

ROY THOMAS' UNDEAD
COMICS FANZINE

HELLZAPOPPIN'
HALLOWEEN
ISSUE!



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October
2005

THOMAS
& GIORDANO'S
DRACULA
DICK BRIEFER'S
FRANKENSTEIN
ANDRU & ESPOSITO'S
MISTER MYSTERY
MR. MONSTER'S
COMIC CRYPT
AND MORE!



PLUS:



DICK GIORDANO

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About Our Cover: For the whole story behind this awesome art by Dick Giordano, see pp. 7-8. [©2005 Dick Giordano; Marvel Dracula TM & ©2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Above: Dick Briefer’s cover for *Frankenstein* #2 (May-June 1946)—with a slightly altered dialogue balloon. Thanks to Al Dellings. [©2005 the respective copyright holders.]



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This issue is dedicated to the memories of

Owen McCarron
& Bruce Hamilton

A-Haunting We Will Go!

It's become an annual tradition, *Alter Ego's* Halloween issue—each time with a cover featuring a major monster who's appeared in comic books, whatever his/her/its origins.

Our first Halloween edition (*A/E* #29, 2003) sported Pete Von Sholly's inspired "*Classics Not Illustrated*" cover of King Kong—as well as a Frank Brunner Batman/graveyard scene on its flip side. Our second (#41, 2004), which was devoted largely to a history of Frankenstein's Monster in the comics, was fronted by a frightening image from Bernie Wrightson's 1970s-80s illustrations of scenes from Mary Shelley's novel. This year, our cover spot goes to *Dracula*, in honor of the completion and now hardcover publication by Marvel, after more than three decades, of Dick Giordano's and my nearly 200-page graphic novel adaptation of Bram Stoker's masterpiece. And we couldn't possibly be happier with the powerful *Dracula* cover that Dick drew especially for this issue!

We thought about devoting this year's Halloween edition to *Dracula* in the comics, but there'd been a coffin-full of such coverage in *Back Issue* #6—so we'll wait a year or three before adding appreciably to it. Besides, thanks to Al Dellings, we still had on hand six weeks' worth of unsold humorous *Frankenstein* dailies done by Dick Briefer that we couldn't squeeze into our 2004 issue, and we'd promised ourselves to print more of them this time around as a special comics section. We also

wanted to feature horror-related art by some of comics' greatest talents... so we did, in a gallery of gruesomeness.

In addition, nearly every issue of *A/E* since #11 has included at least one interview conducted by Jim Amash. This month, we opted for printing the first half of his entertaining and informative in-depth interview with ace inker Mike Esposito (with the second half to follow in #54), using as an excuse the fact that Mike and longtime partner Ross Andru's most successful title for their own 1950s comics line was a horror anthology called *Mister Mystery*. That, plus Michael T. Gilbert's tribute to the supernatural-oriented work of major *Little Lulu* writer John Stanley, completes our roster of Halloween-related material this time around... but that should be enough for anybody.

Especially when we round out the issue with the latest installment of P.C. Hamerlinck's *FCA*, a rousing "re:" section, and the first chapter of Bill Schelly's multi-part coverage of the three New York comicons of 1966—the first year in which more than the barest handful of comics pros attended such events, nearly forty years ago.

Fact is, we kind-of envy you. Because we've already read and savored this issue's cataclysmic contents... and now it's *your* turn.

Bestest,

Roy

COMING IN NOVEMBER

#54

ROY THOMAS' MOST-WANTED
COMICS FANZINE
Alter Ego

GOLDEN/SILVER AGE ACE INKER
MIKE ESPOSITO
ON ROSS ANDRU, SPIDER-MAN,
WONDER WOMAN, & MORE!
PLUS
ROBERT KANIGHER
ON CREATING THE METAL MEN!

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No. 54
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[Art ©2005 Mike Esposito; Wonder Woman TM & ©2005 DC Comics.]

ESPOSITO & KANIGHER— & ANDRU Makes Three!

- Brand-new re-creation (with a difference!) by **MIKE ESPOSITO** of a classic *Wonder Woman* cover by himself and **ROSS ANDRU**!
- "*The MIKE ESPOSITO Interview, Part II – The DC & Marvel Years!*" Working with **ROSS ANDRU** on *Wonder Woman*, *Metal Men*, *The Flash*, & "*The War That Time Forgot*"—& inking *Spider-Man*, *Hulk*, *Sub-Mariner*, *X-Men*, *Avengers*, et al.! Learn why **JIM AMASH** says, "Mike Esposito is as good a teller of comic book yarns as there ever was!"
- Rare art & raucous anecdotes from the Golden & Silver Ages featuring **ANDRU**, **KANIGHER**, **INFANTINO**, **SCHWARTZ**, **LEE**, **KIRBY**, **KANE**, **SEVERIN**, **SMITH**, **ROMITA**, **BUSCEMA** (both of 'em), **GIACOIA**, **COLLETTA**, **BRODSKY**, **THOMAS**, **HECK**, **CONWAY**, **TUSKA**, **EVERETT**, **GOLDBERG**, & many others!
- *First-Person Extra!* Golden/Silver Age scripter/editor **ROBERT KANIGHER** writes about the creation of *Metal Men* & *Sgt. Rock*—with added comments by **JOE KUBERT** & **BOB HANEY**!
- *FCA* with **MARC SWAYZE**, **MICHAEL USLAN**, etc.—**ALEX TOTH**—**MICHAEL T. GILBERT** presents a never-before-seen interview with **JOHN STANLEY**—**BILL SCHELLY** with more on the 1966 **JOHN BENSON** comicon—& *MORE!!*

Edited by **ROY THOMAS**

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Three Decades of *Dracula* —And *Counting!*

Artist **DICK GIORDANO**, Writer **ROY THOMAS**, & Editor **MARK BEAZLEY**
Talk About *STOKER'S DRACULA*—Marvel's Longest-Running Project Ever!

Interview Conducted by Roy Thomas

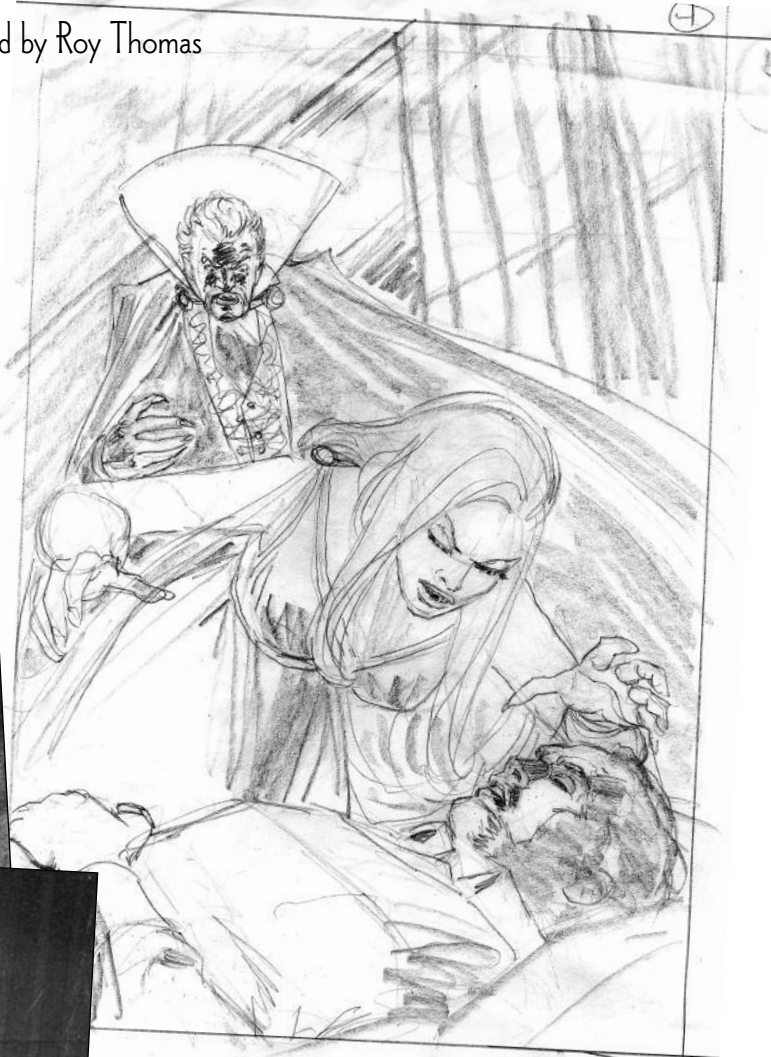
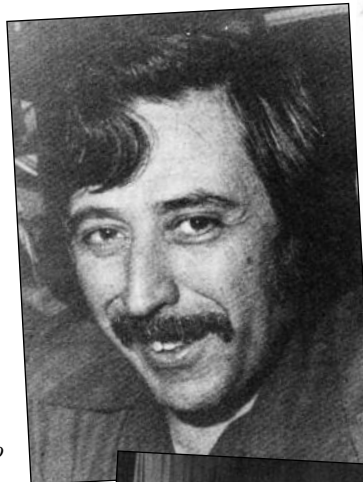
Between Halloween of 2004 and the early weeks of 2005, Marvel Comics published four issues of Stoker's *Dracula*—a 176-page adaptation (probably the longest and most faithful ever done) of Bram Stoker's classic 1897 vampire novel by Yours Truly (as writer) and artist Dick Giordano. The first 76 pages of this adaptation had seen print in 1974-75 in Marvel's black-&-white magazines *Dracula Lives!* and *Legion of Monsters*; it was completed thirty years later, through the good offices of Marvel editor Mark Beazley. Which is definitely a long time between drinks, even of blood! Since this long-lived project—planned as a graphic novel from the start, when the term barely even existed—commenced during the period which is A/E's province, Ye Editor wanted to tell its story from the angle of all three major participants, without simply repeating what Dick and Roy wrote as afterwords to two of the recent series' issues.

This three-way conversation was conducted via e-mail between Dick, Mark, and myself. Originally I planned to edit the e-conversations to read as if the three of us were in the same room at the same time—but, in the end, it seemed to work better simply to begin with my interview with Dick, then move on to the one with Mark. As this issue of A/E goes on sale, Marvel has collected all four issues into a gorgeous hardcover edition, just in time for Halloween 2005, as originally planned. —Roy.

Part I - Dick Giordano

ROY THOMAS: I presume you still don't recall, Dick, any more than I do, precisely when or where we first discussed *Dracula*, so that we both knew of each other's interest in it by 1974. But perhaps we did discuss it before I decided to adapt the novel in comics form.

DICK GIORDANO: As a guess, I would think the subject of *Dracula* came up at one of our lunches in New York, at either the Auto Pub (remember that place?) or at the Playboy Club. We both declared our affection for Stoker's novel. That would have been sometime between 1967-68 and when the idea germinated in your head to do the adaptation for *Dracula Lives!* I can't come up with any specifics, but I've always had the feeling that we discussed it before you started. By the time we began, I was up to my shoulders at Continuity



Dick & Roy Have Aged 30 Years Since Then —*Dracula* Not A Day!

At left are Giordano and Thomas "the way they were" when they launched their adaptation of Bram Stoker's novel in 1974. Dick's photo appeared in the 1975 Marvel Con program book; Roy (then Marvel's editor-in-chief for a few more weeks) is seen giving a talk at the 1974 San Diego Comic-Con, where he was a guest of honor.

Dick's *Dracula* rough above is one of numerous unused cover sketches which were printed in *Stoker's Dracula* #3 in 2004, but is repro'd here from his original pencils, which he kindly packed up and mailed Ye Editor. Incidentally, Dick is accepting commissions to do full, finished versions of any or all of those sketches, as well as other work; see his notice on pp. 7-8. [Marvel *Dracula* TM & ©2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.; art ©2005 Dick Giordano.]

[the art service company created by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano], and I recall doing a lot of it at my home studio on weekends and on the one weekday that I didn't venture into the city.

THOMAS: *You've mentioned Dracula as being the first horror novel you ever read.*

GIORDANO: After getting into reading comics, I progressed, as most comics readers of the day, to the pulps and, after that, to genre fiction. I know you and I have discussed the first "hard-boiled" novel I read, and I have the replica of the Maltese Falcon on a shelf to prove it. It was a gift from you when you, Dann, and I were working together on *Jonni Thunder, a.k.a. Thunderbolt*. A copy was on Jonni's own shelf, somewhere in that story.

I also read some Westerns, a bunch of James Fenimore Cooper, and others, beyond *Dracula*, that I can't recall. Again, as a guess, I would say I read *Dracula* between the ages of 9 and 12. The horror of *Dracula* was often off-screen and written in diaries, notes, and journals by the victims/participants after the acts had occurred; and, to me, that was more horrible than having the author spell out every bit of the gore as it happened!

THOMAS: *As you say, you were very busy working at Continuity Studios with Neal Adams and others at that time, on advertising and TV work, etc., and didn't know where the time would come from. Where did it come from?*

Did it involve burning more than the usual amount of midnight oil? That, of course, would be quite appropriate in the case of Dracula.

GIORDANO: I was more of the business partner at Continuity. Neal was the head honcho as far as the creative end of our business was concerned. Oh, I did art... loads... but much of it was craftsmanship rather than creativity. So when a dream creative project like *Dracula* came along, I'd fit it in, somehow. Besides, Neal and I agreed to put all of our income into the company and draw salaries, so I could and did work on *Dracula* at Continuity, and used its resources and manpower, and 12 pages every other month wasn't an overwhelming schedule, anyway.

THOMAS: *In Stoker's Dracula #4 you give from memory what is probably a pretty accurate reconstruction of a sentence or two from one of my synopses—not just telling what was going on, but talking about page numbers, and how we should drop the events on this page and keep those on another one, etc. Did you find that hard to follow?*

GIORDANO: Not at all, Roy! I rather enjoyed it, since it gave me more room to contribute to the pacing and storytelling of the novel. You



doubtless recall that we both had copies of the same *Dracula* softcover, and your notes pretty much told me when to telescope or eliminate events that were not critical to the story. Also, my ability to hear on a telephone in those days was significantly better than it is today, and since you were the (de facto) editor, there was no one between you and me, so we settled all questions via phone, between ourselves.

THOMAS: *We had to truncate our conception of the adaptation just a bit—to 100 additional pages besides the 76 already completed. At one point, I believe there were to have been 44 more pages—for a total of 144 new pages, or 220 in all. This would have allowed us to do the adaptation at more like the length it would probably have been had we completed it for Marvel in the 1970s. Was this scotched, do you feel, because of Marvel's requirements, or did you feel 100 pages was more doable for you than 144?*

GIORDANO: NO! NO! NO! I would have much preferred to go the 144-page route. I really needed more room to tell the story most dramatically, and I had the time to do it! But Mark [Beazley] was able to sell the project to Marvel on the basis of a collected version to be released in book stores and comics shops for Halloween 2005. That would have required a fifth issue and two months' more work on my part, and a release day of issue #5 too close to the release date for the collected edition. I think we did a good job with the shorter page count, but it would have been even better if we had been able to go

the longer route.

THOMAS: *I know I said at one point that we could do it in 70-80 new pages if we have to—and we would have, though thank God we didn't have to! Any thoughts about that?*

GIORDANO: Lord! If I felt shortchanged at 100 new pages, less than that would have made me feel very uncomfortable. My heart dropped when you said that to Mark. I will agree, though, that the really cool *Dracula* stuff was in the first 76 pages! Still, you've got to finish a project like that seamlessly, and there would have been holes... if not in continuity, then in style.

THOMAS: *Any remembrances of your feelings when the adaptation died a trickling-out death in 1975 with our final then-completed chapter going into the only issue of Legion of Monsters?*

GIORDANO: I knew that was the beginning of the end (it was actually the end of the end, at least for nearly three decades), and I was saddened but too busy with Continuity to stand in place and weep. I got on with it... albeit without the best assignment I'd worked on in years! And I'd miss one of the best collaborations I've had in this business!

DRACULA
Synopsis for 12-page segment
by Roy Thomas

Chapter VIII
HOUR OF THE WOLVES

[MARK & DICK: Numbers in brackets [] indicate the page(s) in the Pocket Books edition of *Dracula* which are covered by the described material, in case either of you wishes to check it out. —Roy.]

P. 1: SPLASH (just ½ page, so we can get in a few more panels—but please leave room for chapter # and title)—DR. SEWARD & PROF. VAN HELSING [163] react to the sight of LUCY—probably best to focus on just the two men, since the previous panel focused on LUCY. VH raises his arms in despair as though appealing to the whole universe: “God! What have we done?” etc. (I’ll truncate VH’s speech. But Dick should have him standing, not sunk in a chair as in the book.) SEWARD is already starting to take off his coat, saying she’ll need his blood again.

VH grabs his doctor’s briefcase, tells SEWARD he’s weakened already—this time he (VH) will provide. (NOTE: The briefcase is missing in the final panel of the preceding chapter... but I’ll leave it to you, Mark & Dick, whether Dick should add it when redrawing that panel. VH wouldn’t have set it down.)

Soon, the transfusion over, weary-looking VH leans over LUCY, who appears to be sleeping peacefully—he tells SEWARD she’ll be all right—this time. He’s ready to put a scarf around her neck, where the two punctures are. [164]

Caption says MRS. WESTENRA has been told not to remove anything against—flowers have medicinal value, etc. SEWARD & VH are by LUCY’s bedside as she awakens an hour later, “seemingly not much the worse from her terrible ordeal.” But SEWARD (closeup?) wonders what it all means—“if my long habit of life amongst the insane is beginning to tell upon my own brain.”

“As We Were Saying Before We Were So Rudely Interrupted...”

This “Chapter VIII” splash and page 2 from *Stoker’s Dracula* #2 (top right & bottom left) are the first new art and story Dick and Roy produced to recommence their adaptation in 2004—repro’d from the first page of Roy’s synopsis, and Dick’s pencil roughs, which were on 8½” x 11” sheets of fairly lightweight paper. To get back into the feel after three Dracula-less decades, note that Dick did some inking with pen on these two initial pages. The roughs were “blown up” and the penciling finished on Marvel art paper, prior to inking. Alas, Dick has few originals of the 1974-75 work; he did have all his original art for nearly three decades—but finally sold most of them, not long before he and Roy were contacted about continuing their version.

As per Mark Beazley on p. 11, Roy requested one slight art change on this first new page: Prof. Van Helsing needed to be carrying his medical bag, so Dick redrew the vampire-hunter’s left hand, as seen on the published page at bottom right. Somehow, too, “Wolves” became “Wolf.” [©2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.]





Dick's pencil rough for the cover of *Stoker's Dracula* #3.
©2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

THOMAS: *Busy as I was then, too, I felt pretty much the same way. I've been trying to remember—do you think I had given you a synopsis for the next [eighth] chapter? We had a title I wrote at the end of the last one published in 1975—"The Hour of the Wolf"—but I don't know if I wrote another synopsis before the axe fell.*

GIORDANO: I don't recall another synopsis having been written... but I guess it's possible. You could have waited until the last minute to write it. We both knew what the next chapter would be about (hence your final blurb title), and since it needn't be approved by a Marvel editor, your synopses then were briefer than they were for the final 100 pages, which did have an editor hovering over them.

THOMAS: *And "hovering" very well, as I'm sure we both agree. Do you recall about when we first began to discuss the possibility of finishing Dracula somehow, after the cancellation of first Dracula Lives!, then Legion of Monsters?*

GIORDANO: Not really. Only that, by that time, life had slowed down for us somewhat, and I, at any rate, remembered the work on *Dracula* fondly and that it had been particularly fulfilling and that I wanted to finish unfinished business. I don't recall that your attitude was as schmaltzy as mine, but you were more than willing to give it a go! It became more of a mission for me! I couldn't tell if you were feeling the same way, but I suspected that you wanted to do it more than you let on.

THOMAS: *Gee, I guess my usual reserved facade fooled you! I was always about as eager as you were to finish it, I think. I recall that once you and I got together and even tried to lease the rights to the*

material from Marvel, and got nowhere... but was that the same time when we wound up in the Marvel offices in the 1990s? I must've been in from South Carolina for something-or-other. Marvel decided, at that meeting, that it would publish the material, old and new... though I don't recall what executive we met with.

GIORDANO: I don't, either. I think he was there for about 38 minutes, and then he was gone. Matt Ragone (of distribution) joined us in mid-conversation, as did editor Glen Greenberg, who later claimed to have fetched the negatives and had them in his office when he was downsized [during the infamous "Marvelution"]. In a letters pages somewhere, I read a letter from Glen gently chastising us for not remembering his name; and in it, he mentioned the name of the exec we talked with.

THOMAS: *I may have forgotten his precise name—I've never been very good with names—but I do remember Glen's enthusiasm clearly...less so any exec's.*

You mention that your phone rang in early 2004, and it was Mark Beazley asking about the two of us continuing the Dracula adaptation for Marvel. He contacted me at the same time. What was your reaction?

GIORDANO: Surprise, of course, and delight—mixed with a sense of irony that, after all this time spent trying to find a way to get someone to help us finish *Dracula*, suddenly one day the phone rings and our original publisher inquires if we have any interest in finishing it! It's a good thing Patti [Pat Bastienne, Dick's longtime associate and assistant] was handling the phone, or I might have uncharacteristically sputtered!

THOMAS: *I know you had some reservations about committing to 100 or more pages of new material, since Marvel might decide to kill the project at some stage—and even though you figured you'd be paid for everything you did, you were reluctant to get involved without some sort of assurance that the adaptation would actually be published... because you'd have taken yourself out of circulation for some months. How did you finally get around this problem?*

GIORDANO: That was a talking point for Mark and me. After trying to get such a clause inserted, he said Marvel wouldn't give such a guarantee. But he personally promised to do whatever he could not to let the project disappear, and I guess in the end my desire to finish *Dracula* overcame my concerns about committing to a large body of work without a play-or-pay clause, which DC used to issue almost routinely. Of course, it all worked out, so—"What, Me Worry?"

THOMAS: *In what ways do you feel it was different working on the material now as opposed to thirty years ago?*

GIORDANO: Well, my focus and perspectives as an artist have changed somewhat. I am now more concerned with graphic storytelling than I was 30 years ago, and less concerned with the illustrative quality of each drawing. I will more often opt for the clear diagram as opposed to the cool drawing. Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive, and when I'm on, I can sometimes deliver both in the same place! I also tended this time around to run out of gas earlier in the day. And yet another sign of the advancing years is occasionally not being able to coordinate my eye and my hand. I think, hopefully, that I'm more aware of these differences than my audience!

THOMAS: *I'm sure you are. I accidentally wrote in my own piece in the 2004 Stoker's Dracula #1 that you had to trace and redraw the work we'd done in 1974-75. I either misunderstood something I was told, or else was working from earlier and happily superceded information. Did Marvel find good copies of the work?*

GIORDANO: Marvel came up with the original 30-year-old film of the pages, and re-mastered them. I complained to Mark after seeing proofs of issue #1 that Marvel had used the wrong paper (hi-gloss) and had lost

too much definition. He said Marvel always used that paper for collection editions and graphic novels, which completely ignored the needs of this particular book. They seemed disinterested in experimenting on the balance of the issues, but Mark recently told me that they're looking into matte stock for the collected edition. Let us pray! Additionally, Mark is re-scanning 30 pages of the original 76 that I still held, and if the scanning is successful, those 30 pages, at least, will be superior to the mini's pages, even if printed on the hi-gloss stock.

I don't know where your information about "tracing" came from. At the very worst, I could've scanned from the original books and have produced results that would at least equal the quality of the negs. Remember I asked you for issues that I was missing, and you said that you had yours bound? I ordered the missing issues from Mile High Comics and had a full set that could be used in a pinch.

And no, I would *not* have re-traced them. That would have taken the starch out of my sails, and the deadlines would have been blown. That would have been at least three months' work.

THOMAS: *Were there any particular problems—or just interesting anecdotes—that you'd care to repeat concerned with working on our Dracula adaptation—either now, or back in the 1970s?*

GIORDANO: You might take this as a compliment... or not. But when you killed Renfield *twice* in your plots [in #3, and then again at the beginning of #4], I never questioned it. I expected that you had a reason that would soon become apparent. Oh, well....
[NOTE: More about that little incident in the Mark Beazley section.]



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MEANWHILE...

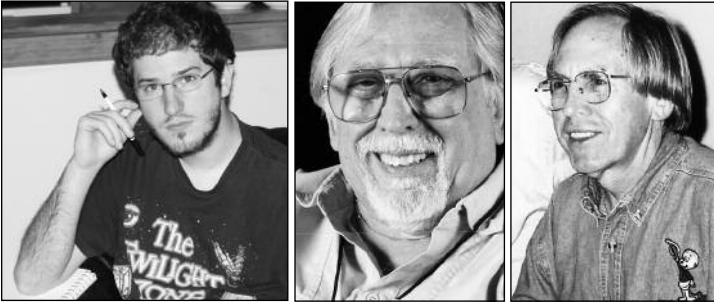
So Many Vampiresses, So Little Time!
Dick feels that, if he and Roy had completed their adaptation in the 1970s, he'd have had more pages in which to expand this sequence with the Count's three "vampire brides" from *Stoker's Dracula* #4. As it stands, the lethal ladies taunt Van Helsing on this penciled page, then flee laughing on the next. [©2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Marvel's insistence that their prohibition on showing characters smoking applied to classics like *Dracula* seemed somewhat ludicrous, in view of the fact that the character smoking was doing it for a specific plot point. We agreed that the point wasn't important enough to take a stand there, but still, for a rule to have legs, it should accomplish some good, no?

I suffered from some frustrations with the lack of room. I could have done a neat bit with *Dracula's* three "wives" as they confronted Van Helsing and Mina in the woods as they rested before continuing their journey to corner Dracula. As drawn, that sequence took about two pages. Would have been much scarier with four pages. Similarly, the battle in the sun/snow shower could have gone a few pages longer.

THOMAS: *You've done some Dracula commissions since Stoker's Dracula began to come out. Were these all based on the cover sketches of yours that were printed in issue #3? Did you do all 16 of those at one time, and Mark just picked from them as he needed them?*

GIORDANO: Actually, to date, aside from convention drawings, I've sold just two commissions based on the cover roughs printed in issue



Three Guys With A Stake in Dracula

(Left:) Marvel editor Mark Beazley. (Center & right:) Dick and Roy as they are today. Thanks to Keif Simon & Jim Murtaugh for the photo of RT at the April 2005 Big Apple Con; and thanks to Rob Jones & Pat Bastienne for the recent photo of DG. Clearly, *Dracula's* held up better than his mortal adapters since 1975—but they're doing their best.

#3, plus three of the cover roughs themselves. Hardly a cottage industry.

Mark would e-mail the need for cover roughs as each cover became due, and I would spend the day drawing 3 or 4 roughs, fax them to Mark, and [Marvel editor-in-chief] Joe Quesada would pick one. I didn't know that Mark was holding onto the faxed covers until they were all printed in one of the issues. If I'd known, I'd have provided the originals... faxes ain't cool!

Aside: I sent the head shot rough that eventually became the cover of issue #4 every time they asked for roughs. It was a favorite of mine, and it was ignored until the last cover. See, Roy? Perseverance pays.

THOMAS: *Inevitably, everybody has his favorite. For my part, I fell in love with the sketch that became the cover of this issue of Alter Ego. At first I was mildly unhappy it hadn't been chosen as one of the four comic covers—but now, of course, I'm delighted, because A/E got a great cover out of it—and, as soon as this issue is published, thanks to your generosity, it'll be hanging on the wall in our guest house, where I'll see it every day, since Dann and I have turned our guest house into a combination library and gym. Thanks again for that!*

As for commissions—if people take a close look at those sketches in Stoker's Dracula #3, you'll probably keep getting orders for years to come. They can contact you through the notice in this very issue.

GIORDANO: Editing and follow-up questions graciously accepted—as will be \$100 bills!

Part II - Mark Beazley

THOMAS: *Just for the record, Mark—what were you doing in 1974, the year Dick and I began our adaptation of Dracula?*

MARK BEAZLEY: *The adaptation began—and ended—before I showed up on the scene. I was born in 1977.*

THOMAS: *How long have you been in the comics field, and how long at Marvel?*

BEAZLEY: I interned at Marvel the spring of my senior year of college in 1999. I was double-

majoring in Archaeology and Classical Civilizations at Boston University, but came to the realization that the world of academia wasn't for me—I didn't want to be in school for the rest of my life. Somehow I managed to convince one of my professors that interning at Marvel would provide an excellent background to examine the archetypal themes present in comics which directly link back to the same themes present in Classical Mythology, borrowing heavily from Joseph Campbell. He agreed to sponsor an independent study which enabled me to receive credit for the internship.

After I graduated, there weren't any positions available at Marvel, so I drifted into editorial in publishing. I spent several years as an assistant editor at a parenting magazine called *American Baby*. The contacts I'd made during my internship bore fruit eventually, and I rejoined Marvel in early 2002. My duties in editorial were more administrative initially: scheduling, editorial planning, and handling freelancer payments. I would work on the occasional special project. I co-edited the first two *Marvel Encyclopedias*. I was Marvel's liaison for the *Marvel Universe Roleplaying Game*—largely because I was one of the only members of editorial who had ever played a role-playing game. Ever so slowly, I started moving more into the collections department, putting together



The Book That Wouldn't Die!

Essential Tomb of Dracula, Vol. 1 (2003) should've been out in 2002. We'll let Mark Beazley tell you why it wasn't. Its cover art from *Tomb of Dracula* #1 (April 1972) is by Neal Adams. The 1999 Colan pencil drawing above is actually from his 2000 *Gene Colan Annual: Painting with Pencil*, but shows the version of Dracula that Dick and Roy were "competing" with in the mid-'70s. There's more mind-numbing Colan art on display in Tom Field's new *TwoMorrow's* volume *Secrets in the Shadows: The Art & Life of Gene Colan*. [Art at left ©2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.; Colan art ©2005 Gene Colan]



Happy Halloween!

A Horrific Helping Of Awe-Inspiring Artwork

Last year's Halloween issue threw a spooky spotlight on Frankenstein in the comics, as depicted by Bernie Wrightson, Dick Briefer, and other talented souls. We don't have an overall "theme" this time—dividing our coverage between versions of Dracula and Frankenstein—but we wanted to devote a special section to "monster-ous" art by some masters of the macabre. —Roy.



The Wright(son) Stuff

Though we printed a number of pages from it last October, we couldn't resist starting out with still more art from the wonderful 1993 volume which features Bernie Wrightson art that didn't make it into the 1983 Wrightson-illustrated edition of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, which is well worth seeking out.

Both are preliminary sketches for quite different finished illos in the Marvel/Dodd & Mead book.

For a copy of *Bernie Wrightson: The Lost Frankenstein Pages*, contact Mike & Hillary

Catron at hcatron@earthlink.net

Priced at just \$9.95 per copy postpaid—and worth every penny. Some things shouldn't stay lost!

[Art ©2005 Bernie Wrightson.]

Frankenstein In The Funny Pages?

DICK BRIEFER & His Merry Monster Comic Strip

Part II

In last year's Halloween issue, #41, along with Don Glut's coverage of Dick Briefer's Frankenstein comic book, Alter Ego printed remembrances of correspondence with Briefer during the 1970s by Al Dellings... extended remarks by the Golden Age artist which he had sent during that period to Howard Leroy Davis... and 25 sample dailies of a Frankenstein comic strip Briefer prepared (in the 1950s?), soon after publication of the comic book version ceased. Soon afterwards, Briefer drew 36 more dailies, retelling one of the two 1950s stories from the earlier strips (itself an adaptation of a published comic book tale), with totally new art and script. This time around, we're presenting the first 20 of these, right after the following piece which has been edited slightly from its original publication in Al's 1970s fanzine Near Mint #35. Dick Briefer passed away in 1983. —Roy.

A Word about DICK BRIEFER

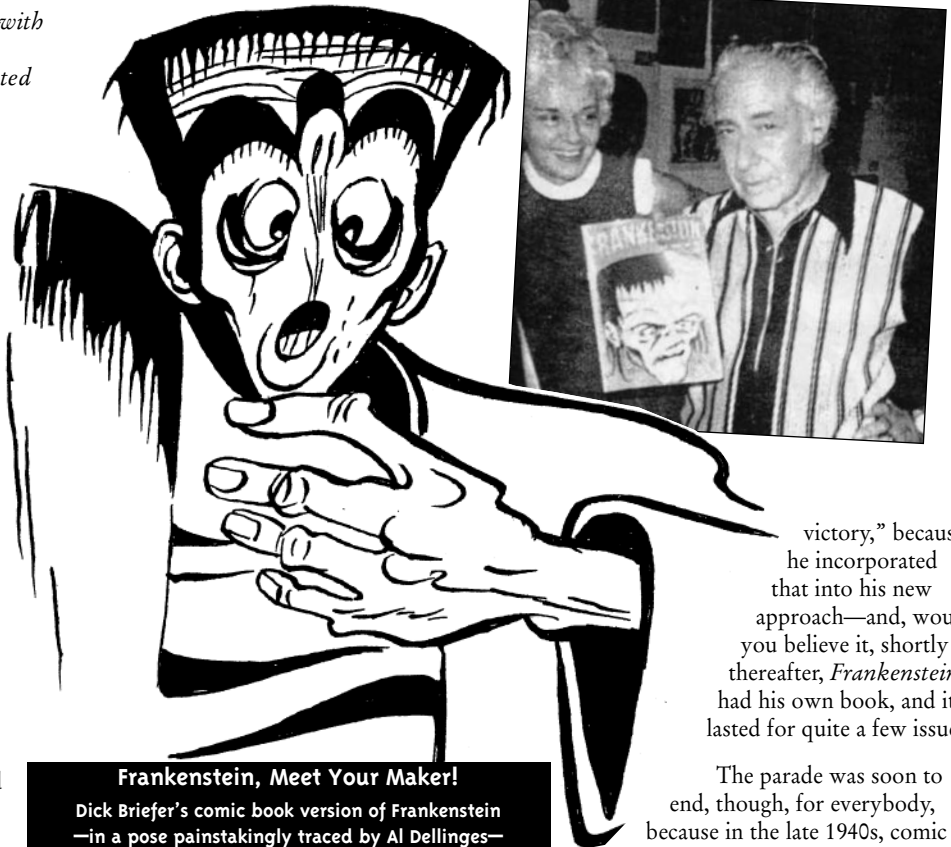
by Ray Funk & Al Dellings

Dick Briefer's first comic book work appeared in *Jumbo Comics* #1, and continued for several issues dealing with a pictured version of the Victor Hugo's classic work *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. His work also appears in several other first issues: *Planet Comics* #1 features "Flint Baker," *Jungle Comics* #1 features a story titled "Drums," and *Mystery Men Comics* #1 contains a "Rex Dexter" tale. Reprints from various issues of *Mystery Men Comics* make up the 1940 *Rex Dexter of Mars Comics* #1, and there is yet another "Rex Dexter" story in *Eagle Comics* #1.

All of this comic book work was done by Dick just prior to his association with Prize Publications, where he created his famous version of *Frankenstein*. He had a copyright on his own version of the famed monster, and in 1982 he was on the verge of syndicating a *Frankenstein* daily strip, done in the comic style. More on this in a moment. First, let's go back to *Prize Comics* #3, which featured the world's first look at Briefer's art on the dreaded Monster.

Dick's Monster was something to behold. Whatever possessed him to put the creature's nose up on the forehead is beyond us—but it worked, making it possibly the weirdest-drawn Frankenstein Monster ever done. His facial expression reflected evil to perfection, but it was different and, if the word fits, refreshing. He was bad, and he *stayed* bad, and he left a path of destruction unparalleled in equality. He did not deteriorate, nor slow down, nor lose his strength; but, somewhere along the line, Briefer had a change of heart about the Monster and made him cute and sweet. This showed just what a genius Briefer really was, because the monster now changed into a humorous character and was more popular than ever.

Apparently Briefer was well aware of the old cliché, "Comedy is



Frankenstein, Meet Your Maker!

Dick Briefer's comic book version of Frankenstein—in a pose painstakingly traced by Al Dellings—contemplates his creator, in a photo that first appeared in *Rocket's Blast-Comickollector* #84, several decades back. [©2005 the respective copyright holders.]

victory," because he incorporated that into his new approach—and, would you believe it, shortly thereafter, *Frankenstein* had his own book, and it lasted for quite a few issues.

The parade was soon to end, though, for everybody, because in the late 1940s, comic books began going downhill. Like many of the other comic book illustrators, Briefer left the business and went into serious painting. But try as he did,

he couldn't get the beloved Monster out of his system, and in the early '50s he wrote and drew a series of daily *Frankenstein* strips in the humorous vein, aimed at syndication. He was unsuccessful at selling the strip, but he did get several offers to do a comic book version. Dick declined. He never told us why, but he made it very clear that a comic book version was out of the question.

And that's how it was for about a quarter of a century, until we contacted Dick regarding a book we wanted to do about him. It was 1977, and Dick was very receptive about the idea. In fact, our contact even revived his interest in the *Frankenstein* daily strip again.

So we prepared a booklet for him, containing the strips he had originally done in the '50s, and resubmitted them. But it was again turned down, except for one publisher who wanted to have Dick do a comic book version of the monster. But Dick still had no interest in doing a comic book version. Perhaps it was for the best, as Dick's health had been failing and he might not have been able to keep a commitment. He recently passed away, and we had several inquiries as to the availability of his unpublished *Frankenstein* daily originals. We tried to contact his wife about them, but never received a reply.

As we see it, Dick's contribution to the world of comic art will never be surpassed, and he had an influence on every artist who ever wanted to draw the Monster. In fact, Alex Toth was an admirer of Briefer's art and

often made quick sketches of the monster à la Dick Briefer's style on postcards he sent out.

Dick Briefer's art always left you laughing.

[Next: Following are four letters Briefer wrote to Al D. during this period, which will help put the sample dailies on pp. 28-32 in perspective:]

August 25, 1979

Dear Al Dellings,

Howard Lowery isn't to blame for this very late response to your letter forwarded to me. I am lazy, have very little nostalgia for the old comic days, and was out of town for several weeks. If you can still use this information, fine.

Actually, I don't know what you wanted in the "interview" you requested. If you want to know if the arrangement you planned on is okay—sure, I'll go along with you.

My "resume" has been written up in several books on comic history. Enclosed is a page from Howard's auction brochure which tells the story—you probably have that.

The "Hunchback" was my first contribution to comics. To stretch it out, I added a lot of original story line. I think I did the cover for that first magazine, *Wow!*, of Eiger & Eisner. Then came "Rex Dexter," which I had absolutely no interest in, and the art was terrible—and believe it or not, I have no recollection what ever of "Flint Baker" and a lot of other strips people claim I did and are generally right. The ones I enjoyed most were "The Pirate Prince" for Lev Gleason's books (*Daredevil?*), a comic "Who Dunit," *Crime Does Not Pay* (Biro & Wood) in which I put people I knew . . . Jimmy Durante and his whole radio crew, and one where Leonard Bernstein was the culprit.

Outstanding to me were short 3-4 page stories in several books edited by E.C. Cronin—good stories and good art.

Frankenstein, the comic version, was always a joy, and I have some superb samples of a projected daily strip that had been turned down by syndicates in the past. At this stage of my life, even though "horror" is "in," I'm too lazy to start sending it out again.

Al—this is about all I can say—I hope I haven't fouled up any plans of yours with this late response. If it did it was probably my loss.

Thanks for your interest, and maybe I'll hear from you some day. I'll be away from home September 10 to November 10 or so, but my mail is forwarded.

Best to you and thanks again,
Dick Briefer

Laughing All The Way To The (Blood) Bank

(Right:) A 1948 "Frankenstein (The Merry Monster)" page by Briefer, repro'd from a photocopy of the original art. With thanks to Al Dellings.
[©2005 the respective copyright holders.]

Dear Al,

November 12, 1979

Apologies and explanations: I was out of town from September to today in the DC/Baltimore area. This is a yearly vacation. Although my mail was forwarded to me by a responsible person—there was a miss-up on some things, especially your magazine that I just quickly glanced through. I did get your letter plus the check before I left, meant to write you and thank you but never got around to it, so I really belong on your ████ list! Apologies. I even brought the *Frankenstein* strip with me to send to you if you wanted to look at it, but didn't do that either.

So first, thanks for the check. Next, the book is amazing to me because some of the stuff I don't remember at all, and the "Hunchback" was the first time I've seen that in 40 years or so!

The only thing that bothered me is that *I alone* did all the art, pencil and inking, on everything I ever did. So changes in style were not the results of different inkers! (You probably wouldn't recognize some of the *fine pen* art (no brush) in some of the Romance Stories I did for Prize.)

I don't know how a syndicate would react to *Frankenstein* (the comic version) at this time. Half hearted attempts in the past to sell it got nowhere, except for one syndicate who showed some interest and had me redraw it to their specifications. The story line is based on old stories, and if it were to be published, there's enough in them to last as long as I could last.

So, if I were to send you the originals, and you were to print a batch to send to all the syndicates (I would tell you the ones I contacted and who turned me down), maybe we can make a deal if you were to sell it for me.

I'm lazy at this time of my life, and won't go to the trouble myself—so if you want to do it and benefit if it is sold—and not benefit if it isn't—let me hear from you.

My firm promise—I will answer you immediately if and when you write again! Honest Real American!

Best and Thanks
Dick Briefer



“Ross Andru And I Had A Handshake Partnership That Lasted Until The Day He Died”

Golden/Silver/Bronze Age Inker MIKE ESPOSITO Talks—About Darn Near Everything!

Interview Conducted by Jim Amash

Transcribed by Tom Wimbish

I knew Mike Esposito had a long career, ranging from Fox Features to Hillman, Standard Publishing, Ziff-Davis, Archie, Skywald, and of course DC and Marvel Comics, plus a few others. And I also knew about his publishing ventures with Ross Andru and other partners, so I figured that we would have a lot to talk about. The happy surprise for me was just how sharp Mike’s memory was on all these events and much, much more. For those of you who thought of Mike Esposito as “just” an inker, I suspect you’ll see him in a whole new light after reading this interview. So far as I know, with the exception of Joe Simon, Mike’s the only man around who can give us an idea of what it was like to be a publisher in the uncertain 1950s—and if that isn’t enough, then wait until you read his thoughts on the people he worked with in his 50+ years in comics, particularly his longtime friend and partner, the late Ross Andru. Andru and Esposito were among the best art teams in comics and deserve all the praise we can give them.

This interview takes a look at the Andru and Esposito team and at Mike’s solo career, in as much detail as Mike could stand to give me (the poor guy!). Seriously, it was a lot of fun spending those hours with Mike, telephonically, and I have our mutual friend, Stan Goldberg, to thank for giving me the contact info. Because of the length of this interview, we decided to split it between this issue and the next, with the second part covering Mike’s career after he and Andru began working for DC Comics in the 1950s. Meanwhile, if you want to see Mike on the Internet, go to www.MightyMikeEspo.net. You can contact him about re-creating your favorite Andru/Esposito cover or one of Mike’s many others, as well. Okay, enough talking from me. It’s Mike’s turn. —Jim.



Mike & Ross & Friends

While Ross Andru (top right) and Mike Esposito drew at one time or another for virtually every comics company around, few of their four-color forays were as important as DC’s *Wonder Woman* #98 (July 1958), the issue in which they took over the mag’s interior art—and they later got to work together on a number of issues of Marvel’s *Amazing Spider-Man*, such as this splash for issue #156 (May 1976). Thanks to Rodrigo Baeza for sending us a list of Andru & Esposito’s ASM work. The photo appeared in *Comic Book Marketplace* #78 (May 2000), to which it was provided by Mike; it’s the only one we have of the two longtime partners together after high school—so count on seeing it next issue, as well! [Wonder Woman art ©2005 DC Comics; Spider-Man art ©2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

"Comics Were Burlesque... Fine Arts Were Broadway"

JIM AMASH: *Since you were there at the time, maybe you can tell me when and where you were born.*

MIKE ESPOSITO: I might not have been there; I might have been out of it. I was born in 1927, on July 14th. I guess I was born in Brooklyn, New York. I was a baby.

JA: *I see that you went to the High School of Music and Art, and then the Cartoonists and Illustrators School.*

ESPOSITO: Yes, I started at the High School of Music and Art at age 14; I guess it was 1941. I think Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia was responsible for that school; he started it in around 1939.

In the 7th or 8th grade, one of my teachers was very impressed with my little sketches. In fact, I did a mural, and if the school is still there, it's probably still on the wall. It was an Alice in Wonderland scene; she's sitting on a mushroom with all the characters. The teacher was impressed. One woman said, "I don't know of an Italian who can't draw." Is that *riiiiiiiight*? We can sing, too. We have no rhythm, though. We can't dance.

Anyway, she was positive that, if you were Italian, you had to be an artist. My brother was there, but he couldn't draw. He was a couple of years behind me. They used to ask him, "Why can't you draw like your brother?" But it doesn't work that way. I'm sure the Buscema brothers went through the same thing in school.

Until you got to the big leagues, every young fella in the neighborhood who later became an artist was the cat's meow; they were the big guys. I used to draw on the streets with chalk—Batman, and all the other characters—and the neighbors used to hate it, because they had to wash the streets. What happens is, your mother tells you you're great, everybody tells you you're great, because you're the only one doing it. When I was ready to go to the High School of Music and Art, my mother said, "Listen now, you're going to meet other kids from all over, and you're going to find out you're not the only one. Don't be upset." The school was at 125th Street and St. Nicholas, way up in Harlem. I had to take two subways for a nickel each to get there. I walked in there to take a test, and I saw these paintings and drawings by the advanced students who were 17 and 18. I said to myself, "My God, I can't compete with these guys." It was what my mother told me: be prepared. I was prepared, but to this day I'm still trying to catch up.

I got into the school, and everything they taught was fine arts. There were no comic strips; that was taboo. Comics were burlesque... fine arts were Broadway.

I got very sick, and never went beyond my sophomore year. I was about 15, and I fainted from all the stress—back and forth between the two subways, back and forth—and I collapsed. The doctor told me I had a little heart murmur, which I don't have any more. He said it was the kind of murmur that you get when you're 16 and you're growing very quickly, but he might have been just pacifying my family, because they wanted an answer of some kind. I fainted because it was a hot, hot day, and I had just been to the funeral parlor to see a friend of mine who had just died. I was sick to my stomach from seeing him lying in the casket. My friend died of spinal meningitis, I think; he went very fast. All the



The Line-Up
(From left:) Mike's cousin Richard—Mike himself—and his brother Ralph. 1938 photo courtesy of Mike Esposito.

kids were afraid; all the guys 15 or 16 years old were walking around wondering if they were next. My sister had also died when she was 14 and I was 11. These kids dying so young was traumatic for me. Once I got back out on the street that day, I collapsed, and my friends all carried me home. My mother naturally went into a panic, because my sister had just died two years before. I've been nervous all these years, because that's what pressure does to me.

"Ross and I Were Drafted Into The Army"

JA: *Isn't that about the time you first met Ross Andru?*

ESPOSITO: Yeah. He was starting the next term. Ross' family was Russian, and his real name was Rossoslav Andruskevitch. They had been living here for about 14 years when Ross was born, so they were pretty Americanized, and he always called himself Ross Andru. He came from Cleveland, Ohio. His father was a brilliant musician who played French horn for the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra and the Ballet Russe.

I did a report for my class on making animation, in which I was very interested. I wanted to become a Disney cartoonist, an animator. I did something on the blackboard on how to make a movie—I talked about Disney, using extreme and in-between drawings, and doing flip-books—and the teacher was very impressed. It was unusual for me because I never did my homework; I was a bad student. She said, "I know a young man your age who just came here from Cleveland. He's in art, too, and his name is Ross Andru. Would you like to meet him?"

I met him outside on a winter day. I went outside and saw this little guy—horn-rimmed glasses and a little round face, with his jacket buttoned up to his neck and two scarves—making snowballs and throwing them at a tree. We introduced ourselves, and he showed me his stuff, and I thought it was bad. I felt sorry for him. It was pretty bad. I tried to explain what was wrong to him: it was crude. Ross and I became very close after that.

JA: *While you were at the School of Music and Art, were there any other guys who went into comics there?*

ESPOSITO: Yes. Gene Colan, Joe Kubert, and Jack Abel were there. Bess Myerson, the future Miss America, was there, too; you know what happened to her. There weren't many comic artists, because the school didn't have a class in comic art.

I was about 16 when I got sick and had to quit the school. I spent my time hanging around my father's grocery store, and I became the local boy who never went to school. All the mothers were nice to me, and their kids were nice to me. I would draw pictures for them. I could make friends that way, and I had a gift for that.

The truant officer came by one day, and said, "Your son hasn't been to school in six months." My father said, "Well, he's sick." He brought me over to him, and I said, "I can't ride the subways." I hadn't gotten over it yet. I got over it years later, once I started believing in myself. Back then, the whole problem was a lack of self esteem, and a fear of the big world around me. I really got over it when I went into the Army, because the Army became my mommy and daddy. I didn't worry about a thing. If I collapsed, they picked me up. If I fell down and hurt myself,

Snapshots

A Kodak cornucopia of photos of young Mike Esposito (and even Ross Andru), sent to us by Mr. E.



Mike, age 16. He didn't tell us the name of the girl. Maybe he doesn't remember?



Mike and Ross clowning around at Music and Art High School, 1945. Mike's labeling makes it clear which is which.



Mike in the Army, also 1945. Of the boots, Mike says: "If you had to put these on in less than 5 minutes flat—you'd be mad, too!"



Relaxing with a couple of *Fräuleins* in Germany, '45.

they'd take me to the hospital. I never worried, until I got home again.

Ross and I kept up our friendship over the phone, and when I got a little better—I was about 17—I took a subway ride to his house in the Bronx. We made plans to do animation. We were going to do chapters of realistic animation. We were going to beat Disney! That's how dumb we were. We were going to do dinosaurs. The title was *Smarty Smith and the Time Machine*, and it was a damn good idea. We put it together, and we took it to King Features when we got out of the Army. We talked to

the head editor, Joe Musial. He was really impressed with it, but he said, "Y'know, I can't buy this from you because we syndicate all of Disney's stuff." Every time there was a movie, they'd do a strip based on the movie. So we didn't get it. He said, "You guys are good, and you know something else, fellas? You're better than Disney." He made us feel good; he was being a nice guy.

We used to go to the Museum of Natural History. We'd draw the dinosaurs' bones, then draw skin over them. Finally, Ross graduated

from the High School of Music and Art. In 1945, Ross and I were drafted into the Army. He was drafted one month ahead of me, and they put him in the infantry. He'd write to me about how miserable he was while he was still in basic training. Eventually, he got pneumonia, and they released him because he developed a heart defect. From the time they let him go until his dying day, he received a medical pension from the Army.

I was drafted on September 15, 1945. They sent me to Camp Dix, and then to Camp Crowder in Missouri. Some guy saw me drawing and put me in the Signal Corps, but I couldn't stand heights. They had me climbing poles, and I'd freeze up there, couldn't move up or down. They finally took me out of the Signal Corps and made me a clerk-typist. On my application, I had written that I had worked as a clerk in my father's store—I put cans of vegetables up on the shelves—so some idiot made me a clerk-typist. I'd never had a typewriter in my life! So I had to practice for about five weeks before I got to a point where I could type pretty fast.

Some time after that, a colonel noticed that I could draw, and shipped me out to Germany to draw for a base newspaper there. When I got there, though, they were closing down the place. Eventually, I got a job in Germany doing venereal disease posters. I did a very famous one that was in all the Army papers, and on posters all over Germany. It was a picture of a guy in a hospital, seen from the rear as he looks out the window at American boats departing, and it said, "If you're drippin', you ain't shippin'." It was famous; I got more compliments on that thing. I did another one that said, "VD or not VD; that is the question," with a hypodermic needle in the middle, a hot blonde on one side, and fire on the other.

There was a major who was so nuts about these posters that he wanted to keep them. He wanted me to do them *for* him, and he wanted me to do some of them a little more naughty than usual. To keep him happy, I did what he wanted. He kept me in good stead with my outfit. He said, "Your term is over in about five months, but if you sign up for 20 years, I'll promote you. By the time you retire, you'll be at least a major, with great benefits and retirement pay." I was a sergeant at the time, and I hadn't even finished high school, but he was going to give me a field promotion to lieutenant.

I said, "But I want to be a cartoonist!" He said, "You can be all that here. You can do these posters! *Forever!*" I thought it over, and I realized that I'd be living in Germany, I'd get married, I'd learn to speak German, and I'd become a completely different guy. So I said, "No, I have to go home."



Putting Yourself into Your Work
 (Left:) Lacking any of the drawings of dinosaurs that Andru & Esposito did at New York's Museum of Natural History in the early 1940s, here's the next best thing: a full-blown A&E page from the story "The Jungle That Time Forgot" in their comic *Mister Universe* #2 (Oct. 1951), wherein the modern-day wrestler battles a T-Rex (or something a lot like it) in a lost world or a war that time forgot or even a Jurassic park. For the splash from this story, see p. 56.
 (Right:) Nope—we don't have any more pics of the boys in uniform, either. But their wrestler-hero had suddenly become a soldier in the Korean War in #4. You'll have to settle for the cover of Ross & Mike's *Mister Universe* #5 (April 1952), the last issue. Art may be by Walter Palais, who drew two interior stories. Thanks to Frank Motler for both scans.
 [Both pages ©2005 the respective copyright holders.]

About two weeks later, I got my orders to go home. I went home on a Kaiser liberty ship that creaked and creaked the whole trip. They took us around the Azores, through these storms, and I never thought I was going to make it home. That little Kaiser was bouncing like a top.

"I Had To Try Something, So I Went To Fox"

JA: *So you left the service...*

ESPOSITO: Yeah. Finally, in 1948, I was safe at home again. Ross and I went to Burne Hogarth's Cartoonists and Illustrators School [later renamed the School of Visual Arts]. While we were there, Burne Hogarth started a couple of newspaper strips. He was doing *Tarzan*, and he wanted to do another one, *Miracle Jones*. He got the idea from James Thurber's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," and it was a Sunday-only strip. It was a humorous thing: the main character would be a simple little feeble guy, and then his dreams would take over, and he would become powerful. United Press Syndicate published *Tarzan*, and because he was with them, he was able to get another strip very easily. But Hogarth needed help.

He pulled Ross Andru out of the class. He saw what Ross was doing—his ability to manufacture layouts and design big pages—and he had Ross lay out the *Tarzan* Sundays. Ross was the sort of guy who would work and work until it just came out of his ears. He would spend the whole night sitting in his room working; he would never do anything else. I was amazed at what he was producing. Hogarth would say, "Give me that," and he would erase it with a rubber eraser, and then he would do his slick inking technique. It would really change every-

1966: The Year Of THREE* New York Comicons!

(*Or Maybe 2½—See Explanation Below)

by Bill Schelly



With grateful acknowledgement to Jack C. Harris, Bbob Stewart, Tom Conroy, and John Benson for their help on various aspects of this piece, including a great deal of the visual material. Extended quotes from the tapes of the convention were transcribed by Brian K. Morris, and edited by Bill.]

Series Introduction

In some ways, the most exciting aspect of fandom's rise in the 1960s was the emergence of the comic book convention—a gathering of fans of comic art in one place, to enjoy the camaraderie of likeminded individuals. Nothing could be more central to the purpose of fandom than these opportunities for meeting industry professionals, exchanging information, and the trading and selling of back issues. You didn't have to have writing or art talent to participate, as one needed in the world of fanzines. You merely needed to be able to get yourself to the appointed spot at the appointed time. The rest would take care of itself. It was fandom in its purest, most direct form.

Hot Dog! Summer In The City!

In July 1966, the Park Sheraton Hotel (now the Park Central, shown here in a recent photo taken by John Benson) was the scene of John's New York Comicon—which was attended in large part (though not solely) by fans of 1950s EC and of DC and Marvel, as per this symbolic montage executed by A/E layout man Chris Day. The (Kurtzman & Wood?) EC figures at left are from a house ad in *Weird Science* #18 (March-April 1953) for *Mad* #3 (the first glimpse the world had of "Superduperman"!)—the JLA heroes at right appeared in black-&-white in *Amazing World of DC Comics* #14 (1977) in an illo by Dick Dillin & Sid Greene—and the Marvel rooftop battle tableau was the Ron Wilson-penciled cover for a 1970s Marvel-UK reprint. The latter is repro'd from the original art, courtesy of "RomitaMan" Mike Burkey.

John says the hotel "is no longer in the Sheraton chain. It's now an Omni hotel and called the Park Central. Unfortunately, there is scaffolding up over the sidewalk now."

[Art ©2005 respectively by William M. Gaines Agent, DC Comics, & Marvel Characters, Inc.]

We at *Alter Ego* are dedicated to taking long, in-depth looks at the earliest comicons. The first major New York gathering (1964) was covered in *A/E*, Vol. 3, #7, and the 1965 New York Comicon took up much of our 20th issue. Shel Dorf treated us to his account of the Detroit Triple Fan Fair of 1965 in *A/E* #31. Now we advance to 1966, the year that began with a mini-con thrown by Calvin Beck of *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine (thus the reference to “½” of a comicon on the previous page), and offered two full-fledged conventions in the Big Apple in the course of a single summer, less than a month apart, organized separately by John Benson and Dave Kaler.

Our series begins with the comicon chaired by John Benson—because, frankly, that’s the one we’ve been able to document the best, aided immeasurably by tapes of the entire formal program provided by Benson himself. For example, we will be running a transcript of the legendary appearance by Leonard Darwin of the Comics Code Authority, who was confronted by a feisty Ted White from the

audience. This is a priceless addition to the history of fandom, as we’ll see in a very-near-future episode of this series. In addition to the tapes, John provided additional data and comments that appear throughout the article and in captions. (Quotes by Benson which are not attributed are taken from recent correspondence.)

A note about the transcriptions from John Benson’s tapes: while the tapes are mostly “good,” there are numerous places where comments are unintelligible, making the editing process exceedingly difficult. Be assured that every effort was made to make certain the speakers’ meaning has been accurately represented.

As the series progresses over the next few issues, we’ll present features focusing on the Beck and Kaler cons. Though we don’t have tapes of panels from those shows, resulting in briefer coverage than for the Benson con, those reports will be special in their own way.

And now—on with the comic book show!!

Part I: The 1966 New York “Benson” Con

Featuring Jack Kirby, Otto Binder, Leonard Darwin, Klaus Nordling, Archie Goodwin, Dick Giordano, & more!

“Let’s Put on a Comicon!
Er... TWO Comicons...?”

In 1966, major news stories told of the Apollo test-launch that killed astronauts Chaffe, Grissom, and White, and the fact that a lost H-bomb was found off the coast of Spain. The Selective Service was drafting 50,000 men a month, part of an effort by President Johnson to win the war in far-off Vietnam.

1966 will also be remembered as the year that the Beatles made their “Rubber Soul” album, and the Beach Boys released their quintessential recording, “Good Vibrations.” And as the year the terms “flower power,” “black power,” and “hippie” came into popular parlance.

For comics fans in America, much attention was aimed toward New York City, and the news that there would be not one, but *two* major New York comicons that summer. Why two? What set of circumstances led to this odd duplication of effort?

Organizing and chairing one comicon was difficult enough. Putting on *two* just added to the difficulties. For one thing, fans living in outlying areas would most likely have to choose one or the other. Wouldn’t this inevitably lead to lower attendance at both? Similarly, wouldn’t the duality result in a halving of the number of guest professionals?

To answer these questions and more, one must back up and look at the history of the first and second cons in Gotham, and examine the events that occurred in the fall of 1965....

Setting the Scene

Though the 1964 New York Comicon is generally called the first



Conventionmeisters Three

(Left:) 1965 comicon host Dave Kaler was profiled in the Long Island newspaper *Newsday* on November 4 of that year. A fuller version of this photo appears in Bill Schelly’s acclaimed book *The Golden Age of Comic Fandom*.
(Right:) John Benson was apparently too much of a blur at his 1966 con for anyone to snap a photo of him—so here’s one he provided for his fascinating and informative 3-part interview that ran in *A/E* #27-29, showing him talking with Phil Seuling (seen at right) in 1969, at the first of the latter’s New York Comicons. Photo courtesy of John.

“real” comicon, it was more of a dry run than an actual convention. Only about 50 fans attended, and it all took place in a single afternoon. It was a start, but clearly it would take a more concerted effort to mount a comics convention that would be spectacular enough to draw fans from more than a regional area. But who would spearhead this task?

Enter: David Kaler, a young marketing executive. Because DC editor Julius Schwartz had begun publishing readers’ full addresses in his letter columns, fans were able to get in touch with each other through the mail. Kaler wrote both Jerry Bails and Roy Thomas, thus discovering *Alter Ego* and the fanzines that came in its wake. Many comic art enthusiasts entered fandom through this same portal.

When it came time to plan a follow-up to the first small con of 1964, local fans persuaded Dave to volunteer to become convention chairman. He also became executive secretary of the Academy of Comic Book Fans and Collectors, after Paul Gambaccini stepped down. His 1965 “Academy Con” was a smashing success [see the account in *A/E* V3#20], but when it was all over, an exhausted Kaler announced that he was never going to put on another convention.

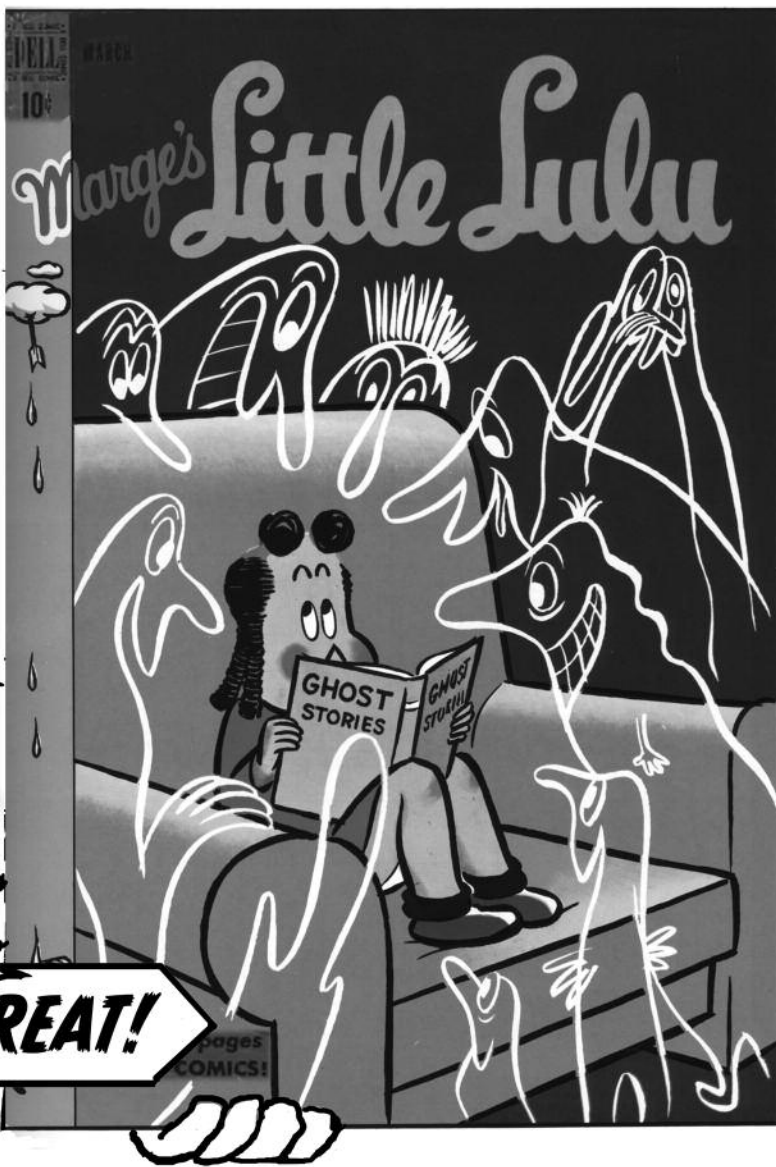


HI, GANG! LAST HALLOWEEN I INTRODUCED A *CRYPT* SERIES CALLED *TWICE-TOLD TALES*, FEATURING *RECYCLED* COMIC BOOK ART AND STORIES. THIS TIME WE'RE SPOTLIGHTING *TWICE-TOLD TERROR-TIDBITS* BY THAT MASTER OF COMIC BOOK HORROR — **JOHN STANLEY!**

IN ADDITION TO DRAWING THIS FRIGHTFULLY FUN *LITTLE LULU* COVER, **STANLEY** WROTE HORROR COMICS SO *CREEPY* THAT KIDS WHO READ 'EM 40 YEARS AGO STILL *SHUDDER* AT THE MEMORY!

THINK WE'RE KIDDING? JUST GLANCE AT THESE *TWICE-TOLD TRIBUTES* TO ONE OF COMICS' GREATEST *STORYTELLERS* — DRAWN BY THOSE SAME *TERROR-STRICKEN* KIDS!

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P.C. HAMERLINCK'S

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Fawcett Collectors of America

No. 112
October '05



JERRY ORDWAY
12.04

[Art ©2005 Jerry Ordway. Captain Marvel TM & ©2005 DC Comics. Special thanks to Mike Mikulovsky. With a tip of the hat to John Romita]

"Death To Spies In America!"

The Saga Of Spy Smasher

by P.C. Hamerlinck

Four-Color Forays

When Captain Marvel made his debut in Fawcett Publications' *Whiz Comics* at the turn of 1939-40, so did another popular Bill Parker/C.C. Beck creation: *Spy Smasher*. This hero, based in Washington, D.C., was one of the first comic book characters to become active in early war efforts by entangling with spies, enemy agents, and fifth columnists ... two years before America's entry into World War II.

The first "Spy Smasher" story quickly established the strip's essential components: patriotic, undercover spy-squashing operations conducted within the United States. It begins with a fire destroying a Naval aircraft carrier, a Navy ship mysteriously exploding, and other obvious acts of espionage. U.S. Naval Intelligence officer Admiral Corby relays the news of the recent terrorist events to his daughter Eve and her fiancé Alan Armstrong. Unknown to the Corbys, Alan would soon investigate the works of sabotage against the U.S. in the guise of a certain goggled hero.

Across the city another meeting takes place. A man whose face is hiding behind a white handkerchief-like mask orders one of his collaborators to kill Admiral Corby and to steal top secret papers from his safe. The evil plan is set in motion ... only to be interrupted by *Spy Smasher*. The thugs flee, but are soon pursued by *Spy Smasher* in his Gyroplane (a smallish, egg-shaped, single-passenger, highly-versatile air-land-sea vehicle). *Spy Smasher* quickly defeats the gang, but their masked leader gets away. Nothing is known about him, other than that he is referred to simply as "The Mask." But the stage is now set for further encounters.

It's soon revealed that The Mask runs a multi-faceted spy network across America. Taking direct orders from Adolf Hitler himself, The Mask keeps *Spy Smasher* very busy as the villain carries out campaign after campaign to cripple America's defenses in order for a Nazi invasion to sweep across the U.S.

Alan Armstrong soon shared his secret identity with Eve, and Armstrong would often learn of current spy activity discussed with him in confidence by Admiral Corby, thereby helping *Spy Smasher* determine his next courses of action. Although working alone, *Spy Smasher* was given full cooper-

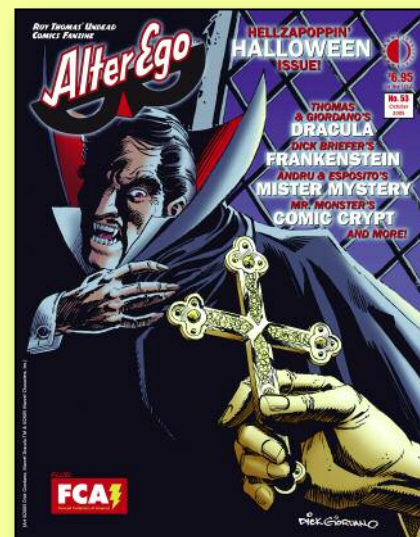


Any Questions Why They Call Him "Spy Smasher"?

Early "Spy Smasher" art by C.C. Beck from *Whiz Comics*, as reprinted in black-&-white in *AC Comics' Men of Mystery* #35. AC has reprinted a number of "Spy Smasher" stories, and has recently re-released the 1942 *Spy Smasher Republic* movie serial on DVD;



IF YOU ENJOYED THIS PREVIEW, CLICK THE LINK TO ORDER THIS ISSUE IN PRINT OR DIGITAL FORMAT!



ALTER EGO #53

GIORDANO and THOMAS on STOKER'S DRACULA, never-seen DICK BRIEFER Frankenstein strip, MIKE ESPOSITO on his work with ROSS ANDRU, art by COLAN, WRIGHTSON, MIGNOLA, BRUNNER, BISSETTE, KALUTA, HEATH, MANEELY, EVERETT, DITKO, FCA with MARC SWAYZE, BILL SCHELLY, ALEX TOTTH, and MR. MONSTER! Cover by GIORDANO!

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