

# Out of the closet and into the comics

## Comic characters often reinforce negative traits and stereotypes

BY HAROLD MOORE

**A**mazing Heroes, a national comic trade publication, in its June 15 edition, published a lengthy article, "Out of the Closet and Into the Comics," by Portland writer Andy Mangels.

Mangels, a comic book author, gives examples of traditional comic-book homophobia as well as some of the limited examples of positive imagery now being presented in American comic literature.

"Comics, especially mainstream Marvel or DC series, have traditionally had a lack of gay characters. When they are used, however, these characters often reinforce the negative traits and stereotypes," says Mangels.

"The first depiction in any mainstream comic of gays was in *The Hulk Magazine* #23, October 1980, in a story by Jim Shooter. In the story, Bruce Banner checks into the YMCA. While in the shower he is accosted and threatened with rape by two young men. When Banner escapes, the lilying, earringed examples of manhood exclaim 'Oh pith' (sic), and then, one would assume, rush off to do their nails.

Banner exclaims, outside, '[I] think I'm going to throw up. God . . . what they were going to do to me — ! Oh my god . . . How can anyone . . . ?' "

On a slowly changing attitude in comics, Mangels writes:

"Writer Mike Baron has included scenes in several of his comic series, and has been the

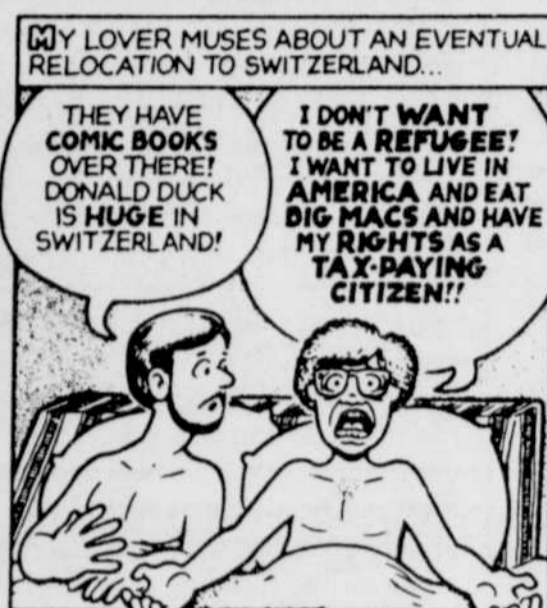
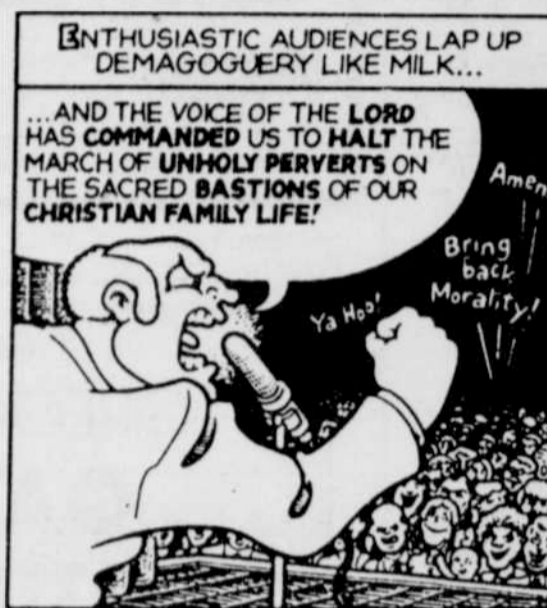
center of a heterosexual AIDS controversy in the pages of *The Flash* letters column since he began work on that series last year. In 'Nexus,' Sundra Peale had a lesbian affair with Jil, while in another issue, Nexus, disguised as 'Lance,' admits to being homosexual to get away from a woman's sexual advances. In 'Sonic Disrupters,' Baron has tossed out several gay references, topping them off with a gay sex scene between a tele-evangelist and one of his young male followers, a la Jim Bakker.

"I asked Baron, since he seemed so at ease with the subject of homosexuality, was he sympathetic to the cause, or possibly gay him-

self? He responded, 'No, I'm not. As a matter of fact, I'm somewhat homophobic.' Baron went on to explain that although he couldn't identify with, or completely understand the reasons behind the same-sex preference, he realized that gays were a legitimate part of humanity."

Mangels encourages fans of comic fiction to monitor the material and take exception to examples of unfair depiction of homosexuality. "The publishers are sensitive to criticism, and in the end we only have to purchase what we see as non-exploitive and fair."

Proudly and openly gay, Howard Cruse is blunt with controversial topics about gays: from his *Dancin' Nekkid* with the Angels.



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