

Bang! Ziff! Swoosh! New Comich

by Gilbert Bouchard

It was bound to happen sooner or later, the baby boom grew up. Thousands of kiddies that had kept the toy and candy industry booming were now into hot tubs and sports cars. The industry hit the hardest by the subtle aging of the North American population was the comic book industry.

You see, comics as we know them were born in the mid-sixties with the revival of the superhero genre by Marvel Comics who introduced Spider-man and the Fantastic Four and the first wave of boomies reached up to the counter and plunked down their 12¢ for the latest Amazing Spider-man. Comics kept on rolling along, raking in the bucks during the sixties and most of the seventies. Big, big bucks. At its peak, Superman comics would boast over five million readers with Spider-man not so far behind.

But by 1979 things were starting to bottom out as the eight to eighteen-year-old group started to shrink, and no future surge of reproductive fervor seemed eminent either. The age of zero population dawned. The comic industry had lost its market: for good.

Titles that had held firm for decades vanished, and others held on for dear life. Mad magazine saw its readership hit adolescents and head for the barbosoms of National Lampoon. Insiders are predicting the demise of this satirical patriarch within the year.

But as can be expected the comic industry would hardly sit idly by and watch the pink slips roll in, with their livelihoods at stake. The big wigs at Marvel and DC Comics moved quickly, and the direction was simple, if you can't find a new market, follow your old market.

After a fifteen year childhood, the industry hit a painful and expensive puberty. The comics were after a more demanding and sophisticated audience, no more kidstuff. The heavy artillery came out. And 1982 was the year of the big change.

The first thing the industry did was to zip up the quality of the books who after years and years of easy sales had grown rather fat and sloppy. New blood was needed, and fast. Over the years, tons of decent writers and artists had left the comics for more lucrative fields. To draw them back into the fold again, first D.C., then Marvel, introduced new contracts and profit sharing systems whereby artists and writers got a piece of the action.

Then the big boys set about streamlining their titles, and clunkers like Superman Family, Team America, Spider-woman, Ghost Rider, Wierd War, and Sgt. Rock, bit the bun.

Better paper and printing processes were introduced, the age of newsprint and four color inks was going, going, gone. Epic comics, fanfare comics led the way, followed by swarms of Baxter stock comics and the large oversized graphic novels all with glossy/semi-glossy cover quality paper throughout the book. The older more knowing reader demanded a better looking product and he got it. He also paid for it. Graphic novels cost about eight bucks, and Baxter stock comics sell for about two and a half dollars.

Even distribution methods were revamped in search of a new readership. With the advent of numerous comic book specialty shops springing up all over the United States and Canada (Dark Star and Hobbit are two such shops in Edmonton), the publishers moved toward direct sales, ie. comic books sold only in specialty shops. Marvel was the first to go this route, offering Ka-zar and Moon Knight through direct sales only a few years back.

Specialty shop and direct sales offer a few advantages, (1) convenience, namely with file/subscription services, discounts, guaranteed comic supplies, access to new releases, and fresh information etc. and (2) freedom from the comic code: with the death of the candy store sales, comics can be a little racier and slightly more experimental in their efforts.

Probably within the next five or six years, the majority of comic books sold will be via comic specialty shops.

Other efforts to squeeze every possible buck out of comics include the recent rash of toy tie-ins, where a toy company manufacturers a line of toys and the comic people put out a comic book series to match. Many such tie-ins are soon to hit the stands (or are already on the stands) including: Crystar, Masters of the Universe, GI Joe, Mysterions, Swordquest, and Atariforce.

One thing for sure is that the industry is playing for keeps. The housecleaning at DC and Marvel is leaving no comic book unturned. Old established comics are being totally re-vamped, some beyond recognition. Longer, more complicated plots, more intense character developments with adult type relations,

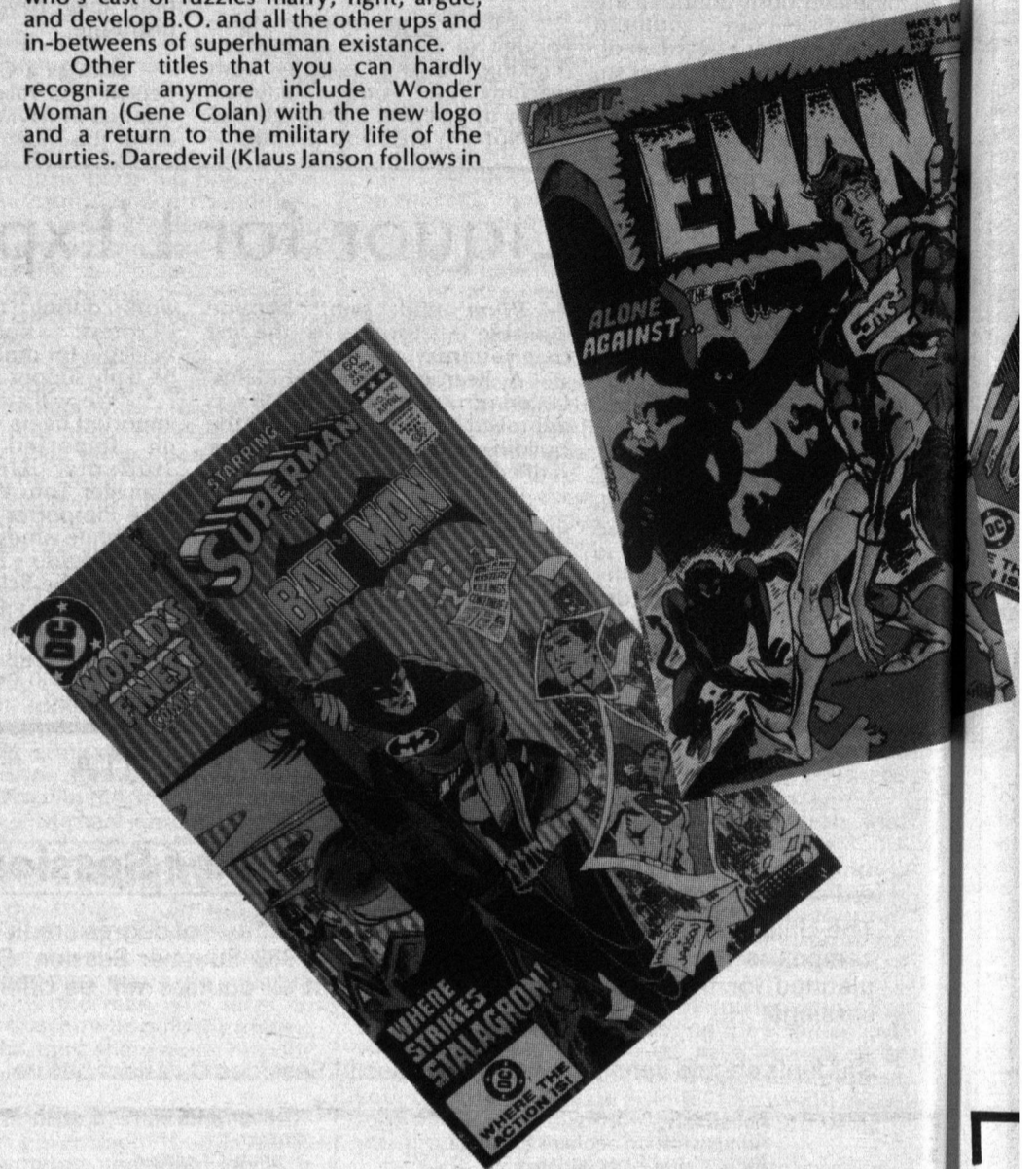
and story lines that often carry over from title to title. Lois Lane dumps Superman, Peter Parker makes out and Bruce Wayne gets weirder.

Two titles that have really grown up are the Legion of Super Heros (Paul Levitz/Keith Giffen) and the New Teen Titans (Mary Wolfman/George Perez) who's cast of fuzzies marry, fight, argue, and develop B.O. and all the other ups and in-betweens of superhuman existence.

Other titles that you can hardly recognize anymore include Wonder Woman (Gene Colan) with the new logo and a return to the military life of the Foursies. Daredevil (Klaus Janson follows in

Miller's shadows), Fantastic Four (John Byrne), and World's Finest, Action Comics and Superman have added a few new bumps and grinds to the adventures of the original man in tights.

The buck doesn't even stop there what with the unpredictability of new titles and the expense of developing a new



L'Express in S.U.B.

Now Open 7:00 am 9:00 pm
Licensed 3:00 - 9:00 pm.

NEWLY RENOVATED



LICENSED LICENSED LICENSED LICENSED LICENSED

Attention all registered graduate students:

The U of A Graduate Students' Association requires members to serve on the following bodies for 1982-83:

- G.S.A. Executive
- Graduate Faculty Council
- General Faculties Council

If you are interested contact the G.S.A. offices at 2175 or attend the March 8th Council Meeting, Back Room, North Power Plant at 7:30 p.m.

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Meeting of the G.S.A. will be held on Tuesday, March 22nd at 7:30 p.m., Back Room, North Power Plant.

ENJOY THE BEST
Coffee & Tea
at

JAVA JIVE

H.U.B. MALL

Monday to Friday
7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.
Saturday
9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Sunday
10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

A &
Acc
Loc
Aut
Bot
Caf
Can
Can
Can
Cha
Dan
Dri
Edr
Edr
Fab
Fast
For