his milieu (supporting cast, environment, powers), presumably intended as a presentation piece for the series. (Interestingly, Robbie Baldwin's shirt is shown with a mountain-peak type design on the front, something that is seen in the comics but which I had always assumed to be a modern touch added by the inker.) To promote the new series, Marvel distributed an 11" x 17" poster to comics shops which depicted the scene from the splash page of *Speedball #1*, showing our hero between the forces of LAW (represented by Robbie's father, Assistant District Attorney Justin Baldwin) and the world of ART (Robbie's mother, former actress now educator Madeline "Maddy" Naylor). It's a classic Ditko juxtaposition of opposites, with Speedball caught in the middle -- like Stac Rae between Dr. Serch and Fera -- but unlike Stac, the teenage Robbie Baldwin hasn't yet determined the right course for himself. The blurb at the bottom of the poster reads, "And you thought you were getting bounced around by life's little problems" (echoing the "problems" angle that was part of Peter Parker's appeal) and said that the new series would be coming out in June 1988.



OPENING PITCH

What comic was the **first** published to have Speedball in it? Sometimes the dates listed in Marvel's in-house magazine *Marvel Age* differ from information that is found elsewhere, such as on the website "Mike's Amazing World" (www.dcindexes.com) that many researchers use as a source for figuring out when comics actually hit the stands. Of course, with comic books, an issue can hit certain stands sooner than others; for example, a comics shop would receive an issue before one's local bookstore did, and the bookstore might receive it sooner than one's local 7-11.

Marvel Age listed two dates for each title, the "shipping" date, followed by the "on sale" date.



The first true appearance of Speedball was in *Marvel Age* #64 (July 1988; on sale March 15 according to *dcindexes.com*) which featured news about "The Evolutionary War" event dominating that summer's Annuals. Speedball appears on the cover of that issue of *Marvel Age* (shown at left), drawn by Ron Frenz and Al Milgrom. The issue noted that *Marvel Age Annual* #4, which contained a new 5-page Speedball story, would ship June 7 and be on sale June 28. *Marvel Age* #64 also contained a notice of the promotion of Ann Nocenti's assistant editor, Terry Kavanagh, to full editor, and that one of the titles under his charge would be the new *Speedball* series. Mike Higgins and his assistant editor Mike Rockwitz were credited as being in charge of the "weekly" *Marvel Comics Presents*, which would in fact become a

biweekly instead. *Marvel Age* #64 also contains a description of *What The -?!* #1 which reveals the true author of the Ditko-penciled tale in that issue: "Mark Gruenwald and Steve Ditko go behind the scenes in a wacky send-up of our misunderstood super-villains." When the issue was published, Gruenwald's writing credit was hidden by a pseudonym instead: Gwen Dibley (see *Ditkomania* #80 for the whole story behind that).

Amazing Spider-Man Annual #22's shipping date was May 31, 1988, therefore making it the first comicbook appearance of Speedball, firmly establishing him from the outset as a member of the Marvel Universe -- meeting Spider-Man and Daredevil -- in the same way that Spider-Man himself was established early on (in *ASM* #1) to share the same world as The Fantastic Four. This Annual also contained a 10-page Speedball solo story by the same team that would be producing his comicbook: plotter and penciler Steve Ditko, scripter Roger Stern, and inker Jackson (Butch) Guice.

Originally, *Speedball* #1 was scheduled to be the character's first proper appearance. *Marvel Age* #64 noted that "Two weeks before this annual comes out, Speedball will debut in his own regular comic, to be plotted and drawn by another Marvel legend, Steve Ditko, co-creator of Spider-Man and Dr. Strange, and scripted by Roger Stern." The report went on to say that "Mark Gruenwald sees Speedball as a new character in the classic tradition of the great Marvel series of the 1960s." These plans changed, as can be seen on a copy of *Speedball* #1 itself, which has the month listed as September on the front cover, but October in the indicia. According to *dcindexes.com*, *Speedball* #1 went on sale June 14, technically making it the 3rd appearance of the character (after *Marvel Age* #64 and *ASM Annual* #22).

Marvel Age #65 (August 1988) announced that Mike Higgins had left his editorial position at Marvel and that Mike Rockwitz was now Kavanagh's assistant editor, with his roster of titles consisting of *Marvel Comics Presents*, *Excalibur*, *Speedball*, and two limited series: *Hero* (not published until 1990) and *Wolfpack*. The issue also contained a color photo of Kavanagh (described as a "Neo-Editor" in the caption) with his former boss, Ann Nocenti. (Kavanagh had been Nocenti's assistant editor since 1985, as reported in *Marvel Age* #33, Dec. 1985.) Although Kavanagh and Higgins shared the editor credit on the first two issues of *Marvel Comics Presents* (which were released in May 1988), *Marvel Age* #65 noted that Higgins had "lined up most of the material you will see in the first several months of the series." Among the upcoming stories mentioned in the article was "a two-part Captain America story written and penciled by Steve Ditko" (which wouldn't see print until three years later, in MCP #80-81, May 1991).



Speedball assistant editor Mike Rockwitz recently shared with me some memories about those days: "Working with Steve was a pleasure. He was a gentleman and a consummate professional. I think I was 20 years old at the time and was thrilled to be working with a legend! From what I recall, he would do layouts of the issues on 8.5" x 11" paper and walk Terry and myself through the action. A few weeks later the pencilled pages would come in and he would go over them again. Steve treated me like any other editor -- in spite of my youthful demeanor. Face it, Speedball was a dopey name -- we used to joke that the cover copy for issue #1 should read, *Speedball - it killed Belushi*. But Steve treated the character with pride and dignity. I enjoyed working with Steve. We even collaborated on an eight page filler story for *Marvel Comics Presents* (#10). He wanted to write a Machine Man story -- so he came up with Machine Man meets [the F.F... Failure Five]. He didn't want to do the dialogue so he asked me if I wanted to write it. Using his amazing layouts I scripted the story." Terry Kavanagh told me that he noted his own "concerns with editor-in-chief Tom DeFalco about the

title for the series being "Speedball," since it was the street name for a mix of heroin and cocaine at the time. (Obviously, Tom didn't share my concerns, since we went with the title anyway.)"

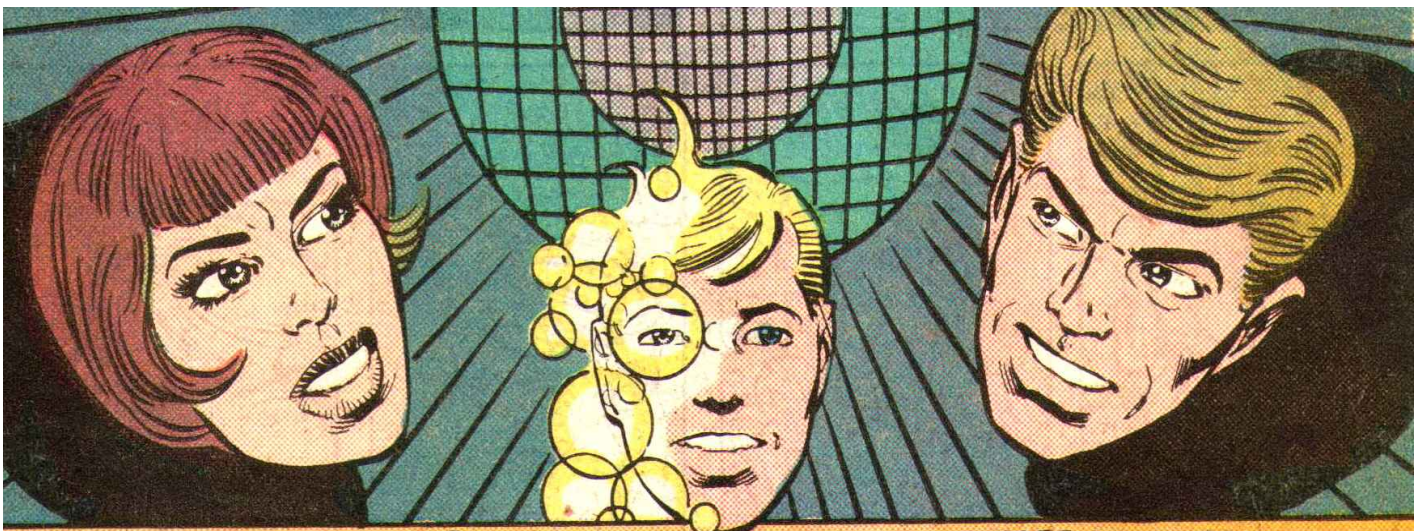
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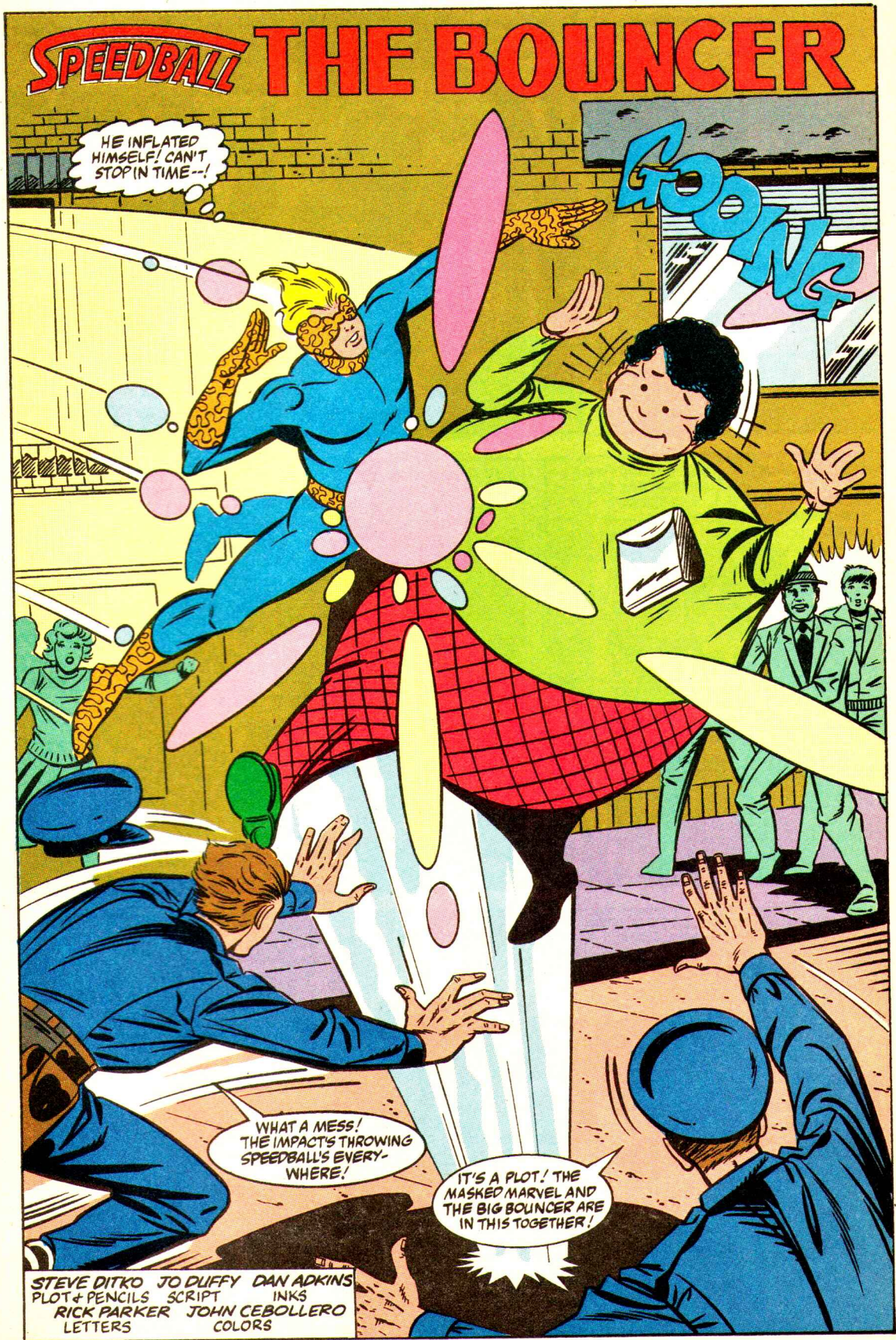
In the first Speedball story, in *Speedball* #1, and on the cover (with his back to the reader), Speedball's face is obscured by the bubbles which surround it. The same force that protects him from injury also keeps his face from being recognized by others. While this obscuring of the face is demonstrated throughout the first story, the subsequent stories allow the reader to see Speedball's face unobscured, with the understanding that the characters in the story aren't able to identify him. (Incidentally, during the Ditko era the hero usually isn't referred to as Speedball at all, but as The Masked Marvel, and it is his *power* which is described as the "Speedball effect." It was only after his own series was cancelled, when Robbie joined the New Warriors, that he was regularly called Speedball in the pages of the comics.) The lack of control exhibited by young Robbie Baldwin as he struggles to master his new powers (and prevent them from being seen by others) can be compared to the physical changes that occur in adolescence, the alienation or sense of discovery that one might feel toward one's own body, which is changing beyond one's control. Robbie's desire not to be touched, which sets off the bubbles around him, could be compared to a teenager being embarrassed by their acne or an apprehension about physical intimacy. (A reader in the lettercol of #8 made a similar observation.) The fact that Ditko was once again plotting and drawing a teenage hero inevitably drew comparisons to his most famous creation, Peter Parker, especially to a mainstream audience that was unfamiliar with his independent work, who knew him only as Spidey's original artist.

It was not the concept of Speedball alone which hearkened back to the early 1960s. As with some of the early *Spider-Man* and *Dr. Strange* stories, Ditko's art pages in *Speedball* were often crammed with panels, sometimes nine or more to a page. The independent, self-copyrighted work that he was also producing in the mid-to-late 1980s, such as *Static* and *The Mocker*, likewise had pages filled with tiny panels that propelled the storyline forward in a clear (if cramped) manner, with the occasional splash page or large panel to accommodate an action scene (for example a long vertical panel if Speedball fell from a great height). The advantage of such an approach is that the writer (or plotter; in this case, Ditko) can tell a lot of story in a small number of pages. While some readers may appreciate getting more story for their buck, lazier readers may find the plethora of tiny panels off-putting and put down the comic as dull because it has fewer of the eye-popping visuals that drew them to reading comicbooks in the first place. Ditko's 1980s *Speedball* and *Static* pages, with their tiny-panel pages, was quite a different approach from the bigger, five or six-panel pages found in Ditko's 1970s Charlton ghost comics, as a glance at Craig Yoe's recent book *The Creativity of Ditko* demonstrates. In those ghost stories, dramatic visuals dominate nearly every page, where tiny panels are usually reserved only to place the omniscient host who is silently observing the scene. So, why the change? The difference would seem to be due to the ghost comics having been drawn from full scripts, written by others, while the *Speedball* and *Static* pages were

plotted by Ditko himself, who was evidently more interested in having the panels serve the purpose of moving forward with a complex storyline (one containing a large cast of characters to follow) rather than wowing the reader with a simpler story's eye-popping visuals. A few of the Speedball stories that Jo Duffy scripted did not have Ditko listed as the plotter, and their page layouts had bigger panels, around six per page.

The series had a large supporting cast, although none had the chance to develop beyond mere types. A reader may have the sense while reading about them that the characters are not acting naturally, but are conforming to a broad personality type set down by a writer for the sake of the story he wants to tell. The two most prominent of Robbie's high school friends is David Bealer, a brash red-haired Flash Thompson type, and Teri (later misspelled Terri) Cooper, a sympathetic Liz Allan type who always winds up with Flash (I mean, David). There were also the personnel at Hammond Labs, where Robbie worked part-time performing menial tasks (as well as running errands for one of the scientists, Dr. Benson, that invariably leads him to the scene of the crime that issue). Perhaps the most important resident of the lab was a cat named Niels (later misspelled Neils) who had been exposed to the same energies that Robbie was, and who shared his bouncing ability. Many stories ended with Robbie in the last panel still trying to find a way to capture the elusive Niels so that the scientists could study him further. Of the cops on patrol, we have the elderly Officer Burnatt (always shooing hobos out of the park) and the patrol partners Al LaGuardia and Don Phipps, with the former always being suspicious of Robbie's presence at crime scenes and the latter dismissing the former's suspicions). The town's media is represented by a station with literally the letters "T.V." at the top of their building (referred to as "TV-6" in the text), where the superficial host Joe Spenser holds forth, while the "S. News" building (for "Springdale News") is home to serious print reporter Emily Barron. Whenever these two meet, they argue worse than Robbie's parents over which of their respective professions is superior. In fact, the nature of their arguments -- words vs. pictures -- resemble the arguments that some comics fans might have. Although they are slightly amusing to watch, it would be interesting to know whether these two characters (shown bookending Robbie in the panel below) were intended only to serve as one-dimensional comic relief, or become more well-rounded over time (as even J. Jonah Jameson did, as early as ASM #10).





Speedball meets "The Bouncer" from *Marvel Super-Heroes* #6 (July 1991).

Ditko presented a new villain in every issue, but there seemed to be no attempt to build up a rogues gallery that could keep returning in future issues to cause trouble for our hero. In the second issue, Speedball fought a character who wore a suit that was able to generate a powerful oozing glue. Despite being billed as "The Sticker" on the front cover, inside he seemed to be just a no-name crook with an interestingly powered suit who died by page 10 (after Robbie removed his helmet, causing him to be smothered beneath his own glue). That issue's backup tale concerned the "Graffiti Guerillas," a group of camouflage wearing vandals who destroyed public property, that were reminiscent of the caveman savages that Ditko's self-copyrighted character The Screamer fought in his sole adventure.

The notion of Speedball facing villains who complemented his bouncing ability was a natural one, and the third issue saw the debut of one Leaper Logan, whose multiple robberies (one of which Robbie was unable to stop) were reminiscent of the one-shot villains encountered by Ditko's Killjoy. Leaper Logan went to jail at the end of that 11-pager, but in the letters page of #8, the editor noted that "We're kind of partial to Leaper Logan," which suggests to me that the character might have returned at some point if the series had not been cancelled. Even better than Leaper was "The Bouncer," whose bouncing ability was reminiscent of Ditko's self-copyrighted character Mr. Quiver. This 8-page Speedball story was originally done for *Marvel Comics Presents*, but finally published instead in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #6 (July 1991) after Speedball joined the New Warriors (thus making the story seem too dated for *MCP*). The late Dan Adkins (who passed away on May 8, 2013) did a nice, polished job inking this tale. It's too bad that he didn't have more opportunities to ink Ditko's Speedball.

Other noteworthy villains (among a fairly undistinguished bunch) included The Basher (who threw heavy balls at cops), The Bonehead Gang (a kind of Three Stooges led by the bald Bonehead, who headbutted his foes -- and his friends for that matter) and The Harlequin Hitman (who had the most interesting mask of the series, with a drooping "eyelid" and raised "lip," and the fashion sense of The Question). Interestingly, when the issue in which The Harlequin Hitman appeared (*Speedball* #7) was originally described in *Marvel Age* #71 (Feb. 1989), the villain was referred to as "The Hit and Miss Assassin." It's possible that the character was renamed to prevent the reader from guessing that it was actually two people playing the role, and one of them was indeed a "Miss" (or "Mrs." to be precise). Looking at the Harlequin Hitman's uniquely Ditkoesque design, one is reminded that this type of look influenced the creation of one of the more popular characters of the late 1980s, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' Rorschach of *Watchmen*. Had there been an interest in doing so, perhaps such a villain could have been built up to be a major recurring character, which may have appealed more to the fans of that era than the minor one-off foes that Speedball was facing every month.

Given Ditko's dense storytelling style, where the plot often seems to be more important than the pictures, it is not surprising that he introduced a running sub-plot to the series in issue #4, the first full-length solo Speedball story. This sub-plot concerned the murder of Alex Bow, whose skeleton was found hidden within a brick wall of the local high school. Both Justin and

Maddy had history with Alex and secrets that they were keeping from each other about it. Even the readers didn't know what they were hiding, since their thought balloons revealed only that they had a secret that couldn't be revealed. At the conclusion of the story, the mysterious mastermind behind it all is standing in silhouette behind a curtain, satisfied that he is safe, while Robbie's parents ponder their separate secrets, foreshadowing that there is more to come. By the final page, this reader was wondering whether even Ditko knew the answers to these mysteries or whether he was simply making it up as he went along, dangling the prospect of some intrigue out there to lure the reader back for future issues.

The Alex Bow sub-plot was referenced a few more times in the multi-story issues that followed, until finally being resolved completely (with no dangling suggestion that it wasn't truly over) with *Speedball* #9. I say "finally" but in truth a sub-plot that lasted only five issues is not all that long, and Ditko could have conceivably kept it going much longer, with additional sub-plots spinning out of the Alex Bow one. Although fans tend to view Ditko's 1960s Marvel work as pleasantly "simple" and "uncomplicated," it was actually anything but, as demonstrated by the fact that the sub-plot involving the Green Goblin's true identity began with his introduction (with face hidden) in *ASM* #14 and wasn't resolved until *ASM* #39-40, after Ditko left Marvel two years later. Additionally, the conclusion of the Alex Bow murder mystery in *Speedball* #9, with its lack of any super-powered enemy is a reminder that the crime genre is a dominant one in Ditko's oeuvre. The viciousness of the hitman paying a visit to an informer, with deadly results, is depicted with a matter-of-fact brutality that gives serious weight to the drama unfolding before the reader's eyes. We also witness a climactic, wordless 4-panel page as *Speedball* goes into action against the killer near the story's end.

The one drawback to the whole thing is that Ditko put so much thought and effort into this work but didn't ink it himself as well, which frequently causes the reader to notice that the art doesn't look quite as good as it should. This was a less common occurrence when the inking was done by Jackson Guice, Bruce Patterson or Dan Adkins, whose styles did not contrast strongly with Ditko's, and sometimes complemented it well. My favorite *Speedball* inker was Bruce Patterson, whose inks added an extra fineness to Ditko's art, although occasionally the faces looked more like Patterson than Ditko. Even Adkins' faces sometimes seemed redone, apparently in an effort to make them look more realistic. Ditko did ink one *Speedball* story himself (in *MCP* #14) if anyone wants to imagine what a Ditko-inked *Speedball* series might have looked like.

STRIKE OUT

The last two issues of *Speedball* unfortunately have the distinction of being the worst-inked of the entire series, by two inkers who had not worked on the character (nor on Ditko's pencils) before. *Speedball* #9 was inked by Jim Sanders III, whose art style at least attempted to be faithful to Ditko's pencils, if lacking the beauty of their line. The worst panels in the issue are on pages 4 and 14, where the characters' open mouths are black maws without tongues, like mail slots more than mouths. In 1984, Sanders had penciled a couple *Starforce Six* stories (a series he created) for AC Comics that were inked by Willie Blyberg (who had

also inked Ditko around this time) as well as inked a couple AC stories that Vic Bridges penciled. In 1986, Sanders inked a young Erik Larsen and Mark Propst for their two stories in AC's *Venture* #1 in 1986. In *Marvel Age* #42 (Sept. 1986), Sanders was profiled in the "New Talent Department," where Jim Shooter critiqued Sanders' ink samples, concluding "This guy's got a future" (despite having pointed out all the problems he had with his inking, as was typical with the column). By 1987, Sanders had a regular gig on the *Incredible Hulk*, inking a young Todd McFarlane, and according to the GCD (www.comics.org), Sanders continued to ink for Marvel until 1997. Today he can be found online at www.sandersink.com

While the inking in #9 may look simplistic, the inking in #10 is overworked, with realistic shading that is completely at odds with Ditko's cartoonier, more playful approach. The website dcindexes.com gives the "on-sale" date for *Speedball* #10 as February 28, 1989, whereas *Marvel Age* #74 (May 1989) gives the "shipping" date as March 2 and the "on sale" date as March 21. That issue of *Marvel Age*, incidentally, reproduced the cover of #10 sans cover copy (shown above) and their description of the issue makes no mention of it being the series' last. It does, however, clear up one mystery that has plagued Ditko checklists ever since, which is **who** exactly inked the issue, since the inker credit in #10 is listed simply as "D. Day," which could mean either Dan or David Day, brothers of the late Gene Day. The answer was there all along, in *Marvel Age* #74, showing that the issue (and presumably the cover as well, also credited only to "D. Day" on the front) was inked by **both** David and Dan Day. The plot of #10 concerns a friend of Claude (a worker at the lab) named Clyde who creates a formula for increasing the size of animals, which predictably creates havoc. In *Strange Avenging Tales* #1 (Fantagraphics, 1997), Ditko returned to these names with a story titled "Claude and Clyde." The Clyde of *Speedball* #10 made a rare return in *New Warriors* #66 (Dec. 1995) along with many of the Ditko-created villains of the *Speedball* series.



□ **SPEEDBALL** #10—Springdale is going to the dogs—*giant* dogs! Not only that, but giant cats, giant snakes, giant animals of every kind are running amok through the town! *Speedball's* literally ricocheting from one end of town to the other as he tries to stop the stampede and find out what's responsible for the wild growth mutation. Plotted and penciled by Steve Ditko, scripted by Joe Duffy, and inked by David and Dan Day. 75c.

Titles Shipping March 30 On Sale April 18

☐ **FANTASTIC FOUR #328**—An all too-mortal **Ben Grimm** must save the imprisoned **Fantastic Four** from **Aron**, the rogue **Watcher**, **Dragon Man**, and the **Frightful Four!** Written by **Steve Englehart**, penciled by **Keith Pollard**, and inked by **Romeo Tanghal**. 75¢.

☐ **IRON MAN #244**—It's a special giant-sized saga that launches an all-new direction for **Iron Man!** A crippled **Tony Stark** refuses to quit being **Iron Man**. But before he can again become the armored **Avenger** he must design a totally new armor technology! When **Tony Stark** is through there'll not only be new armor, there'll also be a new purpose for **Iron Man!** Co-plotted and scripted by **David Michelinie** and co-plotted and drawn by **Bob Layton**. \$1.50.

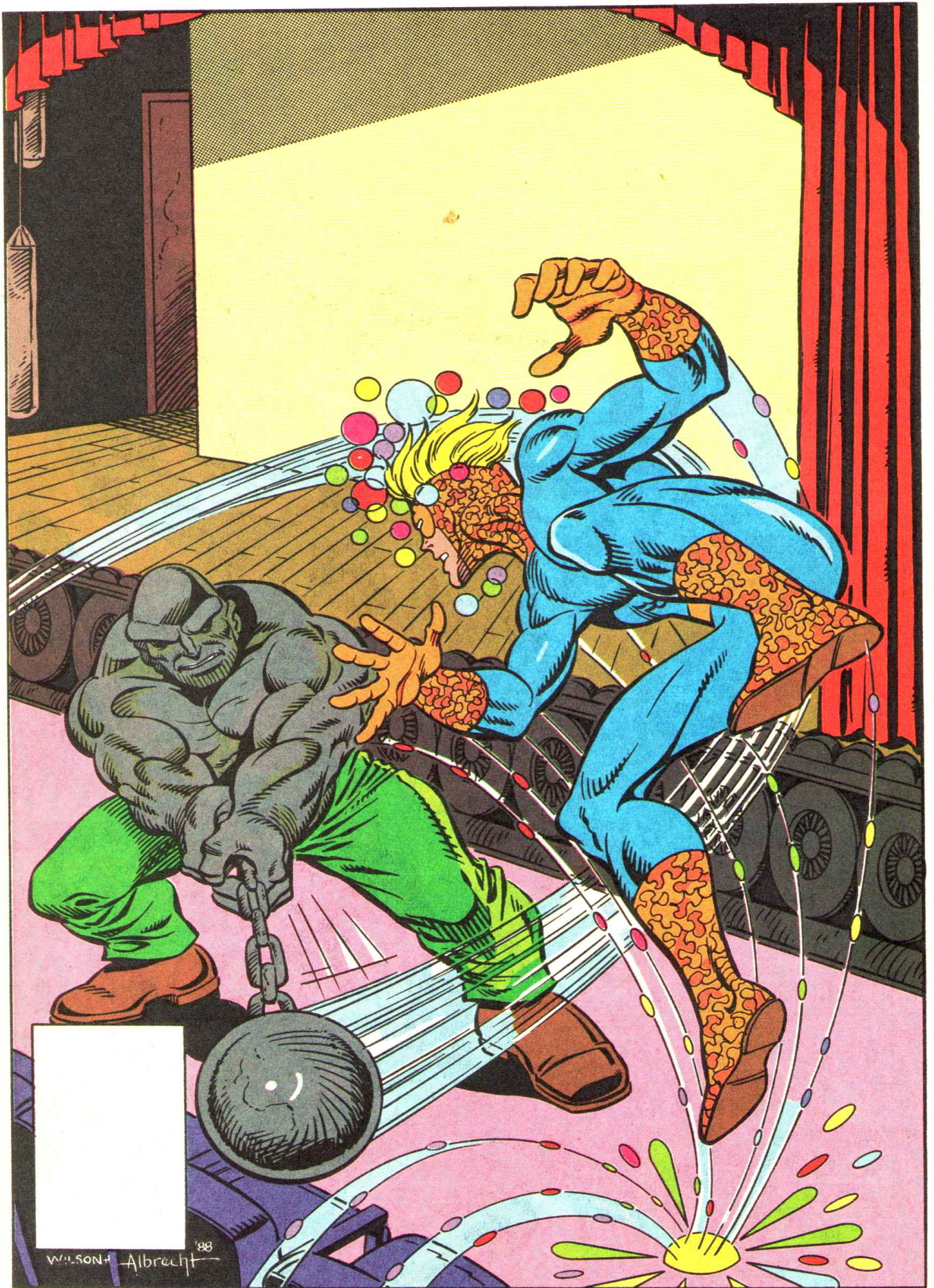
☐ **SPEEDBALL #11**—Everyone wants to be in **Pulitzer Patty's** high school video—everyone except the janitor. When the murder-minded janitor kidnaps her for capturing his image with her camcorder, it's **Speedball** to the rescue! Written by **Fabian Nicieza** and penciled by **Steve Ditko**. 75¢.

☐ **THOR #405**—Asgard is drifting more and more into the **Negative Zone**. To save it from certain doom, **Balder** must defeat the Zone's ruler. . . **Annihilus!** Written by **Tom DeFalco**, penciled by **Ron Frenz**, and inked by **Joe Sinnott**. 75¢.

The cancellation of *Speedball* happened so quickly that although the cover of #10 said it would be the last issue, as did a caption at the bottom of that issue's letters page, a description of the next issue (#11) was published in *Marvel Age* #75 (June 1989). That description (shown at left) noted that #11 would be on sale April 18, 1989 and reveals that one of the stories planned for the unpublished issue was the "Pulitzer Patty" story that was later published in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #1 (May 1990). Fabian Nicieza was the writer of that tale -- surprisingly, since he had not written *Speedball* before. Nicieza later scripted the *New Warriors* series which included *Speedball* as a member. Prior to this, Nicieza had written mostly comics within Marvel's New Universe imprint (a line which was cancelled around the same time as *Speedball* was) as well as short tales for *Marvel Comics Presents*. According to the GCD, this *Speedball* tale would have been the 13th script by Nicieza to appear in a non-New Universe comic, had it been

published as scheduled. According to *Marvel Age* #87 (April 1990), *Marvel Super-Heroes* #1 shipped on March 13 ("on sale" date according to *dcindexes.com*) and went on sale April 3, 1990, almost a full year after the "Pulitzer Patty" story within had been scheduled to be released in *Speedball* #11. My guess is that the second 11-page story in the unpublished *Speedball* #11 would have been the "Jolly Roger" tale scripted by *Speedball's* regular writer, Jo Duffy, which was eventually published in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #5 (April 1991).

A mention in the lettercol of *Speedball* #6 that The Masked Marvel would finally be encountering "a major villain" in #10 had me thinking that the issue scheduled for #10 was pushed back to the unpublished #11 (since the giant chickens and snakes of #10 were hardly "major villains"). My best guess was that the *Speedball* inventory story by Mike Rockwitz and Ron Wilson, published in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #14 (July 1993) -- which included an unpublished cover (shown on the next page) -- was originally planned for #10, since it featured *Speedball* fighting The Absorbing Man. At 22 pages, it was too long to fit into the back of the unpublished #11 (which contained the "Pulitzer Patty" story and likely the "Jolly Roger" story as its backup), so #12 would seem to be the best candidate. Or perhaps the story



was kept on hand with no definite issue-number in mind (despite the lettercol mention in #6) to be used if needed. At any rate, the rumor of a never-materialized "major villain" during the Ditko run has led to speculation like the following, which was posted on Blake Bell's website back in 1998: "*The title would only last ten issues (expiring before the eleventh issue featuring one Dr. Octopus).*" It seems unlikely, however, that Ditko himself would have illustrated a story featuring the famous Spider-Man foe, given that he hadn't even drawn a Spider-Man supporting character like J. Jonah Jameson since his return to Marvel. (Speedball did finally meet Doc Ock in a non-Ditko tale in *MCP* #127 in 1993.)

When one reads the 22-page Absorbing Man story in *MSH* #14 and compares it to the two 11-page tales that would have presumably comprised the unpublished *Speedball* #11 (the Ditko-drawn "Pulitzer Patty" and "Jolly Roger" tales), one is struck by just how different Ditko's approach is from the traditional Marvel superhero comic. In fact, it's safe to say that the average Marvel reader would have found the Absorbing Man issue more thrilling, more "important," than the two stories drawn by Ditko, which would have seemed to them like inconsequential trifles in comparison. Most Marvel fans would not care about Robbie's classmate Patty and how she helped expose a criminal who was hiding out as the high school janitor. Or how Speedball stopped another non-powered crook who was dressed up like a pirate. The fanbase would have been much more interested in seeing Speedball take on a "major villain" like The Absorbing Man. And Marvel itself would know how to market such an issue to the fans better than they would "Pulitzer Patty" and "Jolly Roger." However, if the reader has seen a dozen previous stories where a Marvel superhero fights The Absorbing Man, then they might welcome the refreshingly different and original approach that Ditko was offering. Obviously, there were not enough such readers to be found.

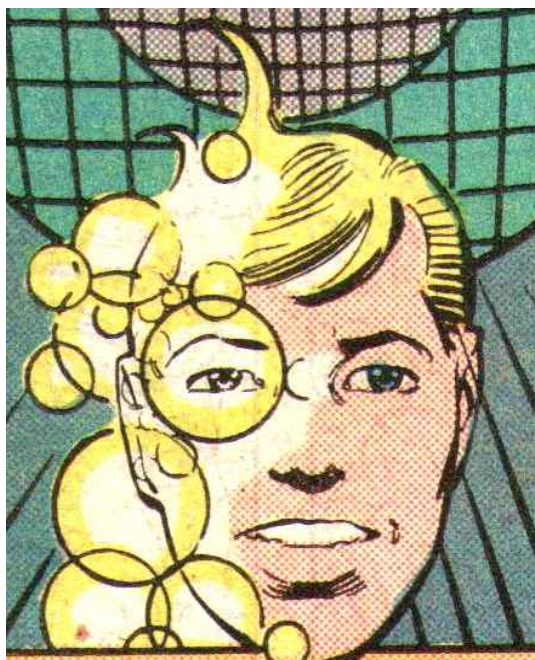
While Ditko himself sometimes repeats himself, exploring similar themes again and again, his particular vision and imagination leans in a direction that results in many of his ideas being uniquely "Ditkoesque." A good example would be the "numbered" villains in "Any Number Can Play" (*MCP* #56, Aug. 1990), where the characters' masks were inspired by the dots on the facings of dice. Even if the story itself is not wholly satisfying, the idea is an interesting one that hadn't been done before. (Playing cards have influenced the look of villains before, such as with The Joker, but to my knowledge basing masks on the dice was a first.)

Speedball became a member of the New Warriors in late 1989, several months after the cancellation of his series, while the last few unpublished Speedball stories from the Ditko era appeared first in *Marvel Comics Presents* and then (when they were no longer reflective of the recent developments in his saga) in the quarterly *Marvel Super-Heroes* magazine, which was a dumping-ground for old inventory stories. Increasingly in these later, post-cancellation stories it was noted that Robbie's town Springdale had an ordinance against costumed characters appearing in public, which had not been brought up before. (This unknowingly foreshadowed Marvel's *Civil War* years later where superbeings by law had to register with the government.) The Speedball stories that appeared in *MCP* from #85 (in 1991) onward reflected the New Warriors version and can be regarded as "post-Ditko." The 8-page "This Is Our Story," written by Scott Lobdell, penciled by Ron Wilson and inked by Don Perlin, that appeared in *MSH* #4

(Dec. 1990) (although originally intended for *MCP*, judging by the page count) is one of the best of the post-Ditko/pre-New Warriors Speedball tales. The story concerns a girl being tested at the lab who possesses super powers, and ultimately sacrifices her life to protect Robbie. The tale is too short, with her death occurring in the very last panel, but its seriousness was a welcome reminder that not all Speedball solo stories had to be played for laughs (as many of the post-Ditko ones were).

Unfortunately, even in that story, the work that Ditko had done in building a cast, creating a world for this character, was ignored by the creators that followed him. The lab and high school are used again in some of the post-Ditko stories, but most of the old regular cast vanishes without explanation. Even Robbie's parents seem more like Ma and Pa Kent in this tale, giving Robbie advice as they relax on the porch (the dad reading the evening paper, the mom sewing), unlike the busy, opinionated characters that Ditko had created. Readers of the time, even his fellow creators, evidently weren't interested in the detailed world that Ditko had thoughtfully constructed. It is reminiscent of Ditko's comment in *The Avenging Mind* (2008) when he writes that "I told [Stan Lee] that I should be inking [instead of George Bell] and could do Dr. Strange because I was the only one who understood Dr. Strange's potentials." Perhaps it was the same with Speedball -- that without Ditko at the helm, the character became dependent on other superheroes (New Warriors, Avengers) to survive in the marketplace. In the case of Speedball, Ditko understood the potential, but the readers could not, which resulted in the series' unfortunate cancellation less than a year after it had begun.

Despite the belated appearance of Ditko-drawn Speedball stories in *Marvel Super-Heroes* in 1990-91, Ditko's involvement with the character ended in early 1989 when *Speedball* was cancelled. Despite having invested so much time and effort into the character, once the comic had failed commercially, Ditko moved on to the next project, seemingly without the kind of emotional attachment that causes many pros/fans to want to continually resurrect past characters. For Ditko, there are always new characters to create, and new worlds to be born.





TO RICHARD

ROSE!!

How Cool

THE SUBJECTIVE CHARACTER OF SPEEDBALL

by Richard Caldwell

The character of **Speedball**, the Masked Marvel, has often been frowned upon as being unwanted comedic relief at best and at worst, like something known in certain archaeological circles as an OTTO (an out of time object), as though he somehow represents an era, an ethos, that is simply of no topical relevance or merit. Regardless, Robbie Baldwin remains one of the last great contributions from the incomparable mind of Steve Ditko to the realms of mainstream comic books. Seeing no reason to take such a fact lightly, and having myself followed the character since its debut more than two decades now past, it is my aim with this article to help shine some light on the history of the colorful oddball of a hero.

In the mid 1980s, then Marvel Editor in Chief Jim Shooter had been given permission and funding to launch an experimental new imprint for the publisher, a new universe if you will, with the idea being a modernized world inhabited by theoretically realistic superheroes. Placing the reins in the capable hands of seasoned editor Tom DeFalco, Shooter busied himself with the two series of company-wide crossovers, the *Secret Wars*. Eventually however, time dragged on and for whatever reasons the only project DeFalco had in place was a new teenage superhero, created by Steve Ditko. Dissatisfied with the lack of overall progress on DeFalco's part and frustrated by Marvel's corporate board suddenly beginning to slash funding for the projected series, Shooter took matters into his own hands, perfectionist that he was. Overseeing what would become known as the New Universe, where inspiration relied overtly more on science fiction than on the science fantasy of the traditional Marvel Universe. For reasons that were never made public, Ditko's new hero was not included in this mix.

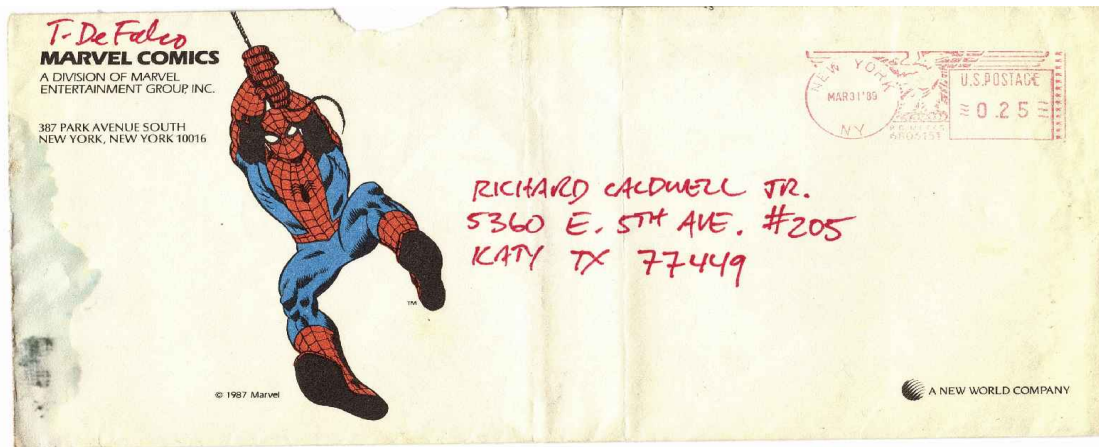
Now, Shooter had (and has) generally always been an advocate and defender of Ditko's efforts, attracting him into later working on some VALIANT properties, as well as using the man as a ringer in the even later creation of Shooter's Defiant Comics group. Considering DeFalco's eventual replacement of Shooter as Editor in Chief of Marvel and the incredible degrees of behind the scenes drama going on at the publisher in the late 80s, I think it is rather safe to presume that Speedball's non-inclusion into the New Universe had absolutely nothing to do with Ditko himself. Moreso, being a semi-regular collaborator with Ditko on a number of other projects before and after, DeFalco remained persistent in wanting to find a home for the property. The New Universe would soon meet its own ill-fated demise, DeFalco soon met with a promotion at the House of Ideas, and in the pages of *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #22 (which otherwise served as but a chapter in the Evolutionary War storyline that spread throughout all of Marvel's annuals of that particular year) the world was at last introduced to Robbie Baldwin... Speedball, the Masked Marvel.

Meeting Spidey and Daredevil in the feature story (which was drawn by the rookie Mark Bagley, who had just begun to garner work through his winning submission in the form of the first *Official Marvel Tryout Book*), Speedball also starred in a solo back-up tale in the comic. This led directly into an ongoing, albeit short-lived, series wherein Ditko himself plotted and drew all of the stories. While the proper origin was detailed in the premiere issue's full-length story, most of the Speedball comics were broken up into two or three short stories apiece. DeFalco served as plotter for a few of the tales, with scripting by the likes of Roger Stern and Mary Jo Duffy. Set in the fictional town of Springdale, throughout the total ten issue run a range of stories were presented showing Robbie slowly coming to terms with his newfound kinetic powers while discerning his own place in the world. All of this was accomplished in a way very comparable to, although somewhat lighter than, Ditko's original work on chronicling the early months of the teenaged Peter Parker's superhuman career some decades earlier. While not the total outcast as was Peter Parker, 15-year old Robbie was nondescript enough as to appeal to anyone looking for an identifiable character. Conversely, missing were any of the underlining messages of much of Ditko's works, aside from the standard "with great power comes great responsibility." Every one of the characters in the *Speedball* series, from supporting cast to the various villains he faced, were new and specifically created by Ditko. And while surprisingly more innocent in tone than some of Ditko's other creations, the Speedball property may as well have been in its very own universe, if not for the fact of his having crossed paths with established characters from the mainstream Marvel Universe in his very first appearance. But for that brief window it seemed as though Steve Ditko had been given his own corner of the big sandbox to play in.

Indeed there was a noticeable timelessness to the Ditko-authored *Speedball* stories that suggests these may not have been exclusively works for hire per se, but possibly even done some years prior to publication. One should consider that at the time of publication, the term "speedball" was actually a drug reference, something which Ditko would certainly not be aware of -- especially if the character was in truth created some time earlier. And although the ongoing series was abruptly ended with its tenth issue, for some time after other Ditko-authored stories would pop up in different anthologies such as *Marvel Comics Presents* and the giant-sized *Marvel Super-Heroes* specials (which was a seasonal title consisting of what were, in all likelihood, inventory stories). It is very probable that Ditko had many of Robbie's adventures in the can before his series even launched, and at the very least, had jumped quite a bit ahead prior to the cessation of the book.

Still other Speedball short stories also began to appear, written by then up-and-coming scribes such as Fabian Nicieza and Scott Lobdell, and illustrated by such veterans as Don Perlin and Ron Wilson. All of these stories stayed close enough in feel to those created by Ditko (not mistaking lightheartedness for comedy trappings), and it would seem that in some creative circles there was already interest accumulating for the character of Speedball, even in spite of his at that point brief publishing history.

Upon my initial reading of the final issue of *Speedball's* regular series, adolescent me wrote a letter of fanboyish concern to Tom DeFalco, eager to see some manner of continuation. He



was kind enough to immediately respond with a letter postmarked 31 March of 1989, telling of long term plans to return the character by way of a new superteam. As evidence of DeFalco's own interest in Speedball, this was in fact a full year and a half before the debut of that New Warriors title, though not quite so long before the Acts of Vengeance story arc (an obvious spiritual forebear to the more recent Dark Reign storyline) that had crossed over into the pages of the Mighty (and DeFalco-scripted) *Thor*. Drawn by Ron Frenz, the guest-starring New Warriors were here shown in action for the very first time, helping the god of thunder defeat the Juggernaut. They were Marvel's answer to the Teen Titans, and there was Speedball right in the mix.

Soon thereafter, as part of Marvel's "Heroes for the 90s" promotional campaign (which also included Todd McFarlane's adjectiveless *Spider-Man*) Marvel launched the *New Warriors* monthly ongoing, written by Fabian Nicieza and drawn by Mark Bagley.

For the next two-plus years, those particular creators did much to bring Speedball into the Marvel Universe proper, as well as casually infusing him with certain timely nuances of popular culture. Their work did not detract at all from Ditko's efforts; rather they built upon what was already there, maybe even to the point of increasing the general believability of Speedball as a modern character. One example of modernization was in the separation of Speedball's parents, which admittedly was a plot device to relocate him to the more active locale of New York City. Such transitions were natural enough to appeal to a growing number of readers, as the *New Warriors* quickly developed a cult following of fans. Eventually Bagley was offered the flagship *Amazing Spider-Man*, and soon Nicieza as well moved on to pursue other endeavors among the X-Men family of titles. For its time, that creative team added many welcome new dimensions to the character, but in the years that followed Marvel found itself neck deep in the over-reaching glut of the 1990s comic book marketplace at large. Many creators came and went on the *New Warriors* series, resulting in constant roster changes, speedily declining production values and even multiple volumes of the title itself. Though Speedball's presence within the team remained one of the lone constants on the series, and though he grew from being an incidental member to even leading the team on occasions, unfortunately the gradual departure from Ditko's original creation was becoming increasingly distinct. Speedball was somehow crossing over into running gag territory.

MARVEL COMICS

A DIVISION OF MARVEL
ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, INC.

TOM DeFALCO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

March 30, 1989

Richard Caldwell Jr.
5360 East 5th Ave. #205
Katy TX 77449

Dear Richard,

Don't worry! You haven't seen the last of
Speedball. We already have plans to bring him back
in a new super-team!

Thanks for being there!

Sincerely,



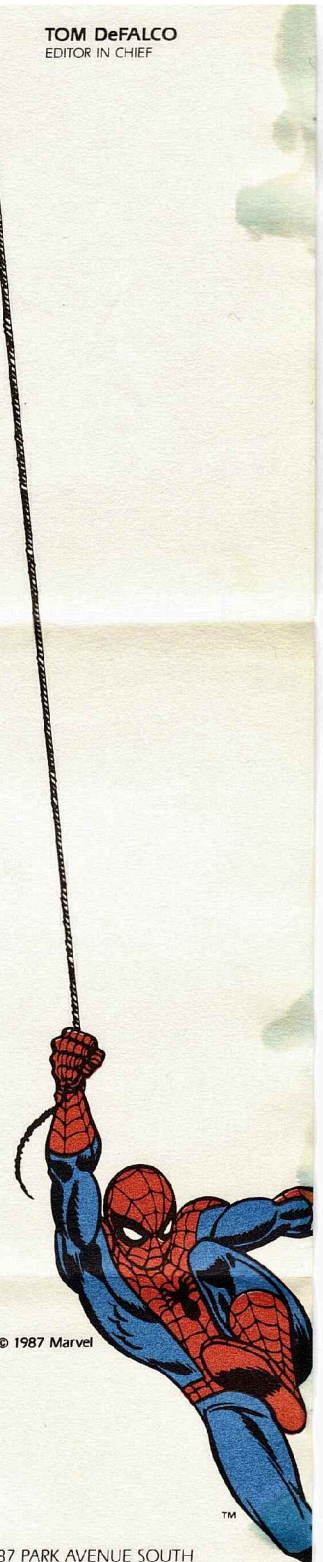
Tom DeFalco
Editor in Chief

TD/ems

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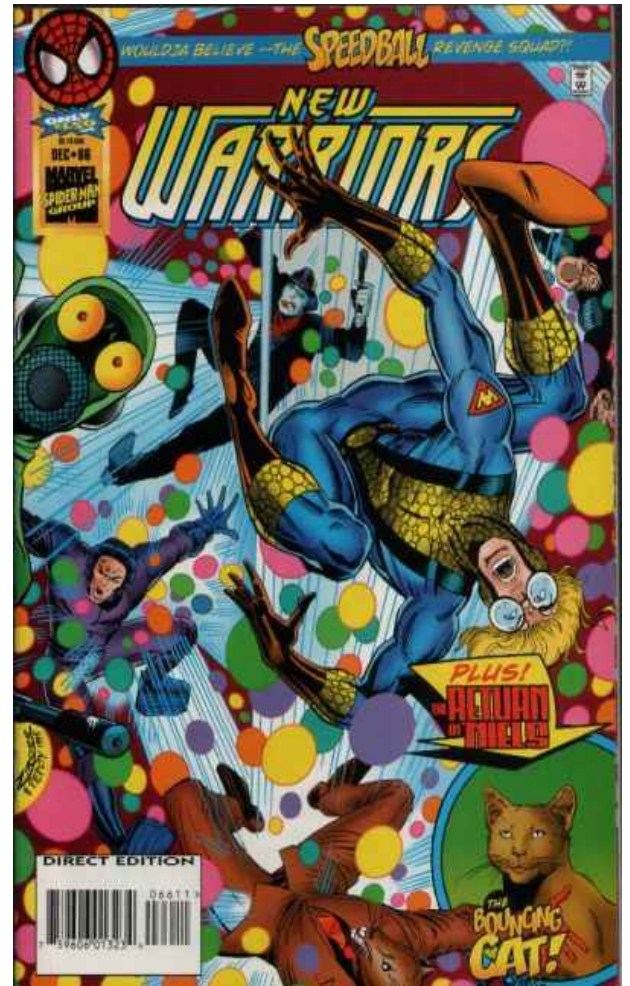
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Even the popular writer Brian Michael Bendis took small jabs at the Speedball property. In the pages of his *Alias* series from Marvel's adult-oriented MAX imprint, he was portrayed as being used by police officers to narc on a gang of drug dealers -- a lowly position for a young superhero. And in a throwaway cameo scene in the *Ultimate Spider-Man* comic, it is more than implied that the "Ultimate Speedball" is grossly obese.

As the target audiences of comic books have matured over the turn of this new century, it would seem in too many cases that the simpler, more innocent themes and approaches of days gone by have become fodder for a kind of snarky animosity -- almost an expression of and reaction to guilt over ever having been captivated by such storytelling. Arguably, we are seeing a few degrees of self-deprecation being utilized oh-so-freely so as to mask anything of the past that could be even remotely construed as embarrassing to the trendier, more adult sensibilities of this modern age in readership. Equally, each new generation of fanboys seems to exhibit an increasingly shorter attention span (as evidenced by creative teams that change totally from one issue to the next, and by limited series that cease publication before reaching their intended end, and ongoing series cancelled in their first year, as well as by the obtuse dealings exhibited regularly in generally every comic book-related forum on the internet), with long term fans becoming scarce and scarcer in turn. Comic books have not only lost much of their innocence (for good or ill), but that very same sense of innocent wonder that before drew so many new young readers in is now something to be acceptably mocked by some voices. While such harshness may well have been warranted for the continued survival of the medium, I feel Speedball is a fine example of this revelation -- an unfortunate sign of the times that is a casualty of comics' continuing identity crisis and inferiority complex.



In the first chapter of the massive (and era-defining) *Civil War* storyline, writer Mark Millar had the current incarnation of the New Warriors go quickly from silly reality television stars into a violent and deadly demise, with Speedball left as the sole survivor. Robbie Baldwin was alone held accountable for the accidental deaths of hundreds of civilians in that battle. As detailed further in the tie-in mini series titled *Frontline*, writer Paul Jenkins explores the downward spiral of Robbie's life that ensued. Faced with the tremendous guilt of the harrowing misadventure and the deaths of his friends and teammates, Robbie was imprisoned as a criminal, beaten physically and humiliated and forced to grow up mighty fast. Eventually adopting the somber and sobering new persona of Penance, writer Warren Ellis then has Robbie pushed into membership with the Thunderbolts -- a team of villains violently

performing the Federal Government's dirty work (in ode to the Dirty Dozen and the Suicide Squad). Despite the dramatic departure from Ditko's work by both Millar and Jenkins, Ellis did manage to bring some semblance of the former Robbie back to the surface. Building more from what Ellis had done rather than his own previous material, Jenkins returned with a *Penance* limited series, designing to forge Robbie into his new path. For the first time in some years, Robbie acts heroically, at the cost of double-crossing his teammates and putting himself at odds with the Federal Government, thereby entering antihero territory full-on.

Currently, Speedball is a supporting character in the Avengers, Marvel's premiere superhero team, with some insinuation given by writer Christos Gage for at least a partial return to what the character once was. Interestingly, Speedball's first appearance outside of the *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* and his own original series was in *Captain America* #352, written by the late (and great) Mark Gruenwald. In this story Speedball tries and fails to achieve Avengers membership. And throughout the early years of the New Warriors, the team was often considered as a "junior league" to the Avengers with Justice being politely denied Avengers membership in their very first issue, and the character Rage later working dual membership in both teams, and the Warriors at one time "borrowing" an Avengers quinjet for an overseas emergency. Even Neils, the similarly powered cat of Speedball has membership in the unofficial "Pet Avengers" team. It might be argued that the decline of the Warriors began when Kurt Busiek and George Perez reappropriated members Justice and Firestar for Avengers "members in training" in their highly successful relaunching of the *Avengers* series in 1998. However, as this only led to some neat character development, it could also be said that the plot threads in question ultimately were necessary to strengthen relations between the two teams. And in DeFalco's short-lived M2 line set in a possible future, an adult Speedball is presented as a senior member of A-Next, the Avengers team of that particular timeline. While Speedball's growing inclusion into the very mainstream *Avengers* line of books is quite possibly door-opening, where the character goes from here is really anyone's guess.

The many extreme changes to the character since Ditko's time may make a true return to form highly improbable. One might even see a conspiracy theory where writers, hopeful to prove their worthiness to Marvel, are invited to express the company's frustration at Ditko's philosophical hermitage by lashing out at his last great contribution to the publisher. In far more realistic terms however, it should be noted that the finest characters in fiction, like real people, honestly do change over time, for better or for worse. Suffice it to say, while Ditko's try at keeping certain archaic interpretations of superheroic fantasy and adventurous fare in the realms of the mainstream may no longer be readily employed, or even fully appreciated, the marks left will not soon be forgotten.

The real future is an awfully big place, and with enough youthful kinetic energy absolutely anything and everything is possible. Or as the great American novelist Tom Robbins once wrote, "It's never too late to have a happy childhood."

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DITKO ' S BOUNCING HEROES

by Rob Imes

A frequent theme in Steve Ditko's body of work is the struggle for control, such as a villain asserting control over others through (an initiating) force and a hero's fight to prevent it (a defensive force). The heroes and villains are not necessarily superheroes, as Ditko has also created stories featuring normal people who fight for control over their own lives, even their

own minds (as in *The Safest Place*). Sometimes it is the hero who must consider whether his power has taken control over him, as in the later chapters of *Static* where the suit begins to integrate with its wearer's body. As we have seen in Ditko's *Speedball*, Robbie Baldwin must continually struggle to control his own powers, to prevent himself from being at the mercy of them, to master his powers so that they are a benefit to his life and not a detriment. Had the comic not been cancelled, it seems certain that the direction in which Robbie was heading was toward greater control over his powers, so that as he matured his use of the powers would have been more effectively heroic. Otherwise, he would remain like the cat Niels, who in *Speedball* #6 was shown bouncing aimlessly around town. "He can't figure out how to control the energy flow to stop himself," Robbie thought, as he sprung into action to save the cat. "Poor little guy must be starving by now... not to mention totally disoriented!"

An older Robbie -- say, an 18 year old Robbie -- would likely resemble Cal Bane, the young hero of Ditko's self-copyrighted strip **The Crackling Blazer (REVOLVER #5, Renegade Press, March 1986)** who demonstrated control over his ability and also a clearer mind about his own life than Robbie did. Cal had left his parental home by age 18, saying "My family and I are better off this way," which implies that he intends to maintain control over his own life and not have to regard the influence of his parents. By age 18, Robbie would have had a better idea of which direction he intended his life to go (either a career in Art, or Law, or neither) and like Cal, may have made moves toward independence to strengthen that determination.

Speedball wasn't Ditko's only bouncing hero of the 1980s. A five-page story titled "Get Mr. Quiver! You Can Try!" appeared in **DITKO'S WORLD #2** (Renegade Press, June 1986) featuring a comical bald-headed bouncing character named **Mr. Quiver** whose main concern in life was eating bowls of Jello, which he found "yummy." As with the Shag story in the previous issue (both tales were originally planned to be published in Charlton Action in late 1985), the story is told in tiny panels. The first page packs a lot into a small space, as we see the oblivious Mr. Quiver defeat three super-villains (The Basher, The Iron Gripper, and Bullseye Best) while happily eating his Jello (supplied to him by his faithful friend and servant, Puffy). The manner in which these villains are introduced and then cast aside in the space of a few panels is reminiscent of the way in which an earlier Ditko hero, Killjoy, easily dispensed with an army of "one-time-use" foes. (The Iron Gripper, by the way, is the steel-armed fellow shown grappling Quiver in the illustration on the next page by Tom Ahearn.)

When a young female cop, referred to only as the Rookie, tries to catch Quiver, she soon regrets having loosened the belts of his thick shoes, causing him to lose control over his bouncing ability just as a squad of enemies crashes into the room to attack him. The Rookie aims Quiver's bouncing body at their enemies, pushing him around like a giant beach ball, to his great delight. In the case of Quiver, the lack of control by the hero (if Quiver can be called a hero) is portrayed as more welcome than his previous control was. Since it is the Rookie who is controlling Quiver's power at the end (by pushing him around), it could be said that the Rookie was the true hero of the story while Quiver was simply the power that she utilized to achieve a just result. The Rookie is using "force" against Quiver, but he has no objections to

it, and finds it "really yummy!" In the end, Quiver goes to jail and is overheard bouncing happily on his bunk, with a caption wondering if he can "bounce back."

To the surprise of many, Quiver did indeed return, in a 17-page story in **The 176-PAGE "HEROES" PACKAGE**, published by Robin Snyder in November 2000 (and unfortunately out of print today). Like other Ditko heroes, the Rookie has not been rewarded for her accomplishment (for capturing Quiver), but instead been assigned routine traffic duty since her investigations risk exposing those in power. When Quiver (still in jail) learns that the Rookie has been captured by a deadly gang, Quiver breaks out of prison (bouncing over the wall) to rescue her. Once again the Rookie uses force against Quiver to get him bouncing, by headbutting him into their enemies. Curiously, the Rookie decides to keep quiet about the corrupt activities of the police commissioner and the governor in order to secure a pardon for Quiver. The story ends with the establishment of a "Miss Rookie & Mr. Quiver Detective Agency," which suggests possibilities for future storylines (although in all likelihood we've probably seen the last of Quiver, I think). Unlike many of Ditko's self-copyrighted stories, the two Mr. Quiver stories are obviously intended to merely amuse and entertain, not impart a philosophical message. An analytical study of the Quiver stories is to miss the point, I think, and would be like a dull professor trying to explain a joke, to the extent that the humor of the punchline is lost. The Quiver stories are simply meant to be enjoyed, not studied for greater meaning.



A "bouncing" Ditko hero with a more meaningful intent was **The Screamer**, whose only appearance was in an 8-page story in the fanzine **THE COMIC CRUSADER #17** (published by Martin L. Greim in 1976; the strip is dated 1974). Like Killjoy (at least in his original appearances), the Screamer doesn't talk at all; he simply emits a loud "scream" (lettered in one panel as "Eeiyeoaweeoiweiihiaiea!") as he attacks his foes, similar to how The Creeper frightens his enemies with his cackling laughter. The Screamer's costume has a shell that covers his head like a hood, from which he can bounce when he hits the ground. The character seems well-protected by his costume, which is an example of how thoughtfully Ditko designs the look of his heroes, for their outfits to serve a practical purpose. An example of The Screamer in action can be seen below.



The story is an entertaining mix of cartoony comedy and straight-up superhero action, as well as being a clever satire against the "back to nature" fad. A group of cavemen (presented as real cavemen, not modern men in disguise) begin making war against modern civilization; it's not made clear how spear-waving cavemen have arrived in the modern world, but it doesn't really matter when the story is told with such satirical glee. The cavemen find sympathetic allies among the nature lovers of today, led by a beanie-wearing activist named Bleeder the Nature Pleader who wants to join the caveman cause. Unfortunately for Bleeder, the brutes have no desire to spoil their natural purity by teaming up with a bunch of clothes-wearing humans, and so they promptly kick Bleeder and his fellow pleaders off the nearest cliff, along with the van that they rode in on. On the last page, Ditko points out the irony that the bruised and battered characters who have wailed against progress are saved by modern medicine. But they have learned nothing from this experience, and continue to whine about wanting to return to "pure noble primitive nature." Clearly the rise of the environmental movement in the early 1970s ("Earth Day" was founded in 1970) influenced the theme of this story. Here Ditko takes the "back to nature" movement literally ("back to caveman days") and portrays the ultimate consequences for such thinking as contrary not only to reason, but to life itself. Perhaps in an

effort not to blunt the satirical points (or because Ditko wasn't interested in making their case for them), a rational defense of environmentalism is not allowed space in the story, its proponents being uniformly portrayed as naive and irrational. Ditko often shows a concern for the state of the world in his strips (as in the bandaged head of *The Avenging World*), but in a symbolic not literal way. Ditko is more interested in the pollution that affects the minds of men and not the actual pollution (an inarguably negative side-effect of progress) that is created by them.

Although this was the only Screamer story published, the character's face appeared at least three more times in the following decade. When the story was reprinted in *The Ditko Collection Volume Two* (Fantagraphics, August 1986), a new drawing of The Screamer's face appeared on the first inside page (Ditko's proposed cover of the book, rejected by the publisher). In *Charlton Action (Static)* #11 (Charlton, October 1985), a row of headshots of Ditko heroes was printed, which included The Screamer (located between Star and The Missing Man). The head was colored green, which is the only evidence of the character's color scheme. A rough color guide exists for the Charlton Action Kid strip done around this time, with what appears to be Ditko's handwriting in the margin, which suggests that Ditko himself provided the color guide for these hero headshots and therefore The Screamer was intended to be green according to Ditko. The Screamer made a final cameo appearance (again, his face only, and just barely visible at that) in a pin-up of Ditko heroes that was published in *The Mocker* collection (published by Robin Snyder in April 1990). The Screamer has been silent and unseen ever since.

While not a "bouncing" character, the athletic **Killjoy** is another self-copyrighted Ditko superhero who, like Quiver and The Screamer, frustrates the ambitions of villains with his physical interference. The character's slender physique is reminiscent of Spider-Man and The Creeper (as well as Marvel's Daredevil due to his skintight red costume). Perhaps no character exemplifies the ballet aspect within Ditko fight scenes better than the limber Killjoy. His face is a smiling comedy mask (contrasted in classic theater with the frowning tragedy mask) which continually mocks the futility of his opponent's actions. (A similar idea was used for Timely Comics' hero The Laughing Mask in 1941, but that character appeared in only a single story before being revived by Marvel in their 2008 series *The Twelve*.) Killjoy has had a similarly limited publication history, appearing in two 8-page stories in the back of **E-MAN #2**



and 4 (Charlton, December 1973 and August 1974 respectively), in full color (later reprinted in B&W with minor shading/speckling added to the artwork in *The Ditko Package*, January 1989). As with Mr. Quiver, Killjoy made an unexpected return in a 21-page story in **The 176-Page "Heroes" Package** (November 2000) which took a different approach with the character.

Similar to how Mr. Quiver dispensed with three foes on his first page, Killjoy meets and defeats three different groups of enemies on the first three pages of his debut tale. In the last panels of each of those three pages, a normally-dressed character appears in the aftermath, like Clark Kent innocently appearing after Superman has performed his feat. But it is three different men appearing in these panels (Ed Gab, reporter on the first page; Al Ace, agent on the second page; Jud Lah, lawyer on the third page), which suggests that if Killjoy has a secret identity, he could be any one of these men (or maybe all three). In these two Killjoy stories, Ditko has stripped down the superhero concept to its bare essentials, good versus evil, with an army of villains to plague the city streets and even his own J. Jonah Jameson in the form of Mr. Hart, head of the *Foundation to Protect the Guilty from Justice*, who holds the hero to standards that he is unwilling to apply to the criminals overrunning the city.

While there is a nod to the earlier Killjoy stories in **The 176-Page Package** (2000) revival by having Killjoy stop a criminal named Killer Kod (shades of Killer Ded in the 1970s version), the new story has a very different tone. Even the hero's name is a bit different, now with a hyphen added ("Kill-Joy") and the formerly silent hero wisecracks at his foes, goading them to destruction. Before we even get to the hero, however, the story is prefaced by three pages depicting a mass of vapor-like men who represent "The Evil Brotherhood" (which is the name of the tale). These are beings who resemble spirits that cause the minds of men to be fogged up with false ideas. On the story's last page, this lot is contrasted by their opposites, the Brotherhood of the Good, who are represented by the glowing outlines of men and women with heads that are surrounded by the halos of reason and logic.

The gist of the story is that one Professor Mudl, who lectures that reality is unknowable, witnesses a murder by Killer Kod. At first he is sure of what he saw, but Kod's demonic-looking lawyer reminds Mudl of his own lectures that truth is relative. Mudl's mind is muddled and Killer Kod goes free. Later when Killer Kod is shot in an alley, Kill-Joy stands by and does nothing to save him, letting him die (which gives his smiling mask a sinister undertone). Just as Mr. Hart was attacked by muggers (and learned nothing) in Killjoy's debut story, so too Mudl is attacked by ruffians, but he is shocked when Kill-Joy refuses to come to his aid. In order to demonstrate the fallacy of Mudl's philosophy, Kill-Joy responds in a manner consistent with Mudl's belief that the truth is unknowable. Unlike Mr. Hart in the earlier story, Mudl struggles with the contradiction between what he knows to be true in the real world and the theories that he has been professing in an academic setting. Once again in a Ditko tale, it is the struggle for control (even the control of one's own mind) that is at the core of this story. But now the athletic hero who was formerly depicted in constant motion has found it necessary to do nothing, to not move at all, to sit on his hands and simply watch while his ideological opponents receive their just desserts.

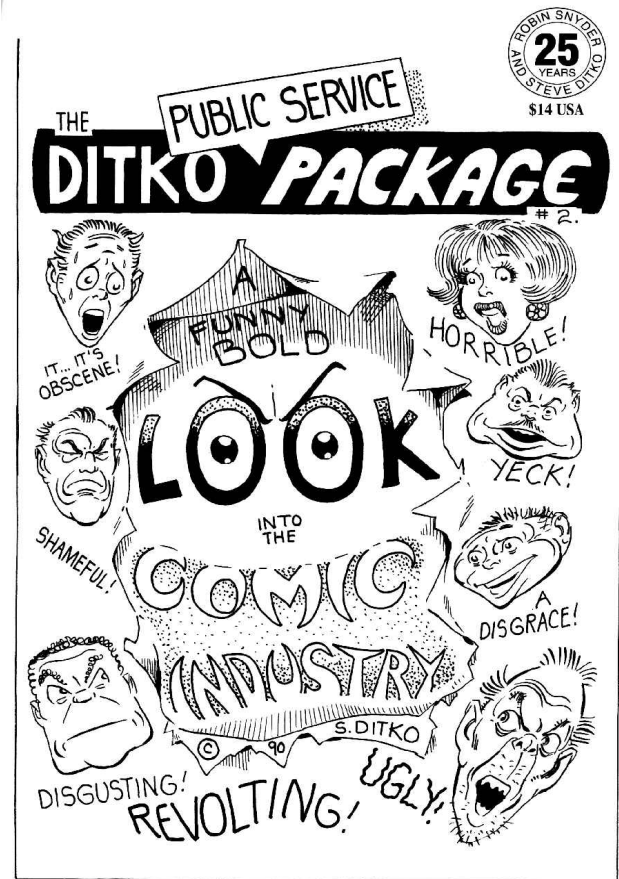


DITKO IN YOUR FUTURE

The 1991 **Ditko Public Service Package** has been released in a new edition. The book (shown at right) is perhaps best described as a satirical graphic novel about comics, told in a series of short humorous scenarios. This new edition of the book was funded through a very successful Kickstarter campaign, which gives hope that more Ditko work will appear in this manner. If you would like to purchase a copy of this book, the cost is \$14 (plus \$3 P&H in the USA) from Robin Snyder, 3745 Canterbury Lane #81, Bellingham, WA 98225. You can email Robin Snyder at RobinBrigit@comcast.net for more information.

The most recent comic book by Steve Ditko was titled **Ate Tea N 18** [i.e., the 18th new release by Ditko & Snyder since *The Avenging Mind* in April 2008] which features Ditko's new characters *The Hero*, *The Cape* and *The !?* (that's his name!). Forthcoming is **#9 Teen** [i.e., #19], in the same format, which judging from the cover will feature *The Hero* and *The Mad Man* among others. These 32-page B&W comics are available from Robin for \$4.00 each (plus \$1.50 P&H in the USA for 1 issue; \$3 P&H for 2 to 5 issues.)

Perhaps the most intriguing new Ditko release has been his new series of essays that have been appearing as **The Four-Page Series**, which are exactly that: four pages of commentary by Ditko about fan mentality. One of the essays is titled "Anti-Ditko 'Fans'" and deals with assumptions and complaints that are made about Ditko among fans. In the past, I have said that I don't believe such "Anti-Ditko" people exist, but a recent



perusal of the comments sections of some blogs that mentioned Ditko was an eye-opener to me. Each issue of *The Four-Page Series* costs \$1.50 in the USA, \$2.50 outside the USA, from Robin Snyder (address above).

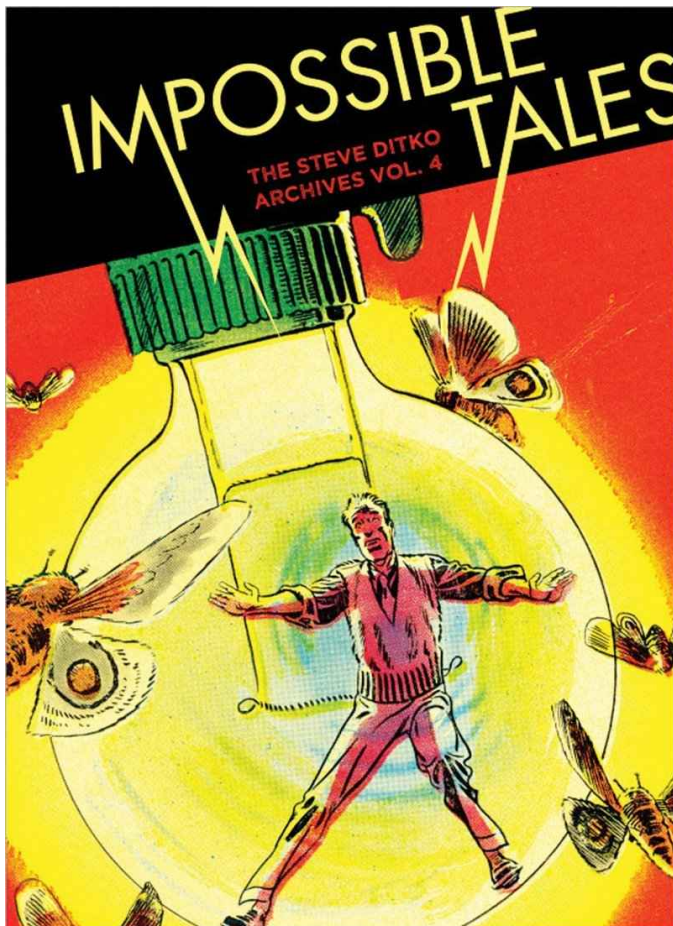
There are also several reprint volumes of older Ditko work scheduled to be released in the coming months, from various publishers.

IDW's **Konga** collection (Volume 2 of their *Steve Ditko's Monsters* series, *Gorgo* being Volume 1) is scheduled to be released on August 20th. The same day (!) Dark Horse Comics is releasing a hardcover collection of all of Ditko's **1960s Warren** work under the title *Creepy Presents Steve Ditko*.

Fantagraphics' **Steve Ditko Archives** series edited by Blake Bell, containing 1950s public domain Charlton tales drawn by Ditko, continues with Volume Four, titled *Impossible Tales*, which is scheduled to be released on October 18th, and Volume Five (under the title *Dripping With Fear*) planned for February 25, 2014.

I hope to have reviews of some of these new books in the next issue (#92) of *Ditkomania*. If anyone would like to submit a review, just drop me a line.

As always, the best place to stay up-to-date with the latest Ditko releases is at Bob Heer's blog at www.ditko.blogspot.com





The UFO CHECKLIST

The **United Fanzine Organization (UFO)** is a co-op of small-press comics publishers and creators dedicated to setting a higher standard of quality in independent and alternative press. The members mutually aid each other in the promotion and production of their own publications. Any small-press publisher interested in applying for membership in the UFO should contact the UFO Chairman: **Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195** or you can email him at robimes@yahoo.com The official UFO website: <http://unitedfanzineorganization.weebly.com>

TETRAGRAMMATON FRAGMENTS!!

#228: This is the UFO Newsletter, the central forum for UFO members, containing columns and artwork that can't be found anywhere else. 28 digest-size B&W pages for **\$2.50** postpaid in the USA from **Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195** or you can email him at robimes@yahoo.com for more info.

DITKOMANIA #90: This issue of the fanzine devoted to comics creator Steve Ditko features a long article by former ACE Comics publisher **Ron Frantz** about working with Ditko in the late 1980s, and the abandoned plans to publish *Ooky & Zooky*, a comic by Superman co-creator **Jerry Siegel**. 44-page B&W digest for **\$3.00** postpaid in the USA from **Rob Imes** (see address above).

FANTASY THEATER #23: A Lady Spectra and Lizard Man team-up by **Steven Myers** and **J. Kevin Carrier**, plus another adventure of the female barbarian Glorianna by **J. K. Carrier**. A 56-page B&W digest-size comic (with color covers) available in print for **\$3.50** from www.indyplanet.com and also available digitally for **99¢** from www.indyplanet.com/digital

HERO CENTRAL UNIVERSE #8-9: A special double-sized issue featuring Faraday, Uberfraulein, and more! 48-page B&W digest comic with color cover for **\$6.00** postpaid from **Jason Bullock, P. O. Box 2684, Loganville, GA 30052**. Email jasonb@girafnetwork.com for more info or visit HCU on the web at <http://www.girafnetwork.org>

HCU CONFIDENTIAL #3: Get more info about the HCU with this companion zine that provides background info & character profiles. 20-page B&W digest zine (with color cover) for only **\$1.00** postpaid from **Jason Bullock, P. O. Box 2684, Loganville, GA 30052**.

STRAW MAN #0: A collection of miscellaneous Straw Man adventures with two never-before-seen stories. A fun done-in-one comic that is a great introduction to the hero who truly lives by the phrase "Sometimes Life Just Sucks." 32-page B&W full-size comic for **\$4.00** postpaid from **David Branstetter, 4212 Frisse Ave., Evansville, IN 47714**. Email strawmancomics@gmail.com or visit www.strawmancomics.com

TALES OF FANTASY #61: More about the new costumed hero "**The Hand**" with chapters 3 and 4, plus an installment of *Dream Diary* and a lengthy, interesting letters column. 52-page B&W digest-size comic book with color covers for **\$3.00** postpaid in the USA from **Larry Johnson, 31 Greenbrook Rd., Hyde Park, MA 02136**. Email LewBrown75@yahoo.com or visit www.LarryJohnsonartist.com

VALIANT EFFORTS Vol. 3 #4: StreetFury continues, plus two backup tales starring The Golden Protector! Full-size 28-page B&W comic with a color cover for **\$3.00** postpaid from **Don Ensign, 250-A S. Paseo Cerro, Green Valley, AZ 85614**. Email him at donensign@mail.com for info.

LETTERS

What do you think of this issue? Let us know at: Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195 or robimes@yahoo.com If you don't want your letter printed, mark "not for publication."

Dear Rob,

It was nice of you to let me see your letter column before going to press, and giving me the opportunity to respond to the comments. The article I wrote for *Ditkomania 90* is something I had wanted to do for years, but I could never quite seem to find the proper occasion or the right publisher. I am glad that you allowed me to do it for *Ditkomania*. As you know, while I was preparing the article for publication, I wasn't quite sure what kind of a reaction to expect. I figured that some people might like it while others would probably hate it with a passion. I am glad to say that this has not been the case. The overwhelming majority of comments that I have received directly, or read on Internet web sites like Facebook have been positive. Needless to say, I am grateful to everyone who took the time to comment. Since some of your readers have asked specific questions about things that I didn't mention during my first time at bat, I will do my best to provide enlightened answers. As much as brevity runs contrary to my nature, I have done my best to keep the comments succinct and to the point. And so with that thought in mind, let us move full speed ahead.

RON FRANTZ

Dear Rob,

I really enjoyed Walking in the Footsteps of Giants by Ron Frantz in *Ditkomania #90*. Over the years Frantz has met and in some cases worked with many of the greatest comic book creators of all time. He chatted with Alex Toth and Jack Kirby, had phone conversations with Jerry Siegel and Wally Wood (unfortunately not ending amicably in Siegel's case) and, most amazing of all, collaborated with the legendary Steve Ditko.

As publisher of ACE Comics, Frantz initially contacted Ditko by phone (he was simply listed in the book). That first call sounded tense by description, but patience, persistence and sincerity paid off for the fledgling publisher. He soon developed a working relationship with Ditko, and eventually met and befriended the enigmatic artist. His account of their meeting in 1987 made for fascinating and at times surprising reading. He was able to ask Steve Ditko about his 1966 departure from Marvel, a question every silver age Marvel fan would likely ask if they had the chance, and the courage. Frantz shares numerous intriguing anecdotes, such as

Ditko calmly finishing up Bill Everett's work on *Daredevil* #1 for a frantic Stan Lee. Ditko's work on that 1964 issue remained, as far as I know, completely unknown to comic book fandom until around 2002.

The story about Bud Plant nearly getting arrested at an Oklahoma City convention in 1972 (Multicon, I assume?) was also interesting, and something I had not heard before. Bud Plant had previously appeared at the Oklahoma City Multicon in 1970, and was quite pleased with his sales there. The 1970 Multicon is famous among Flash Gordon fans (of which I am one) as the first convention appearance of Buster Crabbe, who was guest of honor. And EC legend Reed Crandall was there as well! Man, I would have liked to have been a fly on the wall at that one, but alas I was only 13 years old in 1970 and knew nothing about conventions at the time.

As an Oklahoman myself, I found Frantz's references to various comic conventions in Oklahoma City and Tulsa of great personal interest. I would be curious to learn which Tulsa bookstores Frantz visited with Jim Steranko as he drove the artist around town one sultry summer day back in 1979. One of the area's first comic shops, The Comic Empire of Tulsa, opened in 1976 (and is still around today, 37 years later, with a different owner), and I wonder if it was one of the stops for Frantz and the famous Steranko during their book hunting jaunt all those years ago.

At one point Ron Frantz states, "Before such enthusiastic people like Blake Bell and Rob Imes arrived on the scene, I would say that [Cat] Yronwode was the most sincere and dedicated Ditko fan I ever met." For myself I would like to add that Rob Imes has done a remarkable job on *Ditkomania*. And I would be remiss not to mention Bill Hall, the Ditko fan and scholar who founded *Ditkomania* back in 1983.

Thanks again for another fine issue of *Ditkomania*, Rob. There were less illustrations this time, but for me the text of the Ron Frantz article more than made up for it. It is a candid piece, and may prove controversial for some, as it is not always complimentary to all parties involved (e.g. Dean Mullaney). However, I found the "Ron Frantz Remembers" *Ditkomania* edition a highly entertaining memoir by a publishing figure who has indeed walked in the footsteps of giants.

TIMOTHY M. WALTERS

PO Box 75, Muskogee, OK 74402

Hi Timothy: It is always a pleasure to run into another native Oklahoman. Yes, the event was Multicon '72. I guess this is a good time (as Paul Harvey used to say on his old radio show) to tell the rest of the story. The only thing that saved Bud from a trip to the pokey that day was that Ed Baldwin happened to be working at the registration desk when two burly cops showed up to investigate the report of pornography being sold on the premises. Ed's brother, Billy, was a Captain on the Oklahoma City police force. Since the two cops knew Billy, Ed was able to stall them long enough for one of the convention chairmen to hurry into the dealer's room and alert Bud that the cops would be there in a

matter of moments. At first Bud didn't understand the gravity of the situation. The convention chairman told Bud in no uncertain terms that this was Oklahoma City, and not San Francisco or New York. He convinced Bud that he had to get those undergrounds out of sight in a hurry unless he wanted to spend a few days in the county jail. No doubt, that would have been a best case scenario. I know it must seem kind of ridiculous now, but at the time it could have been a very serious situation. And there was no Comic Book Legal Defense fund in those days to call for help. -- RON FRANTZ

Rob,

Received the latest *DitkoMania* (#90). Saw something about being financed by "Kickstarter." Dunno exactly what you mean, but did think it appropriate to send in another \$10.00 to continue my subscription to your interesting fanzine.

Re: Ron Frantz. Well, someday I might Google him. His piece, while interesting in many ways, sure could have used editing. For example, "One hot summer day in the summer of 1979," while minor, is typical of the overwordiness and tangents (often paragraphs long) that made the work, for all of its pertinent information, a draft instead of a final copy.

Just received *Ditko Monsters: Gorgo* by Craig Yoe (ed.). I look forward to reviews. Interesting that Ditko used many four-panel page constructions in '60-63 while in *Spider-Man* he went with many nine-panel grids.

ALLEN J. SCHULER
allenjschu53@yahoo.com

Hi Allen: Your criticism of my article is well taken. I would be an idiot not to consider the possibility that you could be right about a few things. However, it seems only fitting for me to leave that determination to others who will probably be somewhat less biased than myself. I will be the first to admit that I sometimes ramble on a bit too much when I write. Believe it or not, I could easily have added at least another dozen pages to my article. For me, this is usually the end result of having too much to say and not enough space to say it. Of course, I realize that not everyone likes my style of writing. Frankly, it is not something I worry much about. It has been my experience that no matter how hard a person tries to do anything, you simply can't please everyone. It is like Harry Truman once said: "No matter what you do in this life there is always going to be 'someone' who doesn't like it." Harry actually used a more colorful metaphor than that, but I am sure you get the point. While my style may not be the best in the world, it is mine. It has slowly developed from many years of trudging through the literary trenches while I learned how to write the hard way. The process has involved a lot of practice, along with some trial and error. I am continuing to work at it. All I can tell you is that I try to do my best, and most readers seem to like what I do. End of sermon.

-- RON FRANTZ

Hi Rob,

Wow. Issue #90 definitely comes right out of left field. I can't wait to read the letters of comment on this one.

I share a number of Ron Frantz's opinions and am diametrically opposed to numerous others, but -- having had the privilege of spending an hour talking with Steve Ditko OUTSIDE his studio (i.e. in the hall) a few weeks back -- I do feel compelled to provide a 2013 update, while avoiding violating Steve's well-known and (in my case) well-regarded sense of privacy.

If the neighbourhood in which he has his studio could be regarded as "dodgy" back in 1977, it's certainly nothing of the sort in 2013. The New York City clean-up of the area in the 1980s and 1990s is legendary and justly deserving of praise. Likewise the interior of the building. The lobby is modern and clean and there is an on-duty security guard/receptionist in front of the bank of elevators which are well-maintained, modern and clean. I only saw Steve's floor, but it's in the same category.

And I don't mean "clean for New York City." The Hotel Pennsylvania where I stayed is in that category, the door jambs on the rooms showing signs of repeated attempts at forced entry, the paint chipped, etc. All part of the local charm, for me, and I felt perfectly safe. For New York City.

Steve Ditko's office building is quantum levels above that.

Venturing into borderline sense-of-privacy violation (forgive me, Steve!), I have to say that Steve is the best-dressed, best-groomed octagenarian in whose company I have ever spent time. He even edges out Will Eisner in that category (which is really saying something if you know how well-dressed and well-groomed Will was!).

Steve's environment and Steve's appearance were, to me, at striking variance with what has been presented to Ditko fandom over the years.

I also found him gracious, hospitable, engaging and extremely patient ... and sharp as a tack. Just for the record.

Aside from that, great issue! We all owe Mr. Frantz a great debt for committing his version of this aspect of comics history to paper, I think. Even where and when we hold views diametrically opposed to his own.

Sincerely,

DAVE SIM

Box 1674, Station 'C'
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4R2 Canada

Hi Dave: I don't know if you remember, but we met back in 1986 at a convention in Dallas. At the time I was the new kid on the block, having just published the first issue of *Spencer Spook*. We had a nice long talk at a party held in one of the hotel rooms. Dave Stevens (who was then drawing the *Rocketeer*) sat on the floor next to us sketching while you and I were shooting the breeze. Every once in a while he would look up and say something pertinent to the conversation. As I recall, we mostly talked shop as we used the same printer in Canada, and were having problems getting paid in a timely manner by some of the distributors. I don't mind telling you that I wish I had listened to your advice about not extending too much credit to some of those distributors. I didn't know that some of them were on their last legs, and I ended up losing my shirt when they folded their tents and disappeared into the night owing me (and a lot of other small publishers) thousands of dollars. I hope that you came out of that fiasco better than I did.

Let me say that I have a great deal of respect for your work as an artist and publisher. Your comments certainly hold value in my eyes. The mere fact that we don't agree on everything would probably make for some lively conversation. No doubt, on some occasions we have walked on opposite sides of the street and are bound to see some things from a different perspective. In any event, I am glad that you seemed to enjoy my article. This said, I am going to step out on a limb and encourage you to write a similar article for some future issue of *Ditkomania*. I realize this is probably asking a lot, but there is no doubt in my mind that you have some interesting stories to tell. Among other things, I would love to hear about your working with Jerry Siegel, while publishing some of his "Ricky Robot" stories as a backup in *Cerebus*. Just guessing, but I suspect that some of your experiences with Mr. Siegel were probably not too much different than my own. -- RON FRANTZ

Dear Rob,

Ron Frantz's memoir may well be the most compelling and captivating article ever published in the pages of *Ditkomania*, which is really saying something! One doesn't have to read very deeply into this piece before they realize that they are in for a thought provoking, scholarly written ride.

After opening with a concise denouncement of critics (aided ably by a 19th century dean of Canterbury no less!) Ron nimbly moved on to marking the distinction between authors of memoirs (like himself) and historians; historians *study* history while those who write memoirs are the people who helped to *make* history. Both groups perform important roles. Historians catalogue, quantify and in general record past events, while the remembrances of those who were there when it all happened give us first-hand impressions and opinions of those that made or saw those events happen.

Diaries, journals and such give us unique and individual snap-shots of significant points in time, first-hand recordings which may only be made within a very narrow window. Historians have been writing about the Civil War for 150 years and will no doubt continue to write about it for centuries to come. But for all their research there will never be any more eye witness accounts to draw on than exist already.

In a few decades it will be the same with comics history. With each passing year there are fewer and fewer people with first-hand, or even second-hand, knowledge of the formative years of the American comic book. The facts and statistics will always be there, neatly stored and catalogued, but the flavor and color of those times can only be found in the existing memoirs.

And there's certainly a lot of color to be found in Ron's opining! In addition to sharing clinical facts, Ron isn't at all bashful when it comes to calling a spade a spade, saying exactly what he thinks about people's pros and cons, regardless of who they are. He clearly feels very strongly about these observations, yet for all of his harsh criticisms and occasional accusations, he consistently makes it clear that what he is offering is just one man's opinions. There is conviction behind his words, but no arrogance. He backs up every opinion that he voices with well thought out reasoning, but leaves the door open for divergent views on these matters. This is the kind of tasty recollection that make personal memoirs so invaluable.

Ron succeeds in knocking off our fannish rose-colored glasses, throws away our idolatrous polish and makes us see the publishers and creators of comics for what they truly were and are, mere mortals working in an industry populated by a mixture of scoundrels and hard working honest men, just like any other industry in the world. Forty years ago I would have been one of those fans who "believe that [Stan] Lee walks on water," and would have found it hard to believe that he ever could have done anything wrong or immoral. As a teenager it was more comfortable to see things as black or white. At this point in my life I can easily reconcile the fact that I can admire someone's works and achievements without liking or condoning every other aspect of their life's practices.

Since Vaughan Monroe's hit song of the 40's "Ghost Riders in the Sky" popularized the name and concept of ghost-like cowboys I probably could believe that Lee developed the concept of Marvel's Ghost Rider independently of the earlier M.E. version, if not for the involvement of Dick Ayers in both projects! Perhaps it was assumed that, with the demise of Magazine Enterprises, the original Ghost Rider had lapsed into the public domain, although it does sadly seem just as likely that Ron's assessment that this was out and out thievery is just as likely. Is Stan Lee a bad guy, a good guy, or just a guy? I don't know. What I do know is that I sure love his comics!

Amid all of his remembrances of his days as the publisher of ACE Comics Ron Frantz paints a most satisfying portrait of Steve Ditko. We get to see Ditko as a hard working honest man of deep conviction: a man who meets his obligations, does what he says he will do when he says he will, and doesn't owe anybody any apologies or explanations. (After having spent

so much of my life deifying my favorite comics creators I got a huge kick out of hearing how Frantz finally located Ditko, by simply looking him up in the Manhattan phone book! Now that's a reality check for ya!)

The three pages of Ditko's concept sketches for the aborted *Ooky and Zooky* comic are a tantalizing glimpse at what might have been. Even if it had been just another of the short-lived comics that got buried under the avalanche of independent ventures that clogged comic shops in the 80's, at least hardcore fans would have had the thrill of seeing those two legends of the field work together this one time.

I have to admit that I have conflicted feelings regarding comics creators not being further compensated for the creation of characters which later become major successes for their publishers. My gut tells me that the "powers that be" at DC should have felt a moral obligation to financially reward Siegel & Shuster for providing them with a multi-billion dollar property in Superman. But on the other hand, in how many fields does an employer continue to pay an employee after their work is done?

My father was a small, independent building contractor, and in the Spring of 1959 he built a cabin here in Bridgewater for an article in *Woman's Day* magazine. It was feature in the August 1959 issue under the headline "Vacation Cabin For Less Than \$5,000." Shortly before my dad died in 2006 that cabin sold for just over \$400,000. Should my father have received a percentage of that sale? Should the architect who drew the plans? In this, as in most other professional ventures, the financial gains are limited to payment upon completion of the project. After that, sole ownership goes to whoever paid the bills.

This is an imperfect analogy, I know, but it does make a point. An employer's legal obligation to the people working for him ends with each paycheck. This cold, hard reality can be seen in the situation with Ditko, Marvel and Spider-Man.

Plus, to be entirely fair to both sides, we have to admit that while Ditko was the major player in the creation of Spider-Man, Spidey's longevity and popularity owes a lot to the way that people from John Romita to Todd McFarlane built upon Ditko's foundation in the years that followed. Should each one of them be compensated for the character's success as well? Lee Iacocca headed the design team that created the Ford Mustang. Should he have gotten a check for ever Mustang that ever rolled off of the assembly line?

The sad truth is that Siegel and Shuster signed away the rights to Superman, and Steve Ditko never owned Spider-Man, and each of these men set wheels in motion which made other men extremely wealthy. That's the nature of capitalism; those who actually do the work rarely reap the great rewards.

Thanks for one of the finest issues of *Ditkomania* ever, Rob. And a special thank you to Ron Frantz for taking the time to share all of these thoughts with us.

MIKE TUZ

P.O. Box 182, Bridgewater, CT 06752

Hey Mike: This is the kind of a review that could give a fellow a swelled head if he wasn't careful. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your kind comments. I like to think of myself as a student of history, and it has often occurred to me how so much useful knowledge and information has been lost because people who have lived through historical events fail to document their experiences. This is why I write articles like the one published in *Ditkomania* 90. I have plans to write a few more while I am still able and the memories are still reasonably fresh. In fact, I am currently putting the finishing touches on a new article for *Charlton Spotlight* that will see publication a little later in the year. This one is about Alex Toth.

Although I never expect to see it happen, I wish to God that Ditko would find himself a good book editor (preferably not some blithering fanboy) and write his autobiography. The game is now late in the fourth quarter and the time clock is slowly ticking away. After all, none of us are getting any younger. This brings to mind a time about twenty-five years ago when I tried to talk Jerry De Fuccio into writing a book about his experiences. It never ceased to amaze me how Jerry seemed to know almost everyone in the comics business then over the age of 50. He was a walking encyclopedia on the subject. I very much believe that Jerry knew more about the Golden Age (and the men and women who created the comics) than any man who has ever lived. I know he gave the idea some serious thought, but never got around to writing a book. The sad part about it is that Jerry is gone now, and all of that vast knowledge and experience went with him. -- RON FRANTZ

Hi Rob,

This was certainly an interesting and unusual issue, what with a single article taking up almost all the fanzine. I found the article by Ron Frantz to be very interesting, however it was certainly a disjointed and rambling effort. Erratic might even be a better description, with the theme and subjects seeming to jump all over the place thru different years, perspectives, and background, all filtered thru Ron's own strong opinions and remembrances.

Still, it was loaded with valuable information about ACE Comics and his contact with Steve Ditko. I wish he had dwelt a little stronger and longer on the actual operation of ACE, how things went, sales and distribution wise, before he had to pull the plug on the entire operation.

For what it's worth, I carried all of his comics, including *Spencer Spook*, back when I was running my comic book/science fiction/game store for twenty-two+ years in Worcester, MA. I tried to push the *Face* and *Skyman* issues but I didn't have much luck selling them. A few

people were interested in the Ditko artwork, and a few more older fans were actually interested in the return of the two golden age characters Skyman and the Face. I have to say I only sold a grand total of 2 issues of *Spencer Spook* #1 and **no** copies of any issue after that. I dropped that title as quick as I could.

The problem for most people was that the comics were in black and white for \$1.75 a copy, while there were plenty of comics being offered in full color by a wide variety of companies that were cheaper. Basic economics seems to trump most everything else for comic fans. Add in the fact that the time ACE Comics debuted the racks were awash with dozens and dozens of new comic titles of all kind, way more than most fans could afford to purchase. I liked the ACE stories, but the competition was fierce and like so many others before and since, the company was simply overwhelmed by the marketplace it operated in.

I might also mention that I might be guilty of inspiring Marvel to issue their Ghost Rider western comic. The first issue of my comic fanzine, *The Comic World*, carried a long, enthusiastic article written by me about the ME Ghost Rider character (he has always been my favorite all time comic character, past or present). I sent copies of the fanzine to both Stan Lee and Dick Ayers. I would have sent a copy to ME publisher Vincent Sullivan, except I didn't know how to get in contact with him. Ayers responded very positively with a long chatty letter. Stan Lee didn't respond at all, but my impression was that my article may have been a powerful incentive for Marvel to experiment with a character that they believed was in public domain, using the original artist, because Magazine Enterprises, who had published the character, had been dead and gone since 1958. I hope Vincent Sullivan got a few bucks out of Marvel for the deal anyway.

Ron is also right that comic book creators both past and present often have faulty, or even shifting memories of past events. People often ask questions about seemingly trivial events years in the past and expect the person to recall every detail with absolute clarity. Things that weren't even that significant way back when suddenly are the subject of intense scrutiny. This has happened to me because of my involvement with early comics fandom and sometimes you have to wonder why these people are so concerned about something that seemed not terribly important back then and not much more so right now either.

In addition, with comic creators, artists in particular, when people start telling them how wonderful their stuff is/was, and how important they are/were, it is pure human nature for the ego to swell. If you hear this from enuf people over a long enuf time you may even start believing that you are a terrific individual touched by true genius, and your recollections will be automatically colored by the ego stroking unless you are very careful. Many comics creators cave in to the egoboo assault pretty easily, so past memories related decades later thru the glow of adulation are not necessarily correct. This factor makes it very difficult for people who are just trying to get the basic facts about events and publications.

I agree with Ron that Ditko has a right to live his life any way he wants to. If he wants to exist in solitude and keep away from the world at large, that is certainly his right. How he is

able to do that in New York City, one of the busiest metropolises on the planet, might be worth a separate article itself.

I do think this has helped to warp his world view. Being exposed to the writing of Ayn Rand and not having a chance to interact with other people so he could see how the real world populated by real people actually works is a regrettable series of events.

Most people read Rand in their teens and buy into the ego-centric objectivist viewpoint primarily because they are self centered teenagers who secretly think they are invincible and deserve to be emperor of the world, or at least they deserve to leap to instant success with little or no effort on their part except for the sheer force of their personalities. Naturally, when they react with society and the people around them they usually figure out that this selfish, greedy, malicious philosophy has no real place in the world (unless they want to join an organized crime ring or something similar).

It is upsetting that Ditko continues to buy into this phony philosophy even at this late point in his life, but again, every person is in charge of his own life, and he has made the decisions that brought his life to the point it is now.

It was quite interesting seeing all the sketch art and the ACE ad art as well. After reading the promotional pitch for the *Crypt of the Claw* one-shot featuring Daredevil, Face, Skyman and Black Terror I'm sorry the project never got off the ground. Perhaps it might have led to a Union Of Ultimates or some other team group comic involving the same super heroes later on in an ongoing super-group title.

Incidentally I am amazed you were able to finance this special issue of *Ditkomania* with a Kickstarter campaign. Considering that over 70% of Kickstarter efforts fail to meet their financial thresholds, this seems even more remarkable to me. I don't know if this would ever actually be a viable path for small press publications to pursue, but for super-doooper special issues it might work. It worked for you anyway. I certainly would never even have considered that option.

Well, another very interesting issue. Keep up the good work. I'm already looking forward to the next issue.

BOB JENNINGS

29 Whiting Road, Oxford, MA 01540

Hello there, Bob: It is a real pleasure to run into you again after all these years. Once upon a time I had a fair sized stack of your *Comic World* fanzine, and I always enjoyed reading them. Now, I am going to roll back the clock to about 1967. My memory is now a bit hazy, but as I recall I tried to buy a comic book that you had advertised. I am not sure if it was from an ad in your fanzine or perhaps one from the old *Rocket's Blast*. The only thing I remember is that you mailed my money order back to me because someone

else had already ordered the comic I wanted. It was a vast sum of money, maybe two or three dollars...and that included the postage. This sort of thing happened to me quite a bit in those days, and after being disappointed a few times, I stopped ordering comics by mail for a few years.

I always enjoy hearing from former retailers like yourself who sold my ACE Comics titles a quarter century ago. I certainly appreciate your dedicated efforts to sell them in your shop way back when. I am sorry that *Spencer Spook* didn't sell better for you. Jim Ivey once told me he did pretty well with it in his shop in Orlando, Florida, so I guess you never know about those things. If I had it all to do over again, I probably would have cancelled the title after the third issue because it was rapidly turning into a money-losing proposition. Actually, it was kind of the same way with most of the Ditko comics. The first issue of *The FACE* did very well. Sales dropped off dramatically with the second issue, and I ended up losing money on the third. At the time I thought most of my declining sales could be attributed to an unstable direct sales market. There is some truth to that, but the problem was really a lot more complicated. Among other things there were some real bandits out there masquerading as distributors, who were at least indirectly responsible for killing the golden goose. I had high hopes for *Spencer*. Since it was the first title I published, it will always be a sentimental favorite of mine.

I am going to send you a little something I think you might enjoy...from one old comic book fan to another. In fact, you will probably have it by the time you read this. Incidentally, Bob, have you ever given any thought to publishing a book using some of the best articles from *A Comic World*? I think it is something worth considering. You published some good stuff that I think would be well worth reprinting. In particular, I would love to read that "Ghost Rider" article you published in the first issue!

-- RON FRANTZ

Note from Rob Imes: Bob Jennings publishes the science fiction fanzine FADEAWAY, which I highly recommend! Write him for a sample copy, or view PDFs of the print editions at <http://www.efanzines.com/Fadeaway/index.htm>

DM #90 arrived in my mailbox today and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I literally read it in one sitting as I found Ron Frantz's recollections and brisk and light-hearted writing style completely engaging. His self-deprecating wit and ability to express opinions without being heavy-handed were equally appealing. I learned quite a lot, to include the fact that I didn't realize Steve worked on the old Claw, Face and Daredevil characters, which I only became acquainted with during Alex Ross' recent run in the Dynamite books. I thank you most kindly for the issue.

BRYAN STROUD

3681 Westgate, Pendleton, OR 97801

Hi Rob,

Thanks for DM #90. Ron's epic-length memoir on his days with Ditko, publishing ACE Comics and his other comics-related work, made a fascinating read. It reminded me of reading an issue of Mike Barrier's *Funnyworld* -- enlightening and full of personality.

As a fan of Ditko's work on Spider-Man and Dr. Strange, I've always been curious about his abrupt departure from Marvel, smack in the middle of their phenomenal rise. Any article I'd read had always centered on the relationship between Lee and Ditko, so Ron's exploration of conflict with Martin Goodman seems a much more plausible explanation. I've read too many accounts of publishers of comics and paperback originals who abused the writers and artists they bought work from.

I really enjoyed Ron's approach to the piece. It's loaded with personality and I appreciated his ability to balance his professional expertise with his perspective of things as a fan. The pointed questions he posed to Ditko were spot on. And since many of us will never get the chance, it was a little like he was acting on our behalf.

In particular, I loved his exploration of Ayn Rand's work and Ditko's obsession with Objectivism. I read *The Fountainhead* in high school. As an outsider, I loved the idea of going against the mass consciousness, standing on unwavering principles and never compromising your ideals, no matter the consequences. I was thrilled to read Ditko's *Mysterious Suspense* #1 around that time.

As I got a little older and gained some life experience, theoretical perfection seemed more and more at odds with reality. There is a real seduction to seeing the world in black and white. It simplifies every decision. Unfortunately (or maybe it's better put as fortunately), most of life is gray, and most decisions are compromises, some requiring a great deal of inner conflict to finally settle. Some are never settled and continue to befuddle us every time we revisit them. I loved the line at the top of page 26, ". . . *I wish I could be that certain about anything.*" Beautiful -- and so true!

Certainty can lead to fanaticism. The more you invest in your position the less open you are to giving a different perspective serious consideration. There is a perceived safety in intolerance.

After *The Fountainhead*, I'd always wanted to tackle *Atlas Shrugged*. But the size of it always put me off. I'm glad it did. I finally got through it a few years ago, reading with a considerably different perspective than I had while reading about Howard Roark. It's an historic work, but it's also nearly embarrassingly simplistic.

Rob, thanks for publishing Ron's account in its entirety. For me, it sheds new light on the enigma of Steve Ditko.

RICHARD KRAUSS

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Hi Richard: It sounds as if your experience with Objectivism was not too much different than mine. I can see that we reached some of the same conclusions in the end. While I was still in my early 20's and too young to know any better, I found many aspects of the philosophy appealing. This came at a time when I was involved with a trade association known as WSA. Some of you old-timers will probably remember it as sort of an ersatz Better Business Bureau for nostalgia/comics dealers and collectors. In those days mail fraud was a big problem in fandom and I was usually up to my neck working with postal inspectors on mail fraud investigations. For about two and a half years, I served as the Administrator of the organization, a position that carried a moderate degree of prestige and far too much authority for a man with my limited knowledge and experience to know how to handle. About the time I married for the first time in 1977, I was pretty much burned out on the idea of dealing with people and problems. I began to see the obvious flaws in the Ayn Rand philosophy and decided it was not the way I wanted to live my life. If nothing else, I sure as hell didn't need Rand or anyone else to do my thinking for me. As the years have gone by, I have become thoroughly convinced that I made the right decision.

I suppose that I may have been a little harsh when commenting about Objectivism in my article. No doubt, I must have stepped on the toes of a few Randians. I certainly hope I didn't offend anyone here. The bottom line to all of this is that I respect Steve Ditko's views. Nobody can accuse him of being fickle... and that includes me. Ditko has remained true to his values for many years and, by my way of thinking, that is something to be admired. I only reserve the right to disagree. It is only when zealots of any variety (and the world seems to be filled with them) try to force their beliefs on me that I develop a stiff neck. Ditko has never done that, or at least not with me. I am sorry to say that I have very little interest in reading the vast majority of the philosophical stories that Ditko is creating today. Most of them are too much like a sermon for me to enjoy. And since I have no desire to paragonize his publisher (for personal reasons) they are destined to pass me by... or at least for the present. -- RON FRANTZ

Hi Rob,

AMAZING front cover! I'm embarrassed to admit I don't recall ever hearing of ACE Comics before! Even though I ran a comics shop in the *early* 80's this must've happened *after* my time!

This issue was totally fascinating! I enjoy EVERY issue -- but this was above and beyond. The glimpses into the lives of Jerry Siegel and Mr. Ditko himself help give us students of comics history more rounded out views of these great creators, *and* of what the wrongs they endured did to them.

I'm a big fan of rock 'n' roll from the 1950s on up -- and am struck by the similarities in how early rockers and early comics creators were ripped off, chewed up and spat out by their respective industries.

With technology rapidly eliminating the need for big record companies, or publishers -- we can only hope the creators will benefit fully from direct access to the consumers!

Still -- it is really good for us all to hear and be aware of cautionary tales like those related in Mr. Frantz's memoirs!

As a fan of Mr. Ditko -- I am also very grateful for a chance to see previously unknown sketches and artwork.

This is everything a fanzine SHOULD be, Rob! Thank you so much!

LARRY BLAKE

69306 St. Rt. 124, Reedsville, OH 45772

Latest *Ditkomania* is one of the best ever!! I'm so glad you did not shorten the lead article! This was a true labour of love. One of the best Ditko articles I have read. I learned a lot. History has been well served by your efforts.

Having become a fan of *Big Shot Comics* (many issues at the *Digital Comics Museum* site) I truly loved Ditko's take on Skyman. I feel as though that series could have made it with better distribution.

JEFF CANNELL

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jcannell@mac.com

Rob, I think *Ditkomania* # 90 is the best issue you've yet published. I absolutely loved it. For some reason, the only one of Ron Frantz's comics I came across was the one with the

Ditko cover showing Daredevil battling the Claw. Great comic, with the interior a C. C. Beck homage to the original Jack Cole story. Frantz was obviously an editor after my own heart; I'm definitely going to start looking for back issues of his other publications. And Frantz gave perhaps the most rounded portrait of Ditko the man I've ever read. I suspect Ditko wouldn't be happy with the article, even though he comes off quite well. Although my opinions of Ayn Rand and objectivism track Frantz's pretty closely, I think that the way Ditko's led his life is wholly admirable, and the fact that he lives his life according to objectivist principles can't be entirely coincidental. The most fascinating -- and poignant -- part of the article for me was reading about Ditko's enthusiastic reaction Siegel's "Ooky" script. This is a side of Ditko his fans don't get to see much of -- his enthusiasm for the medium of comic books. Ditko's given more to comics than comics have given back to him, sadly. Congratulations on publishing a wonderful issue.

CEYLON ANDERSON

I found Ron's reminisces (which took up most of the issue) fascinating. In fact I read the entire issue in one sitting, something rare for me nowadays. Steve isn't always portrayed in the most flattering light, but I didn't feel he was being treated unfairly. Your mileage may vary.

I also suspect that some of the Objectivists in the audience will, well... object... to Ron's portrayal of Ayn Rand and her influence on Steve's work. But he makes it very clear that these are just his personal memories and thoughts 25 years after the fact. Though Ron shared some of these anecdotes before elsewhere, there was more than enough new material to make it all worthwhile for me. Like the time Steve told him that Stan Lee actually considered using the original Lev Gleason Daredevil costume for his new version. Who knew?

Anyway, I'm sure Ron's opinions will bring some lively debate on the list. As for me, I'm glad you devoted the issue to it, Rob, as well as the Mort Todd sidebar.

MICHAEL T. GILBERT

Hello Rob,

Some pretty informative content in the Frantz piece. I always appreciate reading someone's first-hand experience of Steve Ditko. And coming from a publisher's perspective it added extra insight. It'd be nice to be able to read more of these type of perspectives if any became available.

I was more than happy to contribute to your Kickstarter, and Robin Snyder's as well. I am

glad to part of "Ditko fandom," a very loyal and active group of people. While we all have different opinions on how certain things should work out, it's our common appreciation of Ditko's work that brings us together.

JAVIER HERNANDEZ

[**Note:** Javier is A DIY cartoonist whose comics include *El Muerto*, *The Coma* and *Dead Dinosaurio*, who has been contributing to *Ditkomania* since 2009. He's also the Co-founder/Creative Director of the Latino Comics Expo. And he drew this issue's **front cover!** You can find him online at www.javzilla.com -- Rob Imes]

I greatly enjoyed Ron Frantz`s article in DM 90. I`ve seen complaints that it was too long, and that it rambled off-subject. I had no problem with either.

I do want to write a follow-up, someday, to my DM article, "Black and White." (Your readers can award themselves the DM-equivalent of a No-Prize if they remember how long ago *that* appeared.) There are some misunderstandings about what constitutes a compromise in Objectivism.

It seems (more from a recent Facebook discussion, than from Ron`s examples) that people believe "not compromising" means "never having to do something I don`t want to do." That`s *subjectivism*.

"Compromise" in an Objectivist context typically refers to two alternatives in a very basic ethical principle, such as the initiation of force. As described in his article, Ron`s example of eating food he didn`t think he`d like is no compromise at all. (Unless, for example, Ron is a principled vegetarian for religious or other ethical reasons, and he ate a hot dog.)

Ron gives the example of Howard Roark harming his own career by refusing to compromise on the design of his building. Ron wonders if Ditko "(and all the rest of the serious Ayn Rand devotees) had some difficulty telling difference between reality and a work of fiction."

I don`t have that problem. And when I asked the Objectivists I see on a monthly basis about this, each one responded that they could see why Roark would not have allowed changes to his building (for the purpose of the story); but if any one of them were faced with such a decision in real life, they might or might not go along with the changes. (We`ll have to wait for that above-mentioned article, for lots of examples.)

Ron describes how some people have concluded that Ditko is an oddball or worse, based on the little they actually know about Ditko. I respectfully ask Ron to consider whether he`s done the same with Ayn Rand.

After reading his 2000 book, *Fandom: Confidential*, my impression of Ron is that he's a person of great integrity. My disagreements above with his perceptions of Objectivism have done nothing to change that view. I respect his efforts, described in his book, to establish trust and honesty among fandom. Ron and I have recently connected via Facebook (see, it is good for something), and I hope to continue exchanging thoughts with him.

(Hey, Ron, are the prices listed for *Fandom: Confidential* on Amazon for real??)

RODNEY SCHROETER

P. O. Box 334, Random Lake, WI 53075

Hi Rodney: After reading your letter I have arrived at the conclusion that I would be an idiot if I tried to debate you about Objectivism. A blind man could see that you know far more about the subject than I do. I realize, of course, that this is the life that you (and Steve Ditko) have chosen, and I most certainly respect your beliefs. All I can tell you is that it is not the way I care to live my life. By the same token, I would not care to debate religion with a graduate of the Dallas Theological Seminary. To earn a degree in theology from that institution, part of the curriculum involved translating the entire Bible from the original Greek into English. I guess it is a small price to pay to become an "ordained" man of the cloth, but the mere thought of my doing something like that is enough to boggle the mind. After such intense study, there is no way any layman could begin to equal their knowledge of the subject. It is kind of the same thing with a person like yourself, who has spent years studying the philosophy of Ayn Rand. After all, a man should know his limitations, and in this particular instance mine are considerable.

Now, as to whether or not I have made lasting judgments about Ayn Rand without knowing her... it is an interesting question. Actually, I think not. Although I never met Ms. Rand, I have read most of her books along with various biographies written by people who knew her best... particularly Barbara and Nathaniel Branden. As matters stand, I have no reason to disbelieve their first hand accounts of the time they spent in close association with Ayn Rand. I dare say that most of it is not a pretty picture. Although this thought might be considered a little far-fetched, I have to point out that I never met Edgar Allan Poe, either. But after reading most of his books and stories along with a few historical commentaries, I feel as if I knew him a little. Actually, I see a lot of similarity between Poe and Rand. They were both brilliant people who obviously spent too much time alone, thinking deep and dark thoughts. No doubt, it had a tendency to warp the way they looked at the world.

Rand seemed to think that she was the greatest philosopher who ever lived. With the exception of Aristotle, she proclaimed there was nothing she could learn from anyone else. Back in the 1960's, it was almost as if she was trying to tell the world: "I am the great and powerful Ayn Rand. I am a genius. By comparison, the rest of you people are

simple-minded dolts. You should consider yourself fortunate that I bother with you at all. Remember this: If I like something... be it music, art, or literature ... you have an obligation to like the same things I do. Everything else is pure crap. You should smoke the same brand of cigarettes that I do because I know what tastes best. Imitate me in all things. Don't you dare question me. If you want to be one of my fans, you better do as I say or else you won't be around to bask in the glow of my brilliance. Don't do what I do, just do what I say. Put me on a pedestal and give me all the adulation I deserve. By the way, pay no attention to that man behind the curtain..."

There is no doubt in my mind that Ayn Rand (like Edgar Allan Poe) was slightly delusional and suffered from an over-inflated ego. Essentially, they were both unhappy people who seemed determined to make themselves and everyone close to them miserable. If nothing else, I think Rand could have used a good heaping dose of modesty. It is rather obvious to me that she didn't give a damn about anyone but herself. For example if she wanted to have an affair with a man half her age, both her husband and his wife were expected to like it. Rand saw herself as being above conventional morality. If something made her feel good, that was all that mattered. To hell with what it might do to his marriage, or hers. And there were consequences to this that led to the downfall of the Objectivist movement in the 60's. However, this is not to say that Rand was not capable of rational thinking, it is just that very few of her ideas need to be chiseled in marble. I found nothing there that I cared to build a life upon. And once upon a time I did give it some very serious thought. In the end, however, I decided it was not for me. But if those things should work well for you and Steve Ditko, more power to you. I wish you all the best.

I appreciate all of the nice things you had to say about me. I like you, too. I tend to be fond of people who actually stand their ground and say what is on their mind. I always find candor refreshing. I find it to be a rare quality these days, and it is something to be admired. I only ask that others allow me the same latitude, and you have certainly demonstrated your willingness to do that. These are the intangible qualities that friendships are built upon.

And thanks for making me aware of the astronomical prices that some bandits on Amazon.com are trying to fetch on *Fandom: Confidential*. This is the first I have heard about it. Ye gad! I could not believe my eyes! \$173.99... \$415.60... \$555.00? I find it hard to believe anyone in their right frame of mind would consider paying that. Hell! The two autographed copies I sent to Forrest J. Ackerman for his famous collection a dozen years ago would not be worth anywhere near that. Just so no one gets the wrong idea... I am all for free enterprise. I like to make money just as much as the next guy because eating is a hard habit to break. To try and sell a book like mine for those kinds of prices (that is still in print) makes my blood boil. By my way of thinking, some of these booksellers have missed their calling. They would do just as well to buy a gun and take up highway robbery. One is about as reprehensible as the other.

In case anyone is interested, I still have copies of *Fandom: Confidential* available for \$20, and that price includes shipping; but if you prefer, feel free to order that copy on Amazon.com for a measly \$555. You won't hurt my feelings a bit, but I might be inclined to question your sanity. If anyone needs to contact me for any reason, my mailing address is: P. O. Box 1634, Mena, Arkansas 71963, or email me at magilla445@aol.com

-- RON FRANTZ

My thanks to Ron Frantz for taking the time to reply to the letters that I received regarding his article in DM #90. The views expressed by Ron are entirely his own, and do not reflect my own thoughts, nor represent an editorial position of this zine.

I believe that an individual's private life doesn't necessarily undermine (or support) their stated beliefs. The personal morality of an individual has no bearing on the *truth* of their claims. Also, if one disagrees with another's statements, it is best to criticize them for what they actually said (and what they actually meant by it). For example, regarding musical taste, Rand wrote in her essay "Art & Cognition" (*The Objectivist*, April 1971, pg. 9) that "No one...can claim the *objective* superiority of his choices over the choices of others." Also, the idea that one hopefully outgrows an interest in Rand's philosophy reminds me of the bias that has historically been expressed about an interest in comic books!

If you have any reaction to this issue, you can send a letter of comment to me at the address on the first page. And perhaps next time, it will be yours truly writing the replies!

-- Rob Imes

Note on the following pages: The next two illustrations were done by **David Branstetter** (www.strawmancomics.com): first, an ad for the United Fanzine Organization (UFO), and next an illo of Speedball which appeared on the back inside cover of the print edition of DM #91. This is followed by an illo of Speedball by **Brian Hayes** (<http://hayfamzone.blogspot.com>); the B&W version of **Tom Ahearn's** Speedball back cover (which was published as the back cover of *Tetragrammaton Fragments* #228); and then the color version (colored by **Mort Todd**) which was published as the back cover of the print edition of DM #91. There are also some bonuses: the unused B&W version of the front cover by **Javier Hernandez**, and the unused version of the front cover colored by **Fester Faceplant**. Hope you have enjoyed this PDF version of DM #91, and that you will join us for DM #92 when it is released!

-- Rob Imes (6/29/2013)

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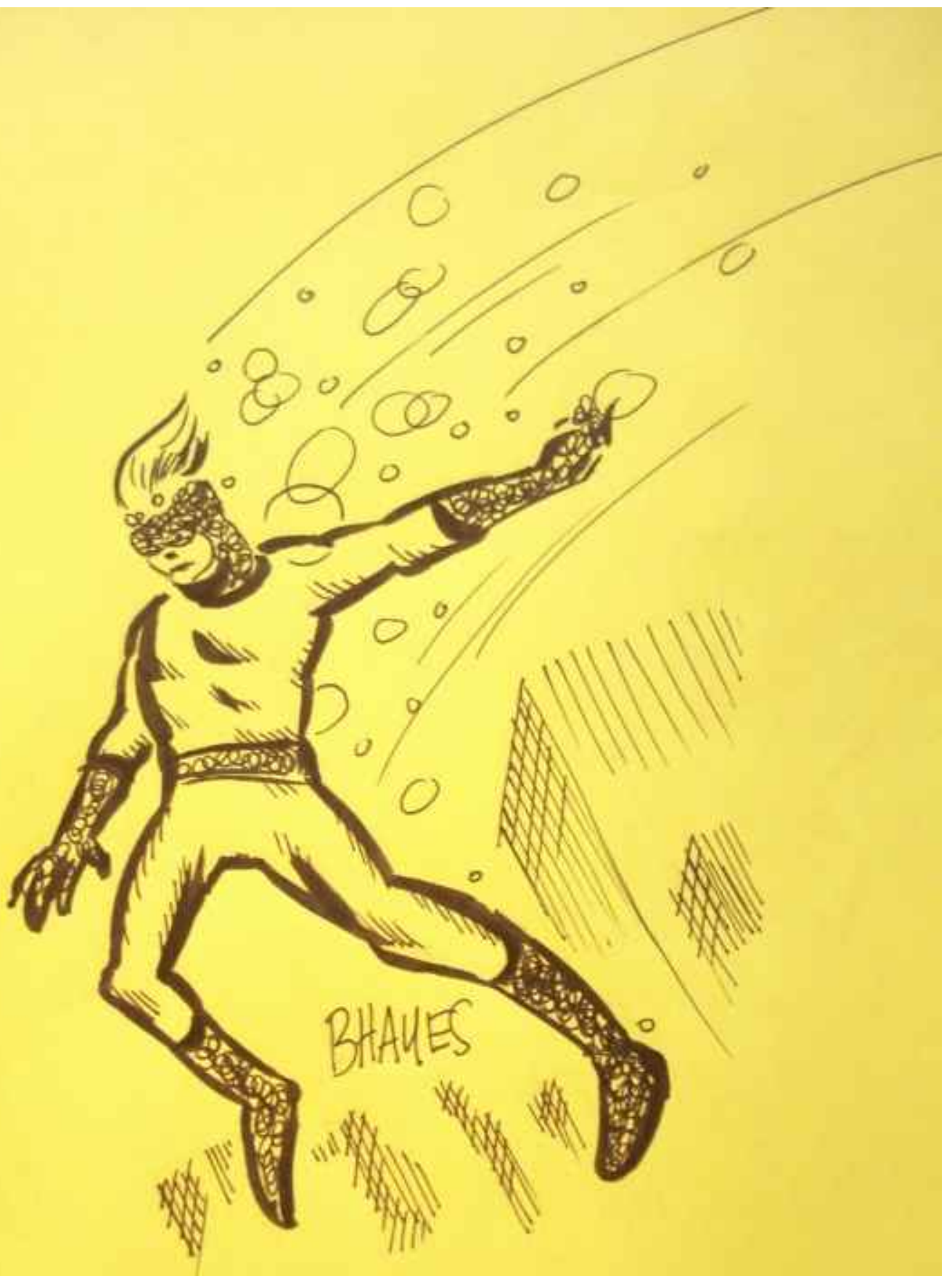
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