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31st Century Schizoid Fan

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Homeworld: Earth
Abilities: 12th Level Imagination

Four of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. But my imagination was really captured by the cosmic stories: the Silver Surfer, Adam Warlock,

Captain Mar-Vell, the Guardians of the Galaxy. I loved science fiction and I loved superheroes: what could be better than combining them?

Me

I've never done anything like this before, but the very persuasive Rob Rundle talked me into it, so I'll give it a go. I'm aiming to write a four-page 'zine for my first effort, and see where it goes from there. How hard can it be? (Gulp.)

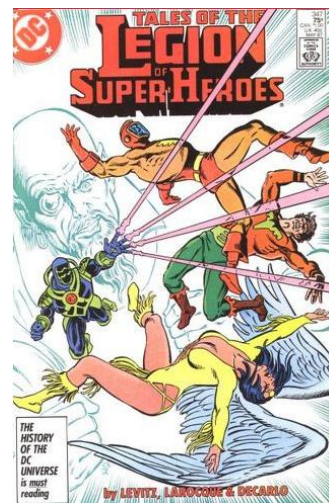
Due to the limitations of a black-and-white printer, and the even more severe limitation of my artistic talents, this isn't going to be a very visual 'zine. Basically it's just words. I may try to sneak in a couple of pictures but don't expect great things of them.

I'll start by saying a few words (but just a few) to introduce myself.

I was born exactly 1,000 years before the Legion first got their Flight Rings, and I think it's no coincidence that I've always dreamed of flying. (I often feel like I'm fighting the Legion of Stupor-Bizarros, too. But enough about work...)

I was brought up on a diet of Victorian fairy tales, Golden Age science fiction, and Silver Age comics. My ambition was always to write, and now I work as a technical author for an IT company, with delusions of being a fiction writer. Close enough!

IF-IF-IF



So I spent the 70s reading Marvel comics. It wasn't until the mid-'80s, when I moved to a town big enough to have—gasp—*two* newsagents, that I started reading the strange new world of DC comics. And one new comic I picked up, completely at random, was this one.

Superheroes from the 30th century! Science fiction! And superheroes! It was majestic, it was cosmic, it was unlike anything I had ever seen before. It was incomprehensible. *How* many characters are in this team? Thirty? And every page has a different unrelated plot on it? What the heck is going on here? Is this any way

to write a comic book?

Of course, I was hooked. I had to buy another issue, if only to work out who all these characters were. Then another. Then another...

By pure random luck, it was my great fortune to stumble upon the Legion at the height of its greatness. Paul Levitz orchestrating multiple plots like some mad conductor. Greg LaRocque and Steve Lightle producing some of the most gorgeous art I had ever seen.

But the Legion wasn't just the best written and best-looking book on the shelves. It was actually unique. No other comic at that time had the same sense of complexity

Me and the Legion

I never read the Legion of Super-Heroes as a child.

The oldest superhero comic I can remember reading was Spider-Man #85 from 1970. But if you grew up in the UK in the '70s, you were probably a Marvel *or* a DC reader, depending entirely on which line your local newsagent stocked. My newsagent stocked Marvel, so that's all I read. My early favourites were Captain America and the original (and best) X-Men, whose early stories I encountered in the black-and-white British reprints, plus of course the Fantastic

and history. No other comic had an entire universe all of its own to play in. Hey, it even had its own *alphabet*!

I don't understand people who won't read the Legion because "it's too confusing" or "there are too many characters to follow" or "too much back-story to catch up on". How are those *negative* points? Those are the comic's *strong* points! Yes, after my first issue I was as confused as I don't know what. But that just made it necessary to read more of it.

Not long afterwards, I discovered a city with not just *two newsagents* but an actual *comic shop*! For the first time in my life I encountered the idea of back issues. That did it. I became addicted to hunting out Legion back issues.

To cut a long story short, between back-issue bins and the Legion Archive editions published in the 90s, I have pretty close to a full run of the comic. There are gaps, and there are some incredibly tatty copies that I would love to replace (oh *why* won't they continue the Archive volumes?) but overall I'm pretty happy with my collection. The one glaring gap is volume 8 of the Legion Archives. This book doesn't seem to exist! I've looked in comic shops up and down the country, I have a standing search for it on EBay... nothing. Volumes 1–7, volume 9, no problem. But volume 8? I'm beginning to think it must be on the banned books list or something.

Anyway, since that initial discovery, I have never stopped buying the Legion. I've stuck with it through three reboots, through bad writers and bad artists, through incredibly stupid editorial decisions. Through low points but through many, many high points too. Every version of the Legion has had something to commend it. But nothing will ever beat that mid-80s volume 3 run by Paul Levitz. Like with Doctor Who, I guess you always have "your" Legion.

But everything I've just spent 500 words trying to say has already been said much more succinctly by somebody you might know:

*"When all is said and done
I simply love the Legion"*
—Steve Lightle



Just the Legion

So, it seems almost like fate that I would be offered the chance to write a fanzine about the Legion in the middle of the biggest

Legion news for years: the "original" Legion has come back to comics and Paul Levitz will be writing it.

Except it's not the *real* original Legion, of course. Despite what DC are touting it as, it's really yet another reboot of the concept. The Legion isn't selling, let's cancel it and start again with a completely new team and a new background story. Again.

So we have a team that, while it *looks* vaguely like "my" Legion, is clearly not. Key stories that the original Legion took part in no longer appear to be in continuity. Previously-dead characters are resurrected without explanation. Previously-existing characters no longer exist. If the writers have gone back to an earlier point in Legion history and picked up the story from there, it is hard to pinpoint exactly when that earlier point must be.

And in forcing this new reimagining on us, they cancelled the actual ongoing Legion book, where Jim Shooter was doing some very solid work, treating Shooter very badly in the process and leaving a bad taste in the mouth.

Still, this re-launched team *does* look like the real Legion. And it was tremendously exciting to see them appear out of nowhere in *The Lightning Saga* JSA/JLA crossover. It was fantastic to see Superman [re-]visit the 31st century in the *Superman and the Legion of Super-Heroes* story in Action Comics. (I'm moving quickly past their *Countdown* appearance, which was a mismanaged hash.) And *Legion of Three Worlds*. Oh my word, that was majestic. Geoff Johns' plotting wasn't exactly watertight, but he knew how to press all the emotional buttons. And George Perez on art. My favourite artist drawing my favourite superhero team, and doing the best work of his career. I could write forty pages just on *Legion of Three Worlds*... but maybe it's best to save that for another day!

Then after that, it went to pieces. DC didn't seem to be able to work out what to do with the "reintroduced" Legion. The backup stories in Adventure Comics just reinforced that assumption. Geoff Johns didn't seem to have any ideas. When you can waste three pages of a five-page story making jokes about mentally ill people, that's a sign that you haven't actually got a story to tell. And then, surprise, this much-touted backup story didn't bother appearing regularly any more. Just when they could be bothered to remember the Legion, I suppose. DC's attitude during this period was mysterious. I suppose that they wanted to keep the team on the readers' radars while waiting for the

new series to launch, but I wish they had done it in a way that made it seem like they cared.

But by then it didn't really matter what they were doing because we already knew the news: Paul Levitz would be writing a new monthly Legion title. Possibly two titles.

Paul Levitz! Is there any better news for a Legion fan?

And Levitz is suddenly on all the Internet news sites saying all the right things and building up his plans for the book. And it all sounds very exciting, and the early artwork released looks very good, and everything seems to be going right.

But Paul Levitz hasn't written a comic for 20 years. And no matter how great he was then, even *if* he hasn't lost anything, comic writing has changed. You can read an 80s comic and tell it was written in the 80s, just as you can read a Victorian novel and tell it was written in the 19th century. Writing dates. Fashions change. A new audience might not accept the style Levitz used to write in. *We* might not accept that style any more, even though we loved it then. Our tastes will have changed, even though we might not realise it.

So, realistically, how good can the new Legion comic be? As good as it used to be? The harsh reality makes it seem unlikely. But maybe it can be good enough. And maybe, just maybe, it can be great.

So although the news of Levitz on the Legion was the best comics news of the decade, I'm waiting to see. And I'm applying the old adage: "hope for the best but prepare for the worst".

That wraps up the news. Time for some reviews.



Review: Legion of Super-Heroes Volume 6 #1

Cover date July 2010

Writer: Paul Levitz

Artist: Yildiray Cinar

Usually I go to collect my comics once a month. Today, I made a special trip into town to pick up this issue.

Before I even read it, I'm not impressed. Look at that cover image.

He's wearing his ring upside down.

I'm sorry, but this is such a fundamental error, I can't imagine how it wasn't caught

and corrected. I noticed immediately when the first cover images were posted on line. I didn't even have to think about it; it was blindingly obvious.

Yes, if the ring was right-way-up it would be upside down on the cover due to the character's pose and that would look silly. So choose a different pose!

Maybe I'm a pedant, and it's a minor matter in the scheme of things, and it doesn't impact the story itself.

But he's wearing the ring upside down. I mean, come on.

To me, it shows that someone doesn't *care*.

I have mixed feelings about Cinar's interior art. A lot of it is great, but parts of it look rushed. I liked his pencil sketches posted on line to promote the book—they were gorgeous. The finished art doesn't always live up to that potential. Maybe he needs a better inker, or maybe he really was rushed (though on a first issue there is no excuse for that). Or maybe he just needs time to grow into the role. I don't hate his work but I think there is room for improvement.

And one more point while I'm on the art: they spelt the name of the Time Institute wrong. Twice. Look at it on page 4 and again on page 17. **TIME INSTITUTE**. It's missing the final **E**. Again it's a minor thing, but it bugs me.

But I love the fact that they are using Interlac, despite the dodgy spelling. The typeface, plus the layout of the futuristic display screens, the classic Clubhouse board symbols... it all makes me feel like the Legion is back. All that's missing is a game of holo-D&D in the rec room. Maybe next issue...

I love Cinar's futuristic designs overall. Titan has an impressive architecture and skyline and spaceships come in a believable range of shapes and sizes. Clothing comes in an impressive variety of futuristic fashions too, though I'm not clear on why Professor Li looks like she's dressed for the 21st century office.



On balance, I like the art. Enough for me to forgive the upside-down flight ring (well... almost) and hope they hold on to Cinar for a while. At least until Steve Lightle becomes free. (Well, I can dream...)

But what about the writing? Can Paul Levitz still write a comic?

Yes, he can. He's not starting with a clean slate—he's got some baggage from the last couple of years to deal with, such as the Legionnaires stuck in the 21st century—but he handles the baggage well, not ignoring it but not letting it get in the way of the story either. And he's already using the rich Legion history. Familiar locations (Titan, the Time Institute) and familiar supporting characters (Dr. Aven, Gigi Cusimano) appear. And although he only gives speaking roles to, I think, eight Legionnaires (five more make cameos), he also introduces a potential new member and a couple more characters with potential to become regular supporting characters. Yes, he can handle a huge cast as well as he ever could.

And he can still juggle plots, too. He's continuing the Earthgov/United Planets tension that has been set up over the last few stories, he's introducing a new Legionnaire, a new Green Lantern, a mystery on Oa, dodgy goings-on at the Time Institute, he's following up Lightning Lad's quest to find his missing sibling, he's kidnapping Saturn Girl's children, and, oh yes, he's blowing up Titan.

Eight individual (but intersecting) plots? In 39 pages? Yes, this is the Paul Levitz I remember. He handles the cuts between scenes flawlessly, using them to build up tension in the major plots while still moving along the sub-plots.

Oh, did I mention it was 39 pages of story? For the price of a regular 22/24 page book. That's what I call value for money.

So it felt like the old Paul Levitz. But did that mean it felt dated? No. It felt very much like a modern comic book.

No, I take that back. It felt different from a modern book in one important way: it felt *dense*. I know it was 39 pages, but even factoring that in it still felt like it packed in a lot more story per page than many modern comics do.

You know what I mean. The modern trend of collecting everything in trade paperbacks, usually about six issues long, means that every storyline is made to neatly fit six issues. Even when there isn't enough story to fill six issues. I read a modern comic in half the time a comic of 20 years ago took me, and rarely want to read it again. There just isn't enough substance.

This issue, though, was packed to the gills with substance. There wasn't anything that felt like filler, and big splash panels were used sparingly, to enhance parts of the story rather than to fill up extra pages.

I was still digesting my first read though of the issue and trying to form a coherent opinion of it when a friend and long-time comic reader asked me what I thought of it. After I struggled to describe the issue for him without spoiling the story (he hadn't read it yet), he stopped me and simply asked, "Did it feel right?"

And the answer was yes, dammit, even with the flaws it felt *exactly* right.

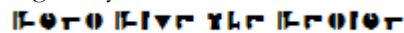
It felt like my Legion again.



Epilogue

Well, I can't quite believe I wrote over two-and-a-half thousands words for this!

This has been a highly-personal view of the Legion of Super-Heroes. Next issue will probably be more of the same, hopefully with a review of Legion of Super-Heroes #2 and... well, I don't know what else. I'll think of something. See you in about two months.



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Set in Monotype Garamond®, ITC Franklin Gothic™ Heavy, and Interlac Solid using Microsoft® Office Word 2007 and Microsoft® Windows® XP on a Dell Latitude D630.

The soundtrack was provided by King Crimson.