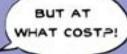


ESCAPE FROM EFANZINIA

I HAVE ABSORBED THE COMPLETE ARCHIVE OF OUR PEOPLE



The Drink Tank #414 Silver Age Scifi Comics



Cover by España Sheriff!!!

Page 3 - Welcome to the Science-Fiction Comics of the Silver Age

An Editorial by Chuck Serface

Page 5 - Space Cabbie by Christopher J. Garcia

Page 6 - Challengers of the Unknown by Ron Goulart A Review by Stephanie Alford

Page 8 - Growing Up in the Silver Age of Comics of the 1960s by Chris Barkley

Page 17 - Cruising the Solar System with Space Cabbie by Randy Smith

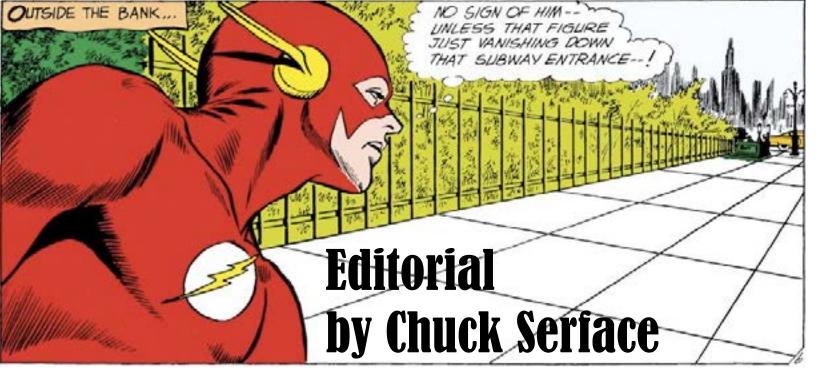
Page 20 - Weird Science Fantasy #26: UFOs & Comics by Christopher J. Garcia

Page 23 - First Mutant, Lost Superman by Derek McCaw

Page 25 - Ultra the Multi-Alien, AKA the Hero of Dalesville by Chuck Serface

Page 27 - My Favorite Silver Age Sci-Fi Origins by Christopher J. Garcia

~Editors~ Chris Garcia ~ Alissa McKersie ~ Chuck Serface



I've discussed elsewhere how four-year old Chuck Serface discovered comics while rummaging for men's magazines in his two oldest brothers' bathroom. There I found instead tattered comics featuring the Martian Manhunter, Metamorpho, and, of course, Superman and Batman. This was 1969, the Silver Age's twilight, but within a few short months I'd encounter Adam Strange, The Justice League of America, the Flash, and the character I discuss in this issue, Ultra, the Multi-Alien. I also developed a strong, strong love for House of Mystery, The House of Secrets, and The Witching Hour. The first comic I can remember owning is Charlton's Ghost Manor. But for now Christopher J. Garcia dedicate ourselves to science-fiction comics of the Silver Age.

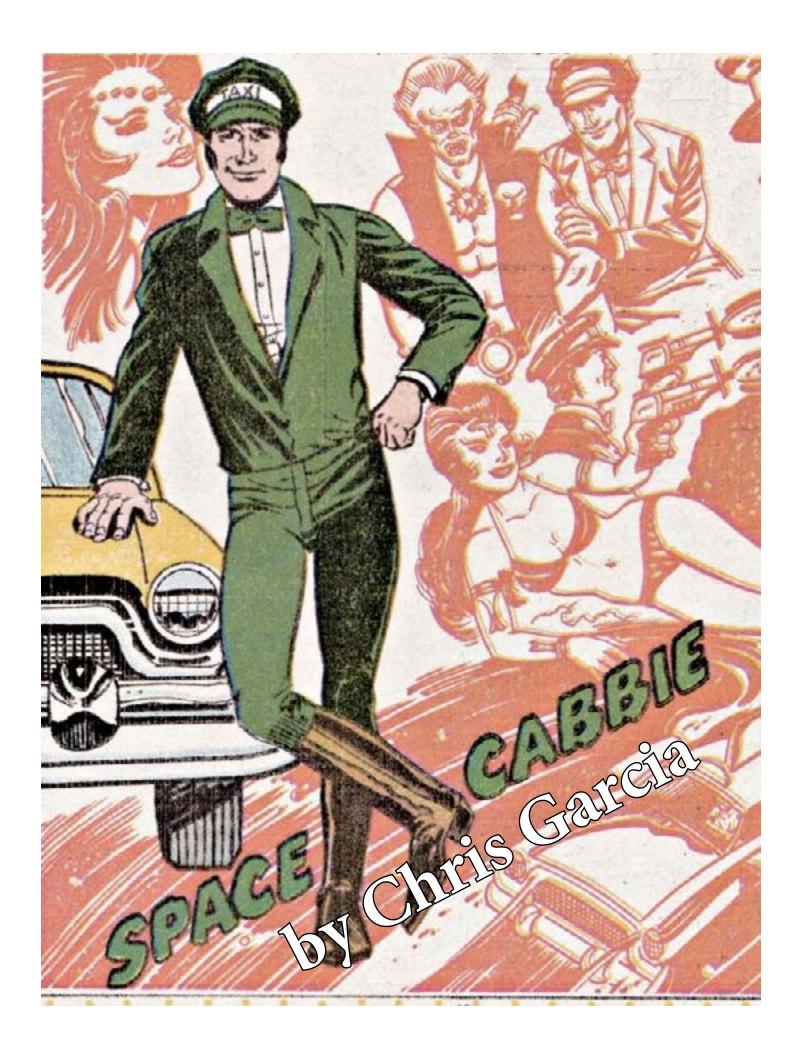
While excellent, submissions here comprise but a brush stroke on a wide, colorful mural. The Silver Age was the Atom Age and the Space Age. Explorations beyond our planet were increasing day by day, and I can't recall a comic publisher who didn't have titles inspiring readers to consider the possibilities, whether scientifically sound or not. Our contributors and your dear editors focus mostly on DC's offerings, but future Drink Tanks easily could expand coverage.

For this issue, Christopher J. Garcia discusses his beloved Space Cabbie and the "cabbie tale." Stephanie Alford offers an honest appraisal of novelist Ron Goulart's Challengers of the Unknown. Chris Barkley recollects his early experiences with the Justice League of America and other comics. Randy Smith shares his views on Space Cabbie, a wildly popular survivor of the Silver Age of DC science fiction, almost equally so with Adam Strange. Christopher J. Garcia chimes in again with UFOs. Derek McCaw remembers Captain Comet. I have thoughts about Ultra the Multi-Alien. Finally, Christopher J. Garcia lists his favorite Silver Age origins.

Thank you to all our friends for sharing our enthusiasm. May childhood daydreams and escapist pursuits never die!

Yours.

Chuck



Otto Binder is one of the most interesting figures in science-fiction history. He wrote thousands of stories for comics, and he wrote a bunch of short stories and novels, often as ½ (or according to some folks 2/3 to ¾) of Eando Binder, the pen name he shared with his brother, Earl Andrew Binder. He was one of the finest pulp writers who then ran into the comics industry, and whose work was often utilized by the legendary Julie Schwartz. In my eyes, his greatest creation was the Legion of Superheroes, but the one that I could easily find myself digging into the deepest is Space Cabbie, because it's a part of a larger story: the cabbie tale.

Taxis really came of age in the 1920s and 1930s, though they came up in the last years of the 19th century. 1899 was the biggest year in both London and New York for making cabs into the big deal they remain today.

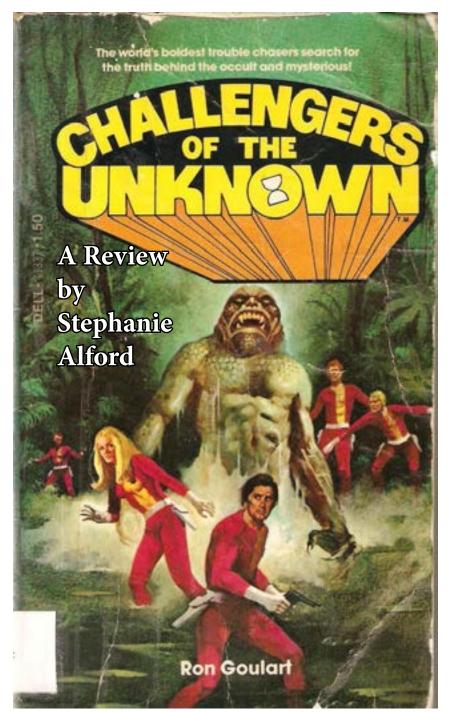
Cabbies are the perfect characters for genre stories. They interact with many different kinds of people, they move through lives in a way that allows them to draw knowledge from across pretty much all social strata. They are mobile, so the stories can move easily and naturally, while remaining contained. Films grabbed on to the taxi driver, including films like Taxi Driver. The classic Finnish film Night on Earth is one of the best films of the 1980s. Books do it slightly better, though, and science fiction books make good use of it. Let's start with Space Cabbie.

Space Cabbie is a galactic taxi driver. He lives in the middle of the 22nd century, referencing 2154 in his first appearance. That first appearance is just about introducing the character, first by looking at various clips of Space Cabbie dealing with his day. He gets asked to go to Paris, and when he asked whether it's Paris, France or Paris, Texas, only to be told Paris on the planet Mercury. He has the same problems of every cabbie: a lack of fares, weird requests for specific routes, and unpleasant passengers. It wasn't anything that folks who had driven a cab wouldn't recognize. Of course, there were ridiculous elements, such as being able to fly a billion miles in an hour that is lame. His first story focuses on picking up a fare that is invisible at first. He becomes involved in hijinks, which is the entire purpose for sci-fi comics of the 1950s! Binder is just about the perfect author for these kinds of pulp-y stories. Of course, taxi drivers were popular on the various genre fiction forms in the early and mid-20th century, especially crime and detective stories. Binder wrote it with a combination of simplicity and intelligence. He isn't a hard-boiled cabbie, but he is shown using his intelligence. He's cunning, and that's a great trait for a pulp-type hero!

The one story that I love is from issue 51 of Mystery in Space, where Space Cabbie gets hailed by and picks up a criminal, and then becomes his get-away driver. The driver is a part of a syndicate, and every time Space Cabbie tries to leave a clue for the cops, the syndicate makes sure that it's all taken care of. That whole idea just makes me wonder if they're so damn good at blocking communications then why didn't they just get the criminal his own space car? Anyhow, it's a charming piece of comics writing.

And that's something that is most impressive – the Space Cabbie is shown as a smart and resourceful guy, but he's been stepped back by the criminals, who end up being caught by a bit of luck. There's a tradition of cabbies being incredibly resourceful, and also being incredibly lucky. That's very fun, and they play with it really well. The Binder pieces are so very Binder, and while they have all the problems of 1950s comics, they're utterly charming because it's obvious that Binder not only writing Space Cabbie, but playing with the vastness of the ever-expanding knowledge of space. It's important to realize that we were discovering new elements about the truth of space, about what the planets looked like, what space was about, and while Binder still played with the naiveté of the public for what these things actually meant, or looked like. There was a fair bit of science coverage, but not a lot of deep context. People had little understanding, but they knew names of planets, of things like The Van Allen Belt, meteorites, and on and on. Binder played with these names, and just put them in the framework of pulp-y taxi cab adventures. It was a nice concept, and I was happy to see how much fun it was, and not just in the "Look at how silly this is!" way, but instead, he plays with the character and situations in a way that is a blast!

There's another impressive science-fiction cab driver novel that came out in the last decade. The Book of Dave is a Canticle for Leibowitz style work about a book written by a cabbie that ends up being the founding and sacred document for a big ol' future religion. Cabbies are great sources for these kinds of stories, and I'm glad there's a lot of Space Cabbie out there to enjoy!



Title: Challengers of the Unknown

Author: Ron Goulart Published: 1977

ISBN-10: 0-440-11337-7

Publisher: Dell

Publisher's Blurb: Deep in the South American Jungle, a real and sinister menace lurks in the shadows of the supernatural ... in a remote lake, a legendary monster, incredibly vicious, surfaces after a sleep of centuries. Acting to protect its oil stake, the U. S. Government calls in ...

The Challengers!

"All assassins aren't efficient." (p. 20)

Ron Goulart's The Challengers of the Unknown is hysterically bad, the groaning out loud while turning pages and exclaiming "I can't believe this got published" kind of bad. But given this book's provenance as the novelization of a comic meant to be a pitch for a movie maybe its having been published shouldn't be that big of a surprise.

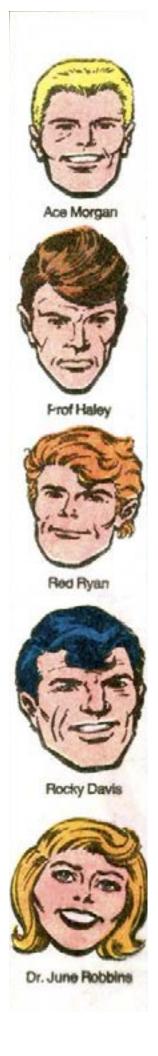
The Challengers of the Unknown is clichéd, derivative, and mostly predictable. Once a nameless country in South America was mentioned, Nazis were sure to follow. It was a cliché of 1970s fiction that Nazis fled in large numbers to Brazil. These men, they were always men, bided their time by plotting and planning to take over the world, waiting until the world was ripe for another Nazi insurgency. This time for sure! Taking over the world for realsies this time!

Mix in a mad scientist who thinks he's perfected an anti-aging regimen that will keep the Nazis alive long enough for their plot to take effect and an alien monster at the bottom of a South American lake and you have enough plots and subplots to keep you busy for, oh, about 155 pages.

Those are the characters who are not The Challengers of the Unknown. The Challengers are bland, run of the mill, superheroes who got through with smarts, snappy commentary, and a disregard for rules, laws, and safety.

Goulart's snappy commentary between the four men of the Challengers is reminiscent of Heinlein. So too is the sexist treatment of token female June, who poses as a female journalist, and joins the boys' club to solve the mystery of The Monster of Lake Sombra, a monster of the Black Lagoon knock-off.

The men are interchangeable, as are the women. This description is suitable for both June and Haley, the only two women with speaking parts. "... the girl, who was very tan, very lovely, quite blonde and wearing a very scant swimsuit" (p. 19) had a "backside identical to Jean Harlow's." (p. 19). Goulart is dating himself here with the Harlow reference. She died 40 years before the book was published.



They're always girls, and they're always objectified. Doesn't matter how smart they are, it's their looks that gets commented on. The men share a similar fate, always athletic, devilishly handsome, quick with the wise crack and over-protective of their female counterpart.

There's Red, whom the reader gathers was once a circus acrobat and uses that skill to drop in during a conversation between the corrupt South American country general, and the corrupt American spy plotting a coup against the South American president, setting the stage for the even greater Nazi coup.

Rocky Davis was a pro wrestler, now muscle for the group. He also mother-hens June something fierce, too scared to make his feelings known to her.

Professor Haley's specialty is underwater exploration, highly necessary if there's a monster in a deep lake which needs investigating.

Ace Morgan rounds up the group as an electronics engineer with nifty gadgets he just happens to have brought along for this mission.

That's pretty much what we know about them -no back story, and no reference to the accident I understand brought them together as The Challengers of the
Unknown. There's no meat to the story, the villains are
laughable, and the monster at the bottom of the lake gets
a really weird origin story that's probably the most coherent nearly unpredictable plot line of the entire book.

Laughable as I said. Yet, I read it and I'm considering keeping it in my personal library so those who inherit said library will find it and read it with puzzled fascination, just as their auntie did. There's something remarkably compelling about this story and writing style. It's bad in all the predictably bad ways, and anyone who's ever seen an action movie of the James Bond type will recognize the bad guys and the ways they're overcome. Certainly, there are better books with which to spend one's time, but I don't regret reading it. I can definitely say it was a once in a lifetime read.





(Author's Note: I am going to assume that a majority of the people reading this and many of the other articles about comics in the 1960s but were not actually alive then. As someone who was, let me tell you that it was a VERY interesting time (in good and bad ways, I assure you) to grow up in and experience If you have any interest in exploring how people lived. If you have any interest in how people lived in that era, I highly recommend you check out Quentin Tarantino's latest film, *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*, which accurately captures the ambience, style, and attitudes [or at least the Southern California version of it] of the year 1969. Take it from someone who was there. You'll be glad you did! -- CMB)

My love and association with comic books in the 1960s is essentially my own personal origin story. Everything I have aspired to or done in sf fandom can be traced to a fixed point in time, a hot July afternoon in Dayton, Ohio in 1966. But in order to get to that point, you need to know what happened to me before that day . . .

My mother was a teacher. My father was an engineer. Of course, their oldest son was going to be a comics and sf loving nerd. What the hell were they thinking? Well, no, let's not go THERE. I was born in August of 1956. Nearly a year earlier, I'onn I'onzz the Martian Manhunter debuted in *Detective Comics* #225.



As most historians of comics acknowledge, the first appearance of the Martian Manhunter is considered ground zero for the beginning of the Silver Age of Comics. Personally speaking, I feel quite fortunate to have been born at this time. I note his appearance because, for a while, I closely identified with this alien character, for a while, the closest thing to a person of color (LITERALLY), that I had seen in a comic book. But more on that later.

The civil rights movement was just getting a toe into the door of America's consciousness, the whole world was on the verge of our initial steps into space and new art forms, modern jazz, rhythm and blues, soul and rock and roll music were a heartbeat away from shocking the staid state of 1950s world culture for good.

I was quite fortunate to be born when I was and where I was raised. My parents were more or less middle class, which, I daresay, was not exactly the norm for a majority of African-American families at that time. All of the children, my two brothers and three sisters, all had the benefit of Catholic grade and high school educations, which they felt was the best option for us at the time. Like most children at that time, we absorbed most of our cultural cues through television: the three broadcast networks, a PBS station, and an independent UHF that played mostly movies and reruns of the network shows.

It was through these shows and cartoons that I first learned about Superman, the Lone Ranger, Mickey Mouse, Tom and Jerry, and the Hanna-Barbera animated family. But in addition to watching, I was also reading. Out of all of the children of the family, I was the most avid reader. I read so much that my parents practically threw me out of the house to go outside and play. Needless to say, I was considered a rather odd person by the other kids in the family, at school, and in the neighborhood.

By the time I was nine years old in 1966, the Silver Age of Comics was in full bloom. I was vaguely aware of comic books back then and read them occasionally. There were several corner stores around called Pony Pegs that would (somehow) collect comics with stripped mastheads and sold them for a nickel. Since our weekly allowance of a quarter didn't go very far (unless you were strictly buying penny candy like Jolly Ranchers) kids like myself went out hunting for soda bottles (which were worth two cents) and beer bottles (a whole dime!) to sell back to most of the local stores for recycling.

Up until that summer, I regarded comics ephemeral entertainment, something to read and given away to friends or acquaintances (but never, NEVER thrown away). Prior to the event I am about to impart here, I was quite familiar with a variety of comics: DC, Marvel, Harvey, Gold Key, and Charlton. I mostly read DC and throughout my first go around of collecting comics, I mostly stuck with them and Marvel though I leaned heavily with DC.

One of my best friends during my childhood was my cousin Michael, the son of my Aunt Blanche and Uncle Albert, who lived up in Dayton, Ohio. My cousin's family was far more prodigious than ours; they ended up with nine children before my aunt came to her senses and quit. (And they were even MORE devout Catholics than us, natch!). Our families were very close. Visits from either group were treated as holidays and we regularly spent a lot of time each summer at each other's houses for weeks at a time. August of that summer, my life changed, for good. My siblings and I were on an extended stay at our aunt and uncle's house. One afternoon on their back porch, my cousin Michael gave one of his comic books, a copy of Justice League of America #46. The cover was odd, LOUD, and garish like the live action Batman TV series that had debuted back in January. The black-and-white checkered border along the top border (a DC marketing gimmick called "go-go checks") certainly made it stand out from any other comic book I had ever seen until then. Batman was being knocked down some chalk faced semi-humanoid onto an unfamiliar gas-masked hero with a SOCK and a THUD! Meanwhile, another costumed hero was flying through a large POW courtesy of yet another Caucasian semi-humanoid. It was obvious that these two guys were the villains and from the delighted looks on their faces they were having a good time. The caption in the upper right corner read: "THE BATTLE MARATHON THAT TURNS THE UNIVERSE INSIDE-OUT! BATMAN! SANDMAN! WILDCAT! (PLUS SEVEN MORE SUPER HEROES). In the lower left- hand corner: "VS SOLOMON GRUNDY! BLOCKBUSTER! THE ANIT-MATTER MAN! (TOO OVERWHELMING TO BE SHOWN ON THIS COVER!). I had never heard of ANY of the characters before. I had no idea what the hell the Justice League of America was. My almost tenyear old mind was about to be opened to a myriad of worlds.



I looked at the comic, and then I looked at my cousin. "What is this?" I asked.

"Just some comic book I found," he replied nonchalantly. "You can have it."

I COULD HAVE IT! That's how generous a soul my cousin Michael was (and still is to this day.) So, I opened it up and dove right in. The splash page featured a group of what were obviously superheroes in space strung out between two earths in an attempt to keep them from colliding. The Justice League Roll Call featured BATMAN * FLASH* GREEN LANTERN * HAWKMAN. The Justice Society Roll Call was BLACK CANARY * DR. FATE * DR. MID-NITE * SANDMAN * SPECTRE * WILDCAT. Looming behind them was a vaguely benign looking alien whose face (and eyes!) are half dark and half-light. The introductory caption read as follows:

HURTLING TOWARDS COLLISION-DESTRUCTION WITH EACH OTHER ARE EARTH-ONE AND EARTH TWO!

STRIDING TOWARDS THOSE EARTHS COMES ANOTHER WORLD-SHATTERING MENACE FROM THE ANTI-MATTER UNIVERSE!

AS IF THIS WASN'T ENOUGH -- YOU KNOW WHAT'S NOW HAPPENING ON EARTH-ONE AND EARTH-TWO? SHEER DISASTER IN THE PERSONS OF BLOCKBUSTER AND SOLOMON GRUNDY -- BUT WE CAN'T GO ON!

YOU'LL HAVE TO READ ABOUT IT FOR YOURSELF! OUR NERVES ARE TOO BADLY SHATTERED BECAUSE WE ALREADY KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO TAKE PLACE IN THE...

CRISIS BETWEEN EARTH-ONE AND EARTH-TWO!

I put the comic book down for a moment. And I think to myself, where the HELL is Superman? I mean, DANG, there is too much going on here for him NOT to be helping, right?

Michael had wandered off to get a drink and watch wrestling on TV. I read on. Late one night, Hawkman is trying to chase down some truck hijackers on a mountain road. Suddenly, some heavy fog rolls in. When it dissipates, the truck is no longer there, but it has been replaced by an armored car full of crooks shooting at him! While Hawkman takes care of business . . . one dimension away on Earth-Two, The Sandman is on the very same mountain driving through the fog and is now chasing down a truck full of stolen furs instead of an armored car! He captures them and wonders what the hell is going on . . . elsewhere on Earth-Two, Doctor Mid-Nite is on the verge of corralling a group of bank robbers when he is suddenly overcome by . . . The Flash of Earth-One! On Earth-One, Batman is in the middle of a fight with jewel thieves when he is transported to Earth-Two and trading blows with boxer turned crimefighter, Wildcat!

It's not just heroes being exchanged between the two planets; thousands of ordinary citizens are being displaced as well! While Green Lantern of Earth-One rescues heroine Black Canary of Earth-Two from a swamp, The Spectre, a nearly omnipotent spirit hero is being inexplicably drawn to another part of the solar system against his will. Meanwhile, Earth-Two super-villain Solomon Grundy has broken free from a floating space prison and is drifting towards landing on Earth-One!

While the Justice League and their Earth-Two refugees try to figure out what the hell's going on, Solomon Grundy starts rampaging through the countryside. MEANWHILE, the Blockbuster, a brutish Batman quasi-villain (it's a LONG story), has been transferred to Earth-Two and promptly starts doing the same thing there!

At this point there is a small, two-panel interlude -- in Ivy Town, Ray Palmer is trying to respond to the Justice League Emergency Signal but someone or something, is jamming his size and weight controls he uses to transform into The Atom. For the moment, he is stuck in his laboratory doing an experiment with his Italian exchange scientist, Enrichetta Negrini . . . on Earth-One, Green Lantern, Hawkman, the Flash, Dr. Mid-Nite and Black Canary clash with Solomon Grundy and after a prolonged battle, barely manage to subdue him long enough to seal him inside of a massive mountain range!

MEANWHILE, The Spectre encounters the being he has been mystically drawn to; an explorer from an anti-matter universe who has entered our universe by some unknown manner. He tries to deter the traveler from progressing any further but the odd energy radiating from the being weakens Spectre so much, it trounces him. By reading the explorer's mind, Spectre discovers that the explorer is on his way to check out the two Earths. But, being composed of anti-matter, any contact with either planet will result in the annihilation of EVERYTHING! Flying ahead of the traveler, the Spectre sees a bigger problem; Earth-One and Earth-Two are being drawn together on a collision course! Desperately, he positions his spirit essence between both planets, holding both at bay for the moment . . .

MEANWHILE, Batman, Doctor Fate, Sandman and Wildcat roll up on the rioting Blockbuster. Batman instantly recognizes him and realizes that the only person who can reason with the behemoth is his secret identity, Bruce Wayne! (Like I said, it's a LONG STORY!) He does so but not before the Blockbuster nearly kills them! Temporarily pacified, the heroes take a breath to contemplate their next move ...

SO, what is causing all of this mayhem between the two Earths? Will Bruce Wayne be stuck babysitting the Blockbuster forever on Earth-Two? Can Ray Palmer solve his control problem? Don't forget, the Anti-Matter Man is still on his way! But WHAT ABOUT THE SPECTRE?????

OUT ON THE VERY RIM OF EXISTENCE, WHERE NOWHERE BECOMES SOMEWHERE AND TIME MERGES INTO SPACE ITSELF . . .

SPECTRE (thought balloon): STRANGE OVERWHELMING FORCES ARE HURLING THE TWO EARTHS
TOGETHER! I-- CANNOT--RESIST THEM MUCH LONGER!

THE NON-MATTER FORM OF THE DISEMBODIED DETECTIVE SHRINKS! SMALLER HE BECOMES...AND STILL SMALLER ...

YOU DARE NOT MISS THE CONCLUDING CHAPTERS OF THIS TALE OF TERRIFIC FORCES WHICH PIT SUPER-HEROES AGAINST THE GRIM GIANTS OF EARTH-ONE AND EARTH-TWO -- AGAINST THE DREAD DANGER OF THE ANTI-MATTER MAN --AGAINST THE COMING CRASH OF THE TWO WORLDS WHICH WILL MEAN THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF MANKIND!

IS THERE ANYTHING THE JUSTICE LEAGUE AND JUSTICE SOCIETY CAN DO TO PREVENT THE ABSOLUTE END OF EVERYTHING?

AMAZING ANSWERS NEXT ISSUE!

Mind ... BLOWN!!!!! But, but ... WHERE WAS THE OTHER PART OF THE STORY? I found Michael watching Bobo Brazil and Haystacks Calhoun dismantling a pair of hapless opponents on Big Time Wrestling. "Hey, where is the other part of this comic book?", I demanded.

"Oh, I don't know," he responded, not taking his eyes from the carnage on screen. "I got it a few weeks ago."

"A FEW WEEKS AGO? Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I NEED TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENS NEXT!" Dragging him off the couch, we went to the corner store where he brought that issue of the Justice League. No luck, they had a bunch of comics but not the follow up issue.

A few days later, I was back home, checking all of the drugstores and pony kegs in the neighborhood, nothing. Throughout the rest of the summer and into the fall, I became obsessed with finding *Justice League of America #47*. #48 did come out, but it was an 80-Page Giant reprint of some of their earlier adventures ("Challenge of the Weapons Master," "The Slave Ship of Space," and "Secret of the Sinister Sorcerers").

My obsession also stirred my curiosity; who were those other heroes from Earth-Two? How long had they been around? And, most importantly, who created them? I started looking for answers at my local public library. By a stroke of good fortune, a kindly librarian steered me to a copy of Jules Feiffer's nearly two-year old tome, *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, one of the first serious studies of heroes and the culture they came from. (And still highly recommended, by the way.)

Inside were a compilation of the early adventures of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Captain America, The Human Torch, the Sub-Mariner, Hawkman, and others. I didn't care much for Feiffer's insightful commentary until I was much older. My search for JLA #47 continued but I thirst to know more about comics was endless. Then I decided to start collecting comics. Much to my parents' despair.

Fearing that I might be too obsessed with "funny books," they tried to ban them from the household. They confiscated and threw them away on a regular basis. They even tried to punish me for buying them. All of this made me even more determined to defy them. After a while they gave up.

I tried reasoning with them by showing them an article from a magazine from school saying that comics were genuine cultural artifacts that might even be worth actual MONEY in a decade or so. A pristine copy of Action Comics # I was worth upwards to a thousand dollars back them. Everybody KNOWS how much it's worth now. At one point in the 1970's, I had scraped together enough money to buy the first run of Justice League of America from I-65 AND their initial appearances in Brave and the Bold. I eventually had to sell them by the late 70s to prevent being evicted from my apartment after I dropped out of college. They're worth a small fortune today. My parents just rolled their eyes and kept taking them away from me.

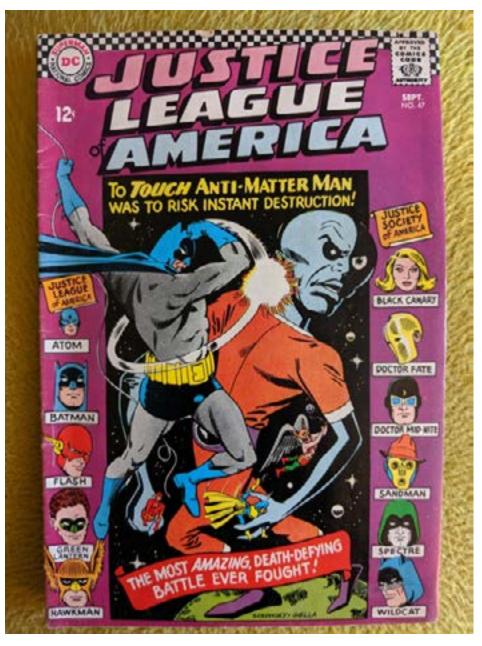


I did not limit myself to just collecting DC comics at that time. Charlton, Harvey and Gold Key had some interesting stuff, but none of them could possibly stand up against what Marvel Comics was doing back then. The Avengers. Tales of Suspense with Captain America and Iron Man. Strange Tales with Doctor Strange and (for a while) Nick Fury and the Agents of SHIELD. Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos, The Mighty Thor, The Amazing Spider-Man, and, of course, The Fantastic Four! Even at such a young age, I KNEW that in terms of artwork, plotting, and character development Marvel Comics were far superior to what anyone was doing back then. I was particularly excited about The Black Panther, a smart, rich, influential and BLACK superhero I could look up to. I was far more excited about him joining the Avengers than the exploits of astronauts for a while.

However, I never gave up looking for *Justice League of America #47*. I finally got a break in the fall of 1968, when a friend of a school friend told him to tell me that he knew somebody who had the comic I was looking for. After getting the details and his address, I set up a meeting after school. It turned out his kid (whose name I don't remember) went to a public school in the neighborhood next to ours. I can't possibly tell you how excited I was when I got out of school that fine autumn day and was walking to his house on Fairfax Avenue to finally lay my eyes and hands on my Lost Ark.

My heart was beating like a trip hammer inside my chest as walked up the steps and rang the doorbell. The kid, black and about the same age and height as me, answered the door. He was expecting me. He stepped out onto the porch with the comic in his hand. I asked to see it. He turned it over for me to see. And there it

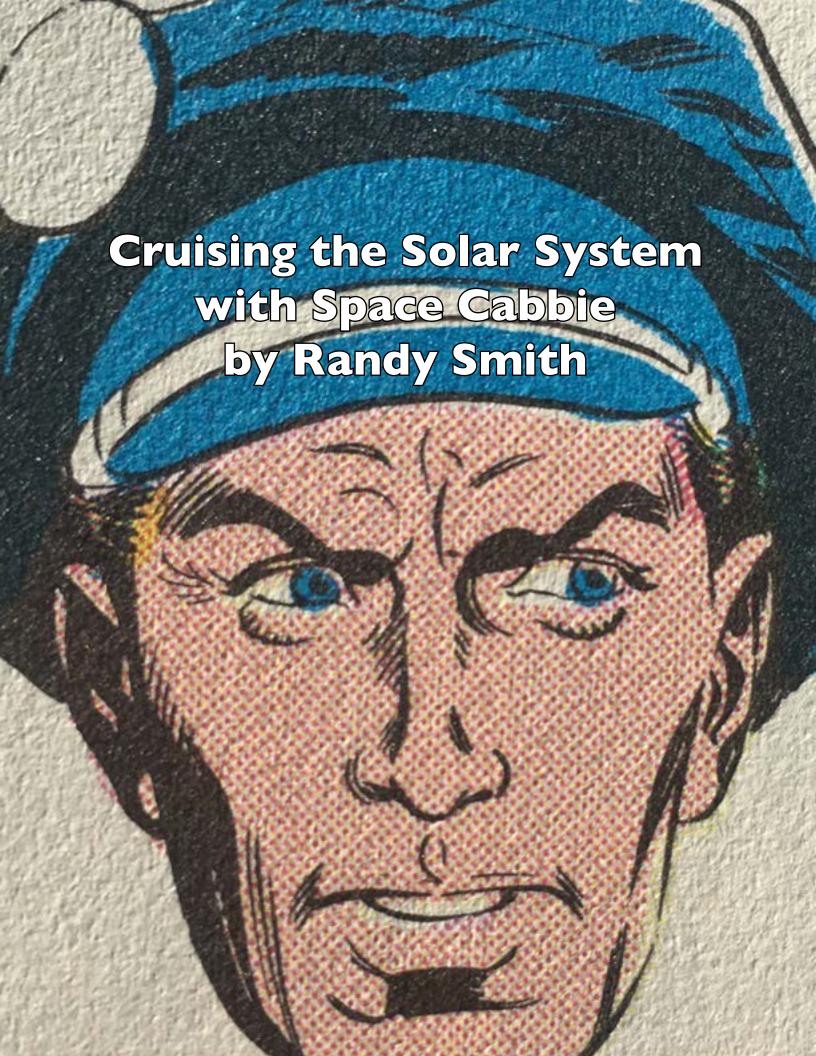
was, in full color:



I couldn't believe it for a moment. I asked him how much he wanted for it. He smirked and said fifty cents, an outrageous price for a single comic book back then. I took two quarters out of my pocket and gave it to him. He gave me the comic book. It was mine! I carefully placed it in my backpack, thanked him, and walked as fast as I could go back to my house. I ran up to my room, locked the door, took it out and breathlessly read it ... FIVE TIMES!

Of course, this could have been the end of the story for me. It wasn't; it was only the beginning of a much longer journey . . . my study of comics eventually led me to graduate to SF and fantasy, starting with a series of young adult novels starring Danny Dunn and Alvin Fernald and ending with the short stories and novels of Ray Bradbury. Once I got my hands on *The Hugo Winners Volumes One and Two* edited by Isaac Asimov, I gradually read more books than comics. I still collected comics until the late 1970s when they became too expensive for me to continue. In 1976, I discovered fandom at a hotel not more than two miles away from my house, where they were holding an SF convention, Midwestcon. Forty-three years later, I am still attending that convention, among many others. Windycon 2019 will be held in Chicago next month; I will be the Fan Guest of Honor. And so, I continue moving forward.







Do you need to get from Mercury to Titan in record time? How about finding someone to navigate through a meteor storm? Call Space Cabbie!

Space Cabbie appeared in twenty-three issues of *Mystery in Space* from 1954 through 1957. As the name implies, he operated a taxi in the form of a small spaceship that took fares around the solar system and (a couple of times) beyond in the mid-22nd Century. Most installments were written by Otto Binder and drawn by Gil Kane. The first issue was drawn by Howard Sherman. They were five to six pages in length, and were never the lead feature or promoted on the cover.

The first story was "Space-Taxi" in issue 21. It introduced the character and several of the recurring themes that would pop up in later stories. Space Cabbie picks up an alien who uses invisibility to skip out on paying his fare. It turns out the villain is a master bank robber and Space Cabbie flies around the system trying to track him down. The solution to the mystery is a puzzle solved by the Cabbie who captures the alien. He soon realizes that he has spent more money on solving the crime than he made on fares, but not to worry, capturing the criminal comes with a big reward and Space Cabbie

comes out ahead!

Most of the early Space Cabbie stories involved solving mysteries by figuring out some kind of puzzle. Losing money, but receiving some kind of reward happens in more than a third of the stories. Mechanical issues with the cab also play a role in this first story, and that will be another common theme.

That first appearance also introduces the Planetary Police, the local law enforcement agency. They are colloquially known as the "Ippy," a fact explained in a footnote in every issue. In the early installments they often do not believe Space Cabbie when he tries to report a crime, however as time goes by, they come to call on his services in helping to catch crooks. In a couple of issues, he picks up a crook as a fare and tries to get stopped by the Ippy by intentionally breaking space traffic laws, but it turns out that this seldom works.

Space Cabbie's relationship with authorities is thoroughly tested in issue 35, "Secret of the Cabbie's Medallion." He goes in for his annual driving exam and fails each of the tests. He is stripped of his medallion—the license to operate a cab—and it is given to the next person on the waiting list. He also has to give up his vehicle. It turns out to have been a plot by a crook which Space Cabbie foils. Afterwards, he passes the test with flying colors and his medallion and car are restored.

In the early issues, the cab looks like a typical 1950s era car with wings added. Beginning in issue 33, it takes on the look of a spaceship. In the first appearance it is red, and subsequently is either yellow or green. The license plate number, shown only in issues 21 and 26, is 7Y33.

Space Cabbie's costume changes as well, although most of the changes can be attributed to inconsistencies in coloring. In most appearances he has a green suit with a bow tie. The tie appears as green, blue, or black. It has polka dots only in the first appearance. His Cabbie hat is usually green or blue, but occasionally shows up as brown or red. His medallion appears as a blank circle attached to his hat except in a few later appearances when it has a "T" in the center. His shirt is usually either white or blue. In issue 30, "The



Robinson Crusoe of Space," he wears a purple turtleneck; the only time he is without a bow tie. Space Cabbie sometimes wears black shoes or boots that may be blue or black. In issue 38 the jacket is drawn to look more like a windbreaker than a sport coat.

"The Robinson Crusoe of Space" also introduces Gabby, the talking parrot, who neutralizes radiation and can sense distances, serving as a living fare meter. Gabby might have made a great permanent sidekick. Alas, this was his only appearance.

Space Cabbie is very much the loner. Despite obvious relationships with other cabbies and the Interplanetary Police, there are no recurring secondary characters. In his final appearance, issue 47's "The Riddle of the Rival Space-Cabbie," it is revealed that he has a girlfriend, but she is not given a name, only appears in one panel, and has no lines to speak.

It would seem that Space Cabbie's primary relationship is with his car. A couple of the more interesting stories explore that relationship. In "The Luxury Limousine of Space!" in issue 45, a wealthy fare gives him a fancy new cab as a tip. He sells his old cab to a used spaceship dealer, and begins to use the new one. It's just not the same! Oh, yes, it has pure gold trimmings and free cigars and



cosmetics for his fares, but it takes up two parking spaces, doubling his parking costs, and guzzles large amounts of fuel. It is also too large to go through the small spaces his old cab could pass with ease. Worst of all, his fares think that since he has such a fancy ship, they do not need to give him tips! He soon begins to long for his old cab. Unfortunately, the used spaceship dealer has sold it. It is now being used as a getaway vehicle by space crooks. Space Cabbie does what he does best. He chases down the crooks, captures them, and turns them over to Ippy. He finally gets his old cab back and is perfectly happy!

In "The Expanding Space-Taxi," issue 36, his cab begins growing in size while Space Cabbie and his fares do not. At first, he is happy that he can fit more people into his cab, but it soon becomes a problem as he cannot reach the steering wheel. Before long, it is too big to land at any spaceport. When the moon begins to tumble out of its orbit, Space Cabbie returns it to its proper place by carrying it in his trunk. Eventually, he finds a way

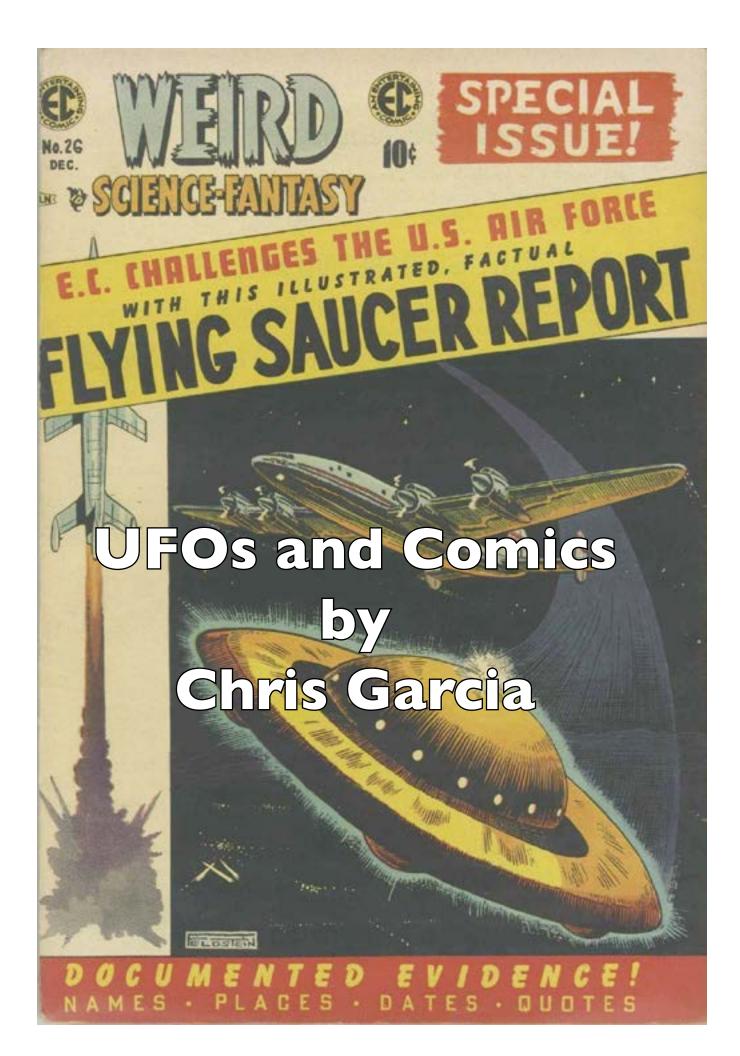


to shrink the cab to normal size, but all of his fares have had such a harrowing experience that they leave without paying. There is no need to worry. All of the fuel stations on Earth, out of gratitude for Space Cabbie's service, agree to fill his tank for free for a year. Once again, he has turned a money-losing adventure into a money-making one.

Following those first twenty-three *Mystery in Space* appearances, Space Cabbie would be largely forgotten until the 21st Century. He appeared in one solo story in *From Beyond the Unknown* in 1972 and was one of the "Forgotten Heroes" teaming with Superman in a 1985 issue of *DC Comics Presents*. He has made occasional appearances as a supporting character over the last twenty years as comics writers and readers have rediscovered him. Space Cabbie has also made some appearances in television animation.

Those first stories from the 50s have a charm all their own. They reflected their times. They were fairly predictable. They had potential that was never realized.

Most of all, they make for fun reading, and that's what comics are for.



It is 0% secret that I am a believer in UFOs ... no, YOU'RE delusional!!! I do, and I always have believed in UFOs, and when I was a kid, I was obsessed. I used to read everything I could find in the library (and as the son of a librarian that was a lot!), and I would look at the skies. Then I discovered Art Bell, and then there was AOL, then there was the Internet, and on and on. I've always loved it, have met J. Allen Hynek and Stan Friedman, read Erik von Danikin and Jacques Vallee, and can tell you the story of Bob Lazar, and more. The reason for it? Probably watching Close Encounters and E.T. as a kid, but really, flying saucers were always just there, you know?

Then, one day, when the Internet was new and I was really into non-fiction comics, I started digging around old comic-book scans. There are thousands of places where you can find pretty much everything from the 1930s to the 70s, and a lot of stuff after that, too. It's spottier though. I do a lot of reading and research with these scans, not only because they're easily available, but because I don't have hundreds of dollars to buy issues of Golden and Silver Age comics. I could ask Brad Lyau, but it's just easier.

So, one day, while looking for various things, I came across a scan of an issue of Weird Fantasy, in this case issue 26, which instantly turned my head inside out. "Flying Saucer Report," It read. Oh yeah! I have a love of non-fiction comics, not only because I am a non-fiction lover, but because it's an excellent medium for transmitting information. The combination of words and pictures, the accessibility of the medium for younger/less-attentive readers, and most importantly, the amount of fun that is imparted to the form by its very nature, makes it an excellent way to tell true stories. For years now, I've only bought non-fiction comics, and when I was first getting into those, I was obsessive.

So, I came across that scan and dug in. First things first -- that cover. Even if I wasn't an ufologist I would be interested. It's an EC comic, and it has all those design elements that make EC comics so identifiable. The logos all evoke the sensation that always follows EC comics, but even more interesting is the main image. The image is of a plane flying above a UFO of flying-saucer make. It's a gorgeous image, underplayed and precise. While a lot of folks point to the final Weird Science Fantasy cover, #29 by the inimitable Frank Frazetta, I think this one say so much with a simpler image. It tells you this isn't a fantastical issue, or at least not supernatural, and that it will deal with realistic themes, because this is an informational issue of Weird Science Fantasy, not a set of fanciful comic stories

And they make good on that promise with the very first page. It opens with a simulation of what a Teletype news report might put out, which gives it a sense of reportage that makes me buy into it a little deeper than I would if it were told in more traditional forms.

The first story is "The Eastern Airlines Case," which is a pretty famous encounter. In 1948, two pilots saw a fiery-type UFO over Alabama. This was during the early days of the flying saucer phase, and it got a lot of attention, both from the press, and from the government. They reported the incident to Project Sign (which they call Project Saucer), which was the US Air Force's first time taking on UFOs in an official capacity. They describe the thing as cigar-shaped, like 100 feet long and twenty or thirty feet around. That's a classic sighting, no? One of the passengers noticed it too, but mostly, it was just the pilots, and as they tried to evade, it seemed to mimic their movements.

The comic shows it in a few short pages, using the actual report as the basis for all the words! That format is great, and the work of writers like Rick Geary seem to be influenced by this method. While I can't be certain, I can't think of an example of doing this method of taking actual wording of reports and turning them into a comic. I love it, and the art, I believe by the legendary Wally Wood, was so well integrated.

The second story, "The Gorman-Fargo, N. D. Case," is better known as the "UFO Dogfight," and was widely-covered, but was also one of the ones that really made the Air Force think "hmmmm... maybe these UFO things are real." George Gorman was out flying, and he was out there flying a P-51 Mustang with the National Guard. While he was flying, he got into a tangle with a glowing ball. It was a twenty-minute dogfight, and there was an air traffic controller on the ground who watched it happen from the ground. This one, more than any other, really got a lot of attention, and might have been the first time the 'It was a weather balloon!' excuse was used. Gorman claimed that the craft that came at him was obviously controlled by something intelligent, but the Air Force said that it was a lighted weather balloon. I heard Hynek talk when I was a kid, and I'm almost certain this was the case he mostly talked about.

The third case they cover is one of my all-time favorites, and the third of the Big Three that were covered by the Project Sign/Saucer reports, is the Mantell-Godman case. While the Kenneth Arnold case of 1947 gets the most credit for popularizing the term flying saucer, it wasn't the one that got the most press. The encounter over Godman Army Airfield at Fort Knox actually led to the death of the pilot, Thomas Mantell. There was a ground-sighting of a flying saucer, and Mantell and three others were scrambled to go into the air to investigate. Lt. Mantell saw the saucer up-close, but he also crashed and died, the first death attributed to the Saucer flap of the late 1940s. This is also the point where it turned from a whacky set of stories about kooky flying saucers to something serious. It didn't hurt that this was also when the Cold War really started to ramp up too, and paranoia was everywhere.

The Muroc Air Force Base case is one of the most famous of the cases, listed here as "Project Saucer

Case #1." It's famous for being a sighting of several craft flying overhead, and here in a single page you get the entire story and the real point of the entire issue: that the entire Project Saucer is just a sham, trying desperately to give completely unreasonable explanations to keep things quiet. This would have worked if there weren't reporters everywhere begging for good stories.

The next one-pager is the United Airlines Emmett, Idaho, case that was one of the coolest of the era, and the only one mentioned here that I had a personal connection to. The stewardess for the flight was Miss Marty Morrow, who happened to be the aunt (or maybe great-aunt) of Steve Morrow, who I grew up with! I heard about the story the first time from him when we were both saucer-obsessed pre-teens! I never got to meet her, though I think she was still alive when I knew Steve, but I always love to read about this story. The United flight saw five saucers darting around in varying formations, and then when those five disappeared, four other ones appeared and flew around. It was one of the stories that made headlines, especially since the pilot, E. J. Smith, was exceptionally good for quotes.

The comic then dives into conspiracy theory for a while. They point out the Air Force made a series of reversals for the explanations of aerial phenomena after a famed observation of Tsuneo Suheki of an explosion on the surface of Mars. This wasn't the first time this had been observed, there was a set of sightings made at Lick Observatory in San Jose in the late 1890s. The comic posits the idea that it might have been the Air Force's reaction to the observations that led the Air Force to make their reversals on the explanations of the various sightings.

Also, the single greatest image in the comic, and one of my all-time personal favorites, was on the bottom of this page, showing a running group of people panicking, with a woman fallen, a terror shining across her face, as she seems about to be trampled. It's a great and powerful panel.

While not as widely-known as the 1949 sightings, there was a series of sightings in 1950, including an amazing Ross Vermillion sighting in Kansas. One of my favorite sightings as he was a former Air Force man who drove underneath a UFO along the road. There was a lot of research done on this one, and it was a favorite of Dr. Hynek, and one that MUFON has written about over the years.

The 1951 sightings are covered, and they are pretty run of the mill, but they are also where the comic starts to pick apart specific theories, such as how stupid is the idea of any of the fast-moving objects being weather balloons. I had never read much about the C. B. Moore sightings from April 14th, 1949. It's a wonderful sighting that was one of the first to include not only pilots, or other military folk, but to include scientists. The object was clocked at 18,000 MPH, which is damn fast. Also, it passed by a weather balloon. Irony.

Donald Keyhoe was one of the most important figures in the history of ufology, surpassed only by Hynek, Stan Friedman, maybe Jacques Vallee, and Whitley Strieber. His letter about a filming of saucers by Delbert Newhouse is pretty controversial, but it's one of the keystone events in the ufology world. He wrote that the film had been analyzed for weeks, and that many of the conclusions they made, that they showed no known type of aircraft, and that they were traveling between 650 and 900 miles per hour. These two pages again conveys a lot of info, but it does what non-fiction comics should do – it infotains!

Then comes the single most interesting case of the 1950s, and in my eyes far more interesting than Roswell – The Indianapolis Case. THOUSANDS of people, and a few pilots. July 1952 was a big day for mass sightings. There was the famed Washington DC sightings later in the month. These are key sightings, and the ones that led to the formation of Project Blue Book. The comic comes to its real conclusion with the coverage of the Washington DC flap of 1952, and it's an amazing story. There is a LOT written about it, and I believe that's the first one where you can find a good amount of TV coverage. It's another major turning point, and one that still resonates with the ufology community.

I had never heard of the River Edge New Jersey case, but it was one of the more interesting ones because it was a sighting by an AP reporter. I must dig into this one.

The story of the Hamilton Air Force base sighting is much like the rest, but the art has one cool thing for me personally. Hamilton was the site of a SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment) air defense installation. The art includes a panel showing an airman at a SAGE console! I love it!

The Recent Developments section is pretty funny, a few pages that round out the issue, but it ends on one of the best lines that speaks to the thrill of conspiracy theory – "So lift your head up... above the smoke-screen of contrived and half-truths. Look to the skies, America! Perhaps one night you'll join the hundreds of competent civilian and army pilots, scientists, and aeronautical experts who have been termed by the Air Force as 'misinterpreters, hysterics, and publicity seekers.' Perhaps you, too, will see a flying saucer."



In 1976, a lithe brown-haired stranger in red and white tights fell from the sky. His name was Adam Blake, and as the narration went in DC Comics' *The Secret Society of Super-Villains* #2, he was human – an earthman returning to his homeworld after twenty years exploring the galaxy in his self-constructed ship the Cometeer. He dropped into San Francisco to discover Green Lantern attacking Gorilla Grodd and Hijack of the Royal Flush Gang. Not recognizing any of them, he only knew that Green Lantern was clearly the aggressor – how he explored the galaxy and didn't know anything about the Green Lantern Corps is best left to the story's writer Gerry Conway to ignore.

But this article should be about silver age sci-fi comics, and that's the weird thing about Adam Blake. Technically, he didn't appear in the Silver Age, but he's a missing-link superhero connecting the Golden Age to the Silver Age, not fitting in either. It wasn't until the Bronze Age and his return to Earth in 1976 that he would become one of DC's most popular superheroes – seriously – for about two years. If you know him, you know that Adam Blake was better known as Captain Comet.

First appearing in *Strange Tales #9* in 1951, Captain Comet falls in a twilight area when DC superheroes other than Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman had pretty much ceased to exist (Aquaman and Green Arrow survived as back-up features). Editor Julius Schwartz hadn't reinvigorated superheroes yet with Barry Allen becoming the Flash, but he was trying.

Schwartz turned to writer John Broome and artist Carmine Infantino, and the three loosely adapted/ liberally borrowed ideas from the pulp hero Captain Future, interestingly enough created by Superman editor Mort Weisinger. The result was Captain Comet, a science-fiction based hero who could be considered Superman 2.0 – he had psychic and telekinetic abilities in addition to super-strength, and though he couldn't fly under his own power, his super-advanced mind allowed him to create a flight belt – notice that in the earliest Legion of Super-Heroes appearances, the Legionnaires wore those instead of flight rings. Brainiac 5 was a hack.

Though other heroes such as Namor and the original Human Torch's sidekick Toro have been retconned as mutants – and in hindsight, of course they were – Captain Comet was actually the first comic book hero to be identified as one from the beginning. Born 100,000 years ahead of his natural time to a midwestern farming couple (shades of Superman), his birth was perhaps heralded by a comet in the sky. That would become important in the Bronze Age.

Blake was different as a child, demonstrating and then trying to hide his extraordinary abilities. It wasn't until adulthood and assuming a relatively low-profile as a librarian that Adam Blake sought out physicist Professor Emery Zackro, who hypothesized Adam being an evolutionary flash-forward.

The Cometeer was built upon a prototype that Zackro had designed, and with a costume and a stun gun also designed by Zackro, they decided that Adam should become a full-time superhero, especially after hostile aliens arrived looking to do a little colonizing. For 38 issues of *Strange Adventures*, Captain Comet fought dinosaurs, artificial life forms, more aliens, and perhaps the human condition before (off-camera) deciding to find himself in space.

Along the way he had an impressive artistic pedigree. After two stories drawn by Infantino, the feature was taken over by Murphy Anderson, who would later become indelibly linked with Adam Strange. The last two Captain Comet stories in 1954 were drawn by Gil Kane, and then... it was over.

In July 1954, Captain Comet disappeared. Two years later Julius Schwartz hit upon the magic formula with the Flash, and the Silver Age was born. But for three years, Superman had a potential serious rival, and even the Martian Manhunter, who also has most of the same powers as Superman and more, didn't appear until 1956. Captain Comet could have and should have launched a new boom and been the dawn of the Silver Age.

He was largely forgotten until returning to face the Secret Society of Super-Villains, and it only took him one issue to figure out who the good guys and bad guys were. But as he was ostensibly always on Earth-I, Captain Comet had largely operated in a time when he was the only superhero, though fans had forgotten him. He quickly became beloved, fighting the Society, appearing in a new solo adventure, and then... again he was felled by a linewide change, known as "the DC Implosion."

In the 1980s, DC identified superpowers as coming from a "meta-gene," their version of mutancy that had to be triggered, and so Adam Blake was retconned as having his powers actually triggered by that comet that appeared at his birth. Though that's relatively minor; no matter what continuity he has appeared in, that original

1951 origin story remains untouched. True to a character who didn't quite fit in any age, he remains unaltered by them all – except the New 52, and he was hardly the only character screwed up by that idea.

Later Jim Starlin would have Captain Comet assume the simpler identity of "Comet," and operate solely out in space alongside Adam Strange, Hawkman, and Starlin's the Weird. But as Comet he was gruffer, more like a P.I. than the decent all-American midwestern man from the 1950s who also just happened to be 100,000 years ahead of his time.

Many of his adventures were reprinted in *Mysteries in Space: The Best of DC Science Fiction Comics*, but it's getting harder and harder to find at a decent price. Maybe it's time for DC to give Captain Comet quality treatment and show a new generation of readers their lost superman, giving them a blast from the Atomic Age.





No superhero has received more ridicule than Ultra the Multi-Alien. Even Aquaman garnered more respect during the years when cooler fans denigrated him as the useless Justice League member who swims and talks to fish. Jon Morris includes Ultra in his *The League of Regrettable Superheroes*, stating "Ultra resembles a mixed-up box of puzzle pieces." Blogger DataJunkie describes Ultra as a "looney composite of four different species of goofy looking space aliens," and *Wizard Magazine* once featured Ultra in its "Mort of the Month" column which highlighted characters of dubious quality. No one, however, has taken lower shots at poor Ultra than late-night host and comedian Conan O'Brien, who in a segment shot at San Diego Comic-Con discussed characters from the *DC Encyclopedia* who "well ... they suck":

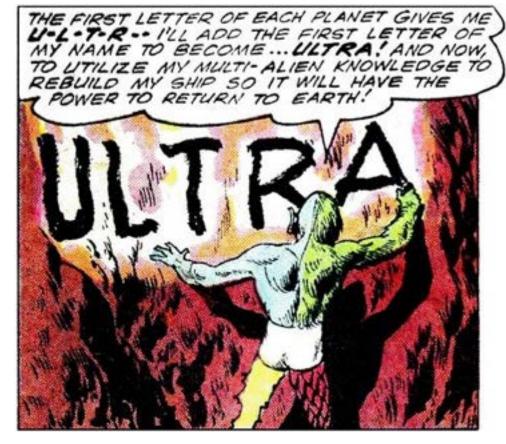
"[Ultra] is a fucking mess. I don't fear this person. One part is chicken foot. This is longer, this leg, which isn't even a leg. I think that's just gravy. Then, of course, he unifying principle for all superheroes who are bad – women's underwear. I hope this person wasn't just fired, but then murdered, who thought of this."

Who is Ultra the Multi-Alien, and why do so many remember him this way? Ultra first appeared in Mystery in Space #103 (1965), replacing Adam Strange for that title's final eight issues. Writer Dave Wood, creator of Dial H for Hero, and artist Lee Elias tell the tale of Ace Arn, a late 21st Century space pilot transporting tourists from Mars to Jupiter. Along the way, Arn's ship becomes trapped in the magnetic field of a nearby comet. Arn safely jettisons his crew and passengers, but the comet drags Arn, now in suspended animation, to another solar system where he crash-lands on an asteroid inhabited by the corpse of the criminal Zobra, an unwitting suicide thanks to an accident involving poison gas, and his four henchmen. Before dying, Zobra had distributed a special gun to each henchman. This gun could transform living targets into members of the race doing the firing while making victims into slaves. Upon encountering Arn, all four fire on him simultaneously. Instead of making him a slave, however, the rays turn him into a composite of all four species neatly segmented into the four quadrants of his body, and containing four separate powers:

Upper right: Ulla (super-strength)
Upper Left: Laroo (magnetism)
Lower Right: Trago (flight)

Lower Left: Raagan (lightning blasts)

Arn takes the first letters of these planets – ULTR – and adds an A representing his name to the end, and thus is born DC's most bizarre space hero, Ultra, the Multi-Alien!



Ensuing stories in the initial run mirror other space comics of the time. Readers encounter scientific hand-waving and alien scientists with evil alien weapons, such as Dr. Taxo, Dynamo, Craniac and Tragg – you get the idea. In the second story, Ultra returns home to Dalesville, USA, and fans meet Bonnie, his fiancée from whom he hides his identity, although she suspects it's him. The relationship between Ben Grimm and Alicia Masters comes to mind, of course. Dalesville, a little slice of mid-60s small town settled into the late 21st Century, acts as home base for Ultra when he's not racing from one planet to the next. Oddly, parts of Venus resemble the Alviso shore along the San Francisco Bay. Terraforming, perhaps? Those hands keep a-waving. Finally, in *Mystery in Space* #110, Ultra devises a hyper-converter disc that allows him to return to human form. The final frame of this story shows him with a bouquet of flowers, apparently off to enjoy happily ever after with Bonnie.

Over the decades, Ultra has made cameo appearance in various comics, mostly as the butt of jokes or to inspire nostalgic chuckling among older fans. Nonetheless, Ultra replaced no less a figure than Adam Strange for the waning Mystery in Space. Strange's stories had started lagging after Julius Schwartz moved to edit Batman and Detective Comics, taking artist Carmine Infantino with him. So, Adam Strange, and Mystery in Space suffered. Again, Ultra replaced Adam Strange! Yes, okay, the stories are weirdly ridiculous, and Ultra flying on the power of one lopsided winged leg or shooting lightning bolts out of his foot plays bathetically, but overall his stories aren't any worse than Hanna-Barbera's Space Ghost, Herculoids, or Frankenstein, Jr.

Most recently, Jeff Lemire has championed Ultra's memory, once in Vertigo's one-shot Strange Adventures (2011), and then conceptually in Justice League United (2014) where Lemire changes Ultra from Ace Arn into a genetic experiment belonging to the villainous Byth. Comic fans never will let Ultra die. Bloggers continue writing about him, and comic historians insert blurbs about him into encyclopedias. His strangeness compels many to never forget him, ribbing him while adoring him like film buffs do with Ed Wood. On October 20, 2019, Sterling Cathalia posted an image to the Facebook Back Issue page that crystallizes the feelings held by so many regarding this hero. I'll give him the final word:



I, your gentle researcher, have been engaged in research. It was borne to me by a re-reading of the seminal 1980s non-fiction series of fictional biographies *Who's Who in the DC Universe*. This was the definitive piece on the history of the characters of the DC Universe. It was a way of cataloging the changes of the company through the decades, which included many versions of the same hero. You'd have entries for Golden Age, Silver Age, and Bronze Age versions of the same hero. Things like *Crisis on Infinite Earths* made that essential in keeping track of things. Here are the ones that sprung from the Silver Age, ranked by science-fictional awesomeness!

Animal Man

Strange Adventures #180

Buddy Baker was at home, and suddenly there was a crash, specifically a UFO crash. That happens, right? Anyhow, he went out to investigate, and afterwards the animal lover Baker found out that he could communicate with animals if he was near them. Now, this is one of the best ways to get super-powers. There are ALIENS! This was in the mid-1960s, so there was less froth around aliens than in the late 1940s and early 50s, but here the aliens are friendly ... if terrible drivers. The key here is that Buddy got irradiated by the UFO-brand flying saucer. The idea of irradiation was hotter in the mid-1960s than even in the 1950s because there was an expansion in nuclear power, the Cuban Missile Crisis had brought us forward in the idea that we were all gonna get bombed, and radiation mutations were 1960s shorthand for gaining super-powers (see Spider-Man).

The Atom

Showcase #34

Gardner Fox. Gil Kane. Murphy Anderson, and Julius Schwartz: an all-star creative team, no? They were responsible for re-launching The Atom in *Showcase* in 1961, and it was brilliant! The idea that Ray Palmer could simply find a piece of a white- dwarf star that would be perfect his shrink-ray is so 1930s sci-fi, no? He gets trapped in a cave, he saves everyone, and uses the shrinking lens on 'em. Now, when he'd used it on other things, they'd blown up, but now it worked! The funny thing is that things like white dwarfs weren't well-known at that point, and so I don't fault Fox or Schwartz working with the concept, but it is ultimately the evidence of the early 1960s. The world had discovered that these things exist, but hadn't really begun to understand.

AutoMan

Tales of the Unexpected #91

One of my all-time favorites! Seriously, has anyone but me ever developed love for this character? Not only was he a robot who was invented by the excellent Miller Sterling, but what makes him so cool? He went to Robot Tech. That's right, he's the first graduate of an all-mechanical men college! Now, while Automan isn't the most beloved character, the idea of an educated robot is incredibly science fictional! He eventually begins to work with Star Hawkins (another unfairly ignored detective hero!) and was life-bonded with his secretary, Ilda! It don't get met more SFnal than that!

The Flash

Showcase #4

Barry Allen is working for the cops. He was a police scientist, and one night, while he was in the lab during a lightning storm, a bolt of lightning came through and showered him in chemicals, making him the fastest man alive!!! This is the start of the Silver Age, and where you can see the influence of Schwartz's decade+ of sci-fi love. The issue of *Showcase* where we see it happen feels like a 1930s pulp magazine story drawn by the legendary Carmen Infantino. It's an amazing effect, the entire Flash story of the 1950s and 60s. He was a cop scientist, and he was a superhero. He was the fastest man alive, but he could also rig himself up some super-science. He was, in every way I could think of, the embodiment of a science-fiction hero, only placed in the context of the present day. That makes him the most science-fictional of heroes!

Green Lantern

Showcase #22

Green Lantern was Alan Scott in the Golden Age. He was a guy with a magic ring that allowed him to be one of the Justice Society of America. He was a fantasy character, of course, and a popular one. In 1959, Hal Jordan became the Green Lantern, and fantasy was gone, science fiction was in! He was a former test pilot, and Hal found a dying alien and he was given a power ring which had to be charged using a green lantern. He was basically an interstellar cop, and the leader of the Green Lantern Corps! Green Lantern was easily the best example of big space in comics. While there were characters like Adam Strange, and the Legion of Superheroes, Green Lantern was one of the ten most important DC heroes of the Silver Age, and a lot of his adventures were in the deepest vacuum of space! He's a Golden Age hero reinvented as a new hero, made only a little hipper.

Doctor Solar: Man of the Atom

Doctor Solar: Man of the Atom #1

Doctor Solar is the only non-DC character on this list, and it's also one of those comics you could find for 25 cents in Brian's Books in the 1980s. The origin was really good, in that Dr. Raymond Solar (one of the most on-thenose names in history!) was waiting for an atomic bomb test in Atomic Valley, and he's turned into pure energy, then sent into space, where he basically wills himself back into human shape. He gets all sorts of powers, though he has to eat cobalt pills and drink radioactive liquids, but it's a small price to pay for intangibility, flight, and turning himself into electricity. The fun thing about Doctor Solar is he is basically Adam Strange meets Superman meets Johnny Thunder. His best adventure, issue #7, was written by Otto Binder, whom I've nothing but love for. The entire series has those weird Golden Key Comics vibes, where the writing is okay, but they go over and over the same ground in so many issues, but overall, it's a lot of fun!