

April 2025



"It's your New York!"

The Rondout Reader



THE PHALLIC SUPERHERO!







On July 10th, 1965, a legend was born, then mysteriously went to ground.

At 3:15 am, Alan Trad slid silently out of bed, leaving his partner snoring.

Downstairs to get dressed, he took a couple cupcakes to get him through the morning. Out in the car, he coasted to the road as not to wake a soul.

On the front seat next to him, he laid out the money and the map. This had to go down like clockwork. If the delivery trucks were on time, he'd have to make his deal quickly to hit the next one.

The first truck was three minutes late. Alan was waiting.

"Morning," he said to the driver. "Like to buy a packet of your stuff before it hits the racks."

"Waddaya jokin'?" came the reply.

"How about I pay you five times retail?" said Alan, flashing the cash. "Things fall off these trucks all the time."

One down. Six to go. Eight if he was lucky. The tip he'd gotten was bigger than a fix in the Kentucky Derby. History was at hand, and the more of it he could get his hands on, the better.

By noon he had hit every delivery. Only one driver refused his money so Alan waited until the product hit the shelves and bought them all.

He had no intention of showing his partner or anyone else what he had scored.

"Nobody knows," he vowed, his brakes squeaking as he pulled back into the driveway.

Alan kept his trunk locked till his lover went to visit 'mother' for the weekend. He had suspicions about 'mother,' but this time 'she' came in handy. No sooner did his companion drive away than he sprang into action. A stop at the hardware store, the collectibles shop, and then the camping outlet got him all the support materials. The pawn shop supplied his 'treasure chest,' a heavy-duty suitcase whose original owner had wound up taking it nowhere.

Back home he chose the perfect spot in the backyard and peeled off a section of matted grass. Then he began digging, deep enough so that no future gardening would stumble upon it, wide enough around to ensure plenty of insulation to keep the treasure dry.

"You are who you are, and I am who I am," he whispered with the first shovelful of dirt.

Finally the underground vault was ready for packing. Alan lay down the waterproof tarps, doubled over for maximum protection. Back to the car, he brought in his 'treasure chest,' the packing supplies and then, oh, so carefully, the prized stock, each to be individually wrapped. One by one he placed them in the tarp-lined suitcase.

One last look.

"A hero to believe in," he said before closing the lid, "To invest in."

Waiting till dark, Alan carried the heavy suitcase to the hole and gently set it in. Two more tarps around the sides and on top before he shoveled the dirt back in. Finally he replaced the sections of matted grass, patted them down and scattered the remaining soil around the lawn.

Alan's score would generate events beyond his wildest dreams, but it was not the best investment he could have made; he should have had his car's brakes repaired. Two days later they failed him, causing a head-on with an eighteen wheeler, killing him instantly.

His companion sold the house and moved in with 'mother.' The property would exchange hands six times over the next forty years. A young ad exec and his wife, a legal aid lawyer, bought it from the bank that had foreclosed on it in 2009. Charles and Mary had the backyard fenced in before bringing home a huge mutt from the pound.

'Calamity' loved to eat and sleep and dig holes in the back lawn. One Saturday morning...

"*Woof! Woof!*" Calamity barked at her deepest excavation to date.

"What have you found, girl?" asked Mary, kneeling next to the dog. "Charley, Calamity's got something. Bring a shovel."

"Looks like the corner...of a suitcase," said Charley, who sunk in the shovel and kept at it. "It's been covered with a tarp. Still intact."

Within five minutes, the suitcase was fully revealed. The locks had rusted badly, but it appeared in good shape.

"Maybe we should call the police," suggested Mary, always the lawyer.

"You think there're body parts in here?" said Charles. "Or maybe Mob money?"

"A terrorist cache?" said Mary.

"Planted last century to blow what up?" said Charles. "Not that heavy. Let's get it inside and see."

Charles and Mary carried the suitcase in and put it on the kitchen table.

A screwdriver plus a dinner knife popped the locks.

"Back up a bit, Hon," said Charles, gently lifting the lid. "I get to play Indiana Jones."

"*Woof!*" barked Calamity.

"More plastic covering," he said, pushing it aside. "My god!"

"Charley, tell me it's cash," said Mary. "A Mafia fortune."

"No, not money," said her husband. "Not yet."

"Then what?"

"We have found 'The Holy Grail' of lost American art!" said Charles, a dedicated fanboy dating back to the Ewoks. "Imagine if Michelangelo had just finished painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and before anyone saw it, an earthquake buried it for all time..."

"Huh? What are you talking about?" asked Mary. "Priceless religious artifacts?"

"Remember the comic book?" asked Charles. "The thirty-two page monthly issue, the Children's Literature of the Baby Boomer Generation, billions sold worldwide?"

"Left in the dust by cartoons, live-action films, the Internet and video games," said Mary. "Long dead and buried."

"Not any more," said Charles, showing her a sample.

Mary's eyes opened wide. "**GAY MAN!** *The Phallic Superhero?*"

"Get us a couple of beers and let's go to church."

"You're serious?"

"As the Dead Sea Scrolls."

She joined him in the living room with her laptop.

"According to *Google*, **GAY MAN** was more *legend* than fact," said Mary, hitting the keyboard. "The underground comic allegedly got a short run in nineteen sixty-five. Something never fully explained went wrong with distribution. Civic groups and schools and especially the church cracked down and sacred off the vendors. Then the big comic book companies got into the act--a proverbial witch hunt with the offensive material burned at the stake. All the evidence was purposely destroyed to keep it out of court. Not even the Smithsonian got a copy."

"We've got five hundred and thirty-three," said Charles, removing two copies from their plastic bags. "In *mint!*"

"Well, I like the cover," she said. "Nice costume, but I expected that, you know."

"*'I am **GAY MAN** and I have the Phallic Power!'*" Charles began to read aloud. "*'Skip the origin, nature or nurture, they'll be debating forever. I became **GAY MAN** because everybody else had a hero and I wasn't allowed to!*

'I can fly, I'm strong and with my 'penetrating' vision, I can see through anyone!

'You see me as white?

'I can be black!

'Or brown!

'I can be Asian or Hispanic.

"I can be old or young, fat or skinny, ugly or handsome.

*"I can be anybody because I **could** be anybody!*

*"I am who I am, you are who you are, but **you** could be me!!"*

"This guy's got style, and an agenda," said Charles. "Written, drawn and inked by..."

"I'm on it," said Mary, back to the keyboard. "William Laird, (1940-1965) controversial and openly homosexual artist and creator of the 'legendary,' that word again, **GAY MAN**, who, if the costumed superhero ever existed, disappeared into American lore. When Laird's longtime lover discovered that he was involved with **GAY MAN**, he ended the relationship. Laird either overdosed or committed suicide that same day.

"Laird's mother claimed her son had been murdered by the comic book companies, but a cursory investigation produced no 'smoking gun'."

"Smoke *this*, world!" said Charles, shaking the book in his hands.

"Look at all the other heroes made of paper and colored ink, imagination and ego," Mary took over the reading. *"I have the Phallic Power! I can be brave and courageous and humble and generous as I'm forced to cope with all kinds of personal problems. But I won't be ashamed and I won't be afraid. Not any more. I'm proud to be **GAY MAN!**"*

"And fed up!" said Charles. "Homosexuals didn't change in phonebooths; they locked themselves in closets. William Laird was coming out with a vengeance!"

"High above the great Metropolis, the Man of Steel lords over all he surveys, the greatest hero ever put into four-color print, when suddenly..." Mary continued reading. *"**BLAM!** Never saw me coming, did you **Superman!** Bet you never dreamt I could even exist. Of course, it's so acceptable that you're a space alien with a righteous streak no human would possibly live up to!*

"Well, think again, you overmuscled, overpowered, "mild-mannered" male impersonator!

*"**KAA-BLAMM!** I'm just as masculine as you'll ever be and I'm from right here!"*

[On the next page, **GAY MAN** becomes one of his many 'secret identities': a doctor in a children's cancer ward. *How would they feel if they found out that not even **GAY MAN** could save them?*]

"But that dark, dark night...high in the skyline of Gotham City...

"Who are you?" [Said the Caped Crusader]," read Mary.

*"Who are you, with your late filthy rich father and your cute 'Boy Wonder?' [Said **GAY MAN**] Always wished you could be me, didn't you? Even for just one issue!"*

*"**BLAM!** Did that hurt? Not as much as you've hurt me! And one other thing, **Bat-Man**, something that's been bugging me ever since you appeared..."*

*"**BOOM!** Rework that cowl!"*

"Too bad," said Charles. "Laird didn't live long enough to see nipples on a Bat-suit."

[**GAY MAN** becomes one of the best running backs in the NFL. On Sunday, he scores two touchdowns, then makes sure a reporter takes a picture of him at a strip club.]

"But Monday night, instead of watching football, on a marvelous New York City skyscraper..." read Mary. "You're new in this biz, wall-crawler, but it doesn't take "gay intuition" to know you'll make it big."

*"Who are you and what do you want?" [asks **Spider-Man**]," read Mary.*

*"To settle this here and now!" **BLAM!** "I am **GAY MAN** and I've got intimate hang-ups all my own, but I don't look like a young Dick Clark and I never want to!"*

[**GAY MAN** changes into a married father of three. If his family ever discovers that he is **GAY MAN**, he'd have to kill himself.]

"Oh, man!" said Charles. "The copyright lawyers would've been on this like wolves. What was the publisher thinking?"

"Haymarket Publishing, Frank Dodd, owner'," said Mary on the keyboard. "Labeled a 'homosexual pornographer' by the Comics Code Committee and publisher of the notoriously mythical **GAY MAN**. The comic's unsolved disappearance drove him to bankruptcy. Haymarket Publishing burned to the ground in August, sixty-five. Convicted of torching his own business, Dodd died in prison, nineteen seventy-two."

"But why the exclusive New York run?" asked Charles. "Wouldn't the book have fared better in say, San Francisco?"

"Dodd may have been hedging his bet," said Mary. "If **GAY MAN** were to be judged pornographic, crossing state lines would have made it a federal case-conspiracy 'to corrupt the morals of America's youth'.

"They'd've thrown away the key."

"Priceless publicity and he wussed out," said Charles. "**GAY MAN** would have blown the whole comic book industry...away!"

"Woof! Woof!" barked 'Calamity'.

"*'At the mega-complex that is Stark Industries...'*" read Charles. "*'Womanizer and drunk! You metal up and get to be a hero, **Iron Man**! Welcome to knuckle therapy. **BLAM!** 'I have the Phallic Power, but I'm supposed to change my deviate, perverted ways? Is that what you pontificate, Golden Avenger?'" **BLAM!***

[As an elementary school teacher, **GAY MAN** is harassed and intimidated by an overbearing female principal while half the women teachers pursue him. What if one discovers and reveals his 'secret identity'? What will the children believe?]

With the turn of a page, **GAY MAN** is confronted by the sexiest, most buxom characters in comicdom.

"I knew this was coming," said Mary. "'Women's issues'."

"*'You super-heroines,'*" read Charles. "*'Marketable tarts created by men, perhaps even by **GAY MAN** himself! Named after housebroken cats and birds, you think you're who little girls want to be?'*

BLAM! KA-BOOM! *"Nobody could be so stupid to be taken in by you!"*

"*'As for you, **Wonder Woman**, are you an authentic Amazon or not?'*" **BLAM!** *"Either go topless or stay in the closet!"*

"Ow!" said Mary. "The sixties feminists would have castrated the author and publisher with a straight razor!"

"They'd have to wait in line," said Charles, still reading aloud.

"*'From Marvel and DC, monolithic competitors seeking to stomp out all originality and independence sought by struggling writers and small publishers, a horde of copyrighted mealtickets attacked **GAY MAN** --- Gods and giants, mutants and monsters, sorcerers and space beings, robots, androids and every kind of hero for every kind of reader except...*

"BLAM! KA-BAMM! KA-BOOM!"

*"Afraid to be seen in the same story with the likes of me, are you?" [asked **Gay Man**] "Ashamed to be on the same page, together in the same panel with a homosexual hero?"*

GAY MAN takes them on, one and two and three at time, his pride his power, his strength his self-esteem, and when each and every one had been bested, he piles them high in a heap in the center of the marketplace.

Hand over hand, he climbs to the top and cries out to the reader.

"I didn't beat these phony heroes because I'm bigger or better, smarter or stronger. I beat them because I'm real, because I'm true!"

"I'm not wrong or evil or sick. I'm just me!"

*"You are who you are and I am who I am, and I am **GAY MAN**! I am one of you!"*

"I could be your plumber or your priest, a cop or a carpenter, a soldier or a salesman, a billionaire or a bum."

*"I might be your father, your brother or your son. I could even be...**you**!"*

"Whoa!" said Charles, closing the comic. "Laird and Dodd not only took on the publishing giants, but the very metaphor of the superhero with 'secret identity' and showy costume. Singlehandedly, **GAY MAN** could have destroyed the industry!"

"Huh, how?"

"Because in their own comic book way, committed to their powers and showy costumes, not about choice or preference, but *fate*...every character is as 'gay' as **GAY MAN**."

"Beaten by the *fear* of the 'Phallic Superhero!'"

"Poor William Laird," said Charles. "Whether he ODeD, offed himself or was murdered, we have his life in our hands. To shred **GAY MAN** and bag it for the dump...We'd be killing him all over again."

"I've got a bad feeling about this," said Mary.

Uh-oh, thought Charles. When the wife quoted STAR WARS, he knew there was a problem.

"Arragh!" 'Calamity' lay down and slept.

"Could we get in trouble for this?" he asked. "Sued?"

"Nobody can sue a 'ghost'. This is 'found stuff,' ours, free and clear, but...Hmm," said Mary. "I bet an issue of **GAY MAN** would make for a treasured *wedding present*."

"Then let's do the American thing....," said Charles, taking Mary by the hand to his deluxe PC in the den. "And sell **GAY MAN** to the highest bidder."

"eBay!" said Mary.

Charles scanned the cover, wrote in the text. With one more click of the mouse..."Sixty years ago, The Powers That Were conspired against **GAY MAN** and thought they had buried him forever. You up for his surprise comeback?"

"All the way to the bank," she said. "Go **GAY MAN**!"

The comic book legend hit the Internet market like a supernova. In less than twenty-four hours, 63 bids brought the price to \$45,000. The auction closed at \$75,500.

Within a week, Charles had sold every copy but two. Only the last 25 brought less than \$10,000. He sent one copy to the Museum of Comic Book Art and, of course, to the Smithsonian Institution.

'Calamity' got a brand new dog house and lived happily the rest of her life on a custom health food diet.

Charles and Mary would have three children before divorcing. All would graduate debt-free from Ivy League schools.

As the character's copyright had long since expired, **GAY MAN** was in the public domain. The Church, the Comics Code Committee, and the Conservatives be damned, MARVEL and DC Comics would each publish their own '32-page full-color monthly' series.

Owned by Warner Brothers, the DC version would be 'Recommended for Adult readers'. Backed by Disney, MARVEL's would be 'PG-13'.

The comic book *lives again!*

Competing video games would hit the shelves by the end of the year.

Beating the comic books and computer fare to the market, competing images of **GAY MAN** would appear on T-shirts, bathrobes, leather jackets, petroleum jelly, vibrators and condoms.

To the winner goes the film franchise.

His *Phallic Power!*



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