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Photo credit: Jesse Chieffo.

# BACK SEAT DRIVER

by Roger Ash

**I'm proud of this issue.** Heck, I'm proud of every issue we put out for you. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be doing my job. I want every issue to be something that you, our readers, will enjoy. But this issue feels special.

Nearly every issue is chock full of stories featuring our favorite comic book heroes and villains. They're in this issue too, but they aren't the ones in the spotlight. This issue belongs to the supporting characters.

In other aspects of pop culture, this issue is full of the comic equivalents of Barney Fife, Q, Norm Peterson, Ted Baxter, Millie Helper, Marcus Brody, Carol Kester, as well as Larry, Darryl, and Darryl. They aren't the stars, but the story, and the lead characters, would be much poorer without them.

I would argue that the character with the best supporting cast is Spider-Man. Over the years, we've not only read of his adventures, but those of his supporting cast as well. Spidey just isn't the same without Aunt May, Gwen Stacey, Flash Thompson, J. Jonah Jameson, Betty Brant, Ned Leeds, and Robbie Robertson. The list goes on and on. But the character who may have had the biggest impact on his life is Mary Jane Watson. Their lives have been tangled together since she first appeared in *Amazing Spider-Man* #42. She certainly deserves her chance to step into the spotlight.

A reason that this issue came about is the woman featured on our cover, Amanda Waller. I've found her fascinating since she first appeared in the *Legends* miniseries. There were no other characters quite like her when she debuted. No one looked like her and no one else had a personality like hers. She got stuff done (I'd really like to use a stronger word, but I can't). If something was important, she wouldn't let anyone stand in her way, least of all the criminals who made up the Suicide Squad.

I'll admit that I'd never heard of Mordecai Pendragon, but that's not surprising as I never got into *Vampirella*. But the suggestion intrigued me, so I went with my gut. I'm glad I did because there's a fun story here. I hope you agree.

I freely admit that Krypto was included because I loved his appearance in the *Superman* trailer. After seeing the movie,

I'm doubly glad as he stole the show for me. I know tons of people who have pets, so it makes perfect sense that our heroes should have them, too. This good boy deserves the attention. And maybe some belly rubs.

You can't have Matt Murdock without Foggy Nelson. At least I can't. Foggy has been a constant in Matt's life since day one. And yet, how much do we know about Foggy? How does he impact Matt? As this article reveals, he's pretty darn vital. Without him, *Daredevil* is a totally different book.

I didn't encounter Oberon until *Justice League*. Before that, he was king of the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. So, my understanding of the character's history was doled out in dribs and drabs. The more I learned, the more fascinating he became. He may be small in stature, but his character looms large.

I don't recall when I first encountered the Warriors Three. What I do know is that I enjoyed them from the moment I encountered them, especially Volstagg. They are a great mix of characters who play off of each other very well. The times that they had

adventures on their own were moments I treasured. I was extremely excited to see them become members of the MCU but ended up being disappointed. They simply didn't feel right. What I didn't realize until I read this article and it was staring me in the face was how vital a part of Marvel's Thor mythology they actually are.

I'm sure you're with me so far, but how do Bronze Age letterhacks fit into the theme? Here's what I think. In the days before the internet, the letters page was how readers could interact with the creators of their favorite comics, as well as other fans. It was also how editors could interact with the readers and pass along bits of information they wanted readers to know. The letters page supported the comic, readers, and creatives all at once. As a reader growing up in the Bronze Age, I found the letters page to be an important part of the comic. And if you enjoy this article, please let us know. Brian Martin has done a ton of research on this topic and we can easily present a variety of articles on the topic.

While their names might not always be on the tip of your tongue, the supporting characters are vitally important to your favorite comics. Without them, the comics would be significantly different. It's long past time we celebrated them. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to bring them the attention that they deserve.



Look at that remarkable supporting cast. *Amazing Spider-Man* #121 cover by John Romita Sr.

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# THE UNDERESTIMATED AND INDEFATIGABLE

# Amanda WALLER

by John Kirk



Upon first examination, Amanda Waller wouldn't be first choice to head up a super-powered covert ops group in the US Government of the 1980s. In fact, she wouldn't be anyone's first choice to head up any sort of professional group, governmental or corporate. The '80s was a shallow time; appearances mattered and if you weren't dressed for success or had the right background or look, you were automatically discounted or underestimated. You were the underdog and you didn't get a chance, unless you pushed things. The odds were against these characters and no one better epitomized that than Amanda Waller. Upon further examination, this underdog would bite hard and force changes to happen.

Through the decades after her '80s introduction, readers would see those changes. The comics landscape around her would change, and so would the hard-bitten Projects dweller from the rough side of Chicago. "The Wall," as she would be come to be known, would change to fit the confines and requirements for the time and medium in which she was featured. While her attitude wouldn't change, her purpose would.

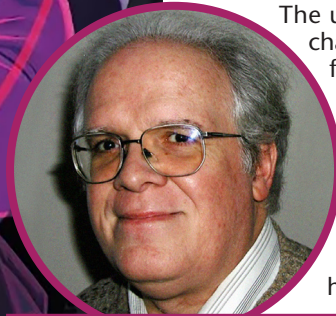
However, when we first see her: obese, plain looking, a person of color, and unthinkable for the time, a woman vying for power in government of Reagan's America, Amanda Waller would be the last name on anyone's list to staff a department, let alone run it. Why? Because in the 80s, the corporate mindset was that you had to have a certain set of ingredients to be a success and those weren't in the underestimated Amanda Waller's make-up. They were in John Ostrander's vision and that's what made her seize readers' attentions and gave her character an enduring quality that would make Amanda Waller recognizable and appreciated by generations of comic readers.

It's the ones who go the distance who we underestimate the most.

## A CHARACTER BEFORE HER TIME

The unique vision Ostrander had for this character was not only groundbreaking for its time but also in its delivery. This was an unlikely character who was not "dressed for success" but was constantly in battle to maintain her authority over the super-powered beings in her charge. Possessed of no extra-human abilities, she only had a ruthless sense of organization, her willpower, her dedication to her country, and its vast resources behind her. Amanda Waller was a new and powerful force to be reckoned with in the landscape of 1980s

comics who had no compunction about telling the President of the United States what to do.



JOHN OSTRANDER

Amanda Waller comes under fire in *Suicide Squad: Dream Team* #3. Cover by Sweeney Boo.

TM & © DC Comics.

Ostrander tells us about his concept for Amanda Waller in the introduction to the first *Suicide Squad Omnibus*.

"Another major piece of the Squad puzzle is who would be in charge. The parameters:

No superpowers. The character would be tough as nails and run everything on their force of will.

I wanted the character to be African American. DC didn't have enough black characters, in my opinion, so I wanted this character to be black-character being the key. I wouldn't write a 'black character'; I wrote a character who was black.

I wanted the character to be a woman. Again, not too many top-tier female characters in comics. Actually, I mostly based her on my paternal grandmother, who could freeze me in her tracks when I was 10 with a look. Tough, yes, but human.

I wanted her to be middle aged and of a certain body type. I wanted her to have lived a life before we met her. And I'm forever looking for ways to subvert stereotypes ... every woman in comics seemed to be built like a model or a centerfold. I wanted someone different from that. Also, having a stockier build would be a visual cue to her being immovable. She's nicknamed "the Wall" for a reason, and I wanted her body shape to look like that."

Rising to the threat of Darkseid's attempts to destabilize Earth, Amanda Waller's introduction in *Legends* #1 is filled with confrontation and belligerence from the very beginning. With her first meeting with the Suicide Squad (or Task Force X)'s field leader, Colonel Rick Flag, we see her assert herself: her authority when he questions her decision-making, but we also see her defend herself against a perceived racial slight. From the get-go, Amanda Waller is defended in her initial dealings in the administration of the Squad, but when Flag, a decorated veteran with years of military tradition backs down from this civilian, readers immediately grasp the force of her personality. Of course, John Byrne's inclusion of garish purple eye shadow

doesn't hurt in reinforcing how much of an objectionable presence she would prove to be.

She's tough and that simple introduction is enough to get a handle on her. But the level of thought that went into that introduction is key. There was no other character like her in the entire DC continuum at this time. Simple, brutally blunt, and in your face, Amanda Waller establishes her presence in a distinctively shocking way.

That first introduction is enough to establish her presence, but the joy in this introduction is that there is more to discover. The brief encounter and dialogue are enough to establish her character, but we are given very little information about her. That information doesn't become known until a year later in *Secret Origins* #14, "The Secret Origins of the Suicide Squad" when we learn about Waller's background.

### THE ORIGIN OF THE WALL

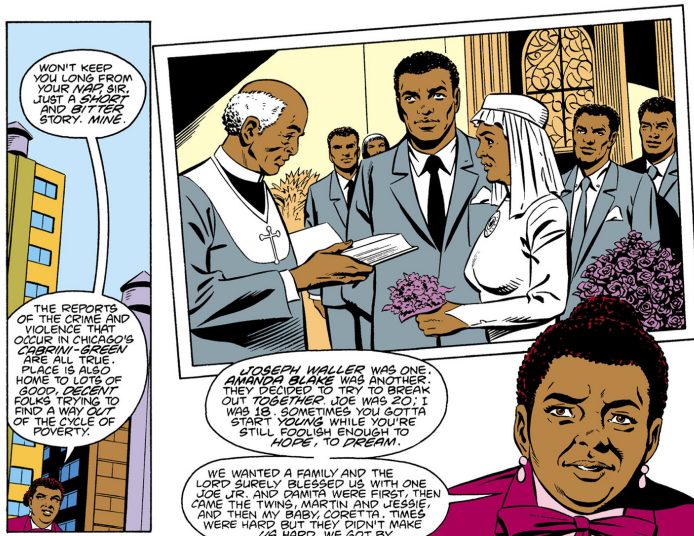
To say Waller's life was hard would be a gross understatement. In this issue of 38 pages, Waller's personal history gets a six-page short summary of what shaped her character. In the format of a briefing to President Reagan, Waller even manages to take a pot-shot at Reagan's domestic policies referring to the social assistance programs that her family took advantage of before his presidency. It's a nice touch in the story that underlines Waller's fearlessness. Not even the office of the President is enough to intimidate her, but we also get a sense of her core values: dedication, family, patriotism, and protection of these things at any cost.

But even though the treatment is brusque, we learn of the personal losses she endured which gives the reader insight into what motivated this woman to develop such a force of character. We are all shaped by the events in our lives and if the poignancy of these events is reflected on for even a moment, Waller not only becomes more understandable, but even more believable.

(left) Amanda Waller makes her presence known in *Legends* #1. Art by John Byrne and Karl Kesel. (right) Waller faces off with Captain Boomerang in *Legends* #3. Art by John Byrne and Karl Kesel.

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Married at a young age and settled in the inner-city neighborhood of Chicago's Cabrini-Green, Amanda and Joseph Waller had a large family of five children. Her oldest son, Joseph Junior, a promising athlete with a basketball future was shot and murdered in the street over a dollar. Her next oldest, her daughter Damita was accosted in the street on her way home from church, kidnapped by a drug dealer known as "Candyman," and brutally raped within earshot of dozens of witnesses, and then finally murdered. When her husband decided to take justice into his own hands to avenge their daughter's death, he too, was shot and killed.

With all this loss in one's history, it would be very easy to expect a person to fold and buckle. Not Waller. These experiences galvanized her resolve. She became the campaign director for a struggling congressman by the name of Marvin Collins, got him elected and that established her foothold in the government to find solutions to the problems that the government couldn't resolve officially. She discovered the existence of the Suicide Squad and realized, in her own words, that as a practical woman, if there was a problem, it needed to be solved. The Suicide Squad, or Task Force X, was that solution. Ruthless and covert operatives who were completely expendable yet possessed of abilities that could get jobs done. In Waller's eyes, the government was paying for their

incarceration; here was a chance for them to contribute to their country in return for their sentences commuted. Should they get lost in the process, then minimal losses all around.

The hardness of Waller's character can be understood with her personal history in mind. These six pages of heartbreaking family loss can help explain not only her own ruthlessness but her determination to protect her nation and her own family from the threats to her country, domestic and foreign. The theme of protecting the remnants of her family is expanded on in later issues, but for now, this is enough to get a root understanding of Waller's motivations.

She is thoroughly unique for the time. We asked Robert Greenberger, *Suicide Squad* editor, why it was thought that this character would resonate with readers at that time.

"Much of Amanda's immediate popularity stemmed from the fact that there was no one like her in comics, either from DC or Marvel at the time. She had an attitude and a physique that was fresh, along with that intimidating nickname: The Wall. Amanda had an agenda, as revealed in her origin story. With each mission, her character was shaped, and her goals remained firm. She intended to protect the world by any means necessary. She didn't care who she used or how she used them; it was all about the mission."

(left) Amanda Waller's story is revealed in *Secret Origins* #14. Art by Luke McDonnell and Dave Hunt. (right) Waller introduces herself in *Suicide Squad* #1. Art by Luke McDonnell and Karl Kesel.

TM & © DC Comics.



(left) Waller stands up for the Squad in S.S. #8. Art by Luke McDonnell and Bob Lewis. (right) Amanda Waller goes toe-to-toe with Batman on the cover of *Suicide Squad* #10.

A newly colored version graces our front cover. Art by Jerry Bingham. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

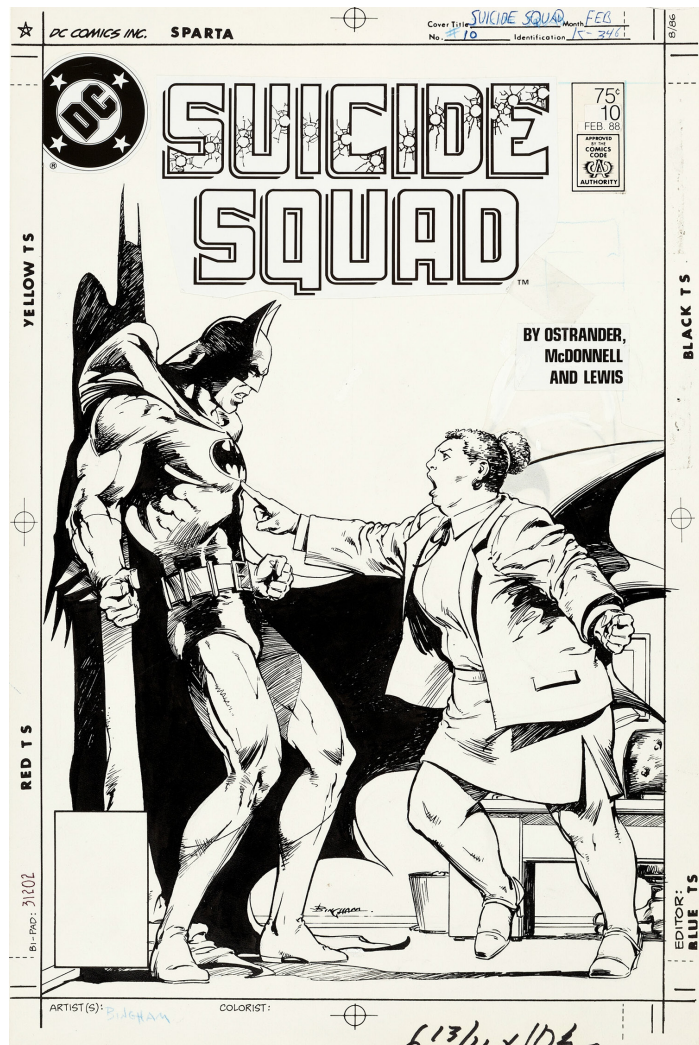
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Amanda Waller's anger fuels her relatability to the audience. Her devotion to the mission is sourced from the injustice she experienced and that anger keeps her focused. Admitted in her conversation with her psychiatrist, Simon La Grieve, in issue #8 of *Suicide Squad* titled "Personal Files," Waller refines it through therapy. Not only does it keep her focused, but it keeps her sane.

This is much in line with the pop culture themes of the time. A ruthless character fuelled by rage and injustice, doing what's right even if it is improper or unethical, is a repeated character seen in many works. Films like *Rambo*, *Missing in Action*, *The Equalizer*, or even the *Death Wish* franchise films are prime examples. These were all works that illustrated the importance of characters overcoming extreme trauma in their pasts through rigid attention to the available resources at their disposals and adhering to a strong moral code of personal justice. These aren't superheroes—just people with extreme motivations who were willing to work outside the regular system.

Remember: this was around the time of the Iran-Contra affair. Americans were accepting the notion of good people doing bad things for the right reasons.

Amanda Waller was a completely novel character for comics because there was no-one like her in



comics at the time. However, there was this growing sense of characters like her who were tired of the typical responses to their perceived injustices in the world and were looking for new ways to deal with them. What it took was ruthlessness tinged with a sense of greater purpose. The end justified the means.

Of course, did John Ostrander know that this novel character approach would be a success? He answered this question in a retrospective on *Secret Origins* #14 in *Suicide Squad Omnibus Vol. 1* that looked at the origins of the Suicide Squad.

"The other half of the story was devoted to Amanda Waller's origin. A lot of readers over the years have said that the Wall was the biggest villain in the series, the worst guy in the Squad. I'll be honest... I didn't see her that way. Never that way. Anti-hero? You bet. Evil? Not the Amanda Waller I wrote. I don't fault anyone for their view and if, after you read this, you cast your vote with the 'Amanda is Bad' contingent, I have no argument. Over the years, I've learned that you should never ask a writer what they wrote; they'll only tell you what they think they wrote."

Years later, Waller's character would change from this though. However, it would still last for the eighties and nineties, before changes to the DC Continuum would make serious changes to her story.

## THE BASE OF THE WALL

Amanda Waller is not an evil character; she is a pragmatist. She deals with her pain and the injustice she experienced in ways that made sense: she examined pathways, sought resources and available opportunities, and threw herself into the work of protecting her country. Essentially, Waller wanted to accomplish some good that translated into justice in her world, and that's an important distinction to remember when thinking about what comic heroes and readers see as typically good. This may not be a novel one today, but it was for the eighties.

There isn't a lot originally written about Congressman Marvin Collins, seeing as he is only a means to Waller's rise to power. However, it can be assumed that Collins is a good man, presumably after Waller's brief assessment of the way he does things in their first encounter. He seems innocent, unaggressive, and with her guidance, she propels him to his seat in government. She doesn't do this through guile and inside knowledge, but through sheer force of will and pragmatic power.

(Note: as Waller's character sees later retcon changes, so does Congressman Collins.)

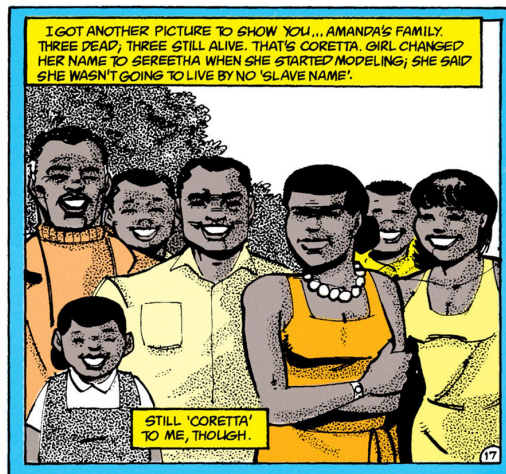
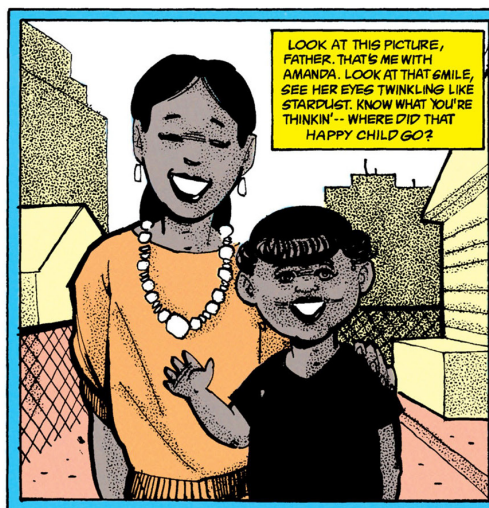
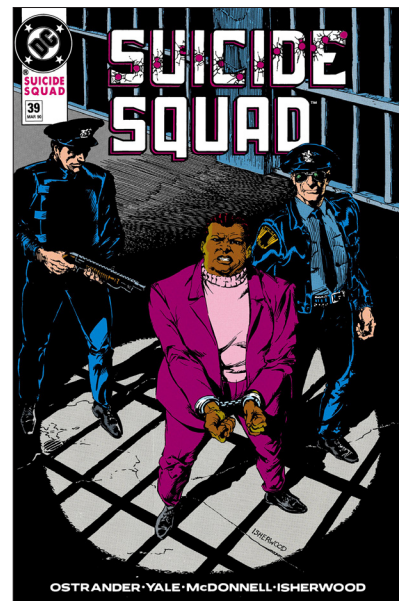
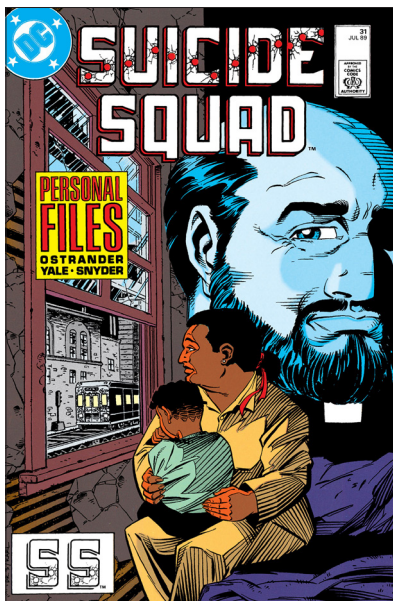
Speaking of will, Waller's force of character has been shown standing up to numerous intimidating personalities in the DC Universe. This includes presidents, members of government, and colleagues but it also includes characters like Killer Croc, Deadshot, and even the Batman. In fact, Ostrander talks explicitly about this in *Suicide Squad Omnibus Vol. 1*, referencing the cover of *Suicide Squad* #10 when Waller has Batman up against the wall (no pun intended) with her finger firmly placed up against him, dead to rights. Even his expression has him intimidated.

"It really captures for me, the essence of Amanda Waller. She's backing Batman up against an unseen wall with her finger in his chest and giving him hell. No background, none needed, in my opinion. She's shortish, plump, black, and middle-aged, and Batman is well, Batman. She has no superpowers, she's not superbly trained, she's not in the peak physical shape that a human can be in—all she has is her will. Her ferocious, indomitable will. That's what makes her the Wall."

This is how she is able to get the attention of President Ronald Reagan, which Ostrander notes does date the story. There isn't a lot described between Collins' election and her discovery of files on the original Suicide Squad/Task Force X in the fifties, but this is how she gets the idea to create an independent, disposable force to achieve objectives that will help her country and the general good at whatever cost.

Ostrander had this to say about Amanda's will:

"So—whose will is stronger, Amanda's or Batman's? Give them both a Green Lantern power ring, which is largely triggered by the user's will. Have them both



(top left) Some of Amanda Waller's past is revealed in *Suicide Squad* #31. Cover by John K. Snyder III and Karl Kesel. (top right) Amanda Waller behind bars. Cover by Geof Isherwood. (bottom) Waller's past as told by her older sister.

S.S. #31 art by John K. Snyder III.

TM & © DC Comics.

(top) Waller makes her presence known in other governmental organizations such as Checkmate. Cover by Gil Kane. (bottom) Amanda Waller knows how to take charge. *Suicide Squad* #39 art by Lule McDonnell and Geof Isherwood. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).  
TM & © DC Comics.



let fly at the other with the rings. Who is going to win? My answer: Amanda, every time."

She threatens Batman with the discovery of his identity. If the Caped Crusader had a weakness, it would be that and, in some variations, Amanda Waller actually was able to make good on her threat. In the pre-52 continuum, it's simply enough of a threat that even Batman takes her seriously and backs down.

### BUILDING THE WALL

Waller has no superpowers. She has no personal resources, just what the American government can provide, which was made accessible to her after a long, hard journey of graft, favors, and political influence. She is not military trained, and in her original incarnation, she does not have any political aspirations other than to right the wrongs she sees with the security of her country and create solutions, either offensive or defensive, to those perceived threats. She fits perfectly into the political machinations of any superhero comic and is an excellent foil to add to those stories.

But the *Suicide Squad*'s frequent encounters with Russian Intelligence and the covert operations they were geared for with other nations meant that there had to be more stories and deeper connections between DC's superheroes and the American government. Characters like Deadshot were revealing aspects of their pasts that wouldn't have been revealed. After all, who knew that Deadshot spoke Russian? Or that a dissident intelligence service known as Argent would find its tendrils into the background of the organization? Characters like Sarge Steel or The Forgotten Heroes would gain greater identification and importance. The development of the JLI meant that the governments of the world would now have a say in the dealings with superheroes and this all stemmed from this character. There was a new theme in DC Comics and at the heart of it sat Amanda Waller.

When *Checkmate*, by Paul Kupperberg and Steve Erwin, hit the shelves, it needed the legitimacy of political characters like Waller to provide it with a degree of governmental authenticity. Amanda Waller, as the Queen, was a natural progression of the character and she fit the bill perfectly.

Formed from the crossover with *The Doom Patrol/Suicide Squad Special*, *Checkmate* featured characters like Harvey Bullock from *Gotham PD*, Tom Tresser (aka Nemesis) and Valentina Vostok of the *Doom Patrol* (who also had ties to Russian Intelligence), and former District Attorney, Adrian Chase, who abdicated his civic role and became the Vigilante. DC was ramping up the population of characters who had connections to the government. Influence was being perceived as a superpower in its own right and those who were in the know, were just as formidable than those with extra-normal abilities.

Waller not only controlled the resources of Task Force X but now she also had the resources of the *Checkmate* organization as well. Her reach extended throughout all levels of American Intelligence, with advanced technology, military, and superhuman assets at her disposal. Her will was not only formidable, but it began to take on an absolute nature. *Checkmate* characters like Black Thorn who represented a threat to the way things would be done under the Queen were to be eliminated. By the end of the eighties, she was at the peak of her power.

Paul Kupperberg remembered this about Waller. "Amanda was the Wall, a resolute defender of her country with a take-no-prisoners-or-any-B.S. attitude, a woman who said what was on her mind and did what was necessary without any apology. She had the full power and weight of the United States government behind her and nothing but





(left) Waller, Batman, and the Suicide Squad together. That's gonna be trouble. Cover by Geof Isherwood. (right) Waller is not above getting her hands dirty. Cover by Geof Isherwood and Karl Kesel.

TM & © DC Comics.

her conscience to guide her and keep her in check. She was the ultimate authority figure... whereas Black Thorn was her opposite, a loose cannon who embodied anti-authoritarianism, but likewise with no filter between her thoughts and her mouth."

### CRACKS IN THE WALL

When a character reaches the top, there is always a downwards descent afterwards. With such a firmly established character presence, if there was ever a story that had a political dimension to it, it was a foregone conclusion that Amanda would be positioned close to it. Waller would become the go-to government bureaucrat in charge. If there was a research facility like OMAC, Waller knew about it. If there was a hero gone rogue, like Firestorm's decision to disarm nuclear weapons in the latter half of the eighties, Amanda would represent the government's response to it. Stories that needed government or military involvement featuring heroes like Captain Atom, the JLI, and others, Amanda Waller was the force they needed to not only provide DC Universe validation but also story direction. The Wall was the perfect authoritarian antagonist. But she had her moments of weakness in this time.

With her near limitless authority in government, it made sense that she would be a target for terrorist organizations and other entities. An ordinary human, no powers, no secret identity, and a vulnerable family life, she was more vulnerable than other characters. As seen in the crossover storyline between Checkmate and the Suicide Squad, "The Janus Directive," Waller seemingly begins to act erratically, sending the Squad operatives on seemingly personal missions, bringing them into conflict with other superhumans and government agencies. No one questions her and no one thinks about the possibility of being compromised. It is this vulnerability that shows those cracks in the Wall.

It is revealed that Waller has been replaced by the cult leader, Kobra. While she had eliminated her double during this time, she pretended to be her replacement in order to determine who was behind the plot. However, even though she is successful,

the damage to her reputation has been done and she is removed from her office and given a jail sentence. Though her time behind bars would be quick, it would be repeated after a mission to Apokolips and a confrontation with the Female Furies. During this time, she would lose one of her operatives (Doctor Light) as well as another family member.

She would return to Earth and use the Squad to pursue a crime cartel known as the LOA. She would kill their leadership and see jail time for it, yet this too, was short-lived as she returned to lead the Squad under the direction of her former associate, Sarge Steel. This time the Squad was a freelance operation that the American government could easily deny. During this time though, Waller's attitude towards the team would change. While she would still retain her imperious nature, she would actually develop a more personal attachment to the Squad.

Waller's attitude towards the Squad was that even though they were expendable resources who could have been disavowed at any time, they were hers to dispose of. What was always maintained was that they were part of Waller ethos in terms of the ruthless standards she held for herself as well as anyone else. In an interview in *Suicide Squad Omnibus Vol. 1*, John Ostrander talked about how much the team meant to Amanda on a professional basis, but what this meant to her on a personal level.

"If she finds some political hack is trying to use the Squad, as does happen, then she gets furious because these are her people. As bad as they are, these are her people and she's not going to waste them. She's a complex character because a lot of people thought she was the worst villain in the whole lot. You can love her, you can hate her, and you can do both at the same time, and that makes her compelling because we know people like that in our real lives. There are very few people who are just terrific all the time, everybody has their shadows. Letting you both love and hate Amanda lets you explore that within yourself."

But accompanying the team would cost Amanda. As previously mentioned, Waller would lose influence, see jail

time, and experience a diminishing of her power. While this would not affect her ruthless sense of commitment, it would see her have to climb the governmental greased pole once more.

Still, in the '90s, her reputation would precede her; her talents would be remembered, and she would form or join other organizations like the Shadow Fighters or be recruited to lead a multi-hero task force to defeat an alien invasion in the series "Bloodlines." She would go on to be a director of the Department of Extranormal Operations organizations and later, she would even see office as the Secretary of Meta-Human Affairs in the newly-elected President Luthor's cabinet. If there was a political position to have anything to do with super-humans, Amanda Waller had either held it or created it.

However, in the 2000s, the Wall's character profile would see some redefinition of purpose to not only her affiliations but her past and future direction.

In the early 2000s Amanda Waller seemed more preoccupied with countering all metahumans, including superheroes, instead of simply using the incarcerated metahumans at her disposal to achieve political ends. Apparently, she became the government's "go-to" for declaring war on heroes should they become politically at odds. With Luthor as President, her talents would not go wasted.

But this marked a departure from the Amanda Waller who was more concerned about social justice and the programs that previous presidents had removed. Originally, she wanted to effect greater security for the nation rather than simply extending a president's will. This was hardly in John Ostrander's vision for

the character. Of course, as Luthor's presidency ends in disgrace, Waller sees a return to prison as well.

In and out of prison seems to be the state for Amanda Waller yet somehow, her will remains resolute. She still finds herself willing to serve her nation yet coming into conflict with more superbeings. After superbeings like Maxwell Lord and his hijacked OMAC project are put down, Waller finds herself appointed in charge of Checkmate and the reigns of power are once more in her hands.

She is barred from having direct control over operations, but she ignores this, once more employing the Suicide Squad in covert ops against familiar foes like Qurac and the Black Marvel family.

Other prominent incidents at this time see Waller developing an anti-Superman defence in the form of salvaged kryptonite. This is genetically grafted on to a Doomsday-like being known as the All-American Boy. The resulting conflict nearly destroys Smallville and Waller is forced to make reparations and is disgraced.

Further involvements with the Suicide Squad are likewise less than heroic and while entertaining to loyal readers, end up often in a stalemate or at least out of the world's public eye. She survives the "Blackest Night," and her own Suicide Squad defies her.

While Waller still possesses her typical force of will in these times, what's new and now more common is her disobedience. In this case, she isn't simply doing the wrong thing for the right reason, she's doing what she wants and justifying it in her mind as the right reason. Her motivations are selfish and her outcomes are less successful and quite frankly, don't even really matter compared to the Cold War operations she ran in the eighties which actually meant something.

### BUILDING THE WALL ELSEWHEN: THE NEW 52

As always, this point in DC Comics continuity always sees changes to original characters. Such was the case with Waller.

What's different in this incarnation is that Amanda actually served in the military, rising to the rank of Captain. She served in Covert Operations in the field and was an excellent hand to hand combatant and marksperson. This Amanda was athletically built and was a spy. She was directly in charge of the Suicide Squad (which also had some changes to it) and instead of seeing them as a team of disposable assets, she simply saw them as a team she didn't have to feel guilty about losing. Amanda Waller 2.0 is a bit more streamlined than her original incarnation.

She later was responsible for forming the Justice League of America—a subset of the Justice league—and then went on to head up A.R.G.U.S., the Advanced Research Group for Uniting Superhumans. Ironically formed out of a need to defend the Earth once more from Darkseid, this Amanda is calculating and ruthlessly pragmatic as we knew her from *Legends #1*, but she is decidedly more striking in her appearance. More generic in nature, she was physically more capable, more heroic, and quite frankly, boring. In short, other than being forceful, this really isn't the Amanda Waller we knew.

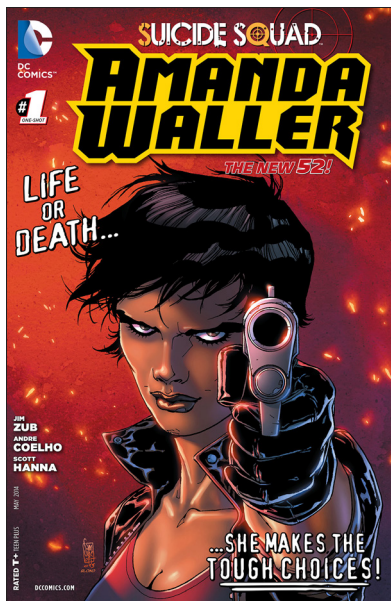
### REBIRTH

In this new incarnation of the DC Universe drawn by Jim Lee, Amanda Waller returns to her more familiar physiognomy. Less than plain though, it's still a bit of a welcomed change from the sleek, panther-esque Waller we saw in the New 52. She has that



Waller won't even back down from Granny Goodness. *Suicide Squad #34* cover art by Karl Kesel. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

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same resolute determination to use the Squad for patriotic purposes and that same sense that “evil exists in the world.” It’s not until *Suicide Squad* #10 that we learn that this version of Amanda Waller had the same tragedy as the original one. Her relationship with her team is still cold and heartless, but she is less the politician and more the director of the team. There is less government or presidential direction, she seems to act independently but still has the greater good of the country at heart. Sometimes the best fix is to leave things alone and in *Rebirth: Suicide Squad* #1, while not 100%, the return of Amanda Waller is certainly a relief.

### VERSIONS OF WALLER IN TV AND FILM

There are a great many versions of Waller in the TV and Film—too many to list in full detail within the confines of this article. But they are all parts of the whole, representing Waller in the different stages of her comic development. I’ve listed the most popular ones for easy reference. Feel free to check out the different representations in other animated and even video game stories.

The film version of Amanda in the *Suicide Squad* films (*Suicide Squad* 2016 and *The Suicide Squad* 2021) feature Viola Davis, who is a version of Waller that clings to the original as much as possible.

The animated *Justice League Unlimited* also sees Davis play Waller, who is an advisor to the President with a less defined character.

*Smallville* saw the legendary Pam Grier play Waller as the more bureaucratic version of Checkmate’s White Queen. Even though she was obviously older than Waller’s character, Grier brought a degree of svelte sophistication that had not been seen in the other versions of her character.

In the TV show *Arrow*, Waller is played by Cynthia Addai-Robinson. In this manifestation, she is the head of A.R.G.U.S. and killed off.

In the animated *Harley Quinn*, she is played by Tisha Campbell and is the hard as nails *Suicide Squad* director.

### OVER THE WALL

Waller’s contribution to the DC Continuum is dependability. Aside from the brief burp of the New 52 that dramatically changed the character to something barely recognizable as Amanda, she has an anchoring trait that makes for entertaining storytelling.

The *Suicide Squad* of today hearkens back to those basic character types, relationships, and premise of the original comic. Even though we know the premise was that someone in the Squad would usually die, the trinity of Deadshot, Captain

(left) Amanda Waller changed, Art by Giuseppe Camuncoli. (right) Viola Davis as Amanda Waller in 2016’s *Suicide Squad* movie. (inset) Amanda Waller gets bagged in the *Harley Quinn* animated series.

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Boomerang, and Amanda Waller are the three characters that John Ostrander said needed to stay alive.

It was Amanda Waller who was the lynchpin to the Squad. That’s obvious. She was the glue who kept the squad together. Despite not having any powers, her force of will not only dominate the Squad but it introduced and kept a vital stream of DC storytelling active in the universe.

It’s this longevity that is Waller’s superpower. This innovative character tapped into a storytelling theme of popular culture in the 1980s and made it a foundational part of comics. It influenced not just the *Suicide Squad* but drew other comics into its orbit as well. It was so resilient that it even became essential parts of the different re-imaginings of the DC Universe and found its way into other media as well.

This chunky hard-ass mom of five who saw three of her family gunned down in the crime-ridden projects of Chicago would go on to be one of the most recognizable and useful characters in the DC mythos. Drawn by the likes of John Byrne, John Romita Jr., Jim Lee, and other incredible talents, Amanda Waller would be an understated character who would remain consistent and recognizable for over thirty years.

As a fan once said to John Ostrander: “Amanda don’t play.” Whatever her form, in whatever medium, the one thing that remained consistent was that her opponents always regretted initially underestimating the Wall.

All John Ostrander quotes come from *Suicide Squad Omnibus* Vol. 1.

Based in Toronto, Canada, a popculture writer, comic, and celebrity panel host for FAN EXPO’s comic conventions, John “Captain” Kirk has hosted and written about talented creators like Bill Sienkiewicz, Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and other comic legends. He has written for *Den of Geek*, *ScreenRant*, *Star Trek Explorer*, *Star Wars Insider*, and [www.original-CIN.ca](http://www.original-CIN.ca).



end

**TWOMORROWS AD PAGE**

"Will your lawyer talk to God for you?"

—Kitty Wells

*Joseph Campbell's The Hero's Journey describes eight primary character archetypes* which regularly appear in western storytelling: hero, mentor, shadow, ally, threshold guardian, herald, trickster, and shapeshifter. Many would likely say that Franklin Percy "Foggy" Nelson fulfills the ally role throughout the panels of *Daredevil*. They are partially correct. He often shifts between several archetypes throughout his escapades, even performing the role of hero to Daredevil's shadow self. Like the scales of justice, Foggy keeps Matt in balance. Daredevil walks a fine line between a carefree swashbuckler a la Spider-Man, and a deliverer of violent vigilante justice. Foggy does a lot for Matt Murdock, but at great cost to his relationships, career ambition, mental well-being, and physical health. He is the Samwise Gamgee to Matt Murdock's Frodoesque burdens. The tale of Foggy Nelson is neither for the faint of heart, nor the totally dour. One can make a strong argument that he may be the real protagonist, depending upon how the evidence is presented. After all, their law firm is called "Nelson & Murdock," not the other way around. With careful consideration we shall review the case of Foggy Nelson. Is he the best attorney pal a hero could have, a complex companion working out unresolved resentments, or the true unsung hero in *Daredevil*? We expect our *BACK ISSUE* jury members to be impartial and balanced when reaching the final verdict. Order in the court, let the trial of Foggy Nelson commence!

#### OPPOSITES ATTRACT

Sometimes the person you room with during your first year of college is not a great match due to conflicting values, habits, schedules, or beliefs. In other instances, they can become dear friends for life. Matt Murdock was fortunate to experience the latter. In *Daredevil* #1 (Apr. 1964) by Stan Lee and Bill Everett, Matt Murdock attends "State College" (i.e.: Columbia) and rooms with Franklin "Foggy" Nelson. Their partnership continued when they attended Harvard Law School. Soon after the tragic demise of Matt's father, Foggy offers to include him in his new practice, "We'll be graduating soon, and my dad's setting me up in a law office! I want you to join me, Matt...as my partner!" The original pairing and contrast seemed simple enough: Foggy was overweight, Matt is thin and fit. Foggy came from the upper crust of social prosperity, while Matt grew up in working class Hell's Kitchen, the son of a washed-up boxer. In *Marvel Age* #106 (Nov. 1991) long-time *Daredevil* penciller Gene Colan noted, "I always loved that *Daredevil* was serious, and that Foggy provided the humor." But was the character of Foggy Nelson that simple? Later, it was revealed that their first encounters were not necessarily so copacetic. In *DD* Vol. 3 #12 (May 2012) Mark Waid and Chris Samnee added some depth to their origin story by describing how Matt was not a fan of Foggy initially. He called him "Foggy" not because he thought he was dim,

Foggy Nelson's on target on the cover of *Daredevil* Vol. 3 #27. Art by Chris Samnee.

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# Foggy Nelson

by Matt Merante



but because of his obnoxious snoring. It was only after defending Foggy in a mock trial, after being falsely accused of cheating by an unethical professor, that they found common ground and a potential partnership. In correspondence with *BI*, super scribe Mark Waid described their relationship further, "He's just such a great counterbalance to Matt in an *Odd Couple* sort of way. Not only is he messy where Matt is neat, not only does he throw all kinds of garbage food into his body.... while Matt needs to be careful to eat natural foods so they don't mess with his body chemistry-something he'd feel acutely-they make a great legal team. Matt's shrewder in court, plays the jury and the judge more cleverly, but Foggy's the one who knows every legal precedent off the top of his head where Matt would have to look it up." Foggy concurs with Mr. Waid, as he elegantly describes their contrasting styles in *DD* #226 (Jan. 1985), "Matt wasn't good on the details. Never had the patience... Way I always put it, Matt was inspiration, and me, I was perspiration...." The original dynamic of Nelson & Murdock continued early on, including a pseudo love-triangle between the two gents and their legal secretary Karen Page (prior to clear HR guidelines). Karen seemed smitten by Matt while Foggy longed for her. Foggy was often the laughable chubby guy who couldn't get the girl. It seemed that from early on, Foggy was intended to serve as mostly an ally and sometimes a trickster, in a buffoonish sort of way. Over time Foggy would evolve.



MARK WAID

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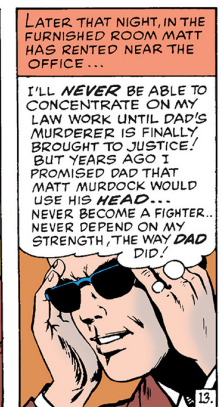
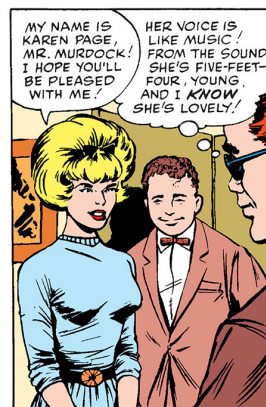
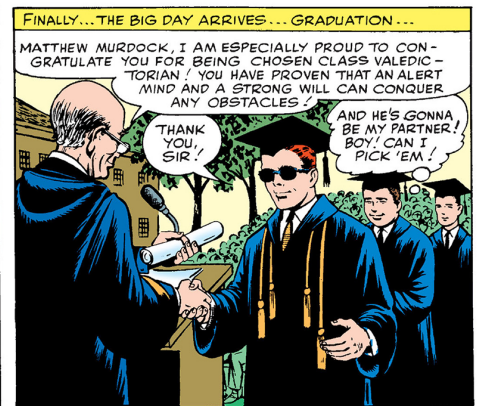
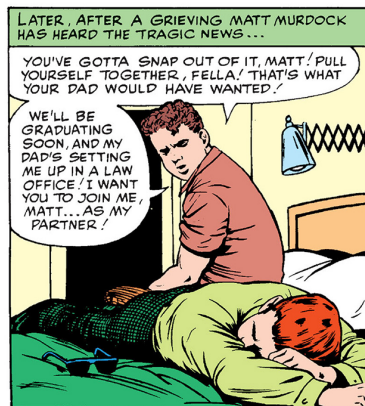
## THE GOOD OLD DAYS

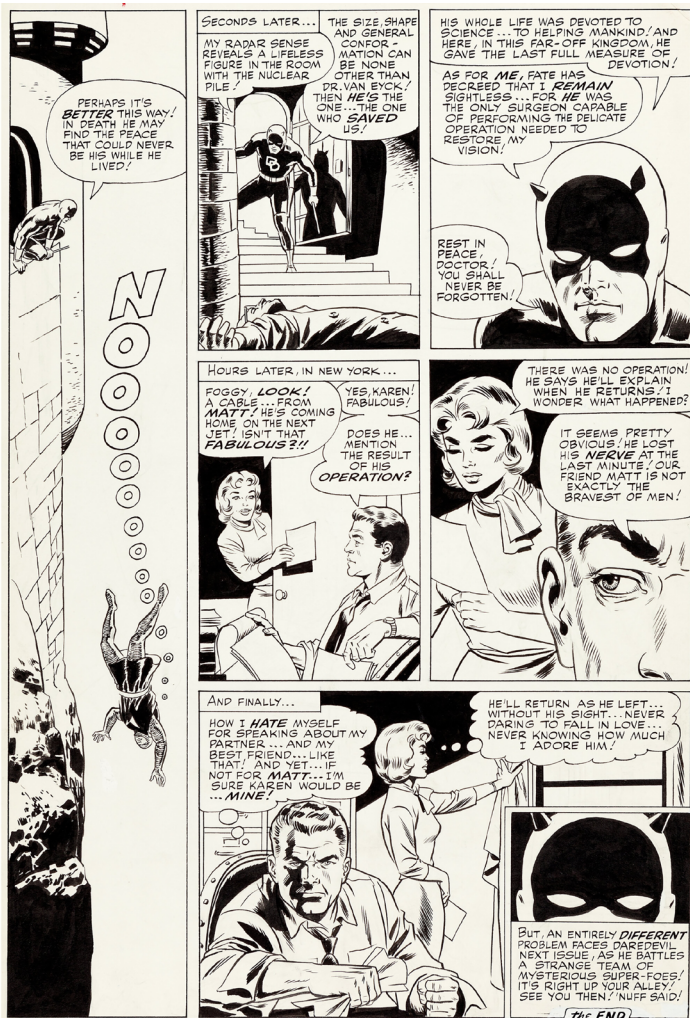
The law offices of Nelson & Murdock allowed for some fun cross-continuity and legal connections in the early going. The Fantastic Four connected with Foggy for some real estate support in *DD* #2 (June 1964) regarding the lease of the Baxter Building.

However, not all the clientele coming in were quite as heroically inclined. Foggy and Matt were sought by more notorious clientele such as The Owl in *DD* #3 (Aug. 1964), the Purple Man in *DD* #4 (Oct. 1964), and even Namor, in *DD* #7 (Apr. 1965). The demand for Foggy as a legal mentor was clearly present from the outset. However, as Foggy's feelings for their secretary Karen Page grew, so did his jealousy. He did not appreciate that Karen preferred the attention of his law partner, Matt. This led to one of his worst personal decisions in *DD* #17 (June 1966). Succumbing to his lower instincts, or shadow self, Foggy allowed Karen to believe that he may be Daredevil in order to impress her. This happened after an erroneous accusation by Spider-Man. Foggy even went so far as to have a mock costume and "fake" battle prepared to support this outrageous claim. The zealous and lethal Gladiator saw this as an opportunity for himself in *DD* #18 (July 1966). During the confrontation Gladiator physically outclassed Mr. Nelson immediately and focused his malevolent designs on Karen. Then the actual Daredevil stepped in to bail out both his law associate and love interest!

(left) Fun loving Foggy Nelson makes it onto the cover of *Daredevil* #1. Art by Bill Everett. (right) Matt and Foggy from *Daredevil* #1. Art by Bill Everett.

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## POLITICS, SHARPSHOOTING, AND MARRIAGE

Many politicians start out in the world of law, and Foggy Nelson was no exception. He ran for District Attorney after several years of practicing law. In *DD* #48 (Jan. 1969) Daredevil prevents an assassination attempt on Foggy by the Stilt-Man, a villain not exactly designed for a stealthy hit. Foggy then easily wins his election but can now no longer be part of the office of Nelson & Murdock due to his upcoming civic duties. Karen Page soon becomes his secretary, and later Matt his special assistant in *DD* #58 (Nov. 1969). The "goofball sidekick" shows some unexpected ambition here, and this career move alters the path of the character for a period.

As Nelson's star rose, so did the attention he gained from an array of forces. In *DD* #120-123 (May-July 1975), Foggy is recruited by Nick Fury to join Shield's directional council, before Hydra can make their own recruiting efforts! Tony Isabella and Bob Brown provided this rollicking yarn featuring the Black Widow, El Jaguar, Blackwing, Silvermane, Man-Killer, Jackhammer, and Dreadnaught. He was the hero for a minute in this tale when in a moment of uncharacteristic rage, he accurately fired a rifle at the chains binding Daredevil and Black Widow from close range...without harming either of them (Franklin Nelson-sharpsooter!?)! After the dust settled, Foggy quickly declined Fury's

offer. Law was his passion, not active duty in battle. It was a very pragmatic decision.

During *DD* #130 (Feb. 1976), Foggy lost his District Attorney reelection to rival Blake Tower, while Daredevil fended off the sinister voodoo machinations of Brother Zed. Matt offers him the opportunity to return to his grass roots as an attorney. Foggy and Matt opened a "Storefront" law office, serving those without the means to hire high-powered legal representation. He is again an altruistic ally, helping the downtrodden and marginalized survive the turmoil of daily survival. *DD* #157 (Mar. 1979) has Foggy attempting to be a hero again when trying to defend his friends from the Death-Stalker's Ani-Men. He sneak attacks Ape-Man with a chair, only to be unceremoniously discarded headfirst into a wall. Needless to say, he is unconscious for most of the following issue, *DD* #158 (May 1979), which featured the debut of a promising up-and-comer named Frank Miller.

Nelson provided the comedic relief in *DD* #166 (Sep. 1980) by Roger McKenzie, Frank Miller, and Klaus Janson. It's Foggy's wedding day and he's going to marry his high school sweetheart, Debbie Harris. Unfortunately, he is dressed in a garish red and green diamond squared tuxedo, resembling a court jester or maybe even a trickster? To make matters worse, he seemingly loses his wedding ring! While Matt fended off an attack from a rampaging

(left) The green-eyed monster rears its ugly head on this page from *Daredevil* #9. Art by Wally Wood and Bob Powell. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)). (right) Foggy attempts to be *Daredevil* in issue #18 with less than stellar results. Art by John Romita and Frank Giacoia.

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Gladiator (again), Foggy retraced his steps in order to locate the ring. It turns out it was sitting on his pinky finger the entire time! The dichotomy in this issue between comedy and violence is jarring. Part of the issue is devoted to Foggy's hijinks, while other panels feature innocent bystanders being sliced and diced by the Gladiator's sharpened buzzsaws. It's an interesting juxtaposition, highlighting the pendulum of extremes that Daredevil will swing between throughout his life, while heralding the more violent path that the series was taking. Foggy also vacillated between both dramatic and comedic roles when integrated into the book's soon-to-be darker tone.

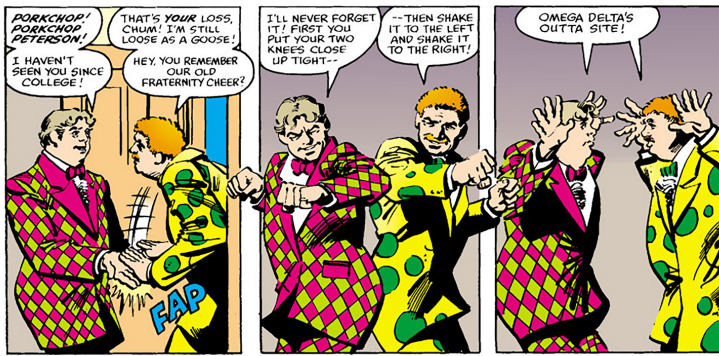
### FRANK AND KLAUS HAD "GUTS"

Frank Miller and Klaus Janson's run on *Daredevil* was not only revolutionary for the comics industry as a whole, but it turned out to be momentous for Foggy Nelson. During *DD* #174 (Sep. 1981), "The Assassination of Matt Murdock," Foggy broke down and confessed to Matt why he had been avoiding him as of late. He was mentally dwelling in a shadow of self-doubt, "It was up to me to keep the dream of ours alive--and I blew it...I'm a failure...I've let you carry me ever since college...." Matt reframed Foggy's viewpoint to that of an indispensable ally, "Do you really believe that Foggy?...The case is going to pieces without you. You're more than a partner to me, more than a friend. I need you." In the iconic *DD* #181 (Apr. 1982), Foggy's recall of Elektra as Matt's college girlfriend saved his life. Prior to her assassination attempt, Foggy recognized her. Elektra couldn't bring herself to kill her former lover's best friend. This encounter led to her demise at the hands of the sadistic Bullseye as he acted on behalf of Kingpin and his own twisted desire to be the most prominent assassin in town. In this instance, Foggy served as a threshold guardian for Elektra, shifting the lens of her *modus operandi* to that of an anti-hero rather than a pure villain. Bullseye would have killed Foggy regardless of any previous connection. Elektra still maintained a small modicum of humanity due to her regard for Daredevil's best bud. A few issues later Miller and Janson altered course in the much-appreciated *Daredevil* #185 (Aug. 1982).

Daredevil artist Lee Weeks was a fan and stated so in *Marvel Age* #106 (Nov. 1991), "The darkness works better when there's light. If you think back, you might remember a story Frank Miller did called "Guts." It was a great break from the serious tone that the series was famous for." Combining both pulpy noir, and comedic elements, this issue is told from the POV of Foggy, attempting to make his way through the underworld under the alias "Guts" Nelson. Unbeknownst to him, Daredevil is quietly monitoring the situation and bailing Foggy out of

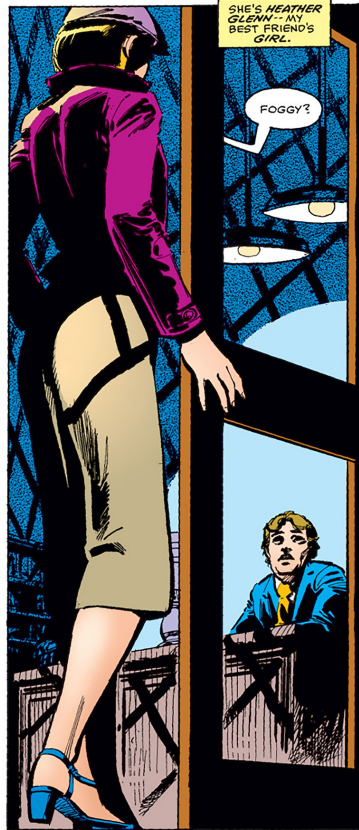
(top) Foggy is elected as District Attorney in *Daredevil* #48. Art by Gene Colan and George Klein. (bottom) Foggy Nelson, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. It could happen. *Daredevil* #121 art by Bob Brown and Vince Colletta.

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I'M WORKING LATE ON A STACK OF RED-HOT DEPOSITIONS WHEN THE SCENT OF TWO-HUNDRED DOLLARS-AN-OUNCE PERFUME SNEAKS INTO MY NOSTRILS. I LOOK UP...

...AND THERE SHE IS STANDING IN THE DOORWAY LIKE A DEER CAUGHT IN THE HEADLIGHTS OF AN ONRUSHING U-HAUL...



Stan Lee PRESENTS  
**GUTS**  
 MILLER SCRIPTER + STORYTELLER  
 JANSON PENCILER + INKER + COLORIST  
 ROSEN LETTERS  
 O'NEIL EDITOR  
 SHOOTER SUPERVISOR

grave danger every step of the way. It does beg the question of how good a friend Matt actually is, allowing his best buddy to take this type of risk in the first place! Foggy served as a hybrid shape-shifter/trickster, behaving in a way that both defies the expectation of the mob and Kingpin, while providing the *Daredevil* audience a much-needed reprieve following the traumatic events surrounding Elektra's death.

**OF LOVE AND LOSS**

After Miller's transformative impact, legendary editor and writer Denny O'Neil took his turn with Mr. Nelson. One of the primary narratives in his run was the "War on Micah Synn." In *DD* #212 (Nov. 1984) Foggy's wife, a very manipulative Debbie Harris, becomes infatuated with the alpha male and budding crime lord Synn, leaving Foggy to be made a fool. Foggy is so desperate for her affection, he even betrays Matt, providing a false alibi for Synn in order to appease her increasing demands. Foggy succumbs to his shadow self here, betraying his lifelong best friend, "You gotta let me explain, Matt, please...you remember me in college...the campus klutz, the fat boy, the nerd, the guy no girl would look at...then I met Debbie...when she accepted my proposal it was all my dreams coming true at once...she said she'd leave me if I didn't tell that lie. I'm sorry." Matt forgives Foggy, and eventually karma comes for

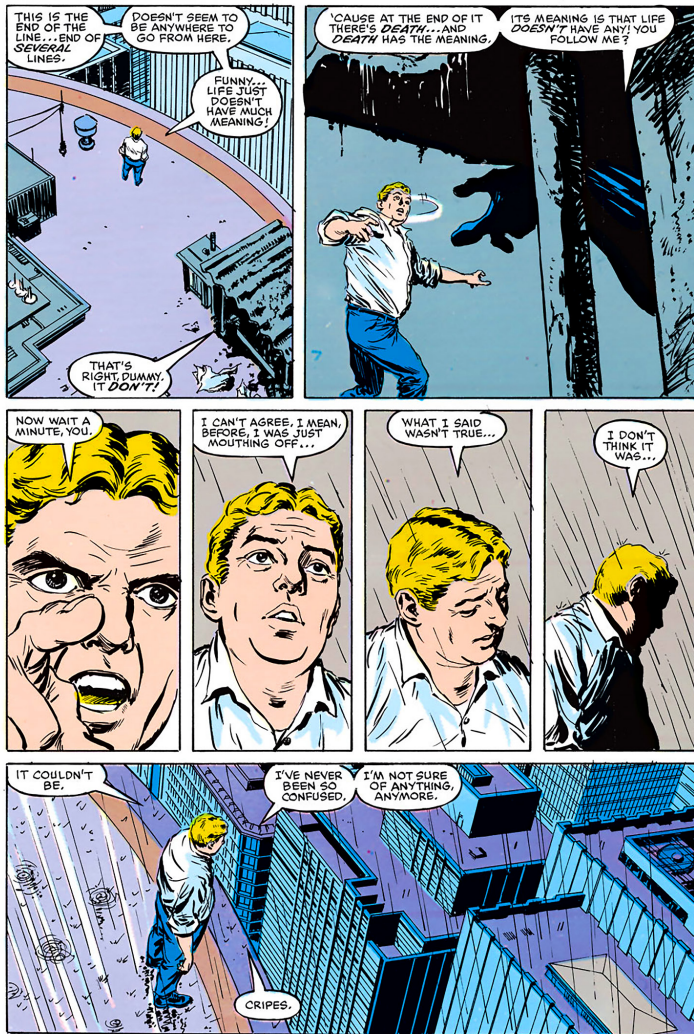
Debbie in the form of grave humiliation and rejection from Synn. Foggy moves past her dalliance, but their marriage is never quite the same and soon dissolves. *DD* #225 (Dec. 1985) culminates in a dark moment for Foggy as he stands atop a New York City high rise, desperately considering the failures of his marriage, business, and relationship with Matt. His frustrations have come to a tipping point, "First my marriage goes down the drain, and my business follows it...life just doesn't have much meaning!" The villainous Vulture encourages Foggy's negative spiral from the sidelines, hoping that he finally succumbs to his self-doubt and internal shadow. Fortunately, *Daredevil* arrived just in time to intervene and talked Foggy off both the proverbial and literal edges. These issues are certainly worth revisiting. They feature some impressive early work by David Mazzucchelli prior to one of the most character-defining comic book runs in all of comic book history.

**BORN AGAIN, WITH FOGGY**

"Born Again" by Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli is an absolute masterpiece of crime fiction, comic book storytelling, and character development. It ran through *DD* #227-233 (Feb. 1986-Aug. 1986), and Foggy contributed to the dramatic interplay as an anchor point between Matt Murdock, Karen Page, Ben Urich, and the Kingpin. As Matt/*Daredevil*'s world quickly comes apart at

(top left) Foggy Nelson, groom and fashion plate. *Daredevil* #166 art by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson.  
 (bottom left) Foggy makes a discovery that saves his life in *Daredevil* #181. Art by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson.  
 (right) Foggy becomes a gumshoe in *Daredevil* #185. Art by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson.

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(left) Foggy reaches rock bottom in *Daredevil* #225. Art by David Mazzucchelli.

(right) Ben Urich and Foggy discuss a missing Matt Murdoch in *Daredevil* #232. Art by David Mazzucchelli. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

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the seams, Foggy Nelson appears to directly benefit. While Matt loses his prestigious job, Foggy signs a fiscally beneficial contract with a new anonymous client, the Kingpin. Karen sells out Daredevil's secret identity for a cheap high, and then Matt's alienated girlfriend Gloriana breaks up with him. Foggy becomes the soft, reliable place for a heartbroken Gloriana to land, eventually starting a relationship with his best friend's ex! Were these the machinations of an ally, a shadow, or a shapeshifter? As with most great noir and crime comics, the lines of morality are blurry and unclear. Frank Miller himself noted some of these distinct features in an interview from *Wizard Magazine* #25 (Sep. 1993), "The morality play is another aspect of the crime story. The protagonists, the "heroes" of these stories are often morally ambiguous. There is a cross-reference between superhero and crime stories, but the morality is much more complicated." Foggy may have no ill intentions towards his friend, or anybody for that matter, but is simply opportunistic towards whatever comes his way: love, money, and prestige. This time Foggy gets the girl, but at a great cost to his chum Matt.

### PLAYING BOTH SIDES

Ann Nocenti and John Romita Jr. took the reins of *Daredevil* during a new era in the mid-'80s. These stories focused on relevant social issues including pollution, animal rights, mental health, nuclear paranoia, unchecked capitalism, and the nature of evil itself. How did Franklin Nelson fit into all of this? Ann Nocenti was kind enough to share her perspective on Foggy in an interview with *BI*.

"I played him a little gullible and as a foil to Matt Murdock in the courtroom. (But) if he loses a case, Foggy doesn't go out and beat up somebody!" This refers specifically to Foggy's representation of the Kelco company, whose illegal chemical dumping blinds a young boy in *DD* #248 (Nov.1987). The similarities here with Matt Murdock's toxic chemical accident are deliberate, however, this young man did not develop any super senses. Kelco is secretly owned by the Kingpin and Foggy admits to defending them with less than honorable methods in *DD* #251 (Feb.1988), "All I'm doing is trading legal swordplay, tossing loopholes, shifting meanings, law games, everybody does it!" Foggy proved that he can function



ANN NOCENTI

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

as a shapeshifter when emotionally distanced from his friend and colleague.

Towards the end of Nocenti's run, in *DD* #284-290 (Sep. 1990-Mar. 1991), Matt has lost his memory and the psychotic Bullseye steals his moniker. Featuring stunning work by penciller Lee Weeks, Foggy performed instrumental legwork behind the scenes, preserving avenues to return Matt's professional identity. He dug deep into Matt's personal files in order to return his life to normalcy, "I've since rectified with the IRS, the government, banks, the law board (referring to the destruction of Matt's life in "Born Again"). I got your license back for you, Matt. Now all I need is you." Clearly this is the work of not only a steadfast ally but also a very close friend seeking amends. Regarding his overall role in the series, Nocenti added, "Everyone needs family. In comics you always had these ad-hoc families that were support groups (i.e. the X-Men). It's important for superheroes to have normal humans in their lives."

### WITH RITES AND GRACE

As the late '80s spilled into the early '90s, market speculation kept companies agile in terms of selling their titles. As special covers, key character

deaths, and highly rendered art styles flooded the market, Foggy Nelson remained steadfast, continuing his work to support the legal practice of Nelson & Murdock. In "Last Rites," *DD* #297-300 (Oct. 1991-Jan. 1992) by Dan Chichester and Lee Weeks, Foggy allows Matt to focus on sabotaging the Kingpin, while he keeps their professional options open. In an interview with *BI*, writer Dan Chichester explained Foggy in terms of the legal role he can play in the book in addition to his value as a confidant. "Foggy is a very stable moral center. This allows the book to have a consistent meaningful legal point of view. When Matt goes too far, Foggy is the first to call him on it...He is something special in Matt's life; the audience has to appreciate that relationship." In *Daredevil* #322 (Nov. 1993) Foggy confronts Matt about his waning focus on his professional responsibilities.



DAN CHICHESTER

Funmov.

Foggy comments at Matt's "other life" in a panel that seems to both wink at the reader and slightly break the fourth wall while sardonically delivering the line "Don't forget your cane."

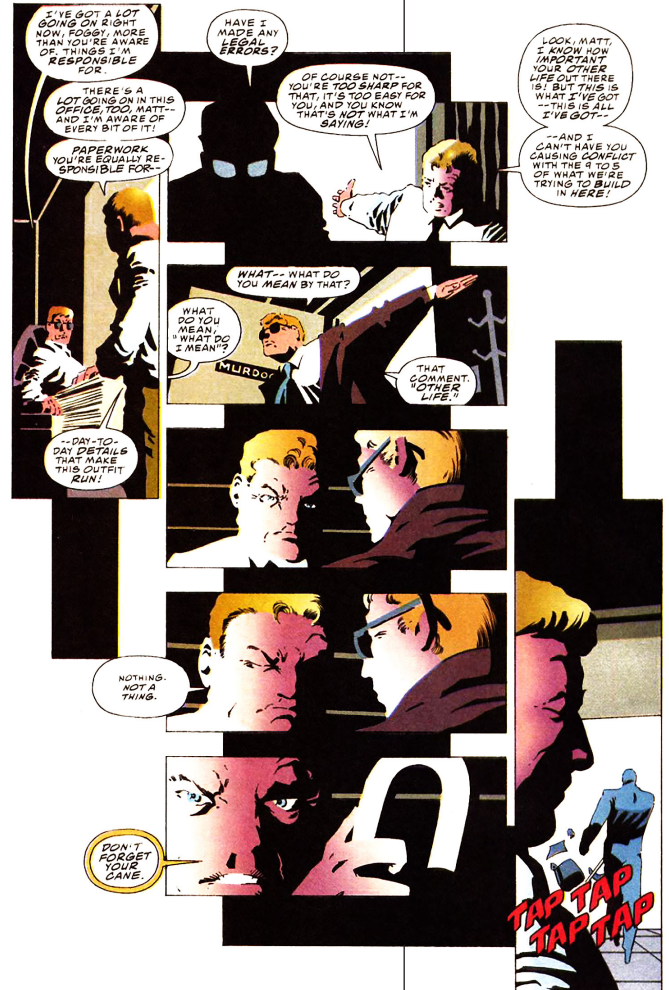
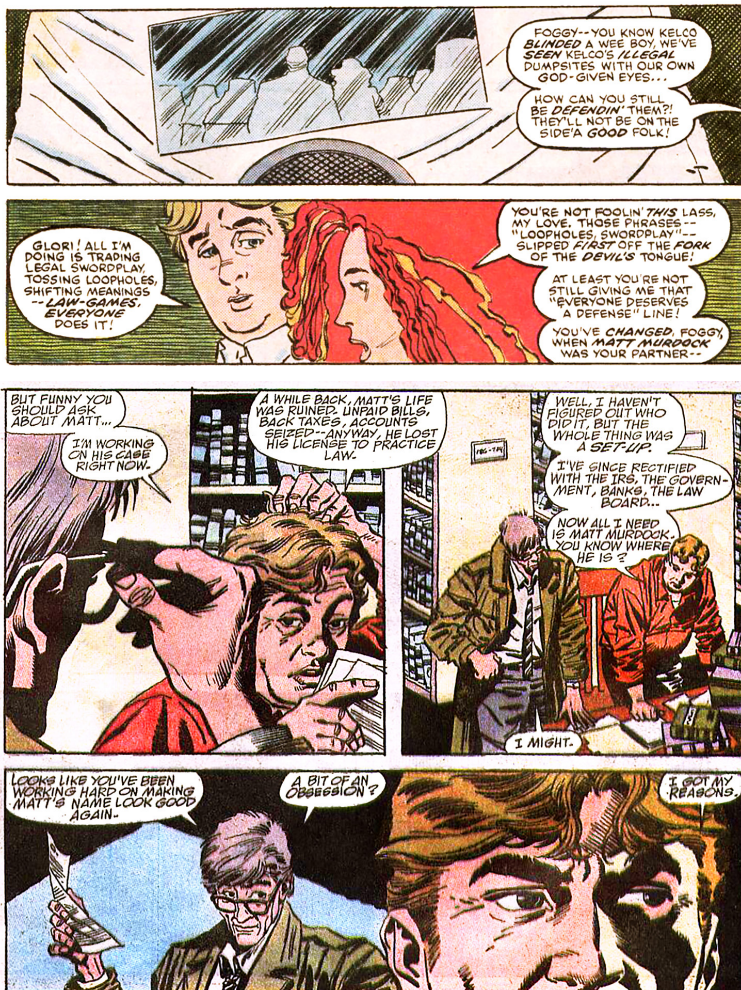
*Daredevil* was in a precarious economic position in the early '90s, as was the rest of the comic book industry. The creative team decided to take a big swing and alter both his costume and civilian

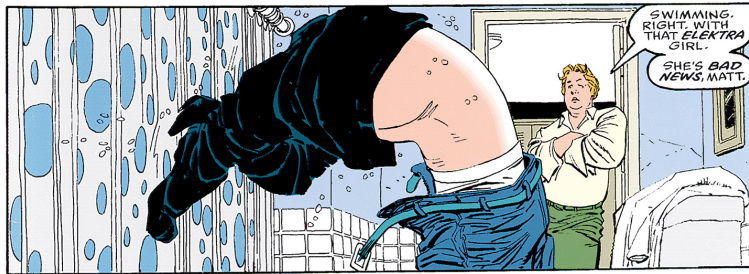
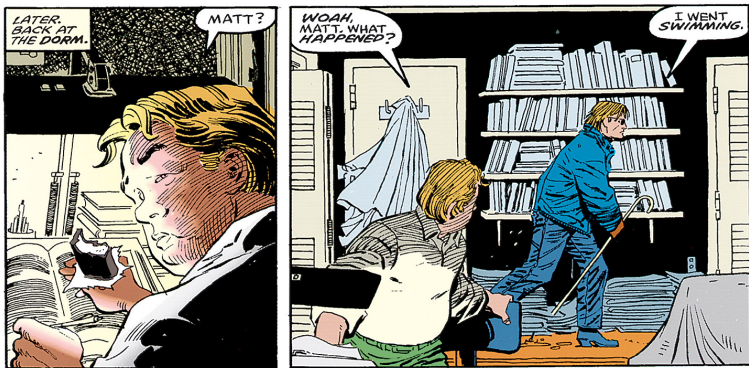
(top left) Foggy's defense of his actions rings a bit hollow. *Daredevil* #251 art by John Romita Jr. and Al Williamson.

(bottom left) Foggy goes to work behind the scenes in *Daredevil* #287. Art by Lee Weeks and Al Williamson.

(right) Things get tense between Matt and Foggy in *Daredevil* #322. Art by Scott McDaniel, Hector Collazo, and Rich Rankin.

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**KARL KESEL**

Facebook.

identity within the same storyline. This move generated increased sales and controversy and eventually developed a cult following for the "black armor costume" within the fan base. Foggy was not as prominently featured during the popular yet polarizing "Fall From Grace," in *DD* #319-325 (Aug. 1993-Feb. 1994). Chichester was candid about his use of Foggy during this period, "Foggy coulda used some more love from me in some of those later stories. I lost a little sight of him in the Sturm and Drang; A character like Matt Murdock needs confessionals. Foggy, in a way, is his priest." So Foggy Nelson has served as a legal confidante, a preserver of professional certification, and even a mentor for when Matt Murdock's moral compass goes astray.

**A FRIEND WITH FEAR**

With the assistance of John Romita Jr., Frank Miller returned to Daredevil for a third time to tell the definitive origin of Matt Murdock in 1993's epic: *The Man Without Fear*. Foggy acted as a herald in this decompressed dive into Matt's first adventures. He triggers Matt's sense of vigilante justice when he's physically bullied by another college student. Days later this student, Brad, ends up mysteriously hogtied naked in the snow in *TMWF* #2 (Nov. 1993)! Then Brad uncharacteristically offers a public apology to Foggy. In *TMWF* #3 (Dec. 1993) Foggy warns Matt to stay clear of the new girl who's captured his attention. "...that Elektra girl. She's BAD NEWS, Matt." Foggy also asks Matt to take a break from his corporate law responsibilities and moonlight with some public class action lawsuits against corporate "bullies" in *TMWF* #4 (Jan. 1994). Finally, in *TMWF* #5 (Feb. 1994) the office of Nelson & Murdock is established with some minor help from his mentor Stick and a loan from Foggy's father. Most of Daredevil's future tendencies, including violent retribution, problematic romances, and the legal pursuit of justice, were either influenced or foretold by Mr. Foggy Nelson.

**SECRET REVEALED AND THE KESEL RUN!**

Did Foggy know that Matt is Daredevil? Karen, Elektra, Kingpin, Typhoid Mary, and possibly even the Punisher seemed to be aware. The knowledge of his best bud and colleague's alias was hinted at over the years but finally became exposed in *Daredevil* #347 (Dec. 1995). Prolific comic legend J.M. DeMatteis wrote this issue, featuring an amnesia-stricken Matt wearing his original yellow costume. After defeating a complex and self-loathing doppelganger, a forlorn and guilt-ridden Daredevil removes his mask only to be comforted by Karen Page and a very confused Foggy, "Wh-what's he doing in that costume?!" Soon Marvel decided to return Daredevil to his original carefree, lighthearted tone after "Last Rites," "Fall From Grace," and a few more "grim & gritty" adventures. Given this task was writer Karl Kesel, following his run on *Superboy*, and relative newcomer at the time, Cary Nord. "I was brought on *Daredevil* specifically to take him back to his roots. Bob Harras asked me to make him a swashbuckler again," said Kesel in an interview with *BI*. During this run, Foggy's biological mother, Rosalind Sharpe, shows up, stirring up all kinds of trouble. While moonlighting as Daredevil, Matt faces off against some classic marvel villains including Mr. Hyde in *DD* #353 (June 1996), The Absorbing Man in *DD* #360 (Jan. 1997), and Grey Gargoyle in *DD* #361 (Feb. 1997). During regular business hours Matt and Foggy engaged in mental judo against the self-serving machinations of Ms. Sharpe. These

(top) Foggy tries to warn Matt in *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear* #3. Art by John Romita Jr. and Al Williamson.  
 (bottom) All is revealed in *Daredevil* #347. Art by Ron Wagner, Bill Reinhold, and Ron McCain.

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plot threads placed Foggy in dire straits, trying to navigate past feelings of rejection, while simultaneously eager to earn his birth mother's approval. Kesel provided additional background about adding Ms. Sharpe to the regular cast.

"At that point everyone knew Matt Murdock was Daredevil and we needed someone in the book who didn't. She also brought some tension to the characters." Kesel graciously shared his perspective on Foggy and how he relates to Matt, "They have the uncommon ability to be friends and business partners. You just don't have many relationships like that in comics (or real life). When push comes to shove they're there for each other. I don't think that Foggy is the *hero*, but I do think Foggy is *essential*. Foggy is almost entirely heart, and he wears his heart on his sleeve too. He's the reader's identification character."

### DEATH BECAME HIM

What does Franklin T. Nelson have in common with Superman, Captain America, Robin, and Bucky Barnes? If you guessed defeating the grim reaper, you are correct!

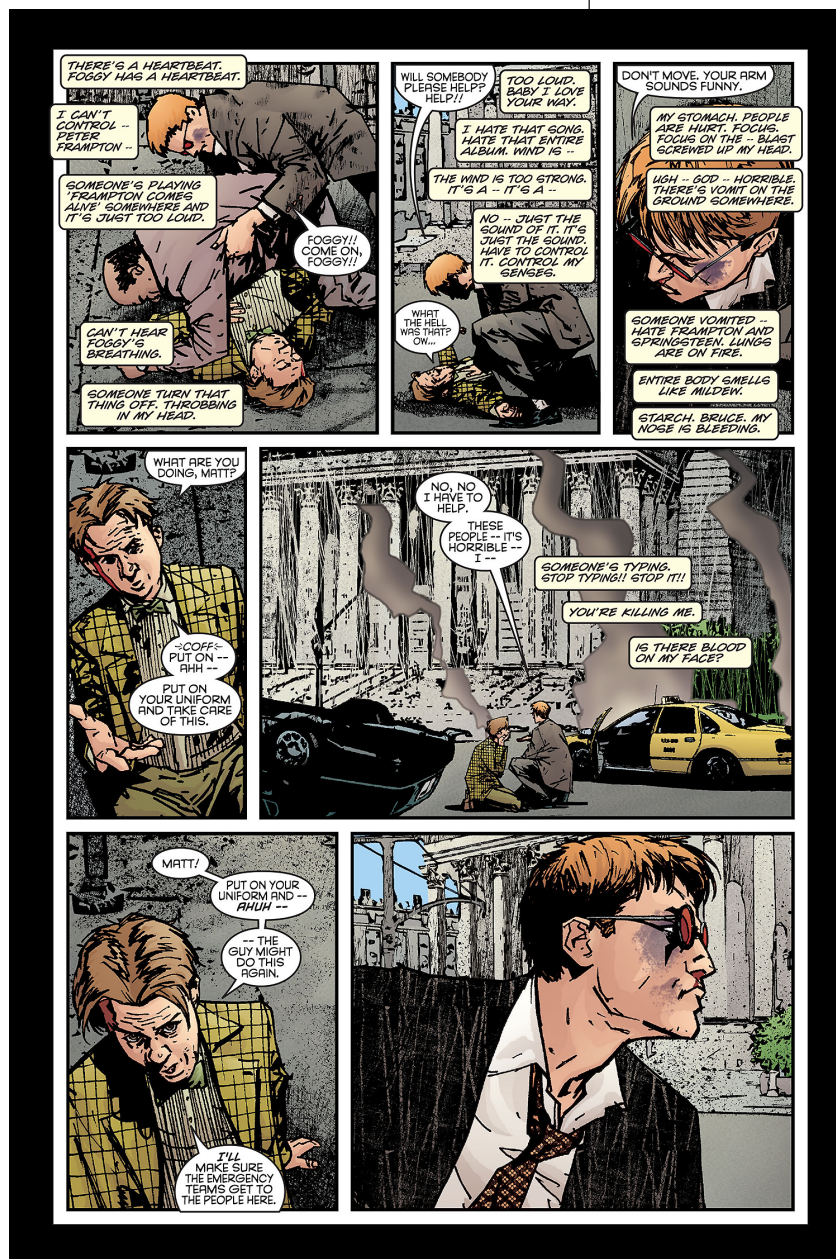
Being best friends with Matt Murdock is high risk, and *DD* Vol. 2 #26 (Dec. 2001) by Brian Michael Bendis and Alex Maleev shows why. On the orders of the Kingpin's son Richard Fisk, aka The Rose, henchman extraordinaire Nitro blasts Matt and Foggy's car into the air, throwing Matt's hypersenses into disarray. Foggy survived, banged up and bruised. He may not have been the primary target, but he easily could have perished. A few years later in Ed Brubaker's run, Foggy Nelson is seemingly stabbed to death, and then secretly placed into witness protection. He attempts to break out of protective custody in *DD* Vol. 2 #88 (Oct. 2006), only to learn that Elektra (later revealed to be a Skrull) has instituted her own protective measures. He is forced to be a silent ally and reticent shapeshifter, passively supporting his best friend from the shadows under the alias

"Everett Williams"—a nice nod to *Daredevil* co-creator Bill Everett. An unknowing Matt survives a prison riot he helped to incite, then travels across Europe to confront the mastermind behind the pseudo-assassination. It turns out it's Fisk-Vanessa Fisk, wife of the Kingpin! Upon confronting her in *DD* Vol. 2 #92 (Feb. 2007) Matt exudes, "He was my friend! He was my best friend!" Fortunately, Foggy was safe and sound.

A few years later, writer Mark Waid had a different take on the "death" of Foggy Nelson in *DD* Vol. 4 #5 (Sep. 2014). Foggy was admirably battling cancer, Ewing's sarcoma, with the aid of Matt and Ant-Man. A surprise attack from an updated Leapfrog sends Mr. Nelson into the literal belly of the beast. He makes a personal sacrifice by blowing himself up along with the Leapfrog's timebomb, saving the citizens of NYC. This demonstrated his selfless and heroic internal nature. Of course, he did not really die but was provided sanctuary for fighting his disease away

(left) Rosalind Sharpe doesn't seem menacing at all. *Daredevil* #353 art by Cary Nord and Matthew Ryan. (right) Foggy survives being blown up in *Daredevil* Vol 2 #26. Art by Alex Maleev.

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(left) Foggy and Matt are featured on the cover of *Daredevil: Yellow* #3. Art by Tim Sale. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)). (right) Foggy's about to be blown up again in *Daredevil* Vol. 4 #5. He gets better. Art by Chris Samnee.



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from the persistent threat of super-villains. Matt was revealed to be the orchestrator of the ruse that provided Foggy both safety and honor. What an amazing gift!

### FOGGY, FOGGY EVERYWHERE

There are several alternate universe versions of Foggy that appear intermittently, such as Normie Osborn's stepdad in *MC2* (1998), Matthew Murdock's college roommate on Earth-1610 (2002), a ship captain in *Marvel:1602* (2003), and a judge in the old west town of Timely in 1872 (2015). Additionally, Foggy has also appeared on both the silver and small screens in the past 25 years. The first actor to portray Foggy Nelson was none other than future *Iron Man* (2006) director and Happy Hogan actor Jon Favreau in the 2003 *Daredevil* film. Foggy Nelson is later played by Elden Henson on the first *Daredevil* TV show (2015-2018). He reprises the role again in *The Defenders* (2017) while making appearances in *Jessica Jones* (2018), *Luke Cage* (2018), and *Daredevil: Born Again* (2025).

Franklin "Foggy" Nelson has been instrumental in the pages of *Daredevil*: financially springboarding Matt's law career, saving him from Elektra's sai, retaining his legal license, covering Matt countless

times in the courtroom, and regularly advising him on relationships, legal matters, and life. His default setting may be ally, but his purpose goes even deeper. He is both a litmus test for the cultural touchstones in which *Daredevil* exists, and an ever-shifting counterpart for his colleague Matt Murdock. As Mark Waid noted, "Matt needs someone around him who can ground him and remind him that the world's not just super-heroes and supervillains." Karl Kesel put it rather succinctly, "Foggy is Matt's best friend." Foggy Nelson—hero, mentor, shadow, ally, threshold guardian, herald, trickster, shapeshifter, attorney, and the very best friend a superhero has ever had. Case closed!

*Matt Merante is a freelance writer/essayist and literacy specialist whose interests include comics, film, and genre fiction. He greatly admires the works of Gene Colan, Sal Buscema, Norm Breyfogle, and John Byrne among others. Matt lives with his family in Virginia and appreciates the ability of any lifelong friends who are able to successfully meld business practices, social endeavors, and crime-fighting.*



# The Magic of MORDECAI PENDRAGON

by Dewey Cassell



When it comes to being a hero, or even an anti-hero, it is not unusual to find that they have some kind of support in their endeavors. As lonely as that vocation may be, it is difficult to do alone. Some align with teams like the Justice League or the Avengers, who join them in their crusade. Others choose less conspicuous helpers who aid them in the background. The Punisher had Micro. Batman had Alfred. Plastic Man had Woozy Winks.

And Vampirella had Mordecai Pendragon.

Vampirella was the scantily clad star of her own self-titled black and white horror magazine by Warren Publishing, which debuted in 1969. She is an alien with the characteristics of a vampire, who not only hosted the stories, but also appeared in her own adventures. She first encounters Pendragon in the story "Carnival of the Damned" in issue #11 (May 1971), written by Archie Goodwin and illustrated by Tom Sutton. Pendragon was a stage magician working for Ashton's World of Fun Carnival. He had been kept captive at the carnival for 15 years by one of the seven demon servants of Chaos, Asmodeus, who had partially possessed Ashton. Asmodeus was using the carnival to collect the souls of unsuspecting visitors, but Vampirella was able to defeat Asmodeus and free Pendragon.

Pendragon appears next in issue #13 (Sept. 1971), performing his magic act at a club on the coast of Texas, with Vampirella as his new assistant. The arrangement is beneficial to both Pendragon as well as Vampirella, who was trying to escape the attention of vampire hunter Conrad Van Helsing and his son Adam. The tricks Pendragon performs haven't improved, but now Vampirella closes the act by transforming into a bat. Pendragon finds her brand of "magic" unsettling, given his prior experience with Asmodeus, and he finds comfort in a bottle, firmly establishing a recurring theme that was introduced in his initial appearance. Together, they travel performing their act and battling the Cult of Chaos.

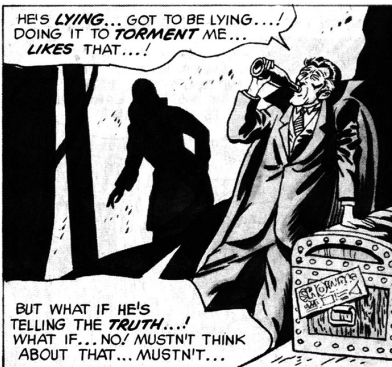
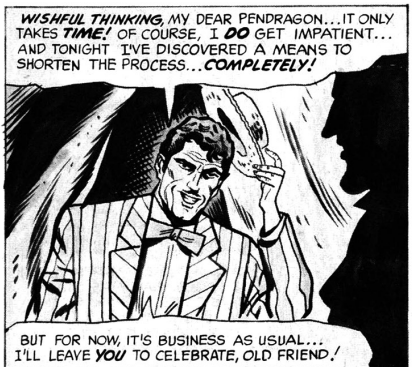
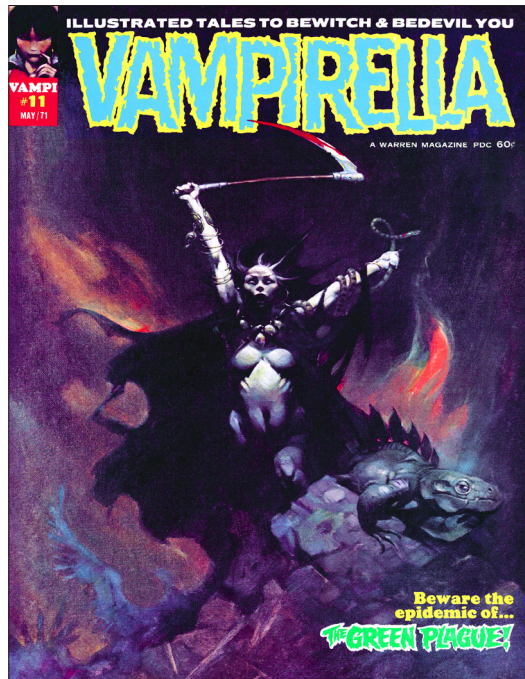
The issues that follow build on the characterization of both Vampirella and Pendragon, as well as their evolving relationship with the Van Helsing.

Pendragon and Vampirella's magic act from *Vampirella* #13. Art by Jose Gonzalez.

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(top) The cover of *Vampirella* #11 (art by Frank Frazetta), which featured (bottom) the first appearance of Pendragon. Art by Jose Gonzalez.

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The stories vary in length but carry forward a loose ongoing continuity from one issue to the next. In issue #21 (Dec. 1972), the entire troupe finds themselves transported into danger, but when Vampirella faces off against a hideous creature, Pendragon steadfastly refuses to leave, saying, "I can run, but the Van Helsings are unable. And the closing of a show is always more meaningful with friends, don't you think?"

But it is in issue #24 (May 1973) that we finally learn the whole backstory on the often-inebriated magician, in a tale written by Bill DuBay and illustrated by Jose Gonzalez that continues over several issues. When America entered World War II, Pendragon was eking out a living as a stage magician to care for his wife and three-year-old daughter. He was declared physically unfit to serve in the armed forces, so he signed up with the USO and left his wife and daughter behind. While on tour, he sent money home and his wife found work in an electronics plant. She fell in love with the plant manager and wrote to Pendragon asking for a divorce, driving him to find solace in a bottle. What Pendragon didn't know, until the present day of the story, was that his ex-wife's new husband abused her regularly. When he struck out at Pendragon's daughter, his ex-wife fought back and he pushed her through a window, leaving her paralyzed. A family friend took in the mother and daughter and arranged an "accident" for the abusive husband. But Pendragon was completely unaware of what had transpired because he never looked them up after the war. By the end of the story, a drugged Vampirella kills Pendragon's son-in-law and injures his grandson, leaving Pendragon distraught, though he does not blame Vampirella for what she is. But Pendragon's estranged wife blames him for all that has happened and unsuccessfully attempts to have him killed.

This story serves not only to make Pendragon a more sympathetic character, rather than a simple drunk, but it also serves to illustrate the complicated relationship that he shares with Vampirella. In his book, *From the Stars ... A Vampiress* (StarWarp Concepts, 2020), Steven A. Roman notes, "The two-part story is probably DuBay's finest contribution to the series as he shows the reader that there's far more to Pendragon than just his role as Vampi's drunken comedic sidekick." On the surface, it may seem like Pendragon has more in common with Woozy than Micro or Alfred, often acting like a bumbling fool. But unlike Micro or Alfred or Woozy, Pendragon's relationship with his "hero" seems often marked as much by fear or sadness as by aid and comfort.

From helping Vampirella find her way to serving as a pawn of Dracula to entrap Vampirella, Pendragon plays a variety of roles in his adventures with the Daughter of Drakulon. Perhaps the most common role he plays is one of captive in need of rescue. Unlike the support staff of some heroes, who remain in the shadows, Pendragon has a very public relationship with Vampirella. Coupled with his frail physique and often inebriated condition, he is an easy target for villains who are looking for leverage against the lady in red. For example, in issue #44 (Aug. 1975), Vampirella witnesses a getaway car fleeing a robbery at a blood bank. Concerned that she might recognize them, the robbers kidnap Pendragon as a bargaining chip against Vampirella. She comes to his rescue, thwarting the villains, and satiating her blood thirst in the process. This plot device is



BUT VAMPIRELLA'S CRIES DO NOT REACH THE MAIN DECK... AND IF THEY DID, WOULD ONLY BE LOST IN THE TERRIBLE STILLNESS THAT HAS SETTLED THERE!



TO APPEAR IN:

VAMPIRELLA #13 TITLE: LURKER IN THE DEEP

Vampirella rescues Pendragon from a monstrosity in *Vampirella* #13. Art by Jose Gonzalez. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

TM & © Dynamite.

used repeatedly throughout the series. Of course, sometimes Pendragon is to blame for needing to be rescued, such as in issue #41 (Apr. 1975), when he travels to England to retrieve an inheritance from a deceased uncle, only to find himself on the threshold of becoming dog food before Vampirella sweeps in to save him.

A related role that Pendragon plays is one of victim. Sometimes, thanks to his close relationship with Vampirella, Pendragon gets physically harmed. In issue #24, having been drugged by their captors, Vampirella bites Pendragon, but she gets distracted before completely draining his blood, leaving him in a weakened state. Getting bitten was sometimes the price to be paid for being a friend of Vampirella. Pendragon even dies at the bidding of one of Vampirella's nemeses, the Blood Red Queen of Hearts, only to be restored to life by aliens the following issue.

Yet another role that Pendragon plays is one of helper. That help takes a variety of forms, such as a spyglass produced at an opportune moment in issue #22 (Mar. 1973) to aid Vampirella and company in finding their quarry, coupled with the revelation that Pendragon had previously used it to swipe secrets from other magicians.

And once in a while, Pendragon also plays the role of savior for Vampirella, such as in issue #49 (Mar. 1976), which finds Pendragon in a hospital recovering from a gunshot wound sustained several

issues before. He conjures an astral projection of the mad god Chaos to deceive a would-be killer demon bent on destroying Vampirella.

Pendragon and Vampirella did have a falling out on occasion, such as in issue #35 (Aug. 1974) when Pendragon accused Vampirella of draining the blood of several local townspeople. Vampirella became indignant over Pendragon's refusal to believe her denial, so she left him to perform a solo act. But when she proves her innocence, she returns to her faithful partner.

There is a time period beginning with issue #67 (Mar. 1978) when Vampirella was acting in Hollywood and keeping company with her shape-shifting friend, Pantha, during which Pendragon took a backseat in most stories. In fact, there are some Vampirella stories in which Pendragon doesn't appear at all, most notably issue #s 65-68 and the intervening crossover appearance in *Eerie* numbers 94 and 95. He returns in *Vampirella* #69 (May 1978) with no mention of his absence. Finally, in issue #99 (Sept. 1981), Vampirella suggests to Pendragon that they revive their nightclub act together.

But perhaps the greatest role that Pendragon plays is one of friend and companion. He followed her into the veritable depths of hell, reluctantly perhaps, but he followed, nonetheless. His regard for her is almost paternal. And more than any of her other acquaintances, Pendragon accepts Vampirella

(left) In *Vampirella* #22, Pendragon provides a much-needed spyglass. (right) Pendragon joins the USO in *Vampirella* #24. Art by Jose Gonzalez.

TM & © Dynamite.





for who she is. Although she is an alien and remarkably different from other people, he does not fear her, nor does he want anything from her, save her friendship. What greater support could a hero ask for?

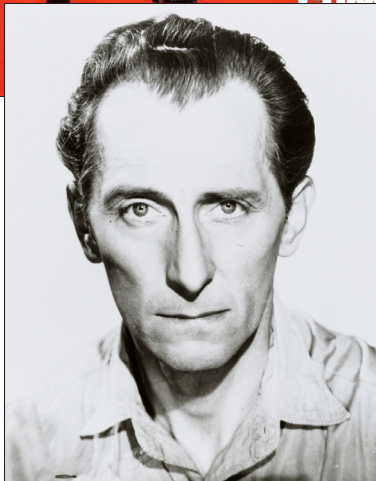
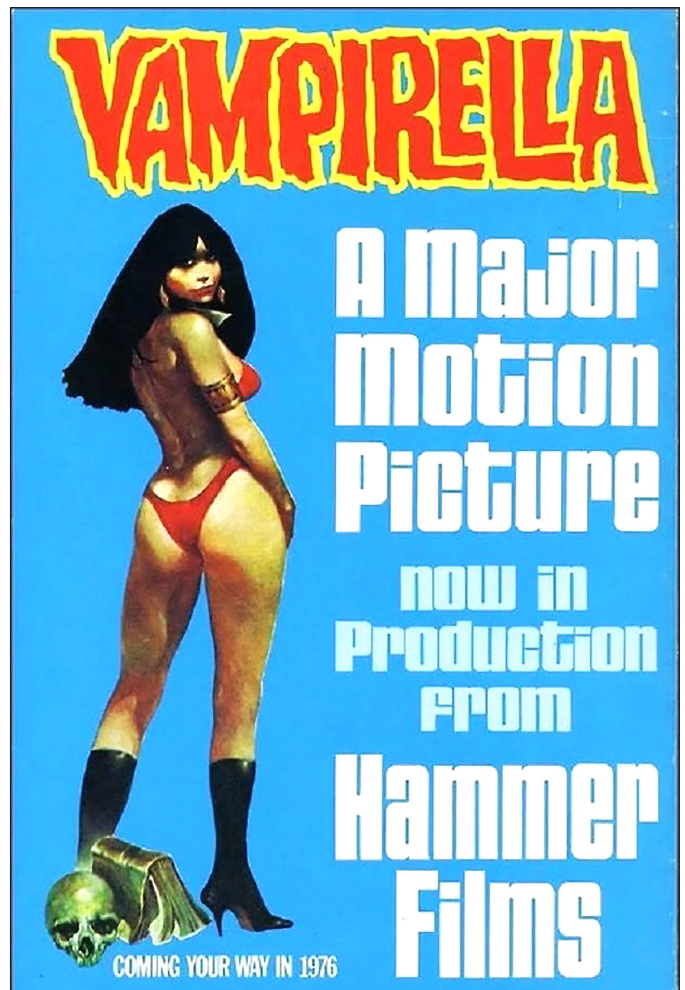
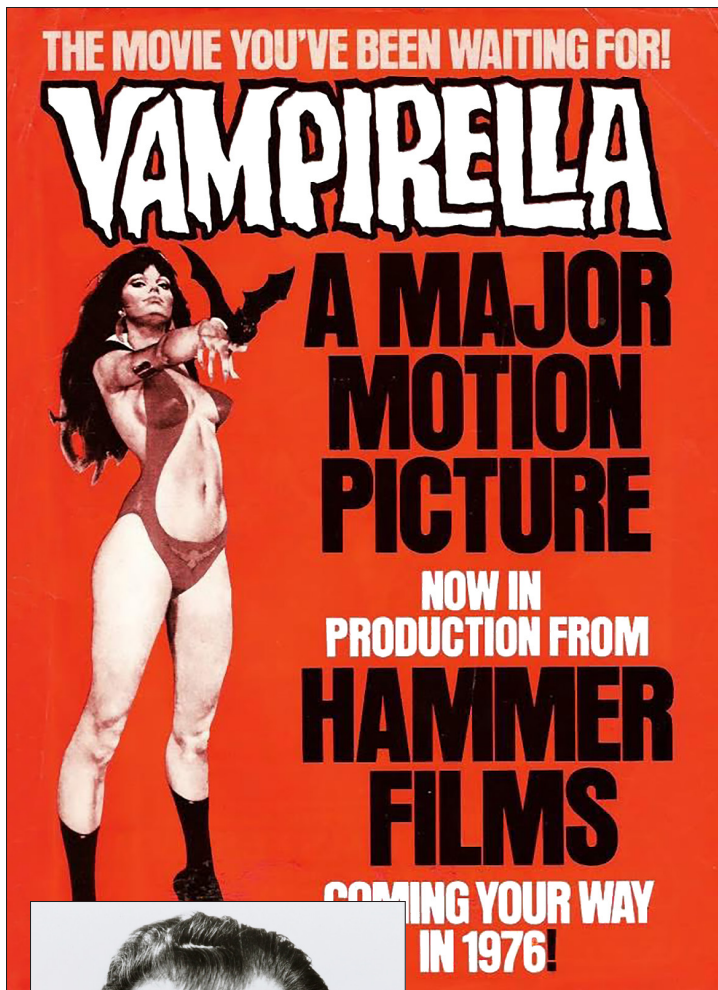
But Pendragon didn't just appear in Vampirella's comic stories. He also appeared in the six Vampirella novelizations by writer Ron Goulart, published by Warner Books, beginning in 1975. Adapting the stories was a challenge well suited to Goulart's talents. Steven A. Roman recounts, "I took the 15-20 page stories," Goulart said, "and turned them into 160-180 page novels. This often took great cunning and ingenuity." Roman adds, "Part of the 'cunning and ingenuity' he applied to the novelizations included adding more depth to the cast of characters. Pendragon gets a bit of retuning with the addition of bitingly sarcastic remarks he constantly utters under his breath (always presented in parentheses) that just about everyone can hear, including the audience for his magic show."

Also in 1975, Warren magazines included an advertisement for a Vampirella motion picture by Hammer Films, planned to be released the following year. Barbara Leigh was cast in the title role and Peter Cushing was chosen to play the part of Pendragon. Cushing was famous for his



(top left) A drugged Vampi bites Pen in Vampirella #25. Art by Jose Gonzalez.  
 (top right) Vampirella and Pendragon have falling out in Vampirella #35. Art by Jose Ortiz.  
 From Vampirella #59. Art by Jose Gonzalez.  
 Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

TM & © Dynamite.



(top) Published advertisements for the Vampirella movie. Courtesy of Mark Woods. (inset) The late, great Peter Cushing. Original scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

Vampirella TM & © Dynamite.

role as Victor Frankenstein, as well as Dr. Van Helsing in *Dracula*, both produced by Hammer Films. In issue #10/11 of *Little Shoppe of Horrors* magazine (July 1990), Glen Davies' article "The Unfilmed Hammer: An A to Z Guide," quotes Cushing on the role. "Hammer Films have just cast me in *Vampirella* in what will be an entirely different part for me," Peter Cushing announced to his fans. "I will play a seedy, not very successful impresario named Pendragon, who tries to do conjuring tricks which never come off. He has taken to drink and is always

a little besotted and he's got a terrible nightclub act that he does with a girl who disappears in a cloud of smoke. This role contains a great deal of humor as well as a great deal of pathos. It could lead me into all sorts of new things." However, the film was never made, due in part to unresolved issues regarding ongoing rights to the lead character, which may have been just as well. Steven A. Roman notes, "Had the film been completed, its one highlight would have been the Vampi/Pen friendship, which is just about the only thing that was successfully translated from the comics."

*Vampirella* #112 (Mar. 1983) was the last issue by Warren, released in December 1982. The final issue does include Pendragon, but Vampirella leaves him behind when she goes to rescue

Adam from danger. It is a far cry from their earlier adventures together. The characters' relationship is left open-ended, though, because it was not planned to be the final issue, as was evident from the advertisement for issue #113 on the last page.

Warren Publishing declared bankruptcy in 1983 and the Vampirella character was acquired by Harris Comics. When they began publishing new material in 1991, they eventually left Pendragon's character behind. It's hard to argue with the success that Harris found in rejuvenating Vampirella for a new audience of readers, but it was a welcome bit of nostalgia when later stories from Dynamite, who acquired the rights to Vampirella in 2010, included the aging magician companion. Whatever his faults, Pendragon served to ground Vampirella. He was someone to care for – and who cared for her – in the midst of her bizarre and often life-threatening adventures. He was an unconditional companion, supporter, and above all, friend. That's a rare kind of magic.

*Sincere thanks to Steven A. Roman. Dewey Cassell is the twice Eisner Award nominated author/co-author of five books and over 50 magazine articles, as well as being a longtime fan of Warren Publishing.*



end

# TERRY'S TOONS

## WHO YELLED "LET'S YOU AND HIM FIGHT"?!



never heard of the chap -- --I'm one of the JONES boys...

the end.

end

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**TWOMORROWS AD PAGE**

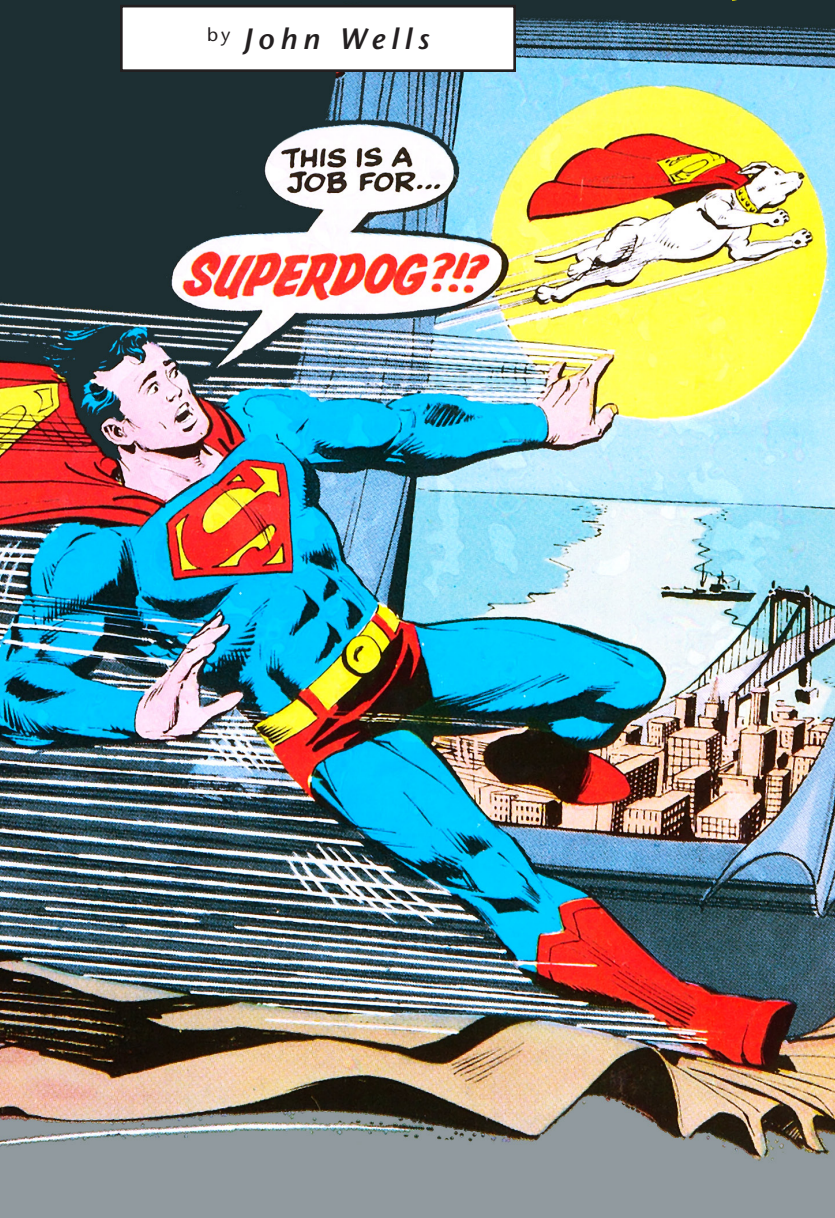
# YOU WILL BELIEVE A DOG CAN FLY!

## THE ADVENTURES OF

# KRYPTO

## IN THE BRONZE AGE

by John Wells



For a subset of Superman fans, fear has a name and it is not Luthor or Brainiac or Doomsday or Darkseid. The creature that strikes fear into their hearts is nothing more than a handsome white pooch called...Krypto. The idea of a superdog in a fluttering red cape is simply a bridge too far for those who prefer to keep their comic books serious and free of anything that one might mistake for children's literature.

It wasn't always that way. In the early decades of film, canines like Rin Tin Tin and Lassie became household names. Likewise, threats to comic strip animals such as Little Orphan Annie's Sandy roused readership as much as real-life perils on the front page. DC's own Streak the Wonder Dog all but pushed Green Lantern into retirement at the end of his 1940s comic book career and his spiritual successor Rex the Wonder Dog enjoyed a healthy run spanning 1951-1959.

Krypto emerged in *Adventure Comics* #210, on sale in January 1955, first presenting himself as a stray whose superpowers soon became evident to Superboy. Investigation led the Boy of Steel to a rocket and evidence that the mystery pooch was a test animal from the distant planet Krypton whose journey had been knocked seriously off course. If that wasn't enough of a coincidence, Krypto also happened to have been the infant Kal-El's own pet before he had been sent to Earth himself!

Writer Otto Binder, fascinated by the infant space program, clearly took his cues from the U.S. and Russia's early (and generally tragic) efforts to use animals like monkeys and dogs as proto-astronauts. Krypto was vastly more successful than his real-life counterparts but one must assume that his rocket was equipped with life-preservation qualities that enabled him to survive what must have been at least a decade traveling the stars.

By the end of the first tale, the Dog of Steel had flown back to those stars in search of adventure. Although he'd been reduced to tears more than once over having a playmate who could match him power for power, Superboy also felt a twinge of relief. Krypto was as rambunctious and obstinate as an Earthly dog. Unfortunately, he wasn't from Earth and a feisty superdog was a handful.

With Curt Swan and Sy Barry on art, Krypto looked pretty much like a real canine save for cartoonishly exaggerated eyes. His early return in *Adventure* #214 further distanced him from true dogs through the addition of thought balloons. The capper was in his third appearance (*Adventure* #220). Forced to appear in a circus act alongside Superboy, the pooch acquired a red cape like that of his master and the archetypal Krypto was born. The cartoony eyes evolved depending on the artist but only Swan—by the end of the 1950s—adjusted his style for a genuinely realistic look when illustrating the Dog of Steel.

Meanwhile in Gotham City, a certain Caped Crusader had acquired his own Bat-Hound in June 1955's *Batman* #92, a scant three months after Krypto's debut. Otherwise known as Ace, he was played more realistically—mask aside—with no cartoony eyes and no thought balloons.

Krypto flies into action on the cover of *Superman* #287. Art by Dick Giordano.

TM & © DC Comics.



TM & © DC Comics.

Krypto debuts in *Adventure Comics* #210. Art by Curt Swan and Sy Barry.

TM & © DC Comics.

Over the next eight years, he figured into 25 stories. That was a number that Krypto would far surpass thanks to his creator.

Otto Binder must have realized at some point that even a superdog would likely be quite old—if not dead—by Superman's time. Hence, he penned a tale for 1958's *Jimmy Olsen* #29 wherein Superman's pal met the Dog of Steel. Krypto was as destructive as he had been back in *Adventure* #210 but this time his behavior was blamed on old age. Miraculously, the superdog quenched his thirst at a virtual Fountain of Youth and he was back to mental and physical sharpness in a heartbeat.

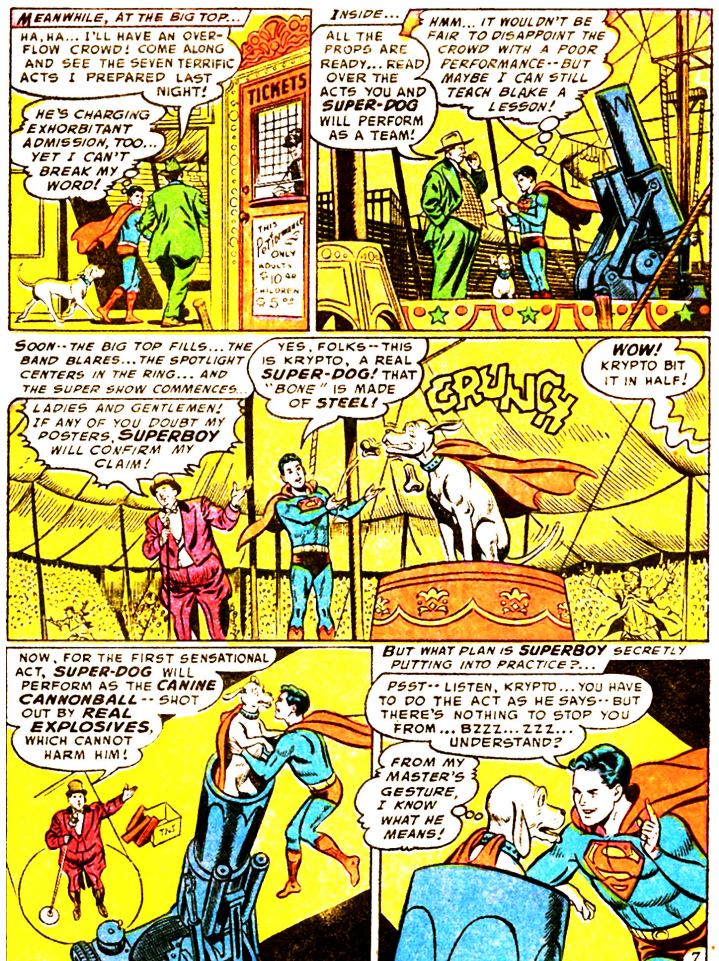
With that story, Binder made it possible for every succeeding writer to broaden the scope of Krypto's appearances from just the Superboy series to the entire line of Superman-related features. The Boy of Steel's own strip remained the superdog's primary home, even allowing him the opportunity to co-found the Legion of Super-Pets (1962's *Adventure* #293) and join the frankly cartoonish Space Canine Patrol Agents (S.C.P.A.) in 1966's *Superboy* #131. Between 1955 and 1970, Krypto boasted over 150 appearances in various DC stories.

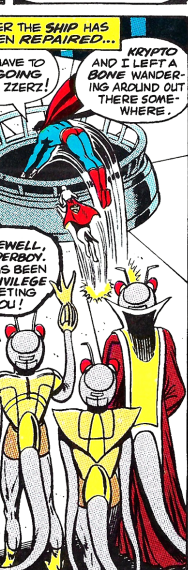
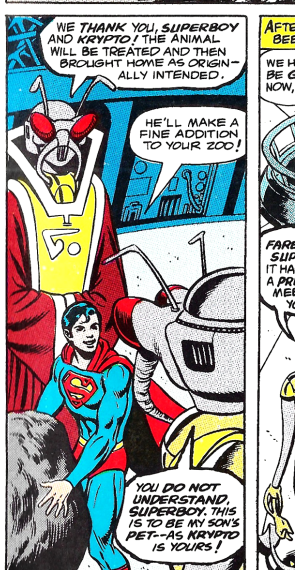
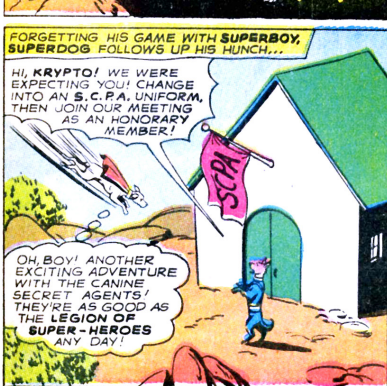
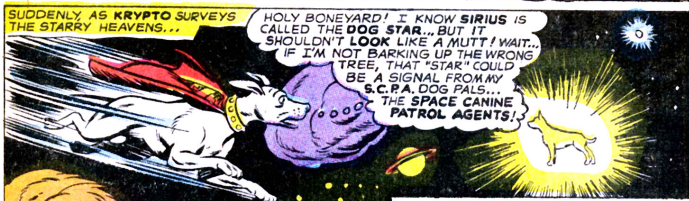
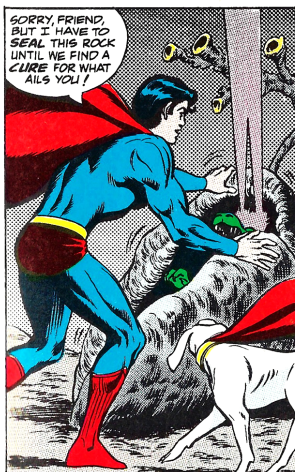
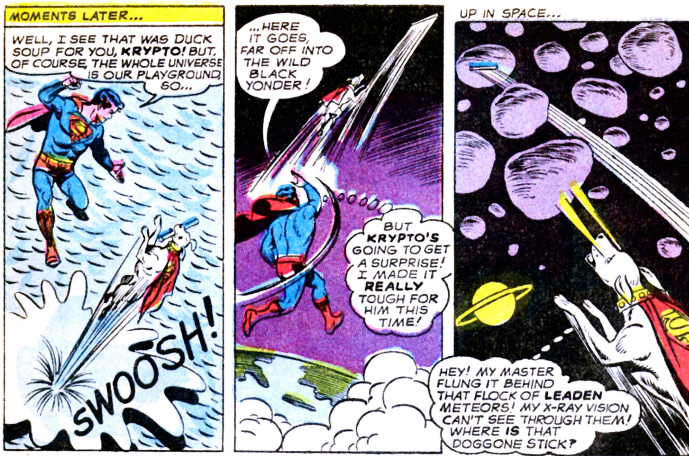
Once veteran Superman editor Mort Weisinger retired in 1970, however, the Dog of Steel's heyday was over. In a world where Marvel's more serious crimefighters had gained considerable traction, the consensus was that super-animals—whether Krypto, Streaky the Super-Cat, Comet the Super-Horse, or Beppo the Super-Monkey—were simply too juvenile for the contemporary superhero reader.

Consequently, Krypto lived on only in reprints, which were still a robust part of DC's publishing regimen. Indeed, 1960s tales featuring the Dog of Steel—generally drawn by George Papp—were a staple of the *Superman Family* title (formerly *Jimmy Olsen*) beginning in January 1974. Starting with issue #165, the original Superboy header on each story was replaced with a "Krypto the Superdog" logo (designed by Gaspar Saladino) that DC continued to use long after *Superman Family* was a memory.

1974 also saw Aurora reissue a series of 1960s superhero models, with custom comics created as a bonus for buyers. Consequently, a short story featuring Superboy and Krypto (by Marv Wolfman and Dave Cockrum) was produced as one of the inserts.

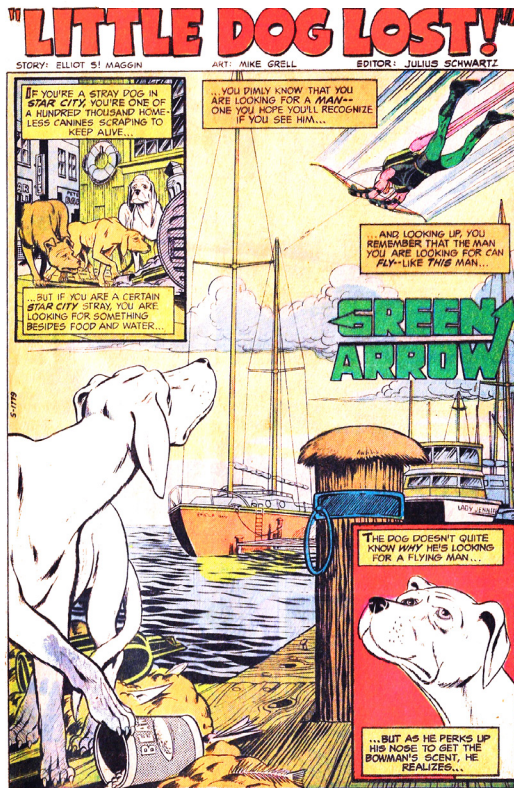
Enter Elliot S. Maggin, a contributor to editor Julius Schwartz's stable and the regular writer on *Action Comics*' Green Arrow feature with artist Mike Grell. The Emerald Archer acquired a four-legged friend in issue #440's installment (July 1974). Wandering the Star City docks, a strangely familiar white dog looked upward and saw GA—wearing a jetpack—rocket overhead. Attracted by the sight of a flying man, the pooch set out after him, demonstrating a surprising proclivity for fighting crime. Ingratiating himself to Green Arrow, "Demian"—so named by Black Canary—kept up the good work in issue #441 as he helped capture Professor Steelgraves. It was only after the mystery canine vanished into the night that GA and BC realized they'd been assisted by the long-lost Krypto.





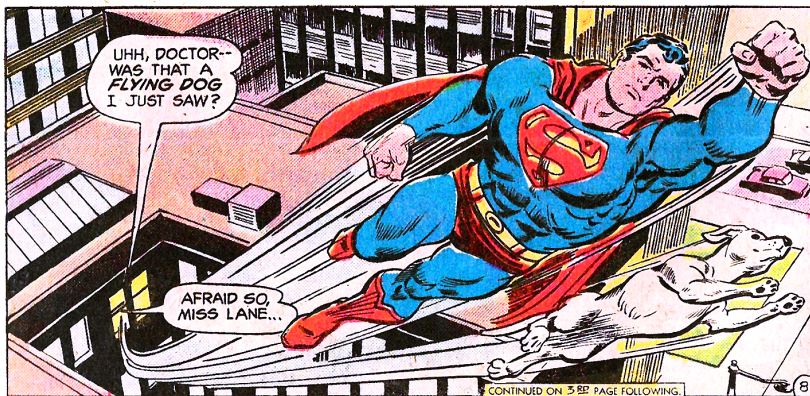
Maggin, now joined by Curt Swan and Bob Oksner, continued the story in February 1975's *Superman* #287. Krypto still didn't fully grasp that he was anything other than a normal canine. A flashback detailed his encounter with an alien called the Mindbreaker that stripped him of his memories and caused his long separation from Superman. Instead, the story followed the white stray's pursuit of a pampered pooch named Chelsea, paralleling his former master's latest date with Lois Lane. Climactically, Krypto finally caught sight of Superman in the sky during a crisis...and rocketed into the air for a long overdue reunion. It was, the epilogue added, a bit too much for Chelsea, who preferred her suitors to be a little more down to Earth. It was all thoroughly charming, including Lois' declaration that she was fine with a superhero.

Visually, Krypto was less cartoony, with Swan maintaining the realistic rendering he'd used in the 1960s. For his part, Maggin played him a bit closer to a true dog, eliminating the human-style thought balloons. "I was trying to show how I thought he ought to be handled," Maggin declared in a 2009 interview posted on the *Superman Homepage*. "Awhile afterward, a friend decided he was going to write a Krypto story and I was delighted. I told him that of course in a relatively realistic story you can't give the dog thought balloons. Anyone who's ever communicated with a dog knows they don't do it in English. He said,



(top left) Krypto flies off for an adventure with the Space Canine Patrol Agents in *Superboy* #132. Art by George Papp. (top right) A page from a specialty Aurora comic included with a model, featuring Krypto. Art by Dave Cockrum. (bottom) A lost Krypto joins forces with Green Arrow in *Action Comics* #440. Art by Mike Grell.

TM & © DC Comics.



'Well, I'll just give him a few thought balloons, then.' So, I rolled my eyes and changed the subject." Having been revived, Krypto sat idle for over a year before appearances in a pair of Curt Swan-penciled back-up stories that ran in 1976's *Action Comics* #462 and 467. The former—written by Superman veteran E. Nelson Bridwell—was squarely in the Silver Age mold, opening with a shot of the outer space Doghouse of Solitude (first seen in 1961's *Superman* #150). The six-pager's plot involved the Dog of Steel exposing a Superman impersonator before agreeing to endorse some canned dog food in exchange for a big donation to animal shelters.

The moratorium on thought balloons was over as of the two shorts, the latter representing Bob Rozakis' first Superman-related script. His tale found the superdog protecting Metropolis from Mr. Mxyzptlk in the Man of Steel's absence, literally threatening to take a bite out of the magical imp.

In between the stories, Bridwell also inserted Krypto into September 1976's *Super Friends* #2, using him as a translator for the cartoony Wonder Dog. "I've taught [Krypto] a simple barking code that enables us to communicate," Superman explained.

In December 1976, Krypto acquired his first solo series. DC's new publisher Jenette Kahn had initiated a series of Dollar Comics that offered an 80-page package of new material and one of its first launches was—effective with issue #182—*Superman Family*. Along with previous headliners Supergirl, Lois Lane, and Jimmy Olsen, there were plenty of prospects to fill the expanded book's pages and Krypto made the cut.

John Calnan penciled the first three installments (and *SF* #187) before newcomer Juan Ortiz signed on with issue #185. Scripting the feature was Bob Toomey, whose first story entangled the Dog of Steel with a pair of buffoonish bank robbers and Blue, the fearsome guardian of Groll's Auto Wrecking.

"My first Krypto story was inspired by the 'meaner than a junkyard dog' line in Jim Croce's 'Bad, Bad Leroy Brown,'" Toomey declared in Paul Kupperberg's *Direct Conversations* (2023). "When you're looking for a story, ideas are everywhere. Everything is fodder, and what could be better than Krypto and a junkyard dog? I turned that one in and did another, and I learned [...] for me, I'd go into an editor's office, ask them if they were looking for something, and usually walk away with an assignment."

With issue #183, Toomey began setting up an ongoing framework. Pining for Chelsea, Krypto discovered that his lost love had gone to Hollywood to star in films for Canine Pictures. Once the Dog of Steel—sans cape—rescued her from a fire, the romance was back on and Krypto—his true identity unsuspected by the filmmakers—was hired as Chelsea's co-star Jocko.

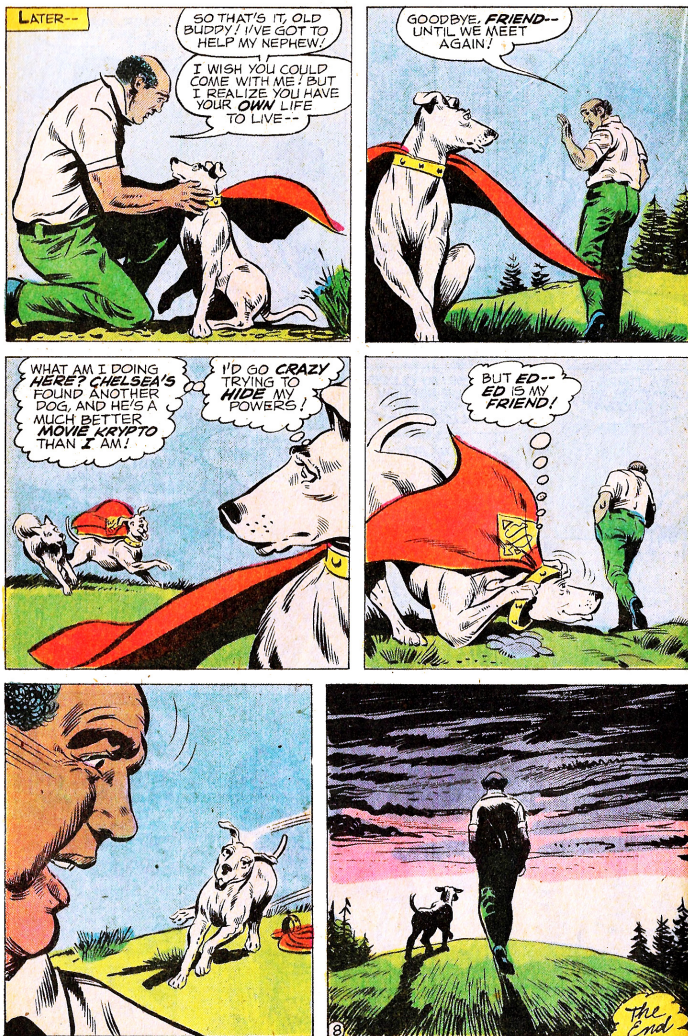
Toomey managed to write two episodes without word balloons but finally bowed to convention with *SF* #184. "I just wanted to give a more direct line into Krypto's thoughts," he told *BI*.

"The readers hated my Krypto stuff," Toomey recalled to Paul Kupperberg in *Direct Conversations*. "Joe [Orlando] hated my Krypto stuff, Paul Levitz hated my Krypto stuff. The only reason they kept the strip going, according to what I was told, was that Jenette Kahn liked it. I kept telling them I was writing it for my eight-year-old daughter, not grown men. You've got to read it in the spirit it was written."



(top) Krypto reunites with Superman in *Superman* #287. Art by Curt Swan and Bob Oksner. (bottom) Krypto rescues a junkyard dog in *Superman Family* #182. Art by John Calnan and Bob Smith.

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FROM KRYPTON HE CAME, IN AN EXPERIMENTAL ROCKET... TO FIND HIS MASTER, SUPERBOY! NOW THAT THE BOY OF STEEL HAS BECOME SUPERMAN, THE DOG OF STEEL HAS TAKEN A NEW IDENTITY-- AND ONLY DETECTIVE ED LACY KNOWS THE ORDINARY-LOOKING "KAPPER" IS REALLY...

WRITER : BOB TOOMEY

LETTERER : MILT SNAPINN

ARTIST : JUAN ORTIZ

COLORIST : JERRY SERPE

# KRYPTO

The SUPERDOG

CHICAGO--A SUDDEN, VIOLENT THUNDERSTORM BATTERS THE CITY, A FOUNDRING DELUGE DRIVEN BY A DARK AND SAVAGE WIND.

LIGHTNING FLARES IN JAGGED STREAMS ACROSS THE SULLEN SKY, ILLUMINATING TWO DRENCHED FIGURES WITH MERCILESS CLARITY.

ALOHA BOB AND JIAN

SE ACARO!

ADK

FINIS

THIS MAN AND THIS DOG HAVE FOLLOWED A TWISTING TRAIL ACROSS THE COUNTRY, NEITHER OF THEM KNOWS IT, BUT THAT TRAIL ENDS HERE --

# REQUIEM

in the RAIN!

Still, the direction of the strip began to change once E. Nelson Bridwell succeeded Denny O'Neil as editor with issue #185. That's when private eye Ed Lacy joined the cast, opening up avenues for Krypto to help fight crime. Lacy was also privy to the superdog's secret identity and pretended to be Jocko's owner. Things reached a turning point at the end of SF #187, where Ed was called away to help his nephew Tommy, accused of murder in Chicago. Saying his goodbyes on a sweet last page, Ed walked away while Krypto considered his options. With Chelsea smitten with Jocko's stunt double, Krypto saw no future in Hollywood. "But Ed—Ed is my friend." The man and the dog left town side by side.

"Ed was originally conceived as a one-shot character," Toomey told *BI*, "a surprise for the readers that an overweight, balding black janitor turned out to be a private eye on a case. But then I saw him as a solution to my main problem, which was that writing Krypto stories where he didn't have any friends or anyone to really relate to was getting harder and harder. I teamed him up with Lacy and that worked a lot better.

"Also, I was writing a lot more stories and getting to understand how comic books worked, so my stories improved. The readers who hated me at the beginning started writing letters saying the Krypto stories were the best in the mag, so I was

encouraged to continue. Plus, I liked the warm friendship that was developing between Krypto and Lacy, which wasn't that different from the one I had with my own highly intelligent dog.

"I named Ed after the guy who wrote one of my favorite novels, the Edgar winning 'Room to Swing' [1958]. The lead character in that novel was black, which was unusual for the time, so I named my black character, who was unusual for the time, after his inspiration."

Ed and Krypto followed Tommy's trail through the next two installments before a crossover with all of *Superman Family's* characters (#190) side-tracked things. E. Nelson Bridwell was responsible for that installment's thoughtful observation about the Dog of Steel. "This entity has been under a yellow sun so long that he has developed far greater intelligence than [an animal under Krypton's red sun would have had.]" The editor was also behind the new collar that the superdog received from Flamebird in the same adventure.

"Nelson was a much more active editor than Denny," Toomey observed. "He was an encyclopedia of DC lore and made sure I stayed on the straight and narrow. One example: I was writing Krypto without a cape. Nelson wouldn't have it. I had to figure out a way to do it and came up with the idea of the cape being rolled up in Krypto's collar. Push a button and out it came. That satisfied

(left) Krypto makes a friend in Ed in *Superman Family* #187. Art by John Calnan. (right) The story with Ed concludes in *Superman Family* #192. Art by Juan Ortiz.

TM & © DC Comics.

(left) Krypto gets a secret identity in *The New Adventures of Superboy* #10 to keep Superboy's secret safe. Art by John Calnan and Kim DeMulder. (right) The importance of Krypto is highlighted in *Action Comics* #500. Art by Curt Swan and Frank Chiaramonte.

TM & © DC Comics.

Nelson, but he wanted Krypto to unfurl his cape in every story."

It was back to Chicago in *SF* #191 and 192, bringing the story of Ed's nephew to a climax. Dramatically staged by Ortiz, it was tonally 180 degrees from where the series had begun and it was also the end of the road. Having reunited Ed and Tommy, Krypto said his goodbyes and tearfully flew off. "I just can't take being an 'ordinary' dog any longer." Although he stuck around for an appearance in issue #193's Superboy story, the Dog of Steel's days as a solo star had come to a halt.

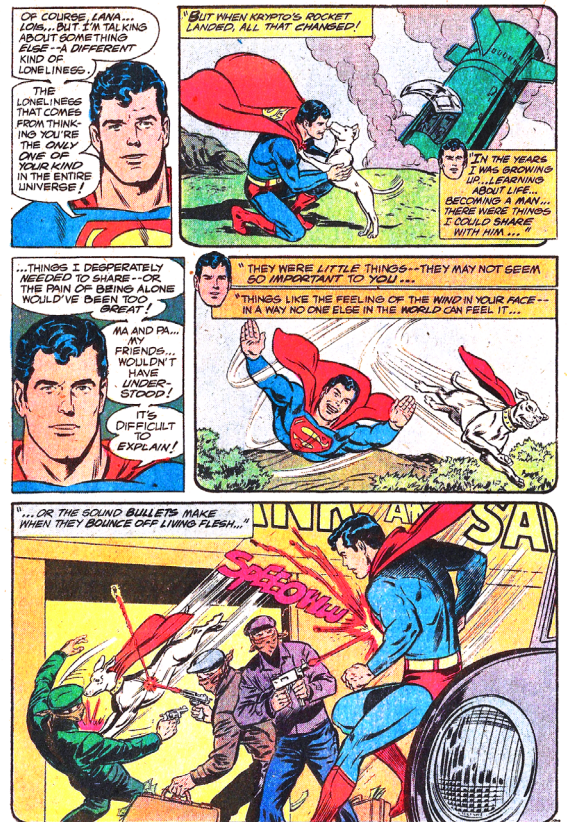
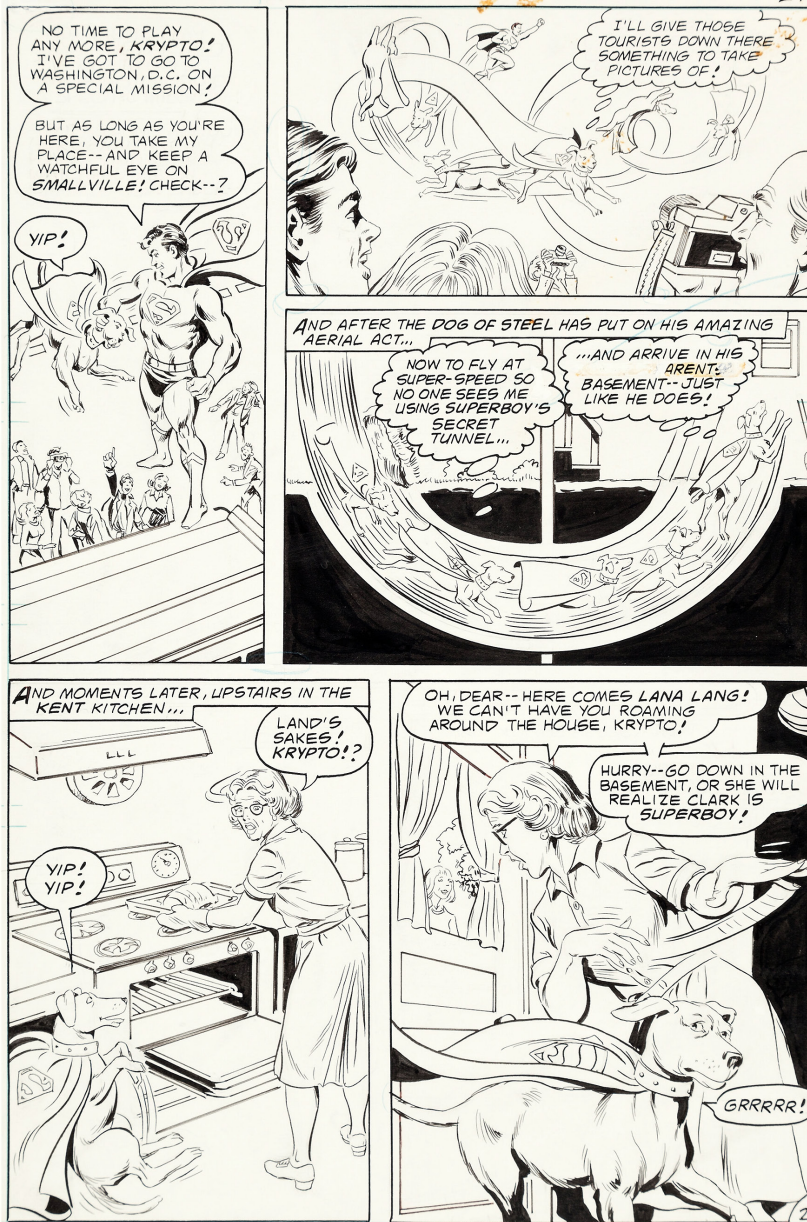
"Y'know, I wasn't assigned the Krypto stories," Toomey reflected. "Denny was just starting the *SF* mag and told me I could have any character in the Superman universe except Superman himself to write about. I chose Krypto because I loved him when I was a kid and because I thought my daughter would enjoy the stories the way I did, and because I love dogs. I never expected anybody to remember those stories after all this time."

In July 1979, DC published the loveliest defense of Krypto that one could imagine, courtesy of writer Marty Pasko (with art by Curt Swan and Frank Chiaramonte). The celebratory *Action Comics* #500 found Superman detailing his life story for a museum exhibition...including his relationship with his beloved dog.

For all the wonders in his life, the Man of Steel explained, there had been a void. "The loneliness that comes from thinking you're the only one of your kind in the entire universe. But when Krypto's rocket landed, that all changed. In the years I was growing up...learning about life...becoming a man...there were things I could *share* with him. Things I desperately *needed* to share—or the pain of being alone would've been too *great*. Ma and Pa...my friends...they wouldn't have *understood*."

"And it didn't matter that we couldn't talk—at least not the way people do to *each other*. Because we *could* communicate in our own special way in the shared *experiences* that were ours and *ours alone*. He was a dog—'only' a dog...but in some ways, he was a closer *friend* to me than anyone on Earth."

Among those moved by the sequence was Mark Waid, who discussed it with Robert Taylor in a 2007 interview posted on *Comic Book Resources*. "Marty Pasko found a way to make Krypto not sound like a stupid idea, which was good, but not what struck me. What struck me was how Marty found a way to use that moment to get into Superman's head and have him admit how important it was to finally have someone around to share things with. 'Things like the feeling of the wind in your face—in a way no one else in the world can feel it—or the sound bullets make when they bounce off living flesh.' That's a great line.



"That was the moment when I suddenly realized how a good writer makes these characters real. He sees the world through their point of view. He imagines what it's like to have their powers, what their life is like. My favorite *Flash* line that I ever wrote was when Wally got his Flash powers for the first time and said, 'The only sound in the world was the rush of the wind and the thunder of my own two feet.' I found that Marty Pasko page on eBay a few years ago and it's hanging in my office now to remind me how we do what we do."

Despite the fine tribute, the Dog of Steel remained conspicuously absent in the Superboy solo series running through the 1970s. When he finally returned in July 1980's *New Adventures of Superboy* #10, it was once again in a solo story, albeit with Ma and Pa Kent prominent in the plot.

Annoyed at being shoved into the basement to prevent Lana Lang from asking why he was in the Kent home in Smallville, Krypto dumped some brown wood stain on his back. Drying it with heat vision, he barreled into the Kent kitchen and a flustered Martha Kent hastily introduced him as their new dog Skippy. "At least she didn't call me Bark Kent," Krypto mused.

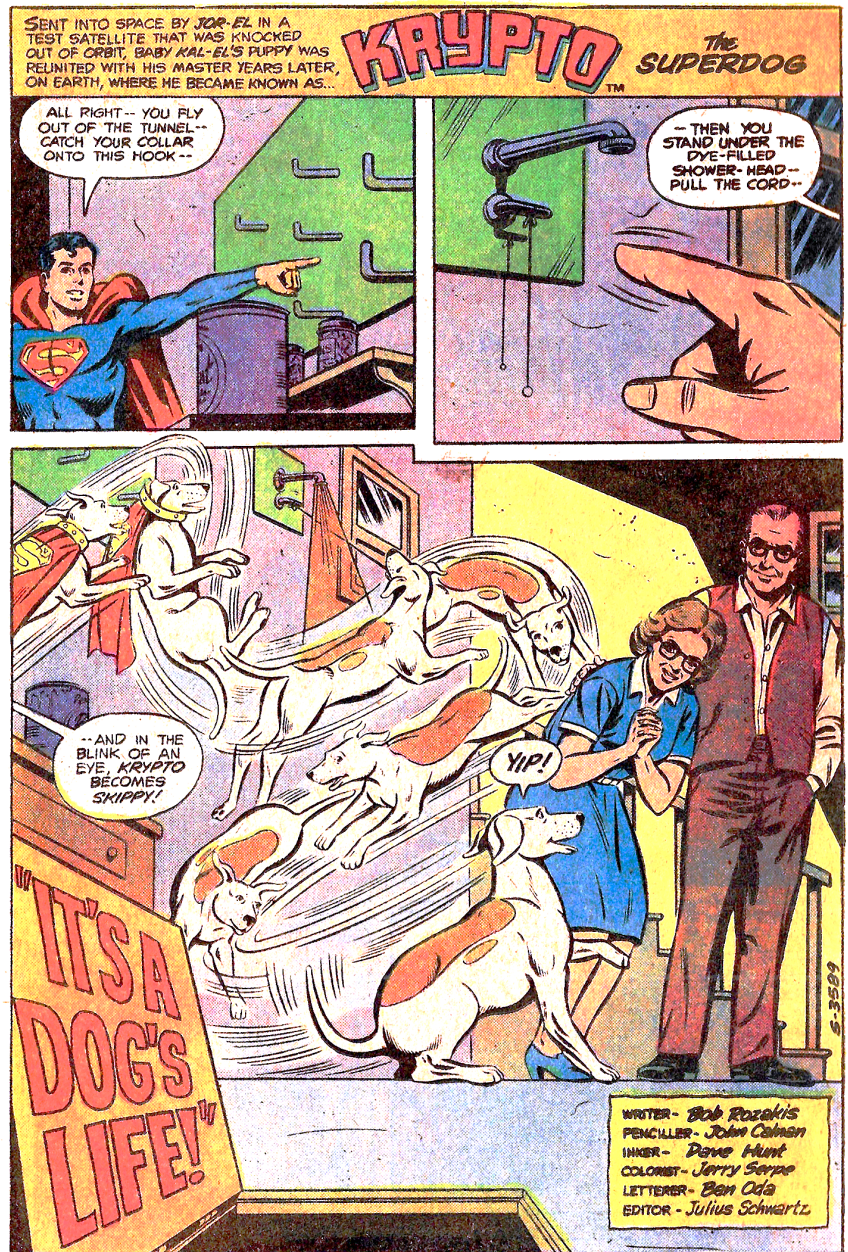
"We were talking about how if you took the cape off Krypto, he might still be recognized," writer Bob Rozakis told Dan Johnson in *BI* #68 (2013). "So, we came up with the idea of Krypto spilling paint on himself. [...] I think Nelson got into it about how we needed to have that spot be the same each time and Julie said, 'Nelson, don't worry about it. We'll just presume it pretty much gets into the same spot each time.'"

While stopping a robbery in the Kent General Store, "Skippy" caught the eye of local vet/dog catcher Howard Shatt, who insisted the Kents' new pet be registered. Rozakis' follow-up in *NAOS* #17 did just that, with Krypto sneakily melting the syringe needle with heat vision as he was seemingly being vaccinated. He rescued Shatt from kidnapers for good measure.

"I always thought the Krypto stories added some lighthearted humor to the Superman mythos," Rozakis told *BI* in 2023, "something that is sorely lacking in so many of the superhero series today. Giving him the secret identity of Skippy (named after my own dog) just added to that humorous approach."

Skippy had also been the name of an enormously popular comic strip character created by Percy Crosby in 1923. The character's name was used without authorization on Skippy Peanut Butter in the 1930s, resulting in a bitter legal battle that Crosby ultimately lost. The cartoonist's heirs—led by his daughter Joan Tibbetts—kept up the fight into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Still retaining comics rights to the character, Tibbetts was vigilant until the end of her life in 2019.

Rozakis could attest to that, telling *BI*, "We had to change his identity to Skip because the owners of the comic strip *Skippy* objected to our using the name." The abbreviated name debuted in *NAOS* #22's "Dog-Detective of Smallville," where Krypto saved a dog accused of having rabies. Unfortunately, there'd be no further solo stories for the Dog of Steel thanks to *NAOS* handing over its back-up feature space to "Dial 'H' For Hero."



Still, Krypto—and (one last time) Skip—made an appearance in issue #24's Bridwell-scripted Superboy adventure. Demonstrating that few things in comics are ever forgotten, Krypto revisited his Skip secret identity—complete with brown patch—in 2025's *Supergirl* #1, by Sophie Campbell.

The sound of barking didn't ring out again until issue #50, where boy and dog had a happy reunion after Krypto returned from a "long romp through deep space." The Dog of Steel was back by Superboy's side in *NAOS* #52 and 53, communicating through barks, growls, and body language. The title's cancellation and its unrealized follow-up once again left Krypto in limbo.

"I was starting to use him in the revamped *DC Double Comics* series," writer Paul Kupperberg told *BI*, "and worked in a cute scene with him and Superboy for that first story but never got to go further with the relationship. I definitely wasn't going to give him thought balloons, but I did hint that there was something going on in that canine skull."

Krypto gets a disguise in *The New Adventures of Superboy* #17. Art by John Calnan and Dave Hunt.

TM & © DC Comics.

(top left) Krypto gets his own comic. Cover by Scott Jeralds.  
 (middle left) Krypto joins forces with Shaggy and Scooby in *Scooby-Doo Team-Up* #9. Art by Dario Bruzuela. (bottom left) Krypto in disguise in *Supergirl* #1. Art by Sophie Campbell.

What happened next? The answer is multiple choice. According to Alan Moore, Curt Swan, and Kurt Schaffenberger in a chilling 1986 “imaginary tale” (*Action Comics* #583), the Dog of Steel died of kryptonite poisoning after killing the Kryptonite Man. Or, as John Byrne told it in *Action* #591 (1987), the pooch was strictly the product of a “pocket universe” and lost his powers and intellect after exposure to gold kryptonite. I prefer the more idyllic imaginary tale from 1963’s *Superman* #162 (by Leo Dorfman, Curt Swan, and George Klein), wherein Krypto enjoyed a blissful existence alongside a retired Superman and Lois Lane on New Krypton.

According to DC lore going forward from 1986’s Superman relaunch, the correct response was “none of the above.” The Man of Steel was

emphatically stated to be the last survivor of Krypton and that stuck for years. This didn’t prevent a multitude of workarounds to reintroduce variations of Krypto, whether in mainstream continuity or in Elseworlds.

Among those was “Starwinds Howl,” a novella by Elliot S. Maggin. Discussing it in his story collection *An Enemy’s Gift*, Maggin recalled being asked to pitch a graphic novel script to DC. “I sat down and wrote up an outline for the epic tale of Krypto the Superdog. *The Call of the Wild* in space.” His prospective editor did not snap it up.

“I wasn’t even sure he had read it, but super-powered house pets were evidently out of phase at the time. So, I sat back down, fleshed it out a bit, and if [my editor] hadn’t convinced me that no one would care about it, the thing might have grown into a novel.” Instead, Maggin posted the novella online, its tale of Krypto’s last days on Krypton and first on Earth greeted with great enthusiasm by scores of readers. Although never sanctioned by DC, the story eventually appeared in physical form as part of the aforementioned print-on-demand *An Enemy’s Gift* in 2018.

By that time, more than a few individuals had realized that ignoring “super-powered house pets” was like leaving money on the table. A 2005-2007 *Krypto the Superdog* animated cartoon introduced the character to a far younger demographic than the jaded readers who scoffed at such things. A plethora of other DC super-animal projects—most comics adjacent rather than comics proper—have emerged in the marketplace in the past two decades. Even in the mainstream Superman continuity, the Dog of Steel’s original background—test animal from Krypton—has been restored.

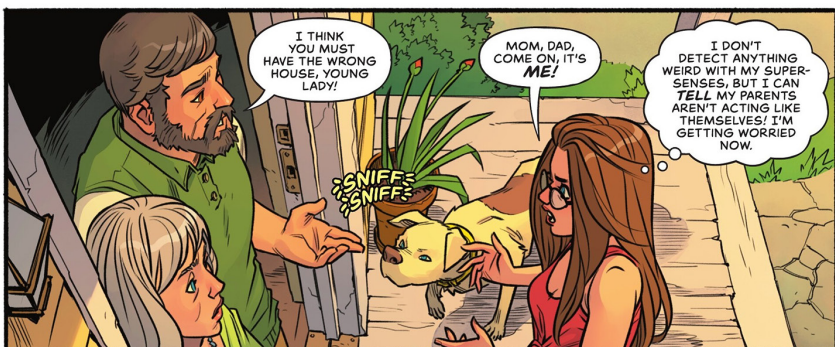
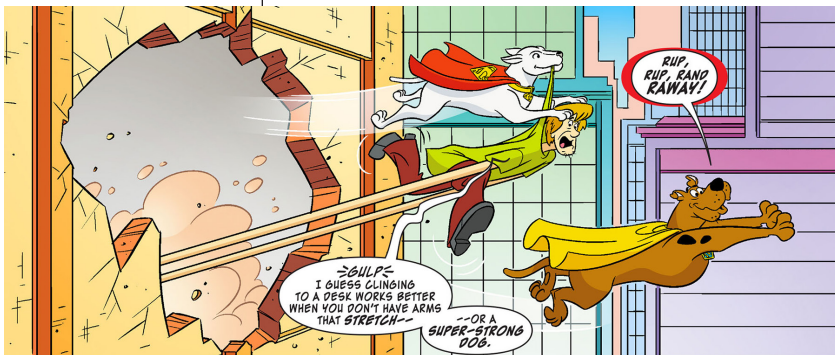
If there were any questions about Krypto’s potential, the reaction to 2025’s *Superman* movie—first the trailer, then the film itself—should have silenced the doubters. Although based more on director James Gunn’s rescue dog Ozu, the movie’s hyperactive Krypto shared some of the same destructive qualities seen way back in *Adventure Comics* #210. “As in the comics back in the day,” Bob Rozakis remarked to *BI*, “Krypto added some lighter moments to the Superman movie and I loved the reveal that he behaves that way because he is actually Supergirl’s pet.”

Ultimately, Elliot S. Maggin declared to Michael Eury in *The Krypton Companion* (2006), “a man needs a dog. A Superman needs a superdog. As far as I can tell, the two species are locked together by some kind of biological imperative we can maybe recognize but can’t explain from within the system.” At its best, the relationship between Superman and Krypto celebrates friendship, loyalty, joy and love. So let’s not sweat the cape and thought balloons.

**JOHN WELLS** is a comics historian specializing in DC Comics. He is the author of the *TwoMorrrows* books *American Comic Book Chronicles: 1960–1964* and *1965–1969*, and co-author (with Keith Dallas) of the book *Comic Book Explosion*.



end



Scooby-Doo TM & © Hanna-Barbera. Krypto TM & © DC Comics.

# THE SPIDER'S LOVE



by **James Heath Lantz**

**Face it, tigers. You just hit the jackpot.** Mary Jane Watson has been perhaps one of the greatest sources of moral support, friendship, and love for Peter Parker during the best and worst times of his life. She's been a confidant and a wife to Peter, and in spite of rough waters along the way, she's been supportive of his career as the masked superhuman known as Spider-Man. *BACK ISSUE* will examine Mary Jane Watson's life and history in the following pages. These pages are guaranteed to make your hearts skip a webbed beat, Spider-Fans.

## THE FIRST DANCE WITH MARY JANE

No, we aren't doing a parody of a Tom Petty song. We are going to take a look at how Mary Jane Watson came into Peter Parker's life. Mary Jane is first mentioned when Aunt May and her neighbor Anna Watson attempt to bring her and Peter together in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #15 (Aug. 1964). Stan Lee and Steve Ditko introduced her way back in the March 1965 cover dated #25 (June 1965), though her face is never shown. Mary Jane makes another hidden appearance in #30 (Nov. 1965), and her first full appearance wouldn't be until the conclusion of issue #42 (No. 1966), drawn by John Romita Sr. Her first bit of dialogue is maybe one of the most memorable in comics. "Face it tiger. You just hit the jackpot."

Mary Jane later revealed why she called Peter "Tiger" in *ASM* #143 (Apr. 1973). She nicknamed him that way in a tongue-in-cheek manner because she saw his calm, bookworm demeanor as an opposite to her seeing the fun in everything. However, we'll observe as the Spider-Man comics serials evolve, that sense of humor is merely a mask to hide the pain she felt from the abuse she, her mother, and sister suffered. Perhaps Mary Jane Watson saw the tiger within Peter Parker when he's fighting criminals as Spider-Man.

Getting back to Mary Jane's first appearance, Peter definitely did hit the jackpot when he met Mary Jane and they joined Aunts May and Anna for dinner. She and Peter hit it off nearly instantly with flirty banter going back and forth between them. Mary Jane even seemed gung-ho about seeing the Rhino rampaging through the streets of New York in *ASM* #43 (Dec. 1966), something that intrigues a young Spider-Man. With that, the seeds for one of the most popular relationships in the Marvel Universe were planted in those tomes by Stan Lee, Steve Ditko, and John Romita Sr..

Many would think that Mary Jane Watson and Peter Parker are polar opposites when they first see them. Mary Jane is an energetic, fun-loving girl, and Peter is a serious, studious boy who feels like he has the weight of the world on his shoulders, especially after Uncle Ben's death. Yet, as the years and stories progress throughout the Spider-Man titles, we are given a broader, more in-depth look into these characters' lives.

Gerry Conway, Alex Saviuk, and Andy Mushynsky explore Mary Jane and Peter's relationship in the *Parallel Lives* (May 1989) graphic novel. Loyal *BACK ISSUE* readers will recall it being discussed in issue #156 with

Mary Jane pines for Peter on the cover of *Amazing Spider-Man* #601, by J. Scott Campbell.

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(top) The introduction of Mary Jane in *Amazing Spider-Man* #42 is perhaps the most famous panel in comics history. Art by John Romita Sr. (bottom) Romita's first sketch of the now-legendary Mary Jane Watson, 1966.

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other graphic novels starring Spidey and the rest of the Marvel superheroes. Conway's story expanded on stories already told by past Spider-Man creative teams while exploring how both Peter and Mary Jane use masks to hide their true selves from the rest of the world, and only they truly know each other. Mary Jane even says early in *Parallel Lives* that when she first saw Spider-Man on television she liked him because like her, he wore a disguise.

Some of Mary Jane and Peter's captions and dialogue in *Parallel Lives* are very similar to show just how much alike both characters are. This is particularly true of the scene involving Uncle Ben's death. There is a re-enactment of the events of *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (Sept. 1962) from Peter's point of view. At the same time, we see what's happening at Mary Jane's Aunt Anna Watson's house next door to the Parker's. A shocked and distraught Aunt May is being cared for by Anna and Mary Jane's mother Madeline while Mary Jane sees Peter enter the Parker home's front door dressed normally and exit from his bedroom window as Spider-Man. Thus, Mary Jane learns that Peter Parker, her aunt's best friend's nephew who she found cute in a nerdy way, and the red and blue clad Web Slinger named Spider-Man were one and the same. Her surprise over this revelation is hidden by her jovial attitude and one of the reasons Mary Jane avoids her first face-to-face meeting.

Conway, Saviuk, and Mushynsky delved into Mary Jane's emotions and reasons for not wanting to date Peter. Everyone believed Peter was still the shy, sensitive, studious teenager he was before the radioactive spider had bitten him. Mary Jane, however, knew the truth, and because the abuse her father inflicted upon her, Mary Jane was afraid that Peter Parker would become like Philip Watson.

Philip and Madeline Watson married and had two children, Gayle and Mary Jane. Aspiring writer Philip's abuse became too much for Madeline. She left with Gayle and Mary Jane. They would live with her Uncle Frank. Frank, however, behaved similarly to Philip. This explained Mary Jane's initial fear of Peter and Spider-Man's actual mask hiding a monster like the ones within her father and uncle.

Spidey aficionados know that Aunts May and Anna tried bringing Peter and Mary Jane together for a long time. Perhaps those ladies knew that they complemented and, in many cases, needed each other. May Parker and Anna Watson saw something, a spark if you will, in the Spider-Couple that resonated with readers. Creators like Gerry Conway brought that to life even if Stan Lee got the webbed ball rolling.

Kurt Busiek, Pat Oliffe, and Dick Giordano created a blast from the past that expanded on Mary Jane's attempts to neither see nor think of Peter Parker and his double life as Spider-Man before ASM #42. Set after ASM #14, *Untold Tales Of Spider-Man* #16 (Dec. 1996), "The Boy Next Door" is the story of Mary Jane seeing Peter Parker and Spider-Man in a different light. Deep down, she wondered who Peter Parker was both in and out of his Spider-Man costume. Yet, when Spider-Man continued to fight Radioactive Man despite the odds being against him, Mary Jane understood that there was more to the Wall Crawler than spider powers and snappy quips. He's someone





who wants to help his fellow man because it's the right thing to do.

Peter is still a mystery wrapped around an enigma after Mary Jane sees him as Spider-Man in *UToSM* #16. She's clearly confused about if she should go to the Parker house with her Aunt Anna. She finally gets the courage to do so in the "Face it, tiger" scene thanks to much convincing from Anna Watson. She and May Parker almost succeeded at getting Peter and Mary Jane together in #42-43. However, Peter's heart was later taken by another—Gwen Stacy.

**MARY JANE AND HARRY, PETER AND GWEN**

Mary Jane, Gwen, and Peter would become a love triangle that rival Archie, Betty and Veronica in the Archie comic books. Peter has eyes for Gwen, though he also loves Mary Jane at times. Both young ladies seem to be friendly rivals for Peter's affections, especially in ASM #53 (Oct. 1967). Peter and Gwen are at the Coffee Bean after a date. Flash Thompson and their friends wonder what Gwen sees in Peter. She quips, "You've got your guru, and I have mine."

Mary Jane replies, "I only loaned him to you, lady!"

Mary Jane's response could be interpreted as a joke. Yet, when one looks beyond the surface, there might be some jealousy. She and Gwen would trade quips and barbs as the *BI* era arrived. By then, Peter and Gwen's romance was in full force. However, don't count Mary Jane out yet, Spider-Fans. That spunky redhead would continue to make Mister Parker's life interesting as Spidey's adventures continue.

Mary Jane Watson continued to have feelings for Peter Parker well into his relationship with her best friend Gwen Stacy. Mary Jane even had chances to win Peter Parker's love when he and Gwen were fighting. However, Mary Jane's feelings for Gwen and Peter are best summed up in Stan Lee, Tom DeFalco, and John Romita Sr.'s "I Remember Gwen" feature from an issue celebrating Spider-Man's 30th anniversary, ASM #365 (Aug. 1992).

Mary Jane's trip down memory lane takes place after ASM #90-91 (Nov.-Dec. 1970). Gwen blames Spider-Man for her father's demise, and the grief-stricken girl doesn't want to see Peter again after he took the Web Slinger's side. Mary Jane could have used that opportunity to have Peter's love for herself. Yet, seeing that Gwen was heartbroken, Mary Jane tells her that Peter was madly in love with Gwen. He only defended Spider-Man because he didn't want her to be bitter. This brought Gwen and Peter back together, making Mary Jane feel good about herself and her actions.

There has been much debate on who loves Peter more, Gwen or Mary Jane. Some would say the former, while others would say the latter. "I Remember Gwen" would give points to Mary Jane. She saw two friends who loved each other, and, in spite of her feelings for Peter, she wanted to see both of them happy.

Mary Jane Watson, Harry Osborn, Gwen Stacy, and Peter Parker would have their ups and downs in each romance. Peter thinking Gwen was seeing Flash Thompson and Harry's substance addiction and later relapse were perfect examples of said events. Yet the young quartet still seemed to have everything until "The Night Gwen Stacy Died".

(top left) The first appearance of Mary Jane in ASM #25.

That's her behind the giant flower.

Art by Steve Ditko.

(bottom left) Mary Jane makes it to the cover with ASM #59.

Art by John Romita Sr. (bottom middle)

*Parallel Lives* delves deeply into both Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson.

Cover by Bob Larkin.

(right) A disturbing look into Mary Jane's childhood from

*Parallel Lives*. Art by Alex Saviuk and Andy Mushynsky.

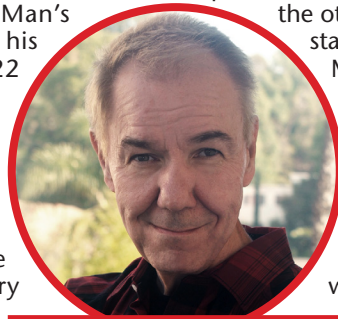
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(left) Mary Jane gains some respect for Spider-Man and Peter when she sees him in action. *Untold Tales of Spider-Man* #16 art by Patrick Olliffe and Dick Giordano. (left) Olliffe and George Perez bring Mary Jane and Spidey together on the cover for the issue.

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Most Spider-Man readers already know of Norman Osborn's return as the Green Goblin and his killing Gwen Stacy ASM #121 (June 1973) and Spider-Man's battle with Osborn that led to his accidental apparent death in #122 (July 1973).

ASM #122 marks a major turning point in Mary Jane Watson's character. Previous issues have shown her when she's cruel to then boyfriend Harry Osborn, which led to his substance abuse issues. He eventually forgave Mary Jane, but she was still in her guise of the flippant girl always looking for the next party until the final page of "The Goblin's Last Stand". She drops the ruse after seeing her true love's pain.



GERRY CONWAY

Gerry Conway discussed Mary Jane's character and her differences from Gwen with *BI*. "Mary Jane provided me with a character arc that many of the other characters didn't have," Conway stated. "During my initial run on Spider-Man, once I brought her into the story, she had some qualities which wasn't true of the any of other characters except for Peter."

Conway continued, "Not to diss Stan, but Mary Jane Watson and Gwen Stacy were not particularly well-developed characters. They were a bit of a cliché. Gwen was a strait-laced, yet kind of available, daughter of a police captain who was kind of boring. She wasn't a Betty Brant or Liz Allen type.

Mary Jane on the other hand, even though Stan portrayed her as kind of one dimensional and flighty, was different. I mean, a one-dimensional, flighty character gives you a lot of opportunity to create intriguing stories for them. Mary Jane provided interesting challenges for Peter that just weren't in his relationship with Gwen."

The final panels of ASM #122 are perhaps among the most impactful images in Peter and Mary Jane's relationship. Peter is a broken man. Knowing the loss of Gwen is influencing his treatment of her, Mary Jane pauses and locks the apartment door. She stays with Peter instead of leaving.

Mary Jane did her best to help both Harry Osborn and Peter in the days that followed Norman Osborn and Gwen Stacy's passing. Both young men did not make it easy for her. She doesn't take their guff just to please them, and she gives Peter a piece of her mind when he tries to apologize in



ASM #125 (Oct. 1973). That scene shows Gerry Conway's ability to go beyond the surface of Mary Jane's life of the party personality. Mary Jane's reaction to Harry and Peter's treatment of her is normal when one considers how her father and uncle were toward her. She is clearly tired of being yelled at by anyone. She ran out of patience and stood up for herself.

Peter and Mary Jane do make up when she witnesses a murder in ASM #127 (Dec. 1973), and she tries to initiate a romance as further issues progress, but Peter, understandably, is not ready for such a relationship so soon after Gwen's death. Mary Jane puts on her party girl mask to hide how hurt she is. Yet she would understand as time went on.

Peter and Mary Jane finally started dating in ASM #136 (Sept. 1974). If you think their night out was a walk in the park, dear reader, you'd be mistaken. Harry Osborn became the Green Goblin, and he's learned that Peter Parker is Spider-Man. Peter, meanwhile, recalls Gwen Stacy's fate and fears the same thing will happen to Mary Jane.

At this point in their relationship, Mary Jane has told nobody, even Peter, that she knows of young Mister Parker's dual identity. Firstly, because she respected his privacy. Secondly, she realizes the danger of a villain discovering the truth. She had firsthand experience when a bomb planted in

Peter's apartment by Harry Osborn lands Mary Jane in the hospital. Yet she put on her happy-go-lucky mask in the same way Peter dons his Spider-Man garb. She understands and shares Peter's fear, but her sense of humor helps cheer up him and Aunt May. This is more proof the Peter needs Mary Jane to ease his mind.

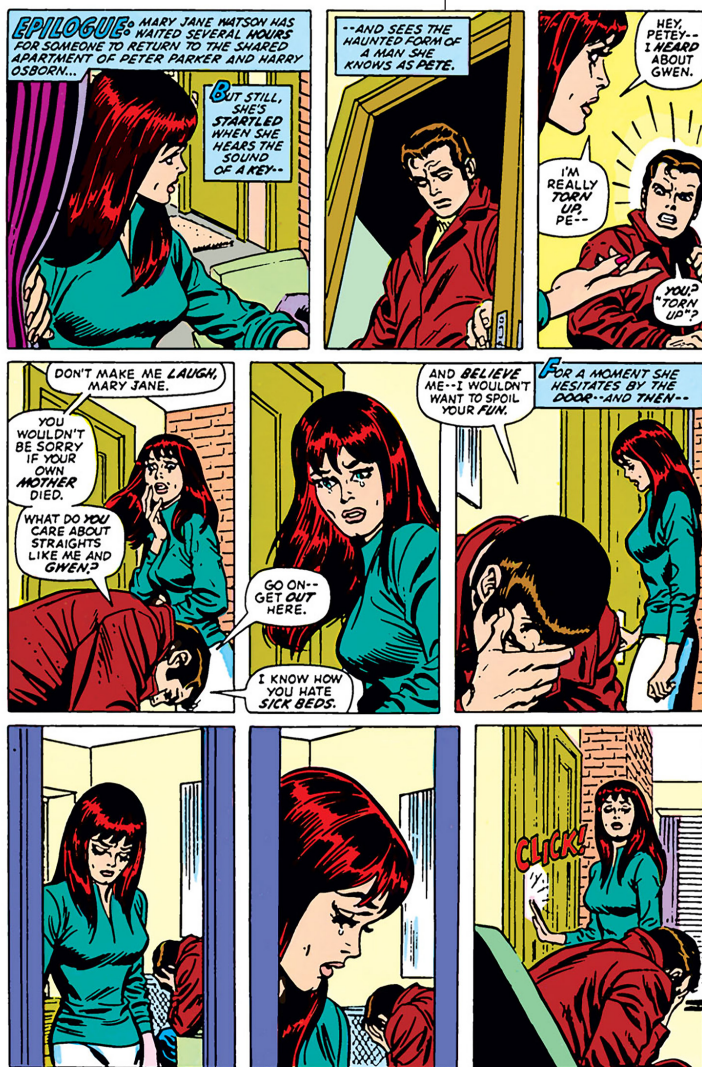
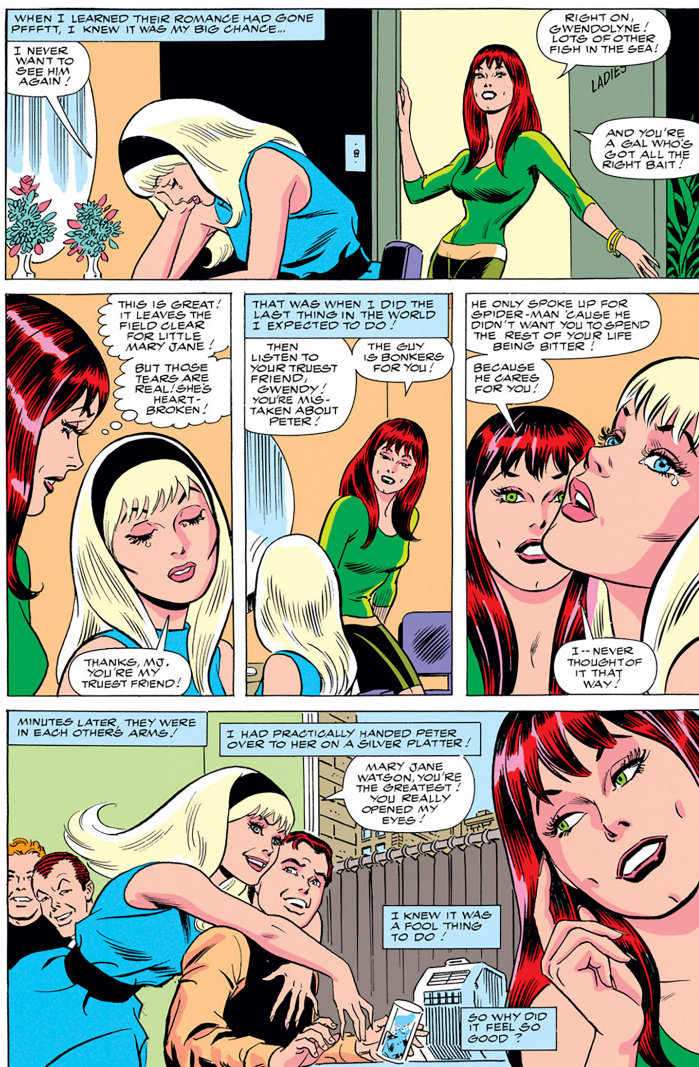
### DAY OF THE JACKAL

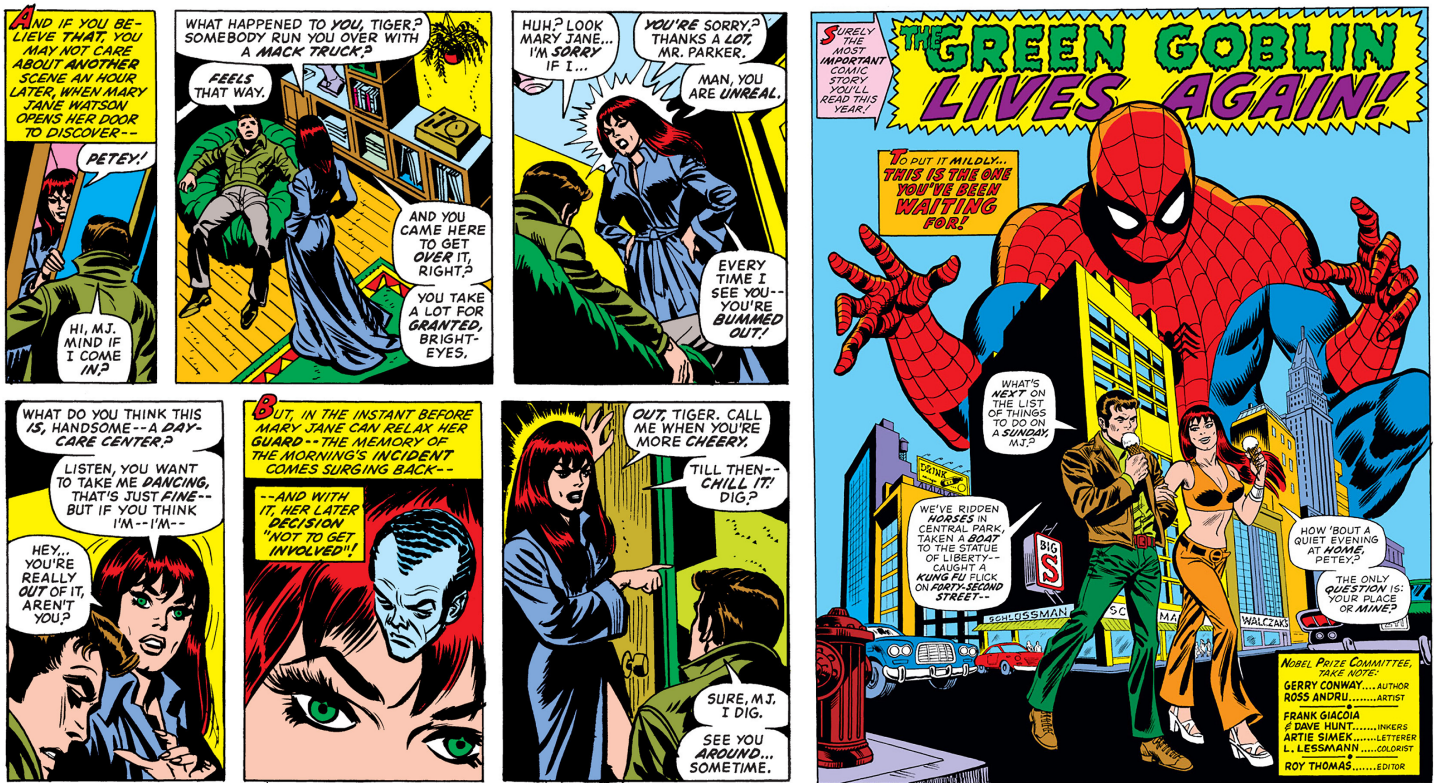
One villain who really had an impact on Mary Jane and Peter's romance was Professor Miles Warren, also known as the nefarious Jackal. Warren had fallen in love with Gwen Stacy and blamed Spider-Man for her death. Warren could possibly be considered a foe almost as insidious as Norman Osborn, as his attempts to destroy Spider-Man involve Peter Parker's personal life.

Meanwhile, Peter and Mary Jane are taking steps to become a romantic couple. She proves to be his anchor when various things make life crazy, including a fight with Mysterio and believing he saw Gwen on the street. Perhaps the greatest moment for the Spider-Couple in this period is when Mary Jane kisses Peter before he leaves for Paris to find a kidnapped J. Jonah Jameson in ASM #143 (Apr. 1975). The captions accompanying the image in the last panel of page seven says it all about Mary Jane and Peter's love for one another.

(left) Mary Jane helps bring Gwen and Peter back together in ASM #365's "I Remember Gwen." Art by John Romita Sr. (right) Mary Jane doesn't deserve to be treated like this, but she's there for Peter anyway. ASM #122 art by Gil Kane, John Romita Sr., and Tony Mortellaro.

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(left) Mary Jane is tired of being taken advantage of and lays down the law. ASM #125 art by Ross Andru, John Romita Sr., and Tony Mortellaro. (right) Peter and MJ finally go on a date, but things are about to turn bad. ASM #136 art by Ross Andru, Frank Giacoia, and Dave Hunt.

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“Something happens. Maybe *this* is the moment they’ve been waiting for. Maybe now, when they are about to *separate*, something finally brings them *together*. Whatever the reason, something happens.”

Something always brings Peter back to Mary Jane and vice versa. Yet, it can be said that more than one thing brings them back together. Love is the obvious one, but there are other factors involved. Fate could be one of those. However, their mutual need for the other to ground them and their friendship which planted the seeds of that love are what make Peter and Mary Jane one of the most popular couples in the superhero comic book medium.

That’s not to say that there aren’t any setbacks for Peter and Mary Jane. One such thing happens at the end of ASM #144 (May 1975). Peter has returned to New York to learn that something strange is going on, as the final panel reveals. Gwen Stacy is somehow alive and well in Peter’s apartment.

Try as they might, Mary Jane and Peter cannot catch a break. One thing after another keeps getting thrown at them, particularly toward the end of Gerry Conway’s run on ASM. Readers are led to believe that the real Gwen Stacy is back, leaving Peter conflicted. He loved Gwen and mourned her, and part of him will always love her, but he also loves Mary Jane. He feels he can’t just leave her.

Mary Jane’s feelings throughout this period are equally conflicted. She’s angry because she feels Peter’s forgotten about her since Gwen’s return. On the other hand, she loves him and, as we saw in “I Remember Gwen”, she understands his feelings for her. What she and Peter don’t know is things are about to get worse for them.

Investigative reporter and friend Ned Leeds discovers Gwen is a clone. Meanwhile, the Jackal

captures Spider-Man and genetically duplicates him, thus learning he’s Peter Parker. A lot of chaos and mayhem ensues to the point where Spider-Clone is believed to be dead, and Gwen, understanding she’s not the genuine article, leaves Peter’s life. ASM #149 (Oct. 1975), Gerry Conway’s last issue as writer (Archie Goodwin filled in with #150) for this title ends similarly to ASM #122. However, it’s Peter who locks Mary Jane’s door this time, making it clear that he loves her as much as she loves him.

While Gerry Conway left ASM, he would launch *The Spectacular Spider-Man* monthly color comic book in 1976 and would write for that title and *Web of Spider-Man* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Conway would use those books to focus on Spider-Man’s circle of friends and family, including Mary Jane. He even introduced a relative into his stories to add to Mary Jane’s character arc.

“When I returned to Marvel and Spider-Man,” Conway recounted, “I wanted to write stories where Mary Jane could develop, she could change, she could learn, she could move on from being a flighty girl. I was writing the monthly spin-off books, and I really got to work on relationships in them. I moved my interest into supporting characters, the conflicts they would face, and the issues that they had to deal with. I wanted to write something that involved Mary Jane and her family. That’s why I introduced Mary Jane’s cousin Kristy who was a bulimic, which was something that I had some knowledge of because a group that I was involved with helped bulimics and anorexics. I saw her as a simple character who was going through some trouble.”

Conway, like those before and after him, got expand on Mary Jane’s personality and made her grow and evolve. To this day, Conway’s writing of her is what makes Mary Jane Watson one of the most beloved people in the life of Peter Parker.

Even if Mary Jane knows Peter is Spider-Man during this trying period in his life, she has to pretend not to. At the same time, she's tired of being avoided by Peter because she knows that being with Gwen's clone will only lead to his heart getting broken all over again. They do settle things as we see in ASM #149, and their relationship returns to being more serious. Conway provides a conclusion to his run on ASM that bookends #122 perfectly. It is a turning point for both Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson, but as someone once said, that was only the beginning for one of Marvel's most popular couples.

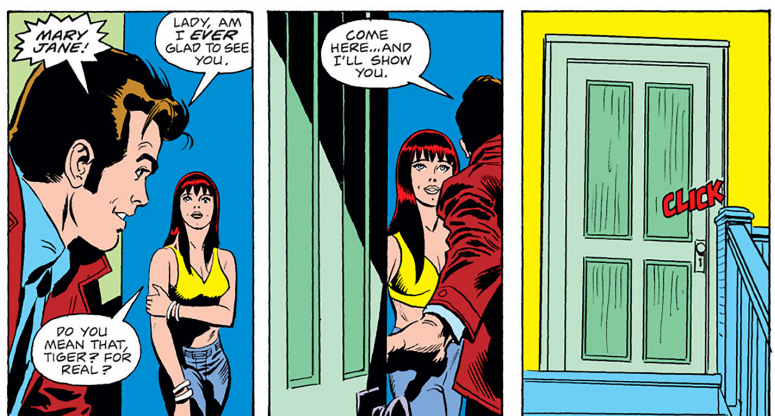
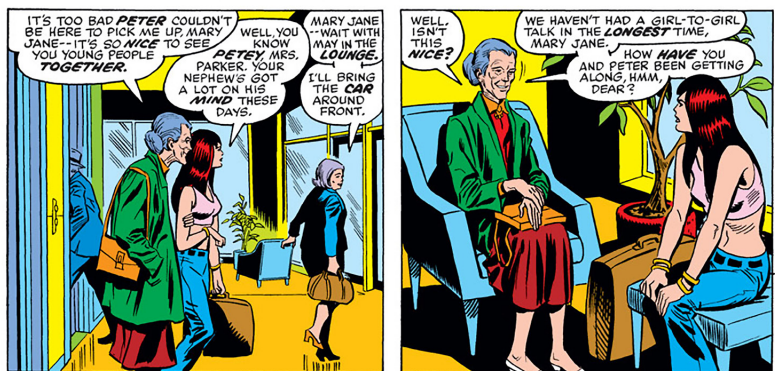
### BEYOND THE WEB

Len Wein would write the ASM monthly book after Gerry Conway's departure. His take on Mary Jane and Peter's romance was that they were serious about one another, but Mary Jane didn't want to take a back seat to Peter's photography job and his life as Spider-Man. Knowing what we know about Mary Jane from *Parallel Lives*, it's easy to see that her feelings are genuine, but they also hide her fear of losing Peter. She's clearly scared that some villain would one day kill him. One could equate Mary Jane or any other loved one of a superhero for that matter, to the husband, wife, boyfriend, or girlfriend of a police officer or firefighter. They risk their lives every day when they put on their uniforms in the same way Peter Parker does when he dons Spider-Man's costume. This leaves Mary Jane to wonder if Peter will return to her even in this stage of their relationship.

Looking further into Len Wein's run, we see Mary Jane trying to move out of the shadow of Spider-Man. Her defense mechanisms of escaping combined with knowing Peter's dual identity make her date Flash Thompson. She is also mentored by Carol Danvers in the first couple of issues of *Ms. Marvel*. We see Mary Jane, while wanting to become a photographer like Peter, become a character beyond the aspiring model looking to dance her troubles away in the Stan Lee years. Her time with Carol was brief, but it does have an impact on Mary Jane. She is trying to find herself as everyone must do in various points of their lives.

Mary Jane is still on her quest to discover who she really is late in Len Wein's run. That doesn't mean she doesn't love Peter. If she didn't love Peter, she would not have looked after Aunt May in the hospital while Peter is dealing with a Green Goblin whose last name isn't Osborn. She also saw both Aunt May and Aunt Anna as the maternal figures she felt did not exist in her own mother. This is why she's by May's side.

As Spider-Man becomes a live action character in a television show on CBS, Marv Wolfman becomes regular scribe on ASM #182 (July 1978). This becomes a turning point for Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson. Peter proposes to Mary Jane, having realized how much he



(top) In ASM #143, Peter and Mary Jane realize that maybe they both hit the jackpot. Art by Ross Andru, Frank Giacoia, and Dave Hunt. (middle) In ASM #147, Mary Jane has a heart-to-heart with Aunt May. Art by Ross Andru, Mike Esposito, and Dave Hunt. (bottom) ASM #149 ends much the same as #122, but this time, Peter locks the door. Art by Ross Andru and Mike Esposito.

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(top) Mary Jane watches over Aunt May while Spidey battles the Green Goblin. ASM #178 cover by Ross Andru and Joe Sinnott. (middle) Peter pops the question in ASM #182. Art by Ross Andru and Mike Esposito. (bottom) The answer in ASM #183 is not what he expected. Art by Ross Andru and Bob McLeod.

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ROGER STERN

Alexander Fuld Frazier.



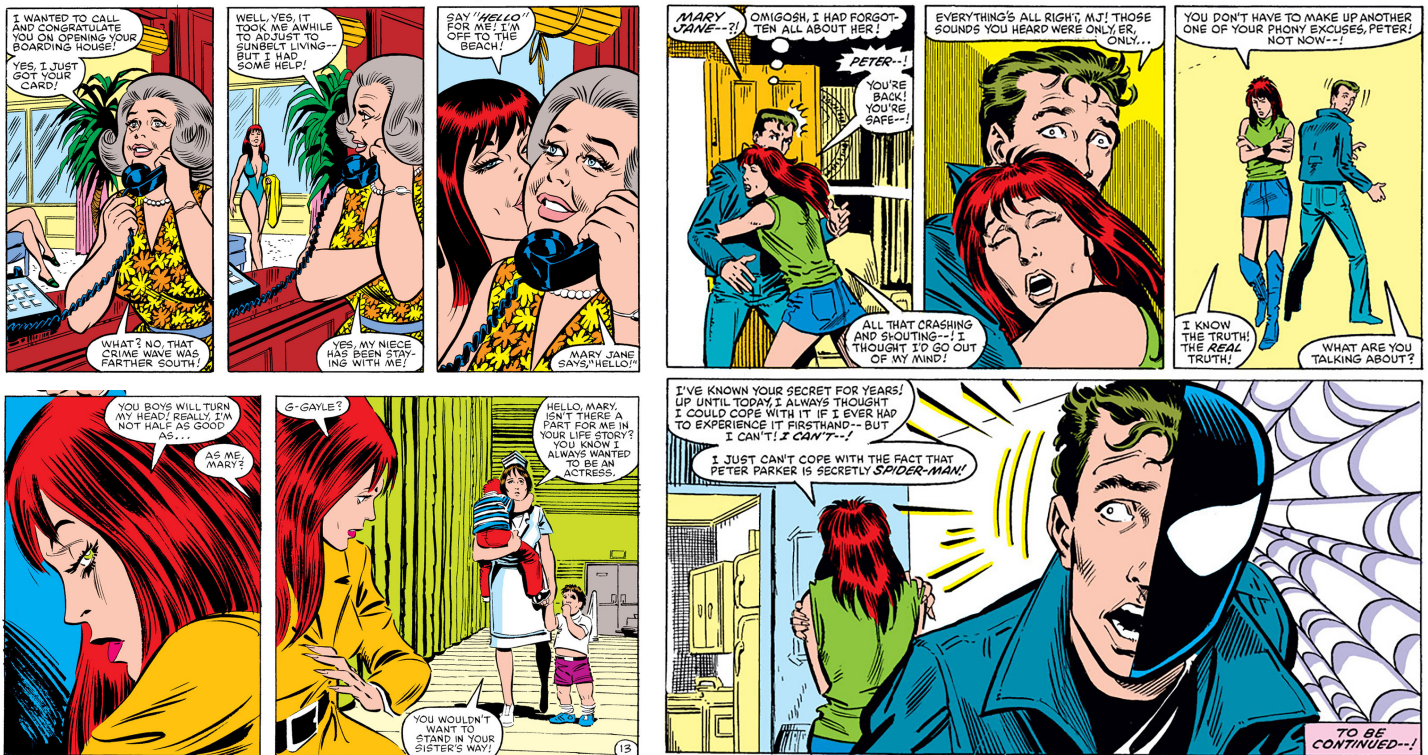
loves her in the previous issue's fill-in by Bill Mantlo. She turns him down in #183 (Aug. 1978), telling Peter she wants to be a free spirit. In truth, she felt the need to seek out who she was without Peter Parker or Spider-Man. Plus, she was scared that any commitment she made would end up like her parents' marriage. Marv Wolfman has stated that he wrote her rejection that way because he was dissatisfied with her characterization from previous creative teams, and thus he wrote her out of the series. Mary Jane wouldn't come back to ASM until #238 (March 1983) by Roger Stern and both John Romita Sr. and Junior.

Stern, according to *Three (Or More) Likely Influences: Mary Jane Watson* by Jack Elving, has stated that his wife had a hand in helping with Mary Jane's backstory. Mrs. Stern was teaching at an all-woman's college and met students of various backgrounds that planted the seeds for Mary Jane's past. Stern also discussed Mary Jane and her return to ASM with *BI*.

"As a longtime reader of ASM, I was very familiar with Mary Jane's character. I'd witnessed her first meeting with Peter Parker in issue #42 and had read all of her appearances after that. I'd always liked Mary Jane and thought that

it was about time that she became part of Peter's life again—though not in the way that other writers eventually decided to explore. What made things different with Mary Jane was that she hadn't been seen in the series for three years at that point, and I wanted to make a big deal of her return. She was one of a small handful of Peter's friends who had briefly shared a romantic relationship with him. Remember, he had actually proposed to her back in ASM #182, and in the following issue she had wisely turned him down. What intrigued me the most about Mary Jane was that we knew very little about her background. For that matter, Peter himself didn't know that much about her past. You'd think that he would have wanted to know something more about that before he'd asked her to marry him. I'd started hinting at Mary Jane's background with the "Daydreamers" story—in ASM #246 (Nov. 1983)—and I fully intended to delve more deeply into her past and show how she had grown up to be the person she was. With the aid of my wife Carmela, I had created a detailed outline of her life—Mary Jane's secret origin, as it were. In fact, I'd sent a copy to Tom DeFalco, when he was still my editor on ASM, to let him know where I intended to go with Mary Jane in future storylines. After Tom eventually became the writer of ASM, he and Ron Frenz used that outline with my blessing, and they really did a masterful job of bringing Mary Jane's past to life. Had I stayed on ASM, my long-range plan was to have Mary Jane start setting Peter up on dates—with varying degrees of success—and eventually introduce him to the young woman who would prove to be his true love and future wife."

Stern continued, "Mary Jane was definitely the old girlfriend. She and Peter had been close in the past, but they were very different people, and they had both moved on with their lives. Mary Jane would always be a treasured friend to Peter and would be always be as supportive of him as she could be. But, as she told Peter in ASM #183, she was 'too free a spirit to ever tie herself down' ... and, even more directly, 'I'm not the down-home-and-marrying kind.' To my way of thinking, Mary Jane was sort of like a comet, periodically passing



through Peter's life—and often turning things upside down. All unintentionally, of course. John Romita and I showed a little of that when we finally reunited Pete and Mary Jane in ASM #242-243 (July-Aug. 1983)."

As *Secret Wars* changed the Marvel Universe, and Spider-Man wore a new black costume, Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz became the new creative team for ASM beginning with issue #252 (May 1984). Five months later, #257 (Oct. 1984) had perhaps one the greatest final panel revelations in Spider-Comics. Mary Jane revealed she knew Peter is Spider-Man, and she could not cope with that knowledge.

"Writing an established character like Mary Jane was no more or less difficult than writing any other established character," Tom DeFalco told *BI* of his writing process and Mary Jane's character. "My approach to writing any established character is simple. I go back to basics and read or reread the character's early appearances. I try to determine who the character really is, who the character portrays, or tries to portray to the world, and what the character truly desires. I had a big advantage when it came to Mary Jane, and his name was Ron Frenz. Ron and I spent hours on the phone discussing Mary Jane and all the other characters in the series. We wanted our readers to think of these characters as real people with real goals, heartaches, and happiness. We spent a lot of time digging into the essence of each character."

"Mary Jane is Peter's perfect counterpart," DeFalco continued. "They are both insecure people who see the dark cloud behind every silver lining

and put on masks to disguise their real feelings—Peter as Spider-Man and Mary Jane as Party Girl."

Perhaps the best issue that sums up Tom DeFalco's methods of character expansion and the character of Mary Jane herself is ASM #259 (Dec. 1984). Another inspiration for the *Parallel Lives* graphic novel, "All My Past Remembered" has Mary Jane reveal her true self to Peter Parker. She discusses her life before meeting Peter, her hopes, dreams, fears, and everything in between. With both Peter and Mary Jane being open books to one another in that issue, the doors had now become opened for them to be friends once again and so much more. The first major step to the happiest day of their lives was finally taken.



TOM DEFALCO

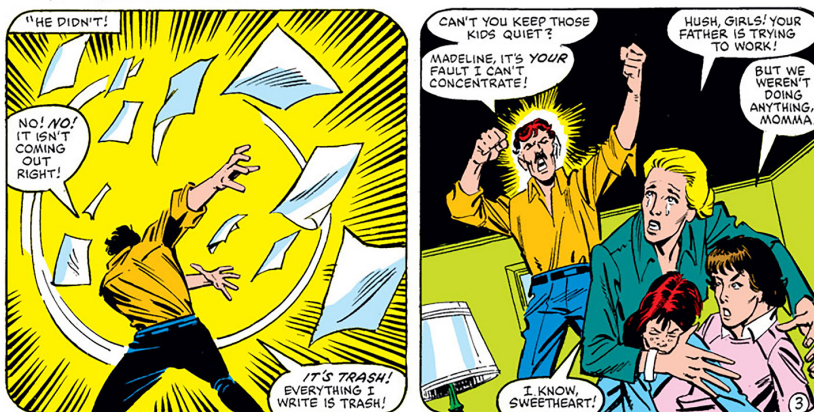
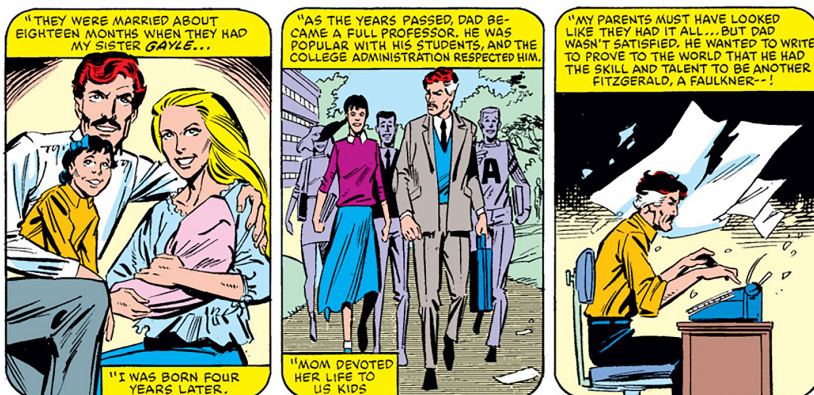
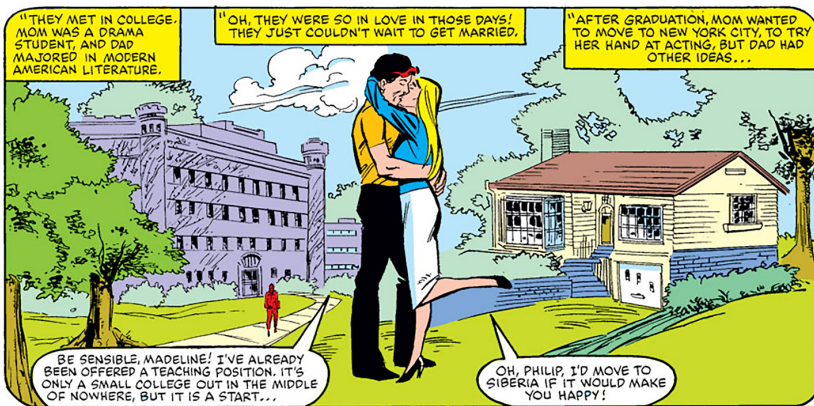
Hildy DeFalco.

**WEB OF MATRIMONY**

Weddings in the Marvel Universe are nothing new. Reed Richards and Susan Storm as well as Hank Pym and Janet Van Dyne are among the best examples of this. Yet no ceremony is as iconic as the one for Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson. Considered Marvel's flagship character, Spider-Man's trip down the aisle with his ladylove would garner a bunch of publicity among comics fans and casual onlookers in a time before the internet and social media. It had crossed over into *The Amazing Spider-Man* daily newspaper comic strip, and a live action version was performed at New York's Shea Stadium starring Tara Shannon as Mary Jane. Stan Lee, who wanted that Peter and Mary Jane be married after decades in each other's lives, would officiate the matrimonial celebration in front of thousands of baseball fans.

(top left) After walking out of Peter's life in issue #183, Mary Jane finally returns in ASM #238, roughly four and a half years later. Art by John Romita Jr. and John Romita Sr. (bottom left) Mary Jane's past is hinted at in her daydream in ASM #246. Art by John Romita Jr. and Dan Green. (right) Mary Jane drops a major truth bomb on Peter in ASM #257. Art by Ron Frenz and Joe Rubinstein.

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June 9, 1987, was the big day when *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual #21* was released. Peter proposed again to Mary Jane in David Michelinie, John Romita Jr., and Vince Colletta's "The Big Question" story published in ASM #290 (July 1987). After feeling like their lives are missing something, Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson eventually figure out they love and need each other in the next two issues after a Spider Slayer attack and the sudden return of Mary Jane's father brings them closer together.

Jim Shooter, David Michelinie, Paul Ryan, and Vince Colletta invited Spider-Fans to "The Wedding" in *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual #21*. The story showcased the hopes, fears, tragedies, and triumphs in the lives of Mary Jane Watson and Peter Parker as they prepare to walk down the aisle. Both characters wonder if they made the right decision. As they and the readers take a look at their lives, Peter and Mary Jane realize that in spite of, and because of, everything they've gone through in the past, they deserve happiness. That happiness happens when they become husband and wife. Yes, there will be more trials and tribulations along the way, but they can handle everything together, two people whose hearts and souls become one.

The marriage of Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson has been another debated topic among Spider-Fans. Some thought it was long overdue, while others think that the couple should have never been wed in the first place. Gerry Conway, Roger Stern, and Tom DeFalco discussed their feelings on the Spider-Matrimony with *BI*.

"As a writer, I'm normally against marrying characters." Conway said. "The difficulty in writing a marriage is putting conflict in it. The threat of breaking up in marriage is an enormous emotional weight. It's one thing when Mary Jane and Peter can walk away after some conflict that they would resolve. It's another thing if Peter or Mary Jane packed up their bags and walked out of their marriage. The threat of breaking up a marriage is an enormous emotional weight and you can't really address it in the short term. It's just too big."

Roger Stern added, "I thought from the very first that Peter and Mary Jane getting married was just a huge, huge mistake for all parties involved, and I'm not sure that the series ever fully recovered from it. I understand why it was done. There was obviously a desire to tie things in with the *Spider-Man* newspaper strip. But the *Spider-Man* comic strip had always maintained a separate continuity from the comic books. The newspaper strip had gone off in its own direction years before, and no one writing the comic books had ever before been asked to acknowledge it in

(top) Mary Jane tells Peter about her less than idyllic childhood in ASM #259. Art by Ron Frenz and Joe Rubinstein. (bottom left) The magic day finally arrives. *Amazing Spider-Man Annual #21* cover by John Romita Sr. (bottom right) Things don't look good for the honeymoon on the cover of *Spectacular Spider-Man Annual #7*. Art by John Romita Sr.

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our stories. Having Peter and Mary Jane get married, and so abruptly, was such a major about-face from everything that had been developing within the series. I found the whole situation very disappointing. You have to understand, I hadn't been just a former Spider-Man writer, I'd been a faithful reader of Spider-Man for over two decades. When the wedding was announced, I stopped reading the series and didn't follow it again for years. When the Spider-Man fans who had started reading the series in the 1990s and afterward complained about the marriage being nullified, I could sympathize with their disappointment. The marriage was what they were used to. But the characters of Peter and Mary Jane had been abruptly changed to make it appear that the marriage could work. And that distorted the way Peter and Mary Jane had been portrayed up until that point. I mean, yes, I could certainly see Peter Parker falling in love and getting married—just not to Mary Jane. The Mary Jane Watson that I had read about—and written about—wouldn't settle down until she was too old to party anymore. And I never saw that as happening within our lifetimes. If you wanted Mary Jane to get married, you would have to radically change who she was. And unfortunately, that's what was done. There was no natural evolution."

"Ron Frenz and I always thought Mary Jane would eventually chicken out and leave Peter

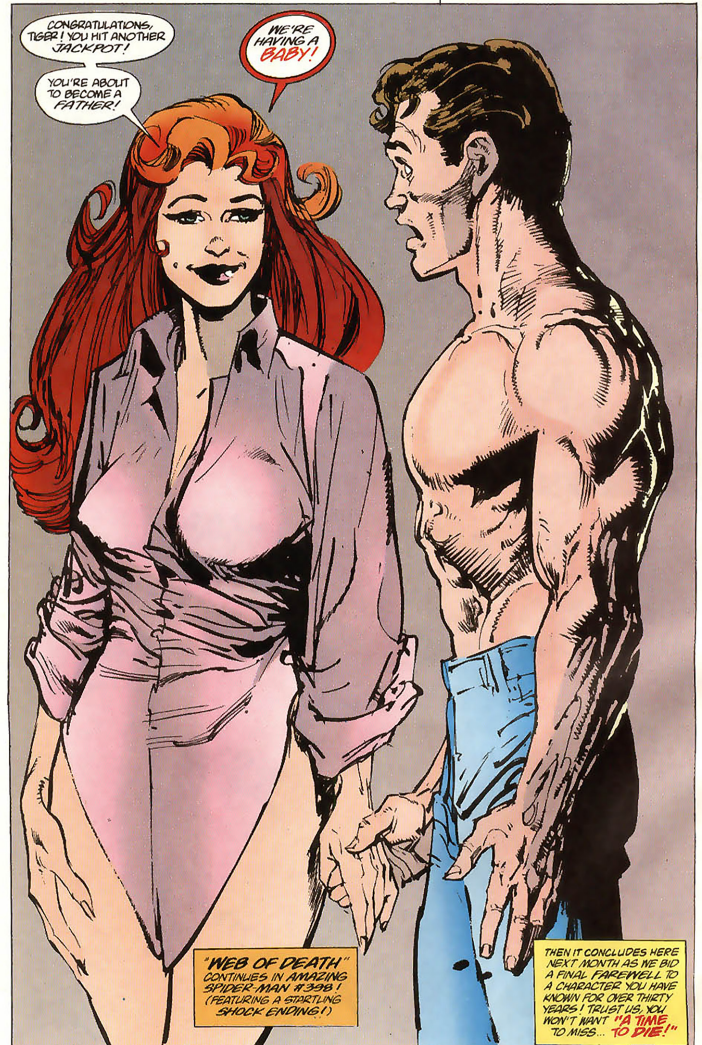
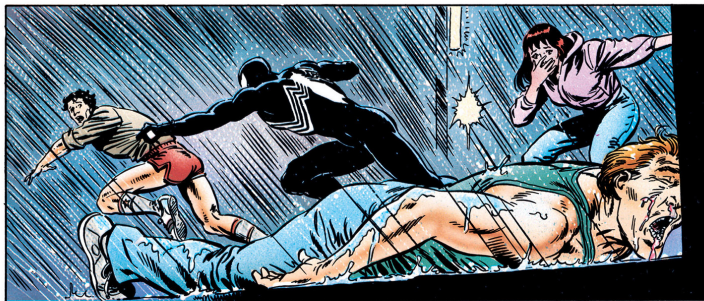
waiting at the altar," Tom DeFalco revealed. "Ron and I never intended for Peter and Mary Jane to get married, and I was against it when it was announced. I was wrong. The marriage actually worked in Spider-Man and especially in *Spider-Girl*. It added an additional layer of responsibility to Peter. I believe the Spider-Man comics are all about responsibility and anything that piles more on Pete is a good for the series."

Both Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson have had tragedy after tragedy enter their lives. *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #21 finally gives them the happiness they deserve. Both of them have faced the demons of their past to get to this moment, and after decades of supervillains, family problems, and even death, Mary Jane and Peter finally get some joy coming to them, and they and some of the fans all said that it's about darn time.

"The Honeymoon", Jim Owsley/Christopher Priest, Alan Kupperberg, Jim Fern, and Al Milgrom's story published in *The Spectacular Spider-Man Annual* #7 (1987) takes place before the last page of *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #21. Said honeymoon takes place in France thanks to an old flame of Mary Jane's. Peter feels like a fish out of water among Mary Jane's friends there when Puma offers Peter and Spider-Man a job. In reality, Thomas Fireheart doesn't trust Webhead to fulfill his duties. Peter sees through Puma's tests and

(left) Burying Peter alive and taking over as Spider-Man is not a good wedding present, Kraven. ASM #293 art by Mike Zeck and Bob McLeod. (right) First comes love, then comes marriage... Mary Jane makes a big announcement in SSM #220. Art by Sal Buscema and Bill Sienkiewicz.

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"WEB OF DEATH" CONTINUES IN AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #293! (FEATURING A STARTLING SHOCK ENDING!)

THEN IT CONCLUDES HERE NEXT MONTH AS WE BID A FINAL FAREWELL TO A CHARACTER YOU HAVE KNOWN FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS! TRUST US, YOU WON'T WANT "A TIME TO DIE" TO MISS.

(left) A page from ASM #322 by Todd McFarlane. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

(right) And just like that, the marriage, and everything associated with it, is gone. ASM #545 cover by Joe Quesada and Danny Miki.

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understands that he is better than Thomas Fireheart. He has his self-respect and the love of Mary Jane, and that makes him richer than any billionaire.

Married life isn't always a bed of roses for Peter and Mary Jane, and they barely have time to relax after they return from the honeymoon with "Fearful Symmetry: Kraven's Last Hunt" and other stories going on almost immediately in the Spider-Titles. However, through thick and thin, Mary Jane loves her Spider-Man. Even when Peter had doubts about his career as the wallcrawler and even his own identity during the much maligned "The Clone/Ben Reilly Saga", she's there to keep Peter Parker grounded while giving him love, friendship, support, and someone to talk to. Peter doesn't need to hide the truth from Mary Jane. He can confide in her things he couldn't tell someone like Aunt May or his colleagues at the *Daily Bugle*.

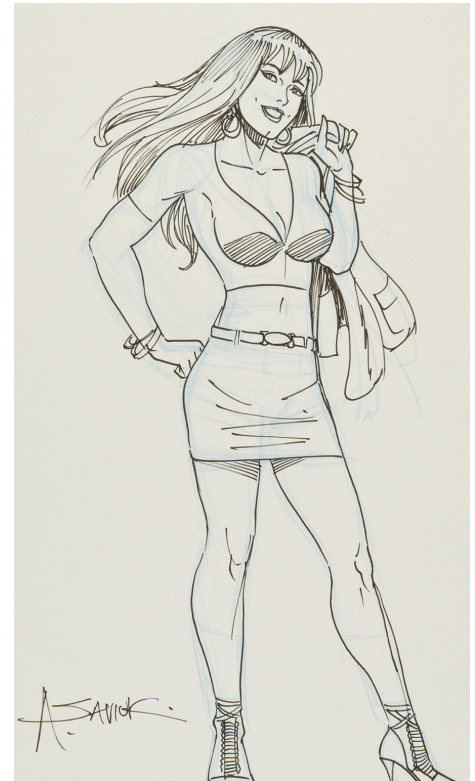
Peter, while sometimes overtaken by his life as Spider-Man, is a source of strength for Mary

Jane when one looks beyond the surface. He supports her modeling and acting career as she supports his need to aid others as Spider-Man. Peter's fighting the likes of Doctor Octopus and Mary Jane's photo shoots in various parts of the world keep them apart at times. Yet they allow the Spider-Couple to appreciate every second they have together.

There are times much later in their marriage, most notably in "The Clone/Ben Reilly Saga" when she was pregnant and the 1999 reboot of the monthly Spider-Titles, when Mary Jane will ask Peter to give up being Spider-Man. She does this because she and Peter have lost so much, including their baby. That takes a toll on her. She understands his need to be Spider-Man, but her need for Peter to be near her is much greater in those periods because she knows that they both desire some periods of normalcy and intimacy without clones, a recently returned Norman Osborn, and chaos in a television studio. In short, Peter and Mary Jane aren't much different from couples that don't exist within a superhero universe. They also need to be alone and away from the world around them to recharge their relationship and themselves.

The aforementioned "Fearful Symmetry: Kraven's Last Hunt" crossover between the then three core Spider-Titles marked the return Sergei Kravenoff while newlyweds Peter and Mary Jane are getting settled into married life. Kraven was out to prove he could hunt the spider and be a better Spider-Man. He shot and buried his web swinging foe alive and donned Spidey's costume. What Kraven didn't realize is that it took more than power to be Spider-Man. He had to have the heart and soul of the arachnid hero. Mary Jane





saw he lacked this when the disguised Kraven saved her from attackers. She knew the man behind the mask was not her husband. Peter escapes from his grave and returns to his bride, though the shock of Kraven's actions and suicide do take a toll on him. He would discuss his feelings with Mary Jane, and she, in turn would help him cope and heal in ways none of Peter's loved ones ever could.

Gerry Conway would return to write *The Spectacular Spider-Man* and *Web of Spider-Man* not much longer after Peter and Mary Jane were married. As Conway stated earlier, he would focus on supporting characters like Mary Jane in those titles. This made them family oriented and allowed Peter and Mary Jane's world to grow with them. The arrival of cousin Kristy and her battle with bulimia adds more depth to already big hearts within Mary Jane and her wall crawling husband. Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson would show readers and themselves in stories like Conway's *Spectacular* and *Web* issues that their love and being together can weather anything that comes their way.

One important thing was allowed to happen when Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson got married. Both characters were allowed to grow up, mature, and evolve. We first see them in their teens and early twenties during the Lee/Ditko/Romita Spider-Comics. Then Gerry Conway would expand on their characters during his celebrated run on *ASM* and later its spin-off titles. Those after Conway would have their takes on Peter and Mary Jane's relationship.

The fact that they tied the knot and allowed their hearts and souls to become one is the event that many fans responded to the most. They saw their favorite couple finally together after all these years. Peter loved Mary Jane, and Mary Jane loved Peter. Peter best described his love for Mary Jane in *The Spectacular Spider Man Annual #8* with the following quote after The High Evolutionary brought back Gwen Stacy.

"Gwen was my past, Mary Jane. You are my future."

That future was changed after Marvel made what is considered the most controversial decision in Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson's lives. A deal with Mephisto gave them "One More Day", a crossover throughout the monthly Spider-Titles. The

Mary Jane by (left) Tim Sale, (middle) Phil Noto, and (right) Alex Saviuk. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

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story erased their marriage from continuity to save a dying Aunt May. Readers who loved seeing Peter and Mary Jane married considered this a step backwards for both of them. Most fans want to see Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson as husband and wife again in mainstream Marvel comic books because their love and romantic union are the backbone of those characters' cores. As stated before, Peter and Mary Jane always return to one another. Perhaps they will marry once again and give readers hope that the happiness they deserve to have together will one day return.

*Dedicated to the lady whose love has spun a web that will forever be in my heart, my beautiful and amazing wife Laura. More love and thanks go to Jadis, Pupino, Odino, and our four-legged Spider-Pets and my nephew Kento, a true hero. Without your affection, assistance, support, and patience, none this would be possible. This article is also dedicated to Gerry Conway, Tom DeFalco, Stan Lee, Steve Ditko, Roger Stern, and the various comic book writers and artists past, present and future who made Mary Jane Watson so perfect for Peter Parker. May the spider's web protect you always, tigers.*

*James Heath Lantz is a freelance writer who was heavily influenced by television, film, old time radio shows, and books- especially comic books- growing up in Ohio. He's co-authored Roy Thomas Presents Captain Video with Roy Thomas. He also wrote the introductions for Pre-Code Classics: Weird Mysteries Volumes One and Two and Roy Thomas Presents Sheena- Queen of the Jungle Volume Three (All published by PS Artbooks.), self-published his Trilogy of Tales e-book (Available at Smashwords.com and other outlets), and reviews various media for Superman Homepage. James currently lives in Italy with his wife Laura and their family of cats, dogs, and humans from Italy, Japan, and the United States.*



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**TWOMORROWS AD PAGE**

# SMALL WONDER: AN ODE TO OBERON

## A TRUE "JACK" OF ALL TRADES

by Robert Jeschonek



FlashBack!

Great heroes sometimes come in small—and imperfect—packages. Such is the case with Oberon, a man of diminutive stature who has held his own alongside New Gods and Justice Leaguers alike, always making a distinct impression in the process.

Never afraid to speak his mind despite his limited height, thinning gray hair, uncertain physical fitness, and lack of superpowers, Oberon has consistently made a splash among DC Comics heroes. He has gone from working as escape artist Mister Miracle's sidekick to assistant manager of the Justice League, leaving a trail of villainous types—and some heroic ones, too—to quake in their boots... or at least scowl at the blustering earfuls he delivers.

As he comes full circle—reverting to Mister Miracle's assistant in the latest *New Gods* series written by Ram V—now is the perfect time to look back at the roles he has led, the lives he has impacted, and some of his greatest moments on the comics page.

### LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! BEHOLD THE MIGHTY MITE!

Oberon first leaped into the spotlight as assistant to the first Mister Miracle, Thaddeus Brown. When New God Scott Free adopted the name after Brown's death, Oberon came with it, and a beautiful friendship was born.

Through 18 issues of the original 1971-1974 *Mister Miracle* series, written, drawn, and edited by Jack Kirby, Oberon and Scott worked together to stage a multitude of "impossible" escapes, combat the forces of evil (much of it originating on the evil planet of Apokolips), and train Scott's successor, Shiloh Norman, in the escapist arts and sciences.

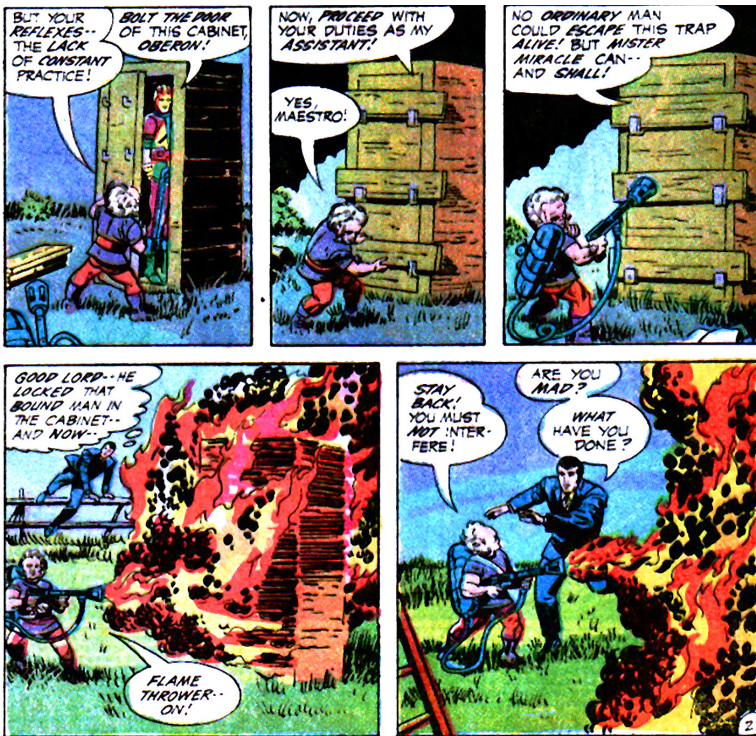
Throughout the series, Oberon served as an irreplaceable partner, providing not only technical expertise related to death traps but a very human presence who grounded the futuristic adventures of Scott and his fellow deities with all their celestial powers and so-advanced-it-might-as-well-be-magic technology. He might not have been a "spring chicken," might not have had a full head of hair or stood taller than 3 feet 7 inches, but his faith in Scott and indomitable will to never back down in the face of a challenge made him a true powerhouse of the Mister Miracle team.

With his relentless fighting spirit and dedication to battling an evil establishment, Oberon also seemed to embody some of the best qualities of his own creator. Like Jack Kirby, who served in Europe in World War II, Oberon was pugnacious and resistant to the pressures of tyrannical forces. He was scrappy and cynical, yet capable of unwavering belief in someone who represented the values he held most dear.

It's no accident, many years later, when writer Tom King finally gifted him with a surname, it was "Kurtzberg," which was Jack's own birth name.

Oberon isn't afraid to get his hands dirty. *Justice League International* #22 cover by Kevin Maguire and Joe Rubinstein.

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### ONE SMALL STEP FOR ONE LITTLE PERSON!

When DC Comics resurrected *Mister Miracle* in 1977, picking up where the first series left off with issue #19 (Sept. 1977), Oberon came along for the ride. The new series ended after just seven issues, but Oberon still found himself front and center as Scott's best friend and partner.

The first multi-issue epic sent Mister Miracle and Oberon on a quest to rescue Scott's beloved Big Barda from Granny Goodness and her gang of Apokoliptian kidnapers. Written by Steve Englehart and penciled by Marshall Rogers—hot off their wildly popular *Batman* run in *Detective Comics*—this storyline even led Scott and Oberon to the dark side of the Moon to face Granny, Kanto, Baron Bedlam, and Vermin Vundabar. They rescued Barda's physical form, though it took a masterful raid on Apokolips itself to restore her mind to working order. Throughout it all, Oberon did his part to help Scott succeed... though perhaps his most notable moment came in issue #22 (Feb. 1978), when he called the New Gods for help. "Uh... *Chief*," he said, referring to lofty Highfather by a lowly human sobriquet. "Your cockamamie offspring is going crackers!"

Looking back at his work with the character, Englehart remembers Oberon as being "simple but fearless" and "interesting." "He's a spunky little guy who's seen the tricks behind stage magick so much that Scott's performances don't faze him, so he's a good companion, and he has kind of a loopy mind."

Though Englehart provided Rogers with full scripts, he doesn't recall how much input the penciler added to the character of Oberon. He does remember, however, that Alan Weiss, a friend of his and Rogers', got the ball rolling by drawing Oberon in issue #19.

When Englehart and Rogers left the series after issue #22, writer Steve Gerber and penciller Michael Golden jumped aboard as the new creative team. Sadly, the ax fell with issue #25 (Aug.-Sept. 1978), as the infamous cutback event that came to be known as the "DC Implosion" took its toll.

Oberon was destined to return to the spotlight, however... and he would do so in a big way. When next he stepped to the forefront, he would no longer be consigned to sidekick status, limited to a thankless supporting role.

Instead, he would be one of the leaders of an international team of the world's greatest heroes.

And another renowned creative team would be responsible for making him soar.

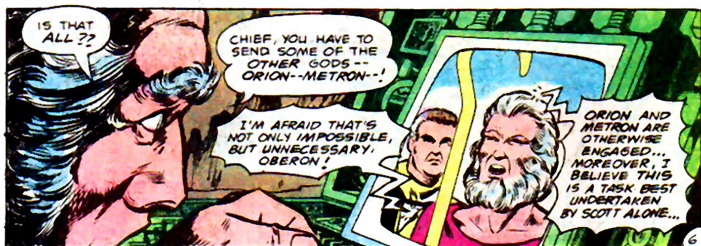
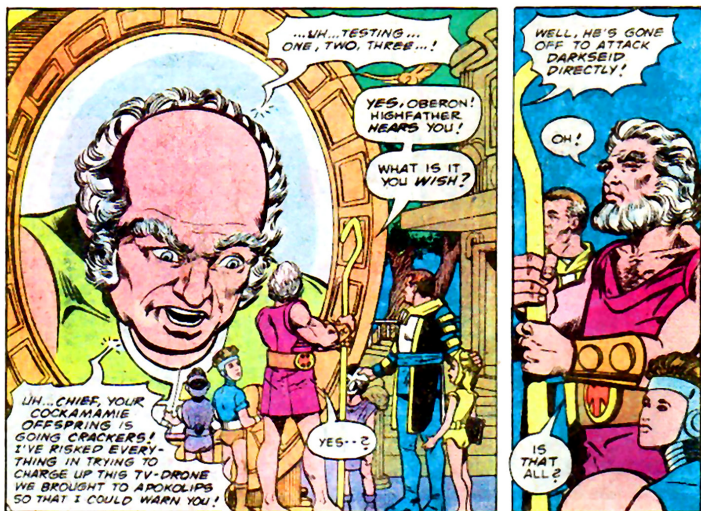
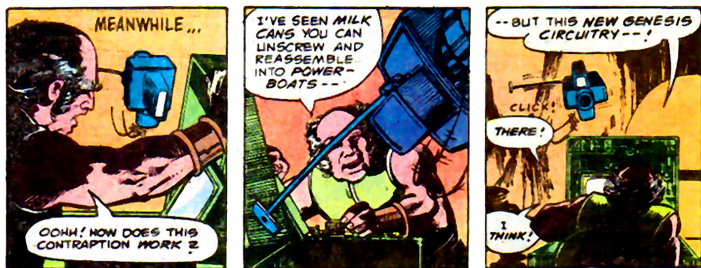
### WATCH THE TRUSTY ASSISTANT BECOME... THE BADASS MANAGEMENT TYPE!

When the first issue of the new *Justice League* hit the stands in early 1987, its now-iconic cover by Kevin Maguire and Terry Austin featured such notables as Batman, Dr. Fate, Shazam, Black Canary, the Martian Manhunter, Guy Gardner, Mister Miracle... and the one and only Oberon. There he was, scowling in the upper left corner of the group shot, looking a little balder, a little meaner... and a lot



(top) Oberon assists Mister Miracle Thaddeus Brown with his latest stunt. Scoot Free can't believe what he's seeing. *Mister Miracle* #1 art by Jack Kirby and Vince Colletta. (bottom) From *Mister Miracle* #5, Oberon and Scott Free work on a new escape. Pencil art by Jack Kirby. Scan courtesy of John Morrow.

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more prominent, given his proximity to the latest iteration of the World's Greatest Heroes.

J. M. DeMatteis, who co-wrote the book with Keith Giffen, did not choose Oberon as a member of the team, but he quickly realized he was the perfect fit. "Oberon and Scott were in place when I came aboard the book," says DeMatteis. "The entire cast was pretty much dictated by the Powers That Be. But once we started writing him, it became clear that Oberon was important to the series. He brought humanity and heart to the team."

The first story of the new *Justice League* series, written by DeMatteis and Keith Giffen, with breakdowns by Giffen, pencils by Maguire, and inks by Austin, did not foreshadow the heights to which Oberon would soon rise... though it did feature him early in the proceedings, smack on page 3. It wasn't exactly an auspicious introduction, as Guy Gardner started off by insulting him, asking, "What's the matter, Sneezy—the other six dwarves couldn't make it?" Things only went downhill from there, as Oberon ended up being tossed around by Guy not once, but twice.

Oberon's future, however, eventually elevated him to a leadership role. Little by little, as the just

plain Justice League morphed into Justice League International, he received more responsibility and visibility, going from monitor duty attendant to assistant manager of the outfit under Maxwell Lord and J'onn J'onzz, the Manhunter from Mars.

It was not a role that DeMatteis and Giffen had planned for Oberon from the outset. Though DeMatteis had loved the character since he'd first appeared in Kirby's original *Mister Miracle* series, he and Giffen came to *Justice League* with no specific intentions in mind. "Keith and I both wrote intuitively," DeMatteis explains. "We let the characters lead the way."

As a team leader and fixer, Oberon proved to be invaluable in many ways. Not only did he bring great organizational skills and a no-nonsense attitude to what was essentially an exercise in herding cats, but he helped hold the chaotic team together when tension and strife threatened to tear it asunder. Always, he succeeded in wrangling the recalcitrant heroes, thanks to the very human qualities that enabled him to stand toe to toe with so many super-powered beings throughout his long career.

(left) Oberon attempts to get Highfather's assistance in *Mister Miracle* #22. Art by Marshall Rogers, Rick Bryant, and John Fuller. (right) Oberon joins the *Justice League*. Cover by Kevin Maguire and Terry Austin.

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J.M. DEMATTEIS

Federico Vinci.



"He's tough, feisty, he's got a great sense of humor, and a big heart," says DeMatteis. "I think his greatest strength is that big heart. It's probably his greatest flaw, too. He's passionately devoted to the people he cares about, and that can make him emotionally explosive at times. Not a bad flaw to have."

Oberon's toughness was most notably on display in *Justice League International* #22 (Holiday 1988). The cover, featuring Oberon decked out like a diminutive Rambo in headband, camouflage, and bandolier with an assault rifle at the ready, bore a title that previewed the action to come: "Oberon Unleashed!"

As part of DC's 1988 *Invasion* crossover, Oberon single-handedly battled a unit of Khund warriors running amok in the JLI's New York embassy. It helped that the Khund soldiers had been miniaturized via Imskian shrinking technology, though they still managed to render the hapless Booster Gold unconscious before Oberon got involved.

For once, Oberon was the biggest person in a fight, towering over the tiny Khunds. Even so, when faced with the aliens' high-tech blasters, his first instinct was to run away as the Khunds taunted him for being a coward. "The nerve of those guys—calling me a coward!" he said as he fled their assault. "I may be yellow... pusillanimous... a clucking chicken—but I'm no coward!"

It didn't take long for him to fight back, though, first with a bowling ball, then one of Blue Beetle's spare weapons, which he spent precious moments searching for under the mess in Beetle's closet. ("Underwear... socks... baseball cards... chicken salad sandwich... Playboy... Penthouse... Entomology Illustrated... National Review...") He finally found the weapon in the nick of time and used it to stop the alien invasion force...then had to consider what to do with the unconscious Khund warriors. ("I can't just stomp on 'em and squish 'em—can I?") In the end, he settled for trapping them in roach motels. (They escaped those prisons and enlarged in *JLI* #24 (Feb. 1989)... only to come face to face with a mob of heroes gathered for a team recruiting drive. The assembled army of superpowered folks quickly neutralized them again with little effort.)

Goofy humor and all, it was a tour de force for Oberon, a showcase for his true toughness in the face of danger. But what about his greatest strength, according to DeMatteis—his heart?

That part of him shone through in other ways during his tenure with the Justice League and its various incarnations. In particular, he developed a romantic attraction to Fire... and she reciprocated.

DeMatteis loved their romance and the way it showcased additional layers of Oberon's personality. "It was another opportunity to show that Oberon wasn't just the sidekick," he recalls. "It showed him in a very different light and illuminated his character in new ways."

Looking back, DeMatteis appreciates the way he and Giffen were able to explore various facets of Oberon and develop his character in fresh directions. "I think we saw different sides to his personality, a general deepening of the character—especially in his relationship with Fire and his friendship with Maxwell Lord. He wasn't just Mister Miracle's sidekick, he was a three-dimensional person with multiple relationships, and he was vital to the team and the chemistry between characters."



(top) Guy Gardner makes a terrific first impression on Oberon. *Justice League* #1 by Keith Giffen, Kevin Maguire, and Terry Austin. (bottom) Oberon and Maxwell Lord discuss current events. *Justice League International* #22 by Keith Giffen, Kevin Maguire, and Joe Rubinstein. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

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Even with all that character development, humor remained a key component of Oberon's portrayal in *Justice League*, *Justice League International*, and, later, *Justice League America*. In *JLI* #18 (Oct. 1988), for example, he accidentally set off some of Thaddeus Brown's original escape artist gear in the basement of Scott and Big Barda's new house in the suburbs, completely destroying the place.

Then, there was his classic encounter with Darkseid during a visit to Apokolips in *JLI* #21 (Winter 1988). After falling down a sewer and crawling his way to freedom, Oberon found himself in what appeared to be the man cave of none other than Darkseid himself. His first, calmly considered reaction to coming face to face with the lord of Apokolips? "I-YI-YIIIIII-YI-YIIIIII!" followed by "Duh-uh-uh-uh-uh" and finally, "D-D-D-D-DARKSEID!!"

For his part, Darkseid was uncomfortably accommodating, calling himself one of Oberon's "oldest and dearest friends" and offering him dry clothes, food, and "a refreshing warm drink," after which the two would "chat about old times!" In spite of his initial fear, Oberon later said, "For a fella who wants to be absolute dictator of the universe, that Darkseid's not a bad guy. And he sets a mean table, t'boot! What a lunch he gave me!"

Of all the many scenes DeMatteis has written about Oberon, he still counts that particular "extremely uncomfortable encounter" as one of his favorites.

### SURVIVING THE HORRORS OF... NORMAL LIFE IN THE SUBURBS!

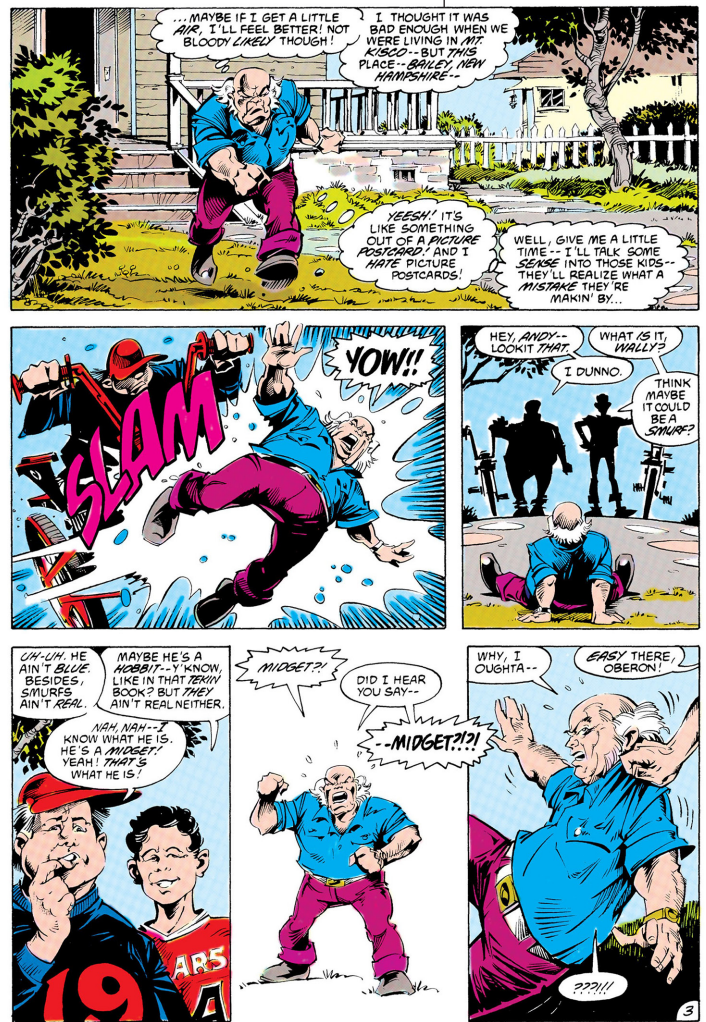
From his early days as Scott Free's manager/assistant to his time as a leader of the Justice Leagues, Oberon underwent some serious makeovers through the years... and he wasn't done yet. In 1989, in a new *Mister Miracle* series, he took on one of his strangest roles yet, moving to the suburb of Bailey, New Hampshire with Scott and Barda.

Naturally, under the guidance of Oberon-whisperer DeMatteis—followed by power scribes Len Wein and Doug Moench—he and the Frees never quite found the normality they craved away from the spotlight. Their suburban home and fix-it shop turned out to be exactly the kind of danger magnets you might expect, as plenty of New Gods swung by to torment them, from the villainous Doctor Bedlam to the Forever People and Scott's biological dad, Highfather. Justice Leaguers like Booster Gold, Blue Beetle, and G'Nort made appearances, too.

Throughout the 28-issue series, Oberon did what he could to help Scott and Barda out of one jam after another while staying true to their suburban lifestyle. The Frees introduced him to neighbors as their uncle, and he played the part as best he could...even as the "family" got involved in wild capers and adventures. Eventually, things got so crazy that they moved to a loft in Manhattan in search of anonymity and peace; instead, they

(left) Oberon meets with a very charming Darkseid. *JLI* #21 art by Keith Giffen, Ty Templeton, and Joe Rubinstein.  
(right) Oberon, along with Scott and Barda, move to the suburbs in *Mister Miracle* Vol. 2 #1. Art by Ian Gibson.

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(top) There's still room for fun in the suburbs. *Mister Miracle* Vol. 2 #6 cover by Mike McKone and Bruce Patterson. (bottom) Oberon introduces Scott to Miracle Workers, Inc. *Mister Miracle* Vol. 3 #5 art by Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin.

TM & © DC Comics.



found the opposite, as Barda became a professional wrestler, and villains like the Noodle Monster wreaked havoc.

Oberon resumed his role as a trainer when Shiloh Norman returned to the fold, resuming his preparations to become the new Mister Miracle. At the end of the series, though, Oberon was left alone and at loose ends as Scott and Barda returned to New Genesis. Without the Frees or the Justice League, what role could he possibly fill to make life worth living?

He found one soon enough, as the Miracle Workers agency was born.

### FROM MISTER MIRACLE'S SIDEKICK TO MIRACLE WORKERS, INC.

When writer Kevin Dooley was handed the baton for a new *Mister Miracle* series in 1996, he brought some clear ideas about Oberon with him. Like DeMatteis, he had a real affection for the character and wanted to explore new facets of him.

"What appeals to me about Oberon as a character is that he is a no BS guy," says Dooley. "He can be bitingly sarcastic and honestly straightforward. He's trustworthy and undeniably loyal. He's got a sharp wit for sure. Probably, though, the greatest strength of the diminutive gent is his caring. He was/is the proverbial little man with a big heart.

"How often, especially in the original Kirby set, did Oberon worry and scream out loud regarding Scott being smashed, blasted, evaporated, sliced, etc.? Each time."

Why, if Dooley loved Oberon so much, did he hold off on using him for the first few issues of *Mister Miracle*, making readers wonder if he'd be part of the series at all?

According to Dooley, "Oberon didn't grace our *Mister Miracle* until issue #5 (Aug. 1996) because situations needed to be addressed and established for Scott: clarifying his powers as a positive force, who he was in the New Gods pantheon, where he was with Barda, and what his new direction was going to be. Ultimately, Oberon entered our stage to get him to the latter when Scott came down to Earth."

When Oberon did finally reenter the picture, he did so as the founder and operator of Miracle Workers, Inc., an organization dedicated to helping people in need. It was a new twist but a perfect fit for the character, merging his experience in promotion and management with his powerful altruistic streak.

"Obie's got a savvy business mind," explains Dooley. "Miracle Workers, Inc., was an opportunity for him to do something on his own—outside of the dying circus venue or as a sidekick."

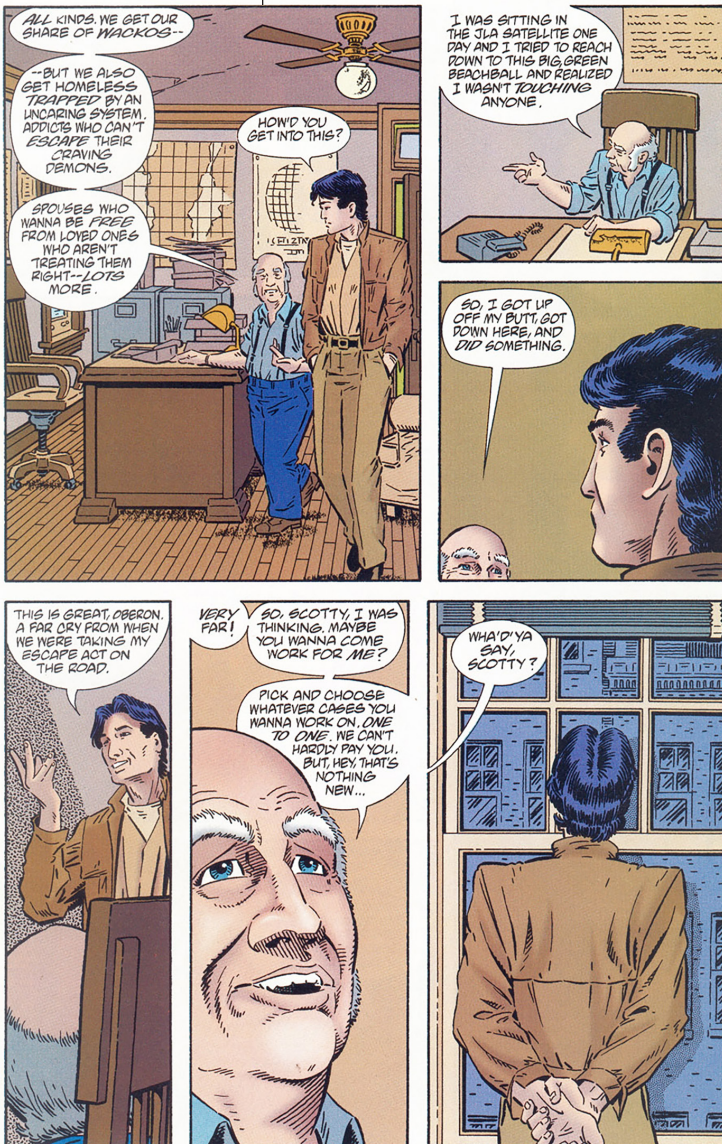
As envisioned by Oberon (and inspired by Dooley), the mission of Miracle Workers, Inc. was to make a difference on a one-to-one level. "Miracle Workers, Inc. is a place where us ordinaries can pick up the phone and call someone not connected with the police, government, et al. In Oberon, they'll find someone who can help them escape their own demons and traps in their favor by whatever means necessary."

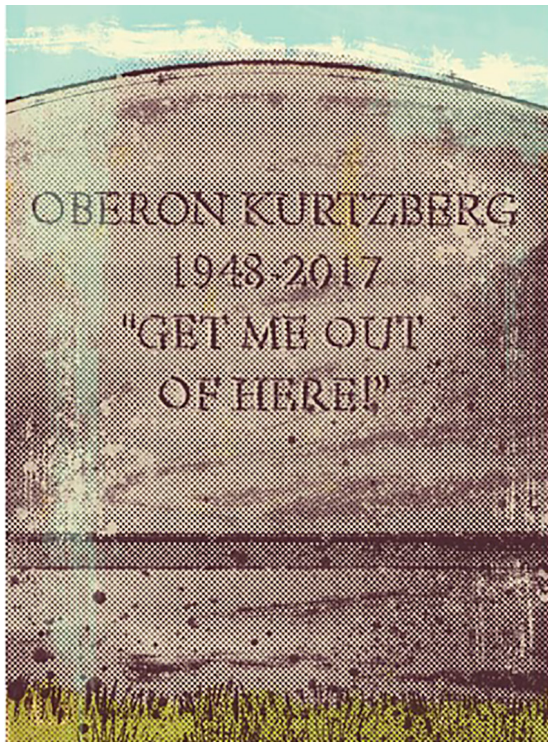
Unfortunately, Miracle Workers, Inc. never reached its full potential. Dooley's *Mister Miracle* series lasted only another two issues, tapping out with #7.

### OBERON KENOBI, THE DEAD MENTOR

After Dooley's '96 *Mister Miracle* series ran its course, Oberon stayed mostly out of the spotlight for a while... but a big comeback was just around the corner. All it took for the little guy to make a big splash again was dying... not in a showbiz sense, but literally.

A 12-issue *Mister Miracle* maxiseries debuted in 2018, written by Tom King, with art by Mitch Gerads. At first, it seemed Oberon would not be part of this critically acclaimed new effort, which went on to win multiple Eisner Awards.





Then, issue #5 (Feb. 2018) rolled around. The reason Oberon had not been part of the action so far became clear on page 8, when Scott and Barda visited his grave. Oberon had died in 2017, it turned out, though the Frees offered no explanation or commentary... just left flowers at the graveside. At least Oberon was given a suitably quippy epitaph on the stone—"Get Me Out of Here!"—and, for the first time, a last name, Kurtzberg.

He did make one more appearance, though, in issue #12 (Jan. 2019), in the next-to-last scene of the series. Like Obi-Wan Kenobi in the original *Star Wars* film trilogy, Oberon showed up to offer Scott some words of wisdom from beyond the grave. He appeared as a blurred figure surrounded by after-images and intercut with random dark bars like video glitches, suggesting he was an illusion as other characters throughout the series had been.

He gave pretty sound advice for an illusion, though, helping Scott resolve his doubts about the uncertain nature of reality and sanity. Oberon told Scott that the world of superheroic crises and continuities was no more real than his wife and kids.

"Kid, this, all this, it'll *break* your heart," said Oberon, or Oberon's ghost or illusion. "Can't escape that. But if you're good, if you stay good, you'll know... there's someone out there who'll help you put it back together."

Was Oberon truly dead? Especially given that the entire maxiseries questioned whether much of what was happening in Scott's world was ever real at all?

Let's just say, you can't keep a good Oberon down. A few years later, in the 2025 *New Gods* series written by Ram V, Oberon reappeared. He looked different, with newly exaggerated, cartoonish features, but he was back from the dead (or limbo or whatever) and helping Scott and Barda protect a divinely empowered Earth child from Orion, who'd been dispatched by Highfather on a mysterious and murderous mission.



### BIG MISTAKE OF A SMALL MAN IN THE BIG TOP

Looking back at Oberon's many appearances over the years, we see he is a complex and imperfect character.

In *Jack Kirby's Fourth World* #12 (Feb. 1998), for example, John Byrne revealed a less-than-noble event from Oberon's past. Years before he got involved with Scott and Barda, when he was still a circus performer going by the name "Tom Thumb," Oberon married a woman named Vera Little. Since she was a dwarf, too, he worried when Vera became pregnant that she might give birth to a child who would also be a little person. Before the baby was born, he ran away, leaving Vera to raise their daughter on her own. He told Vera not to try to contact him, and he never returned to the family, though he sent money whenever he could for the rest of Vera's life.

(top left) Oberon gets a last name. Unfortunately, it's on his tombstone in *Mister Miracle* Vol. 4 #5. Art by Mitch Gerads. (right) Even if he's an illusion, it's good to have Oberon around. *Mister Miracle* Vol. 4 #12 art by Mitch Gerads.

TM & © DC Comics.

Oberon in 2025 in *New Gods* #3. Art by Evan Cagle. (inset) Oberon popped up in the *Justice League Unlimited* episode "The Ties That Bind"

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Unbeknownst to him, his daughter, Christine, was not a dwarf after all. As an adult, she caught up with him and told him her mother had died, then gave him a stack of letters that Vera had written. Full of remorse, Oberon apologized to Christine, but she refused to forgive him for his irresponsible past actions.

"I'm sorry for everything I've done," he told her. "Sorry for any pain I might have caused you. If there is anything I can do to make it up to you..."

"There isn't," she said. "Goodbye...father." For once, Oberon was at a loss for words. Though he wanted to fix the situation, even his gift for repairing what was broken failed him. His mistakes had come back to haunt him, and redemption was no longer possible.

For all the good he'd done in his life, he could never undo that one terrible sin or the damage resulting from it.

### THE TALL AND SHORT OF OBERON

Though Oberon is flawed, something about him is endearing and makes us identify with him. Even in a universe of larger-than-life heroes and villains, he stands out as a memorable character.

Dooley sees Oberon as special and heroic, traits he credits to one quality in particular. "Plain and simple, Oberon gets sh\*t done," he says.

Then there's Oberon's essential humanity, which makes him such an effective rooting interest for readers. "Oberon is more like us than most characters in all the *Mister Miracle* series," says Dooley. "Mayhaps his only flaw might've been his not trusting that Scott would always escape a trap, his own or Granny Goodness's or... any. Then again, that's Oberon's caring side showing through, isn't it?"

DeMatteis, one of the creators who knows Oberon best, sees him as someone whose size belies his greatness in a very literary way. "Despite his small stature, he looms very large. There's something almost Dickensian about Oberon."

### WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN... AND MAY YET BE

Oberon's most passionate writers have one thing in common. If given the chance to write the character again, they would jump at it.

"I'd love an opportunity to write Oberon again," says DeMatteis. "Since the characters themselves dictate their

paths for me, it would be up to Oberon to let me know how he's changed."

As for Dooley, he too would love another shot at the *Small Wonder*, following up on his unrealized plans for the '96 *Mister Miracle* series. "Besides helping everyday people, Oberon and Scott would've taken *Miracle Workers* cases into the superhero realm! With his JLA connections, they could've assisted DC's heroes with troubles they hid from others. Oberon's instinctual tearing through walls to what's really distressing someone, as well as insightfully being able to narrow down what's needed, would've led them to thought-provoking territory.

"A solo adventure or him saving Scott was not out of the back of my mind. Cutting through caca and getting what needs to be done done is his superpower, after all."

**ROBERT JESCHONEK** is a USA Today bestselling author based in Steve Ditko's hometown of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He has scripted comics for DC and AHOY and edits the *Legends of Indie Comics: Words Only* series of prose fiction anthologies featuring classic indie comics characters (including *Concrete*, *Nexus*, *Cerebus*, *Grimjack*, and *Flaming Carrot*) as written by their creators. He has also written official *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* fiction. Visit him online at [www.bobscribe.com](http://www.bobscribe.com).



end



# BROTHERS IN ARMS:

# THE WARRIORS THREE

by Joseph Norton



*Fandral the Fair. Hogun the Grim. Volstagg the Volumnious.* The Warriors Three. Asgard's finest. They have been the God of Thunder's most loyal and trusted companions, traveling through the universe on a Viking ship, fighting hordes of trolls, the minions of the evil god Seth, dragons, and the Hulk. They defended the Rainbow Bridge, accused Odin of treason, hosted a cooking show, and faced down New York City cab drivers. The Warriors Three have been by Thor's side for 60 years, as his trustworthy brothers in arms and drinking companions. Comic books are filled with side-kicks and supporting casts, friends who help keep their secret identities, they get captured, they get saved. The Warriors Three have always been better than that. Able to stand out from the rest, able to hold their own, and occasionally headline their own adventures. Join *BACK ISSUE* in the Halls of Asgard and raise a flagon of ale as we celebrate and sing praise to Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg; The Warriors Three!

## IN THE BEGINNING

The Warriors Three were introduced in the "Tales of Asgard" backup story of *Journey Into Mystery* #119 (Aug. 1965) titled "Gather Warriors." Besides Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg, we also meet other Asgardians like Kroda the Duelist and Magrat the Schemer, but they did not have the same holding power as the Three. In an article from *Comic Book Creator* #2, Stan Lee talked to Roy Thomas about the origins of the Warriors Three.

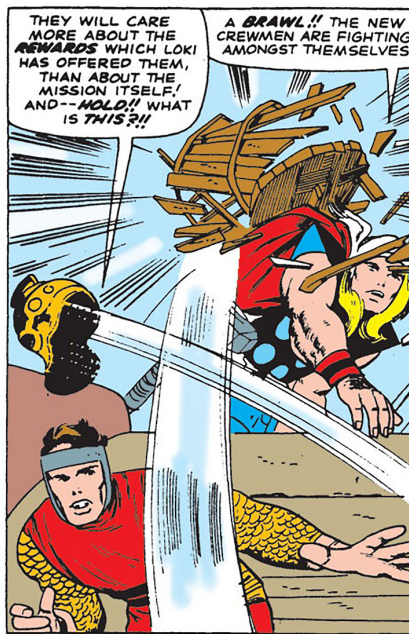
**"Roy:** I was always curious about those three buddies, Hogun, Fandral, and of course enormous Volstagg. Were those characters your idea or Jack's? That's one of those ideas that I could see either you or Jack making up.

**"Stan:** I made those up. I specifically remember that I did them because I wanted a Falstaff-type guy, a guy like Errol Flynn, and then I wanted a guy like Charles Bronson who was dire and gloomy, riddled with angst. Those three were mine."

In typical Marvel bombast the Warriors Three were carved, complexities-free in Marvel's early days. Fandral certainly evoked Errol Flynn, sporting a flamboyant mustache and always a flair for the maidens. His swashbuckling ways telegraphed with word balloons filled with "Thou may not have all the combat to thyself! Fandral will share the exaltation with thee!" Hogun lived up to his name, brooding looks, fiery temper, coded vaguely Eastern by '60s standards. His characteristics played broadly, often with variations of this typical speech "Know you 'tis Hogun the Grim you face, Hogun doth live for battle!" His anger was justified by an off panel murdered family which is what counted as character development

Wonderful artwork of the Warriors Three by Charles Vess excerpted from the cover of *Marvel Fanfare* #34.

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back then. Volstagg was often used as comedic relief, his size played up as a plot point with flashes of heroism. "My glorious record proves that Volstagg knows not the meaning of fear! But why do we race so quickly into a land where death lurks everywhere?" was typical of his bravado. All this dialogue is ripped straight out of *Thor Vol. 1* #130 (Jul. 1966) the "Tales of Asgard" titled "The Fateful Change." How did such stock characters, well versed in third person bravado and cliched emotions, rise above it all?

The Warriors Three were always game for an adventure and they were often never far from the side of Thor whether on Asgard, Midgard (Earth), or traveling the universe. The magic of Marvel comics, specifically with Thor and his adventures set within Norse mythology, was that you could never really tell where the ancient Scandinavian legends ended and ideas and stories of the Marvel bullpen began. One panel could have Loki plotting alongside Ulik the Troll or the Thunder God fighting the Destroyer on the steps of Asgard and the Lee and Kirby chemistry would have it all interact seamlessly in the pages of *Thor*. Characters with no grounding in Norse myths held equal ground in this world and no one benefited more from that fusion than the Warriors Three. Story after story, the Warriors Three represented the best of Marvel's supporting players. Adventures in the main title and the "Tales of Asgard" back up solidified the Warriors Three as critical to the core of the Thor mythos. Lee and Kirby's Marvel style of dynamic storytelling via unforgettable art and bombastic dialogue characterized the Warriors Three and left readers wanting more. The Warriors Three left an unforgettable impression with many future creators as well who, in their time adventuring with them, would add to their legend.

### THE ASGARDIAN BRONZE AGE

Like Lee and Kirby did on so many other titles, their opening run on *Thor* established the template. When new creators took over ushering Thor into the Bronze Age, the Warriors Three were not abandoned. Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg continued their adventures in the work of subsequent *Thor* writers Roy Thomas, Len Wein, and Gerry Conway who built on the earlier stories in their runs throughout the Bronze Age without going too far off book. When asked about the Warriors Three, Conway who wrote *Thor* #193-238 (Nov. 1971-Aug. 1975), told *BACK ISSUE*: "The Warriors Three were useful as characters to inject humor into the main Thor storyline-creating byplay between them humanized Thor, who tended to be more aloof and self-serious (at least in my writing). I ended up creating a whole roster of supporting characters for the book, but they were the template, a balanced core group-charming (Fandral), stoic (Hogun), and jovial (Volstagg)."

The Warriors Three make their first appearance in *Journey Into Mystery* #119. Art by Jack Kirby and Vince Colletta.

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# THE MIGHTY THOR!

## THE WELL AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD!



MY LORD THOR-- THIS BE MADNESS! THOU DOST NOT EVEN KNOW WHY THY FATHER ODIN HATH SENT US ON THIS MYSTIC QUEST--

SAY NO MORE, FRIEND HOGUN. THIS, AT LEAST, I KNOW--

--THOR MUST FIGHT YON CRAGGY GIANT--

--FOR ODIN-- AND FOR ASGARD!

AND VOLSTAGG SHALL DULY GUARD THEE FROM BEHIND, MILORD!

WHERE ELSE, VOLUMINOUS ONE? HATH NOT THOR ORDERED US ALL TO FLANK HIS REAR?

--SENT US HERE, THAT WE SHOULD BATTLE FOR THE WATERS OF SOME TWILIGHT WELL?\*

YET UNDERSTAND THIS, MY FRIEND. IF NOBLE THOR FALLS--

'TIS THE BLADE OF FANDRAL WHICH NEXT WILL STRIKE!

AS ALL BEHIND HIM WATCH, BREATH INDRAWN --THE THUNDER GOD STEPS WITHIN THE DARKENED CAVE, AND THESE SPINNERS TAKE UP THEIR WEAVE!

\* SHOWN IN #195-196 OF THIS MAGAZINE. --TERSE STAN.

STAN LEE, EDITOR    GERRY CONWAY, SCRIPTER    JOHN BUSCEMA, ARTIST    VINCE COLLETTA, INKER    ARTIE SIMEK, LETTERER

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The Warriors Three stand with Thor at the "Well at the Edge of the World." Thor #197 art by John Buscema and Vince Colletta. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

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Conway, Thomas, and Wein embraced the Warriors Three in their runs throughout the Bronze Age. Conway did not stray far from the established playbook either. *Thor* #217 (Nov. 1973), for example, had Hogun seemingly always depicted mid-scream, Fandral's sword would "dance," while Volstagg's contribution was to get bit in his rear end by hell hounds. Volstagg was too often played for laughs in the early days. Thomas, ever the disciple of the Lee/Kirby school, had the Warriors Three facing Seth of the Egyptian Gods in a star-spanning story one could have easily placed in Lee/Kirby's run. Here we again see the standard Warriors Three mode: an angry Hogun, a dashing Fandral, and Volstagg playing the fool. Why fight the formula? The strong work of artists like John and Sal Buscema and Joe Sinnott went far to look past the tropes

(top) Volstagg gets it in the end on this page from *Thor* #217. Art by John Buscema and Sal Buscema. (bottom) A double page spread from *Marvel Treasury Edition* #3 by John Buscema featuring the Warriors Three front and center. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

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and helped to cement the supporting heroes place in our hearts.

Wein had a brief but memorable run on *Thor* and actually got to use the Warriors Three in their own solo tale within the pages of *Marvel Spotlight Vol. 1 #30* (Oct 1976). An easily forgettable tale despite Wein's strong and funny voice as he wrote it, these pages had the Warriors getting into some very street level misadventures in Manhattan. "A Night on the Town" might not have had the epic backgrounds usually associated with Asgardian warriors, but it certainly was a fun romp, breaking no new ground except proving these supporting players deserved some time on their own.

### SUCH GREAT HEIGHTS

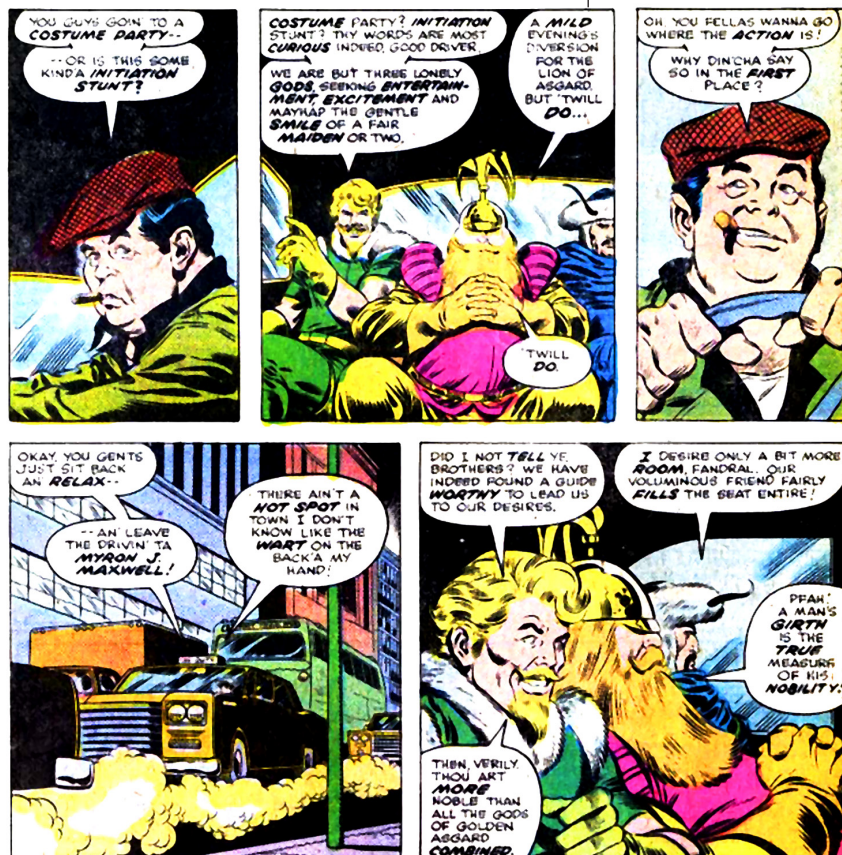
While there is no denying the impact of the Lee/Kirby opening stories, there is very little debate that Walter Simonson's career and character redefining run on *Thor* contributed more to the canon and legend of the Thunder God. Simonson, who had worked on *Thor* as an artist during Wein's run, took over as writer/penciler on *Thor #337* (Dec. 1983). Simonson introduced so many new concepts and characters to the Thor mythos; Beta Ray Bill and Frog Thor are the most memorable, but like other creators, he did not forget all that came before him. Simonson states "The Warriors Three were well established in the Marvel/Thor universe when I began writing the comic. I was trying for a triple, as it were. Marvel's own mythology regarding Thor, my take on the stories such as giving the Odinsword an origin, and mixing in the actual Norse myths as well. It wasn't difficult to draw those three threads together in my stories, that included the Warriors Three."

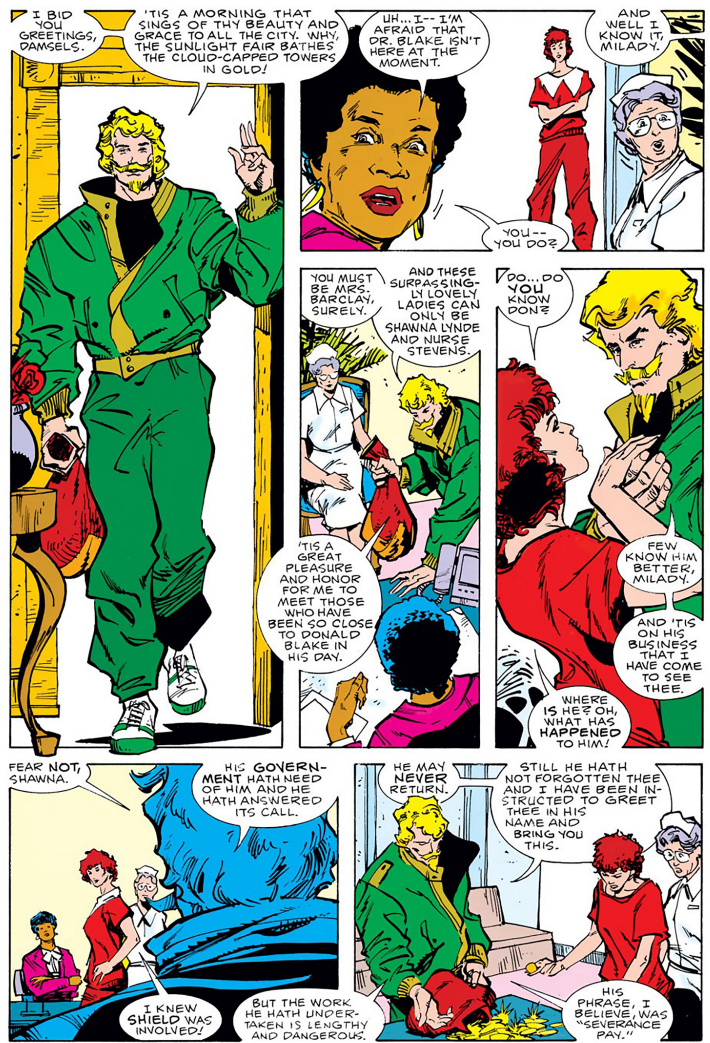
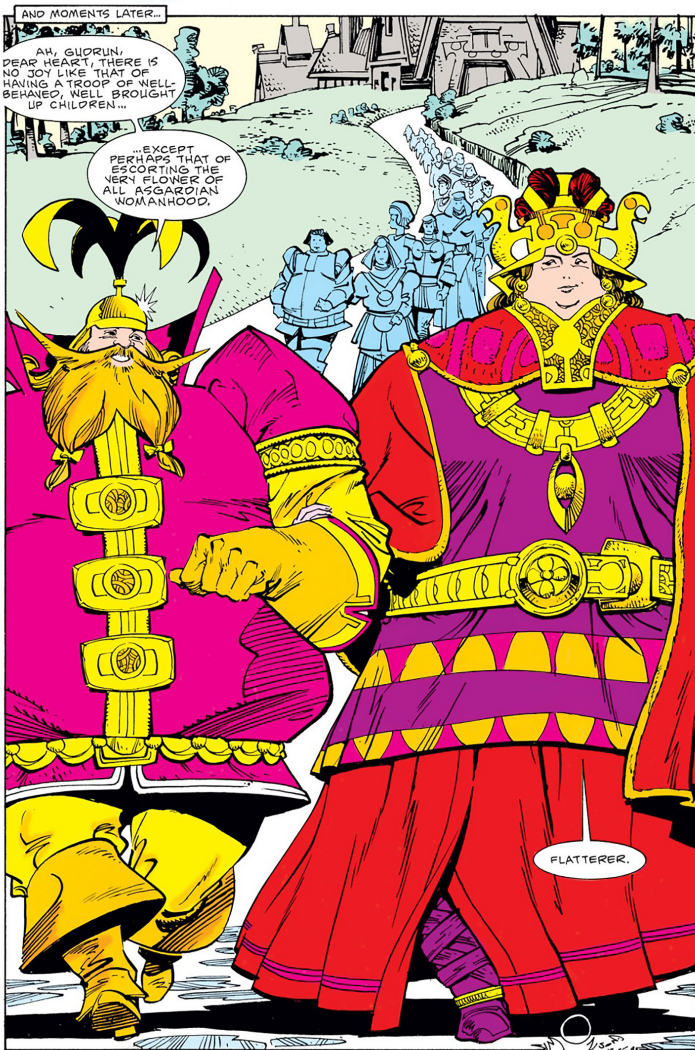
Simonson made them an important part of his stories but did not have them lose their lighter tone "I think it's because they're fun." Simonson told *BI*, "They're a combination of heroic action in Fandral, comedy in Volstagg, and tragedy in Hogun. So, there are a lot of possibilities for stories inherent in the characters and in their interactions with each other as well as Thor and Asgard. They are characters who can be played broadly or more seriously in any story, so they're a pretty good fit for whatever situation and background you need to put them in."

In the opening pages of the first issue, Simonson made Volstagg a drinking buddy of Balder the Brave (Balder got a very effective character refresh during Simonson's time). *Thor #350* (Dec. 1984) had the Warrior Three ride into battle against the forces of Surtur, the mythic villain who centered Simonson's opening arc. His time on *Thor* was unforgettable and his treatment of the Warriors Three, particularly Volstagg, was equal to the task. Simonson's pencils in *Thor #367* (May 1986) give us a full page spread of Volstagg and his wife Hildigund, and in a history filled with creators treating him like a joke. It's hard to find a page treating the Lion of Asgard so regally. Other warriors were given time to sparkle as well in *Thor #354* (Apr. 84) in a clever back up titled "Tales of Midgard," Simonson depicted Fandral in a gloriously '80s green track suit as he visited Midgard to help the world forget Donald Blake as Thor would soon adopt the Sigurd Jarlson secret identity. Simonson used the brief scene as an effective reminder of how critical the Warriors Three were to telling Thor's story. Simonson knew

(left) The Warriors Three star in a story of their own in *Marvel Spotlight #30*. Cover by Rich Buckler and Joe Sinnott. (right) Our heroes taking a cab? Not exactly something you see every day. *Marvel Spotlight #30* art by John Buscema and Joe Sinnott.

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(left) Volstagg and family go for a walk in *Thor* #367. Art by Walter Simonson. (right) Fandral visits the staff of Dr. Donald Blake in *Thor* #354. Art by Walter Simonson.

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how to play to the strengths of his supporting characters in service of the Thunder God.

Simonson also did not shy away from the seriousness. In *Thor* #372 (Oct. 1986), Volstagg adopted some children from Earth whose parents had been killed in the issue. Simonson stated, "Clearly, Volstagg is the more empathetic of the three, also the biggest buffoon, and the one with the most expressive heart. As for children, the 'Tales of Asgard' story in *Journey into Mystery* #119 that introduced him referenced his wife and fifteen children. And although his wife is formidable in her introduction in the following issue, I thought at bottom, they must be very compatible and shared a love of children to have so many. A couple more children who needed a home would undoubtedly appeal to their sense of parenthood and compassion."

In the most important run of *Thor*'s title, Simonson gave Volstagg and his fellow warriors the respect that they had deserved all along. Simonson looks back at his time with the Warriors Three with "they were enormously fun to write and draw and I'm glad I got the chance to do so." We definitely agree.

### GOING SOLO (TOGETHER)

Despite the brilliance of the Simonson work, the readers were about to discover that the Warriors Three could shine in their own solo tales. By the early '80s, Marvel was testing the boundaries of storytelling (as well as distribution and sales) with the introduction of concepts like limited series (*Contest of Champions* and *Wolverine*), graphic novels (*Death of Captain Marvel* and *God Loves, Man Kills*) and the direct sales anthology title *Marvel Fanfare*. Creators Alan Zelenetz (*Alien Legion*) and Charles Vess (DC's *Sandman*) were given five issues of *Fanfare* to tell individual adventures of Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg (with Thor popping in to assist) as they struggle against the machinations of Loki. These five issues, encompassing *Marvel Fanfare Vol. 1* #13 (Mar. 1984) and #34-37 (Sept. 1987-Apr. 1988) spotlighted all the previously established characteristics of Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg but managed to keep them fresh and light. We see Fandral romancing several ladies, Hogun fighting a bridge troll, and Volstagg overindulging at the expense of his ever-suffering wife, Hildigund Zelenetz's playful banter and majestic plotting



WALTER SIMONSON

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matched with Vess stunning, painterly pencil work. These five issues pushed the Warriors Three far beyond the typical Marvel house style with great results. Here, function matched form and the readers were treated to a fairy tale adventure like no other. The Warriors Three have had a long track record at Marvel, but within those pages of *Marvel Fanfare*, it is easy to see how these three characters, broadly conceived in the mind of Stan Lee, could stand tall next to the Gods of Norse mythology. Generous pin-up pages, lush, inviting covers, and vivid colors make these tales in *Marvel Fanfare* a must read for fantasy lovers, comic fans, and Warriors Three followers. (See *BI* #96 for a well-deserved, in depth look at these issues.)

The Warriors Three continued to make their mark in the deeper Marvel Universe with appearances in *Dazzler* #16 (June 1982) and *Avengers Vol. 1* #249 (Nov. 1984), sometimes with Thor, sometimes without. By now, Volstagg the Voluminous had been established as a prodigious father to a brood of Asgardians, so he was a perfect foil for adventures in *Power Pack Vol. 1* #15 (Oct. 1985) with the children of the Powers family assisting them when they sneak into Asgard. Another great supporting appearance in *Avengers* #310 (Nov. 1989) has the Warriors Three playing true to form coming in as the calvary to save Thor and the Avengers from the villainous Blastaar set on conquering Mount Olympus. The Warriors Three also appeared in the *New Mutants Vol. 1* #84 (Dec. 1989) during the "Acts of Vengeance" crossover in a sprawling multi-issue adventure throughout Asgard alongside Volstagg's children. Seeing the Warrior Three interact with the younger mutants brought out a light tone perfectly suited for Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg. The Warriors Three may have never written too far from the original template that Lee and Kirby established, but they were now more than stock characters and creators seem to enjoy writing them as all three represented Asgard well.

## HONORING THE PAST

Crossing the Rainbow Bridge back to Asgard, how do you follow what was widely considered the best *Thor* run ever? What creative team would be able to lift Walter Simonson's pencil after his visionary take on Thor? Marvel brought some heavyweights who moved the book forward into the '90s by taking a step back to the Lee and Kirby style of storytelling. Enter writer Tom DeFalco and penciler Ron Frenz who had both finished up an impressive run on Marvel's flagship title *Amazing Spider-Man* and were looking for something different after that. DeFalco told *BI*, "We (Frenz and DeFalco) wanted *Daredevil*. Ron and I were always great sellers to the mass market." Perhaps to keep the *Thor* title on the top of the stack, the proven winners were bought in for *Thor* #383 (Sept. 1987) and stayed on for several years. DeFalco and Frenz's style embraced the epic grandeur and scope of the Lee and Kirby stories. Frenz told *BI*, "My own belief is an illustrator should work from the root of any concept for which he's responsible. For *Thor*, to me, that means Mr. Kirby. I believe the style of Kirby and his contemporaries will always be vital and relevant."



TOM DEFALCO

Hildy DeFalco.

The entire run is a love note to what Lee and Kirby accomplished 30 years earlier. Expanses of space, Celestials and assembled armies, glorious steppes of Asgard, rough urban landscapes, all beautifully rendered in classic *Journey Into Mystery* style.

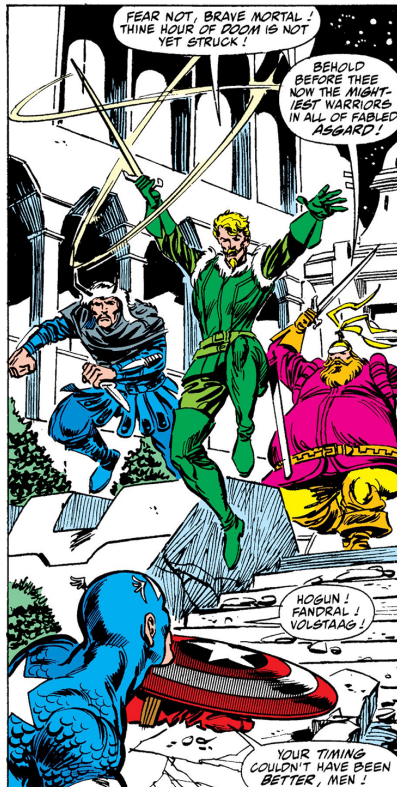
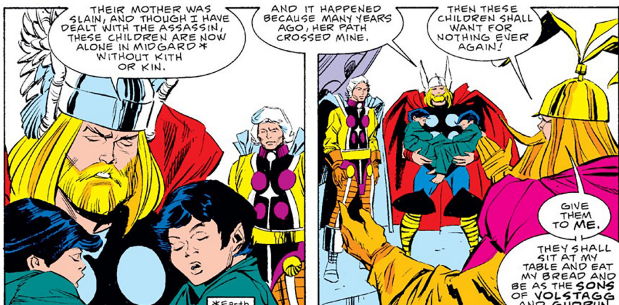
(top left) Volstagg adopts two new sons in *Thor* #372.

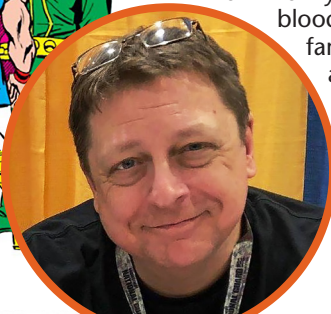
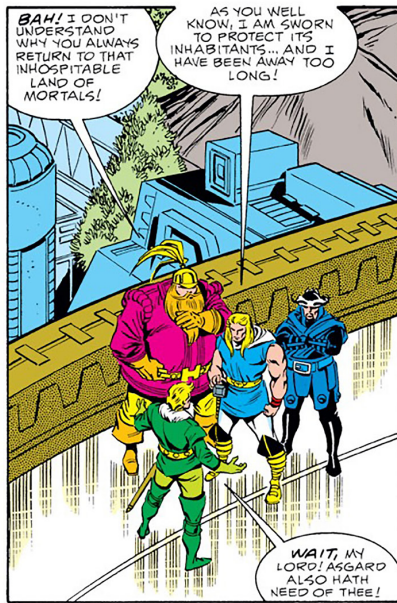
Art by Sal Buscema, Bret Blevins, and Al Williamson.

(bottom left) The Warriors Three get their own ballad in *Marvel Fanfare* #13. Art by Charles Vess.

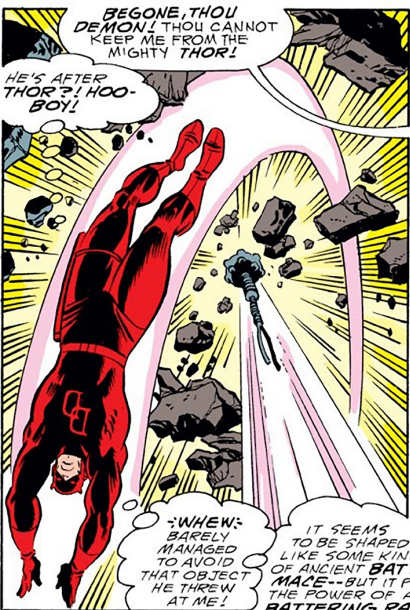
(right) The Warriors Three join the battle against Blastaar in *Avengers* #310. Art by Paul Ryan and Tom Palmer.

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RON FRENZ



The similarities to Lee and Kirby did not stop with the art style. DeFalco and Frenz even bought back the "Tales of Asgard" back-up feature and used it to color in some of the back story of the Warriors Three. DeFalco remembers, "We had a story where Fandral meets Volstagg who was still a formidable warrior then." That story captured the essence of the two warriors before their time as a team. Frenz felt Volstagg had been let down by past creators. "The Thor stories I read as a teenager had lost track of an important aspect of Volstagg and portrayed the character as a pitiable coward begging the question, 'what is he doing hanging with Asgard's finest?' That was incorrect. In Volstagg's first appearance in 'Tales Of Asgard,' Thor makes it clear that Volstagg was indeed the Lion of Asgard." DeFalco and Frenz made a point to show that Volstagg should be more than just comic relief with constant strong appearances during their run demonstrating his bravery in the revitalized "Tales of Asgard" feature, as well as the main title in solo tales and with Fandral and Hogun.

Volstagg was not the only warrior to shine under the light of DeFalco and Frenz. Hogun was front and center in a multi-part story where he faced off against Daredevil in *Thor* #392 (June 1988). DeFalco says, "I guess we had a thing for Daredevil" and the readers were treated to a Marvel house-style brawl where two heroes slug it out against each other on the city streets. The fight is resolved when Hogun the Grim is shot out of the sky by the police unit assisting Thor.

On the splash page of *Thor* #396 (Oct. 1989), the reader is greeted with a classic Silver Age splash page of Thor lying on a hospital bed giving Hogun blood. The scene certainly made any Thor fan smile and DeFalco told *BI*, "That was all Ron. He was a freaking genius"

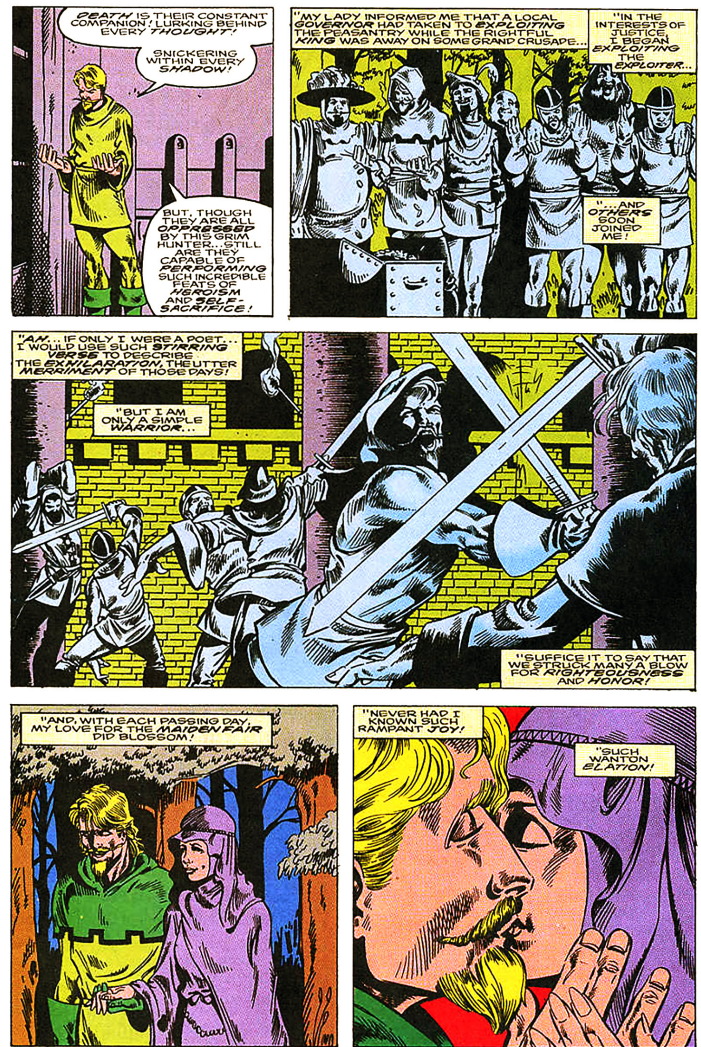
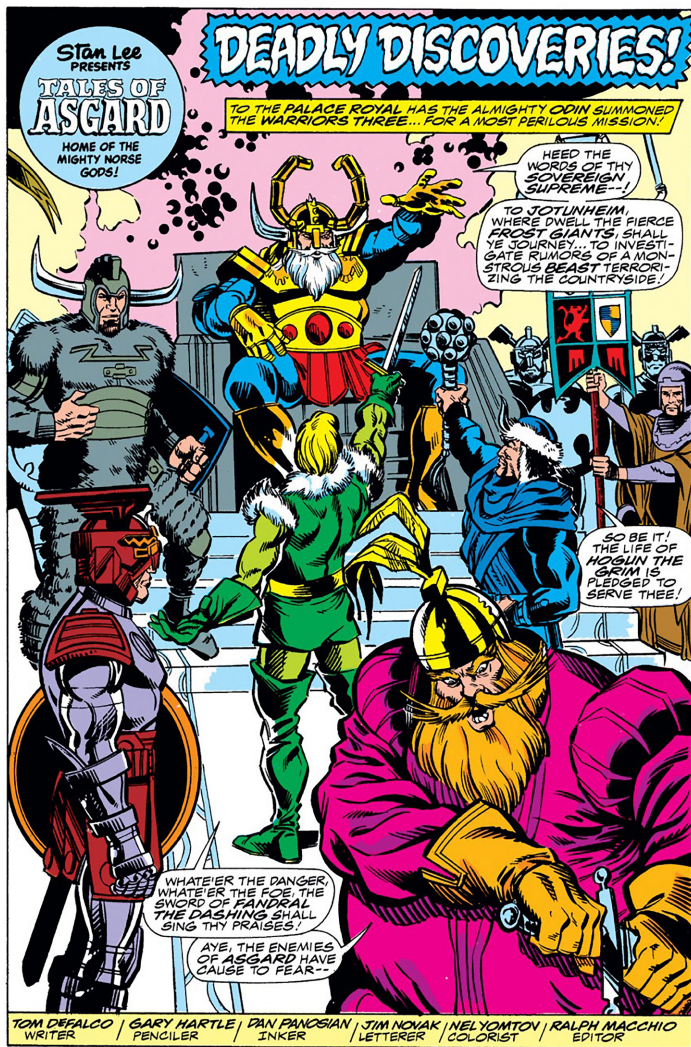
Fandral also had his moment thanks to DeFalco and Frenz. Fandral's connection to Errol Flynn's role of Robin Hood was always subtext with his dashing, swashbuckling style and his green outfit. But in *Thor* spin off *Thunderstrike* Vol. 1 #18 (Mar. 94), within the pages of the "Tales of Asgard" back-up, we see that Fandral was actually the inspiration for the Robin Hood myth as he recounts his adventures in Sherwood Forest

and his lost love Marian. Amidst all the countless battles Fandral had fought, this touching back-up tale showed a tender side of the Warrior never seen before. What could have come across as campy and forced, a Marvel hero filling the shoes of a legend, actually honors the noble Fandral. Frenz laughs as he remembers. "I was the one who suggested Fandral spent some eventful time in Sherwood Forest, so don't blame DeFalco."

It was clear that 30 years after their introduction that the Warriors Three still had a place in the heart of

(top) Friends plan an adventure in *Thor* #386. Art by Ron Frenz and Brett Breeding. (bottom) An addled Hogun battles Daredevil in *Thor* #392. Art by Ron Frenz and Al Milgrom.

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many creators. DeFalco sums up his feelings for the heroes. "The Warriors Three were important and unique because each one reflected different aspect of Thor, which is the function of all supporting characters." Frenz also says, "I was proud of and happy with all of our handling of the Warriors Three, primarily concerning Volstagg." The Warriors Three were so firmly established in the Thor mythos that their presence in the pages of Marvel comics was assured and their adventures would continue on.

### THE BATTLES GO ON

As the amount of comic books expanded in the '90s with superhero titles becoming more popular and comic book shops popping up on each corner, the need for characters capable of doing more than just filling the pages was at a premium. Marvel had plenty of characters ready to go, and so the Warriors Three made their rounds in the main Thor title as well as others. A fitting turn in the Peter David run of the Incredible Hulk Vol. 1 # 422 (Oct. 1994) is a gorgeous showcase for both David's incisive and reverent story and Garry Frank's art, easily up to the task of displaying the heroes at their finest. Countless adventures continued for the Warrior Three and while their individual personalities still shine through, it was fighting alongside Thor that they truly excelled. A perfect example of Warriors Three at their glory is in the "Dark Wars" saga of Dan Jurgen's Thor Vol. 2 #12 (June 1999) as they break out of an infernal prison, weakened and near death (note the shockingly thin Volstagg). John Romita Jr.'s pencils capture the triumphant Warriors doing what they do best, fighting alongside their brother Thor against unstoppable forces, yet coming out victorious. JR JR's muscular and vibrant art

(left) Odin sends the Warriors Three on a quest in a "Tales of Asgard" tale in Thor #420. Art by Gary Hartle and Dan Panosian. (right) So that's Robin Hood.

Thunderstrike #18 art by Patrick Olliffe and Al Milgrom.

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suiting the Warriors Three well, reinforcing that Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg belong in the same panels as Thor.

The Warrior Three's next big spotlight was in the 2005 six-issue miniseries, Thor: Blood Oath by writer Michael Avon Oeming (Powers, Dynamite's Red Sonja) and Scott Kolins (Flash, Excalibur). Blood Oath had Thor and his most faithful companions playing in the deep end of the mythological pool questing for ancient artifacts and meeting other culture's pantheons of gods after the Warriors Three are found guilty of the murder of a giant. The group must collect these items or face death themselves. Oeming was another insightful writer and teamed with Kolins' rich and atmospheric art, the Warriors Three are given a display worthy of their stature. Like other writers before him, Oeming does not stray too far off book. Volstagg was impetuous and hungry, Hogun was explosive and angry, and Fandral was flashy and ever the ladies' man. This tale is reminiscent of Zelenetz and Vess' Marvel Fanfare work twenty years earlier. The story has fairy tale elements wrapped in stunning artwork and pitch perfect characterizations. Watching the Warriors Three triumph and fail alongside Thor, not in brief melodramas like Lee and

Kirby's "Tales of Asgard," but in 22 pages stories makes the strongest case yet that Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg are more valuable than ever to Thor and the Marvel Universe.

### WORLDS TO EXPLORE

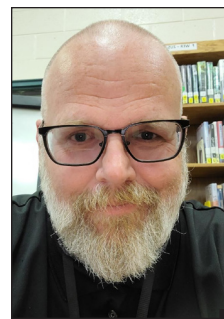
In the early 2010s, the creation and ultimate success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe changed the way readers experience their comics and their favorite heroes. Supporting players like the Warriors Three were forever etched on the Silver Screen and there were opportunities to further explore deeper into these characters. In anticipation of their appearance in 2011 MCU film *Thor*, Marvel placed the Warriors Three in their most high-profile solo adventure to date and handed the task to a creator with a great deal of experience with legendary characters himself, Bill Willingham. The four-issue miniseries titled *Warriors Three* (Jan.-Apr. 2011) was a modern adventure told in typical Marvel 21st century house style of propulsive art and fast-moving

journeys across the entire 616 universe, giving readers tantalizing glimpses of what Marvel comics had to offer. But Willingham, comfortable writing faux mythological characters in modern times as evidenced in his genre warping intelligent and witty *Fables* series, treated the readers to a deeper Warriors Three origin tale as well. The Warriors Three backstory, told in flashbacks, honored the "Tales of Asgard" stories that had come before while filling in the blanks of how Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg became a fighting team. In the miniseries, the Warriors Three battle freight trains and the Fenris Wolf and look equally at home doing both. In a November 2010 interview, Willingham told Newsarama that Marvel approached him with a list of choices for Thor stories." Among the list, they had something to do with Warriors Three, since they show up in the *Thor* movie. It was open-ended, as long as it involved the Warriors Three and showed off their Asgardian take on the Three Musketeers. I leapt at the chance to do that. It seemed tailor made for me. It has a pretty extended flashback to the early days, because there's a lot of the raw, original mythology that feeds into this and ties into the big, terrible incident that happens in modern times that our three heroes have to deal with." Willingham has the reader meet Fandral, Volstagg, and Hogun before they were so dashing, voluminous, and grim. We see them meet Thor and become the Warriors Three as we know them now. Willingham's voice is perfect for this origin story and we get the seeds of the Warriors Three in a Volstagg word balloon as they face the Fenris Wolf when he says to Fandral and Hogun, "Cooperation is the key, I think. Come, let the three of us approach that monster..." The Warrior Three explained 50 years after their first appearance. "The three of us..."

Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg have been ever present in the Thor mythos since their first appearance in 1965. Originally just a collection of fighters, battling alongside Thor, over the years with the help of loving creators, they became the Warriors Three. Loyal and trusted companions of the Thunder God. Backing him up at the gates of Hel and exploring the mythological nine worlds and beyond. Despite the fact that they were created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby as simple, broad characters meant to evoke others, the Warriors Three have seamlessly become part of the Thor legend, so much so that they are almost indistinguishable from classic Norse mythological figures in their actions and grandeur. While even their names, with just a simplistic adjective attached; Fandral the Fair, Hogun the Grim, and Volstagg the Voluminous could indicate a lack of depth, the Warriors Three have proven anything but forgettable and disposable. They have been portrayed as much more than supporting players. Evocatively etched over 60 years and lovingly utilized by creators, the Warriors Three are more than just sidekicks to Thor. Conway, Frenz, DeFalco, and Simonson all expressed similar thoughts to *Back Issue*. The Warriors Three were fun to read and when they had their chance to work with them, the creative teams all approached them the same way. They took the storytelling potential of the Warriors Three and were able to craft unforgettable stories with them. They should be celebrated for their constant presence in Thor titles over the years and for their own ability to overcome the constraints of their origin. More than supporting characters to Thor, the Warriors Three deserve their place in halls of Asgard.

*This writer would like to thank Roy Thomas, Gerry Conway, Ron Frenz, Tom DeFalco, and Walter and Louise Simonson for their assistance in the article. If it was not clear in their comments, each and every creator who I interviewed made a point to express how much fun they had writing the Warriors Three. And it showed.*

*Joseph Norton, better known as the Pete Best of the Warriors Three, was asked to leave the group after his grocery bill exceeded Volstagg's. This is his tenth article for BACK ISSUE.*



(top left) The Warriors Three on the cover of *Thor: Blood Oath* #5. Art by Scott Kolins. (top right) Olivier Copiel and Mark Morales depict our three heroes on a variant cover for 2011's *Thor* #4. (bottom left) Salva Espin's cover to *Warrior Three* #1. (bottom right) Amanda Conner's stunning cover for *Warriors Three* #4.

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# Thank You for Your Support.

# BRONZE AGE LETTERHACKS

by **Brian Martin**



**MICHAEL EURY**



**ROY THOMAS**

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**PETER SANDERSON**



**RALPH MACCHIO**

*I'm sure most of us remember the days when every comic contained a page or two of letters where fans expressed their thoughts about a recent issue. In the **BACK ISSUE** era, it was usually about four issues ago. Many of the names attached to those letters became very familiar, they were published so much. But some of them went a step further and actually entered the comic business.*

We are pleased to welcome to the *BI* round table, four such individuals. Please give a warm welcome to the editor of *TwoMorrrows'* own *Alter-Ego*, Mr. Roy Thomas, long time comic history keeper Peter Sanderson, long time Marvel writer and editor Ralph Macchio, and our own editor emeritus, Michael Eury, as we ask them to take a trip down memory lane with the postman in a round table discussion on their careers as letterhacks, both before and during stardom.

**BACK ISSUE:** *Do you remember what prompted you to actually put pen to paper and write and mail your first letter? Michael, given your prestigious connection to BI, why don't you go first?*

**MICHAEL EURY:** Aquaman! Or rather the absence of Aquaman!

In the early 1970s, DC's Sea King was in limbo after the 1970 cancellation of his title; *Super Friends* had yet to premier. So, in 1972 or so, while in my early teens, I pestered *The Brave and the Bold* editor Murray Boltinoff with hand-written letters begging for a Batman/Aquaman team-up!

**PETER SANDERSON:** I don't recall what motivated me to write my first letter or how many I sent in before one was published. I suppose I saw letters in editor Julie Schwartz's letter pages by regulars like Guy H. Lillian and Irene Vartanoff, and thought, I could do this too.

**RALPH MACCHIO:** There was something that had gone on in one of the Thor books. I was a big continuity guy, of course I still am. And there was a Gerry Conway written issue and he mentioned that it was the trolls that had forged the weapons of Asgard. I recalled from reading my "Tales of Asgard" and committing them to memory, that it was King Eitri of the dwarves. So that initially started me sending in letters, because I sent that to correct him. And I got a No Prize for that, which I still have!

**BI:** *Do you have any idea how many letters you sent before you had one printed?*

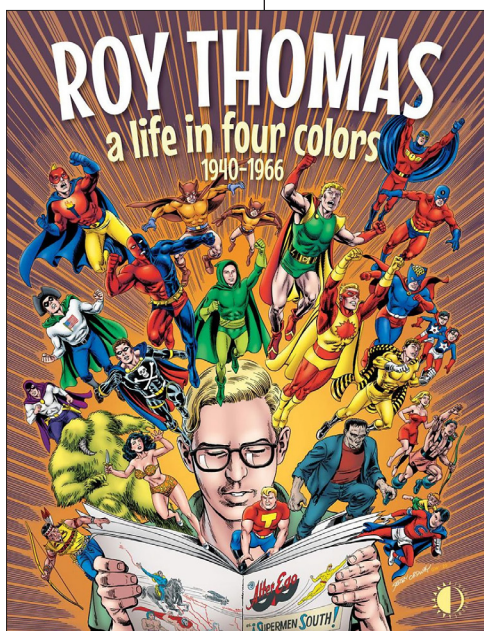
**ROY THOMAS:** Sorry, no. Others may have counted, but I never did. Not a huge amount though, compared to some others. I was busy with the fanzines from 1961 on... and after 1965, working for the comics.

**EURY:** Several, and only to *Brave and Bold* editor Boltinoff, with Batman team-up suggestions. A few times my handwritten signature was illegible to the editor and some of my comments were credited to "Mark Evry" and "Mary Evry"!

**MACCHIO:** Not exactly, but I do recall that I was a big writer of letters to the black and white magazines, too.

(top) You gotta do a lot to win a No Prize. (middle) Peter Sanderson's book, *Marvel Universe*. Cover by John Romita Sr. and John Romita Jr. (bottom) Roy Thomas' autobiography is now available from TwoMorrows. Art by Jerry Ordway.

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**BI:** *How did you feel the first time you saw your letter/name in print? How did you feel as time went on and you had letters published fairly regularly?*

**SANDERSON:** I was of course pleased when I got my first letter in print. It was the first thing I wrote that had ever been published! It was very satisfying to be published regularly in comics letters pages.

**THOMAS:** It was a thrill to see my first letter in print in *Green Lantern* #1. Each subsequent one also made me feel good, of course there's nothing quite like the first time.

**EURY:** I was on Cloud Nine! My first published letter was excerpted in the lettercol of *Brave and Bold* #112 and featured my fanboy-ish appeals for Jack Kirby-created characters teaming with Batman the fact that #112 teamed Batman with Kirby's Mister Miracle might've prompted the editor to include my Kirby cries. Nonetheless, high school student 'Mickey' Eury had his name published in a 'funnybook'!

**MACCHIO:** I was elated and I thought, this is really something special.

**BI:** *Did the fact of having letters printed encourage you to write more?*

**THOMAS:** Sure.

**MACCHIO:** After my first letter, I said, "You know, there's a lot of things going on in the books." As I got older, I looked in the letter columns and there are a lot of things I like in common with the other writers, and I found it fascinating. So, I said, "I'm just gonna do it," and I wound up writing letters all the time to so many of the Marvel books, and they kept getting published.

**EURY:** Not at first. I remember having a *complete* letter printed, not just an excerpted remark, in *Shazam* #25, where I had written to share possible editorial ideas. It wasn't until the early 1980s when my tastes had matured a bit, before I started to write to lettercols again, this time with analyses of the stories I was reading rather than simple fan wishes.

**BI:** *Did you find that you wrote more to the editors that printed your letters?*

**SANDERSON:** The only comics editor I wrote to at first were Julius Schwartz at DC and whoever was doing the letter columns at Marvel.

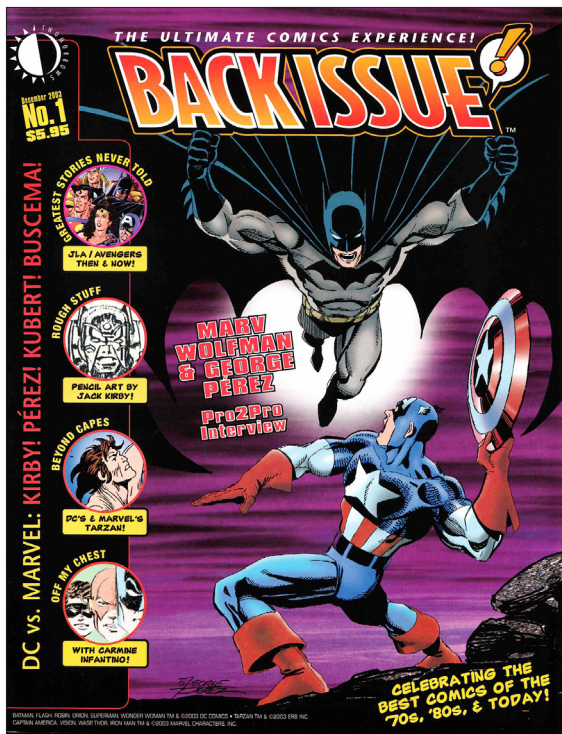
**THOMAS:** Naturally. That's why I wrote more letters to Julius Schwartz's mags than even to Marvel. But I wrote more to Marvel than were printed.

**MACCHIO:** I never used it as an incentive to write to a comic that particularly was the one that would print more of my letters. I would always write when something struck me that I either wanted to compliment them on or critique them on.

**EURY:** My motivation to write was to comment on a story that I was moved by and given my love for team-ups as well as Batman and Superman, I tended to write to Murray Boltinoff and Julius Schwartz the most.

**BI:** *Did you ever have correspondence with a pro or another letter writer due to your printed letters?*

**EURY:** In the early 1980s I began corresponding with other fans through APAs (Amateur Press Alliances). It was through the fabled Legion APA, *Interlac*, where I first met Mark Waid, Tom and Mary Beirbaum, and Colleen Doran, with whom I'd later work at DC.



(top left) Michael Eury created the magazine you're currently reading. Cover by George Perez. (top right) One of Ralph Macchio's writing credits. Cover by John Byrne and Walter Simonson. (bottom) Peter Sanderson and Ralph Macchio's work is included in the *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*. Cover by Ed Hannigan and Joe Rubinstein.

Batman TM & © DC Comics. Captain America TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

**THOMAS:** I don't recall. But it was a letter to Schwartz that led to Julie putting me in touch with Gardner Fox, and then Gardner put me in touch with Jerry Bails... and much flowed from that.

**SANDERSON:** In 1976, Bonnie Wilford, who was then Marvel's letter pages editor, invited me to meet her for lunch, and she brought along her then boyfriend, Chris Claremont, who loved my letters. That was the start of my meeting comics pros around my age, and other letter writing comic fans. Eventually this led to Marv Wolfman and Len Wein inviting me to do research for what eventually became series like *Crisis* and *Who's Who*, and Mark Gruenwald inviting me to write for the *Marvel Universe Handbook*.

**MACCHIO:** I did. Peter Gillis, Peter Sanderson here, and Mark Gruenwald. Also, Dean Mullaney.

**BI:** *Did you have any contact with professionals outside the letters pages before you entered the field? Did anyone recognize you from your letters?*

**SANDERSON:** Yes, other comics pros and fans did recognize my name in the 1970s, and I had a good reputation then for my knowledge of comics history, and I still do. From time to time, I still encounter someone who remembers my old letters.

**BI:** *Did having letters printed give you the incentive to try to work in the industry, or encourage your ambitions if you already did?*

**EURY:** Yes indeed! By the mid-1980s I was determined to break into the comics business as a writer and editor and soon shifted from writing letters to comics to writing about comics for the fan press.

**THOMAS:** I don't think the letters did all that much to encourage me. I still felt it unlikely that a guy in Missouri was going to end up working in comics if he didn't move to NYC and try to get a job. It never occurred to me that one would come seeking me out, courtesy of Mort Weisinger.

**BI:** *What sort of reaction did you have to editorial replies that were printed along with certain letters? Would you take them to heart? Would you take them personally?*

**THOMAS:** Yes, because remember, there were also letters between Julie and me that weren't printed, so we eventually had a bit of a personal relationship.



**MACCHIO:** I was definitely never offended by what anyone had written in response. I understood that they needed to basically keep things positive, and I was pleased they would print letters where I was critical of things at Marvel. The only times I was a little miffed, and just a little, was if I had written something heartfelt and thought I had made a good point, and they would just pass it off. But that would happen very seldom.

**SANDERSON:** Well, back in the 1960s and 1970s, I did respect the opinions expressed by the other leading letter pages writers.

**BI:** *How seriously did you think any suggestions you made as a letter writer would be taken? How much did you consider the opinions of letter writers when you were an editor?*

**THOMAS:** I know one of my letters to Julie led to the use of the Three Dimwits in a *Flash* story. In most cases, I suspect that what I suggested, others suggested too. I'm convinced Jerry Bails' suggestion of a 6-inch revived Atom led directly to the same at DC, whatever Julie claimed for protective reasons. I got a couple of story, or at least sequence, ideas

(top) Macchio corrected an issue he had with the Eternals and the Celestials in *Thor* #300. Cover by Keith Pollard.  
 (middle) Mickey Eury gets a mention on the letters page for *The Brave and the Bold* #112. (bottom) Mickey Eury strikes again in *Shazam* #25.

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Anybody for team-ups? To Jon Garceau, Grand Locks, N.D., and others who ask for a Batman-Tarzan duo, no can do because of contractual arrangements . . . Besides Mr. Miracle and The Demon, Mickey Eury, Concord, N.C., wants other Kirby characters like Kamandi, Sandman, and the Boy Commandos

Dear E.N.B.:

To say the least, I am disappointed with SHAZAM's new quarterly/reprint format. I do think there is hope for the Big Red Cheese's survival, so I'm listing a few suggestions which I hope you'll consider seriously.

DC's best bet would be to create two Captain Marvels! The first step would be to change the current SHAZAM title into THE SHAZAM FAMILY. In it you could reprint more classic adventures of Captain Marvel, Mary Marvel and Captain Marvel, Jr. So the original Big Red Cheese would appear in THE SHAZAM FAMILY.

So what of the second Captain Marvel? He would appear in an all-new comic entitled Shazam-Isis Adventures. I hear National has purchased the comic rights to Isis, so why not start a new Isis strip? The Shazam-Isis mag would star TV's modern Captain Marvel, complete with a long-haired Billy Batson and his Mentor; and Isis would star as the mag's back feature. And the adventures would be set on Earth-One, so Captain Marvel could finally meet Superman, and possibly join the Justice League.

Mickey Eury, East Carolina U., Greenville, N.C.

from readers. I acknowledged a couple, including a Cindy Ward, in the last *Conan* I wrote before leaving Marvel in 1980.

**EURY:** By the time I became an editor in the late 1980s, lettercols were beginning a slow fading act. I remember taking great joy in answering letters at Comico and DC, particularly the latter, where I felt I was following in the footsteps of E. Nelson Bridwell when responding to letters in *Superman* and *Detective Comics*. But by then, comics' content was being shaped either by superstar creators or editorial committee, so any suggestions coming from readers were unlikely to be considered, particularly as companies became more concerned about allegations of plagiarism.

**BI:** Do you feel that the ideas you expressed when you were a letter writer, in terms of what made a quality comic or what interested you, were the ones you followed up on when you became a pro?

**MACCHIO:** Definitely. The things that occupied me were characterization and continuity. I carried that through, especially with my buddy Mark Gruenwald, we wanted everything to fit. In fact, those are the things that, when Mark and I became editors we followed through on, numerous times.

For example. I was a big fan of Jack Kirby's *Eternals*, and I had a problem with the *Eternals* and the *Celestials* all being part of the Marvel Universe. And I wrote in to state my case that I thought they should be outside, in a separate reality. That started a big campaign where, once my letter was published, many, many people wrote in taking either side of the argument.

I remember that when we were helping Roy Thomas out on *Thor*, we would actually alternate writing a few issues and we passed a lot of ideas along, not that he needed us for that, but we were hired on to work with him because he was on the West Coast. I had passed along the idea that the Destroyer was actually put on Earth by Odin to face the final threat, which was the *Celestials*. It just hit me one night because I was reading the first issue that the Destroyer appeared in.

So when Mark and I would up having to write issue 300 of *Thor*, we were talking and we came to the conclusion that, no matter what is going on right now, even if Spider-Man takes down Doc Ock a dozen times, or Iron Man the Melter, it doesn't matter because overshadowing it all is the 50 year judgement of Arishem, who's standing on twin pylons in the Andes and he's got his thumb ready to go up or down to decide humanity's fate. So, we said look, let's use 300 to somehow have Arishem find mankind worthy and we'd eliminate the threat. Gerry Conway had created twelve Young Gods when he was writing the book, and we brought them in and we had Mother Earth Gaia show them to Arishem and he gave thumbs up and he took the twelve that showed mankind's potential and off he went. So, it kind of came full circle to when I was complaining about the *Eternals* being in the Marvel Universe to actually being able to resolve that situation.

**EURY:** Yes. My tastes were shaped as a reader, and as an editor and writer I leaned towards those types of projects whenever possible—generally superheroes. It was no surprise to some that this former *Interlac* contributor became an editor of *Legion of Super-Heroes*. BUT... I had projects assigned to me in other genres, and when working on those series I developed a deeper appreciation for comic books as an art form... while never forgetting my childhood passion for superhero adventures.

**BI:** Do you think your letter writing had any effect on you entering the field? That is, do you think there was any recognition of your name when you began?

**THOMAS:** I mentioned about Schwartz, Fox, and Bails. I know Joe Kubert recognized me when he met me at DC, from a combination of fanzines and letters.

**SANDERSON:** I think of my letter pages letters as the start of my becoming a comic book historian and critic. So, my work today, including my current Substack column, is an outgrowth of my letter writing days.

**MACCHIO:** Absolutely. I was at a convention, I was not a convention goer, but I went to the one in New York in '75. I met Don McGregor on the way there. I'd written a lot of letters to Killraven and the Black Panther, both of which Don was writing, and he went, "Wow, I remember all your letters. Hey, hang around for a while." Later on, he said, "You know, it's early enough, I'm leaving, and I was going back up to the office. Would you like to come up to Marvel and get a tour?" And I thought, wow. I was in graduate school, and I never had an intention of working for Marvel. I didn't see myself as a writer and I didn't know much about the staff. But I thought, well, this is a great opportunity.

So, Don took me up there, and Chris Claremont was there. Chris at this point was just starting. He was beginning on *X-Men* and *Iron Fist*, and he was also the editor of *FOOM*. So, he also said to me, "Hey, I've read a lot of your letters. I know you can write, I've been looking for someone to interview Roy Thomas about *Conan*, then do an article."

So, it was those two things that got my foot in the door. I would come up on multiple Fridays, and Roy, you actually helped me, because it took a while for you to sit down with me for the interview, that meanwhile, I'm up in the office, hanging out, I'm meeting people like Steve Gerber, Steve Englehart, Doug Moench, and I started to get friendly with them. Then John Warner was promoted to editor of the magazine line and he said, "Ralph, I know you're in graduate school, but I need an assistant. Maybe you could work part time." So, opportunities opened up and I just said fine. I got on staff in '76 and stayed for thirty-five years.

**BI:** This one is for Michael specifically. BACK ISSUE almost always has a letters page. Did it make you feel nostalgic when you were choosing letters to run, and did you still look for the same qualities in a letter that you hoped you included in yours when you were writing?

**EURY:** Having helmed *BI* for 21 years before retiring, I never grew tired of the mag's "Back Talk" column. It harkened back to the era when the lettercol was a publication staple—an essential link between readers and editor. Readers' opinions carried great weight with me, and on several occasions readers' recommendations became an issue's theme or the subject of an article. And on a handful of occasions—yours included Brian—a *BI* letter writer's clever missives led to writing assignments.

**BI:** Do you think comics are missing out by not printing letters pages anymore, or do other venues make up for it?

**EURY:** My nostalgic side urges me to answer "yes," since lettercols were such a big part of my past as a reader and editor. But letter writing has fallen out of favor and there is no shortage of social media allowing readers to chime in, so I suspect the lettercol is a thing of the past.

**MACCHIO:** I am glad that there are a number of books at Marvel that do have letters pages back, because I think that personal touch comes across.

**BI:** Wonderful. That is about all the time we have. I would again like to thank Michael Eury, Ralph Macchio, Peter Sanderson, and Roy Thomas for sharing their memories of fighting it out in the trenches of the comic book letter columns.

The author of this article has lots more information about the well-known letterhacks of the Bronze Age as well as a ton of information that was discussed in them. If you would be interested in another article or book on the subject please let *BI* editor Roger Ash know.

Brian Martin is an office manager who lives in Oakville, Ontario, Canada. He never wrote a letter to a comic, but he did write some letters to BACK ISSUE, which led to him writing this article and many others.



\* \* \*

Dear Editor,

Although I am well past what is normally considered the "comic book age," I still find time to enjoy a few of the ones you at DC publish, especially *WONDER WOMAN*, *WORLD'S FINEST COMICS*, *THE FLASH*, and now *GREEN LANTERN*, if, as I hope, you star him in a magazine of his own. I learned to read on the old *FLASH COMICS* and especially *ALL STAR COMICS*, so I have a strong attachment to some of its characters, and am especially glad that you have revived *FLASH* and *GREEN LANTERN*, even if their new costumes are somewhat different.

Just a few suggestions concerning *GL*, if you don't mind:

(1) I believe he needs a friend and confidant. Not necessarily a woman or a boy—but someone. What about reviving his old side-kick Doiby Dickles, of the former *GREEN LANTERN* book, perhaps as a trusted (if bumbling) mechanic.

(2) I personally would like to see also the character of the *HARLEQUIN*, or someone like her, in the new comic. She would be a rival of Carol Ferris and also an interesting "friendly enemy" to *GL*.

(3) I also think *GL* needs a fairly regular enemy, such as *BATMAN'S JOKER* or *SUPERMAN'S LUTHOR*. Perhaps a *SHOCKMAN* or some such, in a yellow costume so that *GL's* power ring cannot touch him, and who can send out electrical charges which rival the green beams of the power ring. I think an occasional bout between two characters of this type would be very interesting. If not this, then bring back the *INVISIBLE DESTROYER* (from the 2nd *GL-SHOWCASE* issue), at least.

That's about all for now. Again I hope *GREEN LANTERN* soon appears in a regular comic of his own. He's a great character, especially since you have changed him so that his power ring cannot effect anything yellow.

Roy Thomas,  
Jackson, Missouri

(It's made us very happy to hear from so many old-time readers of the original *GREEN LANTERN*, and we welcome you all back into the fold! Your letter, Roy, has been well thought out, and we are considering your recommendations. Be assured that we have some terrific villains warming up in the bullpen—and we'll keep signalling them into action to make things tough for *GL*!—Editor)

\* \* \*

Roy Thomas comments on *Green Lantern* #1.

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## SIDEBAR - NEVER MAKE A SAINT OF ME

One of the people whose name you could not fail to notice if you read a comic letter column in the 1980s was Delmo "The Saint" Walters. You have also seen his name recently in *BI* letter columns as well as sister publication *Retro-Fan*. *BACK ISSUE* sat down with Mr. Walters to find out what it's like to be a world-famous letterhack.

**BACK ISSUE:** *Do you remember what prompted you to actually put pen to paper and write and mail your first letter?*

**DELMO "THE SAINT" WALTERS:** I don't remember my first letter, but I remember my first printed letter, in an issue of *Wonder Woman* about Animal Man's appearance in #267. I had commented on his less than super heroic physique.

**BI:** *How did you feel the first time you saw your letter/name in print? And how did it feel as time went on when you had letters published fairly regularly?*

**WALTERS:** It was a great feeling the first time! When they were published regularly it felt like they liked what I had to say.

**BI:** *Or at the very least thought others would be interested! Did the fact that you had letters printed encourage you to write more? Did you find that you wrote to certain editors more than others because they tended to print your letters?*

**WALTERS:** Once a few letters were printed, I wrote even more. But I wrote letters to all and sundry. I wrote letters to authors whose books I read, magazines, and occasionally newspapers regarding articles. I even wrote a letter to Gary Trudeau about a *Doonsebury* Sunday I particularly liked. He was nice enough to send me a reply.

**BI:** *That's cool. Did you ever have any ambitions regarding a career in the industry and did having letters printed give you any hope where that was concerned?*

**WALTERS:** My dream was to be a comic artist and I thought I might end up being one of those lucky few to go from letter writer to pro. Unfortunately, dreams die hard.

**BI:** *At least you can say you had your name in a lot of comics. Were you conscious of the style and quality of your writing when you began, and did it change when you began to have letters published?*

**WALTERS:** I probably wrote better the more I wrote.

**BI:** *What sort of reactions did you have to the editorial replies that were printed?*

**WALTERS:** I liked it when the editors replied within the letters page. Most replies were serious or cool. I wasn't crazy about the flippant ones.

**BI:** *When I would read letters pages I wasn't either. I wanted to know the answer to the question that was asked, too. Did you or do you feel any connection to the industry since you had so many letters printed? Does it make you feel like you are a part of comics history?*

**WALTERS:** I felt like I was a little part of the industry. It feels like I have some sort of legacy nowadays as I've been contacted by people on Facebook asking if I'm "that" Delmo (The Saint) Walters Jr. A few of my friendships were made because of

letters printed in the comics or the *Comics Buyers Guide*. A friend pointed out that I was listed in a Wikipedia entry on letter writers as I was one of the ones who got very many published.

**BI:** *Did you ever receive any personal replies from editors or creators? Other than Gary Trudeau of course.*

**WALTERS:** I got a few black and white preview copies of upcoming issues from editors who wanted a letter for the first issue of a miniseries.

**BI:** *There did seem to be a few people who received a lot of those. Did you ever meet an editor or creator at a convention or signing and have them recognize you from your letters?*

**WALTERS:** Yes. In fact, I introduced myself to Robert Greenberger during a college visit to the DC offices in the middle '80s. We butted heads over DC's *Star Trek* comic during Tom Sutton's run. I wasn't a fan of his lesser actor likenesses.

**BI:** *For the most part your letters were quite short. Were they written that way or edited? Did you spend a lot of time thinking before you wrote?*

**WALTERS:** They were written that way. I'm not very verbose. I used to have trouble in high school doing 500 word essays and such. I pretty much just fired off what came to mind.

**BI:** *As well, you often wrote letters asking questions. Did you always write that sort of thing or did you offer criticism as well and the printing was merely hit and miss?*

**WALTERS:** Funny you should ask. Dean Haspiel, who was a high school classmate and is a friend, once told me during a visit to Marvel back then, my name was on a list of fans whose letters wouldn't be printed because they were too critical! Thankfully that didn't last long.

**BI:** *Yes, or we wouldn't be having this conversation. The response to a letter you wrote to the Hawkman Special was not printed, but a comment was made that they loved the envelope. Do you know what that entailed, and did you do it often?*

**WALTERS:** At some point it occurred to me that if I drew art on the envelope my letter was sent in, it might catch someone's attention when sorting through the pile. Most of the time I copied a panel or pose from within the comic I was writing about, but I also did original work on the envelopes.

**BI:** *Do you still read comics?*

**WALTERS:** I do still read comics, though not as much as I used to.

**BI:** *How do you compare them to those published back when you used to write letters?*

**WALTERS:** Comics are getting more expensive, and the seemingly constant reboots/restarting at #1 are getting on my nerves. In some ways the comics I used to read when I was writing letters were better.

**BI:** *Amen to that. Do you read a lot of things besides comics?*

**WALTERS:** I'm a voracious reader. Besides comics I read books, magazines, newspapers (though not as much as I used to), and nowadays online articles and blogs.

**BI:** *I'm right with you there again. Okay, one final question. Does the nickname, "The Saint" have anything to do with your writing, or was it preexisting?*

**WALTERS:** Preexisting. I had gotten into the Roger Moore series as it was being syndicated in NY on a local station while I was in high school and friends started calling me that, so I included it in the letters.

**BI:** *Thanks for taking the time to do this Delmo.*

**WALTERS:** I was happy to.



DELMO WALTERS

Dear Sirs,  
THE INCREDIBLE HULK #253 was fantastic! Plenty of action and the Hulk to the rescue! Wow!

Delmo Walters  
(No Address Given)

An early letter from Delmo Walters in *Incredible Hulk* #260.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

**TWOMORROWS AD PAGE**

# BACK TALK

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## MR. THOMAS CHIMES IN

Mostly enjoyed Jarrod Buttery's piece on the "Kree-Skrull War," but I do have a few quibbles I felt I'd pass along.

While I suppose a few paragraphs on the origin of the human race via the Celestials might deserve a mention in *any* article that appears in *BACK ISSUE* that involves humans (or the Inhumans or Skrulls or the Kree or whomever), Jack Kirby's *Eternals* saga, while I rather enjoyed it, had zero to do with the "Kree-Skrull War," since that comic wasn't published until several years afterward.

In the "War" issues, having always felt the name "the Supreme Intelligence" just looked like a common English adjective and noun capitalized, I altered that entity's name, in what became perhaps his most important appearance in the Marvel Universe, to "the Intelligence Supreme." I've always regretted that subsequent writers didn't note the improvement, but that's their business. I was disappointed to see all those references to "the Supreme Intelligence" in the article, though, as if my version of the name used over those several issues was some sort of typo.

Some sort of minor error—whether mine or Jarrod's, I'm not sure—creeps in on page 16 with the reference to my teenage begun-novel *Between Two Worlds* and its influences. I'm quoted as saying I wrote those pages a year or two before *This Island Earth* was "filmed"—but of course that's wrong; I wrote it a year or before Raymond Jones' novel was *published* (in 1955), not *filmed*... it didn't become a movie (and not much of one, in my opinion) until the late '50s. Not a big deal but I wanted to straighten out the record.

At this point, I hardly feel a burning need to correct the years-ago statement of Neal's that while drawing *Avengers* #93, he suddenly "remembered Jack Kirby's first Skrull story." As I've pointed out before, Neal "remembered" it because, the first time we discussed the "War," walking along the street in Manhattan on the way to get a spot of lunch, I told him about it, and the fact that in *FF* #2 Stan and Jack had turned only *three* of the four involved Skrulls into cows, which left one still roaming free on Earth... and I had already established Senator Craddock, who was going to turn out to be that "fourth Skrull" later in the story. I can still see Neal stopping short on the street, doing as close a thing to a surprised double-take as I've ever seen in a person... then we walked on. It was, perhaps, Neal's precise notion (as he says) to have the other three Skrulls re-enter the story-line as three of the *FF* again, but I am as sure as I can be of anything that, until I mentioned the cow-related events of *FF* #2 to Neal that day on the street, he was entirely unaware of them. Well, anyway, we made a pretty good team, though probably sometimes we were a bit like that



description of Rhett and Scarlett in *Gone with the Wind*: "mules in horses' harness."

Anyway, nothing above is meant to detract from the fine job that Jarrod did on the article. Reading it was a good refresher... most of the details have faded from my mind over the past 55 years.

Best wishes,

Roy Thomas

*Thank you for setting the record straight. Glad that you mostly enjoyed the article. It made me want to grab a collection and read it again.*

## VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

I just figured out why your *Rivals* issue was even more fun than usual. Variety and range. Different companies and genres. Not too much of any one thing.

I enjoyed the look at the Marvel poker games as a bemused outsider. Never read any of them. Probably didn't want to breathe in the second-hand cartoon cigar smoke. It *does* sound like a clever way to show characterization and better define the heroes' personalities and their relationships. Yet... with temper-prone brawlers like the Thing, Hulk, Nick Fury, and Wolverine, what happens when they have a bad hand or suspect someone is cheating?

The look at the Thing vs. the Hulk battles was fun, too, though I was surprised how many times that grudge match was restaged. Guess it's a regular favorite like Ragnarok or an annual Galactus invasion. More likely, it's something that prompts interest, and sales, for a new audience that hasn't yet encountered the concept.

I can see it more novel and necessary early on. Then it was a rare event, the introduction of similar characters via punches rather than handshakes. Their first slugfest in #12 wasn't to my taste. Took too long to set up, had a wimpy villain, and concluded too fast. Nice cover, though. The rematch, in #25 and 26, was a vast improvement. Got right into it and the Hulk seemed to be winning. Yet, as these things go, Ben still got his glory and admiration, regardless, for perseverance against a stronger foe.

The same would apply to the Flash vs. Superman races. There it seemed either virtual ties, or best-ten-out-of-nineteen track meets.

As the article pointed out, the victor almost had to be the Flash. His comic wouldn't sell better with the revised line, "The second-fastest man alive."

Superman has everything else going for him. He doesn't need the speed trophy, too.

Gladstone Gander and Reggie Mantle make good opponents, initiating conflict, because of good luck or bad morals, respectively. It makes us root for the unlucky duck or typical teenager, instead.

My preference, here, was the "Kree-Skrull War." Missed it at the time of release but enjoyed it, decades later, in collected trade paperback form. It was interesting to see the existing concepts tied together for a more cohesive whole.

Here, I especially loved your reminders, with the Silver Age originals, of some of these concepts and appearances. Particularly of note to me was the Super Skrull's appearance in 1968's *Captain Marvel* title. At the time, I don't think I made the precise connection. It seemed more a convenient existing villain rather than a set-up, conscious or not, of a potential galactic clash to come.

The only little addition you could have noted was the Skrull race's terse guest appearance in *FF* #48, a mighty force fearing the approach of cosmic forces such as the herald or his master.

The "Kree-Skrull War" was even more impressive to me in that it pre-dates *Star Wars* and used the Avengers in new and interesting ways. A significant accomplishment, still.

How lucky that when Reed turned the Skrulls to cows, initially, back in *FF* #2, Johnny didn't decide to have a barbecue.

Finally, I had a great laugh with *Terry's Toons*. A different type of page, with a clever punchline ("Swing" with Scooter) and a wonderful drawing. Reminded me of a cross between *Detective* #27 and *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (the initially unused Ditko rendition). With Adam West's Batman so popular, at that time, it's something that DC could have actually done.

However, other than Clayface and, potentially, Catwoman, I got my lowest score ever in attempting to recognize his many other background players. Hope you're grading on the curve, Roger.

Joe Frank

PS Also, though this issue was long in production before Sal Buscema's passing, it still was a nice tribute to him seeing his art on the cover. That leaves, what, five Silver Age Marvel talents left with us (Lieber, Thomas, Windsor-Smith, Steranko, and Brunner)?

*I'm glad you enjoyed the variety of stories in the issue, Joe. That's something I try to do with every issue, but some are more*

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Dr. Radium © 2025 Scott Saavedra. BACK ISSUE TM & © TwoMorrrows.



*successful than others. Next issue, for example, features Dr. Leslie Thompkins, Dr. Bong, and Dr. Radium. Definitely not your usual assortment of doctors.*

## JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

Just a quick note to say that the last couple of issues of *BACK ISSUE* have been terrific—that's the usual standard, of course, but terrific in an all-new, all-different way that I think is worth calling out.

First, I love the way the article topics have drifted a bit from "comprehensive" to interesting niche. The Thing's poker game piece is a great example. Instead of a miniseries deep dive or a survey of character appearances, we get a fun look at something a little more offbeat. That's the kind of editorial framing I can get behind.

Second, I appreciate the push (the rivalry issue again) away from the Big Two. *BI* has done terrific work on Archie, Harvey, and others over the years, but lately it feels like you're really pushing that boundary even further—and that's a great thing. It really helps expand the scope for readers. There's great stuff to read out there and a lot of us count on *BI* to expand our want lists and not just cycle through what's already in our long boxes.

Third, sure, it's Bronze Age all the way, but if that upcoming Spider-Girl cover is any indication, I'm ready for the *BI* treatment to push into the '90s. It's time.

None of this is meant as a slight against Eury's run, which was amazing. But I'm glad *BI* has the editor it needs for right now.

Dr. Nate Pritts

*Goodness! I'm blushing. I'm very glad that you've found recent issues so enjoyable. Honestly, many of the things you highlight that you like weren't really intentional on my part. The real reason is that Michael Eury and I are different people, so things will change simply because of that. Michael, for example, knows way more about DC than I do. I got into DC with New Teen Titans #1. Anything before that has been because I've read back issues, collections, and comic histories. John Morrow and the great crew of writers that we have really helped me out there.*

*I'm happy you liked the floating poker game article because, as a reader, I loved when that popped up unexpectedly in a comic. The same goes for the X-Men baseball games, which is something I'd like to cover in the future.*

*The '80s were a great time to be a comics reader. Not only were Marvel and DC putting out great stuff, but you also had Dark Horse, Malibu, Eclipse, Comico,*

*First, Fantagraphics, Kitchen Sink, and so many others along with self-publishers. It's important to me to have *BI* reflect that variety. But enough rambling. Time for the sneak previews.*

*Next issue: Comics are filled with doctors, but we want to know: "Is There a Doctor in the House?" Find out in *BACK ISSUE* #170, where you'll discover examinations of Dr. Mid-Nite, Dr. Light, Doctor Druid, Dr. Bong, Dr. Radium, and more. Featuring the work of ROY THOMAS, TODD MCFARLANE, GEORGE PEREZ, DENNY O'NEIL, STEVE GERBER, GENE COLAN, STEVE ENGLEHART, SCOTT SAAVEDRA, MATT WAGNER, JOHN K. SNYDER III, and others, behind a MATT WAGNER cover.*

*Don't ask—just *BI*!*  
Roger Ash, editor

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