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McGREGOR • MAROTO
LADY RAWHIDE
When CHOKERS were all the RAGE!

LADY RAWHIDE™

LADY RAWHIDE CREATED BY DON MCGREGOR AND MIKE MAYHEW
SCARLET FEVER & ANSEL PLAGUE CREATED BY DON MCGREGOR AND ESTEBAN MAROTO
CARMELITA RODRIGUEZ CREATED BY DON MCGREGOR AND TOM YEATES
ZORRO CREATED BY JOHNSTON MCCULLEY
DRACULA CREATED BY BRAM STOKER

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

SCARLET FEVER AND ANSEL PLAGUE take over the Spanish ship, the Evaligelista, bound for Monterey.

CARMELITA RODRIGUEZ saves Lady Rawhide from the gangrenous poison cut into Lady Rawhide' system by Scarlet's Cadaver Blade.

LADY RAWHIDE has hovered in feverish twilight, unable to help her brother, Ramon, who has been knocked overboard.

OTHER PEOPLE'S BLOOD

BRING YOUR OWN CORPSES

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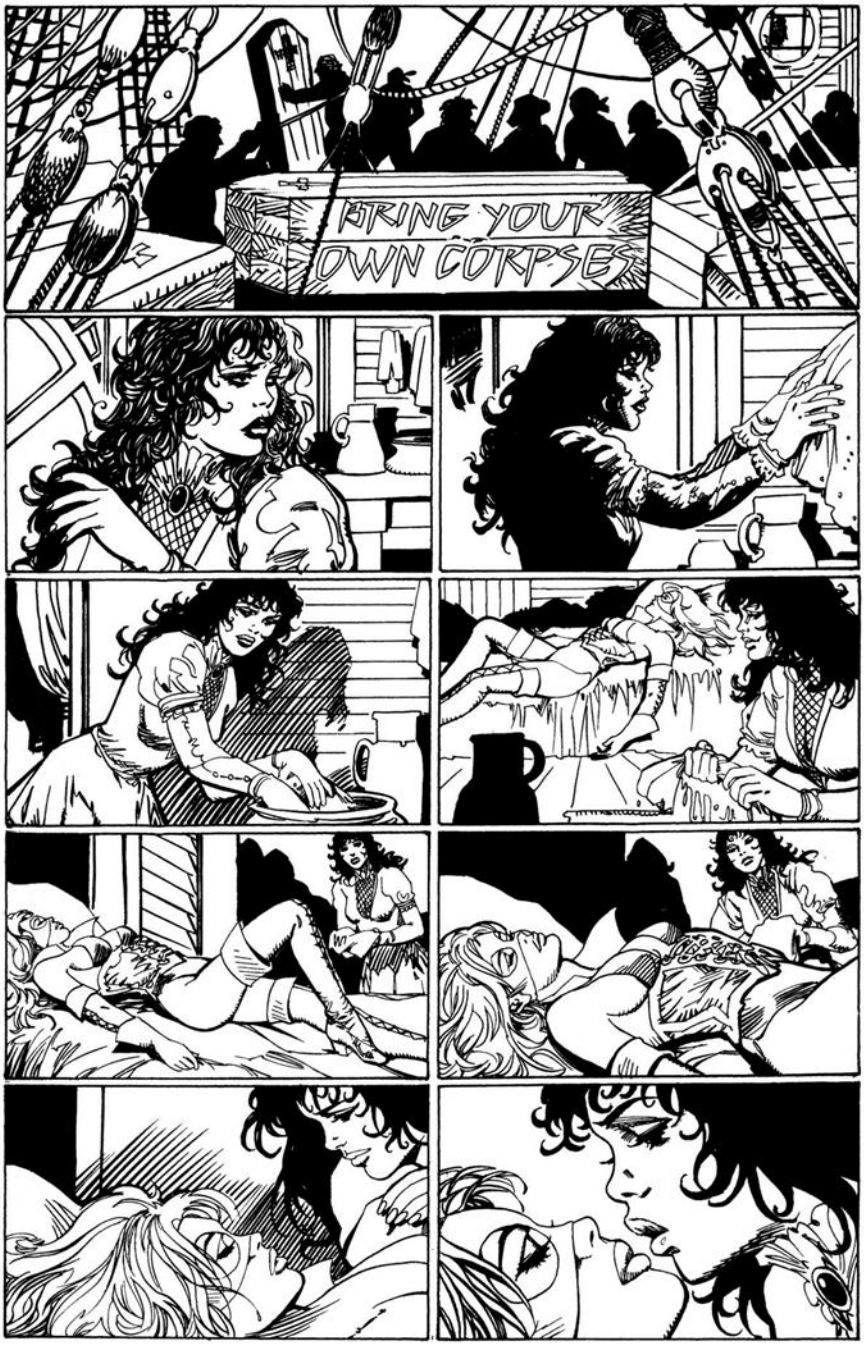
SHE HAS LOST ANITA SANTIAGO.
SHE HAS LOST LADY RAWHIDE.
THEY HAVE FADED INTO A GREY VOID, LOST AS THE VOID BECOMES DARKER AND VASTER, ENGULFING IDENTITY.
AND THEN THE GREY REVERSES ITSELF, LIGHTENS AND NARROWS--
--AND SHE STRUGGLES TO REGAIN HER IDENTITIES, AN AMORPHOUS AWARENESS BECOMING MORE VIVID THE AWARENESS MORE DETAILED.
SHE REALIZES SHE IS BOTH ANITA SANTIAGO AND LADY RAWHIDE.
WITH THAT KNOWLEDGE COMES THE THOUGHT: SHE IS NOT DEAD!


BRING YOUR
OWN CORPSES

AS SOON AS SHE HAS RECLAIMED HER IDENTITIES, HER BROTHER'S NAME IS IN HER HEAD--
"RAMON!"
--LIKE A SHOUT OF RAGING DENIAL AGAINST HIS DROWNING DEATH!
DEATH DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO SCARLET-FEVER!
SHE ENVISIONS RAMON ENTWINED IN KELP STRAND AND SEAWEED, INSIDIOUSLY HOLDING HIM DEEP BENEATH THE SURFACE--
--UNTIL ALL THE AIR IS GONE FROM HIS LUNGS, REPLACED BY SURGING CHOKING SALT WATER.
SHE STARTS TO MOAN RAMON'S NAME ALOUD, AS CARMELITA RODRIGUEZ'S FIGURE COMES INTO FOCUS OUT OF THE LIGHTENING GREY.
SHE CANNOT SPEAK RAMON'S NAME, FOR THEN CARMELITA MIGHT WONDER WHY THE MASKED RED-HEAD WAILS FOR ANITA SANTIAGO'S BROTHER.
WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?
WHAT IS HAPPENING?

YOU ARE LOOKING BETTER.
I FEEL BETTER. I HAVE NO IDEA WHY.
JUST AS I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHY I WAS SUDDENLY SO STRICKEN. I WAS SURE I WAS DYING.
ONE THING I KNOW FOR SURE, THAT BLOND BITCH ISN'T GOING TO GET THE CHANCE TO KNICK ME WITH THAT CADAVER BLADE ANYMORE.
THAT'S HER CHARMING PET NAME FOR HER SWORD. I HATE PET NAMES FOR FUNCTIONAL THINGS.
"CADAVER BLADE?" IS THAT WHAT YOU SAID.
BUT WHAT'S THE USE OF RISKING YOUR LIFE AND BEING LADY RAWHIDE IF YOU CAN'T SPEAK YOUR MIND ON WHAT YOU FEEL IS THE PLAIN TRUTH?
SORRY, HOPE I DIDN'T EMBARRASS OR SHOCK YOU.
SOMETIMES I FEAR I'VE BECOME A LITTLE TOO CANDID FOR MY OWN GOOD.

I'M STILL SO SHAKY. I'M NOT USED TO NOT HAVING CONTROL OVER MY LIMBS, HAVING THEM DO WHAT I WANT THEM TO WHEN I WANT THEM TO DO IT.
HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN UN-CONSCIOUS?
QUITE AWHILE, I'M AFRAID. I DID THE BEST I COULD AT... NURSING YOU.
I'M... MORE ACCUSTOMED TO PEOPLE ATTENDING MY ILLS... REAL OR IMAGINED.
FROM THE WAY I FEEL, YOU WORKED MIRACLES. I'D BE HARD PRESSED TO THINK OF A DOCTOR I'VE EVER MET WHO COULD DO BETTER--
--THOUGH I'M DAMNED IF I KNOW HOW YOU MANAGED TO BRING ME BACK FROM THE BRINK. THOUGH YOU HAVE MY THANKS.
ANYHOW I LOOKED JUST BEFORE YOU TOTALLY CAME OUT OF THE DELIRIUM... FROM THE LOOK OF THE SKY, DAWN'S ABOUT TO BREAK.
IT'S BEEN A LONG NIGHT. ANY IDEA WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON TOPSIDE?
FROM WHAT I COULD MAKE OUT, THROUGH HERE, THEY'RE SETTING UP SOME TYPE OF RIGGING FROM THAT BLOND BIT... PIRATE'S SHIP TO OURS.
ALL I CAN FIGURE IS THEY'RE GOING TO TRANSFER SOMETHING OR OTHER. I HAVE NO IDEA ON GOD'S GREEN EARTH WHAT IT COULD BE.

THE TINY PUNCTURE MARKS ON THE SWELL OF LADY RAWHIDE'S BREAST ARE SCARLET RECRIMINATIONS TO CARMELITA.
THE NIGHT HAS BEEN LONG INDEED, AND SHE NEEDS TIME TO KNOW HOW WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED AFFECTS HER LIFE.
AND SHE LOOKS OUT THE PORT-HOLE WINDOW AND SEES THAT OTHER LONG NIGHT, THE NIGHT LONG FORGOTTEN--
--AND SHE CAN HEAR DRACULA'S SEDUCTIVE VOICE.
SHE REMEMBERS VEINED WINGS AND BLOOD-STAINED CANINES.
DEAD BUT IN MOTION.
ORDERING HER TO LICK HER OWN BLOOD FROM HER HAND, THE BLOOD SHE FEARED WOULD BETRAY AND DOOM HER.
SHE FEARED HER OWN BLOOD, NOT OTHER PEOPLE'S.
A HORRIFYING EROTICISM IN HIS COMMAND AND GESTURE--
--AND YET NON-THREATENING IN A SEXUAL SENSE, BECAUSE DRACULA WAS UNDEAD, AND THE UNDEAD DID NOT HAVE SEX--
--AND YET SHE FELT HER OWN SEXUALITY MORE ACUTELY THAN SHE EVER HAD BEFORE.
IN SOME WAYS, AS SURPRISINGLY, SHE HAD FELT A SENSUAL COCOON IN THIS ROOM, WARM AND CLOSE AND ISOLATED.
AND SHE CAN'T DEFINE IT, BUT THE COCOON IS TORN NOW, THOUGH THEY ARE STILL IN THE ROOM--
--AND SHE FEELS SHY AND AWKWARD, AFRAID A TREMOR IN HER VOICE WILL REVEAL HER EMOTIONAL TURMOIL--
--BRING REJECTION OR RIDICULE--
--POSSIBLY BOTH--
--ALTHOUGH MAYBE NEITHER.

LADY RAWHIDE IS PERPLEXED: SOMETHING HAS CHANGED BETWEEN THEM, BUT SHE CAN'T DEFINE WHAT THE CHANGE IS.
CARMELITA KEEPS AVOIDING EYE CONTACT, SHE'D ALMOST DEFINE THE BEHAVIOR AS A DEMURE ANXIETY, EXCEPT WHY CARMELITA SHOULD FEEL EITHER IS BEYOND HER.
CARMELITA? YOU OKAY?
SÍ. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.
MAYBE CARMELITA IS SPEAKING THE TRUTH.
THERE IS MORE LIGHT AND LIFE IN HER EYES, LESS THE MOROSE STARE.
WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY LOADING OUT THERE?
COFFINS? ARE THOSE COFFINS?
YOU MIND IF I USE ONE OF THESE TO CLEAN MY BLADE?
I DON'T WANT HALF-DRIED BLOOD TO MAKE IT STICK IN ITS SCABBARD AT THE WRONG MOMENT
PLEASE. GO AHEAD.
YES I BELIEVE THEY ARE. I RECOGNIZE COFFINS. I'VE BEEN CLOSE TO COFFINS.
YOU MEAN, BECAUSE OF YOUR FATHER'S DEATH? HIS BURIAL?
SÍ, SURE. THAT'S WHAT I MEANT.
NOW, WHY WOULD SCARLET FEVER HAVE HER MEN TRANSFER COFFINS TO OUR SHIP?
I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HER, BUT I DON'T THINK SHE DOES ANYTHING WITHOUT A PURPOSE...WITHOUT KNOWING EXACTLY WHAT THE END RESULT IS.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND EITHER OF THEM. IT'S AS IF... I WATCHED THEIR FACES AS THE BATTLE RAGED.
BOTH HER AND THAT MAN SHE'S WITH, THEY SMILED THROUGHOUT MOST OF IT.
AS IF THE SPILLING OF BLOOD, OR THE TAKING OF LIFE, HAD NO MEANING TO THEM.
THEY ARE NOT MERELY PEOPLE WHO HAVE GIVEN INTO THE VIOLENT IMPULSE... THE LETHAL HEART WITHIN.
THEY ARE THE ONES WHO ACT ON THAT DEMONIAC IMPULSE AS A DONE DEED.
AND ONCE DONE, THEY FEEL NONE OF THE PAIN THEY HAVE CAUSED.
IF THEY FEEL ANY PAIN, IT IS ONLY THEIR OWN.
I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THAT THE HEARTS OF SUCH PEOPLE, IN SPIRIT, IS LETHAL.
FOR THEM, IT IS NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY TO COMMIT THEIR TERRIFYINGLY HAUNTING ACTS--
--TO KILL AND MAIM, WITHOUT REMORSE.

BUT TO SMILE SO SWEETLY. ALMOST ANGELICALLY. THEIR FACES BEATIFIC.
I FIND THAT MORE NIGHTMARISH THAN MONSTERS OF LEGEND.

THAT'S BECAUSE THEY ARE RIGHT HERE--
--AND WE HAVE SEEN THE REALITY OF THEIR ACTS.

I'VE GOT TO GO.
I KNOW YOU DO.

I NEED TO LEARN WHAT'S IN THOSE COFFINS.
CORPSES?

THAT WOULD BE THE NORMAL ANSWER. I THINK SHE'S HIDING SOME KIND OF WEAPONS INSIDE THERE, AND USING THE COFFINS TO CONCEAL THEM.

I'M NOT SURE HOW... BUT I KNOW... YOU SAVED MY LIFE. I... I WON'T FORGET IT.
THERE'S NOTHING TO REMEMBER. YOU GO DO WHAT I CAN'T DO.

SHE HAS LIED.
ALREADY SHE REMEMBERS THE SOFT RIDGES OF LADY RAWHIDE'S LIPS.

AND SHE STARES AT THE WALLS, AS IF SHE CAN SEE THE FUTURE IN ITS SOLIDITY--

--BUT SEES NEITHER FOUNDATION OR PROPHECY.

ANSEL PLAGUE BECAME A SEAFARER TO ESCAPE TO OTHER LANDSCAPES AND HORIZONS THAN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN.
HE LEFT RHODE ISLAND SO HE COULD PURSUE HIS CRAFT AS A PAINTER, AND AT THE SAME TIME FIND A VENT FOR HIS PENCHANT FOR VIOLENT CONFRONTATION.
ANSEL PLAGUE PAINTED BECAUSE IT GAVE HIS LIFE MEANING.
HE KILLED, AND HE WAS GOOD AT IT BECAUSE HE DID NOT HAVE TO KILL ON A DAILY BASIS, AND THUS, IN BETWEEN KILLINGS, IT GAVE HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXECUTE HIS ART.
NO ONE RIDICULED HIS ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS. FEW CRITICIZED THESE DAYS. THEY ACCEPTED.
MAYBE THEY WERE AFRAID TO OFFER A NEGATIVE TREATISE. AFRAID HE'D JUDGE THEM AND CLEAVE THEIR MINISCULE BRAINS WITH HIS DOUBLE-BLADED AX.
MOST CRITICS NEVER DID ANYTHING CREATIVE; AND WHILE THEY WANTED THEIR NAMES KNOWN, AND THEY WANTED RESPECT, THEY DID NOT WANT TO FEEL THE WRATH OF THE PEOPLE THEY HAD MALIGNED--
--AND IT WAS ANSEL'S BELIEF THAT THEY LIVED IN FEAR THEY MIGHT ONE DAY COME FACE TO FACE WITH THOSE THEY HAD TRIED TO DESTROY.
THEY WOULD GROVEL AT THE FEET OF THOSE PETS WHOSE WORKS THEY ENDORSED.
TO ANSEL, THE ARTS COULD BE A DOWN-RIGHT LETHAL ARENA.
THE BLOOD SPILLED OFTEN COULD NOT BE SEEN.
IT WASN'T LIKE A SHIP DECK SPLASHED RED WITH BLOOD, DILUTED BY SALT WATER, RUSHING IN RIVULETS OF PINKISH GORE.
IT WAS QUIET AND SEDATE WARFARE, BUT WARFARE NONE THE LESS.
AND INSURRECTION AND MUTINY WAS ALWAYS A POSSIBILITY.

HERE'S THE THING ABOUT CRITICS, SCARLET.
CRITICS? DO I HAVE CRITICS?
NOT ABOARD YOUR SHIP. THERE YOU HAVE ONLY UNDYING DEVOTION.
THOSE WHO AREN'T DEVOTED, OR CAN'T FAKE DEVOTION, ARE DEAD.
BUT I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE WHO MAKE OFF-HAND COMMENTS ABOUT A PERSON'S CHARACTER. I'M TALKING ABOUT A PROFESSIONAL CRITIC OF THE ARTS.
NOW, HEAR ME OUT.
DON'T I ALWAYS LISTEN TO YOU, ANGEL?
I WON'T DEBATE THAT. HERE'S MY POINT. CRITICS WOULDN'T KNOW THEIR WAY AROUND A SWORD OR A PHYSICAL KILLING, THEY'RE TOO SQUEAMISH FOR THAT.
WHAT THEY DO IS SPILL OTHER PEOPLE'S BLOOD AND SWEAT WITH THE CRAVEN SNIPPERY OF THEIR QUILL PENS.
THEY BETTER NOT SAY THEY HATE YOUR PAINTING OF ME... WELL, UNLESS I HATE IT--
--BUT THEN, IF I DO--
--YOU WON'T HAVE TO CONTEND WITH SOME CRAVENLY CRITIC SAFELY TUCKED AWAY WHERE YOU CAN'T CLEAVE SOME ARTISTIC SENSIBILITY INTO HIM--
--WITH YOUR AX BLADE.

HERE'S WHAT I SUSPECT...THAT DEEP IN THEIR HEARTS, THEIR BLOOD RUNS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY CANNOT CREATE.
THEY DON'T HAVE THE GIFT TO PAINT OR WRITE OR PERFORM AND SO THEY EXIST AS A PARASITIC CARBUNCLE ON THE FRINGE OF THE ARTS--

--WANTING DESPERATELY TO BE IN THE MIDST OF THE ARTS--
--TO EXPERIENCE THE BLOOD AND COMMITMENT OF CREATION--

--AND YET MISERABLY AWARE THEY NEVER WILL HAVE THE TALENT OR THE GUTS TO BE A PART OF THE PROCESS.
IS THAT WHAT YOU SUSPECT?
ALL RIGHT. HAVE YOUR FUN.

I TOLD YOU A HUNDRED TIMES. NO PEEKING.
IT'S ALMOST FINISHED...IT JUST NEEDS THE FINAL FLESH SHADINGS THAT WILL EMBUE YOUR VITALITY--

--AND THEN YOU CAN GAZE UPON IT ALL YOU WANT.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO IF I HATE IT? CALL ME A CRITIC?

WELL, AS I ALWAYS SAY, EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO AN OPINION. I DON'T MIND THAT.
LONG AS YOU DON'T MAKE A LIVING TELLING OTHER PEOPLE WHAT TO THINK, WHAT THEY HAVE TO LIKE OR HATE.
OF COURSE, I REALIZE IT'S PEOPLE'S OWN DAMN FAULT THEY ALLOW OTHERS TO DO THEIR THINKING FOR THEM.

AND IN YOUR CASE, IT WOULD CRUSH ME IF YOU THOUGHT I'D FAILED TO CAPTURE YOUR EXQUISITE ESSENCE.

LET ME SEE IF I CAN GET YOUR SAIL PAST HALF-MAST.
THE SAIL'S ALREADY BILLOWING.

MARTIN CANIZARES TRIES NOT TO LET HIS EYES **STRAY** TOWARD HIS CAPTAIN'S EYES.

HIS VOICE IS STILL A **PAINFUL GRAVEL WHISPER** SINCE THE RED-HEADED BITCH WRAPPED HER **WHIP** ABOUT IT. HE SWEARS HE STILL TASTES BLOOD IN HIS MOUTH.

HE DOESN'T NEED ANY MORE PAIN, AND SCARLET IS CAPABLE OF INFLICTING PAIN WITH **EASE**.

WHILE PLAGUE AND I WATCH THE TRANSFER FROM THIS SIDE--

--I WANT YOU TO PREPARE THE DECK FOR THE BUTCHERY THAT WILL COMMENCE AS SOON AS WE HAVE THE NEW AMMUNITION INGREDIENTS.
HAVE THE EVANGELISTA'S CANNISTER SHOT GATHERED BY THE MIZZENMAST POLE.

CLIK

WE'LL USE THEIR AMMUNITION STORES NOT THE SATAN'S OWN FOR OUR ADDITIONAL INGREDIENTS TO THE GUNPOWDER INSIDE THE IRON BALLS.
THE GRINDING PROCEDURE WILL START AS SOON AS WE HAVE OUR OWN CORPSES ON BOARD. IT SHOULD BE SOME PARTY.

GO! NOW! DO IT!
YOU KNOW, ANGEL, WHEN I LOOK AT THIS PLAN I HAVE, I BELIEVE I HAVE AN ARTISTIC SIDE, TOO.
THERE'S SOMETHING POETIC, DON'T YOU THINK, USING THE METHODS I'VE DEVISED--
--TO DESTROY MONTEREY.
FWIP

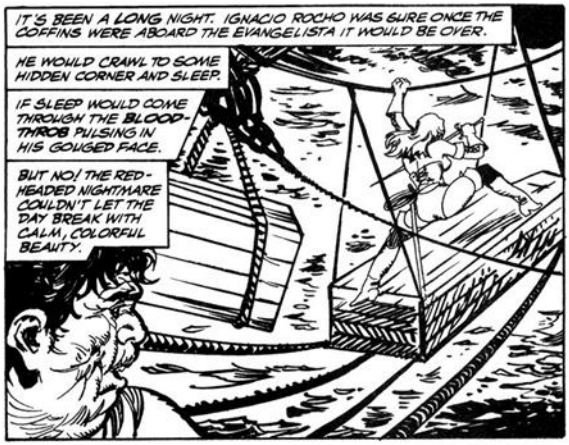
A POETIC IRONY, WITHOUT A DOUBT.
THE IRONY WILL ESCAPE MOST OF THOSE THAT ARE DYING, BUT THEY CAN BE FORGIVEN, DON'T YOU THINK?
WHAP
I THINK THE ONES THAT MANAGE TO SURVIVE--
--WILL NEVER DENY ME ACCESS TO THEIR PRECIOUS DOMAIN AGAIN.
I'LL LIKE THAT.
IT'LL REMIND ME OF MY PRIVILEGED CHILDHOOD.

SHE CAN REMEMBER THE VIRGINIA TOBACCO LEAVES AS TALL AS HER AT SEVEN YEARS OLD.
MONSTROUS GREEN REFUGES, DRIPPING CLAMES OF WIDE AND SLEEK.
REMEMBER THE SMELL OF THEM, THE SOUR PUNGENT IN THEIR DYING IN THE
--AS THE LEAVES HUNG FROM CEILINGS, MUMMIFYING.
SHE BREATHED DEATH IN THE AIR AND INFECTED MOISTURE BLEED FROM THE LEAVES TAKING THE VIVID GREEN WITH IT--
--UNTIL THE LEAVES WERE DRY AND BRITTLE.
EVERYONE ALWAYS TREATED SCARLET SPECIAL WHEN SHE WAS A CHILD--
--WHICH WAS ONE OF THE REASONS MOST PEOPLE COULD NOT FIGURE OUT WHY SHE WAS SUCH A TERROR.
SHE'D HAD SCARLET FEVER AT SEVEN YEARS OLD, AND HER FAMILY HAD BEEN SURE SHE'D DIE.
SHE FACED THE FEVER WITH FIERCE EYES, NEVER YIELDING TO IT.
SHE IMAGINED SHE WAS LIKE THE TOBACCO LEAVES, ALL THE JUICES POURING OUT OF HER, HER WET BLOOD THICKENING AND DRYING AS THE SWEAT STREAMED OUT OF HER PORES.
SHE WENT RIGHT TO THE EDGE OF DEATH--
--STARED AT IT WITH CLEAR SEVEN YEAR OLD EYES--
--GAZED INTO THE BECKONING ABYSS--
--AND THEN RETURNED!
EVER SINCE SHE COULD STARE MAN OR WOMAN IN THE EYE AND MAKE ALL LOOK AWAY.
SHE RECOGNIZED DEATH, WHETHER IT PERSONIFIED ITSELF IN MALE OR FEMALE--
--AND SHE NEVER TURNED HER BACK ON IT.

SHE DID NOT BLINK WHEN THE FEVER BROUGHT THE DEBILITATING SWEAT TO HER MOTHER'S BROW.
SHE DID NOT BECOME ANGRY OR FEEL ANY GUILT WHEN SHE HEARD SERVANTS WHISPERING THAT HER MOTHER HAD CONTRACTED THE FEVER FROM HER.
SHE DID NOT LOSE ANY PRECIOUS BODILY FLUIDS THROUGH USELESS TEARS WHEN DEATH CLAIMED HER MOTHER.
SHE WATCHED HER FATHER WEEP, AND WAS DISTURBED BY IT.
SHE DID NOT UNDERSTAND HIS TEARS, AND SOMEHOW, VAGUELY, SHE WASN'T SURE WHY, EQUATED THE TEARS WITH WEAKNESS.
HER FATHER WAS BOTHERED THAT SHE DID NOT CRY AT HER MOTHER'S DEATH--
--BUT MOURNERS REASSURED HIM, THEY SAID SHE WAS A "STALWART LITTLE GIRL."
NOWADAYS, MANY PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT HER IN LESS KIND PHRASES. "A COLD-HEARTED BITCH" IS AMONG THE MOST POLITE IN CIVILIZED COMPANY.
ESPECIALLY AFTER THEY MOVED TO MASSACHUSETTS, BECAUSE HER FATHER NO LONGER HAD THE "HEART," AND ABSURD SENTIMENT IF SHE'D EVER HEARD ONE, TO LIVE IN THE HOUSE WHERE HER MOTHER HAD DIED.
HER FATHER ONCE TOLD HER, YEARS LATER, WHEN THEY HAD BEEN DRINKING RYE TOGETHER, THAT HE THOUGHT SOMEHOW THE FEVER SHE'D HAD AS A CHILD HAD BURNED ALL VESTIGE OF HUMAN EMOTION FROM HER.
SHE DID NOT HAVE THE FAINTEST IDEA IF HE WAS RIGHT OR NOT. WHETHER HE WAS OR WASN'T, SHE COULDN'T GIVE A DAMN.
A DOUBLOON FOR YOUR THOUGHTS.
YOU'D PAY COIN OF THE SPANISH REALM FOR RUMINATIONS OF DEATH.
SAVE YOUR MONEY, ANSEL, LET'S GO TOPSIDE.

IGNACIO ROCHO DID NOT HAVE A SUPERSTITIOUS FEAR OR CORPSES.
HE HAS SEEN MANY CORPSES, CAUSED A NUMBER OF THOSE PEOPLE TO BECOME CORPSES.
HE DID NOT FEAR WEAPONS.
HE HAD USED LOTS OF WEAPONS, AND AS LONG AS THEY WORKED, HE DIDN'T GIVE A PARTICULAR WEAPON A SECOND THOUGHT.
BUT HE FEARED THESE CORPSES--
--DID NOT WANT TO BREATHE IN THEIR DEATH SOMEHOW AFRAID WHAT HAD KILLED THEM WOULD INVADE HIS BLOOD.
HE CROSSED HIMSELF RELIGIOUSLY, AS IF TO WARD OFF SOME GOD-INSPIRED CONDEMNATION FOR HOW THESE CORPSES WOULD BE USED AS WEAPONS.
LADY RAWHIDE STARES AT THE SWAYING COFFINS AND THE DARK DEPTHS OF OCEAN--
--AND BOTH SHRIEK "DEATH" AT HER.
SHE DOESN'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT RAMON, THERE IS NOTHING SHE CAN DO ABOUT HIM.
SHE DOESN'T WANT TO DEAL WITH THE IDEA THAT SHE MIGHT NEVER EVEN SEE HIS BODY.
THAT HE IS LOST FOREVER. NO CHANCE FOR CHOKED OR WHISPERED "GOOD-BYE" TO HIS BODY.
NO SENSE OF RESOLUTION.
I'LL FIND OUT WHAT YOU'VE HIDDEN IN THOSE COFFINS, SCARLET.
AND I'LL DESTROY WHATEVER WEAPONS YOU HAVE IN THERE!

SHE LEAPS AWAY FROM HER SENSE OF LOSS--
--TO CLAIM THE AIR AND THE FREEDOM OF DECISIVE ACTION.
SHE LANDS WITH A GRACE RAMON WOULD HAVE APPLAUDED.
HE WAS ALWAYS PROUD OF HER ACCOMPLISHMENTS.
SHE WONDERS WHAT HE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF LADY RAWHIDE, IF HE'D KNOWN ABOUT HER, KNOWN SHE DARED THE OUTRAGEOUS DRESS AND ACTIONS.
HE'D HAVE FEARED FOR HER, THAT'S ALL SHE IS SURE ABOUT. THE REST SHE WILL NEVER KNOW.


IT'S BEEN A LONG NIGHT. IGNACIO ROCHO WAS SURE ONCE THE COFFINS WERE ABOARD THE EVANGELISTA IT WOULD BE OVER.
HE WOULD CRAWL TO SOME HIDDEN CORNER AND SLEEP.
IF SLEEP WOULD COME THROUGH THE BLOOD-THROB PULSING IN HIS GOUGED FACE.
BUT NO! THE RED-HEADED NIGHTMARE COULDN'T LET THE DAY BREAK WITH CALM, COLORFUL BEAUTY.

SHE HAD TO GO LEAPING AROUND LIKE SOME DAMN HAUNT!

DAMN! CAN YOU BELIEB ID? EBRY DIME YOU DINK SHE'S GONE...SHE'S BAG.

DIS DIME SHE DOAN GUD ME WID MY OWN FISHIN' GAFF.
I'LL RIB HER DROAT OBEN!

THE WOOD WILL SPLINTER.
SHE'LL SMASH IT, THE WAY SHE'LL SMASH THE SMILE OFF SCARLET'S FACE--
--THE BEGUILING SMILE WASHED AWAY IN BLOOD.

COME ON! GIVE, DAMN YOU!

I'M NOT STOPPING UNTIL I BREAK THROUGH!

JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH! I'M NOT JUST TALKING TO MYSELF NOW, I'M SHOUTING AT SPLINTERED WOOD... AT COFFINS... OR AT WHAT'S IN THEM!

OKAY, OKAY! SO I'M NOT EVEN SURE WHAT OR WHOM I'M SHOUTING AT!
ONE THING I'M SURE OF, I'M SMASHING THROUGH YOU, YOU SON OF A BITCH! I'M FINISHING WHAT I SET OUT TO DO!

OR MAYBE NOT!
IT'S THE LARGE MAN WITH THE HARD EYES AND THE SOFT GUT.
I'VE GUD YOU NOW!
YOU'VE GOT THIS!
AND THIS!
DID THAT FEEL GOOD?
SPLOT
HSS

LOOKS LIKE I'M ATTRACTING A CROWD.
MORNING, CAPTAIN BLONDIE! SORRY TO START YOUR DAY OFF ON SUCH A SOUR NOTE.
BUT THERE'S NOT A DAMN THING YOU CAN DO TO STOP ME FROM BASHING THROUGH YOUR COUNTERFEIT COFFINS!
THE STENCH OF ROTTED FLESH AND DETERIORATING INSIDES TELLS HER HORRIFYINGLY THAT SHE IS WRONG!
NOT ONLY IS THERE A CORPSE INSIDE, BUT IT IS MARKED.
A BROW OF DRIED FLESH STILL BEARING THE WHITE ASHEN MARK OF THE CROSS!
A SIGN OF DEATH BY SOME CONTAGIOUS ILLNESS!
A WARNING THAT THIS WAS A VICTIM OF SOME TYPE OF TERRIBLE PLAGUE!

THE WHIPPING POST

SEND YOUR CARDS, LETTERS AND PONY EXPRESS DISPATCHES TO:
LADY RAWHIDE c/o TOPPS COMICS, ONE WHITEHALL STREET, NY, NY 10004

Dear Don and Renee,

Imagine it, I'm in Abilene Texas autographing copies of OUT OF THE WEST. I'm wearing my hat, my boots, my leather outfit. Got that? But BOOKS 2 ENJOY also sells comics. Soon "m signing my letter in LADY RAWHIDE: OTHER PEOPLES BLOOD. And they sell out!

I'm sure LADY RAWHIDE is selling out all over the country. And with good reason. The new series is as fine as the last. Thanks for sending me a copy of the first issue and the nifty poster. Speaking of posters, I made away with the gorgeous poster of Zorro and Lady Rawhide during my trip to Abilene!

And, Don, when we get you out west, we'll make sure we keep you in the saddle with your hat on your head. After all, we wouldn't want anything untoward to happen to Lady Rawhide's creator.

Till Later,
Jan Archer, author of
historical novels
MAVERICK MOON and
OUT OF THE WEST
Richardson, Texas

Jane, I've enjoyed your letters, and I'm ready to saddle up and move out. Whether my hat makes the total trip is another issue entirely. LADY RAWHIDE has been selling out in many stores, within the first couple of days of its release. In any normal market place this would mean stores would be increasing their orders, and perhaps, eventually, many would have, but we'll never know, since this is, for the immediate future, the last issue of the series

To the Kind Folks that bring me LADY RAWHIDE

My sincerest gratitude for the many hours I've spent enjoying what I consider to be the most enthralling comic book product (and among the best ever) I've ever had the pleasure to absorb.

As a child of the Sixties, I immersed myself in Goldenday's *Tarzan* stories as rendered by Russ Manning, but as I grew older my trips to the comic book stores and my purchases became infrequent. I read a lot of books and still do, but in the Nineties my interest in comic books has been rekindled. *Quantum Leap* and the reappearance of *Tarzan* on the stand led me to discovering the second issue of DRACULA VS. ZORRO and I liked it and started watching for more issues. Since then ZORRO, THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO, and LADY RAWHIDE have become mainstays on my favorites list.

Strong storylines fraught with adventure are certainly your forte, Mr. McGregor. Snappy verbal exchanges and the relative explanation of point of veiw of your characters give them a sense of integrity to mix with their swashbuckling. (And oh so much swashbuckling!) I confess "Other Peoples Blood" has me mesmerized. I love pirate stories and the thrill of the episodic ride.

Your artists, Esteban Maroto, Mike Mayhew and the others convey your stories with such intense and exciting passion that I marvel at their mastery. It can't be an easy thing to get a perfect match at the seam of pages 2 and 3 of "Poisons under the Flesh", but Scarlet"s sword is perfectly on-line. Multi-panel pages have been consistently strong throughout, but in case nobody else ever points it out, I'd just like to say that I really appreciate the whole package you've put together. Ya'll produce a class product.

Well, I guess I'm getting wordy. Just wanted to let you know I'm a big fan and why.

Adios mi amigos.
Rick Chambers
Irving, TX 75061

P.S.-I'd like to thank Josh at LONE STAR COMICS in Irving, TX for his help in acquiring your issues which at times have been hard to come by.

Well, Rick, I'd like to join you in those thanks to Josh at LONE STAR COMICS, too. I appreciate the efforts by store owners who help my stories reach the readers who want them. Hopefully, somewhere, some day, you'll get the chance to read the last six issues of "Other Peoples Blood," Rick.

Dear Whipping Post,

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

I have not been so excited about a comic book character since Evangeline. Lady Rawhide is graceful, witty, and fun. She is the perfect woman for girls to admire. She knows, as Anita, when to be polite and modest, and quietly strong. However, as Lady Rawhide, she is brazen, strong and free. She has no shame about her body, nor should she! And even uses it to her advantage.

Thank you also for Captain Scarlet Fever. She is so much fun. I know that Lady Rawhide # 4 is going to give us more background on Ansel Plague, so when do you tell us about Scarlet? Please don't make us wait too long.

Thanks Again,
Sandra Stoll
Florissant, MO

In this very issue you hold, Sandra, we spend

quite a lot of time with Scarlet as a child. If you ever have the chance to read "Other Peoples Blood" Part Eight, you'll see how Scarlet became a pirate captain.

I'm glad you feel so positvely about Lady Rawhide. I loved writing her. I'll miss her. There will be, by the way, apparently a LADY RAWHIDE action figure ready for sale in 1998.

The Whipping Post,

Don, I keep trying to write you, and I keep getting in over my head. Your stories and characters are so deep and complex, that I get overwhelmed with all I want to say. So, I'm going to try to stick to the thoughts that occured to me while reading LADY RAWHIDE #3

I just realized how action-oriented you are as a writer. it should have been obvious, but I always thought of you in terms of theme and character, but this issue proved action isn't short changed. I can't remember a more thrilling ride since Melissa Siren gave birth to twins in SABRE. This whole issue must have taken only a few minutes in real time. Ramon in the water, Anita cut by the Cadaver Blade! Are you trying to give me an anxiety attack?

Speaking of characters, without periodic issues devoted to long monologues like some of the other writers do, you've really made me care about these people. I love Anita for her bravery and good humor. I hate Scarlet Fever for her casual cruelty. And I can't help but sympathize with Ramon, "Starting with such promise and passion and ending in bitter resignation."

It's great that you didn't kill off Ramon for Anita's motivation (like Batman, et al). What Ramon is now, and what he was, are a constant reminder of the injustice of life, for both Anita and the reader. Here is a young man, handsone and free thinking enough to be confused for Zorro, ending up horribly wounded. Ramon treated his sister like an equal, encouraged her intellect, her talents, and her fearlessness. That Ramon is gone. Iamgine the loss for Anita, of probably her only true confidante. But Ramon is still alive, justa ghost of his former self, bitter and transformed by pain into the opposite of what he wanted to be in his life. This has much more impact than a one-dimensional cut-out killed off in the first act to set up the hero's motivation.

If Zorro isn't going to be in this book, Ramon provides the spark for Lady Rawhide to play against. Frankly, Nikolai Antonov form "It Can't Happen Here" was a bland damsel in distress. It's the dialogue between Lady rawhide and Zorro, the Nick and Nora Charles of their day, that I find erotic. But don't stop the cheesecake, cause thats fun too.

One last question: Will Lady Rawhide be fighting Buck Wylde, buck-naked?

Ronald Jay Kearschner
Louisville, KY 40205

Good question, Ron! The mind boggles! You know what Sean Connery says, "Never say never!"

It's exciting when a reader lets you know they enjoyed the ride, doubly so in this case since you compare it to my earlier work on SABRE. When we showed the babies being born, Jan Mullaney at Eclipse comics called to tell me he feared we'd lose thousands of copies in sales. I told Jan that a baby being born was natural, and the scene should stay, since SABRE always looked askance at society's notions of right and wrong, but that I'd take out any act of violence he wanted. When the next batch of pages came in and Jan saw Deuces Wild and Summer Ice kissing, he just looked at artist Billy Graham and said, "I guess there's no sense talking to Don about this, huh?"

Anyhow, that brings me to the end of the letters column. I should let you know that you can contact Zorro Productions with e-mail at their website about your interest in seeing Lady Rawhide continue. You can also learn about updates of the Zorro movie, and lots of other things Zorro related. Contact- www.zorro.com

Adios, amigos,
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Yes, I'M A JACKIE CHAN FAN—PLEASE SEND ME DETAILS ABOUT JACKIE CHAN'S SPARTAN X

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When I first started writing the ZORRO: MATANZAS! storyline, my thought was to bring Lucien Machete as an antagonist for Zorro into the forefront. Lady Rawhide had appeared in ZORRO's number 2, 3, 6-11, and I wanted to bring other supporting cast members center stage. Who knew it'd be years later before you readers would have the chance to read this series. Hell, who knew it might be a long time before you'd get to finish "Other People's Blood."

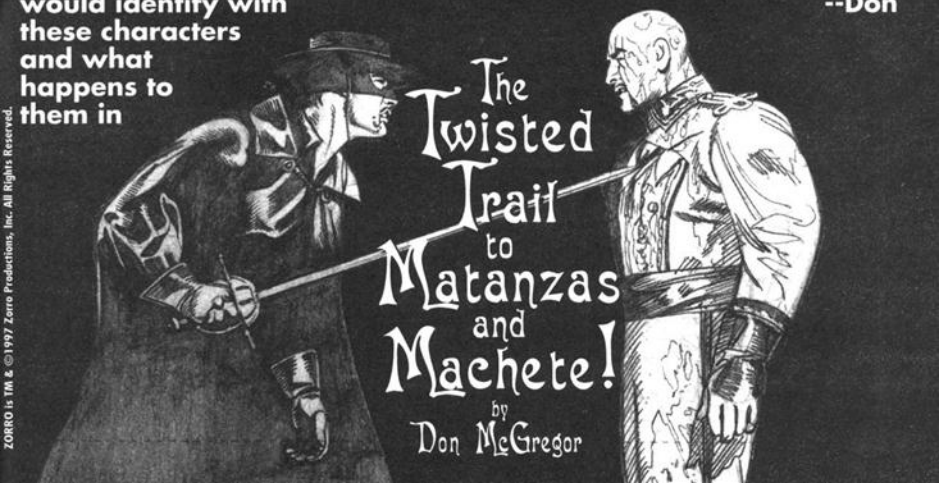
We were starting our second year of ZORRO comics, and I wanted to enrich the roles of the people around Zorro, beyond Lady Rawhide, and the events occur that would hopefully surprise and move our regular readership emotionally, as well as embrace the thematic whole that permeates "Zorro's Renegades." As a storyteller, I wanted to do things the readers would not anticipate, yet would make sense in dramatic context. that they would identify with these characters and what happens to them in their distant time period on a very visceral level. Time no longer distances. Some things are eternal.

The safe course would have been to stay with the dynamics of the Zorro/Lady Rawhide relationship, but for the strength of the series long-term, it was important that its texural shadings and Zorro's interaction with the other people inhabiting early Spanish Los Angeles was vital, to broaden the scope of the series as it focused in on specific incidents of high impact.

And now, some pages of Mike Mayhew's astounding pencils for the upcoming MATANZAS! These pages showcase Zorro and Machete at each others' throats! I wanted to use some of Mike's gorgeous double-page spreads for this preview, but we'll save them for the actual books. They're unique and powerful, establishing a place and time and diverse cast in exquisite fashion.

Anyhow, enjoy this preview.

--Don



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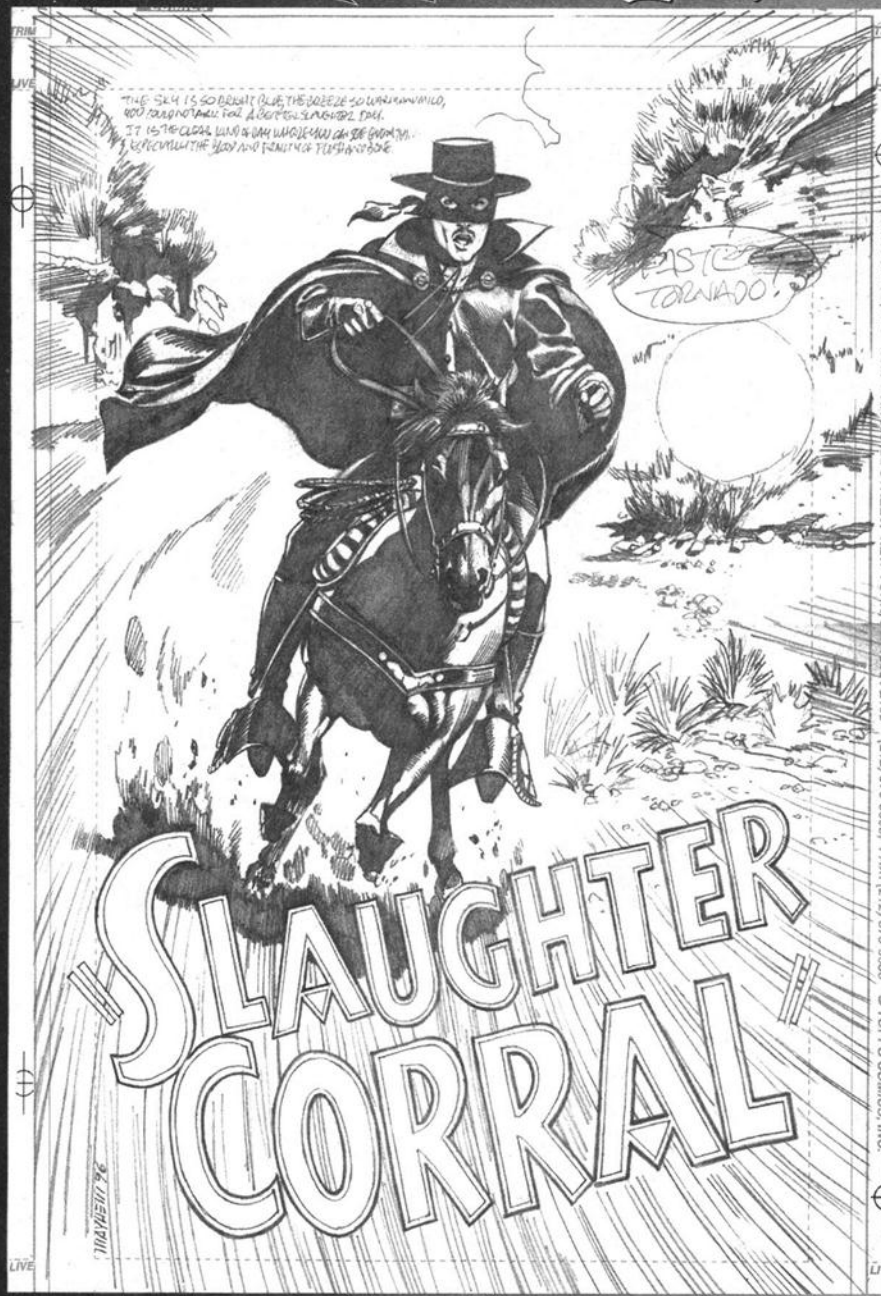

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TOPPS-SPIN: Inside Topps Comics

It's been a couple of months since my name has begun appearing as the Editor-in-Chief of Topps Comics, so I thought I'd finally introduce myself. I've been a comics fan from the time I was in the 1st grade. I can remember swapping books with my next door neighbor...a 7-year-old who seemed to have every Dell Comic Book that was ever published. My big three favorites were **C.C. Beck's** *Capt. Marvel*, **Bob Kane's** *Batman* and **Jack Cole's** *Plastic Man*. However, I would read anything that was 52 pages and printed in 4 colors. I can go on forever reminiscing about the funny animal books, the westerns, sci-fi and crime comics that filled the comic racks back in the 1950s.

The first 35 years that I spent with Topps...wow, it blows my mind just to write that...was involved with trading cards. I worked with teams of talented, creative writers and artists. Folks such as **Wally Wood, Jack Davis** and **Norm Saunders** produced artwork for hundreds of great bubble gum cards. **Art** *"Maus"* **Spiegelman, Gary** *"Pumpkinhead"* **Gerani** and yours truly wrote series after series for such releases as **STAR WARS, GARBAGE PAIL KIDS** and **THE X-FILES** trading cards.

My pet project back in 1962 was planning and writing the original **MARS ATTACKS** card series with my mentor, **Woody Gelman.** Who could have dreamed that years later Hollywood and **Tim Burton** would come calling and bring it to life on the screen? Yes, looking back, there have been some truly memorable moments for me as the creative director at Topps. I had the opportunity to chat with **George Lucas** and **Mark Hamill**, meet **Soupy Sales** (think of him as the '60's version of **Pee Wee Herman**) and spend an hour or two with **Michael Jackson** at his mansion .

But now the focus is on comics, as I begin a second career here at One Whitehall Street.

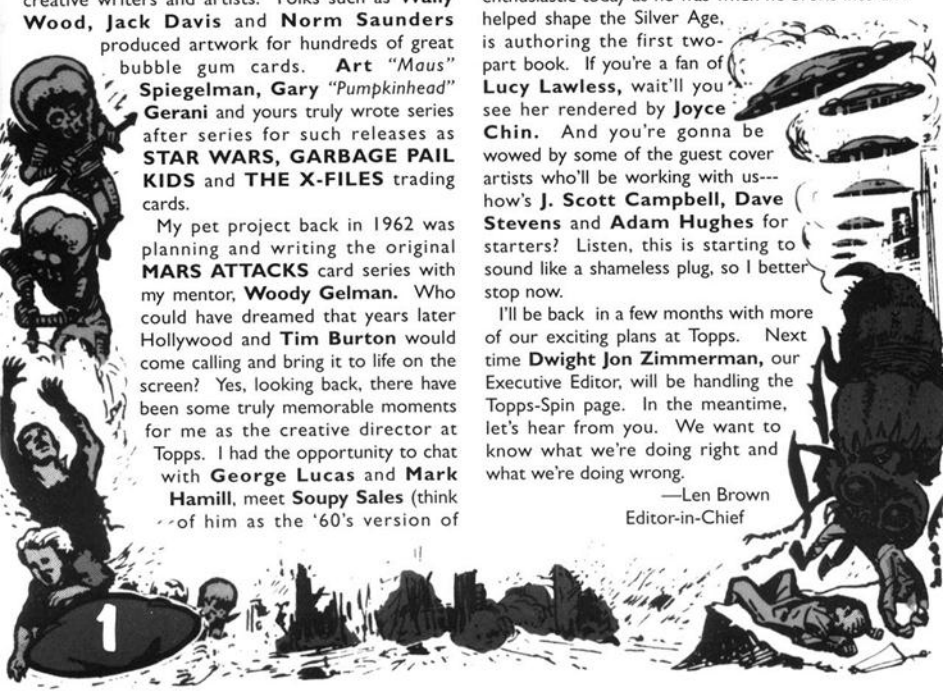
In its brief 5-year lifetime, Topps Comics has produced a full menu of titles—everything from superheroes, to funny animals **(DUCKMAN),** westerns **(ZORRO** and **THE LONE RANGER),** great movie and TV adaptations **(JURASSIC PARK, BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA, THE X-FILES, HERCULES),** and, of course, our own **MARS ATTACKS.**

I'm most excited about the first project to launch under my watch.

Beginning in August, Topps will be publishing a series of **XENA:WARRIOR PRINCESS** books. **Roy Thomas**, one of the legends in comics...and as enthusiastic today as he was when he broke into and helped shape the Silver Age, is authoring the first two-part book. If you're a fan of **Lucy Lawless,** wait'll you see her rendered by **Joyce Chin.** And you're gonna be wowed by some of the guest cover artists who'll be working with us---how's **J. Scott Campbell, Dave Stevens** and **Adam Hughes** for starters? Listen, this is starting to sound like a shameless plug, so I better stop now.

I'll be back in a few months with more of our exciting plans at Topps. Next time **Dwight Jon Zimmerman,** our Executive Editor, will be handling the Topps-Spin page. In the meantime, let's hear from you. We want to know what we're doing right and what we're doing wrong.

—Len Brown
Editor-in-Chief



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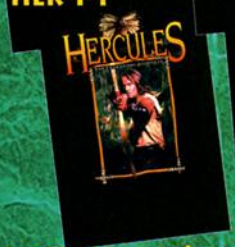

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