



"The thoroughness with which [Irving] relates the Blue Beetle history is admirable...and awesome. The treatment of Victor Fox is accurate and, from my memory of him, generous."

-Will Eisner
Comics legend, in 1999

"By reading [The Blue Beetle Companion] I've learned a thing or two (or three or four) about my favorite medium, and because herein I've met...some of the most colorful rascals ever to put their (smudgy) fingerprints on said favorite medium."

-from the Introduction by Tom De Haven
author, *It's Superman!*

"[Irving] is tenacious, thorough, exact, entertaining, and — above all else — endlessly enthusiastic and dedicated to his subject."

-from the Afterword by Jon B. Cooke,
editor, *Comic Book Artist Magazine*

The Blue Beetle Companion: His Many Lives from 1939 to Today unlocks the crazy, controversial, and unique origins of one of comics' longest-running (and most resilient) super-heroes. Christopher Irving, *Comic Book Artist* Associate Editor and comics historian, traces the Blue Beetle's roots from his inception at Fox Comics in 1939 to his new incarnation at DC Comics.

Interviews with Will Eisner, Joe Simon, Joe Gill, Roy Thomas, Geoff Johns, Cully Hamner, Alex Ross, Keith Giffen, Len Wein, and others help solve the mysteries surrounding the many lives of the Blue Beetle! From mystery man to acrobatic superhero to an armored teenager, *The Blue Beetle Companion* is the first definitive book about comics' greatest underdog.

TwoMorrows Publishing
Raleigh, North Carolina



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by Christopher Irving



BLUE BEETLE COMPANION

HIS
MANY
LIVES
FROM
1939 TO
TODAY

CHRISTOPHER
IRVING

the **BLUE BEETLE** *companion*

His Many Lives from 1939 to Today

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Book design by Rich J. Fowlks



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THE GOLDEN AGE

THE BIRTH OF THE MYSTERMAN: The many faces of Officer Dan Garret

1939-1950

Comic books exploded as an industry in the 1930s, taking pop culture by storm in a four-colored blur. While an army of four-color mysterymen and crimefighters were successfully jettisoned upon an unsuspecting world, changing the mighty course of movie serials, merchandising, and radio shows, dozens more would-be heroic successes fell between the cracks, washed away with the gutter trash from the Great Depression.

The Golden Age of comic books began with Superman's premiere in the first issue of *Action Comics* in June of 1938. The first true super-hero, Superman was a combination of Flash Gordon, the mysterymen of the pulp magazines, and Captain Easy from the *Wash Tubbs* comic strip. Even though, Detective Comics only printed 200,000 copies of *Action Comics* #1 and sold 130,000, a fact Detective wasn't made privy to until three months after the comic's release.

The Blue Beetle was neither jettisoned, nor did he necessarily fall between the cracks: he just hung on and remains to do so more than sixty years after his birth. Kind of an anomaly unto himself, the Blue Beetle could have easily disappeared from comic pages everywhere before the end of World War II...or he could have been a raging success that would have given Superman and Captain America a run for their tights-clad money.



A young Will Eisner,
in 1941.

Like many figures in the formative days of the comic book medium, Victor Fox was a colorful character straight out of a Dickens novel.

"Victor was short, round, bald and coarsely gruff, with horn-rimmed glasses and a permanent cigar clamped between his teeth," artist Al Feldstein told historian Jon Berk. "He was the personification of the typical exploiting comic book publisher of his day—grinding out shameless imitations of successful titles and trends, and treating his artists and editors like dirt."

"Victor Fox actually had his own apartment in the same building with the Fox Features offices," Chuck Cuidera revealed. "One day, he asks me to do a favor for him. He has this box of liquor, and asks me to take it up to his apartment, near the top floor of the building. I go up there, and who answers the door but a beautiful woman dressed only in a slip! She invited me in, asked if I wanted a cup of coffee or anything. I was polite, but got out of there fast as I could! That was Fox, though—he always had a girl around, stashed away somewhere!"

"Fox found out I was also a painter," Don Rico said in a 1975 interview with Barry Alfonso for *Mysticogryfil*. "So he commissioned me to do a mural for his home and he kept me prisoner in his house."



Jerry Iger, the other half of Eisner and Iger, in 1942.



(above & next page) Eisner's ciphers of himself and Victor Fox, from the 1986 Graphic Novel *The Dreamer*.

© Will Eisner Estate

Victor Fox would pace back and forth around his bullpens, chomping on a cigar and announcing "I'm the king of comics!"; comics may have been "a kid's field, but we're not playing school here with chalk on a blackboard," and Fox always had "millions of dollars tied up in this industry."

Al Feldstein could still do a mean impersonation of Victor Fox, even decades after working for him. The enigma that was Victor Samuel Fox is gradually being uncovered in a sorting of myth, falsehoods and outright lies spoken from and about the man. The long-running story has been that Fox was a former accountant at Detective Comics who saw the success of his employer, quit, and started his own comics company that same day. Historian Michael Feldman firmly believes the accountant story a fabrication and there has been no documentation or witnesses who have attested towards Fox's former employment. Writer Robert Kanigher once stated that "Fox had nothing to do with DC."

Victor Fox's beginnings were across the Atlantic...in jolly old England.

Victor's parents, Joseph and Bessie Fox, were born in Russia in May, 1865 and March, 1863, respectively. They had two daughters after their marriage: Annie in July, 1884 and Rosie in September, 1885 before moving to Nottinghamshire, England. Once there, Fanny E. was born in April, 1892, and Samuel Victor Joseph on July 3, 1893. The Fox family emigrated to America by March, 1898—the month Etta G. was born. Another Fox sister, Marrion, was born in May 1900.

The Foxes settled in Fall River City in Bristol, Massachusetts by 1900. Joseph was employed as a storekeeper before moving the family to New York City by 1917. There, Joseph opened his own women's clothing business, where he employed his daughters Etta as a designer and Marion as a Secretary. The Foxes lived on 555 West 151st Street in New York, presumably under the same roof. By this point, Samuel had begun going by Victor Samuel, and had started the exporting line of his father's business.

According to Victor's June 5, 1917 draft card, he had earlier served six months as a First Lieutenant in the Army. The draft card also describes him as being of medium height and stout, with gray eyes and black hair (which corresponds with the general description given by those who knew the man). Apparently not one for military service, Fox attempted to exempt from duty since he exported the military uniforms his father had started manufacturing...a matter of either coincidence or design. His business office was listed as 42 East 20th Street.

Who Was Who in America listed Fox as Chairman of Consolidated Maritime Lines, Inc. from 1919 to 1922, becoming an Industrial Engineer for reorgns. to large corporations until 1935.

April 19, 1927 saw the 27 year-old Fox involved in a lawsuit against the Palmer and Parker Company, whom Fox and Company had subchartered to transport mahogany logs from Gold Coast, Africa to Boston in 1920. Two years later, on November 26, 1929, Fox was arraigned for operating a "boiler room" scheme, where he sold good stocks in exchange for bad ones, and failed to deliver "unissued" stocks. Fox, at the time, was operating under two business names: "Fox Motor and Bank Stocks" and "American Common Stocks, Inc."

At some point in 1936, he reportedly published astrology magazines under the Zarius Zeus pen name (Zeus, ironically enough, is the "King" of the Greek pantheon of gods). By 1939, he decided that a comics empire was written in the stars for him.

Meanwhile, a failed comics cartoonist/publisher and his young business partner, Jerry Iger and Will Eisner, had formed a comic book production studio to package original material.

"The reason I got together with Jerry was because he was a good salesman and I was shy at the time," Eisner reflected. "Good at making product and running a shop, period. Jerry had no hesitation about calling on any publisher. Now he was the short guy in the team, but he was a very feisty guy. He was 13 years older than me."

The Eisner and Iger shop of Universal Phoenix was the first to divide the cartoonist's tasks into an assembly line, arranged so that the work could be produced more expediently. Eisner and Iger had met some years before when, in 1936, they produced the short-lived *WOW! What A Magazine*, one of the earliest forays into comic books with original material. After *WOW!* folded in 1937 (the launderer who'd invested the money, John Henle, cancelled the title due to low sales), Eisner and Iger became full partners (for producing the \$15 capital to rent an office, Eisner got top billing). The new Eisner and Iger shop packaged original comics for publishers like Centaur and Fiction House.

"I was very poor because it was still the Great Depression," Eisner told Gerard Jean. "Jerry Iger was broke; he was out of work, out of a job. But I saw something that was very obvious: You didn't have to be a genius to see that they were looking for new stories, original stories. Up until that time, the magazines that were beginning were using newspaper strips, which they pasted together. Then I said to Jerry Iger, 'Something is happening here. Pretty soon, there won't be enough strips, and they will need original material; and I think we can do it.'"

Pictures show Iger as a well-coiffed man with a pencil-thin moustache and pinstripe suits and Eisner as a handsome kid with a high forehead. Iger was born to Austrian immigrant parents in 1903 New York and was then transplanted to Oklahoma for a good amount of his childhood. Returning to New York in 1916, Iger would later land a job at the famous Fleischer animation studios in Manhattan in 1922. From there, he would work for the Hearst-run *New York American* for a decade as a staff artist. Eventually, Iger would answer a 1936 classified ad for a cartoonist/editor to land the position assembling *WOW! What A Magazine*.



WOW #4, 1936, featured early work by Will Eisner.



What follows is The Blue Beetle's first appearance from *Mystery Men Comics* #1 (August 1939), with special thanks to Michigan State University.



THE GOLDEN AGE

A TOUGHER BIRD TO CATCH!: The Ill-Fated *Blue Beetle* daily strip

Victor Fox, bent on expanding his comics empire, decided to take over the daily newspapers' comic section in late 1939, even advertising in an article in the October 28 issue of *Editor & Publisher*.

"He told the column [Fox Feature Syndicate]," the article reads, "has prepared for release Dec. 3 a four-page, eight-comic ready-print Sunday supplement in four colors. The comics include: *The Green Mask*, *Patty O'Day*, *Dr. Fung*, *Yarko the Great*, *Rex Dexter of Mars*, *The Golden Knight*, *Tex Maxon*, and *Spark Stevens*, all features being polled by FFS for reader popularity. These can be serviced in black-and-white, he added.

"In addition, Mr. Fox said, FFS will release this month to newspapers four daily comic strips, *The Green Mask*, *Spark Stevens*, *The Blue Beetle*, and *D-13 Secret Agent*. These are black-and-white. Of FFS's 70 comic features, the column was told, more than 50 are available to newspapers."

Fox's four-page comics supplement premiered on January 7, 1940, to undoubtedly high fanfare. *The Springfield Republican* in Springfield, Massachusetts carried the short-lived Sunday strips.

In order to save on ordering new features, Fox would print two comic book pages side by side and resume the page count each Sunday, until the full stories were told. Each story opened with a half-page splash on the first page; when it came time to print up Sunday strips #2-up, Fox would chop off the top half of page three of the comic book and paste up the half-splash from the first page. As a result, there would be huge leaps in continuity from week to week. *Blue Beetle* could be knocked out one Sunday, but would be in the middle of a fist fight the next. The only attempt made to give any flow was in a hastily lettered caption imposed on the "splash."

To make things more confusing, the stories were printed out of sequence. The first two weeks of *The Blue Beetle* reprinted his introduction in *Mystery Men Comics* #1 (where he resembled the Green Hornet), followed by *Mystery Men* #3, then *Mystery Men* #4, followed by the third story...all of which had the *Blue Beetle* in different costumes. Not worried about character integrity, Sunday funnies readers got four variations on the character within two months.



Victor Fox forecasting the future of comics, from *Editor & Publisher*.

Next spring, Fox offered his *Weekly Comic Magazine* to newspapers: a sixteen-page comic book insert featuring headliners The Blue Beetle and Patty O'Day. Interestingly enough, Will Eisner's *The Spirit* Sunday supplement debuted on June 2, 1940; one can only wonder if Fox had caught wind of Eisner's latest venture and had decided to compete with it.

The Blue Beetle Sunday strip for July 7, 1940 had Dan Garret and Mike Mannigan escape from the villainous Taro. "You'll never leave this house alive!" Taro screams at the escaping duo. "I'll blow you up with it!" Readers never found out. On July 11, *The Blue Beetle* and other Fox Sunday strips disappeared from the pages of the *Republican*.

In an interesting sidenote, the *Republican* offices were located roughly two blocks from Fox's printer/Office of Publication on 29 Worthington Street in Springfield. It may have been a matter of the same printer, or sheer coincidence, that made them one of the few papers known to carry the Sunday strips.

Perhaps timed to coincide with the release of *The Blue Beetle* #1 and debuting the day after the Sunday strip, *The Blue Beetle* daily comic was literally a one-time victory over National's *Superman*—only one newspaper has yet been known to have ever carried the strip.

At the height of the *Superman* strip's popularity, it was read by 25,000,000 readers in 285 papers. Could *The Blue Beetle* compete? *The Boston Evening Transcript* thought so on January 8, 1940, the first day of the strip's run:

"INTRODUCING — '*The Blue Beetle*'"

"The Transcript presents today to its comics strip devotees '*The Blue Beetle*.' It appears for the first time in the place of honor at our right.

"*The Blue Beetle*,' let it be known, accords with the latest trend in comic strips in presenting the incredible adventures of an individual of extraordinary powers. But it works, we believe, a definite artistic advance in his category of strips in that it makes these superhero feats more nearly within the realm of common laws of physics, anatomy, etc. In other words, it makes incredibility more credible, with the ingenuity of a Jules Verne, an H. G. Wells or a Johnathan Swift.

"With introducing '*The Blue Beetle*' with our right hand, we wave a measuredly regretful farewell to '*Superman*' with our left. The escapades of Superman during the months of his incumbency here have often strained our sense of logic, and many of our readers have indicated a similar feeling that the cards were too definitely stacked in favor of Superman."



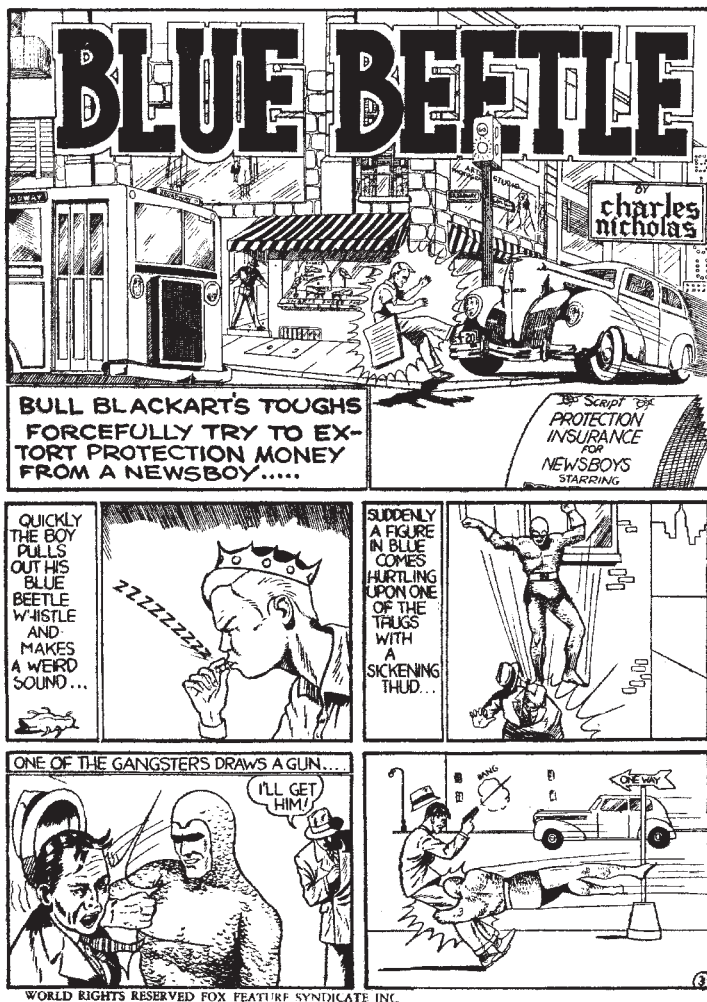
Spirit Section from August 17, 1952.

Spirit TM and © Will Eisner Estate.

"Listen, Eli," hotshot York City Sun reporter Charley Storm reasons with his editor. "You know I'd be the first to laugh this thing off but I can't because I've a burning hunch it's true!"

Storm turns to face a darkened window, looking out at the York City night.

"I tell you, Eli, that somewhere in York City tonight there is an incredible personality who is waging a private war against crime. Who he is and what his motives are, I don't know.



"Despite your skepticism," Storm says as he turns from the window. "I know he exists and I'll find him. There's a story somewhere when killers like 'Croaker' Conway and crime czars like Dude Riley become irritated when I inquire about underworld rumors concerning this man the mobsters call 'The Blue Beetle'!"

"Look, Charley," Crane puts his hands on the spunky reporter's shoulders. "I'm editing the 'York City Sun' not 'Grimm's Fairy Tales.' Now fix that hangover with a bicarbonate of soda. It'll chase away all those 'Blue Beetles' you've been seeing."

A silhouetted figure swings by the Sun's window as Storm makes a vow to his editor.

"Okay, I'll go quietly, Eli," Storm pronounces. "But I'll find the 'Blue Beetle' and when I do, I'll bring back an exclusive that'll blow all your page one stories into the recipe column."

With a powerful left arm, the Blue Beetle pulls himself onto the ledge of a building, pondering.

"So Charley Storm's gone beetle hunting, eh?" the Blue Beetle thinks. "He's a tough kid to elude—but I'm a tougher bird to catch!"

So started the first two days of the *The Blue Beetle* daily strip, drawn by a young Jack Kirby, before he partnered up with Joe Simon on *Blue Bolt*. Dramatic Kirby eartags dominate *The Blue Beetle*, as characters stand with powerful muscular and elongated bodies, punches are thrown like piledrivers and shadows pour over characters like black syrup. It was Kirby's first super-hero work and it smacked of Milton Caniff, using blacks to establish a noir-ish atmosphere as The Blue Beetle himself creeps through the shadows of York City. The art is heavily rendered with the youthful enthusiasm of a young Kirby, everything from the

This Sunday strip reprinted *Mystery Men* #4: the first appearance of the Blue Beetle in his traditional costume.

THE GOLDEN AGE

“THE KING” AND THE BEETLE: The Jack Kirby Blue Beetle daily strip

The following *Blue Beetle* strips (from January 8 to January 30, 1940), written and drawn by Jack Kirby, were reproduced from both microfilm of *The Boston Transcript* and copies of original proofs. Thanks to Will Murray for providing the proofs. Alas, we can only give you the first part of Kirby's Blue Beetle adventure...the entirety can be found on Greg Theakston's *The Complete Jack Kirby Volume One* CD Rom, available from Pure Imagination.

THE BLUE BEETLE



Somewhere—Someplace—!



By CHARLES NICHOLAS



THE BLUE BEETLE



By CHARLES NICHOLAS



THE BLUE BEETLE



Stop Worrying Mother!



By CHARLES NICHOLAS



THE BLUE BEETLE

Cop Blows D. A. Goes!

By CHARLES NICHOLAS



THE BLUE BEETLE

This Job Is Done!

By CHARLES NICHOLAS



THE BLUE BEETLE

A Dire Prediction!

By CHARLES NICHOLAS



THE BLUE BEETLE

The Rooftop Shadow

By CHARLES NICHOLAS



Gorilla gangsters with tommy guns? This Blue Beetle story from *Mystery Men Comics* #20 (March 1941) is an example of the Azure Avenger in his Golden Age prime, from creepy chain mail to dropping off of rooftops like his namesake. A tip of the hat to historian Will Murray for providing the scans from his original comic.

MYSTERY MEN COMICS

PAGE 1





THE SILVER AGE

FROM CHAIN-MAIL TO STROBE GUNS: Blue Beetle's rebirth at Charlton Comics

1954-1983

The Blue Beetle's new home was built by yet another immigrant with a court record: John Santangelo, who came to America from Italy in the early part of the 20th century as a manual laborer. Living in Yonkers, New York and traveling to Derby, Connecticut to lay bricks in the '30s, Santangelo began pursuing a young high-school girl in the neighborhood. Unable to fulfill her wish of finding printed popular song lyrics in the city, Santangelo came across the idea to print them out on his own.

The beginnings of the Charlton Publishing Company stemmed from crude printed single pieces of paper, folded in half and printed at a fellow Italian friend's print shop. Santangelo drove around Connecticut and New York with his wares, dropping them off with cigar store owners. The lyric sheets cost Santangelo 2 cents to print, and he split the 10 cent price tag 50% with the store owners.

"He had a saying many years later," Santangelo's son Charlie said. "When he'd become wealthy, that 'I never made a dollar; I always made a half-dollar'."

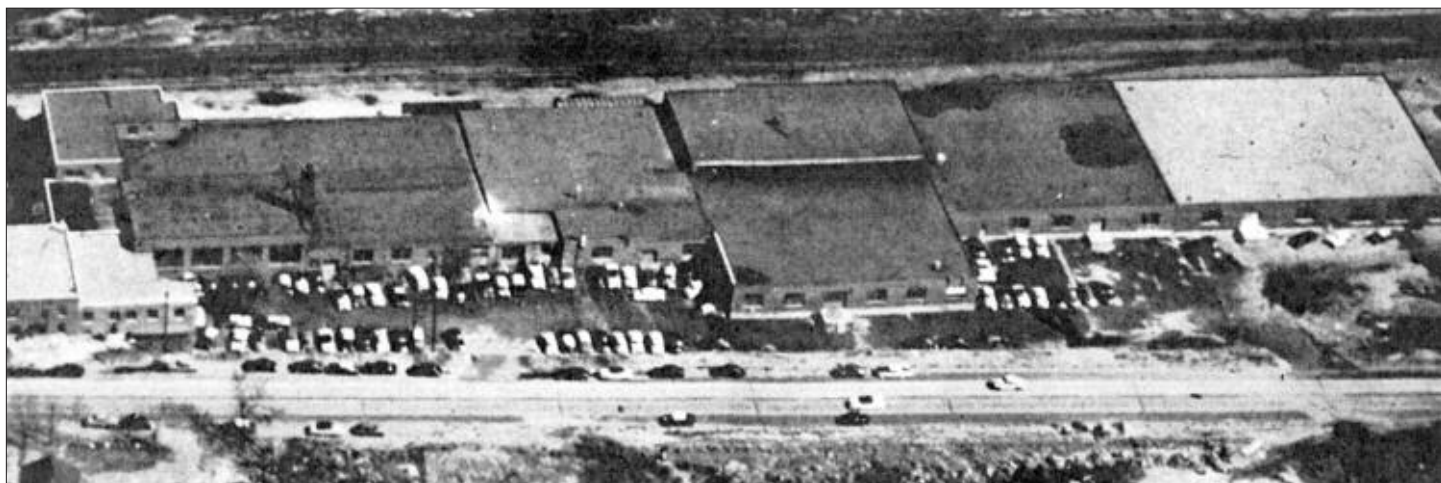
Pretty soon, Santangelo's song sheet took off and Santangelo increased production. Copyright infringement caught up with John, and he found himself sentenced to a year and a day in the New Haven County Jail.

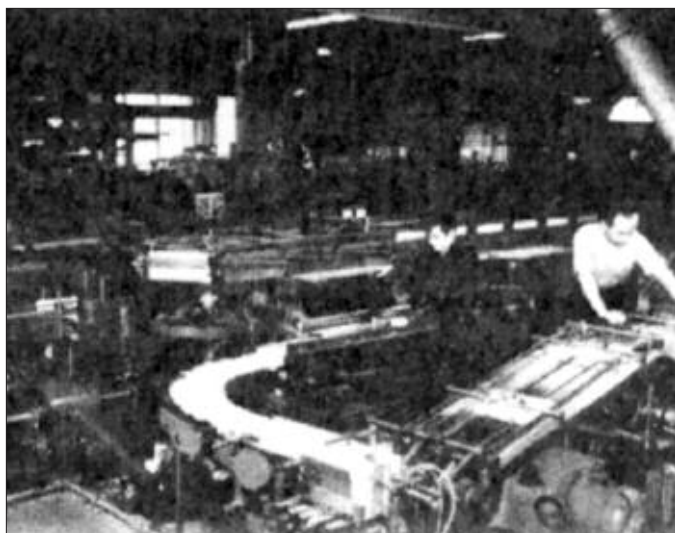
"My old man was an immigrant and he didn't know anything about copyright laws," Charles said. "It certainly wasn't terrible or intentional, but he did violate the law."



(above) Steve Ditko was known to bring candy to Charlton's female employees.

(below) The Charlton Publications complex in Derby, Connecticut.





Charlton's roof even covered a complete printing operation. Courtesy of Bob Beerbohm.
(below) *Space Adventures* #13 (October-November 1954).



Former Charlton head staff writer Joe Gill presented a view of Santangelo that differed from a July 1958 *Newsdealer* magazine article that likened the founder to a “latter-day Horatio Alger”:

“He was wealthy, a very cunning man, and a friend of mine. But a lot of people didn’t like him.”

While serving out his sentence, Santangelo met fellow inmate Edward Levy, a disbarred attorney incarcerated due to his involvement in a Waterbury political scandal. The two became fast friends and, with a handshake deal, decided to establish a legitimate publishing concern upon their release. Levy and Santangelo both had infant sons named Charles, inspiring them to name their newfound business Charlton Publishing.

Levy and Santangelo secured licensing rights (officially this time) and launched their black and white magazine line with evolved versions of Santangelo’s bootleg sheet: *Hit Parade* and *Song Hits*. They would publish their first comic book, *Zoo Funnies*, in Autumn of 1945. The newborn comic book line wouldn’t exceed more than a handful of titles and were all packaged by cartoonist Al Fago.

After years of sending out the printing to New York shops, Charlton set up operations in a 150,000 square-foot building in Derby in the late ’40s. Levy and Santangelo expanded their line in 1951 when they bought an old comics printing press and hired an in-house comics department, with Fago overseeing the newly-hired staff of artists.

The partners’ philosophy was that the cheapest and most efficient way to produce periodicals would be as an “all-in-one” operation; with everything under one roof—editorial, printing, distribution—both eliminating any middle-man expenses and maximizing their profit. The Charlton building housed three sister companies:

Charlton Press, Charlton Publications, and Capitol Distribution, with off-site auxiliary concern The Colonial Paper Company.

The self-contained nature of Charlton is what probably saved their comics lines from the industry bust of the mid-’50s—one brought about by a combination of anti-comic sentiments and the downfall of the American News Company, the largest newsstand distributor for comic companies. Ever a stickler for a discount, Charlton acquired unpublished inventory and comic books from various sinking shops and packaging houses. From 1954 to 1955, they gained titles from Simon & Kirby’s Crestwood, St. John, Fawcett Publications, and Superior Comics. Amongst these acquisitions was *The Blue Beetle*. It’s unclear where Charlton acquired the rights, but is likely that they were bought from the Iger/Roche shop rather than Fox Comics.

Super-heroes got a shot in the arm from the success of *The Adventures of Superman* television show in the 1950s. Aside from cementing the Man of Steel even further into the cultural vernacular, it gave super-heroes a much-needed adrenal boost. Companies scrambled to cash in on the revived super-hero craze, with companies like Timely (now Atlas) bringing old characters out of the mothballs, and newcomer Magazine Enterprises publishing characters like *The Avenger*.

Charlton did their part by resurrecting *The Blue Beetle* in October-November 1954’s *Space Adventures* #13. The Fago cover, recreated from *The Blue Beetle* #58, had the hero bursting through a newspaper that announced “The Blue Beetle Returns!” and “Blue Beetle Strikes Again: Fear Strikes the Underworld!” The ten-page reprint story, “Murder in the Ring,” first appeared four years earlier in Fox’s *The Blue Beetle* #58.

THE MODERN AGE

A WORLD NOT HIS OWN: The Blue Beetle becomes part of the DC Universe 1986-Present

By the 1980s, Charlton had one foot well in the grave; the company that once published an empire's worth of comic books and magazines was now down to a handful of magazines. It isn't known exactly when Blue Beetle and the other Action Hero characters were bought outright from the sputtering Connecticut publisher (the exact figure has not been disclosed, due to proprietary reasons). Paul Levitz, DC's publisher and former comics fanboy, apparently bought them as a present to DC's then editor-in-chief Dick Giordano, the original mastermind behind the line in the '60s.

1986 was a huge year for DC: they launched their landmark twelve issue "maxi-series" *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which resulted in massive company-wide editorial changes. When the Blue Beetle landed on a rooftop and fought a gang of thugs holding a girl hostage in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #1, George Pérez drew him to move like Ditko had him move...and writer Marv Wolfman had him speak like the Ditko version.

"That's my job," Beetle tells the grateful lady. "It goes with the blue union suit!"

And then...the Blue Beetle was pulled into the continuity of the DC Universe, and things would never again be the same for him.

Ted Kord's entrance:
Crisis on Infinite Earths
#1 (April 1985).

Blue Beetle TM & © 2007 DC Comics.



Giffen, however, had a different view of the prototypical Ted Kord:

"You couldn't take him seriously. He was so derivative of so many characters. The name 'Blue Beetle,' to me, said that the guy was not taking it all that seriously himself. I want to point one thing out, just for the record: nothing we ever did with the Blue Beetle was meant to denigrate the character. Marc DeMatteis and I had a great deal of affection for the characters that came to be known as our Justice League. We're very proud of the way the Beetle/Booster team evolved.

"People will look at the old Blue Beetle of Ditko and even Paris Cullins and say 'How dare you make fun of him?' We were trying to do something with the character. Would you rather have this Blue Beetle, or no Blue Beetle? That was the only choice DC was giving at that point."

The Blue Beetle lasted in the *Justice League* books for about eight more years, only to disappear again for a couple more. Meanwhile, Dan Garrett appeared as a bit player in flashback stories, particularly the *Justice League of America: Year One* maxi-series, where he became a repeat victim of invading aliens.

In the summer of 1999, Dick Giordano and Bob Layton, both formerly of Charlton Comics, made an attempt at reviving the Charlton characters in a mini-series titled *The L.A.W.*

"The Blue Beetle has been turned into a laughable buffoon," Layton said in 1999, before the mini-series' release. "But that's *not* how I remember the character from when I was a kid. I actually play off the Beetle's reputation as a clown to drive some serious points home in the series."

The L.A.W. didn't result in any lasting effects in the DC Universe, especially not with the Blue Beetle. Layton and Giordano's portrayal of Blue Beetle was more of a throwback to the Len Wein/Cullins version which, in itself, was a throwback to Ditko's Spider-Man.

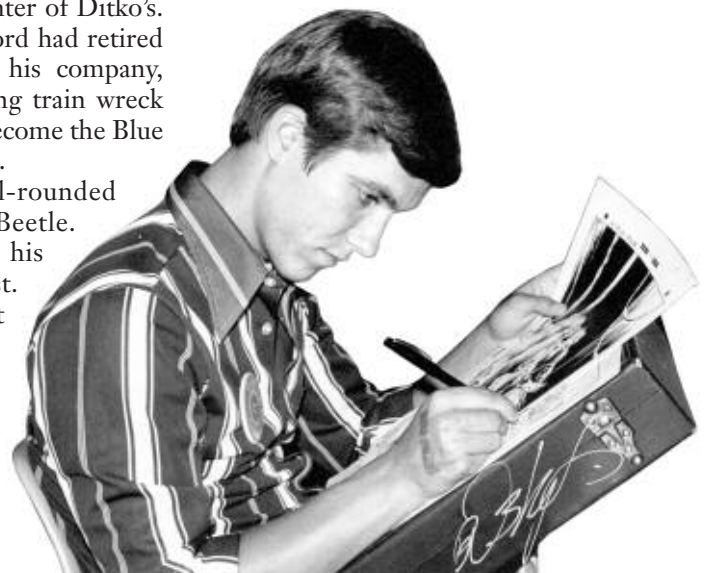
In March 2000, writer Chuck Dixon brought Ted Kord back in the pages of *Birds of Prey* #15, a title featuring the crime-fighting duo of Oracle (Barbara Gordon, the former Batgirl) and Black Canary. Dixon's portrayal of Ted Kord straddled the line between the light-hearted adventurer of Giffen's run, and the able-bodied crimefighter of Ditko's. Coming in to the picture as a friend of Barbara's, Ted Kord had retired as the Blue Beetle and decided to focus on running his company, Kordtronics. When Barbara and Ted encounter a burning train wreck while flying the Bug over Gotham City, Ted is forced to become the Blue Beetle once more, and continued to do so for a few issues.

"I approached him kind of like he was a more well-rounded Bruce Wayne," writer Chuck Dixon says of his Blue Beetle. "He had a full private life and was very involved in his business as both a technological innovator and a capitalist. He enjoyed being the Blue Beetle and used it as an outlet for the frustrations he built up working in the corporate world. I also liked the idea that I think Keith Giffen initiated, that Ted had to work harder than most heroes to stay in shape."

In *Birds of Prey* #39, Ted Kord encountered a greater villain than any he ever faced: degenerative heart disease, diagnosed after Ted had unknowingly suffered from about three heart attacks.



(above) Beetle and Booster Gold swap insults in this page from *JLA: Classified* #4 (April 2005). Art by Kevin Maguire. (below) Bob Layton, Charlton alum and writer/inker of *The L.A.W.* Blue Beetle, Booster Gold TM & © 2007 DC Comics.





killed, everyone expected me to be upset. I'm thinking 'I don't care.' After *I Can't Believe It's Not The Justice League*, DeMatteis and I had decided we didn't want to tell another story with these characters again. It wasn't that we didn't like the characters, but we didn't have any more stories that we felt passionate about telling, and it would have been hack work."

The Last Bwa-ha-hurrah by Kevin Maguire, from *JLA: Classified* #9 (September 2005).

Blue Beetle, Max Lord TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

Through the machinations of *Infinite Crisis*, Dan Garrett's Blue Beetle scarab wound up in El Paso, Texas. In *Infinite Crisis* #3, teenager Jaime Reyes finds the scarab lying in rubble and takes off with it. Prompted by Booster Gold, the scarab attaches itself to Jaime's spine and generates a suit of blue armor around him...making Jaime the new Blue Beetle.

The architect of this new Blue Beetle was a name familiar to the character: Keith Giffen.

"[DC Editor-in-Chief] Dan Didio took me to lunch and said 'Blue Beetle and the scarab. That's all you can have. Are you interested?'," Giffen revealed. "The challenge was there, and I believe my decision right then was to make him Hispanic. I've been a huge agitator for more diversity in heroes; not all super-heroes are white and Anglo-Saxon. When I got the yes on that, I knew this was something I really wanted to do. *Blue Beetle* as a book, the tone, the location, the characters... I've been agitating for this for years. The fact that it was the Blue Beetle surprised me. I was also flattered that DC said 'It may as well be you since you have a knack for the character.'"

Giffen approached a disappointed Blue Beetle fan about co-writing the new book: Hollywood screenwriter John Rogers.

"One of the reasons I'm on the book is that, after Ted Kord was killed in the lead-up to *Infinite Crisis*, I had written this kind of snarky thing on my website about the tone that comics are on now," Rogers, writer of the *Catwoman* and *Transformers* films, said. "Keith, who I knew from other situations, called up and said 'They said they'd give me the scarab and free reign, so do you want to build the new book?' So I hopped on and, one of the things we wanted to do was tell good, simple stories with a great supporting cast, and the story of heroism."

Rounding out the initial *Blue Beetle* art team was artist Cully Hamner, a main member of Gaijin Studios in Atlanta, Georgia. His slickly delineated artwork has appeared in *Daredevil*, *Green Lantern: Mosaic*, and *Down for Top Cow Comics*.

"The editor, Joan Hilty, called me up and asked if I was interested," Hamner revealed about his initial involvement in the book. "I think it took a little while for both of us to decide that I would draw it. I hadn't



The new Blue Beetle bursts onto the cover of *Infinite Crisis* #5 (April 2005).

All characters TM & © 2007 DC Comics.

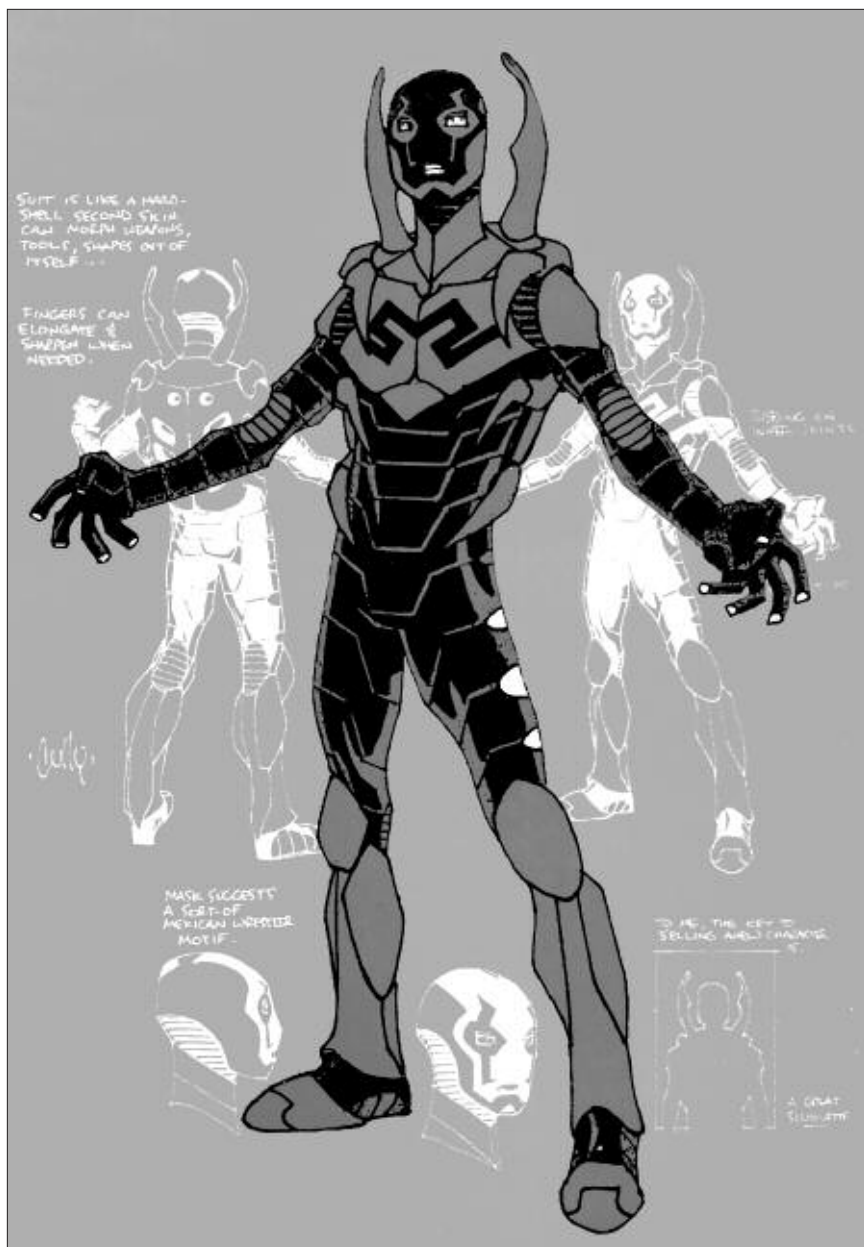
THE MODERN AGE

APPRECIATION: Cully Hamner on his Blue Beetle design

That was essentially the design for Blue Beetle now, the only difference being that DC wanted something on his chest, as an insignia or graphic. I decided to do something similar to the Ted Kord insignia, and it works in tying the whole thing together.

He doesn't have two B's on his chest. It's a graphic that has a little bit of history behind it, which is just enough history to make it work, without it being slavish to the previous Blue Beetle. It worked for me, because part of the rationale that they wanted was a suit that was multi-functional and armor-ish. My thought was to do more of a second-skin that would have an armored exo-skeleton look that a beetle has, but not be so technical-looking. The conceit is that you don't know what the source of the armor is, whether magical or technological; the nature of things is going to be revealed, but you don't know what side of the spectrum the armor comes from. There are also several other influences: the mask is slightly influenced by Mexican wrestlers...

You look at a character like Batman, and you know him by silhouette. You just have to see the two ears and cape. All the best characters have that sense: even Spider-Man has a graphic to him, even if he's a black figure, you just have to put those two eyes on him to know. My intention was that if you even just saw him backlit, you'd know who it is. The bugpack (as I call it) backpack that he wears, gives it that. That was a very purposeful thing on my end.



Blue Beetle, 2005 style: Cully Hamner's original designs for the Jaime Reyes Blue Beetle.
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