EDITORIAL

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Printed by Pioneer Printing Services, 5330 Massachusetts Ave., Indianapolis, Indiana. Phone: 547-8347

Artists this issue: Dan Adkins, John Byrne, Paul Gulacy, Bob Layton, Val Mayerik, Don Newton, Craig Russell, and Duffy Vohland.

Our apologies to 'Doc' Larry Brincky, who's article was crowded out this issue. ONE LAST DESPERATE CHANCE will be around next issue (for the next hundred issues as well) so hang in there!

Next issue will be full of surprises! We are now negotiating with several big name artists for C.P.L. #8 and we'll do our best to bring 'em to you. Also, all the regular columns, part 2 of Tony's The Hour of Thunder and the first installment of Fortie's Fandem! Regie-2000 says "Be there, ya dumb human!"
Putting out a fanzine can really put you through some changes. Take the CPL crew, for instance. In the past six months editor-in-chief Mayerik has gone from being a comics dealer to being a daring young fanzine editor... And at last report, he had thrown all caution (not to mention a stack of yellowing zip-tone and one half-eaten jelly sandwich) to the winds in an attempt to become a big name artist with the Dan Adkins gang.

Mayerik, in the meantime, has gone east to study Brooklynese at the feet of Grand-Gang-Guru Duffy Vohland. All of which means that I'm stuck with pouting out this issue's editorial, while trying to ignore the mechanical kludging of my metallic co-editor, Rogie-2000. (Wait 'til he finds out he has to proofread the final layout-out! Chortle!)

So what's the point of talking about the changes our humble staff endures? Glad you asked! The simple fact is that CPL is gonna change. Now don't get all upset! CPL has always been undergoing change. After all, originally it was nothing more than a comics catalog. There will be nothing really drastic in the new changes. Basically we'll be cutting back on a quarterly schedule. This will give our faithful staff a chance to meet deadlines while still leading what we suppose to be normal lives. Secondly, we are bringing to a close our first and probably last subscription drive. No More Subs! It goes without saying that all previous subs will be honored. That means we'll have to keep publishing, at least, issues #121 and #122. Any way, you can count on CPL changing... hopefully for the better. We won't be going slick, or typeset, or four-color... but Bob and the paper shortage willing, we will improve! Now! Stay with us and find out!

And now, let's take a look at issue number seven.

As mentioned last issue, we are presenting a rollicking interview with Craig Russell and a beautiful portfolio of visuals by the talented Vel Mayerik. And although those two features, along with the stunning visuals by Paul Gulacy and Dan Adkins, threaten to make this the special "Ohio" issue, there's still room for the usual columns by Messrs. Urnicky, Vohland, Mayerik as well as yours truly! Plus, this issue's remarkable return to fanzines of the Wandering Fan himself, Tony Isabella, plus, more art by Don Newton, Bashful Bob and everybody's favorite Canadian, John L. Byrne.

And next issue... the second installment of "The Secret Life of Peter Parker", in which my old school chum, Franklin W. Maynard, takes an in-depth look at our friendly neighborhood arch $nid's religious leanings, plus all the usual features... and more fun and thrills than you can shake a stick at!

So until next issue, here's wishing you good reading and as fearless Bob says...

Heavy Hannegors,
Sterno and Rog-2000

Dear CPL Readership,

I have returned from the depths of East Liverpool, Ohio where I made my first attempt to go to a con. At the time you read this, I will still not know the fate of my sample pages that were sent to Marvel. Never fear, I shall keep you all informed as new breaks, but I didn't interrupt Sterno's editorial for a moment of chest beating...

It has come to the attention of the CPL staff that certain parties in fandom have seen fit to ignore the copyright laws protecting our publication. I would like to let it be known that CPL is protected by a legal copyright and we are totally within our rights to prosecute any violators. (C.P.L. #5 Copyright registration #26122, C.P.L. #6 Copyright registration #26121)

We feel it is the duty of CPL readers to inform us when they suspect a violation of our copyright and to withdraw their support from any publication doing such. It is by your support that CPL is able to bring you fandom's best.---------Bob
Strange to preserve the gift.

"This lizard means everything to me, just as all living things do. This lizard is sacred in its existence. For a few seconds, I held the life of a sacred being in my hands.

"What an awesome responsibility."

With his usual facility, Namor the Sub-Mariner, the Man-Thing, while there's little to make think there's anything man-like about Marvel's monster of the Everglades.

But no matter. The important thing is that DC's feature is a much more realistic one than Marvel's. Instead of being a fleshly beast, the Swamp Thing is quite alive and intelligent...but convinced to serve one's duty, the key to his physical humanity. The path of the story stems from the inescapable fact that no one will ever understand man, though many will sympathize with him.

In issue #4, the first of 1973, the Swamp Thing is a young man who went on two months later to be befriended by a young warlock and his familiar. Both stories drew heavily on gothic and mystical elements for their plots. The sixth issue found him in a village of child life, seeming to have a shift in emphasis away from the gothic. Conclave's sub-plots began to show a close. The following issue, this year's first, was part of the Swamp Thing pitted against an uncomprehending-and uncomprehendingly-Beastman as he crossed paths in other stories against the Animal Man. The next two issues weren't quite as good as the previous ones both storywise. The art by Len Wein and artist Bernie Wrightson are able to get to the point of the stories with any amount of dispatch. Unfortunately, about this series is that Wein has been able to convey its basic theme-the contrast between the Swamp Thing's essential humanity and the inhumanity of the surrounding world-without having to smash it into the reader's head. So the issues are complete in itself despite the running sub-plots. This is good for a theme and for the sake of this: anyway, a mossy sort of that definitely isn't the soap-opera type.

How Swamp Thing will fare in the future is yet to be seen. With Nestor Redondo reported to take over from Wrightson, it may lose some of its fluid vitality. But right now on the title, both the Swamp Thing in DC's Weird Western Tales.
Hex is such an ugly and callous son of a bitch that it's not hard to understand why the feature has received criticism in *WF*'s letters column.

The fact that Hex is so unfeeling, makes him unique in the realm of western comic heroes...and aside from the very early Sub-Mariner, he's pretty well unique among all other heroes.

Hex is an anti-hero, the type of person a super-hero could never be and yet be acceptable on the stands today. Many of these deflections on the pseudo-elfin view we in 1974 have of ourselves—it's all right for a former-confederate-turned-bounty hunter to be a truly hard and mean cuss...but, say, contemporary heroes such as Daredevil or Green Arrow? Uh, uh, no way!

Writer John Albino's characterization of Hex has been clear and effective without distracting the reader from the story itself. For example, in *WF* #20 we find Hex bringing to town three outlaws he's been after. They run into a snowstorm along the way. Soon, one of the outlaws calls out to him:

"Hex, what, what is it?"

Outlaw: "Jasper! He's stopped coughing...I think he's..."chucked it!"

"Hex: 'Is that all? Lock, boy, don't go callin' me agin' unless it's important, you know?'"

Jasper, for the record, had been winged in the shoulder. While Hex was capturing the trio. A few seconds later Hex had nonchalantly killed him full in the face.

Albino's Hex is not a mean, uninterested about justice unless he is directly involved in the conflict at hand. East and other stories, the reader learns more about Hex's characterization with each of his actions.

Artistic Tony DeZuniga, I daresay, is the best western artist ever to grace the pages of comics. While my experience with western comics is sketchy at best, I can at least say that, judging from DC's and Marvel's western reprints, no artist has been more adept at capturing the essential toughness and emotion of the old west than DeZuniga.

Mike Fleischer took over the scripting job with *WF* #20, but based on Albino's stories and a fill-in by Arnold Drake, the series is well worth reading regularly.

And blatant that many write it off unthinkingly. Yet despite its sheer handiness it's light-hearted. Political satire reigns in its pages and each story attacks a different target within this overall starting point. Significantly, though, it's done without a trace of the self-righteousness that characterized some of Denny O'Neil's work on the old *Green Lantern* series or that permeated much of Mike Friedrich's writing for Julie Schwartz during those years.

Much of Prez's satire is done just for the sake of fun, as with issue #2's parody of Bobby Fisher. Two issues later the target seems to have been Marvel's Werewolf by Night and Tomb of Dracula books; the Werewolf was a wolf-man from Transylvania, while Dracula was a leering cripple, scooting around on a little cart with the aid of hand-blocks. At the same time, though, Prez manages to get in a few back-handed slaps at certain targets—Mayor Daley in #1, the myth of peace in our violent world in the first few pages of #2, and the right-wing Minutemen organization in #3.

The book's mix of the oh-so-seriousness that characterizes many comics, particularly the Marvels, and some fans off. So be it. But this won't alter the fact that Prez is certainly imaginative and innovative, and ably presents itself as one of the best of its chosen "imaginative world."

Last of the five is Marvel's Captain Marvel, which is probably the "best"素养 today. It has the list despite the nature of its plotline, which has drawn heavily from the Kirby Trilogy: the good guys fighting the hulking (Thanos/Darksied), who is seeking the key to ultimate power (the cosmic cube/the Anti-Life equation), and despite the similarities between the symbolism of Rick Jones/Marvel and Billy Batson/Captain Marvel.

Oh, make me laugh because Jim Starlin is a master story-teller. While his art isn't power-packed like Kirby's, it exudes its own special brand of majesty, one which draws the reader into it rather than leaps out at him.

Starlin plots the series himself and of late has been writing it as well, he's been able to add imaginative twists and touches that would render him impossible. He tends to center the story around its artistic possibilities, instead of the other way around. His journeys into "Marvel"-land are all that we say, mind-boggling, enhanced as they are by his intricate and well-defined illustrations. (I'd hate to see a DC artist try the same thing working from another writer's script.)

The end result is a beautiful, readable product, unsurpassed in its chosen realm.

Finally, an Honorable Mention for a single story the Steve Englehart/Sal Amendola Batman saga, "Night of the Stalker" in *Detective Comics* #430. Here was the definitive Batman, outwardly shed of his humanity, truly a creature of the night. I'm buying this story up because it could well have been Batman's very first story back in the late Thirties—it captured perfectly comics only realistically unique crime-fighter and shows how utterly terrifying he can be. Englehart's Batman, unlike those of the other writers, would not be featured in an Earth-1 celebrity-expose magazine. It's a shame that other Batman writers and artists haven't been able to see the masked Manhunter for what he should be.
Before starting this interview I would like to state that this took place on the 11th floor of the Detroit Hilton in Craig's room. The questions for CPL were Kim Eastland, Butch McFarlin, and myself.

Craig Russell, for the record is a shy, reserved individual with some pretty strong ideas about comics and fandom, as you will soon find out.

For you nit-pickers who have to know Craig is twenty-one years old and is currently living in Brooklyn with Gang leader, Duffy Vohland. ... Bob nearby.

CPL: First off Craig, what comics do you have credited to your name at the moment?

CRAIG: Three episodes of Ant-Man, Dr. Strange, a Iron Man, and several short stories.

CPL: I know you've done some work on Conan too, Issue #21, correct me if I'm wrong. Did you do inking on that issue?

CRAIG: Yes, the only inking on that issue was done by the background artists. I did all the backgrounds in that issue too, Smith did the layout in blue pencil and V. Meyiker filled in all the people.

CPL: Conan looked a lot like Conan on that inking.

CRAIG: That's the way Conan should have looked. Anyway, Val did the finished drawing and I did all the backgrounds, castles and such.

CPL: Did Smith do only the first two pages?

CRAIG: Yes. He did pencil the first two pages and then blue penciled the rest of the story. That issue was produced very poorly.

Supposedly, the whole reason for it was so Smith could get ahead. He was slow because he put so much work into each issue of Conan that it pushed him behind schedule. It was still working out until Dan got behind on his inking. Then, as soon as we finished it and sent it to be lettered and all that, some parts were so bad that Dan had to white out whole sections and redo them. At the time, neither Val or I were inks and the styles were simply incompatible.

That Conan was done before my first full length comic. It was a square format, and Dan would lay out and then work out, but as it worked out, I drew it and Dan did the coloring.

And here did correct an awful lot of mistakes, though. We also got in a mess of arguments, too (laughing). After that they gave me the Dr. Strange, and I really knocked myself out on it, but it was over-detailed.

I hadn't learned how to put a great amount of detail and still tell the story yet.

CPL: Barry Smith is good at that.

CRAIG: Yes, Jeff Jones is another. A lot of people are (laughing). But that the inkers took out a lot of my finer lines and just sloshed over it. I'm referring to Giacosa, Esposito and Hunt.

CPL: Sounds kind of like a law firm.

CRAIG: Man, I don't even know who Hunt is! Some inking in the Dr. Strange are very nice, probably Giacosa. The rest was just hack, really hack. The one thing that really got me was the coloring. If you're working in the black and white field, you have no problem as far as your work coming out the way you did it. I don't understand why more attention isn't paid to coloring comics. Color can either destroy or improve a comic, it depends entirely upon the artist that works with color.

CPL: From the artist's point of view, how does it feel when you really knock yourself out on a page, turn it in to Marvel, and then they more or less prostitute it, or make it look really bad by putting a poor inker on it?

CRAIG: Well, it's pretty disappointing. It isn't completely discouraging because the good enjoyment comes from the doing, even if it's messed up. Even if everyone sees it as less than what I did it, I know I did it to the best of my ability. The most important thing is what it means to me. If you don't have that attitude about your work, I think you would get so discouraged by comics, you wouldn't last past a few issues.

Before you mentioned doing something and then seeing it messed up, I did an issue of Iron Man that I really got excited about. Iron Man was about my favorite super-hero and I really thought I could do something with it. The reason I was asked to do it was that the issue of Iron Man I did previously done a walk-on by Iron Man in one of my Ant-Man stories. Mike Friedrich liked my version of Iron Man so well, he asked Roy to let me do a fill-in issue. So I knocked myself out on this story, doing twenty pages of little light reflections that Mike was crazy over, and when I turned it...
in they took all those little reflections out I couldn't believe it! I found out later that Esposito took them all out for continuity's sake. They said that Iron Man doesn't always have those little blips of light. They also made some changes as far as story-telling, taking panels out and rearranging them. That didn't bother me because the corrections they made improved the story. But to actually make a comic worse, just for continuity's sake makes no sense at all.

CPL: Getting back to coloring, what do you think of the European comics?
CRAIG: They're just beautiful!

CPL: Of course, they have better quality paper than we have, we don't seem to give much of a damn, do we?
CRAIG: No, we don't. Tom Palmer is about the best colorer I can think of. He really knows how to lend in shadows, which is something that Marvel's colorists can't seem to grasp. When they do a scene at night it's always dark green, dark blue or pale purple, but Palmer can do a scene at night and everything is colorful or there are shades of color. His coloring actually adds to the drama of the story.

CPL: Is your new Dr. Strange the next thing you started work on?
CRAIG: No. After that Iron Man story I did the last Ant-Man and I was really getting depressed about my work.

CPL: Many fans consider your last Ant-Man your best because it had more action in it.
CRAIG: I was slowly improving issues to issue. I was having to force my self into the super-hero, Marvel, approach to doing comics.

CPL: I noticed you had to swipe if that's what you're driving at.
CRAIG: Well, I've used lots of swipes from the start. It's a slow process of taking a swipe and making it your own work. Smith swipes.

CPL: I noticed that you took a leave of absence from Marvel. I needed time to step back and take an objective look at my work. I had gotten into comics without any previous training in the art field and I felt I needed to get away from comics for a while. I spent a couple of months just looking at other comics. I have a big E.C. file, all cut up, that Atkins gave me. I would spend hours going over them by line to see how other people draw. Then I started working on a Dr. Strange story that I made up and trying to come up with a fresh approach. Something more my own and more fantasy oriented than my previous Dr. Strange. I even got books on Indian temples. I've always felt that they never done enough with Dr. Strange's hands so I found this book in a bookstore downtown called Ritual Hand Poses of the Buddhist Priests, that I used as models for casting spells. If I was doing the book regularly, I'd have a different hand position for every spell Dr. Strange casts. I'd have a certain way to position the hands to cast the rings of the Cyttorak and all that kind of stuff. A definite pattern would be worked out.

CPL: Could you hack a monthly or bi-monthly schedule and still maintain the quality of your sample pages?
CRAIG: On a bi-monthly schedule, I'm sure I could!

CPL: Could you get into westerns?
CRAIG: That's a good question. I've tried to draw guns before but it didn't come off too well.

CPL: A lot of times, good art is wasted on western books. There are exceptions like El Diablo and Jonah Hex.
CRAIG: Have you seen the European westerns? Ll Blueberry is a French strip & is probably about the best drawn comic strip in the world. And it's gorgeous! You wouldn't believe all the things that could be done with a western. It's like what Frazetta did for love stories. I did get myself in a certain frame of mind for that Dr. Strange story. I didn't care too much for the Robert E. Howard adaptation or the whole Shuma-Gorath series. My story was in that run. It was all set on earth which I don't think is the right place for Dr. Strange, he belongs in all those other dimensions. About the only one to ever capture the proper mood, I think, is Ditko. He's about the only one that could get Strange into a completely different world naturally. It's almost a psychological-type thing which I tried to work into Dr. Strange. There is an entire other story going on underneath the dialogue-type story. Dr. Strange goes to this other dimension, and as soon as he gets there the ground starts to suck him up into it. As he's being pulled down, up comes this organic arc which forms itself into a woman who is the villainess... she is the planet. You find out later in the story that the reason for her luring Dr. Strange to that dimension is to make him her husband, and rule over the dark domain. The planet's
CPL: Oh Ant-Man, Iron Man and Dr. Strange, which would you prefer to do on a regular basis?

CRAIG: Dr. Strange, most definitely.

CPL: Do you like sorcery comics?

CRAIG: If I had the chance to do any character out of the Marvel line I would want to do Dr. Strange first, then Conan, then Thor or something with that supernatural heroic flavor. As far as sorcery goes, I would like to do Iron Man or Captain America.

CPL: Why Iron Man?

CRAIG: I like the metal and his alter ego. If you like the idea of being an industrialist and all that...someone wrote a letter saying, "Why don't you do more with Matt Murdoch's life as a lawyer?" It seems that secondary considerations in any super-hero still happen to be a function in their other life. Another factor I take into consideration is the super-industrial image, with all the factories scattered around the U.S. The story I did was-set in Cincinnati and with all those factories and the Iron Man skipping all over the place.

CPL: What do you think of this Satanic-horror movement within comics?

CRAIG: The Zombie and most of the black and white magazines, I've picked up, look like a few pages and then put back down again. I did pick up the Son of Satan, but I took one look inside and dropped it like a hot potato.

CPL: But you are interested in the occult?

CRAIG: Oh yeah, that's why I'll put it down faster than a bad super-hero movie... because I like the Werewolf, Frankenstein, and Gothic titles. I like what we said earlier about getting into the right frame of mind for your character... that seems to be a particular approach to this occult phase of comics.

CPL: Do you feel the comics industry is wrong in putting all this Satanic oriented stuff on the market?

CRAIG: I don't know if I'd say it's particularly wrong or not... dull would be a better word (laughter). My story, the Montarstor story is the one Steranko did in Tower of Shadows called "The Stroke of Midnight". It was incredible in the fact that throughout the entire story, there were no monsters or gore or anything like that, and it still came off a scary as hell.

CPL: Would you like to work on a black and white that's fantasy and horror based?

CRAIG: Oh yeah! You bet I would!

CPL: Following some of the same lines, if Marvel were to give you a free hand in creating a new title or character of some kind, what sort of creation would it be?

CRAIG: Something in the line of the epic adventure with a little bit of everything thrown in. You know, Norse gods, Valkyries, the whole line of fantasy and mythology.

CPL: How, how, more and more, that comics are oriented to the younger age group. If you could do one geared to the adult level, what would you do?

CRAIG: Well, I'm working on that right now. That's why I've been soliciting the Symbolist painters and getting more into mythology. I see no reason why a story can't function on two levels. For example, Smith uses symbolism... his Black Hound of Vengeance had it, his Red Sonja had it too... but at the same time makes it so kids of eight years old could read it and get excited by it. The story I'm working on now is called "Chimera". A Chimera is a mythical creature that leads man to all sorts of folly. The symbolist painters were painting Chimeras all the time, picturing them with serpentine-like bodies. The story concerns a barbarian who comes to a kingdom and decides he wants to rule it. In his attempt to take over, he discovers that the queen is a Chimera.

CPL: Do you think Warren would publish something like that?

CRAIG: I don't know... I certainly hope so! There is a very straight line running through it, enough to make it go well.

CPL: Getting back to a previous question, how do you get yourself in the mood for a story? How do you motivate yourself?

CRAIG: Meditation is one of the main reasons I took a leave of absence from Marvel. My trouble was that I couldn't co-ordinate the ideas and the page. I just couldn't get it... it's hard to explain.

CPL: Have you ever considered writing for other artists?

CRAIG: No, I don't think I could even get you that, although I'd like to write for a script.

CPL: Do you think that when an artist does the whole book that they get a better product?

CRAIG: Yes, very definitely! When John Romita did Dr. Strange, it was originally to be a big ten issue series that he and Thomas were to do. At the last minute Thomas dropped out and John took over and did it. Stan, without changing a line on the Smith pages, managed to change the entire plot line of that story, which is now the eight page feature in

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CPL: What do you think of his Charlton super-heroes, Blue Beetle... Capt. Atom... the Question... all those things?

CRAIG: I love 'em! I still enjoy them out of my collection & reading them over and over. I especially like the Question.

CPL: Let's get some opinions of a few young artists, like Wrightson for instance.

CRAIG: I think he's finally come into his own. Before when looked at his stuff, you thought "Well here is the Frazetta" and that's a Graham Enigos", and you could always see his influences. It was only after the second issue of Swamp Thing that he really started to gel. It became a Berni Wrightson with a style all his own. He's a fantastic artist.

CPL: What do you think of Starlin?

CRAIG: Starlin... I'm watching. When I first started working on the comic, didn't like it at all, but for some reason I kept buying his stuff and looking forward to each new Jim Starlin issue. You can usually tell enthusiasm in an artist's work and his work definitely shows it. You can tell he's got good. His last few Captain Marvel issues were
I'm down, I'm dying...
Oh, I wish I was... queen!

What?
Oh no! God, where am I?
just fantastic. He is very good now and in a few years, he'll be one of the best.

CPL: What about Jim Aparo?
CRAIG: Aparo is most confusing. I look at his work and say, "It's so nice...", but I can never remember anything he has done. His stuff doesn't leave an impression on the readers.

CPL: Perhaps he's too consistent?
CRAIG: That's probably it. His cover illustrations are very striking!

CPL: Do you like undergrounds?
CRAIG: Yes, it's strange that the underground field is about the only place where the artist can get a fair shake. He is allowed to work at creativity, he gets a percentage of the profits and has more control over his work. Truly amazing!

CPL: What do you think of Howard the duck?
CRAIG: Oh, I thought he was simply incredible! I love that duck! I was really freaked out by Howard in Man-Thing. (laughter) Marvel got an amazing mail response to him. People wrote in like crazy saying that any duck that liked broads and 440 magnums can't be all bad.

CPL: Some artists claim that National is too sterile an environment for creative activity. Would you ever consider working for D.C.?
CRAIG: I think I would try Warren or Skywald first.

CPL: Then National isn't your first choice?
CRAIG: No, basically because you have to work from a script having everything already laid out for you to do. I hear D.C. is making exceptions now with Wrightson & Chaykin. Both of them work straight from a plot outline like the Marvel artists do. That gives them more creative freedom. From what I hear, it's very hard to do anything creative at D.C. because you get so many editors giving you the run-around.

CPL: Do you remember when we were all kids, sitting around reading the Marvel Bullpen pages? I use to imagine these guys at Marvel all relaxed in a lounge, drinking coffee, just being one big happy family. (laughter) What's happened to that image?

CRAIG: I would buy every single Marvel comic that would come out and I could hardly wait for the next Bullpen page to come out. I'd pick up a comic and say, "What's Herb Trimpe doing this month? OH! HE GOT A NEW CAR!!" All that is gone now. I guess. They've expanded so much that
THE HOUR OF THUNDER

BY
TONY ISABELLA

The lightning split the sky behind the lofty Terminus Building and a poet might have glimpsed dim shapes through the steel clouds that filled the heavens. But Godfrey Spelling was not feeling particularly poetic this hellish night. He squeezed against the side of the bus shelter to avoid the tumultuous rain. He was cold, wet, and very tired.

The downtown area was deserted this Sunday evening. Spelling could not see another human being anywhere. He had been all alone since leaving the newspaper office. All alone in a city of over a million people. A typical Sunday night in Lakeside City, Godfrey looked at his watch. Nearly midnight. Even the thunder was hush.

The thunder echoed off the empty streets. Godfrey cursed the lateness of the bus, the lateness of the hour, the lateness of his presence, the latter due to a late-breaking story. And his curses were lost in the thunder, the lightning, and the rain. The hidden store gods were angry. Spelling laughed.

Godfrey Spelling was a man who did not believe in gods. Godfrey did not believe in anything these days. He had once believed in religion until his history interfered. He had strongly believed in his country until a president lied to him. He had once believed in his own innate goodness until an unscrupulous rise to the editorship he did not deserve convinced him that he was as corrupt as the rest of the worthless human race.

Godfrey stopped this train of thought. It was too unpleasant without the presence of other worthless creatures to ease the pain. He decided to concentrate on other things. Why hadn’t he called a cab for one. Why wasn’t the bus here, for another. He became so engrossed in these matters that he did not feel the scarlet lightning bolt that leapt from the dark skies to strike him and remove all trace of Godfrey Spelling and the bus shelter from the streets of Lakeside City.

And Godfrey thought a voice an instant later.

THERE ARE FORCES—SOME GOOD, SOME EVIL, SOME UNCARING OF SUCH IDEALS—THAT SILENCE AT MIDNIGHT... AND IF THESE FORCES HAVE EVER OR WILL EVER INFLUENCE THE DESTINY OF MAN, IT IS NOT FOR ANY HUMAN TO KNOW... THEY KNOW... THEY CAN REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE LIFE OF A MAN, A WOMAN, OR A CHILD... FOR GOOD OR FOR ILL.

And Godfrey stared out on a crisp winter morning and felt his legs weaken. He sat on the bus shelter bench. He sat there a long time, not knowing what else he could do. Eventually he had a better idea. He felt a stirring in his legs and went for a walk through the chilly air of his own personal nightmare.

Godfrey walked until he came to a small clearing. In the center of the clearing was a sturdy oak. Chained to the base of this sturdy oak was a giant of a man. He was massive, built as a tree in the oak that held him. His long hair and beard frame red and his eyes held the same intensity. Lying on the ground near this giant man was a short-handled hammer. On the hammer’s head, a sole word was chiseled: MJOLNIR.

Godfrey stared, as was beginning to become a habit, in this sad dream of his. The giant’s beard bristled at the newsman’s seeming inability to comprehend the situation and the effect was much like that of a raging forest fire. He bellowed at Spelling with enough force to start Godfrey shaking.

“Stop gawking, you witless troll! Pick up the hammer, by Woden, and be quick about it!”

Godfrey flew to the hammer, propelled by the fear the bearded man inspired. The hammer looked as if it weighed a hundred pounds or more. He knew he could never lift it. Yet lift it he did with but a minimum effort.

“Good. You pass the first test.
Now, lift the hammer. Lift it above your head, Fool, and strike down at these chains. Do not hesitate. Mjolnir can not harm it's master."

"Again, Godfrey Spelling did the impossible. The hammer crashed down on the chains, shattering them with this one blow. Impact sent the hammer flying from Godfrey's hand. Mjolnir landed on the ground several yards away and still spinning from the contact."

The redbeard rose to his feet and the hammer left its resting place to come to the man's open hand with a resounding thud. With hammer in hand, a change came over the giant. Alread impressive looking, he now became a symbol of strength. That massive arm was lifted to the sky and the sky was filled with crackling lightning. And thunder. Thunder louder than the disbeliefing editor had ever heard before. Spelling trembled as the man turned to face him.

"Know you, mortal, that you have freed Thor Redbeard from the evil chains of Loki. As the last of the Aesgarians, I deem thee a friend of the real and a friend of Thor!"

Godfrey Spelling, crusading editor, fainted.

When Godfrey came to, he found himself flung over Thor's back and being carried with ease. Sensing his load stirring, the giant placed Spelling on his feet. Godfrey nearly fainted again, but he was steadied by Thor's sturdy arm and lowered gently to the ground. The human cursed his weak knees.

"That's a good lad. Don't be embarrassed. Wielding Mjolnir is a monumental task for any mortal, especially a beardless youth who has yet to see forty winters."

Godfrey passed that remark by, what were his thirty years to a man-go-d?—who had lived thousands? There were things he had to know, to understand about this very real nightmare.

"Who are you? Where is this place?"

"So many questions! You must be a scribe or, even worse, one of the poets. Relax yourself, son. I'll answer all."

"My name is Thor Redbeard, first son of the god Woden, who, one hundred years of time past would have it—Woden. You have likely heard of me. The last time we were on your planet, we gave quite an account of ourselves. Remember your legends call it, the ultimate clash of the heroes and the traitors."

"We, the gods of Asgard, were delivered unto the evil ones in this existence by that half-breed bastard, Loki. We found him as an infant, among the dead, among the heroes, of gods! All were destroyed."

All except two. I escaped the dying lunge of the Serpent by inches. Loki feigned death and crept from the battlefield, unseen by all save myself and Heimdall, to recover."

"I have chased Loki through a million dimensional worlds like this, seeking revenge for Asgard's doom. When the Evil One caught me asleep, he chained me, inches away from Mjolnir! Though my own power was reduced, I was able to bring you to the place where Loki is. As an intelligent fellow, such as yourself has probably noticed, you did. And soon Loki will pay for his infamy!"

Godfrey listened to Thor's tale. He almost admitted that the things he had long denied existence. But an ominous undertone in the god's voice grated on his human nerves. He couldn't put a definition on it. It was a hint. He ignored it for the time being. He had one more question to ask.

"Thor, before, when I lifted Mjolnir, you said I had passed a test. What did you mean?"

"Are you but a fool, after all, man? A child knows that only the godly may lift sacred Mjolnir! If it were not thus, Loki would have used it to spread his way into Valhalla! Enough talk! Our next task is to find Loki."

"Our task?"

"Of course, friend mortal. It is your universe which he'll destroy!"

PART II....next issue!
I have long been a fan of Steve Ditko’s work. He has worked for almost every major publisher of superhero books: Marvel, DC, Charlton, Tower and probably others that I can’t think of at the moment. Ditko is a person who obviously has opinions and philosophies on the world and makes no bones about expressing them.

Fan either agree or disagree with Ditko’s philosophies (I personally find myself agreeing with most of them), but I don’t think I’ve ever met a fan who didn’t respect Ditko’s craftsmanship. I’d like to take this opportunity to discuss one of Ditko’s best creations and my personal favorite: the Question!

The Question was introduced in the Blue Beetle #1, one of Charlton’s superhero comics put out during the Batman craze. The Question was a Ditko hero in the finest tradition of Ditko heroes. One thing I’ve always liked about most Ditko characters is that they are people’s first and super-heroes second. The Question was no exception. The Question was really Vic Sage, TV broadcaster for Worldwide Broadcasting Co. Vic was opinionated and stubborn enough not to back down under any circumstances.

Considering the space limitations (the Question as a back-up was only allowed seven to eight pages) Ditko did exceptionally well. He used an average of eight or nine panels a page in order to get as much of a story into the strip as possible. The pace was always fast, mainly because Ditko had a lot of story to tell but not much space to do it in, making the many panels per page necessary.

Like the Creeper, the Hawk, and Dove and many of Ditko’s other characters the Question wasn’t slowed down by having to change his costume, which by the way, was probably one of the simplest in comics. His costume consisted of his street clothes, usually a suit and tie (although in some cases it was a turtleneck and jacket) which, because of a special treatment with chemicals, would change colors. His shirts and sweaters would turn a light blue.

To disguise his features he donned a special mask invented by Professor Roder, a character who, although appeared in some issues, was never high-lighted. It was never explained how Vic Sage made him or why Rodor invented the mask for him.

The mask was flesh colored and solid looking on the outside. On the inside, however, Vic was able to see, breathe and talk. When the gas that changed the color of his clothing was released, it also cemented the mask to his face and turned his specially treated hair from its normal red to black. This unique set-up allowed Vic to turn into the Question on the run eliminating an unnecessary loss of time.

This coupled with the fact that the gas also changed any I.D. on papers in his wallet to a fictitious one out of state made it impossible for anyone to find out who he really was. Almost all of Ditko’s characters have these impossible to remove costumes. Presumably from this, we can assert Ditko did this in order to devote more time to plots and characters; and so he wouldn’t be bogged down by secret identity hunters.

Ditko is a master of character. In the first issue of MM after conceiving a runner of an illegal gambling ring with a “respectable” businessman, Vic asks the viewers “.... will another (gambling ring) rise in it’s place? Only YOU can answer that question!”

While this is being broadcast over TV one viewer is shown asleep,
another is reading over a newspaper thinking "Oh I didn't finish the crossword." The final scene is in the outside of a metropolitan building with a balloon from an occupant saying, "Hey Mac, place a bet for me!" A perfect portrayal of public apathy!

Vic Sage's the Question's world, was a world of politics; and the magic of the character can probably be explained by re-reading EIS- TORM! and trying to make sense of the book featuring the only book-length Question story. The fact that most of the real action was on nine panels that were used when the Question appeared in the back of Blue Beetle, hinted at the fact that he might be a classic among comics. It was.

The story started out with the Question's treacherously purchased building lent crazy jewel floors above ground level. Inside was a respectable businessman, Jason Ord, consorting with the underworld character who hadn't yet been brought to justice because of lack of evidence. The Question vowed to himself it was time for his real.
The other day I was startled out of a particularly good daydream by the ever-insistent ringing of F.A. Bell's little money-maker. For once, however, I was glad to take the call...for it turned out to be a telephonic greeting from my old college roommate, Franklin W. Rayner...F.W. to his friends. Frank was passing thru town during the holiday and quicker than you can say "Draw two" we were reconquered in the far booth at Ferris's Bar & Grill reliving old thrills & twisting old memories. The talk eventually swung around to comics...Frank remains a bit of a dabbler...and that's when the memories really took off!

"Say, Sterno, ya see the new Penthouse?"
I admitted that I hadn't.

"There's nearly a full page on Uslan and the course! Written by O'Neill, no less!"
It is probably worth mentioning that for about the thousandth time I was slightly taken aback. For the course, what F.W. was talking of, was and still is, known by the handle of J213...The Comic Book in Society. A course that, oddly enough...I had a hand in starting some two years ago at Indiana University. It's an interesting story. One I call.....

"HOW I FOUNDED AN INTERNATIONALLY RENOUNCED COMIC BOOK COURSE AND BECAME A SWINDLING NON-ENTITY!!!"

It all begun back in the spring of 1971. At the time, I was residing in one of the many limestone-covered complexes known as Foster Quadrangle...even though it is composed of six buildings, I was vainly checking my mailbox for the 27th time when my eyes glanced upon an unusually gaudy poster pushing something called "Foster Project Seminars". It was the usual glut of experimental student-inspired courses...stuff like "The Importance of Human Sexuality", "The Historical Impact of Woodstock", and "Yoga for Science Majors"...you know the usual stuff! Well, along towards the bottom was a small paragraph that read something like..."Don't see anything you like? Why not start your own course...for credit? See the project office for details!" And so it struck me..."WHY NOT COMICS???" "Why not?" replied the gangling grad student behind the desk. "One topic is as good as another."

"Okay, so what do I have to do?"
"Well...you fill out one of these forms and give it to me to submit to the approval committee. With it you should include a bibliography, a reading list, a class syllabus, and a statement of proposed goals."

All that evening I labored away. A lot of obvious choices went into the work...Steranko's History...an assortment of fanzines...a smattering of learned...and not so learned articles. Finally it was all completed and handed in. And then....
short, I appeared before the committee, held them spellbound for 45 minutes to an hour with my knowledge of comic book trivia... Do you know anything about Pogo? Wow, and how much is that one worth? Gee, 'choke', I remember that one..." was politely thanked and dismissed. Again I heard nothing... until July, 1971. I had just returned to school from the annual New York Con. Suddenly, there, alone, waiting for me was a letter: "We are happy to inform you that your course has been approved..." Great! Now they tell me.

And so, when September rolled around, it was Professor Sterno who greeted fifteen eager faces. And admittedly it was a fun semester. I got some fantastic term papers... sparked a little attention in comics around the campus. But teaching... sheesh, what a hassle! The course was showing promise, but I needed someone else to teach it. Enter Mike Uslan. I had met Mike at WUSU, the campus-carried radio station. He was doing an oldies show called Bloomington Bandstand, and was teaching a free university course that paralleled mine. So when I approached Mike with the idea of taking over the course, he was enthusiastic.

"Say, maybe I can talk Carmine or Stan into coming to town as guest speakers!" he expounded.

"Sure, Mike, sure!" I thought he was pulling my leg.

So Mike took over the course for the second semester. Over the Christmas holidays, he revamped it, brought in a bunch of new material, even hit up the university for a budget! And I enrolled in the class. (Sneak that I am, I knew I could get two extra credits by taking the course.) Unfortunately, I missed the first two classes because I stupidly came down with a bad case of the flu. There I was sitting at home recuperating, when the phone rang. Phones are always ringing at dramatic times in my life. This time it was a fellow comic freak, Bob Butts, making use of a temporarily unguarded phone line.

"Sterno, you gonna be back next week?"

"Yeah, Bob! Doctor says I can come back down, why?"

"Hey! Uslan's got Denny O'Neil to appear as guest speaker!"

And so it was that I returned to find Mike Uslan surrounded by a camera crew from NBC news.

"Well, Stern," Says F.W. Maynard... "How's your not an international attraction, tell me..."

And tell you will in the final episode of this tale called, "TAKE THE DIPLOMA AND RUN!" in the next Sterno's Hot Ones.