
No Subscriptions! Single issues: $ .75, Dealers rates available upon request. There are absolutely no back issues available. Back issues can be purchased by writing: Bud Plant, 3446 Mt. Helena, San Jose, Calif. 95127

OUR COVER: Paul Gulacy, artist of Marvel's Master of Kung Fu, renders his version of the goddess of Self-abuse. (I can't believe I'm saying this!)

IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial by Stern ............................. page 4
Mike Vosburg Interview ........................ page 7
Color Him Green ................................ page 17
Grant's Tomb by Steven Grant ................. page 20
The Council of Seven . . . Remove their Hoods ............................... page 20
by William Wu .................................. page 31
Letters to the Editor ..................................... page 31
Northern Lights by John L. Byrne ............. page 34

ARTISTS THIS ISSUE: Syd Shore, Mike Vosburg, John L. Byrne, Don Malitz, Herb Trimpe, Paul Gulacy, Joe Staton & Roger Siler (Letterer)

CONTRIBUTORS! Please refrain from sending in samples unless you can put any of our regular CPL artists to shame.

SPECIAL THANKS DEPT.: To Motown Mike Vosburg and his wife, Deb . . . for all their kindness. Also to Raunchy Rogue for all the leg-work.

AND IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Words, pictures, maybe some numbers (Then-kyo, PK.)
CPL #13 will herald the return of Stern's Hot Ones (Whether you like it or not), yet another sizzling Grant's Tomb, part three in the irregular CPL mini-series "The Secret Life Of Peter Parker" by Frank Maynard, another of John Byrne's Northern Lights columns (this time on Doctor Doom), and lots more! Art? But of course! Art out the wazoo as per usual!

CONTEMPORARY PICTORIAL LITERATURE is published quarterly by CPL/Gang Publications, 4010 Mallory Dr. Apt. A, Indianapolis, Ind. 46236. Phone 1/317/888-1410. Entire Contents are copyright © 1975 by CPL/Gang Publications and may not be reprinted or reproduced without written permission or an act of Congress. All characters are the copyrighted property of Marvel, Charlton, National, Archie and Mike Vosburg. Why are you wasting your time reading this when you could be enjoying the mag?
"Unfortunately, Atlas is what comics is all about..."
So writes author Steven Grant in his analysis of publisher Martin Goodman's attempts at re-entering the comics field. And we must agree. Think for a moment of the really ugly things that go on in comics publishing—the deliberate rack-crowing, the unearned brag-dadociaco, the high-handed treatment of creative personnel—and you'll realize that Atlas has in a sense become a microcosm of the industry. We have seen a handful of shockingly beautiful books and a carload of tripe.

"But wait a minute. Is it really fair to judge a line on its first few efforts?" Normally, no. However, in looking back on the six "first issues" Mr. Grant puts under the glass, we find that some general conclusions can be drawn. First and foremost, it is clear that a free, creative hand can devise a damn good comic. And no better examples can be found than in Hama's Wolf and Chaykin's Scanning.
Secondly, Jeff Rovin had no business being an editor. The books he presided over himself were somewhat less than totally entertaining masterworks. And through his interference Messrs. Chaykin and Hama left their books in a state of what can most politely be called disgust. Luckily, Mr. Rovin is now gone. It remains to be seen if the damage he did can be corrected.

All of this is not to say that Atlas is on the skids. The departure of Rovin helped some. The arrival of former Marvel staffer Dave Kraft may help a lot more. But there's still a long rocky road ahead for the crew at 717 Fifth Avenue.

And it's so hard to make a comeback when you've hardly even started.

This twelfth issue of CPL is just sort of... like Topsy. We now sport color covers—formerly found the relatively inexpensive way to do it! We are now type-set instead of typewritten. This is not so inexpensive, but it is necessary.

You want an explanation? Okay, you've got one!

When we started producing our sister magazine, the Charlton Bullseye, we discovered that it just wasn't feasible to count out all of the words, letters and spaces that needed to be typed in the same way we did for CPL. It took too much time. So we went type-set. We could do it with nary a problem on Bullseye as it was a larger book with a bigger print-run and a higher price.

But when we started to go into production on CPL #12, we ran into problems. We couldn't produce one magazine one way and one another. There just wasn't time. So we went type-set on CPL as well.

And we raised the price to $7.50. And we don't like it anymore than you do.

We'd much rather stay at our nice old price. But if we did, Bob Layton would have to start knocking over liquor stores and gas stations in order to put CPL out. And neither he nor the State Attorney General are quite ready for that!

So here we are for $7.50. Four times a year, with ever-losing' color covers, and type so clear you can read every word.

And here's a promise... we'll change our format before we have to raise prices again! It wouldn't be fair to charge more than $7.50 for a magazine this size. Even if we are worthy it... old times amongst you will notice that there is... there are... no Sterno's Hot Ones this issue... and for a very good reason! There wasn't any room! Nor is Steve Gerber with us this issue. What with that crazy writer becoming a Crazy editor, and a number of new titles starting up... well, you've heard of the dreaded deadline doom. Dogs willing, he'll be back with us next issue.

So, what's in this issue?

Glad you asked!

Milton K. Voeburg has been involved with comics for quite some time. He was the editor of Masquerader, one of the earliest fantasies. He's dabbed in the undergrounds, and most recently he's been doing ghost stories and such for Charlton and Shang Chi for Marvel's Deadly Hands of Kung Fu. Mike's a fine artist and draws women better than anybody we know! And if you paid any attention to all of our table of contents, you'll know that Mike is the subject of this issue's provocative CPL Interview.

Writer Steven Grant, who is beginning to gain some kind of notoriety in writing circles for his work on the comics adaptations of Eric... and in wisecracker circles for his extremely well-done sardonic allusions to various comics conventions... puts both of his talents to work in this two-part look at the Atlas/Seaboard line, as mentioned earlier.

Punctilious William Wu turns his own barbed wit loose on the houses of Charlton, National, and Marvel with an interlude in one act that points out the emergency of the new-old oriental stereotype.

And Jocull Johnny Byrne continues in the second part of his "Bad Guys We've Known And Loved" mini-series, this time psychoanalyzing Darkseid. In addition, the multi-talented Mr. Byrne teams up with Joe Staton to render the tale of "The Inheritors," a six-page graphic fantasy in the captivating CPL manner.

And while we're on the subject of Calgary's Private Lovers, we'd like to remind you that John is now pencilling Iron Fist for Marvel as well as fully rendering Doomsday Plus 1, yes, and Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch for Charlton. We encourage you to buy all three! (This has been a Free Political Announcement on behalf of the John Byrne for Messiah Committee. The congregation will now rise for a chorus of "Hall, Canada!"

And I want to hear you tenors this time!!

Getting back to CPL, we draw your attention to our lovely green centerspread boy. Seems that Papa Joe Sinnott's ever-lovin', blue-eyed PlayThing way back in issue eight brought the green-eyed tinge of jealousy to a certain emerald-hued stomper. So when we offered him the chance to pose, he... uh... jumped at the opportunity. Need we say more?

AND ALSO FROM CPL/ANG PUBLICATIONS—

Charlton Bullseye #2 is now on sale with art by New
ton Byrne, Wildman, Starlin & Milgrom, and Satter—

"Two Against Sunuria," the thrilling conclusion to the
tlinal showdown between Captain Atom and the Ghost
by Ditko and Byrne in "Moonshift," a five-page
science-fiction short by Steve Ditko and
Howard Siegel and yours truly... and all between
stunning color covers by Staton and Newton respectively
for only a buck... $5.50 for a year subscription

Charlton Bullseye #3 will follow in two months. CB #3 is the Kung Fu special issue featuring Sanho Kim's "Wrong Country," twenty-four pages of martial arts
action... plus work by Frank McLaughlin... and
the biggest comics news ever to come out of Derby, Con-
necticut!

In the meantime keep your nose clean, read a comic book every night, and be here again in three months!
VOSBERG INTERVIEW

CPL: How do you feel about picking up stuff in your room? (Cleaning up after drawing?)

VOS: How do I feel about it?

CPL: Yes...

VOS: (Laughing) It's just something I have to do now and then to keep things organized. Is there a question you can come up with to start an interview?

CPL: Allow me to ask you some real earth-shaking questions like where you grew up at. That sort of thing?

VOS: Well, I grew up in the Detroit area here in a place called Pontiac, Michigan, and I spent most of my life there. I went to school there. I went to a college nearby. I taught school there for two or three years. And I've spent the last couple of years in Detroit. Other than that, I just lived around the Pontiac area.

CPL: What ever made you decide to get into comics?

VOS: Well, I've always enjoyed comics. Like when I was in school there was a friend who interested me in drawing. I had a little home-made comic book, and we traded back and forth. Eventually, Jerry Bails came out with his first fanzine back in the early 60's. I wrote to him and he turned me on to fanzines and such. So I started doing those. Well, I showed you The Masquerader that I put out.

CPL: You used to be the publisher of Masquerader, didn't you?

VOS: Yeah, I used to be pretty proud of the stuff I put out back in the 60's, but eventually I got to the point where I was basically an editor for Masquerader and I wanted to spend more drawing. So I dropped out of the editing and started to do just drawing. At the same time, I came to a decision in my life where I just felt like comic books weren't what I wanted to do. So I went to college and got a teaching degree.

CPL: So you taught school for awhile.

VOS: Yeah, I taught for three years. After I taught for awhile, I kind of had that same feeling that it really wasn't what I wanted to do. I mean I liked it and all that, but I found myself spending more and more time on my drawings. So I figured that I'd make as well give it a try again, and see what I could do... drawing for a living. So I quit teaching and started working on my comics again. After a couple of years, I started getting work. That's basically what I'm doing right now: drawing comics for a living.

CPL: Okay. So how did you first get into the industry then? Who did you approach first with your samples?

VOS: Well, the first thing I did, I drew up pages for the undergrounds because they were the fastest ones to break into the industry. You didn't need a whole lot of talent to get into them. There was a lot of talent people that did stuff for them but the thing with the undergrounds was the fact that there was probably a handful of really talented underground artists that should have been doing the stuff. Like I said, there were people that were willing to pay the money to get into them, and I think they could have made money off of it. That's not fair to them. Let me say rather, that they want to produce something of their own, just that about anything that could draw could get work published in an underground. Maybe, sometimes, even make money off of it. So as a result, everyone started pouring stuff into the undergrounds. And I think I was the classic example of someone that didn't belong in the undergrounds, but it was a place to get my work published. And I think that what eventually caused their decline was the fact that there were a lot of people around there that didn't belong there. I was telling you this last night. I think they are basically politically oriented. That's really what sold the undergrounds. Also they were a place you could throw in a lot of sexual materials that the normal comic couldn't carry. What happened was the revolutionary revolt or movement was absorbed into society, the youth grew up, all the sexual materials was available elsewhere. As a result, the undergrounds kind of fizzle. I think the basic problem why they weren't satisfying was that the really quality material was so diluted that you just didn't see much of it, including my stuff.

CPL: I've never seen it. Do you have any here?

VOS: Sure! I'll show you some. (Mike hands CPL undergrounds he'd done)

CPL: So you did undergrounds for awhile then you decided to go on into comics. How did you go about getting into it?

VOS: The undergrounds kept my interest, without them I think I might have quit and said there's not a place for me. But I kept plugging away, and eventually Paul Kune at Gold Key gave me some stories to do which I immediately regretted. But again, I kept going at it. Then Joe Orlando saw some of my later samples and he said I had done some stories for him. After that I took some stuff up to Charlton, and they gave me some work. At that time my work progressed to a point where I was feeling most confident in it. And the work should have been pretty steady. Then the paper shortage came around.

CPL: That's when Charlton shut down for awhile.

VOS: Right. It took away regular assignments for me. So I talked to Rich Buckler, and he got me a story at Marvel.

CPL: Which one was that?

VOS: It hasn't been printed yet. The first thing I did for them hasn't even been scripted yet.

CPL: That sounds like Marvel.

VOS: They were very happy with the story so they locked around and gave me the Shang-Chi feature to do. So I spent the last six months or a year working on that.

CPL: You said earlier that you'd like to get to Kung-Fu. Why?

VOS: I enjoyed it very much when I started because I was used to doing comic books. If I did six pages of material on a story I thought I was really working. Doing Shang-Chi I had to do fifteen pages a month. Not only fifteen pages a month, but fifteen pages of the same character. It was really a good experience for me because it was my first strip and it gave me a chance to develop a character like that, and I enjoyed doing that. I think I got to the point where I wasn't adding anything to the strip. I was just creating it. What I did create efforts I had to put into it. I burned out in six months, because I'm not a Karate freak.

CPL: Are you into Kung-Fu at all, or have you seen the movies?

VOS: I've seen the movies, my wife is into karate. The technical things I checked out with her. As far as capturing the violence and emotion of the Kung-Fu thing I didn't feel like that was my strong point. So I really kind of wanted to get out of doing the strip. I didn't feel as if I was making it anywhere after the first few issues. I think the people at Marvel themselves understood what to do with Shang-Chi. I think that Starlin and Englehart when they created the character really had something going, because they are two really creative people.

CPL: Sales prove that.

VOS: Yeah. Once it was off the book, I don't think the people that took it over really understood who Shang-Chi was and I don't think really understood the character. I think Paul Gulacy has really done a good job with the strip, even though some of his artwork
CPL: You’re still working for Charlton, aren’t you?
VOS: Right. I did a war story for them ... because they need it. I’m doing a romance story now, which I’m really having a good time doing because it’s a lot of fun drawing these little, lighthearted characters. The perfect teen-age couples ... whatever.
CPL: You know, not too many people like doing love stories.
VOS: Well, I think the thing is, when you say “not too many like love stories,” you’re talking about “not too many like comic fans” like love stories. I think that’s one of the things I’ve learned into the industry from comic fandom. The kind of things comic fans like, aren’t the kind of things that sell comics.
CPL: I think that point was brought out well to the panel discussion at the Cosmicon in Toronto. When a fan asked Nick Cox from Charlton if they were planning out such “stinko” love comics, Nick simply stated, “We don’t publish them for you! We publish them for the people who enjoy romance comics!”
VOS: Yeah, if you could look at sales figures for the comic book industry, right now. Marvel comics and all their super-heroes, are selling better than probably anything else. Not being in that end of the industry, I don’t know. But I’m sure that you would find that Uncle Scrooge has been a perennial seller. And a lot of the girls, whether they call Funny Faces or attend adult comic books have always sold well. The same is true with love stories ... same was with Mystery books.
CPL: It’s a variant-type thing ... it depends on the artist. A lot of artists prefer action. I couldn’t see Kirby doing love stories the way he’s drawing now, you know what I mean?
VOS: Oh! But he was the originator. He put out the first love stories, back in the 50’s, along with Joe Simon, Secret Romance or something like that.
CPL: But I was talking about the 1975 Kirby and what he’s doing at National. Could you picture Jack penciling Secrets of Young Brides for Charlton? (Laughter) Some artists just don’t fit that kind of mold.
VOS: Yeah, well ... you’d find that most artists can do just about anything, but whether they look good on it is another story. I thought a lot of the National stuff they put out in the 60’s ... their super-heroes stuff, ... most of their artists weren’t suited for it. And I think as far as super-heroes go, Marvel has had the right idea. They have really gotten into the kids heads, and captured exactly what the kids want to see. That’s the Marvel bass for Marvel ideas. Comic books is such a big business now that in each panel the action at its ultimate peak! And that’s what they are interested in. It holds their attention. Another thing, getting back to the whole love idea, the average comic book fan looks at Frank Frazetta and is just astounded at the detail and the artistry of it! Him and guys like Williamson. But the average comic book reader just doesn’t have the time to sit down and appreciate that stuff. When the average comic book reader looks at a comic, he wants it staring him in the face. He doesn’t have time to study the figures and to see how all the anatomy has been carefully proportioned and how detailed all the little figures in the background are. They want to see it stuck right in front of their nose, and I think that is why Jack Kirby is so successful, because he brings everything right up in front of the reader. All him (the reader) has to do is look at it and it’s all there.
CPL: Kirby is unusual in the fact that everything he draws is panorma and then he slaps a border around it, regardless to whether or not the picture remains in the panel or is pushed out.
VOS: Well, Kirby is another artist that I really can’t get excited about his drawing and that’s something to myself, I mean, it’s very important, I really love the drawing. But I think as far as producing a comic book
CPL: There are few people that can do it as well as Jack Kirby.
VOS: Although he may not be as popular as he used to be, I find there’s still a great deal of respect for Kirby as the originator of the comic book super-heroes that we see today.
CPL: I think the problem with Kirby is that he’s such a creative person that he’s moved beyond the comic book. The comic book, as it is now, is just too confining and only a limited number like Jack Kirby. The only way it could come across now is if they reprint his stuff in the Dollar Book format, with fold-out pages that when you opened the book they should thank you! (Laughter) He’s at the point now that everything he does is as good as it ever was ... its just that everybody has seen it all before.
CPL: Is it true that Joe Kubert is the greatest artist in the world?
VOS: No. (Laughter)
CPL: I believe I’ve heard that quoted once, Mike.
VOS: I like Joe’s work very much. I’d say he’s my favorite cartoonist. There’s just something about his work that when I look at it, nobody else has it. If you want to talk about better artists I think you can talk about Frazetta, Williamson. You could name hundreds of people that can draw better than Joe Kubert. But when it comes to putting it down in a comic book, Joe just does something that nobody else does. I wouldn’t go so far as to say that he’s better than Jack Kirby in his own way, he turns out comic books that no one else could ever do. For example, I don’t think that Joe Kubert could ever turn out the type of superhero stuff that Jack Kirby could do. But I don’t think that Kirby could ever sit down and crank out a Tarzan page like Joe Kubert could do.
CPL: Well, I was just remembering a quote from a “certain fan” that used to write Kubert a lot. That’s why I asked you that. (Laughter)
VOS: Right! As a kid, looking at Joe Kubert’s stuff, I really thought that Joe Kubert was the greatest artist that had ever lived!
CPL: You use to write to him, didn’t you?
VOS: Yeah! I hadn’t seen everybody else at that time and looked at it now over all those years. I still think that if I had one comic book that had to be done, and I needed an artist to do it, I’d use Joe Kubert. Regardless of what it was! (At this point the phone rings! BANG! BANG!)
CPL: Ok, where were we ... Kubert, right? Did you use to be pen-pals with him?
VOS: Well, I wouldn’t say “pen-pals.” I wrote Joe as a fan a number of times. Now that I’m busy in comic books and realize how much time it takes, I’m amazed that the man had enough time to write to me when I was a kid. Meeting Joe, he is a personable man. What can you say ... I like his work but meeting him in person was also enjoyable. He’s a great guy! That has nothing to do as to whether or not he’s a good artist or not. Joe is one of the most talented people in the industry that will turn you off personally. I think it takes a certain sort of individual to turn out good work.
CPL: Living here in Detroit, you grew up with guys like Rich Buckler, Jim Starlin, Al Milgrom ... How do you think they’ve influenced your thinking as far as comic books go?
VOS: Quite a bit. The interesting thing is that I was a fan, and as a result, got started long before most of those guys. But when I dropped out of comics they all passed me up.
CPL: They just kept on improving!
VOS: Right. Probably, the one that draws the best is Rich Buckler.
CPL: Really? You mean as far as technical skills ...?
VOS: My drawing of females is a very basic thing with me. When I was younger, I just never really had very much confidence in myself and all the drawing I did were pretty much an escape thing: I think you'll find that's true with a lot of people in comic books. The good people are the ones that can structure their drives and their creative ability and put it into something so they aren't frustrated. When I was younger or even now I realize I am bound by reality. That there are limits to what I am, what I can do, and where I am in this world. My drawings give me a chance to escape that by creating another world. If I ever meet the perfect woman, which is a terrible thing to say since I'm married, my wife and I talk about this and she understands what I'm talking about. She's not talking about the ordinary, she's not talking about Sophia Loren. She's talking about the woman that puts Sophia Loren to shame. I'm talking about the ultimate woman, the woman that walks down the street and there's an aura around her. Not only physically the most beautiful woman, but everything. More or less the female concept of "the god." I think that's what a lot of comic books try to get at, we're not drawing people, we're drawing gods. Maybe that's why Kirby's stuff went over so good with the New Gods concept because that's really what super-heroes are. They're like gods!

CPL: Something superior to human beings?
VOS: Right.
CPL: More like demi-gods?
VOS: Super-heroes like Kirby just reduced the old epic ideas we always have. The Norse gods, Roman gods, and reduced them to a modern level and called them super-heroes. Alright, that's what I want to do with the women that I draw. It's just something I find I enjoy a lot... sitting around drawing beautiful women. I can illustrate my sexual fantasies... put them down on paper and I'm not frustrated. If I work a 9-5 job, I would have a lot of frustrations.

CPL: Tell me about Linda Lovcraft...
VOS: Linda Lovcraft is a creation I came up with working for the undergrounds. I never really felt I had a place in them. If they came out now I think that I've come up with some ideas now that really would fit well with the undergrounds. I think Linda Lovcraft is one of them. I admire Alfred Hitchcock, his subtlety. Alfred Hitchcock well-produced movies and will visualize very little on the screen. But will cause the viewer to visualize everything in his mind. That's what I want to do with Linda Lovcraft. It's not really a porno strip, but just a sexually-orientated strip. I don't really want a lot of sexually explicit material. I think that gets so boring. What I want to do is come up with a sexually-orientated comic strip that the average person could look at and laugh at and enjoy without being directly stimulated. In other words Linda isn't a creation that you read behind the bathroom door. It's something you can pick up and get a good laugh about.

CPL: Sex is a laughable subject. So much of literature and movies are based around the sexual relationship between men and women, something that hasn't been explored in comic books.

VOS: I really don't want to over-ride the sexual aspect of Linda either because it's only a starting point for her, I'm really interested in using her as a format for my humor. I think that's something she's well suited for. Something I've always enjoyed. My early interest in comics was the Wally Wood stuff in Mad. To me those were the comics I always enjoyed. There isn't a lot of that around in the market now. So I want my work in another direction to sell it. With Linda Lovcraft I can do exactly what I want, which is to create a humorous strip that is tongue and cheek. I could talk a lot about Linda Lovcraft, and what I had planned for her but it would be redundant in a sense, because what I have to say about her in the strip... taking for hours and it's the old story "a picture is worth a thousand words." I think with Linda there's pretty much what I'll have to do. Basically, the personality that I want for Linda is she is technically the villain. But a very friendly villain, a very lovable villain let's say. She really doesn't do anyone any harm. And if she did they kind of deserved it any way.

CPL: More of a prankster than a villain.

VOS: Basically, What Linda does is she gives everyone exactly what they want or what they ask for. But it isn't always exactly what they want. As to what I meant by that, I leave entirely up to our readers.

(Laughter)
CPL: What it sounds like an E-Man with sexual overtones as far as the tongue and cheek type humor.
VOS: I thought E-Man had a lot of sexual over-tones!
CPL: It does. If you ever talked to Cull! (Laughter) He keeps it very subtle.
VOS: I think the idea is tremendous.
CPL: An exotic dancer, that has all kinds of implications. They never go go-go or stripper always exotic dancer. They never show her in action. So you don't know exactly what she does.
VOS: Well that's better because I have some great fantasies about her.
CPL: Yes! A lot of fans do, you know! Nova has the qualities that fans will fantasize about... the personification of femininity, so to speak.

VOS: While we’re on the subject, that’s something I really want to be careful about with Linda Lovelace. I don’t want to conceive the ultimate man’s woman. I want to conceive the ultimate woman. If I continue on with the strip, I really want it to be written by a woman. I think with the wrong, it would become a sexist thing, and I don’t want to see that. I’m not an advocate of man’s lib. And I’m sure anybody that looks at my work will probably be the first to say, “That’s for sure!” (Laughter) But at the same time, I’m aware that I’m a chauvinist.

CPL: Okay, what about your own desires as far as commercial comics go? You said you really don’t feel fulfilled on the Kung-Fu strip... what would you like to do?

VOS: Okay, commercial comics, I think, there is a ton of stuff you can do and be fulfilled doing, unless you’re one of the really great geniuses, and I don’t think I’m one of the really great geniuses...I think my stuff is competent. I like it as hard as I can.

CPL: People can usually sense enthusiasm in an artist’s work. You, Jim, and Al have that in your work.

VOS: Oh sure, I have enthusiasm about my work but one thing I think you have to be careful of is realizing what you are capable of. In American comics, at this point, center very much on violence. I’m not saying that’s good or bad, as a moral judgement, but I’m saying that the central theme in all American comics is a violence-orientated thing.

CPL: But that’s true of all the media, movies, television, books...

VOS: That’s true. After all, it’s just a reflection of the American way of life, but comics is what I am familiar with. So that’s where I sit, I think what comics really need now is a different slant. One thing we are really need, in the industry, (and again if it doesn’t sell, you can’t have it) is a return to the funny animal strips. More cartoon-oriented strips, I think what Marvel comics has done, in their field, is probably tremendous! But I feel there’s a lot of fields that are being ignored. Fana, the way they think about comics, think about Marvel comics...and that’s it!

CPL: Just Conan... Captain Marvel... F.F. etc. etc.?

VOS: Yeah, and a lot of other things on the field is being ignored! And a lot of creative people are turning away from it. Right now I’m doing a romance story. But I wish there were three or four people in the field, who really tuned a lot of creative energy toward romance stories. And I think you’d see some really great stuff.

CPL: Heart-thrashing things? (Laughing)

VOS: No, I think you’d see some good stuff! Maybe we could get away from all this stop... the same old stories... boy meets girl... she thinks she doesn’t like him, but in the end, it turns out that she does... Yeah! If you really put a lot of creative energy into something you could start turning out a good romance story. I think Stan’s story that he did in romance form was a good example. But I don’t think it had stop there. I think you could do a lot farther with that. In that same way I think there are other fields too. I really believe we need a lot more humor in our comic strips. If you look at the European comics, you’ll find that they are very humor-orientated. Like the old Disney stuff was adventure-based. But there was a lot of humor in them. And I think that’s something that’s missing now. There is this whole attempt to get as much realism as possible in the comic books.

CPL: Relevancy?

VOS: Yeah, I think that’s good, but I don’t think it’s the only thing, I would love to see more strips like the Spirit, Fog-2000, things like that.

CPL: Many of the more running serious comics have the potential of a tongue-in-cheek humor book. Personally, I think the Hulk has unlimited humor potential. Len Wein has been using a bit of it in his more recent issues of Hulk.

VOS: Well, I think you see a lot of that at Marvel now and then, but I think you need to see it done even more. That’s the kind of stuff I’d like to do.

CPL: That’s what it needs... more humor.

VOS: The type of person that I am, I don’t think that in my work, I could really project and capture a lot of violent material and make it come off.

CPL: You don’t enjoy doing the violent aspects of comics, then?

VOS: I won’t say I don’t enjoy it, it’s just that I can’t capture the feeling for it like some artists can. Jim Starlin can do it very well, Buckler does also. Probably the ultimate at capturing it would be... Frazetta, because there may not always be a lot of violence portrayed in Frazetta’s work. But just the whole feeling of tension is there. There is an emphasis on that in comics today. It’s good, in a sense but only complaint is that it’s over-done! I would like to see comics go in different directions.

CPL: Who is your favorite comic book character? The one you would like to do?

VOS: Boy... if I could do any character... hmmm... I would probably do one of the Burroughs characters. Probably Carson of Venus, it’s a character that I would really love to do.

CPL: Kaluta did a really good job.

VOS: I’d hate to follow him.

CPL: You’re totally different from Kaluta.

VOS: Yeah.

CPL: I think every artist has the desire to do Burroughs at one time or another, because they’re the ultimate adventure characters.

VOS: I wouldn’t have much desire to do Tarzan. I love Kubert’s. But again he isn’t a character that I’d like to do. As far as a regular comic book character I think Dracula would be extremely fun. Fan Manchu I really love doing. When I was younger, my favorite comic book heroes were like Hawkman. I’d love to do a Hawkman too, he’s like my favorite super-hero. My really favorite heroes were in the books. I did a lot more reading than I did reading of comic books, or least in amount of time. So when it comes to doing favorite characters I love to do adaptations of the books. The Fu Manchu would be the ultimate thing for me.

CPL: Never know, if Marvel gets around to it, you might see it.

VOS: I think Marvel is going to do one with Frank Brunner and Steve Englehart?

CPL: About it but I don’t think they have the rights to do adaptations under the name is what I understand. You’ll find out I’m sure eventually.

VOS: Well, the really great Fu Manchu adaptation was the Wally Wood “Mask of Fu Manchu.” Have you ever seen that?

CPL: No I haven’t.

VOS: It’s really beautifully done. Must of come out in the late 40’s or early 50’s. He really captured Fu Manchu I thought. But it would never go over to Marvel Comics because Fu Manchu was too old and too low key.

CPL: Yeah.

VOS: It’s kind of strange. When I would draw Fu Manchu, half the people at Marvel didn’t want to insult the oriental.

CPL: They’re worried about ethnic problems?
VOS: Yeah, and yet when you draw Fu Manchu if you didn't draw the overly oriental characteristics...

CPL: Yellow-peril type person.

VOS: Right. They'd say well redo this. It was strange.

CPL: It's hard to do a character that was written on that basis, yellow-peril, or the ethnic type characteristic stereotype that Fu Manchu was the evil genius from China, without drawing him that way. It's impossible to have them all look like Bruce Lee.

VOS: I remember one time when I drew Fu manchu. One of the comments was, "he looks too much like Ming the Merciless." Well Ming the Merciless was like a direct Fu Manchu rip-off. But that's the kind of things you run into. So maybe it would be better if I never did Fu Manchu because I would never be happy with what people wanted me to do with the character.

CPL: Marvel's afraid of stepping on peoples toes.

VOS: They've got a point because the way Fu Manchu should be done to sell in the comic is completely different from the way he should be done to sell in a book. But artistically I'd be upset by it. So each one of us in our way is right about what they're doing.

CPL: There's a lot of good characters that haven't been adapted. I'm glad this kind of thing is happening here, their adapting science fiction? Do you do much on your own?

CPL: We're going to need a lot more tape, too... we're running out. Let's conclude. What do you think of fandom Mike, now that you're on the other side?

VOS: Fandom is a neat thing for comic book people. It's neat for the fans themselves because it gives them a chance. The young people, that gives them a chance to see how the business is run. And it gives them a chance to play around with it a bit. It's a starting point. And also really wonderful for the people in the business because it gives them a chance to see how they appreciate it. I remember when I started writing to some of the professional artists back in the 50's that had been around for 20 years. I really doubt if they realized how much people really enjoyed their work and how much people really knew who they were. I never sat down and asked Kubert about this. But I'm sure now Kubert realizes how many people are fans when he was doing hawkman. And these other things I'm sure he was probably surprised when people started writing in saying, "Hey I always liked Kubert's stuff," and it really began to surprise him. Not only Joe but I bet a lot of people in the industry were surprised at how many people really aware of who they were and what they were doing involved in work. And like myself I'm always amazed when people come up to me at conventions and say, "Gee, you're Mike Vosburg and I saw your work." It kind of puts you in unrealistic situation because for really what you're doing you're getting an enormous amount of attention.

CPL: Just drawing something you enjoy doing.

VOS: It never fails to impress me that as a comic book artist I can go to conventions and have a lot of people get excited over who I am and if I were a doctor or a lawyer, who in their own way are probably more important. People would be polite, but just not as impressed.

CPL: H.P. Lovecraft.

VOS: And detective fiction and murder mysteries. I would love to do murder mysteries in comic books, it would really be fun. Again they would be very difficult to adapt because things that make a murder mystery exciting when you read it wouldn't make it exciting in a comic book. I think you see that in films. You have to know each form. In comic books you can restructure the world as you want it. But in reality you can't do that. That's why comics are important now.

CPL: In comics you are the shaper of events.

VOS: For a lot of people their lives are going to shaped by the world around them. Much more than the last 20 years. We're going to need a lot of comic books to get us through. A lot more humor. (Laughter)
Life hasn't always been a bed of roses for this issue's centerspread boy! Born Robert Bruce Banner, our emerald companion prefers to be called Hulk. "Hail puny Banner!" says the green behemoth with a sneer. And his manner suggests that you'd best change the topic.

Hulkie loves the great out-of-doors, and nine times out of ten that's where you'll find him...bounding about the countryside, communing with nature from the sunny Southwest to the frozen North.

A pacifist by nature, Hulk has definite thoughts about the military. "Don't like Army. Don't like Air Force. Always shoot, bomb, make noise! Dumb! All dumb!" says Hulk. And yet, our green-skinned gumba has been known to get his dander up on occasion. "People bother Hulk?" he admits. "Hulk Stomp! Nothing is stronger than Hulk!"

Yes, and though his straight-forward manner has cost him a few friends at times and made him a bit of a loner, things are definitely looking up for the Hulk. Nowadays you might periodically bump into him in Manhattan's Greenwich Village as he visits friends. Whatever the case, you can look for the big green gawoot to be doing bigger and better things as time goes by.

After all, nobody can beat the Hulk!
GRANT'S TOMB

BY STEVEN GRANT

"Comics is an escapist medium, no matter what the psychologists say. If you entertain and make a valid social point, then all the better. But first and foremost, entertainment is our bag."

And just as Atlas was a titan in Greek mythology, so plan we to be a titan of comic books. If there's any doubt in your mind as to whether or not we can do it, take a look at our lineup. 'Cause this is what comics is all about!

Like most people, I first heard of Seaboard at the New York Convention on July 4th. I was thrilled. Seaboard had special deals and was promising relative artistic freedom. Hoards of great talent were reported to have flocked to the company. Great things were in store.

I am not normally this naive. But it's hard not to be carried away with such obvious hopes.

Months later, Seaboard, who in the meantime had adopted the name Atlas, announced their lineup to the Comic Reader and Mediascene. Suddenly Atlas did not look so charming, but decided to hold off making an opinion until I could see the actual books. And finally, the first three titles appeared.

Not precisely the first. Atlas had previously released two rather nondescript black and white titles: a Famous Monsters of Filmland parody called Movie Monsters, and an unmemorable horror book with the cumbersome title of Weird Tales of the Macabre. The less said about the better.

A brief aside: Atlas covers are awful. As a friend of mine pointed out, they don't look like comic book covers. They look like someone's imitation of comic book covers. Unfortunately true. Despite the talents of such people as Dick Giordano and Neal Adams, the first three books have covers resembling nothing so much as a kaleidoscope of bizarre objects, meaningless design, static poses, and gaudy coloring. Heightening the dull effect are the rather blank looking logo designs, almost certainly calculated to make sure that the title of the book doesn't catch your eye.

PHOENIX appears to be Atlas's answer to Superman. Drawing on the idea of ramping Gods From Outer Space theme, editor writer Jeff Mlin is an unassuming concept looking for a comprehensible plot. A hyperbromonal astronaut is saved from certain death by aliens living at the north pole. The aliens are once responsible for the evolution of mankind, and their characterization begins with alluring benevolence and quickly degenerates into paranoia. Astronaut Tyler is just brilliant enough to be able to understand the alien's weapons and turns his spaceship into a superweapon which is incapable of counter. The aliens destroy Reykjavik, Iceland, then Phoenix (Tyler) destroys their base, long distance yet, but enough survives to, in a fit of muted priorities, punish Tyler and then destroy the human race. To be continued. Possible ad nauseum.

Raven seems to believe that characterization entails being able to get angry at the proper times, and this is the sum of the character of Phoenix. Atlas seems to be putting this book endlessly, referring to Phoenix as the Man of Tomorrow (for those who didn't take my word for the Superman companion) and 'the greatest story ever told!' Amundsen's art is nice, but suffers from slopiness. This is all right for a backup feature, but one expects more polished work on a lead. The entire concept of the book, however, is stale. But nothing exceeds success, and an old story, I suppose, deserves retelling. Even old stories deserve better retellings than this, though not an overworked idea, and one that could yield many interesting possibilities.

It is a question of the abilities of Mike Fleischer and Ernie Colon that they have found none of them. Colon's art, while interesting, is uneven, and Fleischer's story, while semicoherent, lacks a most important element of comic book story-telling: tension. The fragmented story breaks from the frame piece to the origin with no method of return. We are, at the end, left with no interest in what has gone before, and even worse, no way of getting interested in what is yet to come.

Lastly, we are left with no interest in Matthew Desmarche's The Grim Ghost, who is portrayed as a vain, pompous, womanizing scoundrel. Seeing the devil's Puckish attributes is faintly amusing, but the plot scene has no effect on the rest of the book. We can retain little interest in a character who can remove all opposition with a wave of the little finger, or who can shoot a man in cold blood, and then put him on the back for it. It is doubtful that such a character and such a book will be able to develop a steady audience capable of keeping it alive. It is doubtful that it will be missed.

I will refrain from discussing Mike Sekowsky's dull, disproportionate artwork on IRONJAW, the third Atlas title, and concentrate on Mike Fleischer's barren, unimaginative, hacking scripture.

As if the creators responsible for Iron Jaw felt that the book needed some sort of justification, there is a section in the back of the book called 'The World of Iron Jaw' (Iron Man, Iron Wolf, Iron Fist, Iron Jaw: does comics perhaps have too many irones in the issue?). Aside from comments about the perpetrators of Iron Jaw, there is this absolutely ludicrous statement: 'Iron Jaw, unlike other comic book characters, is a real human being. What he thinks, what he says, how he reacts, is a real man.' The real man, placed in that same situation would do! We shall return to this concept in a moment.

Iron Jaw is sword and sorcery plot 8D: wanderer comes to a land, gets involved in fight with soldiers. Evil king finds out that wanderer is a rightful ruler of that land. Wanderer thrown in dungeon and freed by princess. Fights in arena (this will be in 82 and stay there 'til...? No?) if you'd heard it, you should have stopped me.

But Iron Jaw has one fascinating side: it gives us a real insight into the workings of Fleischer's mind. It is interesting that Fleischer's 'real man' is one characterized by emotionless brutality and motivated entirely by homeliness. For Fleischer, the difference between a good man and a bad man is simply: the bad man finds humor in brutality; the good man refuses to react to such brutishness at all. This is the pattern evident in Jonah Hex, the Spectre, and Grim Ghost, and it now becomes evident in Iron Jaw.

The statement about the reality of Iron Jaw is ludicrous because Iron Jaw bears not even the faintest resemblance to a real human being. But, at least, a reactionless, empty construct. He deals with other people on a single level: men should be killed; women should be raped and degraded. He speaks only in conjunction, such as his refusal to try to add to his war without his glasses.

Ludicrous because it places a 'real man' in a sword and sorcery background, unless it is done with the finesse of such things as Pratt and deCamp's Harold Kroz stories or Robert E. Howard's epic stories of sword and sorcery. A hero of this genre must be larger than life, an archetype. To reduce him to merely human is to render him uninteresting. Fleischer has made Iron Jaw far more interesting by reducing the hero to a mere common man, and even mutilating him with an iron jaw, a blunder which will surely tell in the sales returns.

To explain further, the sword and sorcery type in Iron Jaw by explaining it as being a fantasy world is begging the question. The fantasy, what parts of it he can lay claim to, is a Marvel-like setting, a lifting of a verb, is Fleischer's Iron Jaw's treatment of women, his terms of interpersonal relationships, his predilection toward gratuitous violence, are, in a word, sick. If that truly believes that a 'real man' would act this way, perhaps it would be wisest if he sought professional help before venting his adolescent power fantasies in public print. No man will ever forget the story of the father who, when asked what was the first? In the first place? A man, a father. A man who thought, a question, one of the sun, and then what possible reasons, outside of sheer laziness, could he have had for producing this in the first place? Unfortunately, Atlas is what comics are all about. The same old endlessly reworked formula, reapplying ad nauseum, with one eye on the sales charts. The Atlas product is so very obviously tied up with 'sure money.' The fact that it is not even a remotely believable concept, which was the same idea on which Marvel built much of its success, is a problem. It is inherent in the great trend setters of the past, in Superman, E.C., and Spiderman, is a problem. It is inherent in the great trend setters of the past, in Superman, E.C., and Spiderman, will it succeed? It will succeed. The first three outings have been a disappointment and a betrayal of the talents which they have at their command.

NEXT: WULF THE BARBARIAN, THE DESTROYER, AND THE SCORPION.
Dear Gang,

CPL 11 came my way. It looks good, and thus... a letter of comment.

Steve Gerber had an interesting column. Weird, but interesting... I believe... have refrain from the "eaten sweeten beaver, you criminal" type of writing (which sounds like a brain drooling). The big boys... and girls, if you want to throw in Gertrude Stein... may have made their reputations in mainstream literature with the techniques, but it comes across poorly in a fanzine. Steve's points about campoteums are well taken and important, but they are unnecessarily obscured by his fancy-dan affectations.

"I want to be happy." Oh, come on! Is this fellow writing for Marvel or one of Magazine Management's confession magazines?

But about relevancy... it occurred to me some while back that the comics of the forties were often very relevant to the times. In this, the Golden Age, Superman, and World War II were the stuff of headlines and radio news, as well as of comics. The comics then reflected their era better than the comics that came later. I don't think. How relevant is a horror comic? Or a comic about Superman turning into a giant grayfish because of Radioactivity?

Yet, relevancy per se is not the main issue and probably never was even when it was a hot topic. The question is whether or not the comic is any good. An artist like Ditko may draw his characters and settings as though it's still 1937, but his style is so compelling and he tells such a good story that you don't really notice. He makes you believe women still wear seamed stockings and fuzzy, cylindrical hats, and men floppy hats and proto-rootsuits at least for as long as the story lasts. But all the relevancy in the world won't save a poor story. Ditko & Maginn wrote a Supergirl story for a recent Superman Family that featured the girl's soul-searching and her decision to Help People as a counselor... and it was awful! The villain was preposterous, the plotting was disjointed, the dialogue utterly lacked humor or even much spirit, and the characterization was close to non-existent. It may have been Relevant, written by a Young Person for Young Persons, but it wasn't very good. Another issue of the same magazine reprinted an old Jim Shooter Supergirl story which was thoroughly Relevant, but it was worlds better. The plotting was tight, characterization at least enough to help you tell the characters apart, and the dialogue lively and in spots even sparkling. Come to think of it, Shooter must have been some years younger than Maginn when he wrote it.

I heartily disliked the much-acclaimed Green Lantern/Green Arrow issues (the curious can look up the scathing letter I had printed in the LOC column of issue #8 for details), but mainly because I felt that the comics were more than just relevant—they were cramming a specific political position down the readers' throats. They were propaganda for a set of beliefs that I did not share, I thought, and I resolved the attitude Dennis O'Neil and Neal Adams seemed to have—to the effect that the comics presented Absolute Political Truth and it was their solemn duty to present it to the others so that the kids in Columbus, Ohio, would wake up to how awful injustice and pollution are. Everyone was jumping on Steve Ditko for adapting Ayn Rand to comics, but Green Lantern got nationwide coverage and mountains of praise. Unfair. I thought. If Dennis O'Neil had the right to push his beliefs in comic form, why didn't William F. Buckley? Or Gus Hall? Or George Wallace? Or Dr. Spock? Or anyone else with a political message?

I'm more than a little bothered by political groups whose attitude towards the media is that if only they can get their hands on it, they would be able to propagate to a captive audience. This applies equally to groups who would use their TV time to expose the Jews in finance and government, as well as to groups who would bewail napalm babies in East Granatuan and blame the conscript of Chase Manhattan and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Such groups, or individuals, seem to regard the audience as a lot of unthinking bozos who will indiscriminately swallow anything dumped on them via the media. That may explain in some way what O'Neil was trying to do, although he most certainly believed with all his heart that what he was writing was utter trash and had to be gotten out to all those ignorant kids before it was too late. But when I want political commentary, I most certainly won't buy a Young Lantern! And when I want a comic book, I won't bring home National Review or The New Republic!

Steve Gerber expressed some promising thoughts on the subject of writing good comics. I wish he would have gone into a little more detail about what he was personally doing to write good comics. All that he said is vague and ill-defined.

I'm not sure it's even possible for good comics to be done in the classic Marvel style (I'm not familiar with how Gerber writes his stories, so forgive me if what I say is irrelevant to his working method). Throwing a plot at the artist to break down and draw and then dialooguing the result is such a ridiculous backwords way of going about it that I'm surprised Marvel writers have the temerity to call themselves writers. (If things have changed at Marvel and the artists are no longer having to do most of the work in telling the story, I'll be glad to hear it.) But no wonder Marvel writers seem to have felt obligated to earn their pay by drawing the story with words upon meaningless words! Spidey Super Stories with its terse, simple dialogue is probably a better comic than the horribly wordy regular Spiderman comic. But that's beside the point. Does no one at Marvel do a full script? Does no one at Marvel know that comics are not prose novels, and that to wax eloquent is to ruin a story that can be told only through the pictures.

I find it hard to read Marvels these days. A single issue of a comic is not complete in itself. But the continued stories are so tangled and open-ended that they don't seem to be really getting anywhere. Talk talk, fight talk, talk talk. It makes the appreciate some of the old Mark Weisinger Jimmy Olsen or Lois Lane comics. The stories in those were much too short and never had time to develop... and they were told mainly through captions and overly-explosive dialogue, reading more like plot summaries than actual comics. Nevertheless, those old creators had beginnings, middles, and endings. Problems were solved, the story started at one point and got to another, and by the end you felt like you had read a story rather than like you had tuned in late on a soap opera.

I've said enough. Dwight R. Decker, Tujunga, CA

(Mr. Decker is the motivating force behind such fanzines as True F.A.T. and the late, great Freez. At present he is leading a meager existence on the West Ayn Rand to comics, but Green Lantern got nationwide Rant to comics, but Green Lantern got nationwide coverage and mountains of praise. Unfair. I thought. If Dennis O'Neil had the right to push his beliefs in comic form, why didn't William F. Buckley? Or Gus Hall? Or George Wallace? Or Dr. Spock? Or anyone else with a political message?

I'm more than a little bothered by political groups whose attitude towards the media is that if only they can get their hands on it, they would be able to propagate to a captive audience. This applies equally to groups who would use their TV time to expose the Jews in finance and government, as well as to groups who would bewail napalm babies in East Granatuan and blame the conscript of Chase Manhattan and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Such groups, or individuals, seem to regard the audience as a lot of unthinking bozos who will indiscriminately swallow anything dumped on them via the media. That may explain in some way what O'Neil was trying to do, although he most certainly believed with all his heart that what he was writing was utter trash and had to be gotten out to all those ignorant kids before it was too late. But when I want political commentary, I most certainly won't buy a Young Lantern! And when I want a comic book, I won't bring home National Review or The New Republic!

Steve Gerber expressed some promising thoughts on the subject of writing good comics. I wish he would have gone into a little more detail about what he was personally doing to write good comics. All that he said is vague and ill-defined.

I'm not sure it's even possible for good comics to be done in the classic Marvel style (I'm not familiar with how Gerber writes his stories, so forgive me if what I say is irrelevant to his working method). Throwing a plot at the artist to break down and draw and then dialooguing the result is such a ridiculous backwords way of going about it that I'm surprised Marvel writers have the temerity to call themselves writers. (If things have changed at Marvel and the artists are no longer having to do most of the work in telling the story, I'll be glad to hear it.) But no wonder Marvel writers seem to have felt obligated to earn their pay by drawing the story with words upon meaningless words! Spidey Super Stories with its terse, simple dialogue is probably a better comic than the horribly wordy regular Spiderman comic. But that's beside the point. Does no one at Marvel do a full script? Does no one at Marvel know that comics are not prose novels, and that to wax eloquent is to ruin a story that can be told only through the pictures.

I find it hard to read Marvels these days. A single issue of a comic is not complete in itself. But the continued stories are so tangled and open-ended that they don't seem to be really getting anywhere. Talk talk, fight talk, talk talk. It makes the appreciate some of the old Mark Weisinger Jimmy Olsen or Lois Lane comics. The stories in those were much too short and never had time to develop... and they were told mainly through captions and overly-explosive dialogue, reading more like plot summaries than actual comics. Nevertheless, those old creators had beginnings, middles, and endings. Problems were solved, the story started at one point and got to another, and by the end you felt like you had read a story rather than like you had tuned in late on a soap opera.

I've said enough.
GAR'S LEGS PUMP AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, TO REACH THE SECURITY OF THE TRIBE...

EVEN IF THOSE NUMBERS DISBELIEVE!
OMEN! YOU MUST TAKE US FOR POOLS!

ALL DEMONS WERE DESTROYED MANY YEARS AGO...

...FOR THERE IS SAFETY IN NUMBERS...

BY THE ROAR OF THE GOD'S CHARIOT...

A DEMON LEAVES HIS VEHICLE...

THE DEMONS...

...ALIGHTING WITH A SILENCE UNBETRAYING HIS IMMENSE STATURE.

THE AIR FILLS WITH A VIOLENT TENSION...

...AS EACH GROUP SIZES UP THE OTHER.

BUT IT IS A TENSION WHICH MUST BE...

--BROKEN!

KNOW YE THIS DEMON. THIS IS THE LAST DAY OF YOUR EXISTENCE!

YOU MUST...

YOU MAY...
Gar moves with the speed of a leopard.

You would have me a fool before my tribe!

For that demon...

Die!

Gar wipes the sweat from his brow.

And his gaze falls to the revelation at his feet.

A man...

I do not understand.

But it is the villagers who have summoned these demons.

And the thrust of their ship wipes out Gar's curse...

But Gar rises once more...

Sharing his fists at the empty sky...

Even as it knocks him off his feet...

Somehow knowing that the demons will never return.

So tonight...

We shall pay them a visit...

...and teach them to betray their race!

They seek to flee!

You shall not escape, demon!

But the demons are too swift...

Gar does not escape me, demon!

But Gar rises once more...
GRANTS TOMB #2: Seaboard Continued... or, How
You Gonna Keep 'Em Down On The Phoenix After
They've Seen The Scorpion?

It's been a pet theory of mine for some time now that
a successful comic book company rests its success on
only two titles: a back book and a science fiction
book. The pulp firm of Street and Smith began the
cycle with the twin hits Doc Savage (science fiction)
and The Shadow (crime). The fledgling DC Comics hit
the top with Superman and Batman at the core of their
line. Marvel Comics followed the science fiction
junkies with The Fantastic Four and the crime fans
with Spider-Man.

As I mentioned several weeks ago, depending
on your perspective, Atlas/Seaboard launched the line
with somewhat dismal Superman, The Phoenix.
This week we take our entry into the Batman/crime
arena with The Destructor.

The Destructor, white race, is 100% superhero
cliche. Though Archie Goodwin scripts, there is none
of the innovation and power of The Manhunter. Though
Steve Ditko is pencilling, there is none of the dynamic
enthusiasm of Spider-Man or The Blue Beetle. And,
though Wally Wood, on one of his periodic forays into
comic books, handles the inks, there is the sense as
never before that this is, after all, only a joke.

Which is not to say that the book is out and out bad.
It's sort of a creeping badness. All of these men are
professionals, which means that they can turn out
polished products when they do a job. And this may be
enough to sell the book, as it has been enough to sell
The Flash and so many like it for so many years. But it
is not enough to chip an edge into the market that titles
like the Flash already have.

The Destructor suffers from the problems of most
super-hero origin stories: corn and a sense of
self-embarrassment. It uses motifs drawn carelessly
through the history of comics: the scientist with a
superman potion, the sacrificial father who gives his
life to save his son, the vow of vengeance on the rainy
gravesite. It is encumbered further by an awkward name
and a miserably designed costume, which I hope will
be changed as soon as possible. It is also hampered
in a minor way by Steve Ditko's politics, miraculously
made inoffensive but kept intact by Archie Goodwin's
script.

There are some interesting moments here. Allusion
to graft in the police departments, the business end of
crime, and the sub judic peace warfare which goes on in
the underworld, not with guns, but with deals and
politics, pop up now and then and add a much needed
touch of realism to the story. But even when all clothes
like the early styles (Spice Hunter's supply of V-neck sweaters), life is still
dealt with in bad-name terms, and people still
walk, talk, look, and react like people in a comic book.

To paraphrase The Destructor himself, "and
fancy approach aside, The Destructor is just one of
the breed. Time for Goodwin, Ditko, and Wood to start
using what they were given to the fullest!"

I was visiting some people in Milwaukee the other
day. They were discussing the Seaboard titles and
told me how good they were, and kept my
mouth shut until they began talking about what a fine
book IRON JAW was. At which point I stepped in.
This eventually prompted the comment, "For a comic book
fan, you sure don't like comics much!"

Contrary to these sentiments, I do like comic books.
And, contrary to what most of you think, I am even
like some Seaboard titles. WULF THE BAR
BARIAN, for instance.

I was expecting to hate the book. Besides a really
horrible name, the strip has all the types of cliches I've
been raving at Atlas for: The evil sorcerer, the skilled
prince waiting to reclaim his throne, the vengeance

motto, the invincible swords and badly named
fortresses, and all the other gimmicks of sword and
crime. On top of all this, I am getting very, very bored
with barbarian heroes.

So nice then to find out that, despite the title, Wulf
is no Barbarian. Larry Hama, the writer and penholder
of Wulf, deserves applause for putting together all the
issues of sword and sorcery while avoiding many of the
pitfalls which confront heroic fantasy writers. As
opposed to an aforementioned colleague of his, Hama
has actually worked out an interesting, entertaining
plot.

For one thing, Hama obviously spent a bit of time
figuring out just what this world he's playing with is
like. As an introduction, the strip is beautifully
constructed. It lets us know, easily and without
unnecessary frills, what is going on, what the basis of
the series is, and manages to give, not as an aside, but
as an integral part of the action, a taste of Wulf's world,
of the varied cultures there, and a glimpse of the rules
and codes which run these societies. And this is what
Hama has grasped, what Howard grasped in Conan, in
spite of what he said, that sheer muscle, sheer power
is not enough to rule, that even a barbarian must follow
the rules of society when he is in that society, or his
own rules when he is not. Hama, unlike most sword
and sorcery writers who have come after Howard,
recognizes this, and incorporates it into the structure
of his material.

The writing on the book is tight, and while the
dialogue varies from good to being a nuisance to being
bland in parts, the story holds up as Hama's interest
and enthusiasm carry it though. The artwork also
varies from good to mediocre, but it has interesting
layouts andhas the unusual directness that holds the
attention and focuses it on the important parts of the
story. Hama may not be a perfect artist, but he's real
good (and let us not slight Klaus Janson, whose
inks, though somewhat uneven at the rest of the work
on WULF certainly improve the overall appearance of the
magazine).

And there's The SCORPION.

First, let me point out that I've long been a Howard
Chaykin fan, bearing the slings and arrows of
outrageous fans unimpressed by the vagaries of
Chaykin's characteristic book to book uniqueness.
Through Sword of Sorcery to Iron Wolf through his
Batman and Red Circle stuff, I have been an
unwavering (well, maybe not completely unwavering)
champion of the inherent talent of Howard Chaykin.
It's nice to be vindicated.

The Scorpion is what the Shadow should have been.
The story is tight and well written without being
pompous and corny. The art avoids the Mike Kaluta
Frank Robbins debate by sacrificing neither the pulp
feel nor action. Everything is introduced, nicely tied in,
and finally concluded with a minimum of fuss, but
without loss of any excitement or entertainment value.
Unlike most hero strips, Chaykin has wisely foregone
the traditional origin story, replacing it with a one page
lover, and delivering instead a very lean, impressive
book, in both writing and artstyle a 20-page tribute to
the work of Alex Toth.

Let us hope that The Scorpion remains functionally
mercurial, unlike his predecessors, Luke Cage and
The Human Target. Moto Frost's preoccupation with
gaining power is one of his most enduring features. And
Ruby Bishop is one of the toughest comic book ladies
I have seen in some time, though I hope Chaykin
will avoid the usual Marla Lane "drop your weapons or
we'll kill you!" approach.

I hope this column has brought some attention to
the work of Larry Hama and Howard Chaykin, two
talents without whom being a fan could be a truly
boring experience.
THE COUNCIL OF SEVEN: REMOVE THEIR HOODS
by William F. Wu

The huge hall is silent and empty. Bronze oil lamps stand five feet high, with blazing orange flames that brighten the great round table and toss shadows into the blackness of the high ceiling. Dark shapes flicker across the fat grinning statues in the corners of the room. Long scrolls hang on mahogany walls in semi-darkness and tropical plants lounge lazily on lattice-work screens.

Puddled footsteps brush the polished floor to break the stillness. Seven figures in dark hooded cloaks file into the hall and stand behind high-backed teakwood chairs, intricately carved and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. When all have come to stand at their appointed places, leaving one throne-like chair vacant, the Seven pause. Then they sear themselves carefully and begin to relax. One takes a deep breath and rolls up his sleeves; another leans back and sighs. A third throws back her hood and pouts. It is the Mantis.

Mantis: So he's late again! This One is in no mood to be patient. Special effects almost killed her in that last issue—a tree, for god's sake!

Three more members remove their hoods. They are all men of different ages, all completely bald.

Wong: Shove it, bug lady. Lee and Dirk used to put me through changes with Doc you wouldn't believe. And—

Yang: Can it, banana. You haven't played a major part in years and you know it. Englehart's all but fixed you, anyway: Clear's the new foil. What good is a yellow Step'n Fetchit in 1975?

Wong: That's what I'd like to know. Anything to get off this payroll—you think I like being excess plot baggage? And Strange's HOUSEBOY at that.

Mantis: Stand up to him! This One knows you had some martial arts many years ago—It says so in every script you get whipped in, just before somebody bashes that shiny skull.

Shiwan Khan: Easy, Mantis... We all do what we can.

Mantis: You're a newcomer! How dare—

Shiwan Khan: Silence! Certainly. Shadow #11 was my first appearance for some time—but I'm an old hand at this. I was in this business in the 30's, dammit, and we're still trying to get decent roles. Luke Cage got a mag—there's a Black Green Lantern—how come O'Neil still has me trying to take over the world? I thought he was a liberal.

Yang: He's writing about the '30s. At that time—

Shiwan Khan: It wasn't real in the '30s either!

Yang: But there was a lot of Anti-Asian feeling. O'Neil tries to capture all the old atmosphere, that element included.

Mantis: At our expense! Take Yang's example—and kick my ass all by myself. They try anything, pow!

Shiwan Khan: That's another way to pander to stereotypes. Not all of us and martial artists and we shouldn't have to be. And Yang's past is in the past, too—no relation to the present, just like my last appearance.

Wong: I'm hungry. Shoulda stopped for a hot dog on the way over.

Yang: And bald! Bald! All of us! I'm sick of being bald! Especially in winter.

Two of the still-hooded figures had been conferring. Now, they, too, throw back their hoods and look at Yang.

Fah Lo Suse: Take it easy, will you? That's not the worst of it. Quite frankly, I'm fed up with having to prance around half-naked, flashing my various parts all over the page. Suzi Wong, Dragon Lady, Tokyo Rose all in one. Mantis, you have it better, even if you do have to go barefoot.

Mantis: This One was just laid off. Won't be eligible for the Seven after this.

Lotus: I'll tell you what I don't like. I've worked in several episodes of "Sons of the Tiger" and I'm cast as an emotionally helpless slant-eyed chorkie who's already fallen for that bloodstreak, Bob Diamond. What's wrong with Lin Sun, the Chinese guy?

Shiwan Khan: Why isn't he here?

Wong: It's not his rotation.

Mantis: There's nothing wrong with inter-racial couples. I don't believe in racial purity.

Lotus: That's not what I mean. I'm not against inter-racial couples, either. But why is it always white man, Asian woman? Mantis—your father was white, mother Vietnamese. You went for the white wordsman. I had to fall for Diamond, even with Lin Sun right in the plot. Shang-chi's white mother is a single-panel exception... gratuitously, as it turns out.

Yang: And except for Shang-chi's parents, there is no other Asian male involved in a love affair besides myself.

Wong: We're all eunuchs as far as the plot writers are concerned. Open season on our women for all the white heroes. That's not racism?

Yang: Yin is on the out-rotation this month, too...
Shiwan Khan: I'm not. O'Neill created I-Ching several years ago, whose role was a grandfather/Charlie Chan/martial arts-expert type. As poor as that role was, my part with the Shadow is really a step backward. And look at the new Richard Dragon series—as usual there's a bald old Asian tutor, totally fortune-cookie. The protagonists are black and white, the hasn't-been is Asian.

Lotus: Hey, who's that still wearing his hood? Yank it off, someone.

Lei Kung, the Thunderer: Hey! What—oh. Just catching a few winks, heh.

Wong: Sleeping? What for? You don't work any harder than I do—a couple of flashbacks in the Iron Fist origin series and nothing else. You'd be laid off now, if it weren't for the repeat in "Deadly Hands." #10.

Lei Kung: Of course I don't do much—Iron Fist is white, Yuji is white, the whole story is racial rip-off. They don't want to give us parts that don't require martial arts and then they give white characters parts dealing heavily with Asian culture. Squeezing us out.

Lei Kung the Thunderer pulls his hood back up and returns to his dozing.

Yang: Lazy jerk.

Wong: So what about Sunfire—it looks like he's gonna be a hero, now, with the X-Men.

Mantis: You mean a regular superhero? An Asian protagonist not puffed into being by the martial arts madness? This One cannot believe it.

Wong: They already let him uncap those fake back teeth that Everett and TuKe made him wear. He missed the cover of Giant-Size X-Men #1, though.

Shiwan Khan: Someone called him "Jap" in the script. It just helps teach kids a racist insult and how to use it.

Yang: It was really unnecessary. Any insult would have furthered the plot and characterization as well.

Wong: We've been waiting a long time; it won't hurt to wait longer.

Yang: Right—we'll see if they give him a character role or another rehashed stereotype.

Mantis: Speaking of waiting... This One is tired of it! Why is he late?

Shiwan Khan: "This One"! "This One"! Insect, you are more Uncle Charlie Chan than any of us here—can't you say "I"? What happened to your sense of self? Your first person pronoun? Singular? Take in a Charlie flick and listen to him: "... Must go now. Humph! Dr. Y... Would like to do this. What kind of ego-less, ploy-centric garbage is this?

Wong: Englehart is strong on characterization... but in comics, the devices are limited.

Mantis: If he made This One—that is, me—talk funny because This One is—I am—half-Vietnamese, then let me in! Where is he? I'll—

Fah Lo Suee: Silence! We've all been victimized—that's why the Council of Seven meets. How are we going to get non-racist roles in comics? Non-sexist roles? How can we get a decent break from an industry of writing devices, exaggeration, stereotypes, facts, and short-cuts?

On noiseless feet, two sumo-like heavies come into the room pulling a huge gong on its wheeled frame.

Lotus: Hi, Tak!

Tak: Shhhhhhhhh!

The other servant strikes the gong with a great padded stick and the entire room reverberates. Dr. Fu Manchu enters the hall and walks to the empty chair at the table. His long robes flow in silence and he scans the faces of seated members from his height. Resting his fingertips on the back of the chair, he raises his eyebrow at the nappling Lei Kung, the Thunderer. Lotus reaches over and jerks his hood off.

Fu Manchu bows very slightly and addresses the table. "Good news, my Council. I'm taking a lesser part in my son's series for a while. The stories should be substantially less racist for my relative absence."

A brief silence is observed. Then:

Shiwan Khan: We should all be so lucky.

Wong: Yeh—such as, fire me.

Mantis: Don't bring me back.

Lotus: Give me Lin Sun.

The servants remove the gong and the tall man takes his seat. Orange flames flicker and rise against the darkness and the Council of Seven consider their lot with mounting anger.
DARSEID by Byrne

Unlike Galactus, discussed in this space last issue, Doctor Doom who will follow. Darkseid is not so much a villain in himself, but a focal point for a veritable plethora of lesser evils. DeSaad, Granny Goodness, Baron Vunderbar, Glorious Godfrey, Steppenwolf, Wonderful Wally, Kanto, Doctor Bedlam, all seem superficially more active than somber, brooding Darkseid. And yet, excepting Steppenwolf, none would ever exist—in a sense worth worrying about— if not for Hegra's son. Although he is undoubtedly the core of this most rotten of apples, Darkseid is, conversely, the most 'likeable' of the whole motley crew. Just as the quality credited to DeSaad, Darkseid 'knows what he is' and loves it! Unlike the swelling DeSaad, however, Darkseid has great dignity and strength. More importantly, as demonstrated time and again, he has a sense of humor, manifest as anything from the tweaking of Big Bear's nose in Forever People #8 to the 'practical joke' of releasing Beautiful Dreamer stripped to a six-pack of radium bombs.

And, like his ancestor Galactus, Darkseid has his own brand of honor. When he loses, he loses well. And, while honesty won't get you far on Apokolips, Darkseid himself has a definite code of ethics beyond which he does not stray. The only overt instance of treachery I can attribute to Darkseid (allowing that we are talking about a war here, and that in that sense New Genesis is just as treacherous as the issue of the New Gods) is the minor one involving his uncle, Steppenwolf, of power by 'killing' Isaya.

Generally, however, he leaves the petty villanities to the petty villains. Again, though he exercises his will whenever one of them crosses the bounds of what Darkseid considers 'right' as with his extermination of DeSaad in New Gods #11, Ruthless he is, but as much with his own people as with his enemies.

Unlike one or two despicable villains we could select from Terran history, Darkseid's ruthlessness is born not of pettiness, but of knowledge of his own power. Darkseid is a god, and he knows it. Not only is he a god, but the chief god of a world of gods.

So let's have a quick glance at the ruler of Apokolips. He is not particularly tall—shorter than Big Bear, for example—and not very much taller than Mark Moonriser. On a human scale he would certainly be no more than six feet, perhaps less, since the majority of the Young Gods seem shorter than their elders, and we have no reason to assume the Forever People are any different. However, while Kirby's unfortunate handling of perspective makes it difficult to properly gauge Darkseid's height, we are not at a loss to judge just how formidable he would be in person. He is built more like a dwarf than a full-sized man—a broad, stocky figure, rocklike even without the granite cast of his complexion. There can be little doubt that on the day called 'Last Battle', when Darkseid and his estranged son meet 'in the red light of the fire pits', even a wielder of the cosmic force such as Orion will not have an easy victory. In fact, he has a victory at all.

New Genesis and its peoples may represent the better of the two worlds aesthetically, but where do they stand against the technological prowess of Apokolips? Without Orion, Apokolips-born Orion how long would New Genesis survive? High father was defeated with ridiculous ease when he was still Isaya, and we have no evidence to support any theory that his power has increased since his transfiguration. As issue #6 of the New Gods demonstrates Lightray's vulnerability (to keep all things!).

In each encounter with the forces of Apokolips, victory has been only narrowly won. In the case of the Forever People this is most evident. In six out of eleven issues they win only through outside aid (Superman, Highfather, Infinity Man, Sonny Sumo) or through the clumsiness of Darkseid's henchmen. And, except for a brief verbal effort in issue #9 of Mister Miracle, Darkseid makes no personal moves against Orion. Even against Orion there is no physical clash.

Why? Why, unless Darkseid is holding back, keeping in check, perhaps, power so terrible even he hesitates to use it? Look at it in another analogous sense. When God the Devil were set against each other, Satan was banished into Hades. Why? Throughout the bible God does not hesitate to annihilate his enemies. Is it perhaps that Satan is just as powerful as God, and allowed himself to be banished, since battle would ultimately result in the destruction of both?

Ask yourself when Darkseid and Orion finally battle, who will the Black Racer claim? Quite possibly... both?

NEXT: Doctor Doom!!