

PANELOLOGY



BY SEAN MCQUAID

Legion of Super heroes (ongoing series)
Writer- Tom McCraw; Penciller-
Stuart Immonen; Inker- Ron Boyd

THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES HAS been through more incarnations than Shirley McLaine, and is diving headlong into its latest and perhaps greatest identity crisis yet under the guiding hands of the McCraw-Immonen creative team. Everything hits the fan in *Legion of Super-Heroes* #54, hailed by advance DC publicity as a major turning point for the series. A comic book staple for decades, the Legion is well-known to many fans as a large, powerful and revered group of teen heroes based in the

Legionnaires series (by the Bierbaums), Giffen and the Bierbaums left the book.

The writing chores fell to, of all people, Tom McCraw- the book's colourist. By that time, Stuart Immonen had already become the book's penciller, a blessed relief from the aesthetically bankrupt Giffen. Immonen is able to render high technology and alien beings and locales with imaginative flair and concrete realism, essential talents for any Legion artist; moreover, Immonen is both a competent storyteller and an action artist. Best of all,

find that they have been framed for treason as collaborators of the hostile Khundish empire.

The active Legion members (including Drake "Wildfire" Burroughs, immensely powerful, anti-energy being given form by his containment suit; Brin "Timber Wolf" Londo,

escape the authorities and go underground, taking on new costumes and appearances so that they can continue their work undiscovered while attempting to clear their names; and, as tension mounts, Vi usurps command of the team from Rokk and leads them into their new secret life as costumed adventurers on the run, going from planet to planet as they continue to battle for justice in secret while seeking proof of their innocence.

The end result is a combination of *The Fugitive T.V.* series and Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy*, though certainly more diverse and sophisticated than the latter. The new treason plot introduces a strong, sustained undercurrent of suspense which has been absent from the Legion of late, giving the book direction; it's also a good excuse to get the rather jaded adult Legion back into costume (as many fans have requested) since the members are forced to adopt secret identities of sorts (some of the new outfits are pretty snazzy, too, though others are decidedly less so). McCraw manages to develop the characters in a consistent, engaging and believable fashion except for Vi's unchallenged seizure of command from Rokk, which comes out of left field in the latter half of the story. He also shows an appreciation for and grasp of Legion continuity in his depiction of numerous friends, foes, and former Legionnaires on the periphery of the action: Universo, the "reformed" criminal mastermind who, as New Earth's ambassador, engineered the Legion's frame-up to prevent their future interference with his plans; the troops and students of the United Planets Militia Academy (who are forced to apprehend the Legion and whose ranks include such former Legionnaires as Duo Damsel, Bouncing Boy, the Legion SUBS, and even Crystal Kid); and dozens of others. The current storyline has the makings of a minor comic book epic, and McCraw seems comfortable with the cast and plot complications such an undertaking entails.

Apart from some characterization glitches, the one major complaint about *Legion of Super Heroes* #54 is its cover: one of those fancy-schmancy, die-cut, foil-enhanced excesses that looks rather nice but jacks up the already expensive comic's price from \$2.25 to a princely \$3.95; thankfully, this is an isolated incident to mark the new direction in the series-actually the first time that the rather uncommercial, cult-following Legion series has resorted to such sales gambits as gimmicky covers.

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thirtieth century. The current Legion series has shaken up the team's universe, set in a time years later when the galaxy is struggling out of an environmental and economic collapse, and the long-disbanded, older Legion reunites to help bring peace and order to a chaotic cosmos.

The result was thirty-something super-heros in a science-fiction setting, revolving largely around the war to free Earth (which was later destroyed) from a covert takeover of its government by a malevolent alien race known as the Dominators, with a variety of subplots concerning what had become of past and present Legion affiliates during the years between the current series and the previous *Legion of Super Heroes* series, which had been written by Paul Levitz until its cancellation with his departure. The present, darker *Legion of Super Heroes* series was authored by Keith Giffen (who was also series penciller) and Tom and Mary Bierbaum, who charted the evolution of the Legion's universe on a rather grand scale. After the resolution of the Earth war storyline ("The Terra Mosaic"), followed by the destruction of Earth and the establishment of the new teen legion that spun into its own

though, are his people. Immonen renders each character uniquely and always with some observation from life, whether it be expression or physical traits; his characters have a naturalistically sculpted appearance reminiscent of Adam Hughes, with a beautiful sense of chiaroscuro reinforced by the inking of Ron Boyd.

What about the story, you ask? Well, McCraw has only begun to establish himself, but issue #54 marks his first major storyline and a new character for the book. The Legion, fresh from a disastrous confrontation with the time-warping tyrant Glorith, find several of their members transformed-some into children (Kent, Devlin and Mysa), one into an old man (Brainiac S), and another into something both more and less than human (Celeste, whose body is destroyed, leaving her a humanoid energy entity). Led by veteran Legionnaire Rokk (formerly Cosmic Boy) Krinn, the Legion returns home to the United Planets only to

animalistic mutate possessed of superhuman strength, speed and senses; Salu "Vi" Digby, combat veteran with the ability to shrink in size; Ayla (formerly Lightning Lass) Ranzz, who generates and projects electricity; Brainiac 5, scientific genius; Celeste, embodiment of a vast emerald energy; Laurel Gand, "superman"-powered Daxamite; Sussa "Spider-Girl" Pakka, master thief endowed with animated, elongating tresses; Jo (formerly Ultra-Boy) Nah, who can channel his body's near-limitless ultra-energy into any one of several superhuman powers at a time, including strength, invulnerability, flight, sensory enhancement, and heat/x-ray vision; Mysa Nal, accomplished sorceress; and Rokk Krinn, natural leader and tactician, who lost his magnetic powers in combat-related injuries)