

Astro City is the needle in a haystack of crap

BY PHIL E. LEWIS

A visit to your local comic book store will make you quickly aware that the comics of today are not for kids. Comics today are generally more focused on gratuitous T&A. This is obviously done for the sheer sales potential to the horny shut-ins who plague these kind of stores. Comic book publishers believe their clientele are young boys struggling with puberty and men looking for a cheap thrill. There are a few books on the racks that do not fall into this abyss of juvenile sexism.

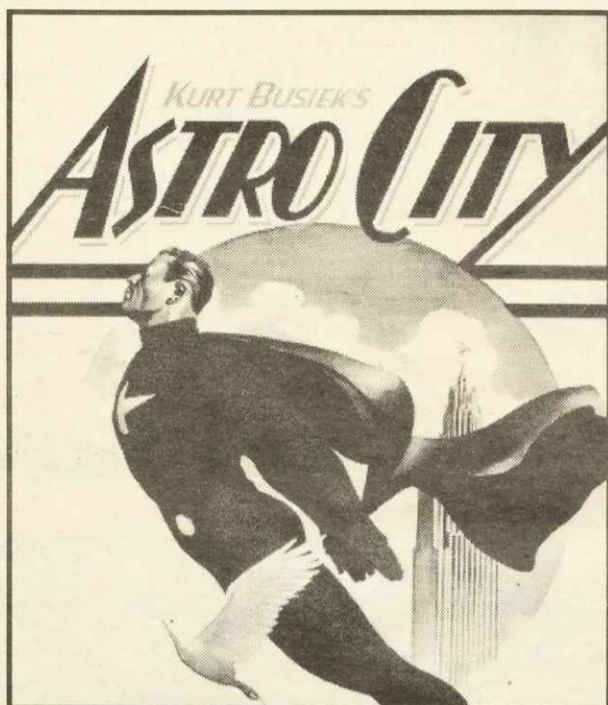
Astro City by Kurt Busiek and Brent Anderson is one of these exceptions. *Astro City* is a comic with your basic superhero devices, but without the basic superhero plot lines.

New mainstream books tend to try to subtly base their characters on existing ones. They do this to tap into an existing fan base without crossing the thin line which could lead to lawsuits. It's an obvious ploy to make up for their inadequacies in originality.

On the other hand, Busiek and Anderson blatantly copy existing characters, and they create original ones in the same vein of those prominent in the golden age of comics. This is the time in comic history (the 60s and 70s) when heroes like Superman and the Incredible Hulk were created.

The one aspect of *Astro City* which makes it stand out is the consistently good writing. Busiek's most well known works are the Marvel and Kingdom Come mini-series. These series have garnered enough critical acclaim to be used in American university english courses. Many

of the *Astro City* storylines feature a moral which teaches us or makes us think differently about the human condition.

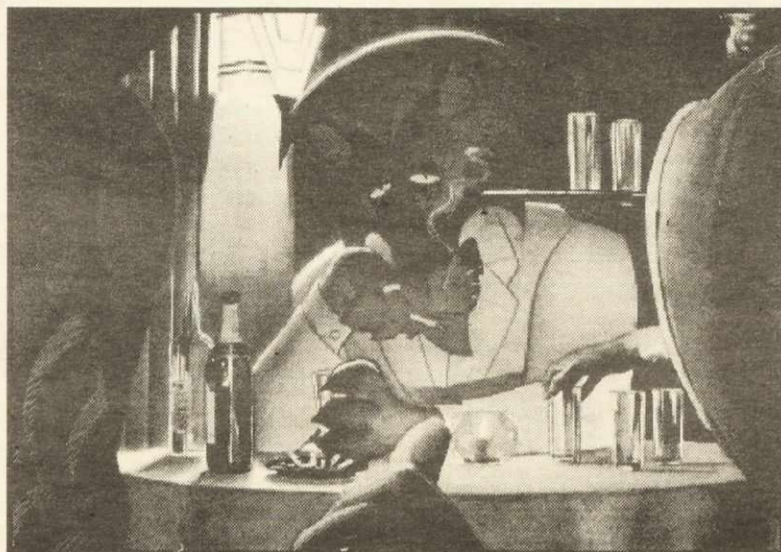


An example of this can be seen in the story about the First Family, who on the surface seem to be a re-working of the Fantastic Four. The story revolves around the young girl of the family and her yearning to find out what it is like to be a "normal" kid. The young child, who is the most powerful in the family, is fascinated by a group of children playing hop-

scotch. Young comic book readers often marvel at the possibility of being their favourite hero. In this case it was the hero that was envious of the life of the "real" kids.

Astro City is a rare gem in the

comic book field today. It manages to accomplish what the medium is meant to do — tell a provocative story while making use of our often neglected imagination.



Coming of age in Babylon

Finding Your Own Reality is a poorly written and confusing self-help book created solely to ease the suffering of author Doug De Bias — it does not exist for your benefit. Everyone should know this before spending the exorbitant fee required to obtain this CD case-sized book: \$12 US — which means it costs even more in Canada.

Finding Your Own Reality

Doug De Bias

New Spring Publications

The book is a collection of De Bias' thoughts and rants on what it is to be part of western culture and America, what it was like to be a hippy and how, since they all sold out, you will too. Spiritually uplifting stuff, indeed.

The right and the left of the political spectrum clash in the author's head, but he doesn't seem

to root his ideals in any particular ideology. What results is a hodge-podge that can be downright confusing. For example, De Bias claims to be offering a self-help book, much like the ones with Neo-Buddhist sayings. But the Buddhists don't preach capitalism. De Bias will tell you how great capitalism is and how great he is, but then he'll tell you how great love is.

He continues to belie his conservatism by explaining the evil and corrupt nature of American democracy (which is inherently right-wing), parents and teachers. He'll even tell you about the nets everyone older than you is trying to trap you in; but De Bias is just trying to trap you too.

He wants you to sell-out. He doesn't want you to do what the hippies couldn't.

There are a few good thoughts in

the book. It contains politically correct views on women, homosexuality, the Vietnam War, minority groups and ethnic cleansing. However, you would have to be out of the pop-culture ring for an awfully long time to have missed the PC movement.

De Bias even shares his conservative opinions on drug use. At one point he comments that if hard drugs are enticing to you, "...put this book to much better use, and beat the hell out of yourself with it". If you're questioning what drugs are the least healthy, think of his next few lines: "What's worse: crack, heroin or speed? What's worse: killing yourself and a friend, killing yourself and a family member, or maiming yourself and killing three strangers?" His final catchy comment on drug misconceptions is "lots of pot smokers smoke too much...reefer

can be a crutch. The folks who don't think so are the folks who definitely smoke too much".

Yet, just when you think you have De Bias pegged as a bible thumpin' red blooded American, he jumps to the left again.

"I am an American patriot. I am a free person. I don't like to pledge allegiance or wave the flag. I distrust anyone who would wrap themselves in a flag. No one has the right to wrap himself in a flag of patriotism to oppress you."

Overall, De Bias switches back and forth — from an extreme leftist lamenting his inability to stay left to a reactionary right-wing corporate android. He doesn't say much that is true or right, but his personal egotism will make you contemplate the various proposed truths this model of American confusion espouses.

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CD REVIEW

My Own Prison
Creed
Attic

Did you figure grunge was dead, or that it should be? Well someone forgot to tell Creed. I was lucky enough to get off the grunge bandwagon before it fell over and died, but this band has somehow survived. From what I hear they're getting some play on some radio stations out west, and I guess that could be considered good, as long as it stays west.

The lead vocals put up by Scott Stapp are a mixture of the high whiny end of Layne Staley (Alice In Chains), Scott Weiland (Stone Temple Pilots) and the deep growling of Eddie Vedder (Pearl Jam). Then, again, the last I heard, those bands didn't want any recognition or decided to put out "unplugged" stuff, which is different from what happened six years ago.

This is a typical one-guitar band and Mark Tremonti does a very good job of layering a solo over a running bass line. However, although he manages to get the right "feel", his rhythm falls short. Go figure. It sounds like he's trying too hard to get a fancy tone when he's actually not putting enough emphasis on what the song is calling for.

So, if you got caught in the plaid-wearing grunge days pick this up. But come on, how many people are still saying "Cobain is God". Meaning: Creed should try playing some California punk or crappy pop, or at least tune in to some music station, hear what's going on, and catch up with the rest of the world.

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