

AMAZING HEROES

BOLLARD



OKAY...THE
DOOR'S OPEN!
COME ON IN!

THE EUROPEAN INVASION



DREDD RECKONING

Prior to 1983, few American fans had been able to follow the adventures of Mega-City's number one police officer on a regular basis. Dredd had, to be sure, enjoyed a sizeable cult following in America, buttressed by British fans' vocal enthusiasm over the character, but the American fans who had access to Dredd, via rare imported British comics and expensive albums, were in a distinct minority.

That all changed with last year's debut of *Judge Dredd*, a monthly color comic devoted to reprinting

A HERO HISTORY OF JUDGE DREDD

by
Andrew
Littlefield

the best Dredd adventures for an American audience. Although there are some who cavil about the format of the U.S. Dredd edition (the artwork, which was mostly produced for black-and-white magazine reproduction, sometimes looks cramped and muddy in the four-color Mando comic book format), there is no denying that the Eagle Comics edition has finally made Dredd available to a new and enthusiastic audience. As this is being written, *Judge Dredd* is a consistent top seller among the

"independent" publisher, and Eagle has just released the first issue of a second Dredd series, *The Judge Child Quest*.

The City and the Judge

It may strike a somewhat ironic note that Dredd, the faceless lawman of Mega-City One, has achieved international recognition by 1984, as the character shares certain similarities with Orwell's Thought-Police; still, Dredd's future is a far more genial one than any imagined by Eric Arthur Blair.

Judge Dredd is basically a futuristic variant on the Dirty Harry Callahan cop, fascistic overtones and all. Dredd is the sternest, hardest, meanest, and best of a cadre of lawmen known as 'Judges' who keep law and order in the 22nd Century. Their 'beat' is Mega-City One, a huge city complex which comprises the whole Eastern Seaboard of America, containing some 8 million potential law-breakers. It was described like this in the second episode of Judge Dredd: "By 2099 the Great Eastern cities of America had swollen into a vast mega-city, stretching from Montreal in the North to Georgia in the South." The city is ruled by a hierarchy of judges—the Council of Five, led by the elected Chief Judge—making Mega-City One an autocratic State. The Judges patrol the city on their law-masters (highly powerful motorbikes), looking to stop 'perps' (perpetrators). Many of the best stories in Judge Dredd have been developed from this simple premise.

Within the series, very little is actually known about Dredd himself; in Prog. (issue) 30 of *2000 A.D.* (the weekly magazine in which virtually all of Dredd's adventures have appeared), it was revealed

that Joe Dredd had been trained from birth to become a Judge, along with his brother Rico Dredd. Rico grew up to become corrupt and Dredd was forced to exile him to a penal colony for 20 years, and later execute him when he returned to Mega-City One seeking vengeance.

In Prog. 34, Dredd's birthdate was given as sometime in the year 2066. Apart from this, all we get from Dredd is his grim, relentless personality. Dredd lives for the Law.

One of the things that molded Dredd's persona is undoubtedly the training all Judges undergo. Fifteen years' service, beginning at the age of five, in the Mega-City Academy of Judges, is then followed by graduation with full honors and then eventually a trial run supervised by a qualified Judge. Only then can a man assume the identity of a Judge. It is Dredd who best exemplifies this, as indicated by his favorite saying—"I AM the law."

Dredd Origins

Despite Dredd's fairly meteoric rise to cult status, his origins stretch back to 1977 and to two men, Pat Mills and John Wagner. Mills was to be editor of a new Science Adventure (as opposed to Science Fiction) comic for I.P.C., Britain's largest publisher. English comics appear on a weekly, rather than monthly, schedule: because of this, they feature five or six continuing stories, with between four and eight pages each. *2000 A.D.* was to be similar to the rest of I.P.C.'s line, albeit with an emphasis obviously designed to cash in on the current *Star Wars* boom. It was certainly *not* intended to appeal to the usually more mature members

of British and American fandom; like the rest of I.P.C.'s line, it was aimed at the 7-14 year old market, the main target audience for all comics in Britain. This accounts for the sometimes adolescent flavor of *2000 A.D.* Dredd's success was also something of a surprise: the revived Dan Dare, in his time a hugely popular comics character in England, was intended to be the main showcase of *2000 A.D.*, yet it was Dredd who scored in the popularity stakes, going on to become the centerpiece star of *2000 A.D.* and remaining the only permanent feature in the comic.

Mills originally formulated the name Judge Dredd for use in a possible occult story; however, Wagner discussed with him an idea he'd had for a futuristic police story, involving a character who was judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one. After further thought, Mills gave the name Judge Dredd to this character—and the appellation stuck.

Wagner then produced an introductory script, which Mills rewrote. Spanish artist Carlos Sanchez Ezquerro was chosen to illustrate, as his war comics for I.P.C. had impressed both Mills and Wagner. It was Ezquerro who then devised the basic visual appearance of Judge Dredd, giving him his all-black leather costume, and designing his bike and gun.

When he drew the first strip, Ezquerro included, as an almost incidental detail, a number of high-rise developments which he envisaged as New York in 2099—the time and place Dredd was going to exist in. Mills was already excited by Ezquerro's work on the story, and he latched onto this detail, getting the artist to do a full-page cityscape. An I.P.C. art director, Doug Church, remarked that this future city seemed too big and exciting just to be New York, and so the

The sternest, toughest, meanest of the Judges, Joe Dredd, makes a point. Art by Brian Bolland, of course.





2000 A.D., the weekly magazine in which most of Dredd's adventures have appeared.

landscape was widened and re-named, becoming Mega-City One.

It is rather fortunate that this occurred, as the Mega-City has become an integral part of the strip, perhaps only second to the Judges themselves. It has provided Wagner (sometimes under his aliases of John Howard or T. B. Grover) with many springboards for ideas or plots—such as locations as the 'New You parlour' or the 'smokarium' and particularly the city blocks, which are massive skyscrapers housing up to 60,000 citizens and named after famous people (such as Dan Tanner block, Eisner block, Enid Blyton block, Sonny Bono block, Billy Carter block, and numerous others) add greatly to the Dredd milieu. Wagner and Mills have gone to great pains to set up a realistic social fabric, and one of the great sources of humor and satire in Judge Dredd has come from exploiting this. Products such as "Wate-On," "Umpty Candy," or companies like Utto Sump's Ugly Clinic appear all the time, always used in a very funny way. Television particularly comes in for some sharp digs. Dredd's universe has not just been confined to Mega-City One—later additions included Mega-City Two, the Moon, the Cursed Earth, the Russian Sov-block, and Texas City or Mega-City Three.

Because Mills had expanded the basic concept of Judge Dredd, the original story had to be shelved. Eventually, an idea came from a freelance writer named Peter Harris and was reworked to form the basis of the first Judge Dredd. It appeared in the second issue of 2000 A.D. and it proclaimed "Meet the toughest lawman of them all..." We did.

Early Dredd

The setting of the first story was still "New York 2099," for the first and last time. It was a very simple little episode involving a lawbreaker called "Whitey" who kills Judge Alvin and is eventually captured by Dredd, who sentences the murderer to "Devil's Island," a penal colony within the city's huge traffic complex. Already, Dredd's grim persona is established, and the main premise behind Judge Dredd is present, but it is not a particularly memorable debut.

The first seven episodes of Judge Dredd continued in this vein. None of the stories showed much sign of continuity, but merely added further detail to Dredd and his work: Mega-City One was already evolving into an exciting and interesting locale, and the strip was now showing a great deal of

promise.

Artists involved in these early stories were Ezquerro, Mike McMahon—a young artist whose early style resembled Ezquerro's to some extent but was later to blossom into a unique vision highly suited to Judge Dredd—, Ron Turner (not the U.S. underground comix publisher), and Massimo Bellardinelli. The latter two proved unsuitable for the strip and moved on to other things and Ezquerro also devoted less of his energies to the Judge. A number of artists tried their hand at Judge Dredd at this time, but only Ezquerro, McMahon, and, a little later, Ian Gibson (of *Robo-Hunter* fame) stayed with the strip early on.

Whilst Judge Dredd was proving popular with the readers of 2000 A.D., it was not until the introduction of the first continued story—"The Robots' Revolt"—that Dredd gained his position as the comics' most popular character, where he has stayed ever since.

At the end of the Dredd story in Prog. 9 of 2000 A.D. the character posed the question "How long will it be before robots discover how to break the law?" and we were promised "the answer is in next Prog.'s Judge Dredd." This marked an end of sorts for the strip. Mills had developed Mega-City One and now it was up to Wagner to continue it. "The Robots' Revolt" ran from Progs. 10 to 17. It was introduced because Mills felt that 2000 A.D., whilst good, lacked the science-fiction touch. He saw the introduction of robots to the flexible Judge Dredd as the solution to that problem, and suggested the idea to Wagner. He responded with "The Robots' Revolt."

The storyline involved a psychopathic robot known as "Call-Me-Kenneth." Previously subservient, "Call-Me-Kenneth" led the robot population into revolt against their human masters, or "Fleshy Ones" as they called them. All the while their leader became increasingly deranged (it shouts at one point "I'm a big fan of Adolph Hitler") until Dredd defeated "Call-Me-Kenneth" and dampened the revolution, with the aid of his faithful robot manservant, the lispig "Walter-the-Wobot."

Whilst later Dredd stories were to have a wider scope, and last much longer, "The Robots' Revolt" is still popular with many Dredd fans, and not just for nostalgic reasons. As Martin Lock said in the 34th issue of his fanzine *BEM*, "In many ways, it's the most important story that 2000 A.D. [has] ever printed... it proved that nothing succeeds like a good, taut serial, even when the character has normally appeared in shorter

AS DREDD TOURED THE CITY
HIS ANGER GREW AND GREW—

A VILE MADNESS
IS GRIPPING THESE
PEOPLE. BUT LAS
VEGAS HAS A JUDGE
SYSTEM. WHERE
ARE THEY? WHY
AREN'T THEY DOING
SOMETHING?



The unique artistry of Mike McMahon—rough but effective.

episodes before; it was therefore possible to try more such serials." "The Robots' Revolt" represented a break from the rather staid English comic to include features of the more exciting American comics. Dredd *isn't* a super-hero, a fact which John Wagner takes great pains to underline. In *BEM* #29, he remarked "An important point is that Dredd is *real*... a credible character in a credible situation. Caped creeps mincing about in leotards are all right, I suppose, if you happen to be mentally defective. Personally, I'd much rather stick my head in the oven."

Finally, "The Robots' Revolt" was notable for introducing some much needed supporting characters to the series—Walter and Dredd's cleaning lady, Maria—causing continuity to become a little more fixed than before (although in the issue after the "The Robots' Revolt" no mention is made of it). Also of interest was the use of Asimov's Law of Robotics in the story, indicating what a universal concept that has become.

Marking Time; Bolland Arrives

It was some time before the fever-pitch of "The Robots' Revolt" was bettered. There again followed a

series of unconnected stories involving Dredd and Mega-City One. It would be impossible to detail every one- or two-part story that has appeared in a Judge Dredd here. Many of these stories simply mark time for the strip; a comic that appears on a weekly basis tends to eat up ideas very quickly, so little in the way of shock revelations or story advancements (let alone character development) can occur very often in what is essentially an action strip. Instead, Wagner and artists produce a number of shocking or amusing vignettes. There usually occur between the Judge Dredd epics, and whilst essential to the appeal of the strip, it would be ludicrous to describe them *all*.

Episodes of particular interest in this period included Prog. 20, which introduced Max Normal, Dredd's informant and a regular supporting character famous for his pin-striped suit. He was involved in a heinous case of illegal comic selling, namely *2000 A.D.* (One cannot help but notice that greedy dealers have not been eradicated by the year 3000!) Prog. 28 featured a rare occasion of cross-continuity between strips, when characters from another *2000 A.D.* story, Harlem's Heroes, turned up in the Judge Dredd series. (The futuristic basketball players are currently appearing in Eagle's *Robo-Hunter* comic.) Prog. 31 featured the return of Whitey from

the first Dredd episode: a nice aspect of Dredd is its tendency to use characters from previous episodes in new and unexpected ways, often many issues later. It also shows the high degree of control John Wagner has over the series.

After a number of one and two part stories, Prog. 41 marked another turning point for Judge Dredd: the introduction of Brian Bolland as a regular Dredd artist. Bolland had previously worked on the controversial Nigerian comic *Powerman*, and after doing a few covers for *2000 A.D.*, he was given the Judge to handle. He soon became the artist most identified with the character, yet he has in fact produced fewer episodes than artists McMahon, Ron Smith, Ezquerra or Gibson. This is an indication of the quality of Bolland's work on the strip. Right from the start, it seemed that Brian's bold and exciting style, coupled with imagination and visual wit, would prove popular, and despite the fact that he has not worked on the character for well over two years it is still Brian who is identified by many fans as *the* Dredd artist. This should not be seen as a slight on any of the artists who have worked on Judge Dredd: Bolland himself claims to prefer Mike McMahon's highly original style.

Prog. 42 began another Judge Dredd serial—"Dredd on Luna 1."



A scene you'll never see in the U.S. edition of Judge Dredd: Dredd meets Burger Law. Art by McMahon.

Unlike "The Robots' Revolt," it was simply a series of unconnected stories with a different location to that of Mega-City One.

"The International Lunar Treaty of 2061 divided a million square miles of the surface of the Moon between the three great cities of North America and called it Luna-

One. Every six months, one of the three cities would have to supply a new Judge-Marshall to govern the Luna-One police force. This time it was Mega-City One's turn... and they chose Judge Dredd."—*Judge Dredd* #2.

This is how Dredd found himself on Luna-One. Upon arrival, he was

greeted with a very friendly welcome and had a gunfight showdown with a renegade robot. By beating him, Dredd immediately asserted his authority. It was an authority he needed. In the following weeks, he also defeated "Geek Gorgo," ushered in the year 3000, and confronted the disfigured megalomaniac "Mr. Mooney." Other adventures on Luna-One included "Elvis," a car whose responsibility circuits were damaged and who went on a killing rampage in Progs. 53-56, causing hundreds of other cars to go 'mad' as well (shades of "The Robots' Revolt"), and "The Oxygen Board," recently reprinted by Eagle Comics.

The stories on Luna-One were fine, full of the usual invention the reader had by now come to expect of Judge Dredd, but a Judge's home is where his 'beat' is, and so on the cover of Prog. 59 it proclaimed "Mega-City One, beware—the Judge is back!" However, Dredd's stay in Mega-City One was to be short-lived, as after a couple of issues, the Judge was to get involved in his longest adventure to date: "The Cursed Earth," considered by many (including this writer) as the definitive Dredd adventure.

The Cursed Earth

Unlike nearly all the other Judge Dredd stories, "The Cursed Earth" was written by ex-editor Mills, with an occasional fill-in by T. B. Grover or Jack Adrian (an alias for science-fiction writer Chris Lowder). It lasted for 25 installments in all, running from Progs. 61-85, and was drawn by only two artists, Brian Bolland and Mike McMahon, with an inking assist from Dave Gibbons on one Bolland episode.

The basic premise of "The Cursed Earth" was described in its opening splash page: "An impossible journey through a radioactive hell—can even the Judge survive the Cursed Earth?" It owed more than a little to Roger Zelazney's SF novel *Damnation Alley*, but as with many Judge Dredd stories it was a case of adaptation rather than plagiarism. In fact, most of "The Cursed Earth" was a series of sidetracks to the stories' main plotline, which involved Dredd transporting vaccine across the radioactive wasteland "The Cursed Earth" which separates Mega-City One from its counterpart on the West Coast of the USA, Mega-City Two, whose inhabitants were suffering from the plague 2T (FRU)T. As the airport had been



For some odd reason, the folks at McDonald's didn't find this satire amusing at all; as a result, it will never be reprinted. Art by McMahan.

overtaken by plague carriers, Dredd had to traverse the Cursed Earth by land. To help him on his journey, Dredd was presented with a huge tank called "The Killdozer" and enlisted the unwilling aid of High Risk punk animal "Spikes" Harvey Rotten. Also along for the ride were Judges Jack, Patton, and Gradgrind, really little more than cannon fodder.

As can be expected, Dredd meets up with numerous obstacles along the way—the devil's lapdogs, a group of mutant rats, the mutant pack known as The Brotherhood of Darkness (their leader's face has been added to Mount Rushmore) and the last president of the USA, Robert L. Booth. It was Booth who in 2070 pressed the nuclear button and killed millions in the holocaust that followed. Found guilty, by the survivors, of war crimes, he was sentenced to 100 years' suspended animation, only to be discovered by Dredd. However, the most interesting supporting character in "The Cursed Earth" saga was Tweak, an alien who resembled an anteater and is perhaps the most sympathetic character to be presented in Judge Dredd so far. Tweak's family were killed by Slavers and Tweak himself was forced to serve his captors until Dredd rescued him, concluding "Sometimes the human race makes me sick," bringing out the fact that even Dredd is human. Tweak joined Dredd for the "Cursed Earth" adventure.

The most infamous "guest stars"

in the whole history of 2000 A.D. appeared in Progs. 72 and 73, and then 77 and 78, as part of "The Cursed Earth" saga. The first two featured the "Burger Wars," and introduced the ultimate example of fierce competition! To quote the good Judge: "I see it now. After the war, with the government gone, there was *nothing* to stop the big burger chains' lust for complete control. They grew more and more powerful, until their hamburger war turned *violent*." What followed was an all-out war between rival companies Burger King and McDonalds in a giant competition for customers. . . with Dredd and his crew in the middle! The victorious Ronald MacDonald outlined his plans as: "a dream, ma friends, a dream where ah see every square inch of this fair land covered by one big McDonalds Burger bar! A dream where every American child—be he *normal* or *mutie*—kin grow up without knowing the *horrors* of natural food!" Never again has the satire been as sharp.

In Progs. 77 and 78, another familiar face or two appeared—amongst them the Jolly Green Giant and a certain Kentucky Colonel famous for the finger-lickin' flavor.

These episodes resulted in a number of threatened lawsuits for infringement of copyright, meaning that these issues can never again be reprinted, making them

true collectors' items.

After this, "The Cursed Earth" storyline continued apace, including a visit to Las Vegas and an evil tryannosaur called Satanus running amok. Issues 81 and 82 featured "Tweak's Story," giving further detail to the alien's life and showing that he could foresee the future. After learning to communicate, Tweak told Dredd that "Spikes" was about to die and indeed he does, but going out in an honorable way, proving he was "not... jus'... a... punk" to quote his dying words. After leaving "Spikes" behind and losing Tweak, Dredd made the final journey to Mega-City Two alone, his teammates all having died along the way. On his way, delirium sets in and Dredd is confronted by nightmares of all the things he has seen on his journey. He is also reunited with Tweak who refuses to acknowledge his part in the mission and simply returns to his planet. His task completed, Dredd is able to fly back to Mega-City One, the airport now in safe hands.

As Eagle Comics Editor Nick Landau correctly suggested: "The Cursed Earth" is when Judge Dredd really falls into place." Although it occasionally strayed from its original idea, "The Cursed Earth" succeeded because it was an epic,



What the hell, here's another panel from "Burger Death."

in a time when that term usually means a two-comic story. It is a piece filled with invention and excitement, as well as having rounded and entertaining characters, with even Dredd coming over as more than just a two-dimensional hero. You should all be able to make up your own minds, as "The Cursed Earth" is currently being reprinted by Eagle comics.

The Day the Law Died

Despite the complex storyline of "The Cursed Earth," Dredd was not allowed to rest, as upon his return to Mega-City One, he was accused of murder! It turned out that this was just a misunderstanding created by a robot impersonating Judge Dredd, but it launched the comic into another epic, "The

Day the Law Died," which ran from Progs. 89 to 108 of 2000 A.D. It was solely written by John Wagner, and illustrated by a number of artists new to Judge Dredd—Ron Smith, Gary Leach (of "Marvelman" and "Warpsmith" fame), Bret Ewins and Brendan ("Freakwave") McCarthy.

The story involved Judge Cal, a homicidal maniac elected as Chief Judge of Mega-City One (after the Dredd Robot he controlled killed the previous Chief Judge). With the aid of Alien Mercenaries, the Kleggs, Cal ruled the City with a mixture of fear, paranoia, and insanity. The story moved to an exciting finale when Cal considered his rule to be perfect and decided Mega-City One had to die in this ultimate state! It is left to Dredd, a small band of fellow judges, and Sewer Dweller Fergee, a violent, simple yet tender giant, who is

"King of the Big Smelly," to defeat Cal and his brainwashed Judges. Fergee sacrificed himself for the cause and was nominated by Dredd as a national hero. At the end of the storyline, the Kleggs were extradited, and Dredd declined the position of Chief Judge, saying, "My place is where is always has been: *On the Streets.*"

"The Day the Law Died" is much more similar to "The Robots' Revolt" than "The Cursed Earth" as it revolved around a single plot thread without much deviation from it. Caligula's insanity is the controlling feature of the story—he dominates all aspects of the events in the strip and it is he and Fergee who leave the most lasting impressions. As his insanity reached outrageous proportions, so the humor increased (at one point Cal appointed his pet goldfish a Judge), and there is plenty of well-paced action, a requisite of all good Dredd stories. Whatever storyline followed on from "The Cursed Earth" was bound to suffer in comparison, but "The Day the Law Died" was a fine follow-up in that its focus and tempo were at opposites to its precursor. One only questions the *wisdom* of running two long stories without any fill-ins—Dredd may not have needed the breathing space, but the reader certainly did.

However, things did then return to a state of relative "normalcy" where one- or two-part stories were the norm. Among them were the story which introduced Dredd's only living relative, Vienna (Ricó's daughter), the first city block episode, the recently reprinted (from Progs. 122-124) Father Earth storyline, and a four-parter which dealt with a giant spider invasion, "The Black Plague." However, let us jump forward to Prog. 149 and the introduction of Dredd's greatest nemesis—the fearsome Judge Death.

Through a Dark Mirror

Like many great opponents, Judge Death is really a perverted mirror-image of his opponent—in this case Dredd. He has fought the good Judge only twice but they have both been memorable battles. The first was a three-parter, and the second a five-parter, running from Progs. 224-228. Both were written by John Wagner and drawn by Brian Bolland.

Judge Death arrived in Mega-City One, determined to cleanse it of its evil. Death came from a world which "saw that all crime was committed by the living. There-

fore, life itself was illegal!" Dredd enlisted the aid of an attractive psi-Judge, Anderson, who became the one link between Dredd and Death. When she was possessed by Death, Dredd was forced to seal her in the plastic solution known as Boing, imprisoning Anderson and Death forever. . .

Or so they thought. In the second Death tale, a foolhardy megacitizen revived Death only to see him team up with his fellow Judges, Fire, Fear, and Mortis. With the revived Anderson's aid, the dead souls of "Deathworld" found their Judges guilty for sentencing them to an unfair death; their penalty was destruction. Anderson commented on the departed Judges: "They'll never trouble us again," but I wouldn't be surprised if Judge Death was to make a reappearance one day. He's just too good a villain!

Backtracking to the previous Dredd continuity, Prog. 156 initiated a new storyline—"The Judge Child." It was to be the longest in Judge Dredd so far, running from Prog. 156 to Prog. 181, all written by Wagner and drawn by Bolland, the ever-improving Mike McMahon and Ron Smith, whose interpretation has always tended to the super-heroic.

The Judge Child was Owen Kryslar, a bald male child, with an Eagle emblem printed onto his forehead and gifted with fantastic powers.

The story began when dying precog Judge Feyy had a vision that Mega-City One would be destroyed in the year 3010 unless Kryslar is found because it is he who "is fated to rule Mega-City One in its gravest hour" and offers the only hope of salvation for the city. Thus, Dredd was assigned to find the Judge Child; the search took Dredd through numerous exotic locations like the slave markets, the sepulchre of the rubbish God Filmore Faro, Texas City, Pluto, the planet Ombra (in a delightful tale of Alien courtship told in verse), the planet of the body-broker Lesser Lingo, the planet Argos, and many others. In addition, it featured such characters as the Angel Gang, the Jigsaw Man, the Necromancer, and Dredd's companions—the female Judge Hershey and Judge Lopez, who managed to aggravate Dredd considerably by wearing a moustache and who eventually died acting as an oracle for Dredd (a controversial death with many 2000 A.D. readers).

Throughout his journey, Dredd was constantly frustrated: he always seemed to be just one step away from catching the enigmatic



One of Dredd's greatest adversaries: Judge Death. Art by Bolland.

Judge Child. Along the way, clues were placed indicating that the boy was far from pure; for example, he caused the death of two men. Although he was able to predict the future, Dredd observed that "This Child my City is depending on is touched by a . . . streak of evil." He eventually closed in on the Child,

after defeating his violent kidnapers, the Angel Gang, and confronted him. Looking at Kryslar, he said "I've had my doubts about you for some time . . . let me look into your eyes, boy . . . I see only evil. It is as I feared. The boy is warped beyond redemption. Such a one can never be Chief Judge of

Mega-City One." Dredd left, imprisoning the Child on the planet Xanadu. It appeared that Feyy's prediction had to be wrong, and concluding thus Dredd returned home, ending the Judge Child saga on a curiously anti-climactic note. (In fact the whole Kryslar saga is downbeat, as on his return to the strip in Prog. 288 he had become purely evil and intended to destroy Mega-City One. For this, the Child was executed for crimes against Mega-City One).

As in previous epics, the main plotline was scattered with numerous sidetracks and subplots. It certainly provided spectacle on a scale never seen before in Judge Dredd (ably handled by Ron Smith, in particular), though perhaps it overstayed its welcome a little. It lacked the previous stories' focus due to its fragmentary nature, and it sometimes seemed that Dredd (and Wagner) had forgotten what exactly his mission was.

Marking Time

Yet again Dredd's life returned to "normal" when he was back in Mega-City after a particularly well-written episode where Dredd's competence is questioned and answered in style! Stories included the introduction of Fink Angel and Ratly, who was a vicious sub-human in control of a horde of mutant rats, and a nuclear attack from the pirate Captain Skank, which

hinted at the troubles between Mega-City One and the Sov-block, later to explode into full-scale warfare in "The Apocalypse War."

By now, Dredd had settled down into a steady pace. The character, City, people, and look had all been established long ago, and the strip dropped into a rut which Judge Dredd has not yet fully escaped. The pressures of popularity have made the strip (and 2000 A.D. as a whole) less unpredictable and outrageous. Whilst Dredd has retained its excellence on the whole, it is an element that one still misses with a little regret.

A kind of mini-series within Dredd followed, under the title "The Mega-Rackets," which detailed a number of fantastic crimes taken from the Hall of Justice Files. It comprised "The Body Sharks," "The Perp Runners," "The Umpty Baggers," "The Blitz Agencies," "The Psychosi," "The Numbers Racket," "The Stookie Glanders" and "Mob War." Each crime lasted for three to four episodes and formed an interesting and clever departure to the usual Dredd tale, whilst remaining firmly with the Mega-City scenario.

This neatly leads us up to yet another long Dredd storyline, "Block Mania." It featured Mike McMahon's last work on the character: the artist felt that he had achieved all he could on the strip and moved onto even greater heights on another 2000 A.D. strip, "Slaine," written by Pat Mills. Like virtually all the Dredd stories,

"Block Mania" was written by John (T.B. Grover) Wagner, and appeared in 2000 A.D. Progs. 236-244.

It began with the caption "Block Wars were nothing new to Mega-City One. . . Judges were used to handling Block Wars. But *nothing* could have prepared them for that day in 2103 when madness reigned —and the whole city went wild!" This was the basic premise of "Block Mania," which gave Wagner full rein to include numerous jokey block names, most of them peculiar to an English audience.

From a small incident, the inter-block rivalry progressed until it encompassed the whole of Mega-City One, engaging in an orgy of senseless destruction and violence. It was eventually determined that the Mania was actually the result of contaminated water, planted by an East-Mog Judge named Orlok. An antidote for the Mania was found, but Orlok informed Dredd that it was just a clever scheme to reduce Mega-City One to a state of chaos, enabling the Soviets to launch death-dealing missiles on Mega-City One. . .

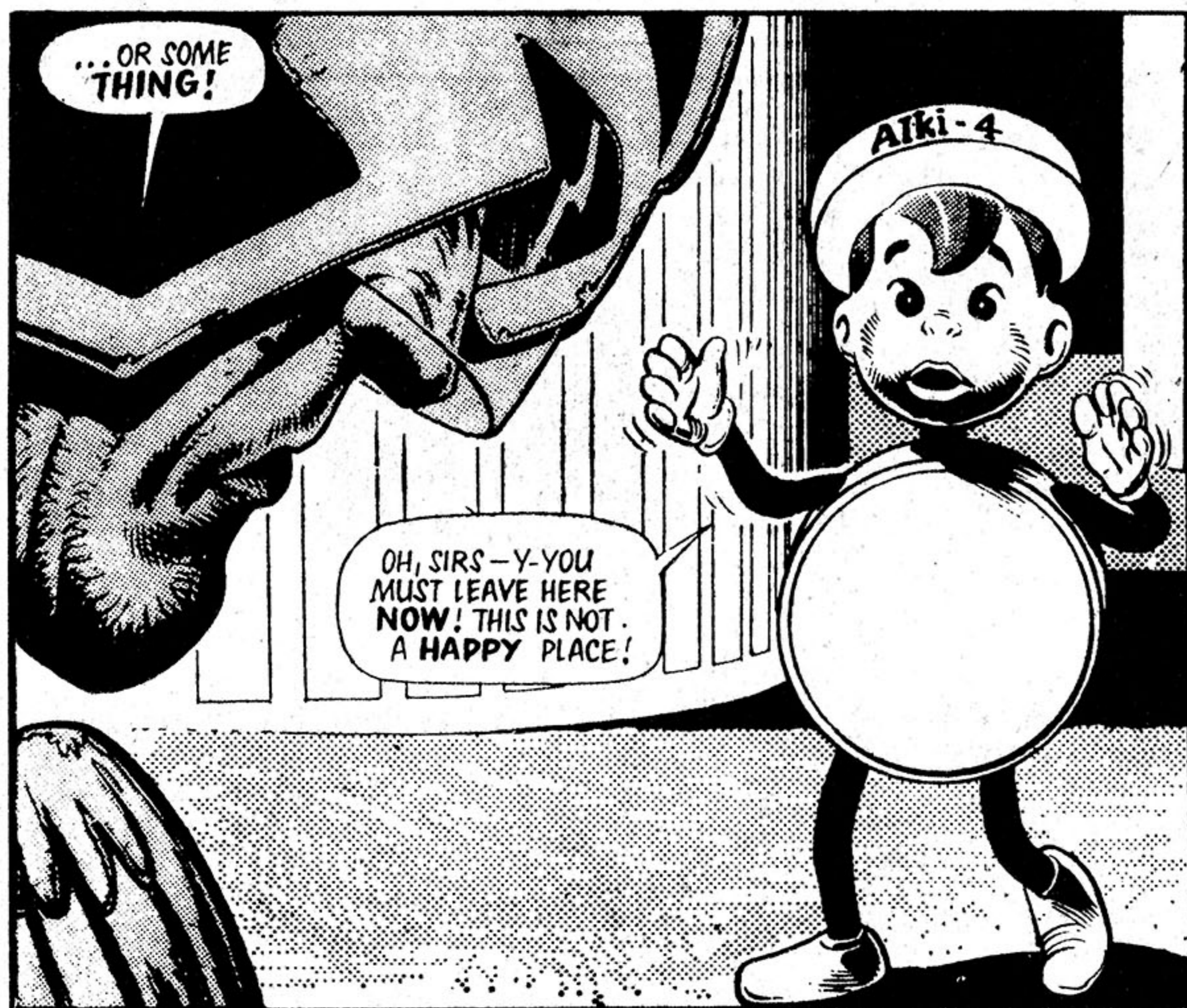
The conclusion of "Block Mania" marked the last Dredd story drawn by Brian Bolland, now working for DC Comics. Bolland's absence from the character is still felt in many quarters.

The Apocalypse War

"Block Mania" also led directly into the most recent (and longest) Dredd epic—"The Apocalypse War." It lasted from Progs. 245 to 270 (with one reprint in Prog. 268) and saw the return of Carlos Ezquerro to Judge Dredd after a long absence. Ezquerro drew every episode of "The Apocalypse War" in a much looser style than his previous work. It seemed that occasionally the artist was feeling the pressure of drawing so many pages, resulting in a rather rushed look, but it often had the gritty flavor appropriate to the story.

"The Apocalypse War" is by far the most controversial of all the Dredd storylines to date, and many of the criticisms aimed at it were fair comment. First, there is little of the invention that has typified Judge Dredd—at times it seemed like little more than an all-out war between Sov. and U.S. forces. These identities are easily transferable to the current U.S. and Russian super-powers. In this respect, "The Apocalypse War" is staunchly pro-American: the Russians are painted as the evil, power-mad ag-

Judge Dredd meets Speedy Alka-Seltzer. (The same story features appearances by the Jolly Green Giant and Colonel Saunders.)



gressors, whilst the Mega-City One Judges are forced to retaliate against their pernicious evil. This kind of thinking, however accurate, in a supposedly apolitical British comic is surprising.

Second, "The Apocalypse War," after an entertaining beginning in "Block Wars," never seemed to get anywhere very quickly. Many episodes were little more than bouts of nuclear exchange.

Things *did* start to get going as the Sov.-block invaded Mega-City One and the Judges (led, naturally, by Dredd) retaliated in a devastated Mega-City. This led to Dredd infiltrating a Sov-infected Grand Hall of Justice, killing the weak-willed Chief Judge Griffin. Dredd retreated, wounded, and enlisted the aid of eight Judges (including Anderson and Hershey). They invaded an East-Meg missile silo and threatened to destroy the whole of East-Meg One. Dredd invaded the Soviet headquarters and killed War Marshal Mazan, the insane Soviet leader directly responsible for the war. The Russians then agreed to an unconditional surrender, and The Apocalypse War was over. In the aftermath, a huge clean-up was mounted, a new Chief Judge was appointed, and gradually life in Mega-City One returned to normal. The question of whether The Apocalypse War was the catastrophe predicted by Judge Feyy was also posed at the end of the story. Dredd replied: "Either that or there's worse to come!"

Whilst certain parts of "The Apocalypse War" entertained and worked—notably sub-plots involving Walter and Maria—the overwhelming impression is of one long fight scene, punctuated by as little story as possible. It is a *senselessly* violent piece and for many marks a very disappointing period for Dredd, whilst predictably pleasing the general readership. In pandering to its audience's basest desires "The Apocalypse War" cannot be faulted.

After the War, Mega-City One was in a state of chaos (one it is still recovering from). The task of rebuilding the City was arduous and slow, and Dredd was faced with mopping up all the crime that had sprung up in his absence—problems such as robot rebellions, the League of Fatties, The Return of Otto Sump, Fungus, Fink Angel, and yet more illegal T.V. game shows. Happily, Wagner soon returned Judge Dredd to his diversified and satiric style: it would be wrong to suggest that Wagner is a spent-force on the comic, but his burden needs to be lightened. Writers like Alan Moore or Pat Mills would be excellent substi-



Last year, John Byrne contributed his own version of the Judge to a special edition of 2000 A.D. Here the Judge calms down a rowdy...

tutes. In the meantime, Wagner is still a neglected and assured force in comics writing. Dredd and Mega-City One is back to being a comic filled with incredible places, people and incidents: long may it do so. Whilst the quality may have dropped, it still is a *vital* part of 2000 A.D.

Still the Law

Throughout the mayhem in Mega-City One, it is Judge Dredd who stands firm, emotionless and strong. In a period of eight years, he has risen to become Britain's foremost comic character, overshadowing that past favorite Dan Dare. Times have changed and it is Dredd who now best represents a popular British mythic character. He has been made the star of 2000 A.D., and a newspaper strip by Wager and Ron Smith; the song "I Am the Law" (by The Human League), countless T-shirts and models, a board game, numerous reprint comics, albums, and foreign translations, and he is soon to be given an all-new comic in Britain.

His appeal, I believe, is based on two things: first, there is no denying that the combination of a grim lawdoer and futuristic setting is a powerful and appealing one, cleverly calculated for a wide audience. The right-wing overtones also add to the mystique; the

reader secretly hopes he would meet the unforgiving Dredd's approval. Wagner explained his appeal by saying: "He is extreme. Wishy-washy characters do not go down well, but someone who is extremely bad or good is automatically more interesting. Dredd scores twice here because he is both good and bad: the stern upholder of the law, never wavering from his code, and yet, making judgments that are, by today's standards, terrifying."

2000 A.D. writer Alan Grant, makes the point even more forcibly: "He's a fascist, the ultimate cop." (Both quotes from BEM #29.)

Second, however, I feel that all this would be worthless if not for the fact that throughout its existence, Judge Dredd has been a singularly well-crafted strip. It has obviously been done with far more thought and care than most comic strips, and its excellence derives from this: it is apparent that such talented creators such as Pat Mills, Brian Bolland, Mike McMahon, Ron Smith, and particularly John Wagner do care. Their work on *Judge Dredd* goes beyond mere superior professionalism. Let us hope that this standard is maintained, for whilst his future is assured, it would be a shame if Judge Dredd's reputation was tarnished for the sake of cheap commercialism. After all, he is the law...

This is ANDREW LITTLEFIELD's first article for AH.