

The Ensign Report #5 (Nov. 2012) UFO Edition.

Comments and opinions by Don Ensign. Published in Tetragrammaton Fragments #225.

Chairman Steve: Just wanted to take this opportunity to thank Steve Shipley for all his hard work for UFO during the last two years and especially *T-Frags*. Thanks for making my transition to the group so smooth. Look forward to more comics from you.

Chairman Rob: And welcome Rob to the post of UFO chairman. May your time at the helm be a good and profitable one.

Unreal # 0 (Spring 2012, Jim Main). It seems as if there are several ways to edit and publish a magazine. In my previous career as a publication designer I ran across two methods of editorial oversight. The first was with a religious non-profit that had their own editorial/writing staff. The editor (with input from the organization's leader) crafted a magazine which harnessed the literary skills of a team of staff writers. There were some articles by outside writers (especially from within the organization) but most were by the writing staff. I later worked with another faith-based non-profit where the editor was the president's wife. She got almost all of her material from outside writers (often though, but not always, solicited). She would heavily edit some articles (to the point of almost rewriting them) and other pieces needed very little revision. My early experiences in 1960s comics fandom presented a different form of editorial supervision. Many fanzine editors of analogy titles basically asked for submissions and apparently printed pretty much what came it (or at least that was the perception). It seems as if Jim Main uses the original fanzine (now small press) method. Jim selects a theme/topic for a specific publication and sends out a internet "cattle call" to potential contributors to help fill the pages of the magazine. Of the Main Enterprise pubs that I've seen so far the results of this method are mixed at best. I appreciate that Jim is dedicating this issue to the late *Unreal* publisher Rod Synder. Very nice tribute. In some ways *Unreal* with its highly eclectic contents harkens back the

old genzines of the 1960s and 70s.

The Atomic Round Table (by Sam Gafford): Back in the early 1960s I came across a rather unusual (weren't they all) comic that sported men in knight's armor riding on giant dalmatians. I enjoyed reading several of the stories then mostly because of the beautiful Murphy Anderson art. Gafford does a good job summarizing the charm of the original series and the numerous permutations of the series concept since then. Sam's conclusion is don't tamper with past features that were meant as "stand alone" series-- that were not meant to fit into some grand overarching continuity scheme. The Mr E comic is a public domain hero comic strip by some guy named Ensign. Only comment: There were two endings to this story (Main ran the happy ending). The ending not seen was a unhappy one for Mr E (some have used the term "cautionary tale").

Larry Johnson does a fine job describing and analyzing two rather obscure horror movies *The Devil Bat* and *The Flying Serpent*. In some ways I appreciate Larry picking such relatively unknown films —perhaps because there has been very little recent commentary dedicated to them. He doesn't have a whole lot of critical competition to compete with. I've done the same thing myself. However I look forward to reading Larry's analysis on less esoteric movies or comics in the future.

Mr. Abusador: This is not my kind of comic strip. The concept is pretty awful-toilet material literally. I'd suggest Earl try doing some comics with a person who has a sense of nobility and good to play off the low-life characters. This strip is populated with crummy, disgusting people none of which have any commendable qualities. The artwork needs to mature beyond the Jack Kirby/John Byrne influenced style. Martin's sense of panel-to-panel story telling is good but he needs to work on refining his inking and lettering.

Prey: This is an interesting snapshot from over 25 years ago with Carl Taylor, a

strong Jack Kirby imitator, (see page 2) expressing other influences like John Byrne, John Romita and John Buscema—pretty much the 1970s/80 Marvel house style. Taylor does some competent panel layouts with good inking and use of craft tint/zipatone. It is interesting looking at this piece from the mid-1980s to realize how much computer lettering and tones/color have changed the way we do comic art in the 21st century. The concept of a vampire getting his comeuppance from an "Alien" is clever.

Sunrise: Nice little story glimpsing into the afterlife of vampires. Having a ferryman transport one's soul down the river Styx is a pale reflection at best of the Biblical view of the life to come. "Things which eye has not seen and ear not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him." I Cor. 2:9)

Sivad: *Your Monster of Ceremonies*. This is a loving tribute to a local Memphis, Tennessee horror movie host from the 1960s by Steve Keeter. It is well written full of nostalgia for a local boyhood cinema favorite. Back in the early 1970s I moved to Southern California and watched a similar Monster Host named Seymour (Larry Vincent), Similar to Sivad, Seymour would actually insert himself into the horror or science fiction movies using separate overlapping screens to toss in satirical comments relating to the action. The humor ranged from corny to very funny. Seymour's program lasted for five years and shortly after it ended Larry Vincent passed away. The stand alone illos I liked best were the Conan piece and the back cover by Jamie Chase. Chase is a very good illustrator—excellent work. Also Cliff Kurowski and Marc Haines did a fine job on the cover.

Tales of Fantasy (2012, Larry Johnson)

The Hand: Over the past several years I've been doing an extensive research project of the old Fawcett comic book character, Captain Marvel Jr. During the last six years of CapJr's Golden Age career the editors and writers developed an elaborate geographic setting for the character. The Blue Boy's alter ego crippled newsboy Freddy Freeman had a newsstand on the corner of Oak and Main in front of the

Citizen's Bank. Across the street was Red O'Riley's gas station and down another street was a soda shop and two or three blocks away was Mrs Wagner's Boarding House where Freddy lived (also Red O'Riley and the friendly cop on the beat Officer Bellows lived there). You get the picture. It seems as if Johnson is doing the same thing with Brookston. On page 4 of the first story a pimp assaults a prostitute and in the same alley in the second story (page 4) the Hand rescues an apparent homosexual. We know because a poster of Mr. Morphote adorns the brick wall of the alley and the BSI sign on the cityscape. What is interesting—this is the same alley that the Kreski ambushed Madame Boogla's son in *TOS* #56. This is great pre-planning on Larry's part. We also have exterior and interior shots of the Java Junction with a large picture of Zooy (*TOS* #58) on the wall in both stories. Gabrielle Lagrange (last in #56 and 57), Detective Kolowski (#56) and Joe Carbone (#57) also makes reappearances. This story has something that is early sixties "Ditkoque" about it. There is a loner Freddy Brown who comes into possession of a powerful device. He doesn't know quite what to do with it—so he naturally makes a costume and flies around the city and runs into folks who need rescuing. Freddy is very unsure of his new found powers. Mr. Morphote is a pivotal character. It appears that Mr. Morphote was the person who let the Kreski into the alley in #56. Also it looks as if Mr. Morphote is the comic book villain Dr. Morpheus (second story p. 9). This shows the blurring between the "real" world of Brockston/Greenville and the comic book world of *The Hand of Justice*. A further blurring is the existence of the electronic glove device invented by Janos Podreczny in the 1950s at the same time as *The Hand of Justice* comic book. Larry is playing with our minds leaving clues all over the place.

Johnson's artwork while simple (this story's illos reminds me not only of Ditko but CC Beck). I very much like the use of perspective and the interior room shoots. There is a sense of real space and solidness. Also enjoyed the book shelves displaying the works of the masters like Blake, Burke, Main, Shipley, Imes,

Bullock and others. We definitely need to see more of the Hand. The prose fiction piece, "Slime Molding" was far less successful. When I first starting reading this tale it felt like Larry had an assignment to produce a story where you imagine yourself as a slim mold in a college writing class. This story took me about three sittings to actually finish. The term "leaden prose" kept coming to mind.

This yarn has proper grammar but it just was not written in a compelling way. Perhaps Larry needs to read it out loud and edit it like crazy. I've enjoyed Larry's non-fiction writing on comics history but this short fiction story just didn't make it for me. Great letter column and fun Space Cat strip as usual.

Matt Baker With Love #1 (2012, Dan Burke) While Dan Burke is no longer currently a UFO member I wanted to address his book in *T-Frags*. As noted in past columns I listen to Dan's podcast. He has mentioned on occasion his admiration for the work of Matt Baker. Baker was an African-American comic book artist active from the mid-1940s until his death in 1959. Baker specialized in what has become known as "Good Girl" comic book art for such publishers as Fox, Fiction House and later developed a more sophisticated drawing style for St John, Charlton, Atlas and other publishers. In this volume Burke concentrates on Baker's earlier work especially of Fiction House's Tiger Girl, Sky Girl, Sheena and Fox's Phantom Lady. Most of these stories involve shapely heroines cavorting around engaging in various adventures and in the case of Sky Girl misadventures. Sky Girl's antics are actually quite funny unlike the rather dull episodes of her jungle sisters. Baker drew attractive young women very well and this was the reason most readers (male) purchased these comics. For their



This is a model of Wayne Gardiner's Knightingail comic heroine interviewing a Dalak at the Tucson Comic Con. Nov. 3, 2012

times the comics were racy especially the covers of Fox's Phantom Lady. Burke crams numerous color and black & white reprints of these comic book stories plus examples of the syndicated newspaper comic strip Flamingo Baker drew in the 1950s. For the most part these are well produced/scanned from the original comic books and even the original art and published through CreateSpace. The only quibble I have is that some of the pages are jammed with four pages of comic book stories so you need a magnifying glass to actually read the dialog balloons. Burke weaves some helpful explanatory commentary about Baker's life and art style in and out of the numerous reprints. He compares Baker favorably with the work of Jack Kirby and Curt Swan. The author writes about different period of Baker's artistic career however he doesn't actually state when these several periods began and ended. Perhaps in the three subsequent volumes of *Matt Baker with Love* Burke will further clarify these periods of artistic development.

The value of this kind of book is if you like seeing the work of a specific comic book artist in paper form and printed well with minimal but very favorable commentary this is for you. This is essentially a showcase or tribute book. If you are looking for more incisive and detailed criticism you'll probably need to look elsewhere. Interestingly

TwoMorrows Publishing is coming out with their own Matt Baker book this Fall. In conclusion Dan Burke's *Matt Baker With Love* lives up to its title.

Hero Central Universe #7 & HCU

Confidential #2 (2012, Jason Bullock) I appreciate the explanations in *HUC: Confidential*. It helps to get me up to speed on what Jason is attempting to do. And what he are attempting is quite ambitious. Trying to weave a comic strip story from various strands of classical myths. I recently came across a couple of books that address these issues. They are *Forgotten History of the Western People* by Mike Gascoigne and the *Ancient Post-Flood History* by Ken Johnson. Gascoigne points out that the third century BC Greek writer Euhemerus put forth the notion that the gods were just deified men. Euhemerus and later writers claimed that Zeus was Orisis and Isis (a wife of Zeus) was a priestess of Hera, Zeus' wife/sister. Also Zeus was the son of Kronos (the Biblical Ham, son of Noah). Other sources (Johnson) claim that Japheth (another son of Noah) was the ancestor of Zeus and Hercules. The issue is that there could be a connection between classical pagan myths and Biblical genealogies. You might wish to study these sources which could enrich the storyline you are working on.

HCU #7: Very nice cover-great coloring. This was basically an extended fight issue with some movement on character development and storyline. The figures move very well and the artwork has lots of energy. Nice layout and good panel-to-panel story telling.

Just a couple of technical issues: In *HCU: Confidential*: First, in the "Writing Drama in HCU" and "What is an Avatar?" every line's first word was capitalized. This is distracting and it should be corrected in the future. Second, the blacks and linework around each form needed to be beefed up (they are now muddy -even gray). When you bring your scanned pages into Photoshop (or Photoshop Elements) go to the Menu Enhance and hit on Auto Levels which should darken up the blacks. You can also use Adjust Lighting under the Enhance Menu.

Everyone have a great Thanksgiving, a Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year.

Bio-Speak 5

Back in 1959 on one of my summer job trips to a local strawberry farm I talked to another boy about the TV Superman. We had just heard that George Reeves had died unexpectedly. Is seems as if even then the rumor of his



suicide was going around. The boy couldn't fathom how Superman could kill himself or even die. While being only 11 I harbored no such illusions about the mortality of a human actor or even if there was a Superman. Like many kids growing up in the 1950s The Adventures of Superman TV Show had become a part of my kid culture. This was Superman--as I was then disconnected from the comic books.

Oddly I thought that Superman's costume was mostly red not blue as in the comics. The costume I saw on my black & white TV screen was predominately gray (the cloth colors). This was before Superman Red and Superman Blue. When I started pursuing comic collecting the TV Superman was a fading memory.