

Holy Human Resources! Comic Book Character Captures Dual Nature of HR Pros

The Human Resource may not be as evil as Dilbert's evil HR director Catbert, but she can do mass layoffs in a single pen stroke.

By Ed Frauenheim

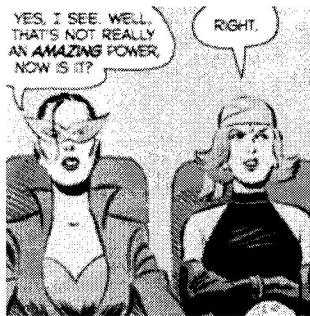
First there was Catbert, evil director of human resources.

Now comes another less-than-positive portrayal of the HR profession in the realm of cartoons and comics: The Human Resource.

A sultry and somewhat sinister figure dressed in a miniskirt and thigh-high boots, The Human Resource is one character in a graphic novel published earlier this month called *The Adventures of Unemployed Man*.

The 80-page book recasts the recent recession and contemporary corporate life as taking place in a world of heroes and villains.

The Human Resource is billed partly as a seductress to the central hero, Unemployed Man. But despite what affectionate feelings she may have for him, she belongs to the Just Us League with fellow villains The Man, The Boot and The Outsourcerer.



Is this a reason for real-life HR leaders to take offense? Not at all, says Sue Meisinger, former president and CEO of the Society for Human Resource Management.

"I think it's a hoot," Meisinger says. Most HR professionals will look at the satire and laugh as well, she predicts. After all, she says, the job all but guarantees facing some heat. "It comes with the territory," she says.

Polly Pearson, a consultant and former vice president of employment brand at computer storage maker EMC Corp., says The Human Resource captures the dual nature of HR officials. On the one hand, they advocate for employees. But they ultimately serve management.

"In all humor," Pearson says, "there's a seed of truth."

There's also a true-life story behind the book for co-creator Erich Origen. He lost his job at a media company in 2009 and has been unemployed since. To Origen, the book is a chance to provoke fresh thinking about flaws in the economic system.

As for The Human Resource, Origen claims no ill will to the profession as a whole.

"I've had great HR people on my side," he says. "That said, I still find the term 'human resources' disturbing. It sounds like something the machines in The Matrix would use to talk about their human batteries."

Origen and co-creator Gan Golan modeled The Human Resource after Catwoman, the wayward

anti-hero who has a love-hate relationship with Batman. At one point during Unemployed Man's job interview at her company, The Human Resource leans in close to the hero, putting her hand on his chest. But in the next panel she rejects him as lacking experience as a "sidekick"—and he falls through a trap door.

"It's obviously a complicated relationship," Origen says of the two characters. "Just like Batman's is to Catwoman."

She may not be as evil as cartoonist Scott Adams' Catbert, who takes a kickback, conspires to give bad job reviews and fires an employee by ejecting him with a giant spring, but The Human Resource nonetheless can be a menace.

Her superpowers are detecting strengths and weaknesses, Origen explains. And, he adds, "She can do mass layoffs."

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