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BACK ISSUE!™

TWOMORROWS

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THE RETRO COMICS EXPERIENCE!

BACK ISSUE!



Edited by **MICHAEL EURY**, **BACK ISSUE** magazine celebrates comic books of the 1970s, 1980s, and today through recurring (and rotating) departments like "Pro2Pro" (dialogue between professionals), "BackStage Pass" (behind-the-scenes of comics-based media), "Greatest Stories Never Told" (spotlighting unrealized comics series or stories), and more!

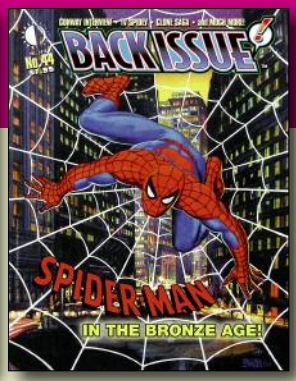
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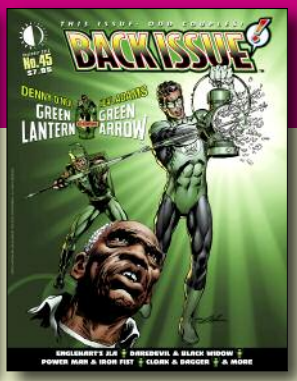
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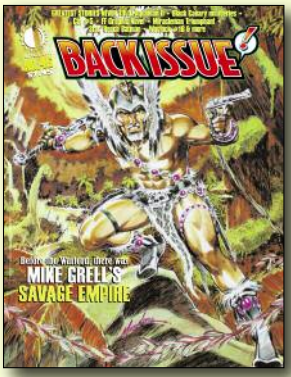
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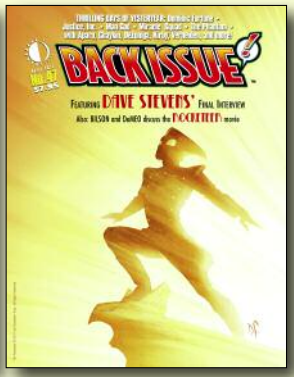
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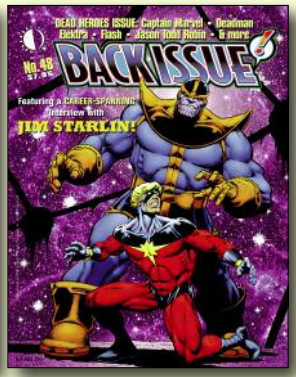
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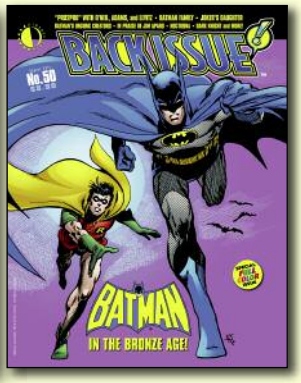
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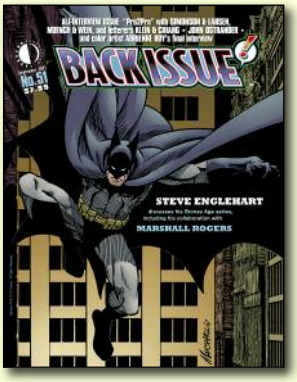
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Bronze Age Mystery Comics! Interviews with **BERNIE WRIGHTSON, SERGIO ARAGONÉS, GERRY TALAOC,** DC mystery writer **LORE SHOBERG, MARK EVANIER** and **DAN SPIEGLE** discuss Scooby-Doo, Charlton chiller anthologies, Black Orchid, Madame Xanadu art and commentary by **TONY DeZUNIGA, MIKE KALUTA, VAL MAYERIK, DAVID MICHELINIE, MATT WAGNER,** and a rare cover painting by **WRIGHTSON!**

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"Gods!" Takes an in-depth look at **WALTER SIMONSON's** Thor, the Thunder God in the Bronze Age, "Pro2Pro" interview with **TOM DeFALCO and RON FRENZ,** Hercules: Prince of Power, Moondragon, Three Ways to End the New Gods Saga, exclusive interview with fantasy writer **MICHAEL MOORCOCK,** art and commentary by **GERRY CONWAY, JACK KIRBY, BOB LAYTON,** and more, with a swingin' Thor cover by **SIMONSON!**

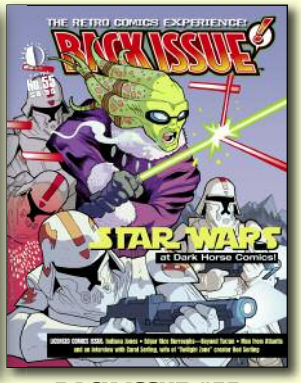
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"Liberated Ladies" eyeing female characters that broke barriers in the Bronze Age: Big Barda, Valkyrie, Ms. Marvel, Phoenix, Savage She-Hulk, and the sword-wielding Starfire. Plus a "Pro2Pro" interview with **JILL THOMPSON, GAIL SIMONE,** and **BARBARA KESEL,** art and commentary by **JOHN BYRNE, GEORGE PEREZ, JACK KIRBY, MIKE VOSBURG,** and more, with a new cover by **BRUCE TIMM!**

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"Licensed Comics"! Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Man from Atlantis, DC's Edgar Rice Burroughs backups (John Carter, Pellucidar, Carson of Venus), Marvel's Warlord of Mars, and an interview with **CAROL SERLING,** wife of **ROD SERLING.** With art and commentary from **ANDERSON, BYRNE, CLAREMONT, DORMAN, DUURSEMA, KALUTA, MILLER, OSTRANDER, and** more. Cover by **BRIAN KOSCHACK.**

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The Retro Comics Experience!

Celebrating the Best Comics of the '70s, '80s, '90s, and Beyond!

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TWOMORROWS

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Detail from the cover of *Essential Avengers* vol. 6—which repurposed Gil Kane and John Romita, Sr.'s cover art from *The Avengers* #122 (Apr. 1974). © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.

BACK seat driver

by Michael Eury



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WHAT IF THE AVENGERS™ MOVIE HAD BEEN MADE DURING THE BRONZE AGE?

The World's Mightiest TV Heroes

Marvel's boob-tube titans of the 1970s–1990s assembled! Front row: Hulk (Lou Ferrigno), Nick Fury (David Hasselhoff), Captain America (Reb Brown), Thor (Eric Kramer), and She-Hulk (Brigitte Nielsen). Back row: Spider-Man (Nicholas Hammond), Dr. Strange (Peter Hooten), and Daredevil (Rex Smith). Special thanks to Andy Mangels, Heritage Comics Auctions, and Ricky T. Butler for the images, and to our do-gooder designer Rich Fowlks for Photoshopping them together!

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THE ROWDY RESURRECTION AND RETURN OF Wonder Man!

FlashBack!

by Jerry Boyd



Dead Man

Simon Williams, Wonder Man, in a 1997 George Pérez commission done for writer Jerry Boyd (and colored by our designer, Righteous Rich Fowlks), is backed up by a quartet of *Avengers* comics in which he appeared: (top left) his premiere issue, #9 (Oct. 1964), cover by Jack Kirby; (top right) lying in state on the Rich Buckler/Joe Sinnott cover for #102 (Aug. 1972); (bottom right) #155 (Jan. 1977, cover by Kirby and Al Milgrom), continuing a tale started in *Super-Villain Team-Up* #9; and (bottom left) in his bright red duds in #162 (Aug. 1977), by the dynamic drawing duo of Pérez and Pablo Marcos.

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Tepid Reaction

When he returned to Marvel to write *West Coast Avengers* (see the Pro2Pro on page 60), Englehart didn't warm up to the once-dead Simon. Still, he recapped Wondy's origin in *WCA* vol. 2 #2 (Nov. 1985), with artists Al Milgrom and Kim DeMulder.

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Loose ends, forgotten subplots, unfinished story arcs—whatever you wish to call them, they sure can play heck with an incoming creative team after they've taken over an ongoing and successful superhero title.

In the early 1970s, Marvel Comics scribes Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, and Gary Friedrich made way for some new writers, fully expecting that the flower of Mighty Marvel would continue to flourish with this infusion of new blood. This new blood would take the House of Ideas into inspired, exciting directions, indeed. And Wonder Man, one of those "loose ends," would be revived through the talents of a new *Avengers* writer who'd previously been putting his energies into standard romance and horror stories—Steve Englehart.



STEVE ENGLEHART

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH!

Steve had been mightily impressed by the possibilities of the medium. On his college campus in the '60s, he'd shown "The Galactus Trilogy" (*Fantastic Four* #48–50) to friends. Selected by Marvel editor-in-chief Roy Thomas (after the Smiling One, Stan himself, got promoted to publisher), Steve got the keys to the front door of Avengers Mansion.

I asked Steve if part of the interview process included a *decent knowledge* of Marvel continuity. He recalls, "No, I think it sort of got there by osmosis. You had to go to New York and it was assumed that you knew what you were doing and what you were getting into. By that time, Gary Friedrich didn't want to write a six-page monster story, so they looked around and thought about who could do that and other jobs. I had been doing some artwork but writing was part of me, obviously, and I was better at it than drawing. I got *Captain America* and *The Defenders* at the same time and I don't really recall Roy asking, 'Do you know who the Hulk is?' I was expected to know all of that. In those days, you knew the characters, had a feel for them,



Fear the Reaper

The Grim Reaper made his diabolical debut in Roy Thomas' *Avengers* #52 (May 1968; cover by John Buscema and George Tuska). The Black Panther spoiled his plans and became a team member by issue's end.

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On the Slab

Lying Frankenstein–like again, Wonder Man's death provided the spur for the machinations of his brother, Eric. Art by Heck, Cockrum, and Sinnott. From *Avengers* #108 (Feb. 1973).

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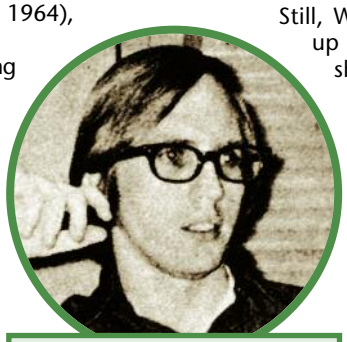


and the books. If not, you got them by osmosis—by being in the Marvel offices and being exposed to the history of them, and in the early '70s, those were not long histories for most of them. Now, the editors at Marvel tell you what's been going on the past 10–15 years! That's their job!!"

I asked Steve if he asked for *The Avengers*. His reply was, "No, I was just happy to be there. They gave me the Beast [in *Amazing Adventures*]. I was having a good time with the Beast. In those days, it was all assignments. It was Roy's idea to give me *The Avengers*. I was sorry to see him get off that book because he'd done it so long and so well, but I guess he saw something in me that told him I could do the book."

"Stainless" Steve Englehart's scripting began with *Avengers* #105 (Nov. 1972). But his writing began in earnest when he finished up a multi-parter with the Grim Reaper and the Space Phantom (*Avengers* #108, Feb. 1973). The Grim Reaper had been plaguing the Vision with "dreams" (pun intended) of having his mental imprints placed inside the body of Captain America. In the background lay the presumed-dead Wonder Man. This would prove somewhat fortuitous. Why? Because Mr. Englehart would return to Wonder Man before long, and in happy surprises for those who glommed onto his writing style, Steve would turn his attention to those pesky little loose ends, those unfinished subplots that had sometimes baffled Roy and Stan and their letter-answerers for years!

Before Englehart's tenure, the Assemblers belonged to Roy Thomas, who'd admirably guided the team through many trials and tribulations. And it was the Rascally One who created Eric Williams, the Grim Reaper, whose first appearance was in *Avengers* #52 (May 1968). Reaper's sole motivation as a baddie was to "avenge" (ironically) the death of his brother, Simon Williams—Wonder Man. As the dangerously deranged Eric saw it, it was the *Avengers* who killed his brother at the end of *Avengers* #9 (Oct. 1964), *not* the Masters of Evil.



ROY THOMAS

Thomas, like Englehart, enjoyed toying with the diverse elements and characters of the Marvel Universe and bringing them into a coherent coexistence that longtime Marvel fans could understand, even if they had been readers since the Timely and Atlas days! Two Timely heroes, the Vision (in *Avengers* #57) and Red Raven (in a brief appearance in *X-Men* #44), had been retooled for the 1960s by Roy.

Wonder Man may have been resurrected under Thomas in the late '60s, but that notion was shot down by Marvel's "Distinguished Competition."

Thomas notes for *BACK ISSUE*, "I don't recall any 'big plans' for Wonder Man, only using him as part of the basis of the Vision, since Wonder Man was presumably prescribed from coming back by whatever letter Marvel received from DC (complaining re Wonder Woman's 'similarity' of name, I believe)."

Still, Wonder Man was a name that came up often. Every time the Grim Reaper showed up to bedevil the Assemblers in the late '60s, Simon was usually mentioned.

Englehart came up to bat next. In *Avengers* #108, the Vision rejected Eric's offer of obtaining Captain America's body (even though the idea briefly intrigued him—by then, the android was in love with the beautiful Scarlet Witch), but the regular super-doer heroics set up by the Star-Spangled Avenger and the others pushed the Wondy controversy way back … into the background.

I asked Roy if he gave Steve any ideas for Wonder Man's resurrection as he left the book, when he was editor-in-chief of the Marvel line. "Far as I know,



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Pawn of the Dead

Wonder Man as one of Kang's Legion of the Unliving. Cover of *The Avengers* #131 (Jan. 1975) by Gil Kane and Frank Giacoia.

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Steve's ideas were his own," Thomas says. "I don't recall making any suggestions."

Englehart had no definite plans for the team initially—or Wonder Man in particular: "My foremost goals were not to screw it up. I took the first few issues one at a time. The Big Three [Iron Man, Captain America, and Thor] had their own books. You could only do so much with them. So I moved toward Wanda and the Vision. I just liked Wanda and the Vision quite a bit—they were the lynchpins of the group. They began to write themselves.

"So did Mantis … and everybody else, really. Mantis and the Swordsman came in after a year or so when I was on the book and that was when I said, 'Okay, here are characters I can develop and do new things with.'"



DEADTIME STORIES

Loose ends … loose ends. Over at *Captain America and the Falcon*, writer Englehart and artist Sal Buscema had taken the 1950s' Ike–era Cap and Bucky and incorporated them briefly (and wonderfully) into the '70s, even explaining how they came about while Steve Rogers was in that block of ice. The fans loved it. Two parts of the Marvel Universe were to come together nicely when the gunslingers of the late 19th century (Kid Colt, Rawhide Kid, Ghost Rider, etc.) met the Avengers (Thor, Hawkeye, and Moondragon) on their prairie turf in *Avengers* #142–144 (see *BI* #42). And since the Swordsman was made an official member of the team under Stan Lee and Don Heck in *Avengers* #19–20, Steve made it *even more* official and took the reformed supervillain in the new team he put together. Returning to see this, Hawkeye wasn't pleased at all—but the readers (for the most part) liked this development.

Mr. Englehart was on a roll, ably aided by pencilers Bob Brown, Sal Buscema, John Buscema, Don Heck, and Dave Cockrum, among others. And though the fans weren't clamoring en masse for a wondrous return for Wonder Man, Steve tested the waters beforehand anyway, to see if a Captain America–style resurrection was right for Simon Williams. In *Avengers* #131 (Jan. 1974), the seeds were planted. Kang the Conqueror revived a veritable legion of "the dead" to defeat his longtime enemies: Midnight (a martial-arts menace revived to bring down Mantis), the original Human Torch, the Ghost (a powerful wraith from *Silver Surfer* #8–9), the Frankenstein Monster, Baron Zemo, and Wonder Man made up the Legion of the Unliving! This fear-fraught faction met the Assemblers in the appropriately creepy labyrinths in the limbo world, and the battles began. This time, after being relegated for some time to only flashbacks and slab-tables, the body of Simon Williams finally got to speak for himself!

My next query for Mr. Englehart was, "When you finally got Wondy off that slab for that three-parter with Kang's dead villains, did the ideas start percolating in your head as to Wonder Man's potential?"

Steve observes, "Yeah. I had this idea that Kang could travel through time and attack the Avengers in different moments in history. He was the main villain when the team found themselves in the Old West and the old Marvel gunmen showed up. So Kang could also get these 'dead guys' when they were alive, or distort time and circumstances to bring them back to life. [Wonder Man] was just one of the dead guys. It did start me thinking, though. It was another year or so before Simon was brought into the regular storyline."

Back in action, Wondy took on Thor and Iron Man separately as well as a severely wounded, one-armed Vision who got hurt in *Avengers* #132 and *Giant-Size Avengers* #3 (Feb. 1974). Neither team was truly triumphant, but the results set up the healed Vision (his arm restored by Immortus) on a quest through time created by Immortus to find out his complete origin. Again, Steve was taking those—you guessed it—





incomplete story arcs and ending misunderstandings and confusion.

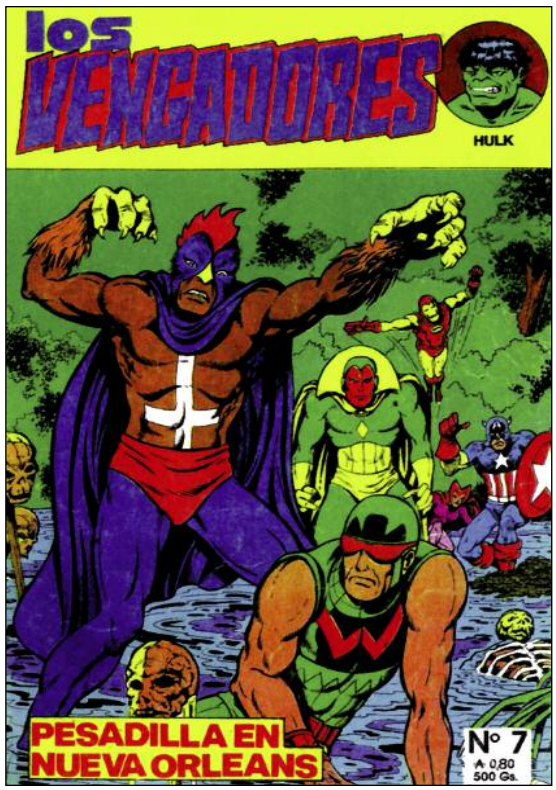
The Vision found out that his body was originally the Human Torch's! He'd known already that Wonder Man's brain imprints were indeed the basis for his computerized mind.

With that loose end tied up, Steve moved on.

In *Avengers* #141 (Nov. 1975), a new cartoonist made his presence known to readers, and, to cop a cliché, Mighty Marvel was on the move again. His name was "Gorgeous" George Pérez (okay, the Bullpen moniker came long after his birth) and he very quickly became a fan favorite.

Mr. Pérez recalls for *BI*, "I wanted the gig! No one wanted that book. It was a team thing with so many characters. I actually *asked* for that book. George Tuska left and it came my way."

After a number of great story arcs and hero introspections in the merry Marvel manner, Steve and George got the line-up down to a superlative seven: Hellcat, Moondragon, and Thor would move on, leaving a nice grouping of Yellowjacket and the Wasp, Cap, Iron Man, the Beast, the Scarlet Witch, and the Vision at the end of *Avengers* #151 (Sept. 1976). And just when the crowds began to cheer happily for the new team and shake their hands outside the mansion, a large crate erupted from within and … a man thought *dead* pointed to the Vision and said, "He … did it. He … is the one … THE ONE WHO STOLE MY MIND."



Brother, It's Voodoo!

(top left) *Avengers* #151, page 17. Art by Pérez and Marcos. (top right) Kirby and Dan Adkins "resurrected" Simon Williams on this cover for *Avengers* #152 (Oct. 1976), and one moment later (!!), artist Oscar Stepanich did a variation for a Spanish edition the same year (left).

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Englehart had done it. Wonder Man's body, albeit in a zombie–like state, was (for lack of a better word) … alive.

It turns out that Simon Williams had been resurrected (this time) by the Black Talon, one of Brother Voodoo's old foes. The Assemblers, able to gauge the former whereabouts of Williams' body via Wanda's improved witch powers, trail the source of the problem to New Orleans and defeats a voodoo cult under the Black Talon. In *Avengers Annual* #6 (1976), Williams gets his mind back after a hard hit on the head by the Beast, who'd taken a liking to the zombie–like hero/villain. The Beast, Wonder Man, and the Whizzer (Marvel's Golden Age speedster) showed up cavalry–style, to help the new team defeat the Living Laser, Nuklo, and a renegade army. (Marvel wasn't slacking up in getting those forgotten heroes/loose ends connected to present continuity; at least one reader had asked if Quicksilver was somehow related to Bob Frank, the Whizzer of the Timely years.)





The Englehart/Pérez show was magnificent, but it was short-lived. Gerry Conway wrote the aforementioned annual and Jim Shooter was about to become the regular writer. I asked Steve if he shared his direction for Wondy or for the team for those men.

"No," Steve responds. "Unfortunately, it wasn't that friendly a situation. Gerry had the power as editor-in-chief and told me and Steve Gerber he was taking over *The Defenders* and *Avengers*. He could do that even though I protested. I told him, 'That's not the Marvel way of doing things, as I saw it. I'd like to have some compromise.' It didn't work. I left abruptly and didn't have the chance to consult. What they did is what they did.

"What I was looking for, in Marvel years, was that Wonder Man had been lying on that slab for that long period of time. He was a man a decade or more removed from his time. What would he be like after all that time? He made me think of a man resurrected in a new time. His entire life was unbalanced. And here was this android that'd been living off his mental imprints—this android … that had loved, married, and been part of this great team. So how did this dead hero see himself? How did he fit in? There was a lot of stuff to play around with in Wonder Man. But I didn't get to do it."

THE WONDER YEARS

Conway began a nice multi-parter that involved Attuma and his new aquatic henchman-baddie called Tyrak the Treacherous, eventually involving Dr. Doom and Sub-Mariner in a tie-in from *Super-Villain Team-Up* #9 (Dec. 1976). The results were marvelous, worthy of some of the best stuff Roy and Stan and Jack Kirby done in the sizzling '60s. As an added bonus, "King" Kirby was even doing covers for *The Avengers* then, and Wonder Man was on a few of them. Older readers may have been wistfully brought all the way back to the cover of *Avengers* #9.

Overall, the readers were thrilled to have Wondy back. He was a *natural fit* for the Avengers, even though he'd not be an official member for some time to come. In addition, he was shrouded in mystery, having been "dead" for so long. The Beast wanted to know more about this dead hero. The biologist Yellowjacket, Iron Man (the team's leader), and Captain America—who'd been part of the line-up when Simon Williams breathed his last—were also curious.

Those three, along with the Wasp and Thor, had been there for the attack of Wonder Man, along with Zemo's Masters of Evil. It seems that Baron Zemo had perfected a machine to give a human incredible strength, invulnerability, and stamina. Wonder Man had fists that "hit almost as hard as Thor's hammer." Failed industrialist Simon Williams was embittered by the ruination of his own companies while Stark Industries, to him, seemed to be the cause of it. Since he'd been wiped out (in fair competition) and accused of embezzling company funds, he welcomed a chance to eliminate Stark's bodyguard Iron Man and his avenging friends for Zemo. But they don't come any more sinister than a Stan Lee baddie, right? Zemo told Williams that he needed periodic doses of a serum only Zemo could provide if he wished to continue living. The meaning wasn't lost: Obey Zemo or die. Wondy and the others gave the Assemblers a great battle, but on the threshold of victory, Simon had a change of heart. Zemo played his trump card and fled with the Executioner and Enchantress, leaving a serum-less Williams to die in the midst of the Avengers.

That was 1964.

In 1976–'77, Williams was a guest at Avengers Mansion. As Marvel's newest super-strongman, he had to prove his mettle in other books as well as the one he'd been revived for. In *Avengers* #155 (Jan. 1977), he mixed it up with Prince Namor, who, after taking a few of Simon's best shots, privately assessed, "That human is almost as powerful as the Thunder God, Thor!"

It's Clobberin' Time!

Wonder Man vs. the Vision, on (top) "King" Kirby's goods-deliverin' cover to *Avengers* #158 (Apr. 1977), and (bottom) two interior panels with Wondy coming into his own (art by Sal Buscema and Pablo Marcos).

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In *Defenders* #47 (May 1977), Wondy was home alone at the manse when Marvel's non-team showed up. Not knowing anything about the costumed Simon Williams, they reasoned he was an intruder and the fight was on. In *Avengers* #158 (Apr. 1977), a deeply troubled Vision took on Williams after seeing his dazed wife in the arms of the "man" who had come back to reopen all his doubts about his synthetic claims to humanity. The slugfest was allowed to go on by order of Iron Man, who probably felt (like the readers) it was bound to happen. Though the scrap was the usual Marvel "draw," Wondy reminded Vizh, "I'm in a class only Thor can touch!!"

WOW! Readers might have written in to see similar donnybrooks with the Hulk, Hercules, the Silver Surfer, Colossus, or the Thing, but Jim Shooter, now ensconced as permanent *Avengers* writer (as of the 158th issue), had other ideas. (As for the bad guys, I'd have been overjoyed to Wondy's having periodic bouts with Hyperion, the Rhino, the Abomination, Sandman, Ulik, and the Absorbing Man!)

Simon could hold his own against the Vision, but not the foe they'd face next. In *Avengers* #158–159, the entire team, even aided by Thor and the Black Panther, was nearly finished off by Graviton, who'd harnessed the power of gravity by scientific means.

The Grim Reaper returned in *Avengers* #160 (June 1977) for "The Trial!" He had to know if this revived Wonder Man was truly his brother—and if he was, the "superfluous android" was to be destroyed. Luckily for the Reaper, he had only to contend with his two "brothers," the Scarlet Witch, the Beast, and the Black Panther, whose jungle senses had divined that Williams was no longer "human"—a fact to which Simon finally admitted.

Somehow, his bodily energies hadn't exactly died off but evolved—*morphed into something else*. He was Simon Williams … but he'd changed internally. Shooter and Pérez resolved the Vision's internal conflicts in this great issue. The android declared that he was complete and unique unto himself, no matter his mental imprints and plastic form! Wanda tearfully rejoiced. Her man was finally past his issues.

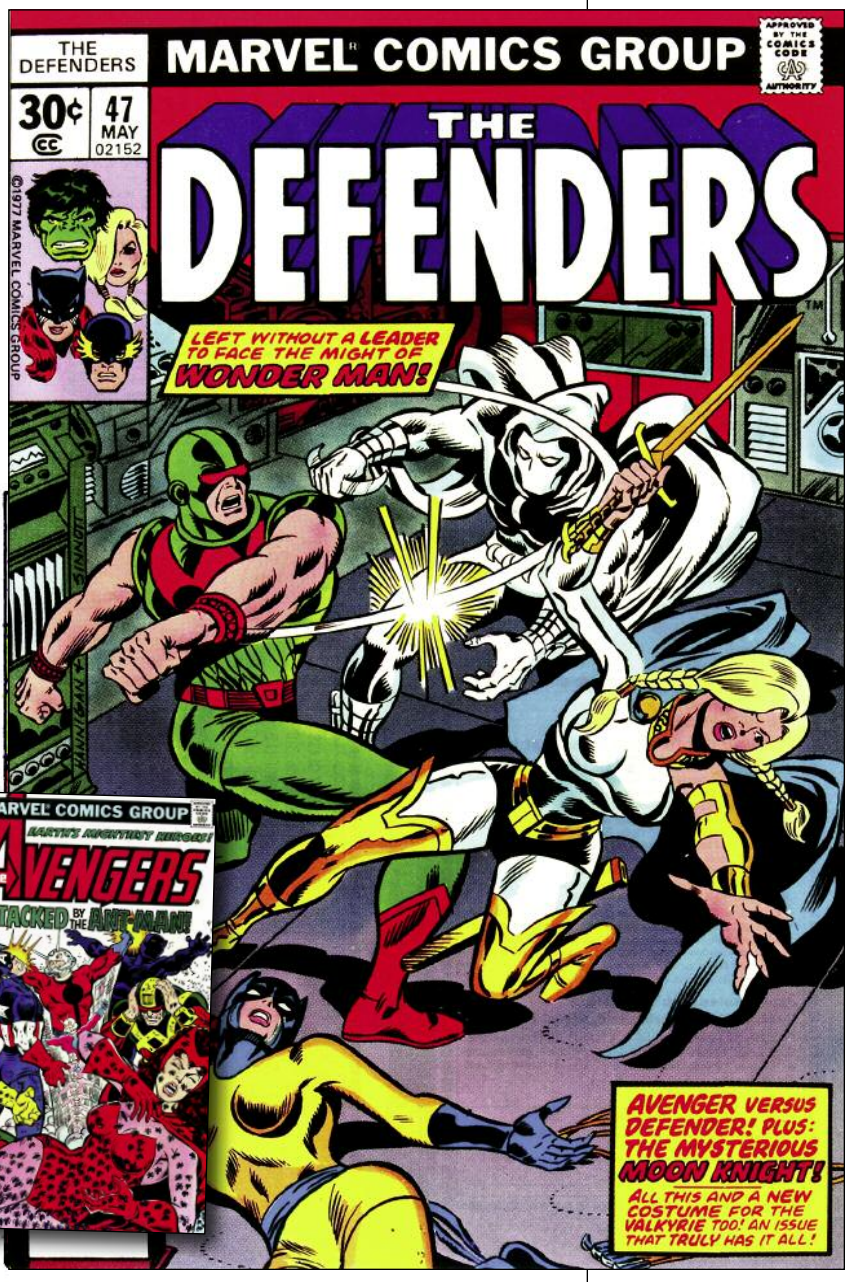
Eric Williams wanted to have the final say, but before his energy-scythe could do its dirty work, it was Simon himself who put a stop to the trial. With his original costume shredded by his devious sibling's blade, Wonder Man put him down with a punch and stood over him quietly as the Black Panther bade the others to leave them in peace.

Another issue was "resolved."

There Must Be Some Misunderstanding

Wondy wallops Marvel's non-team—including the ladies!—in a guest-shot in *Defenders* #47 (May 1977). Cover by Ed Hannigan and Joe Sinnott.

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Dressed for Success

Avengers #161 (July 1977) intro'ed Wondy's new outfit. You'll note that the yellow features on his torso form a cleverly stylized "WM"—but what else would you expect from George Pérez? Inks by Marcos.

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DO CLOTHES MAKE THE (WONDER) MAN?

Wondy got an awesome new costume in *Avengers* #161 (July 1977), and *this* fan couldn't have been happier! It was the disco era, after all, and a lot of young Americans were stepping out in coiffed manes, silk scarves, sport jackets, and other fashions of the times. So why shouldn't Simon get in step and style with a late-'70s look as well? The dark green and red colors were still prominent along with the crimson goggles. The Beast (the comic designer) and George Pérez (the *real designer*) had done Mr. Williams proud.

However, the adversaries to come kept Simon from getting his superhero self-esteem fully back. Ultron, a souped-up Lethal Legion, and Count Nefaria (with mega-powers) came up in succession and all were more than Simon anticipated. Against Ultron in *Avengers* #162 (Aug. 1977), Wondy muttered to himself, "Why … never even considered the possibility of dying!" And later, he thought again, "I-I don't want to die again!" Count Nefaria was even more than Thor could handle! Wondy's new costume got torn up again in combat under writer Shooter, penciler John Byrne, and inker Pablo Marcos. The two artists had become Marvel sensations in their own right, and Mr. Marcos kept the art uniform in his inking when Mr. Pérez wasn't around.



DAVID MICHELINIE

After Nefaria was defeated, Wonder Man went into an "I'm not worthy to be an Avenger" period. He'd been frozen in battle too often and feared death. He didn't go back into costume, but chose a safari jacket, shades, dark turtleneck, and black pants—a non-superhero look. Though he held his own in slugfests to come, Shooter moved the subplots over to a rift between Cap and Iron Man over the latter's "leadership," government agent Gyrich's interventions, and the subtle machinations of the powerful Korvac. The Guardians of the Galaxy were brought in as guest-stars. Jocasta, the bride of Ultron (!!), hung around the manse, and Ms. Marvel flew in to help out. Wondy was just another cog in the wheel.

Wonder Man might've been better served if he'd gotten a two-parter in *Marvel Spotlight* or *Marvel Premiere* (in '77 or so) where, outside of the group book, he'd have had some quiet time to sort out his remaining issues with his incarcerated brother, look over what was left of his company, and redefine himself. And if Gerry Conway or Steve Englehart, penciled by Pérez, could've found time for that, so much the better! Still, *The Avengers* was, after all, a *team* book, and *Solo Avengers* was a title not even contemplated in the 1970s. In addition, the creators brought their own best notions to the title, and if they felt Wondy had had his "Marvel spotlight" already, so be it.

About the second costume, George Pérez notes, "I thought it was a good design—it looked, coloring-wise, however, like a Christmas tree! Maybe I should've put more black [shades] in it. I wasn't sorry to see it go, though."

Jim Shooter was followed by permanent writer David Michelinie, who came in and lightened up matters considerably. Again, it was the late 1970s, and most people wanted to get away from the real-life double traumas of Watergate and Vietnam, huge issues that had hurt the national identity. David recalls, "Jim was the most recent writer on *Avengers* before I took over, so I tried to follow his lead. He was very generous with his input, but I don't remember a lot of details. I believe it may have been his suggestion that Wonder Man try an acting career."

In *Avengers* #194 (Apr. 1980), Simon told the Beast that he'd found work. Hank happened to have the boob tube on when Mr. Muscles, a kiddie-show mascot in a circus strongman outfit, made his debut—and Mr. Muscles just happened to be none other than the Beast's avenging teammate, Wonder Man! Embarrassing, yes, but different! It was part of what made David's stuff so unique.

Michelinie reflects on Wondy's moonlighting gig as Mr. Muscles: "There were a number of rather bizarre local-access cable shows on New York television at the time, and they were likely the inspiration for the Mr. Muscles character. I think most readers appreciated the humor. Simon Williams, as I saw him and tried to portray him, was a likable but troubled guy who was trying to find himself. I think most readers could identify with him, and probably

House Party

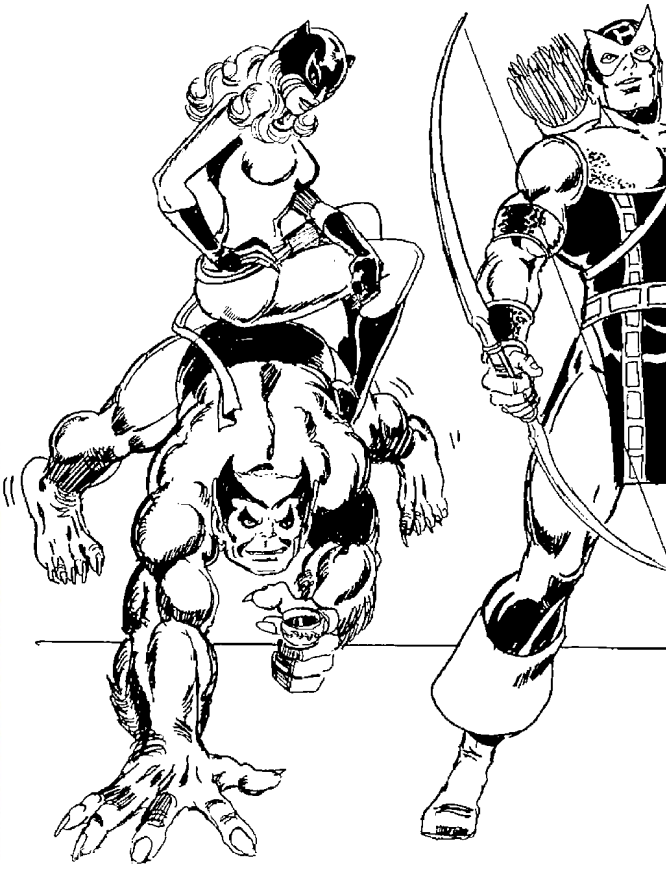
(center) The late-'70s Avengers—including our man Wonder Man—in a sketch, circa 1978, by George Pérez. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (below) Wonder Chum takes on Magneto in this trio of panels (penciled by Bob Hall and inked by Don Perlin and Duffy Vohland) from *Super-Villain Team-Up* #14 (Oct. 1977).

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had embarrassing moments in their own lives when their plans didn't work out exactly as they'd hoped."

The writer had no problem keeping Simon Williams in civvies when he fought with Earth's Mightiest Heroes. He observes, "At the time, Wonder Man wasn't comfortable with being a superhero, so it made sense that he wouldn't be comfortable with the trappings of that label—a flashy costume being the most visible of those trappings. The safari jacket gave him a unique look among his costumed peers, and also subtly separated him from them, as he felt separated from them inside."

Though the Avengers had gone through a number of writers, pencilers, inkers, and even editors from '71–'79, it retained a flair for introducing and guest-starring interesting new heroes and keeping the interest going for the old ones. Wonder Man was an interesting anomaly in that he was the one of the "oldest" *and* "newest"—groomed (slowly) to become one of the Assemblers of the '70s, but through a series of different creators, rose to a height in popularity … and then settled in as just one of the boys.

Williams finished the '70s partying with the Beast and doing the requisite guest-starring in *Marvel Team-Up* (#78 and 136) and *Marvel Two-in-One* (#51 and 78). Those last two issues of both titles came about in the '80s, and Wondy even got a solo outing in *Marvel Premiere* #55 (Aug. 1980).

Though John Byrne, Don Heck, Sal Buscema, George Tuska, and others had penciled the Earth's Mightiest Heroes' late-'70s adventures, it was George Pérez who made Wondy his own and is remembered as the chief Avengers artist of those marvelous years. Steve Englehart says about Pérez, "I thought his stuff was great! There were always a lot of new guys coming into the business, and he was one of the best ones."



Sartorial Safari

Our hero's non-traditional look, as seen on the cover of his first solo outing, *Marvel Premiere* #55 (Aug. 1980). Cover art by Ron Wilson and Joe Sinnott.

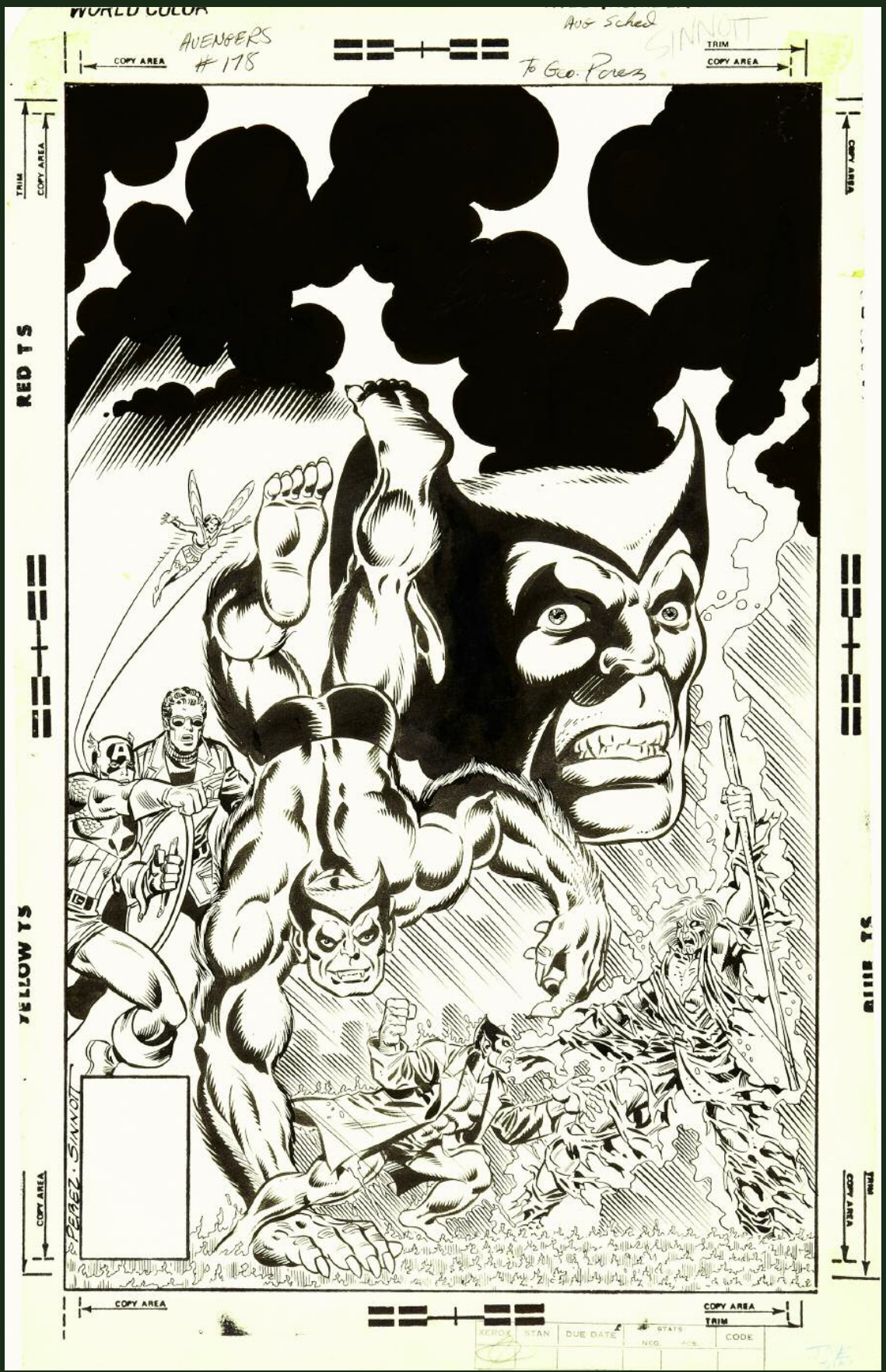
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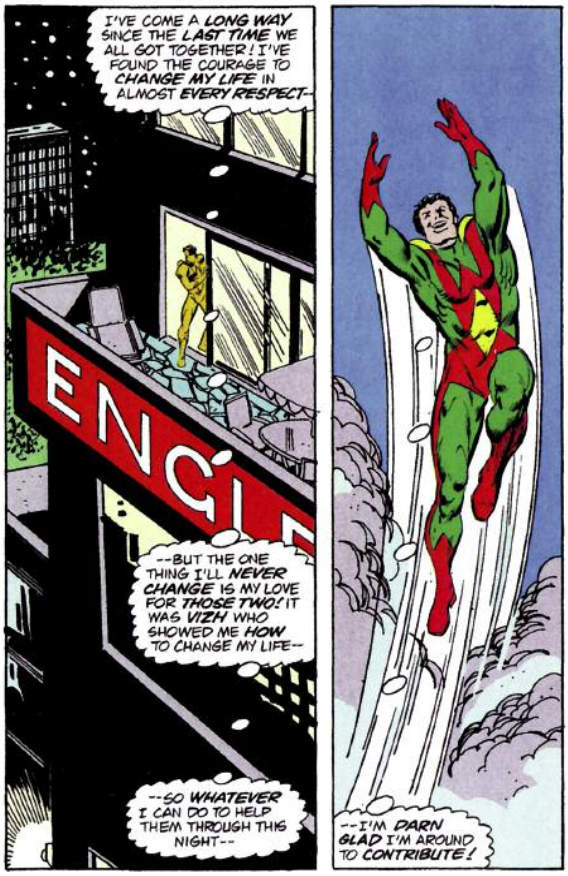




Pulse-Pounding Pérez Pinup! George Pérez's intended cover (inked by Sinnott) for *Avengers* #178 (Dec. 1978) was bumped for a John Buscema-drawn variation (inset).

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Leaving "Englehart Hospital"

Another costume change!! *Vision and the Scarlet Witch* #12 art, by Richard Howell and Frank Springer.

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David Michelinie concurs: "George Pérez was terrific to work with, and his pencils were some of the finest my plots have ever been treated to. They were a joy to dialogue, but could occasionally provide an unexpected challenge. For instance, there was a scene in issue #194 where Captain America and Ms. Marvel are in the yard outside Avengers Mansion and some kids climb a wall and throw a snowball at them. Cap slings his shield without interrupting the conversation, deflects the snowball, and the kids run off. In my plot, the story then cuts to Tony Stark at a window looking down at the scene. But in the pencils George had included a panel of Cap and Ms. Marvel still talking after the kids left. I hadn't planned on continuing their dialogue, and didn't know what to do. But that's part of the fun of working with George: dull pencils can put a writer to sleep, but creative stuff can keep him on his toes. In the end I was forced to come up with a little character bit that I think made the transition even better!"

MORE WONDERS TO COME

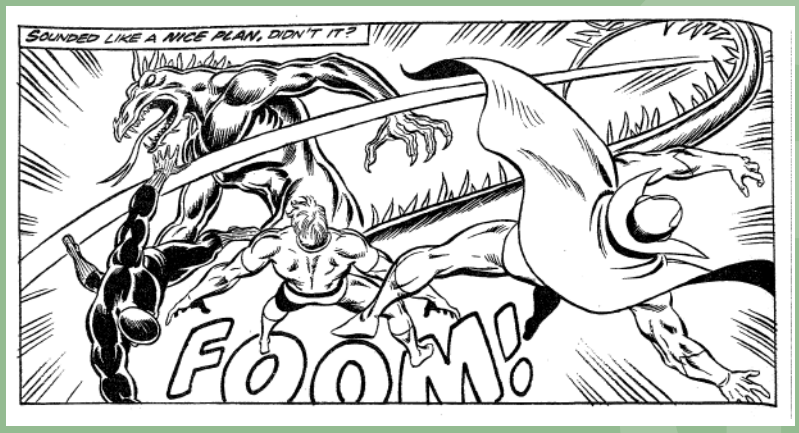
In the '80s, a miniseries called *The Vision and the Scarlet Witch* (specifically, in issue #3, Jan. 1983) saw the Grim Reaper yet again attempt to destroy the Vision. This time he'd also go after Wonder Man also, deciding both "men" were "travesties" of his dead brother. (How deranged can you get??)

MAKE ROOM FOR FOOM!

Mysteriously after the inception of the fan club FOOM in January of 1973, a lot of sound effects in *The Avengers* and elsewhere came out as "FOOM!" Coincidence?

I asked "Rascally" Roy Thomas, who opines, "I suspect that FOOM! was a plant only if it showed up after the club name was decided on."

That's good enough for us! Here are some panels from different *Avengers* mags that kept FOOM on our minds…













Isn't It Enchanting?

For the second issue of the solo Avenger's own ongoing title (*Wonder Man* #2, Oct. 1991), considerable alterations were made from penciler Jeff Johnson's original cover (left, featuring a nude brunette in place of the Enchantress) and the final version, inked by Terrific Terry Austin. Courtesy of Heritage.

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all courtesy of Steve Englehart. In the '80s extended families were becoming more prevalent in the Marvel Universe, with lost brothers, fathers, sisters-in-law, and children popping up. Simon was now a part of it all. In a way, things had come full circle for him. He'd found peace in what he'd become internally; happiness and pride in having his "brother," the Vision, as a teammate; and he'd even become an uncle because of that relationship.

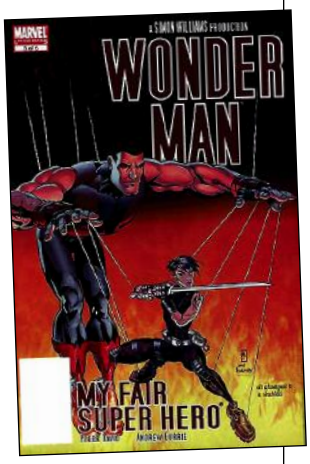
Added to that, he'd officially been made an Avenger. He'd get his own one-shot and miniseries in the '80s and a short-lived series in the '90s. Capping the '80s, Wonder Man got a non-team adventure in *Solo Avengers* #13 (Dec. 1988), and Jim Valentino took Marvel's "book of possibilities" and in *What If?* #5 (Nov. 1989) looked at two alternatives of Wondy's life if he hadn't been killed off in 1964.

Simon became a member of Hawkeye's West Coast Avengers in the '80s, as well. Englehart wrote some of the issues. I asked him if he ever felt like dismissing certain developments he didn't care for regarding Simon, and reshape him.

"Not really," Steve says. "When you take over a series you should take over smoothly. By that time [Wonder Man] had a long heritage and he was so firmly established as a not super-bright, easygoing guy … *that* was the Wonder Man I had to deal with. There was no way to get back to that 'spooky dead guy' I'd envisioned earlier. All in all, I worked with the guy I had. But I much preferred the character in the direction I would've liked to take him in…"

Simon Williams, Wonder Man, continues to be a power player in the Avengers today. Despite his many ups and downs, his days as a loose end are over—and he's still a wonder.

Special thanks to Ed Lustig, Paul Sager, Piers Casimir, and the Bullpenners who provided photos, scans, and comments.



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Bill Mantlo did the writing on this one and pulled together a number of the Thomas and Englehart initiatives: The Vision had lost an arm fighting Isbisa (a Golden Age enemy of the All-Winners Squad) and needed a transfusion only Wondy could give him. The Reaper plans to wreck the machine that transfers the energy Vizh and Wonder Man are sharing. He takes out the doctor and chloroforms the Scarlet Witch. All this time the Vision has been dreaming. He meets Dr. Horton and the original Human Torch and fights against Ultron-5 in his delirium. (Yes, the gang's all here!) Back in his original outfit, Wonder Man offers the Vision his brain and places it inside the synthezoid's head! Fighting through dreams and the energy transfer, the heroic pair again thwarts the Reaper. Rick Leonardi and inkers Ian Akin and Brian Garvey provided some nice illustrations.

Another 1980s storyline would see a pregnant Wanda giving birth to twins in *The Vision and the Scarlet Witch* #12 (Sept. 1986), a follow-up maxiseries. (You never saw a story where the Vision would grin more.) On hand were Magneto, who wanted to rebuild the bridges to his daughter; Wonder Man; and a zombie-fied Grim Reaper brought back to life by Nekra,



***JERRY BOYD** has written numerous articles for fanzines* **The Jack Kirby Collector**, **BACK ISSUE**, **Alter Ego**, **The Harveyville Fun Times!**, *and the* **Spooky Fearbook**. *He's proud to have interviewed numerous professionals in the industry for those publications. Jerry is a professional schoolteacher and an aspiring screenwriter living in Southern California. As often as he can, he sends copies of rare art to* **BI** *for other readers/fans to enjoy.*

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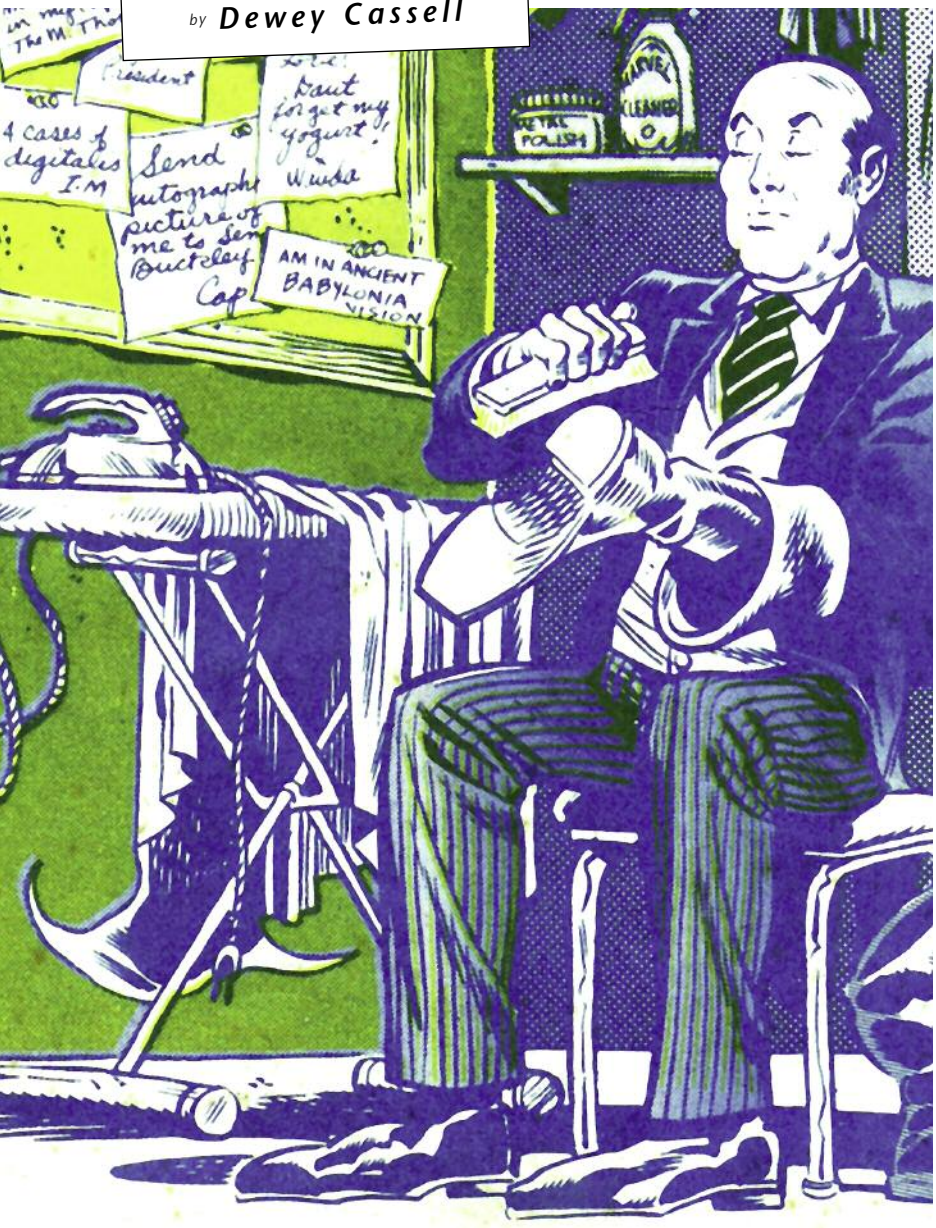
behind-the-scenes

If Only Those Walls Could Talk...

Backstage PASS

THE AVENGERS MANSION

by Dewey Cassell



It seems that every great superhero team must have a place to call home that befits their stature. For the Justice League of America, it is an orbiting satellite 22,300 miles above the Earth. For the Legion of Super-Heroes, it was originally a cylindrical building resembling an upturned rocketship, later replaced by a sprawling headquarters complex in futuristic Metropolis. And for the Avengers, the place to assemble was a mansion at 890 Fifth Avenue in the borough of Manhattan, New York City.

Like with most things, when it comes to being a superhero team, it pays to have wealthy friends. The benefactor of the Avengers was none other than millionaire inventor Tony Stark. Stark inherited the mansion from his father, industrialist Howard Stark, who built it in 1932. Shortly after the formation of the Avengers, Tony Stark (whose alter ego Iron Man was a founding member) donated the mansion to "Earth's Mightiest Heroes." The dwelling occupies an entire city block and was reportedly patterned after The Frick Collection, a museum at 1 East 70th Street that was originally built as a private residence by architect Thomas Hastings in 1914 for industrialist Henry Clay Frick. The first appearance of the mansion was in issue #2 of *The Avengers*.

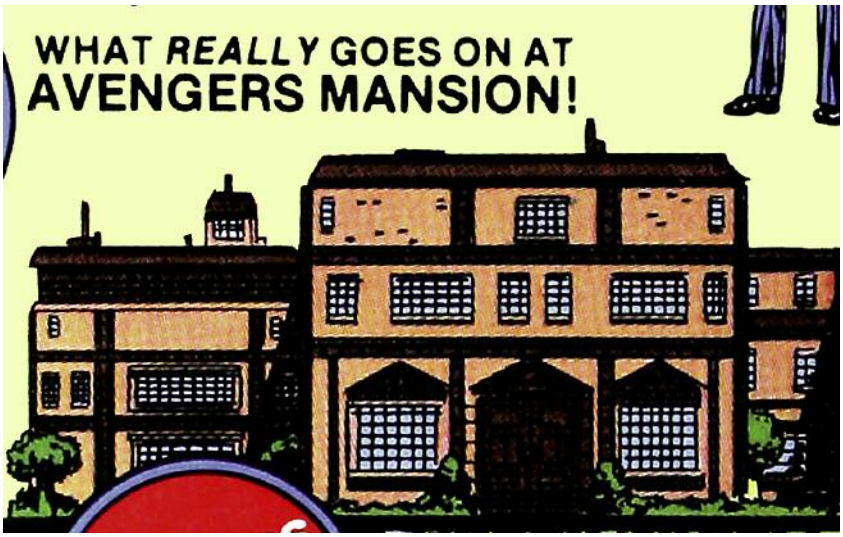
The mansion has three floors above ground and three basement levels. The top floor of the building houses the hangar and runway for the Avengers' primary mode of transportation (at least for those who can't fly)—the Quinjets, a VTOL aircraft designed by the Wakanda Design Group, led by T'Challa (a.k.a. the Black Panther).

The second floor encompasses living quarters for Avengers in residence, short- or long-term. Most Avengers maintain a residence elsewhere, but some have lived at the mansion, including Thor, Moondragon, Hellcat,

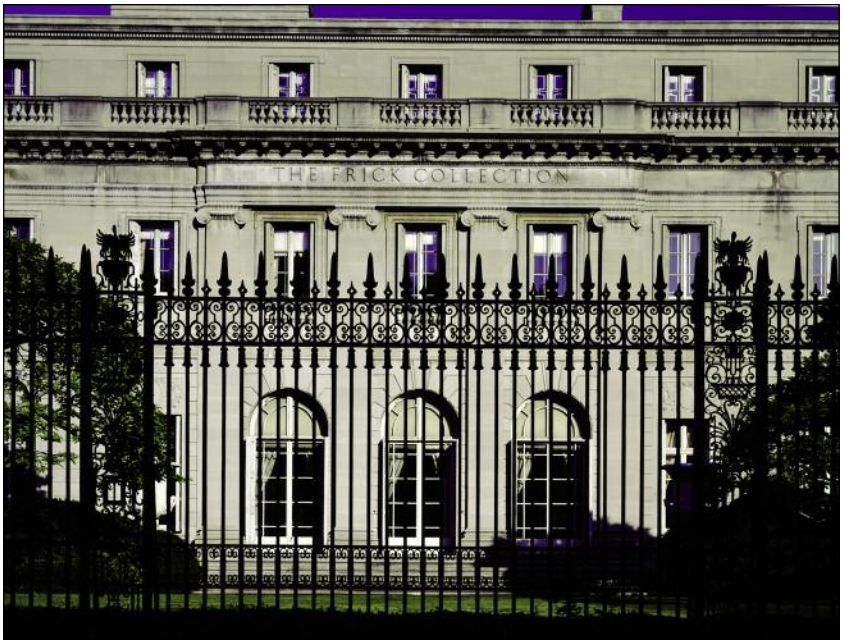
Man About the House

The keeper of Avengers Mansion: Jarvis, trusty butler and confidant, as immortalized by artist Marie Severin on the cover of Marvel's fanzine, *FOOM*, issue #6 (Summer 1974). Scan courtesy of Dewey Cassell.

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Falcon, and Captain Marvel, among others. Tony Stark maintains quarters there, as well, for his private use.

The first floor contains the dining room and library, as well as living quarters for the mansion's resident butler, Edwin Jarvis. The first floor is occasionally opened to the public.

The first basement level contains recreation and training facilities, including a gym, track, swimming pool, and game room, as well as a Combat Simulation Room reminiscent of the X-Men's Danger Room. This level also includes medical and laboratory facilities.

The second basement level is where Avengers meetings are held. It also contains their computer and communication systems, as well as power supply and generator. Security is at its highest on this level of the mansion.

Howard Stark originally used the lowest floor of the mansion for weapons testing. It was here that he constructed the robot Arsenal, which later attacked the Avengers. This level also once contained a submarine pen with access to the East River.

The mansion is surrounded by a 12-foot-high security fence and is equipped with various surveillance mechanisms designed to protect the privacy and safety of the Avengers (although it does not seem to dissuade most supervillains).

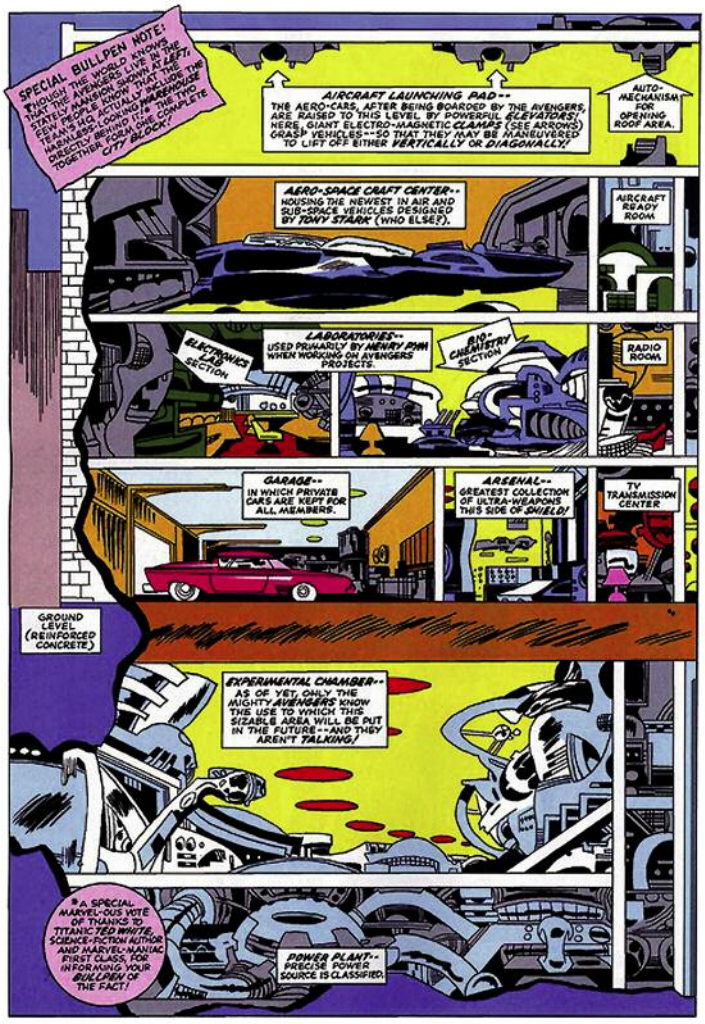
The mansion has been through a lot of changes over the years, and been a faithful bystander and safe haven for its resident heroes through countless battles. It has seen dozens of Avengers come and go in their ever-evolving roster. In essence, the mansion has been a part of the team, like Jarvis, since the beginning. As the saying goes, if only those walls could talk…

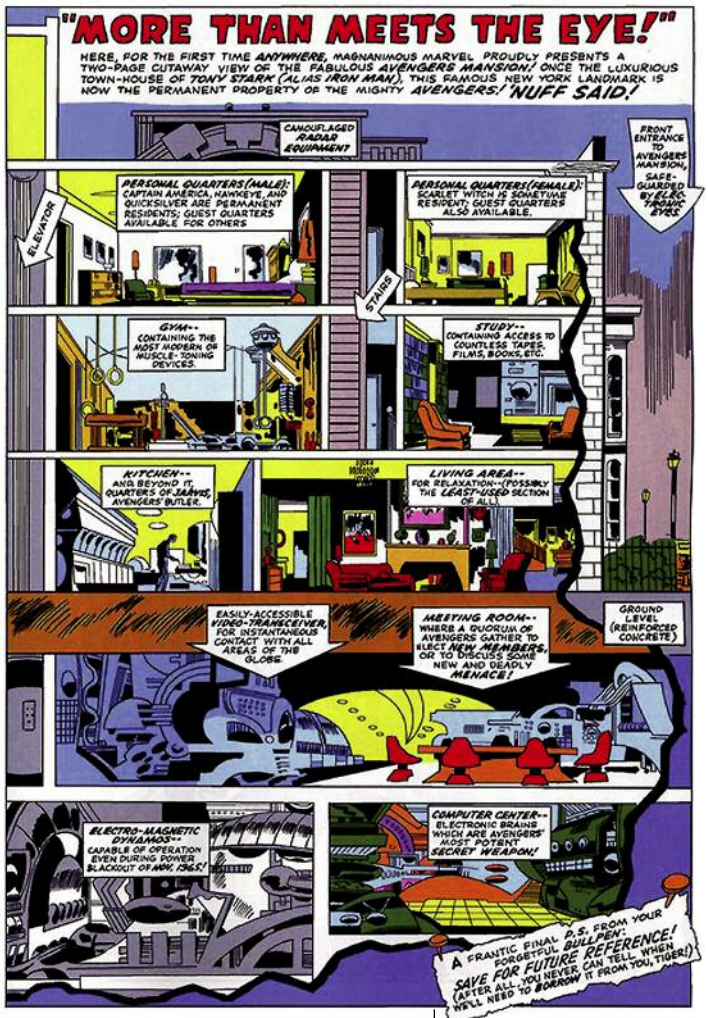
DEWEY CASSELL: ***So, what were some of the most memorable changes you have been through?***
AVENGERS MANSION: Wow, that's a tough one. There have been so many. Like when Thor and Iron Man moved me back 35 feet from the street to provide a little more privacy and a nice front yard, not long after the gang moved in.
CASSELL: ***Do the Avengers typically get along pretty well?***
MANSION: Do you read the comic book? No, of course they don't. They fight like cats and dogs. What do you expect? They're a bunch of type-A personalities. Even the girls. I remember when they took over the place in issue #83.
CASSELL: ***Who is your favorite Avenger?***
MANSION: A mansion can't play favorites. I do have a soft spot for Cap, though.
CASSELL: ***How do you get along with Jarvis?***
MANSION: You couldn't ask for a better butler. A true gentleman. We were made for each other.
CASSELL: ***Have you ever been hurt during an Avengers battle?***
MANSION: Yes. In fact, I'm not the original mansion.
CASSELL: ***Are you a clone?***

Architectural Inspiration

(top) Detail from the cover of *Avengers* #197. (middle and bottom) Photographs of The Frick Collection, on which Avengers Mansion was based. *The Frick Collection Exterior: Fifth Avenue Garden and Façade*. The Frick Collection, New York.

Photos: Andrea Brizzi.





MANSION: Wrong comic book. No, I was significantly damaged during an attack by the Masters of Evil, but I was eventually rebuilt.

CASSELL: ***Who was your favorite artist to render you?***

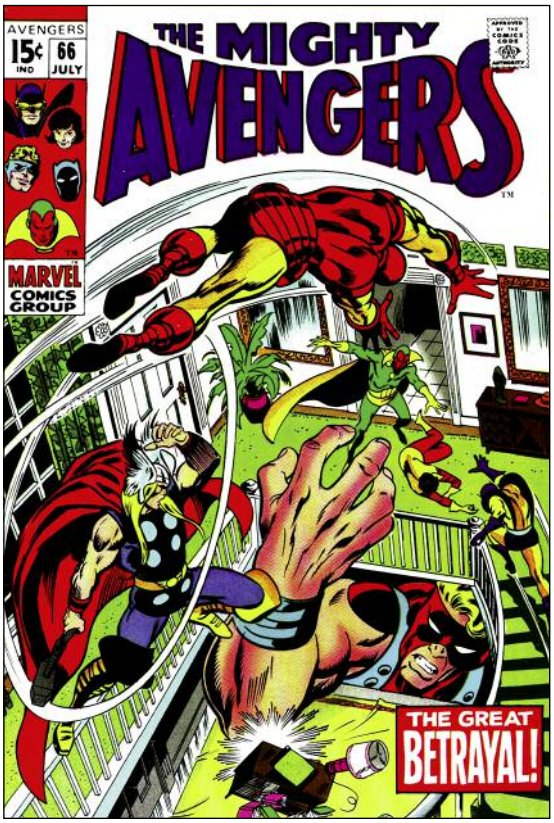
MANSION: John Buscema, hands down. He made the men look stronger and the women more beautiful and even an old mansion like me look better.

As clubhouses go, the Avengers Mansion may not be as cool as an orbiting satellite or an upturned rocketship, but it has a charm and resiliency all its own. After the attack by Baron Zemo and friends, the mansion site was known as "Avengers Park" for a while. When the United Nations once granted the Avengers sovereign-nation status, the mansion became known as "Avengers Embassy." In recent years, it has continued to undergo various travails, although I suspect it will remain a sanctuary for those Mighty Marvels in need of a place to rest, enjoy the care of an attentive butler, and to assemble to protect the world from the ever-present forces of evil.

Even for superheroes, there's no place like home.



Dewey Cassell is a frequent contributor to **BACK ISSUE** *and author of the book* **The Art of George Tuska**. *He is currently working on a book about Marie Severin that will be published by TwoMorrows Publishing in August 2012.*



"More Than Meets the Eye"?? (above) Isn't that the Transformers' tagline? Mighty Marvel used it way before *they* did, in *Avengers King-Size Special* (a.k.a. *Avengers Annual*) #1 (Sept. 1967). (left) Big John Buscema (with inker Sam Grainger) takes us inside the mansion on the cover of *Avengers* #66 (July 1969).

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end

FlashBack!

ROGER STERN'S AVENGERS™

by Jason Shayer

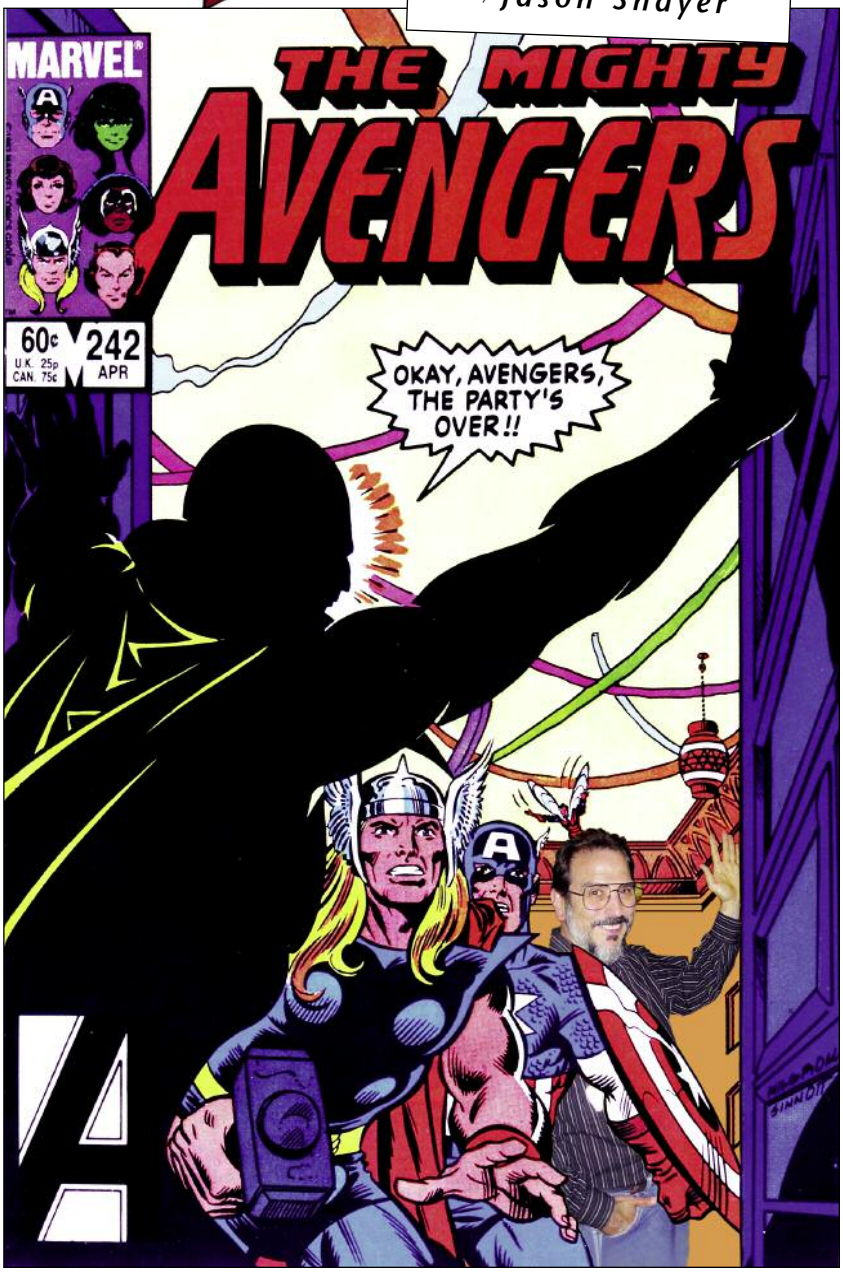
Roger Stern was perhaps the most underrated writer for Marvel Comics during the 1980s. Despite the volume and quality of his work, which included major titles like *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Avengers*, *Captain America*, and *Doctor Strange*, he never broke into the superstar category, like Chris Claremont, John Byrne, or Frank Miller.

What made Stern's five-year run on *The Avengers* so successful and memorable were his characters. Each character had their distinct attitude and direction, as well as flaws, which set them apart from the typical superhero stereotype.

Stern understood what it meant to be a hero: Being a hero, even at the power levels of the Avengers, required a human connection. It was never about their god-like powers or superhuman abilities—it was about their humanity with all of its strengths and weaknesses.

While he deftly handled the more popular and iconic characters like Captain America and Thor, Stern naturally gravitated toward the second-tier characters, like the Wasp, She-Hulk, and new recruits like Captain Marvel and Starfox. His approach balanced the team's roster and allowed him the storytelling flexibility to make broader changes to their lives, as they didn't have their own ongoing books. While these second-tier characters didn't possess earth-shattering powers, they reflected the heart and the soul of the Avengers.

This "Flashback" article will dive deep into Stern's work on *The Avengers* and walk you through some key character moments throughout his unforgettable run.



Wrong, Vision—The Party's Just Getting Started!

We take liberties with the gripping Al Milgrom/Joe Sinnott cover of *The Avengers* #242 (Apr. 1984) to celebrate the half-decade, full-throttle run on the title written by Roger Stern (seen waving, alongside members of Earth's Mightiest Heroes).

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ENTER STERN

On how he got the *Avengers* writing assignment, Roger Stern says: "I asked for it. Seriously, *The Avengers* was the first assignment that I actively sought out at Marvel. Before that, on *Doctor Strange*, *The Incredible Hulk*, or *The Amazing Spider-Man*, an editor had always asked me to write the series. But with *The Avengers* … well, I'd edited the book for a couple of years, and it had always been one of my favorites. So when I heard that Jim Shooter was going to be stepping down from writing *Avengers*, I called Mark Gruenwald and tossed my hat in the ring."

Avengers #227 (Jan. 1983) kicked off with a test of Captain Marvel's powers that served as her audition for the team and as her introduction to the readers. Captain Marvel and her alter ego, Monica Rambeau, were created by Stern in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #16 (Dec. 1982). He had the idea of her becoming an Avenger in mind from the outset. Her 17-page origin was a fine example of how to concisely and effectively introduce a new superhero that hit all the necessary character marks.

"With Captain Marvel, I did my best to create a character in the Lee/Kirby/Ditko tradition, a down-to-Earth person who suddenly acquired extraordinary power," Stern says. "And I wanted her to be a straightforward, likable superhero. At the time, so many of the then-newly minted super 'heroes' didn't seem very heroic. We already had Wolverine and the Punisher. I wanted there to be at least one new character who wasn't homicidal or a jerk."

Captain Marvel was a rookie superhero with access to almost unlimited powers and Stern leveraged her perspective as a vantage point into his story for new readers. She was learning to use her powers and found herself in awe of the legendary heroes that surrounded her, much like young readers might imagine themselves in the same role.

Stern paid particular attention to his female characters and developed them into strong, leading women that were great role models for young girls. Captain Marvel joined the team as an Avenger-in-training, and would gradually become more skilled with her powers and gain confidence as an Avenger, both of which would prepare her for her eventual leadership role.

THE REDEMPTION OF HANK PYM AND RENAISSANCE OF THE WASP

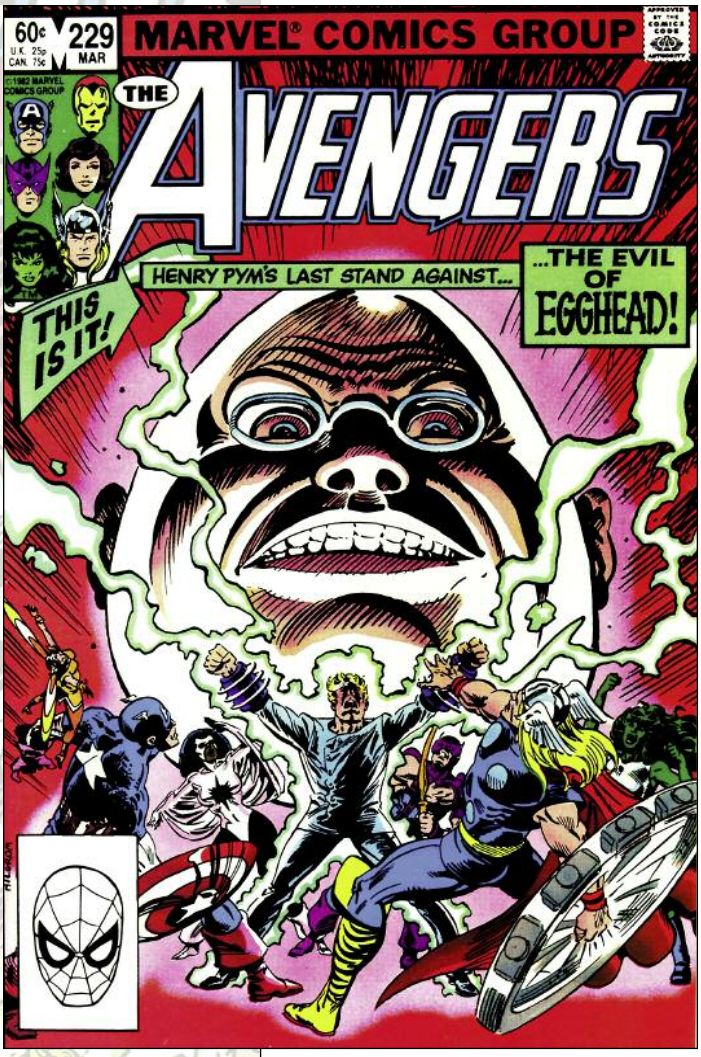
As the new regular writer, Stern didn't waste time getting settled in. He took on the Henry "Hank" Pym subplot, which had been dangling since Jim Shooter's tenure as writer, and had him face the public charges of kidnapping, theft of government property, and treason.

Stern cleverly used a psychiatrist, trying to determine Pym's mental fitness to stand trial, to flashback through Hank's past. Pym recounted his early history

***Which* Hand Do I Place on the Bible?**

(above) Affable Al Milgrom shares with us his original, unused cover for *Avengers* #228 (Feb. 1983). Compare it with the inset of the published version to see how Hank Pym's hands were changed. (left) Brett Breeding's cover to *Avengers* #227.

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Family Matters

(left) The Pym saga continues in *Avengers* #229 (Mar. 1983). Cover by Milgrom. (right) The Wasp came into her own under Roger Stern's tenure as Avengers writer. Page 21 of #230, by Stern/Milgrom/Joe Sinnott.

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as a scientist, his relationship with the Wasp, his career as an Avenger, and his fall from grace. His narrative was compelling and moving and wove together 20 years of convoluted history written by several writers, each with their own take on the character.

At the same time, Stern also focused on the Wasp as the leader and chairwoman of the Avengers, and her struggle to find her place without Hank Pym. Despite being a founding member of the Avengers since way back in 1963, her presence on the team wasn't anything more than as a sidekick, fashion diva, or plot device, usually the damsel in distress. She had always lived in the shadow of Hank Pym and his various superhero incarnations. Her most significant developments as a character seemed to be her exhaustive wardrobe.

"Don't forget, the Wasp was a kid when she first became the Wasp—she was a debutante, just barely 20—not that much older than, say, Spider-Man," Stern reminds *BACK ISSUE* readers. "We saw her come of age in the Avengers."

The Wasp worked around the team's government clearance that mandated only seven Avengers by instituting the Avengers-in-Training program. She did so by pulling some strings, as the First Lady and she had the same masseur! From Stern's first issue, he was already taking Wasp in a new direction and expanding her character. She was confident, driven, and resourceful.

And as impressive as her new attitude was, Stern showed the depth of her personality as she struggled to hold it all together: "Maybe I don't have Hank around to lean on anymore—but I can tough it out! I'll show 'em … I don't need him … don't need anybody! After all, I'm an Avenger. I'm the leader of the Avengers."

Stern recalls, "At the time, there were a few readers who thought it was crazy to have the Wasp leading the Avengers, but seen in the overall context of her life, it really was a natural development. The Wasp was a founding Avenger, and had been with the team for most of her adult life. She was recently divorced from a troubled marriage, and getting her life back together. At that point in her life, Jan was reinventing herself, looking for new challenges, and taking on new responsibilities."

Stern also invested time with the other Avengers, especially touching on the newly rejoined Hawkeye and new member She-Hulk. Each member was given some face time in which their human vulnerabilities were highlighted. For example, Iron Man regretted having romantically pursued the Wasp as Tony Stark while she didn't know he was Iron Man.

Stern accomplished all of this in just his first issue!

From the letters page of *The Avengers* #227, Stern wrote: "Needless to say, I'm thrilled and honored to be writing the adventures of Earth's Mightiest Heroes—but said thrill and honor does not preclude an occasional gulp of insecurity. Like most of you, I've been a big fan of Jim Shooter's tenure on the book and stepping into his size-13 sneakers is not going to be an easy task. Still and





Squashed! Who doesn't love an empty-costume cover?? Original art to the cover of *Avengers* #230, from the Al Milgrom archives.

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all, the Big Guy has charted an impressive course through these waters and he's left me enough concepts, plot-threads, and ideas for a score of adventures."

An obstacle in Stern's path was writing a team book with several members that had their own books and ongoing storylines handled by other writers. It must have been a constant exercise in communication and collaboration to weave through the minefield of storylines and limited series and crossovers. Stern not only accomplished that feat, but consistently fielded an interesting cast of characters.



Al Milgrom joined as the new regular penciler on *The Avengers* with issue #228. "Working with Al Milgrom was a lot of fun," remembers Stern. "Al is a very good storyteller, and a great idea man in his own right. Unfortunately, he was still pulling down a day job as an editor, and was usually drawing another book, as well. Consequently, we never got to really collaborate on *The Avengers* in the way we had on the Guardians of the Galaxy feature for *Marvel Presents*."

"The challenge with any team book is how to draw a lot of the team in individual panels," explains Al Milgrom. "It creates problems as you don't want to draw everyone really small every time, especially when you have these larger-than-life characters. But you find ways to do it. Perhaps have a character or two larger in the foreground with the other team members smaller in the background. I liked to play with the panel shapes and use horizontal panels where you could put in a lot of characters and crop characters in a way to have a full figure or two and enough of the other characters to know that they were there."

Joining Milgrom on the art duties was legendary inker Joe Sinnott. Their relationship would run through the rest of Milgrom's run on *The Avengers* as well as several years on *West Coast Avengers*. "I had really good support from veteran inker Joe Sinnott, who was such a good inker and draftsman," mentions Milgrom. "On the book's interiors, I was only doing the break-downs, which is basically a lot of the linear drawings, but not a lot of texture or spotting of blacks. When Joe Sinnott does finishes or any kind of inking, you know that he is going to make your work look really sharp since he's so good and conscientious. I was thrilled to death to get someone as good as Joe to ink my stuff."

The Avengers #230 (Apr. 1983) wrapped up the Hank Pym storyline and delivered an emotionally

Heavy Lifting

(left) Milgrom/Sinnott original cover art to *Avengers* #231, courtesy of Editori-Al. (right) Wanda's a black magic woman on the same art team's cover to #234 (Aug. 1983).

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Eternals-ly Yours

Mr. Hot Stuff, Eros—a.k.a. Starfox—makes the scene in *Avengers* #232 (June 1983), thanks to the Stern/Milgrom/Sinnott combo. (left) He's rechristened on page 5 of that issue.

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satisfying finale to his trial. Pym not only triumphed over the Masters of Evil singlehandedly, defeated his old nemesis Egghead (the first villain he faced back in *Tales to Astonish* #38, Dec. 1962), but also restored his faith in himself and the faith of his former teammates in him.

Stern could have neatly tied a bow around this story and had Pym rejoin the Avengers, but he didn't. Instead, Pym took responsibility for his actions, which included undergoing a mento-scan to confirm there was no outside influence affecting him, after which Pym admitted: "It would have changed a lot of things if there had been, wouldn't it? But no, I made my own mistakes … and I have to live with them."

Pym bid farewell to the Avengers and to his life as a superhero. It was an emotional departure for both Pym and the Wasp. The Wasp was strong and confident as the Avengers chairwoman through the proceedings, but watching Pym leave broke her heart and she finally gave in to an overwhelming flood of emotions. But that emotional ordeal was the catharsis that she needed to move toward standing on her own.

A few years later, Pym would rejoin the Avengers, but this time as a member of the West Coast Avengers. Writer Steve Englehart embraced the story foundation put down by Stern and made Pym one of the more interesting members of that team.

SHAKING UP THE ROSTER WITH STARFOX

With the resignation of Iron Man in *The Avengers* #231 (May 1983), the team's roster was bolstered by Eros, a member of the Eternals' faction that lived on Saturn's moon, Titan. Similar to Captain Marvel, Eros was a fresh take on the Avengers, as well as being an alien defending a world he barely understood. He was rebranded by the Wasp as Starfox to avoid the sexual innuendos associated with his real name. He also brought a light-hearted tone to what was usually a rather serious mix of people.

"The addition of Starfox to the Avengers roster came from a suggestion of Mark Gruenwald's," Stern recalls. "He thought it would help mix things up to introduce a cosmic Starlin[–like] character to the team. And, as I recall, Gruenie was the one who came up with the name "Starfox"—to go with that fox-head insignia he'd always had on his chest.





A Wall-Crawling Avenger?

From Spider-Man's two-part guest-shot: (left) Page 17 of #236. (right) Al and Joe's original cover to #237, from the Milgrom collection.

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Beyond the basic Eternal's powers of flight, physical resistances, and superstrength, Starfox had the ability to stimulate a target's pleasure centers. The interesting twist here was that Starfox didn't think this power was worth mentioning. When his teammates found out, the notion of his power made them understandably nervous and uncomfortable.

(Interestingly, this story element was revisited over 20 years later by Dan Slott in *She-Hulk* #6–7, Mar.–Apr. 2006, where Starfox was put on trial for a form of sexual assault because of the use of his powers.)

With *The Avengers* #232 (June 1983), Stern spent quality time on multiple character fronts, carefully moving their stories along. He included a small but significant scene between Captain Marvel and Starfox when she asked him about her namesake, the original Captain Marvel.

Starfox replied: "He was a gentle warrior … a noble soul. He was a true hero … worthy of rank and name!" Captain Marvel took his words the wrong way and flew off insulted, leaving behind a bewildered Starfox. But, just in those four panels, Stern highlighted Starfox's naivety and Captain Marvel's lack of self-confidence. That scene would be revisited in issue #250.

A VISIT BY YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN

Spider-Man swung by for a two-part guest appearance in *Avengers* #236–237 (Oct.–Nov. 1983) and boldly exclaimed his desire to join the Avengers. Stern was also writing *Amazing Spider-Man* at that time, and his proficiency with the character brought out the best and worst in Spidey. For example, Spider-Man's wry and sarcastic manner irritated She-Hulk, who pranced about in a towel as the Mansion's intruder alert had taken her from her bath.

Spider-Man balked at the offer to join as an Avenger-in-Training. Struggling with bills, college tuition, and a negative public perception, he tagged along during a mission to prove himself more than a trainee. An attack on the Pegasus Project by the Lava Men quickly demonstrated that Spider-Man's style conflicted with the Avengers' team tactics.

Wasp didn't hesitate to take down the cocky Web-Head a few pegs in issue #237. As the story escalated and the threat shifted from the Lava Men to a potential meltdown of the Pegasus Project, a humbled Spider-Man impressed the Avengers enough for them to go forward with his application. Unfortunately, the National Security Council refused his membership as Spider-Man's notoriety had preceded him.

Spider-Man's presence on the team added a fun, quirky dynamic, but it would become tiring and overdone rather quickly.

HITTING HIS STRIDE

Nineteen-eighty-four shaped up to be a rather busy year for Roger Stern, as he wrote *The Avengers*, the *West Coast Avengers* limited series, *Doctor Strange*, and *The Amazing Spider-Man*.

"I wasn't writing them simultaneously—it was more like one after another," Stern discloses. "And it was a great fun. It kept me fresh, finishing up a story about a team of heroes, moving on to a tale of sorcery, and then on to write about an eccentric loner.

"I remember, shortly after I started writing *The Avengers*, receiving a letter from someone who was surprised that the book 'read differently' than my *Spider-Man* stories did. Well, I would *hope* so! [*laughs*] All three [ongoing] books were very different in tone. It would have been wrong to write them all the same way."

Stern's workload was also playfully addressed in the letter page of *Avengers* #234: "Roger tells us that he's been able to tap vast stores of energy ever since he started living his life in reverse. He does not recommend this for everyone."

His plots and scripts were solid and he thoughtfully managed the team dynamics despite the lack of the big guns, like Iron Man, Thor, and Captain America, who all appeared sporadically throughout the year.

Fist of Fury

Al Milgrom, who penciled the cover of anniversary issue *Avengers* #250 (Dec. 1984), tells *BACK ISSUE*: "Unfortunately, they didn't use the cover copy I had suggested, which was, 'It's the Avengers' 250th issue. Let's give them a big hand!'" Cover inks by Joe Sinnott.

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AN ANNIVERSARY, AN EXIT, AND SOME CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

The Avengers #250 (Dec. 1984) was a double-sized anniversary issue that featured the first Avengers (East) and West Coast Avengers team-up. This issue showcased Stern's abilities in handling a broad roster of characters and tapping into each of their fears and weaknesses as well as strengths and confidence. Stern also restored a sense of grandeur to the Avengers with this double-sized issue, pitting this large roster of Avengers working to defeat a planet-threatening menace like Maelstrom.

Issue #250 was also a pivotal moment for Captain Marvel. Captain Marvel had fallen victim to the emotion-altering powers of one of Maelstrom's minions, Phobius. She held her fear at bay long enough to guide the Avengers to Maelstrom's hidden base. She then had to overcome the paralysis her fears had instilled to act and rescue Tigra from the clutches of Maelstrom.

Afterword, Starfox approached her and told her how he had initially been upset at her taking the name Captain Marvel since he and the original Captain Marvel (Mar-Vell)

Toasting Teammates

A bonding moment between Stern Avengers add-ons Starfox and Captain Marvel in *Avengers* #250. Thanks to Andy Mangels for the art scan!

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WHAK-ed!

Roger Stern, with artists Bob Hall and Joe Sinnott, plays head games with the Vision in *Avengers* #251 (Jan. 1985). Page 15 (below) and detail from the cover (center bottom).

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had been good friends. However, she had since earned his respect: "I can think of no finer tribute to my old friend to see his name carried on by one so courageous!" What a wonderful moment whose seed was planted well over a year earlier and came to fruition with great timing.

Avengers #250 was Al Milgrom's last issue. "It really wasn't my choice," he tells *BACK ISSUE*. "I had taken a leave of absence to do the *Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* limited series that Chris Claremont wrote. I was penciling and inking it as well as handling the writing and pencils on *Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man*. I couldn't keep up with *The Avengers*, so I took a break from the title. But, while I was gone, John Buscema was available and after a few fill-in issues, John became the new regular artist.

"When I wanted to come back, the spot was already filled," Milgrom continues. "I don't resent it, as I had made the conscious choice to do the *Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* series over *The Avengers*. Fortunately, editor Mark Gruenwald then suggested that I do the *West Coast Avengers* book. But I recall having had a great time on the book and I was a big Marvel Comics fan, so it was a wonderful time drawing all these characters."



UNLIMITED VISION

Building on events he set into motion years before, Stern's "Unlimited Vision" subplot moved onto center stage with *The Avengers* #251 (Jan. 1985). Back in July 1983, the Vision was left in a comatose state during the *Avengers/Fantastic Four* crossover that had pitted them against Annihilus. A few months later, Starfox linked up the Vision and ISAAC, the world computer on Titan. This new configuration granted the Vision a holographic body and allowed his consciousness to merge with the electronics of the Avengers Mansion.

The experience had a profound effect on him and made him aware of the near-limitless possibilities such a connected existence could have. The Vision finally recovered from the trauma he had sustained and returned to his android body. However, when the core Avengers were swept away in the events of the Secret Wars crossover in *Avengers* #242 (Apr. 1984), the Vision wondered if the world wouldn't have to rely on superheroes if he was to extend the control he had enjoyed over the Avengers' computers and electronics.

This notion appealed to both facets of his character, the man and the machine. What human being wouldn't want to make the world a better place? What machine wouldn't want to increase its processing power and make the world more efficient?

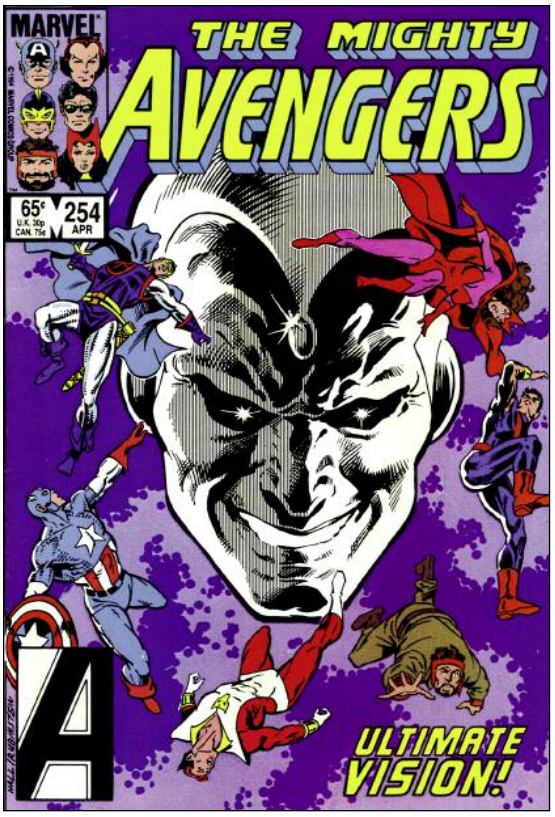
When the team returned the following issue, the Wasp passed the chairman position on to the Vision. In his new role, the Vision set his plan into motion. He created a West Coast chapter of the Avengers under Hawkeye's leadership in a veiled attempt to dilute the roster of heroes.

"I was building upon the foundations of the Vision's history, his life up to that point," Stern mentions. "Don't forget, the Vision had previously been controlled by preset programming—mainly from Ultron—and I was interested in exploring how that was accomplished and how he could avoid it in the future. Each aspect of his being—both man and machine—was, in its own way, corruptible. Looking back, I see the Vision as being like a latter-day Pinocchio, searching for his own humanity."



In *The Avengers* #251 (Jan. 1985) titled "Deceptions," we witnessed the escalation of the Vision's clandestine behavior as he made his final preparations. The encephalatron command chair, which would allow the Vision to assume control over every computing system on Earth, was ready.

The Vision confessed to ISAAC: "The things I saw when my mind was linked to your memory capacity—! I saw ways of eliminating the chaos that has ever plagued me ... and plagued mankind! I saw ways to achieve such control that I would never be helpless again! (...) There are still too many extraneous factors that arise, frustrating my attempts to





maintain control! I can't even keep the Avengers' membership stable. How can I begin to right the many wrongs of the world?!?"



Being a robot cast in the form of the man, the Vision was programmed to be human, but taking this next step would forever rob him of that: "Through this apparatus I could bring about a new Golden Age in effect, I would rule the world! But at such a cost, ISAAC … at such a cost!"

Stern carefully established that this wasn't a mad bid at power, but rather a genuine, altruistic attempt to more efficiently help the world. But we all know what they say about good intentions. Access to that kind of power corrupted both facets of the Vision's personality.

His subconscious surfaced this internal conflict through a nightmare that physically split the Vision apart into two personas, a pure robot and a flesh-and-blood version. The Vision came to his climatic decision point in *Avengers* #252 (Feb. 1985). When his home was destroyed by an act of arson fueled by mutant hysteria, it was timely in that it solidified his resolve: "Yes … my duty is clear!" He sent away the team, gave Jarvis the day off, and then committed to "save humanity from itself."

Stern peered deeper into the Vision's motives in *The Avengers* #253 (Mar. 1985) and let the reader understand the sacrifice he was about to make.

In the Vision's own words: "I have come to the conclusion that the only way I can fulfill my duty to make the Earth a safer place … is to run it myself!"

This decision wasn't without a sacrifice from the Vision, as he recognized it would involve abandoning his human form.

Inspired by and encouraged by ISAAC, the Vision reached out to the various computer networks around the globe and seized control. When the Avengers learned of what was happening they confronted him, and his reply was quite simple: "Well, there is no easy way to put this … but I have taken over the world. (…) As of this moment, full control of the Earth's computerized weapons systems is mine. Even as we speak my control over major domestic systems is growing. I wish there had been some other way—but I had found no alternate means of ending war and strife on this planet."

As the Avengers regrouped in issue #254 and returned to the Mansion to stop him, the Vision forced

Eye Contact

(above) The Vision's ultimate breakdown, from page 15 of *Avengers* #254 (Apr. 1985). (left) The issue's cover. Written by Stern, with art by Hall and Joe Rubinstein.

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the team to split up and tried to reason with each group independently. The Vision admitted to manipulating his teammates to bring about his ultimate goal, including driving off the Wasp so that he could become the new chairman, creating the West Coast Avengers, and sending off Captain Marvel into deep space.

He also revealed the existence of a control crystal, implanted by Ultron during his creation, which helped Ultron control him. The Vision eventually overcame its influence, but it still impeded any further emotional growth as well as interfered with his ability to reason. When he was one with the Avengers Mansion's electronics, he felt that limitation removed and when he was returned to his body, he wanted nothing more than to push that to its limits and become more powerful. In his mind, he could justify that by convincing himself he was doing it for all the right reasons.

Fortunately, each of these groups pushed him at different emotional levels and they helped him realize what he was doing and they stopped him. As soon as the Vision was downloaded back into his body, he used his power of intangibility to reach into his head and remove the control crystal.

The Vision stood there, humbled and humiliated before his teammates, when Captain America stepped up and put his hand on the Vision's shoulder. "You made a serious mistake, Vision. You fell prey to your own ego, your own emotions. But there was never any meanness in your actions. You might have been wrong, but everything you did was intended to ease pain and suffering. (…) But in the end, you recognized your mistake and tried to correct it."

Interestingly, in 1989, John Byrne would revisit this storyline and have the Vision abducted and disassembled by forces that feared he could take over the world's computers at any time.

ENTER BUSCEMA AND PALMER

The legendary artistic pairing of John Buscema and Tom Palmer came on board as the new ongoing artists for issue #255. The veteran art team was a familiar one for longtime Avengers fans who had enjoyed their earlier stint on the title in the 1970s.

Buscema's dynamic layouts were seasoned with a wonderful sense of perspective. He employed a variety of camera angles that heightened the intensity of his dynamic action sequences. His elaborately rendered figures and his mastery at drawing facial expressions stood out in this run.

Tom Palmer's inking style can best be described as embellishment. His finished art and lavish inks completed Buscema's overall artistic efforts. His delicate and precise inks defined the mood and atmosphere and contributed to the overall panel flow.

"With Tom Palmer inking John Buscema, there's a team that's just unbelievable," Al Milgrom states. "They could not only do beautiful work, but they could do it on time. To have that kind of quality and detail and still produce it on a monthly basis was just great."

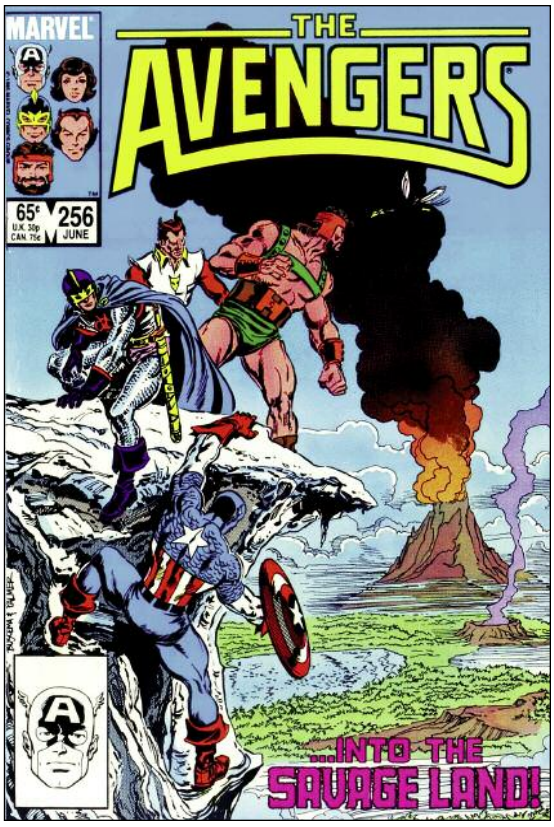
Roger Stern shares, "It was both fun and frustrating working with John Buscema. John was, bar none,

Big John Joins Roger Dodger

(left) Stern's Avengers as illo'ed by John Buscema and Tom Palmer. Page 16 from #255, courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions. (right) That duo's cover to #256 (June 1985).

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Team Supreme

Behold, the wizardry of the Buscema/ Palmer art combo, spotlighting Stern's Captain Marvel on this eye-opening splash from *Avengers* #255 (May 1985). Courtesy of Heritage.

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the finest illustrator I ever worked with. But his heart wasn't really in drawing superheroes—which was a shame, because he drew them better than about 90% of the artists then working in comics. I did my best, but I could never get him as interested in the Avengers as he was in drawing Conan.

"And Tom Palmer is the unsung hero of the Avengers art team," Stern adds. "John gave my stories form, but Tom gave them the substance, the weight. You want to know how good of an artist Tom Palmer is? There were a few occasions when John had inadvertently left something or someone—say, a Quinjet or the Wasp—out of a panel, and I would roughly scribble an indication of the missing object or person on the penciled art page, along with a note of apology. And when Tom had finished the art, there was the Quinjet. There was the Wasp. And you couldn't tell that he'd drawn it, instead of John Buscema. *That's* how good he was."



JOHN BUSCEMA

As to the transition from Milgrom to Buscema, Stern says, "I've always tried to play to my artists' strengths, and work things in that I thought they'd enjoy drawing. But I otherwise plotted and scripted the stories with John pretty much the same as I'd with Al. The biggest difference was that I sometimes had to hustle to keep up with John. There were times that I'd swear he could draw faster than I could write."

AVENGERS: UNDER SIEGE

The "Under Siege" storyline that ran through *The Avengers* #273–277 (Nov. 1986–Mar. 1987) is broadly acknowledged as Stern's finest effort on this title. It still stands today as one of the classic all-time superhero-team epics and has certainly aged well.

Rather than summarize the story, I'll let you enjoy it on its own, especially if you haven't read it yet. However, there are three components I want to highlight: the role the Wasp played, the aftermath scene with Captain America and Captain Marvel, and characterization of the Masters of Evil.

Baron Zemo II, the son of the original Baron Zemo, wanted to avenge his father's death by killing Captain America, and he wanted to do it in style. Zemo II and his newly assembled Masters of Evil stormed and seized control of the Avengers Mansion. They then took down the Avengers one-by-one as they returned home.

This story can be seen on the surface as the ultimate battle between Captain America and Baron Zemo II. But if you look a bit deeper, you can see that it's also about the Wasp. She was the Avengers chairwoman at the time and this was the team she assembled, and this attack happened under her watch.

Accept No Substitutes (or Sub-Mariners)

(left) Namor's acceptance onto the team sparks protests. From *Avengers* #267. (right) That dang Kang makes a bang in issue #269. By Stern/Buscema/Palmer.

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The Wasp continued to develop throughout Stern's run, building on the foundation that Jim Shooter had established. Janet Van Dyne had matured and had earned her place as the Avengers' chairwoman and now commanded respect. With this storyline, she was challenged on all of these levels.

She was faced with the defeat of her team, the capture of her teammates, a critically injured Hercules, and the occupation of their home, but she didn't wilt under the pressure. She regrouped and led a group of Avengers who had answered her distress call to free her captured teammates, retake the Mansion, and defeat Baron Zemo II.



TOM PALMER

Stern also invested a significant amount of time on the villains. His supervillains were portrayed as real people, breaking the mold of shallow, plot-driving sterotypes. The dynamics and infighting within the Masters of Evil was realistic and believable.

This arc wasn't your typical supervillain storyline—nothing as blunt as pursuing world domination. Stern cleverly had the supervillains take the battle to the good guys directly who knew that once the Avengers were defeated, they could leisurely continue with their plans for world domination.

Zemo II patiently waited for the precise time to strike, scheming to take advantage of the Avengers' weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Zemo II had assembled a large group of villains to form this incarnation of the Masters of Evil. Stern didn't shy away from presenting some realistic problems in terms of keeping the group together as a team.

The more physical members of his team itched for action, while others were completely unpredictable, including those who refused to acknowledge his leadership and became defiant rivals vying for control of the team. Zemo II juggled the logistics of keeping everyone occupied and ensured the team's loyalty through respect or fear.

This carefully planned investment in Zemo II paid dividends as the storyline reached its climax. Elevating his villainy established the severity of his threat and made this challenge a true test for the Avengers.

In the aftermath of the battle, Captain America recovered a torn photograph, the only photo he ever had of his mother and the only surviving item from his treasured army footlocker. Physically, the Avengers took a pounding with Jarvis and Black Knight severely beaten and Hercules in a coma, but in this scene, the simple effect of having Captain America break down over the torn photo of his mother really hit home.

During his one-on-one battle with Zemo II, when asked why he hadn't broken, Captain America defiantly stated: "If there's one thing life has taught me, it's never to give up!" But, it isn't until the battle was over that Captain America fully realized the impact of their assault.

This scene accentuated the depth of this attack as it made you realize they didn't just destroy Avengers Mansion, but they destroyed Captain America's home. Stranded in an alien future after awakening from his suspended animation, Captain America was taken in by the Avengers and the Avengers Mansion became his home.

To see Captain America's hands shaking as he held the torn photo of his mother was a powerful scene. Captain America is the Avengers at its core, the steady unshakable symbol of this super-team.



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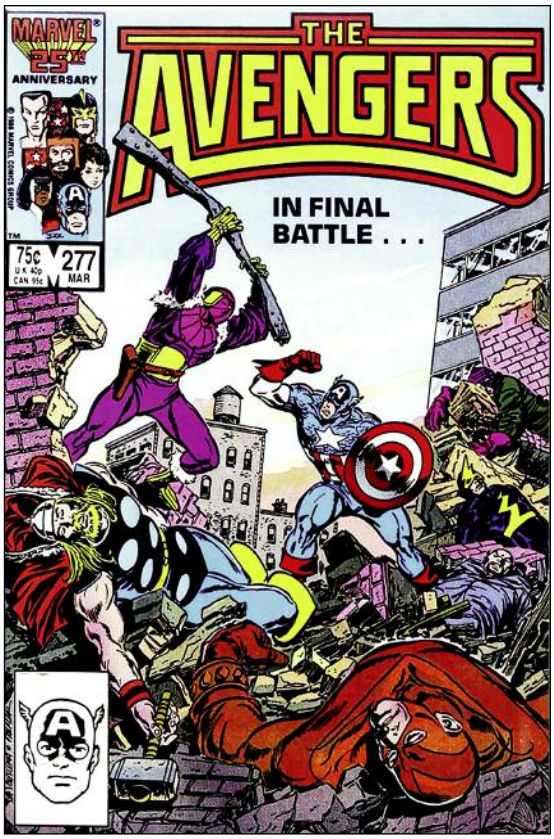


Occupy Avengers Mansion

Stern raises the stakes as Baron Zemo II takes charge—and hostages—in *Avengers* #275.

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I Remember Mama

(left) Steve Rogers' only remaining photograph of his mother leads to a poignant exchange between the Avengers' Captains. (right) The Masters of Evil mix it up with Earth's Mightiest on the Big John/Joltin' Joe cover to *Avengers* #277 (Mar. 1987).

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And who was there to comfort Captain America? Captain Marvel. She was someone else for whom the Avengers Mansion was her home away from home, and the Avengers were her family.

She said to Cap: "I've never lost what you have, Steve, but I know that we must mourn for our losses. If we don't, we can never heal. And we must heal … we must go on! There are too many people depending on us. We have to help each other salvage what we can from the past and rebuild for the future."

These were deep, poignant words that might have come from Captain America's own mouth had he not been so devastated. Stern's characterization was multi-dimensional, highlighting the physical side of these god-like beings as well as showing us their emotional side that, more often than not, is far more human.

"With that scene, I wanted to get at the human aspect of the Avengers, to show how they reacted to and dealt with the Mansion—their home base—being taken over and pretty much destroyed," says Stern. "And the two Captains were very much at the heart of that. Ever since his reintroduction in *Avengers* #4, Captain America has pretty much been Mr. Avenger … the 'First Avenger,' as the movie so aptly put it. He's not a god or superpowered, but he's still the seasoned pro, the guy you can always count on. And Cap's inner strength comes from the fact that he's resilient, not rigid. He keeps the stiff upper lip when he's on the job, when he has to. But afterwards, when the crisis has passed, he's man enough to let his grief show.

"It made sense for Captain Marvel to be the one who noticed that Cap wasn't around because she'd been in law enforcement," Stern adds. "Good cops are sharp observers—they have an awareness of people coming and going around them. So Monica went looking for Cap herself, rather than asking a more senior Avenger. Why? Again, because she was the good cop, looking out for her teammate. She was concerned about him. Captain Marvel had enormous respect and regard for Captain America."

In terms of handling these emotional scenes, Stern focused on those one-on-one relationships. He distilled the subject down to the two most significant people at that particular decision point and had them work it out. In this scene, would it have been as effective if the entire team had huddled around Captain America? How about his choice of Captain Marvel? Would it had felt the same if Thor or the Black Knight had been the one to comfort him? I don't believe so.

An interesting side note that demonstrated the impact of this scene and storyline, in *Thunderbolts* #105 (Oct. 2006), a remorseful Baron Zemo II traveled through time, snagged Captain America's footlocker before it was destroyed, and returned it to Captain America.

RISING STAR – CAPTAIN MARVEL

Stern's investments in Captain Marvel and her alter ego, Monica Rambeau, paid dividends. The letters page of *The Avengers* #245 testified to the growing popularity of the new Captain Marvel: "We've lost track of the number of letters we've received asking us to show more of Captain Marvel's personal life as Monica Rambeau."

She was one of the few Avengers into whom we had a glimpse of their personal lives. That perspective helped round out her character, letting us know that there was more to her life than being an Avenger.

Avengers #246 (Aug. 1984) was another classic character-building issue that focused on Captain Marvel. Monica chose to reveal herself as Captain Marvel to her parents, who were an important part of her life.

"There was a tradition of service in the Rambeau family—her father was a firefighter, her grandfather had been in the military," mentions Stern. "When she revealed to her parents that she was Captain Marvel, when they learned that she had become an Avenger, among her father's first reactions was: 'You've met Captain America!'"

The Avengers #249's (Nov. 1984) letters page hinted at Stern writing a *Captain Marvel* series, but unfortunately it never came to fruition.

With the Wasp taking a well-deserved break as the team's chairwoman, *Avengers* #279 (May 1987) focused on filling that void. This issue was a typically strong Stern transition and character story, bringing Captain Marvel's story arc to a climax. The opening scene had Captain Marvel disarm a hostage situation and in just a couple of pages concisely demonstrated how she had grown as a person and as an Avenger.



Stern then framed the backstory of her nomination as Avengers chairwoman through a discussion with her parents where she talked out her concerns and fears. That scene grounded Captain Marvel, demonstrating how important this decision was to her and highlighted the support she needed and received from her family. Too often characters have unlimited reserves of confidence and are written as if there was really no decision for them to make.

This was one of the keys to Stern's powerful characterization: He grounded his characters in the real world, showed them dealing with their weaknesses, and then had them make genuine decisions rather than have the plot drive them.

EXIT STERN

Unfortunately, the "Assault on Olympus" storyline that ran through issues #281–285 (July–Nov. 1987) was Stern's last as writer on *The Avengers*.

Avengers editor Mark Gruenwald fired Roger Stern after a disagreement over an upcoming storyline. Here's what Gruenwald had to say about the situation in the letters column of *The Avengers* #288 (Feb. 1988): "I was not interested in doing any injustices to the characters either, but I also believed that the storyline could be done without hurting any characters. I was also not interested in forcing a writer [Roger Stern] to write something he didn't want to.

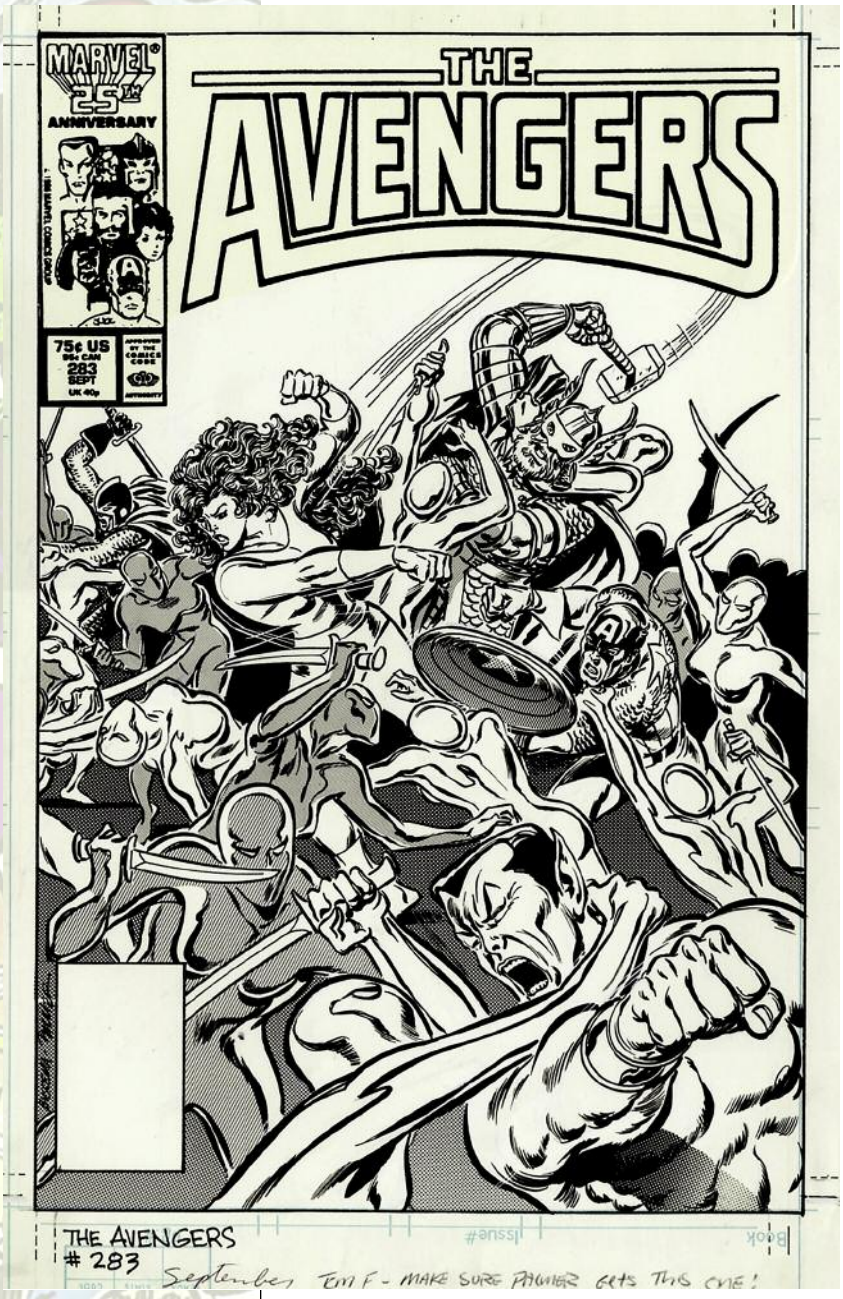
"So, despite our five years' plus of amicable working relations, we had developed what seemed to be irreconcilable differences. Something had to give. I informed Roger that I wanted to proceed with the agreed-upon storyline and thus, I would hire another writer who could get behind the scenario enough to do it justice."



That Ain't No Way to Treat a Lady

The Web-Slinger misinterprets Captain Marvel's intentions on this original page from *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #16, introducing the superheroine who would soon be an Avenger. Written by Stern, with art by John Romitas Jr. and Sr. (background) Detail of Captain Marvel from Tom Palmer's painted cover to #255.

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Olympian Effort

Original cover art to *Avengers* #283 (Sept. 1987), by Buscema and Palmer. Part of Stern's final *Avengers* story arc, "Assault on Olympus." That bearded Thunder God is the Sigurd Jarlson version of Thor, whom we covered just a few months ago in *BACK ISSUE* #53.

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Roger Stern reveals his point of view: "I was asked to replace Captain Marvel—who had just recently taken over the leadership role—with Captain America. It was suggested to me that I should have Captain Marvel screw up badly and turn the chairmanship over to Captain America. Needless to say, I thought that was a bad idea.

"I sent my editor a memo pointing out that dumping Captain Marvel in such a way couldn't help but look both racist and sexist. Plus, it didn't make sense to have her screw up. Captain Marvel had just led the Avengers through a major conflict with the Gods of Mount Olympus; she'd stood up to Zeus, for crying out loud. In light of all that, I suggested that we should reconsider things. The answer I received was that I was fired from the series."

With all the time that Stern had invested in Captain Marvel, it's not hard to see why he took this position. At that point, Captain Marvel had reached the apex of her character arc and deserved to be rewarded with a significant tenure as Avengers chairwoman.

On what might have been had he stayed on as writer, Stern says: "I had planned to tie up some loose ends from the recently canceled *Power Man and Iron Fist* series. I was going to clear Luke Cage in the case of Iron Fist's murder. My plan was to reveal that Fist's old enemy Master Khan—in the guise of Tyrone King—had framed Luke.

"I later passed that scenario off to John [Byrne], who later used a few elements of it in the *Namor* series. I hoped to eventually have Power Man join the Avengers … which I guess finally happened.

"I also had a vague notion that Loki should somehow be involved with issue #300, but I was fired long before I could think too much about that."

WRAPPING IT ALL UP

Stern's work has stood the test of time, standing as epic storylines of the 1980s. Recently, Marvel Comics has reprinted his *Avengers* work in a series of Marvel Premiere Editions, *Avengers: Siege of Avengers Mansion* and *Avengers: Assault on Olympus*.

Storytelling requires conflict and Stern understood this as he incorporated the typical-superhero external conflict, as well as the textbook Marvel-angst internal conflict. His conflicts felt organic, especially in those transition issues as they developed his characters. At its core, character development is change, understanding how a character deals with conflict, and how they change accordingly.

Stern consistently delivered an entertaining and engaging team book that successfully navigated Marvel continuity and crossovers (such as *Secret Wars* and *Secret Wars II*, the "Surtur Saga," and the "Dire Wraith War"). Stern's handling of the team members, particularly its strong female characters, stands as a textbook example of writing a super-team comic book. He balanced the action with character development and built genuine relationships, allowing his Avengers to become more than just teammates, but friends.

"I was really just trying to be faithful to the concept of a team of heroes united against a common threat," Stern explains. "I built upon the stories that those before me had written."

So while he may have started his run feeling daunted as he filled in for Jim Shooter, he charted his own impressive course that thrilled readers and impacted not only his contemporary peers, but the next generation of writers.



JASON SHAYER's addiction to comic books and his 12-year-old mindframe have caused more than a few people to raise an eyebrow. When he's not writing or reading, he's teaching his young daughter the finer points of comic-book collecting.

end

Quips and Quivers:

FlashBack!

A Non-Superpowered Hero in a Superpowered World

by Adam Besenyodi



Ace Archer

Clint Barton, Hawkeye, in an undated pen-and-ink commission by Bob Hall (colored by *BI*'s own Rich Fowlks), courtesy of Edd Walker. Behind Hawkeye is a fantastic foursome of covers starring the Battling Bowman: (top left) his first appearance, *Tales of Suspense* #57 (Sept. 1964), cover by Don Heck; (top right) joining Earth's Mightiest Heroes in *The Avengers* #16 (Oct. 1965), cover by Jack Kirby and Dick Ayers; (bottom left) winging it solo in *Avengers* #189 (Nov. 1979), cover by John Byrne and Dan Green; and (bottom right) cover art by Mike Perkins for the miniseries *Hawkeye: Blindspot #1* (Apr. 2011).

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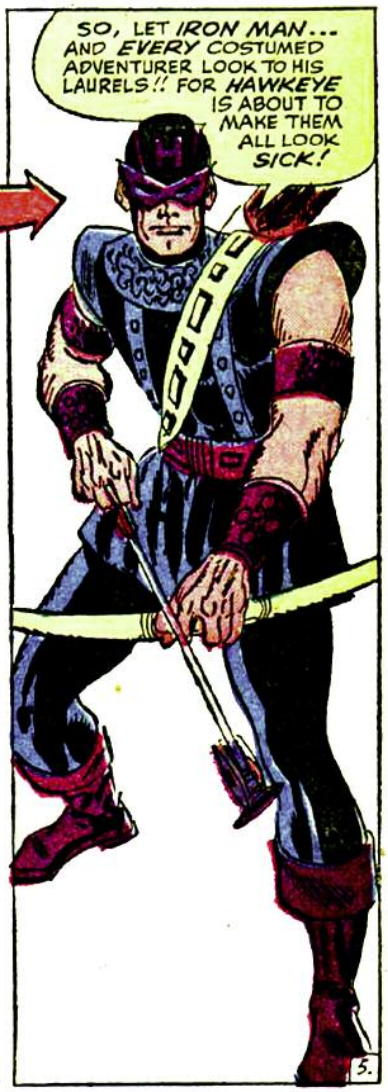
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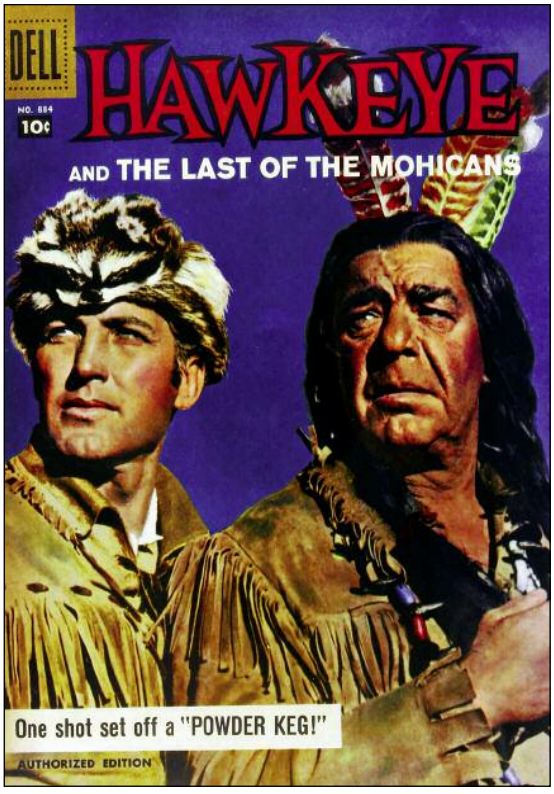
Comics' First Hawkeye??

(center) What the--?! Ye ed stumbled across this while looking for Hawkeye art for this issue and thought it too delicious to overlook. In 1958, Dell Comics' *Four Color* #884 published this adaptation of the short-lived (39 episodes, 1957–1958) TV series *Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans*. As this photo cover shows, it starred John Hart as Nat "Hawkeye" Cutler, a fur trader … and yes, that's the Wolf Man himself, Lon Chaney, Jr., as Hawkeye's American Indian ally, Chingachgook, the last of the Mohican tribe! Who says this isn't the *BACK ISSUE* Age of Useless But Too Cool Trivia? (top) Ol' Eagle-Eye's quite full of himself as he bows in the Iron Man tale in *Tales of Suspense* #57. Words by Stan the Man Lee, illos by Debonair Don Heck.

Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans © 1958 Incorporated Television Company (ITC). Hawkeye © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.







In 1941, a certain comic-book company created an archer who employed trick arrows and didn't play well with others. The character would go on to join that comic universe's premiere team, have plenty of woman trouble, and marry a fellow superhero with a bird-themed name. Almost 25 years later, Marvel took that blueprint for DC's Green Arrow and created the same character. Hawkeye "was an example of how Marvel could take a DC character," *Avengers* and *West Coast Avengers* limited series penciler Bob Hall says, "and make him even better." He may have been "a blatant rip-off," according to Hall, but he was one that that "really worked."

What makes Hawkeye/Clint Barton so compelling is the depth of character added by his strengths and flaws. The staggering amount of egotism required of a non-superpowered superhero to be successful in the world he inhabits is repeatedly contradicted by the overwhelming insecurity resulting from that same set of circumstances. Throw in habitual girl problems and a perpetual dose of money trouble, and you have decades' worth of material to mine.

Debuting on the pages of *Tales of Suspense* #57 (Sept. 1964), Hawkeye's insecurities manifest almost immediately. Hawkeye's archery show was a purposely unromantic distraction for a mistaken-intentions Coney Island Circus date between Iron Man's alter ego Tony Stark and his secretary Pepper Potts. However, the midway marksman is upstaged when Iron Man shows up to save an out-of-control flying pinwheel ride. Spurred on by "blazing jealousy" of Iron Man's heroics, the archer—Hawkeye—is inspired to create a costume and trick arrows. His first night out, he botches stopping a jewelry store robber, and the police blame Hawkeye. The mistaken-identity scenario leads Hawkeye right into the arms of Natasha Romanova, the Black Widow, who offers the archer her communist technology … *if* he offs Iron Man.

Using explosive, rust-tipped, and nylon-rope-strand arrows, Hawkeye holds his own against Iron Man, but his "demolition blast warhead" arrow ricochets off the Golden Avenger and inadvertently nicks Black Widow. Hawkeye abandons his attack on a stunned Iron Man, grabs Natasha, and steals away by motorboat under cover of the fog.

GIRL TROUBLE

Hawkeye shows up in two more issues of *Tales of Suspense* over the next seven months, both times as Iron Man's foil and Black Widow's fool. "Originally I planned to use my talents to serve mankind!! If only I hadn't met the Black Widow," Hawkeye thinks while raiding Stark's factory for weapons plans in issue #60 (Dec. 1964), "and yet … without her, life would be meaningless to me!" The charms of a woman and a few lies are all it takes for Hawkeye to commit treason.

Four months later, the Black Widow, who had previously fled to Russia, returns to once again bait Hawkeye into battling Iron Man. They fight to a draw on the pages of *Tales of Suspense* #64 (Apr. 1965), until Natasha is hurt and Hawkeye abandons the battle to rush her to safety, all while being chastised by the object of his affection for giving up on the fight because of his love. It's a love that never really completely fades, and is even proven to be at least somewhat reciprocated: In *Avengers* #211 (Sept. 1981), when Natasha and Hawkeye run into each other at the Avengers Mansion, the Black Widow wishes she and the archer had a chance to talk more, yet thinks, "I'm sure he doesn't care [for me] anymore!"

What begins as a crush for Hawkeye soon evolves into a pattern of unfortunate, and often unrequited, love interests, because from Natasha, he transfers his special brand of emotionally stunted love to Wanda Maximoff, a.k.a. the Scarlet Witch.

Meeting on the pages of *Avengers* #16 (May 1965), the team's first really big roster shakeup resulted in Captain America leading a trio of former villains: Hawkeye, the Scarlet Witch, and Quicksilver. Hawkeye immediately sets about hitting on his teammate with a brashness that speaks to the sexism of the day. That impudence habitually blinds Hawkeye to the reality of his romantic situations. He remains oblivious to the deep love that develops over the years between Wanda and fellow Avenger the Vision, and continues to pelt her with borderline sexual harassment behavior. But early '80s *Avengers* scribe Roger Stern sees things a bit differently. To him, "Hawk's not so much a sexist, as he is an all-purpose butt-head."

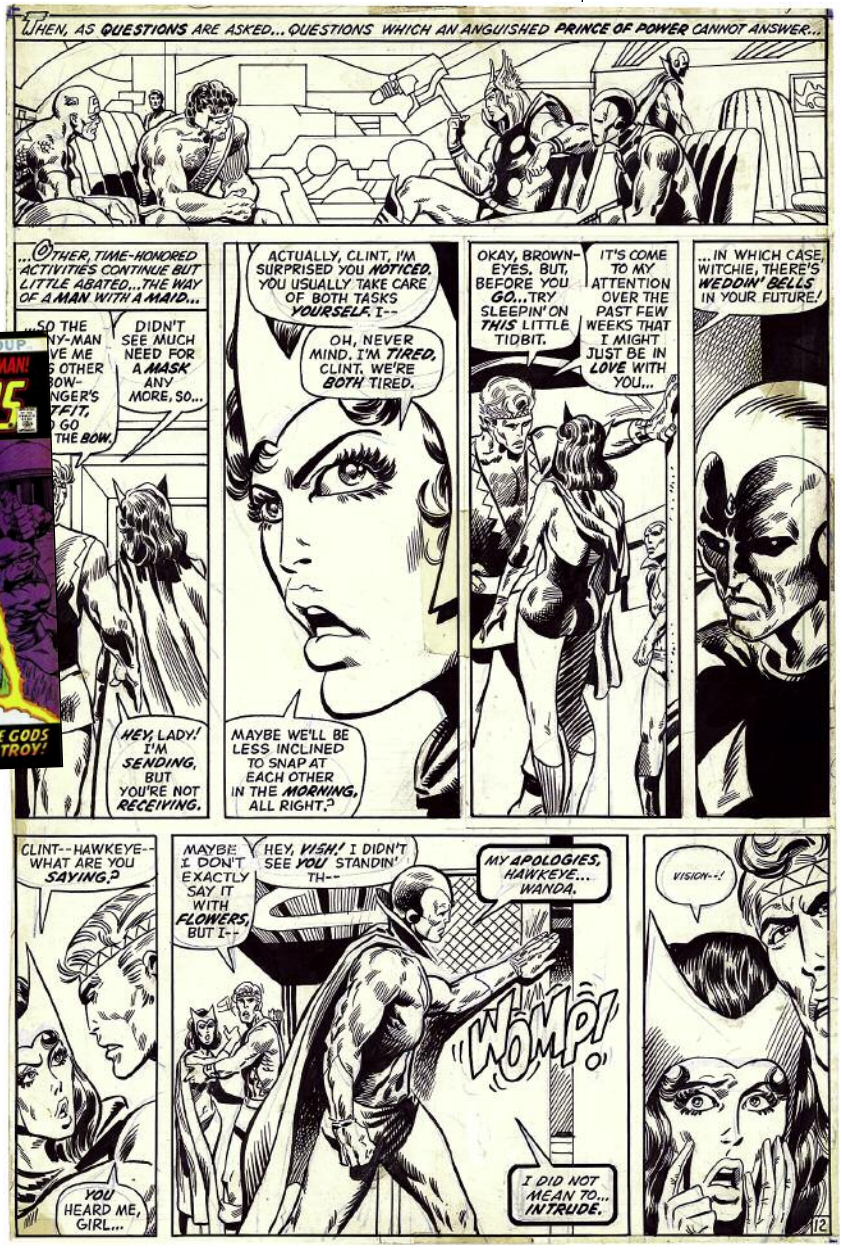


After his heroic return from the life-changing events of the Kree-Skrull War in *Avengers* #99 (May 1972), Hawkeye notices "ol' Wanda's as fine as ever" and chats her up. Wanda completely shuts him down, telling him just how self-centered and unobservant he is. Undeterred by pointblank rejection, Hawkeye actually proposes to her! No bended-knee proposals for this roustabout, though: instead it's all about *him*. He informs Wanda that he's realized over the course of the war that he "might just be in love with you," and because of that, "There's wedding bells in your future!" Gotta love that confidence.

Hawkeye's delusion about their relationship begins to come to a head in *Avengers* #102 (Aug. 1972), when he decides to lay his cards on the table with Wanda once again by first making a remark about him being "the future father of [her] little witch-brood," then proceeding to tell her he's always "dug" her and that "it's time we let it all hang out!" Wanda attempts to let him know her heart belongs to another, but Hawkeye misappropriates the Women's Liberation Movement ("No more'a that 'ladies first' bull") and plants a kiss on a very surprised Scarlet Witch. When she doesn't kiss him back, things start to sink in for the amiable



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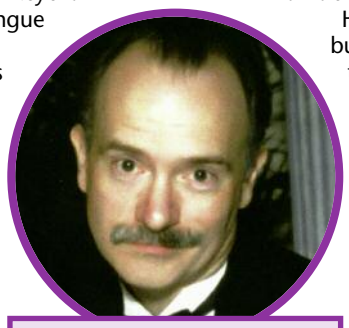
Pulling on Heartstrings

Hawkeye tells the Scarlet Witch he's got a thing for her—overheard by the Vision—in *Avengers* #99 (May 1972). Words by Roy Thomas, art by Barry Windsor-Smith and Tom Sutton. Original art page courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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lunkhead. Wanda tells him there can never be anything between them and that she's already in love with the Vision. Writer Roy Thomas gives Hawkeye a moment of dignity by holding his tongue in the immediate aftermath.

Seven issues later, Hawkeye boils over at the sight of Wanda and the Vision on the pages of *Avengers* #109 (Mar. 1973), insults her, and stalks off to his room to pack and quit the team. On the roof of the Avengers Mansion, Hawkeye convinces himself he didn't love Wanda, but laments how hard it is to lose again. In the vernacular of the day, Hawkeye wonders why "Witchie won't give me a tumble," thinking "I've got looks, I'm fun to talk to … why can't I get it on??" Of course, years later, in *Avengers* #189 (Nov. 1979), when we get a glimpse inside the Lower East Side room Hawkeye's renting as a civilian, there is a picture of Wanda taped to the wall above the bed!



MARK GRUENWALD

Hawkeye eventually rejoins the Avengers, but after breaking his leg while helping the team rescue President Reagan and S.H.I.E.L.D. head honcho Nick Fury, Hawkeye is forced to take a break from active duty. That doesn't stop him from keeping his second job moonlighting as the Security Chief for Cross Technological Enterprises, and it is there he meets Sheila Danning, Head of Public Relations for CTE. Introduced in *Avengers* #234 (Aug. 1983), Sheila would show up the next month on the pages of the *Hawkeye* limited series, where it's revealed she and Hawkeye have been dating since they met.

During a moment of personal reflection, the archer marvels that Sheila's different from the Black Widow and Scarlet Witch, who made him feel like he "was put on this world for women to dump on." Of course this can't end well, and Sheila is exposed as using Hawkeye on behalf of the villain Crossfire, cousin of the original owner of CTE. The betrayal is uncovered as Hawkeye finally finds someone to complement his brashness and help mend his broken heartedness: former S.H.I.E.L.D. agent-turned-hero-for-hire Mockingbird.

Over the course of the miniseries' four issues, writer Mark Gruenwald takes Barbara "Bobbie" Morse, whose only previous appearance as Mockingbird in the prior ten years was under a beautiful Frank Miller cover for *Marvel Team-Up* #95 (July 1980), and creates a perfect relationship dynamic for the archer. Gruenwald really forces Hawkeye to mature during the events of the limited series. What begins as a contentious partnership—Hawkeye misguidedly blames Mockingbird for the end of his relationship with Sheila—evolves as they are forced to work together to not just defeat Crossfire, but to survive. Ultimately, the limited series ends with an epilogue in the Pocono Mountains of New York one week after the climax of the story, where it's revealed that Hawkeye and Mockingbird have eloped.

The newlyweds dubiously make their entrance on the pages of *Avengers* #239 (Jan. 1984) during Assistant Editors' Month, announcing their relationship first to Hawkeye's former romantic rival the Vision, then awkwardly to the archer's original crush, the Black Widow. But it's not until *Avengers* #242 (Apr. 1984) when the party really gets started—literally. The bulk of the Avengers team returns to the mansion to find the celebration of Hawkeye and Mockingbird's marriage in full swing. After a shocked Wasp congratulates the couple, Hawkeye asks Cap if he made the right move, and Cap tells him, "Getting married is the most responsible thing you've ever done!" There's a nice moment between She-Hulk and Hawkeye, and then Thor blesses the couple.

Later in the issue, it's apparent a roster shuffle is on the horizon for the Avengers, and Hawkeye confides to Mockingbird that those changes usually don't bode well for him. He confesses he's "never accomplished anything on my own until I met you," and "now, if I have to leave, it's okay. I know I have a life outside the Avengers."

Walking Tall

Hawkeye hangs up his arrows to become the new Goliath in *Avengers* #63 (Apr. 1969), featuring this iconic cover by Gene Colan and George Klein.

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EGO AND INSECURITY

Hawkeye's romantic life is a natural extension of his superhero identity. That theme of "playing out of his league," according to Roy Thomas, only helped to "underscore his lack of powers." To be a non-super-powered hero in a superpowered world requires an astounding amount of arrogance. Sexist and crass, Hawkeye sees himself as God's Gift to Women. Confounded when his professions of love (or lust) go unreciprocated, Hawkeye is too wrapped up in himself to see his own flaws. He alternates between blaming the object of his affection and pitying himself.

Falling somewhere between arrogance and insecurity, Hawkeye's attitude informs his approach to authority: He doesn't question it so much as attack it head-on. Repeatedly. This internal conflict is also visible in the reoccurring motif (an ongoing joke, really, in the Marvel Universe) of Hawkeye blowing his stack and quitting the Avengers for a while before coming back into the fold. *Avengers*, *Hawkeye*, and *West Coast Avengers* limited series inker Brett Breeding describes Hawkeye as a "poor man's Captain America," but notes there's a hero in there. He's someone who, despite always being in Cap's shadow, has something to contribute.



BRETT BREEDING

From the moment he joins the Avengers, Hawkeye wears his self-doubt on his sleeve. He arranges an "audition" for himself by breaking into the Avengers Mansion, tying up Tony Stark's butler Jarvis, setting off a smoke-bomb arrow to get the team's attention, then convincing Iron Man, Wasp, and Giant-Man that he's gone straight. To prove his worth to the team, he notches, draws, and fires three arrows simultaneously at the bound butler, all of which hit their mark and free Jarvis' ankles, wrists, and gag. Amusingly, Hawkeye is given an "Avengers' Manual" to study their by-laws, and Iron Man later reveals that he "has successfully passed our rigorous series of qualifications tests, and has been thoroughly investigated and approved by the Federal Security Agency."

As the new team of Cap, Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, and Quicksilver are walking to the dais to be introduced to the media, Hawkeye thinks it "strange that Captain America, who seems to possess no noticeable super power, should be chosen as our leader!" And later, in front of the public, he wonders if the new roster has enough power to keep the people's confidence.

During those early years on the team, Hawkeye continually challenges the authority of Captain America. Writer Roger Stern suspects that "if you were reading those issues when they first came out, you might have wondered why Cap didn't just haul off and punch him out." But even Hawkeye couldn't ignore Cap's leadership qualities. The archer has shown considerable growth over the years, and Stern now "doubt[s] that there's an Avenger whom Hawkeye reveres more."

Years later, on the pages of *Avengers* #227 (Jan. 1983), we see Hawkeye at his most insecure. His "nose was out of joint," Stern defends, "because the team had changed so much in such a short time." But in that very first issue of Stern's run on the title, Hawkeye is threatened by Wasp's authority as Avengers' chairperson, the new Captain Marvel's power, and She-Hulk's strong personality.

When Eros comes to Earth from Titan, Hawkeye is laid up with a broken leg, something Stern dreamed up as "a means of temporarily getting Hawkeye out of the *Avengers* book and setting things up for the miniseries Mark [Gruenwald] was writing." While everyone else expresses surprise at Eros' desire to join the Avengers, Hawkeye's "Oh, no!" reaction illustrates how threatened the archer really is by the god's arrival in *Avengers* #231 (May 1983).



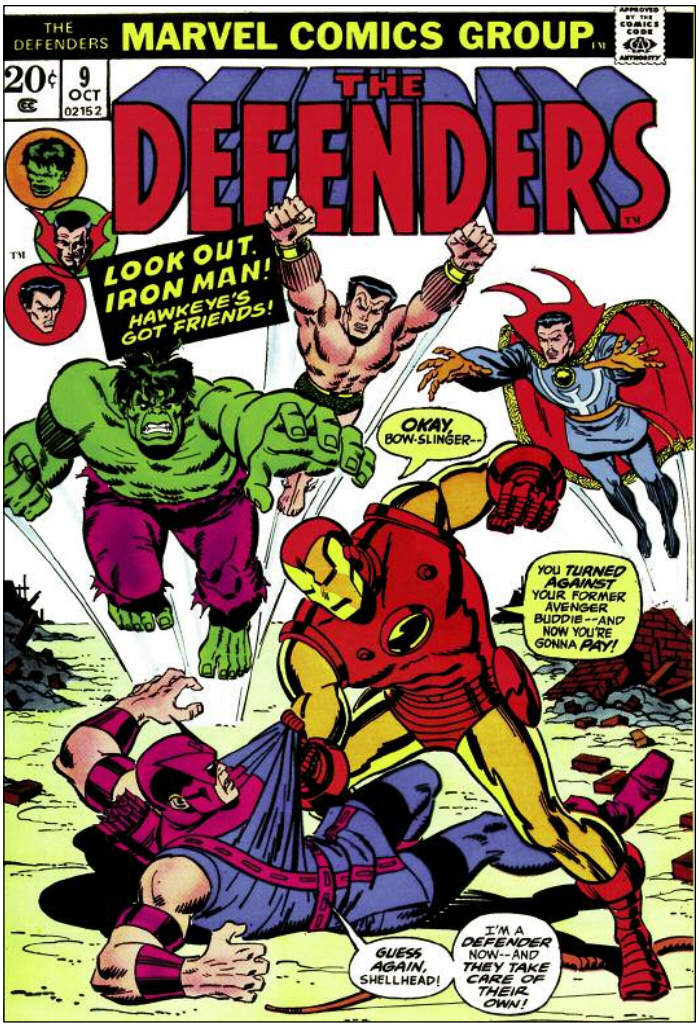


Somebody Forgot to Wear Their Big-Boy Pants

(right) Once Clint Barton left size-changing behind, he returned to archery in *Avengers* #98 (Apr. 1972)—wearing this new, immodest costume. By Roy Thomas, Barry Windsor-Smith, and Sal Buscema. (left) *Avengers* #100, featuring Hawkeye's new duds and a legion of assemblers on its Windsor-Smith-drawn cover.

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Consider Me Gone (left) Headstrong Hawkeye quits in *Avengers* #109 (Mar. 1973). Cover by John Buscema and brother Sal. (right) The marksman briefly bopped onto the "roster" of Marvel's non-team, courtesy of writer Steve Englehart. Here he's tussling with his former ally Iron Man on the Sal Buscema-drawn cover to *Defenders* #9 (Oct. 1973).

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POWERED UP AND POWERED DOWN

During Roy Thomas' legendary run on the *Avengers* title, he did something remarkable with the irascible archer: He powered him up! *Avengers* #63 (Apr. 1969) opens with the Black Panther T'Challa's ship having malfunctioned on its approach to New York City. Hawkeye steps up to dispatch an electro-magnetic arrow to help ease the Avengers Mansion roof landing when his bowstring snaps. In the end, it's Vision who has to deliver the arrow that is revealed to have been designed by T'Challa. This is enough to send Hawkeye into a bitter fit of insecurity, dejectedly proclaiming that "one crummy broken string … and I'm Mr. Fifth Wheel!"

Inside the mansion, Hank Pym announces he's giving up the Goliath identity for good in favor of the Yellowjacket persona, believing repeatedly growing and reverting to normal size contributed to his schizoid behavior. As he's about to destroy the what's left of his "new, even more powerful growth serum" and new Goliath costume, Col. Nick Fury interrupts, asking the team to locate and bring in missing S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Black Widow. Acting Avengers chairman T'Challa forbids Hawkeye to join the team on this mission because of his past relationship with Natasha, the villain-turned-hero.



BOB HALL

Hawkeye is hacked off, but follows orders and stays behind while the team sets off. When a distress call from Natasha comes in, Hawkeye decides that he's going after her, but that she's not going to be rescued by "some nut playin' Robin Hood." He dons Hank's Goliath togs, downs the growth serum, and singlehandedly saves Black Widow.

Hawkeye reveals his identity change to his teammates at the opening of the next issue. When Hank asks him about his archer career, Hawkeye picks up his bow and snaps it. "Even when he changes his costume," observes artist Bob Hall, "he still retains his personality." Hank declares Hawkeye the new Goliath and, as Goliath begins to apologize for taking Hank's growth serum without asking, Hank blows it off and Wasp comments that they all "hope your body adjusts to growing better than Hank's" did.

While Thomas powered Hawkeye up simply in "an attempt to do something different" with the character and "make him a little more powerful," he kept the characters pretty cavalier about any potential dangers to the new Goliath. Although Thomas' motivations may have been more personal—he admits a preference toward writing powered characters and trying to find "something different to capitalize on [artist Gene Colan's art style]"—



it still makes perfect sense for the insecure archer to seize an opportunity like this, regardless of risk.

Later in *Avengers* #64 (May 1969), big-time New York City racketeer Barney Barton shows up at the Avengers Mansion asking to see Hawkeye and finds Goliath instead. Although the team—and Goliath, in particular—don't completely trust Barton, they follow up on the lead the criminal provides regarding Egghead's space station, and the group, Barton included, immediately departs. Aboard the space station, Barton is fatally wounded in the Avengers' battle against Egghead and his minions. In his dying moments, he calls Goliath "Clint" and tells him he kept his secret. Goliath swears Egghead will pay for Barney's death. Hank asks Goliath why Barney called him "Clint," and Goliath reveals to the team that his real name is Clint Barton and that Barney was his brother.

Comic-book urban legend advances the notion that naming a character "Clint" was verboten by the Comics Code Authority established in 1954. Supposedly, cheap printing, sloppy reproduction, and all-capital text in comics presented the risk of the "L" and the "I" running together to inadvertently form a less-than-delicate four-letter word. Of course, urban legends are generally just that: There is no explicit ban of the name "Clint" in comic books, and "no one," according to Thomas, "not even Stan [Lee], let alone the Code, ever objected" to Hawkeye/Goliath's real name. And it's worth noting that reveal took place in a Comics Code-approved book in 1969.

Clint never strays from his archer roots, and just two issues after taking the growth serum he has to resort to a makeshift bow and arrow to save the Swordsman while capturing the villain Egghead and finding closure for his brother's death. It's an approach



to the character that inker Brett Breeding always thought was a neat idea to begin with, combining the personas of Goliath and Hawkeye.

Over the course of Thomas' epic Kree-Skrull War event, Goliath takes the last of Hank's growth serum in *Avengers* #94 (Dec. 1971), and then goes missing after setting off to stop a Skrull warship from destroying Earth. *Avengers* #98 (Apr. 1972) opens a week after the end of the Kree-Skrull War and the Avengers desperately trying to piece together what happened to Goliath. Forced to battle Ares, the team must abandon their search to uncover Goliath's fate. The clash's decisive moment comes when an arrow frees Thor's hammer, and the tide is turned. The arrow's owner is revealed to be Clint, who makes his entrance and reiterates he's no longer Goliath, "just a blond-haired bowslinger named Hawkeye!" In truth, a powered-up Clint Barton was really just writer Thomas "fooling around with things" in an experiment he ultimately feels "didn't particularly work out" well for the character.

Collecting Himself

(above) The craggy-faced creep called the Collector gives Hawkeye an ego boost on this original art page from *Avengers* #174 (Aug. 1978), by Dave Wenzel and Pablo Marcos. (left) A roster shift shakes up the archer in #181 (Mar. 1979). Cover by Pérez and Austin.

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FORCED LEAVE OF ABSENCE

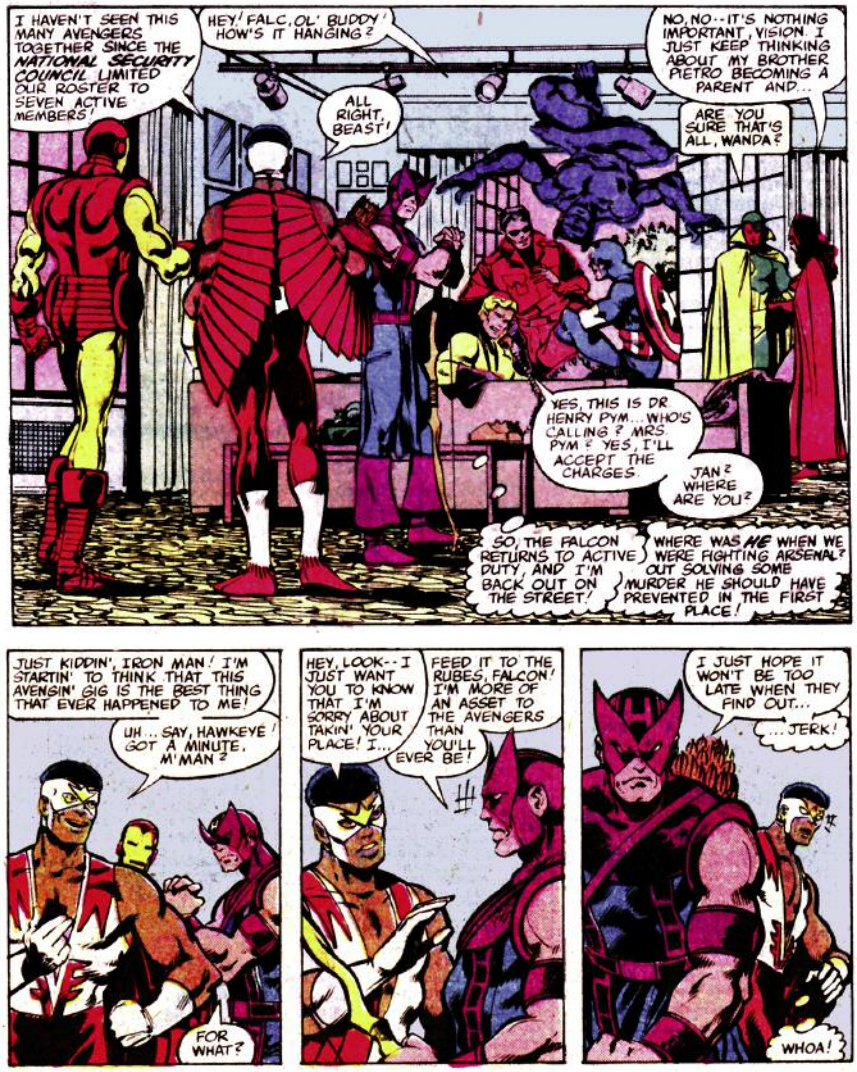
Beginning in the late 1970s, the US government regularly interferes with Avengers business in the form of liaison Henry Peter Gyrich. Appointed by the National Security Council, Gyrich revokes the team's priority status and, in *Avengers* #181 (Mar. 1979), the team is trying to earn back that status by installing the required security measures and, to the team's surprise, paring down their numbers. Gyrich dictates a roster that excludes Hawkeye, substituting the Falcon. Hawkeye and Iron Man both take exception at Hawkeye's omission from the list, arguing that the Falcon—who isn't present at the meeting—isn't even an Avenger. Gyrich tells them that if they want to be sanctioned, they have to adhere to government policies, including Affirmative Action laws. Without the Black Panther, the team needs another black member—so Hawkeye is out and the Falcon is in.

They eventually cross paths at the Avengers Mansion in *Avengers* #189, and when Falcon tries to apologize for taking Hawkeye's place on the team, the hotheaded archer tells the birdman to kiss off.

"PETER PARKER PROBLEMS"

In *Avengers* #189, we also get a taste of Clint's "Peter Parker problems": Although the "Stand-by Avengers" are on retainer, Clint comments that the money he's pulling wouldn't even cover rent on the Lower East Side room he's crashing in. The rejection letters from potential employers force him to seek employment as ex-Avenger Hawkeye instead of as ex-carny Clint Barton, and lead him to the security chief gig at CTE. Two nights later he has "a pad on the West Side, my own coffee cup," and employment for a company that "makes Stark International look like Toys-'R'-Us!," Clint would hold this position as Hawkeye until his solo limited series in 1983.

The CTE engagement becomes an important part of Hawkeye's identity, satisfying a need for him that even being an Avenger can't fulfill. Clint clearly feels a sense of pride the self-sufficiency having employment outside of the superhero team offers. With more than a little bit of immodesty, he even turns down the Avengers in #211 based on his contentment with the security-chief job.



But less than a year later, Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, and Wasp all agree the team needs new blood. Cap recommends Hawkeye on the merits of his having "always worked well as a team member" (although taking his body of work as a whole this seems like a bit of questionable judgment on Cap's part) and "took pride in being an Avenger." So in *Avengers* #221 (July 1982), Cap and Iron Man pay the bowslinger a visit at the security offices of CTE. Naturally, Hawkeye gives them serious attitude, but ultimately accepts their offer in his typical smart-alecky fashion: He writes "YES" on a page ripped out of an issue of *Playboy* and shoots it ahead of a walking away Cap and Iron Man on a well-placed arrow. With President Ronald Reagan's signature, Hawkeye and She-Hulk are the newest Avengers.

Just because Hawkeye is an Avenger again doesn't mean things are any less challenging, and we get some great examples of just how "everyman" Hawkeye really is throughout this issue and its follow-up. For starters, instead of the Avengers sending a car for him, Hawkeye is cabbing it to the Mansion and contemplating the difficulty of holding down two jobs when his taxi is cut off by a pink Cadillac. He disrupts the offending car's electrical system with a "micro-pulse circuit shifter" arrow, but the driver of the Caddy happens to be She-Hulk, who takes exception by upending the cab. As a result, Hawkeye has to go to the emergency room to make sure he's okay!

We see each of the team members preparing to gather for the weekly Avengers team meeting, and find Hawkeye cutting out from CTE early in *Avengers* #222 (Aug. 1982) to attend. He stops at his company-provided Central Park West apartment, but complains about being "shy on cash" (apparently he pulls $1,200 a week from his CTE gig) and hopes he can "scare a square meal at Avengers Mansion." He hops out the window, down to the street, and in front of a cab. Hawkeye gripes later at the mansion that "lousy cabbies won't even give a hero a free ride anymore," and this after shamelessly asking the cabbie if he wants "a star" to ride in his cab. After the meeting adjourns, Hawkeye plans to sneak back into the mansion to raid the pantry. Never content, however, Hawkeye later worries in *Avengers* #288 (Feb. 1983) about turning into a "wage slave" because of the "wad of bucks" he's earning from his CTE job.

FIERCE LOYALTY

Hawkeye is nothing if not loyal as the lone voice to deride the team for not supporting Hank, vowing in *Avengers* #224 (Oct. 1982) that if he could spring his friend without making things worse, he would. Stern put that allegiance on display brilliantly in writing the "Trial of Hank Pym" arc, and when the proceedings come to a head in *Avengers* #229 and 230 (Mar. and Apr. 1983), it's Hawkeye who saves Hank's life by shooting an arrow into the barrel of Egghead's gun, killing him. It provides closure for Clint, who can't help but think about his brother Barney who "bought the farm stopping Egghead from killing the Avengers."

Bad Blood

Our man Clint's one bad-mannered bowman in this exchange with the Falcon, from *Avengers* #189 (Nov. 1979). Art by John Byrne and Dan Green.

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It's also revealed that Egghead's is the first death Hawkeye has been responsible for. It's clear from Roger Stern's writing that the archer never intended to take the villain's life, but he also understands that if he hadn't taken the actions he did, his friend would be dead instead. Despite numerous threats of contempt-of-court charges, Hawkeye is found innocent in a New York Circuit Court. That doesn't get him completely off the hook, however, as he is forced to face an official Avengers inquiry convened by Wasp to determine the validity of the charge and issue any intra-team disciplinary action against Hawkeye if necessary.

Hawkeye doesn't deny his actions caused the death of Egghead, but according to Stern, "it wasn't his intent to kill Egghead … he was merely acting in defense of a fellow Avenger." Hawkeye saw his friend in mortal danger and did what was necessary to save him. "After all," Hawkeye tells the jury of his peers, "we are supposed to be the Avengers, right?" Given the opportunity to speak before the group, Hank tells them "the only thing Hawkeye is guilty of is being a good Avenger" and that "it has been my sincere honor to have known Hawkeye's fellowship." The hero is acquitted.

ON HIS OWN

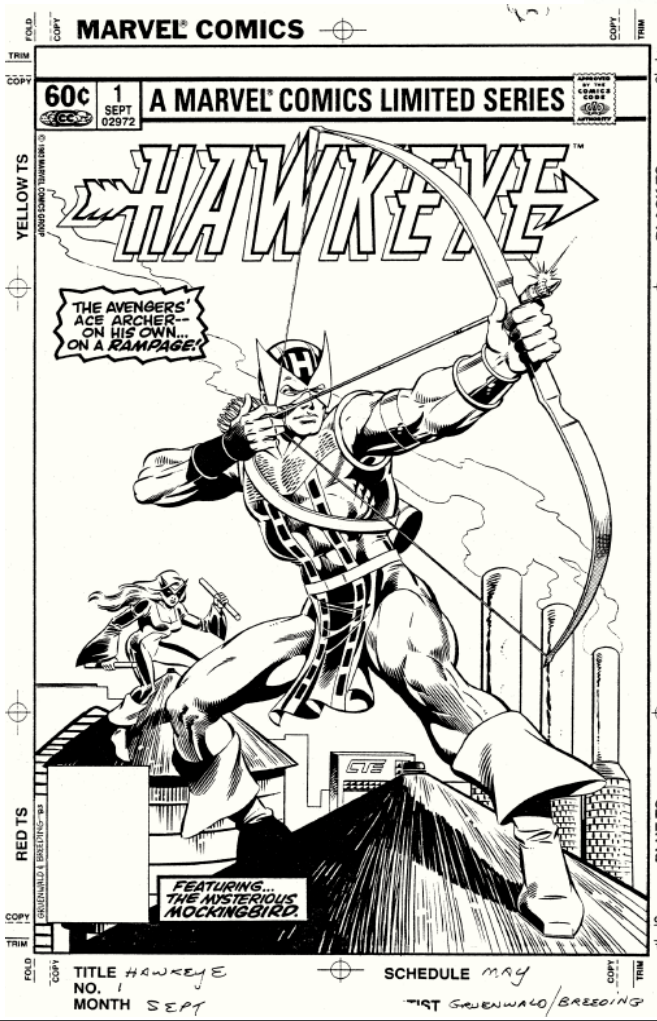
Mark Gruenwald's philosophy of what makes a good limited series, shared in *Marvel Age* #6 (Sept. 1983), is "a quartet of stories which feature a major crisis and resolution in the life of a hero—the outcome of which will in some way alter the hero's life thereafter." That guiding principle becomes the overarching theme of *Hawkeye* as Gruenwald completely deconstructs the character on the pages of the miniseries later that same year. Early in the arc, Hawkeye and Mockingbird are stripped of everything—Mockingbird's apartment blows up, while Hawkeye is completely broken by the fraud that was his relationship with Sheila, the end of his career at CTE, and the loss of his company-provided apartment.

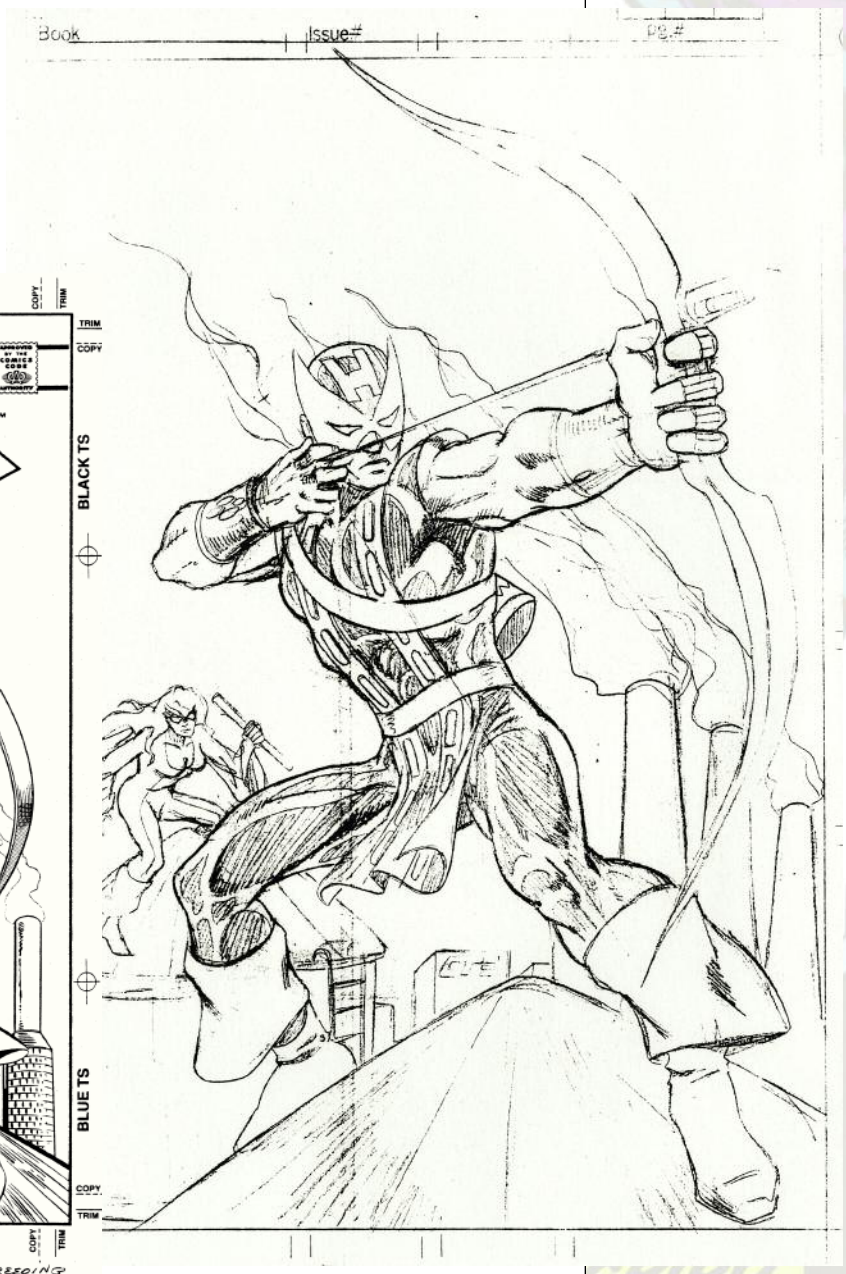
Hawkeye is the greatest archer in the Marvel Universe, and Gruenwald underscores that throughout the miniseries. In the opening pages of *Hawkeye* #2 (Oct. 1983), the archer consoles himself in abandoned subway tunnels under Manhattan by performing the repetitive motions of "reach, notch, draw, aim, release" until finally passing out 42 hours later.

Broke and following the only lead they have, Hawkeye and Mockingbird end up having to take the subway. During that ride in *Hawkeye* #3 (Nov. 1983), the costumed pair is approached by Captain America, in his civilian persona of Steve Rogers, who, noting Hawkeye's attire, offers to help. In probably the most telling sequence of panels, Gruenwald lays all of

Solo Shot (right) Mark Gruenwald's cover pencils for issue #1 (Sept. 1983) of the *Hawkeye* miniseries. (left) Brett Breeding's finishes of same, with graphics. Courtesy of Mr. Breeding.

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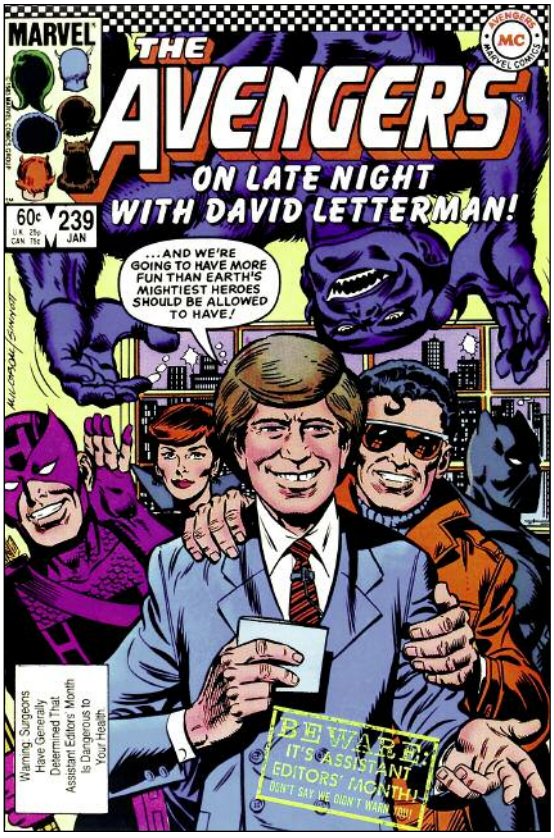




Hawkeye's insecurity to bare. The archer ponders Rogers' offer for a split-second, acknowledging he's "at the end of my resources, maybe out of my depth, but if I let Cap in on it, he'll wind up running the show … and I'll end up on the sidelines again, just like it was back in the Avengers." He brushes off Rogers with a quip as he and Mockingbird reach their stop and disembark.

Exiting the subway, Mockingbird gushes about how gorgeous Rogers is, sending Hawkeye into another mini-sulking crisis. Alternating between clarity and over-drama, Hawkeye realizes for seemingly the first time how "second rate" Cap makes him feel, but believes that if he doesn't solve this problem on his own he "may never be able to stand on my own two feet." Walking through Grand Central Station, Hawkeye and Mockingbird are attacked by Crossfire's minions, and the archer bounces right back thinking "nothing like a good chase [to make] me feel great about myself again" once the adrenaline is pumping and he's in the thick of the fray.

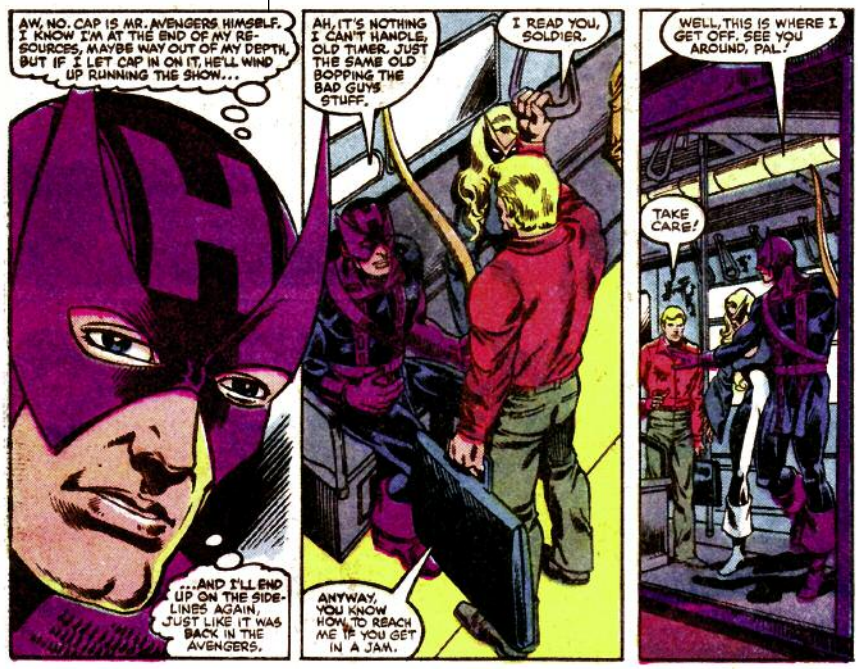
Captured and following the time-honored code of every great bad guy, in *Hawkeye* #4 (Dec. 1983), Crossfire expounds on his history and his plan to devastate the superhero ranks by killing Hawkeye and using his body to lure the other heroes to his "Undertaker Machine." When Hawkeye asks why he's been chosen as the bait, Crossfire delivers a humiliating blow, telling him it should be "obvious … you are the weakest, most vulnerable known costumed crimefighter in town." Crossfire decides to test the rage-inducing power of his machine on Hawkeye and Mockingbird, forcing them to fight each other against their will. Adding insult to injury, Crossfire makes it known that "considering your training and backgrounds, my bet is that Hawkeye will die first."



Ear Shots

Hawkeye's compromised hearing made him a joke target in *Avengers* #239 (Jan. 1984), guest-starring David Letterman. Cover art by Al Milgrom and Joe Sinnott. (below) The archer and Mockingbird have a subway encounter with Steve (Captain America) Rogers in *Hawkeye* (the miniseries) #3, by Mark Gruenwald and Brett Breeding.

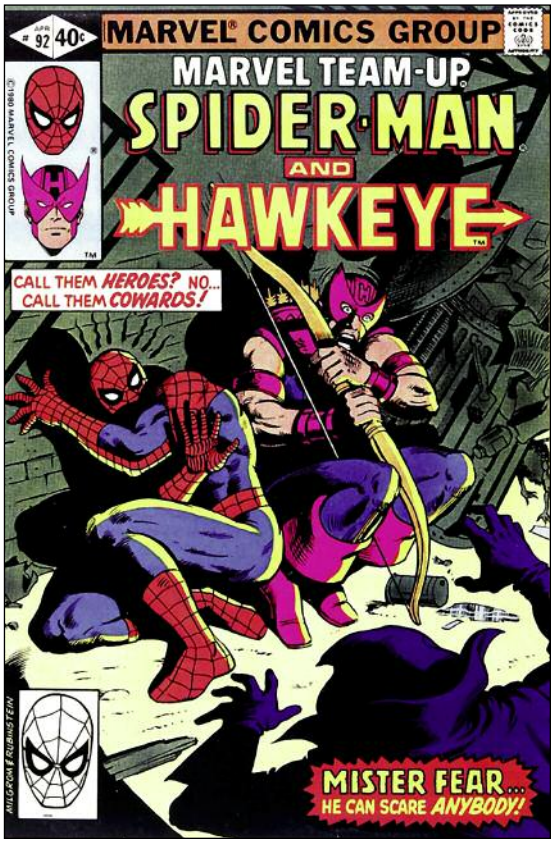
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Yellow Feather

Quivering Batman and Green Arrow, targets of the Scarecrow. Sorry. We meant, quivering Spider-Man and Hawkeye, targets of Mr. Fear. Cover to Hawkeye's guest-shot in *Marvel Team-Up* #92 (Apr. 1980) by Al Milgrom and Joe Rubenstein. The archer's miniseries would soon follow.

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Although weaponless under the thrall of the Undertaker Machine, Hawkeye's instincts make him notch, draw, and shoot pretend-arrows from an imaginary bow.

The proud archer ultimately defeats the Undertaker Machine using a "hypersonic" arrowhead to jam its frequency by activating it in his mouth. The move sacrifices Hawkeye's hearing, but enables him to save Mockingbird and himself. When he confronts a waiting Crossfire, the villain has the hero's bow in hand with a concussive arrow notched, but Crossfire isn't strong enough to draw the bow, and the arrow detonates at his feet, knocking the villain out cold. Hawkeye's duality is displayed in a single scene: Here is an athlete in peak physical condition, "arguably the best marksman alive—at least with a bow and arrow," according to Roger Stern, yet he doesn't even really directly defeat the villain—it's Crossfire's poor planning and inability to draw the bow that brings about his own downfall.

Hawkeye's pride is never more apparent, or detrimental, to his well being than in the way he handles his deafness in the aftermath of the battle. He "couldn't stomach the pity" if Mockingbird knew about his hearing loss, so he keeps the secret to himself and nearly loses his future wife in the process. But she's persistent, and we find out on their honeymoon that she ran after him and forced him to explain "the reason for his asinine behavior." [***Editor's note:*** Hiding one's hearing loss by pretending to hear normally is most commonly called "bluffing."]

The same stubbornness appears 30 days later during "Assistant Editors' Month" when, in *Avengers*

Ad-atomy

From the files of Brett Breeding, the Marvel Comics house ad for the *Hawkeye* miniseries, from pencils to finishes to its final color form.

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On the Mark

Today's Hawkeye is much more confident than in his earlier Marvel appearances. John Romita, Jr. promo art from 2010.

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#234, Hawkeye refuses to wear a hearing aid or allow anyone else be spokesman for the team during their appearance on *Late Night with David Letterman*. He has Mockingbird procure a copy of the questions Letterman will be asking. Of course, the questioning goes off the rails immediately, and Hawkeye ends up answering questions that aren't being asked.

WEST COAST JAUNT

In the wake of the events of *Secret Wars*, Wasp steps down as Avengers chairperson and nominates Vision to lead the team in *Avengers* #243 (May 1984). In an attempt to block Vision from ascending to the role, Hawkeye nominates Cap, who immediately turns down the recommendation and instead seconds the Vision's appointment. As his first order of business, Vision proposes a new "detached membership" status for Thor and She-Hulk, but that still leaves them one member over the six-member limit. Hawkeye is immediately worried, wondering, "Who gets bounced?!" The answer comes in the form of Raymond Sikorski, Gyrich's replacement as the Avengers' National Security Council Liaison, who announces with the Vision the establishment of a West Coast branch of the team.

Limited-series penciler Bob Hall suspects Stern may have had "a little bit of his tongue in his cheek" when he was putting the *West Coast Avengers* book together. When Hawkeye questions who will run the new team, Vision reveals that Hawkeye will lead the new team based on his "years of experience as an Avenger," and by virtue of having "worked with nearly everyone who's ever been a member." Mockingbird is added to the roster straightaway, and the newlyweds are to make their way out west immediately.

Within a few issues, Hawkeye and Mockingbird have located a West Coast compound for the new team, and by the opening of *West Coast Avengers* #1 (Sept. 1984), the duo has established themselves in their new home. Via video conference, Vision tells Hawkeye that he's "proven to me that you were the right choice to lead the new West Coast division of the Avengers!" Later in that issue, however, Mockingbird thinks that her husband might be trying too hard to be a good leader, and notes the irony that his first act as team leader was to have the team split up to track an intruder.

The question at the heart of Hawkeye and the West Coast Avengers is this: Did Hawkeye as the chairman of the West Coast team elevate the stature of the character or detract from the validity of the team? Series writer Stern, who developed the idea for the team with Mark Gruenwald while attending a comics convention in Georgia, says, "The idea of Hawkeye being the leader was there right from the beginning," with the intent being to have Hawkeye see how difficult leading a team could be. "If you gave [the West Coast chairmanship] to Cap, you would have no doubt the team would be a success," says *West Coast Avengers* miniseries inker Brett Breeding, but "giving it to Hawkeye allowed for conflict," which is exactly what the creators were trying to convey.

KEEPING THE PARTY GOING

He might try a little too hard sometimes, but Hawkeye is "the type of guy who," according to Stern, "whenever he shows up—you could say, 'Okay, *now* it's a party!'" And he's right. For all of the character's flaws, he is pretty damn happy-go-lucky. I mean, this is a guy who wears a "Happy Chef" apron over his costume when barbequing in the *West Coast Avengers* miniseries.

Hawkeye is a character that developed slowly, over decades. From Iron Man's antagonist to Captain America's challenger to headlining hero to West Coast team leader, Hawkeye grew into a well-rounded character. From love-struck Black Widow admirer to walking sexual-harassment case to husband, he has also matured as a man. For the creator who probably knew the character best, Hawkeye is believable because he's relatable. Mark Gruenwald summed him up this way in *Marvel Age* #6: "He's an ordinary guy who ran off to join the circus and gained his superior abilities the hard way … Hawkeye is *the* self-made super-hero."



***ADAM BESENYODI** is a freelance writer and editor. He is the author of the book* **Deus ex Comica: The Rebirth of a Comic Book Fan**, *and the writer of* **Exo-1** *and the* **Rock-Solid Steelbots** *from Action Lab studios.*

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JUGGLED TO DEATH

by Jarrod Buttery



Backstage PASS!

Mike Carlin describes his appearance in the *Hawkeye* miniseries:

THE MAIN VILLAIN WAS A GUY NAMED ODDBALL (NO, THAT'S NOT ME), AND HE HAD A FEMALE SIDEKICK ... WHOM MARK GRUENWALD WAS STUCK ON A NAME FOR.



MIKE CARLIN

"She was a beautiful demolitions expert … seemed obvious to me, so I suggested Bombshell. He loved it, used it, and as a 'reward' he drew me into the story as a guy on a subway train who Oddball whacks in the face with a billiard ball or something!

"The appearance actually reflected a true-to-life story of mine where one New Year's Day a friend of mine and I were taking a subway train home from a party at around 5:30 in the morning. Some subway ruffians took the opportunity to menace us … and actually took my friend's fairly expensive camera. My friend took his camera back … and the thugs really upped the menace. This is when I stood up to menace a little … and the head thug pulled a *gun* on me.

"I looked around the train that had other folks on it (lotsa people going home after New Year's Eve parties) and called out: 'Hey, everybody. Look at this guy. He's going to shoot me!'

"The guy got embarrassed or scared (or the gun wasn't real), and he hesitated. My friend and I pushed past and at the next stop got off train. Then the thugs got off. And then we got on … and this happened a few times until the conductor closed the doors with us on the platform and the thugs taken away from us on the train.

"Anyways, it does illustrate that Mark had a good sense of humor about his friends' life-and-death adventures. My character in *Hawkeye* does the whole spiel up to 'Hey, look everybody! This guy's gonna juggle me to death,' except Mark has Oddball clock me. An alternate-universe ending to the train adventure where I got away? Or did Mark secretly wish I had gotten shot? Hmmm… Now we'll never know!!"

Marvel Headache #305

Oddball temple-topples "wise guy" Mike Carlin in this page from 1983's *Hawkeye*. Words and breakdowns by Gruenwald, finishes by Breeding.

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Listen to the MOCKINGBIRD™

FlashBack!

by Jarrod Buttery





Avengers Assemble! Thor, Iron Man, Hulk, Giant-Man, Wasp! Captain America, Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, Quicksilver! Black Widow, Hercules, Black Knight, Vision, Black Panther! And, more recently, Spider-Man, Wolverine, Doctor Strange, Iron Fist, Luke Cage! So … where did this Mockingbird come from? That was the question asked by Mark Gruenwald in an editorial box in the letters page of *Marvel Team-Up* #95 (July 1980).

FROM THE EVERGLADES TO THE SAVAGE LAND

Our story starts with Marvel's muck-monster, the Man-Thing. As discussed in *BACK ISSUE* #6 (Oct. 2004), Man-Thing first appeared in *Savage Tales* #1 (May 1971), but the magazine was temporarily canceled and a planned follow-up for issue #2 wasn't published. The follow-up depicted Dr. Barbara Morse and fellow scientists working to recreate the Super-Soldier serum that originally produced Captain America. They were also searching for missing colleague Ted Sallis who, unknown to them, had been transformed into the Man-Thing after the terrorist organization A.I.M. had tried to steal the serum.

This Len Wein/Neal Adams tale eventually saw print in the middle of *Astonishing Tales* #12 (June 1972). Marvel's Jungle Lord, Ka-Zar, had received a solo series in the title and, in issue #6 (June 1971), in a story by Gerry Conway and Barry Windsor-Smith, an unnamed brunette woman rushes to Ka-Zar's English estate. Admitted entrance by the butler, she demands, "Lord Kevin Plunder! Where is he? I must speak with him! 'Tis a matter of the fate of worlds!" When she is calmed, she admits, "Lord Kevin and I have never met, and yet I feel that I know him! You see, I can

"Marvel's Newest Sensation"

Marvel Team-Up #95 (July 1980) was the "first appearance" of the soon-to-be Avenger Mockingbird—but it was not the first time readers encountered her alter ego, Bobbi Morse. Cover art by Frank Miller and Bob McLeod.

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Backdoor into the Marvel Universe

An early appearance of the woman who would eventually become Mockingbird. Page 18 of *Astonishing Tales* #18 (June 1973), by writer Mike Friedrich and artists Dan Adkins and Frank Chiaramonte. Original art courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions.

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… can 'feel' people … in my mind! And I know that unless I speak with him, Lord Kevin will die!"

That was Conway's last issue. When asked if he had any recollection of the scene, Conway admits, "Wow, wish I could help, but it was looooonnnnng ago and far away. You might ask Roy Thomas; I have a feeling he could have been involved in plotting those issues." Indeed, Thomas wrote issue #7 (Aug. 1971), wherein the aforementioned butler tells the brunette girl that Lord Kevin has returned to his jungle abode.

Issue #8 (Oct. 1971) opens with a light aircraft crashing into the Savage Land, and a blonde girl parachuting to safety. Ka-Zar finds the pilot, Paul Allen, who insists that they must find his fiancée, Barbara. Paul also reveals how they found the Savage Land: "All I have to go by is this map, which your servants back in England gave her," thus confirming that *blonde* Barbara is the unnamed *brunette* girl from the previous issues. Herb Trimpe was the artist for issues #7 and 8 and says, "It probably was a mistake on the part of the colorist. We tried to maintain quality in the time allotted, but we had to make the deadlines to avoid late fees with the printer. Of course, there may have been other reasons for the sudden change in hair color."

Explanations eventuated in *AT* #12 (June 1972), written by Thomas. Dr. Barbara Morse and Dr Paul Allen were revealed to be "Part of a US Scientific Project, working at a secret lab in the Everglades, to achieve a certain … biochemical breakthrough." They enlisted Ka-Zar to use his jungle abilities to search for the missing Sallis. The story then gave way to the seven-page Man-Thing flashback.

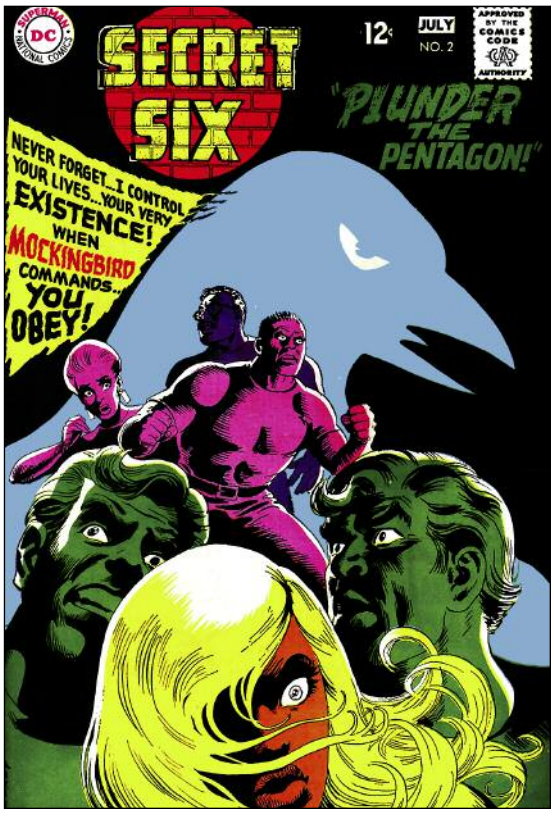
Roy Thomas recalls, "I know that I wanted to find a way to integrate that second Man-Thing story into *Ka-Zar*, but I don't remember any specific details." Although memories have faded over the years, it seems that whatever initial plans were held for Conway's mysterious brunette girl, Thomas saw an opportunity to change her to blonde Barbara Morse in order to make use of the unpublished Man-Thing story. Or we could be charitable and assume that, pursued by A.I.M., Barbara was wearing a wig and exaggerating her urgency in her first appearance.

AT #13 (Aug. 1972) concluded the storyline. Not only was Barbara a biologist, but an agent of

Comics' First Mockingbird

Let's not forget that before Bobbi came along, DC Comics had its own Mockingbird, the mysterious puppeteer of the covert squad known as the Secret Six. Cover art to *Secret Six* #2 (June–July 1968) by Nick Cardy (who'd no doubt draw one gorgeous Bobbi Morse, if given the chance!).

TM & © DC Comics.







S.H.I.E.L.D. She was only pretending to love Paul Allen, who was, it turns out, working for A.I.M. Paul is killed by the Man-Thing, A.I.M.'s Everglades base is destroyed, and Ka-Zar admits he is sorry that he didn't get to know Barbara better.

A fill-in followed but a new direction accompanied new writer Mike Friedrich. *AT* #15 (Dec. 1972) finds Ka-Zar (and Zabu!) in New York, following A.I.M.'s trail and enjoying the hospitality of Barbara Morse. The façade of meek fiancée over, Barbara is the relaxed and confident character of later years. She flirts with Ka-Zar and invites him to "Call me Bobbi."

The nickname stuck and she is treated as co-star of the title. Nick Fury assigns Bobbi, Agent 19, the task of stopping A.I.M. and A.I.M.'s Super-Soldier: Victorius. At the end of issue #20 (Oct. 1973), with Victorius—not victorious—Ka-Zar returns to the Savage Land. Bobbi admits to herself, "Despite our differences, I'm still wrapped up in this guy! I've made my intentions plain, but I can't possibly see myself in his awful jungle."

Accompanied by Shanna the She-Devil, Bobbi returned to the Savage Land in *Savage Tales* #8 (Jan. 1975)—where she does not fail to notice the chemistry between the jungle characters. Writer Gerry Conway explained, in *BACK ISSUE* #43 (Sept. 2010), that he wanted to provide an alternative love interest for the Lord of the Savage Land. Ka-Zar and Shanna eventually married while Bobbi disappeared for a year.

HUNTED BY THE HUNTRESS

Barbara Morse could have disappeared from continuity altogether had not Mike Friedrich come to her rescue. According to the editorial from Archie Goodwin in *Marvel Super Action* #1 (Jan. 1976), Goodwin had proposed a new character: the Huntress. "I suggested the title and the notion of using S.H.I.E.L.D. to writer Mike Friedrich. He decided to draw upon a character he'd helped develop while scripting the color *Ka-Zar* comic, and wound up revamping her totally," wrote Goodwin.

Birds of Prey

(left) Barbara "Bobbi" Morse in her first costumed guise. Washtone-rich splash page to her one-and-only Huntress outing, from the black-and-white magazine *Marvel Super Action* #1 (Jan. 1976). By the Friedrich/Evans/Springer team. (It's interesting to note that inker Frank Springer was the illustrator of DC's aforementioned *Secret Six* series—home of that *other* Mockingbird!) (right) While DC's original Huntress was a Golden Age supervillainess that debuted in 1941, Bobbi Morse relinquished her Huntress moniker in 1977 when DC introduced Helena Wayne as the Earth-Two superheroine Huntress. Seen here is Huntress' bio from *Who's Who* #10 (Dec. 1985); text by Len Wein, art by Joe Staton. (Of course, post–Crisis, the Huntress character has continued to change. Sheesh! All these Huntresses and Mockingbirds are enough to make your temples throb!)

Marvel Super Action © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc. Huntress/*Who's Who* TM & © DC Comics.



The Three Faces of Bobbi

From the collection of this article's writer, Jarrod Buttery, a trio of sketches of the lovely Mockingbird, by (this page) David Finch, (center) Stuart Immonen, and (right) George Pérez. (center background) Detail featuring Mockingbird from Tom Morgan's cover to *West Coast Avengers* #38 (Nov. 1988).

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Presented with proof of corruption within S.H.I.E.L.D., agent Morse is asked to investigate the organization from within. Bobbi monologues: "I had my own ideas how to best carry out my new mission. Namely to drop out of S.H.I.E.L.D. and create a brand-new identity—so was born the Huntress!" Clad in a black leather catsuit, Bobbi does indeed clean up a corrupt cell in Mexico City, but only one issue of *MSA* magazine was published. Bobbi Morse disappeared again and, in the meantime, DC debuted a character called the Huntress.

It was 35 years ago and writer Mike Friedrich admits he has little recollection of these stories: "I'm afraid I remember almost nothing about Bobbi Morse. I even reread her appearance in *MSA* #1 and it didn't help. Sorry." Regardless, Friedrich was invaluable in developing Bobbi as a three-dimensional, take-charge, agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.



STEVEN GRANT

AND NO BIRDS SING...

Although the Huntress never reappeared, Bobbi received yet *another* opportunity and another identity. *Marvel Team-Up* #95 advertised "Spider-Man and introducing Marvel's newest sensation—Mockingbird." Within, Spider-Man is told that Mockingbird is a rogue ex-S.H.I.E.L.D. agent who was previously known as the Huntress. Of course, Bobbi is still investigating corruption within S.H.I.E.L.D. Helped by Spidey and Nick Fury, she exposes a high-ranking double agent but is critically wounded, and the issue ends on a solemn note.

Mark Gruenwald's editorial box appeared on the opposing letters page: "Where did this Mockingbird come from?" He explained that he had originally created Mockingbird as an opponent for Spider-Woman. "Showing the sketch to Steven Grant, he helped me work out her powers and weaponry," but Gruenwald then left Spider-Woman's book. "Time passed, and Steven was searching for something new and different to do in *Team-Up*. He was toying with the idea to revamp the Bobbi Morse character. Somehow we got the notion to amalgamate the two concepts and make Bobbi Morse the Mockingbird."

Steven Grant is very happy to talk about the character he had a hand in developing: "I'll take Mark's word that I dredged up the Bobbi Morse character. I was interested in the 'investigating S.H.I.E.L.D.' storyline; in fact had pitched that to Marvel at the end of 1976 on my first visit up there. When I started writing for Marvel, I re-pitched it with Nick Fury as the investigator but they weren't interested. So the *MTU* story was a way to backdoor that in."



Grant was asked if he had followed Bobbi's earlier appearances, and admits, "I'd read the *Ka-Zar*s she was in, and her one Huntress outing, and I can't say I had any real interest in the character. But there's a decent bit of pleasure in taking characters you've had no interest in and trying to find something interesting about them. With Bobbi, the S.H.I.E.L.D. thing was the interesting part."

So if Grant decided upon revamping Bobbi Morse, where did the Mockingbird name come from? "Funny story," replies Grant. "Mark's early love was always DC superheroes, and he had this long-term dream of creating a Marvel version of the Justice League. Not parallel world versions like the Squadron Supreme but a Marvel-Earth version. He had notebooks and notebooks at home full of character names and designs, and gave me the notebooks to look through to see if there was anything there I liked as a new identity for Bobbi, since the Huntress identity was shot by, ironically, Paul Levitz creating a Huntress character for DC. One of the characters in Mark's notebook was a Marvel-Earth version of Black Canary, who in Mark's version was in fact black, who he intended to pair up with Hawkeye, the pre-existing Marvel parallel to Green Arrow. Her name was Mockingbird. I actually wasn't crazy about the name, but it was far better than anything I'd come up with at that point, so Mockingbird it was. I remember coming up with some bogus motif rationale for the name, but never got a chance to develop that either. The name grew on me the more I worked up the character."



Crimefighting Chemistry

(left) Mocky's driving Hawk nuts in this tussle from *Hawkeye* #1. (below) Mockingbird's new threads, from the *Marvel Universe Handbook* (with colors by *Bl*'s Rich Fowlks). Can anyone help us ID the artists?

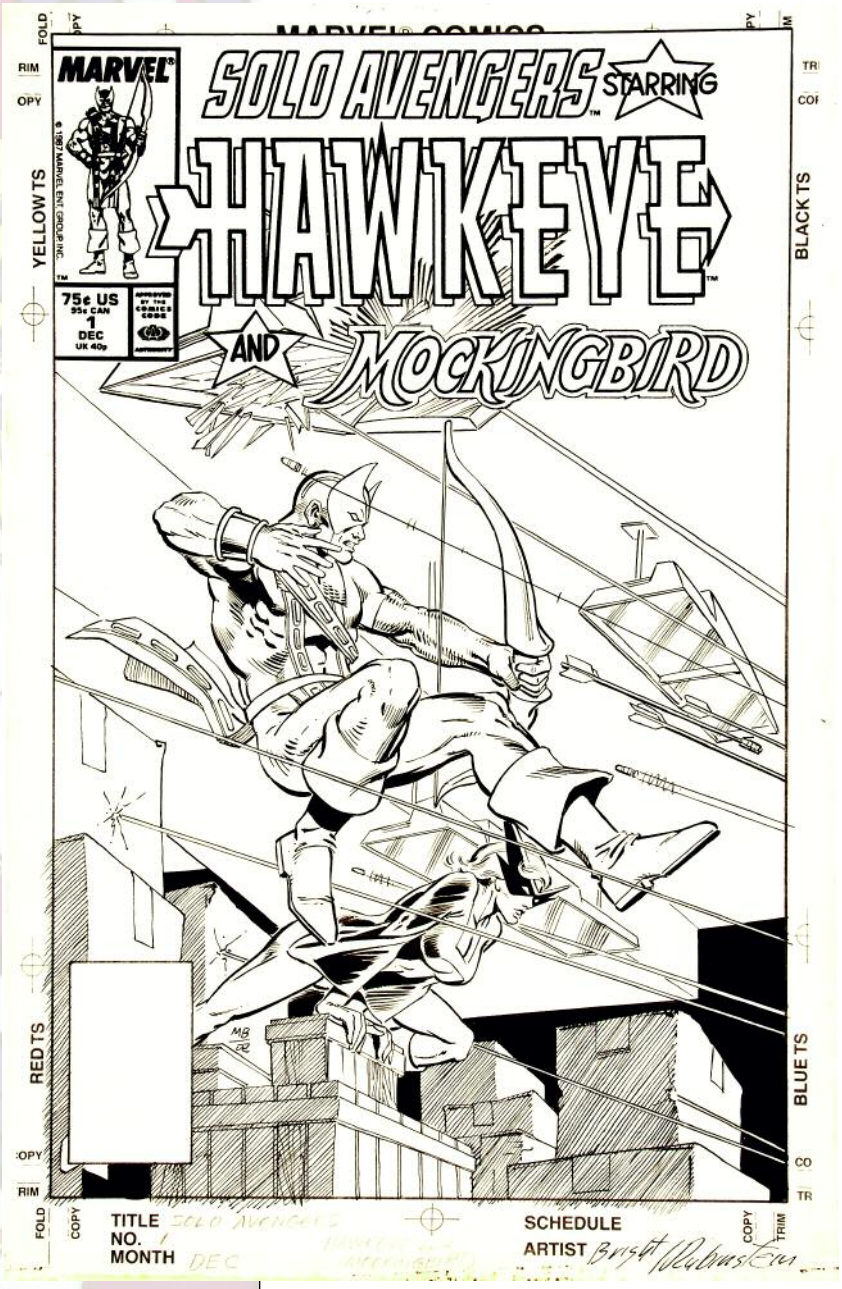
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The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe #7 (July 1983) states that Bobbi took the codename Mockingbird from a C.I.A. operation involving Nick Fury. *Handbook* co-writer Peter Sanderson volunteers, "I haven't found a story about this C.I.A./Fury operation. Mark was willing to establish things in the *Handbook* that hadn't appeared in stories, and this may be one of those instances. Since he had claimed Mockingbird as his character, he would feel free to do that." Perhaps Gruenwald and Grant subconsciously recalled the C.I.A.'s real-life "Operation Mockingbird."

When asked if he had any plans beyond the unresolved ending, Grant explains, "I was hoping the response would be good enough that she could get at least a solo adventure somewhere and I'd be able to do more stories. [However,] the silence was thunderous, and Marvel wasn't really into unpowered masked characters then. I certainly never intended her to get hooked up with Hawkeye, but clearly Mark did and kept it close to his vest. I was less eager to expose her Black Canary origins. I did want to write a non-powered heroine, though—I prefer to write characters who have no superpowers—and Mockingbird was a first stab at that. In some ways, she was a dry run for my own character, Whisper."

And so, with the greatest respect to Mockingbird, was she initially designed as a knockoff of Black Canary? Grant believes, "Unquestionably yes, at least in Mark's notebooks. He designed the costume that ended up in print, but I did design Mockingbird's weaponry—sort of. Mark's original design





Double Trouble

Original art by Mark Bright and Joe Rubinstein to *Solo Avengers* #1 (Dec. 1987), courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Hawkeye was the lead feature, but Mockingbird co-starred in "her first solo exploit ever!" (according to the cover blurb, added during the production phase of this cover), written by Tom DeFalco, penciled by Jim Lee (yes, Jim Lee), and inked by Al Williamson (Holy Moley!).

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had her wielding one long stave and I just thought that was way too cumbersome, though I did like her having an offense/defense equivalent to Captain America's shield, so I came up with a split stave that could be used in multiple ways, and connected into one long stave when necessary. It was just a matter of trying to come up with an at least semi-practical weapon. I was just trying to turn her into a character I'd like to write. When I moved in on her, though, I did try to strip out as many Black Canary-isms as I could, so hopefully that's why she didn't strike you as a knockoff."

If the Huntress didn't set the world on fire, Mockingbird was, in Grant's words, "ignored. I remember some complaints from somewhere about using *MTU* to introduce new heroes, when it was supposed to be Spider-Man teaming up with established characters, but I don't recall whether they came from fans or inside Marvel." And so, Bobbi disappeared for another three years—but she did have a champion…

MARRIED TO A MARKSMAN

Mockingbird's next real appearance was in Mark Gruenwald's *Hawkeye* #1 (Sept. 1983). In *Solo Avengers* #1 (Dec. 1987), Gruenwald described Hawkeye as "The most popular Avenger who doesn't have his own book," and, in *Marvel Age* #6 (Sept. 1983), wrote, "Hawkeye's long been one of my favorite Marvel heroes." Writing and drawing the miniseries, Gruenwald finally had the chance to team up Hawkeye and Mockingbird. *Marvel Age* #6 promised, "You'll see the Avenging Archer do something no other Marvel hero has ever done before!"

And the hype was true. After defeating Crossfire, Oddball, and Bombshell in issue #4 of the miniseries (Dec. 1983), Hawkeye and Mockingbird eloped! Was this always the plan? Gruenwald's then-assistant, Mike Carlin, answers: "Yup. The whole story arc was planned out from the start. Mark was a big fan of both the Marvel and DC Universe, and he loved the relationship that DC's Green Arrow had with Black Canary, sooooooo, Mark made the Marvel version of that relationship slightly different by having his archer/bird-lady take the plunge. Mockingbird was created as a Black Canary type, and Mark put them together after the fact, the same way DC did." As for editorial: "Everyone was all for it. Mark had been doing comics for a while by that point and people trusted his instincts pretty well."



MIKE CARLIN

Gruenwald was known as a writer and editor but he also penciled the entire *Hawkeye* miniseries—inked by Brett Breeding and Danny Bulanadi [see previous article]. Ian Akin and Brian Garvey assisted on the final issue. "I think you can assume that 99% of the time you see multiple inkers it's because of the Dreaded Deadline Doom," comments Garvey. "Ian says we were working for Mark Gruenwald on *Vision and Scarlet Witch* at that time. Also, Danny Bulanadi was our mentor—we used to ink backgrounds for him but on this issue we were inking full pages." (Yes, including the famous hot-tub scene.)

Hawkeye carried Mockingbird over the threshold of Avengers Mansion in *Avengers* #239 (Jan. 1984) and writer Roger Stern was prepared. "Mark Gruenwald was my editor on *Avengers*, and he always kept me up to date,"

says Stern. It was always planned that Hawkeye would return to the Avengers once the miniseries was complete."

Bobbi had arrived. She was part of the Avengers and would soon become a founding member of the West Coast Avengers. Stern recalls that this wasn't originally the plan: "The idea for a West Coast branch didn't even come up until well after the *Hawkeye* miniseries. *Avengers* #239 was written a couple months before Gruenie and I even discussed the miniseries that became *West Coast Avengers* (*WCA*). But, once I started developing *WCA*, it seemed like a natural for Hawkeye to go off with his new bride to form the new branch of the team."

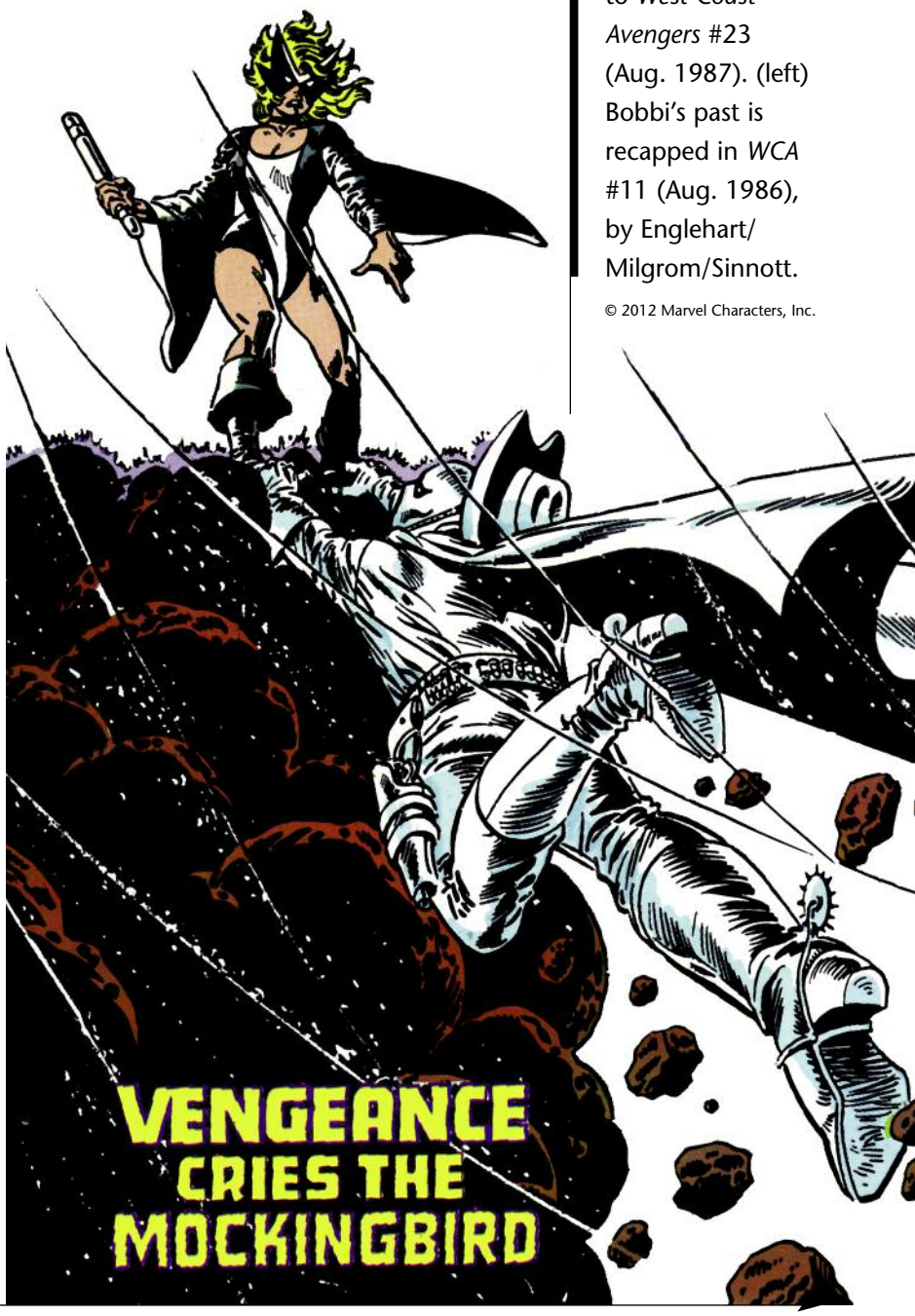
Stern admits to a fondness for the character: "Oh, I was very familiar with Bobbi. I'd followed her development ever since she'd first turned up in the Ka-Zar series. I'd read her brief appearance as the Huntress, and was around the offices when Gruenie was working with Steve Grant to re-establish her as Mockingbird. I'm afraid I never had much opportunity to further her development. I mainly just followed up on what Steve and Mark had established. But I enjoyed having Mockingbird in the series. Playing her and Hawkeye off against each other was a lot of fun, and it was a real hoot showing Hawkeye as he adjusted to married life. I just wish I'd had more of a chance to make use of them both in the Avengers."

"DROP DEAD."

After Stern's initial *WCA* miniseries, Steve Englehart wrote the *WCA* ongoing title with art from Al Milgrom. In issue #12 (Sept. 1986) Bobbi received a new bare-legged costume, but Milgrom admits, "I don't remember doing the redesign myself. I'm guessing it was someone else … couldn't tell you who. Sorry." Soon after came Mockingbird's most notable storyline. During the "Lost in Space-Time" arc, Bobbi was kidnapped, drugged, and seduced by a lovestruck Phantom Rider. Brought to her senses, Bobbi confronted the villain and allowed him to fall to his death in the historic *West Coast Avengers* #23 (Aug. 1987).



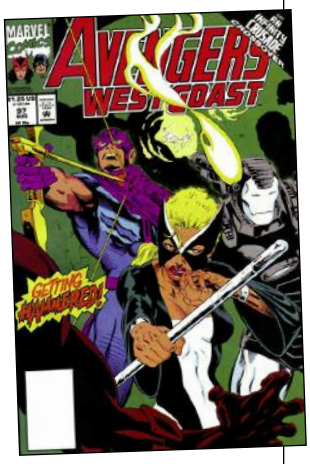
On his webpage, Englehart states that Mockingbird became his favorite in the group. "It was her arc that made her my favorite," he relates. "I liked Mocky a lot and had some big plans for her back in the day. I'd been given Mark's background for her, as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, and one day I realized S.H.I.E.L.D. played by very different rules from the Avengers. When she dropped that guy off the cliff and refused to apologize for it, my infatuation was complete. But in the midst of my run, I turned it up a notch, with her and Hawkeye hashing out their different rules—and so, just before I was cut off, I split them and the team. I was looking forward to seeing what would happen as it played out, with some people on her side and some on his. How would this rift be perceived back on the East Coast? Would the Wasp bring down the hammer on this split, or even disincorporate the WCA? There was so much to look forward to there. And yet, Hawky and Mocky loved each other, deep down. The next year would have been really fun stuff."



Cliffhanger

No remorse as Mocky lets the abusive Phantom Rider fall to his death. Detail from Al Milgrom's cover to *West Coast Avengers* #23 (Aug. 1987). (left) Bobbi's past is recapped in *WCA* #11 (Aug. 1986), by Englehart/Milgrom/Sinnott.

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Bobbi managed a quick visit to the Savage Land in *West Coast Avengers Annual* #3 (1988), where she met with Ka-Zar, Shanna, and their new baby, but in her ongoing subplot she was haunted by the ghost of the Phantom Rider. However, Englehart left *WCA* with issue #39 (Dec. 1988) and issue #41 (Feb. 1989) quickly wrapped up the storyline with the ghostly Phantom Rider exorcised by Daimon Hellstrom. John Byrne took over with issue #42 (Mar 1989) and began to bring Clint and Bobbi together. The pair left the team and started to train the Great Lakes Avengers.

The title changed to *Avengers West Coast* and Roy and Dann Thomas commenced as writers with issue #60 (July 1990). Clint and Bobbi's relationship deteriorated, and their divorce was nearly finalized (issue #88, Nov. 1992) when Bobbi was kidnapped by Ultron. As he had once used the Wasp's brain patterns to animate Jocasta in *Avengers* #162 (Aug. 1977), Ultron now used Bobbi's brain patterns to animate Alkhema in *AWC* #90 (Jan. 1993). Overjoyed to find her safe, Clint reconciled with Bobbi in the all-important *AWC* #91 (Feb. 1993).



TILL DEATH DO US PART

But happy endings sometimes don't last. Bobbi was killed by Mephisto in the devastating *AWC* #100 (Nov. 1993)—marking the first occasion that the Demon Lord wrecked a perfectly good marriage. "The editor (or people over his head) ordered me to kill Mockingbird," admits Roy Thomas. "I didn't like the idea, but of course I did it."

Nel Yomtov was the book's editor: "I was very proud to edit *AWC* and very grateful to have had such a talented creative team on the title. Although time has dimmed my memories a bit, I know one of the reasons was the frequent need for the Marvel titles to have special 'events' that could be promoted by our sales department to boost sales. We decided it would make sense to create such an event for the anniversary issue #100. Bobbi was the unlucky victim we chose." But was this also due to a decision to send Hawkeye in a different direction? "We were purposely taking Hawkeye on that grim, bitter trip, and I think we wanted to fuel that with something big—Bobbi's death."

Then-Marvel editor-in-chief Tom DeFalco admits, "I'm afraid I don't recall any discussions about the death of Mockingbird. Roy has a great memory when it comes to these things so I assume the idea originated with editorial. It's my guess that Mark Gruenwald, Nel Yomtov's group editor, was probably involved. If that's the case, Mark would have worked out the details and told me his plan at some point. If that's what happened, it didn't leave a lasting impression on me."

"I can say with certainty that I informed Gruenie that we were planning Mockingbird's death," confirms Yomtov, "for the simple reason that he was my supervisor, and it was important he be aware of such major storylines impacting our group's characters. I don't believe, however, that he made suggestions for the storyline we planned, and he surely did not put any limitations on what the writer and I wanted to do." It seems Gruenwald was thus instrumental both in Mockingbird's creation and in her departure.

AWC was canceled with issue #102 (Jan. 1994) and replaced by *Force Works* #1 (July 1994). Some members of the AWC joined Force Works but not Hawkeye. Was an excuse needed to sideline him? Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning wrote *Force Works*: "We were invited to reinvent and rebrand the title. We were just given a bunch of characters and plot threads, and a brief to relaunch with a new proactive feel. I don't remember Hawkeye ever being under consideration for *FW*, and therefore Bobbi's death was not a setup to explain his absence."

Hawkeye next appeared in his second eponymous miniseries (Jan. 1994), written by Chuck Dixon. "I was assigned the *Hawkeye* mini based on my *Punisher* work," remembers Dixon. "I seem to recall that Nel wanted that 'grim and gritty' feel. I vaguely remember that the death of Mockingbird was the motivation for Hawkeye to go solo and move from the trick arrow stuff to go more lethal."

Hawkeye soon rejoined the Avengers, but Mockingbird stayed dead. She even appeared in Hell in various titles. In *Hellcat* #3 (Nov. 2000), scripted by

She's Got Legs...

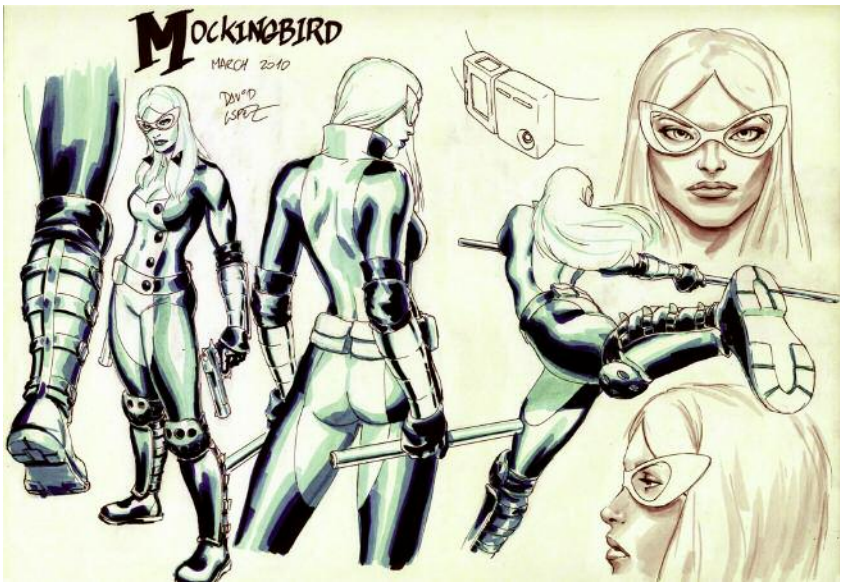
This cliffhanger to *West Coast Avengers* #42 (Mar. 1989) teased readers (and the WCAvengers) with Mockingbird's new look. Words and pencils by John Byrne, inks by Mike Machlan. Courtesy of Heritage.

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Pretty Bird Loves Bowman

(right) Mockingbird model sheet drawn in 2010 by David Lopez, artist of Marvel's recent *Hawkeye & Mockingbird* series. (bottom) Marvel's S.H.I.E.L.D.-agent-turned-super-heroine, Bobbi Morse, and her eagle-eyed beau with a bow, Clint Barton. Paul Renauld's cover art *Hawkeye & Mockingbird* #6 (Jan. 2011).

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Englehart, Patsy Walker supposes Mockingbird is in Hell for killing the Phantom Rider. "Hell no, I'm not here for that," retorts Mockingbird. "Despite what my husband thinks, that was pure justice." Indeed.

Mockingbird stayed dead for 15 years—but that wasn't Bobbi Morse. *New Avengers: The Reunion* #2 (June 2009) revealed that Bobbi was replaced by a Skrull infiltrator, between scenes, in *AWC* #91. She was one of the first to be replaced in the Skrulls' long-term "Secret Invasion" because she didn't have any powers—she'd be easy to duplicate. The early infiltrators truly believed their roles—the Skrull truly believed she *was* Bobbi and she truly loved Clint. Is this why the Skrull maintained the façade in Hell? Or can we really believe *anything* that is presented to us from Mephisto's realm?

Regardless, Bobbi is back. *Reunion* writer Jim McCann championed her return because, according to an interview on the CBR website, "With one character we wanted to get back something that the Skrulls would have taken away. I said that [Clint and Bobbi] were like the 'Mr. And Mrs. Smith' of the Marvel Universe [and Brian Bendis replied], 'That sounds great. We can use that.'"

Steven Grant was glad to see her back, although "My biggest recent Mockingbird thrill wasn't her return from the dead during the Skrull invasion storyline but her appearance on the new *Avengers* cartoon show, where she's been used really well." There may even be more TV exposure: Jeph Loeb announced at San Diego Comic-Con International 2011 that *Mockingbird* is in development as an ABC show: "A college-aged science geek named Bobbi Morse gets recruited to a spy organization." It was described as "*Alias* meets *Felicity*."

In recent issues of *New Avengers*, Bobbi was mortally wounded. Her life was saved only by the injection of a newly rediscovered mixture of the Super-Soldier serum and the Infinity Formula. Coming full circle, Bobbi is now a superpowered Super-Soldier herself—something she was researching in her very first appearances over 40 years ago. It will be interesting to see where the next 40 years takes her.

The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to Dan Abnett, Mike Carlin, Gerry Conway, Tom DeFalco, Chuck Dixon, Steve Englehart, Mike Friedrich, Brian Garvey, Steven Grant, Andy Lanning, Al Milgrom, Peter Sanderson, Roger Stern, Roy Thomas, Herb Trimpe, and Nel Yomtov. Thanks also to Sal Cipriano and David Hyde at DC Comics.



Jarrod Buttery lives in Western Australia and has written several articles for* BACK ISSUE. *He has his fingers crossed that an "Agent Morse" gets mentioned in the* Avengers *movie.

end

COSTUME PARTY DEPT.
No, you haven't dropped in on a MAD Magazine *article by mistake, but it might seem like one! Here's a (hopefully) humorous look at some of the Earth's Mightiest Heroes' mightiest foibles.*

YOU KNOW YOU'RE

1 …it's never a prank call you're getting when your home phone rings between midnight and 5 in the morning with the words, "Avengers Assemble!!"

2 **…any time Jarvis announces that there's a "stranger" at the front door, you have to CHECK to make sure he's not a white-haired giant wearing a cape.**



3 …people say "God go with you" to you and you're always tempted to answer, "That's no problem—the team's full of 'em!!"

4 …long holiday weekends are times you have to catch up on computerized team-history files instead of traveling or partying.

5 …you can mark the seasonal changes by the regularly scheduled attacks of Kang the Conqueror.

6 …you have to explain to your male teammates that a "vision" you saw recently was a gorgeous woman.

7 **…you NEVER swat or step on insects—they may have a message for you from Yellowjacket or the Wasp.**



8 …you haven't had a regular job in DECADES but you can always crash at the world's most famous mansion with a butler to cater to your every need.

9 …there's nothing abnormal about you and the guys debating which group has "the most delectable hotties" —the Atlanteans, Skrulls, Inhumans, Kree, or mutants.

AN AVENGER WHEN...

by Jerry Boyd

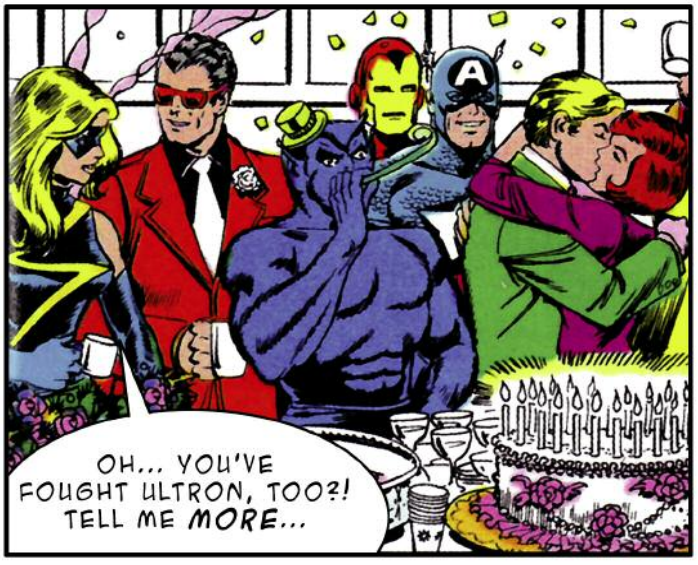
10 ...you can get rid of the paparazzi, reporters, autograph seekers, and rabid fans just by ditching your costume.

11 ...you can get rid of just about everybody ELSE just by flashing your A-1 Priority I.D. card.

12 ...you have to refrain from passing on jokes about the X-Men, Defenders, and Brotherhood of Evil Mutants 'cause some of your teammates used to be belong to those groups.

13 ...all your bills are "paid" via phone calls with these words: "Stark Industries International will cover it."

14 **...meeting attractive singles of the opposite sex that have lots of things in common with you is never a problem.**



15 ...you've journeyed to fabled Asgard, Mt. Olympus, the Savage Land, and the Great Refuge but never to Denver, Las Vegas, Atlanta, or Salt Lake City.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE A WEST COAST AVENGER WHEN...

16 ...your members spend more time trying to get a Hollywood agent than fighting bad guys.

17 ...the team leader has to explain to panicky Los Angeles residents that you're the GOOD guys—even though the Son of Satan is in the group.

18 **...there's a catfight among the girls, and it's a real CATfight!**



19 ...Ultron's flattened half your squad by the time you've finished shouting, "West Coast Avengers Assemble!!"

20 ...missions have to be turned down because six of your members are constantly having marital squabbles.

Special thanks to Michael Aushenker for his mirthful input.

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end

AVENGING THE LEFT COAST...



West Coast Avengers writers ROGER STERN and STEVE ENGLEHART recall working with these superhero "WACkos"

by Michael Aushenker



Pro 2 Pro

Hawkeye. Wonder Man. Mockingbird. Tigra. Moon Knight. Even Iron Man (the Jim Rhodes version, anyway).

West Coast Avengers *first appeared in 1984 as a four-issue limited series (Oct.–Jan. 1985) written by* ***Roger Stern*** *and drawn by Bob Hall and Brett Breeding.*

A West Coast Avengers *ongoing series soon followed, running 102 issues (Oct. 1985–Jan. 1994). It was originally written by* ***Steve Englehart*** *and drawn by Al Milgrom, through #41. John Byrne followed, writing and drawing the series from issue #42–57, and various creative teams followed Byrne until its 1994 finale. The title was renamed* Avengers West Coast *as of issue #47 in 1989.*

The following is a parallax view of West Coast Avengers *through separate interviews with writers Stern and Englehart conducted in August 2011.*

– Michael Aushenker

ROGER STERN

MICHAEL AUSHENKER: ***How did the* West Coast Avengers *four-issue miniseries come about? Was it based on solid sales for the regular* Avengers *series? How were you chosen to write this mini?***

ROGER STERN: I actually remember the origins of this project pretty well, because it happened to coincide with my birthday, back in 1983. I was attending a comic-book convention in Rome, Georgia, along with Mark Gruenwald, my editor on *The Avengers*. And while we were there, we batted ideas around for the project, which eventually became the *West Coast Avengers* miniseries. ("West Coast Avengers," by the way, was just supposed to be a placeholder name. But we were never able to think of a better title. Sorry about that.)

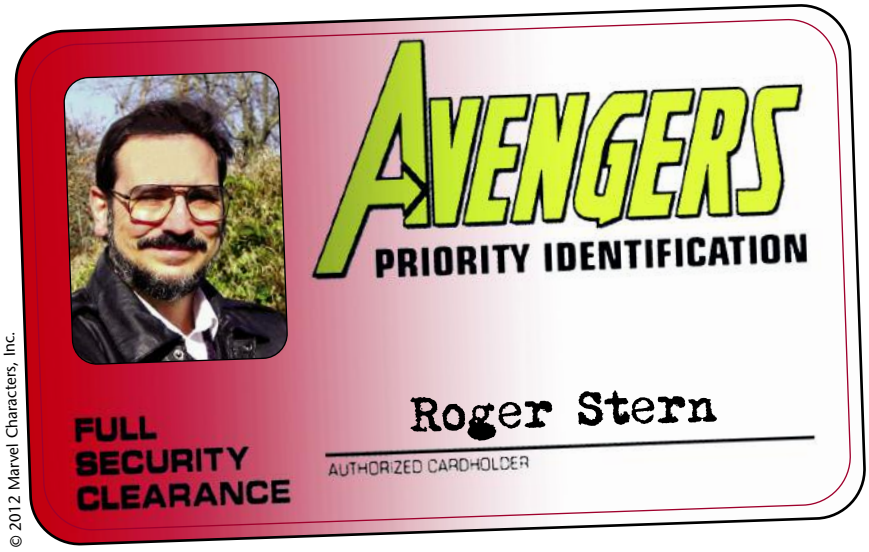
Anyway, WCA was originally conceived as a fun little miniseries that would A) help expand the scope of the Avengers as a team, and B) solve a problem we'd been having with other editorial offices. See, at the time, there were a couple dozen Avengers—or former Avengers—and I had plans for most of the ones who didn't have their own series. However, I had also limited the number of active Avengers in any given issue, in order to allow more space to each individual character and to avoid giving my artists interminable crowd scenes to draw. As a result, it seemed as if every time we turned around, some other writer would be glomming onto any Avenger who wasn't currently on the active roster for one miniseries or another—and all too often under the supervision of someone other than Mark.

And there was little we could do to prevent this because we "weren't using them." I think that we even had to get permission to use the Beast in a story because he had become a Defender.

Star Power

Some of Marvel's mightiest became Tinseltown Titans in this *Avengers* spin-off. Headshots by Bob Hall/Brett Breeding and Al Milgrom, grabbed from various *West Coast Avengers* covers.

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So we came up with this scheme for an *Avengers* limited series, which would have Hawkeye moving to the West Coast to establish a second Avengers base there—as part of the "Ultimate Vision" storyline I was developing in the main book. [***Editor's note:*** See this issue's "Roger Stern's Avengers" article for more on the "Ultimate Avengers" story arc.] And then, after the Vision storyline had been wrapped up, the plan was for the West Coast compound to continue to periodically appear in the *Avengers*. In that way, we could have about a dozen Avengers on active duty, but usually no more than five or six in any given issue. And if other people wanted to use them, they'd have to come to Mark for approval first. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out that way.

AUSHENKER: ***Can you talk about your collaboration process with Bob Hall and Brett Breeding?***

STERN: We worked together in what was then called the traditional "Marvel style." I would write a plot, from which Bob would pencil the story. Then I would get photocopies of Bob's penciled art and write my script based on what he had drawn. And then, once the story had been lettered—in India ink, right on the art boards, in those days—it would go off to Brett for inking. I was already living in Upstate New York by then, and I think Bob was living in the metropolitan area. And Brett was living in Delaware, I believe. So we never saw each other the whole time we were working on the miniseries. And, in those pre–Internet days, the art pages—actual 11" by 17" pieces of Bristol board—physically traveled several hundred miles in the process.

AUSHENKER: ***The cover of the first issue of the mini made a big game out of which members would be selected. Who, behind the scenes, selected the characters that made the final cut? Why this mix of characters?***

STERN: I would guess that the cover was probably Mark Gruenwald's idea—maybe with input from Mike Carlin, who was then Gruenie's assistant editor. I rarely had any input into the covers.

AUSHENKER: ***Did you have a favorite or least favorite character in this group, writing-wise? Was it fun to write the female characters Tigra and Mockingbird?***

STERN: Oh, I liked them all. Otherwise, I wouldn't have used them. But I'd had a soft spot for Tigra since her old days as the Cat. And I'd liked how Steve [Grant] and Mark [Gruenwald] had developed Bobbi as Mockingbird. I thought that Tigra and Mockingbird both made good Avengers.

AUSHENKER: ***Would you like to comment on any aspect of the storyline that culminated with the group slipping into Graviton's lair incognito (Tigra disguised as Madame Masque, Mockingbird as a bartender, etc.) to spring a battle on him?***

STERN: I remember deciding on Graviton as the main villain of the piece, because I wanted the new team to

Casting Call

When the Avenging Archer put out the word for a California-based team of heroes, little did the limited series' writer, Roger Stern, realize that he would be a victim of the concept's success. *West Coast Avengers* #1 (Sept. 1984) cover art by Bob Hall and Brett Breeding.

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go up against someone who wouldn't be easy to beat. The Blank, whom I'd originally planned to introduce as a Spider-Man villain, seemed to make a good stooge for Graviton. (And since no one ever used the Blank after this story, I was finally able to have him bedevil Spider-Man … some 24 years later.)

As for the Avengers going undercover to take the fight to Graviton—well, they knew that they had a fight on their hands, and that their strongest member had been captured. Of *course*, they would use disguises. That's just how smart they were.

AUSHENKER: ***I'm guessing that the success of the miniseries is what led to the permanent series that Englehart wrote? Or was that planned from the beginning? How were sales on the* WCA *mini?***

STERN: Oh, our sales were great. *The Avengers* regularly sold over 200,000 copies a month, and the first issue of *WCA* sold an additional 100,000 copies over that. Now, of course, that was for the first issue of a new *Avengers* book. Sales dropped off after that. But the last issue still sold about 20,000 copies more than *Avengers* #250, which it lead into.

Remember, the original plan was to establish a second branch of the Avengers, based in California. Once the miniseries was over, I was supposed to have the members of both branches to draw upon for my stories, which I was already planning out. If I came up with a story wherein—oh, let's say, Moses Magnum was creating a super-volcano in the middle of Kansas … I could mix and match Avengers from both coasts to assemble a select team to deal with the challenge.

It was never my intent for the West Coast branch to be spun off into a separate series. But, as I said, *WCA* sold so well that a decision was made to turn it into a regular monthly book—written and drawn by somebody else. In a way, Bob and I were victims of our own success.

From a marketing standpoint, it sort of made sense. Steve Englehart was returning to Marvel, and there was obviously some interest in having him write a series that would recapture the excitement that he'd made with *The Avengers* in the '70s. And he and Al Milgrom had always worked well together. I certainly never blamed them.

But things could have been handled better by the office. The *West Coast Avengers* series was already a done deal, by the time I was told. Suddenly, I had only half of the Avengers I thought I was going to have. I had to scrap plans for about a year's worth of stories, and scramble to devise new ones. I was months getting caught back up.

Could have been worse, though. At least, both *Avengers* titles were under the same editor.

AUSHENKER: ***How did you feel about Englehart's take on* WCA *and where he and artist Al Milgrom took the long-running series after your version?***

STERN: Geez, that was what … 26, 27 years ago? At this point, the only thing I remember about Steve's and Al's stories were that they went off in their own

Spin Cycle

(above) Graviton vs. the left-coasters on the Hall/Breeding cover to issue #3 (Nov. 1984) of the limited series. (left) Iron Man gets an eyeful of Tigra in *WCA* vol. 1 #1.

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I Am Iron Man!

Jim Rhodes proves his mettle as Iron Man to mouthy Hawkeye on page 5 of the fourth issue of the *West Coast Avengers* mini. From the Stern/Hall/Breeding combo.

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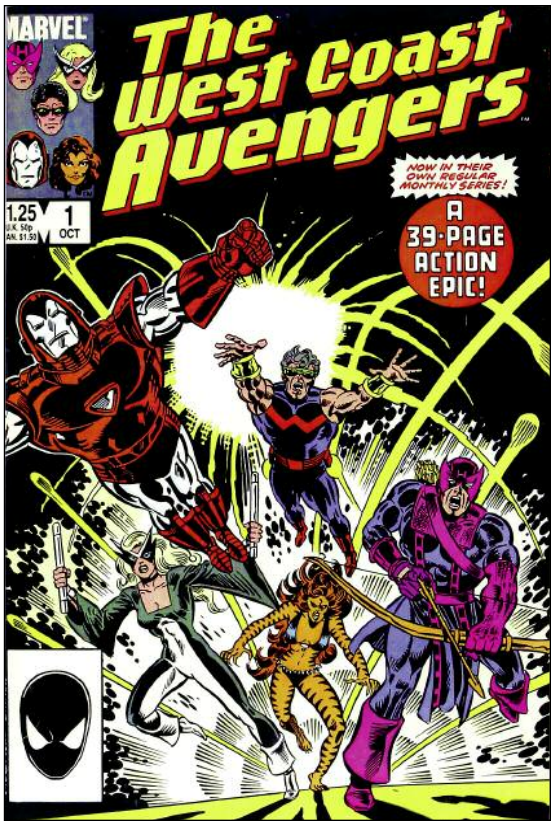
direction. Didn't they have Wonder Man become a motion-picture action hero? Nothing wrong with that. But my plan was that—in his free time—Simon [Williams, a.k.a. Wonder Man] would have become the world's greatest stunt man.

AUSHENKER: ***Was it a fun challenge working with the Jim Rhodes Iron Man and the overall dissatisfaction Hawkeye and others had with dealing with this ersatz Iron Man?***

STERN: Hey, Rhodey *was* a real Iron Man. He just wasn't the original. And I don't think the team really had time to become dissatisfied. After all, most of them hadn't known that Tony Stark was Iron Man … at least, not at that point in time.

AUSHENKER: ***Looking back, how do you feel about the miniseries in respect to your canon of writing achievements with* Amazing Spider-Man*,* Doctor Strange*, etc.? Do you consider it a major or minor note in your body of comics work?***

STERN: I'd say that it's a nice little sidebar to my *Avengers* stories. It was very nice to see it collected in a hardcover edition after all these years.



Return Engagement

Cover to the first issue (Oct. 1985) of the *WCA* ongoing monthly. Art by Al Milgrom and Joe Sinnott.

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STEVE ENGLEHART

In 2008, Steve Englehart, writer of the West Coast Avengers *series, told this reporter how he decided on setting the group's headquarters in the affluent Los Angeles neighborhood of Pacific Palisades. He had driven down from his home base in Oakland, California, to visit his cousin, who lived in Westchester at the time. The cousin drove Englehart on a day-long tour around the L.A. area, describing each of the enclaves, while Englehart scribbled notes on an AAA map. They drove down the coast past Manhattan Beach and Palos Verdes, over to Long Beach, up the 710 past Compton, to downtown Los Angeles, Mulholland Drive, Topanga Canyon, and Pacific Palisades, winding up in Santa Monica.*

Through this road trip, Englehart gained a comprehensive, if superficial, understanding of L.A., and he decided that the sunny, hammy, well-heeled West Coast Avengers would be stationed in Pacific Palisades, while the more secretive Green Lantern Corps set up their headquarters on Mulholland.

AUSHENKER: ***You had already quit writing comics when you received the* West Coast Avengers *assignment…***

STEVE ENGLEHART: I was working for Atari at the time. I was doing game design and writing manuals.

AUSHENKER: ***Did you think you had left comics for good?***

ENGLEHART: Yeah, up until that Sunday night. Both [Marvel editor-in-chief Jim] Shooter and [DC Comics executive editor Dick] Giordano asked me to come work for them. I told them, I'm not writing

comics anymore. I got home on Sunday and my boss at Atari said they were selling the company and we were going to get laid off. Out of that came *Green Lantern* on the DC side. [Mark] Gruenwald was the editor on *The Avengers* and was starting up a *Vision/Scarlet Witch* series. They gave me Roger Stern's four-issue thing [the *WCA* follow-up]. It wasn't till later that I heard that Roger was unhappy with this. I thought, I could either look for work on Silicon Valley with the 1,000 others who got dumped or I could go where they can't compete with me.

Giordano was an old friend. He knew me as a person. I played square with him and he played square with me … I turned everything in on time. I don't remember ever giving an editor a sleepless night. I had a history with both companies at the time—frankly, I was a big enough get for both of them.

AUSHENKER: ***While working at Atari, did any co-workers know you had made a name in comics?***

ENGLEHART: I just low-keyed it. Now and then someone would say, "Oh, you're Steve Englehart!"

AUSHENKER: ***What was your favorite book to write during this period?***

ENGLEHART: *Green Lantern* was my favorite. I didn't dislike [the others], but *Green Lantern* was really fun.

AUSHENKER: ***How did these characters come together?***

ENGLEHART: Gruenwald did a four-part *Hawkeye* miniseries. He decided to give him a girlfriend and he was doing a take-off on the archer and the bird girlfriend [DC's Green Arrow and Black Canary] from the other company, so Black Canary became Mockingbird.

I know when they were putting the WCA together with Hawkeye in as leader, then Mockingbird. I guess Wonder Man was in the movies, so he made sense. Tigra—they needed a cute girl. I thought that the group was people picked because they were in the neighborhood, but not a very organic group. They didn't function as an organic team.

This was Hawkeye's chance to run a team. He's a second banana. He wants to do better. But then I looked at the group, and this is not Iron Man, Cap, Vision, Witch, and Thor.

AUSHENKER: ***Did you see* West Coast Avengers *as a serious Avengers book?***

ENGLEHART: It was going to be a less serious visual thing. Milgrom's stuff is more lighthearted. There was no way we were going to compete with whoever was drawing the Avengers.

I like Milgrom's stuff. And Hawkeye was a natural comedian. I mean, I called [WCA] the WACkos! They were the looser California version of the whole thing. I really took the approach was that now the *West Coast Avengers* book was the real *Avengers* book. And we did outsell them. Putting sincerity into stuff, that's one thing I really I pride myself on—we were making that book a serious contender to be a book you should read. I don't



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Bashful Benji, Avenger

Yep, that's the Thing, as an Avenger! Original cover art to *West Coast Avengers* (ongoing) #9 (June 1986), courtesy of its artist, Al Milgrom. Inks by Joe Sinnott.

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know if I would've done this any differently than if I wrote the [flagship] *Avengers*.

AUSHENKER: ***Did you get along with the top brass?***

ENGLEHART: Shooter and I had this interesting relationship. Shooter liked to have rules. When I came back, some of those rules didn't make sense to me and I talked to him and he respected me. He had a rule you can't use the word "supervillain" because no one uses that in real life. [But] in the Marvel Universe, people would make the distinction between Dr. Doom and the guy who knocked over a liquor store, [so Shooter] allowed me to use the word "supervillain." I do think that Shooter wanted to run the Marvel Universe that we all knew and loved. He just wanted to make the trains run on time.

When they hired Tom DeFalco [as editor-in-chief], they said, "Okay, we're changing the rules." It was clear that what they wanted to do was cash out. So they thought, "Let's do lots of #1 issues and let's have five Thor magazines and let's run it into the ground." In a way, Shooter was the bulwark against that.

AUSHENKER: ***Any thoughts in particular about Mockingbird?***

ENGLEHART: The thing that fascinated me about Mockingbird—before that, she was a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent. They don't play by the same rules as the heroes. It came to that point where the Phantom Rider drugged her and raped her, although I never spelled it out. And she dropped him off a cliff. [***Interviewer's note:*** This took place in *West Coast Avengers* #23, one of Englehart's all-time favorite issues.]

AUSHENKER: ***Whose choice was adding the lone-wolf character Moon Knight to the cast?***

ENGLEHART: I did. With the Avengers, every once in a while, we had to change the line-up, that was part of the Avengers shtick. Moon Knight had such a complex history with Frenchie and Khonshu and whatever, it was hard to integrate into the group. He wasn't being used. He could've been a Defender just as easily. When I did the whole time travel thing, I was able to play with the ancient Egyptian god. He worked well in that.

AUSHENKER: ***What other characters did you enjoy working with?***

ENGLEHART: I always had a soft spot for Hank Pym. He's the guy who loses all the time. Hawkeye was good, Mockingbird was good, Iron Man was good while he was there, the Thing was good while he was there—I always pre-determined that Thing would leave.

AUSHENKER: ***Were there characters you didn't like, that were tougher for you to write?***

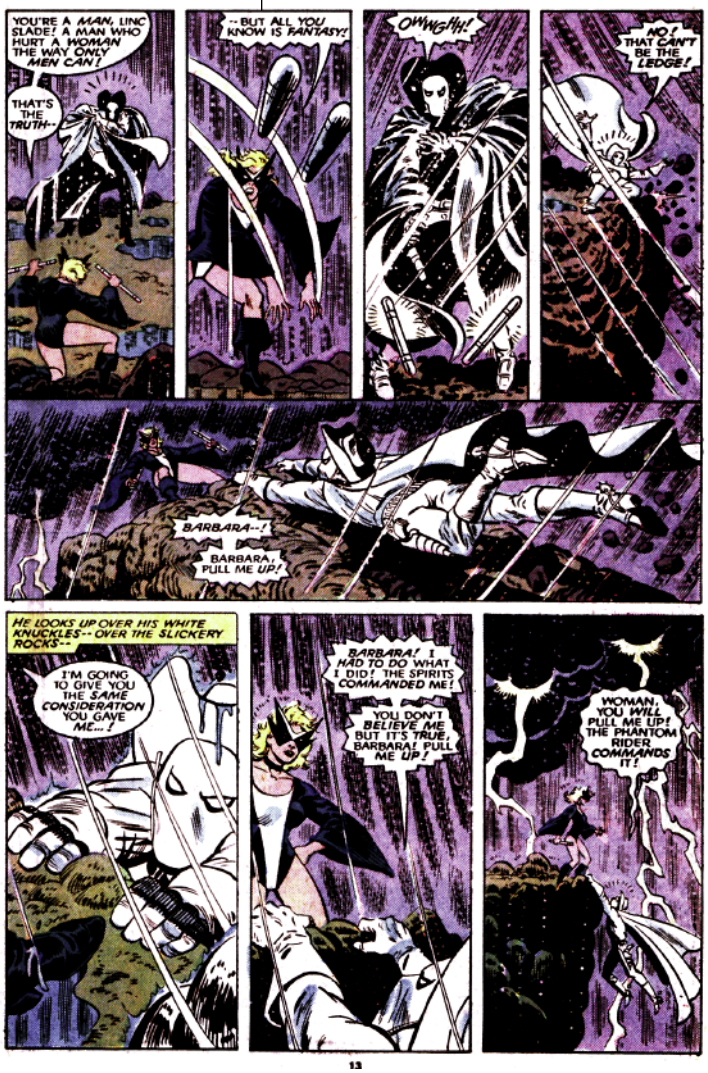
ENGLEHART: Tigra—all she was was sexy. It was hard to come up with anything to do with her. She had no supporting cast, no history. There was not much to build on.

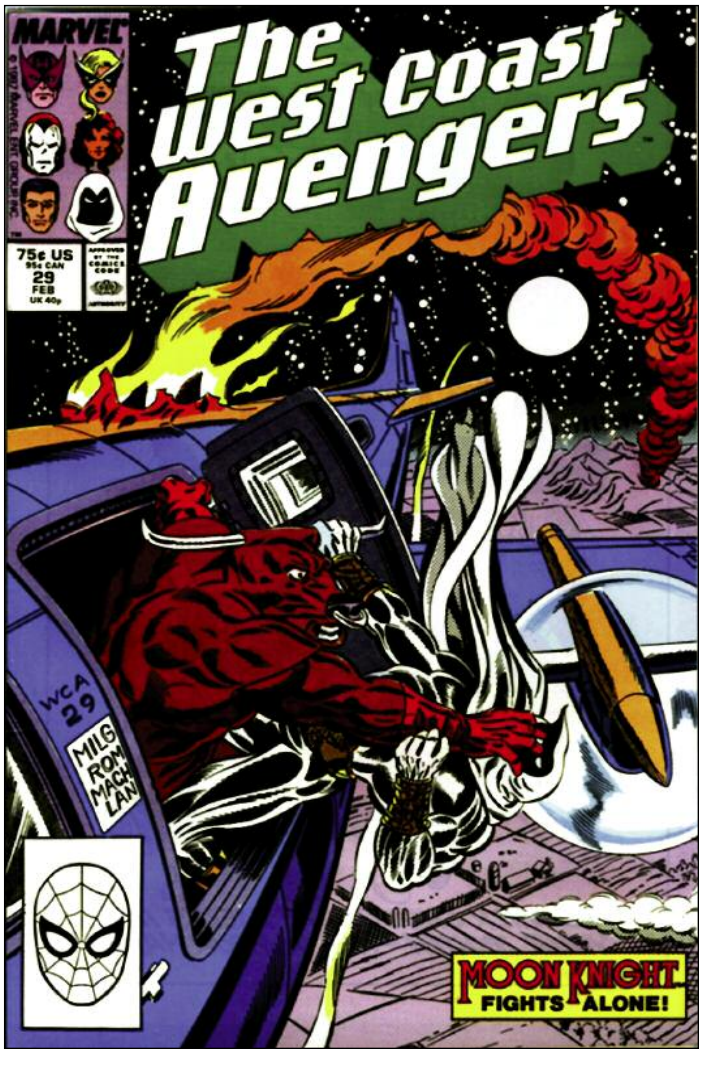
The other guy I wasn't that happy with was Wonder Man. I had brought him back as the last thing I did on *The Avengers* in the '70s. The thing that was interesting to me was that he was dead for a long time—here's this guy who has been dead. Nobody *really* dies in comics,

These Kids Don't Play Well with Others

(left) The Mockingbird/Phantom Rider showdown from *WCA* #23, one of Englehart's favorite tales. (right) Loner Moon Knight as an Avenger. Cover to *WCA* #29 (Feb. 1988) by Milgrom and Mike Machlan.

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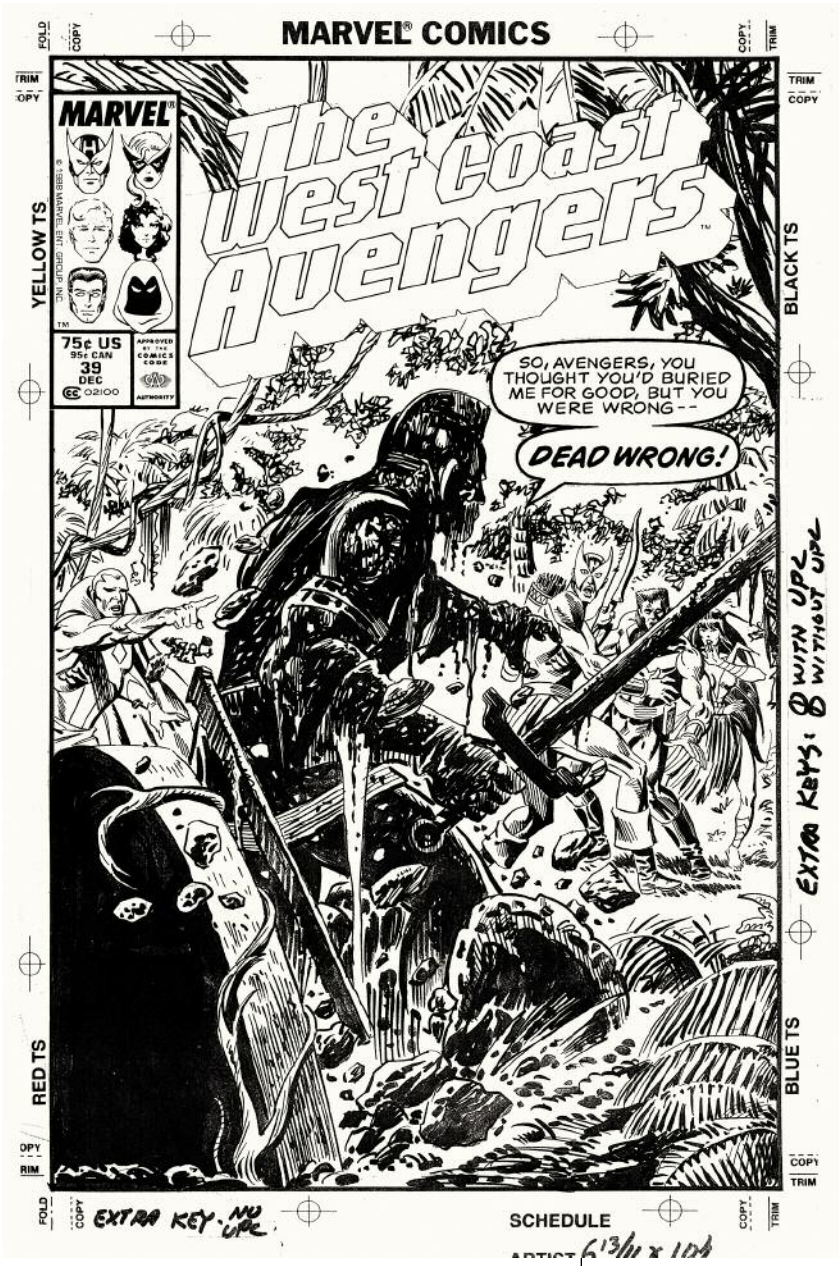




Another Risen Avenger

Swordsman makes a startling return on this Milgrom/Machlan original cover to *WCA* #39 (Dec. 1988)—also featuring Englehart's Mantis. Art courtesy of Al Milgrom.

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but I wanted to play with the fact that he was on the other side and that's why I brought him in as a zombie. Then I left the company and Shooter got the book [as writer]. By the time I got *this* book and they said it's got Wonder Man in it, he was a totally different character, kind of this third-rate Arnold Schwarzenegger.

But I can't say I never got super-enthused with Wonder Man. When Gruenwald and I came up with the new costume with the W motif—we thought it was brilliant, but nobody else did.

AUSHENKER: ***Why did you leave Marvel the second time, in 1989? You did a few unorthodox things in the books you were writing*—Fantastic Four, Silver Surfer—*that rankled the editors and went against Marvel's corporate grain. What was the sticking point with* West Coast Avengers*?***

ENGLEHART: I came up with Mantis and they said, "No, we don't like Mantis. We don't want Mantis in this book." Well, I'm writing it and she's my character and it's my storyline. If you look in #38, there are panels where she's standing there with a lot of space over her head because they took out the dialogue.

With *Silver Surfer*, they told me, "You have six issues and you're out of there." In *Fantastic Four*, I had been doing this thing where Crystal was carrying on with Johnny Storm and her husband Pietro was crazy. I wrote a story to fit that arc in which she says, "I'm doing this because the family needs me to do this, but I don't like you"—and they took all that out … I ended up taking my name off of there.

West Coast Avengers was the most brutal of them all. They said, "You can't do this." There was interference on the last couple of issues when I started to split the team up between Hawkeye and Mockingbird—some were siding with her and some with him. There was a schism right down through the Avengers. It was really when I brought in Mantis [that] they told me, "We don't want Mantis."

They just took Mantis out. With the same pictures, Ralph Macchio wrote in all the dialogue. And I didn't know that till I saw this in print. They didn't tell me—they just did it. It became very quickly untenable.

AUSHENKER: ***What did you think of the John Byrne run that followed yours?***

ENGLEHART: Byrne turning Vision into a toaster—that was not a popular thing to do. On the one hand, I didn't pay attention. This is not going to make John spit out his Corn Flakes, but I'm not into the "I'm here, now everything changes" attitude. I didn't like the way he handled it.

AUSHENKER: ***What do you think of the current Marvel and DC comics that are still rehashing concepts you inspired in the '70s, such as with the "Death of Captain America" storyline?***

ENGLEHART: Now everybody knows Captain America and Green Lantern and Iron Man, but the comics are selling [just] 40,000 [an issue].

I don't think the books are as good. You don't get much bang for your buck anymore. I don't know that your general person on the street thinks they're children's trash, but it is a childish medium and I can get my fix by going to the movies three times a year.

I couldn't give you a definitive answer as to why the sales are so bad, but I do think that the product is worse. I tend to think that the whole thing ended in the '80s.

One of the first things Marvel did from House of Ideas to cash cow [was], they got rid of me. They told me, "We don't like the *FF*, *Silver Surfer*, *West Coast Avengers*. It's too volatile. You're gonna have to dial it back." The upshot of that is that they clamped down, took out a lot of the ingenuity, and, four years later, they were bankrupt. They lost a lot of the audience that they had. It was a big sea change in the '90s.



***MICHAEL AUSHENKER is a Los Angeles-based writer and cartoonist. Visit* cartoonflophouse.com.**



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ASSEMBLE THEM ALL!

FlashBack

AVENGERS ACTION FIGURES IN THE *BACK ISSUE* ERA

by Chris Franklin



Earth's Mightiest Megos

Courtesy of Chris Franklin, this article's writer, Mego's 8-inch action figures of a quintet of Quinjet-riders: (left to right) Falcon, Iron Man (with his '70s faceplate nose), Captain America, Hulk, and Thor.

Avengers © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Walk into any retail store with a toy department today, and you'll probably find figures based on Earth's Mightiest Heroes. The cinematic adventures of Iron Man, Thor, and Captain America have increased their profile so much that toys from each film are a sure bet.

But that wasn't always the case. During the childhoods of most *BACK ISSUE* readers, the selection of heroes wasn't nearly as great. Those characters that made it onto bubbled cards were a rare breed indeed. But the Avengers did assemble … at least in part. In their early years of the 1960s, Avengers figures were pretty scarce, but that would change in the next decade. The story of who made it and who didn't, and why, is truly a tale to astonish. From Mego to Mattel and beyond, this is the story of the Avengers in plastic!

THE MEGO DECADE

The Mego Corporation released its World's Greatest Super-Heroes line in 1972. Utilizing 8-inch-tall bodies and removable cloth costumes, Mego produced figures of both Marvel and DC characters [as well as Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan and Robert E. Howard's Conan; at the time those savage heroes headlined their own series at DC and Marvel, respectively]. Between 1973 and 1976, Mego assembled five of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, starting, of course, with the First Avenger himself.

Mego's Captain America lacked the white lower-sleeve portion and red gloves of his comic-book uniform. Today, while most collectors agree that while Captain America is a must-have in the line, his execution left a bit to be desired: "I think Mego had to cut corners on Captain America because he had an accessory, so he lost some detail as a result," says Brian Heiler of the Mego Museum (*www.megomuseum.com*). "I wouldn't have changed that, mind you—the shield makes the figure."

Captain America's Bronze Age partner, the Falcon, was faithfully adapted by Mego, the exception to his comics costume being brown flesh hands instead of white gloves. Unfortunately, Mego was known to use whatever parts it had available at the time, and some Falcon figures have hairy brown hands, pulled from the inventory of Mego's concurrent Planet of the Apes toy line. Though done without malice, it still raises the eyebrows of collectors 35 years later.

Tony Stark's alter ego, Iron Man, had an impressive Mego wardrobe. Iron Man's fisted, cuffed, and coiled gauntlets were a major improvement over the plastic "oven mitts" worn by other Mego superheroes. One oddity that puzzles people about Mego's Iron Man is that his helmet was sculpted with a nose. Some surmise that Mego originally intended the Iron Man sculpt for Dr. Doom, but Iron Man did indeed have a nose on his helmet in the comics of the time.

Mego's Incredible Hulk was bulkier and more muscular than the standard Mego figure, but he was strangely shorter as well. His stature did not diminish the figure's popularity, according to Heiler: "Hulk may be short, but he's a testament to Mego's simple but effective style



and he's likely one the bestselling Mego superheroes as a result."

The Mighty Thor rounded out the team in 1976, and showed how far Mego had come since its earliest heroes. With his rooted blond synthetic hair, chrome-plated helmet, newly sculpted boots, heat-sealed plastic discs on his tunic, and, of course, his hammer Mjolnir, the God of Thunder cut one impressive action figure.

Fans of the Avengers comics had to wonder why some of their favorites were overlooked at the time. Amongst collectors polled, the Android Avenger was the most-requested missing member, as collector Tim Arnold attests that he wanted "a Vision figure, big time! Of course, a Hawkeye would have been sweet as well."

Which villains would have been most favored? Collector Bill McFarland offers, "Definitely Kang and/or Ultron—easy and cheap [for Mego], as it would take only one figure to take on the Avengers."

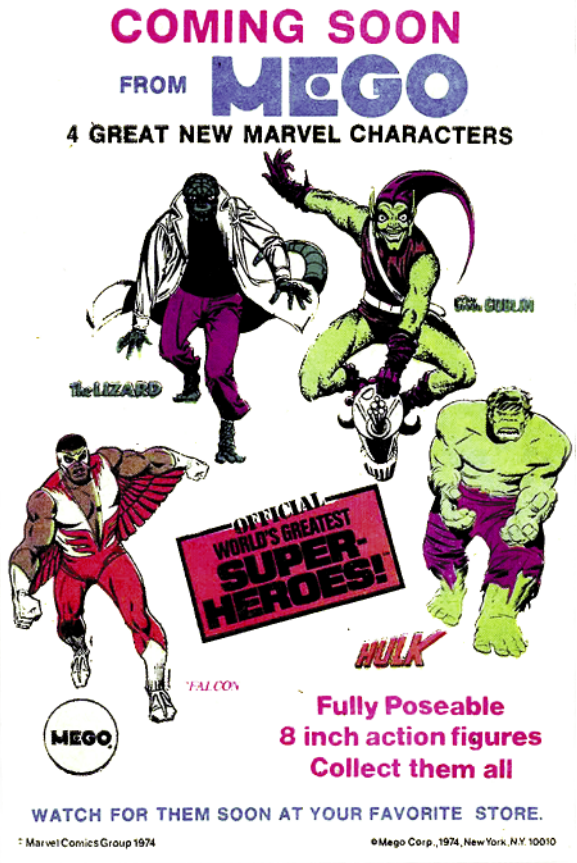
Despite the continued popularity of the World's Greatest Super-Heroes and an expansion of the line into different-size formats, Mego succumbed to bad investments in other licenses and suffered additional financial woes, and shut its doors in 1983.

FLY AVENGERS FLY!

Most Avengers-related toys were marketed under the individual heroes' logo, or a general Marvel Super Heroes banner. But collector Bill McFarland is fond of a set of toys from the 1970s that actually managed to use the Avengers name proper:

"Fleetwood made a line of launchable gliders under the name 'Fly Avengers Fly.' It was the first time I saw the Vision on a toy, and couldn't resist." Although Fleetwood made gliders of everyone's favorite android, plus Iron Man and Thor, the company also inexplicably included the Human Torch under the Avengers logo!





SECRET TOY COMPANY WARS

After the demise of Mego, industry giant Mattel made a pitch to DC Comics for the license to its characters, who were then viewed as more recognizable. DC passed, opting instead for Kenner's Super Powers proposal, and Mattel, not wanting to lose any market share to Kenner, reworked its pitch to focus on Marvel characters. Working closely with then-Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, the result was a short-lived toy line and two comics miniseries known as *Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars*.

The Avengers could only claim three members and one villain amongst Mattel's offerings. Some of these figure choices were highly questionable, sidestepping popular, evergreen characters for obscure ones that never set foot in a *Secret Wars* comic.

The main gimmicks of the Secret Wars line were their "Secret Shield" accessories. Each figure came with a round (heroes) or square (villains) plastic shield with a lenticular (flicker) lens. When preprinted paper inserts were tilted inside the shield, the image changed.

But all of this left Captain America without his traditional shield. The Sentinel of Liberty had to make do with his flickering accessory like his other fellow heroes. (At least they got his costume right.)

Iron Man is considered the best-realized figure in the line by collectors. His classic armor is faithfully reproduced. Oddly enough, although Jim Rhodes



Mego-a-Go-Go (above) Blister-carded Captain America Mego figure. (right) A comics house ad promoting new Marvel Mego figures. (below) The Fly Avengers Fly offerings, featuring the wrong-team choice of the Torch.

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The First Avengers

Pre–Bronze Age, "Batmania" of the mid-1960s inspired a wave of "Marvelmania" merchandising, some of which featured dis-assembled Avengers. Seen here: The second issue—with flicker ring—of Captain Action's Captain America uniform, released by Ideal Toys in 1967. While Marx Toys mass-produced nicely sculpted plastic figurines of six Marvel characters, the company's oddities pictured here like this Cap wind-up and trike-riding Thor are hard to find. And this 1967 pinback from Button World may be the first collectible to bear the actual Avengers brand!



Captain America, Thor, and Avengers © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.
Captain Action TM & © Captain Action Enterprises.

was the Iron Man participating in the *Secret Wars* comic, and the secret identity listed on the back of the Golden Avenger's action-figure package, one of his secret shield inserts revealed the face of… Tony Stark!

The Avengers did have a villain they could call their own in the first series. The time-traveling despot Kang's comic-book design was interpreted fairly well by Mattel, but he lacked his puffy shirt, opting for a more skin-tight look that allowed Mattel to reuse the standard torso mold for the line.

Unfortunately, Kang has the ignobility of being one of the most passed-over toys in the history of comic-based products, becoming what is known in collector circles as a "peg warmer." Brian Heiler explains, "All I can say is, Kang was a bad idea. Kids didn't have a clue who he was. I saw those sitting on shelves until about 1992."



The Falcon was the last Avenger to fly into the line in 1985. His profile in the '80s was very low, save for a few guest appearances and a brief miniseries. He never appeared in either *Secret Wars* comic-book series. Nevertheless, he is considered one of the nicest figures in the line, complete with his movable wings and his pet bird Redwing as an accessory.

By the time the dust cleared and the line was canceled, most fans of the series had to be asking, "Where was the Hulk? Where was Thor?"

Brian Heiler observes, "Hulk was likely glossed over because he required more tooling, a huge mistake as he had a high recognition factor and his own Saturday morning TV series. Mattel probably could have included twice the number of Hulk figures into the assortment and had them sell."

In addition to these very obvious glaring omissions, Heiler casts another figure vote for the team's android and bowman: "I think Vision or Hawkeye would have been colorful additions to the line."

As for potential villains, despite his legacy of unsold figures, Tim Arnold is still happy with his Kang figure: "I'm just very satisfied that made a Kang. He was the ultimate Avengers foe. Other than that, maybe a Ultron would have been fun."

Amongst collectors, one mark against the Secret Wars series is the whole concept of the line. Many fans would have preferred a more traditional Marvel toy line without a pre-conceived story-line, secret shields, etc. Among those is collector Brian Heiler:

"Mattel kind of phoned-in the Secret Wars line. Stuff like the helicopters and the motorcycles were either recycled and/or uninspired. The figures lacked certain details and the lenticular gimmick wasn't necessary. The whole line seemed like an afterthought really and paled next to Kenner's better-thought-out Super Powers line."

TOY BIZ AND BEYOND

The last 25 years have been much kinder to Avengers toys. Both Toy Biz and Hasbro have produced figures of nearly every member and foe of the team.

Earth's Mightiest Heroes have come a long way since the time when even their most powerful members may have missed a meeting in the toy aisle!



CHRIS FRANKLIN** is a graphic designer, cartoonist, husband, and father of two.* ***He would like to thank Tim Arnold, Brian Heiler, and Bill McFarland for their invaluable help.



Nobody Loves Kang (above) The peg-warming Secret Wars figure Kang, in his blister card with accessories. (center) A loose Iron Man Secret Wars figure.

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end

Michael Finn's "One Minute Later" original-art collection features classic and contemporary artists' what-might-happen-next follow-ups to iconic comics covers. *Allow us to exploit* BACK ISSUE*'s new full-color format by sharing these pulse-pounding pinups that fast-forward five unforgettable moments in Bronze Age Avengers lore. (To see more "One Minute Later" commissions, visit Michael's Comic Art Fans gallery at:* www.comicartfans.com/GalleryDetail.asp?GCat=9834*).*



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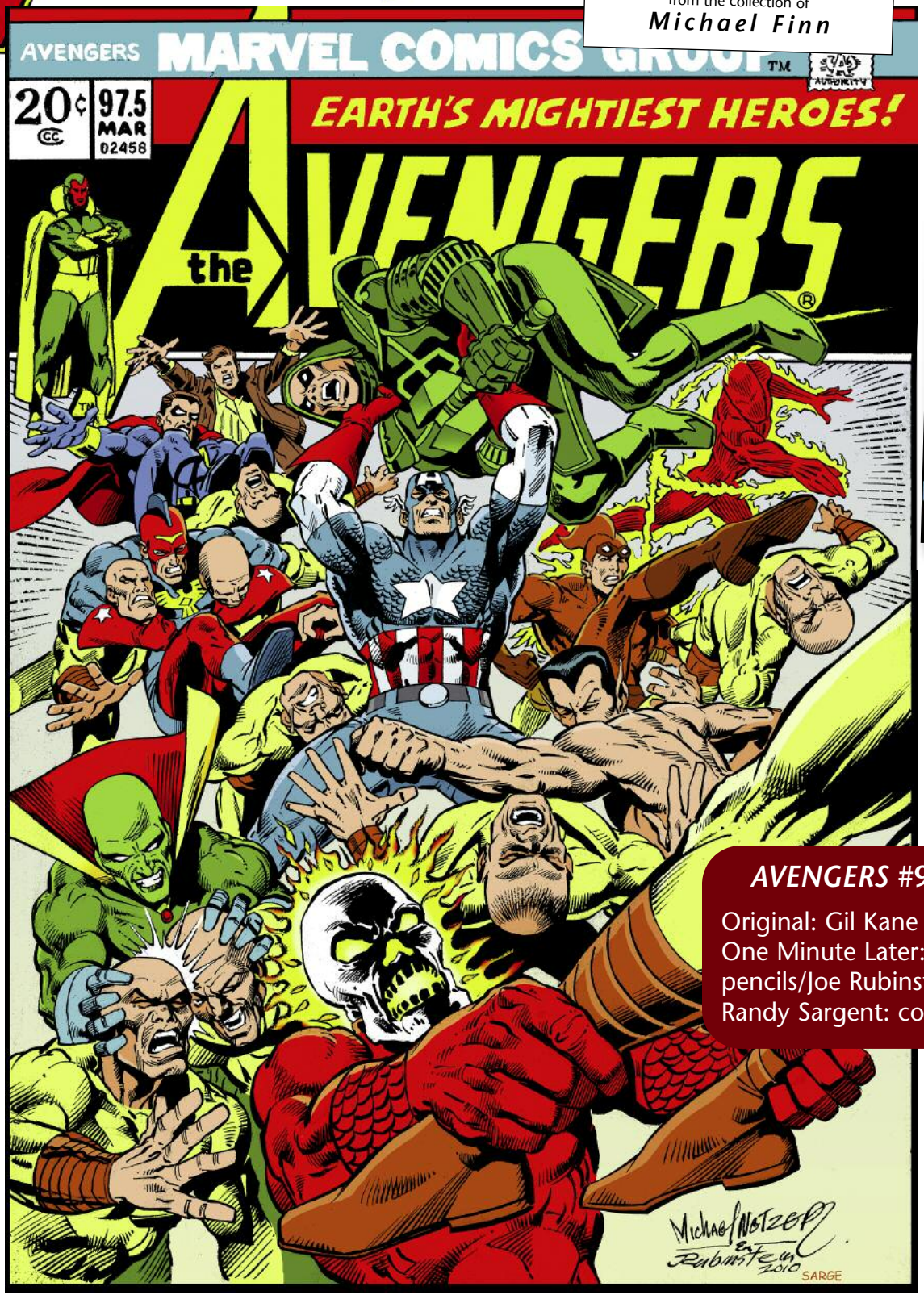


AVENGERS #93 (Nov. 1971)

Original: Neal Adams and Tom Palmer
One Minute Later: Mike Gustovich: pencils/inks/colors

AVENGERS® ONE MINUTE LATER GALLERY

from the collection of
Michael Finn





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***AVENGERS* #97 (Mar. 1972)**

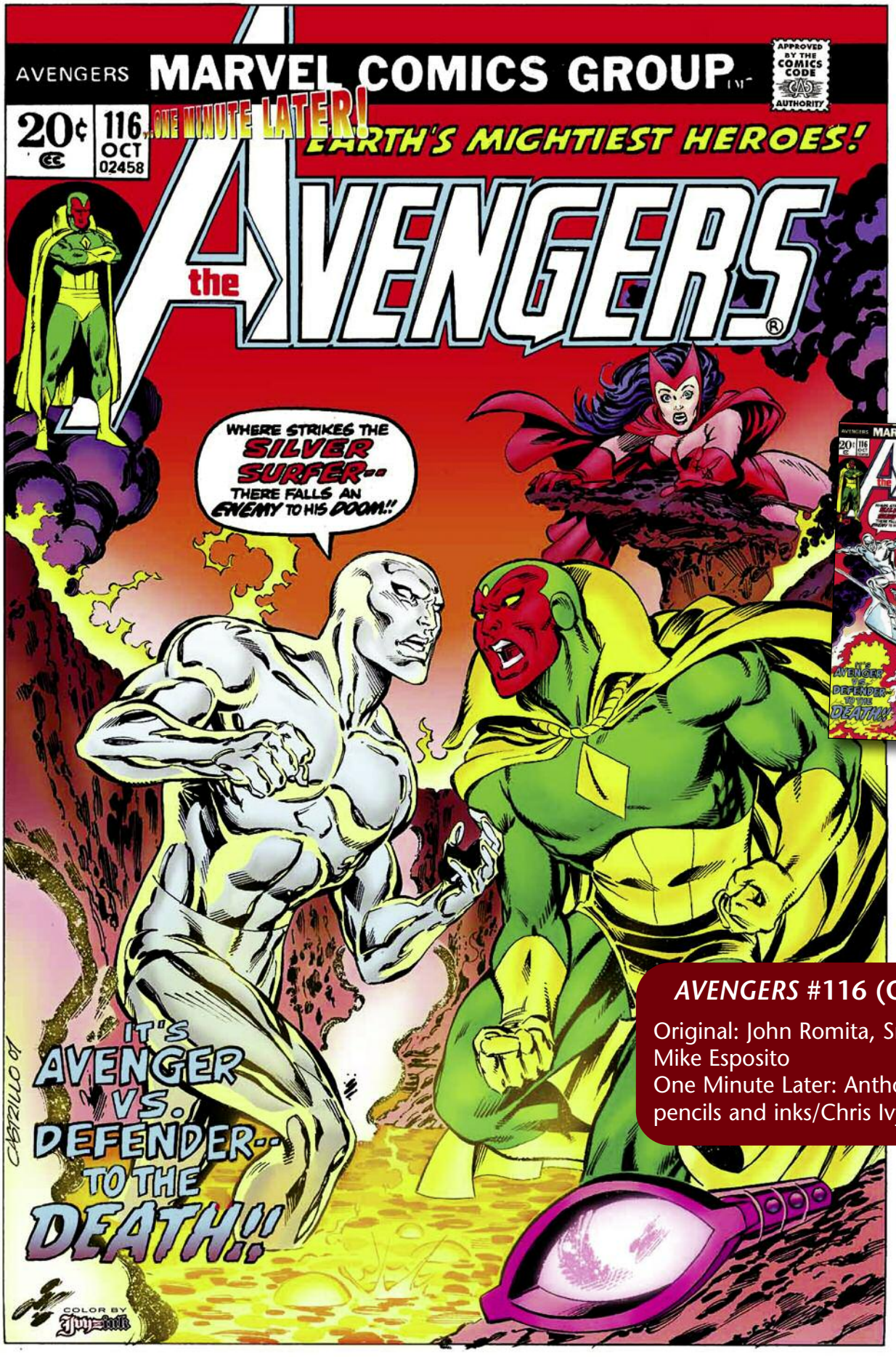
Original: Gil Kane and Bill Everett
One Minute Later: Michael Netzer: pencils/Joe Rubinstein: inks/
Randy Sargent: colors



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AVENGERS #103 (Sept. 1972)

Original: Rich Buckler and Joe Sinnott
One Minute Later: Rich Buckler: pencils and inks/Randy Sargent: colors





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AVENGERS #116 (Oct. 1973)

Original: John Romita, Sr. and Mike Esposito
One Minute Later: Anthony Castrillo: pencils and inks/Chris Ivy: colors



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AVENGERS #158 (Apr. 1977)

Original: Jack Kirby
One Minute Later: Ron Frenz: pencils and inks/Randy Sargent: colors

end

BACK TALK

Send your comments to:

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***Postal mail: Michael Eury, Editor* · BACK ISSUE**
118 Edgewood Ave. NE · Concord, NC 28025

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BILL MANTLO BENEFIT ON FACEBOOK

I've created a Facebook group that might be of interest to you and readers of *BACK ISSUE*. The group is called "ROM's Spaceknights to Benefit Bill Mantlo" (*www.facebook.com/groups/141453282624884/*). The purpose of the group is to encourage Marvel and Hasbro to team up for new *ROM* material or preferably a collection of older *ROM* material, with the proceeds going to help Bill Mantlo. I'm hoping word will get around and enough people will join to encourage Marvel and Hasbro to do this.

If there is any question of our legitimacy, please note that the group's mandate flat-out states we won't accept any money, preferring to leave that to Marvel should this come to fruition. I haven't contacted Marvel yet, preferring to wait until our numbers are big enough for Marvel to pay attention to us. I hope you will consider helping us spread the word, in the hopes of helping someone who gave so much to the 1980s Marvel Universe. Thank you.

– Andy Nystrom

Consider it done, Andy. We're always willing to lend a helping hand to Bill Mantlo, and would like to see his* ROM *collected.

– M.E.

ONE LAST APARO TRIBUTE (RE *BI* #50)

Having been born smack-dab in the middle of the '60s (1965), I was too young to see the original live-action *Batman* show when it originally aired (along with another little TV show called *Star Trek*, which I hear was somewhat successful), but Batman was still my favorite hero when I was a youngster, and the 1970s Batman was *my* Batman. I didn't know (nor did I care at the time) that this era was referred to as the "Bronze Age of Comics." I was too young to sit and analyze the hows and whys. All I knew was I liked some [comics] and not others.

The first comic with Batman that I remember getting was *Brave and the Bold* #112. It was one of the two comics my brother brought to me while I was in the hospital. The Batman in the first story looked incredible, while the one in the last story so-so. I found out later that most of the stories in it were reprints, and it turned out that only the first one was new. The difference in style was like night and day. The "new" story's Batman looked sleeker, more capable—of what, I don't know, but he certainly looked more the superhero part despite having no superpowers.



TM & © DC Comics.

All that must have been realized subconsciously, however, because all I knew at that age was that it looked so cool. The artist's name was Jim Aparo.

[***Editor's note:* The 100-page Super-Spectacular The Brave and the Bold *#112 (Apr.–May 1974) headlined an all-new Batman/Mister Miracle team-up, written by Bob Haney and drawn by Jim Aparo. One of its reprint backups was* B&B *#59's Batman/Green Lantern team-up, by Haney and Silver Age stalwarts Ramona Fradon and Charles Paris.***]**

I found myself liking artists who drew Batman in the same style. Not necessarily copying Mr. Aparo, but with that same lean, sleek look: the long, flowing cape that came almost all the way to Batman's ankles; the high, pointed ears on the cowl (although not as ridiculously high as they got later on, as in "KnightsEnd," I think); and, small detail though it is, the capsule–like containers on the utility belt.

Through the years, I found three artists stood out, so far as their Batman art was concerned: Dick Giordano, Jim Aparo, and Neal Adams.

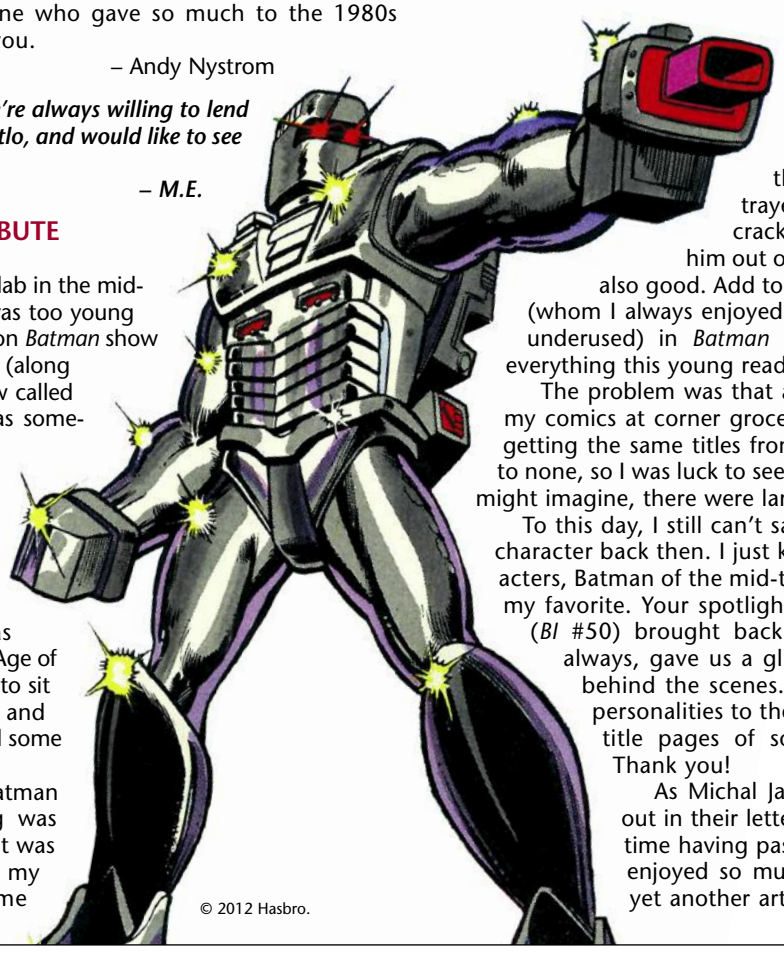
I was never a fan of the older, impossibly square-jawed Batman drawings. To me, those three artists captured Batman beautifully. He looked real the way they drew him, yet there was still that sense of eeriness to him that made him so effective against the criminals he fought.

All that said, I also enjoyed the way Robin was being portrayed—more serious, yet able to crack the occasional joke. Seeing him out on his own more and more was also good. Add to that his team-ups with Batgirl (whom I always enjoyed seeing and thought was way underused) in *Batman Family*, and you had almost everything this young reader could ask for.

The problem was that at the time, I was still getting my comics at corner grocery stores, and the chances of getting the same titles from month to month were slim to none, so I was luck to see one issue in five or 10. As you might imagine, there were large gaps in my collection.

To this day, I still can't say why I was so drawn to the character back then. I just know that, of all of DC's characters, Batman of the mid-to-late '70s and early '80s was my favorite. Your spotlight on the Bronze Age Batman (*BI* #50) brought back a lot of memories and, as always, gave us a glimpse of what was going on behind the scenes. You also help put faces and personalities to the names I saw so often on the title pages of so many books growing up. Thank you!

As Michal Jacot and Dave Barker pointed out in their letters, the saddest part of all this time having passed since these comics we all enjoyed so much came out is learning that yet another artist or writer has passed away.



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From your pages, I've learned of the passing of Mark Gruenwald, Dick Giordano, and the man whom you might say was responsible for my getting into Batman in the first place, Jim Aparo. Although apparently five years late, this was the first I'd heard of it and I extend my belated condolences to his family and friends. He touched a lot of lives with his work and will be missed. (And now I just picked up *BI* #51 and find that my favorite *Daredevil* artist, Gene Colan, has also passed away—this is a trend I would love to stop happening. There won't be any of the really ones left if it doesn't!)

Now, just so you won't get swelled heads thinking I liked EVERYTHING about your anniversary issue, I'm afraid I can't say it was completely perfect. Why? I know I'm probably in the minority of this, but I have to say it. I was never a member of the "Frank Miller is the next best thing to God" cult. In fact, I feel he totally *ruined* Batman. Yes, I say ruined, and your inclusion here of an article on his *Dark Knight* put a damper on an issue that was, up to that point, perfect. Because of it, I'm afraid I'll have to give the issue a 9 instead of the 10 it would otherwise have been. Oh, well, better luck with issue #100!

Before I leave, though I do have a question. It's one that's been bugging me for years, so I hope you can help me. Back about 35 years ago, there was a comic with Batman and Robin in which I believe Batman was supposed to dive into a giant tub of water at a circus … except someone had put a spear pointing straight up from the bottom of this pool for Robin to impale himself on. I can't find which issue this is from, and sometimes it feels I must have dreamed the whole thing, but if you can tell me which one it is, I'd be very, very grateful. I can't even sure that it wasn't Batman who was supposed to be diving into the pool to be subsequently killed—I just know one of them was. Please, HELP!

– Christopher Boucher

That issue is drawing a blank from ye ed, so I'll flash the Batsignal to call out to* BI*'s Batmaniacs: Can anyone identify this story (and issue number) for Christopher?

– M.E.

"THE LONE SCRIBBLER" REMEMBERS ADRIENNE ROY

***The following letter regarding the death of DC color artist Adrienne Roy (whose final interview appeared in* BI *#51) was emailed to Anthony Tollin, who kindly shared it with* BACK ISSUE.**



I just found out yesterday that Adrienne had passed back in December, and I am devastated by this. I'm not sure if she mentioned me or not, but I was the little boy who used to write her as "The Lone Scribbler" more than 30 years ago. I was surprised at the serendipity when I found out she was living here in Austin in 2009, and was very happy we were able to connect for lunch and dinner a couple of times. The last time I saw her I picked her up at her apartment and took her to the Oasis on Lake Travis for dinner.

I remember her mentioning all the awesome stuff you were doing with Sanctum. She bragged on you quite a bit.

Anyway, if you're interested in reading what a profound and lasting impact she had on me, feel free to read this, copied from a note I posted on Facebook:

When I was a little boy of 10 years old growing up in southern WV, like most boys in those days I loved to read comic books. But I didn't just read them, I absorbed them … I knew the origin stories, the arch nemeses, etc. They were wonderful … they didn't insult my intelligence like a lot of the dumbed-down juvenile fiction was prone to do. They were amazing and fantastic stories of people doing impossible things. And for me, they were an escape … most of my daily life felt rather uninspired at the time … it was all coalmines, coal trucks, pothole-filled roads, and mountains. I loved the mountains, because they were a giant, endless playground for me to play in … but they also made me feel isolated … cut off from the rest of the world.

So comic books were my escape. When I was 3 or 4, my brother Dusty had garbage bags full of them. I couldn't yet read, but I would try to figure out the stories from the pictures. Several were literally falling apart because I would get to the end and would immediately start reading it over again.

By the time I was 10, I wanted to work on my own comic books … I mean, think about it … these people get paid money to draw comic books! And they lived somewhere where people worked on creative things, not mining coal or driving trucks or other more mundane pursuits. So I thought, how do I get in on this deal? Hell, I can draw pretty good!

So a Batman comic book I was reading had the phone number for the offices of DC comics in New York City … so being naive and not knowing what a "phone bill" was, late one evening I called the number.

A friendly female voice answered the phone. "I want to draw comic books," I must have said, or something similar. She was not dismissive. She did not say, "Sorry, kid, I got deadlines to meet." She seemed genuinely interested in talking to this 10-year-old boy with the hillbilly accent.

She told me her name was Adrienne Roy. She was 25 years old, and she was a comic-book colorist. "Cool! What books do you color?" I asked.

"Oh, you know … *Superman* … *Batman* … *Teen Titans* … *Warlord*…" she kept naming them off.

I looked on the credits of the book I was holding and sure enough, there she was, "Adrienne Roy."

Wow … here was a lady who was *directly* involved in the creation of some of my favorite comic books and she was being so nice to me. We talked for a while and she said, "Call me back any time!" And I did.

I also wrote to her … using the pen name "The Lone Scribbler" … commenting on stories and such. She mailed me Christmas cards, pictures, wrote me letters, etc. She always addressed them "John Nagle, a.k.a. The Lone Scribbler" … it was so great. I was on Cloud Nine. She even sent me two sets of original colored pages for two Batman comics, where Batman comes to WV to battle the villain Blockbuster, who, of course, had gone to work in a coalmine. She signed them, "To John, colorfully yours, Adrienne."

Well, little boys grow up, and though I never completely stopped reading comic books (42 years old and counting!), I did slow down, and eventually lost touch with Adrienne.

Fast-forward 30 years.

I was now a self-employed software engineer living in Austin, Texas. One day in 2009, marveling at the ability of the Internet to dig up past acquaintances, I Googled "Adrienne Roy." To my happy surprise, I discovered that she was now living in … AUSTIN, TEXAS! She was no longer coloring comics … nowadays they use special computer software and better offset printing

techniques to produce richer color and smooth gradients, and so she decided to change careers and become a hypnotherapist.

So I emailed her ... "Hey, do you remember me? The Lone Scribbler??" Surely not ... I must have been such a nuisance." But to my pleasant surprise, she enthusiastically remembered me and was so happy that I had looked her up. She was now in her mid-50s, she had a daughter going to UT, and so decided to move to Austin to be near her.

So we quickly scheduled lunch, and so it was more than 30 years after my first conversation with her, I would finally meet her face-to-face for lunch at Mikado, my favorite restaurant in Austin. We had a conversation that spanned the 30-year gap since our last conversation. It was epic. And wonderful.

We had lunch again a month or so later, and to my surprise she showed up with a bunch of stuff that I had sent her ... a picture of me sitting on a bar stool at the local sundry store and several letters. She actually had kept all of that stuff, and here she was 1/3 of a century later with them still in her possession. I asked her if I could borrow them to scan, and she said, of course, "But I want them back! They're precious to me!"

Well, I scanned them and we corresponded back and forth a bit after that, but we never seemed to have schedules that worked for another lunch. I was traveling a lot and she was busy with a variety of things.

Today, to my sad surprise, I found out that she passed away this past December after a year-long battle with cancer. I was shocked ... I had no idea, because the last time I saw her had to have been just before she found out.

Obviously when I think of her, I think about my childhood ... of how she was so nice to that little 10-year-old redneck-sounding comic-book nerd who came to see her as a lifeline to the outside world. She could have been a typical, busy adult ... too busy with deadlines and other excitement in her life to deal with some little kid in southern West Virginia. But she wasn't, and she made a lasting impression on that boy.

So even though she passed in December, a part of my childhood died today and for that I am sad. But I am very happy that I did finally get to meet her and tell her in person how much it meant to that little 10-year-old, starry-eyed dreamer that she took the time to be so nice to way back in 1978.

May your afterlife be as filled with color as was your life on Earth.

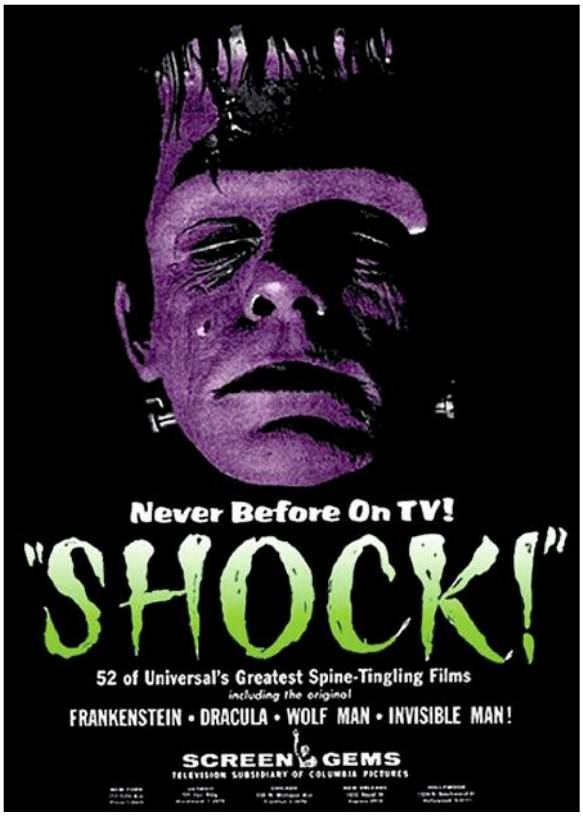
– John Nagle, The Lone Scribbler

THIS READER'S IN SHOCK!

As a longtime reader of *BACK ISSUE*, I have to say that the #52 Mystery Special was outstanding! An excellent variety of titles and characters were presented that really offered a sense of time and place for the reader to relive a great period of mystery history.

In his article, "Hosts of Horror," Dewey Cassell states that the *Shock Theater* films were released to TV by Universal Pictures. To clarify, while the films *were* from the Universal catalogue, the TV package of these movies were marketed originally as SHOCK!, and were distributed by Screen Gems, the television subsidiary of Columbia Pictures.

– John Navroth @ Monster Magazine World



GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

Fun fact: The text feature in *Ghosts*, "The Files of Dr. Geist" (*BI* #52, page 27), was created and initially written by me, though I never wrote any of the comics stories featuring the shark-jumpily-nomenclatured Dr. Paul T. Geist. I did write the intro pages for a handful of issues of *Ghosts*.

Also, I provided the impetus for the revision of the *Ghosts* cover line, "True Tales of the Weird and Supernatural" (ibid). When on staff at DC I heard editor Jack C. Harris, in the office next to mine, plotting a *Ghosts* story with a freelancer. When the writer left, I asked Jack why, if the stories had to be plotted, they were referred to as "True Tales." Jack, bless his heart, grinned and immediately replied: "Well, it *is* true, they *are* tales." But the cover copy was changed soon after.

– Mike W. Barr

I've just cracked open *BACK ISSUE* #52 and hugely enjoyed the article on *Ghosts* by John Wells. As regards the cover copy tweak from "true" to "new tales of the weird and supernatural," I may have had something to do with that…

…shortly before the change, I wrote to DC "Answer Man" Bob Rozakis asking about the use of the word "true," given the standard indicia declaration that "The stories, characters and incidents mentioned in this magazine are entirely fictional. No actual persons, living or dead, are intended or should be inferred."

What Bob's reply was I can't recall, but the *Ghosts* subtitle certainly changed almost immediately. Spooky!

Anyway, thanks as ever for a great magazine. The digital-only option has to make for one of the biggest bargains in comics.

– Martin Gray

TO THE BACK ISSUE BINS!

Hello. I wanted to start off with a few words concerning the Steve Englehart interview that ran in *Alter Ego* #103 and *BACK ISSUE* #51. Englehart is one of my favorite comic-book writers, and I enjoyed the spotlight on his career. His run on *Captain America* is, in my opinion, one of the defining periods of that series, and the character of Mantis is an all-time favorite of mine. My only real complaint is that Richard Arndt did not have Englehart address the specifics behind one of his more controversial subplots, having the Falcon retconned into a street hustler, Snap Wilson, who was brainwashed by the Red Skull. After all these years, that is probably the one area of Englehart's era on *Cap* that most people still look upon with criticism, and I would have liked to see Englehart explain the reasoning behind his radical revision of the Falcon's origin.

Also, I hope that a future edition of *BI* will have a follow up interview with Englehart, this time covering his post–Bronze Age work at Marvel and DC. As I understand it, his parting from Marvel in the late '80s was abrupt and not amicable, and if he does not mind going into it, I would be interested in reading about what creative differences arose, as well as what his ultimate plans were for Hawkeye and Mockingbird, the return of Mantis, etc. I was happy that in the early 2000s Englehart did have the opportunity to briefly return to Marvel with the enjoyable *Avengers: Celestial Quest* miniseries, which enabled him to wrap up some of the loose ends concerning Mantis that were left dangling from his sudden departure.

On to *BI* #52. Bronze Age horror is not a subject that I am especially familiar with, and so I found this issue to be very informative. My favorite article was probably the retrospective of/interview with Gerry Talaoc. I was familiar with Talaoc's inks/finishes on *Incredible Hulk* and *Alpha Flight* in the 1980s, but I had no knowledge of his prior work, other than the vague awareness that he was one of the many Filipino artists who had begun working in American comics the previous decade. So much of the information in the interview was completely brand new for me. I enjoyed viewing some of Talaoc's recent paintings. He obviously has not lost his artistic touch! By the way, Talaoc is on Facebook, where he's been keeping in touch with fans. I dropped him a note saying how much I enjoyed the interview.



TM & © DC Comics.

The article on Madame Xanadu was also interesting. I am a fan of Michael Kaluta's work, and I so I became intrigued by *Xanadu* when he illustrated the "Exodus Noir" arc on the Matt Wagner-penned series. That led me to pick up the other trade paperbacks by Wagner and Amy Reeder, which I also enjoyed. "Enter Freely, Unafraid," left me interested in reading Xanadu's early appearances. I have no idea if DC will ever collect them, but at least now I know what specific back issues to keep an eye out for.

Speaking of back issues and trade paperbacks, *BI* #52 inspired me to search out both. I bought one of the *Showcase Presents: House of Mystery* volumes at a local comics shop. I also sought out issues of *Star Spangled War Stories* and *The Unknown Soldier* on eBay, and picked up about half a dozen, which contained gorgeous artwork by Dick Ayers and Gerry Talaoc (not to mention beautiful covers by Joe Kubert). So thanks once again for broadening my knowledge and interests.

I appreciated the brief look at Charlton's horror anthologies. In the last five years, I've begun picking up copies of the Charlton books here and there. They feature some incredible artwork. As good an artist as I knew Steve Ditko to be, my appreciation for him really began to grow when I read *Ghostly Haunts* #23, which contained two extremely well illustrated stories by him, "Treasure of the Tomb" and "Return Visit." (Both of those are reprinted in *Steve Ditko's 160-Page Package*, published by Robin Snyder.) And, yeah, Ditko drew a knockout depiction of Winnie the Witch. I loved seeing some original Ditko artwork on display in *BI* #52, because so much of that is rare to find. Also, thank you for presenting the *Scary Tales* cover by Joe Staton, one of my favorite artists who I have always felt was on the under-rated side. He painted some amazing covers for the Charlton books.



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Thank you for your time, Michael. Keep up the great work.

– Ben Herman

Great letter, Ben! Since you're buying back issues you've read about in* BACK ISSUE*, looks like we're living up to our name!

Steve Englehart's* Captain America and the Falcon *series was featured in both* BI *#20 (in a Pro2Pro interview with Steve and artist Sal Buscema) and #22 (in an article exploring Cap and Falc's partnership). And Mr. E is back this very issue.



Next issue: JENETTE KAHN, former president and publisher of DC Comics, tells all in a career-spanning, exclusive interview conducted by ROBERT GREENBERGER. Also: DC's Dollar Comics and unrealized kids line (featuring an aborted Sugar and Spike revival), the Wonder Woman Foundation, an interview with retailer-turned-DC-exec BOB WAYNE, DC's public service comics, the early days of the Vertigo imprint, and a tribute to the late EDUARDO BARRETO. Don't ask, just* BI *it! See you in sixty!

Michael Eury, editor

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- *Original art: covers and significant interior pages*
- *Little-seen fanzine material*
- *Other rarities*

If you have any of the above materials, please query the editor via email prior to submission. Art contributors will be acknowledged in print and receive a complimentary copy of the issue.

Since **BI** *is a full-color publication, preference is given to color artwork. Random convention sketches and "quick sketches" that do not reflect an artist's best work and were not intended for print will no longer be considered for publication.*

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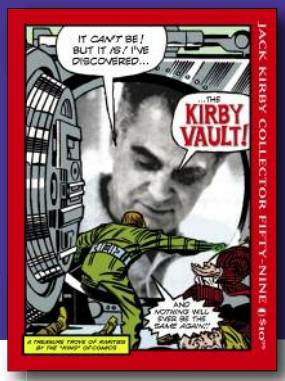
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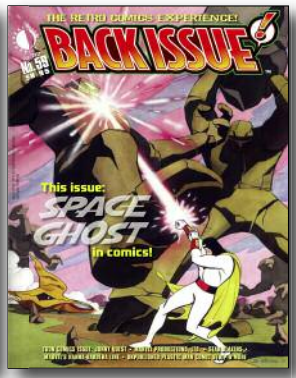
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BACK ISSUE #58

"JLA in the Bronze Age"! The "Satellite Years" of the '70s and early '80s, with **BUCKLER, ENGLEHART, PÉREZ,** and **WEIN**, salute to **DICK DILLIN**, the Justice League "Detroit" team, with **CONWAY, PATTON, McDONNELL,** plus **CONWAY** and **GEOFF JOHNS** go "Pro2Pro" on writing the JLA, unofficial JLA/Avengers crossovers, and Marvel's JLA, the Squadron Supreme. Cover by **McDONNELL** and **BILL WRAY!**

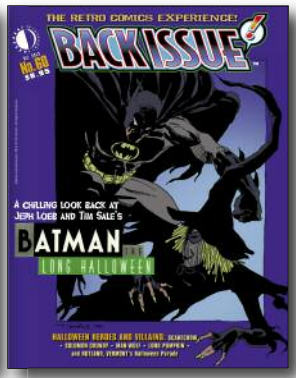
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BACK ISSUE #59

"Toon Comics!" History of Space Ghost in comics, Comico's Jonny Quest and Star Blazers, Marvel's Hanna-Barbera line and Dennis the Menace, behind the scenes at Marvel Productions, Ltd., and a look at the unpublished Plastic Man comic strip. Art/comments by **EVANIER, FOGLIO, HEMPEL** and **WHEATLEY, MARRS, RUDE, TOTH, WILDEY,** and more. All-new painted Space Ghost cover by **STEVE RUDE!**

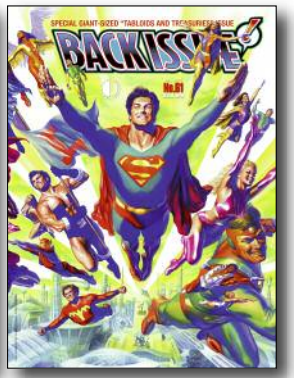
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BACK ISSUE #60

"Halloween Heroes and Villains"! **JEPH LOEB** and **TIM SALE's** chiller Batman: The Long Halloween, the Scarecrow (both the DC and Marvel versions), Solomon Grundy, Man-Wolf, Lord Pumpkin, Rutland, Vermont's Halloween parades, and… the Korvac Saga's Dead Avengers! With commentary from and/or art by **CONWAY, GIL KANE, LOPRESTI, MOENCH, PÉREZ, DAVE WENZEL,** and more. Cover by **TIM SALE!**

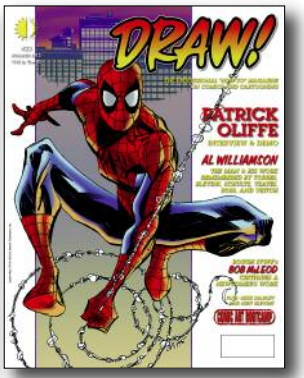
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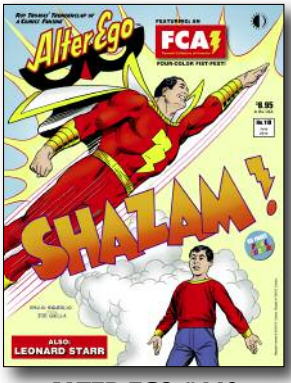
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PATRICK OLIFFE interview and demo, career of **AL WILLIAMSON** examined by **ANGELO TORRES, BRET BLEVINS, MARK SCHULTZ, TOM YEATES, ALEX ROSS, RICK VEITCH,** and others, **MIKE MANLEY** and **BRET BLEVINS'** "Comic Art Bootcamp", a "Rough Critique" of a newcomer's work by **BOB McLEOD**, art supply reviews by "Crusty Critic" **JAMAR NICHOLAS**, and more!

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ALTER EGO #110

SHAZAM!/FAWCETT issue! The 1940s **"CAPTAIN MARVEL" RADIO SHOW**, interview with radio's "Billy Batson" **BURT BOYAR, P.C. HAMERLINCK** and **C.C. BECK** on the origin of Captain Marvel, **ROY THOMAS** and **JERRY BINGHAM** on their Secret Origins "Shazam!", **FCA** with **MARC SWAYZE, LEONARD STARR** interview, Mr. Monster's Comic Crypt, **BILL SCHELLY**, and more!

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GOLDEN AGE NEDOR super-heroes, **MIKE NOLAN**'s Nedor Index, art by **MESKIN, ROBINSON, TUSKA, MOIRERA, SHOMBURG,** and others, unknown facts about ACG writer/editor **RICHARD HUGHES**, with photos and never-published Herbie scripts! Plus **FCA, MR. MONSTER,** more 2011 Fandom Celebration, and part II of **JIM AMASH'S** interview with **LEONARD STARR**! Cover by **SHANE FOLEY!**

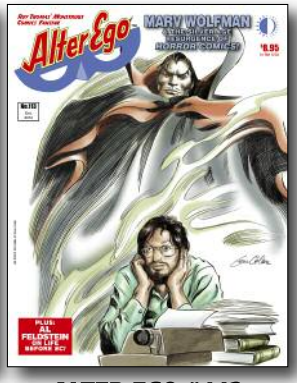
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ALTER EGO #112

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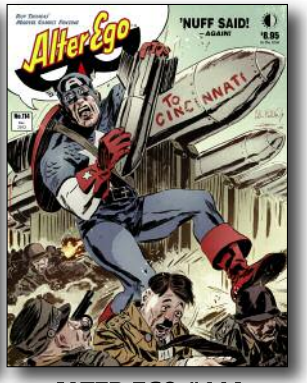
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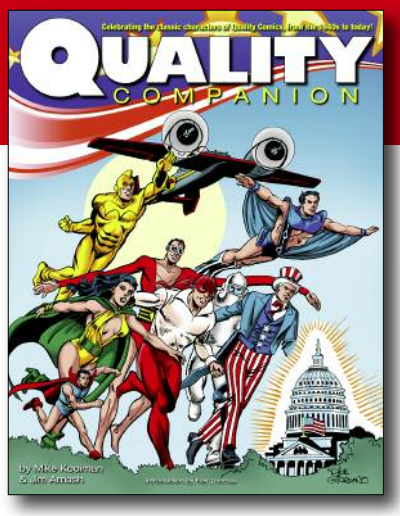
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ALTER EGO #114

MARVEL ISSUE on Captain America and Fantastic Four! **MARTIN GOODMAN**'s Broadway debut, speculations about FF #1, history of the **MMMS**, interview with Golden Age writer/artist **DON RICO**, art by **KIRBY, AVISON, SHORES, ROMITA, SEVERIN, TUSKA, ALLEN BELLMAN,** and others! Plus **AL FELDSTEIN** Part II, **FCA, MR. MONSTER** and **BILL SCHELLY**! Cover by **BELLMAN** and **MITCH BREITWEISER!**

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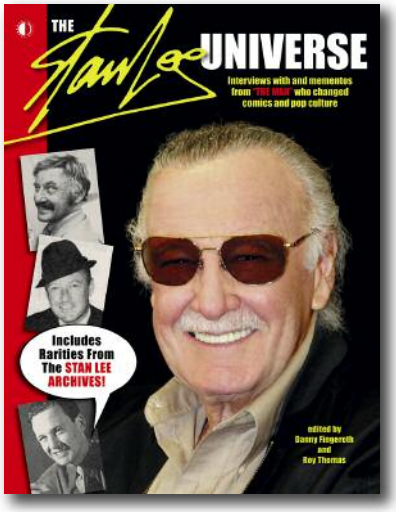
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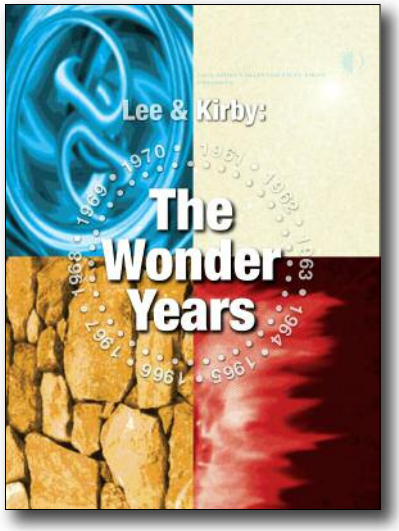
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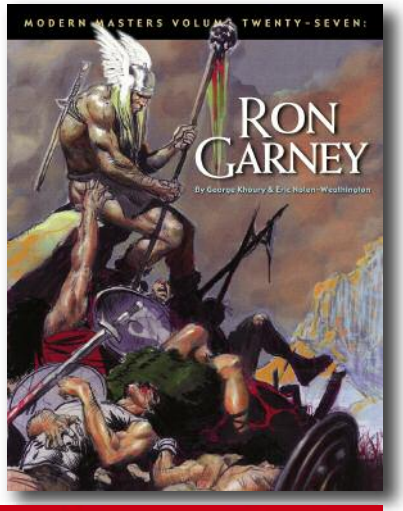
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