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COVER ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN CANINI

A MESSAGE FROM THE SCRIBBLER

Welcome to the 17th issue of the *Columbus Scribbler*! We've got something truly special for you this time. We're thrilled to finally unveil our list of the **Top 50 Comic Characters of All Time!**

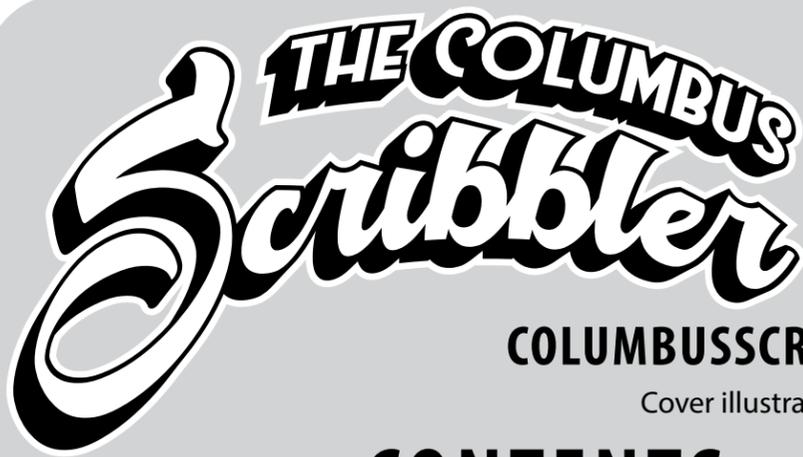
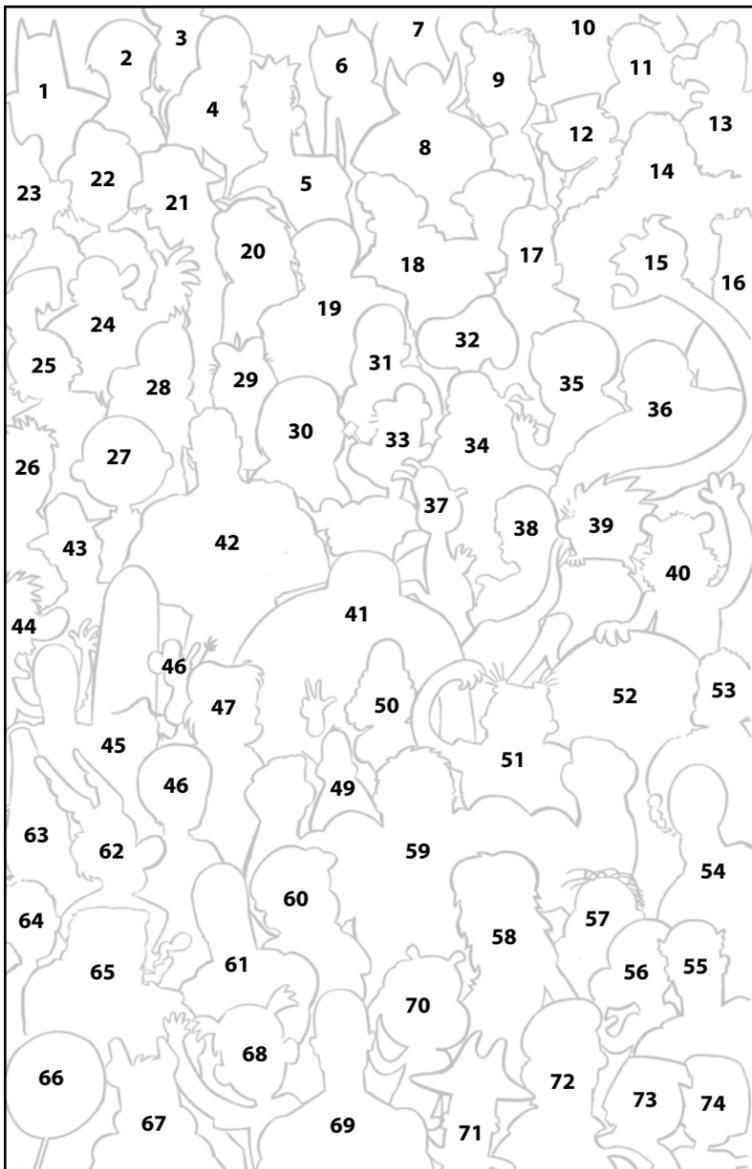
A huge thank you goes to CXC for sponsoring this issue and to everyone who supported our Kickstarter campaign. Whether you backed us directly or helped spread the word, we're deeply grateful. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to get more copies of this issue into the world and into the hands of future comics fans than ever before.

This issue wouldn't have been possible without the help of everyone who filled out our survey and took the time to share why certain characters meant so much to them. Thanks also to the local cartoonists who contributed their talents to this issue, many of whose work you can find at your neighborhood comic shop.

The *Columbus Scribbler* is made possible by you, the readers. You can help keep the scribbles coming by becoming a patron of the arts for as little as \$1 a month. Support us on Patreon or through PayPal at columbuscribbler.com, and help us continue to inspire the future of comics.

Scribble on!

- Brian Canini



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Cover illustration by Brian Canini

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The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of The Columbus Scribbler.

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MEET THE PEOPLE OF COLUMBUS: DANIELLE LEEMAN

DANIELLE (DANI) LEEMAN WAS BORN AND RAISED IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA. SHE WAS RAISED IN A JEWISH HOUSEHOLD WITH A YOUNGER BROTHER UNTIL HER PARENTS DIVORCED WHEN SHE WAS FIVE. HER FATHER LATER REMARRIED. DANI WAS A LATCHKEY KID WHO OFTEN MADE AFTERNOON SNACKS FOR HER BROTHER, FRIENDS, AND HERSELF.



DANIELLE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH INTEREST IN SCHOOL AND OFTEN ACTED OUT. AT FIFTEEN, HER FATHER ASKED HER TO LEAVE HOME AFTER SEVERAL DISPUTES. UPON HER RETURN, HER FATHER, MOTHER, AND STEPMOTHER, KNOWING SHE WASN'T INTERESTED IN ATTENDING A TRADITIONAL COLLEGE, GAVE DANI AN ULTIMATUM TO EITHER GO TO CULINARY SCHOOL OR LEAVE HOME FOR GOOD.



DANI WOULD GO ON TO GRADUATE FROM THE CALIFORNIA CULINARY ACADEMY. SHE HAD BEEN WORKING THROUGH SCHOOL AT A LOCAL BURGERMEISTER, WORKING IN THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE AS A SERVER. AFTER GRADUATION, SHE WOULD TAKE UP A NEW POST AS THE EXECUTIVE CHEF AT A BELGIAN GASTROPUB CALLED LA TRAPPE, WHERE SHE MADE RABBIT STEW AND OTHER BELGIAN DISHES FOR THE NEXT FOUR TO FIVE YEARS.



OVER THE COMING YEARS, DANIELLE WOULD MOVE THROUGH A VARIETY OF RESTAURANTS, INCLUDING AS A LINE COOK AT A NEW ORLEANS-THEMED RESTAURANT, THE MAGNOLIA GASTROPUB, AND EVEN TRIED HER HAND AS A CHOCOLATIER AT XOX TRUFFLES. SHE FINALLY LANDED AS A SOUS CHEF AT SAN FRANCISCO'S SECOND-OLDEST RESTAURANT, THE COMSTOCK SALOON.



IN 2016, THE BAR MANAGER OF COMSTOCK SALOON DECIDED TO MOVE BACK TO OHIO TO OPEN A NEW RESTAURANT CALLED THE BLIND LADY TAVERN. DANIELLE VISITED WHILE ON A TRIP TO CLEVELAND FOR A WEDDING, AND HER OLD BOSS OFFERED HER A SPOT ON THE TEAM. AFTER ENDING AN EIGHT-YEAR RELATIONSHIP, DANI DECIDED SHE COULD USE THE CHANGE AND MOVED TO OHIO.



UNFORTUNATELY, THE PARTNERSHIP DIDN'T LAST. HOWEVER, SHE FOUND WORK WITH TWO NEW UPCOMING CHEFS. SHE STARTED TO WORK WITH SOME OF THE PREMIERE RESTAURANTS, INCLUDING CHALLAH FOOD TRUCK, AMBROSE AND EVE, AND PRESTON'S BURGERS, LOCATED IN THREE SHEETS BAR, WHERE SHE MET BRANDON, HER FUTURE FIANCE.



AFTER MAKING ANOTHER FULL-TIME SWITCH IN HER CULINARY CAREER TO MILO'S CATERING, DANIELLE FOUND A PART-TIME GIG AT EIGHT AND SAND. AFTER COVID, THE BAR HAD A NEW OWNER, AND DANI WAS OFFERED THE POSITION OF HEAD CHEF, SERVING HER OWN FOOD INSIDE THE SOUTHSIDE BAR.



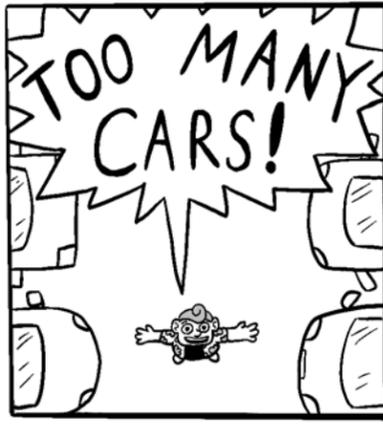
IN 2018, DANIELLE'S BOYFRIEND LED HER ON A SCAVENGER HUNT THROUGH A SERIES OF COLUMBUS HAUNTS THEY HAD VISITED TOGETHER, PROVIDING HER WITH LOCATIONS VIA LONGITUDE AND LATITUDE. THE DAY-LONG SCAVENGER HUNT FINALLY LED HER TO EIGHT AND SAND, WHICH OPENED JUST FOR THAT DAY. HER FRIENDS AND FAMILY WERE THERE TO WITNESS HER GETTING ENGAGED.



DANIELLE LEEMAN IS ONE OF THE BEST CHEFS IN THE CITY. HER LIFETIME OF COOKING LED HER DOWN A WINDING ROAD OF CULINARY CHALLENGES. SHE HARNESSSED EACH LESSON AND USED IT TO CRAFT A NEW STANDARD FOR THE TERM "BAR FOOD."



SHE AND HER TEAM AT EIGHT AND SAND WERE RECENTLY FEATURED ON AMERICA'S BEST HOLE-IN-THE-WALL RESTAURANTS IN EVERY STATE BY MASHED.COM. DO YOURSELF A FAVOR AND PAY THEM A VISIT.



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— THE COLUMBUS SCRIBBLER PRESENTS —

THE 50 GREATEST COMIC CHARACTERS

By Brian Canini

The great comic critic Tom Spurgeon once said that list-making allows a person to “think of their chosen medium of interest for the forest rather than the trees,” and can “drive a critic to find and engage work out of their usual comfort zone.”

He went on to say, “Just as important is that readers and critics can then use the lists compiled in any number of ways: to discover new works, to develop new ways of looking at familiar works, to get a snapshot of the usefulness of a specific critic for your own future needs, to expose yourself to competing summary views of an art form and what’s important in it, or even as a silent debate partner to sharpen your rhetorical tools.”

Inspired by that spirit, at the end of 2024, we reached out to nearly 150 individuals from across the globe and all corners of the comics world—mainstream and alternative cartoonists, indie and small press creators, comic shop retailers, publishers, critics, and educators—to share their top 10 favorite characters.

Selections could come from comic strips, books, graphic novels, or manga. The only rule was that contributors couldn’t vote for characters they had created themselves. The list that follows was compiled by tallying all the responses and organizing them by total votes.

One of our central goals at the *Columbus Scribbler* has always been to foster a deeper appreciation of the comics medium and encourage more people to explore its many forms. We hope this list introduces you to new favorites, inspires you to revisit familiar ones, and maybe even sparks some conversation about your own top comic characters.

Maybe your favorites made the cut, or maybe you’ll discover someone entirely new. Either way, we hope this list opens up new paths for exploration and helps you connect with this remarkable art form in fresh and exciting ways.

“At the time when I found the *Sandman* series, and I’m sure when it originally came out as well, she was the first cool and powerful female character I’d ever seen who wasn’t overly sexualized. She existed beyond being some guy’s love interest. She has an important, painful, and complicated job, but she keeps a good attitude. She’s goth, but her personality is bright and optimistic. She’s complex in that, a beautiful contradiction.”

- Kate Isaacs, Columbus Cool Cat’s Pro Tips



CHRIS BACHALO

48 | DEATH

Created by: Neil Gaiman & Mike Dringenberg

First Appearance: *The Sandman* vol. 2, #8 (1989)

Notable Comics: *Death: The High Cost of Living*, *Death: The Time of Your Life*

Unlike most traditional Western culture versions of the Grim Reaper, Death of the Endless is characterized as a perky, kind, down-to-earth, pale, goth girl dressed in casual clothes. She is an immortal being, not an agent or god of death, but the personification of Death itself, the end of life. She has said, “When the last living thing dies, my job will be finished. I’ll put the chairs on the tables, turn out the lights, and lock the universe behind me when I leave.”

Did You Know: Mike Dringenberg’s drawing of Death, inspired by his friend Cinamon Hadley, captivated Neil Gaiman and became the character’s definitive look. In a striking coincidence, a waitress mirroring Death’s outfit from the drawing served Gaiman and Dave McKean that very evening. Tragically, Cinamon Hadley passed away from colon cancer in 2018. While Dringenberg’s vision established Death’s appearance, Dave McKean later utilized various unnamed English models for *Sandman* cover art.

“It’s difficult for me not to be a fan of a character named Karen. But even without that advantage, Emil Ferris makes Karen smart, compassionate, and brave. Indomitable. Her relationships with others, especially her brother, are nuanced and feel profoundly truthful. She brings that truthfulness to her burgeoning understanding of herself as well. With all these qualities which sound so adult, she never stops being her age; she’s precocious but never smarmy.” - Karen Green, Columbia University Curator for Comics and Cartoons

50 | KAREN REYES

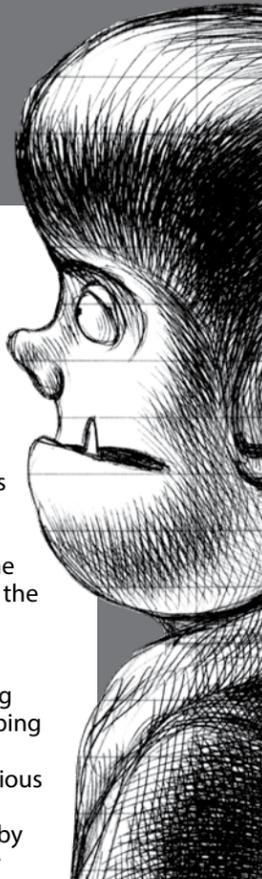
Created by: Emil Ferris

First Appearance: *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters* (2017)

Notable Comics: *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters* Books 1 & 2

10-year-old, B-movie horror and pulp monster loving Karen Reyes is on a quest to solve the murder of her mysterious upstairs neighbor, Anka Silverberg. Inquisitive by nature and prone to daydreaming, we follow Karen’s investigation through her illustrated diary as she grapples with her queer identity, which she doesn’t fully understand yet, and Anka’s traumatic past, all under the foreboding backdrop of 1960s Chicago.

Did You Know: The initial print run of Emil Ferris’s debut graphic novel, *My Favorite Thing Is Monsters*, found itself aboard a shipping freighter belonging to Hanjin, then the world’s sixth-largest shipping company. When Hanjin declared bankruptcy in 2016, numerous cargo shipments were left stranded at sea and impounded at various ports. Consequently, copies of Ferris’s highly anticipated book, initially slated for an October release, were effectively “detained” by the Panamanian government. For nearly six weeks, Ferris and her publisher, Fantagraphics, were left in a state of uncertainty regarding the fate of the books and the next course of action.



EMIL FERRIS

“He’s a little punk! His moral compass isn’t fully formed; he’s loud, rough, and acts before thinking. And he is a lot more of an a-hole in the manga than in the film. But it makes him a volatile character to follow through the story, which is never boring. Oh, and the bike is dope.”

- Victoria Douglas, *Halftone Hospital*

49 | KANEDA

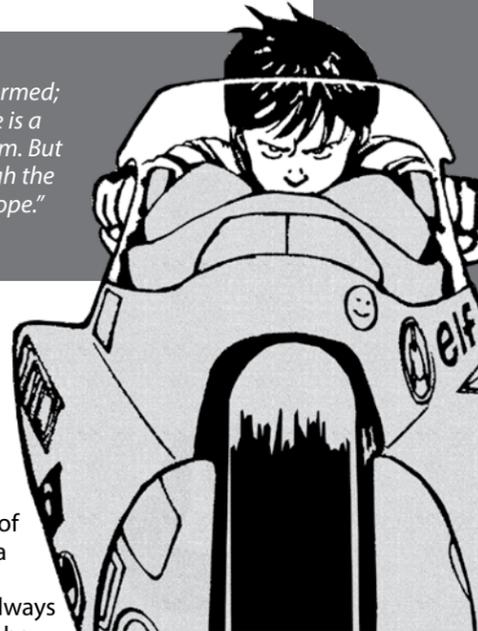
Created by: Katsuhiro Otomo

First Appearance: *Young Magazine* (1982)

Notable Comics: *Akira*

This brash, carefree delinquent is the leader of the motorcycle gang that propels the manga series *Akira* forward. Beneath his tough and cocky exterior, Kaneda is brave and caring, always looking out for the safety and well-being of the members of his gang. Above all, Kaneda values loyalty and becomes vengeful when his trust is broken. When his best friend, Tetsuo, gains psychic powers and begins to wreak havoc, their friendship is ruined, and Kaneda becomes involved with the terrorist resistance movement to stop him.

Did You Know: Shotaro Kaneda, the hero of *Tetsujin 28-go* (*Gigantor*), inspired the name “Kaneda.” The character’s influence extends beyond the name, with references like the “Kaneda” motorcycle in *Saints Row 2* and the inclusion of his signature red bike as an Easter egg in *Ghostrunner*.



KATSUHIRO OTOMO

47 | JIMMY CORRIGAN

Created by: Chris Ware

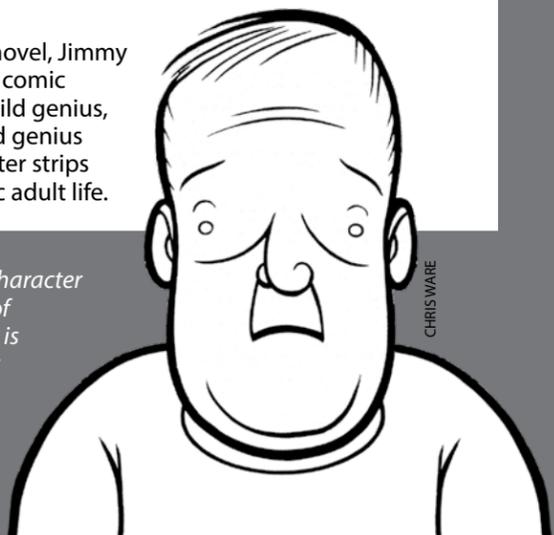
First Appearance: *Acme Novelty Library* #1 (1993)

Notable Comics: *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

A meek, awkward, lonely 30-something, Jimmy Corrigan longs for a place that feels like he belongs. This leads him on an adventure to meet his father, also named Jimmy, for the first time over Thanksgiving weekend, unbeknownst to his overbearing mother. His stress over the experience is just as palpable as his yearning to make a family connection in what *The New Yorker* declared as “the first formal masterpiece of the medium.”

Did You Know: Beyond the graphic novel, Jimmy Corrigan features in other Chris Ware comic strips, both as his initial persona, a child genius, and as an adult. While Corrigan’s child genius form dominated Ware’s early work, later strips increasingly depicted his melancholic adult life.

“I find Jimmy Corrigan (*The Smartest Kid on Earth*) a great character because he is a representation of the isolation and feelings of directionlessness that sometimes comes with adulthood. He is searching for more in the relationships in his life and doesn’t necessarily find what he’s looking for. He’s a raw character that some would say doesn’t change or grow, but I think the act of looking for more is universal. And not finding more, maybe even more so.” - Thomas Boeing, *iNK*



CHRIS WARE

"Luba is a brilliant character because she is messy. Gilbert shows us why he loves her and shows us her shortcomings."

- L. Pidge, *Infinite Wheatpaste*

"Luba works best as a mysterious, dangerous woman who has come to town and is both envied and lusted after by her neighbors. She's the most interesting character in the best comics ever made, and what more do you need to know?"

- Colin Blanchette, *Canon Zine*



GILBERT HERNANDEZ

46 | LUBA

Created by: Gilbert Hernandez

First Appearance: *Love and Rockets* #1 (1981)

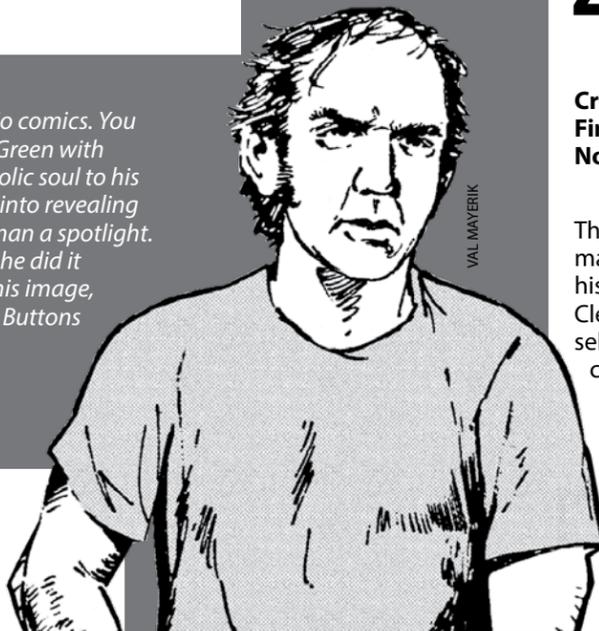
Notable Comics: *Heartbreak Soup*, *Human Diastrophism*

A beautiful, hammer-wielding, fiery-tempered enigma of a woman with enormous breasts and an eye for younger men, Luba is the star of Gilbert Hernandez's portion of the groundbreaking comic series *Love and Rockets*. Through the years, Gilbert has weaved tales of Luba from her infancy as the illegitimate child of a woman married into organized crime, all the way to her life as a middle-aged migrant to America.

Did You Know: Luba first appeared in a sci-fi story titled "BEM," and her look was inspired by the bold, curvy pin-up women of European science fiction and exploitation comics. At first, some readers had strong opinions about her body type and attitude, but that only pushed Gilbert Hernandez to lean in harder. "I took that as a challenge," he said. "I'm going to keep her and I'm going to make her better and make her the most important character in the whole series... You can't tell me that if a woman down the street looks like Luba, she's a lesser person. She's just as much of a person as any of the other characters." And that's exactly what he did.

"Harvey Pekar didn't invent modern auto-bio comics. You can probably give that distinction to Justin Green with *Binky Brown*. But after Justin bared his Catholic soul to his audience, Harvey channeled his Jewish one into revealing smaller moments and giving the common man a spotlight. He looked out as much as he looked in. And he did it with multiple artists and interpretations of his image, something that inspired me to create my *So Buttons Comix* for 20 years and counting."

- Jonathan Baylis, *So Buttons*



VAL MAVERIK

43 | CEREBUS THE AARDVARK

Created by: Dave Sim

First Appearance: *Cerebus the Aardvark* #1 (1977)

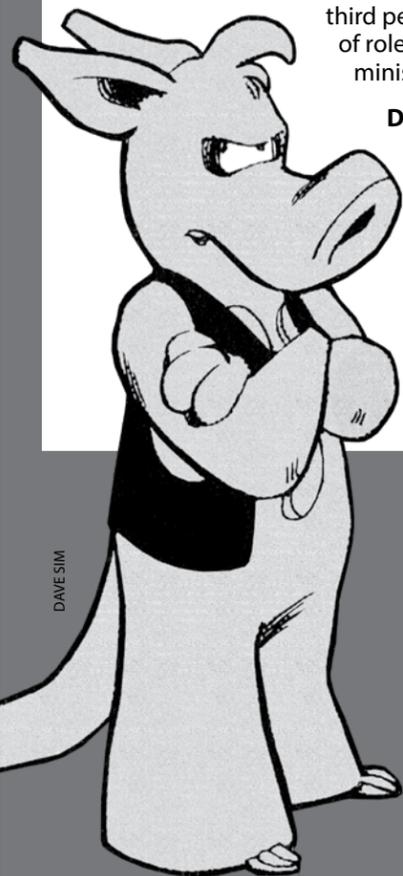
Notable Comics: *High Society*, *Church and State*, *Jaka's Story*

A misanthropic, amoral Cerebus started his adventures first as a parody of sword and sorcery comics, such as *Conan the Barbarian*. He soon evolved, allowing the 300-issue series to explore a variety of other topics, including politics, religion, and gender issues. Often referring to himself in the third person, Cerebus takes on a number of roles, including barbarian, prime minister, and Pope.

Did You Know: Recognizing Cerebus's rising popularity, DC Comics made repeated attempts to publish the series in the 1980s. Despite a substantial offer in 1988—\$100,000 plus 10% of licensing and merchandising—Dave Sim declined, choosing to maintain complete creative control over Cerebus.

"Cerebus is often unlikable, even detestable, but over the course of the series, we see him in every possible emotional state, from catatonic to enraged to terrified. His reactions to events can be extreme, but they are always plausible. He is both childish and childlike, and the moments that stick with me most are when his bravado can't hide his fear of the world and his place in it."

- Colin Blanchette, *Canon Zine*



DAVE SIM

"Jughead rocks because he has a singular focus and is easily pleased. Almost no one in the Archie-verse is ever really satisfied, and that's because their intentions are impure and generally toxic, but not Jughead. Jughead just wants a burger, and who could ever find fault with that?"

- Paterson Hodgson, *Pulping*



SAMM SCHWARTZ

45 | JUGHEAD

Created by: Bob Montana & John L. Goldwater

First Appearance: *Pep Comics* #22 (1941)

Notable Comics: *Crowning Achievements*, *Afterlife With Archie*

With a wry and sarcastic sense of humor, Forsythe Pendleton "Jughead" Jones III takes life as it comes. He's best friends with Archie Andrews and is obsessed with eating food. Most of his classmates and teachers view him as lazy and somewhat of an oddball, leading them to tease and taunt him. However, Jughead is extremely clever and creative when necessary, and he often takes advantage of his tormentors' weaknesses, all while having fun.

Did You Know: In the 1990s, a spin-off comic named "*Time Police*" turned Jughead's hat into a time-traveling machine.

44 | HARVEY PEKAR

Created by: Harvey Pekar

First Appearance: *The People's Comics* (1972)

Notable Comics: *The Quitter*, *Our Cancer Year*, *Our Movie Year*

The "poet laureate of Cleveland," writer Harvey Pekar, made himself into a comic book character. Utilizing his own mundane life as a file clerk and the city of Cleveland as a backdrop, within the pages of his self-published *American Splendor* series Pekar helped change the perceptions of the graphic novel, the drawn memoir, and autobiographical comic narratives with, as he put it, tales about "staying alive, getting a job, finding a mate, having a place to live, finding a creative outlet."

Did You Know: Harvey Pekar retired from his job as a filing clerk in a Veterans Hospital in 2003, where he had worked for 36 years.

42 | JOHN CONSTANTINE

Created by: Alan Moore, Steve Bissette, and John Totleben

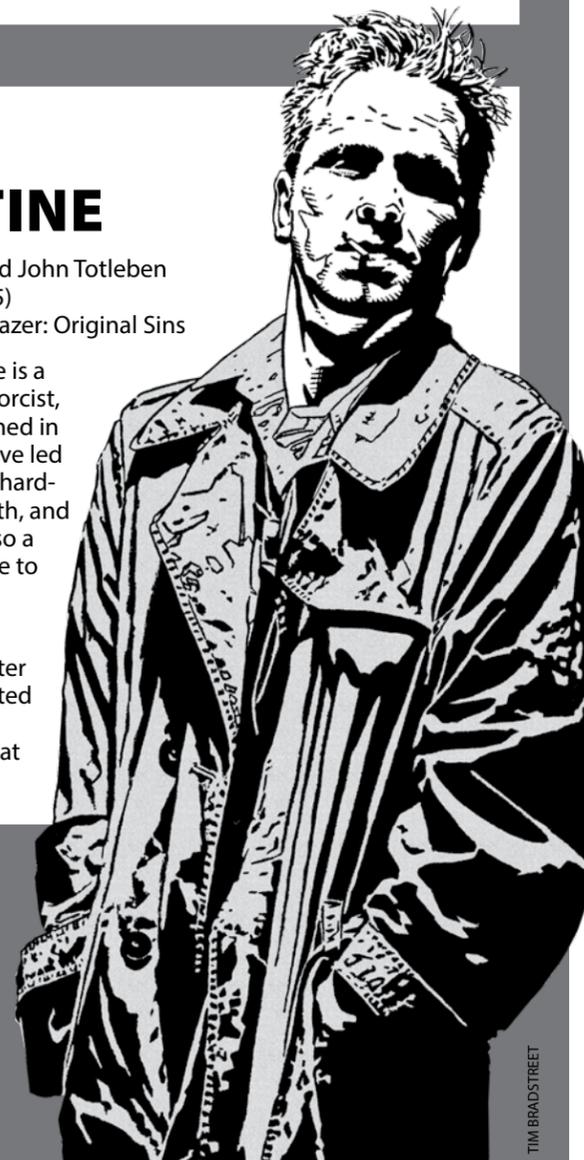
First Appearance: *Swamp Thing* #37 (1985)

Notable Comics: *Dangerous Habits*, *Hellblazer: Original Sins*

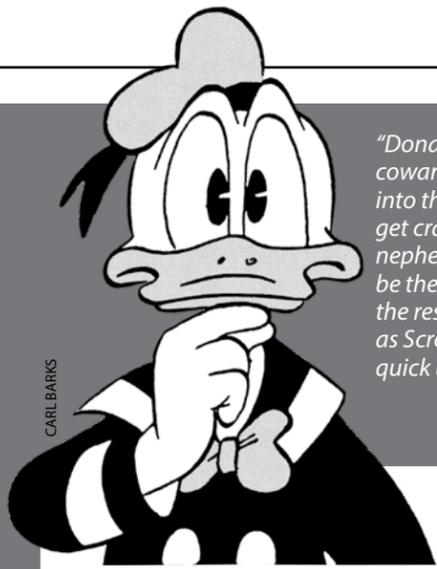
Also known as *Hellblazer*, John Constantine is a working-class warlock, occult detective, exorcist, and con artist from Liverpool who is stationed in London. His career path and life choices have led him to be a foul-mouthed, chain-smoking, hard-drinker with a cynical view toward life, death, and the world in general. Paradoxically, he is also a passionate humanitarian with a deep desire to make a positive impact on humanity.

Did You Know: According to an article on *Screen Rant*, Alan Moore, Jamie Delano, Peter Milligan, and Brian Azzarello have all reported seeing John Constantine in real life but declined to interact with him for fear of what would happen.

"John Constantine was my first antihero character. Sure, he's the one doing most of the good work in those stories, but he treats it all as if he's doing a job he doesn't especially enjoy. He's got that devil-may-care cool facade that makes any moments of real emotion, be it pain from loss or a brief moment that actually shows that he cares, hit harder and therefore feel more impactful." - Kate Isaacs, *Columbus Cool Cat's Pro Tips*



TIM BRADSTREET



CARL BARKS

"Donald Duck (at least in the Uncle Scrooge Comics) is the Everyman. He is played as a bit of a coward at times, but I always found him extremely reasonable in his desire to avoid danger. He went into the ancient tomb. The fact that he wants to leave early when things look like they're about to get crazy seems pragmatic. I also love how that character of Donald is framed as a caretaker of his nephews. He doesn't have the power and influence of Uncle Scrooge, but I always found him to be the moral anchor of the group. I've always been under the impression that Donald is the responsible adult in the room. Though sharing some of the same traits of greed as Scrooge, Donald seems less inclined to risk everything and everyone for a quick buck." - CM Campbell, *That Ol' English*

41 | DONALD DUCK

Created by: Dick Lundy & Walt Disney
First Appearance: Mickey Mouse Weekly #67 (1937)
Notable Comics: Lost in the Andes, The Old Castle's Secret

A duck of many faces, Donald can be mischievous, arrogant, short-tempered or adventurous treasure hunter. At the same time, he is also the responsible uncle, raising his nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louie, in a suburban house in Duckburg. He began his life in comics in the *Silly Symphony* comic strip in 1934, shortly after his theatrical debut in the cartoon *The Wise Little Hen*. He was an instant star, and some have argued that, in comics, he is more important and beloved than Mickey Mouse. Donald would truly come into his own beginning in 1943 under the pen of "The Good Duck Artist," Carl Barks. Barks made Donald more adventurous, less temperamental, and more eloquent.

Did You Know: Donald has a twin sister who is the mother of Huey, Dewey, and Louie. In various incarnations, she has been known as Thelma, Della, or Dumbella, and, according to a Dutch cartoon, became an astronaut.

"Goku is blood thirsty and competitive, but strangely upbeat and positive. He also forgives his enemies, and I think all of his foes (other than Freeza) become friends of his, eventually. It's a strange combination of personality traits, but it really works." - Alex Schubert, *Bloppy Boys*



TOYOTAROU

39 | GOKU

Created by: Akira Toriyama
First Appearance: Weekly Shōnen Jump #51 (1984)
Notable Comics: Dragon Ball Z

Based on Sun Wukong, the main character of the classic 16th-century Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, and combined with influences from the Hong Kong action cinema of Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee, Goku began life in manga as an eccentric, monkey-tailed, superhumanly strong boy practicing martial arts. With his friends, he goes on a quest to find the seven wish-granting Dragon Balls, growing up into Earth's mightiest warrior along the way.

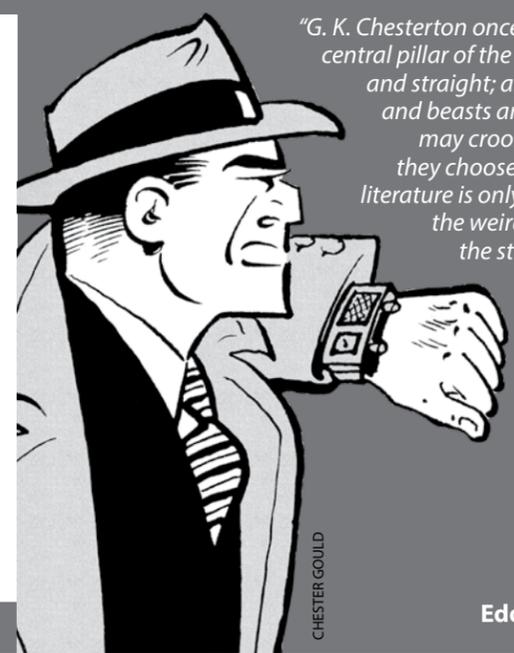
Did You Know: May 9th is officially "Goku Day" in Japan. This recognition, granted by the Japan Anniversary Association at Toei Animation's request, cleverly plays on the Japanese readings of 5 ("go") and 9 ("ku"). While no prescribed festivities exist, it's a fantastic tribute to the beloved *Dragon Ball* hero.

37 | DICK TRACY

Created by: Chester Gould
First Appearance: Dick Tracy (1931)
Notable Comics: Complete Chester Gould's Dick Tracy Vol. 4, 8, & 9

The symbol of law and order, and one of the world's greatest detectives, Dick Tracy is a tough and intelligent police detective. Tracy was recruited into the "plainclothes" unit by Chief Brandon to infiltrate the operation of a powerful crime boss, Big Boy, and bring him to justice. Over the years, Tracy has become one of the most decorated police officers in America and has developed a reputation for having killed the most criminals in the line of duty. He has been in hundreds of near-death situations, but thanks to his fast thinking and cutting-edge technology, like his 2-way wrist radio, he's always come out on top, keeping the underworld in check.

Did You Know: While early 20th-century comic strips offered light entertainment, *Dick Tracy* broke the mold with its stark portrayal of crime. Notably, it featured the first murder depicted in a comic strip, a level of violence that drew criticism. Creator Chester Gould defended his work, arguing, "any policeman on night duty sees far more blood than I have ever put in my comic."

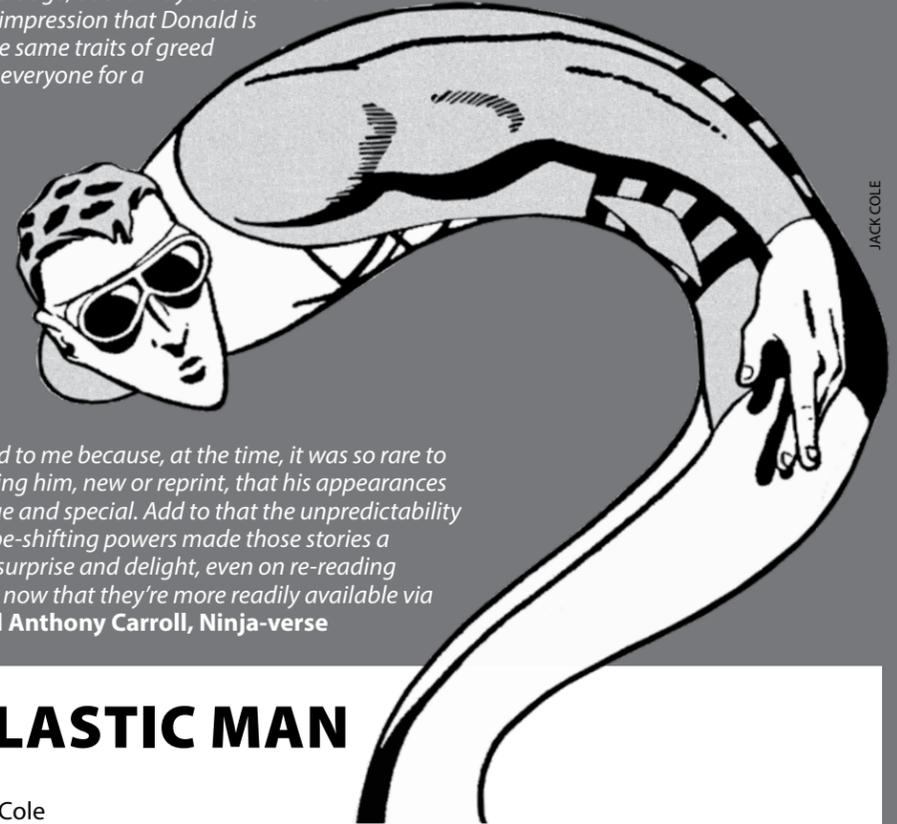


CHESTER GOULD

"G. K. Chesterton once wrote that, "Man, the central pillar of the world must be upright and straight; around him all the trees and beasts and elements and devils may crook and curl like smoke if they choose. All really imaginative literature is only the contrast between the weird curves of Nature and the straightness of the soul." *Dick Tracy* comics embody this ideal of imaginative literature. Tracy is the central pillar surrounded by the weird curves of Pruneface, Itchy, The Mole, Flattop, and dozens of other beasts and devils."

- Chris Russ, *Eddie the Office Goblin*

"The malleability of Plastic Man lends itself to an endless possibility of experimentation within the form and language of comics." - Marc Koprinarov, Santos Sisters



JACK COLE

"Plastic Man appealed to me because, at the time, it was so rare to see any stories featuring him, new or reprint, that his appearances anywhere were unique and special. Add to that the unpredictability of his stretching/shape-shifting powers made those stories a continuing source of surprise and delight, even on re-reading many of those stories now that they're more readily available via reprinting." - Michael Anthony Carroll, *Ninja-verse*

40 | PLASTIC MAN

Created by: Jack Cole
First Appearance: Police Comics #1 (1941)
Notable Comics: On The Lam, Plastic Man Archives Vol. 1, Meet The Terrifics

Patrick "Eel" O'Brian began life in comics as a criminal until one heist gone wrong ended with him shot in the shoulder and doused with a strange chemical. He soon discovers that his body now has all the properties of rubber, allowing him to stretch, bounce, and mold himself into any shape he desires. Determined to leave his life of crime in the past, he dons a red and yellow costume with goggles. Criminals would soon come to fear this zany, shape-defying hero known as Plastic Man.

Did You Know: Plastic Man was created in 1941, 20 years before Mr. Fantastic. He had his own animated series in 1979, is immune to telepathy, and, having been frozen, broken, scattered, and reformed countless times, has always been able to reconstitute himself. As he doesn't age, Plastic Man is considered immortal.

"Grandma Ben stands out because she is complex and layered, but not obvious. The gag early on is that she's sweet, open, and wildly strong, but we also see she's brooding, highly-trained, and has made really difficult choices (not always the best ones, too.) Grandma Ben makes me think more about what is visible and what is hidden underneath the surface." - Patrick Lay, *Death Strikes*



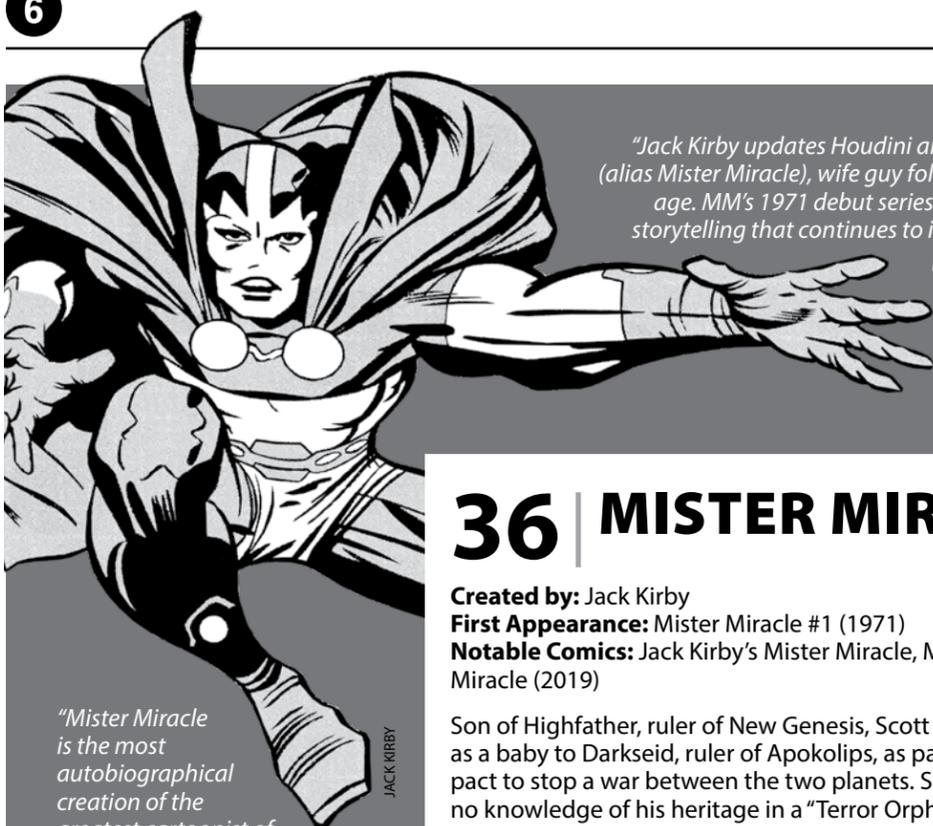
JEFF SMITH

38 | GRAN'MA BEN

Created by: Jeff Smith
First Appearance: Bone #3 (1991)
Notable Comics: The Great Cow Race, Old Man's Cave, Rose

A tough-as-nails farmer with a stern gaze, immense strength, and a kind heart, Gran'ma Ben is the former Queen of Atheia, Rose Harvestar. Rose escaped to the quiet town of Barrelhaven with Lucius Down to protect and safeguard her granddaughter, Thorn, from the Lord of the Locusts. One of her great joys in life is racing against cows on foot, and she always wins. She despises those stupid, stupid rat creatures.

Did You Know: It has been argued that the once Queen of the Valley Kingdom, Gran'ma Ben, is as powerful as the She-Hulk.



"Jack Kirby updates Houdini and Spartacus as Scott Free (alias Mister Miracle), wife guy folk-hero for the technologic age. MM's 1971 debut series is a masterpiece of action storytelling that continues to inspire me (issues 3 & 4 are particular standouts). Not to mention that costume with the full-face cowl looks amazing!"
- Brian McCray, Krania

36 | MISTER MIRACLE

Created by: Jack Kirby
First Appearance: Mister Miracle #1 (1971)
Notable Comics: Jack Kirby's Mister Miracle, Mister Miracle (2019)

Son of Highfather, ruler of New Genesis, Scott Free was exchanged as a baby to Darkseid, ruler of Apokolips, as part of a diplomatic pact to stop a war between the two planets. Scott grew up with no knowledge of his heritage in a "Terror Orphanage" designed to break his spirit through torturous training. This upbringing made Scott an exceptional warrior who despises violence. He is also a master escapist and acrobat with superhuman strength, agility, speed, reflexes, and stamina. Eventually, Scott rebelled against the totalitarian ideology of Apokolips and escaped to Earth, assuming the identity of Mister Miracle.

Did You Know: Mister Miracle possesses the complete Anti-Life Equation, a power said to give its user control over the will of all living beings. He refuses to use it because it would reduce others to mindless slaves, essentially stripping them of their "life."

"Mister Miracle is the most autobiographical creation of the greatest cartoonist of all time. He's the vehicle that Kirby used to explore man's combat with death itself; he interfaces with a complex spectrum of the feminine (Granny Goodness, Big Barda, Mother Box); and he deepens Kirby's meditations on religion (he was sacrificed by his god-like father to establish peace and now must come to Earth to fight against evil and death)."
- Chris Russ, Eddie the Office Goblin



"I spent a lot of time with the BONE characters as I colored the graphic novels, and Phoney was by far my favorite. I suppose it's an indictment on my own personality, but I found everything Phoney did to be hilarious. He's arguably one of the villains of the story with all of his horrible schemes. I feel like he comes around in the end."
- Steve Hamaker, PLOX

"Phoney Bone encompasses what we love in storytelling: the quintessential flawed character with a good heart. His internal struggle and moral ambiguity keep our eyes glued to the page, eager to see what he'll do next. It's satisfying to watch him begin as a character driven purely by the ID and mature as extraordinary circumstances place him in complex situations. He follows in the tradition of lovable jerks like Daffy Duck, Donald Duck, and even Bart Simpson."
- Sam Grinberg, Scumburbia

35 | PHONEY BONE

Created by: Jeff Smith
First Appearance: Bone #1 (1991)
Notable Comics: The Great Cow Race, The Dragonslayer

Eldest of the Bone cousins and the catalyst for their adventures in The Valley, Phoncible P. Bone will do anything to get rich. From trying to rig a cow race to minting his own coin, his schemes often backfire, with one of them even getting him and his cousins, Smiley and Fone, run out of Boneville. However, even though Phoney is manipulative, greedy, and selfish, he is also very protective of his cousins and always tries to look out for and provide for them.

Did You Know: In 1994, Phoney appeared in the *Normalman/Megaton Man Special*, written by Jim Valentino and Don Simpson. This issue also featured other offbeat characters, including the Flaming Carrot, Cerebus, and Everything Man.

"Captain America and Superman are powerful, physical specimens. However, it is their altruistic character and positivity that makes them even more symbolic. Heroes like them will always be needed."
- Darryl Banks, Green Lantern

"To me, Steve Rogers is the quintessential superhero. Beyond all the superpowered fighting, he cares most about the little guy, and does his best to do the right thing - even when it's hard."
- Tiffany Babb, The Comics Courier

34 | CAPTAIN AMERICA

Created by: Joe Simon and Jack Kirby
First Appearance: Captain America Comics #1 (1940)
Notable Comics: Winter Soldier, Truth: Red, White & Black, He Who Holds the Cosmic Cube, Man Out of Time, Captain America No More, Operation: Rebirth, The Strange Death of Captain America

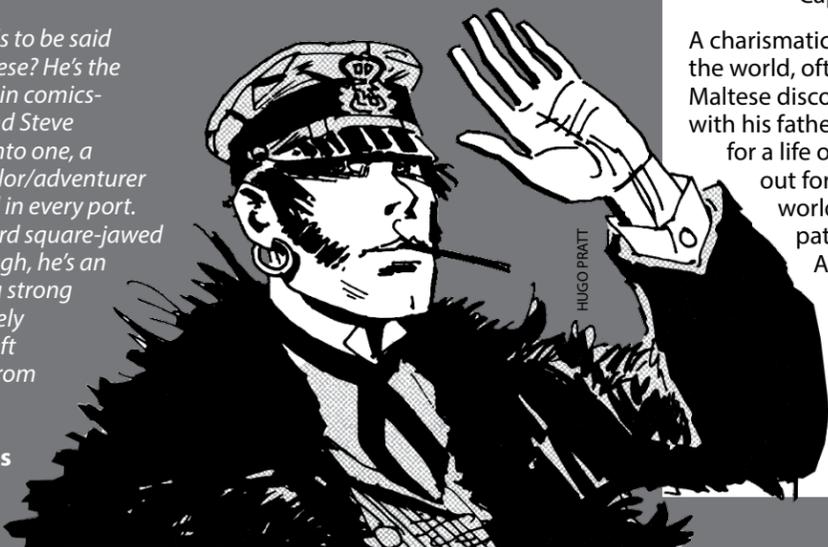
Frail Steve Rogers was born in the 1920s to an impoverished family on the Lower East Side of New York City. He faces rejection at every turn when attempting to join the U.S. Army to fight in the Second World War. However, his resolve is noticed and he is recruited as the test subject for "Project Rebirth", a secret government program that seeks to create super soldiers utilizing a "Super-Soldier Serum." The experiment is a success, enhancing Rogers to peak physical perfection, but a Nazi spy assassinates the inventor and destroys the remaining serum. Rogers is given a patriotic uniform and shield, becoming Captain America, and fights the Axis powers throughout WWII. In the final days of the war, Rogers disappears into the Atlantic Ocean. Reawakened in modern times, Captain America joins and later leads the Avengers.

Did You Know: After WWII, Marvel attempted to relaunch the character in the early 1950s, billed as "Captain America, Commie Smasher," where he faced enemies associated with the Soviet Union. This series was a commercial failure, lasting only 3 issues. He was later revived successfully in *Avengers #4*.

"My all-time favorite comic character--not least because he is without question the sexiest character in the history of the medium. Corto Maltese betrays no ideological or political leanings--he has an inner moral compass that determines how he behaves and with whom he sides. He is an adventurer in the most literal sense of the word, much like his creator; I'm not sure any other character is as accurate a reflection of its creator as Corto Maltese, as Pratt was something of an adventurer himself. Corto has a kind of easy-going bravado that makes him sympathetic in nearly any setting."

- Karen Green, Columbia University Curator for Comics and Cartoons

"What more needs to be said about Corto Maltese? He's the coolest character in comics--Indiana Jones and Steve McQueen rolled into one, a globe-trotting sailor/adventurer with a lady-friend in every port. Unlike the standard square-jawed comics hero, though, he's an intellectual with a strong moral code, as likely to issue a mean left hook as a quote from Rimbaud."
- Ben Towle, Four-Fisted Tales



33 | CORTO MALTESE

Created by: Hugo Pratt
First Appearance: Sergeant Kirk (1967)
Notable Comics: The Ballad of the Salty Sea, Under the Sign of the Capricorn, The Secret Rose

A charismatic, somewhat cynical, always adventurous sailor, Corto Maltese travels the world, often finding himself in the middle of political and social turmoil. As a boy, Maltese discovered that he had no fate line on his palm, so he decided to carve his own with his father's razor, declaring that his fate was his own choice and setting himself up for a life of thrills. Maltese is considered a "rogue with a heart of gold," always looking out for the underdogs and the oppressed. His adventures take him around the world during the first three decades of the 20th century, where he often crosses paths with real historical figures like the American author Jack London, American outlaw Butch Cassidy, German World War I flying ace Red Baron, and many others. Corto Maltese, by all accounts, is considered one of the most important and influential characters in European graphic literature.

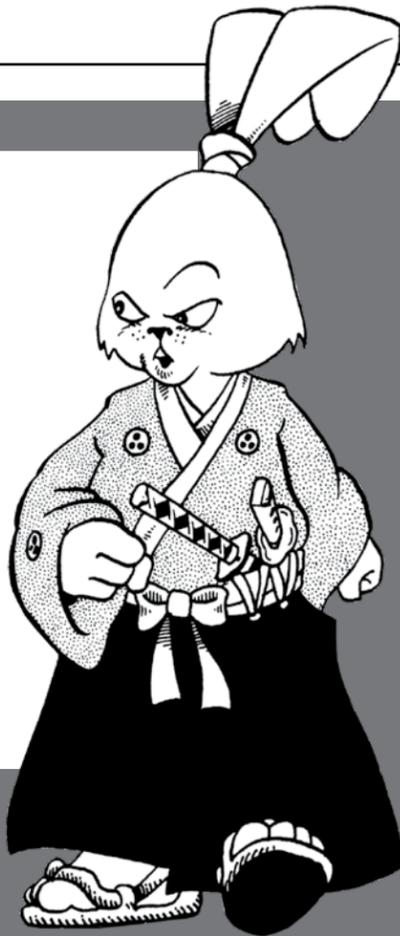
Did You Know: Corto Maltese's adventures are so influential that the fictional South American island nation of "Corto Maltese" appears in the DC Comics universe, most notably in Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* and Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* movie.

32 | MIYAMOTO USAGI

Created by: Stan Sakai
First Appearance: Albedo Anthropomorphics Vol 1 #2: The Goblin of Adachigahara (1984)
Notable Comics: The Ronin, Grasscutter, Duel at Kitanoji, Daisho

A rōnin walking the musha shugyō (warrior's pilgrimage), Usagi is known as one of the greatest swordsmen in the land. He is the main protagonist in the long-running comic book series, *Usagi Yojimbo*. Cartoonist and creator Stan Sakai used the life of legendary swordsman Miyamoto Musashi as inspiration for Usagi and had originally planned on having the character of Usagi be human. He ultimately decided to anthropomorphize him, however, after doodling a rabbit with its ears bound in the style reminiscent of a samurai topknot. Throughout the series, Usagi goes on many adventures, making countless friends and allies while traveling the backroads, making a living as a yojimbo (bodyguard) for hire.

Did You Know: Miyamoto Usagi was featured in numerous *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* crossovers, spanning comics and the animated series. Notably, the cartoon series mislabeled him "Usagi Yojimbo" in his first appearance. The second appearance rectified this, correctly identifying him as "Miyamoto Usagi" during the Battle Nexus arc.



"Usagi Yojimbo is a unique look at the Age of Samurai. His honor and pure spirit through countless adventures have been endearing for decades."
- Gib Bickel, *The Laughing Ogre*

"When I look back on my comics collection, the only character that I continue to collect is Usagi Yojimbo. Besides the incredible art of Stan Sakai, the Usagi character is still a true hero. Always protecting the weaker, even when drastically outnumbered. You have to root for the underdog... err... rabbit."
- Bob Corby, *Small Press and Alternative Comics Expo*

"Wimpy's hilarious. He's a creature of pure, unbridled, single-minded moochery. He can't be bargained with, he can't be reasoned with. He doesn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear--and he absolutely will not stop, ever, until you give him a hamburger. Or perhaps a duck dinner (you bring the duck!)." - Ben Towle, *Four-Fisted Tales*

"Wimpy stands as one-of-a-kind almost one hundred years since his creation, the most unredeeming soul to ever grace the comics. His selfishness was unparalleled. And he's not even a villain! How can you hate him? He can't help himself (unless it's to a hamburger). Utterly disloyal, eternally blissful, ever predictable. Wimpy once said, "The inconsistency of some people is astonishing!" not realizing that his own consistency will always be even more so. The ACME of comic foils."

- Eric Reynolds, *Fantagraphics*



"Little Lulu is one of the most memorable, and I daresay one of the most powerful, female characters in comics history: a young woman with creativity, initiative, imagination, determination, and an iron-clad sense of self-worth. She fought constantly against the gender norms of her day, which made her a fitting mascot for the Friends of Lulu, a group founded in 1994 to support women as both comic creators and comic readers. She undercut masculine superiority, outwitted exclusionary boys, rebelled against empty authority... she got her way, and she did it by her wits." - Karen Green, *Columbia University Curator for Comics and Cartoons*

"What I wouldn't do to live in Little Lulu's world."
- Brian Baynes, *Bubbles Fanzine*



31 | WIMPY

Created by: E. C. Segar
First Appearance: Thimble Theatre (1931)
Notable Comics: Popeye Volume 2: Wimpy & His Hamburgers

Playing the role of a self-centered foil to Popeye, J. Wellington Wimpy is a soft-spoken romantic, intelligent, educated, and charming. Unfortunately, he's also a scam artist, a lazy coward, a miser, and a glutton. The character was partly inspired by creator E. C. Segar's time at the *Chicago Herald-Examiner*, where it became common knowledge that if co-worker H. Hillard Wimpee invited you out for a hamburger, you'd be the one picking up the tab. Wimpy is a man of constant vices and schemes, from mooching burgers to pocketing discarded cigars, without any real intention of reform. While Popeye often tries to change him, Wimpy remains the same. And with a friendly arm over your shoulder, he'll ask in his gentlest voice, "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today."

Did You Know: A popular hamburger chain was named after Wimpy. Founded in Bloomington, Indiana in the 1930s, Wimpy Grills grew to 26 locations in the U.S. In 1954, Wimpy went international with the opening of the first Wimpy Bar in the United Kingdom. While the U.S. locations had all closed by 1977, the chain still lives on in the UK to this day.

30 | LITTLE LULU

Created by: Marjorie Henderson Buell
First Appearance: Little Lulu (1935)
Notable Comics: Little Lulu: Working Girl

Beginning life as a mischievous tomboy in single-panel strips in the *Saturday Evening Post* by creator Marjorie Henderson Buell, under the pen name "Marge," Little Lulu would gain her own comic book series in 1948, written by John Stanley, who would rapidly expand her character, cast of friends, and world. Lulu is smart, very creative, but also stubborn. She and her friend Annie often scheme to "teach the fellers a lesson" in a never-ending battle with the boys to show them that girls are as good as they are.

Did You Know: During the 1940s and 1950s, Little Lulu served as the primary mascot for Kleenex tissues, headlining a large-scale advertising campaign and appearing on numerous licensed products. From 1952 to 1965, she was also featured in a prominent animated billboard in Times Square.

29 | MR. NATURAL

Created by: Robert Crumb
First Appearance: Yarrowstalks #1 (1967)
Notable Comics: The Book of Mr. Natural: Profane Tales of that Old Mystic Madcap

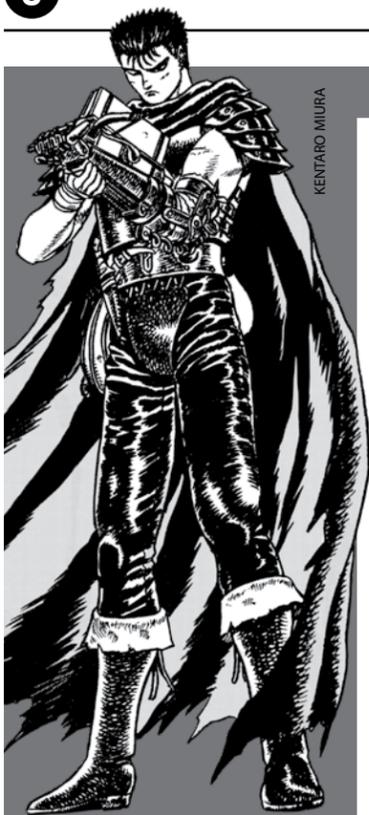
Preaching about the evils of the modern world and the salvation to be found in mysticism and natural living to all who will listen, Mr. Natural is a slightly overweight, guru with a long, white beard that stretches down to his knees. He's a straight talker, but this often gets him into trouble, as when he is kicked out of Heaven for telling God it is "a little corny" in "Mr. Natural Meets God." Spawned from the mind of the king of underground comix, Robert Crumb, Mr. Natural's stories often focus on themes about the inability of generations in the United States to connect, with each generation rejecting the one before it.

Did You Know: According to an article from the SFGate.com, Roger Greene, after he moved to Haight-Ashbury from the midwest, changed his name to Mr. Natural and runs a school for music. Upon meeting Greene, Crumb claimed he was the embodiment of his character.



"Good ol' Mr. Natural! He has always come across to me as knowing that he's "trapped" inside the consciousness of a raving, obsessive, perverted, self-hating weirdo like R. Crumb. I think Mr. Natural is the "divine" portion of R. Crumb's soul personified into a cartoon character. His most admirable quality is that, instead of being at odds with the lunatic who has created him, Mr. Natural accepts the world he has been drawn into for what it is, doesn't get caught up in all the neuroses, and just goes with the flow. I think having "peace" in that way is something everyone, including myself, should try to cultivate more of. And he's also really funny!" - Tony DiPasquale, *Nugget*

"Debuting in the late 60s, Mr. Natural is Robert Crumb's greatest character, quickly becoming both timely and timeless. Back when everyone was asking the big questions about the meaning of existence, Natch managed to keep it real, or if you prefer, natural!"
- Kel Crum, *Cornelia Cartoons*



KENTARO MIURA

28 | GUTS

Created by: Kentaro Miura
First Appearance: Berserk Chapter A0: "The Black Swordsman" (1989)
Notable Comics: Berserk

Born from a hanging corpse and raised by mercenaries and an abusive, adoptive father, Guts lives in a brutal world where violence is survival. His early trauma shapes him into a hardened, mistrustful warrior and a formidable swordsman. Wielding a massive sword and possessing the cursed Berserker Armor, he is brutal, often ruthless, in combat, but he's also loyal, showing immense love for those he cares for. His story is one of vengeance and survival against all odds. He is considered an iconic character in manga, inspiring countless characters in games, anime, and Western media.

Did You Know: Miura, in an interview featured on the Berserk DVD 3 Extra, expressed surprise at the parallels between Guts and Gottfried "Götz" von Berlichingen, a 16th-century German soldier. He highlighted the shared traits: an iron prosthetic arm, a history as a mercenary, a volatile temperament, and the near-identical name. Miura stated the similarities were "especially uncanny" given he was already developing *Berserk* when he discovered Götz's story.

"I like Guts because he is relentless. As corny as it may sound, he is inspiring because he never stops, no matter how wounded he is or how outmatched he seems. He's the ultimate badass!"
 - Max Schaller, Horde Magazine

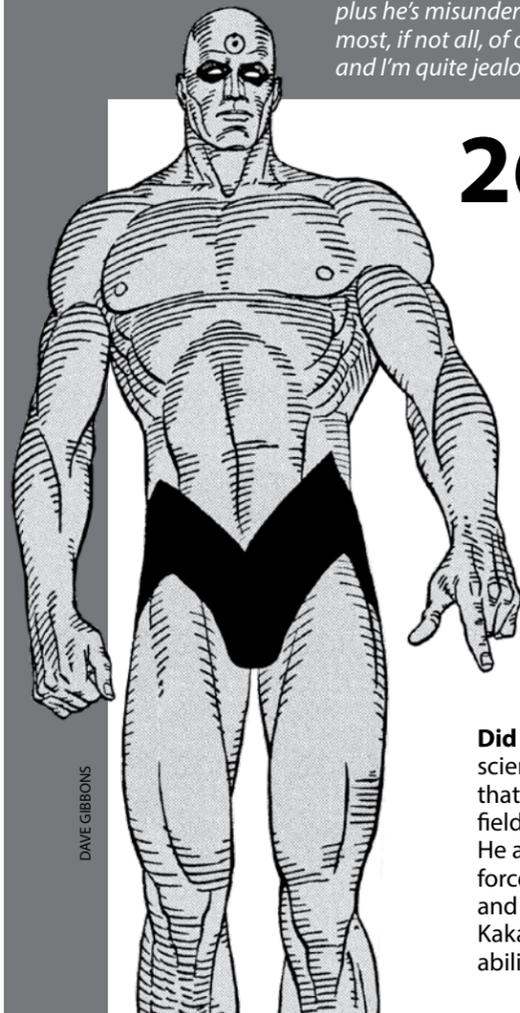
"Dr. Manhattan is one of my favorites due to his unparalleled intellect, plus he's misunderstood and has trouble understanding/relating to most, if not all, of our species. Oh, and most of all, his skin is baby blue and I'm quite jealous of that." - Stephen Hines, Snails With Lasers

26 | DOCTOR MANHATTAN

Created by: Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons
First Appearance: Watchmen #1 (1986)
Notable Comics: Watchmen, Doomsday Clock

It's 1959, physicist Jonathan Osterman suffers a catastrophic accident when he is trapped in an Intrinsic Field Subtractor and is subsequently disintegrated. In the coming months, he gradually learns to reassemble himself, ultimately emerging as a glowing blue god known as Doctor Manhattan. From there, Doctor Manhattan goes about changing the world, altering the global power dynamic, and all while becoming more and more detached and emotionally distant from humanity. "The superman exists and he's an American."

Did You Know: James Kakalios, physics professor and scientific consultant for the *Watchmen* film, asserts that Doctor Manhattan's powers, including the intrinsic field generator, have a basis in real-world physics. He argues that electromagnetic, strong, and weak forces would be required for matter manipulation, and quantum tunneling could explain teleportation. Kakalios suggests that even Manhattan's extensive abilities are plausible within physics.



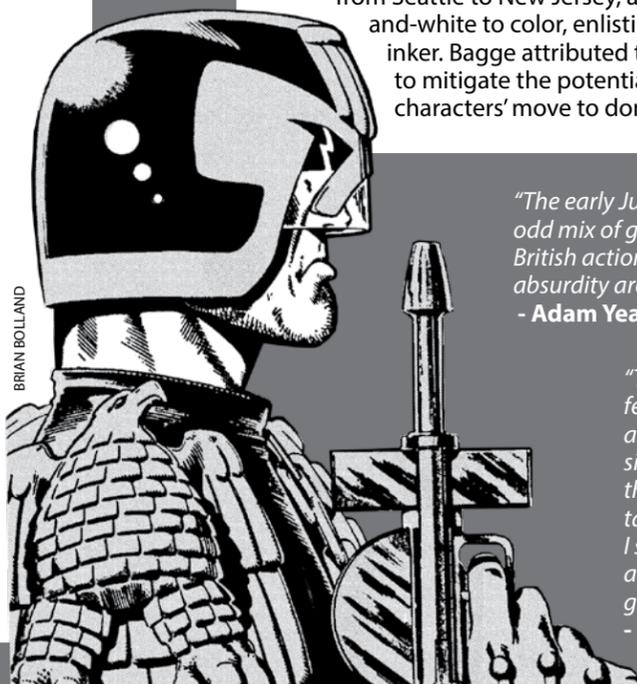
DAVE GIBBONS

24 | JUDGE DREDD

Created by: John Wagner, Carlos Ezquerra, and Pat Mills
First Appearance: 2000 AD # 2 (1977)
Notable Comics: America, Necropolis, Origins, 'The Return of Rico', Judge Death Lives

Judge, jury, and executioner, empowered to dispense justice on the spot, Dredd is an uncompromising warrior of order in the sprawling, overpopulated metropolis of Mega-City One. Whether he's facing mutants, killer robots, or rampant social decay, Dredd meets every threat with a stiff upper lip and brutal efficiency. Born out of the weekly sci-fi comic anthology *2000 AD* in 1977, his stories are drenched in dark satire and violent action. Over the decades, Judge Dredd has become both a symbol of the dangers of authoritarianism and one of British comics' most iconic characters.

Did You Know: A strict rule in *Judge Dredd* is that Dredd's full face is never revealed. Initially an unofficial guideline, co-creator John Wagner cemented it, explaining, "It sums up the facelessness of justice – justice has no soul. So it isn't necessary for readers to see Dredd's face, and I don't want you to." While rare, undetailed flashbacks show his childhood face, his adult features remain hidden. An early story played on this: when Dredd removed his helmet, other characters reacted as if he were disfigured, but a mock censorship sticker obscured his face from the reader.



BRIAN BOLLAND

"Enid is an almost prototypical coming-of-age protagonist, in the vein of Holden Caulfield. She's really at war with herself, and trying to figure out who she wants to be as an adult. And, although it's been mentioned before, she really was a singularly realistic female character when she first appeared; I've known many Enids."
 - Alex Schubert, Blobby Boys

27 | ENID COLESLAW

Created by: Daniel Clowes
First Appearance: Eightball #11 (1993)
Notable Comics: Ghost World

Drifting through life with a cynical eye and a foul mouth, Enid Coleslaw is a recent high school graduate trying to figure out her place in this world. With her best friend, Rebecca Doppelmeyer, in tow, the two galivant around town criticizing everything and everyone. Enid finds joy in playing pranks on other people, especially her former classmate, Josh, whom she attempts to seduce. Creator Daniel Clowes said of Enid: "When I started out, I thought of her as this id creature... Then I realized halfway through that she was just more vocal than I was, but she has the same kind of confusion, self-doubts, and identity issues that I still have – even though she's 18 and I'm 39!"

Did You Know: While readers have speculated on the meaning of "Ghost World," Clowes has stated it came from graffiti he spotted in Chicago. This detail is reflected in the comic itself, where the characters pass a building bearing the phrase, which Enid reads.



DANIEL CLOWES

As cliché as his slacker disposition and cynical attitude may seem these days, I consider Buddy Bradley to be one of the defining characters of my generation, and a character that greatly influenced my own comics. Drawn bendy, and full of gesticulation, his expressive style really resonated with me. Flawed yet lovable, his quirks and dysfunctions make him all the more endearing."
 - November Garcia, Malarkey

He has got a classic cartoon look that's equal parts rubber hose style cartooning and Big "Daddy" Roth zaniness. I will follow that scumbag's "adventures" forever."
 - Robb Mirsky, Sludgy



PETER BAGGE

25 | BUDDY BRADLEY

Created by: Peter Bagge
First Appearance: Comical Funnies (1981)
Notable Comics: Buddy Does Seattle, Buddy Does Jersey

A perpetually dissatisfied, sarcastic slacker, Buddy Bradley has become something of a Gen X icon. Through him, creator Peter Bagge satirized everything from pop culture and consumerism to personal dysfunction. Buddy's life unfolds as a series of chaotic misadventures, starting in Seattle during the early '90s grunge explosion and eventually leading him across the country into suburban life. Along the way, he leaves a trail of failed relationships, crummy jobs, and existential angst.

Did You Know: By 1994, Peter Bagge's *Hate* sales had surged, affording him a "five-figure income," as he revealed to Gary Groth in *The Comics Journal*. This financial success coincided with two significant changes: the relocation of Buddy and Lisa from Seattle to New Jersey, and the shift from black-and-white to color, enlisting Jim Blanchard as an inker. Bagge attributed these decisions to a desire to mitigate the potential "depressing" effect of the characters' move to domestic New Jersey.

"The early Judge Dredd strips are an odd mix of gritty cyberpunk and old British action comics. Their quality and absurdity are hard to match."
 - Adam Yeater, Blood Desert

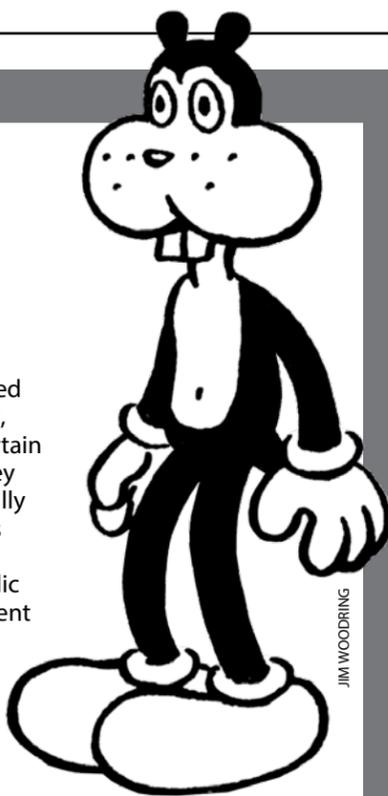
"The first Dredd prog I picked up featured the Judge running down a citizen who'd littered on the sidewalk. It was nice to see a comic that looked super cool yet didn't take itself very seriously, and when I started to get deep into comics as a teenager, Dredd was something I gravitated to immediately."
 - Matthew Allison, Cankor

23 | FRANK

Created by: Jim Woodring
First Appearance: JIM #4 (1990)
Notable Comics: The Frank Book, Congress of the Animals

In a bizarre, dreamlike universe called the Unifactor, roams a bucktoothed, anthropomorphic creature of uncertain species, with expressive eyes, Mickey Mouse-style gloves, and a perpetually innocent demeanor: Frank. He does not speak, he pantomimes his way through an ever-shifting, psychedelic world full of strange creatures, ancient totems, impossible machines, and nightmarish dream logic. Creator Jim Woodring describes Frank as "11 years old... covered with short, dense fur like a mole's... innocent but not noble... mortal and must someday die." Mixing joy and dread in a way few comics do, Frank has inspired countless independent and art comics and is widely regarded as one of the most singular and visionary creations in the medium.

Did You Know: The "Frank" stories have been cited as an inspiration by many alternative cartoonists, like Dave Cooper. Their influence extends to mainstream comics as well, with creators such as Alan Moore expressing admiration and even including an image of Frank in an alternate universe within his superhero series *1963*.



JIM WOODRING

"You never want to ascribe too much concrete meaning to some of the functions of Frank within the story. He's in the tradition of Felix the Cat, Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny, insofar as he can be whatever the story requires or often makes of him from one Frank vignette to the next. He's aggressor and victim, lover and kid grossed out by amorous behavior, instigator and passive non-participant. He pokes his head everywhere, especially where it doesn't belong. His default facial expression is curious but inscrutable, his behavior is primarily exploratory, and at least one story suggests that Frank is more of a superposition that can be held by interchangeable bodies than a fixed personality, if such descriptions can even be applied. He's both a reader-insert cypher and another mysterious and sinister part of the dreamworld he inhabits." - Stephen Pellnat, *Upstate*

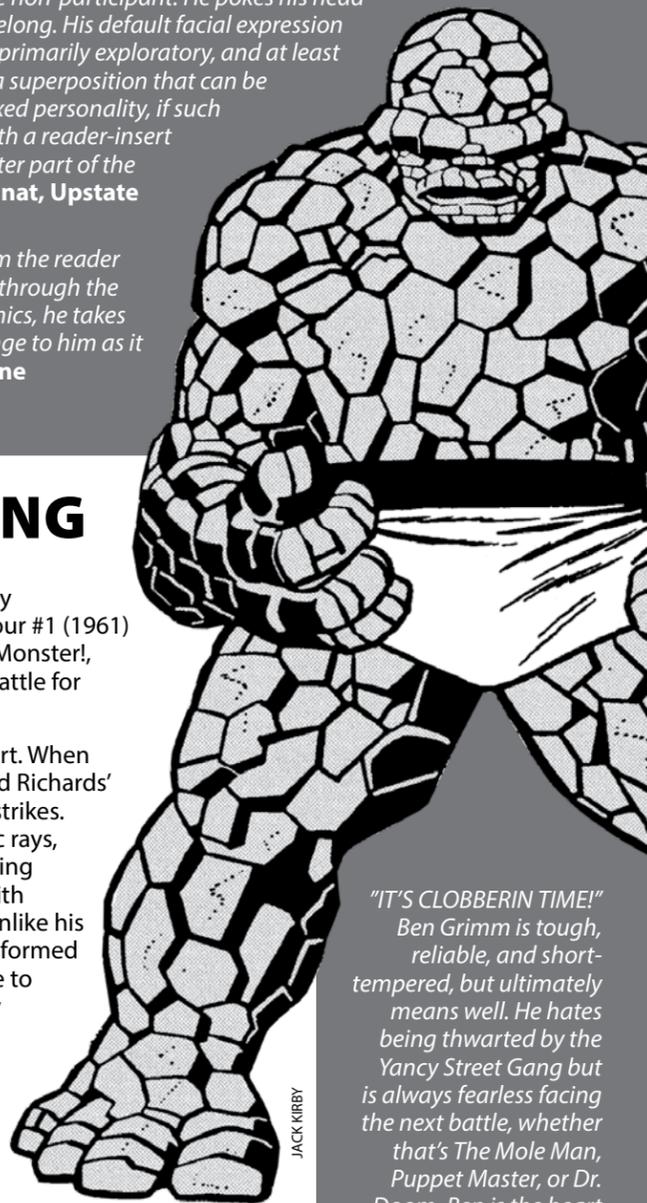
"Frank is a generic anthropomorph whom the reader can project themselves onto. Wandering through the psychedelic landscape of Woodring's comics, he takes the reader along for a ride that is as strange to him as it is to us." - Max Schaller, *Horde Magazine*

22 | THE THING

Created by: Stan Lee and Jack Kirby
First Appearance: The Fantastic Four #1 (1961)
Notable Comics: This Man... This Monster!, Clobberin' Time, Hereafter, The Battle for the Baxter Building

Part monster, part hero, and all heart. When Ben Grimm co-pilots his friend Reed Richards' experimental spaceflight, disaster strikes. The ship is bombarded with cosmic rays, forever altering the crew and granting them superpowers. Ben is gifted with immense, inhuman strength, but unlike his teammates, he's permanently transformed into a hulking rock creature, unable to return to his human form. A deeply human character trapped in an inhuman body, both man and monster, the Thing's blend of vulnerability and toughness has made him one of Marvel's most emotionally complex and beloved heroes.

Did You Know: Jack Kirby said of The Thing, "He had my manners, he has my manner of speech, and he thinks the way I do. He's excitable, and you'll find that he's very, very active among people, and he can muscle his way through a crowd."



JACK KIRBY

"IT'S CLOBBERIN TIME!" Ben Grimm is tough, reliable, and short-tempered, but ultimately means well. He hates being thwarted by the Yancy Street Gang but is always fearless facing the next battle, whether that's The Mole Man, Puppet Master, or Dr. Doom. Ben is the heart and soul of the Fantastic Four, and is based on one of the greatest cartoonists of all time... Jack Kirby." - Carl Lucas, *Shogun Bear*

"Fone Bone was very special in that he captured the imagination of a wide audience of both young and old, not being a superhero, and in the black and white, independent, singles floppy market! Bone planted the seed of a market that exploded when Raina Telgemeier gave us Smile. He's the Godfather of the YA GN section!"

- Jonathan Baylis, *So Buttons*

"Fone is a favorite of mine because he's a fish out of water, coming from a cartoony world into a huge fantasy world, and I think a lot of his responses to the situations they come across are pretty universal and funny. When he doesn't want to leave at the end, you feel it. You don't want their adventures to end. I think of him a bit like Samwise is to Frodo in Lord of the Rings, the way he is to Thorn, and as everyone knows, Sam was just as much the hero as Frodo, so too is Fone Bone to Thorn."

- Kate Isaacs, *Columbus Cool Cat's Pro Tips*



JEFF SMITH

21 | FONE BONE

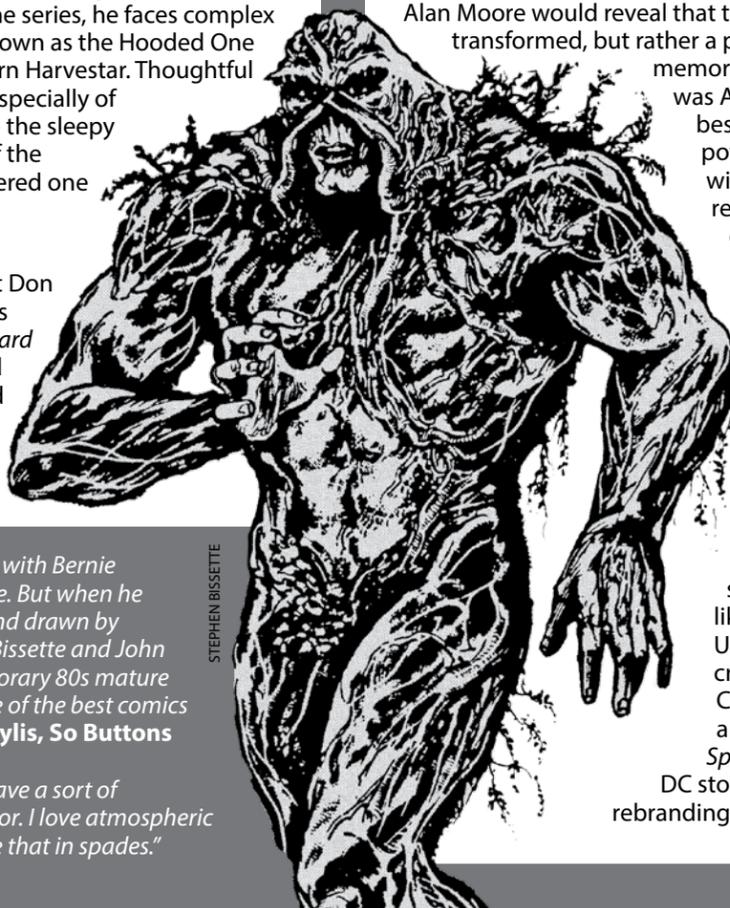
Created by: Jeff Smith
First Appearance: Bone #1 (1991)
Notable Comics: Out from Boneville, Rock Jaw: Master of the Eastern Border

Fone Bone is the brave and kind-hearted hero of *Bone*, the critically acclaimed graphic novel series by Jeff Smith. The youngest and most sensible of the three Bone cousins, Fone Bone finds himself in a mysterious valley filled with dragons, ancient secrets, and dangerous rat creatures. Throughout the series, he faces complex challenges, including battling the dark sorceress known as the Hooded One and navigating his unspoken love for his friend Thorn Harvestar. Thoughtful and imaginative, Fone Bone is also an avid reader, especially of *Moby-Dick*, which he enjoys reading aloud, much to the sleepy dismay of his companions. As the emotional core of the story, Fone Bone is a key reason why *Bone* is considered one of the greatest all-ages graphic novels.

Did You Know: Fone Bone's name is a tribute to "Fonebone," a recurring surname used by cartoonist Don Martin in his *Mad* magazine strips. The character has been recognized for his significance, ranking as *Wizard* magazine's 28th-greatest comic book character and IGN's 60th-greatest comic book hero. IGN attributed this status to his role as the "heart and soul" of the story, citing "his good nature and his unrequited love for his ally Thorn."

"Swamp Thing was born out of homage to EC horror, with Bernie Wrightson's Graham Ingels-y riff on a swamp creature. But when he was regenerated in the 80s, penned by Alan Moore and drawn by Underground-influenced, Joe Kubert students Steve Bissette and John Totleben, Swampie planted the seed for the contemporary 80s mature comic book that led to Vertigo Comics, home of some of the best comics made at the end of the 20th Century." - Jonathan Baylis, *So Buttons*

"I dig Swamp Thing because his best stories have a sort of melancholy mood that's draped over the horror. I love atmospheric comics, and Swamp Thing books tend to have that in spades." - Michael Cavender, *Film & Comic Critic*



STEPHEN BISSETTE

20 | SWAMP THING

Created by: Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson
First Appearance: House of Secrets #92 (1971)
Notable Comics: The Anatomy Lesson, Rotworld, American Gothic

Brilliant scientist Alec Holland was working on a revolutionary bio-restorative formula to solve world hunger when criminals sabotaged his lab in the Louisiana swamps, causing a deadly explosion. Doused in chemicals and engulfed in flames, Alec flees to the swamp, only to emerge transformed into a powerful creature made of plant matter, Swamp Thing. Later, acclaimed writer Alan Moore would reveal that the Swamp Thing is not actually Alec Holland transformed, but rather a plant-based entity that has absorbed Alec's memories. He is described as "a plant that thought it was Alec Holland, a plant that was trying its level best to be Alec Holland." Processing immense powers, including telepathic communication with plant life, control over vegetation, and regeneration, Swamp Thing has become one of DC Comics' most iconic and enduring supernatural characters. His stories blend horror, environmentalism, and emotional depth, carving out a unique space in the superhero genre.

Did You Know: The dynamic with the Comics Code Authority (CCA) changed in 1984 over *The Saga of the Swamp Thing's* "Love and Death" issue (by Moore, Bissette, and Totleben). Artist Stephen Bissette recalled in 2008 that the CCA first rejected it for a disturbing zombie attack scene, then found more objectionable content like rape and incest upon closer inspection. Unwilling to compromise, DC supported the creators and released the comic without the CCA seal—a step only taken once before by a major publisher (Marvel's 1971 anti-drug *Spider-Man* issue). Consequently, from issue #31, DC stopped submitting *Swamp Thing* to the CCA, rebranding it "Sophisticated Suspense" for older readers.



CHARLES SCHULZ

"Linus holds within himself both the mind of a philosopher and the heart of a religious zealot, and those two aspects coexist without being at odds. One aspect of Linus is prevalent in many of our lives, in the form of the activities or physical things we use to comfort ourselves. Charles Schulz and Linus changed the meaning of the phrase 'security blanket.'" - Andrew Neal, Meeting Comics

19 | LINUS VAN PELT

Created by: Charles M. Schulz

First Appearance: Peanuts (1952)

Notable Comics: The Complete Peanuts Vol. 1, Vol. 5, & Vol. 8

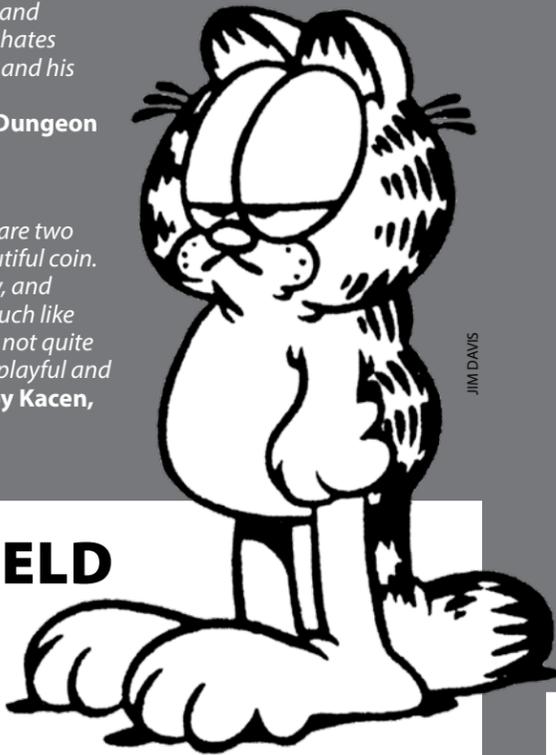
The outspoken true believer of the Great Pumpkin and Charlie Brown's best friend, Linus is a unique blend of vulnerability and wisdom. Rarely seen without his ever-present blue security blanket. Linus endures frequent teasing, especially from his older sister, Lucy, but his loyalty to the blanket never wavers. As the voice of reason and logic in the *Peanuts* strip, Linus has grown from a precocious baby into one of the most intellectually mature and emotionally grounded characters in the series. He often quotes literature, theology, and philosophy well beyond his years, offering surprising depth in a child's world. Creator Charles M. Schulz once said of him: "Linus, my serious side, is the house intellectual; bright, well-informed, which I suppose, may contribute to his feelings of insecurity."

Did You Know: From Merriam Webster, "The contemporaneity of the blanket-carrying Linus and Charlie Brown's description with the emergence of the security blanket in the English lexicon leaves us wondering if Schulz did, in fact, influence the coinage of the term. What can be said with certainty is that he helped familiarize people with the concept of children having a security blanket as a protection against anxiety."

Not only is Garfield a true American icon, he is also the most important cartoon cat from my hometown (Marion, Indiana). Garf is an anti-authority figure and a pioneer of body positivity. He hates Mondays, but he loves lasagna and his Pooky bear. VIVA GARFIELD!"

- Drew B. Hall, The Comfort Dungeon

"Garfield and Hobbes are two sides of the same beautiful coin. They're sarcastic, witty, and scornfully mocking. Much like cats in real life, they're not quite malicious, but they're playful and make us laugh." - Abby Kacen, We Are The Sickos!



JIM DAVIS

17 | GARFIELD

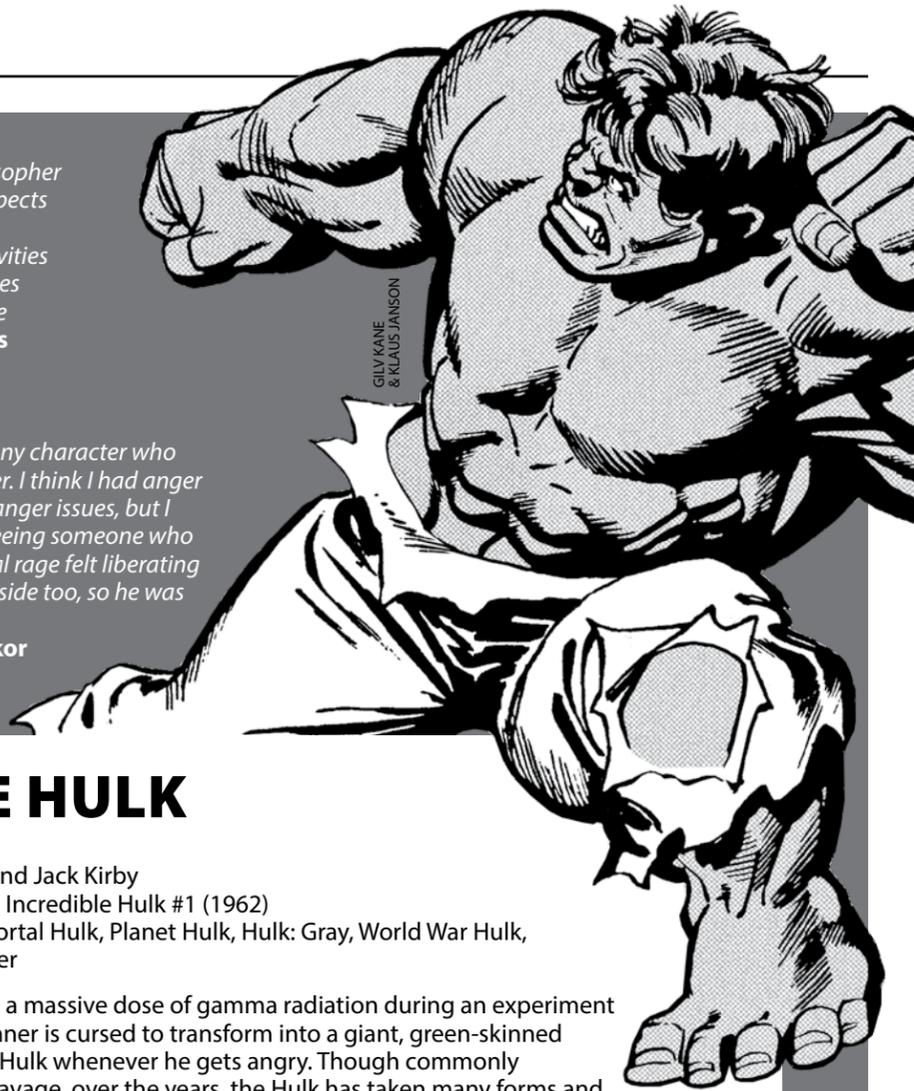
Created by: Jim Davis

First Appearance: Jon (1976)

Notable Comics: Garfield at Large, Garfield Takes the Cake, Garfield Takes Up Space

The great lover of lasagna and sworn enemy of Mondays, Garfield is one of the most recognizable and beloved cats in pop culture. Lazy, sarcastic, gluttonous, clever, and unapologetically self-absorbed, Garfield is the orange tabby Persian cat of the perpetually awkward Jon Arbuckle. Originally drawn with tiny features and an obese physique that required him to stand on all four legs. Creator Jim Davis credits fellow cartoonist Charles Schulz (of *Peanuts* fame) with suggesting changes that allowed Garfield to stand upright, thus making him easier to animate for television. Later design tweaks, such as enlarging his eyes and refining his features, were driven by the shrinking size of newspaper comic strips, ensuring the humor remained visible even at smaller print sizes.

Did You Know: *Garfield* holds the Guinness World Record as the most widely syndicated comic strip, appearing in over 2,500 newspapers and journals. This famous feline has also cultivated a significant online presence, boasting more than 16 million fans on Facebook.



GILY KANE & KLAUS JANSON

"As a kid, I identified with any character who transformed into a monster. I think I had anger issues (well, I KNOW I had anger issues, but I won't get into that), and seeing someone who unleashed that kind of feral rage felt liberating to me. The Hulk had a soft side too, so he was the total package."

- Matthew Allison, Cankor

18 | THE HULK

Created by: Stan Lee and Jack Kirby

First Appearance: The Incredible Hulk #1 (1962)

Notable Comics: Immortal Hulk, Planet Hulk, Hulk: Gray, World War Hulk, Return of the Monster

After being exposed to a massive dose of gamma radiation during an experiment gone wrong, Bruce Banner is cursed to transform into a giant, green-skinned monster known as the Hulk whenever he gets angry. Though commonly portrayed as a raging savage, over the years, the Hulk has taken many forms and alter egos, from a mindless, destructive force (War) to a brilliant warrior (World-Breaker), a self-hating protector (the Devil Hulk), a genius scientist in his own right (Doc Green), and a gangster (Joe Fixit). Widely considered one of the most iconic characters in pop culture, the Hulk has appeared in video games, cartoons, and movies, as well as on clothing, collectibles, theme parks, and more.

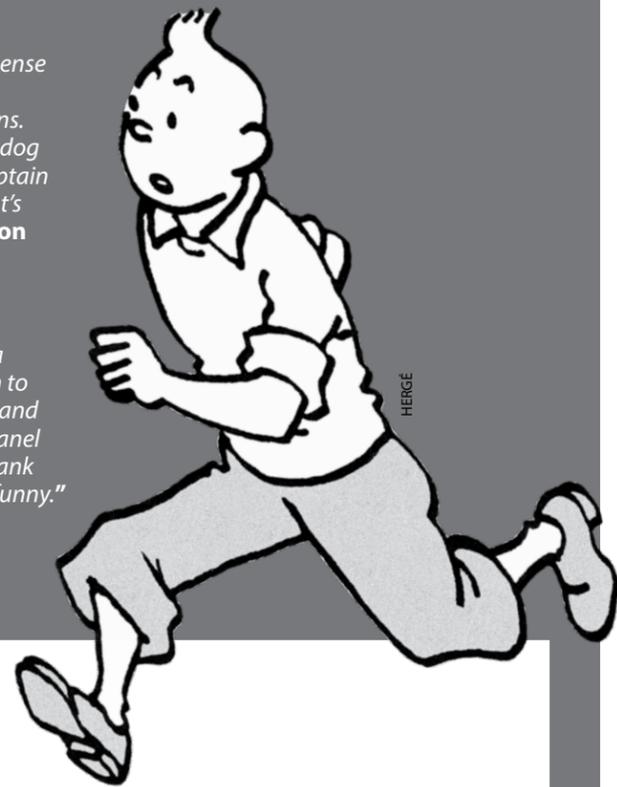
Did You Know: It might surprise some Marvel aficionados to learn that the Hulk wasn't always green. In fact, when he first smashed onto the scene in *The Incredible Hulk #1* (1962), co-creators Stan Lee and Jack Kirby envisioned him as gray. However, due to the printing technology of the era, the gray often appeared green. This led Lee to officially establish the Hulk's iconic green coloring in subsequent comics, even though the gray version would later become an important aspect of his character's history.

"Tintin is a dizzying compositional fun house - every panel invites you to look at the next panel. There are so many fun ways to read Tintin. In other words - Tintin used great storytelling through composition, which is not common - that's what makes Tintin enjoyable to this day." - Bryan Moss, Power to the Panel

"Tintin is one of the great comic characters because of his curiosity, sense of adventure, and knack for getting into--and out of--ridiculous situations. He is a young journalist with a loyal dog (who sometimes talks) and a sea captain sidekick (who drinks to excess). What's not to love?" - Dan Gearino, Cartoon Crossroads Columbus

"Reading Tintin, on page 1, you're hooked. And every page ends with a little cliffhanger, so you have to turn to the next. The drawings are so clean and inviting, you want to step into the panel and live there. Tintin himself is so blank that really, YOU are Tintin. Plus, it's funny."

- Jason, The Left Bank Gang



HERGÉ

16 | TINTIN

Created by: Hergé

First Appearance: Tintin in the Land of the Soviets (1929)

Notable Comics: The Black Island, The Calculus Affair, Tintin in Tibet, Prisoners of the Sun, The Red Sea Sharks

Brave, resourceful, and guided by a strong moral compass, Tintin often risks his life to expose injustice, uncover secrets, or help others. Alongside his loyal dog Snowy, the young Belgian reporter has traveled the globe on adventures that have taken him from the Soviet Union and the Congo to Tibet and even the moon. Readers and critics have described Tintin as a well-rounded yet deliberately open-ended character. Intelligent and creative, his lack of backstory and emotionally neutral personality allows him to serve as a mirror to the folly, evil, and absurdity of the world around him. When asked how the character of Tintin developed, creator Hergé once remarked: "He practically did not evolve. Graphically, he remained an outline. Look at his features: his face is a sketch, a formula."

Did You Know: The intrepid reporter Tintin maintains an air of mystery, as his surname and exact age are never explicitly stated throughout the series. While he begins as a young boy and perceptibly matures in later adventures, his specific age remains an intriguing question for readers.

15 | DAREDEVIL

Created by: Stan Lee and Bill Everett

First Appearance: Daredevil #1 (1964)

Notable Comics: Born Again, Typhoid Mary, The Man Without Fear, Roulette, Last Hand

When young Matt Murdock is struck by a radioactive substance while saving a man from an oncoming truck, he loses his sight, but his remaining senses are heightened to superhuman levels, especially his hearing and touch. He also develops a radar-like perception that allows him to "see" his surroundings. A lawyer by day and costumed crimefighter by night, Matt leads a dual life, constantly balancing the demands of the legal system with the harsh realities of the streets. He walks a fine line between law and vigilantism, often torn by rage, vengeance, love, and loss. His Catholic faith and moral convictions are in constant tension with the choices he faces as Daredevil. Daredevil stands as a symbol of resilience and justice—a man striving to do what's right in an often unjust world. Grounded, flawed, and fiercely human, he has been widely praised by critics as one of the most psychologically complex characters in superhero comics.

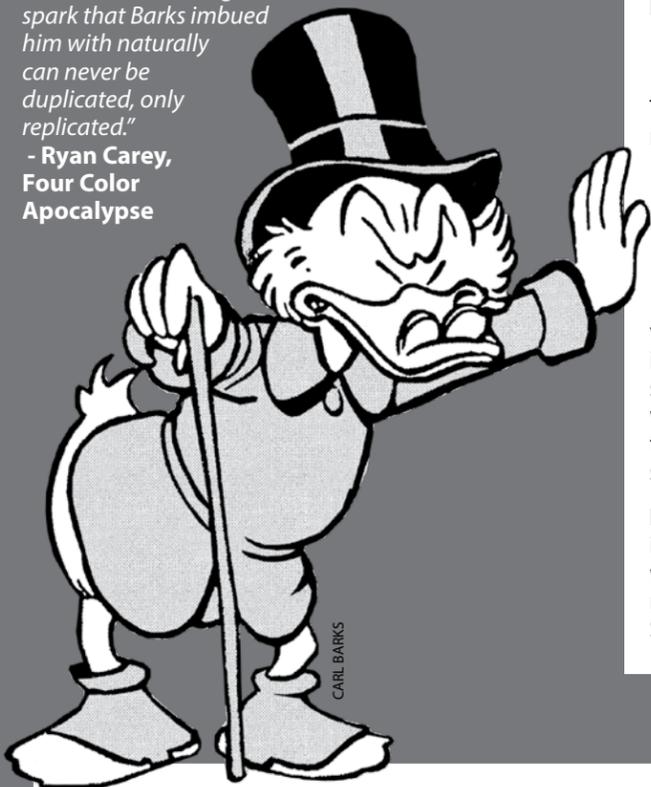
Did You Know: The creation of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, conceived by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, was significantly inspired by Daredevil, alongside other comic influences. Several direct parallels exist between the two series, most notably in their origin stories: both Daredevil and the Turtles gain their abilities after being exposed to radioactive material spilled from a truck. Additionally, Splinter, the Turtles' wise mentor, pays homage to Stick, Daredevil's sensei, and the Foot Clan, the Turtles' adversaries, draw inspiration from Daredevil's ninja villains, the Hand.

"I admire Scrooge's sense of adventure. He's as crazy and singular as the great comic creators."

- Brian Baynes, Bubbles Fanzine

"Scrooge McDuck is the apex of Carl Barks' imaginative genius. Funny, maddening, irascible, sometimes even insufferable --- but never less than utterly enjoyable. He's a character that could have only come from the mind of one person, and while others have crafted great stories with him, the extra spark that Barks imbued him with naturally can never be duplicated, only replicated."

- Ryan Carey, Four Color Apocalypse



14 | SCROOGE McDUCK

Created by: Carl Barks

First Appearance: Four Color #178 (1947)

Notable Comics: Only a Poor Old Man, The Seven Cities of Cibola, Back to the Klondike, The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck

The richest duck in the world, Scrooge McDuck, is a self-made billionaire, adventurer, and businessman. A world traveler and thrill-seeker at heart, Scrooge is always chasing new excitement, whether he's hunting for lost treasures or exploring ancient ruins, usually with his nephews in tow. Intelligent, stubborn, and fiercely independent, Scrooge rarely backs down from a challenge and takes immense pride in having earned every coin he owns. To celebrate his victories or simply to unwind, he can often be found in his iconic Money Bin, diving into his massive fortune like a swimming pool. When asked how he earned his vast wealth, Scrooge proudly declares: "I made it by being tougher than the toughies and smarter than the smarties! And I made it square!"

Did You Know: Scrooge was originally intended to be a one-shot bit player and was portrayed as a grumpy, frail, old man much like his namesake, Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*.

13 | WOLVERINE

Created by: Len Wein and John Romita Sr.

First Appearance: The Incredible Hulk #181 (1974)

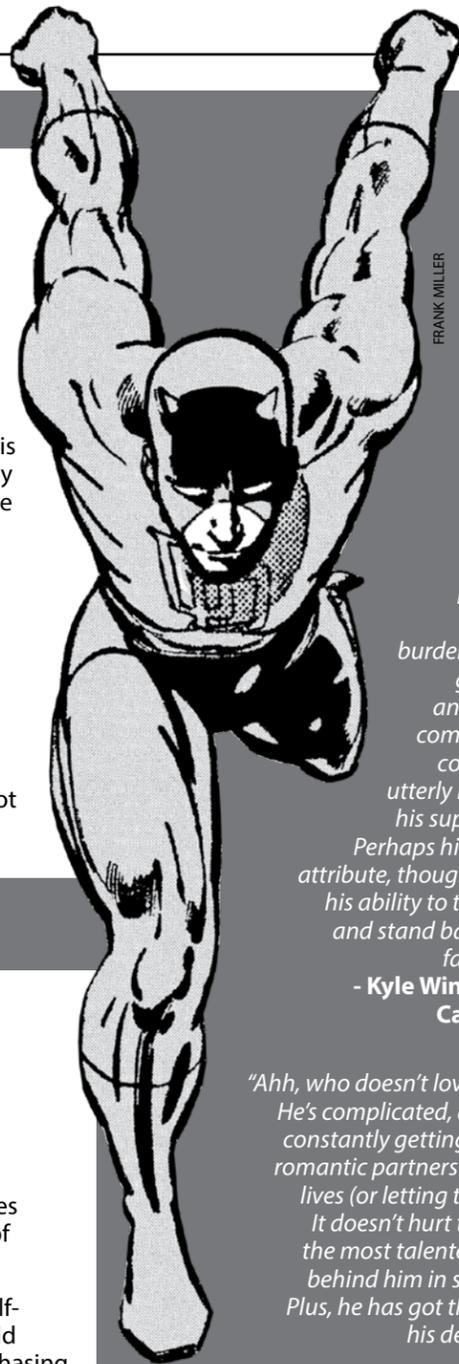
Notable Comics: Weapon X, Origin, Old Man Logan, Wolverine, Enemy of the State

A loner with a code, a healing factor, a skeleton reinforced with the unbreakable fictional metal adamantium, and retractable claws, Wolverine is a Canadian mutant with a fierce temper. Over the course of his long life, he has been many things: a soldier in nearly every major war of the last century, a government experiment, and a member of teams like Alpha Flight, the Fantastic Four, the Avengers, and, most famously, the X-Men. Wolverine constantly struggles to maintain his humanity and reconcile it with his wild, animalistic nature. With the help of Professor X and the X-Men, he strives to make peace with his traumatic past and to channel his rage into something more meaningful. Wolverine was a groundbreaking character in superhero comics—gritty, morally complex, and emotionally scarred—quickly becoming a fan favorite and inspiring countless imitators. As he famously says, "I'm the best there is at what I do, but what I do best isn't very nice."

Did You Know: In a 1996 Marvel Comics crossover event, the worlds of Star Trek and X-Men collided. Upon discovering Wolverine is a mutant, Spock, with characteristic Vulcan composure, requests that they follow through to security. However, Wolverine, in a burst of fury, lunged at the Vulcan. Spock swiftly subdued Wolverine with a Vulcan neck pinch the moment the mutant came within range. Observing the incapacitated Wolverine, Spock delivered a classic, understated remark: "I trust I have made my point."

"Wolverine is a hilarious amalgam of every masculine trope from all beats of fiction. He's a cowboy, lone wandering warrior with a sketchy past who loves tobacco and whiskey, and a gruff lady's man. He's a samurai, a warrior with a spiritual code and ruthless skill. He eschews human values for his animal brethren, a man of nature, and natural law. He's also a hairy daddy! Father figure to any wayward girl (yikes?) who needs a mentor. Wolverine/Jubilee relationship is the best Marvel duo (fight me). He also has a mysterious backstory that managed to be compelling in comics for decades. (And honestly, the best Marvel plot line of all time). Am I basic? Maybe. But I swoon every time he calls Professor X "Chuck"."

- Shaheen Beardsley, Oboy Comics



"Few 'Big Two' characters are as compelling as Daredevil: a blind vigilante lawyer burdened with Catholic guilt, emotionally and psychologically complex, riddled with contradictions, and utterly human even with his superhuman senses.

Perhaps his most admirable attribute, though, is his resilience, his ability to take life's punches and stand back up just like his father taught him."

- Kyle Windle, Issues with Cartoons Podcast

"Ahh, who doesn't love Matt Murdock? He's complicated, angry, depressed, constantly getting tangled up with romantic partners and ruining their lives (or letting them ruin his life). It doesn't hurt that he may have the most talented creative teams behind him in superhero history. Plus, he has got this lovely grace in his design and action."

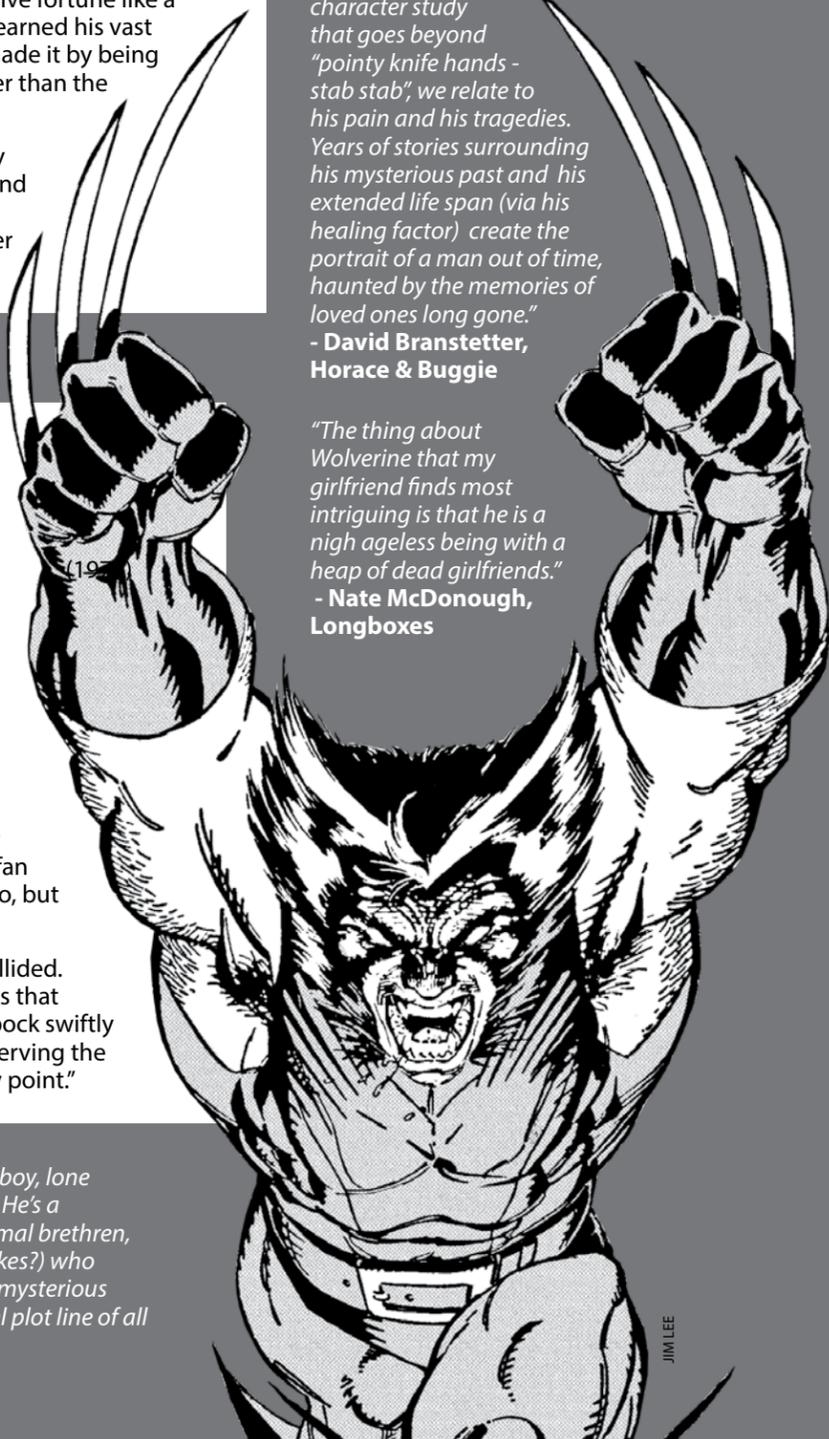
- Tiffany Babb, The Comics Courier

"Wolverine's trauma and bottled rage paint a compelling character study that goes beyond 'pointy knife hands - stab stab', we relate to his pain and his tragedies. Years of stories surrounding his mysterious past and his extended life span (via his healing factor) create the portrait of a man out of time, haunted by the memories of loved ones long gone."

- David Branstetter, Horace & Buggie

"The thing about Wolverine that my girlfriend finds most intriguing is that he is a nigh ageless being with a heap of dead girlfriends."

- Nate McDonough, Longboxes

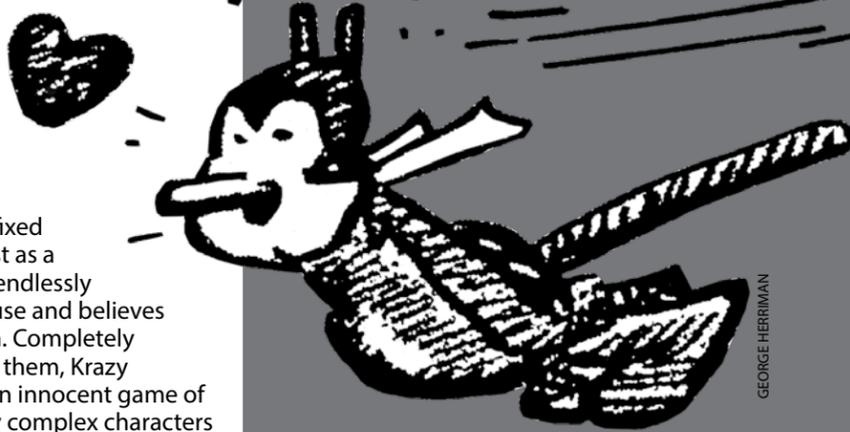


12 | KRAZY KAT

Created by: George Herriman
First Appearance: The Dingbat Family (1910)
Notable Comics: The George Herriman Library: Krazy & Ignatz 1919-1921

Simple-minded, curious, mindlessly happy, and perpetually innocent, Krazy drifts through life in Coconino County without a care. Unlike most comic strip protagonists, Krazy isn't defined by a fixed personality or consistent logic—instead, they exist as a fluid, dreamlike presence: whimsical, gentle, and endlessly loving. Krazy is hopelessly in love with Ignatz Mouse and believes that the bricks Ignatz throws are signs of affection. Completely unaware that Offissa Bull Pupp is also in love with them, Krazy mistakes the dog's repeated arrests of Ignatz for an innocent game of tag. Krazy Kat remains one of the most beautifully complex characters ever created in comics. Strange, soft-hearted, and enduring, Krazy lives in a surreal, ever-shifting desert world—always dreaming, always loving, always a little bit apart from reality.

Did You Know: Although George Herriman's birth certificate identified him as Black, a significant decision shaped his future when his light-skinned family chose to pass as white after moving during his childhood, with records later suggesting French or Greek heritage. As Herriman's comic strip career began in 1902, well before the emergence of self-identified Black cartoonists like Wilbert Holloway and Jay Jackson in the 1920s and 1930s, it made Herriman (secretly) comics' first major Black creator.



"Krazy Kat lives in a world much like ours -- a world filled with violence and cops, where reality incessantly rewrites itself behind our backs. And yet Krazy does not despair; instead, she affirms the whole of reality -- not with sentimentality, but with a deep mystical YEZ." - Drew Lerman, Snake Creek

Krazy Kat stands alone, not just in the history of comics, but in the history of all media, as arguably the most sheerly lovable character ever created. George Herriman's innovative page designs, epic storylines, and amazingly sharp wit are all marvels in their own right, but without the glue of Krazy Kat himself, both holding it all together and propelling the strip forward, you've got innovation and smarts and humor with no beating heart at its core. It's the strip's protagonist that elevates it to the level of something to be loved."

- Ryan Carey, Four Color Apocalypse

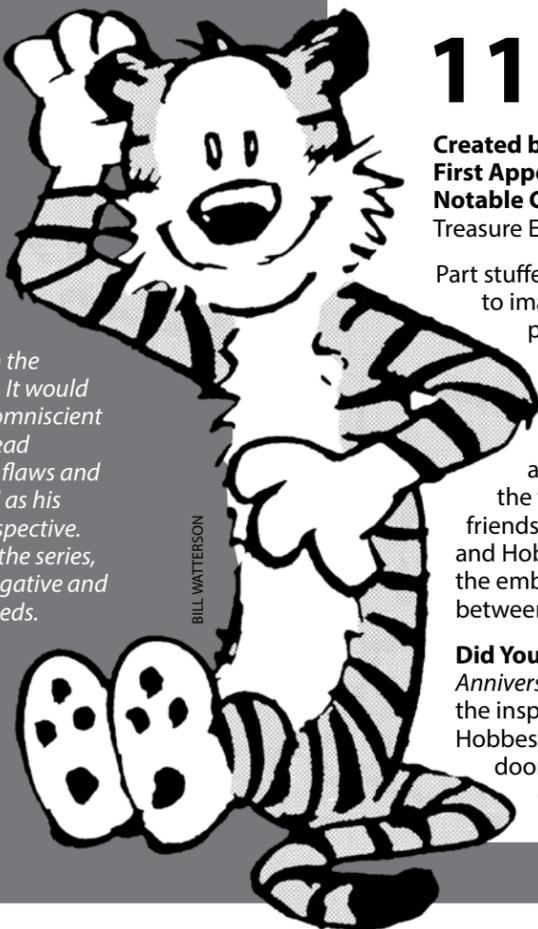
"I love Krazy Kat. They're the proto-SpongeBob. An androgynous, silly, well-meaning, optimist in a bizarro-world taking life as it comes and trying to enjoy as much of it as they can. Krazy isn't "stupid"; they know what's going on, they just choose to look at life with the awe and wonderment of a child. Krazy is a much-needed antidote to extreme negativity and hopelessness. They're also a hapless romantic, which personally is very relatable, even if getting beamed with a brick is not my preferred love language." - Tony DiPasquale, Nugget

"Garfield and Hobbes are two sides of the same beautiful coin. They're sarcastic, witty, and scornfully mocking. Much like cats in real life, they're not quite malicious, but they're playful and make us laugh."

- Abby Kacen, We Are The Sickos!

"A character so distinct and well characterized that I've never bothered to give a moment's thought to his shifting reality within the logic of the Calvin and Hobbes strip. It would have been easy to write Hobbes as omniscient or supernaturally wise, but he's instead presented as a fully realized person, flaws and all, moving through the same world as his human comrade with a distinct perspective. He has some of the funniest lines in the series, and pivots effortlessly between instigative and reactive, depending on the strip's needs. His design is flawless, a handful of artful dashes of ink for stripes and a pliable face that's impossible to mistake for anyone else. He's more than the ego to Calvin's id, he's most believable as his best friend and closest confidant."

- Stephen Pellnat, Upstate



11 | HOBBS

Created by: Bill Watterson
First Appearance: Calvin and Hobbes (1985)
Notable Comics: The Essential Calvin and Hobbes, Homicidal Psycho Jungle Cat, There's Treasure Everywhere

Part stuffed tiger, part philosopher, and part wild animal, Hobbes is the counterbalance to imaginative, impulsive six-year-old Calvin. He's named after the 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who, as creator Bill Watterson notes, had "a dim view of human nature." Hobbes typically shows a greater understanding of consequences than Calvin, but rarely intervenes beyond a few oblique warnings. Often the voice of reason, he gently (or sarcastically) calls out Calvin's wild schemes and questionable ethics. Introspective, playful, loyal, and mysterious, Hobbes is just as likely to wax philosophical about life as he is to pounce on Calvin, especially at the front door when Calvin comes home from school, one of his favorite games. The friendship between Calvin and Hobbes is what gives the strip its heart, making Calvin and Hobbes a timeless classic. Hobbes is more than a tiger; he's the embodiment of imagination, friendship, and the quiet tension between the world as it is and the world as we wish it to be.

Did You Know: Bill Watterson revealed in the *Calvin and Hobbes Tenth Anniversary Book* that his cat, a gray tabby named Sprite, served as the inspiration for Hobbes. Sprite even sparked the iconic image of Hobbes greeting Calvin with a high-velocity mid-air pounce at the door. Following Sprite's passing, Watterson created his poignant comic strip.



10 | MAGGIE CHASCARRILLO

Created by: Jaime Hernandez
First Appearance: Love and Rockets #1 (1981)
Notable Comics: Maggie the Mechanic, The Girl from H.O.P.P.E.R.S., The Love Bunglers

A mechanic, punk, lover, and caretaker, Maggie Chascarrillo stands out as a rare and layered comic book heroine. A fixer of broken machines and often broken people, Maggie is a kind soul who struggles with low self-esteem, despite being deeply loved by those around her. Thanks to creator Jaime Hernandez's decision to age his characters in real time, Maggie is also someone readers have grown old with, literally and emotionally. In the early issues of *Love and Rockets*, Maggie is a globe-trotting mechanic who embarks on sci-fi-tinged adventures. But as the series evolves, so do her stories, gradually shifting toward the intimate and grounded. Back in her Southern Californian hometown, she's introduced to the punk scene, where she forms a profound bond with sharp-tongued musician Hopey Glass. The two become best friends, occasional lovers, and emotional anchors for one another. Over the decades, Maggie gains weight, works dead-end jobs, and navigates messy relationships, including divorce, all with a vulnerability that feels brutally real. Her journey is marked by insecurity, resilience, kindness, and quiet strength. If there's one word that defines Maggie's story, it's growth. She changes in a way few comic characters ever do. She is the antithesis of the static, ageless comic book protagonist. It's her warmth, her flaws, her endurance, and the depth of her portrayal over more than forty years that have made Maggie Chascarrillo one of the most beloved and realistic characters in the history of comics.

Did You Know: Maggie goes by several nicknames, including "Shrimp" (used by her aunt, Vicki Glori) and "Maggot" or "Mag" (used by Hopey). And her last name? Chascarrillo is actually Spanish for "funny story." Which, if you know Maggie, couldn't be more perfect.

"Like many longtime *Love and Rockets* readers, I am in love with Maggie. She's a fully realized, charmingly flawed character who feels as real to me as the people that I know in real life. She's the type of person I think of and go, 'Oh, I hope she's doing well!'" - Andrew Neal, Meeting Comics

"She's my Gasoline Alley. A character that has grown old with the readers and the author. We're all fortunate to live during Jaime's lifetime... one of our best living cartoonists! I love that Maggie is maybe the most real creation we all know. AND... she started by working on robots and other things mechanic!" - Chris Pitzer, AdHouse Books

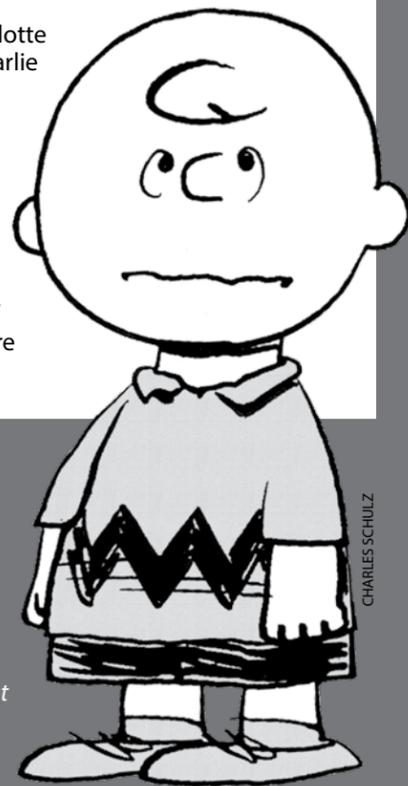
"The only comic character I've ever fallen in love with. What more needs to be said?" - Eric Reynolds, Fantagraphics

9 CHARLIE BROWN

Created by: Charles M. Schulz
First Appearance: Peanuts (1950)
Notable Comics: The Complete Peanuts Vol. 1, Vol. 7, & Vol. 12

The world's favorite "lovable loser," Charlie Brown, is one of the most recognizable and beloved characters in American pop culture. Kind, thoughtful, and honest, he is also plagued by self-doubt, anxiety, and chronic bad luck. Creator Charles Schulz once said, "Charlie Brown has to be the one who suffers, because he is a caricature of the average person. Most of us are much more acquainted with losing than we are with winning." Much of Charlie Brown's character was drawn from Schulz's own life. Both Charlie Brown's and Schulz's fathers were barbers, and their mothers were housewives. Charlie Brown's friends, Linus and Shermy, were named after Schulz's real-life friends. Even Charlie Brown's unrequited love mirrors Schulz's own heartbreak. His crush on the Little Red-Haired Girl was inspired by Donna Mae Johnson, an accountant at Art Instruction Inc. When Schulz finally got the nerve to propose to her in June 1950, she turned him down and married someone else. Symbolizing the quiet struggles and everyday courage of ordinary life, one of Charlie Brown's greatest virtues is his resilience. He fails at almost everything he attempts, whether it's flying a kite, managing a baseball team, or kicking a football, but he never stops trying. His persistence often ends in further disappointment, but occasionally, it results in a rare and deeply earned victory. Throughout it all, he voices his woes with his signature catchphrase: "Good grief!"

Did You Know: In 1954, Schulz introduced Charlotte Braun, conceived as a female counterpart to Charlie Brown. Charlotte was more than just a gender-swapped Charlie Brown; she embodied his temperamental opposite. Functioning as a kind of prototype for the later character of Lucy, Charlotte was an assertive extrovert who often tormented Charlie Brown's introverted nature. Ultimately, Schulz decided to write Charlotte out of the strip. In a humorous twist, he cited a fan letter requesting her removal as the "official" reason, playfully informing the fan that they were responsible for Charlotte's "demise."



CHARLES SCHULZ

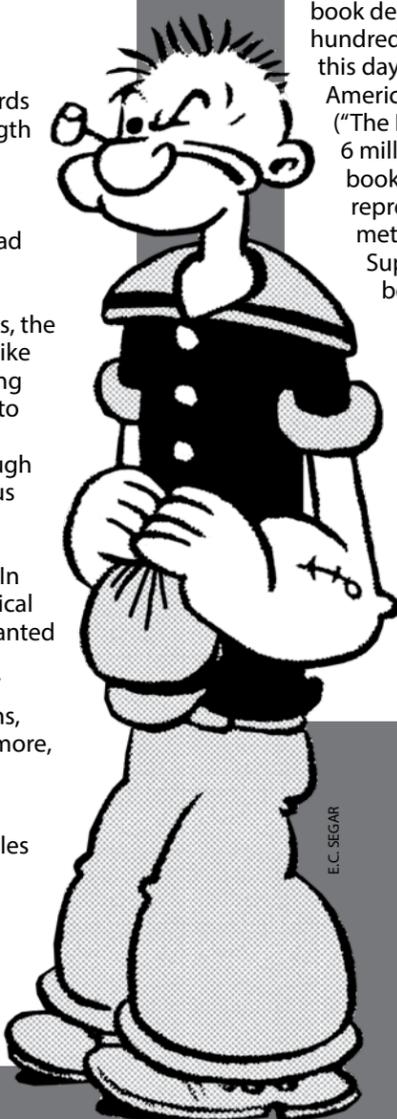
"I think the great trick that Charles Schulz pulled on all of us who followed his strip for years is that we never really want Charlie Brown to succeed. Schulz knew that adolescence is a purgatory where one's failures, loneliness, and heartbreak remain tethered to our memories as we age. I think Charlie Brown was Schulz's way of saying to readers (but in all honesty, probably himself) that other people in the world feel this same bitter angst and at the very least we can laugh about it and move on with our day."
- Alex Nall, Town & County

7 POPEYE

Created by: E. C. Segar
First Appearance: Thimble Theatre (1929)
Notable Comics: Popeye Volume 1: Olive Oyl & Her Sweetie

"I yam what I yam, and that's all what I yam!" The immortal words of a scruffy, one-eyed sailor with a heart of gold and the strength of a hundred men. From his first appearance as a supporting character in the comic strip *Thimble Theatre*, it was clear that Popeye was more than a mere bit player. He quickly took over the strip, overshadowing the original leads, and by 1931, he had become so popular that the strip was retitled *Thimble Theatre Starring Popeye*. Popeye is believed to have been inspired by a tough laborer named Frank "Rocky" Fiegel from Chester, Illinois, the hometown of creator E.C. Segar. Fiegel was described as "just like the fictional spinach-loving mariner... a one-eyed, pipe-smoking curmudgeon with a jutting chin." He was known for getting into fights, but also for handing out candy and treats to children, including a young Segar, who would one day honor him through this beloved character. Interestingly, spinach, now synonymous with Popeye's superhuman strength, did not originate in the *Thimble Theatre* strip. Instead, the idea was introduced in the 1933 animated cartoons developed by Max Fleischer Studios. In the original comics, Popeye gained his strength from the magical powers of Bernice the Whiffle Hen, a mystical creature who granted good luck and vitality to those who rubbed her head feathers. For nearly a century, Popeye has shown off his "supker-strenk," becoming a global icon. He has appeared in countless cartoons, comic strips, movies, video games, books, toys, clothing, and more, cementing his place in pop culture history.

Did You Know: Popeye's love for spinach didn't just make him strong; it's also credited with a nationwide boost in spinach sales over the years! To honor this impact, statues of the famous sailor have popped up in key spinach-growing areas across the United States. You'll find him in Crystal City, Texas, where spinach is a major crop, and also in the Arkansas towns of Springdale and Alma. Alma, in particular, proudly boasts the title of "The Spinach Capital of the World."



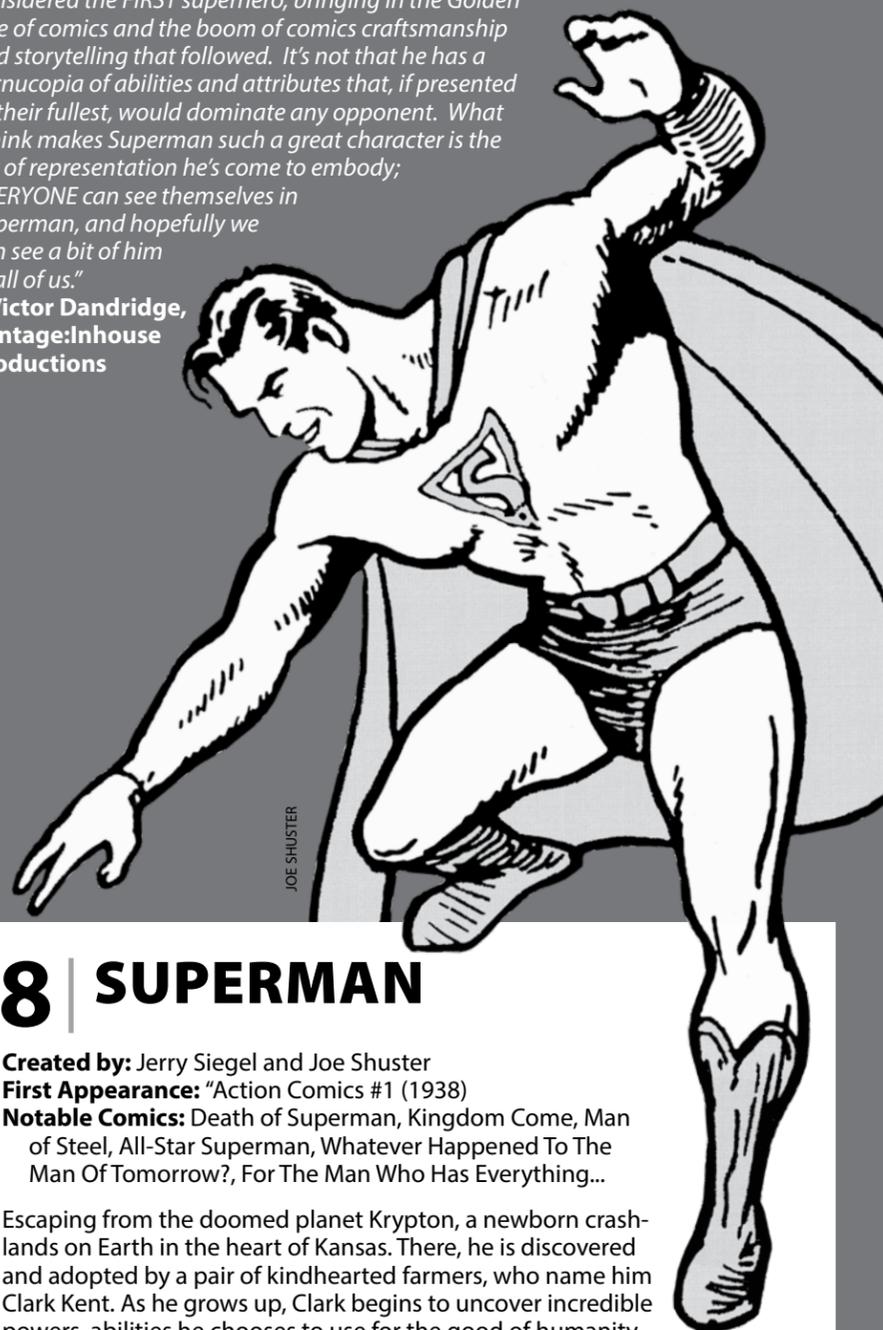
E.C. SEGAR

"Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's Superman is, without a doubt, the greatest creation to ever spring from the four-color page. While many would attribute his enduring popularity to the power fantasy or wish fulfillment of being able to leap a building in a single bound, it's the character's thematic core that has truly pushed him to the heights he's reached today. The idea that the Last Son of Krypton's true power is not the super strength that he gains from absorbing the yellow light of our sun... but kindness, that he absorbed from his loving parents."

- Dave Baker, Mary Tyler MooreHawk

"It's not ONLY that Superman is conventionally considered the FIRST superhero, bringing in the Golden Age of comics and the boom of comics craftsmanship and storytelling that followed. It's not that he has a cornucopia of abilities and attributes that, if presented at their fullest, would dominate any opponent. What I think makes Superman such a great character is the art of representation he's come to embody; EVERYONE can see themselves in Superman, and hopefully we can see a bit of him in all of us."

- Victor Dandridge, Vantage:Inhouse Productions



JOE SHUSTER

8 SUPERMAN

Created by: Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster
First Appearance: "Action Comics #1 (1938)
Notable Comics: Death of Superman, Kingdom Come, Man of Steel, All-Star Superman, Whatever Happened To The Man Of Tomorrow?, For The Man Who Has Everything...

Escaping from the doomed planet Krypton, a newborn crash-lands on Earth in the heart of Kansas. There, he is discovered and adopted by a pair of kindhearted farmers, who name him Clark Kent. As he grows up, Clark begins to uncover incredible powers, abilities he chooses to use for the good of humanity. He moves faster than a speeding bullet, is more powerful than a locomotive, and can leap tall buildings in a single bound. He becomes Superman. Often considered the world's first superhero, Superman's comic book debut helped launch the industry into its Golden Age. He inspired hundreds of other characters and stories, and even more imitations. To this day, more *Superman* comics have been sold than those of any other American superhero. In November 1992, the landmark *Superman #75* ("The Death of Superman") became a cultural phenomenon, selling over 6 million copies and becoming one of the best-selling single comic book issues of all time. Strong, brave, and compassionate, Superman represents the best of humanity. He is more than a character; he is a metaphor for immigration, identity, moral responsibility, and idealism. Superman doesn't just save the day; he inspires hope, kindness, and belief in the goodness of others. It's no wonder he remains one of the most iconic and enduring figures in all of pop culture.

Did You Know: The Man of Steel has taken some truly unexpected forms: a four-legged Kryptonian as Centaur Superman in *Whom Gods Destroy*, a super-powered member of a plain community as Amish Superman in *JLA: The Nail*, and a champion of the proletariat as Communist Superman in *Red Son*. Then there's Tarzan Superman raised by apes in *Superman/Tarzan: Sons of the Jungle*, and Calvin Ellis, who became Black Superman as well as the world's first Black president in *Final Crises*. The Nazi version of Superman, Overman, was featured in *Superman of Earth-10*. And in a fascinating twist of fate, there's a Bruce Wayne/Superman, where the Waynes live on and raise the orphaned Kal-El after their own son's passing.

"Popeye was a scrappy 'everyman', before I even knew the term. He was resilient, took a beating from the bad guys and such, but always persisted and triumphed, even without his spinach 'power-up'. He really inspired 8-year-old me!" - Michael Anthony Carroll, Ninja-verse

"That chin! Those arms! His gift of gab! It really doesn't get much better than the original Popeye until 1938. Perfect cartooning." - Robb Mirsky, Sludgy

"Popeye feels like American folk art - some of the comics feel very proto-culture- like as if Segar stumbled across making a comic." - Bryan Moss, Power to the Panel

"I think Hellboy is a perfect comic book protagonist; his origin story can fit into a single page, his design is instantly recognizable, and he's a natural foil to any number of compelling villains and conflicts. Beyond that, Mike Mignola is a master storyteller. His ability to take both WWII pulp stories and folklore and combine them into a complex world of monsters and mystery is astounding. The Hellboy universe is just close enough to our reality that it doesn't require a backlog of knowledge to approach, while also being unique enough to spawn a nearly endless number of stories. The way Hellboy is accepted by other characters as a natural part of the world instantly grounds the readers and allows for the crazier and more surreal concepts to land smoothly. Superheroes almost always have a suspension of disbelief problem, but that's never been a problem for the Hellboy comics. Put a confident and colorful monster in a uniform and have them stand next to a human who's in over their head, and we will immediately buy into the premise."

- Skye Berggren, *The Fish Wizard*

"Mike Mignola's seminal paranormal investigator gives us the perfect point of view into the endlessly fascinating dichotomy of how the bizarre can be mundane and the mundane... if you look hard enough... can reveal the bizarre. This accomplishment is thanks to Mignola's considerable talents and the contributions of people like Guy Davis, John Arcudi, Duncan Fegredo, John Byrne, and countless others. Hellboy, the B.P.R.D., and the legions of spin-off characters that populate these pages have served as a beacon to all who are obsessed with exploring the shadowy nooks and crannies of our collective unconscious." - Dave Baker, Mary Tyler MooreHawk

6 | HELLBOY

Created by: Mike Mignola

First Appearance: *Next Men* #21 (1993)

Notable Comics: *Seed of Destruction*, *The Corpse*, *Wake the Devil*, *Box Full of Evil*

Summoned to Earth by Nazi occultists during World War II in a desperate attempt to unleash a demon to win the war, Hellboy instead ends up in the hands of the Allies. He is raised by Professor Trevor Bruttenholm of the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense (B.P.R.D.), growing into a good-hearted investigator of supernatural threats, complete with a massive stone right hand and a deep love for cats and cigars. Hellboy originated from a drawing in 1991 that creator Mike Mignola did for the Great Salt Lake Comic-Con promotional pamphlet. At the time, Mignola had no serious plans for the horned figure with the label "Hell Boy" on his belt. But the name stuck with him, and over time he began refining the concept into what would become one of the most iconic characters in indie comics. With bright red skin, solid yellow eyes, pointed ears, cloven hooves, and a tail, Hellboy is impossible to miss. Yet his most striking feature may be his horns, which he keeps filed down to large circular stumps. A practice he began as a child, largely out of a desire to feel less "different" and to reject the demonic fate others insist he's destined for. Blending folklore, horror, and noir through a uniquely stylized art style, Hellboy is the story of a tough-talking, blue-collar hero who likes to punch monsters, smoke cigars, and occasionally save the world. What more could you want from a comic book character?

Did You Know: Hellboy's mother, the witch Sarah Hughes, was a descendant of the illegitimate child of King Arthur and Morgan le Fay, making Hellboy the current true heir to the British throne. Hellboy learns of this stunning revelation in the comic "The Wild Hunt." Morgan le Fay reveals his birthright and presents him with Excalibur, the legendary sword. Hellboy initially rejects the idea and has no interest in it. However, he eventually accepts his heritage and pulls Excalibur from its stone, claiming his birthright and moving one step closer to his supposed destiny as the harbinger of the apocalypse.

"What can't I say about Nancy? She's dynamic, charming, rude, funny, sad, & clever. She's every girl and also most importantly herself."

- Caroline Cash, *Peepee Poopoo*

"I think we all want to think we have her boldness and spunk."

- Brian Baynes, *Bubbles Fanzine*

"The appeal of Nancy for me is that the character is the most efficient and clear distillation of the visual language of comics and the broad scope of how that language can be used to interact with a reader."

- Marc Koprinarov, *Santos Sisters*



4 | NANCY

Created by: Ernie Bushmiller

First Appearance: *Fritzi Ritz* (1933)

Notable Comics: *Nancy Wears Hats*, *Nancy and Sluggo's Guide to Life*, *Nancy: A Comic Collection* (2019), *How to Read Nancy: The Elements of Comics in Three Easy Panels*

With her spiky black hair, signature bow, round face, and eyes always wide to the wonders of the world, Nancy moves through life with bold curiosity. She's sassy, literal-minded, blunt, mischievous, and clever, often outsmarting the adults around her with deadpan wit. Created by Ernie Bushmiller, Nancy was originally introduced as the niece of the strip's namesake, Fritzi Ritz. But she quickly stole the spotlight. Within a few years, the focus shifted entirely to Nancy, and the strip was renamed in her honor. Bushmiller once said that he originally intended Nancy "just as an incidental character and I planned to keep her for about a week and then dump her ... But the little dickens was soon stealing the show and Bushmiller, the ingrate, was taking all the bows." Cartoonists and scholars often point to the "perfect gag structure" of Nancy. It's a precise balance of form, setup, and punchline. Cartoonist Wally Wood famously quipped, "It's harder to not read *Nancy* than to read it." For nearly a century, readers have followed Nancy as she navigates life's absurdities with curiosity, confidence, and a mischievous grin. The strip remains a landmark in American comic art, deceptively simple on the surface, but endlessly admired for its clarity, rhythm, and style.

Did You Know: Andy Warhol, during his pop art zenith in 1961, crafted his own artwork inspired by Nancy. Cartoonist Mark Newgarden also put his own spin on the strip with a decidedly psychedelic take titled *Love's Savage Fury*.

3 | SPIDER-MAN

Created by: Stan Lee and Steve Ditko

First Appearance: *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (1962)

Notable Comics: *Spider-Man No More*, *The Night Gwen Stacy Died*, *Kraven's Last Hunt*, *If This Be My Destiny...*, *The Sinister Six*

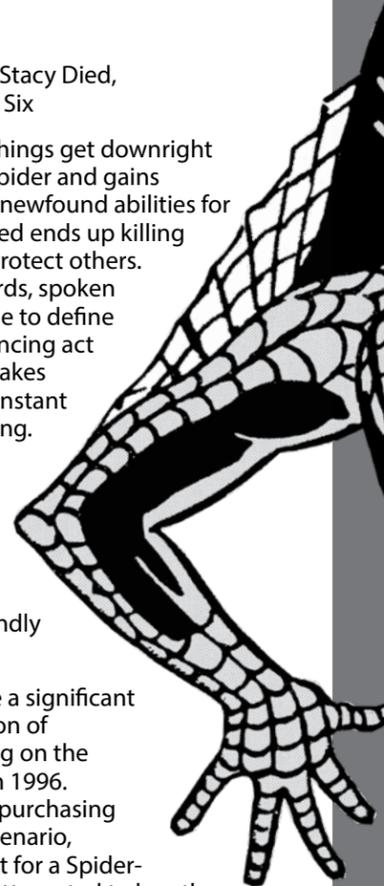
As if being a high school student weren't hard enough, things get downright challenging after Peter Parker is bitten by a radioactive spider and gains superhuman powers. At first, he tries to capitalize on his newfound abilities for fame and money. But when a criminal he could've stopped ends up killing his beloved Uncle Ben, Peter vows to use his powers to protect others.

"With great power comes great responsibility." Those words, spoken by Uncle Ben, echo throughout Peter's life and have come to define him, not just as a person, but as Spider-Man. It's the balancing act between his heroic duties and personal struggles that makes Spider-Man's story so compelling. He is defined by his constant effort to do what's right, even when it costs him everything. As one of Marvel Comics' flagship heroes, Spider-Man has become a cultural icon. He grows, fails, learns, and keeps swinging. No matter how insurmountable the problem seems, Spider-Man always faces it with a quick joke and a spark of humor, bringing light to even the darkest of moments. It's this resilience, humility, and humor that have earned him the title of the world's "Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man."

Did You Know: During the 1990s, Michael Jackson made a significant effort to acquire Marvel Comics with the singular ambition of portraying Spider-Man. At that time, Marvel was teetering on the brink of financial ruin, ultimately declaring bankruptcy in 1996. Sensing an opportunity, Jackson reportedly deliberated purchasing the company with his family. Adding to this intriguing scenario, director James Cameron had already penned a treatment for a Spider-Man film. Jackson, desiring to helm the project himself, attempted to buy the movie rights. Upon learning that Spider-Man wasn't available for individual sale, he allegedly declared his intention to buy the entire company.



"Spider-Man is one of the most "ordinary" superheroes, and his story shows him grappling with how "doing good" can affect an ordinary life. Some superheroes seem to have it all—but Peter Parker's personal life is frequently a wreck, he lives in a crappy apartment, and he works a crappy photographer's job. Taking responsibility in life isn't glamorous; it means paying costs and making trade-offs, and Spider-Man shows that more honestly than most comic characters." - Sunshine Gao, *For the First Time*



"I've loved Snoopy from my earliest memories of cartoon strips. From his WWI persona to his encounters with Lucy, he always makes me smile, and that's an amazing ability."
 - Gib Bickel, *The Laughing Ogre*

"Snoopy is one of the greatest comic strip characters ever created. A legend in his own mind – and our own – Snoopy can embody anything his creator, Schulz, needs him to: he's a dog, he's an author, he's the Flying Ace. Snoopy is the character we all wish we could be, happily living out the world-famous beagle's fantasies alongside him."
 - Alexis E. Fajardo, *Kid Beowulf/Editorial Director Schulz Studio*

"There's a decent chance that Snoopy may be the comic character that has touched the world the most. Perhaps because of his iconic design or the specificity of the world built around him (or some other undefinable element that makes regular ol' comic characters immortal) – everyone knows who Snoopy is, everyone has an idea of what he's like. I don't believe in much lasting forever, but if Snoopy lasted forever, it wouldn't surprise me."
 - Tiffany Babb, *The Comics Courier*



5 | SNOOPY

Created by: Charles M. Schulz
First Appearance: *Peanuts* (1950)
Notable Comics: *The Complete Peanuts* Vol. 1, Vol. 8, & Vol. 10

Far from any ordinary dog, on the surface, Snoopy is the pet beagle of Charlie Brown. He can be selfish, gluttonous, and lazy at times, often mocking his owner. Yet, beneath the sarcasm and aloof attitude, Snoopy shows deep love, care, and loyalty, even if he rarely remembers Charlie Brown's name and always refers to him as "the round-headed kid." But it's what lies beyond the surface that makes Snoopy so compelling. From a struggling author pounding out novels atop his doghouse, to a World War I flying ace in constant aerial dogfights with the Red Baron, to the sunglasses-wearing college cool guy known as Joe Cool, Snoopy has one of the richest inner lives in comic strip history. Creator Charles Schulz once said in a 1997 interview: "He has to retreat into his fanciful world in order to survive. Otherwise, he leads kind of a dull, miserable life. I don't envy dogs the lives they have to live." When Snoopy first appeared in the *Peanuts* comic strip, he was a traditional, dog-like character, walking on all fours and not speaking, even through thought balloons. Over time, Schulz gradually evolved him, giving him an upright posture and thought balloons that opened a window into his vivid imagination. Snoopy slowly became the breakout star of *Peanuts*, often stealing the spotlight from Charlie Brown himself. What began as a background pet character blossomed into an expressive, whimsical, and deeply quirky icon adored by generations.

Did You Know: Tokyo is home to a Snoopy Museum. It first opened in 2016, but closed in 2018 to make way for a larger space. After hosting traveling exhibitions in the interim, the Snoopy Museum reopened in December 2019 in Minamimachida Grandberry Park, Machida-city, continuing to showcase original *Peanuts* comic strips and exclusive collections.

"Calvin spoke to so many people, not just from his unbridled imagination, but from his philosophical questioning of everything around him. We were brought into his world of Spaceman Spiff, Calvinball, and heartfelt adventures with Hobbes, without questioning if it was real or not. Calvin was able to speak to the child in all of us, young and old"
 - Gregory Baldrige, *Teach*

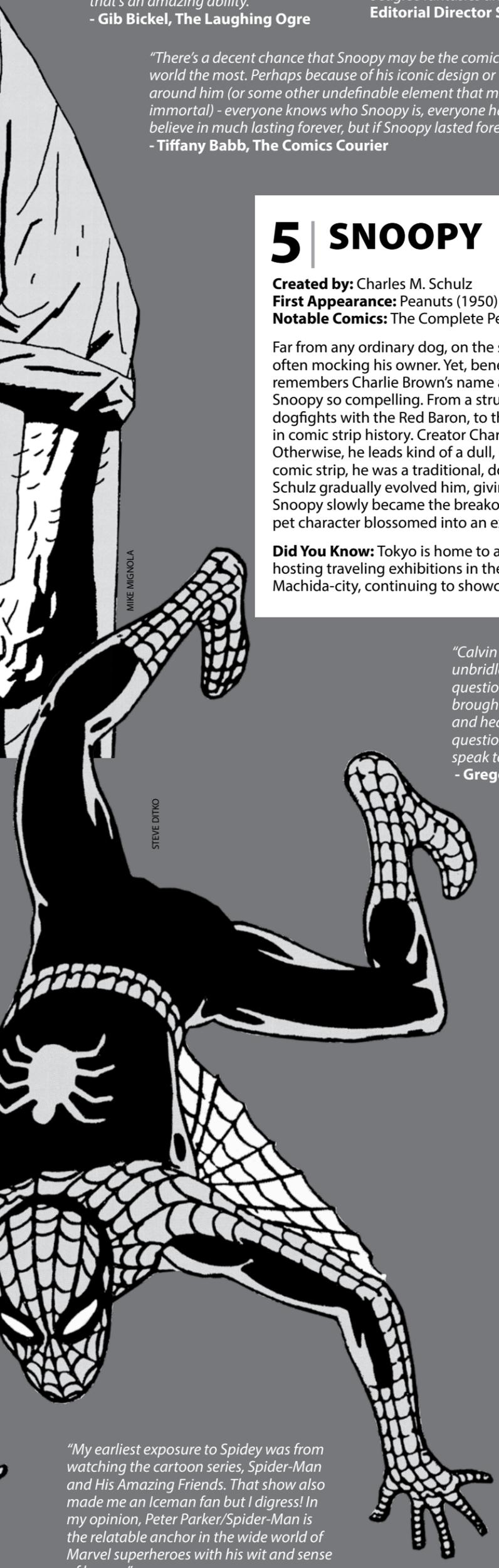
"When I was growing up, Calvin was far and away the most interesting and complex character in the funny pages. He was selfish and vindictive, but his boundless imagination, curiosity, passion, and self-assurance made him a role model for every kid who was weird in their own way."
 - Maryanne Rose Papke, *Silver Kraken Comics*

2 | CALVIN

Created by: Bill Watterson
First Appearance: *Calvin and Hobbes* (1985)
Notable Comics: *The Essential Calvin and Hobbes*, *Attack of the Deranged Mutant Killer Monster Snow Goons*, *The Authoritative Calvin and Hobbes*, *The Indispensable Calvin and Hobbes: A Calvin and Hobbes Treasury*, *It's a Magical World*

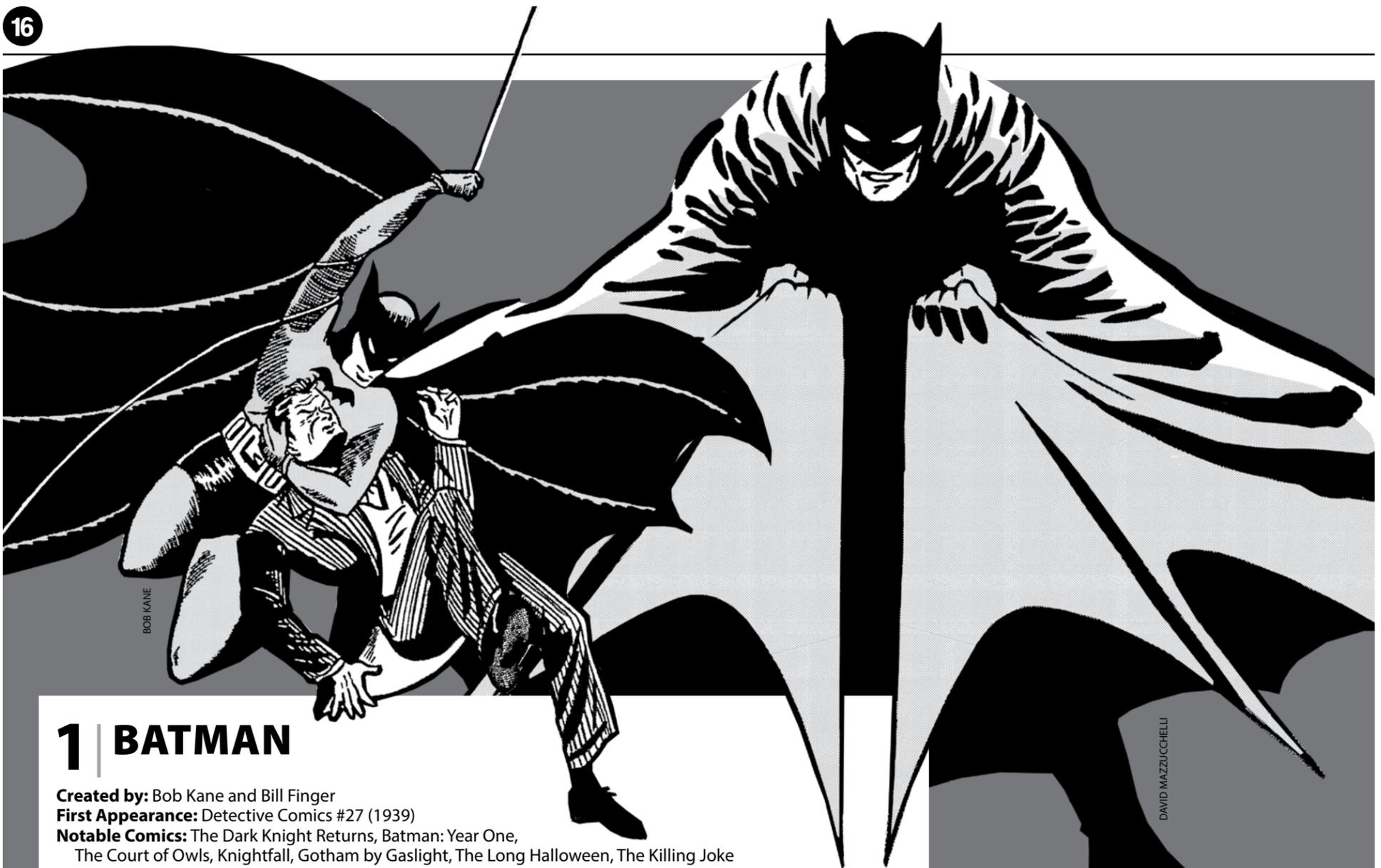
Wildly imaginative and chaos-loving, Calvin is the star of the beloved comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*. He's a mischievous and adventurous six-year-old boy with spiky blond hair and a distinctive red-and-black striped shirt, a quick tongue, and a mind that races from brilliant to bizarre in a matter of seconds. Named after the 16th-century theologian John Calvin, his name hints at the strip's occasional philosophical depth. Calvin demonstrates intelligence through his sophisticated vocabulary and abstract thinking, though he'd much rather make snowmen into grotesque sculpture gardens or launch himself into space in a cardboard box than get good grades in school. Creator Bill Watterson once described Calvin as having "not much of a filter between his brain and his mouth", a "little too intelligent for his age", lacking in restraint, and not yet having the experience to "know the things that you shouldn't do." Calvin's best friend is Hobbes, a stuffed tiger who comes to life in Calvin's eyes, sometimes offering sage advice and wisdom, other times getting him into more trouble. Calvin has a boundless fantasy life. One moment, he's exploring strange worlds and battling aliens in deep space as Spaceman Spiff. The next he's a superhero righting wrongs as Stupendous Man. The strip still resonates and continues to influence readers of all ages, even today, almost 30 years after the strip ended. Calvin stands as a symbol of the wildness, imagination, and confusion of being a kid. *Calvin and Hobbes* isn't just a comic; it's a work of literary and artistic genius.

Did You Know: Throughout the entire run of *Calvin and Hobbes*, Calvin's parents remain without given names. In contrast, his teacher, Miss Wormwood, is directly named after Wormwood, the junior devil from C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*.



"My earliest exposure to Spidey was from watching the cartoon series, *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*. That show also made me an Iceman fan but I digress! In my opinion, Peter Parker/Spider-Man is the relatable anchor in the wide world of Marvel superheroes with his wit and sense of humor."
 - Steve Hamaker, *PLOX*





1 | BATMAN

Created by: Bob Kane and Bill Finger

First Appearance: *Detective Comics* #27 (1939)

Notable Comics: *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Batman: Year One*, *The Court of Owls*, *Knightfall*, *Gotham by Gaslight*, *The Long Halloween*, *The Killing Joke*

When wealthy socialites Martha and Thomas Wayne take a wrong turn down the crime-ridden streets of Gotham City after a matinee with their son, Bruce, they end up victims of a mugging that takes a horrible turn. When the gunfire ceases to echo, young Bruce Wayne is left howling to the heavens, alone in a pool of blood and shattered pearls.

As young Bruce faces down the worst nightmare any child can imagine, a switch flips in him, and he makes a vow to rid Gotham of the kind of crime that shattered his life. He uses his vast wealth to train his body and mind to peak human perfection. He even crafts a persona to strike fear into the hearts of criminals. He becomes a symbol. He becomes Batman, an icon recognized throughout the world.

Just as Bruce Wayne was shaped by tragedy into a symbol, Batman, as a character, was forged through creative collaboration and evolving artistic vision. Batman was originally conceived shortly after the appearance of Superman, which created a demand for more superheroes to fill the pages of comic books and capitalize on Superman's success. While artist Bob Kane was long credited as Batman's sole creator, it has since become widely recognized that writer Bill Finger played a crucial, if initially uncredited, role in the character's creation.

Kane's original sketch featured red tights, bat wings, and a domino mask. Finger made significant contributions, making the design more bat-like by suggesting a cowl, cape, gloves, and a darker costume. Finger is also responsible for writing the tragic origin central to the character.

Kane and Finger drew inspiration from pulp fiction characters like the Shadow, Sherlock Holmes, and Zorro. With Batman's debut in *Detective Comics* #27, he became an instant hit and soon received his own spin-off publication, *Batman*, in 1940.

The Batman that Kane and Finger introduced, much like his inspirations, was a ruthless vigilante who wasn't above killing criminals in his early appearances. However, over the course of the 1940s, Batman evolved into a just, tempered superhero with a stringent moral code.

The tragedy at the heart of his origin story is what defines Batman. He refuses to use a gun—the weapon that killed his parents—and he refuses to kill, a line he won't cross even with his worst enemies. To that end, Batman boasts one of the most iconic rogues' galleries in all of comic book history. Many of these villains reflect twisted versions of his own trauma and ideals.

Often described as "The World's Greatest Detective,"

Batman solves crimes through deduction. He stands as a rarity in the pantheon of superheroes as he has no powers but relies on his wits, martial arts, fear tactics, and a wide array of gadgets to fight crime.

Although he's dark and brooding, Batman is also a family man. Over the years, he has had an ever-expanding cast of supporting characters and allies in his war on crime. This Bat-Family includes such notable characters as Batgirl, Batwoman, Nightwing, and a number of different Robins.

The Bat-Family began with the introduction of Robin the Boy Wonder in *Detective Comics* #38. Robin was the world's first superhero sidekick. He was introduced as a way to lighten the tone of the series and give kids a character they could identify with. He was another immediate success, boosting sales for the comics.

Bill Finger once said, "Robin was an outgrowth of a conversation I had with Bob. As I said, Batman was a combination of Douglas Fairbanks and Sherlock Holmes. Holmes had his Watson. The thing that bothered me was that Batman didn't have anyone to talk to, and it got a little tiresome always having him thinking. I found that as I went along, Batman needed a Watson to talk to. That's how Robin came to be. Bob called me over and said he was going to put a boy in the strip to identify with Batman. I thought it was a great idea."

From the colorful camp of the 1960s TV show to the dark, brooding realism of Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, Batman has undergone countless transformations over nearly a century of stories, often reflecting changing storytelling trends and audience expectations. In cinema, Batman has become a multi-generational icon, with actors like Michael Keaton, Christian Bale, and Robert Pattinson each redefining the role for a new generation.

So iconic is Batman that the opening of *Batman: The Animated Series* didn't even include a title. Audiences instantly recognized him from the rooftop silhouette alone. Batman has become a global pop culture phenomenon, continually reimagined and embraced across generations. Across mediums, Batman endures, an orphan turned icon, forever battling the darkness that shaped him. He has become more than a character—he's a myth.

He is vengeance.

He is the night.

He is... Batman.

Did You Know: Bruce Wayne was Robin before he was Batman. In *Detective Comics* #226 (1955), it's revealed that during his early years of training, Bruce Wayne adopted the Robin identity to learn under detective Harvey Harris. He donned the costume to conceal his identity from Harris, protecting his future path as Batman. Harris even gave him the name "Robin," inspired by Bruce's sharp mind, which reminded him of the bird. This aspect of Bruce Wayne's history, however, was later retconned in the 1980s, erasing any suggestion that Bruce ever used the name "Robin" or donned a costume before his debut as Batman.

"I think what's great about Batman, besides one of the best rogues galleries in comics, is the versatility of Batman. You can have the campiness of Batman '66 or the dark, gritty Batman like Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns*, which allows for endless stories that you can tell. There's a Batman for everyone."

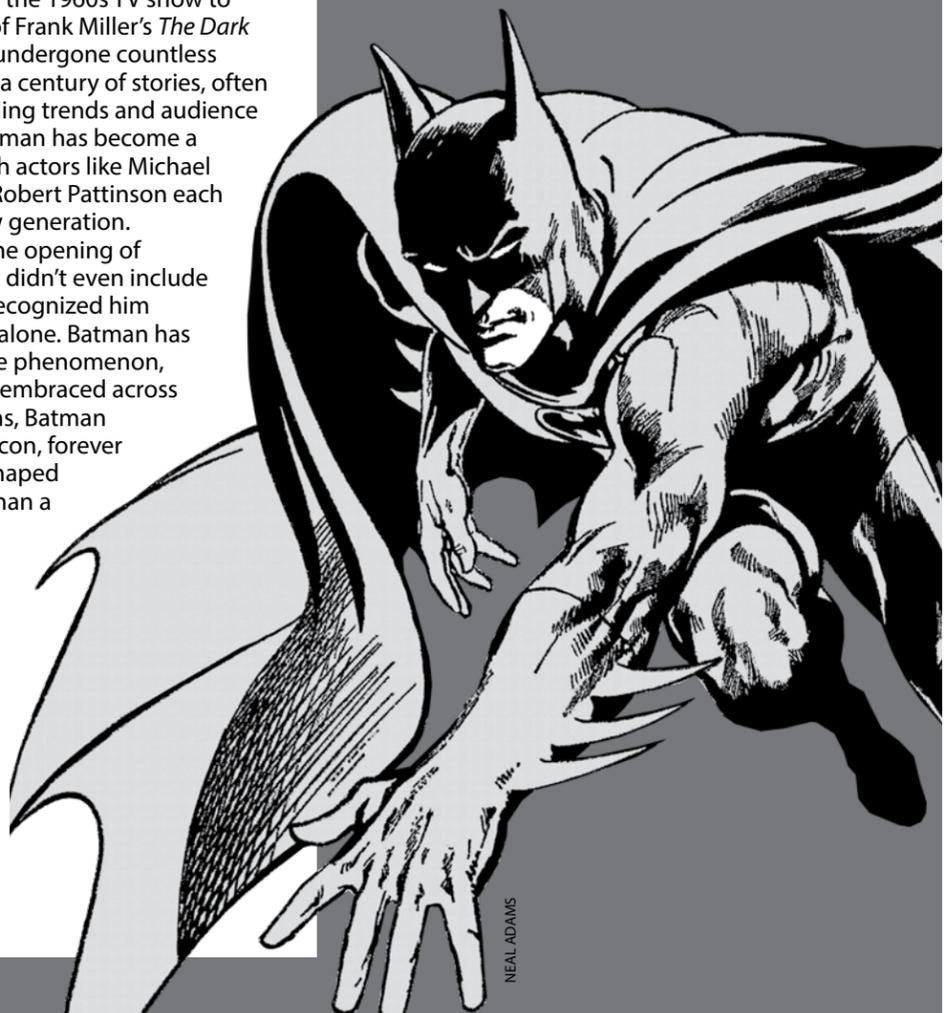
- Greg Osborne, *Bearded Comics Bro Podcast*

"Batman fits into pretty much any genre. Batman fights Jack the Ripper in the Victorian Era? Sure! Batman investigates a brazen museum heist committed by robots? Why not? Batman travels to an alien planet to overthrow a warlord with psychic powers? Sign me up!"

- Michael Cavender, *Film & Comic Critic*

"He has overcome tragedy with self-improvement and a sense of civil responsibility. As Bruce Wayne, he could succumb to the trappings of wealth and celebrity, but he decides to patrol the streets on the same level as the criminals he's trying to stop. As a character, he's an excellent conduit of times -- he can be campy or dark, and it still makes sense, because either way, he's the kind of hero we'd all like to be!"

- Russ Kazmierczak Jr., *Amazing Arizona Comics*



Cartoon Confessional - JAS'25



*Note: None of this replaces my therapy/professional help, but I found engaging with nerds/people who also make things to be soothing/helpful.

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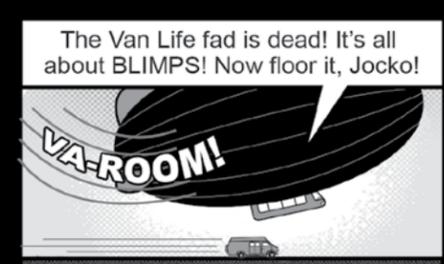
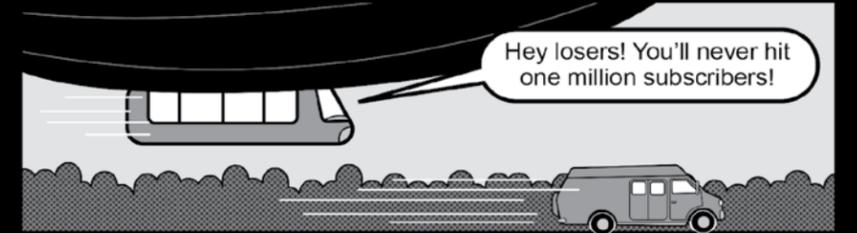
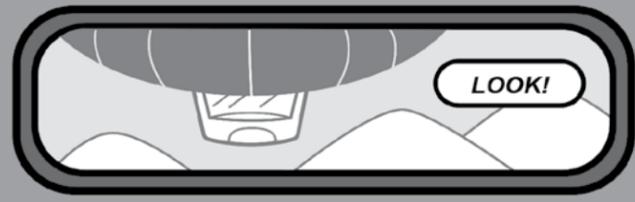
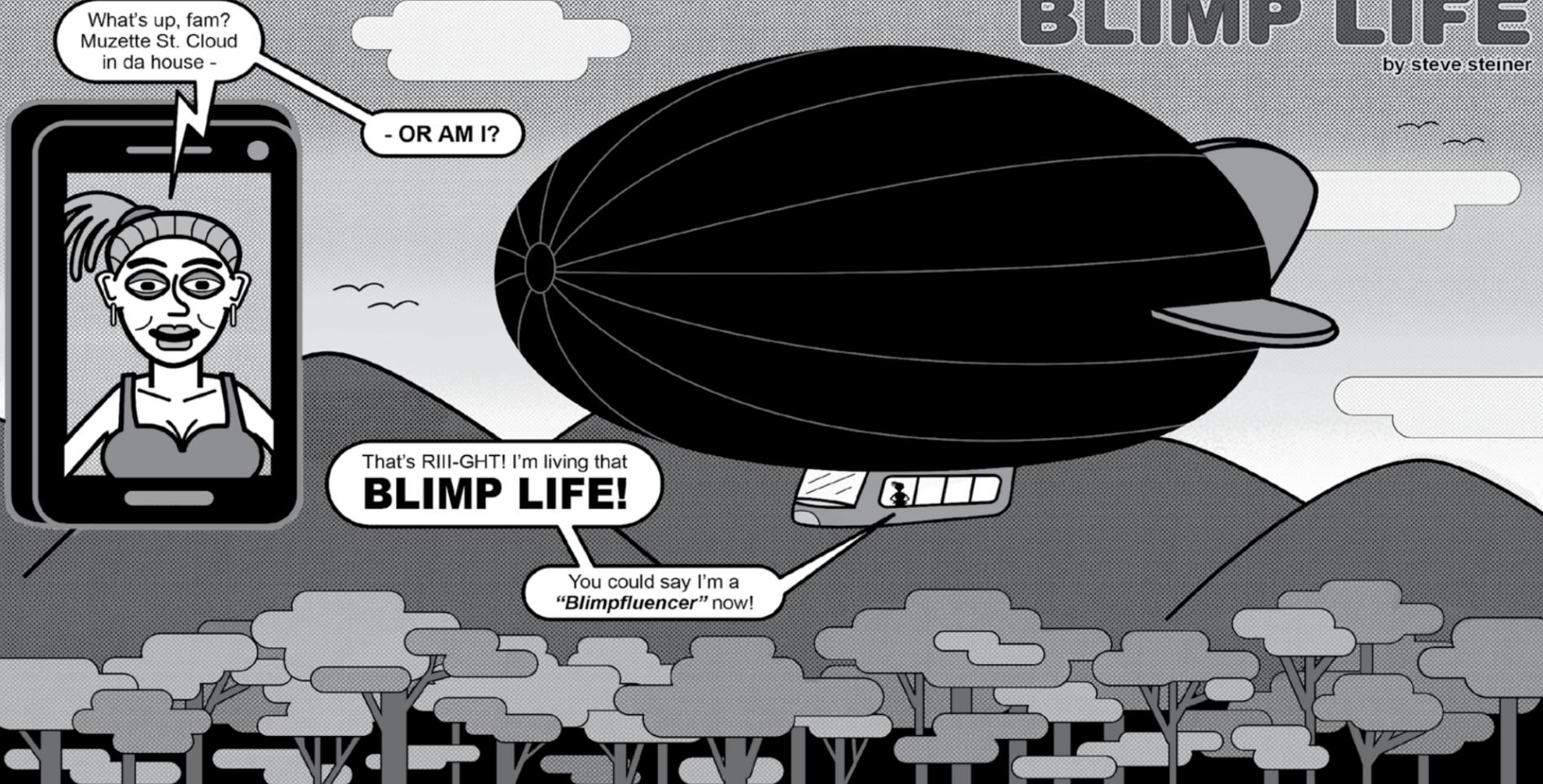


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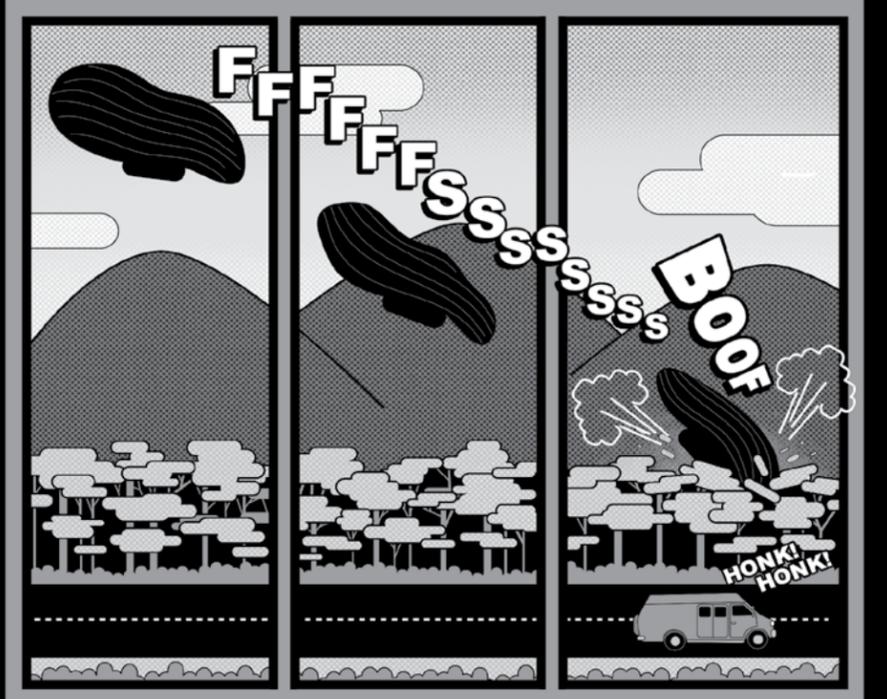


BLIMP LIFE

by steve steiner



SMASH CUT!





ANDREW WESLEY BENNETT



Steve Willis cartooned at Evergreen State College with the likes of Matt Groening, Lynda Barry and Charles Burns.



He was offered premier cartooning work with the likes of Esquire, Atlantic Monthly and Lears.



Steve turned them all down and took his own path.



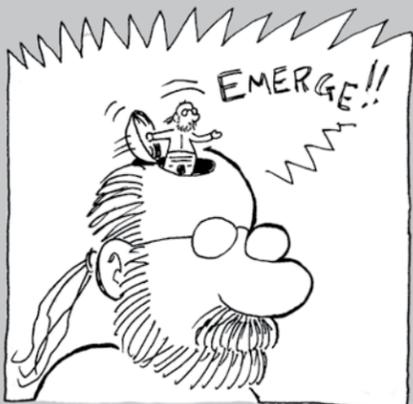
What a path it has been.

THAT "SIMPSONS" GUY EVEN REFERRED TO WILLIS AS A GENIUS.
TRUE STORY!



Morty the Dog

The Collected Cranium Frenzy by Steve Willis



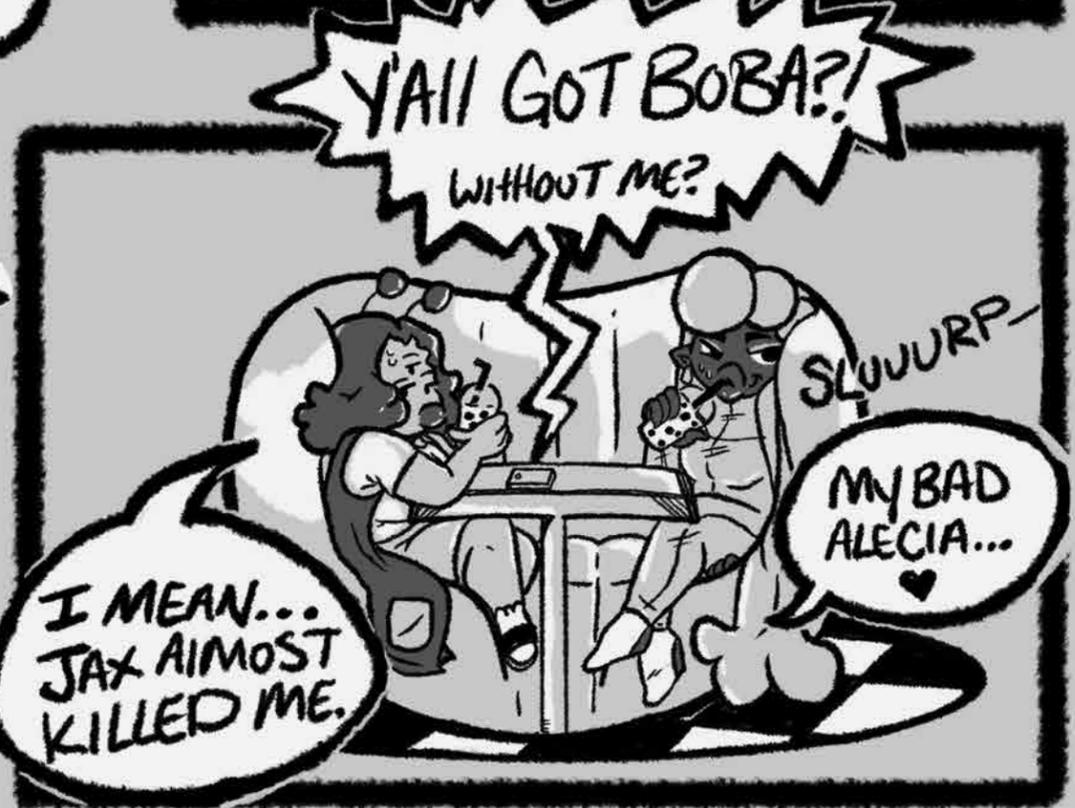
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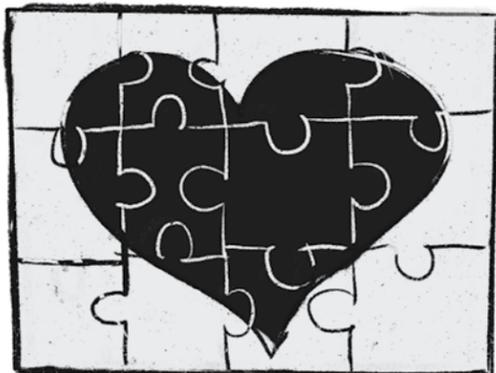
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DEDICATED TO MY DAD, ROBERT WRIGHT, WHO HAD A GREAT PUZZLE OF HIS OWN.

PUZZLE PIECES

BY: SHANNON WRIGHT @SHANPOOZI

LATELY, I'VE BEEN THINKING OF LIFE LIKE A JIGSAW PUZZLE.



I HAD THIS FANTASTICAL IDEA OF WHAT IT WOULD LOOK LIKE.



YOU KNOW, THE PUPPIES IN THE HOT AIR BALLOON BASKET.

INSTEAD, THE BOX IS ALL BEAT UP AND TATTERED.



SOME PIECES ARE MISSING ENTIRELY NOW.

IT'S DIFFICULT. PAST ME HAD THOUGHT MY FUTURE, & LIFE WOULD LOOK ONE WAY.



I DESPERATELY TRIED TO PLAN ACCORDINGLY TO GET THERE, TO BUILD THAT PICTURE.

IT FELT LIKE EVERYONE WAS ALWAYS SCRAMBLING IT ALL UP.



IT WAS PAINFUL, & I WANTED TO DO THE OPPOSITE.

A LOT OF MY PIECES BROKE ALONG THE WAY.



ESPECIALLY WHEN TRYING TO PUT SOMEONE ELSE'S PUZZLE TOGETHER MY WAY.

NO MATTER HOW MUCH I TRY TO MAKE THINGS LOOK LIKE THE BOX, THEY JUST DON'T.



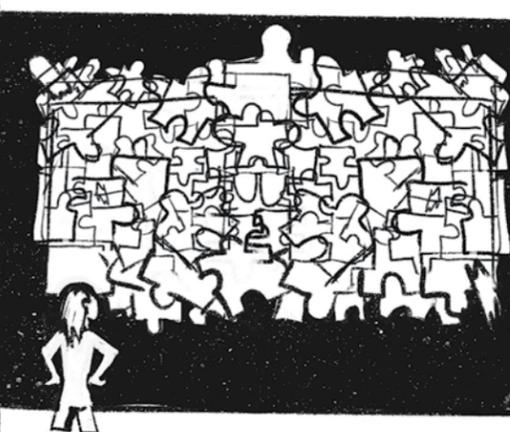
LIFE DOESN'T REALLY CARE- ABOUT HOW THINGS "SHOULD" FIT TOGETHER.

YOU CAN STILL PUT THE PIECES YOU'RE GIVEN TOGETHER TO MAKE SOMETHING GREAT.



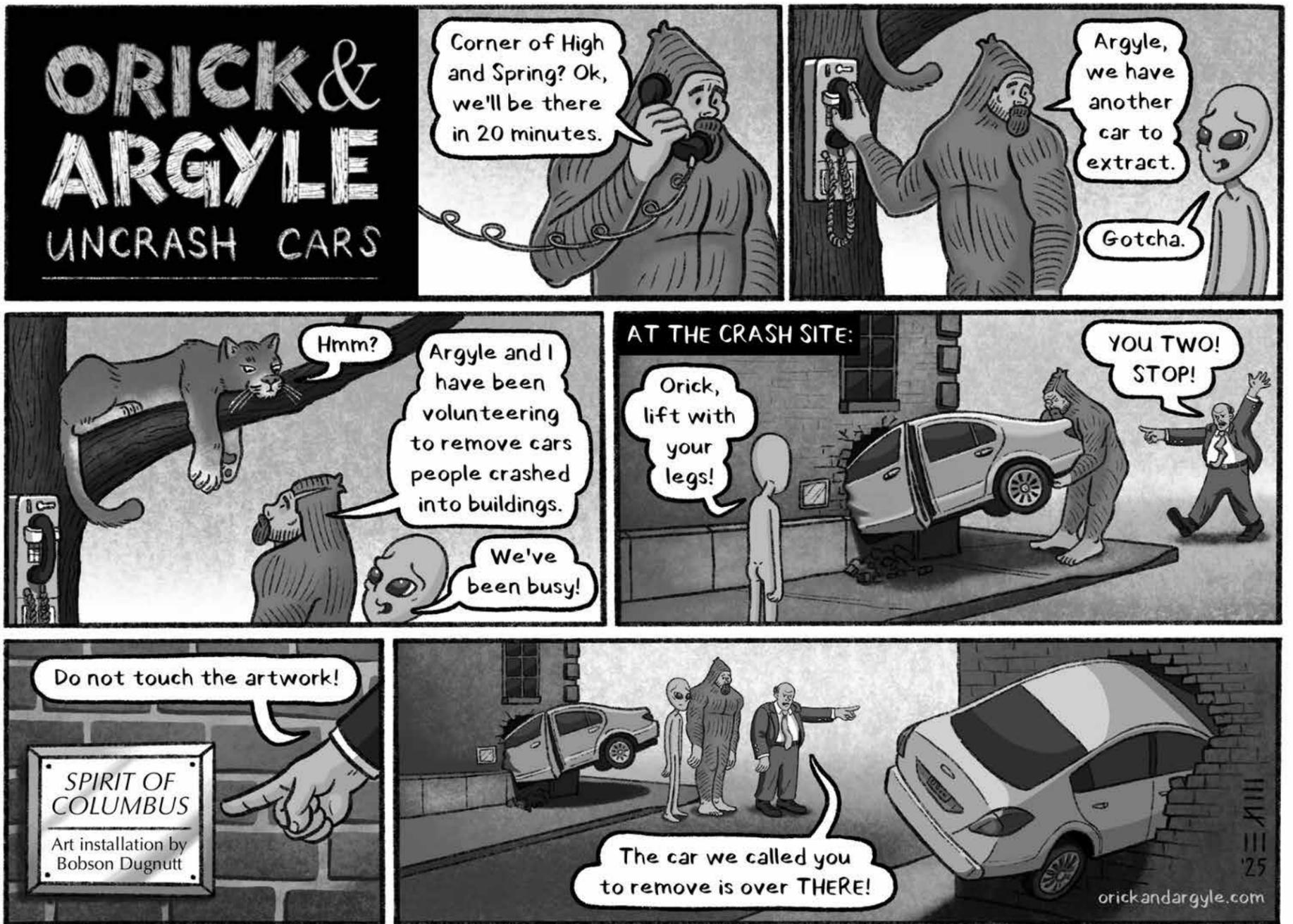
EVEN IF IT'S A LOT DIFFERENT THAN HOW YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD BE.

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-S.L.W



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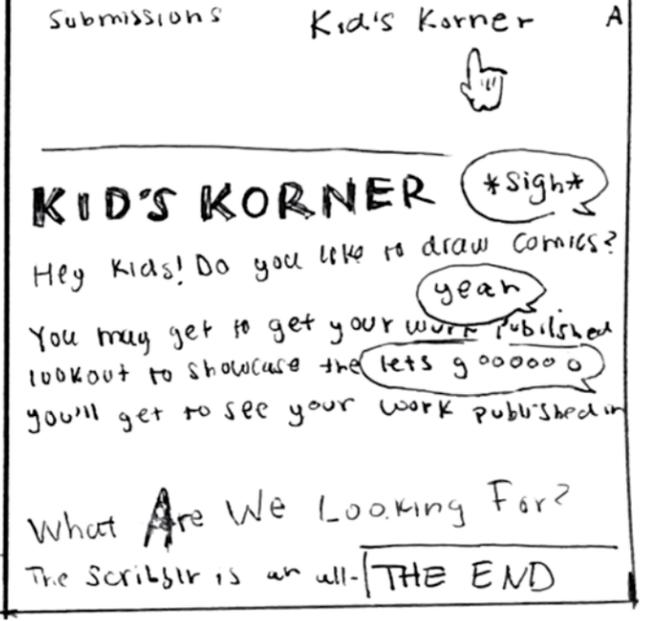
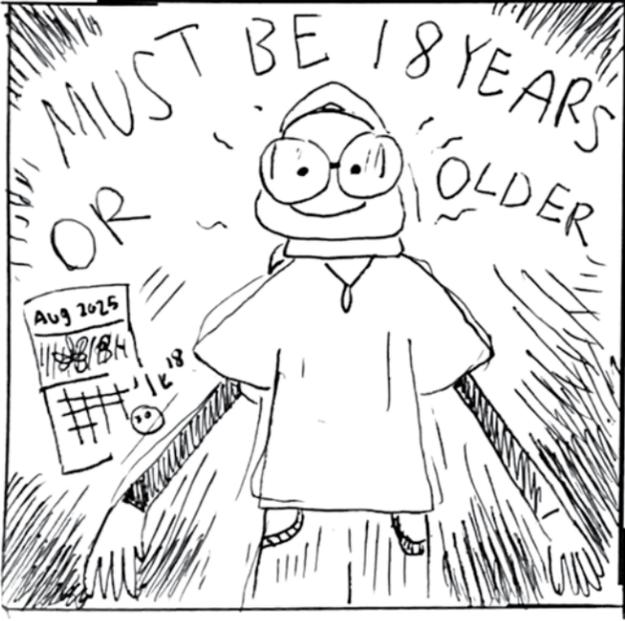
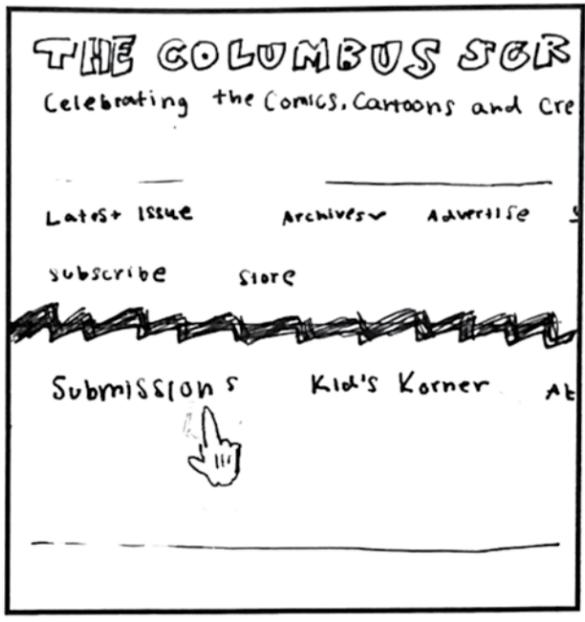
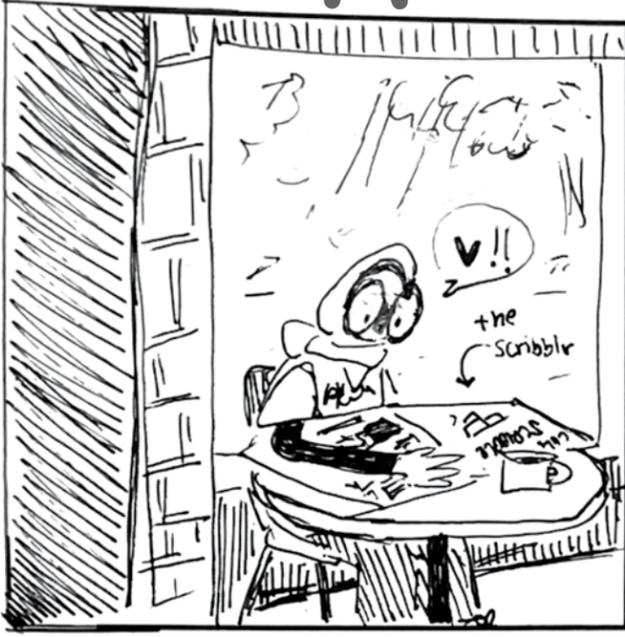
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PICKS FROM THE SHELF

Comic Reviews by Steve Steiner

BENEATH THE TREES WHERE NOBODY SEES

by Patrick Horvath

You could say "boring" is a way of life for the residents of Woodbrook. It's a community where everyone knows each other, or at least they think they do. Little do they realize there's a serial killer in their midst! Protagonist Samantha Strong blends in, acting friendly to her customers as the owner of the local hardware store, only to slip away into the neighboring city to feed her bloodlust by murdering unsuspecting victims. As part of her ritual, she cuts them up neatly and deposits their parts into paint cans for disposal, with none the wiser. Her whole horror act runs smoothly until a new, more flamboyant serial killer hits Woodbrook. Now, as panicked townsfolk begin to investigate this rash of murders, Sam's perverse crimes are also at risk of discovery. The only way to return to the status quo and resume her devious pastime unhindered is to stop the killer herself.

I thought this was a great story from Patrick Horvath, especially after I discovered through some quick research that *Beneath the Trees* is his first graphic novel. The immediate draw for me is Horvath's clever use of art style. As others have noted, it feels akin to classic children's book author/illustrator Richard Scarry, twisted with the introduction of cruel violence. The juxtaposition of these elements, the animal fairytale setting and psychopathic slaughter, ups the horror quotient in an exciting way. Horvath's narrative is clear and in true "who done it" fashion, throws in some curveballs to keep us guessing about the identity of who this other serial killer is. Where I think *Beneath the Trees* is lacking is in the character of Sam herself. It's no easy task to take a sociopath and



have an audience embrace them. When it comes to fictional serial killers, only someone like Dexter comes to mind. Dexter, like Sam, is a sadistic killer, yet he has a moral framework, a "code" as he calls it. He only kills the guilty who have escaped our justice system. This leads us, on some level, to root for Dexter when he feeds his murderous desires. Sam demonstrates no such ethic and is only concerned with her own selfish motivations. Thus, as the story progressed, I found myself not invested much in if Sam was caught, defusing the tension Horvath had built. Giving her an extra emotional incentive would have made Sam a more relatable character.

I do have one more small pet peeve with Horvath's work. In a world of anthropomorphic animal characters, he also has normal "regular" animals. For instance, there are anthropomorphic dogs and also four-legged pet dogs. I can understand why he would make this choice, as in the story, we are introduced to a cat character who runs the butcher shop. If there were no ordinary animals, it would ruin the whole premise of a serial killer, since these animals would kill each other as a way of life. There is one scene, though, towards the beginning, as Sam is burying her paint cans full of body parts in the woods, that a regular bear interrupts her. Confused, I failed to comprehend this, and at first thought the bear was also anthropomorphic like Sam, but had chosen to strip naked for a jaunt in the forest. Really threw me for a minute!

Overall, *Beneath the Trees* is still a recommendation, especially for horror lovers.



REID FLEMING, WORLD'S TOUGHEST MILKMAN

by David Boswell

In honor of our "50 Greatest Characters" issue, I decided to shine a spotlight on one of my favorites that didn't make the list. *Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman*, was another find from the longboxes of my local comic store while I was in high school. It was a time that I had outgrown most superhero comics and was looking at any and all independent work I could find. Brash, arrogant, prone to violence, and constantly drunk, Reid Fleming's rebellious demeanor was a revelation to my teenage self. Reid is no hero, but rather a force of nature. He's unafraid to tell a customer off, and one of the running gags is his propensity to destroy milk trucks at an alarming rate. Stylistically, it offered an alternative from the mainstream comics and inspired me to continue making my own primitive sketchbook comics.

The creation of Canadian cartoonist David Boswell, Reid first saw print as a newspaper comic strip in the late 1970s, later to be sporadically published in comic book form throughout the 1980s and '90s. Since then, it seems the World's Toughest Milkman has retired. According to Boswell's Wikipedia entry, a Reid Fleming script was optioned by a movie studio, though it never saw production. As a fan, that's the way I'd prefer it. I can't imagine any actor encompassing his persona.

While very few issues were published, they're worth picking up if you come across them in the wild. Or you can get digital copies rather cheaply at reidfleming.com. The site is at least worth a visit to bask in the glow of early 2000s web design.



SOLDIER'S HEART

by Carol Tyler

Since she currently has an exhibit up at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum, I had renowned cartoonist Carol Tyler on my mind. It felt like it was time to revisit perhaps her best-known book, *Soldier's Heart*. A thick tome of over 350 pages, it's a collection of her previously serialized comic, *You'll Never Know*, that was originally published between 2009-2012. While the main thrust of the story is Carol seeking to find out just what her father experienced as a veteran of World War II, she expands the narrative into a sprawling American epic that spans three generations and nearly 100 years.

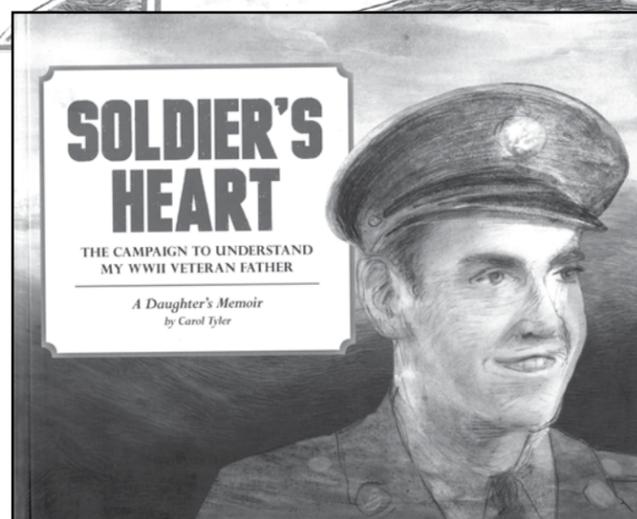
Recently separated from her husband, Carol gets a fresh start by moving across the country from Cincinnati, Ohio, with her teenage daughter in tow. Beyond her own personal problems, Carol must also deal with her aging parents, who live one state over in Indiana. Her mother, Hannah (affectionately known as "Red") is no longer able to tend the house as she used to since having a stroke, leaving her father Chuck often to his own devices. Like many veterans of the era, cantankerous Chuck is tight-lipped about his experiences. Slowly, he gives in to his daughter's prodding, revealing bit by bit his time serving in the European Theater. The book retraces his steps from his birthplace of Chicago to Camp Forrest, Tennessee, across the Atlantic to North Africa, Italy, and France, and then back again.

Along the way, as she pieces together her father's story, Carol touches on her own childhood memories, deals with being a single parent, and reconnects with her estranged husband, fellow cartoonist Justin Green. She weaves in decades of family history, with tales both humorous and gut-wrenching. My favorite of these is the account of how her parents fell in love and married. It was 1941, and she was a clerk and head of personnel at Camp Forrest. He was a wisecracking sergeant, who once nabbed her typewriter "under orders." After one magical evening back in Chicago, they wed before he was shipped to war. This and many of the other anecdotes are told as if you're perusing photographs in an album, a storytelling device I particularly enjoyed.

As the story goes on, Carol begins looking through government archives for any of Chuck's military records with little luck. After another dead end while in Washington D.C., the two visit the National World War II Memorial. This proves to be Chuck's emotional climax. *Soldier's heart* was a term commonly used for a combination of conditions that afflicted those who fought in the American Civil War. Today, we call it post-traumatic stress disorder. Soaking in the monument, Chuck's long-repressed soldier's heart comes to the fore.

Tyler displays a deft hand with her cartooning, avoiding any cynicism that is so often present in autobio comics. While the dynamic with her father can be strained, she doesn't seek to judge or confront him, just understand. What really makes me connect with *Soldier's Heart*, I think, is that I, too, had a veteran in my family that I wish I knew more about. In my case, it was my grandfather who served in the Korean War. Perhaps if I had read *Soldier's Heart* sooner, I would have pushed harder to learn more about what those old photos meant.

Soldier's Heart is a must-read, having garnered Tyler a bevy of accolades, and I urge you to check it out if you haven't already. Her exhibit *Write It Down, Draw It Out* is on display through November 9th and is free to the public.





CENTRAL OHIO WINS BIG AT 2025 EISNER AWARDS

Central Ohio had a strong showing at this year's Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards, held during San Diego Comic-Con International. Often described as the comic industry's equivalent to the Oscars, the Eisners recognize excellence in comics and graphic storytelling.

Local winners included cartoonist Jeff Smith, who won Best Archival Collection/Project—Strips for *Thorn: The Complete Proto-BONE Strips 1982–1986, and Other Early Drawings* (Cartoon Books), and Caitlin McGurk (pictured above), curator at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum, who received Best Comics-Related Book for *Tell Me a*

Story Where the Bad Girl Wins: The Life and Art of Barbara Shermund (Fantagraphics).

Margaret Flinn, a professor at Ohio State University, won Best Academic/Scholarly Work as editor of *Drawing (in) the Feminine: Bande Dessinée and Women* (OSU Press).

Additionally, Lucy Shelton Caswell, founder of the Billy Ireland, was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame and Columbus illustrator Rafael Rosado received the Dwayne McDuffie Award for Diversity in Comics for *Call Me Iggy*.

A huge congratulations to all! These honors highlight Central Ohio's growing impact on the national comics scene.



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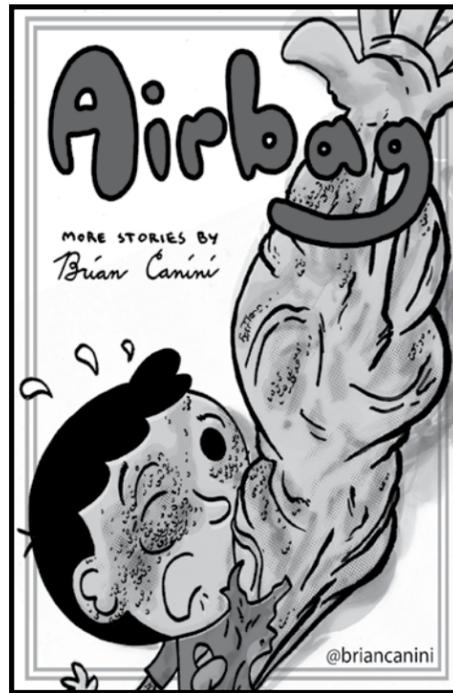
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JACK WALLACE
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COMICS COVERING CAVAN

By Jack Wallace

On Friday the 21st, I had forty fresh copies of issue 16 of the *Columbus Scribbler* tucked under my arm when I entered Cavan Irish Pub. Cavan is a gay Irish pub on the south end of Columbus, a bar my wife and I have visited for years. It started when we lived on South High, just a few doors down. Years passed, and we'd made many friends, so we became regulars. I plopped down at the bar with my papers and ordered a drink from the lovely bartender and friend, Megan.

As people walked in throughout the evening, they were greeted with a copy of the *Scribbler*. Marilyn saw me first. Marilyn had been the subject of the last "Meet the People," where I interviewed her and scripted an abridged version of her life into a nine-panel comic script drawn by Brent Bowman and lettered by Chris Allen. Marilyn has lived a storied life and was willing to share it with us. We met at Cavan only weeks before to do the interview.

Sarah came in with her boyfriend, Matt. Sarah is an art teacher working on her dissertation for her Master's Degree. We had been out of a kid's comic for two issues, and when I asked Sarah if she knew anyone, she jumped at the opportunity. A month later, she texted me a photo of a comic drawn by her 12-year-old student.

Steve pulled up a seat. His grandfather had been a cartoonist for the *Erie Railroad Magazine*. Our center spread included a brief history about his grandfather and featured comics he had made in the 1920s.

Everyone got a few copies to give to their friends and family. Steve said he would put a copy in a time capsule for a niece to learn about her great-grandfather.

As the bar filled up, people would pick up a copy and start to peruse the issue. Often, running the *Scribbler*, we distribute the copies, and rarely get to watch people consume the product myself, my partners, and the comics community spend months making.

A charming man named P.K. asked me who the artist of the "Meet the People" was, and I told him it was a local artist named Brent Bowman. He said it was gorgeous work.

As I went out to the smoking patio, people were lounging. Some were looking through the issue and asking Marilyn questions about her life. One person was looking at the cover with the work of Barbara Shermund and started asking each of us which character represented us. "You know it's a great piece of work because we're all talking about it," I remember someone saying.

As the night closed, I went to the bathroom, and a copy of the latest issue was sitting on top of the toilet tank. Something inside me sparked with joy. It was the same feeling that ran through me when we found a copy of the *Scribbler* in the trash

can next to a pair of sneakers right after the Doo Dah Parade. A feeling of pride that something we were all part of was consumed and now lies discarded, like the good times we all had. It had been through its life cycle.

It was not the first time I've felt proud to be part of the *Scribbler*. Every time an artist told us that the first time they'd been published was in the *Scribbler*. Or when you drop into a hip place and people clear a space for the paper, excited for the delivery.

That night, the *Scribbler* did everything we created it to do. It got people talking about comics. It got people familiar with local artists. It shared the lives of community members. A heartfelt thank you to the people of Cavan for sharing their stories with us. Another thank you to all of you who have supported everything we've tried to do, and I hope there are hundreds of other small times that we don't get to see where the *Scribbler* has been an enjoyable part of your day.



◀ **Stephen Meininger presents the centerpiece of Issue 16, reflecting the work of Charles Dante Smith, a cartoonist for the *Erie Railroad Magazine* and Stephen's great-grandfather.**

Marilyn Coleman holding up the Meet the People section of Issue 16, containing 9 panels of her life from her early days in Los Angeles to her retirement here in Columbus. ▶



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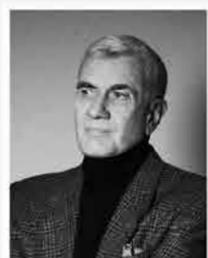
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-The Art and Flair of Mary Blair
-Two Guys Named Joe



JOHN MUSKER
-I'm Hip
-The Little Mermaid
-Moana
-Treasure Planet



KATIE COOK
-Nothing Special
-Gronk: A Monster's Story



KAYLA E
-Precious Rubbish
-They Never Loved You!



LONNIE MILLSAP
-My Nib is Cold!
-My Mother Was Human!



LUCY KNISLEY
-Sugar Shack
-Relish
-Something New



MICHEL FIFFE
-Copra
-Bloodstrike: Brutalists
-Creating Copra



MIMI POND
-Over Easy
-The Customer is Always Wrong
-Do Admit



RAUL THE THIRD
-Vamos! Series
-Stuntboy Series
-El Toro and Friends



RAY BILLINGSLEY
Curtis



MATT MADDEN
-99 Ways to Tell a Story
-Ex Libris



TONY MOORE
-The Walking Dead
-Venom
-Battle Pope



PATRICK LAY
-Death Strikes
-Multi
-Screaming Mimi Kids

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KEITA KATSUSHIKA
Higashi Tokyo
MachiMachi



MARCO KOHINATA
-My Lost Things
-Light
-What I Want to find is light



LOUI
-Red Flower
-Molly and Lukas



GIGI MURAKAMI
-Resenter
-The Soul Stealer
-Peep the Apocalypse
-Wash and Go



DEB AOKI
-Bento Box
-Mangasplaining

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