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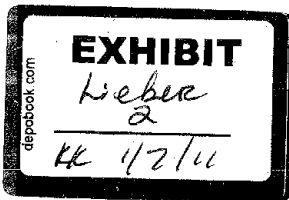
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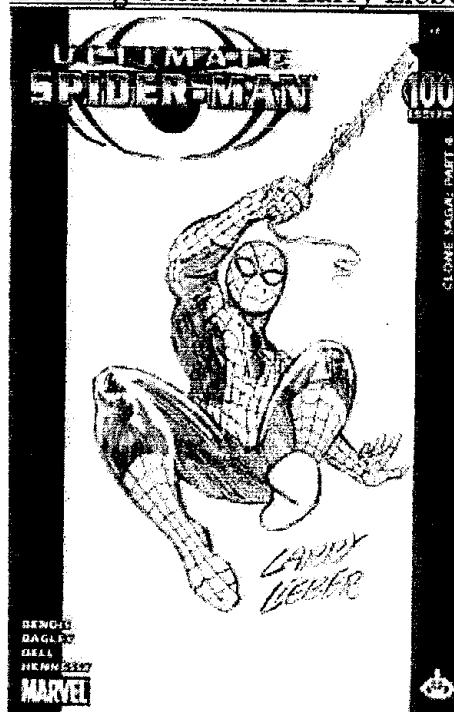


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MONDAY, AUGUST 06, 2007

Looking Back With Larry Lieber



LARRY LIEBER is one of the more overlooked, underrated and as such forgotten men from the Silver Age of Marvel comics. For a while there it appeared that there was nothing that Larry couldn't do - he wrote and he drew, and he did them both solidly and more than competently and remained at Marvel for many years. It can be argued that Larry Lieber wrote more stories for legendary artist Jack Kirby other than Stan Lee and Joe Simon. As a writer Larry scripted the first appearances of both Iron Man (working with Don

Heck) and Thor (with Kirby). As an artist he enjoyed a memorable run on Marvel's western title Rawhide Kid, where he provided both stories and art.

Often working in the shadow of his more famous older brother, Stan Lee (born Stanley Lieber), Larry was often the subject of many (unfair) nepotism charges, even after Lee had left the company. Larry landed at Marvel in the late 1950s and remained until 1974, when he was head-hunted by his uncle, the infamous Martin Goodman, to become a writer/artist/editor at the short lived company Atlas (Seaboard). After that venture failed Larry returned to Marvel where he saw out the remainder of his career. A victim of a Jim Shooter purge, Larry has been



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drawing the Spider-Man daily newspaper strip since the late 1980s, and, health permitting, he'll be drawing that until he finally puts down the pen and retires.

DANIEL BEST:

Where were you born and where did you grow up?

LARRY LIEBER:

New York City. Born in New York and grew up in Manhattan but my first years were in the Bronx. Do you know New York at all? I guess not if you're in Australia.

DB: Only from what I've seen.

LL: Well there are boroughs in the City. New York is made up of Manhattan, The Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and

Staten Island. Those are five boroughs and the main one is Manhattan, which I'm sure you know from the movies. But the Bronx is, I don't know how to describe it, it was a quiet or a little, almost suburban in a way. That's where I grew up. Actually I was only there until I was about ten and a half and then we moved to Manhattan. Then I grew up in Manhattan in a place called Washington Heights.

My brother, of course you know about my brother right?

DB: Yes.

LL: He's nine years older than me. So when I was born he was nine years old and we hardly had anything to do with each other. By the time I was nine he was 18 and he went into the Service, it was World War II. He was in the Service for a while, until the end of the War I guess; and as I said, I was in Manhattan for a few years, in my teen years.

DB: What kind of art schooling did you have?

LL: Well it was just public schools there, where everybody went. It was nothing special. As a kid you start about five years old, I did that in the



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More art up on The Artist's Choice Website-

Bronx and then in Manhattan I did the same. I went to Junior High School and then High School. I went to a place called George Washington High School, up in Washington Heights and my brother had gone to De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx. I would have liked to have gone there but you had to live there to go, so I wasn't eligible.

When it was time for High School, I tried to get into a High School that specialised in music and art and that's what it was called, High School of Music and Art, but I didn't make it. I asked why I didn't make it and they said, "One of your teachers said you had a poor attendance record," which was untrue. The one thing I know is I came to school, maybe I wasn't a good student or something, but I was there. At any rate, I never got into Music & Art and I always regretted it.



DB: And how did you break into the comic book industry?

LL: It was in my family really. My brother was in it and he started when he was about 17 or 18 or whatever. Also my uncle was in it and a cousin of ours owned the company. At that time it was called Timely Comics and he owned it, Martin Goodman. I was just a kid and kids liked comics at that time. We didn't have television then and so there were newspaper comics and the comic books. I used to like to draw and copy

them and so on. I remember once, and I don't know when it was, but my uncle, Rob Solomon, took me down to Timely Comics. They were in a building called the McGraw Hill Building, later on in the Empire State Building. I actually worked there when I was about 17, but not in the comics; and he took me down there. While I was there I remember meeting Jack Kirby. I was a kid and Jack Kirby drew a picture for me, you know, because it's a little picture of Captain America and Bucky and it's signed, "Hi Larry, your pal Captain America and Bucky!" It was signed Jack Kirby and then Joe Simon signed it also. I still have the original drawing here hanging in a frame.

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Andrew Boscardin:

DB: Oh beautiful.

LL: I don't know how young you are, may I ask?

DB: I'm 38.

LL: Okay, well that's
young from where I sit.
I'm 74.

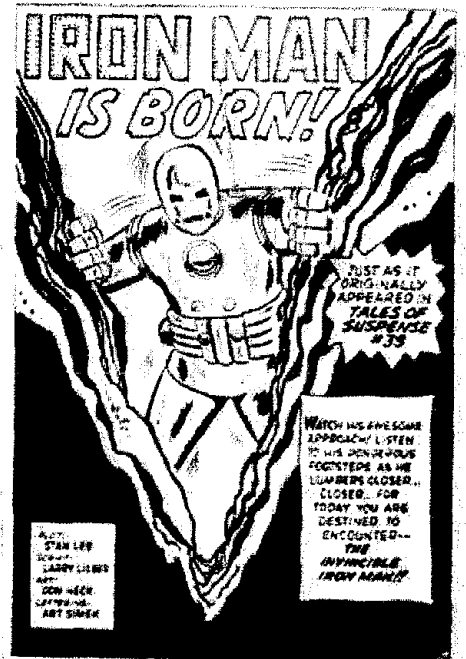
My mother died when I
was 16. My brother was
back from the Service, he
was just married and he
moved out outside of
New York to Long Island.
I lived with him for a
while and it didn't work
out so well. I wanted to
leave, so I left. I was very
young and I had a couple
of jobs.

I worked for the New
York Times as a
messenger when I was 17

and I also worked in a lettering studio in Times Square. I worked for an
excellent letterer who did lettering with a brush. His name was Sam
Furber and he had done lettering on movies, when you see movies in
those days you'd see a title like 'Beau Geste' and it was lettered by hand. I
don't know what they called it, show card, whatever the heck it was, but
you had to be a very good letterer to do it with a brush. I was in his
lettering studio and he wanted to teach me to letter, but I draw with my
left hand, even though I do everything else with my right hand and he
said you can't be a left handed letterer, you've got to work with your right
hand.

I tried and I couldn't of course, it was very difficult, so I didn't really
letter. I then worked for a company called Magazine Management, which
was also owned by Goodman and they put out other books, not comics.
They put out movie magazines, what they called men's magazines like
Male Stag and things like that and they put out some pocket books.

Any rate I worked there but I had no skills at all. All I did was paste up. I
did so much paste up with rubber cement and I was using the thinners
that after a while I found out I had no fingerprints. Along came the



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The Fate of the Artist

Korean War and I joined up. When you join the Service the first thing they want to do is take your fingerprints so they can keep track of you and I had to come back two or three times to the fingerprints, the developer said, "We're not getting anything".

So that was my thing there and at the time I was living in Manhattan. I lived in a hotel for about a year and a half that no longer exists. The Hotel Manhattan Towers, it was on Broadway and 76th Street; and then I went into the Service for four years and the first year when I got out of basic. The basic training was at a place that also no longer exists anymore. It was a place called Sampson Air Force Base, up near the Finger Lake area of New York State, Lake Geneva I think it was; and I was there for a year and a half.



When you first come out of basic training they have to give you a job of some sort right? You can't do basic forever so they ask you what you'd like to do, what you're suited for and I said, "I don't know," and as it turned out I wasn't suited for anything. I didn't know enough mathematics to be a technician and I hadn't gone to college where I could I think be a pilot, you had to have more education and more this. So I said, "Well I know how to draw," and the guy said, "You can draw?" I said, "Yeah". So he gives me a piece of pencil and a paper and he says, "Draw me." So I sketched the man and it must have been good enough. He says, "Alright, you can draw, you're an artist".

Unfortunately there was no classification for an artist when you get out of basic. When I got out of basic training I had one stripe on me. In the Army that would have been called a Private First Class, in the Air Force it was an Airman Third Class. So there was no classification for an artist. So the nearest classification they had was a draftsman. So they classified

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If you're a comic book artist or professional and are interested in getting your

me as a draftsman, which I'm not. A draftsman knows how to make plans for bridges, buildings and things and I don't know the first thing about it. So I'm classified as a draftsman and they put me in the training aides where they were making up different things. While I was there I made up a little cartoon character. I wasn't really a cartoonist; I wanted to be a comic artist, like Jack Kirby, doing heroes or something or other, more realistic, not humorous cartoons.

But I happen to make up this little thing, I think it was called Itch and Scratch and it appeared in the Base Newspaper. After it appeared in the Base Newspaper I received a letter or something from a Sergeant in Wright Patterson Air Force Base which is a very big Air Base in Dayton, Ohio. He wrote to me and said, "I've seen your work and we're starting a command wide magazine and we'd like to have you work on it, we think you're good". So I was delighted, I thought, "Oh boy that'll be great". But it took a little while for him to process the papers to go through and to get me there and in the meantime at Sampson, they got a call from the Far East that they needed a draftsman.

Now the place where I was working in was the training aides. It reminded me of a prison movie a little bit, in that there was a guy in charge, a Sergeant in Charge and the Sergeant had his friends, people he liked and they flattered him a lot. They called him by his initials, and whenever a call came through it was up to the Sergeant to select somebody to go overseas. Well he never selected his friends, he selected the people who were sort of the outsiders and I was one of the outsiders. There was a guy from West Virginia who was an outsider, somebody else who was a tough guy from Brooklyn and a few others and me.

So he picked me and when he told you this, it was so funny, the reason I say it's like a prison, he had a room where all his friends would sit in the room and he would face them like a school teacher facing a classroom and the people who weren't his friends were outside the room.

I was called into the room and he told me you have to go and so on and that he picked me. Okay. Well I thought I'm going to go over there, they think I'm a draftsman, I'm not, they're not going to be happy with that but somebody in Wright Patterson Base knows what I am and wants me, it would be a lot better to go where I can be appropriate, where I could do the work. But I didn't know what to do. So I went to a place on the base called the Air and Spec you can go there with grievances and problems and so on. So I went there.


Unfortunately the Air Inspector, some Sergeant, I don't know, he'd been in a long time, had I guess the military type of reasoning. I told him the

own site up and running then by all means feel free to fire down an email and we'll work something out. We'll be happy to set up a site that more than meets your needs at a very decent price (ie: usually nothing. I just like doing that kind of stuff as a favour).

How Utterly Odd: Facebook Comic Con | Daniel Best, 20th Century Danny Boy

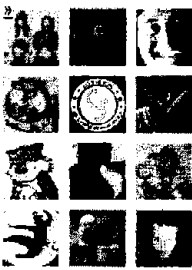


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Sergeant wanted me and the first thing he said was, "Look, I am not interested in any deals entered into between you and a Sergeant out of base". He said, "You're classified, you're going". I said, "But I'm not a draftsman". He said, "You're classified as a draftsman, you're supposed to be a draftsman". There was no reasoning with him. I'm supposed to be a draftsman. If I explained why they gave me that, he didn't want to know that. It was a real military thing. If you're classified, you're supposed to learn it quick.

So it was hopeless. So they sent me overseas. I just remember being on a big ship and they sent me to Okinawa. It took about 12 days to get there. The first day I was sea sick, second day sea sick and as soon as I stopped throwing up, they put me on duty for the trip doing KP in the kitchen. So for 12 days I was washing dishes and doing this and doing that. The last day I cut my finger and whoever was in charge took pity on me and said, "Alright, you can take off today". That was the last day. So that was my lovely trip abroad.

When I got there I had to report in. I reported and I just remember there was one point where I entered a room and somebody "Ah at last, a draftsman is here." This was when I felt I was in a prison movie like the new guy and I had to tell them, "I'm not a draftsman fella's, I don't..." and they looked at me. Well they realised it's not my fault, so they weren't going to throw me into the sea. "Oh shit we didn't get..." I don't know anything about drafting. So they said just kept out of their way.

There was a recreation room and I learned to play a little bit of pool but I had to do something so finally they put me in training aides there too. It gets even better. On the base, or in the Air Force, there are two kinds of officers or there were then. There are officers who fly planes and there are offices that don't fly planes. Now the officers who fly planes are generally nice guys. They have their airplanes, they fly, they're proud and all that. The ones who don't fly planes aren't always nice because I guess they must feel a little inferior, you know. You're in the Air Force and you don't fly, what are you doing? Yeah, compared to the pilots.

So they're usually the people who want discipline and other things that compensate them. Although I don't know that many of them. But on our base we had a guy who was a handsome man and a pilot and he had the name to go with it too, Colonel Kincaid; and he was a wonderful guy.

But he had an assistant under him and his name was Colonel Twitty. Colonel Twitty was not a pilot and he believed in military discipline and the morale on Okinawa was very low. At the time it had, I believe, the

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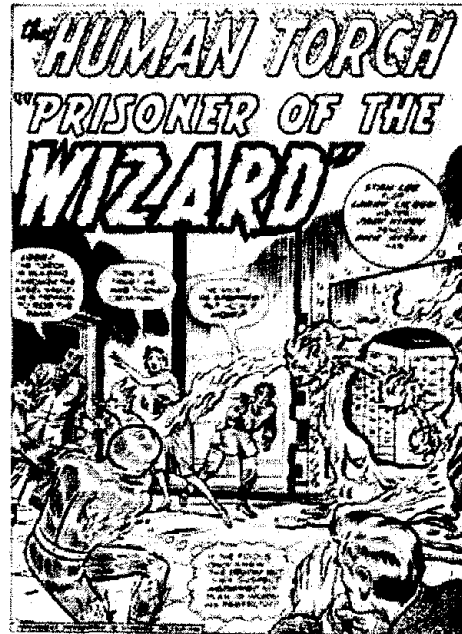
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second highest venereal disease rate in the Air Force or something. In those days it wasn't so serious because they didn't have AIDS or anything that they couldn't cure. Whatever the guys got they gave them penicillin and they got cured. It also had about the lowest reenlistment rate in the Air Force which you can usually tell about the military. You know if people reenlist it's not bad. So it wasn't a very great

place; and because of that Colonel Twitty decided that we need to bolster the morale. He came up with the idea that everybody should go through basic training again. Now most of these people had been in the Service for a while. It was my second year or third year. See this will give you morale. That's what we need.

So they had to make up plans for this and all that and I'm still not a draftsman but I made up some signs. I had to work on it, I don't remember how and they made a training centre and as luck would have it, or irony or poetic justice or whatever, I was one of those working on it and they sent me through, one of the first. So I had to go back into basic training again on this hot and miserable island of Okinawa; and we had two leper colonies off the island there. We had snakes there, poisonous snakes. We slept under mosquito nets for two years because they were afraid of encephalitis.

So it wasn't a delight. Somebody described it once. They said, "It's the only place where you can stand with mud up to your knees and have dust blow in your face at the same time." It never got too cold or too hot but because of the humidity you felt it very much when the weather was kind. But I went through it and then, and this was my triumph in the Air Force, Colonel Twitty decided he wanted an emblem on the base, a new emblem or something and the case headquarters and he wanted an eagle painted. So they come to me and they say "Lieber you've got to paint an



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eagle”.

Now Lieber had been to art school, Pratt Artist Institute, while I was doing my paste ups for Magazine Management, a couple of years, a few years previously. But I never finished my illustration and I never really painted a picture, I never got to it. So Lieber did not know how to paint, and here I was given the assignment, I can't tell on my cans of paint, I'm not a draftsman but now I'm not an artist.

So I don't know how the hell I did it, I really don't. But I must have gotten photographs from Life Magazine of an eagle and he wanted a fierce eagle no less. So I did it very slowly because I didn't know what I was doing. I don't remember where I got the paints, some cans of paint or why I stood on the ladder like Michelangelo because there was a big emblem. In the headquarters, I think it was a big shield and it had the number of the squadron, you know, above the shield and this was an eagle above that looking fierce and I must have been on that thing for weeks or months.

Now between me and Colonel Twitty there were some other officers. My immediate officer was a warrant officer, a very nice man called Major Hamilton and he was due to retire. He didn't want anything to spoil his retirement, the poor guy, and his boss was a major I liked very much, an older man. Anyway this major was his boss and he was a nice guy too, everybody was nice. I guess Twitty in his own way was nice too.


The only problem was I didn't know what the hell I was doing and it took me a long time, so I kept trying to paint. I swear to you, I don't remember how I did it, whether I drew it first or must have drawn something looking at a picture; and I was working on it and working on it. Well as time went by, Colonel Twitty was getting impatient and he would let the Major know he was impatient in no uncertain terms and the Major would let the Warrant Officer know and those two guys were sweating a little, understandably and the Warrant Officer said, "Lieber when are you going to get this done? When are we going to have our eagle?" They were all worried and I felt bad for them but I was doing the best I could.

Anyway it took a very long time. I don't remember whether it was months or weeks or whatever, and Colonel Twitty was going to have apoplexy or something, have a fit. Finally Lieber finished the eagle okay and they were going to have a ceremony. I remember standing in the Headquarters down there, in front of the shield and everything and the Warrant Officer that was there and the Major was there and they're waiting for Colonel Twitty to arrive, you know; and Colonel Twitty

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arrived and when he walked in the first thing he did was give me a look, that if looks could kill I would have dropped dead on the spot. Like you son of a bitch, you're making me wait.

But then he looked at the thing and he looked up and when he looked up, he looked up pass the shield and the number of the squad and he saw the eagle. Suddenly his face broke into a smile and he said, "This was worth waiting for"; and that was my triumph in the Service. The Warrant Officer breathed a sigh of relief, as did the Major and I and they took my picture. We had a base newspaper and my picture appeared in the newspaper, okay and oh boy was I relieved and happy and other people talk about they were heroes, they were this, this was my triumph.

I was in the service for four years. The first year was at Sampson, two years on Okinawa and then they said, "We're sending you back to the States for your fourth year, where would you like to be, what section?" So they gave us sections of choices. So the first section I picked was the East Coast with New York City and they said, "What's your second choice?" I said, "My second choice is California". I thought that would be nice, Hollywood, something I could look at. So they sent me to Del Rio Texas, my choice. Del Rio Texas is a little town and the base was near the Rio Grande River. It's nothing that anybody would really want to go to and it reminded me of Okinawa, it was the same thing. Okinawa when you looked out, all you saw was water and here when you looked out, all you saw was sand.

So that was it. I always kept that newspaper and years later when I was married they decided to have a Korean Reunion and they had it in West Virginia, I forget where it is. Virginia Beach I think it was; and I went with my wife, my late wife, and before I went I wanted to find that newspaper, I don't think I had ever shown it to her. I looked all over my apartment, there are bundles, there's this, and I never found it. So I couldn't take it with me but I could tell people the story but they were telling more interesting stories to guys who were in combat and in Korea and you know, all the battles. So that's my war experience.

DB: It sounds like the plot of Catch 22 or something like that.

LL: Yeah, it could be a comedy. I'll give you another thing. Somebody wrote a play called the Tea House of the August Moon, I don't know if you've ever heard of that?

DB: It rings a bell on me for some reason.


LL: There was a tea house on Okinawa, previously during World War II or just after. Anyway while I was there, somebody wrote the play in the United States and it was showing so because of that they went and

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What? You Missed Something? New & Improved Archive, Same Stuff Though

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opened another tea house to copy the play. Anyway that was a comedy with Marlon Brando and you could see it sometime with Glen Ford. It was called the Tea House of the August Moon. So that's that. Now what else. You ask a question so I can relax a second.

DB: When you got out of the Services you went straight into working at Marvel?

LL: Well not quite, a couple of years later. I went to art school for a while. I still wanted to

be an illustrator but I didn't go back to Pratt, instead I went to the Art Students League. I wanted to study and I ended up actually studying with a famous teacher there but I had to leave in the middle of it and again I never finished painting, I never learnt to paint.

He had a thing when you paint a picture, I think it was ten steps, I was up to step three when I had to quit. So I still can't paint a picture and years later when I joined the Society of Illustrators because they lowered their standards and let me in as a comic artist. I used to be embarrassed. I'd go there and I'd say I'm not a painter, I'm not an illustrator, but it turned out that I was like a star because it's almost like a dark haired girl going to Scandinavia, she stands out you know, or a blonde in South America. So I stood out, "Oh you did Spider-Man"? But I never became the illustrator.

But I started working and I forget exactly what, it was in 1958. I wasn't fast enough or good enough to draw comics, although that was what I wanted to do, so my brother offered me a chance to write.

In the art school at that time, they didn't teach you how to draw without a model. All the drawing when you learn anatomy they have models there. So with a model what you do is, you develop your eye, you get a very good eye and most artists use models. Illustrators do it, certainly the fine artists didn't just make it up, they draw with models. In comics it's

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the one field you don't use models. You're not getting paid enough and you've got to grind out picture after picture and be able to construct the figure and do it so that I never really learned. You know I wasn't that good at it.

DB: I've always wondered what training you had when you started writing.

LL: Oh okay. My brother said he had no writer but himself. He was the only one. He said, "I can use you, you can help me, you can write". I said, "Stan I'm not a writer". He said, "Oh I've read your letters from the Service, you can write. I'll show you, you can do it". So he taught me and that was an interesting experience for about I don't know how many years, I guess a few years. Let's say 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962.

Yeah for a few years I was writing.

At first they were, the stories were these, what were these monster stories and you know the books?

DB: Journey into Mystery...

LL: Yes, that's it. Journey into Mystery.

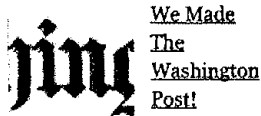
DB: Tales To Astonish, Tales Of Suspense...

LL: Yeah, those books right. They were five page stories or seven page stories, he would make up the plot then he would give it to me and I would write it. At the time I was living in a place called Tudor City, in a furnished room. I would write and I wrote stories for Jack Kirby who was so fast; he was drawing faster than I could write. I had to keep feeding him stories; he needed them to earn a living. I think he was living in New Jersey at the time and I'd go to the post office on Saturday night and send the stuff there. I did that for a few years; and then they started making up the Super Heroes and I wrote a few of the first, Ant Man and Iron Man and Thor.



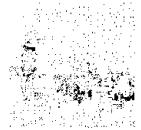
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Frank
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February 9,
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Sad to say that Frank
Frazetta has passed away, as
the result of a stroke, on
Mothers Day evening, after
spending time with his
family. Fra...

Stan again made up the plots, but I made up the civilian names for a few of them that I create. Let's see, the Ant Man was Henry Pym. I made up the name Henry Pym and Don Blake I made up for Thor and Tony Stark I made up, you know. But the important names, such as Ant Man, Thor and Iron Man, Stan made up.

So that was what I did. I must have drawn a little and then when they started doing the superheroes, he needed other people to draw them. It was more work and he was going to hire artists and I don't know how good I would have been as an Editor compared to others, so I never even tried. I sort of melted into the background. I didn't want to write that kind of stuff all that much. I didn't want to get involved; and what they did was Jack Kirby had been doing a Western and Western's weren't selling that well, it didn't matter what you did with them as long as they sold a certain amount.

Anyway he of course was used on the superheroes which were important. He was so wonderful at that.



When Jack gave up one of the Westerns, the Rawhide Kid, they gave it to me. Stan gave it to me and it didn't matter much, so I was really on my own. I wrote and drew it and I enjoyed that. I've always enjoyed it when I write the stuff and draw it myself and I did that for seven years.

I liked it. However it wasn't that popular a thing because everybody was interested in all the superheroes. Occasionally I'd meet somebody who said, "You know I read that

one, I really liked it". So I enjoyed that and after that I did covers for a while, superhero covers. In the meantime I did some other things. There was one point where I was doing romance comics. I was writing and they were actually pretty good; and then there were periods where I had difficulty getting work and Martin Goodman went into difficulty. I'll just

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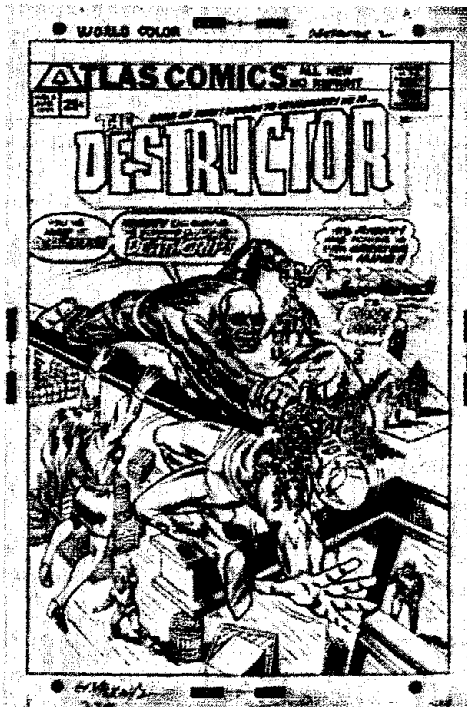
Original Art Stories: Frank Miller vs Klaus Janson

You may remember a while back I received an email from The Former DC Staffer who

put this in and I don't want to elaborate on this, but many of the artists and writers could go from National comics from DC to Marvel, go back, one and another, and if they weren't happy at one company they'd go to another. If they wanted more money they could go. I was the only one who could never do that because that was the price for Stan being my brother. So I could never do that.

As a matter of fact, once I didn't have any work and I sent work to DC and a friend of mine brought it over, Frank Giacoia. He came back and he said, "Well it's alright, but they'd have no need for it now," so I didn't get the work. Some time later, I was in a restaurant where some of the artists in Manhattan used to go to and I happened to be sitting with Carmine Infantino who was the art director of DC. We had met a few times before, we were friendly and I brought this up to him. I said, "You know I sent over that work and I never heard", and he looked at me with surprise and he said, "Do you mean that was on the level?" I said, "Yes, yes, I needed work". He hadn't replied because they were very suspicious. They would have thought Stan Lee is sending over a spy or something you know. I would see what they're doing and go back or whatever the hell it was. So I couldn't do that, I couldn't work.

So at any rate Martin Goodman started his company, Seaboard and Atlas. I knew colour comics and he was putting out colour comics and he was putting out black and white books, like Warren Publications. He picked me to do the black and white books and he picked the guy from Warren to do the colour comics, don't ask me why. It didn't work out and the guy ended up getting all the books except a couple and then that didn't work out. The guy left and then I had to do all the things. It was an experience that was not too pleasant and I don't, I don't like to talk about it.



discussed the falling out between Frank Miller and Klaus Ja...



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But when that was over, I don't know, maybe it was only a year and a half or something or a year, I don't know how long Seaboard was around, about a year. Then I came back from Marvel and they offered me a job in the British Department. The British Department was the Department where they did reprints of the books and they sent them to Great Britain and so I had very little original to do. Actually we did make up one original story there which was Captain Britain. John Buscema

drew it and it was a delight to work with him, somebody else wrote it and I worked on covers. So I was in the British Department for a while; then that ended, they closed the Department. Stan started Spider-Man in the newspapers. He was writing it, Romita was drawing it and then they decided he wanted The Hulk. Let's try that. The Hulk was kind of popular on television; and so I drew The Hulk. Stan was writing it and after a while The Hulk wasn't doing well and I don't know exactly why, but it wasn't and Stan decided to give it up, or give up his part. He said, "Larry if you want, you can write The Hulk and draw it". So once again I was writing and drawing and that I enjoyed even more than the Rawhide Kid.

I made up stories that I really liked and it lasted a little while. After that, after the Hulk, Stan left. I think he went out to Hollywood or out to California and that's when Jim Shooter came in and took over. I didn't have any steady work then. I did a few inventory stories or different things, until finally they needed somebody, an artist, on Spider-Man on the strip which Fred Kida had been doing until he retired. They tried somebody else and it didn't work out and they offered it to me and I started doing it and I've been doing it for 20 years now it'll be.

DB: It's a long run.

LL: Yeah. For a while after about the first or second year, I inked it myself but it was very hard in terms of time. I'd sit up all night inking it.

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We were in this one room apartment studio and I'd be inking all night and one day and then I'd rush down to King Features and deliver it. One day I just delivered it to King Features and I left and I tried to think of something and I couldn't think of the numbers, or remember dates or something and I got a little nervous and I said, "Maybe I can't take this sitting up all night, a whole night anymore. I'm not that young".

So I gave up the inking. I said, "If I ever get fast I'll do it again," but I never went back to it and that's it, that's my story.



DB: The Hulk newspaper strip; I remember reading that when it came out at the time and I always thought that the work you were doing there was more interesting than the comic book in a lot of ways.

LL: Oh you mean the stories? Well thank you, yeah.

I liked doing it. When I was writing, before the superheroes, Stan was teaching me to write. Now he had never taught anybody else to write so he didn't know how well somebody learns or doesn't learn or, he didn't know how to compare me to anybody else. All he knew was I didn't write as well as he did.

He wasn't always the most patient person and I had problems with the dialogue and he said, "Why did you say that? You could have said it this way, or this way or that way," and I'm realising yeah, I don't think of it that way or this way.

So at any rate finally I think at one point he got a little exasperated and he said, "Look," he said, "I'm going to hire some of the old pros." He remembered writers from the past. So anyway he must have for a while. He still gave me work, he didn't want to take work away but they were putting out a few more books.

So he hired somebody and then the next week when I came back to him he said, "I don't know." He said, "Larry, you know something, you're not good, but you're better than these other guys". So that was my first victory if you want to call that a victory right. The others are worse than me.

My second victory came years later when I was doing the Hulk,

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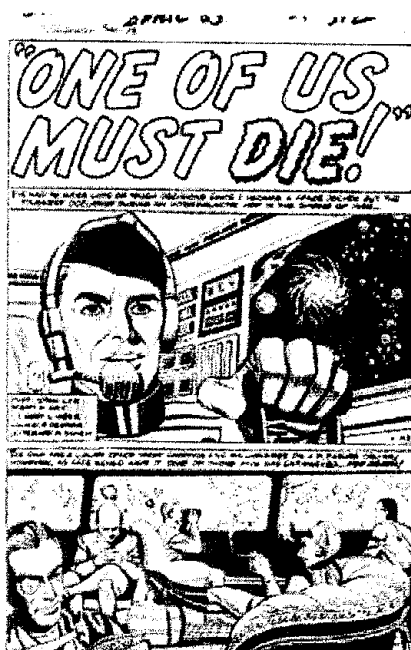


newspapers, when I was writing it and he said to me one day, he said, "Larry," he said, "I look at the Hulk, and it's very good. Also I think it's even more dramatic than Spider-Man". So when he said that to me that he liked it and thought that in a certain way more dramatic. I felt good about that. So that was my second victory.

Unfortunately the strip failed, it isn't around but Spider-Man still is. So those were my experiences in comics.

DB: Now for a writer who thought he couldn't really write, you probably wrote more stories for Jack Kirby than anyone else outside of Stan and probably Joe Simon.

LL: Did I? Amazing. You would know better than I. I did write them for a few years.



Kirby was in every book. I remember some of the stories were for Don Heck and the only ones that I never wrote, because Stan liked writing them himself, are the ones for Steve Ditko. At the back of each book I think, there was a story for Ditko and that was Stan's own story.

I did learn to write and I learned a lot from Stan. Some years later he and John Buscema had a course, an artist course teaching drawing to some people. They used work out of a hotel and I don't know how long it lasted, maybe a

couple of years. When they were about to end it or before they ended it, they decided they'd like to put writing into, teach people to write and they asked me if I wanted to teach it. I remember I went there, down to

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this hotel, and for one semester I guess you'd call it or something, I was teaching about six or seven people about comics and in order to teach them, I've never thought about it, I had to make up some kind of curriculum or something. I remember I had a whole bunch of index cards. What a comic should be, what it shouldn't be, I'd Xeroxed some papers to show, to explain this and that, and it must have been pretty good.

I went down and when it was over, they gave me a book with a lot of appreciation saying how patient I was and how much they learned and so on.

DB: When you were writing back in the day of Marvel, did you write with a particular artist in mind, such as Kirby?

LL: No, I wasn't thinking of Jack when I did it. It could have been Jack or Don Heck or anybody. The only one I was concerned about was Stan because I had to show it to him. I was only hoping Stan would like it but Jack would do what he wants; I didn't care about what he did afterwards. You know I just wanted to put something down that Stan would say, "Hey, this is okay. Hey this pretty good, that reads nice". You know, "that's okay". I remember he praised the names I made up, places and people. You know my famous story which I told so many about Thor's hammer?

DB: No, I don't think I've heard that one.

LL: You don't know that one? When Stan made up Thor and he gave him to me and said, "This guy has got a hammer and swings it around". I guess the hammer I felt it had to have a name. Maybe Stan said it, I don't remember. I just know because, there's going to be a name, I said, "What the hell kind of a name I'll give to the hammer", so it just came to me.

I used to look at it in the back of the dictionary, Miriam Webster's they have geographical places and they have biographical names and a lot I would take from that according to what the character was, what a person was and that's where I must have gotten Henry Pym or I got the name Pym from an English scientist. It sounds like an English scientist; and so somehow I made up the name and I wanted it to be short, I'm always thinking of the lettering. I also think of other people, I don't want to put a burden on the inker, on the letterer, so I said, "Uru". I made up the name Uru, U-R-U.

The Uru hammer, I said, "That sounds exciting". I don't know what the hell; it's just a name. So I made that thing up and after a couple of issues, Roy Thomas, who was the editor of the books, came in and one day I'm in the office, I don't know what I was doing and Roy came over to me and

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he comes over with this big book, "Bullfinches Mythology". I never read the book. Roy comes over to me and he says, "Larry, where in here did you find the Uru hammer". I said, "Roy I didn't find it in there, I made it up," and he looked aghast that I'd made it up because he had been a schoolteacher, an English teacher. He left and the next thing I know, he found the real name for it which is Mjölfnir or something according to the Norse legends, so it became Mjölfnir instead of Uru which was made up by Larry Lieber.



Well a couple years ago, a couple years ago they invited me out to the San Diego convention, which I think is the largest convention. I don't usually go to conventions, I had never been there before but they invited me as a guest and I was on a panel. I'm on the panel and there were people in the audience and I forget who else was there, there were a couple of men and there was a very talented writer and there was a woman on there from DC I think. Anyway I can't see the other people on the panel and somebody in the audience asks me about it, everybody wants the story so I told the story of the Uru hammer and I said I made it up and then Roy Thomas put the real name in, this and that and I hear a voice, a woman's voice say, "You made that up?" and I said, "Yeah". She says, "Well don't you know what that means?" I said, "No, I don't know what it means", and it turns out that it was a woman on the panel and she says, "In the Norse language or something that means power, strength".

In other words, it had an appropriate meaning which I had no idea, I just made up a word. So I thought that was kind of cute. Here I make up something which Roy changed immediately. But that's my claim to fame and fortune that I made up a name and it turned out to be an appropriate name, according to this woman.

DB: Getting back to the writing aspect and the artists. Were they Marvel-

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style or full scripts that you presented to artists like Kirby and Heck?
LL: They were full scripts and I didn't think of Jack when I wrote it at all. All I thought of was will Stan like this or will he tell me, "Larry this isn't good, you can't do this". I didn't want to hear something like that.



DB: Now when you were working at Marvel at that stage, were you working at home or actually in the offices?

LL: When I was writing this stuff I did it all at home. I would go into the office and Stan would give me a synopsis, this is what I want and I would take it home and write. When I started, I lived in this place, this little furnished room, this place in Manhattan called Tudor City. There's a little park there, near the United Nations area, and I remember sitting there with a pad and some

yellow paper or something and because I was trained as an artist and I thought visually, especially with a comic.

I would lay it out at first in, little boxes, like I was doing little story boards for myself; and I'd say, "Alright panel one, I'll do this or I'll do that" and then write it. I'd sit out in the park when the weather was nice and do it; and then I'd go into my room, I had a furnished room, one little room.

I remember there was an elderly woman owned the apartment and the windows were not normal windows that opened up and down, go up and down but they were little French windows that opened out, so you could not put in an air-conditioner. So it got pretty hot in the city there then and I had a Vornado fan that saved my life, I kept it on all the time; and I was at the typewriter, typing with two fingers and learning to write.

DB: On the job training.

LL: Yeah it was, it really was and I learned a lot I think. My two favourite writers were Rod Sirling and Sterling Silliphant and they were writing for

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[bobby pickett \(1\)](#)

television. I used to hear their stuff. I love good dialogue and tried to write and think about it. That's how I did it, I'd have to send out a full script, it was always a full script.

I think the Marvel style came when Stan was doing the superheroes and he had so much to write. Also he was working with a guy like Jack. He knew the characters and could come up with different gimmicks perhaps; things in the stories so. I don't know who started that, but I never worked with it that way at all.

DB: So even after the superhero thing started and you were working at Marvel in the late 1960's and the 1970's, you never worked the Marvel style, everything was full script for you?

LL: As far as I know, yes. Now I could be wrong, my memory isn't the best and so you may be able to find somebody who says "He did write Marvel style," but as far as I know, I don't recall ever writing that way. Not that I know of. When I wrote, every time, it was a script.



Except when I was writing for myself, like when I did the Hulk, but I'm not even sure then. I didn't have to type it all out when I did the Hulk. I don't know how I did it but I knew I was going to draw it and if I'm drawing and writing it I could put it together.

But I really don't, now that you mention it, I don't even recall how I did it myself. But whenever it was anybody else, I don't remember ever telling somebody here's the story, go ahead and then I had to fit in dialogue. I don't remember that process. Stan was very good at it. He could look at the picture and decide what the dialogue should be and sometimes he'd look and he'd say, "Here's a little area that could use something". Oh he did it so easily and smoothly.

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You know, "Here's a little area that could use something," and he'd put a little gem in there in those days and just write to fit the story, to fit the drawing. I never did that as far as I know.

DB: When you'd go up to the offices, who were some of the people that were hanging around at the times?

LL: Well it depends when. In the early years when I started writing before the superheroes, I was the only one he had. As a matter of fact, it was almost like something out of the movie Citizen Kane.

When I started working for Stan doing those little stories he was in an office that was as big as nothing, like somebody's little alcove almost. It had a window there and I don't know if anybody was there with him. I don't know if he had Sol Brodsky at the time or who the other people were. I just remember going up and there might have been somebody sitting there doing a little colouring. It was a narrow little nothing of a few feet and he was making all his own lettering corrections; and we were on the second floor of a building on Madison Avenue and 60 of looking down into the street.

Now the years pass and then came the superheroes, then came this, the company was sold to Perfect Films and Cadence Industries and Ronald Perlman. One day years later they have a party or something to celebrate; this was before business got bad. It was downtown in Manhattan and I got an invitation. So I go down there and it was being held in I guess a discotheque or a nightclub, and I walk in there and I see a load of people and I see people coming down a staircase dressed like comic characters and I look over and I think I see Stan over there talking to Perlman and others and businessmen and artists and I think to myself, like this feels like Citizen Kane to me. You know that movie?

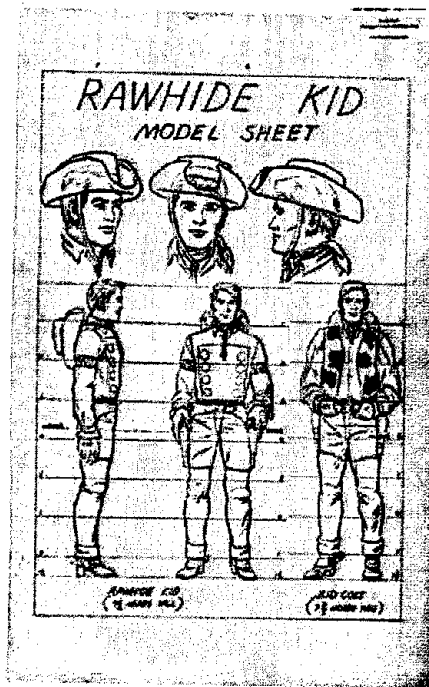
DB: Yes when they start up the newspaper it's with just Kane and his assistant, the two people and then...

LL: Exactly. Yeah or where he came from and he had the sled as a child. Well that's what I felt that this was. It started as nothing and I thought, "Oh my God, look what this has become?" Because I didn't go down to the office often or anything there. All those years I just thought Stan and I were just about the only two. I think he had Brodsky doing it and then later he got, as it went on, he got some more people, secretaries, a big space. But that was the beginning. Later on I knew the artists when Jack Kirby would come up; when John Buscema, the first time I met him. He was the most amazing artist. I couldn't believe that anybody could be that good. The first time I met him I remember shaking hands with him and he had a grip, I thought he'd crush my fingers. He didn't look very

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much like an artist; he looked more like the Head of the Long Shoreman's Union or something. You know he was a weightlifter but he could draw the most beautiful and sensitive. I told him one day, I said "I know your secret. You've sold your soul to the devil," I said, "because nobody draws that well that hasn't". He was what I'd call the best drawer, maybe not the best artist, but the best drawer I ever saw. Though I knew him I never saw much of Kirby. But occasionally he'd come up but I knew him through his work and I loved his work very much; and then I saw the others there.

Gil Kane sometimes came up, as did Don Heck. When I worked with the staff, and there was a big staff there of people who, I don't know, they're retired, they're gone. There was a wonderful inker who was I guess my closest friend. His name was Frank Giacoia. He was wonderful and he was a very human guy. He and I had a similar problem, we were always late with our work, slow and behind, and he really suffered; but he was a wonderful human being; and that's all. That's was it.



I knew some others there of course. In the 1960's it was a very relaxed atmosphere. So anybody could come in and they'd talk and they walked around and so on and so forth. Later on it changed very much because people were different and I don't know. This is when Cadance had it and they moved some place else and they had to watch things, people would steal things. They'd come in and steal whatever the hell they could so before I could get in I had to be announced, I had to this, or wait out in the waiting

room for somebody to come and see you. It changed completely. But in those early days, it was the most relaxed place you could think of and it was very nice, it was very nice.

I don't look back on the days with fondness because I barely got a living and I wasn't the artist that I wanted to be and they just were not happy

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days for me at all. But that's what it was. They were there and I do remember there were some nice, nice people and good artwork and a relaxed atmosphere.

I think most of the other people would tell you happier stories than I, because I think most of them were earning more of a living and as I said, they could go from company to company and they did this and that. For me it wasn't so great.

But I did have friends there. For a lot of the time I was living alone. I wasn't married and I didn't go out much. Then later on I did meet a woman, we got married and unfortunately there was a great deal of illness on her part. We had a marriage but she's gone now and so I sit here alone in the room and I try to go out and do things but I'm glad I have Spider-Man and in an odd way I try to think ahead of what I'd like to do, what I'd still like to do. I seldom look back on those days with any great nostalgia, because I guess I was a lonely person and I didn't want to be that way.

I used to say as a matter of fact, I wish I had gone to College and there were times I would have wanted to leave and just get a job, but I never went to College. So often over the years if I meet a young artist who says, "How do I, what do I draw, what do I do?" I say, "Look whatever you do, go to College, get an education so if you ever decide you don't want to do this, you could do something else. Don't just depend on comics." Also, I'll tell you one other thing which is kind of ironic. When I started writing those comics, The Journey into Mystery type, I asked Martin Goodman, "How would you describe this industry? Because now I'm starting to write this stuff," and at the time he said, "I'd call it a dying industry," and it probably was; and so I didn't how long I would be around. Well the industry not only didn't die, but you know what happened and it was because of Stan I think. Stan was really made for comics. He and Jack Kirby. I have always felt that he was the essential comic artist. Stan was the essential comic writer and Jack was the essential comic artist; and by that they didn't put in anything more than a comic in their work and they didn't put anything less than the best comic.

DB: Makes sense. I've always thought that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby as a team were far better...

LL: Oh I thought they were the best.

DB: ...than what they were on their own.

LL: Yes, yes, because Kirby could add stuff to Stan's, that's why Stan could do it. Jack needed Stan I think. There used to be friction between them and he left. He went over to DC and when he went there he put out I don't know ten books or something or other, eleven, whatever it was,

[johnny cash](#) (1)
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[julius schwartz](#) (1)
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[mike vosburg](#) (1)
[moira bertram](#) (1)

and almost all but one failed, they didn't make money.

Then he came back to Marvel later. But when he was with Stan certainly they made money.

DB: There was a period there where everything they did was just pure gold.

LL: Yes, yes. Jack was a very good storyteller and he knew how to do it. Stan certainly flourished and he developed this whole style of writing that was very individual where he would talk to the writer. It was very much his personality and if I happened to come across once in a while an old comic, you know he didn't do that. I don't think he did it in the books that I was doing, Journey into Mystery, I don't think he had enough to do it to work. But when he started with the older superheroes, each one had their own personality like Spider-Man and the dialogue was very individual and came very easily to him. So I think he was perfect for it.

Many thanks to Will Murray for making this interview possible - you're one of the best Will!

Posted by Daniel Best at 8:29:00 AM

Labels: [artists](#) , [interview](#) , [larry lieber](#) , [marvel](#) , [writers](#)

4 comments:

Scott said...

Larry Lieber has always fascinated me, because he really could do it all -- write, draw and edit. Some of my fondest comic-book memories are of the monster stories he wrote for Marvel that were reprinted in Creatures on the Loose and others, the Atlas books he worked on, and the Rawhide Kid.

Thanks for the interview, and Mr. Lieber, if you're reading this, THANK YOU for the entertainment and joy you've brought me. Take care of yourself.

--Scott Rowland

Tuesday, August 07, 2007 2:58:00 AM

Anonymous said...

Danny,

I've been reading through the interview and enjoying it. I've had the pleasure of speaking to Larry on the phone and

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[monster mash \(1\)](#)
[monsters unleashed \(1\)](#)
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meeting him in person in one of his rare New York Convention appearances. Larry is a a very low key guy with a wonderful self-deprecating sense of humor. He tells great stories anout his experiences in comics.

I hope they reprint his Incredible Hulk comic strip one of these days. He did a nice job on that strip.

Nick Caputo

Friday, August 10, 2007 3:45:00 AM

Rob at MEC said...

Good interview with an interesting person. Always good to hear about the Silver Age creators. Thanks and thanks to Mr. Lieber.

Thursday, February 07, 2008 6:11:00 AM



Senador Lombrith said...

Thank you very much for this interview. It gives a lot of valuable information about the early Marvel years, and it puts also some light upon the reality behind the "Marvel Method".

By reading it, I have realized that Larry Lieber deserves far more acknowledgement than he actually has among readers.

Saturday, July 05, 2008 7:29:00 PM

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