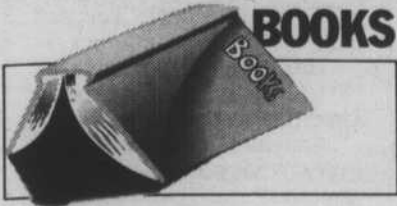


Vertigo

New comics defy description, tackle taboos



By William J. Harms
Staff Reporter

DC Comics has combined its mature reader books into a new line called Vertigo.

The following is a brief review of two new titles to be published under the Vertigo imprint, "Enigma" and "Sandman Mystery Theatre," and an already established but underrated title, "Shade: The Changing Man."

"Shade: The Changing Man" is the best produced comic book in the last three years. Written by Peter Milligan with art by Chris Bachalo and Rick Bryant, it is the story of Shade, a man from Meta (another dimension) who in his time on earth has inhabited the body of a serial killer and a woman, and now inhabits the body of a psychotic.

To make things interesting, Shade's girlfriend Kathy sleeps with her girlfriend Lenny on a regular basis.

In "Shade" No. 33, the first issue to be published under the Vertigo imprint, Shade finds a new body and Kathy is kidnapped by a psycho in a creepy hotel. Sound simple? Far from it.

A book like "Shade" cannot be described in a few lines, so it's not worth a try. It is, however, the best-written comic available. Milligan creates a world so insane that it is all too

real. Through the use of Shade, Kathy and Lenny, Milligan shows us the dark side of humanity, and explores subjects that are normally too taboo for commercial literature.

The best example of this is the issue in which Shade, who finds himself turning into things if he stays in one place for too long, turns into a blanket underneath which Kathy and Lenny make love.

“**A book like "Shade" cannot be described in a few lines, so it's not worth a try.**”

“Shade: The Changing Man” cannot be recommended enough. Hopefully DC will reprint the early issues in a trade-paperback so they can be easily acquired. However, with issue No. 33, which was released last month, the back issues are not absolutely necessary to understand the story line, so it is a good place to start. Issue No. 34 will be released Thursday.

“Enigma” is an eight-issue miniseries written by Peter Milligan with art by Duncan Fegredo.

Michael Smith is the lead character. When Smith was a child, his life was changed by a comic book called Enigma, whose title character possessed amazing mental powers. As a grown man, he finds himself pulled

from his tightly organized life when he is attacked by The Head, a man who enjoys sucking people's brains out. It is then he realizes that the Enigma is alive, no longer just part of a comic book, but part of Smith's reality.

As with "Shade," "Enigma" cannot readily be described because it transcends normal storytelling. The writing is top-notch, and Fegredo's art is very stylistic and fits the writing well.

The first two issues of "Enigma" are fairly violent, with Smith nearly being killed in the first issue. But Smith's close call with death merely serves to help him discover who he really is. As Smith tries to discover the secret behind the Enigma, he discovers himself.

"Enigma" comes highly recommended. The first issue was released on Jan. 19, and the second issue will be available Feb. 23.

"Sandman Mystery Theatre" is a new monthly title written by Matt Wagner with art by Guy Davis. Set in the 1930s, Wesley Dodds is a tormented young man who at night becomes the Sandman, a trench-coat wearing vigilante who arms himself with a gun that shoots sleeping powder.

The first issue is pretty good, although the art is underwhelming. Wagner's immediate introduction of multiple characters makes it difficult to keep everyone straight, but he will have a strong cast to pull from in the future.

The book's dark undertone leaves the impression that there is more going on than is on the surface.



Courtesy of DC Comics

A scene from the first Vertigo issue of "Shade: The Changing Man."

Sandman appears only in a couple of pages, but his presence is felt throughout the book. Wagner seems to be going out of his way to get out of the "playboy by day, hero by night" stereotype. Dodds is not very charming and seems to be sort of a social

flunky, so his character is refreshing and familiar at the same time.

If you like detective stories with a psychological thriller slant, check out "Sandman Mystery Theatre." It's a good book and the first issue goes on sale Thursday.

UNL student suffers indignities, confusion over university name



By Jan Calinger
Staff Reporter

As proud as I am to go to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I believe there's one small flaw that can cause a lot of confusion about my alma mater-to-be.

The name can confuse a lot of people.

Although all paraphernalia sold bears the name "University of Nebraska," and although one sees the name "University of Nebraska" when driving into town on I-80, this is still UNL for all practical purposes.

It's not an upsetting thing. It simply means I have to take five to 30 extra seconds to explain where I go to school.

Whenever I'm in Omaha my mother's friends ask me what college I attend. The resulting conversation is as follows:

I go to UNL.
"UNO? Did you say UNO?"
No, UN-LLLL. Down in Lincoln.
"Oh, I thought you said O, like in Omaha."

I can understand the misunderstanding. It has happened to me when talking to my inarticulate friends. The difference was, they were going to UNO, whereas I

thought they were here in Lincoln.

Out-of-state conversations also have the potential to be confusing. While talking to relatives in Ohio, I mentioned going to UNL. They asked me what I was doing in Las Vegas.

I learned after a minute of explanations that they thought I was going to the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, or UNLV (which some of my friends think is the University of Nebraska at La Vista).

"You're confusing us," they said.

Sorry, I didn't mean to.

"Aw, that's all right. You should have gone to Ohio State anyhow." A friend of mine attending the University of Kansas was making plans last fall to attend the KU-NU football game. She went to the counter, where the attendant asked her what she wanted.

"I need tickets," she said.
"Where?"
"To the KU-UNL game."
"The what?"
"The KU-UNL game."

"The Jayhawks aren't playing UNL this season, I don't think."

My friend was getting flustered. Her friends at UNL told her the Huskers were, in fact, playing the Jayhawks.

"Yes, they are. On Nov. 7."
"No, they're not. They're playing NU. It says right here."

"Yes. The University of Nebraska in Lincoln. It's the same thing."

"I never heard it said that way. But here are your tickets. Say, are you from Nebraska or something?"

But I thought of ways to solve

See UNL on 10

Biography offers insider's view of Led Zeppelin band members' years of excess, superstardom

"Stairway to Heaven"
Richard Cole with Richard Trubo
Harper Collins

The time has now come when all Led Zeppelin fans can do as Zep guitarist Jimmy Page once did and throw their copies of the Zeppelin biography, "Hammer of the Gods," out the window. After all, it's cheaper than tossing a television set.

"Stairway to Heaven," the new Led Zeppelin biography, is a true insider's look at the career of the viking conquerors of rock 'n' roll.

Co-written by Richard Trubo and former Zep tour manager Richard Cole, "Stairway" sheds light on almost all the legends surrounding the band that set new standards for rock star behavior in the early 1970s.

Much of the quality material for Stephen Davis' controversial "Hammer of the Gods" came from Cole's account of events. Not only are all and more of the tales of frenzy and excess from "Hammer" retold in "Stairway," but they are told in more depth and with less speculation.

From the infamous shark fishing and red snapper snatching at the Edgewater Inn in Seattle to the television launching and general debauchery at the Centennial Riot House and elsewhere (make that everywhere), "Stairway" makes it clear why the band had the reputation it did.

Cole and Trubo paint an honest picture of the band that doesn't attempt to justify or defend its activities; but there is little shame to be found, either.

Led Zeppelin was hated as much as adored by the public and media for the intensity of its music and the lives of

its members.

From the beginning, the media wrote off Zeppelin as being nothing but a psychedelic testosterone surge on speed that only juvenile delinquents could be foolish enough to identify with.

Poor media relations led the band to isolate itself in the early years. After Zep reached superstar status and journalists wanted to profit from its rise, the band remained the same — inaccessible.

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That only made media backlash worse, and speculation got out of hand.

By the time their eponymously titled album was released in 1971, members of the band had supposedly sold their souls to Satan in exchange for wealth and fame.

Despite the frequent infidelity that Cole describes as characteristic of vocalist Robert Plant and drummer John Bonham, he takes every opportunity to make it clear that they were really looking for entertainment. Much is left up to the reader to judge.



Courtesy of Harper Collins

Richard Cole, co-author of "Stairway to Heaven"

Frequent humorous and offhand references to the cocaine and heroin abuse of the band (not to mention almost continuous drunkenness) seem surprisingly casual in the modern anti-drug climate, but Cole makes it clear that such activities were inextricably tied to the group's demise. And the final chapter of the book yields the expected endorsement of sobriety.

"Stairway" may not offer much in the way of a challenging read, but it is a thoroughly enjoyable account of a musical and social phenomenon that will never happen again.

If ever you wanted to throw a TV out a window (or every TV out every window), dice a hotel room to bits with a samurai sword or see if a Volkswagen really floats, then "Stairway" is for you.