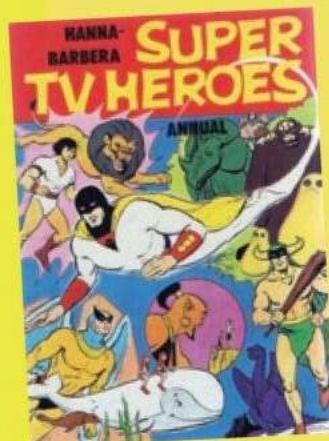
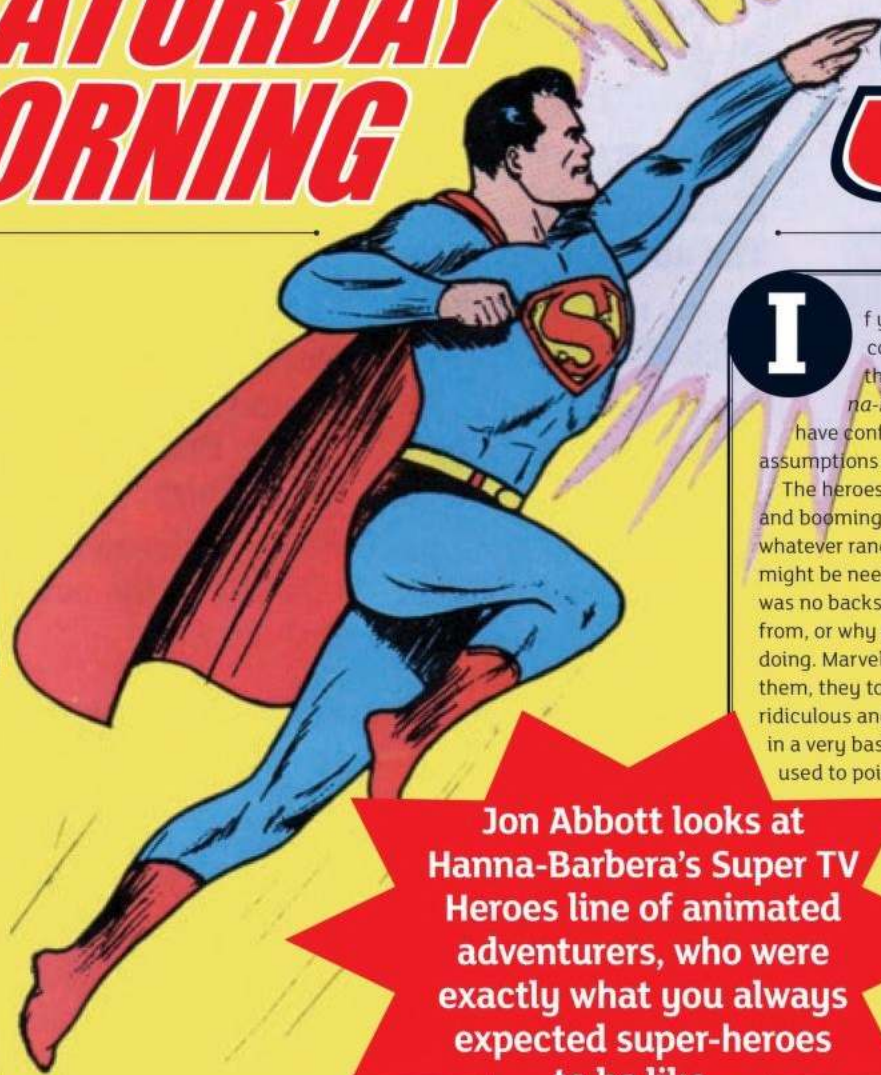


SATURDAY MORNING

SUPER-HEROES



Jon Abbott looks at Hanna-Barbera's Super TV Heroes line of animated adventurers, who were exactly what you always expected super-heroes to be like...

If you had never picked up a comic-book from the start of the 1960s onward, then Hanna-Barbera's *Super TV Heroes* would have confirmed all your prejudices and assumptions about comics in general.

The heroes all had exaggerated muscles and booming voices, and could rustle up whatever random and vague super powers might be needed to suit the occasion. There was no backstory as to where they had come from, or why they were doing what they were doing. Marvel and DC didn't just overshadow them, they towered over them. They wore ridiculous and impractical costumes drawn in a very basic style, and *Birdman* even used to pointlessly and needlessly shout

"Biiirrrdmaaan!" whenever he flew into the sky! What was that all about? To warn passing aircraft?

Reaffirm his self-confidence? Perhaps it was to all those people down below, pointing and asking "Is it a bird? Is it a man?" Perhaps he just enjoyed his work.

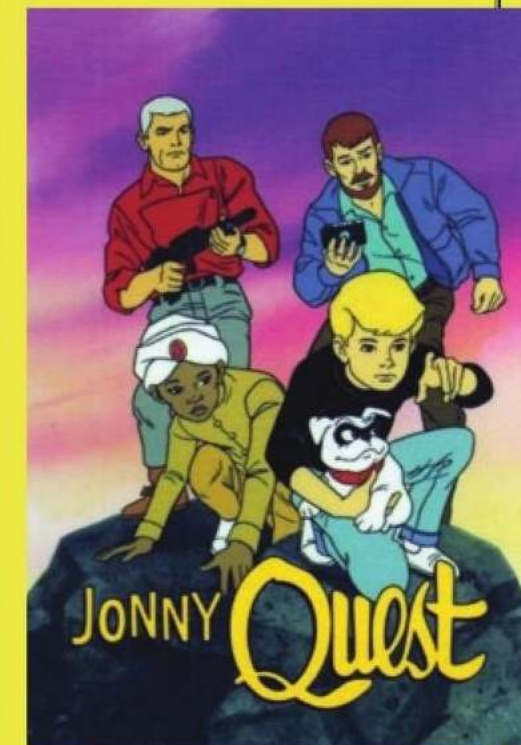
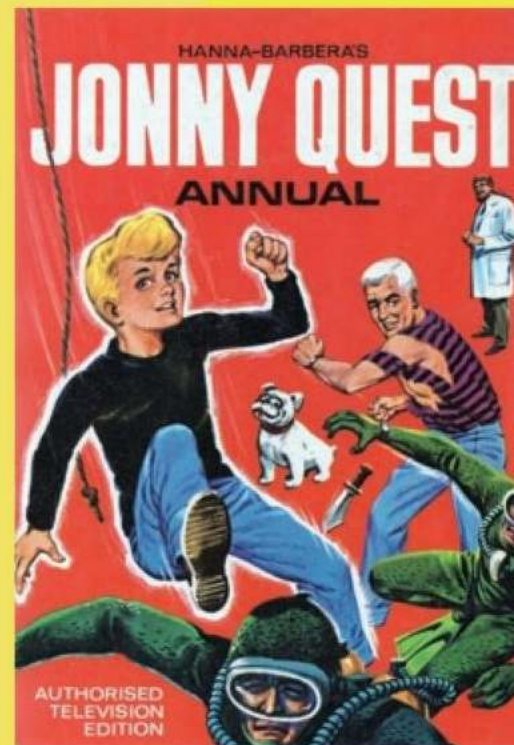
And yet, I love these cartoons.

The sudden influx of Saturday morning super-hero adventure cartoons that flooded all three American networks in the mid-'60s were enormous fun, competently produced, creative, colourful, and lively. And they stopped for nothing but the commercial breaks.

HERE'S JONNY!

Hanna-Barbera first dabbled in the arena of adventure cartoons by producing the superlative *Jonny Quest*, TV's first ever animated action show, for primetime in 1964 (the BBC aired it in Britain when it was first made, and then it disappeared for thirty years until Boomerang came along on satellite TV in the '90s). An artistic success sunk by its own quality (the ratings didn't justify the expense, so it lasted just one season), it was beautifully drawn, intelligently written, and outstanding in every way. Check it out on DVD, but make sure you get the original.

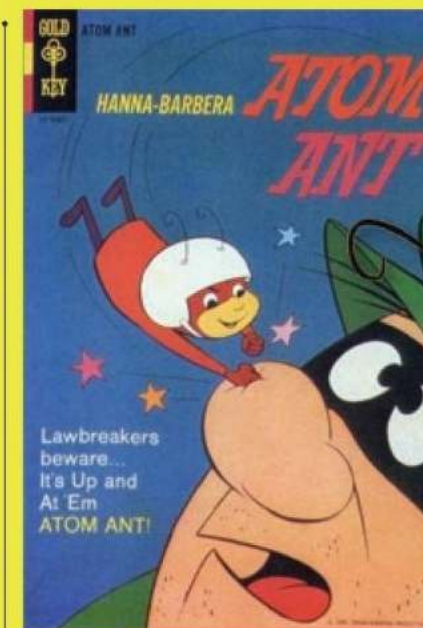
The cartoons Hanna-Barbera provided for Saturday morning TV were less complex, considerably more colourful, but far less substantial. Although they nicked a few ideas from *Jonny*, plus a fair amount of background music, there was no comparison in content. Nevertheless, you'd have to be pretty miserable and bad-tempered not to find them entertaining, albeit on a very superficial level. What did Shakespeare say? "Full of sound and



fury, and signifying nothing". Yep, that was *Space Ghost* and his buddies.

This article is intended to talk them up, while not unduly raising your expectations. They are what they are. I like what they are. They deserve their moment in the sun. This month, we look at the 1966-'67 season, next time the deluge, in 1967-'68.

Actually, Hanna-Barbera first got into the crime-fighting business the previous year, during the 1965-'66 season, but via their more famous funny animal output. As the unexpected failure of *Jonny Quest* (1964-'65) suggests, the company had enjoyed far more success in off-peak syndication and Saturday mornings, than prime-time (evenings), where 1960s adults had proven fairly resistant to the charms of animation. While *Huckleberry Hound*, *Yogi Bear*, and *Quick Draw McGraw* had ironically proven a success with all age groups off-peak, and become something of a pop culture phenomenon (*Huck* and *Quick Draw* played in bars and college dorms as well as playrooms), only *The Flintstones* had cracked prime-time. It's hard to believe now, but although they've played endlessly, everywhere, for the last sixty years, both *The Jetsons* and *Top Cat*



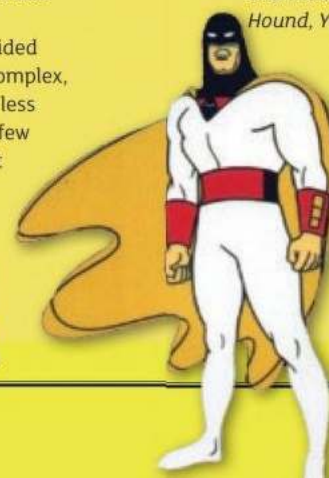
were initially single season prime-time flops.

Realising what side their bread was buttered, Hanna-Barbera continued turning out funny animal shows for Saturday mornings each season, but by the mid-'60s, the well was running dry. When you're coming up with characters named 'Wally Gator' and 'Peter Potamus' it's time to move on.

Looking at current fads of the day, the company saw, like everybody else, super-heroes and spies, and so came up

with their first two crime-fighters, *Atom Ant*, whose size belied his strength (episodes opened with him working out in a gym inside his ant-hill!) and spy spoof *Secret Squirrel*. Both premiered on NBC in September 1965, and ran in the U.K. on ITV shortly afterwards, after which they also promptly disappeared until the satellite explosion of multi-channels in the '90s.

In America too, the novelty quickly wore off, the shows no doubt hindered by gratingly poor choices in voice artistes, and unbelievably poor supporting cartoons, particularly in the case of *Secret Squirrel*.



SEE THE NEW SUPER HEROES

SATURDAYS ON CBS

STARTING SEPTEMBER 10 BRAND NEW COLOR CARTOONS

ALL TIMES EASTERN AND PACIFIC EXCEPT THE CHECK TELEVISION LISTINGS IN YOUR AREA.

MARVEL SUPER-HEROES ARE ON TV

- CAPTAIN AMERICA!
- THE SUB-MARINER!
- THE INCREDIBLE HULK!
- THE MIGHTY THOR!
- IRON MAN!

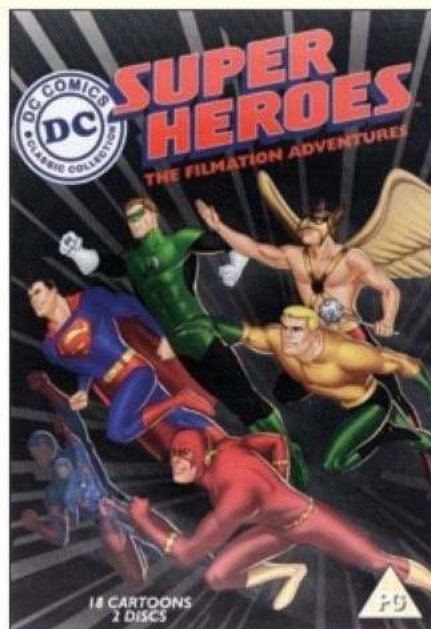
© MARVEL COMICS GROUP - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

LOOK FOR THEM ON THE FOLLOWING TELEVISION STATIONS:

• NEW YORK, WOL-CHANNEL 9	• SYRACUSE, WHEW-CHANNEL 5	• SALT LAKE CITY, KCPX-CHANNEL 4
• LOS ANGELES, KFI-CHANNEL 5	• PROVIDENCE, WPRO-CHANNEL 12	• ROCHESTER, WHEC-CHANNEL 10
• CHICAGO, WGN-CHANNEL 9	• BALTIMORE, WBAL-CHANNEL 11	• SAN JUAN, P. R., WAPA-CHANNEL 4
• PHILADELPHIA, KYW-CHANNEL 3	• MILWAUKEE, WISN-CHANNEL 12	• SAGINAW/BAY CITY, WHEM-CHANNEL 5
• BOSTON, WBAC-CHANNEL 7	• MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL, WOOD-CHANNEL 4	• PORTLAND, ME., WISN-CHANNEL 13
• DETROIT, WKW-CHANNEL 5	• NEW ORLEANS, WWL-CHANNEL 12	• TAMPA, WTVT-CHANNEL 13
• ST. LOUIS, KSD-CHANNEL 5	• ALABAMA, WVEN-CHANNEL 12	• LITTLE ROCK, KATY, CHANNEL 7
• WASHINGTON, D. C., WTTG-CHANNEL 5	• CHARLESTON, W. VA., WVAZ-CHANNEL 3	• SPRINGFIELD, MASS., WHYN-CHANNEL 40
• BUFFALO, WKBW-CHANNEL 7	• MEMPHIS, WHQ-CHANNEL 13	• EVANSVILLE, IND., WERT-CHANNEL 10
		• HARRISBURG, VA., WWSB-CHANNEL 3

CHECK YOUR LOCAL LISTING FOR TIME THIS LIST IS INCOMPLETE AT TIME OF PUBLICATION.

Above: Marvel or DC, take your choice. Super-Heroes were everywhere on telly back in the day!



WATCHING THE DETECTIVES

Early in 1966, Adam West's *Batman* series on ABC and Irwin Allen's *Lost in Space* on CBS started to do in prime-time what Hanna and Barbera had failed to do, and pull in both the kids and the adults, and the company - while still staying in their Saturday morning comfort zone - jealously took notes.

Knuckling down with network chief Fred Silverman, Bill and Joe came up with... guess what...? *Batman in Space*. But *Space Ghost*, as designed by the creative Alex Toth, became a unique creation in his own right. In the meantime, however, while all this was going on, Silverman was also hedging his bets with Hanna-Barbera's rivals, Lou Scheimer's Filmation Studios.

Filmation had been on their knees and facing closure when they managed, through an elaborate charade resembling a *Rockford Files*-style 'Big Tent' scam that made their company look busier and more populated



than it was, to persuade CBS and DC Comics to let them produce an animated *Adventures of Superman* built around the talents of the radio show's voices from the '40s.

DC was distributor shorthand for *Detective Comics*, National's first title, since it was far easier to bellow "Where are the DC's?" across the warehouse than "Where are the National Periodical Publications?" (although referred to as DC Comics by the wholesale trade since their earliest days, the company was still stubbornly calling itself National Periodical Publications right up until the early '70s).

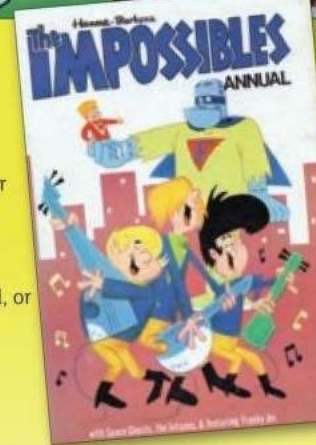
While DC had nothing to lose by letting William Dozier and Lorenzo Semple do their worst (or perhaps best) to the ailing *Batman*, they kept a close eye and firm grip on Filmation's *Superman*, bringing in their own writers to provide the stories, and, just as they had done in the '50s with the live-action *Superman*, running a very tight ship to protect their biggest seller.

To be fair, Filmation did an excellent job with *New Adventures of Superman*, and included an equally entertaining supporting cartoon featuring *Superboy*, although sadly, *Supergirl* never made an appearance. The following year, *Aquaman* joined the show, which doubled in length to an hour, and other DC heroes were trialled in series of three episodes each. These were *Flash*, *Green Lantern*, *The Atom*, *Hawkman*, the entire *Justice League* (without *Batman* and *Wonder Woman*, licensed to Dozier), and the *Teen Titans* (without Robin, but allowing *Wonder Girl*).

When the live-action *Batman* series ended, Filmation swiftly snaffled the Dynamic Duo too, and continued to produce DC super-hero animation until Hanna-Barbera introduced the *Super-Friends* format in the 1970s. All these bar *Superboy* can currently be found on Region One DVD, and the three episode trials on both regions.

CARTOON MARVELS

Not to be left out, the neophyte Marvel Comics, novices at the TV game, also dipped their toes into the TV cartoon business, although for off-peak syndication rather than Saturday mornings (syndicated programming, if I'm getting too technical, is sold directly to individual stations or territories for any time of day scheduling,



rather than being part of a major network's prime-time programming line-up; rather than being subject to sudden cancellation, a specific number of episodes are filmed and offered. The catch is if nobody bites, you lose your shirt, so those suppliers tend to pre-sell, or make cheaply, or both).

Marvel were not so naive as to let the Grantray-Lawrence company loose with their top sellers *Spider-Man* and *The Fantastic Four*, but tentatively licensed *Captain America*, *Iron Man*, *Sub-Mariner*, *Hulk*, and *Thor* to them, to be marketed under the generic title *Marvel Super-Heroes*. They weren't too thrilled when they found out that the company had simply taken the comics they'd supplied as reference tools and literally animated the panels... as sparingly as possible. Despite the outrageous short-cuts, these five series (all on DVD) have acquired a nostalgic charm over the years, and can offer a fuzzy trip down memory lane if you're forgiving about their cheapness. Like so much low-budget entertainment, they become more entertaining with age; the theme songs alone are hilarious.

Back at Hanna-Barbera, *Space Ghost* shared his show with *Dino Boy*, one of the weaker of the barmy army still to come. This was exactly what it sounded like, a young boy and his pet dinosaur adventuring in a lost world type of hidden valley with a friendly caveman protector. Whereas *Space Ghost* and *Dino Boy* played it straight, the preceding show in the schedules played as comedy. *Frankenstein Junior* and *The Impossibles* featured young Buzz Conroy and his scientist dad, and a giant flying Frankenstein robot, their invention, friend, and protector. *The Impossibles* were a typical '60s-style pop group who short-changed their fans every week by interrupting their concerts to fight crime as a masked super-group with, er, exactly the same name. It was never really established whether

everyone knew the pop group were the super-heroes too, but as they plainly were, the masks seemed a little superfluous.

Premiering the same season *The Monkees* turned up in prime-time, *The Impossibles* (great name, at least), were Fluid Man, Multi-Man, and Coil Man, and they all had names that were, of course, self

explanatory. Fluid Man converted to water, Multi-Man split into several duplicates, and super-springy Coil Man prevented pregnancies. Unfortunately, the threesome's rather harsh-voiced adversaries were a boring

Above: Frankenstein Jr. and The Impossibles premiered September 10, 1966 on CBS, and ran for two seasons

bunch, and without either logic or backstory the kids quickly tired of seeing the character-lite clowns do the same schtick each week. I wonder what Multi-Man will do this time? Oh yeah... multiply. And like all guys with no personality, they have a real cool car to covet! It even doubles as a speedboat and airplane!

Unusually, the producers may have come to the same conclusion, as the stories became more interesting and varied as the show went on. By the time you get to the second disc on the DVD, there's an amusing western-based episode, and an adventure in London which replaces the usual narrator with a clichéd Brit. Both stories manage to fit every relevant clichéd and stereotype within the six minutes allocated, and very funny they are too. Another episode sends the Impossibles into the future, and their rip-off of *Batman*'s Mr. Freeze is more fun than the original.

Frankie Jr. was voiced by none other than the legendary Ted Cassidy (Lurch in *The Addams Family*, the android in *Star Trek*), and far more popular with me and my mates at the time, although CBS had put their money on *The Impossibles*, giving them two cartoons per show and Frankie just one. But even *F.J.* found himself facing the same tired old cackling loons and mad scientists, although later he faces a genie in H-B's standard Arabian Nights setting and, pre-dating *Scooby-Doo*, an army of ghosts ("It looks like Dr. Spectro is back to haunt us!"). So if you pick up the DVD, you might bear in mind that Disc Two is the best.

The popularity of prime-time *Batman* remained high among the kids though, and so, after eighteen shows, while *The Impossibles* and *Frankenstein Junior* went into re-runs with fellow fad-followers *Atom Ant* and *Secret Squirrel*, with the following season came the deluge.

Next issue: All together now... "Biiirrrdmaan!"

