

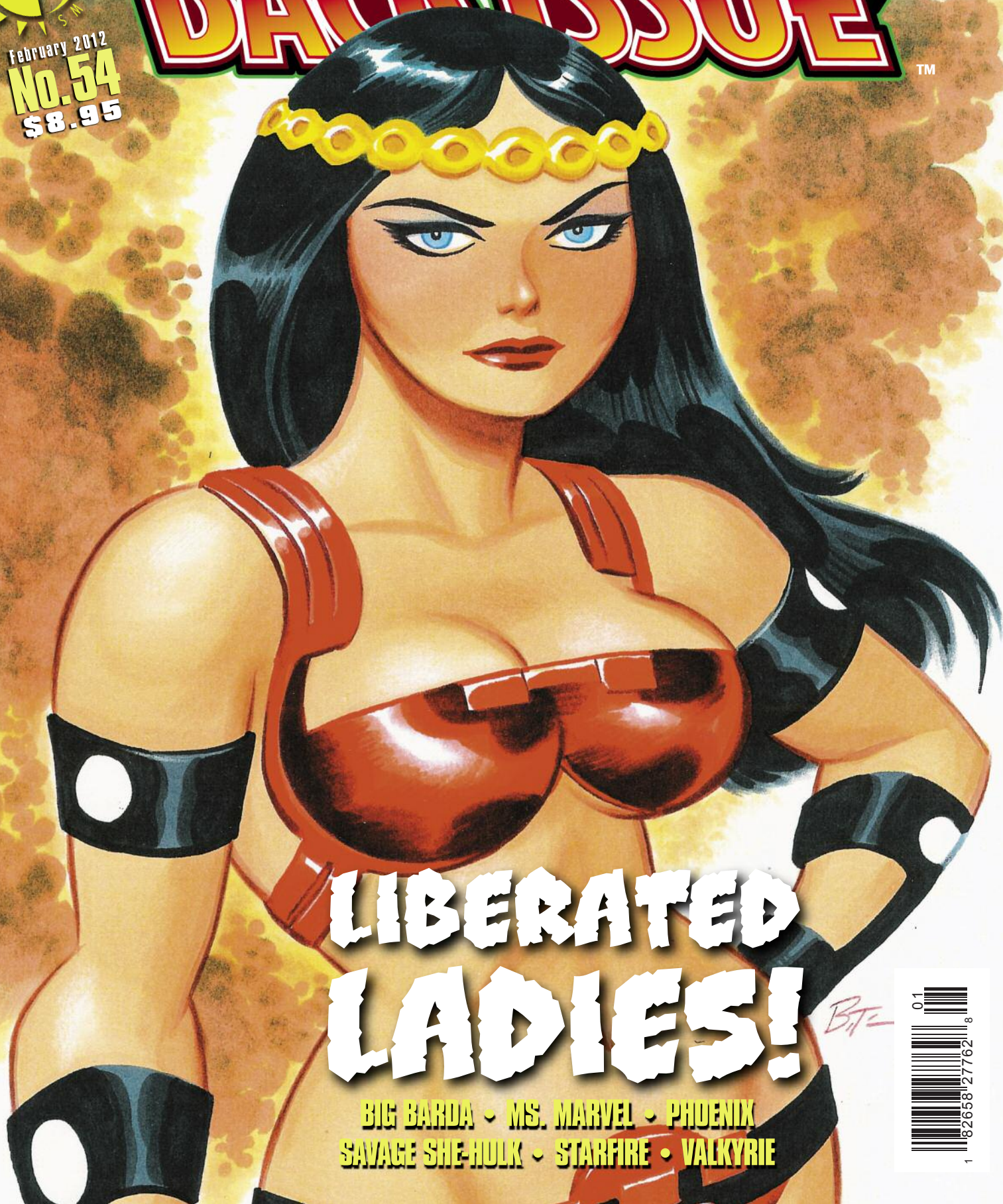
JILL THOMPSON, GAIL SIMONE, & BARBARA KESEL in a Pro2Pro interview!

BACKISSUE!



February 2012
No. 54
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LIBERATED LADIES!

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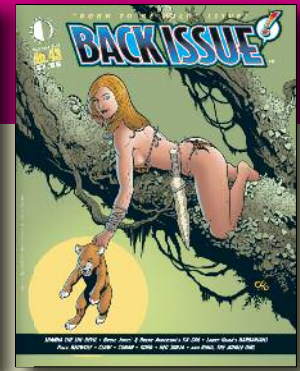
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THE RETRO COMICS EXPERIENCE!

BACKISSUE!



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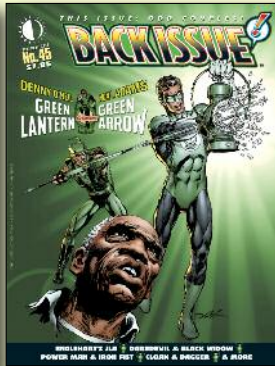
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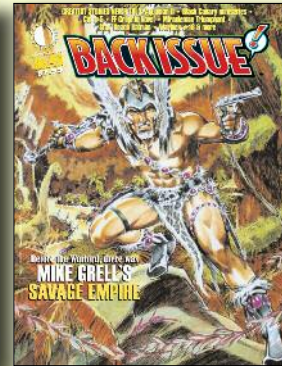
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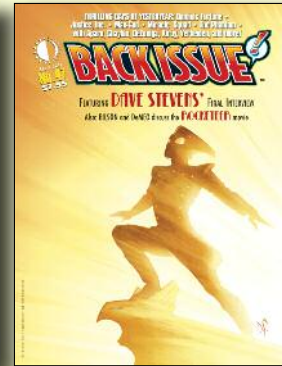
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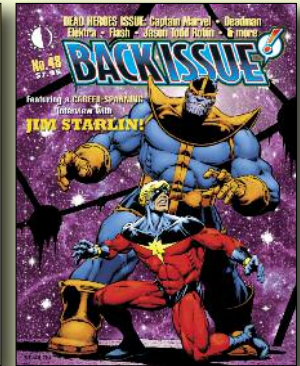
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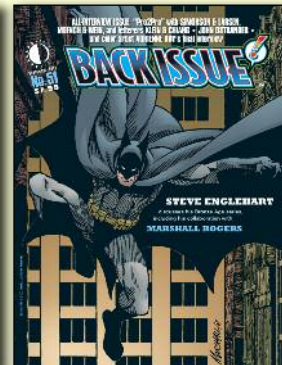
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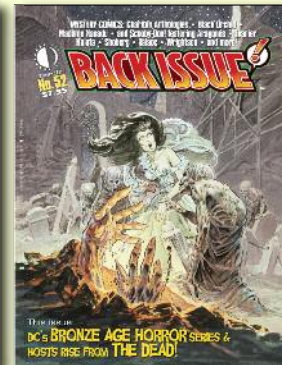
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Bronze Age Mystery Comics! Interviews with **BERNIE WRIGHTSON**, **SERGIO ARAGONES**, **GERRY TALAOC**, DC mystery writer **LORE SHOBER**, **MARK EVANIER** and **DAN SPIEGEL** discuss Scooby-Doo, Charlton chiller anthologies, Black Orchid, Madame Xanadu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

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Volume 1,
Number 54
February 2012

*Celebrating the
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the '70s, '80s,
'90s and Beyond!*

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BACKISSUE
The Retro Comics Experience!

The Liberated Ladies Issue



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BACK seat driver

by Michael Eury

I've always been surrounded by strong women.

My mom was no bra burner, and I doubt she'd consider herself "liberated," but during the Women's Liberation era she managed to work a full-time job, raise two boys and take care of her husband, cook dinner each night, volunteer at church, zip around to her sons' school-related activities, sew many of her own clothes and mend clothes for family and neighbors, feed pets, and keep our household in order. She'd always perform these herculean tasks with a smile and with warm, Southern grace, but could get tough when she needed to—like the time she read the riot act to an eccentric neighbor who fired warning shots over my eight-year-old head when I was trying to keep my dog from chasing her (zoning regulation-defying) backyard chickens. Today my mother, Aggie Eury, is 78 years young, and while some might mistakenly call her a "little old lady," she works part-time as a caregiver for ... little old ladies. Mom assists those whose deteriorating minds and bodies no longer allow them to perform what most of us would consider routine tasks—and she does so with her patented kindness.

My Aunt Sue is indeed a liberated lady, and was probably born that way, 73 years ago. She's big and boisterous, has always been outspoken (even during a time when women, like children, were supposed to "know their place" and hold their tongues), and is an absolutely riotous storyteller. No meek woman, she. Aunt Sue tends to hold court at family and social events and have people rolling out of their seats. I always enjoy seeing her, because I know I'll be showered with love and laughs.

My wife Rose is another incredible woman. She also never burned a bra (during the '70s and '80s she often didn't wear one, either), but, unlike Mom or Aunt Sue, she considers herself a feminist. She believes in equal opportunities not only for women but for all people regardless of race, religion, or sexual orientation. Flying against the tide of high divorce rates, the remarkably resilient Rose has stuck by my side for 25 years, through myriad challenges such as my struggles with adult-onset hearing loss.

My lifelong affiliation with these and other amazing women has positively imprinted me, and I'm a better man for knowing them. And thus I'm privileged to share with you this issue's theme of "Liberated Ladies," examinations of comic-book heroines who stepped out of the kitchen and into your face: Big Barda, Valkyrie, Ms. Marvel, Starfire, Phoenix, and She-Hulk. If you've come to ogle good-girl pin-ups, you've picked up the wrong issue. But if you're ready to be inspired by fabulous females—including comics-industry wonder

women Barbara Randall Kesel, Jill Thompson, and Gail Simone—then prop up your feet and prepare to be dazzled!

EDITORIAL PREEMPTIVE STRIKE DEPT.

Before you write ye ed asking, "How could you omit [fill in the name of your favorite Bronze Age superheroine here] from your 'Liberated Ladies' issue?" I refer you to *BACK ISSUE's* own back-issue bin, where you'll find articles on the following characters in these issues:

- #5: Lynda Carter Wonder Woman
- #8: Storm
- #13: Death of Romance Comics, Marvel's '70s Love Comics
- #14: Wonder Woman and the Star Riders
- #17: "Super Girls" issue, with Tigra (and the Cat), Supergirl, Diana Prince-Wonder Woman, Spider-Woman, Donna Troy, Flare, the original Batwoman
- #18: Death of Gwen Stacy
- #19: She-Hulk (the Movie)
- #23: Mary Jane Watson/Peter Parker 20th Wedding Anniversary, Isis
- #24: Amethyst, Zatanna, Conjura
- #26: Black Widow, Ms. Tree
- #28: Terra
- #33: Power Girl, Kitty Pryde, Firestar
- #36: Vampirella
- #37: Wonder Woman's return to WWII
- #38: Batgirl, Huntress
- #39: Sensational She-Hulk
- #40: Catwoman, Vixen, Josie and the Pussycats, Black Cat, Hellcat
- #41: Twelve Trials of Wonder Woman, Thomas/Colan Wonder Woman
- #42: Shanna the She-Devil, Rima the Jungle Girl, Red Sonja
- #45: Daredevil and Black Widow, the Vision and Scarlet Witch, Cloak and Dagger
- #46: Black Canary unpublished miniseries
- #48: Elektra
- #50: Joker's Daughter, Nocturna
- #52: Madame Xanadu, Black Orchid
- #53: Moondragon

And coming up:

- #56: Mockingbird
- #57: A cover-featured, career-spanning interview with former DC Comics president and publisher Jenette Kahn!

Mega-Rod Maven! ■ Inspired by Lainie Kazan & Roz Kirby!
Beloved of Scott Free, Mister Miracle! ■ Daughter of Breeda!

FlashBack!

Big Barda

Furious Female

She's hot,
she's sexy
and she's
liberated

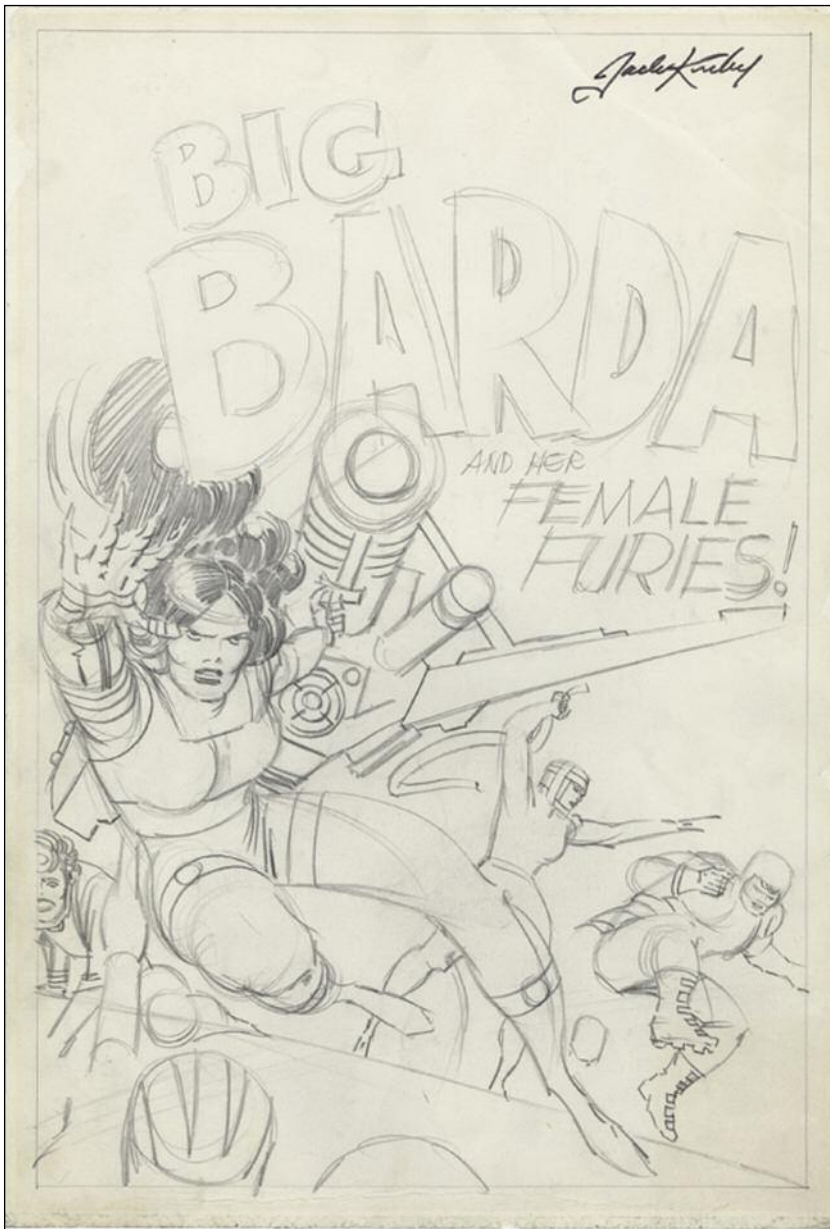


by Jim Kingman

This article's title contains three perfect descriptions of *Big Barda*: **strong, sexy, and liberated**. She was also rough, tough, and smart, and would not take flak from anyone. Though in peerless command of her emotions due to relentless military training, she was capable of displaying great sensitivity and naivety. She was not above confronting what she felt was personal weakness to make herself a better person. In the early 1970s, she

may have been the most physically and emotionally balanced of all the characters in writer/artist Jack Kirby's Fourth World, published by DC Comics (then National Periodical Publications) in four ongoing titles: *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen*, *The New Gods*, *The Forever People*, and *Mister Miracle*.

Big Barda was an extremely beautiful woman, whether traipsing around in a weapon-adorned red



Big Plans

(above) Courtesy of *The Jack Kirby Collector*, Kirby's unfinished splash for his proposed *Big Barda* spin-off book, circa 1972.

TM & © DC Comics.

bikini while hoisting up a large cannon, lunging into battle in full Apokoliptian military attire, or leaping into the fray in a comely skirt to protect friends from harm. Looks were not everything, of course. Barda's loyalty was fierce, her sense of humor biting, her maternal instincts impressionable, her desire for peaceful moments commendable, her love for battle insatiable, and her temper quick to ignite. Foremost of all was her unconditional devotion and love for Scott Free, Mister Miracle.

Yet Barda was not raised and trained to be emotionally balanced, or a pin-up girl, or a liberating force. She was molded in Granny Goodness' "orphanage" on the planet Apokolips to be a warrior woman supreme, and her leadership qualities won her command of the Female Furies, an elite military unit in the service of Darkseid, the epitome of evil in Kirby's Fourth World saga. This service did not last long, however, because Barda was meant for greater achievements. She has attained all but two: her own comic book and her own ongoing back-up series, although in both instances she certainly came close.

REJECTING HER DARK SIDE

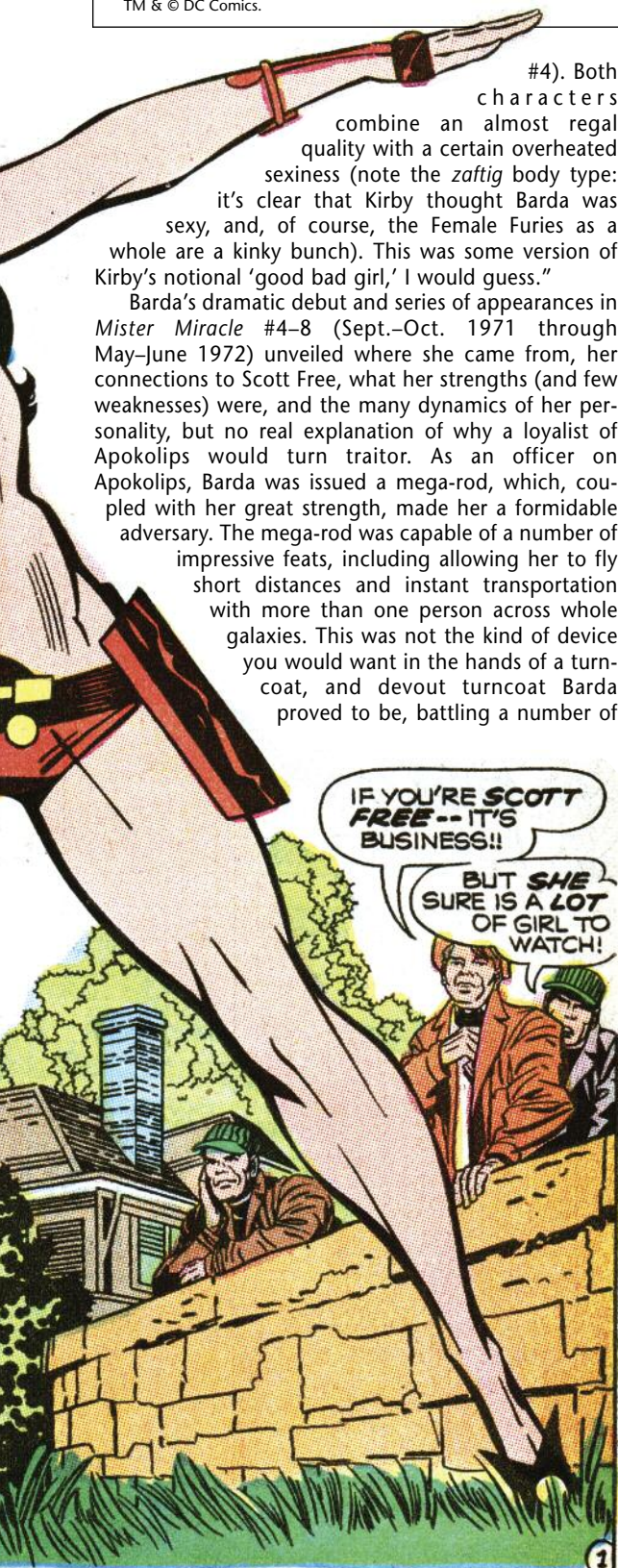
Big Barda's statuesque body and strong facial features were inspired by actress and singer Lainie Kazan, while aspects of her personality came from right at home, that of Kirby's beloved wife, Rosalind (Roz). "One thing notable about Barda," explains Charles Hatfield, comics scholar and author of *Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby*, "is that, like Medusa of the Frightful Four/Inhumans in *Fantastic Four*, she began as a sort of anti-heroine, or at least someone with a checkered past. Medusa is a good point of comparison, because in both cases Kirby played up sensuality in the character's design: for all of Barda's fearsomeness, when she's first introduced it's with a strong element of sexual titillation (just look at her first scene with Oberon, in *Mister Miracle*



Woman of Wonder!

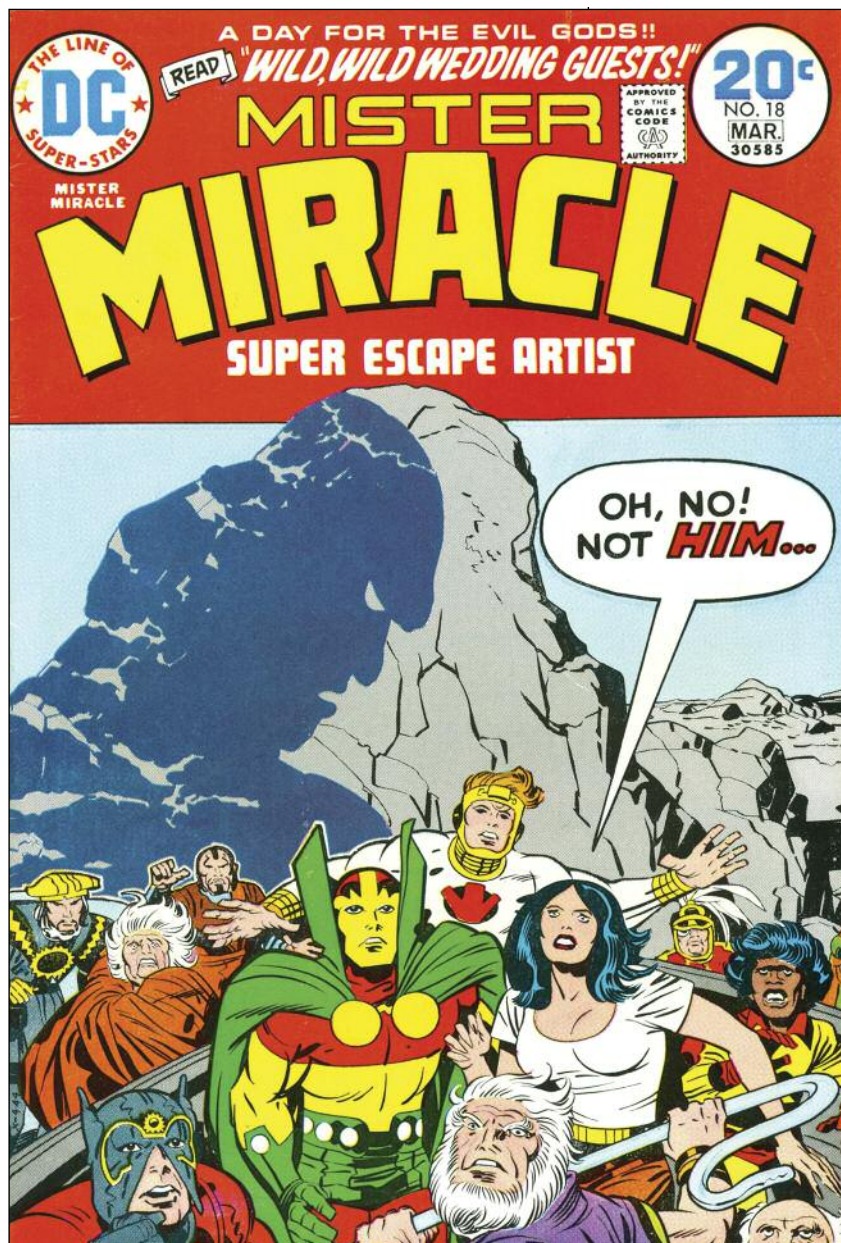
(below center) Kirby's great splash page from *Mister Miracle* #5 (Nov.–Dec. 1971) featuring the bodacious Barda and her curvaceous physique. Inks by Mike Royer.

TM & © DC Comics.



#4). Both characters combine an almost regal quality with a certain overheated sexiness (note the *zaftig* body type: it's clear that Kirby thought Barda was sexy, and, of course, the Female Furies as a whole are a kinky bunch). This was some version of Kirby's notional 'good bad girl,' I would guess."

Barda's dramatic debut and series of appearances in *Mister Miracle* #4–8 (Sept.–Oct. 1971 through May–June 1972) unveiled where she came from, her connections to Scott Free, what her strengths (and few weaknesses) were, and the many dynamics of her personality, but no real explanation of why a loyalist of Apokolips would turn traitor. As an officer on Apokolips, Barda was issued a mega-rod, which, coupled with her great strength, made her a formidable adversary. The mega-rod was capable of a number of impressive feats, including allowing her to fly short distances and instant transportation with more than one person across whole galaxies. This was not the kind of device you would want in the hands of a turncoat, and devout turncoat Barda proved to be, battling a number of



former allies such as Baron Bedlam, Virman Vundebur, members of her own squadron, the Female Furies (Mad Harriet, crazed wielder of power spikes; Stompa, endowed with powerful feet; Lashina, armed with metal whips that she could peel off her uniform; and Bernadeth, master of the deadly Fahren-knife), Kanto the assassin, and Granny Goodness herself (not to mention engaging in a classic conversation with Funky Flashman in *Mister Miracle* #6, which also introduced the Female Furies). It was not until the extraordinary flashback episode set entirely on Apokolips, published in *Mister Miracle* #9 (July–Aug. 1972), that readers learned the tragic event that helped motivate Barda to leave Apokolips.

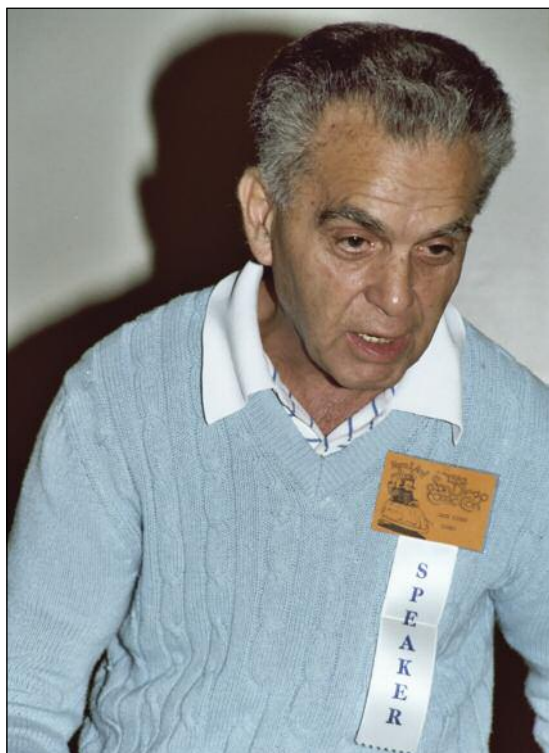
In the climatic sequence of *MM* #9's "Himon," Scott and Big Barda raced on foot to outdistance themselves from a barrage of heavy artillery fire. Scott shouted to her, "Barda! What you're doing is unheard of here! Why are you helping me?" Barda shouted back, "Because I like to help fools!—Because I couldn't save Auralie! I don't know!"

Barda *did* know. In the midst of deadly danger, with

Wedding Crasher

(above) Anyone who read 1965's classic *Fantastic Four Annual* #3 knew that Kirby couldn't resist throwing chaos, not rice, at groom Scott Free and bride Barda when it was their turn to walk down the aisle. Cover to *MM* #18 (Feb.–Mar. 1974) by Jack Kirby and Mike Royer.

TM & © DC Comics.



Barda in her own comic.

"Kirby proposed a *Barda and the Female Furies* book when *New Gods* and *Forever People* were being canceled," recalls Carl Gafford, long-time colorist at DC during the 1970s and '80s. "As *Mister Miracle* was the only surviving Fourth World title, Kirby had hoped to spin Barda off into her own series, but it didn't happen. *Kamandi* and *The Demon* were Kirby's next creations instead. I saw some of the pencils for the *Barda* book on display at the 1972 July 4th Comicon in New York City, and we really missed out not seeing it as a regular book."

Steve Sherman, who was Kirby's assistant during Jack's tenure at DC in the 1970s, adds, "I think

Jack was just trying to expand the character's presence as much as he could. I would guess that he would have liked to hand the comic off to someone else to write and draw, leaving him to just do the overall editing. Barda was a big hit with the readers, as far as the letters



LAINIE KAZAN

went. I think the character took people by surprise. This was about the same time Jack came up with 'Galaxy Green' [Editor's note: one of the King's "Unfinished Sagas" explored in *TwoMorrrows' The Jack Kirby Collector* #56]. I believe a lot of it was Jack trying to appeal to an older audience than who usually bought DC comics. He was also influenced somewhat by the underground comics he was getting. People would hand him a bunch of the latest issues at conventions. He would flip through them at home and laugh at the material, but then when asked if he could do something similar, he would shake his head no and say that he was just too old fashioned to do

Big Daddy

Big Breeda (!) may have been Big Barda's momma, but her daddy was none other than Jack "King" Kirby.

When Alan Light snapped this photo of Kirby at the San Diego Comic-Con in 1982, Barda was nowhere to be seen in comics—outside of back-issue bins. Special thanks to Alan Light for the pic.

Kirby explosions resounding all around, everything we know—*still* know and love—about Barda was crystallized in that one outburst. Scott Free was troubled, encouraged by his elders to seek an identity bigger than himself, and leaving Apokolips to discover his place in the grander scheme of things. Barda was assured and determined to aid him. She had tasted the innocence of Auralie, the imaginative young girl Barda had befriended and sought to protect, and Scott's desire for freedom. Auralie's death by torture unhinged Barda. Scott's attempt to escape inspired her. Barda realized she was on the wrong side. She didn't have to find herself, or change from within—she simply had to switch allegiance. Once on Earth to help Scott vanquish his enemies and prepare him for a career as a traveling super escape artist, Barda was never about becoming liberated. She was liberation upon arrival.

BARDA BREAKS OUT—ALMOST

Such was his fondness for the character at that time that Kirby planned to star





ROSALIND KIRBY

that sort of stuff. I think Big Barda was sort of his way of putting some sex into the magazines, without going over the line."

Observes Hatfield, "I think the Barda project is particularly notable because, along with the never-realized 'Galaxy Green,' it

would have been a rare example of a Kirby creation headlined by female characters. Of course, Joe Simon and Kirby had done romance comics for many years, but these lacked continuing characters."

In reading the beginning of *Mister Miracle* #10 (Sept.–Oct. 1972), I get the feeling that Kirby had every intention of splitting Scott and Barda up once they returned from their wild adventure on Apokolips in *MM* #7–8. The Female Furies had joined them, and it is possible with the surprise arrival of Ted Brown, Scott's soon-to-be public-relations manager, that Mister Miracle, Oberon (Scott's assistant), and Ted would embark on the much-delayed super escape artist

tour while Barda and the Furies possibly acted as "hidden protectors" for Scott, be it from foes of Apokolips or Earth.

FULL HOUSE

With the proposed Barda book nixed, *Mister Miracle* had a large, somewhat unwieldy cast (so unwieldy that Mad Harriet went missing in action from #11 on), with a lot of diverse characters sharing the supporting spotlight behind Scott's starring role. Barda held her own with the troupe, however, playing a larger role in *MM* #13.

When Ted called Barda out on her romantic feelings for Scott in *Mister Miracle* #14 (June–July 1973), it appeared as if a dramatic turning point had been reached.

The introduction of troubled youth Shilo Norman in *Mister Miracle* #15 shifted the direction of the series and abruptly tabled subplots and supporting characters. Barda's romantic feelings for Scott were replaced by a mentoring role she shared with Scott for Shilo, and the Female Furies were simply dropped from the book.

In *Mister Miracle* #18 (Feb.–Mar. 1974), the final issue of the series, Scott and Barda professed their love for one another and decided to get married immediately. Kirby did not mess around with that decision. *Mister Miracle* and Barda's friends, foes and fellow New Gods were all on hand in the hot, barren American desert to witness the wedding. Even Darkseid made an appearance. If not for Orion's shout-out to Darkseid about



Isn't It Romantic?

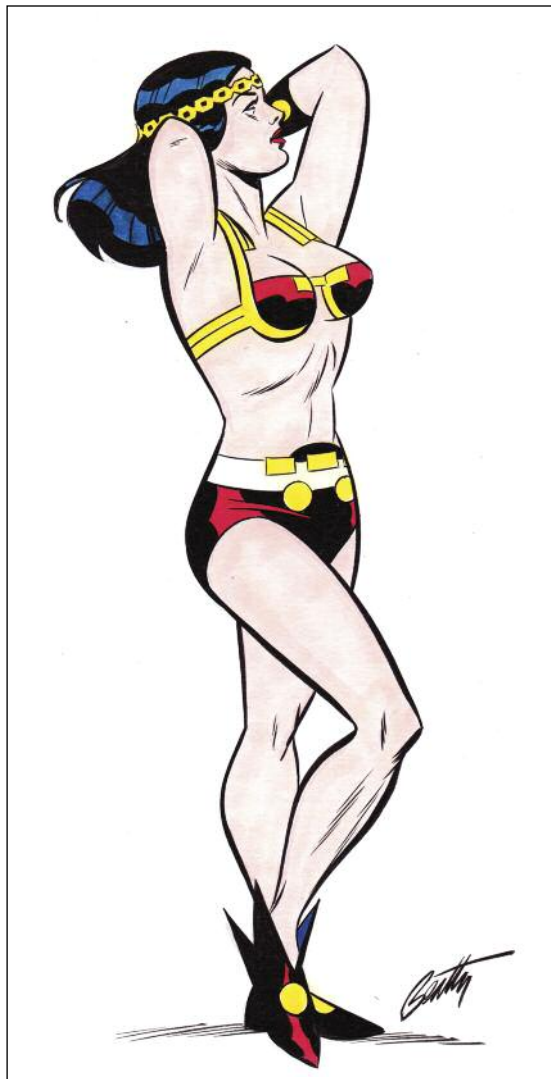
(above) Panel from the conclusion of *Mister Miracle* #5 (Nov.–Dec. 1971).

TM & © DC Comics.

Once, Twice, Three Times a Lady ... Who Can Kick Your Butt

Mrs. Scott Free, as rendered by (opposite page inset) our cover artist, Bruce Timm; (far left) *Ms. Tree* illustrator Terry Beatty; and (left) Marvel and DC (and one-time member of "Romita's Raiders") artist Rodney Ramos. The Timm illo is courtesy of Anthony Snyder (www.anthonyscomicbookart.com), while the others come to us via Ben Herman.

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B.B.'s Guns!

(above) Barda, by artists Adam Hughes and Karl Story, from *Who's Who in the DC Universe* #11 (July 1991), edited by Michael Eury.

TM & © DC Comics.

their impending "final battle," the marriage of Scott and Barda could have been a satisfactory, though not exactly dramatic, ending to the Fourth World saga. The wedding of a child of New Genesis reared on Apokolips to a woman of Apokolips who incorporated her warrior upbringing with the peaceful ways of New Genesis consummated the diversity in their relationship, instilling hope that one day there could be peace between the two warring factions.

Scott and Barda then abruptly left Earth to live together on New Genesis. A high note. It's always good to leave Barda on a high note.

BACK SEAT BARDA

Of course, this wasn't the last comic-book readers would see of Barda and Mister Miracle and all the New Gods. After two years in comics limbo, Barda returned with Scott Free in "Return of the New Gods," published in *First Issue Special* #13 (Apr. 1976).

Kirby's conception of the character included a personal touch—after all, an aspect of Barda was a literary extension of Jack's wife. Every subsequent writer of Barda until after *Crisis on Infinite Earths* had nothing so

deeply vested in her personality. In fact, some writers simply accepted her as in tow with Mister Miracle's supporting cast. For example, in three *Batman/Mister Miracle* team-ups Bob Haney wrote for *The Brave and the Bold*, *B&B* #112 utilized her as no more than an assistant for one of Scott's escape attempts; *B&B* #128 was a little more generous, acknowledging the couple's marriage and netting her a cover appearance; but in *B&B* #138 she made no appearance at all. On the other hand, in 1980 Gerry Conway put Barda to superb use in *Justice League of America* #183–185, rightly focusing on her capabilities as a warrior, while tapping into the anguish and rage she had always harbored at being raised in Granny Goodness' orphanage.

When *Mister Miracle* was revived in June of 1977, Barda found herself ignominiously positioned flat on her back on the covers of *Mister Miracle* #19–21. She didn't fare much better in the interior stories. As good as this *Mister Miracle* revival was—and it was very good (just listing the creators involved—Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers, Steve Gerber, Michael Golden—attempts to that)—the focus was on Scott Free's acknowledgment of his godhood and emulation of the role of the messiah. This regulated Big Barda to an almost low-end supporting role. Under Englehart in *MM* #19–21, Barda went from equal partner in marriage to being kidnapped by Granny Goodness, brainwashed to kill her



husband, rescued and punched out by Mister Miracle, and eventually revived from a coma thanks to Scott's derring-do. With Barda safely recovering from Granny's brainwashing, Scott struck out on his own to confront Darkseid, so Barda did not appear in *Mister Miracle* #22 (Feb. 1978), the first issue in the series since *MM* #3 not to include her.

When writer Steve Gerber took over in 1978 for *MM* #23–25, Barda reclaimed much of her dignity in #24 with one punch thrown at her preoccupied husband, at which point she slipped back into a supporting role.

Then it appeared Barda's opportunity to shine solo had finally arrived. She was scheduled to have her own back-up series in *Mister Miracle*, beginning in *MM* #26, as part of the "DC Explosion," an eight-page increase of all-new story material in DC's standard-size books, which started in June of 1978. It was even noted in the "Newswatch" section of *The Comics Journal* #38 (Feb. 1978) that "Young Big Barda," a series set on Apokolips, would debut in *MM* #26, with the first episode written by Steve Gerber. However, *Mister Miracle* was abruptly canceled with #25, a precursor to the more shocking and sweeping DC Implosion later that summer. For the second time, a Big Barda series never saw print.

In the post-*Crisis on Infinite Earths* DC Universe, Big Barda was immediately given two things sorely lacking in her appearances since Kirby's *Mister Miracle*: depth to her personality, in *Mister Miracle Special* #1 (1987), and a headlining, albeit co-starring, role, in *Action Comics* #592 (Sept. 1987).

In *Mister Miracle Special* #1, writer Mark Evanier and artist Steve Rude respectfully explored Barda's concerns for the safety of her husband as a super escape artist. Barda told Scott he must choose between her or his death-defying antics. Scott chose Barda. Later, comments from members of a circus freak show gave Barda second thoughts, and made her realize she should tolerate and support what Scott wanted to do with his life.

As depicted in this *Special*, and actually a recurring theme throughout Scott and Barda's lives, there would always be the threat of Darkseid and his minions. There was no riskier career choice than opposing the oppressive shadows of Apokolips, and Barda and Scott would always share that choice together. *Mister Miracle Special* is a fine comic. Evanier's long-time friendship with Kirby and understanding of the King's concepts and characters served Barda and her fans well.

There is a major problem with writer/artist John Byrne's take on Big Barda in *Action Comics* #592–593's Superman/Big Barda/*Mister Miracle* team-up. It doesn't happen right away, which makes it all the more distressing because up to a point Byrne handles Barda extremely well. Once Barda becomes susceptible to mind control, however, basically to permit porno as a plot device, credibility falls apart. There is simply no way that a woman with Barda's physical, mental, and military training is going to fall victim, twice-over to add insult to injury, to an ugly, worthless Apokoliptian outcast known rightly so as Sleeze.

LOST IN SUBURBIA

In the wake of *Mister Miracle Special* #1, Barda chose a domestic lifestyle and begrudgingly accepted Scott Free and Oberon's participation in the revamped Justice League. After being kidnapped by Manga Kahn and rescued by Barda and the JLA on Apokolips in *Justice League International* #13–21, Scott decided to also go



the domestic route, which led to some interesting contrasts in the storylines of *Mister Miracle* and Big Barda in a new *Mister Miracle* series, which debuted in late 1988.

The early issues dealt with *Mister Miracle*, Barda, and Oberon attempting to adjust to a suburban lifestyle in the small town of Bailey, New Hampshire. Unfortunately, they were constantly accosted by foes from Apokolips and visited by family and friends from New Genesis and the Justice League, which severely hampered any kind of domestic bliss but did not deter Barda from learning how to cook. When *Mister Miracle* ditched Earth for an intergalactic super escape artist tour, Barda became involved in adventures of her own in Bailey, which turned out to be more interesting than Scott's exploits off Earth. "It's all in the contrast and balance," notes writer Doug Moench, who scripted the series from *Mister Miracle* #14 through 28. "One makes the other refreshing."

After discovering a monkey cruelly mistreated by human hands, Barda was encouraged by her next-door neighbor to join an animal-rights group protesting the recent establishment of an animal-research facility on

Cover Girl...

...but puppet-person in John Byrne's *Action Comics* #592 (Sept. 1987) team-up with Superman.

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Va-Va-Va-BOOM!

(left) Barda pumps iron in the warrior's memorable labor in *Mister Miracle* #5 (Nov.–Dec. 1971).

TM & © DC Comics.



A League of Their Own

(above) Barda and her gal pals wrestle their way onto the cover spot of *Mister Miracle* #25 (Mar. 1991). Cover by Joe Phillips and Bob Dvorak.

TM & © DC Comics.

the outskirts of town. Barda, always the warrior, did not like the idea of peaceful protest and felt a more forceful approach was necessary to protect the animals. Barda's naivety and capacity for violence led her to being arrested for blowing up a warehouse. During her stay in prison, she learned that Scott Free had perished, but that wasn't actually the case. The once-mighty warrior woman, who

took great pride in her resiliency, sunk into despair. As the main plots of Scott's return to Earth and Barda's impending court appearance began to converge, and other subplots began to overlap (this was a very busy comic book), Barda's storyline shifted from a nod to social relevancy to standard superhero fare, as it was revealed that the animal-research institution was a front for Darkseid's latest attempt to subjugate every human on Earth. Despite the suddenly predictable outcome (another battle between good and evil, Barda's name cleared), Barda's storyline proved once again that she was capable of handling a lead role.

When Scott, Barda, and Oberon moved to New York, Barda began another entertaining subplot. Her failed attempts to be a professional wrestler led her to form a new Female Furies as a traveling wrestling team. Again, this storyline was more intriguing than Mister Miracle's concurrent reunion with Shilo Norman. For the first time in her career, she had her own cover spotlight on #25 sans Scott Free or any other established DC character, although it was still under the *Mister Miracle* banner.

"*Mister Miracle* was the first comic where I was officially in the credits as 'editor,'" recalls Kevin Dooley. "At the time, I was assistant editor for Andy Helfer, who was so busy with other stuff, I asked if I could take the full reins of *MM*. I always had an affinity for the character since Kirby and in all of his incarnations—c'mon, Gerber, Englehart, Rogers, Golden. What a legacy! I had admired Doug Moench's writing for such a long time as well. I believe Andy and I found the (ever stupendous) artist Joe Phillips in a submission pile. It still stuns me that I got to work with such talent.

"When I came on *MM*, Andy had already worked out quite a bit of storyline with Doug, who took over from the equally legendary Len Wein," Dooley continues. "I remember talking over plotlines and laughing a lot with Doug, and allowing his amazingly creative mind to go with it. I didn't have much to do with the Barda/Female Furies wrestling plotting except Doug and I shared our enjoyment of G.L.O.W. (Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling), popular at the time."

MOTHER AND CHILD REUNION

The last issue of the series probably had loyal Barda fans convinced that she was the true star of the comic. Barda had always believed she had been conceived on Apokolips in a "Gestatron," placed in Darkseid's nursery, and transferred to Granny Goodness' orphanage for her warrior training. But it was revealed in *Mister Miracle* #28 (June 1991) that Barda had a natural birth and her mother was—hold on to your mega-rods—*Big Breeda!*



"The genesis of Barda's mom was also, sadly, its 'apoklips,'" says Dooley. "There were plans, I fuzzily recollect, of Big Barda and her mom (and the Furies) freeing the breeders. Ever so vaguely I recall Doug and I discussing the Biblical/Greek/Roman myths implied in Kirby's Fourth World, and how gods would sow their seeds (dark seed?). I would have loved to have seen where Doug and Joe would've taken it, but ... alas."

Reunited with her mother, Barda, along with Scott, returned once again to New Genesis, and once again we left Barda on a high note, always a good thing.

During the 1990s and first few years of the 21st century, Barda made a number of appearances in the DC Universe, including *JLA*, *Birds of Prey*, *Jack Kirby's Fourth World*, *Justice League of Amazons*, *Orion*, and a fourth *Mister Miracle* series, written by Dooley. Perhaps one day we will explore those later episodes in Barda's history in *BACK ISSUE*.

Still, there is a final fate to Barda's career, one that can't be held off for discussion at another time. For this article's title I paraphrased the cover headline of *Rolling Stone* #352 (with Jim Morrison), and now I must paraphrase it even closer to the original caption: Big Barda: She's strong, she's sexy, and she's dead. In Jim Starlin's *Death of the New Gods* #1 (Early Dec. 2007), Barda's life tragically ended, her body sprawled on a cold kitchen floor. She was dressed in full military attire, an ugly, bloody, gaping hole in her chest, as a devastated Scott Free knelt over the lifeless form. It's a depressing picture, the lowest point in her history. We will not, I assure you, leave Barda on that kind of a low note.



There is a dramatic sequence at the end of *Mister Miracle* vol. 1 #17 (Dec. 1973-Jan. 1974) where Big Barda is in furious battle with her partial doppelganger, Della "the Dinosaur." Barda easily lifts a large three-drawer file cabinet to protect her from the bullets being fired at her at close range from Della's gun. Barda tears off the top of the file cabinet, holds the cabinet up with her right hand, and slams her left fist into the back of the file. *Wham!* The three drawers discharge from the cabinet and plow into Della the Dinosaur. *SFAK! WAK!* End of furious battle. Barda triumphant!

It's a high note. It's always fitting to leave Barda on a high note.

She Coulda Been a Contenda...!

(inset) Big Barda in a proud moment as one of the back-up feature stars of the *DC Explosion* in a 1978 house ad drawn by Joe Staton. Little did they know that the *DC Implosion* would soon send most of them packing!

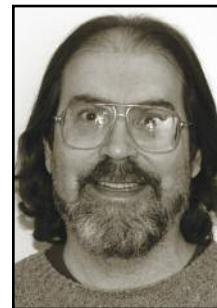
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File That Under "D," for Demolish

(spread bottom) Panels from Kirby's penultimate issue of *Mister Miracle*, #17 (Jan. 1974), features Big Barda taking on her evil counterpart, "Della the Dinosaur," in grand style. Inks by Mike Royer.

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JIM KINGMAN purchased his first comic book, DC's World's Finest Comics #211, on a family road trip in March of 1972, and has been reading and collecting comic books ever since (with no end in sight). He has been writing about comics since 1993, and edits and publishes Comic Effect, a small-press fanzine emphasizing the fun in reading comics.



end



FlashBack!

THE RIDE OF THE VALKYRIE!

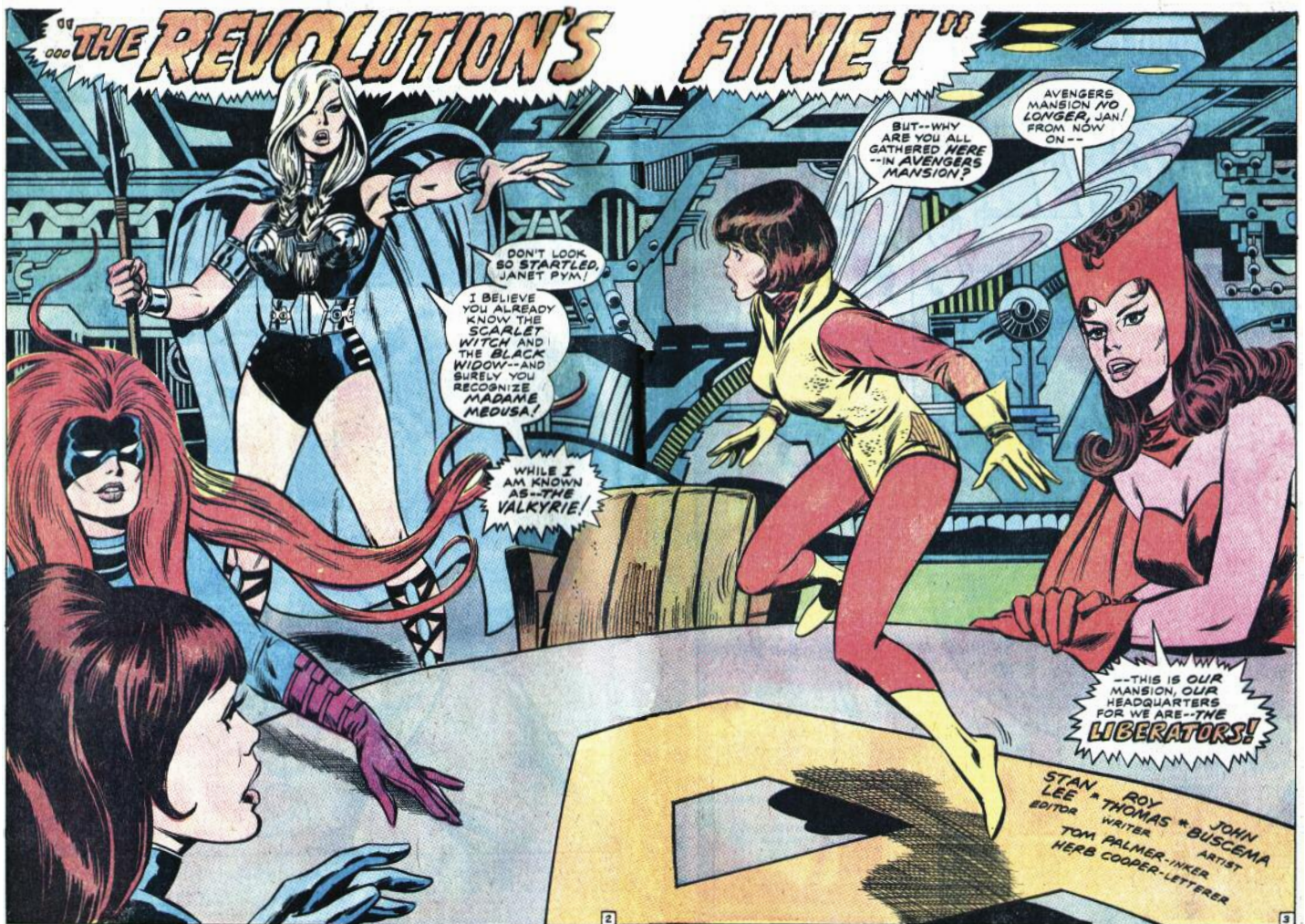


Valkyrie! Valkyrah!

Detail from John Buscema and Frank Giacoia's cover art gracing *The Defenders* #4 (Feb. 1973).

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by Jonathan Miller



Marvel Comics' Valkyrie made her first appearance on the cover of *The Avengers* #83 (Dec. 1970), an iconic image that heralded a new age in mainstream comics in terms of the depiction of women in the medium. Flanked by a quartet of A-list Marvel heroines, the Wagnerian warrior stood over the defeated forms of the male Avengers and announced that the era of their predominance had passed. Inside ("The Revolution's Fine"), she related her origin—a typical comic-book tale of a scientific laboratory accident, but in this case one facilitated by male chauvinism and arrogance—and converted the heroines to her cause, namely the humiliation and defeat of their male counterparts. Her argument used nothing more than the way female characters such as themselves had historically been sidelined, ignored, or dismissed altogether, and in truth her claims were hardly exaggerated.

LADY LIBERATORS

So motivated, the newly formed Lady Liberators surprise their men friends at Rutland, Vermont's famous Halloween parade and proceed to thoroughly kick the crap out of them. It is only following this that Valkyrie's story, motives, and indeed her very identity are revealed to be entirely false, a ruse perpetrated by longtime Avengers nemesis and perennial femme fatale the Enchantress, recently jilted by erstwhile partner-in-crime the Executioner and looking to revenge herself on the entire male population. Their newly found cause celeb thus betrayed, the heroines must then quickly

reverse their positions and rally to their fellow good guys' side. Although the final panel has the Scarlet Witch defiantly proclaiming that their movement towards equality would not be sundered by the betrayal of their leader, the status quo of gender roles seemed comfortably in place once more by the next issue.

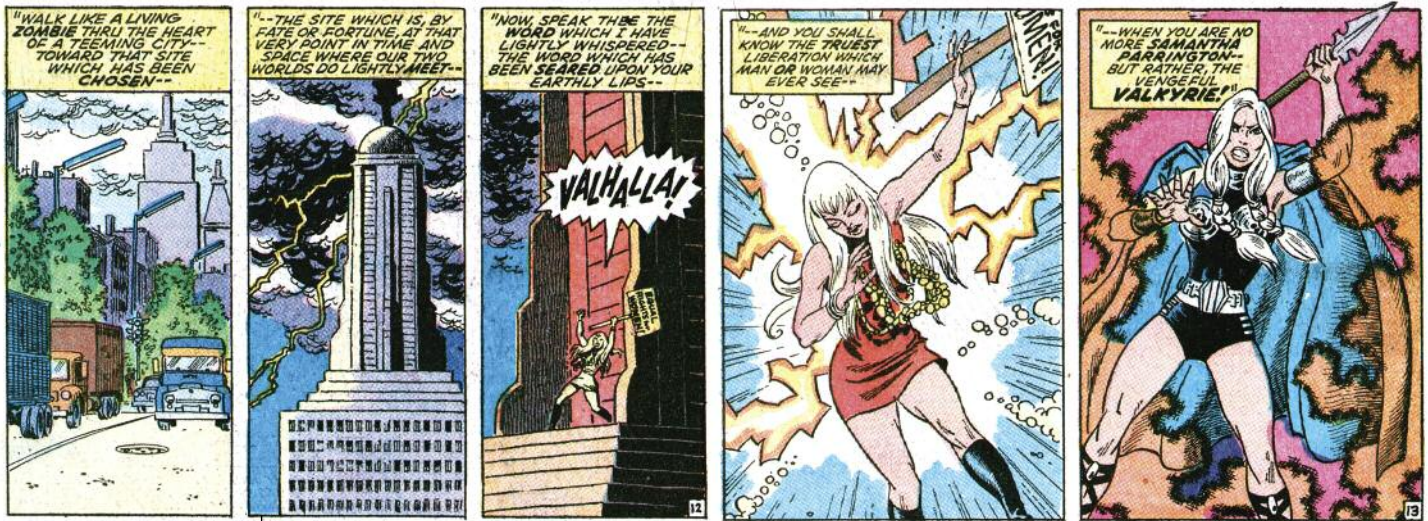
Cultural critic and author of *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors* Jennifer K. Stuller takes issue with the characterization of feminism, particularly the way "the Wasp walks in and refers to their group as a 'Powderpuff Protest Meeting'—again suggesting that women who seek better treatment in the workplace are simply girly-numbskulls who ask too much and don't know their place, and even women think so, too. But as the Valkyrie monologues about her origin story and her mistreatment at the hands of men, the women, including the Wasp, are quickly recruited into Valkyrie's cause. As they jump to become the Lady Liberators, we are given the impression that women are easily brainwashed and will do anything for a seemingly abstract concept they call sisterhood. And brainwashing it is ... or at least in this case, magic.

"Though ironically, most of what the Valkyrie says to convince the women to band together is true: The male heroes grab all the attention for themselves, men write newspaper headlines that neglect contributions of women allies, and that the Black Widow is just a female Spider-Man (something she herself has already admitted elsewhere). Though the girls pony up, it is later revealed, as it so often is with depictions of other

Sisters Doing It for Themselves!

(above) The very first appearance of Valkyrie also gave us the singular appearance of the Liberators! Art by John Buscema and Tom Palmer from *The Avengers* #83 (Dec. 1970).

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Val from Valhalla
 (above) Valkyrie makes her first return in the pages of the Roy Thomas-scribed *Incredible Hulk* #142 (Aug. 1971). Panels and cover (below) by the Hulk-ilicious team of Herb Trimpe and John Severin

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young women in popular storytelling—especially feminists—that the Valkyrie is not interested in equal rights for women, but in her own twisted pursuits. She is, in fact, a villainess—scorned by her lover and mentally unstable. As a result she believes all men must suffer for her lover’s misdeeds. And the lesson learned is that women who demand respect aren’t to be taken seriously, and that women’s liberation is trivial and a joke.” (*Emmapeelers, DiscoDivas, and the Feministas of Justice: A Look at Superwomen in the American 1970s*. Presented at the Comics Arts Conference at Wondercon, 2009.)

Roy Thomas, writer of the story that introduced

Valkyrie and—along with artist John Buscema, her co-creator—offers his perspective: “Over the years, some people (not necessarily always women) assaulted the view of feminism in the *Avengers* story, but others defended it and I often see it listed as someone’s ‘favorite story’ or some such thing. I think most people saw that it was not an attack on feminism, just a story about how it could get very strident and out of hand. The feminist movement in those days was derided from time to time as having no sense of humor ... but, of course, that was done partly because feminism wasn’t taken as seriously in some quarters as, say, the

civil rights movement (of which feminism was really a part). I don’t recall people saying, for instance, that African Americans should have a sense of humor about their situation ... although that wasn’t a bad idea, no one would have dared.”

Acknowledging that the superheroines do at least acquit themselves quite well, Stuller still laments, “For me, these moments feel like tokens and are negated by the fact that ultimately, feminism and/or the women’s liberation movement are depicted as politics that dupe women and are not to be taken seriously. So often in popular culture we see a young woman swayed by the dangers of feminism. Usually she looks up to a feminist mentor who turns out to be crazed or scorned. She’s a feminist because she hates men or is mentally ill. Then the young woman learns a lesson and is returned to a life of safe heteronormativity. So for me, seeing this sexist trope time and time again, this misunderstanding or undermining of feminist politics and activism doesn’t necessarily negate those tiny moments (like Scarlet Witch), but it certainly compromises them. As you’ve suggested, it’s important to point out those little progressive moments alongside those that are more obviously problematic.”

VALKYRIE, v.2

So, somewhat of a caricature and exposed as not only a fraud but, ultimately, a fiction, Valkyrie had nevertheless far from exhausted her potential. She returned in *The Incredible Hulk* #142 (Aug. 1971), this time in reality a young activist named Samantha Parrington, transformed by the Enchantress for the purpose of battling the Hulk, effectively giving Valkyrie an identity as an independent person in a story with elements of social satire. “I saw very quickly that the Valkyrie concept was too good to be a one-shot, so I soon had a new woman take on that persona,” says Thomas. “In a sense, I guess I created (or rather, co-created) the Valkyrie twice, though I only did a single story about her each time.” Samantha’s true self is restored at the end of the issue, leaving Valkyrie more concept than actual character, but Thomas was clearly taking steps towards realizing Valkyrie as a full-fledged member of the Marvel Universe, “although it was left to Steve Englehart and various artists, especially Sal Buscema, to do so,” he concedes.

Englehart and Buscema accomplished said task when Valkyrie returned again in *The Defenders* #4 (Feb.

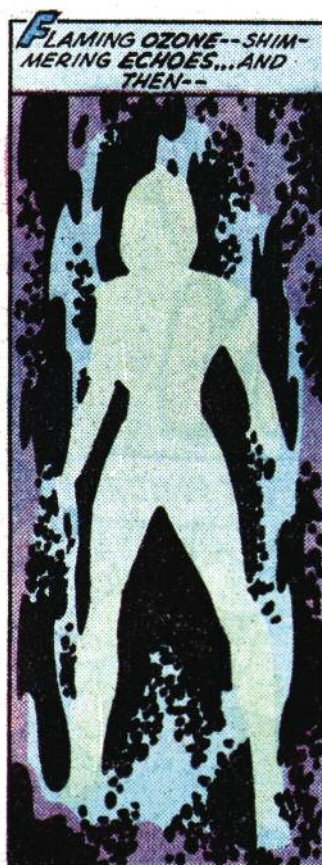


1973) on the cover of which she was once again extolling her superiority over various assembled male heroes, but this time with the intention of coming to their much-needed aid. In "The New Defender!" she does just that, courtesy once again of the Enchantress, who this time uses a mentally ill young woman named Barbara Norriss, first introduced in *The Incredible Hulk* #125 (Mar. 1970) and driven hopelessly insane in the previous issue, as the receptacle for the Valkyrie persona in order to aid her and the Defenders against a mutual enemy. Barbara's identity is completely subsumed, but not eradicated, by that of Valkyrie, an important plot point that would be revisited repeatedly over the years. From that point on, Valkyrie pursues her own destiny independent of the Enchantress' agenda. She is initially still somewhat strident but decidedly less belligerent, generally exhibiting nobility, levelheadedness, and good character.

As for making her yet a third person, distinct from both the Enchantress and Samantha Parrington, Englehart had elected to give her a clean slate, free of any agendas established during her short but somewhat polemical history. He also made her a virtual tabula rasa—albeit one with a *raison d'être*—by having Barbara Norriss suffer a pronounced psychotic break in the previous issue, leaving her by turns violently psychotic and catatonic, effectively mindless. Thus Valkyrie's possession of her body would be a mercy, avoiding any ongoing conflict about the situation. Englehart explains: "I was just connecting several storylines, and the way they played out, the straightest line through the maze was to come up with a new woman for the Valkyrie to inhabit. It was the inhabiting that interested me, and certainly having a new woman gave me a clean slate—but all the women had this personality imposed on them, so I basically had the Valkyrie with some softer edges. The catatonia was a result of the storyline. I never thought about Val being a mercy for her, but it's a good idea."

Roy Thomas recalls, "I'm pretty sure it was Steve's idea to put the Valkyrie in the Defenders, and to make her yet a third person. I'm not sure I was wild about that latter part, but I let Steve go his own way because the Valkyrie wasn't well established, and I didn't feel any need to impose my view on Steve in that instance."

In writing his interpretation of the Valkyrie, Englehart seemed to sidestep the stridently feminist motivation the Enchantress had originally given Valkyrie and the antagonism that went with it. "She was a feminist creation, but if I stuck that character with two macho guys (Hulk and Subby), that would be her only topic of conversation," Englehart says. "Plus, I



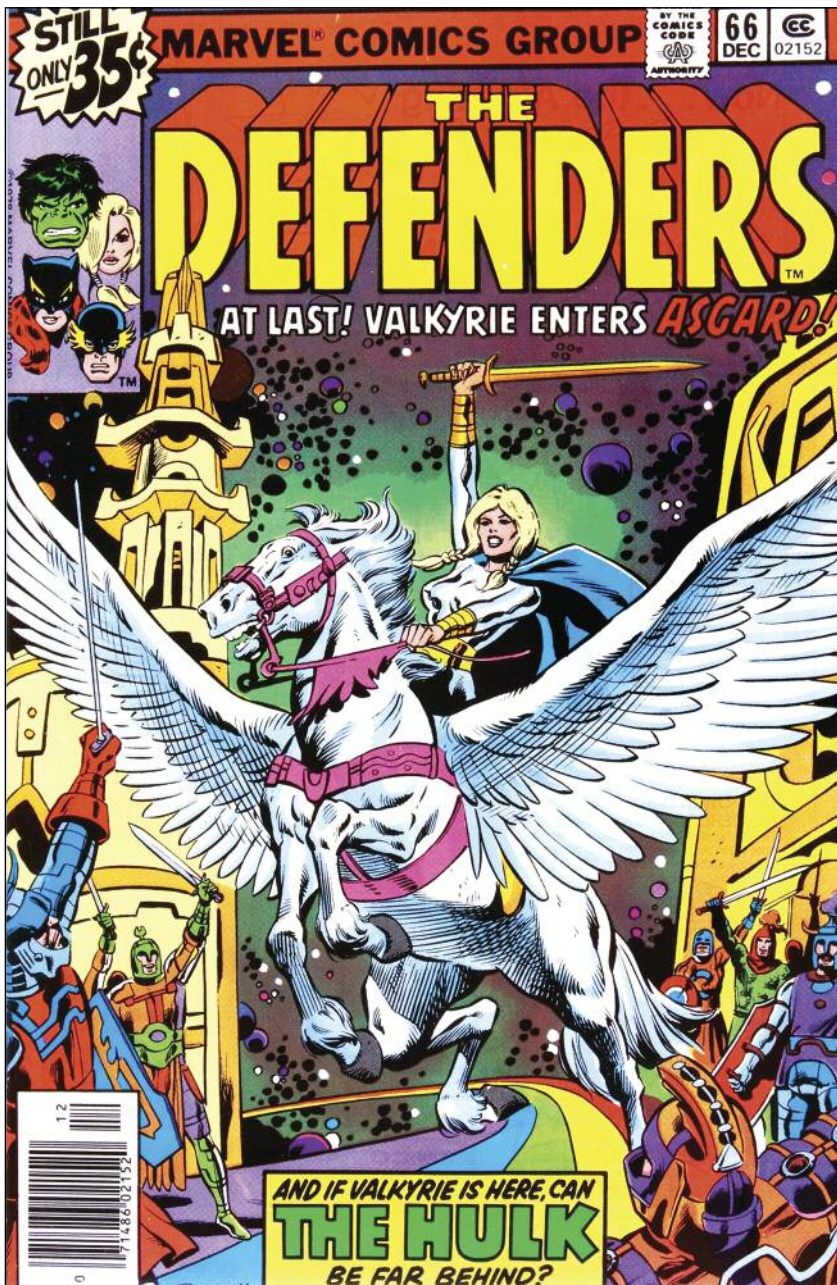
was forming a non-team team, so continued arguments didn't work for my purposes. I was all in favor of Women's Lib, but I chose her because she was a woman who wasn't obviously part of any group and could become part of this one, and was tough enough at heart to stand up to the guys. And finally, she had her own personal demons, which I could play out over time without upsetting the action balance of the Defenders but still explore in an interesting fashion."

Stuller notes an improvement, but still takes issue with some of the language: "I will say I was thinking of the panel—and I'll have to paraphrase—where Valkyrie tells Sub-Mariner, I think, that she doesn't hate men she merely knows she's as good as they are [*Defenders* v.1 #4]. I see the intent—which I think is positive—but the fact that it positions men as the standard is unfortunate. Instead of suggesting that women's strength comes from striving to be like men, it would have been so much more powerful if she'd said something like 'I merely know we are equals.' The former, though well intended, is misguided and an illustration of internalized sexism. I mean, think of the reverse. Would a male comic-book character say to a woman, 'I merely know I'm as good as you are?' No. Because men are privileged as the norm."

Three Times is the Charm!

Valkyrie returns for a third time in *The Defenders* #4 (Feb. 1973). Art by Sal Buscema and Frank McLaughlin. Words by Steve Englehart.

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Valhalla Homecoming!

Our heroine returns whence she came on this cover from *The Defenders* #66 (Dec. 1978), with a blurb suggesting a kinship between her and a certain Mr. Purple

Pants. Art by John Buscema and Bob McLeod.

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HOLDING HER OWN

The new Marvel all-star team of Doctor Strange, Sub-Mariner, and the Hulk that made up the Defenders needed a female presence to balance the testosterone-laden team, and Englehart would have been hard-pressed to find one among the company's existing roster of superhero women who could hold her own alongside such heavy-hitters. So, a year or so before the debut of the Cat and Shanna the She-Devil would make a conscious play for modern-minded female readers and well in advance of Ms. Marvel and Thundra, Valkyrie became a fixture in the Marvel firmament, both her consciousness and her sword-arm generally raised.

Perhaps initially just a good plot device, the character's staying power was no doubt due to how she reflected shifting social attitudes. Just as William Moulton Marston's creation of the feminist propaganda-spouting Wonder Woman in the 1940s paralleled the message of Rosie the Riveter and dovetailed per-

fectly with America's need for women to take on traditionally male-occupied positions in industry during World War II, in her initial appearance Valkyrie represented new ideas advocated by the Women's Liberation Movement and the societal reaction embodied in one.

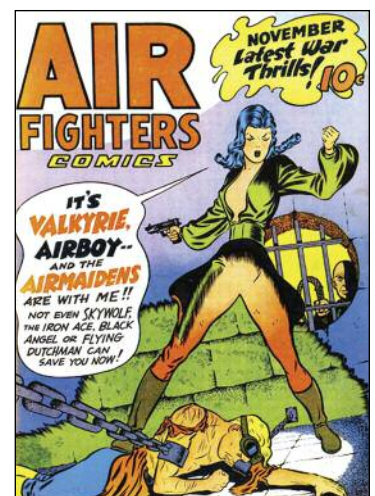
In his book *Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy and the History of Comic Book Heroines*, author Mike Madrid declares of Valkyrie: "She is the Anti-Wonder Woman and her mission is the polar opposite of the loving co-existence of the sexes advocated by the Amazing Amazon since the '40s." The comparison seems obvious, but her various writers never considered her Marvel's answer to Wonder Woman. "I've never thought that, and don't really think it now," Englehart states. "Valkyrie's an 'Amazon,' but a tough, in-your-face one, and not a princess with a family behind her—so they seem pretty different to me."

Admitting, "I suppose most superheroines derive in some way from Wonder Woman, even if the Woman in Red came first (after all, who remembers *her?*)," Roy Thomas nevertheless maintains, "the connection between Wonder Woman and the Valkyrie isn't a very strong one. More derivative was Warrior Woman, as a Nazi equivalent of the Amazon in *The Invaders*."

Despite her creator's disclaimer, it's difficult not to see in Wonder Woman a thematic antecedent of the Valkyrie—a woman warrior (complete with metal breastplate) from an iconic, mythological band of female warriors, who specifically champions sisterhood whilst generally pursuing social justice for one and all. Valkyrie was an almost-literal embodiment of the sororal unity espoused by Wonder Woman, in that an element of the spell that was used by the Enchantress to create her prevented her taking any violent action against another woman; to do so caused her agonizing physical pain.

It was left to Steve Gerber, who wrote *The Defenders* for several years, to develop Valkyrie's identity beyond her underlying purpose of promoting (and in effect, demonstrating) equality. To do so, he played on the potential identity crisis set up by Englehart when he had Valkyrie unwillingly possess the body of Barbara Norris. When confronted by elements from Barbara's life, Valkyrie is guilt-ridden for having stolen the woman's existence and simultaneously frustrated that, not being able to claim Barbara's identity as her own, she has none.

Two especially interesting story arcs occur during Gerber's tenure, the first in 1975 in *Defenders* #22–25, in which Barbara's estranged husband Jack shows up and wants to know why his wife thinks she's someone else. Eventually he grudgingly accepts that "Val" is not Barbara anymore and sometimes refers to himself as "the guy who's married to your body." There's a very interesting, possibly unintended, subtext to this story element, in



that Valkyrie appears to develop some affection for Jack which she effectively denies by violently denying that she is Barbara, ignoring the possibility of her having feelings independent of Barbara's but parallel to them. The fact that her memory of being Jack's wife, a traditional woman's role, was suppressed, is emblematic of the conflict many women faced at this time between having a career and a family, the idea that being liberated meant sacrificing traditional roles, the two sometimes thought of as somehow incompatible. Since Barbara represents the normal, socially sanctioned role of wife, Valkyrie could be seen as struggling with the idea that being liberated and powerful and being in a traditional marriage need not be mutually exclusive.

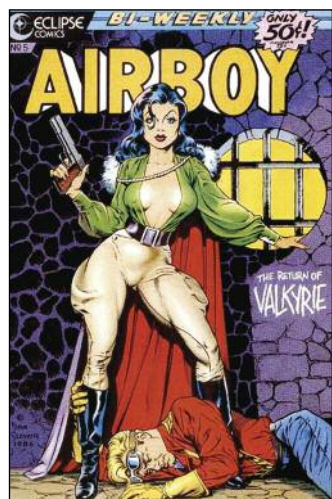
IDENTITY CRISIS?

Her frequent antagonist Arisen Tyrk, nee Lunatik, calls Valkyrie "the living identity crisis," (*Defenders* #73, July 1979), although noting that she had by that point apparently resolved the situation. The feminist dogma had gradually diminished and then rapidly disappeared as the character progressed. David Anthony Kraft, who shared scripting duties with Roger Slifer on *Defenders* (working from Gerry Conway's plots) beginning with #44, taking over as sole writer with #46 (Apr. 1977, "Who Remembers Scorpio?"), saw little sense in having a character stemming from ancient mythology be preoccupied with modern political views: "What reason would a Valkyrie have for being a feminist? Someone like that would have a whole different response to our culture, coming out of a completely different environment. Warrior women in Asgard don't have that particular problem. On the other hand, I could find that in her. She was so used to another reality that [upon encountering the lack of sexual equality], she was appalled."

Changing focus, Kraft ignored some of the cliché-laden would-be-feminist symbolism, such as the enchantment prohibiting Valkyrie from combating women, even slimy-haired swamp women on an alien planet, as in *Defenders* #27 (Sept. 1975). "I have an innate bias against gimmicks; that's largely why I ignored it," Kraft says. "I used to hate things in comics like a guy who's powerless against the color yellow. Marvel characters actually had character—they weren't just gimmicks. I also didn't have my characters didactically spout my points of view; I tried to give characters their own voice. I wasn't trying to make a statement, as Thomas may have been.

If a character harps on [one particular issue], it becomes one note. I don't write characters as role models for women, or for men, either."

Under Kraft's pen, Valkyrie's search for her identity continued, but Kraft saw it as stemming from Valkyrie's situation related to her mythical origins: "Imagine the frustration at having



your essence trapped in the body of an earth-woman, one who didn't have the athletic body, this shaped body, that Valkyrie would've been used to, and having to cope with that. There's a parallel to Thor, another immortal banished to Earth. Everything would be unfamiliar." Noting some similarity to Captain America's origins in Valkyrie's situation, he elaborates, "After all, none of us chooses the bodies that we're in. As long as Valkyrie was conflicted, she couldn't be who she was."

Her struggle in creating a life for herself outside of the role she was expected to play in her community (in her case as a superheroine who was part of a team of superheroes) still paralleled that of many women of the day, as she enrolled in classes at Empire State University in an effort to discover herself, an environment as alien to her as it would've been to housewives and young mothers going back to school at a time when American culture was evolving and traditional gender roles being reevaluated.

"I don't think women have to be strong in the same

Ye Gawds!

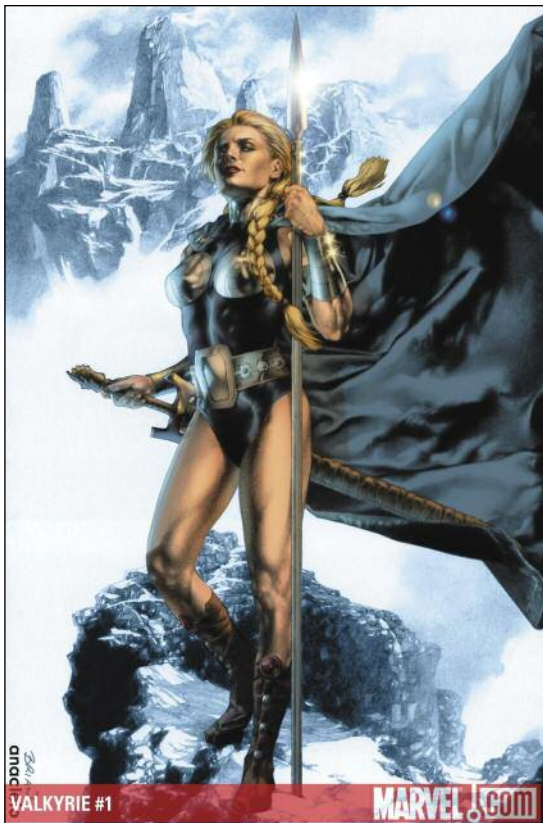
(above) John Romita, Sr.'s cover of *Marvel Two-in-One* #7 (Jan. 1975).

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The Bad One

(center left) Lest we forget: the *other* Valkyrie, the pistol-packing female nemesis of Airboy.

Airboy TM & © Todd McFarlane Productions.



way that men are," Kraft adds. "In the shorthand of mass communication, when they want a woman to be strong and formidable, they give her a male weapon. Val had a sword—a male weapon—which fit with the feminist thing, but she couldn't use her sword a lot because killing people would have made her unsympathetic and wouldn't have been allowed under the Comics Code either, so she hit people with the flat of her blade a lot. So she had a male weapon, but was kind of emasculated [in that sense]. I wanted to give her a staff instead. Wonder Woman's lasso was the perfect female weapon, something that tightens and constricts, not a hard, poking, beating thing. Male weapons are natural projections of male sexuality. Women's genitals involve inward symbolism."



Wagnerian Warrior

Various incarnations of the Val of today.

(above) Brian Anacleto's cover painting for *Valkyrie* #1 (Nov. 2010).

(above right) Detail of Chris Bachalo and Tim Townsend's variant cover for *Secret Avengers* #4 (Oct. 2010).

(inset right) Jelena Kevic-Djurdjevic's art graces a variant cover of *Secret Avengers* #6 (Dec. 2010).

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WHAT WOMEN WANT

The second particularly notable storyline during Gerber's run takes place in 1976 in *Defenders* #35–39, in which Valkyrie is arrested after wrecking a restaurant while battling one of the Headmen. She's then cast in a women-in-prison scenario, complete with a giant butch stereotype for an antagonist, due to 1) her inability to physically harm another woman without experiencing crippling pain herself, a factor of the spell that created her and a sort of literal translation of ardent feminism, and 2) her noble refusal to break herself out of prison, which she could easily accomplish by knocking a hole in the wall but doesn't because she adamantly submits to the rule of law and endeavors to deal with the situation on its own terms. She ultimately triumphs thanks to her calm, stoic perseverance.

That Valkyrie has to overcome the prohibition from opposing her own sex, yet still recognize the rights of both sides of the conflict, the women prisoners, and the male warden, establishes the virtue and necessity of judging people as individuals regardless of gender and makes her victory a mark of her individual character, not any ascribed to her as a representative of a class.

The antagonism toward men that was the hallmark of Valkyrie's initial appearance had long since dissipated, along with any perceived



necessity to prove that women are the equal of men, or at least the need to argue it. When several of the *Defenders*—it is only incidentally the male half of the team—fall under the spell of an arcane gemstone (*Defenders* #44, Feb. 1977), it culminates in Valkyrie leading all the female characters in battle against the men, a scenario that was repeated 20 years later in the

second *Defenders* series (vol. 2 #16/*The Order* #4, July 2002). Such incidences of the male heroes needing to be saved—in the case of the latter example, it's from themselves—by the female heroes, after first being defeated in battle by them, demonstrated an equality that there was no need to argue for or about.

Even in the absence of any antipathy toward men, Valkyrie didn't evidence any particular interest in them. Englehart speaks to the problematic nature of creating a romance for her: "There I'd have to say no, in keeping with her feminist background. Not that feminists can't have romance, but for her to have it, I'd have to walk her through the personality growth (and I'm not sure the construct would have allowed that in the first place). If I'd written the series for several years, I'd certainly have explored her more, and it's quite possible that I'd have done that walking, but the book I was writing was an action book,

but the book I was writing was an action book,

and then pretty quickly I wasn't writing it any more, so I never even got to thinking about romance. Everyone else on the team was pretty much 'self-explanatory,' so delving deeply into her would have thrown the whole tone of the book off. That's the kind of thing that would have taken time, to work the book as well as her into a space where it could happen."

When Valkyrie is enslaved by the Mandrill's seductive power over women in *Defenders* #79 (Jan. 1979) and again in #90-91 (Dec. 1979-Jan. 1980), Wonder Woman and her Amazons, whose bracelets of submission were Aphrodite's admonishment never again to fall victim to man's duplicity and guile, are echoed again as Val is rendered helpless by a power (one might say a force of nature) she can't fight. In the end she's freed by the sisterly devotion of her teammate and best friend Hellcat. There was no such godly prohibition against romantic love in Valkyrie's case, but her warrior's businesslike attitude tended to preclude it.

Kraft attributed her lack of romantic entanglement to her unfamiliarity with our culture. When classmate Ledge asks her for a date, "You wish to offer me a dried fruit?" is her only response. The writer saw the possibility of at least a sexual relationship between the warrior woman and the Hulk as more plausible: "She had a natural affinity for the Hulk, another stranger in an unfamiliar land," but didn't necessarily consider that the monster's attraction to her was mutual, and a purely physical assignation was out of the question. "The Comics Code was always there," Kraft remembers.

Although she had effectively gained a secret identity of sorts in Barbara Norriss, Valkyrie still didn't really have an origin beyond having been brought to life by a magic spell. It was years later that it was established that she was an actual person that the Enchantress had ensnared and not simply a magical construct. In *Defenders* #66-68 (Dec. 1978-Feb. 1979), Kraft and Ed Hannigan's plot has Valkyrie return to Valhalla as a key player in a civil war that would determine who would oversee it—Hela, Goddess of Death, or her rival Ollerus. Valkyrie is known as Brunhilde to those in Asgard and its environs, and it's evident from the moment of her arrival that she has roots here, an entire personal history that had never been suggested in any of the character's appearances. Surprisingly, the much more popular Thor doesn't make an appearance, which avoids pulling focus from Valkyrie.

At the end of the story arc she is returned to Earth, still in the enchanted body of Barbara Norriss, but free of any further potential conflict between the two, Barbara Norris having been discovered in Valhalla inhabiting the original immortal form of Brunhilde and, after siding with Ollerus, banished to Niffleheim. Rid of the complication of an unwanted other identity, henceforth Valkyrie would be very much her own woman, free of any lingering ties to her body's previous inhabitant and displaying unwavering confidence and heroism. "Stories need to progress," Kraft explains. "Going to Valhalla made her more secure, more comfortable in her own body—even though it wasn't her own body. It advanced her another step and made these changes."

Valkyrie's new identity, the recognition that she was indeed Brunhilde, the legendary leader of the Valkyrior, may have inspired Roy Thomas to use her in adapting the *Ring of the Niebelung* saga during an extended story arc in *Thor* #291-300 (Jan.-Oct. 1980), although it is more her by then very recognizable image than the character known to readers. A subsequent narrative reincarnation, which leaves most of those involved with



no memory of the previous existence they shared, renders the tale technically canonical but effectively peripheral to any ongoing interpretation of Valkyrie.

THE DEAD ZONE

For nearly 150 consecutive issues she appeared in almost every issue of *The Defenders*, a steadfastly loyal and unfailingly virtuous teammate to the rest of the cast, even the Hulk, with whom she had a better rapport than most. She was a perfect foil to Doctor Strange, far more reasonable than their temperamental fellows, but sometimes just as impatient with the magician's sometimes-ponderous diatribes. Hot-headed characters like the Sub-Mariner and Nighthawk were balanced by her cool rationality, and female cast members like Hellcat, Clea, Cloud, and the Red Guardian tended to rally around her.

Sometime after the centennial issue, she was restored to her true self, Brunhilde, and a new chapter in her story began. The backbone of a new team,

Cho Nuff!

(above) While the Ultimate Universe wasn't a part of this article's character study, we doubt you'll mind eyeing Frank Cho's rendition of Val from *Ultimate New Ultimates* #4 (Dec. 2010). Script by Jeph Loeb.

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Busting Up the Boys Club!

(below) Ya can't blame us for not resisting one last detailed gander at Val's debut, on the striking cover of *The Avengers* #83 (Dec. 1970), with art by John Buscema and Tom Palmer. She's a feisty one, she is!

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Valkyrie becomes custodian of the disgraced Moonragon and in the end sacrifices herself to defeat the malevolent Dragon of the Moon, but happily this is not the end of her story. Thanks to her role as a chooser of the slain, she resurfaces in *Strange Tales* v. 2. #5 (Aug. 1987) along with several of her teammates, also recently deceased, continuing the battle along the borders of the Land of the Dead. She is shortly revived in *Doctor Strange* vol. 3 #3 (Mar. 1989) as part of the Dragon Circle, occupying yet another host, Sian Bowen, but this incarnation didn't prove as lasting as the last had, and she was largely absent from Marvel Comics for the ensuing decade.

As the mainstay of the original title, Valkyrie could hardly be left out of the second *Defenders* series, and when she returns thanks to Kurt Busiek and Erik Larsen, it is once again in the form of the long-forgotten Samantha Parrington. When the revival of the title faltered after considerable critical disdain, Valkyrie languished once more, until Ed Brubaker elected to revive the original version for his *Secret Avengers*.

One of her more notable appearances during the 1990s had been *Valkyrie* #1 (Jan. 1997), which sported a cover image by Pablo Raimondi informed by the aesthetic of male fantasy propagated by the contemporary bad-girl trend, demonstrating just how far the culture had shifted, but a more recent eponymous

one-shot (Sept. 2010) from writer Bryan J. L. Glass and artists Jay Anacleto and Phil Winslade saw a return to the classic vision of Norse mythology, an eternal warrior for a new era.

Comparisons to Wonder Woman aside, Valkyrie has proven a likable and original character, suitable as a role model for any reader, male or female. As in Wagner's *Die Walküre*, the sum of her use by various writers at Marvel Comics came to define her character through her compassion and her steadfast determination to do the right thing even if it required personal sacrifice. As her co-creator Roy Thomas says, "Haven't read enough comics to know if the Valkyrie has fulfilled her potential, but if she's been around for years, she's probably come close." Indeed she has.

**ALL RIGHT, GIRLS--
THAT FINISHES OFF THESE
MALE CHAUVINIST
PIGS!**

JONATHAN MILLER once met Gloria Steinem after attending one of her speaking engagements and he's been a big fan of liberated women ever since. He suggested the theme for this issue.

end

**FROM NOW ON,
IT'S THE
VALKYRIE
AND HER LADY
LIBERATORS!**



LIBERATION & CONSTRAINT
PROGRESSION & REGRESSION

FlashBacks!

MS. MARVEL

A Binary Life

One of the most difficult things about writing (and writing about) superheroes that have existed for decades is that it's hard to continually recapture the context and zeitgeist surrounding their creation. If comic books are mirrors for society, and their characters reflect specific historical moments and movements, then superheroes start losing a bit of their relevance as soon as the moment of their creation is over. Dazzler, Luke Cage, and even Superman are very much products of their time. Some have worn better than others because their symbolism is more enduring or better able to adapt.

by Alex Boney

Danvers Defiant!

A melange of Ms. Marvel imagery. Main figure is our heroine detailed from the cover of *Ms. Marvel* vol. 1 #18 (June 1978), and background triptych (from left) is Carol Danvers in her spiffy new costume (cover, *Ms. Marvel* #20, Oct. 1978); as Binary (cover, *Uncanny X-Men* #164, Dec. 1982); and her modern-day threads (standing in as her guise as Warbird) from the cover of *Ms. Marvel* #12 (Apr. 2007). First three are by Dave Cockrum and last is by Greg Horn.

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has suffered differently. Despite all of this—perhaps even because of it—Ms. Marvel has remained one of the most resilient, enduring, and determined heroines in comic-book history. And when it comes to “liberated ladies” of comics, she provides a useful and instructive case study.

CAROL DANVERS

Although Ms. Marvel debuted in the late 1970s, Carol Danvers had already been a part of Marvel continuity for nearly ten years. Carol debuted in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #13 (Mar. 1968) as a background character in the story that introduced Captain Marvel (or Mar-Vell—an alien officer who was sent by the technologically advanced Kree Empire to spy on Earth’s space-age capabilities). General Bridges, a commander at an unspecified Cape (presumably Kennedy at the time), introduces Carol Danvers in the following way: “Dr. Lawson, this is Miss Danvers! Man or woman, she’s the finest Head of Security a missile base could want!” This was high praise for a woman who had achieved such a lofty military position in the 1960s, and it established Carol as a tough, independent career woman from the very beginning.

When Captain Marvel graduated to his own ongoing series a couple months later (May 1968), Carol came with him as a recurring part of his supporting cast. She was not just strong-willed, but almost precognitive. Carol immediately distrusted Dr. Walter Lawson (Mar-Vell’s stolen secret identity), who she correctly thought was hiding a secret. While her initial skepticism was based largely on intuition (and Lawson’s suspicious behavior), it was also egged on by Lawson’s regressive attitude toward women in power. In *Captain Marvel* #5, Lawson tells Carol that her wariness is “perfectly obvious! You’re a woman—a lovely woman, in fact! And you’ve been given a very masculine role in life!

Naturally, psychological conflicts must arise when a beautiful young woman is asked to play at police-man!”

This sort of condescension was part of the humorous wink/nudge appeal of Carol’s role in those early issues. While she was strong and professional, she occasionally acted “like a skittish girl” (*Captain Marvel* #6) and served as a love interest for Mar-Vell during the book’s first couple years. She continued to distrust Lawson while fawning over Mar-Vell—a romantic-triangle dynamic that changed considerably in *Captain Marvel* #18, which proved to be a major turning point for Carol Danvers. When Yon-Rogg (another Kree officer) travels to Earth to attack his arch-foe Mar-Vell, Carol is caught in the middle of the battle. She finds herself trapped in a cavern when a Kree device

Danvers’ Debut
(above) The future Ms. Marvel was first introduced within the Marvel Universe as foil for Captain Marvel, the Kree warrior, in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #13 (Mar. 1968). Words by Roy Thomas and art by Gene Colan and Paul Reinman.

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But when time passes, and American society shifts toward new interests and concerns, creators struggle to make extant superheroes keep up with that change. Sometimes they take drastic measures to keep characters relevant, and sometimes the heroes end up worse for that wear.

One of the characters who has experienced some of the greatest, most drastic, and most troubling transformations over the last 35 years is Carol Danvers. Originally created as a bit supporting character for Marvel’s 1960s *Captain Marvel* series, Carol went on to become Ms. Marvel, Binary, Warbird, and Ms. Marvel (again). In some ways, Ms. Marvel is the Marvel equivalent of DC’s Power Girl. Both characters were created during a rising tide of feminism in the 1970s, both have been powered up and depowered frequently by male creators, and both have suffered extraordinary physical violations including rape and mysterious supernatural pregnancies.

It’s easy to make the case that superheroes (male and female alike) have suffered various forms of horrible torment over the decades. After all, torment creates drama. But there’s something peculiar and almost fetishistic about the gendered nature of the torments devised for Carol Danvers—a character who was created to be an embodiment of feminine strength and willpower. Carol hasn’t necessarily suffered more than her male counterparts. But she



“This Female Fights Back!”
(right) John Romita, Sr.’s art graces this bust-out, navel-gazing cover for *Ms. Marvel* #1 (Jan. 1977).

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Marvelous Ms.

(right) Panel from *Ms. Marvel* #1 (Jan. 1977), with words by Gerry Conway and art by John Buscema and Joe Sinnott. (below) Snagged from the Fireside book, *The Superhero Women*, by Stan Lee (1977), is John Romita, Sr.'s frontispiece to the Ms. Marvel tale, itself a detail originally from his *Spidey Super Stories* #22 (Apr. 1977) cover.

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called the Psyche-Magnitron explodes and bathes her with energy. While Carol is seemingly still alive at the end of the issue, she disappears from the book for several years.

When Carol appears again in *Captain Marvel* #34 (Sept. 1974), she has moved on from her position at the Cape to become the Security Advisor for the Defense Department. While she demonstrates no physical side-effects of the Psyche-Magnitron, she has had to deal with the professional fallout of her time at the Cape: "Ever since the Walter Lawson/Captain Marvel foul-up at the Cape, I've been on the spot with some four-star chauvinists—so I'm running this show tight." Carol's reappearance in a couple late issues of *Captain Marvel* connected her back to Mar-Vell's beginnings, but her status as a major supporting character was clearly at an end. She'd have to wait a few more years to step back to the front of the stage.

MS. MARVEL (ORIGIN)

In a premiere issue cover-dated January 1977, Gerry Conway and John Buscema reintroduced Carol Danvers as an independent career woman in a completely different context. Whereas Stan Lee (editor), Roy Thomas and Arnold Drake (writers), and Gene Colan (artist) had presented Carol as a security officer in a decade of military escalation, Conway and Buscema adapted the character to a new decade and repackaged her as Marvel's strong, vocal representative of the Women's Liberation Movement. When *Ms. Marvel* #1 hit the stands, Carol Danvers was no longer a military officer or security advisor of any sort. Rather, she was the editor-in-chief of a new magazine (published by J. Jonah Jameson, of course) called *Woman*. If the name and professional position looked familiar, it was by design. Feminist author and advocate Gloria Steinem had started a magazine called *Ms.* five years earlier.

The gendered nature of *Ms. Marvel* wasn't just apparent from the title and the protagonist; feminist sensibilities were woven through the entire book. The cover of *Ms. Marvel* #1 announced her as "A bold new superheroine in the senses-stunning tradition of Spider-Man!" The thugs attacking her in the first few pages call her "dame" and "broad." One bystander says, "I've seen tough—but that little lady makes Lynda Carter look like Olive Oyl!" After the street fight, a little girl says, "Mommy, I've never seen a woman like that—have you? Wow! When I grow up—I wanna be just like her!" And naturally, J. Jonah Jameson's chauvinism is introduced as a major thematic antagonist to Carol's progressive leanings. Jonah laments that "Lately ... I haven't had the time to devote myself to our magazine department—particularly, our women's magazines—and let me tell you, Miss Danvers, it shows. Articles on *Women's Lib*, interviews with Kate Millet, stories about careers for women—yecch."

Even the end of that first issue is important. For the letters-page back-matter of *Ms. Marvel* #1, Gerry

Conway wrote a letter that remains one of the most significant statements about Ms. Marvel as a character (and men writing female characters) ever written. In the letter, Conway argues that "you might see a parallel between *her* quest for identity, and the modern woman's quest for raised consciousness, for self-liberation, for identity. In a way, that's intentional. Ms. Marvel, because of her name if nothing else, is influenced, to a great extent, by the move toward women's liberation. She is *not* a Marvel Girl; she's a woman, not a Miss or a Mrs.—a Ms. Her own person. Herself. *But she doesn't know who she is....* Naturally, in time, she'll learn her true identity (in two issues, to be exact, if you're statistically inclined), but that search for self will continue for as long as the character lasts. Ms. Marvel is many things, but most of all she's a growing personality, constantly reaching for a better understanding of herself as a human being."

While it seemed clear that the socio-political winds of change provided the driving force behind the creation of Ms. Marvel, Conway now looks back on the creation of the book with a more practical perspective. "It actually came about for fairly uncreative reasons," Conway recalls. "I had been brought over to Marvel to be an editor-in-chief, and that didn't turn out so well for me. I didn't really enjoy the time I was there, and the people who were under me were not happy with having to work for me, and it just became more hassle than it was worth. One of the things I had been attacked for by people there was the idea that I was kicking them off books in order to take over [writing] their books. This





Cockrum Rocks!

(above) This was apparently to become a house ad promoting the “new” Ms. Marvel, and was drawn by the fondly remembered Dave Cockrum but unpublished at the time.

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Celestial Diva

(right) Sporting her new costume design, our heroine graces the cover of *Ms. Marvel* #23 (Apr. 1979), the last issue of the initial run. Art by Dave Cockrum and Joe Rubinstein.

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being a ‘Girl’ might be a little bit off-base. So we came up with the idea of Ms. Marvel.”

Though Conway was instrumental in creating Ms. Marvel, he only stayed on as the writer and editor of her title book for two issues. The second issue, which featured the cover blurb “Face it, Scorpion! You’re just not man enough to beat Ms. Marvel—not now—not ever!” bridged the temporal and professional gap between Carol’s military life and her new career as a writer and editor. As Carol explains it, becoming a writer was a way to recapture self-respect and find her identity after the Cape Kennedy fiasco.

But there were problems with Carol’s new identity, too. While she was ostensibly a symbol of female independence and liberation, she also carried baggage that seemed to come from a pre-feminist age. For one thing, she had no idea that she and Ms. Marvel were the same person. Her transformations to Ms. Marvel were triggered by fainting spells and blackouts, which had been used to signal female hysteria and instability for centuries. When she woke up from her spells, she suffered from amnesia. And

was, of course, not the case—at least from my point of view. But given that that was how they felt, I said to Stan, ‘Well, is there any way that we could create some stuff so that I’m not kicking people off books?’

“Stan had either just created She-Hulk or was thinking about creating her, and we thought, ‘Can we come up with another female superhero that can use the Marvel name?’ And Stan said, ‘Like Marvel Girl or something.’ And I thought, well, you know, the ‘Something Girl’ thing might be offensive to some people. I had just done Power Girl over at DC, but that was more like a tribute to Supergirl than anything. I thought the idea of Marvel’s first real solo female character (other than the Cat)

although she was living her own life as her own person, her costume—and even, to an extent, her identity—was not her own. Her powers were largely a recreation of her already-established male counterpart. Her “Seventh Sense” precognitive ability was clearly not Kree, but it was reminiscent of Spider-Man’s spider-sense. Her blue-and-red-and-star costume was essentially the same outfit worn by Captain Marvel (with the exception of her exposed midriff and navel). The costume was interesting, but it wasn’t terribly original.

According to Conway, this all made sense from a marketing perspective. “I can’t say that I designed the costume, but I did want it to look like it was derivative of Captain Marvel,” Conway says. “I felt that that was potentially one of the main selling points of the character. If you’re going to call somebody Ms. Marvel, you’ve got to tie it into the other character called ‘Marvel.’ Seems to me. The costume being derivative was something that, by definition, was going to happen. Whether the way we did it was good? That I can’t say.”

Conway didn’t leave the title after two issues because of creative differences. In the end, he simply didn’t have much more to add to the concept. “I don’t think it was something where I looked at it as something I didn’t care about at all and I wasn’t going to do a good professional job,” Conway reflects. “It’s just that when you come right down to it, it was not something about which I thought I had that much to say. At that point in the ‘70s, I think everybody was fairly well-committed to socially conscious thinking. Women’s Liberation, civil rights, the anti-war movement—all of that was part of the gestalt of the time. When you grow up in that environment, you do develop a fairly clear set of values that are either pro or against. I certainly felt passionately about the topic. I just don’t think I ever felt passionately about the character.”



MS. MARVEL (EVOLUTION)

After Conway’s early departure from *Ms. Marvel*, a new creative team was hired to steer the direction of the book. Archie Goodwin was brought on as editor, and Chris Claremont was hired to write Carol’s stories. Claremont had begun making a name for himself on *X-Men* just a couple years earlier, and he had already garnered a reputation for writing strong female characters. As Conway recalls, “When Chris came on the book, I think Chris really did feel it. He’s always had a great affinity for female characters. He had some ideas and was able to take it and develop it into something a little better than what it had been.”

For Claremont, agreeing to write *Ms. Marvel* was the only sensible

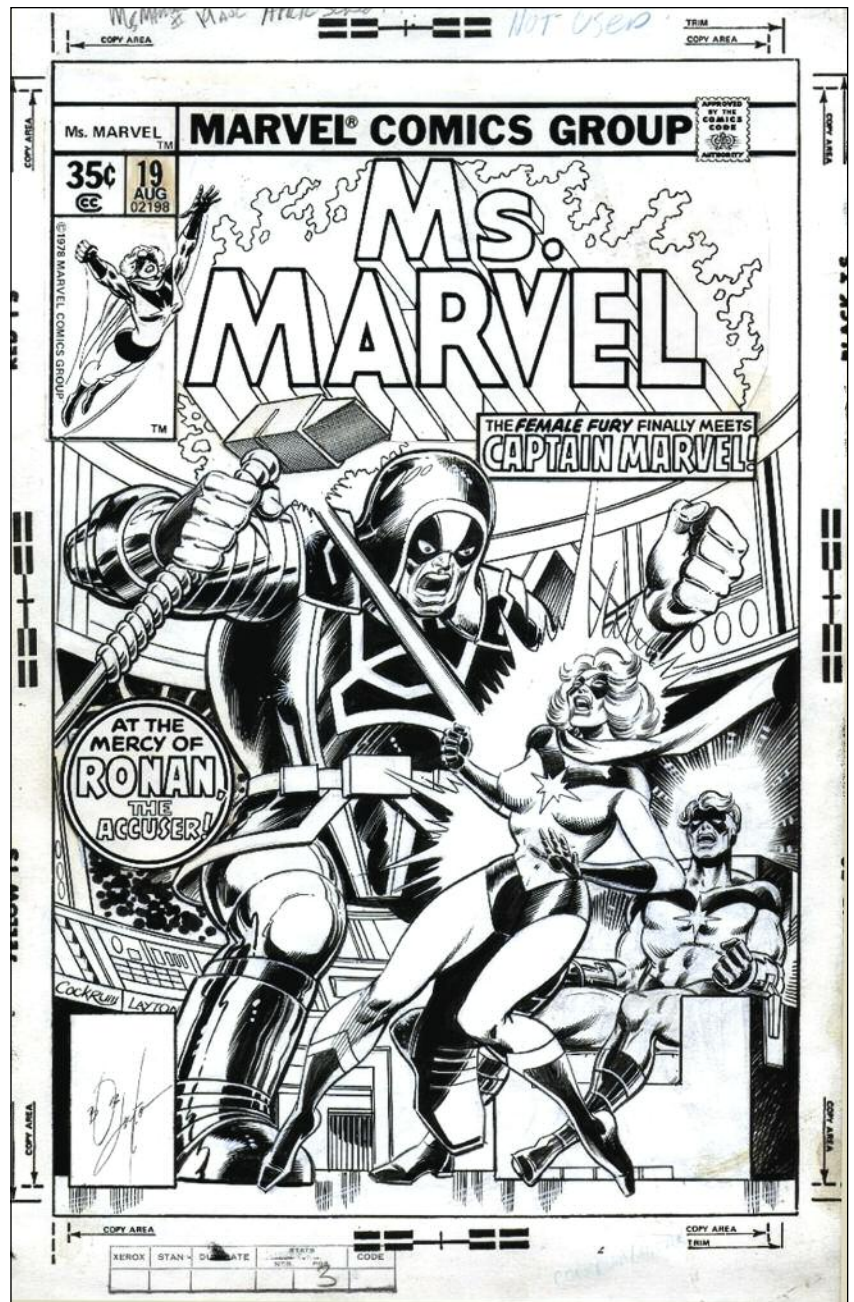
move a young freelance writer could make. "I suppose like many young writers, the key answer to that is that we're all desperate for work," Claremont admits. "In those days, you were paid a page rate. There weren't royalties, there weren't secondary license sources. There was nothing but the actual payment for the plot script. And it wasn't all that much, even then. The first rule of any writer at Marvel or DC was to grab anything you could. In this instance, Gerry moved on. The book was tossed to me. In those days as a young writer, you never turned anything down—no matter how ghoulish. Or silly. The rent needs to be paid."

Soon after Claremont began writing *Ms. Marvel*, her characterization and motivation began to deepen significantly. In issue #3 (Mar. 1977), Carol revisits the cave in which the Kree machine bathed her in energy and realizes that she and Ms. Marvel are the same person. But with that realization comes the difficulty of having to navigate two different personae. As Carol says in #5, "I've become two different people, each as determined to stay alive as the other. And if it came down to a choice—Ms. Marvel or Carol Danvers—no, blast it, Ms. Marvel or me!—what would I do? What could I do?" The split-personality angle continues for many issues, even as the cold, scientific aspects of her Kree personality begin to grow stronger. As the series progresses, she becomes more strong-willed, short-tempered, and merciless. In #7, she claims that "I am the same woman I was a moment ago ... and I'm not. I'm alien. Warrior. Kree. And I won't be denied."

For Claremont, *Ms. Marvel* provided a useful testing ground—a way to expand his writing range and a way for him to earn his reputation for female characterization. "Even then I had a reputation for liking to write women characters more than men characters," Claremont says, "because there was a lot more room to play since they weren't fully formed as concepts. I didn't like writing women more than men, but at least as much as writing men. The reason was that, because the characters had to a surprising extent been ignored through the '60s (in terms of growth and presentation and reaching out to the audience), to me there was a lot more fallow ground to play on."

Claremont made the most of what he was given. He continued to explore Carol's various personalities as a way to develop a distinct character. In *Ms. Marvel* #13 (Jan. 1978), Carol visits her parents in Boston. Her father is revealed as a hyper-masculine anti-feminist who never really approves of anything Carol does (and certainly doesn't approve of her current career as editor of *Woman*). This constant impulse to seek her father's approval provides a key to understanding Carol's past and future motivations. This issue also provides a resolution to the split-personality dilemma that had been plaguing her for months. She concludes that "somehow, when the Psyche-Magnatron transformed me into a Kree warrior, my mind couldn't cope with the change. So it split in two, creating me and Ms. Marvel. Two identities for what was really the same person. That's why in all of Ms. Marvel's fights I—Carol Danvers—never got hurt. No matter what I wore, or how I looked, or who I thought I was, I was always Ms. Marvel, and she was me."

Another major complication that Claremont added was making Carol's profession more believable. In early issues, Carol's identity as editor is largely theoretical. We rarely see her in the office working. But in #9, she's actually portrayed as an editor, in the office, managing a staff. In the next issue, we see her control of the mag-



azine begin to slip away because she's frequently away from the office fighting as Ms. Marvel. She's a professional woman, but that profession eventually has to matter. Carol continues to argue with Jonah Jameson and get more stressed out as the series progresses until Jameson finally fires her in issue #22. According to Claremont, this was the only logical conclusion to her chosen career. "She was editor-in-chief of *Woman* magazine," Claremont points out. "Well, I don't know about you, but I've been there. Not *Woman* magazine, but I've been an editor, a senior editor, an editorial director ... you don't sit around all day doing superhero stuff. It's a job. You have responsibilities. People depend on you. You can't be out of the office every day doing stuff."

According to Claremont, his approach to writing *Ms. Marvel* was essentially architectural. He was taking the shaky, undefined foundation of the character, firming it up, and building a series of structures that would sustain entertaining stories featuring a believable, original character. "I wanted to create or evolve the series

J'Accuser!

(above) Unused cover for *Ms. Marvel* #19 (Aug. 1978). Art by Dave Cockrum and Bob Layton.

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nuity and marketing perspective, this was clearly a good thing. In *Marvel Team-Up* #61–62 (Sept.–Oct. 1977), Claremont wrote—and John Byrne drew—a team-up in which Ms. Marvel and Spider-Man fight the Super-Skrull. Given Ms. Marvel’s recent Kree origin, the choice of villain was a natural fit. A year later, Ms. Marvel was featured in an issue of *The Defenders* (#57, also written by Claremont). In *Ms. Marvel* #15, Carol seeks out the Avengers. A few months later, she makes a guest appearance in *The Avengers* (#171–172, May–June 1978) and helps the team fight Ultron. The issue closes with Ms. Marvel declining an invitation to join the group back at Avengers Mansion: “No thanks, Wondy! I’ve got a life of my own! Don’t worry, I’ll be back! I’d like to see more of you! You have a lot to learn about liberated women—especially *me*—but a hunk like you might be worth educating!”

All of these appearances had the effect of not only solidifying Ms. Marvel as a unique character with something to add, but also integrating her more deeply into the fabric of the Marvel Universe. Later in 1978, she teams up with the Avengers again (*Avengers* #175–177) and fights alongside Doctor Strange and Spider-Man (*Marvel Team-Up* #76–77). The next year, she officially joins the Jim Shooter-era *Avengers* as a replacement for the recently departed Scarlet Witch (*Avengers* #183, May 1979). This is the alliance that would later prove to be the source of both her greatest and her lowest moments.

While Carol flourished and grew elsewhere, it was in her own book that she continued to receive the most development. Claremont was set on correcting some of the flatness that he thought hampered his first couple years on *Ms. Marvel*. “To me, the things that Gerry set up became more impediments,” Claremont observes. “Gerry might well have had specific goals in mind and directions he would have taken that obviously would have been very different. The frustration of *Ms. Marvel* was that the first 18 issues were, for me, spring training. It was looking at the concept, character, and structure, and looking at everything that was there and trying to figure out which elements worked—the costume, the job, the reality of her life, how her powers came to be.”

One of the biggest obstacles Claremont confronted was Carol’s inherent link to Captain Marvel. Although one of Carol’s frequent catchphrases was “Hala!” (the home world of the Kree), there were not otherwise many explicit connections between the Ms. and Captain Marvel to speak of. In fact, Ms. Marvel doesn’t actually meet her namesake until *Ms. Marvel* #19 (Aug. 1978). In this key issue, illustrated by Carmine Infantino, Carol finally comes face-to-face with Mar-Vell as the pair is captured by the Kree enforcer Ronan. This issue also reveals much more of Carol’s personal background, including her father’s refusal to pay for a daughter to go to college (leading her to join the Air Force and fly war planes), her paying her own way through college, and her ascension to the NASA security appointment at the Cape. The book closes with Carol confronting Mar-Vell and insisting that she must attain a level of independence in her superhero identity as well: “All my life, I’ve fought to be my own

We’re Gonna Turn It On! We’re Gonna Bring You the Power!

Betcha didn’t recall that merely months after her debut, Ms. Marvel guested in *Spidey Super Stories* #22 (Apr. 1977). Here’s an interior page by Win Mortimer. John Romita’s SSS cover to that ish is inset.

starring a young woman with a history—a very specific history that had already been established,” Claremont says. “The thing that had to be borne in mind was that Carol Danvers had already had bits and pieces of her life already in view going back before the evolution of Ms. Marvel. She was Air Force. She was, to an extent, NASA. To go from that to *Woman* magazine—especially as editor, working for Jonah Jameson—was ... strange. How does that all fit together? You go from being an NCIS-type security agent in her earlier incarnation, where she met Captain Marvel, to being a journalist in *Ms. Marvel*. It was odd. Where did she come from? What was her mindset? How did she get to where she was?”

Something that both complicated and assisted Claremont’s construction project was that, as Carol increased in familiarity and popularity among readers, she began to be pulled into more books. From a conti-



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woman. The last thing I wanted was to become a female copy of anyone—especially you. But, for better or worse, that's what happened. I'm not griping, y'understand. I ... like being a superhero. But ... Mar-Vell ... our powers may be similar, but our heads aren't. I'm not Kree—I'm human, and proud of it."

As Chris Claremont points out, the separation was necessary and inevitable—especially given the constraints of her origins. "The challenge we had was trying to figure out the mythology of who Carol was, of who Ms. Marvel is. And part of that rationale is finding a way to literally drive a crevasse between her and Captain Marvel so that she isn't created out of his lesser rib, to use a Biblical reference. So that she had something in terms of her origin, her reality, what makes her who she is, that makes her unique. Otherwise, what you're doing is Captain Marvel-Lite. And you can't in any superhero reality. That was the other fundamental challenge to the reality. If this is the centerpiece icon of Women's Lib in the visual adventure medium, why is every aspect of her reality derived from a man? Her job is courtesy of Jonah Jameson, her costume and powers are courtesy of Captain Marvel. What is there here that's Carol? What is here that speaks to her uniqueness as a person and/or as a woman?"

One of the most effective ways that Claremont and artist Dave Cockrum could achieve this level of independence was with a visual alteration. If comics is at least a 50% visual medium, then changing Ms. Marvel's costume was a clear way to make a clean break and set a new path. "Here's a case in point," Claremont says. "You take an image of Captain Marvel, and what you have is this beautiful red-and-black costume that is designed to accentuate a man's broad shoulders. You have this inverted triangle leading down to the waist and toward the crotch, emphasizing his shoulders, his rib cage, his lean muscular waist, and down to the hips and the legs. Wham! He's a reversed arrowhead. When you look at it drawn by Starlin, it's primal, it works, it's right. The only problem is that it doesn't work on a woman. Visually speaking, what you've got is the arrowhead design except that the body doesn't come down to an arrowhead point. It reverses course at the waistline, and you suddenly have wide hips. So what you end up with is almost a visual caricature. Because what you're looking at is this big, open belly—especially after it was decided to open the costume because it was 'sexier'—and these giant wide hips. There was



never any aesthetic 'wow' to it. It wasn't organic in terms of the character, and it certainly wasn't organic in terms of the body."

The solution was the new black costume—a black leotard, a yellow swoosh across the chest, a red waist sash, and black boots and gloves—that debuted in *Ms. Marvel* #20 (Oct. 1978). The issue opens with a splash page in which Carol looks at herself in a full-length mirror and declares "If I do say so myself—I look grrrrreat!" Unfortunately, Cockrum only stayed on the book for one more issue, and the series was canceled with *Ms. Marvel* #23. Two more issues, intended for June and August 1979 cover dates, were fully scripted and partially illustrated, but they never saw publication as part of *Ms. Marvel*.

The story featured a fight with the Hellfire Club and Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, as Mystique coordinated an elaborate attack on Carol. The story was eventually completed and published in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #10–11 (1992), but by that time the plot points involving Mystique and Rogue had been fleshed out elsewhere.

Avenging Angel

(above) *The Avengers* #183 (May 1979) has Ms. Marvel joining the ranks. Words by David Micheline; art by John Byrne and Klaus Janson.

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Stormy Relationship

(right) John Byrne cartoon commentary on the fashion sense of Storm of the Uncanny X-Men and our heroine. From the 1978 New York Comic Art Convention program book.

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MS. MARVEL (OUTRAGE)

After the cancellation of her title series, Ms. Marvel continued to be featured in Jim Shooter and David Michelinie's *Avengers* title. Shooter had been writing *The Avengers* during Carol's introduction to the team, and she became an official part of the team around the same time Michelinie took over writing chores on the series. According to Michelinie, Carol wasn't intended to be a target of any sort. In fact, she didn't have much of a prominent role at all early in his run. "She wasn't in any of the stories I scripted before I became regular writer on *The Avengers*," Michelinie notes. "And she was only in two panels of the first story I plotted myself—and she didn't say a word in either of them. I'd never read the character in

her own book, so really didn't have any feelings about her one way or the other."

Carol's involvement with the Avengers, however, eventually led to the strangest and most troubling episode in the character's life. In a four-part story beginning in *Avengers* #197 (July 1980) and concluding in *Avengers* #200, Carol discovers that she's three months pregnant and carries out the full term of a pregnancy—all in roughly 24 hours. Her fellow Avengers don't know how to respond. When Carol tells them she's pregnant in *Avengers* #199, Jan (the Wasp) replies, "I think it's great! Gosh, a real baby!" and Beast

responds, "Hey, if the kid needs a teddy bear, I'm available." In *Avengers* #200 (Oct. 1980), Carol doesn't go through a traditional birth. Apparently the result of an immaculate conception, the birthing process leads to no pain or any apparent physical alteration. In fact, she's recovered fine and back in her Ms. Marvel costume a few pages later, and her son is full grown a few pages after that. The boy (now a fully functional genius of a man) is named Marcus.

The best that can be said of *Avengers* #200 is that it's perhaps the most surreal and jarring issue of the long-running series. While it's difficult to summarize the convoluted plot, the following is necessary to understand: Marcus is the son of a time-travelling despot named Immortus. Born in Limbo, Marcus suffers a pseudo-life of lonely desperation. When he views Carol in the real world, he sees an opportunity to escape. He somehow snatches her from a plane and steals her away to Limbo. Once he has Carol in Limbo, Marcus proceeds to seduce her with the aid of a time machine (which gives him access to Beethoven's music and Marie Antoinette's satins and silks) and his father's mind-manipulation devices. Then he impregnates Carol with his own essence, which she will carry to term as a child in the real world. Thus Marcus can be reborn in the real world and live a life free from Limbo.

To recap: Marcus kidnaps Carol, brainwashes her, and rapes her. She then bears a child that ends up being the rapist himself. At the end of the issue, when Marcus' plan fails because his body can't exist in the real world after all, his story inspires so much sympathy in Carol that she agrees to return with him to Limbo. And the Avengers let her go and wish her luck.

According to David Michelinie, the difficulty of the story was caused by circumstances beyond its actual plot. "Okay, here's the backstory for the infamous birth arc," Michelinie says. "What occurred in *Avengers* #200 was entirely different from what had been intended when we started setting the story up in subplots. The 'baby' wasn't Marcus, and the reason for the 'pregnancy' was completely different from what was ultimately published. But just before the plot for issue #200 was

due at the penciler, another title from Marvel was published that did exactly the same thing as what we'd planned for *Avengers*. So we couldn't do our original story since it was, in essence, already in print. (I mention no names here since I don't want to embarrass anyone. And I'm not saying that other writer consciously stole our idea. But *Avengers* #200 was something of an event, and the plots and outlines were fairly common knowledge around the offices. The other writer may have heard or read the plotline, then weeks later came up with his story without realizing it was something he'd been exposed to before.) You'll notice that there are four names listed in the plot credit for issue #200 [Shooter, Michelinie, George Pérez, and Bob Layton]. That's because we had an incredible task and a deadline to make. We had to put our heads together and come up with a new, different-in-every-way conclusion that would still fit the stories

You Call This a Blessed Event?

Carol Danvers went through bizarre indignities in the pages leading up to *The Avengers* #200 (Oct. 1980). Cover art by George Pérez and Terry Austin.

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Just Plain Creepy!

Ms. Marvel immaculately conceives and just about instantaneously gives painless birth to a being that grows in an adult in days. He's the baby and the father. From *The Avengers* #200.

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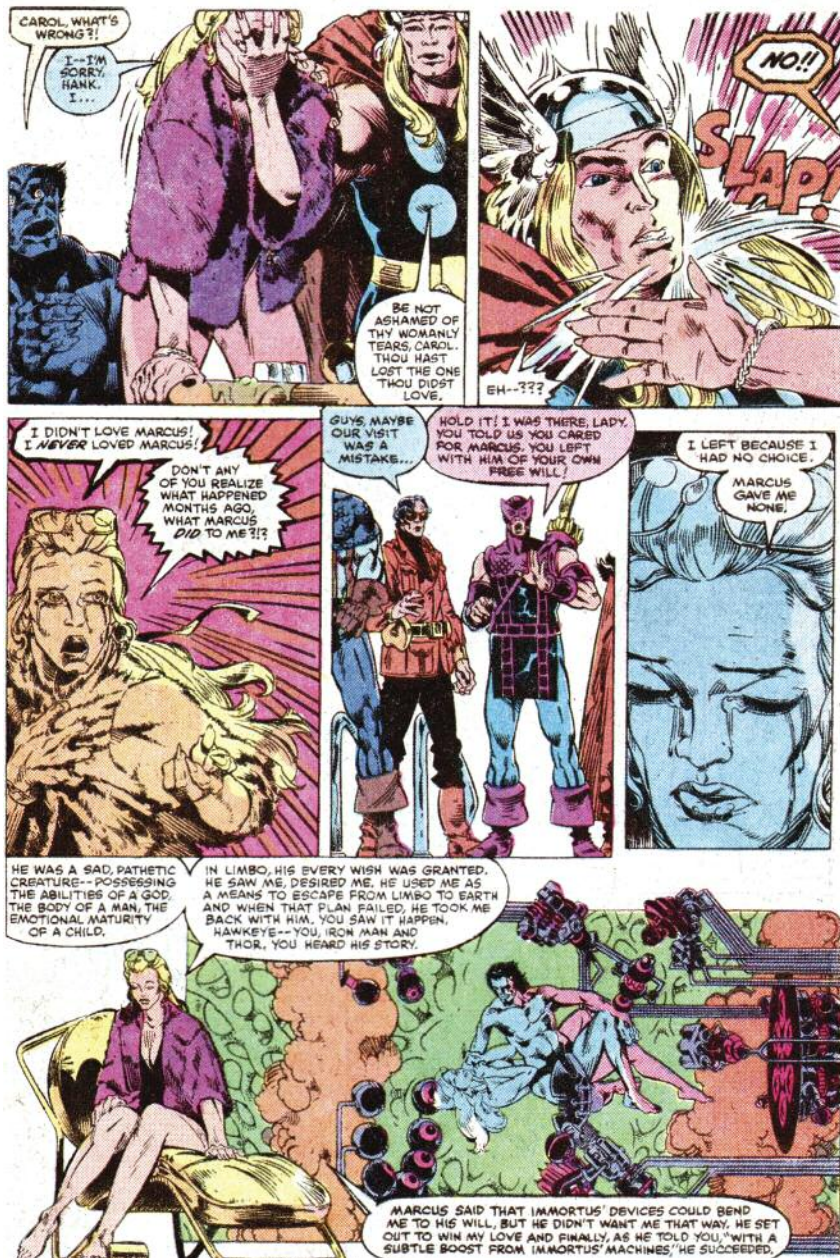


that had already been drawn, written, and even published. It was an overnight jam session and wasn't at all what we'd wanted to do in the beginning. It was imperfect, and controversial, but it was the best we could do under extremely trying and limiting circumstances."

Michelinie also says that nothing malicious or spiteful was intended by the story. "Yes, of course it was out of the ordinary," he says. "But there was nothing misogynistic or fetishistic about it—except in the minds of those readers who delight in 'finding' that sort of thing. As I mentioned before, that story was cobbled together at literally the last minute. We didn't have the luxury of second-guessing ourselves or considering subtleties that future critics might read into it. I don't recall who came up with the initial storyline (as in, what we'd originally intended), except that I know it wasn't me. The plotline concerned major elements of Marvel history, and would have impacted future Marvel continuity, and I just don't think that big. I'm not removing myself from any blame; obviously I didn't object to the storyline since I plotted and scripted most of it. But I imagine the overall concept came from editors, those who knew the Marvel Universe more intimately than I. And as far as I know, no one raised objections along the way—probably because the original storyline had less that could be considered objectionable than what was eventually published."

Avengers #197–200 was clearly mired in last-minute alterations and editorial/creative scrambles. But the end result ended up being so convoluted—on so many levels—that Claremont intervened in a follow-up *Avengers Annual* a year later. "As the shaper of her character for a long while," Claremont notes, "I found that whole circumstance between her and Marcus left a really unpleasant taste in my mouth that I felt was a disservice to her as a character and to the stories that had been written before that. I thought that it was a mistake. And for once, I actually wrote a story to overthrow it. And the advantage was that it was a very good story. And more to the point, it had Michael Golden's art, which made it a visually spectacular story. My conceptual standpoint as a shaper of her character back in the day all comes down to those last six pages, where she says to the Avengers, 'Come on. I am ABC and D and none of you are surprised when I suddenly start talking out of character and say I'm going off with this guy to live happily ever after? And nobody says a word? You're my friends. Nobody thought twice. You just let it happen.'"

In *Avengers Annual* #10, Carol is completely reset once again. The issue opens with her depowered. She has escaped Marcus' imprisonment in Limbo and returned to Earth, only to have then-mutant outcast Rogue completely absorb all of her powers and memories. After Carol recovers from that trauma, she finally has a chance to confront the Avengers with their failure: "There I was, pregnant by an unknown source, running through a nine-month term literally overnight—confused, terrified, shaken to the core of my being as a hero, a person, a woman. I turned to you for help, and I got jokes. The Wasp thought it was great, and the Beast offered to play teddy bear. Your concerns were for the baby, not for how it came to be—nor of the cost to me of that conception. You took everything Marcus said at face value, you didn't question, you didn't doubt. You simply let me go with a smile and a wave and a bouncy bon voyage. That was your mistake, for which I paid the price. My mistake



was trusting you."

After *Avengers Annual* #10, Carol recovered her health but not her powers. She recovered many of her memories but not her emotional attachment to them. Her encounter with Rogue had left her bereft of most of the identity that Claremont had worked so hard to build. But Claremont still had a plan.

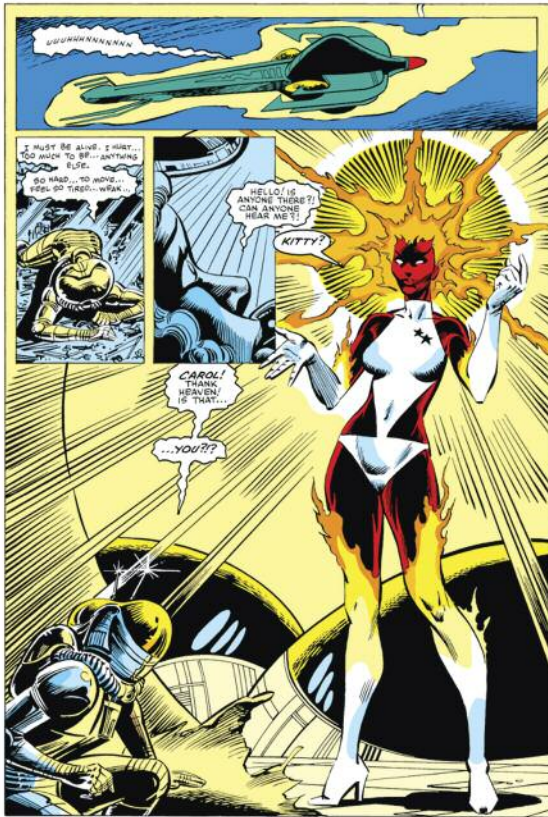
BINARY

Beginning with *Uncanny X-Men* #150, Carol becomes a member of Xavier's support crew. She has been taken on as a consultant/mechanic for the X-Men, and she is called "Xavier's patient" in *X-Men* #153 because she is still seeking the mentor's help and guidance at the Xavier Institute. Carol's brief time with the X-Men also reveals a background of sorts with Logan (Wolverine). In *X-Men* #154, after Carol recognizes Logan and asks if they have met, he replies, "Yeah—when you were Air Force intelligence and I was Canadian secret service. You an' your partner, Colonel Mike Rossi an' me ran some pretty hairy capers together. Those were good

Now, That's a Slap in the Face!

Carol Danvers, a.k.a. Ms. Marvel, explains the real story behind her baby/baby daddy Marcus in the Chris Claremont-written, Michael Golden-penciled, and Armando Gil-inked *Avengers Annual* #10 (1981).

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times.” Though the adventures Logan alludes to have yet to be fully explored, they have been mentioned repeatedly since (notably in *Uncanny X-Men* #163 and *Ben Grimm and Logan* #1–2).

The connection between Carol and Logan deepens her attachment to her newly adopted family. And when Carol and Logan break into the Pentagon to upload a virus and wipe out the government’s files and records of the X-Men (*X-Men* #158), she finally comes to terms with some of her recent trauma. As she views her own files, she thinks, “Brooding about what happened, wishing things were different, won’t help. I can’t go back. I can’t change anything. And I shouldn’t try. I am. I exist, here and now. I have a present, and a future—a life, to savor to the fullest—the same gift every infant receives at birth. If it’s good enough for them, it’s more than enough for me.”

The resignation is hopeful but short-lived. When Carol goes into space on a mission with the X-Men a few issues later (#161), she is taken captive by an alien insect army called the Brood. In *X-Men* #163, the Brood conducts a series of experiments on Carol that leaves her transformed yet again. Because the Brood finds Carol to be psychologically resilient and physically

powerful, they subject her to “evolutionary modification,” stretching and altering her physiology to inhuman extents. They contort her body, but her mind always stays aware and doesn’t break. Wolverine eventually rescues her, but the Brood’s experiments have unleashed a latent power that dwarfs her powers as Ms. Marvel.

Uncanny X-Men #164 (Dec. 1982) presents Carol’s first full transformation into the character called Binary.



Binary Waves

(above) Page from Chris Claremont and Dave Cockrum’s *Uncanny X-Men* #164, the issue where Ms. Marvel becomes the galaxy-hopping Binary. (right) Cockrum’s design sheet for Binary (and friends). (inset) Ms. Marvel turns on the old Binary heat (and dies in the process) in the 37th issue of her title (May 2009). Art by Phil Jimenez.

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Setting aside her former identity, Carol embraces a new identity that embodies both her newly discovered power and the empty canvas that connects her emotional losses to the vast, open void of space: "My old friend Captain Marvel was gifted with cosmic awareness—an ability to become one with the universe. I think I've gone beyond that. His was a spiritual merger, mine is physical. Somehow, when I use my power, I tap into a white hole—my energy source is the primal fabric of a universe. Like a star, I can generate heat, light—radiation across the spectrum—gravity."

After traveling with the X-Men for a few more issues, she leaves the team after Rogue approaches the Institute seeking asylum (*Uncanny X-Men* #171). When Professor X accepts Rogue into the fold, Carol is so outraged that she flies off into space. She eventually joins the intergalactic space pirates called the Starjammers and engages in a series of adventures as part of that team. For Claremont, this rehabilitation provided Carol with a fresh start that was worthy of her character. "It allowed her to play on the big guys' field," he says. "Ms. Marvel was born of Captain Marvel, who was an interstellar being. He was Kree. This enabled her to walk in that territory for a while. It broadened her horizons."

WARBIRD

Carol spent most of the 1990s as Binary, though she wasn't often featured prominently. She was the cosmic power she had always dreamed of being (from her

childhood dreams to her NASA days), and she was coping with her recent losses by channeling newfound might toward productive ends. But in *Quasar* #34 (May 1992)—part of the massive Avengers crossover "Operation: Galactic Storm"—Carol sacrifices a great deal of her Binary power by saving Earth's sun. Her powers drained, she returns to the Avengers Mansion infirmary to recover. She spends the next few years in space as Binary, but her powers begin to become erratic and unpredictable in *X-Men Unlimited* #13.

When Kurt Busiek and George Pérez launched a new *Avengers* series in 1998, Carol is invited to be a part of the re-assembled group. She initially appears as Binary, but *Avengers* #4 reveals that the events of *Quasar* #4 depleted the vast majority of her cosmic powers. Now de-powered, she still agrees to join the Avengers and chooses the codename "Warbird"—a nod to her childhood dreams of flying and her Air Force

days. But before the Avengers reveal their new lineup to the public (a celebratory ritual), Carol takes a drink from the stocked bar at the Mansion to ease her nerves. From there, things only continue to get worse.

In "Live Kree and Die"—a four-part crossover that ran through *Iron Man* #7, *Captain America* #8, *Quicksilver* #10, and *Avengers* #7—Carol's drinking has escalated considerably and her behavior has spun completely out of control. Now that the full weight of her recent past is sinking fast, she has turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism. In *Avengers* #7, she is kicked off the team until she can pull herself together. Her alcoholism is then carried over to *Iron Man*, where she hits complete rock bottom. In *Iron Man* #24, Carol wakes up in a drunken stupor, gets drunker, and kicks Tony Stark through a passenger jet in mid-flight. In the next issue, she realizes what she's done, attends her first AA meeting, and begins to pull her life back together.



The Marvel Marvels

Captain Marvel and Ms. Marvel as drawn by George Pérez.

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A Gal of Many Guises

(left) Artist Greg Horn depicts Carol Danvers in her various personifications over the decades in this *Ms. Marvel* #22 (Feb. 2008) painted cover.

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Humbled and regretful, Carol rejoins the Avengers upon Tony's recommendation in *Avengers* #27 and remains a part of the team through most of Busiek's extended run on the title. In *Avengers* #70 (Oct. 2003), she leaves the team to become the Chief Field Leader of Homeland Security—a return to her government security roots. When *New Avengers* launched in 2005 under the direction of Brian Michael Bendis, Carol was not part of the team.

telling and poignant conversation with Captain America, Carol reveals that "in the House of M, I got to live the life of a real hero. A hero who inspires people. I got to feel exactly what that feels like, and I loved it. And now I—I realize that I love being that person, and there's absolutely no reason in the world why I shouldn't try to be that person all the time. And frankly I'm embarrassed to realize that I'm not anywhere near that person I should and could be. I've wasted so much time being, basically, half of myself."

The most significant recent event in the life of Carol Danvers came in the *House of M* event in 2005. In the reality-bending elseworlds/what-if world of *House of M*, in which each hero is granted his/her greatest wish, Carol becomes the greatest hero in America. She enjoys a healthy, celebrated public persona and a fabulous life as the renamed and rehabilitated Ms. Marvel.

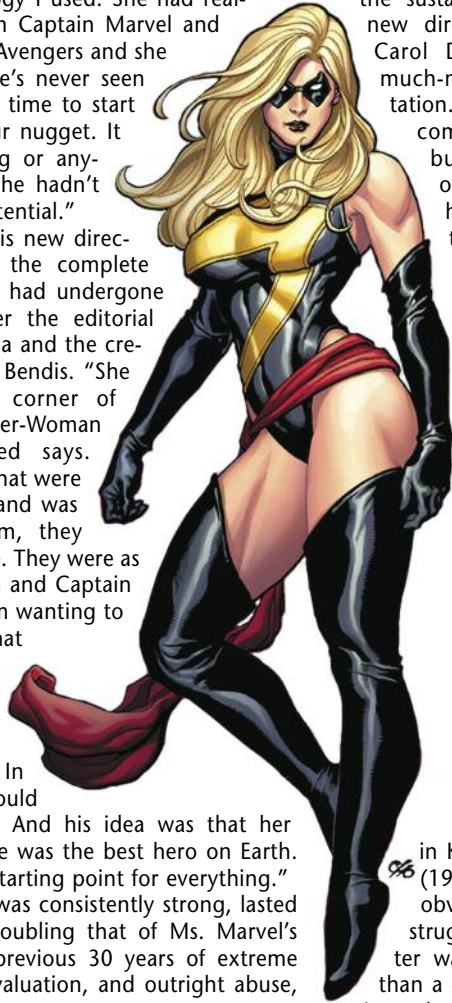
Two months after Carol reconnected with the Avengers, Marvel launched a new *Ms. Marvel* series written by Brian Reed and illustrated by Frank Cho. Much like Chris Claremont, Brian Reed had quickly earned a reputation for writing strong female characters from his work with Bendis on *Spider-Woman: Origin*. Reed began his series by bouncing off Carol's monologue from *New Avengers* #15. "The direction that I pitched originally was that she was part of the biggest band on Earth, with the Avengers, and now she's going to have a solo career," Reed recalls. "I

The next year, Brian Michael Bendis reintroduced Carol to her former (and natural) teammates in *New Avengers* #15 (March 2006). In a

think that was the analogy I used. She had realized that she came from Captain Marvel and that she was part of the Avengers and she really was great. But she's never seen herself as great, and it's time to start doing that. That was our nugget. It wasn't about reinventing or anything. It was just that she hadn't been living up to her potential."

To a large extent, this new direction was the result of the complete realignment that Marvel had undergone during the 2000s under the editorial leadership of Joe Quesada and the creative leadership of Brian Bendis. "She came from the same corner of [Bendis'] brain as Spider-Woman and Luke Cage," Reed says. "These were characters that were big when he was a kid and was reading comics. To him, they were the Marvel Universe. They were as important as Spider-Man and Captain America. It was really him wanting to bring these characters that he had a love for back to the forefront. Let's bring them back and make them cool again. That was his thing with Carol. In the House of M, what would her greatest dream be? And his idea was that her dream would be that she was the best hero on Earth. And that was really the starting point for everything."

Reed's series, which was consistently strong, lasted 50 issues—more than doubling that of Ms. Marvel's original run. After the previous 30 years of extreme alterations, torment, devaluation, and outright abuse,



the sustained series and new direction provided Carol Danvers with a much-needed rehabilitation. The past wasn't completely erased, but the future opened up more healthy possibilities for fulfillment and purpose. And *purpose* is the key word here. This was, after all, a character that was forged in the optimistic wave of equality and potential that was promised by the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s.

But this was also a character who had inspired satire

in Kitchen Sink's *World's Worst Comics Awards* (1991): "Ms. Marvel ... now there's a name obviously chosen to identify with women's struggle for dignity and equality. And what better way to show commitment to these ideals than a costume that showcases your navel?" This is a character who has earned an infamous but much-deserved mention at Gail Simone's "Women in Refrigerators" website: "Mind-controlled, impregnated by rape, powers and memories stolen, cosmic-powered then depowered, alcoholic—SHEESH!"

Ultimately, as is the case with all superheroes, Carol Danvers will be most remembered by what comes next. Liberation will always be a forward-looking concept, because the constraints of the past will always exist. In Carol's case, the constraints are significant. But after *House of M*, she seems determined to free herself from them and forge a new identity. And honestly, that's the only direction that makes sense. Because that's all she's ever known.

ALEX BONEY is a freelance writer and English teacher currently living near Kansas City, Missouri. His graduate work in English at the Ohio State University explored the connection between superhero comics and modernist art and literature. He regularly contributes articles to *BACK ISSUE* magazine and presents work at the Comic Arts Conference in San Diego. While most of Alex's academic and professional work is focused on 1930s and '40s superheroes, he remains partial to the *Question*, *Power Girl*, and the *Martian Manhunter*.



end

Thoroughly Modern Marvel

(this spread) A plethora of superb portraits of our heroine. (opposite page) Terry Dodson's variant covers (and line art) for *Ms. Marvel* #25 (May 2008) and *Captain Marvel* #4 (May 2008). (inset above) Detail from Frank Cho's cover of *Ms. Marvel* #1 (May 2006). (above) Mike Deodato Jr.'s *Ms. Marvel* #37 (July 2009) cover. (left) Variant cover (promoting the movie *Tron: Legacy*) of *New Avengers* #7 (Feb. 2011) by artist Mark Brooks

© 2012 Marvel Characters.

IT'S AN UNDENIABLE FACT THAT MOST FEMALE SUPERHEROES ARE DESIGNED AND DRAWN MORE FOR THE TITILLATION OF MALE READERS THAN TO REPRESENT FEMINIST IDEALS. BUT THERE'S A FINE LINE BETWEEN ACCEPTABLY SEXY AND EXPLOITATIVELY SILLY.

OW!

HIGH HEEL FIGHTING

IN THE GOLDEN AGE, PHANTOM LADY WAS THE EPTOME OF THE SO-CALLED HEADLIGHT COMICS, IN WHICH FEMALE CHARACTERS WERE LARGELY DEFINED BY ONE PROMINENT PHYSICAL FEATURE.

OR I GUESS I SHOULD SAY TWO!

PHANTOM LADY'S PLUNGING NECKLINE MAY SEEM A BIT IMPRACTICAL FOR CRIMEFIGHTING, BUT SHE'S HARDLY THE ONLY SUPERHEROINE WHO RUNS A CONSTANT RISK OF WARDROBE MALFUNCTION!!

CENSORED

EEP!

WHO'DA GUESSED IN 1969 WHEN VAMPIRELLA WAS INTRODUCED THAT SOME DAY HER BARELY-THERE OUTFIT WOULD BE NO BIG DEAL?

AREN'T YOU HOT IN THAT?

EXPOSED FLESH HAS BECOME A HALLMARK OF SUPERHEROINE AND VILLAINESS COSTUMES, EVEN FOR LONG-ESTABLISHED CHARACTERS LIKE STAR SAPPHIRE.

WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT CELINE DION AGAIN, HAROLD?

URK

GREEN LANTERN

THE SECRET LIFE OF STAR SAPPHIRE

SOMETIMES THE BARED SKIN JUST SEEMS SILLY, AS IN MS. MARVEL'S ORIGINAL 1977 LOOK.

STILL, WHEN THE MIDRIFT HOLE WAS CLOSED IN MM #9, SOME FANS OF CAROL DANVERS' BELLY BUTTON CRIED FOUL!

DESPITE THE SEM OVERTONES OF HER GOLDEN AGE ADVENTURES, WONDER WOMAN'S OUTFIT WASN'T PARTICULARLY PROVOCATIVE UNTIL COMICS' DARK AGE OF THE '90s, WHEN SHE AND ALMOST EVERY OTHER WOMAN IN COMICS BEGAN TO LOOK LIKE POLE DANCERS!

excuse me, you have something stuck in your BUTT...

I MEAN, C'MON - IT'S HARD ENOUGH TO IMAGINE THE AMAZONS WEARING HIGH HEELS, BUT THONGS AND PUSH-UP BRAS? THEN AGAIN, DIANA HAS BEEN A VICTIM OF BAD STYLING MORE THAN ONCE IN HER GLORIED HISTORY...

GREAT HEHA! MY OWN REFLECTIONS ARE ATTACKING ME!!

AS FOR HIGH HEELS, THEY ONLY MAKE SENSE IF THE CHARACTER CAN FLY AND NEVER HAS TO RUN OR FIGHT BALANCING ON FOUR-INCH STILETTOES. MAGIC-WIELDING CHARACTERS ALSO GET A PASS.



IN RECENT YEARS, SUPERHEROINES' STILETTOES COME AND GO AT THE WHIM OF THE ARTIST BUT LET'S FACE IT, SEX APPEAL ASIDE, IT MAKES ZERO SENSE FOR BLACK CANARY, BLACK WIDOW OR BATGIRL TO BE TEETERING IN HIGH HEELS...



IT SPEAKS VOLUMES THAT IN MOVIES LIKE X-MEN AND WATCHMEN, THE HEELS ON STORM AND SILK SPECTRE SUDDENLY DISAPPEAR DURING ACTION SCENES.



FELINE FEMMES FATALES CATWOMAN AND BLACK CAT BOTH HAVE THE GOOD SENSE THESE DAYS TO SPORT FLATS. BUT THEY SURE DO LIKE TO LEAVE THOSE CATSUITS UNZIPPED.



BRA SIZES ALSO SEEM TO REFLECT THE PREFERENCE OF THE PENCILER MORE THAN ANY MODEL SHEET SPECIFICATION...



I ACTUALLY LIKE HOW POWER GIRL'S AMPLE BOSOM HAS BECOME PART OF HER PERSONALITY, BUT WISH WRITERS WOULD STOP TRYING TO PAINT HER SUIT WINDOW AS SOME KINDA FEMINIST STATEMENT. WHY CAN'T SHE JUST BE PROUD OF HER -UM- ASSETS?



BREASTS ASIDE, TRULY AMAZONIAN WOMEN ARE A COMICS RARITY, BIG BARDA, THUNDRA AND SOMETIMES SHE-HULK BEING EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE OF SWIMSUIT MODEL PROPORTIONS.



I LOVE DARWYN COOKE'S OVERSIZED INTERPRETATION OF WONDER WOMAN IN THE NEW FRONTIER BUT THE ODDS OF A BIG DIANA IN THE MAINSTREAM DCU ARE SKINNY!



WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THE IMAGE OF SUPERLADIES? THINGS MAY BE BETTER THAN THEY WERE IN THE '90s, BUT AS LONG AS COMIC BOOKS RETAIN THEIR PERPETUAL DEMOGRAPHIC, THE SUPER POWERED PIN-UP ISN'T GOING ANYWHERE... JUST ASK THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES!





BARBARA RANDALL KESEL GAIL SIMONE



Trio of Titanic Talent

(from left) Barbara Randall Kesel, Gail Simone, and Jill Thompson in photos taken this summer on the convention circuit by Shannon E. Riley.

They've made significant contributions to the world of comics, making inroads for other female creators and leaving their own personal mark on some of the biggest icons. Now, the always brilliant, funny, and passionate Barbara Randall Kesel, Gail Simone, and Jill Thompson talk to BACK ISSUE in an exclusive "Pro2Pro" interview—sharing their thoughts on the industry, the power of Barbara Gordon, and the rise of social media.

— Shannon E. Riley

SHANNON E. RILEY: *Barbara, let's start with what I think is one of the best stories I've ever heard about breaking into the comics industry. You wrote a ten-page letter to DC editor Dick Giordano about the portrayal of women in comics—and he was so impressed, he hired you! Tell me about that letter and how it came about.*

BARBARA RANDALL KESEL: Well, it starts with an attempted abduction. Mine. No, really. When I was in college, a tiny, little thing who looked much younger

than I was, I worked at the library in Pomona, California. I was early and walking along the row of antique stores on a closed-off section of street when this guy ran up behind me, put his arm around me, and cheerfully told me how happy he was about our trip to the mountains. This was before the first *Terminator* movie, but I had the eerie experience of "seeing" instructions in the air in front of me kind of like the Terminator POV: "Stay calm, keep responding to keep him talking, you have 100 yards to get away from him and safe or he'll catch up to you," and "Oh, by the way, all of these stores are closed." Then I saw an open door on the left and bolted. I ended up inside a used bookstore with a startled couple behind the center desk. I raced into the stacks shouting, "I'm not here and you don't see me!" The guy followed me in and asked them if they'd seen his girlfriend. They told him she'd gone out the other door into the parking lot. They then locked that door behind him and asked if I needed the police. Well, today? Instant AMBER Alert.

women in comics roundtable

MONEY JILL THOMPSON



by **Shannon E. Riley**
conducted throughout May, June, and July 2011

Back then? I said no, because even though I *knew* I was in serious danger, he never spoke a direct threat, he carried no weapon, and I wasn't even sure I could describe him. I was afraid that the only result would be an incident report with my name and address on it that he might be able to get his hands on somehow. "But I'll take one of every one of those comic books on the rack behind you," I said. I was just under 20, and I'd never lived near a store when I could buy new comics *every month*. I'd found new ones on road trips and used ones from the little used bookstore next to the Kroger in Seabrook, Texas, but never had a reliable source before that. That store must have gotten half my salary for the next couple of years.

And I got to know Carl and Frances Pfeiffer and some of the cast of store regulars enough to grouse about how lame the women in some of the stories were. Frances was the one to suggest I write in and tell them my opinion—it hadn't occurred to me that they were happening *now* and I could comment! So I only

ever wrote six letters before the big one. In the lettercol of one of the Batman books, a writer had asked how come DC's women weren't as complicated as characters as the men, and suggested DC hire more women creators. Dick Giordano's editorial reply was that he didn't think it mattered. So I wrote a tome. I was at Cal Poly getting my theater degree at the time, so I outlined a dozen things they could do to make their characters better—tricks we use as actors, playwrights, and directors, and how they could apply to comics. So Dick called me and asked how far Diamond Bar was from San Diego, and could I come to the convention there to meet him? He hired me to write the Batgirl back-up in *Detective* when I didn't take the job he offered me because I wanted to finish off my degree. After I graduated, I took the next editorial opening. Tah dah! So ... I'm in comics because I didn't end up as a body in a canyon. Or a refrigerator!

RILEY: *Speaking of which ... Gail, your website "Women in Refrigerators" similarly cast a light on*

WRITER / EDITOR

BACKISSUE!

DATA CARD

Beginnings:

Batgirl back-up stories in *Detective Comics* #518–519 (Sept.–Oct. 1982)

Milestones:

The Fury of Firestorm / Hawkman / Secret Origins / Batgirl Special / Teen Titans Spotlight / Who's Who in the Legion of Super-Heroes / Hawk & Dove / Who's Who in the DC Universe / Spelljammer / Comics' Greatest World: Golden City / Ultragirl / WildC.A.T.s / Superboy / Superman: Lois Lane / Elseworld's Finest: Supergirl and Batgirl / Meridian / Sigil / The First / CrossGen Chronicles / Aqua / Rogue Angel: Teller of Tall Tales

Works in Progress:

Working with Cat Staggs on a new character for the Womanthology project / Graphic novel to be announced soon

Cyberspace:

Find Barbara Kesel on Facebook



BARBARA RANDALL KESEL

immediately what I was talking about. There was a *Green Lantern* story where the hero came home and found his very likable and interesting girlfriend chopped up and stuffed in a fridge, and there was also the shooting of Barbara Gordon, Batgirl, in the industry classic, *Batman: The Killing Joke*. [Author's note: Kyle Rayner's girlfriend, Alex, is killed and stuffed into a refrigerator by the villain Major Force in *Green Lantern* #54 (Aug. 1994).]

It's silly on one level—it's all just stories, right? But at the same time, all these guys were wondering online all the time, "Why don't women read comics?" And the sheer immensity of the violent and often sexualized portrayals really weighed down on me as a reader—I quit reading for a good while. Male heroes sometimes died, but not in the same manner ... the girls were being killed just to make the hero's quest for vengeance more justified. It got hugely boring on top of being nasty as a gender issue.

We should have started with a fun question!

RILEY: *Were you surprised by the response you got from fellow fans and creators in the industry?*

SIMONE: Well, not from creators, a lot knew exactly what I was asking. Some disagreed, that was fine, but almost all were very respectful. As for fans, I've heard so much nonsense that isn't on the site over the years—for example, the site is asking a question, not stating a proposition, you know? And the words "sexist" and "misogynist" are never used. But I'm still being called vile names from people who never even read the site all these years later. It's good fun, I have to laugh at it now. But at the time, I think it was an unexpectedly powerful bit of almost unintentional activism. The phrase has gone far beyond comics and is used in other media, as well.

And it made a difference, I wouldn't have said it did for a long time, but I have been in high-level meetings at comics companies where it came up, and the people there didn't even know I'd made the site. It made people aware, at least a little bit, that there *are* female readers, something that just wasn't really acknowledged for a long, long time.

RILEY: *How do you think things have changed since "Women in Refrigerators"?*

SIMONE: Oh, it's better. The trope still exists, but now we have enough female creators, editors, and readers that even the goofiest of goofs has to admit they're part of the readership.

JILL THOMPSON:

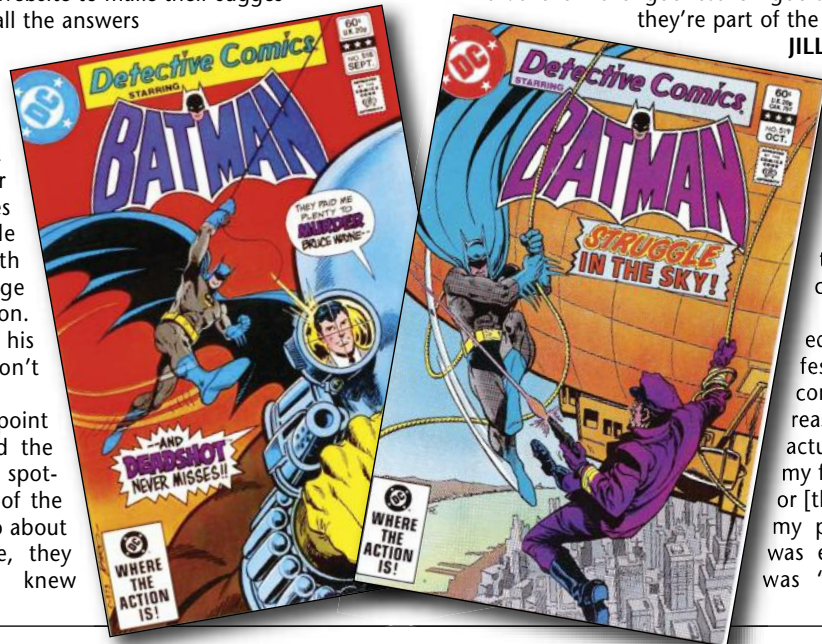
There are more women [working in the industry]. They may not be working necessarily at the two bigger companies...

When I started working professionally in comics, one of the reasons that I was actually able to get my foot in the door or [that] people saw my portfolio was, I was easy to spot. I was "that girl that

the treatment of women in comics. You generated an extensive character list and their respective fates—starting with "All of Savage Dragon's girlfriends (dead)" to "Zatanna (powers severely limited)." Was there a specific storyline that prompted you to take action and let your voice be heard?

GAIL SIMONE: There were a couple, but I should add here that I think the list is the weakest part of the site ... I didn't write it, I asked readers at the *ComicBookResources.com* website to make their suggestions and not all the answers

fit the criteria established, as much as one would hope. Erik Larsen, for example, takes understandable umbrage with the Savage Dragon mention. I haven't read his work, so I don't really know. However, the point of the list and the site was pretty spot-on, and most of the pros I talked to about it at the time, they agreed, they knew



Detective Debut

(inset right) Barbara Randall got her start as writer in the comics field scripting Batgirl back-ups in *Detective Comics* #518 & 519 (Sept. and Oct. 1982, respectively). Cover art by Jim Aparo.

TM & © DC Comics.

wanted to draw comics," because I was pretty much that one girl. There were maybe five of us, and if we weren't at the same convention at the same time, [it was] "There's that one girl with the portfolio!" [laughs] Now I'm so happy that there are little girls that come up to me and show me their comics. They say that I inspire them. I've met so many girls now that come up to me at comic conventions, which I would have never had years ago. The last convention I was at [I had] 12 girls—which was amazing to me—they said they are going to the American Academy of Art because I went there. It makes me feel great—they're *my* kids! And they want to draw *comics*. It's like, they want to learn all about illustration and stuff, but they *love* comics. And manga, too, but they really, really love this form of storytelling no matter what the style is. That's what I'm really proud of.

RILEY: *Barbara, how about since you wrote your letter to Dick Giordano?*

KESEL: Well, there's been one extraordinary change: 30 years ago, [if you] did a lineup of comics creators and had 30 people in line, you had 29 white males and one "other." Nowadays, if you take a random selection of comics creators and you line them up, you can still set it up [so] that you only get a lineup of 30 white males, but there's so many more voices represented. Technology has allowed so many more people to tell their own stories. Technology's been the biggest change, since pretty much anyone can produce a four-color comic on their Mac and then send it off to the same printer the big boys use. The only barrier is money.

There's [also] a hugely broader accepted range of what makes a comic book. The biggest change has been from the point of educators and librarians. The same people who historically pooh-pooed comic books as "not literature" have grown up, have done

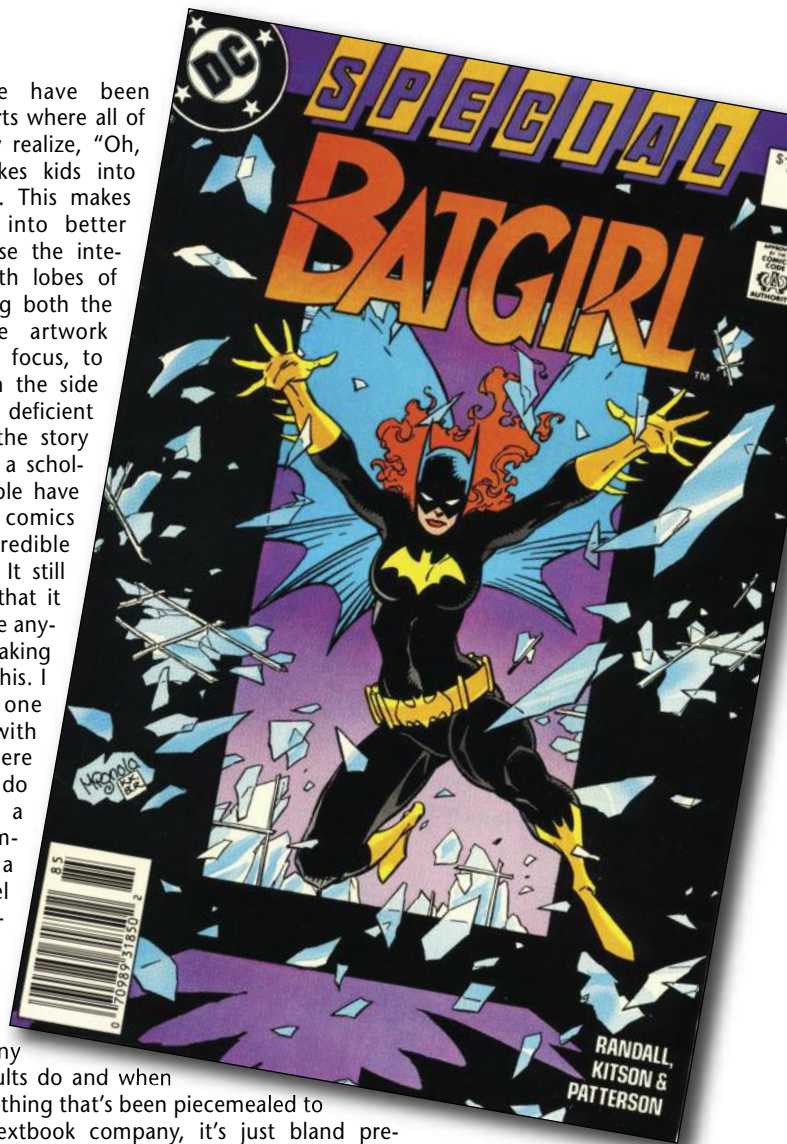


studies, there have been scholarly reports where all of a sudden they realize, "Oh, sh*t, this makes kids into better readers. This makes slow readers into better readers because the integration of both lobes of the brain using both the text and the artwork causes you to focus, to figure through the side where you're deficient and sum up the story better," so on a scholarly level people have realized that comics [are] this incredible teaching tool. It still frustrates me that it doesn't feel like anybody is truly taking advantage of this. I worked on one property with Marvel where they tried to do this through a textbook company [with] a graphic novel for kids' programs. That's fine, except kids don't like to read crapy stories any more than adults do and when

you have something that's been piecemealed to death by a textbook company, it's just bland pre-chewed food. There may be some good ideas in there, but it's [watered down] out of fear that someone will be offended. I mean, *Harry Potter* has shown us you can find a dozen people who will be offended by any one thing [in the series], and yet it's this extraordinary, rich story that has a whole spectrum of different kinds of characters involved in it. This is my particular passion: I want to do comics that are socially complicated without being overtly sexual or overtly violent so they will fit comfortably in any school library ... but I don't want to do them through any kind of textbook company because I want to be able to do them with character peculiarities. Then I want to graft teaching materials onto that where you have information that's both been embedded in the comics to be used that way or inspires people to come in and say, "Oh, look, you can pluck *this, this, or this* out of it," and create a teaching tool there that somebody might actually really enjoy being taught by.

Right now you have a lot of kids learning from comics. If they're looking at mainstream comics, what they're mostly learning is violence and death, violence and death, violence and death ... which is exciting and dramatic and, you know, it's been a staple of saga and opera and stories for the entire life of human beings, but there's plenty of smaller drama not being explored, those first moments of embarrassment or disappointment or betrayal.

Oh, and I don't want to be dumping on the comics

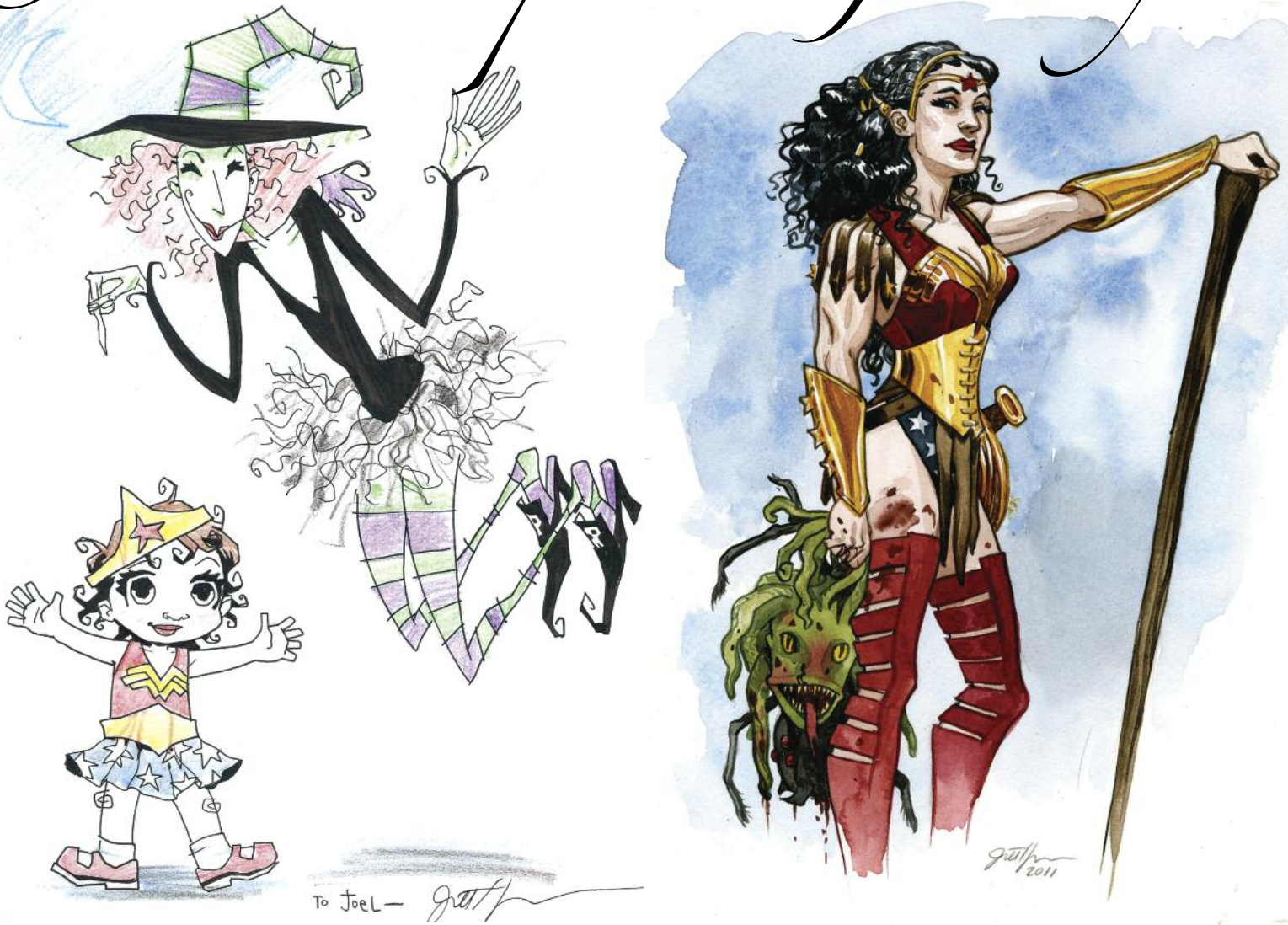


Barbara by Barbara

Many a BRK fan first encountered Barbara Randall Kesel's work during her memorable stint writing *Batgirl*. Here's her *Batgirl Special #1* (1988) with cover art by a young Mike "Hellboy" Mignola. Barbara's artist partner on her first stint chronicling Barbara Gordon's heroics was Trevor von Eeden, who drew the piece at left.

TM & © DC Comics.

Jill Thompson Gallery!

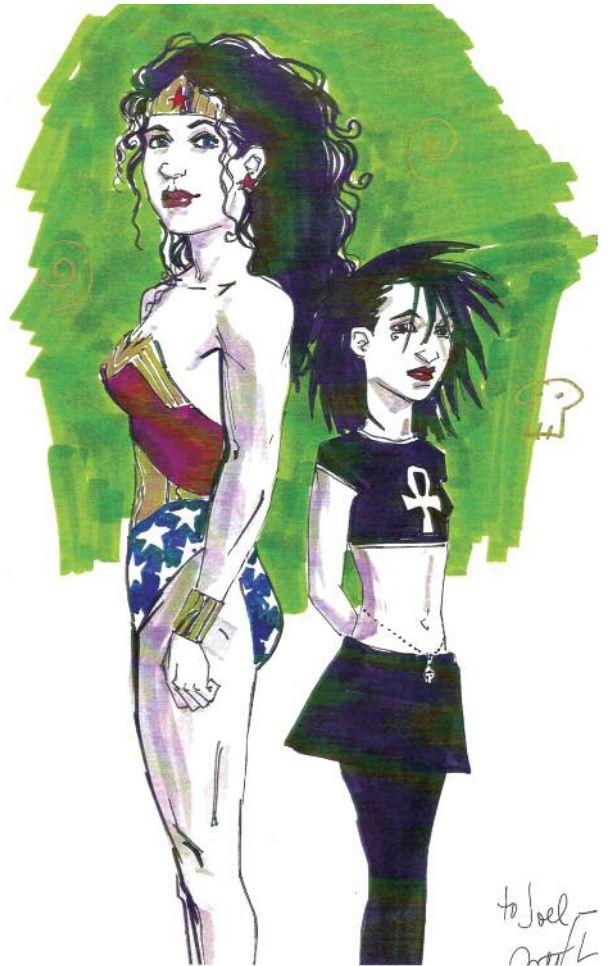
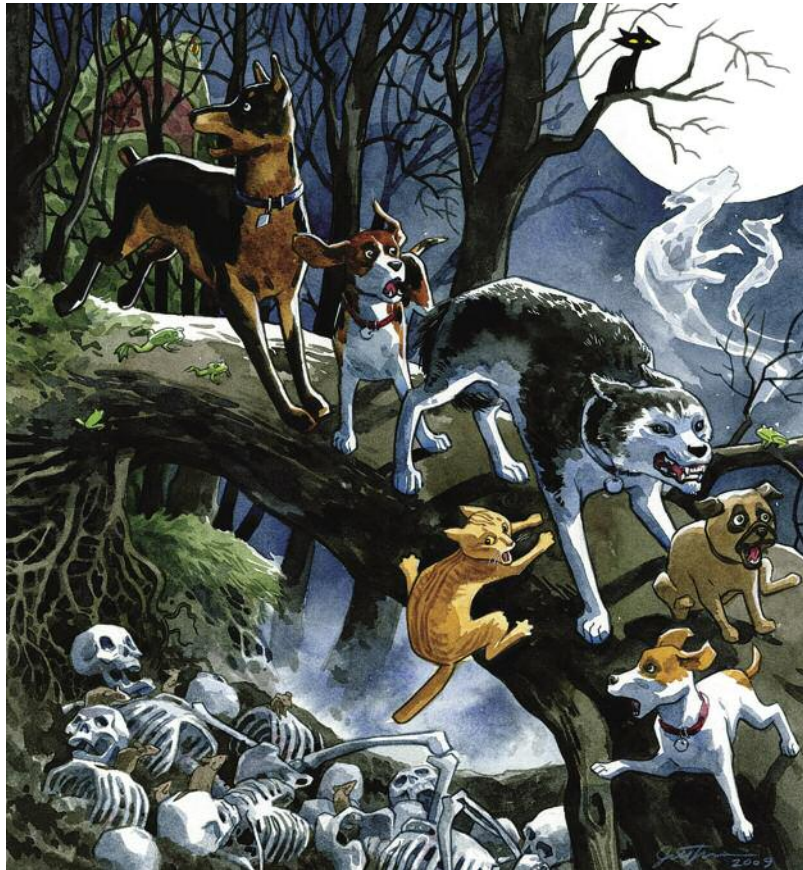


Jill of All Trades

Ms. Thompson can draw just about anything, as seen in this gallery of Scary Godmother, Wonder Woman, *Beasts of Burden: Animal Rites* cover, and *Girl Comics* #2 cover for Marvel. Note that the Scary Godmother/WW-garbed Hanna Marie sketch (this page, above) and WW/Death duo (next page, bottom right) are from the collection of Joel Thingvall, and (this page, upper right) an 8.5 x 11-inch color print of this Wonder Woman painting is available for \$20 plus postage and handling directly from the artist at www.jillthompson.blogspot.com.

Scary Godmother TM & © Jill Thompson. Wonder Woman and Death TM & © DC Comics. *Girl Comics* & Marvel heroines © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc. *Beasts of Burden* TM & © Evan Dorkin & Jill Thompson.





to Joely
with



War and Peace
 (above) A full-page splash of Rob Liefeld and Karl Kesel's *Hawk & Dove*, the 1980s miniseries and series Barbara co-wrote with ex-husband Karl.

TM & © DC Comics.

Marvel's Sassisest Powerhouse!
 (right) Yep, Barbara also wrote for Marvel Comics in this 1996–1997 miniseries, *Ultragirl!* Art by Leonard Kirkand and Terry Pallot.

© 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.

was beautiful when I was a kid. "God bless Lady Gaga and 'Born This Way'!" There is so much more [of an] attempt to be inclusive, to make people feel like they fit in no matter what they are.

SIMONE: Barbara's smart, that's what I think.

RILEY: *I want to talk a bit about two of the biggest female icons in comics, Lois Lane and Wonder Woman. In her first appearances, Lois Lane was tough-as-nails and an intellectual equal to Clark Kent. In the Silver Age, however, she devolved into constantly trying to trick Superman into marrying*

that are out there right now because again, what's going on is there's much more participation by [a wider cross-section of creators]. I've got nothing against white males. I happen to really enjoy looking at them! But I've got that fierce desire to make sure everybody's voice is heard. That everybody can see a representation of themselves. I'm old enough to remember the impact that the Benetton ads had when they first came out. [Here was] this huge advertising campaign that included unusual people. Nowadays a 20-year-old girl's image of what is beautiful has been expanded so far beyond what I was allowed to think

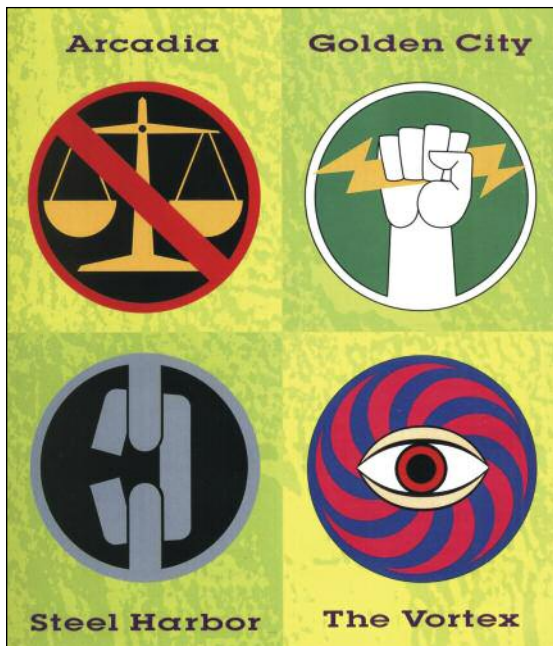
her or figuring out his identity. Barbara, Gail, you've both written Lois Lane. How do you approach a character like Lois, who has so much history and has been portrayed in wildly different ways?

KESEL: Lois has the privilege of being in on the ultimate joke—the story that Clark Kent is Superman and when you step inside that relationship, when you see the vulnerability of the most magnificently strong person on the planet, then you are in a privileged backstage position of being able to tease him, wink at him, you know, and share the joke and be the safe vent for any kind of feelings that may come out of being in that position. She is the most powerful woman on the planet because she sees the private side of Superman and because of that, since she knows he's got her back, she can do anything. It doesn't mean she's invulnerable. It does mean that she knows that [if] you've got somebody behind you, you can speak your voice in a way you can't if you're just alone in the wilderness.

But part of what you were saying about Lois, too, has to do with the image of women in the US—because Lois as a creation came along just before the war, where we had these iconic images of women as glamorous and gutsy, and then you've got wartime where the images were then of women having to run the factories at home and step up in roles that traditionally were not supported for them, so we got the Rosie the Riveter icon. Then in post-war America you had a huge marketing campaign to get all the women out of the workplace and send them back home ... so there was a correlating push in fashion to create empire waist-style clothing that makes any woman look slightly pregnant. The media pushed everything toward maternalism, towards home and hearth, being a mom and not stepping out and being an independent creature. So, you had Lois as a reflection, too, of what was going on in the world. She went from business-suited reporter to fuddy fashions. Then you have Lois stepping up during the age of Women's Liberation with this, "Hello, I'm wearing the mini-skirt" [portrayal] and then reworked as an '80s-style power player and now I think you have a sort of "Lois as Oprah/Adventurer" ... but I think [ultimately] she's emblematic of the professional everywoman of the US.

SIMONE: Yeah, I submit that the original Lois is freaking amazing. She's not just Clark's equal, it is made





very clear that she is the best reporter at the *Planet*—the gutsiest, the smartest, everything. Clark has to cheat to even keep up with her. As fun as some of the goofy later stories are, it's a shame to see her made into a lovesick, marriage-hungry schemer later. Someone's gender issues were definitely showing.

RILEY: *Wonder Woman is instantly recognizable around the world and known to people who don't even read comics. Jill, you began penciling Wonder Woman with issue #45 (Aug. 1990). This must have felt like hitting the jackpot! How did you end up at DC?*

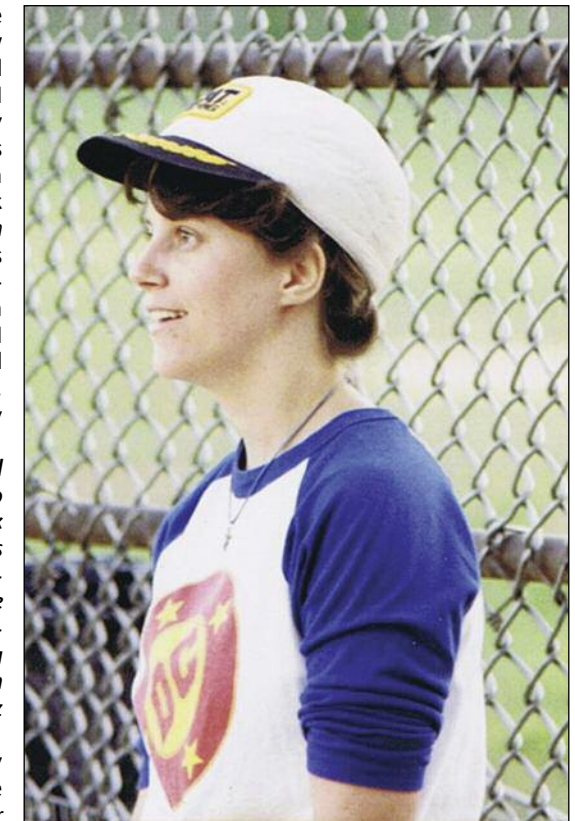
THOMPSON: Well, I had just finished painting *The Scarlet Letter* for First Comics' *Classics Illustrated* line. I was living in Ohio with my boyfriend at the time and Evan Dorkin and Robbie Busch were driving to NYC from a con in Detroit. They stopped over at our house because we were kinda the halfway mark for the long drive. Robbie was coloring *Sandman*, which had just started. He asked what I was working on now that I had finished with *The Scarlet Letter*. I responded that I didn't have anything else on my table. He told me that his editor, Karen Berger, was looking for a new artist on *Wonder Woman* and that if I did some samples he would let her know they were coming. So I did one or two and sent them in along with some *Elementals* and *The Scarlet Letter* as a résumé. Really quickly

after that, Karen called me and hired me to do a few more sample pages and then offered me the job. I was really happy and really nervous because I was going to be working with George Pérez, whose work I loved on *The New Teen Titans*. And nervous because I hadn't really followed *Wonder Woman* since I was a young girl. I was all about Spidey and the X-Men. Claremont, Byrne, and Austin—my Dream Team!

RILEY: *I'd previously read that you made a point to play up Diana's Greek features. I thought this was brilliant, and certainly made a lot of sense given the character's heritage. Was this something that you'd discussed with series writer George Pérez when you came aboard?*

THOMPSON: Nope. I only spoke to George once while I worked on *Wonder Woman*, and that was before I got the first script. I don't remember what we spoke of, only that I was so excited to work with him and wanted to do the best art I possibly could.

RILEY: *Gail, you were the first woman to serve as ongoing writer of the Wonder Woman series. Did you feel the weight of that "first" designation when you got the assignment?*



Dark Horse's Dark Horse

(upper left) Writer Kesel scribed for the shortlived 1990s Dark Horse Comics' imprint, Comics Greatest World.

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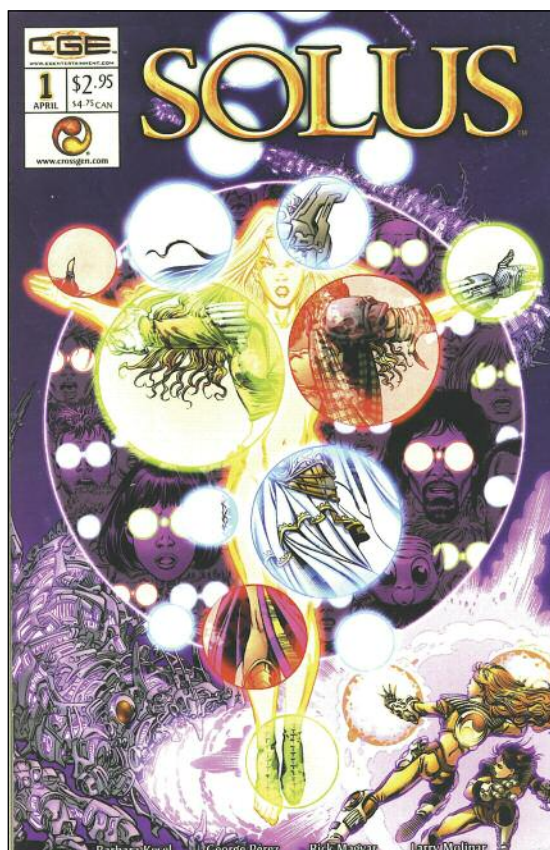
Bulletgirl

(above) Barbara played on the baseball team, the DC Bullets, while on staff at the company.

CrossGen Kesel

(left) Barbara wrote several titles at the Florida-based publisher CrossGen.

© 2012 CrossGen.



SIMONE: I was actually the second—the great Mindy Newell was the first, even though her run was incredibly brief. But absolutely, the weight of handling *Wonder Woman* in an interesting way, that's honest and meaningful, that was a huge responsibility. I loved it ... the cast is just amazing—Hippolyta, the Amazons, Etta, I loved writing them.

She's a character that many comics readers, and even comics pros, just don't get. I got these really odd comments from people like Brian Bendis and Howard Chaykin about her relevance, and they were so strangely defensive, as if she represented something that clearly made them uncomfortable in some way.

But the point is, I feel



Barbara Randall Kesel, Writer

(above) Herself.
In living color.

the same way about Wolverine, I think he's the most dull, clichéd, repetitive character on Earth right now ... but I don't feel particularly *threatened* by the fact that people like him. It's just not on my radar either way. These guys, and there were a lot, would go out of their way to tell me how Wonder Woman wasn't relevant.

But Wonder Woman is actually *hugely* relevant to a large number of people—she's got a massive fanbase, they just don't all read comics. One woman was inspired by Wonder Woman to train to be an astronaut, and actually made that goal. Others use Wonder Woman as their personal avatar, their inspiration, I just

some mixed editorial and creative messages, so I wanted to bring a consistent hand to it. I came on board thinking, "Okay, we want all the previous Wonder Woman stories to count, we want a cohesive Wonder Woman where her history isn't just bulldozed over for the twentieth time." In retrospect, that may have been a little too inside, if that makes sense. I think the first priority should be to tell ripping yarns.

RILEY: *Would you ever write the Wonder Woman*

heard that constantly. I don't know if the same can be said for Hawkman or Cyclops or whatever.

Additionally, Wonder Woman is a superhero that makes little girls happy, and that is something very few superheroes can say. If that's not relevant to some middle-aged male comics pros, well, who cares, really? They're not the audience.

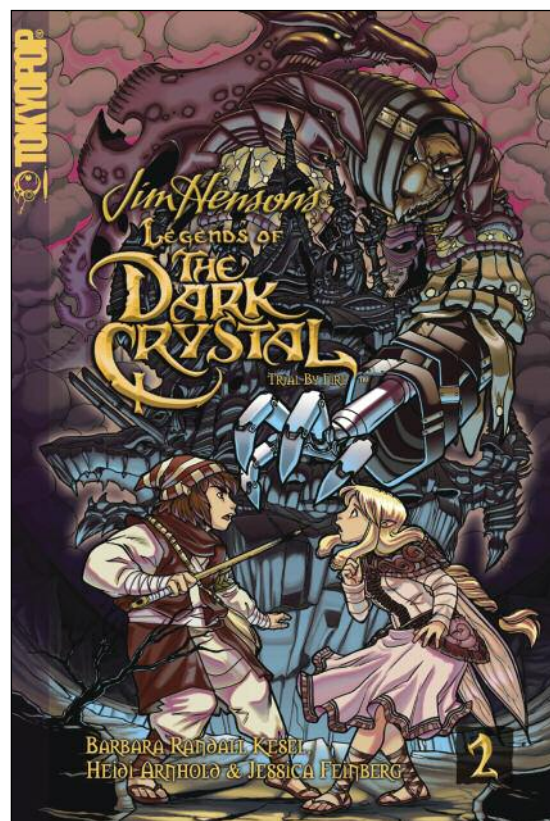
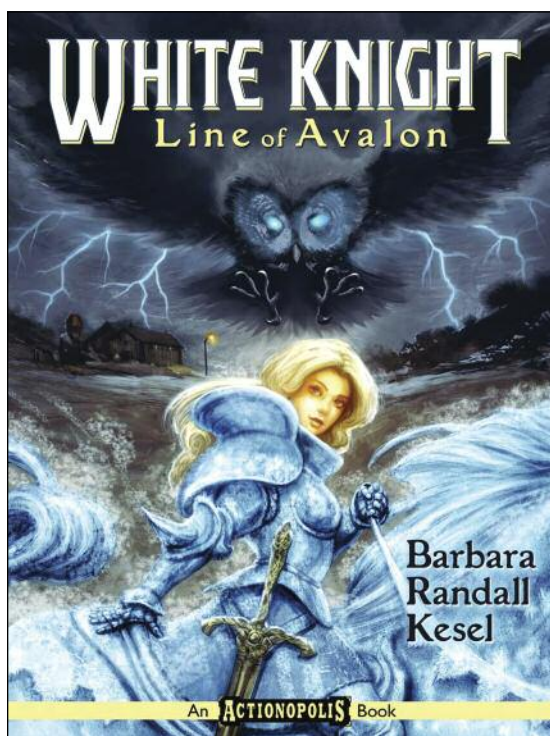
RILEY: *How did the assignment come about—did you submit a pitch?*

SIMONE: No, I was asked. I was asked before and turned it down, I didn't want to be known as a "chick" writer exclusively, but I regret giving in to that kind of thinking. Writing is writing.

The book was in some trouble due to weird scheduling issues and

Keeping Current with Kesel

Barbara's recent work was featured in (far right) Toykopo's *Legends of the Dark Crystal*, vol. 2 (2010, cover art by Jae-Hwan Kim) and (right) Komikwerk's *White Knight: Line of Avalon* (2010, cover art by Michael Geiger).



Dark Crystal © 2012 The Jim Henson Company. White Knight © 2012 Komikwerks, LLC.

series again—or is it a case of “been there, done that” for you?

SIMONE: I would write *Wonder Woman* again, but probably not a monthly ongoing. One of the problems is that the company itself doesn't know what to do with the property, to some degree, so the editorial message is very mixed and changes on a whim. That's tough to negotiate. I think it'd be more rewarding to do a graphic novel or something, but I am very proud of the previous work I did. My first *Wonder Woman* collection, *The Circle*, is always being studied in colleges—that's very cool.

RILEY: *Barbara, you wrote Batgirl Special #1 (June 1988), where Barbara Gordon hangs up her cape and quits superheroics for good. A few months prior, Alan Moore's Batman: The Killing Joke (Mar. 1988) was released and we saw Barbara Gordon shot through the spine and paralyzed by the Joker. Tell me a little bit about how the Special came about and your involvement in that.*

KESEL: Well, with the *Special* and the *Secret Origins* story, those both got done as *Killing Joke* was starting up and Dick came to me and said, “We've got these two stories that we're going to do, and basically Batgirl's [world] is about to be blown up—try to make people care.” [Author's note: Kesel wrote the Batgirl origin story appearing in *Secret Origins* #20 (Nov. 1987).] In other words, we have this character who's sort of been in limbo, sort of been underused, and now since we have this ending that's going to happen, we need to have some connection for people to care about what was lost there. There was that weird feeling trying to work on this character, at the same time knowing that they're going to have this horrible fate...

So during that time I wrote both those stories knowing what the fate was for this character, and in fact I think we may have had some of the [*Killing Joke*] pages in already. I was trying to get across that wistful note of reinforcing what would be lost as opposed to just writing a story that's a one-shot. I'd ordinarily want to write something that's complete and iconic but it doesn't necessarily have to have any other agenda—and in this case there was definitely a sense of trying to get across what would be gone.

SIMONE: Loved that book—it's a huge inspiration for

W R I T E R

DATA CARD


BACKISSUE

Beginnings:
Women in Refrigerators website / *You'll All Be Sorry!* weekly online column for Comic Book Resources

Milestones:
Simpsons Comics / *Killer Princesses* / *Deadpool* / *Agent X* / *Birds of Prey* vol. 1 / *Rose and Thorn* / *Action Comics* / *Villains United* / *Secret Six* vol. 2 / *The All-New Atom* / *Gen 13* vol. 4 / *Welcome to Tranquility* / *Wonder Woman* / *Secret Six* vol. 3 / *Birds of Prey* vol. 2 / *Welcome to Tranquility: One Foot in the Grave*

Works in Progress:
Batgirl ongoing series /
Co-writing *The Fury of Firestorm* with Ethan Van Sciver

Cyberspace:
@GailSimone on Twitter



GAIL SIMONE

what I am doing with the *Batgirl* ongoing.

RILEY: *What are your thoughts on Moore's story, in particular, Barbara Gordon's fate?*

KESEL: I think it's a good, powerful story and it's a very good Batman/Joker story ... it hits a very strong note [about] the psychological dynamic between those two. I mean, it's sad that Barbara Gordon kind of [ended up as] collateral material. I do feel and did feel that if it was James Gordon's son and not daughter, he'd be back walking today. There does seem to be a persistent culture in that it seems more plausible to the creators and the readers that the guys get up and walk again

Women in Refrigerators

(below) Screenshots of Gail Simone's columnist work on the Internet.

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WOMEN IN REFRIGERATORS

[Front Page] [Character List] [Respondent List] [Reactions]

Hi,

This is a list I made when it occurred to me that it's not that healthy to be a female character in comics. I'm curious to find out if this list seems somewhat disproportionate, and if so, what it means, really.

These are superheroes who have been either depowered, raped, or cut up and stuck in the refrigerator. I know I missed a bunch. Some have been revived, even improved — although the question remains as to why they were thrown in the wood chipper in the first place.

I know I missed a bunch — I just don't know my comics deaths the way I should. I'm not editorializing — I'm just curious to find out what you guys think it means, if anything.

The preceding letter was written and sent by me when I realized one day that most of my favorite female comic characters had met untimely and often icky ends. The history of the idea and this site are listed here, and the responses from various comic professionals are listed here.

An important point: This isn't about assessing blame about an individual story or the treatment of an individual character and it's certainly not about personal attacks on the creators who kindly shared their thoughts on this phenomenon. It's about the trend, its meaning and relevance, if any. Plus, it's just fun to talk about refrigerators with dead people in them. I don't know why.

We'd love to hear what you think on this subject, or women in comics in general.

Thanks for visiting!

— Gail Simone, March 1999

LONG-AWAITED UPDATE!

Sorry it's taken this long to update this page. Various other things have prevented keeping it fresh as I would have liked. However, that doesn't mean the e-mail stopped in the meantime! It seems more people are interested in the page than ever! Welcome to those of you coming here from the Dallas Observer article or the mention in Wizard, by the way. For those of you who have been here before, there are some new things scattered throughout these pages, including new pro respondents, and fan email. More should be up soon.

Also, the list as included here needs some revision, since some of these characters have seemingly changed status since last year. Maybe people are listening?

Thanks for checking it out!

Gail Simone

PS: People have been asking about those of us who have worked on the site.

I'm currently writing a humor (!) column on comics called *You'll All Be Sorry!* At Jonah Welland's *Comic Book Resources*. I've also made a weird leap into professional comics writing, working for Bongo Comics on various *Simpsons* books, starting with issue #50.

Beau Varbrough, who designed this site, writes possibly the most trusted news column on comics on the net; *COMIC WIRE*, at Jonah Welland's *Comic Book Resources*. He also has a site of his own, *Secret Identity*.

Rub Harris, who did the lion's share of the site maintenance, works on a cool new site, *www.Superpowers.org*, along with John Norris, who has helped gather respondents and done some updates. I have a guest editorial there this month. This site is the brainchild of Jason Yu, who has kindly arranged for my page to be hosted at his site.

Also noteworthy is the brilliant Daniel Merih Goodfrey, a gifted artist who did our "covers" (check the "reactions" page). He has his own site, *E-merci.com*, and is working on an award-nominated web comic, *BUST*.

Thanks to all these valiant guys!

COMIC BOOK RESOURCES

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NEWS COLUMNS REVIEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY RESOURCES

YOU'LL ALL BE SORRY: *Darkseid*

by Gail Simone, Columnist | You'll All Be Sorry Home

COLUMNS YOU'LL ALL BE SORRY

Category: Comic Books | Print Article
Tue, September 5th, 2000 at 12:00am PST

Absolute ruler of the scarred planet of Apokolips **DARKEID** is at the beach with his grown son, the fierce warrior **ORION**. They are skipping stones into the ocean.

ORION: Father...do you ever see shapes in the clouds?

DARKEID: YES, MY SON. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THAT FORMATION, I SEE THE HOWLING AND CRYING OF HUNGER DOG INFANTS AS MY **PARA-DEMONS** SLAUGHTER THEIR FATHERS BEFORE THEIR VERY GAZE IN THE STREETS OF **ARMAGETTO!**

ORION: That's just like you, Father. Always thinking of your work!

DARKEID: HA HA HA HAI

The Courtship of ORION'S FATHER

A YABS by Gail Simone



but that the women kind of go, "Oh, I'm so hurt." There's that disappointment because it's sad when [you] have a character taken off the table ... but Batgirl, like I said, wasn't really working for what they had going in the Batman mythos at that point. It was the grim-and-gritty he-man Batman era, no girls allowed! She was not a good dynamic

player. I could understand why they felt that the character was extraneous and needed to be removed. I don't entirely agree in the long term and certainly interesting things have come out of it since. I really like the Barbara Gordon-as-Oracle thing. That worked out okay.

SIMONE: I have nothing good to say about the Babs-shooting, I think it's an intensely juvenile note in an otherwise very mature book. Babs is shot and then pretty much ceased to exist—it's just completely irritating to me in every way. Even

Alan has disavowed it. But it's still spoken of with such reverence, and it is a beautiful book, of course. Kim Yale and John Ostrander are the heroes for making something wonderful out of all that mess by creating Oracle. **RILEY:** As you mention, Gail, Barbara emerged as Oracle in *Suicide Squad*, thanks to Kim Yale and John Ostrander. Barbara, were you involved in the evolution of Barbara Gordon into Oracle?

KESEL: I was involved in the sense that I was on a lot of phone calls with Kim, who was very upset about the whole Batgirl thing. She was battling cancer at the time and I think it took on a very strong personal resonance for her.

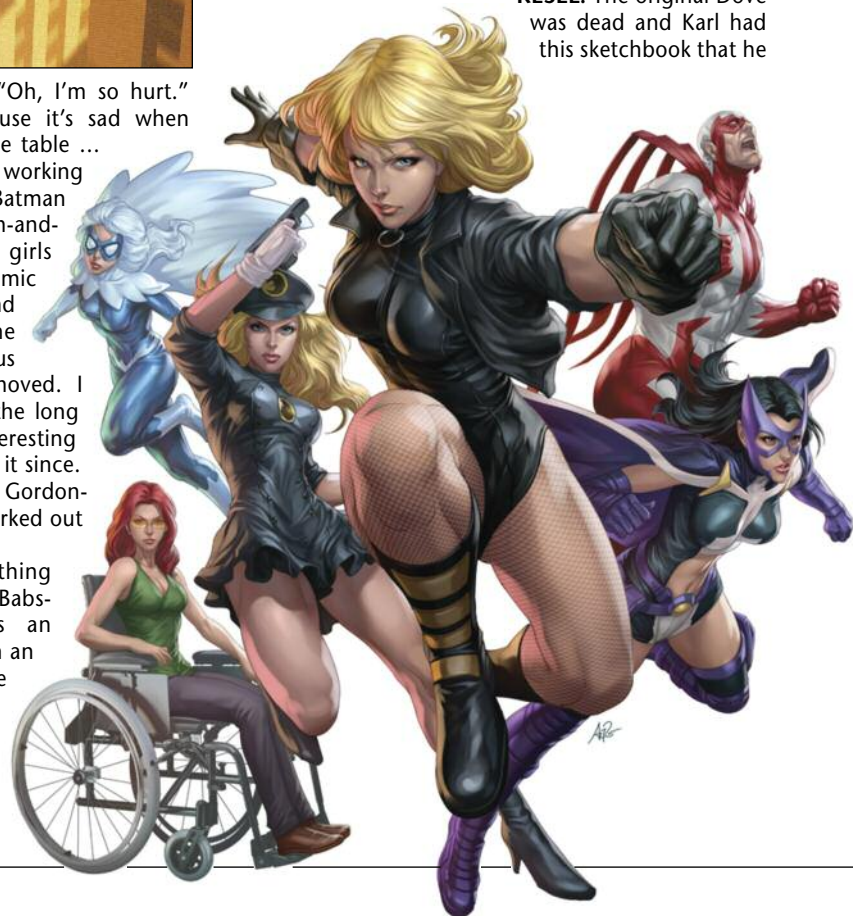
SIMONE: Wow, I'm a friend of John's, and a bit of an Oracle scholar, and I didn't know that part of her history, Barbara. That's very moving.

RILEY: Gail, you took over writing the ongoing *Birds of Prey* series from Chuck Dixon, where Oracle was one of the principal players. She's emerged as one of DC's most popular heroes, in no small part because of your handling of the character. What do you think it is that makes Barbara Gordon so popular?

SIMONE: Well, one of my thoughts on this is that she's smart. In every version of the character, Barbara is the smartest person in the Bat-family, whether it's as Oracle, or being a librarian, or even briefly a congressperson, she's the smart one. I think people love her a little bit for that, for being the smart geek who can also kick your ass when called for, wheelchair or not.

RILEY: The 2010 *Birds of Prey* series features Oracle, as well as Hawk and Dove. Barbara, you co-wrote the 1988 *Hawk and Dove* miniseries with Karl Kesel, and then went on to write the ongoing series. Tell me about how Dawn Granger came to be the new Dove.

KESEL: The original Dove was dead and Karl had this sketchbook that he





did random pieces in and one of the little sketches was a male Hawk and a female Dove. I said, "Where'd this come from?" and he said, "Oh, I always thought Dove should be a female because there's that yin-yang, the opposites there." Obviously with the original version coming out of the politics of the '60s, it worked beautifully—but here we were in the '80s and the same kind of politics didn't work. They would probably work again now, but they didn't work then and I just ran with the idea of a female Dove.

Basically, I have a brother and Karl has a sister and [they] probably very strongly influenced [what we were doing]. His sister happened to live in Georgetown and my brother happens to be somewhat combative, so those qualities probably very much influenced the characters, too, but it all came out of a single image. It would never have occurred to me to make Dove a female—actually, it would never have occurred to me to do anything with Hawk and Dove because I thought they were kind of dated, but we once we got into that dichotomy of male/female, warrior/peaceful [it worked well]. The biggest joke to me of the *Hawk and Dove* series is people missed the fact they were *both* egoists. He is a deliberate, single-minded loudmouth conservative who hits first. She is this hypersmart, bitchy single-minded manipulator and tactician who uses people. Very few readers ever picked up on the fact that she was as obnoxious as him in a different direction because it's more subtle.

RILEY: Gail, did you reference Barbara's work on the character when you decided to bring Dove into the 2010 *Birds of Prey* ongoing series?

SIMONE: Oh, absolutely, and I talked with Karl, as well. That book was really delightful to me. It was about relationships when most other books were just trying to "out-gritty" each other in the most laughably childish ways.

RILEY: Barbara, in your "Kirby Girls" story from the 2011 *Chicks with Capes* anthology, published by Moonstone Books, you pay homage to Jack Kirby and his incredibly powerful, curvaceous women. They weren't just cheesecake! These were women who were kicking ass and taking names. Tell me about the genesis of your story.

KESEL: The genesis of that story is that I hung out

Symphony of Simone Superlative Scripting Spectaculars

On this spread, behold characters and artwork that graced the excellent writing of fan favorite Gail Simone (albeit one "inspired" image!). (clockwise from upper left) Catman battles Batman on *Secret Six* #2 (Dec. 2008) cover art by Cliff Chiang; the crew—Bane, Catman, Deadshot, Ragdoll, the Last Victim, Scandal Savage—of *Secret Six* #26 (Mar. 2011) by Daniel LuVisi; and *Birds of Prey* #8 (Mar. 2011) cover art by Stanley "Artgerm" Lau, featuring Black Canary, Huntress, Hawk and Dove, Lady Blackhawk, and Oracle. Oh, and just for fun, here's a parody cover, melding two current hot fads, Tyler Walpole and Rus Wootton's *Angry Birds of Prey*, from the website www.the-gutters.com.

Suicide Squad, Batman, Birds of Prey TM & © DC Comics. Angry Birds © 2012 Rovio Entertainment Ltd.

1982 WOMEN IN COMICS PANEL

Courtesy of Alan Light, photographs from a San Diego Comic-Con panel from 30 years ago, gathering the industry's top female cartoonists, writers, artists, and editors of the day. (top, left to right): Dori Seda, Laurie Sutton, Jan Duursema, Trina Robbins, and Carol Kalish. (middle, left to right): Jo Duffy, Lee Marris, and cat yronwode. (bottom, left to right): Marris, yronwode, and Carol Lay. Also on the panel but not pictured: Terry Boyce and Melinda Gebbe.





Gail Storm

Gail Simone (above) came on the aughts like a hurricane as hot writer. Here's two of her regular assignments over time, (right) *The Fury of Firestorm: The Nuclear Men* and (below) *Wonder Woman*.

TM & © DC Comics.

every week in Tampa with a group of gals called the Alpha Bitch Club who were all in their 30s and 40s. The conversation gets pretty raw because [when you get] women in their 30s and 40s alone and away from the kids and away from the husbands, *ohmigawd!* Snark ensues. I told them all, "Don't look for yourselves here [in this story]. There is no one-to-one correlation there and there's a different number of people involved," but the story did come from the kind of conversations we had. It sparked the idea that when you have a

bunch of superpowered women hanging around, what are they going to talk about?

Well, the story's a pretty mild version of it and I'm not going to talk about the ending. But the Kirby thing is kind of funny because I never really liked Kirby's art myself. I came to appreciate Kirby's artwork through Steve Rude's appreciation of it. When I was a kid I hated it because I thought all the girls were ugly. So, you know, the characters make homage to [Kirby] in all this, but that's sort of my late-breaking realization of the extraordinary qualities of [his work]. I was just never drawn to his style. It seemed too ... rough and heavy. When I started at DC, it seemed like every artist was doing a Kirby homage, all they could talk about was Kirby and I just didn't get it. It wasn't until I was talking with Steve Rude at a convention and he was just going on about [Kirby], you know, pointing out some pieces—and I saw it through his filter. It's like somebody telling you the definition of a word in another language where suddenly you understand the word in a way that goes beyond just literally what it means to the emotional, resonant meaning of it to someone.

Going back to the bitches in the coffee shop, I just thought it was [fun] to have that same kind of, you know, *Sex in the City*-meets-superheroes kind of quality to the conversation. I know how women speak, especially how women in their middle age speak when men are not around. Thanks to my time at comic-book companies I know how men speak when women aren't around because they would usually tend to forget I was there—and then



there's the way men and women speak to each other, which is a third language.

RILEY: [laughs] *I couldn't help but think of Bronze Age powerhouses like Jack Kirby's Big Barda, John Buscema's She-Hulk, and Ric Estrada and Wally Wood's Power Girl. There's a joyfulness to those characters. I think Amanda Conner's recent work on the 2009 Power Girl series is a great example of injecting a sense of fun and humor, while still staying true to the essence of the character.*

KESEL: That was kind of like the fantasy version that was in my head. If I could do ["Kirby Girls"] as a comic book, I'd have Amanda draw it. Amanda has an extraordinary sense for getting across character with a single stance or a single outfit. She's one of the best people I've ever seen to understand clothing as character. The single panel that endeared Amanda to me for life—I think it's either Spoiler or Arrowette—but there's a panel where you see one of these young girls from the back. It's the typical young-girl thing where she's got the racer-back shirt with the straight bra or vice versa—the bra straps don't match the shape of the shirt in a way that only kids under 20 do? It just said everything about that character. I worship at the altar of Amanda Connor.

SIMONE: She's one of those cherished few who understand how to do "sexy" without it also meaning "embarrassing" when it comes to superheroes. She's amazing.

RILEY: *Jill, since we're on the subject of artists—who were your artistic influences growing up?*

THOMPSON: Comic-wise? Charles Schulz, Bob Montana, Bob Bolling, John Buscema, John Romita, John Byrne, Jamie Hernandez, Wendy Pini, P. Craig Russell, Steve Rude—and through "the Dude" and Paul Smith, Andrew Loomis ... I hope I haven't left anyone out. Probably have ... sorry, but that gives you an idea.



RILEY: *Did you have any mentors when you first got started in the industry?*

THOMPSON: Bill Reinhold really took the time to correct me when I was making mistakes and teach me why the things that I was doing were wrong. He and Mitch O'Connell and Lenin Delsol convinced me to go to the American Academy of Art. Steve Rude and Paul Smith introduced me to the world of Andrew Loomis books. The Academy honed my skills and got me ready to apply them to the comics medium. And once I got started on a regular book, I'd say P. Craig Russell was definitely a mentor and friend. He really took me under his wing in a way. I loved hanging around with him and talking art and design and layout and composition.

RILEY: *Aside from Wonder Woman and a handful of other DC and Marvel comics, much of your work has been somewhat left-of-center or leaning towards the supernatural. Has this been by design, or has it been more of an organic path for you?*

THOMPSON: I tend to enjoy the humorous, the sarcastic, the supernatural, the magical, the spooky ... so I'm drawn to that material. I guess I've been lucky to get to collaborate on stories that have subject matter I enjoy. *Finals* (1999) was a perfect collaboration between Will Pfeifer and me—we brainstormed ideas for that all the time. I loved working that way. With *Scary Godmother* and *Magic Trixie*, I'm driving the train so I can take it anywhere I like!

RILEY: *Your work on several titles under DC's Vertigo imprint was exemplary. It really put you on the map for a lot of comics fans. Looking back, did you think at the time that your work on Sandman with Neil Gaiman, for example, would open the door to so many other projects?*



THOMPSON: I was so fortunate to get to work on *Sandman* with Neil Gaiman. It was an amazing fit for me! And it was the title that brought my work to the attention of others. I knew I was doing great work on that book because the stories and the characters meant so much to me. I wanted to make sure my drawing did justice to what I was reading in my script. I had been a huge fan of the series and wanted to do it proud!

RILEY: *2003's Death: At Death's Door saw you working in a manga style. How did this come about? Were you looking to stretch a bit creatively?*

THOMPSON: Manga was just starting to get big and booksellers and bookstore reps were asking Vertigo to publish some manga-style products. They said that they believed they would be a great seller. And *Sandman* material would be perfect. One gentleman went so far as to actually mention me by name as

52 Skidoo!

Batgirl and a zillion (okay, 51) other titles were recently relaunched for the ambitious reboot of DC's entire line. Cover by Adam Hughes.

TM & © DC Comics.

The Amazing Colossal Bart

(left) *Treehouse of Horror* #8 (2002) included work by two of our subjects.

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ARTIST/ WRITER

BACKISSUE!

DATA CARD

Beginnings:

Pencils for "Banana Man, the Hero with Appeal!" from *Just Imagine Comics and Stories* #8 (Winter 1984) / Pencils for the John Ostrander-scripted "Bad Sports" from *GrimJack* #32 (Mar. 1987)

Milestones:

Fathom / *Elementals* / *Classics Illustrated* / *Wonder Woman* / *The Sandman* / *Black Orchid* / *Badger*: *Shattered Mirror* / *Swamp Thing* / *The Invisibles* / *Seekers into the Mystery* / *Scary Godmother* / *The Books of Magic* / *Finals* / *The Invisibles: Apocalipstick* / *Scary Godmother* (2001 series) / *X-Men Unlimited* / *Death: At Death's Door* / *Batman: Gotham Knights* / *Fables* / *Magic Trixie* / *Beasts of Burden* / *Hellboy* / *Beasts of Burden: Sacrifice*

Works in Progress:

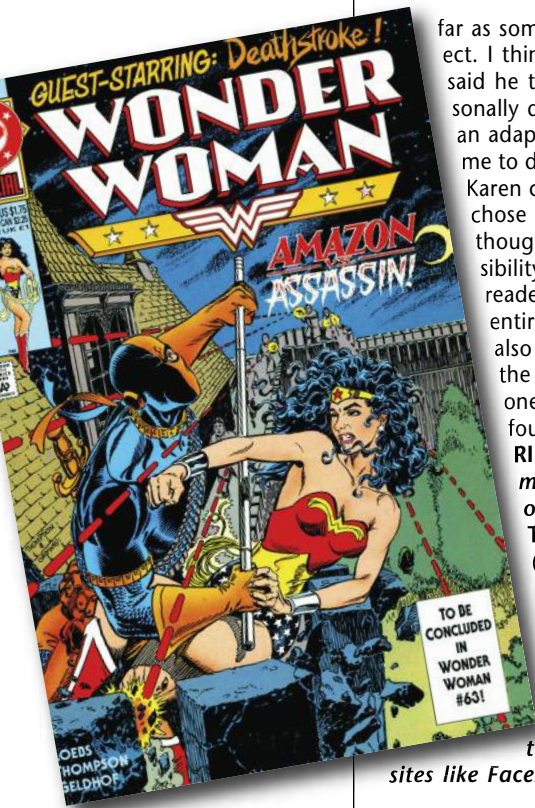
Story with Shelly Bond for an upcoming anthology / Project with Steve Niles for Dark Horse

Cyberspace:

@thejillthompson on Twitter



JILL
THOMPSON



far as someone he believed could do such a project. I think Karen [Berger] kept asking Neil, who said he thought it was a good idea but he personally didn't know enough about manga to do an adaptation—but he thought they should ask me to do it. So with the Neil stamp of approval, Karen called and offered me a manga project. I chose to adapt "Seasons of Mist" because I thought that story fit well with the Shouju sensibility. And many retailers introduce new readers to *Sandman* that way because the entire family is featured prominently in it. I also thought I could add a cute "in between the panels" escapade and still return everyone to the original ending—no harm, no foul!

RILEY: *Did you reference any specific manga comics or anime while working on the book?*

THOMPSON: I love Rumiko Takahashi (*Lum*) and Miwa Ueda (*Peach Girl*), as well as all the Studio Ghibli films, my favorite old *Speed Racer* [episodes], and *Captain Harlock* (the first anime I'd ever seen at a sci-fi con back when I was a teen).

RILEY: *What are your thoughts on the Internet and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter allowing women to*

have more of a voice in the industry?

KESEL: I think that technology has allowed many more girls to participate because the same girls who might be intimidated to step into the local comics store have a computer at home and can talk safely to people who can't touch them. So that allows a whole lot more people across the board to get in and to get involved and talk comics. People can find "like characters." To me, the most interesting phenomenon of Comic-Con for the last ten years has been the crews—largely, it's anime fans—who meet each other online and then meet at the convention and it's almost got nothing to do with the convention itself. It's their group meeting with a safe place for girls, so suddenly you have, like, 14- to 16-year-old girls who have a safe place to meet at a convention because they have a gang of like-minded girls who can all hang together so they're not feeling overly intimidated or afraid to come into this place because the guys can be pretty overwhelming.

That being said—oh, my God, the wildfires of attitude that you find online can be just overwhelmingly offensive, because the same people who would not dream of saying something rude or critical in person are unleashed online and have no filter and have no discretion. So as much as you have the good parts, you also have the evil. You have the lack of restraint and a lack of tact, so you have the good of the connection and the bad of the manners. But it's another new tool. I'm learning the hard way that I have to pay more attention to that kind of stuff. I just got told I wasn't considered for a job because my "social metrics are not high enough." Oh, bother!

SIMONE: Well, I was "discovered" as a writer for a website, and I came up through message boards and all that stuff. Barbara's right, there are some really awful conversations out there, racist, homophobic, misogynist, all that stuff. But I do think it's the minority ... and the balance is that you can talk to a reader in Singapore, you can read wonderful, innovative web-comics that would never get published otherwise. It's more than a fair trade, and it's exciting, it's involving. The female readership is up and will continue to grow, and the smart companies will take notice.

THOMPSON: You don't see me on Twitter *at all!*



[laughs] Obviously, I like [social media]. It's an extension of my own personality. I mean, comics are so much of a solitary job, you know? You do get to meet fans at conventions and signings, and you do see other creators from time to time. But most of the time, unless you have a studio situation—you're working by yourself. I like the direct contact that I can have with people who like my work. I like that people can tell me what they like or what they want to see, and I like to tease them with images at any time. Like at four in the morning, if I'm working on something, I can take a picture of a tiny portion of a page that I am working on that I'm so psyched about and just put it out there and people can see it whenever they want to. It's the closest that I think we can come to mental telepathy, which was one of my mutant powers when I was a child. I very much wanted to have Phoenix [or] Professor X powers and I thought that could happen, evolutionarily—you know, if we were only able to unlock the rest of our brain we would probably be able to do that. I do text messaging and Twitter and Facebook—I can reach a good amount of people and hopefully *more* people every single day, and they can see my work and the things that I like. My personality is a lot of my work, you know, *Scary Godmother* or *Magic Trixie*—or any of my other works that I do collaborating with other people. That's what's so good about social media—it's that everyone gets to see that part of me and know how much of my heart and soul I put into everything, every story that I try to tell.

RILEY: *One last question: If you could go back in time to before you went pro, what advice would you give yourself?*

KESEL: You know what? That social metric thing has everything to do with it. I'm very vocal in my opinions, but I'm very private in my life, and that works against you in a way that I never dreamed. If I could go back



ten years ago and redo some of my choices to stay quiet—like I have a partially [finished] website out there that started out as somebody's design project and then didn't happen, but it's still sitting out there—it exists—and I haven't taken the time to do something with it. If I had known five years ago how crucial it was going to be now, I would've made it a bigger priority but I just can't find the motivation to do the "tooting my own horn" stuff. I know I badly need to revamp it and get back to it and I hate that part. I like making up stuff for other characters, I don't like promoting myself in that way. But obviously, you need to do it. So ... I'd hire a publicist and then go hide in my office and make stuff up!

SIMONE: I am in the same boat. I paid for a website and I just looked at it and thought, this seems more like a shrine to my own wonderfulness, and I just couldn't go through with it, so it hasn't been used ever. I don't regret most of the choices I've made. I only took assignments I wanted to do—some may not have gone as I hoped and planned, but I'm still pretty happy I took those chances. I guess I'd advise myself to write more prose, early on. I am just starting to do that, and I feel like I have a lot of catching up to do.

THOMPSON: Use your first royalty check to buy real estate!

SHANNON E. RILEY has been reading and collecting comics since 1978, when his dad bought him his first book, Detective Comics #475. He is an executive producer on the forthcoming Fredric Wertham documentary Diagram for Delinquents. Learn more at robertemmons.blogspot.com.

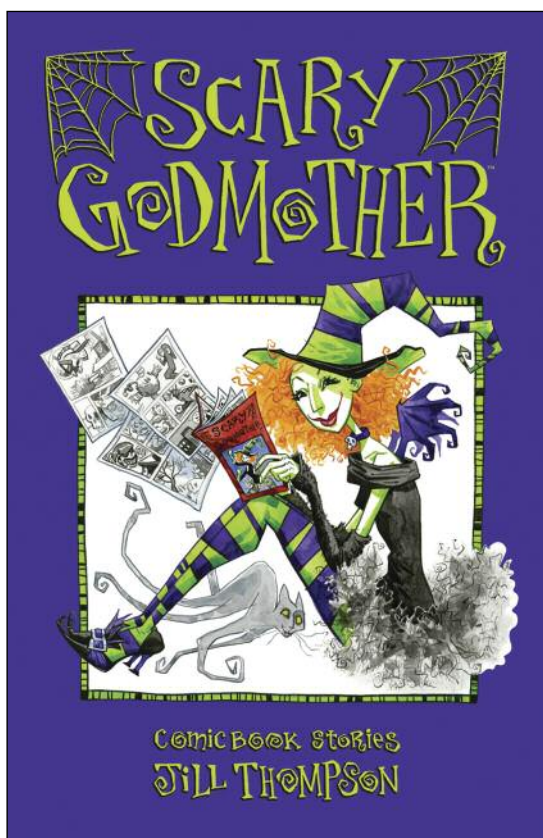


end

Cover Girl

(clockwise from top) Because *Comic Book Artist* editor Jon B. Cooke is guest-designing this ish of *BI*, he elects to repropose a detail of the *gawgeous* sepia-toned cover image (by Dan Martin of Chicago) of a *gawgeous* Jill Thompson from his *gawgeous* CBA vol. 1, #23 (Dec. 2002); Jill's cover art for the 312-page omnibus *Scary Godmother Comic Book Stories* (Dark Horse, 2011); our own Michael Eury hitchin' a ride from Jill at Chicago-Con 1988; and her cover of 1992's *Wonder Woman Special* #1, with inks by Jerry Ordway, no slouch he!

Portrait © 2012 Dan Martin; Scary Godmother © 2012 Jill Thompson; Wonder Woman TM & © DC Comics.





SWORDS & SCIENCE &

STARFIRE



by **Andy Mangels**

Although the Women's Liberation movement was in full swing by 1976, one would hardly have noticed it in the world of comics. Female lead characters were few and far between. Although *The Secrets of Isis* ruled Saturday mornings, and *The Bionic Woman* and *Wonder Woman* had recently been born in primetime, as of comics cover-dated in July, only six female characters headlined books: *Blondie* (Charlton), *Little Lulu* (Gold Key), *Red Sonja* in *Marvel Feature* (Marvel), *Tigra* in *Marvel Chillers* (Marvel), *Vampirella* (Warren), and *Wonder Woman* (DC).

Young visitors to the newsstands might have been quite surprised then to see *Starfire* #1 (cover-dated Aug.–Sept., but on sale in May), an all-new title from DC Comics that featured a sword-wielding Asian female—"A Woman Rebel in an Enslaved World!" promised the cover copy—standing over a defeated-but-thuggish male warrior. The tagline promised "A New Epic of Swords & Science," heady words in a pre-*Star Wars* community.

Starfire would last eight issues, ending abruptly with an Oct.–Dec. 1977 cover-dated comic that promised further adventures to come. But although one person stayed consistent through all eight issues—penciler Mike Vosburg—nothing else stayed the same. Four writers, two editors, two inkers, cast members disposed of almost every issue, costume changes ... to say that *Starfire* was a comic in flux is an

understatement. Assembled in the article to follow are the recollections of almost every living creator who worked on *Starfire*, explaining where the concept came from, and how it became such a patchwork quilt.

From Beyond Space and Time!
Detail from a beautiful Mike Vosburg commission piece, featuring our heroine, the siren of swords and science, Starfire!

TM & © DC Comics.

STARFIRE ORIGINS

The creation of Starfire can clearly be credited to writer David Michelinie, who scripted the first two issues of the series. "As I recall, I was asked by [editor] Joe Orlando to come up with a female sword-and-sorcery character to be DC's answer to Red Sonja," the author says today. "It's always fun and challenging to create new characters, especially when you get to create a new world to put them in. But I was already writing a fairly traditional sword-and-sorcery book at the time in *Claw the Unconquered*, and I also had no desire to [copy] Red Sonja and simply put new names on the characters. So I came up with the sword-and-science angle, putting the series more in the realm of fantasy than barbarian action. I wanted a tone that was more in line with Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars and Venus books, than with Robert E. Howard's muscle and magic epics."

DC was publishing multiple fantasy/barbarian books at the time, including *Claw*, *Stalker*, *Beowulf*, and the on/off *Warlord* series. Was *Starfire* an attempt to open the market specifically for female characters? "I really wasn't in on DC's corporate reasoning or decision-making," says Michelinie. "My impression was that the company wanted to put more titles on the stands, and hoped to tap into the Conan market that was doing well for Marvel. I assume they wanted a female character because Red Sonja was popular, and they already had several male characters in fantasy books."

Prior to *Starfire* #1, penciler Mike Vosburg had worked for Gold Key and Charlton, and regularly done books for Marvel including *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*, *Savage Sword of Conan*, and two *First Issue Special* comics for DC ("Starman" and "Return of the New Gods"). "I had very little to do with the creation of *Starfire*," he admits today. "As I recall, I was working exclusively for Marvel at the time, and the companies were always looking for ways to entice the new talent away from each other. So when I started talking to DC, *Starfire* was what they had in the works that fit for me. Roy Thomas once told me years later I'd been in the discussion for Red Sonja since the female characters were my specialty; fortunately, they went with Frank Thorne."

In creating *Starfire*, Michelinie did add one element to the visuals and characterization that was unusual for the generically whitebread world of comics: *Starfire* herself was half-Caucasian and half-Asian. "It was purposeful, but there was no grand scheme behind it," Michelinie says. "I just thought it would be cool and a little different. I had also recently dated a Chinese-American woman, so that may have been a factor as well." Michelinie also reveals that the character was originally called "Akanda," "Probably because it sounded like 'anacanda.' Fortunately, clearer heads prevailed and the more commercial 'Starfire' was eventually substituted."

As for the rest of the look of the character, and her world, Vosburg was totally in control. This included the asymmetrical costume *Starfire* wore, which included a cut-out over her breasts in the style of Wally Wood's design for Power Girl. "I was very big into the European cartoonists: Moebius, Carlos Jimenez, Victor De La Fuente, Esteban Maroto, Paul Gillon, and many others," says Vosburg. "In fact, the only bad advice that



DAVID MICHELINIE



Joe Orlando ever gave me was: 'You're looking at those European guys too much.' But one of my big influences was Guido Crepax and his character Valentina. As I've explained in other interviews, one of the costumes he dressed Valentina in was the inspiration for *Starfire*'s costume." As for the sexy aspects, Vosburg also references Howard Chaykin, Barry Windsor-Smith, and Frank Brunner. "I'm afraid my stuff was pretty tame by comparison. DC would have probably preferred that I push it a lot further. If I had, maybe *Starfire* would be in issue #500 by now and I would have missed out on a lot of fun in Hollywood.

"On the first issues I was able to design all of the characters, which was a lot of fun," Vosburg says. "I do remember one of the creatures was a lot like something I saw in Victor De La Fuente's *Haxtur*. The male lead wore something right out of Errol Flynn's

Pointer Sister

Cover of the first issue of *Starfire* (Aug.–Sept. 1976), with art by Ernie Chan, pencils, and Vince Colletta, inks.

TM & © DC Comics.



Voz's Vixen (this spread) Courtesy of David Michelinie, Mike Vosburg's design sketches for *Starfire*, including (far right) Dagan, the warrior-priest. The drawing above features a note to DC executive editor Joe Orlando: "Joe—This is the final sketch for Akanda [*Starfire's* original name]—Gives her a little more youthful look." (opposite, bottom right) *Starfire* #2 (Oct.–Nov. 1976) cover by José Luis García-López and Vince Colletta.

Starfire TM & © DC Comics.

Robin Hood. Certainly the shadowy creatures were from Joe Kubert's *Hawkman* [story] 'The Shadow Thief of Midway City.' For me, entertainment isn't so much about originality as it is execution. As the series went on and the direction would change, so would *Starfire's* costume. I think it went from elegant to ridiculous. I'm sure it boiled down to an attempt to display as much flesh as Red Sonja."

ISSUES #1 AND 2: THE MICHELINIE "ERA"

Written by David Michelinie, with art by Mike Vosburg and Robert Smith, and editing by Joe Orlando, the debut issue featured a story titled "A World Made of War." In it, readers met *Starfire*, a beautiful mixed-heritage humanoid girl who had been raised as a slave since birth by the Mygorg. King Sookarooth of the Mygorg allowed her some education and luxuries in his palace as he eventually intended for her to be his mate, but upon learning of her intended fate on her 18th birthday, *Starfire* flees Castle Mollachon. She is soon caught by Sookarooth's men, but rescued by a warrior-priest named Dagan who teaches her (in a montage) how to be a fierce warrior. When Dagan is captured and killed by Sookarooth, *Starfire* raids the castle, frees the other slaves, kills Sookarooth, and vows to free the people of



MIKE VOSBURG

her planet from the Mygorg.

The war on the planet was essentially between religious groups—priests who had used their science to bring to their world the brutish Mygorg and the shadow-powered Yorg to fight for them—and Michelinie notes that he took part of his inspiration from our world. "I think it was simply because so many wars on Earth are fought because of religion—the Crusades, Jihads, etc.," says Michelinie. "So why should creatures on other worlds be immune to this insanity?"

As for the names of the various races and creatures, he says, "When I was a kid I saw a science-fiction movie on TV called *Gog*. In it there were two robots named *Gog* and *Magog*. I have no idea why, but two names sounding similar for similar beings stuck with me, and that carried over to my naming the two monster races in *Starfire*. It's a common technique in both science fiction and fantasy to give alien characters, settings, and objects names that aren't part of normal English speech. In reality, alien names would likely be unpronounceable by human tongues, and most conversations with otherworldly



beings would be in some pseudo-language that both could learn and use. But since English-speaking writers are pretty much forced by necessity to write their stories in English, they often sprinkle weird names into their stories to indicate that, yes, this isn't our world even though people talk like it is."

Having *Starfire* execute the king—despite him begging for mercy—proved to be controversial among fans as later letters pages would attest, but Michelinie received no negative feedback from DC editorial. "I guess everyone in editorial had seen *Dirty Harry*," he jokes. Still, a production error on the comic gave rise to an urban legend that the book hadn't been approved by the Comics Code Authority because of the level of sexuality and violence in it. According to the editor, however, the CCA stamp fell off the cover in production, and the book was printed without anyone noticing it. Michelinie confirms this: "I think this legend falls in the same category as Elvis being alive or George W. Bush having a brain; people keep it going because it's more interesting than the truth. Nobody ever told me the book was rejected, and no one ever told me to change anything in the way the book was handled. As far as I know, it was just a production error."

Despite the appearance of underground and foreign comics into the market—all of which featured more outright violence and sexuality than any newsstand comic—neither Michelinie nor Vosburg intended *Starfire* to be terribly controversial. "I was never consciously aware of trying to 'push any boundaries' with sex and violence," says Vosburg. "All my attempts were at trying to push my own boundaries of what I was capable of. I was far more interested in being another Leonard Starr than in creating a statement about sex or violence. But let's face it, whatever we were doing wasn't as violent as Barry Smith's exceptional work at the same time in *Conan*; and when I looked at the stuff I was a lot more impressed at the quality of the material than his technique for people spattered with blood after a battle."

Michelinie admits that he pushed a little bit, though probably, "not consciously. I think, in my youth, I was always trying to push things a little. I was never extreme, but I did like to see what I could get

away with now and then. More out of curiosity than rebelliousness." As for any kind of feminist agenda or message to *Starfire*, he says, "the whole thing was about gender, though not necessarily about sex. Feminism and Women's Lib were big issues at the time, and I wanted to tell a story of a woman who was learning about herself and what she was capable of, without spouting bra-burning, I-Am-Woman-Hear-Me-Roar slogans. I didn't get to do a lot of that with only two issues, but that was the subtext I'd hoped to explore."

Issue #2 (Oct.–Nov. 1976) was written by Michelinie, with art by Vosburg and new inker Vince Colletta. In "The Siege of Lortnan Manor," *Starfire* is given a supporting cast of rough, male freedom fighters; meets a young boy who engages in the forbidden act of reading books; fights pterodactyl-like sky beasts and the Mygorg; and gets a map to the Lightning Lords, who may have powerful weapons that could aid in the fight against the Mygorg enslavers. *Starfire* also gets the first in a continuing series of unwanted sexual advances, thanks to one of her men, Thrumdahg.

Although one online source claims that the issue's plot had a lot of similarity to a *Planet of the Apes* episode, Michelinie says he wasn't aping the TV tale. "I think I may have watched the first episode of the *Apes* TV series, but none beyond that. The TV version did nothing for me. So, no, issue #2 wasn't based on anything but my own thoughts." As for messages about illiteracy or banned books, he wasn't going for that either. "That bit was just based on a common characteristic of oppressive governments, like Nazism or Soviet com-





Starfire, Siren of Sword and Science!

(above and opposite) Sextet of *Starfire* covers, #3-8, by Mike Vosburg (pencils) and inker Vince Colletta.

TM & © DC Comics.

Warrior Respite

(below) Mike Vosburg's cover art for *The Comic Reader* #127 (Feb. 1976).

Starfire TM & © DC Comics.



munism, which try to keep the rabble from learning too much about viewpoints other than the party line. As for the father killing his son, the theme there was moral weakness, a man choosing to accept evil in order to make his own existence more secure. His fear of losing that security led to the accidental murder of his own son."

As for Thrumdahg, Michelinie says that he was "your basic sexist pig on the surface, and having Starfire put him on the ground when he got fresh was just a way to show she could handle herself without spouting feminist rhetoric. In the future I'd hoped to have Thrumdahg mature and grow, to be a partner with Starfire and respect her—while still wanting to get in her pants, of course. Some things don't change."

Vosburg doesn't recall why Bob Smith was replaced after issue #1. "Bob Smith did a great job on the first issue. Vinnie, to his credit, always seemed to work harder on my stuff than usual, and the books always looked very nice. We had a falling out over my desire to ink my own work, but what Vinnie didn't understand was that I didn't care if Frank Frazetta inked my work; it wasn't *me* anymore. I wasn't cut out for the factory process of comics. When I would see an inked job of mine, I'd only see the problems with it, and assumed that the inker had caused them. It was only when I inked more of my own work that I was able to see the difficulties I was creating for an inker, and I was able to improve my penciling."

Michelinie left abruptly after completing the first two issues, though he stayed at DC to write many other books. "I honestly don't remember why I left the book," he says today. "It wasn't out of anger or 'creative differences' or anything negative like that. Possibly I left to do another project, or simply because I didn't want to do two series (this and *Claw*) that were similar in tone or flavor. I always regret leaving a series, whether I created it or not, when it means not being able to carry through on ideas or story-

lines I had planned. But unless one writes every issue of every series one is assigned to, that's going to happen. You just move on, and hope you can incorporate your ideas into something else down the line."

ISSUES #3-5: THE MAGGIN "ERA"

Following Michelinie as writer was Elliot S. Maggin, while Vosburg and Colletta remained on art, and Orlando remained as editor. *Starfire* #3 was titled "The Arena of the Frost-Dragon," and in it, Maggin added a larger supporting cast, including a bald, mute giant nicknamed "Thump" who is rescued from a gladiator arena and who became very protective of Starfire ... and clearly important to the future of her fight for freedom. Also new were weapons master Anzus and tracker Moonwatcher. Finally, Maggin killed off Thrumdahg, showing he had no problems axing a previously created character.

Issue #4 was "Slaves of the Golden Queen," and in it, Starfire and her men go up against the human villainess Queen Karoleen, whose half-face golden helmet hides a horrible secret. Oddly, the issue features a bal-ladeering tone in its caption boxes that seemed to have come from nowhere.

Jack C. Harris took over as editor for issue #5, titled "Here There Be Monsters!" More sexual harassment of Starfire from males, and the return of some science-based concepts—the previous two issues had been almost strictly fantasy—all led to a surprise ending when the crew finally meets up with the Lightning Lords, only to have them recognize Thump.

Maggin was unable to do an interview for this article, but Vosburg notes that, "Elliot's stuff was more humor oriented, which in retrospect I'm not sure worked." As for his own evolving style, Vosburg—who worked from full scripts, as was the DC style of the era—says, "My style certainly changed a bit every issue, as my work improved, but the tone of the book would change dramatically with different writers and editors ... it not only changed writers, but also editorial direction three or four times. One month it was straight dra-

matic adventure, the next month a comedy parody a'la *Barbarella*, then a PG attempt at T&A. As a French interviewer pointed out to me recently, I was the only one who worked on the book for every issue."

ISSUES #6-7: THE ENGLEHART "ERA"

With *Starfire* #6, Steve Englehart took over as writer for "Citadel of Silence," in which *Starfire* meets a sorceress known as the Lady of the Lightning or Lady Djinn, and learns of the Keeper, a sentient computer, both of whom have sinister ties to Thump's past. *Starfire's* gang gets attacked by the Mygorg, and the shadow creatures called the Yorg attack as well. *Starfire* also gets a new costume at the market nearby. The story concluded in issue #7's "Freedom Never Dies," in which *Starfire's* costume is torn into an even more-revealing version, the Keeper causes some fatalities whilst teleporting *Starfire's* companions to its citadel, and the secrets of the Lightning Lords and Thump's past are finally revealed.

Englehart had previously worked with Vosburg on a story for *StarReach*, and as he admits, "When this opportunity came up, I was all for it. I don't know, if I ever did, why the previous [writer] left. This was in an era when books were assigned, not asked for." As for the elements of mixing science and sorcery, he notes that, in his ideas for the book, "Science was to show how it differed from sorcery, but it didn't exclude sorcery; it included science." Differentiating the series from the *Conan/Red Sonja* books was an element he found easy to do: "I love [Robert E.] Howard, but he had created a world for *Sonja* and *Conan* and *Kull* that had distinct parameters. Mike [Vosburg] came up with a much larger set of parameters, creating a sort of 'softer' sword and sorcery—more like *Fafhrd* and the *Gray Mouser*, perhaps."

As to why he left the series after two issues, Englehart says that "all my DC work that year had a

cut-off point because I'd told them in advance that I'd be leaving to go to Europe. Any latterly added series, like *Master Miracle*, were only until that date. Beyond that, I say again, I did not drive *Starfire*—she was Mike's baby."

The letters column in issue #6 contained an interesting note from the editor; alongside two letters from female readers, the editor noted that, "We're surprised and happy that a good 25% of the letters to *Starfire* are from young women. Have we, at long last, found our female audience?"

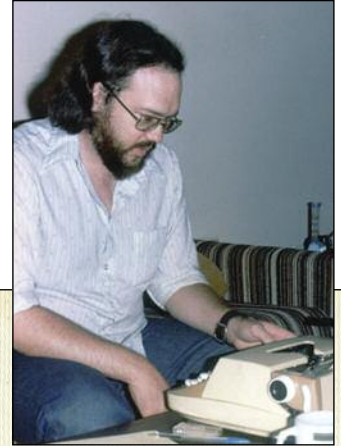
ISSUE #8: THE DeFALCO "ERA"

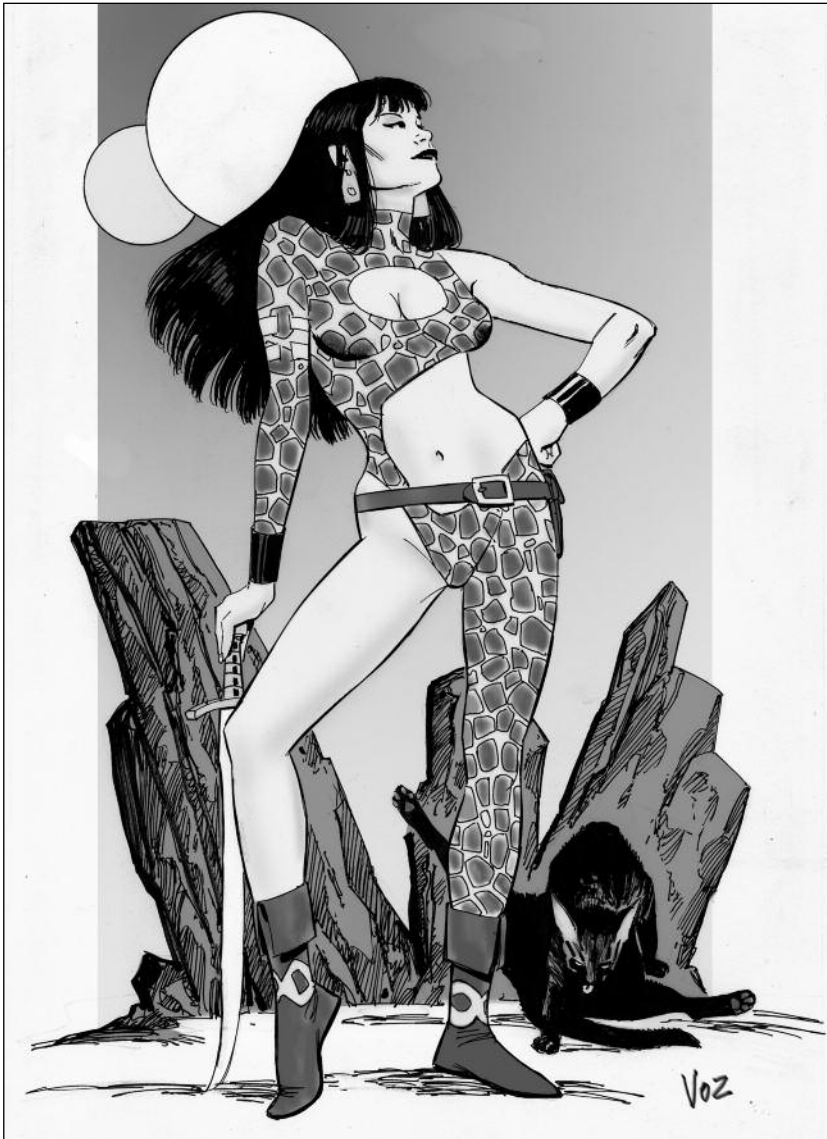
With the eighth issue, editor Denny O'Neil took control of *Starfire*, and brought aboard the final new writer, Tom DeFalco. In "The Dwellers of the Dark Domain," *Starfire* begins leading a refuge group of humans to the fabled sanctuary known as "the Haven," where they will be able to live free from Mygorg and Yorg dominance. Along the way, they discover an underground city, and learn of a magical weapon known as the Eye of Armageddon, which will drive the Mygorg from the planet forever.

In a preview blurb in [DC's fanzine] *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #14, it was noted that

**Musing
Michelinie**

(below) The writer in a '70s pic and Joe Orlando-drawn caricature.





Her People's Savior

(above) Mike Vosburg shared this commission piece of *Starfire*.

Inset right is Voz's *Starfire* #5 cover recreation.

Starfire TM & © DC Comics.

scripting *Starfire* would give DeFalco "an excellent opportunity to break typecasting since his last assignment was *Betty and Veronica*." DeFalco agrees with the assessment: "I was mainly writing for Archie and Charlton Comics and doing other humor material on the side in those days. I met Paul Levitz and he suggested me to Joe Orlando for some custom comics work. Joe liked my work enough to later give me a 64-page assignment for DC called the *Super Jrs.*, which sort of/kind of starred baby versions of the Justice League. Joe also passed my name over to Denny O'Neil who needed a writer for a romance comic. Since I was writing for Archie, I guess they figured I could do the job. I don't remember the title of the comic, but my story was called 'I Won't Kiss That Evil Way!' (Yeah, those were the days!) [Writer's note: It was *Young Love* #126, the final issue of that series.] Denny liked the job enough to offer me other work. At some point Joe suggested I try my hand at adventure and superhero comics, and I must have told him about an interest in sword-and-sorcery material. I don't remember if it was Denny or Joe who offered me *Starfire*, but I jumped at the chance."

DeFalco wasn't given any story notes from previous writers, although he read the previous issues. "I often worked with Denny and we began every assignment

with a long conversation about the series: what we liked, what we thought worked, and what we thought the series needed," DeFalco says. "Denny was/and still is a never-ending fount of ideas and always pointed me in the right directions."

As for what he saw as the series' greatest strength, DeFalco didn't consider the costume—or lack thereof—to be the largest part of the equation. "I thought her unique draw was her premise: a sword-and-sorcery world that's been invaded by aliens with high-tech weapons," DeFalco says. "Starfire might have appealed to a similar reader as Red Sonja, but the characters were completely different. Red Sonja was a vengeful loner trying to survive in a savage world. Starfire was a reluctant leader desperately searching for a way to save her people and her world from invaders who had far superior firepower."

One of the goals the writer established was to "keep introducing new locations and new concepts every issue. I assume the quests for both the 'Eye of Armageddon' and 'The Haven' would have been ongoing. When I took over *Starfire*, I was warned that sales were low and the title was near cancellation. My plan was to design a quick out—a way to easily end the series if we got word it was about to be canceled. So much for that idea!"

Had *Starfire* continued, DeFalco "would have attempted to do a character-driven series full of action and angst that introduced new concepts, locations, and problems every issue. That's what I have always tried to do whenever I've been assigned a series." Instead, he was writing his second issue when he got news the series had been canceled. The news didn't make the letters column for issue #8, however, which promised issue #9 in two months' time.

Why was *Starfire* canceled? DeFalco says that "comics were mainly sold on mass-market newsstands



in those days, and it took about nine months to get final sales numbers. However, you got a pretty good idea how you were doing after four or five months. I assume the powers-that-were looked at the sales of the first couple of issues, realized they were a lot lower than anticipated, and pulled the plug."

Mike Vosburg agrees with the hypothesis, but puts more blame on some higher-ups: "Unfortunately, the book never had serious backing or direction from the powers-that-be, so it was doomed from the start." Still, looking back on the eight issues, Vosburg found his working relationship good with his editors. "Joe [Orlando] was a real mentor to me. I found what input and art criticisms he would offer always to be of great help," he says. "I really enjoyed working with him. Unfortunately, he was tied to Vinnie [Colletta, DC's art director], so I never got a lot of sympathy when I tried to convince him to let me ink the work. Jack Harris was a good guy; he didn't try to intimidate you or condescend. If you got the work in on time to Denny [O'Neil], that was as far as it was going to go unless you were on one of his pet projects."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

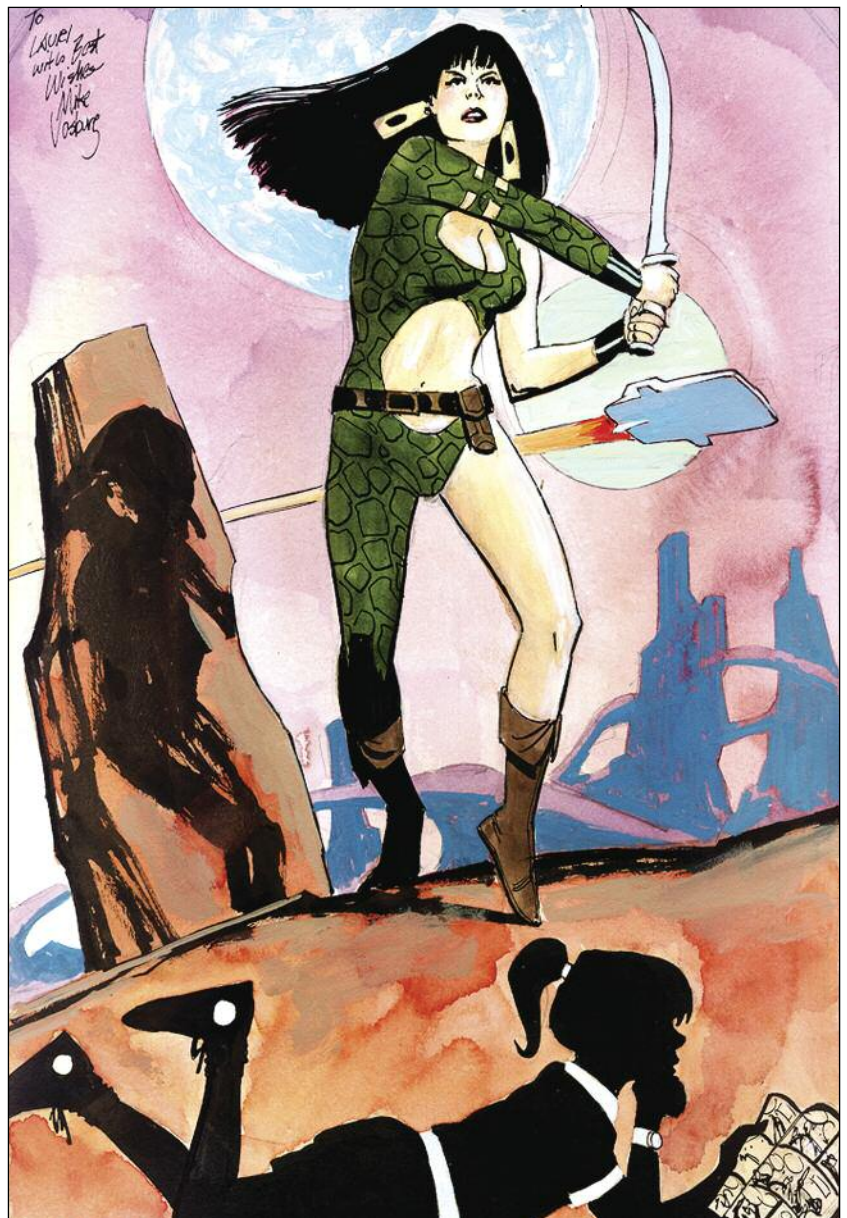
Of working on his two issues of *Starfire*, Englehart says, "I was glad to have the chance to work with Mike again before I left comics at that time." Although he's drifted in and out of comics since then, these days, Englehart is now writing the fantasy/thriller *Timeless* series of novels for Tor: *The Point Man*, *The Long Man*, and *The Plain Man*. A new book, *The Arena Man*, will be published in 2012.

DeFalco was a longtime writer, editor, and even editor-in-chief at Marvel following his early days at DC and elsewhere, and is noted for his work on *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *Spider-Girl* books; the latter heroine was Marvel's longest-running female character to headline a solo comics series. More recently, Ron Frenz and DeFalco have been hired to do the lead stories for *Jughead Double Digest* #175-177 (which feature the return of Jughead as Captain Hero), and he is scripting a DC one-shot of *Superman Beyond* #0, featuring the Superman from the *Batman Beyond* universe. As he looks back on *Starfire*, he has bittersweet memories. "I have always remembered the character with fondness and wish I could have given her the happy ending she deserved," he says.

Several years after the *Starfire* series ended, writer David Michelinie did have one more opportunity to write the lady sword-slinger, though only in a tiny scene. In *Star Hunters* #7 (Oct.-Nov. 1978), *Starfire* and *Claw the Unconquered* were shown to be two of the "eternal champions of the Sornai" on the world within the multiverse. Since the *Star Hunters* series ended in a cliffhanger, the concept was never followed up on, but Michelinie reveals that he was inspired by the Eternal Champion concept of Michael Moorcock.

"I was a big admirer of Moorcock's multiverse sagas [Editor's note: See last issue's Moorcock interview], and *Elric of Melniboné* was a direct influence on my creating *Claw the Unconquered*. I had hoped to do an homage to the Moorcock canon with a graphic novel that brought *Claw*, *Donovan Flint* [of *Star Hunters*], *Starfire*, and a surprising fourth aspect—*Jonah Hex!*—into one story, but, alas, I left DC before I could beg that into existence."

Today, *Starfire*'s creator has written two episodes (co-plotted with Bob Layton) for the second season of the animated *Iron Man Armored Adventures* series on



Nickelodeon. He also has a prose novella in the anthology, *The Avenger: The Justice, Inc. Files*, due in January 2012, and he's working on a four-issue *Iron Man* miniseries for Marvel, co-plotted and inked by Bob Layton, and penciled by Dave Ross.

And as for the brunette sword-swinging heroine *Starfire*, Michelinie says, "With only two issues to my credit, I actually didn't spend a whole lot of time writing the book. I did like the characters, the concepts, and the possibilities, and it would have been interesting to have pursued them further. But a career is a fluid thing, and one usually just rides it to wherever it leads. In this case it led away from *Starfire*."

The longtimer on the *Starfire* project, penciler Mike Vosburg, has drawn comics to this day, as well as storyboards for films, television shows, commercials, and animation. He also writes and draws a creator-owned project called *Retrowood*, available through his website, vozart.com. In recent years, he's found that a lot of fans still fondly remember his sword-wielding heroine, and he has produced multiple cover recreations and commissions of her. "*Starfire* had all the elements in it that really appealed to me," he says. "I enjoyed drawing it

Girl Power!

This *Starfire* commission is inscribed by artist Mike Vosburg to "Laurel."

Starfire © 2011 DC Comics.



Starfire Forever!

Courtesy of the artist, Mike Vosburg pin-up of his memorable character Starfire.

Starfire TM & © DC Comics.

tremendously, and hopefully during the run of the book I improved a good bit as an artist."

And what has become of the "Siren of Sword and Science"? As you'll see from our sidebar, she's made a few appearances, still fighting the good fight for freedom ... and asymmetrical jumpsuits.

All interviews were conducted in July 2011. Artwork is courtesy Dave Michelinie, Mike Vosburg, the collection of Andy Mangels, and Heritage Comics Auctions.

ANDY MANGELS is the USA Today best-selling author and co-author of 20 books, including the recent TwoMorrrows release Lou Scheimer: Creating the Filmation Generation, as well as Iron Man: Beneath The Armor, and a lot of comic books. Additionally, he has scripted, directed, and produced Special Features for over 40 DVD releases. His moustache is infamous. www.AndyMangels.com



end

Co-Star Starfire

OTHER STARFIRE APPEARANCES

After the end of her series, Starfire made a few appearances, some of which seemed wildly out of continuity. Following is a listing and description of the further adventures of Starfire.



Star Hunters #7 (Oct.-Nov. 1978)

Starfire and Claw the Unconquered are revealed as two of the "eternal champions of the Sornai" on an alternate world in the dimensional multiverse.

Who's Who in the DC Universe #22 (Dec. 1986)

Mike Vosburg illustrated the one-page capsule summary on Starfire in DC's monthly encyclopedic tome.

Swamp Thing vol. 2 #163 (Feb. 1996)

The dark character Nightmaster is unstable and apparently creating alternate realities with his subconscious mind. Among those created are the characters of Starfire, Stalker, and Claw. No other story has referenced this plot point.

Starman #55 (July 1999)

In a Rashomon-style story, Space Cabby, Space Ranger, and Ultra the Multi-Alien tell a flashback story involving Starfire being saved from Jarko the space pirate by two of the DC Starmen. Amusingly, each story features a different Starfire: one features Leonid Kovar, the Russian Starfire from the Silver Age *Teen*



Titans book (later known as Red Star); another features the sword-wielding heroine of the 1970s; and the third features the buxom, golden-skinned Koriand'r from the *New Teen Titans* series.

Time Masters: Vanishing Point #2-5 (Oct. 2010-Jan. 2011)

Starfire is one of several characters that take part in the storyline, along with Booster Gold, Rip Hunter, Superman, Green Lantern, and Claw.



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PHOENIX

RISING 



by *Jim Ford*

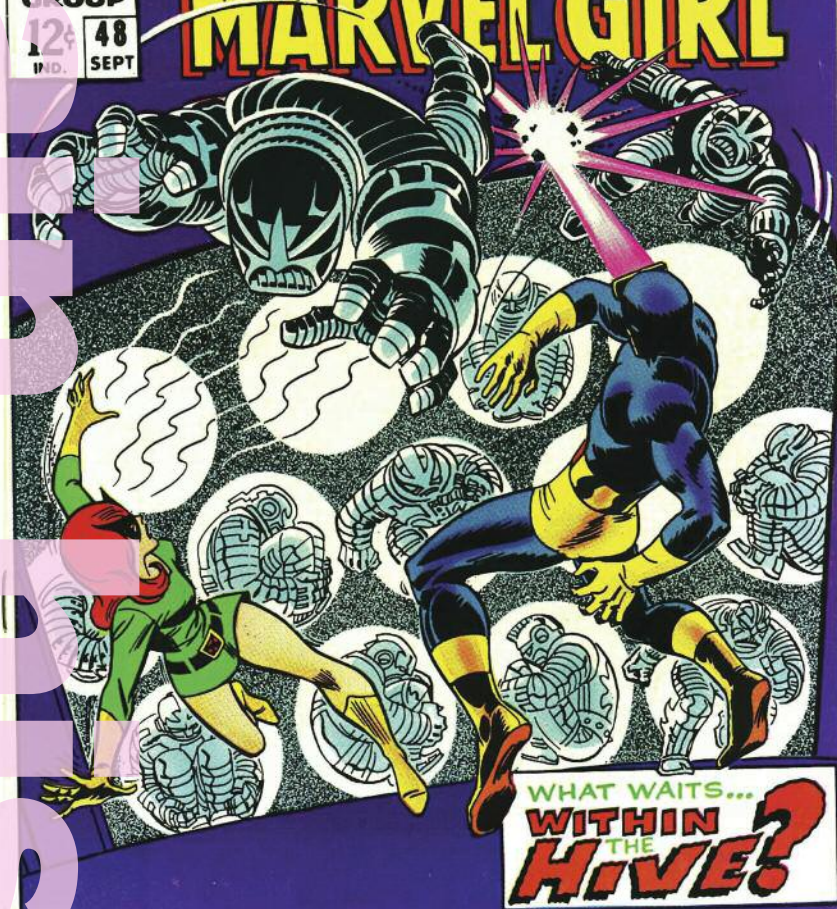


Bring on the
epic!
GUYS!

X-MEN FEATURING:

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

CYCLOPS AND MARVEL GIRL



Mutants in Love!

Teammates Scott (Cyclops) Summers and Jean (Marvel Girl) Grey officially became an item in the pages of *X-Men* #48 (Sept. 1968). Cover art by John Romita. (inset right) *X-Men* co-creator Jack Kirby and inker Chic Stone's pin-up from *X-Men* #9 (Jan. 1965).

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"Hear me, X-Men!" Jean Grey shouted as she soared into the sky. "No longer am I the woman you knew! I am fire! And life incarnate! Now and forever—I am Phoenix!" Bathed in a corona of fire, her mind burning, Jean then plummeted unconscious and barely alive in *X-Men* #101 (Oct. 1976). That she had survived at all was miraculous. That she was now transformed, a Phoenix forged from solar flame, was unimaginable.

Jean was a mutant with the talents of telepathy and telekinesis. She was kidnapped in *X-Men* #98 (Apr. 1976) and found herself, along with Wolverine and other members of the X-Men, held captive aboard an orbiting space station. Cyclops, the leader of the X-Men, had led a team to rescue her. Their space shuttle was critically damaged. Solar flare activity, unusually heavy and especially haz-

ardous, surged toward the station, threatening them all. Jean piloted the shuttle while the X-Men were secured inside a shielded compartment. She hoped that her talents would allow her to survive the solar flares long enough to get home. In *X-Men* #100 (Aug. 1976), Jean gave her life so that others might live. It would not be the final time that she would have to make that choice.

OLD SCHOOL

Jean was introduced in *X-Men* #1 (Sept. 1963) as the newest student to the Xavier Institute for Gifted Youngsters. She was given the name Marvel Girl and learned that she was among four other students who all had special mutant talents. Together they would become the X-Men.

As the only young woman on a team with five other men (including her teacher, Professor Xavier), Jean was the center of attention. It was Cyclops, a reserved 18-year-old, who caught her eye. Jean was 17. She started flirting with him in *X-Men* #3 (Jan. 1964), but he was painfully shy, afraid of the devastation his uncontrollable optic blasts could cause should he relax his guard.

Jean, with Cyclops, whose real name is Scott Summers, continued their nervous flirtations until after Jean had left the team for Metro College. A flashback in *X-Men* #138 (Oct. 1980) showed that they had proclaimed their love for each other behind the scenes of *X-Men* #32 (May 1967), but they were not shown as a couple until *X-Men* #48 (Sept. 1968).

Marvel Girl's talents were subtle, even demure. She was able to lift small objects using telekinesis. Later, with experience, and as the demands of the story required, the strength of her telekinesis grew and she was given the power of telepathy. Marvel Girl may have been the weakest of the X-Men. All that changed.

ALL-NEW, ALL-DIFFERENT

A new creative team took over the series with Giant-Size *X-Men* #1 (1975). Writer Len Wein and artist Dave Cockrum were the architects of the new team of X-Men. Chris Claremont became writer with the first regular issue, *X-Men* #94 (Aug. 1975). Cyclops remained as the only original member while Jean unceremoniously left her life as Marvel Girl behind in that issue. Wein told Peter Sanderson in an interview for Fantagraphics Books' 1982 volume *The X-Men Companion* (TXC), "She was meant to come back in just a few months. The two of them couldn't stay apart and she was going to show up again ... with redesigned powers. We were going to revamp her not quite into what Phoenix became, but make her a different character, because we all thought she was a wimp, that she wasn't worth it. We had to pretty much reconstruct Jean Grey as a character."

As for her redesigned powers, the final page of *X-Men* #100 suggests Jean was bombarded with cosmic rays. The "tac-tac-tac" sound effect is reminiscent of *Fantastic Four* #1 (Nov. 1961), when cosmic rays penetrated the command capsule of Reed Richards' rocketship. The original intention may have been that her mutant powers would be augmented by the same means as the *Fantastic Four* received their powers.

A MARVEL MASTERWORK PIN-UP



Cockrum initially did five different versions for Phoenix's new costume: all-white with gold gloves, boots and sash. The all-white costume was rejected by then-editor-in-chief Archie Goodwin because readers would be able to see the opposite printed page through the costume. Goodwin directed Cockrum to use Marvel Girl's original light-green colors for her costume. "I was really miffed about it for a long time," Cockrum admitted in *TXC*. He wanted Jean, who was a green-eyed, redhead, "...to look terrific and be terrific, and she kind of got clichéd—became a cliché—unfortunately." Cockrum explained, "Because before Farrah Fawcett became big she was doing Wella-Balsam commercials and things like that and occasionally appearing in [*Cosmopolitan*] and I thought she was terrific, and so that's who Jean became. And then she had to un-become Farrah Fawcett after Farrah became a big deal." Recalling that Jean had become a bathing-suit model when the team disbanded in *X-Men* #48, Cockrum further explained that they all wanted her to be more flamboyant than what she had been as Marvel Girl.

"First, Dave and I deliberately set out to make her more independent and attractive before we made her into Phoenix," Claremont said in *TXC*. "I saw no reason why a young, intelligent, attractive, courageous, heroic young woman should look like a Republican frump." Claremont was building a reputation for writing strong women. One such woman was Misty Knight, a supporting character from *Iron Fist*. Misty had moved into a fashionable apartment with Jean in New York's Greenwich Village and welcomed Jean's release from the hospital in *Iron Fist* #11 (Feb. 1977). Perhaps Claremont intended to suggest that Jean's newfound style was influenced by Misty Knight.

Phoenix was more than simply Marvel Girl with a new look. Jean learned the full extent of her powers in *X-Men* #105 (June 1977) when Professor Xavier was attacked by Firelord, a former herald of the world-devourer Galactus. With a thought, Jean transmuted her clothing into her costume. She shot into the air, burning the atmosphere around her. She slammed Firelord with telekinetic bursts of incredible force and shielded herself from his starbolts, the same blasts of energy that had stopped Thor. "Dave and I kind of liked the idea that we had a female character who was cosmic," Claremont said in a 1979 interview with Margaret O'Connell in *The Comics Journal* #50. "No one else did. Len [Wein, then editor of *Thor*] objected strenuously to our using Firelord if Phoenix beat him. We couldn't have a lady character who's cosmic, because—well, his argument was that it made the rest of the X-Men superfluous." With her powers now rivaling that of gods, she felt an exhilarating—almost frightening—feeling of ecstasy. It was intoxicating, and had she allowed her emotions to dominate, she would have killed Firelord. "We got around it," Claremont continued, "by having the fight be a draw. And by making sure Phoenix got the last shot, which is blasting Firelord ten or twelve miles into New Jersey." Phoenix then demonstrated how cosmic she was by energizing a star-gate, allowing the X-Men to pursue their prey across the galaxies. Later, she even brought a meteor from outer space crashing to the ground. There seemed nothing she could not accomplish.

The plasma rippling around Phoenix manifested itself as a fiery raptor. "Well, I did the bird, but I didn't do it the way [John Byrne] does it, and I like his better," Cockrum said, again in *TXC*, talking about the unique

Phoenix effect he had created to represent Jean's power. "Mine was more Kirby-crackle, brush-scratch sort of thing, and he refined it into the very elegant, sweeping stylized bird that it is now." John Byrne replaced Cockrum as penciler with *X-Men* #108 (Dec. 1977), when the series began monthly publication. "My early Jean Grey was Raquel Welch," Byrne remarked in *TXC*.

On a planet in the distant Shi'ar Empire, Phoenix saved the universe in *X-Men* #108. The X-Men found themselves pawns in a galactic civil war. Within an extra-dimensional doomsday device called the M'Kraan Crystal, Jean was tortured by nightmarish visions of dying. She realized that she had already died and been reborn. "We agonized over what the hell she did," Cockrum said in *TXC*, "'Well, she can die and be resurrected with some super-power.' I don't know if we made it all that clear to the readers, but we knew she died up there and recreated herself, and later on we made it more clear, but beyond that it took us a long

A New Shade of Grey

(below) A whole new chapter begins for the team when Marvel Girl is transformed into The Phoenix. Cover art of *X-Men* #101 (Oct. 1976) by Dave Cockrum.

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From the Ashes

(above) These Dave Cockrum preliminary designs for the Phoenix's costume indicate writer Len Wein and artist Cockrum originally wished to see Jean Grey suited in a white costume, a color scheme nixed by then-Marvel editor-in-chief Archie Goodwin.

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But She Will Rise

John Romita, Jr. and Al Williamson's depiction of a critical moment in Marvel Girl's transition into Phoenix. Cover of *The Official Marvel Index to the X-Men #7* (July 1988).

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time to figure out exactly what she did, so we left her in the hospital for several issues, while we thought about it." *X-Men* #125 (Sept. 1979) explained that driven by her love for Scott, she briefly became a being of pure thought. "Yeah," Cockrum added, laughing, "She's the Force."

At the center of the M'Kraan Crystal, Jean touched a dying alien entity that forever changed her. Its death would have released a neutron galaxy, obliterating the universe. Jean offered her own energy to heal it, but she was not powerful enough. Claremont said in *TXC*, "We had originally envisioned that she had a power

level that was equivalent to Storm's [another of the new X-Men,] and that the saving the universe was a one-time-only stunt, that it was Jean achieving her full potential for that one moment ... she was drawing on the other X-Men for help."

Frantically, Jean pulled energy from wherever she could to replenish her own, with her awareness expanding outward to encompass the entire solar system. Emotionally entangled with the alien entity, Jean felt a singular, boundless rhapsody at her own power and beauty. It was an experience she would carry with her until she died, and a craving she would destroy a



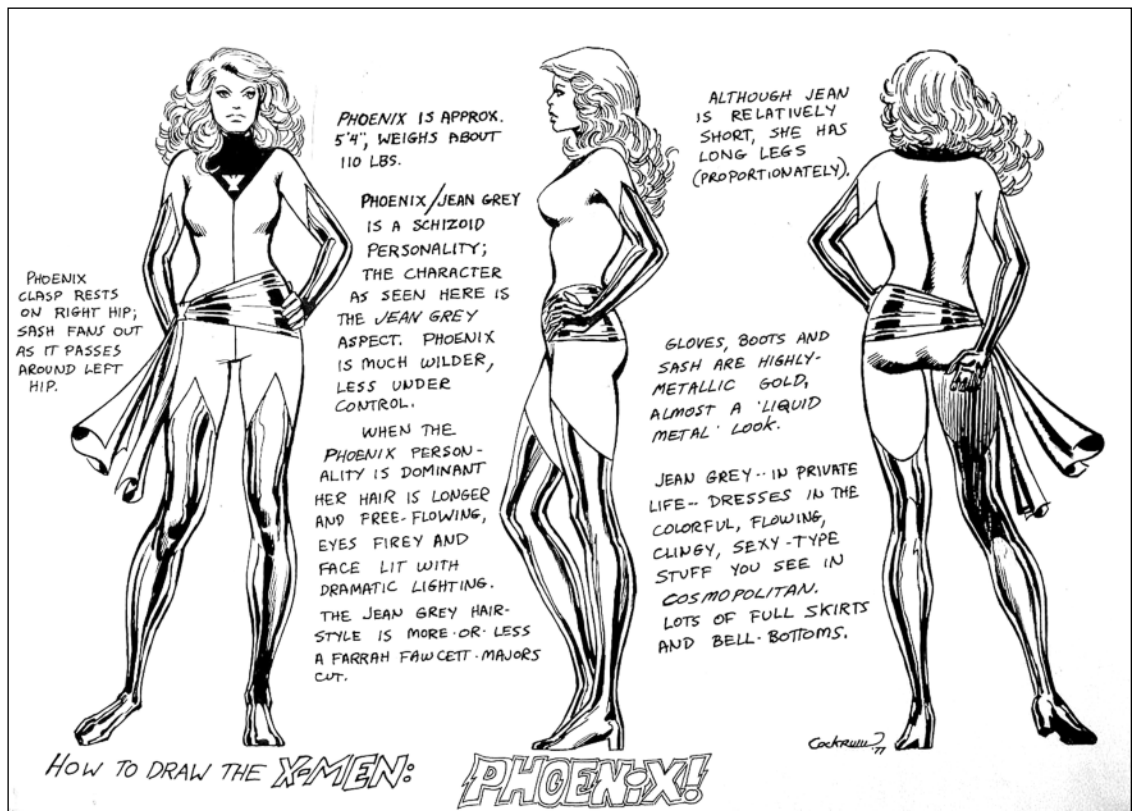
universe to fulfill. "The ramifications were something we didn't really consider when we started it," Claremont admitted.

In contact with the alien entity, Jean lost her sense of self. She did not know if she was Jean Grey or Phoenix, human or energy. She separated the two in her mind. Cockrum had noted on her character model sheet that Jean had "a schizoid personality," and in the quiet moments of *X-Men* #109-110 (Feb.-Apr. 1978), she confessed to Scott that she did not even know who she was anymore. She could not articulate the ecstasy and the fury she felt fighting Firelord. She feared the absolute power she now held, thinking of it as Phoenix's power and not her own. "What Jean was transmuted into as Phoenix was a creature with every emotional sensation, every physical sensation, heightened to an almost infinite degree. And the physical capacity to gratify every emotion," Claremont said in *TXC*.

For a young woman with so great a mental power, Jean's psyche was sadly fragile. As if to demonstrate, she was dominated body and soul by the evil mutant Mesmero in the very next issue, *X-Men* #111 (June 1978). In what must be a prelude to the tragedy to come, Mesmero stripped her of identity and virtue by hypnotizing her into believing she was a trapeze artist in a traveling circus.

Scott was also concerned by how Jean had changed since becoming Phoenix. "Actually, as Phoenix, she isn't [a different person from Jean]. She is a more extreme example of something that was evolving before Phoenix," Claremont specifically stated in *TXC*. Claremont may have been voicing reader complaints that she was not acting as they expected, as much as building emotional tumult. He had anticipated fan reaction toward his characterization of Jean early on. In *X-Men* #98, when Jean stole a kiss from Scott, Claremont had characters resembling Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the original *X-Men* creators, remark on how that would have never taken place in their book.

Claremont ostensibly teased Jean's death at the conclusion of *X-Men* #108, but waited until *X-Men* #114 (Oct. 1978) to kill her, at least in the minds of the



X-Men. Following a battle with the villain Magneto at the core of a volcano, Jean and Scott were separated. They each believed the other dead. Claremont used the opportunity to examine Scott's feelings, and perhaps excise his own demons. "Now, bearing in mind again that Scott and Jean have known each other for almost four years, that they have declared their love for each other for at most two years, bearing in mind that she has transmuted into a demi-goddess form, and at the time I had just lost a very close friend—she died very suddenly—I was examining how people relate to death, and especially to the death of someone you love. And it is not straightforward. You feel blindsided," Claremont explained in *TXC*. "A numbness. He felt nothing," Claremont said of Scott's grieving. "Someone like Scott would internalize the grief, would shut it away, would ignore it, and by ignoring it would ignore his own feelings toward Jean." In the end, Scott accepted that the difference he saw in Jean was due to her growth as a person.

If Scott was numbed by Jean's apparent death, then Wolverine (Logan) was positively heartbroken. "The notion that he would fall instantly in love with Jean works fine, because I fell instantly in love with Jean when I read *X-Men* #1," John Byrne admitted in *BACK ISSUE* #4 (June 2004). "You fall in

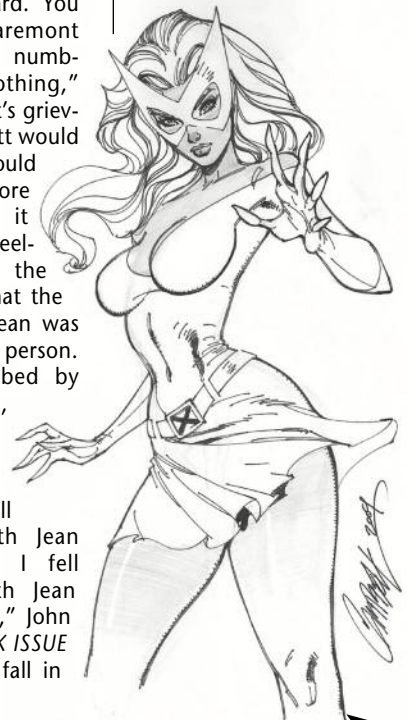
All Dressed Up

(above) Cockrum model sheet.

(below) J. Scott Campbell sketch.

(inset) Byrne cover.

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Ganging Up

(above) Byrne's commission art featuring Dark Phoenix besting DC and Marvel's best. (below) Professor Xavier and friends (plus an enemy or two) pose for artist John Byrne's drawing of the *X-Men* cast of his legendary tenure.

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love with Jean; that's what you do." Wolverine carried a photograph of Jean with him. He had torn Scott from that picture in *Iron Fist* #15 (Sept. 1977), while mooning over her outside her apartment. Sadly for Logan, Jean never gave him a second thought.

Claremont and Byrne foreshadowed the approaching darkness when a villain most beguiling showed his true face in the shadow he cast in *X-Men* #122 (June 1979). "As far as I was concerned, Phoenix was always a part of the X-Men. Jean was an integral part of the team," Claremont said in *TXC*. "John disagreed, and from that disagreement—as he put it, he was getting disenchanted with the book in the mid-20s. Then when we decided to turn Jean evil or to make her a villain, he got intrigued and stuck around."



CHRIS CLAREMONT

PROLOGUE TO DISASTER

The tragic events began in *X-Men* #129 (Jan. 1980) with an intimate moment between Jean and Scott. Jean had dealt with her grief over losing Scott by vacationing abroad, and though their reunion took place in *X-Men* #126 (Oct. 1979), there was no time then, for them to talk. "The point I was trying to make was that Scott had no way of knowing whether or not he was in love with Jean because he had nothing to base it on," Claremont said in *TXC*. "He had nothing to compare it with. It just existed on its own in an emotional vacuum." Now, after experiencing a deep sense of loss, Scott knew he loved Jean, and she him.

Jean's powers had been reduced to those of Marvel Girl. Her subconscious had dampened them, causing them to fail twice before in *X-Men* #110 and 112. Jean had hoped her power had burned itself out. She feared her powers more than death and sometimes wished that she had died on that shuttle. "The potential to become Phoenix is still within Jean," Claremont said in *The Comics Journal*. "But without the necessary increase in her awareness, in her perception, if her consciousness, her soul, whatever, is not enlightened, if her consciousness is not cosmic, then she can't handle the power... She'll burn herself out, she'll be warped, twisted, turned into an evil person. Ergo, what happened was her mind shut her down, as a safety mechanism. To prevent her from hurting herself, it just dropped a wall down." Jason Wyngarde was playing the dangerous game of methodically breaking through that wall.

Wyngarde introduced himself to Jean in *X-Men* #122. He was one of the Inner Circle of the Hellfire Club, themselves mutants hunting the X-Men. He had stalked Jean throughout her travels, disguising himself, gaining insight, to slowly fill the void created by Scott's presumed death. He made Jean believe she was slipping backwards in time, reliving the decadent, visceral life of her 18th-century ancestor, beginning in *X-Men* #125. Wyngarde confused her, seduced her, and eroded her moral inhibitions, nearly bringing her to murder in *X-Men* #126. Later in *X-Men* #130 (Feb. 1980), he wed her and boldly kissed his new bride in front of Scott, who looked on, dumbfounded.

Inevitably, Jean's mental ramparts crumbled under Wyngarde's undermining influence. In *X-Men* #131 (Mar. 1980), she was casually violent, almost sadistic. When she clashed psychically with the White Queen, another mutant from the Inner Circle, her Phoenix effect was more than a spectacular light show. It was a physical construct that attacked the White Queen with devastating ferocity. Though she fought back, the White Queen chose to kill herself rather than endure Jean's blistering savagery.

Wyngarde gained full command of Jean in *X-Men* #133 (May 1980). She obediently struck down Cyclops with a single, searing blast. Jean was enthralled, fully believing herself to be the Black Queen of the salacious Hellfire Club, a dominatrix garbed in black corset, spiked collar, and whip. Jean reveled in her sexuality as she flirted lasciviously with each of the men in the Inner Circle. Events that were actually taking place around her were shrouded behind images from the 18th century. In *X-Men* #134 (June 1980), she saw the manacled



X-Men before her, captured by the Inner Circle, as slaves and revolutionaries.

The creative team had different views on Jean's acceptance of her time slip visions. In interviews, again with Peter Sanderson, from *Comics Feature* #4 (July-Aug. 1980), Byrne believed that "she could have turned them down," but that she enjoyed the experiences. Jean herself admitted to Wyngarde that he gave her what she secretly wanted. Claremont, on the other hand, maintained that Jean was "fascinated" by the evil perpetrated by her ancestor, but they were visions in a "bad dream." Jean thought, "I'm doing nasty things, but it's not real," Claremont said.

Blinded and shackled, Scott attempted to reach Jean on the astral plane through the permanent psychic bond she had established with him in *X-Men* #132 (Apr. 1980), when Jean had told Scott about her time slips. Too late, Scott had realized that the other man in Jean's life, Jason Wyngarde, was actually the mutant master of illusion, Mastermind. Mastermind cut Cyclops down at the threshold to Jean's mind, and with that brought about his own annihilation. Jean witnessed the events, illusory though they were. She saw Scott, the man she loved, felled by an imposter who stood between her and him.

Jean broke free from Mastermind's hold. In revenge, she reached into his mind and shared with him a glimpse of the universe. She had once expanded her own awareness to encompass the minds contained in a single solar system. As a telepath, she was trained to protect her thoughts from the maelstrom. Mastermind could not and was driven mad.

Emotions overwhelmed Jean, terrifying her. The unbridled sexual desire and sadism Mastermind had exposed in her was amplified by her rage. She was unable to suppress herself any longer. Jean became something evil.

"...One day [Marvel writer] Steven Grant suggested we turn Phoenix into a villain," Byrne said in a recent interview on the *GraphicNovelReporter* website, with him giving credit where credit was due. "At first, I did not like the idea, but as I thought about it, the basic underpinnings of the story began to take form in my head. If someone could be seen to corrupt Jean, rather than her just turning bad, this could make for an interesting story. I suggested Mastermind as the villain of the piece, and Chris, borrowing heavily from *The Avengers* TV series [the 1966 episode, 'A Touch of Brimstone'], added the elements of the Hellfire Club."

Three principal factors coalesced to make this storyline the key event in X-Men history, and a story often imitated. First, each of the creators genuinely cared for Jean, even as they were sending her toward destruction. "The original intent to turn her into a bad villain got lost for me about two-thirds of the way into when I suddenly started thinking we're doing this to Jean Grey with whom I've always been deeply involved," Byrne admitted during a round table discussion featured in *Phoenix, The Untold Story (PTUS)* (Apr. 1984). Likewise, Claremont, along with Cockrum, had spent months developing the character and then having to defend their artistic vision from editorial dissent.

Second, each of the creators had opposing perspectives on the character. Claremont largely drew his cue



JOHN BYRNE

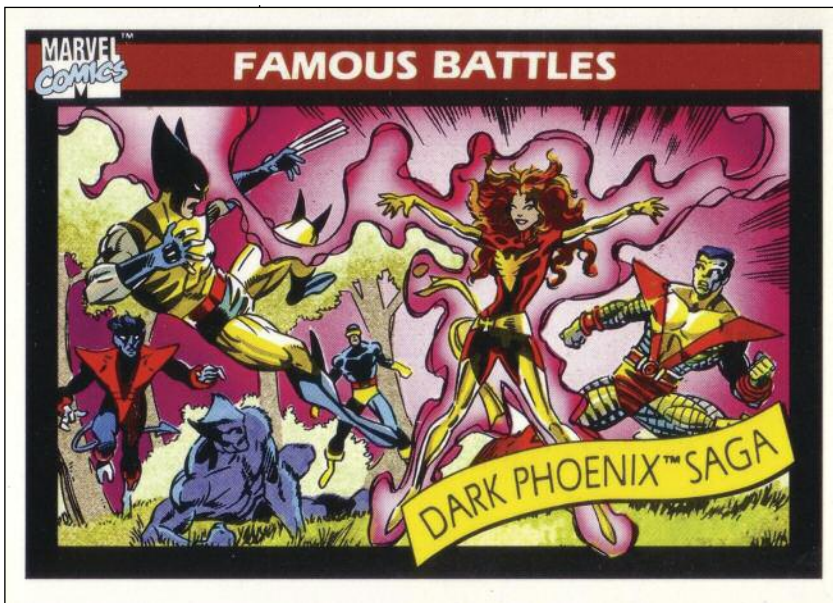
on Jean's personality from the later issues of the first run of the *X-Men*, where she was more assertive. In *X-Men* #63 (Dec. 1969), she single-handedly stood up to Magneto, flat-out rejecting his advances. Byrne perceived Phoenix as an entity separate from Jean: "My whole thought was make Phoenix evil and then suck Phoenix out of Jean," he said.

Their opposition extended to all aspects of the creative process. "I mean, it was frustrating ... it was kind of like that Chris and I bouncing off each other," Byrne said in an interview with Jon B. Cooke in *Modern Masters volume 7: John Byrne (MM7)* (TwoMorrows Publishing, 2006). "Pardon my modesty, but one of the reasons the book was as great as it was, was that we were just out-doing each other all the time. 'I'm going to do this!'"

Beware This Bird

Great John Byrne commission piece depicts Dark Phoenix throwing her former X-Men teammates asunder.

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Bubble Gum Rumble

(above) Number 98 of 1990's *Marvel Universe Trading Cards Series 1* depicted the "Famous Battle" of the Dark Phoenix Saga. Artist unknown. Published by Impel.

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Look At Me!

(inset) Paul Gulacy painted this cover of *Bizarre Adventures* #27 (July 1981), which featured a Phoenix solo story written by Chris Claremont and illustrated by John Buscema (pencils) and Klaus Janson (inks).

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'Oh, yeah? I'm going to do this!' And just bam, bam, bam, bam, and bigger and bigger." When Claremont plotted an exploding star, Byrne drew a world destroyed.

Claremont elaborated in *PTUS*, "Part of the conflict was, do we keep her, do we get rid of her, does she remain a hero, does she become a villain...? I don't think, in terms of actually putting it in the story, we were ever sure until we actually came to the final moment." Jim Shooter, then-editor-in-chief, suggested that the development of the story, with neither creator knowing exactly how it would turn out, was "very existential ... like a real person's story." He continued, "But, that's the whole theory of Marvel Comics—the synergy that develops between a writer and an artist—and I think it works. I mean, those are outstanding issues."

Finally, Byrne's artistry played a significant role in making the story memorable. Few professionals are as qualified to speak of what makes his work exemplary as is artist Walter Simonson. In the "Introduction" to *MM7*, Simonson wrote, "John was a gifted visual storyteller. I still think that the Dark Phoenix Saga in the *X-Men* was the best run of super-heroes comics in the 1970s. And it demonstrated a particular talent of John's that has served his work well ever since. In a comic with a seemingly endless parade of characters traveling across the page, sporting a variety of costumes, morphing their identities, and switching from good to evil and back again, the reader

was never lost. John made it look so easy that I think his ability to keep the storytelling so clear and so dramatic at the same time isn't always full appreciated."

DARK PHOENIX

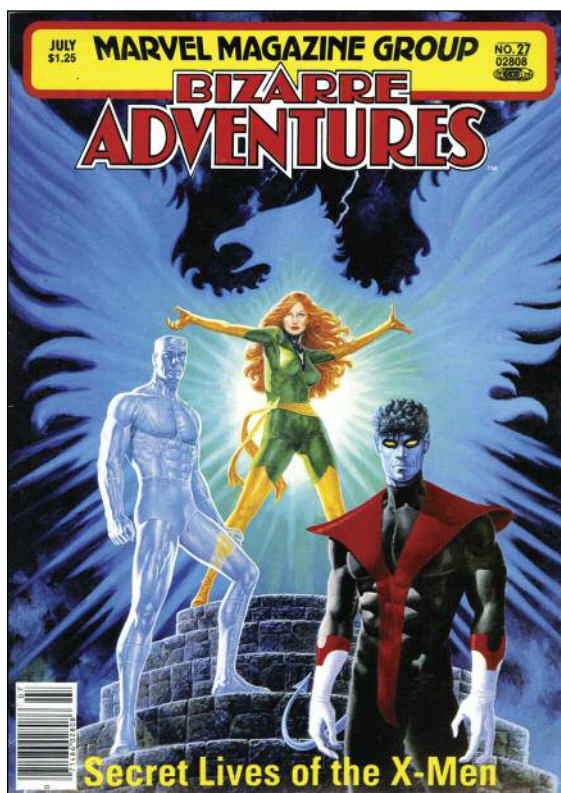
Dark Phoenix exploded their aircraft, sending the X-Men falling to their deaths. Obsidian flames masked Jean's face, scorched the air around her, and obscured the pain and sadness lingering in the psychic bond she shared with Scott. Her costume was no longer green, but blood red. "The fundamental difference is that had Jean been her nice, normal self and had the Phoenix reasserted herself, it would have been the same sort of thing: the power would have been tempered by Jean's self," Claremont explained in *TXC*. "But the critical difference was that this transformation came after Mastermind had been playing with her head, had been unlocking all the moral inhibitors within her." Though the X-Men survived, Jean fought to abolish any lasting emotional ties with them. "So she acted, as Storm said ... not out of love, but out of lust. There's a critical difference: the idea that love is the quest for physical sensation tempered by an emotional attachment—by a strong physical-emotional-mental attachment—whereas lust is just scratching an itch. It's a thrill, a physical thrill and nothing else."

Jean was not insane and she was not possessed. She was, woefully, a junkie craving her fix. "She wants to be cosmic again," Claremont revealed in *TCJ*. "It's like a drug, a very strong, very irresistible drug, and she wants more. And the more she gets, the more she

wants. But the thing is, she can't handle it. She's too young, in evolutionary terms, as well as physical terms." Jean wanted nothing less than to experience the immense joy she had felt inside the M'Kraan Crystal. She needed desperately to satisfy that urge, and with that, she took off for the stars.

On the edge of the distant Shi'ar Empire, Jean plunged into a star to replenish her strength in *X-Men* #135 (July 1980). The sun became unstable and exploded in a supernova, killing five billion inhabitants of a planet orbiting the star. It was Byrne, and not Claremont, who added the destruction of the planet to the story, making Jean a mass murderer. "No, she couldn't [make the conscious choice not to destroy the planet]," Claremont rationalized in

TXC. "I mean, she didn't care. There was no awareness of right and wrong. She was beyond that. It was ... when she consumed D'Bari, it was the equivalent of a human being destroying an ant hill. 'We're sorry we have to kill you, ants, but we're hungry, we've got to eat something, we've got to plow this for a freeway.'





On the evolutionary scale, they were not sentient beings to her." Though Jean may have been oblivious that her actions would destroy a planet, she nonetheless enjoyed their dying screams, as she later confessed to Scott in *X-Men* #137 (Sept. 1980).

In both *X-Men* #135, and earlier in *X-Men* #108, Claremont compares Phoenix to Tiphareth, the core sphere of the Tree of Life in Kabbalah teachings. Claremont had been working on a story device where each of the X-Men represented a specific sphere. The idea was never fully realized.

In *X-Men* #136 (Aug. 1980), Jean returned to her parents' home to find solace in ordinary places while trying to regain her moral center. The X-Men ambushed and fought valiantly to subdue her, but even with cunning and tactical superiority they were simply overpowered. Had Jean not struggled to control herself they would have all been dead. In a lucid moment, she pleaded for Wolverine to kill

her, but he could not. Scott reached out

to her. He spoke to her true nature as a loving woman, calming her. But then, Professor Xavier struck and, in a climatic psychic war, he bound Dark Phoenix, healing Jean. "It may be that the thing that gave him the margin of victory over Dark Phoenix was not that he was much stronger than her per se, but that his mind, his power was under control. It was focused, he was experienced in its use," Claremont said in *TXC*. Relieved, weary, and their psychic bond restored, Scott thought that he would love her 'til death they did part. She accepted.

The Shi'ar Empire had other plans. They teleported the X-Men aboard their flagship and demanded that Phoenix be destroyed in *X-Men* #137. They had watched horrified as a lone woman had decimated a Shi'ar warship, after obliterating an entire solar sys-



As Seen on TV

(above) Animation cel art, courtesy of Heritage Galleries, of Jean Grey as Dark Phoenix.

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Power Corrupted

(inset) Penciler John Byrne and inker Terry Austin's cover (repro'd from the color key) of *X-Men* #135 (July 1980).

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and lettered. Claremont and Byrne agreed that it was Shooter's prerogative to ask for the changes, but were angered that the directive came at the last minute. Over the next few days, a new ending was written. The final six pages and certain panels were redrawn and several word balloons and captions were rewritten. Shooter said, "I want to make it clear that it was less my moral problem with a character who was a mass murderer than it was a problem from a story sense. I don't think the situation was being credibly addressed."

The X-Men defended Jean from the Shi'ar Empire in a duel of honor. In the final moments of *X-Men* #137, Phoenix shattered the psychic barriers Professor Xavier had erected after seeing Scott struck down in battle. The X-Men rallied to stop her before the rage, fear, and sadness she felt overwhelmed her.

Jean begged, but they could not find the will to end her suffering.

Weakened and exhausted, Jean again dissociated herself from Phoenix, as she had in *X-Men* #108. She could only cope with the atrocities she had committed by believing she was two beings, Jean Grey and Phoenix, symbiotic and inseparable. Jean was a troubled young woman who had given more

to the universe than any person should be asked. Her mind was so beautiful it would not let her die, but having survived death, it broke.

On the dark side of the Moon, in the ruins of an ancient alien colony, Jean Grey killed herself. She was just 24 years old. Rather than risk the death of the man she loved, the deaths of her friends, or of the entire universe, Jean gave her life so that others might live. Scott once told her, "For love of the X-Men, you sacrificed your life. For love of me, you resurrected yourself. For love of the whole universe, you almost died a second time to save it. Know nothing of love?" he asked, bewildered. "Jean, you are love."

JIM FORD knows his friends are tired of him talking about comics all the time, so he is glad for the opportunity to write some of it down. He was especially excited to be able to write about the "Dark Phoenix Saga," his single favorite superhero story.



end

Malevolence Soars

(above) The Marvel Universe senses things are amiss as Dark Phoenix takes to the stars on this *X-Men* #135 page. Words by Claremont; art by Byrne and Austin. (inset) Cyclops despairs over the fate of his beloved on Byrne and Austin's moody cover of *X-Men* #136 (Aug. 1980).

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tem. Despite the debt of gratitude they owed Jean, they could not allow her to continue to threaten the universe.

The original ending of *X-Men* #137 was different than what was published. Jean was to be stripped of her power by means of Shi'ar technology and returned to the care of the X-Men. "I saw what was going to happen to Phoenix in issue #137, and I did not feel that it worked," Jim Shooter said in *PTUS*. "I thought that it was out of character for the X-Men. I felt that it was a cop out. I had a big problem the way the story was resolved. I mean, this lady had wiped out an inhabited planet, then destroyed a starship full of people.... I was very unhappy with it. I felt that the way the story was originally designed to end, it did not have enough consequences for what happened—it wasn't an ending. I found that the story was kind of ... in a way, it wimped out. It ended with her being back with the X-Men, seemingly without much concern on their part about what she had done, which struck me as being out of character for them." Shooter requested that the ending be changed after the pages had already been penciled

HUMBLE

FlashBack!



BEGINNINGS

She stumbled out of the blocks, but the She-Hulk went from knock-off to actual character in the space of 25 issues

There are characters that make their entrances fully formed, exploding into comics pages or televisions or movie screens with definitive qualities that hook readers and viewers from the start.

by Douglas R. Kelly

It's hard to picture James Bond as anything other than a super-cool spy, Wonder Woman as anything other than a powerful Amazon princess, or Adrian Monk as anything other than a brilliant detective who's afraid of milk.

The She-Hulk doesn't fall into this category. In fact, when the decision makers at Marvel Comics decided, in the fall of 1979, to launch a new title based on the character, the only thing they knew for sure was that it would be a female version of the Incredible Hulk. "The genesis of the whole book was that Universal Television

was doing the *Hulk* TV show," says writer David Anthony Kraft. "Apparently, their attorneys or somebody over there thought they

had discovered a loophole and that they could basically spin the *Hulk* off without having to license it from Marvel. The word at the time was that Universal was working on some female form of the Hulk. So Marvel had to spring into action and Stan basically cranked out something really quick, just to get it out there."

In order to launch the character as quickly as possible, they turned to artist John Buscema, another storyteller in the Marvel fold who could turn out high-quality work as fast as the legendary Stan Lee. "Stan not only works incredibly quickly, he's somebody who can

Busting Out

Panel from the Stan Lee (writer), John Buscema (penciler) and Chic Stone (inker) story in *The Savage She-Hulk* #1 (Feb. 1980).

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Shaggy Lady

(above) A rare instance of John Buscema inking his own pencils on this, the cover of *The Savage She-Hulk* #1 (Feb. 1980). (inset) Cousin Bruce Banner shares his Hulk-ified blood with Jen Walters, who will become an emerald green giant herself.

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make gold out of straw," says Jo Duffy, who would become editor of the book beginning with issue #3. "Having Stan and John do it was a blessing, because think of what it could have been if it had been done by people who were not in love with the idea—an idea that did not grow organically, out of the creative force. And John Buscema—you couldn't get a better artist. If you're going to do something in a hurry and have it look heartfelt and brilliant, you get Stan and John to do it."

Reaction around the Marvel Bullpen to the idea of doing a female

Hulk was somewhat less than enthusiastic. "The whole idea was appalling to me," says Kraft. "We all groaned in horror. There was something so perverse about the situation that I got to thinking about it and the one thing I didn't want to see happen was [that we would] take the Hulk and just clone it as a female. So, because I have a strange way of looking at things, I thought, 'I need to do that book.' I actually went to [editor-in-chief Jim] Shooter and said, 'This is horrible, but if there's going to be a She-Hulk, I need to be on that.'"

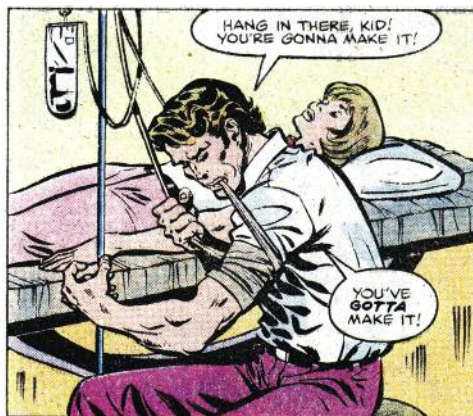
KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

First, though, that Lee and Buscema premier issue of *The Savage She-Hulk* hit the stands with a cover date of February 1980, with Chic Stone's inks complementing Buscema's pencils. Lee wasted no time ensuring that readers would make the Hulk connection right out of the gate. He made the central character, attorney Jennifer "Jen" Walters, the cousin of Bruce Banner, alter ego of the Incredible Hulk. The issue begins with Banner visiting Jen in Los Angeles, where she's a practicing criminal lawyer. During the visit, Jen tells Banner that she's defending a hood named Lou Monkton, who's been accused of murdering the bodyguard of mobster Nick Trask. After the two of them are ambushed by a couple of thugs working for Trask, Banner saves Jen's life by giving her a blood transfusion (he is a doctor, after all). By giving her his own gamma ray-infused blood, he inadvertently creates the She-Hulk, and then leaves town the next day once he learns that she'll pull through.

When the thugs try to finish her off at the hospital, the stress of the situation triggers a monstrous change in Jen: She turns into a 7-foot, 300-pound raging behemoth and trashes the hospital room and elevator. When one of the hired guns yells, "It's like ... she's some kinda *She-Hulk!*" she responds, "You called me a She-Hulk! And a She-Hulk I'll be!" She chases down the thugs and hands them over to the police after one of them admits they were hired by Trask to kill Jen because Trask is afraid Jen would prove that he murdered his own bodyguard and framed Monkton.

Issue #1 closes with Jen realizing she has become a monster like her cousin. But she decides that "From now on, whatever Jennifer Walters can't handle, the She-Hulk will do!" Interestingly, there is no editor's or writer's message page in this first issue to kick off the new series, although the new series is briefly mentioned on the "Bullpen Bulletins" page as one of the many books slated to appear that month.

David Kraft perceived that first issue as an opportunity: "Stan gave her the Jennifer Walters alter ego. Beyond that, there really wasn't anything there. So I



was like, 'I can go in any direction I want with this.'

As Kraft worked on the story for issue #2, Mike Vosburg was tapped to take over the art chores on the book. He recalls being impressed with Buscema's work on issue #1. "John taught me everything I should be doing," Kraft says. "His stuff was amazing and it was the perfect road map in terms of starting that series." Following a brief retelling of the origin story from issue #1, Kraft introduces several characters who will prove central to the story of the She-Hulk as time goes on: Assistant District Attorney Dennis "Buck" Bukowski is a self-confident blowhard who loves nothing better than crossing swords with Jen; Jen's father, Morris Walters, is the sheriff of Los Angeles County and a widower following the murder of Jen's mother by Nick Trask; and medical student Dan "Zapper" Ridge is Jen's neighbor and would-be boyfriend.

Also introduced is Jen's friend, Jill, who is mistaken for Jen when she borrows Jen's car and is targeted by Trask's men. Jen changes into the She-Hulk and gives chase, intending to save Jill. D.A. Bukowski also mistakes Jill for Jen and intervenes in the chase, stopping the She-Hulk from saving Jill and in fact causing Jill's death. Bukowski believes he was stopping the She-Hulk from harming Jen, and when he sees the She-Hulk pull Jill's lifeless body from the wreck, he accuses the She-Hulk of murder in front of witnesses who have gathered at the scene.

In issue #3, the papers get the story wrong and report that Jen Walters has been killed by the She-Hulk, and Monkton and Bukowski agree to play along with the story until Jen can nail Trask for murder. Sheriff Walters, believing his daughter Jen is dead, announces that the She-Hulk is a murdering monster and that he wants her taken into custody, dead or alive.

She-Hulk has it out with Sheriff Walters in issue #4. The sheriff has reluctantly borrowed a laser cannon from Trask to try to destroy the She-Hulk, but she manages to disarm him before anyone can be injured. At the end of the issue, the media reveals that Jen Walters is in fact alive, and she and her father are reunited. Despite their telling one another "I love you," Jen is still bothered by the fact that, just a few hours earlier, her father tried to kill her when she was the She-Hulk.

Throughout issues #2 through 4, Zapper is a loyal friend to Jen, even saving her life at one point when she accidentally overdoses on tranquilizers in an attempt to prevent herself changing into the She-Hulk. He knows that she's the She-Hulk but keeps her secret, and it's obvious he has feelings for Jen that go beyond friendship.

MINDING HER OWN BUSINESS

Jo Duffy came aboard as editor of *The Savage She-Hulk* beginning with issue #3, sharing that duty on some issues with Al Milgrom. But unlike Kraft, she says did not seek out the assignment. "I was an innocent bystander," Duffy says. "I'm good friends with Paty Cockrum, and at the time, she and I were working in the same office. I was at my desk, minding my own business, and Paty happened to be in my office and she was talking about the fact that people didn't know how to do good female characters in comics. Paty was ranting about this, and Jim Shooter ducked his head in to see what was going on, and Paty was like, 'Why can't you get someone to get your female characters right?' And Jim said, 'You're right, and it would take a female to do that. Mary Josephine, you are now the editor of the *She-Hulk*.' He meant it nicely and he was giving me



more responsibility, but I was like, 'But, I'm editing *Daredevil* ... and I want to be editing *Doctor Strange*! I don't like *She-Hulk*!' I actually didn't at the time. Not that I disliked the character, but I got into Marvel Comics because I had my pet favorite characters, and if I was editing *She-Hulk*, that meant I wasn't available for the next one of my favorites that came open. In any event, Paty and Jim cooked it up between them, and I said okay."

At the time, Duffy was in the early part of a career that would see her go on to write and create characters for DC and Image as well as for Marvel. Because Kraft lived in Georgia, she worked with him mostly by long distance. "Dave was not in New York," she recalls. "We frequently worked by phone, more than in person." With Mike Vosburg being based in Battle Creek, Michigan at the time, collaboration on story ideas and artwork was understandably limited in those pre-Internet days. But the working model seemed to click. "I enjoyed having Jo as an editor," says Kraft. "She had all these ideas for characters. She'd look at [different characters] and say, for example, 'Why, if I

Later, Gator!

(above) Page from *The Savage She-Hulk* #8 (Sept. 1980).
Words by David Anthony Kraft; breakdowns by Mike Vosburg; and finishes by Chic Stone.

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Golden Age
Nifty cover by
Michael Golden of
The Savage She-Hulk
#11 (Dec. 1980).

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was doing the *Fantastic Four*, I'd do this."

Duffy feels that a good editor enables a writer to do his or her job by getting out of the way. "When I say he wrote it, I mean he wrote it. It was his story, his idea. At that time, at Marvel, the writers wrote and the editors edited. It was basically my job to let them do their jobs and to get everything from point A to point B on time with no mistakes."

For his part, Vosburg says the arrangement worked pretty well. "We would talk once in a while, but basically, I would get a script and if there were questions or whatever, I would call him and we'd talk about it. Dave was pretty easygoing ... I enjoyed working with him."

Kraft was writing the She-Hulk in a way that emphasized both the emotional and rational sides of the character's personality, but always with an eye toward having Jen and the She-Hulk completely aware of each other's existence and experiences. "I didn't want to see the She-Hulk just running around, growling, and basically just being [like the] early Hulk," Kraft says. "When

she was the She-Hulk, it was all passion. Like her passions unleashed. Her anger, her love, everything. Larger than life. When she was the attorney, she was reasoned, she was controlled, studied, and more intellectual."

Duffy saw the She-Hulk character as more one-dimensional: "I have to say, I was not at the time particularly comfortable with the idea of a big, steroid case, testosterone-filled female punching stuff up. I was much bigger on characters like the Wasp and Phoenix, and the women of the X-Men, than I was characters like Thundra and the She-Hulk. I have since seen how you can do a woman who's a fighter and yet can still be a woman. I really didn't like that, a lot of times; when people did strong woman characters, what they really were doing was doing male characters and sticking breast implants on them."

The strength Duffy refers to is seen more as passion by Kraft. "I looked at it like this: This is a passionate woman, fully unleashed, when she's the She-Hulk," he says. "Jennifer Walters was a feminist in the true sense of it—she was a confident, professional woman capable of dealing with her life."

BIG NAMES

Bringing in popular characters as guest stars never hurts sales, and the creative team have Jen and She-Hulk tangling with Iron Man in issue #6 (July 1980) and the Man-Thing in issues #7 and 8. A new love interest, the aforementioned Richard Rory, is introduced in issue #7 as a man who has hit the jackpot in Las Vegas and meets Jen in Los Angeles after witnessing a run-in between the She-Hulk and the law.

Following a two-part story in issues #9 and 10 in which Jen and the She-Hulk help to rescue a young man who has been drawn into a cult, issue #11 opens with She-Hulk in a badly debilitated state, in need of immediate medical attention. Zapper manages to get her to a lab where Dr. Michael Morbius is being held on a murder charge. Morbius administers a serum to the She-Hulk in an effort to save her life and in the process "cures" Jen of the problem of changing into the She-Hulk when she is under stress or is angry. She now will be able to control the change on her terms. With the element of risk—the danger of becoming the She-Hulk at inopportune moments—now removed, one might think that story possibilities would be more limited. But Kraft doesn't think so. "I kind of looked at it the other way around," he says. "Who wouldn't want this ability? I think it's why people will get drunk or take drugs for a good time. They want to control how they feel in any given situation. If she was always going to change at unpredictable moments, we're kind of stuck with this device. Every single story there's this unpredictable moment. I thought it was better if she could actually be in charge of it."

As the series progressed, Mike Vosburg began to hit his stride with the *She-Hulk*. "It's learning how to draw better," Vosburg says. "About the time I was doing *She-Hulk*, I was starting to get into watercolor, photography, and life drawing. All those things had an effect on how I approached the material. You know, I wasn't that popular or that good when I started, so no one said to me, 'Don't change.' So I had the advantage of trying new things and moving forward. When I look at that two-year period, I really can see a progression in storytelling—in drawing—that took place over that period of time. I feel that I moved forward quite a ways with what I was doing."

He also sees the inking on the run as having played

a key role in his own development. "Having Frank Springer as the inker on the majority of [the series] was a real boon to me. Chic Stone did a great job in the first few issues he did, but when Frank took over, he taught me so much about what you should do as an inker. I would look at what he brought to the work, and was a real education for me. That was a big help when I went on to do my own things later on. Frank was one of my biggest influences."

A PEOPLE PERSON

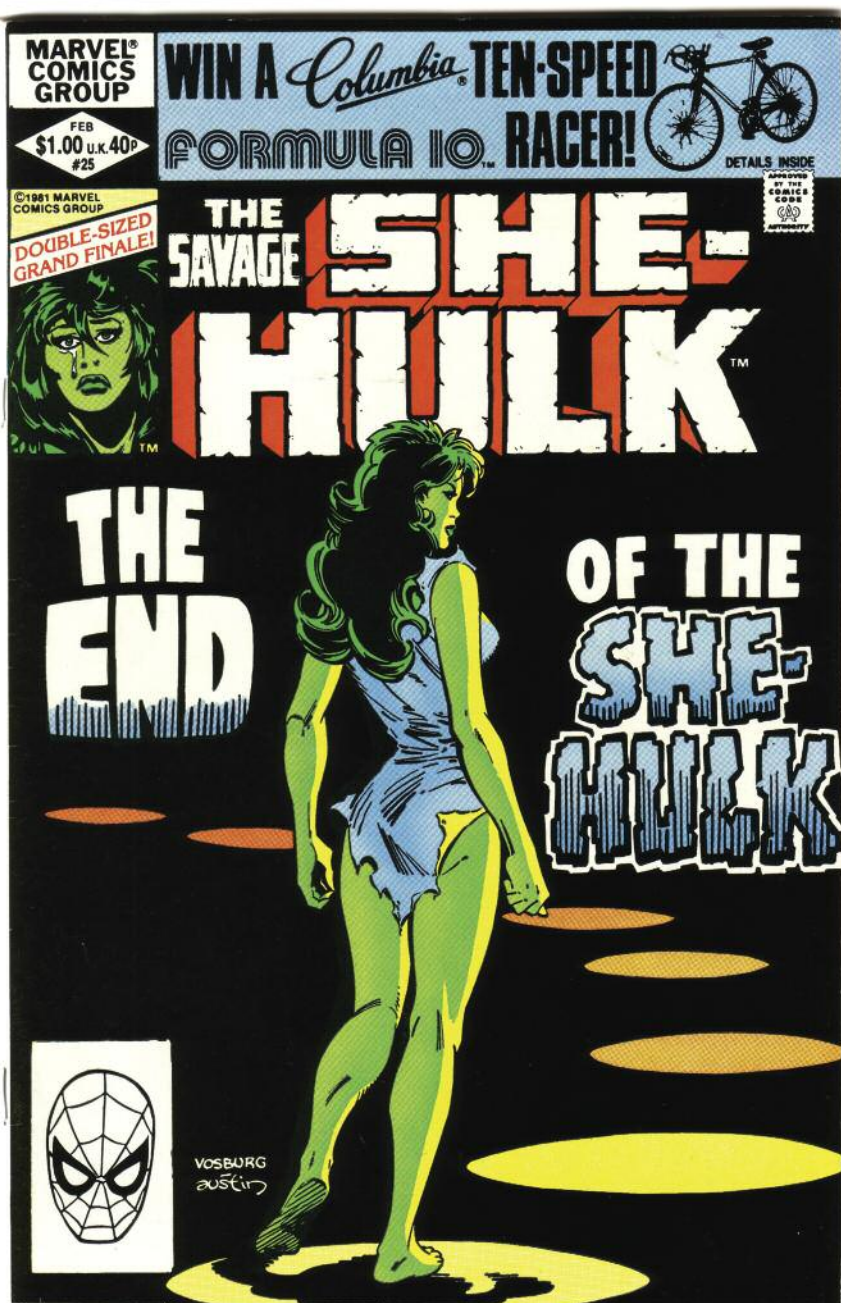
Jen and the She-Hulk's relationships grew more complex as time went on, with Jen seeing Zapper as a good friend despite his romantic interest in her. She's more interested in Richard Rory, while the She-Hulk grows closer to Zapper. Following a two-part star-spanning adventure in issues #13 and 14 that featured guest stars Hellcat and the Man-Wolf, She-Hulk embraces Zapper and tells him that she loves him. He returns the sentiment, and issue #15 finds the two of them enjoying a day at the beach. Meantime, Jen's father has become even more convinced that the She-Hulk must be stopped, while also believing that his daughter Jen is going off the deep end. This view of things is encouraged by his girlfriend, Bev Cross, who manipulates him into deciding to sell the family's house, which is Jen's home.

Issue #16 (May 1981) would be Jo Duffy's last as editor. "Archie Goodwin invited me to join him as second-in-command of what grew to become the Epic line," she says. "Since it involved creator-ownership, many new technical challenges, and since I had always loved working with Archie—who had hired me to work at Marvel while he was editor-in-chief—giving up my editorial slot on the superhero line was a sacrifice I had to make. Hard choice, but totally worth it." Duffy left the editing in the more-than-capable hands of Al Milgrom, who also did pencils and inks on some issues of the series.

In issue #17, Buck Bukowski discovers that he had been mistaken about the She-Hulk, and that he is responsible for Jill's death. He tells all of this to Sheriff Walters, who at first has a hard time believing the She-Hulk isn't the murderous monster he had thought she was. But he calls off the all-points bulletin for her arrest. He publicly clears the She-Hulk of the charges against her, and she storms off after reading him the riot act for all the pain he put her through.

Jen's relationship with her father continues to deteriorate, due in large measure to the way that Bev is manipulating him. The She-Hulk has become increasingly independent and now wants to remain the She-Hulk all the time, alienating those around her. Zapper and Richard confront Sheriff Walters with the news that Jen is actually the She-Hulk, and he reacts by throwing them out of the house as he tells them their "joke" isn't very funny.

The She-Hulk does battle with a series of super-baddies thrown at her by Shade, a mysterious figure determined to destroy her. Shade is working with a man named Doc, who supplies him with these villains. The Seeker, Radius, and Torque all take their best shots at the She-Hulk, and she schools each of them in the art of being defeated. While all of this is going on, Lou Monkton reenters the story as he starts an all-out gang war with Shade, with the She-Hulk caught in the middle. Issue #23 (Dec. 1981) features one of the best covers of the series, showing the She-Hulk being blasted from behind by Torque as the cover declares "The She-



Hulk War!" Terry Austin inked this one, and Mike Vosburg liked the result. "Terry's [also a] Detroit boy, and we've known each other since high school or college, before we got to Marvel," Vosburg says. "And I worked with him later on the *Cloak and Dagger* series. Anytime Terry inked my work, it was a pleasure to see it."

THE END OF THE SHE-HULK?

Sales of *The Savage She-Hulk* were not up to par for a Marvel book, and the handwriting was on the wall as the creative team prepared issue #25, cover-dated February 1982, which would be the final issue of the series. The story, "Transmutations," begins with the She-Hulk discovering that it actually is Doc who is behind all of these attacks, and she determines to have it out with him and Shade.

She-Hulk has made her way to Shade's estate, where she forms an uneasy alliance with Torque, who also is now after Doc. Shade turns out to be a robot

Good Night, Mrs. Calabash!

(above) Cover of the final issue of *The Savage She-Hulk*, #25 (Feb. 1982). Pencils by Mike Vosburg and inks by Terry Austin.

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HOW WILL OUR VERDANT VIXEN BE SPENDING HER TIME NOW THAT SHE'S NO LONGER APPEARING IN HER OWN MAG?

ARTIST MIKE VOSBURG ENVISIONS A LIFE WITH THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE IN LOS ANGELES HIGH SOCIETY.

AND WHO COULD OFFER HER A BETTER INTRODUCTION INTO THAT SWINGING LIFE THAN HER VERY OWN COUSIN, THE FORMER STAR OF HIS OWN TELEVISION SERIES, THAT WELL-KNOWN HUNK-ABOUT-TOWN, THE INCREDIBLE HULK.

WE'D LIKE TO USE THIS REMAINING BIT OF SPACE FOR TWO PURPOSES. FIRSTLY, TO CORRECT AN EDITORIAL OVERSIGHT WHICH LEFT THE CREDITS OFF OF ISSUE NUMBER 23 OF THE SHE-HULK. HERE IS A LIST OF THE PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE: DAVE KRAFT, WRITER * MIKE VOSBURG, PENCILER * AL MILGROM, DAVE SIMONS, JACK ABEL, INKERS * SHELLY LEFERMAN, LETTERER * CARL GAFFORD, COLORIST. SORRY FOR THE FOUL-UP FOLKS. SECONDLY, WE'D LIKE TO LIST THE NUMEROUS INKERS WHO HELPED CLOSE OUT THIS, THE FINAL ISSUE OF THE SHE-HULK. THEY ARE: AL MILGROM, SAL TRAPANI, MIKE VOSBURG, RICK MAGYAR, MIKE GUSTOVICH, DAVE SIMONS, STEVE MITCHELL, BOB WIAKKA, JOE RUBINSTEIN, AND:WHOW? JACK ABEL. THANKS, GUYS.

**Words N.O.T.
by D.A.K.**

“Happy Ending” final page inserted into *The Savage She-Hulk* #25 (Feb. 1982). Art by Mike Vosburg and “Diverse Hands.” (inset) John Byrne’s cover for *The Sensational She-Hulk* #1 (May 1989) breaks the “fourth wall.”

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with a tiny mutated guy inside his metal skull, who runs off after battling the She-Hulk. She-Hulk finally locates Doc and they do battle as he brings her up to speed on his plans for world conquest. Meantime, the sheriff, with Zapper and Richard Rory in tow, arrives at the estate, as does Lou Monkton, all intent on helping Jen/She-Hulk. The sheriff has discovered that Bev has deceived him and he now wants to reconcile with his daughter, even if she is the She-Hulk.

The She-Hulk triumphs in the climactic battle with Doc, with the help of Monkton, the sheriff, Zapper, and Richard. As Doc is led away to jail, the She-Hulk tells the men in her life that she likes being the She-Hulk and plans to stay the She-Hulk. While Zapper is pleased with her decision, Richard walks away heartbroken as he thinks to himself, “Good-bye, Jen ... I still love you!” And the sheriff reconciles with his daughter, declaring on the last page, “Now we’re a family again.”

Jo Duffy sees that relationship as a highlight of *The Savage She-Hulk* series: “The directions books could go if they don’t get canceled ... it’s one of the sad things about building an open-ended world. I think Dave was doing things that had never been done in comics

before with that father/daughter relationship, which in a way was a soured father/son relationship. You could tell that the issue really was, she should have been a son and a cop, instead of a girl and a lawyer. I think they could have so much more with that, but this is what happens when a book gets canceled.”

Despite the feel-good happy ending of the last issue, David Kraft was pleased that the choice made by the character was not over-ruled by the decision makers at Marvel. “They redid the last page,” he says. “That big, happy, kind of DC Comics pin-up, we’re all a happy family. Not in my script. But back then, most heroes, even Marvel’s, generally did the morally correct thing. But I decided on that to take a chance, and I thought, ‘Let’s be honest about this. If I had the ability to have my intellect with me, even though I was highly more emotional and I was highly sexed, and I had the power to do all this ... am I going to be responsible and be an attorney?’ So, the honest way to do that was that she’s going to choose to stay the She-Hulk. I’m going to have her choose sensuality and power and—it’s cool to be the She-Hulk.”

NOW SHE’S SENSATIONAL

Anyone even remotely familiar with the Marvel Universe knows this wasn’t truly the end of the She-Hulk. She would later become an Avenger and a Defender, and would even join the Fantastic Four. And, of course, she starred in series such as *The Sensational She-Hulk* in the late 1980s and 1990s. Kraft feels that the work



his team did on *The Savage She-Hulk* helped pave the way for the later growth of the character. “I was nearly where I wanted to be with the She-Hulk when they canceled it,” he says. “I felt like I had taken it from ‘early Marvel’ through its arc with that kind of strange, Marvel one-off villains and things like that. And I had just about got to the point where, for people who picked it up since then, they were able to play with it because [we had brought it to] that point. That *Marvel Two-in-One* story [issue #88, June 1982, which appeared a few months after the final issue of *The Savage She-Hulk*] with the Thing and She-Hulk was where I was heading with it.”

Still, he sees his time spent writing the She-Hulk as well worth it. “I felt like I had a blank canvas that I could really run around and create stuff on,” Kraft says. “That was part of why I wanted the book, because there was nothing established before it. I got a chance to actually take a Marvel character and form it.”

DOUGLAS R. KELLY is editor of Marine Technology magazine and is hopelessly addicted to Silver and Bronze Age comics. His byline has appeared in such publications as Model Collector, Associations Now, Transaction Trends, and Buildings.

end

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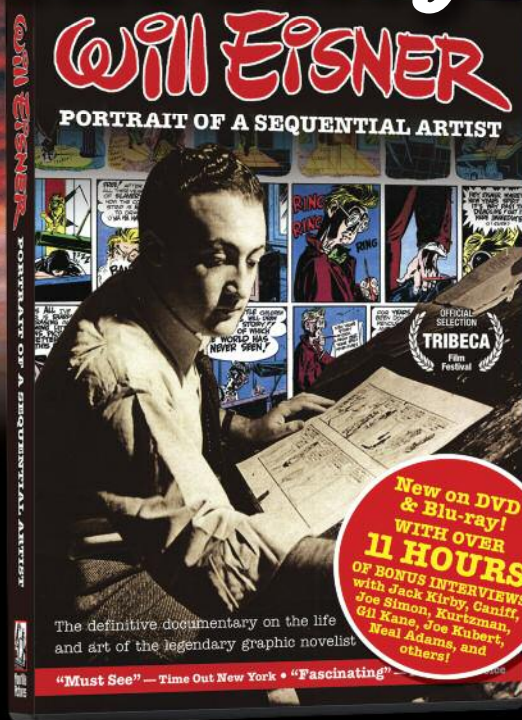
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FACE FRONT, SUPER FRIENDS!

BACK ISSUE's Facebook page has been hopping lately with tons of enthusiasm and interesting posts! A theme for an upcoming issue ("Bronze Age Back-up Series") was also recently suggested by someone in the group. Don't miss out on the fun—join the group today!

– M.E.

THE STRANGE DEATHS OF BATMAN

So, how did I prepare for picking up issue #50? By re-reading *The Batcave Companion* cover to cover, of course, LOL! Loved the Jim Aparo piece (but whatever happened to that Aparo book TwoMorrows advertised a few years back, but hasn't released yet?), and I'm happy to see David V. Reed getting props; I think his "Where Were You the Night the Batman was Killed?" four-parter was a Bronze Age milestone, and I'm surprised DC has never collected it into a trade.

– Ge Pop

Glad your copy of *The Batcave Companion* isn't collecting dust on the shelf, Ge! That Aparo book from TwoMorrows is back in production after several setbacks, including Mr. Aparo's 2005 death, and believe me, nobody's as anxious for that one to be released than yours truly! As soon as TwoMorrows Grand Poobah John Morrow puts it on

the schedule, we'll trumpet it here in BACK ISSUE.

And I believe you know by now that Reed's "Where Were You..." story arc was included in the 2009 trade paperback *The Strange Deaths of Batman*.

– M.E.

WHO IS DAVID V. REED?

Having bought BACK ISSUE #50 generally for the Bronze Age Batman coverage in hope of seeing some favorable attention paid to the bulk, quality, style, craft, and other elements of the appeal of that era's Batman work by the great David V. Reed specifically, I must express my high appreciation of Jim Kingman's fine essay, "The Mystery of Men with Unsung Legacies." He could not have done better evoking fond memories of my adolescence if he had personally sat across from me in a restaurant.

During the Julius Schwartz editorship, David V. Reed, in my view, consistently provided the best Batman tales since Gardner Fox for many of the same reasons and other reasons limited to my severely qualified enjoyment of the cultural mix of the 1970s—to say noth-

ing of the competent art, no matter who the artist! The story was always told intelligibly, with the artist doing his share of the heavy lifting; given my own small talent I knew when I was getting a real deal for my money!

The Batman letters-column mystery of David V. Reed's true identity intrigues me to this day because I always wanted to know under what specific pseudonym he wrote episodes of the television show *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, whose more-realistic first season is my favorite. Any help I can get in this regard will be most appreciated.

What I will always regard as Reed's finest achievement is his immediately following the excellent future-set imaginary tale in *Batman* #300 (in my opinion the best-ever centenary issue of *Batman*) with a jolting two-part return to the present that was by no means the post-landmark issue disappointment it could have been. David V. Reed knew exactly what he was doing and plainly was resolved to do it well.

– Steven Smith

It was our privilege to give David V. Reed his due, Steven, and you're right, Jim Kingman did an excellent job with that article.

We did a quick Web search to try to pinpoint which episodes of *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* were written by Reed, to no avail. Any VTTBOTS fans out there with this info? If so, please let us know. And in the meantime, Steven, you may wish to check out the fansite dedicated to the show, www.vttbots.com.

– M.E.

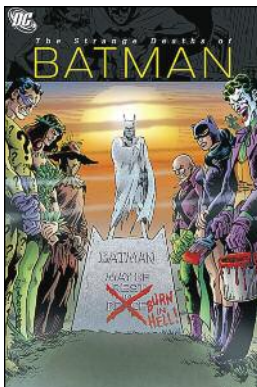
STEADY, OLD CHUM...

I greatly enjoyed "Batman in the Bronze Age" issue of BACK ISSUE (or should I say, "Bat Issue"?), but upon reading it, I am still quite perplexed that people from Neal Adams and Denny O'Neil still continue to blame the *Batman* TV series for the silliness that the character endured in the 1960s. Perhaps they have really selective memories, because I can recall that the silliness that really crept into the *Batman* comics began from the 1940s onward. Lest they forget the original Batwoman and Bat-Girl, Ace the Bat-hound, Bat-Mite, stories about the flying Batcave, Batman and Robin going back in time using hypnosis, the jungle Batman, the merman Batman, etc.—the TV series *Batman* was a pale comparison of silliness compared to the truly juvenile and silly stories that were prevalent during the period.

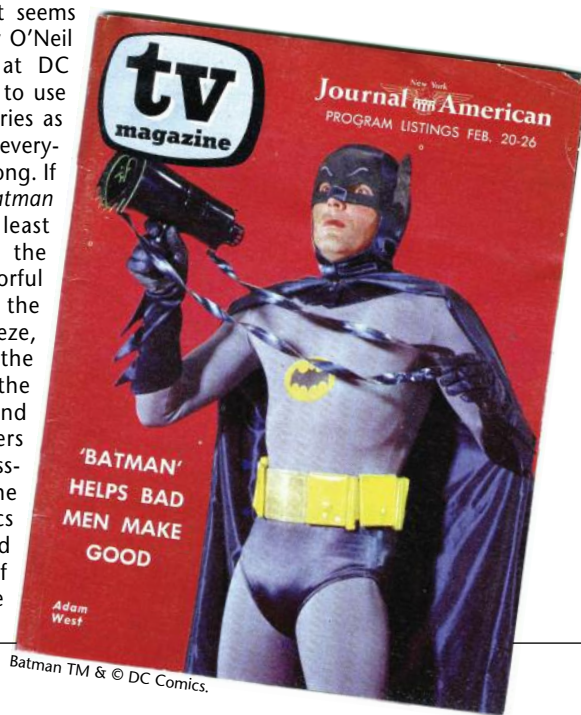
In fact, it just seems to me that Denny O'Neil and the others at DC Comics just want to use the *Batman* TV series as a scapegoat for everything that was wrong. If anything, the *Batman* TV series at least brought back the emphasis of colorful villains like the Riddler, Mr. Freeze, Mad Hatter, the Penguin, the Catwoman, and countless others that had been missing from the *Batman* comics while Batman and Robin were off zooming to the



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moon in the Bat-rocket—or underneath the waters in the Bat-submarine and chasing such memorable villains as the Getaway Genius. As far as I'm concerned, the "camp" approach to *Batman* was the perfect vehicle to revive interest in the character and that worked to rescue the comic from cancellation. Batman and Robin were out walking around constantly during the day in the comics long before the advent of the TV series, but I guess that's something the editors at DC Comics don't want to own up to. They should embrace all aspects of the character and not just blame one tiny era for all the silliness that the character went through. As a child in the 1970s, I was not allowed to read the *Batman* comics because they were too dark and violent. Is that really something that DC Comics should rejoice in?

– Christopher Krieg

We certainly can't speak for DC Comics, Christopher, and we're not sure our friends there rejoice in anything other than healthy sales and creative achievements. Fortunately, today DC offers a "Batman lite" (with the TV tie-in title The All-New Batman: The Brave and the Bold) as counterpoint to the "dark and violent" Dark Knight of mainstream comics. That's an all-ages win/win.

But you do make two valid points: that corny Batman comics certainly predated the January 12, 1966 debut of ABC-TV's Batman (I wrote about that topic in my book The Batcave Companion, co-authored by Michael Kronenberg), and that the TV show has become a convenient scapegoat for those who disliked Bat-zaniness. You don't need a visit from that pesky Bat-Mite to remind you that things got goofy in Gotham City long before Adam West first slid down the Batpole, but late-Silver Age Batman comics got even wackier with DC writers' sometimes-successful, sometimes-not efforts to duplicate the TV show's humor and spirit.

However, it's not the Joker who has the last laugh here, it's Mr. West himself: Other than William Shatner, is there another television actor who has become such a celebrity predicated upon a single character? From TV commercials to cameos to his role as the mayor on The Family Guy, Adam West is still a pop-culture presence in his 80s! (Now, if only DC, 20th Century Fox, and Greenway Productions could broker a deal to release the complete Batman series on DVD...)

– M.E.

DYNAMITE!

BACK ISSUE #50 was another great issue. I may not be the biggest Bronze Age Batman fan (I prefer his Golden Age appearances), but there was a lot of great reading



© Scholastic Press.

this ish. You even had a short but welcome article/interview with Duella Dent (I always pronounced her name "DOO-La"), who in her short-lived Harlequin persona I always thought tragically never took off like she deserved to.

My favorite part, though, was on page 31 where you actually showed a picture of the original Dynamite Duo, Nightglider and Dawnstar, from Scholastic's old Dynamite magazine. Man, I've been trying to track down information on them for years, but pickings have been awfully slim on these obscure '70s superheroes (although I did recently find a page of artwork from issue #64 on a website called "Once Upon A Geek" at <http://onceuponageek.com/2009/10/27/remember-dynamite-magazine-for-kids/>).

I would love to see an article on both them and all the other

superpowered characters who showed up in the oddest places back then in magazines and the like that usually didn't cater to the comic-book market. I've seen the most wonderfully eccentric costumed champions over the years, although admittedly many of them by only brief mentions in the back of Jeff Rovin's invaluable *Encyclopedia of Superheroes* (which I have two copies of because I literally read the cover off the first one!).

Oh, and speaking of obscurities, did you know that the paperback cover you printed on page 20 for David V. Reed's *The Whispering Gorilla* is actually a British reprint (the price sticker gave it away) of a "sequel" to somebody else's book?

Yeah, Reed's book was originally titled *The Return of the Whispering Gorilla* and was an unauthorized follow-up to Don Wilcox's 1940 novella in *Fantastic Adventures* vol. 2, #5 about a man who wakes up to find his brain transplanted into the body of an angry ape, only with the setting changed from the big city to the African jungle. If you're interested in checking out the bizarre but obviously highly influential original story, it has been reprinted online at <http://magicmonkeyboy.blogspot.com/2010/05/whispering-gorilla-by-don-wilcox.html>.

– Jeff Taylor

While characters like the Brown Hornet and TV's Blue Beetle have been mentioned in previous issues, Jeff, an article on non-comics superheroes sounds like fun. We're booked up for the next year but will consider this for a future issue.

In the meantime, those of you who fondly remember the kid's mag Dynamite will be happy to learn that its founder, Jenette Kahn, is the subject of a lengthy, cover-featured interview that will appear in BACK ISSUE #57!

Thanks for the Whispering Gorilla info, too.

– M.E.

RETAILERS: PLEASE STOCK BACK ISSUE

Number 50 of *BACK ISSUE* was your best one to date. A real feast for Batfans, with full color and a hard spine. I count myself fortunate to own it since (as always) my comics shop only had one copy.

– Ed Reilly, Ireland

Thank you for the positive feedback, Ed.

You're not the only reader struggling to find BI in comics shops; even here in the States, most shops only order enough copies to fill subscriptions, meaning that BACK ISSUE often doesn't make its way onto the stands—and that there are thousands of potential readers who still have yet to discover our magazine. True, comics retailers are struggling in a diminishing marketplace and weak economy, but each issue BI appeals to the mainstream through its histories of the characters they currently follow ... and, of course, it's the perfect mag for the longtime reader craving nostalgia and for the former comics fan who has lost interest in the medium. And our loyal readers can help keep this magazine going strong by asking their shop owner to stock and promote the mag. Thanks for your support!

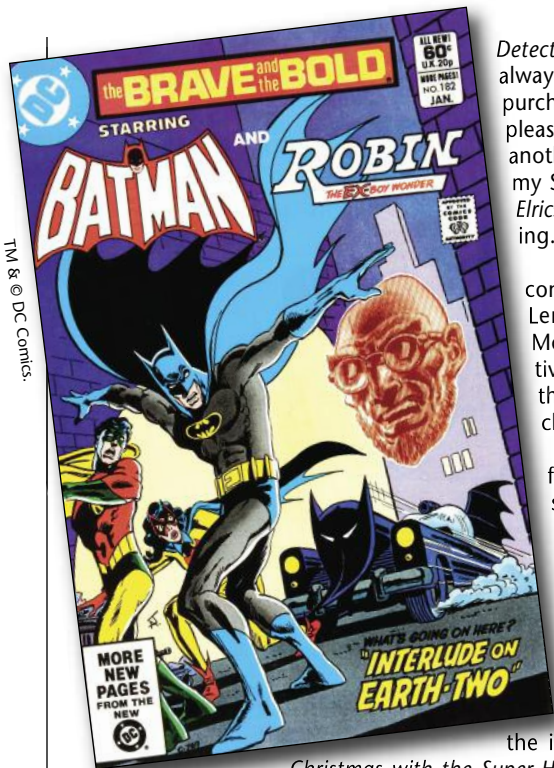
– M.E.

WANTED: ALAN BRENNERT

I just received *BACK ISSUE* #49 and 50 in the mail and devoured them as quickly as possible. Great timing, as I recently won an auction of Bronze Age *Batman*, *Batman Family*, *Brave and the Bold*, and



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Detective Comics issues. Your magazine always seems to anticipate my latest eBay purchase—don't know how you do it, but please keep it up. They complement one another perfectly. (I'll have to break out my Simonson/DeFalco-era *Thors* and my *Erics* for issue #53—looks quite promising.)

It was great reading memories and context-for-stories of Denny O'Neil, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Doug Moench, and the gang. Their respective runs on Batman interest me more than many contemporary takes on the character.

One thing I thought was missing from the Bronze Age Batman retrospective was the perspective of Alan Brennert. I know he only wrote a handful of Bronze Age Batman tales, but two of them were collected in DC's *The Greatest Batman Stories Ever Told* volume published in the 1980s (which served this particular reader as his introduction to all pre-Miller Batman mythos). I get

the impression from his contribution to

Christmas with the Super-Heroes #2 that he wasn't particularly enamored with DC's decision to wipe out and recon its multiverse, and he seems much more focused on other mediums for this fiction and writing talents these days. I've always been curious about his perspective on that. It's probably out there on the Internet somewhere, I'm sure (and we was probably interviewed in a back issue of *BACK ISSUE* itself, I imagine—I should have looked it up before I started writing!).

Before I sign off, let me just say that if adding a dollar onto the price means the kind of color reproduction we say in issue #50, add away! Definitely worth the extra buck.

– Bryan McMillan

Bryan, I'm not monitoring your eBay purchases—honest!

Alan Brennert's unforgettable DC Comics stories do deserve the *BACK ISSUE* treatment, but since he wrote only a few Batman stories, he didn't make the cut for issue #50 (even though he scribed a few of ye ed's favorite issues of *The Brave and the Bold*, including the one seen above). Besides, Mr. Brennert contributed to *Marvel series* as well, so a broader look at his work is warranted. We'll see if we can put together an Alan Brennert interview or article for a future issue.

Next issue: "Licensed Comics"! Twenty years of *Star Wars* at Dark Horse Comics, *Indiana Jones* in comics, the adaptation of *TV's Man from Atlantis*, DC Comics' 1970s *Edgar Rice Burroughs* back-ups (John Carter, Pellucidar, *Carson of Venus*), *Marvel's Warlord of Mars*, and an interview with CAROL SERLING, wife of *Twilight Zone* creator ROD SERLING. Featuring art by and/or commentary from MURPHY ANDERSON, JOHN BYRNE, PAUL CHADWICK, BRIAN CHING, CHRIS CLAREMONT, DAVE DORMAN, JAN DUURSEMA, MICHAEL KALUTA, KARL KESEL, CAM KENNEDY, JOHN JACKSON MILLER, FRANK MILLER, JOHN OSTRANDER, RON RANDALL, MIKE RICHARDSON, RANDY STRADLEY, TIM TRUMAN, TOM VEITCH, MARV WOLFMAN, and more. With a never-before-seen *Clone Wars* cover by BRIAN KOSCHACK. Don't ask—just BI it! See you in sixty!

– Micheal Eury, Editor



BACK TALK

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

BACK ISSUE is on the lookout for the following comics-related material from the 1970s and 1980s:

- ✎ Unpublished artwork and covers
- ✎ Original artwork and covers
- ✎ Pencil artwork
- ✎ Character designs, model sheets, etc.
- ✎ Original sketches and/or convention sketches
- ✎ Original scripts
- ✎ Photos
- ✎ Little-seen fanzine material
- ✎ Other rarities

Creators and collectors of 1970s/1980s comics artwork are invited to share your goodies with other fans! Contributors will be acknowledged in print and receive complimentary copies (and the editor's gratitude).

Submit artwork as (listed in order of preference):

- ✎ Scanned images: 300dpi TIF (preferred) or JPEG (emailed or on CD, or to our FTP site; please inquire)
- ✎ Clear color or black-and-white photocopies

BACK ISSUE is also open to pitches from writers for article ideas appropriate for our recurring and/or rotating departments. Request a copy of the *BACK ISSUE* Writers' Bible by emailing euryman@gmail.com or by sending a SASE to the address below. Please allow 6–8 weeks for a response to your proposals.

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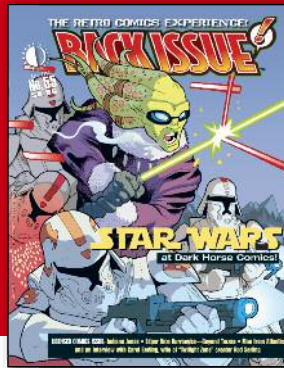
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BACK ISSUE #55

"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, ORSTRANDER, and more. Cover by BRIAN KOSCHACK.

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BACK ISSUE #56

"Avengers Assemble!" Writer ROGER STERN's acclaimed 1980s Avengers run, West Coast Avengers, early Avengers toys, and histories of Hawkeye, Mockingbird, and Wonder Man, with art and commentary from JOHN and SAL BUSCEMA, JOHN BYRNE, BRETT BREEDING, TOM DeFALCO, STEVE ENGLEHART, BOB HALL, AL MILLGROM, TOM MORGAN, TOM PALMER, JOE SINNOTT, and more. PÉREZ cover!

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BACK ISSUE #57

JENETTE KAHN interviewed by ROBERT GREENBERG, DC's Dollar Comics and unrealized kids' line (featuring an aborted Sugar and Spike revival), the Wonder Woman Foundation, and the early days of the Vertigo imprint. Exploring the talents of ROSS ANDRU, KAREN BERGER, STEVE BISSETTE, JIM ENGL, GARTH ENNIS, NEIL GAIMAN, SHELLY MAYER, ANN MOORE, GRANT MORRISON, and more!

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ALTER EGO #107

Big BATMAN issue, with an unused Golden Age cover by DICK SPRANG! SHEL DORF interviews SPRANG and JIM MOONEY, with rare and unseen Batman art by BOB KANE, JERRY ROBINSON, WIN MORTIMER, SHELLY MOLDOFF, CHARLES PARIS, and others! Part II of the TONY TALLARICO interview by JIM AMASH! Plus FCA, MR. MONSTER'S COMIC CRYPT, BILL SCHELLY, and more!

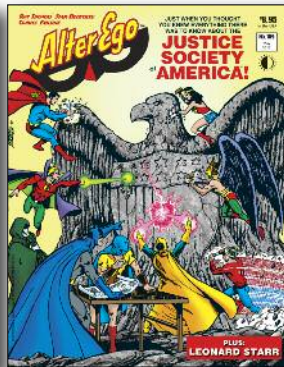
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ALTER EGO #108

1970s Bullpenner WARREN REECE talks about Marvel Comics and working with EVERETT, BURGOS, ROMITA, STAN LEE, MARIE SEVERIN, ADAMS, FRIEDRICH, ROY THOMAS, and others, with rare art! DEWEY CASSELL spotlights Golden Age artist MIKE PEPPE, with art by TOTH, ANDRU, TUSKA, CELARDO, & LUBBERS, plus FCA, MR. MONSTER, BILL SCHELLY, cover by EVERETT & BURGOS, and more!

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ALTER EGO #109

Spectre/Hour-Man creator BERNARD BAILY & Johnny Thunder's JOHN B. WENTWORTH, '40s super-groups that might have been, art by ORDWAY, INFANTINO, KUBERT, HASEN, ROBINSON, and BURNLEY, LEONARD STARR interview by JIM AMASH, MIKE PEPPE interview by DEWEY CASSELL, BILL SCHELLY on "50 Years of Fandom" at San Diego 2011, FCA, Mr. Monster's Comic Crypt, PÉREZ cover, 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. HAMERLICK and C.C. BECK on the origin of Capt. Marvel, ROY THOMAS and JERRY BINGHAM on their Secret Origins "Shazam!", MARC SWAYZE, more BERNARD BAILY, LEONARD STARR interview Part II, Mr. Monster's Comic Crypt, BILL SCHELLY, and more!

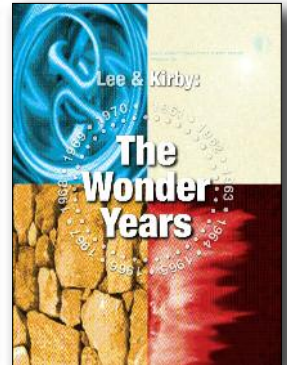
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DRAW! #22

Interview with inker SCOTT WILLIAMS from his days at Marvel and Image to his work with JIM LEE, FRANK MILLER interview, plus MILLER and KLAUS JANSON show their working processes. Also, 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!

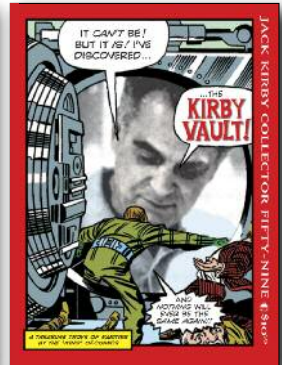
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LEGO SPACE WAR issue! A STARFIGHTER BUILDING LESSON by Peter Reid, WHY SPACE MARINES ARE SO POPULAR by Mark Stafford, a trip behind the scenes of LEGO'S NEW ALIEN CONQUEST SETS that hit store shelves earlier this year, plus JARED K. BURKS' column on MINIFIGURE CUSTOMIZATION, building tips, event reports, our step-by-step "YOU CAN BUILD IT" INSTRUCTIONS, and more!

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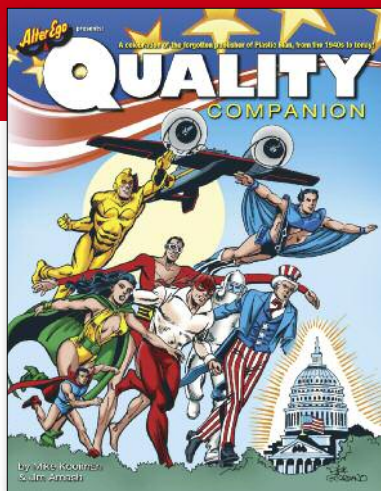


BRICKJOURNAL #19

LEGO EVENTS ISSUE covering our own BRICKMAGIC FESTIVAL, BRICKWORLD, BRICKFAIR, BRICKCON, plus other events outside the US. There's full event details, plus interviews with the winners of the BRICKMAGIC CHALLENGE competition, complete with instructions to build award winning models. Also JARED K. BURKS' regular column on minifigure customizing, building tips, and more!

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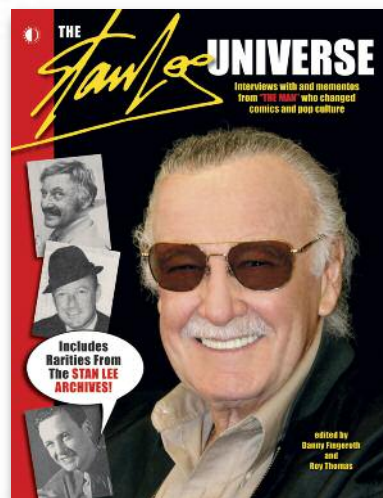
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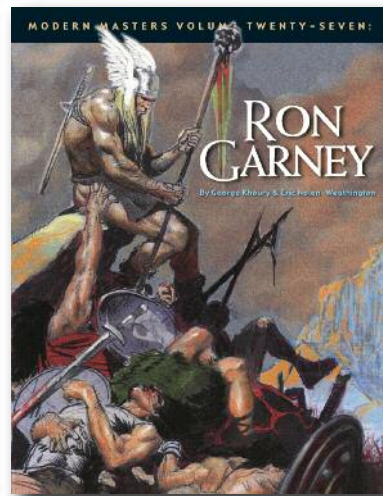
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