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BACK ISSUE!

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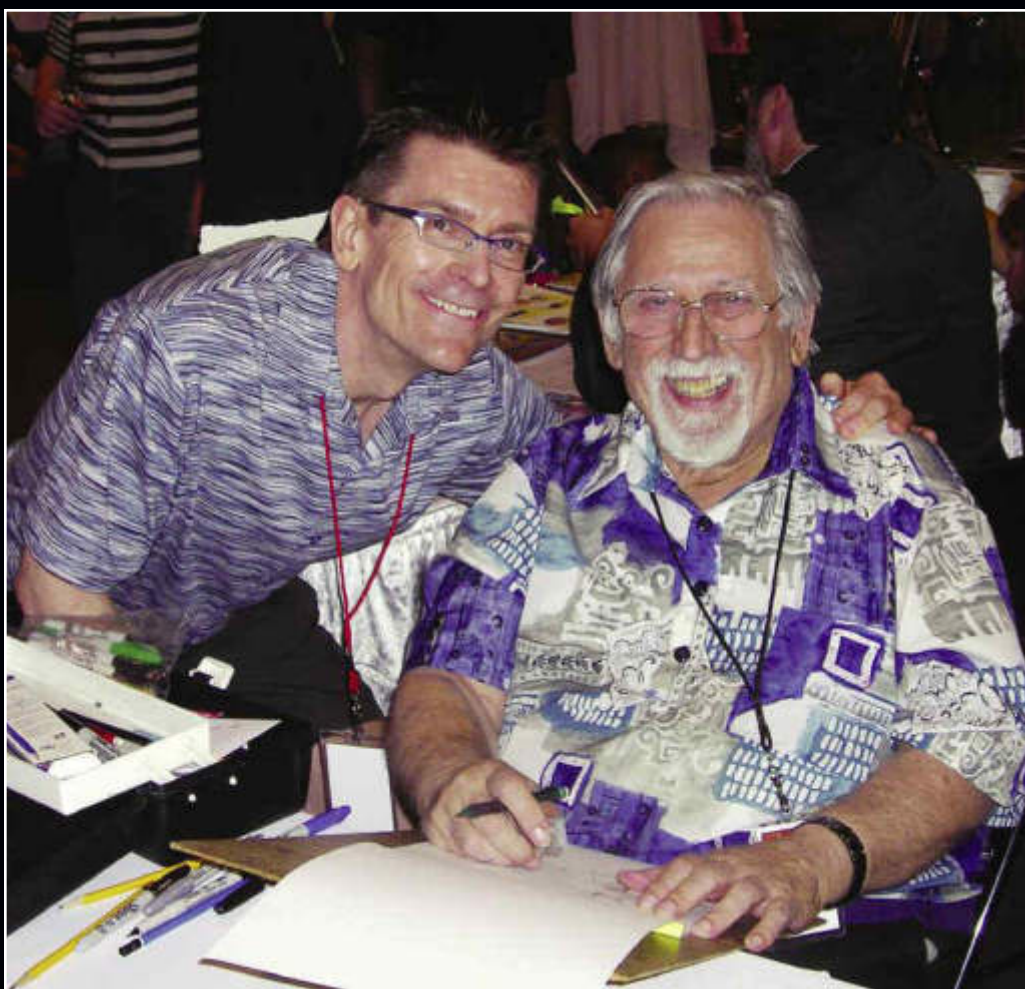


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BACK seat driver

by *Michael Eury*



DICK GIORDANO
1932–2010

Artist.
Editor.
Teacher.
Friend.

Volume 1,
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July 2010

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

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BACK ISSUE

The Retro Comics Experience!

RED, WHITE, AND BLUE ISSUE!

BACK SEAT DRIVER: Editorial by Michael Eury Inside Front Cover

BEYOND CAPES: Flagg! Unfurled 3
Revisiting Howard Chaykin's trailblazing '80s masterpiece, American Flagg!

FLASHBACK: Contest of Champions 10
The story of Marvel's first limited series, a road not taken to the 1980 Summer Olympics

FLASHBACK: The Twelve Trials of Wonder Woman 19
The Amazon Princess' attempts to regain her JLA seat in this overlooked '70s story arc

PRO2PRO: The Sensational New Wonder Woman 26
Roy Thomas and Gene Colan look back on their short-lived DC collaboration

FLASHBACK: Captain America: Home for a Hero 31
A look at the Avenger's Brooklyn Heights years, where we got to know Steve Rogers

PINUP: Captain America Movie Poster by Joe Jusko 37
An amazing illo promoting a rarely seen, forgettable film adaptation

FLASHBACK: Whatever Happened to the Sentinel of Liberty? 38
Remembering the Roger Stern/John Byrne era of Captain America

BRING ON THE BAD GUYS: The Red Skull 49
Seventy years of Captain America-hating evil—and this supervillain is still smiling!

FLASHBACK: Quality Time: Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters 57
Trapped in a world they never made, DC's flag-waving super-team

ROUGH STUFF 66
Patriotic pencil art from the vault of Tom Ziuko

BEYOND CAPES: They Red, White, and Blew It!: Team America 70
Why this Marvel motorcycling team spun out of control and into limbo

GREATEST STORIES NEVER TOLD: The Unpublished Team America 76
This short-lived series had more fractures than Evel Knievel!

BACK TALK 78
Reader feedback on issues #38 and 39, plus a tribute to Dick Giordano.

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Captain America, painted by Greg and Tim Hildebrandt in 1994 for the Marvel Masterpieces trading-card series. © 2010 Marvel Characters, Inc.

FLAGG!

unfurled

by Philip Schweier



In 1983, when First Comics launched *American Flagg!* on the burgeoning direct market, creator Howard Chaykin had been working in comics for over a decade, but was largely an unknown quantity to mainstream comic-book fans. Unlike many comics artists of his generation, he eschewed superheroes in favor of the road less traveled—romance, war, and science fiction/fantasy. His endeavors paid off in 1977 when he was tapped to illustrate the comic-book adaptation of *Star Wars*.

In the late 1970s, again taking the road less traveled, he entered the field of “illustrated graphic novels,” adapting for publisher Byron Preiss such material as Alfred Bester’s *The Stars My Destination* and Samuel R. Delany’s *Empire*. Later, the growing independent comics market fostered creator-owned projects, generating a fresh opportunity for Chaykin.

First Comics was a small publisher located in Evanston, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Its debut title was based on the science-fiction stage play *Warp*, and the company offered creator’s rights to other titles it published. Writers and artists, retaining ownership of their creations, were responsible for production of the titles, while First handled printing, marketing, and distribution. Though common practice among many publishers today, this business approach revolutionized the comic-book industry in the early 1980s.

When First Comics initially approached Chaykin, he admits he was a bit leery: “My concern had all and everything to do with the fact that this was a brand new company, located in Chicago. I’d always worked for companies I visited and had day-to-day dealings with.” At the time, Chaykin lived in New York, but would shortly move to the Los Angeles area.

However, First Comics had much to offer Chaykin in return. “They [First Comics] talked about a financial plan that would make it possible for me to get out from under the debt that I had accrued working for Byron Preiss,” says Chaykin. “It was encouraging. So I went home and concocted a scenario, a pitch document, and that was that.”

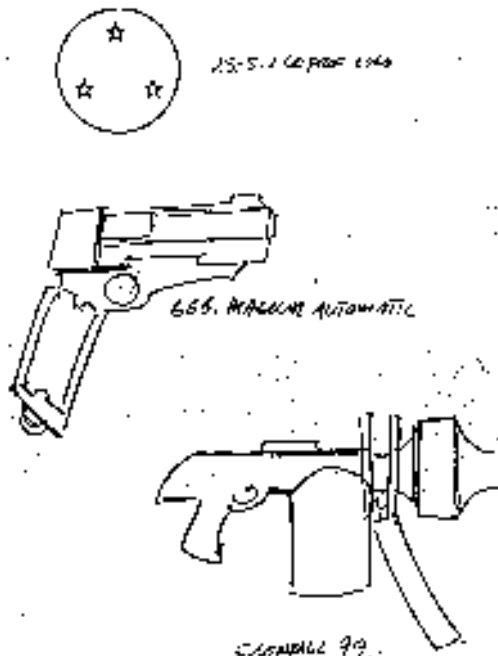
The end result was the critically acclaimed *American Flagg!*, which Chaykin describes as the apotheosis of all the things he’d been reading, studying, and learning since a teenager. “It was all science fiction, post-holocaust, negative utopia, fetishism, patriotism—as it has been hijacked by the right.”

Speculation by fans has suggested specific elements might include everything from *Blade Runner* to Steely Dan to Raymond Chandler. Chaykin acknowledges *Blade Runner* and Raymond Chandler, but he wouldn’t know Steely Dan if it came up and bit him on the ass. He mentions *Maverick*, *Gunsmoke*, and *Terry & the Pirates* as primary influences.

Back in the USA!!

Detail from Howard Chaykin’s cover to *American Flagg!* #1 (Oct. 1983), published by First Comics.

© 2010 Howard Chaykin.



First Flagg

Chaykin's early sketches for Reuben Flagg, Medea Blitz, and the series' iconography and weaponry. Courtesy of David "Hambone" Hamilton.

© 2010 Howard Chaykin.

THE WORLD OF AMERICAN FLAGG!

American Flagg! premiered from First Comics with a first issue cover-dated October 1983. The series is set in the year 2031. In the years since 1996 (the Year of the Domino), the world has fallen into chaos—economic collapse, nuclear war, and social upheaval have resulted in a dramatic shift in world power. The American government has relocated to Mars ("Temporarily, of course"), leaving what remains of the United States to be governed by the Plex, a corporate entity that, like the Roman Empire, appeases the populace with a steady diet of drugs, sex, and entertainment.

The star of *American Flagg!* is Reuben Flagg, a former video celebrity conscripted into the Plexus Rangers, the peacekeeping arm of the Plex. He is posted as deputy in Chicago, under Chief Ranger Hilton "Hammerhead" Krieger, where Flagg quickly discovers his youthful ideals are misplaced in the historically corrupt environs. When Krieger is murdered, Flagg inherits, by default, his pirate video station, Q-USA.

Reuben Flagg might be described as the archetypal Howard Chaykin hero, versions of which can be seen in later Chaykin projects such as *Times²*, *Power & Glory*, and *American Century*. Chaykin says, "Flagg combines elements of Henry Fonda, William Holden, and James Garner, who are the three archetypes for me who embody my concept of what heroes should look and act like. You know, grace under pressure, common decency with a sidwinder's sensibility."

Flagg's supporting characters came in all stripes, and the cast as a whole seemed to owe a great deal to writer Damon Runyon. Following Krieger's death, Flagg becomes Chief Ranger, and is appointed a robotic deputy named Luther Ironheart—all brawn

and no brains. Krieger's daughter Mandy is Reuben's on again/off again lust interest.

There is also Chicago Mayor Charles Keenan Blitz and his errant daughter Medea, and Bill Windsor-Jones, the heir apparent to the throne of England. Rounding out the principal cast is Raul, a walking, talking tabby cat who, in true Chicago political fashion, is eventually elected mayor.

The first story arc (later republished in trade-paperback format as *Hard Times*) runs for three issues, followed by another three-chapter arc (also republished in trade-paperback format, as *Southern Comfort*) which takes Flagg and friends south to the New Orleans Plex mall. *American Flagg!* #7-9 (Apr.-June 1984) sees the return of the gang to Chicago just as an off-kilter Soviet weather satellite begins making life in Chicago more miserable than usual, and leads directly into the final three-issue story arc. As a whole, all 12 issues comprise one overall story, greater than the sum of its parts.

Generating the first 12 issues exhausted Chaykin, ruining his health. "I was still a smoker and a drinker at the time," he explains, "And it was 28 pages a month and I'd never done anything like that before, and it was insane. It just devoured my life. I had no assistants. I didn't know how to work with an assistant at that point, and it was a very difficult process. I mean, it's not like it was rocket science. It was just a lot of work, and I was trying to do a fairly high-quality product and I didn't want to slough it off."

Chaykin's effort paid off, as *American Flagg!* was met with a great deal of critical acclaim. Among the aspects of the book that made it so groundbreaking was its overall design. Once referred to as the *Citizen Kane* of comic books, *American Flagg!* seemed to rewrite many of the rules and restrictions of comic-book design.



© 2010 Howard Chaykin.

LETTER PERFECT

A key element to the design of *American Flagg!* was the work of letterer Ken Bruzenak, whose type and layout contributed to the way each page conveyed the story. "His lettering is drawing," Chaykin once said. "It is not simply there to tell a story. Its shape, its form, its drawing, its placement in the picture is part of the story."

Today Chaykin says of Bruzenak, "We are twin sons of different mothers. We have very similar sensibilities. We shared a lot of goals, and I have a great deal of respect for Ken's work and skills. And that remains today."

According to Bruzenak, "When I worked with Howard, the pages were perfectly designed. I'd look at his page and know exactly where I have to fit in, what I can contribute, what I can leave alone."

Despite its critical acclaim, *American Flagg!* was not without its criticism as well. One letter writer in issue #4 (Jan. 1984) suggested that *American Flagg!* should have a warning label due to its more mature content. His comments include, "The concept behind this series is an interesting one, and showcased some of the finest art I've ever seen in my near-twenty years of comic reading ... but the subject matter and language in the book were definitely adult oriented." [Editor's note: I'll fess up—that letter writer was me!]

Chaykin has little to say about such criticism. "I was doing a book that I would be interested in reading, and I've always made the mistake of assuming I share the audience's sensibility and I'm constantly reminded that I don't."

According to Chaykin, doing a project for First Comics had both advantages and liabilities. "On the plus side, since there was no history here whatsoever, there was no baggage to be carried by the new book. On the down side, we never reached a huge audience, so *Flagg!* never had the wider appeal it might have had under a DC Comics or Marvel label."



AHEAD OF ITS TIME?

Even though *American Flagg!* went on to win a number of awards, including seven Eagle Awards from the British magazine *Comics International*, Chaykin will argue the book's success. "I don't think *Flagg!* was anywhere near the popular, commercial hit—I mean, it wasn't a commercial hit because it was not that kind of book at the time," he says.

"One of the things about *American Flagg!* that I recognize is that *Flagg!* existed in one of those small corners of the comic-book universe, which made it possible for it to be borrowed from and influence a lot of people without anyone noticing it was there to be influential."

Former First Comics editor Mike Gold says, "If Howard was the creative spirit doomed to always be ahead of his time—a phrase commonly associated with his comics career—then *American Flagg!* was uncannily in its time."

One of the remarkable aspects of the series is how much of the world of *Flagg!* has come to pass.

Ladies' Man

(below) Chaykin's use of Crafttint artboard gave *American Flagg!* a unique textured look. Page 22 of #7 (Apr. 1984), and (left) #6's cover.

© 2010 Howard Chaykin.



Captivating Covers

Readers could always count on Chaykin to deliver dynamic cover art. Covers to (left) *American Flagg!* #8 (May 1984) and #10 (July 1984).

© 2010 Howard Chaykin.

Militant Islamic terrorist children, reality shows based on public humiliation, rampant consumerism and self-indulgence, and the fall of the Soviet Union and the United States as a diminished superpower are currently part of the real-world landscape.

"It just seemed real and logical that that's where things were heading. I was always amazed that anybody else saw things in a different light," suggests Chaykin. "This is the way it looked to me. It was perfectly reasonable that this is the way things were heading. And I got a lot wrong, too, and a lot of it was kind of baroque and silly, but it just seemed to be where things were heading."

As the series continued, character profiles and secondary storylines reduced the number of pages of story per issue and helped lighten Chaykin's workload. After taking a couple of issues off, he returned to the drawing board, continuing to write and draw *American Flagg!* for the next year or so.

Reuben Flagg's escapades included a foray into communist Canada, in which a masked vigilante known as the Black Beaver is disrupting the Plex's attempts to absorb a cowboy-themed fast-food franchise, much to the dismay of its puppet administrator.

Upon his return to Chicago, Flagg finds the city in turmoil, torn between friends who are now opposing candidates in the city's mayoral race. Meanwhile, he has a visiting Plexus Ranger from Dallas in pursuit of a serial killer, and a new crime boss to uncover.

Following the mayoral election, in which Raul—yes, the *cat*—is elected to high office, Flagg heads to England where he is reunited with an old enemy and an even older love.

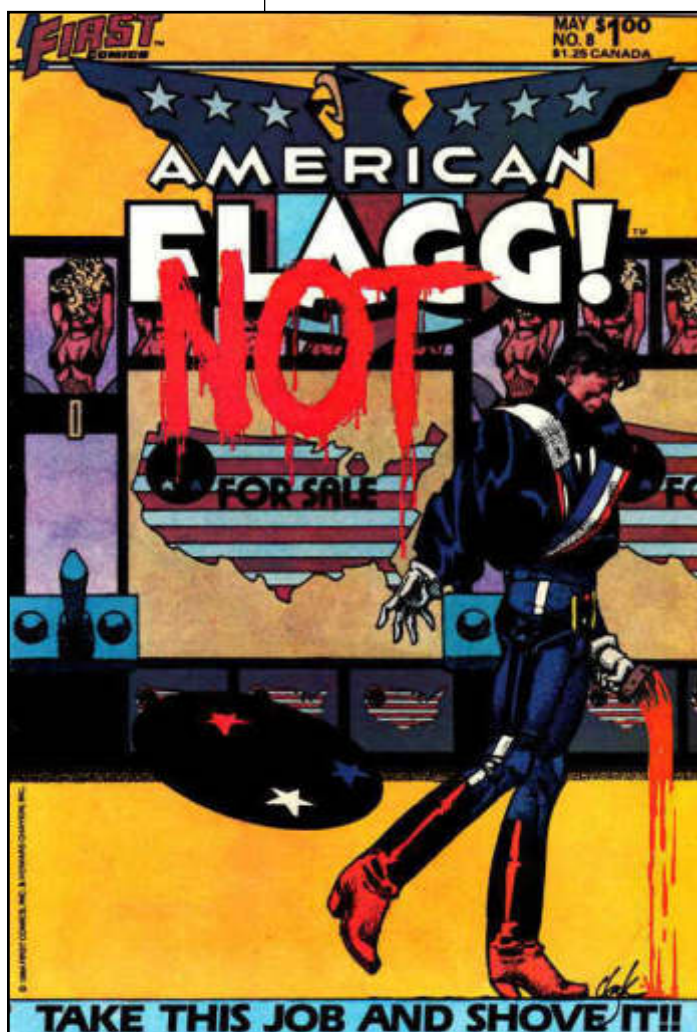
Given such plot elements as talking cats being elected mayor of Chicago, it's no great surprise that the stories are laced with a number of inside jokes and pop-culture references that might make the material seem dated. Those long forgotten become meaningless. (Elwe and the Tree Weasels, anyone?)

"We had a policy back then to not explain—which caused confusion among some readers who couldn't tell irony if it came up and bit them on the ass," says Chaykin. "Life is too short—and I was writing and drawing the book for publication, not posterity."

FLAGG! A.C. (AFTER CHAYKIN)

In issue #27 (Dec. 1985), the first which Chaykin neither wrote or drew, Flagg returns to Chicago, landing smack in the middle of "Lustbusters," a story penned by Alan Moore which had begun as a supporting storyline five months before. It offered Chaykin a brief respite, but by #35, he dropped out completely, with the exception of contributing a few covers.

Chaykin enjoyed the opportunity to work on other projects, which included two miniseries (*The Shadow: Blood & Judgment* and *Blackhawk: Blood and Iron*) published by DC Comics, and two original graphic novels, *Time²* and *Time²: The Satisfaction of Black Mariah* from First Comics.



A Different Flagg!

American Flagg!, post-Chaykin: Page 17 of issue #37 (Feb. 1987), written by Steven Grant and drawn by Mark Badger. Art courtesy of Heritage.

American Flagg! TM & © Howard Chaykin.

Some might suggest that *American Flagg!* opened doors for Chaykin, but he disagrees. "The doors were open before that, and they were maybe open a bit wider afterwards. *Flagg!* demonstrated that my skills were a bit more polished," he says. "*Flagg!* reflected an honest attempt to create a labored product. I worked my ass off, and I created a standard of finish that I've had to maintain since then. I think it made me a more known quantity."

American Flagg! was turned over to writer Steven Grant and penciler Mark Badger, who took the book in an entirely different direction, much to the dismay of its longtime audience. J. M. DeMatteis followed Grant as the series' writer.

Wary of his misadventures, Flagg and his militant robot deputy Luther Ironheart abdicated their authority. They left Chicago on an *Easy Rider*-style journey across western America, during which Ironheart became embroiled in a mechanical uprising, leading him to ponder his existence. Flagg, meanwhile, became the subject of hero worship, which he found uncharacteristically unsettling. Much of the wit the readers found so appealing was replaced by more philosophical questions. Formerly devoted fans abandoned the book, with many writing in saying that with Chaykin's departure, the book had lost its sharp edge. Sales on *American Flagg!* began to drop to half-mast.

Readers' sentiments are echoed by Chaykin himself. "I frankly was appalled at what followed me on the book," he says. "I thought it was awful. I really did. I thought it was dreadful looking and dreadful sounding. It wasn't smart, it wasn't clever, and it didn't look very good. I felt like I'd worked my ass off to create a product that nobody could pick up and run with. I was amazed by that."

"I had assumed that it was a book that someone else would come along and work as hard on it as I did—well, maybe not as hard. Or maybe they did work as hard. It certainly didn't look it. I just thought it was sh*t."

Issue #46 (Nov. 1987) was regarded as the all-apology issue, in which readers were reintroduced to what made *American Flagg!* so engaging in its earliest days: "Sex tempered by violence tempered by humor." First Comics offered fans a mea culpa, with promises of Chaykin's return with the following issue. After all, someone had to put it all back together.

CHAYKIN RETURNS

Nevertheless, Chaykin regards First Comics' attempt to salvage what had been one of its most successful titles as "a waste of time." *American Flagg!* #47–50 were plotted by Chaykin, with scripts by Mindy Newell. Art was by Paul Smith and Richard Ory, under Chaykin's direction.

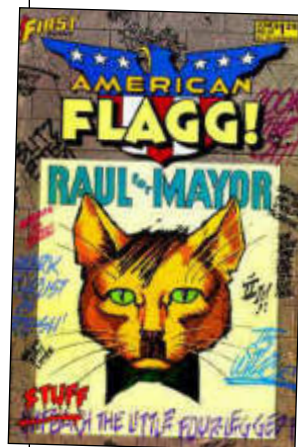
"I put the crew together," says Chaykin, "and they all worked with me. First Comics had already demonstrated their complete inability to competently produce *Flagg!* on their own, so why in God's name would I listen to them?"



Another goal was to wrap up storylines, as Reuben journeys to Mars to confront the absent government of the United States, only to be handed the keys to the kingdom in #50 (Mar. 1988). In typical self-serving fashion, Reuben wastes no time in allowing such power to corrupt him.

Almost immediately, the series was relaunched as "*Howard Chaykin's Amerikan Flagg*," Flagg jets off for the former Soviet Union in pursuit of his long-lost father, only to end up in prison in Schwarzendesland (Germany now occupied by Communists of African heritage). Eventually, with the help of Raul and Jules Folquet, Reuben manages to break out, but his unfortunate incarceration has cost him his presidency.

Once again he is made deputy ranger to Moscow's Chief Ranger Celia Prospektova (a.k.a. "Mother Russia"), a hard-line old girl who won't stand for Reuben's crazy brand of Chicago hijinks. He is tasked with seeing to it that Eurydice Khan,



© 2010 Howard Chaykin.

Phase Two

Mike Vosburg drew Howard Chaykin's *Amerikan Flagg!* in the style of the series' creator. Inks by Richard Ory and Tony Van deWalle. Page 11 from issue #5 (Sept. 1988).

© 2010 Howard Chaykin.

pop-star daughter of Europe's biggest media mogul Rupert Khan, is kept on a short leash.

In addition to moving the setting to Russia and replacing a large portion of the supporting cast, there were changes behind the scenes. John Moore took over scripting duties from Mindy Newell, and Mike Vosburg joined the production team, taking over the art chores from Smith.

"Howard and I are acquaintances from a long time back," says Vosburg. "I had moved to Los Angeles in 1984 and Howard followed not long after to pursue a career in film. So when he needed someone to work with him on *Amerikan Flagg!*, I was not only familiar with his style but also was close by and available to work in a studio setting."

The team worked out of Chaykin's home for a short while, but soon got a studio in Glendale where everyone—Chaykin and Vosburg, joined by John Moore, Richard Ory, and Tony Van deWalle—worked on the book.

"Working in the studio with all the other artists was a new experience for me," says Vosburg, "and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It did a lot to instill new creative ideas for me. It was where I first starting doing painting and illustration. The competition in those circumstances really does push you."

According to Vosburg, Chaykin and Moore worked out the storylines. "My job was to break down the plot into a series of pictures, and to do a rough pencil layout for each page," explains Vosburg. "Howard's plots were a joy to work on; they were literally a description of six pictures that told the story. I sometimes found the dialogue a bit esoteric; there were a lot of jokes I didn't get."

"Richard Ory would then take the pencils and clean up and ink the backgrounds," Vosburg continues. "I would do the same with the figures. Then either John or Tony (whoever was coloring at that specific time) would hand paint the blue-line pages. Richard might have helped on that, too."

Perhaps in an effort to maintain the "*Amerikan Flagg!*" look, Vosburg emulated Chaykin's style of rendering. "What he did was brilliant," praises Vosburg. "And you must remember that we had for the most part the same influences in [Alex] Toth, [Joe] Kubert, and Wally Wood. However, in retrospect, it would have served both our needs better if I had gone more for my own style of finishes. I thought the crafttint served Howard very well when he did the first series. However, it turned into a bit of the tail wagging the dog on what we were doing. The inking was kept fairly bold to accommodate the roughness of the crafttint texture, and with the painted style, we really didn't need the added dot pattern."

"That said, I learned a lot from working with Howard, and with working with crafttint. It forced me to think more in terms of 3-D. And I will always be indebted to Howard for introducing me to the Famous Illustrators—especially Robert Fawcett."

One memorable experience on *Flagg!* for Vosburg was the time the actor Harry Anderson came by the studio to hang out. "I really wanted to ask him all kinds of questions about the cast of *Night Court*, and all he wanted to talk about was comics."

"I think the book still holds up well," says Vosburg. "It certainly isn't in the same category as the stuff Howard did on the original series, but it was still solid work."

THE FLAGG! FOLDS

Chaykin guided the book for 12 issues to its eventual conclusion before *Flagg!* eventually folded altogether. "They [First Comics] realized that was what they were going to get out of it, so they might as well just make it 12 issues and run," says Chaykin.

Other than a handful of collected volumes, *Amerikan Flagg!* disappeared from comic-book shelves. First Comics, like many other comic-book publishers that sprang up in the mid-1980s, eventually faded as a company, though in fairness, not due to the cancellation of *Flagg!*, but instead due to the overall changes in the comic-book industry in the early 1990s.

Meanwhile, Chaykin moved on to a successful career in television, writing for such shows as *The Flash*, *Viper*, and *Earth: Final Conflict*. He continued to write and draw comics on a limited basis—most notably *Power & Glory*, which contains a passing reference to *Flagg!*—but it wasn't until 2001 that he returned to comics full-time.





In 2003, Dynamic Forces announced (never-realized) plans to republish the initial 14 issues in a 376-page hardcover edition featuring additional cover paintings and promotional pieces, as well as a brand-new *American Flagg!* story written and illustrated exclusively for the edition.

Twenty-five years later, Chaykin is still proud of his creation. In 2009, he was asked to contribute a *Flagg!* story to a book published by the Hero Initiative. "Scott [Dunbier] called me up and said, 'Hey, can you do a *Flagg!* story for the Hero Initiative?' I said, 'Sure. Why not?'"

"I think it holds up, oddly enough," Chaykin says, looking back on *American Flagg!* "It's still crude in a lot of places, as well, and there are things that are obvious and over-jokey, but then again, in the context of comics, where gravity is always mistaken for enormity, a little bit of jokey isn't such a bad thing."

He adds, "I like a little bit of comedy in the material. I think it's clever. I think it's a little nihilistic. I think it's dirty and sexy and funny in places, and I have nothing to be ashamed of. And I have a lot of work to be ashamed of."

While the series is certainly a high point in his career, Chaykin does not regard it as his life's work. "My life's work is a train of effort and events. I've been working very steadily since the early 1970s. I just edited the 'Art of' [Howard Chaykin] text, which credits me with material I have no clue whatsoever, and I actually had to stop. 'Did I actually do that?' What the hell? I don't remember. But I'm working now, and every day I get up—I've said it more than once: for the comic-book reader, it's every Wednesday at the store, and for me it's every morning on my desk. So it's a different relationship, and I don't spend a great deal of time obsessing over it."

"I live at the beach, I own my house outright, and I have a terrific life. I'm blessed. I'm one lucky bastard,"



says Chaykin. "Again, my problem occasionally is I open my mouth too much and actually say what's on my mind, because people will take any meaning they choose to put to what I say, and again, I believe comics is a calling and a craft and a career, but I wouldn't do it for free, and I like the money, and I certainly like to not have to work as hard as I do to maintain my life."

Of *American Flagg!* itself, perhaps something written on the eve of its debut sums it up best. In a "First Notes" column published in 1983, editor Mike Gold wrote, "Chaykin's probably the most patriotic person I know. Not the usual 'Love It or Leave It' nonsense that serves to divide instead of unite—and is therefore *not* patriotic. Howard's patriotism comes from pride—and from great hopes for America..."

"America is the land of *hope*. And that's a wonderful thing to have."

"So amid all the violence and women, amidst all the style we have come to associate with Howard's work, you're going to find a great deal of patriotism in *American Flagg!* ... Thoughtful, hopeful patriotism."

PHILIP SCHWEIER is a graphic designer and freelance writer living in Savannah, GA. He is also a frequent contributor to www.comicbookbin.com.

Mike Gold

Last Gasps

(left) Chaykin's cover to *Howard Chaykin's Amerikan Flagg!* #11 (Mar. 1989). (above) A vid-screen montage from issue #6.

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end

THE STORY OF MARVEL'S FIRST LIMITED SERIES:

CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS®

A.K.A.

MARVEL'S ROAD NOT TAKEN TO THE 1980 SUMMER OLYMPICS

by Dan Tandarich

The *Marvel Super Hero Contest of Champions* (June–Aug. 1982) holds a special place in Marvel's history. It was the company's first limited series and it paved the way for a comics universe that placed all of its characters in one epic story, with events like *Secret Wars* and DC Comics' *Crisis on Infinite Earths* to follow in its footsteps.

However, this landmark series was originally intended to be something else entirely. It was supposed to be a *Marvel Treasury Edition* with a tie-in to the 1980 Summer Olympics.

This is the story of Marvel's first limited series. The behind-the-scenes tale involved real-world politics, a complete overhaul of plot, and contained, perhaps, one of comics' biggest blunders ... or did it?!

AN OLYMPIC BOYCOTT

In order to understand Marvel's first limited series, one must first look at the oversized tome, *Marvel Treasury Edition* #25: *Spider-Man versus the Hulk at the Winter Olympics* (1980). The story—by writing collaborators Bill Mantlo, Mark Gruenwald, and Steven Grant, with art by Herb Trimpe and Bruce Patterson and a cover by Al Milgrom and Jack Abel—pits Queen Kala and the Lava Men against Mole Man and his mindless subterraneans and outcasts at scenic Lake Placid, New York—home of the 1980 Winter Olympics. Kala wants the fabled waters of the Fountain of Youth, but the Mole Man won't give it to her since she rejected his amorous advances. The "Contest of Champions" between the two warring factions will decide if Kala gets the water or if the Mole Man gets a queen.

Kala abducts a few Olympic athletes and outfits them with "the most advanced weapons known to subterranean science" such as jet-powered skis and skates, as well as an enhanced bobsled and hockey stick. Spider-Man and the Incredible Hulk arrive on the scene and are quickly swept up in the madness. Picture a double-page spread of Olympic athletes taking on the Mole Man's outcasts, with Spider-Man and the Hulk right in the middle of this free-for-all, as Kala and the Mole Man look on. Due to Kala's exposure to the surface, she ages rapidly and agrees to go back with the Mole Man. And so the story ends. However, on the inside of the back cover a full-page advertisement previews: "Coming this summer ... Marvel Super Heroes at the Summer Olympics. Guaranteed to be the most awesome assemblage of heroes ever seen in one titanic tale!" And so, indicating another adventure, readers expected to see this next Olympic escapade sometime that summer.

Mantlo, Gruenwald, and Grant began brainstorming for the next Olympic extravaganza. During the idea session one main problem seemed to pop up. Steven Grant recalled the evening in his "Master of the Obvious" column for *Comic Book Resources* issue #148 (July 2004):

Heroes Hang Out

Grandmaster and Death gather Marvel's superheroes in this unpublished page (by John Romita, Jr. and Pablo Marcos) originally intended for *Marvel Treasury Edition*.

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Hulk Smash Gold Medal!

Wall-Crawler vs. Jade Giant in 1980's *Marvel Treasury Edition* #25. Cover art by Al Milgrom and Jack Abel.

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"The Olympics were an international affair, but Bill had spotted a big flaw in Marvel's concept of the book; aside from a smattering like T'Challa, the Black Panther ... and some X-Men, Marvel had no international heroes. Bill had recently overseen the transformation of a number of Russian villains into 'heroes in their own eyes' in the *Incredible Hulk* #258-259 [Apr.-May 1981] so those were taken care of. That night, we mostly sat around concocting international heroes out of whole cloth. Mark provided the Irishwoman Shamrock, the Arabian Knight, and a couple others. I remember some red Chinese superhero [the Collective Man]. Mark and his girlfriend, after the fact, provided the Israeli heroine, Sabra. [Mark's girlfriend at the time was Belinda Glass.] My contributions were a flying French hero, Le Peregrine, and an aboriginal Australian sorcerer, Talisman. Mark mostly designed the costumes. The big hang-up we had that evening was a South American hero. We tossed that one around for hours. I remember suggesting the Ocelot, rightly thrown out because naming heroes and villains after animals, particularly big cats, had been done to death. Finally, I grabbed a Spanish dictionary and we just went through words, until I stumbled across 'Defensor' which means 'strength' in some form or another. Perfect. Our final hero was the South American, Defensor. Anyway, by the end of the very long evening we had seven or eight new heroes to work with. Add in Colossus, the Banshee, the Black Panther, and a couple of Russians and it wasn't anywhere near as Americentric as it began."

Gruenwald and Grant started to plot the story. Grant continued:



"We wanted to mix it up a little, do something different. We came up with a fairly complex plot, with lots of one-on-one action no one had seen before. Twist at the end, that sort of thing. The story's pretty much what we settled on but the match-ups were all changed by Bill's final write-up."

Grant recalled characters like Hawkeye, the Falcon, and the Scarlet Witch getting more of a spotlight before Mantlo's final write-up. Mantlo had put more popular fan-favorite characters to the forefront, and had told Grant, "A lot of people would be buying the book specifically to see some of the battles that we'd thrown out." Grant said, "We had some very popular Marvel heroes lose their fights and he thought the book would be a lot more commercial and successful with those particular battles, and with the popular heroes winning."

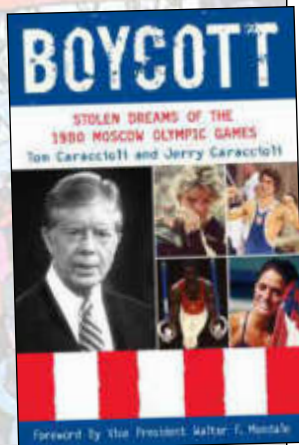
The script was given to the editor. Artist John Romita, Jr., relatively new to the comics industry at that time, was given the penciling duties, and Pablo Marcos, a longtime artist, was assigned the inking. The first pages of the story had started to materialize. The story, slated to be one of the next Treasury Editions, was supposed to come out six months later. However, real-world events put an end to that plan.

Broken Promise

Marvel Treasury Edition #25

concluded with this house ad announcing a Summer Olympics follow-up that was scrapped once the United States pulled out of the 1980 games.

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Moscow 1980 Olympics
 (left) Promotional poster for the 1980 Summer Olympics.
 (above) The book *Boycott: Stolen Dreams of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics* (New Chapter Press, 2008), by Tom Caraccioli and Jerry Caraccioli, explores the events behind the United States' refusal to participate in the games. (right) *Contest of Champions* # 1 (June 1982).

Poster © IOC Olympic Museum—Allsport/Getty Images.
 Boycott © 2008 Tom Caraccioli and Jerry Caraccioli.
 Comic © 2010 Marvel Characters, Inc.



The Summer Olympics were to be held in Moscow, Russia, in 1980. Toward the end of 1979, Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union. US President Jimmy Carter put the Soviet Union on alert: By February 20, 1980, if the Soviets failed to bring their troops out of Afghanistan, the 1980 Summer Olympics would be boycotted by the United States. The conflict was not resolved by the deadline, and Carter followed through with his threat.

Now Marvel Comics had a story that was a tie-in with the Olympics, but the boycott made it irrelevant since the United States would not be participating in the games. *The Marvel Super Heroes at the Summer Olympics Treasury* was canceled.

SALVAGING THE STORY

Meanwhile, Pablo Marcos, living in South America, received no news that the story had been taken off of the schedule or that its existing pages had been labeled as "inventory." He continued inking the pages in his possession in between more pressing assignments, as there seemed to be no deadline on the Summer Olympics pages.

But what about those international characters that had been conceived especially for the story? Bill Mantlo didn't want those creations to go to waste so he debuted some of them in the pages of the *Incredible Hulk* #250 (Aug. 1980). In a footnote, Al Milgrom, editor of the title, wrote, "But fear not, True Believer! You will have a chance to meet the Collective Man, the Soviet Super Soldiers, Sabra, the Arabian Knight, and Captain Britain in future issues of this and other Marvel Mags!"

By now, it was 1981. Tom DeFalco had become an editor at Marvel and Mark Gruenwald was his assistant editor. Regarding the seemingly abandoned project, DeFalco picked up the story from his introduction of the *Contest of Champions* collected edition (Apr. 1999):

"We were in our office one day when Pablo showed up with his forty-odd pages, and asked when he'd receive the end of the job. I had no idea what he was talking about. Mark not only did, but he immediately

realized how we could exploit those pages. Racing to Jim Shooter, who was Marvel's editor-in-chief at the time, Mark proposed that we break the story into three parts and publish it as a limited series. Jim quickly agreed. Mark called Bill, who immediately made the necessary adjustments to the plot, and then we somehow conned John Romita, Jr. into finishing it."

The idea of the miniseries format had already been used by DC Comics, which by this time had published *World of Krypton* #1–3 (July–Sept. 1979), *Untold Legend of the Batman* #1–3 (July–Sept. 1980), and *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps* #1–3 (May–July 1981). Marvel was contemplating the idea of the limited series. In an article by Mark Gruenwald in *Marvel Age* #6 (Sept. 1983), he wrote about his inception of the *Hawkeye* limited series: "I first began thinking about a limited series featuring Hawkeye in the fall of '81. Having completed a year of cosmos-creating exploits on *Thor*, I was in the mood for something literally more down to Earth, so I approached Jim Shooter with the concept."

Although Gruenwald began the first issue in the winter of '81, the *Hawkeye* limited series would not be put onto the schedule for another two years. However, when Gruenwald approached Shooter with the concept for the pages featuring all of their characters, that seemed to be a perfect fit for the company's first limited series.

There was one very big problem, however. The Marvel Universe had undergone many changes between the original story's conception in 1979 and the first issue's publication in 1982. Characters had lost their powers or had become inactive, teams had roster changes, outfits had been redesigned, and new characters had been created. The limited series was going to have to reflect the current Marvel Universe, and that was going to take a considerable amount of art corrections.

Enter: Bob Layton! Layton did so many art corrections to make the book reflect the current Marvel landscape that he received a separate credit in the first issue. Upon inspection of various pages of the original artwork,





it is obvious which characters had been covered with white paint, only to have a different character take their place or for them to disappear out of the story completely. In some cases, whole pages had to be omitted. Now, the Beast was only *visiting* Avengers Mansion, as opposed to being a member of the team since he had since joined the Defenders during the story's hiatus. When the Soviet Super Soldiers arrive on the scene to stop the Red Ghost, the Red Guardian (Dr. Tania Belinski) was by their side. She had to be written out since she had left the planet. Giant-Man (Bill Foster) was originally next to Quasar at Project Pegasus but had to be replaced by the Jack of Hearts due to the character's radiation poisoning. In the massive double-page splash, notable replacements are Wolverine (originally Yellowjacket) and Northstar (originally Wolverine). Captain Britain took over for a deceased Captain Marvel. This type of exchange was repeated again and again as one character morphed into another to make the story work. The biggest change, however, had to be the switch from Ms. Marvel to She-Hulk in the second contest.

At that particular point in Marvel continuity, Ms. Marvel's title had been canceled and the character had been de-powered by Rogue in *Avengers Annual* #10 (1981). She-Hulk, therefore, was a perfect match to take over, being another female powerhouse. Certain dialogue needed to be reworked, naturally, to make it She-Hulk-worthy. For example, she was not "soaring" anymore toward the Arabian Knight but "leaping." And when she walloped Sabra a little harder than expected, her outburst, "By Pama," (a Kree expression perfect for Ms. Marvel) was changed to the

simpler "Oops!"—all of which still didn't explain how the majority of She-Hulk's battle took place in the air.

Similar to Ms. Marvel's substitution, Ghost Rider was another character who had made an appearance only to disappear. By that point the demonic Ghost Rider was no longer able to control his powers for good. Tom DeFalco remembered that "Mark [Gruenwald] worked very closely with Bill Mantlo to update the script and Mark supervised all the art changes."

LET THE CONTEST BEGIN!

Now, with the plot rewritten and the art redone, the *Contest of Champions* was unleashed in issues cover-dated June to August 1982. The story begins with the Grandmaster, a cosmic gamesman, and the Unknown, who turns out to be Death herself, in a wager as they decide to use Earth's super-champions as their pawns. The stakes are for the life of the recently deceased Elder of the Universe, the Collector, brother of the Grandmaster, who had perished at the whims of Korvac in *Avengers* #174 (Aug. 1978). Should Grandmaster win, the life of his brother will be restored, but, should he lose, his own life will be forfeited.

The scenes change quickly as heroes are introduced only to be abducted by a strange, red glow and transported to a dome in space. (In the original script, that place was to be the Olympic Dome in Russia.) The first abduction begins when the Avengers are training in their exercise room. The team consists of Captain America, Wasp, Iron Man, Vision, Wonder Man, Scarlet Witch, and a visiting Beast. Ms. Marvel was supposed to be in this scene speaking with Wonder Man,

Didn't Have a Ghost of a Chance

(left) Unpublished Summer Olympics page featuring Ghost Rider, along with Angel and Iceman. Says writer Dan Tandarich, "I was so excited when I found this, as I had always thought a few characters were missing from the opening pages of *Contest of Champions*—and then I discovered this!" (right) An aerial She-Hulk in this revised page.

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Unpublished Olympic Dome

From the collection of Dan Tandarich, an unpublished double-page splash by artists John Romita, Jr. and Keith Williams. This art intended for the Summer Olympics one-shot could not be repurposed into *Contest of Champions* since it depicted the Olympic Dome in Russia.

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but due to the aforementioned passage of time and storyline changes, the Scarlet Witch was drawn in her place. Similarly, dialogue changes were also needed. In the original script, when the Wasp questions Beast's playful but disruptive bouncing, he answers her, explaining, "Olympic fever is what, Jan! Today's the start of the 1980 Summer Olympics! Why don't we take a breather and catch it on the tube?" But now the Beast's response is changed to "Sorry, Cap! It's just such a gas to be back in Avengers Mansion—even if it's just for a visit! The Defenders just don't have anything to compare with this!"

Groups of heroes such as the Soviet Super Soldiers, the Fantastic Four, Alpha Flight, and the X-Men are also whisked away by the red glow. The disappearances continue in New York, where Hellcat and the Valkyrie watch the Dazzler perform in a "fashionable Soho rock club," and Spider-Man climbs the walls in midtown Manhattan. (Could that have been the Marvel offices, with Mark Gruenwald looking out?)

The Savage Land, San Francisco, and the US Southwest—where the Hulk is locked in battle with Doc Samson—all lead to snatchings of heroes. In New York, Daredevil and Moon Knight are wrapping up a case, Dr. Strange and Devil-Slayer are meeting in the Sanctum Sanctorum in Greenwich Village, and Machine Man is striding across the Hudson River.

GLOBAL GUARDIANS

New heroes are introduced from around the world. Le Peregrine takes to the skies in France, only to leave no trace as he is enveloped by the crimson glow. In Australia, the Talisman is taken from his meditative trance. Defensor, from Argentina, is apprehending a paramilitary group when he suddenly disappears. School children are being rescued from a terrorist's bomb by Shamrock in Northern Ireland. Sabra is in mid-attack mode, using her energy quills in Israel. The Collective Man is pitted against a gang of thieves in the People's Republic of China before he dematerializes. The Arabian Knight vanishes from atop his flying carpet in Saudi Arabia. And, in the skies of West Germany, Blitzkrieg disappears.

In the original storyline, once heroes had blinked out, they had been immediately replaced with Olympic champions, looking bewildered and put in some precarious situations like hanging off of Moon Knight's helicopter or charging into each other in the place of the Hulk and Doc Samson.

The assembled heroes of Earth materialize in a massive dome in space. The panels that follow take full advantage of Marvel's shared-universe concept with the type of character interaction that has made this a fan-favorite series. The Beast and Sasquatch trade barbs, Iceman and Darkstar share



an awkward reunion since their time together in the Champions, and Machine Man and the Vision lament their status in society as artificial lifeforms. Canadians Shaman, Wolverine, and Vindicator compare notes on their situation. Wall-crawlers Spider-Man and Spider-Woman say hello. The Black Knight and the Arabian Knight cross swords, literally, while sub-sea heroes Triton, Stingray, and the Sub-Mariner convene. The Thing introduces the Human Torch to Quasar. Moondragon and Professor X share panel time due to the fact that they both exhibit amazing mental prowess (or possibly to show the two most famous bald heroes together). Power Man, the Black Panther, the Falcon, Brother Voodoo, and Talisman ponder their situation. An early version of the Illuminati—Dr. Strange, Mr. Fantastic, Professor X, and Iron Man—pool their intellectual resources. Characters have a chance to interact with others not in their usual circles for the first time.

The Grandmaster and the Unknown begin to choose teams and explain the goal of locating each of the four pieces of the golden Globe of Life to their captive players. Captain America was selected first, with 23 others soon to follow. In the rules of “fairness,” only homo sapiens have been chosen “excluding from the game those Immortals, Inhumans, Atlanteans, Eternals, and aliens who also occupy this world.”

THE FIRST CONTEST

The first contest is entitled “Frenzy in the Frozen North!” Daredevil, Darkstar, and Talisman play for the Grandmaster and are pitted against the Unknown’s team of the Invisible Girl, Iron Fist, and Sunfire. One may wonder why the heroes would go along with all of this. For starters, Earth has been placed in a state of suspended animation until the contest is over. Also, if the Grandmaster wins, he must, as he swears, never use the denizens of the Earth as his pawns again. If the Unknown’s team wins, she will extend the life of the sun for an extra million years.

In order to maintain entertaining interactions between the characters, Bill Mantlo, as scripter, along with Mark Gruenwald, had to keep the personalities and histories of each individual hero intact. After Sunfire jets off in his own hot-headed way, for example, Iron Fist and the Invisible Girl (Sue Richards) contemplate their plan of action. Sue thinks how unlike this situation is compared to working with the Fantastic Four. Meanwhile, Daredevil mentions the Black Widow to his Russian colleague, Darkstar. Talisman and DD both let the other know they work best alone, due to their unique abilities. The heroes get paired off immediately with a hero of the opposing team: Sunfire and Darkstar, the Invisible Girl and Talisman, and Iron Fist and Daredevil. Sue’s invisibility and Talisman’s senses-staggering bull-roarer make for some great visuals and also set up how their powers can work together, which will prove useful in the denouement of the series. Daredevil and Iron Fist meet for the first time, and both heroes’ individual fighting styles are highlighted. The struggle ends when Sunfire’s battle with Darkstar cracks the ice below, revealing a golden piece of the Globe of Life, which Daredevil quickly grasps. Score: Grandmaster, one; the Unknown, zero.



THE SECOND CONTEST

The scene then shifts to the second contest called “Ghost Town Showdown!” On one side of the abandoned settlement, Iron Man, Sabra, and the Arabian Knight represent the Unknown. On the opposing end, She-Hulk, Defensor, and Captain Britain make up the Grandmaster’s squad. Both teams have personality conflicts. Referring to remarks made by Sabra and the Arabian Knight, Iron Man responds, “How can we hope to gain the prize when we’re fighting both the Arab-Israeli conflict and the battle of the sexes at the same time?”

Meanwhile, She-Hulk and Defensor get off on the wrong foot as chivalry meets Women’s Lib. The face-offs for this round include She-Hulk vs. Sabra, Iron Man vs. Defensor, and Captain Britain vs. the Arabian Knight. Iron Man underestimates his opponent as his repulsor rays are repelled by Defensor’s vibranium shield. Sabra and the Arabian Knight continue to argue throughout the battle, with Sabra stating, “I would rather be dead than allied with you!” As the players outmaneuver each other, the Arabian Knight slips into a dilapidated building and pulls out the globe from an old forge. The point goes to the Unknown and ties the game, and that finishes the second issue.

International Heroes

Contest of Champions spotlighted heroes from beyond the continental USA.

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Around the World

Contest of Champions
not only featured
numerous characters,
but it frequently
changed locales.

From issue #1.

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STRIKE THREE

The third, and last, issue of this limited series begins with the third contest, "Siege in the City of the Dead!" On a vast, open plain, the heroes materialize: Wolverine, the Thing, and Le Peregrine for the Grandmaster; and Vanguard (of the Soviet Super Soldiers), Angel, and the Black Panther for the Unknown. Once again, personalities grate against each other. Vanguard's strategy is that they must "locate our opponents, scout their strengths, hold them in détente," while the Panther champions "stealth and cunning." Vanguard turns to the Angel and then challenges the Panther on using those skills in broad daylight on a flat plain, only to notice that he has gone from view already.

The Thing refers to Wolverine as "Shorty" and says, "You're one of those new X-Men, ain'tcha?" Many characters are meeting for the first time. Yet again, the battles ensue. Wolverine, who is ready to use deadly force, takes on the Black Panther. The Angel faces off against Le Peregrine, only to initially get trounced until he takes the measure of his foe, thinking, "This clown's fighting rings around me! Me—the guy who practically invented the idea of the winged super-hero!"

Meanwhile, the Thing teaches Vanguard a lesson in the art of superhero brawling. Even though they are on opposing teams, the Thing watches out for his old ally, the Black Panther, as Wolverine's claws get closer to his neck, only to have the Panther use his own weight against him. At the end, the heightened senses of the Black Panther and Wolverine point the Thing in the right direction under the ground to grab the third piece of the globe, giving Grandmaster the upper hand, with the score at two to one.

THE FINAL CONFLICT

The fourth and final battle is "The Struggle in the Jungle!" Captain America's idea of teamwork is quickly shattered as Blitzkrieg takes to the skies and Sasquatch stomps off complaining of the smell of sweat-soaked fur in high temperatures. These three arrive courtesy of the Grandmaster. On the other team, the Collective Man demonstrates his power to split into five beings, thereby searching the jungle more effectively, to the amazement of Storm and Shamrock, all of whom represent the Unknown. It is lightning against lightning as Storm squares off against Blitzkrieg. Storm thinks to herself, "How dare he seek to ensnare within an elemental prison, one who commands the elements?! One who is mistress of the storm!"

Shamrock's power to affect probability—thus stacking the odds in her favor—frustrates the efforts of Captain America since the two had the same idea of swinging on vines amidst the dense foliage and trees. Her luck pitted a python between her and Cap during a chase, as well as landing her safely to escape—and her green outfit serves as perfect camouflage in the jungle, especially compared to Cap's red, white, and blues. And the Collective Man puts in a surprising show of force against Sasquatch, who has pinned him down, calling upon "the strength of ten thousand of my countrymen" in order to throw off his 2000-pound opponent, only to pass out after this daring feat.

While Blitzkrieg super-charges the air, creating an electrical vortex to reveal the globe, Cap goes to reach out for it in a nearby tree. As the Star-Spangled Avenger muses to himself, "Once I reach it this contest will be over," he hears another voice: "Sorry, Captain! But I happened to be closer to it than you! Just lucky, I guess!" And with that, Shamrock takes the final piece of the Golden Globe.

Now Shamrock is on the Unknown's team. The score should be tied two to two. However, the final caption box reads, "Final score: Grandmaster, three, Unknown, one." *What?!* As the last chapter plays out, the Grandmaster is announced as the winner in front of the assembled heroes. Talisman knew "to reclaim one life-force without substituting another—would cause a disruption of the natural order." Combining his power of the mystic bull-roarer to induce dream-time with the assistance of the Invisible Girl, they reveal the Unknown to be the entity known as Death. Lady Death neglects to tell the Grandmaster that in order to resurrect his brother, another life-force of equal power, such as himself, must die in his place. Following the rules he himself put forth, the Grandmaster feels he has no choice but to accept the deal. The Collector is returned to the living, only to see a pile of ashes with the Grandmaster's garb in the center. Death and the Collector leave for parts unknown, while the heroes all return to the exact spots from which they had been abducted, thus ending the *Contest of Champions*.



TIE-BREAKER

During the course of the series, Mark Gruenwald had become a full editor. As Tom DeFalco relates, "Mark supervised the last issue, made all of the final corrections, gave me a copy to proofread, got my okay, and sent the comic to the printer." And that was supposed to be the end of *Contest of Champions* ... however, the mail kept on coming after the final issue. DeFalco soon found out why when Jim Shooter summoned Gruenwald and DeFalco into his office. According to DeFalco, "Jim was holding all three issues of *Contest*, and he wasn't smiling. Seems we screwed up. The game was actually a tie, and neither Mark nor I realized it. Jim was not pleased. He asked us what we were going to do about it. I, of course, had no idea. Mark not only did, but he immediately informed Jim that the mistake was put in deliberately to set up a sequel. I don't think Jim ever fell for that line, but *Contest* had certainly sold well enough to deserve a sequel so he approved it on the spot. Mark volunteered to call Bill and John, and I sighed with relief. I was finally through with *Contest*."

Steven Grant adds, "I was well out of the loop by that point, so I couldn't tell you where the two-two/three-one screw-up came from, except that Mark and I had put the three-one scheme into our version because this sort of thing always ended in a tie in comics and we wanted a clear winner for once."

Now, one would think that the epic story would have been enough to satisfy any Marvelite—however, there was a surprise extra like none other. Appearing in all three issues was a reference chart for the Marvel Universe

for the year 1982. The introduction for the index stated, "As a special bonus feature to commemorate this awesome gathering of super-stars, we've compiled—for the first time anywhere—a complete list of every single super hero alive today." That list included all of the active heroes of the day, as well as inactive heroes such as Yellowjacket; an honor roll of the deceased, remembering individuals such as Phoenix; superheroes of other worlds and other times like Gladiator of the Shi'ar Imperial Guard; and finally, quasi-heroes like Agatha Harkness. This was the unofficial beginning of *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*! It was the handiwork of Mark Gruenwald, with assistance from Peter Sanderson and Peter Gillis.

Marvel's second limited series, starring Hercules [*Hercules: Prince of Power*], was already advertised on the last page of the index. Marvel seemed pleased with the format, and the fans were as well. Other limited series quickly followed, with titles like *The Vision and Scarlet Witch*, *Wolverine*, *Cloak and Dagger*, *Hawkeye*, *Jack of Hearts*, *X-Men and the Micronauts*, *Iceman*, *The Falcon*, and *West Coast Avengers* all getting their time in the spotlight.

A sequel to the *Contest of Champions* did happen eventually in the two *Avengers* annuals in 1987. *West Coast Avengers Annual* #2 was written by Steve Englehart, and Tom DeFalco wrote *Avengers Annual* #16. Both were edited by Mark Gruenwald. The Grandmaster was up to his old tricks once again, using the Avengers as his pawns. Apparently, his "death" meant that he did not have to keep promises he made while he was living the first time. Both teams of Avengers battled it out, and their reward was to go up against the Legion of the Unliving. By story's end, it all came down to Hawkeye

Unpublished Pages

These two pages created for the original *Marvel Treasury Edition* failed to make the cut for *Contest of Champions*. From the Tandarich collection.

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The Contests Continue

(above) Ed Hannigan and Al Milgrom's cover to *Marvel Super Hero Contest of Champions* #3 (Aug. 1982).

The miniseries spawned a sequel and continuations, such as (right) 1987's *Avengers Annual* #16.

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and a trick he had picked up from his days in the carnival. Grandmaster couldn't resist the challenge and accepted the idea of choosing an arrow that had a modular arrow-head attached to it. He chose the wrong one, and Death was able to put her realm back in order, freeing the Avengers and exiling the Grandmaster from Death, which is what he actually wanted all along. When Captain America questioned Hawkeye about leaving the fate of the universe up to a random game of chance, he was shocked to learn that the bowman cheated. Hawkeye responded, "The whole universe was at stake! Did you expect me to be a cornball like you ... and play fair?"

There was a *Contest of Champions II* (Sept.–Nov. 1999), written by Chris Claremont, with art by Oscar Jimenez and Michael Ryan. This was completely unrelated to the original, focusing on the plans of the Brood Queen (with assistance from the Badoon). The villainess, through nanites, had the heroes of Earth fight against each other, and through a process of elimination, had a plan to use the winners as hosts for Brood embryos. Of special inter-



est were the "reader's choice battles," where fans could vote on the Marvel website to decide who should win certain bouts. These confrontations included Mr. Fantastic vs. the Hulk, Daredevil vs. Deadpool, and Gambit vs. Hawkeye. Rogue and Warbird (alias Ms. Marvel) were also featured prominently in the story's outcome.

As of this writing, a hardcover treatment of the original storyline entitled *Avengers: The Contest* will be released in the summer of 2010, three decades after *Contest of Champions*' initial inception.

The 1980 Summer Olympics and the *Contest of Champions* did have an impact on Marvel history. The results included new international characters, the launch of Marvel's first limited series, a template for the company-wide crossover event, and the beginnings of *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*. Not bad for a project that was to be shelved.

"This was the quintessential Mark Gruenwald project," says Jim Salicrup, a colleague of Mark's who also made a name for himself at Marvel as an editor. He goes on to say, "Mark loved attempting to organize chaos, and the series was the ultimate superhero fan's dream of seeing his favorite heroes battle it out."

This article is dedicated to Mark Gruenwald. Special thanks to Eliot Brown, Tom DeFalco, Steven Grant, Ralph Macchio, Al Milgrom, and Jim Salicrup for their time and recollections.

DAN TANDARICH is the former education director for the New York City Comic Book Museum and currently teaches fifth grade in Brooklyn. This is his first article for *BACK ISSUE*. Contact him at yellowjacket74@hotmail.com.



end

The Twelve Trials of

Wonder Woman®

FlashBack!



by Jim Ford

Let the Trials Begin

Detail from the cover of *Wonder Woman* #212 (June–July 1974), by artist Bob Oksner, the issue where the Amazon Princess began a dozen labors to prove herself worthy of returning to the Justice League of America.

TM & © DC Entertainment.

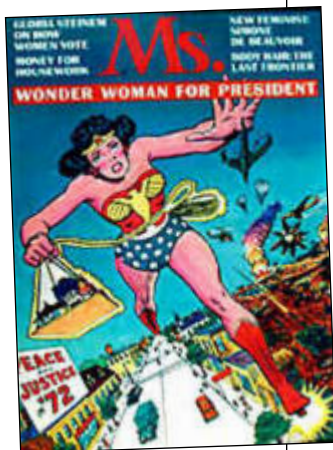
"You are about to read *Wonder Woman's* strangest story!" Superman demanded our attention, pointing to us from the cover of *Wonder Woman* #212 (June–July 1974), "And I am going to tell it to you exactly as it happened!" Who could refuse? From the opening page, we were given a seat at the table with the other members of the Justice League of America as Superman reluctantly laid out his report, exasperated that he has had to spy on a friend. He recounted his story, leading to the moment on the cover. Wonder Woman was clearly upset, crying. Superman was pleading with her to come back to the Justice League, yet she would not rejoin until she had proven herself worthy in Twelve Trials, as Heracles had completed Twelve Labors. Wonder Woman would have to surpass a test of self and defeat "The Man Who Mastered Women," a villain called the Cavalier, to complete her first trial.

RETURN TO POWER

Robert Kanigher had been the sole writer/editor of the *Wonder Woman* title since 1948, and had only relinquished the role in 1968 due to illness, making way for the character's "Big Change." Wonder Woman renounced her Amazon powers and did not appear in her widely recognizable red, white, and blue costume for nearly five years. This was her "relevancy" period, as detailed in *BACK ISSUE* #17, that lasted from early 1968 until *Wonder Woman* #204 (Jan.–Feb. 1973), when Kanigher was reassigned to the familiar post for eight issues. Wonder Woman reappeared suddenly in costume, interrupting an ongoing storyline. Kanigher unceremoniously killed her supporting cast and returned Steve Trevor to the series without any word of explanation, though Trevor had been killed several issues prior.



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It is generally believed that Gloria Steinem, leading feminist, political activist, and publisher, had something to do with the character's costumed return. Wonder Woman had appeared on the cover of the premier issue of Steinem's magazine *Ms.* in January 1972. Steinem had a business relationship with Steve Ross, CEO of Warner Communications (then-corporate owner of DC Comics). Carmine Infantino, publisher of DC Comics at the time, denied any involvement from Steinem. "I met her when she came down to the offices," Infantino said in an interview for the inaugural issue of *TwoMorrows' Comic Book Artist*. "She told me that she grew up with and loved the character; but that was it and I never saw her again. I heard nothing further." Infantino further explained that the decision to revert Wonder Woman was because of poor sales.

Julius "Julie" Schwartz was assigned *Wonder Woman* at the end of summer 1973, following Kanigher's brief return. Though not quite a Herculean task, it was arduous nonetheless. "My first job for Julie went like this," Martin Pasko, Schwartz's editorial assistant at the time, recalled in an interview on the *Word Balloon* podcast, "He calls me in and he says, 'What do you know about Wonder Woman?,' and I said, 'Not much.' And he said, 'Well I've just been handed the book and I don't think I know what I want to do with it yet. I don't know anything about Wonder Woman so your assignment is to read everything we have in the library on Wonder Woman and get a sense of the character for me,' and I said okay, and I spent the next month being immersed in the inside of William Moulton Marston's rather strange brain as interpreted by Harry Peter."



LEN WEIN

Schwartz may not have known Wonder Woman, but he knew guest-star appearances by heroes on a comic-book cover boosted sales. He guessed that the predominantly male readership, who may be reluctant to purchase an issue of *Wonder Woman*, might buy it if it featured Superman, or Flash, or Batman, so was born the idea of Wonder Woman undergoing Twelve Trials, with each story narrated by a member of the Justice League and featured prominently on the cover. "I'm not sure," Pasko says, since the idea was accomplished before he came on board, "but knowing Nelson Bridwell's love of classical literature and Greco-Roman mythology in particular, it wouldn't surprise me if he was the one who came up with it and Julie bit because it meant it bought him a whole year to figure out the series' format once the guest-starring stuff was done." E. Nelson Bridwell was Schwartz's senior assistant editor, and one of the first comics fans to become a professional.

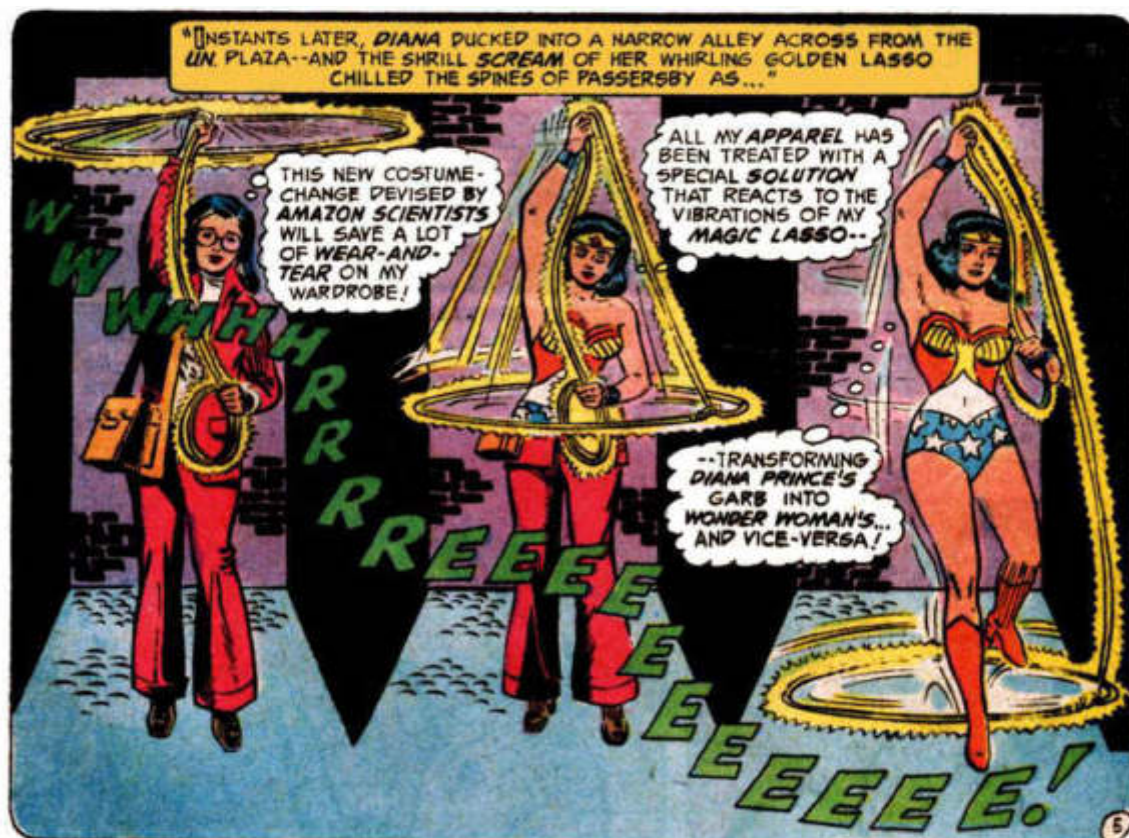
At one time or another, Schwartz edited nearly every superhero title in the DC Comics lineup. He could draw on an extensive talent pool of eager young writers and veteran professional artists. Bob Oksner was assigned the covers, working from Infantino-designed layouts. Superman artist Curt Swan was called on to pencil the first story, as he would be called on throughout Schwartz's tenure on the series.

Always mindful of the importance the readership put on consistent internal continuity, which was in disarray, Schwartz chose Len Wein to write *Wonder Woman* and return her to the Justice League. "It was just time," Wein explains, "and the JLA wasn't the same without Wonder Woman" (as the regular writer of the *Justice League of America*, he would know).

A New Spin

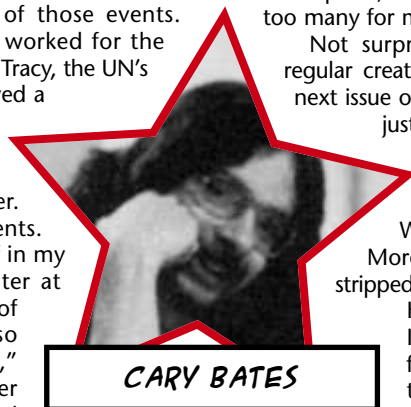
Writer Len Wein introduced this magic-lasso transformation to Wonder Woman's comic. Page 5 from issue #212 (June-July 1974), drawn by Curt Swan and Tex Blaisdell.

TM & © DC Entertainment.





Wein covered a lot of ground in his first issue, #212, building the structure for an ongoing series and establishing clear guidelines for other writers to follow. He identified the elements that defined Wonder Woman, and noted the changes from Kanigher's brief run that still existed. Wonder Woman was still an expert in martial arts from her time out of costume, but suffered amnesia of those events. Diana Prince, her alter ego, still worked for the United Nations, and while Morgan Tracy, the UN's trouble-shooter diplomat, still played a role, Wonder Woman learned that her recent relationship with Steve Trevor was a false memory implanted by her mother. Wein also added his own elements. "The single thing I'm proudest of in my one issue as *Wonder Woman* writer at the time was the introduction of her spinning her magic lasso around herself to change identities," he says. "Julie thought Wonder Woman should have a cool transformation method and that's what I came up with. I was incredibly pleased to see a version of that effect being used a few years later on the Lynda Carter *Wonder Woman* TV series. It's nice to have added something significant to the Wonder Woman mythos."



CARY BATES

GUEST STARS

Surprisingly, Len Wein was off the title after *Wonder Woman* #212. "I wasn't assigned only this one issue, I was assigned the ongoing book," Wein recalls. "It's just that, by the time I finished the issue, I was also writing *JLA*, *Swamp Thing*, and several Marvel titles a month at that point, and *Wonder Woman* was just one book too many for me to handle."

Not surprisingly, Schwartz called upon the regular creative team of *The Flash* to create the next issue of *Wonder Woman*. "Reader ... It's not just this family that's freaked out!" Flash tells us, "It's the whole world—and I am going to tell you why!"

For her second trial, Wonder Woman opposed the "The War-No-More Machine," an alien robot that stripped humanity of violence and ambition. Here, writer Cary Bates and penciler Irv Novick crafted a story like one found in any issue of *Flash*, even down to the quirky caption-with-a-pointing-hand Novick often employed [in the manner of the *Flash*'s original artist,

Carmine Infantino] to direct readers to the next sequential story panel. Novick was no stranger to Wonder Woman, having drawn her prior to Kanigher's first departure. Bates was a prolific writer, regularly writing the lead feature in *Superman* and *Action Comics*, *Superboy* starring

The Trials Continue

From late 1974, (left) Green Lantern guests in *Wonder Woman* #214, while (right) Aquaman makes a splash in #215. Cover art by Bob Oksner (with Ross Andru and Mike Esposito providing the reprint boxes on the Giant issue's cover).

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the Legion of Super-Heroes, and Supergirl. Interestingly, Bates is the only other writer to have written Wonder Woman under editor Bob Kanigher. He wrote the origin story of Nubia, Wonder Woman's lost sister, in Wonder Woman #206 (June-July 1973). "I can't recall specifically, but I'm fairly certain [Nubia] was a Kanigher creation," Bates explains. "The basic origin plot was probably his and I embellished it." While the control Julie Schwartz exerted over his writers' stories is legendary, "Bob wasn't quite the plotmeister that Julie was," Bates recalls. "Anyone familiar with Bob's own scripts won't be surprised to learn that he was more interested in the emotional hooks in a story."

Writer Elliot S! Maggin, along with Bates, was at the time one of the main writers of the Superman comics, and he alternated with Bates on Wonder Woman as well. "Great Guardians!" Green Lantern exclaimed from the cover of Wonder Woman #214 (Oct.-Nov. 1974), a 100-Page Super-Spectacular, "Has Wonder Woman snared that bomber too late to prevent it from wiping out Moscow?" In this Cold War

fable, Wonder Woman must prevent a man who made a "Wish Upon A Star" from becoming the king of a dead world for her third trial.

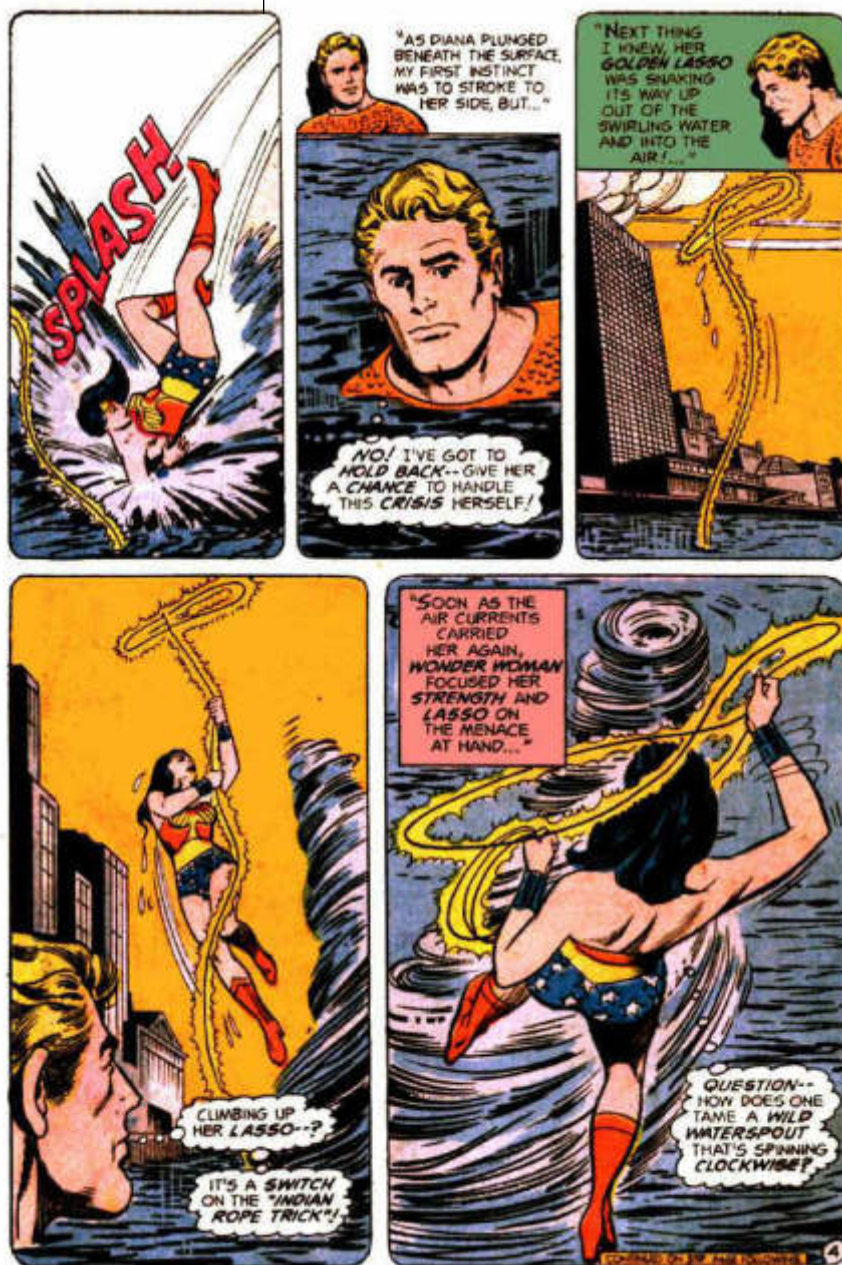
In 1974, Supergirl and Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane folded into Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen and the title was renamed Superman Family. Schwartz was given editorial control over the combined comics series. He inherited the creators formerly associated with each title and he immediately assigned John Rosenberger, the artist of Lois Lane, to Wonder Woman. Rosenberger and Cary Bates had worked together on that title, even having the costumed Wonder Woman guest-star in Lois Lane #136 (Jan.-Feb. 1974). Joined by new regular series inker Vince Colletta, also formerly of Lois Lane, they chronicled WW's fourth trial, the "Amazon Attack Against Atlantis!" where a beleaguered Aquaman asks us, "Wonder Woman can handle most menaces ... but what can even two super-heroes do against the awesome might of Mars—God of War?"

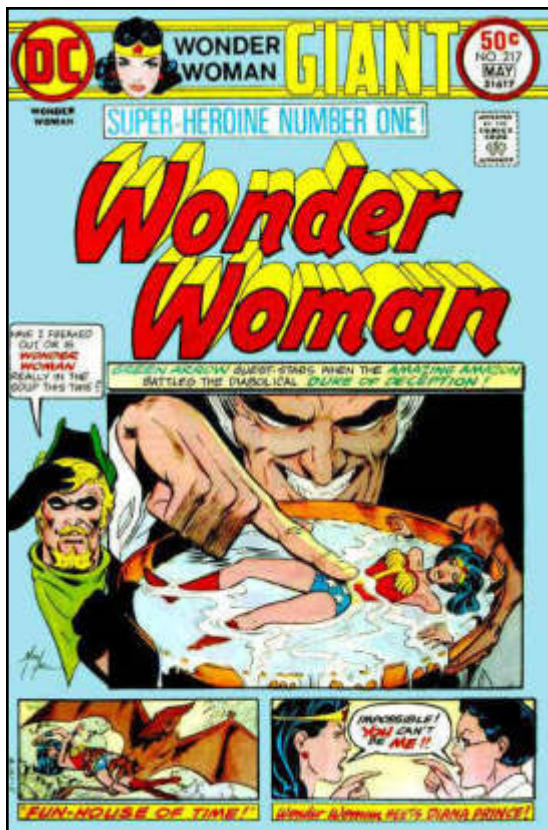
Maggin returned as the writer for the next two issues. He was the regular scripter of the Green Arrow backup series in Action Comics, which featured Black Canary, and the clear choice in presenting both their narratives. "Why are men forbidden on Paradise Island?" Black Canary questions from the cover of Wonder Woman #216 (Feb.-Mar. 1975), drawn this time

Amazon Princess and Sea King

(left) Penciler John Rosenberger (inked here by Vince Colletta) was one of the many Twelve Trials artists. Wonder Woman #215 (Dec. 1974-Jan. 1975), page 4, scripted by Cary Bates. (below) Lois Lane #136.

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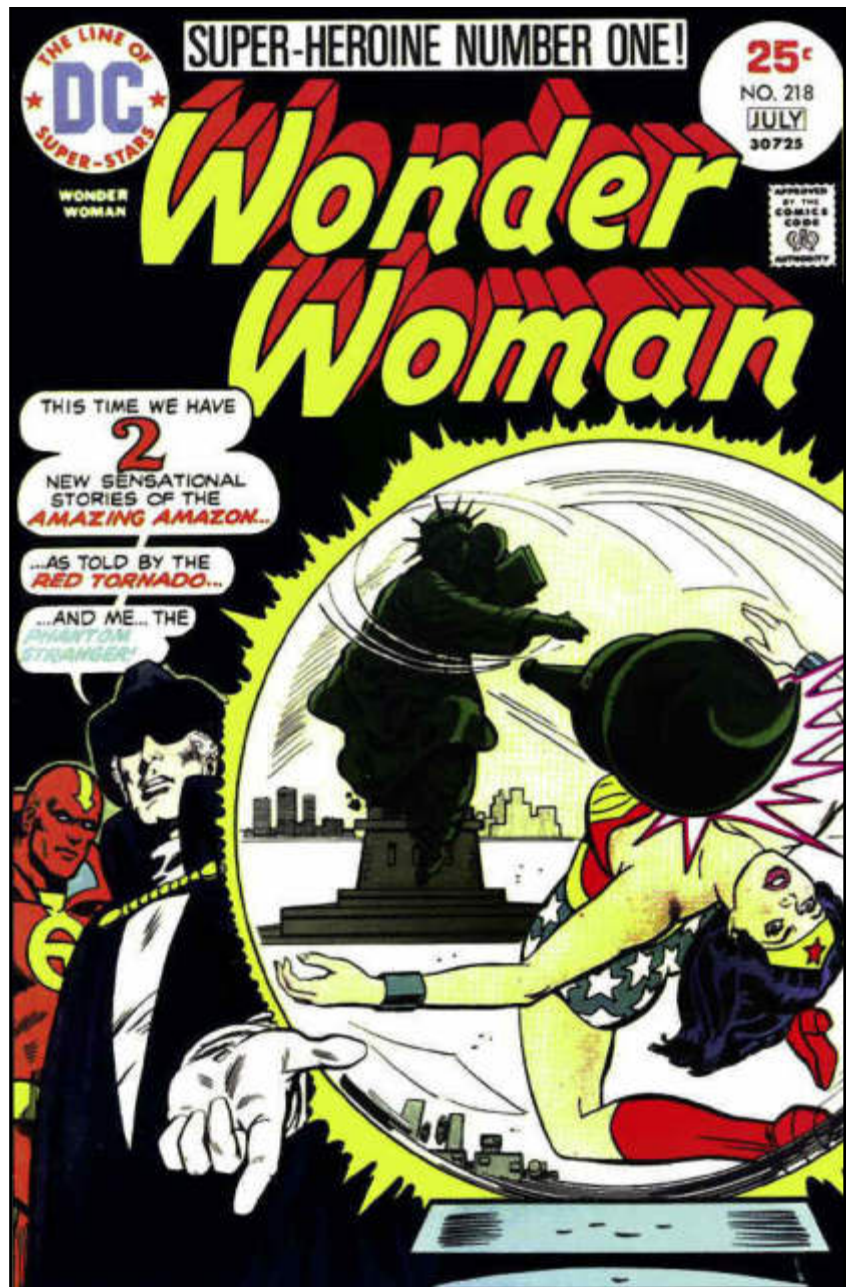




by artist Nick Cardy. Canary continues, "What would happen if one stepped on the soil of the Amazon Isle? Here, at last, is the astounding answer!" With "Paradise in Peril," Wonder Woman must stop a male invasion force from reaching the island for her fifth trial. Black Canary learns that the Amazons will fight amongst themselves to the death for the affection of any man they find on the island, a provocative variation on the traditional story that tells of the Amazons losing their immortality should any man step on Paradise Island.

Sadly, this was John Rosenberger's final issue. As described in the DC Comics fanzine *Amazing World of DC Comics* (AWoDCC) #17, Rosenberger fell ill before completing *Wonder Woman* #217. His unpublished penciled pages were showcased in AWoDCC alongside finished pages by Dick Dillin, who stepped in to completely redraw the story. Dillin, another of Schwartz's regulars, was pencil artist on *Justice League of America* and incidentally drew the story in which Wonder Woman quit the Justice League in *JLA* #69 (Feb. 1969). Until recently, Dillin had also penciled the "Green Arrow" backup series in *Action Comics*. That series was taken over by artist Mike Grell, who also furnished the cover to this 64-Page Giant issue, on which Green Arrow asks us, "Have I freaked out, or is Wonder Woman really in the soup this time?" Wonder Woman must not succumb to the tricks of her old foe the Duke of Deception to save "The Day Time Broke Loose" for her sixth trial.

It took a full year for Wonder Woman to complete half of her Twelve Trials for re-admission into the Justice League of America, given her title's bimonthly publishing schedule. Some readers, such as Mary Jo Duffy, a future Marvel editor and writer whose letter appeared at the top of the column "Wonder Words" in issue #216, thought that this was far too long a time to wait. Perhaps to both address her concerns and to try out a new regular writer, the next issue featured two stories.



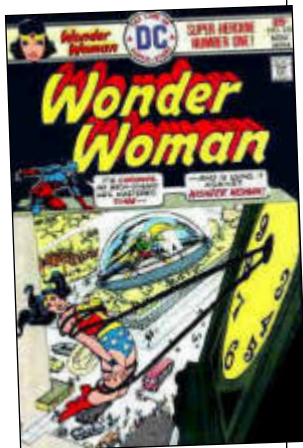
PASKO TAKES THE LEAD

Martin Pasko became the regular writer with *Wonder Woman* #218 (June–July 1975), a double bill, "This time we have 2 new sensational stories of the Amazing Amazon ... as told by the Red Tornado ... and me ... the Phantom Stranger!" the Phantom Stranger announced on the cover. Pasko had been fixing scripts for the horror anthology titles, working for editors Joe Orlando and Murray Boltinoff. For Schwartz, he began writing the "Atom" and "Fabulous World of Krypton" backup stories in the *Superman* titles before taking over the lead feature in *Wonder Woman*. These stories marked a change in tone as Pasko, newly steeped in Wonder Woman lore and familiar with the character, pushed the Justice Leaguers further into the background and used them less as protagonists than had Bates or Maggin. Both stories, "Revolt of the Wonder Weapons," narrated by Red Tornado, and "Give Her Liberty—and Give Her Death," were drawn by artist Kurt Schaffenberger,

Artist Merry-Go-Round

Among the many artists contributing to the arc was (left) Mike Grell, cover artist for *Wonder Woman* #217, featuring Green Arrow. (right) Bob Oksner returned for the Phantom Stranger/Red Tornado cover of #218.

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known at that time for his work on *Superman Family* and *Shazam!* Writer David Michelinie was credited as script consultant for the second story as Wonder Woman, for her eighth trial, defeated Justice League villain Felix Faust.

With the next issue, the Elongated Man found himself in a feminist folk tale. "Whew!," he wonders, "Let's see how Wonder Woman gets out of this deadly trap!" as he videotapes Wonder Woman gleefully entangling herself in her own golden lasso and awaiting to be killed by armed men. For her ninth trial, Wonder Woman found herself, along with fictional analogues of real women, Irish activist Bernadette Devlin, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, and tennis professional Billie Jean King, in another-dimensional "World of Enslaved Women." The strange vibes of the place



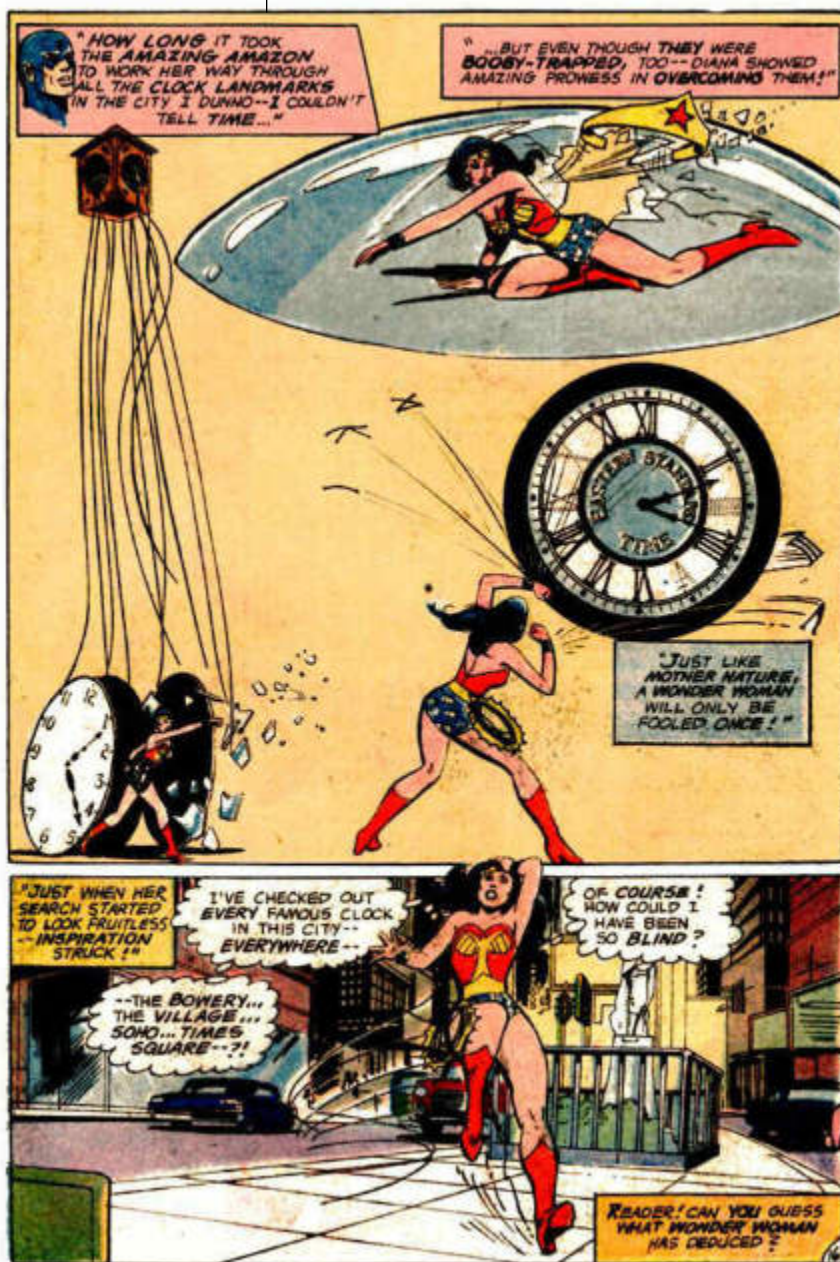
MARTY PASKO

made them glad to be imprisoned until Wonder Woman showed them the way out. "I am a pro-feminist male," Pasko says. "The mail we had been getting on the *Superman* stuff I was writing at the same time, which deliberately emphasized romanticism and the Superman/Lois sexual relationship, in an effort to determine if there even *were* a female superhero audience, suggested that my writing was able to strike a responsive chord with that demographic. So I proceeded with the understanding that, while 90% of the readership was male, my sensibility seemed to be attracting female readers as well—to both *Superman* and

Wonder Woman."

Wonder Woman #220 (Oct.–Nov. 1975) was a standard-sized comic originally scheduled to be a 64-Page Giant. Dick Giordano—who a few years earlier had inked and later illustrated many of the powerless Wonder Woman's stories—returned as artist, after providing the cover to #219, to salvage a job Neal Adams had originally accepted and had passed off to his Continuity Associates studio. Giordano, a once-and-future editor for DC, famously drew his boss Carmine Infantino as a villain in his last issue of *Wonder Woman* before resigning. Wonder Woman's tenth trial, "The Man Who Wiped Out Time," contains its own visual in-jokes as Julie Schwartz, assistant editor Bob Rozakis' wife Laurie, and Giordano himself all make brief appearances.

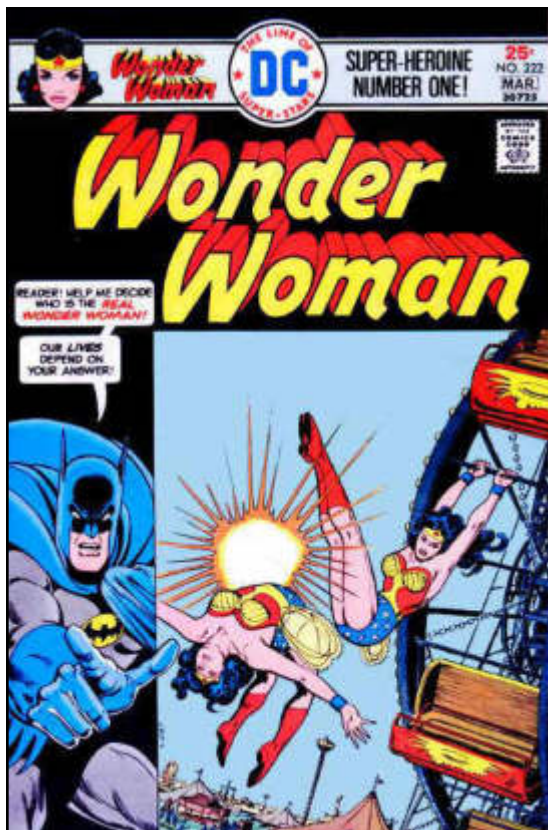
Schwartz used the Justice League appearances in *Wonder Woman* to promote the Batman "Bat-Murderer!" storyline taking place in *Detective Comics* #444–448, with Superman pointedly noting Batman's absence and Schwartz providing a referencing footnote. Batman returned from that ordeal to solve the mystery Pasko had laid out as Wonder Woman's final trial. At the same time that Atom shouted from the cover of #220, "It's Chronos, my arch-enemy! He's mastered time—and is using it against Wonder Woman!" Hawkman asked, "Who is this villain from Wonder Woman's past—and why does she seek a strange vengeance?" from the cover of issue #221 (Dec. 1975–Jan. 1976). Hawkman discovered that "The Fiend with a Face of Glass" was Doctor Cyber, who, with her lackey Professor Moon, conspired to steal Wonder Woman's face during her eleventh trial. How could Wonder Woman be in two different places at the same time? The answer, of course, was that one was an exact-energy duplicate. "Reader!" Batman demanded as two Wonder Women fought on the cover of *Wonder Woman* #222, "Help me decide who is the real Wonder Woman! Our lives depend on your answer!" Batman trailed Wonder Woman



Giordano Returns

Dick Giordano, who drew many of Wonder Woman's "Diana Prince" adventures, returned to illustrate *Wonder Woman* #220 (Oct.–Nov. 1975), guest-starring the Atom.

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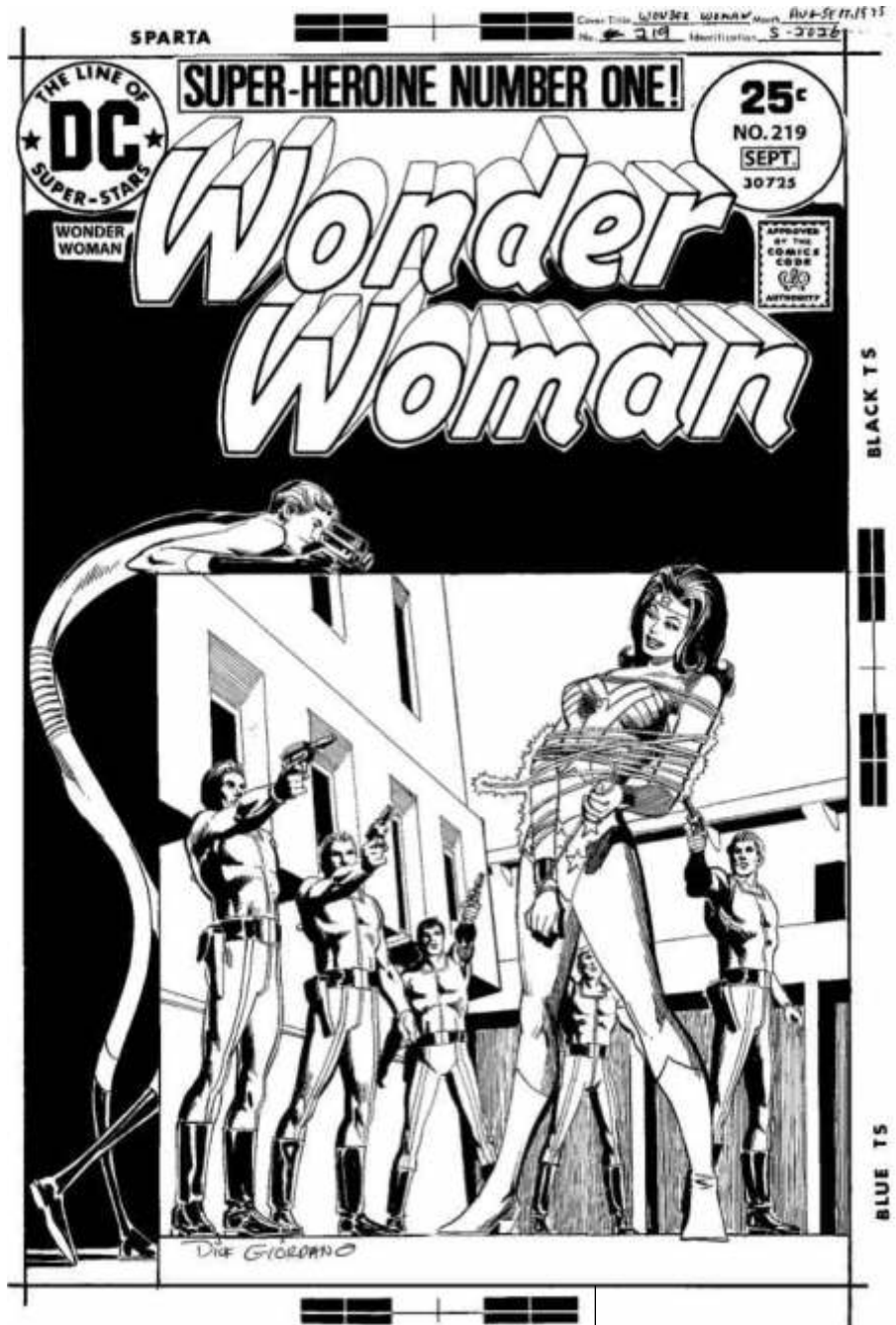


to the Dazzleland amusement park, where Wade Dazzle, a dead ringer for Walt Disney, commands, "Will the Real Wonder Woman Please ... Drop Dead!" Pencil art was by José Delbo, while new *Batman* artist Ernie Chan fittingly provided both the Hawkman and Batman (above) covers. Batman learned it was the duplicate Wonder Woman who had fought Chronos, but he awarded the real Wonder Woman a point based on the achievements of her doppelganger. Having successfully completed all Twelve Trials, Wonder Woman was unanimously accepted back into the Justice League of America.

"I wasn't terribly happy with any of them," Pasko says of his Twelve Trials stories, "as they were done under very restrictive editorial control, and an editorial sensibility with which I rarely agreed. I didn't much enjoy writing *Wonder Woman* until we were rid of that conceit."

Pasko describes having a screaming match with E. Nelson Bridwell over not explicitly naming the "stupid" purple healing ray in one of his stories: "Nelson Bridwell had inordinate (and, in my opinion, destructive) editorial influence on *Wonder Woman*: too stuck in the past, too 'married' to the Marston sickness to just shut up, step aside, and let the professionals fix the damned thing. To Nelson, if it had been published, it was 'canon' and had to be lived with. Julie was so insecure about the material that he more often than not let Nelson have his head.

"I felt that you couldn't advance the form or improve on anything if you had to approach it in a strait-jacket—that is, being hidebound and rigid and unquestioningly 'faithful' to this so-called 'canon,' which was often deeply stupid or, at the very least, ill-considered. Eventually, after doing some stories in which I tried to push the envelope a bit (particularly the two-parter called 'A Life In Flames,'



with the Judy Garland *manqué*," Pasko remembers, reflecting on his story that appeared later in *Wonder Woman* #226 and 227. "Julie started giving me more and more maneuvering room as his respect for me as a writer grew."

Pasko continued to write the series until *Wonder Woman* #232, even after Schwartz was reassigned off the title. Pasko must have proven himself worthy. Schwartz assigned him to write *Justice League of America*, and his first story reintroduced Wonder Woman to the team in *JLA* #128 (Mar. 1976).

For hours of recorded interviews with Martin Pasko and other comics creators, visit www.wordballoon.com.

JIM FORD is married and has two great boys, one of whom wants to be Superman when he grows up.



Smile! You're On Ductile Camera

Dick Giordano's original cover artwork to *Wonder Woman* #219 (Aug.–Sept. 1975), guest-starring the Elongated Man. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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end



THE SENSATIONAL NEW

In the early 1980s, DC Comics found itself in the enviable position of having landed two legends of Marvel Comics—Roy Thomas, who had succeeded Stan Lee as writer and editor, and artist Gene Colan, renowned for his work on Daredevil and Tomb of Dracula. With two creators gifted at telling dynamic superhero stories, DC seized the opportunity and paired them on Wonder Woman, hoping to breathe new life into one of its flagship characters. DC's "sensational new" incarnation first appeared in a 16-page insert in DC Comics Presents #41, then moved to Wonder Woman with issue #288.

DC's original intentions were good, but it did not ultimately work out as planned. Colan remained on the book for a total of 18 issues, but Thomas departed after only nine, returning briefly to pen issue #300. Their collaboration on Wonder Woman was well received by most fans, but both artist and writer had misgivings, as revealed in this interview.

— Dewey Cassell

DEWEY CASSELL: *How did working for DC compare to working for Marvel?*

GENE COLAN: I always wanted to work for Marvel. I never did too well up at DC. Marvel was a little better company to work for financially. They didn't let you do everything you wanted to do, but they were more open-minded as to what you wanted to do with a story and pretty much let you alone. At DC, they wanted you to be more of a generalist. I didn't like it there, but in this business it's like a revolving door, you move from one place to another and catch the work wherever you can.

ROY THOMAS: I had left Marvel because Jim Shooter had lied to me and therefore I wouldn't work under him, so I took a contract with DC. I enjoyed it for the first couple of years or so. I had told them I didn't want to do *Superman* and *Batman*—so naturally some of my first assignments were doing stories with *Superman* and *Batman*. Then, they offered me *Wonder Woman*, and I thought to myself, "This is better! Not only is she an old JSAer and Justice Leaguer, but all her adventures appear in just the one comic." As for working at DC, the main thing for me was that, at Marvel, I had edited my own books, so I wasn't technically subject to anybody except Stan. But suddenly [I was] under this DC editor for that, and that editor for this. I got along with them all and didn't have a lot of problems. It was just a different environment.

I know when Gene was doing *Wonder Woman*, they decided to put that new "W" symbol on her. Do you remember that, Gene? You were drawing her with the eagle and they came up with that W. I think you

Bustin' Loose

Wonder Woman #288 (Feb. 1982) trumpeted the debut of Roy Thomas and Gene Colan as the Amazon Princess' new creative team.

Cover inked by Dick Giordano.

TM & © DC Entertainment.

WONDER WOMAN™

by Dewey Cassell
conducted November 27, 2009



had already penciled the issue and then they went back and had to change it. I never felt that W fit very well on a woman's bust.

COLAN: I had to constantly redraw the W that they used on the bust of her costume. It made a nice-looking symbol, but it was hard to follow the lines. I had to copy it every time.

THOMAS: They paid a lot of money for the design of that W. I believe a while after that they discovered that virtually the same W was being already used by some hockey team, and I believe there was even threat of a lawsuit. It got settled amicably, one way or the other. I just didn't like the W symbol. But I loved the idea of working with you on *Wonder Woman*, Gene. That was one of the main reasons I wanted to take it. I think the first few issues we did together were a lot of fun.

CASELL: *That answers another of my questions. I wondered if you designed the W, Gene.*

COLAN: No. That's the way they handed it to me.

THOMAS: They couldn't have an honest artist design it. They had to pay real money to some outsider to design it. Just like they paid a bunch of money in that same time to design a new DC symbol that was basically the same as the old one, just tilted as if it were about to roll off. Not much to it. Think about all of the money they were spending designing things.



Bye Bye, Eagle

The preview story in *DC Comics Presents* #41 introduced Wonder Woman's updated insignia. Art by Colan and Romeo Tanghal. Courtesy of Ben Smith.

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WRITER / EDITOR

BACKISSUE! DATACARD

Beginnings:

Alter-Ego / assistant to DC Comics editor Mort Weisinger (1965)

Milestones:

Too many to adequately list, but some highlights:

The Avengers / *X-Men* / *Conan the Barbarian* / *Amazing Spider-Man* / *Fantastic Four* / *The Invaders* / *Star Wars* / *Captain Carrot and His Amazing Zoo Crew* / *All-Star Squadron* / *Infinity, Inc.* / *Arak, Son of Thunder* / *Wonder Woman* / *Shazam! The New Beginning* / *Captain Thunder and Blue Bolt* / *All-Star Companion* series

Works in Progress:

Alter Ego / *Marvel Illustrated* / *Conan: Road of Kings*



Photo by Nightscream, from the 2008 Big Apple Convention.

ROY
THOMAS

ARTIST

BACKISSUE! DATACARD

Beginnings:

Wings Comics for Fiction House in 1944

Milestones:

Journey into Mystery / *Kid Colt*, *Outlaw* / *Creepy* / *Eerie* / *The Avengers* / *Silver Surfer* / *Iron Man* / *Sub-Mariner* / *Captain Marvel* / *Captain America* / *Dr. Strange* / *Daredevil* / *Tomb of Dracula* / *Howard the Duck* / *Phantom Zone* / *Wonder Woman* / *Ragamuffins* in *Eclipse Monthly* / *Batman* in *Detective Comics* / *Night Force* / *Nathaniel Dusk*, *Private Investigator* / *Jemm: Son of Saturn* / *Silverblade* / *Rob Zombie's Spookshow Spectacular* / *Hellboy: Weird Tales*

Works in Progress:

The Invincible Gene Colan, edited by Clifford Meth / commissions

Cyberspace:

www.genecolan.com

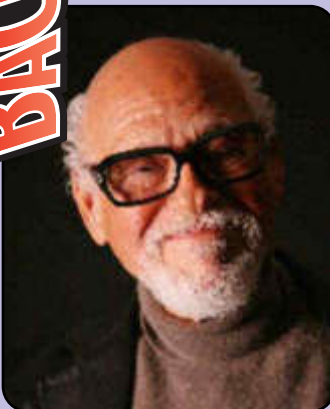


Photo courtesy of Gene Colan.

GENE
COLAN

Iron Man Revisted

(below) The splash page to *Wonder Woman* #288 (seen here in glorious pencil form, by Gene Colan) provided a sly wink to (right) an Iron Man splash from *Tales of Suspense* #73.

Wonder Woman TM &
© DC Entertainment. Iron Man ©
2010 Marvel Characters, Inc.

CASSELL: So, when you took over the character, did you get any direction about where to take it? They sort of re-branded it as "the Sensational New Wonder Woman."

THOMAS: I think the fact that I was new there, coming over from Marvel, and Gene was coming over from Marvel—they were trying to give a little bit of excitement to it. They weren't exactly starting over, but they just wanted to give it a feeling of a relaunch. Of course, they had that giveaway "preview" story that was in another comic, that sort of eased people into it, explaining how she got her powers. We wanted to go over the basics. They mostly just wanted stronger villains and better stories and better art.

I came up with the character, the Silver Swan. I thought it would be interesting to have a female villain who was an ugly duckling character that becomes this strong and attractive Silver Swan. And Gene designed this beautiful character. I was really very pleased with those issues.

CASSELL: Roy, were you writing full scripts for DC?

THOMAS: No, Gene and I did it just like back at Marvel. I wrote a plot. That was one of the things that was agreed upon when I went over there. I wasn't the

first one [at DC] doing scripts what used to be called "Marvel style." A lot of other writers were doing it. One of the reasons Marvel did so well was that Stan was giving Kirby and others, too, a lot of freedom. I still feel it's the best way to do an action script.

CASSELL: Gene, do I take it you preferred working from a plot rather than a full script?

COLAN: Yeah. That's how we worked pretty much. I get enough from a plot. I think that freedom was important. It let the artist create, be creative.

CASSELL: When you started drawing *Wonder Woman*, do you recall if they gave you any sort of background information or back issues for reference?

COLAN: Oh, yeah. I had to have reference for her. Basically, how she looked, how she dressed. And any of the other major characters. I had to make sure I got those right. Outside of that, I don't think I got much help. In telling the story, I could draw what I wanted.

CASSELL: Is it true that the splash page to the first *Wonder Woman* story is an homage to the first "Iron Man" story from *Tales to Suspense* that you did?

THOMAS: Oh, yeah. I don't know if Gene knew it. The very first "Iron Man" story that Gene drew, coincidentally, was one Stan just plotted and handed over to me to dialogue—*Tales of Suspense* #73. The story opens with a closeup of Iron Man coming down a hospital hallway. So it occurred to me, why don't I have Gene draw the same scene in *Wonder Woman*? I wanted to echo the scene from Iron Man.

CASSELL: Following the Silver Swan storyline, there was a three-parter called "Judgment in Infinity," that had over a dozen female characters in it. Was that a tough one to draw?

COLAN: I can't remember.

THOMAS: I'll bet it was. I know you didn't like it at the time. You're better off blotting it out of your mind.

COLAN: [laughter] Apparently, I have already done that.





THOMAS: I loved the idea of doing *Wonder Woman*, and we had just gotten started when the first thing they did was have this pile-up. They forced me to write a several-part story that featured all the female characters of DC. Remember that? *Wonder Woman* and Zatanna and Black Canary and everybody else. We had just had a couple of issues, and then they dropped this thing, which had nothing to do with it, in the middle of it.

After that, they decided to take the last seven or eight pages away from us—and from *Wonder Woman*—and put the Huntress in [as a backup; see *BACK ISSUE* #38 for details]. All of a sudden, we only had 17 pages instead of 20-something. With those two things, I found myself looking around to try to find some way to get off it. Even though you were drawing it, I didn't like the way they were treating the strip. They got the two of us on there to sell *Wonder Woman*, and then they didn't give us a fair chance to do it.

COLAN: Who was the editor at that time? Was it Dick Giordano?

CASSELL: It was Len Wein.

THOMAS: This was not primarily Len's doing—any of this, I don't think.

CASSELL: It seemed odd that they didn't give it a chance to establish a new readership.

THOMAS: I think the Huntress was a fine character. Give her her own book. But why shoehorn her in *Wonder Woman*? If they wanted to make something out of *Wonder Woman*, give it a chance.

CASSELL: You plotted some of the later issues, though, right?

THOMAS: I came up with the idea for the character Commander Video. But I dropped off and didn't finish it.

CASSELL: That was a favorite villain among a lot of the fans.

THOMAS: I made up that name. I liked Captain Video, but we couldn't do that, so I thought Commander Video. Later on, Mike Uslan, who by that time had moved from comic-book writer to film producer, had the rights to Captain Video, and likewise turned him into Commander Video for TV. Earlier, he talked with my then-partner Gerry Conway and me about writing it, though whether for TV or a movie I don't recall. I liked the idea of Commander Video coming out of the TV screen.

COLAN: Well, all I can tell you is that I didn't enjoy the book. It wasn't the kind of thing I wanted to do.

THOMAS: You drew women so beautifully. When they gave me the chance to do *Wonder Woman*, I jumped at it. It was a weird situation, actually. Gerry Conway was a friend of mine, and he was after DC to revamp the book, to get a different artist—and then when they finally did it, they changed the writer, as well, and he didn't get to do it. He got something else. That's the way it goes sometimes.

COLAN: They asked me to do it, but I really didn't want to do it. It had nothing to do with the writing. But I don't remember ever turning anything down

New (Bad) Blood

During the Thomas/Colan run, readers met (left) Silver Swan in *Wonder Woman* #289 (inked by Tanghal) and (right) General Electric (Commander Video) in #295 (inked by Frank McLaughlin).

TM & © DC Entertainment.

Still a Wonder

Gene Colan
commissioned sketch
of Wonder Woman
from 2001.

TM & © DC Entertainment.



flat. Whatever they gave me to draw, I did it. I felt I had to.

THOMAS: I think you told me eventually you weren't that wild about doing it. You did it very well, but I think you would have rather done some male character like Batman.

COLAN: I would have, yes. When I decided to accept it, though, I took it on and sort of slipped into it.

CASSELL: *About that same time, Gene, weren't you also drawing Batman for DC?*

COLAN: Yeah.

THOMAS: You did the one I wrote with the Mole. It was based on the Mole character from the early MAD comics.

COLAN: I did one *Superman*, too. Just one, I think.

THOMAS: Well, there were several things in the *Wonder Woman* book I was not enthusiastic about

later, but the one thing I enjoyed about those first issues was that you were drawing it.

COLAN: Well, thanks. If I'd had my choices, I would have done something else. But that's how it was. I'm not sure how long I was on it—I think at least a year.

CASSELL: *Actually, it was a year and a half.*

COLAN: Was it really that long? I've lost sense of time.

THOMAS: We were on it together and then I came back for #300.

CASSELL: *Roy, I take it that the 300th issue of Wonder Woman was co-written by your wife?*

THOMAS: Yes. That was a big issue and Dann [Thomas], Gene, and I did the main framing sequence. [Dann] was the first woman to have a writing credit on *Wonder Woman*, though I take it Joyce Murchison had written some stories under [Wonder Woman's creator] Dr. Marston back in the mid-1940s. And Dorothy Rubicek had worked on it, too, at least as a story editor rewriting dialogue and the like, though I don't know if she ever wrote an entire story.

I decided that, since it was the 300th issue, it should finally have a woman writing it. Some of that story was stuff I wanted to do and some of it was her idea. That issue also had a woman drawing one chapter. The chapter that Ross Andru drew was about the Earth-Two Wonder Woman's daughter Lyta (short for Hippolyta), who soon became Fury in *Infinity, Inc.* I think it was a good issue.

CASSELL: *The fan mail was pretty positive during this timeframe. Gene, you may not have enjoyed drawing it, but the fans seemed to like what you were doing.*

COLAN: Well, the biggest thing I had at DC was *Nathaniel Dusk*. [Editor's note: Hard-boiled PI Nathaniel Dusk was one of the "Spies and Tough Guys" spotlighted in BACK ISSUE #26.] It was reproduced from my pencils. It's hard to find a good inker. Tom Palmer was the best I've ever had. He was great, but not always available. I didn't want to ink it myself if someone was good at it.

THOMAS: Didn't Giordano ink *Wonder Woman*?

CASSELL: *Dick inked Gene's covers. Romeo Tanghal and Frank McLaughlin inked the sequential art.*

COLAN: Dick was especially good at it. I liked his stuff.

THOMAS: Whenever I get a chance to work with the people I enjoy working with, I try to do it. With *Wonder Woman*, I liked the character and the fact that I would be working with you, Gene.

CASSELL: *The two of you made a great team. It's too bad it didn't last longer.*

THOMAS: I felt they had sabotaged what they had wanted us to do. And I had a lot of other things I was doing. I didn't have the patience. If they had just left us alone and left it a regular book, I'd have stayed on it for a long time.

Thanks to Gene and Roy for the interview, as well as Ben Smith and Dawn Hammel for the artwork.

DEWEY CASSELL is a regular contributor to BACK ISSUE magazine and author of the book *The Art of George Tuska*, now sold out from TwoMorrows Publishing. He is currently writing a book about Marie Severin.



end

CAPTAIN AMERICA™

HOME FOR A HERO, THE BROOKLYN HEIGHTS YEARS

by Lex Carson



FlashBack!

It seems that every iconic comic-book hero has a home. Superman has Metropolis. Batman has Gotham. Daredevil hangs his horns in Hell's Kitchen. However, it seems a bit ironic that the symbol of American freedom and heritage, Captain America, for years lived a nomadic existence in the land that he championed. It took decades for his search of his place in the USA to be fulfilled when he returned to his roots at a home in Brooklyn.

HOMELESS HERO

For years, Captain America, a.k.a. Steve Rogers, was a man without a home. In fact, when he was revived from the Arctic ice in 1963 and came to New York City, he immediately checked into a hotel room. Cap either stayed in self-described "cheap" hotels, impersonal apartments, or lived in the mansion provided by his new teammates, the Avengers. After Rogers was kicked out of a hotel after his frequent absences and occasional fighting, writer Steve Englehart had the Sentinel of Liberty sleeping on his partner the Falcon's couch!

Why Cap never settled may have been a bit puzzling to some readers. The Sentinel of Liberty's original Marvel Age scribe, Stan Lee himself, kept Cap on the move, even going so far as having him taking a long sojourn in the West on his motorcycle. Steve Englehart perhaps sums up Marvel's feelings on the matter: "When I inherited Cap, he was mobile and I never gave any thoughts to settling him down. It would seem that Captain America would consider himself available to all of America, and not settle into any one locale."

This all changed in the 1979. The catalyst for the hero to pursue a normal outside life was the apparent death of his longtime romantic interest Sharon Carter. Carter was Steve Rogers' only romantic interest from the moment they met in *Tales of Suspense* #75 (Mar. 1966). Their tumultuous relationship had continued for years.

Ultimately, Sharon fell under the control of the manipulative Dr. Faustus and Steve viewed videotape of her graphic death by incineration.

MISTER ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD

Captain America #237 (Sept. 1979), written by Roger McKenzie and Chris Claremont, is the issue where Cap finally finds hearth and home. After Sharon Carter's apparent death, Steve Rogers disappears for weeks. His former partner, the Falcon, finds Steve's impersonal Yorkville, Manhattan, apartment empty, and his neighbors don't know and do



No Place to Hang His Mask

While keeping watch over America, Cap rarely has had time to enjoy life as Steve Rogers.

Detail from the cover of *Captain America* #284 (Aug. 1983), by Mike Zeck and John Beatty.

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MIKE FARREL



JOSH COOPER



ANNA KAPPLEBAUM



BERNIE ROSENTHAL

not care to know where he has gone. Steve eventually returns to his Avenger teammates to inform them that he was moving out of Avengers Mansion for good and moving into a Brooklyn Heights studio apartment. This brownstone, located at 569 Leaman Place, would serve as his home and base of operations for many years.

Another integral reason for this move was Steve Rogers' desire to pursue a career other than an adventurer. Other than tenure as a New York City policeman, Rogers had never held a steady civilian job. Cap had recently discovered that he was an accomplished artist prior to becoming the Super Soldier of World War II. However, brainwashing techniques during the war had caused him to forget this part of his former life. Without the notoriety of his superhero status, Rogers wanted to try his hand at commercial art and reenter the workforce.

Steve Rogers' new home of 569 Leaman Place was a boarding house, and Rogers was immediately immersed into the lives of its residents. It also caused him, for the first time as an adult, to be a part of working-class, middle-American society. The residents at Leaman Place were a diverse lot that would cause Steve Rogers to take a careful inventory of his own values.

One resident, Mike Farrel, is a college-educated, politically minded firefighter. It took Steve several issues to actually have a conversation with Mike. The first time the two meet, Farrel is running out the door at top speed for a fire call. Steve Rogers immediately is impressed with Mike's bravery and his life of action and helping others. However, as he learns more about Mike's personality, he discovers the fireman's judgmental nature and his frustration with the American justice system that didn't always punish criminals to the fullest extent of the law.

Farrel's vision of values and the direction of America eventually cause him to join the vigilante group the Watchdogs. The Watchdogs are an "American Values" organization and are not opposed to using violence and terrorist tactics to make their views known. Their actions lead the group into direct conflict with Captain America. When Cap eventually takes down the organization, he is shocked to find that Mike Farrel is one of their members. More recently, Farrel has developed an obsession with destroying Captain America. Mike Farrel has continued to battle him, and may have perished, as the costumed Super-Patriot.

Another resident of Leaman Place is Josh Cooper. In fact, "Coop" is the first person Steve Rogers meets when he moves. Cooper is overly friendly to his new tenant and explains to him that at Leaman Place, "things are different here. We stick together. It's the only way to survive." He immediately volunteers to help Steve Rogers move his furniture into the building. Throughout the years, Coop always wonders why he becomes fatigued with heavy lifting and wonders why his new artist friend appears not to tire. After the moving is completed, Rogers offers Cooper a glass of goat's milk. Despite their differences, Steve Rogers and Josh Cooper become fast friends.

Josh Cooper is an African American who teaches students with severe learning disabilities. After getting to know Josh, Steve notes, "Maybe the world could use fewer Captain Americas and more Josh Coopers!" Rogers also admires Coop for his work and the passion he puts into teaching. The father of one of Cooper's students, the superpowered Joe Smith, becomes enraged with the funding and implementation of special-needs education system and begins terrorist attacks with intentions of killing one of Cooper's fellow teachers. When Josh tells Steve about this deadly situation, Captain America quickly becomes involved, saves the endangered teacher, and captures the misguided villain.

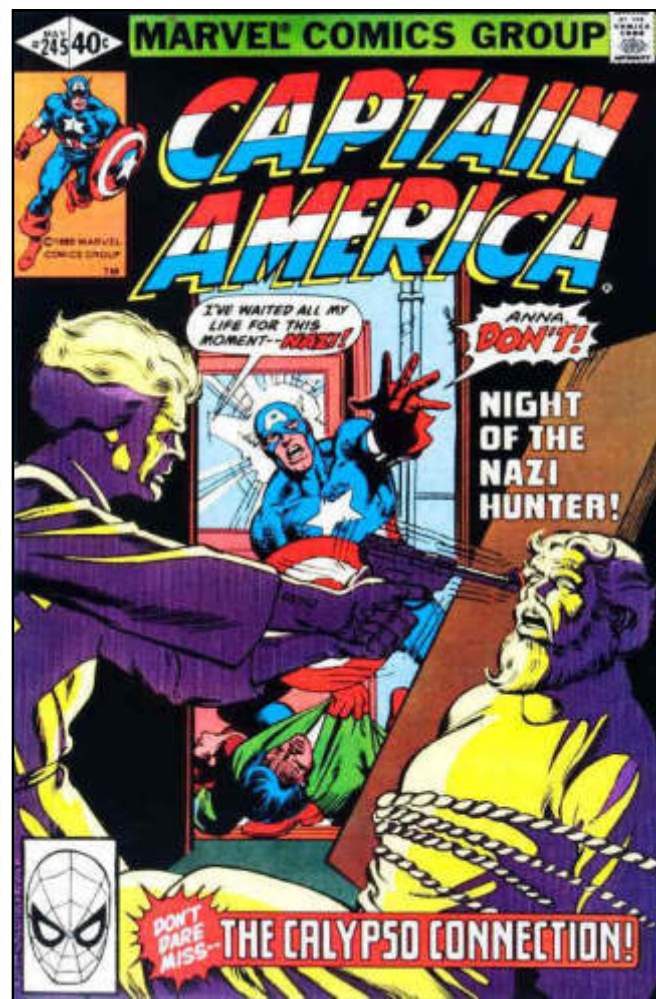
The resident landlady, Anna Kapplebaum, is perhaps the most complex character at Leaman Place. Anna is a German Jew and a Holocaust survivor, having immigrated to a new life in America. She still bears the death-camp tattooed numbers on her forearm from her ordeal. Steve Rogers immediately recognizes her from his past. Anna recalls her imprisonment and rescue from the Nazi death camp Diebenwald. Diebenwald is a fictional camp, but noted to be similar to the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Treblinka. Steve remembers how he liberated this camp, having led an Allied force as Captain America in the waning days of World War II. In particular, he specifically recalls Anna, a young teenager at Diebenwald. This young captive of the Nazis has now become his much older landlady.



**Welcome to
Brooklyn Heights**
Steve Rogers' residence
of 569 Leaman Place,
and his neighbors.

Courtesy of
Marvel.Wikia.com.

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Steve Rogers admires the spirit of Anna Kapplebaum. Despite being surrounded by death and despair at Diebenwald, she has chosen to *live*. Her life is not one of bitterness, but one of giving to others and making sure that the residents in her house are taken care of like family. In a remarkable coincidence, Anna Kapplebaum comes face to face with Dr. Mendelhaus, a notoriously sadistic camp physician from Diebenwald. She has a loaded pistol and has the opportunity to kill Mendelhaus, but at the urging of Captain America and moved by her own conscience, she chooses not to do so. Noting his belief to “temper justice with mercy,” Anna’s decision not to kill Mendelhaus further earns her the admiration of her new tenant Captain America.

CAP’S NEW LOVE

Perhaps Anna Kapplebaum’s most significant contribution to Steve Rogers was to introduce Steve Rogers to another resident of Leaman Place, a young lady who lives across the hall from the Star-Spangled Avenger, Bernadette Rosenthal. Steve Rogers will eventually enter into a romantic relationship with Bernie and the two would get engaged.

Bernie and Steve almost immediately become friends. Steve is initially very guarded about what he tells Bernie. For example, Steve is reluctant to share with her the significance of Sharon Carter’s picture in his apartment. For some time, Bernie does not know if Sharon is an old girlfriend or a family member. It will be quite some time before Rogers can overcome his

grief over the “death” of Sharon Carter and begin a romance with Bernie. [Editor’s note: As longtime and current readers of *Captain America* know, Sharon Carter did not stay dead.]

At this time, Bernie Rosenthal is somewhat different from other ladies of Marvel Comics. She is Jewish and divorced. Please recall that this is 1979, a year before the United States would elect its first divorced president, Ronald Reagan. Also, unlike other leading ladies of the comics world, Bernie quickly deduces that Steve Rogers is also Captain America. She realizes that Steve’s sermons on his beliefs about American values are the same as when she hears Captain America speak in public.

Rosenthal is somewhat aggressive in pursuing Steve Rogers. Again, this is something that makes Rogers, who had his formative years in the 1930s, somewhat uncomfortable. He is also reluctant to place another female in danger as he did to Sharon Carter and blames his adventuring for Sharon’s eventual “death.” Despite these concerns, Bernie assures Steve that she can accept his life of action and service and she is not concerned that some supervillain could attack her.

Bernie Rosenthal works as a glass blower. This somewhat obscure profession also becomes a source of friction. Economic times as well as sales at her business, “The Glass Menagerie,” eventually decline to the point where she is forced to close shop. This will cause Bernie to re-examine her life and eventually make a decision to leave New York.

Revenge

(left) *Cap* #234 splash page.
(right) On Frank Miller and Josef Rubinstein’s cover to *Captain America* #245 (May 1980), the Star-Spangled Avenger intervenes as his landlady, concentration-camp survivor Anna Kapplebaum, encounters a sadistic tormentor from her past.

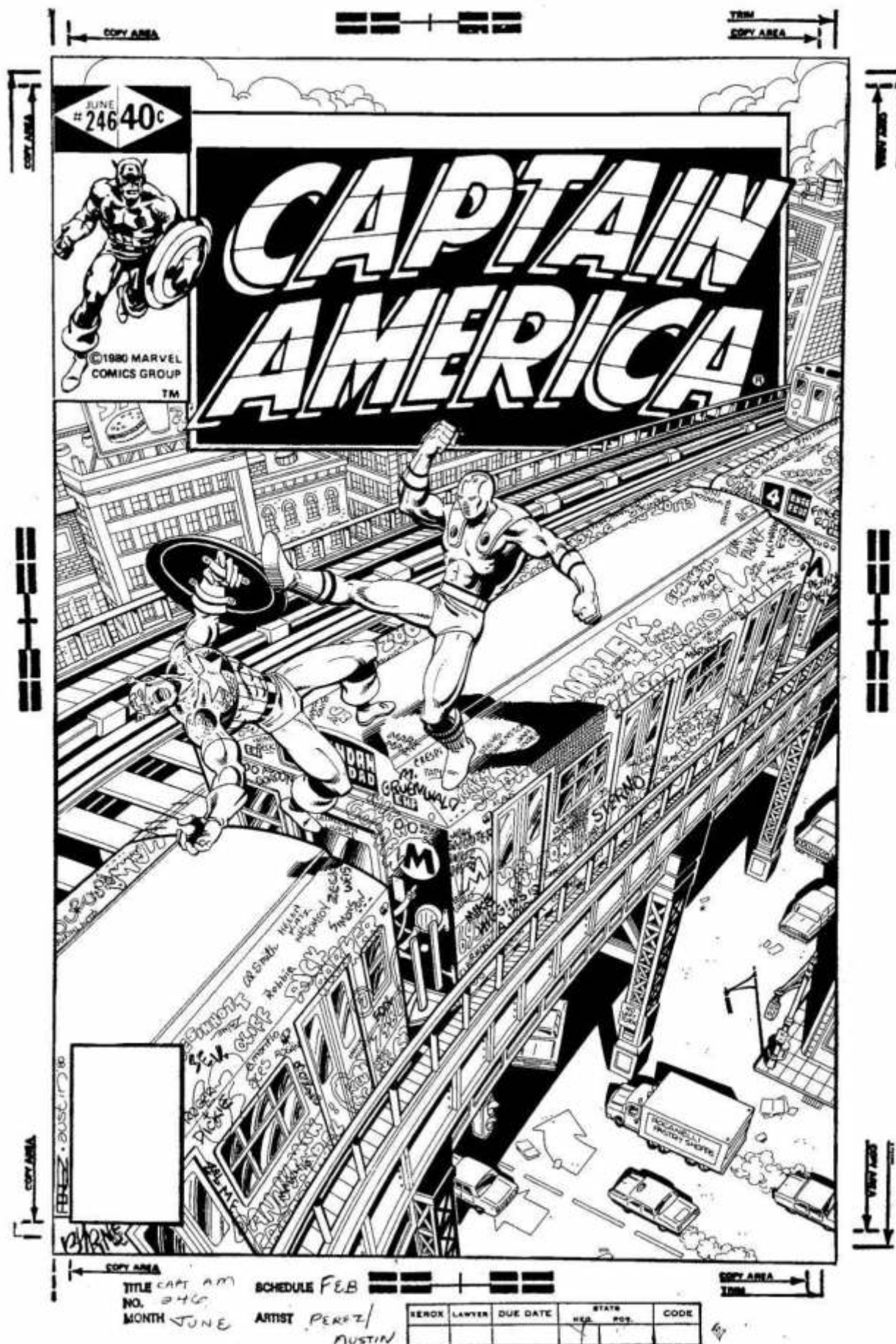
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Not Your Average Joe

Original cover artwork for *Captain America* #246 (June 1980), by George Pérez and Terry Austin. Note the subway graphitti, which contains names of the Marvel Bullpen.

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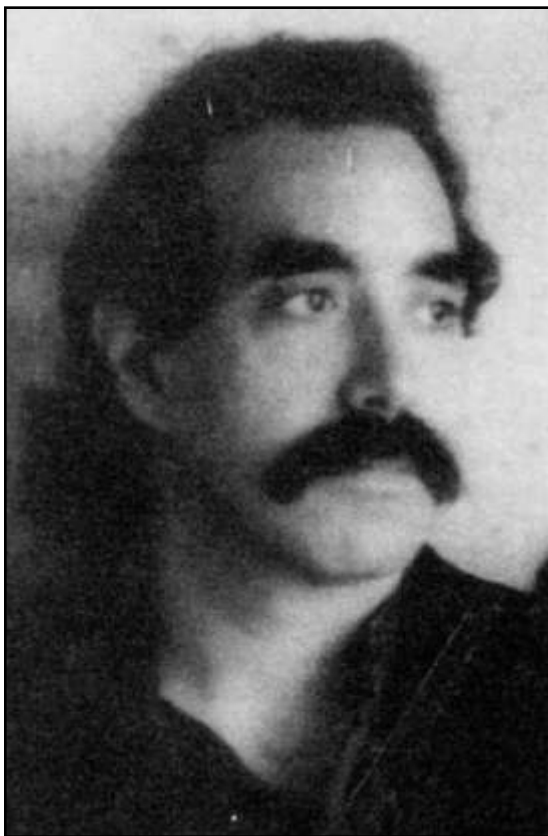


WRITERS IN RESIDENCE

The creation and development of Steve Rogers' home at 569 Leaman Place is presented from several writers' perceptions. The monthly series *Captain America* was being handled by a plethora of writers: Chris Claremont, Roger McKenzie, Peter Gillis, Roger Stern, and John Byrne, to name just a few. For several months, *Captain America* did not have a regular writer.

A major change occurs in *Captain America* #261 (Sept. 1981) when J. M. DeMatteis becomes the title's long-standing writer. In 1981, this young scribe received one of his first Marvel assignments from Jim Shooter. DeMatteis recalls his conversation with the Marvel editor-in-chief: "Jim Shooter hands me an assignment. 'There is a new Captain America movie coming out and we want to do a tie-in. Come up with a story.'" The movie was the poorly received made-for-TV adventure with Reb Brown starring as Captain America. [Editor's note: See BACK ISSUE #5 for info about TV's *Captain America* movie and its sequel.] This cinematic piece was disappointing and DeMatteis' story eventually removed all references to the movie before his publication saw print. This effort by DeMatteis saw print as a three-part story and got him awarded the job as *Cap*'s regular writer.

J. M.'s first story has a dubious beginning: On the first page, its new writer portrays Steve Rogers getting a little drunk with the Falcon and Josh Cooper. DeMatteis considers this idea a "major blunder" and Cap vows never to drink and lessen his inhibitions again. (Current readers have now learned that Captain America's Super-Soldier Serum doesn't allow him to get drunk.) Despite a brief firestorm from readers in the letters page, DeMatteis goes on to serve over four years as the writer on this series. His collaboration with artist Mike Zeck begins a seven-year collaboration for the two that produced classic storylines for not only Captain America, but also for a number of Marvel characters in the 1980s.



The new creative team also gives a fresher insight to Steve Rogers' world in Brooklyn Heights. DeMatteis grew up in Brooklyn in a time he describes as "the late 1960s and 1970s—when questioning the nature of reality was the order of the day." Having Steve Rogers enter into society for the first time into the setting of DeMatteis' formative years gives the perfect blend of the Steve Rogers American Dream with DeMatteis, the American Dreamer.

DeMatteis describes his protagonist in the following manner: "Steve Rogers, to dip into movie lore, was the George Bailey of superheroes: a simple, honest man of inherent decency, who always struggled to do the right thing—no matter how difficult it was. He wasn't concerned with ideologies or the politics of the moment. He was concerned with the American Dream. To my mind, Captain America's greatest power wasn't the strength he gained from the Super-Soldier formula: It was the depth of his compassion, his caring, and his belief in the revolutionary power of simple human decency."

Longtime Writer

(left) J. Marc DeMatteis in an early-1980s photo by Kent Williams, from *Comics Scene* #4. (below) *Cap* #276 (Dec. 1982) featured Bernie Rosenthal dealing with her knowledge of Steve Rogers' dual identity. Cover by Mike Zeck and John Beatty.

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DeMatteis Milestones

DeMatteis began his long run on the title with (right) *Captain America* #261 (Sept. 1981, cover by Zeck), which featured Steve Rogers getting tipsy. (below) The writer brought back the 1950s Bucky, Jack Monroe, in issue #281 (May 1983, cover by Zeck and Beatty).

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DOWN-HOME HERO

Brooklyn Heights becomes Captain America's home. He walks its streets. He eats in its diners. The local citizenry's struggles become his struggles. Be it Neo-Nazis promoting violence, petty criminals, or hate and intolerance from any particular group, Steve Rogers fights and denounces it while always maintaining the hope and faith of what his community and America could be. The hero had found a home and he would serve as its noble defender.

By his own admission, DeMatteis has "ambivalence about the role of violence in superhero comics." True to form, his run on this title does not feature the senseless "who can beat whom" matches that appeared to become a staple at Marvel Comics for a time. Yet an aversion to senseless destruction did not mean that the nature of villainy or a rival character's motivation was not explored in depth. Perhaps for the first time, a great deal of character development and introspection went into Cap's rogues' gallery.

For example, in *Captain America* #276 (Dec. 1982), Helmut Zemo is reintroduced. Zemo, the son of the late Heinrich Zemo, Cap's nemesis of World War II and his earliest *Avengers* stories, had not been seen since his one-time appearance, as the misguided "Phoenix" in *Captain America* #168 (Dec. 1973). After an over 100-issue absence, Helmut returns to his vendetta against Captain America. Previously Zemo's anger toward the Star-Spangled Avenger was fueled by his belief that Cap killed his father. DeMatteis adds to this character's complexity by revealing that his previous battle with Captain America in which he appeared to die in a boiling vat of Adhesive X has left Zemo's face a horrid disfigurement. Helmut's appearance, compounded with the tragic loss of his father, further complicates

the character. Since Helmut Zemo's revival, his epic struggles with Captain America have raged for decades.

BUCKY'S BACK!

Another believed-dead character revived by J. M. DeMatteis is Jack Monroe, the Bucky of the 1950s. For years, Jack was assumed to be dead, assassinated by his partner, the Captain America of the 1950s, under the mental manipulation of Dr. Faustus. In *Captain America* #281 (May 1983), we learn that Jack has survived. Re-entering into a society much more complex than the 1950s, Jack reaches out to Steve Rogers. After initial shock and disbelief, Steve lets Jack stay in his apartment and Jack eventually becomes Cap's partner as the "new" Nomad.

By far the most significant development DeMatteis gives to any villain is to Captain America's arch-enemy: Johann Schmidt, the Red Skull. Now working with British artist Paul Neary, the two compose a massive story arc culminating with *Captain America* #300 (Dec. 1984). The Red Skull will "die" while trying to carry out a complex, yet completely demoralizing, defeat of not only Captain America but also his belief system. Issue #298, "The Life and Times of the Red Skull," gives readers the ultimate origin for the Red Skull. While being true to the villain's background created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, DeMatteis inserts previously unrevealed vignettes from the Skull's childhood that helps further explain and compound Schmidt's depraved nature. [Editor's note: A Red Skull history appears elsewhere in this issue.]

In a sense, the Red Skull's "death" in issue #300 puts Captain America back at a crossroad. DeMatteis recalls that, "I began to question where Cap would go from there." Knowing that his arch-villain and his sinister plans for America were finally destroyed, the writer notes, "It seemed logical to me that Cap would have reached a point where he said, 'Enough! I've been doing this for four decades and it hasn't made the world a better place or me a better man. Violence is a dead end and I have to chart a new course.'"

DeMatteis proposed to then-Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter that Cap become a global peace activist and says that Shooter did not approve the idea. Shortly, Cap's former editor Mark Gruenwald became the title's new writer, and Captain America's life in Brooklyn Heights would soon come to an end. Bernie Rosenthal leaves Steve Rogers to attend law school at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Simultaneously, Cap moves out of 569 Leaman Place and once again becomes a mobile character, moving about the country answering citizens' calls for help in America wherever he might be needed. Steve Rogers tells Bernie Rosenthal in issue #317, "I can't shake this feeling that this is like ... the end of an era." Indeed, it was an end of an era. It was the end of a home for a hero.

LEX CARSON is a Marvel Comics Silver and Bronze Age collector and historian as well as a contributor to BACK ISSUE. He is also an active editor on the Wikia Marvel Database Project.



end



Joe Jusko illustrated this unproduced poster for the 1990 *Captain America* movie, which Marvel had hoped would rival the success of 1989's *Batman*. The *Cap* film was yanked before its US release and this stunning poster (courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions) went unseen—until now.

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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE SENTINEL OF LIBERTY?

Remembering the Roger Stern and John Byrne Era of



This is an IMAGINARY STORY ... about a perfect soldier who was born in a laboratory and became the living symbol of the glory that is America! It tells of how a frail 98-pound weakling with an unquenchable love of liberty was miraculously transformed into the ultimate human fighting machine; of his fateful past during the dark, dramatic, danger-packed years of World War II; of his relentless battle against the foes of freedom and the dread specter of Nazism; of how he fell in battle during the final days of the war and disappeared into the frozen wastes of the North Atlantic, a lost champion of the Greatest Generation, the fallen hero of a bygone era. It ends with him rising from the sea, reborn into the modern world, the star-spangled herald to a new generation of heroes. And it begins in the Golden Age of Comics...

With *Captain America Comics #1* (Mar. 1941), creators Joe Simon and Jack Kirby introduced the world to one of the most iconic superheroes of the 20th century in a story that remains as timeless as it is historic. Over the course of the ensuing 70 years, the essence of that origin story, titled "Meet Captain America," has remained remarkably consistent, while at the same time continuing to evolve, gaining further elaboration and added detail with each subsequent telling of the tale. In recent years, such notable works as *The Adventures of Captain America: Sentinel of Liberty* (Sept. 1991), *Mythos: Captain America* (Aug. 2008), and *Captain America Comics 70th Anniversary Special #1* (June 2009) have all offered their own unique take on that seminal first appearance authored by Simon and Kirby.

Yet the first truly definitive version of this origin story came in the form of *Captain America #255* (Mar. 1981), a special 40th anniversary issue courtesy of creators Roger Stern and John Byrne. Ironically due to a subsequent editorial disagreement with Marvel Comics, this revisiting of Captain America's beginnings turned out to be the end for Stern and Byrne's short-lived but still fondly remembered collaboration on the title. Lasting only nine issues, their brief tenure nonetheless managed to introduce a number of important precedents within the book that continue to reverberate to the present day. Some of these important milestones for Captain America included a new love interest, a potential bid for the White House, and a memorable jaunt to England wherein Cap reunites with some old Invaders allies to battle the Nazi-vampire Baron Blood. In 1990, this run was collected into a trade paperback titled *Captain America: War & Remembrance*, and given a new printing in 2007 to coincide with Marvel's highly publicized "The Death of Captain America" storyline.

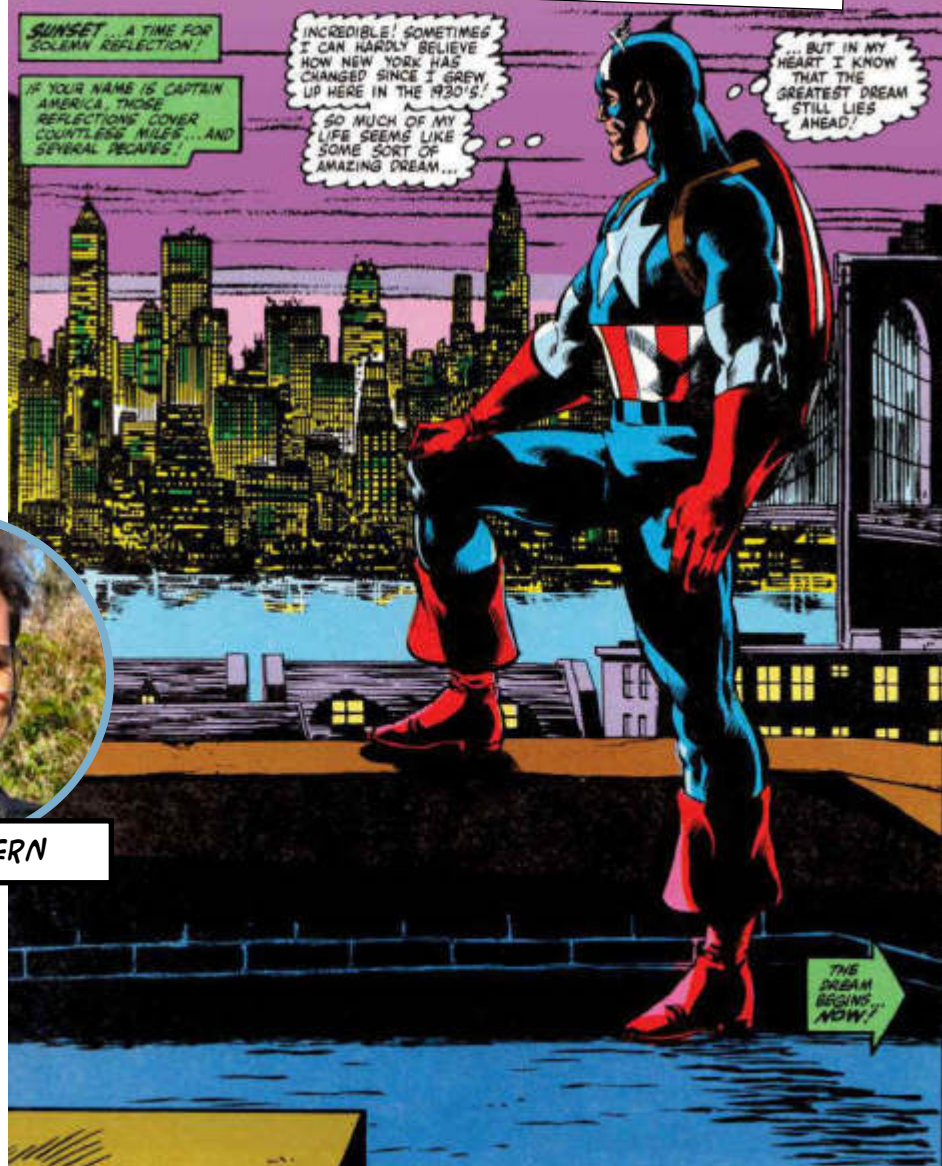


ROGER STERN

Short Run, Long Remembered

Page 1 from issue #251 (Nov. 1980), from Roger Stern and John Byrne's brief *Captain America* stint.

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In his introduction to *War & Remembrance*, writer Roger Stern recalled his initial reaction to being offered the opportunity to pen the adventures of Captain America, admitting, "Frankly the assignment gave me pause. Sure, I'd spent a year and a half as *Cap's* editor, [but] this meant sitting down and staring at a blank piece of paper until a story started to grow. And it couldn't be just any story ... it had to be a story worthy of Captain America, the Living Legend of World War II, the Sentinel of Liberty... And since Steve Rogers—the man who became Captain America—was the child of an earlier generation, that meant understanding what life was like in the United States from 1920 through the Second World War."

Despite Stern's initial trepidation, it did not take long for him to find an enthusiastic partner to handle the art chores on the book. "Before I started my research," Stern recounted, "I called up a friend of mine. 'Guess what?' I said. 'I'm going to write *Captain America*.' 'Great!' he said. 'I want to draw it!' You may have heard of my friend. His name is John Byrne."

In talking with *BACK ISSUE*, artist John Byrne still exudes an unmistakable enthusiasm toward the Sentinel of Liberty, declaring, "Captain America was one of my favorite characters from the moment I 'met' him in *Avengers* #4 (Mar. 1964). Despite being born in England and having lived, at that time, half my life in Canada, I suppose I was always something of a 'closet American.' There was something about the razzle-dazzle of the country, plus the high ideals it represented, that spoke to me. And here was Captain America, who was all that stuff walking around in a cool uniform. So when Roger asked if I would be interested in joining him on the good



JOHN BYRNE

Captain's home book, I think I said, 'Yes!' before Rog even finished the question!"

Likewise, Byrne describes his partnership with Stern in equally glowing terms. "Roger and I were always in the same groove," Byrne reflected in *TwoMorrows' Modern Masters* vol. 7: *John Byrne*. "People will often cite my nine issues of *Captain America* rather than the *X-Men* as the pinnacle of my work. Roger and I think very much the same way. I didn't contribute much in the plotting on *Cap*. That was very much Roger... But Roger and I really both agreed totally on who Captain America was, so there was no friction at all there, except the good friction that makes machines run."

As to the question of why some readers still consider his brief run on *Captain America* to be the pinnacle of his work, Byrne offers no explanation, conceding, "I cannot ever figure out why people like what they like, or don't like what they don't like. It's all way, way, way too subjective! That said, Roger and I had a whole heap of fun doing *Captain America*. Perhaps that was what people found in those pages."

Uncovered Past

(left) The cover of *Captain America* #247 (July 1980), and (below) its splash page, the issue in which the Stern/Byrne combo premiered on the title. Art by Byrne and Joe Rubinstein.

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The Sentinel's War Journal

On page 9 of *Cap* #247, Dum-Dum Dugan helps the Star-Spangled Avenger unlock some of the mysteries of the hero's past.

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THE SEARCH FOR STEVE ROGERS

"To understand the man, it's helpful to understand his times," writer Roger Stern observes, offering some present-day perspective to *BACK ISSUE* on his approach to Captain America. "Steve Rogers grew up poor during history's worst economic depression. You think things are bad now? During the worst of the Great Depression, anywhere from 25 to 40 percent of the work force was unemployed.

"As a youngster, Steve Rogers saw firsthand a world of deprivation, fear, and bigotry. But he had a loving mother and good teachers who instilled in him a love of American ideals. Rogers had been weak and sickly, but his mind was sharp and his principles strong. And it was those principles, those ideals, as much as the government's Operation: Rebirth that made Steve Rogers Captain America. And Captain America is everything that's good about the American Dream."

Stern also had very deliberate reasons for his decision to revisit the early history of *Captain America* during his run. "When I had become editor of *Captain America* in 1978,"

he explained in his *War & Remembrance* introduction, "I'd inherited a story which purported to give the background of Steve Rogers in the years before he became Captain America. While a good idea, it suffered somewhat in the execution and it radically contradicted the previously established history of our hero... No one was happy with it, and I promised myself that someday, somehow, I would clear things up for the readers. That's why, in the opening of our first story, Cap is on his way to visit his old friend Nick Fury and get to the bottom of 'this latest memory mystery' so he can get on with his life. That's also why, in our ninth issue, we spelled out the complete origin and early history of Captain America."

The story that Roger Stern refers to as having "inherited" is in fact *Captain America* #225 (Sept. 1978), written by the late Steve Gerber. The issue is actually the concluding chapter to an ongoing subplot, informally referred to as "The Search for Steve Rogers." This subplot focused on the fact that Steve Rogers had almost no memory of his life prior to the experiment that turned him into Captain America. Eventually, after many months of psychological confusion, Rogers becomes so desperate to uncover his past that he undergoes an experimental mind-probe in the hopes of reclaiming his lost memories. It's worth noting that throughout this "memory mystery" period in *Cap's* history, there was a fair amount of creative reshuffling going on behind the scenes, including Don Glut replacing Roy Thomas as writer after only three issues, only to have Glut then replaced by Steve Gerber after just three issues of his own. "By the time I became the editor of *Captain America*," Stern recalls, "Steve [Gerber] had already left the book, and I think that Roger McKenzie had already been hired. I do recall that the book was in desperate shape as far as deadlines were concerned. That is why an inventory story written by Peter Gillis was slotted before Gerber's last issue. I basically inherited that issue, and there wasn't time to do anything more than check it for typos and send it out the door."

Gerber's aforementioned final issue offers a melancholy tale in which Steve Rogers finally rediscovers his past, recalling an unhappy childhood as a frail and introverted young man. Due to his sensitive and artistic nature, Steve grows estranged from his demanding father, who clearly favors Steve's athletic and confident older brother Mike. This rift deepens when Steve's pacifist beliefs cause him to oppose America's entrance into World War II. When Mike is then killed during the attack on Pearl Harbor, Steve tries to enlist in the Army, only to be rejected on the grounds of a heart murmur, which leads him to be chosen as a test subject for Operation: Rebirth.

Despite the various merits of Gerber's story, it feels far more resonant with the zeitgeist of the Vietnam era than that of World War II America, and violated existing continuity in several respects. "The most obvious error in that story was showing Steve Rogers attempting to enlist after the attack," Stern points out. "Simon and Kirby's first issue of *Captain America Comics*, cover-dated March 1941, actually went on sale in December of 1940, almost a year before Pearl Harbor. Cap came into being before the United States entered the war, and that wasn't just a Golden Age thing. There had been a number of later Marvel Comics establishing that Rogers became Captain America long before Pearl Harbor—notably in the *Invaders* series, which was still running at the time of that story. Any suggestion that Rogers had a change of heart only after the death of a



previously unmentioned brother just didn't work with what we already knew about him."

Stern goes on to note, "The childhood in suburban Maryland—the young Steve Rogers being a pacifist with 'no interest in girls or sports'—was contrary to everything we'd ever been shown about Steve Rogers. In fact, just four years earlier, in *Captain America* #176 (Aug. 1974) Steve Englehart had established that Rogers was an urban kid, born and raised in Manhattan. Steve Gerber's story seems to have been an attempt to give Captain America more depth. Not a bad goal, but the backstory he came up with just didn't fit Steve Rogers. If you wanted to give him more depth, all you really had to do was delve into the times in which Steve Rogers came of age: The war had been going on for nearly a year when Simon and Kirby created Captain America. Granted, in 1940 there was still a strong isolationist element in America. But people who had any inkling of what was going on in occupied Europe wanted to do something, even *before* Pearl Harbor. Simon and Kirby saw what was going on. Captain America was their answer to that sentiment."

TRUE LIES

Thus in his first issue as the new writer, Roger Stern begins his collaboration with John Byrne in *Captain America* #247 (July 1980) by tidying up some of the lingering character inconsistencies inherited from previous writers. Specifically, the story opens with Captain America seeking help from spymaster Nick Fury, director of S.H.I.E.L.D., to unscramble the "jumbled memories" that have recently resurfaced in his mind. "I've always been a little uneasy about the blank spots in my memory," the hero frets. "The shock my system endured when I was thrown into suspended animation at the war's end was pretty severe! There were a lot of things I couldn't remember... But this latest memory mystery has been bothering me... I've got to clear it up—at once!"

Fortunately for Captain America, Nick Fury has already been investigating Steve Rogers' past on his own and even succeeded in locating an old Army footlocker belonging to Rogers that has been kept in storage all these years. While rummaging through the old footlocker, Cap discovers his original, badge-shaped shield [as depicted in the hero's first appearance in *Captain America Comics* #1]. Cap also finds an old war journal, which he promptly utilizes to uncover the truth behind his jumbled, sometimes contradictory memories. In a clever bit of retroactive continuity mending, Stern reconciles all of the earlier inconsistencies by explaining that Rogers underwent an experimental procedure during the war in which he was implanted with various false memories as a defense mechanism against interrogation should he be captured by the enemy.

"That's it!" Cap proclaims in welcome relief. "Pre-programmed false memories! Thank heaven I remember now! I remember it all... I grew up in Manhattan ... on the Lower East Side! I was orphaned in my teens ... it all comes back, so real and true!"

Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robotmaker

Mark Gruenwald's sketch for the Marvel supervillain Machinesmith, shared with
BACK ISSUE by Roger Stern.

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SUICIDE BY CAP

Yet no sooner does Captain America finally manage to unravel the puzzle of his tangled past than he is suddenly attacked by one of the great Nazi villains from that selfsame era, Baron Strucker. Using his old shield, Cap aids Nick Fury in fending off the Baron's assault, only to discover that they have actually been fighting a sophisticated robotic doppelganger created by the mysterious Machinesmith. When Cap later suffers a second attack at the hands of the synthetic monstrosity called Dragon Man, he uses the encounter to track down the Machinesmith at a secret laboratory. After fighting his way through a veritable robotic army of Machinesmith duplicates, Cap puts an end to the threat by destroying the central computer system controlling the robots. However, in a final twist, the slowly disintegrating computer system reveals that it intentionally lured Captain America to the secret laboratory specifically for the purpose of achieving its own demise. As it turns out, the Machinesmith had once been a man, but foolishly programmed his robotic constructs to preserve his life at all costs, thereby prompting them to upload his mind into the central computer system, trapping his consciousness within its lifeless mainframe. "You used me to commit ... suicide," Cap realizes.



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Suicide by Cap

(right) Cap #249

(Sept. 1980)

featured a startling
turn of events
(below) involving
the Machinesmith.

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"Believe me," the Machinesmith replies with his dying words, "there are cases where the quality of life falls so low ... it becomes little more than a mockery of what life should be!"

If the euthanasia subtext of the story seems particularly striking, it is likely because Stern gave careful thought to his use of the Machinesmith. "I had originally devised the Machinesmith character for one of Bill Mantlo's *Marvel Two-in-One* stories," Stern notes. "Mark Gruenwald had come up with the character design. I really liked the look Gruenwald gave 'Smith, so I decided to use him as the master villain in our first *Cap* story arc. And in thinking through 'Smith's motivations, I realized that he probably wanted to die, preferring the possibility of oblivion to an existence maintained by computer memory. There's a phenomenon called 'Suicide by Cop' in which a despondent individual will deliberately threaten a police officer, usually with an unloaded firearm, in hopes that the officer will shoot and kill him. The fail-safes in Machinesmith's cybernetics kept him from ending his own 'life,' and his defense systems would have been too much for ordinary policemen to overcome. But the data he gathered led him to believe that 'Suicide by Cap' was a possibility."

LOVE, AMERICAN STYLE

At the same time that Captain America was contending with the bizarre machinations of the Machinesmith, he still found time to pursue a civilian career as a commercial artist, and a new romance in the form of neighbor Benadette 'Bernie' Rosenthal. Stern discussed his thinking behind this romantic subplot in an interview with Dugan Trodgen for *Marvel Spotlight: Captain America Remembered* (2007). "Steve needed a little romance in his life," the writer told Trodgen. "Since the Avengers had revived him, the only love in his life had been S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent Sharon Carter, and when we started on the book, she was dead. I thought that if Steve Rogers was going to have a life out of costume, he needed a smart, down-to-earth sweetheart—someone who wasn't a secret agent or another superhero. And that was Bernie. The thing that I really liked about their relationship was that while Bernie and Steve were about the same 'age' physiologically, culturally they had a May-December romance."

This cultural divide becomes clear when Bernie expresses her appreciation for Bruce Springsteen and Elvis Costello, only to be met by a blank stare from Steve Rogers, who instead prefers the musical styling of Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller. Similarly, when the two venture out to the theater together, Steve convinces her to go see a revival of *Oklahoma!*, whereas Bernie is more interested in seeing the avant-garde theatrical revue *Oh! Calcutta!* Throughout these interludes, Stern and Byrne invest the character of Steve Rogers with an array of humanizing details, allowing him to demonstrate moments of shyness, charm, and self-deprecating humor. Herein Rogers reveals himself to be a man who comes home to an empty kitchen, pulls all-nighters to meet a deadline, and doesn't even know the name of his local congressman.

"It was more a matter of showing the private man," Stern says of his efforts to humanize Steve Rogers. "Captain America always occupied so much of Steve's life. The trick was to step back and take the time—and the panel space—to show what his life was like when he took off the mask. Cap is such an iconic hero that there's always a danger of his being portrayed as just a symbol. To show his basic humanity, I thought it was important that we show what he was like 'off duty.' John and I were lucky in that there was a format change midway through our run, giving us five extra pages of story space per issue."

Paradoxically, Stern and Byrne finally succeeded here in resolving "The Search for Steve Rogers" not by rewriting his past, but by enriching his present, particularly in the form of his "May-December" romance with Bernie. Perhaps it is for this reason that Bernie continued appearing in the pages of *Captain America* long after Stern and Byrne had departed from the series. In fact it wasn't until the early 1990s, more than a full decade later, that Bernie finally made her exit from the title with *Captain America* #431 (Sept. 1994).



The People's Choice

Original Byrne/Rubinstein art to page 8 of Cap #250 (Oct. 1980), where our hero contemplates a presidential bid. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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"Yeah, when I did my research for [2009's] *Captain America* #600, I was a little surprised by how often she'd appeared over the years," Stern confesses. "I don't recall that we had any specific model for Bernie. Mainly, we wanted her to be different from Sharon Carter, in both appearance and demeanor. We'd decided that Bernie had a background in the arts. And John had known a fellow student in art school who was a glass-blower, so he knew what the gear looked like." As for where the writer saw the relationship eventually heading, Stern replies, "I don't believe we'd planned that far ahead. We were just going to let any romance develop naturally."

PRESIDENTIAL MATERIAL

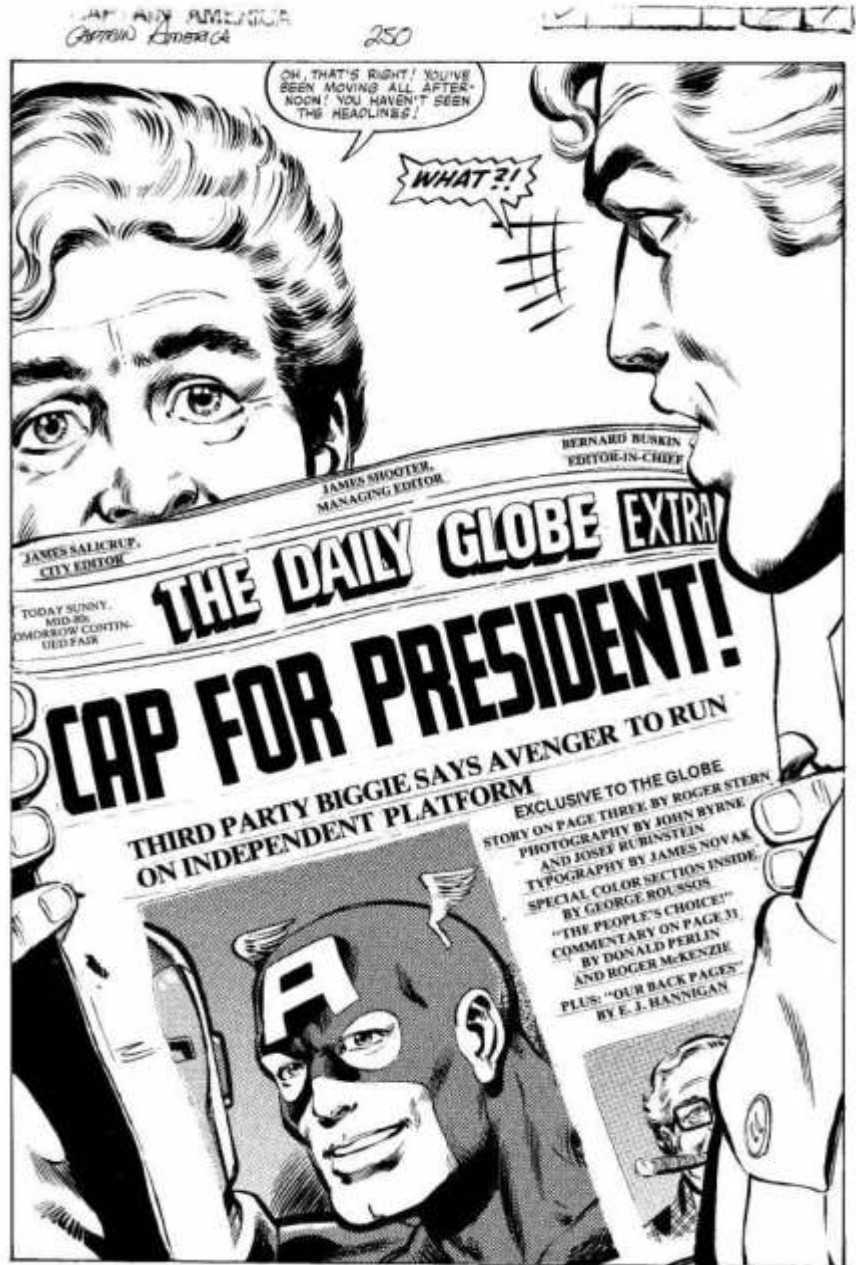
Appropriately enough, the profound changes occurring in the life of Captain America during this period were mirrored by the nation itself. Just as the United States prepared to elect a new president in the form of actor-turned-politician Ronald Reagan, within the pages of *Captain America* an even more famous figure found himself caught up in the campaign for the White House. Released in the months leading up to the actual election, *Captain America* #250 (Oct. 1980) opens routinely enough, as Cap dispenses with a small band of gun-toting terrorists holding hostages at a convention hall. After disarming the gunmen, Captain America learns that the freed hostages are all members of an independent political party called the New Populist Party (NPP). Before long, NPP chairman Samuel T. Underwood becomes so impressed with Captain America that he tries to recruit the hero into becoming the NPP's new candidate for President. Although Cap scoffs at the idea, Underwood persists, arguing, "The people don't want a politician ... they want a leader ... and what do we have to offer as presidential material this year? The same type of political idiots the Demos and the G.O.P. keep putting up! People want a change, Cap.... And you could be that change!"

Despite Underwood's impassioned plea, Cap repeatedly dismisses the notion, until finally agreeing to at least consider it. Unfortunately for Captain America, this small gesture allows Underwood to alert the media with news of Cap's presumptive candidacy. "The American people will convince him for us," Underwood assures his staff. "If I work this right, Cap's sense of duty will force him to run!"

Indeed, Underwood's plan actually starts to play out just as he had hoped. Although Steve Rogers is agast at the front-page newspaper headline announcing, "CAP FOR PRESIDENT!" his friends and neighbors are far less skeptical about the prospect. "You'd actually vote for a man who is basically anonymous?" Steve asks them. "What does he know about foreign affairs, or energy, or inflation?"

"Oh, Steve," Bernie counters, "What do any of the candidates really know about those things? Wouldn't it be great to have a president you knew you could trust?"

Still unsure what to make of the idea, Cap grows even more conflicted when he meets up with his



Avengers teammates, who are themselves divided on the topic. "I'm ready to hit the campaign trail," the Beast promises. "I can guarantee that you'll sweep the mutant vote!" The Wasp also voices her support, saying, "You're just the kind of man this country needs!"

In contrast, Iron Man and the Vision are incredulous at the prospect. "You're not serious about this presidential nonsense, are you?" Iron Man asks. "You of all people should know better than to get mixed up in politics! You know the type of red tape and corruption you'd be faced with!" The Vision also voices his disapproval, maintaining, "You are a man out of time, Cap ... 1940s solutions will not work for today's problems!"

After some deep soul-searching over how best to fulfill his patriotic duty to the country he loves, Captain America decides to address the nation in a live, televised speech from the NPP Convention. "I have worked and fought my whole life for the growth and advancement of the American Dream," Cap tells an anxious crowd. "And as long as the Dream remains even partially unfulfilled, I cannot abandon it! And so I hope you can understand—I cannot be your candidate." Captain America goes on to urge the disappointed



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Bittersweet Moments

(left) Cap prepares to make the announcement of his lifetime in issue #250. (below) Steve Rogers' rather awkward reunion with former ally Spitfire in *Cap* #253 (Jan. 1981).

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audience, "Look within yourselves to find the people you need to keep this nation strong ... and, God willing, to help make the Dream come true!"

Interestingly, this classic "Cap for President" story was actually an idea first proposed to Roger Stern some years earlier when he was editing the series. As Stern explained in his *Marvel Spotlight* interview with Trodglan, "When Don Perlin and Roger McKenzie were working on *Captain America*, and I was their editor, they'd wanted to have Cap run for president. But they'd also wanted to have Cap win the election and operate out of the White House for the next four years! And I thought that premise was just too far-fetched. A year or so after that [John Byrne and I] were having dinner after work with [Marvel editor-in-chief] Jim Shooter ... tossing ideas around, trying to think of something special to do for *Captain America* #250... Jim suggested that we consider the 'Cap for President' idea. I was still skeptical at first. After all, I really didn't think that Cap was the type who would be interested in running for office. But then Jim said that should be the whole point of the story—that we should make it about who Cap is and why he wouldn't run. We'd taken the premise in a totally different direction from the one Don and Mac had suggested, [but] I made sure that they were credited with the idea on the letters page in *Cap* #250."

Some three decades later, this memorable "Cap for President" issue has lost none of its charm or relevance, and even seems prescient in some ways. Reflecting on the story in late 2009, Stern confides, "I've always tried to follow my father's example and vote for candidates, rather than parties. I like to see good candidates running for office—and bad candidates voted out. I wasn't very enthused by any of the potential presidential candidates in 1980, and I'm sure that feeling affected the story. In that respect I'm afraid that 'Cap for President' could have been retold almost every four years without requiring much updating ... until 2008. The results of that last election made me more optimistic for the country than I've been in decades."

CREDIBLE THREATS

In the wake of Captain America's aborted run for the White House, Stern and Byrne ramp up the action quotient for a two-part thriller in *Captain America* #251–252 (Nov.–Dec. 1980), in which Cap must contend with both Mr. Hyde and Batroc the Leaper, while thwarting their mad plot to annihilate Manhattan by ramming a giant supertanker carrying 50,000 tons of liquefied natural gas into the docks of New York Harbor. Sadly, this light-hearted and high-spirited adventure takes on a slightly more ominous tone in a post-9/11 world due to real-life concerns over terrorists employing supertankers as de facto weapons of mass destruction against America's harbors.

"Just because *Captain America* is primarily an action/adventure series, doesn't mean we couldn't touch on deeper subjects," Stern asserts. "Over the course of our run, we dealt with euthanasia, politics, terrorism and extortion, and aging. I didn't have





"And I Love Me Some Quirky!"

Artist Frank Robbins' interpretation of Cap was a favorite of creators Roger Stern and John Byrne. Detail from page 6 of *Captain America* #190.

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answers to those problems, but I think that including them as part of the stories gave a good dash of reality to the series. In the case of the Batroc and Hyde story, I had read an article about natural gas supertankers and the danger they could present in a populated area. That seemed like something that a conscienceless supervillain like Hyde would try to use as a weapon. I saw it as a great opportunity to get Cap into another great deathtrap. We were able to pit him against a couple of classic Lee/Kirby villains, all in the middle of a credible real-life threat."

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

On the heels of his battle with Batroc the Leaper, Captain America jumps across the pond to merry old England in *Captain America* #253–254 (Jan.–Feb. 1981) after receiving a cryptic summons from Lord James Montgomery Falsworth. Now an elderly recluse confined to a wheelchair, Lord Falsworth was once the World War I British hero known as Union Jack, and later an ally of Captain America during World War II. Upon arriving at Falsworth Manor in the UK, Cap is joyfully reunited with Lord Falsworth's daughter, the Lady Jacqueline Falsworth-Crichton, who also served as a wartime ally of Captain America under her superheroine guise of Spitfire. This reunion between Cap and Spitfire actually takes on a wonderfully bittersweet quality as the middle-aged Lady Crichton suddenly becomes self-conscious of her faded beauty when confronted by the timeless visage of Steve Rogers, who looks exactly as he did when they last saw each other almost 40 years ago. It is a brief yet lovely little moment that adds a breath of genuine emotion to the proceedings.

Once Lord Falsworth finally makes his entrance, he informs Cap of the reason for his summons, explaining that a series of grizzly murders have been taking place in a nearby village. Upon learning that the murder victims were all drained of their blood, Lord Falsworth deduces that his old enemy, the Nazi-vampire Baron Blood, must be the true culprit behind the killings. Despite the skepticism of Lady Crichton, who believes that her father is growing senile, Cap trusts the suspicions of Lord Falsworth and agrees to investigate the murders. Following a visit to Baron Blood's crypt hidden within the Tower of London, Cap exposes Blood to be the killer and almost gets turned into a vampire himself in the process. Nevertheless, Cap sets a trap for Baron Blood by enlisting the aid of a working-class ruffian named Joey Chapman to pose as Union Jack, thereby luring the vampire out of hiding. Although the ruse works perfectly, Captain America is forced to decapitate the undead villain with his shield in an uncharacteristically brutal act of violence that is deeply upsetting for the hero. The victory also comes at a grave cost for Lord Falsworth, whose heart finally gives out after the ordeal, claiming his life just as he burns the remains of his longtime enemy.

Significantly, this two-part mystery not only presented readers with an exceptional gothic tale, it also reintroduced a number of key elements from the classic *Invaders* series such as Baron Blood, Union Jack, and Spitfire into the contemporary Marvel Universe. This went on to have longterm ramifications for both *Captain America* and the Marvel

Universe as whole, manifesting itself in recent years in the form of such series as *New Invaders* (2004), *Union Jack: London Falling* (2006), and *Captain Britain and MI:13* (2008).

However, according to John Byrne, the creative team's original intent in passing on the mantle of Union Jack to Joey Chapman has been somewhat lost over the years. Specifically, as Roger Stern initially related in his *Marvel Spotlight* interview, "Our new Union Jack was at least partially inspired by John Lennon's song, 'Working Class Hero.' The British members of the Invaders had mostly been the nobility, but it was the common man who did most of England's fighting and dying... I just thought it was about time that a commoner became the archetypical British super-hero."

Yet Byrne argues that this notion has been partly misconstrued by later writers. "The 'working-class hero' angle was Roger's idea, though I am not sure how well it actually came across. Roger used the correct term 'art school' to describe the guy's background, and later writers, less worldly than Rog, did not understand this meant 'industrial arts,' i.e., shop class! So, in *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, for instance, he's described as an 'art student.' That's not as blue-collar as Roger had in mind!"

Nonetheless, Stern says of the tale now, "Our story was mainly an open fan letter to [*Invaders* artist] Frank Robbins. John and I had always loved Robbins' work, and the story was a fun way of acknowledging Cap's past with the Invaders."

Artist Byrne echoes this praise for Frank Robbins, saying, "From the first time I saw his work there was something about it that appealed to me a whole lot. Without looking the same at all, his drawings had something of the innate quirkiness of Steve Ditko. And I love me some quirky!"

OPERATION: REBIRTH

In the ninth and final issue of their *Captain America* collaboration, Roger Stern and John Byrne bring their considerable talents to bear on crafting a comprehensive and action-packed retelling of Captain America's origin, titled "The Living Legend." In his introduction to *War & Remembrance*, Stern described the genesis of the issue: "We knew we had to do something extra special [for Cap's 40th anniversary], but what? And then, Mark Gruenwald—at the time, an assistant editor—challenged us to tell the legend of Captain America in a single cohesive issue. Well, the moment we heard that challenge we knew we had our story! We'd take the readers back to the very beginning of Cap's career and tell—once and for all—the complete saga of Cap's origin! We could reveal why Steve Rogers was given the proud red-white-and-blue uniform! We could show how the terror of the Red Skull led indirectly to the creation of Captain America! We could even show Cap getting his new shield! The more we talked about it, the faster the ideas flew. John suggested reproducing the story directly from his penciled art, to suggest the rougher feel of the 1940s. I insisted that we use Franklin Delano Roosevelt as narrator, to add to the authenticity. And with John conjuring up images from Depression Era movies and the original

Beginnings

(right) *Cap* #255
(Mar. 1981),
the hero's 40th
anniversary issue,
opens with (below)
this recreation of
the cover to
Captain America's
very first comic.

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Kirby-drawn comics, I dove back into my research books. The end result was *Captain America* #255. It turned out to be our last issue."

One of the most impressive facets of this celebrated 40th anniversary issue is the way in which the creative team seamlessly weaves together so many previous versions of the same story into a unified whole. Starting from the very first page, in which artist Byrne offers up a spectacular homage to the cover of *Captain America Comics* #1, depicting the Sentinel of Liberty punching out Adolf Hitler. Similarly, just as that first issue of *Captain America Comics* opened with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt introducing the concept of a top-secret experiment to create an American "Super-Soldier," so too does this version. However Stern and Byrne seize this opportunity to also detail the early years of Steve Rogers, dramatizing his poverty-stricken youth during the Great Depression, wherein his father died when Steve was just a child, and his mother passed away from pneumonia when he was still in his teens.

This celebratory issue also manages to reconcile the conflicting portrayals of the experimental Super-Soldier Serum that turned Steve Rogers into Captain America, which had alternately been presented over the years as an intravenous injection, an oral serum, and a controlled bombardment of "Vita-Rays." Once again the creative team cleverly incorporates all of these preexisting versions into a modern reinterpretation that depicts the Super-Soldier formula as being administered in a series of stages, thus making all of the disparate earlier depictions now canonical. Further, the story offers up some very utilitarian reasons for the evolution of Captain America's costume and shield, even creating a rationale for the costume itself, revealing it to be America's patriotic answer to the horrific visage of the Red Skull.

"The Skull has come to personify the evil of Nazism," an Army General tells Steve Rogers while presenting him with the Captain America uniform for the first time. "We desperately need an agent who is his opposite ... a man who will be the living symbol of life and liberty!"

"If America needs a man to stand up for her principles," Rogers vows, donning the costume, "then as God as my witness, I shall be that man!"

In looking back at his work on that 40th anniversary issue, Byrne contends that it could be done better today: "That was a fun issue to work on. I will say, I wish I'd done it thirty years later, though! I recently did an *Angel* miniseries for IDW, and with the vastly improved technology at our command, that was reproduced in gray tones, so it really looked like my pencils. The *Captain America* job had to be done so dark that it might as well have been inked. In fact, due to Roger giving [series inker] Joe Rubinstein a non-specific credit ('Inker of Today') for his work on the last (and only the last) pages, I have run into many, many fans who think Joe inked the whole issue!"



Pure Evil

John Byrne rolled out his new uniform for the Red Skull in the 1996 DC/Marvel crossover *Batman/Captain America*.

Red Skull © 2010 Marvel Characters, Inc.

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

Insofar as why the duo of Stern and Byrne decided to leave the book after only nine issues, the answer depends upon whom you ask. According to Byrne, the fault rests primarily with former Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter. "Shooter woke up one morning and decided that we should only do one-part stories," Byrne told Jon B. Cooke in *Modern Masters* vol. 7. "So Roger and I had already started part one of a three-part story—Cap and Red Skull. And Jim Salicrup calls me up—he was the editor—and says, 'This has to be a one-part story.' And then Roger's calling me saying, 'They say it's gotta be a one-part story... I refuse to compromise my artistic integrity. This is a three-part story.' So Roger quit."

"I don't remember calling John about the length of the story," Stern says in response to Byrne's account. "But that was nearly 30 years ago. Maybe I did. At any rate, I didn't quit over that ... I took the time to run the story by Shooter. And when I showed him what we had planned, he agreed that the Red Skull trilogy was what he was looking for in a three-part story. So, the length of the story wasn't a problem."

To hear Stern tell it, his departure had more to do with deadlines than with multi-part storylines. "The bigger problem was that Marvel was also going through one of its periodic bouts of cracking the whip on deadlines. I had been sick for a week or so, and John had recently gotten married, so Jim Salicrup was worried about the possibility of *Captain America* shipping late. He wanted to schedule a fill-in by another creative team, and I lobbied against that. As the series' writer, I didn't like the idea of a fill-in. I was pretty sure it would cut into the momentum—and the readership—that John and I had worked hard to build. Sales would dip after a fill-in, and it could take months of work for a creative team to win lost readers back. Plus, it was going to cost John, Joe [Rubinstein], and me money. Before there were royalties, Marvel paid a bonus to writers and artists for every six consecutive issues they produced. Any fill-in would set all of our bonuses back, further punishing us for what I thought was an unwise scheduling decision."

"I'd enjoyed working with Jim Salicrup, and I really didn't want to give him a hard time, but neither did I like the way we were being treated," Stern continues. "We had just produced *Captain America* #255 [and] I thought that it would be better to leave on an up note. In solidarity, John and Joe left the book as well, which they didn't have to do. Fortunately, we all had other assignments to fall back on then."

Despite the discrepancy, Byrne holds steadfast in his version, stating flatly, "Roger is misremembering. It happened as I described it."

Regardless, Stern and Byrne were forced to abort their plans for *Captain America*, the details about which Stern remains coy, saying, "I have those plots buried away in my files, but I'd prefer to keep the details to myself. I can tell you that John had designed a great-looking new uniform for the Skull."

In fact, for those curious about this "great-looking new uniform," it is worth noting that John Byrne did eventually unveil this redesign for the Red Skull in a *Captain America* story, albeit some 17 years later in a non-canonical company crossover. "My redesign for the Skull was the one used in *Batman/Captain America* (1996)," Byrne confides. "We also planned the gag later used by Mark Gruenwald, where the Skull gets hit with his own 'dust of death' and ends up with an actual skull face, rather than a mask."

Regrettably, the team's remaining plans for *Captain America* would go unrealized, although there has been some intermittent consideration given to a reunion. "After we left the series," Stern remembers, "I toyed with the idea of turning the story into a graphic novel. But before I



could, some things were done with the Red Skull in other stories that would have invalidated much of what we intended to do. There was a little talk, a few years ago, of having John and me finally produce the story as a special project. I don't know how Marvel would have marketed it, or what format it would have been in, or what they would have called it. Before I could even locate the plots, there were some editorial shuffles at Marvel, and any further talk of that particular project went away. That could all change tomorrow, of course. I've been in this business long enough to see all manner of projects suddenly rise from the dead. But for now our story will have to remain *the one that got away*."

AMERICAN HISTORY X

A year after Roger Stern and John Byrne departed from the pages of *Captain America*, an interesting footnote to their *War & Remembrance* era emerged in the form of the story "What If Captain America Had Been Elected President?" appearing in *What If?* #26 (Apr. 1981), by writer Mike W. Barr and artist Herb Trimpe. As the title suggests, the story explores a hypothetical scenario in which Captain America had actually accepted the nomination of the New Populist Party, and then gone on to win the presidency. "John [Byrne] and I had been approached about revisiting 'Cap for President' as a *What If?* story ourselves," Stern tells *BACK ISSUE*, "but we were both too busy at the time. So, when Mike asked if we'd mind his writing it, we gave him our blessing. It's been decades since I read it, but as I recall, it was a good read. (Hey, no big surprise—it's a Mike W. Barr story!) And I dearly loved that Marie Severin drew the cover, making Jack Kirby the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court."

In discussing his *What If?* story with *BACK ISSUE*, writer Mike W. Barr describes how he specifically sought out the assignment, recalling, "In those days, *What If?* was a good gig for a hungry freelancer, as the book had a lot of pages to fill on a bimonthly basis but no regular creative team."



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I'm certain I campaigned for the assignment; the original story fairly cried out for the 'What If?' treatment. (For a guy with as little experience as I had in those days to ask if I could write a 'What If?' version of a Stern/Byrne collaboration really shows, as Stephen Colbert would say, 'big brass ones,' doesn't it?) I have a faint memory of asking Stern if it would be okay with him if I wrote the story; he probably floated it past John Byrne, whom I have no memory of consulting. I do recall that former Cap writer Roger McKenzie, whose idea it was that Cap would run for president, wanted Cap to win the election and be the sitting president of the United States in the canonical Marvel Universe. I don't recall why I wrote the *What If?* story instead of Mac. It's interesting to note that the cover date of *Captain America* #250 is 10-'80 (Oct. 1980), and that of *What If* #26 (which was reprinted in *What If? Classic*, Vol. 4 in 2007) is 4-'81 (Apr. 1981), an interval of only seven months. I must have been working on the plot before *Captain America* #250 was even in print, maybe from Xeroxes of the original Byrne art. I believe this was my first—and perhaps only—collaboration with Herb Trimpe; he did an excellent job."

Change You Can Believe In

President Captain America reveals his true identity on page 10 of *What If?* #26 (Apr. 1981), by Mike W. Barr, Herb Trimpe, and Mike Esposito.

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Barr's *What If?* tale actually begins with a brief recap of the "Cap for President" issue, but this time Captain America has a sudden change of heart and decides to run for president after all, realizing, "I call myself a symbol of America ... and I can make Americans proud of themselves—proud of their country ... how can I deny them that?"

With regard to this initial premise, Barr comments, "Usually the 'pivot point' in *What If?* stories was an alteration of a physical act, something that had been accomplished. This pivot point had to be the changing of the protagonist's attitude. I tried to give Cap a rationale for changing his mind, but I find that to be the weakest part of the story."

Subsequently, Cap goes on to make the controversial move of selecting a largely unknown African-American senator named Andrew Jackson Hawk as his vice-presidential running mate, despite the protests of the NPP leaders, who are irate over the selection. Nevertheless, Steve Rogers wins the election by an "overwhelming majority" and soon earns himself the nickname of "President America." Following his inauguration, Steve Rogers pursues a vast array of new policy initiatives, vowing to "free America from the tyranny of foreign oil," and openly aiding a revolutionary army in their overthrow of a South American dictatorship—which draws severe criticism from the press who fear that "President America" is leading the country into another Vietnam.

"I thought—and think," Barr adds, "the concept of Captain America, the living embodiment of America's values, becoming America's chief executive is extremely poignant and rich with dramatic possibilities... Captain America I see as nothing more—nor less—than the positive personification of the American psyche, which, at its best, is beneficent."

Alas, much like the Stern and Byrne era of *Captain America*, Cap's tenure as commander-in-chief winds up being all too brief. For when the leader of the revolutionary army reveals himself to be the Red Skull in disguise, the president is forced to make the ultimate sacrifice by giving his life to save Washington, D.C. from destruction. Thereafter, Captain America is memorialized with a statue at Arlington National Cemetery and mourned by a grateful nation, grieving not only for a fallen president, but for the death of a dream, and the loss of its greatest champion, the Sentinel of Liberty.

Of course, this was only an *imaginary* story. But as writer Alan Moore once famously pointed out... *Aren't they all?*

The writer wishes to thank Roger Stern, John Byrne, and Mike W. Barr for contributing to this article. And he would especially like to thank Roger Stern for sharing his Mark Gruenwald sketch with BACK ISSUE.

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end

THE RED SKULL



100

YEARS
OF EVIL
AND STILL

SMILING

by **Bruce Buchanan**

If evil had a face, chances are it would be red with a cigarette holder clenched between its teeth.

Most of Marvel Comics' classic villains tend to be more along the lines of deluded egomaniacs or even, in the literary sense, tragic heroes. Characters such as Dr. Doom, Magneto, and Dr. Octopus all have some innate humanity, some thread of decency, which, although it may be buried, still inspires a certain level of sympathy.

But not so for the Red Skull. Captain America's arch-nemesis is evil, mean, and nasty to the core. A Nazi war criminal and terrorist mastermind, he is the perfect foil for perhaps Marvel's most upstanding super-citizen.

EARLY SKULL

The Red Skull's first appearance actually predates America's entry into World War II, and in his first appearance, he wasn't even German. The original Red Skull, as introduced in *Captain America Comics* #1 (Mar. 1941) was American businessman George John Maxon, a Nazi sympathizer who led a covert ring of saboteurs.

Even though US was still months away from entering the war, Marvel Comics had a strong pro-Allies/anti-Nazi sentiment, largely echoing public opinion of the day. Captain America and teen sidekick Bucky defeated Maxon, who appeared to die at the end of the story.

Not surprisingly, the legendary team of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby are responsible for placing the Red Skull in the pantheon of great comic-book villains. When Marvel revived Captain America in the early 1960s, it stood to reason that the Red Skull wouldn't be far behind.

Lee and Kirby set the stage in *Tales of Suspense* #65-68 (May-Aug. 1965), with a dynamic flashback story set in World War II. (At the time, Captain America did not have his own solo book, as he and Iron Man split the page count of *Tales of Suspense*.)

The Red Skull and his Nazi henchmen capture Captain America, brainwash him, and send him to assassinate the leader of the Allied Forces in Europe. Cap snaps out of his trance and, with Bucky's help, destroys the Red Skull's ultimate weapon—a portable disintegration ray.

This story also features the origin of the Red Skull. Johann Schmidt was a poor, non-descript young man in 1930s Germany. He spent much of his time drifting and in jail for petty crimes. But one day, while working as a bellhop at a hotel, he had a chance encounter with Adolf Hitler. Hitler tells one of his officers, "I could teach that bellboy to do a better job than you!" When he looks into the young man's eyes, he sees the hatred and rage burning within them. Schmidt completely buys into the Nazi ideology and becomes Hitler's personal protégé and, ultimately, his most feared lieutenant.

Bad to the Bone

Captain America's arch-enemy, the Red Skull, drawn by Mike Zeck. From the *Essential Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*.

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Up To No Good

Silver Age Red Skull appearances in (left) *Tales of Suspense* #80 (Aug. 1966; cover by Jack Kirby and Don Heck) and (right) *Captain America* #103 (July 1968; cover by Kirby and Syd Shores).

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THE SKULL RETURNS

The villainous mastermind made his modern-day return in *Tales of Suspense* #79 (July 1966). He reveals that, much like Captain America, he has been in suspended animation since the end of World War II. He has been revived by agents of AIM, the high-tech terrorist organization. AIM scientists build the Cosmic Cube, which gives its wielder the power to alter reality. Not surprisingly, the Red Skull betrays his new allies and acquires the Cosmic Cube for himself. Only Captain America's courage—and the Red Skull's own arrogance—stand in his way of world domination.

The Red Skull appears to drown at the end of the story. It won't be the last time he cheats an apparent death. It also won't be the final time he attempts to acquire the Cosmic Cube. Both become familiar motifs for the Red Skull during the next four decades. This three-part story is told in *Tales of Suspense* #79–81, written by Stan Lee, with pencils by Jack Kirby and inks by Don Heck and Frank Giacoia.

The devious Red Skull soon returns for a four-part story beginning in *Tales of Suspense* #88 (Apr. 1967).

He uses a robotic double of Captain America's deceased sidekick, Bucky, to lure the hero into a trap, then tries to strong-arm Cap into giving up the location of one of America's nuclear submarines. Instead, Cap sets his own trap, and the Red Skull again apparently is killed in an explosion. This time, Stan Lee and Gil Kane provide the story and art.

In 1968, Cap finally gets his own solo comic, which begins with #100. In the subsequent issue (*Captain America* #101, May 1968), Lee and Kirby add another new wrinkle to the Red Skull's legacy: the Sleepers. The Sleepers are a series of robots created during World War II by Nazi scientists and hidden in a dormant state until they could be revived. They become one of the Red Skull's most frequently used weapons in his fight for world domination.

Cap and Agent 13 (the still-unnamed Sharon Carter) go into action to battle the Red Skull, his Sleeper, and the Exiles, a group of the Red Skull's old World War II cronies, each with a different ability or weapon. The four-issue story concludes in *Captain America* #104 (Aug. 1968).

The Red Skull next menaces Captain America in issues #114–119 (June–Nov. 1969), when he once again gains possession of the Cosmic Cube. The Skull uses the Cube's power to switch bodies with Captain America, then seeks to discredit the Sentinel of Liberty's image and legacy. Thinking that Captain America is powerless, the Red Skull leaves him to the Exiles to finish off. This time, Lee joins forces with artists John Romita, Sr., John Buscema, and Gene Colan.

This storyline is particularly notable for the introduction of a major new Marvel hero—the high-flying Falcon. Captain America discovers Sam Wilson on a Caribbean island and trains him to be a superhero. Together, they defeat the Red Skull and a long, successful partnership is born. In 2000, Marvel fans voted *Captain America* #117, the Falcon's debut issue, at #81 of the 100 Greatest Marvel Comics of All-Time.





RED SKULL IN THE BRONZE AGE

By 1971, Stan Lee had left *Captain America* and writer Gary Friedrich, who had produced an award-winning run on *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* just a couple of years earlier, took over the book.

Friedrich's second issue (*Captain America* #143, Nov. 1971) brings back Cap's arch-nemesis with a decidedly '70s twist. In this 34-page story, the Red Skull disguises himself as a "black power" activist to foment racial tensions in Harlem. Captain America and the Falcon have to stop the Skull's plan before those tensions turn deadly. The story also introduces Leila, an African-American militant who soon becomes Sam Wilson's love interest.

Some of the dialogue may seem a bit dated by modern standards (such as Leila referring to Sam as "Uncle Tom"). But race relations were at a difficult point in 1971—the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was still fresh in many people's minds and school desegregation was a controversial issue in many cities. This story reflected the uneasiness and anger that existed in many communities.

But *Captain America* struggled mightily during the era of the Vietnam War and the Counterculture Revolution. "He was a symbol of patriotism and no one knew how to handle that," writer Steve Englehart tells *BACK ISSUE*. Some in comics wonder if *Captain America* had become an anachronism that simply couldn't resonate with a cynical modern audience.

Enter Englehart. The writer says he wasn't brought in to save *Captain America*. Instead, he was, in his words, the "bottom man on the totem pole" who was given what was considered a dead-end book. Englehart had written a few issues of *Amazing Adventures* featuring the Beast. He said those issues didn't sell particularly well, but Marvel's editors liked his approach and offered him the full-time



jobs on *Captain America* and *The Defenders* at the same time. He took over *Captain America* with issue #153 (Sept. 1972).

Within months, the book was a top seller and Steve Englehart went from being "the bottom man on the totem pole" to being one of comics' hottest writers. Englehart brought the hot-button issues of the day, such as an unpopular war, political corruption, and race relations, and put them in the comic for Steve Rogers to confront head-on. It was pure dynamite, and comics fans couldn't get enough. In one storyline, for example, a criminal organization called the Secret Empire is revealed to have ties at the highest levels of the US government. The storyline was a direct response to the Watergate controversy that rocked Americans' faith in their government in real life.

When he took over the title, Englehart asked, "'If *Captain America* existed now, who would he be?' That led me to really get into him as a symbol of what was going on in America." He viewed Steve Rogers as a "New Deal Democrat" from World War II who

He's Got the Power

Writer Gary Friedrich's story in *Captain America* #143 (Nov. 1971) reveals that a mystery masked militant is actually the Red Skull. Art by John Romita, Sr.

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Cold-Blooded

Steve Englehart believes the Red Skull should be used judiciously, and pitted the villain against Cap in (left) *Captain America* #185 (May 1975; cover by Gil Kane and Frank Giacoia). Cap and Dr. Doom formed an uneasy alliance to battle the Skull in (right) *Super-Villain Team-Up* #10 (Feb. 1977; cover by Kane and Ernie Chan).

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believed America should always do the right thing and who frequently found the American reality of the 1970s didn't live up to his expectations.

With that definition of Captain America in place, Englehart said it was a simple matter to see the Red Skull "as the World War II villain—the epitome of the Nazi."

Englehart's Red Skull was just that—an unrepentant Nazi who sought to fulfill the evil mission Adolf Hitler had begun. Under the Comics Code, there were limits to how far Englehart could take this concept, but he made it clear that the Red Skull was filled with racial and anti-Semitic prejudice, calling African-American S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Gabe Jones "a dog," for example.

"From my point of view, not running with that is missing something," Englehart says. He also made sure that the Red Skull was a frightening character, in word and deed as well as in appearance. The villain brought back his trademark of playing "Chopin's Funeral March" and introduced the Dust of Death, a weapon that asphyxiated many an innocent victim.

"I carefully considered the failures of my previous plans and realized that I had come to rely more on power than the terror I had spread in the '40s—terror that made men whimper at the whisper of my name!" the Red Skull says in *Captain America* #185 (May 1975).

Englehart waited until the very end of his run to bring back the arch-enemy of freedom. He says the

Red Skull is like "the nuclear option" of Captain America villains, and great care should be taken to ensure that the Red Skull isn't overused. His appearances should be rare enough to be special to readers, he said.

Englehart's Red Skull story, which began in *Captain America* #183 (Mar. 1975), proved to be the most controversial of his run, and also one of the best-remembered Captain America stories of the 1970s.

IDENTITY CRISIS

At the time, Steve Rogers had given up the mantle of Captain America, feeling that he could not represent a country he no longer recognized. So he briefly assumed the costumed identity of Nomad, the Man without a Country, and continued to fight crime.

In his absence, a tough-talking, idealistic young man named Roscoe decided that America still needed Captain America and donned the colors that Rogers had temporarily abandoned. But Roscoe was no superhero and in his first adventure, he and the Falcon are captured by the Red Skull. The Red Skull murders and crucifies the impostor, leaving a horrified Steve Rogers to discover Roscoe's body. While the actual violence takes place off-panel, the image (crafted by veteran artist Frank Robbins) is still shocking and sends a message that this Red Skull is no garden-variety comic-book bad guy.

But while that issue may have been controversial, it was nothing compared to the firestorm unleashed in issue #185. In this issue, Steve Rogers—having resumed his rightful role as Captain America—and the Falcon confront the Red Skull, only to have the Falcon turn on his best friend!

In the subsequent issue, the Red Skull reveals that everything Captain America—and the reader—has known about the Falcon up to this point has been a lie. The Falcon was not Sam Wilson, social worker and upstanding citizen. Instead, he was “Snap” Wilson, a former small-time hoodlum. The Red Skull claims he used the Cosmic Cube to turn Wilson into the Falcon, solely for the purpose of watching him betray Captain America down the road.

“I knew you well, Captain America! I knew exactly what kind of man would most appeal to your sniveling liberalism!” the villain gloats.

Many fans were outraged, claiming Marvel had undermined their preeminent African-American superhero for the sake of a shocking plot twist. But Englehart says that wasn’t necessarily his intent. He set up the dramatic revelation in his final issue (#185), but left it in the hands of John Warner to explain in the following issue. After all, the Red Skull is a master of deception—who was to say he was telling the truth about the Falcon’s new origin?

“I’m not going to duck the mixed reaction to it,” Englehart says. “I was bringing my run to a close and wanted to give John something interesting to run with.”

A few years later, Englehart took a similar approach to Batman’s arch-rival the Joker in his critically acclaimed *Detective Comics* run, returning the Clown Prince of Crime to his dark, pulpy roots as a dangerous killer.

Englehart says that in recent years, he approached Marvel about a 12-issue *Red Skull* limited series, told from the villain’s point of view.

“With the freedom we have now, I wanted to do the Red Skull in depth, but Marvel said, ‘No, we don’t want to do that,’” Englehart says. “I’m sure it would have been controversial, but pulling it off would have been fun—just take him as he is and go with that.”

KIRBY IS COMING (BACK)!

After Englehart moved on, the Red Skull next moved from the hands of an up-and-coming star to one of comics’ all-time legends.

In 1976, Captain America co-creator Jack Kirby returned to Marvel after a several-year stint at DC Comics. He was assigned *Captain America* and given full creative control of the book—Kirby was the title’s writer, artist, and editor. The King’s return to *Captain America* was met with mixed reactions from fans. Kirby took the book into a hard science-fiction direction, which left some fans wanting more traditional superhero fare. Other readers reveled in Kirby’s powerful, wildly imaginative art.

But one extended storyline enjoyed widespread acclaim. And not surprisingly, it involved Captain America’s old sparring partner, the Red Skull.

In issue #206 (Feb. 1977), Kirby introduces a brutal South American military leader known as the Swine. In one memorable scene, one of the Swine’s slaves begs for more food. So the Swine presents him with a banquet table full of food, but then forces his slave to overeat until he dies.

In the following issue, the Swine’s men kidnap Captain America and bring him to Rio Del Muerte (“River of Death”), where they intend to make him a slave. But Captain America escapes, aided by the Swine’s beautiful cousin, Donna Maria.

But Cap and Donna Maria are subsequently captured by fugitive Nazi scientist Arnim Zola, the so-called “bio-fanatic,” who is conducting bizarre, highly unethical genetic experiences in the South American jungles. Zola has genetically engineered his own body (with his face now in his mid-section, an image that only Kirby could pull off) and has produced a series of organic mutants—creatures with highly malleable bodies.

But Zola’s greatest and most evil experiment involved his plan to clone Adolf Hitler. Captain America discovers that Zola’s benefactor and mentor is none other than the Red Skull, and the two fight a desperate battle in the jungle, which leaves Captain America temporarily blind. The basic plot of the story was clearly taken from *The Boys from Brazil*, a bestselling novel of the day by Ira Levin. In the novel, real-world Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele works to clone Hitler in small South American villages. But whatever Kirby owes to Levin, he makes the story his own, and this thrilling adventure has been collected in the trade paperback *Captain America: The Swine*.

(Also in the mid-’70s, the Red Skull menaces the Invaders and the Liberty Legion in a three-part World War II flashback tale in *Invaders* #5–6, Mar.–May 1976; *Marvel Premiere* #30, June 1976, which features a classic Kirby cover; and *Super-Villain Team-Up* #10, Feb. 1977.)

After his defeat in South America, the Red Skull next returns in *Captain America* #226–227 (Oct.–Nov. 1978), in a Roger McKenzie/Sal Buscema story in which the villain transforms the crew of the S.H.I.E.L.D. Helicarrier into an army of skull-faced henchmen. Alone against an army of Red Skulls, Captain America thwarts the Red Skull’s plot.



The Swine

Writer/penciler/editor Jack Kirby borrowed from *The Boys from Brazil* for his Red Skull epic which included *Captain America* #210 (June 1977). Cover inks by Mike Royer.

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Lights, Camera ... Death!

The Skull used a faux movie production to entrap his arch-foe in *Cap* #263 (Nov. 1981). Original art by Mike Zeck and "Quickdraw Studios," courtesy of Heritage. (right) #263's cover, by Zeck and John Beatty.

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RED SKULL IN THE 1980s

Writer J. M. DeMatteis and artist Mike Zeck brought the villain back to his Nazi roots—and back to the forefront as Captain America's most dangerous nemesis—with two memorable 1980s sagas.

The duo created one of the most interesting Red Skull stories to date in *Captain America* #261–263 (Sept.–Nov. 1981). A Hollywood movie studio is filming a movie based on Captain America. The film is being backed by a mystery man known as "the Teacher," who intends to use the film to discredit the Sentinel of Liberty. On a more sinister note, he also plans to use a special film that will allow him to brainwash the people who view the movie. Of course, the Teacher is revealed to be none other than the Red Skull, making the situation even more desperate for Cap.

The Red Skull laid low for a couple of years, coming back during the build-up to the landmark *Captain America* #300 (Dec. 1984). This brilliantly paced storyline plays out over the course of nearly a year.

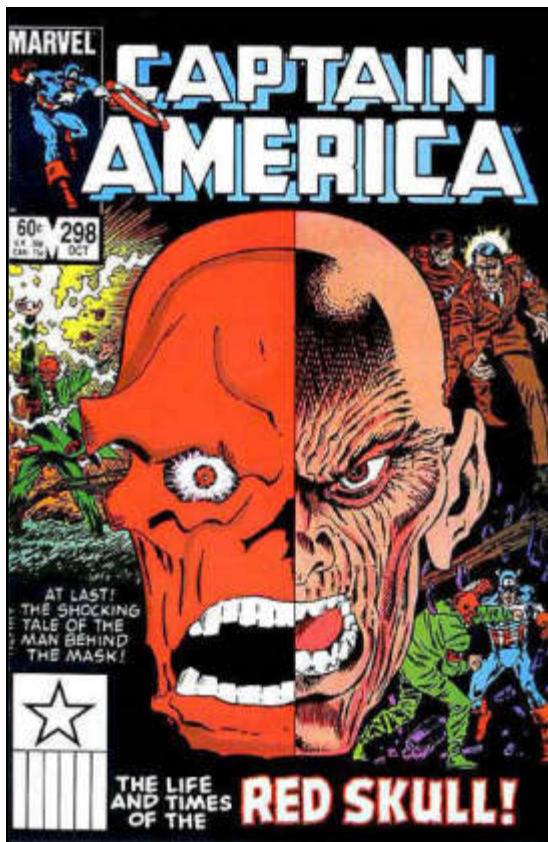
DeMatteis, working with artists Zeck and Paul Neary, presents a Red Skull who is infirm and frail. During the first issues, we only see him in shadow, clutching a cane with gnarled fingers and barking orders from his bed. Around the same time, Captain America begins experiencing uncharacteristic weakness and fatigue. Before long, Cap discovers that he is aging rapidly.

Captain America confronts the Red Skull at Skull House, the villain's haunted house-like mansion, and learns the Skull's sinister final plot. The Red Skull is dying, having aged at a rapid rate to what would be his natural age in the mid-1980s. So he has secretly poisoned Captain America and negated the effects of the Super-Soldier Serum, causing Cap to age as well. The Red Skull wants to die in glorious mortal combat with his arch-foe. To ensure that Captain America plays along, Mother Superior has kidnapped the four people closest to Steve Rogers—girlfriend Bernie Rosenthal, partners Sam Wilson (the Falcon) and Jack Monroe (the new Nomad), and childhood friend Arnie Roth. The four are held captive in Skull House.

Captain America #300 is billed as a fight to the death between Cap and the Red Skull. Captain America defeats his arch-foe, but refuses to kill him. The Red Skull dies of an apparent heart attack, cursing Cap with his dying breath. In the subsequent issue, the Avengers restore Cap's vitality and the hero seemingly can begin life without the Red Skull.

But you can't keep a good villain down, of course. The Red Skull resurfaces in *Captain America* #350 (Feb. 1989), revealing himself to be the mastermind behind a number of recent plots that have plagued Captain America. Most notably, he worked behind the scenes to have a US government commission strip the title of Captain America from Steve Rogers and give it to a confident, gung-ho young hero named Johnny Walker, who previously had been the Super-Patriot.





The pressure of living up to Rogers' legacy proved too much for Walker to bear, particularly after his parents are murdered. This is exactly what the Red Skull expected to happen, as he hoped to discredit Captain America's good reputation. After Rogers (as "the Captain," his new, temporary costumed identity) defeats the new Captain America, the two men join forces against the Red Skull. Walker then returns the costume and shield of Captain America to its rightful owner, Steve Rogers.

It turns out that the Red Skull, with Arnim Zola's help, survived his apparent death by switching his consciousness to a cloned body of Steve Rogers. So now, Captain America and his greatest foe have, for all purposes, identical bodies!

The Red Skull also explains that he has changed his strategy, abandoning his Nazi ideals to embrace American-style capitalism, which he intends to use to destroy the USA from the inside, using semi-legitimate means. Instead of "living from one grand scheme to the next," he simultaneously has his hand in a number of ongoing plots.

STILL EVIL AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

During his ten-year tenure on *Captain America*, writer Mark Gruenwald used the Red Skull as more of a regular supporting-cast member than an arch-villain who resurfaces every few years. Gruenwald's stories include the Red Skull battling the Kingpin for control of New York City's drug trade, introducing the villain Crossbones as his righthand man, and getting kidnapped by the mutant Magneto in retribution for the Red Skull's role in the Holocaust.

As of this writing, *Captain America* once again is near the top of Marvel's sale charts and once again is being written by one of the industry's hottest writers—Ed Brubaker. And the Red Skull remains a fixture as Captain America's arch-foe.



FOLD COPY TITLE CAPTAIN AMERICA

SCHEDULE

In 2007's *Marvel Spotlight: Captain America Remembered*, Brubaker said, "the Red Skull is ... pretty much just straight-up evil. He's not crazy; he's just evil. He's this nihilistic, anarchistic, fascist guy who brings out the worst aspects of all those things."

With a big-budget *Captain America* movie now on the schedule for 2011, it seems a virtual lock that the Red Skull will make his way to the silver screen. Nearly 70 years after his creation, he remains as popular—and despicable—as ever. And comics fans wouldn't want him any other way!

BRUCE BUCHANAN has been a journalist and freelance writer since 1996 and is currently working on several comic-book projects. Contact him at brucebuc@bellsouth.net or www.comicspace/brucebuchanan/.



Seeing Red

(left) *Captain America* #298. The background images are cover artist Paul Neary's reworkings of earlier *Tales of Suspense* Captain America scenes. (right) Mike Zeck's original cover art to *Captain America* #326.

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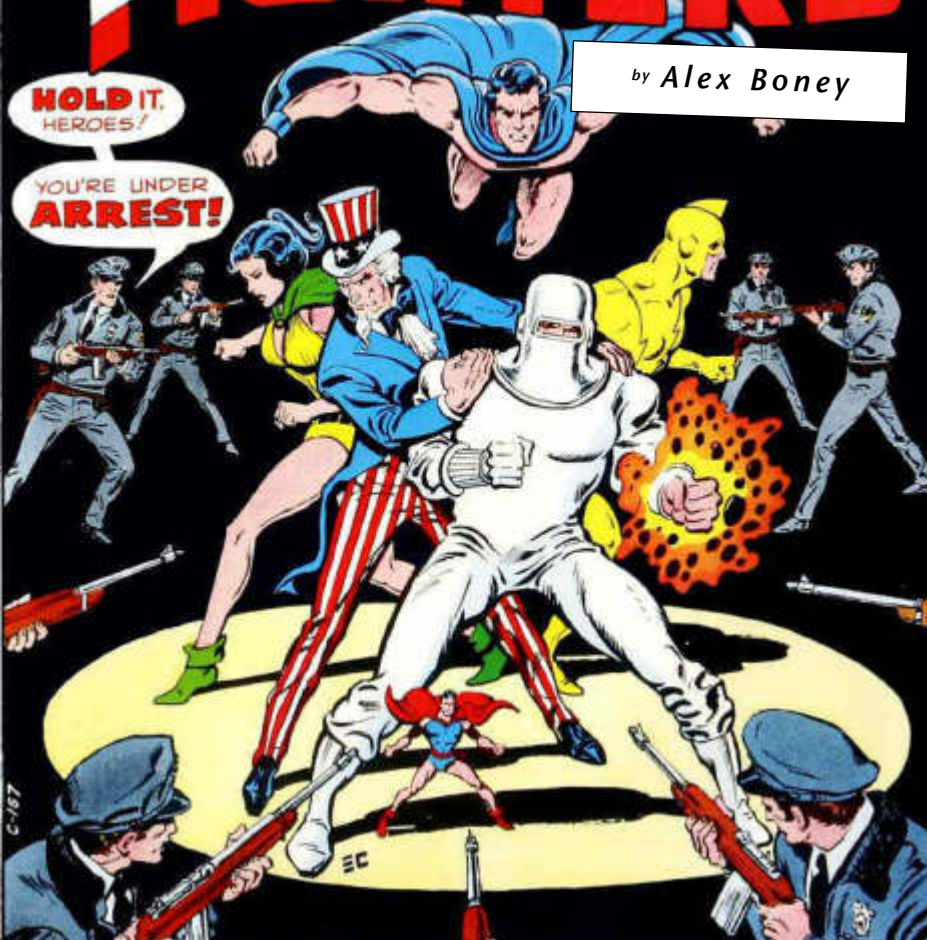
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FREEDOM FIGHTERS®

by Alex Boney



In 1976, the United States of America celebrated its bicentennial anniversary. It was a strange, uncertain year for the US for many reasons. Two years removed from the resignation of President Richard Nixon and just one year removed from the end of the Vietnam War, America was not at its patriotic peak when its 200th birthday rolled around. Whether by intention or coincidence (no one seems to know quite which), DC Comics debuted *Freedom Fighters* in that bicentennial year. Led by Uncle Sam and consisting of five additional characters pulled from the Quality Comics Group books published during the 1940s, *Freedom Fighters* was—at least in title and theme—DC's most patriotic book to date. But it also featured a team out of time and out of place, and that sense of displacement is something that the group has had to contend with ever since.

The Freedom Fighters actually debuted three years earlier in *Justice League of America* #107 and 108 (Sept.–Oct. and Nov.–Dec. 1973). In that “Crisis on Multiple Earths” story, the Justice League and Justice Society are transported to Earth-X—an alternate Earth where the Axis powers won World War II. The only superpowered heroes left on Earth-X are the Freedom Fighters, who fight to free the world from the Nazi tyranny that has spread across the globe. The “freedom” of that story is clear. But after the battle was won, the team lost its sense of focus and purpose. The subsequent decades have seen numerous writers and artists attempt to fit the team (and various of its members) into the context of the DC Universe with varying degrees of success. Although the characters were reimagined and reinterpreted for decades after their first appearance, they didn't truly find their place or their voice again until recently.

THE QUALITY LIFE

While the Freedom Fighters assembled as a team for the first time in 1972, the characters debuted individually decades earlier. In 1939, the Quality Comics Group began rolling out a series of comic books starring costumed heroes to compete with high-profile characters like Batman and Superman. Most of the Quality characters were created by the Eisner and Iger Studio—a packaging group founded and run by Will Eisner and Jerry Iger that supplied comics for many Golden Age publishers.

The first four Freedom Fighters who appeared in Quality's books were drawn by Lou Fine and—most likely—written by Will Eisner. Doll Man, who debuted in *Feature Comics* #27 (Dec. 1939), was a research chemist named Darrell Dane who discovered a way to shrink his body to roughly six inches while enhancing his strength. Ironically, the shortest Quality character would experience the company's greatest longevity.

Stop! In the Name of the Law!

Detail from Ernie Chan's cover to *Freedom Fighters* #1 (Mar.–Apr. 1976).

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Crisis on Earth-X

Justice League of America #107

(Sept.–Oct. 1973)

revealed that this super sextet lived on a parallel Earth under Nazi control. Cover by Nick Cardy.

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He was the lead character in *Feature Comics* until 1949, was featured in his own title until Quality folded in 1953, and served as the inspiration for Gardner Fox and Gil Kane's reimagining of the Atom in *Showase* #34 (Sept.–Oct. 1961).

Black Condor, who first appeared in *Crack Comics* #1 (May 1940), probably has the most convoluted origin of all the Freedom Fighters. Penned by Kenneth Lewis (a pseudonym for Lou Fine), Black Condor was originally named Richard Grey, Jr. When Richard's parents were murdered on an expedition in Mongolia, the orphaned infant was rescued by a mother condor who flew him back to her nest and raised him as one of her own children. After developing the ability to fly, Grey traveled to America, adopted the identity of murdered senator Thomas Wright (who conveniently looked exactly like Grey), and began fighting crime as the Black Condor.

The most famous and familiar of the Freedom Fighters, Uncle Sam, first appeared in *National Comics* #1 (July 1940). While Eisner and Fine created an origin

story for the fictional character they were writing, the iconic image that Sam represents stretched back over a century. The legend of Uncle Sam began with a meat inspector from Troy, New York, named Samuel Wilson, who supplied rations for the United States military during the War of 1812. Uncle Sam came to stand for "United States" by 1820, and the visual image of Sam continued to evolve throughout the 1800s. Thomas Nast (a cartoonist for *Harper's Weekly*) developed the now-familiar bearded, coat-tailed image during the two decades following the Civil War, and the famous "I Want You" painting of Uncle Sam (painted by James Montgomery Flagg for a July 16, 1916 issue of *Leslie's Weekly*) became ubiquitous as America entered WWI in 1917. In comics, as in American politics, Uncle Sam came to represent the physical embodiment of the spirit of America. Eisner and Fine channeled that spirit for Quality—both in *National Comics* and *Uncle Sam Quarterly*—during the WWII years.

The Ray first appeared two months after Uncle Sam, in *Smash Comics* #14 (Sept. 1940), and the remaining Freedom Fighters all debuted a year later. Although *Police Comics* #1 (Aug. 1941) is best known for the first appearance of Plastic Man, it also hosted the origins of Phantom Lady (debutante Sandra Knight), the Human Bomb (Roy Lincoln, the son of an explosives expert), and Firebrand ("Rod Reilly, millionaire society scion"). While none of these characters achieved the popularity of fellow Quality characters Plastic Man and Blackhawk, they were all sold to DC Comics after Quality stopped publication in 1953.

LIFE DURING WARTIME

When Len Wein began looking for new characters to populate his annual JLA/JSA crossover event in 1976, he turned to some of the oldest characters in DC's stable. The parallel-Earth crossovers had been popular with readers for several years, but Wein needed a group of heroes that could top the popular Seven Soldiers of Victory crossover of the previous year. The Quality line provided just such a trove: "As a collector, I had always been a fan of the old Quality Comics line, publishers of *Plastic Man* and *Blackhawk* and *G. I. Combat* and many other favorites from the 1940s until the early 1950s," Wein wrote in his introduction to the trade paperback *Crisis on Multiple Earths* vol. 3 (2004). "When Quality folded, DC had acquired the rights to their titles and continued publishing several of them, especially the ones I just mentioned. The Quality characters seemed the next likely choice for revival.

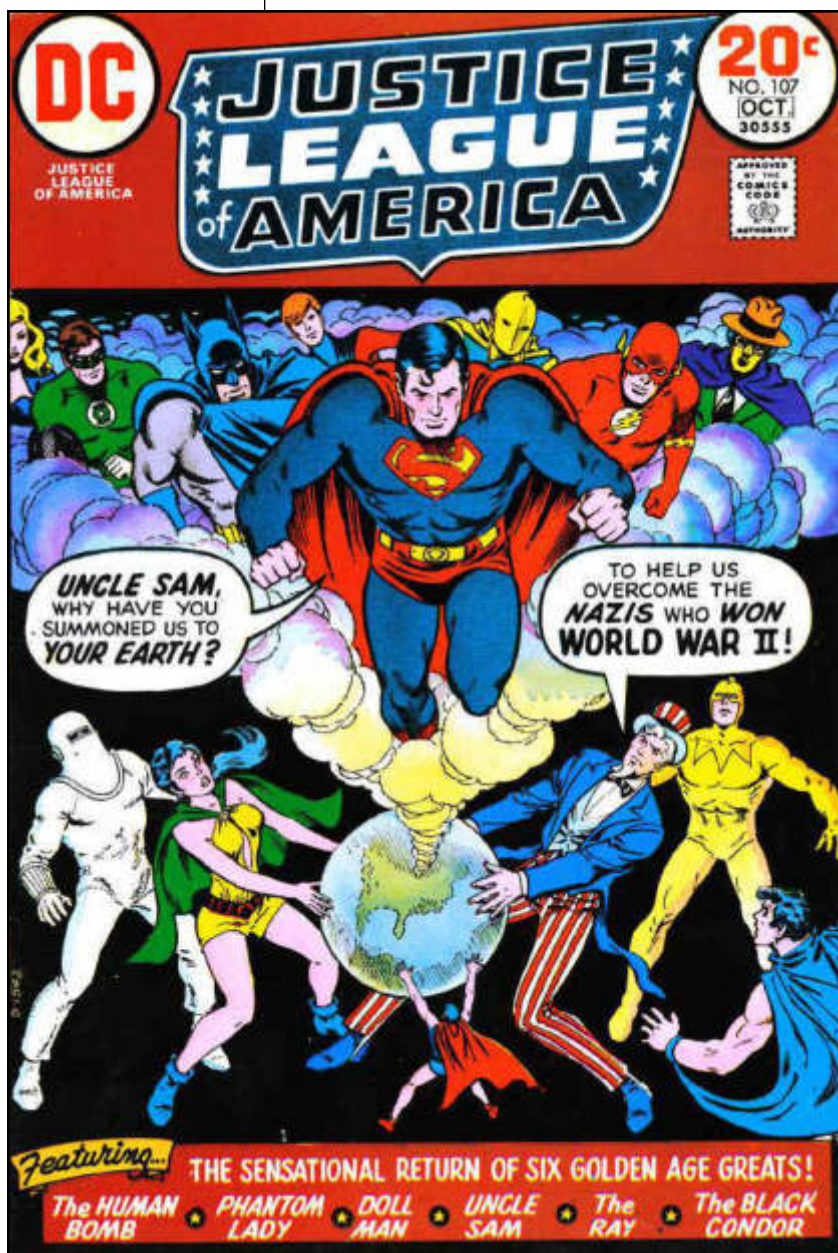
"I went through the list of Quality characters and settled on the six you're about to meet, including one of my personal favorites, Uncle Sam. But since the Quality characters had known their heyday mostly during the Second World War, I contrived a way to set my story in a world where that war had ended very differently. I titled the year's extravaganza 'Crisis on Earth-(swastika symbol)' and turned the script in to Julie [Schwartz]. He loved it...

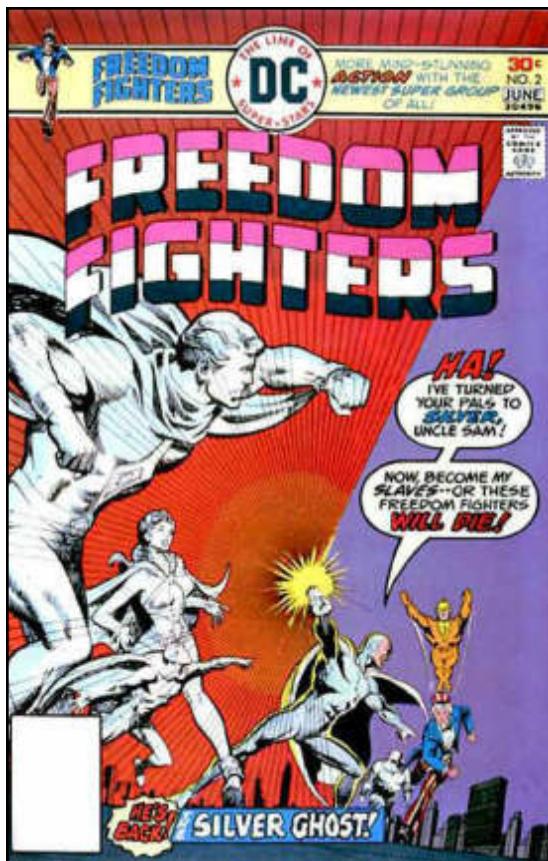
"...With one small exception.

"Having lived through WWII, Julie had a rightly understandable antipathy toward the symbol of Nazi tyranny.

"No story I ever edit will include that symbol in the title," he told me, even as he scratched it out.

"But after Earth-One, Earth-Two, Earth-Three, and all the others, it seemed the perfect choice," I argued. "If we can't use the swastika, what do we call the world?"



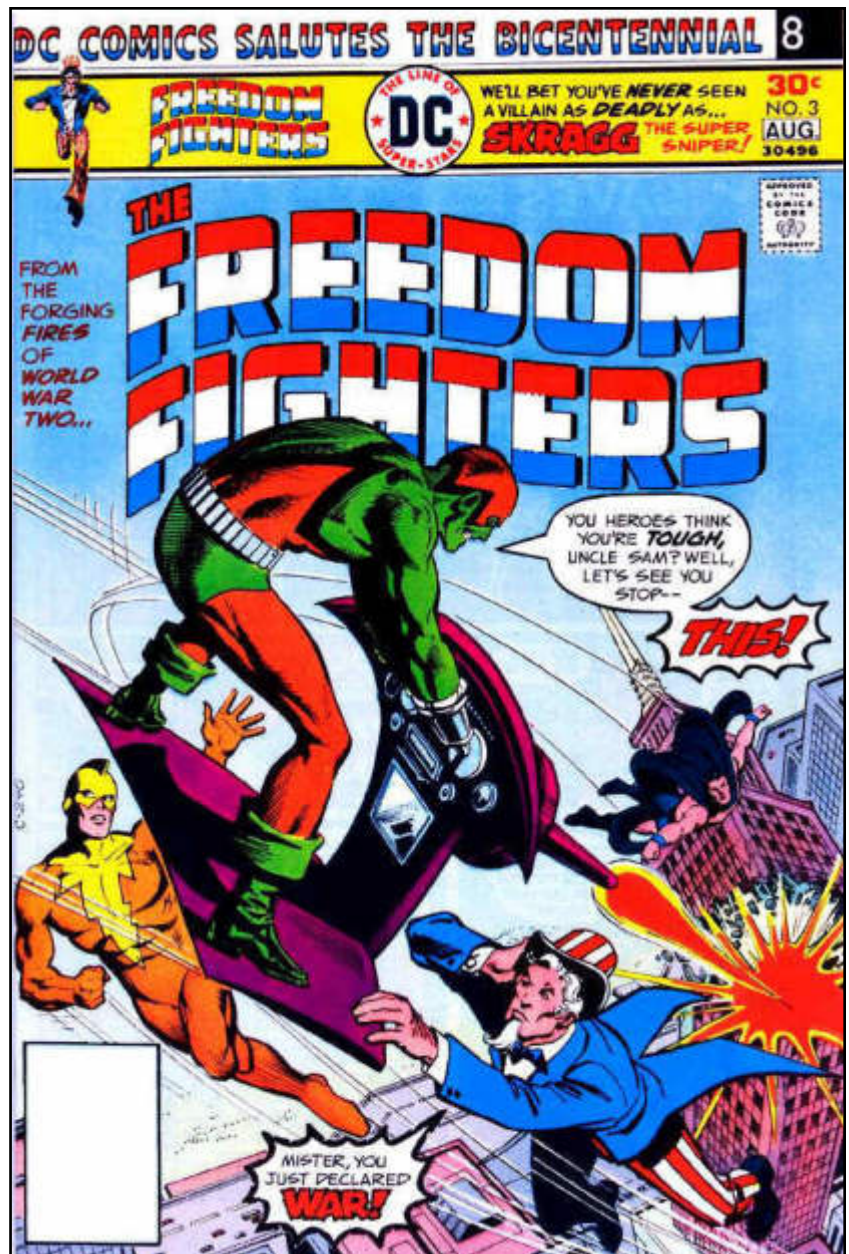


"Julie thought about it for a moment, then used his pencil to erase each of the crossbars on the swastika.

"There," he said proudly. "Earth-X is as good a name as any."

In *Justice League of America* #107, Wein brought together Uncle Sam, Phantom Lady, Black Condor, the Human Bomb, the Ray, and Doll Man to fight as "the Freedom Fighters." Several JLA and JSA members inadvertently travel to the new parallel Earth and team up with the Freedom Fighters to rid Earth-X of the Nazi menace, and the story ends with the Freedom Fighters remaining to rebuild after the end of the protracted war. While the story itself was formulaic (let's face it—it's difficult to work extensive characterization into a two-issue story featuring 13 costumed heroes), the concept was unique and the Dick Dillin/Dick Giordano art was remarkable. Although the Freedom Fighters didn't appear again for several years, the characters were now an intriguing and established part of the vast pool of characters DC could pull from for future projects.

One of those projects came as Gerry Conway was developing a new team book for DC in 1976. Conway had recently been hired—principally as an editor—to create new material and titles for DC. As he was sifting through the company's materials, the Freedom Fighters concept struck him as particularly fertile ground to revisit. "I was looking for some group to write because I enjoyed writing group books," Conway says. "The Freedom Fighters was a team I had enjoyed when Len wrote them, and I was looking for something that wasn't going to force me to take other editors' interests into account as I was doing it. They were free to be developed however I saw fit. Also, I was—and still am—friends with Roy Thomas, who had a fondness for the 1940s characters and was always sort of promoting them to anyone who would listen."



BRAVE NEW WORLD

Plotted and edited by Conway, written by Martin Pasko, and illustrated by Ric Estrada, *Freedom Fighters* #1 was cover-dated Mar.-Apr. 1976. Conway preserved the core dynamics of the team that Wein had introduced in *Justice League of America*, but the new creative team had room to develop more complicated character dynamics in a book devoted entirely to the Freedom Fighters. Instead of leaving the characters on Earth-X, Conway decided to have them venture to Earth-One to try their hands at crimefighting and adventuring. As Uncle Sam explains, "Almost immediately [after the Nazi threat was defeated], the wheels of democracy began to turn once more. But they hummed right along without us. With liberty restored we had nothing to fight for anymore ... and frankly, we were bored. But we'd heard about your Earth from the JLA. And so with the help of a teleporter developed by a scientist-friend ... we arrived in Times Square and realized right away that your Earth's not too much different than ours. Shucks, I guess people are alike all over."

FF's Rogues' Gallery

Villains including (left) the Silver Ghost and (right) Skragg challenged our heroes in *Freedom Fighters* #2 and 3. Both covers are by the late, great Dick Giordano.

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Wanted

(below) Heroes in hiding, from page 7 of issue #3. Original art by Ramona Fradon and Vince Colletta, courtesy of Heritage. (right) An unlucky Wonder Woman guest-appearance in #5. Cover by Rich Buckler and Colletta.

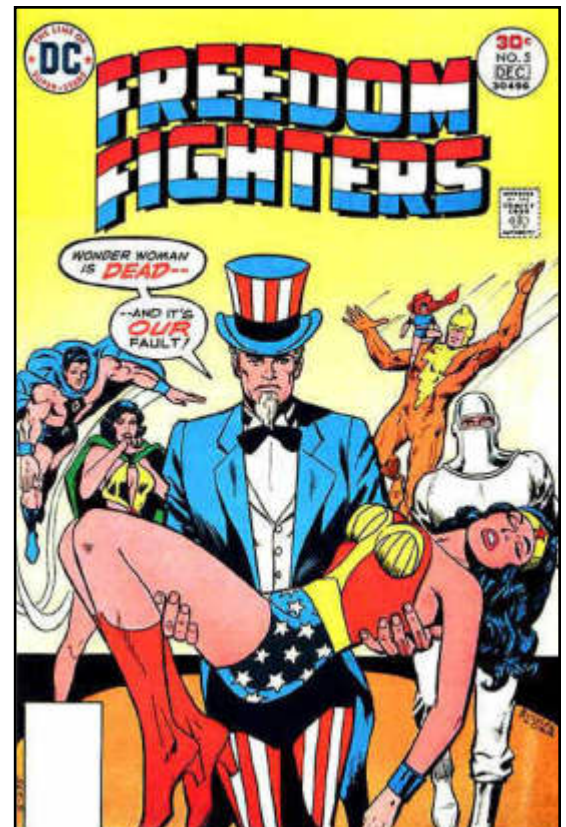
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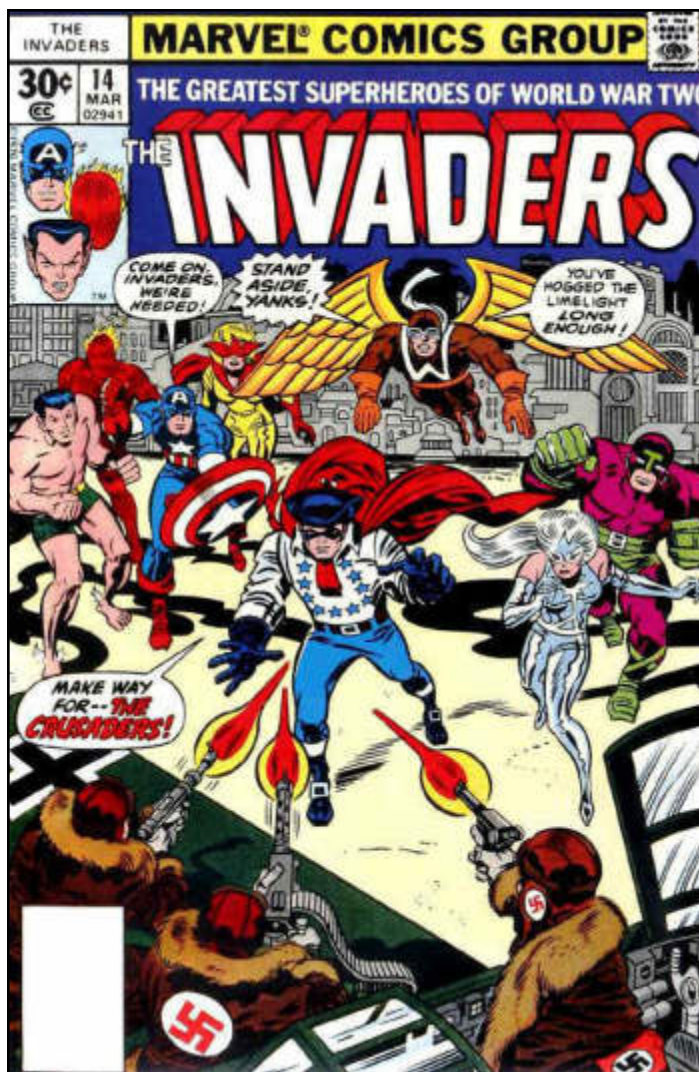
This new world is foreign to the WWII holdovers in many ways, and the book's first few issues are devoted to establishing just how out of place (and time) the team is. Uncle Sam's antiquated expressions ("tarnation," "whippersnapper," "gol-dern," and "shucks") are contrasted with contemporary slang, and Phantom Lady's gender identity is set against the Women's Liberation politics of the '70s. The first few issues move at a frenetic pace, which also sets up the Freedom Fighters as a perpetual team on the run. Immediately upon arriving at Times Square, the group begins fighting a villain called the Silver Ghost, who blackmails and frames the team over the next few issues. Perceived as enemies of the state, the Freedom Fighters become fugitives for the remainder of their series. As a tagline for *Freedom Fighters* #8 (May-June 1977) says, "Once they fought against a tyranny that enslaved and entire world—and won! But now their battle is much more personal—and the freedom they fight for is their own!"

Conway and Pasko steered *Freedom Fighters* for only four issues before handing the team's adventures off to new editor Tony Isabella and new writer Bob Rozakis, who maintained the same basic structure that Conway had established. The team continued to be hounded by both Silver Ghost and the authorities, and the FF kept moving from town to town in an attempt to clear their names and establish some sort of permanent identity in their adoptive world. "Had I started writing the book from the beginning, I probably would have done the same thing that was there when I came on," Rozakis says. "The 'hero on the run' thing was fun because I got to move them around the country and do the different stories in different places—Minneapolis and the Midwest, New York, the North Pole, Texas, Vermont...."

"It was a fun book because I could move the characters around and I could have different subplots going on with different sets of characters. I had Doll Man on trial for murder at the same time the other characters were running around, and it gave me the opportunity to team them up in different groups and move a lot of plots along at the same time. But I also tried to tell a complete story of some kind in each issue."

While some of the team's enemies were familiar (they faced Cat-Man in *Freedom Fighters* #10), most of the characters they fought were original creations. Probably the most interesting battle stemmed from an unofficial crossover with Marvel Comics' *The Invaders*. For *Freedom Fighters* #7 (Mar.-Apr. 1977), Rozakis created a team called the Crusaders—a group of competing heroes based loosely on the Golden Age Marvel Comics characters—whose mission was to hunt down the Freedom Fighters and bring them to justice. The Invaders pastiche consisted of Barracuda (Sub-Mariner), Fireball (Human Torch), Spark (Toro), Americommando (Captain America), and Rusty (Bucky). "Probably the most fun I had was doing the





crossover with the Crusaders," Rozakis says. "That was my idea. We got the word over to Roy that we were doing it, and he did the same thing. If you look at the *Invaders* book, he had them fighting the doppelgangers of the Freedom Fighters at about the same time I had the Freedom Fighters fighting the doppelgangers of the *Invaders*. I don't think we ever spoke about it to one another. Roy knew that I was writing a pastiche of the *Invaders* and I knew that he was writing a pastiche of the Freedom Fighters."

Roy Thomas created a similar approximation of the Freedom Fighters characters in *The Invaders* #14–15 (Mar.–Apr. 1977), which shipped at the same time Rozakis was using the *Invaders* characters in *Freedom Fighters*. Thomas' characters—also called the Crusaders—consisted of the Spirit of '76 (Uncle Sam), Dyna-Mite (Doll Man), Ghost Girl (Phantom Lady), Captain Wings (Black Condor), Tommy Lightnin' (the Ray), and Thunder-Fist (Human Bomb). "Tony Isabella and I agreed that we were going to kind of do a take-off of each other's characters," Thomas recalls. "It was probably based on the fact that Tony knew that Denny O'Neil and I were supposed to do sort of an Avengers/Justice League thing several years before, which obviously didn't work out very well. There really wasn't anything planned except that he was going to have something done in *Freedom Fighters* at the same time that I was going to do something in *The*

Invaders." [Editor's note: The unofficial JLA/Avengers crossover is explored in the book *Justice League Companion*, from TwoMorrows.]

On its face, *Freedom Fighters* was a typical team book. But because its characters were marginal and relatively new, it allowed its creators to take chances and experiment in interesting ways. "There really wasn't that much historical weight to the characters," Rozakis reflects. "Superman or Batman have much more historical weight because those characters had continued to be in print the whole time. These were characters that had appeared in the '40s and possibly the very early '50s, and then disappeared. So other than their appearance in Justice League, they hadn't been seen at all. So they were pretty much fair game. The only person who probably remembered reading these characters in their original stories was Roy Thomas, and he was working in the business at the time."

Although *Freedom Fighters* was unique in structure and dynamics, it was one of the many books that fell victim to DC's company-wide contraction in the late '70s. Because DC created dozens of new titles between 1975 and 1977 in an attempt to compete with Marvel, there just wasn't enough interest (or money) to sustain a book comprised of secondary characters. The book came to an end with *Freedom Fighters* #15 (July–Aug. 1977). The team's adventures continued a year later in *Secret Society of Super-*

The Crusaders "Crossover"

(left) Writer Roy Thomas introduced FF analogues in *The Invaders* #14 (cover by Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott), while Bob Rozakis returned the favor with Marvel knock-offs in *Freedom Fighters* #8 (cover by Rich Buckler and Jack Abel).

Invaders © 2010 Marvel Characters, Inc. Freedom Fighters TM & © DC Entertainment.



After the DC Implosion...

...the FF's scuffle with the Secret Society of Super-Villains ended up in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2. (right) A team-up with Superman in *DC Comics Presents* #62 (Oct. 1983).

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Villains (SSoSV), which Rozakis was also writing. SSoSV #15 (June/July 1978) closes with the Silver Ghost organizing a team of villains (Copperhead, Mirror Master, Sizematic Twins, Quake Master, Chronos, and Killer Moth) to launch an attack on the Freedom Fighters. That attack was never officially published, though. While *Freedom Fighters* fell victim to low sales, SSoSV fell victim to the DC "Implosion" that suddenly ended the publication of 20 DC titles in the summer of 1978. SSoSV #16-17 had been scripted and drawn, but the issues were never completely finished. Black-and-white copies of those stories—which featured an extended battle between the Freedom Fighters and the Society—were printed in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2 that summer.

Rozakis also wrote a script for SSoSV #18, but the series was killed before that issue was even penciled. That script describes the final confrontation between the Freedom Fighters (including newly added member and former Quality character Firebrand) and the Silver Ghost. After the team is captured by the Society,



Firebrand breaks free and grapples with the Silver Ghost. Both characters are turned to silver, fall out of a window, and shatter into pieces. The issue ends with a dispirited Freedom Fighters team determined to leave an Earth-One that has afforded them anything but freedom and escape. The following dialogue from the script to #18 hints at the team's new direction:

DOLL MAN: There's some reports in the Secret Society's files—about an interdimensional transporter that S.T.A.R. Labs has perfected! We can go home ... to Earth-X!

UNCLE SAM: I reckon we might—but we'd be runnin' away! And retreatin' isn't the American way!

PHANTOM LADY: "Running away?" "Retreating?" Sam—Rod is dead! Happy is dead! The police want to put the rest of us in jail! We've been charged with a collection of crimes we didn't commit and the last hope we had of getting the truth out went out that window! What's left on this Earth for us ... except more of the same? We left Earth-X because it was dull! I'll take that "dullness" any day!

Rozakis had plotted out the team's adventures for several years and did indeed have plans for them after the SSoSV crossover had ended. "My ultimate plan after the confrontation with the Silver Ghost," Rozakis says, "was to have the Freedom Fighters go back to Earth-X, where they would discover that the Nazis had taken over again. I was looking forward to doing WWII superhero comics, but in the present day. It would have been the other extreme. It was like, 'Okay, you took characters who were basically WWII characters and put them in present-day America. Now let's take the characters and place them in what present-day America would be like if the Nazis had won.'"

LIFE IN EXILE

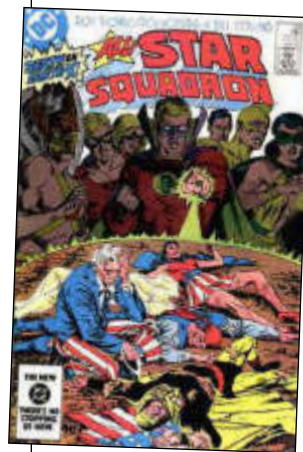
After *Secret Society of Super-Villains* ended in 1978, the Freedom Fighters were not used again for five years. Bob Rozakis scripted issue #62 of *DC Comics Presents* (Oct. 1983), co-starring Superman and the Freedom Fighters, but that issue essentially existed outside the confines and consequence of continuity. The Freedom Fighters had returned to Earth-X and were called back to Earth-One to help Superman fight a Neo-Nazi menace. But the next major step for the Freedom Fighters came when Roy Thomas decided to use the characters in his WWII-era *All-Star Squadron* book.

In order to use the Quality characters in *All-Star Squadron*, Thomas had to explain how the Earth-X team could also know and interact with the Squadron members of Earth-Two. This called for a complete revision of the Freedom Fighters' origin. In *All-Star Squadron* #31–35 (Mar.–July 1984), Thomas established that all of the Freedom Fighters were actually from Earth-Two to begin with. Uncle Sam accidentally stumbles on a gateway to the parallel Earth-X—a world without superheroes of any sort. He returns to Earth-Two to recruit a team of heroes to go to Earth-X and repel the spread of Axis power before it can begin. This prototype Freedom Fighters team—primarily pulled from Quality characters—is made up of Red Torpedo, Magno, Miss America, Neon the Unknown, Invisible Hood, and Hourman. The team averts the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941, but everyone but Sam is apparently killed in the attack. Worse yet, foiling the Pearl Harbor attack delays America's involvement in WWII. As a result, the Axis powers spread further into Europe and Asia and become so vast that America cannot stop the advance. In *All-Star Squadron* #31, Uncle Sam returns to Earth-One to recruit a new team (the team that Len Wein assembled in *JLA*) that can help battle the Axis forces. At the conclusion of the Freedom Fighters story in *All-Star Squadron* #35, the team decides to remain on Earth-X as long as it will take to defeat the growing threat.



This all sounds incredibly complicated (and it is), but it also reconciles the '70s series with Thomas' desire to use the Golden Age characters. Ultimately, though, the *All-Star Squadron* story didn't accomplish what Thomas had hoped: "Originally, there was a question of whether the characters should be on Earth-Two at all," Thomas says. "I brought them in I think mainly because I wanted to use a couple characters. One was Phantom Lady. We needed another woman or two in the group, because there really weren't very many superheroines in the '40s. We had Wonder Woman and I was making up a new Firebrand, and there was Liberty Belle. But there were so few that I felt the need to get some more in the group and Phantom Lady fit. I also thought about doing a little more with Plastic Man. But in the long run, I didn't end up using Phantom Lady—maybe because she didn't have that much in the way of power and maybe she didn't seem like that much of an addition to the group. And Plastic Man had this FBI job. If I had it to do over again, I would probably have left the Quality characters out altogether and wouldn't have had them in the *All-Star Squadron*. I had plenty of characters without having those characters on Earth-Two."

As it turned out, Thomas needn't have worried. A year after *All-Star Squadron* rewrote their history, the Freedom Fighters' original world was wiped out altogether. In *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, a company-wide crossover event intended to streamline DC's convoluted multiple-Earths structure, Earth-X was one of the worlds that was erased by a universe-and-dimension-spanning antimatter fray. After fighting off a team of heroes that has traveled to Earth-X to help save it, the Freedom Fighters finally join the larger collection of heroes to fight back against the villainous Anti-Monitor. While most of the Freedom Fighters are principally used as background filler in most of *Crisis*, Uncle Sam interrupts the narrative in *Crisis* #10 (Jan. 1986) to deliver an inspired pep talk that channeled Tom Joad and returned the elderly icon to his 1940s roots. At the end of *Crisis*, Earth-X is eliminated. But all the Freedom Fighters are preserved and pulled into the streamlined continuity of one Earth.



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Continuity Changes

(left) *All-Star Squadron* #31 revised the FF's past, and (right) Uncle Sam as motivational speaker in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #10.

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LIFE AFTER CRISIS

After *Crisis on Infinite Earths* ended, the Freedom Fighters effectively disbanded. Though the team had survived the Crisis and were now residents of the new unified Earth, they were even less relevant than they had been in the 1970s. Original Freedom Fighters stories had ended, but several members of the team were featured in issues of *Secret Origins* in 1986–1987: Doll Man in #8, Uncle Sam in #19, and Black Condor in #21. Murphy Anderson—a longtime admirer of Lou Fine’s artwork in the 1940s—drew all of these stories, and Roy Thomas edited and wrote nearly all of the Golden Age origin stories (including the Justice Society stories) in *Secret Origins* ... with one exception. “I never had much interest in Uncle Sam,” Thomas admits. “The only Golden Age superhero origin I didn’t write for *Secret Origins* was Uncle Sam. Len [Wein] wanted to write it, and I didn’t care much for the character. To me, he was just this editorial cartoon come to life and I just wasn’t that interested. I could have been interested in him if he was a superhero dressed in red, white, and blue. I just wasn’t that interested in the editorial cartoon walking around.”

In the decade following the *Secret Origins* stories, individual members of the Freedom Fighters received major overhauls. Phantom Lady was the first of several characters to face complete revision. *Action Comics Weekly* #636 (Jan. 24, 1989) began a six-part story that introduced a new Phantom Lady. Dee Tyler, daughter of the US attorney general, was a graduate of a secret French university where the original Phantom Lady (Sandra Knight) was a dean. An aging Knight apparently passed on her costume and phantom-ray equipment to Tyler, who continued Knight’s legacy of crimefighting. Two other heroes—the Ray and Black Condor—received similar revisions, though they each received

their own eponymous comics books. The new Ray, Ray Terrill (son of original Ray “Happy” Terrill) debuted in a four-issue 1992 miniseries before going on to star in an ongoing series that ran 28 issues from 1994–1996. A new Native-American character named Ryan Kendall debuted as Black Condor in *Black Condor* #1 (June 1992). While Kendall was no relation to original Black Condor Richard Grey, Grey does make appearances as a specter several times in the series (*Black Condor* #4 and 10).

Even the iconic American fixture Uncle Sam didn’t escape the 1990s without drastic alteration. In *The Spectre* #37 (Jan. 1996), writer John Ostrander and artist Tom Mandrake began a 14-issue storyline called “The Haunting of America”—an intricate retelling of the history of America from a much darker point of view. In Ostrander’s account, the founding fathers forged a talisman in 1776 that contained the spirit and aspirations of America. Over the course of “The Haunting,” the talisman breaks into fragments as the country gradually becomes a land of discord and transgression. In *The Spectre* #50, the talisman is reassembled and the character once known as Uncle Sam is transformed into a hero who calls himself the Patriot (the reunified spirit and promise of the Founders’ original vision).

The year 1997 was particularly dark for Uncle Sam at DC Comics. While the DC Universe (DCU) character emerged from a deep darkness to become something brighter in *The Spectre*, writer Steve Darnall and artist Alex Ross created a two-issue-series out-of-continuity story for DC’s Vertigo imprint that presented a much bleaker picture. In the heavily allegorical *Uncle Sam*, Ross and Darnall reimagine Sam as a homeless, delusional man wandering the streets of a crime-infested, filthy American city searching for his place and his identity in a country lost to him.

Quality Heroes Revisited

(right) *The Ray* #1 and (above) *Black Condor* #1 introduced new versions of these characters into the DC Universe, while (far right) Uncle Sam dropped in on the Ghostly Guardian in *The Spectre* #37.

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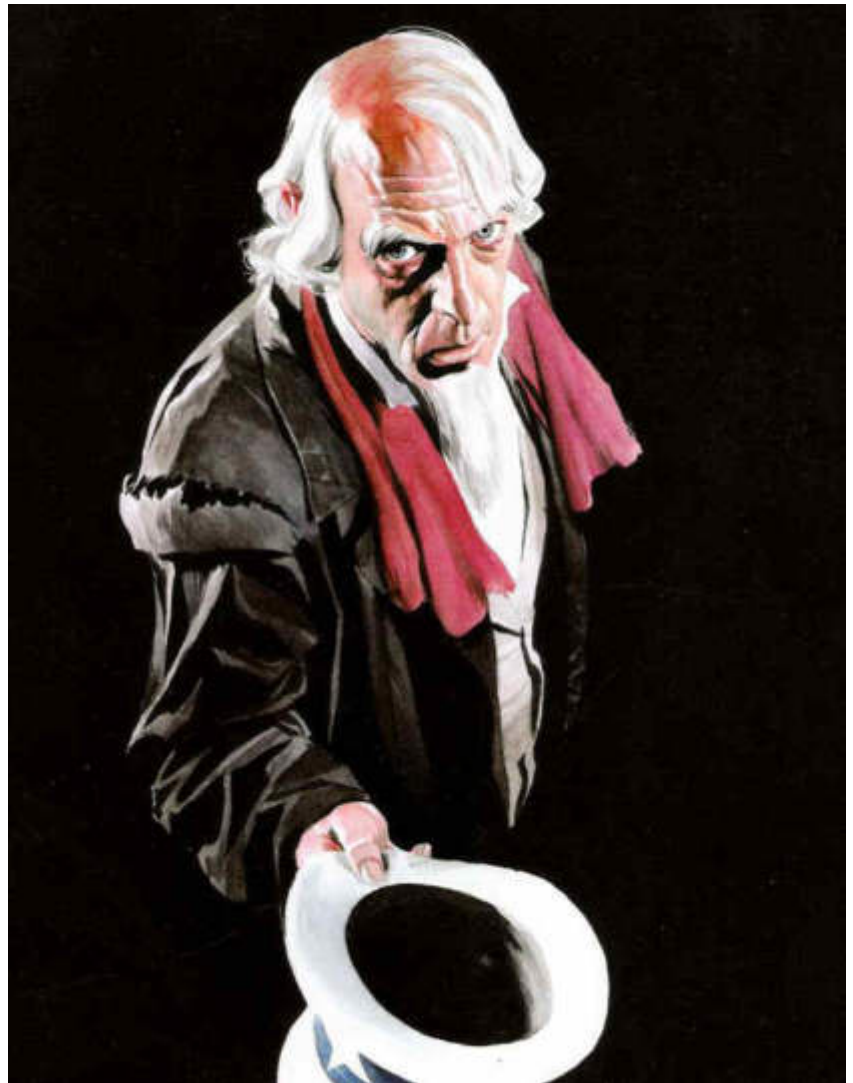
THE MODERN LIFE

After the *Spectre* story from 1997, Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters largely fell out of DC continuity again for several years. The team was reassembled—for the first time since *Crisis*—in *JSA: Our Worlds at War* #1 (Sept. 2001)—as an ancillary JSA unit. The team leader is the Patriot, and the rest of the new team is comprised of Iron Munro and Damage (both JSA legacy characters) and the new Phantom Lady, Black Condor, and Ray. The Patriot reverts back to his familiar Uncle Sam form in *Superman* #178 (Mar. 2002)—a quiet, compelling story by Jeph Loeb and Ed McGuinness in which Sam becomes so disoriented and confused after the election of Luthor to president of the US that he blames Superman for the country's malaise. But after Superman talks with him, Sam closes by saying, "It's never been harder to be what we are. The spirit of America." Once again led by Uncle Sam, the new Freedom Fighters team is seen next in *JSA* #49–51 battling alongside the JSA. And *JSA* #73 establishes that the new team is headquartered in the basement of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

The newly assembled Freedom Fighters didn't have much of a chance to congeal before being violently shaken apart. *Infinite Crisis* #1 (Oct. 2005) opens with the team getting ambushed outside of Metropolis by the newly constituted Secret Society. Hopelessly out-matched, the team is decimated by a group of the DCU's top villains. Sinestro kills Black Condor, Deathstroke runs Phantom Lady through with a sword, Bizarro pounds the Human Bomb to death, and Uncle Sam is left lying in a pool of oil in an alley, apparently dead.

As horrifying as the *Infinite Crisis* annihilation was, it had an oddly positive transformative effect on the Freedom Fighters. Because there was nothing left of the original team to salvage, DC decided to start from scratch and reconstitute the team using only Uncle Sam and the original characters' names as the starting point. Many of these new characters were introduced in the 2006 six-issue series *The Battle for Blüdhaven* (co-written by Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti, illustrated by Dan Jurgens, and based on concepts developed by Grant Morrison). *Blüdhaven* ultimately served as a prequel for *Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters* (USatFF), an eight-issue miniseries in which a resurrected Uncle Sam (rejuvenated in the waters of the Mississippi River) pulls together a disparate group of disaffected, aimless superheroes to fight against an increasingly tyrannical United States government. "The country was in a volatile state regarding the president, public perception, desire for change, and the uncertainty of another terrorist attack on American soil," Justin Gray says. "Despite the escapist nature of superhero comics, Uncle Sam is most identified as a patriotic and political character so we really wanted to work in the climate of the nation at the time. The Freedom Fighters—and most specifically Uncle Sam—were intended to recharge the sense of optimism and spirit of the time when they first appeared and how they would confront a more cynical age."

Because the team had not really had a guiding purpose since they won their fight against the Nazis in *JLA*, this new Freedom Fighters suddenly seemed politically and historically relevant. Cut from their historical ties to WWII, the new team meshed well with the contemporary political climate of America. "Some of the ideas Morrison introduced were driven by bringing back the mythological status of the American dream that Sam represents in conflict with a leadership not opposed to setting aside the Constitution in the name of freedom," Gray says. "These were jaded heroes who had all but forgotten the pur-



pose of their existence was to protect freedom and uphold inalienable rights. Sam had to return with the message that America was and is about hope. Change was important to not only to making them more relevant in the 21st century, but we wanted to tackle different aspects of cultural change such as celebrity infatuation, paranoia, terrorism, the changing landscape of military activity and a loss of faith in leadership and the direction our nation was headed in. Each Freedom Fighter represented a different facet of those concepts."

After the first critically (and creatively) successful USatFF series, the team returned for a second eight-issue miniseries in 2007–2008. After several decades of fun and entertaining stories about these characters trying to find their place in an unfamiliar world, the Freedom Fighters have finally grown into a sense of awareness that captures the sense of mission that made their 1972 debut so engaging.

ALEX BONEY is a PhD student at the Ohio State University. He is currently finishing his dissertation, which is about modernism, comics, and the rise of the American heroic ideal. He has written articles on a variety of subjects ranging from James Joyce to Booster Gold, and co-edits an online comics review site at www.guttergeek.com.



Down and Out in the USA

Writer Steve Darnall and artist Alex Ross' gripping two-issue *Uncle Sam* series of 1997 explored the best and worst of American politics and culture.

TM & © DC Entertainment.

end

★ rough Stuff ★

by Tom Ziuko

(right) You can't have a stars and stripes issue without featuring the icon that started it all—

Captain America, created during World War II to battle the original Axis of Evil—drawn here by his creator, Jack Kirby.

This is page one from Kirby's sketchbook done during the early to mid-1970s, and given as a Valentine's Day present to his beloved wife Roz.

(opposite page)

Also created during World War II to defend democracy, the distaff version of the red, white, and blue was the Amazonian warrior Wonder Woman, elegantly portrayed

here (with her invisible jet) by gentleman Gene

Colan, in this commission art from 2001.

Captain America © 2010 Marvel Characters, Inc. Wonder Woman TM & © DC Entertainment.

The red, white, and blue. These five simple words evoke images of the heart of America—Mom's apple pie cooling on the windowsill, Dad cooking hotdogs while the kids play baseball, the settlers giving smallpox-infested blankets to the Native American Indians... (ohh—sorry, didn't mean to get all political there). So instead, let's celebrate all that's right with the Star-Spangled Banner, as seen through the comic-book lens.





(below) From the Last Son of Krypton to the Man of Tomorrow, it's Superman—the ultimate illegal alien. Pencil art done for the DC Comics Style Guide by José Luis García-López, published in 1982. Inset version inked by the late Dick Giordano.

Superman TM & © DC Entertainment.



(opposite page)
Once again, we close with something special. In the 1960s, Golden Age artist Lou Fine (best known for his work on "Doll Man") continued to create beautiful art for the advertising agency Johnstone-Cushing, including comics for *Boys' Life* magazine. Here's an unpublished page from a civic-minded strip called "The Right To Choose." So learn a lesson, and remember kids, you *too* can be a superhero—vote on Election Day!

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE



ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK
"WHY THE UNITED STATES
IS RICH"

by
**WHEELER
McMILLEN**

PUBLISHED BY THE GAYTON PRINTERS, LTD., CALDWELL, IDAHO
USED BY SPECIAL PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS



BECAUSE OF THE AMERICAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE, AN EXTREMELY NECESSARY TRUTH MUST BE EMPHASIZED...

RIGHTS MEAN RESPONSIBILITIES.

HAVING THE RIGHT TO VOTE HE IS EXPECTED TO INFORM HIMSELF SO THAT HE CAN VOTE WITH INTELLIGENCE.

HAVING THE RIGHT TO A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF FREE EDUCATION HE IS EXPECTED TO STUDY IN SCHOOL AND TO BECOME A DECENT AND COMPETENT CITIZEN.

HAVING THE RIGHT TO SPEAK AND WRITE AS HE THINKS HE IS EXPECTED TO USE THESE RIGHTS SO AS NOT UNFAIRLY TO INJURE OTHERS.

HAVING THE RIGHT TO HELP MAKE THE LAWS HE IS EXPECTED TO OBEY THEM.

THE TRAFFIC SIGNAL IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF RESPONSIBILITY. THE RESPONSIBLE DRIVER CONSIDERS THE SAFETY OF OTHER DRIVERS AND OF PEDESTRIANS. BY OBEYING TRAFFIC SIGNALS AND TRAFFIC REGULATIONS HE KNOWS WHEN IT IS SAFE TO GO WITHOUT DANGER TO HIMSELF OR ANYONE ELSE... HE IS AWARE OF HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AS A DECENT AND CONSIDERATE CITIZEN.



NOT USED

2218

end



They

RED, WHITE, and BLEW It!

Okay, admit it! When the 2004 politically incorrect puppetoon Team America, World Police hit theaters, more than one of us thought of a certain souped-up Marvel Comics motorcycle series.

It was Ronald Reagan's America when *Team America* debuted in June 1982, only a month before a more ambitious multicultural team comic, *G. I. Joe*, walked down the direct-market red carpet with a high-end, offset-printed series. Team leader Honcho! The carrot top R. U. Reddy! Ace African-American mechanic Wrench! His girlfriend Georgina! The Latino loner Wolf! The mysterious Marauder!

Sure, it was familiar and formula. But this comfort-food reading had its charms, a reflection of a time when comics could wear its patriotism on its sleeve and not be ironic or sarcastic.

In retrospect, *Team America* resembles a hybrid of elements from other projects. Marauder seemed a cross between Racer X from *Speed Racer* and *G. I. Joe*'s Snake Eyes. Wolf, a Hispanic James Hetfield, operated in Wolverine/Timber Wolf hostile-loner mode. Honcho, Reddy, Cowboy—in another context, such characters might swell the ranks of some *Sgt. Fury* knock-off. Reddy was the typical leprechaun Irishman. The peripatetic riders had their masked/helmeted/Evel Knievel-jumpsuited alter egos that made them more superhero-esque, throwing the book into *Human Fly* territory (Fly scribe Bill Mantlo wrote many *Team* issues). Cowboy looked particularly awesome in his guise. In today's market, *Team* might have made great manga.

Marauder's mystery became a running thread. Was he one of them? Or a mysterious amalgam of the entire team? Theories abounded. Letters columns saw readers weighing in.

But as *BACK ISSUE* discovered, the drama behind the scenes of this relatively benign series may have rode circles around anything within its pages, as we take a rocky ride across *Team America*'s raceways.

AN ALL-AMERICA DEBUT

Like so many Marvel titles of the epoch, *Team America* sprung from the world of toys.

"The licensing people at Marvel were primarily responsible for Marvel's involvement with *Team America*," then-Marvel Comics editor-in-chief Jim Shooter tells *BACK ISSUE*. "Ideal Toys had a line of stunt-vehicle toys called Team America. I think they had a license to use Evel Knievel's name and image to promote the line ... our licensing execs worked out a deal for Marvel to develop entertainment around Team America—not including Evel Knievel—in the form of comics and, if possible, animation, TV film, even live action."

The book began as pure assignment from the top down.

Rocky Road

Fast-and-furious action was the norm in *Team America*. Cover to #2 (July 1982) by Mike Vosburg and Al Milgrom.

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FUELED ON HIGH-OCTANE BEHIND-THE-SCENES
DRAMA, WAS MARVEL'S SHORT-LIVED

TEAM AMERICA

ONE PATRIOTIC SERIES TOO MANY?

by Michael Aushenker





Shooter says, "I was directed by the president of Marvel, Jim Galton, to develop a property around the stunt vehicles—characters, a backstory, a bible—and to launch a series. Roger wilco."

Marvel enjoyed much success translating toys into superhero comics. *ROM: Spaceknight*, at 75 issues, had long outlasted the inspiration: a failed Parker Brothers cyborg poseable figure.

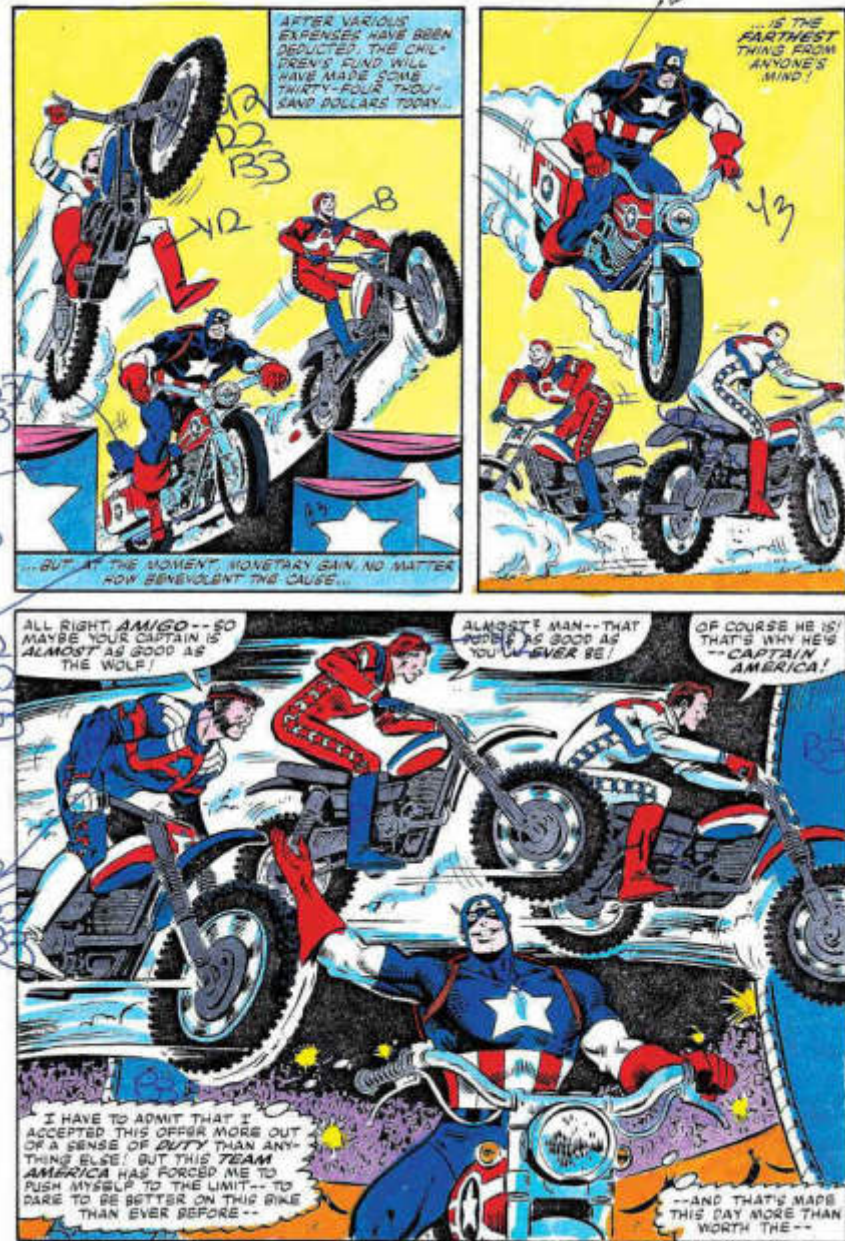
Shooter: "I think the licensing people were hoping to duplicate the success we'd had with Hasbro on *G. I. Joe* and *Transformers*, which we developed for entertainment, and for which we produced very successful comics, a very popular animated TV show (which turned out to be a financial disaster, by the way, due to incredibly inept management at our studio, Marvel Productions), and an animated movie."

As an aside, Shooter notes, "For a while, we also handled the licensing for those Hasbro properties, until Hasbro, unhappily with the poor performance of our licensing turkeys, took it over themselves."

From the beginning, Team America became connected to Hydra, a hangover from J. M. [Marc] DeMatteis and Mike Zeck's introduction of the super-rider group in *Captain America* #269 (May 1982), where Team America fought the Mad Thinker and his historical robots. This was Team's first appearance, although DeMatteis and Zeck did not create the group.

"As the writer of *Captain America*," DeMatteis tells *BACK ISSUE*, "I was told, by editorial, to include them in the book. My memory is that they were a new toy line that Marvel was going to be spinning off into a comic book (but, hey, I could be wrong). I was presented with concepts, fleshed them out a bit, and we did the story, which I recall very little about!"

Following that appearance, "I recruited creatives to develop *Team America*," Shooter says. "I think I did some of the concept/foundation work," he says,



"largely because I was one of very few Marvel creators who'd ever ridden a motorcycle."

Mike Vosburg sets the scene of how he came to be the original artist on the series.

"When I came back to Marvel [in the early 1980s]," Vosburg recalls, "I probably worked for two or three years. And then I did, like, six months on *John Carter [Warlord] of Mars*."

Then Vosburg left Marvel.

"One of my problems going back to DC was that [then-DC art director] Vinnie [Colletta] loved everything I did," he says, "so anything I did went to Vinnie [to ink]. So I switched over at Marvel in hopes that, if I can't ink it myself, I can get a different inker."

"Well, of course, the first project I'm on is *Team America*. And I meet with Jim Shooter and he says, 'Mike, who would you like to have ink you?' And I said, 'Anybody but Vinnie.' Sure enough, that was the big surprise that Jim had in store for me was, 'We got Vinnie to ink for you.' And I didn't realize at the time that Jim and Vinnie were best buddies. After that, my career at Marvel continued to go

First Ride

(left) Team America debuted in *Captain America* #269

(May 1982). Art by Mike Zeck and John Beatty. (above) Bob Sharen's color guide to page 9 of that issue, courtesy of Charles Costas.

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Hydra on the Run

The motocross heroes were fully integrated into the Marvel Universe, as seen on this Vosburg/Colletta page from *Team America* #1 (June 1982). Courtesy of Charles Costas.

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downhill. I wound up on the Shooter list of 'Do not give this guy any more work!'"

"I've seen J. M. DeMatteis credited as creator," Shooter says, "but I don't think that's accurate. I think that, besides whatever input I had, Al Milgrom was the primary creator. Ask Marc, ask Al. They may have a clearer memory. I know this for sure—'R.U. Reddy' is definitely an Al Milgrom name, Al being master of the punny name. 'Editori-Al' was the name of his column in *Marvel Fanfare*. I rest my case."

While flattered by Shooter's attribution, Milgrom admits, "I recall doing several cover roughs for the book, but honestly, I don't recall if I helped formulate the concept. Since I was involved in the concept and writing of the *US-1* book [another toy-inspired series based on an electric truck set], it may have followed that they called me in to work on the motorcycle book [Writer's note: In fact, *Team America* preceded *US-1*]. And despite Jim's contention that such a punny name must have been mine, I'm not so sure. Plenty of guys in this biz have done punny names over the decades."



Shooter parses his contributions.

"'Unlimited Class Racing' was my idea," he recalls. "James McDonald was a name I provided—that was my late uncle's name. I also contributed the name Georgianna Sue Castleberry, borrowed from a young woman who worked in the same store my mother did, in Pittsburgh. I think Honcho was mine, too. Maybe Wrench. Dunno."

"I think I wrote a rough treatment that impressed Ideal. Others added some of the guts and many of the details, I think. We probably got some input, too, from the licensing execs. They loved to chip in—sometimes good stuff, sometimes things we comics folks had to work around."

It appears that *Team America* was one of a few books that seemed to almost comprise a minor Marvel sub-genre: the athlete/everyman as superhero. You had *Team* hot on the heels of *Human Fly*, right before *US-1*. Ghost Rider's alter ego was a stunt man. There also seemed to be a big trend toward "all-American" books—*Team America*, *G. I. Joe*, *U.S.-1*. Cashing in on Reagan's America?

"Pretty much all the toy books were forced upon us by the licensing people and the president," Shooter says. "If there was a trend, it was in the toy business, not at Marvel."

So why create a book about stunt cyclists when the similarly themed, short-lived *Human Fly* had been canceled a couple of years earlier?

"We ninth-floor creative types were victims of our own success with *G. I. Joe* and *Transformers*," Shooter says. "Once those took off, the tenth-floor president and the licensing people saw gold in every toy property. You should see the list of the ones I successfully fended off."

The series seemed very serious about cycle racing, with backup features devoted to cycling tips and terms. Only in *Team* could you find two pages of "Honcho's Racing Hints," with Honcho straight-talking the reader with earnest advice on unlimited-class racing, and illustrations of Cowboy attempting jumps ("Remember—the back wheel lands first!"). Several *Team* covers, such as the solo spotlights, delivered all-American montages. So, was this book coat-tailing a specific sports craze? Or was this reflecting Shooter's personal interest?

"I don't remember," Shooter says. "I'm a reasonably experienced dirt and street biker. I probably thought such things would be interesting."

Which partially led Shooter to script and/or plot several issues. Partially, because there was more behind Shooter's writer's credits on the book than a mere love of motocross.

"My entire contribution to *Team America* stemmed from our inability to get anyone else to do it, or do it remotely right," Shooter says bluntly. "Make that do it in a remotely usable fashion. In fact, most of the writing I did while EIC at Marvel I did because it wasn't possible or practical to get someone else who could do it and not screw it up."

TROUBLE OUT OF THE GATE

The quondam editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics has plenty to say about *Team America*'s inauspicious start out of the gate.

"I remember that originally I assigned Denny O'Neil to edit the book," Jim Shooter says, "and we chose David Kraft to write it, largely because he rode a motorcycle (a Norton Commando, I think).

The Marauder

TA's most mysterious member in action on page 27 of *Team America* #2. Courtesy of Charles Costas.

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I was too busy to check on the progress of the book. It was presented to me for approval the day before it had to go out to the separators.

"It was a train wreck. Pathetic. Lousy. Stupid beyond human imagining. An embarrassment. Totally unprintable.

"I seriously doubt that Denny ever read the plot or the script; or even glanced at the art," Shooter reckons. "I suspect that he didn't care and left it to his assistant, or maybe just figured that Kraft, a biker, would do a reasonable job. He didn't.

"I should have fired Denny then," adds Shooter, candidly. "But ... how do you fire a legend like Denny O'Neil?"

Short on time, Shooter rallied his most dependable, available employees.

"I called in a bunch of artists, colorists, and a letterer," Shooter remembers, "and we stayed up all night at the office and literally remade issue #1 of *Team America* overnight. Frank Giacoia was there, I remember, and Vince Colletta did heroic work. Christie 'Max' Scheele, too. I rewrote the mess. We got it done and it shipped on time. That's my memory of it, anyway.

"By the way," Shooter adds, "I've seen the cover credited to Bob Layton," he says. "He may have inked it, but Frank Miller drew it."

The credited artist on *Team America* #1's interior remembers getting a false green light from management on his leg of the race.

"One of the most frustrating things about the book was that I did it, I brought it in, I went over it with Jim, and he said, 'Yep, I like this, like this,'" Mike Vosburg remembers. "A month later, I get a frantic call from someone over at Marvel, and they go, 'We're gonna need some overnight stuff! Jim has looked at the book and is really unhappy with it.' And I go, 'That's strange, he looked it over last month and he loved it.' But that was the way Jim worked."

"After issue #1," Shooter says, "we got the best people available to work on the book—but, in truth, most creators disdained 'toy books' and 'licensed books,' except *Conan*. And *Star Wars*. And *Indiana Jones*, for a while. Maybe one or two others. *G. I. Joe*, for instance, had a special appeal for guys who liked military stuff, like the great Herb Trimpe and editor/major *G. I. Joe* [comics series] creator Larry Hama. But on *Team America*, we ended up with guys like Bill Mantlo, who would take anything, or Alan Kupperberg, or whoever couldn't get other work that month. Did Don Perlin draw any *Team America*? [Writer's note: Perlin worked on #12.] If so, it was as a favor to me. Don was great, and I knew he could (reluctantly) draw motorcycles, from our days together on *Ghost Rider*."

ONE FORMULA RACE BOOK

Editor-in-chief Jim Shooter had a lot on his plate, overseeing Marvel Comics. While its magazine division consisted of only four products, the title *Marvel Fanfare*, on high-quality "Baxter" paper, like *G. I. Joe*, was being pitched at the emerging direct-sales market. The Epic line was about to debut. Bill Sienkiewicz was a hot artist, as evinced by the fanfare of him guest-penciling *X-Men* #159, and Frank Miller's star was white hot as he wrapped up his original *Daredevil* run.

Team America #1 (June 1982), written by Jim Shooter and drawn by Mike Vosburg, introduces readers to our globe-trotting professional motorcyclists: James "Honcho" McDonald, Winthrop "R. U. Reddy" Roan, Jr., Luke "Cowboy" Merriweather, Leonard "Wrench" Hebb, and Georgianna Castleberry (later Castleberry Hebb after marrying Wrench). Then there's the mysterious Latino badass, Wolf (Lobo).

Vosburg did not care for the assignment, nor did he remain on the book for long.



"It was a pain in the ass only because I wasn't familiar with motorcycles," Vosburg says. "Motorcycles were Jim's passion."

In *Team* #2, the baiting Hydra assassin hunts down Lobo. Was the Hydra/CIA plotline of the early *Team America* books an attempt to keep it rooted in the larger superhero Marvel Universe?

"Yes," Shooter says. "Because we, Marvel, owned at least our contribution to *Team America*, we were able to tie in the series more than most."

After the two-part Hydra plot, solo adventure spotlights followed, with #3 shedding no light on Marauder. *Team America* #4 (Sept. 1982) went on the road with the loner Wolf, while #5 focused on Honcho in which Marauder tackles CIA Agents, and #6 centered on R. U. Reddy in a battle against the Sweetwater Chemical Company dealing with terrorists and creating "hungry water"—water so polluted, it takes on a life of its own and consumes passing motorcyclists.

A stand-out is the quintessential *Team* #8 ("Trials," Jan. 1983)—a solidly structured, well-paced issue, courtesy of Shooter and fleshed out by Mantlo—which presents many of the *Team* tropes, as the multi-faceted Ed Hannigan cover illustrates: "Adventure! Intrigue! Action! Romance!" Raven-haired rival Monique Areadite attempts to seduce El Lobo to her team.

"Are you riding for the rich witch, Wolf? Or for Team America?" Reddy demands.

"El Lobo drives for El Lobo, and he answers to no man!" shouts the loner as he roars away.

The book climaxes with an exciting race between Wolf and Monique's car ... and Team America loses. The group vows to rebound, all while Wrench watches girlfriend Georgianna growing closer to Cowboy.

THE FINAL LAP

Not even appearances by Iron Man (#9) and Ghost Rider (#11) could boost *Team America's* numbers, although its "weak" sales would be coveted by today's Marvel.

Shooter: "I routinely canceled titles that fell near 100,000 copies a month back then. Now 100,000 these days would be a giant hit. I suspect that *Team America* was one of our bottom-three titles at the end. I always looked at those bottom three and figured that if there was no clear way to turn them around, then we should try something else."

The final issue of a comic-book series is a tricky affair. It can become one of the best issues, packed with resolutions and/or out-the-door shockers (see *Combat Kelly and the Deadly Dozen* #9) or a dissatisfying experience, canceled quickly sans closure (OMAC #8). Thankfully, *Team America* #12 (May 1983) resembles the former, as Shooter saw the end coming and worked out the storyline in this fun, freewheeling, double-sized finale.

Yes, #12, proved to be the series' weirdest, with the offbeat revelation of Marauder's secret identity. Penciled by Don Perlin (who also drew the explosive cover) and inked by Vince Colletta, it starts out with a big splash (literally) with a reaction shot of the team as they learn the startling identity of the Marauder. Turn the page, the big reveal. Wrench should've figured it out. After all, he often made out with the Marauder: Georgianna (in padding to make her body appear more masculine). Mysteriously, Georgianna has no memory of her Marauder exploits.

Parallel to this revelation at the Lakebed Oklahoma Speedway, we drop in on the story of Elsie

Carson, regional director of the international terrorist organization Hydra. Apparently, she was in charge of the failed attempt to kill Team America in the previous issue, in which the gang, with Marauder, handily defeated Ghost Rider and a gang of Hydra agents. As Elsie sulks in her office over her failure (which means that her end is eminent at the hands of her superiors), her costumed sidekick, Lance, is already lamenting her pending demise.

After escaping Hydra, Elsie crosses paths with Team America and spills the beans on Hydra's firstborn mutant program: Years ago, the criminal organization had selected young couples and spiked their drinks with chromosome-altering drugs that would give their children mutant abilities. Evidently, Team's men were recipients. As a result, the motocross men, combined, conjured up the Marauder, using Georgianna as the entity's host body.

Shooter's dialogue milks much workplace humor. When Lance arrives to turn in his "terrific boss," Elsie, he says, "I really appreciated the time off when my wife, Charlotte, was sick..." When Elsie shoots Lance during a bold escape, she thinks to herself, "Ah! Just winged him! He'll be okay ... I hope! His sons can do most of the work down at the auto parts store while he's laid up ... and Hydra's medical benefits plan ought to cover his hospital expenses. Darn! I hope his wife, Charlotte, doesn't get hysterical over this. It's always more upsetting somehow when a part-timer gets hurt!" Reading such passages regarding the mundane aspects of Hydra—workplace compensation, employee benefits, medical coverage—is delicious when one is cognizant of who the writer is; perhaps such worries plagued Marvel's editor-in-chief.

Georgianna was not having an affair with Cowboy, but was getting motorcycle-riding lessons to impress Wrench. The man also known as Leonard Hebb proposes to Georgianna. Her response: "Len ... as they say back in Motown ... you got it, bro!"

Meanwhile, Team America is breaking up. Honcho wants to return to his former employer, the CIA, while Cowboy wants to start a school. As a result of Team's dissolution, Reddy can no longer generate the income to repay his father. He throws piles of his father's letters as he vents his poor-little-rich-boy papa issues in a manner unseen since Ryan O'Neal confronted Ray Milland in *Love Story*. Reddy's teammates convince him to phone his father. To Reddy's surprise, his father not only patches things up with him but covers Wrench and Georgianna's wedding.

As Team's riders go their separate ways, Reddy wonders "if Georgianna is the only one who can become the Marauder or if someone else might! I guess we'll never know!" As his plane takes flight, the mysterious Marauder watches, perched on a cliff, before riding off into the sunset. "The end ... for now."

According to Shooter's *Team America* obit column in #12, "The Last Word," the book was canceled despite the fact that it was technically in the black. The verdict on the series was that it was not big enough of a seller to justify all of the hard work that went into it, even though 1983's 100,000 comics-per-month sold would make for a blockbuster title in 2010.

Don Perlin has said before that he did not enjoy drawing motorcycles, so imagine going from *Ghost Rider* to *Team*. Yet "after a couple of issues, it became second nature. On *Ghost Rider*, you could cover the motorcycle up with flames. The [*Team*] ones stick to details, where the engine was."



**Marvel Team
(America)-Up**
Ghost Rider blazes
into *Team America*
#11 (Apr. 1983).
Original Dave Simons
cover art from
the collection of
Charles Costas.

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Going Out with a Bang

A climactic battle with Hydra from *Team America* #12 (May 1983). Art by Don Perlin and Vince Colletta.

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Shooter's admiration for Vince Colletta seems apparent in the series' last issue, which is not only graced with a Q&A interview between the pair in the Bullpen Bulletin, but Shooter singles Colletta out in that issue's "The Last Word" column for staying "from beginning to end, working with half a dozen different pencilers, often under terrific deadline pressure and managing throughout to do slick, polished, professional work."

Was the big revelation regarding Marauder planned from the very beginning?

"Honestly, I forget," Shooter says. "However, it was/is my style to have all such things figured out from the get-go."

Team America made a brief return with new costumes and a new identity (the Thunderiders) in *The Thing* #27 (Sept. 1985), alongside the Sharon Ventura Ms. Marvel (who joins the team). The concept fizzled. Team America disappeared—a blip on the history of Marvel Comics.

SMELLS LIKE TEAM SPIRIT

A product of '80s Americana, *Team America* enjoyed its finest hour in a dozen tidy issues that saw the group carom from skirting with the tentacles of Hydra to fumbling through romance and relationships, to allying with Marvel superheroes, fighting villains, fighting each other, and, ultimately, banding together to win—and lose—some major races.

Given *Team America*'s tumultuous backstory, Jim Shooter today understandably harbors mixed feelings about Marvel's fleeting attempt to superhero-size motocross.

"I thought we did the best we could, under the circumstances," Shooter observes. "Some really nice things were done in *Team America*. There were some really good moments."

One of the best (and progressive) elements of the series was that the team was multicultural. Like *G. I. Joe* and *Silver Age Sgt. Fury* comics, *Team* reflected the people of its mother country—the Latino Wolf, African-American Wrench and Georgianna, Cowboy hailing from the South, and Irish-American Reddy. The interracial teamwork and tension in *Team America* appealed to Shooter the writer.

"Instant ethnic diversity was de rigueur because of the toy connection," Shooter says. "I hoped we would accomplish it in a way that was not merely politically correct, but was actually real-feeling and interesting, with characters who were people first, and of whatever required backgrounds second."

There was never a doubt that this book's characters should reflect a true American palette.

"I'm in favor of people. Some of my best friends are people," Shooter says. "I think that a contrast of backgrounds can offer the possibility of intriguing interactions. I hate it when the required politically correct racially/ethnically diverse ciphers are trotted out like puppets. In later endeavors, I avoided that syndrome, and introduced diversity more naturally, gradually, rather than the PC one-from-column-A, one-from-column-B, etc., manner."

Despite Marvel's game efforts, Shooter admits, "Overall, we failed. I'd like to add this: Michael Fleisher once said of comics, words to the effect, 'There is more skill,



knowledge, and work in the least of our efforts than most people will ever understand.' He's right. We tried, and the effort was tremendous. Greater than you'd believe.

"But there are too many moving parts in the process of creating, and especially in the process of creating comics, to get everything right all the time. That time, we blew it."

Special thanks to Alan Rutledge, Frank 'N' Sons, City of Industry, California, and Jeff Rogers, JNJ Comics, Fountain Valley, California, for filling in the gaps in my collection.

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end

THE UNPUBLISHED

When *Team America* #3 appeared, cover-dated August 1982, it was officially credited to Bill Mantlo (script), Luke McDonnell (pencils), Mike Vosburg (inks), and Jim Shooter (editor). The published version, that is.

There was a whole other, completely different version of #3 (and, apparently, #1 and 2) which never reached the hands of Marvel's readers.

Over the years, comic-book art collector Charles Costas of Chevy Chase, Maryland, has purchased art from favorite artists Mike Vosburg and Zeck (the latter of whom drew *Team America*'s debut in an issue of *Captain America*). The original art that Vosburg sold to Costas included pages for the unpublished versions of *Team America* #1-3.

"I got them directly from Vosburg," Costas tells *BACK ISSUE*. "I worked in Los Angeles in 2000 and 2001 as a pharmaceutical consultant. I had originally bought some *Tales of the Crypt* covers from him. Vosburg had *She-Hulk* and other stuff in his files. We went through his artwork that he was ready to sell. With that, there were his unpublished *Team America* pages. A lot of the Marvel art, he didn't really want to keep. Mike influenced a generation with what he did for *G. I. Joe* but he could care less about it."

Costas got to know Vosburg, visiting the artist and his wife at their Tujunga home. "I asked Vosburg what was the reason these issues didn't get published," he says. "His answer was along the lines of, he and Shooter had a falling out."

Costas, in turn, sold some of the Vosburg art, including the mystery versions of the series, to diehard *Team America* fan Mark Madias. According to Madias, who has studied *Team America* intently, the series has a history of massive reworking.

"*Team America* #1 was completely redone at least twice, based on the art I purchased," Madias says.

Madias shares his thoughts with *BACK ISSUE* on the unpublished *Team America* #3 which "never saw the light of day..."

"If we look at the published issue #2," he says, "we see the unpublished story plugged at the ending: 'Next Issue—The Break-up of Team America!' What was published in #3 instead was a solo Marauder story, followed by a Wolf solo story in #4, a Honcho spotlight piece in #5, and a R. U. Reddy tale in #6."

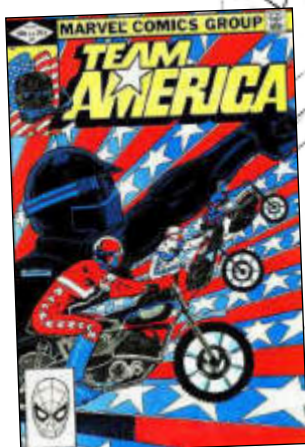
Milgrom Plays Rough

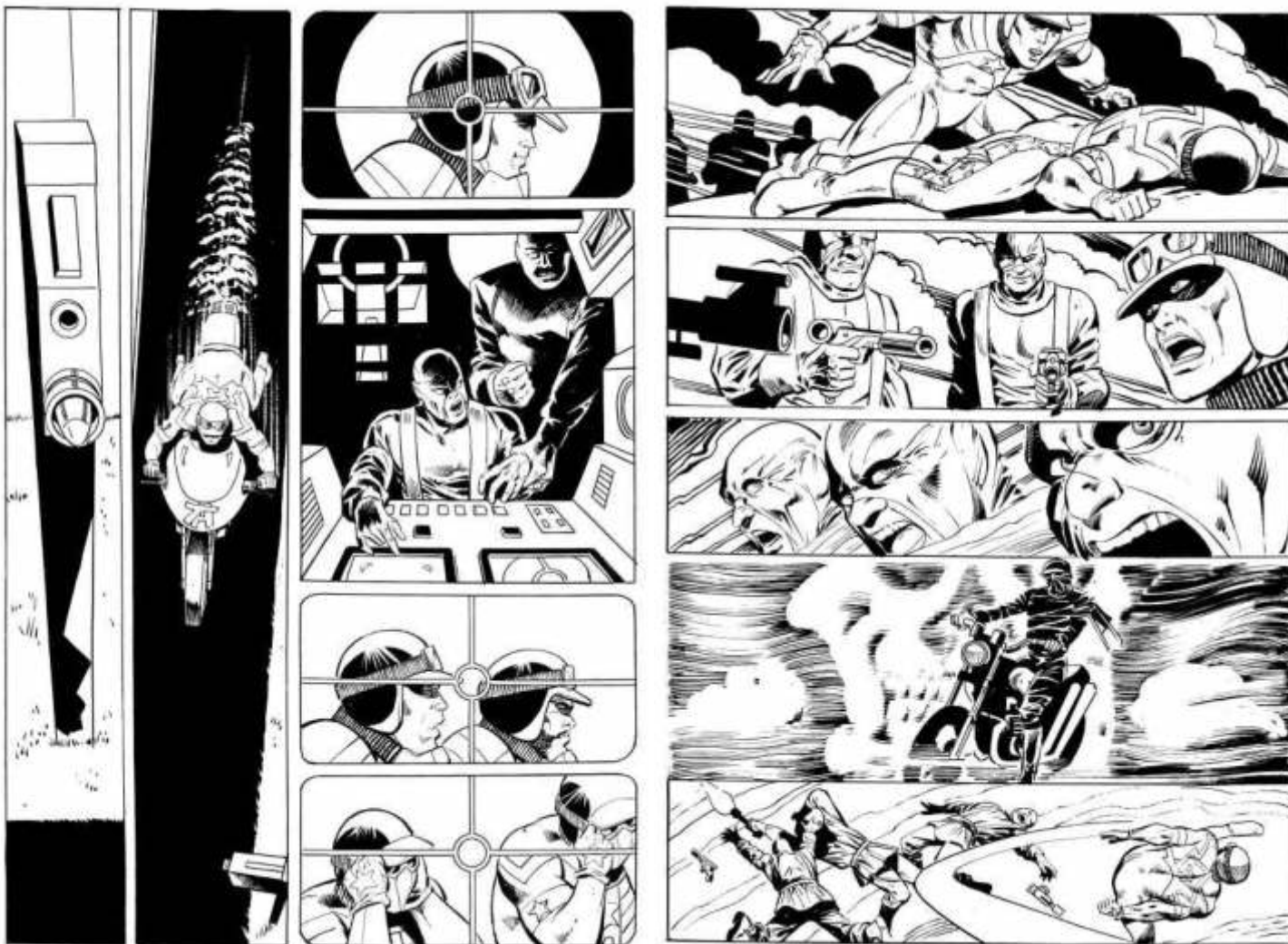
In addition to the unpublished art which Vosburg sold to Costas, Al Milgrom submitted to *BACK ISSUE* the rough sketch for his original cover concept of *Team America* #1. Thanks, Al!

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TEAM AMERICA

by Michael Aushenker





"These four issues (#3–6) have variant editions that came packed with the Ideal toys, each with the specific character. These variants carry the numbering and indicia information that would take the unpublished story into account.

"The published issue #3 [Marauder solo story] is cover-dated August 1982," Madias continues. "The issue packed with the Marauder toy, the same solo story, bears #4 on the cover, and the indicia reads September 1982. This goes down the line: Wolf's solo book, published issue #4 (Sept. 1982) is #5 (Oct. 1982) in the toy variant edition, and so on. The R. U. Reddy solo toy variant bears the [issue] number 7 (Dec. 1982). The published #7 was the Cowboy story.

"If you take published issue #2 (July 1982) and the variant issue #4 (Sept. 1982), that leaves a nice hole for the unpublished issue #3. *Overstreet* [Comic Book Price Guide] merely states an 'A' and 'B' version of the issues, no numbering difference. These variants have no regular advertisements, and do not have the pinups that the published issues have. In addition, the interior of the front cover is an ad for the Team America toys.

"As to why #2 was never packed with the toys, and received no variant edition," Madias says, "about ten years ago at Rogers Comics in New York City, I saw bundles of the Wolf and Honcho variants. Maybe 300 copies in the bins. They were obviously over-printed, and that is why you get Wolf and Honcho comics with the four-wheel toys.

"I think what Ideal wanted Marvel to do was a Team America version of the 'Evel Knievel' comic with 'Mr. Danger,' which Vosburg drew, if memory serves, and found it a problem when Marvel tried to tie it in with all their other stuff."

So why was the original issue #3 dropped?

"If you look at issue #2," Madias says, "it plugs three of the toys Ideal produced or intended to produce directly in the story: the Super Stunt Dirt Buggy, the Scramble Rig, and the Winnebago. The Winnebago was basically the old Evel Knievel toy with 'T. A.' slapped on the sides, and although Ideal never produced it, the illustration is clearly based on this toy, and not on a real Winnebago.

"It seems clear to me," Madias concludes, "that issue #2 was intended to be packed with the Buggy and the Scrambler. The solo issues highlighted the specific action figures that came with the bikes."

Madias has another theory about the destiny of *Team America*: "What appears to be happening in the production office is Ideal sanitizing the books. This is further seen when Ideal pulls the plug on the book, and the Marvel-created characters appear the next month with the New Mutants and the X-Men in the two X-books, to clearly stake the rights to the characters. The Marauder is called the Dark Rider in these issues, and Team America do not appear anywhere on the covers."

So much mystery for such a short-lived series!

end

Unseen Team

The unpublished art of *Team America*

"has more to do with tying Team America to the Marvel Universe through Hydra," says art collector Mark Madias. "In fact, some of the unpublished art from issue #1 states (under the White Out) that Honcho was a S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent. This was altered to 'C.I.A. agent' in the printed issues."

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BACK TALK

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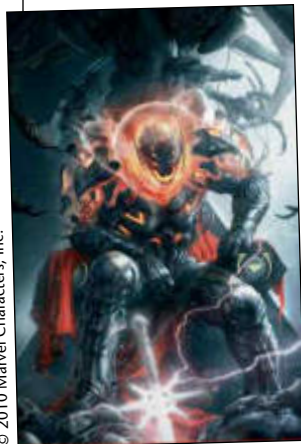
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MORE FAMILY AFFAIRS



I've enjoyed your magazine for years and look forward to many more. The latest "Family" issue was no exception, the Ultron and Power Pack features being real standouts. In regard to the former, it would be nice to see an article going in-depth about the theme of "bad fathers" throughout the *Avengers* series.

One nitpick: Jack Abramowitz's spotlight on Heidi Saha was a creepy subject that left out one vital part. Did he attempt to contact her for the article? It would be illuminating to know where she stands on her exploitation as teenage cheesecake. When I reached the end, I had to go back and check again that I hadn't missed anything. Not that I'm encouraging coverage of more subjects like this (please, no), but hearing at least

that Heidi Saha couldn't be reached for comment or had nothing to add would do the reader a service.

— James Proctor

P.S. I really enjoyed Scott E. Williams' "Marvel Marital Mayhem." Going back over the mag, I laughed for the hundredth time at his priceless advice: "Do not *even* get to know Peter Parker." More articles in this spirit (poking fun but not mocking) are welcome.

Jack Abramowitz responds:

"Thank you for your comments on the Heidi Saha article. I did try to contact her; I sent a message to an address that to my knowledge is current, but I did not receive a reply. I also tried to contact another prominent con model of the time who had competed against young Heidi; she likewise did not respond. To a degree, the approach I took was based on the information at hand.

"As far as it being creepy, that was kind of the point of my piece. I was too young when this magazine came out to have any firsthand knowledge of reader reaction, but it's such a spectacularly bad idea by our standards that to us it's staggering that it was ever produced. Yes, it's creepy, in a very different way from most Warren publications, but one has to suspect that it was intended as innocent. The concept of the magazine is certainly distasteful, but the contents are fairly tame, especially when compared to, say, the teenage pop divas of the past few years."

From ye editor: So you want to read about more bad dads in Avengers? We'll keep that in mind, as an Avengers-themed issue is being planned for late 2011.

And re your opening sentence: Sometimes it's hard to believe that BACK ISSUE has been around since late 2003! To those of you who have been reading BI "for years," thank you! And we're happy to have those of you who came late to the party in our family as well.

— M.E.

BYRNE'S UNFORGETTABLE FF

I enjoyed the cover of *BACK ISSUE* #38! John Byrne's art is always great, but this take on Rockwell meets FF really stands out!

The theme of family is nice, since I liked how some of my favorite heroes worked from a family background, even the loner Batman!

Fantastic Four became a favorite of mine just before John Byrne took over the art for the first time, and his later work writing showed great imagination and a good handle on plots and characters. As the article pointed out, I agree that his inks on his own pencils didn't work out as well as with Terry Austin and others inking, but, hey, the stories and character development were so engaging I didn't mind a very slight reduction in art quality.

I was glad you could get a great article on Batgirl. "Growing Up Batgirl" was a real treasure, with the history and insights from those who are qualified to comment! That was a nice surprise that Dewey Cassell was able to talk to Denny O'Neil, Cary Bates, and Yvonne Craig and have a very interesting, informative article for us.

As with most "untold stories," the article on C. C. Beck's battle with DC showed again how things don't always work out well, and readers lost out on what sounded like another great project. I appreciate hearing the backstory of what happened, but am sad for the outcome.

Thanks for bringing back "Rough Stuff." It's always interesting seeing what these artists can do with a pencil. I especially liked the Superman on page 49, done by (who else?!) John Byrne!

— Paul Green

Always nice to hear from you, Paul.

Glad you liked the return of "Rough Stuff." That feature, now in the hands of Atomic Tom Ziuko, is more than eye candy since Tom is investing a lot of editorial thought into matching each issue's theme. What do the rest of you think of the return of "Rough Stuff"?

— M.E.

WHAT THE ZECK??!

Browsing the digital edition of *BACK ISSUE* #39 this morning, and happy to see my *What The--?!* cover (pg. 11) included as part of the Spider-Ham article. Clever issue idea by [editor Jim] Salicrup and one of my more "fun" covers at Marvel.

Not sure if most readers will get the "April Fools" joke of crediting it to Alex Saviuk though. :-o

It was, of course, the original "Kraven's Last Hunt" team reassembled for that cover—me and Bob McLeod.

— Mike Zeck

Thank you for the correction, Mike.

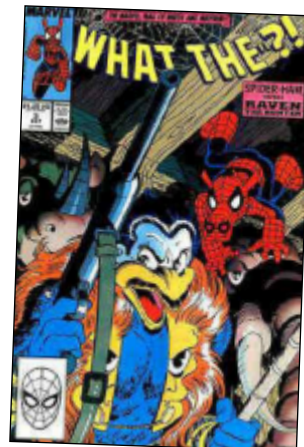
That Saviuk credit came from the good folks at the Grand Comic-Book Database—the web's go-to source for comics info—and we've informed them of the error.

(Hey, can I use the "April Fools joke" excuse for the other mistakes that crept into the issue...?)

— M.E.

NOT BUGGED BY BI #39

Just thought I'd send you an e-mail telling you how much I have enjoyed the latest issue of *BACK ISSUE*, #39, which I have just finished reading. Having looked forward to the interview with Giffen and Fleming about *Ambush Bug*, I was not disappointed at all. It made for great reading and was very funny as I had hoped. The stories about the submarine advert and the voodoo doll and Alan Moore were priceless.



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I also really enjoyed all the other features, particularly the ones on Spider-Ham, Fred Hembeck, Flaming Carrot, Alan Kupperberg, Big Boy Comics, and Reid Fleming.

One of my favorite issues of *BACK ISSUE* so far, and I had a letter printed as well to boot, which is very nice to see. Even better, Rufus Dayglo, an excellent artist and all-around top fellow, had a letter printed in the same column as me, and I agree with him about what a great artist the criminally underrated Gerry Talaoc is and am glad too, that, Mr. Talaoc is well.

Good luck with going to eight issues a year and adding color. I'll keep buying and reading, and hope that you'll gain plenty of new readers, too. All the best.

— Matthew Jones

Matthew, you've got another letter printed this ish! And our own Michael Aushenker will be bringing the talented Gerry Talaoc back to our pages, in an all-new interview, in BI #49.

— M.E.

A SUPER DESIGNER

Hi, Myk-El,

The latest *BI* was about as far from Krypton as you could get, but that was fine. Thank you very much for running the Reid Fleming article with accompanying Boswell interview. Rich Fowlks did a wonderful job with the design and deserves much praise.

As do you! I didn't know that Reid would be in such fine company. The humor articles were so well chosen that it made for a bang-up, full-bodied mag, chock full of great reading.

I don't laugh out loud very often when digesting articles of historic interest, but there were two such moments during the Keith Giffen/Robert Loren Fleming "Pro2Pro" interview. When it was recounted that Fleming backed Moore, Bissette, and Tottleben [of 1980s Swamp Thing fame] down the hall with even greater horror than those creep-masters could imagine, it was hilarious. Also, when Fleming was doing some proofreading in Julie Schwartz's office and he and Kurt Schaffenberger had explosive laughs at Julie's expense, I can just imagine the indignant senior editor getting all huffy while stifling a chuckle or two, as well.

Just a trunkload of fine material in this one; many congratulations to you for its success.

The best to both of you gentlemen,

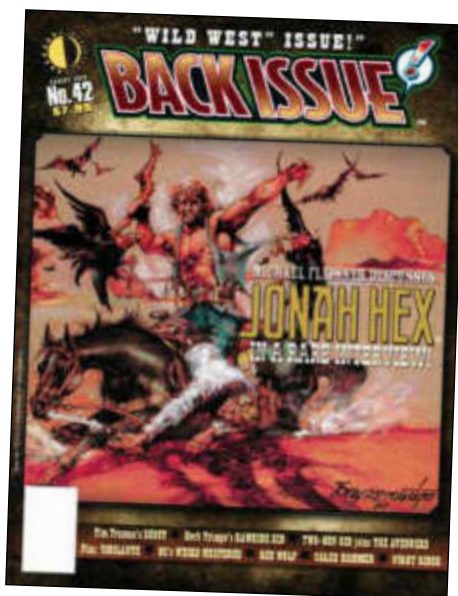
— Eddy Zeno

That's high praise, indeed, coming from the author of one of our favorite books on comics, Curt Swan: A Life in Comics. Eddy, your Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman contributions in BI #39 helped make our "April Fools" issue a treat.

Thank you for mentioning the superlative design work of Rich Fowlks. The deadline treadmill often distracts us from giving Rich his due, but his work on BACK ISSUE cleverly gives each article its own identity while working in harmony with the issue's other features. And for those who have read BI "for years," you've witnessed Rich's maturity as an artist and a designer. Here's to the talented Mr. Fowlks!

Next issue: "Wild West"! When was the last time you read an interview with writer MICHAEL FLEISHER? Maybe never! So you can't miss the exclusive interview with the long-time Jonah Hex scribe in BACK ISSUE #42, which is loaded with art both cherished and rare. Plus: TIM TRUMAN's Scout, the Two-Gun Kid joins the Avengers, HERB TRIMPE's Rawhide Kid, DICK AYERS' original Ghost Rider, DC's Weird Westerns, Red Wolf, Caleb Hammer, Charlton's Westerns, and the Vigilante's 1970s revival. With art and/or commentary by NEAL ADAMS, JIM APARO, CHUCK DIXON, LUIS DOMINGUEZ, GEORGE EVANS, JOSE LUIS GARCIA-LOPEZ, KEITH GIFFEN, ED HANNIGAN, BILL KUNKEL, GRAY MORROW, FABIAN NICIEZA, and BEAU SMITH, and a heckuva Jonah Hex cover by TONY DeZUNIGA. Yeeee-haw! Don't ask—just BI it!

Michael Eury, editor



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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
- ✦ Penciled 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.

Artwork submissions and SASEs for writers' guidelines should be sent to:

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REMEMBERING DICK GIORDANO

Dick Giordano, who throughout his long career “changed comics, one day at a time,” passed away on Saturday, March 27, 2010.

I knew that Dick, my former boss and longtime friend, was ill and hospitalized in Florida, but his death caught me by surprise. My wife Rose and I were out most of the day Dick died, and we returned home to several voicemails. Upon listening to the beginning of the first message but not yet hearing it in its entirety, Rose gasped to me, “Someone has died...”

My thoughts raced with names of who it might be, and yet Dick Giordano did not come to mind. Dick had this immensely likable quality that made him seem indestructible—or perhaps I was just being selfish because I didn’t want to think of a world without him.

Dick Giordano was a talented artist, a go-to inker, an influential editor, and an experienced teacher. That you know. But unless you

had the privilege of meeting or working with Dick, you aren’t aware that he was one of the nicest people on this planet.

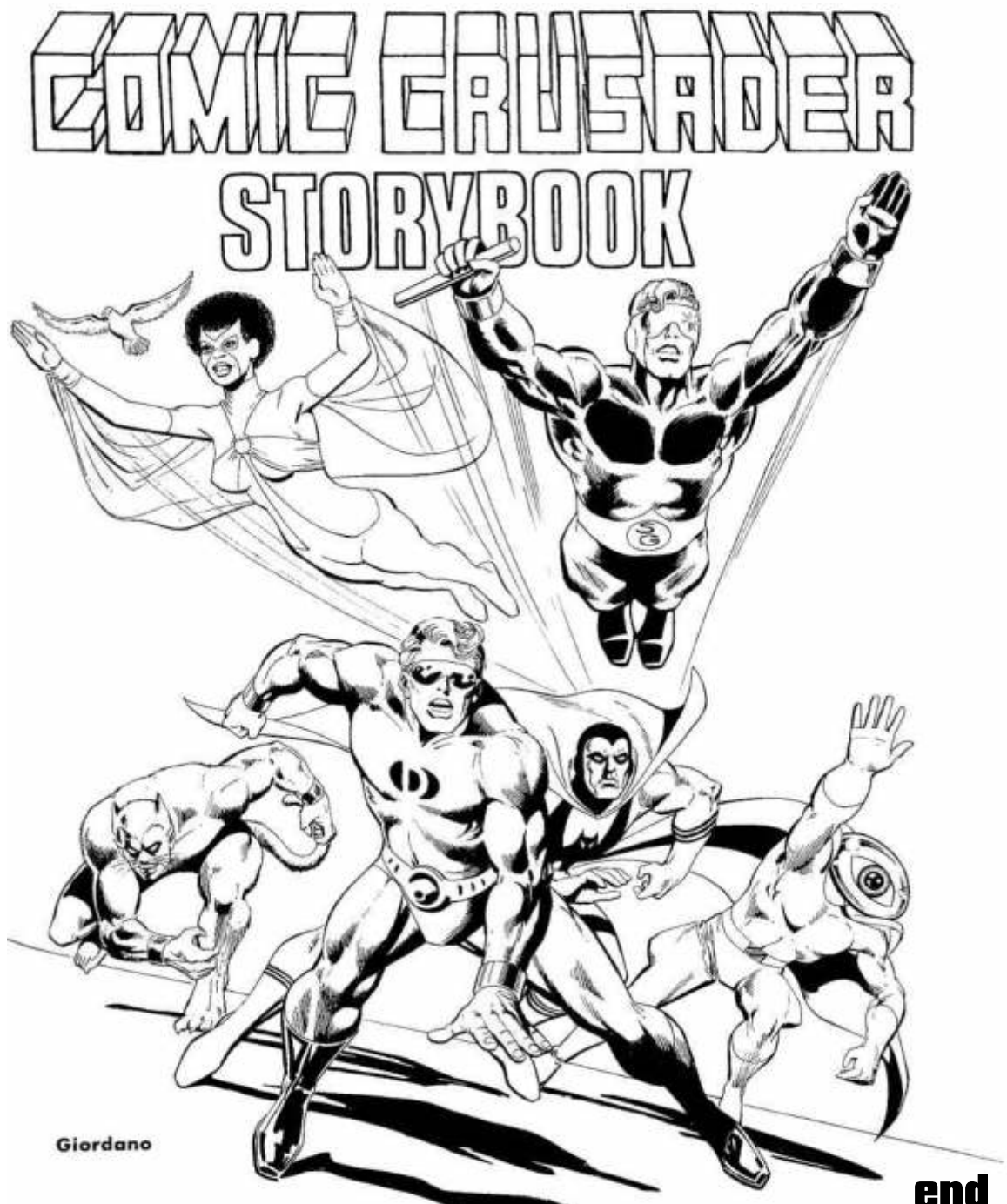
Coincidentally, this issue features several images drawn by Dick Giordano, art selections that were made before his passing. Also, last issue’s White Tiger/Sons of the Tiger article featured comments from Dick in what might very well have been his last interview. That’s a distinction we’d rather not have earned—Dick had more recollections to share, and more illustrations to draw (including a BACK ISSUE cover), and now his voice has been silenced and his pen capped.

BACK ISSUE extends its deepest condolences to the Giordano family, to Dick’s friend and ally Pat Bastienne, and to DC Comics. Thank you and good afternoon, Dick.

– Michael Eury

Here’s a Dick Giordano rarity: the original cover art to *Comic Crusader Storybook* #1, published in 1977 by Martin Greim, featuring the characters Xal-Kor the Human Cat, the Defender, Dr. Weird, the Eye, White Raven, and Space Guardian. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions.

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