

CLAIMS DEPARTMENT



Julie Schwartz. I met him a few times, I know as he was one of the guys my Dad would talk about and mention that he had met me when I was very young, but the last time sticks in my mind. It was WonderCon, the first one I'd been to in ages. I was getting my press badge and I was standing next to a very old dude. I kinda recognised him, and since we were both so early as to have been merely late for the previous year, we had to wait on line.

And wait.

And wait.

We started chatting, about science fiction, about comics, about the good places to eat near the convention center. It was a lovely chat, and I was happy to get to spend the time. As far as I remember, he never said he was Julie Schwartz, he never mentioned that he was responsible for some of the first fanzines, that he had more-or-less invented the Silver Age, that he was, in many ways, The Other Forry, only for comics instead of monster movies.

It was not too long after that when I heard that Julie had died.

There is no one more important to the evolution of comics out of the Golden Age and into the Silver Age than Julie Schwartz. I grew up after that period, but I loved nothing as much as Flash, the Justice League, Adam Strange, Doom Patrol. All of those were incredibly deeply influenced by the editorial work of Julie Schwartz. The focus on science fiction within the world of the Silver Age, including the creation of Adam Strange and various other science fiction themes.

There are so many stories about Julie from the world of science fiction. You'll find a few of 'em in this issue, but there will always be many many more waiting to be discovered. This is the start, so take that as a warning!

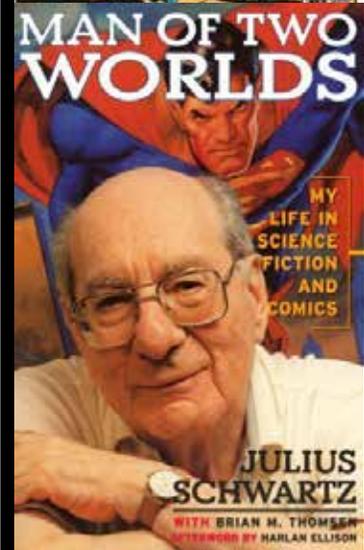
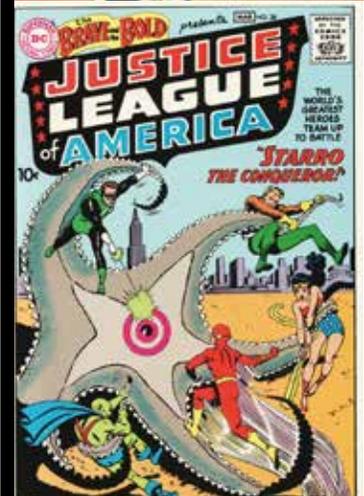
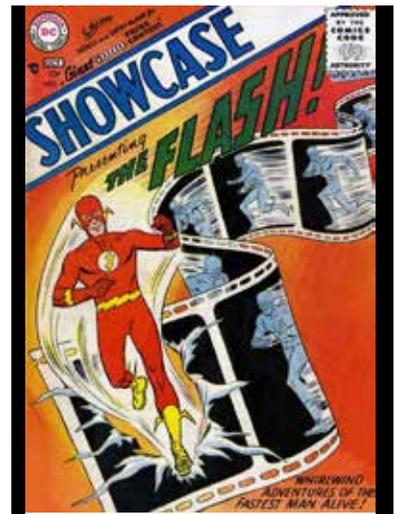
What else is going on?

Hey, my kids are starting to become potty trained, which is impressive when you consider JohnPaul is just now walking and neither are really talking much. Two years old! They're not perfect yet, but I had expected another year of full-time diapering!

I'm working on contracts, a lot of writing, including a series of documentaries about Disneyland attractions and various amusement parks. Those have been very fun to do over the last year or so.

Journey Planet's still in the running for the Hugo, and it's getting a lot more readership for some reason. Not sure why. My podcasts, [Registry](#) (on the National Film Registry), [Fantasy Film 101](#) (on fantasy films), and [SiliGone Valley](#) (about the lost places of Silicon Valley) are all experiencing significant upswings! Always a good time!

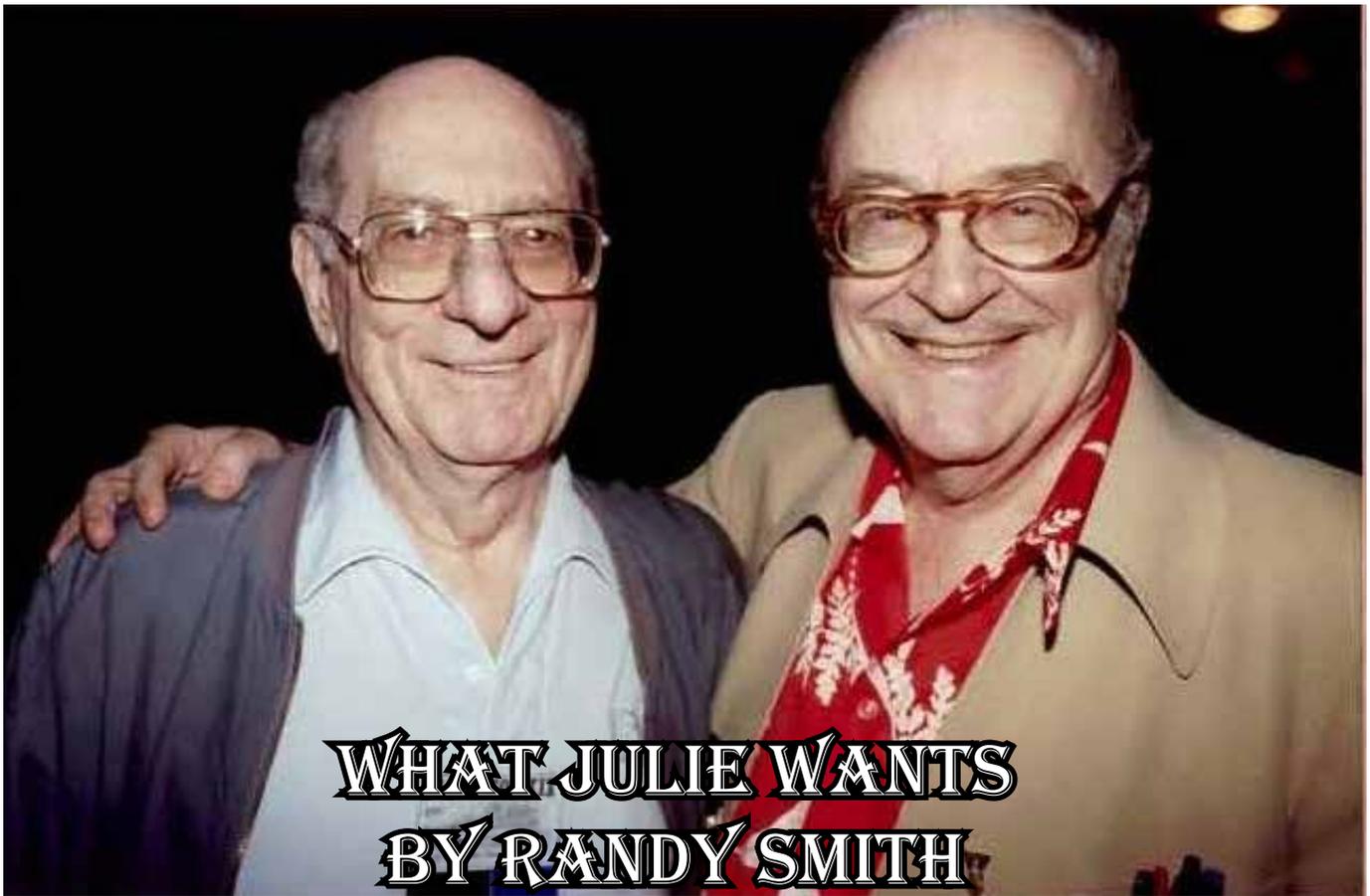
So, what's in here? Well, you already saw the fantastic Mo Starkey cover! I love Johnny Thunder! There's Randy Smith, my hero! There's Derek McCaw, whose comic writing is phenomenal! Guy Lillian, who had an amazing fortune to have Julie as a Mentor! James Bacon gives us a look at the Silver Age and War Comics, and as always, he's a genius. Derek McCaw rounds out the issues because how could it not?



Christopher J Garcia
Editor

The next issue of Claims Department will be dedicated to The Zodiac Killer in life, pop culture, and general fear...

Deadline - October 31st



Shortly after Julius Schwartz died, I was asked to be on a memorial panel for him at a Science Fiction convention. It was a fun, free-wheeling panel with each of the panelists sharing personal anecdotes of times we had spent with Julie. There was plenty of laughter as we remembered this man who had touched all of our lives in so many ways, both through his work and through personal connections. It was the most fun I had had on a panel in a long time.

The panel was scheduled early in the afternoon on Friday of the convention. Most of the convention members had not yet arrived onsite. Our audience consisted of the wife of one of the panelists and a Braniac 5 action figure. The action figure had arrived in the purse of the other audience member and was carefully placed on the seat next to her specifically to double the size of the crowd.

Scheduling was clearly a factor in the size of attendance at the panel. Were there other factors as well? What does the average fan think of when her or she thinks of Julius Schwartz? Was he simply some guy who edited comics a few decades ago? Do they think of him at all?

During the panel, I told of a conversation that I had once had with Julie. We were talking about the upcoming Worldcon. I wanted to know if he would be there.

I was surprised by Julie's reaction.

"Did you know," he said, "That I've never been asked to be a Fan Guest of Honor at a worldcon?"

He said this with anger and hurt in his voice. His emotional level was strong. This was clearly something very important to him.

He pointed out that he was one of the founders of fandom. He was a part of the group that gave birth to worldcons. Yet, he had never been a Fan Guest of Honor. He had never even been asked. It was the one honor he really wanted and he was angry that he had never received it.

Julie was part of the organizing committee for the first worldcon. He was a member of First Fandom. He co-edited one of the earliest fanzines. He was one of the first literary agents to specialize in Science Fiction. His involvement in the early days of fandom, both as a fan and as a professional was deep and broad. Julie helped shape the fandom we know and love today.

During the 1980s, Julie had a slide presentation that he used to show at conventions. It consisted of

pictures from the early days of fandom, including club meetings and cons from the 1930s and 1940s. It was a fascinating show. I think I attended it several times. Alas, the crowds tended to be small, mostly consisting of a few fanhistory buffs like myself and some First Fans who came to reminisce about their younger days.

I've always wondered what happened to those pictures. I'm pretty sure that there were some photographs that I have never seen anywhere else. Julie, himself, was often the photographer.

At LACon III, the 1996 Worldcon in Anaheim, Timebinders, the group of fans interested in maintaining a record of Fandom's past, set up a Fanhistory Room. A series of photographs from Hugo Award banquets from the 1950s and early 1960s were on display. These were official convention photographs taken by professional photographers hired for the event and consisted of well-dressed fans and pros sitting around banquet tables. The goal was to identify each person in each photo, thereby documenting as much as possible who had attended each convention.

Julie came into the room. We asked him to try to make some identifications. He carefully looked at each photo, providing names if he could.

As he came to one particular year, he said, "I'm not sure I could be helpful on this one. I missed the convention that year."

Then, looking more carefully, he said, "Oh, look, there I am!"

Julie didn't miss many conventions in those days. Even after he began working full time in the comics industry, he remained a Science Fiction Fan. When comics fandom began to take shape in the 1960s, Julie remained involved in both the SF and the comics branches of the fannish community.

Not long after Julie told me of his wish to be a Worldcon Fan Guest of Honor, some members of a worldcon bid committee asked me for suggestions about who they should ask to be GoHs if they should win the bid. I told them about my conversation with Julie. I mentioned that he would be thrilled to be asked.

The bid committee members expressed doubts as to whether Fan Guest of Honor would be the right category for him. One of them suggested that maybe Julie should be a "Special Guest" or possibly a "Comics Guest." I repeatedly emphasized that Fan Guest of Honor was what Julie wanted. He had said so to me personally and had said it emphatically. He wanted to be recognized for his contributions to Fandom. This was something that would make him happy.

"He wants to be Fan Guest of Honor," I said several times, emphasizing the word "Fan."

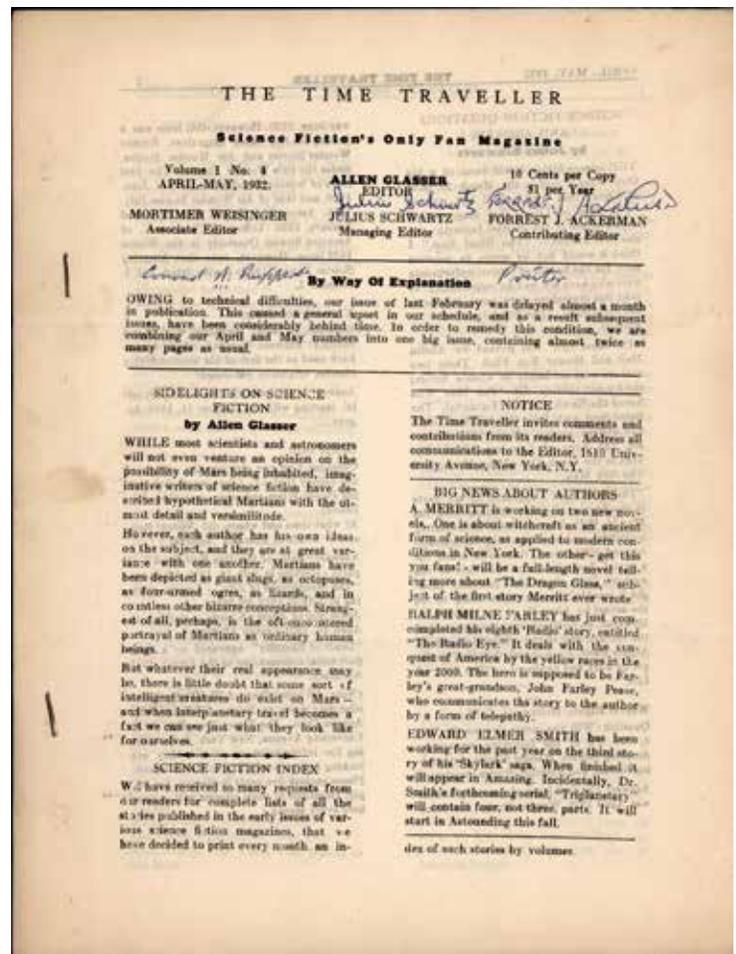
They did not get it.

Maybe they thought that being a Fan Guest of Honor would be a lesser kind of recognition for him. Maybe they were less aware of his contributions to giving birth to fandom than of his contributions to the birth of the Silver Age of comics. Maybe they simply did not think that he had good name recognition.

I do not know.

What I do know is that Julie would have considered it to be a great honor to be Fan Guest of Honor at a worldcon. Sadly, he died before he got that chance.

It was what he wanted.





ADAM STRANGE -OR- THE SPACEMAN BY CHRIS GARCIA



When I was very young, not much older than the two poop-factories I parent right now, I remember my Dad's piles of comics. There was the war comics pile, kept in the small hutch next to the big chair in the living room, and there were the dirty comics, kept in the orange box on a shelf that was supposedly out of my reach, and a small pile of DC comics that lived in a closet.

I spent a lot of time climbing around inside closets as a youngster.

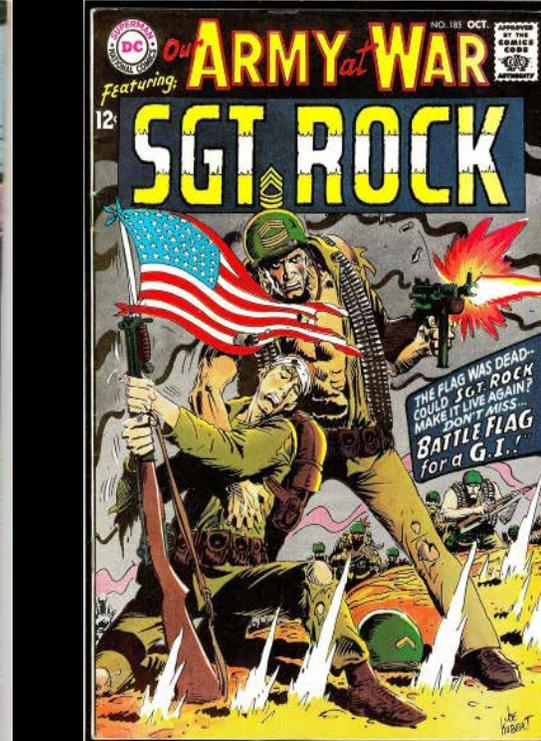
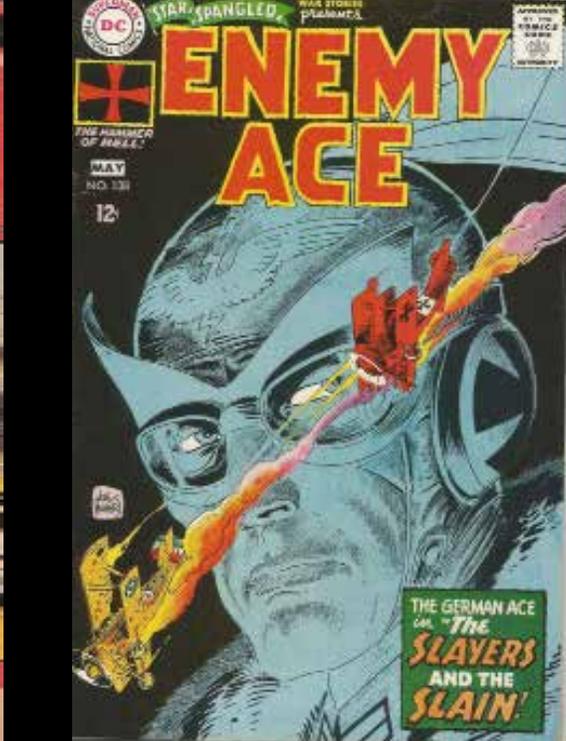
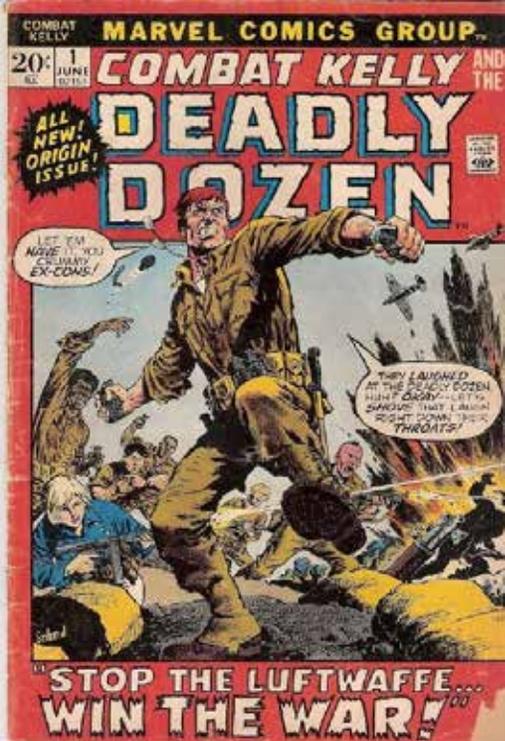
That pile was special, because it had about twenty comics of various types. There were issues of The Justice League of America, The Atom, Green Lantern, and House of Mystery, but the ones I loved were called Mystery in Space. They were science fiction stories, the issues he had were from the early 1960s. They had all sorts of wild stories, with characters like Knights of the Galaxy, and Interplanetary Insurance, Inc.. The character I loved was Adam Strange.

At that point, I couldn't read. I wouldn't really be reading well enough until I was 7 or so, but the way he looked, with the pink outfit and the shark's fin on his helmet, plus his traveling and fighting, made him my favorite. I wore out those issues, tore 'em to shreds, not out of malice, but just by reading and re-reading and re-re-reading each of them over and over again.

Julie Schwartz created Adam Strange, along with artist Murphy Anderson, who designed the costume. That was really what drew me in, because it wasn't the words, the ideas, but that image of Adam Strange that did it. The feeling of the comic, as if I had watched a movie without the sound on, still made a sort of impact, but it was divorced from the meaning the writer had likely intended. In fact, I had my own name for him – The Spaceman.

I would play The Spaceman, running around the house with an old garden hose nozzle as my ray gun, with my hand on the top of my head serving as The Spaceman's mighty fin. I would basically run about the house going 'blast!' and climbing into closets that were caves and towers.

I was given a copy of a wonderful book called Mysteries In Space, which were re-prints of a lot of DC sci-fi comics from the Silver Age. It's a great book, and feature two Adam Strange stories, one of which was The Planet That Came to a Standstill. The story was the one that explained how Strange had saved the Justice League from Kanjor Ro. Gardner Fox had written the issue, and is considered one of the finest Adam Strange stories of the early 1960s. The art from that issue, with Carmine Infantino and Anderson penciling and inking, was something I instantly knew. It was one of the issues I had read, in the closet, in those days before I could read. It was The Spaceman! I read it in the hospital while my Boys were in the Intensive Care Nursery, and it brought me back to those days, and I had a strange urge to put my hand to the top of my head and make a fin...



SILVER AGE WAR COMICS BY JAMES BACON

What are silver age comics? In the Notting Hill Comic and Book Exchange on Pembridge road in London, it is a box with more expensive comics predominately from the sixties, At The Escapist, it is hundreds of comics in boxes on the first floor in Berkeley, In London, at Orbital, they are on the wall, as they are in Boston in Davis Square at Comicazzi. Some stores do not stock them, or hold them well in their original format others, while I am standing in the premises them I see large quantities of cash handed over for prized rarities.

An age of comic books encompasses all that was produced. It is an era, a period in time. Indeed there seems to be very decided start and end point. The start is with *Showcase* number 4, dated October 1956, with Flash on the cover by Joe Kubert and Carmine Infantino. This comic ushered in a new age.

Lets be clear, despite comic book racks now being flooded with Superheroes DC comics only had 3 superheroes that had their own titled books, Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. Julius Schwartz edited the comic that was written by Gardner Fox and brought the revival of Golden Age heroes to the then current audience. The term 'Silver Age' came from a letter to *Justice League of America* in reference to the Golden Age coming back, another revived title, like *Green Lantern*, *Hawkman*, or *The Atom* which were all also revived. It wasn't as neat or planned as modern rebirths and *New 52's*, it just happened organically, with obvious genius and great story telling ability behind it. Indeed there is a fist fight about whether the introduction of Martian Manhunter a year previous in *Detective Comics* in 1955 is the starting point, and of course there was an Earth-1 and Earth-2 situation, which has always left me confused and lets be honest was a bit, untidy.

So the time seems to be from 1956 to 1970, a time when an incredible number of comics came to the fore.

For many readers, the silver age of comics is a perfect term, for it was the time that so many great comics occurred; so many new and wonderful marvellous characters started. Like many things though, not all children's programmes or books transcend generations and indeed while many people collect and value the silver age of comics, I do not find many to be as entertaining as reads of the last 20 years. That is just about taste, it does not denigrate readers or fans of a given work, it is just that the work is not for me.

The area of comics I think I read the most is War Comics, It was a hugely active time, indeed from a perspective of creativity, most of the legendary War Comic characters were created within the time of the Silver Age. The fifties and sixties of course were full of War Films and TV programmes depicting the Second World War, to a degree that we do not see currently. The Cold War was on, and American victories were a seller. The Johnny 7 one man army toy gun was the best seller in 1964, and there were no shortage of militaristic toys, pastimes and indeed comics, to entertain.

The calibre of the comics is variable. The artwork especially so, with nearly abstract depictions of tanks, regalia and insignia at times, and at others, accurate detail and impressive attention to mechanical and realistic detail. Some of this art was, in fairness, incredible, Some dreadful.

I sometimes find the stories too short and not deep enough, but there are occasions when American war comics aspire to the heights and for American war comics this time was a Silver Age for creation, although not so much revival.

Sgt. Rock appeared un-named and unranked in *G.I. Combat* #68 in January 1959, although referred to as The Rock. Another appearance refining the character led to a proper debut as Sgt. Rock in *Our Army at War* #83 in June 1959. Created by Robert Kanigher and Joe Kubert it is one of the longer lasting War Heroes from DC.

Sgt Rock's 'Easy company' were an interesting bunch for the sixties but thankfully was not as inherently racist as 'Chop chop' from the 'Blackhawks'. Backhawk, which began in *Military Comics* 1 in 1941, I was the fourth comic that had been continuously running from the 40's through the fifties but the racism in 1941 was incredible.

Thankfully, there was some movement, so when Jackie Johnson a black American ex-heavyweight boxing champion first appeared in *Our Army at War* #113 December 1961, he was not the stereotype that would make one utterly cringe. Little Sure Shot, Louis Kiyahani was an Apache sniper, Both characters were treated very differently, more emphatically and with less stereotyping than had gone before. There were some odd things occurring, for instance Little Sure Shot decorated his helmet with feathers, but only with the permission of Rock, who felt he was honouring his heritage. Little Sure Shot first appeared in *Sgt. Rock's Prize Battle Tales*, a Giant 80-Page War Annual January 1964. All of Easy Company were issued with nicknames as Rock did not want them re-entering civvy street and recalling what they had done in the heat of battle when they heard their name called. The comic saw a title change to *Sgt. Rock* and ran for another 360 or so issues up to number #422. Sgt. Rock has lived on though, and there have been a number of mini series about the character.

Two months before Showcase #4 hit the racks, *All-American Men of War* hit the news stands, in September 1956 and would run for nearly ten years, with 118 issues. Robert Kanigher who worked with Julie Schwartz on the revival of Superheroes was crucial to so many of the stories in this comic, but he was joined by amazing artists such as Alex Toth, Gene Colan, Russ Heath, Joe Kubert, and Irv Novick.

1960 would see the debut of Johnny Cloud an Native American hero, in *All American Men of War* issue # 82. Named 'Flying Cloud' by his Navajo Chief father, his victimisation growing up was portrayed, as was his overcoming prejudice to a fighter pilot in the US Army Air Force as the rank of Lieutenant. A crack pilot, he shot down many German planes, was truly heroic, and attained the rank of Captain. Racial prejudice was still a factor to the story, but there were especially interesting moments, when, for instance, he had a dream where he saw himself flying jets in the future, or the amount of guilt he felt for those who were lost from his squadron.

Later he would join the 'Losers, after being found by by Jeb Stuart of the Haunted Tank stories, who also picked up Captain Storm, a Marine PT boat commander, and Gunner and Sarge, all who had felt matters were so grim for them, that being the 'Losers' was the best title for them.

Enemy Ace first appeared in *Our Army at War* # 151 in Feb-



February 1965, Hans Von Hammer was a World War I pilot flying for the Germans, and his stories told the German side of the war. A good and honourable German, many will not know that he had an American contemporary in Lt Steve Savage, Balloon Buster, who displaced Johnny Cloud for his first appearance, in *All American Men of War* #112. Now Enemy ace was created by Robert Kanigher and drawn by Joe Kubert and Kanigher also created Steve Savage, with art by Russ Heath. Savage though had a Native American heritage of sort, his father was Brian Savage or as he was known Ke-Woh-No Tay - He Who Is Less Than Human – because he had been stolen as a child by Kiowa Indians, and then when he found out his true heritage was known as Scalphunter by non-native Americans. Now, before we tarnish the Silver Age, it should be mentioned that this whole Scalphunter episode actually only came about in a 1977 *Weird Western* tales, but it is rather indicative of how stories can fluctuate between some sensitivity and absolutely none in comics.



Roy Lechtinsein,, who went on to create such expensive pop art obviously saw the value to War Comics. He was not so much a fan, as seeking, influence, and so if you look at his art many of the comics of the time can be traced as having been great sources of inspiration.

Star Spangled War Stories #102 contained the 'CRAK'

All American Men of War #89 had a Jerry Grandenetti cover, along with the story from #90 *Wingmate of Doom* seem to piece together his most famous WHAM!

GI Combat #94 featured Jeb Stewart which had the 'Okay Hotshot' image,

Our Fighting Forces #66 had the dog growling 'Grrrrr!'

Our Fighting Forces issue # 71 saw the torpedo firing 'Los' find its source.

While one could source of seek out those given issues to see if they are representative of DC War Comics of the era, In 1979 Michael Uslan edited a graphic novel: *America at War: The Best of DC War Comics* and offered a different selection. At some two hundred and fifty six pages, there is a very interesting collection of comics from Blackhawk in *Military Comics* 1941 up to *Unknown Soldier* in *Star Spangled War Stories* in 1974.

From the silver age the following comics were chosen:

Push-button War from *Our Army At War* #67 Feb 58;

Sgt Rock in *Our Army At War* #83 June 59;

Gunner in *Our Fighting Forces* #49 Oct 59;

Mlle. Marie in *Star Spangled War Stories* #87 Nov 60;

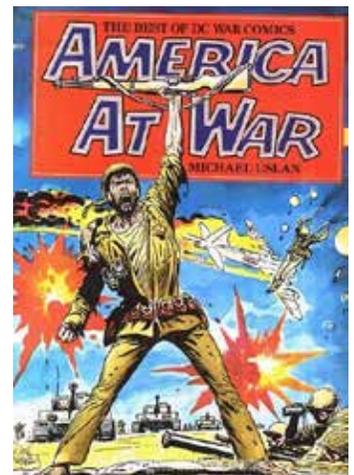
Haunted Tank in *GI Combat* #87 May 61;

Enemy Ace in *Showcase* 57 Aug 65;

Sgt Rock in *Our Army At War* #160 Nov 65;

War That Time Forgot in *Star Spangled War Stories* #134 Sep 67;

Capt. Hunter in *Our Fighting Forces* #102 Aug 66;



Meanwhile, as a counter to the All American tough NCO Sgt Rock, Mademoiselle Marie made her first appearance in August 1959. Star Spangled War Stories had started before in 1952 but it wasn't until August 1959 that Robert Kanigher and Jerry Grandenetti created based somewhat on French resistance fighter Simone Segouin.

The Superhero revival began at DC, and Julie Schwartz was key to that, Marvel Comics really capitalised on the market, Fantastic Four, Spiderman and so many comics erupted and helped create fandoms and conventions.

Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos published by Marvel Comics was created as a test to see if the worst title Stan Lee could come up with would sell, and so Jack Kirby and himself created Nick Fury. In fairness to Sgt Fury, he like Sgt Rock had considerable diversity within his ranks, Private Isadore "Izzy" Cohen was a Jewish American comic book hero, pretty unheard of up until then, Private Gabriel Jones was a Black American, and just like Jackie Johnson was seen serving in a Unit with white soldiers, or fully integrated, something that did not happen until 1948, and Private Eric Koenig was a turn coat, who had defected from Germany. Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos #1 appeared in May 1963 from Marvel Comics. Although the comic would continue for some time, original work only appeared up until the mid seventies. Nick Fury though went on to be a Colonel and very much so a leader of a covert operations spook organisation SHIELD. By 1966 with artist Jim Steranko the comic was very artistically progressive, and considered to be a phenomenal work.

The War Comics and indeed the comics of the time, do not always fill me with the pleasure that I get from other comics. It is hard to pin point, sometimes I think the earnestness is too clumsy, Sgt. Rock falls to bits, but doesn't really, and there isn't a maturity that I can sometimes expect. Sgt. Rock never has a commanding officer for very long, and their fatality is normally required for the story to progress with Rock in charge. I haven't really gotten into Sgt Fury, and I secretly wish that some modern writers would take all these characters, especially the DC ones and do something considerably more decent with them. There have been moments of brilliance, such as War in Heaven by Garth Ennis, and Sgt. Rock: The Lost Battalion by Billy Tucci but these are rare occurrences.

One Comic that does attain a status of excellence in my mind from this era is Blazing Combat.

Harvey Kurtzman's Frontline Combat which ran from 1951 to 1954 and Two-Fisted Tales from 1950 until 1955 from EC Comics was an influence on James Warren who had found some success with his horror comic Creepy and expanded into the War genre.

These stories, exemplified the horror of war, the loss, the utter waste that could come from fighting, eschewing a moralistic and patriotic heroic and mens adventure tropes to focus on the human elements, and spread that through a wide variety of perspectives. This magazine format comic lasted but four issues, with stories about 8 pages long. All were written by Archie Goodwin, with some artists contributing to the stories, the four covers by Frank Frazetta. Artists included Gene Colan, Reed Crandall, Russ Heath, Joe Orlando, Alex Toth and Al Williamson. The American War of Independence, the American Civil War, World War I, World War 2, The Korean War and the Vietnam War all had stories told. Given this was 1965, it was a tremendously brave thing to do, to feature a war that was really just starting, indeed issue 2 caused considerable upset when the view point of a Vietnamese farmer was demonstrated that innocents existed and could be collateral damage. This upset manifested itself in many ways, the story was entitled 'Landscapes' but orders fell through the floor, distributors were potentially pressurised, various veteran organisations quietly expressed distaste, Military Post Exchanges stopped ordering them and the comic ceased.

If anything, Blazing Combat is the Silver Age War Comic. It was honest and raw and the art was very honest and accurate.

Fantagraphics Books reprinted all four Blazing Combat comics in a collected edition most recently, first in hardback in 2009 and then in paperback in 2010 and it should be available from usual sources.

If ever there was a Silver Age American war comic, it would have to be Blazing Combat, and although you may not know of the characters that appeared therein, they are much more real.



JULIUS SCHWARTZ & AMBUSH BUG BY DEREK MCCAW

When Julius Schwartz essentially triggered the Silver Age, it was with a healthy dose of science fiction. Though there was still an element of magic to it – are lightning and a chemical bath any more logical a reason for super-speed than vague “hard water experiments”? – at least the illusion of science was more prevalent.

He also set the stage for both Superman and Batman to have character renaissances by making them more serious. Schwartz gets a lot of credit for supporting the team of Dennis O’Neill and Neal Adams, who made Batman dark again, and of course, did the classic Green Lantern/Green Arrow book.

But what Schwartz doesn’t get enough credit for is his sense of whimsy, and pushing his writers’ creativity to the limit with silly ideas that they spun into classics. As the legend goes, it was Schwartz who noticed that books with gorillas on the cover sold better, so 1960s DC books have a lot of gorilla foes, including one that made it to the CW – Gorilla Grodd.

More infamously or brilliantly, Julie would commission cover images and then challenge writers to come up with the story that explained it. Far more often than not, writers rose to the challenge – whether it was as simple as the Flash begging readers to buy this issue because his life depended on it, or as ridiculous as the Flash having been turned into a living wooden marionette.

That style reached its apex with the *DC Challenge*, a 12-issue mini-series in the 1980s in which one creative team would write an issue, create a title for the next story and leave on a cliffhanger. Nobody knew where the mini-series was going, and though the whole thing was confusing and nonsensical, I will never forget the issue title “Don’t Bogart That Grape, Hand Me the Gaspump.”

Julie was also one of the earliest creators to break the fourth wall – not just with the Flash addressing readers, but by appearing in a Flash story himself. It was his metafictional idea that we all exist on Earth-Prime, and occasionally characters from the DC Universe could cross over, and vice versa. When Grant Morrison rose to acclaim with *Animal Man*, inserting himself in the story, he wasn’t breaking new ground; he was echoing Julius Schwartz.

The style and the silliness was paid back by Keith Giffen in the pages of *Ambush Bug*. Giffen took Schwartz’ cover approach to the extreme. Though always a goofy character, with each successive mini-series the book got

more and more surreal as Giffen got bolder. It reached the point that the challenge was between plotter/artist Giffen and writer Robert Loren Fleming. Some pages have random panels with no clear connection other than Ambush Bug being in them, and it was up to Fleming to justify them.

The direct tweaking of Schwartz, however, occurred in one of the last solo appearances of Ambush Bug, the *Ambush Bug Nothing Special*. After several issues where it became clear the DC Universe wanted nothing to do with Ambush Bug, the special opens on a self-help book. One bold “quote” stands out. While many on the page are testimonials to the efficacy of this “Book of Jobs,” Julius Schwartz’s is self-aggrandizing: “I am DC’s Goodwill Ambassador. I have always been DC’s Goodwill Ambassador. I will always be DC’s Goodwill Ambassador.”

It’s almost a throwaway tweak, but the rest of the surreal book will return to it, literalizing Schwartz’s immortality in comic book history. Even though he had largely retired by that point, Giffen roasts Schwartz as the true power in the DC Universe – an editor declaring war on whimsy.

As Ambush Bug travels through time to find a place where he can slide back into the DC Universe, Schwartz is there. In the 30th Century, he’s a member of the Legion of Super-Heroes, “Julie Lad.” When Ambush Bug stumbles into a desolate wasteland in the far future, Julius Schwartz is still there, controlling DC Comics. There is no escaping him.

Ambush Bug tries to adopt other comic company styles, mocking Image Comics and pitting Schwartz against their attitude. When he recreates himself as a Rob Leifeld-style musclebound hero, his enemy reveals himself to be Schwartz. And then Sugar of Sugar and Spike hires Ambush Bug to hunt Schwartz down.

It should be mentioned that Schwartz, very much a hands-on editor, oversaw every appearance of *Ambush Bug*, and had wisely given the character over to Giffen. For having a good sense of humor and an instinct for what got people hooked on DC Comics, Giffen was right about Schwartz: he will always be DC’s Goodwill Ambassador.

Or, as he put it himself in that same *Ambush Bug Nothing Special*, in Julie’s Helpful Tips #3 – “A kabuki without make-up is like a Day without Doris.”



JULIUS SCHWARTZ – OUR FAVORITE GUY’S FAVORITE GUY BY GUY LILLIAN

What do I owe Julius Schwartz? Everything. I owe him a good part of my love of writing. I owe him any sense of appreciation that I possess. I owe him my love of the fantastic. I owe him my community. I owe him my marriage. In a way I owe him my life – because I can’t imagine my life without those things, and like I say, all of those things, I owe in great part to Julie.

Let me start where all things start: at the start. Near enough to my start, too: a town in the Mojave Desert called Rosamond, a bedroom for Edwards Air Force Base (Chuck Yeager once lived there), where my grandparents lived. My folks and I visited there every summer, and on a hot summer evening one day in the late fifties I found myself sitting by a magazine basket leafing through its stash of publications. Within the stack of otherwise forgettable fluff I found a copy of Showcase ... starring The Flash.

Now this wasn’t the first comic book I’d ever seen – far from it. I’d read – or looked at – many a Superman or Superboy story as an even younger whelp. In fact, I remember my true first comic: a copy of *World’s Finest* (52 pages for a dime) with Supes, Batman and Robin on the cover ... getting shoeshines. But this was my first encounter with the new force in comics – the Silver Age – and its refurbished set of superheroes.

Hooked, landed, fileted, sautéed ... addicted.

Around that same time, *Twilight Zone* came onto the air, I discovered Andre Norton novels at the local library, and I finally got to see *Forbidden Planet* – on the tube. (For some reason, my father took me to watch *Conquest of Space* ... twice.) I was, then, now, forever, a fan. But something about *Flash* held special appeal. This issue had showcased (haha) the Mirror Master, primary among Flash’s epic Rogue’s Gallery. The next – which I latched onto as soon as it appeared – featured “The Cosmic Treadmill”. And something else. A letter column.

This was back in the days when DC Comics was in the practice of sending original *Flash* artwork and scripts to letterhacks whose LOCs – letters of comment, that is – particularly tickled the editor’s fancy. The editor being whom he was, that usually meant letters containing the worst puns. “Gorilla Grodd would always be *monkeying* around” – that level of wit. After reading *Flash* for a year or two, and falling in love with Carmine Infantino’s artwork, this practice annoyed me, and if you don’t remember from your own life, there’s no creature more annoying or annoying on this planet than a 13-year-old nerd who reads comic books.

So, in the very home where I had first found that *Showcase*, I borrowed a pen and a small pad of writing paper and told that editor off. How dare he waste invaluable treasures on bad jokesters telling bad jokes? I stole a stamp from my grandmother and mailed my bombast away. That would show that editor ... that Julius Schwartz.

Months pass. I am buying comics at the Thrifty Drug Store near our apartment in Riverside, California. One of them is *Flash* #133, which is blessed with the stupidest cover ever to appear on a DC magazine. From a poster advertising an appearance by the evil magician Abra Kadabra a ray beams forth (or is it “a beam rays forth”?) from his magic wand, striking the Scarlet Speedster – who has the form of a man-sized wooden puppet! This illo would have been clever had it not been adorned with a thought balloon, Flash thinking – as who would not in his situation – “I have the strangest feeling I’m being turned into a puppet!”



Disregarding this idiocy, I walked back home across the mall parking lot, scanning the letter column as I strode. And I read “And finally, Guy Lillian, despite himself ...”

I actually won a prize for my little rant – the original script for “Kid Flash Meets the Elongated Man”, a John Broome back-up story featuring the two second-bananas fighting the Weather Wizard. Because we’d moved since I’d written the LOC, the m.s. took weeks and weeks to get to me, a frustrating experience indeed. But once I had it, I learned two things: (1) how D.C. Comics wrote their stories and (2) I mattered.

I had the strangest feeling I’d been turned into a letterhack.

I kept writing to Schwartz’s comics. Two other letters appeared in short order, in that terrific anthology of science fiction, *Strange Adventures*. This was a matter of great amusement to most of my schoolmates, whose literacy never reached the level of Nancy & Sluggo, never mind *Mystery in Space*, no offense to Ernie Bushmiller. Julie Schwartz’ comics always impressed me most because the stories were well-paced and, if I may say so, literate. I kept writing LOCs, and why not? Having my words published in a nationally-distributed magazine made up somewhat for being a skinny, goofy-looking nerd – as I said to a class once, “I’m too skinny for sports and too ugly for girls; I’ve gotta get some laughs out of this thing somehow!”

But phooey on such trivialities as real life. Having letters published in comics meant that my address was being published, which brought me into contact with other fans. Principal among these was Mike Friedrich of Castro Valley, who drove the fifty-some-odd miles to our home in Walnut Creek for a fannish confab – my first. Mike and I fell into a good-natured competition to see who could place the most LOCs – but then came July 9, 1966.

Mike had called me a few weeks earlier with a breathless statement/question: “How would you like to be a pro?” Julie Schwartz had responded to a letter he’d sent DC with an offer to read and perhaps buy scripts – and to let me in on the offer! Furthermore, he told Mike that he and Mrs. Schwartz were planning a trip to San Francisco – jogging distance from our homes! Would we like to come say hello?

We were both ecstatic. Mike immediately began planning a mini-convention at his house to host Julie – who, it turned out, couldn’t come that far. No matter: after the con we’d drive over to The City and meet him there.

The minicon was jolly fun, although all I remember about it was the cartoonist from a local paper who gave a spiel. Afterwards we loaded into a fellow’s car and were off to San Francisco. Alas, within a couple of miles Friedrich remembered a script he had written for Schwartz, left at his home, and back we went to get it. En route, an elderly lady returning from the grocery store ignored a stop sign and plowed into us like a meteorite.

I’ve been in four major traffic accidents in my life, but this was the first. The noise was indescribable: kind of like sharing a grinding machine with a hundred tin cans. Everyone except Mike was smashed to bits (I suffered a miserable hematoma in my left leg) and ended up in the local emergency room – a break for us, as it turned out. We had the benefit of camaraderie and shared misery. Mike had his room full of comics ... and a dream destroyed. We never saw Schwartz that trip.

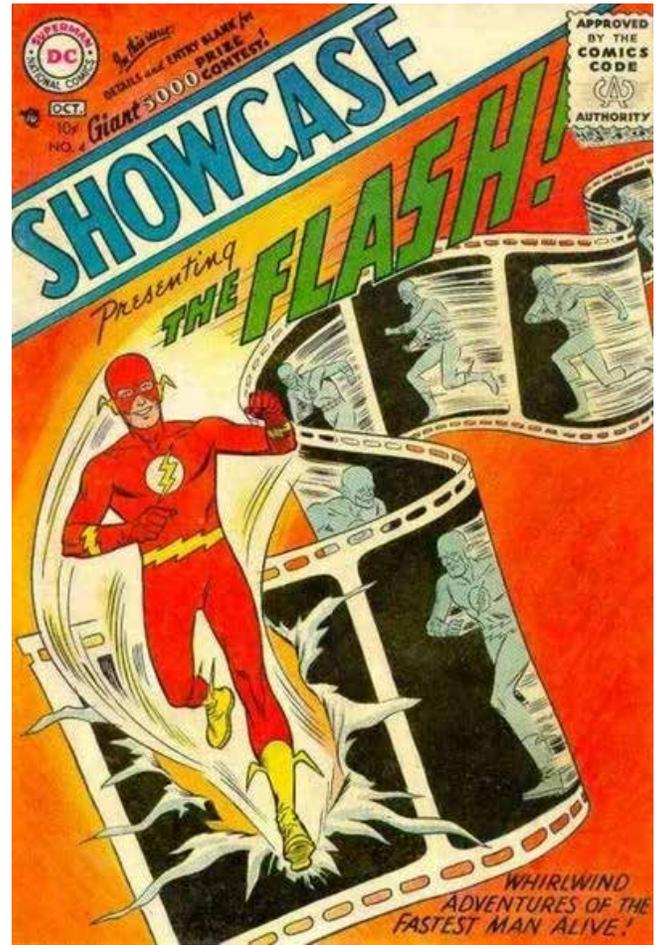
Of course, that wasn’t the end of things. Our dream was only deferred. Mike fulfilled his dream and became the writer he wanted to be, working on Julie’s *Justice League of America* and eventually founding his own comics line. He’s now a minister and doing even greater things, if such can be imagined. I went on in life, moving with my family to New Orleans after graduating from Berkeley.

I had maintained my desire to create fiction – but my teachers (among them Jackson Burgess and Lillian Hellman) turned my ambitions to other things besides comics. I applied to the Writing Program of the University of North Carolina. When accepted, however, I soon learned that Greensboro, site of my studies, was only twelve hours by bus from New York City – and we all know what’s in New York.

I made the call. They put me through. “Sir,” I stammered, “my name is Guy Lillian.”

“The thoid, no doubt!”

The next day, I went to DC Comics.



STAY TUNED FOR OUR FAVORITE GUY'S FAVORITE GUY
 PART 2
 IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF...
CLAIMS DEPARTMENT!!!

