



# ZOMBIE ZONE

FREE COMIC BOOK DAY SAMPLER



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Marvel Zombie Society Amateur Press Association

presents

**Zombie Zone**

**FREE COMIC BOOK DAY SAMPLER**

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## Comics 2010

The comic book industry is a vibrant and pulsating medium. Over the last two decades, it has been in an almost-constant state of growth and evolution. Longtime fans can recall the thrilling growth and maturity of the medium in the 1980s, the multi-company and multi-versions of the 1990s, and the expansion into public consciousness of the 2000s. Over the past couple of years, Marvel and DC have reinvented their lines into a more cohesive line intended for mass audiences. Many smaller publishers have opened shop and carved out a niche (Dynamite, IDW, etc.). Comic book films and television shows are aplenty. And, thanks to the internet, any reader can obtain almost any book published at any time.

With the industry in good shape, what does the future hold? One would normally assume more growth and outward expansion. However, the future appears somewhat grim. There are signs that there may be a recession in the industry, both creatively and administratively.

With every growth cycle, there must come an end. After the explosive growth thanks to *Infinite Crisis* and *Civil War*, as well as the follow-ups *52* and now *The Initiative*, readers may need time to catch their breaths. An immediate crossover would do more harm than good. And, any subsequent crossovers will likely cause the same type of disdain as with the repetitive 1990s annual events (anyone recall *Atlantis Attacks* or *Armageddon 2000?*).

However, likely the industry will face recession due to external forces. Cost of paper is most likely to rise in the next several years, causing an increase in cover price of comics. \$3 seems to be a current breaking point for a general title. What happens when the standard 32-page monthly books cost \$4 or \$5 each? This is not only likely but should be anticipated by 2010.

The internet has revolutionized the way music is listened to and now how TV and films are being viewed. This is likely to shortly impact the comics industry. Vertigo has already offered first issues for free on the internet. Savvy web users can read any comic ever published on the internet for free. It's only a matter of time before this becomes more widespread in some form or another. The major companies are already experimenting with web access for comics. The problem is that this is a one-way street: once readers begin to become accustomed to reading comics online, it's not likely they'll prefer the hard-copy versions. While there likely will always be hard-copy versions, even a decrease in sales of 10% could have a dramatic impact on the (hard-copy) retail market.

It also appears that the latest cycle of comics-related films and animated TV shows is about to expire. With *Legion* appearing too similar to *Teen Titans* and other related shows, it's likely that viewers will turn their eyes to the next "hot" show (increasingly Japanimation-influenced). The current *Spider-Man 3* and *FF II* films, along with the recent *Ghost Rider*, suggest that too much of a good thing is happening this summer. It's likely that the imitators will see release in 2008-09, leading to a backlash against comics films for awhile. This too will diminish general audiences' interest.

So, what does this mean? Is the comics industry doomed? Of course not. But, a recession is likely and actually ... welcomed! When the industry becomes too bloated, market pressures turn fans' interest to other media. This will cause a shake-out that will allow the comics industry to re-think its approach. Perhaps some convergence of print and electronic media is necessary. Perhaps offering a wider variety of titles. Perhaps rethinking WHO the audience is and catering to different segments. Perhaps focusing on "regional" titles (i.e. books being released only in the Southwest or Northeast to start). Perhaps more multi-cultural and multi-national characters and titles. Or, perhaps following Japan's lead and producing comics beyond superhero fantasy themes. The possibilities are endless. This will likely lead to a strengthening of the foundation for the next growth cycle in the mid 2010s. I, for one, will be looking forward to it.

Mark Lucas

## The Little Redhead That Can

Unlike most superheroes' love interests Mary Jane Watson was not created for this role and, also unusually, she only joined her feature's cast after several years. In an evolution that took decades, she became Spider-Man's girlfriend and later wife, not according to a grand design, but 'naturally' and in ways undreamed of by her creators. One would think a fictional character is entirely subject to the whims of her writers, artists and editors, but MJ somehow acted as if she was alive and refused to do as she was told. Ultimately she prevailed not just in competition with a host of other characters, but also against several writers' attempts to reduce her to very minor roles, to separate her from Peter and even to write her out completely. Maybe that 'insubordination' is a reason why more than a few comics professionals went on record against her and her marriage even though she remains one of Marvel's most popular characters with the fans.

One argument advanced against the Watson-Parker marriage is that it prevents writers from utilizing romantic subplots. (Maybe the real reason why some writers are obsessed with turning Spider-Man into a 'swinger' who keeps falling in and out of love is that it would enable them to rehash old plots and patterns with different actors). Editor Tom Brevoort went so far as to claim that married Spider-Man was only "operating at 40%" of a single one. Taken seriously this would mean that since 1962 he nearly always operated at less than 50%, because for plot purposes a character like Peter committing to Betty, then Gwen, MJ, Felicia, and finally MJ again, is practically like being married. Periods in which Spidey was undecided between two or more women were rare, brief, and never stood out enough to justify Brevoort's dictum. I would not be the only one to say that the time after MJ left (ASM #193, June 1979), when Peter had a different girlfriend in every book, was just a mess. Readers did not get emotionally involved with any of them in significant numbers, so it was only natural that many were glad to see Mary Jane return to Peter's life in ASM #242.

It has been suggested that there are no stories involving a married Spider-Man which you could not also do with an unmarried one. This ignores that Marvel's editorial will not allow certain 'married' storylines (e. g. the Parkers raising children) because it is fixated on not 'aging' Spider-Man (as if there weren't plenty of parents younger than him). But even if true the suggestion would not mean that much. Peter Parker could be written as half of an unmarried couple, but the constraints that would put on writers would be the same as those of a marriage. Unless one turned Peter into a totally different person, there are few plots one could do with him as a single that one could not also do with him married. It is not that after the wedding there were no more stories in which Peter and Mary Jane's relationship went through crises or where they were tempted by others. Conversely, many post-wedding storylines would not have had the same emotional impact had Peter and MJ not been married (or in a *de facto* conjugal relationship), e. g. *Kraven's Last Hunt* and *The Other*.

The way Joe Quesada and others like to portray the Watson-Parker marriage as the cause of all woes lacks perspective and may be diagnosed as a red herring. The romantic angle of superhero features is only one of several aspects and only on a few occasions does it drive the main plot. When fans gripe about the state of the Spider-books, they tend to complain not so much about the marriage as to things like the Spider-totem, *Sins Past* or Peter going public; to over-convoluted and over-extended storylines like the 1990s Clone Saga, or the neglect of the supporting cast. What you don't really hear is disgruntled fans say: "Man, that was so awesome when Peter could not make up his mind between Gwen and MJ, that should have gone on forever". If some fans dislike the marriage, it is generally not because of its effect on the plots, but because they don't like Mary Jane. For this minority everything would be peachy if Peter had instead married their particular favourite.

Comics creators and editors also can be nostalgic old fans who like to revisit old stories or try to return a title to 'the way it was originally intended'. Even if they don't worship Gwen Stacy to the extent of Jeph Loeb (*Spider-Man: Blue*) or Kurt Busiek (*Marvels*), quite a few still think of the Mary Jane of the 1960s as the 'real MJ' and it goes against their grain to accept that she has grown to be much more than the 'party girl' who played second banana to Gwen. That may be why some creators say that MJ and Peter were unsuited for each other as if it was self-evident why that was so, while a large part of their audience would have to conclude that they are desperately trying to ignore how well the marriage worked out during the past two decades and also how even before the wedding Peter had a better rapport with MJ than any other woman he knew.

### Three Fallacious Urban Legends About Mary Jane Watson-Parker

*“The wedding was forced on the creators and editors of the comic-books out of the blue when Stan Lee did it in the syndicated strip. Mary Jane had to be brought back suddenly and rushed to the altar without proper motivation.”*

Joe Quesada told a version of this myth at Wizard World in Philadelphia last June – the way he told it, Stan Lee browbeat Jim Shooter into forcing the wedding on the ASM team. You’d think Marvel’s editor-in-chief would know what he is talking about, but for starters, it took a good four years from Mary Jane’s return into Peter’s life (ASM #242, cover-dated July 1983) to her accepting his proposal of marriage (ASM #292, September 1987). Also, artist Ron Frenz revealed in *Comics Creators on Spider-Man*, he and writer Tom DeFalco were already working towards a wedding ceremony before they heard from Stan, only they planned MJ to stand the groom up: “Anyway, Jim Shooter decided that Pete and Mary Jane would actually get married and Stan Lee agreed because he wanted them to be married in the newspaper strip. [...] I guess when you think about it, the whole marriage was kind of our fault.” This is true in more ways than one, for without Frenz’ and DeFalco’s ASM #257 (October 1984), Stan Lee would not have decided to marry MJ and Peter off in the newspaper strip then. In *Marvel Age* #54, he said: “One day I found out that in the comic book, Mary Jane knew Spider-Man’s secret identity, which surprised me. I figured it was silly that she didn’t also know it in the strip, so I decided that she’d discover his identity in the strip too. Then I figured that if she knows who he is, he might as well marry her! [...] I’d wanted to marry them off. So when Mary Jane learned Peter’s secret identity, it was the perfect excuse!” *“Spider-Man vs. Wolverine #1 showed that Peter and MJ should not/could not be lovers.”*

This one is preached by writer Christopher J. Priest, who then wrote the story as Jim Owsley and claims that Peter’s “romance with MJ didn’t really kick into high gear until Marvel decided to pervert my *Spider-Man versus Wolverine* into an excuse for the two to get married”. But the actual story does not bear out his accusations of being violated: A kiss in MJ’s apartment reveals Peter’s deeper feelings and ruins the pretense that they are just friends (which is later underscored when he comes close to death in a fight and it is her name that he utters). Mary Jane gasps at this, causing Peter to flee. In spite of this, MJ reappears on the final page and they end up in a close clinch as she helps him get over his harrowing experiences in East Berlin. A reader might have been excused for wondering if the two made love after the final panel. In subsequent issues they returned to pretending to be just friends, which permitted the Black Cat to manipulate Peter into thinking he was falling in love with her again, but when Peter realized that he had been duped, he returned to MJ and proposed marriage. Meanwhile Mary Jane’s jealous reaction to Peter’s reunion with Felicia, including her outburst in ASM #288 (scripted by Owsley!) demonstrated that she was definitely not happy with Peter dating other women.

*“The Mary Jane of the movies is a blend of the old Mary Jane Watson and Gwen Stacy.”*

Joe Quesada supported this in an interview on the *Spider-Man 2* DVD set, some Gwendyphiles say similar things about Ultimate MJ or even the mainstream MJ after Gwen’s death. Sure, MJ’s later versions are more ‘serious’ and three-dimensional than the old ‘party girl’ MJ, but are there enough specifically Gwen-like traits to justify such statements? In looks and speech-patterns it was actually Gwen who was remodeled after MJ’s pattern in the 1960s. With respect to family and social backgrounds, the contrast between Mary Jane and Gwen became even bigger since the 1980s (Gwen came from a respected, well-to-do family and had a loving, close relationship with her father, MJ took jobs to make a living and it later emerged that she came from a broken and downwardly mobile home and her relations to her parents and sister were strained). The character resemblance between the later MJ and Gwen is so vague that you could say that the former is a synthesis of the “old MJ” and Betty Brant or Peter Parker with equal or greater justification. Ultimate MJ and the old Gwen Stacy share an interest in science, but that is about it. The Mary Jane of the movies is kidnapped by the Green Goblin and thrown off a bridge as Gwen was in ASM #121, but this is really the Goblin doing similar things in both cases. As far as personality and her own actions are concerned, Kirsten Dunsr’s character has much more in common with Liz Allan (in part 1 she dates Flash Thompson in high school and has an ‘end to my old life’ parting when they graduate) and Betty Brant (her romance with Peter is derailed by his activities as Spider-Man, so in part 2 she becomes engaged to another man).

## Comic Reviews

### Welcome to Tranquility #1-4 (Wildstorm)

Tranquility: Where old super-heroes go to retire. What a cool, but strange town to live in. A town populated by the comic book heroes who fought the Nazis and protected us during the Cold War. They try to enjoy retirement, but that is not always so easy when they still have their superpowers...

The main character (so far) is Sheriff Lindo. She has to give a TV-reporter and her cameraman a tour of life in Tranquility. As she shows the TV-crew around, we get to meet some of the inhabitants of the town. Halfway through the tour (and towards the end of issue 1) one of the old heroes gets killed. From that point on the book reads as a detective story.

The story, written by Gail Simone, is solid and interesting. There is a nice combination of action, drama and humor. Neil Googe's art takes some getting used to. The quality of the art is good, but Googe switches between many different styles. One example is that flashbacks to the heroes' younger days are drawn differently from the rest of the story. Once you get used to it, you will like it.

*Welcome to Tranquility* can become one of the successes of 2007.

### Walk In #1-3 (Virgin Comics)

The main character is a young man called Ian who travels from town to town, barely making a living. And something always goes wrong. He blacks out and wakes up in a new town with gaps in his memories. We meet up with Ian just as he arrives in Moscow and gets a job with a dream-reading act at a club called Deja Vu.

He has abilities he does not understand. He can actually see people's dreams, fears and aura. But the strangest part is that he sometimes has strange visions of a futuristic and alien world.

The art by Ashish Padlekar is okay. It is a bit rough and lacks details, but it suits the story. The colors are soft and pale, but they too go well with the story.

The story (idea by Dave Stewart, script by Jeff Parker) starts off well. It quickly gets interesting, and the way Ian's abilities develop makes you want to keep reading. That is, until halfway through issue 3. From that point on something goes very wrong with the story. Weird does not even start to describe it. I think maybe Stewart's and Parker's imagination went a little overboard here.

The conclusion must be that I liked the first two issues of *Walk In*, but I did not get issue #3 at all. Whether you will like this book or not depends on how weird you like your comic books.

And in case you are wondering: Yes, Dave Stewart is the Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics.

### New X-Men #33-36 "Mercury Falling" (Marvel Comics)

I used to be a huge fan of the X-Men. I bought every book with an "X" in the title. But those days are long gone. Over the last few years, I have dropped every X-book except *Ultimate X-Men*. Lately though, I have tried to pick up a few random X-books to see if any of them could restore my love for the X-Men. New X-Men is the latest book I have tried.

The story arc "Mercury Falling" (issues 33-36) is like a modern version of the constant battle between Wolverine and the Weapon X project. The enemy in this story is the Facility, where X-23 (Laura) was created. Mercenaries from the Facility attack Mercury and X-23, apparently in order to recapture their lost creation. As it turns out, they are actually after Mercury (not a really big surprise considering the name of the story arc). X-23 then gets a chance to prove her friendship to her new teammates by going after the Facility.

This book reminds me of a combination of the *New Mutants* and *X-Force* from the late 1990s. The students are young and still under training and strict control at the Xavier Institute, but at the same time rebellious and a force worth reckoning with.

*New X-Men* is much better than I expected. The story (in these issues at least) was exciting and well written. Craig Kyle and Chris Yost have done a good job of putting these characters together and making them believable as a team. The art by Paco Medina is also very nice.

I will not be racing down to my local comic shop to order the next issues of this title, but I can definitely recommend *New X-Men* if you are looking for a decent X-book to add to your shopping list.

### newuniversal #1-3 (Marvel Comics)

The White Event hits earth on March 2, 2006. For most people it is just a strange bright white light in the sky. For a handful of individuals, life changes in a flash.

John Tensen, Kenneth Connell, Izanami Randal and Jennifer Swann suddenly find themselves as more than they were. They have powers and abilities beyond those of any other humans.

But this is not the first time something like this has happened on earth. Archaeologist Leonard Carson has just discovered an ancient "lost city". The city was rumored to have been ages ahead of its time and to have been protected by the powerful Starr the Slayer.

Warren Ellis and Salvador Larroca have joined forces to give Marvel a whole new universe to play with. The story looks very interesting so far. The story by Ellis just keeps getting more and more exciting. The art by Larroca is better than I expected. I have known him to be a good artist, but he has never been one of my favorites. But his work on *newuniversal* has been great so far. I especially like the way the characters' powers manifest themselves. Part of that success can also be credited to Jason Keith's coloring.

I am already hooked on *newuniversal*, and I predict that this title will be one of the success stories of 2007. Run and buy it today!

*Kenneth Rasmussen*

Four months ago they took him from us. His name was Bill Foster. The world knew him as Black Goliath. I knew him as Uncle Bill.



He wasn't really my uncle. He was actually more like a father to me.

I met him once. Uncle Bill introduced him to me when I was fourteen.

He had a presence about him. He inspired other heroes in the same way Uncle Bill inspired me as a person.

This is where Black Goliath fell. This is where they killed him.

This is where a man who never intended to be a hero died. He only wanted to help people. As many people as he could.



I stand here on the spot where a good man died. Where they killed the best man I ever knew.

And I swear I will make them pay. Stark, Richards, and everyone else who fought against you that day. You will be avenged, Uncle Bill.

Uncle Bill and my father grew up together in the slums of Los Angeles. Uncle Bill got out. Made something of his life. Something special. My father never did.

I was three when my father died. Uncle Bill got my mother a job at the lab he worked at not long after. He helped her get a new apartment and moved us out of the ghetto. He gave us a chance at a new life.

He gave me even more. He was there to teach me how to catch and throw a ball. He taught me higher math and introduced me to a love of science. Most of all, he taught me what it means to be a great man.



A month and a half ago, the world lost another hero. A living legend. The man we called Captain America.

Captain America was a man of old-school principles and values. And he was against the Superhuman Registration Act.

Uncle Bill sided with him in opposition of the Act. It cost Uncle Bill his life. And ultimately, it cost Captain America his as well.



# FALLOUT

## STARK FUTURE

COMING TO A DYSTOPIAN TOMORROW NEAR YOU

## Manga Reviews

### Saiyuki

With the popularity of *Gundam Wing*, *Fushigi Yugi*, and various other “pretty-boy” type shows and animes, it’s sort of a no-brainer that *Saiyuki* and its sequel, *Saiyuki Reload* are popular mangas. However, to say that *Saiyuki* is just another pretty-boy manga is an insult to Kazuya Minekura’s work. While on the surface, *Saiyuki* seems to be another pretty-boy stereotype with its blonde, redhead, and two brunette leads; the complexity of the very worldly priest Genjyo Sanzo, the cheerful Son Goku, the ever smiling Cho Hakkai, and chain-smoking playboy Sha Gojyo go beyond the atypical stereotypes of “The Brooding One”, “The Playful One”, and so on and so forth.

Not to mention Minekura’s art is vastly different from most other manga-kas out there. She renders her men with a sultriness and realism that is refreshing to the cookie cutter way that seems to be so popular. Her men aren’t symmetrically perfect, but each have their own flaws and quirks that she reveals with such skill in a mere stance or expression. Indeed, the men of *Saiyuki* are lookers, but they’re different, exotic, and full of personality.

Another way that *Saiyuki* excels is in its masterful characterizations and interactions. It’s one thing to simply say that Hakkai and Gojyo are best friends, but it’s another to show it through flashbacks in how they met and how protective Gojyo can be, despite the fact that Hakkai can take care of himself. Then there’s the relationship between Sanzo and Goku, something along the lines of master and student, but perhaps something more familial as well.

*Saiyuki* also has captivating story lines. Minekura has woven hints throughout each volume since the beginning that tantalize us and keep us guessing until they come into play. Such as the complex character Dr. Ni who at first is presented as little more than a mad scientist but, as the story progresses, he shows himself as something much more than that (and perhaps the center of all of the Sanzo-ikku’s problems).

Round out the complexity of the characters, the stunning, unusual artwork and throw in high octane action sequences that display the boy’s fighting abilities and there is something for everyone in this series. *Saiyuki* knows exactly how to keep you guessing and yearning for more. If you’re looking for a manga that’s a little different and like your characters wonderfully complex, *Saiyuki* and *Saiyuki Reload* could just be for you.

### Fullmetal Alchemist

*Fullmetal Alchemist*, or *FMA* as it’s fondly referred to, has sort of become an anime phenomenon in the U.S. Go to an Anime Convention and you see a wave of red dusters and blond braids like the main character sports. Now, I’ll admit that I haven’t seen the *FMA* anime except for a few episodes. However, I will tell you that I adore the manga.

*FMA* follows the Elric Brothers, Alphonse and Edward, a young pair of alchemists. Their mother died when they were still children. The two, always studying in their absent father’s books, had a natural talent at alchemy. So after their mother’s untimely death the brothers dove into their studies to overcome the alchemist’s greatest challenge (and break a cardinal law of alchemy) - to create a human being.

In their attempt to resurrect their mother, the boys committed the greatest sin known to alchemists and they paid a huge price. Ed lost his left leg and poor Alphonse lost his entire body. Even as Ed lost his leg, he encountered the mysterious entity known as the Truth, which gave him knowledge beyond normal alchemy. Once he recovered, he called upon the Truth again and made a bargain. However, all he was allowed to do was exchange his right arm for his brother’s soul. So Ed did the impossible yet a third time that day - he sealed his brother’s soul into a suit of armor.

In the aftermath of this, Ed swore to get his brother’s body back and to heal his own by obtaining the mythical Philosopher’s Stone. To be allowed greater resources for his research, Ed became a State Alchemist for the military at the age of 12, something that had never been done before. During their free time, Ed and Al seek out clues to find the Stone in order to regain their original bodies.

Of course, things aren’t quite so simple. The mysterious Homunculi, led by the sultry Lust, are also after the Stone. They are marked by an Ouroboros tattoo, a winged snake eating its tail, and are named after the Seven Deadly Sins. They’re indestructible, powerful and can change the shape of their body at will. They also have a keen interest in Ed and the other alchemists in the world, such as Col. Roy Mustang - the Flame Alchemist and Ed’s commanding officer.

While the artwork seems rather young and childish, the stories contained within are not. Issues such as life, death, childbirth, and zen philosophy are tackled with surprising grace and skill. Though there are humorous moments peppered throughout, the overall tone is a darker one about death and what limits a person should cross when bending and breaking the laws of nature for their own gain.

The characterization is killer here. While at first glance Ed seems to be your brash, hot tempered hero, he’s actually brilliant and has a deviant streak a mile wide. Alphonse is the more introspective brother and at times is the more mature out of the pair, even though he’s the youngest. And the supporting characters such as Winrey Rockbell, Roy Mustang, and Izumi Curtis breath more life and heart into the Elric brothers’ story.

*FMA* is a manga that clearly demonstrates that you should never judge a book by its cover. While seemingly sweet and childlike on the outside, the inner heart of this manga is a bit whimsical, heartbreaking, thought provoking, and has some great metaphors. This is one series where the hype and popularity is well deserved (even though some of the fans may be a little scary).

*Manga Reviews continued on next page*

## The Constantine's Villanelle

I'm a bastard, it's been said;  
I live at the edge of Hell,  
and all my best mates? They're dead.

Dance where demons fear to tread;  
I'm a bit mad, truth to tell --  
I'm a bastard -- it's been said.

See my hands, all stained with red?  
My greeting is quite the knell.  
And all my best mates, they're dead.

What? You say you've been misled?  
Flash a grin, I cast my spell --  
I'm a bastard. It's been said.

All the silent tears I've shed...  
guilt, loneliness I can't quell.  
And all my best mates -- they're dead....

Haunted for the life I've led,  
but my nature's to rebel.  
I'm a bastard, it's been said,  
and all my best mates...they're dead.

*Anita Olin*

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*Manga Reviews continued from previous page*

### Hellsing

Sometimes one must fight fire with fire, and in some instances only a monster can stop another monster. Especially when that monster is the most powerful vampire in existence, the mythical Dracula. Instead of simply killing Dracula at the end of Dracula, Van Helsing captured the powerful vampire and bound him to Van Helsing and his direct descendants as a servant.

Now called Alucard, which is obviously Dracula spelled backwards, he serves Van Helsing's great granddaughter, the tough as nails Integra Fairbrooks Wingates Hellsing.

*Hellsing* opens with a young female police officer, Seras Victoria, surrounded by a group of ghouls (people bitten by vampires who then become undead creatures). Seras is the lone surviving member of a police unit investigating a series of mysterious deaths in a small English village that, as it turns out, has been beset by a vampire. Alucard arrives even as the vampire is preparing to savagely feed on her.

Alucard makes short work of the ghouls. In the process of killing the vampire, he also shoots Seras. However, because she is a virgin, he is able to save her by turning her into a vampire. In the Hellsing universe, only a virgin can be transformed into a vampire.

The story moves forward from there, highlighting Seras' transition from 'Police Girl', as she is called by Alucard, into nightwalker. During this time mysterious vampire attacks are springing up all across England that are unlike any other vampiric attacks witnessed before. As the Hellsing Organization digs deeper, and crosses blades and bullets with the Catholic Church's Iscariot Organization, they find something disturbing - the Millennium Group.

The Millennium Group has existed since World War II and was a pet project of Hitler. Their goal was to create an army of vampires. And now the Millennium Group, headed by the odd Major, has found a way to bring their plan to fruition using a computer chip that transforms people into vampires of a sort. With a vampiric army at their disposal, they want to complete what the Nazis were unable to do in World War II - take over the world, beginning with London.

There is a lot of dark humor in *Hellsing's* depths, from Alucard's nonchalance to killing to the interplay between him and Paladin Alexander Anderson. The two are more like boys playing than anything else. They just happen to be trying to kill each other.

This manga is just a blast. The art improves vastly from volume to volume. There's a huge difference between the art in volume 1 as compared to the art in volume 7. It's still actively being published in Japan so only seven volumes are presently available in the United States.

Still, if you like vampires in any shape or form, I highly recommend this series.

*Jennifer L. Bratcher*

## THWIP! Loves Mary Jane



In the modern comic book market, superhero titles dominate the American comic scene, but make up only a small percentage of the comic market in other countries. The manga style that is popular in Japan, and with younger American readers, has long seemed to be at odds with the traditional superhero comic book style. There have been numerous attempts over the past 10 to 15 years to transplant the successful superhero characters like Spider-Man and the X-Men into a manga format and style, in an attempt to tap both markets. Those attempts have largely met with little success. It seemed that you could either read and enjoy manga comics, or you could read and enjoy superhero comics, but not both. At least, that was true until very recently.

Marvel Comics, one of the largest comic publishers in the world, and publisher of Spider-Man, X-Men, Hulk and many others has, after a bumpy start, finally created a successful blend of the manga and the superhero genres. It achieved this success by making its most widely known and most popular character a supporting character, and turning the spotlight onto one of the most successful supporting characters. The result is the comic book *Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*. And yes, they put Spidey's name first, but the comic is primarily about Mary Jane Watson and her high school friends, including Liz Allen, Flash Thompson, Harry Osborn, and a young science nerd named Peter Parker.

The comic started out as just *Mary Jane*, but ended after just four issues. In a cruel yet common irony in the comics market, the title ended on a cliffhanger. Response must have been better than Marvel had expected though, because a few months later they put out a four-issue mini-series, *Mary Jane: Homecoming*, which resolved the largest of the cliffhangers, and advanced the overall plot quite nicely. By the time the mini-series had ended, it was clear there was a market for the title, and the ongoing *Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane* title was born.

The title billing, with Spider-Man coming first, is just a nod to the realities of the current American comic book marketplace, where most comic book specialty stores display titles in alphabetical order. Giving Spider-Man top billing assures that in those stores, people looking for titles that begin with "Spider-Man" will easily find the comic. In other shops, where all titles for franchise characters like Spider-Man, Superman and Batman are displayed together, having "Spider-Man" in the title helps to tell the employees where the book belongs. In any case, the main character of the series is Mary Jane, and the plots focus on her and her life, with Spider-Man literally being a supporting character in the book.

FYI - A hardcover collection of the first two mini-series and the first five issues of the current series (13 issues in all) is currently available, under the *Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane* title. The cover price is \$24.99 (a little under \$2 per issue, which is a good deal), and Amazon.com was selling the book for as little as \$16.49 in March. It's well worth checking out.

There are some minor differences between the continuity of this title, and the established continuity of the Marvel Universe that dates back to the 1960s. The biggest difference is that originally Peter Parker was in college before he first met Mary Jane Watson. This isn't a problem, however, as the blockbuster movie *Spider-Man* established that Peter and MJ were high school classmates, and had known each other -- indeed, lived next door to each other -- for years. This comic book series builds upon that.

As with all comic books, the key to success lies within the artwork and writing, and how they work together to tell an interesting story. The artwork by Takeshi Miyazawa has the genuine manga style that so many new comic readers want, along with enough of the more traditional American style of artwork that the book avoids the many layout pitfalls that often make a superhero-to-manga transition difficult for superhero comic fans. The writing by Sean McKeever is equally responsible for the success of this book, since McKeever captures the same reader-friendly flavor that can also be found in *Amazing Spider-Girl*.

Storylines have explored jealousy, the tentativeness of new girlfriend/boyfriend relationships, and the awkward exploration of new interests, like Mary Jane's discovery of an interest in acting. The *Mary Jane: Homecoming* mini-series also explored the many issues that surround the right of passage that is the Homecoming Dance, and the selection of the Homecoming King and Queen.

*Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane* is a great comic book that is easily accessible to readers of all ages. Unlike many "all-ages" books, this comic is enjoyable for young readers, while also being interesting and entertaining for older readers. In addition, despite the implication in the title, it's not a romance or soap opera style comic, and it is equally enjoyable for both men and women.

My recommendation is to go back to the comic book shop where you picked up this free MZS-APA Sampler, and ask them for the newest issue of *Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*. While you're there, you may also want to check out some other comics, like *Fables*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Amazing Spider-Girl* or *Usagi Yojimbo*. If you enjoy *Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*, you may also enjoy *Love Fights*, which has been collected in two digest-sized trade paperbacks. While I love *Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*, I also love good comics, and all of these titles fit that bill. If you'd like to share some comments about these or other comics with other comic fans, check out the MZS-APA websites listed below.

Have a great Free Comic Book Day!

Thwip! Loves Mary Jane! Volume 1 Number 1, May 2007, Free Comic Book Day Special. ISSN 1547-5581. The Thwip! name and logo are ™, and contents are © by, Ivan A. Martin. Subscriptions to Thwip! are available in the USA, Canada and Mexico for \$18 for 12 regular issues, plus the Annual and any Free Comic Book Day issues. Make checks or money orders payable in US funds to Ivan A. Martin, and send to 4054 - 70th Street, Urbandale, IA 50322-2616. All previous issues are also available. For details write to the address above, or e-mail to [thwipfanzine@aol.com](mailto:thwipfanzine@aol.com), or go to [www.comicspace.com/thwip](http://www.comicspace.com/thwip).

# About the Marvel Zombie Society Amateur Press Association

## What Is An APA?

An APA (amateur press association) is a collection of individual fanzines collected and circulated to contributors in a single bound volume. Members create and photocopy their “zines” for the entire membership and send them to a Central Mailer, who then collates and sends out copies to members. A roster of set membership provides contributors a friendly forum to exchange thoughts, creations, and ideas. Assessments are based on mailing costs only.

## What Is The MZS APA?

The MZS APA was founded in 1988. It initially began as an individual fanzine under the guise of the Marvel Zombie Magazine before later transforming into a full fledged APA. But don't let the name and origins fool you; it is not in any way a “Marvel-only” APA. It may have started that way in 1988, but that was almost two full decades ago. The MZS APA is a creative community for fans of ALL comic books, fantasy, popular entertainment, media, science fiction and related fields. The diversity of the members provides spirited discussion on a wide variety of topics.

Artists and writers are given creative freedom to practice their crafts within the pages of MZS. However, you don't have to be a trained artist or writer to be a member; a desire to be involved in a unique level of fandom is all you need to produce your zines.

Monthly mailings can range anywhere from 80 to 300 pages or more, with a large percentage of the membership participating each month.

## How Does The MZS APA Work?

The MZS APA is a monthly publication. Members must submit a minimum of 2 pages every 2 months. 25 copies of your contribution are mailed to the Central Mailer (CM) by the beginning of each month. The CM then collates all of the fanzines, binds them together, and sends a copy out to each member. Each member is required to maintain funds in an account to pay for mailing costs. Assessments are based on mailing costs and generally range from \$3.75 to \$5.15 depending on the size of the mailing and delivery method (1st class or bound printed matter rate).

## What Can Be Done In The MZS APA?

You are the creator and editor of your own fanzine publication; you can do whatever you want. This may include artwork, essays, stories, articles, interviews, humor, comics work, or mailing comments (MCs) to fellow members. MCs are one of the most popular features of every mailing because they provide you with active discussion and debate with other members over countless topics. Discussion on all comics, current films, political issues, current events, books and such have all been topics of interest.

## Why The MZS APA?

There is a unique spirit among this community of contributors. The MZS APA is a group of like-minded individuals who share common interests. Semi-annual joint publications (mini-comics, theme issues) are done collectively. Contests are frequently held. Members assist other members with projects and form friendships with each other outside the APA.

In addition, each issue contains numerous contributions full of interesting material covering a wide range of comics and other related entertainment.

There are lots of message boards and other forums where comics fans can engage in discourse about their favorite titles and even some places where various works by writers/artists can be posted. But there is just something about the printed page that you can't get from those places.

More importantly, you're dealing with a closer circle of fans who share the same level of passion for comics and a lot of other related interests (anime, sci-fi, and all sorts of similar stuff). And lets face it, we've all encountered the immature jokers on open forums who make the experience a lot less pleasant than it should be.

## How Can I Join?

If you are interested in joining the MZS APA, it takes only \$5.00 to open your account. A sample copy is \$2.50. If you would like more information about the MZS APA, visit our web-site ([www.mzsapa.com](http://www.mzsapa.com)) or send an e-mail request to [cm@mzsapa.com](mailto:cm@mzsapa.com)



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YOUR BRAINS