

The Drink Tank



Grant Morrison

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Kill Your Boyfriend: An Explanation about 15 Years Ahead of Time

by Christopher J. Garcia



There are few pieces of literature that feel as fresh twenty-ish years after I've first encountered it. There are few pieces I associate with exes that I can still revisit and enjoy with the same love I had for it before. *Kill Your Boyfriend* is that rare piece.

Let me start with the milieu in which I encountered it. My friend Jordan is a giant comic fan. He's a lot more up on things than I am, which is not difficult. I dip my toes in from time to time, but really, it's not a regular thing for me. I love comics, but I've got specific likes and dislikes.

In 1996, I knew nothing about Grant Morrison.

See, I told you I was always behind the times!

Now, I had for certain read several Morrison comics at that point, but the name meant nothing to me. In fact, I had quite enjoyed *Animal Man* and *Doom Patrol*, though I had never dug into those who were behind the titles as creators. They were just comics I liked. In those days, I could probably have named five comics writers (Moore, Miller, Waid, Gaiman, Chaykin) and Morrison weren't one of them. So, I had soaked, at least a little, in the Sea of Grant without knowing the name assigned to it on the map. I had been buying comics at that point fairly regularly, notably the *Mike Danger* comics that Tekno was putting out, and then *Terminal City*, which I still believe is one of the most underrated comics of that particular decade. I was deep into the Paradox Press books, too. Of course, this was at the tail end of my all-time favorite imprint – Milestone Comics. I would usually walk about from New England Comics (or Brian's Books if I wasn't in Boston) with four comics a week. Of course, there were Elseworlds to buy too. I bought so many of them!

But I wasn't buying one-shots.

So, back home for what I remember of the early portion of summer break 1996, Jordan and a bunch of us are hanging out, enjoying life and probably listening to the dulcet tones of mid-90s rockabilly. It was a great time to be alive.

Now, there was a massive pile of comics sitting around, and right on top was a cover that caught the eye – a young woman, holding a gun over her head, a bottle in her other hand, and a heart with a knife through it over which was scrawled *Kill Your Boyfriend*.

Do you think I could resist?

At the time, I had a type – brutal. M, and SaBean, and Judith, and even Dusty (who I believe I was dating at the time) were all brutal in one form or another. I was making choices that were fun, not necessarily smart. That may, in fact, describe every choice I've ever made in any arena, but let's move on.

So, I grabbed the comic and read it. The art was by Philip Bond. I could name a few more comics artists than writers at that point, but I instantly had to know who was doing this marvelous art! It was clean cartoon, the type that I had fallen in love with from Rick Geary (who is more detailed) and Humberto Ramos. It's just wonderful and it imparts a sort of humorous setting for the piece.

A piece whose humor is a slightly darker black.

The story is half-*Heathers*, at the time one of my top five films, and *Natural Born Killers*. Two young people cross paths, and together they kill the Girl's boyfriend. They're

British kids of the “this is so boring” view of the world. They need subversion, and hot damn, do they establish their own!

The story is violent, sexy, and the Girl is drawn exactly like the woman I was most interested in at the time: giant eyes, brown hair, a face that comes alive with the world around her is in chaos.

My god, do I know that look!

The entire package was absolutely amazing, and when I sat it back on the pile, it lived in my brain for a good while. The next time I stopped by the comic shop, in this case I think it was R&K Comics in Santa Clara, I grabbed it.

I read the ever-loving hell out of it.

I probably read it twenty times over the weeks that followed, and it came with me on the plane back to school in Boston. Once there, I went out and got a copy for Dusty, who loved it. She thought that the Girl was a role model.

I should have known there and then.

In 1996, I knew nothing about Grant Morrison.

After we broke up, several months later, I started seeing M again, and gave her a copy. I must set the scene visually for this one, as glossing it over would not do justice to one of the most cinematic moments in my life. M, wearing a pair of bright red leggings and a silk kimono I had bought her at a thrift store in Haverhill, sat on top of the cushion she put on top of the old-timey radiator she had in the corner of her room, a cigarette in a holder jutting out into space from her face of three-days-forgotten makeup. In her hands was *Kill Your Boyfriend*, which she folded in half again every time she finished another set of pages. I sat on the bed, a bottle of Coke rising and falling as it balanced a moment away from disaster on my chest. In the background, I had put on The Smiths.

It's always The Smiths.

But I hardly heard the music; she was reading aloud.

“And I haven't killed anyone yet. Fucking genius!” she exclaimed.

She read the entire comic out loud, adding her commentary at every available moment. I mostly just watched her, as every time she'd turn the page and refold, I'd get the quite the show from her torso under that kimono. It felt like a forever, but it was probably twenty minutes or so, but she was sold.

I would give a copy to any woman I dated for years. Melissa, Gen, Linda, though not Vanessa. It was always something that we could share, and usually it was something that they ended up loving, often even more than I did.

The work is magnificent, and Morrison drew from a famous pair – Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, the [Moors Murderers](#). That is obvious pretty much from day one. Grant's work with the various concepts of serial killers, including the run in *Crisis* about *Bible John*, really shows that they get the entire murderer mindset.

Seizing the Fire: A Zenith View by Helena Nash



Zenith hit me like an express train. It was everything I wanted from a comic story but didn't know until I saw it.

I don't know what Grant Morrison's elevator pitch to the editor at *2000 AD* actually was, but in my mind it's something like "British pop star superhero vs Cthulhu Nazis."

Only, *superhero* doesn't really adequately describe the titular character of *Zenith*. *Dick* might. Or "self-interested celebrity who'd really rather other people did all the fighting," a far cry from *2000 AD*'s traditionally hard-bitten bastards like *Dredd*, *Strontium Dog*, *Rogue Trooper*, and *Slaine*.

That first episode of the first book (known as *Zenith Phase I*) in 1987 was just brilliant. It's the tail end of World War Two, and the British Army are pushing into Berlin. There's a George Formby song playing on the wireless, "*Mister Woo's a super-human now*," and the clean-cut super-soldier *Maximan* – sporting a Union Jack vest – taking out a Panzer tank. But things aren't looking great for this 1940s *Captain Britain* – now he's on the ground, bleeding and defeated by a superior force – the grinning Nazi *Masterman* (giving it the full *Rutger Hauer* in *Blade Runner*) who prepares to administer the killing blow.

Which is when the Americans drop the nuclear bomb on Berlin, vaporising both hero and villain.

Cut to the 1980s, in which a resurrected *Masterman* – hosting the Lovecraftian entity *Iok Sotot* – is intent on eradicating the handful of remaining superhumans, including vacuous celeb *Zenith*, whose flight and super-strength ebb and flow with his biorhythmic cycle.

The artwork was just gorgeous. Steve Yeowell's precise clean inks and big expansive panels looking to me like the sort of thing I would have expected in a totally different publication from *2000 AD*: a John Byrne *Marvel* comic, maybe. *Zenith* seemed totally at odds, visually and "storily" from the general run of strips in *2000 AD* at the time. Like Morrison and Yeowell really wanted to pitch it to one of the Big Two across the pond but took what they could get. *Zenith* was never a natural fit in *2000 AD*, but for me it was an absolute gem.

From a story and genre point of view, *Phase I* screamed "Alan Moore's run on *Captain Britain*" to me, and that was no bad thing; home-grown superheroes in a recognizably contemporary British setting, a fight for survival against an inhuman killing machine, and a final confrontation with a reality-butchering horror. The central cast of non-heroes were extremely flawed, like young, dumb pop star *Zenith* with his shoulder pads and Rick Astley quiff, dowdy middle-aged everywoman *Ruby Fox* with her fading electrical powers, Lennoesque hippie-turned-cynical tory telepath *Peter St John*, and last but not least an actual Welsh superhero in the form of overweight drunk and former firestarter *Siadwel Rhys*.

And the fact that Yeowell's artwork was not a million miles from that of British legend *Alan Davis* didn't hurt either. Man, that artwork was good.

So many great moments in that first book, so many quotable lines.

SHH! DARKNESS IS COMING . . .
 THANK YOU . . . DEAR MASTERMAN.
 WHAT A SHAME. I THINK I'VE BROKEN HIM.
 TYGER TYGER!

Phase II (1988) was pretty good, with the aging “engeneticist” Dr Michael Payne capturing Zenith to force him to father a new batch of superhumans for him. There’s a secondary villain in the form of a thinly veiled Richard Branson-alike multimillionaire, whose megalomania finds St John floating cross-legged over London in his suit, hoping to catch a bunch of incoming nuclear missiles. This book also contains fair bits of *ick*, whether it’s Zenith being introduced to the nubile young clones of both Ruby Fox and his own dead mother, or the reveal of just what’s wired up inside the hulking robot Warhead.

Zenith Phase III (1989) was where the series started to lose me. On paper, a storyline involving multiple earths, tons of half-forgotten British superheroes (the Amazing Three, the Leopard from Lime Street, et. al) and an apocalyptic struggle against the many-angled Lloigor should have been right up my street. But on the *actual* printed page, it was hard to follow what was going on. The bulk of this book focusses on two armies of largely unnamed heroes fighting and dying on two different alternate earths. The action switches between the two groups frequently, and I could never remember which team Zenith was on – was it the one with the big sad Russian bloke, or the one with punk Buddhist girl? The weekly format of *2000 AD* – with only a few pages devoted to *Zenith* – contributed to the disjointed storytelling. But for me, the art was the main problem; in between *Phases II* and *III*, Steve Yeowell had developed a new style, one that can be best summed up as being bitten by a radioactive Bill Sienkiewicz. Gone were the clean lines and crisp, easily-to-read layouts, and in came massive swathes of black ink, angular characters, and a general confusion about who was doing what to who in each panel. It was bold and expressive for sure, but didn’t do the challenging storytelling any favors, which was a shame. On the plus side, *Phase III* did also bring us acid-house obsessed android Archie.

There was a bit of a gap before *Phase IV* (1992), and when it returned, Zenith himself had undergone a makeover, with an appropriately Britpop-era haircut and jacket (which I both loathed), while the strip now had full-color artwork, and a conclusion of sorts to the overall story-arc. In a neat development, which had been hinted at way early on in *Zenith*, a set of supporting characters who are initially framed as the sort of cool, rebellious, anti-establishment heroes that the 80s had spent a lot of time telling us the 60s was all about, turned out to be absolute dicks, as they evolve from superhumans to . . . well, that would be telling. Suffice to say there’s a bunch of smiling cosmic naked people in *Phase IV* who turn the sun black and give the remaining population of Earth clasped hands in place of heads, who slavishly applaud their masters overhead. Oddly, the most disturbing image for me in *Phase IV* is that of a zit being squeezed, so all credit to Yeowell for that. Our non-heroes Zenith and St John are the last remaining humans on this nightmarish world, who bear witness to the horrors that the superhumans have wrought, with seemingly no way out. It all ends very neatly, as I have come to expect from Morrison’s *Zenith*.

If there is a weakness in *Zenith*, one that runs throughout all the books in fact, it’s that the titular character himself isn’t really ever the star. He’s a bit like Jack Burton in *Big Trouble in Little China*; he looks like the hero at first, but when you read it again, you realise that other people are doing most of the heavy lifting, usually St John employing his sneaky mind-wangling, or some poor costumed sap making the ultimate sacrifice. There is a moment later on in *Phase III* when it looks like Zenith has actually stepped up and done something awesome in the style of Spock at the end of *Wrath of Khan*, but, without wanting to spoil it too much, clever writing and cunning artwork conspire to pull the wool over our eyes; Zenith would never be that heroic. He is a bit of an empty vessel at the heart of the story, but I think that was always Morrison’s intention. And with that in mind, I clap my headhands in appreciation.

Phase 1



Phase II



Phase III



Phase IV



The Pas de Trois of Mayer, Morrison, and Moore a.k.a. Alan Moore and *Superfolks* by Pádraig Ó Méalóid

Part 0 of ∞: But First, an Explanation...

On 25 October 2012, I posted my first piece on Heidi McDonald's excellent *Comics Beat* website, having promised it to her nearly a year previously. This was the first part of what was to be a three-part set of articles examining the relationship between Robert Mayer's *Superfolks* and several of Alan Moore's major works.



Inevitably, this meant I had to look at what that other British comics wunderkind, Grant Morrison, had said about all that. I did not, at the time, realize that this would end up with my getting a very detailed annotation of the final part of the set by Grant Morrison himself, nor that it would all end up getting comments from the likes of Kurt Busiek, Ed Brubaker, and Robert Mayer himself. And, most wonderfully, from the producer of the movies of *From Hell* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Don Murphy, who was one of the people who suggested I should take my mouth off Alan Moore's penis – a direct quote there – and ask him the hard questions, so eventually I did, at the start of 2014, just over a year after my debut on *The Beat*. Moore agreed to that particular interview – which was conducted by email via the late Steve Moore – on the sole condition that I do not amend nor edit anything he wrote. You can see it all here:

<https://slovobooks.wordpress.com/2014/01/09/last-alan-moore-interview/>

These articles, and particularly that interview with Moore, shot me into some sort of comics journalism superstardom, even leading *Bleeding Cool*'s Rich Johnston to call me a “friend of the site,” an accolade I neither asked for nor endorse. None the less, I am proud of them and, even though my own relationship with Moore ended afterwards, prompted by my being foolish enough to send him a copy of my lovely book, *Poisoned Chalice: The Extremely Long and Incredibly Complex Story of Marvelman (and Miracleman)*, because he felt I was calling him a liar in one particular part of it and, having read back over that bit, I cannot but agree with him. In truth, I think Alan was getting a little wary of being in such comparatively close proximity to someone who was unashamedly straight out of comics fandom, and even one of his daughters, both of whom are still good friends, commented afterwards that she was amazed that I had lasted so long in his graces.

Anyway, here it all is, all 20k+ words of it. Enjoy.

Part 1 of 3: Approaching Menace: The Case for the Prosecution

In 1977 Dial Press of New York published Robert Mayer's first novel, *Superfolks*. It was, amongst other things, a story of a middle-aged man coming to terms with his life, an enormous collection of 1970s pop-culture references, some now lost to the mists of time, and a satire

on certain aspects of the comic superhero, but would probably be largely unheard of these days if it wasn't for the fact that it is regularly mentioned for its supposed influence on a young Alan Moore and his work, particularly on *Watchmen*, *Marvelman*, and his Superman story, *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* There's also a suggestion that it had an influence on his proposal to DC Comics for the unpublished cross-company "event," *Twilight of the Superheroes*. But who's saying these things, what are they saying, and is any of it actually true?

Before I get to any of that, though, here's a brief(ish) overview of the book, just so I can refer back to it as I'm going along, if I need to. *Superfolks* was first published by Dial Press in the US in 1977, and was subsequently published, in 1978, in hardback in the UK by Angus & Robertson, and then in paperback in the UK by Magnum Books in 1980, so it was at least potentially available in Northampton in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Alan Moore was, and remains, a voracious and omnivorous reader, and a book about comic characters would almost certainly have been something he would have wanted to have a look at, so it could have been—and as we shall see later, actually was—read by Moore at that time. But did the contents of that book influence him to such an extent that all of his major superhero work was based on it? Here, I'm afraid, is where I'm going to give away all the big secrets of the book, such as they are. If you don't want to know, then go away, read the book, and meet us all back here afterwards . . .

David Brinkley is a forty-two-year-old New York journalist. He also has a secret: he's a superhero. He's originally from the planet Cronk, where he was known as Rodney, the baby son of Archie and Edith, who put him into a spaceship (as Cronk was just about to explode) and send him to Earth, where he was found by a couple called Franklin and Eleanor from Littletown, who adopted him. He went to Middletown High, where he was infatuated with a girl called Lorna Doone. As an adult, he was originally involved with a fellow journalist, Peggy Poole, before he met his wife, Pamela Pileggi. (To add to these two sets of PP initials, we're also told that "The world is actually ruled by a shadowy, rarely seen Dallas multi-billionaire midget called Powell Pugh." Peter Pan is in there as well, as a very dissolute version of himself.)

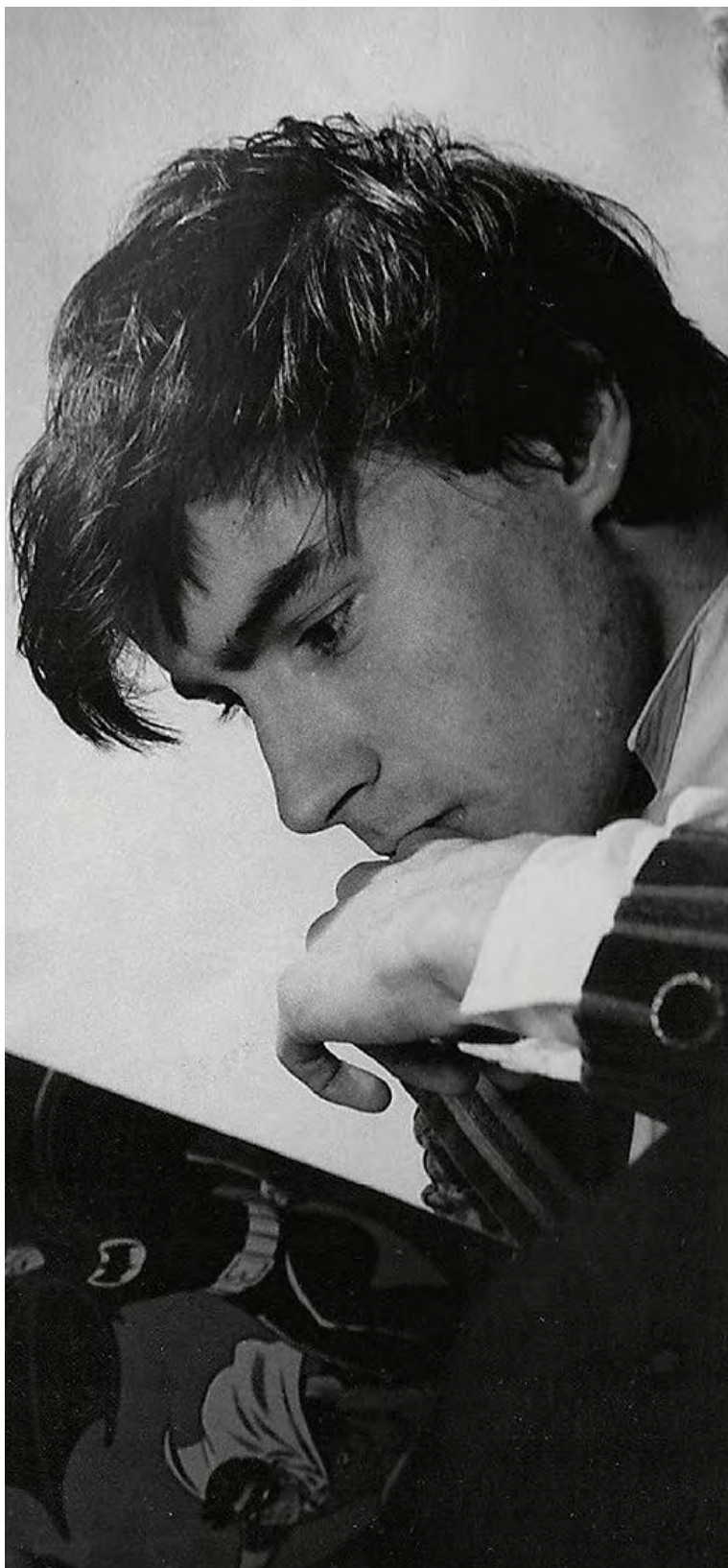
Brinkley is six foot one and has blue hair. His costume is described as a skin-tight blue leotard, with his emblem in white on the chest; slim red boots; red overshorts; a white cape; and a purple mask. He was known as The Man of Iron, and The Man of Tomorrow. His roster of enemies had names like Hydrox, Oreo, Univac, Elastic Man, Logar the mad scientist, and Pxyzszygy, the elf from the Fifth Dimension. Because he's from Cronk, he is of course vulnerable to Cronkite, the radioactive meteoric remains of that planet. We're never actually told what Brinkley's superhero name is: he's referred to as Indigo, but it's made clear that this isn't his actual name, but a codename—at one point, however, someone talking about him gets the first syllable 'Supe-' out before choking on their food, so we can interpret that as we choose. We're also never told what the white emblem on his chest is, incidentally.

When the book starts, Brinkley has been retired from superheroing for eight years, because his powers were starting to fail on him. However rioting, looting, and general lawlessness have broken out in New York, and the police force has resigned after not being paid for two months, following the bankruptcy of New York (which very nearly actually happened), so he decides that he'd better make a comeback to help deal with it. We've already been told that Batman and Robin, Superman, and the Marvel Family are all dead, so he tries to recruit Captain Mantra, another superhero who has given it all up. Mantra, under his other identity of Billy Buttons (and if Indigo is Superman, then Captain Mantra is very definitely Captain Marvel), is in a sanatorium, ever since seeing his twin sister Mary cut to pieces by a train when Dr Spock tied her to the railroad tracks, and she couldn't remove her gag in time to say her magic word. Buttons could change back into Captain Mantra, but has sworn never to do so again, so Brinkley seem to be on his own.

So, to run through the rest of it quickly, it turns out there are several different parties who want Brinkley's superhero alter ego out of the way and have staged the riots to flush him out: the aforementioned multi-billionaire midget, Powell Pugh; the Mafia; the Russians; and of course the CIA—they're all working towards the same goal, but it's never made completely clear to what extent each interacts with the other, except that Powell Pugh seems to be in the center of it all. There is a very brief appearance by a supervillain called Demoniac, who is the offspring of an incestuous coupling between Billy and Mary Mantra, but he's dead within a few pages. In the end, we find out that Powell Pugh is actually Pxyzszygy, the elf from the Fifth Dimension, and that, through all the companies he owns, he has been introducing tiny amounts of Cronkite into

pretty much all manufactured items, explaining why Brinkley's powers were fading. However, because he's been caught, Pxyzszygy has to return to the Fifth Dimension. Brinkley has to choose between leaving Earth forever, which will mean he'll have full use of his powers, or remaining with his family, and never having super-powers again. He does the right thing and stays on Earth. Oh, and it turns out that everyone knew he was Indigo all along—after all, who else had blue hair?

Besides all of that, the book is filled with references to people who would have been famous in the mid-seventies, but not so much so now. For instance—and something I didn't know until I decided to look it up, just in case—there was an actual American newscaster called David Brinkley. And, if you haven't heard of Walter Cronkite, another American newscaster—although his fame had even reached as far as me here in Ireland—then the fact that Brinkley is from the planet Cronk is not going to be as funny as the author wanted it to be. There are any number of other examples of actual people getting walk-on parts: actress Marilyn Monroe is a nurse, leading feminist Bella Abzug is a taxi driver, dancer Fred Astaire is the President's valet, and so on, and so on. Other, non-real, characters also get a mention: on the first page we're told Snoopy is dead, killed by the Red Baron, although he turns up alive later on. And the reference to Lorna Doone is more likely to refer to the American brand of shortbread biscuits than to the English novel of 1869 by RD Blackmore. At one point, during the really-quite-serious bit at the end, where Brinkley is trying to decide whether to stay on Earth or go away forever, Cinderella's Fairy Godmother appears, says a few lines, and goes away again, for no reason that I can make out—it's certainly not to advance the plot, or any other legitimate literary device I can think of. And this is part of the problem I have with *Superfolks*—the thing is, as far as I'm concerned, it's really not very good. It reads, more than anything else, like one of those bad first novels that authors have in the bottom drawer of their desks, never to see the light of day. It cannot make up its mind, from page to page and sometimes from sentence to sentence, whether it's attempting to be serious, humorous, cynical, flippant, or something else. Kirkus Reviews seem to agree, in their review, which says, "Mayer should include a laugh-track with every copy, since readers unwilling to give stock responses to TV images will find this about as funny as a plastic taco." The book would probably have benefitted



hugely from being put into the hands of a good editor, who might have actually cleared a lot of this up and made it into the better piece of work that is undoubtedly in there, struggling to get out. Still, what we've got is what we've got . . .

So, anyway, that's the book itself. The next thing is, where and when did these suggestions that Alan Moore had ransacked the book appear, and who was saying them?

The first mention of this I can find is from Grant Morrison, who had a column called Drivel in the British comics magazine *Speakeasy* (ACME Press, UK) between September 1989 and March 1991, around the same time as they were breaking into US comics with *Animal Man* and *Arkham Asylum*. Right in the middle of their run, in *Speakeasy* #111 (July 1990), their column included this:

Cor, What a Coincidence!

Why, just the other day I was hanging around outside Saxone, hoping for a sniff of those new brogues, when up come a fella with a copy of this old book called *Super-Folks* by Robert Mayer in his hand. I'd heard of it but hadn't read it. So home I skipped and buried my nose deep with-in the pages of this remaindered treasure.

And what a read it was! It starts off with this brilliant quote from Friedrich Nietzsche, right? 'Behold I teach you the Superman: he is this lightning he is this madness!'

Then it really gets going!

It's all about this middle-aged man who used to be a superhero like Superman. There's a weird conspiracy involving various oddly-named corporate subsidiaries. There's a simmering plot to murder the Superman guy and unleash unknown horrors on the world. There's another middle-aged character in a rest home, who's vowed never again to say the magic word that transforms him into Captain Mantra. There's a corrupted and demonic Captain Mantra Junior and loads of other stuff about what it would be like if superheroes were actually real. In the end, the villain turns out to be a fifth-dimensional imp called Pxyzsyzgy, who has decided to be totally evil instead of mischievous.

Let me tell you, it's a book I can only describe as *visionary*, and you must also believe me when I say it would make a great comic.

Or even three great comics.

If only I'd read this book in 1978, I might have made something of my life and avoided all this pompous, pretentious Batman nonsense that's made me a laughing-stock the world over.

Oh well, never mind. There are plenty more books on the shelves.

After that, there's a short final piece where Morrison writes:

That Bit at the End

All of a sudden, I've got the most terrible headache. It's one of those nasty spite headaches, and I've no-one but myself to blame. I've over-indulged in the lowest form of wit this month, and it's time to turn over a new leaf.

Or is it?

It's fairly obvious that Morrison is pointing the finger at Alan Moore, and specifically at, as they say, "three great comics": *Marvelman* ("this middle-aged man who used to be a superhero like Superman"), *Watchmen* ("a weird conspiracy involving various oddly-named corporate subsidiaries"), and *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* ("a simmering plot to murder the Superman guy and unleash unknown horrors on the world").

It isn't until eleven years later, as far as I can see, that *Superfolks* gets mentioned again, in Lance Parkin's *The Pocket Essential Alan Moore* (Pocket Essentials, 2001), where he says:

One big influence on Moore seems to have been the satirical novel *Superfolks* by Robert Mayer (1977), about a Superman-like hero who has retired, grown fat and become increasingly impotent in any number of ways. Moore's work echoes the book in a number of places: the idea of Superman giving it all up to live a normal life has been a recurring theme; the police going on strike because the superheroes are stealing their jobs is a key plot point in *Watchmen*; also, *Superfolks* and *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* have the same ending—a formerly mischievous but now truly evil pixie character is behind the events of both.

Although *Superfolks* was first published in 1977 and had become slowly better known as the years went by, it still took until December 2003 for it to be republished in the US. Nat Gertler of About Comics of Camarillo, California, got the rights for a limited-edition of 2000 copies, which were only made available in direct market comics shops, according to his website. I can't help but notice that the real David Brinkley died in June 2003, six months before this edition came out. Whether there is any correlation between this long gap in publication and that fact, I honestly don't know, although, as Sherlock Holmes might say, it is strangely interesting. The About Comics edition came with a cover illustration by Dave Gibbons, and an introduction by comics writer Kurt Busiek, who was effusive in his praise of the book, and in his opinion of its significance. Amongst other things, he says:

This is the best Superman parody I've ever read. [. . .] It was clearly written by a guy who knows and likes these characters, who knows the foibles of the superhero genre, and embraces them in all their absurdity.

This is one of the best Superman stories I've ever read. [. . .] there's a damn solid plot, a story that—if it actually was a Superman story [. . .] would be well-remembered by fans for its clever ideas, its emotional power and its scope.

This is one of the best superhero stories I've ever read. Here, the superhero isn't a metaphor for power, but a metaphor for power slipping away. This man's a grownup—aging, fading—and the story is all about that.

I'm not the only one, either. Find the people who did new and different things with superhero stories, and odds are you'll find that they've read and been affected by this book. Ask Mark Waid about it and watch him smile at the thought of it. Ask Neil Gaiman, watch his eyes light up with enthusiasm as he talks about what an impact it had. Ask Grant Morrison. Look at the work of Alan Moore, possibly the most significant creator the field currently has of superhero stories that break with formula and expectation and inspire others to do the same and you'll see this book's influence throughout—from the epigraph that opens *Superfolks* and *Watchmen* being the same, from Kid Miracleman to Ozymandias's pervasive and complex commercial empire to Mr. Myxzyptlk's motivations and revelations in the finale of *The Last Superman Story*, and more.

I want to point out where Busiek says “. . . from the epigraph that opens *Superfolks* and *Watchmen*

being the same...' He presumably meant to say *Miracleman*, rather than *Watchmen*.

And I also want to say that I took his advice, and I asked Neil Gaiman what he thought of the book. This is what he told me:

I loved *Superfolks* -- it was a revelation to me when I read the book (with the gogochecks on the cover) and it was about stuff I knew and taking it semi-seriously.

There is one final publication of *Superfolks* I want to mention, which contains another example of the finger being more-or-less pointed at Alan Moore. In March 2005 St. Martin's Griffin of New York City published the book in paperback, and this remains the most recent edition of the book, to my knowledge. This time 'round, the introduction was written by Grant Morrison, where he says, amongst other things,

Behind the unpromising pulp facade, I was happy to uncover some of the aboriginal roots nourishing the '80s 'adult' superhero comic boom. [. . .] In *Superfolks* I'd found a barely acknowledged contribution to the vivid and explosive evolution of the 'mature' superhero story that characterized the '80s and '90s. [. . .] In his bittersweet portrayal of the middle-aged Captain Mantra, with that half-remembered magic word always hovering somewhere on the tip of his tongue, I could see that Robert Mayer had prefigured the era of so-called 'deconstructionist' superheroes, which in turn spawned many of the medium's most memorable and ambitious works. In the conspiracy themes, complex twisting plot-lines, fifth-dimensional science, thrilling set pieces, and reverses of *Superfolks*, we can almost sniff the soil that grew so many of our favourite comics in the '80s, '90s, and beyond. [. . .] Historians of the funnies will find in *Superfolks* a treasure trove of tropes. Everyone else gets a good laugh and a good story as Mayer takes us to a wonky Earth-Nil parallel universe of downtrodden urban supermen and clapped-out cartoons.

Originally, all the commentary was in books and magazines. However, with the advent of the digital age, we invariably find it spreading to the Internet. Robert Mayer, the author of *Superfolks*, eventually joined in the debate himself, on his (now defunct) website. He says:

Time was when superheroes resembled grown-up Boy Scouts in tights. They were clean-living, clean-thinking, all-American chaps or women without a neurosis, sexual hang-up or mean thought in sight, always fighting for justice, America and the little guy against the villains of their make-believe worlds.

Then came the 1980s—and all that changed. Superheroes became filled with inner darkness, psychological problems, insecurities. In other words, they became real, suffering humans with real hang-ups alongside their superpowers. The Dark Knight, for example. Who is to blame for this dark, downward spiral into the superhero abyss? Apparently, I am.

Among the spawn, many critics say, were much of Alan Moore's work, including the "classic" *Watchmen*. To my knowledge Mr. Moore has never publicly acknowledged a debt to *Superfolks*, but you can Google *Superfolks* and read all about it.



The other thing the Internet gave us, of course, is any number of opinions about the relationship between *Superfolks* and the work of Alan Moore. You only have to type the words “Alan Moore,” “stole,” and “*Superfolks*” into your search engine to find any number of posts on blogs and forums, stating that, as you might guess, Alan Moore stole all his ideas for *Superfolks*. A quick search of the Internet brings these two examples: a book reviewer on the also now defunct toonzon.net actually spends most of his time talking about Kurt Busiek’s introduction, and says:

According to the introduction, there's a disturbing number of prominent comics writers today who read this book back in the 70's and cite it as a primary influence on their work. In addition to Busiek, Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman, and Mark Waid are all avowed *Superfolks* fans. Read this book, and you'll find out where Moore swiped more than a few of his ideas for *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow*, *Miracleman*, and *Watchmen*.

. . . and on a now-missing post on *Bleeding Cool*, we see what is a very typical posting in a thread about DC’s forthcoming then *Before Watchmen* comics:

I wonder how Robert Mayer would feel to see how Moore has ripped off his *Superfolks* novel countless times without credit.

There is one other online article I want to look at before I get to the end of this part of the story. The last post on a blog called *Flashmob Fridays*, on 24 of February 2012, looked at Alan Moore’s *Twilight of the Superheroes* proposal to DC Comics in 1987, which was never actually written and published, and remains one of his great lost works. The article is written by three different people, and one of them, Joseph Gualtieri, see in that proposal further evidence of Moore’s, as he says, “strip-mining” of *Superfolks* for ideas.

Then there’s some of the content. Blackhawk picking up teenage boys is a gag (he’s really recruiting them into a private army), sure, but Moore also has Sandra Knight [Phantom Lady] sleeping around, Plastic Man as a gigolo, and an incestuous relationship between Billy and Mary Batson.

The other thing that occurred to me this time about *Twilight* is how in a lot of ways it’s the ultimate product of Moore’s decade of strip-mining Robert Mayer’s *Superfolks* that saw him produce *Marvelman*, *Watchmen*, and *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow*? When Moore finally spoke publicly about Mayer’s book [a link which leads, embarrassingly but perhaps inevitably, to an interview I did with Moore where I asked him about this], he tried to minimize its role in his career and attack Grant Morrison for bringing it up (in a coded manner) in a magazine column:

‘I can’t even remember when I read it. It would probably have been before I wrote *Marvelman*, and it would have had the same kind of influence upon me as the much earlier – probably a bit early for Grant Morrison to have spotted it – Brian Patten’s poem, *Where Are You Now, Batman?* [. . .] I’d still say that Harvey Kurtzman’s *Superduperman* probably had the preliminary influence, but I do remember *Superfolks* and finding some bits of it in that same sort of vein.’

The *Twilight* proposal may be the best example of just how untrue what Moore said is—he clearly internalized *Superfolks* to such a degree that he never, ever makes note of the fact that Mary and Billy Batson’s relationship is an incestuous one. For those unfamiliar with *Superfolks*, the coupling of the book’s Batson analogues is a key plot point, producing one of the book’s major villains. Mayer’s take on the Marvel Family hangs all over Moore’s take on Billy’s sexuality in the proposal.

And that’s the case for the prosecution. Specifically, this is what the various people I’ve quoted are saying that Alan Moore took from *Superfolks*.

In 1990, Grant Morrison suggested that Moore based “three great comics” on the book: *Marvelman* (“this middle-aged man who used to be a superhero like Superman”), *Watchmen* (“a weird conspiracy involving various oddly-named corporate subsidiaries”), and *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* (“a simmering plot to murder the Superman guy and unleash unknown horrors on the world”).

Fifteen years later, in 2005, they were being a bit more circumspect, although it’s still pretty obvious that Moore was front and center when they said:

In the conspiracy themes, complex twisting plot-lines, fifth-dimensional science, thrilling set pieces, and reverses of *Superfolks*, we can almost sniff the soil that grew so many of our favourite comics in the '80s, '90s, and beyond.

In 2001 Lance Parkin said:

One big influence on Moore seems to have been the satirical novel *Superfolks* by Robert Mayer (1977), about a Superman-like hero who has retired, grown fat and become increasingly impotent in any number of ways. [. . .] also, *Superfolks* and *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* have the same ending—a formerly mischievous but now truly evil pixie character is behind the events of both.

In 2003 Kurt Busiek said:

Look at the work of Alan Moore, possibly the most significant creator the field currently has of superhero stories that break with formula and expectation and inspire others to do the same and you’ll see this book’s influence throughout—from the epigraph that opens *Superfolks* and [*Miracleman*] being the same [. . .] to Mr. Myxyzptlk’s motivations and revelations in the finale of *The Last Superman Story*, and more.

And up until recently Robert Mayer’s own website said:

Among the spawn [of *Superfolks*], many critics say, were much of Alan Moore’s work, including the ‘classic’ *Watchmen*. To my knowledge Mr. Moore has never publicly acknowledged a debt to *Superfolks*, but you can Google *Superfolks* and read all about it.

Finally, in 20012 Joseph Gualtieri said:

For those unfamiliar with *Superfolks*, the coupling of the book’s Batson analogues is a key plot point, producing one of the book’s major villains. Meyer’s take on the Marvel Family hangs all over Moore’s take on Billy’s sexuality in the [*Twilight of the Superheroes*] proposal.

So, really, that all looks pretty damning for Alan Moore. In the second part of this three-part-story, I shall attempt to see if there might be any other interpretation for all of these accusations. And in the third and final part, I’ll look to see if maybe there might not be a little tension between Moore and Grant Morrison, which might have helped to pave the way for all of this.

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Alan Moore and Superfolks

Part 2 of 3: The Best Defence is a Good Offense

So, just to recap where we left off last time: it looks like Alan Moore has based all the big hits of his career on ideas he stole from Robert Mayer's 1977 novel *Superfolks*. Various people -- including Grant Morrison, Kurt Busiek, Lance Parkin, Joseph Gaultieri, and even Robert Mayer himself -- have claimed at one point or another that Moore based a lot of his superhero work on various aspects of the book, specifically *Marvelman*, *Watchmen*, *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?*, and his proposal to DC Comics for the unpublished cross-company "event," *Twilight of the Superheroes*. But is any of this true, or might there be another explanation? To answer that, I'm going to go through the individual allegations or suggestions, and deal them one by one, to see how they hold up.

Did Alan Moore read *Superfolks*?

Firstly, there's the question of whether Moore ever actually admitted reading *Superfolks*. Was Robert Mayer factually correct when he said that "Mr. Moore has never publicly acknowledged a debt to *Superfolks*."? Actually, no, he wasn't. In Lance Parkin's *The Pocket Essential Alan Moore* from 2001, mentioned previously, there's this quote from Moore:

By the time I did the last Superman stories I'd forgotten the Mayer book, although I may have had it subconsciously in my mind, but it was certainly influential on *Marvelman* and the idea of placing superheroes in hard times and in a browbeaten real world.

I asked Parkin where the quote from Moore came from, and he told me that,

Moore read a draft of the manuscript and added that line himself. From memory, it's a handwritten annotation to the proof, one of only about three comments he had.

However, it did seem as if though nobody had ever actually asked him about this. One blogger wrote:

I'd love it if some ambitious journalist removed his mouth from Alan Moore's penis and asked him about this influence.

. . . which is a fair point, if somewhat colorfully presented. Has anyone ever asked Moore about this? Has anyone, as the writer put it, removed his mouth from Alan Moore's penis and asked him about this influence? Yes. I have. I'd interviewed Moore a number of times, at this stage, and always tried, amongst the questions on his current work, to ask him something about his older work, or to nail down some of the stories that have built up around him. So, in an interview published in *3AM Magazine* on the 17 March, 2011, there's this exchange (slightly edited here, but the original is still online, if you want to read the lot):

PÓM: Right, the first thing I wanted to ask you, actually, before I get into your own work is, I wanted to ask you about *Superfolks*. Grant Morrison was at one stage intimating that you'd read *Superfolks* and based your entire output on it.

AM: Well, I have read *Superfolks*. But it was by no means the only influence, or even a major influence upon me output.

PÓM: When you read *Superfolks*, what sort of influence would it have had on you?

AM: I can't even remember when I read it. It would probably have been before I wrote *Marvelman*, and it would have had the same kind of influence upon me as the much earlier—probably a bit early for Grant Morrison to have spotted it—Brian Patten's poem, *Where Are You Now, Batman?*, and that, which had an elegiac tone to it, which was talking about these former heroes in straitened circumstances, looking back to better days in the past, that had an influence. I do remember *Superfolks* and finding some bits of it in that same sort of vein. Like I say, it probably was one of a number of influences that may have had some influence upon the elegiac quality of *Marvelman*.

An obvious question to ask here would be why, in the ten years between 2001 and 2011, did Moore go from saying *Superfolks* was “certainly influential on *Marvelman* and the idea of placing superheroes in hard times and in a browbeaten real world” to saying it was ‘by no means the only influence, or even a major influence upon me output’? Perhaps it is that in his initial list of things that had been influential on *Marvelman* he hadn't mentioned *Superfolks*, and wanted to correct this omission in Lance Parkin's book, but found that, in the interim, the number of claims that he was somehow a giant fraud, whose entire output was stolen wholesale from this one book, had made him more cautious, and you can hardly blame him for that.

That initial list of influences mentioned above is from a 1983 interview by Eddie Stachelski in issue #5 of Lew Stringer's *Fantasy Express* fanzine, where Moore said:

When I researched *Marvelman*, I tried to get right back to the roots of the superhuman and sort out exactly what made the idea tick. I read obvious things like the Greek and Norse legends again, I read a lot of science fiction stories that touched upon the superhero theme . . . things like [Olaf] Stapleton's *Odd John* and Philip Wylie's *Gladiator*. I even read a few comics.

The thing is this: Alan Moore has always been a cultural magpie, hoovering up everything he could find, and using them in his work—the first two volumes of *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* reference over eighty different works of fiction, along with work from other media, for instance. He's hardly alone in this, but he has always been frank about what those influences are. This has already been alluded to above and is going to be an even more prominent theme through the rest of this piece. I might as well warn you now that I am probably going to find some older—in some cases much older—examples for nearly all of the things Moore is said to have plucked from *Superfolks*, with only one real exception. But you're going to have to keep reading to find out what that is. So . . .

Behold, I teach you the Superman . . .

The next allegation I want to address is the regularly repeated one that Moore's *Marvelman* story and *Superfolks* both started off with the same quote. Grant Morrison alluded to this in 1990, as did Kurt Busiek in 2003, as mentioned previously. The thing is, this is both true and untrue, but mostly untrue. *Superfolks* has as an epigraph this quote:

Behold, I teach you the Superman:
he is this lightning, he is this madness!

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche
Thus Spake Zarathustra

The first issue of *Miracleman*, as published by Eclipse Comics in August 1985, begins with a ten-page story called “Miracleman Family and the Invaders from the Future,” which has originally published in L Miller & Son’s *Marvelman Family #1* in October 1956. This is followed by a page of eight panels, consecutively tighter close-ups on the head of Marvelman from the last page of the “Invaders from the Future” story, finally ending up with a completely black frame. This is accompanied by this text, broken up over the eight panels:

Behold . . .
I teach you the Superman:
he is this lightning . . .
he is this madness!
Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche,
Thus Spake Zarathustra

The thing is, neither the story from 1956 nor the page with the quote from Nietzsche are there in the original publication of Marvelman in Quality Communications’ *Warrior #1* in the UK in 1982, and they’re both gone again by the time the first three issues are collected into Eclipse’s *Miracleman Book One: A Dream of Flying* TPB in 1988. So, I’m going to suggest that they were put there by the editorial people at Eclipse, perhaps with input from Dez Skinn, to try to give the American audience a taste of what went before—although this doesn’t explain the quote from Nietzsche, or why it is presented word for word at it is in *Superfolks*, including using Nietzsche’s middle name. And I’m further going to suggest that Moore himself may have been unhappy with this meddling with his work, and asked to have the extraneous parts, the parts he had not written, removed for the TPB publication. So, although this allegation is partially true, in that one version of the beginning of Marvelman/Miracleman began with the same Nietzsche quote as *Superfolks*, I think it’s highly unsafe to presume that Moore himself had anything to do with this, which is what is being implied.

Grant Morrison, Kurt Busiek, and Lance Parkin all point to similarities between *Watchmen* and aspects of *Superfolks*. Morrison alludes to “a weird conspiracy involving various oddly-named corporate subsidies,” Busiek mentions “Ozymandias’s pervasive and complex commercial empire,” which is effectively the same thing, and Parkin says that “the police going on strike because the superheroes are stealing their jobs is a key plot point in *Watchmen*,” likening it to a similar situation in *Superfolks*. So, taking these one at a time . . .

In *Watchmen* Adrian Veidt, aka Ozymandias, has a business empire that includes a large number of companies that feature in the story’s central conspiracy. In *Superfolks* Powell Pugh, aka Pxyzszygy, has a business empire that includes a large number of companies that feature in the story’s central conspiracy. Certainly, there would seem to be a similarity there. However, there are earlier instances of essentially the same thing—books with characters who own a large number of companies that feature in the story’s central conspiracy—which there is a very good chance that both Moore and Mayer would have read. Pierce Inverarity in Thomas Pynchon’s 1966 novel *The Crying of Lot 49* fits the description perfectly, as does Malachi Constant



in Kurt Vonnegut's 1959 novel *The Sirens of Titan*. Moore regularly cites Pynchon as one of his favourite writers, there are references to the work of Vonnegut in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier*, and I would be very surprised if Mayer had not also read one or both of these books, as well. So, on this at least, it is possible that both authors were, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by earlier works, rather than Moore having only seen the idea in Mayer's work.

Lance Parkin's statement that "the police going on strike because the superheroes are stealing their jobs is a key plot point in *Watchmen*" is similar to a situation in *Superfolks* needs a bit more examination. Yes, the police in *Watchmen* do go on strike—there is a general police strike across the USA in 1977 because they are afraid that their jobs are threatened by the costumed adventurers. However, there is very little similarity between this and *Superfolks*, where New York's police force resign *en masse* after working unpaid for seven weeks, brought about by the bankruptcy of New York City, something that very nearly happened for real in the 1970s. So, on one hand we have a nationwide strike, on the other we have a city-specific mass resignation, and both are for very different reasons. Except for the fact that in both cases we have streets unprotected by the police, there's no other similarity between them. So, again, I'm going to dismiss all these accusations about *Watchmen* borrowing from *Superfolks* as being unsafe, at the very least.

Marvelman, Miracleman, Mackerelman, etc. . . .

Grant Morrison makes various allegations, or suggestions of allegations, about the influence of *Superfolks* on Marvelman. In 1990 they said:

It's all about this middle-aged man who used to be a superhero like Superman. [. . .] There's another middle-aged character in a rest home, who's vowed never again to say the magic word that transforms him into Captain Mantra. There's a corrupted and demonic Captain Mantra Junior and loads of other stuff about what it would be like if superheroes were actually real.

. . . and in 2005 they said:

In his bittersweet portrayal of the middle-aged Captain Mantra, with that half-remembered magic word always hovering somewhere on the tip of his tongue, I could see that Robert Mayer had prefigured the era of so-called 'deconstructionist' superheroes . . .

Yes, both works feature middle-aged superhero characters, except that in *Superfolks* David Brinkley has chosen to retire, whereas in Marvelman Mike Moran has been suffering from amnesia, so there's a difference there, straight away. Brinkley's decision to come out of retirement is really a variation on the "putting the band back together" trope, the earliest example of which is probably to be found in the novel *Twenty Years After* by Alexandre Dumas, originally published in serial form in 1845, where d'Artagnan tries to get the Three Musketeers back together, as you might guess, twenty years after the events of *The Three Musketeers*. Marvelman, on the other hand, is an "amnesiac hero" story, which dates back at least as far as Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, published from 1859, again in serial form, or to the 1918 novel *The Return of the Soldier* by Rebecca West, which is probably the first time that a hero in a book suffered from traumatic amnesia, which is specifically what Mike Moran has. And I should also point out that, whilst Mike Moran was middle-aged, Marvelman was not, as they are actually two different entities, unlike David Brinkley and his superhero alter-ego.

Another thing that is evident is that Morrison really wants to say that the Captain Marvel analog, Captain Mantra, had, like Mike Moran, forgotten his magic word, so that they can accuse Moore of appropriating this as well, but stops just short, presumably because they knows it's just not true, and that there really is no correlation between the two things. Actually, Morrison really is obsessed by Captain Mantra, considering for how brief a time he actually appears in the book, as they mention him both times they write about the book.

Morison also mentions a corrupted and demonic Captain Mantra Junior, meaning the character Demoniac, which Kurt Busiek also refers to briefly. So, is Kid Marvelman a direct take from *Superfolks's* Demoniac? Unsurprisingly, I'm going to say no. Demoniac, the Captain Mantra Junior character, is the result of an incestuous coupling between Captain Mantra and Mary Mantra's mortal counterparts, Billy and Mary Button. As such, he's a classic example of a type that can be traced back to Mordred in the Arthurian legends, who is Arthur's son by one of his half-sisters, Morgan le Fay, and who goes on to fight Arthur in his last battle and dies at his father's hand. Kid Marvelman, on the other hand, is a classic example of the idea that power corrupts, and a direct-line descendant of Captain Marvel's enemy Black Adam, who preceded Captain Marvel as a recipient of the powers of the wizard Shazam, but became evil over time, which is more or less exactly what Johnny Bates, aka Kid Marvelman, did. Certainly, there are superficial similarities between Demoniac and Kid Marvelman, but these similarities are not unique to these two characters, and plenty of other examples of incestuous sons turning on their fathers, or sidekicks turning evil, or power corrupting are to be found in comics, in literature, and in myth and legend. And, as well as all that, Demoniac has a very brief minor appearance in *Superfolks*, lasting no more than a handful of pages, as compared to the major role that Kid Marvelman has throughout Moore's run on Marvelman.

Before we leave Marvelman/Miracleman, I did want to say something about things that actually were influential on that story, and those characters. While Moore does say that *Superfolks* was an influence on Marvelman, he also lists a number of other works. He has always maintained that Harvey Kurtzman and Wally Wood's "Superduperman" from *Mad* #4 in 1953 (the year he was born, as it happens), which he read in about 1964 or 1965—probably in *The Mad Reader* (Ballantine Books, New York, 1954)—was the primary influence on Marvelman. Talking to George Khoury in *Kimota! The Miracleman Companion* (TwoMorrows Publishing, Raleigh, 2001), he said:

I picked up one of the Ballantine reprints of Harvey Kurtzman's *Mad* which has actually got the Superduperman story in it, and I remember being so knocked out by the Superduperman story that I immediately began thinking—I was 11, remember, so this would have been purely a comic strip for my own fun—but I thought I could do a parody story about Marvelman. This thing is fair game to my 11-year-old mind. I wanted to do a superhero parody story that was as funny as Superduperman but I thought it would be better if I did it about an English superhero. So I had this idea that it would be funny if Marvelman had forgotten his magic word. I think I might have even [done] a couple of drawings or Wally Wood-type parodies of Marvelman. And then I just completely forgot about the project.

There are various other tellings of this story, from both before and after this version in *Kimota!*, not least in this very article.

As well as Superduperman, Moore also mentioned Liverpool poet Brian Patten's poem "Where Are You Now, Batman?", which he said was influential on the elegiac feel of Marvelman. When I went to look for a copy of this, I found that, much like Batman himself, it has actually been revised numerous times. This is, as far as I know, the original version, as it appeared in *Penguin Modern Poets #10: The Mersey Sound* (Penguin Books, 1967), before any of the revisions:

Where are you now, Batman? Now that Aunt Heriot has reported Robin missing
And Superman's fallen asleep in the sixpenny childhood seats?
Where are you now that Captain Marvel's SHAZAM! echoes round the auditorium,
The magicians don't hear it,
Must all be deaf . . . or dead . . .
The Purple Monster who came down from the Purple Planet disguised as a man
Is wandering aimlessly about the streets
With no way of getting back.
Sir Galahad's been strangled by the Incredible Living Trees,
Zorro killed by his own sword.

Blackhawk has buried the last of his companions
 And has gone off to commit suicide in the disused Hangars of Innocence.
 The Monster and the Ape still fight it out in a room
 Where the walls are continually closing in;
 Rocketman's fuel tanks gave out over London.
 Even Flash Gordon's lost, he wanders among the stars
 Weeping over the woman he loved
 7 Universes ago.
 My celluloid companions, it's only a few years
 Since I knew you. Something in us has faded.
 Has the Terrible Fiend, That Ghastly Adversary,
 Mr Old Age, Caught you in his deadly trap,
 And come finally to polish you off,
 His machinegun dripping with years . . .

Moore also mentions this poem and its effect on his work in a much earlier interview in *Comics Interview* #12 in 1984, where he says:

When I was about 16 or 17 I got involved with Northampton Arts Lab, where you'd get together with some people, hire a room, put out a magazine, do performances. I learned a lot about timing in comics from acting, and I learned how to use words really effectively from poetry. There's a poem by Brian Patten called 'Where Are You Now, Batman?' It has a haunting line about 'Blackhawk has gone off to commit suicide in the Hangars of Innocence.' It made you think, 'Ah! If only they'd look at those characters with a bit of poetry in the comics themselves!' I think that's where my attitude came from.

Moore talks about reading Joseph Torchia's first novel, *The Kryptonite Kid* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1979) —at about the same time as he read *Superfolks*, which would be about right, as it was published in 1979, just two years after Mayer's book—and says he "found that quite moving." Briefly, it's about a young boy who writes letters to Superman, who he believes is real. He talks about his troubles at home and in school, and what is obvious to us, but not to him, is that he is in love with his best friend Robert. Sometimes the boy, Jerry Chariot, suggests to Superman how he can beat his enemies, and perhaps the character who most often gets mentioned is Mr Mxyzptlk, with whom the boy seems obsessed, and who he occasionally identifies with. It's a strange, sad, moving story, and Torchia's only other novel, *As If After Sex*, also has a character called Robert, who falls in love with a man called Julian. There's obviously some element of autobiography in these two books: Jerry Chariot from *The Kryptonite Kid* not only shares a first initial with the author, but his surname is an anagram of the authors, and both feature someone called Robert in a relationship with a man whose name begins with a J. If you get a chance, I urge you to read *The Kryptonite Kid*.



Twilight of the Superheroes

Another book that Moore would definitely have read at about the same time as *The Kryptonite Kid* and *Superfolks* (based on a recent conversation I had with Bryan Talbot when he was over here in Dublin, who was telling me about Moore enthusing to him about *Superfolks* and *The Kryptonite Kid* when he was reading them, and also mentioning a book of superhero short stories he had read) has to be *Superheroes*, a collection of stories published by Sphere in 1978. There was some good stuff and some bad stuff in it, but possibly the most important story in it was Larry Niven's 1971 essay "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex," which Moore undoubtedly both read and assimilated. Which allows me to bring up the allegation Joseph Gaultieri made, when he said:

[Moore] clearly internalized *Superfolks* to such a degree that he never, ever makes note of the fact that Mary and Billy Batson's relationship is an incestuous one. For those unfamiliar with *Superfolks*, the coupling of the book's Batson analogues is a key plot point, producing one of the book's major villains. Meyer's take on the Marvel Family hangs all over Moore's take on Billy's sexuality in the [*Twilight of the Superheroes*] proposal.

The thing is this: DC's Silver Age started in October 1956, and the Marvel Age in November 1961. By 1977, these were 21 and 16 years in the past, respectively. And in 1977, Alan Moore was 24 years old, and had been reading comics all his life. But he'd also been reading lots of other things in that time, as well. Certainly, any adolescent comics reader would be likely to have speculated on what might actually happen if Clark Kent and Lois Lane ever finally did go to bed together, and even to have considered that perhaps Superman and Wonder Woman would have made a good match, as Moore suggested in *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* And Moore was obviously aware of things like Tijuana Bibles, as they feature in both *Watchmen* and *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier*, where he even creates his own. But what about the sexuality of the Marvels in his *Twilight of the Superheroes* proposal? Here's the relevant piece:

House of Thunder

The House of Thunder is composed of the Marvel family, plus additions. Captain Marvel himself is the patriarch, and is if possible even more estranged and troubled by the state of the world than Superman is, perhaps because the Marvel family are having to come to terms with the difficulties of having human alter egos along with everything else, a point I'll return to when I outline the plot. Alongside Captain Marvel, there is Mary Marvel, who the Captain has married more to form a bona fide clan in opposition to that of Superman than for any other reason. There is also Captain Marvel Jr, now an adult superhero every bit as powerful and imposing as Captain Marvel in his prime, but forced to labor under the eternal shadow of a senior protégé. To complicate things, Captain Marvel Jr and Mary Marvel are having an affair behind the Captain's back, Guinevere and Lancelot style, which has every bit as dire consequences as in the Arthurian legends. The other member of the Marvel clan is Mary Marvel Jr, the daughter of Captain and Mary Marvel Sr. Mary Jr is fated to be part of a planned arranged marriage to the nasty delinquent Superboy during the course of our story, in order to form a powerful union between the two Houses.

Surely, it's not hard to see that the kind of dynastic intermarrying that is going on here is much more likely to be influenced by things like the ancient Egyptians, where sibling marriages were commonplace amongst the Pharaohs? And Moore himself references the Arthurian elements in this. Again, I think his influences are far more likely to be from other sources, and from his wider reading, than they are from the sole influence of *Superfolks*. Certainly, the idea of there being a dynastic structure to the different groups, and that they would marry off their offspring for political purposes is his own, but straight out of European history, right up to the present times, nearly.

Whatever *Did* Happen to the Man of Tomorrow?

There is one final allegation of the influence of *Superfolks* on the works of Alan Moore, and it is perhaps the most troubling, at least to me. In September 1986 DC published the two parts of *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* beginning in *Superman* #423 and ending in *Action Comics* #583, a story which was meant to be the last Superman story of the Silver Age, ahead of a reboot of the character by John Byrne in the wake of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. In his introduction to the collected edition of the stories in 1997 Paul Kupperberg quoted DC editor Julius Schwartz on the difficulty he was having deciding who he should get to write that “last” Superman story:

The next morning, still wondering what to do about it, I happened to be having breakfast with Alan Moore. So I told him about my difficulties. At that point, he literally rose out of his chair, put his hands around my neck, and said, ‘if you let anybody but me write that story, I’ll kill you.’ Since I didn’t want to be an accessory to my own murder, I agreed.

It’s this story that has perhaps the most pointed comments about its being influenced by *Superfolks*. In 1990 Grant Morrison alluded to “a simmering plot to murder the Superman guy and unleash unknown horrors on the world, [. . .] In the end, the villain turns out to be a fifth-dimensional imp called Pxyzsyzgy, who has decided to be totally evil instead of mischievous,” and in 2005 they said that “In the conspiracy themes, [. . .] [and] fifth-dimensional science [. . .] of *Superfolks*, we can almost sniff the soil that grew so many of our favourite comics in the ‘80s, ‘90s, and beyond.” In 2001 Lance Parkin said that “*Superfolks* and *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* have the same ending—a formerly mischievous but now truly evil pixie character is behind the events of both.” And in 2003 Kurt Busiek says, “Look at the work of Alan Moore, possibly the most significant creator the field currently has of superhero stories that break with formula and expectation and inspire others to do the same and you’ll see this book’s influence throughout [. . .] Mr. Mxyzptlk’s motivations and revelations in the finale of *The Last Superman Story*, and more.”

And they’re right. The ending of *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* is very similar to a scene in *Superfolks*. In Mayer’s book, Brinkley asks Pxyzsyzgy:

Why, Pxyzsyzgy? You used to be happy with pranks, with mischief. The Cosmic Trickster, that’s your role. Why all this? Murder, intrigue . . . ?

And Pxyzsyzgy replies:

Cosmic Trickster, shit. I’m tired of playing the clown. Call it Fool’s Lib. From now on there will be death, destruction, disease.

Although I should point out that he’s saying this as he’s being banished back to the Fifth Dimension . . .

Meanwhile, in *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* Mr Mxyzptlk says:

The big problem with being immortal is filling in your time. For example, I spent the first two thousand years of my existence doing absolutely nothing. I didn’t move . . . I didn’t even breathe. Eventually, simple inertia became tiresome, so I spent the next two thousand years being saintly and benign, doing only good deeds. When that novelty wore off, I decided to try being mischievous. Now, two thousand years later, I’m bored again. I need a change. Starting with your death, I shall spend the next two thousand years being evil!

So, yes, there is a great similarity between Pxyzsyzgy and Mr Mxyzptlk. There is another similarity between

the two of them, though: in both cases they are no more than plot device, someone there to represent an ultimate evil that has been behind the scenes all along. And in both cases, they appear for exactly three pages before being dealt with and defeated by the stories' protagonists. Certainly, in *Superfolks*, we are shown Powell Pugh, Pxyzsyzgy other identity, being involved from the start of the book. However, in *Man of Tomorrow*, until Mr Mxyzptlk turns up, Moore could have chosen anyone as the Man Behind the Curtain.

It is possible that there might be more of a reason than a conscious or unconscious memory of *Superfolks* in the choice of Mr Mxyzptlk as the bad guy. In that same introduction to the collected *Man of Tomorrow*, Kupperberg goes on to say:

So, in a letter to Moore dated September 19, 1985, Julie [Schwartz] proclaimed, 'The time has come! Meaning: that I've just been informed that the September cover-dated issues of *SUPERMAN* and *ACTION* will be my last before John Byrne and Co. take over. What I'm getting at is: the time has come for you to type up the story your 'mouth' agreed to do—that is, an 'imaginary' Superman that would serve as the 'Last' Superman story if the magazines were discontinued—what would happen to Superman, Clark Kent, Lois Lane, Lana Lang, Jimmy Olsen, Perry White, Luthor, Brainiac, Mr. Mxyzptlk, and all the et cetera you can deal with.'

If this is the actual content of the letter, and not a post-factum version of it that handily matches the content of Moore's story, then it does seem that Julius Schwartz has given Moore a very exact menu of who he wants in the story, specifically including Mr. Mxyzptlk. And there is another possible reason why Moore chose to use Mr. Mxyzptlk: In *Superfolks* Pxyzsyzgy is only banished back to his fifth-dimension home, and can return to Earth in four years, by which time Brinkley will be completely powerless. Perhaps Moore couldn't help wanting to find a better and more permanent solution to the problem, and having found it, really wanted to use it. Certainly, for my money, that scene when Mr. Mxyzptlk is finally dispatched is one of the scariest in comics, and a much better way of dealing with the bad guy.

So, this, and *only* this, is where I think Moore borrowed from *Superfolks*, whether consciously or unconsciously. That's not to say he might not otherwise have been influenced by it, of course, or that the book does not have an interesting and possibly even important place in the development of how comics were brought to a more realistic and sophisticated place than they were before it was written.

There is no doubt that, at its heart, *Superfolks* is a parody of superhero comics, and of Superman in particular. Indeed, it's so close to DC's Superman that it's a wonder that DC didn't actually take action, as this is something they've often done in the past. Nonetheless, for a writer who claims that he gave up reading comics at the age of 12, and that his favourite comics character is Elmer Fudd, there is much of worth in *Superfolks*, if you strip away some of the silliness it contains perhaps a little too much of. And, while it probably owes at least some of its own roots to things like Marvel's *Not Brand Echh*, and to Mayer's own background as a journalist, equally we can see its influence in many modern comics, and even in things like the TV show *The Greatest American Hero* where, in imitation of David and Pamela Brinkley, we find Ralph Hinkley and Pam Davidson.

Obviously, in all of this, I'm very much taking Alan Moore's side, but even so, I do honestly believe that many of the claims made about his appropriating ideas from *Superfolks* are either mistaken, exaggerated, or just downright wrong. I had hoped to say something about the vast array of influences that can be seen in Moore's work, from the influence of Monty Python's Bicycle Repair Man on his work in general, to the much more specific influence of the opening of Philip José Farmer's *To You Scattered Bodies Go* on the idea of where the spare bodies are kept in *Marvelman*. But I really think I've gone on about this long enough.

There is one final part of this examination of Alan Moore's relationship with *Superfolks* to come, however, called "The Strange Case of Grant Morrison and Alan Moore," which will appear here soon.

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Alan Moore and Superfolks

Part 3 of 3: The Strange Case of Grant Morrison and Alan Moore

Originally, when I set out to look into the various allegations about Alan Moore and Robert Mayer's *Superfolks*, I thought it was going to be a comparatively straightforward piece to write. Just read the book, find out what people had said, and attempt to match the two of them up together. What could be easier, I asked myself? Ten thousand words and nearly a year later, I find that I could not have been more wrong. However, doing the research is at least half the fun, I've always said. Much of the fascination of writing about things like this is that you never know what you're going to find out. And one of the things that I found out was that I really needed to know more about the animosity between Alan Moore and Grant Morrison, as it seemed to be a constantly recurring aspect of the story of Moore and *Superfolks*.

So, to go back to where I started, back to the beginning of the piece called "Alan Moore and Superfolks: Part I—The Case for the Prosecution," there's that piece from Grant Morrison's Drivel column in *Speakeasy* #111 (July 1990), where they talk about reading *Superfolks*, and makes it really quite clear that they think—or pretend to think—that Alan Moore plundered the book for ideas. But this isn't by any means the beginning of their—for want of a better word—relationship.

But what is the beginning of that relationship? There are two different versions of this, depending on who you listen to. First, there's Alan Moore's version of events, which I've transcribed from the webchat he did for the Harvey Pekar statue Kickstarter. One of the questioners asked,

You are somewhat surprisingly not the only acclaimed comics writer from the UK to also be a vocal magician. Obviously I'm talking about Grant Morrison here, who has never been terribly shy about their views on you or your work. Can we possibly draw you out on your views of them and their work?

To which Moore replied:

Well, let me see . . . The reason I haven't spoken about Grant Morrison generally is because I'm not very interested in them, and I don't really want to get involved with a writer of their calibre in some sort of squabble. But, for the record, since you asked: the first time I met them, they was an aspiring comics writer from Glasgow, I was up there doing a signing or something. They asked if I could perhaps—if they could invite a local comics writer who was a big admirer of mine along to the dinner. So I said yeah. This was I think the only time that I met him to speak to. They said how much they admired my work, how it had inspired him to want to be a comics writer. And I wished him the best of luck, I told him I'd look out for his work. When I saw that work in *2000 AD* I thought 'Well, this seems as if it's a bit of a cross between Captain Britain and Marvelman, but that's probably something that he'll grow out of.' It was on that basis that I recommended him to Karen Berger when she was starting [indecipherable speech—Vertigo?].

Then there started a kind of, a strange campaign of things in fanzines where they were expressing their opinions of me, as you put it. They later explained this as saying that when they started writing, they felt that they weren't famous enough, and that a good way of becoming famous would be to say nasty things about me. Which I suppose is a tactic—although not one that, of course, I'm likely to appreciate. So at that point I decided, after I'd seen a couple of his things and they seemed incredibly derivative, I just decided to stop bothering reading his work. And that's largely sort of proven successful. But, there still seems to be this kind of [indecipherable speech] that I know.

And, as far as I know, he's the only bone of contention between me and Michael Moorcock. Michael Moorcock is a sweet sweet man—I believe he has only ever written one letter of

complaint to a publisher over the appropriation of his work, that was to DC Comics over Grant Morrison, so the only bone of contention between me and Michael Moorcock is which of us Grant Morrison is ripping off the most. I say that it's Michael Moorcock, he says it's me. We've nearly come to blows over it, but I'm reluctant to let it go that far, because, I'm probably more nimble than Moorcock—I've got a few years on him, I'm probably faster, but Moorcock is huge, he's like a bear. He could just like take my arm off with one sweep of his paw, so we'll let that go undecided for the moment. But, those are pretty much my thoughts on Grant Morrison, and hopefully now I've explained that I won't have to mention their name again.

The other version of the story comes from Patrick Meaney's *Talking with Gods* documentary, where Morrison says:

I remember reading V for Vendetta and thinking, this is what I wanted to do, this is the way comics should be. One of the first things I did was go down to see Dez Skinn in London, the publisher of *Warrior*. I had taking this story, which was a Kid Marvelman spec script, and he bought it straight away so, again, that was a really good jump for me. Then Alan Moore had it spiked, and said it was never to be published. Thus began our slight antagonism, which has persisted until this very day. They asked me to continue Marvelman, because Moore had fallen out with everyone in the magazine, and taken away his script, and they said 'Would you follow this up?' And to me that was just like, oh my God—the idea of getting to do Marvelman, following Alan Moore, 'I'm the only person in the world who'd really do this right,' and I was well up for it. I didn't want to do it without Moore's permission, and I wrote to him and said, 'They've asked me to do this, but obviously I really respect your work, and I wouldn't want to mess anything up, but I don't want anyone else to do it, and mess it up.' And he sent me back this really weird letter, and I remember the opening of it, it said, 'I don't want this to sound like the softly hissed tones of a mafia hitman, but back off.' And the letter was all, 'but you can't do this,' you know, 'we're much more popular than you, and if you do this, your career will be over,' and it was really quite threatening, you know, so I didn't do it, but I ended up doing some little bit of work for *Warrior*.

It's hard to put exact dates on either of these versions, but presumably Moore's story happened before Morrison's, and, given that Morrison's story refers to Moore having stopped writing Marvelman for *Warrior*, this puts the date at some point between August 1984, when Moore's last Marvelman story appeared in *Warrior* #21, and February 1985, when *Warrior* #26, the last issue, came out—containing the Morrison-scripted "The Liberators: Night Moves," incidentally, their only work to appear in the magazine. So, the meeting in Glasgow between Moore and Morrison must have happened at some point between the first issue of *Warrior* in March 1982 and Moore's last story, in August 1984. The exact timing is possibly not that important, but I like to nail these things down if I can!

Meanwhile, Morrison's own star was on the rise. They started writing *Zenith* for *2000 AD* in August 1987, after various other work here and there in UK comics, and this was their breakthrough work. I didn't come across them myself until later on, when they were writing *Animal Man* for DC Comics, and still think that "The Coyote Gospel" from *Animal Man* #5 is one of the single best things ever put on a page anywhere, by anyone. It was during this time that Morrison, as Moore put it, had "a strange campaign of things in fanzines where they were expressing their opinions of me [. . .]. They later explained this as saying that when they started writing, they felt that they weren't famous enough, and that a good way of becoming famous would be to say nasty things about me." Morrison themselves refers to this too, in their book *Supergods*, where they says:

High-contrast Western manga art by my Zoids partner Steve Yeowell made *Zenith's* world a frantic modernist blur of speed lines and contemporary fashions and haircuts. We announced to the world that *Zenith* was intended to be as dumb, sexy, and disposable as an eighties pop

single: Alan Moore remixed by Stock Aitken Waterman. Keeping all the self-awareness outside the story, we used interviews and forewords to admit to our sources. In them we praised creative theft and plagiarism, quoted the French playwright Antonin Artaud and sneeringly suggested that the likes of *Watchmen* were pompous, stuffy, and buttock-clenchingly dour. The shock tactics I'd brought with me from the music world, delivered with the snotty whippet-thin snideness of the hipster, had helped me carve out a niche for myself as comics' enfant terrible, and Steve was happy to play along as the handsome nice one with nothing controversial to say.

My public persona was punk to the rotten core. Outspoken and mean spirited, I freely expressed contempt for the behind-the-scenes world of comics professionals, which seemed unglamorous and overwhelmingly masculine by comparison to the club and music scenes. My life was rich, and my circle of friends and family was secure enough that I could afford to play a demonic role at work. Reading interviews from the time makes my blood run cold these days, but the trash talk seemed to be working, and I was rapidly making a name for myself. Being young, good-looking, and cocky forgave many sins, a huge hit British superhero strip did the rest and proved I could back up the big talk.

Talking about this more recently, in David Bishop's *Thrill-Power Overload: Thirty Years of 2000 AD* (Rebellion, UK < June 2007), Morrison recalls being asked by the editorial people at *2000 AD* to come up with an idea for a British superhero strip. They said:

[Zenith] was very much a reaction against torment superheroes. *Dark Knight* is a brilliant piece of Reagan-era fiction and *Watchmen* is very, very clever in its architecture, but both books felt pompous and concept albumy to me as a young man in the 80s. I wanted to do something a little less self-conscious perhaps, or to align myself with a different current of thinking. I had grown bored with the dull 'realism' of the grim'n'gritty school. Brendan [McCarthy]'s work was so unique, so personal and inspirational that I was completely blown away and converted utterly to the McCarthy method—tell the truth on to the page and let your psyche all hang out. At the same time . . . I wanted some 'realistic' aspects to my story. I decided to make it about the superficial things I was into at the time: clothes, records, TV shows. Instead of creating an aspirational superhero, I gave Zenith all of my worst, most venal traits. I wanted to create a postcard from the 80s, but I also thought that if I did it without the prevailing captions and thought boxes the strip might stand up quite well on its own.

My own opinion of what happened, and how I feel about it, has changed quite a bit since I started writing these three pieces. Yes, I have a lot of sympathy for Alan Moore about the things that were being said about him, but I think that it's pretty obvious there was more than an element of the japester, the trickster, about Morrison's writing, in particular the piece they wrote about *Superfolks* in their Drivel column in *Speak-easy* in 1990, which they make all the more obvious in their end piece. I'd also like to point out that that was over thirty years ago now, a long time to have something like that hanging over you, and this applies equally to both of them: Moore is still having it used as a stick to beat him with, and Morrison may wish that a not-terribly-serious piece they wrote as a young man, and which has cast a much longer shadow than anyone could ever have expected, would simply go away. (And, indeed, having someone like me digging it up one more time can hardly help in that, although I'm hoping that this might get to be the final, and definitive, word on the subject . . .)

I also imagine that having someone get in touch to offer to take over the writing on his first major piece of work probably wasn't received terribly well, and it's hard to blame Moore for that, either. But in many ways Morrison was only doing what Moore had done before them. I can certainly recognize the punk spirit in some of what Morrison says—I'm less than 100 days older than Morrison, and I do recall that rule #1 in punk was that everything that went before was rubbish and had to be destroyed. In hindsight, of

course, there is much that was discarded that has since been reappraised and found not to be so dreadful after all! In much the same way, when Morrison says, 'Reading interviews from the time makes my blood run cold these days,' I imagine that one of the things they're particularly referring to is their treatment of Moore in those early articles.

I certainly think that Morrison may now regret some of their earlier actions but, particularly in this Internet age, nothing is gone, and everything is remembered. It is interesting, I think, that in their book *Supergods*—which itself seems to actually reflect the title of *Superfolks*—they doesn't actually mention *Superfolks* in relation to their or Moore's work, except once, in the context of it having been an inspiration for Pixar's *The Incredibles*. Even so, *Supergods* has the line *Behold, I teach you the superman: He is this lightning, he is this madness!* by Friedrich Nietzsche as its epigraph, the same as *Superfolks* did, and Marvelman didn't. Is this all some sort of strange cosmic coincidence, or is Morrison trying to tell us something? Honestly, I have no idea.

So, what do I think, in the end? I think, first, that, although Grant Morrison poked fun at Alan Moore with regard to *Superfolks*, they certainly didn't mean it to be taken as seriously as it was, or for it to become a big stick to beat Moore with. And I really think it's a shame that Alan Moore has such difficulty moving on from things like this, because he's done his own share of saying mean things about Morrison, to this day. I genuinely love Moore's work, and one of the things I love most is the sense of compassion, of redemption, that is in much of it, but reading over these pieces, it's hard not to see Moore as the one who is perpetuating this, rather than Morrison, who only ever has good things to say about Moore's work these days. It's not that I don't think that Moore has good reason to do the things he does, just that it can be difficult sometimes to see that your gods have feet of clay. In the end, though, I still love his work, and still admire him enormously as a person and as a creator. I don't read as much of Grant Morrison's work as I used to, mostly because I finally decided that I was giving up on superheroes for good a few years back, but their work on *Animal Man* and *Doom Patrol* is still some of the best work ever done in mainstream comics, and I think that people give them a hard time which they definitely doesn't deserve. I probably fall into that category myself, although I think I may go rethink some of those ideas now. After all, it's never too late to change your mind.

There is one final thing I want to clear up, seeing as it came up here: Whatever happened to that Kid Marvelman story that Grant Morrison sold to Dez Skinn?

Dez Skinn, in *Talking to Gods*, said about Morrison:

They were such a quiet unassuming kind of guy when they'd come into the office, they were more like a fan than a professional, you know, very shy, very timid-seeming, but their work was the absolute opposite, it was totally out there, even their early stuff. I thought it was a really nice little five-pager but Alan, like any creator, I guess, who owns material, didn't want anybody else touching his material.

And here's Dez again, this time talking in George Khoury's *Kimotal: The Marvelman Companion*:

Grant did submit a Kid Marvelman story, about a discussion between Kid Marvelman and a Catholic priest, and it was quite fascinating because Kid Marvelman argued a very good case against organised religion. Nobody was flying, no beams from anyone's eyes, but a bloody clever script, clever enough that I sent it to Alan Moore for his opinion. Alan's reply was, 'Nobody else writes Marvelman.' And I said to Grant, 'I'm sorry, he's jealously hanging on to this one.'

There is a long-standing rumour that the story was published in *Fusion #4*, a Scottish comics fanzine, but the piece in question, called *The Devil and Johnny Bates*, was actually an article about Kid Marvelman by someone else. None the less, Morrison did draw two covers for *Fusion*, including the one for #4. Yes, that is Kid Marvelman on the cover of #4, and Marvelman himself on the cover of #6. But that Kid Marvelman story never did get to see print, it seems. Which is a shame. Who knows what the future hold, though? Not me!

Edited to add: But, some years later, it finally *did* get published, in Marvel's *Miracleman Annual #1*, with art by occasional Marvel head honcho Joe Quesada.

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Alan Moore and Superfolks **Part 4 of 3: From our Scottish Correspondent . . .**

Hope the following rather massive info-dump helps clarify a few things. I also hope this may explain why I've sometimes felt myself to be the victim of a genuine grudge that seems quite staggering in its sincerity and longevity. Reading the comments section following "The Strange Case of Alan Moore and Grant Morrison" I can't help but note how heavily my detractors rely on a total lack of research, gross distortions of historical fact, and playground name-calling to support their alleged points.

Not that I expect this to make much difference but the opportunity to separate fact from fantasy is a welcome one. Pádraig quotes from Alan Moore discussing me during a webchat earlier this year without challenging even the most obvious and basic of the many historical inaccuracies and contradictions in Moore's assertions. In fact, Moore's recollections are completely unreliable, and I wouldn't mind having some facts put on record, once and for all.

Thanks to Pádraig for allowing me to respond directly to his piece and to Laura for bringing it to my attention and offering me space on *The Beat* to get some things off my medal-heavy chest.

Originally, when I set out to look into the various allegations about Alan Moore and Robert Mayer's *Superfolks*, I thought it was going to be a comparatively straightforward piece to write. Just read the book, find out what people had said, and attempt to match the two of them up together. What could be easier, I asked myself? Ten thousand words and nearly a year later, I find that I could not have been more wrong. However, doing the research is at least half the fun, I've always said. Much of the fascination of writing about things like this is that you never know what you're going to find out. And one of the things that I found out was that I really needed to know more about the animosity between Alan Moore and Grant Morrison, as it seemed to be a constantly recurring aspect of the story of Moore and *Superfolks*.

So, to go back to where I started, back to the beginning of the piece called "Alan Moore and *Superfolks*: Part I—The Case for the Prosecution," there's that piece from Grant Morrison's Drivel column in *Speakeasy* #111 (July 1990), where they talk about reading *Superfolks*, and makes it really quite clear that they think—or pretend to think—that Alan Moore plundered the book for ideas. But this isn't by any means the beginning of their—for want of a better word—relationship.

But what is the beginning of that relationship? There are two different versions of this, depending on who you listen to.

Not entirely. One "version" is supported by incontrovertible facts and verifiable research. The other relies on demonstrable errors. Beginning with the latter:

So, first there's Alan Moore's version of events, which I've transcribed from the webchat he did for the Harvey Pekar statue Kickstarter. One of the questioners asked:

You are somewhat surprisingly not the only acclaimed comics writer from the UK to also be a vocal magician. Obviously I'm talking about Grant Morrison here, who has never been terribly shy about their views on you or your work. Can we possibly draw you out on your views of them and their work?

To which Moore replied:

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something. They asked if I could perhaps—if they could invite a local comics writer who was a big admirer of mine along to the dinner. So I said yeah. This was I think the only time that I met them to speak to. They said how much they admired my work, how it had inspired them to want to be a comics writer. And I wished them the best of luck, I told them I'd look out for their work. When I saw that work in *2000 AD* I thought 'Well, this seems as if it's a bit of a cross between Captain Britain and Marvelman, but that's probably something that they'll grow out of.'

Let's start with "an aspiring writer..."

The usually well-informed Moore's grasp of the facts is a little shaky here but the truth is well documented and, as can be quickly verified, my first professionally published comic book work "Time Is A Four-Letter Word" appeared in the independent adult sci-fi comic *Near Myths* in October 1978 (written and drawn by me, the story was/is, amusingly enough, based around the simultaneity of time concept Alan Moore himself is so fond of these days and which informs his in-progress novel *Jerusalem*). By 1979, I was also contributing stories on a regular basis to DC Thomson's *Starblazer* series and I'd begun a three year stint writing and drawing Captain Clyde, a weekly half-page newspaper strip about a lo-fi "realistic" Glasgow superhero. Captain Clyde ran in three newspapers. I was even a guest on panels at comics conventions.

In October 1978, Alan Moore had sold one illustration—a drawing of Elvis Costello to *NME*—and had not yet achieved any recognition in the comics business. In 1979, he was doing unpaid humor cartoons for the underground paper *The Back Street Bugle*. I didn't read his name in a by-line until 1982, by which time I'd been a professional writer for almost five years. Using the miracle of computer technology, you can verify any of these dates right now, if you choose to.

It's true that Moore's work in *Warrior* and *The Daredevils*, combined with the rising excitement of the early '80s comics boom in Britain, galvanized me into refocusing and taking my existing comics career more seriously at a time (1982) when the music career I'd tried to pursue was spinning in circles but I hope even the most devoted of his readers might understand why I've grown tired of the widely-accepted, continually-reinforced belief that Moore's work either predated my own or that he inspired or encouraged me to enter the comics field when it's hardly a chore to fact-check the relevant publication dates.

So, I'll repeat until maybe one day it sticks; I was already a professional writer/artist in the late '70s, doing work-for-hire at DC Thomson alongside "creator-owned" sci-fi and superhero comics. This was at the same time as people like Bryan Talbot, Peter Milligan, Brendan McCarthy, and Brett Ewins, making us some of the earliest exemplars of the British new wave. If Alan Moore had never come along, if he'd given up halfway through his ground-breaking turn on *St. Pancras Panda*, we would all still have written and drawn our comics. We published our own fanzines, and small press outlets were popping up everywhere. *2000 AD* was at a peak. Marvel UK was in a period of expansion and innovation. I'd already submitted art and story samples several times to both DC and Marvel, along with a pitch for a crossover entitled "Second Coming" to DC's New Talent Programme in 1982. I was on the files and I didn't stop angling for work. DC would have found all of us, with or without Alan Moore, who seems curiously unable or unwilling to acknowledge that he was part of a spontaneous movement not its driving force or sole font of creativity.

It was on that basis that I recommended him to Karen Berger when she was starting what would become Vertigo.

It's hard not to be a little insulted by Moore's comments that he recommended me to Karen Berger for what he has described on more than one occasion, and with a fairly extravagant degree of solipsistic self-regard, as a "proposed Alan Moore farm with Vertigo Comics," seemingly unable to imagine veteran writers like Peter Milligan, me and others as anything more than extensions of his own self-image. See [here](#) or [here](#) (two links

here, one of which is still live, one of which isn't . . .)

However, as five minutes research will confirm, the Vertigo imprint was established in 1993, by which time Alan Moore had fallen out with DC over the “For Mature Readers” ratings system and quit doing new work for them (I believe his split with DC occurred in 1987). I had already been working there for six years doing *Animal Man*, *Doom Patrol*, *Arkham Asylum*, *Gothic*, *Hellblazer* and *Kid Eternity*. I had a good relationship with Karen Berger and was a fairly obvious choice for her to call when she conceived the Vertigo imprint. No other recommendation was necessary. It ought to go without saying that none of us were told to write like Alan Moore—nor did we—and that this is an out-and-out lie.

Far more significantly, much of the material that fed into early Vertigo was originated by the creators and by editor Art Young for the proposed Touchmark imprint of creator-owned adult comics he'd been assigned to put together under the aegis of Disney, of all things.

Coincidentally gay-themed series like Peter Milligan's *Enigma* and my own *Sebastian O*—which actually grew out of a pitch for a revamp of IPC's *Janus Stark* character—were commissioned by Art for publication at Touchmark, not by Karen Berger. When Touchmark experienced a failure to launch, Art was re-hired by DC and brought his portfolio of projects to Vertigo. At no point was Alan Moore involved in any of this. Again, why the fibs, other than to reinforce once more the fantasy of me—and indeed every other Vertigo writer—in a junior or subordinate position to himself?

As Moore points out, the work I did on *Zenith* 25 years ago can trace a little—not all—of its influence to Marvelman and Captain Britain both of which I loved; my own introduction to the first volume of *Zenith*, published in 1988, admits as much, while also listing the book's many other touchstones. *Zenith*, in fact, was a very successful strip, and was sufficiently more than the sum of its parts to still be remembered fondly. The same can be said of *Animal Man*, the first four issues of which owe a stylistic debt to Alan Moore because I was trying to get my foot in the door by giving my new employers at DC something familiar before taking off in my own direction. Nobody told me to do this—it was sound commercial sense, just as I tried to use a DC Thompson 'voice' for my *Starblazer* stories. When the convincing was done and *Animal Man* was extended into a regular monthly series, I immediately took the job more seriously and switched gears back to my own approach – see next section.

Then there started a kind of a strange campaign of things in fanzines where they were expressing their opinions of me, as you put it. They later explained this as saying that when they started writing, they felt that they weren't famous enough, and that a good way of becoming famous would be to say nasty things about me. Which I suppose is a tactic—although not one that, of course, I'm likely to appreciate. So at that point I decided, after I'd seen a couple of their things and they seemed incredibly derivative, I just decided to stop bothering reading their work. And that's largely sort of proven successful. But, there still seems to be this kind of [indecipherable speech] that I know.

As mentioned above, the commercial work I was doing in the early 1980s wasn't much like the kind of material I wrote and drew for myself, or for indie publication. To get work with Marvel UK and *2000 AD* I suppressed my esoteric and surrealist tendencies and tried to imitate popular styles in order to secure paying jobs in the comics mainstream. There is a reason those pieces were written in a vaguely Alan Moore-ish style and it's because I was trying to sell to companies who thought Moore was the sine qua non of the bee's knees and those stories were my take on what I figured they were looking for. My personal work from the same time is written in a very different style and is more in the vein of *Doom Patrol* or *The Invisibles*. You don't need to take my word for this: it can be verified by looking at the *Near Myths* material or stuff like the *Famine* strip in *Food for Thought* from 1985. It can even be gleaned by looking at the clear difference between the first four *Animal Man* issues and the fifth—“The Coyote Gospel” story Pádraig mentions—and subsequent issues.

Doing my own approximation of the “in” style to get gigs on Marvel UK books was, I thought, a demonstration of my range, versatility and adaptability to trends, not the declaration of some singular influence it has subsequently been distorted into over four decades—mostly by Alan Moore and his supporters, in what can sometimes seem to me a never-ending, career-long campaign to undermine my personal achievements and successes and to cast me, at all times, in a subsidiary role to the Master.

Furthermore to suggest, as Moore does, that subsequent work of mine, including the balance of *Animal Man*, *Doom Patrol*, *Flex Mentallo*, *JLA*, *The Invisibles*, *New X-Men*, *Seven Soldiers*, *Batman*, *All-Star Superman*, etc. was equally indebted to Captain Britain and Marvelman means either one of two things: that he’s read the work in question and is again deliberately distorting the facts for reasons known only to himself—or that he hasn’t read it at all, in which case he’s in no position to comment surely?

(I do know that Alan Moore has read a lot more of my work than he pretends to—one of his former collaborators quite innocently revealed as much to me a few years ago, confirming my own suspicions—but until Moore himself comes clean about it that will have to remain in the realm of hearsay.)

And, as far as I know, they’re the only bone of contention between me and Michael Moorcock. Michael Moorcock is a sweet sweet man—I believe he has only ever written one letter of complaint to a publisher over the appropriation of his work, that was to DC Comics over Grant Morrison, so the only bone of contention between me and Michael Moorcock is which of us Grant Morrison is ripping off the most. I say that it’s Michael Moorcock, he says it’s me. We’ve nearly come to blows over it, but I’m reluctant to let it go that far, because, I’m probably more nimble than Moorcock—I’ve got a few years on him, I’m probably faster, but Moorcock is huge, he’s like a bear. He could just like take my arm off with one sweep of his paw, so we’ll let that go undecided for the moment. But, those are pretty much my thoughts on Grant Morrison, and hopefully now I’ve explained that I won’t have to mention their name again.

Why would he feel qualified, on the basis of the “couple” of things of mine he claims to have read a long time ago, to insist that not only do I rip *him* off on a regular basis but his friend Michael Moorcock too? Can anyone tell me from which Michael Moorcock novels *Zenith* and *Animal Man* were plagiarized? (And if Moorcock made any complaints to DC in the ’90s, I never heard about them. I had no idea there was any beef with Moorcock until *PopImage*’s Jonathan Ellis drew my attention to it in 2004.)

As an important aside in this discussion, Moorcock’s spurious allegations of creative theft are based on exactly TEN pages of material in issues #17-#19 of *The Invisibles*. These pages were explicitly presented as a Moorcock pastiche—or more strictly a pastiche of my own Gideon Stargrave stories from *Near Myths*, which were heavily but not entirely influenced by Moorcock and JG Ballard—occurring in the head of the fictional character King Mob. King Mob actually talks about his obsession with Jerry Cornelius within the story and I reference Moorcock’s work as an inspiration for these pages in the letters column of issue #17.

Not content with deliberately misinterpreting a mere ten pages of my fifteen-hundred-page comic series, Moorcock—this “sweet, sweet man” —continues to this day to jeer and spit abuse. Here’s Alan Moore’s mate Michael Moorcock— (another dead link here, I’m afraid) -- describing me as ‘a sticky-fingered tea leaf (!) and talking about having me “duffed over.”

‘I’ve read the work of Grant Morrison twice. Once when I wrote it. Once when they wrote it. As far as I’m concerned my image of Grant Morrison is of someone wearing a mask, a flat hat and a striped jersey and carrying a bag marked SWAG.’

Sexy!

Leaving aside his own appropriation of entire swathes of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Harry Blyth, Moorcock fails to convince that he's read any aspect of my "work" even once, let alone twice. He has so far failed to back up the casual slander with any actual evidence or examples of when he found the time to write *The Invisibles*, *St. Swithin's Day*, *The New Adventures of Hitler*, *We3*, *The Filth*, *Kill Your Boyfriend*, *Mystery Play*, *Seaguy* or *Joe the Barbarian* to name just a few. In a 34-year career, I've also written long-running DC and Marvel series, plays, screenplays, video games, short stories, and a book; all of which, if Michael Moorcock is to be believed, were written by him. Except for the bits I stole from Alan Moore!

Allow me to demonstrate how easy it is to play this dangerous game:

I'll start by pointing out how various interviews in which I talked about my practice of Chaos Magic during the 1980s and early '90s clearly played into Alan Moore's decision to declare himself a magician in 1993. Next, with censorious authority, I'll point to my own *Doom Patrol* #53 and claim it gave him the idea for his 1963 project at Image, released a year later. I'll suggest that Moore's take on *Supreme* was a lot more like my take on *Animal Man* than *Zenith* was like Marvelman or Captain Britain—The Supremacy in *Supreme* is a fairly blatant copy of the Comic Book Limbo concept I introduced in *Animal Man* seven years earlier and the Moore book's wider meta-fictional concerns also covered territory well-trodden by *Animal Man*. *LoEG: Century* with its apocalypse/moonchild plot occurring over three time periods cannot help but recall the apocalypse/moonchild plotline running over three time periods in *The Invisibles* fifteen years previously—with Orlando playing the Lord Fanny role, if you fancy. I could go on and on here, with convincing examples, but you get the idea. I'll wind up with some condescending comment about how I figured he'd grow out of the rip-off magic and metafiction nonsense then wryly conclude that there's not much chance of that now he's nudging 60.

The above is at least as plausible as Alan Moore's outlandish attempts to claim that my entire career rests on two stories he wrote 30 years ago.

As Ed Brubaker pointed out in the comments section of Part 2 of Pádraig's series of articles, all writers are influenced by all kinds of things, including one another, all the time. That's actually not the point here. As we've seen in my case, Alan Moore makes a habit of accusing others of copying HIM and has charged the entire mainstream comics industry of living off his leftovers for 30 years. No writer in recent memory has been as loud, vociferous and vicious in his condemnation of others in his field. Moore never seems to tire of pointing the finger and relentlessly positions his own oeuvre as the source of all our Niles. No-one would begrudge him his own obvious influences if he didn't feel the need to constantly lecture the rest of us from a moral high ground he occupies dishonestly. The wider issues around plagiarism, influence, ownership and appropriation—especially in the context of the IP-driven corporate vision of creativity—are definitely worth further discussion but I'd like to keep this narrowed down to Pádraig's essay and specifically Alan Moore's comments about me.

However, as evidence that I'm not alone before the jury, Moore has charged and found guilty the entire mainstream comics industry of living off his leftovers for 30 years here — [\(another dead link\)](#) — and in other interviews which relentlessly position his own oeuvre as the source of all our Niles. No-one would begrudge him his own obvious influences if he didn't feel compelled to lecture the rest of us from a moral high ground he occupies dishonestly.

Moore finds it acceptable to include Geoff Johns among the "parasites" and "raccoons" rooting through his trash. Why? Because Johns seasoned his own epic expansion of the Green Lantern mythos with a couple of minor elements from Moore's Green Lantern short story "Tygers" (*Green Lantern Corps Annual* #2, 1986)—a story that was itself created to make sense of a plot hole in the 1959 Green Lantern origin by Gardner Fox!

So, in fact, both Moore and Johns were simply doing their work-for-hire jobs by adding to and expanding upon the many-authored quilt that is DC, and specifically Green Lantern, continuity. In a shared narrative universe, such as those of DC or Marvel, any element introduced into the continuity surely becomes part of the backstory and is therefore available to other writers to build upon or incorporate. Johns' Green Lantern work and the *Blackest Night* story in particular would have worked as well without any reference to "Tygers," in fact. Thus does Alan Moore assault a fellow writer with dehumanizing language for the unspeakable crime of synthesizing prior elements of Green Lantern's back story into his own fresh and personal creative vision for the character. Why the sneering, dehumanizing putdown? Who chastises a man for the unspeakable crime of synthesizing prior elements of Green Lantern's back story into his own fresh and personal creative vision for the character, m'lud?

Would Moore have appreciated a comparison to vermin snuffling among Gardner Fox's garbage for treats when he brought Fox's Floronic Man back from the archives to feature in a *Swamp Thing* (Len Wein's trash!) story? What obsessive snouting around in the municipal tip does *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* reduce to if we regard Alan Moore's endeavors through the same unforgiving lens he applies to Geoff Johns' work?

Geoff Johns, like the rest of us, has his own identifiable obsessions as a writer. He has his own interests, his own points of view, and his own way of articulating his ideas via his chosen medium. I know for a fact that Geoff has seen and done and endured things in his life that Alan Moore is unlikely ever to experience, yet Moore automatically brands him creatively bankrupt and tries to insist that Johns' imagination is so low on fuel, it relies for sustenance on his own. If I can speak up for a friend, Geoff Johns, like the rest of us, like anyone who picks up a pen to earn a living, has plenty to say and, with all respect, he doesn't need Alan Moore's help to say it.

Excuse the fit of editorializing there. It had to happen. Let's return to the facts in this Strange Case:

The other version of the story comes from Patrick Meaney's *Talking with Gods* documentary, where Morrison says:

'I remember reading V for Vendetta and thinking, this is what I wanted to do, this is the way comics should be. One of the first things I did was go down to see Dez Skinn in London, the publisher of *Warrior* I had taking this story, which was a Kid Marvelman spec script, and he bought it straight away so, again, that was a really good jump for me. Then Alan Moore had it spiked, and said it was never to be published. Thus began our slight antagonism, which has persisted until this very day. They asked me to continue Marvelman because Moore had fallen out with everyone in the magazine, and taken away his script, and they said 'Would you follow this up?' And to me that was just like, oh my God—the idea of getting to do Marvelman, following Alan Moore, 'I'm the only person in the world who'd really do this right,' and I was well up for it. I didn't want to do it without Moore's permission, and I wrote to him and said, 'They've asked me to do this, but obviously I really respect your work, and I wouldn't want to mess anything up, but I don't want anyone else to do it, and mess it up.' And he sent me back this really weird letter, and I remember the opening of it, it said, 'I don't want this to sound like the softly hissed tones of a mafia hitman, but back off.' And the letter was all, 'but you can't do this,' you know, 'we're much more popular than you, and if you do this, your career will be over,' and it was really quite threatening, you know, so I didn't do it, but I ended up doing some little bit of work for *Warrior*.'

It's hard to put exact dates on either of these versions, but presumably Moore's story happened before Morrison's, and, given that Morrison's story refers to Moore having stopped writing Marvelman for *Warrior* this puts the date at some point between August 1984, when Moore's last Marvelman story appeared, in *Warrior* #21, and February 1985, when *Warrior* #26, the last issue, came out—

containing the Morrison-scripted *The Liberators: Night Moves* story, incidentally. So the meeting in Glasgow between Moore and Morrison must have happened at some point between the first issue of *Warrior* in March 1982 and Moore's last story, in August 1984. The exact timing is possibly not that important, but I like to nail these things down if I can!

The timing is very important because Moore met me not once but many times — the first at a comic mart in Glasgow's McLellan Galleries (in '83, I think) when I gave him a copy of my music fanzine *Bombs Away Batman!* which contained positive reviews of his strips in *Warrior* and *2000 AD*. The second time was at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow in 1984 where I recommended William McIlvaney's *Laidlaw* novels to him. On both occasions, and whatever he may have thought then or now, I was not an 'aspiring writer' but a many times published one, as can easily be checked.

In the company of Bryan Talbot, I spoke briefly with Moore again at a comic convention in Birmingham in 1986, by which time we had corresponded on the subject of Marvelman, and when we met for a fourth time at the dinner he semi-recalls (in Glasgow during the *Watchmen* Graphitti Editions tour in 1987, when he and Dave Gibbons signed a copy of their book for my mum), I was a full-time professional, working for *2000 AD*—and DC too by that point—not an aspiring writer (I also met and spoke with him after that—the last time we were in a room together was at the Angouleme comics festival in 1990 but by then he would no longer communicate with me, even by semaphore).

When Moore says, "They asked if I could perhaps — if they could invite a local comics writer who was a big admirer of mine along to the dinner," the careful, self-aggrandizing, phrasing suggests not only that Moore had no idea who I was but that some special privilege had been accorded me when, in fact, the meal was organized by John McShane, who ran AKA Books and Comics in Glasgow at the time. I spent two afternoons a week hanging around John's shop talking comics, and as a friend and a fellow professional who knew Moore and respected his work, he naturally invited me along to the dinner as a guest. This mysterious 'local comics writer' was, in fact, someone Alan Moore knew, had met, and had even exchanged letters with previously, as outlined above. A fellow professional, in fact.

I remember talking to him about becoming a vegetarian — "sometimes you can't live with the contradictions, Grant" — which suggests I'd started work on *Animal Man*. I kept detailed diaries from 1978 - 93 and I can check the exact dates but *Arkham Asylum* was also written in 1987. I was far from up-and-coming at the point in time Moore cites. Why the made-up stories about me?

Cui bono?

Meanwhile, Morrison's own star was on the rise. He started writing *Zenith* for *2000 AD* in August 1987, after various other work here and there in UK comics, and this was his breakthrough work. I didn't come across him myself until later on, when he was writing *Animal Man* for DC Comics, and still think that "The Coyote Gospel: from *Animal Man* #5 is one of the single best things ever put on a page, by anyone. It was during this time that Morrison, as Moore put it, had 'a strange campaign of things in fanzines where he was expressing his opinions of me [. . .]. He later explained this as saying that when he started writing, he felt that he wasn't famous enough, and that a good way of becoming famous would be to say nasty things about me' Morrison himself refers to this too, in his book *Supergods* where he says,

"High-contrast Western manga art by my Zoids partner Steve Yeowell made *Zenith*'s world a frantic modernist blur of speed lines and contemporary fashions and haircuts. We announced to the world that *Zenith* was intended to be as dumb, sexy, and disposable as an eighties pop single: Alan Moore remixed by Stock Aitken Waterman. Keeping all the self-awareness outside the story, we used interviews and forewords to admit to our sources. In them we praised creative theft and plagiarism, quot-

ed the French playwright Antonin Artaud and sneeringly suggested that the likes of *Watchmen* were pompous, stuffy, and buttock-clenchingly dour. The shock tactics I'd brought with me from the music world, delivered with the snotty whippet-thin snideness of the hipster, had helped me carve out a niche for myself as comics' enfant terrible, and Steve was happy to play along as the handsome nice one with nothing controversial to say.

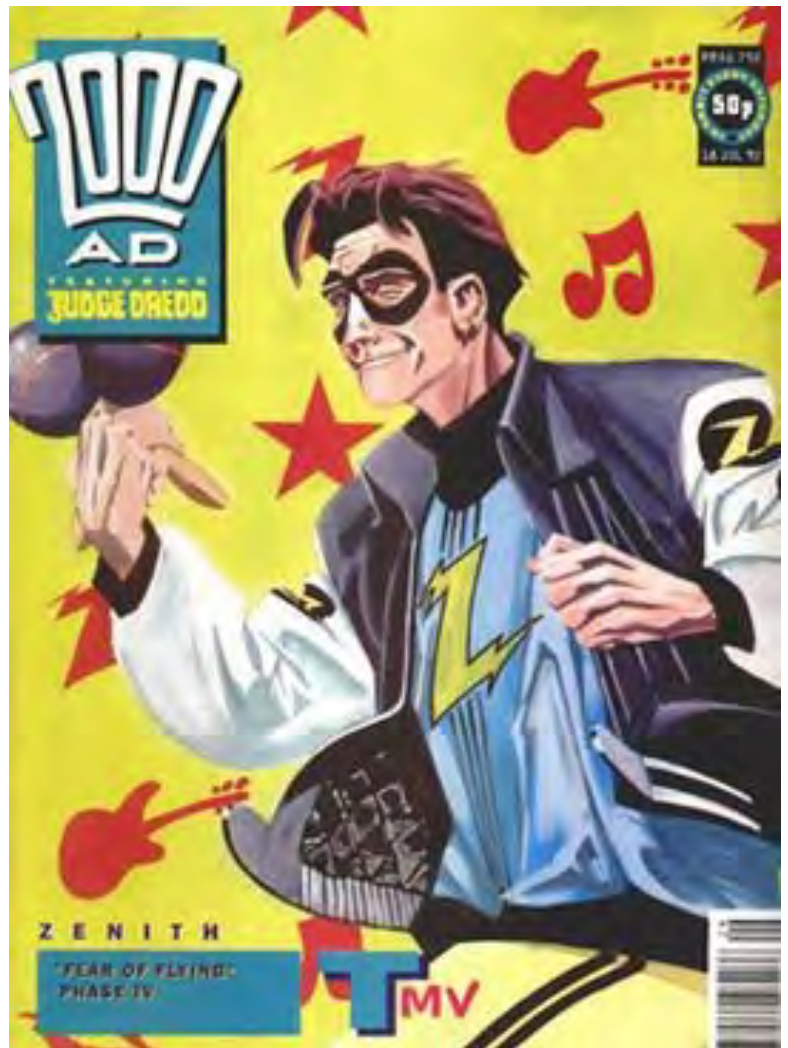
"My public persona was punk to the rotten core. Outspoken and mean spirited, I freely expressed contempt for the behind-the-scenes world of comics professionals, which seemed unglamorous and overwhelmingly masculine by comparison to the club and music scenes. My life was rich, and my circle of friends and family was secure enough that I could afford to play a demonic role at work. Reading interviews from the time makes my blood run cold these days, but the trash talk seemed to be working, and I was rapidly making a name for myself. Being young, good-looking, and cocky forgave many sins, a huge hit British superhero strip did the rest and proved I could back up the big talk."

Talking about this more recently, in David Bishop's *Thrill-Power Overload: Thirty Years of 2000 AD* (Rebellion, UK, June 2007)—

Sorry to interrupt here, but an interview from 2007 can't have appeared "more recently" than the extract from *Supergods*, published in 2011, without the aid of string theory. (A fair cop! PÓM)

—Morrison recalls being asked by the editorial people at *2000 AD* to come up with an idea for a British superhero strip, he said:

'Zenith was very much a reaction against torment superheroes. *Dark Knight* is a brilliant piece of Reagan-era fiction and *Watchmen* is very, very clever in its architecture, but both books felt pompous and concept albumy to me as a young man in the 80s. I wanted to do something a little less self conscious perhaps, or to align myself with a different current of thinking. I had grown bored with the dull 'realism' of the grim 'n' gritty school. Brendan [McCarthy]'s work was so unique, so personal and inspirational that I was completely blown away and converted utterly to the McCarthy method—tell the truth on to the page and let your psyche all hang out. At the same time... I wanted some 'realistic' aspects to my story. I decided to make it about the superficial things I was into at the time: clothes, records, TV shows. Instead of creating an aspirational superhero, I gave Zenith all of my worst, most venal traits. I wanted to create a post-card from the 80s, but I also thought that if I did it without the prevailing captions and thought boxes the strip might stand up quite well on its own.'



My own opinion of what happened, and how I feel about it, has changed quite a bit since I started writing these three pieces. Yes, I have a lot of sympathy for Alan Moore about the things that were being said about him, but I think that it's pretty obvious there was more than an element of the japester, the trickster, about Morrison's writing, in particular the piece they wrote about *Superfolks* in their Drivel column in *Speakeasy* in 1990, which they make all the more obvious in their end piece.

Context!

There was more than just an “. . . element of the japester, the trickster. . .” to Drivel. As may be deduced from one or all of the following clues:

-- the title.

The accompanying photograph of me sneering, stripped to the waist wearing a rather pretty necklace, and flipping a “V” sign.

The over-the-top, bitchy and camp style of the writing —

— Drivel was a monthly, scurrilous, humor, gossip, and opinion column in *Speakeasy*, the leading British comics magazine in 1990 when the piece in question was written. I had a brief from my editor Stuart Greene, and I mostly stuck to it, except when I used Drivel to indulge in William Burroughs-style “cut-up” experiments. My fee for the column went to Blue Cross, so all that manufactured bile wasn't wasted and helped make the lives of some rescue animals a little more comfortable on a monthly basis. Otherwise, the persona I adopted for “Drivel” was an exaggerated caricature partly inspired by the Morrissey interviews I enjoyed reading. The whole point of the column — which was one of the magazine's most popular features, incidentally — was to take the piss out of the comics scene at the time.

Alan Moore was only one of the many, many targets of Drivel and he came off lightly in comparison to some others—with whom I am still on friendly terms. The main target of the satire in Drivel was myself and if anyone's reputation has suffered as a result of people in other lands and different times presenting as indictable some daft words written in jest, I'd suggest it's been mine.

In defense of my 30-year-old self, he had an editorial mandate to amuse and provoke, unlike the 59-year-old Alan Moore who insults, condemns and hurls baseless accusations at his contemporaries and their work in almost every interview he gives. I find it tragic but quite pertinent to this piece that the loudest voice in our business — the one that carries the furthest and is taken most seriously by the mainstream media — is the one that offers nothing but contempt and denunciation, with barely a single good word to say about any of the many accomplished and individual writers currently working in mainstream comics, let alone the wealth of brilliant indie creators.

Does he ever, for instance, use his high media profile to do anything other than steer potential readers away from modern comic books and their creators—while over-playing his own achievements and placing himself centre stage at every turn? How hard would it be to say something encouraging, positive, or hopeful about the generally improved standard of writing in all comic books these days? Or at least say nothing at all.

And if I may untangle the logic behind so much of his hectoring: Moore constantly reiterates the idea that all modern comics are copied from stuff he did in the '80s — and they're all rubbish!

Is he genuinely saying that his influence has been entirely malignant? If he actually believed that I'd almost feel sorry for him. I see my own influence all over the place and I'm quite chuffed.

I'd also like to point out that that was over twenty years ago now, a long time to have something like that hanging over you, and this applies equally to both of them: Moore is still having it used as a stick to beat him with, and Morrison may wish that a not-terribly-serious piece he wrote as a young man, and which has cast a much longer shadow than anyone could ever have expected, would simply go away. (And, indeed, having someone like me digging it up one more time can hardly help in that, although I'm hoping that this might get to be the final, and definitive, word on the subject . . .)

I also imagine that having someone get in touch to offer to take over writing his first major piece of work probably wasn't received terribly well, and it's hard to blame Moore for that, either.

For a broader picture of what was happening with Alan Moore and *Warrior* at the time, I suggest asking Alan Davis (another on Moore's list of excommunicated former collaborators) or Dez Skinn for their recollections. I'm sure it'll be in one of those George Khoury books about Marvelman. I wasn't part of all that. (Or my own *Poisoned Chalice: The Extremely Long and Incredibly Complex Story of Marvel (and Miracleman)*, exclusively available from Lulu!)

But in many ways Morrison was only doing what Moore had done before him. I can certainly recognize the punk spirit in some of what Morrison says — I'm less than 100 days older than Morrison, and I do recall that rule #1 in punk was that everything that went before was rubbish. In hindsight, of course, there is much that was discarded that has since been reappraised and found not to be so dreadful after all! In much the same way, when Morrison says, 'Reading interviews from the time makes my blood run cold these days', I imagine that one of the things he's particularly referring to is his treatment of Moore in those early articles.

My blood runs cold because I am no longer a young man but an increasingly decrepit 52-year-old with a lot less arrogance, a lot more life experience, and a bit more compassion for people, even the ones I don't particularly like. With the wisdom of hindsight, I wish I could tell my younger self that in the future, no matter how much he thought he'd changed or matured, "Drive!" would always return.

These days, if I aim a barb at Moore, and I sometimes do, it's generally as revenge for having my attention drawn to some latest interview or other. I know there's a lot more to him than the contemptuous, patronising Scorpionic mask—we're all just people and we all do the same daft people shit and all that—but it's the face I've been exposed to more often than not, so I'm afraid my view of Alan Moore has a somewhat negative bias that deepens every time he opens his mouth to preach hellfire and damnation on the comics business and its benighted labour force.

Having said that, I learned long ago to separate my antipathy toward the man's expressed opinions from my enjoyment of his work and I've been very complimentary about that work over the decades. Conversely, I can guarantee you will search in vain for a single positive comment about me or my work coming from Alan Moore's direction — in spite of our obvious shared areas of interest.

I certainly think that Morrison may now regret some of their earlier actions but, particularly in this Internet age, nothing is gone, and everything is remembered. It is interesting, I think, that in their book *Supergods* — which itself seems to actually reflect the title of *Superfolks* — he doesn't actually mention *Superfolks* in relation to their own or Moore's work, but in the context of having been an inspiration for Pixar's *The Incredibles*. Even so, *Supergods* has the line 'Behold, I teach you the superman: He is this lightning, he is this madness!' by Friedrich Nietzsche as its epigraph, the same as *Superfolks* did, and Marvelman didn't. Is this all some sort of strange cosmic coincidence, or is Morrison trying to tell us something? Honestly, I have no idea.

The structure of *Supergods* is roughly based on the Qabalistic idea of the Lightning Flash—the zig-zagging magician’s path from the lowest material sphere of Malkuth/the material world via the various sephiroth or spheres to the highest spiritual sphere known as Kether in this system. In the same way, the book moves from the earthy foundations of the early chapters, with their focus on physicality, to the speculations, philosophies and “higher” considerations of the concluding chapters.

I chose this structure for a couple of obvious reasons — firstly, because the superhero as a figure unites the mundane and the divine and secondly because every time a new “age” of comics was said to begin, I noted that it tended to be announced by a superhero wearing a lightning bolt insignia, or descended from one (as Marvelman from Captain Marvel), or came with iconic references to lightning, thunderbolts and electricity. My favourite superhero is The Flash and his emblem is a stylized, simplified echo of the right-to-left zapping course of the Qabala flash.

I was very aware of the irony of re-using that hoary old Nietzsche quote but there was, quite simply, no more apposite epigraph for *Supergods*, I hope you’ll agree.

The title of the book, by the way, is not a reference to *Superfolks* but to David Bowie’s song “The Supermen” which includes the lines “and supergod dies . . .”

So, what do I think, in the end? I think, first, that, although Grant Morrison poked fun at Alan Moore with regard to *Superfolks* they certainly didn’t mean it to be taken as seriously as it was, or for it to become a big stick to beat Moore with.

Pádraig will need to offer more convincing evidence that my 1990 *Speakeasy* column has done the slightest harm to Alan Moore’s sales or his reputation. I’ll wager that less than 2% of the readers of *Watchmen* — still the world’s best-selling graphic novel — have heard of *Superfolks*, let alone *Speakeasy* or *Drivel* (although the proportion is likely to rise if people keep drawing attention to this very minor issue—currently it’s an item on MTV Geek). As I’ve said, it’s far easier to make the argument that Moore, along with powerful allies like Michael Moorcock, continues to indulge in clear, persistent, and often successful attempts to injure my reputation, for reasons of his own.

And I really think it’s a shame that Alan Moore has such difficulty moving on from things like his, because he’s done his own share of saying mean things about Morrison, to this day. I genuinely love Moore’s work, and one of the things I love most is the sense of compassion, of redemption, that is in much of it, but reading over these pieces, it’s hard not to see Moore as the one who is perpetuating this, rather than Morrison, who only ever has good things to say about Moore’s work these days. It’s not that I don’t think that Moore has good reason to do the things he does, just that it can be difficult sometimes to see that your gods have feet of clay. In the end, though, I still love his work, and still admire him enormously as a person and as a creator. I don’t read as much of Grant Morrison’s work as I used to, mostly because I finally decided that I was giving up on superheroes for good a few years back —

By only reading my work-for-hire superhero comics from 20 years ago, I feel Pádraig has missed out on most of the important stuff of my career. I hope he’ll try *The Invisibles*, *The Filth*, *All-Star Superman*, *We3* and *Seaguy* at least. (I had at the time all this was happening read all of those, with the exception of *Seaguy* . . .)

— but his work on *Animal Man* and *Doom Patrol* is still some of the best work ever done in mainstream comics, and I think that people give him a hard time which he definitely doesn’t deserve. I probably fall into that category myself, although I think I may go rethink some of those ideas now. After all, it’s never too late to change your mind.

There is one final thing I want to clear up, seeing as it came up here: Whatever happened to that Kid Marvelman story that Grant Morrison sold to Dez Skinn?

Dez Skinn, in *Talking with Gods* said about Morrison, “He was such a quiet unassuming kind of guy when he’d come into the office, he was more like a fan than a professional, you know, very shy, very timid seeming, but his work was the absolute opposite, it was totally out there, even his early stuff. I thought it was a really nice little five-pager but Alan, like any creator, I guess, who owns material, didn’t want anybody else touching his material.”

And here’s Dez again, this time talking in George Khoury’s *Kimota!: The Marvelman Companion*,

Grant did submit a Kid Marvelman story, about a discussion between Kid Marvelman and a Catholic priest, and it was quite fascinating because Kid Marvelman argued a very good case against organized religion. Nobody was flying, no beams from anyone’s eyes, but a bloody clever script, clever enough that I sent it to Alan Moore for his opinion. Alan’s reply was, “Nobody else writes Marvelman.” And I said to Grant, “I’m sorry, he’s jealously hanging on to this one.”

There is a long-standing rumor that the story was published in *Fusion #4*, a Scottish comics fanzine, but the piece in question, called “The Devil and Johnny Bates,” was actually an article about Kid Marvelman by someone else. None the less, Morrison did draw two covers for *Fusion* including the one for #4, both of which might or might not be reproduced here. Yes, that is Kid Marvelman on the cover of #4, and Marvelman himself on the cover of #6. But that Kid Marvelman story never did get to see print, it seems. Which is a shame.

I probably have the only surviving copy of the script. One day I’ll look it out and put it online. I seem to remember it being quite good, but I made the teenage mod Johnny Bates look exactly like me, forever damning myself as Moore’s Devil!

(Eventfully, that script was dug out, and published by Marvel Comics in *All-New Miracleman Annual #1* in December 2014. PÓM)

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Fanny, Danny and other Trannies Trans portrayal in Grant Morrison's comics By Helen Nash

I didn't see many representations of my people in comics when I was younger. Back then, 'trans' was still a prefix not an adjective, as in 'transvestite' and 'transsexual', and those words were reserved for lurid articles in the press about cross-dressers and so-called gender-benders like Boy George of Culture Club.

Comics contained all sorts of transformations: Billy Batson shouted *SHAZAM!* and became the adult Captain Marvel. Bruce Banner got angry and became the Hulk. And there were any number of werewolves by night, man-bats, congorillas and lab-coated lizards. But in four-colour comics, men were men and women were women, and ne'er the twain would meet.

There were odd almost-trans characters from time to time. Like Starhawk of the *Guardians of the Galaxy* trading places with his wife Aleta, with her matching blue & gold outfit and delightfully flicky Farrah hair. Or the villainous, voluptuous Vamp in *Captain America* who became the brutish Animus (completely with funky crystal club; no, I don't know why either). Or the amnesiac Cloud in *The New Defenders* who switched from female to male form to pursue their romantic interest with the telepath Moondragon. But I never really saw characters who you might class as transgender as we know it today, not until *Zenith Phase III*, written by Grant Morrison in 1990.

Metamaid was one of a legion of supporting heroes in the third book of *2000 AD's* take on the superhero genre. Most of those background characters were just there for a quick 'Oh look, it's <insert name of obscure British superhero> from <insert name of defunct British comic book>' moment, or to die horribly at the hands of the Lovecraftian horrors that Zenith and co were up against, or purely for a bit of light comedy relief.

Her name was obviously a comical pun on 'meter maid', made famous by the Beatles' song. She looked cool. She could fly and was super-strong. She was fun and flirty in the face of the apocalyptic horror the heroes were confronted with. And, as was revealed in a quiet moment in the story, she was a pro-operative transsexual, in the parlance of the time.

It was played as a shocking reveal, and also as a source of hilarity, as the ever-dickish Zenith discovers her 'secret' and promptly sends someone else off to rendezvous with Metamaid for a bit of a fumble in the boiler room. I wasn't sure how I felt about that scene.

Two years later in 1992, watching the big-screen thriller *The Crying Game*, the same sort of shocking reveal was played out again. And again





two years after that in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, only now the 'Hey, she's really a dude' scene was played for very much for laughs as Ace is physically sick at the thought. Everybody in the cinema laughed. Everybody else.

Trans people on the big screen were still very much victims or villains. And always deceptive, misleading, luring unsuspecting straight men into a shocking moment of revelation and disgust. But in comics, at least we had Metamaid.

Shortly after *Zenith*, Grant Morrison returned to the theme of gender fluidity in DC's *Doom Patrol*. Described as a 'travestite street', Danny the Street was a magical stretch of urban road made up of stereotypically male shops like Army & Navy stores which were decorated gaily with colourful lights, bunting and ribbons. The street communicated through printed shop signs using the old gay 'secret language' Polari. To my shame, it took me ages to realise that Danny the Street was a pun on famous British drag queen Danny La Rue.

The big development in the depiction of trans characters came in 1994, with Morrison's new Vertigo series *The Invisibles*, about a group of anarchist heroes battling the psychic enslavement of humanity by forces mundane and metaphysical. Among their number was Lord Fanny, a transgender shaman. Fanny was great. She was tall and gorgeous and powerful, and a proper member of the team. Not a background figure or a stretch of road. Not a victim (once you get past her original story in the punningly-titled 'She-Man') or a villain. Her trans-ness was part of her life, but not the *only* thing about her. And she wasn't bitter or out to trick people. She was *out*, very out. And she could dance.

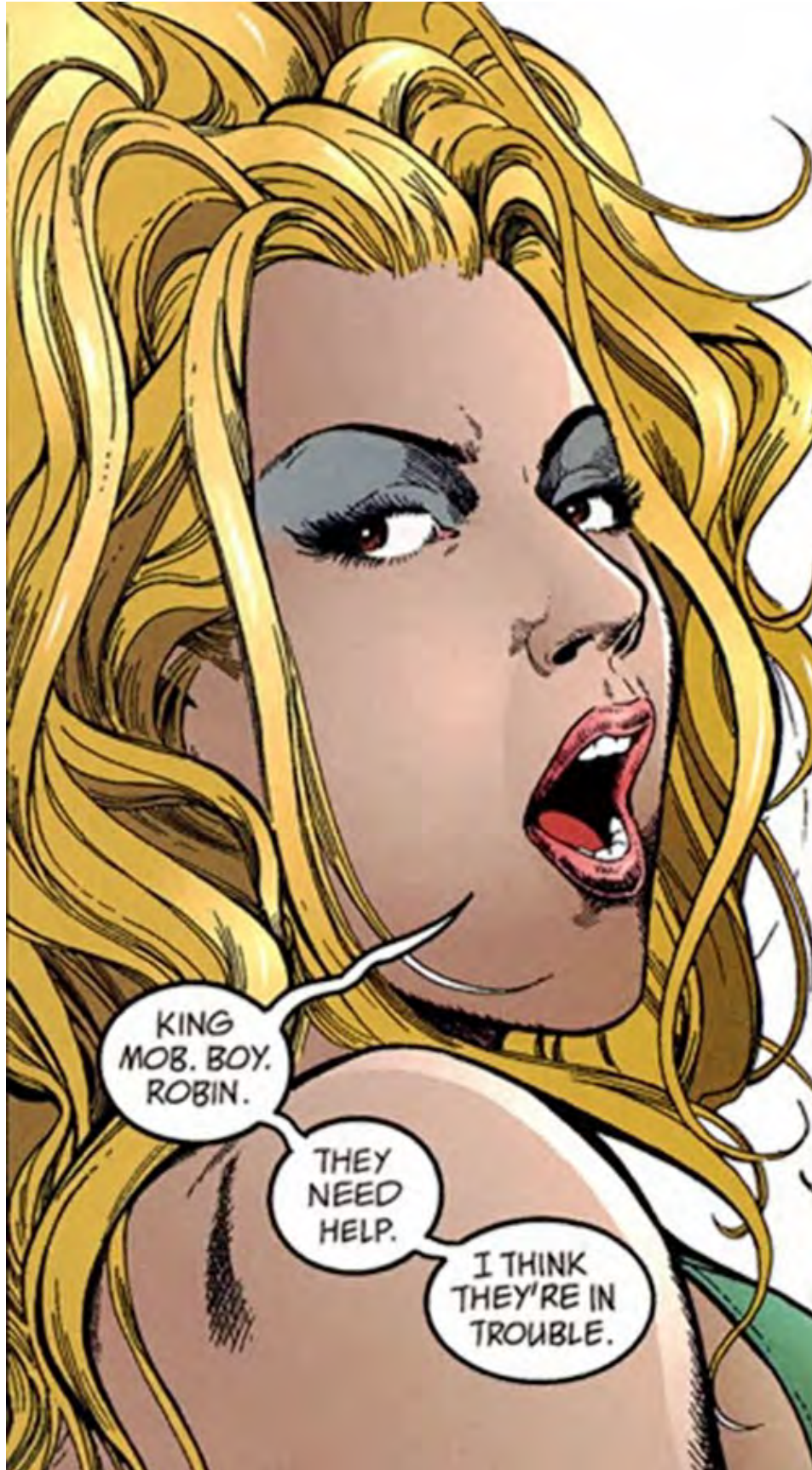
And did I say she was gorgeous? Especially when drawn by Brian Bolland and Phil Jimenez.

I remember reading those early issues of *The Invisibles* in the mid-90s and noticing a few details about Fanny's life which pinged my *whatever-the-trans-version-of-gaydar-is*. My transceiver? Details like when she gets slashed across the chest in issue #8 by the assassin Orlando, absolutely ruining her latex and silicon breastforms. Fanny bemoans how much they cost her at 'the Transformation store in London'. Later in issue #13 ('Venus as a Boy'), we see Fanny shopping for a pair of replacement boobs in that very shop. Morrison knew what Fanny was talking about; Transformation was a real shop in London, just round the corner from Euston station, and silicon breastforms did indeed cost a fortune (decent ones anyway), as I well knew, having shopped there myself many times.

I always thought that Grant Morrison had either really done their research to add in those details of Fanny's life, or it was something that the writer already knew. It was well known (and fairly obvious) that the *Invisibles'* ultra-cool leather-clad killer King Mob was Morrison in fictional form, but I'm pretty sure Lord Fanny also represented a facet of the writer's identity.

In Fanny, comic readers finally got a trans character who was cool, smart, funny, brave, sexy and absolutely unapologetic about who and what she was. It was nice to be able to point at an *Invisibles* cover and say 'See her? She's a bit like me.'





Grant Morrison's *Luda*

A Review

by Chuck Serface



Grant Morrison's *Luda* isn't a beach-read one might enjoy in isolation. Instead, it's best experienced as an object for discussion. Author Gabino Iglesias, for example, feels Morrison's handling of identity and gender merit analysis:

Morrison shows just how fluid gender is while obliterating the idea of identity as an established, monolithic thing. Luci and Luda are men, women, men that play women, and women that play men. These leads to a master class in the use of pronouns that delivers lines like this: "She's a boy playing a girl playing a boy" and "He'd done her research." Gender, identity, fluidity, and constant transformation — for performance purposes and for life in general — collide in *Luda* in beautiful ways, and Morrison presents all of it with heart and unwavering clarity.

Elizabeth Sandifer, on the other hand, doesn't glance so favorably upon Morrison's thematic efforts, albeit not outrightly negatively:

Perhaps more to the point, it's difficult, given some of the recent events in trans media criticism, to say that recklessly problematic trans representation from an author who has literally been an anti-nuclear activist since they were a small child is not exactly what we deserve right now. In a career that has never been unduly marked by moderation, *Luda* is for better and for worse the most Grant Morrison book ever to Grant Morrison. The number of autobiographical readings available are tremendous. In one entirely credible interpretation the book is that it sees Mark Millar getting the weirdest pasting in the entire history of literary feuds. In another, it's Morrison's climactic retaliation against their old literary and magical rival Alan Moore. In a third, it's their definitive statement on what they meant when they declared that they were nonbinary and preferred they/them pronouns. It is all of these things, far more, and, in the final analysis, far less—a work of staggering technical ambition that resolves into a shaggy dog tale.

Morrison's built their notoriety by inspiring multiple reactions both among and within readers. When it comes to their *Justice League: Earth Two* I'm an immense fan. *Doom Patrol* under Morrison's hand kept me interested in comics, much as did Moore's *Swamp Thing* and Gaiman's *Sandman*. But what about recent efforts on *Green Lantern*? I didn't respond warmly, I'm afraid. Although brilliantly daring, Morrison often flirts dangerously with self-indulgence, becoming too self-referential, perhaps alienating readers who might need to hear what he's selling. I struggled with *Luda*, bouncing back and forth from love to hate, for this very reason.

Luda's set in mythical Gasglow (yes, you get the reference), a world we experience through the eyes of drag queen Luci LaBang – performer, Glamour wizard, and portrayer of Widow Twankey in Morrison's play within a play, *Phantom of the Pantomime*, a combining of *Aladdin* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. Along comes Luda, a younger drag performer, who gains the play's central role after the first occupier suffers a mysterious accident. La Bang takes Luda under her wing, promises to teach her Glamour, and what develops calls to mind for many famous cinematographic and literary relationships: (1) Margo Channing and Eve Harrington from *All about Eve*, (2) Philip Carey and Mildred Rogers from W. Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*, and (3) the one to which Morrison admits, Merlin and Nimue from Arthurian legend. All this blends with stream-of-consciousness and unreliable narrator techniques, drawing (as such techniques are meant to do) readers into a very subjective world view based on Luci's tilted observations and reactions. If like me you're a straight cis male, this will fuck with your head, but in a good way.

I'm reminded, in fact, of another literary work starring a first-person narrator that winds, deflects, and possesses a very limited attention span – Tristram Shandy from Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), a work mostly about the acceptance of impotence. Here's a sample of Shandy's chatty, rambling style (spoiler alert: "nose" means "penis" no matter what Shandy claims):

I define a nose, as follows,—intreating only beforehand, and beseeching my readers, both male and female, of what age, complexion, and condition soever, for the love of God and their own souls, to guard against the temptations and suggestions of the devil, and suffer him by no art or wile to put any other ideas into their minds, than what I put into my definition.—For by the word Nose, throughout all this long chapter of noses, and in every other part of my work, where the word Nose occurs,—I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less.

And:

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly considered how much depended upon what they were then doing; that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost: Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly, I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that, in which the reader is likely to see me.

Now compare these with Luci LaBang's style:

When it comes to the Glamour, you're stitching together anything you've got lying around

that might help to anchor the desired sleight of mind in concrete reality, full moons, new moons, feast days, holidays, superstitions, talismans, and totems. It's vital to think on your feet, as imperative as it is to know how to put together an award-winning ball gown out of gift wrap, safety pins, and a shower curtain fit for the bin. You're looking to emphasize ideas of ritual, establish special days and hours for certain operations. Assembling a look, you want the elements to coordinate, to correspond. You want the drag to match the occasion and vice versa.

And:

I realized I'd been split in two. I'd been separated out, curds-and-whey style, then subtracted from myself. In some black and backward act of alchemy. Mercurius, the androgynous spirit of wholeness, had suffered a near-fatal sundering somewhere down the line. One half abandoned, stumbling and flabby, with his neuroses hanging out like guts, the other banished to the Twilight Zone, leaving only traces and spoor: the cobby husks of her dresses, her empty coats and vacant shoes; drained bugs dangling on their hangers in a spider's web of wire.

No doubt, both narrators take an anti-crow-flies approach when moving from A to B, but with Luci, once I understood, as much as I could, what she'd experienced living within patriarchal society, I felt empathy toward her, even with annoyed with her taking forever to reach her point. Indeed, our minds are built to avoid emotional pain, and Luci exemplifies this devastatingly while exploring aging, gender, even love.

Where do I fall with *Luda*? While reading the novel, I alternated between being pissed off at Morrison, amazed at their wordplay and irony, and frustrated by lengthy exposition about the play within a play. Once I educated myself about p-zombies, I appreciated what Morrison was after thematically here as well. *Luda*'s a dense book that'll keep you looking up concepts, references, all while parsing through Luci's meanderings. I go back to what I said at the beginning. *Luda*'s best experienced as a discussion, not in isolation. Don't be afraid of what you don't know or haven't experienced. Don't be afraid to consult others approaching Morrison's ideas from various personal experiences and lifestyles. Once upon a time, I took a graduate course entitled James Joyce, and the reading list included several guides to help students wade through Joyce's literary gymnastics. I explored critics' opinions – Iglesias and Sandifer, for instance -- here with similar effect. I cared enough to apply the extra effort, so Morrison's efforts paid off, at least with me. Currently, with drag queens and other LGBTQ+ community members under fallacious and evil attack from certain quarters, you too shouldn't be afraid to leave your shell and engage this important interchange.

