

ORION

THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE OF TIME AND SPACE #4 OCTOBER 2005



THIS ISSUE:

"PLAYING SOLITAIRE" ♦ SUPERHERO FICTION BY MARK SHAINBLUM
CAPTAIN CANUCK IN "MILLENNIUM BLUES" ♦ BY MARK SHAINBLUM AND RICHARD COMELY
THE TITANS VS. THE HOSERS ♦ THE EARLY GABRIEL MORRISSETTE EXPOSED!

PLUS: A 1981 MARV WOLFMAN INTERVIEW! ♦ PICTOGRAM PLACE! ♦ MEDIAWATCH! ♦ LOTS OF EXCLAMATION MARKS!

MURPHY'S LAWYER

MARK SHAINBLUM'S LITTLE PIECE OF MIND

Hi again!

This issue of Comico ships with an extra bonus, the first issue of Orion, published back in 1981. My 18-year old earnestness is really, really painful to read, but the production values still hold up pretty well, if I do say so myself. I was originally planning to produce Orion like most fanzines of the day, typed on a Selectric typewriter, printed on a photocopier and stapled in the upper left corner. However, I had just entered Marianopolis College and joined the student newspaper, The Paper.



LINOTRONIC DAYS

This gave me access to a Linotronic phototypesetting machine, a primeval beast that set type optically, one line at a time, on a thin strip of photographic paper. I had permission to use the machine as long as I paid for the supplies, and I recall I tussling for access to it some weekends with another student who was doing pamphlets for the Jesuits.

I had just completed typesetting the Richard Comely interview when Marianopolis' student congress surprised The Paper by selling the Linotronic out from under us, no consultation, no advance notice,

nothing. (Twenty-four years later and it still pisses me off!) It disrupted production of the paper for weeks, until we were able to arrange for typesetting at Concordia, and it completely blew Orion off the rails. I had already typeset a big chunk of the magazine, and though it would have made economic sense to produce the rest of the magazine on a typewriter, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. In the end, I dropped a lot of money typesetting the rest of the magazine at a commercial studio. Even if you don't adjust for inflation, I paid about the same for my current PC and laser printer combined. In real, adjusted terms, it probably would have paid for every computer and every printer I've ever owned.

MIDDLE-AGED FANBOY ANGST

Okay, enough reminding myself of how long it's been since Orion #1 came out. I hate to admit it, but that kind of stuff has been bothering me lately. When I was in my late 20's and early 30's, I deluded myself into thinking that I didn't have to worry about going through a mid-life crisis later, because I'd already done all the angsting about getting older. I've been very conscious of the passage of time since I was 18, and working in comics makes you feel like a senior citizen by the time you hit 30. However, you know what they say, you can always tell a love scene that's been written by a virgin. Similarly, I warn you, you can never really know what it's like to hit your 40's until you actually do it. No amount of previous life experience can prepare you for that growing sense of perspective. When you're 20, and you think back 10 years, you were a child. When you're 25, and you think back 10 years, you were 15, still in high school, still probably living at home, still largely without adult responsibilities. It's only when you can think back 10 and 15 years and remember yourself as an adult, already earning a living and already with some successes and failures under your belt, that the ageing process really hits you.

CH... CH.. CHANGES!

Please note my revised phone number and mailing address below. Finally decided to give up the P.O. Box I was hardly using and two separate phone lines.

THIS ISSUE

There's a real smorgasbord of content this time out. Since I've only got a handful of copies of Orion #2 left, I can't distribute the original, so I'm reprinting my 1981 Marv Wolfman interview, which features a very special artistic debut by a very dogged illustrator we all know well. Enjoy it!



Somebody's Little Sister by Francesco Marciuliano, from www.drinkatwork.com



Orion

THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE OF TIME AND SPACE

ISSUE #4 • OCTOBER 2005 • FOUNDED 1981 • MARH SHAINBLUM, EDITOR
COVER ILLUSTRATION, "PLAYING SOLITAIRE" BY STORN COOK

Orion: The Canadian Magazine of Time and Space is published by Matrix Comics for inclusion in Comicopia and for limited external distribution. ISSN 0710-2410. All contents copyright © 2005 Mark Shainblum, except Northguard and Angloman, copyright © 2005 by Mark Shainblum and Gabriel Morrissette, and Captain Canuck, copyright © 2005 Richard Comely. Cover illustration copyright © 2001 Storn Cook. Used with permission. Stella! STELL... I mean... **ANDREA!!** All rights reserved. **Printed in Canada.**



Matrix Comics • 5735 Eldridge Avenue • Cote Saint-Luc • Quebec • Canada H4W 2E1
Tel.: (514) 369-9090 • mark@matrixcomics.com • www.matrixcomics.com and www.northguard.com/mbs.

CAPTAIN CANUCK

"Millennium Blues"

By Mark Shainblum and Richard Comely
with Sandy Carruthers

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

In 1993, Richard Comely revived his classic 1970's superhero *Captain Canuck* in a limited series called *Captain Canuck Reborn*, published under the Semple Comics imprint.

Unfortunately, the great artist George Freeman – who broke into comics during *Captain Canuck's* first incarnation – wasn't available to illustrate the new series, and Richard further handicapped himself by ditching the earlier series continuity. He replaced Tom Evans, agent of the futuristic Canadian International Security Organization (CISO) with Darren Oak, estranged brother of Nathan Oak, a high muckety-muck in your typical Eye-in-the-Pyramid, Illuminati and Freemasons global conspiracy. *Captain Canuck* went from being a cool super-agent with a laser gun to a street corner orator with a megaphone.

The new series, to be diplomatic, was less than a stellar success, and Richard wound down the comic book version after four issues. He is nothing if not dedicated, however, and he cut the existing issues up into a daily comic strip, which he syndicated to a few small-market newspapers, including the Guelph (Ontario) *Mercury*, among others. In 1996, after using up all the existing comic book material and working with a couple of other freelance writers,

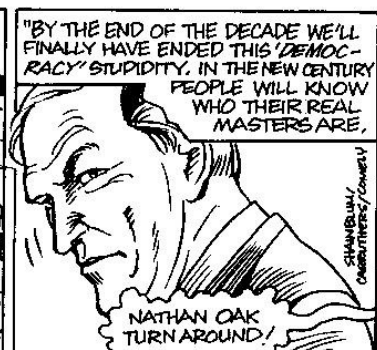
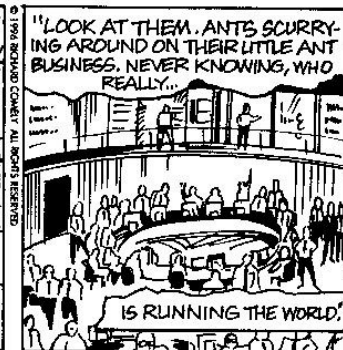
Richard asked me if I'd be interested in writing the series. How could I say no? It may not have been the *Captain Canuck* I knew, but it was still *Captain Canuck*.

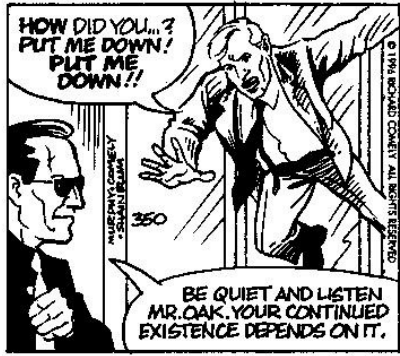
I have mixed emotions about my work on this series. For one, I wasn't entirely comfortable with the whole conspiracy

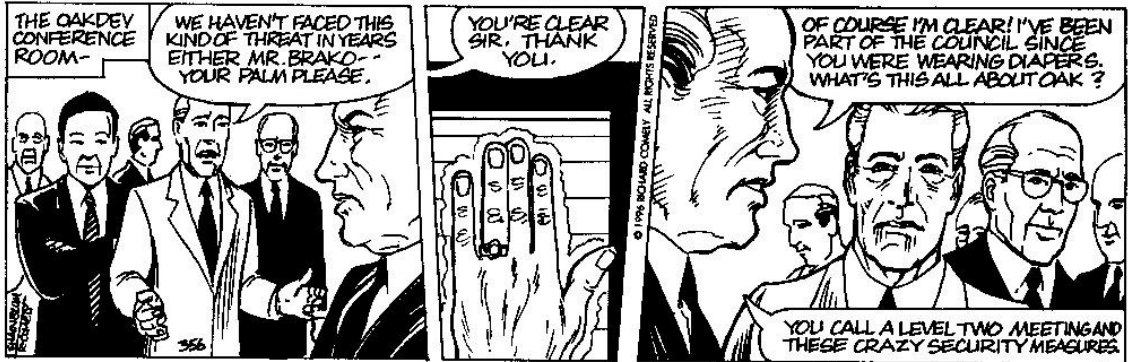
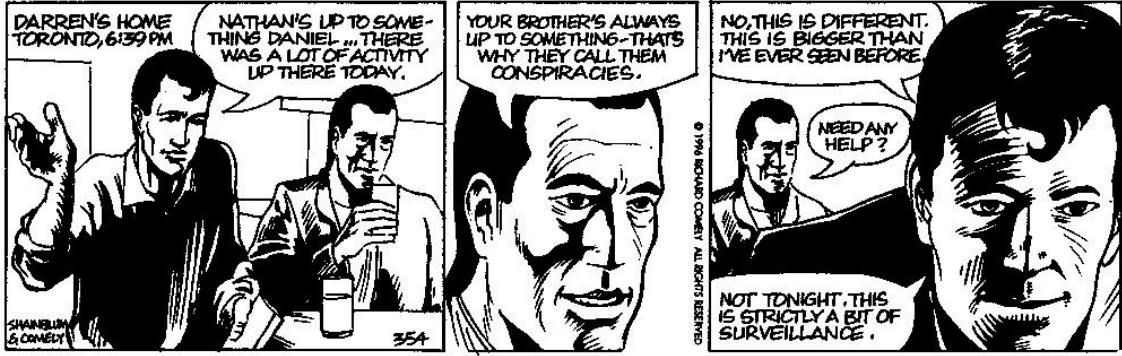


theory subtext. For two, as Gaby can confirm, I am not always the most timely writer in the world, and when my scripts were late, Richard would dash off fill-ins with dramatic plot twists that I hadn't planned for.

More on this next issue! With no further ado, on with the story!







Captain Canuck: "Millennium Blues" continues in the next issue of Orion!

MEDIAWATCII

REVIEWS AND OVERVIEWS OF THIS AND THAT

Comics

I have a confession to make. Sometime in the mid-90's, when the Image Comics blight was at its height, I just gave up on mainstream comics. They had become too expensive, too thoughtlessly violent, and (most damning in my view), just way too stupid. The field was colonized by a bunch of rock star illustrators who couldn't write and so decided that writing was superfluous. They treated it like a production afterthought on a par with logo design or lettering, certainly nowhere near as important as the eye-blowing computerized colour that became Image's trademark.

A quick anecdote, to drive the point home: An early Image Comics creator hired a friend of mine to take over writing his incredibly successful series about a Hulk-like creature from another dimension. Remember, this was a hit ongoing series selling hundreds of thousands of copies (at least at the outset), and the creator had already written and illustrated something like a half-dozen issues to this point. Here's an outtake from their first creative meeting:

FRIEND: So, what kind of society does (Character) come from in his home dimension?

CREATOR: I don't know.

FRIEND: Okay, well, what's his job or his social role there?

CREATOR: I don't know.

FRIEND: What's his real name?

CREATOR: I don't know.

FRIEND: What does he eat?

CREATOR: I don't know.

FRIEND: What's the difference between your ass and your elbow?

CREATOR: I don't know.

(Liberally paraphrasing, as you might imagine.)

This guy wrote and drew upwards of six issues of a comic book without knowing his main character's *name*? Without knowing if he was married or single or reproduced by budding? Without knowing what *he ate to stay alive*, for God's sake?

Now don't get me wrong, Image was not an unmixed blessing. From a creators' rights standpoint, it represented a huge victory over Marvel and DC, and Image's innovative co-op structure eventually provided a launching pad for *Astro City*, *Powers* and the whole Alan Moore/America's Best resurgence. That was later, though. Initially, the Image approach was an unmitigated disaster for comic book writers and the art of comic book storytelling in general. Eventually, that chased away readers like me, and eventually, comic book sales tanked.

It seems that publishers have finally learned their lesson, at least for this turn of the great comic book wheel. Writing has made a big comeback, and I've been spending the last few months catching up on some of the stuff I missed over the last couple of years.



GREEN ARROW: QUIVER

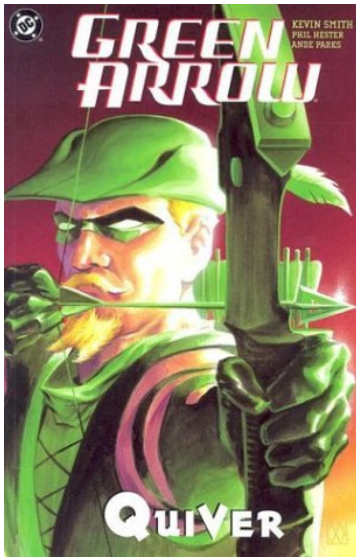
Written by Kevin Smith, Illustrated by Phil Hester and Anse Parks

Trade Paperback, DC Comics, 2003

This is not a 90's Image Comic. Kevin Smith definitely writes better than any of those guys. Hell, he'd write better than that crew if you hit him in the head with a sock full of Duracells.

That said, his writing still annoys me, on film or in comics or anywhere. He's witty and intelligent and has introduced the comic book style to a mainstream audience, but he's frankly just not that good a writer. His plots meander all over the place, and all his characters talk in the same voice -- a verbose, totally unnatural ironospeak that really gets on my nerves.

Worse, finally let loose in the DC Universe, Smith just can't resist playing with every toy in the toy chest. Batman, Superman and the (Hal



Jordan) Spectre take up almost as much airtime as Oliver Queen himself. Virtually every DC hero from Aquaman to Zatanna pops in for at least a cameo, and important plot points hinge on continuity

bits mined from Swamp Thing, Sandman and even Stanley and His Monster, an obscure 60's DC humour comic by Arnold Drake and Mort Winslow. Some of it is fun, fanboy-buzz kind of stuff, but most of it is downright disturbing (especially the creepy-crawly, cannibalism-and-demon-worship reinterpretation of Stanley and His Monster. It was far better off as a fondly remembered dead series.) Smith blithely assumes that his readers will be able to follow him through this endless litany of DC continuity jumpcuts, a dubious idea at best. A newcomer to comics, or even to DC Comics, would be completely lost within the first five pages. I could hardly follow it in some places, and I've been mainlining this stuff since I was seven.

Smith does some good things in *Quiver*, to be sure. He undoes Oliver Queen's poorly thought-out demise (although literally bringing him back to Earth from heaven opens all sorts of cosmological doors that probably should have been left closed) and strips him back to his arch-liberal-with-boxing-glove-arrows essence.

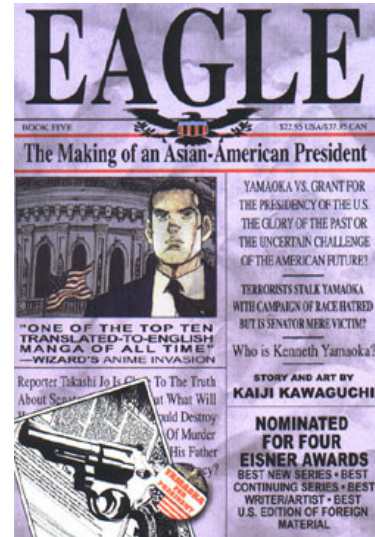
Mike Grell did a terrible disservice to Green Arrow years ago, starting with the execrable *Longbow Hunters* series. In his haste to make the character more "gritty" and less "gimmicky," Grell never stopped to ask why a man who could make non-lethal gimmick arrows would suddenly switch to killing and maiming instead. At the very least, Smith addresses those questions and does his best to answer them.



EAGLE: THE MAKING OF AN ASIAN-AMERICAN PRESIDENT

Written and Illustrated by Kaiji Kawaguchi
Trade paperback series, Viz Comics, 2000-02

Eagle is a great series, a fascinating plunge into the strange world of American presidential politics, seen through the eyes of a young Japanese journalist who may or may not be the illegitimate son of the first Japanese-American



contender for the presidency. To say much more would be to spoil it, but I highly recommend this series. It's so great, in fact, that it's been helping me push much deeper into the manga

world. I've had to rewire my brain and accept manga on its own terms. The Japanese simply have a different approach to writing and storytelling, a more staccato rhythm that in some ways reflects a more staccato language and a vastly different set of cultural assumptions.

Eagle should also be required reading for any mainstream North American publisher considering a leap into graphic novels. The Japanese experience proves that there's a huge

potential audience for exciting, mass-market fiction told in comic book form. DC and Marvel (and the DC and Marvel wannabes) have proven themselves incapable of doing anything beyond superheroes, while the independent and alternative press often exist solely in opposition to DC and Marvel, skewing towards artsy experimentation or "how I learned to masturbate" autobiography. Worthy work, to be sure, but often inaccessible to a mass audience. *Eagle* is the manga answer to *The West Wing*, with the huge potential readership that entails.



ROAD TO PERDITION

Max Allan Collins and Richard Piers Rayner
Graphic Novel, Simon & Schuster, 2002
(Reprint of DC Comics/Paradox Press edition)



Road to Perdition was born as part of DC's brief attempt to attract the kind of mainstream (i.e. non-superhero) readership that Japanese publishers take for granted. Written by

Max Alan Collins, one of the few successful mainstream novelists who also writes comics, *Road to Perdition* is straight-up, Prohibition-era gangster story in the tradition of *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Untouchables*.

Collins isn't a great writer, but he's a very good mystery and crime fiction writer, and *Road to Perdition* is a good read. The black and white line art, by British illustrator Richard Piers Rayner, is very slick and moody, although sometimes (like other artists who rely heavily on photo reference) Rayner's emotional tone can be a little flat. Even in the middle of gun battles and bank robberies, we sometimes seem

oddly distant from the emotional action. All in, though, well worth the read.

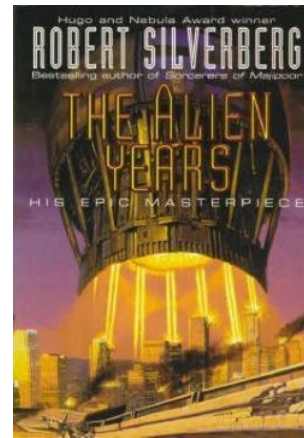
Interesting how a "fringe" property like *Road to Perdition* became a major Tom Hanks movie starring Tom Hanks when it was a near-flop as a graphic novel series.

Books

THE ALIEN YEARS

by Robert Silverberg
Novel, HarperPrism, 1998

At his best, Robert Silverberg is a brilliant science fiction writer, one of the first American authors in the field who tried to integrate hard science fiction with a more literary (some might say "mainstream") writing style.



Unfortunately, at least in my view, Silverberg often has difficulty establishing a balance between the contradictory demands of two vastly different genres. The *Alien Years* feels like a book at war with itself, on the one hand it's an SF adventure chock-

full of genre clichés (invading aliens, a group of mavericks who form the core of the resistance), and on the other hand it's a generational potboiler like *Roots* or *Rich Man, Poor Man*, all about family, identity and (pardon the pun) alienation. There's nothing to say that you can't combine these things successfully in a single book, but *Alien Years* isn't it. Moreover, to use a comic book reference, I think Silverberg falls into the Miracleman trap. Just as Miracleman was the answer to the question "What would superheroes really be like?" Silverberg's whole novel seems posited around the notion that invading aliens would be so alien that we couldn't possibly understand them at all. It may be true, but it doesn't make for great fiction. (WARNING! SPOILER ALERT!) After more than

300 pages of sound and fury, we never learn anything about the aliens, virtually all the human resistance to them turns out to be futile, and they eventually just pack up and leave without anyone finding out why they showed up in the first place. It's almost as if Silverberg spent a year in a Canadian Literature class.

Web

ORIGINAL

www.orsinal.com

Online games by Ferry Halim

As a general rule, I hate computer games, desktop, online or otherwise. Escapist pastimes are supposed to be relaxing, so I don't understand the appeal of something that turns you into a twitching mass of over stimulated nerve-endings.

Original is different. Site creator Ferry Halim is an artist, and most of his online games (almost 60 in all) are beautiful little visits to a fantasy-



land. There are a few traditional shoot 'em ups, to be sure, but the vast majority of Halim's

put more emphasis on a dream-like, fantasy element. In Pocketful of Stars, you're a dreaming child on an ice lake, capturing stars from the sky. In Bubble Bees, my personal favourite, you're capturing flying bees in soap bubbles, accompanied by a lulling soundtrack. It may not be macho, but it's worth a month of Prozac when you're stressed out!



INFINITY PLUS

www.infinityplus.co.uk

Science fiction, fantasy and horror showcase
Editor and Publisher, Keith Brooke

Infinity Plus dates back to 1997, the era of single-celled organisms in Internet terms. It's an amazing archive of SF, fantasy and horror by

over 60 writers, all personal favourites of site creator Keith Brooke.



MARS RAVELO'S DARNA

www.igma.tv/show.php?showid=105

Filipino TV series website



Darna, created in 1947 by the legendary comic artist Mars Ravelo, is the Philippines' answer to Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel. Darna is a bikini-clad mystical warrior who shares a body, Billy Batson-fashion, with a young girl named Narda. Immensely popular in her native country, this hit new series on GMA Television is only the latest in a series of Darna movies and TV series that stretch back over 50 years.



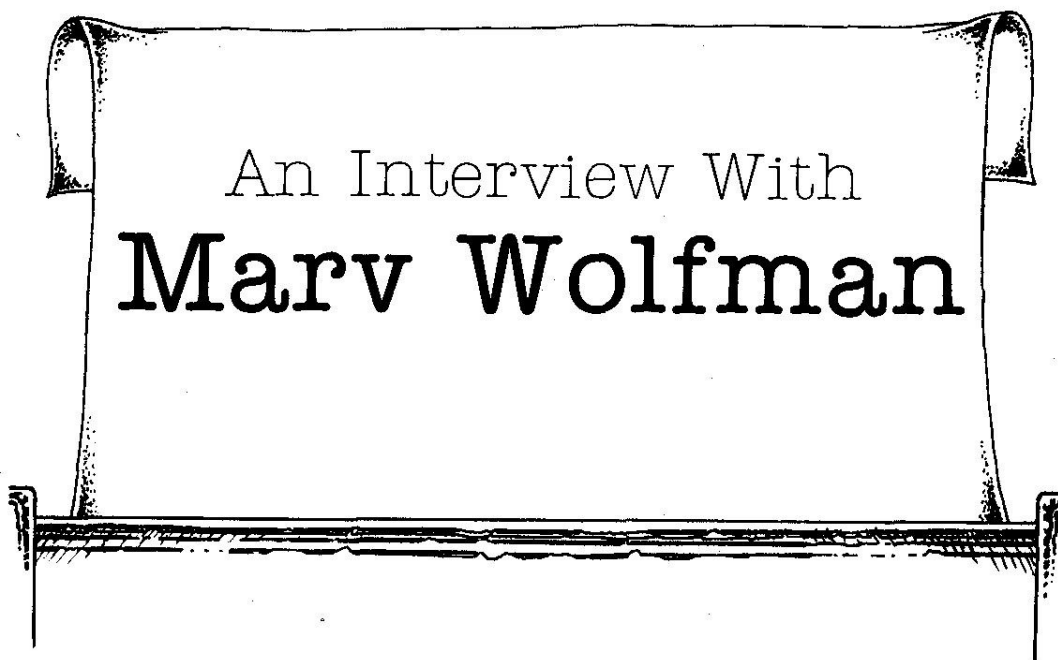
You just *have* to see some of the episode clips. Imagine those old Filmation Shazam and Isis Saturday morning shows as produced by a soft-core porn director. Especially the scenes where

Darna fights her evil, black-bikini'd twin, Black Darna.



Embarrassing Myself and Gaby: Part One

Below, you'll find a 1981 interview I conducted with comic book writer Marv Wolfman, published in *Orion* #2. In the middle of the piece, you'll find some of Gabriel's earliest published comic art. We were young. Forgive us.



Marv Wolfman is well-known as one of the premier creators in the comics field. One of the first of the so-called "new-generation" of writers (that is, someone who grew up reading comics and gravitated to the field voluntarily), Wolfman entered the field in the mid-1960's with friend Len Wein, and had to contend with the hostility and intransigence of a field which had not changed in twenty-five years. At DC Comics, Wolfman wrote mystery stories, love stories, *Blackhawk*, *The (original) Teen Titans*, and, as Wolfman put it: "... just about anything I could sell." In 1971, after the great shakeup at DC which saw a huge contraction of their line, Wolfman moved briefly to Warren magazines, and then to Marvel Comics. During his nine year tenure at Marvel, Wolfman wrote virtually every character the company published, including *Spider-Man*, *The Fantastic Four*, and his highly acclaimed run on *Tomb of Dracula* with artist Gene Colan. In 1979, after a much publicized dispute with Marvel management, Wolfman returned to the newly revitalized DC line, and within a year had created the most popular DC title in recent memory: *The New Teen Titans*. Wolfman also contributed to the revitalization of *Green Lantern*, and in-

roduced another superhero team within that book: *The Omega Men*, scheduled to jump to their own title in 1983. Wolfman is also currently writing and editing *The Night Force* (alternately publicized as *The Dark Force*, and *The Challengers*, an experimental book attempting to resurrect the non-superhero horror comics form.

This interview was conducted in November of 1981, at *Dreamcon I* in the *Queen Elizabeth Hotel*, Montreal. It was conducted and transcribed by Mark Shainblum, and approved by Marv Wolfman.

ORION: You are well known as one of the early fans of comics. Could you tell us something about the early days of comics fandom?

WOLFMAN: I got into fandom one year after it began, because I received *The Comic Reader* No. 13 in the mail, and it

was a monthly book. I started publishing fanzines...

ORION: Such as?

WOLFMAN: I published about four or five of them that ran a number of issues. One was called *Super Adventures*, it ran I think, ten or eleven issues. Then there was *Stories of Suspense* which was a horror fanzine, and a fairly revolutionary concept called *What The?*, which was totally free. All you had to do was pay for the stamp.

ORION: Which is quite common a practice now in science-fiction and comics fandom.

WOLFMAN: I guess so, but it wasn't then. Nobody had ever done that before. It was something I was interested in, I never made money on it, but it was enjoyable.

ORION: You and Len Wein were among the first fans to break into the comics field, the first of the "new generation" of creators. Was it difficult to enter the professional field?

WOLFMAN: When we started, at least at DC there weren't any others who were working generally for all the different editors, Len and I were the first. It was very hard because the older editors did

not want to use new people. The fact that we were fans made it worse in many ways because they didn't know how to deal with us. You see we actually cared about the books and characters on a level outside of just turning in work.

ORION: There was no concept then of doing a book or character for the sake of doing that character?

WOLFMAN: No. You see, there was nobody new in the field for almost twenty-five years. Well, there were occasional new people, but anyway, when we came in, we just wanted to do it and do it well, and that was our only interest. We tried to enter the field basically against the wishes of the professionals of the time. Slowly there was a great influx of talent our age, and today it's all that way pretty much. It was really hard, we did tons of mystery stories, most of them without our names. I did love stories, I did funny stories, actually just about anything I could sell.

ORION: What was the first superhero title you did?

WOLFMAN: Well, I guess if you consider Blackhawk...

ORION: Uh-huh.

WOLFMAN: That was the first thing I sold. After that, the Teen Titans, we did Teen Titans No. 18. In fact this (indicating a group of art stats on the table) is the New Teen Titans No. 18. That's basically what it was like.

ORION: When did you make the switch from DC to Marvel?

WOLFMAN: About 1971. What happened was DC was cutting back and there just wasn't work available. I started working for Warren, as their editor, then Roy Thomas asked me to come over to Marvel. At that point I was writing... what was it?... Dracula, plus I had done work on *Spoof*, the comedy magazine.

ORION: Oh yeah, I had forgotten about that.

WOLFMAN: I came over, and I stayed there for eight years.

ORION: And that leads right into the question I guess I'm obligated to ask: There's been a lot of talk about conditions at Marvel recently, and about the less-than-amicable departure you had from Jim Shooter, Marvel's editor-in-chief...

WOLFMAN: I'd rather not talk about it.

ORION: No? Okay, on to other things. What characters have you enjoyed working on the most?

“The only similarity between the Teen Titans and the X-Men is that we both brought back old characters and did them better.”

WOLFMAN: At Marvel, Spider-Man, very much. I loved working on Spider-Man. Dracula of course, no doubt about that. Some of the Fantastic Four stuff, but I think I like the villains better than the heroes. I really enjoyed writing Doctor Doom, but I didn't particularly care about writing the Fantastic Four.

ORION: What was it about the Fantastic Four you didn't enjoy?

WOLFMAN: I just didn't have the... way of handling a group book at that point, it was very difficult. It was a personal thing, I don't enjoy writing team-up books, it took awhile before I learned how to do it.

ORION: What's the major difference between team-up and solo stories?

WOLFMAN: It's just the way you structure a story, so that the various characters are used and stuff of that sort. I love the

Fanastic Four, I think it's a great book, but I just found it difficult to write. Ummm... not much else at Marvel, primarily Spider-Man I really liked, and of course Dracula. At DC: Superman, Teen Titans of course, Green Lantern I enjoyed, the Blackhawks, things of that sort.

ORION: Just to expand on a couple of those: I recall reading a comment by you somewhere, in which you said that Superman was one of the most difficult characters to write you ever handled. Could you explain why?

WOLFMAN: Well, Superman can do most anything. In order to write a Superman story you have to get around the fact that he can do most anything, which means you have to structure an entire story which plays against him rather than with him. What I did the first time I wrote Superman, which was when I first started at DC...

ORION: The Vandal Savage story?

WOLFMAN: That's right. I tried to find situations to play against him. When I just came back to the book I found ways to play with him. You have to learn how to re-work the characters to make it work, to make Superman work. As I said, when I came back I found my own handle for the character, and I think starting with the Brainiac stories that should be on sale now, I've figured out how to handle Superman. It is very difficult to write him.

ORION: You're doing *Action* now?

WOLFMAN: *Action Comics*, right.

ORION: How do you work with Curt Swan?

WOLFMAN: We're doing it plot style. The first batch of stories we did, I did full scripts. They're very nice but they didn't work out as well, so I went to the plot style and Curt's stuff just exploded from that point. Even though he's not comfor-



© 1982 Marvel Comics Group

© 1982 DC Comics Inc.

Second Issue

11

table with it, his layouts and his approach and his whole attitude towards the book has improved tremendously. Even though he would prefer going back to script they won't let him, because his stuff looks so much better than it did before, and his stuff was always nice. We also have a better inker on the book now. Dan Adkins is taking it over, and maybe some people will realize that Curt can draw, because Curt is tremendously good, and he's been ruined in the inking.

ORION: Well, I have trouble with Curt myself, because compared with some of the artists I was weaned on, his style seems a bit static.

WOLFMAN: Wait till you see the Brainiac three-part story and you'll change your mind, certainly by the third story.

ORION: Could you tell me a bit about Green Lantern? What's your view of the character?

WOLFMAN: First of all, I just had to leave the Green Lantern book.

ORION: Ooohhh.

WOLFMAN: Yeah, I know. I really didn't want to, but my new horror book comes first.

ORION: Is that the one you're doing with Gene Colan?

WOLFMAN: That's right. I just don't have much time, so I had to give GL up. My view of the character was that basically Hal Jordan and Green Lantern are the same person. Unlike Clark Kent and Superman or Bruce Wayne and Batman, they're exactly the same. I see Green Lantern as a very independent character, very powerful, and also very loyal. You can't tell from the current storyline but that's because of what the plot is, and that's not revealed until issue No. 150. My view was to get him off Earth, because I felt he should be the Green Lantern of his entire space sector, not just the planet Earth. He's got this incredible ring and all he does is fight ordinary criminals.

ORION: Well, I always felt that Green Lantern was the character with the most untapped potential.

WOLFMAN: So do I. I think putting him in space will release a lot of that potential. Unfortunately I don't do enough of those stories, I get off with issue No. 153.

ORION: Who's taking over?

WOLFMAN: Mike Barr.

ORION: Do you enjoy working with Joe Staton?

WOLFMAN: Yeah, I love working with Joe. He's a friend of mine. He was a friend before we worked together. It was very nice working with him. He's a very

“It was very hard (at the beginning) because the older editors did not want to use new people.”

good artist, very under-rated by the fans because he has a cartoony approach to his material. I found when we did Green Lantern that his pencils were real tight.

ORION: That's odd, because that's what's always bothered me about his art; his pencils always seemed a bit slapdash.

WOLFMAN: He had suffered a lot of bad inking, I felt. Joe's style does have a humorous quality to it, and the previous inkers embellished the humorous aspect rather than play up the straight. Joe's stuff in the last year has gotten really good, tremendous.

ORION: Well, I find that when he's inked by Giordano or one or two other people he looks fine, but when he inks himself...

WOLFMAN: You should see the stories inked by Dennis Jensen and Mike DeCarlo, tremendously good. I think they're bringing out the quality of his work, the serious quality as opposed to the humorous quality.

ORION: Regarding the New Teen Titans, could you give us a little background detail on the characters

themselves? How were they created and so on.

WOLFMAN: Basically Len Wein and I sat down and created them. Len wanted a mystic character, I didn't, but Len said he really wanted one, so I came up with Raven.

ORION: Why didn't you want a mystic character?

WOLFMAN: Because I didn't want to do the Phantom Stranger, and I didn't want to do Doctor Strange, yet the descriptions he kept giving me were that. He said the challenge is to find another way of doing it. Raven came out of being challenged by Len, which is the way I work best. Cyborg was mine, as was Starfire...

ORION: Wasn't there a Starfire several years back?

WOLFMAN: Yeah, there's been a lot of Starfires. I created two of them. I didn't do the sword and sorcery character. The first Starfire appeared in Teen Titans No. 18, and he's been brought back in New Teen Titans No. 18, this issue right here (indicating stats on the table).

Len wanted the Beast Boy character, and I agreed only on the condition that we change the name, because I hated "Beast Boy". That's basically it, we just sat around a long time, several months actually, before the characters were created. As soon as we got the go-ahead for the book I got George Pérez to come over from Marvel to do it, because George and I are friends. He was going to continue on the Avengers and also do The Teen Titans. He came up with the sketches for the characters just beautifully. I wasn't joking in the first issue letter column. He handed in drawings and we didn't have to change anything. Usually



on initial character sketches you want to change stuff. They were absolutely perfect and George has continued on that trend ever since; His stuff has been just remarkable.

ORION: I understood George is leaving Justice League of America, is he going to be devoting all of his time to New Teen Titans?

WOLFMAN: Teen Titans and another project that I can't talk about.

ORION: There were certain people in the fan field that charged New Teen Titans with being somewhat derivative of X-Men. Do you have anything to say about that?

WOLFMAN: The best answer I can give is an answer Chris Claremont himself gave when we were both on a panel at a convention in New York. He said the on-

ly similarity between the Teen Titans and the X-Men is that we both brought back old characters and did them better. That's the *only* similarity. The fact that they're young characters has nothing to do... I didn't create the original Teen Titans who were young superheroes, Chris didn't create the original X-Men who were young superheroes. There is no similarity I can see between the books. The characters are totally different, the types of stories Chris like to write and I like to write are totally different. I think what we did, simply, was resurrect old titles at approximately the same point, and do them better. And that's it. I certainly wouldn't have done a rip-off of the X-Men, because I wouldn't concern myself with that. It would come across as a rip-off rather than as its own book.

ORION: Could you tell us something about the Titans/X-Men crossover?

WOLFMAN: Nothing's been decided yet really. We're having a meeting this week trying to work out the villains. Originally it was supposed to be Darkseid of the New Gods and Dark Phoenix, but I don't know if that's the way it's going to go.

ORION: I can see where that would cause a lot of continuity problems...

WOLFMAN: Well, that's Chris' choice. I don't know if he'll be given the okay to do Darkseid, that's what we have to decide.

ORION: Do these stories take place in an alternate universe?

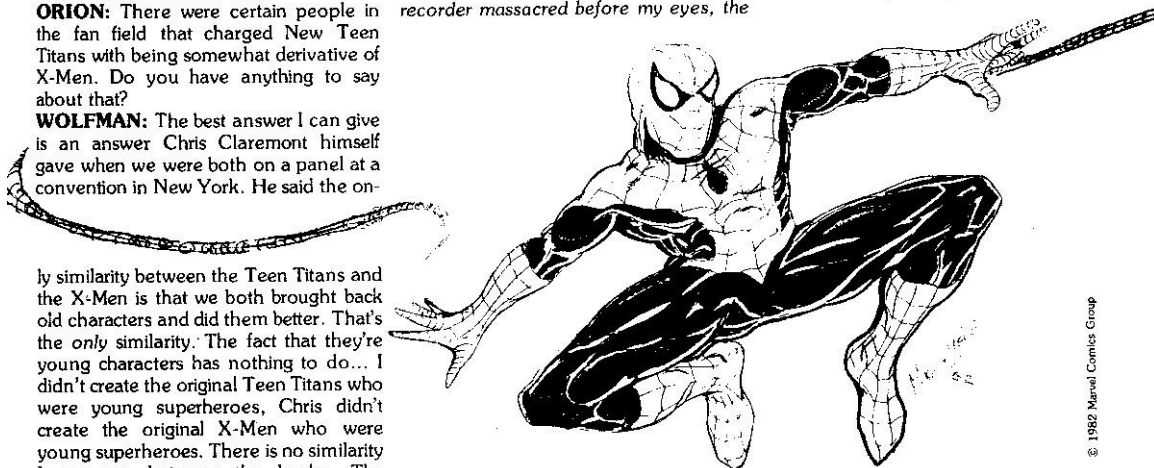
WOLFMAN: If I had written the second Superman/Spider-Man story, there would have been a paragraph somewhere in the book indicating that it was, very subtly so no one would know if they didn't want to.

ORION: Well, it seems to me that there's no other way these stories can be organized.

WOLFMAN: I don't worry about it. That's one of the reasons that I don't care if Darkseid and Dark Phoenix are the villains; but other people do, so...

(Hiatus. At this point the convention doors opened, and Marv was besieged by a huge group of fans. Rather than risk being torn limb from limb and have my tape recorder massacred before my eyes, the

story had nothing to do with the New Doom Patrol, it had to do with the *Old* Doom Patrol. Robotman was a member of the old Doom Patrol and that's all. It's very possible I could have had a panel with the New Doom Patrol and him saying: "Look I have this assignment to do." But I really did not want to confuse the readers. You have to remember that the Doom Patrol was cancelled something like fourteen years ago; for most readers



remainder of the interview was postponed for a few hours.)

ORION: I understand that you and George Pérez signed a contract with Flying Buttress Publications to do a graphic feature called *Janus*. Are you still working on that?

WOLFMAN: I plotted it about a year-and-a-half ago. George hasn't really had the time to draw it. When it comes out I don't know if it will be through Flying Buttress or not, because our contract with them has lapsed already. It's something George and I want to do when he can get some free time.

ORION: Can you give a few details about it?

WOLFMAN: It's sword and sorcery and horror, and it is about a hero. To say any more would give away the concept, which I don't want to do.

ORION: I'd like to get back to the Teen Titans if I may. In the last few issues you were tying up some loose ends left over from The Doom Patrol continuity. I notice you incorporated Robotman in the story but completely left out the rest of The New Doom Patrol members.

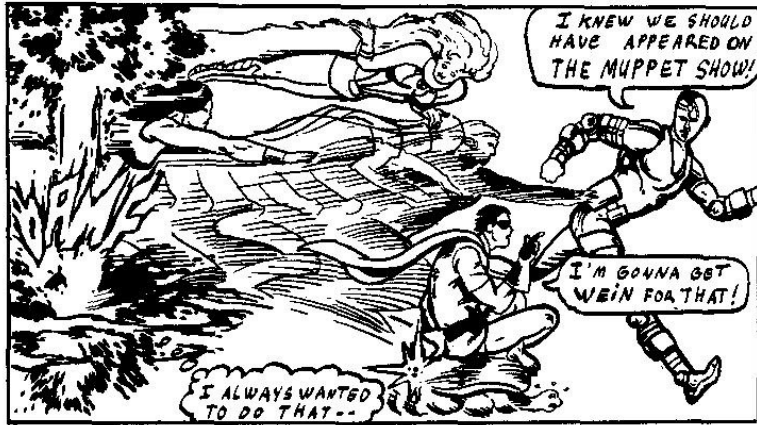
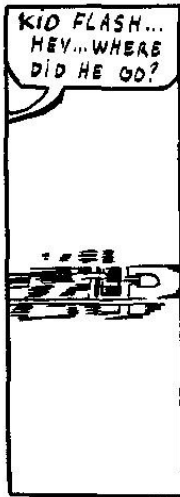
WOLFMAN: Well, frankly, I wasn't interested in the New Doom Patrol. The

of the New Teen Titans, they have no idea who the Doom Patrol is. In order to say that there are *two* Doom Patrols would have been totally confusing, so I decided to ignore the New Doom Patrol, centre only on the old one and tie it in that way. If you notice, the story has really very little to do with the Doom Patrol, it has to do with Gar Logan avenging the death of his mother, who happened to be a member of the Doom Patrol. That's to make sure that it held its own as a story, rather than just a piece of nostalgia.

ORION: Recently, in an issue of *The Brave and the Bold*, Batman was teamed-up with an adult Hawk & Dove. It seems to me that that story does tend to mess up your continuity a little bit does it not, since Hawk & Dove were originally shown as teenagers along with Robin and the others. Now they're adults and Robin is still a teen.

WOLFMAN: Well, I never intended to use Hawk & Dove. They're a 60's concept and I don't worry about it. If that's the way they have it, fine, since I wasn't going to use them, it's okay.

ORION: Will you be tying up any of the plot threads from the old Titans book? There's still the old headquarters sitting around with Mal and all.



WITH RESPECT AND APOLOGIES TO MARY WOLFMAN, GEORGE PEREZ AND LEN WEIN.

... NOW BACK TO OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED INTERVIEW...

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

WOLFMAN: You know, I'm not really interested in tying up old Titans stuff. First of all, not that many people care about it...

ORION: No argument.

WOLFMAN: Secondly, I refuse to play nostalgia in the book. The book has to survive on its own in today's, 1980s market. If by picking up something from the past makes a good story today, fine, but I'm not going to ruin a book just to do old-time stuff. I think it's important to do a viable book today. Also, God knows what some of those writers were doing back then! They had no concept of what they were doing sometimes, they didn't know from issue to issue. I'm not them, I'd rather do *The New Teen Titans*, it began with issue No. 1, we acknowledge the existence of a previous Titans and leave it at that.

ORION: Okay, now to backtrack a little, What about this book you're working on with Gene Colan?

WOLFMAN: It's a horror/adventure title, it doesn't have a title yet so I can't say... It will either be *The Challengers* or *Dark Force*, or possibly a third title, I'm not sure yet. (This became *Night Force - Ed.*)

ORION: I assume there is no connection with *Challengers of the Unknown*.

WOLFMAN: No. It's a very different

type of book, nothing quite like it has been done in regular, above ground, mainstream comics. It's being paced like a novel, there may be issues with no action, there may be issues that are just solely characterization. I'm trying a very adult type of comic book and I'd like to see it work. It's modern horror stories, and it is a series, it's not like the regular DC mystery books.

ORION: A different tack now: What's your opinion of the alternative press, does it have a future?

WOLFMAN: Oh yeah, I think the alternative press is going to handle some very nice material. I'm hoping to do something for *Eclipse* soon, I have a plot for Dean Mullany that he's asked for, and I just haven't been able to sit down and type it up. It's a horror story by myself and Gene Colan. I want to do it, I like what Dean is doing, and I like what some of the other

"We extended the code far beyond what they ever intended to publish (with Dracula)."

houses are doing as well. As soon as I can get it done, Dean will have my plot, and if he likes it, he'll take it, if not, perhaps another company will. I see great hope for the alternative press, I think it's very good that they're around.

ORION: Speaking of which, do you prefer to do books without the Comics Code, or do you feel it serves a purpose?

WOLFMAN: The code is okay for certain types of comics. I see no reason why Superman should not be under the code, and stuff of that sort. I would just as soon prefer doing books outside of the code, it depends on what audience I want to reach. If I want a solely adult audience and alienate the little kids to the point that they won't understand what I'm doing, fine, I'll do it without the code. I use the alternative press for deeper emotional type stories and that kind of thing. I think you have great latitude within the code to do great stuff too: Look at what Frank Miller's doing with *Daredevil*.

ORION: Yes, but I feel he's pushing the code to its limits.

WOLFMAN: Fine! We all have to push the code to the limits! I tried that when I was doing *Dracula*, we extended the code far beyond what they've ever intended to publish. It depends on what market I'm reaching, that's all. Each story is aimed at a different market in a certain sense: Superman is not aimed at the

same audience as *Teen Titans*, and the *Challengers* or *Dark Force* or whatever they're called will be aimed at a very straight realistic audience. They may also enjoy the *Teen Titans*, because I'm bringing the same sensibilities to it, the same characterizations and writing, but they're going to have to like things without superheroes. I'd just as soon do stories in or out of the code.

ORION: Marvel, I understand, is producing fandom-only X-Men editions. Is DC contemplating anything similar with the Titans?

WOLFMAN: I've yet to see or hear anything of that X-Men book being done. They have not yet signed any contracts and they announced it about a year-and-a-half ago. It's possible we may do it with the Titans, it's equally possible we may not. It depends on how the books grows, whether George and I want to do it... it may come down and they'll say: "Look, we're going to do this as a special graphic novel". And we'll say that we'll want so much money for it, and they may offer us our regular page rate. In that case they may get someone else to do it, but I don't know if they'll be able to sell it. That's real callous, I doubt if that could happen. DC and George and I have a very good relationship. The most likely thing that would happen is that we'd work something out and do it. I don't really know though, it depends on whether and where they feel they could sell it to the direct market, and if they feel they could sell a *Teen Titans* graphic novel for five dollars like Marvel feels they can.

ORION: Do you have any particular favourites among the Titans? Do you prefer certain characters over the others?

"In order to write a Superman story you have to get around the fact that he can do most anything."

WOLFMAN: I like Wonder Girl, actually I like the girls better than the guys. They're more interesting in terms of their backgrounds...

ORION: I notice there's a much more even ratio of males to females in the Titans.

WOLFMAN: Yeah, it was intended to be. But they also have more interesting origins and concepts behind them for me. Of the guys I like Changeling because I like writing that sense of humour type



stuff, I enjoyed it when I did Spider-Man too, Robin; so-so, Kid Flash; I'm starting to get into him now, it took awhile before I warmed up to him, Cyborg; I always like Cyborg because I knew he was going to get the most negative comments because of the way we began him. He was very negative and embittered and all that, but I knew we were going to change him. The mail went exactly the way I expected it to, so he is a personal favourite for that reason.

ORION: It seemed that you were playing up the "angry young black" type of thing.

WOLFMAN: I know. I intended very specifically to do that and then make the change, because I wanted every character to change within the context of the story. Cyborg, because of his background (which I knew long before his origin was published) had to be embittered. And it's not because he is black, but because of what happened to him. All the other characters had to have their personalities based on where they were from, and when you change a character they grow within the context of the book.

ORION: Cyborg has struck me as the first real black character in comics where that issue is just not important, it's just an



incident, it's *there* without excessive attention being called to it. I do remember reading, I believe it was in an interview with Len Wein in *The Comics Journal*, that you and he created a black character in the mid-sixties and DC would not publish it. Is that correct?

WOLFMAN: The publisher at that time would not publish it. The publisher who was there when we started the story loved it and asked us to expand it to a two-parter. He left while we were in the midst of the story and the new publisher decided that he didn't like it.

ORION: This character was called Jericho?

WOLFMAN: Yeah. It was for Teen Titans by the way.

ORION: I see from the material you've got here that you're working on a Teen Titans mini-series. Which characters will be featured?

WOLFMAN: In order it will be Cyborg, Raven, Changeling, and Starfire. That'll be on sale this summer.

ORION: Are you doing this to expand the characters beyond that which can be done in the regular book?

WOLFMAN: Yeah. I don't have room in the regular comic to do a twenty-five, twenty-seven page Changeling or Cyborg or whoever story. Here's a chance to explore their origins, who they are, and do a lot more detail than I do in the regular comic. It's the perfect opportunity to do that within a mini-series format. ■

CANADIAN SF

NEW CANADIAN FANDOM

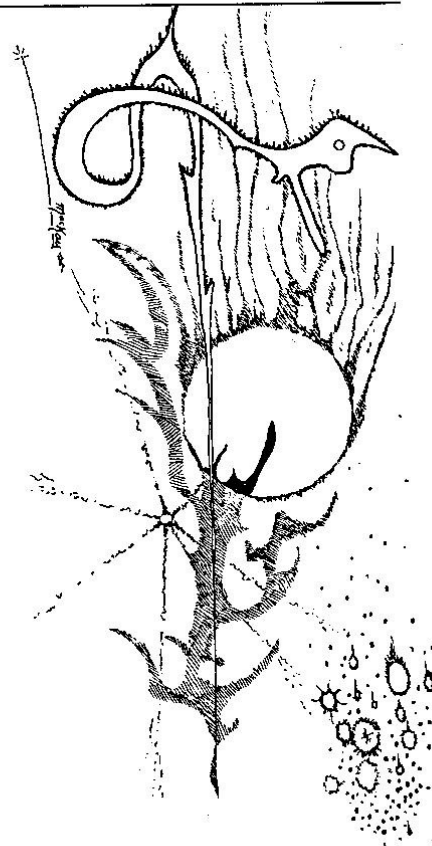
THE CANADIAN SCIENCE FICTION NEWSLETTER

DO YOU KNOW who won the Canadian Science Fiction & Fantasy Award this year? Last year? Can you name five Canadian science fiction writers—not counting Gordon R. Dickson, Spider Robinson, Judith Merril, or Michael Coney? Do you know where the SF conventions are being held in Canada this year, or which major SF and fantasy authors will be attending? Do you know who published science fiction in Canada last year, or what new books are coming out? How many of the hundred or so SF related publications in Canada did you get last year? Are you really informed about the SF scene in Canada?

NEW CANADIAN FANDOM is the Canadian science fiction newsletter. Each sixteen page issue features news from all the SF clubs in Canada, complete convention listings, convention reports, fanzine reviews, publishing news, book reviews by TORONTO STAR reviewer doug barbour, a fan column by Tara Wayne MacDonald, a lively letter column, and articles on Canadian SF, Canadian culture, Canadian comics, and—of course—Canadian fandom. In addition, there are personal essays, fannish articles, and off-the-wall humour of the sort you might find in GENRE PLAT, RAFFLES, MAINSTREAM, TBM, TAPPEN, or KRATOPHANY (our favorite fanzines). We do not, however, publish fiction or poetry.

While we provide a forum for Canadian fans to exchange information, ideas, and opinions, NCF is also widely circulated outside of Canada. NCF provides a showcase for Canadian talent, but we also bring the best talents of other fandoms to our Canadian readers. The news and review sections emphasize Canadian content, but the letter column, artwork, and many of the articles and fannish pieces reflect the international nature of fandom.

To receive your FREE sample issue of NEW CANADIAN FANDOM, send your name and address (including postal code) to NCF, Post Office Box 4655, P.S.S.E., Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6E 5G5. Or subscribe at the low rate of five issues for \$4. [NCF is also available for trade with other fanzines, artwork, letters of comment, articles, Canadian fan/SF news, etc.]



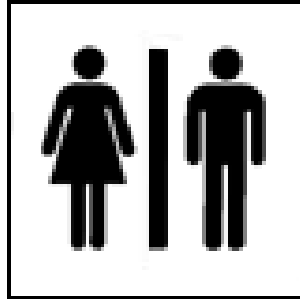
Second Issue

17

Needless to say, the ad above is obsolete

Pictogram Place 1

HAVEN'T I SEEN YOU
AROUND HERE BEFORE?



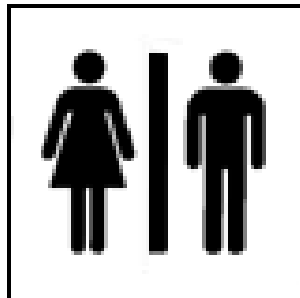
I'LL BET YOU SAY THAT
TO ALL THE GUYS.

ENOUGH SMALL TALK.
LET'S GET IT *ON*, BIG
BOY!



WOO-HOO!
A WOMAN AFTER
MY OWN HEART!

IT AIN'T YOUR
HEART I'M AFTER,
SAILOR!

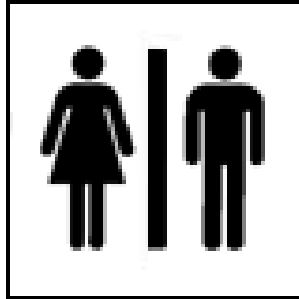


AWWRIGHT!

CONT'D

SO? WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

WELL, TO BE HONEST, ISO STANDARD PICTOGRAMS DON'T HAVE ANY... UMMM... YOU KNOW...



SIGH.
THAT'S WHAT I GET FOR HANGING AROUND MEN WITH NO DEPTH.

YOU JUST HADDA SAY IT.



PLAYING SOLITAIRE

By Mark Shainblum

Originally published in the anthology Playing Solitaire and Other Stories (Cyber Age Adventures Press, 2001) and later distributed on a CD-ROM in the program book of the 2001 World Fantasy Convention held in Montreal.

PART ONE

Her name was *not* Solitaire, but Solitaire would do for the moment. For lack of something better.

She was garbed in a short padded jacket, an insulated kevlar bodysuit and sensible boots. And a mask, of course. A mask was obligatory. A stylized insignia in the shape of a concentric swirl adorned her jacket over the right breast.

Solitaire flew over the sub-freezing, snow-covered streets of Montreal, trailing a blinding corona of light behind her. No one looked up. Montrealers were an urban, unflappable folk with political uncertainty and a harsh winter to worry about. The odd superhuman flying overhead or smashing through a brick wall barely elicited a murmur of surprise anymore.

Solitaire flew; her long, brown hair billowing in an undulating wave behind her. The Arctic air stung her face and eyes; and her tears streamed alongside like a school of angelfish trailing a shark.

She tried to tell herself that the tears were only due to the cold and the speed of her flight. She wasn't Parthenon or the 7Woman, after all. She was still all-too-human and still vulnerable to wind and cold.

And pain.

Her angle of ascent steepened. Her corona got brighter still. She heard nothing but the all-encompassing roar of the wind. Her lungs laboured to draw breath in the increasingly thin, frigid atmosphere.

She spread her arms before her in a 'V' and swooped upwards. The intensity of her corona brightened, the stinging blast of cold air in her face became an unrelenting hurricane that drowned out light and heat and sound. Blind and deaf, Solitaire screamed her pain and her fury and her humiliation into the night.



They had been talking about the heavy stuff. The 'L' word came up, followed by the 'C' and even the 'M' words. She felt simultaneously giddy and serene. She felt secure with this man, sure of his love and trust. She kissed him passionately, her tongue languidly sliding into his mouth.

They broke apart. He looked at her, his electric blue eyes boring, it seemed, all the way down to her soul. "I love you," he said, finally, laughing at the sound of it. "I love you and I treasure you and I'm starting to think I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

She heard herself sigh, a sound so girlish and adolescent she almost wanted to giggle. "Be sure," she said to him. "Be sure you mean it before you say it—"

"I mean it," he said emphatically. "You don't know how much I mean it."

Carl's eyes were blue. His hair was red bordering on blond. A striking combination. He was tall and wiry, but muscular and very strong. For a normal man.

Her eyes filled with tears. "It's been so long," she said. "I've waited such a long time to hear somebody say that they loved me."

"I love you, baby," Carl said, the conviction and the honesty like steel in his voice. "I know you've had it hard. I know there have been some bitter years, but I'm here. I want to make it better for you. I know I can."

She put her fingers over his lips. "Sssh. Wait. You don't know everything yet."

"Ooohhh, secrets. You don't scare me, lady. I've got a few secrets of my own."

"This is a big one. This is something that could change everything."

"Nothing could change the way I feel about you, babe. Nothing. You're about to tell me that you're bisexual or still married to someone else or something, right? I'm telling you right now that we can work it out. It doesn't matter."

She snorted. "I wish it were that simple."

"So give already. Give and let's get it over with! You'll feel better, I promise you!"

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure." She took a deep breath. "I...I..." she started, and suddenly felt herself shaking violently, like a leaf in a storm. This was ridiculous! She had faced the Octet alone! She had beaten Futureshock and Thirdwave without raising a sweat. She had seen and done things that would have driven most normal people insane, and yet she was trembling before this supremely ordinary, extraordinary man.

"Take a deep breath," he said. "It's not as bad as all that."

"Okay," she said, wishing for a brown paper bag to hyperventilate into. "I just thought you should know that I'm...I'm...superhuman."

Carl looked at her blankly, still holding her hand. He blinked. Once. Twice. Then he laughed; a deep, baritone laugh that was all wrong for his wiry frame. "Okay, babe. It's okay. If you don't want to tell me now, you can tell me some other time. There's no pressure."

She was dumbstruck for a second, the raw syllables of his words divorced from their meaning, bouncing off her brain. "No," she said at last. "No, Carl, I'm serious. I have superhuman powers. I'm a reserve member of Cold Squad."

"Come on," he said, a little plaintively. "You're pulling my leg!"

"Carl. I'm Solitaire."

Carl's hand was suddenly gone from hers. He had retreated to the opposite end of the sofa, and the electric light in his eyes was changing hue. "This isn't funny, Rachel," he said.

"I'm not trying to be funny, Carl. I'm trying to be honest."

"Bullshit. Next you're going to tell me you were kidnapped by aliens or something?"

The room swam. This was getting away from her. "Aliens are science fiction, Carl. Superhumans are real flesh and blood people. One of them is standing right in front of you."

Carl shook his head. "I thought you were different," he said. "I really did. I thought we had something special going here."

"Oh for God's sake!" she said, lifting her arms and shutting her eyes tight. She went to her dark space, to that closed room within her mind where she stored her power. She flooded it with the light of consciousness, and her living room was suddenly drowned in a blinding sheet of bright. Superheated air cracked like rifle shots around her, blowing off her outer clothing and leaving only the resistant bodysuit below. Carl cried out and shielded his eyes with his arm.

She stood before him, glowing like the North Star, the charred remains of her street clothes smoldering at her feet. "I'm Solitaire, Carl. Do you believe me now?"

His face fell. She had never understood the expression 'till that moment. His face fell. All the happiness and compassion and joy broke loose and tumbled to the floor, shattering into a million pieces. Carl fell to his hands and knees and vomited noisily onto the remnants of her blouse.

She reached for him. He shook her hand off as if it were red-hot.

"Carl..."

On rare occasions, she was open to the future. To all the possibilities of the future. That was one of her powers, more curse than blessing. This potential lifepath, so strong, so high in the probability matrix, melted away like snow on a warm spring morning. She looked briefly on the face of an unborn daughter who would stay unborn, saw her giggle and laugh, and reached for her as she dissolved like a soap bubble.

"I can't," he whispered.

She reached for him again; he knocked her hand away. "Don't," he said. "Just don't."

"But I'm still the same person I was five minutes ago! Nothing's changed!"

"Everything's changed," he said, looking up at her, wiping his chin with his left hand. "Everything."

And then he was gone.

And she was alone.

Again.



There weren't many people in Montreal who could tap you on the shoulder two kilometers up and accelerating at five meters per second. Jacinthe was one of them.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, when Solitaire turned. "You're going to run out of breathable atmosphere!"

Solitaire heard her as if from a distance, through a dull roar that a small part of her mind warned might already be a sign of oxygen deprivation. Jacinthe put her hands on Solitaire's shoulders and exerted a counterforce to her massive acceleration.

"Slow it down," she said in French, her mother tongue. "Let's talk."

“I’m tired of talking,” said Solitaire, nevertheless cutting her speed. Both women hung in space for a moment, looking down at the twinkling lights of Montreal below them, and then Solitaire suddenly went limp like a ragdoll. Gravity reasserted itself, and she fell.

“Hey!” shouted Jacinthe, rotating in midair and diving like a pearl diver after her friend. Several hundred meters down she caught her, snagging her jacket. The sleeve made ominous ripping noises, but the supertough fabric held. Solitaire hung like a dead weight in Jacinthe’s grasp, dragging both women to Earth in a surrealistic slow-motion freefall.

“Let me go, Jacinthe,” Solitaire said in a monotone. “Just let me go.”

“Cut this out, girlfriend,” Jacinthe shouted, switching to English. “You’re scaring me! At least hover, dammit! I can’t hold us both up!”

Solitaire complied, silently.

“What the hell is the matter with you? Are you out of your mind? Do you want to die?”

“I don’t know,” said Solitaire, cold and distant. “I just don’t know anymore.”

“That’s crap. I was with you when the Slipstream attacked the city. I never saw anybody fight for their own life, for life in general, so intensely. Don’t tell me you’ve suddenly decided to take the chickenshit way out!”

“It’s too much, Jacinthe. It’s just too much. I can’t do it anymore…”

Jacinthe shook her head slowly. “This is about a man, right?”

“Yes.”

“And you told him who and what you were—”

“I had to.”

“Let me guess. He shit his pants and ran.”

“No. He barfed and ran.”

Jacinthe laughed; a bitter, short laugh.

“Your mistake, chère, is expecting anything else. People like us fly or bend steel in our bare hands or survive in outer space unprotected. We kiss vacuum. That’s the price of power. That’s the price of the responsibility we bear.”

Solitaire shook her head slowly, eyes tightly shut, squeezing the tears out one by one, reluctantly. “I don’t believe that. I can’t go on believing that. Everybody needs love, even us. Especially us. I’m still a woman, Jacinthe. I never asked for this life.”

Jacinthe folded her arms in front of her. “You have to let it go. You’re Solitaire. Accept the essential truth of the name you’ve chosen. You’re alone and you will always be alone. That’s not such a terrible thing for someone who can touch the sky.”

“It is to me,” said Solitaire. “It is to me.”

It was amazing how a Holiday Inn was exactly like a Holiday Inn regardless of where you were. Even the smell was the same. For all his nose knew, Elliot Levitt could just as easily be back in Rouse's Cove or in Montreal or in Bangladesh. Despite himself, he was a little disappointed. He didn't know what he was expecting to find in Canada, but it sure wasn't that generic chain-hotel disinfectant smell.

The desk clerk was clicking away violently at her keyboard. She looked up at him and he forced himself to smile. Yes, she was young, but not all that young. And, he reminded himself for the tenth time, she wasn't one of his students. He didn't have to feel guilty about noticing the curves of her body, or that incredible French-Canadian accent. It was weird; it wasn't like any French he'd ever heard in his life. It probably related to Paris the way the Bronx related to Oxford, but it still drove him nuts.

"Here you are, Mr. Levitt," she said, handing him a cardkey sealed in a small envelope. "You're in room 317. Enjoy your stay."

"Thanks very much... uhhh... Dominique," Elliot replied, slipping the cardkey into his jacket pocket. He hoped she hadn't thought he was looking down her blouse when he read her name badge. Of course, he had been, just a little. He hefted his suitcase and paused. "Can you tell me where the Palace des Congress is?" He winced at his own accent. Grade Nine French was many years behind him, but Dominique didn't seem to notice. She flashed him a distant professional smile and pointed towards the elevator.

"We're connected to the Palais des Congrès through the Underground City. Just take that elevator down to the Metro level and follow the signs."

Underground City. It sounded almost magical, like the place Dorothy visited after Oz. "We're not in Kansas anymore Toto," Elliot muttered to himself, automatically. "Not in Oregon either, for that matter."

"Beg your pardon, sir?" Dominique asked.

Elliot shook his head. God, he was spaced. Why did this city have such an odd effect on him? "I was just saying that I'm in town for the teachers' convention. Got to be there bright and early."

Dominique nodded absently. "Yes sir, I know. I saw the special convention rate in your reservation."

"Oh yeah. Uhh...thanks again."

Three minutes later, Elliot unlocked his room, tossed his suitcase onto the generic Holiday Inn bed with the generic Holiday Inn floral bedspread, and took a Coke Diète from the generic Holiday Inn mini-bar. "They'll probably charge me \$8.95 for it too," he thought, unscrewing the top and chugging it back in three gulps. "And it even tastes the same. So far you've been a big disappointment, Montreal."

Elliot threw himself onto the bed. "But why should you be any different?" he muttered. He closed his eyes and felt himself drifting into a hazy, headachy post-flight doze. Ten minutes later, his eyes snapped open as someone started smashing a complete set of crystal champagne glasses right next to his ear.

What? Rewind that thought, he told himself. It was just the stupid cellphone ringing. Back at the airport he'd tucked it into the outer pocket of his suitcase without even realizing it was still turned on. He fished the phone out, littering the bed with crushed in-flight magazines and gum wrappers. He flipped the phone open and fumbled it to his ear, knocking his glasses off in the process. "Hell...hello," he croaked.

"Elliot!" Chirped a bright, wide-awake voice. "Am I disturbing you?"

Elliot's brain churned. It wasn't a voice he'd expected to hear for the next few days. "Karen? Is that you?"

"Of course it's me, silly boy. Who did you think it was?"

Someone who gives a shit, he thought. "I don't know. What can I do for you, Karen?"

"The psych department at Fessenden is giving a lecture on 'Superhumans in a Jungian Context' tonight. I thought you might like to go."

"Aside from the fact that I'm 3000 miles away in a foreign country, Karen, I don't think I'm really up to it."

"Oh cool! Are you on a missio—"

Elliot cut her off, too late. "I'm in Canada for that teacher's convention. Remember? We talked about it."

"Oh," Karen said, obviously disappointed. "I thought you might be doing superhu—"

"Karen, I'm on a cellphone. Remember Prince Charles and the tampon conversation? God knows who's listening in."

"Oh. Right. Sorry." There was a pause.

"So," Elliot prompted.

"So," said Karen.

"Sorry I can't come to the lecture. Maybe another time."

"Right," Karen replied. "Another time."

There was another pause.

"Karen, I'm on a roam number here. This call's going to cost me a fortune."

"Oh. Right. Sorry," she repeated. "Umm, bye!"

The cellphone went dead. Elliot held it away from his face, looking at it like he'd never seen it before. He sighed, deliberately turned it off and dropped it to the nightstand.



Jacinthe and Solitaire touched down in a parking lot next to a small shoe repair shop on Monkland Avenue. The sign said *Cordonnerie Fit-Right*, in that west end melange of French and English. The law might say your sign had to be in French, but it didn't say that it had to be good French. Solitaire leaned against the plate glass window and drew several shallow, rasping breaths.

"Ça va?" asked Jacinthe.

"Ask me later," replied Solitaire. "I don't know. But I know you're a good friend. Thank you for being there."

"It wasn't totally altruistic, I'm afraid. I was looking for you. Business."

Solitaire desperately held up her hand, palm first, like a traffic cop trying to stop a speeding truck. "Don't tell me. Please don't tell me."

Jacinthe shrugged. "I'm sorry, but you've got to know. It's Moëdoq. He's back, and this time he's made friends."

Solitaire shivered. "Aw, shit." She fell to her knees in the snow and covered her face with her hands.

Jacinthe's eyes widened. "Solitaire? Are you okay?"

"No. Fuck no." She rocked her body back and forth like a small child. "Can I cry, Jacinthe? Is a post-feminist superhuman defender of right allowed to cry like a goddamned baby?"

"I can do this myself, chère. I just wanted you to know in case he came after you. You can sit this one out, he doesn't even have to know you're alive."

Solitaire looked up. "Really?"

"Really," Jacinthe replied, not meeting her eyes.

"You're lying."

Jacinthe said nothing.

"Is that the kind of person you think I am? I'm supposed to let you die because I'm having a hissy fit?"

"It's not a hissy fit, chère. I've only got a B.A. in psych, but it's not too hard to see you're in a full-blown depression. You're Prozac meat, bébé."

Solitaire laughed a hiccuping laugh through her tears. "Thanks."

"I'm trying to save your life. I think facing a psychopathic superhuman..." Jacinthe made a desperate gesture with her hands "...thing, whatever he is, would be what the shrinks call 'contra-indicated' right now. He creeps you out under the best of circumstances."

Still kneeling in the snow, Solitaire pulled a Kleenex from a pocket on her jacket sleeve and wiped her eyes ineffectively. "I just don't know where to put him, Jacinthe. I'm a nice middle-class Jewish girl from Côte Saint Luc. He doesn't fit. I don't understand him. He turns everything I think I know about the world upside down."

"Kind of like us," replied Jacinthe softly, "for people like Carl."



It was about 2 am. Elliot had eaten dinner in Montreal's tiny Chinatown, watched half of a soft-core porn film on the hotel's pay channel, showered, read the complementary local newspaper and marveled at all the unfamiliar names and references in the stories. He felt ill at ease, alien, and vaguely stupid because of it. This was Canada after all, not Iraq or Uzbekistan. It was only about a six-hour drive to British Columbia from where he lived, although he'd never made the trip.

But he felt lost, somehow. It looked like America; it had burgers and fries like America, hell you could even watch TV from America. But it just wasn't America. And somehow that really disturbed him.

Elliot turned and looked at himself in the mirror. "What the hell is the matter with you?" He closed his eyes and took a few breaths. "Get a grip!" He turned the lights off and sat down on the edge of the bed. He slowed his breathing, and tried to center himself using the rough techniques he'd picked up from Wendat.

The familiar crystalware tinkling of the cellphone made him jump. "God," he growled, "does the girl ever sleep?" He snatched the phone and put it to his ear before remembering that he'd shut it off.

You are lost, whispered something without a voice.

The cellphone flowed like quicksand. Elliot felt hard plastic morph into something vaguely reptilian, knew it was growing fangs or pincers before he even looked, and threw it against the mirror with all his strength. It impacted with a wet, organic thud. There was no sound of breaking glass, just a strobe-frozen impression of bat-like wings forming, of a huge gaping maw full of needle teeth. Elliot's eyes flashed red, and it burst into flame with a roar that was equal parts combustion and anger.

Off balance, Elliot tumbled backwards onto the mattress. He surrendered himself to Wendat's training, felt himself using the momentum of the fall to push himself over the other side of the bed. He fell into a defensive crouch in the tiny space between the bed and the wall, asked himself no questions, killed every stray thought in his mind mercilessly, and took in the whole room in a single strategic glance.

As far as he could tell in the gloom, nothing was out of place. Nothing was broken. Nothing was burned. He dashed for the door and yanked it open. The hallway was empty. There was no commotion. No screaming. No fire alarm.

He advanced a couple of paces down the hall. He heard the muffled voice of a French TV announcer coming from room 315, and the soft moans of lovemaking coming from the next room over. Obviously nobody had heard a thing.

He re-entered his room and searched it. He emptied his suitcase on the floor, opened all the bureau drawers, even pulled the mattress off the boxspring. Everything was as it had been before.

Except he no longer had a cellphone.

Shit! He'd been totally unprepared. He crossed the border and put it out of his mind. Everybody knew that Canada was nice and safe and boring. Nothing interesting ever happened up there.

Shit! He thought. You stupid, ethnocentric gringo. What have you walked into?

He scrambled for the TV remote and stabbed the ON button. He flipped channels frantically, watching network logos both familiar and unfamiliar whiz past. ABC. CBC. CBS. NBC. Global. CNN.

He stopped. Bernard Shaw was rambling on about the Federal Reserve rate.

"Thanks a lot, Bernie," he muttered, and kept flipping. Soccer. Auto races. Naked women. Bugs Bunny in French. Bugs Bunny in English.

Bingo! A local channel was airing a special report of some sort. Something was happening, but it was all going on in French. The words *crise* and *surhumain* floated to the surface. Elliot's Grade Nine French churned slowly and spat out translations: Crisis. Superhuman.

Shit! Elliot thought again, here I thought I was getting away from all this crap. He flipped twice more until he stumbled onto another local channel running the same story, this time in English. Pulse News Special Report! screamed the byline. An attractive Asian woman was shoving a microphone at a very uncomfortable-looking police official.

"The situation is not controlled," he said in heavily accented English. "We are urging citizens in the Plateau Mont-Royal and Mile End to stay in their homes."

The reporter furrowed her brow in professional concern. "You're not contemplating an evacuation?"

"Not at this time. Jacinthe and Solitaire have defeated this entity before, we are assuming they will be able to do so again. And it's not one neighbourhood that will be safer than any other if they lose."

Elliot blinked. Solitaire? Surely not the witch woman with red hair and long fingernails? He shivered and hoped not. And Jacinthe? Who? Who the hell knew Montreal had superheroes? Or supervillains for that matter?

“When you say entity, you mean Moëdoq?” The reporter continued.

“That’s what it calls itself, yes,” replied the cop. “It has appeared twice before. Always in Montreal, always in mid-winter. Other than that, we know almost nothing about it.”

“Is it acting alone?”

The cop shook his head. “Not this time. It seems to have a number of operatives from the Slipstream working with it, although we don’t understand their exact relationship. This is a first, we’ve never seen the Slipstream collaborate with anyone before.”

Elliot threw his hands in the air. Slipstream? What the hell was a Slipstream? He’d never heard of any of these things.

He fell back into bed. Hell with it! It was a local problem. He didn’t know the ground, he didn’t know the players, he’d probably screw everything up if he just charged in blindly.

Except.

Except something, probably this Moëdoq thing, had gone out of its way to involve him. Would it allow him to simply ignore it? Or would some other appliance grow teeth and attack him again in the middle of the night, or worse, in the middle of a huge crowd of educators tomorrow?

He watched the reporter and the police officer do their media dance, he watched the improbable cut to a commercial for a local strip club, he watched as the TV station ended its coverage of the brewing crisis and switched back to an infomercial for rechargeable batteries.

Fuck you, Moëdoq! he thought. *I don’t know you, I don’t care about you. I’m going back to sleep.*



They were fighting for their lives in Fletcher’s Field, a huge public park directly across the street from the main peak of Mount Royal. They had deliberately pulled the battle out of the densely populated narrow streets of the Plateau Mont-Royal into the wider expanses of the park. There were still houses and business near Fletcher’s Field, but at least they had room to maneuver and defend themselves without worrying so much about collateral damage.

For no good reason at all, Solitaire remembered that her father had lived in this neighbourhood as a child, in one of those duplexes on the corner of de l’Esplanade. Thankfully, none of them were damaged, although all the windows in the Bibliothèque nationale annex on the corner were shattered. The building had once housed the original Jewish Public Library, her father had told her. He’d spent the few happy hours of an unhappy childhood there. They won’t get near it, she promised herself.

Her hands were clasped together in front of her, fingers interlaced and enveloped by a translucent blue sphere the size of a volleyball. It looked like a computer-generated globe, complete with latitude and longitude lines. On good days, Solitaire would smile and call the sphere her ‘deathstar’. Today wasn’t a good day. Today she called the sphere nothing, thought nothing, said nothing. She floated over the scene of battle like a dark angel, her sphere spitting bolts of blue destruction in a 90 degree arc.

She didn't miss. Not once. Every time she fired, Slipstream agents in their stupid yellow armour fell, limbs jerking spasmodically, bugs crushed by a cruel child. Solitaire wasn't even sure all of her opponents would be getting back up when the battle was over. Today, she wasn't sure she cared.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Jacinthe, energy wings and talons fully extended, methodically ripping open one suit of yellow armour after another, like a worker on some hellish assembly line. Her gaze shifted, and she saw a Slipstream Mediator in green armour—an officer in their fanatic army—unlimber an ugly bazooka-thing and point it in Jacinthe's direction.

"*Attention!*" Solitaire screamed in French, and thrust her clasped hands in her friend's direction. The sphere accelerated away, trailing a blue comet's tail back to Solitaire's fists. The sphere expanded as it flew, encompassing Jacinthe's entire body just as the Mediator's weapon discharged. Whatever he fired at Jacinthe disintegrated on impact with no effect. Without slowing, Solitaire whipped her body around, yanking the sphere from Jacinthe and slamming it into the Mediator's armoured face and chest. His mirrored faceplate spat flame and he screamed in agony.

"*Tabernac!*" exclaimed Jacinthe, as the sphere smoothly recoiled to Solitaire's hands, shrinking back to its original size en route. Jacinthe leaped onto the Mediator's convulsing form. "Stay calm!" she yelled as she projected a stiletto-thin energy talon from her right hand. She sliced the green armour open like a butcher splitting a pig, wrenched the edges of the raw metal wound open with her bare hands and pulled the Slipstream officer out.

His hands flew to his charred face. "My eyes! My EYES!" he shrieked in a horrible falsetto.

Jacinthe's energy talon shrank to near invisibility. She stabbed at an acupuncture point on the Mediator's neck and he folded like a puppet with its strings cut. She laid him on the ground and spun on her friend.

"Thank you for the save *bébé*, but get it under control. We're the good guys, remember?"

"No," replied Solitaire. "I don't know what that means anymore."

A speaker on the demolished green armour crackled to impossible life. I'm so glad to hear that, whispered something without a voice. Thank you.

Light flared, halogen bright. Spasmodically, both women covered their eyes.

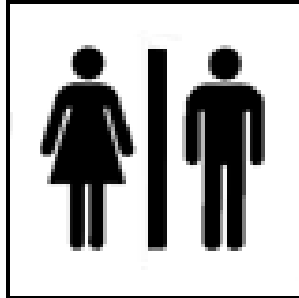
When Jacinthe's vision cleared, Solitaire was gone.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Pictogram Place 2

I JUST LOVE A MAN
IN UNIFORM.

REALLY? HANG ON, I'LL PUT
ON MY CUSTOMS OUTFIT.



I'M SORRY MA'AM, YOU
CAN'T IMPORT ALL THIS
SEXUAL FRUSTRATION
INTO THE COUNTRY.

YOU'LL HAVE TO STEP
INTO THE STRIP SEARCH ROOM AND
LEAVE IT ALL WITH ME.



CONT'D

THAT WAS SO FAR BEYOND
LAME THERE'S NO WORD
FOR IT.

DOES THAT MEAN
I DON'T TURN YOU ON?

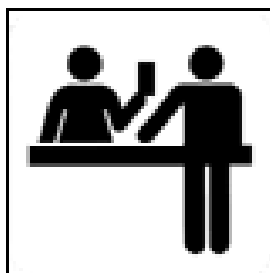


LET'S PUT IT
THIS WAY...



YOUR ONE-WAY TICKET
TO **ANTARCTICA**, SIR.
THE MUSCULAR MEN WITH
GUNS WILL ESCORT
YOU TO YOUR GATE.

HEY!



COMIC COPY AWATCH

MARK SHAINBLUM'S MAILING COMMENTS

Hi folks! I hope you'll forgive me if I don't comment about every single entry. I'm trying to teach myself brevity. If I miss anybody this time, I'll catch up next time!

A Call to Apostrophes!

I don't want to be a nitpicker or single anyone out, but I am an editor by profession, and some typos occur constantly and drive me **CRAZY!!!!**

IT'S: A contraction of "it is."
"It's a hot and steamy night in Gotham."

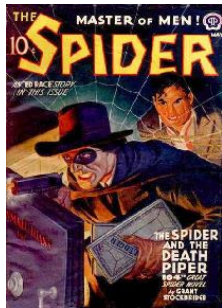
ITS: The possessive form of "it."
"Its fetid breath made Batman's eyes water."

YOUR: A possessive.
"Your car is blocking the Batmobile, citizen!"

YOU'RE: A contraction of "you are."
"You're going to the movies tonight? I thought we were conquering the world!"

A Ramble Through the Woods

I really enjoyed this issue, Alan. Lots of interesting stuff! Particularly liked the feature about The Spider. There was an earlier, American pulp hero of the same name, The Spider, Master of Men. He was a low-budget imitation of The Shadow, but Stan Lee has cited him as an influence in the creation of Spider-Man.



Freelancing: Yes, it can be equal parts terror, excitement, boredom and liberation, not necessarily in that order. I've been discovering, however, that it requires a personality type different from mine. You need to be organized, good with numbers and equally ready to sell yourself as to create. You

also have to give up the illusion of "being your own boss." Yes, you can work in your underwear at 2:30 a.m., if that's your cup of tea, but you're trading in one big boss telling you what to do for dozens of little mini-bosses, (i.e.: clients) telling you what to do, and worse, they couldn't care less about what you're doing for any of the other mini-bosses at the same time.

Nascar Mystery Pages: The pages you found online come from a series of licensed Nascar



comics, including *Nascar Adventures* and *Legends of Nascar* produced by Toronto-based Vortex Comics, the same outfit that produced Mr. X. They sold these not only through comic shops, but also directly through Nascar at the races themselves. daily

basis! New religions must spring up constantly!)



The Old Detective's Watering Hole

Glad you enjoyed Westercon, Jeff! Sounds like it was a blast!

Sorry to hear about your flooding. I had a similar experience in my old apartment building on Queen Mary. I had about half my comic collection stored in my basement locker (I know, I know, but I didn't have any other storage space) and discovered too late that the idiot who lived in the basement apartment routinely caused semi-floods by washing the

floor with a garden hose. Ruined 90% of what I had down there.

Keep us informed about the Podcasting experiment! I've really become a huge podcasting fan in the last little while, and I'd be curious to find out how yours works out.



ComicsPOV

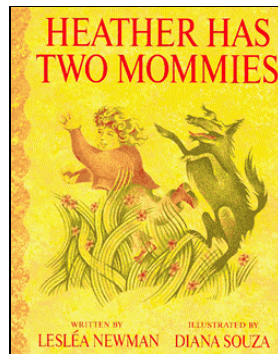
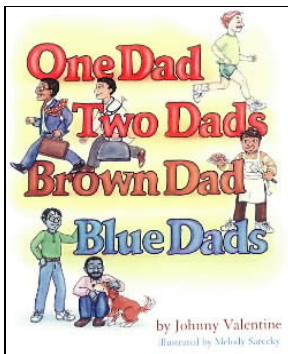
Hey Francisco, I really appreciate your comic reviews. As someone who's been out of the field for awhile, I need some direction to find the good stuff. Your overviews are great.



Niche of Dog Savage

Gaby, my friend, what can I say? It was really nice to see a new Angloman, Poutinette and West Island Lad illustration from you, though you're gonna need to convince me about the new Poutinette costume.

And, just to answer West Island Lad's question, Angloman has two dads, just like a lot of people in this day and age.



And speaking of dads, I can't tell you how much your comments about my late father meant to me (and to my Mom, who read them too). He really was a gentle, kind, man, and it's nice to know that other people remember him the same way. I actually had no idea that you spoke to him before you spoke to me. That was the summer I was away in Israel, and my parents

took it upon themselves to make sure Orion #1 got distributed. Capitaine Quebec opened while I was away, so my father took copies of Orion there himself. He also took copies to a wholesale magazine distributor in Toronto, got them to agree to carry it. However, they required an identification number to be printed on the front cover, so my Dad had a rubber stamp made and hand-stamped the number on several hundred copies.

It's hard to believe we've been working together for so long. Gotta say, writing in Copia has really sharpened your written English. You write better than most native English speakers now.



Floodgates of the Mind

Kyle is a gorgeous, wonderful baby! Mazel Tov to you and Chantale!

(Come clean, did Kyle Rayner or Kyle Baker have anything to do with the choice of name?)



Blam! Zap! Pow!

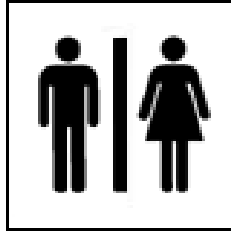
Hey Rob, a great section. Really enjoyed your overview of the Comics Code Authority. I must agree that the CCA is probably irrelevant these days, but if you want to sell comics on regular newsstands, you're still handicapped if your comics don't carry the seal.

Though I share your concerns about overly violent comics and the dearth of comics produced for children, the Comic Code's influence was in the end, pernicious. It institutionalized the idea that the entire medium was only for children, and in its early and middle years it prevented creators from dealing honestly and openly with subjects like racism, divorce and women's rights. The Code once rejected an EC Comics science fiction story because it showed a black man with beads of perspiration on his face!

Pictogram Place 3

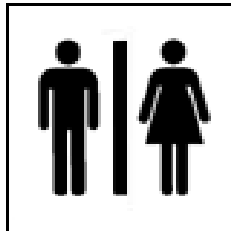
OKAY, BEFORE WE GET ANY
DEEPER INTO THIS RELATIONSHIP...

WHO SAID ANYTHING
ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP?



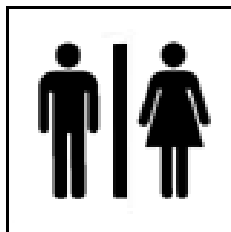
SERIOUSLY...
IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIAL
I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I WAS BEING SERIOUS!



COME ON! YOU **KNOW**
YOU'RE HOT FOR ME!

SIGH.
OKAY, FIRST OF ALL, I GUESS
I SHOULD TELL YOU...

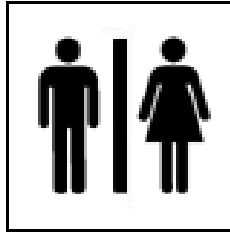


CONT'D

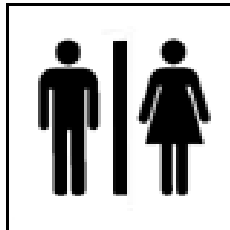


UHHHH?

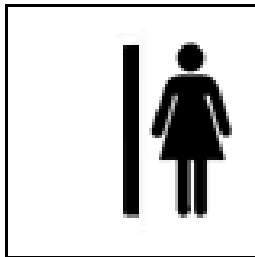
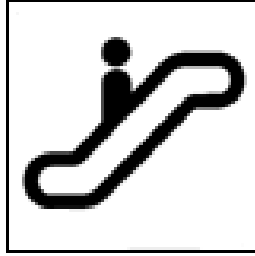
BUT I HAVE MY LIMITS...



IT'S... UHHH...
BEEN REAL NICE CHATTIN'!
I'M OUTTA HERE!



CONT'D



HEH HEH. DOES IT
EVERY TIME!