

RON FRANTZ REMEMBERS

DITKOMANIA

#90

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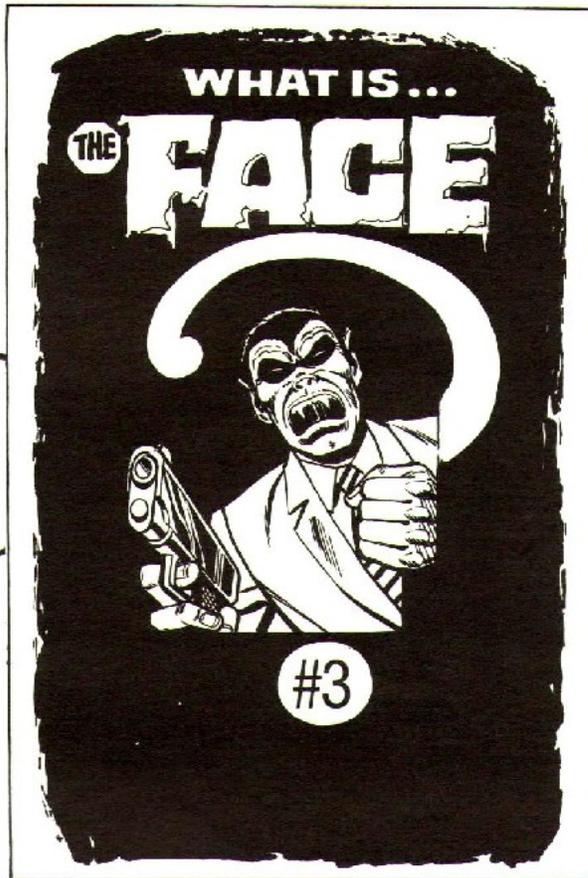
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ACE
COMICS

SCRIPT
by
JOE GILL

COVER PRICE \$1.75

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STORY AND
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SPIRIT BEYOND THE REALM OF MORTAL COMPREHENSION?
THE ANSWERS AWAIT YOU IN ISSUE NUMBER THREE OF...
WHAT IS THE FACE?

DITKOMANIA #90

FIRST PRINTING: March 2013. This is the PDF edition, first published on paper by Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195 USA and available from robimes@yahoo.com **PRICE:** \$2.00 (plus \$1.00 for P&H in the U.S.). Front cover art and "Walking in the Footsteps of Giants" are Copyright © 2013 Ron Frantz. The ad shown above was for the release of *WHAT IS... THE FACE?* #3, which was released in March 1987 by ACE Comics, and is © 2013 Ron Frantz. The Ditkomania Yahoo Group is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ditkomania> and subscription & ordering info can be found at www.ditko-fever.com/dmreturns.html

EDITKORIAL

Welcome! This issue of *Ditkomania* consists mainly of a lengthy article by **Ron Frantz**, written especially for this issue, about his time as publisher of **ACE Comics** in 1986-87. In recent years Ron has contributed a regular column to *Charlton Spotlight*, as well as writing a book titled *Fandom: Confidential*. You can obtain more info about both by emailing him at Magilla445@aol.com

Steve Ditko drew several comics for ACE in the 1980s: *What Is... The Face* (3 issues), *Return of the Skyman* (1 issue), and the cover of *ACE Comics Presents #1* (*Daredevil Battles The Claw*, shown on our front cover). In his article, Ron discusses the planned collaboration between Ditko and **Jerry Siegel**, which unfortunately never came to be. I notice that in one of the Siegel letters that Ron quotes, Siegel refers to himself as "the scriptwriter who co-originated Superman," a statement which acknowledges the equal contribution of the artist to the creation of that character. It may be worthwhile to contemplate the parallels (as well as differences) between Siegel and Ditko, co-creators of two of the most famous superheroes ever published.

My apologies in advance for the lack of artwork inside the print edition of this issue, but I wanted to give Ron as much space as possible to tell his story, his way. As with any memoir, the views and perspectives are those of the author. If anyone has a different recollection of these events, or information contrary to the manner in which they are described, they may submit it here so that the historical record is more complete.

As some of you may know, this issue of *Ditkomania* was funded through the website **Kickstarter** (www.kickstarter.com). The way it works is that a project is put on the website with a dollar amount goal needing to be reached for the project to be funded. (In this case, my goal was \$400.) If the goal is reached, the credit cards of those pledging are charged for the amounts that they pledged. (If the goal isn't reached, nothing happens.) Ultimately, \$501 was raised through the site for this issue (although of course the site takes a cut of that money). Although I would have published this issue regardless of whether the goal had been met, this helped raise the funds to get the issue done more quickly than it otherwise would have been. I will consider using Kickstarter on future issues (especially for #100, which is a mere 10 issues away!) and I encourage any other small-press zine publishers to try it.

My **thanks** to the following generous people (in alphabetical order) for pledging the most for the fund-drive:

Rick Brooks
Mark S. Ditko
Stephan Friedt
Ted Haycraft
Jason Sacks
Jim Salicrup

For the first time, a **digital** version (in PDF format) of the new issue has also been made available (which you are now reading), containing some extra items that there was no room to include in the print copy (such as a **color** version of the issue's back cover by **Mort Todd**). Any reader interested in receiving the PDF of DM #90 can simply email me at robimes@yahoo.com Being a print partisan, and not terribly capable when it comes to computers, I am not sure if I will make any future issues available in digital versions, so the PDF of #90 is a test of my ability as well as reader interest. Let me know what you think!

Speaking of Kickstarter, a reprint of the 1991 **Public Service Package** graphic novel by Ditko is being funded through the site this month. The project was set up by Ditko's co-publisher Robin Snyder and (as I write these words, on March 16th) it has already surpassed its goal of \$4900. Just enter the word "Ditko" in the search box on the site, and the page will show up. Congratulations to Robin for making this happen!

The September 2012 issue of *The Comics!* newsletter contained four pages of **new essays by Ditko** on Marvel's anti-hero premise, self-deceiving fans, and the public's "right to know." If anyone wants to know what Ditko himself has to say on these topics, simply order a copy of the issue from **Robin Snyder, 3745 Canterbury Lane #81, Bellingham, WA 98225-1186**. You can email Robin at RobinBrigit@comcast.net for more info. A 6-issue subscription to *The Comics!* is \$15 (or \$19 outside the USA).

As always, you can keep up-to-date on the latest new Ditko releases by regularly checking Bob Heer's Ditko blog at www.ditko.blogspot.com

The **next issue** of *Ditkomania* is scheduled to be released in May, and will be devoted to Ditko's bouncing characters like Speedball and Mr. Quiver. I may attempt to fund that issue via Kickstarter as well, although DM #91 will likely have fewer pages than this one does. As always, if you'd like to contribute to the zine, just drop me a line.

-- Rob Imes, EDITOR.

Walking in the Footsteps of Giants: **My memories of Steve Ditko, Jerry Siegel, and Vincent Sullivan** **by Ron Frantz**

The desire to catch but a glimpse of those who have deeply influenced their generation is in no sense petty or ignoble. Without being an abject hero-worshipper, every man or woman of cultivated intelligence takes an interest in seeing men of unquestioned greatness, the chief figures in the age in which they have lived.

It is quite curious to turn over the long forgotten and dusty volumes of reviews which were once lorded at with arrogant insolence over the literary world, and to see how critics, now utterly insignificant and always shallow, expended their ignorant incapacity and scorn upon men at whose feet the world has longed at to learn. The writers of such critiques, with a hectoring affectation of omniscience, look down on men transcendently their betters from the whole altitude of their own inferiority.

-- The Rev. Frederic William Farrar, D.D.
Dean of Canterbury

Although there will be those who might consider these words as unduly harsh, I must admit to sharing the sentiment. Having trod a far distance down the path of life, it has been my sober observation that an overwhelming majority of critics suffer from overbearing conceit, which is of course, God`s gift to little men. In this instance, the good Reverend was writing about some of the aggravation suffered by his dear friend, Lord Alfred Tennyson, at the hands of critics.

No doubt, Farrar was rightly sensitive on this subject. As a cleric of the Church of England, he wrote a number of books, including his charming and insightful 1897 memoir, *Men I Have Known*. I find it interesting that the same human foibles he observed over a century ago are as prevalent today as they were then. The times may change but people seldom do. Farrar was a man of rare perception who understood the value of friendship. He numbered among his acquaintances such notables as Charles Dickens, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Thomas Huxley, and Charles Darwin. Had I been around in those days, I think I would have given almost anything for a chance to pinch-hit in that league.

It is fascinating to note that, with some reservations, Farrar agreed with many of Darwin's theories as set forth in *The Origin of Species*. Upon Darwin's passing in 1882, Farrar took issue with certain Ecclesiastical elements of his day who believed that "Darwinism" borderlines on heresy because it substituted the action of natural causes for the immediate action of the Deity. Standing firmly on his convictions, Farrar ignored the caterwauling of Darwin's critics and was instrumental in arranging for his final resting place in Westminster Abbey, next to Sir Isaac Newton. For the benefit of those who enjoy historical trivia, I would be negligent if I failed to mention that Farrar was the maternal grandfather of World War II British field marshal Bernard Montgomery.

Those things being said let us now come to the subject at hand. As a result of similar pieces that I have written in recent years for *Charlton Spotlight* and *Alter Ego*, a few well-meaning friends and colleagues have taken it upon themselves to bestow upon me the title of "comics historian." Although I have been flattered (and sometimes amused) by this kind of praise, the title is not one I feel comfortable accepting. I say this for a simple reason: I have little desire to engage in the kind of extensive research that true historians like Bob Beerbohm, Craig Yoe, and Gerard Jones feel obligated to do. I usually restrict my writing to events I have witnessed firsthand, or about some of the interesting people I met along the way. Since I lack the ambition to be a bona fide historian - or the opinionated guile to be a critic - I fall as a shapeless mass somewhere between the two.

Some of you are probably wondering about what possible connection there could be between Steve Ditko, Jerry Siegel, and Vincent Sullivan? As you will soon discover, there is more than what is generally known. It is a long (and hopefully entertaining) story filled with unexpected twists and turns along with an occasional chuckle. I like to think of it as one of those true to life situations that lend credence to the theory that fact is stranger than fiction.

I imagine some loyal and devoted Ditko fans will remember the ACE Comics titles I published in the late 1980s. At least I hope so. Since then, a few curious people have asked how I managed to get so many well-known professionals (like Ditko, Joe Gill, Pat Boyette, Alex Toth etc.) to produce new story and art for me. I would love to say that it was due to my endearing charm and astute business acumen...but that would be stretching the truth by a wide margin. Although this sort of thing seems to work well for Stan Lee, it has never been my style. I would say in my own situation that it was the result of circumstance and good fortune. I can tell you that it helped to be standing in the right place at the right time when opportunity knocked.

In any event, let me say that I have had the inestimable privilege of knowing and working with some of the finest creative talent that the comics industry has ever produced. While my own meager accomplishments pale in comparison, I feel as if I have walked in the footsteps of giants. Turning the clock back a little past a quarter of a century, I remember how my brief foray into the madcap world of comic book publishing began by accident. Contrary to popular opinion, I didn't wake up one morning with a hangover and decided to become a publisher. I received no startling mystic revelations,

nor did I graduate from some Ivy League College with a degree in economics and a minor in journalism. For me, it all started in the fall of 1985, when I bought some original comic art from a dealer named Tony Dispoto. This included an unpublished *Spencer Spook* story from 1955.

While we were haggling about the price, I discovered that Dispoto was an agent for Fred Iger, the owner of the old American Comics Group. When I casually mentioned it would be nice if someone would reprint all of the old *Spencer Spook* stories, Dispoto told me that publishing rights were available if I was interested. Acting on sheer impulse I decided to jump in and buy the rights. The hard part was that I had to sell a substantial portion of my comic book collection to finance the transaction. Because most of the golden age *Spencer Spook* stories had been written and drawn by animators moonlighting from Warner Bros. or the Walt Disney Studio, I thought there might be enough public interest to justify publishing some new stories featuring the character.

Starting from scratch, I knew artist Pat Boyette reasonably well. We had been friends for about ten years and often talked on the phone. When I asked Pat if he would be interested in drawing some new *Spencer Spook* stories, he agreed with very little convincing on my part. More than anything, I think it had been a long dry spell for Pat and he was in dire need of a paycheck. Jerry De Fuccio, the former associate Editor of *Mad Magazine*, consented to write a script for the first issue. Unfortunately, De Fuccio was never enamored with the assignment. After several weeks of complaining and finding fault with the character, it became apparent that he could not produce a script. For this reason, it became necessary for me to find another writer. I agreed to Pat's suggestion of prolific Charlton scribe Joe Gill.

Since I had started out by publishing a comic book featuring a long-forgotten golden age character, I thought I would try the same thing again. Looking to expand the line, I remembered two characters published by Columbia Comics in the 1940s: *Skyman* and *The Face*. Since neither character had seen the light of day for at least forty years, I figured I might be able to buy the publishing rights for a reasonable price. Being a man of limited means, it was necessary for me to operate on a shoestring. My old friend Robert Sampson, a noted pulp magazine historian and *Edgar Award* winning mystery writer once told me: "It is a damn shame not to be born rich instead of good looking." Never let it be said that Sampson didn't have a wry sense of humor. Bless his memory.

I asked Jerry De Fuccio (who seemed to know almost everyone in the comic book business over the age of fifty) if he knew who owned the rights. In this particular instance, he did. De Fuccio said that Vincent Sullivan had retained the rights to all of the characters he created for Columbia after the company folded in 1948. Sullivan went on to become Publisher of Magazine Enterprises (ME). Early in his career, he had been the editor at National Periodicals when *Superman* first appeared in *Action Comics*. While we negotiated a selling price, Sullivan told me that *Skyman* and *The Face* had always been among his favorites. Had ME survived into the 1960's, Sullivan would likely have revived the characters when the "super hero" boom hit and comic book racks literally bulged with titles featuring long-underwear characters.

I found Sullivan to be a cordial man. Although he was getting on in years, his mind was still sharp as a tack. As we got to know one another a little, I felt comfortable asking him a few questions about the time he spent at DC Comics in the late 1930s. Feeling a sense of pride, Sullivan liked to tell the story of how he discovered both *Superman* and *Batman*. It might explain why he claimed to have been personally responsible for the commercial success of both characters. While there are others who will disagree with Sullivan's modest claim, I can only say that I wasn't around when it happened...and neither were they. This being the case, it seems only fitting and proper to give him some benefit of the doubt. In this particular instance, I was not about to call Sullivan a liar.

In particular, I had some questions about the 1935 publication of *New Fun*. When I began publishing my ACE Comics line in 1986, I was fortunate enough to obtain stats for some nice golden age stories (including some that were previously unpublished) that I used as fillers. While searching for an old family picture that a relative needed, I stumbled across the Xerox copy of *New Fun* #1 that I had stored in a cardboard box. Some years earlier, I did some restoration work on a bedraggled copy of that very rare comic book as a favor to a fellow collector. Before returning it, I took the liberty of making copies of the pages, thinking I might have some future use for it. Believe it or not, I had forgotten that I had it. Upon seeing it again, I was intrigued by the possibility of publishing a reprint.

My primary concern was whether or not the issue was in the public domain and free of copyright restrictions. The best available information from the Library of Congress pointed in that direction. While I had his ear, I wanted to talk about it with Sullivan, who had been an early contributor to *New Fun*. Sullivan had known the legendary founder of DC Comics, Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, who had given him his start in the comics business. Sullivan, who seemed hesitant to speak disparagingly about his old boss, implied that Wheeler-Nicholson was a decent man hindered by inexperience and a lack of operating capital. Sullivan said that Wheeler-Nicholson probably would not have bothered to file for a copyright, as he would have considered it an unnecessary expense. In any event, Sullivan advised me to proceed with caution, as there might be legal complications beyond mere copyright issues. When my attorney voiced similar concerns, I decided to heed their advice and forget about it. I needed a lawsuit like I needed another nose.

Somewhere in the middle of our conversation, I asked Sullivan about selling the publishing rights for his *Ghost Rider* character to Marvel Comics. He seemed a little confused by the question and replied: "What are you talking about? I never sold any rights to Marvel." I then told him about Marvel publishing a new *Ghost Rider* comic book in 1967 where the lead character was the spitting image of the 1950s version Sullivan had published. As a matter of coincidence (or perhaps not) Dick Ayers illustrated both versions. Sullivan asked me if I was certain about this, and I told him there was no doubt about it. I still had a few issues of the Marvel version on hand and offered to send them along so he could see for himself. At his request, I did just that.

A week or so later, Sullivan called to tell me that he had received the comics. Needless to say, he was somewhat annoyed about the situation and might I add, deservedly so. Sullivan said he didn't know Marvel had used his character without permission. He had been busy at the time manufacturing a brand of peanut butter and paid very little attention to what was going on in the comic book industry. There is little doubt in my mind that Stan Lee was aware of the ME version before Marvel began publication of their title. I am sorry if anyone might take issue with that statement. I realize, of course, there are people who believe that Lee walks on water and can do no wrong; but there is no way for me to make such a misappropriation of intellectual property sound like an achievement.

Sullivan thanked me for bringing the matter to his attention and said that his attorney had already begun discussions with the legal department at Marvel. It is the sort of thing that makes experienced lawyers smell blood just before they go for the jugular. I never did hear how any of this turned out, but I imagine Marvel probably ended up paying through the nose. All of this happened before Marvel transformed the *Ghost Rider* from a western into the more familiar motorcycle-riding version. The property later made a fortune for Marvel when it was developed into a major motion picture. I can't help but wonder if Sullivan (or his estate) received at least a token payment.

After several more telephone conversations that included a bit of friendly discussion along with some serious haggling, Sullivan and I finally agreed on a selling price for *Skyman* and *The Face*. It was the usual situation of him wanting to charge more and me wanting to pay less. I now do the same thing almost every weekend, buying and selling stuff out at the local flea-market. Some things never seem to change. Sullivan was a shrewd businessman, but he was also honest as the day is long. As a matter of formality, Sullivan requested that I put my offer in writing. After sending him a letter to this effect, I received the following reply dated April 14, 1986.

Dear Ron:

Many thanks for your letter of April 7th and the enclosed copy of the news release.

Being a firm believer in the entrepreneurial spirit (which you certainly are displaying) I shall be pleased to accept your offer for the magazine publication rights to SKYMAN and THE FACE.

Upon receipt of your check, you may consider this letter as authorization to use SKYMAN and THE FACE in the magazines you contemplate producing - should you wish a more formal type of release, I would be happy to oblige.

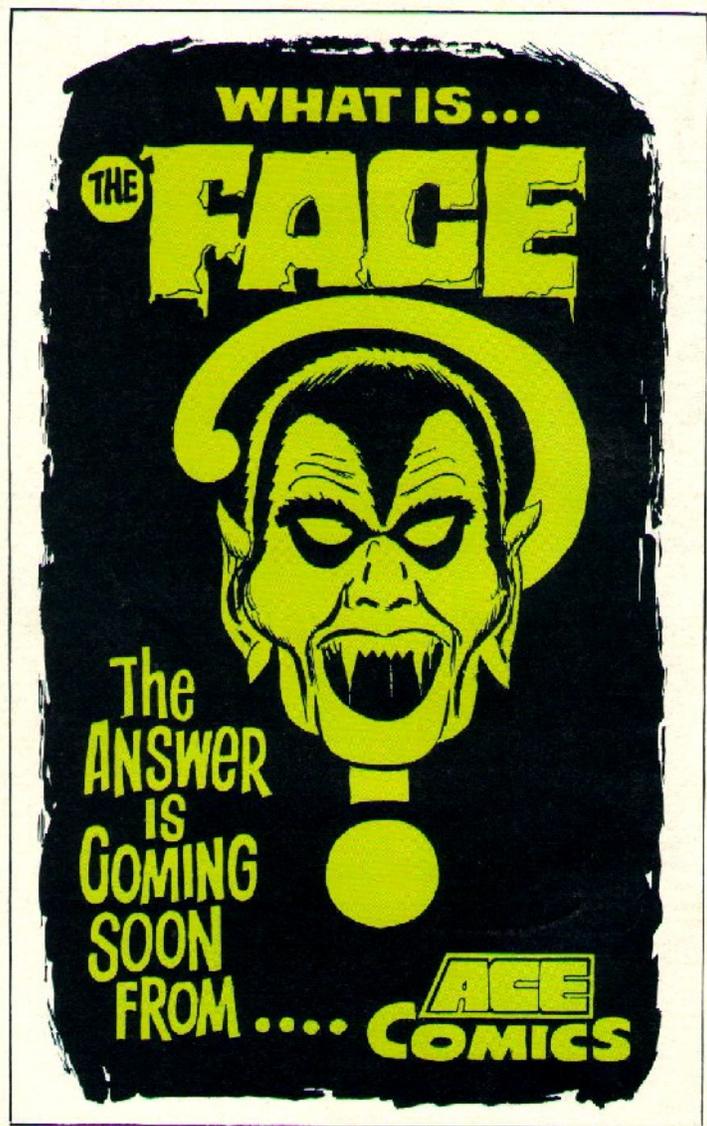
I wish you much success with this new endeavor - do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance. I look forward with interest to hearing from you again.

From the very first moment that the idea crossed my mind, I knew Steve Ditko was the artist I wanted to draw *Skyman* or *The Face*. Since I didn't know Ditko, it seemed logical to talk with someone who knew him. I first gave a call to Dean Mullaney, who I had met a few years earlier at a convention in Oklahoma City. Ditko had recently done some work for Mullaney's Eclipse Comics line. When I told Mullaney what I wanted to do, he seemed oddly pessimistic about the idea. Mullaney had a lot to say about Ditko, none of which could be considered complimentary. In no uncertain terms, he declared that Ditko was a moody person who could be nearly impossible to work with. He strongly "suggested" that I would do better to find someone else.

Mullaney seemed to have a peculiar notion that since he was no longer working with Ditko, no one else should either. I told Mullaney that I was sorry to hear about his problems, but I still wanted to talk to Ditko about the project I had in mind. After a bit of stalling, Mullaney said that he could not provide me with Ditko's phone number. His proffered explanation was that it would violate his editorial policy and Ditko's privacy. I didn't

believe any of that malarkey for a minute. For reasons of his own, Mullaney simply did not want me to talk to Ditko. Under the circumstances, I thought it best to keep my mouth shut and proceed without any help from Mullaney. Incidentally, I heard Ditko tell his side of the story when we met about a year later at his studio. Needless to say his version was a little different.

I knew from previous conversations with Dick Giordano (who knew Ditko well from having been his editor at Charlton and DC) that Ditko was a man of strong conviction. He had definite ideas about right and wrong and seldom, if ever, deviated from them. Ditko was not a man inclined to beat around the bush. If an editor or publisher offered him an



assignment - and he had a problem with any aspect of it - Ditko would say so in no uncertain terms. If it ran contrary to his philosophical beliefs, he would simply decline the offer and that would be the end of it. Mullaney`s opinion notwithstanding, I could not bring myself to believe that a man of Ditko`s experience and reputation would be "impossible to work with."

My next step was to call Dick Giordano and ask if he had Ditko`s phone number. Dick said he didn`t have the number handy, but he thought Ditko was listed in the Manhattan telephone book. When I called information to ask if they had the number, I was pleased to learn that they did. The listing was there in plain sight for anyone to find. Once I had the number, I called Ditko right away. After the line rang about six times, he answered his phone. When I asked if I was speaking to Steve Ditko, he replied in a somewhat terse manner: "Who are you and what do you want?"

After I introduced myself and explained the reason for my call, he warmed up a little. At least he was willing to listen to what I had to say. I am glad he did because Ditko must have received plenty of calls from strangers who wanted him to do something or another. I foolishly tried to hedge my bet by telling Ditko that Joe Gill, Dick Giordano, and Pat Boyette were friends of mine and any one of them would be willing to vouch for me. I guess it was a foolish thing to do. Ditko was not the least bit impressed. After we had talked for a few minutes, Ditko ended the conversation by saying: "I don't discuss business by phone. Send me your offer in writing." Without saying another word, he hung up. My first impression was that none of this was going very well. Since I had nothing to lose, I sent Ditko the following letter, dated March 29, 1986:

Dear Mr. Ditko:

It was indeed a pleasure visiting with you by phone last Friday. As I told you, I have been an admirer of your artwork for over twenty years, beginning with your work at Marvel in the early 1960`s and continuing on to Charlton, DC, and others.

Please find enclosed the particulars of my first publishing venture, The Adventures of Spencer Spook. It is my intention as a publisher to produce a variety of magazines using only the best combination of character, story, and art. Again, as I mentioned over the phone, I am currently involved in negotiations with Mr. Vincent Sullivan to purchase the publishing rights for two of his golden age creations; The Skyman and The Face. I am confident that the deal will materialize soon as Mr. Sullivan and I are not too far from agreeing on a purchase price. As soon as the deal becomes final, I would like to discuss with you more earnestly about your illustrating one series or the other.

Incidentally, I think you will find me especially reasonable and cooperative in working matters. My only concern is that of quality, and in this regard I can certainly allow you the latitude of doing your own work, in your own way. And too, as a publisher, my primary objective is to derive a reasonable profit from publishing. I have no altruistic intentions whatsoever. If an idea or magazine won`t

sell, I'll try something else. From a business vantage point, I feel I have to be both pragmatic and objective in order to be a success. In this regard I hope you and I will be able to work together sometime soon to produce a successful product.

In terms of a timetable, I am looking at late summer, probably August or September for launching a second title as a companion feature to *Spencer Spook*. If the deal materializes, the second title will feature *Skyman* or *Face*, or both.

I have enclosed both my personal business card and a SASE for your convenience. Please let me hear from you regarding these matters at your earliest convenience.

Based on our previous conversation, I really didn't know what to expect from Ditko. I could only hope for the best but I was prepared for the possibility that he might tell me to go peddle my fish elsewhere. Then, about April 15, 1986, I received the following reply from Ditko:

Dear Ron,

If you can get *Skyman* and *The Face*, I would be interested in working on either one. I have enough experience working out of the city companies [Marvel and DC] to realize that if I am not working on my own idea or story there is no point in my doing complete pencils or doing the inking. While I have to letter my own work, I am not a letterer. I would pencil the story, but not pencil it as a pencil version of an inked page. Too many small elements (faces, details, etc.) become lost or smudged. Also, many inkers have their own inking style and never actually follow the penciling and shading. I have worked on bimonthly books [that] when I got the job back to ink, it was already late. I have given up rushing the inking. Even now, at Marvel, this is the most effective and productive way for me to work. If you have any problems or questions about the above, let me know.

Things were certainly looking up. I hoped Ditko might be willing to do both the pencils and inks, as it would have made things a lot less complicated for me. However, since that was not his wish, I was willing to take his work any way that I could get it. Let me say for the record, I never had a single problem working with Ditko. I always found him to be friendly, cooperative, and most of all, very professional. No one could have asked for more. This is not to say, however, that he didn't have ideas of his own. For example, when Ditko was drawing the first issue of *The Face* he wanted to make a minor change in the script. This involved adapting a two-panel sequence into three. It wasn't any big deal as far as I was concerned. I knew Joe Gill would not have cared. While we were talking about it on the phone, I told Ditko to go ahead and change anything he wanted. It wasn't necessary for him to first clear it with me, as I respected his judgment.

It seems prudent to mention that I had only been publishing comics for a few months. At this stage of the game I was far from being a seasoned professional. The way I had worked with Joe Gill on *Spencer Spook* was to send him a basic plot outline, and he would turn that into a finished script. If I wanted to make any changes to his script, that

was fine with him. Unlike some writers I could mention, Joe didn't wear his ego on his sleeve. For Joe, writing was strictly a business.

If Joe's scripts had any conceivable flaw, I thought he tended to be a bit sparse when writing dialogue. In a feeble attempt to act like an editor, I beefed up the dialogue and added a few captions. I soon learned that this was rarely necessary. After I had finished pattering around with the script, I sent it to Boyette who did everything else, including the art, inking, and lettering. Gill and Boyette had enjoyed a very long and productive working relationship. They respected one another, and in the due course of time they became very good friends. Boyette had illustrated dozens of Gill's scripts at Charlton, and there was never the slightest hint of rancor between them.

Before Boyette had drawn a single panel for me, we agreed that he could make any changes to the script that he wanted. Since I was little more than the "idea man" of the team, I figured that I had no business telling Boyette how to draw. It would have been like Woody Allen giving Muhammad Ali boxing lessons. This being the case, I thought it best to let Boyette do his job without making him listen to any advice from me. He could



easily tell where I had inserted the additional dialogue. Pat understood what I was trying to do, but he felt that I was stuffing way too much dialogue into some of the panels. He explained this required larger word-balloons that interfered with how much detail he could put into a panel. Once I understood what he was talking about, I knew that he was right. On his own volition, Boyette rewrote (or completely eliminated) about half of that additional verbiage. In a few instances, he added a few spot gags of his own that improved the flow of the story. I could not have been happier with the result.

Much to my surprise (and delight), most of the people I knew in the comics business seemed to like the issue. Due to my inexperience, I felt like a blind man staggering around in the dark. After Joe Gill had shown Dick Giordano the finished art before publication, he called to tell me how much he enjoyed it. Dick

went so far as to say that if DC had been in the market for a humor title, and if it were offered to him; he would have snatched it up in a heartbeat. Coming from Giordano, it was high praise indeed. After I mailed Ditko a complimentary copy of the first issue, he sent the following note:

That Spencer Spook was great! Pat has a nice humor touch. It had a crowded content material, a [comic book] convention, but he kept nicely to the essentials, the main ideas. I thought Wally Wood was the master of this kind of presentation in comics. I'm ready to make Pat the new king.

Ditko, however, was not comfortable working the same way as Boyette. I learned very early in the game that artistic temperament is no fallacy. He had his own ideas about the division of labor. Ditko didn't mind offering a suggestion here and there, but he had no intention of assuming the role of editor by making any unauthorized changes. He felt that was a responsibility of the editor, and he had no intention of doing my job for me. On several future occasions, Ditko made similar suggestions, but each time this was nothing more than a formality. I always told Ditko to do what he thought best. But from Ditko's vantage point, it made the final decision mine and not his. I can't help but wonder if Ditko had this kind of working arrangement with Stan Lee while he was drawing *Spider-Man* and *Dr. Strange*? If he did, it would certainly explain a lot of things.

As time went by and Ditko and I became a little more comfortable with one another, we began to talk about a few personal matters. This included some of his recollections about working at Marvel in the 1960s. Ditko told me about the time that Lee showed him the first issue of *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandoes*. After looking it over, Ditko said something to the effect of: "It looks fine, Stan...but tell me, why are we publishing a war comic? Any new superhero title would probably sell better." Lee just shrugged and said: "Martin Goodman wants a war comic because DC is selling a lot of war comics. And what Martin wants, Martin gets." That ended the discussion. I have heard it implied on several occasions that Lee often worked under the thumb of Goodman, who made all of the major decisions. If true, this story is a vivid example.

Then, there was Ditko's amusing tale about showing up at Marvel late one afternoon to drop off a finished art job. When he arrived, he discovered Lee muttering under his breath and pacing the floor of his office in a near panic. It seemed that Bill Everett had just turned in the artwork for *Daredevil* #1. The job was very late, and only about $\frac{3}{4}$ finished. Lee was really in a spot because the art was due at the engravers the following morning. The predicament might have cost Lee his job if Martin Goodman had to shell out thousands for downtime expense if the issue was not ready to print on schedule. When Lee saw Ditko walk through the door he practically got down on his knees and begged him to help. Being a nice guy (and understanding the gravity of the situation) Ditko took off his jacket - rolled up his sleeves - then asked Lee for a pencil, a pen, and bottle of ink. He sat down at the nearest drawing table and started to work. Ditko said he worked almost until dawn, batting out the job in near record time. According to an account by Mark Evanier, Sol Brodsky arrived on the scene a few hours later and pitched in to help. I have no way to verify that since Ditko never mentioned it to me, but I suppose it could have happened that way.

THE DEATH FACTORY

JOE GILL STEVE PITKO FRANK McLAUGHLIN WAYNE TRUMAN RON FRANTZ
SCRIPT PENCILS INKS LETTERING PLOT & EDITING

NIGHT SHROUDS THE SLEEPING CITY AS DEATH STALKS IN THE SHADOWS! A MYSTERIOUS, FRIGHTENING APPARITION GOES HIS LONELY WAY ON HIS ETERNAL HUNT FOR THE PREDATORS OF THE CITY JUNGLE!

LOOK! AND SEE THE FACE... HUNTED BY THE POLICE AND THE UNDER-WORLD... THE FACE ALL MEN FEAR!



WHAT IS... THE FACE? Vol. 1, No. 2, May, 1987. Published by Animated Comics Enterprises Inc., P.O. Box 354, Bethany, Oklahoma 73008. Ron J. Frantz, Editor and Publisher, Robert B. Barnes, Business Manager. Entire contents Copyright © 1987 by Animated Comics Enterprises Inc. THE FACE, Tony Trent, and all other prominent characters featured in this issue and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are Trademarks of Animated Comics Enterprises Inc. THE FIVE DURIN BROTHERS Copyright © 1949 by Lev Gleason. Printed in The United States.

Splash page of **WHAT IS... THE FACE? #2** (May 1987).

On June 18, 2002, I told this story for the first time on the Ditko-I discussion group. With the possible exception of Evanier, no one in the group had ever heard about it. This included Tom Brevoort, who was an editor at Marvel. Brevoort must not have wasted any time passing the Ditko/Daredevil story around the office. When Marvel published their first edition of *The Essential Daredevil* in October of that year, they listed Ditko in the credits as the co-illustrator of *Daredevil* #1 with Bill Everett.

Every now and then this topic pops up on one of the Internet discussion groups. That last time around, Roy Thomas posed a question about it. For some reason, there always seems to be a cynic in the crowd who questions its accuracy. I have been told more than once that I had to be woefully mistaken because they were too blind to see any trace of Ditko in the story. This being the case, allow me to state for the record that the information is absolutely reliable. It came directly from Ditko. I don't know how anyone else feels about it, but in this particular instance I am sure as hell not going to tell Ditko that he is wrong about his own life.

There is no doubt in my mind that Ditko was the kind of artist Stan Lee could always depend on in a tight spot. For example, Ditko once inked an issue of *Sgt. Fury* over Dick Ayers's pencils when another inker bailed out on Lee at the last minute. It was a similar situation when Ditko inked *Fantastic Four* #13 over Jack Kirby, when the regular inker didn't have time to do the job. There are numerous other examples I could cite, but I am sure you get the point. Considering the shabby way that Lee later treated Ditko while they were working together on Spider-Man, I would say that he had a very short memory. Lee was obviously not very big on gratitude.

One afternoon I had a long discussion with Ditko about why he departed from the hallowed halls of Marvel in 1966. It was something I had wondered about for years. I began by telling Ditko my story about how heartbroken I had been when he stopped drawing *Spider-Man*. I think Ditko was genuinely amused when I told him about my writing an angry letter to Marvel threatening to never buy another issue of *Spider-Man* until Steve Ditko returned. Believe it or not, I never did. I would have been about twelve at the time, and still naive enough to believe that anyone at Marvel would actually care.

About 1965, I sent a dollar to Marvel and became a card-carrying member of the *Merry Marvel Marching Society*. The membership kit included a whimsical recording titled "The Voices of Marvel." I remember getting quite perturbed when the mailman folded the envelope in half before stuffing it into the mailbox, thereby leaving a nasty crease in the flimsy plastic record. Every now and then I dig it out of the filing cabinet so I can listen to the glittering voices of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Wally Wood, Chic Stone, Don Heck, Sol Brodsky, Artie Simek, Stan Goldberg and Flo Steinberg. Lee even made a joke about Ditko refusing to lend his voice to the recording. It is like a trip down memory lane. Just for fun, let me recite this brief passage by "Fabulous" Flo Steinberg:

Hello fans...it's nice to meet you! As Marvel's corresponding secretary I feel as though I know most of you from your letters.

Judging by the tone of her voice, Miss Steinberg had to be a lovely and sensitive young woman. You develop an immediate impression that she really enjoyed reading the fan mail. But I doubt that Steinberg felt that kindly about me after reading my letter. She probably thought: "Boy...what kind of rotten kids are they raising in Oklahoma these days?" I have long since forgotten exactly what I said in that scribbled two-page letter, but I remember it contained some rather salty language. Not that it matters now, but I often wondered what Steinberg did with the letter. If I were to wager a guess, she probably filed it away for future reference in the nearest garbage can.

Forty-seven years have now come and gone, and in all this time I have never been able to warm up to the *Spider-Man* stories drawn by John Romita. He just didn't have the same pizzazz as Steve Ditko. I felt the same pangs of disappointment a few years later when Jack Kirby abandoned Marvel, and Romita took over the art chores on the *Fantastic Four*. By this time I was entering high school and it was a slightly less traumatic event in my life. I will say, however, that it forever ended the romance between Marvel and me. Still, I have noticed that the revered "House of Ideas" has somehow managed to stay in business all of these years without my continued patronage.

During the past five decades there has been a lot of speculation circulating about what really happened behind the scenes when Ditko left Marvel. I find it curious how some of the people who have worked with Ditko at different times in his career have tried to keep anything they know a secret. They tiptoe around the facts as if they were stepping on eggshells. I will give you a splendid example. The recently published *The Creativity of Ditko* by Craig Yoe included an article by Mike Gold, who worked with Ditko at DC in the late 70s. Gold offered this opinion:

The first rule of the Ditko Club is, you don't ask about Spider-Man or Dr. Strange. This is not to say that Steve wouldn't talk about the situation with Marvel or Stan Lee. He just wouldn't do it for publication.

I will point out that, obviously, his feelings did not extend to Marvel's then publisher Martin Goodman, as Steve worked for Goodman's Atlas-Seaboard Comics. He did return to Marvel and worked on just about everything except Spider-Man and Dr. Strange.

I am not sure what to make of those comments, because it is a completely different story than the one Ditko told me twenty-five years ago. Let me begin by saying Ditko was never the least bit secretive when talking to me about Stan Lee or Marvel. He never once implied that I should consider any part of these conversations as confidential. At the time, I don't think Ditko was overly preoccupied with the past. He was a lot more interested in whatever job he happened to be working on at the moment.

Much to my surprise, Ditko always spoke well of Stan Lee. They may have had their differences, but if there was any lingering hostility on Ditko's part he did a darn good job of hiding it. Using a jovial tone, he referred to Lee as "the best public relations man that ever worked in the comic book business." And I think he said that with all due respect.

Ditko mentioned that in the early issues of *Spider-Man*, Lee was the idea man who came up with villains like the Vulture, Doctor Octopus, Electro, and the Sandman. Besides that, Lee didn't do much on *Spider-Man* except for writing some dialogue and a few captions. I have no reason to disbelieve him.

Of course, Ditko had no illusions: He knew that Lee was the kind of a guy who loved the sound of his own voice. Lee didn't need a press agent to tell the world about his wonderful achievements at Marvel; he did a good enough job of that himself. And Ditko was not the only artist of my acquaintance who had that opinion: Alex Toth told me essentially the same thing in 1983 while we were having a drink together at a hotel bar in Oklahoma City. The bottom line is that Ditko pretty much accepted Lee at face value. The fact that Lee was riding high on an ego-trip didn't seem to bother him much one-way or the other.

According to Ditko, he did not leave Marvel because of any alleged argument with Lee; he left because he was vehemently angry with Martin Goodman. As Ditko told the story, he became quite irritated with Goodman, who wanted changes on *Spider-Man* - the ones that came to pass when Romita took over the strip. More or less, Lee was caught in the middle. I think Lee may have sympathized with Ditko's plight, but Goodman paid the bills. Lee knew which side of his bread was buttered. Since the changes that Goodman demanded didn't suit Ditko, he took a walk and didn't look back. It would be years before Ditko returned to Marvel, and that happened only after Goodman was long gone from the scene.

I gather from recent comments by Ditko that he has since changed his mind about some of his earlier recollections. This is one of the reasons I believe that personal memories about historical events should be written down as soon as possible. Speaking from experience, I know that memories tend to fade with the passing of time. Our perceptions of past events are often prone to change along with our evolving attitudes. All it takes is one person pushing the right buttons to make us reconsider an earlier opinion. I suspect that some of this may have happened with Ditko.

I once asked Ditko about why he had worked for Martin Goodman at Seaboard. The way Ditko looked at it is that he never actually worked for Martin Goodman. Instead, he worked for Goodman's son, Chip. Somehow, that made a difference in his thinking. I am not sure how Ditko managed to separate the distinction in his own mind, but this is the way that he told the story to me. Of course, it could have been the simple matter of Ditko needing the job. I can't speak for Ditko, but I have worked for people I didn't particularly care for because eating three square meals a day is a hard habit to break.

Although twenty years had passed in Ditko's life, it was evident to me that he still nursed a grudge against Goodman. I can't say that I blame him a bit. Actually, Ditko was in good company. About 1976, I had a nice chat with Jack Kirby in a hotel lobby in Dallas while we sat down and smoked cigars together. Although he was a little hesitant to talk about his problems with Marvel, I developed the distinct impression that Kirby felt he had been thoroughly screwed to the wall by Goodman. By the same token, Kirby had

very little love for Stan Lee.

Ditto for Wally Wood. Pat Boyette, who had been a close friend, often talked with Wood for hours at a time on the phone. Sadly, Wood had a drinking problem and would sometimes pass out right in the middle of a conversation. Pat knew some of the story, and passed it along to me a few years after Wood had passed away. It is probably safe to say that if Goodman was running for President, I don't think he would have got Wood's vote. Wood, by the way, didn't think much of Stan Lee, either. I knew that much from having talked to him myself a couple of times on the phone in the late 70s.

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that Martin Goodman was at best, an insensitive profit-driven mogul. If an innocent bystander were to stand between Goodman and a dollar, he would likely have been trampled under a cloud of dust. Perhaps I should mention that there is nothing unusual about the way Goodman ran his business. He belonged to a shady group of comics' publishers, including Harry Donenfeld at DC and John Goldwater at Archie, who were every bit as unscrupulous in matters of business as Goodman. Beginning in the 1930s, they learned the tools of their trade by working in the dog-eat-dog business of publishing pulp magazines.

About 1894, the founder of that industry, a former telegraph operator named Frank Munsey started his publishing business with borrowed money. During the course of several decades, Munsey worked hard, took unimaginable risks, and became wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice. While making his fortune, by means fair or foul, he went out of his way to inflict misery on anyone who had ever incurred his displeasure. By all known accounts, Munsey cared very little about other people. He was known to fire employees on a whim, or for the smallest transgression. For example, Munsey disliked fat men and would not have an overweight person on his payroll.

When Munsey passed away about 1925, he left behind extensive real-estate holdings and a publishing empire that included a string of metropolitan newspapers and his line of best-selling pulp magazines, notably *The Argosy*. Martin Goodman and his buddies had obviously learned their lessons well from men like Munsey. No one could ever accuse them of allowing sentiment to interfere with making a profit. W. C. Fields might have said it best: "Never give a sucker an even break."

One has to look far and wide to find anyone who ever had a kind word to say about Martin Goodman. Like the fictional J. Jonah Jameson, all he cared about was making money; and often it came at the expense of those who worked for him. When times were good (and Goodman was getting richer by the minute) he made extravagant promises to men like Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby to keep them dangling on the end of his string. Of course, he never had the slightest intention of keeping those promises. Goodman took great care to never put a word of it in writing, making it easy for him to weasel his way out of the verbal agreement when it suited his purposes.

I have often wondered how Goodman managed to get through life without someone peppering his backside full of buckshot. Having walked down that side of the street with

one former employer, I could understand some of Ditko's anger. I know all too well how it feels to be wronged, and then to loathe that person with every ounce of your fiber. But why Ditko chose to remain silent all those years may forever remain a mystery. Perhaps he considered it to be nobody's business except his own. It has been my impression that Ditko never felt as if he owed the world an explanation. Putting the matter into perspective, it helps to remember that most of us have experienced unpleasant things in our lives that we would just as soon forget. For whatever it may be worth, my best guess is that this is the way Ditko looked at Martin Goodman.

On several occasions, I have been asked if I had any major disappointments while working with Ditko. In particular, I can think of only two:

The first is a simple matter of economics. I am sad to say that neither *Skyman* nor *The Face* sold very well. Having Ditko's name on the credits did not generate any additional business at the box office. Perhaps the only viable explanation I can offer is that Ditko was not a popular artist at this point of his career. Many of the younger fans then patronizing the comic book shops actually hated his art. While attending some of the conventions and trade shows around the country, I had the opportunity to speak with many different retailers. They told me stories about customers who would pick up a comic book that looked interesting - see that Ditko had drawn it - cast a few disparaging remarks - and then stick it back on the shelf where they found it. As unbelievable as it might seem now, this same sort of thing also happened with most of the new comics drawn by Jack Kirby.

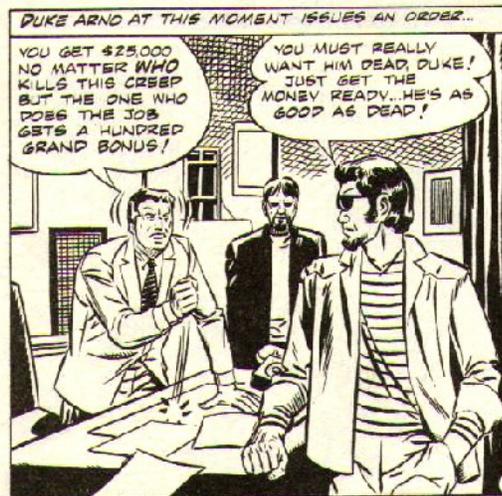
Some of these retailers suggested that *Skyman* and *The Face* would sell better if I were to replace Ditko with a more popular artist. I never told Ditko about this negative reaction to his work; maybe I should have. At the time it seemed like the right thing for me to do. But for the life of me, I have never been able to understand why those sniggling teenagers who so vehemently despised Ditko and Kirby idolized some of the artists who openly imitated their styles. It never made a lick of sense to me. I will admit that I have never been a very good businessman, but I never regretted publishing those comics drawn by Ditko for a single moment. I am proud of the work we did together - and had the fates allowed, we probably would have done a lot more.

Before moving on, I want to take a moment to mention another editor who felt the same way about Ditko that I did. This was Jim Shooter, who was then Editor-in-Chief of Marvel Comics. I met Shooter while attending a 1986 convention in New Orleans sponsored by American Booksellers Association. Although many of his former colleagues have been critical of the way Shooter ran the company, I found him to be very amiable. Since I never worked with Shooter, I have no idea what he would have been like as a boss; I can only tell you that he was nothing less than gracious to me. He certainly didn't have to be. Shooter and I had never met and I didn't have a thing to offer him. These are the moments, I think, when you see the best side of people.

A MAN POSSESSED

MYSTERIOUS AND EERIE--FRIGHTFUL AND TERRIBLE TO BEHOLD--IS **THE FACE!** WANTED BY THE POLICE FOR A CRIME HE DID NOT COMMIT, THE FACE IS ANXIOUS TO CONFRONT UNDERWORLD BOSS "DUKE" ARNO, WHO HAS OFFERED \$100,000 FOR HIS DEATH!

CREDITS: SCRIPT: JOE GILL • PENCILS: STEVE DITKO • INKS: RICK ALTERGOTT • LETTERS: WAYNE TRUMAN • PLOT & EDITING: RON FRANTZ



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Splash page of **WHAT IS... THE FACE? #3** (August 1987).

After accepting his invitation to sit down for a chat, I told Shooter that I would soon be publishing a new comic book illustrated by Steve Ditko. He smiled and said: "I am glad to hear it. I have always liked Steve. It is unfortunate that the fans don't seem to go much for his stuff these days. I have taken flak from some members of my own staff for hiring Ditko; but I don't care. I like his art. He does a good job and you can always depend on him to get the job done on time. I will continue to use him whenever I can." His comments made me feel like I was in good company.

My second big disappointment involved a project of considerable potential that hardly progressed beyond the planning stage. It began when I received the following letter, dated July 31, 1986 from famed comic book writer Jerry Siegel:

Dear Sir:

I am the scriptwriter who co-originated SUPERMAN. I have created some new comic book properties. Would you be interested in considering them for publication?

If so, you would supply the artwork through your connections. If interested, please advise. I would appreciate it if you would send me copies of your published comic books so I can evaluate which comics properties may be suitable for your company.

Since I had never met or corresponded with Siegel, his letter came as quite a surprise. I read the letter with keen interest, although it did leave me feeling somewhat bewildered. It seemed unimaginable to me how a writer of his reputation would be reduced to looking for work with a small publisher like myself. I didn't know at the time that Siegel's career was pretty much in shambles. The doors to most of the major publishers had been closed to him because of his decades-long battle with DC Comics while trying to regain the proprietary rights to *Superman*. Of course, I was very much interested in looking at anything Siegel had to offer. I would have considered it a privilege to work with him in any capacity. After all, he was a true legend in the business. I wasted little time in responding. Then, I received a second letter from Siegel:

Dear Mr. Frantz:

Thank you for your letter of August 23. SPENCER SPOOK and your promo material are very professional and attractive, a definite plus.

Enclosed under separate cover for your consideration:

OOKY AND ZOOKY. A one-shot, based on some old sketches by Joe Shuster, and developed and scripted by me. This would be the first collaboration by the team of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, in many years. Because of Joe's eye-problems, another artist would be necessary for the artwork.

RICKY ROBOT: Enclosed are Xeroxes of the beginning of the RICKY ROBOT

version with art by Dave Sim and Dan Day which was [previously] published in CEREBUS, plus enough script for the balance of the proposed first issue of a RICKY ROBOT comic book series. Another artist would be necessary, and the characters in the new version need not look similar to the earlier version.

THE FABULOUS MISFITS, (I would change title to **THE FABULOUS IDIOTS**).
Written as a graphic novel, it could be converted to a mini-series.

THE STARLING. Enclosed is a script for the first issue of this maxi-series. Also enclosed is some of Val Mayerik's artwork on the DESTROYER DUCK series of **THE STARLING**. Val would not draw the new version. The characters of the new series need not resemble Val's earlier version. Eclipse retains right to reprint the earlier 48-page **STARLING** version.

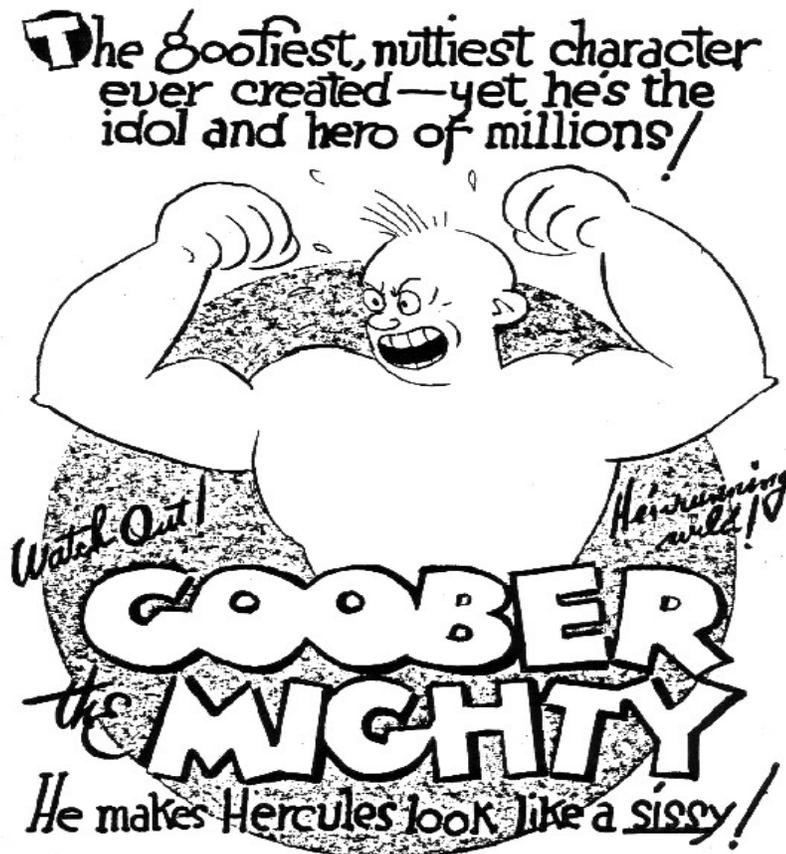
ZONGOLLA THE ULTROID.
Enclosed are scripts for the first three issues of a 6-part mini-series.

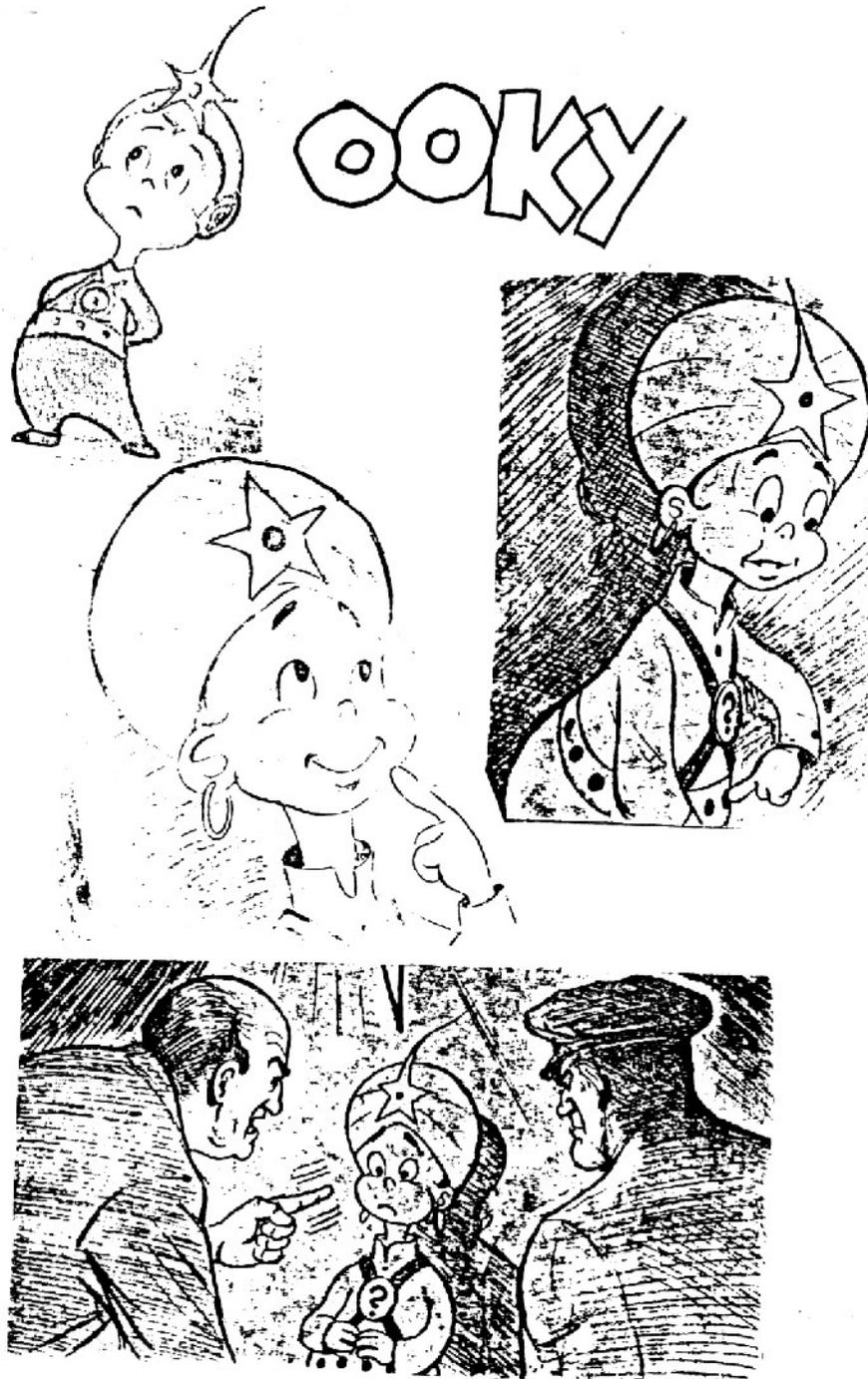
ULTRA-KIDS HIGH SCHOOL.
Enclosed are the first 31-pages of the 96-paged graphic novel script. This can be adapted into a mini-series.

GOOBER THE MIGHTY.

Treatment is based on the strip from the 1930s created by Joe Shuster and me. Earlier material printed in Eclipse's SIEGEL AND SHUSTER DATELINE 1930's. Because of Joe's eye problems, another artist would be necessary. Eclipse did not accept this Treatment and so I believe I can offer it elsewhere.

I have other comics available; this is enough to submit for the present. If interested, let me know what your offer would be. These are multi-submissions and I am seeking best offers. I would retain the copyrights; in the case of OOKY AND ZOOKY and GOOBER THE MIGHTY, Joe and I would retain copyrights.





Above: *Ooky* art by Joe Shuster. This is the "reference" art to which Ditko refers in his own *Ooky* design page (shown later).

Previous Page: *Goober the Mighty* art by Joe Shuster.

The next 4 pages: Sample pages of Jerry Siegel's *Ooky & Zooky* script.

Jerry Siegel
11928 Darlington Ave., Apt. 102
Los Angeles, CA 90049
(213) 820-2492

OOKY AND ZOOKY/Siegel & Shuster

(1) PAGE ONE

LOGO: Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster Present...

OOKY AND ZOOKY

CAPTION: Off in NEVER-WAS LAND ... hovering above a
fiery VOLCANO ... guarded by bad-tempered
flame-breathing DRAGONS ... floats:
MUMBO-JUMBO CASTLE.

CAPTION: It is the abode of ancient CONJURORS!

Large panel. In a weird other-dimensional, storybook-type fantasy-land setting, an eerie old castle, which appears foreboding, hovers in the air above a great volcano crater. Out of the crater belches flames and smoke. This eerie castle is the abode of ancient conjurors. The castle is protected, on both sides of it, by fierce, hovering, fire-breathing dragons who keep themselves aloft with their great, powerfully beating wings.

(2)

CAPTION: The magic-practitioners are away, attending a
CONJURORS CONVENTION ...

CAPTION: ... and so two mere trainees in the MAGICAL ARTS
have the mysterious castle all to THEMSELVES!

ZOOKY and OOKY are tip-toeing together, along a corridor inside the gloomy castle. ZOOKY is costumed ... he is a dumb but very lovable guy who wears a costume ala OOKY's costume, with a star-symbol atop the turban he wears. He is very muscular and powerfully-built. OOKY is ZOOKY's cute little boy pal who is costumed as in the accompanying drawings, except that in these opening scenes neither of them are yet wearing the MAGIC BELTS which have many buttons on them. ZOOKY is nervous. OOKY is determined to go ahead with his plan, though he, too, can't help being a bit nervous about it.

(CONTINUED ON NEXT SHEET)

PAGE FIVE

(1)

The Ancient Conjurors, all of them clad in appropriate Magical Arts attire, stand in a huddle at the open entrance of the FORBIDDEN ROOM, ala a group of glaring vultures. They glare in terrible fury toward the two quaking trainees OOKY AND ZOOKY, who sputter fearfully toward the offended Ancient Ones.

ZAGLIOSTRO: A BILLION CURSES ON YOUR FEEBLE BRAINS!

ZOOKY: We didn't mean no harm!

OOKY: We were only ... only ...

(2)

ZAGLIOSTRO paces furiously toward the two malcreants. His fists are clenched. He glares madly. OOKY and ZOOKY whimper and crouch, their arms raised, their fingers spread, in panic.

ZAGLIOSTRO: You were only, WHAT?

OOKY: I'm only a k-kid.

ZOOKY: I'm only an ... uh ... ADULT!

(3)

ZAGLIOSTRO looms like a dark cloud over ZOOKY and OOKY who are both down on their knees, hands clasped pitiously. ZOOKY and OOKY sputter fearfully, confusedly.

ZAGLIOSTRO: WHY ... are you TRESPASSING ... here ... in the FORBIDDEN ROOM?

ZOOKY: Well, I...

OOKY: We... er...

(4)

OOKY and ZOOKY have arisen onto their feet again. They look worriedly toward the cluster of Ancient Conjurors who have gone into a huddle and are in a whispered conference, ala a football team on a playing-field.

OOKY: Ps-sst! The conjurors have gone into a HUDDLE!

ZOOKY: Now why would THEM GINKS wanna do THAT?

PAGE SIX

(1)

ZAGLIOSTRO cackles evilly.

ZAGLIOSTRO: You NIT-BRAINS will go to EARTH with those purloined MAGIC-BELTS because...

ZAGLIOSTRO: ... because ... HA, HAA, HAAA...

(2)

OOKY and ZOOKY gape in bewilderment toward o.s. ZAGLIOSTRO.

O.S. ZAGLIOSTRO: ... those EARTH CRETINS do not believe in MAGIC!

O.S. ZAGLIOSTRO: It will SERVE THEM RIGHT to have you DUM-DUMS foisted upon them...

O.S. ZAGLIOSTRO: ... MAGIC-BELTS, and all!!!

(3)

All of the Ancient Ones leeringly point extended forefingers toward crouching, bewildered OOKY and ZOOKY, who clutch at each other in bewilderment, and are starting to vanish. Magical power-streams from the many pointing forefingers assail OOKY and ZOOKY powerfully.

CONJURORS: BEGONE! THROUGH TIME AND SPACE...

(4) ... TO EARTH!!

CAPTION: Instantly -

OOKY and ZOOKY are tumbling through what appears to be outer-space except that large magical symbols are zooming along through the mystic area. Huge, ethereal faces of the gleefully laughing ANCIENT ONES can be seen looming in b.g. OOKY and ZOOKY both have frightened expressions as they tumble along.

(5)

CAPTION: Unexpectedly!

As they tumble along, OOKY is dismayed to see that what appears to be a great spinning whirlwind is sweeping in through the mystic area toward bewildered, scared ZOOKY.

OOKY: (THOT) Oh, my!

OOKY: (THOT) Look what's comin' LICKETY-SPLIT toward my best pal ZOOKY!

PAGE TWENTYFIVE

(1)

A dramatic scene high in the sky. OOKY has stopped pedaling the magic-bike. Seated on it, he gapes in surprise toward ZOOKY who dangles in the sky before OOKY. ZOOKY gapes in surprise at OOKY. Imagine! Meeting in the sky! Thisaway!

OOKY: ?!

ZOOKY: ?!!

(2)

Both of them fling their arms wide-apart and yell delightedly at each other.

OOKY: ZOOKY!!!

ZOOKY: OOKY!!!

(3)

Now, as the magic-bike hovers in the sky, OOKY stands on its tricycle-seat. He laughs happily as he is embracing chuckling ZOOKY who hovers close to OOKY.

OOKY: So you're "THE MENACE"!

OOKY: You're as menacing as ... ha, ha ... an ICE-CREAM ^{COME!} ~~☒~~

ZOOKY: That's th' NICEST thing anybody ever said about me, ha, ha!

(4)

Now the two of them are zooming along through the sky, side-by-side. The magic-belts of both of them are aglow. OOKY is rapidly pedaling his magic-bike. ZOOKY is zooming along through the air close to pedaling OOKY. Both of them grin in comradely fashion toward each other.

OOKY: Let's go somewhere else an' talk, ZOOKY!

ZOOKY: Lead on, OOKY!

(5)

Flabbergasted cops, standing on street next to their halted police-car, gape upward toward the o.s. duo up in the sky. Some awed pedestrians, close by, are doing likewise.

1ST COP: They don't LOOK dangerous ... do they?

2ND COP: They'd better STAY OUTTA TROUBLE... or else!!BOTTOM CAPTION: Can OOKY AND ZOOKY stay out of trouble?

What do YOU think?

See ya next issue!

After spending a very pleasant evening reading Siegel's scripts from the comfort of my favorite easy chair, one seemed to stand out above the rest. It was the whimsical *Ooky and Zooky*. My initial impression was that Siegel had created something very special. The story deftly combined elements of fantasy, humor and adventure. If I were to offer a description, Ooky and Zooky was a curious hybrid of *Dr. Strange* and *Dennis the Menace*...with elements from *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* tossed in for good measure. I thought the story had potential written all over it. Once it was in print, I could easily imagine some producer wanting to adapt it for animation or television. In my opinion, it was a lot better than *SpongeBob SquarePants*, and look at what has happened with that. Needless to say, it was something I very much wanted to publish.

Being a creature of habit, the artist I had in mind to bring the series to life was Steve Ditko. The idea of teaming the co-creators of *Superman* and *Spider-Man* was, to say the least, intriguing. Perhaps I was guilty of putting the cart before the horse, which is something I've always had a bad habit of doing, I decided to give Ditko a call and tell him about it. While Ditko quietly listened, I described the story and asked if it might be something he would be interested in drawing.

For some reason it was always difficult for me to gauge Ditko's reactions over the phone. Unlike some of the people who I talked to on a regular basis, there was never any danger of Ditko getting his tonsils sunburned. When he wanted to, Ditko could make a clam sound like Louis Armstrong blowing his trumpet at Carnegie Hall. He could say more with a few well-chosen words than almost anyone I have ever known. Ditko was far too disciplined for me to persuade with mere enthusiasm. He did say that the story sounded interesting, and coming from Ditko that meant a lot. Before making any kind of commitment, Ditko asked me to send him the script so he could look it over. Not wasting any time, I had copies made and shipped it that afternoon via Federal Express. That way Ditko would have it in his hands no later than 10 AM the following day.

Much to my surprise, Ditko called around eleven AM the next morning. I was late getting to work because I ended up having coffee with Danny Hodge. Some of you may have heard of him, as Danny was one of the biggest names in professional wrestling during the 60s and 70s. He is now considered to be one of the true legends of the sport. After wrestling in the 1956 Olympic games (and getting robbed out of the gold medal) Hodge was the first wrestler to be featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. We were buddies for a few years and at one time considered doing a book together about his remarkable career.

I had just arrived at the office and I could hear the phone ringing as I opened the door. The first words out of his mouth were something to the effect of: "You are right. That Siegel script is great! It is the best script I've read in years. How soon can I start drawing it?" To say that he liked the story would be an understatement. I had the feeling that Ditko was almost jumping up and down with excitement. There was no doubt in my mind that this was a job he really wanted to do. In fact, Ditko liked the script so well that he had

already started some preliminary sketches to get the feel of the characters. He promised to send them along for my perusal in a few days. After I had seen his sketches, I was as anxious as he was to get going on the project. But Ditko understood that I still had to come to terms with Siegel. At that point it looked very promising.

Although he never said as much, I think Ditko felt the same way about working with Jerry Siegel that I did. Although I doubt anyone would ever hear such words reverberating from his lips, Ditko was a fan who fondly remembered the early Siegel and Shuster *Superman* stories. It can be said that Steve Ditko and Jerry Siegel were nothing alike in temperament or personality; but deep down they were kindred spirits. They shared a similar tragedy in their lives. While Siegel had lost the rights to his greatest creation, *Superman*, due to blatant chicanery on the part of his publisher, Ditko experienced much the same treatment with Marvel Comics over *Spider-Man*. Profiteers made countless millions from their creations, and then left them without so much as a blessing. Ditko and Siegel felt the same sting of injustice and bore its mark all the days of their lives. Each man, in his own way, was forced to cope with the frustration the best way they knew how. I daresay that it was seldom, if ever, a pretty picture.

Getting back to Siegel...while we continued to discuss our business by phone our conversations became more casual. Siegel did not like to talk much about *Superman*. The subject was obviously painful for him. On a more pleasant note, I remember telling Siegel that as a youngster I had loved those silly *Mighty Crusaders* stories he wrote for Archie Comics in the mid-1960s. Looking at them now through more jaded eyes, I can see how they were aimed at a juvenile audience; but nearly half a century later, they still have a certain endearing charm. Then, I received the following letter from Siegel, dated January 7, 1987:

Dear Mr. Frantz:

Thanks for your recent phone call expressing interest in OOKY AND ZOOKY. I would appreciate it if you would send me a letter outlining the terms of the proposed deal, the page rate for the script, and what the royalty arrangement would be for a OOKY AND ZOOKY one-shot comic book. Joe Shuster and I would jointly own the trademark and copyright for OOKY AND ZOOKY, and we would want the right of approval as to which artist would draw the strip. It would be necessary to see samples of the artist`s published work. Please make your best offer. Perhaps you might want to send a copy or rough draft of the proposed contract, so I can bring it to the attention of my attorney.

I had given some serious thought about what kind of deal I could offer to Siegel. Since my resources were limited, I was only in a position to stick my neck out so far. I think Siegel understood my predicament and he seemed willing to work with me. He was, however, adamant about owning the trademark and copyrights. Considering all the problems he had in the past with DC over *Superman*, I could understand his feelings. It was my impression Siegel had become almost paranoid about such things. He was of the mindset that nobody was ever going to screw him again.

I didn't expect to make a huge profit on the deal, but I still thought it was advantageous for me to do it. Just the prestige of working with a man of Siegel's reputation could have been considerable. To get the wheels of progress moving, I offered Siegel a \$500 advance. In a subsequent phone call we agreed that I would foot the initial printing and production costs. Then, upon publication, after all the expenses had been figured in, we would split any remaining profit down the middle. If he wanted to give Joe Shuster a cut, it would come out of his end.

I only had two requests: The first was that I could cancel publication if advance orders were insufficient to pay for the printing and producing the artwork. Second, I wanted to have the option to reprint the story at some future date. Siegel said he was comfortable with those terms, but thought it would be prudent to first consult his attorney. Of course, I had no problem with that. When I told Siegel that I wanted to use Steve Ditko as the artist, his reaction was almost hostile. Siegel said he had seen Ditko's art on *Spider-Man* and thought the style would be completely wrong. Siegel mentioned he had met Ditko about 1963 when they were both working for Stan Lee at Marvel. Siegel then asked if Pat Boyette might be available. He had seen Boyette's work on *Spencer Spook* and liked it. Later, when I sent him copies of Ditko's preliminary sketches, his objection disappeared. At this point, all I could do was sit back and wait.

While I was waiting to hear from Siegel, I took the liberty of discussing the matter with Dick Giordano who was then a vice-president at DC Comics. Since I had never negotiated a deal like this, I hoped that Dick would be able to provide me with some useful insight. I knew Giordano had, on a few occasions, worked out similar deals with some of the creative talent working at DC. Talking to me as a friend, Giordano seemed to think the offer I had made to Siegel was reasonable. However, he did point out that I was the only one at risk of losing money on the deal. He didn't think that aspect of it was good business. As all publishing endeavors tend to be, I knew I was taking a calculated gamble but I was willing to take my chances.

About four or five weeks passed before I heard from Siegel again. His silence left me wondering what was going on. Siegel finally called to tell me that he would require a formal contract before we could do business. While I was accustomed to doing business on a handshake, that prospect was totally unacceptable to Siegel. Next came his insistence that he would only accept a contract drafted by *his* attorney. On top of it all, he expected me to pick up the tab for all of his legal expenses, quoting an outlandish price that would have eliminated any possibility of my making a dime on the deal.

I certainly did not like what I was hearing. As matters stood, I started to feel like one of us had flipped his wig, and I didn't think it was me. If nothing else, it sure seemed like Siegel was intentionally giving me the runaround. It was almost as if Siegel had taken on a "Jekyll and Hyde" type of persona. Perhaps I could have been a little more diplomatic; instead, I vented my frustration with the situation by saying: "Maybe I am wasting my time by talking to you. If your attorney is calling the shots, why don't I just talk to him? That way we can eliminate the middleman." I don't think that Siegel appreciated my

candor. Later, I very much came to regret those angry words.

This latest development from Siegel took me completely by surprise. I knew something behind the scenes had soured the deal, but I had no idea what it could be. Not knowing which way to turn, I told Siegel that I needed some time to think things over. I promised to get back to him as soon as possible. Much later, it occurred to me that I probably made a big mistake when I mentioned to Siegel that I had recently done business with Vincent Sullivan. I had no way of knowing that at some point in time Siegel and Sullivan had a major falling out.

Just to make things interesting, I knew that Sullivan had worked with Siegel at DC on *Superman*, and then ten years later at ME on *Funnyman*, I hoped Sullivan might have a suggestion about how I might smooth things over with Siegel. After all, he had known Siegel a lot longer than I had. Much to my astonishment, the request did not go over well with Mr. Sullivan. In fact, I think he was actually offended by it. Sullivan made it clear that he did not wish to discuss the matter. His strong reaction left me feeling like I had inadvertently wandered into a hornet's nest. I could only presume there were some unresolved problems between Siegel and Sullivan. My guess is that it had something to do with business, and it probably happened a long time ago. No doubt, any hard feelings that remained were mutual.

At this point, I felt like I had no choice but to walk away from the project. I called Siegel once more to tell him that I was sorry, but I would not be able to publish *Ooky and Zooky*. I thanked him for his time and that was the end of it. We never spoke again. While all of these events were slowly unfolding, Ditko very patiently waited on the sidelines for some word from me. I kept him abreast of what was happening as best I could, but it was becoming increasingly apparent that his interest had begun to wane. Finally, I had to tell Ditko that the deal with Siegel was not going to happen. When I filled him in on the details, he seemed to understand. At least he said that he did. I know Ditko was as disappointed about it as I was; but we both had been around long enough to know that some things in life are simply not meant to be. All a person can do in a situation like this is to let it go and move on.

Not long ago, I read Gerard Jones's remarkable historical tome, *Men of Tomorrow*. Let me say that his painstaking research about the Golden Age of Comics is, without doubt, the best I have ever read. I highly recommend it for anyone wanting to know more about the life and times of Jerry Siegel. However, there is one brief passage beginning on page 332 that I feel obligated to question:

Early in the rise of the new comic book market, Jerry Siegel tried one last time to bring his writing career back to life. He sent proposals for series to most of the small publishers jumping into the field. Eclipse Comics published a few of his stories, but the rest regretfully turned him down. He entered negotiations with DC to write a few special issues of Superman, but the contracts never satisfied him; he was very careful about what he signed now.

In 1986 Tom Hall of Elite Comics learned the Siegel story in an unpleasantly vivid way. "I couldn't believe I'd actually gotten a submission from the creator of Superman," he said. "I tore open the envelope and pulled out the scripts. There was something called "Future Cop" and one that seemed to be a reworking of Slam Bradley, and there were two versions of each - one PG-rated and one R- or X- rated. But I never got to read all of them. As I began to read them, I was beginning to itch. Then I noticed fleas jumping right off the scripts. I jumped up and took the scripts outside so my furniture wouldn't become infested. I had to get rid of the scripts and envelope, since it was full of fleas, too. And all I could think was that here was someone we owe our industry to, and he was living in a small apartment in LA with fleas.

Not to impugn Hall's integrity, but I have trouble believing his story about the "fleas." I say this because during the same time period that Hall mentioned, I received at least three large envelopes in the mail from Siegel. Not one of them contained so much as a single flea. And if I had received such a package from Siegel (or anyone else for that matter) I would simply have taken it outside to fumigate. It doesn't take a Rhodes' scholar to figure that one out. This would adequately take care of the problem without resorting to such a drastic measure as disposing of the package or its contents.

About a dozen years ago, I experienced a similar problem with an old radio I bought on eBay. It arrived in the mail looking as if I had been through Operation Desert Storm. When I took the back off the radio to check the tubes, I discovered the damn thing was infested with live spiders. I kid you not. After getting over the initial shock, I carried the radio outside and sprayed it down with a can of strong insecticide. Of course, I didn't throw the radio away, but I did have a few choice words to say to the guy who sold it to me. It is probably fair to say that his definition of a "good working radio" and mine varied considerably. Everything worked out okay in the end. The radio cleaned up nicely and it now occupies a respectable spot in my study on top of a bookcase. I guess every time I look at that radio for the rest of my life, I will remember the story about Jerry Siegel and the fleas.

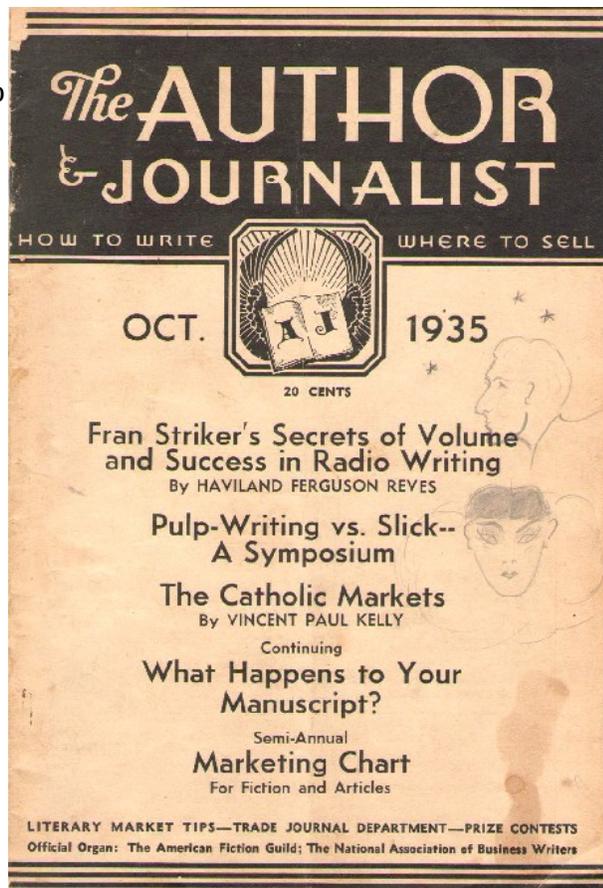
One of the more interesting aspects about Siegel's storied career is how it began among the science-fiction fans in the early 1930s. Among other things, Siegel published some of the earliest fanzines. These poorly printed fan magazines are now exceedingly rare and sell for exorbitant prices when they are offered for sale. Please note the following announcement (containing information provided by Siegel) that appeared in the "Literary Market Tips" section published in the March 1932 issue of *The Author & Journalist*. I am certain that many of you will find it of interest:

Science Fiction, 10707 Kimberley Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio, is announced as a new market for science fiction writers. It is issued by the Morontz Publications. Jerome Siegel is editor and Bernard J. Kenton is managing editor. The latter writes: "More boodle for science fiction writers, in the appearance of our new ¼ to 3 cents a word publication. Stories desired must have a snap in them such as is found in the works of P. Schuyler Miller and Francis Flagg. No fairy tales with a 10,000-word

introduction involving the construction of a space-machine, or the technical potentialities of seven different kinds of water glass as a function of the temperature in expectation of determining the heat of activation of the colloidal coagulation of silicic acid, are desired. What we do want are tales in which the interest does not lag, since lengthy descriptions stick out like a sore thumb in the way of an otherwise uncriticisable periodical. If unacceptable, we will radio stories back at the earliest opportunity, provided sufficient postage accompanies each manuscript." Payment is presumably on publication.

A respected Denver based journalism instructor named Willard E. Hawkins published *The Author & Journalist* for decades. When not teaching, he wrote dozens of short stories, serials and novelettes that appeared in the pulp magazines of the period. While publishing his monthly journal, Hawkins became friendly with such authors as L. Ron Hubbard, Erle Stanley Gardner, Harry Stephen Keeler, Robert Leslie Bellem, Ralph Milney Farley, and a host of others who contributed articles discussing topics like literary form, style, technique, and how to submit articles to editors.

Strangely, Hawkins seemed to take an interest in the literary aspirations of young science-fiction fans like "Jerome" Siegel and future Superman editor "Mortimer" Weisinger. I think he realized how desperately they were searching for an audience. This may have been due to Hawkins having written a few science-fiction stories for *Weird Tales* and *Astounding*. One plausible theory is that Hawkins saw budding talent in young Siegel and wanted to encourage it. It probably came as no great surprise when Siegel became world famous a few years later by creating Superman with artist Joe Shuster. It is a matter of speculation if Hawkins knew that "Bernard J. Kenton" was a pseudonym Siegel used when submitting stories to pulp magazines.



The two science-fiction writers that Siegel admired, P. Schuyler Miller and Francis Flagg (George Henry Weiss) are virtually forgotten today. They were regular contributors to leading pulp magazines like *Astounding*, *Unknown*, *Weird Tales*, and *Wonder Stories*. If a person had the time or interest to research those stories, it would be fascinating to see how much they may have influenced Siegel's future comic book work. For example: Did stories by Miller or Flagg have any bearing on the creation or development of Superman? Taking Siegel's tender age, inexperience, and lack of formal

education into consideration, it certainly makes for an intriguing possibility.

It seems ironic how so few historians seem to know of Willard E. Hawkins. I would think his place in history would be reserved. While reading through old issues of *The Author & Journalist*, I can see his desire to help struggling writers glisten on every page. Nowhere is this more clearly evident as when Hawkins chastised Harry Donenfeld and his brother Irving, who had a habit of stiffing writers out of money owed them for stories published in their sex-pulps...or "smooshes" as they were called by people in the business. Irving, by the way, was nothing more than an employee. Harry was the principal owner and the driving force behind the operation. Not pulling any punches, Hawkins published the following notice in the January 1932 issue of *The A&J*:

Magazines of the Merwil Publishing Company, consisting of *Gay Parisienne*, *Gay Broadway*, and *La Patee*, 143 W. Twentieth Street, New York, make no attempt to pay for accepted and published material unless the author brings suit, and then seek to compromise for half. It is obvious that stories sent to such markets are submitted very much at the author's risk.

For the record... prior to becoming publisher at DC Comics in 1938, Harry Donenfeld could be described as a smut-peddler. I do not apologize if that description should offend anyone, as I can think of no way to make him sound like a pillar of the community - nor would I care to try. Apparently Hawkins hit a nerve. Donenfeld had been caught (so to speak) with his pants down. Trying to hide his embarrassment and protect what remained of his reputation, Donenfeld offered the following rebuttal that appeared in the March 1932 issue of *The A&J*:

Emphatic denial of the charge published in the January *Author & Journalist* the effect that the Merwil Publishing Company, which issues *Gay Parisine*, *Gay Broadway*, and *La Patee Stories*, has failed to meet its obligations to authors, is entered in a letter received from Irving Donenfeld, head of the company. We quote from Mr. Donenfeld's letter:

"Most of our writers, illustrators, and artists are being paid promptly, and in many cases, when they are in need of cash, get an advance before payment is due. As in every other line of business, there are occasions when people insist upon getting paid more than is due them. In your own publication you quote us as paying 1/2 cent a word. There were just two instances where writers demanded 1 cent a word, declined our offers of a check for what was legitimately due them, with the result that they are now suing us. They have the right to sue and we have the right to defend ourselves. Whether they are right or we are right the court will eventually decide."

Mr. Donenfeld accompanies this statement with an extended list of writers to who he refers for verification of the statement that the magazines have paid for their contributions promptly on publication. *The Author & Journalist* published its warning in good faith, as a result of complaints received from certain authors who

reported difficulties in making collection for published material. We recognize, however, that individual misunderstandings are not necessarily conclusive as to the general policy of a publishing company. We are glad to be assured by Mr. Donenfeld that writers in general, who submit work to the Merwil magazines, can depend upon prompt payment on publication at the announced rate of 1/2 cent a word.

On top of his other endearing qualities, it would seem that Donenfeld was also a very accomplished liar. In this instance he was merely stalling for time. Leaving little room for doubt, Donenfeld was about to take his dishonesty one step further. Hawkins makes the following report in the April 1932 issue:

Publication of a letter in our March issue from Irving Donenfeld, president of the Merwil Publishing Company has resulted in the receipt of numerous interesting letters from contributors giving their experiences with this concern, which now publishes *Gay Parisienne*, *Gay Broadway*, and *La Patee*. Mr. Donenfeld objected to a warning item, based on the experiences of contributors, in our January issue and claimed that his magazines are now paying for all material on publication. The numerous experiences reported this month relate to Irwin Publishing Company, which went into bankruptcy and was reorganized under the name of Merwil Publishing Company. Writers who had money due them from the Irwin Publishing Company are still holding the sack, and it is the contention of Mr. Donenfeld that his new company is not obligated to pay the same. With regard to the legal status of these accounts, *The Author & Journalist* is not in a position to advise. We hold strongly, however, that there have been too many instances of publishers who evade their responsibility to authors by reorganizing, and that caution should be observed in submitting manuscripts to a company with such a record.

As despicable as this incident makes Harry Donenfeld appear, he would soon go on to far greater infamy. Within a few short years he made a vast fortune by first stealing DC Comics out from under the nose of Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, and then depriving Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster of their rightful ownership to *Superman*. It was no big deal: Donenfeld was made to order for the role. All it required was a total lack of conscience, cunning, deception, larceny, intimidation, and the assistance of a few corrupt attorneys and at least one dishonest judge. Having the support of a few mobsters to help with matters of distribution didn't hurt either. My only regret is that I didn't ask Vincent Sullivan for more detailed information about Donenfeld when I had the opportunity. I guess I was too busy thinking about other matters at the time. Sullivan worked at DC when most of these events transpired and his memories would certainly hold historical value. Let that be a lesson to any of you with aspirations of becoming a historical writer. Get the information when you have the chance because you may never get another opportunity. Trust me on that one.

On a more positive note, it is the opinion of this commentator that Willard E. Hawkins was a man with an impeccable reputation. It seems almost indecent to mention him in the same breath with the like of Harry Donenfeld. Granted, these few paragraphs are not much of a tribute, but it is the best I can do for now. Hawkins helped launch a lot of

literary careers including one Jerry Siegel. I think I can say with very little fear of contradiction that Hawkins deserves to be remembered.

While preparing this article for publication, I listened to a wonderful 43-minute interview with Siegel and his wife Joanne, conducted in a private room at the 1975 San Diego Comic Book Convention. Hearing Siegel's voice for the first time since 1987 brought back a cascade of memories. The voice on the recording was exactly the way I remembered it. Siegel had a high-pitched, slightly effeminate voice that reminded me of the way Arthur Lake sounded in those old *Blondie* movies. Had I not known better, I would have sworn it was the voice of a teenager and not a grandfather.

Alan Light and Murray Bishoff conducted the interview. If those names sound familiar, they should. Light was the founder and publisher of *The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom*. Bishoff was his long-time assistant and a regular columnist. I knew Light well from my past involvement with the WSA Program during the 1970s. Light had sent me the interview on CD a few years ago along with a few other things he thought I might enjoy. I appreciated his kind gesture, and the fact that he still remembered me after all these years. This interview holds considerable historical significance because it was the first time in many years that Siegel had spoken publicly. To the best of my knowledge, it has never been transcribed for publication. For the benefit of future historians, I very much believe it should be published in a collectors' journal like *Alter Ego*.

It is amazing how the mind tends to glaze over certain things with the passing of time. I had totally forgotten how Light was the first publisher to tell the sordid story of how Siegel had lost the rights to *Superman* - how he and his family lived in poverty while DC made untold millions from his creation. For decades, DC adamantly refused to acknowledge that Siegel and his partner Joe Shuster had created *Superman*. Using attorneys to do their dirty work, DC began to harass Siegel with threats of lawsuits if he dared to breathe a word of the truth. Frankly, it was as shameful a demonstration of corporate greed as any I have ever heard. Light took a big chance by publishing those editorials defending Siegel, as he could easily have invited a peck of trouble for himself.

Parts of the interview were heart breaking. The story that hit me hardest was the one where Siegel tells about having to sell most of his old comic books to pay the rent and feed his family. I think most collectors have had to do things like that at one time or another. I've had to do it a few times and I know how painful it can be. Unless a person happens to be independently wealthy, it takes years to accumulate a decent collection of almost anything, be it diamonds, marbles, or old comic books. Siegel received mere pennies on the dollar of what those comics would be worth today. Just imagine what some of them might fetch at auction, especially if a letter of authenticity with Siegel's signature came with it. I must admit that I got a little misty-eyed when I heard Siegel tell the story.

When Siegel was asked questions about his ongoing legal problems with DC, he rather meekly avoided them. In doing so, I imagine that he was acting on the advice of

his attorney. However, there was no doubt in my mind that Siegel was busting at the seams for a chance to tell his side of the story. At one point in the interview Siegel said he planned to write a biography where he would tell everything, leaving no stone unturned. I have no idea about how far he progressed with that. I have never heard anyone else ever mention a word about it.

Then, there was a story about Joanne Siegel having known actor George Reeves before he starred in *The Adventures of Superman* television series. Siegel mentioned (with some apparent disgust) that he never received a penny from DC in royalties. When Siegel was down on his luck in the late 60s, unable to find work in comics, he wrote comedy skits for an afternoon kiddie show in Boston. It was not the sort of thing that he was accustomed to, but it was good honest work. The Siegels spoke with pride about their daughter Laura, who had become an actress. After making a few commercials, she landed a role on the *Sons and Daughters* television show that aired briefly in the fall of 1974 on CBS.

I wish I had heard this interview (and read Gerard Jones's book) before I began serious negotiations with Siegel. It certainly explained a lot of things that I did not understand about his seemingly odd behavior, especially his reluctance to trust people. Siegel was simply a mild man who had been badly hurt by entrepreneurs who took advantage of his inexperience. He was certainly not the screwball that I had taken him for. At this much belated date, I feel a strange sense of guilt for reacting to Siegel the way I did. If I had it all to do over again, I would have tried a lot harder to reach an agreement to publish *Ooky and Zooky*. I am not sure it would have made any difference, but at least I could have struck out swinging at those knuckle balls in the dirt instead of being called out on strikes.

Many years later, I was saddened to learn that Jerry Siegel had passed away. Only toward the end of his life did Siegel begin to receive some of the credit (and financial compensation) that he so richly deserved. I sincerely hope that Harry Donenfeld, Mort Weisinger, and the rest of those fat-assed bandits at "Superman DC National Comics" choked on their ill-gotten gains.

Looking back at my publishing days from twenty-five mileposts down the road, my memories of working with Steve Ditko rank among my favorites. We talked many times on the telephone and I came to think of him as a friend. I finally had the opportunity to meet him in person at his New York studio in the summer of 1987. I was on my way to Derby, Connecticut, to discuss a possible distribution deal with Charlton Publications. I planned the trip out carefully in advance so I would have time to stop and meet with Ditko. I had called about a week ahead to tell him I would be passing through town, hoping he might be willing to see me. Ditko told me to give him a call just before I got there, and we would make plans to meet.

I had spent the previous evening at the home of Jerry De Fuccio, who lived across the river from the Big Apple in Jersey City. I was completely exhausted because it had been

over thirty-six hours since I last slept. Despite my fatigue, we had a pleasant visit, spending most of our time looking at Jerry's fine collection of original comic book art. He had a lot of nice pieces, including several dozen beautiful cover reproductions by C. C. Beck. Jerry had commissioned the art years earlier while he was still earning a respectable salary at *MAD*. They were really something to see. I would love to have owned a single one of them. I understand these are now in high demand, selling for three to five thousand apiece on the collectors' market.

The following morning, I called Ditko and we set a time to meet that afternoon at his studio. After thanking Jerry for his courtesy and providing me with a badly needed night of lodging, I set out for a harrowing journey through that snarling maze of New York traffic. Between dodging pedestrians and motorists who paid little attention to traffic signals, my nerves were soon shot. I remember having stopped at a red light somewhere in the Times Square area. All the while the cabbie behind me leaned on his horn and screamed at me to get the hell out of his way. He wanted me to run the light so he could do likewise. He must have realized I was from out of town when I refused to budge an inch from the spot until the light turned green.

After driving around in circles for over an hour, unable to find a place to park my car on the street, I finally pulled into a parking garage several blocks away. I remember how it cost more to park my car for a few hours than what I usually paid to spend the night at a Motel 6. After walking through a rather seedy-looking neighborhood, I arrived at Ditko's studio somewhere near the appointed hour. When I knocked on his door I could hear a muffled voice on the other side telling me go away. Hearing that New Yorkers are not readily known for their warm hospitality, I didn't quite know what to think. My first thought was maybe he had mistaken me for someone else. I knocked again, and said loud enough for him to hear me: "Hey Steve...this is Ron Frantz. I have an appointment to see you."

Finally, Ditko cracked his door open and peered at me suspiciously, as if I had been Mephistopheles coming to pay a call. I don't think Ditko expected me to show up at his door wearing a jacket and tie and carrying a briefcase. I probably looked more like a life insurance salesman than a publisher. Jerry De Fuccio had warned me about wandering the streets of New York dressed like that, but I paid him little mind. It was probably a miracle that I didn't get mugged on the way. Judging from some of the motley-looking characters I passed on the street, I could understand Ditko being a little cautious with strangers.

I developed an immediate impression that Ditko didn't get too many visitors, nor did he want them. But once I was inside the door his demeanor changed almost instantly. I noticed that he had been working at his drawing table before I arrived as the fingers on his drawing hand were smudged with ink. There was a stack of original artwork sitting on the floor next to his table that must have been close to three feet high. It looked to me like unpublished work. Ditko apparently kept busy on those "Ayn Rand" inspired stories when he didn't have a paying job going.

The only chair in the place was the one Ditko sat on to draw, so we spent the entire

visit standing. This was one of the hottest days of the year and the heat outside was miserable. And the temperature inside wasn't too much better. Ditko's studio was stuffy and devoid of ventilation. I don't think the windows in that place had been opened in ages. I noticed the heat didn't bother Ditko much. He seemed to be as cool as a cucumber while I was sweating like a mule pulling a plow up a steep grade. I tried several times to get Ditko to go somewhere where we could sit down and be a little more comfortable. I invited him out for a hamburger - or a cup of coffee - or to get a drink at the nearest pub. It had been a rough day and I sure could have used one. For whatever reason, Ditko had no intention of going anywhere. If I wanted to visit with him, it had to be then and there, or not at all. So we stayed.

After being in his company for a few minutes, I began to understand why Ditko had a reputation for avoiding the public. I am sure he had to be a little self-conscious about his appearance. Ditko would have been about sixty at the time, and didn't look to be in the best of health. Ditko was not a good-looking man like Alex Toth or Jim Steranko. He didn't have a beaming "radio talk show" personality like Pat Boyette, or a gift for gab like Stan Lee. I would describe Ditko as tall and thin, pudgy around the middle, balding, and wearing thick glasses. He was as dour as an old college mathematics professor that I used to have for a neighbor.

I think that working alone all those years in the isolation of his studio had taken its toll on Ditko. The clothes he wore were splattered with ink-stains, and were in need of laundering. Putting it delicately, his hygiene left something to be desired. While that description might sound a little gauche to some people, I know from experience that this sort of thing happens to a man who spends too much time by himself. I have seen it happen to other people I have known, including a few eccentric collectors. Now that I am about the age Ditko was then, I realize how fortunate I am to have a caring wife who makes me put on a clean shirt before going out to dinner; she tells me when it's time to go the barber or to come in out of the rain. She tends to be a lot more sensible about such things than I am. There is no telling where I would be without her gentle influence.

There is no doubt in my mind that Ditko's work was the most important thing in his life. In this respect I see a great deal of similarity between Ditko and the fictional Ayn Rand hero, Howard Roark. You may remember that dramatic scene in the theatrical version of *The Fountainhead* when a board of trustees demands that Roark (played to the hilt by Gary Cooper) make a minor change in the design of his building. When Roark refuses, one of his prospective clients angrily blurts: "But we are your clients, and it is your responsibility to serve us." Roark replies: "I don't build in order to have clients. I have clients in order to build. If you want my work, you must take it as it is or not at all."

When Roark is faced with the decision of "compromising" the integrity of his building or becoming a laborer in a stone quarry, he chooses the quarry. The next time you see Roark on the screen he is toiling away in the hot sun, suffering the tortures of the damned. I somehow doubt that one person in a thousand would have subjected himself to that kind of misery if there were any reasonable alternative. And not getting your way about something is certainly a poor excuse. The scene makes for interesting cinema, but I

can't help but wonder if Ayn Rand actually believed any of that nonsense. It is the kind of articulated message that no self-respecting pigeon would carry.

I am not sure if Ditko would have seen it that way, but I have often thought he must have lived through a similar scene in his own life when he refused to make the changes demanded by Martin Goodman on *Spider-Man*. Like Roark, Ditko would not compromise his principles, no matter how vague or disingenuous they might have appeared to anyone else. With the possible exception of a few disgruntled fans, the decision hurt no one but Ditko. Stan Lee probably didn't care and Martin Goodman walked away from the fiasco smelling like a rose.

Now, I am not a philosopher by any stretch of the imagination, but I do know that almost every day of our lives involves some kind of compromise. Let me give you an example: I got married for the first time in the summer of 1977. While I was having breakfast with my new mother-in-law who lived in the Jackson Heights area of New York, she served me a generous portion of something called "bagel and lox" along with a foul smelling variety of blue cheese. Now, there was nothing wrong with the food; but having lived most of my life in Oklahoma I never had the opportunity to sample Jewish cuisine. I must admit that given a choice, I would have preferred a plate of ham and eggs. As distasteful as I found the food, I had the option of eating what I had been served or going hungry. It was simple as that.

I remember another occasion a few years later, when I had planned to spend an evening playing penny ante poker with a few buddies. Nearing the end of the workday, one of the salesmen turned in a huge order of office furniture going to an Anadarko Indian Reservation. Just to make things interesting, that idiot of a salesman promised delivery no later than ten o'clock the following morning. For some unfathomable reason, he thought the world might come to an end if the order was not delivered on time. It would take three people working half of the night to get the order ready. Naturally, my employer demanded that I work overtime. Since I was on salary, I had to put in the extra time without any additional pay. When I complained that I had plans for the evening, he reminded me that I had a choice: I could work late and keep the job that provided food and shelter for my family, or I could start looking elsewhere for another job. These were the days of the oil embargo when energy prices (and almost everything else) were soaring through the roof and decent jobs were hard to come by. This being the case, I really didn't have much of a choice.

I don't mind telling you this guy was the most despicable human being that I ever worked for. His history in business read like a horror story. I remember how he was constantly dodging creditors and being sued for not paying his bills. The odd thing is that he always had the money, but he preferred to leave it in the bank so he could collect every last cent of interest. There were rumors spoken in hushed whispers about him having connections with organized crime. Personally, I would not have doubted it. He had absolutely no qualms about cheating anyone foolish enough to do business with him. Had the man not been old enough to be my grandfather, I would have, in the words of Al Jolson, been tempted to "raise an onion on his bunion" more than once. When the first

opportunity came along for me to jump ship, I did. I think Martin Goodman or Harry Donenfeld would have adored him.

No matter how you care to look at it, both of those situations required some compromise on my part. As much as the thought might have irritated Ayn Rand, most of us have to do things like this occasionally just to survive. It seldom matters if we like it or not. Rand would have us believe some fairy tale that a man of integrity would not sacrifice his principles by eating strange food, working overtime against his will, or changing the design of a building to suit the whims of a prospective client. It also doesn't rain in Minneapolis in the summertime. After spending most of his adult life deeply engaged in Ayn Rand inspired thought, it had to affect the way Ditko looked at the real world. If I were a psychologist, I might think Ditko (and all the rest of the serious Ayn Rand devotees) had some difficulty telling the difference between reality and a work of fiction.

But regardless of what anyone else might think, this was the life Ditko had chosen. If it worked for him, who am I to question his rationale. During our visit Ditko wanted to spend as much time as possible discussing his philosophical beliefs. He must have owned a copy of every book ever written by, for, or about Ayn Rand. He subscribed to all the magazines devoted to the subject and had stacks of them reposing on a bookshelf. When I asked Ditko what he thought about Rand as a person, he said that she was a brilliant woman. Ditko spoke with near reverence about meeting Ms. Rand on several occasions. He often listened to her lecture at the Nathaniel Branden Institute; a fellowship composed of budding objectivists seeking wisdom and guidance. They held regular meetings in a room at the Empire State Building during the early 60s.

After reading most of Ayn Rand's books, including her long-winded pseudo-intellectual diatribes, I was fascinated to see that about the time of her death she had become fodder for some of the political pundits. This included Joseph Sobran, whose columns I used to read on the editorial page of *The Daily Oklahoman*. Sobran wrote about Rand in somewhat less than glowing terms:

One of the most fascinating books I have read in years is the new biography of the novelist-philosopher Ayn Rand. Titled *The Passion of Ayn Rand*, it is written by Barbara Branden, whose husband Nathaniel Branden was not only the chief disciple but the lover of Rand for many years.

As the former Mrs. Branden tells it, Rand simply sat down with her husband and the young Branden couple and announced to all concerned that she and Nathaniel were going to have an affair. The astonishing thing is that although the affair ruined both marriages and ended in violent bitterness between the two lovers, Barbara Branden writes objectively and admiringly of Rand.

She [Rand] made it big with her novel *The Fountainhead*, published in 1943. Its architect-hero, Howard Roark, embodies and articulates Rand's philosophy of selfishness, later known as objectivism, which she thought of as the only intellectual

antidote of socialism.

Ironically, Rand became a cult figure, and her followers tried to turn themselves into carbon copies of her ideas, tastes, style, and even vocabulary. She had an autocratic habit of excommunicating those who disagreed with her. She was the world's most intolerant libertarian, and a mighty capricious rationalist.

Barbara Branden not only put up with her husband's infidelity with Rand, when he took up with a third woman, she helped conceal the affair, correctly fearing that the philosopher wouldn't exactly take the news philosophically.

Eventually, however, the truth had to be told. With her poor husband (who had taken up drinking) sitting by, Rand roared that Branden, who was 25 years her junior, should have preferred her erotically to all others for her ideas and character, even "if I were eighty and in a wheelchair!" Rand denounced the Brandens publicly, all but destroying the objectivist movement.

Another syndicated writer whose articles regularly appeared in *The Oklahoman* was William F. Buckley Jr. This was before Buckley took an ultra-conservative plunge off the deep-end of the pool, and his newspaper columns were still reasonably coherent. Shortly following her passing, Buckley wrote the following comments about Rand and her merry band of adjutants:

I have in years gone by, often given offense. Seldom so intense as by the article written here after the death of Ayn Rand, the novelist-objectivist, who certainly commands more armed divisions, with poisoned spears, than the Pope.

Remember, that Rand was herself a very difficult woman, whose contempt for her critics was frequently enunciated, who scorned any organization of philanthropy, indeed the very idea of altruism; who was most militantly evangelical in her atheism and who was humorless enough to suggest as the appropriate symbol for her movement - a dollar sign.

A young, learned and articulate journalist, who writes jazz criticism for the *Kansas City Star*, takes a leisurely autobiographical look at Ayn Rand. Terry Treachout was at sixteen, a precocious New Leftist. "Sixteen," he writes, "is a good age to like hard rock, Wagner or intellectual house-smashing." He was looking around, dissatisfied with Abbie Hoffmanism. He wanted something more in touch with reality; and though his high school library didn't have the *The Conservative Affirmation* by Willmore Kendall, it did have - sitting on the shelf like a time bomb - *Atlas Shrugged*."

Treachout read the book and was carried away - as he points out, others continue to be carried away.

Treachout writes charmingly about the experience of discovering Ayn Rand. "(It

was) ideal fare for a frustrated adolescent in search of fresh ideas. I spent a delightful month of my sixteenth year plowing through every book I could find by the author of *Atlas Shrugged* instead of studying for my driver's license exam. I scored 85 on the written test and barely passed parallel parking; but when it came to objectivist epistemology, I could have aced by final exam, written or oral. It didn't last, Thank God, and I had a terrible mental hangover when it was all over."

The pity of it is that there are those who stay out there, in the parched deserts of objectivism. And their isolation affects their manners. They cannot stand it that some people should be as stern with Miss Rand as Miss Rand was stern with them.

As strange as it is for me to think about now, I can remember a time when I was another of those inquisitive young men who found intellectual stimulation from reading Ayn Rand. It did not last for me, either. My adventure into the world of objectivism began with some of Ditko's philosophical stories published by Joe Brancatelli, and Bruce Hamilton's future son-in-law, Bruce Hershenson. It would be years before I learned that Bruce Hamilton, a former radio disc jockey and vintage comic book and record dealer, wrote the second published story drawn by Ditko in 1953, titled "Stretching Things" for *Fantastic Fears* #5. It is the sort of thing that makes a person realize that we live in a very small world, after all.

For reasons I cannot begin to explain now, Ditko's early philosophical stories had an influence on me. I enjoyed Ditko's fare so much that it inspired me to read Ayn Rand. I met Hershenson about 1974 at a convention in Houston. In fact, I bought some of the Ditko comics directly from him. He seemed like a nice guy and I enjoyed talking to him. I will admit that I had been impressed that Hershenson was the first person of my acquaintance who had actually seen Ditko in the flesh.

I remember asking Ditko if he had read the copy of *The Passion of Ayn Rand* sitting on his bookshelf. I had read it recently and found it to be both entertaining and provocative. It certainly provided me with some food for thought. While Ditko said he had read the book, he did not think it had any bearing on Rand's philosophy. However, he did take issue with Barbara Branden, calling her vivid account of Rand's personal life "a pack of lies". And so, for the first time since I had known him, I found myself in disagreement with Ditko. I made little effort to hide it, and I am afraid it drove a barrier between us. Perhaps Ditko had expected something different from me, but I think he soon realized that I was capable of doing my own thinking. I was just hardheaded enough to say what was on my mind, and it didn't matter if other people liked it or not. And I am sorry to say this included Steve Ditko.

Judging by Rand's promiscuous lifestyle, I thought she knew as much about ethics as a pig does about table manners. She apparently did not care if she hurt the people closest to her; all that mattered was getting whatever she wanted. Rand may have been a brilliant novelist, but she was not the kind of person that I would care to have as a dinner guest. Most certainly, she was not someone I could place on a pedestal and worship as if she were a Deity. It seems to me that if Rand had done half of the goofy things that Barbara

Branden writes about in her book, she would have been a candidate for a private room decorated with rubber wallpaper. I do not think it unreasonable to question the rationality of a person who claimed that Aristotle was the only philosopher who ever lived that she could learn from. Maybe I am the one who has a problem, but I wish I could be that certain about anything.

It took a few years for me to arrive at the conclusion that most of Rand`s simplistic black and white views did not offer a solution to any of the world`s problems. It seemed to me that Rand spent far too much time by herself, thinking deep and dark thoughts. Edgar Allan Poe had the same problem. With the exception of a journalist here and there, the only people she seemed to talk to were members of her fan club. I don`t believe Rand made any conscious effort to understand the plight of ordinary people who struggle every day of their lives just to get by. I am not sure that she even cared. The thought that someone could use a little help never entered into her thinking. I began to understand what Treachout meant about Rand`s novels leaving him with a mental hangover. It was much the same with me.

I feel fortunate to have found my way out of the "Parched deserts of objectivism" before it did any real damage to my cheerful disposition. At least I got away with my sense of humor still intact. I hope Terry Treachout did as well. I would love to talk to him someday about objectivism and how it could relate to jazz music. I would like to ask him if he thought Rand might have appreciated or understood the music of Thelonious Monk or Dizzy Gillespie? My guess is probably not. I would say that despite her fame and fortune, Ayn Rand lived a very sad and lonely life. It was as if she was forever searching for perfection in an imperfect world. In some ways, she was really more to be pitied than scorned.

While we were discussing more pleasant matters, I told Ditko about my last visit to New York in the summer of 1979. I had been there on business to attend a tobacco industry trade show held at the Statler-Hilton hotel. One afternoon, I managed to sneak away from the convention long enough to pay a visit to Jerry De Fuccio at *MAD Magazine*. While trotting down Madison Avenue, I stopped at the building a few blocks down the street where Marvel Comics hung their shingle. I had hoped to say hello to Archie Goodwin who I had met a few years earlier at a Tulsa convention.

After speaking to the pretty receptionist lurking behind a glass window, she invited me to sit down while she checked to see if Goodwin was available. The place was almost as busy as a bookie joint as people were coming and going like the wind. While I was relaxing in a comfortable chair, I saw this young man come straggling in off the street with a stack of original art under his arm. Apparently he was one of the artists working at Marvel. I had no idea who he was, but it was hard for me not to notice that he wasn`t wearing a shirt or shoes. His pants were full of holes and he had long greasy hair running down the middle of his back. I would venture to say that he had not bothered to bathe that day. I guess the good old days of "Smiling" Stan Lee and the Merry Marvel Bullpen was gone forever.

When I told this story to Ditko, he just smiled. I imagine that he had seen lots of these "long-haired" characters hanging around the offices of the big publishing companies. As we talked, I discovered that Ditko and I shared a few mutual acquaintances. We had reason to dislike some of the same people. Numbered among these, was Gary Groth at Fantagraphics. When I mentioned his name, Ditko gave me a sour look, and then called Groth a "damned socialist." I am not sure exactly what he meant by that, as he declined to go into the particulars. The best I could figure is that somewhere along the way Groth had really done something to get under his skin. All I said to Ditko was: "Welcome to the club."

About then Ditko told me about a problem he was having with some of the original art dealers. It began when Marvel finally got around to returning some of Ditko's original art. After many years of waiting, Ditko was in no mind to sell. The trouble was that those art dealers did not want to take "no" for an answer. They kept pestering Ditko, giving him a lot of double talk about how he was hurting the economy by being so greedy. Then, they declared he had a moral obligation to see that his art got into the hands of fans and collectors who would really admire and appreciate it. Of course, they were simply nice guys looking to quadruple their investment. It was as if they thought Ditko owed them the privilege of genuflecting before them. Hearing the story was enough to make me want to throw up on my shoe. I didn't ask Ditko for any names, but I am sure that I must have known some of them, or at least by reputation.

Then, much to my surprise, Ditko asked me what I thought he should do. Actually, I felt honored that he thought enough of me to ask for my opinion. I paused for a moment to gather my thoughts, and then said: "Steve.... if it were me, I would tell those art dealers to go fornicate with a duck! They are just looking to make an enormous profit at your expense. The bottom line is that the art belongs to you. Keep it...sell it...or throw it away. Do whatever makes you happy. You don't owe any of those people the time of day. I do think, however, that it might be a good idea for you to hang on to it for a while. The value of original comic book art is going up all the time. Marvel art from the 60s is already fetching very good prices and yours will do nothing but go up in value. It's as good as money in the bank collecting compound interest." I guess that I was not too far wrong as some of the original Ditko pages that disappeared while they were still in Marvel's custody are now selling for five grand each. Ditko didn't say a word. I guess he liked the answer, as he sort of nodded his head in silent approval. That was the last either of us said about it. I had hoped he might offer to show me some of the art as I had never seen a Ditko original from that period close up. When he didn't, I didn't feel comfortable asking him.

Then, we talked a little about Dean Mullaney and Cat Yronwode. I had previously heard some of the story about the ill-fated *Art of Steve Ditko* book Mullaney and Yronwode had contemplated, but it was interesting to hear Ditko's take on it. Obviously, this subject was a real sore point with Ditko. It had caused him considerable annoyance and displeasure. Most of his aggravation seemed to be directed at Yronwode, who in Ditko's opinion had betrayed his confidence. I gather that everything had been well and fine between them until Yronwode found one of Ditko's old high school yearbooks.

Hoping to learn more about Ditko's early life, she started calling some his old classmates. Yronwode should have known better. It didn't take long for word to get back to Ditko, and then the proverbial manure hit the fan.

When I told Ditko about my experience with Mullaney when I first tried to contact him, he said something like: "That is typical of Mullaney. You can't believe a word he says about anything." According to Ditko, Mullaney made a belated effort to try and smooth over some of their differences. Ditko agreed to meet with Mullaney at a prearranged time and date. When Mullaney showed up for the meeting several hours late, it didn't help matters any. When Mullaney finally arrived, Ditko became highly agitated when he discovered that Yronwode had accompanied him to the meeting. Ditko said he had agreed to meet with Mullaney alone; he did not care to discuss anything with Yronwode, at that time or ever. The meeting was quite brief, and conducted in the hallway outside of Ditko's door. I suppose nothing of any real importance was resolved.

In December of 1982 I had been a co-chairman of the annual Wintercon held in Oklahoma City. That year our guest of honor was Dick Giordano. On Saturday night I had the pleasure of moderating a panel discussion that included Giordano, Mullaney, Yronwode, and science fiction illustrator Richard Courtney. I had prepared a list of questions for the panelists, asking each of them to answer as they saw fit. One of the questions was: "Which illustrator and/or author, whichever the case may be, has been the greatest influence on your professional work and why?" In particular, Yronwode's answer was quite enlightening:

As far as comics go, I think Milton Caniff and Will Eisner; and I'd also add Walt Kelly. They all dealt with similar themes in their work and there are other ones I enjoy a lot. Also Elzie Segar. And Winsor McCay is another favorite. McCay is mostly a delight of the eye. I never really shed a tear over a Winsor McCay story, or felt terrible anticipation about what would happen. It's just beautiful. Caniff is definitely tops for me. It has something to do more technically with his pacing. Characters come and go out of the situation, their relationships to each other change dramatically during the course of things. And it's not a fight scene every seven or eight pages.

When I was younger, I would say that Stan Lee had a tremendous influence on me, but only his work with Steve Ditko. The work he did with Kirby, looked like the kind of stuff that the guys who beat up people at school would have liked. I was the kind that got beat up. And so, I liked Ditko. But of course, as time went on, I found that Stan Lee had less to do with that than I thought and it was really Steve Ditko who had a very strong influence on me. Not so much in my own idea of plotting or writing, but when it came to what I thought looked beautiful in men. I thought that Steve Ditko drew very beautiful men and I spent years pursuing the ideal. It didn't come in, believe it or not. I do not like the way he's doing it now.

The following day, I had the chance to sit down with Yronwode and Mullaney in the hotel coffee shop. They reminded me of a pair of old hippies from Berkeley who came

out of the late 60s rock culture. I must admit that I didn't see much of that stuff while growing up in the Oklahoma City area. There were very few "love-ins" or Vietnam War protests in my neighborhood. Nobody was burning their draft cards or brassieres...or at least not out in public. It was more of a Merle Haggard-*Okie from Muskogee* kind of environment. In this respect we were from entirely different worlds. I was in my thirties before I ever sampled pot; and to this day I still prefer a good cigar.

I remember when underground comics dealer Bud Plant came to the 1972 summer convention in Oklahoma City. Bud narrowly avoided being arrested on charges of selling pornography. It seems that some of the local Pentecostals had seen the comics on his dealers' table and were appalled by the sight of Robert Crumb and Vaughn Bode. If memory serves, Bud was also selling some of the "Ditko-inked" Eric Stanton's books like *Sweeter Gwen*. Although Ditko has denied any official involvement with Stanton's work, the general consensus is that he did. I owned a copy of it once upon a time and it sure looked that way to me. The fact that Ditko and Stanton shared a studio at the time makes it all the more likely.

At least one of the Pentecostals called the District Attorney's office to complain. When two burly police officers arrived at the convention to investigate the report, it took a lot of fancy-footwork to get those underground comics out of sight before they dragged Bud away in handcuffs. It could really have been an ugly situation because the local District Attorney was a fundamentalist zealot who made a career out of crusading against the forces of sin and evil. He would have turned that kind of incident into a front-page headline. I could tell you some bizarre stories about this pious hypocrite, but it will have to wait for a more suitable occasion. But I will say that he would have made a great movie villain. Vincent Price would have been perfect in the role. By the way, I always liked Bud. He was a great supporter of my ACE Comics line, and sent me several nice letters when I published something he liked. Better than that, Bud was a distributor that always paid his bills on time. He was one of a very few that you could depend on.

Personally, I found Mullaney to be about as dull as a mud fence. Most of the comics he published were of little interest to me. We talked a little about his interest in music and record collecting. I had recently started to collect old 78rpm records and we shared a bit of common interest there. I think I made Mullaney uncomfortable when I mentioned that I had recently traded for one of the old British "Eclipse" records. I don't think it was common knowledge that Mullaney had made rather liberal use of both the name and logo for his line of comic books. Mullaney then excused himself, saying that he had another appointment. Maybe he did, but I had my doubts. Yronwode remained behind and we continued our visit without interruption.

Yronwode was definitely a better conversationalist than Mullaney. I thought she was a tad opinionated about certain things, but at the same time she could be very pleasant and charming. Her enthusiasm was almost contagious. Naturally we spent quite a bit of time talking about Steve Ditko. Her voice became tinted with excitement as she told me about the *Art of Steve Ditko* book she had been working on with Mullaney and Mark Upchurch. Yronwode was what I would call a professional fan. In recent years she had been a

popular columnist writing for *The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom*. For a time, I subscribed to the newspaper for no other reason than to read her column. It was that good.

Before such enthusiastic people like Blake Bell and Rob Imes arrived on the scene, I would say that Yronwode was the most sincere and dedicated Ditko fan I ever met. She absolutely adored his art. This said, I am not sure I can make the following comment without it sounding offensive, but I am going to try: It is my personal belief that Yronwode had a romantic attraction to Ditko's art. Having been around the block a few times myself, I could see a gleam of excitement in her eyes while we talked about Ditko. I used to see that same look on my first wife when she talked about actor William Shatner. Before we were married, she had been the founder and president of a fan club known as *The United Friends of William Shatner*. To say the least, she was just a little smitten with Shatner.

In the words of Richard Millhous Nixon, let me make one point perfectly clear: I don't believe any of Yronwode's fascination was ever directed at Ditko himself. Hoping that I am not trying to sound too much like a psychologist...I would call her interest in Ditko's art an exaggerated form of hero worship. I have often thought it might have been something for Dr. Phil or Nathaniel Branden to contemplate. I was definitely out of my league here.

Yronwode is, I think, a very sexually oriented person. Just so nobody gets the wrong idea, let me say that there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. There was a time in my life when I used to think about such things quite a bit. I base my assertion on what I have learned about Yronwode's life after comic books. About seven or eight years ago, I stumbled across her web site. At first glance, it appeared that Yronwode had taken up with a peculiar variety of new age mysticism. I can only imagine what Ditko might have thought had he seen it. Some of the information on her web site pertains to "new age" products to cleanse the mind and body and techniques promoting sexual gratification.

Being something of an agnostic, I have difficulty comprehending any of the mumbo-jumbo that goes with legerdemain. Frankly, I can no more believe in the existence of the supernatural than I do in leprechauns or the Easter Bunny. But what any form of mysticism could possibly have to do with sex is way beyond me. By the way, I don't think I am guilty of divulging any secrets here. It seems to me that Yronwode would not be promoting these subjects on her web site if she were the least bit concerned about privacy.

It is unfortunate that things ended so badly between Ditko and Yronwode. As Humphrey Bogart said so movingly to Claude Rains at the end of *Casablanca*...it could have been the beginning to a beautiful friendship. Ditko had been her hero; and at this stage of his career, Ditko needed all the support he could get from his few remaining fans. Instead it ended with them becoming enemies. The presence of Dean Mullaney in the equation probably didn't help matters any.

Just before I left his studio, Ditko wanted to show me the story he had been working on before I arrived. Of course, it was another of his philosophical stories that hardly anyone wanted to read. It may have been one of the *Static* stories, but I can't swear to that now. I had talked to Ditko earlier about the distribution deal I had been negotiating with Charlton. If it went through (and I was banking a lot on it) it might have kept me in business a good while longer. Ditko was very much interested, as he hoped I might publish some of his philosophical stories in color for a new and wider audience. Ditko was disappointed when I told him that I didn't believe there was a market for them. As much as I personally liked Ditko, I was not in a position to gamble any money on it.

One of the projects I had been contemplating was a new *Ghostly Tales* kind of comic, done in the style of the old Charlton title. Since I had been working with Charlton alumni like Ditko, Joe Gill, Pete Morisi, and Pat Boyette, it would have been an easy title to publish. All I needed was financing. I knew a potential investor that was looking for an income tax deduction. He was willing to bankroll the project if the distribution deal with Charlton panned out. Then, Jerry De Fuccio had been talking to me about publishing a new comic book based on Arch Oboler's classic radio show from the 40s, *Light's Out, Everybody!* Jerry sweetened the pot when he said that he had permission to use the title and access to Oboler's original scripts. When I asked Ditko if he might be interested in working on this type of a comic, his response was lukewarm at best. On that note, I figured it was time for me to hit the road as Frank McLaughlin was waiting for me to arrive at his home in Connecticut. I had a meeting with the management at Charlton scheduled for the next day.

After returning home, I only talked with Ditko on the phone once or twice more. As I recall, we usually talked about how bad the business was doing. After the deal with Charlton failed to materialize, I knew that I could not keep things going much longer. I soon reached the point when I no longer wanted to try. Direct Sales distributors were folding their tents right and left. Most of them disappeared into the night owing me (and lots of other people) thousands of dollars. A few months later, I finally had to throw in the towel. After getting wiped out in the "Direct Sales" crash, I barely had two nickels left to rub together. As much as I hated the thought, the time had come for me to start looking for another job.

Then, I remembered something that Jerry De Fuccio had once said: "If you live by the comics you will die by the comics." He was right. It happened to Jerry a few years earlier and then it happened to me. For the next ten years, I was so emotionally drained by the experience that I did not want to even think about publishing anything. As my life moved forward in a new direction, I lost track of most of the artists and writers that I had known and worked with. As a matter of necessity, I took a job selling shoes for the Florsheim Company. Al Bundy certainly had nothing on me.

About two years after I had abandoned all hopes of remaining a publisher, I received a letter from De Fuccio asking if I might return one of his scripts. Trying to make conversation, he inquired about what I was doing for a living. I sent him the material he requested along with a brief note bringing him up to date about how I was keeping food

on the table. It prompted this reply:

Thanks to you for the rapid response in digging out my *Presentiments* script. Say, I was decked in Florsheim shoes since I was in grammar school. They had the seal of approval from my physician father, though I don't see them in my locale any more. I like your determination regarding the shoe business. You manifested the ability to round up talent and it must be discouraging to stick it out in a job that's relatively routine.

Routine was certainly the word for it, and the ordeal was indeed discouraging. I like to think of it as my own proverbial stint in the stone quarry. The only difference between Howard Roark and me is that I would have preferred to do almost anything else. However, like Howard Roark, it took me a while to get out of the quarry. I never did find my way back to comic book publishing or the land of milk and honey, but I did manage to earn a respectable living for the next few years. I guess it could have been worse.

Here I am now, episodically retired and living with my wife near a small town in western Arkansas. They say when it comes to love and marriage, the third time around is the charm. It has certainly been that way with me. It was a blessed day when she came into my life some fifteen years ago. I could not be happier.

In recent months, I have noticed how a few yammering magpies on the Internet have plagued Ditko with inane comments. Most of these upstarts, who haven't the foggiest notion of what the hell they are talking about, have gone so far as to question his sanity. It began after the release of the most recent *Spider-Man* movie. It seems that a writer with one of the New York newspapers managed to get an impromptu interview with Ditko. He announced to the world that Ditko had never received a dime in compensation from the motion picture company for using the characters he helped to create. It left readers with an impression that Stan Lee made out like a bandit while Ditko got the shaft. I daresay that he did not venture far from the truth.

Then, there has been a rumor in circulation that, out of the kindness of their hearts, this motion picture company offered to pay Ditko a million dollars as a good will gesture. I do not know if there is a shred of truth to the story, but I am not inclined to believe it. The crux of the matter is that none of the Hollywood studios have ever been known for their lavish generosity. For example, some of the movie moguls have a history of trying to save a few thousand dollars by making unauthorized use of intellectual properties. I guess stealing is a better word for it. The odd thing is how these companies consider such devious behavior to be perfectly acceptable. And should they get caught with their fingers in the cookie jar and be forced to spend a hundred times that amount defending their dishonesty in court, they see it as a routine business expense. It seems to me that this sort of thing defies all sense of reason, but then what do I know?

If I sound a little cynical it is because the same thing has been done to me. As a result, I once spent several years battling a major motion picture company in federal court. I am

sad to say that I did not receive a nickel for my trouble, but at least I had the satisfaction of knowing it cost them well over a hundred grand in legal fees fending off the lawsuit. At least that is what my attorney told me before he became ill and was forced to retire from his law practice. I've also had similar problems with a few unscrupulous publishers who have used copyrighted characters or other related material belonging to me without permission or recompense. But that is another story for another time.

Now, Ditko is his own man and he certainly doesn't need me or anyone else to defend him. The way I see it is this: If a motion picture company offered Ditko a million dollars - and he refused the money for any reason you might care to imagine - that is a matter of personal choice. Personally, I can't imagine anyone doing that. Ditko may have his principles, but he is not stupid. I can only tell you that if someone were to offer *me* a million dollars to use anything I have ever written or published, I would dance a jig all the way to the bank. My only question would be: "Where do I sign the contract and how soon can I get the money?" My wife and I could then spend the rest of our lives in relative comfort without worrying about the rising cost of living. Heck, I might even go back into the publishing business. I have enough unfinished projects from my ACE Comics days to keep me busy for years. And like an idiot, I keep adding more stuff to an ever-growing pile.

I suppose that Ditko rarely concerns himself with such trivial matters as personal comfort or financial security. In spite of all this, I think it may shock some people to discover that not everyone in the world cares about making a ton of money. The moral of the story is that there really are a few things in life more important than just getting rich. Being able to spend time doing some of the things that gives us pleasure and satisfaction is one of them. It would appear that Ditko spends his days doing just that. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that if Ditko were looking to feather his nest, he could make a bundle by doing nothing more than selling a few autographed pieces of his original Marvel Comics art. Then, he could earn a tidy sum by doing cover recreations or commissioned art on request. And it boggles the mind to think what he could earn by making a few public appearances. Since he has not been seen at a gathering of comic book fans since 1964, I think there are a lot of people out there who would pay good money to see him in person.

The bottom line is that Ditko has no interest in doing any of those things. Mine is not to reason why. However, it really sticks in my craw to see a few narrow-minded people condemn Ditko for living his life in a way that suits him. I cannot begin to fathom how some dolt who has never met or talked to Ditko can have the audacity to question his mental health. If you ask me, some of these self-styled critics are the people that need to have their heads examined. At the very least, I think someone had been very careless in their upbringing.

I probably see the matter differently because I had the pleasure of knowing Ditko. We talked many times on the phone and I always enjoyed his company. While I may not agree with some of his convictions, I will say for the record that Ditko is one of the most genuinely sane people that I ever met. Now, if there is anyone out there who really thinks

that Ditko has some kind of a mental disorder, I would suggest they watch the 1987 *Masters of Comic Book Art* video. I don't mind telling you that this is the Steve Ditko I remember. Although he is not shown on the video, you hear Ditko's voice expressing his ideas clearly and succinctly. His manner is serious, intelligent, and focused on the subject. By my way of thinking, these are definitely not the words of a madman.

Although coming to such a realization might sorely pain some of his critics, it should be remembered that Ditko actually stands for something. Remarkably, his views have remained steadfast for almost half of a century. And this cannot be said about very many people. I have known my fair share of wishy-washy citizens (some of them holding public office) who are eager and willing to change their minds for expediency or on a mere whim. But you will never find an ounce of such hypocrisy in Steve Ditko. He tells the world right up front where he stands, and he won't surrender an inch of ground to anyone who happens to disagree with him. I can only speak for myself, but I find it easy to respect a man with his kind of gumption.

Years ago, I came to know Ditko well enough to realize that he doesn't care about what most so-called critics think about his art or the way he lives. He would consider those arrogant "writers of such critiques, with a hectoring affectation of omniscience" not worth a minute of his time. The Reverend Farrar certainly knew what he was taking about on this subject. Farrar, in his infinite wisdom, had a very clear understanding of what rattles around in the minds of critics masquerading as lucid thought. I like to think that Farrar would have understood and appreciated Steve Ditko. He would have considered him to be a man cut from the same cloth as Lord Tennyson or Charles Darwin.

One hot summer day in the summer of 1979, I spent an afternoon driving around Tulsa, Oklahoma with Jim Steranko. He wanted to look for lost treasure at some of the local used bookstores and I ended up with the chauffeur's job because no one else wanted to do it. Since I owed the convention chairman a favor, it became my task to do. While we were driving from one bookstore to the next, we discussed many different topics. Among other things, Steranko spoke of his admiration for artist Alex Toth. I was almost astounded when I heard Steranko say: "Two hundred years from now, scholars and historians will look at Toth's art with the same reverence they do now for Rembrandt and Michelangelo."

At the time I thought that Steranko was talking through his hat. His praise for Toth seemed to be lavish and bit over-exaggerated. It was hard for me to put up an argument because I think there was some real genius in Toth; besides that, he was a friend of mine. Perhaps I should mention that Steranko was another of those guys who seemed to be in love with the sound of his own voice. Since then, however, I have experienced a change of heart. Here I am now, thinking much the same way about Steve Ditko that Steranko did about Alex Toth. While I will admit to having no talent for prognostication, I do believe that aspiring artists of the next century will be studying Ditko's work with wide-eyed admiration. Along with such notables as Pablo Picasso, Maxfield Parrish, and Norman Rockwell, Ditko will be recognized as one of the most influential artists of 20th Century.

Most opinions are a dime-a-dozen, and mine are no different. It is like the time in the 70s when famed *Shadow Magazine* illustrator Graves Gladney criticized Jim Steranko, who was then producing covers for a new series of *Shadow* paperback books. Gladney said: "I don't think Steranko has a hell of a lot of talent." Out of sheer orneriness, I couldn't help but pass that comment along to Steranko. He just shrugged and said: "That is fair enough because I don't think much of Gladney, either. I think George Rozen did a better job of illustrating the pulp *Shadow* covers, and he was there a long time before Gladney."

When I mentioned that I liked Gladney's covers better than Rozen's, it led to some lively discussion. However, it didn't take long for me to realize that I was hopelessly overmatched when it came to debating Steranko on the subject. After all, man should know his limitations. While I was armed with mere opinions on the subject, Steranko had a ton of practical experience. It is hard for a layman to top that. It didn't stop me from trying, but it was clearly no contest. Steranko beat me hands down. I had fun, anyway, and I hope he did too.

Once again, I recall a scene from *The Fountainhead* when Howard Roark's aging mentor (who obviously had been drinking) asks him if he knows what the people on the street think about architecture. Cutting him to the quick, Roark replies: "I don't care what they think about architecture, or anything else." I think it is much the same way with Ditko. He likes his art and always tries to do his best. This is all that has ever mattered to him. It speaks well of Ditko.

Putting it bluntly...I say to hell with Ditko's critics! If they choose to persist in their irrational belief that Ditko is some kind of a nutcase because he won't do some of the things they would like him to, there is nothing I can say or do that will change their minds. The only way I could adequately express my contempt for these mental midgets would be to let loose with a string of four-letter adjectives. Since I am getting a little too old to have my mouth washed out with soap, I will resist the urge to do that. In any event, I take some pleasure in knowing that no one can stop me from thinking.

In closing, I very much believe this would be a better world if more people in it were as principled and devoted to their craft as Steve Ditko. My only wish is that he would step down off his philosophical high-horse just long enough to plot and draw one final *Spider-Man* story. For old-times sake I would settle for some dialogue written by Stan Lee; and if necessary, Ditko's pencils could be inked by Johnny Romita. It would certainly make the irascible twelve-year old that used to occupy this middle-aged body deliriously happy. I doubt if it will ever happen, but it never hurts to dream...

Editor's Note: Ron Frantz provided me with photocopies of six pages of Ditko's character sketches for the *Ooky & Zooky* comic that never came to be. Blake Bell printed four of those sketches in his book *Strange and Stranger: The World of Steve Ditko* (Fantagraphics, 2008). The last two sketches shown here have not been published before, until this issue of *Ditkomania*. Below is Steve Ditko's 1986 letter to Ron, discussing the sketches which follow. Compare the drawn figures to the sample pages of Siegel's script, printed elsewhere in this issue. – *Rob Imes*

Ron This will give you a rough idea of the comic style. Some poses may appear stiff because they're not part of a panel idea where you have a definite action-reaction situation. Also, most drawings are bigger than would appear in a panel where dialogue, props and other characters are involved. So clothing designs (magic types etc) have to be basic, simple yet interesting.

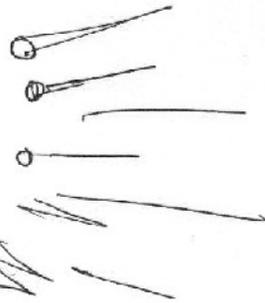
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OOKY



← could have shorter legs

He doesn't have ANY legs in the reference it makes him look like a duck.



ZOOKY



SIZE
COMPARISON

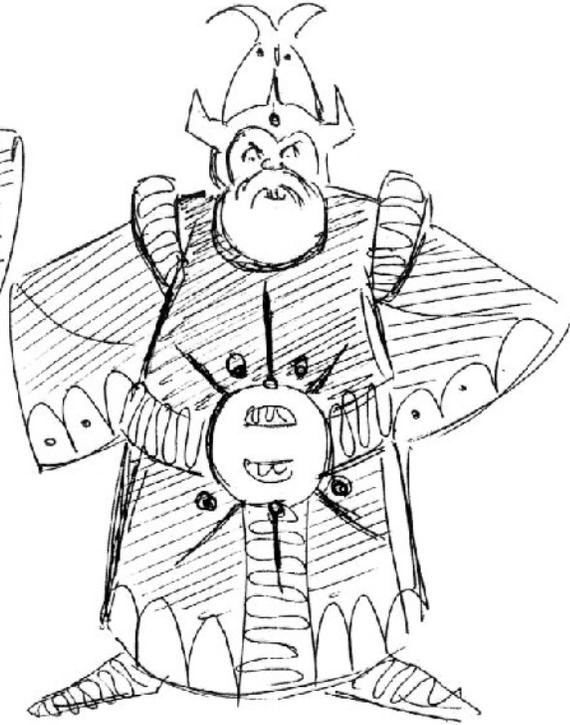
2 COP TYPES -



MAGIC TYPES



MAGIC TYPES



ZAGLIOSTRO



AMAZING HEROES #128 (Nov. 1, 1987) carried a list of four **ACE Comics** that were scheduled to be released Oct. 16-31, 1987, none of which came out: **ACE Comics Presents #5** (Nature Boy), **Adventures of Spencer Spook #10**, **Fantastic Adventures #4**, and (what concerns us here) **The Crypt of the Claw #1** by Mort Todd and Steve Ditko! An ad for the Todd-Ditko comic was published in *ACE Comics Presents #4* (shown below), but unfortunately ACE went out of business before Ditko actually drew any interior pages for the comic. On the next page, you can read Mort's original 1987 letter to ACE publisher Ron Frantz pitching this lost comic... -- Rob Imes.



FROM ACE COMICS! **THE CRYPT OF THE CLAW!**

*The **ULTIMATE**
VILLAIN is **BACK**
from the **GRAVE!***

AN ALL NEW
SUPER-HORROR TALE
WRITTEN and INKED
BY MORT TODD,
ILLUSTRATED BY STEVE
DITKO, AND BACKED UP
BY A CLASSIC TALE OF
THE **BLACK TERROR**
by MORT MESKIN and
JERRY ROBINSON!



Strange things are going on in Maine...inanimate and dead things are coming to life! Bart Hill, grandson of the original Golden Age **DAREDEVIL**, joins Tony Trent, the **FACE**, and the strangely evolved **BLACK TERROR** in a life-and-death struggle against the evil **CULT** of the **CLAW**! The cult plots nothing less than the reanimation of their dead leader, the satanic **CLAW** along with a legion of zombies! It's up to our heroes to thwart their vile plan...but how do you effectively battle the living dead? It's a Halloween happening that can't be missed!

32 PAGES OF STORY and ART • \$1.75 • SHIPPING ON OCT. 22nd

DAREDEVIL

535 Fifth Ave New York NY 10017 (212) 867-7878

Okay Ron,

Hold onto your hat, I've got a hot one for you! I don't know how eager you are to put out another title, but this would be a Halloween one-shot or limited series at most. It's called The CRYPT of the CLAW! and features the FACE, BLACK TERROR and DAREDEVIL. I know using DAREDEVIL's name is sticky, so I thought we could name him the DEVILDOG or STUNTDEVIL (By the way, Steve Ditko told me that when Stan Lee first wanted to do DAREDEVIL he wanted Steve to do it and with the same costume as Lev Gleason's DD!).

Here's the plot: TONY TRENT and a secretary are sent to a Broadcaster's convention in Maine and get lost, to Trent's relief. They check into a spooky old place and meet an old chemist named BENTON. It turns out Benton is researching an odd story about fish that still flop long after death! Trent notices a large oriental community that is attributed to Vietnamese relocation. Another person on the scene is BART HILL, secretly the 'DEVIL' who is following up on a lead that the CULT of the CLAW is operating up north. The FACE and the DEVIL battle a faction of the cult while thwarting an attempted sacrifice. The Claw was last seen in the 1950s and had evidently been obliterated by an experimental atomic blast. Hill learns of an attempt to raise the Claw from the grave through some occult scheme and Benton, secretly the TERROR, deduces that the radioactive corpse of the Claw was interred in the Maine woods. Rains had filtered through the contaminated ground into streams and the resultant radioactivity made dead things (like the fish) have the semblance of life! The Terror, Face and Devil arrive at the grave site just as the cult members start their ritual to raise the Claw. The Claw and many of his sacrificed followers erupt from the Earth and attack our trio. After an intense battle, the Terror, more alchemist than chemist, comes up with a concoction that creates an acid rain storm that eats away at the zombies, effectively ending the menace! Weird, huh? What do you think?

I'd naturally like to write it, have Steve Ditko draw it and ink it myself on duo-shade paper to give it the effect of the enclosed illo. Finally. I'd like to have Dan Clowes letter it.

I also have some concrete ideas on developing the main characters a bit.

The FACE will be the same as usual. Though he's on a trip, he instinctively brought his mask, but didn't bring any weapons. His clothes might be more functional because of the location and I was thinking he might arm himself with a sawed-off shotgun.

The DEVILDOG (or whatever) is the grandson of the DAREDEVIL, though it's only obliquely referred to. He carries on his family legacy of battling the Claw. His costume is slightly altered by the addition of spiked wrist and ankelets similar to his belt. His boomerang has a razored edge.

The TERROR is the most extremely modified. Benton is the same chemist who was the BLACK TERROR in the 40s. He's fairly fit, elderly with white hair that has a black streak. He has transcended over the years from a chemist to more of an alchemist. He can bend the elements to his will. When he transforms into the TERROR his eyes sink in mask-like, his hair turns black with a white streak, his skin gets tauter and he's younger, though ageless looking.

I think it'd be a great superhero team horror comic for a Halloween one-shot or mini-series. We could do it in 18-20 pages and fill up the rest of the mag with FACE, DAREDEVIL or TERROR reprints. I've told you that I have a run of EXCITING COMICS with the TERROR from 1941-45 and some ROBINSON/MESKIN ones. You could do the same with a mini-series. We could also get a cover from John Severin for a couple hundred if you're interested. Then, place a few strategic ads and pow!

CRYPT of the CLAW #1 sounds like a hot seller to me, but if you're still hesitant, it could be worked into the FACE series. What do you think? I'll give you a call in a couple of days. Take care!

Best Regards,

WD-F
Michael

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This issue of DITKOMANIA isn't the first time that ACE Comics publisher Ron Frantz has appeared in the pages of this fanzine. Way back in DM #19 (Autumn 1986), a letter by Ron appeared, along with sample pages of the first issue of *The Face* comic. This was sent in response to DM's then-publisher Bill Hall's request for information about this new Ditko comic. Ron got reacquainted with the zine in 1999, shortly before its demise later that year, when a letter of his appeared in DM #62 (June 1999), along with a front cover by Dick Ayers depicting Gabe Jones (of *The Howling Commandoes*) with *The Face* [shown at right]. Those two letters are reprinted on the next two pages.

— Rob Imes



ACE COMICS
Ron Frantz, Editor
P.O. Box 354
Bethany, Okla. 73008

October 5, 1986

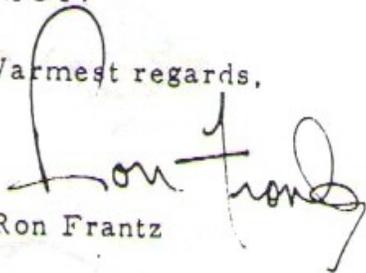
Dear Bill:

Thank you for the sample copy of "Ditko Mania" and your interest in the **FACE**! I'm sorry to be so long in getting back to you. I have enclosed for your possible interest, exerox copies of the first seven pages of the initial **FACE** episode by Ditko/McLaughlin/Gill. You may reprint with my permission any of this material in your next issue of Ditko Mania if you wish, but please make the necessary notation that the **FACE** is TM and (c) 1986 by Animated Comics Enterprises Inc.

The first issue is now slated to ship in early November, and issue #2 will ship in late January. Issues 2 and 3 will continue the story-line begun in issue #1 (The Ransomed City), and is in essence a three-part story. The same creative team should continue for the first three issues.

Thanks again for your interest. ENJOY!

Warmest regards,


Ron Frantz

FACE FACTS

Hello Bill...I think it is really neat that Dick Ayers chose The FACE for your cover to Ditkomania. I would imagine this came from some recent correspondence between Dick and myself.

Back in 1986-87 when I was publishing my line of ACE Comics, I had quite a time finding a suitable inker for Ditko. I had looked high and low for several people. At the top of my list was Dick Ayers. At the time, it was as if he had vanished from the face of the Earth. It seemed as if no one in the comics business had any idea where Dick had gone.

When Dick and I started chatting on email a few months ago, I told him the story and sent him a complete set of the ACE Comics I had published. Dick seemed to really enjoy most of the comics and expressed disappointment that he had not been around to ink Ditko. He had inked Ditko stories for Marvel in the early 60s and would have enjoyed doing it again. At the time, Dick had taken a sabbatical from comics. For several years, he spent time with friends and family, getting a much deserved rest.

I would guess, the cover was Dick's way of saying "thanks for remembering me."

Dick is as warm, friendly, and gracious as a man can be. Just one hell of a nice guy. And Dick knows that I am a BIG fan of his old Sgt. Fury stories.

Incidentally, I would LOVE to see that cover!

Warmest regards,

.....Ron Frantz

Thanks for the info Ron and I hope that you like the cover. Thanks also for providing nearly half of the interior pages and the only Ditko cover for 1987:

1987

DAREDEVIL BATTLES THE CLAW [Ace]

1 May Cover

RETURN OF SKYMAN [Ace]

1 Sep "Return Of Skyman" [18 pages] {Ditko pencils, Rick Altergott inks}

WHAT IS... THE FACE? [Ace]

2 May "The Death Factory" [18 pages] {Ditko pencils, Frank McLaughlin inks}

3 Aug "A Man Possessed" [18 pages] {Ditko pencils, Rick Altergott inks}

ACE COMICS PRESENTS

DAREDEVIL

BATTLES

THE CLAW





Shown here is the process by which the cover of **ACE COMICS PRESENTS #1** (May 1987) came to be. Ditko penciled and inked the cover, and then overlays for the price tag and issue number were placed atop the artwork. Finally, the art was colored (next page).

ACE COMICS PRESENTS

DAREDEVIL

BATTLES

THE CLAW

1

\$1.75
\$2.25
(Canada)





New UFO member **DAVID BRANSTETTER** (of *Straw Man* comics fame) drew this illo of DAREDEVIL and THE CLAW on his website. You can check out more of his work at www.strawmancomics.com and www.dimlightgraphics.com

Here's another "Daredevil Battles the Claw" image – this time it's the cover of **SAVAGE DRAGON #188**, due out on May 29th from Image Comics. The cover is by Erik Larsen. You can find out more about this issue at <http://dragonfan.net/http://dragonfan.net/>



LETTERS

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

Hi Rob,

Received *DitkoMania* #89 last week, thanks for sending it along. There was the usual interesting mix of material this issue.

It may be that three separate reviews of Craig Yoe's **The Creativity of Ditko** may have been too much; more than a trace of overkill here. However I found the mix of Martin Hirschak's gosh-wow hero worship tribute, Jason Sacks' in depth analysis, and your own tight factual overview made a complete package that provided a better mix of information and oversight than a single review might have.

I do not have this volume myself, and altho the fact that new comic book material is presented along with color-remasterings of some past Charlton stories is tempting, the \$50 price tag, along with the rapidly declining availability of shelf/storage space around my house more than counterbalances my fannish enthusiasm.

A few points: I believe Craig Yoe hit the nail on the head when he comments that generally speaking there are no beautiful women or handsome men in most, perhaps all of Ditko's pre-Spidey artwork at Charlton. I also echo Jason Sacks' comments that the panels and the personalities are artistically crafted to create a sense of claustrophobic worry. These are people who have either been hemmed in or have been hit suddenly by the woes of the world. Sometimes these problems are self inflicted due to their own selfish personality flaws, or sometimes they are in a morass of trouble thru no fault of their own, but the lines on those faces, the scowls, the wrinkles around the eyes, are there because those people are in the midst of dealing with genuine problems. In addition, they are about to be shoved into the realm of the supernatural, certainly not the most comforting thing to have happen when the world is already beginning to dramatically interfere with (or even to crush) your life. Yes, there are some people who might possibly be pretty or handsome, were it not for the mess they are currently in. I think Ditko matches his art to the characters in those stories very well, and that is why the readers do not generally perceive them as being attractive, or even notice when some of them smile occasionally.

I question that there is much different between the individuals in high school class pictures from 1944 and today. The clothes and hair styles might be different, but I don't think the basic personalities and attitudes of HS students about to launch themselves into the outside world differs much over the long decades. Of course in 1944 there was a major war still going on,

whereas in 2012 there is still a major Depression going on, but young people tend to take an optimistic outlook to life at that age, and I don't think Ditko's class was much different.

I also wonder why you would question Yoe's assessment that a particular face was the young Steve Ditko. Certainly after putting all the work and effort into producing the second volume of his Ditko homage, he would have done his best to make sure the face in the photo(s) he ran would be correct.

I also echo your concern about the mess the Charlton Comics copyrights are in. It may have been that some of those 1970s-80s comics were never copyrighted to begin with. Some rights were presumed to have reverted to the original creators, but not all. On the other hand Charlton has been out of the comic book biz for years and apparently has no desire to revisit that part of its past, so who really cares? If a Charlton comic story were optioned for a motion picture the situation might become more complex, but I don't envision that happening. Meanwhile fan-boy projects like this one have been reprinting those stories with no legal difficulties (that I am aware of anyway) for a long time, so it apparently doesn't really matter.

The Amber Stanton article appears to be mostly wishful thinking by a doting daughter. Maybe her dad did contribute something to the development of Spidey, but it appears unlikely that his influence was very strong, if he truly was involved during those early days. In interviews Stanton himself says Spidey was all a Ditko art effort. Stanton could have become a comic book artist in his own right if he wanted, but generally he was not interested in mainstream comics, he was interested in female bondage and fetish material, so I think it is safe to conclude that the Amazing Spider-Man was a creation that developed because of Stan Lee/Steve Ditko/Martin Goodman and the changing tide of comic book sales that made costumed super heroes more appealing to the buying public than short SF/supernatural mystery tales. I also believe we cannot underestimate the fact that Archie's Fly comic character had an alter ego and physical appearance that influenced the way editor Stan Lee was willing to formulate Spidey.

The overview on the Ditko/O'Neil story at Charlton really evokes no additional comment. Likewise the article on the *Amazing Fantasy* back story. I believe the information Will Murray unearthed concerning comic story production numbers and the conclusions Caputo provides are basically correct.

I remember buying *Amazing Fantasy* #15 off the stands when it came out. Word spread among my group of comic buying friends (admittedly a small group at my high school --- most guys were a lot more interested in girls than comics) that this was something unusual, and the copies at the three or four stores I regularly checked for new comics sold thru in about two weeks. I presume they sold thru, but you could never be sure because the women who opened the twice weekly bundles of magazine orders might have just pulled the issues to make room for the new titles when they came out. I tend to favor the sell-thru idea tho, because that's what I want to believe.

From the letter column I echo Larry Johnson's observation that many of Ditko's more voluptuous women resemble Marilyn Monroe or Jane Russell. Most artists keep a personalities/facial profiles file of characters they can use in their comic book stories, and I'm sure Ditko did the same. However it may be that in using the easy reference to two very well known movie stars of the period he was creating a sort of artistic short hand so that readers seeing faces and shapes they recognized, would automatically subconsciously decide that the characters in the comic stories were going to be similar to the movie role types those women were most identified with. It's something to consider anyway.

BOB JENNINGS
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(The reason I question whether all of the yearbook pics in the Yoe book are indeed of Ditko is based on what Blake Bell said in DM #66: "I've seen others pass off photos from the JHS yearbooks of 1944 and 1945 -- where you see someone who people are suggesting may be Ditko -- but I didn't go with those," i.e., print them in his 2008 biography of Ditko, because it couldn't be confirmed that those pics were of Ditko. If it was confirmed, then how? If not confirmed, why not let the reader know that it's not definitely him? -- R. I.)

Dear Rob,

As always, I find each issue of *Ditkomania* entertaining and educational. Your latest issue was equally so. However, I thought I needed to note a couple of corrections in regard to Jason Sacks' very flattering review of *The Creativity of Ditko*. In my essay, I did mention a number of collaborations I produced with Steve. One of them was "Tommy Todd's **Dream** Squad," not "Timmy Todd's Death Squad" as Sacks states. I don't know, maybe Sacks' title might be more appealing to today's audience...

Secondly, the title *Daughters of Time* did indeed see print. It was published in 3D by Ray Zone. Ditko did the cover which was inked by Kurt Schaffenberger, the only time these two artistic giants ever teamed up. The interior of the book was penciled by Kurt, the last full-length comic he ever drew. Unfortunately, because of some kind of deadline problems, the book was horribly inked, so much so that Kurt didn't even want his originals back (I still have them, along with the Ditko/Schaffenberger cover, which Steve gave to me as a gift).

Thanks for continued enjoyable reading.

JACK C. HARRIS

Dear Rob,

I loved the front cover on the latest *Ditkomania*! I've enjoyed all of Martin Hirschak's contributions to DM over the past few years, and this just might be the finest piece to come your way from his drawing board yet (although I'd have to check through my back issues of your zine to be absolutely sure). At first glance I thought this truly was a Ditko illustration. Nice work on all levels. And the solid blacks of the printing really make the contrasts pop.

I also really liked the "Ditko Considered" center spread. Javier Hernandez did a great job of distilling the essence of Ditko's career; reducing six decades into two concise pages and making it look effortless. There's a lot of information crammed into those pages, yet they're not at all confusing or cluttered. The whole strip works really well, though the second panel is my favorite; a wonderful visual summation of Ditko's involvement with Spider-Man. The cleverly designed long, horizontal Dr. Strange panel is very nice, too.

It was a pleasant surprise to come across a full page of 1960's vintage Jack Kirby art in these pages. This may be blasphemous to say to the editor and readership of *Ditkomania*, but as much as I like Steve Ditko's Marvel Comics work, Kirby was always my favorite. His efforts with Stan Lee on the Fantastic Four are what turned me into a life long comic book fan.

I'm reasonably certain that I am not the only fan who hopes that Kirby's rejected prototypical Spider-Man pages are still extant and will resurface one day. What a fascinating treat that would be! And as long as I'm fantasizing, I'd like to imagine that Ditko did actually ink that story before Stan rejected it. Seeing Ditko's finishes over Kirby's pencils in *FF* #12 always makes me wish that these two giants had worked together more often.

It was an interesting choice to have Ditko's unused cover art for *Amazing Fantasy* #15 accompany Nick Caputo's article. It's a great image that deserves to be seen and remembered, and your longtime readers will certainly understand the history behind it, but its presence here without any explanation could be confusing to newer readers not in the know. Maybe a caption would have been a good idea. Of course, confusion isn't necessarily a bad thing; it can lead us to doing some research and uncovering the truth for ourselves.

Glad to see the multiple reviews of *The Creativity of Ditko* by you, Jason and Martin. It's always good to get a variety of opinions, even when those opinions are pretty much in accord with one another. If you're all in agreement then it's probably true; this is a good book that is well worth owning. Your carefully compiled checklist of the providence of the stories contained in this volume will also be of great help for those trying to make that decision.

Another fun issue, Rob. Thanks!

MIKE TUZ
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Thanks for the copy of *Ditkomania* #89. It was fun to be part of the really unique roundtable about *The Creativity of Ditko*. I really enjoyed how all of us brought our own viewpoints to the book, with our own writing styles, approaches and attitudes. I hope the readers found it interesting to compare our different takes on Craig's new book. I know I loved reading the almost completely different approach that we all took to the work.

Nick's piece on *Amazing Fantasy* #15 brings a whole bunch of interesting ideas together to present a really interesting theory of what really happened behind the scenes of the creation of the comic. I remember that Will Murray article from *Comic Book Marketplace* that Nick cites and I remember thinking about how logical Murray's explanation was of the comic and its genesis. Nick did a really nice job of bringing his disparate thoughts together and creating a really nice integrated theory about one of the most important comics in history.

Bryan Stroud's article about "Forgotten Ditko Tales" was interesting, but it really just made me angry. As I mentioned in my review [DM #87] of the *Ditko Omnibus*, I was really frustrated that DC didn't reprint all of Ditko's '70s stories in that nice hardcover series, and Bryan's article really made me wish that I had the chance to read "Gnark" in that book. I mean, come on, that's a Ditko/Wood collaboration and those are pure magic! Similarly, Ceylon's piece about Ditko's '60s Warren work with Denny O'Neil makes me wish the Fantagraphics Ditko series was already up to that decade already. I guess that will happen soon enough.

Add a great cover by Martin (is it just me or is the screaming man a dead ringer for J. Jonah Jameson?) and a great piece by Javier, and this was yet another solid issue, Rob!

JASON SACKS
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(Thanks, Jason! Readers, I hope that you have enjoyed this special digital edition of *DITKOMANIA* #90! If you have any comments or suggestions, you can email me at robimes@yahoo.com or write to me via postal mail at: Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195. I hope to see you all here next issue! – R. Imes)



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>

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