

# Comics: perfect blend of art and imagination

Albert Einstein once wrote imagination is more important than knowledge; the theory is that without imagination, inspiration is one tough cookie to find. John Stuart Mill once wrote that art necessarily presupposes knowledge.

Perhaps neither of the two ever read comics, but it occurred to me that if there were any one format that blended imagination and art, it just might be comics.

Story by John Bock

Last Saturday, Eugene's first annual comics convention found its way to the Lane County Fairgrounds. What a great deal — where else could you find about 40 comic book merchants under one roof, selling everything from G.I. Joe combat toys to Bill & Opus post-campaign T-shirts.

Oh sure, maybe this was small potatoes compared to other conventions, but I didn't know any better and really didn't care. It was a first. And it wasn't too bad.

"It's a major event in town for collectors and for people who just love comics in general," said Darrell Grimes, host and co-organizer of the convention, or as he put it, the "con."

Grimes has been trying to get a local convention off the ground since 1980, eight years after his shop, Emerald City Comics, opened.

"Eugene is sort of an untapped market; it's a golden opportunity for collectors to fill the gaps in their collections," he said.

National comic book artists from throughout the Northwest appeared at the show; people like Marvel's Randy Emberlin and Chris Warner, DC's Gary Martin, and Mike Grell — one of the top artists working today.

Comic books — more accurately, comic magazines — have a broad appeal, for reasons as varied as their creators themselves. "People are rediscovering comics," suggested Martin, who is from Eugene. "There seems to be a correlation between the economy and the popularity of fantasy."

"It's art and writing... especially art," one dealer said. "New formats draw higher quality work, better quality because you draw better talent."

Tom, proprietor of Tom's Comics, (get it?) said another factor in the phenomenon was basic scarcity: "It's sort of 'I've got it and you don't.' So many competing for so few



Photo by Michael Wilhelm

About 40 comic magazine merchants gathered at the Lane County Fairgrounds to display their wares at the first annual Eugene comics convention.

issues... even though there's multi-millions of copies, there's still multi-millions of people out there wanting those copies."

Warner, artist of Doctor Strange, is more philosophical. "Fiction is a manipulative form; comics — particularly the

superheroes — represent power for the powerless."

He says one of the problems with simplistic, adolescent themes and characters is that they prevent the magazines from reaching a wider, more mature audience.

"There's too many teenage superhero mutants!" he says, chuckling. "Europeans treat their comics like films. It's true, if you make movies just for kids, who else is gonna want to see them?"

ing there are people available to broaden the market and generate new formats. "You go into commercial art offices and artists will have all their little drawings around; cartoons, watercolors... and that's the stuff they want to do."

Martin is one who should know: He was one of them after he graduated from San Jose State with an art degree. He got bored, showed some work at a convention, and started his career in comic art, as did

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— Chris Warner

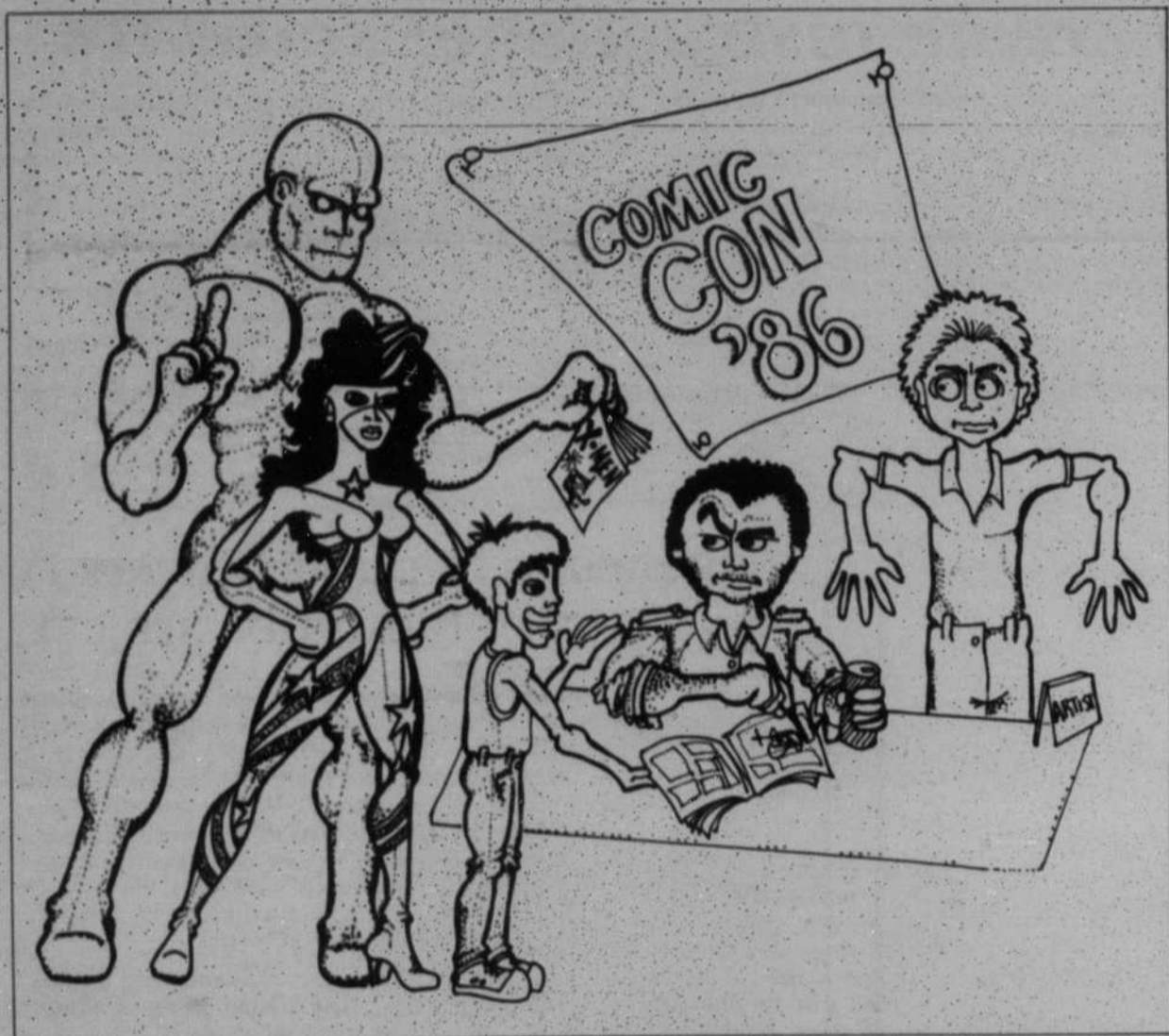
Warner believes if comics had plots and characters reflecting socio-political themes and were sold "somewhere you wouldn't feel like an idiot," public perception would change and a greater evolution of comics as an art and entertainment form would come about.

"I think there'll always be comics," adds Martin, imply-

Warner, Emberlin and numerous others.

"There's been a growing respectability in comics recently," Grimes said. "...more selections, better competition, more free agents and independents are leaving the big nationals (like Marvel and DC) for newer formats and projects."

"It's an exciting time for comics," he added.



Graphic by John Bock

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