Look, up in the sky! It’s a bee! It’s a clown! It’s ... a giant eyeball?

You know about Batman, Superman, and Spiderman, but have you heard of Doll Man, Doctor Hormone, or Spider Queen? In The League of Regrettable Superheroes, you’ll meet one hundred of the strangest superheroes ever to see print. So prepare yourself for a sneak peek of just a few of the not-ready-for-prime-time heroes.
AH, THE GOLDEN AGE OF SUPERHEROES, an exuberant era of two-fisted action and adventure, when every Super-Tom, Wonder-Dick, and Amazing-Harry could throw on a cape and a cowl and give Hitler the business!

Superheroes were a brand-new phenomenon when Superman debuted in *Action Comics* #1, late in the spring of 1938. After Superman the floodgates opened, and magazine racks were deluged with atom rays, jet packs, leering villains, and triumphant figures clad in primary-colored costumes leaping over cityscapes.
VEN IN THE RELATIVELY innocent Golden Age of comics, superheroes were no strangers to the peculiar—and unlikely—benefits of prolonged exposure to radioactivity. Radium, uranium, and general “atomic power” found its way into no small number of ray-beams, serums, and “atomic belts,” granting recipients tremendous power in some vague scientific-sounding way. Atoman possessed a short half-life, for the self-described “guardian of the new age of peace, security and happiness for all people” managed to get only a second issue before publisher Spark closed its doors.

**ATOMAN**

“There’s no doubt about it! I am radio-active!”

Created by: Ken Crossen and Jerry Robinson

Debuted in: *Atoman* #1 (Spark, February 1946)

Atomic number: Zero

© 1946 by Spark
“I am going to rid the world of Adolph Hitler.”

Not every hero possesses such clarity of purpose that they know what to do with their superpowers the minute they get them. But self-doubt isn’t a shortcoming that plagues the Conqueror. Within moments of receiving his superhuman strength, his mission is clear: he’s got to kill Hitler! Whatever his other shortcomings, Bill Everett’s patriotic hero didn’t lack ambition. For four issues in 1941, the single-minded Conqueror stormed Europe in search of his target, along the way executing Nazi officers, agents, and spies and lining his trail with wrecked remnants of the German war machine.

**Created by:**
Bill Everett

**Debuted in:**
*Victory Comics* #1 (Hillman Periodicals, August 1941)

**Last seen:**
Moving inexorably toward Berlin

©1941 by Hillman Periodicals
AFTER THEIR INITIAL WAVE OF SUCCESS IN the 1940s, superheroes began to fall out of favor. An overstuffed marketplace may have been the primary cause. At one point, literally hundreds of costumed do-gooders campaigned for readers’ attention (and money) every month. Changing social mores also contributed to the decline. Even a senate subcommittee hearing on juvenile delinquency took the material to task. As westerns and spaces adventures moved in to the public imagination to occupy the spot where caped crusaders once resided, it seemed that superheroes were a fad whose time had come…and gone.
More than a few superheroes have taken to the skies using the name “Captain Marvel.” Most, naturally enough, have been published under the auspices of the Marvel Comics Group, which is intent on preserving its corporate identity in an often crowded marketplace. The original, of course, was the red-suite, lightning-bolt-emblazoned hero whose magic word “Shazam!” echoed in the ears of fans, from comic pages to movie serials to Saturday morning TV. Ultimately, the troubled Captain M lasted for only a handful of issues. The publisher folded after less than a year, with a measly three titles to its name.

Created by:
Carl Burgos and
Roger Elwood

Debut in:
Captain Marvel #1
(M. F. Enterprises,
April 1966)

Personal existential
dilemma:
If mine eye offend
me, should it fly
away and fight
crime?

© 1966 by M. F.
Enterprises
C. BECK AND OTTO BINDER were two of the key personnel responsible for making the original Captain Marvel, the lightning-empowered, “Shazam!” spouting World’s Mightiest Mortal, one of the most popular superheroes not only in comics but around the world. (Not to be confused with Captain Marvel the self-dismembering android). Unfortunately for the dynamic duo, in 1951 the long-running lawsuit between Captain Marvel’s publisher Fawcett and rival comics publisher National Comics (home of Superman, and now know as DC Comics) left them jobless.

In the 1960s, Beck and Binder chose to reunite for another attempt to catching lightning in a bottle, as it were. The result of their collaboration was the absurd Fatman, a plump but athletic character named Van Crawford who was happy to spend his idle time indulging his many and varied hobbies and collections. When a spaceship—also a space-changing alien—crashes within sight of his daily constitutional, Crawford rushes to its aid. He is rewarded for his efforts with the power to transform into a UFO.

FATMAN THE HUMAN FLYING SAUCER

“Sorry boys ... but the scales are weighted in my favor!”

Created by:
C. C. Beck and Otto Binder

Debuted in:
Fatman, the Human Flying Saucer #1
(Lightning Comics, April 1967)

Possible unused IDs:
Capt. Corpulent
the Living UFO, Tubby Titan the Anthropomorphic Alien Vessel
As the 1970s dawned, superheroes had begun to emerge from their adolescence and were ready to grow up. Where it had once been sufficient for a caped crime-fighter to keep his do-goodery confined to super-villains and the occasional agent of an enemy nation, superheroes increasingly found themselves directly addressing problems related to social issues. Drug abuse, civil rights, and profound existential dilemmas became as much the purview of the genre as radioactive eyebeams and bulletproof skin.
The year is 1973, and America is in turmoil. The wounds of Vietnam, the Watergate scandal, PONG’s release, the birth of Carson Daly…it is, in many ways, the country’s darkest hour. Surely, the only hope lies in electing a clock-obsessed teenager to be president of the United States. Prez (a.k.a. “First Teen President”) was the brainchild of Joe Simon, the man who, along with Jack “King” Kirby, created literally thousands of pages of comics and dozens of superheroes, including Captain America. Now teamed with artist Jerry Grandenetti Simon was ushering in a completely new kind of patriotic superhero.

The allegory-rich story of Prez was effortlessly adapted in an issue of Neil Gaiman’s well-regarded 1990’s series The Sandman. Prez was recast as a Christ-like figure resisting the temptation of a satanic Boss Smiley. It’s a shame Prez hasn’t made a substantial return since. The world can never have enough heroes who stand for truth, justice, and the American way.

One thing bothers me—if the clocks aren’t on time, how do we know when it’s election day?"
“I have great power, but I become a rabbit to use it? I don’t know if being a superhero is worth it!”

THUNDERBUNNY was one rabbit who had trouble finding a permanent hutch. The character originally appeared in fanzines—small-run magazines printed, edited, and distributed by comic book fans—before landing at Charlton Comics. When that company sold its stock of superheroes to DC Comics, Thunderbunny suddenly became homeless. Red Circle, a superhero-friendly imprint of Archie Comics, provided an early home, as did Warp Graphics. Thunderbunny then hopped over to Apple Comics, where his luck finally ran out.

Created by:
Martin Greim

Debuted in:
Charlton Bullseye #6
(Charlton Comics, March 1982)

Other career options:
Delivering Easter eggs; outsmarting hunters with speech impediments

© 1982 by Martin Greim
Want to learn more about these regrettable superheroes and dozens of others? Check out: