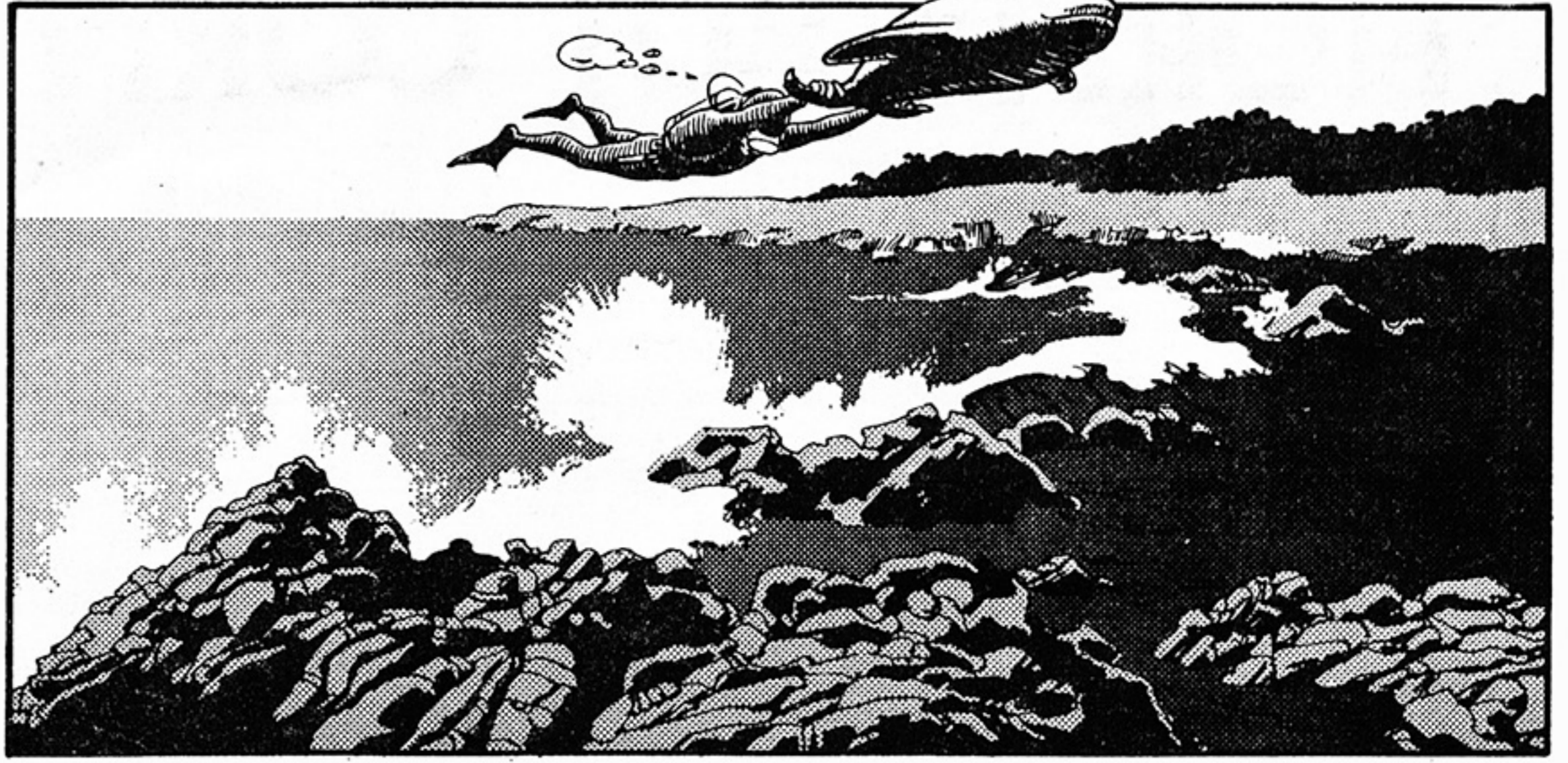


Cartoonists' Coop Press Spreads Its Wings



by Clay Geerdes

The first two comix are out from the newly-formed Cartoonists Co-op Press (Box 40474, San Francisco, Ca 94110). Cornfed No. 2, the work of Kim Deitch, is a graphic novelette entitled, "Miles Microft's Last Case." Middle-Class Fantasies, which has a nice drawing of Rita Hayworth on the cover, is the first book of Fresno artist Jerry Lane.

The Co-op has evolved as an alternative to the existing system of underground comix production. It is a survival measure, and the first four members are Bill Griffith, Kim Deitch, Jay Lynch, and Jerry Lane.

How does the co-op work? Well, each artist gets his own backing and does his own work. This amounts to shooting and stripping negatives, arranging for printing dates, securing storage space, and working out a method of distribution.

Distribution is the biggest problem. Underground comix have never become socially acceptable to mainstream America, and though some companies have attempted to get them nationally distributed none have been successful. At various times the books have been rejected on sexual, religious, and political bases. ZAP, because the title is best known, has the distinction of being one of the most-busted books, comic or otherwise,

in the entire world.

At present, the bust of Fahrenheit 451, a bookstore in Laguna Beach, is headline news in Orange County. The ambiguity of a recent Supreme Court decision has blocked distribution in many parts of the Midwest. Small businesses are unwilling to take chances as they were a few years ago when a general feeling of optimism prevailed in hip communities. Sales have dropped to about a third what they were in 1971 when the movement peaked, so many feel the small margin of profit involved is no longer worth the gamble.

On the company side, publishers are facing printers who will be demanding double the going rates for newsprint after the first of January. Postal rates have increased. Nearly every aspect of the business has incurred inflated technical costs, while the cover price of the comix has remained stable at 50 cents (black and white) and 75 cents (color).

Obviously, the cover prices will go up next year on the undergrounds just as they will go up on the overgrounds (DC's 50-cent books go up to 60 cents in '74). Print runs are already down to 10,000 (from 30,000 at peak) due to what amounts to local rationing of newsprint, and the reader is going to find himself paying more for the same amount of

graphic material.

Can the comix survive? Well, readership goes up in time of depression, but there was plenty of newsprint available in the thirties and no lack of natural resources; indeed, the number of gas stations tripled. Right now, it is only logical to assume that food and gas will take their toll on everyone's luxury budget, meaning all printed materials will sell more slowly.

On the other hand, when the print ends, anything already in print will sell at inflated prices. Since many undergrounds now in print will never be reprinted, we can expect dealers to inflate the prices on the few that are left in stock. This is already routine practice with overgrounds which are never reprinted.

The Cartoonists Co-op Press is open to any working cartoonist who has a book completed and ready to publish. The members know that they have an audience scattered around the country and they intend to keep on doing what they can to provide for those people.

Books by Deitch and Lane are on the stands now or available by mail. By the end of this month, Jay Lynch's Nard 'n' Pat anthology will be out, accompanied by Bill Griffith's Tales of Toad 3. The artists need your support right now. The next few months will tell the tale.



Another Hit Of Grim Wit

by Clay Geerdes

Muscles, monsters, and massive-breasted women are the favored playthings of Kansas City cartoonist Richard Corben, and from the looks of Grim Wit #2 (Last-Gasp, P.O. Box 212, Berkeley, Ca) he's still on the same fantasy trip.

Why not? It's proven a big moneymaker in the past few years since he broke into the undergrounds during the phase when Sword and Sorcery and science-fiction attracted the interest of Jaxon and Ron Turner. Corben premiered in Skull #2, and has appeared in all subsequent issues of Skull and Slow Death.

His personal fanzine, Fantagor, is now a regular title at Last Gasp, and, since The Rip-Off Press

cut back on comic publication, it looks like Ron Turner will have a monopoly on all forthcoming Corben work, excepting that which has been going into Jim Warren's Creepy and Eerie. The word is Corben is now doing most of Warren's color separations.

Corben's appeal is easy to evaluate. His stories are beautifully rendered and he has an exact feel for time and space. Plots are kept simple and spiced up with enough sex and violence to maintain reader influence. For those intellectuals who see his work as decadent, there are others who see his violent, decayed, world as an apt symbolic representation of modern times.

Slow Death began in 1969 as an attempt to teach some ecological



principles via graphic art, and Corben's futuristic science fiction certainly does that. "How Howie Made It In The Real World" is to the seventies what Huxley's "Brave New World" was to the thirties. What those eco-freaks are saying is only too true, and, if you think not, you just haven't thought about what the term "en-

ergy crisis" means in long-range perspective.

There are several strains in Corben's work. He's a fairy tale artist or a futurist and he seldom likes to spend any time with realism. He likes dragons and superheroes and Gods and Goddesses, shapeshifters and witches, and he treats most of his material in the style of a humor magazine like MAD, never taking any of it too seriously.

His first underground story was "Lame Lem's Love," a parody of the kind of story that used to appear in The Haunt Of Fear. From the days of Entertaining Comics, Corben retains the narrator; his version of the Old Witch is a big-breasted, skull-faced creature he calls Horrilar. She tells the tales recorded in Grim Wit.

Grim Wit #1 was a horror comic with the main story one concerning a werewolf, "The Beast of Wofton". but the second issue in more whimsical, and Corben refers to it as the "Dragon Issue." The main story, "Den," expands a theme Corben began in an earlier issue of Slow Death. A beautiful woman operates as a decoy for a dragon with the action taking place in the future. In all of Corben's work, women are treacherous in one way or another, a viewpoint which is biblical.

"Damsel in Dragon Dress" is a twist on the fairy tale of The Frog Prince. Doug Moench wrote this one. Corben has illustrated a number of his scripts for Warren's Creepy and Eerie.

The lead story in Grim Wit 2 is Jaxon's Death Rattle, a tale originally done for Weird Fantasies 2 (shelved for a while, said Mike Moore of Los Angeles Comic Book Company). Jack's story reveals his interest in anthropology and fetishism, mainly that of the Aztecs. Like Corben, he enjoys the comic irony of anachronistic jargon, often putting contemporary idiom in the mouths of his ancient Indian warriors. "Tell the Sun-God I sent you, ok?"

"Sure Xibalba, but meanwhile, why don't you kiss my rusty ass?" Jaxon gets in a few licks at Marvel Comics in Death Rattle. He's critical of clean-cut barbarians like Conan and Kull who rarely swear, fornicate, bleed, or show their battle scars. With the tightening up of the market for underground comix, Jaxon has returned to painting, using as his inspiration Robert E. Howard's Conan The Cimmerian. He exhibited his first three paintings at the October Sword and Sorcery Convention in Los Angeles.

Grim Wit #2 is in color, the first underground since Up From The Deep to sell for a cover price of a dollar. The quality is nice, and it's certainly a better buy than those cardboard spectaculars DC Comics has been publishing lately. If the prices of undergrounds had been raised when costs went up, perhaps the financial situation wouldn't have gotten out of hand the way it has. They'll be 75 cents by 1974.

