

# PANELOLOGY

## You Will Believe a Man Can Fly

Flight: it has probably fascinated humanity since our first encounters with birds, and we have long coveted that power for ourselves through our stories, from Icarus to Superman. It's one of the most primal, universally appealing fantasy concepts imaginable.

It seems strange, then, that the power of flight has become so... common. From Superman on up, our pop culture's fantasy stories are populated with an ever-growing legion of characters who can fly, including many whose flight power is but one of several exotic abilities they may possess. Whether it's mutation, magic, or mind-over-matter, it seems that in comic books just about everyone and their dog can fly (literally, if you count Krypto the Superdog).

Despite this saturation, the concept persists in comics and all other fantasy mediums. Indeed, the enduring archetypal strength of flying characters is apparent in the fact that several of the comics' most successful characters are based solely or primarily on the power of flight. Unquestionably the best-known and most successful of these birdmen (flight-based heroes are usually patterned after birds and equipped with wings) is **Hawkman**. Arguably the most successful and popular DC Comics character of the 1940's not to have his own series, Hawkman co-starred in *Flash Comics* with (who else?) the Flash throughout the 1940's, until the shrinking comics market saw the cancellation of virtually all super-hero comics by 1950.

Hawkman was archaeologist and antique weapons collector Carter Hall, who discovered through dreams that he was the reincarnation of the unjustly slain Egyptian prince Khufu. Inspired by his dreams to create an anti-gravity Nth metal which he incorporated into a costume complete with wings and hawk-like mask (emulating the Egyptian deity Horus), Hall defeated the evil reincarnation of Khufu's killer Hath-Set (Anton Hador) and continued to battle evil thereafter as the Hawkman, battling the crimes of the present with the weapons of the past. He eventually picked up a sometime partner in the form of his fiancée Shiera Sanders, a.k.a. **Hawkgirl**. One of the most powerfully bizarre visual concepts of the Golden Age of comics with a unique modus operandi, Hawkman captured readers' imaginations in both his own *Flash Comics* feature (where he often upstaged the title character) and as the chairman of the legendary Justice Society of America (comics' first super-team) in *All-Star Comics*. In fact, he was the only character to appear in every issue of *All-Star*.

Such was Hawkman's impact that a new Hawkman was among the first to appear when DC began reviving the super-hero genre with revamped versions of old favourites in the late fifties. This Hawkman looked almost exactly like the earlier one, and had the same flight power and antique weapon arsenal, but in keeping with 1950's trends he came from a science fiction background rather than a mystical one: he was Katar Hol, wingman (policeman) from the planet Thanagar come to Earth to study human police methodology (accompanying him was his wife and partner Shayera Thal, alias Hawkgirl, later known as **Hawkwoman**). These new hawks starred in their own ongoing series and features several times over the years, and became members of the Justice League. The new Hawkman, further revamped as a darker character by Tim Truman in *Hawkworld* and reworked still further during *Zero Hour*,

currently appears in his own ongoing series and as a member of *Justice League America*.

No other birdman can compare to Hawkman's success, but a few others have achieved varying degrees of significance. The most noteworthy Golden Age flyboy was Quality Comics' **Black Condor**. Conceptually speaking, the Condor was rather



silly: he was an orphan raised by condors in the Mongolian desert, where he discovered he had the mutant ability to fly. He eventually found his way into western civilization and established a double identity for himself by avenging the murder of a US senator who conveniently looked just like him. He thereafter became a costumed crimebuster (though he didn't sport wings or even a mask, just trunks and boots and some weird underwear, glider chutes). What made the Condor significant was the artist on his feature in *Crack Comics*, Lou Fine. A superbly talented draftsman with a classical flair for anatomy, Fine made the Black Condor one of the most imaginatively graceful flying figures of any artistic medium or era.

The Condor joined the bulk of the super-heroic flock in limbo by the end of the 1940's, and did not reappear until the 1970's. By this time DC had bought out Quality Comics, and DC reintroduced many of Quality's characters as inhabitants of an alternate world (Earth X) where the Nazis won World War II. These Freedom Fighters, including the Condor, debuted in a *Justice League of America* guest-shot and briefly sustained their own ongoing series in the 1970's. The Freedom Fighters characters were later integrated into DC's mainstream 1940's continuity and the Earth-X business was written out of continuity altogether following the *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. So, too, were all the Freedom Fighters' 1970's goings-on, and that being the case the only canonical contemporary appearances the Condor has made to date are as a ghostly behind-the-scenes mentor to the new Black Condor, who briefly sustained his own ongoing series a short time ago (and even more briefly served as a member of Justice League America). The new Condor is a reclusive, surly reluctant hero and mutant telekinetic whose

abilities allow him to fly (among other things), and he appeared most recently in *Showcase '94*.

The final significant flyboy of the 1940's was the **Red Raven**, a hero who was raised on the remote island of the winged Bird People (who gave him a winged red costume that allowed him to fly as they did, probably to avoid giving the lad an inferiority complex). The Red Raven aimed high, debuting in his own comic book, but dive-bombed into obscurity since his title only lasted one issue (an issue notable for some Joe Simon/Jack Kirby work and the debut of one of comics' great oddball heroes, the Human Top). Decades later, it was revealed that Red Raven had retired to become the rather fanatic guardian of the island of the Bird People, appearing as a menacing guest-star with the X-Men and Sub-Mariner, whom Red Raven died battling. He has also appeared sporadically in stories set in the 1940's as a member of a team called the Liberty Legion. His daughter succeeded him as the new Red Raven, but has only appeared once to date.

As for who the most significant of the modern-day flyboys is (apart from revampings of the above Golden-Agers), that's probably a toss-up between Marvel Comics characters Archangel and the Falcon. **Archangel** (millionaire playboy Warren Worthington III) debuted as The Angel (the second Marvel character by that name) in the now-classic 1963 premiere issue of *X-Men*. The X-Men are a team of adventurers whose members, like the Black Condor, are all mutants born with qualities or abilities outside human norms. Angel's mutation was a pair of big, feathery white wings that enabled him to fly. He was a mainstay of the struggling X-Men book until its hugely successful 1970's revamping led to him and other characters being dropped from the roster in favour of new additions like Wolverine, Banshee and Nightcrawler. After leaving the X-Men, Angel (who publicly revealed his secret identity) founded and financed a new super-team called the Champions (starring throughout their short-lived ongoing series), and after its disbanding he served stints with the X-Men and later the Defenders (remaining until the disbanding of that team and the cancellation of their series).

Ever the team player, Angel then founded and financed the new team X-Factor (composed of the original founders of the X-Men), starring throughout that ongoing series until its roster merged with the X-Men. Early in X-Factor's history, Angel was grievously injured in action and had his wings amputated. He was then captured by the would-be world conqueror Apocalypse, who brainwashed Angel into becoming a killing machine and genetically re-engineered him so that his wings regrew as blade-edged, near-invulnerable organic steel wings whose feathers he could fire like missiles and which exuded a chemical that induced paralysis on contact. The newly formidable Angel (who also now had blue skin) soon broke free from Apocalypse's control and rejoined his teammates with the new name of Archangel. Archangel now appears in the various ongoing X-Men series (and has also been spun off into the successful X-Men animated series and toy line).

*The Falcon* is a more obscure character at present, but has been a major player in past Marvel Comics, beginning with *Captain America* # 117, wherein Cap met up with bird-trainer Sam Wilson on a remote island and trained him as a crimefighter when they joined forces against the Red Skull. Wilson, clad in

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