



By Sean McQuaid

Come to me you all ye who are info-junkies, 'cause have I got a treat for you! Well, something at least moderately interesting, anyway. To comic book info junkies, that is. Oh, just ignore my babbling and skip down to the next paragraph.

This week, we take a gander at some comic book source books: y'know, handbooks, info books, reference guides, that sorta thing. The increasingly complex comics industry has been turning out these self-referential guides ever since the original *Marvel Universe* handbook way back in the early 80's, and although the big two (Marvel's *Marvel Universe* and DC's *Who's Who*) are currently on hiatus, there's no shortage of small reference guides from smaller companies like Image.

One such info book is the recently released second installment of *Youngblood Battlezone* (Image Comics, \$4.15). This EXtreme Studios production (adorned with an absolutely grotesque Yaep/Panosian cover) is a guide to the *Youngblood* and *Team Youngblood* super-teams and their related characters (almost all of whom are Rob Liefeld creations, the major exception being Chap Yaep's character Dutch).

Included are past and present *Youngblood* members Badrock, Brahma, Chapel, Combat, Cougar, Die Hard, Dutch, Knight Sabre, Link, Masada, Photon, Psi-Fire, Riptide, Sentinel, Shaft, Troll and Vogue, plus a variety of their friends and foes. Each character gets a page or two of illustration and info.

The writing is often clumsy, and there are more typos and foul-ups than the average info series (further fueling my longstanding hypothesis that EXtreme Studios would benefit greatly from tighter editing). It's a textually inferior sourcebook, neither as artfully composed and comprehensive as *Who's Who*, nor as exhaustive as the tiresome *Marvel Universe*.

As an info book, this comic would make

By Trent Drake

In keeping with the Halloween spirit, I'm reviewing a whole bunch of comics. Some of 'em have horror undercurrents, and some of 'em are just plain horrible...

## Networks

Art and Story by Whilce Portacio  
Image Comics

When I saw the advance hype for this mag, I thought it would be horrible. You see, the title refers to close quarters espionage missions where the operative's hands may get wet with

a good set of trading cards. Clip away some of the extraneous text (much of which is vague and/or pointless filler), and you're left with sketchy pictures of who these folks are and what makes them tick. It's enough to give you a very basic impression of each character, but little or nothing beyond that (although in some cases this is understandable since the characters have never been fleshed out in the comics). The histories are, with few exceptions, disjointed and often sparse. Even more vague are the "abilities" descriptions. Examples: Dutch's entry rambles on about his cyborg

thing's a glorified poster book-- so if you're not willing to blow around five bucks (after taxes) on purty pictures, save your shekels. Moreover, unless you've got a hankering for Image-style art (ridiculously overdone and warped physiques with contrived dynamism and lotsa tiny lines) most of this stuff isn't for you. I won't bother telling you about all the bad pics (suffice it to say they are legion), but there are a few goodies: Chap Yaep's Dutch is rather striking though: somewhat overdone, Chris Sprouse does a creditable job of Masada and Riptide, and Photon and Vogue are nicely rendered by

Productions" division of Image Comics (specifically the characters of *Cyberforce* and its companion title *Codename: Stryke Force*). The first issue features entries ranging from Ballistic to Ripclaw, with another installment due in January (according to the interior back cover).

All things considered, this book's a bit better than its *Youngblood* counterpart. It's roughly a 75-25 picture-info ratio herein, but since every character gets two pages anyway there's a bit more textual substance than *Youngblood Battlezone*. It's not as fluidly literate nor as richly visual as the average *Who's Who* entry, but few source books are.

One thing this book has over both *Who's Who* and *Youngblood Battlezone*, though, is its technical diagrams. In fact, they're the most detailed, professional-looking tech guides this side of the early *Marvel Universe*-- and no wonder, since Top Cow has recruited veteran *Marvel* tech-junkie Eliot Brown to design these diagrams (among them: the *Stryke Force* Submarine, the *Cyberforce* Compound, the *Cybercycle*, and the *Cyberforce* Jump Jet). Now, if they could just shanghai someone like Mark Waid to do their text...

As with *Youngblood Battlezone* the text is sometimes vague or disjointed, but also like *Youngblood* this may be due at least in part to the variably convoluted or sketchy development of the characters to date. Regardless, it's a notch or two above the EXtreme Studios stuff in terms of substance and correctness.

The abilities descriptions are usually a tad more substantial than *Youngblood Battlezone*, though still pretty sketchy in some cases; a nice touch, however, is the "power ratings key" applied to each character's entry. It helps give you a ballpark idea of the range of each characters' basic physical and mental abilities.

As for art, *Cyberforce Universe* boasts a fairly palatable assortment of illustrations: nothing remarkable, but not bad for Image.

## Cyberforce Universe



abilities without ever telling you precisely what they are; Die Hard is said to possess a "specially crafted shield"; but we never find out what's special about it; and many characters' abilities are described glowingly without ever going into precise detail as to what they are, especially in the areas of strength and combat skill. Most of the pages are 80-90% illustration.

If we're gonna call a spade a spade, this

Marat Mychaels and Todd Nauck; however, the whole lot of them are pikers next to the legendary George Perez, who illustrates the *Youngblood* and *Team Youngblood* group shots-- an oasis of illustrative virtuosity in an aesthetic wasteland. *Youngblood* has never looked better.

So much for them. Our next subject is *Cyberforce Universe*, a sourcebook about the characters from Marc Silvestri's "Top Cow

blood. Oh happy day. Nightmarish images of *Youngblood* getting worse ran through my mind. Instead, it turns out to be a weird but fun story with pretty decent artwork.

And a twisted story it is! Yet another *Team 7* is launched on a suicide mission... only they don't know it. Sent into a mountain stronghold in the Balkans to retrieve a bio-weapon from terrorists, they discover that the terrorists are actually vampires and the bio-weapon is a 'bio-metalloid compound saturated with nanotech wetware'. In other words, liquid metal armour. When *Team 7* realizes

that the army plans to sacrifice them to destroy the vampire enclave, they decide to wear the bio-armour and hope they survive. It turns out to be a symbiotic lifeform that renders them damn near invincible.

Now fugitives from the army they served so well, the betrayed *Team 7* enters the employ of Waering. Waering tells them about the vampire's plan to unleash a genetically-engineered plague at a rock concert. In order to save innocent lives, *Team 7* crashes the concert and wipes out a few more vampires. In the process they discover some strange new pow-

ers the armour grants... and a weakness that gets two team members killed.

The weird but mildly original storyline is buoyed by the bizarre heroes and villains. On the side of the angels we have not only a group of superheroes encased in liquid metal but also a tribe of lycanthropes known as the *Were-Nation*. The bad guys are two groups of vampires, each with their own plans for *Team 7*. The tainted ones, led by Prince Drakken, wish to retake the world from the humans. These bestial blood-suckers have ruined the reputation of the real werewolves. Then there's