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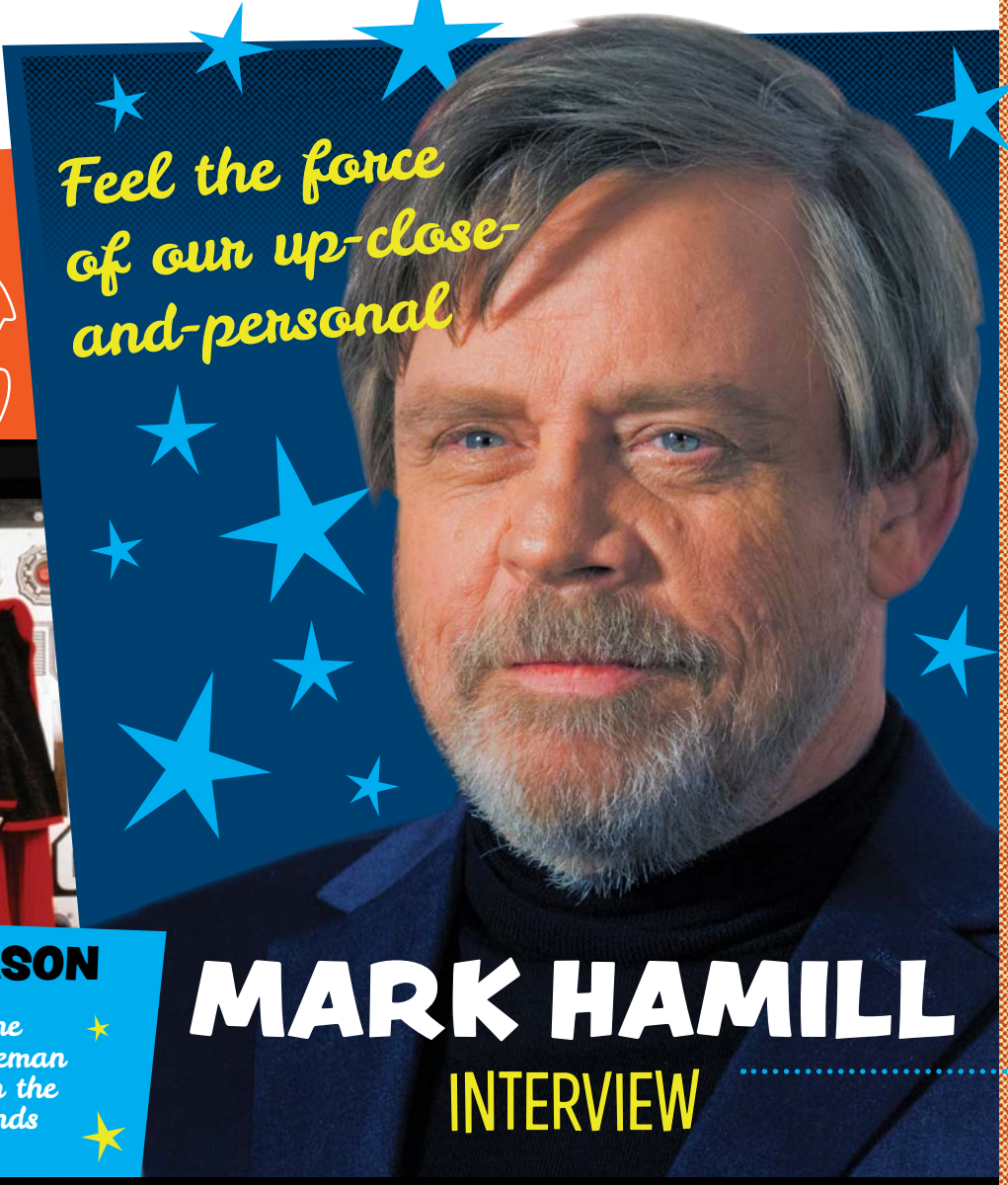

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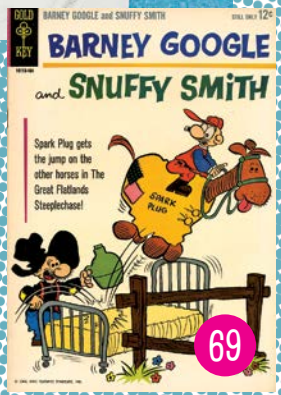

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Cover image of Mark Hamill at the *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* Japan Premiere Red Carpet on December 6, 2017. Photo by Dick Thomas Johnson [CC BY 2.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0)].

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RETRO INTERVIEW

Mark Hamill

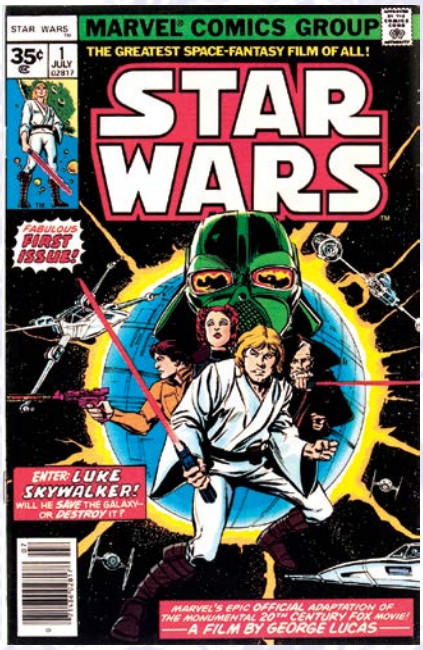
The Jedi Looks Back

by Glenn Greenberg

Meet Luke Skywalker! One of four 1977 Star Wars promotional posters illustrated by Del Nichols and produced as a Coca-Cola premium. Star Wars TM & © Lucasfilm Ltd. Courtesy of Heritage.

Mark Hamill at the 2017 Disney Legends Awards luncheon. PHOTO: Steve Sherman

He may not really be a Jedi Knight, but make no mistake—Mark Hamill is a Force to be reckoned with. All an interviewer has to do is ask him a question and then just get out of his way. Because, in delivering an answer, Hamill will go into great depth, providing rich backstory and texture, and he will often go down paths that are both unexpected and thoroughly delightful. He's a natural storyteller, which should come as no surprise to people who have followed his career closely and are aware of his writing work—he created the comic-book miniseries *The Black Pearl*, published by Dark Horse in 1996, which he has hoped to adapt into a film—and his turn behind the



(LEFT) Howard Chaykin artwork graces this rare promotional poster distributed at the San Diego Comic-Con and Kansas City WorldCon in the summer of 1976, roughly a year before the film opened. (ABOVE) Compare Chaykin's poster art to his iconic cover for the Marvel Comics' first issue of *Star Wars* (July 1977).
Star Wars TM & © Lucasfilm Ltd. Courtesy of Heritage.

camera, as the director of the 2004 mockumentary *Comic Book: The Movie* (in which he also starred).

But, of course, on top of his highly acclaimed voice work as the Joker in the now-classic *Batman: The Animated Series* and its various spin-offs, Hamill is best known for playing Luke Skywalker in five Star Wars movies—and he will take on that role again, for the sixth and presumably last time, in *Episode IX*, due for release in December 2019.

I had the opportunity to interview Mark Hamill on April 6, 2017, in my capacity as a senior editor and journalist at *TIME Magazine for Kids*, for which I was writing a feature story about the 40th anniversary of *Star Wars* and its impact on our culture. The release of *Episode VIII: The Last Jedi* was eight months away, and, naturally, there was very little that Hamill could say about it, so the conversation was primarily about the past, rather than the future.

I had expected and prepared for our conversation to run only about 15 to 20 minutes, but he and I ended up talking for nearly an hour. Unfortunately, due to the main focus of the article, and the fact that other people involved in the franchise—specifically animator Dave Filoni and production designer Doug Chiang—were also interviewed and quoted extensively, most of Hamill's comments ended up on the cutting-room floor, so to speak. It seemed like the full interview would never see the light of day.

But thanks to *RetroFan* editor-in-chief Michael Eury, who expressed great interest in publishing the complete text, the interview is finally getting a home. Much gratitude to TwoMorrows publisher John Morrow, for his efforts to secure Mr. Hamill's blessing for this piece to run, to Dante Ciampaglia, my original editor, for his support and encouragement, and, above all, to Mark Hamill himself, for his time and his ongoing generosity.

RetroFan: As a comic-book fan, and as someone who grew up loving science fiction and genre stuff, can you remember what your initial reaction was when you read the script for the original movie?

Mark Hamill: I can. I'll never forget it, as a matter of fact. Mind you, I didn't read the entire script until I'd gotten the part. I met George [Lucas] and there was just a general interview. He didn't speak at all. Brian DePalma was also looking at actors for *Carrie*, so George stayed silent. It was a little "tell us about yourself" kind of thing—there was no talk of a movie or anything, they just want to get a feel of who you are. Then, based on that, I got a screen test, and it might have been a seven-, eight-, nine-page scene, in the cockpit of the *Millennium Falcon* with Han Solo—Harrison [Ford] did it with me—and then, I heard I got the part and they sent the script to my house.

And I was by myself and it was a little one-bedroom apartment on the beach in Malibu. And I sat in my living room and—well, I say living room, but you walk in and it's one big room and one bedroom [*chuckles*]—and in any case, I read this thing and I was just astonished. I mean, I couldn't believe my eyes. I was a *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine kid, I idolized the

black-and-white *King Kong* and all the old Universal horror classics—I was so into this stuff. Ray Harryhausen was an idol of mine, Willis O'Brien, Marcel Delgado, all those old, cool, stop-frame animation people.

But anyway, I'm reading this thing and I just can't—like I say, the script itself, even without John Williams' fantastic score and all the brilliant special effects and the art direction and all that—just the core story as it's written down, is thrilling. I mean, you have that same sense of swashbuckling adventure, and that whole "swept away"—I remember thinking specifically, this really smacks of *Wizard of Oz*, with a gender switch. Instead of a young girl from a farm in the Midwest, here you have this boy or young man, someone who's like—I was guessing Luke was in his senior year of high school, otherwise why wouldn't he have just left home? And he's swept away on this incredible adventure where he meets this fantastic array of characters, from a swaggering pirate and smuggler and rogue and an impudent, imperious princess who's beautiful and he falls in love with, and he meets a wizard. Like I say, Han Solo's a space pirate—there's pirates and wizards and princesses! And, of course, the deep, dark, scary Darth Vader—I read that part and I said, "This is a wonderful role!" I mean, he's not in it that much, but it's so filled with mystery, it's like *Phantom of the Opera*—masks are always very compelling dramatic devices because the audiences' imaginations are so much greater than anything we can create. That's why it's inherently disappointing when anyone is *un*masked, because they can't meet those expectations.

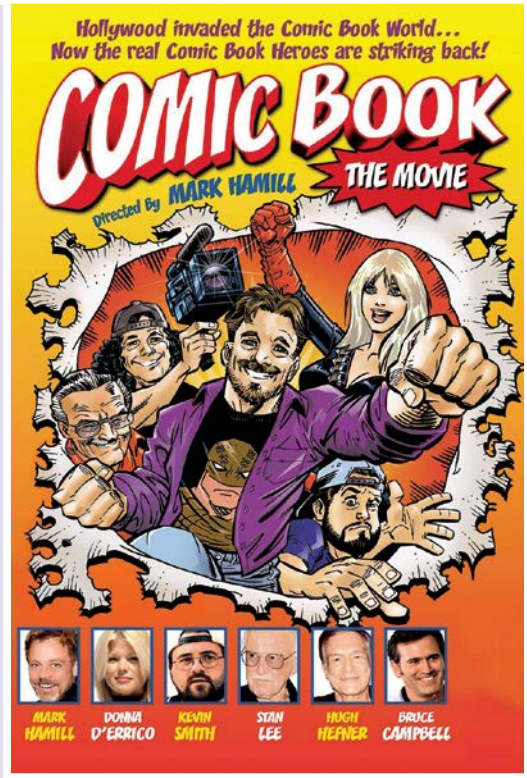
I thought that the robots specifically were written to be more human in many ways than the actual human characters, because they had all these frailties. [*breaks into a C-3PO impression*] "Oh, I've forgotten how much I abhor space travel! This is all *your* fault!" [*laughs*] I mean, what robot argues over whose fault it is? It just tickled me no end.

The one thing that really occurred to me was—because when I'd heard about this project, people said, "Oh, it's like Flash Gordon or something." And yes, it is. But I thought it much more strongly favored a traditional fairy tale. And had we been traveling around in horse-drawn carriages, it would have become very clear. And that's why I thought it had a much broader appeal than traditional science fiction, which is usually dry and sort of scientific and lacking in humor. I mean, *2001* is obviously a masterpiece, but a barrel of laughs it ain't.

RF: Right, right.

MH: And this one, I thought, was *hilarious*. And I also admired how they used concepts like the Force, which was sort of a way to talk about spirituality and religion, which makes everyone—well, I'm speaking in *very* broad strokes here—but makes people uncomfortable, you know? It was a way to be able to acknowledge that aspect of our beings without too much... resistance, I say, from the audience.

This could all be inherently corny—now, I had done children's theater, I mean, I understand that kind of storytelling and I love it because it's primal, it's black and white, it's good versus evil. The Big Bad



2004's *Comic Book: The Movie* was Mark Hamill's directorial debut. Courtesy of Heritage.

No joke, you can't look at this specialty retail cel from *Batman: The Animated Series* without hearing Mark's voice, making him the definitive Joker for many fans. TM & © DC Comics. Courtesy of Heritage.

Moon Landing Mania


NEIL A. ARMSTRONG


EDWIN E. ALDRIN, JR.


MICHAEL COLLINS

by Michael Eury

"That's one small step for man... one giant leap for mankind."

Really, just typing those words is giving me goosebumps. Watching *Apollo 11*'s Neil Armstrong back-hop off the *Eagle* ladder onto the sandy unknown was one of those signature *Remember where you were when...?* moments of my life, and probably yours, too.

On July 20, 1969, I was 11 years old, plopped onto the floor of our den. My parents and I gawked at our boxy Motorola, back when televisions were considered furniture, their wide wooden cases and mesh-covered speakers engulfing a wall. We were utterly mesmerized by flickering black-and-white images of Armstrong's courageous first steps. It was pushing 11 o'clock at night, and even though school was on summer hiatus I was staying up well past my bedtime to watch history unfold. Who could sleep on such a momentous evening? (Well, my little brother could, but he was only three at the time...)

Earlier, just after 4 o'clock that afternoon, an "LEM" (Lunar Excursion Module, or simply Lunar Module) named *Eagle*, containing American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, had perilously touched base in the Sea of Tranquility on the surface of the Moon, while the remaining member of their three-person crew, Michael Collins, orbited the Moon in *Apollo 11*'s command module, *Columbia*. And what did Neil and Buzz do for an encore? They took a late-night stroll on the dusty lunar surface, broadcasting it back to the largest television audience ever at that time, a half-billion viewers worldwide!

If you weren't alive during the Sixties, you missed the Space Race, a futuristic fistfight that actually started in the late Fifties. It was an awesome era of unparalleled imagination and determination, as the U.S.A.'s National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) went head-to-head with Russian scientists as they blasted dogs, chimps, and eventually men into orbit atop highly combustible rockets. From the moment on May 25, 1961, when U.S. President John F. Kennedy announced our nation's goal of landing a man on the Moon by the end of the decade to the actual event itself, a coterie of crewcut-topped flyboys and chain-smoking eggheads thrust into reality outlandish notions which were once the fictional purview of visionaries such as Verne and Burroughs. Kids like me were given real-life heroes whose bravery and coolness rivaled Batman, Bond, and the Beatles. With the violence and bloodshed that choked the nightly news throughout


The Washington Post

FINAL

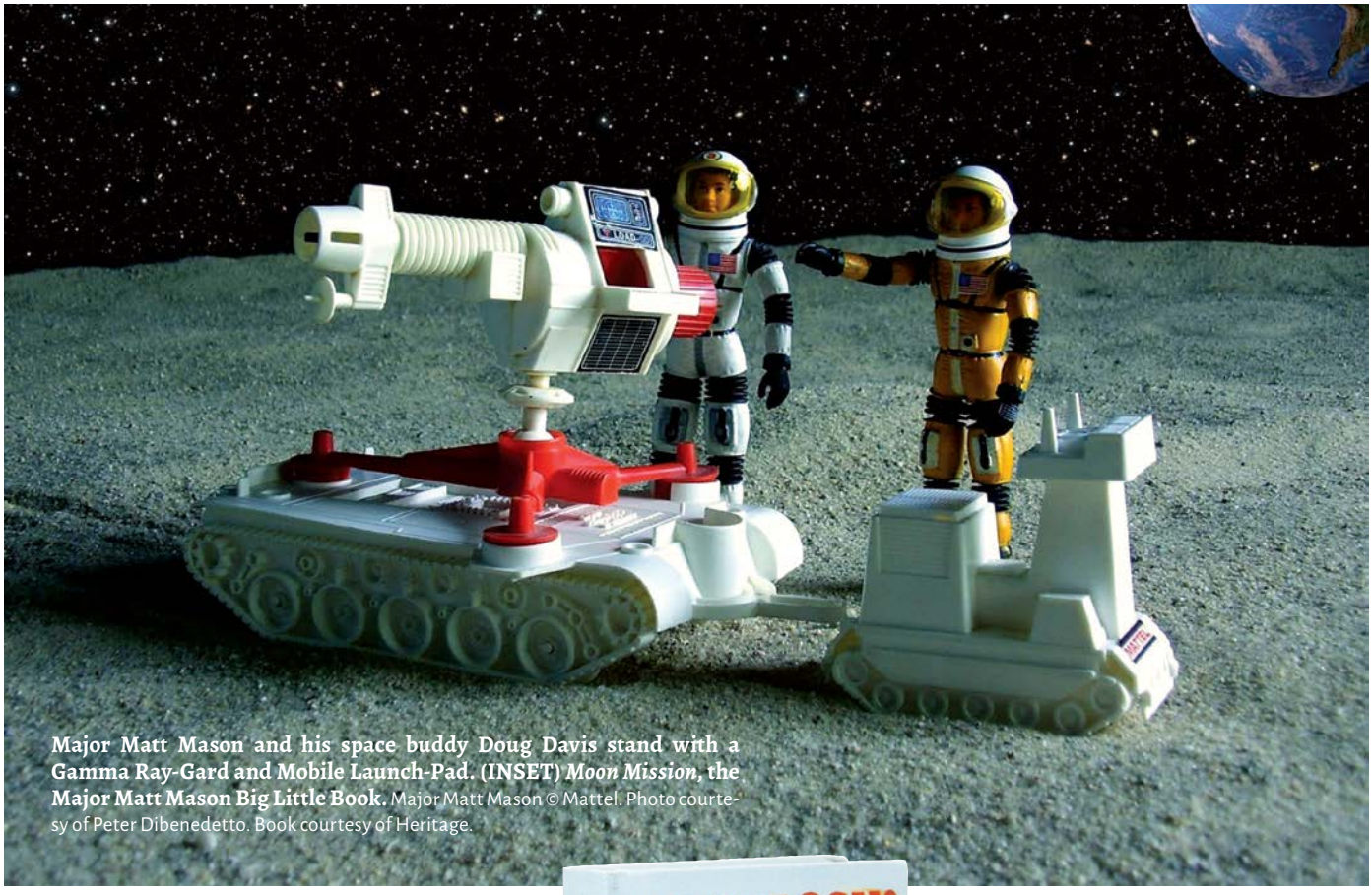
'The Eagle Has Landed'
Two Men Walk on the Moon

'One Small Step For Man... Giant Leap for Mankind'

Moon Walk Yields

(ABOVE) First men on the Moon: autographed portraits of lunar-walkers Armstrong and Aldrin and orbiter Collins. (LEFT) The morning after history was made, newspapers touted this spectacular accomplishment—and became collectibles, especially this one, signed by the *Apollo 11* astronauts. (BACKGROUND) Buzz Aldrin's footprint on the moon's surface. Newspaper © The Washington Post. Courtesy of Heritage. Lunar photo: NASA

Major Matt Mason



Major Matt Mason and his space buddy Doug Davis stand with a Gamma Ray-Gard and Mobile Launch-Pad. (INSET) *Moon Mission*, the Major Matt Mason Big Little Book. Major Matt Mason © Mattel. Photo courtesy of Peter Dibenedetto. Book courtesy of Heritage.

by Joseph Baneth Allen

Do you remember the daring exploits of American astronaut Major Matt Mason, who lived on a lunar space station with three other fellow astronauts and explored the unknown worlds of the Solar System?

Major Matt Mason—or Triple M, if you prefer—was created by Mattel Toys in 1967 to cash in on the popularity of the American Space Program. Along with his fellow astronauts Lt. Jeff Long—an African-American astronaut—Sgt. Storm, and civilian astronaut Don Davis, Mason and America's brave astronaut team were often assisted by the alien frenemy Captain Lazer when they traveled beyond the Moon. Also helping Major Matt Mason and his crew was their good friend Calisto, a mysterious alien with advanced mental powers, who hailed from Jupiter.

Not all aliens in the Major Matt Mason Universe were friendly, though. Attempting to thwart Major Mason and his space buddies was Scorpio, a truly bizarre insectoid alien who was forever hurdling search globes from his gigantic vest on his chest.

Mattel's Men in Space

Mattel marketed Major Matt Mason as "Mattel's Man in Space." Mason and his crew were also known as the "Men in Space."

Even at the height of Major Mason's popularity, toy astronauts were mostly a "Boys' Only Club"—although female astronauts were introduced in the Major Matt Mason Big Little Book published by Whitman back in 1968. In *Moon Mission*, Major Mason and his team confront giant rabbits and huge burrowing worms on the Moon. What makes *Moon Mission* unique is that it was the first and only Big Little Book published that chronicled the adventures of a popular toy.

Another unique aspect of Major Mason and his crew is in their backstories: They were engineers who lived on the Moon, and who dealt with the unforeseen obstacles of space exploration and mysterious all-powerful aliens. Major Mason and his crew were the first action figures/dolls to have "advanced degrees" stressing the importance of science and math.

"Mattel's Men in Space were the first toys to actually have advanced, albeit fictional, engineering degrees from universities," says Michelle Parnett-Dywer, curator at the Strong National Museum of Play located at Rochester, New York.

Yet apart from the passing mention of the Men in Space having engineering degrees, there was no further backstory for each of the toy astronauts. "There was no backstory [for the Men in Space]," recalls cartoonist Joe King, a former art director for the Licensing Division of Mattel Toys. King started working for Mattel Toys back in the late Seventies and left roughly a decade later.

During the toy line's near-decade-long run, Major Mason and his fellow astronauts were never as popular or as imagination-flexible as G.I. Joes, who weren't bound to one play environment. Marty Grosser, a fan of Mattel's Men in Space and the editor of Diamond's *Previews* catalog since 1988, concurs.

"Well, I was a kid back in the mid-to-late Sixties, so I definitely had my imagination expanded by the Space Program at NASA," Grosser recalls. "I watched the Moon landing on TV, and all I wanted to be was an astronaut—that, of course didn't last. But

still, I filled in my dreams of space travel by playing with Matt Mason, Calisto, Captain Lazer, Scorpio, and the rest, [filling] in the missing pieces from the Colorforms Outer Space Men—Colossus Rex ruled! —and the Zeroids.

"The only thing that would eventually drag me away from the Space Race was the Kung-Fu Grip of G.I. Joe's Adventure Team—another great set of toy memories there!"

"We all were Apollo Kids," says vintage action-figure collector Peter J. Dibenedetto. "We were all excited about the Moon landings, and Major Matt Mason allowed us to participate in our imaginations. The Men in Space and their various accessories—which included satellite launchers, re-entry shuttles, and space stations—were one of the top ten toys in the Sixties."

Following in Joe's Boots

Yet without Hasbro, Inc. taking the—then for its time—high-stakes gamble on its line of G.I. Joe figures for boys, Mattel's Men in Space never would have been launched off the conceptual drawing table.

When Hasbro proved the popularity of boy-oriented play dolls—pointedly called action figures, not dolls, by their

The Major Matt Mason line featured a "universe" of imaginative products. (BOTTOM RIGHT) Captain Lazer is Mason's towering ally in this promo graphic. © Mattel.

The First Time I Met Tarzan

PHOTO: Pixabay - bere69.

by Will Murray

If the name Will Murray rings a bell, I've gotten around in the last 40-odd years of freelancing. For some 25 years, I was Boston correspondent for *Starlog* and her sister magazines, *Fangoria* and *Comics Scene*. I traveled to movie locations around the world and interviewed tons of talent. Comic books, pulp magazines, old-time radio, film, TV, and other expressions of American popular culture have been my meat, man and boy, fan and professional writer. I bought some of the earliest Marvel Comics off the newsstands before the days of comic shops. I belong to the Baby Boom generation whose dimes helped build the present Marvel Entertainment empire.

As a fiction writer, I've stepped into the literary shoes of some of my favorite writers. My first brush with pulp fiction was reading Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter of Mars series. I've since gone on to revive his greatest creation in *Tarzan: Return to Pal-ul-don* and the acclaimed *King Kong vs. Tarzan*. I contributed

Will Murray's lifelong jungle fever probably dates back to this 1959 theatrical release starring Gordon Scott, *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure*. Note this movie poster's still of the film's aftermath of a plane crash. Tarzan TM & © ERB, Inc. Courtesy of Heritage.

40—yes, 40!—novels in Richard Sapir and Warren Murphy's hilarious *Destroyer* paperback series, as well as scripting the character for Marvel Comics. The first film I covered for *Starlog* was a based on the series. *Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins* was the film. I've been privileged posthumously collaborate with one of my favorite authors, writing Doc Savage novels under the house name of Kenneth Robeson from series originator Lester Dent's notes and unfinished manuscripts. Along the way, I penned individual novels featuring Mack Bolan: The Executioner, Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., and the *Mars Attacks* franchise. Currently, I'm launching the *Wild Adventures of the Spider* for Altus Press, based on the Thirties pulp and movie serial hero. My crossover novels have pitted Doc Savage against King Kong and Doc against the Shadow—twice!

As a contributor to numerous prose anthologies, let me just list some of the classic characters and cultural icons I've brought to life: Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Spider-Man, Ant-Man, the Hulk, the Spider, the Avenger, the Green Hornet, Honey West, Sherlock Holmes, Cthulhu, Planet of the Apes, Dr. Herbert West, and Lee Falk's immortal Ghost Who Walks, the Phantom. I've contributed to several encyclopedias focusing on the mystery, horror, science-fiction, and comic-book fields. For National Public Radio I adapted the Doc Savage novel, *The Thousand-Headed Man*, as a six-part serial.

Never mind all the pulp, comics, and H. P. Lovecraft fanzines to which I contributed back when I started writing in the Seventies. It amazes me that many of these modest but pioneering articles are footnoted in Wikipedia.

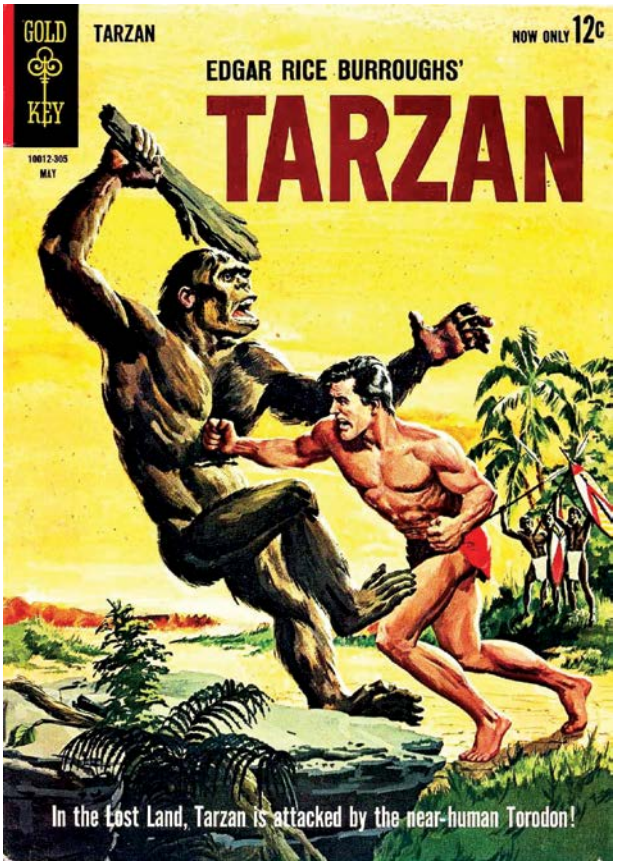
I've been so prolific for so long that sometimes Facebook and Twitter followers are stunned to realize that the same Will Murray who writes *Doc Savage* is also the creator of Marvel's *Unbeatable Squirrel Girl*. But I am. Honest. And other, seemingly unrelated, Will Murrays as well.

As consumer and creator, I've been immersed in popular culture for so long I was slower than most to wake up and realize that the stuff I have loved for so long has risen to the point that it's become the dominant shared culture (outside of sports) for the entire world. That fact that I live in a time when *Ant-Man* and its sequel, *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, are major motion pictures is so far removed from the reality of the early Sixties when I was buying *Tales to Astonish* that I might as well have been teleported to another planet!

For this column, I'm going to delve into all of it. I'll take you behind the scenes of the typical movie shoot, introduce you to creators I've interviewed, and shine a penetrating spotlight on the darkest, most mysterious corners of the cool stuff we all love.

I'm calling this column Will Murray's 20th Century Panopticon. A panopticon is a building or prison constructed so that only one observer can keep an eye on all inmates, who can't tell when they are being watched, and so must always be in their best behavior lest their secret activities be uncovered.

I am that observer and I have been watching for almost 60 years. I have secrets to tell....



One of the things I most enjoy doing is solving mysteries. Recently, long after I thought I'd never in a million years figure it out, I learned the name of the first film I ever saw on the big screen. And it turned out to be eerily meaningful as far as my later career developed.

I don't consciously remember the year. I just know that I was very young. This would have been in the mid-to-late Fifties.

Something was going on in my immediate family. I think my mother was visiting a relative out of town. My father had me. My younger siblings were not part of this adventure. They were probably still in diapers. But I was walking. I found myself in an unfamiliar neighborhood, accompanying my father. I remember noticing a billboard for a brand of bread I did not recognize. I'm not sure I was reading at that point. If I was, I just learned to recognize simple words. So I was very young. Since I was born in 1953, this incident probably took place no later than 1960.

It was night and my father took me to a movie theater. This may have been my first such visit. Certainly I don't recall ever having been in a movie theater before this.

I no longer recall anything about the film except this: early in the first reel there was a scene of a small airplane descending into a jungle and ultimately crash landing. That's all my fading memory will give up.

For decades, that brief scene stuck in my mind—the first one I beheld on the big screen. When I got older, I began wondering what the movie was. Obviously, it was a jungle picture. They made a lot of them back then. But I hadn't a clue what it was or what it was about. Since I was more or less preliterate, the film's title had escaped me. By the time it occurred to me to ask my father, it was too late to do so.

Gold Key's *Tarzan* #135 (May 1963). Cover painting by George Wilson. TM & © ERB, Inc. Courtesy of Heritage.

Craig Littler strikes a heroic pose as Jason, with the logo of his series and the anthology series which featured it. Jason of Star Command © 1978 Filmation Associates. Space Academy © 1977 Filmation Associates.

by Andy Mangels

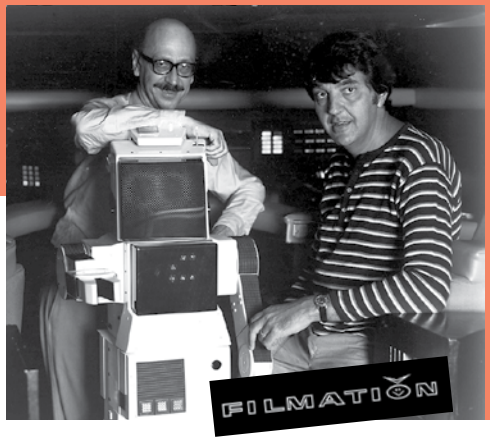
Welcome back to *Andy Mangels' Retro Saturday Morning*. Since 1989, I have been writing columns for magazines in the U.S. and foreign countries, all examining the intersection of comic books and Hollywood, whether animation or live-action. *Andy Mangels Backstage*, *Andy Mangels' Reel Marvel*, *Andy 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. In this new *RetroFan* column, I 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!

"Danger hides in the stars! This is the world of *Jason of Star Command*... A space-age soldier of fortune determined to stop the most sinister force in the universe... Dragos, Master of the Cosmos! Aiding Jason in his battle against evil is a talented team of experts, all working together in a secret section of Space Academy. *Jason of Star Command*!"

The announcer's voice was Filmation co-creator Lou Scheimer, but the intonation and visuals promised pure science-fiction space-adventure serial, translated to Saturday mornings. With a hero that could have been Han Solo's brother, a one-eyed villain that was television's scariest-looking bad guy, and special effects unrivalled on television, *Jason of Star Command* pushed viewers into hyperspace!

Graduating from *Space Academy*

Founded in the early Sixties by animators Lou Scheimer and Hal Sutherland, with ex-disc jockey Norm Prescott, Filmation Associates had been riding high on Saturday morning animation since the 1966 debut of their *The New Adventures of Superman* series. Although the majority of their shows were animated spin-offs based on live-action licensed properties—*Fantastic Voyage*, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *Batman*, *The Brady Kids*, *Star Trek*, *Lassie's Rescue Rangers*, and *The New Adventures of Gilligan*, to name a few—Filmation eventually branched out to live-action original series. Beginning with *Shazam!*



The creator and director of *Jason of Star Command*, Arthur Nadel, stands behind Peepo the robot in the cockpit of the *Starfire*, with producer Lou Scheimer. Jason of Star Command © 1978 Filmation Associates.

Cast members of the first season of *Jason* included (L to R) James Doohan as Commander Canarvin, Craig Littler as Jason (holding robot W1K1), Susan O'Hanlon as Captain Nicole Davidoff, Charlie Dell as Professor E. J. Parsafoot, and Sid Haig as the villainous Dragos! Jason of Star Command © 1978 Filmation Associates.

in 1974 [see cover story in *RetroFan* #4], the studio produced their first live-action superheroine series with *The Secrets of Isis*, the original comedy *The Ghost Busters* [coming next issue!], the bizarre anthology *Uncle Croc's Block* in 1975, and the post-apocalyptic sci-fi series *Ark II* in 1976.

Filmation began development on a new science-fiction series in 1976, which was announced to the press in April 1977; part of the fall CBS Saturday morning line-up would be a new live-action space series called *Space Academy*. The series was set in the year 3732, where young cadets were attending the interstellar school known as Space Academy. There, they mixed futuristic school lessons with visits to other planets, encounters with alien creatures, and hijinks with their school robot, the waist-high Peepo. The man who had written the original *Star Trek's* second pilot, Sam Peeples, helped develop the series.

The timing was fortuitous for the series; an upcoming science-fiction film had brought together many special effects designers, and Lou Scheimer hired a group of them to create the asteroid-based home of Space Academy, as well as the various spaceships and aliens. That upcoming space film? None other than *Star Wars*, which debuted May 25, 1977, and soon became a huge phenomenon!

In a post-*Star Wars* entertainment world, every television network was scrambling to have its own interstellar action series. CBS beat their competitors to the punch with *Space Academy*, which debuted on September 10, 1977, and garnered high ratings. Between those ratings and *Star Wars*' success, CBS quickly agreed to Filmation's plans for a *Space Academy* spin-off. A series called *Star Command* was announced in March 1978 for fall airing; the series would be presented as a serial during a new 90-minute anthology series to be title *The Super Seven*.

Working under show creator Arthur Nadel, Samuel Peeples was again brought in to further develop the new series, and he wrote the first six episodes in June 1978. Each of 16 contracted episodes for the show—now titled *Jason of Star Command*—would be only 11 minutes in length, with each tale ending in a cliffhanger, not unlike movie serials of the Forties and Fifties. Viewers would then have to tune in the following week the get the next chapter of the story. Contrasting *Space Academy*'s mostly teen and preteen cast, *Jason of Star Command*'s plot found a group of heroic adults working within a secretive section of Space Academy to combat sinister forces that conspired to dominate the stars. Leading them were a dashing Commander, whose team included a daring soldier of fortune named Jason, computer expert Captain Nicole Davidoff, eccentric scientist Dr. E. J. Parsafoot, and the miniature robot W1K1. Together they often faced the evil machinations of Dragos—the self-proclaimed "Master of the Cosmos"—and his alien minions aboard the Dragonship.

"*Jason of Star Command* was really a breakthrough show," said Scheimer in my interviews with him for the 2012 TwoMorrows book, *Lou Scheimer: Creating the Filmation Generation*. "It was a sequel to *Space Academy*, and even used some of the same sets, spaceships, and characters, but it showed the adventures of the grown-ups rather than the kids. And it was really done as if it were a serial, with a season-long continued storyline, a cliffhanger ending each week, evil villains, and alien creatures. It was also probably the most expensive Saturday morning show ever filmed, costing about $200,000 per quarter-hour episode!"

In June, casting notices went out across Hollywood for the shows' leads: Jason, 20s, athletic, young Errol Flynn type, lead, regular; Nicole, mid-20s, pretty, athletic, lead, regular; Parsafoot, 40s, scientific character, Jason's sidekick, mentor, and friend, regular; Vanessa, 30s, femme fatale, sultry, seductive, bewitching, hard, regular; Dragos, any age, play half-human and half-robot villain type, will be costumed, regular; available guest stars with recognizable names to play cameos.

Initially, Scheimer had planned to have actor Jonathan Harris cross over his role of Commander Gampu from *Space Academy*, but the studio and the aging *Lost in Space* star had a falling out over fee negotiations. "We brought in Jimmy Doohan to play the role of the Star Command leader, Commander Canarvin," Scheimer said. "He was the perfect guy to do a Saturday morning live-action sci-fi show." Doohan had already worked for Filmation previously on the animated *Star Trek* series, wherein he had shown himself quite versatile in the voiceover department, playing many different aliens and guest characters.

Scheimer recalled that for the lead role of Jason, they wanted to find a guy who was a lot like Han Solo from

with a flash. To operate the light, the laser beam that went on in the eye, I had a wire going down the back of the helmet, down the costume, and I triggered it in my hand."

Space villains at the time were all compared to Darth Vader, ignoring the king space villain of all time: Ming the Merciless (later a character in Filmation's animated *Flash Gordon* series for NBC). "I approached playing Dragos as doing classical theater, and I used Iago from *Othello* as a basis for the character, that kind of quiet evilness that is actually much more deadly than someone who is physically violent," says Haig. "As a matter of fact, at one point in time, someone from Standards and Practices with the network showed up on the set, just to make sure we weren't violating any rules, and I was shooting this scene in which Jason was thwarting me from doing whatever evil thing it was I was trying to perpetrate. I slammed my fist on the table and said, 'Jason!' and he said, 'Oh, no, no, no, no, that's way too violent!' And so I said, "'Oh, okay,' and so we did it again, and I looked uh, right into the camera, and very quietly said, 'Jasonnnnnnn…' And you tell me, which is scarier?"

Sid Haig in an interview for the *Jason* DVD set. (INSET) Dragos wears elevator boots, because 6'4" wasn't tall enough! Jason of Star Command © 1978 Filmation Associates.

Haig remembers that many of his scenes in the first season were shot in a different manner than other shows he had worked on. "Our script consisted of all 16 episodes; they were all written before we started shooting. So, if we were doing a scene in the control room, we did the scenes in the control room for all 16 episodes all at the same time. If it was in the gangway, it was from all 16 episodes at the same time. No matter what set we were on, we were doing scenes from all 16 episodes, so that we could make that deadline to get all 16 episodes in the can! That was an amazing way to work, but you really had to be sharp to remember which episode it was that you were doing at any given time!"

Of his co-stars, Haig worked the most with Littler. "Craig Littler was an amazing guy. I mean, he *was* Jason. He just personified the good guy, you know. And he had a strength to him which made for a very good adversary, and we had a great time together." Haig found director Arthur Nadel a pleasure to work with as well. "He had a clear vision for what it was he wanted to do, he was able to impart that to you, and then he just kind of got out of the way and let you do your work. He would listen to any suggestions that you might have, and weigh them carefully before he said yes or no to any idea that you might have. Working with a director like that on a series where you're there together every day for weeks was an absolute pleasure."

Haig remembers producer Scheimer fondly. "I met up with Lou Scheimer at the San Diego Comic-Con in July of 2006, and I had to tell him at that point that he didn't know it at the time, but he not only saved me career-wise in terms of, of feeling good about what I was doing, who I was, but he literally saved my family, financially, by giving me that role. He joked, and he said, 'God, I could've gotten you cheaper!' "

Jason of Star Command was filmed at a secondary studio known as Filmation West (in Canoga Park, California, instead of the main offices in nearby Reseda), which basically appeared to be a warehouse in an industrial park with a lot of commercial/manufacturing businesses. "We were always being plagued by salesmen coming through the door, wanting to sell stuff," says Haig. "And one guy was particularly insistent, he came in, and he wanted to see Arthur Nadel, and the receptionist said, 'He's extremely busy, I'm sorry, he can't be…' and he said, 'That's all right, I'll wait,' and he just sat down in the chair to wait for Arthur. At that point in time, I came through the office [in costume] to get a cup of coffee, got my coffee, and went back to the sound stage. He asked the receptionist who I was, and she, very fast on her feet, said, 'That was Arthur Nadel.' The guy got up and left, and we never saw him again!"

Haig didn't just scare the salesmen, as he relates about one scene. Aboard Dragos' ship, he had a large aquarium "easily 110 gallons with really colorful fish. They set up this shot through the fish tank at me, and for some stupid reason, because that's what I do, I reached forward, and I went to touch the glass in front of one of the fish. As I did, it turned and looked at me and shot off in the other direction, and I said, 'Well, see, the fish gets it!' "

As for the special-effects crew and alien creatures he got to interact with as Dragos, Haig is complimentary. "The special effects and make-up people on this show were consummate professionals. I mean, they did things with machinery and electronics and make-up that to that point I had never seen. We were extremely fortunate to be able to work with a team like this. We had some great creature makers on the show, and the aliens were really bizarre-looking. Some looked like they had tentacles coming out from all over their entire body, others were crusty-looking, and it was really wild working with those guys. They really didn't have a lot of dialogue, so there wasn't a lot of interacting, but I remember a scene in which I was trying to explain my evil plan, which I was going to involve them in, and I just put my arm around one of the aliens and then pulled back and said, 'It's easier if you take a shower, pal.' "

The Greatest American Hero

by Dan Hagen

Stephen J. Cannell didn't like superheroes. He thought they were stupid.

Cannell, one of American TV's most successful writer-producers, never read superhero comic books and didn't watch superhero TV shows. The superhero was, as he put it, "a BS genre."

But superhero shows had provided ABC-TV with some of its biggest hits, including *Batman* and *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and the network wanted another one.

What ABC also wanted, undoubtedly, was to replicate the success of Richard Donner's recent *Superman* film (1978)—a tall order for a small screen. Network television was a quotidian, kitchen-sink medium, generally uncomfortable with superheroes or anything else so spectacular that it might be out of place in Mary Tyler Moore's modest living room.

Some superhero TV shows, like the Sixties' *Mr. Terrific* or the Seventies' *Spider-Man*, had been dismal failures that nobody involved seemed to believe in—pre-sold packages produced by cynics, as author Jon Abbott described them in his book *Stephen J. Cannell Television Productions: A History of All Series and Pilots*. Audiences are likely to reject a show if they sense that its producers have contempt for them.

But Kenneth Johnson's successful series *The Incredible Hulk*, still airing on CBS at the time, had shown that a superhero show might tackle serious social problems like child abuse, and need not be camp.

Nevertheless, navigating such a primetime series around the pitfalls of absurdity and cheesiness remained a tall order.

ABC thought Cannell could do it. He wasn't so sure.

"By that time in my career, I had learned not to say no in the room, but to always bring the piece of meat back to the den and kind of sniff it for a while before I kick it out in the sand," Cannell recalled in an interview for the Archive of American Television. "So I said, 'Let me think about it. Maybe, something.' I was sort of thinking, 'I'm never going to do this.' "

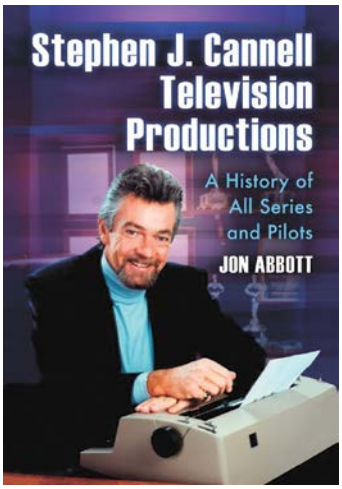
All right, so superheroes were BS. Where to go from there?

Wait a minute, Cannell thought. The private detective genre was also BS, and yet he had created one of the most successful private-eye series in TV history, *The Rockford Files*.

How had he done that? By pretending he was Jim Rockford.

"What would I do if I was Rockford?" Cannell said. "If I had a guy pull a gun on me, I'd give him my watch. So I always knew what Rockford would do, because it was exactly what I would do."

Okay, then. What if he, television writer Steve Cannell, were given a caped,



Cannell's series were examined in this 2009 book published by McFarland. © 2009 Jon Abbott.

Early publicity photo for the series spotlighting its cast, (LEFT TO RIGHT) Robert Culp, William Katt, and Connie Sellecca. The Greatest American Hero © Stephen J. Cannell Productions.

superpowered suit by aliens and told that while wearing it, he could accomplish great good for the globe?

Cannell mused about that.

"I've got TV shows on the air, I've got networks calling me up wanting me to do pilots, and I'm going to put on this spandex outfit with a cape and run around in the street? What would I do? And what happens when I get arrested the first time, and my wife comes down and goes, 'What are you doing?' And I'm, 'Oh, this is for Bud and Joan's costume party.' The second time I get caught, what am I going to say? All of a sudden, that starts to be funny to me."

In the Mighty Marvel Manner

In a way, Cannell did for TV what Marvel Comics editor Stan Lee had done for comic books a decade before. Like Cannell, Lee took pride in the dramatic jiu-jitsu of turning plot pitfalls into peaks—repurposing something that might be regarded as a liability and making it a storytelling advantage.

Take Captain America, for example. Lee wanted to revive the Forties character in 1964, but was worried that Sixties readers wouldn't accept a cornball character dressed in red, white, and blue tights.

"Over the years we had tried to resurrect him, and he never worked," Lee recalled. "After World War II ended, he was just a guy in a dumb costume running around. I mean, that's the way a lot of people perceived him.

"So I thought, 'Wouldn't it be fun to say he had been frozen in the ice for these two decades or whatever it was, and now he's back?' I'm always trying to give them a personality hook or a character trait that would make them unique. And I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great? Here's a guy who's been out of it for 20 years, and suddenly everything is changed.' He never knew what a hippie was. There are hippies, there are guys smoking marijuana, all those things…".

So against the public's disintegrating belief in America, Marvel Comics would juxtapose Captain America himself.

"That's right!" Lee said. "And here's a guy who'd be considered totally square. He believes in liberty and freedom and the flag. It was the Vietnam War, and nobody was interested in war anymore. People were turned off. So I figured, 'Let's give it a shot.' So that was the reason for the man out of time, out of sync.

"One thing I always tried to do was take things that are disadvantages, and try to make a plus out of them," Lee recalled.

Cannell, too, was well practiced at turning genre weaknesses into strengths.

"In many ways, Stephen Cannell is to TV what Stan Lee was to the comic-book industry—both present us with heroes who are vigilantes, Robin Hoods, and anti-heroes, flawed, vulnerable, tongue-in-cheek pastiches of harder, straighter fare," Abbott wrote. "Like Lee's Sixties Marvel superheroes, Cannell's TV heroes—particularly those of the early Eighties (*Greatest American Hero, Hardcastle and McCormick, The A-Team, Riptide, Hunter*)—are living in a halfway world too real to be as phony as the fantasy environments of more straight-faced entries in their chosen genres, too fake to be confused with grim reality. Stan Lee took superheroes out of impossibly pure characterizations and make-believe locales, and dropped them squarely in an equally fictional environment that more closely resembled reality… Cannell played the same trick with the TV hero."

Clothes Make the (Super)Man

The Cannell shows were a matter of deftly navigating between dramatic poles. They winked at the inherent absurdity of fictional genres like private eyes and superheroes, even as they provided moments of heartfelt heroics.

The reluctant hero, the superhero, and superhuman high jinks—Cannell's recipe successfully mixed ingredients from *The Rockford Files, The Adventures of Superman,* and *Bewitched* into something fresh.

Co-star Robert Culp said this approach was typical of Cannell's creativity. "What Steve is good at is taking a lighthearted approach to a genre, if you will, and kind of putting a twist on it that no one else would think of but Steve Cannell," Culp told *David Anthony Kraft's Comics Interview* magazine.

Perhaps Cannell's cleverest idea was to build the superpowers right into the alien superhero suit. That *required* Ralph Hinkley (William Katt) to wear the embarrassing costume, something no one would ordinarily do, and thereby provided a convincing explanation for an otherwise inexplicable comic-book convention.

The 1981 pilot film, written by Cannell and directed by Rod Holcomb, plays both up and *against* such comic-book superhero conventions, spotlighting them in witty ways.

While Ralph's trying on the suit for the first time, his young son Kevin (Brandon Williams) is in the next room watching TV. So Ralph's costume change is conducted to the accompaniment of the absurd stentorian tones of Ted Knight narrating the Seventies Justice League cartoon *Super Friends*.

FAST FACTS

The Greatest American Hero

- **No. of seasons:** three
- **No. of episodes:** 45 (four unaired)
- **Original run:** March 18, 1981–February 3, 1983
- **Cast:** William Katt, Robert Culp, Connie Sellecca, Michael Paré, Faye Grant, Jesse D. Goins
- **Network:** ABC

INSTRUCTIONS NOT INCLUDED

An Interview with

William Katt

by Dan Hagen

RetroFan: You sort of grew up on the set of *Perry Mason*, right? Most of us see your profession as quite glamorous, but, with two actors for parents, did you regard the life of a performer as pretty ordinary?
William Katt: At a young age, there wasn't any way to gauge the difference between ordinary and extraordinary. It was just what was!

Famous faces, I knew from television. Photographers taking photos of our family, days playing hooky from school to go to set with my parents—that was normal!

Of course, at the same time, there was joy, there was a lot of darkness and drama around our house growing up. Mom and dad both actors, careers going in different directions... it was conflicted, to say the least!

But that's pretty normal too, isn't it? Just watch TMZ and see the ups and downs of entertainment marriages and family life. It's always best of times, worst of times! No different now than 50 years ago! That's the business, as they say. Still, I feel lucky to have grown up in it and, looking back, I wouldn't change a thing.

RF: The son of Kit Carson and Della Street—no wonder you grew up to be the Greatest American Hero. What were your mother and father like?
WK: My mother and father were complicated people! They both had their own distinct devils and angels, but that's what made them attractive to each other and to their fans. That's what also made them interesting parents!

Dad was the son of German immigrants... [he was] born in Brooklyn, New York. He grew up in a rough neighborhood. He was street-smart, tough, a savvy businessman—but incredibly kind and, above all, a man of his word. I learned the true meaning of integrity being raised by him. Although we didn't get along all the time when I was growing up, I still live by the lessons I learned from him to this day.

I should add he was an incredible raconteur, and I wish I had acquired his storytelling abilities. Sadly, I didn't! I confess I actually bore myself sometimes!

Katt in costume in his iconic role. The Greatest American Hero TM & © Stephen J. Cannell Productions.

My Visit to the Museum of Pop Culture

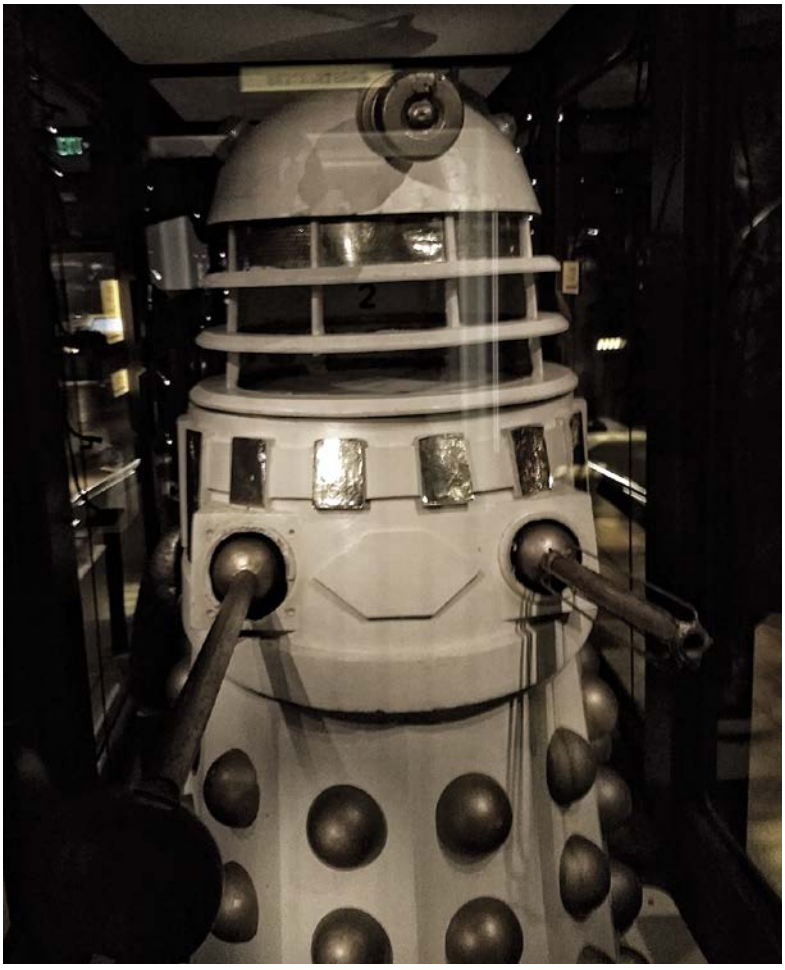
The Crazy, Cool Stuff We Love On Display (and Why My Mom Liking the Marvel Exhibit Was So Great)

by Scott Saavedra

I like popular culture and I like museums. I also like eggs, but that's a story for another time. My interest in the former was mostly a product of me growing up in the U.S.of A. My interest in the latter was largely due to an uncle and some elephants.

I was, maybe, six years old when my father's oldest brother had taken me to what is now known as the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. We were in the African Mammal Hall, at the end of which stood a massive display of elephants. It was mesmerizing. As we got closer, the display seemed to engulf me. It felt as if we were entering another world. I was in love.

My affection for that museum (or any museum, actually) was so powerful that after that first trip I lied to my very dear grandmother, Mama Angela, as we walked home from church one day. Mama Angela, momentarily confused about how to get back to her apartment (it was across the street from the church), asked me which way we needed to go. I pointed in the direction of the elephants, miles away. I figured if I could just get us to the museum I might be able to convince her to let me go in. A few moments later she regained her wits and my cunning plan fell apart. Mama Angela—her back permanently hunched, a result of not receiving adequate medical attention after being struck by a car years earlier—and I walked slowly and silently back to her apartment. I was ashamed of myself for about four or five decades and, yes, post-life I expect to ride the express bus to the Bad Place. That



(TOP) An apparently dead cute gremlin from *Gremlins* (1984) was surprisingly one of the more disturbing displays at the museum, particularly given the number of severed heads and dead bodies on exhibit. (ABOVE) A tired looking Imperial Dalek from a 1988 episode of *Doctor Who* ("Rememberance of the Daleks").

installation consisting of "dead bodies" in canvas sacks hanging by chains. You are free to walk among the fake corpses and… feel repulsed, I guess.

Infinite Worlds of Science Fiction

This is all very anti-science-fiction, but back in the Olden Times, televisions had tubes inside them and two sets of channels on two different frequency ranges: Very High (VHF) and Ultra High (UHF). The channel-selector dial for VHF broadcasts clicked nicely from station to station. That's where the network shows and reruns of *Star Trek* and *Twilight Zone* could be found. Using the UHF dial was more like trying to tune to a radio station. Sometimes you got the signal, sometimes you didn't. On UHF we watched *Speed Racer*, *Kimba the White Lion*, and once—but only once—I tried to watch *Doctor Who*.

Since then, I've warmed to the Doctor considerably as have lots of other people around the world. MoPOP has some props from the original run of *Doctor Who* including a Cyberman suit and a Dalek with bits peeling off, causing the poor dear to seem less than threatening.

There are plenty of aliens about, as you would rightly expect. Mork from Ork (*Mork & Mindy*, 1978–1982) is represented by a spacesuit and gloves worn by series star Robin Williams. Other aliens include an Arkellian Sand Beetle prop from one of the craziest, over-the-top sci-fi movies of all time, *Starship Troopers* (1997), a facehugger from *Aliens* (1986), and Greedo's head (Han shot first) and a Jawa costume from *Star Wars* (1977). Yes. I continue to refer to the first Star Wars movie as *Star Wars*. It must be a generational thing but this "Episode IV: A New Hope" business never caught on with me so, I guess, get off my lawn, nerf herder.

There were some paintings about but all were overshadowed, I felt, by an H. R. Giger concept piece for *Alien* (1979). It's gorgeous in a, you know, H. R. Giger sort of way. You admire the talent and the imagination, but it makes you feel things you don't understand.

Are there any weapons? Affirmative! Lots and lots of ray guns, disruptors, and what-have-you (both props and playthings), including Ripley's pulse rifle from *Aliens* (1986), Buck Rogers' Atomic Disintegrator toy, a Reverberating Carbonizer from *Men in Black* (1997), and many more I couldn't identify. Zap.

Sci-fi craft appear courtesy models from our pre-CGI past: An Atreides ship miniature from *Dune* (1984), a Narcissus Shuttlecraft miniature from *Aliens* (1986), and the six-foot *Discovery One* from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

Science-fiction artifacts are not limited to the Infinite Worlds exhibit. The same is true for the

BARNEY GOOGLE and SNUFFY SMITH at 100

by Michael Eury

Google is 100! No, not the internet giant, but one of the funnies' most successful characters—the dapper, diminutive idler with the zany "goo-goo-googly eyes," Barney Google.

Cartoonist and sports aficionado Billy DeBeck (1890–1942) created Barney Google in a daily comic strip originally titled *Take Barney Google, F'rinstance*, which premiered on June 17, 1919 on the sports page of a Chicago newspaper. It soon gained wider distribution through King Features Syndicate. The strip's placement on the sports section was not random, as its unscrupulous protagonist was a rabid fan of boxing, horse racing, and poker, and routinely bet on competitions, in direct defiance of his overbearing wife (who was written out of the strip). Originally a lanky figure, Barney's appearance was soon modified by DeBeck into the familiar, cigar-puffing pee-wee whose zany eyes were usually trained toward racing forms and card games.

In the July 17, 1922 strip, Barney Google gained a funny-animal sidekick—a joke of a racehorse named Spark Plug, a.k.a. "Sparky"—whose presence quickly helped the feature, soon retitled *Barney Google and Spark Plug*, gallop to stardom. Barney Google and Spark Plug were among the first comic-strip characters to become multimedia sensations: merchandise featuring the pair flooded the market throughout the Twenties; lyricist Billy Rose's 1923 hit novelty song, "Barney Google (with the Goo-Goo-Googly Eyes)," was a hit; and silent comedy shorts, animated theatrical cartoons,

(LEFT) Snuffy Smith, the bodacious breakout star of the *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith* strip, in a 1937 colored pencil-and-ink illustration by the comic's creator, Billy DeBeck, produced for King Features Syndicate executive Brad Kelly. (RIGHT) The loveable—and merchandisable—Spark Plug was introduced into *Barney Google* on July 17, 1922. © King Features Syndicate, Inc. Snuffy Smith drawing courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

Early Barney Google and Spark Plug products included these dolls of the cartoon stars, produced by Schoenhut in 1922. © King Features Syndicate, Inc. Courtesy of Hakes Auctions.

World War II-era comedy films, and comic books kept them in the public eye outside of the funny papers, all making creator DeBeck a very wealthy man. It seemed like nothing could topple the juggernaut that was *Barney Google*...

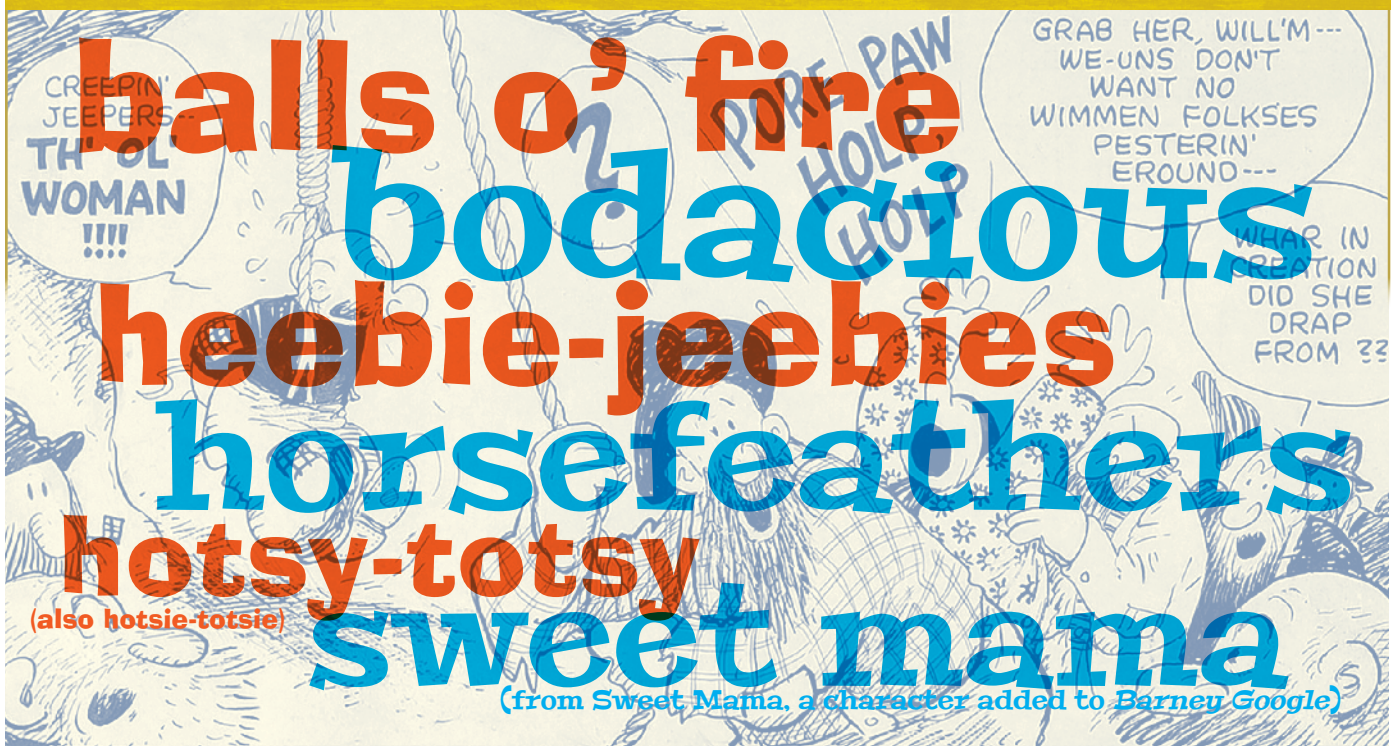
...except for *another* bodacious, pint-sized lazybones, this one with a taste for chicken-thieving and moonshine.

In the Thirties, as the Great Depression gripped America, many "hillbillies"—impoverished people of the U.S. Appalachians—fled the mountains for other ports of call, in search of employment. A hillbilly craze of sorts emerged in the popular culture, its poster child being cartoonist Al Capp's celebrated, long-running *Li'l Abner* comic strip, which premiered in 1934. *Li'l Abner* would continue for decades to come and its rustic setting and cornpone humor would influence such later media properties as *Ma and Pa Kettle*, *The Real McCoys*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and *Hee Haw*.

In the November 17, 1934 installment of *Barney Google and Spark Plug*, Barney, on the lam from the law, ducked into the Appalachian community of Hootin' Holler, where readers were introduced to a cantankerous, scruffy mountain man named Snuffy Smith—or "Smif," for y'all flatlanders who don't speak hillbilly. The checkers-cheatin' Snuffy, quick to draw shotgun bead on any potential "revenoor" who might be sniffin' around for his moonshine still, was so shiftless and conniving by comparison, he almost made Barney seem worthy of Rotary Club membership. Barney and Snuffy feuded at first, but once it became clear that readers were fascinated by the backwoods antics of sawed-off Snuffy and his plump wife Loweezy (a.k.a. "Weezy," although her name was spelled "Lowizie" in her earliest appearances), the fellas got along just fine. Before long, Snuffy took up residence in Barney's comic strip as its co-star, its title being changed to *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith*, with Barney often up to no good in the

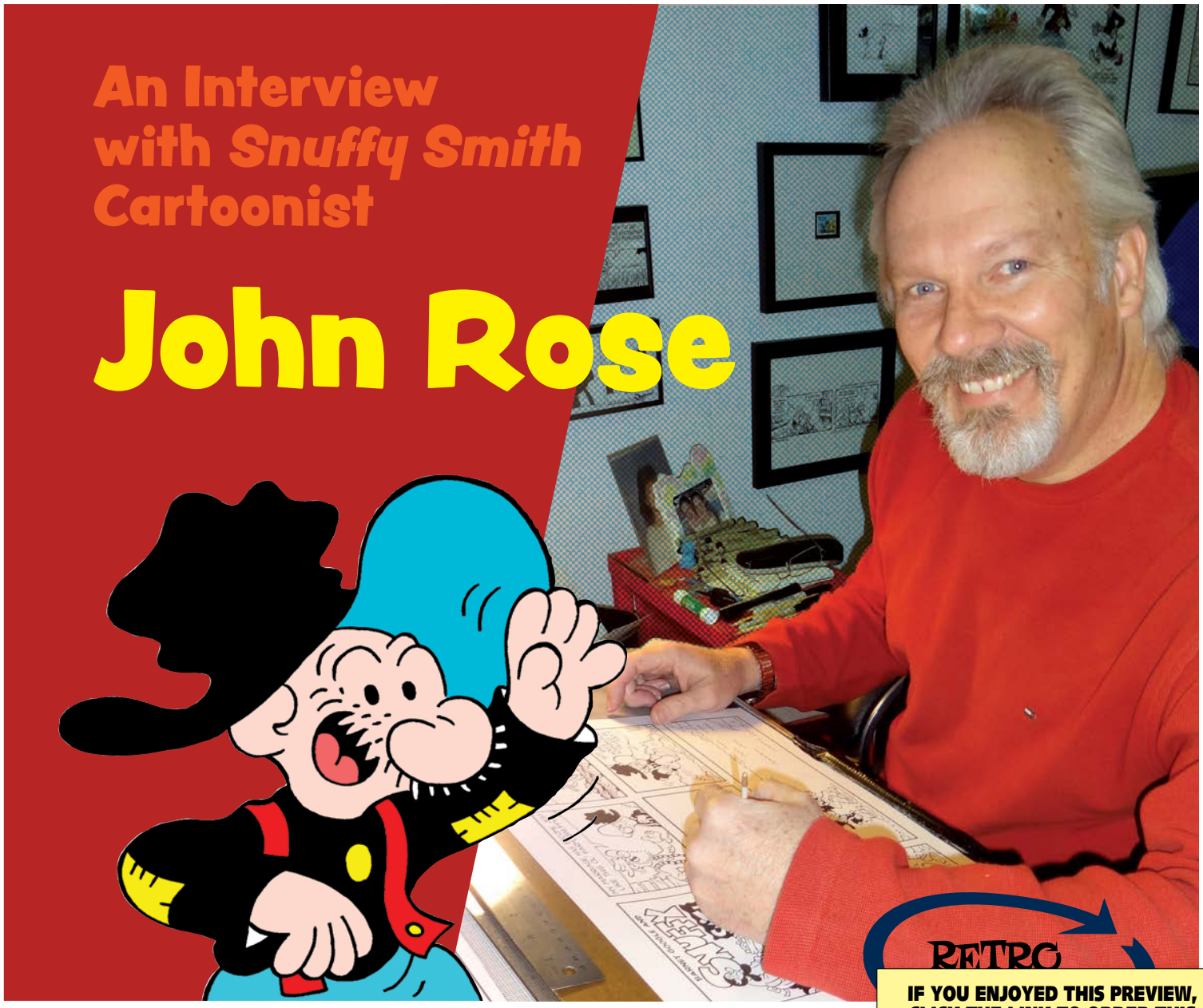
GOOGLE SHAPED OUR LINGO!

The creation and popularization of these slang words and phrases is attributed to the comic strip *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith*:



An Interview with *Snuffy Smith* Cartoonist

John Rose



Conducted by Michael Eury

Cartoonist John Rose, a member of the National Cartoonists Society and the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists, was born, educated, and resides in the mountains of Virginia. He began cartooning professionally in the late Eighties as a political cartoonist and children's-feature illustrator.

Rose took up residence in Hootin' Holler in 1998, assisting gag-master Fred Lasswell on King Features' *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith*. Upon Lasswell's death in 2001, Rose was hired to produce the feature. He has deftly maintained the spirit of his predecessor on the strip while subtly earmarking it as his own through contemporary references and through personal appearances where John meets *Snuffy*'s fans face to face.

Several books have been published collecting Rose's political, children's, and *Snuffy Smith* cartoons. His work has been honored with national and regional awards, the most recent, as of this writing, being 2018's First Place Award in the Tennessee Press Association's "Best Use of Humor in an Ad" PSA campaign for his creation of Snuffy Smith-starring "Snuff Out Wildfires Before They Start" toons.

I was drawn to Rose's *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith* cartoons for two reasons: his accessible, likeable cartooning style and his name. Regarding the latter, I have an uncle named John Rose, my mother's mai
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