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Legion of British Superheroes

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LEGION OF BRITISH SUPERHEROES



MURRAY

WELSH

JOHNSON

LEGION OF BRITISH SUPERHEROES

Edited by Chris Murray



There is a long tradition of British superheroes going back to the 1930s. Many of these long forgotten superheroes were created by largely forgotten creators, and published by small, and now largely forgotten publishers. Much of my research over the last several years has been concerned with investigating these characters, comics, creators and publishers. The main research output from this project was my book, *The British Superhero* (2017), published by the University Press of Mississippi, but I have also attempted to shine a light on this dimly lit corner of British comics history through various articles and presentations at conferences, conventions, and other events. Part of the work has taken the form of practice research - working with several very talented comics artists to create stories about British superheroes. One of the main strategies has been the creation of a fictional British superhero, Alpha, and a supporting cast that includes Alpha Girl and the villainous Doc Oculus!

The first half of this comic takes the form of a visual essay, with art by Gary Welsh. It presents a handful of British superheroes (there are so many more!). The aim is to give a sense of the types of British superheroes that have emerged over the years. It does not pretend to be comprehensive, but is intended to be indicative. There are also

references to comics that have engaged with this history, from Alan Moore and Alan Davis's *Captain Britain* and Moore and O'Neill's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, to Grant Morrison and Steve Yeowell's *Zenith*, and *Jack Staff* by Paul Grist. More recently Rebellion have been reprinting classic British superheroes in their Treasury of British Comics series, and offering contemporary reinterpretations through their mini series, *The Vigilant*.

The second half of the comic features Alpha, this time in a story set in 1960s Dundee, and involves another largely forgotten aspect of pop culture (groan), Pola Cola, a fizzy drink produced in Dundee by Robertson's Fruit Products Ltd. This story was drawn by Nick Johnson. The comic concludes with two public information style advertisements, responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, but influenced by health campaigns seen in British comics in the 1980s, such as the campaign against young people smoking, which saw Superman battling Nick O'Teen!

I hope you enjoy the comic and perhaps learn something about the wonderful world of British superheroes! If you would like to learn more please consult the research project's section on the Scottish Centre for Comics Studies website:

scottishcomicstudies.com/british-superheroes

Be seeing you,

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Guide to Abbreviations

There are a couple of abbreviations used in this comic. These typically follow the name of a copyrighted character and are used to identify the publisher, as follows:

AP - Amalgamated Press, which became Fleetway. These characters are currently owned by Rebellion.

DCT - DC Thomson.

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Front cover by Gary Welsh. Intro image by Helen Robinson. Back cover by Gary Welsh and Phillip Vaughan. Production by Rebecca Horner.

A Note on Publishers

In this comic there are references to some lesser known small publishers, such as Cardal, Scion, Cartoon Arts, and several others. These publishers appeared for a time during World War Two and in the years following. They often published British superhero stories, making up for the fact that the American comics coveted by British readers were hard to get hold of at the time.

SUPERHEROES ARE AMERICAN.



AFTER ALL, THEY FIGHT FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND THE AMERICAN WAY, RIGHT?

WELL, NOT ENTIRELY. SUPERHEROES HAVE EMERGED ALL AROUND THE WORLD, AND THERE HAVE BEEN A GREAT NUMBER OF BRITISH SUPERHEROES OVER THE YEARS.



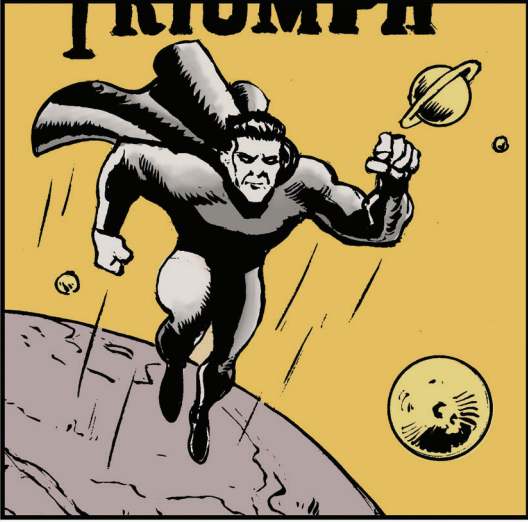
THESE RANGE FROM EARLY PROTOTYPE 'SUPERHEROES', LIKE *DICKY THE BIRD-MAN* BY JACK B. YEATS (COMIC CUTS, AP, 1910), TO COSTUMED FLYING ADVENTURERS LIKE *SCARLET BAT - THE WINGED AVENGER* (FILM FUN, AP, 1943).

THERE WERE ACTUALLY MORE SUPERVILLAINS THAN SUPERHEROES IN THE PENNY BLOODS AND DREADFULS OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND THE BOYS' PAPERS OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY. THESE INCLUDED *THE BLACK SAPPER* (ROVER, DCT, 1929).

SOME CHARACTERS, LIKE *PANSY POTTER THE STRONGMAN'S DAUGHTER* (THE BEANO, DCT, 1938,) WERE MODELLED ON AMERICAN CHARACTERS LIKE POPEYE.



EVERYTHING CHANGED WHEN *SUPERMAN* APPEARED IN AMERICA IN 1938, AND THE FOLLOWING YEAR HIS ORIGIN (TAKEN FROM THE NEWSPAPER STRIPS) WAS REPRINTED IN THE BRITISH COMIC, *TRIUMPH* (AP), WITH A COVER BY JOCK MCCAIL.



THE AMAZING MR X APPEARED IN THE *DANDY* (DCT) FOR 14 INSTALMENTS BETWEEN 1944 AND 1945 (THOUGH I SUSPECT IT WAS CREATED MUCH EARLIER, IN RESPONSE TO SUPERMAN APPEARING IN *TRIUMPH*). THE ARTWORK WAS BY LONG-TIME DCT ARTIST JACK GLASS.



THE BRITISH COMICS MARKET WAS BOOMING IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS AN IMPORT BAN ON AMERICAN COMICS, WHICH WERE CONSIDERED MUCH MORE GLAMOUROUS THAN TRADITIONAL BRITISH COMICS.

SMALLER BRITISH PUBLISHERS, SUCH AS CARDAL, PAGET, GERALD SWAN, SCION, FOLDES, MILLER AND SON, AND CARTOON ARTS PRODUCTIONS, FILLED THE GAP IN THE MARKET WITH DOZENS OF HOME-GROWN SUPERHEROES.

A KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO AMERICAN STYLE COMICS IN BRITAIN WAS DENIS GIFFORD, A COMICS ARTIST, WRITER, COLLECTOR, AND POP-CULTURE HISTORIAN.

GIFFORD CREATED HIS OWN CHARACTERS, SUCH AS *MR MUSCLE*, 'BRITAIN'S SUPERMAN' (*DYNAMIC COMICS*, INTERNATIONAL COMICS, 1945), MIXING SUPERHERO ACTION WITH A CARTOONY, HUMOROUS STYLE.

GIFFORD ALSO CREATED *STREAMLINE* (CARDAL, 1947) WITH HIS CHILDHOOD FRIEND, BOB MONKHOUSE (LATER TO FIND FAME AS A COMEDIAN AND TV PERSONALITY). MONKHOUSE CREATED *THE TORNADO*, WHO FIRST APPEARED IN *OH BOY!* COMICS (PAGET, 1948).

DENNIS. M. READER CREATED *POWERMAN* (*SUPER-DUPER COMICS*, CARTOON ARTS, 1947), WHICH SHOWCASED HIS AMERICAN ART STYLE TO GREAT EFFECT. READER ALSO CREATED *ELECTROGIRL* AND *PHANTOM MAID*. THESE WERE COMICS THAT WERE NOT TRYING TO PARODY AMERICAN SUPERHEROES, BUT TO MATCH THEM.

ANOTHER BRITISH ARTIST WORKING IN THE AMERICAN STYLE WAS CREWE DAVIS, WHO CREATED *DANE JERRIS*, AGENT ONE OF THE INTERPLANETARY SOLAR FORCE, AND *CAPTAIN MAGNET*. BOTH APPEARED IN *SUPER-DUPER COMICS* (CARTOON ARTS, 1948).

WONDERMAN - THE ATOMIC MARVEL, AKA CAPTAIN JUSTICE, WAS CREATED BY MICK ANGLIO (PAGET, 1948) AND OFTEN FEATURED STRAIGHT LIFTS FROM SUPERMAN COMICS.

CAPTAIN MIGHT (PROF ALAN ENGLISH), THE NEMESIS OF CRIME, APPEARED IN *AMAZING COMICS* (MODERN FICTION LTD, 1949), BY DENIS GIFFORD. LIKE *STREAMLINE*, THERE WAS A CLEAR 'INFLUENCE' FROM JOE SIMON AND JACK KIRBY'S *CAPTAIN AMERICA*.



ACE HART FIRST APPEARED IN 1948 (FOLDES), A MIX BETWEEN A SUPERHERO AND A SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURER LIKE FLASH GORDON.

THUNDERBOLT JAXON (AP, 1949), WRITTEN BY T. PENDOWER AND DRAWN BY HUGH MCNEILL AND INTENDED FOR THE AUSTRALIAN MARKET, WAS CLOSELY MODELLED ON FAWCETT'S CAPTAIN MARVEL, WHICH WAS BEING REPRINTED IN BRITAIN BY MILLER TO GREAT SUCCESS.

ELECTROMAN WAS PUBLISHED IN 1951 BY SCION AND, AGAIN, WAS CLOSELY MODELLED ON CAPTAIN MARVEL.

MASTERMAN COMIC (1952, STREAMLINE), WITH ART BY JOE COLQUHOUN, SAW ANOTHER OVERT CAPTAIN MARVEL... HOMAGE. CAPTAIN UNIVERSE #1 (ARNOLD BOOK COMPANY, 1954) BY ANGLO FOLLOWED THIS TREND TOO. MIRACLEMAN (1958) WAS DESIGNED BY ANGLO AS AN AMERICAN STYLE SUPERHERO FOR THE SPANISH MARKET BUT WAS ALSO REPRINTED IN BRITAIN.

MARVELMAN, 1954-63 (MILLER), BY ANGLO, PERHAPS THE BEST REMEMBERED BRITISH SUPERHERO OF THIS TIME, FAMOUSLY COPIED CAPTAIN MARVEL - AGAIN!

MILLER HAD BEEN REPRINTING CAPTAIN MARVEL IN BRITAIN UNTIL THE LAWSUIT BROUGHT BY SUPERMAN PUBLISHER DC COMICS EFFECTIVELY PUT FAWCETT OUT OF THE SUPERHERO COMIC BUSINESS.

RATHER THAN LOSE THE READERSHIP MILLER ASKED ANGLO TO PRODUCE A CHARACTER CLOSELY MODELLED ON CAPTAIN MARVEL... EVERYONE ELSE SEEMED TO BE DOING IT!

SUPERSTOOGIE, BY HARRY BANGER (GERALD SWAN, 1956), COMBINED SUPERHEROES WITH SLAPSTICK COMEDY, DEMONSTRATING A COMMON THEME IN BRITISH SUPERHEROES - PARODY.

BRITISH CREATORS OFTEN SEEMED UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO REPLICATE THE PATRIOTIC TONE OF AMERICAN SUPERHERO COMICS, AND INSTEAD UNDERMINED THE GENRE, DELIVERING AN IMPLICIT POLITICAL CRITIQUE OF AMERICA. BRITAIN WAS AN EMPIRE IN DECLINE WHILE AMERICA WAS THE WORLD'S FIRST ATOMIC SUPERPOWER. THE SUPERHERO WAS A SYMBOL OF SHIFTING GLOBAL POWER DYNAMICS.

SEVERAL SUPER-POWERED TYPES, SUCH AS *ADAM ETERNO* AND *THE STEEL CLAW*, APPEARED IN FLEETWAY'S *LION* (1952) AND *VALIANT* (1962), WHICH WERE NOTABLE FOR FEATURING A MIX OF STORIES BY BRITISH AND EUROPEAN ARTISTS.

SUPERMAN CREATOR JERRY SIEGEL EVEN WORKED FOR BRITISH COMICS, WRITING *THE SPIDER* FOR *LION* (1965), TURNING THIS MYSTERIOUS VILLAIN INTO A CRIME-FIGHTER. ARTWORK ON THE SPIDER WAS BY REG BUNN.

SIEGEL ALSO WORKED ON *GADGETMAN* AND *GIMMICK-KID*, DRAWN BY RENATO POLESE, WHICH APPEARED IN *LION* IN 1966, AND WAS CLEARLY INFLUENCED BY JACK KIRBY. HERE WAS AN ITALIAN ARTIST ECHOING THE STYLE OF AMERICAN SUPERHERO COMICS IN A BRITISH COMIC IN A STORY WRITTEN BY THE AMERICAN CREATOR OF SUPERMAN, AND INSPIRED BY THE BATMANIA SPARKED BY THE 1960S AMERICAN BATMAN TV SERIES THEN SHOWING ON UK SCREENS! HOLY TRANSNATIONAL COMICS CULTURES!

JOHNNY FUTURE BURST INTO *FANTASTIC (ODHAMS)* IN 1967 WITH STUNNING ARTWORK BY SPANISH ARTIST LUIS BERMEJO.



*STARR OF WONDERLAND** BY SPANISH ARTIST EMILIO FREJO WEARS AN ADVANCED FLYING SUIT AND PROTECTS HER FATHER'S AMUSEMENT PARK (DIANA, 1966, DCT).

VALDA, BY ARTIST DUDLEY WYNN, APPEARED IN *MANDY* IN 1968 (DCT), AND WAS MAGICALLY EMPOWERED WITH MYSTERIOUS POWERS AND ETERNAL YOUTH.

BRITISH SUPERHEROES WERE DIVERSIFYING AND EUROPEAN ARTISTS WERE MAKING INROADS INTO BOTH THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH COMICS INDUSTRIES.

*Olivia Hicks is the first academic to write on Starr of Wonderland, who she discusses alongside Valda in her PhD, *Of Gods and Girls: The Teen Superheroine in British and American Girls' Comics from 1940-1984*. I am indebted to her insightful work on British superheroines.

DURING THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S THERE WERE LOTS OF SUPER-POWERED TYPES IN DC THOMSON COMICS, WITH *KING COBRA* APPEARING IN *HOTSPUR* IN 1976, WITH ARTWORK BY RON SMITH, AND FUTURE COMICS SUPERSTAR DAVE GIBBONS DRAWING *SPRING-HEELED JACKSON* (1977), ALSO FOR *HOTSPUR*.

BILLY THE CAT AND *KATIE*, CREATED BY DAVID SUTHERLAND, WERE A COUPLE OF CATSUIT WEARING CRIME-FIGHTING KIDS WHO APPEARED IN *THE BEANO* FROM 1967.

LEOPARD OF LIME STREET WAS ANOTHER YOUNG CATSUIT-CLAD CRIME-FIGHTER, AND A REGULAR SERIES IN *BUSTER (FLEETWAY)* FROM 1976, WITH ARTWORK BY MIKE WESTERN AND ERIC BRADBURY. THE STORY HAD NUMEROUS SIMILARITIES TO *SPIDER-MAN*.

IN 1976 BRITISH SUPERHEROES ENTERED THE MARVEL UNIVERSE WITH THE CREATION OF *CAPTAIN BRITAIN*. PRODUCED IN THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF MARVEL BY CHRIS CLAREMONT AND HERB TRIMPE, THE CHARACTER WAS DESIGNED AS A CORNERSTONE OF THE NEW MARVEL UK IMPRINT, BUT THE CHARACTER STRUGGLED TO RESONATE WITH BRITISH READERS.

CAPTAIN BRITAIN FARED BETTER WHEN WRITTEN BY DAVID THORPE, THEN ALAN MOORE, AND LATER JAMIE DELANO, AND DRAWN BY ALAN DAVIS. MOORE'S STORIES IN PARTICULAR OFFERED A GOTHIC DECONSTRUCTION OF THE SUPERHERO, INCORPORATING MYTHOLOGY AND DYSTOPIAN THEMES.

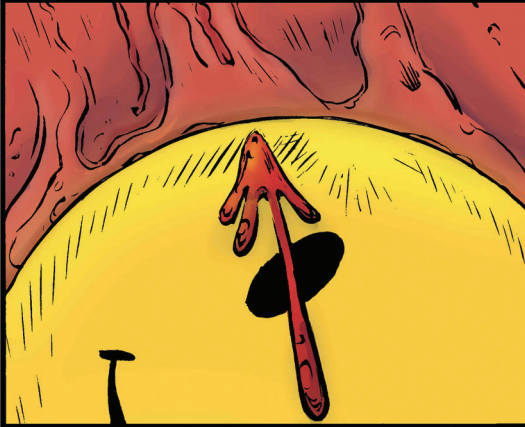
WARRIOR FEATURED *MARVELMAN* (QUALITY, 1982) BY MOORE AND GARRY LEACH, REWORKING THE 1950S CHARACTER CREATED BY ANGLO. THIS WENT MUCH FURTHER THAN *CAPTAIN BRITAIN* IN ITS VIOLENT, DECONSTRUCTIVE TAKE ON THE SUPERHERO.



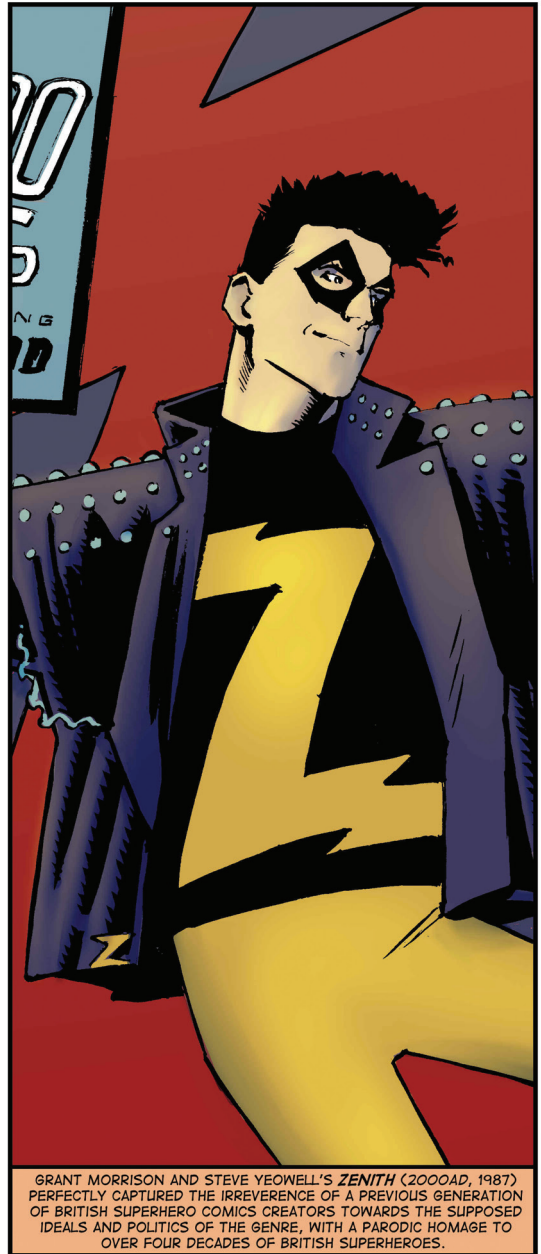
THIS WAS THE START OF WHAT WOULD BECOME KNOWN AS THE 'BRITISH INVASION' OF AMERICAN COMICS.



WATCHMEN (1986), BY MOORE AND DAVE GIBBONS WAS PERHAPS THE DEFINITIVE WORD ON THE DEGRADATION OF THE SUPERHERO IDEAL, AND ONE OF HIGH POINTS OF THE COMICS MEDIUM IN TERMS OF NARRATIVE POTENTIAL.



BRENDAN MCCARTHY AND PETER MILLIGAN'S *PARADAX* (STRANGE DAYS, ECLIPSE, 1994) WAS A POP ART MASTERPIECE, MIXING SUPERHEROES, THE SENSIBILITY OF INDEPENDENT COMICS, AND A HEAD TRIP OF ART SCHOOL SURREALISM.



GRANT MORRISON AND STEVE YEOWELL'S *ZENITH* (2000AD, 1987) PERFECTLY CAPTURED THE IRREVERENCE OF A PREVIOUS GENERATION OF BRITISH SUPERHERO COMICS CREATORS TOWARDS THE SUPPOSED IDEALS AND POLITICS OF THE GENRE, WITH A PARODIC HOMAGE TO OVER FOUR DECADES OF BRITISH SUPERHEROES.

BANANAMAN IS ONE OF THE LONGEST-RUNNING BRITISH SUPERHERO CHARACTERS, FIRST APPEARING IN *NUTTY* IN 1980 (DCT). HE NOW FEATURES IN *THE BEANO*, AND IS ONE OF THE FEW REMINDERS STILL IN PRINT OF THE IRREVERENT APPROACH OF GENERATIONS OF BRITISH COMICS CREATORS TOWARDS THE SUPERHERO GENRE.

PAT MILLS AND KEVIN O'NEILL'S *MARSHALL LAW* (1987) TURNS PARODY INTO SATIRE WITH ITS SADISTIC SUPERHERO-HATING JUDGE DREDD FOR THE LONG-UNDERWEAR BRIGADE - MARSHAL LAW!



ALSO INSPIRED BY THE X-MEN WAS MARTIN EDEN'S SMALL PRESS QUEER SUPERHERO SOAP-OPERA, *THE O MEN* (1997), AND *SPANDEX* (2008), WHICH FEATURES AN LGBTQ SUPERHERO TEAM BASED IN BRIGHTON,



IN THE EARLY 1990S CHRIS RYAN PRODUCED *BRIT FORCE*, INSPIRED BY MARVEL'S X-MEN. A NUMBER OF OTHER TITLES FOLLOWED, BUT THE 90'S COMICS BOOM SOON TURNED TO BUST, TAKING OUT RYAN'S LINE OF COMICS.

AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM PAUL GRIFF PRESENTED *JACK STAFF*, A RE-WORKING OF CAPTAIN BRITAIN AND UNION JACK, WITH SEVERAL NODS TO UK COMICS HISTORY, ALBEIT IN A MORE AFFECTIONATE WAY THAN ZENITH!



IN 2018 ALAN MOORE AND KEVIN O'NEILL'S LAUNCHED THE LAST VOLUME OF THEIR *LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN* SERIES ENTITLED *THE TEMPEST* (KNOCKABOUT).



THE STORY BROUGHT BACK A HOST OF BRITISH SUPERHEROES, SHAKING OFF THE IRREVERENCE OF ZENITH AND THE NOSTALGIA OF JACK STAFF. HERE, IN THE FULL LIGHT OF DAY, WERE BRITISH SUPERHEROES, NOT AS PARODY OR SATIRE, BUT WITH THEIR HIDDEN HISTORY REVEALED AND CELEBRATED.

THE HISTORY OF BRITISH SUPERHEROES IS A LONG AND RICH ONE. THESE CHARACTERS WERE OFTEN A PARODIC AND SATIRICAL RESPONSE TO THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS, BUT THEY CAN TELL US A LOT ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND BETWEEN THESE TWO DISTINCT BUT LINKED COMICS CULTURES.

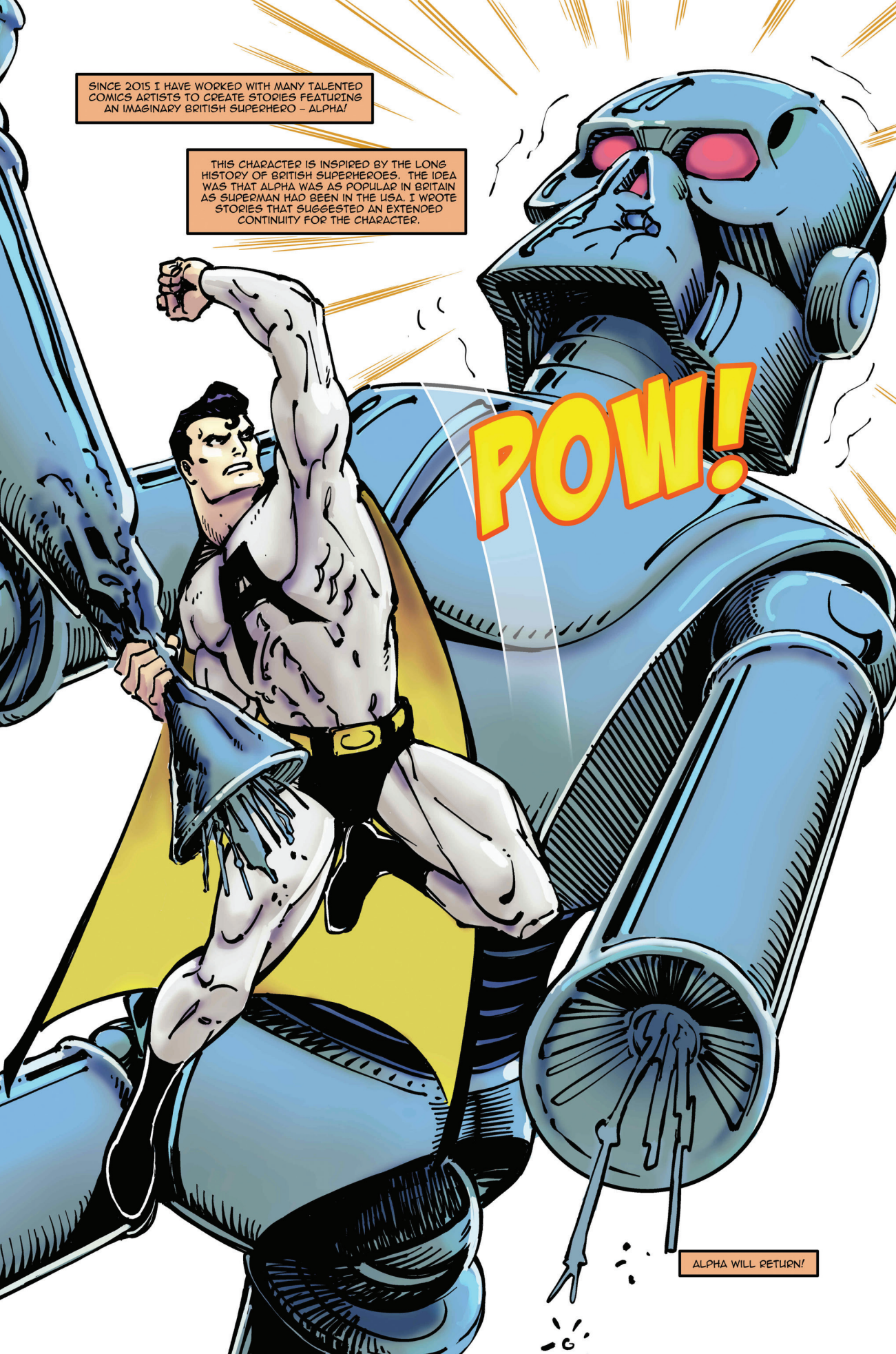


SINCE 2015 I HAVE WORKED WITH MANY TALENTED COMICS ARTISTS TO CREATE STORIES FEATURING AN IMAGINARY BRITISH SUPERHERO - ALPHA!

THIS CHARACTER IS INSPIRED BY THE LONG HISTORY OF BRITISH SUPERHEROES. THE IDEA WAS THAT ALPHA WAS AS POPULAR IN BRITAIN AS SUPERMAN HAD BEEN IN THE USA. I WROTE STORIES THAT SUGGESTED AN EXTENDED CONTINUITY FOR THE CHARACTER.

POW!

ALPHA WILL RETURN!



SUPERHERO WHO'S WHO



- | | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Mr. Muscle | 4. Ace Hart | 6. Electroman | 9. Masterman | 12. Phantom Maid | 15. Miracleman |
| 2. Streamline | 5. Thunderbolt Jaxon | 7. Powerman | 10. Captain Universe | 13. Dane Jerrus | 16. Marvelman |
| 3. The Tornado | | 8. Wonderman | 11. Electrogirl | 14. Captain Might | 17. Superstooge |



- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| 1. The Steel Claw | 4. Johnny Future | 6. Valda |
| 2. Gimmick-Kid | 5. Starr of Wonderland | 7. The Spider |
| 3. Gadgetman | | 8. King Cobra |



- | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 9. Billy the Cat | 11. Leopard of Lime Street | 12. Original Captain Britain |
| 10. Springheeled Jackson | | 13. Captain Britain |

ALPHA

6^D

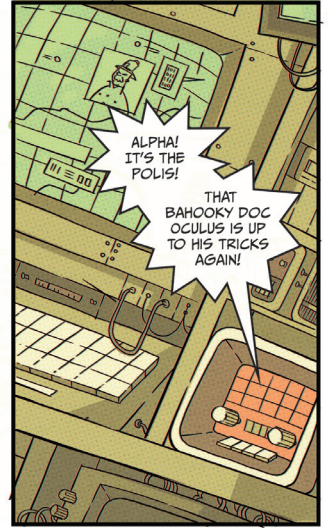
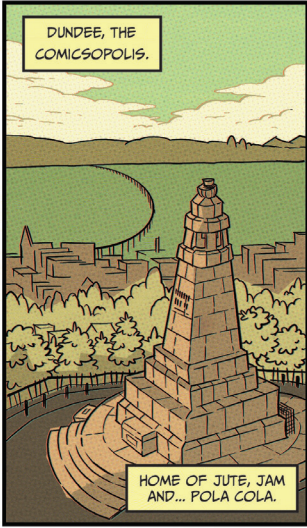


THE POLA COLA CAPER!

CHRIS MURRAY • NICK JOHNSON

Pola

Cola







Take it from

ALPHA

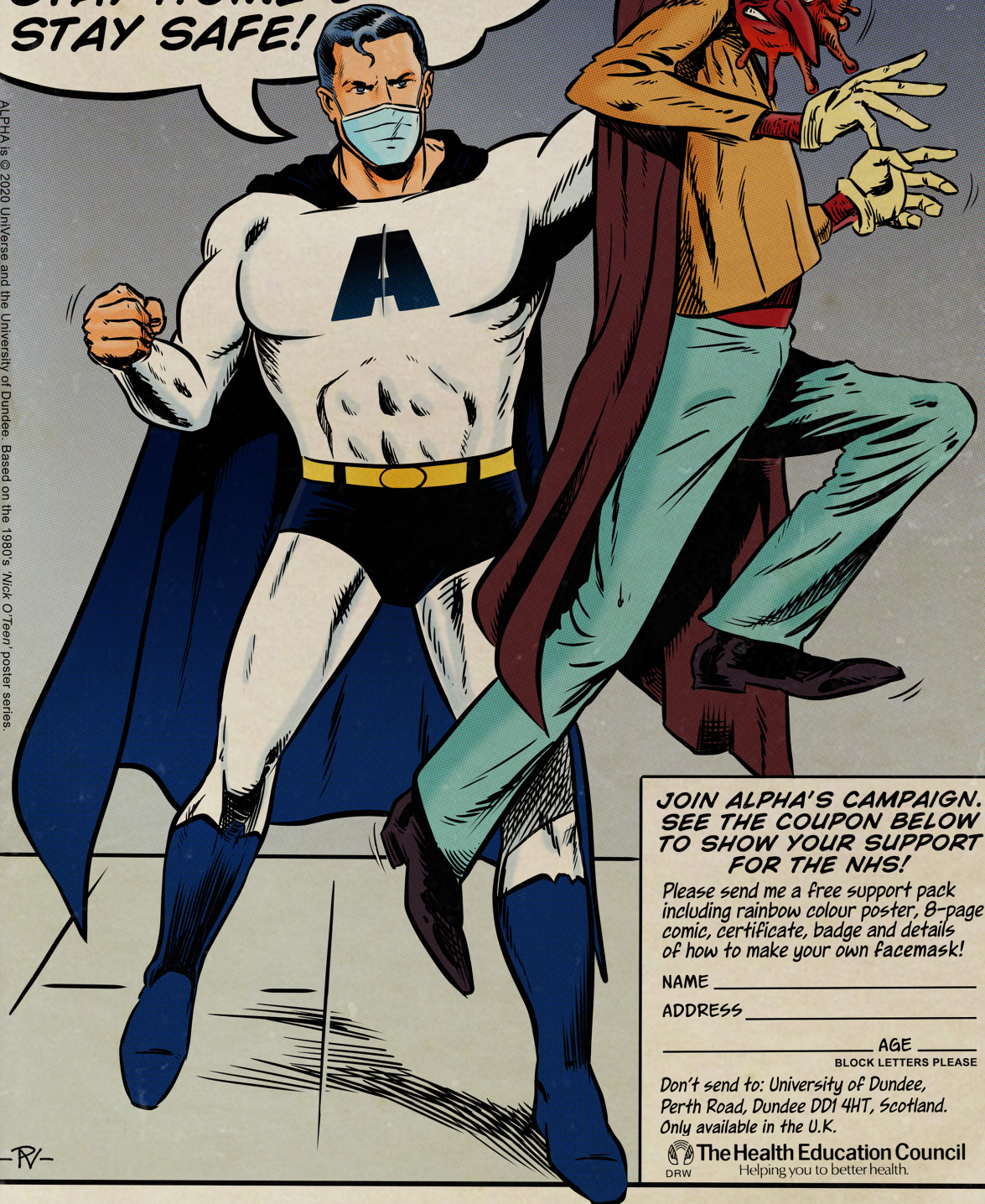


SOCIAL
DISTANCE, STAY
HOME! THE NHS
ARE THE REAL
HEROES.

**Remember
Alpha won't
be there
when you
wash your
hands!!!**

HELP ME CRUSH THE EVIL
COVID NINE 'TEEN!
 SELF-ISOLATE, PRACTICE
 SOCIAL DISTANCING
**STAY HOME &
 STAY SAFE!**

ALPHA is © 2020 Universe and the University of Dundee. Based on the 1980's 'Nick O'Teen' poster series.



**JOIN ALPHA'S CAMPAIGN.
 SEE THE COUPON BELOW
 TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT
 FOR THE NHS!**

*Please send me a free support pack
 including rainbow colour poster, 8-page
 comic, certificate, badge and details
 of how to make your own facemask!*

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

_____ AGE _____

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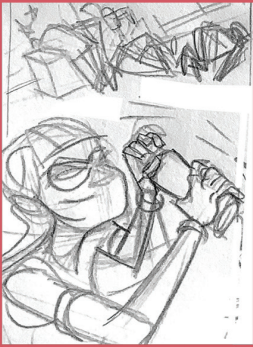
Front Cover Pencils by Gary Welsh



Pola Cola Caper Cover Sketch by Nick Johnson



Pencils



Colour



by Nick Johnson

Pencils



Ink



Colour



by Gary Welsh

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS



Professor Chris Murray is Chair of Comics Studies and Associate Dean

International, Knowledge Exchange and Impact at the School of Humanities, University of Dundee. He is Director of the Scottish Centre for Comics Studies and Dundee Comics Creative Space. He teaches several undergraduate courses on comics and the Comics & Graphic Novels MLitt/MDes. He also supervises several PhD students undertaking research on comics. His research focuses on British and American Comics.



Gary Welsh is a freelance story artist based in Motherwell. In recent years

he has completed an honours degree in Animation and masters degree in Comics and Graphic Novels at Dundee

University. He has been passionate about comics and visual narrative all his life and is currently working on a number of freelance comic projects.



Nick Johnson was born and raised in Calgary Alberta and currently

resides in Edinburgh Scotland as he finishes his Masters in Comics and Graphic Novels at the University of Dundee. He has worked in e-learning, children's books, film, comic books and as a writer/director in animation. He has developed and hosted interactive comic workshops for kids and adults, acted as an artist-in-residence in schools, and returned to his undergrad school AUArts as an instructor for two years to teach narrative and conceptual illustration. www.nickj.ca



Phillip Vaughan has credits on published work such as *Braveheart*,

Jim Henson's *Farscape*, *Star Trek*, *Wallace and Gromit*, *Teletubbies*, *Tom & Jerry*, *Commando* and *Superman*, as well various original IP's.



Rebecca Horner is a cartoonist and colourist who is constantly working on

several projects at once. She is Workshop Coordinator and Production Lead at Dundee Comics Creative Space, and has done production on many books, including this one! rebeccahorner.com

THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

Art by Elliot Balson



THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP IS STRONG AND STABLE



UNI*VERSE