

## **REVIEWS by Rob Imes**

### **BEYOND HUMAN #3** (published by Hal Jones):

This was a highly enjoyable issue. The amount of detail that Hal puts into his artwork is impressive, his storytelling sense is natural, and his characters have personalities that live and breathe. For some reason, this comic reminds me of one of the old 1970s Atlas-Seaboard titles. I remember reading the first issue of Tiger-Man as a kid and being disturbed by its realistic take on a superhero (for example, a scene where a guy in a bar sees our hero and laughs at his wearing of a costume). In the same way, Hal has taken the idea of a hulking hero, a misunderstood "monster," and made it plausible and real. The use of profanity is normally not to my liking, but in this case it emphasized and made palpable the horrors of bullying -- that is how bullies really talk when they are kicking your face in. It's too bad that the series is not in the full-size comic format any longer, but the digest size didn't detract from my enjoyment when the work is as good as this. Well done, Hal!

### **HERO CENTRAL UNIVERSE #6** (published by Jason Bullock):

I had found the last few issues of this series a bit confusing, and I expected to feel the same way this time as a new hero was introduced to the already crowded cast, but I was pleasantly surprised by this issue. Jade Scarab is sort of an Egyptian version of Iron Man whose adventure takes up the first 11 pages of the comic, and which is like a self-contained story in itself. There is a beginning, middle, and end, and all of the characters seemed to be alive on the page. After reading it, I wanted to read more of his adventures, as long as they were as enjoyable as this one. The last 7 pages were about Michael Faraday and Flora Ironwood and seems to be setting up a subplot for a future issue. I'd enjoyed their initial appearance a few issues ago, but they didn't seem like their previous selves to me, not as memorable and likable as before -- not sure why that is. Still, overall this was an enjoyable issue. Nicely-done cover as well, both drawing and design-wise. Well done, Jason!

### **HERO CENTRAL, JR. #1** (published by Jason Bullock):

The fact that this is an all-color series really helps to make Jason's art pop, making it look more like the kind of art you'd see in a pro comic. I thought Kineto's costume was cool, although a bit too much like a member of Alpha Flight. He had the most memorable personality of the cast, but it might have been better to have given him some thought balloons to contrast with his flippant-sounding talk. Readers might tire of him if they come to view him as simply a smart-aleck all the time. It would add more depth to his characterization if it turned out that his attitude was just his way of covering up some private insecurities. The comic ended just as it was getting good, though -- too short (only 9 pages of story)! If you can keep this going, it may turn out in the long run to be the best series you've done yet!

### **PAPER & INK #3** (published by Steve Shipley):

This was my favorite issue of *P&I* yet. In the past, I'd been critical of this zine for failing to live up to its potential, as I saw it. But this issue had it all, despite its 12 pages: a classy color cover, an opinionated editorial, an interview with writer/artist Larry Johnson, and reviews of several indie comics, some of which I'd never heard of before. Based on the info presented here, I'm going to order a copy of *AlphaOmega*. I also liked how Steve seemed more willing to write a critical review than I'd seen in *P&I* before -- for example, giving Jason Bullock's *Hero Central, Jr.* a low rating (I liked the comic more than Steve did) and criticizing the moral content (or lack of it) of a comic called *Revelations* (which I've not read, and don't really want to, after reading Steve's review). Some people might not appreciate tough reviews, but I like it when a reviewer says what they honestly think, without worrying that they might tick off a friend. When a person puts their work out for the public to see, they ought to expect a reaction. If all of the reviews are going to be more hype than substance, that doesn't do anyone any good. So, *P&I* is serving a useful purpose. As long as we keep getting honest opinion in its pages, I'll remain a happy reader.

### **SLAM BANG #47** (published by Dan Burke):

Production-wise, this is one of the most impressive UFO zines ever! The color really jumps out at the reader. All of the contributions were at least interesting, although they were a bit all over the map. My favorite visual gag was in the first strip when the reader is led to believe (due to obscured lettering) that *Slam Bang's* HQ occupies a large building, when in fact it resides in a smaller space at a side entrance. Dan's stuff tends to be silly and satirical, while Simon Mackie's was sincere and personal. (I thought Simon's story ended too abruptly at the end, though -- I wanted to find out what happened next.) "Funeral" by Carrie & Hartman was, I felt, manipulative of the reader in the worst way: they show a young girl crying at the death of a pet, but then the twist is that this girl is a sicko who gets her kicks cruelly killing animals. Well, if that is the case, why is she crying in one panel and then giving us an evil grin (and no sign of tears) in the last panel? It seemed constructed merely to shock the reader, to give them a jolt, but not deal with murder and its consequences seriously. (Of course, neither did Dan's "Sisters of Death" story, but that was obviously a twisted comedy, and a technicolor, psychedelic trip in the process.) It was interesting to see a Larry Johnson story in color, but for some reason I thought the colors gave the story an unreal, fake fairy-tale flavor, like paper dolls in a coloring book instead of real people. Dan's article on artistic peaks was interesting, but the occasional missing word, and consistent misspelling of Ditko's name, was a drawback to this otherwise worthwhile piece. I get a sense of a lack of seriousness in Dan's work. I think if he had stronger editorial content on the writing side, it would give *Slam Bang* more depth, something to make the critics sit up and take notice. The talent and content is there right now to accomplish that; I think it just needs to be channeled with a more intelligent approach. But then what do I know? This really is a great mag that I enjoyed reading. Thanks, Dan!

### **UNREAL #0** (published by Jim Main):

I got the PDF version of this publication in an email. At first I wasn't sure what it was, and being reluctant to open unknown files, I simply moved it to an email folder that I've labeled "UFO" (for emails concerning the UFO, natch) and promptly forgot all about it. It wasn't until later on the Facebook group when Jim mentioned the email that I remembered receiving it! Anyway, the PDF has a nice sharp, colorful look to it. I'd never read an issue of *Unreal* before, so it's hard for me to compare this to the late Rod Snyder's version.

On boring technical matters, I'd have recommended that the first page of Sam Gafford's Atomic Knights article to have had the comics images on either the left or right side of the page, not down the middle. That way Sam's text wouldn't have been so short on either side (less than 20 spaces for letters per column), making the reader's eyes continually having to drop to the next line. I also would have used bold type or italics occasionally to highlight certain important names or titles. I've not read any Atomic Knights stories, and this article makes me want to do so.

Don Ensign's "Whatever Happened to Mr. E?" was disappointing. The story's ending was meant to convey the hero's redemption, but to the non-believer, it looks like this troubled man has simply replaced one addiction for another. (And I say that as a Christian myself, not someone hostile to the message that is being conveyed.) Perhaps a better ending would have been for him to confront and defeat Kolah, rather than simply switching gods out of desperation.

"Gobble" by Earl Martin was a bizarre and unlikable story on nearly every level. There was indeed an "unreal" flavor to this, especially in the characterizations, giving me the impression of having been written by an immature teenager who thinks he's being clever.

Carl Taylor's 2-pager had nice art, but was weak in the story department. Sam Gafford's "Sunrise" had an alluringly old-fashioned quality, but ultimately left me wondering if I'd just read the last 2 pages of a novel, without knowing what went before. The film articles (by Larry Johnson and Steve Keeter) were excellent (especially Keeter's, about a horror host that I knew nothing about), but a bit out of place and "buried" among the comics. They would have been better showcased in a fanzine devoted to horror films.

As usual with Jim's anthologies, I liked this issue despite its uneven content.