
Subject: Comics Reviews #2 of 2
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Like Moriarty, I find myself slipping a little behind in my reviews (part of it is that I'm falling behind in my *reading*...). There are two separate batches of reviews, one covering ALPHA FLIGHT through GREEN LANTERN, and the other MR. MONSTER through VIGILANTE (plus CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS, following a Spoiler Warning).

Ratings for the comics reviewed are as according to the Mad Armenian Scale, a shameless rip-off of the Moriarty Scale, stolen out from under the very nose of the Napoleon of Crime. Nyah-ah-ah!!

|=>A+< A veritable Classic. One of the best of All Time. Example: THE SPIRIT |
|==>A< One of the best of the year. Ex: TEEN TITANS #39: "Who Is Donna Troy?" |
|==>B< A very good issue, one of the best of the month. Example: CEREBUS |
|==>C< A well done, entertaining issue. Satisfying. Example: JON SABLE |
|==>D< Rather boring, or a few good spots mixed with more bad ones. Ex: ROM |
|==>F< Boring AND stupid or childish. Example: MARVEL SUPERHEROES SECRET WARS |
|==>Z< Actually offensive. Example: DAZZLER --- THE MOVIE GRAPHIC NOVEL #12 |

MR. MONSTER #1 [C]

You may remember the first third of this as something that appeared in the last issue of pacific's VANGUARD ILLUSTRATED. The rest was suppose to appear there as well, but fate intervened. Eclipse decided that it would toss all three chapters of the Mr. Monster serial into a single comic book (since the colors were supposedly wretched in that first appearance, they felt no qualms about the first third of this one-shot being a reprint).

So how is it? Well, it's amusing and entertaining fluff. Mr. Monster is a no-nonsense, don't-take-shit-from-anybody, macho kinda guy, and here, he takes on a werewolf biker gang who has been intimidating this poor schlepp who quite inadvertantly was turned into a lycanthrope but doesn't have the heart for it. The closest I can come to a comparison is that it reads much like a

Judge Dredd story, which is praising with faint damns. I *like* Judge Dredd, and MR. MONSTER could easily become a JD story with a few cosmetic changes. And that's the only real problem: there's no spark of originality here. When all one can think of when reading it is that it's just like a Dredd story with the names changed to protect the copyright, there's something wrong. Still, it's a good, funny read, and worth giving a shot. Besides, the text piece in which Michael Gilbert explains where Mr. Monster came from is fascinating, and the Bill Messner-Loebs art is wonderful (certainly enough to confirm that his art in JOURNEY has really been slipping).

MS. TREE #16 [C]

The latest in a long line of "socially conscious" comic books: those that deal with such problems as drugs, racism, child abuse, and other such nastinesses of our society. Like a long ago couple of issues of THE NEW TEEN TITANS, this issue focuses upon the issue of child runaways. The subject is dealt with in a realistic and sympathetic manner, but there are two things that bug me about it.

First, the hidden bleeding-heart-liberal in me feels that Tree dealt with a particular villain in this story a tad too harshly. Sure the guy was a worthless piece of scum, but I lost a little respect for the character of Tree from the way she handled things.

The second is why I think this is slightly less effective than the Titans runaway story. It so happens that Tree turns down a case involving a runaway child, claiming that the trail was too cold (the child ran away four years prior to this, and the parents went through many PI's trying to find her). And serendipitously, she no longer escorts these folks out the door when she learns that her own adopted son has run away, tossing her head first into the problem. I feel that needing to make the hero a victim in order to get him involved in the problem smacks of poor motivation (gee, so sorry, but as long as it doesn't happen to *me*, who cares?) It's nice to see this comic tackle such a serious problem (as opposed to the bandwagon jumping-on of the previous story about beauty-pagent blackmail), but it's too bad Collins and Beatty didn't do a better job of it.

NEXUS #9 [C+]

Lots of things of interest going on here. Nexus' incipient conflicts with the new government of Ylum, the continuing intrigue involving Ursula, and last but not least, the stew that Nexus finds himself in now by killing (with good reason) a 14-year-old kid in front of crowds of people (on Earth, no less). I only have one complaint, and that's that I'm sick of the current stereotype of kids with mohawks being bad guys just because they affect a punk style. Sigh.

NORMALMAN #7 [D+]

Valentino seems to be a bit off this time around. However, I couldn't help but ask: How many characters could *you* identify on page 7. Out of 66, I couldn't get 3.

OMEGA MEN #26 [C]

If you haven't been following this lately (and rightly so), you might want to give it another try. A new team, Todd Klein and Shawn McManus, has taken over the reigns, and they're off to a promising start. In a sense, it's more of the same old space battles, this time against a new foe, the Spider Guild, then against the Citadel, but the focus seems to be a bit narrower. Most of the Omega Men are trapped on over-run planets, and the story is going to focus on a small group, which includes Kalista, Tigorr, Harpis, R'yandir (Starfire's brother), a renegade Green Lantern, and a new character. The GL and the Spider Guild are out of a few "Tales of the GL Corps" stories that Klein has done in the past couple of years. Be warned, however, that this issue drops into the middle of the current story, with flashbacks occurring over the next few to tell us what lead up to the current situation.

This issue also starts off a new back-up feature called Vega, by the ever more present Alan Moore. This first episode tells of one world in this system that didn't fall to the Spiders, and why. Like his GL back-up, this is minor Moore.

Oh, and last but not least, this comic has got a *stunning* cover by McManus. The layout is nice, but it's the colors that reach out and grab you.

RAGAMUFFINS #1 [D]

I wish I could say that it's nice having Don McGregor and Gene Colan's Ragamuffins stories collected all in one place. It *is* nice, except for one thing: they aren't worth reprinting. McGregor seems to have this obsession with proving how much better a writer he is than everyone else because he does non-commercial stories---you know, about hard-boiled detectives, children's school adventures, and the like. Nary a superhero to be found, nosirree; none of that adolescent male power fantasy crap for me. What he, and others like him --- writers and critics alike --- have lost sight of is the fact that a good superhero story can still be a good story, and a lousy non-superhero story can still be a lousy story. A *truly* "different" comic story is one that in which the story is *handled* differently than others, not one that is superficially different because it has a different subject. Alan Moore (*especially* Alan Moore, with "Marvelman"), Walt Simonson, Frank Miller, Roger Stern, John Byrne, and Chris Claremont, to mention a few, have all proven that superheroes can be handled seriously and intelligently, and differently. McGregor, with the comic at hand, proves that a comic with such a "different" subject matter is still o-nay odd-gay if it's poorly executed. Each of these three stories has got

heart and soul coming out the ears, but they have no substance whatsoever. And to me, style alone just doesn't make the grade (as regards writing, anyway; artwork is another matter entirely).

VIGILANTE #18 [B]

I wish I could give this a better rating. The first half of this two-issue fill-in was one of, if not *the*, best piece of work by Alan Moore. With a tinge of regret, I report that the second half doesn't quite live up to the promise of the first. Still, Moore really pulls through on the characterization (which was the high point of the previous half). Here we get to see another side to Carl Linnaker, the villain of the story, and to Fever, the Vigilante's sidekick/foil for this story. We see that Linnaker isn't all bad, and after all he's done, there's at least someone who still loves him. And we see that Fever isn't all good, that she can succumb to that same push for revenge that in most people remains under control. A line from the story kind of sums it up: "But that won't stop them picking at it and trying to turn it into something black and white. Something they can have an opinion about. Something they can judge." Life isn't all black and white, and often we lose sight of that fact. This story helps rectify that situation.

WARNING!! SPOILER ALERT!!

CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS #3 [C+]

My, my, my. This one's got it all, folks! A totally unknown character fighting alongside the Teen Titans and the Outsiders (which team, if any, she belongs to is anyone's guess); the second(?) death of the Flash; a few minor war and western characters get bumped off; Brainiac goes in search of Luthor to try and find a way to save the Universe (after all, if he lets the Universe get destroyed, where is he going to live?); and for a smash finale, Earth-1, and quite possibly the rest of the surviving Earths, goes Snuff City along the entire timeline.

And the blurb for next issue says: "This is the big one! The end of the Multiverse!" And that will only be issue #4!

--- jayembee (Jerry Boyajian, DEC, Maynard, MA)

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