

Local Boy Done Super

Mike Allred among the talented at the Eugene Comic and Collectables Show.

Living in Eugene today without reading comic books would be the equivalent of ignoring rock 'n' roll in 1963 Liverpool. Local comics creator Mike Allred puts that same energy and panache into his work that the Beatles crammed into their music. And while you can't take a time machine to the Cavern Club, you can go to the Lane County Fairgrounds from 10 am to 5 pm Sunday, April 27 and meet a master of comic art.

More than 10 years ago Allred pumped out a comic book called *Madman*, combining angstful existentialism with yo-yos and superheroes. Each panel Allred drew was reminiscent of a Roy Liechtenstein painting. The plots were filled with humor and a zest for life while the colors were brightly provided by Mike's wife, Laura. He created a universe filled with aliens, private investigators, and an amnesiac Santa Claus that left readers with a false sense of déjà vu of a Hanna-Barbara cartoon that never existed. With *Madman* the quality was consistently fantastic, but the quantity of new work became unfulfilling.

Allred focused on making independent movies, getting a Hollywood production of *Madman* rolling and doing everything but what made him beloved by strangers: writing and drawing comic books. But at the dawn of the millennium Allred made a New Year's resolution to stop putzing around. He created a comic book company called AAA Pop Comics, turned the *Madman* movie over to Robert Rodriguez (director of *Spy Kids*), and cranked out 15 issues of *The Atomics*. *The Atomics* were a group of beatniks turned superheroes where Allred continued with his themes of alienation, self-loathing, pop cul-

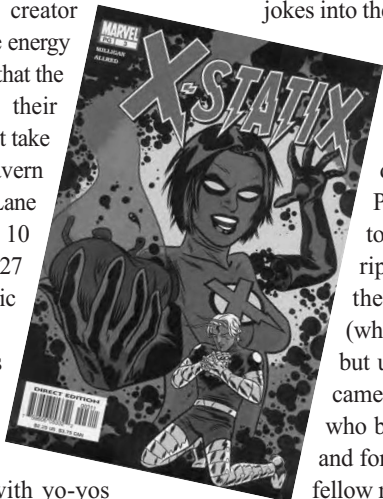
ture obsession, and the notion that love conquers all. The characters were distinct and intriguing while the art always threw amusing jokes into the background.

But *The Atomics* abruptly ended when the big boys of Marvel Comics came knocking at Allred's door. Allred along with writer Peter Milligan were assigned to revamp a second rate *X-Men* rip-off called *X-Force*. Under their new creators *X-Force* (which is now available monthly but under the name *X-Statix*) became a comic book about people who became superheroes for fame and fortune rather than to help their fellow man.

These characters were obsessed with marketability rather than nobility. The superheroes range from Phat, an Eminem wannabe who is now struggling with his homosexuality, to Venus Dee Milo, a young virgin (but only because she does not have a physical body), to Mister Sensitive, a character impaired with acne and hypersensitivity. But fear not, despite their descriptions, these characters are anything but poignant. They are fleshed out and very real but Allred and Milligan remembered this is still a Marvel Comic, so they keep it simple. A comic that teenagers of all ages can enjoy.

Allred's comic books are, like the early Beatles, filled with simple fun and charisma rather than layered with meaning and a desire to change the world.

All of Allred's work, (*Madman*, *The Atomics*, *X-Force* and *X-Statix*) is compiled in trade paperback or you can attempt to collect the original back issues from the many vendors at this Sunday's comic book convention. And while you're there you can bug Allred about when the heck we are going to see *Madman* again. **EW**



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