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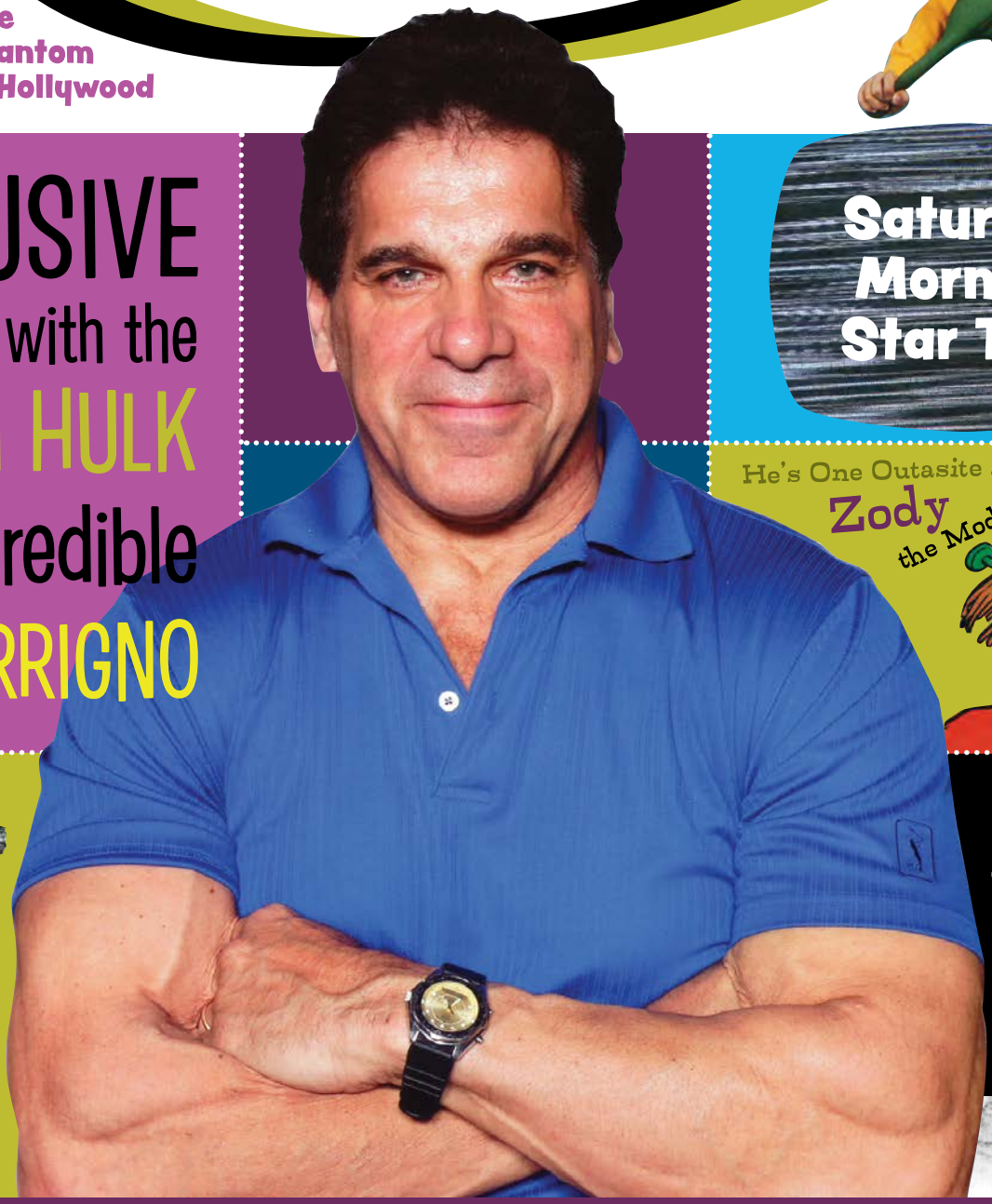
The Phantom in Hollywood

Move over, Stretch Armstrong — it's Elastic Hulk!

EXCLUSIVE Interview with the Original HULK The Incredible LOU FERRIGNO



Saturday Morning Star Trek

He's One Outasite Automaton!

Zody the Mod Rob

Visit Mayberry... and Meet Thelma Lou

How I Met the WOLF MAN Lon Chaney, Jr.

*Do You Dare Enter...*The Super Collector's House of Fun Stuff?

Featuring **Martin Pasko • Andy Mangels • Ernest Farino • and the Oddball World of Scott Shaw!**

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RETRO FAN

THE CRAZY COOL CULTURE WE GREW UP WITH

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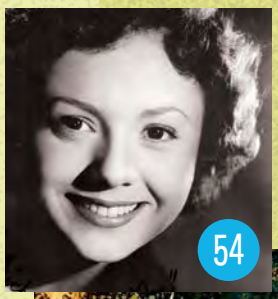

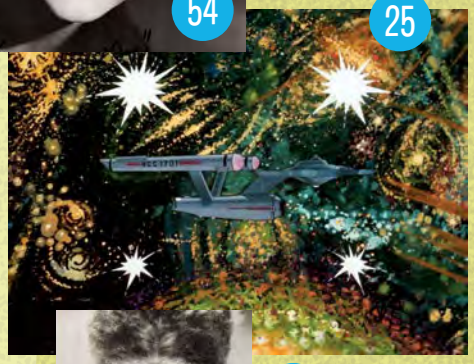

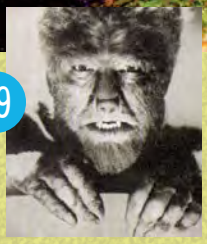

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RETROTORIAL

by Michael Eury

Remember when Saturday morning television was our domain and ours alone? When our tattoos came from bubble gum packs, our Slurpees came in superhero cups, and our TV heroes taught us to be nice to each other?

Those were the happy days of the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties—and that is the era of *RetroFan* magazine, where we celebrate the Crazy, Cool Culture We Grew Up With!

RetroFan is the newest addition to TwoMorrows Publishing's lauded line of periodicals and books. This quarterly magazine will explore pop-culture history through insightful, nostalgic, and fun articles and interviews that provide the stories behind the stories of the stuff that made our childhoods so special.

We're honored to feature four regular columnists whose contributions will appear in every issue:

- **MARTIN PASKO** (*Martin Pasko's Pesky Perspective*)
- **ANDY MANGELS** (*Andy Mangels' Retro Saturday Morning*)
- **ERNEST FARINO** (*Ernest Farino's Retro Fantasmagoria*)
- **SCOTT SHAW!** (*The Oddball World of Scott Shaw!*)

Most of you are aware of their accomplishments, which include Emmy® Awards, bestselling books, and Hollywood credits, but if not, they'll introduce themselves in this issue.

Other features in the magazine include celebrity interviews, Retro Travel, Retro Toys, Retro Collectibles, and RetroFad segments, plus a Super Collector feature where a guest collector takes us on a private tour of his or her stash of stuff! These departments will be produced by guest contributors known for their expertise in and enthusiasm for their subject matter.

But wait... there's more! Behind the scenes of each issue are:

- **SCOTT SAAVEDRA** (designer) Scott is a noted comic-book creator (*It's Science with Dr. Radium, Chip 'n' Dale Rescue Rangers*), comics historian (*Comic Book Heaven*), graphic designer, writer, illustrator, and storyboard artist. In 2017 he collaborated with *RetroFan*'s editor as the book designer of *Hero-A-Go-Go: Campy Comic Books, Crimefighters, and Culture of the Swinging Sixties*. He's also producing the *ReJECTED* department, fantasy *RetroFan* covers that will bust your gut each issue.

- **MICHAEL EURY** (editor and contributing writer) I'm the editor-in-chief of TwoMorrows' Eisner Award-nominated, long-running *BACK ISSUE* magazine and the author of over a dozen pop-culture and regional-history books including *Hero-A-Go-Go* and *Captain Action: The Original Super-Hero Action Figure*. A former editor for Comico the Comic Company, DC Comics, and Dark Horse Comics, as a writer my clients have included DC, Marvel, Dark Horse, Nike, Toys R Us, *Cracked* Magazine, and the Microsoft Network.

That's the most impressive team assembled since Jim Phelps last rifled through his IMF dossiers, if I may say so myself. Or since the Trouble Alert bleated its clarion call throughout the cavernous Hall of Justice. We're dedicated to packing each page of *RetroFan* with more info, trivia, and enjoyment than you'll find in any other mag.

One note about our target demographic: While *RetroFan* will mainly spotlight pop culture of the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties, we won't be anchored exclusively to those decades. In this issue, for example, you'll read about the *Phantom* movie serial from the Forties and monster movies of the Forties and Fifties—but let's not forget that lots of pre-Sixties cinema was the stuff we grew up on, in reruns, in weekly matinees on our local television stations.

Thanks for joining us for our premiere issue—and be sure to tell your friends about *RetroFan*!

Coming soon: *RetroFanmail*, our letters column! We'd love your feedback on this issue. Write to ye ed at *euryman@gmail.com*.

***RetroFan* editor Michael Eury interviews Lou Ferrigno at the Fayetteville Comic Con, October 2017.** Rose Rummel-Eury.

RETRO FAN

www.RetroFan.org

EDITOR
Michael Eury

PUBLISHER
John Morrow

CONTRIBUTORS
John Cimino
Michael Eury
Ernest Farino
Andy Mangels
Martin Pasko
Scott Saavedra
Scott Shaw!
Tom Stewart

DESIGNER
Scott Saavedra

PROOFREADER
John Morrow

SPECIAL THANKS
The Andy Griffith Museum
Kenyettta Carter
Michael Chaudhuri
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Terry Collins
Jay Duncan
Heather Elliott
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Aaron Harvey
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Lou Ferrigno
Betty Lynn

RETRO INTERVIEW

The HULK Speaks!

An Interview with Lou Ferrigno

by Michael Eury

Hulk TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.
TV Hulk © Universal Studios.

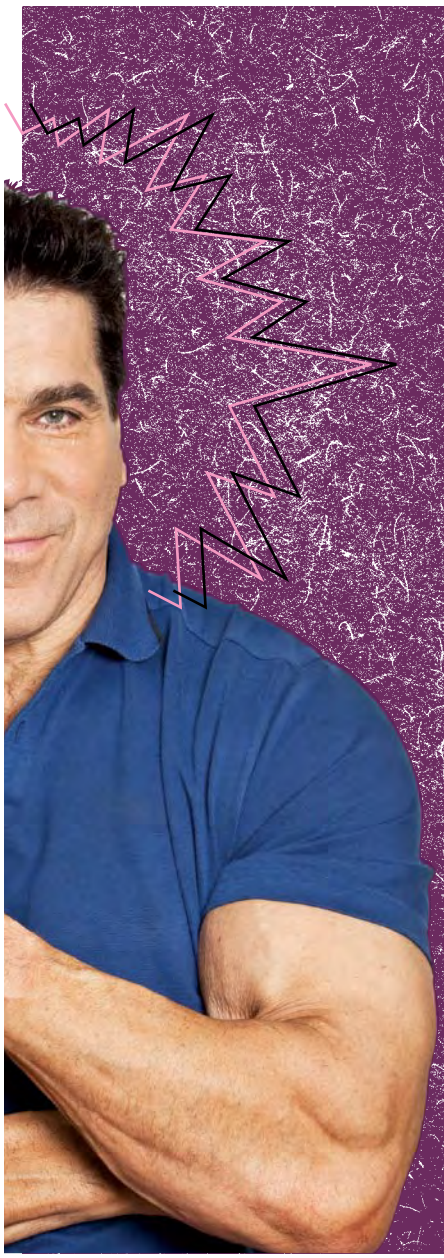
"Who's your favorite Hulk?" may be a fair question to ask of a fan of Marvel Studios' movies, but for us RetroFans, there's only one answer: Lou Ferrigno.

Giant in both muscle and spirit, the Brooklyn-born Louis "Lou" Ferrigno took a childhood disability—a profound hearing loss—and turned it into a catalyst to become a bodybuilder, partially in response to his fascination with muscle-bound heroes including screen Hercules Steve Reeves and comic books' own Incredible Hulk. After graduating high school he earned an International Federation of BodyBuilding & Fitness (IFBB) Mr. America title, followed by two consecutive IFBB Mr. Universe titles.

Before he flexed his way into the popular culture as Marvel Comics' "creature driven by rage," Ferrigno caught the attention of moviegoers as the ambitious competitor of Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Pumping Iron*, a 1977 documentary directed by George Butler and Robert Fiore that spotlighted the 1975 Mr. Universe and Mr. Olympia bodybuilding competitions. Soon he was cast to replace the quickly ousted Richard Kiel (best known as the toothy Bond movie menace Jaws) as the mean, green alter ego of Bill Bixby's Dr. David Bruce Banner on television's popular drama *The Incredible Hulk*, which ran on CBS for five seasons from 1977–1982.

From that point on, Ferrigno has been no stranger to audiences. He's starred as mighty man-gods in the movies *Hercules* (1983), *The Adventures of Hercules* (1985), and *Sinbad of the Seven Seas* (1989), co-starred in television series, and even shown a flair for comedy, playing himself as a semi-regular (along with his wife Carla) on TV's *The King of Queens* and in the 2009 buddy comedy *I Love You, Man*. To date he's appeared in over 40 films in a variety of roles.

Today, Lou heads "The First Family of Bodybuilding" as a bodybuilding consultant and private trainer, joined by his adult children (*www.louferrigno.com*). He's also an in-demand motivational speaker, frequently appearing at fitness events and comic-cons. And he's still a part-time crimefighter—in real life—occasionally volunteering as a sheriff's deputy in San Luis Obispo County in southern California.



Lou Ferrigno first caught the eye of audiences as the impressive young bodybuilder in George Butler's 1977 docu-drama *Pumping Iron*. Lobby card from the Italian version of the film, courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).
Pumping Iron © 1977 White Mountain Films.

Despite his remarkably versatile résumé, Lou Ferrigno remains best known as the Incredible Hulk, a role he has continued to play in recent years as a voice actor. I got to meet Lou in person on Sunday, October 22, 2017, at the Fayetteville (North Carolina) Comic Con, where I interviewed him on stage before a boisterous crowd of fans. What follows is an edited transcription of that panel.

RetroFan: Lou, we share something in common other than our giant biceps [*both Lou and Michael flex for audience, to laughter and applause*]. We both have a hearing loss. I understand that was a motivating factor in your life. Could you tell us about that?
Lou Ferrigno: Yeah, by the age of three, I had an ear infection and had lost about 75% of my base hearing, and I was very introverted as a child and had a speech impediment. So, as a kid, I was bullied a lot. They called me "deaf Louie," "deaf kid." Children do not have the psychological maturity to defend themselves, so I became obsessed with reading comic books like *The Hulk* because I wanted to escape the pain. The more I read about it, the more I became obsessed with the power of the heroes, and that made me discover bodybuilding. Working out—that was my platform to survive, and it changed my whole life. I had a lot of hardships like learning how to speak properly, and was ridiculed a lot. Some 50 years ago I felt like a freak, but I never, *ever* felt sorry for myself.

[*to audience*] I say, everybody in this room is handicapped in one way or another, but you have to go about being the best you can be. Sometimes you'll have naysayers saying, "You can't, you can't, you can't." Every dream I've had, I've achieved because of my confidence and my drive. I'm saying to you, if you have a passion about something, embrace it, because if you have passion, you're unbeatable, you're unstoppable. [*applause*]

RF: Great advice! When did you start weight training?
LF: I started at the age of 12 or 13. It's funny, I didn't have weights. I couldn't afford them. So I would go to the junkyard and get cement pails—like, six cement pails. I'd filled some halfway with cement and some all the way and put in a broomstick. [*demonstrates curls for audience*] The first time I stood up and started to do a curl, I thought, "This feels *good*." Because I was able to work out with makeshift barbells, I did something for the first time in my life that I felt good about. People laughed about me, because back in those days, nobody had ever heard about weight training. My father would tell people, "My son works out with weights"; "he's doing weight training, he doesn't talk about school"; or, "he's obsessed with weights." That really changed my life, because it connected my mind and my body.

RF: Who were your comic-book heroes when you were a kid?
LF: I read *Superman* comics and *The Hulk* comics. You know, it's funny, I traded my comic books as a kid for bodybuilding magazines. If I'd stayed with collecting comics, I would have made more money than bodybuilding, ten times over! [*laughter*]

RF: So, Steve Reeves was one of your childhood heroes?
LF: Yes, Steve Reeves was Hercules and I went to the movies when I was a kid. I saw him pulling two gigantic pillars, and that changed my life. It was the first time I had seen a bodybuilder on screen. He was about 31 years old and had a beautiful woman whose life he saved. In those days, I couldn't talk to girls and I always wanted a girlfriend. To see Reeves was the beginning of *my* era.

RF: When did you win your first bodybuilding competition?
LF: I decided to compete for the first time in the Open Mr. New Jersey Hercules. I came in 23rd place! I remember being on stage and people were taking pictures, with flash bulbs going off. My friends, they laughed at me, but I said to myself, "This is my path."

This is funny, but I went home to my father and said, "I'll never do worse than third place again," and from that point on, I started to win all the major competitions. But you have to understand, I trained very, very hard, harder than the average person, because to be the world champion, you'll have a lot of pain. I built my body. At first I was skinny—I was about 220 pounds at 19 and competed on and off for about 27 years.

RF: The first time I ever saw you was in the *Pumping Iron* documentary.
LF: [*mimicking Arnold Schwarzenegger*] With your favorite governor? Ahnald Schwarzenaga. [*laughter*]

[*normal voice*] Yes, we did *Pumping Iron*,

The Legends and Lore of the Incredible Hulk, Stretch Armstrong, and the Mego Elastic Superheroes

By John "The Mego Stretch Hulk" Cimino

Stealing An Idea for Survival

In 1979, toy manufacturer Mego Corporation was enjoying its 25th anniversary. But despite reaching such a milestone, the time for celebrating was not on the company's radar.

Earlier, in 1978, *Star Wars* toys came along and dominated the entire industry like never before. It was bad enough that Mego passed on the *Star Wars* license in 1976, because now, along with every other toy company, it was playing catch-up.

But it went a little further for Mego. Besides making some bad business decisions, they were in major debt due to a new state-of-the-art factory that had a bunch of internal problems, and sales were rapidly declining. The success that Mego once had in the earlier part of the decade was becoming a thing of the past. Mego was now in desperate need of a new toy idea to help get their company back on track.

For the last three years competitor Kenner, which had the *Star Wars* toy license, was also doing well with another toy called Stretch Armstrong. Stretch Armstrong was a 12-inch, corn-syrup-filled latex figure that could stretch into many different positions. By 1979, the toy proved to be so popular that Kenner introduced a variety of new figures into the line including the Stretch Monster and Stretch X-Ray. All the Stretch Armstrong figures remained unchallenged on the toy shelves because no other toy did what they did. Mego recognized this and wanted to do something similar. Having obtained the licenses for the Marvel Comics and DC Comics characters since 1972 and ruling the superhero toy market with its 8-inch "World's Greatest Super-Heroes" action-figure line,

Mego's Elastic Hulk figure. Hulk product photos in this article courtesy of John Cimino.
Incredible Hulk TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Mego yanked a good idea away from Kenner—Stretch Armstrong!
Stretch Armstrong © Hasbro.

Front and back views of the salesman's prototype for Elastic Hulk, in the white box.

Incredible Hulk TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Mego knew it could challenge Stretch Armstrong's market share with more well-known properties possessing a stretching gimmick. I mean, what kid wouldn't want a stretching Superman or Batman figure, even though stretching had nothing to do with their superpowers? I know *I* would!

With Mego gaining "insider information" (remember those two words because you'll see them again before this article is through) on how to make these figures, the company went about creating a "stretch" toy line of its own. Basically, all Mego did was substitute the wording of "elastic" for "stretch" on the product box, designed a similar type of latex figure (but made it about an inch taller), and used world famous comic-book superheroes instead of generic characters. Thus, in April of 1979, Mego introduced the "Elastic Super Heroes" toy line to the world. Spider-Man, Superman, Batman, the Incredible Hulk, and Plastic Man (the first-ever toy of the character, which came along later that year) became new, chunky, corn-syrup-filled latex super-figures—and for the youngsters, elastic versions of Mickey Mouse, Casper the Friendly Ghost, and Donald Duck were added in the spring of 1980. Each figure was placed in a Styrofoam "coffin" with a clear plastic cover and put in a white window box that fully displayed it, so every kid walking down the toy aisle could see that there was a new stretch toy in town.

Besides showcasing the Elastic line in toy catalogs, Mego spared no expense in promoting them (especially during the Christmas season). There were full-page ads in every DC and Marvel comic book that came out in December 1979, an ad in the *Heroes World Catalog* #2 that was released during that fall, and ads in various magazines, newspapers, and department store catalogs like Sears, JC Penney, and Montgomery Ward. There were also a total of four TV commercials produced for Mego's Elastic figures: three included the superheroes while one showcased the cartoon characters.

The Success of *The Incredible Hulk*

The superhero characters Mego used for its Elastic line were immensely popular at the time (yes, even Plastic Man, who had a cartoon on Saturday mornings back then), especially the Hulk. The character gained a meteoric rise in worldwide fame from 1977–1982, with the highly successful live-action TV series *The Incredible Hulk* starring Bill Bixby, Lou Ferrigno, and Jack Colvin. The show was about Dr. David Banner (played by Bixby), a widowed physician and scientist, who is presumed dead. He travels across America and finds himself in positions where he helps others in need despite his terrible secret… that in times of extreme anger or stress, he transforms into a huge, incredibly strong green creature that has been dubbed "the Hulk" (played by Ferrigno). In his travels, Banner earns money by working temporary jobs while searching for a way to either control or cure his condition. All the while, he is obsessively pursued by a tabloid newspaper reporter named Jack McGee (played by Colvin) from the *National Register*. Jack is convinced that the Hulk is a deadly menace whose exposure will enhance his career. It was a perfect formula that kept families tuning in on Friday nights and little boys running around their neighborhoods screaming like the Hulk with nothing on but ripped "toughskin" jeans

Mego's Elastic Hulk in front (opened, with instructions), back, and side box views.

Incredible Hulk TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

the Ghost Who Stumbles

The Phantom Phollies of Philmland

by Martin Pasko

Welcome to the first installment of what is planned as a regular feature in each issue of *RetroFan*. It will be a quarterly tour of the outrageously memorable; the *kitschy* and the campy in the fantasy-oriented (and usually comics-based) film and television we all devoured in the Sixties, Seventies, Eighties, and Nineties, whether straight-facedly or not. Your guide on this decidedly subjective, highly opinionated trip down that memory lane haunted by our most hilarious screen nightmares is yours truly, Martin "Pesky" Pasko.

I got my start in the comics business by becoming known for my letters of comment that were published in the books. (You might recall that comic books had letter columns from c. 1958 to c. 1998.) My comments were more often than not what DC Comics' Julius Schwartz, who was the editor who most frequently ran my "LoCs," called "brickbats rather than bouquets." He later told me he was always relieved to see a letter from me: he needed my sourness to cut the saccharin of the other, more adoring comments. So much so that if I actually liked something, he wouldn't run my letter. I had been typecast. Julie dubbed me "Pesky Pasko," and the nickname stuck.

I've reached that point in life where I prefer to try being mellower, perhaps even *praise* something for a change, or at least be temperate rather than scathingly critical. Nevertheless, for this column, I intend to don ol' Pesky's comical-curmudgeon cape once more, in a quest to provide you with amusement and entertainment. This, as well as a raft of useless facts that are less important to you than knowing how wide Kim Kardashian's hips currently are, and which we'd much prefer to give you with hyperlinks; besides, nobody's figured out how to do that on paper yet. Of course, with the long lead-times *RetroFan* works on, by the time you read this, somebody probably will have.

Herewith, then, the first in a series of (very sharp) tongue-in-(very large) cheek columns that will attempt to prove that, as the old saying goes, "no stalgia is good stalgia," and that reminiscence can sometimes comically traumatize as well as idealize. Along the way, I'll be interpolating anecdotes of personal experiences with some of my subjects, fictional or flesh-and-blood. (In this first outing, however, I'll stipulate that I've had no experience with writing

The Ghost Who Walks' best cinematic adaptation—1996's *The Phantom*, from Paramount Pictures—failed to connect with moviegoers. Poster courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions.

Phantom's tendency to work by night, and the strip's extensive use of skull imagery, both in the Phantom's costume and in the decor of his lair, the Skull Cave, made him what Bill Finger would later call, in describing Batman, a "creature of the night—dark, terrifying" who would be feared by criminals who, as we all know, are a cowardly and superstitious lot.

Aside from his home base being a cave, Falk's creation anticipated Batman in many other ways. For example, Falk's costume design gives the Phantom high boots and a wide belt which doubles as a holster, not unlike the utility belt, which was, in turn, stolen from *Doc Savage*. And, in Falk's original concept, the Phantom was secretly a rich playboy and prominent New York socialite.

But, while fleshing out the concept at King Features' invitation, Falk felt that what he was developing was too derivative of too many inspirations from his childhood. For example, in interviews late in life, he freely admitted he was conscious of the similarities to Tarzan, and acknowledged the costumes worn by the Robin Hoods of the movies as the source of his character's distinctive garb. So, at the last minute, he tried to freshen the concept by shifting the locale to a jungle, a setting supposedly mysterious and uncharted. From there, Falk evolved the elaborate backstory of the multiple Walker generations fueling the myth of immortality, and the legend of *The Phantom* was born.

So maybe the better way to "shorthand" *The Phantom* is "*Batman* in the jungle." But if the two properties' basic appeal is essentially the same, why has Batman, unlike the Phantom, had widespread and enduring success in media other than comics—indeed, becoming a media craze at least twice? Perhaps the jungle element played a bigger role in why their "career paths" did not parallel each other than might be apparent. On the other hand, that's counter-intuitive considering the enduring popularity in film and television of such characters as (there's that name again) Tarzan.

In the Fifties, while *Jungle Jim* and *Superman* were hits on TV, and in the late Sixties, as *Batman* was causing that first national craze, the Phantom never had a live-action TV series of his own. (Although the 1943 serial did show up on TV during the late-Sixties nostalgia fad.) In fact, to date the Phantom's live-action TV activity has been limited to failed pilots and miniseries. As we'll soon see, however, it may have been King Features' ill-advised attempts to produce many of these shows themselves that have thus far stymied the Phantom's chances for small-screen stardom.

No, jungle fever doesn't have you seeing double! Columbia followed *The Phantom* with its *Captain Africa* knock-off serial of 1955. Posters courtesy of Heritage.

Star Trek
The Animated Series

by Andy Mangels

Boldly going—to Saturday mornings! Licensed cel sold through *Starlog* of the *Star Trek* cartoon's title, courtesy of Heritage Auctions.
Star Trek © CBS Studios Inc.

Welcome to *Andy Mangels' Retro Saturday Morning*. Since 1989, I have been writing columns for magazines in the US and foreign countries, all examining the intersection of comic books and Hollywood, whether animation or live action. *Andy Mangels Backstage*, *Andy Mangels' Reel Marvel*, *Andy Mangels' Hollywood Heroes*, *Andy Mangels Behind the Camera*... nearly three decades of reporting on animation and live-action—in addition to writing many books and producing around 40 DVD sets—and I'm still enthusiastic. Which leads to this new column for *RetroFan*, which will examine shows that thrilled us from yesteryear, exciting our imaginations and capturing our memories. Grab some milk and cereal, sit cross-legged leaning against the couch, and dig in to *Retro Saturday Morning*!

The Animated Frontier

No matter how knowledgeable about *Star Trek* or television animation one is, chances are that the origins of *Star Trek: The Animated Series* occurred much earlier than most fans realize. Founded in the early 1960s by Lou Scheimer, Norm Prescott, and Hal Sutherland, Filmation Studios was a scrappy young company that was changing the face of the nascent Saturday morning culture only a few years after they had broken out of studio animation jobs and formed their own company. Although they were working on *Journey Back to Oz*, the first animated feature film to have an all-star voice cast, Filmation was best known as the studio behind popular animated superheroic television exploits for *Superman*, *Aquaman*, and *Batman*, as well as the musical adventures of *The Archies*. That latter series was the first of its kind; aimed at preteens and featuring pop music and dancing, several songs from the series—including "Sugar, Sugar"—earned gold records!

Filmation had already worked with several veterans of the primetime live-action *Star Trek*, which debuted on NBC on September 8, 1966. They had done animated film titles for special effects artist Joe Westheimer, whose Westheimer Company worked on *Trek*, and several *Trek* writers also wrote for Filmation. Recognizing the value in working with licensed pre-existing characters and shows—a built-in audience was a plus for *Batman* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*—Filmation had talked with multiple networks about animated spin-offs, including *Bewitched*, *Godzilla*, *Fantastic Voyage*, and *Star Trek*.

Scheimer was already in talks with Paramount and NBC about an animated spin-off during *Star Trek's* third season (1968–1969) when the axe came down on the parent series, and it was canceled as of the fall season. "We saw the opportunity to do something cool with it," said Scheimer in my interviews with him for the 2012 TwoMorrows book, *Lou Scheimer: Creating the Filmation Generation*. "We had gotten in touch with them while the show was still on the air, but I remember that Paramount and Gene Roddenberry, the creator, weren't really getting along."

The Filmation team worked with Philip Mayer, the director of special programming for Paramount shows, and a company writer/animator named Don Christensen to create a proposed

Images from multiple episodes of *Star Trek*.
Star Trek © CBS Studios Inc.

when Roddenberry wanted last-minute changes. "He and Gene were friends, and worked very closely together," said Scheimer. "Truthfully, the series would not have been as successful as it was without the hard work of Hal. But I remember that one day, Roddenberry wanted to change something. Hal said, 'We can change that, but we are not going to make the air date.' And Gene knew how important that was, so he told us not to change whatever it was." Roddenberry so liked the Filmation crew that he invited some of them to the christening of his son with Majel Barrett.

While it didn't get a primetime airing, the first footage of *Star Trek* did air in primetime. On Friday, September 7th at 8:30 p.m., NBC aired the *NBC Starship Rescue* special, hosted by *Emergency!*'s Randolph Mantooth and Kevin Tighe and the cast of *Sigmund and the Sea Monsters*. As one could glean from the title, the gem in the crown was a preview of *Star Trek*, showcasing its footage.

The fall season began the next morning, on September 8, 1973. *Star Trek* aired on NBC at 10:30 a.m. The same morning saw the debuts of two other animated series that sprang from live-action series: Hanna-Barbera's *The Addams Family* cartoon and Fred Calvert's *Emergency + 4* show. Like *Star Trek*, they used most of the same voices as the original series, though *Emergency!* was the only show not in reruns.

Oddly, not everyone in the country saw the same debut episode of *Star Trek*! George Takei was running for the 10th District Councilman seat in Los Angeles, and FCC television rules said that for any local candidate that got airtime, the station had to give equal airtime for other candidates. Because Sulu appeared in the pilot episode "Beyond the Farthest Star" with about 30 seconds of dialogue—thus giving him some kind of unfair advantage in the election process—L.A. audiences saw "Yesteryear" instead!

The debut episode of *Star Trek* had two other elements that made it historically important. "Beyond the Farthest Star" was written by Samuel A. Peeples, who had written the first-aired *Star Trek*, "Where No Man Has Gone Before" (Peeples later wrote for Filmation's live-action *Space Academy* and *Jason of Star Command* series). More importantly was that the debut date, September 8, 1973, was exactly seven years to the day that the original *Star Trek* series had debuted in primetime!

The reviews for *Star Trek* were terrific. The *L.A. Times* (September 10, 1973) wrote that "*Star Trek* is as out of place in the Saturday morning kiddie ghetto as a Mercedes in a soapbox derby... It is fascinating fare, written, produced and executed with all the imaginative skill, the intellectual flare and the literary level that made Gene Roddenberry's famous old science-fiction epic the most avidly followed program in TV history, particularly in high IQ circles." A *Variety* columnist (September 12, 1973), meanwhile, said that Filmation's *Trek* was "superior enough in animation, scoring and narrative to create an atmosphere of reality against the frenzied product all around it."

Star Trek had an auspicious beginning, and the five-year mission was underway once again.

Mission Highlights of Season One

Past the debut, the second episode of the series was "Yesteryear," written by Dorothy Fontana. The story dealt with Spock's childhood and the death of his pet sehlat, which was groundbreaking for children's programming; few

I Met the Wolf Man!

(and lived to tell about it)

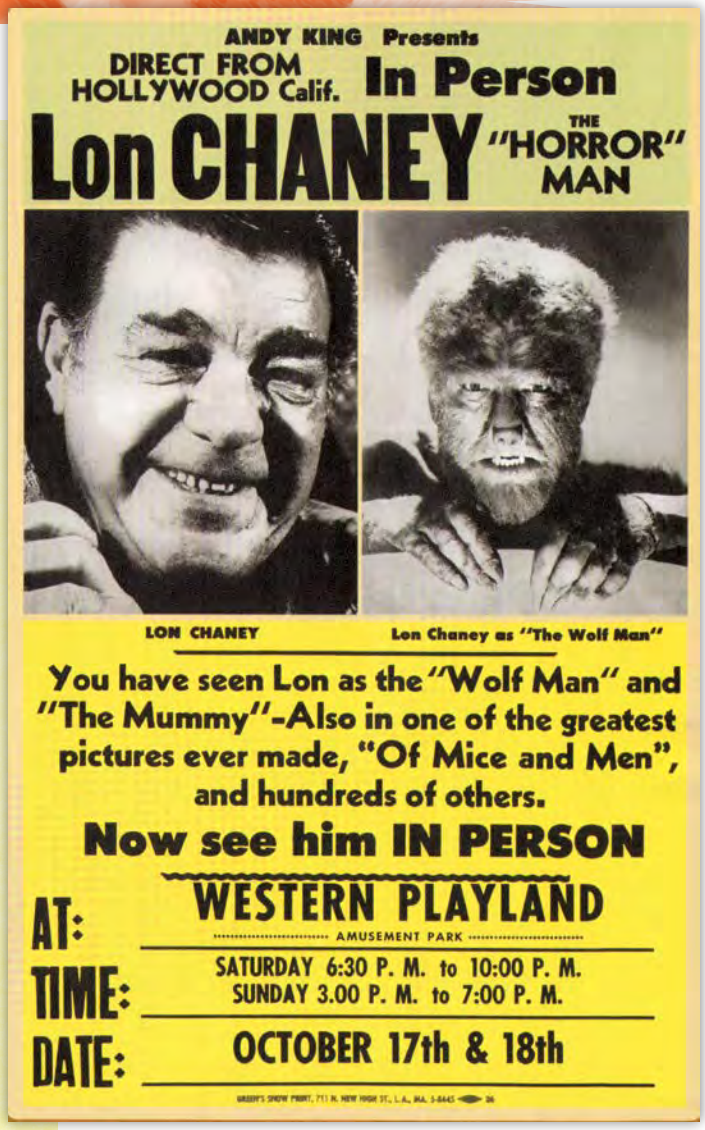
by Ernest Farino

Famous Monsters of Filmland © Philip Kim.

1964. My Favorite Year.

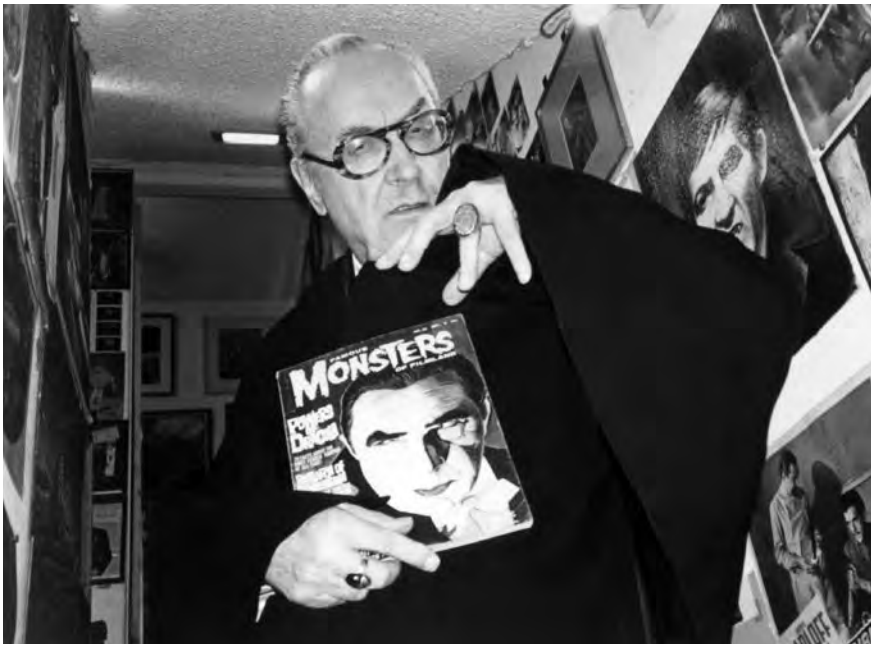
I was living in El Paso, Texas, and it was Prime Time for this 12-year-old MonsterKid—the double-bill reissue of Hammer Films' *Curse of Frankenstein* and *Horror of Dracula*, Aurora monster model plastic kits, and *Mars Attacks!* bubble gum trading cards (which actually came out in 1962 but were still the rage). And, of course, the "godfather" of monster magazines, *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. My first issue—all true MonsterKids remember their first issue of *FM*—was #26 *[above]*, with the "Thetan" monster from *The Outer Limits* episode "The Architects of Fear" on the cover. I read and re-read that magazine so much that the covers actually fell off and went missing. I wish I'd kept that battered copy but it was eventually replaced. For some reason—I think I'm a little slow on the uptake from time to time—I didn't catch on that this was a recurring magazine, a periodical. The next issue I stumbled across was issue #30 with the great Russ Jones painting of Bela Lugosi on the cover, and I was stunned. Wait—I started with #26... this was #30... I *missed* three issues?! From that moment on I was an obsessive newsstand junkie, which sparked a passion for collecting all magazines even remotely related to horror or sci-fi, even Stan Lee's *Monsters to Laugh With*, one-shots like *Chilling Monster Tales* and *The Official Munsters Magazine*, and *Cracked*'s *For Monsters Only*. When James Warren and Forry Ackerman came out with *Monster World* in 1964, a great and glorious day, I was *convinced* they had made it just for *me*.

Famous Monsters #26 had an installment of the multi-part "Inside Darkest Ackerman" feature which opened the doors to the Forry's Ackermansion. That was a MonsterKid's dream: to be able to wake up in the morning and go downstairs to "work" in that environment, taking care of all things monsters. Over the years my own two-bedroom apartment evolved into a mini-Ackermansion—The Farinomansion—and now there's



Meet the "Horror Man," Lon Chaney, Jr.! Actual event poster from young Ernest Farino's 1964 encounter. Poster courtesy of Jay Duncan.

The Wolf Man © Universal Pictures.



(TOP) Forry Ackerman in the original "Ackermansion" (1951–1971), c. 1967. (BOTTOM) Forry in the second Ackermansion (1971–2002) dressed in his authentic Bela Lugosi Dracula cape, holding a copy of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine, issue #30 (1964).

Famous Monsters of Filmland © Philip Kim.

nary a square inch of wall space left amidst all of the framed posters, photos, paintings, and other ephemera. (The ceilings are starting to look mighty inviting…) In the early 2000s I became friends with one of Forry's assistants and gradually gained considerable and frequent access to the Ackermansion long after the regular Saturday morning tours ended. That one-time MonsterKid's dream became real, a pinch-me moment each time.

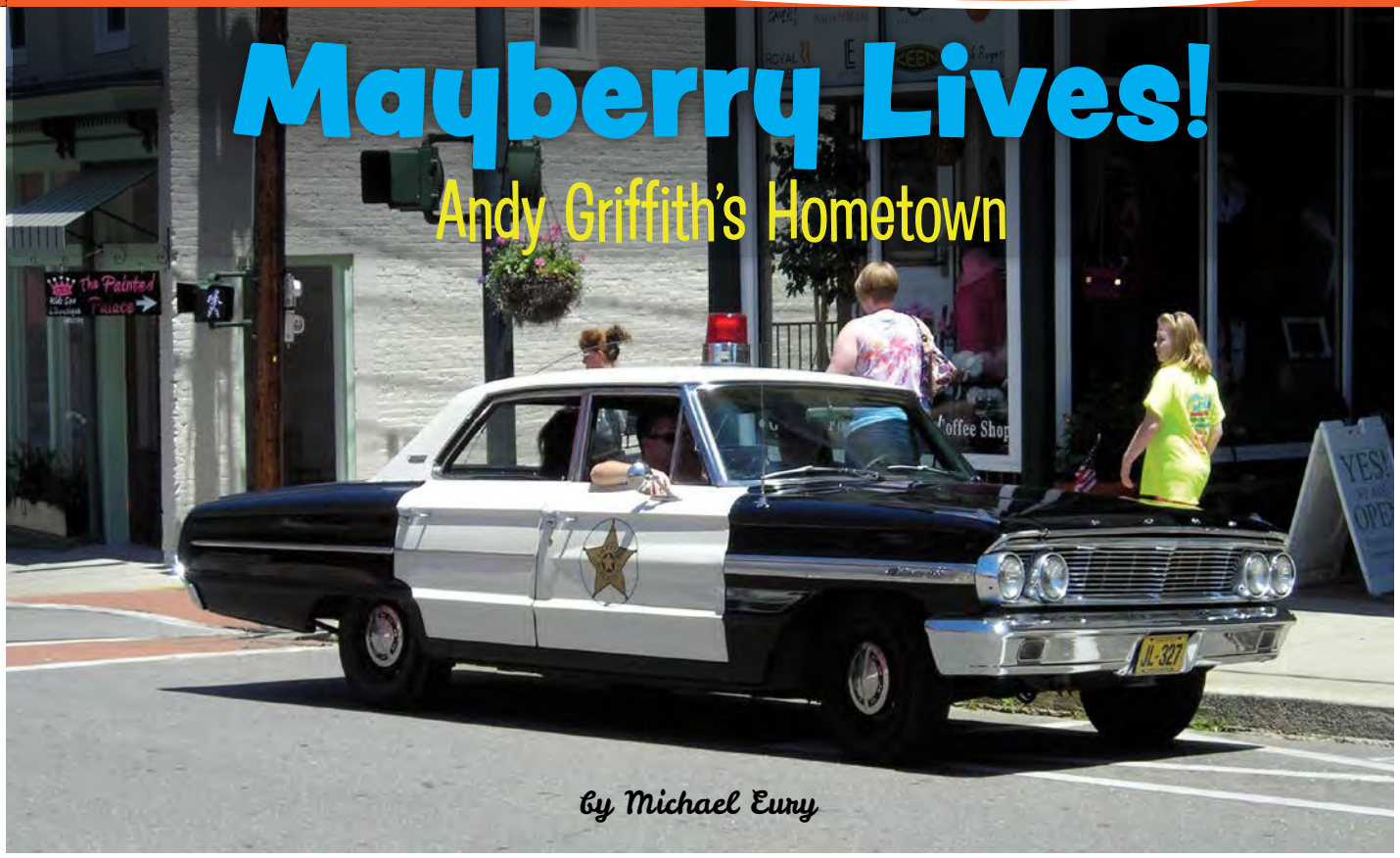
At one point the fire marshal instructed Forry to remove the brush down in the backyard gully behind the house. The rallying cry went out and I joined a handful of others taking care of that problem over a full weekend. Allergies be damned, it was a way to "give back" a little, and I didn't hesitate for a second.

Television in 1964 was seemingly custom-made for me with a wide selection of new series and holdovers in reruns: *The Munsters*, *The Addams Family*, *The Twilight Zone*, *One Step Beyond*, *Bewitched*, *My Favorite Martian*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, and *Fireball XL5*. When "The Control Voice" opened each week's episode of *The Outer Limits* by informing viewers that "There is nothing wrong with your television set… *We* are controlling transmission…" —I *believed* it. I can distinctly remember yelling out at my younger brother, "Don't touch the TV!," eventually relaxing with a sigh of relief at the end of the hour when we were informed, "We now return control of your television set to you." *Whew!*

To say nothing of *Shock! Theater*. That was the package of Universal horror movies syndicated to individual markets. I don't think the version in El Paso was called *Shock!*, but I didn't care about such details. Oddly, the show ran on Sunday afternoons, so my brothers and I would close off the living room to make it as dark as possible. We sat enthralled by *Son of Frankenstein* and *The Wolf Man*—movies that previously existed only as stills in *Famous Monsters*—while our parents and some neighbors held their weekly card game in the kitchen. Another late-night horror-movie

Mayberry Lives!

Andy Griffith's Hometown



by Michael Eury

In the 1998 comedy-drama *Pleasantville*, Tobey Maguire plays David, a reticent teenager obsessed with a wholesome, *Father Knows Best*–like vintage TV sitcom. Via a magical remote control, he and his frisky, polar-opposite twin sister Jennifer (played by Reese Witherspoon) become trapped inside the show's black-and-white reality.

There's a much easier way to personally experience a television classic: by visiting Mount Airy, North Carolina, birthplace of legendary entertainer Andy Griffith and an inspiration for pop culture's most beloved small town, Mayberry, of *The Andy Griffith Show* renown.

Nestled within view of the magnificent Blue Ridge Parkway, Mount Airy, once the site of textile mills and furniture manufacturers, is now, according to the town's mayor, David Rowe, the corporate headquarters of several companies including Renfro Corporation, Insteel Wire Products, South Data, AES, Pike Electric, and Starrett. It is the location of the largest open-faced granite quarry in the world, which has provided stone for structures in Washington, D.C., Fort Knox, and Kitty Hawk. The famous "Siamese" (conjoined) twins, Chang and Eng Bunker, settled in Mount Airy in the 1800s. Country singer Donna Fargo called Mount Airy home before becoming the happiest girl in the whole U.S.A.

But the town of 10,000-plus' indisputable claim to fame is homespun humorist and musician Andy Griffith (1926–2012), the only child of a blue-collar worker and his wife. Andy's roots were humble, spending his first three years bunking with relatives before his folks finally bought their own house—in the poor side of town. It was on the stage at Mount Airy High School that young Andy's passion for performing began, after which he earned a music degree at the University of North Carolina and briefly taught high school band and drama. Soon, Griffith's toothy grin and Southern drawl whisked him from the Carolina stage (*The Lost Colony*) to the comedy circuit (with the hit record, "What It Was, Was Football"), then on to teleplays (*No Time for Sergeants*, which later became a theatrical film starring Griffith) and a stunning dramatic movie role (1957's *A Face in the Crowd*) before rocketing him into America's living rooms and hearts as Sheriff Andy Taylor, Mayberry's peacekeeper, in eight seasons of *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960–1968).

Things haven't changed all that much on Mount Airy's Main Street since the days when young Andy lugged his trombone case to and from music lessons with his pastor. You can amble down its rustic walkways while licking a cone of homemade peach ice cream, laze

(ABOVE) Tours of Mount Airy are available from replicas of the Mayberry sheriff's squad car.

Photos by Michael Eury, unless otherwise noted.

The Mayberry courthouse doors and signs are among the most popular exhibits at the Andy Griffith Museum.

Main Street Mount Airy, as seen from a mule wagon tour.

Local businesses bear names familiar to *Andy Griffith Show* rerun watchers.

on a bench and wave at friendly faces passing by, or take in a movie or live show at the Historic Earle Theatre, a venue built in 1937. Mount Airy is such an idyllic place, you almost believe it could be policed by a sheriff without a gun. Were it not for contemporary trappings such as hybrid cars and Wifi window signs, you might think that you, like *Pleasantville*'s David and Jennifer, were stuck in a time warp.

Mount Airy now boasts tourism as a major economic driver—to the tune of $121,000,000 annual revenue for North Carolina's Surry County, while employing roughly 840 people. It is the stomping grounds for bluegrass festivals and fiddlers' conventions, an Autumn Leaves Festival, a regional history museum, tours of historic homes and Civil War trails, ghost tours, and broadcasts of *The Merry-Go-Round*, radio's second-longest-running program after *The Grand Ole Opry*, at the Earle Theatre.

But thanks to Andy Griffith's legacy, the biggest show in town is Mayberry. Mount Airy has co-opted the "Mayberry" brand from its most famous son's fictional hamlet. While the town has no shortage of chain restaurants, retailers, and hotels, it's the small, locally owned businesses that evoke the essence—and reuse the names—of *The Andy Griffith Show*.

In Mount Airy you can get a trim at Floyd's City Barber Shop or simply ogle its assortment of thousands of "Wall of Fame" photographs, taken by late owner Russell Hiatt, of visitors (including celebrities) perched in its barber chair.

Right next door is the Snappy Lunch, whose name was once mentioned on *The Andy Griffith Show*, which looks pretty much like it did when young Andy ate there; it's the home of the famous (and filling) pork chop sandwich.

Wally's Service Station is a refurbished gas station originally built in 1937 which today hosts a gift shop and a replica of the Mayberry Courthouse, including a jail cell whose creaky iron door is ready to swing open for your photo op. Wally's is also the launch point for guided auto tours of Mount Airy offered from a dead-on replica of the Mayberry squad car, a customized Ford Galaxie.

When in Mount Airy you can grab a brew and sandwich at the Loaded Goat, a Barney Burger at Barney's Café, or nurture your sweet tooth at Opie's Candy Store. You'll find a restaurant and a caterer called Aunt Bea's (as opposed to the television series' spelling of "Bee"), as well as the Mayberry Motor Inn's "Aunt Bee's Room" (with the proper spelling), which contains nearly three dozen personal belongings of the actress who brought the Mayberry matron to life, Frances Bavier. Visitors can also book a stay in Andy Griffith's Homeplace, his former residence on East Haymore Street (a street name once mentioned on the classic show) that has now become a bed-and-breakfast. You won't have to worry about being locked up next to Otis if you're caught imbibing at Mayberry Spirits, one of around a half-dozen businesses sporting the Mayberry moniker. And just a stone's throw away from Mount Airy is Pilot Mountain, whose breathtakingly beautiful, foliage-topped "Knob" (a.k.a. the Big Pinnacle) peaks over 2,400 feet above sea level. Its lower Little Pinnacle provides unforgettable hiking and viewing opportunities, and its nearby municipality, also named Pilot Mountain, inspired the name of Mount Pilot, the "big town" near Mayberry on *The Andy Griffith Show*—although in real life, Mount Airy is considerably larger than Pilot Mountain.

Yet the most exciting attraction in town for classic TV addicts is the Andy Griffith Museum, an expertly curated gallery of memorabilia celebrating the life and career of Mount Airy's most famous

RETRO INTERVIEW

Meet Thelma Lou

An Interview with Betty Lynn

by Michael Eury

Ol' Barn and Thel, in a not-so-private moment from *The Andy Griffith Show*.

That Barney Fife—he beats all, you know that?

Mayberry's quirky, jerky, by-the-book deputy might've had an eye for the ladies, from his phone flirtations with Juanita at the diner to his impromptu rendezvouses with Skippy the Fun Girl, but there was only one girl for Barney. She was "the cats," the only one he ever really loved—the affectionate, infinitely patient and forgiving, strong-willed but sometimes temperamental, occasional matchmaker Thelma Lou.

When meeting Betty Lynn, the lovely actress who brought Thelma Lou to life in *The Andy Griffith Show* (as well as in the 1986 reunion movie *Return to Mayberry*), it's easy to see why ol' Barn was smitten. The eldest surviving *Griffith* cast member (age 91 at this writing), Ms. Lynn is a sheer delight—warm and accessible, as friendly as you'd expect someone from Mayberry to be.

Of course, she's not really from Mayberry. Nor is she "just" Thelma Lou.

Betty Lynn, a native of Kansas City, Missouri, started taking dance lessons at age five, and by her early teens was acting and singing on radio. Once she turned 18 she was contracted as a U.S.O. entertainer, wooing U.S. troops across the globe during World War II. Postwar, as a New York-based actress, Lynn appeared on stage in productions including *Park Avenue*. She soon broke into Hollywood, making her film debut in *Sitting Pretty* (1948), for which she won a Photoplay Gold Medal. A flurry of films followed, including *Apartment for Peggy* (1948), *June Bride* (1948), *Cheaper by the Dozen* (1950), *Payment on Demand* (1951), and *Many Roads to Cross* (1955). She transitioned to television, appearing in everything from anthologies (*Schlitz Playhouse of Stars*) to comedies (Ray Bolger's *Where's Raymond?*) to Westerns (in the *Walt Disney Presents* serial *Texas John Slaughter*), as well as a slew of guest-spots on series before and after her days as a semi-regular on *The Andy Griffith Show*.

But it is as Thelma Lou that Betty Lynn will be forever remembered. Introduced in the Season One episode "Cyrano Andy," Thelma Lou curiously lacked a last name, although she had two lady cousins (Karen Moore and Mary Grace Gossage) who visited Mayberry. She seemed to spend virtually no time at her unspecified "office," yet lived in a roomy, neatly decorated house all her own. She was seen in a mere 26 of the 249 episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*, but their rerunning in perpetuity has created the illusion of hers being a much more frequent role. Certainly her wide smile and chemistry with Don Knotts have made Betty Lynn's status as a Mayberrian seem larger, as has her continuing devotion to the fans of

the show. Now a resident of Mount Airy, North Carolina, Ms. Lynn makes personal appearances on the third Friday of each month at the Andy Griffith Museum, graciously greeting each and every one of the many (sometimes hundreds) of fans of all ages lined up to say "hey" to good, ol' Thel.

It was prior to one of those appearances, on Friday, August 18, 2017, that I had the good fortune to "set a spell" with Betty Lynn. The Surry Arts Council's Tanya B. Jones and Heather Elliott kindly arranged a private interview, and Ms. Lynn was remarkably gracious while trying to sneak a few bites of her rapidly cooling takeout lunch while I asked questions.

RetroFan: So, you've lived here in Mount Airy for 11 years...
Betty Lynn: Eleven years in January, and I love it very, very much.

RF: I've read the story elsewhere but would like to hear it directly from you: How did you come to relocate from Hollywood to Mount Airy, North Carolina?
BL: I was robbed twice in my home in L.A. I was out of town both times when it happened, but it scared me. I was afraid to go back... my home had been wrecked, really.

RF: Oh, I'm so sorry.
BL: At first I went to a hotel, and wondered where I should go. I knew I couldn't stay in a hotel. A friend said, "You should go and buy a home," but I didn't want that responsibility any more. My hometown in Kansas, where I grew up, it has really extreme weather sometimes—really cold winters and hot summers, and I thought, "I'm not sure I can handle that any more."

So, Tanya [Jones, executive director of the Surry Arts Council] was kind enough to suggest that I come here, and I could stay at the RidgeCrest area, where she had put me up the last time I came for Mayberry Days.

I always thought I got a cold on my way here—"I must have caught a cold on the plane," I thought. And then I found out after I moved here that I have allergies here in North Carolina that I never had in California. But that's okay, I can live with that.

RF: Speaking of L.A., I wanted you to know that we have a mutual acquaintance, *[comics and TV writer]* Mark Evanier.
BL: [*ecstatic*] Oh, my dear Mark! He was my neighbor from the time he was a year-and-a-half!

RF: I'd heard that.
BL: First time I ever saw him was watching him crawl out the back steps of his home, trying to learn to walk, and he'd fall on his backside [*laughter*].

But he'd spend a lot of time at my house. He used to come over—and he was so bright, even when very young—and he would show up at the door. Sometimes my mother and I would have our coats on, ready to go out, but we would take them off, and bring him in. He would go to my piano, and he was very gentle, unlike some other children. He would show us some poems that he made up—they were kind of like haiku, just a couple of lines, but they were brilliant! My mother and I would applaud him for everything he did: "Oh, Mark, that was wonderful!" He was so intense. He didn't smile a lot, very serious. He was just adorable; we loved him.

RF: So it certainly came as no surprise to you that he became a successful writer.
BL: Not at all. He's brilliant! I saw his blog, finally. He wrote so funny.

RF: I was his editor for a while when I worked at DC Comics [on *The New Gods*].
BL: Or, were you? He started writing to the comics when he was so young. He was amazing. I loved him very much. I've always loved him. We were very close. And as he got older he'd come over and we'd talk about things. I'd tell him, "You be good to those older actors, because it's not easy when we get old." And he's been very good to them, too.

RF: With actors, and with older creators of comic books, too. Mark's one of the most noted historians of comics.
BL: He was not foolish about anything that he did. I'm so happy that you know him. Tell him I love him.

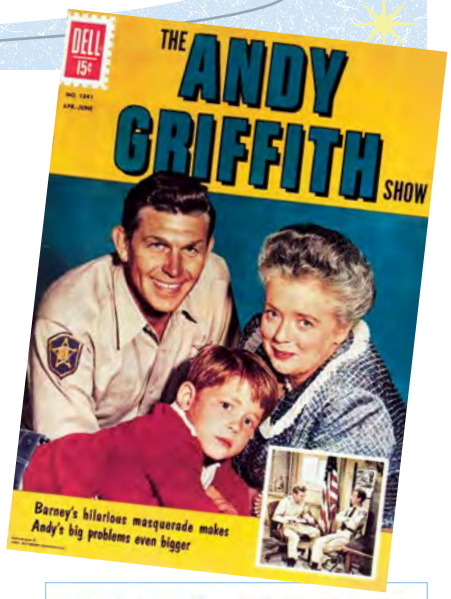
RF: You had such an extensive and impressive stage and screen career for years, long before you became known and loved as Thelma Lou. Before you were hired for *The Andy Griffith Show*, did you

Betty Lynn and interviewer/editor Michael Eury, backstage at the Andy Griffith Museum in Mount Airy, North Carolina, August 18, 2017. Photo by Heather Elliott.

Original Andy Griffith Show Collectibles

The Scarcity of Mayberry Licensing in the Sixties

by Michael Eury



Front and back covers to the second comic book, *Four Color* #1341. "Opie's Printing Press" art by Bill Fraccio.

Back in the Sixties, when DVRs—VCRs, even!—were the stuff of the future, your favorite television show could only be seen once a week. For a TV junkie, seven days seemed like an eternity. Luckily, a legion of licensors lined up to ensure that the best (and sometimes, the worst) of the boob tube could be revisited at the consumer's demand through tie-in products such as board games, comic books, View-Master reels, coloring books, Colorforms, record albums, card games, paperback novels, trading cards, model kits, frame tray puzzles, and lunch boxes. If a Sixties show was a hit, the market would be flooded with products bearing the likenesses of its stars.

The Andy Griffith Show (*TAGS*) was indisputably a hit, scoring in the Top Ten of the Nielsen ratings for each of its eight seasons—even snatching the coveted Number One spot during its last season, 1967–1968. Its successor, *Mayberry R.F.D.*, remained in the Top Ten, only dropping to the Number 15 position in its third and final season.

With *TAGS*'s tens of millions of dedicated viewers, you'd think there would be no shortage of Mayberry merchandising during the show's heyday. Before you set your sights on obtaining a Sixties-vintage squad car model kit or a Sheriff Taylor outfit for your Captain Action, let me warn you that your search for collectibles produced during the show's original run will be quite limited, to only a handful of items.

Why the scarcity of items bearing the *Andy Griffith Show* brand? In their exceptional book, *The Definitive Andy Griffith Show Reference* (McFarland, 1996), authors Dale Robinson and David Fernandes posit that the children comprising much of *TAGS*'s viewing audience were an unappealing commercial demographic to merchandisers. That's an interesting theory, but Sixties manufacturers certainly weren't shy about cranking out kid-targeted products connected to nighttime TV shows, and there's no shortage of *Bonanza* figures, *Beverly Hillbillies* paper dolls, and *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* walkie talkies in collectors' curio cabinets to prove this point.

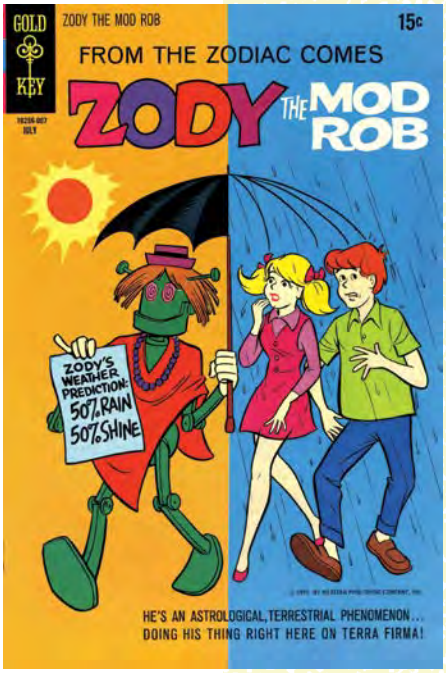
The authors also suggest that the show's producers lacked interest in exploiting the series. No argument there. Their focus was on the quality of the production itself and the cultivation of Mayberry as a welcoming "place" where viewers yearned to retreat. While some episodes are stronger than others, there was no dud among *TAGS*'s 249 episodes (other than mountaineer "Dud" Wash, who married Charlene Darling), and as a result the series endures as one of television's most perennially popular programs.

Seconding this conjecture is Terry Collins, author of *The Andy Griffith Story: An Illustrated Biography* (Explorer Press, 1995), who contends, "My theory for the lack of merchandising during the original run of *The Andy Griffith Show* can be traced to Andy's own tastes and how he wished the show to be perceived. As a part owner of the series, he was in a position to refuse the usual overtures to create card games or lunch boxes based on the denizens of Mayberry. Unlike the sheer insanity of *The Beverly Hillbillies*, the 'Griffith' show (as Andy usually referred to it) was

Oddball Comics

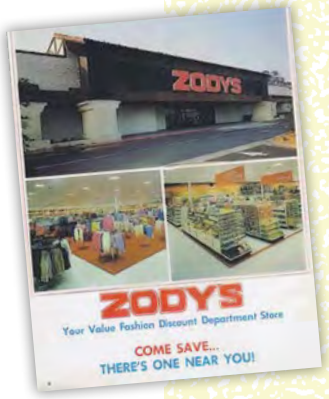
ZODY THE MOD ROB #1

by Scott Shaw!



The outasite automaton, *Zody the Mod Rob*. Issue #1 (and only) cover art by Roger Armstrong.

Title: *Zody the Mod Rob*
Issue Number: No. 1
Cover Date: July 1970
Publisher: Western Publishing Company, Inc. (Gold Key Comics)
Cover Artist(s): Roger Armstrong



Scott Shaw! suspects that Zody the Mod Rob got its name from a chain of Los Angeles "fashion budget department stores," Zodys, which was similar to Target. This ad is from 1974, but Zodys was around a decade earlier.

The Metal Men! Machine Man! Adam Link! Yes, these are some of comicdom's greatest robot characters... and then there's *Zody the Mod Rob*, the groovy star of this issue's Oddball Comic—from the same people who brought us *Magnus, Robot Fighter*! And as his comic's cover claims, "He's an astrological, terrestrial phenomenon doing his thing right here on Terra Firma!" Like wow, man, what were the folks at Gold Key smokin' back in 1970 when they came up with this far-out funnybook—hashish-oiled mechanical joints?

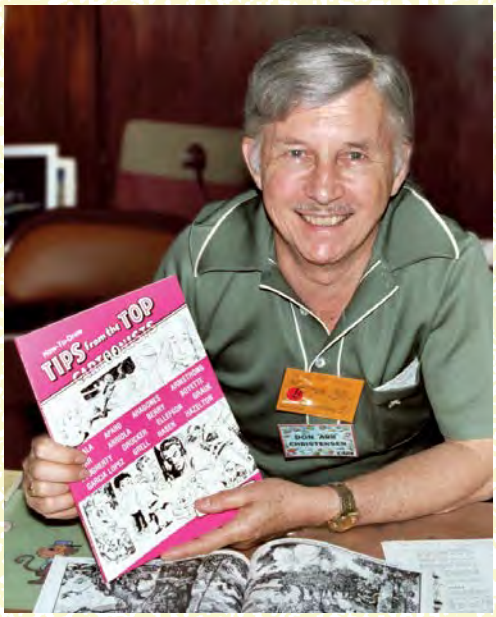
Zody the Mod Rob is one of those multi-tiered oddities that's as good a children's comic as it is a relic of the Sixties (although it was published a full three years *after* the so-called "Summer of Love") that's hilarious in its middle-aged un-hipness! Plus, it's liberally sprinkled with drug references that are used without any cognizance of the catchphrases' real meanings!

During the mid-to-late Sixties, many mainstream comic-book publishers desperately tried to exploit aspects of the hippie era in their funnybooks. Most of their editors were middle-aged white men with absolutely no identification—or even a basic understanding—of the youth movement that was revolutionizing American society. For drama or for laughs, many major publishers were trying to lure young readers with their (mostly) sanitized new (or made-over) titles with a synthetically "groovy" theme: DC's *Brother Power the Geek* ("the real-life dangers of hippie-land"), *Prez* ("the first teenage president of the United States"), *Swing with Scooter* and *Windy and Willy* (the latter featuring touched-up reprints of the officially licensed *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* comic from only a few years earlier); Harvey's *Bunny* ("queen of the in-crowd") and *Rock Happening*; Archie's *Madhouse Ma-ad Freak Out*; and Charlton's *Go-Go*, among others. Since the results were usually lame and unintentionally hilarious, no actual hippies would be caught dead reading these comics, not when they could instead peruse an issue of *Zap Comix*, *Mr. Natural*, *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*, *Air Pirates*, *Harold Hedd*, *Dope Comix*, or any number of other under-the-counter (cultural) "underground comix," sold in "head shops" catering to the psychedelic crowd. Only young children were naïve enough to find the neutered mainstream "hippie comics" to be entertaining.

Speaking of kids, although perceived as a rather staid and conservative publisher of children's comic books, Gold Key made occasional attempts to approach hipness. One of these, *The Close Shaves of Pauline Peril* by creators Del Connell and Jack Manning, was actually impressively cool and innovative, even though the uniquely Oddball series only lasted for four issues. Other efforts in this direction were generally less successful, although Gold Key's editors seemed to hang a lot of expectations on the word "mod"; hence such titles as the Oddball romance comic *Mod Love* (one issue), the Oddball teenage comic *The Modniks*, (two issues), the Oddball hot rod comic *Mod Wheels* (a whopping 19 issues)... and this single issue of the Oddball hippie robot astrologer comic *Zody the Mod Rob*. How appropriate for the first issue of TwoMorrows' *RetroFan*. Hopefully, this magazine will last a *lot* longer, maybe to when the 2010s will be considered nostalgia, at least by the mutants staggering

around in a post-apocalyptic world.

Zody the Mod Rob was created and written by Don R. (for "Ragnvald") a.k.a. "Arr" Christensen (July 6, 1916–October 18, 2006). Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, he studied at the Minnesota School of Art and worked at the art department of *The Minneapolis Journal*. In 1937, he began working at the Walt Disney Studio as an in-betweener and later, a scriptwriter. There, Don worked on classic animated features such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*, and *Dumbo*. Due to the union strike of 1941, Don left Disney to work at Warner Bros., where he wrote and storyboarded a number of wartime cartoon shorts. During this period, he also started doing work for the comic-book industry, where he swiftly became one of its most prolific practitioners. Often using "Don Arr" as his pen name, Christensen wrote and drew generic funny animal stories for Sangor, Pines, American Comics Group, and National/DC Comics. From the Fifties through the Seventies, Don worked for the Los Angeles office of Western Publishing, mainly writing and storyboarding comics starring cartoon characters from Disney, Warner Bros., Walter Lantz, Bob Clampett, and Hanna-Barbera. The versatile cartoonist even wrote a few "realistic" comic books for Western/Gold Key, including *Magnus, Robot Fighter* and *Space Family Robinson* (a.k.a. *Lost in Space*). One of his most highly regarded funny books is the adaptation of *Donald in Mathmagic Land* with Tony Strobl and Steve Steere, but my personal favorite is his *Woody Woodpecker in Chevrolet Wonderland*, a showroom "giveaway" comic hawking the 1955 Chevy. (Yeah, I'd trust a psychotic bird to recommend my next automotive purchase...) Don wrote a lot of educational and promotional funny books, as well as concocting puzzle pages for activity books, Big Little Books, greeting cards, comic strips, magazine articles, radio show scripts, and Saturday morning cartoon scripts and storyboards for Depatie-Freleng, Filmation, Grantray-Lawrence, and Sunbow. He also edited, wrote, and published *How to Draw Tips from the Top Cartoonists* (1981), an excellent instructional book. Don was also a president of Southern California's Comic Art Professional Society (CAPS). He was 54 years old when he conceived *Zody the Mod Rob* and was obviously out of touch with the counterculture... but he was a very nice man and I think that it shows. I guess that's one good reason why I dig this obscure Oddball Comic so much.

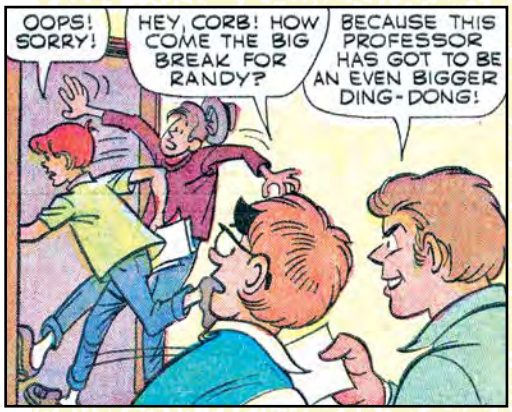


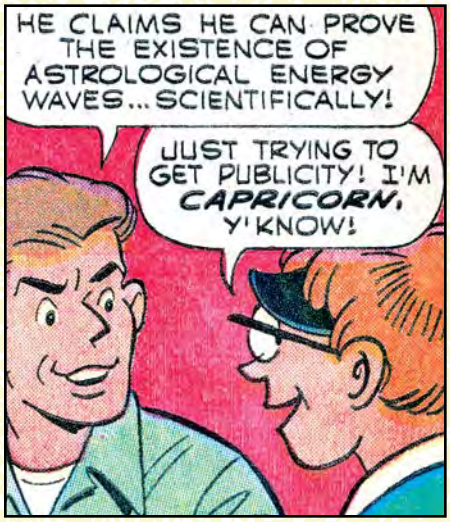
Zody creator and writer Don R. Christensen, at the 1982 San Diego Comic-Con.
Photo by and courtesy of Alan Light.

Zody the Mod Rob was penciled and inked by Roger Armstrong (October 12, 1917–June 7, 2007). He was born in Los Angeles and his father was a director and cameraman for early silent Mack Sennett movies and later, a screenwriter for 20th Century Fox. Like most cartoonists, Roger began drawing about the time he started walking and by age 16 was selling cartoons to local advertising agencies. Of course, having a father who worked on Charlie Chaplin comedies must have been inspiring to the budding cartoonist. He attended Chouniard Art Institute for two years, but finances forced Roger to quit art school and take a job at Lockheed working on airplanes. Soon after, he met Chase Craig, a cartoonist working for Western Publishing. It wasn't long before Roger was drawing funnybooks for the company that had the rights to all of the great cartoon characters. Armstrong drew a lot of comics and storyboards starring characters from Disney, Warner Bros., Walter Lantz, and Hanna-Barbera. In the late Seventies, Roger drew H-B comics for Marvel. He also drew comic strips, including *Ella Cinders*, *Napoleon and Uncle Elby*, *Scamp*, *Little Lulu*, and *Bugs Bunny*. Roger was also an art teacher and watercolor artist specializing in landscapes. He was a great believer in "paying it forward" and spent a lot of time and effort with aspiring artists of all types.

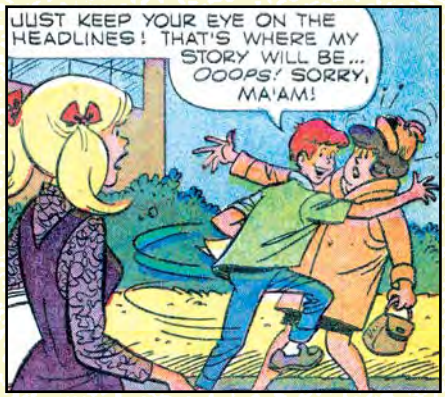
Original Roger Armstrong art to page 1 of *Zody* #1. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

The issue's 25-page, book-length *Zody the Mod Rob* cover story, titled "From the Zodiac Comes Zody the Mod Rob." It begins in the student newspaper office of Tinker High School, where "your sensational, erudite, articulate, charming and modest editor-in-chief" Corby Kane hands clean-cut teenage reporter Randy Martin his first "real" assignment for the *Tinker High Times* ("high times?!?), to "wing a feature" on Professor Ipsof Acto, who's booked to speak at the next week's school assembly. Grabbing an armload of pencils and note pads, Randy—who already knows where the scientist resides—eagerly rushes out the door while Corby explains his motives to a young copy editor on staff:

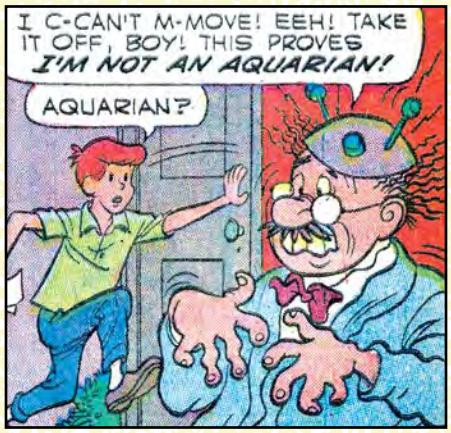




While on his way to the scientist's home laboratory, his girlfriend, Sharon Gordon, anxious to confirm their date later that night, joins Randy, but the teen reporter can't stop to chat:



As he approaches Professor Acto's home, Randy hears yelps of pain from inside. Entering the place, Randy is alarmed to find the frazzled-looking scientist quivering under a strange metal helmet.



As Randy helps the rumpled research scientist remove the device from his noggin, the Professor explains the zodiac sign of Aquarius and asks his visitor his birthdate.

Despite Randy's protests, the eccentric-scientist jams this "horoscope cap" onto the student journalist's head and adjusts its controls:

PROFESSOR IPSOF ACTO: Don't worry! It's designed for an Aquarian brain! It won't hurt YOU! It will magnify Aquarius energy waves so you're sure to get the most good from them!

Reacting to Randy's genuine interest, Professor Ipsof Acto delightedly pulls out two large charts covered with esoteric configurations and formulas:

PROFESSOR IPSOF ACTO: You see? My lecture charts show how the stars and planets send patterns of influence criss-crossing the universe! Now YOU will be TUNED IN on yours!

But despite the professor's hopes, Randy doesn't feel any effect from the horoscope cap. After examining the teen reporter for over an hour, Professor Acto declares his experiment a failure and tells Randy to remove his invention from his sight. While leaving the lab, he expresses a determination to help the nutty scientist.

Walking down the street, a passing motorist heckles Randy about his unusual headgear. Self-conscious about attracting more unwanted attention, he drops by a shop specializing in "bargain wigs."

Too Much Stuff and Too Little Time

Collecting Collections

by Tom Stewart

[***Editor's note:*** *Are you a Super Collector? Want to share your collection with* RetroFan *readers? If so, contact the editor at* euryman@gmail.com — *and include a few photos from your collection with your query.*]

I have stuff. A *lot of stuff.* So much stuff that the house looks like a pop culture museum, or one that exploded on the modified Fifties bungalow I've lived in since 1999. Vintage movie posters, boys' series books from the Twenties, Thirties radios, toys... and that's just walking a couple feet in the door. It's a bit crazy, a bit obsessive, and more than a bit... *me.* If a collection is a reflection of the collector, then mine is a mirror shattered, reflecting light every which way.

Collecting is all of a piece; it can be hard to say where one collection ends and another begins, as one usually leads you into another; comics led to books, books and movies led to collecting autographs. I collect more things than I *don't* collect. And even the things I don't collect, I have a couple of here and there. So when people ask, I sometimes tell them the things I *don't* collect, like baseball cards. I do have a few vintage ball cards and signed balls, though. You see? It's not always easy to define a collection for many collectors.

Amid a backdrop of movie and serial posters and a carpet of vintage comic books, Super Collector Tom Stewart can't resist rereading *The Flash* #227. Photo by Kenyetta Carter. (Note: All other photos accompanying this article by Tom Stewart.)

Comics

My first love. We've had something of a rocky relationship over the years, but I've always come back to comic books. My love of comics probably started the same way it started with a lot of kids: the Adam West *Batman* show. I watched it as a tiny kid, and loved Batman ever since. My mom got me my first comics, cast-offs from her friends. These were read-into-submission Disney and Warner Bros. books, all Mickey, Bugs, and friends (I think *Super Goof* was the favorite here). The problem with these is the Disney comics (*Walt Disney Comics and Stories*) often featured serials of which I only got to read a chapter or two, leaving me to figure out by myself how Mickey outwitted the Phantom Blot.

When my parents divorced when I was seven, my dad started giving me an allowance, which I spent on comics. The first one I remember buying was *The Flash* #227 (May–June 1974), "Flash -- This is Your Death!" It had this Flash guy sweating (crying?) on the cover while reading a book about his own death. *Who could resist?* This started me down the rabbit hole of DC fandom (never cared for Marvel until I discovered Jack Kirby Sixties' work, another long story) and haunting the 7-11 on new comics day. I bought every DC comic I could afford (hiding the more expensive, oversized *Limited Collectors' Editions* from my mom so I could avoid the lectures about how comics only cost a dime in her day). When I'd read all the DCs, I'd buy Harvey, *The Spirit* magazine, or Archie digests. I searched for back issues, finding a few here and there, and lusted over the Captain Company ads in

the back of the Warren *Spirit*'s showing exotic books like *All in Color for a Dime*. I filled out a couple of the order forms, but could never get enough money in one place at the same time. I had to borrow what I could from a library that didn't see comics as either important or even worthy of putting on their shelves. They had the Jules Feiffer *The Great Comic Book Heroes* and both *Superman* and *Batman From the 30s to the 70s* books, but that was it. I was alone in my love of the four-color newsprint. Almost.

They were out there, but in the mid-to-late Seventies, comic-book fans didn't for the most part advertise the fact that they were comic-book fans. There weren't a lot of superhero T-shirts except by special order, and a comic-book shop in Pasco, Washington, didn't exist at the moment. I was pretty open about my obsession as I was constantly covering notebooks and school assignments with Batman drawings. When I would locate another member of the tribe, it would be with a nod, a whispered, "I like comics, too" and a request to borrow that issue I had hidden behind my schoolbook. I traded a bit here and there, but mostly the other kids had the same comics I had. One kid in sixth grade had his brother's early Seventies Batman comics I got ahold of: *Detective* #400 (Man-Bat!) and a couple others. It was my first Neal Adams comic, and I needed more.

It wasn't until I found a local (kinda local, two towns over) bookstore that I discovered a consistent source of old comics: the Bookworm in Richland, Washington. They had a tiny bathroom that was stuffed to the ceiling with comics: DC on the right and Marvel on the left, assorted oddball stuff on the floor underneath. How many hours did I spend there, fingers raking the stacks, looking for the thicker spines of the DC Giants and 100-Pagers? How many hours did I spend begging my dad for a ride over there? I discovered tons of Sixties comics (this would have been the late Seventies, so Sixties DCs were still around and being brought into the store regularly) and tried to buy all that I didn't own. I found my first Golden Age comics there (a *Captain Marvel Adventures*, a *Whiz*, and a *Mary Marvel*, all three bought for eight bucks). I picked up a VG *Green Lantern* #1 for $20 there, in the

Superhero muscle cars! Captain Action and Action Boy in the Silver Streak, the Mego Batman and Robin in their Batmobile, and a more recent vintage Batman '66 Batmobile with the Dynamic Duo. Standing in the background are Ideal Toys' Knight of Darkness and J. J. Armes figures.

learn everything about their hobby, but often how to care for and repair what they love), and went looking for more. At the same bookstore, I found a stack of ten more, and then at a Value Village I got another stack of the hard-to-find later editions.

With the advent of the Internet (thank you, Internet!) I not only completed my collection of the hard-to-find editions but found extras I could turn around and sell to fund more purchases of other series. I now have all the original *Investigator* books, and a

ilton, Rick Brandt, Ken Holt, Tom

g these books on the Internet

nd comics; I went from

ions, rare plays, personal

py of *Bridgman's Anatomy* with

), and a near-complete *Perry*

nds were a first American

rld in 80 Days and a first

jacket), both found at thrift

oks make a home, I think,

se I either wanted the ones

t never got. This is fairly

ost like revenge collecting.

nude Mego Batman at a

can't leave him naked, can I?

About this time eBay came along, and once again I was lost. And then I got into Captain Action.

The good Captain was the Nine-in-One Superhero, Ideal Toys' answer

A collection of Western books and figures, the latter including some Marx Johnny West figures and Gabriel Lone Ranger figures, with miscellaneous items peppered around.