

new lease on life and the first real chance to develop more fully (both characters have, thankfully, been focused upon to some extent in the Legionnaires' adventures since the new teen group emerged). There are also a few entirely new characters thrown in, in the persons of new recruits Catspaw, Dragonmage, and Computo, not to mention Reep "Chameleon" Daggles of the adult Legion, who serves as the new team's financier and adviser. The mixture of new and old characters in a vastly new setting ensures that this is not exactly the same Legion as it was before, and even the clone characters are in some cases developing in new directions according to their new situations, while at the same time remaining consistent with their original personalities.

The writing is quite competent. Series writers Tom and Mary Bierbaum, long-time dialogue writers for *Legion of Super Heroes*, make their debut as fulltime plotters and scripters here. While it's too early in the series to definitively assess their plotting talents, they do exhibit a good working knowledge of the immense background knowledge that the series entails, and they have managed to quickly establish the Legionnaires in their new situation and setting on New Earth. Their characterization is varied and true to the original personalities of the Legion characters, but some characters (such as new additions Catspaw and Dragonmage) seem noticeably lacking in depth, though the Bierbaums have displayed a knack for naturalistic characterization and personality revelation in the past. The tone of the new series is light, with an emphasis on action and adventure with touches of humor, and it's pleasant if you not immensely sophisticated reading if you approach it on that level.

The art is similarly accessible in a pleasantly basic fashion. Penciller Chris Sprouse's solid linework captures the more upbeat, polished atmosphere sought by this series, particularly in the representation of the various high tech locales and equipment, not to mention the sleek new Legionnaires costumes, whose variations on a uniform design provide a consistent team image that is still varied and colorful. Sprouse also provides a solid variety of facial features and physical appearance on his characters, and his fairly simplistic figure drawing is very clean and eye-catching, well-suited to the youthful tone of the series (right down to the slim figures and big, soulful eyes that Sprouse has a penchant for).

A monthly standard format comic book priced at \$1.60, *Legionnaires* is a very accessible, appealing book when taken at its level as a good-old-fashioned super hero series in a future setting, light reading of the adventure-fantasy genre. The series does recapture a lot of the spirit and energy of the old Legion series while standing on its own, and both old and new readers may well enjoy the book. ●



This Week: *The Lawnmower Man*

Even as I write this, the wind is howling outside, making whining noises around the eaves of the house, begging me to stop using the computer...

No, wait. That's my little brother. Sorry.

Well, it's been a couple of weeks, and I thought it was about time I got back in action. This week's feature, *The Lawnmower Man*, is an interesting mix of virtual reality, grass, mental retardation (possibly caused by grass), and spectacular special effects (probably conceived while smoking grass). It's got virtual video games, scheming quasi-scientists, bit-mapped bees, murderous cyborg monkeys, and, believe it or not, an actual lawnmower.

In fact, *The Lawnmower Man* has all the makings of an epic sci-fi horror blockbuster. It wouldn't even belong in this column if it weren't for events near the end... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

First, a plot synopsis. Pierce Bronsan stars as Dr. Angelo, a pacifist scientist with a government grant. He wants to use a virtual reality technology he pioneered for educational purposes. The government want to use it to create psychotic soldier simians (chimps, to the rest of you). Naturally, Angelo balks at using his computer universe for violent means, especially after his favourite monkey escapes and is mowed down by moronic, trigger happy government goons. So the government operated lab, VSI, allows Angelo to take a vacation. Angelo spend much of his time on hiatus either drunk or flying through a computer. His marriage is falling apart. His mind is starting to go on a vacation of its own.

Until the day Angelo meets Jobe, an amicable mentally challenged lawn care specialist with all sorts of troubles of his own. They are, in random order: the hypocritical priest who runs Jobe's life and periodically beats him; Jake, a gas station attendant who makes fun of Jobe to make himself feel big; and a child-

beating redneck asshole with all kinds of prejudice against Jobe because Jobe makes the asshole's son happy. VSI is ruining Jobe's life, too, because the aforementioned ape made friends with Jobe just before being perforated. Jobe mistakes the ape for Cybo-Man, his favourite superhero, and is so traumatized by its violent death that he blabs it all over town. This causes the assholes to beat him, make fun of him, and keep their kid away from him, in that order.

Angelo picks up on this, feels guilty, and decides to make it up to Jobe by making him smarter through virtual reality! Think of the possibilities! Talk to Big Bird face to face! Put on funny clothes with Mr. Dressup! Go on a trip to Mr. Roger's Neighbourhood without leaving your house! Realistic hallucinations with better special effects than an acid trip and no after-taste!

Ahem. The next twenty minutes or so are spent in an interesting time warp as we see little vignettes that prove Jobe is getting smarter. He starts to take more pride in his appearance, dressing better and mowing lawns faster. He can read, talk in grammatically correct sentences, and understand his comics. He stands up to the priest, tells off Jake, and gets laid.

Up to this point, the movie seems like straight - if a tad cheesy - science fiction. Then, without warning, it turns into one hell of a horror movie. You see, the tests and treatments have to be moved to VSI because Angelo's home unit has nothing left to teach Jobe. And when Jobe moves in, the organization that really runs the show decides to try the old chimp treatments out on Jobe. You see, VSI is actually an offshoot of DSI, a.k.a. the Shop. Stephen King readers will know what the Shop is all about from novels like *Firestarter* or the tv series *The Golden Years*. For the benefit of people who haven't

continued on next page