

THE RUDDER

The Newsletter of the USS Continuum

MARCH 2009



THE CLOCK IS TICKING...

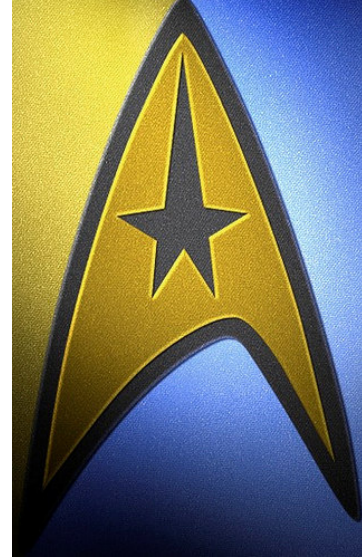
The next two months are going to be some of the most important ones for our recruiting efforts that we've had in a long time!

This coming Saturday (April 4), we will be at the "Festival on the Green" at UWF. While the event lasts from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., we will be there one hour earlier for set-up.

On Saturday, May 2, the *Continuum* will host an event at the Planetarium with the Escambia County Amateur Astronomers as a way of blending science fiction with science fact.

On the weekend of May 8-10, *Star Trek* opens in theaters. We plan to be at the Rave Theater on Bayou Blvd in costume, uniform, or *Continuum* or STARFLEET shirts; handing out flyers; and talking with potential members about our group.

And on the weekend of May 29-31, we plan to follow-up on the success of the film at "The Wrath of Con" in Panama City, FL.



COMING IN THE MONTH OF APRIL

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|----------|--|
| 3 (Fri) | Command Staff Meeting, Books-A-Million, 7 p.m. |
| 4 (Sat) | Festival on the Green, UWF, 9 a.m.
Bowling, Avalon Bowling Center, 6 p.m. |
| 17 (Fri) | General Meeting, PJC, 7 p.m. |
| 18 (Sat) | "Finesse & Elegance" by the Pensacola Symphony Orchestra, TBA, 5 p.m. |
| 24-26 | Camping, Hurricane Lake. |

So we are asking everyone to be involved! There is a lot of work to be done (as described in this issue) to take advantage of these golden opportunities. There are various behind-the-scenes duties, and we will continue to discuss ideas at our meetings. And, of course, we will need a big showing our members at each of these events to make them a success!

FESTIVAL ON THE GREEN

Festival on the Green is an annual event at the University of West Florida. There are numerous arts and crafts displays, as well as live performances and sales. Although the event is a two-day event (Friday and Saturday), we will only be there on April 4 with our displays. We need people there at our booth to answer any questions visitors may have. Set-up begins at

9 a.m. with the festival lasting between 10 and 3. Even if you cannot stay for the entire time, please come out when you can to help us.

The festival is located between the Commons Auditorium, the John C. Pace Library, and along the stretch of adjacent buildings on UWF's main campus. Maps are available at <http://uwf.edu/festival/map.cfm>. Please wear your *Continuum* T-shirts.

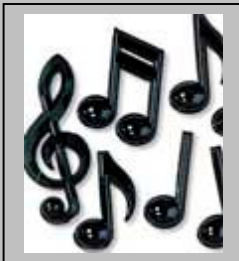
(Afterwards, till 10 p.m., the EAAA will also a public telescope viewing as a part of the "100 Hours of Astronomy," a project of the International Year of Astronomy. For more information about IYA2009 and the "100 Hours of Astronomy," check out <http://www.astronomy2009.org>).

PLANETARIUM EVENT

We have scheduled this event for 2 to 9 p.m. on Saturday, May 2. It will be our first Planetarium Event we have done in nearly ten years. However, unlike past events, we are in charge of every bit of the programming. In the Planetarium, we will be having astronomy programming followed by *Star Trek* programming. We will also have displays, brochures, and "alien food."

This project's planning is still in the works. But we know we are going to need people to prepare the food (the recipes will be available at this month's meetings) and help us with promoting this event through distributing press releases and flyers. We have a meeting with the

PENSACOLA SYMPHONY CONCERT



WHAT: Concert "Finesse & Elegance," featuring *Continuum* member Matt Fossa.

WHERE: Saenger Theatre, 118 Palafox Place, Pensacola FL

DAY: Saturday, April 18

TIME: We will be meeting at 5 p.m. at a restaurant (to be determined) before going to the concert at 8 p.m.

COST: \$25 for Mezzanine seating. **Money due at the CS meeting April 3.**

Planetarium administrator this Friday to further work out the details, and we plan to discuss ideas with the EAAA while we're with them at Festival on the Green. More information will be presented at the April Command Staff meeting.

MOVIE PREMIERE

We will be at the Rave Theater on Bayou Blvd on the weekend of May 8-10. This will include any advance showings (i.e., midnight) as this will be the ideal time to recruit interested members. We need people in costume, uniform, *Continuum* T-shirt, or STARFLEET shirts.

Because there is a large amount of time covered, we will have rotating shifts for those working the table. We need people handing out flyers and "gofers."

There is a *remote possibility* of the *Continuum* having its own special advance showing at the Rave. More information will be revealed as it becomes available.

WRATH OF CON

This will be the second year for the Wrath of Con on May 29-31. With the film still fresh in the public's mind, a science fiction with a few *Star Trek* stars is a great opportunity to promote ourselves. Although this convention is in Panama City, there is a chance we will meet a few people from Escambia and Santa Rosa County. There is also a chance we can people instrumental in starting a new STARFLEET chapter in that area.

To register, go to <http://www.wrathofcon.org>.

OUR DISPLAYS

- Two display boards featuring pictures of previous events
- The *Continuum* mosaic framed
- A Captain's Chair
- TV and DVD player to play *How William Shatner Changed the World*

BUILDING THE CAPTAIN'S SEAT

As one of our displays, Bruce Dolan is heading a project to build a captain's chair similar to the one featured on the right that people will be able to come and sit in.

But we need your help in putting it together before the Planetarium event!

Bruce will be setting up workshop dates. Get with him if you're interested in helping out at 626-3669 or bdtrek@bellsouth.net.



- *Continuum* banner
- STARFLEET flag
- *Continuum* flyers and application forms
- STARFLEET application forms
- Giveaways

GIVEAWAYS

As apart of the Planetarium Event and the Movie Premiere (and perhaps the Wrath of Con as well), we will be having a free drawing for a specially designed *Star Trek* mosaic. This is something we are making and is a unique to get contact information of potential members.

We will also looking at other giveaways. These will include business card-size magnets of the *Continuum* to hand out at each of our events and possibly some STARFLEET items as well.



GOING CAMPING ONCE AGAIN

We return to Hurricane Lake on April 24-26 for a weekend of camping!

Cost is only \$20 per person, which covers your food for the entire weekend and is due by the April 17 ship meeting. (The ship will pay for tent space for *Continuum* members).

For more information, go to http://www.region2.org/usscontinuum/camping_trip.html.

EVENT REVIEW: STARFLEET REGION 2 SUMMIT

By Chris Hammonds

This article originally appeared at Axiom's Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy (<http://www.axiomsedge-scifi.com/>), and it was written for people generally unfamiliar with STARFLEET or the Continuum.

On 6 March of this year, a gathering of *Star Trek* and sf fans, and some folks who just enjoy the camaraderie, took place in Jackson, MS. It's something that happens every year about this time in different places around the Southeast. It's a sort of convention without paid celebrity guests, although this year there was a celebrity there (more on him later).

The Organization:

STARFLEET is — as you may have guessed by the name — a *Star Trek* fan organization that also encompasses and celebrates all of sf. With a setup based on the Starfleet of fiction, it is a group of affiliated clubs from different towns and states, each group being known as “ships” and being basically autonomous with the individual members holding memberships to STARFLEET. These



From Left to Right: Sharon Bogart, Sandy Dolan, Bruce Dolan, Jay Gallops, Chris Hammonds, and DJ Allen.

clubs meet on a more-or-less regular basis to watch films, play games, discuss sf in general, and perform community services (my ship, the *USS Continuum* in Pensacola, FL, performs cleanup duties for the local Ronald McDonald House, among other things when we can schedule them). Leaders of STARFLEET are elected by the membership and serve on a volunteer basis. The current Commander of STARFLEET is Santa Claus (he says his name is “Sal Lizard” but he’s obviously Santa; you’d think if he wanted to go incognito he’d at least shave), and I’m not really sure who anyone else is really. I mean, there is a list but Sal’s the only one outside Region 2 I’ve really met.

Region 2 itself (there are 20 regions to STARFLEET, covering virtually the entire planet) is comprised of Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean — although the Caribbean and, I believe, Puerto Rico are currently not represented (there is someone in Cuba attempting to start a chapter but our marvelously organized government can’t seem to figure out whether or not the ideals of *Star Trek* would constitute a violation of our embargo). R2 consists of 30 ships, nearly half (13) of which are in Florida. Jack Eaton is the Region Coordinator (probably because they couldn’t sucker anyone else into overseeing this unruly bunch) and is by all accounts a very laid back “good guy” (I’ve met him a couple times and would agree with that, only adding that he looks like Meatloaf when he dresses up).

The Summit:

Jackson, MS is about a four-hour drive for me. I work nights, and *Watchmen* opened the day I had to drive to Jackson so this was a loooooong day for me. I

had traveling companions, Sharon and Jay, both of whom also went to *Watchmen* with me. They talked to me, bought me coffee, played bad music (sorry, Sharon) and generally slapped me around to keep me awake for the drive — except for Jay, who slept half the way. We did meet a young lady on the road whose idea of a good time would be setting a friend on fire (it's what she said). Finally, we reached Jackson — which is easy to figure out because it's where the interstate turns into a nature trail, only bumpier — and the Budget Inn, where the Summit was located. The rooms were nice, comfortable, and we got there just in time for The Great Dalmuti tournament. The Great Dalmuti is an easy to learn card game in which each hand changes the social order for the next hand. I can only tell you to buy the deck, gather about eight or nine friends together, and start playing. We didn't get to play this time, though; we were all hungry and tired. Saturday morning began with the Opening Ceremony, in which we were all welcomed by the R2 Staff and stood for the Posting of the Colors and to sing the National Anthem. We also had a reading and introduction of all the ships in R2 and paid special homage to the Summit Host, the *USS Haise*, named for Fred Haise, an astronaut who flew the Space Shuttle *Enterprise* and was a member of the crew in another mission you may have heard of: *Apollo 13*. Next there were several programs put together by the *USS Haise* crew and others throughout the Region: "Star Trek Collectibles," "Klingon the Fun Way," and a speech by Fred Haise. A report on the Klingon seminar and Mr. Haise's speech will follow this report. Later Saturday night came the Awards Banquet, and various people from



From left to right: Vice Regional Coordinator Lucy Ferron; Regional Coordinator Jack Eaton; Commander, STARFLEET Sal Lizard; and Chief of Summit Sandy Dolan at the Region 2 Summit Opening Ceremonies.

around the Region were recognized for their accomplishments. I fell asleep in midafternoon, only to be awakened by friends from my ship to hold a meeting. After the banquet — which was a buffet of very good food — I stayed up til around four or five playing cards with a friend, although we didn't attend the Texas Hold 'Em Charity Tournament, in which over nine hundred dollars was raised.

Sunday was the last day. It began for me with a "Comic Books Now" seminar hosted by John Yelverton, a member of the *USS Haise* who owns a comics shop and is absolutely brilliant (because he agrees with me that *Final Crisis* wasn't very good). Then there was an "Ask the Brass" session which I couldn't go to due to severe hunger (I'd missed breakfast). And the Summit ended with a great Closing Ceremony in which it was discovered that we had raised nine hundred dollars for charity, so a hat was passed around so we could make it an even thousand. We ended up with around \$1150.00 (I offered to take the excess off their hands but...). All in all, a good time was had by all.

I was never much of a joiner. I didn't join the Kiss Army when I was a kid. I didn't join the REM Fan Club when I was one of only three people I knew who had even heard of them. I didn't join the... well, you get the idea. I know a lot of people will resist the notion of joining a *Star Trek* fan club because they don't want to wear a uniform, or hang out with "geeks", or whatever. You don't have to wear a uniform to be in STARFLEET. You can; there are entire chapters devoted mainly to costuming. But you don't have to. As for hanging out with geeks — everyone's a geek about something. Whether you collect guns, knives, comics, sports memorabilia, history books or used ladies underwear (that's for everyone who saw *Life on Mars* a few weeks ago), you're a geek. I can honestly say that I have never been associated with any group of people I enjoy being with or am more proud of (most of the time) than my friends in STARFLEET in general and the *USS Continuum* in particular.

Starfleet and Region 2 Links:

<http://www.region2.org/usscontinuum/mainpage.html> (*USS Continuum website*)

www.region2.org (*Region 2 website*)

www.sfi.org (*STARFLEET website*)



MOVIE REVIEW: *The Watchmen*

By Chris Hammonds

This article originally appeared at Axiom's Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy (<http://www.axiomsedge-scifi.com/>).



Average Rating (Between Four Moviegoers): 3.75 out of 5 Stars

In 1986, DC Comics published writer Alan Moore's (*Promethea, Supreme*) vision of an alternate history where superheroes appeared in the 1940s, as the Minutemen, and the 1960s, as the Watchmen. Moore's original idea was to use the Charlton Comics heroes that DC had acquired — Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Peacemaker, The Question, etc. — and use them in a very dark mystery miniseries in which the story would unfold from the discovery of a murdered Peacemaker. The tale would then take us into the depths of a world in which America relies on superpowered individuals for its preeminence while the rest of the world fears and distrusts the US (y'know, totally opposite of the "real" world). This was something along the lines of Moore's own previous work, *Miracleman*, although that series had been written for and set in England. Problem was the characters would by the end of this story be rendered virtually unusable; DC wouldn't allow it. So Moore was asked to use original characters. He resisted this suggestion at first because he believed that using recognizable heroes would give the work a weight and power that original characters the readers had no stake in just couldn't reach. But then he decided to simply use the Charlton characters with different names, changing them slightly here and there to suit the story. Artist Dave Gibbons (*2000 AD, Green Lantern Corps: Recharge*) was brought in to produce the characters from Moore's detailed script and *Watchmen* was born. And became a phenomenon, a comics legend of unparalleled



popularity among comics fans and the general public alike for a story with all original characters.

Which led to two decades of wrangling over the making of a film. Sam Hamm, who would write the original Tim Burton *Batman* ('89), was attached and was praised by Alan Moore before turning in a script that completely changed the ending of the story — and I do mean completely. That was never made —obviously. Then there were various plans for films and even a tele-series in the vein of *The Prisoner*. (I personally have long held the belief that a

miniseries would be best for this story, with HBO's recent *John Adams* only adding fuel to that fire.) Moore himself came to believe that *Watchmen* should never be made into a film. He stated that comics are static by nature and he had written this story to be perused and studied at leisure, not flashed before the "reader's" eyes at 24 frames per second. He thought that the story would lose much of its impact if seen too quickly for the viewer to really absorb the richness of detail (an argument that Peter Falk had made for *Columbo*, which helped lead it into the Sunday Night Mystery wheel rather than be seen as a weekly show) (more on this later). Moore resolved not to have his name on the credits of the film and signed his share of any profits over to Gibbons.

This review will not touch very much on the specific points of the film. If you have not read the book you should see the movie. If you have read the book you should see the movie. Below are four people's views, people from all over the spectrum:

We'll start with the "average movie-goer." This is a person who likes movies, enjoys a good action flick as well as anyone, and has never read *Watchmen*, knew nothing of the story going in, and isn't a comics reader. We'll call him "John" (because that's his name). John sat with a frown at the end of the picture. He "liked it, but..." thought it dragged in places and was totally lost by the opening scenes intended to introduce the Minutemen and show the history of the Watchmen. He thought it was well-made and enjoyed it, but also thought there was too much going on at once sometimes with little explanation and that we saw far too much of "the naked blue guy" and the ending came a little out of left field. John's rating, based on his reactions: 2.5 Stars

Next we move to another category, which we'll call the "sf geek". This is someone who loves sf and reads the occasional comic; he knows the general gist of *Watchmen* and has looked forward to the film with fairly keen interest but has never read the story. We'll call this person "Jay" (because that's his name). Jay really liked the film, although he too thought it dragged in places. He got most of the story, even gleaning the backstory a little better than John from the opening (probably due to his more extensive and intensive immersion in sf), but thought there several places where things were confusing. These things were all explained later, but they still contributed to a general feeling of vague dissatisfaction with some of the film. Jay still really liked the film and would see it again in the theater. Jay's rating, based on reaction: 3.5 Stars

Third, we have the "sf geek getting serious about comics." This is someone who's just lately really getting into comics and has read *Watchmen* for the first time in the last month in anticipation of the film. This person will be called "Sharon" (I think you get the pattern by now). Sharon just nodded through the whole film. She knew what was coming and when and really enjoyed watching it all the way through. She thought the film was very well done and did complete justice to the book, which she also loved, even though the ending was slightly different. She thinks Zack Snyder is the greatest director in the history of Mankind and... well, I guess she didn't really say that. She does really want to see the movie again, if only to really study and catch some of the things she's

pretty sure she missed the first time around due to the density of the story.
Sharon's rating, based on reactions: 5 Stars

Finally, we come to the "comics geek who thinks Alan Moore is the best writer in comics since Stan Lee and is such a geek that he'd argue that *Miracleman* is Moore's best work, not *Watchmen*". We'll call this person Chris (which would be a strange coincidence except that it really is me). Chris read the original comics as they came out but hasn't read *Watchmen* in over two decades — even though he's borrowed the TPB from his brother and even now still has the issues. Chris loved the film, remembering the pieces of the story as they came up. He never really noticed any kind of drag in the film, although there were several places where he thought the story could have been trimmed and one glaring omission in the character department. The villain of the piece, to Sam's mind (why do I suddenly feel like Ricky Henderson?), just wasn't shown enough for the audience to get a sense of his character, and that's probably mostly because of the very thing Alan Moore mentioned about absorption of story being hindered by the speed with which it passes (told you you'd see it again). Chris would again argue that a cable miniseries would have been the best forum for a live-action version of this tale, although he would also say that Snyder did an excellent job, and understands that a feature film stands to make far more money than anything on TV. Sam will definitely go see this film again. Sam's rating, based on access to his thoughts: 4 Stars

Translating any story from one medium to another is always a hit-or-miss process. There is an enormous amount of pressure in attempting to interpret an artist's work, even when the two media are as similar as film and comics. The translator(s), in this case the director Zack Snyder and the screenwriter Alex Tse, always runs the risk of alienating a segment of the source material's fandom, especially in the case of something with the near-mythic history and devoted fan-base as *Watchmen*. Snyder and Tse had a nearly impossible task that they met very well. This really is an excellent film that I really expect to either pick up steam over the coming weeks or wallow in mediocrity (after the initial, prerelease hype-induced success) only to become recognized for the classic film it really is over time. The density of the story lends itself to repeat watching, and is indicative of a film that should only get better and be understood more fully with each successive viewing. Alan Moore may have taken his name off the credits,



but this film is a true tribute to him and a worthy translation of his work to film. There will never be an exact, precise match but Snyder and Tse come very close to it.

TELEVISION REVIEW: *Dollhouse*

By Chris Hammonds

This article originally appeared at Axiom's Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy (<http://www.axiomsedge-scifi.com/>).

Rating (after 6 Episodes): 4 out of 5 Stars (with a lot of upside)

I had never heard of this series until just a few months ago. I don't tend to read a lot about what's coming up. I don't spend much time watching new television anyway, and, frankly, after all the infighting and stupidity which destroyed *Sliders*, inside stories on these things only serve to depress me. I knew Joss Whedon was the creative force behind the show, and Eliza Dushku would star, that was all I needed to know to see that this could be a great show. It was also on Fox, which had somehow figured out a way to crush Whedon's *Firefly*, and that they were planning on putting on Friday nights — the same move that NBC made with the third season of *Star Trek*, and everyone connected with that show would tell you they knew they were slated for failure the moment they saw that. So, while I felt I had every reason to believe the series would be great, I also felt I had reason to believe the series wouldn't last long. So, while I planned to watch it, I didn't spend any time beforehand reading about it, and really didn't know much about the basic storyline going in.

The *Dollhouse* is set in Los Angeles and is ostensibly about a secret organization that uses a "super-brainwashing" technology to completely wipe the memories and personality from "volunteers". These "volunteers", called "dolls" or

"actives", can then be implanted with the memories and experiences of anyone for any purpose, at the behest of very wealthy and/or powerful clients. Or they can be used by the *Dollhouse* itself to protect the operation. That's the basic gist of a much more complicated story thus far.

I make notes on episodes when I watch them, sometimes detailed, sometimes less so. I share them here, by episode:

- "Ghost" - Interesting. Looks like they may have found a cinematic "Total Recall" that works. Great first story, although I don't know how bright it was for them to steal the guy's money at the end — I'm sure he paid quite a bit up front for Echo. Not thrilled with "the reporter following the Hulk" —er, I mean, Agent Mulder—er, I mean, Agent Ballard but we'll see.
- "The Target" - This "Alpha" thing reminds me of something, something pretty recent but I can't put my finger on it. Yet. It is interesting that he killed everyone but Echo. Wonder if "he" is Echo. Should have seen the camper guy coming. Why didn't they program Echo to be tougher, Rambo or something? Unless they really didn't know what he was going to do —and that's dumb. Still, nice to see them make Wrong Turn. Okay, the end explained it all, at least

them not knowing makes sense. This woman who lives across the hall from Ballard? Bet she's from Dollhouse.

- “Stage Fright” - I finally got it — “Alpha” reminds me of that first bionic chick on The Bionic Woman from last year, “The First” that goes crazy and decides to avenge whatever wrongs have been done to him/her. Although it could still be Echo. Now I’m wondering if anyone is who they appear to be (after Victor turned out to be from Dollhouse; didn’t see that coming at all). Someone could easily have imprinted the psychiatrist, Amy Ackerman’s character, Echo’s handler, even the snotty lab guy (which also reminds me of The Bionic Woman). Rihanna’s hot but her music sucks, and she’s a loon. This whole thing about Echo being special is kind of a given — she is Eliza Dushku. Wish the mob guys had whacked Ballard.
- “Gray Hour” - Not too sure about the whole “no one knows the details of your engagement” thing; just seems like a good way to get actives wiped out. Is pretty cool how the whole safe-cracking thing was brought into the ep — with the security guard and all. Love the Cell riff (why haven’t they made that into a movie yet?) wiping Echo’s imprint. But these two dorks she’s locked in with... you have one — ONE — way of reaching the outside world and you throw it on the floor?!? Love the imprint Sierra with taffy thing but I thought they only had thirty

minutes from the time Echo was wiped. It would have had to take them that long to figure out what happened to her, much less talk about it, then imprint Sierra as Taffy, then talk that Taffy into helping, then...; Tofer hints that only Alpha could have come up with the method of wiping Echo but how could Alpha know that doing that wouldn’t get her killed? And after all the trouble he went to leave her alive.

- “True Believer” - Worst ep so far, I think. Just not thrilled with the making her eyes cameras thing. Victor’s “man-reaction” is interesting, though. Wonder if the “big revelation” next week is going to be that the dolls — or maybe just some of them — are either becoming self-aware, or have been infiltrated. Maybe there’s a rival organization... and maybe it’s a secret organization within the Church... and, and... anyway. I don’t understand Dominic’s whole deal with Echo; was very surprised by that. Wish I could say I was surprised that the government agent turned out to be a lying, conniving murderer.
- “Man on the Street” - Victor and Sierra? I don’t think Victor’s any kind of infiltrator; he’d have to be smarter than that. Didn’t know that every good fairy tale gets more divisive as it’s told, but... Is Ballard a Terminator? Or is this billionaire just scraping the bottom of the barrel for security? The billionaire’s story is sad — I think it even touched the emotionally dead Ballard, no

matter what he acted like. The thing about the handler having sex with a doll — I'm surprised this hasn't happened before. I'm really even more surprised that the handlers aren't wiped and imprinted before they start in the field. Mellie and Ballard — I knew that story got to him! I never liked Hearn anyway. I can't believe DeWitt has sent Hearn to kill Mellie; I can't believe Hearn will go through with it without trying something. What the — there are 20 DHs? Why do I think the "someone distracted the programmer" story is bs? I wonder if maybe someone in the DH is really Alpha, or working for him, with or without his knowledge. HAH-HA! I knew Mellie was one of them!!! Still, not exactly the "OMG!" moment I was expecting.

All right, that was a glimpse into my twisted thought process. And this was actually a more coherent version than usual. Most thought-strings I spin would make no sense in the "real world".

Dollhouse is an excellent show with an episodic storyline that combines great stand-alone stories with an intricately woven overall storyline that has enough action and mystery to keep the viewer coming back for more. The beauty of the central idea is that anyone on the show can be anything at any

time, making it easy for them to manipulate the viewer and provide a nearly unlimited amount of twists and turns, no matter what they've shown in the past. The danger of this, of course, is if we become invested in a character and they outguess themselves by going to the "nothing is how you think" well too often. I trust in Whedon, though, to do the right thing and not let that happen. He has a nearly infallible sense of what he as a fan wants to see and how to go just beyond that, often taking us somewhere we really didn't think we wanted to go and making us love the journey. My four star rating here is indicative of the fact that this is a series that hasn't reached its potential, but also (totally unlike *Medium*) because this story has no real hook into the real world and has a much higher bar to reach story-wise for a five star rating. I have no doubt Whedon can get us there — he certainly did with *Buffy*, and *Angel*, and... well, everything he's ever done, really — but it will take a bit of time.



COMIC BOOK REVIEW: *Squadron Supreme*

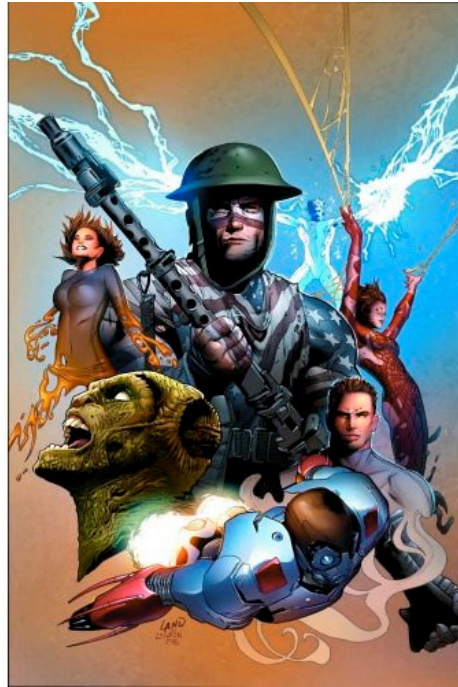
By Chris Hammonds

This article originally appeared at Axiom's Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy (<http://www.axiomsedge-scifi.com/>).

First Story Arc: Power to the People

Rating: 3.5 out of 5 Stars

In the '70s, Marvel and DC did a number of crossovers, two Superman/Spiderman team ups and a Hulk/Batman to mention a few, but one of the hottest stories they ever discussed was an Avengers/JLA teaming that never came off. (This team-up did occur, of course, a few years ago now but in the '70s it just never looked like it would). Marvel blamed DC, DC blamed Marvel, blah blah blah — bottom line, it never



happened. But Marvel writer Roy Thomas had already created an analogue to the JLA with the Squadron Sinister, a group of four villains brought together by the cosmic entity Grandmaster to do battle with the Avengers. Later, it was shown that these villains were patterned after the heroes of an alternate Earth, a team named The Squadron Supreme. This team's roster was filled out to more closely parallel the JLA's and supported a couple of miniseries in the '80s and a graphic novel (in the days before "graphic novel" became the designation for any comics story the way it is now). This became known as the Earth-712 version of the team (Marvel Earth is designated Earth-616).

Years later, the great writer J. Michael Straczynski (creator of *Babylon 5*, and the comic *Rising Stars*) decided to try his hand at "reimagining" the Squadron Supreme in his *Supreme Power* series. Said to be set on Earth-31916, this team was a more cynical, science fiction-oriented offshoot, having the soft edges that typically come with comics logic made sharper. Hyperion, the Squadron version of Superman, is shown to be an alien who crash landed as a baby and was kidnapped by the government and given "parents" who raise him in the controlled environment of a government safehouse. Power Princess (Wonder Woman) is ostensibly a Greek Goddess who maintains her physical perfection by absorbing the life force of anyone handy. Blur (The Flash) is the child of a single parent who exploits his unexplained superspeed for monetary gain, becoming a kind of corporate billboard for the highest bidder. Which brings him into direct conflict with Nighthawk (Batman), a black man who saw his parents killed as victims of a

hate crime and whose main now focus is crime that affects mainly black victims. He sees Blur, who is also black, as a sellout. Amphibian (Aquaman) and Dr. Spectrum (Green Lantern) are linked emotionally, the former a mute girl who was drowned but did not die, the latter a government agent testing a crystal weapon taken from Hyperion's ship. Emil Burbank, the 31916 version of Lex Luthor is also brought into this mix. Later, this group would interact with the heroes of Marvel's *Ultimates* line in the series titled *Ultimate Power*, taking that world's Nick Fury while leaving their Power Princess behind.

In the first arc of the new series, Howard Chaykin (*Black Kiss, American Flagg*) and Marco Turini begin the story five years after the devastation that occurred on Earth-31916 in the wake of the events of the *Ultimate Power* mini. The Squadron has disbanded and most of the members have disappeared while mankind rebuilds. Nick Fury and Emil Burbank are government operatives and Arcanna Jones, a Squadron member who most closely resembles Marvel's own Scarlet Witch in power, has gone into business for herself. Man has even sent four astronauts to the Moon, where, unknown to the general public, they find an alien artifact, a spore that infects them and is then surreptitiously spread to various people around the nation. This creates an analogue of Spiderman, Captain America (Old Soldier, who is actually made from the dust of various soldiers of different eras buried in the Tomb of the Unknowns), and Iron Man, in addition to the astronauts being an ersatz Fantastic Four, all of these creations being fairly drastic variations on the heroes we know. In addition, there are others not so familiar. Most of this first arc is used to show the new superhumans, reintroduce some of the old team, and give us hints and glimpses of others. This is a world of reawakening power, power that Nick Fury means to control through the reinstatement of the S.H.I.E.L.D. Project he headed on his own world. Fury uses his history as a pragmatic soldier to navigate the corridors of governmental power and shows an easy ability to win over individuals of great power to his side.

"Power to the People" is an excellent lead in to the rest of this ongoing series, my only problem with it being the time. Some of the things that happen, some of the reactions that people have in the series, especially some of the superhumans, just don't seem to jibe with it being set five years after the Squadron Supreme basically disappeared. It just seems sometimes that that disappearance couldn't have happened more than a few months before the beginning of this story at most. That said, it's a minor complaint. As for the rest of the Squadron, in the current miniseries *Ultimatum*, Princess Zarda (Power Princess) is going to try and reopen the dimensional gateway between the Ultimate Universe and Earth-31916 so we can evidently look forward to her return to the fold, and the end of issue #6 — the last installment in this arc — gives us a hint of other members returning; Blur and Nighthawk, along with the couple of former members previously mentioned here, were shown in this story. Chaykin's writing is excellent here, as is Turini's pencils — not generally a fan of this style of art for super hero stories but it really seems to fit here.

This storyline is now available in a trade paperback.