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BACK seat driver

by Roger Ash

Join me on a trip inside my head for a glimpse at how my brain works. Please wipe your feet on the way out.

I was perusing a list of characters and topics that we've covered in *BACK ISSUE*, hoping to find inspiration for a theme for an issue. I soon noticed that not many villains had been covered. The list ranged from some of the biggest villains in comics to some that seem to be eternal punching bags. This seemed like a good theme to me, Mr. Morrow agreed, and we were off and running.

A good villain helps define a hero. I would argue that Superman needs someone like Lex Luthor, Batman needs the Joker, Spider-Man needs the Green Goblin, and on and on. A good villain makes for a good hero. There's likely a reason that there's no comic book called *The Amazing Meter Maid*. People whose parking meter expires don't make for compelling villains.

But Lex Luthor? Now, there's a compelling villain. There's a reason that villains like the Juggernaut, Killer Frost, the Scorpion, and Dormammu keep coming back. They challenge our favorite heroes and reveal their true worth. Add to that list The Royal Flush Gang and the Sphinx and it adds up to a solid issue. While Lex Luthor is featured in this issue, the article only covers his pre-*Crisis* appearances. His career as a villain has been too long to cover it in its entirety in this issue. There will eventually be an article on the post-*Crisis* Luthor. You have my word on that.

So, let's talk about a few things in this issue aside from the villains. First why it's called the "Big Bad Issue." You may think it's because of the phrase "big bad" which originated with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. While Buffy and the Scooby Gang face various villains throughout the season, there is one big bad in the background, often controlling things, that our heroes must face in the season finale. And it would make perfect sense for you to think that's where the theme for the issue came from. Heck, even I like the connection. But it wasn't my initial thought. I went much older and much more primal. The name for the theme came from the first villain I remember hearing about as a child, the Big Bad Wolf. If you prefer the explanation that it came from the *Buffy* phrase, I can live with that.

At 172 issues in, we have a new department, "BACK to the Drawing Board." Have you ever tried to make mashed potatoes but not boiled the potatoes long enough? (Stick with me on this. It'll all make sense.) It's hard, crunchy, and always stops a bit short of mashed potatoes. Five more minutes in boiling water and the potatoes would have been perfect, but you were in a hurry. The characters in "BACK to the Drawing Board" are the crunchy potatoes. They should have had a bit more time before they hit the page. Our first installment features the Batman villain, the Ten-Eyed Man. We've got more heroes and villains to feature in upcoming issues. We hope you have as much fun with these articles as we are. Don't take them too seriously, these are done with fun in mind.

The Killer Frost article is wonderful, but it also makes me a bit choked up. Gerry Conway was interviewed about Killer Frost weeks before his passing. While I can't verify it, this may well have been the last interview he did. I am happy that he was able to share his remembrances of the creation of this classic villain with us. Reading the quotes, his love for comics really comes through. And I'm getting choked up again.

I hope you enjoyed this peek into my brain and how this issue came to be. Now it's time to get to the good stuff. Enjoy!



Here at *BACK ISSUE*, we can never get enough Fred Hembeck in our lives. We mirthfully present Mr. Hembeck's illustration of Flash's rogue's gallery. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*)

Characters TM & © DC Comics.

SHADES OF GRAY... AND PURPLE AND GREEN: The Evolution Of The Pre-Crisis Lex Luthor

by John Wells



Bring on the Bad Guys!

In the days when Superman was a boy, another figure stepped forth to join the fight for justice. His identity hidden by a red mask and yellow costume, the tech-based Amazing Man quickly won the adoration of the citizens of Hadley and any skepticism expressed by Superboy was dismissed as professional jealousy. In fact, the Boy of Steel's doubts were well founded and he soon produced evidence that Amazing Man had been playing a long game aimed at looting the entire community. Unmasked and sent to prison, the bald so-called hero shook his fist at his captor. "When I get out, you'll have reason to regret this," he swore, "As sure as my name is Luthor!"

Wait…what?!! If young readers of mid-1957's *Superboy* #59 (Sep. 1957) were shocked to read the origin of the Superman/Luthor feud, imagine the reaction of later generations familiar with very different accounts of that formative rivalry. There had been many forks in the road on the way to the Luthor of the Bronze Age and beyond but it started with writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster.

For Clark Kent, the story began in Europe, where he and fellow war correspondent Lois Lane had been dispatched to cover the country of Toran's invasion of neighboring Galonia (*Action Comics* #22). Behind the scenes, Kent learned in *Action* #23 (Feb. 1940), a mysterious weapons broker called Luthor aimed to "engulf the entire continent in bloody warfare" and eventually pit the nations of the world against each other.

Armed with advanced technology that included holograms and a fearsome green death-ray, Luthor stood before Superman with a mop of red hair and a crimson robe to match. "Just an ordinary man," he purred, "but with the brain of a super-genius. With scientific miracles at my fingertips, I'm preparing to make myself supreme master of th' world." The Man of Steel was unimpressed, tearing into the villain's dirigible complex and sending the airship to a fiery end on the fields below. "And that's th' end of Luthor," Superman declared to Lois.

It was not. Moving to the United States, Luthor made his continued presence known by triggering earthquakes in Metropolis in *Superman* #4 (Feb. 1940). By the time Luthor went down in a plane crash (*Superman* #5), there wasn't much doubt that he'd be back. The surprises were where…and in what form.

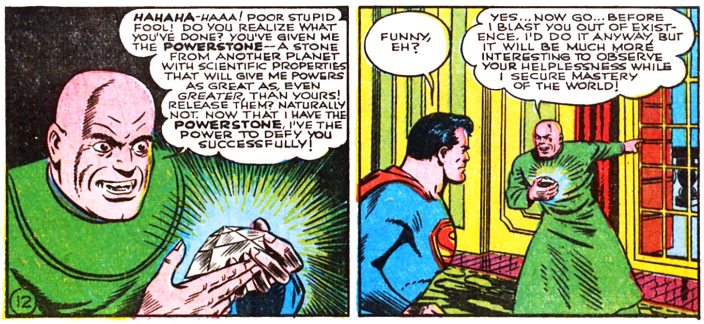
Superman's massive popularity had quickly translated to a spin-off comic strip and it was there that Luthor resurfaced on November 15, 1940. Although he still communicated with Superman using holographic imagery as he had previously, the villain seemed to have aged dramatically virtually overnight. He wasn't just bald but sunken-cheeked and dressed in a side-button white surgical smock. Luthor resembled no character so much as the Ultra-Humanite, a Superman nemesis who appeared half a dozen times (starting in *Action* #13) before Luthor came along.

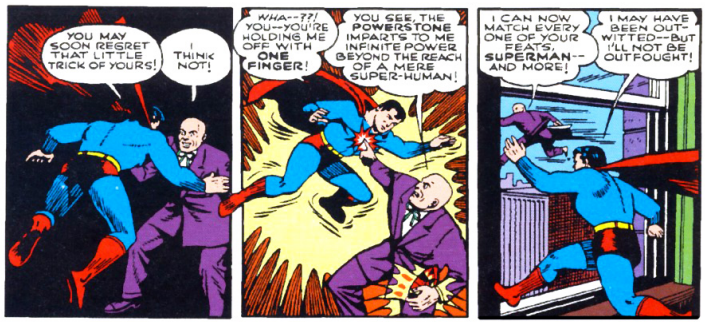
Fans would later theorize that Luthor's sudden hair loss was an art reference error: One of Joe Shuster's assistants looked at a bald underling in an earlier tale and assumed it was Luthor. It's quite plausible but the point of reference was more likely the earlier mad doctor. Notably, the November 22, 1940 comic strip referred to Luthor as "the evil ultra-scientist."

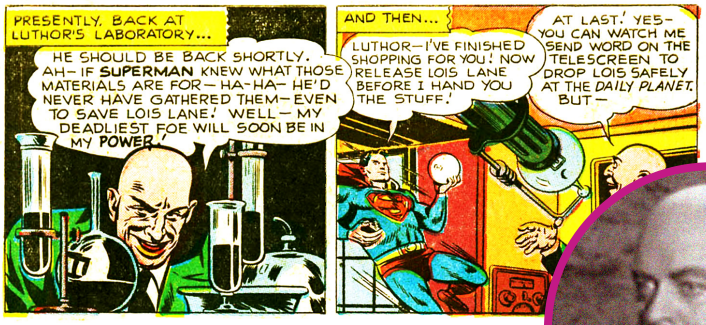
Paging through early issues of *Action Comics* for reference, the assistant would have seen multiple pages featuring the evil

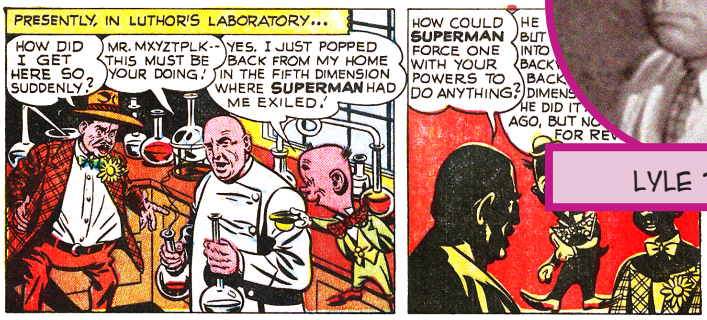
Lex Luthor was completely in his element when he appeared in the 1978 *DC Super-Heroes Poster Book*.

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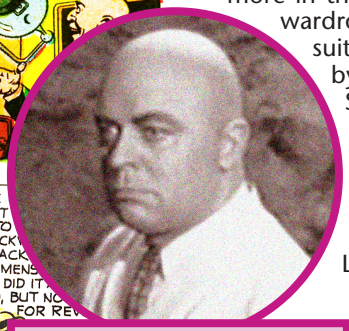
scientist named Ultra and could easily have leapt to an incorrect conclusion. Coincidentally, the earliest piece of Luthor merchandising—part of a 1940 Superman paper doll set—consisted of a cut-out of the red-haired, robed villain on the same sheet as the wheelchair-bound Ultra.

In any event, Luthor's hairless skull became a signature feature of the villain in the comic books from March 1941's *Superman* #10 going forward. An early highlight was 1942's *Action* #47 and *Superman* #17, wherein Luthor's acquisition of the Powerstone enabled him to match the Man of Tomorrow in pure physical strength.

As the 1940s rolled into the 1950s, Luthor shed his penchant for robes and doctor's smocks in favor of a suit and tie. He also gained weight, with artist Wayne Boring in particular rendering him with a double chin. In a period when most of Superman's recurring adversaries were comical tricksters, Luthor took things seriously. He formed an alliance with the Prankster twice—joined by Mr. Mxyztplk the first time (1950's *Action* #151) and Toyman the second (1954's *Superman* #88)—but generally aspired to more than merely humiliating the Man of Tomorrow. Luthor wanted him dead, even synthesizing artificial kryptonite a scant nine months after Superman learned that the real thing could kill him (1950's *Action* #141).

Luthor (played by Lyle Talbot) *also* created synthetic kryptonite—and a precursor to the Phantom Zone—in the 1950 movie serial *Atom Man vs. Superman*. Remarkably, the villain bypassed the 1940s radio show and the 1950s TV series. His television debut finally came in 1966's animated *New Adventures of Superman*.

By the start of 1960, twenty years after his debut, Luthor could boast 61 comic book appearances to date and even more in the newspaper strip. He could afford to relax his wardrobe going forward, switching from three-piece suits to prison grays in the new decade, exemplified by the Superman feature's de facto top artist Curt Swan. Between issues on sale in January 1960 and December 1969, the Man of Steel's greatest foe made an astonishing 103 comic book appearances, including an "All-Luthor Issue" (*Superman* #168)! That number doesn't include reprints such as those in *80-Page Giant* #11's Luthor compendium in 1965.



LYLE TALBOT

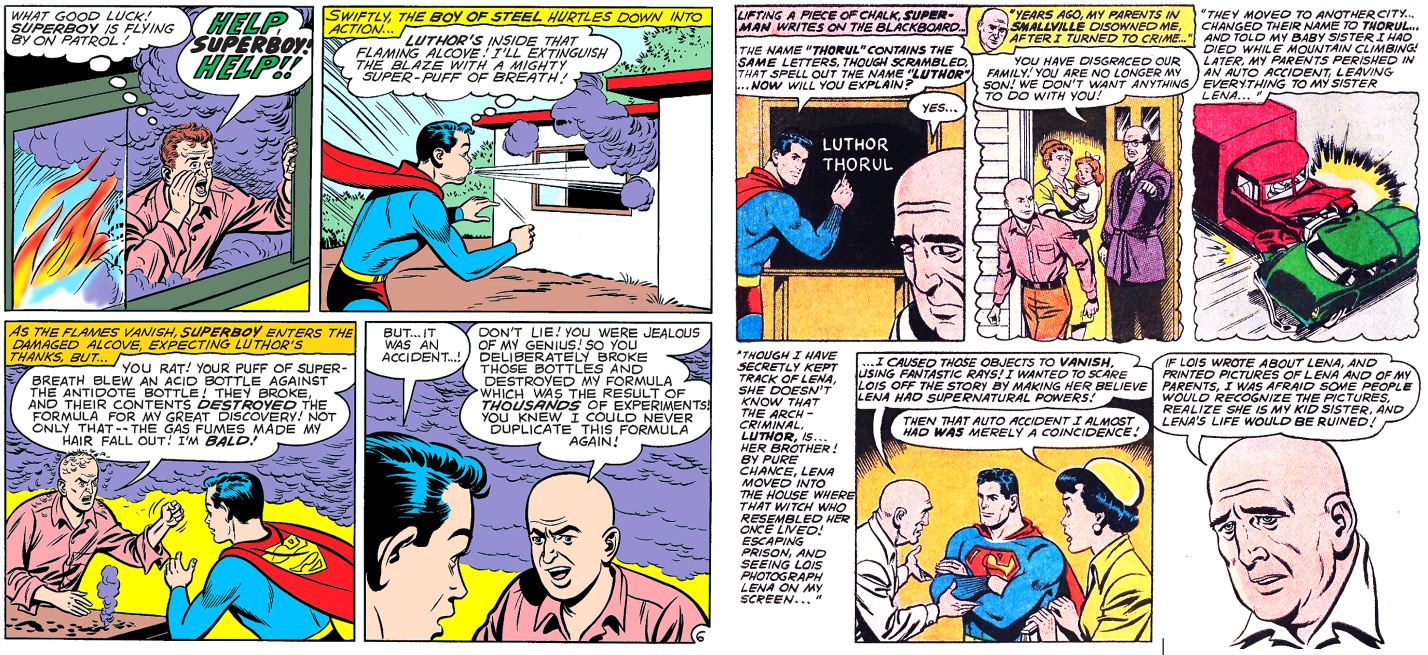
Scheduled to be featured in both January 1968's *Jerry Lewis* #105 and *Jimmy Olsen* #109, Luthor's appearance on the former's cover was disguised at the last minute with facial hair. One can speculate that there were fears of oversaturation.

The villain's ascendance stemmed in part from a fateful decision by Mort Weisinger that coincided with Luthor's 20th anniversary. In March 1960's *Adventure Comics* #271, the Superman line's editor struck Jerry Coleman and John Sikela's 1957 Amazing Man origin from the record in favor of a new one.

Fittingly, "How Luthor Met Superboy" was written by their creator Jerry Siegel. Joined by artist Al Plastino, Siegel documented the fast friendship of the teenage Superman and a newcomer to Smallville who was a scientific prodigy. Enthusiastically building

(top) An early Lex appearance in *Action Comics* #47. Art by John Sikela. Lex's persona evolved from businessman (2nd row) in *Superman* #17, art by Joe Shuster and John Sikela, to (3rd row) mad scientist in *Action Comics* #141, art by Bob Oksner, and (5th row) *Action Comics* #151. Art by Stan Kaye. (bottom left) Lex was reworked in the artwork for (bottom right) *Jerry Lewis* #105's cover. Art by Wayne Boring and Stan Kaye.

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a full laboratory in support of his pal's experiments, Superboy rushed in when the structure subsequently caught fire. In the process of extinguishing the blaze, however, the Boy of Steel also blew fumes in the direction of Luthor…whose thick brown hair fell out on the spot.

The teen genius was livid, as much for Superboy quashing his creation of protoplasmic life as for making him bald for life. In the aftermath, young Luthor threw himself into inventions that would provide a public service and reap accolades that overshadowed the Boy of Steel's own feats. Tragically, each succeeding creation backfired spectacularly and Superboy was forced to fly in to fix things. The teen hero was still rooting for his ex-friend's success but Lex Luthor wasn't hearing it.

Aside from providing Luthor with a first name (meant to extend the series' "LL" motif), the story brought a sea change to the saga of the archenemies. Reframed as childhood friends torn apart, Superman and Luthor's conflicts took on a degree of pathos and motivation that never existed before. Now that the fights were personal, a whole new range of story possibilities arose.

In a neat bit of continuity, Siegel had teen Lex discover the existence of the 30th Century's Legion of Super-Heroes in late 1960's *Superboy* #86. Reasoning that there should also be a Legion of Super-Villains, the adult Lex made contact with them in 1961's *Superman* #147. Later (or earlier), young Luthor sent a robot to the future to fight the Legion (*Adventure Comics* #300) before heading there in person (*Adventure* #325).

As 1960 ended, Siegel and artist Kurt Schaffenberger added another wrinkle in *Lois Lane* #23. Its surprise ending revealed that mysterious psychic Lena Thorul was Lex's kid sister, shuffled away from Smallville as a toddler by her late parents. Disgraced by their son's activities, they'd changed their name to Thorul and Lena never knew the truth. Ashamed, Lex vowed to shield her in the present day and persuaded Superman and Lois to sit on the secret themselves. Writer Leo Dorfman picked up the thread in 1962's *Action* #295, establishing Lena as a classmate of Linda (Supergirl) Danvers and revealing that her mental powers stemmed from an accident in teenage Lex's lab.

Then it was writer Edmond Hamilton's turn. In 1963's *Superman* #164 (illustrated by Curt Swan and George Klein), Luthor publicly challenged his adversary to a showdown on a world whose red sun left the Man of Steel powerless. Rather than level up as he'd done with the Powerstone, Lex had Superman level down. Shirtless for the match, Swan's Luthor clearly hadn't just lost weight but started working out. The hero won the physical brawl, but only after he stopped reflexively pulling his punches as if he was still powered-up.

Afterwards, Lex discovered that the world was inhabited, its humanoid people eking out an existence after a long-ago apocalypse stripped away their knowledge of the race's scientific achievements. In short order, Luthor had upgraded the people's quality of life and was revered for it. He rather liked the feelings that stirred in him, even surrendering to Superman in exchange for the Man of Steel's promise to deliver an ample water supply to the thirsty people.

Lexor—as its people renamed the world—was soon back in issues #167 and 168, where Hamilton continued to play up the irony of its populace lashing out at that mean Superman for harassing the great Luthor. *Action* #318-319 (1964) even found Lex marrying a native named Ardora. Neither a hoax nor a dream, the marriage was legit but Luthor's inevitable returns to Earth made it a long-distance relationship. Superman was sympathetic, though, as when Ardora learned of her husband's cold-blooded murder of several Atlanteans in *Action* #332. He erased her memories of the incident so that she could return to her state of bliss.

The aforementioned murders were a reminder that, despite the more complex characterization, Luthor was still a ruthless villain. He took inspiration, 1961's *Action* #277 revealed, from historical outlaws like Atilla the Hun, Genghis Khan, Captain Kidd, and Al Capone. Statues of each adorned a "Hall of Heroes" within Luthor's Lair,

(left) Luthor gets a new origin in *Adventure Comics* #271. Art by Al Plastino. (right) Lex learns he has a sister in *Lois Lane* #23. Art by Kurt Schaffenberger. (inset below) Lex challenges Superman to a boxing match in *Superman* #164. Cover by Curt Swan and George Klein.

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(top left) Lex and Ardora from *Action Comics* #318. Art by Swan and Klein. (middle left) Lex's Hall of Heroes in *Action Comics* #277. Art by Swan and Forte. (bottom left) Lex in action in *Best of DC* #27. Cover by Ross Andru and Giordano. (right) Lex triumphant in *Superman* #149. Art by Swan and Kaye.

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Lex's response to Superman's Fortress of Solitude. Hidden within an abandoned Metropolis Museum, it was conceived by writer Bill Finger and memorably brought to life by Curt Swan and John Forte.

The definitive account of Luthor's evil was published in 1961's *Superman* #149 (by Siegel, Swan, and Sheldon Moldoff). It was officially an "imaginary tale" with no bearing on the series' regular continuity but it profoundly affected a generation of readers.

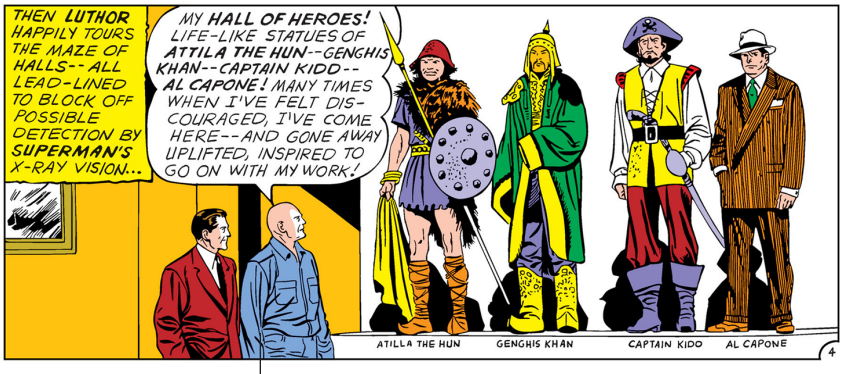
Deceptively titled "Lex Luthor, Hero" on the splash page, it presented the repentant rogue's creation of a cancer cure that earned him parole with the Man of Steel's backing. Thrilled at his former friend's reformation, Superman enthusiastically supported Lex's new projects…right up until Luthor metaphorically stabbed him in the back. Crowing that it had all been an act, Lex wasted no time in murdering the Man of Steel beneath a lethal green kryptonite spotlight. An international period of mourning and the trial of Lex Luthor concluded a tale best known as "The Death of Superman."

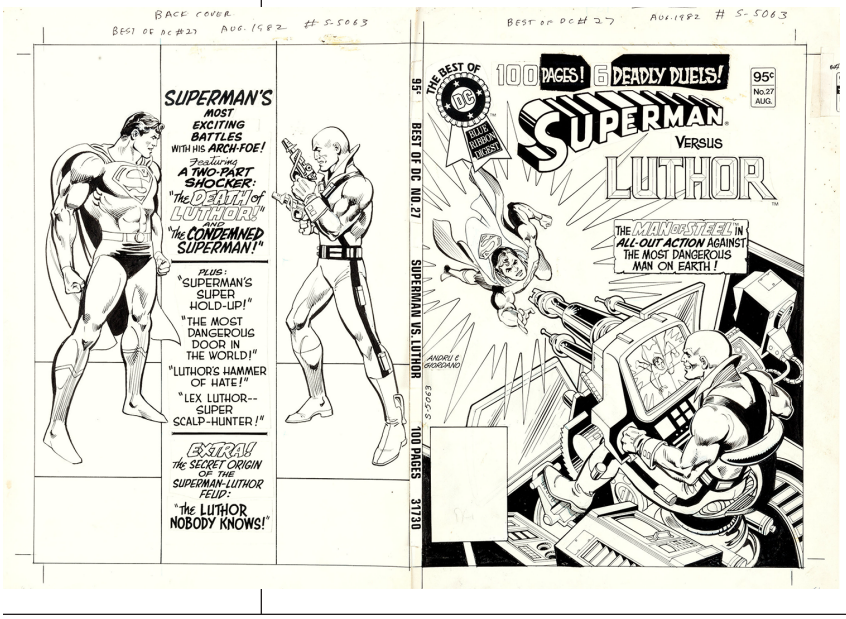
In 1968, writer Leo Dorfman and artists Ross Andru and Mike Esposito played out a scenario where Luthor nearly killed Superman for real through exposure to Virus X, an incurable Kryptonian counterpart of leprosy. Spanning *Action Comics* #362-366, the multi-parter culminated with a last-minute cure involving white kryptonite. Rocketed into space to die, Superman passed through Lexor's system and—with his x-ray vision—saw its people tearing down their tributes to Luthor for his crime on Earth. In 1982's *Best of DC* #27, Superman assistant editor E. Nelson Bridwell dismissed the scene, noting that the Man of Steel had no powers in Lexor's star system. "Superman was ill, near death—delirious. He only *imagined* that scene on Lexor, where Luthor is still top dog."

Lex was certainly top dog among Superman's rogues, although he formed a wary partnership with his foremost contender in *Superman* #167. Brainiac—newly revealed as a computerized being—possessed tech and intelligence that appealed to Luthor far more than the merry pranksters he once interacted with. Tempting Brainiac with an upgrade of his intelligence, Luthor performed computer brain surgery with a tamper-proof failsafe. If Brainiac reneged or threatened him, Luthor had a literal kill-switch in place.

The villainous pairing stemmed from a cover sketch submitted by a 15-year-old Ohio boy. Cary Bates had envisioned the devilish duo holding a birdcage with a tiny Superman, miniaturized by Brainiac's shrinking ray. Flush with success, the teenager sent further crude cover pitches and eventually received an invitation to begin writing scripts for the Weisinger-edited Superman line.









His first full story was an imaginary tale in 1967's *World's Finest* #167, positing a world with Lex Luthor as Superman and Clark Kent as Batman. The last comics with Weisinger's editorial byline (1970's *Superman* #230-231) also featured a Bates alternate history with a variation of Lex as the Man of Steel.

The final major Luthor story on Weisinger's watch was a late 1969 Leo Dorfman/Win Mortimer/Jack Abel two-parter (*Adventure Comics* #387-388) that revisited Lex's sister Lena Thorul. Unseen since her 1964 wedding (*Action* #317), Lena was now the mother of a blond toddler named Val Colby who received mysterious gifts each year on his birthday. This time, it was a space jewel that endowed the boy with psychokinetic powers. Uncle Lex was only too happy to exploit his nephew. Once the abilities conked out, Luthor handed the boy off to Supergirl while telling Val that he lied about being his uncle. Even now, he was protecting Lena from the family secret.

Luthor had no such concerns about his college-age niece Nasthalthia, who emerged out of the blue in July 1970's *Adventure Comics* #397. As part of the post-Weisinger shake-up, editor/writer/penciler Mike Sekowsky gave Supergirl a Luthor all her own and enrolled Nasty at Stanhope University alongside Linda Danvers. The newcomer aspired to unmask the Girl of Steel—with Linda her prime suspect—but she never succeeded. Uncle Lex popped in for a second visit in issue #401 but Nasty otherwise played things solo in the supporting cast through her last appearance in *Adventure* #424 (1972).

Continuity-conscious assistant editor E. Nelson Bridwell knew that Lex's niece didn't jibe with established history so he revised the family tree in *Adventure* #401's letter column. "Luthor does have an older sister, one who married a European gentleman and has been living abroad. Lena Colby is unaware of this sister's existence because her parents disapproved of their daughter's early marriage and had no communication with her when they were killed in an accident."

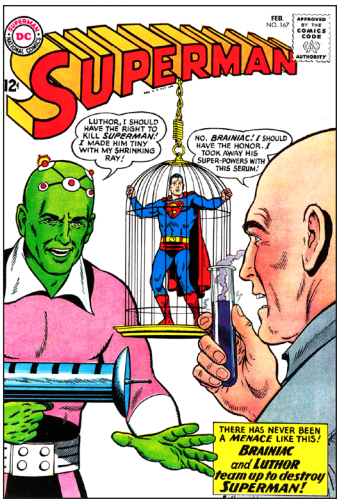
A more egregious error in the Murray Boltinoff-edited *Superboy* #159 (July 1969) had the Teen of Steel fighting an *adult* Luthor! Writer Frank Robbins and penciler Bob Brown's subsequent Luthor stories in issues #166, and 169 (1970) properly depicted the villain as a teen himself. All three tales used the same broad formula of having Luthor's involvement revealed in the climax after appearing in disguise for most of the plot. Leo Dorfman followed suit in issue #177 (1971), where Luthor posed as an alien invader.

Cary Bates (with Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson) continued that pattern in the Boltinoff-edited *Action* #407 (Oct. 1971). In this case, Lex played the tech-savvy crony of a drug-running pilot who accidentally discovered the location of Superman's arctic sanctum. The fact that "Slesar" could pick the locks of the Fortress of Solitude was a big clue that he wasn't a common hood.

The unmasked Luthor had no interest in looting the place. He was there to plant an anti-matter fusion bomb primed to activate when Superman opened the door. "More than anything else," he emphasized, "I want him and his Fortress *annihilated*!" The Man of Steel got rid of the device, of course, but he was incredulous that Lex was willing to be a suicide bomber. "Do you hate me *that* much?"

"You know the answer to that, Superman."

Two months later, in *Superman* #248, Luthor's obsession seemingly wiped out the human race. Drawing on primal matter from the cosmos, Lex formed a hulking starfield he called the Galactic Golem. The parasitic entity craved stellar energy so Luthor funneled a portion into an unwitting Superman and put a huge target on his back. A clash of titans ensued and the Man of Steel desperately tapped the Golem's own energy to temporarily shift all of humanity to another dimensional plane. Unaware of what had happened, a guilt-ridden Lex wound up joining forces with Superman to lure the Golem away from Earth. When it was over and Earth's people returned, Luthor's relief was palpable.



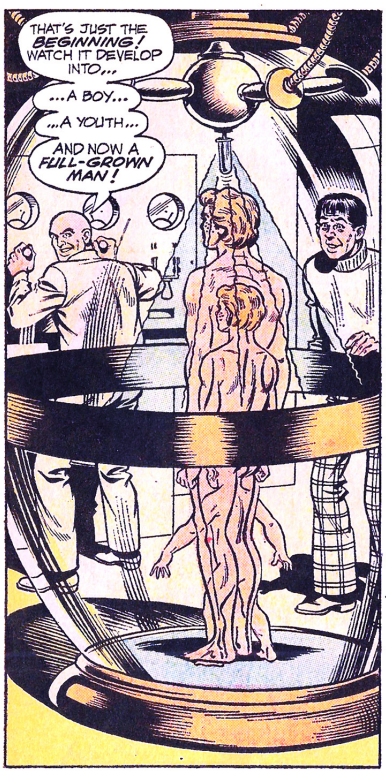


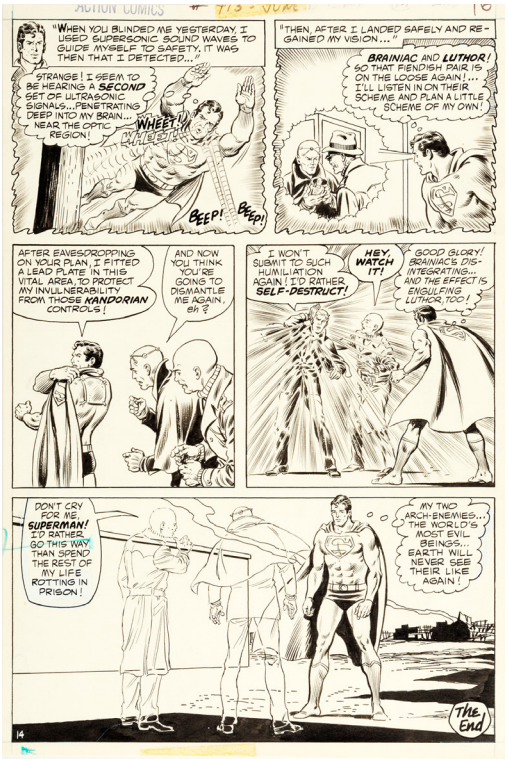


(top left) *Superman* #167 has teams Lex with Brainiac. Cover by Swan and Klein. (top right) Even Lex's relatives are criminals! *Adventure Comics* #387, cover by Swan and Anderson. (bottom) Lex invades the Fortress of Solitude in *Action Comics* #407. Art by Swan and Anderson. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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(left) The Galactic Golem was a foe who could trade blows with Superman. From *Superman* #248, art by Swan and Anderson. (middle) Luthor clones Jimmy in *Jimmy Olsen* #162. (right) Luthor and Brainiac team up again in *Action Comics* #413. Art by Swan and Anderson. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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"*Listen* to it, Superman," he smiled, "The sounds of life and laughter."

Since taking charge of *Superman* in 1970, editor Julius Schwartz and writer Denny O'Neil had avoided Weisinger-era villains like Luthor. For issue #248, though, the scripter was Len Wein. "The problem with Superman's rogues' was, they were all thinkers…they were scientists, or guys who built toys," Wein told Michael Eury in *The Krypton Companion* (2006). "With the Golem, he could hit Superman, and Superman could hit him back."

From the Galactic Golem back to his recreation of Bizarro in 1959's *Action* #254, Luthor was as fixated on creating life as he was when Superboy inadvertently disrupted his first attempt. Leo Dorfman (with Bob Brown and Murphy Anderson) detailed another example in September 1971's *Superboy* #179. Therein, Lex created a Superboy that was part android and part "cytoplasm" as an obedient soldier. The programing worked too well, though, and the artificial being displayed its counterpart's integrity by sacrificing itself to save the real Boy of Steel. "A collection of chemicals and artificial protoplasm," Superboy declared as his twin melted away, "but he was a hero."

By September 1973's *Jimmy Olsen* #162 (by Dorfman and Kurt Schaffenberger), Luthor had even mastered cloning. Acquiring genetic material from Jimmy's dentist, Lex created two adult duplicates of Superman's pal for his latest obsessive attack on the Man of Steel. Interestingly, no one used the opportunity to link the story to Jack Kirby's 1970-1972 run on the book, where the DNA Project's cloning—and an Olsen duplicate—were prominent components.

Meanwhile, Dorfman had reunited the Luthor-Brainiac team in April 1972's *Action* #413 for a wild story in which they used a voodoo doll laced with Kryptonian circuitry to menace Superman. When that didn't work, Brainiac self-destructed on the last page and took Luthor with him.

In fact, they'd merely teleported to an Anti-Superman Fortress in the Andes. In *Action* #417 and 418, the duo joined forces with two Jim Shooter creations from the 1960s (Grax and the Marauder) as the Crime-Lords. Curiously, the quartet offered Superman a truce, claiming that they wanted to save Earth from a phantom menace. Aside from native Luthor, the villains' justifications for preserving Earth were shaky…and with good reason. It was all a put-on to capture Superman. Now dismissed as a "primitive Earthling," Luthor switched allegiance to the Man of Steel out of pure self-preservation.

Dorfman, mostly associated with Murray Boltinoff at this late stage in his career, left the *Action* writing roster when Julius Schwartz became *Action*'s editor with issue #419. Artists Swan and Anderson were still around, though, when Cary Bates penned his latest Luthor script for February 1974's *Action* #423. Reflecting on his inability to defeat Superman, Lex concluded that his deep-rooted loathing of the hero made him too irrational to focus. Consequently, he transferred his raging hatred into Superman via a psych-sonic hammer, gambling that a more volatile Man of Steel would be easier to defeat.

It was a good idea but it didn't work. Nor did Luthor's plot in Bates' *Action* #428. Using a proxy, an imprisoned Luthor created a super-hypno-beamer that made Superman virtually invisible to the human race. Savvy enough to connect the situation to Luthor, the Man of Steel played mindgames with him to restore things to normal.

Mindgames were an understatement for what happened to Luthor in August 1974. Since the 1972 revival of Fawcett Comics' Captain Marvel, DC had teased the prospect of an encounter with his onetime rival Superman. *Shazam!* #15 didn't deliver that but writer Denny O'Neil and artist Bob

Oksner brought the next best thing. Devising a Magic Accumulator to use against Superman, Lex noted a Shazam! comic book, dismissed it as "idiotic trash," and blasted it with his new weapon. In a heartbeat, he was in Captain Marvel's universe ("Have I landed in an animated cartoon or something?") and allied with Mister Mind, the World's Wickedest Worm. Ultimately, Luthor used the Accumulator to return home, relieved to be back until a red-and-blue clad figure behind him cleared his throat.

Reader Bob Rodi noted in issue #17's letter column that Lex *could* have learned his foe's secret simply by browsing a spinner rack on the parallel Earth. "It happens that Luthor did get a Superman comic," E. Nelson Bridwell replied, "But he saw Clark Kent changing to Superman and decided the comics on that world were as ridiculous as everything else."

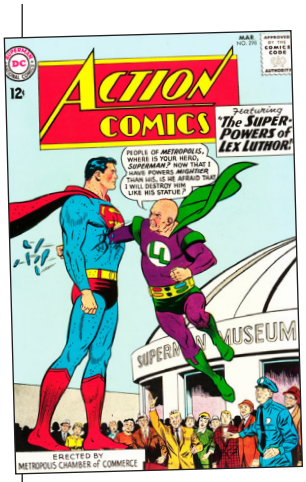
September 1975's *Superman* #282 (illustrated by Swan and Schaffenberger) was no laughing matter. Still brainstorming on why he couldn't best the Man of Steel, Luthor secretly regressed Superman—both mentally and physically—back to his early twenties. "This young Superman is brash…impulsive…using more brain than brawn," Lex crowed, and theoretically easier to beat. Alas, the plan worked too well with hero and villain ultimately hurtling to their doom at the Earth's core. Suddenly, Luthor was begging his greatest enemy to save him ("Superman never quits!") and reversed the aging process just in time.

The story represented a new voice in Julius Schwartz's roster, someone who'd been writing comics for a couple years but only now had his hands on Lex Luthor. Not quite 24-years-old, Elliot S. Maggin told *BACK ISSUE*, "It seems to me I came in with another idea altogether and Julie boxed that one out, whatever that was. This was a plot Julie and I came up with cold in the office that day and I went home and wrote it."

Broadly speaking, there was one more person in the DC offices who had an impact on the story. "When I became [DC] vice-president in 1973," Sol Harrison explained in *Amazing World of DC Comics* #10 (1976), "additional responsibilities were given to me, mainly in the area of merchandise using our characters. Besides checking the art and packaging of new products, I could recommend the use of additional characters who were doing well in our magazines at the time. […] I've been able to talk to the editors and get them to think in terms of products featuring our characters for merchandise using our characters. The Joker Van was created and Mego Toys made a vehicle similar to it."

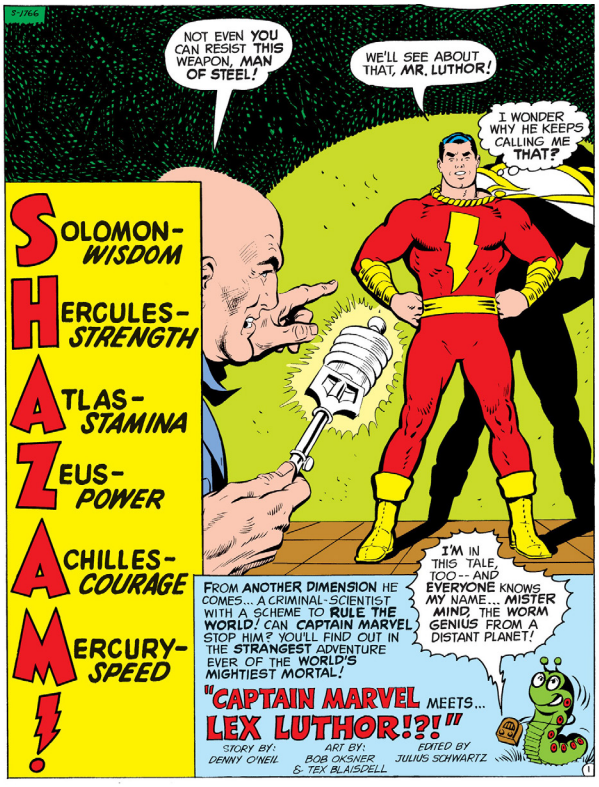
In 1974, Sol Harrison set his sights on Lex Luthor, specifically his wardrobe. The prison grays and civilian clothes had to go. Over the years, the villain had worn costumes for a variety of one-off personas, among them Zytal (*Action* #42), the Light (*Superman* #13), the Kryptonite Man (*Action* #249), the heroic Defender (*Superman* #168), the Mechano-Master (*Superboy* #135), and Cerebron (*Superboy* #177). Briefly endowed with Kryptonian-level powers in 1963's *Action* #298, he'd even adopted a Superman-esque costume with a contrasting purple/green color scheme. For the sake of merchandising, Harrison believed that Lex needed to get with the program and start wearing a colorful outfit like the other big name bad guys.

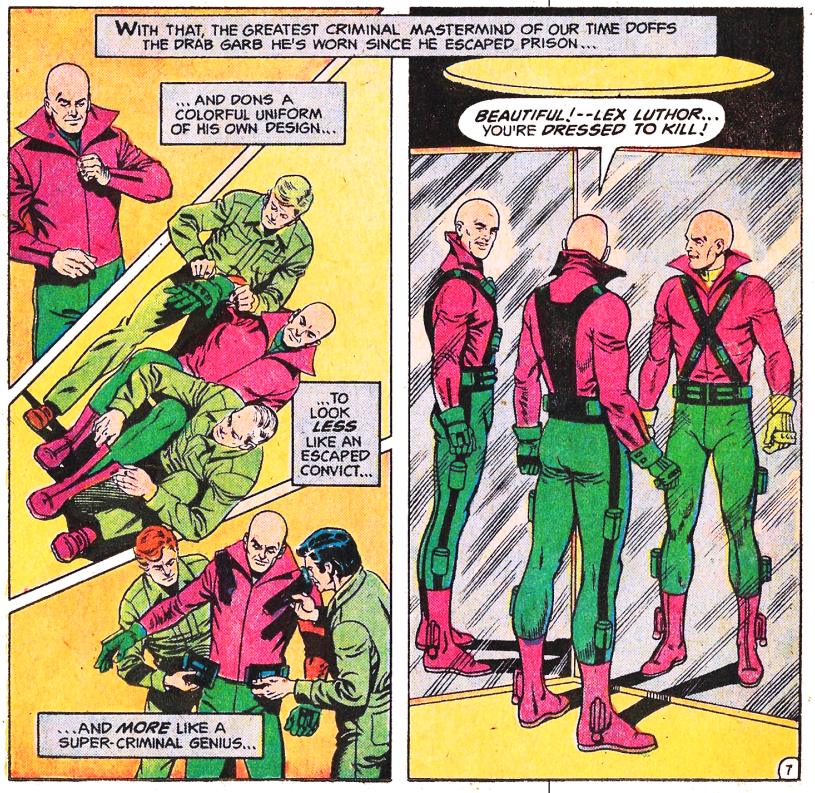
Consequently, Curt Swan designed a costume for issue #282, even drawing a panel of Lex in front of a mirror that showcased the outfit from three angles. The purple and green action suit's accessories included jetpacks on the boots that enabled Lex to soar through the sky. As Harrison hoped, the costumed Luthor became a big hit in licensing, from action figures to coloring books and even a featured role with the Legion

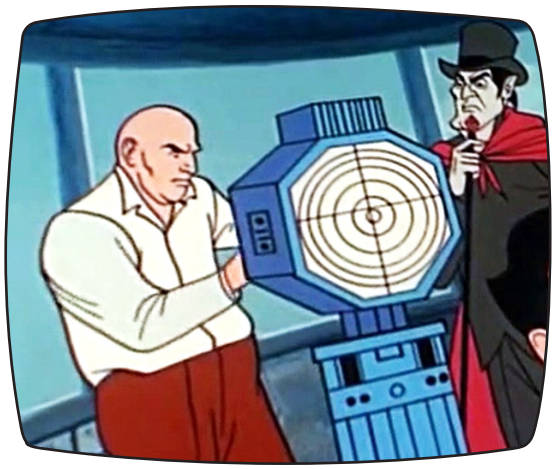


(left) Luthor takes on Captain Marvel in *Shazam* #15. Art by Bob Oksner. (right) Luthor gets a new costume in *Superman* #282. Art by Swan and Schaffenberger. (inset above) An early Luthor costume in *Action Comics* #298. Cover by Swan and Moldoff.

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(top) Luthor came to animation in the 1966 *New Adventures of Superman*. (middle) Lex gets action figures from Mego. (bottom) Luthor's model sheet from *Challenge of the Superfriends*.

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of Doom on 1978's Saturday morning cartoon *Challenge of the Super Friends*.

"Turned out the licensors liked it," Maggin told *BI*, "But I didn't much. I liked the mechanical lizard suit that we used later even less. I was always partial to the gray prison fatigues. I don't even think Lex much like dressing up like a costumed villain. Reminded him too much of all the costumed freaks in the Justice League."

Meanwhile, Maggin reconsidered Luthor's Lair for *Superman* #282. The villain now occupied a sunny midtown penthouse in Metropolis with a well-compensated staff. Running the operation like a thriving business, he guaranteed that his team members would be "paid triple-time for the period they spend in prison. Never let it be said that Lex Luthor's an unfair employer." This was, Maggin wrote in his first novel, "the highest paid staff in organized crime."

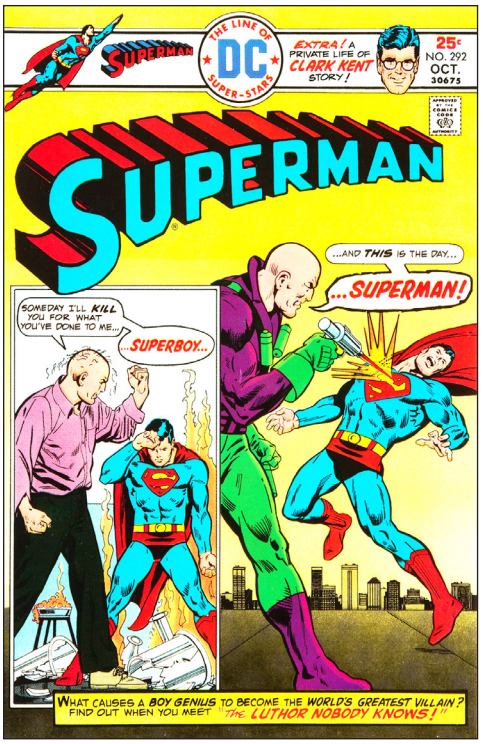
Luthor's business faced a hostile takeover in January 1975's *Superman* #286, where the Parasite mimicked Lex's voice and general authority to plunder the villain's arsenal. It fell to a snarky Lex and a delirious Superman to save the embattled Metropolis. With victory assured, Luthor dosed the fallen hero with a potion to revive him. "That will get you back in shape, but not before I take off. I want *no one* to beat you but *me*!

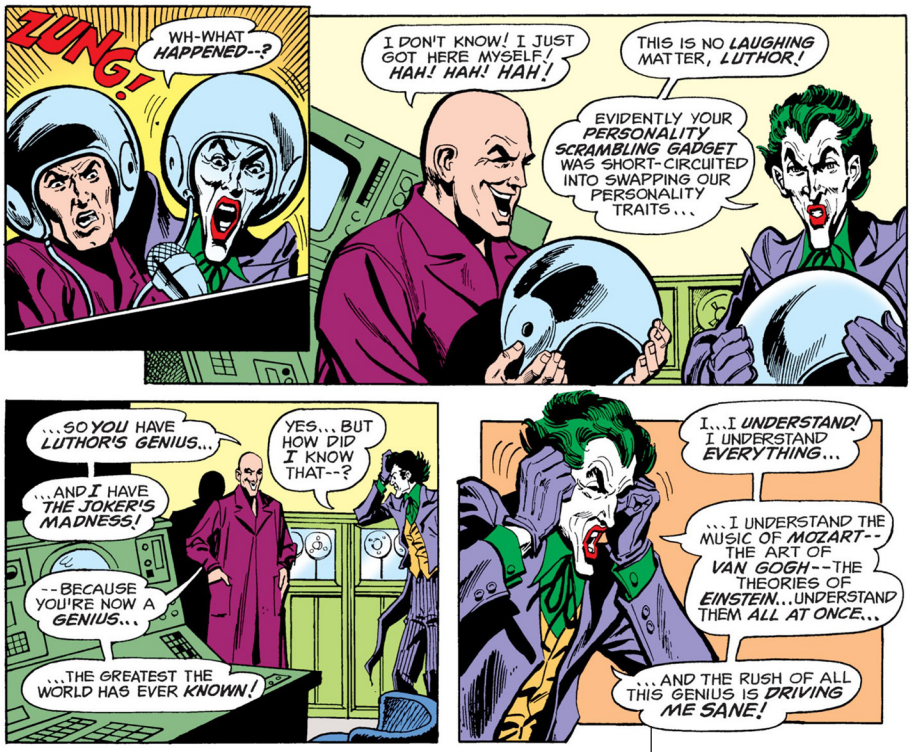
"I liked the Parasite story," Maggin declared. "I started writing it in the subway on the trip home. I always looked for excuses for Supes and Luthor to put a temporary hold on the cutthroat enmity. It lets them interact more and gives them more room for the snark. I think if I were writing the series today, I'd have Superman send some snark back. Or maybe he'd just think of witticisms and not toss them around out loud. Thought balloons have fallen into some disuse lately, but I think it'd be fun to have Superman think of a few choice put-downs in any given situation and not use them because he considers it beneath him."

Asked about his approach to Luthor, Maggin considers "the most influential stories—that is, the ones that most stick in my mind—are 'The Death of Superman' (the real one; the imaginary story from 1961) and 'How Luthor Met Superboy' from *Adventure Comics* in 1960." The latter was reprinted in July 1975's *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-39, neatly pivoting into Maggin's next Luthor tale (with Swan and Bob Oksner) a few weeks later in *Superman* #292.

Framed with a destructive present-day clash, the plot flashed back to a reevaluation of the original Lex/Superboy feud. In Maggin's account, the pre-accident Lex had been no choirboy. Rather, he was impish, cocky, and prideful, qualities that all played into his reaction to losing his hair and having his experiment go south.

"I loved 'The Luthor Nobody Knows,'" Maggin declared. "I'd been mulling over a story like that for a long time before I wrote it. When people ask me what I'd have done with Superman if I had continued to write the comic, I always say I'd do more to develop the relationship between Superman and Lex—both in terms of their history





(left) A fresh look at Luthor's past. *Superman* #292, cover by Oksner. (right) Luthor and Joker change heads in *Joker* #7. Art by Irv Novick and Frank McLaughlin.

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and their adult interaction."

In the immediate future, Maggin bypassed the traditional character dynamic by putting Luthor in a different orbit. A Green Arrow/Black Canary trilogy in *Action* #456-458 climaxed with the revelation that the kidnapped comedian whom BC was tracking was really a disguised Luthor. He envisioned Black Canary as a test subject for an anti-Superman weapon and, well, the heroine proved that he still had bugs to work out.

Luthor fled to the Maggin-scripted *Joker* #7 (Feb. 1976) for a reunion with its title character. As the greatest foes of Superman and Batman, they'd been an obvious pairing in a trio of *World's Finest* adventures (*WFC* #88, 129, 177) but their disparate personalities made for a prickly relationship. This time out, the Joker's disruption of an experiment caused Lex to lose his mind rather than his hair. Specifically, the villains' defining madness and genius swapped bodies. Good humor ensued along with a tossed off reference to Lex's improvisational brilliance. Holed up in a fast-food joint at one point, he mixed paint chips and kitchen chemicals in a soda bottle to make himself "a carbonated rocket engine."



ELLIOT S. MAGGIN

Sadly, Maggin's association with Schwartz ended about this time, leaving Cary Bates as the dominant biographer of Lex Luthor for the nonce. First up was May 1975's *Superman Family* #172 (with Boltinoff edits and Schaffenberger art). It found Superman thunderstruck that Luthor had received a Presidential pardon…and was engaged to be married to Lois Lane after a whirlwind romance. It seemed that Lex saved Earth from an extinction-level event while the entire Justice League was in deep space. The third act revealed that Lois had played on Lex's vanity until she found proof that he'd orchestrated the catastrophe. Nonetheless, the televised wedding aired live…but not the way anyone expected.

A Lex/Lois romance had been explored during the 1960s in rather tragic imaginary tales (*Lois Lane* #34, 46, 64, and 65) but it was unusual to see it in mainstream continuity. It wasn't the last time that writers would toy with the idea of Lex romancing his arch-enemy's girlfriend.

1976 opened with something truly unprecedented: the first team-up of DC and Marvel heroes in the tabloid-sized *Superman Vs. Amazing Spider-Man*. Written by Gerry Conway with art primarily by Ross Andru and Dick Giordano, the opus properly also featured their greatest foes: Lex Luthor and Doctor Octopus. Grandiose and entertaining, the story was also a bit off model when it came to one character in the climax. That's when Doc Ock decided to join the heroes upon learning that Luthor intended to destroy the Earth whose people he held in contempt. That was a far cry from the character who was wracked with guilt five years earlier when he only *thought* he'd eradicated the human race.

Conway's next outing with Luthor—May 1976's *Superman* #302, with pencils by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez—was comparatively traditional. Therein, Lex turned the Man of Steel into a giant…although his brain didn't expand accordingly. Luckily, Superman had the Atom on speed-dial for assistance.

Oddly enough, giantism had also been central to Luthor's appearance a few months earlier in *World's Finest Comics* #238. Years earlier, he'd arranged for a delayed-action plague to strike Lexor, confident that its people would send someone to



Earth to cure them with an antidote he already had under wraps. His rescuer turned out to be his teenage daughter Dora, disillusioned when she learned that he'd caused the giantism outbreak himself. Even worse, the stockpiled serum had been destroyed in the interim. It fell to the teenage sons of Superman and Batman to help Lex create a new batch. As the preceding suggests, the entire story was part of writer Bob Haney's recurring Super Sons alternate history and had no bearing on the primary DC continuity of the 1970s.

The pendulum swung from giants to miniatures in a Bates/Swan three-parter for *Action* #464-466 (July-Sep. 1976). Still workshopping a way around his inability to thwart Superman, he reasoned that his hatred of the Man of Steel was ultimately aimed at Superboy. Thus, he'd turn him into a teenager so that his rage was properly directed (with de-aged versions of Batman and Flash—actually, artificial lifeforms—rolled out first as proof of concept). In an odd twist, the teen Superman concluded that Lex had acted on an unprecedented part of his power-set "With my super-power of suggestion, my mind can make whatever I *believe* happen *really* happen." Once he realized he'd been conned, Superman reverted to adulthood.

Did Superman *really* have this power? One is inclined to think Lex *actually* used a variation of the weapon that shaved years off the Man of Steel back in *Superman* #282.

Regardless, Lex's next adversary skewed younger as he fought Superman's cousin Supergirl in December 1976's *Superman Family* #182. Imaginatively rendered by penciler Mike Vosburg, it was a nice Jack C. Harris script about an overconfident Luthor's pursuit of supposed green kryptonite that had been spotted on Mars.

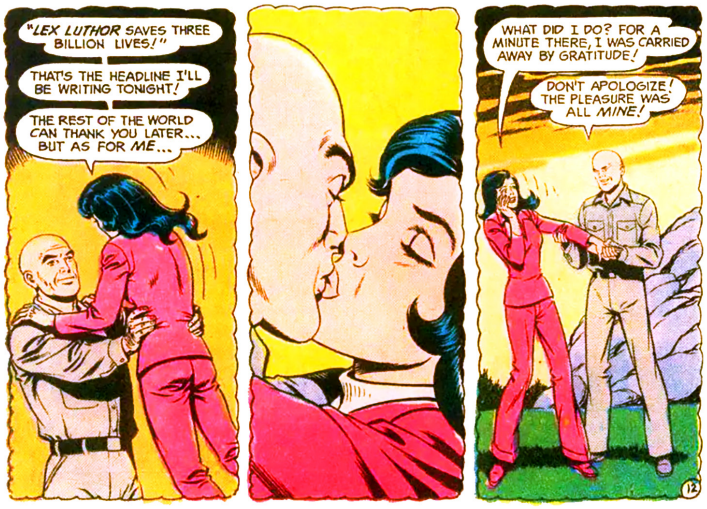
The adventure didn't dampen Lex's cockiness. He was back in February 1977's *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #7 not merely wanting a seat at the rogues' table but expecting to lead the fledgling group. The whole thing was a disaster, culminating with his discovery that a Society strikeforce hadn't even successfully engaged Superman in battle but rather actor Gregory Reed.

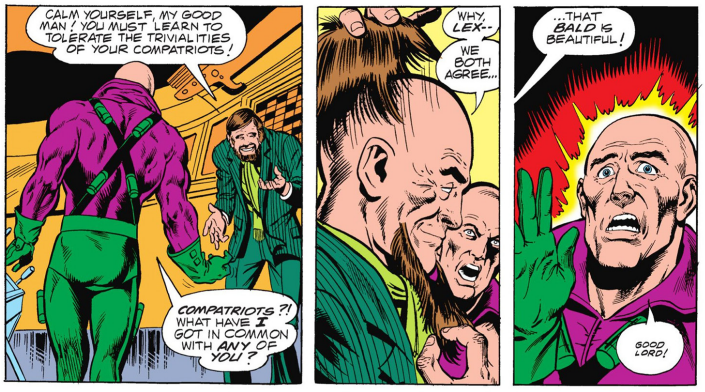
Illustrated by Rich Buckler and Bob Layton, the romp was scripted by Bob Rozakis. "The *Secret Society* story was one I wrote to appease the many fan requests for Lex to appear there. Of course, he would expect to be in charge. Of course, he would use the other members to further his own plot against Superman. And of course, he would give up on the idea of running the group when it did not work the way he expected."

Rozakis revisited Luthor that autumn in a Superboy two-parter for *Adventure Comics* #454-55, where teenage Lex faked the kryptonite irradiation of Smallville's population. It was as much for the opportunity to exile Superboy as to lord over the locals who looked down on him. One nice scene featured Clark Kent—secretly struggling with k-poisoning—trying to convince his former friend to surrender. Ultimately, the Boy of Steel traced the supposed kryptonite infestation to a specially equipped satellite and ensured that Smallville would no longer go green.

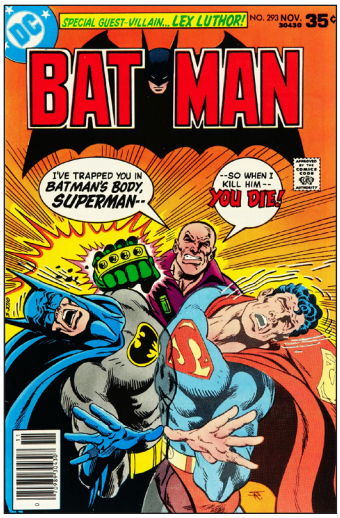
"Overall, I think the primary goal of the Luthor I wrote about was getting back at Superman for humiliating him," Rozakis notes. "Any secondary plans for robberies or world domination or whatever were just that...secondary. That is epitomized in the classic 'Death of Superman' story in the '60s. And let's face it, Lex did not appear very confident in his plans throughout the Silver Age. He never bothered to change out of his prison grays!"

As in Rozakis' story, a satellite factored into Lex's scheme in—of all places—*Batman* #293 (Aug. 1977). This was part of a David V. Reed/John Calnan four-parter wherein a group of Bat-villains set up trials to determine which of their number got the credit for Batman's apparent murder. Luthor, arriving at the courtroom in a flamboyant costume he may have stolen from Liberace's closet, contended that he had done the deed. He asserted that a satellite of his creation had swapped Superman and Batman's consciousness, providing his nemesis with a mortal body he could kill. Lex left in a rage after Superman himself took the stand to testify how his enemy had screwed up.









There's just something about a bald head. (top) Lois reveals her attraction to Lex (??!?) in *Superman Family* #172. Art by Schaffenberger. (middle) Chrome-domes gotta stick together in *SSoSV* #7. Art by Rich Buckler and Bob Layton. (bottom left) Beating up super-kids is low, even for Lex Luthor, *Action Comics* #466. Cover by Neal Adams. (bottom right) Lex pulls a *Freaky Friday* move on the Dark Knight and the Man of Steel in *Batman* #293. Cover by Jim Aparo.

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Smarting from the latest humiliation, Luthor sought out Brainiac in August 1977's *DC Special Series* #5 (by Bates, Swan, and Vince Colletta) with the mutual goal of killing the Man of Steel. Having discovered an alien colony on Earth that worshipped Superman as a god, Luthor envisioned using their secrets to murder the very figure they revered. That didn't quite work out.

Clocking in at 64 pages, the story was the longest Superman adventure published to that date. May 1978's "Secret Life of Lex Luthor" (*Action* #486) was historic in its own right, representing the first-ever Luthor solo story. The author was Elizabeth M. Smith, who'd penned earlier Lori Lemaris and Clark Kent tales for *Action* #475 and 477. Now an author with a diverse résumé, Elizabeth Flynn (a.k.a. Eilis Flynn) told *BACK ISSUE* how her comics work began.

"One summer—between junior and senior year in high school—when I had a lot of time on my hands, I read a lot of comics and wrote letters to the editor. A lot of letters. I guess the fact that I was persistent got Julie's attention, because I received a letter from Nelson Bridwell inviting me to pitch. I didn't know it was an unusual thing. I just thought that it sounded like fun, so I did. By the time those stories came out, of course, I was in college and my classes grabbed most of my attention."



ELIZABETH M. SMITH

Her Luthor tale (illustrated by Kurt Schaffenberger and Frank McLaughlin) found Lex creating and stealthily delivering another birthday gift for nephew Val. Spotted by a policeman and fearing that someone might confiscate the "bomb" he just delivered, Luthor taunted the growing police presence—ultimately at the cost of freedom—until Val carried the parcel inside, unaware of who brought it. The gift was a Superman cape with the same elasticity as the real thing. Luckily, Uncle Lex was no longer around to hear his nephew's full reaction: "Too bad it isn't a Batman cape. *He's* my *real* hero."

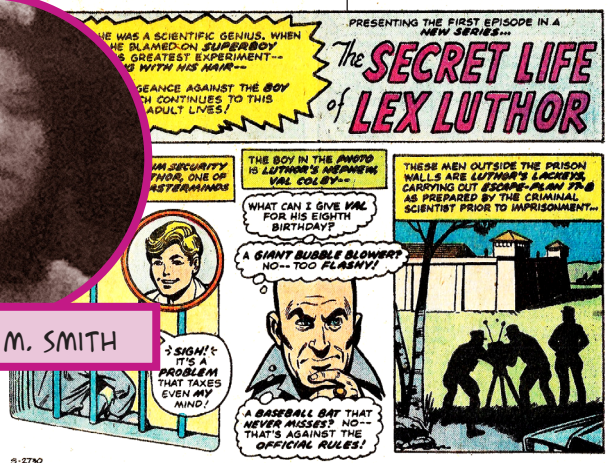
"I remember wondering about Lex," Flynn recalled. "He was always the villain, a bitter one, to boot. But I figured he had other traits that hadn't been explored. He couldn't always have been evil. He had to have vulnerabilities, emotional touchpoints, not just his hair. Character-driven stories always interested me. A couple examples are 'How Luthor Met Superboy!' which was interesting but really? I figured the writer was worried about his receding hairline. Then there was 'Lex Luthor Meets the Legion of Super-Heroes!' (This one in particular because I'm a longtime Legion fan.) Looking back, I have to think that Luthor was a very insecure individual, poor guy."

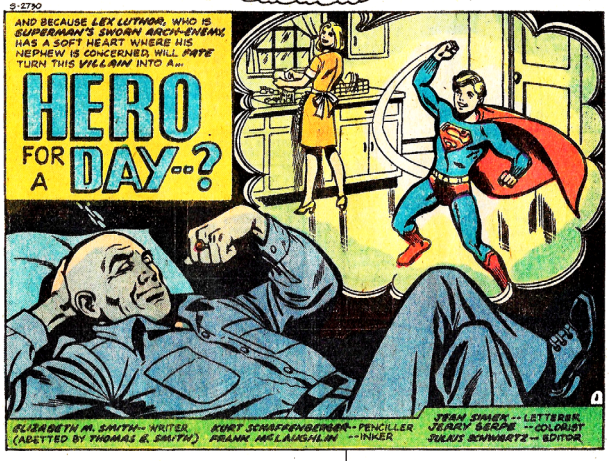
Although touted as "the first episode in a new series," no further "Secret Life" episodes ever appeared. "I didn't remember that," Flynn remarked. "I did remember that I got feedback from fans that they thought it was weird and they didn't get it, as though Luthor couldn't possibly have any redeeming qualities. Seriously? Good characters have all sorts of layers, fellas! Of course, since then I've written novels (including a super-hero romance) and edited bestselling authors. In both pursuits I fall back on how characters always have different layers and traits. No villain thinks he's the bad guy."

For what it's worth, Gene Hackman's Lex Luthor certainly did, yanking off his toupee at the end of December 1978's *Superman the Movie* to declare himself "the greatest criminal mind of our time." Quite unlike the comics, the blockbuster film's Luthor had no particular beef with Superman other than the fact that he was in the way. He was also more vain and overtly funny, written in a campy style—complete with a moronic underling and a moll for eye-candy—that lingered from the days of the *Batman* TV show. Regardless, Hackman elevated the material to create an indelible impression with a generation of viewers.

He also rebelled against Luthor's signature look. In the December 16, 2001 *Los Angeles Times*, director Richard Donner recalled Hackman's declaration, "'No, I'm not going to shave my head. You figure it out.'" Consequently, the director created the illusion that the character was wearing multiple toupees. "We wanted to change his hair in every scene to make Lex Luthor look very vain." Hackman similarly refused to shave his mustache until Donner promised to remove his own in solidarity. The director had secretly done so already and replaced it with a fake. "So [the makeup man] shaves Gene's mustache. Then I peeled mine off.



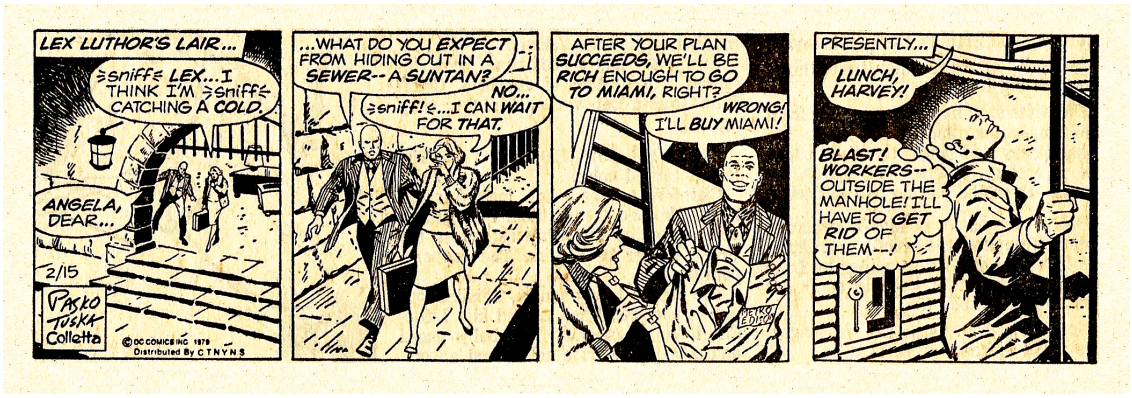


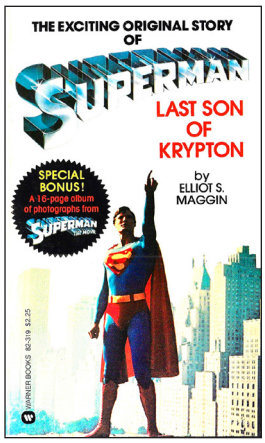




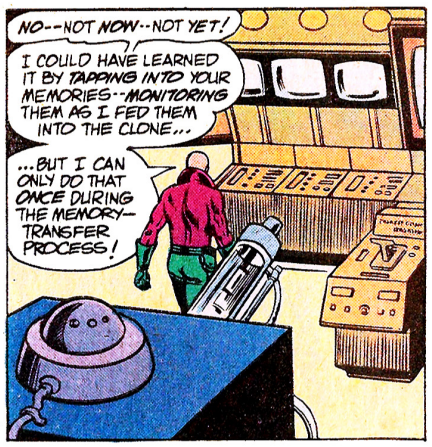
(top) Luthor and Brainiac in *DC Special Series* #6. over by José Luis Garcia-Lopez and Giordano. (middle) *Action Comics* #486 features the first solo Luthor story. Art by Shaffenberger and McLaughlin. (bottom) Gene Hackman as Luthor in the *Superman* movie.

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(top) Luthor makes an appearance in this *WGSH* strip from 1979. (bottom left) Elliot S. Maggin's *Last Son of Krypton* novel. (bottom right) Luthor creates a Superman clone in *Action Comics* #500. Art by Swan and Chiarmonte.

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Gene looked at me and his neck went red...and then he started to laugh and he said, 'I owe you one.'"

Despite the impact of the movie, its portrayal of Luthor went unrecognized in the comics…with one exception. In April 1978, DC had launched a Justice League newspaper strip called *The World's Greatest Superheroes* and its focus shifted to Superman in January 1979. Soon readers were following the antics of a smart-mouthed, well-tailored Lex Luthor who had an underground lair, a lovely assistant (Angela Duffelmeyer rather than Eve Teschmacher), and a willingness to don wacky disguises. "The first thing [incoming editor Joe Orlando] demanded of me was that we 'tie into' the movie as best we could, without adapting it per se," writer Martin Pasko told John Trumbull in *BI* #109 (2018).

The film also provided an opportunity for Elliot S. Maggin to return to Superman, by way of a novel he'd done for an unrealized series of paperbacks starring DC heroes. For contractual reasons (long story), a proper novelization of the film wasn't an option but nothing prevented Warner Books from publishing Maggin's script with a movie still on the cover. *Superman: Last Son of Krypton* sold a whopping 450,000 copies and provided a purer vision of the writer's Superman and Lex than his comics scripts.

Extended flashbacks to Smallville deepened the pair's characterization and motivation even more than "The Luthor Nobody Knows" had. "Luthor was raised on anger," Maggin wrote. "Superboy was raised on responsibility." Lex felt the loss of the living protoplasm like the loss of a child. "He directed the entire mass of his hatred at Superman, who was thankful to take the hatred and leave only Luthor's disdain for the human community."

Luthor's penthouse base from Maggin's earlier stories now had a name—the Zephyrmore Building, owned by the Thunder Corporation. "The Chairman of the Board and principal stockholder of the Thunder Corporation," the script detailed, "was a publicity-grabbing, billionaire playboy named Lucius B. Tommytown who did not really exist, never did exist, but was the creation and puppet of Lex Luthor." Tommytown was one of a number of "imaginary people" that Luthor used to expand his reach.

The Luthor in the novel (both here and in its 1981 follow-up *Miracle Monday*) was snarkier and funnier than Maggin's four-color version, with prose opening up greater opportunities for humor. Some of the most entertaining moments came from Superman and Lex's alliances against bigger threats. "They're relentlessly at odds with each other," Maggin said, "but clearly, aside from the condition that one of them has super-powers and a tedious sense of mission, they're the most natural friends in the world. I think it's their normal state."

"When I wrote *Last Son of Krypton,* I developed a pattern of Luthor insulting Superman every chance he got by comparing him to animals or rancid food items. Somebody even wrote a review of the novel suggesting this was childish and silly, and I suppose it was. But I thought Lex would naturally descend to that level of immaturity when it came to interacting with Superman. Lex's dislike of Supes is so irrational and unyielding that it's probably the only thing in his life that routinely makes him childish."

That irrational hatred was on display in July 1979's *Action Comics* #500 (by Martin Pasko, Curt Swan, and Frank Chiaramonte). As Superman reminisced at a museum gala, Luthor secretly funneled those memories into a clone of the Man of Steel. Once he swapped out the real thing with his replica, Lex couldn't resist having the clone completely reframe his pivotal Smallville origins to make Superboy the bad guy. Even in defeat, Luthor could at least boast that he had finally perfected the creation of life with this latest clone.

That mastery had a particularly dark side, something that Cary Bates (with Swan and Chiaramonte) demonstrated in mid-1980's *Action Comics* #510-512. Enchanted by a woman he encountered while trying to kill Superman, Luthor experienced love at first sight. Angela Blake was even bald, the result of a terminal illness that Lex effortlessly cured. In short order, Lex swore off crime, received a Presidential pardon, and booked Superman to be best man at his wedding.

It was all an especially complex scheme meant to climax with Superman and Angela both being blasted into an anti-matter

dimension ("the L-Zone") when the Man of Steel kissed the bride. Only after escaping the deathtrap did Superman learn the true horror of the situation. Luthor had killed the real Angela Blake and replaced her with a clone that became a virtual human bomb. In order to truly sell the romance, Lex erased his memories of Ardora and his initial interaction with Angela so that even *he* believed his love for her was real. Weeping uncontrollably in his Nefarium sanctuary as the story ended, Luthor never considered that his grief would be real, too.

"That has always been one of my favorite Luthor arcs," Bates told *BI*, "because it demonstrated the extreme measures his hatred for Superman compelled him to take, even if that required brainwashing himself to believe he had actually 100% reformed. The lettercol response to the story overall was quite positive. And I do remember Julie and I both felt that Luthor ending up in tears after truly experiencing love and loss was a fitting last scene. You could also interpret this story my three-part answer to the question of whether Luthor could ever *truly* reform."

If anything, the trilogy made Luthor even more sadistic. When Lois Lane and Lana Lang were afflicted with a different terminal illness, Superman begged his greatest foe to find a cure in June 1981's *Superman* #363 (by Bates, Swan, and Chiaramonte). Lex didn't merely refuse, but tried to break the vial containing a sample of the disease, which would have infected him and compelled him to find a treatment. The villain laughed that, on the off-chance he didn't succeed, Superman would "never *dream* of risking the life of your arch-foe…even if abiding by your code means your ladyfriends will die."

Love and death also intersected in 1982's *Superman Spectacular* #1, where Luthor and Terra-Man formed an alliance after the latter turned up a rare piece of red kryptonite. That seemed to backfire in a big way when it split the Man of Steel into Superman-Red and Superman-Blue. Things got serious at the end when Lex used magic to kill Lois. Fueled by love, grief, and a plea to the Kryptonian deity Rao, Superman revived her but was angry enough to want to kill Luthor for a moment. Plotted by Bob Rozakis, scripted by Paul Kupperberg, and drawn by Adrian Gonzales and Vince Colletta, the story was the first in a series of graphic albums to be produced for German publisher Ehapa and one of the relatively few to be released for U.S. consumption.

Rozakis and Kupperberg, along with Bates, had opportunities to write the formative Lex Luthor during the period. Bates and Schaffenberger offered two 1980 tales, one where the young Luthor's botched experiment turned Superboy into a bio-magnet (*New Adventures of Superboy #11*) and the other where the teen villain tried distorting Superboy's powers (*NAOS* #14).

"I used Luthor sparingly," Kupperberg told *BI*, "although one of my earliest Superman jobs was on *Superman Spectacular* #1. But I was just the dialogue man on that story so I didn't have a say in the story."

"There were a handful of Luthor stories that I really liked when I was a kid," Kupperberg continued, "particularly the ones set on the planet Lexor, where he was hailed as a hero for helping drag the people there out of the stone age with technology. There was more character development in those couple of stories than in the previous twenty or so years of appearances. But otherwise, I always thought he was this one-note, overused character, and even as a 10-year-old reader, I thought his motive for hating Superboy was beyond lame—'You made me lose my hair! I hate you!'—forgetting that the only reason Superboy did what he had to do that caused Lex's hair to fall out was to save Lex's life from the accident that Lex himself had caused! And don't get me started on his criminal business model! If he'd only tried marketing his inventions instead of using them to rob banks, he'd have made a lot more money *and* wouldn't have been forced to wear those prison grays all the time."

Lex was wearing those grays in *NAOS* #38 (Nov. 1982), where Kupperberg and Schaffenberger participated in an



(top)Lex falls bald head over heels for Angela Blake in *Action Comics* #510. (middle left) Why does *that* guy always gotta get in the middle of Lex's action? The cover to *Action Comics* #512. Art by Swan and Chiarmonte (middle right) Superman is forced to beg for Luthor's help on the cover of *Superman* #363. Art by Rich Buckler and Giordano. (bottom) Lex becomes the keeper of all the world's magic in *Superman Spectacular* #1, and what's he going to do with it? Nothing good, that's for certain!

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unusual crossover. "I didn't really have a say in using Luthor," Kupperberg recalled. "This was a time-spanning crossover story where Superman's adult mind got stuck in his teenage body that was set up by Cary Bates in *Superman* #380 and concluded in *Superman* #381 and 382, so I was just following his lead. I did, though, pre-date *Groundhog's Day* by a decade with the endlessly repeating day schtick!"

Dealing with cultural shock that included the sight of his long-dead parents, Superboy/man snapped during an encounter with young Lex Luthor. Aware of all the crimes he was destined to commit, the Man/Boy of Steel rolled into an out-of-proportion beatdown before being brought to his senses.

Kupperberg and Schaffenberger's story for *NAOS* #48 (Sep. 1983) was comparatively traditional: Luthor transferred Superboy's powers to himself…except x-ray vision. Two issues later, a time-traveling 30th Century villain reached out to Luthor, who secretly plotted to steal his futuristic tech.

Rozakis (with Swan and Schaffenberger on art) moved past Smallville to Clark Kent's junior year of college in *Superman: The Secret Years* #1-4 (Nov. 1984-Feb. 1985). The miniseries opened with a transitional moment for Lex. After years in reform school, he turned 21 and headed to prison. Not that he stayed there long. When he returned in issue #4, young Luthor had a group of scientists on his payroll and was blackmailing the world with an array of satellites he put in orbit. Even with enhanced powers, Lex still went down in the end as Superboy declared that he now expected to be called Super*man*.

"Obviously, the Luthor I used in my stories was the Silver Age version that I grew up reading about," Rozakis declared. "Though the 'you made my hair fall out so I will hate you forever' reason was a bit farfetched, it did underscore the rivalry that brewed between Lex and Superboy during their high school years and, as I showed in *Secret Years*, through college as well. Looking back now, however, one has to wonder what would have happened if Lex had invented Rogaine."

Back in the present, Luthor made a cameo in Marv Wolfman and Joe Staton's *Action Comics* #525. Sustaining radiation poisoning during a mission, henchman Nathaniel Tryon didn't get the Maggin-era bonus pay. Instead, Lex put him in a curative chamber that was meant to last a week and (unbeknownst to Tryon) turn him into a pawn for his boss. In the interim, Luthor was arrested and his henchman's treatment lasted a year before he awoke in August 1981 as the super-villain Neutron. His boss' plans were never revealed but the radioactive rogue proved a menace to Superman in his own right.

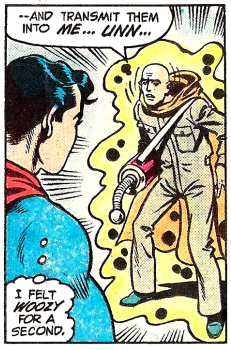
Two months earlier, *Superman II*—with Gene Hackman's Luthor in the cast—made its U.S. premiere and inspired a pair of tabloid-sized tie-in comic books from DC. A 64-page Fortress of Solitude spotlight in *DC Special Series* #26 (by Roy Thomas, Ross Andru, and Romeo Tanghal) detailed the history of Superman's arctic sanctum with the spine of an armored villain trying to use its secrets to set up a chain reaction that would destroy not only the Man of Steel but the entire Earth. Dominus was unmasked on the last page as Luthor, displaying the same off-model behavior as he did in the Superman/Spider-Man one-shot where he *also* tried to commit genocide.

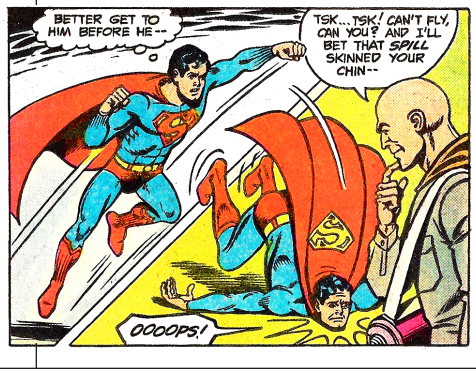
Speaking of off-model, we turn to the pages of *Superman Family* and the "Mr. and Mrs. Superman" feature by E. Nelson Bridwell and Kurt Schaffenberger. Set on the parallel world of Earth-Two during Clark and Lois' 1950s honeymoon phase, the strip included an episode in issue #202 (April 1980) about the conman who had—way back in 1949's *Superman* #61—discovered

(top left) *New Adventures of Superboy* #38. Cover by Andru and Mike DeCarlo. (bottom left) Lex steals Superboy's powers in *NAoS* #48. Art by Swan and Schaffenberger. (right) An unexplored time in the past of Superman and Lex from *Superman Secret Years* #4. Art by Swan and Schaffenberger.

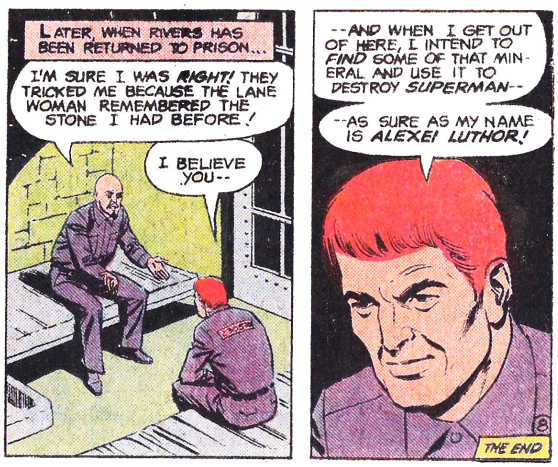
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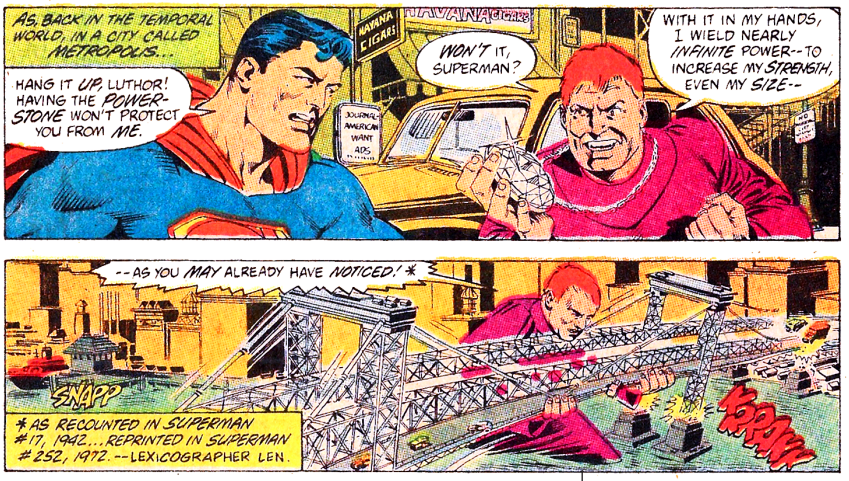


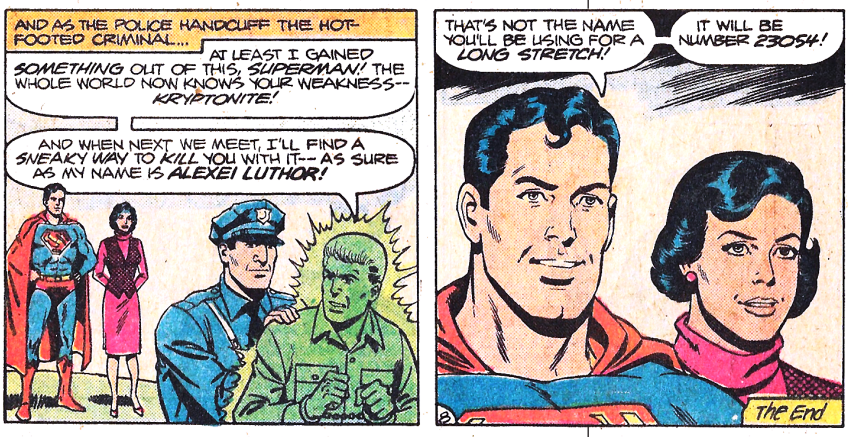












the existence of kryptonite. At the time, Dan Rivers hadn't realized what he had. In the sequel, he attempted to prove that it was a substance that could weaken—if not—kill Superman. The Man of Steel managed to refute his claim but Rivers—back in prison—was certain he was correct.

"I believe you," his redheaded cellmate declared, "and when I get out of here, I intend to *find* some of that mineral and use it to destroy Superman—as sure as my name is Alexei Luthor."

For a decade, in various DC text pages, Bridwell had developed multiple points of distinction between the present-day Superman's trappings and those of his Earth-Two counterpart whose career dated back to 1938. Technically, details like the Daily Star, editor George Taylor, and a red-haired Luthor only existed for a couple years in the comics but they never went away in Bridwell's retcon. For example, when writer Roy Thomas used a flashback to 1942's Powerstone story in *All-Star Squadron* #20 (1983), Jerry Ordway drew Luthor with red hair even though the original tale depicted him as bald.

Following another tease in *Superman Family* #203, the redheaded Luthor made good on his vow in issue #205. He not only proved that Superman was vulnerable to kryptonite but made sure the whole world knew it. He showed up again in issue #210, this time employing magic to oppose the Man of Steel.

Back on Earth-One, Alexis Luthor—whose full name was established in *Action* #512—theorized that he must have an Earth-Two counterpart like Superman and devised a means of swapping worlds with a still red-haired Alexei. Fighting different versions of Superman didn't pay off for the two Luthors and they wound up escaping to a third world in the second half of June 1982's *DC Comics Presents Annual* #1 (by Marv Wolfman, Rich Buckler, and Dave Hunt). Earth-Three tilted toward evil and Team Luthor was only too happy to join forces with its sinister Ultraman.

If there was a villainous iteration of the Man of Steel, however, there should logically be a good version of his greatest foe. With the encouragement of his world's Lois Lane, the Alexander Luthor of Earth-Three put on a red and blue costume and joined the Supermen from twin Earths in defeating his counterparts.

To be fair, Earth-One's Luthor was no longer fully committed once he learned that Alexei had intended to destroy the parallel worlds of their birth. In 1981, Lena Thorul had finally discovered that she was his sister—and was angry with all the people around her who knew before she did. By the end of October 1981's *Superman Family* #214 (by Martin Pasko, Win Mortimer, and Vince Colletta), Lena and Lex had taken tentative steps toward reconciliation and he had no desire to see her or his nephew Val die.

A turning point was brewing when 1983 dawned. Publisher Jenette Kahn issued a directive to editor Julius Schwartz to shake up the Superman series, incorporating more angst, soap opera, and subplots to reflect the storytelling in many DC and Marvel titles. She also wanted to see the Man of Steel's two greatest foes given makeovers to coincide with Superman's 45th anniversary in March 1983's oversized *Action Comics* #544.

"When Jenette asked to have Brainiac and Luthor redesigned," Wolfman recalled in *Amazing Heroes* #96, "I had wanted to do Luthor. But I was assigned Brainiac because Cary wanted Luthor." Wolfman's idea had been to reestablish Lex as a publicly law-abiding tycoon who used legal loopholes to confound Superman. Given Luthor's long criminal record (including his recent murder of Angela Blake), the concept strained credulity. Even with Vandal Savage substituted as the shady businessman (starting in *Action* #542), the subsequent run of stories proved divisive.

The story that Bates (with Swan and Anderson) delivered opened with Lex in retreat, traveling to Lexor for a full recharge. Unaware of her husband's two near-marriages on Earth,

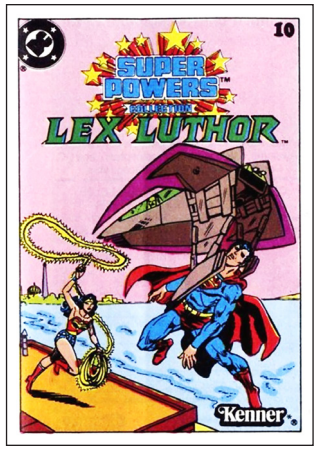
(left) Meet the Earth-Two Luthor. *Superman Family* #202, art by Schaffenberger. (top right) Jerry Ordway draws a red-haired Luthor in *All-Star Squadron* #20. (bottom right) Luthor exposes Superman's weakness in *Superman Family* #205. Art by Schaffenberger and Adkins.

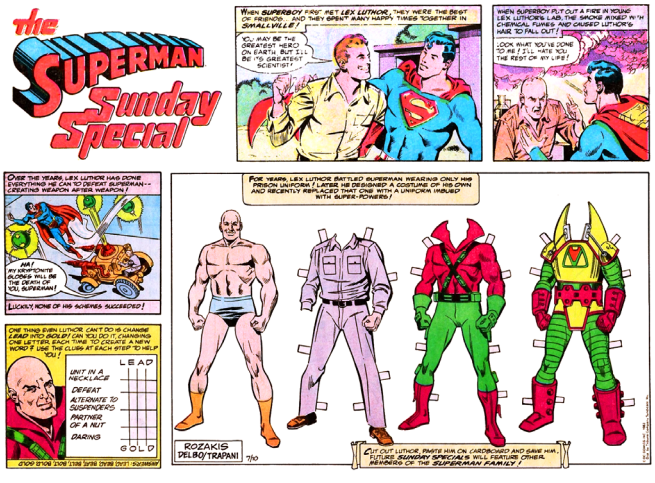
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(top left) George Perez's redesign of Lex Luthor appeared in *Action Comics* #544, and was used as (top right) the design for the Super Powers toy line. (middle) Two of the mini-comics that came with the Super Powers toys. (bottom) The 1983 Superman newspaper strip that debuted Lex's new look.

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Ardora welcomed him with open arms and introduced him to his toddler son. Luthor was not one to sit around idle and began exploring the planet's literally buried ancient technology. Along with devising a neutrarod designed to stabilize Lexor's unstable core, he also adopted a new purple and green armor that he began taking on anonymous—and destructive—test runs as the Mystery Marauder. His secrecy lasted only until Superman arrived to take him back to Earth. Luthor scoffed at the Lexorians' sense of betrayal, not that the feelings of the "little maggots"—his words—would matter much longer. A stray blast from Luthor bounced off Superman and struck the neutrarod. Lexor exploded within a matter of seconds, taking Ardora, Lex, Jr., and the rest of the population with it. Only the warsuit saved Luthor himself.

Sheer guilt and irrational jealousy caused Luthor to transfer all personal responsibility for the Lexor tragedy onto Superman. One of the intentions of the makeover was to strengthen Luthor's motivation for hating Superman beyond the initial triggers of resentment and losing his hair.

The new look—created by George Perez—didn't hurt, either. Talking to Andy Mangels in *Comics Interview* #50 (1987), he recalled getting "a very, very high designer's fee for designing his costume. So, they paid me a very large amount of money for what ended up being a fifteen-minute job, probably greater than the royalty would have paid me for the character."

At least as important (perhaps more) from a corporate level, the new warsuit was a potential licensing goldmine. Both it and Ed Hannigan's Brainiac redesign were prominent in Kenner's Super Powers action figure launch in 1984, complete with in-package mini-comics and a newsstand miniseries. The Super Powers concepts—including Luthor—also extended to animation, starting in September 1984 on ABC's *Super Friends: The Legendary Super Powers Show*. Meanwhile, the armor had premiered in the *Superman* newspaper strip, both Bob Rozakis and Jose Delbo's Sunday Special (starting with a July 10, 1983 paper doll panel) and Paul Kupperberg and Delbo's daily feature (as of December 3, 1983). "It was the only time I went full-tilt, purple and green costumed Luthor," Kupperberg declared, "which was some over the top fun."

In the comic books themselves, Luthor rode a chunk of Lexor to Earth and named it L-Island (later Black Island) when it splashed down in the Atlantic. In April 1983's *Superman* #385, Lex surrounded himself with support staff: mad chemist Renzil Dugan, cybernetically-enhanced enforcer "Louto" Malono, mob boss "Wicked Wanda" Nordo, and Siamese twin crime planners Plato and Pluto Statler. Bates continued their attacks on the Man of Steel in *Superman* #386, 401 (Aug. 1984), and 410, 412, and 413 (May-Aug. 1985). The latter three issues featured an insidious plan on Luthor's part, wherein he tampered with Superman's very sense of reality and triggered the firing of Clark Kent as collateral damage.

Bates' last word on the warsuit belatedly revealed its origin. Powered by an exo-spine, it had been created by ancient pre-Lexor scientists as a doomsday device designed to eradicate any civilization technologically capable of waging protracted warfare. Ironically, the exo-spine's scans of Lex's own super-scientific creations convinced it that Earth needed to be cleansed. Hence, another Superman/Luthor team-up, one that quelled the threat of the spine even as the armor—on Lex's command—withdrew for future instructions.

Illustrated by Alex Saviuk and Pablo Marcos, "Luthor's Ultra-Ego" was prepared in 1984 for another of Ehapa's Superman quarterlies. With six-pages trimmed from its original 46, the story finally saw U.S. publication in May 1986's *Superman Annual* #12 with a Brian Bolland cover replacing the Saviuk/Klaus Janson version seen in Germany.

Another Ehapa story—by Elliot S. Maggin, Alex Toth, and Terry Austin—featured the pre-armor Luthor but didn't see print in the U.S. until June 1983's *Superman Annual* #9. The delightful romp found Lex passing himself off as his goodhearted twin brother Erasmus, a con that Superman and Batman were happy to let him perpetuate as long as he was creating things to benefit mankind.

"It was part of my interpretation of Luthor as a profoundly capable and creative scientist," Maggin told *BI*. "As I wrote in the novels, in any other time in human history Luthor would be the greatest man in the world. He'd be a cross between da Vinci and Benjamin Franklin. But because he had the misfortune of living in a time when there was a Superman here too, since he needed to be the greatest at something, it could only be in a pursuit that was not open to Superman. He had to be the world's greatest criminal. This story was a chance to illustrate that."



Twin Luthors also showed up during 1985's *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, most notably in issue #9. After Brainiac named Earth-One's Luthor field commander of a huge squad of super-villains, the Earth-Two version cried foul. "My genius is far greater than his! You don't need him!" Brainiac incinerated him on the spot. "You are correct . We do not need two Luthors." (Earth-Three's Luthor, by the way, had *already* died—along with the rest of his world—in issue #1 but his cosmically-empowered son appeared throughout the 12-issue miniseries.)

Still more variant Luthors could be found in the pages of July 1985's *DC Comics Presents Annual* #4 (by Elliot S. Maggin, Ed Barreto, and Jerry Ordway). Its inspired premise was that Metropolis had been hosting an annual convention devoted to a certain bald bad guy. For Luthorcon III, the actual Lex orchestrated the presence of the real Superman at the event with the end goal of having unwitting impersonators kill the Man of Steel with genuine kryptonite. The arrival of time-traveling heroine Kristin (Superwoman) Wells put a snag in the plan.

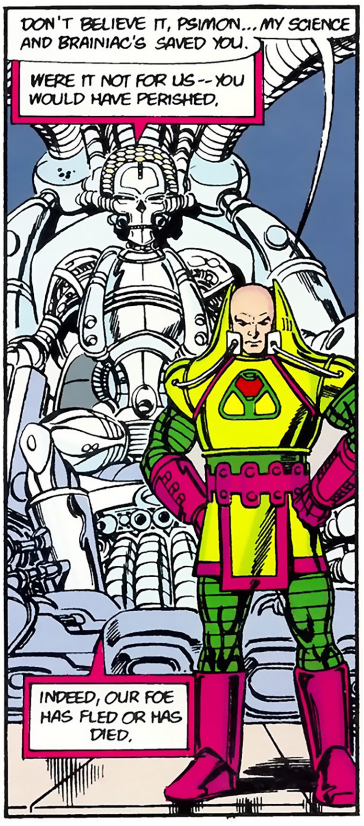
Luthor was no more successful in May 1985's *Heroes Against Hunger* but his mission there had been a noble one. Produced as a fundraiser for famine relief in Africa, the one-shot was plotted by Jim Starlin with script, art, etc. contributed by dozens of creators. The story found Superman and Batman coaxing Lex to help rejuvenate the arid African soil, something he agreed to once he realized that the Man of Steel had failed to find relief himself. Although the efforts to create a quick fix were a failure, Luthor—like the heroes—was left deeply shaken by the hunger and desperate conditions they witnessed.

There was no empathy whatsoever the following month in *Superman* #423 and *Action Comics* #583. The Man of Steel was poised for a scorched earth reboot by John Byrne in July and editor Julius Schwartz hired superstar writer Alan Moore (joined by penciler Curt Swan and inkers George Perez and Kurt Schaffenberger) to write a two-part "imaginary tale" that closed the book on the era. For Luthor specifically, that meant a literal team-up with Brainiac, who fused his electronic skull to Lex's head and used him as the means of carrying out horrific attacks on Superman and friends.

"Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow" may not have been Earth-One canon but the recent *Superman* #416 (Nov. 1985) had been. Elliot Maggin and Curt Swan were joined by inker Al Williamson for a pair of linked stories, the first of which endearingly detailed Lex's annual efforts to celebrate the birthday of Albert Einstein while evading capture by Superman. Once he finally realized what Luthor was doing each March 14, the Man of Steel brought the fugitive to the Smithsonian Institution so he could see its centennial statue of Einstein up close. In homage to the conclusion of 1960's first Lena Thorul story, the final panel found Lex thanking Superman as he reentered the Pocantino Federal Correctional Facility.

Maggin himself reveres Einstein, and had made him a pivotal figure in Superman's past as part of the *Last Son of Krypton* novel. (Pocantino originated there, too.)





(top) *Superman Annual* #12 cover only seen in Germany. Art by Alex Saviuk and Klaus Janson. (inset) The U.S. release of *Superman Annual* #12. Cover by Brian Bolland. (bottom) Lex and his old buddy Brainiac in *Crisis* #9. Art by George Perez and Jerry Ordway.

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(top) Luthor shows admiration for Einstein in *Superman* #416. Art by Swan and Al Williamson. (bottom left) Luthor attempts to end hunger in *Heroes Against Hunger*. Cover by Neal Adams and Giordano. (bottom right) *LexCorp* by Elliot S. Maggin.

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The back-up in *Superman* #416 shifted the action a century in the future, where a white-bearded Man of Steel used time travel to set up events in the lead story. The tale also revealed that "world renowned psychiatrist" Calvin Anderson ultimately "cured Lex Luthor of his criminal obsessions." Afterwards, he and Superman were finally able to call each other friends again. By the late 21st Century, the company known as Lexcorp was a household name.

"The shift was inevitable as the character matured," Maggin believes, "and the direction I started moving him from early on. I was never really good at portraying anyone as evil to the point of being plain unproductive. It was a source of contention between Julie and me. I was gradually moving the character to being the way I always thought of him logically."

Maggin later elaborated further on the Superman/Lex relationship—both past and future—in a prose short story entitled "Luthor's Gift" (available since 2018 as part of the print-on-demand book collection *An Enemy's Gift*).

"The people you interact with, even those you might generally consider adversaries, are relationships," he observes. "Friends really. I ran into a guy I knew well in high school whom one might have thought of as a classroom bully–but he never was and I told him so. He was just a guy I disagreed with about a lot of stuff fifty or sixty years ago (Damn am I that old?!!?). I've got friends now whom I just argue with, mostly over politics. We never slam each other's lockers shut or step on each other's homework out of spite. We just argue. It's fun. I wouldn't be able to support a point of view if I didn't have someone around to disagree with rationally. The characters we put into stories, even those who inspire earth-shattering fights, are metaphors for our relationships in life."

The reconceived Superman and Lex who debuted in July 1986 would never be mistaken for friends at any point in their lives. Now a shady tycoon who resented the hero who outshined him, this Luthor nonetheless carried over some elements from his forebears. The bald head. The scientific prowess. The irrational hatred of a certain Kryptonian. Marv Wolfman's rejected 1983 Luthor pitch, of course, drove the new interpretation.

Even Maggin's Lexcorp became a signature element. John Byrne credited Marvel editor Mark Gruenwald with suggesting the name, only learning in 2008 that it originated in *Superman* #416. "Which Mark almost certainly read," Byrne remarked in a Byrne Robotics post. "Wish he'd mentioned that!"

It had become fashionable to mock the Superboy-made-Luthor-bald origin but even that reemerged in the 21st century. Few ever appreciated the fact that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby had used the same premise—without fan derision—in 1964's *Fantastic Four Annual* #2. In that case, it was Doctor Doom whose experiment went wrong and Reed Richards whom he irrationally blamed for the resulting facial scars.

"It may not be gritty," former *Comic Reader* editor Mike Tiefenbacher observed to *BI*, "but holding an irrational grudge is way more human (and thus, sympathetic) than the tired loved one's death avenging thing. Poor self-image is easily the most universal human failing." Conceding that the Comics Code Authority would never have gone for it, Tiefenbacher imagines a 1960s comic book that might have capitalized on the Lexor-era: *Superman's Rival, Lex Luthor*.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about Luthor is that he never went away. Since his debut in 1940, he has been the only villain to appear in new comic book stories every single year of his existence. That's an achievement even the Joker can't match. Unlike the costumed crooks who fell in and out of favor over the years, Luthor's civilian trappings allowed him to survive in any environment. And when times changed again, he could still change up his wardrobe accordingly in snappy green and purple numbers. Someday, if we wait long enough, even prison grays will be in style again.



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

end

The SCORPION THIS MIGHT STING

by Matt Merante





"A man who studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green" —Sir Francis Bacon

Scorpions have been powerful cultural totems for millennia. In the Zodiac, Scorpio is known as the eighth symbol from the constellation Scorpius. Zeus rewarded the scorpion by casting its visage among the stars after it stung Orion to death. Egyptian mythology holds the scorpion in high regard as a symbol of empowerment and rebirth. Aesop's tale *The Scorpion and the Frog* explores the unrelenting nature of biological imperatives. And in the animal kingdom, a scorpion is a successful predatory arachnid, using brute force and deadly venom to hunt and survive for over 400 million years.

Stan Lee and Steve Ditko combined both myth and nature to construct Mac Gargan, the Scorpion, who has pursued Spider-Man and J. Jonah Jameson for quite some time since being introduced in *Amazing Spider-Man* #19-20 (Dec. 1964-Jan. 1965). With his bright green costume, lethal prehensile tail, and countless suit upgrades, he perpetually stalks his prey after an experiment gone awry. Gargan never intended to be "The Scorpion" permanently but is forever tainted by a process he signed up for. This paradox makes the Scorpion a unique and nearly tragic figure. However, that is only the surface story. Mac Gargan is not simply a hybrid human/scorpion driven mad by genetic tampering.

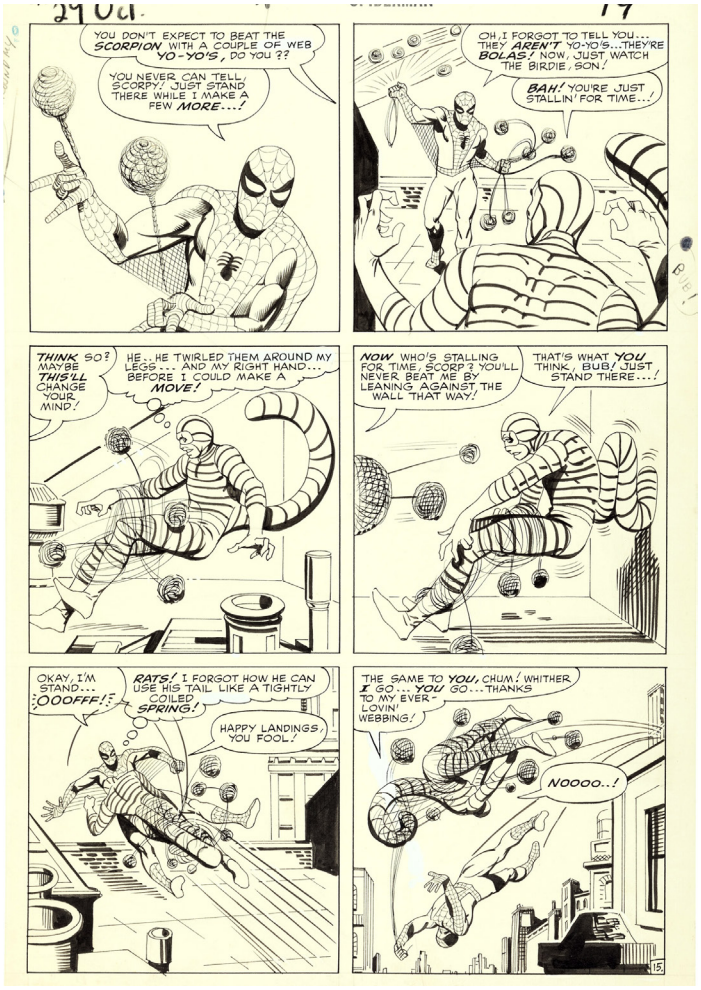
He is a vessel of pure unadulterated hate. The Scorpion is the living embodiment of J. Jonah Jameson's fear and resentment towards Spider-Man, manifested in a cybernetic super-suit of insanity. He's the Frankenstein's monster of the Spiderverse, forever lamenting his creation while wanting vengeance on the estranged father that bore him. But what happens when one is primarily driven by hate? Will Mac Gargan ever find what he is seeking, or did his transformation reveal an innate nature that was already present? Let's crack open this exoskeleton and see what the Scorpion can teach us about rebirth, revenge, and recursion!

The Scorpion crashes the original Clone Saga. *Amazing Spider-Man* #145 cover by Gil Kane and John Romita. (inset) The Scorpion makes his dynamic debut in *Amazing Spider-Man* #20. Cover by Steve Ditko.

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(top left) Less than a year later, the Scorpion is back in *ASM* #29. (top right) Spidey wasn't the only hero to feel the Scorpion's sting. *Captain America* #122 cover by Gene Colan and Joe Sinnott. (bottom) The Scorpion and Spider-Man go toe-to-to in *ASM* #29 by Steve Ditko. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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SCORPLING SPONSORSHIP

From the very start, Daily Bugle publisher J. Jonah Jameson hated Spider-Man. His distaste was so pervasive that he paid a middling private investigator to undergo an experimental process in *ASM* #20 (Jan. 1965) to defeat Spidey–a process that drove the subject, Mac Gargan, insane. Jameson created a nemesis that would hate him and Spider-Man in equal measure. How did this come to be and why did private gumshoe Mac Gargan agree to drink untested mutated scorpion juice? Well, it came down to a fairly common motivator: money. As Mac stated himself, "I'm getting $10,000 also for my part in this… and I'd do anything for that kind of dough!" Adjusted for inflation, that's about $103,000 today. Still, getting paid six figures to gain scorpion-like strength and endurance while losing one's sanity seems a bit short-sighted.

Dr. Farely Stillwell, who accepted a bribe to test black science on a human, also had a scorpion suit with a cybernetic tail on hand. Mac Gargan was corrupted by his newfound powers. He soon robbed a bank after tossing Spider-Man around like a ragdoll. The morally mercurial Dr. Farely tried to deliver a cure to Gargan after realizing his formula was problematic. Declining, Scorpion used his tail to fatally knock him off the side of a building. Mac Gargan went from being a mediocre PI to a robbing, murdering, maniacal monster in less than 48 hours! Jameson soon realized the consequences of his actions, "It's all my fault…just to satisfy my own personal hatred I tried to destroy Spider-Man! And, in so doing, I've unleashed a far worse menace upon the world!". Spider-Man outmaneuvered the stronger, slower Scorpion by tearing off his tail and knocking him out cold. Jameson would have a brief respite, but nine months later the menacing Scorpion would return.

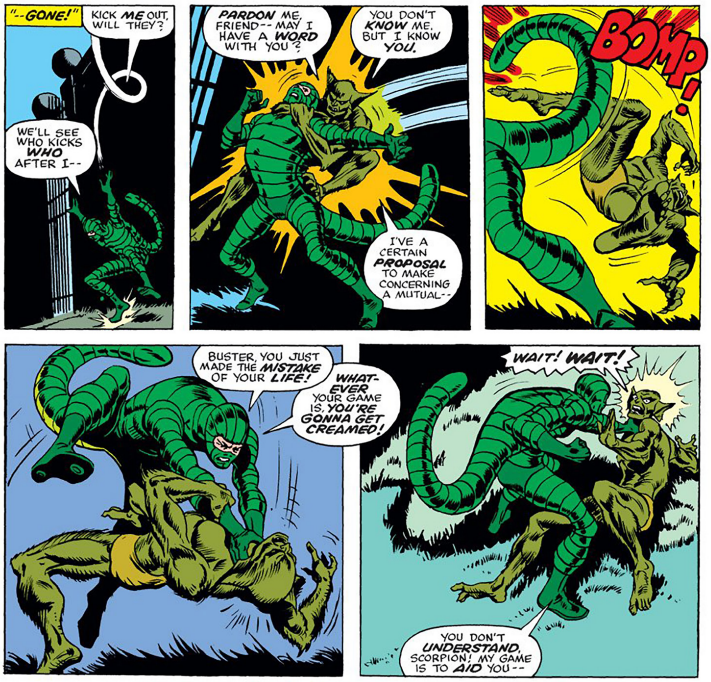
In *ASM* #29 (Oct. 1965), Scorpion escaped prison after the guards provided him with his costume for psychological comfort (hopefully they were relieved of their duties). He headed straight for the Daily Bugle to directly confront Jameson while tail-smashing every desk and file cabinet the company owned. After a long battle amongst the NYC skyline, Spidey created "web-bolas" to stifle Gargan. He then outlasted him in an underwater scuffle with his incredible lung capacity! Who knew spiders could hold their breath longer than scorpions? Again, Jonah was the target here, and he selfishly kept his role in Gargan's origin story to himself. But folks were becoming suspicious.

CLONING AROUND

Peter Parker and J. Jonah Jameson were not the only ones to cross paths with the Scorpion and his tail. Captain America had the pleasure of deflecting caudal strikes with his shield in *Captain America* #122 (Feb. 1970), saving Agent Thirteen. They met again in *Captain American* #151-152 (Apr.-May 1972), this time in a tag-team match: Cap and Falcon versus Scorpion and Mr. Hyde.

The Scorpion would reappear in *ASM* #145-146 (June-July 1975), by Gerry Conway and Ross Andru. In the midst of the "return" of Gwen Stacy, Gargan showed up to make another bank withdrawal after again being released for good behavior. These two arch-arachnids quickly faced off in a construction zone with Scorpion knocking an emotionally distraught Spidey into a concrete mixing vat. Believing he'd defeated Spider-Man once and for all, an overzealous Scorpy decided to test his abilities against the world of organized crime?! After being chased away by mafia bullets, he encountered the Jackal who saw a mutual benefit in combining forces.

The Jackal used Scorpion as a tool for his machinations, much like Jonah did years ago. He aimed Gargan at a hospitalized Aunt May in order to smoke Spider-Man out. Peter Parker was visiting with Aunt May at the time of Scorpion's intrusion, and after a quick change he drew Gargan away, pummeling him thoroughly. The battle concluded with Spider-Man slugging him off the top of the Chrysler Building! The Scorpion was





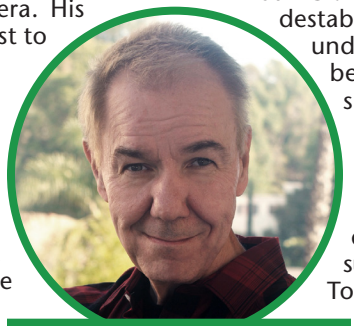
(left) The Jackal and the Scorpion hatch a sinister plot in *ASM* #146. (right) Spider-Man and Scorpion battle on the rooftops. *ASM* #146 art by Ross Andru, John Romita, John Romita Jr., John Tartaglione, Mike Esposito, and Frank Giacoia. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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saved only by his coiled tail. Legendary spider-scribe Gerry Conway reflected on the selection of the Scorpion for this story via interview, "I loved the character…he was a great visual appointment for Spider-Man. Most of the villains Spider-Man was fighting at the time were either mad scientists or multi-millionaires. Mac Gargan was just an ordinary guy who got this superpower, and he was (initially) motivated by wanting money. Readers related to that character." Conway held issue artist Ross Andru in very high regard, "I think that Ross was the best Spider-Man artist of that era. His storytelling was fantastic…Ross came the closest to the storytelling techniques of Steve Ditko."

SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

Ms. Marvel had the pleasure of facing off with Mr. Gargan during her first solo series adventures, *Ms. Marvel* #1-2 (Jan.-Feb. 1977), by Gerry Conway, John Buscema, and Joe Sinnott. As Carol Danvers joined the ranks at the Daily Bugle, the Scorpion robbed a bank. He delivered the money to a mysterious figure, Professor Kerwin Korwin, in exchange for the use of a booby-trapped lab. Think of it as renting a deathtrap motel. And who did he want to host? You guessed it: J. Jonah Jameson. "Because of Jameson, I'm a monster!", he lamented, believing to be permanently bonded to his costume.



GERRY CONWAY

Jameson was captured by Gargan and dangled over a vat of acid. Ms. Marvel crashed the lab, saved Jamison, and tossed Scorpion towards the vat. This caused it to rupture and rain acid down upon him. It was revealed in part two of the story, "Enigma of Fear", that the Scorpion was a pawn in a greater A.I.M. scheme to test Ms. Marvel's power set. He escaped A.I.M.'s clutches before being indoctrinated to their cause but was left helplessly atop a statue by Ms. Marvel until the authorities arrived.

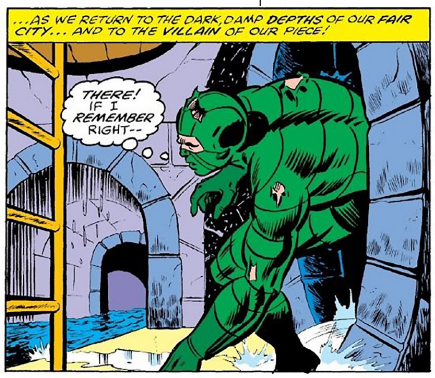
Mac Gargan reemerged in *The Spectacular Spider-Man* #21 (June 1978) by Bill Mantlo, Jim Mooney, and Mike Esposito. In "Still Crazy After All These Years", Gargan's psychological destabilization has progressed further. He wandered underground a la the Phantom of the Opera, still believing his costume was an everlasting second skin. Blaming Jameson for his predicament, "because of him I can never lead a normal life… never feel the sun on my skin…", he revisited the original lab where he first transformed. Feeling completely distanced from humanity, Scorpion doubled down on the original process, increasing his superhuman strength, endurance, and durability. To the surprise of no one, he sought to attack Jameson and destroy him once and for all. A webless Spider-Man saved Jonah, and then immediately tore off Scorpion's mask. It was never actually sealed to his face! The delusion that Gargan harbored was purely psychological. He acted like a monster because that is how he viewed himself.

It required the combined efforts of both Captain American and Spider-Man to fend off Scorpion in *Marvel Team-Up* #106 (June 1981) by Tom DeFalco and Herb Trimpe. This time he embellished his insanity in order to be given his costume for emotional support while under custody (a nod to *ASM* #29).

(top) The Scorpion doesn't fare too well against Ms. Marvel. Cover by John Buscema and Dick Giordano. (bottom) Gargan wanders the sewers and stumbles across where he was created in *Spectacular Spider-Man* #21. Art by Jim Mooney and Mike Esposito. (inset) *ASM Annual* #18 features a classic Scorpion tale. Cover by Ron Frenz and Butch Guice.

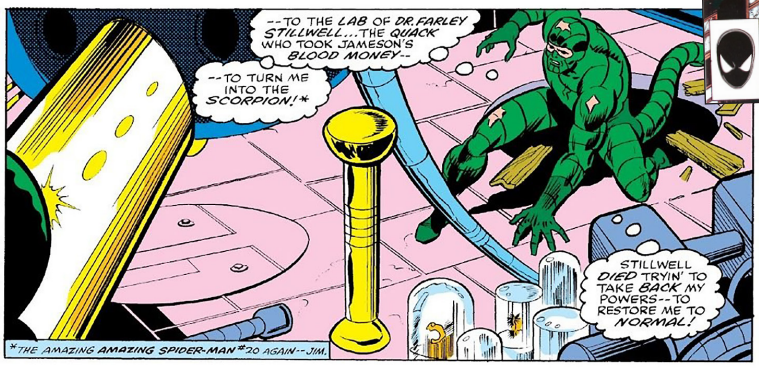
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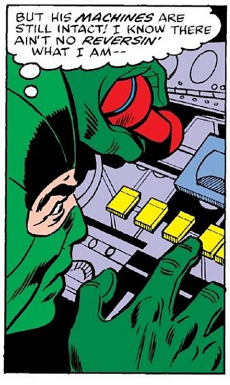
















Gargan escaped (again), headed to the lab (again), adding some potent electromagnetic blasts to his tail. Then he did something out of character: recruited low-level criminals to begin a protection racket. The first aim was to destroy Jameson by financially incapacitating the Daily Bugle. Spider-Man, with a huge assist from Cap, foiled the plan at the last minute, but not before Jameson was hogtied and slapped around. Captain America sliced off the end of Scorpion's newly upgraded tail using his shield, thus ending another pallid attempt at vengeance. Following a brief cup of coffee with the Masters of Evil in *Avengers* #222 (Aug.1982), Gargan would circle back once again to his preferred quarry.

JONAH'S DEBT

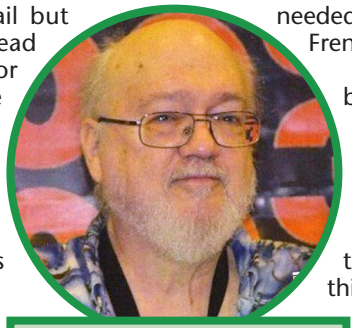
In *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #18 (Dec. 1984) we get a peak bronze-age "tail" in "The Scorpion Takes a Bride! (But not the way you think!)". First, it was scripted by Stan Lee, his first in twelve years! Additionally, it was plotted and penciled by the distinctive synergy of long-time collaborators Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz, with sharp finishes by Bob Layton and Butch Guice. The combined talent poured into this annual created a near perfect comic. The plot cuts quite deeply to the core of the tumultuous relationship between J. Jonah Jameson and Mac Gargan. Scorpion's resentment was so ingrained that he decided to end one of Jameson's loves–his son or fiancée—and J. Jonah had to choose! Gargan, consumed by madness, refused to accept the continued consequences of a decision he made years ago. He wished to make Jameson pay—permanently. The genius twist of this issue is that it turns out Jonah already had been paying for years: the Scorpion's doctor bills, sanitarium residency, and even a fund devoted to Scorpion's victims! Jonah took responsibility for his decision, something that Gargan never did. Spider-Man intervened on Jonah's behalf and made sure the Scorpion's plan failed. Issue penciller extraordinaire Ron Frenz shared with *BI* which features make the Scorpion an effective antagonist, "Visually the Scorpion is very dynamic. Physically he cuts a figure equal to Spider-Man in his skintight outfit, and the lack of eyebrows gives him a creepiness factor I've always loved. He holds a place in the rogues gallery as an 'opposite number' type of character."

MAKING IT STING!

One of the most curious aspects of the Scorpion's early adventures was his tail: It was wide, round, and at times, dare we say–stubby. Yes, it could break through granite, periodically shoot force blasts, and knock around a hero or two, but never seemed truly "scorpion-like". Enter David Michelinie and Todd McFarlane. In 1989 they upgraded the character in a way that made a lot of sense, adding a ferocity that would serve the Scorpion well for the foreseeable future. David Michelenie explained via email, "One of the first things I wanted to do in the story in *ASM* #318-319 (Aug.-Sept. 1989) was to make Scorpion more dangerous, both visually and action-wise. Since a real scorpion has a barb on the end of its tail I figured that would be a nice addition for our human scorpion. And Todd did a great job making that barb look scary and lethal! Then we added the ability to have the new tail shoot mace, acid, and even energy blasts. Which, we

hoped, gave Gargan a bigger edge in a fight, as well as adding variety to those fights. And having Scorpion attempt a kidnapping for Justin Hammer in return for those upgrades gave us the basic plot for those two issues."

Scorpion intended to do Hammer's will in return for the upgrades to his tail but was again completely insane. Instead of kidnapping Hammer's target for a ransom, he made him a hostage to be exchanged for Jameson! Spider-Man, with the unlikely assistance of Rhino and Blacklash, was able to foil the plot and subdue Scorpion. To add insult to injury, Rhino snapped off Gargan's brand new tail.



DAVID MICHELINIE

After a brief battle with Canada's favorite super team in *Alpha Flight* #79-80 (Dec. 1989-Jan. 1990), Scorpion reappeared in *ASM* #342-343 (Dec. 1990-Jan. 1991). Image Comics cofounder and fan favorite artist Erik Larsen had his turn with the character. This time Spidey had no powers at his disposal to fight with! Luckily, the Black Cat aided him during the encounter, and the following issue his powers returned.

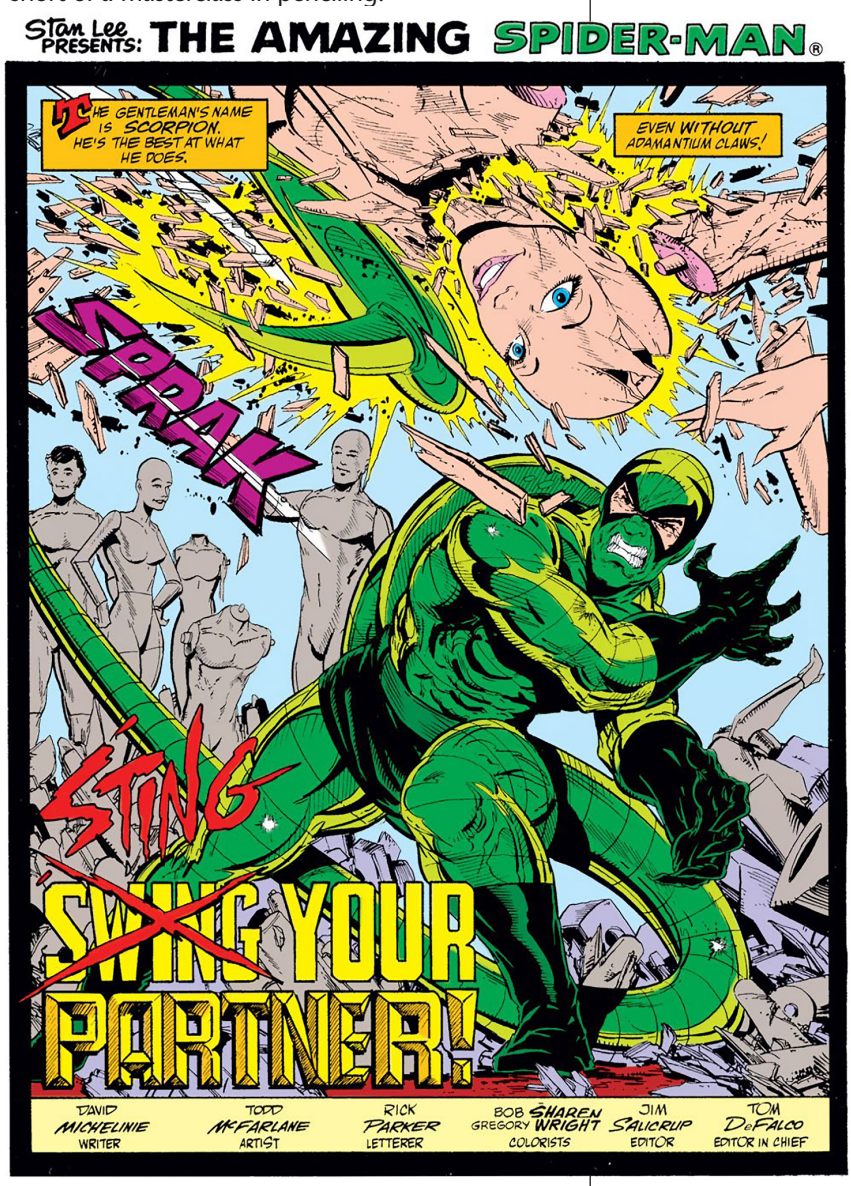
In correspondence with *BI*, Larsen noted his interpretation of the Scorpion, "I was following Todd's lead (McFarlane) to some extent. His costume had been updated a bit, so I felt that I had to go with that general design. At the same time, I wanted it to harken back to the original look so I pushed it in that direction as much as I could… Ditko's Scorpion just had a couple of holes for a nose and he didn't give him eyebrows, which I thought made him look creepier and more inhuman. So, while I kept Todd's updated stinger and the new eye surround, I went back to Ditko's version for various other details. Ditko's designs were both simple and distinctive. You could dress them up and add rendering but the essential elements were all there. They conveyed everything that they needed to." Or as the aforementioned Mr. Frenz put it, "Ditko's genius is timeless."

David Micheline brought Scorpion back one more time during his run in *ASM* #370 (Dec. 1992): "Life Stings". Gargan's upgrade in this instance was an electric charge emanating from the tail that would prevent anyone from grabbing or tearing it off. The Tinkerer provided this service for a fee. While on his way to pick-up his new outfit, Scorpion happened to see Spider-Man and Felicia Hardy walk by. He decided to attack and failed…again. This issue was penciled by Mark Bagley and portrayed a very svelte Scorpion. Seeing the differing design choices by McFarlane, Larsen, and Bagley is nothing short of a masterclass in penciling.



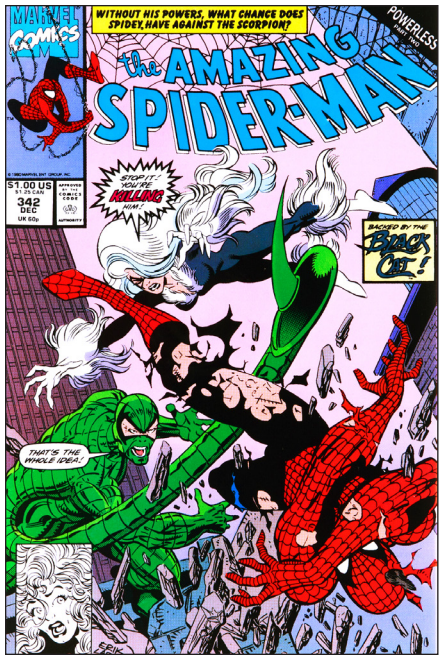
Todd McFarlane gives the Scorpion an upgrade in *Amazing Spider-Man* #318.

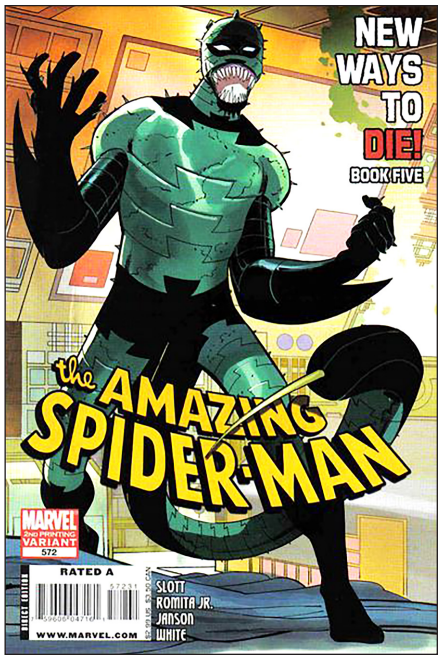
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(left) The Black Cat aids Spider-Man in his battle against the Scorpion. Cover by Erik Larsen and Al Gordon. (right) A terrifying Scorpion/Venom hybrid by John Romita Jr. and Klaus Janson. (inset below) An outstanding portrait of the Scorpion by Sal Buscema.

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THE PREDATOR & THE PREY

Tom DeFalco and Sal Buscema explored the possibility of redemption for Mac Gargan in *SSM* #215-216 (Aug.-Sep. 1994), "The Predator and The Prey". Rejecting the general populace, Scorpion wanders the sewers (callback to *SSM* #21) in search of solitude. He encountered a delusional millionaire, Mr. Phillip Cussler, Sr., who believes he was cast out of the family business and had his sights set on revenge. Cussler deduced that the Scorpion could easily help him achieve it. Again, even when trying to get out of his own way, Mac Gargan is seen as a blunt instrument in somebody else's plan. This odd couple developed a legitimate friendship, but not before an aggressive and careless Spider-Man inadvertently put Cussler Sr. in the hospital!

Gargan wanted to reform, but a reckless Spidey influenced by toxic sewer sludge beat the tar out of him. Thus, making Spider-Man the "real" predator of the story.



If heroes only ever see Mac Gargan as the villainous Scorpion, how could he ever change his ways? Can a criminal reform if society never forgives their past transgressions? Tom DeFalco considers whether Mac Gargan deserved a reprieve, "I have always tried to humanize my villains. I want the reader to see them as real people: otherwise, they are just props. I think the Scorpion deserves a certain amount of sympathy—even though his situation is the result of his own choices. Even monsters can be sympathetic."

The art for this issue was provided by the late Sal Buscema, in the gritty and kinetic style that captured the imagination of many *SSM* subscribers in the 1990s. DeFalco shared his thoughts about Buscema, "Sal was a consummate professional. He was one of the finest visual storytellers this industry has ever seen and you could always count on him to deliver the job on time…Aside from being a great artist, Sal was also a true gentleman with a wonderful sense of humor. He was an amateur actor who appeared in many community theatre musicals. He also played volleyball into his early 80s and belonged to a few bowling leagues up until his death".

MOLTED DESIGNS

For a period during the mid-2000s, Mac Gargan was no longer the Scorpion, having taken over the Venom moniker from Eddie Brock. As nature abhors a vacuum, a new female Scorpion was on the scene: Carmilla Black. She was co-created by writer Fred Van Lente and penciller Leonard Kirk, with designs by Phillip Tan. Van Lente candidly explained how this came about in email correspondence, "It was my first-ever full Marvel gig. I was invited with at least one other writer to pitch on it. They had decided that they were going to turn the male Spider-Man villain into a teenage female SHIELD agent, ostensibly because she won a "Next Character Makeover" poll on Marvel.com. I pitched the idea that she was the illegitimate daughter of Viper and Silver Samurai, two villains who had been associated with each other for a long time…Marvel said, 'You can't use Viper and Silver Samurai because they're in Mark Millar's Wolverine run'…So Monica Rappaccini, Scientist Supreme of AIM and (the new) Scorpion's mother, was born. Carmilla wound up on the 'Renegades,' the team of heroes who supported the Hulk in the World War Hulk event…which mutated into *The Incredible Hercules* (2008-2010), the series that basically launched me. She was a huge part of forging my career, even if her own impact on the Marvel Universe was minimal." Van Lente adds, "I used her in *ASM* as the Scorpion representative during *'The Gauntlet'* storyline when Gargan was kind of in limbo. Ironically, I helped Dan Slott co-write the return of Gargan as Scorpion in *ASM* a few years later."

In *ASM* #572 (Nov. 2008) by Dan Slott, John Romita Jr., and Klaus Janson, the now "venomized" Mac Gargan was outfitted in Scorpion-like armor. He fought the original Venom, Eddie Brock, who was reenvisioned as Anti-Venom. This new hybrid Scorpion-Venom existed due to the genetic tampering and monetary freedom of none other than Harry Osborn in "New Ways to Die". Later, in *Dark Avengers* #1 (Jan. 2009) Mac Gargan employed the Venom symbiote to impersonate Spider-Man. He maintained this cover for approximately a year, acting as a violent and unpredictable version of Spidey. While this occurred, Carmilla Black stole Gargan's original costume, escaping both Red Hood and Tombstone in *ASM* #626 (May 2010) "The Sting". Gargan would soon be relieved of the Venom symbiote and regain his original name and powers shortly thereafter.

DIVERGING SPECIES

The Scorpion has appeared in a multitude of other forms including cartoons, video games, and toys. His first animated appearance was in the 1967 *Spider-Man* series. In 1983 he appeared in *Spider-Man and his Amazing Friends* (*Attack of the Arachnoid*; S3, Ep.4). He was a recurring villain in *Spider-Man: The Animated Series* (1994-1998), voiced by Martin Landau and later Richard Moll. Maximus Gargan, the cyborg Scorpion, invaded Aunt May's house before being defeated by Spider-Ham, Spider Noir, and Peni Parker in the Academy Award winning animated film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018). Actor Michael Mando played Mac Gargan in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017) and the Scorpion in *Spider-Man: Brand New Day* (2026). Lead character designer and comic artist Leonardo Romero reinterprets the Scorpion as a gang-leader, utilizing black market Oscorp gear in season one of *Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man* (2025). The Scorpion has also been featured in several video game iterations, starting in 1990 with Gameboy's *The Amazing Spider-Man* up to PS5's *Spider-Man 2* (2023). And he was even included as a McDonald's Happy Meal toy in 1995!

There are quite a few alternate Scorpions scurrying about in the Marvel Multiverse. In the modern classic *Ultimate Spider-Man* #97 (Sep. 2006) by Bendis and Bagley, the Scorpion is a clone of Peter Parker! Miles Morales fought his scorpion on his homeworld Earth 1610 (Maximus Gargan), and later Mac Gargan on Earth 616 in *Miles Morales: Spider-Man #2* (Mar. 2023). And Scorpion, an agent of Oscorp, wears white armor to take on the Samurai Venom in *Extreme Venomverse* #1 (July 2023). Additionally, several other "Earths" featured wearers of the suit and armor.

SURVIVAL INSTINCT

What is to be gleaned from the tale of the Scorpion? Is J. Jonah Jameson ultimately responsible for Mac Gargan's crimes? Can a melding of man, machine, and nature have a positive outcome? Who drew the fiercest tail stinger? Many questions arise with few clear answers. However, some ideas do bubble to the surface: Personal responsibility is the benchmark of a hero and the bane of a villain. One should never consume raw, untested animal DNA for monetary gain. Joining the Venom symbiote rarely solves your problems. Feigning insanity in order to get your costume returned to you only works in comics, and if you are bonded to a cybernetic tail, you better learn how to use it.

Like his real-life namesake, the Scorpion is a survivor, albeit a resentful one. Throughout the ebb and flow of comic history, Mac Gargan has evolved, devolved, and recurred based on a crippling default setting: being simultaneously motivated and handcuffed by his hatred towards Jameson. Unwilling to forgive his perceived enemies nor take ownership for poor decision making, he is trapped in a prison of his own design. Does the Scorpion truly desire peace, or is the stinging pursuit of vengeance his singular motive for existence? One thing is clear: wherever a scorpion hunts, a friendly neighborhood spider will not be too far from the fray.



Matt Merante is a writer and literacy specialist whose interests include comics, film, and pop culture. He greatly admires the work of Gene Colan, Sal Buscema, Norm Breyfogle, and many others. Matt lives in Virginia with his family and has never seen a green scorpion.





(top) The Carmilla Black Scorpion debuts in *Amazing Fantasy* #7. Cover by James Jean. (bottom) The Camilla Black Scorpion in action from *Amazing Fantasy* #7. Art by Leonard Kirk, Jonathan Glapion, and Kevin Conrad.

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TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

The Royal Flush Gang

They're Not Playing with a Full Deck

by Brian Martin



A Royal Flush is incredibly rare when playing poker. Unless it's in the movies, then it is pretty much the easiest hand for the hero to get. But in comics, the Royal Flush Gang have perennially been one of those middle of the pack villain groups that gets trotted out fairly regularly, but very, very seldom are they a real threat. The RFG had a joker in their deck though, as this group was quite frequently portrayed as under the sway of a more major league antagonist, and part of a larger plan. With that in mind, we'll put on our dealer's visor, do a little fancy shuffling, and more than a few times deal from the bottom of the deck as we examine the career of these pasteboard purveyors of plunder.

CUT THE DECK

The card themed crooks would first come to the table in a pair of 1960s issues of *Justice League of America* (Love those go-go checks!). First in issue #43 (Mar. 1966) then to be dealt with again in issue #54 (June 1967). Both were the creations of writer Gardner Fox and penciller Mike Sekowsky. Bernard Sachs, and Sid Greene were the respective inkers.

Beginning life garbed in the suit clubs, the initial conflict features the group's leader discovering a force called Stellaration which he charges various playing cards with to achieve various effects (taken from actual cartomancy) when directed against a foe. The five of diamonds gives bad news, the four of diamonds means betrayal, etc. The JLA finally discovers the source of the Royal powers and charges up team mascot Snapper Carr to offset the effects, dressing him as a joker. A white and red garbed one with bells so as not to confuse him with The Joker, we presume.

Upon defeat, the Flushers (hmm, might need a better nickname) are shown to be led by frequent League antagonist Amos Fortune. Thus, the trend of being someone's gang started very early.

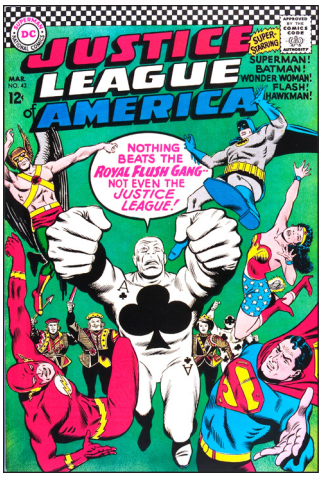
For their return engagement, a bit of a change in tactics was called for as the Gang first battle the JLA dressed as the historical inspirations for various cards in a deck. Still powered by the same energy, the RFG still meets defeat at the hands of the Justice League.

The group were shuffled into the deck and did not emerge until Martin Pasko wrote, and Irv Novick and Tex Blaisdell illustrated issue #5 (Jan.-Feb. 1976) of *The Joker* where the predictable conflict between the group and the titular villain occurred. More apt after the climax of the first Gang appearance of course. A new Ace has taken over and even switched the group's suit to spades. The symbology of the various cards is still a weapon used by the gang, a holdover to their Fortunate origins. The Joker manages to resist these weapons however, indicating they are based on the power of suggestion. Something his insane mind is not affected by. Not a high point in Gang history, Joker uses a couple of simple string gimmicks to tie up the entire group for the police.

Just a final Bronze Age tidbit for everyone. The plot of the issue revolves around a set of paintings. But during the course of the story, Joker reveals his real name and the fact that his grandfather painted those works and splashed experimental paint in his face turning his skin white. I don't know how many of these sorts of tales turned up in the Bronze Age, but this one can definitely be counted as a Clown Prince concoction.

Stylish artwork from the cover of *Justice League of America* #203 by George Perez and Dick Giordano.

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(top left) The Royal Flush Gang make their debut in *Justice League of America* #43. Cover by Mike Sekowsky and Murphy Anderson. (top right) The Royal Flush Gang would go after anyone. *Wonder Woman* #256 cover by Jose Delbo and Vince Colletta. (bottom) Meeting the Joker seems natural for the Royal Flush Gang. *Joker* #5 art by Irv Novick and Tex Blaisdell. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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VINTAGE CARDS

The Royal Flush Gang were not the first card themed deck of villains. Debuting in *Captain Marvel Jr.* #7 (May 1943) were the Ace, King, Queen, and Jack of crime. Dressed more based on their nomenclature than anything card based, they certainly had a previous claim to the schtick. Someone should have dealt them a ten though.



Not long after, a single Gang member broke away from the pack. *Secret Society of Super Villains* #2 (July-Aug. 1976) featured the new member Hi-Jack. Gerry Conway, David Kraft, Pablo Marcos, and Bob Smith were the creative team who inducted him and he played a fairly substantial role in this issue and the next. Unfortunately, early in issue #4 he was dispatched to limbo by the Wizard.

He would not remain there though, as Conway wrote the tale that showed him residing in prison in *JLA* #167 (June 1979).

The Jack was back in the gang for their clash with Wonder Woman in issue #256 of her title the same month. Different sources claim this is the same Jack and that it is not. Maybe just from a different suit?

DEALER'S CHOICE

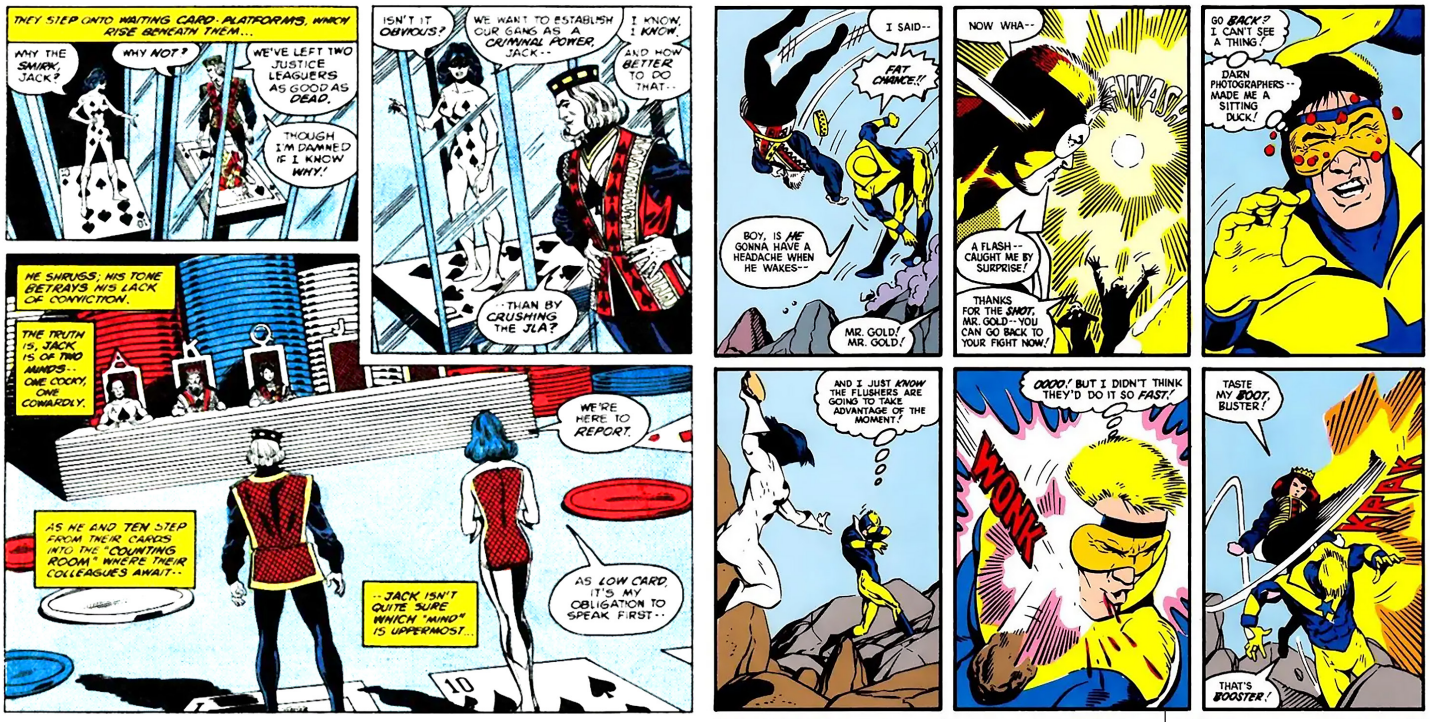
The idea for the grouping appeared to be too good to let go however and the concept, with new players recruited for the various cards, made their return in grand fashion in *JLA* #203 (June 1982). Gerry Conway scribed the story for Don Heck and Romeo Tanghal to illustrate over this and the next two issues. At the end of the first instalment, we are once again aware that the Royals (that's a little better) are being used. The Ace this time is a robot who reports to a mysterious master over a view screen.

The Gang attacks the JLA and puts some members into a coma with something called Z-Radiation that is slowly stealing their minds. Turns out the puppet master this time is Hector Hammond, who needs the brain power to end his long paralysis. The tale had a twist as the Jack in this deck turns over a new card and assists the JLA, not keen on serving a robot, and the disembodied Hammond suffering his final defeat at the "hands" of the equally spectral silent half of Firestorm, Professor Martin Stein.

THE ACE OF SPADES

The Royal Flush Gang would not appear again until after the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* reorganized the DC Universe. But their return showed that some things never change. *Justice League* #4 (Aug. 1987) was by the legendary team of Keith Giffen, J. M. DeMatteis, Kevin Maguire, and Al Gordon. The JL had not quite segued into full "Bwa-ha-ha" mode on the title yet, so this issue was still a very serious deal, plus, it brought Booster Gold into the mix, possibly responsible for changing the direction of the group for the foreseeable future.

The RFG attacks the JL just as Booster is leaving a meeting after berating Max Lord for trying to foist him on the group. Black Canary vocally wonders why the Royals would attack, but Booster finds them first and beats them quite easily. Until their new Ace shows up. An extremely powerful robot, it tosses the group around until the team of Booster and Blue Beetle manage to defeat it and Booster is welcomed onto the team. Though we suspect it at the time, we later find out the card themed cads were hired by Lord to make Gold look good and get him on the team. Just another case of them carrying out someone else's agenda.



(left) The Royal Flush Gang get an HQ in *JLA* #203. Art by Don Heck and Romeo Tanghal. (right) Booster Gold takes on the Gang by himself in *Justice League* #4. Art by Kevin Maguire and Al Gordon. (inset) This time, the Royal Flush Gang goes after the New Teen Titans. Cover by Tom Grummett and Al Vey.

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RIVERBOAT FANTASY

It would take until July of 1990 before the writing team of Barbara and Karl Kesel would pen a pair of *New Teen Titans* issues for Steve Erwin and Bob Smith to illustrate featuring the RFG. The duo of fill-ins occurs before major changes to the title began in #72, with issues #68 (July) and 69 containing the clash and once again the team is working for someone else. In this case, they believe it is the Joker, but it is really the Earth One version of the Gambler. He leads them to the wrong conclusion by sporting the purple hat the Clown Prince of Crime added to his ensemble in the *Detective Comics* issues created by Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers, and Terry Austin (#475-476, don't you know).

A couple of significant changes are made to a pair of Gang members, as King reveals, due to the metagene (introduced to the DCU in the *Invasion* series [*BI* #165 has all you could want to know about that series]), he cannot be killed, while The Gambler informs Jack that the Jack of Spades is a one-eyed Jack and stabs him in the eye!

A further change to the Gang is they are now employing teenagers as lower numbered cards dubbed Ten's Little Indians. Danny Chase (a character who garnered a wide range of opinions during his tenure with the Titans) infiltrates this off-shoot. The downside is, the Gambler has already shown he is not above killing one of the minions if there is any chance they will betray the Gang.

Danny's time with the Titans turns out to be his undoing as the RFG find a picture of him with that group and deduce his real identity. His subsequent escape brings the Titans into the fray and leads to the Gang's defeat. Not all of them are captured at once though, as King and Jack discover the Gambler's ruse and find his base of operations, an old-fashioned riverboat. They attempt to take a measure of revenge, especially Jack, but Starfire pops in just in time to head that off.

RESHUFFLE

1992's *Justice League Spectacular* reset the League after that humorous era, and the creative teams that would take over the various books crafted this special. The teams of Dan Jurgens with Rich Burchett and Gerry Jones with Ron Randall and Randy Elliot equally split the creative chores.

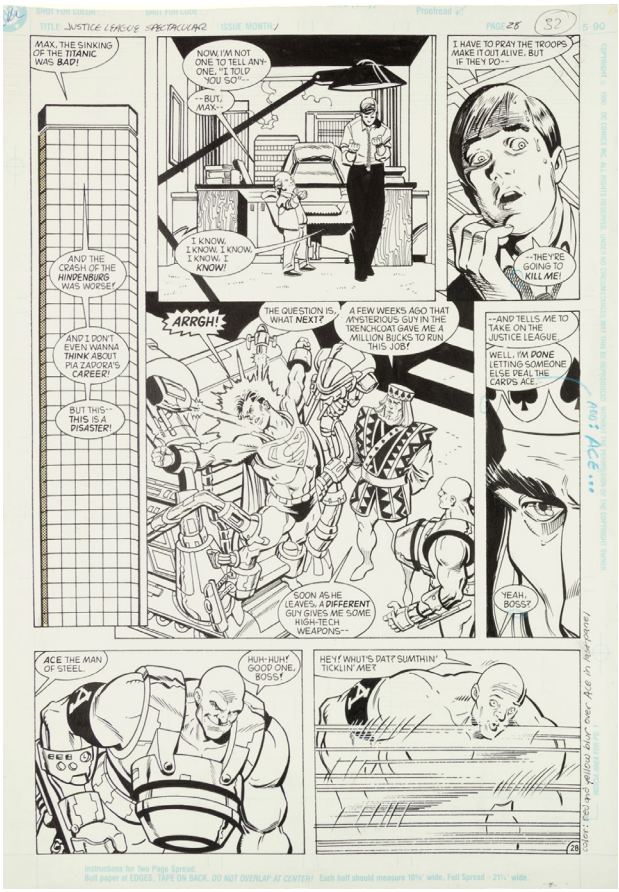
The Royal Flush Gang is tapped to be the villains of the piece, but they are once again the pawns of Maxwell Lord, with the twist of new rogue the Weapons Master clandestinely helping them out. Despite this, at one point King says, "This time we don't play the stooge for anyone!" Taking over a theme park and kidnapping some European delegates, the Flushers (hmmm, still not sounding right) even manage to capture Superman before their eventual defeat.

Writer/penciler Jurgens was quite succinct when *BI* asked him about the Royal Flush Gang. "I really can't say I have any memories of that, other than the fact that the RFG is generally fun to use. They present a strong, unique visual and, as a group, can give a hero or two a bit of a run for their money because of their different powers. Both fun to write and draw.

"As for that story, I think we thought of them as opponents that would work well for a one-shot."

BOTTOM OF THE DECK

The RFG would kick around for a while as bit players when someone needed the stuffings kicked out of them. Karl Kesel again wrote them in *Adventures of Superman* #520 (Feb. 1995) as he made them one of the groups that Superman takes out in a busy Christmas Eve with the assistance of artists Stuart Immonen and Jose Marian. James Robinson used them in issue #29 (April 1997) of his seminal *Starman* run (Examined in depth in *BI* #133).





MULTIPLE DECKS

Geoff Johns would redefine the entire dynamic of the Royal Flush Gang in *Superman: The Man of Steel* #121 (Feb. 2002). Dealing in Todd Nauck and Lary Stucker to illustrate, after a fairly normal battle between Superman and the Gang (or at least as normal as a super powered visitor from another planet fighting a group of people dressed as playing cards gets), during which the Ace of the group is again a robot, Supes (in his guise as mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent), has an interesting conversation with police officer Cobbins. In the course of the interview, the officer reveals that the RFG is no longer just composed of five costumed felons but have begun recruiting and consolidating gangs in various cities around the US. This is brought front and center when Superman tracks the Gang to one of their hideouts and is attacked by around one hundred Gang members! This is Superman so he takes them out in short succession, but we learn that the new recruits have all sorts of numbers encompassing all of the deck, and status is based on card hierarchy, and numbers can go up or down based on performance. A new standard had been set with many different styles of cards involved.

The Royals again had a robot ace and again got whupped when Geoff Johns and David Goyer wrote *JSA All Stars* #4 (Oct. 2003) for Mike McKone and Wayne Faucher to illustrate, even though the story focused more on Star-Spangled Kid's father being a minion for the Gang.

In the *Villains United* series that led up to the *Infinite Crisis* crossover, a cell of the Royals battled Firestorm in the fourth issue of the *VU* series (Oct. 2005) by Gail Simone, Dale Eaglesham, and Wade von Grawbadger and issue #17 of *Firestorm* (Nov. 2005) by Stuart Moore, Jamal Igle, Rob Stull, and Prentis Rollins. This offshoot is a very "street" gang sporting hip, up to the minute attire. As just one grouping the major assemblage from the series employs, the RFG could again be said to be working toward someone else's goals.

In that *Infinite Crisis* series' second issue (Jan. 2006), Geoff Johns, Phil Jimenez, and a team of inkers give one entire page to the Joker killing off a version of the Gang who look a lot like the originals, again, complete with a robot Ace. We are given no indication if they are.

Only two Flush Gang members appear in *Birds of Prey* #91 (Apr. '06) by Jim Alexander, Brad Walker, and Jimmy Palmiotti, a Queen and a Jack to be specific, in a story where they mainly run up against the Huntress as they try to prevent her from saving the life of a crime boss. This tale highlights the changes the Gang have gone through as the Royal duo in this tale are involved in a lot more street level crime than the original group, while spreading the Flushers (oops) further abroad in the DCU.

PLAY THE GAME

The Gang even got clubbed with spades right in their hearts and were surely seeing diamonds in flashback tales of this era.

Superman Confidential #1 (Jan. 2007) by Darwyn Cooke and Tim Sale retroactively put them in action near the beginning of the big red S's career, while even more ignominious was Len Wein, Jose Luis Garcia Lopez, and Dave Gibbons's narrative in *DC Universe Legends* #4 (Oct. 2010) where the group gets taken down by the Metal Men in two pages!

They could hold their own in a longer storyline though. Everyone loved the Detroit based version of the Justice League, right? Well Steve Englehart had some thoughts about them and pitted them against the card-carrying criminals in four issues of *JLA Classified*.

(top) The Royal Flush Gang have Superman in *Justice League Spectacular* #1. Art by Dan Jurgens and Rick Burchett. (bottom) The Royal Flush Gang meets Starman in issue #29. Art by Tony Harris and Wade von Grawbadger. Original art scans courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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He tells *BI,* "Back in the day I was asked to fix the JLA, constituted at the time by the big guys. [Writer's note: That "day" would have been issues #139-150 (Feb. 1977-Jan. 1978) of the original run of *JLA*. *BACK ISSUE* covered that run way back in issue #45] When the Detroit gang came out, they were underwhelming-but when I was asked to do *JLA Classified*, I thought, why don't I try to fix them too, instead of going back to the big guys?

"A part of that was that some of my original stories had been retconned out of existence, and I didn't want to work with a reality that differed from the reality I created any more than I had to. I had to futz around with the Martian Manhunter, but I could concentrate on the otherwise unused Detroiters. I hope I gave them a little boost."

Issues #22-25 (July-Sep. 2006) bring Tom Derenick and Mark Farmer to the table to illustrate this tale that reunites the original grouping of friends of Amos Fortune to wear the suited suits. He also brings back the Stelleration charged cards that affect emotions. Englehart revisited these elements saying he was, "Just trying to make the RFG as formidable as possible. I thought Stelleration was pretty powerful if you really used it, so I (or Ace) did." Believing the League to be much weaker at this point the RFG plan an ambush.

They attack the new recruits to the Justice League (Vibe, Vixen, Gypsy, and Commander Steel for those who have forgotten) plus chaperone J'onn Jonnz, but it does not work out as Ten and Queen are crushed by boulders in the battle. Amos Fortune reveals that he sabotaged their effort and plans to use the second iteration (or should that be deck?) of the gang to accomplish the same goal. They attack not long after the first skirmish but are themselves thrown on the discard pile.

Asked about killing two Royals, Englehart states, "I did it for the sake of my story. These original guys had been pretty much forgotten so no one complained, but then again, maybe no one noticed…"

DO GROUNDHOGS EVEN PLAY CARDS?

Dan Slott wrote a five-issue arc in *JLA Classified* for Dan Jurgens and inkers Trevor Scott, Jerry Ordway, and Al Milgrom to illustrate. The Royal Flush Gang appears in each of the middle three issues of the storyline that runs through #s 32-36 (Late March-May 2007) even though they are defeated in each issue. This is not an extreme example of revolving door prison reform so maybe we had better explain.

The overall title of the narrative is "The 4th Parallel" and focuses on a new character called the Red King. A nobody who ends up in control of JLA foe Doctor Destiny's Materioptikon, he, after various misadventures, ends up with three chances, in three different realities, to take over the world. In two of these scenarios, the RFG is used as just a way to introduce the Red King character and are quickly dispatched. In issue #33, however, they play an integral role.

The three tales they are in feature the exact same opening page with the League confronting the Gang. But this story flips the narrative as the Red King intervenes, attempting to gain the trust of the JLA. As they strive to save innocent lives, the Royals escape. As in so many other cases we have seen, the RFG is again in the employ of someone else. In this case it is the Red King and as they had been previously used, they are set up so that he can make himself look good to the Leaguers.

One intriguing aspect of this tale is that the King provides the Royals with a device to enhance their powers. One he has the countermeasure for but, hey, you can't have everything. The device gives them the ability to become two dimensional, and thus invisible when turned sideways, and with razor sharp edges. A welcome riff on the card motif.

Just so no one has any anxiety issues, the JLA wins in the end and restores reality to its proper order. Just wanted everyone to be able to sleep at night.

(left) This is a camping trip Justice League Detroit won't soon forget. *JLA Classified* #22 art by Tom Derenick and Mark Farmer. (right) The Gang takes on the Detroit League. Cover by Mike Zeck and Jerry Ordway. (inset) *JLA* #35. Cover by Eddy Barrows and Ruy Jose.

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WIN, LOSE, OR DRAW

The Royal Rumblers would feature next in a story penned by veteran Len Wein in *JLA* #35-37 (Sept.-Nov. 2009). Anteing up with the artwork were Tom Derenick on pencils and a tableful of inking help.

This Gang carries on the nationwide organization theme and even provides a little background on how the idea for the expansion came about. Oh, and once again Amos Fortune is in charge, though not costumed as one of the Royals, he is behind the scenes as Wild Card and is even given a slightly revised history to strengthen his ties to them. The JLA were a little fractured themselves at this time, as this occurs just before James Robinson and Mark Bagley were to begin their run on the book. Most disappointed in this schism is recent DCU creation Roulette, who we find has had the heroes dealt as her hand in a contest with Fortune. Why would she take up this proposition? Seems she is live streaming the battle for the bloodthirsty patrons her business caters to.

Confident that a luck manipulating device the Gang purloins in the first issue will ensure his victory, Amos has obviously not read enough comic books as the Justice League emerges victorious in the end. Split up at one point to handle gangs in widespread cities, the JLA reunite for the mop up, but the ubiquity of the group at that point causes Plastic Man to lament as they are attacked by yet another faction, "Please just tell me this is the last of the gang!"

During that mop up, both Fortune and Roulette escape. The latter to deliver some information to what it turns out was her master, while Fortune sees a bird come home to roost. Ever since the expansion of the gang, the impression has been given that the higher cards and Amos see the lower denominations as expendable, to the point of sometimes eliminating them if captured so they cannot divulge sensitive information. The final page of issue #37 shows the widow of a slain number two shooting Fortune dead!

DISCARD PILE

The Gang exited the *BI* era fairly quietly. *Zatanna* #4 (Oct. 2010) had a brief appearance with the Las Vegas version of the group eschewing the card motif and dressing as the Rat Pack. (Any readers young enough to not recognize the reference, just ask your parents. Or any other information source available.) *Superboy* #5 (May 2011) had them taken out in passing by Superboy and Impulse.

UNWRAP A FRESH PACK

In my articles I often finish off my detailed examinations of a subject with the Flashpoint event and the subsequent New 52 titles that reset the DCU for a little while. It is a nice handy end to the extended *BI* era, though I try to give a bit of mention to how the focal point has fared since that benchmark.

The Royal Flush Gang have remained quite active in recent times, appearing in different guises as bodyguards and enforcers with a variety of looks. They even took a starring role as the main antagonists of Brian Michael Bendis's story arc in *Justice League* #69-71 (Jan.-Mar. 2022). Dealing in artists Phil Hester and Eric Gapstur, the arc interweaves with the Leviathan plot Bendis was unfolding in the DCU at the time. The Gang are not really anyone's pawns here, though their motivation does come about due to their reaction to Leviathan attempting to recruit them to his cause.



Their master plan does involve them stealing Superman's Fortress of Solitude, so we can certainly credit them with being ambitious in this encounter, even if their eventual defeat by the League does not take up near the amount of time they may have wished it to.

I FOLD

Like the Joker in the deck, the Royal Flush Gang will surely continue to turn up when they are least expected. They may even pose a significant threat from time to time, though they are just as likely to be someone else's opening bid. But based on their long history, Dan Jurgens probably summed it up best when he had Booster Gold remark in issue #28 (Mar. 2010) of his then current series, as he takes out the Gang in a couple of pages, "Seems like I run into you guys five times a year. Always the same results too. Total smack down."

Thanks to Steven Englehart and Dan Jurgens for their input and assistance.



Brian Martin lives in Oakville, Ontario, Canada, where, truth be told, when not writing articles for* BACK ISSUE*, he plays a fair bit more euchre than poker. But that's just the way the cards fall.

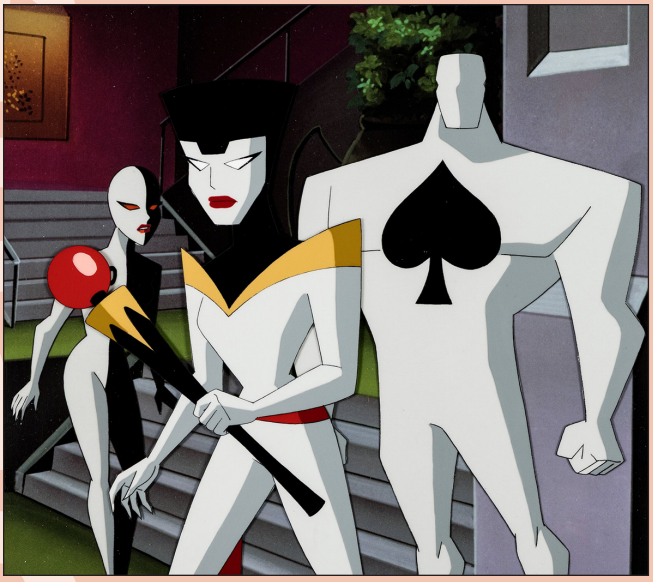
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THE POKER STARS ON TV

For a group that can charitably be assigned the rank of B-Listers, the Royal Flush Gang have had a surprisingly healthy presence in the DC cartoon and TV universes.

Cartoon wise, they have appeared in *The Super Powers Team: Galactic Guardians*, *Batman Beyond*, *Justice League*, *Justice League Unlimited*, *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*, and *DC Super-Hero Girls*. Truth in advertising compels us to reveal that in two of these stories the group are created and molded by the Joker, while the *JLU* episode has them created out of whole cloth by Ace.

Portrayed by real live people, the Royals first dealt with Green Arrow in the *Arrow* series before appearing in *The Flash* show. Initially just human thieves, by their final dealings they were given some meta human abilities.



HELLO DARKNESS, MY OLD FRIEND

by Paul Burns



Kevin Nowlan's rendition of Dormammu. (inset) Dormammu makes the cover of *Bring on the Bad Guys*. Art by John Romita.

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It's fitting this article is under the *Bring on the Bad Guys* banner, as the 1976 book of the same name was the first time I encountered Dormammu. There he is, menacingly sharing the cover with Doctor Doom, Mephisto, Red Skull, Loki, Green Goblin, and Abomination. Forty-nine years later, those Bad Guys gather together in individual issues of a connecting miniseries, giving Dormammu his first ever solo title. I guess Marvel finally gave the devil his due.

Dormammu is first mentioned in *Strange Tales* #115 (Dec. 1963). The Ancient One, under attack by former student Mordo, utters an incantation to repel the black magic: "I summon the powers of the Vishanti! By the spell of the Dread Dormammu, in the name of the all-seeing Agamotto…all thy powers I summon." A few panels later, Mordo is seen calling upon the unseen Dread One for more power: "Let the force of your power descend upon my enemy! Let him feel your fatal touch! I beseech you, Dormammu!"

Strange himself invokes Dormammu's name in *Strange Tales* #116 (Jan. 1964) and with Mordo back to calling on "all the dread powers of the mighty Dormammu" in the following issue, it was inevitable readers would eventually see the mysterious deity.

Interviewed in Mike Conroy's *500 Comic-book Villains* (2004), Stan Lee admitted the name Dormammu sparked intrigue among the readers of Doctor Strange. "It seems there was something about that nutty name, Dormammu, that was keeping Doc's devoted disciples awake at nights trying to figure out who Dormammu was," Lee explained. "I knew I was in big trouble. I had made up the name–now I had to dream up a character to go with the name."

Enter artist and Dormammu co-creator Steve Ditko. "He gave the demonic DD…a visage totally different from any villain I had ever seen in comics before," Lee stated. "He gave him a face which was not a face, a head which is more than a head!"

Ditko's design of a nightmarishly screaming, featureless face surrounded by flame provides a truly demonic presence to torment the newly established Master of the Mystic Arts. But on the upside, Dormammu's debut also introduced Strange to the love of his life.

Lee, at his alliterative best, introduces Strange's newest bad guy with the title "The Domain of the Dread Dormammu" in *Strange Tales* #126 (Nov. 1964). Ditko's art blew away Steve Englehart, as he explains to *BI*: "What appeals to me is the splash page, look at that thing. That is a Marvel Comic with everything that entails, announcing The Dread Dormammu! Starting right here, I'm all-in on whoever Dormammu turns out to be. (I have often told how comic art sucked me into comics, with writing coming out of left field, and here's what I'm talking about. I flat out love everything about this page, including Artie Simek's The Dread Dormammu!) And it's just as well, because the Dread One in his origin story is a run-of-the-mill bad guy, spouting standard supervillain lines. But Ditko threw in a mysterious white-haired girl, and that required, over time, a 'fleshing out' of the family dynamics in the Dark Dimension. So, by the time I wanted to write him, Dormammu had come to live up to his lettering."

The Ancient One sends his disciple into Dormammu's "Dark Realm" after a messenger delivers a warning of the Dread One's intention to arrive on Earth. Ditko's brilliance shines as he depicts the psychedelically bewildering confusion of the Dark Domain, along with its bizarre defenders. As Strange combats these obstacles, he is observed by the aforementioned "mysterious white-haired girl," urging him to go back. Enter Clea, the later revealed niece of the Dread Dormammu, who fails to dissuade Strange meeting the ruler of the Dark Domain.

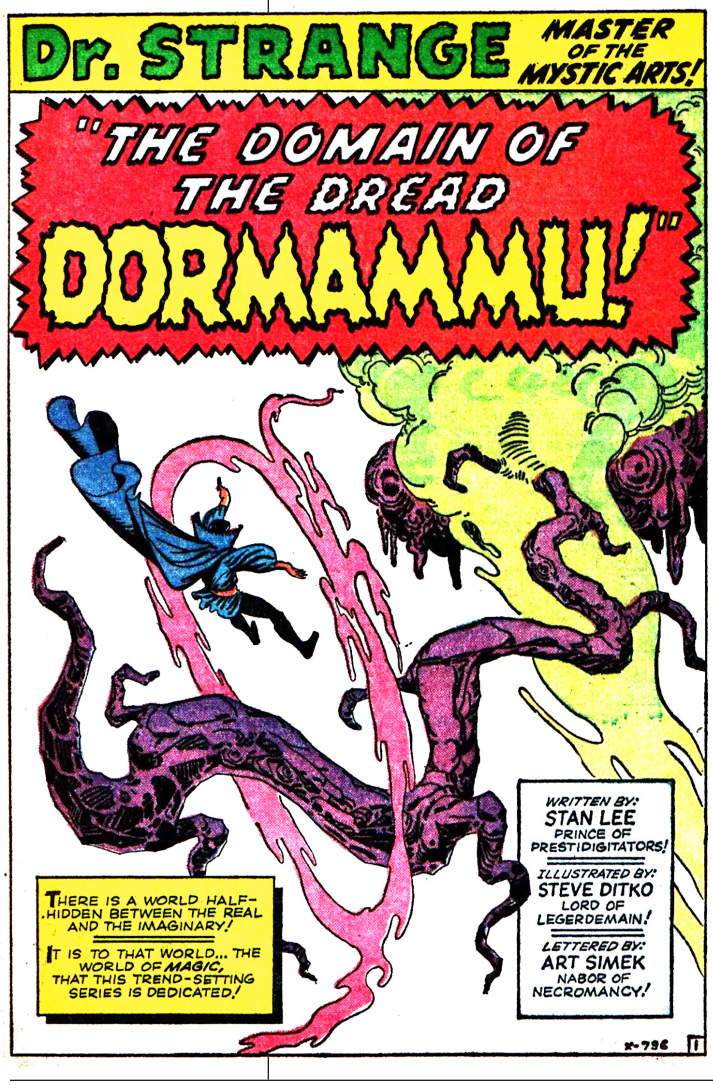
Strange Tales #127 (Dec. 1964) pretty much does what it says on the title. "Duel With the Dread Dormammu" sees Clea explain to Strange if he defeats Dormammu, the barrier protecting the Dark Dimension will fall and her people will be slain by the Mindless Ones. Strange ignores Clea's plea, telling her he is sworn to protect the Earth. During Strange and Dormammu's mystical battle, the barrier weakens and the Mindless Ones enter the Dark Dimension. Strange adds his power to Dormammu's to repair the barrier, thus ending the enmity between them. Strange's reward is Dormammu's vow to not invade Earth, and a promise not to harm Clea. When Strange returns to Earth, a rejuvenated Ancient One bestows a new red cape and amulet to him.

Duty bound to that pesky vow, Dormammu nonetheless casts a large, demonic shadow over *Strange Tales* #130-141 (Mar. 1965-Feb. 1966) using his servant Mordo to do his bidding, imbuing him with greater powers to challenge Strange and the Ancient One. The sprawling saga has Dormammu pulling Mordo's strings, ordering him to pursue Strange around the world. Strange realizes even his formidable powers may not be enough to defeat Dormammu and plunders the Ancient One's mind to learn the location of the omnipotent Eternity, who refuses to augment Strange's power, insisting the mage will stop the Dread One with wisdom alone.

Dormammu, frustrated by Mordo's incompetence, sends him, Strange, and the Ancient One to another dimension, where he is free to deal with Strange himself, engaging him in combat before an audience of dimensional rulers, with the fate of Earth and other dimensions hanging in the balance. The rules of the contest preclude the use of magic and demonic power, instead, the weapons of choice are the somewhat underwhelming "Pincers of Power." With dimensions at stake, it is curious both parties agree to rely on seemingly limiting conditions, but it does allow Steve Ditko to illustrate a beautifully balletic battle.

(left) Doctor Strange descends into the realm of Dormammu. *Strange Tales* #126 art by Steve Ditko. (right) Dormammu squares off against Eternity in this astounding image by Ditko from *Strange Tales* #146.

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When it seems Strange is besting Dormammu, a redemptive Mordo blasts the Sorcerer Supreme. This naturally is the height of humiliation for Dormammu and furious at Mordo denying him victory, dispatches him to the Dimension of Demons. That's one thorn out of Strange's side. The other is removed when Strange recovers and defeats Dormammu with his own Pincers (maybe they weren't such a bad idea after all). Furious at having to make another vow to not attack Earth, Dormammu taunts Strange with the captured Clea, stating he will never find her.

Roy Thomas begins scripting Dormammu in *Strange Tales* #144 (May 1966). "Back in the early 1960s, I didn't care all that much for the Doctor Strange stories," he admits. "I could never figure out exactly what such a character could actually do…besides cast a spell, which seemed to me a convenient deus ex machina. So how ironic was it that the very first Marvel hero for whom I wrote dialogue for two episodes in a row was Doctor Strange. I became an instant, if belated, convert. Turns out that I just loved writing magical spells for the Mystic Master to recite."

Dormammu challenges Eternity in *Strange Tales* #146 (July 1966). Not adverse to hyperbole, Lee announces the story thus: "The final cataclysmic clash of creation's mightiest mystics! Only Majestic Marvel would dare hurl this epic between covers…only you are worthy of reading it!" This dynamic verbosity permeates the whole story, but it's justified given the heady concept of a demon battling the whole of creation. Ditko matches the colorful language with stunning visuals, typified by iconic, dramatic full-page images on pages five and six. Dormammu has never appeared so indomitable. "Human eyes have never witnessed such a struggle!" indeed.

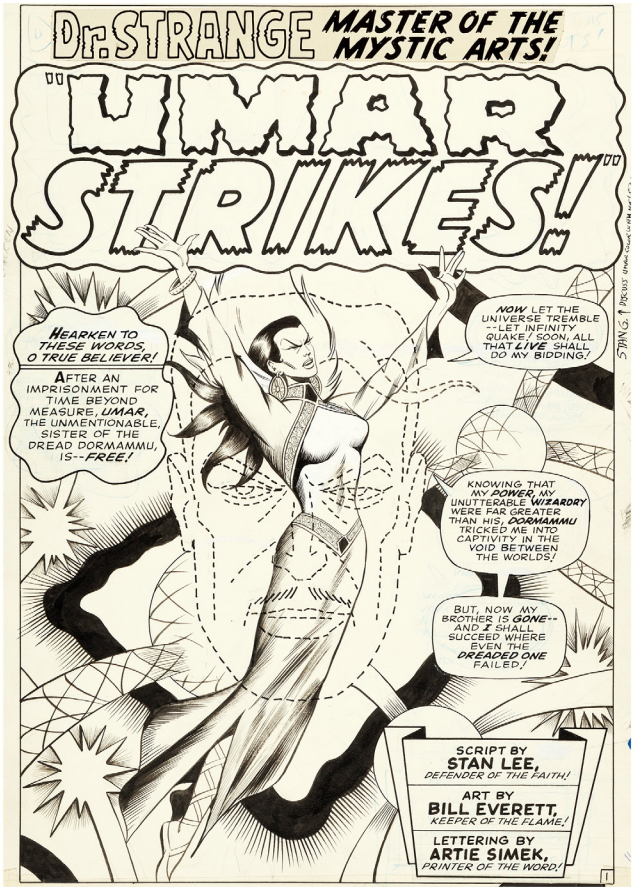
After the "cataclysmic impact" of their battle, The Ancient One tells Strange Dormammu has been destroyed and Eternity is missing. Clea is finally released and reveals her name to Strange. They part, but Clea knows in her heart they will meet again.

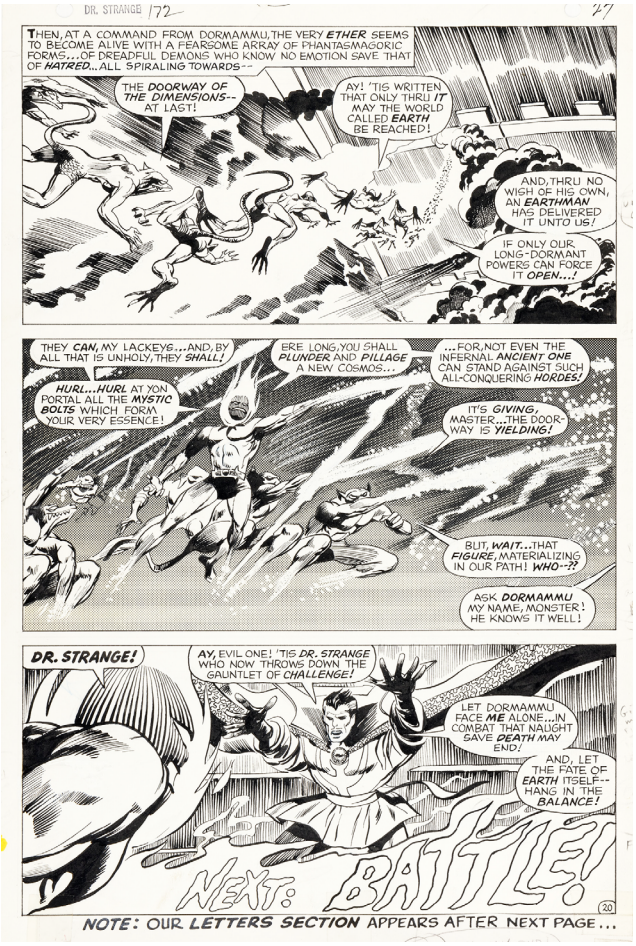
Strange Tales #146 is Steve Ditko's last Doctor Strange story, scripted by Dennis O'Neil. As Thomas explains, "In 'The End–At Last,' Steve's final outing on Strange, Denny not only got to provide dialogue and captions for an epic duel with Dormammu and a reappearance of Eternity, but he also became the guy who finally named Clea." O'Neil chose Clea from the title of one of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, published in 1960.

O'Neil, in his *Strange Tidings* blog wrote of Strange: "He was the first superhero Stan Lee asked me to write when I was a fuzzy newbie, working as an editorial assistant at Marvel. I'd fooled around with magic as a kid and here I was writing about a magician."

Despite what Wikipedia asserts, Dormammu's sister, introduced in *Strange Tales* #150 (Nov. 1966) was not created by Roy Thomas, who scripts the story: "No, Stan created Umar–with Bill Everett," Thomas tells *BI*. "I had nothing to do with it and know nothing about the why of it except that it made a good story… which was our main criterion."

The final two pages of the issue sees the Mindless Ones attacking the barrier of the Dark Dimension, with Clea trembling in fear at their onslaught. Enter Umar: "Radiant with the beauty of youth yet emitting an aura of evil which is ageless." She announces herself as the sister of Dormammu to the Mindless Ones, who recoil in fear of her. Umar reveals her brother, fearing her power, imprisoned her and now she intends to make the most of her freedom. She makes Doctor Strange's life a misery over the next few issues of *Strange Tales*.



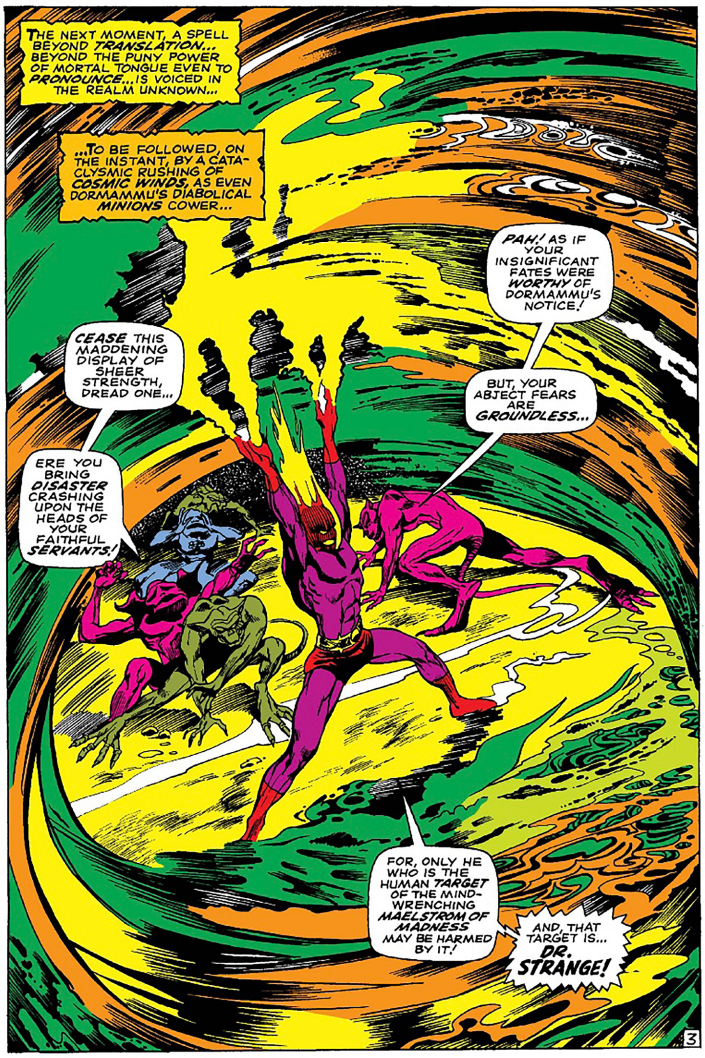


(top) Dormammu's sister, Umar, by her creators, Stan Lee and Bill Everett from *Strange Tales* #151. (bottom) Dormammu's way is barred by Doctor Strange. Issue #172 art by Gene Colan and Tom Palmer. Original art scans courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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(top left) Dan Adkins's simple but effective cover to *Doctor Strange* #173. (bottom) A stunning Dormammu from *Doctor Strange* #173 by Gene Colan. (top right) Dormammu is featured on the cover of *Avengers UK Weekly* #66 by Arvell Jones and Aubrey Bradford.

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Thomas returns to Dormammu in *Doctor Strange* #171 (Aug. 1968). Tom Palmer beautifully illustrates Strange's continuing search for the missing Clea with a psychedelically grandiose landscape rivalling Ditko's. Palmer spoke to *The Comics Journal* in 2015: "My first job was pencilling a Doctor Strange issue, which was written by Roy Thomas. Outside of those couple of pencilled pages for Wally Wood this was the first comic book pencilling I had ever done and it must have shown. Dan Adkins did a tremendous job inking the issue making me and the book look quite professional."

Doctor Strange #172 (Sep. 1968) sees the return of Gene Colan on art, with Palmer inking. "When I returned to pencil another issue I was told they had a new penciler and would I like to ink him? I had done enough inking for advertising art so I took the opportunity and inked that next Doctor Strange issue," Palmer explains. "The new penciller was Gene Colan and it was the beginning of a wonderful relationship both personal and professional. I worked hard on that first inking assignment and did everything I could to turn his illustrative pencils into inked line art for printing. I soon learned that Gene pencilled quite differently than other pencilers using graded pencil tones to render form and shadow and not strictly pencil lines. I enjoyed the challenge. Marvel must have liked what I had done and I was asked to return for the next issue."

Thomas also comments on Colan's art: "The first casualty of Colan's debut was all those Daliesque other dimensional dreamworlds Ditko had fabricated. Gene didn't think that way and didn't mean to waste time trying. His nether realms consisted mostly of swirling smoke and nebulous backgrounds. Gene brought an unaccustomed realism to Doctor Strange, which changed the feel of the stories and was reflected in my writing. Tom Palmer enhanced that."

In *Doctor Strange* #172, Dormammu holds Clea and Strange's friend, Victoria Bentley, captive as he recounts his battle with Eternity, which resulted in his expulsion into the Realm Unknown, there to be reunited with Clea, ironically banished by the Ancient One for her own protection. Strange battles to save both Clea and Bentley.

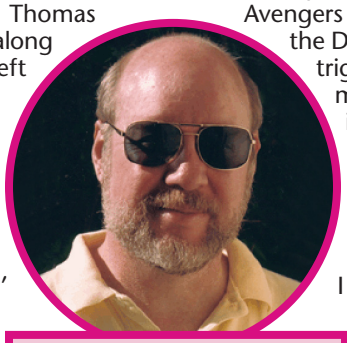
Dormammu transports Umar to his side, and they, along with the Mindless Ones, approach the Doorway to Dimensions, but Strange bars their way.

Dan Adkins' cover to *Doctor Strange* #173 (Oct. 1968) is simple, but powerful. Dormammu's fearsome visage looms behind the seemingly lifeless form of Strange. Gene Colan's interior art continues to boggle both eyes and mind, particularly on page three, with his display of Dormammu's fiery power. Clea transports her and Bentley away from the realm, where they empower Umar into freeing Strange from Dormammu's energy chains. The mage then sends the Dread One through to Earth's dimension, which is the undoing of Dormammu. As the Dread One loses power, Strange reminds him of his sacred vow to not attack Earth. By breaking it, Dormammu brings about a curse that depletes his powers. Strange uses the Winds of Watoomb to sweep Dormammu back to his Dark Dimension. Strange, flowery as ever, realizes this won't be the last time he will encounter his foe: "Dormammu shall never rest till he has drunk deep from the cup of vengeance."

In *Marvel Feature* #2 (Mar. 1972) Dormammu's disciples perform an occult ritual to summon him to Earth. The issue is beautifully illustrated by Ross Andru. "He was a longtime favorite of mine," Thomas explains. "The other young writers (Conway, Wolfman, Wein) and I always valued Ross Andru more than Stan did. I loved working with him because he was a good storyteller."

The Defenders reluctantly reunite to battle the Dread One. Separated from his body, Strange's astral form floats helplessly as Clea summons Sub-Mariner and the Hulk. Dormammu's disciples intend their master to inhabit the inert body of Strange.

As Namor and Hulk attack them, Clea liberates Strange's astral form that had been hiding in the body of faithful Wong, back into his master's physical body. Made whole, Strange confronts Dormammu and succeeds in besting his foe once again. This story clearly suggests Dormammu could be Marvel's devil. "He was obviously always a Satan-like figure," Thomas states, "although Satannish and Mephisto came along later to fill that role more precisely... which left Dormammu as simply a very interesting villain."



STEVE ENGLEHART

steveenglehart.com.

Steve Englehart picks up Lee and Thomas' stewardship of Dormammu beginning with *Marvel Premiere* #10 (Sep. 1973). Strange faces a Shuma-Gorath created illusion of Dormammu, illustrated by Frank Brunner, who spoke to *Comic Book Artist* in 1999. "Roy came back to me and said, 'Hey, who would you like to work with?' I had just met Steve Englehart, and we had talked about where Doctor Strange should be going, and Steve could understand the future I was conceiving for Doctor Strange, and he was into it." The character of Strange appealed to Brunner: "I don't know if I told Roy that I really wanted to do Doctor Strange. He sort of read my mind; here was this character who was like a superhero, but he didn't go around punching people, and that kind of character was what I wanted to do."

Brunner also illustrates the beautiful front and back covers of *Marvel Treasury Edition* #6 (1975). "They asked me to do the covers, and I asked, 'Who's in the book?' And they told me Ditko was in the book, Marie Severin, Barry Smith, and I said, 'Hey, Barry Smith did one Doctor Strange story. You're going to tell me you can't have one story of mine?' So, they relinquished to my request. I guess it was Marvel's policy at that time to only reprint the oldest material." *Marvel Premiere* #10 is reprinted in the treasury, along with a center-spread pin-up from Brunner.

The gorgeous back cover image of Dormammu was repurposed as a variant cover for *Guardians of the Galaxy* #17 (2021).

Englehart, Thomas, Sal Buscema, and Bob Brown help Dormammu broaden his ambitions beyond the confines of the Doctor Strange title to tackle the wider Marvel Universe in the classic "Avengers/Defenders Clash" (always Clash, never War) beginning with prologues in *Avengers* #115 and *Defenders* #8 (both published in Sep. 1973). The Dread One and the Asgardian Lord of Lies, Loki, team up to deceive and manipulate the two teams into gathering components of the Evil Eye. This is the first Marvel crossover, with the saga appearing concurrently in both *Avengers* and *Defenders* titles. Or, as Englehart reveals, "Roy later called it the first bi-weekly comic. The Defenders and the Avengers fought it out all Summer long."

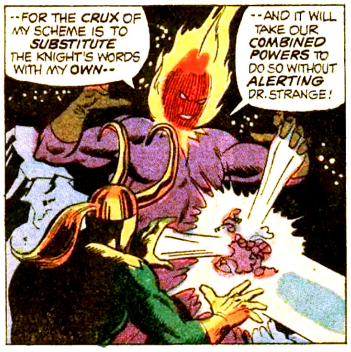
Steve Englehart spoke to *BI* about the decision to use Dormammu. "To me, Dormammu was the Big Bad for Doctor Strange, both because of his power but also the Clea connection, adding up to a reasonably rounded character. When the Defenders as a whole needed a supremely powerful opponent for the Clash, I looked at Dormy first because none of the other Defenders, powerful as they might be, had a Big Bad. That gave a cosmic aspect to the idea I was forming, and over on the Avengers side there was unfinished business with Loki–so, a couple of gods, at that interesting intersection of Asgard and the Dark Dimension sounded right."

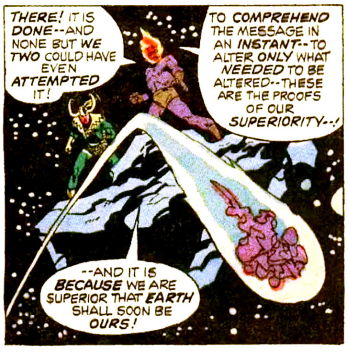
While Bob Brown illustrated the *Avengers* issues, handling the *Defenders* books was regular penciler Sal Buscema, who preferred his half of the Clash, as revealed in *Sal Buscema: Comics' Fast & Furious Artist*: "Primarily because I liked the characters better. My guy (the Hulk) was in there. Sub-Mariner was kind of an off-speed character, and I enjoyed doing him. The same with Doctor Strange. That's why I liked it better than the *Avengers*. There were also fewer of them, so it was not quite as difficult a book to do."

Following a titanic tussle between the teams, "The Avengers/Defenders Clash" reaches a climax in *Avengers* #118 (Dec. 1973). Dormammu uses the assembled Evil Eye to merge the Dark Dimension with Earth. Not even the presence of The Watcher spooks Dormammu, who easily defeats the united Avengers and Defenders. However, a vengeful Loki turns on the Dread One, allowing the Scarlet Witch to fire a hex, triggering the Eye to suck the "living power" of Dormammu into it. It's the first indication Dormammu is an energy being. "Everybody else in the Dark Dimension had a human form, but he'd always been a roaring flame," Englehart explains, "no indication that he was anything other than energy. In my later *Hellcat*, he's shown briefly with a human face, but that was a mistake that I should have caught."

For a more detailed look at the "Avengers/Defenders Clash," see *BACK ISSUE* #82 (Aug 2015).

Frank Brunner provides the cover for *Doctor Strange* #3 (Sep. 1974) which reprints *Strange Tales* #126-127. Englehart would soon be writing his own stories of Dormammu. "Adding at least something to characters was a thing I strove for with all my characters, so seeing what I



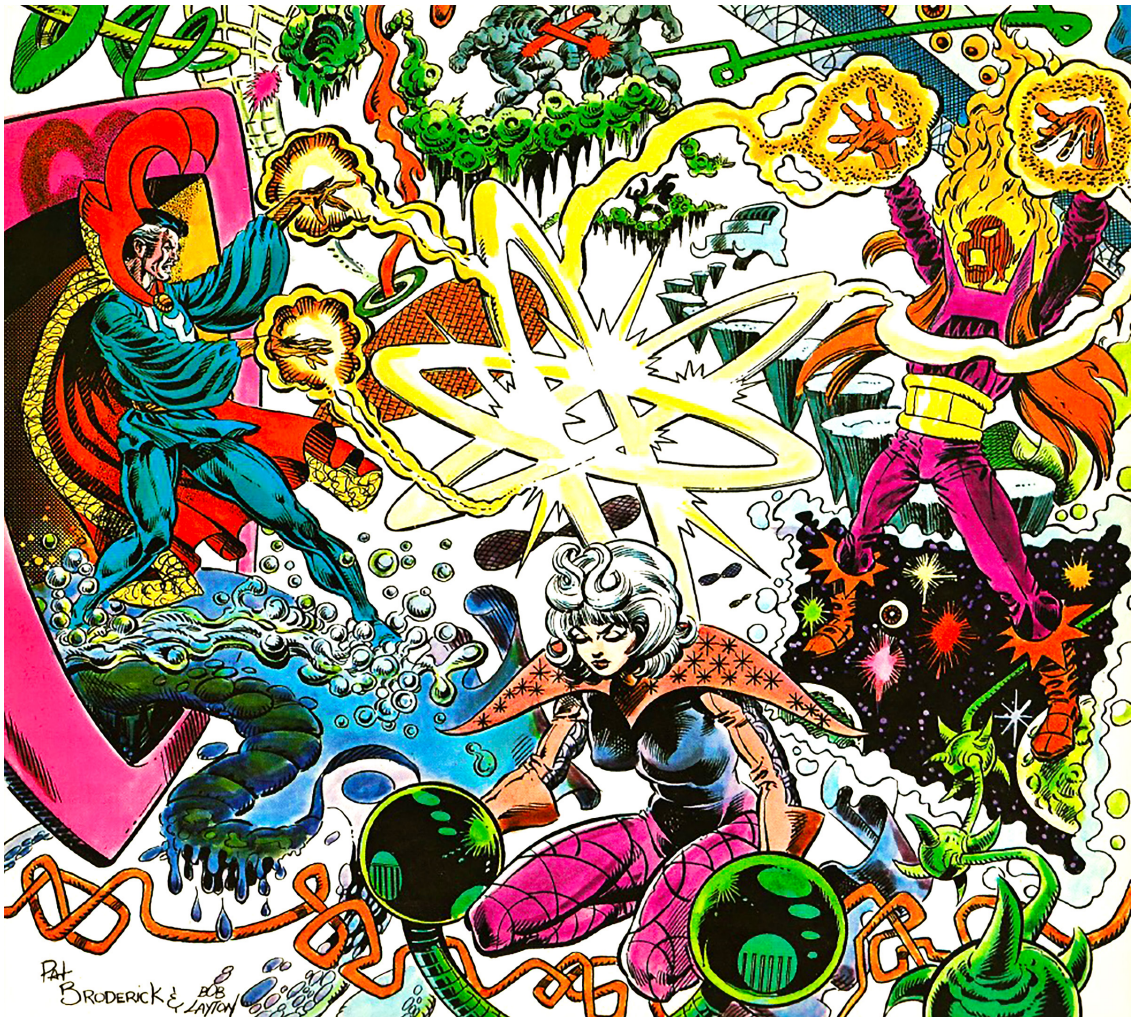






(top) Dormammu helps incite a battle between the Avengers and the Defenders. *Defenders* #8 art by Sal Buscema and Frank McLaughlin. (bottom left) Originally the back cover of *Marvel Treasury Editon* #6, Frank Brunner's art was used as a variant cover for *Guardians of the Galaxy* #17. (bottom right) The stunning cover to *What If?* #18 by Tom Sutton.

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Pat Broderick and Bob Layton's dynamic depiction of the Dread One in battle with Doctor Strange on the 1980 Marvel calendar.

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could do with this character was the usual mix of fun and hope I could do it right."

Gene Colan takes over art chores from Brunner in *Doctor Strange* #6 (Feb. 1975) "Frank drew magick, Gene drew magickal realism. Both very valid ways of visualizing magick," states Englehart. In New York, Strange and Clea are attacked by Umar who is washed away by the ever-handy Winds of Watoomb. As Strange pursues Umar into the Dark Domain, Clea travels to the center of the earth to encounter Dormammu, his energy resurrected by his disciples with Umar transporting it to Earth. Clea discovers Dormammu has imprisoned Mother Nature herself. Englehart makes it clear Dormammu is a concept, a shared belief that can never die as long as it is worshipped, as he explains to *BI*: "When Frank Brunner invited me to write Doctor Strange, he and I wanted to play in the vast realms Lee and Ditko had sketched out. After wrapping up the Shuma-Gorath story, our first new story involved (maybe) God. And then we did Death. And when Frank had to drop off, Gene Colan and I did Life. Mother Nature was Earth's goddess, and a Big Bad here might well be from another dimension, and since I'd annihilated Dormammu it was about time to resurrect him. The idea that belief creates gods is an old one so I used that to explain it."

This born again Dormammu is not bound by the vow the former incarnation made and is now free to attack Earth, whose fiery core reignites the villain. However, the spirit of Mother Nature is not happy with Dormammu using her life force without her consent and causes a volcanic eruption to deprive him of the heat he needs to complete his resurrection. This enables Clea to escape and call on other mystical help as Strange battles Umar in the Dark Dimension. Clea eventually joins Strange and is reunited with her father, Orini, who she is dutifully unable to challenge, but through a religious and mediative ceremony, she manages to absorb Strange's power from the G'uaranthic Guardian into herself.

Englehart weaves his complex narrative strands into a satisfying conclusion in *Doctor Strange* #9 (Aug. 1975) as Dormammu finally arrives on Earth. But, as ever, Umar betrays him, proving to be more powerful thanks to her half-humanoid connection to the Earth. It is revealed to readers that Umar is Clea's mother. As Strange confronts Umar, Clea, imbued once again with Strange's magic, frees the Earth spirit who unites all of nature against a resurrected Dormammu. This saga of religious worship, satanic rituals, energy exchanges, and betrayal certainly challenged young minds: "My idea of Doctor Strange throughout was sophisticated themes," Englehart states. "Big ideas that only a Sorcerer Supreme would deal with. When I wrote *Defenders*, Strange was primarily a superhero, but in Doctor Strange I could go a lot deeper."

In the middle of this epic, Englehart dovetails into the Don Heck illustrated *Giant Size Avengers* #4 (June 1975). "In one part of the Marvel Universe, I was telling the story of Earth's goddess versus the Dark Dimension's duo, for the fate of the planet–and in another, I was revealing that Mantis is the Celestial Madonna," explains Englehart. "Those stories seemed similar in size and scope, so I opted for a quick connection between the two."

Ominously hovering over the Avengers on the cover, Dormammu, seeking revenge for his defeat at the hands of the Scarlet Witch, captures her and hypnotically pits her against the Vision, but her love for the synthezoid undoes his control. They, along with Agatha Harkness, defeat Dormammu and Umar, and

the Witch forces Dormammu to free the Earth spirit and leave the planet alone. But as we've seen, Dormammu's vows have more loopholes than a Doctor Marten boot.

Roger McKenzie and Don Perlin pit Dormammu against Johnny Blaze's demonic alter ego in *Ghost Rider* #29-31 (Apr.-Aug. 1978). Doctor Strange entraps Blaze, forcing him to release his demon side. Both parties are unaware they are being monitored by another flaming skull, who is responsible for orchestrating a battle between Ghost Rider and a fake Strange. It's not long before an enraged Blaze is confronting the real Master of the Mystic Arts, engaging him in a mighty, magical battle where it appears both combatants are equally matched, until Clea once again thwarts Dormammu by coming to the aid of her lover. Strange enters Blaze's mind, finding the man within the demon and discovers the origin of Ghost Rider, before Dormammu makes his presence known. Blaze enters the body of Strange as Dormammu possesses Ghost Rider. As the physical battle rages, the tussle between Strange and Dormammu continues in Blaze's mind. The two struggles culminate in Strange's exorcism of Dormammu.

What If? #18 (Dec. 1979) asks "What If Doctor Strange Were a Disciple of Dormammu?" Peter B. Gillis wrote this divergent reality tale of a villainous Stephen Strange. He spoke to the *Epic Marvel Podcast* in 2021: "Mark Gruenwald and I were really close friends before we were professionals, and I worked on his magazine *Omniverse*, which dealt with alternate realities, so, I wanted to be true to the idea of divergent points and I talked to Mark about doing Doctor Strange, my favorite character."

Tom Sutton illustrated the story. "I did suggest the artist, because I really always wanted to work with him."

Stephen Strange accepts the help of Mordo rather than the Ancient One, setting him on a villainous path. "What if he made the wrong choice, and remains the asshole surgeon that he had been when the choice was offered to him?" asks Gillis.

Strange continues his training from Mordo who introduces him to Dormammu. The Ancient One gathers a collection of mystics to combat the threat, including Agatha Harkness and Anthony Druid, along with obscure choices such as Turan Barim and Rama Kaliph. "I was absolutely a Marvel zombie," Gillis states. "I had something of an encyclopedic knowledge of the Silver Age. When you had the circle of the good mystics, I kind of made sure to go and cover all the bases. That was the fun, and that kind of reflects my omniverse background."

Dormammu confronts Eternity, and Doctor Strange is caught between their power struggle, leaving him with choices: Chaos or order? Good or evil? Ultimately he reverts to the heroic Strange. "Once he gets to the end of the story, the Doctor Strange we know and love from the mainstream reality ends up being present." says Gillis.

In *What If?* #40 (Aug. 1983), Butch Guice helps Gillis tell the tale of Baron Mordo becoming the Sorcerer Supreme, teaming up with Nightmare to manipulate Dormammu into helping them conquer Earth.

Frank Miller gets the chance to depict Dormammu and the Dark Dimension in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #14 (1980) when he and Denny O' Neil team the Dread One with Doctor Doom to cause a double headache for Spidey and Doctor Strange.

Dormammu takes an uncharacteristically sedentary role in *Thor Annual* #9 (Jan. 1981). Chris Claremont and Luke McDonnell pitted the Dread One against the Lord of Asgard, Odin, in a chess match, each competing on behalf of Chaos and Order respectively. The true threat in this story is Umar the Unspeakable, who battles the son of Odin and attempts to trick Thor into getting Odin to forfeit the





(top) Dormammu and Nazis. That can't be good. *Doctor Strange* #50 art by Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (bottom) Dormammu commands this cover by Rogers and Austin.

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game, allowing Chaos victory. However, the spirit of Jane Foster reveals Umar's machinations and the game is declared a draw, with cosmic balance maintained.

Roger Stern and Marshall Rogers help Doctor Strange celebrate his 50th issue in 1981. The issue marks the frosty first meeting of Morgana Blessing and Clea. Roger Stern told the *Marvel Masterworks Resource Page* the reason for Blessing's introduction: "Partly, that was my own little back-to-the-basics approach. The early Doc stories had him standing between normal people and the forces of the beyond. There was an unfortunate tendency in writers to let the weird stuff take over in Doc. But if everything in the series is weird, and everyone is a mystic, then nothing is special anymore. Morgana Blessing was the sort of woman that Doc would have had a relationship with, in his previous career as a high-priced surgeon. She was the Earthly love, in contrast with the ethereal, extradimensional Clea. All the regular readers loved Clea, of course, but the relationship she and Doc had was not exactly an enlightened one. If Clea had just been Doc's lover that would have been okay, but she'd also become his student, his disciple. It was a case of 'I love you, Clea.' 'And I love you, Master.' Not a healthy relationship...not healthy at all."

In "The Cat and the Cataclysm," Mordo, disguised as Blessing's cat, attacks Strange, Clea, and Wong. Proving it's never a wise idea to be romantically attached to Strange, Clea and an amnesiac Blessing are kidnapped. Strange chases after Mordo into Earth's past, specifically 1943, where his meets Nick Fury and the Howling Commandos, an idea proposed by artist Rogers. "Marshall was incredibly inventive," Stern recalls, "always coming up with new visual concepts, designs, and ideas. He wanted to have Doc meet Sergeant Fury and his Howling Commandos during World War II. Yeah, I think we can make that work."



Strange follows Mordo through a Vortex of Oblivion in Stonehenge and guess who is waiting for him? Yep, and this time the Dread One has help in the form of sorcerers Sir Anthony Baskerville and Mordo's grandfather, Viscount Heinrich Krowler.

Doctor Strange #51 (Feb. 1982) sees Stern and Rogers at their absolute best, weaving several plots together with stunning visuals. The astral form of Strange, posing as the Ancient One, encounters Dormammu in the past, as the Nazis use the London Blitz to power the arrival of Dormammu on Earth. Krowler, possessed by the Dread One, prepares to sacrifice Clea, using the Mordo possessed body of Morgana Blessing. The ritual is broken by the soulless body of Stephen Strange kissing Nick Fury's girlfriend, Pamela Hawley. The war between love and hate is displayed magnificently on page 19 with Strange channeling the past Dormammu's energy to strike the Dormammu attempting to enter Earth, as the possessed Morgana uses Mordo's power to strike the possessed Krowler. Whew! All clear? Shorthand: The power of love defeats the power of evil.

While the "Flames of Faltine" are first mentioned in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #2 (Jan. 1965), Roger Stern and Paul Smith reveal Dormammu and Umar are exiles from the Faltine dimension in *Doctor Strange* #71 (June 1985). The Faltine siblings meet the Dark Dimension's ruler, King Olnar, and teach him to break down doors to other universes and absorb them. They annex the neighboring dimension of the Mindless Ones which results in the creatures swarming over the Dimension, killing many including Olnar. After destroying the Wizard-Host who blame them for the invasion, Dormammu and Umar construct a barrier to keep the Mindless Ones out, gaining the gratitude of the citizens of the Dark Dimension. They appoint Dormammu regent of the realm, and he partially uses his Faltine form to create his flames of regency.

In his introduction to *Marvel Masterworks Doctor Strange Vol. 10*, Stern recalls seeing Smith's art for this issue: "I still remember our letter carrier delivering a giant envelope of artwork–taller and wider than I'd ever received before–and opening said package to discover that Paul had decided to experiment with drawing the issue at twice the printed size. I don't know what Marvel's production staff thought of it, but it certainly looked nice."

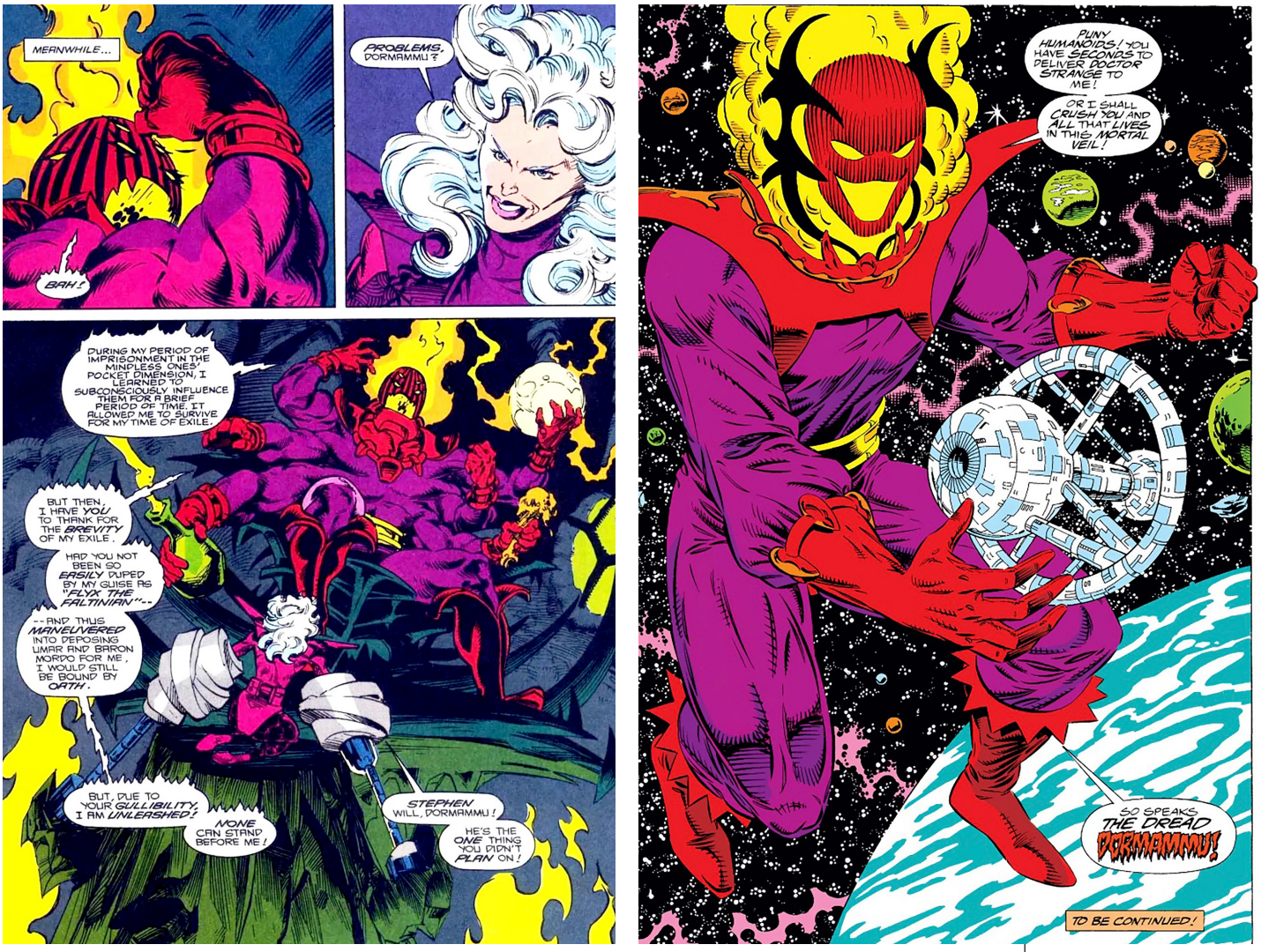


Issues #71-73 (June-Oct. 1985) of *Doctor Strange* sees Strange aid Clea in overthrowing Umar's rule of the Dark Dimension. The saga has Clea finding out Umar is her mother and becoming the new Dark Dimension Regent.

In *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* #1-2 (Nov 1988-Jan 1989) Peter B. Gillis and Richard Case put Strange through one of his most bizarre confrontations with Dormammu, and that's saying something. After his dark residue hides in Strange's eyepatch (long story), Dormammu takes over Strange's body while his astral form is absent. This leads to astral Strange inhabiting the body of a rat to escape Dormammu's Crimson

Is it Strange or Dormammu? Richard Case art from *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* #1. (inset) "The Dark Wars" begins in *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* #21. Cover by Jackson Guice.

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Bands of Cyttorak. Rat-Strange finds some talking frogs who aid him in summoning Mother Earth, who sends the empath Topaz to assist Strange exorcise Dormammu from his body with help from Clea. As Strange floats back into his physical form, Topaz chooses to keep the rat, telling Strange the creature is female.

Roy & Dann Thomas and Jackson Guice begin "The Dark Wars" in *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* #21 (Sep. 1990). "Everything I worked on with Jackson was fun and fascinating," Thomas states. "He built on the realism that Colan had brought to the series. His realistic way of rendering a story pushed me to dig ever deeper into the human side of Doctor Strange, which I felt often got ignored in favor of him acting always like the Mystic Master."

Strange conquers an invasion of the Mindless Ones and travels to the Dark Dimension to discover Dormammu has reconstructed a new body from the darkness in the dimension and stolen the flames of regency from Clea. The Dread One brings back Umar to rule at his side, and in a truly disturbing scene, performs a "Exorcism of Transferal" between Strange and Clea, with a smaller version of each other emerging from their mouths.

Umar predictably betrays Dormammu, who easily erases her from existence. Or so he thinks. Umar is saved and brought to Strange and Clea where she undoes the Transferal spell, separating husband and wife. Despite this exchange of benevolence, Umar has no desire to aid Strange and Clea in confronting Dormammu and she disappears. Meanwhile, back in New York, the Dread One's former disciple, Mordo, is battling to prevent his former Master's invasion of Earth. However, as Dormammu himself puts it: "It seems you are ever at my feet or at my throat, my dear Baron," as Mordo pledges his allegiance to the Dread One to rule Earth at his side.

Displaying his malevolence like never before, Dormammu then mashes the Mhuruuks into a single mass and deposits them inside the G'uranthic Guardian, which then starts leaching Strange and Clea's power. That, however, is Dormammu's undoing, as Strange sends his astral form into the Guardian, and uses it to battle the Dread One. Proving that wielders of dark magic have more twists and turns than a rattlesnake on a hot plate, Umar and Mordo team-up to defeat Dormammu. Realizing there is little point in destroying everything he wishes to rule, Dormammu, losing his physical form, agrees to a truce with Umar. She promises he will rule a portion of the Dark Dimension, and true to her word, she cruelly gifts him the realm

(left) That's a new look for Dormammu. *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* #50 art by Geof Isherwood. (right) Dormammu's evil can't be restricted to one time period. *Guardian of the Galaxy* #34 art by Kevin West.

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of the Mindless Ones. Umar takes her place as ruler of the Dark Dimension, with Mordo as her consort. Clea vows not to challenge her mother's sovereignty. The Thomases tie all the bows nicely on the saga of the Faltine twins. For now.

"The Dark Wars Saga," in this writer's opinion, is a masterpiece, "I'll take that as a compliment," Thomas says, "I'm afraid I don't recall a lot about the details of that story. While I was still invested in my work in the '90s, I didn't have the same obsession and thus memory recall on it that I had with a lot of my earlier work."

Thomas teams up with Randy and Jean-Marc Lofficier to reveal Dormammu's true origin and history in the back-up strips in *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* #21-23 (Sep.-Nov. 1990).

Dormammu and Umar are two energy constructs from the Faltine universe, where no matter exists. The Faltine give "birth" to smaller constructs of themselves and one of those Genitors, Sinifer, produces two mutant Scions, Dormammu and Umar. Sinifer fails to put an end to their unholy desire for forbidden matter, and they reduce him to dead matter, resulting in the other Faltine banishing the evil twins. As seen in Roger Stern's *Doctor Strange* run, Dormammu and Umar become rulers of the Dark Dimension. Clea's birth traumatizes Umar and she is left unable to revert to her Faltine form. She turns on Dormammu who banishes her into a pocket universe.

Dormammu's first arrival on Earth causes the Great Fire of London. He originally encounters the Ancient One at Stonehenge and is swiftly sent back to the Dark Dimension. He sends a portion of his power to Earth and possesses the form of Tom Malverne, who becomes Jack the Ripper. This particular choice is lost to the mists of time: "Frankly, I don't recall it at all," laughs Thomas, "I do recall using Jack the Ripper as part of a DC Elseworlds story which did a Doctor Moreau spin on the JLA."







Having tricked Clea into building an army to oppose Umar and Mordo, then absorbing their powers, the now many armed Dormammu returns in *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* #50 (Feb 1993). Len Kaminski and Geof Isherwood gathered Ghost Rider, Hulk, and Silver Surfer to help Strange attack the ruler of the Dark Dimension. Once there, Strange enters Dormammu's body to find "the black center of his malevolent soul." Strange battles the Dread One's ego, damaging it enough to have Dormammu consider the dominion of the Dark Dimension beneath his vast power and to seek loftier ambitions.

Roy Thomas's final Dormammu tale (for now) is in *Doctor Strange: Sorcerer Supreme* #55 (July 1993). Part of the "Infinity Crusade" crossover, Dormammu treats the astral form of Strange to an illusory retelling of the mage's origin. Mirroring *What If?* #18, Strange becomes the disciple of the Dread One in an attempt to persuade Strange to aid him in combat against The Goddess.

Proving he can emerge from the most surprising of places, Dormammu's next appearance is in a far-flung alternate future. *Guardians of the Galaxy* #32 (Jan. 1993) by Michael Gallagher and Kevin West sees Major Victory and Doctor Strange journey through the Dark Dimension. After an attack by the Mindless Ones, they arrive on the Brood home world, unaware they have picked up a stowaway.

Guardians of the Galaxy #34 (Mar. 1993) sees an essence of the original Dread One symbiotically attach itself to the future Dormammu, to triumphantly emerge in the 31st Century. He destroys the Guardian's ship in issue #36 (May 1993) but the Galactic Guardians transport the team onto their ship Icarus. Thus begins an epic space battle as this timeline's Ancient One (Stephen Strange) unites the cosmic power of the Guardians to repel Dormammu. The battle ends with Dormammu absorbing the Guardian's energies, giving him the power to kill the Ancient One. Luckily, this timeline's Sorcerer Supreme, the alien Krugarr, imbued with the spirit of the Ancient One and with the added power of Talon, can thrust Dormammu back into the Dark Dimension, which may as well have a revolving door.

Steve Englehart returns to Dormammu in *Hellcat* #1-3 (Sep.-Nov. 2000). Illustrated by Norm Breyfogle, the series has Patsy Walker facing not only Dormammu, but also Mephisto, Hela, Satannish, and Daimon Hellstrom. The final issue reveals Dormammu spawned Satannish, who fathered Hellstrom, essentially making Hellstrom Dormammu's grandson.

"Trying to make sense of the five devils and their relationships, one new relationship fit everything together very neatly," explains Englehart. Despite Patsy's trauma, she remains lighthearted enough to goad Dormammu with nicknames like "Dormouse" and "Doormat". "I always say I love all my characters," says Englehart, "but I certainly love Patsy Walker and her attitude."

The next major appearance of Dormammu is in the 2005 Defenders miniseries from Keith Giffen, J.M. Dematteis, and Kevin Maguire who bring their "Bwah-Ha-Ha" approach to Marvel's "non-team". Nightmare warns Strange Dormammu and Umar are planning to attack Earth (again) so Strange puts the band back together. The jokey, bickering dialogue between Dormammu and Umar takes some getting used to, but it does give a spicy new flavor to a typical Faltine twins invasion tale.

(top left) Hellcat faces Dormammu. Cover by Norm Breyfogle. (top right) Kevin Maguire draws a pretty nifty Dormammu. (bottom) Dormammu as he appeared in the 2016 *Doctor Strange* movie.

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(left) Dormammu finally gets his own book. *Bring on the Bad Guys: Dormammu* cover by Lee Bermejo. (right) Dormammu and Doctor Strange keep the conflict alive. Cover by Alex Ross.

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Keith Giffen, who once described Dormammu and Umar as "Donny and Marie from hell," spoke to *CBR* in 2004. "Dormammu and Umar have teamed up to finally get it right. The two most powerful pan-dimensional beings are coming gunning for our reality and they win."

The postmodern approach permeates all five issues, leaving behind the Silver and Bronze Age personas of the Dread One and his Unrelenting sister, but maintains the trope of Umar being the stronger of the two in ruthless ambition, if not physical power. That said, Dormammu makes for a more fearsome and dynamic cover star, as *Defenders* #3 (Sep. 2005) proves. Maguire's art shines throughout. "I'd like to go on record as saying Kevin Maguire draws the best Dormammu I've ever seen," stated Giffen. "And I'm including Ditko in the mix. Sacrilege, but it's that good."

Despite the levity of the *Defenders* series, Dormammu achieves Godhood by entering Eternity and reshaping creation in his image. Meanwhile, Umar, strangely hyper-sexualized, is content with having her way with the Hulk. Dormammu's new reality has a subserviently evil Stephen Strange and distorted versions of various Marvel heroes. Namor meets his human doppelgänger who teams up with the always duplicitous and self-serving Umar to bring Dormammu down. Umar feeds the real Strange the power he needs to weaken Dormammu while the Hulk administers the coup de grace. Having stolen Eternity's power from her brother, Umar returns Earth to what it was and deposits a wizened, hairless, and powerless Dormammu to the care of Strange.

Dormammu graduates from the comics and onto the big screen in 2016, with his fearsome visage appearing in the climax of the Doctor Strange movie, providing a powerful if short lived spectacle. Strange triumphs, placing the Dread One in a time loop, until he bargains for his freedom by vowing to stay away from Earth.

Dormammu never stays dormant for long. He gives crime-lord The Hood demonic powers, takes over Limbo, possesses Ego the Living Planet, and finds the time to produce an heir (sort of) in Doyle Dormammu, as seen in Skottie Young's *Strange Academy*.

One of the best Strange and Dormammu confrontations occurs in *Doctor Strange* #3 (2023) by Jed Mackay and Pasqual Ferry. Strange meets Dormammu for a Parley Day, in which the Dread One possesses one of his disciples and Strange attempts to save his life. During their chat, they relive Dormammu's various defeats, including *Doctor Strange: The Flight of Bones* #3 (Apr. 1999), when he is devolved into satanic cherubs and *Doctor Strange* #16 (Jan. 2017) where Chris Bachalo gives him a nightmarishly abstract makeover. Strange enlists Jean Grey's aid in exorcising Dormammu from his host.

Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, with the help of Roy Thomas and Steve Englehart, created lasting Lovecraftian icons and mind-bending concepts decades before the current day fascination with wizardry, with Dormammu arguably their best demonic creation. "I think that the visual aspect of him–a guy with a head made out of demonic fire–an image rarer in the 1960s than it might be later–captured our attention," states Thomas. "Mordo couldn't hold a candle to him in my eyes."

In Ryan North's *One World Under Doom* (2025), Dormammu once more proves to be a massive threat to Earth, when he engages in a savage battle with then Sorcerer Supreme, Emperor Doom, for dominion over the planet. Doom, with the aid of an army of heroes, vanquishes the Dread One, but you know it's only a matter of time before he is back. Dormammu is eternal evil and for comic creators since 1963, the malignant muse that keeps on giving.



Paul Burns enjoyed charting the history of the Dread One, realizing the Devil not only has the best tunes, but features in some of the best comics, too. Making his job a lot easier were the always kind and generous Roy Thomas and Steve Englehart.

end

TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

THE COLD HEART OF A KILLER FROST

by Doug Zawisza



Bring on the BAD GUYS!

Just as every snowflake is different yet composed of the same base ingredient–frozen water–each of the three Killer Frosts is different yet retains a heart as cold as her villainous name. From Crystal Frost to Louise Lincoln to Caitlin Snow, these frigid femme fatales have given the Nuclear Men known as Firestorm a run for their money. Their levels of action upon their icy vendetta varies, sometimes even shading towards the side of (snow?) angels, but none of the Killer Frosts would exist if not for Martin Stein, Ronnie Raymond, Jason Rusch, or some amalgamation of Nuclear Men known as Firestorm. But mostly Martin Stein. More on that–a lot more–later. Keep reading.

(You can read more about Firestorm in *BACK ISSUE* #112, the Nuclear Issue)

One of the most recognizable and persistent foes from Firestorm's surprisingly deep gallery of rogues, Killer Frost frequently leads with her icy heart, futilely seeking the warmth of relationships as a chilling parallel to her ability to drain the warmth from the bodies of victims. Each Frost has anchored the various volumes of Firestorm's solo series, building their collective reputation like children might assemble a snowman following a blizzard.

Pour yourself a cup of cocoa–or a taller, cold drink–and settle in for this spotlight on the glacial gal from Firestorm's adventures–all three of them!

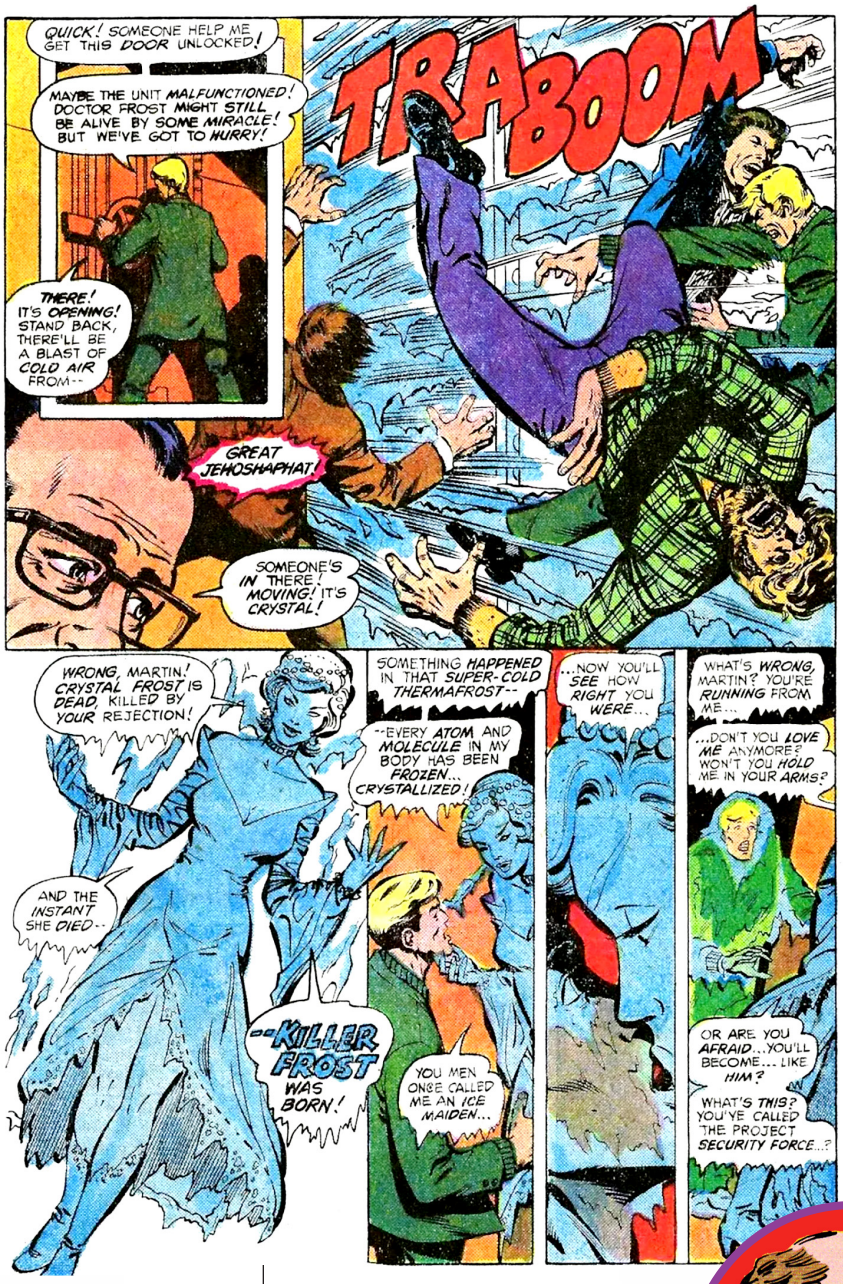
INTRODUCING THE ICE PRINCESS

"Wrong, Martin! Crystal Frost is dead, killed by your rejection! And the instant she died, Killer Frost was born!" Thus begins a more modern Ice Age brought on by Killer Frost, particularly, Killer Frost the first in the pages of *Firestorm* #3 (June 1978). The precedent is set: rather than being born from flame like a phoenix, each Killer Frost sheds her humanity through a death event, reborn as a calculating, crystal-cold killer.

"Kiss Not the Lips of Killer Frost" was written by Gerry Conway, drawn by Al Milgrom, inked by Bob McLeod, lettered by Ben Oda, colored by Mario Sen, and edited by Jack C. Harris, *Firestorm* #3 is the keystone of what became the flame-headed hero's first five-issue series, which was cut short by the infamous DC Implosion. Interviewed specifically for this article shortly before his passing, Gerry Conway confirmed that his intent was to introduce a new villain in each issue, laying the foundation

Killer Frost is here to freeze a fiery heart in *Fury of Firestorm* #20. Cover by Rafael Kayanan and Dick Giordano. (inset) Killer Frost debuts in *Firestorm* #3. Cover by Al Milgrom.

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Killer Frost makes her explosive first appearance in *Firestorm* #3. Art by Al Milgrom and Bob McLeod.

TM & © DC Comics.

for an impressive Rogues' Gallery for Firestorm.

"I like creating characters. Let's put that out there," Conway told this interviewer. "And I love the idea of a Rogues Gallery. My intention was to create a new villain every issue, just build that up as it worked out. You know, I didn't have that opportunity entirely, but I think that was a good group of supervillains."

Beneficiaries of Conway's intent to craft new characters, the grander DC Universe would draw upon what Conway, Milgrom, and company established in the first volume of *Firestorm* for almost five decades.

Conway added, "It seems so obvious to me that a character like Killer Frost would be used more frequently than she is. Yeah, you know, she looks great. There's a perfect villain tie-in for Firestorm. Ice versus fire. It makes sense, even beyond the obvious aspects of it." Continuing on, Conway shared, "She's an interesting person. She's much older than Ronnie, and as a result, there's an interesting dynamic playing off of the older woman versus the younger man. So that's fun. She was a peer of Martin Stein's, right?"

Former student turned peer, it was Crystal Frost's work–inspired by her one-time professor Martin Stein–that led her to design the Arctic-based Mohole One. Scientists gathered to devise a method to use heat from the Earth's core to provide new energy. [Writer's note: this comic was crafted between the 1973 oil crisis and the 1979 energy crisis, highlighting the creative team's sci-fi science/pseudo-science leanings.]

The Arctic was chosen for the natural cold it would provide, but Martin Stein had developed the critical component to make Crystal Frost's ThermaFrost refrigeration unit successful: his experimental condenser. Stein's arrival gave Frost the opportunity to feel seen, to be treated equally beyond the misogynistic Mohole-based scientists who she felt dismissed by, and to realize her greatest career triumph. And maybe even cash in on the schoolgirl crush she had on Stein. After all, Frost was certain Stein not only saw her as an equal, but perhaps even a love interest.

Crystal Frost could not have been more wrong. Stein objectively denied any romantic interest, and crushed Frost's hopes completely. So much so that in a fit of rage, she stormed into the ThermaFrost, accidentally bumping the automatically locking door which–you guessed it–trapped Frost in her own device, subject to the cooling power of -1000° Centigrade (or four times the temperature of absolute zero–hey, it's 1970s pseudo-science).

Killer Frost emerges a being completely crystallized from extreme exposure and dressed like a prom queen from the East Arctic Plateau. Regarding the name, Firestorm and Killer Frost co-creator Al Milgrom recalled, "I said, 'Well, if she's a bad guy, maybe she should be, like, a killer frost or killing frost. Like, you know, the kind of frost that kills a farmer's planted stuff out in the fields.' And they liked that, and they went with it, so we named her Killer Frost. And, of course, arguably, in my long and storied career, one of my longest lasting characters."



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Asked about her outfit, Milgrom said, "An icy character was nothing new at DC. They had about 12 of them. I think they once did a story where they had a bunch of them team-up together... Killer Frost was really just the latest addition in a long line. My thought for her was that I designed her a very icy, chill-looking almost a ball gown kind of thing. And it was made up of sort of diamondy-looking ice shards. So, the dress was flowy and icy, and she had her hair done up with pearls [in] an upswept hairdo and all this stuff. And I think she had long sleeves, so as she drifted along on her little ice pathways, the sleeves, and the bottom of the gown would sort of billow out behind her, to help the illusion of motion."

Throwing ice, freezing the guards on duty outside the ThermaFrost, and swirling cold air to carry her aloft, Killer Frost had focused her hatred into survival and a quest for vengeance with one-half of Firestorm as her primary target–Professor Martin Stein, representing the absolute worst in all men. "Kiss me, Martin!" Killer Frost wailed, "Kiss your scorned lover! Kiss the lips of Killer Frost!"

The other half of Firestorm, high-schooler Ronnie Raymond, playing in a basketball game feels the kiss as though he was at Mohole One. Professor Martin Stein initiates the Firestorm transformation for the first time, summoning Ronnie to join him as Firestorm at Mohole One. Through the course of their conflict, Stein deduces that Frost's cold powers are, ironically, fueled by heat: "Killer Frost needs warmth, she thrives on it, lives for it!"

And, indeed, she does. As noted in *Who's Who: The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe* (Feb. 1986), "Killer Frost needs to absorb heat in order to survive. Hence, Killer Frost can kill people by kissing them and simultaneously draining the warmth from their bodies."

How do you defeat such a foe? Put her on ice in a prison of her own design: a nuclear-powered-replicated ThermaFrost unit. At least for a year or two. That is exactly how Firestorm concludes the first battle with Killer Frost in *Firestorm* #3.



THAWING OUT A VILLAIN

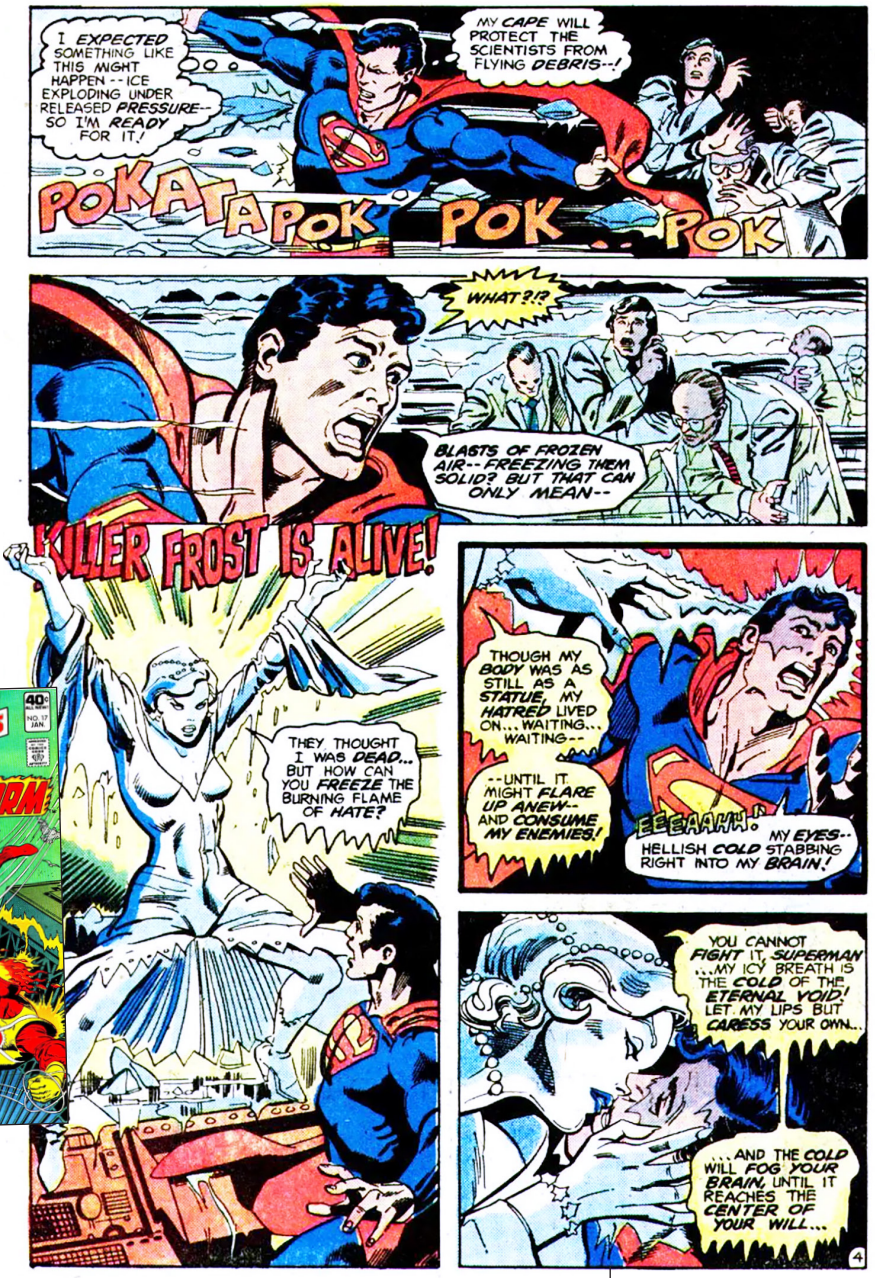
Nineteen months after her debut, Killer Frost returns (and so does Firestorm) in the pages of *DC Comics Presents* #17 (Jan. 1980) in a tale called "The Ice Slaves of Killer Frost!". Facing Superman for the first time, the ice queen brought some new tricks in this issue written by Gerry Conway, drawn by José Luis Garcia-López and Steve Mitchell, lettered by Ben Oda, and inked by Jerry Serpe, in this Julius Schwartz-edited comic. A pivotal issue that reintroduces the Nuclear Man and his frozen femme fatale foe, *DCCP* #17 returns the climate-conflicted opponents for further adventures on the horizon.

With Oda's icy word balloons helping set the temperature for Killer Frost's frigid dialog this comic expands Frost's powers and her mania. Among her new chilly abilities is her command of the cold to "fog your brain until it reaches the center of your will, freezing your ability to reason, and making you [Superman] my icy slave!" This power is not mentioned in *Who's Who* but becomes core to the character's bag of tricks moving forward.

Frost's plan is to forge a device mirroring the ThermaFrost (the source of her power and malady) to freeze all men (and presumably women). A mind-controlled Superman comes in handy for assembling such machinery atop the tallest buildings in New York.

The target of Killer Frost's contempt, Martin Stein, just so happens to be on the scene, trying to stop S.T.A.R. from defrosting the villain. He arrives after the Man of Steel has been mentally frozen. *DCCP* #17 runs 17 pages and Firestorm does not face off with his foe until page 16. The romp ends with a rinse-and-repeat solution for the villain of the piece, once more leaving Killer Frost on ice.

Six months later (real time) Firestorm joins the Justice League of America on Superman's invitation in *Justice League of America* #179 (June 1980) setting up Killer Frost to eventually join the baddies for *Justice League of America* #195-197 (Oct.-Dec. 1981). Titled "Targets on Two Worlds," this three-part JLA/JSA team-up put Killer Frost in league (pun intended) with all of the most (sarcasm) familiar villains: Monocle, Floronic Man, Psycho Pirate, Brainwave, the Mist, Signalman, Rag Doll, and Cheetah. Killer Frost takes center stage on the George Pérez-drawn cover of *Justice League of America* #195, crossing good guys off the required big board the Secret Society uses to track opponents.



(left) Killer Frost and Firestorm return in *DC Comics Presents* #17. Cover by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez. (right) Killer Frost takes out Superman in no time flat in *DC Comics Presents* #17. Art by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez and Steve Mitchell.

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(top) A classic *Justice League of America* cover by George Perez features Killer Frost. (bottom) Killer Frost assembles a villainous team in *Justice League of America* #195. Art by Perez and John Beatty.

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Joined by George Pérez, inker John Beatty, Ben Oda (again), and colorist Carl Gafford, Conway chose to have the Justice League of America and Earth-2's Justice Society of America face off against the Secret Society of Super-Villains. With an agenda to upset the multiverse by eliminating ten heroes from the two Earths, this Secret Society has been assembled from both worlds with the express intent of unseating balance. It makes sense when the Ultra-Humanite explains the plot. Sort of. Upset the balance and the ensuing chaos will course-correct to eliminate the variable that triggered the upsetting of the balance. Or something like that.

As Conway recalled, "It works out for the Justice League as an oppositional group. You know they fit in. And again, my motivations are sometimes selfish. I just wanted to see those characters brought back."

Around this time, Firestorm was running as a backup in the pages of *Flash*. Killer Frost did not appear in that string of backup tales, deferring to grace readers with her presence until this JLA/JSA event. Her next appearance would be with the Nuclear Man in the pages of Firestorm's next ongoing series.

WE NOW RETURN TO YOUR REGULAR NUCLEAR PROGRAMMING

Less than a year later, the archenemies once more met to pit their complimentary powers against each other. Milgrom had this to share about the legacy his characters faced, "Then they gave him [Firestorm] back his own title, and it was Pat Broderick [on art]. Lovely, detailed stuff."

Pat Broderick had started working with the Nuclear Man in the pages of the aforementioned backup series in *Flash*. "Firestorm was first a backup job. I was also given the *Legion* [*of Super-Heroes*] at the time but found myself burnt out on the group books. I asked Dick Giordano for a single character title when one opened up and as luck would have it, it was *Firestorm*."

Fury of Firestorm #1 (June 1982) hit the stands on March 4, 1982, and took off to be one of DC's most popular books. The first issue set up the characters, brought readers up to speed, and started weaving in threads from the backups while setting up several subplots. Frequently compared as "DC's Spider-Man" in that the title featured a youthful point of view character, solidly likeable, diverse supporting cast, and bizarre foes with astonishing powers and abilities, it certainly helped to have talent like Gerry Conway and Pat Broderick driving the series.

Crystal Frost drifted in as one of those subplots that becomes the primary plot in *FOF*#3 (Aug. 1982). Her imprisonment following the "Targets on Two Worlds" was deemed to be infringing on her civil rights. Judge Martha Roberts orders Killer Frost's containment tube to be turned off as Frost's cold powers were not yet proven in court.

Yup, free the villain and they do villainous things. Frost takes advantage of the broadcast team present and informs the world of her intent to become Queen of New York, "Men ignored Crystal Frost. They don't dare ignore the Ice Maiden." She was really trying to make the Ice Maiden moniker stick.

Broderick's detailed artwork throughout Killer Frost's icy escapade shows Killer Frost freezing the Bronx Reservoir and, by proximity, all the water across, under, and in Manhattan, encasing the city in ice.

"Killer Frost was one of his [Firestorm's] original foes from his first series designed by Al Milgrom, who, coincidentally, was my last editor at Marvel before crossing over," Broderick said, "So, with Killer Frost she was part of Gerry's original cannon, I wanted to do those characters justice. I hope I did."





In *FOF*#4 (Sep. 1982), Killer Frost desires a royal escort as she is now the self-appointed Queen of New York. Holding the frozen city hostage, Frost orders Firestorm to fetch movie star Curt Nolland (of *Smokey and the Thief Wreck Georgia* fame) as her escort. As depicted on the cover drawn by Broderick and inked by Dick Giordano, the Justice League of America comes to the rescue while Firestorm defends Killer Frost and her icy agenda. Typical heroic misunderstanding leading to a dynamic fight sequence. JLA guidelines dictate the hero on the spot has primary responsibility. The League gave Firestorm the lead, concocting a plan to deliver Nolland to Killer Frost with a wink and a nudge.

Asked about Nolland's striking resemblance to Burt Reynolds, Conway replied, "Well, he has a mustache. He's got the mustache and the hat. And, I mean, coming from the '80s, yeah. I mean, I can see it, but it was also a style of that time to be fair. I had a mustache. No one would have accused me of looking like Burt...I was so delusional about my appearance, so God knows what I was thinking."

Broderick has a similar recollection: "Curt?! Curt...well. Burt [Reynolds] could have been his inspiration. Gerry and I were cooking with gas by issue [#]4. I had found my comfort zone. Gerry had a wonderful way of writing some comedy into Ronnie's life. Yeah, I'll go with that."

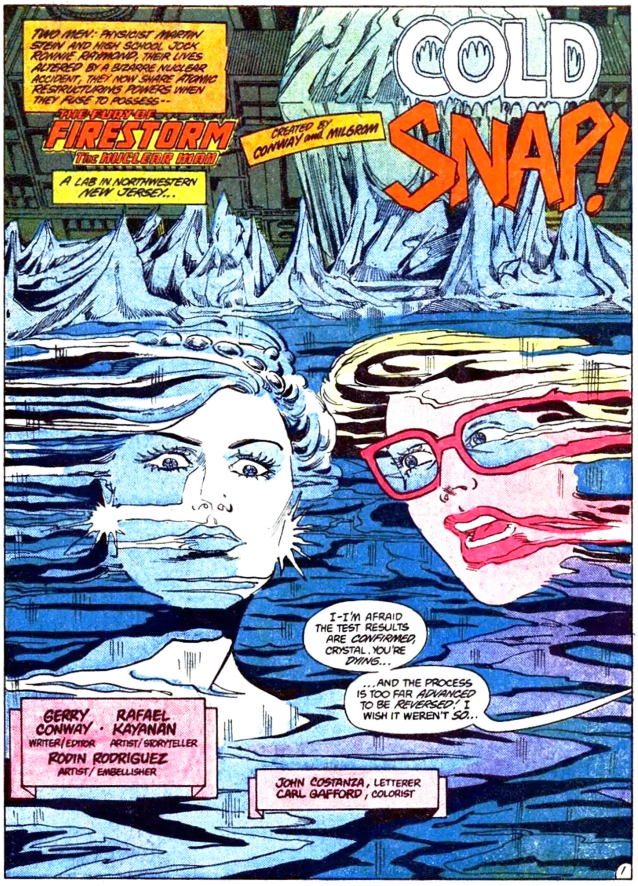
And the plan worked. Chummy since their shared revisitation of Red Tornado's true origin in *JLA* #193 (Aug. 1981), Firestorm–specifically Professor Stein–and Red Tornado, devised a portable ThermaFrost unit smuggled in Reddy's chest, activated to return Killer Frost to frozen captivity once the heroes sprung the trap. Iced up but not out, the crystallized Crystal Frost had one more appearance left to vex the Nuclear Man.

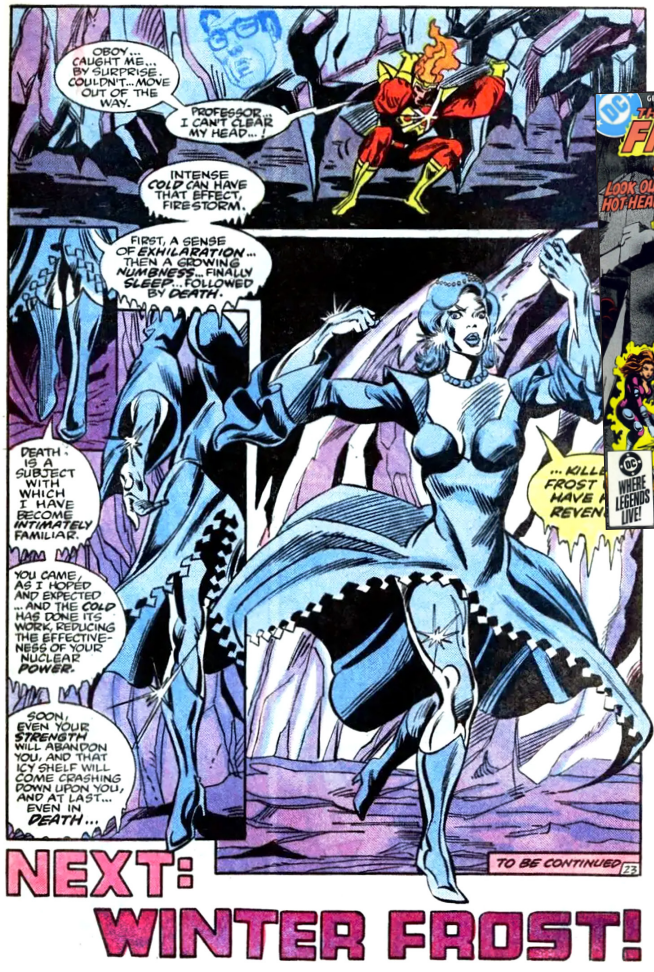
FOF #20 (Feb. 1984) brought the return of Killer Frost and also welcomed Rafael Kayanan to the team, joining Conway and longtime embellisher Rodin Rodriguez. Adam Kubert (yes, THE Adam Kubert) lettered the issue and Carl Gafford colored the issue. A bird lands on a transformer in "Frost Bite" leading to a chain reaction that ends with Killer Frost being released from her freezer unit. And, of course, she goes after Stein, who, because he's being pursued by Killer Frost activates the Firestorm transformation again.

Kayanan had this to share about joining the Firestorm creative team and drawing Killer Frost, "[My] main recollection was that she was the first character I ever penciled professionally (along with Firestorm) when I had to pencil the covers before beginning interiors. I recall how Dick Giordano really fixed my rookie lines with just a few bold strokes." Rodriguez provided

(left) Firestorm gets a new series and Killer Frost returns in the third issue. (I'm sensing a pattern.) *Fury of Firestorm* #3 art by Pat Broderick and Rodin Rodriguez. (right) Firestorm delivers Curt Holland to Killer Frost. *FOF* #4 art by Broderick and Rodriguez. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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consistency within the book, having inked Broderick and continuing with Kayanan for a spell.

FOF #21 (Mar. 1984) introduces Louise Lincoln, a colleague of Crystal Frost's and future Killer Frost herself. Realizing that she is terminally ill, Crystal Frost has sought Lincoln for help. As a deep freezer only slows the decay process, so has the living crystallization slowed Frost's own demise. Now, however, the crystalline condition has turned a corner and is accelerating. Frost is given days. Maybe hours. The battle raged through the pages of the issue with Frost physically waxing and waning, like a time lapse video of withering fruit being played forward and in reverse as she attempts to take Firestorm's heat one last time. By issue's end, she's gone. Killer Frost no more. Long live Killer Frost.

SECOND ICE AGE

The next year of *FOF* introduces more new foes for the Nuclear Man, like Slipknot, Mindboggler, Silver Deer, and more, but no one can match the icy indignation of Crystal Frost. Until *FOF* #33 (Mar. 1985). The creative team of Conway, Kayanan, inker Alan Kupperberg, letterer Phil Felix, and colorist Nansi Hoolahan brought Louise Lincoln back into the Firestorm cast with "Burn, Manhattan, Burn," highlighting her guilt for not being able to save Crystal Frost. The issue opened with Lincoln's confession and which carries throughout the issue as Lincoln tries to duplicate the conditions that created Killer Frost–until an accidental explosion actually does create Killer Frost. Well, *another* Killer Frost.

Conway saw parallels in the Stein-Raymond and Frost-Lincoln relationships. "I think that archetype really worked well, you know, the older character [Martin Stein] mentoring the younger character [Ronnie Raymond], because it reflected a real-life situation, which is you have the adult looking over the shoulder of the young teenager, giving advice, interfering, second-guessing. You know all of that." He continued, "It was a perfect archetype. And the same with Louise Lincoln and Crystal Frost, you know, you had, the older, more experienced character and the younger, less experienced character. So, there was a little bit of a parallel that I was trying to introduce there. So that was my motivation, I thought that the development of Crystal Frost was more interesting than Louise Lincoln. She had the more interesting backstory, and I knew that Pat Broderick had done a wonderful job with that character."

Conway gave Kayanan space to develop the second Frost. "Gerry was the perfect pro for me to start my journey in the industry. He was always easy-going, the stories and characters just flowed. I was always fired up after getting off the phone with him. I would think back about working with him through the years to remind myself how fun it was when my current job was not so fun or if I was working with a lot of negative energy from others."

When asked about his work distinguishing Frost and Lincoln, Kayanan said, "At the time, my interior pencils were heavily rendered, but I recall trying to make the Louise Lincoln version a bit more coquettish with softer features."

Killer Frost II (Louise Lincoln) makes her first truly frosty appearance in *FOF* #34 (Apr. 1985) on the final page of the issue as Firestorm

(top) A very stylish Killer Frost and Louise Lincoln greet us on the splash page of *FOF* #21. Art by Rafael Kayanan and Rodin Rodriguez. (bottom) The Louise Lincoln Killer Frost walks onto the pages of *FOF* #34. Art by Kayanan and Alan Kupperberg. (inset) The Louise Lincoln version of Killer Frost makes the cover of issue #35. Art by Kayanan.

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is struggling to hold up an ice shelf reflecting the gorgeous cover work from Kayanan and Giordano.

"At the time, it was still pre-digital coloring so I really just relied on more details behind Firestorm and less behind Killer Frost because most of the time there would be indications of ice around her," Kayanan recalled, adding this advice to future Killer Frost artists, "Stay away from sharp angled forms that is not ice to avoid confusing readers."

Strutting her stuff in *FOF* #35 (May 1985) and returning to the point of origin for Firestorm, Killer Frost II finds ample energy at the Hudson Nuclear plant. "So warm. It makes my skin...tingle. I need the warmth...I need the power."

Circumstances lead to Firestorm on the ropes and Plastique joining the fray for a surprising super-villain team-up with a big payoff in *FOF* #36 (July 1985). Firehawk joined the battle as well, letting Firestorm take on Plastique while Firehawk battled Killer Frost. Throughout *FOF* #36 Lincoln's obsession is clearly laid out: she chose to be Killer Frost, feeling like Crystal Frost deserved to live more than Louise Lincoln, even as Killer Frost. Thus, Frost deserves life more than Lincoln. This revelation makes the Killer Frost less a legacy and more a continuation of a role, office, or Rogues Gallery cabinet post.



Defeated and iced down, this all-new Killer Frost would not be chilling out too long before returning to action.

CR-ICE-IS

Crisis on Infinite Earths #1 (Apr. 1985) reunites Firestorm and Killer Frost in the most peculiar way. Penciled by George Pérez, who returns to work on Firestorm, a character Pérez drew in the Flash backups, a team-up in *Flash* #293 (Jan. 1981) and in the pages of *JLA*. Pérez also draws every other character in the DC Universe over the course of the series, but Firestorm under Pérez's pencils is always next level.

Working alongside writer Marv Wolfman, inker Dick Giordano, letterer John Costanza, and colorist Tony Tollin, Pérez depicts the recruitment of Firestorm and Killer Frost over two stunning pages in *COIE* #1. In a 1984 memorandum from Bob Greenberger shared in the *Crisis on Infinite Earths: The Compendium* contained in the Absolute Edition slipcase, Greenberger clarifies, "The original Killer Frost is dead, but a new version [Louise Lincoln] is being created, making the character viable for the Crisis."

"Viable" and "available" got a bit conflated as all possible definitions of both words got explored. Psycho Pirate was enlisted to manipulate Killer Frost into being smitten with Firestorm. Frost's powers are less necessary than the drama and comedy that comes with the emotional manipulation of enemies into not-quite-lovers in this early era example of frenemies.

Conway approved of the frenemies move in *Crisis*, "Anytime you can have fun with characters you should, you know, and I think Marv did a great job."



As the cast of the *Crisis* sprawls to attempt to include every character ever published in DC Comics, Killer Frost's need to be on the side of angels fades in *COIE* #5 (Aug. 1985). In *COIE* #9 (Dec. 1985) Killer Frost is back to being full-on evil, where she has helped freeze Earth-S alongside other environmental evildoers such as Weather Wizard, Captain Cold, Icicle, and more. Several of these icy individuals are gathered two decades later as the Ice Pack in the all-ages friendly *DC Super Friends* #16 (Aug. 2009).

POST-CRISIS

Following *COIE*, Firestorm gets a new direction and at least one overhaul of the creative team. The story is told elsewhere, but the shorthand version is Firestorm is intent on ridding the world of nuclear devices, no matter what it takes to do so. Which leads to Killer Frost's first post-*Crisis* appearance as she is recruited to be part of Firestorm-focused Suicide Squad that includes Firestorm foes Multiplex, Parasite, and Slipknot alongside Squad regulars

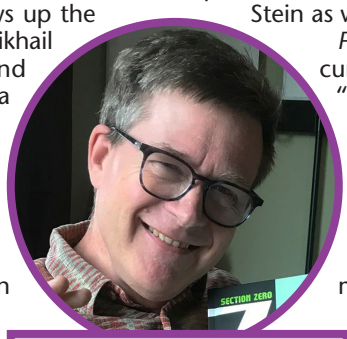
Killer Frost graces the cover of *FOF* #36 by Rafael Kayanan. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (inset) Killer Frost joins the Suicide Squad in *Fury of Firestorm* #64. Cover by Joe Brozowski and Bob Lewis.

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Deadshot, Captain Boomerang, and Rick Flag in *FOF* #64 (Oct. 1987). Written by John Ostrander, drawn by Joe Brozowski, inked by Sam DeLaRosa, lettered by Duncan Andrews, and colored by Nansi Hoolahan, the tussle with the Suicide Squad leads to explosive results in *Firestorm Annual* #5 (1987), which swapped in Alfredo Alcala on inks and Shelly Eiber on colors.

Firestorm Annual #5 literally blows up the Firestorm concept, merging with Mikhail Arkadin and opening up the second half of the series while placing a mysterious shroud over the fates of Ronnie Raymond and Martin Stein.

Frost next appeared in *Firestorm, the Nuclear Man* #82 (Feb. 1989). Written by John Ostrander, penciled by Tom Grindberg, inked by Sam DeLaRosa, lettered by Duncan Andrews, and colored by Nansi Hoolahan, this self-contained appearance includes a fight with Firehawk as Ronnie Raymond struggles to activate the Firestorm matrix. Killer Frost is dealt with and, once again, put on ice to chill out until her next rampage in *Firestorm* #94 by Ostrander, artist Tom Mandrake, letterer John Workman and colored by Hoolahan. The issue answers some questions about the Firestorm entity for Martin Stein as well as for the readers.



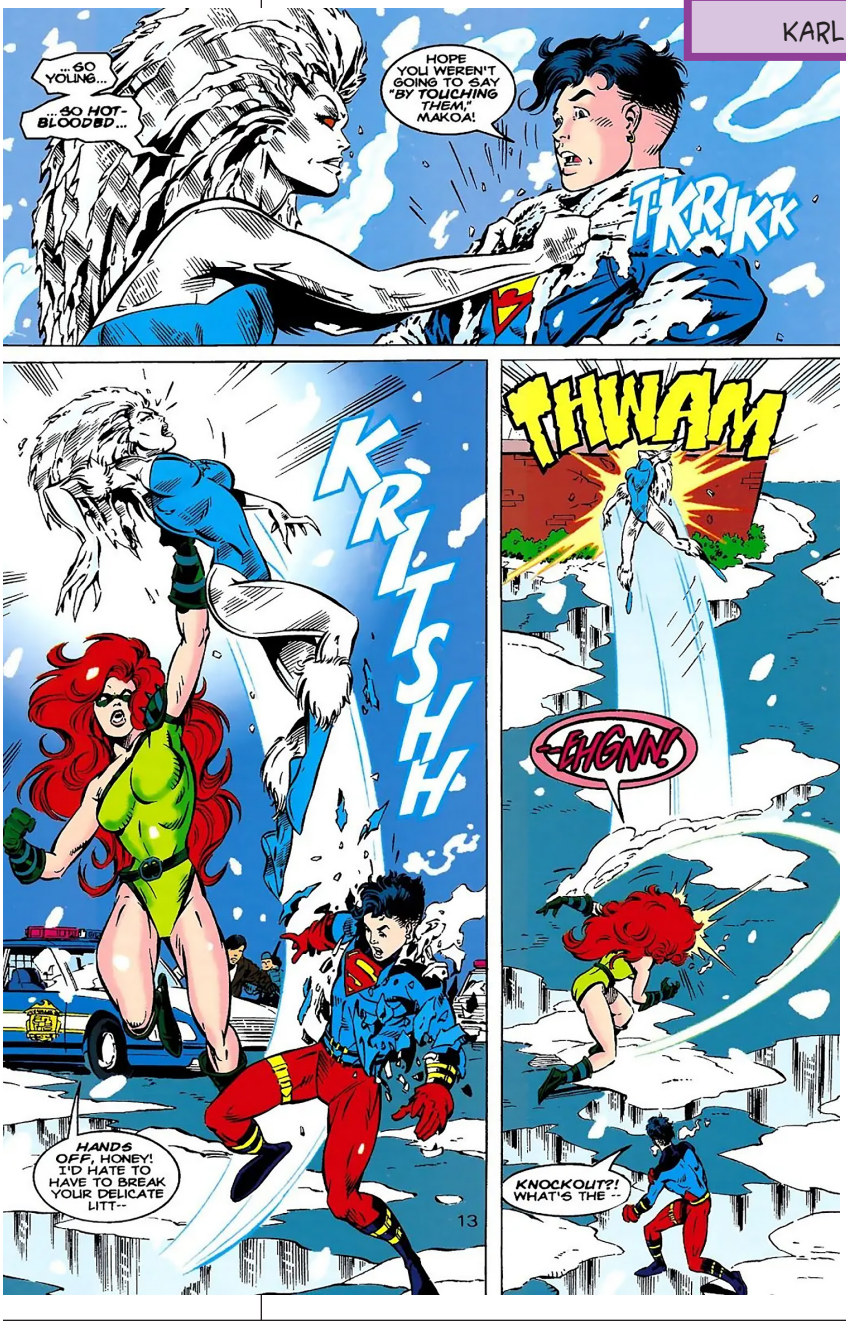
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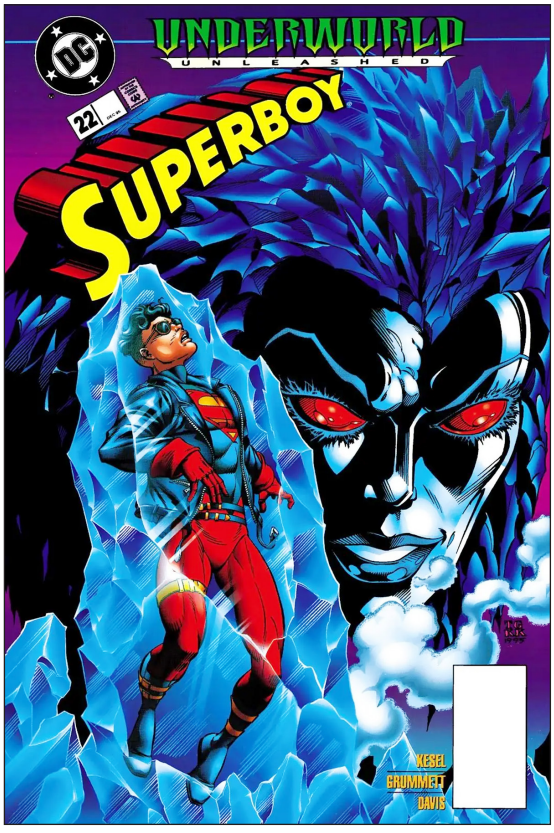
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Firestorm #99 (July 1990) seems to cure Louise Lincoln of the Killer Frost "virus". Ostrander, Mandrake, inker Carlos Garzon, Workman, and Hoolahan craft a story of Parasite running rampant at the Institute for Metahuman Studies. Parasite discovers Frost and begins feeding on her power, absorbing what makes Lincoln Frost until Lincoln is declared free of Killer Frost, neatly putting a bow on the ongoing adventures and adversarial escapades between Firestorm and Killer Frost before the series' finale with *Firestorm* #100 (Aug. 1990).

UNLEASHED

Following the conclusion of Firestorm's series, Killer Frost, like Firestorm, is off the board until the *Underworld Unleashed* event in 1995, over half a decade after her previous appearance. Firestorm languishes longer, but *Superboy* #22 (Dec. 1995), written by Karl Kesel, drawn by Tom Grummett, inked by Dan Davis, colored by Tom McGraw, lettered by Richard Starkings & Comicraft, tells the tale of Killer Frost's power-up from making a deal with Neron. She crashes an airliner near the





(left) Louise Lincoln returns in *Superboy* #22. Art by Tom Grummett and Dan Davis. (right) Cover by Tom Grummett and Karl Kesel.

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Honolulu Airport, absorbing all of the heat in the resulting blaze and gets a new outfit in the process. Her new look is more snow-bunny than ice queen, a sign of the times in 1995. Asked to reflect on his work with Killer Frost, Karl Kesel said, "I only vaguely remember her appearance in the *Superboy* book, and she was chosen primarily because we were in Hawai'i, so the contrast between hot and cold was appealing."

Once more: contrasting hot and cold. Just as Gerry Conway intended.

Firestorm returned in the pages of *Extreme Justice* in 1995. Towards the end of that series–*Extreme Justice* #14 (Mar. 1996)–Killer Frost joins the Legion of Doom. The creative team was writer Robert L. Washington III, penciler Tom W. Morgan, inker Ken Branch, letterer Kevin Cunningham, and colorist Lee Loughridge. The Legion of Doom tale weaves through subplot and main plot for the remainder of the run up to *Extreme Justice* #18 (July 1996).

Unhampered by Firestorm following the conclusion of *Extreme Justice*, Killer Frost appeared in a wide range of DC Comics throughout the early 2000s, including *Green Lantern* #127 (Aug. 2000), the second volume of *Suicide Squad* #6-9 (Apr.-July 2002), *Green Lantern* #157, and *Green Arrow* #54-56 (Nov. 2005-Jan. 2006) among others.

Firestorm returned in 2005, following *Identity Crisis*, and, naturally, Killer Frost would find her way to cross paths with the Nuclear Man once more. *Firestorm* #8 (Feb. 2005) being the first of a three-part fight between foes that ran through *Firestorm* #10 (Apr. 2005). Writer Dan Jolley, penciler Jamal Igle, inkers Rob Stull and Lary Stucker, letterer Phil Balsman, and colorist Christ Sotomayor demonstrate a new ability of Frost's–long-range heat absorption.

Killer Frost came back for a few more bites at the nuclear apple during that series, including a two-parter that pit her against Firehawk and teamed Killer Frost with Mister Freeze in *Firestorm* #24-25 (June-July 2006). The story also brings in Batman for a first meeting with Jason Rusch as Firestorm and puts Killer Frost on the sun courtesy of writer Stuart Moore, who joins Igle, inker Keith Champagne, letterer Travis Lanham, and colorist David Baron for what would be Louise Lincoln's Killer Frost swan song.

FORECAST CALLS FOR SNOW

Caitlin Snow as Killer Frost made her debut in *Firestorm* #19 (June 2013), the penultimate issue of the New 52's Nuclear Man series.

Caitlin Snow was almost someone else entirely, as a gun-for-hire named (or at least called) Loren was depicted with blue skin and visibly icing up the forearm of a comrade in *Firestorm, the Nuclear Men* #1 (Nov. 2011). She doesn't have any dialog, but she does appear again in a panel or two the next issue.

Loren disappears from *Firestorm* altogether. Caitlin Snow only logged a couple appearances as a foe to Firestorm in his own series. This left Caitlin Snow's story to be told elsewhere.

Caitlin Snow's origin is told in *JLA* #7.2 (Nov. 2013) by writer Sterling Gates, artist Derlis Santacruz, colorist Brett Smith, and letterer Dave Sharpe in a story titled "Killer Fost in Freezing to Death." This one-shot set the record straight for Caitlin Snow in the New 52 era of DC Comics.

The third version of Killer Frost has jumped across media and has more cumulative appearances than the other two combined. Bolstered by her appearances on TV and the potential of the Suicide Squad movie franchise, Killer Frost parlayed a quick appearance in *Suicide Squad* #8 (Feb. 2017) into a spotlight role in the *Justice League vs. Suicide Squad* miniseries. Her actions in this series started Caitlin Snow on her heroic journey.

A few years later, during the Rebirth era, Caitlin Snow full-on joined the Justice League of America, with *Justice League of America: Killer Frost Rebirth* #1 (Mar. 2017) opening the door. From there, she would go on to serve on the League as a hero, perhaps leaving her villainous ways frozen in the past ice age of her evolution.



(top left) Killer Frost takes on Firehawk. Cover by Brian Stelfreeze. (top right) Caitlin Snow debuts as Killer Frost. Cover by Dan Jurgens and Ray McCarthy. (bottom) The Caitlin Snow Killer Frost as she appears in *Firestorm* #19. Art by Jurgens, McCarthy, and Karl Kesel.

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(top left) Caitlin Snow's origin is revealed in *JLA* #7.2. Cover by Tony S. Daniel and Matt Banning. (top right) Killer Frost makes a turn for the good in *JLA: Killer Frost-Rebirth*. Cover by Ivan Reis and Joe Prado. (bottom) Killer Frost vs. Cyborg on a variant cover for *Justice League vs. Suicide Squad* #6 by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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DANIELLE PANABAKER

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ALL AGES ICE

In addition to the previously mentioned Ice Pack, Killer Frost has made appearances in other media and on other teams, becoming a fan favorite. Dropping the "Killer," Frost became a recurring character with the DC Super-Hero Girls in their various multimedia appearances.

Most famously–or most recognizably-the Caitlin Snow Killer Frost gained a following as she was portrayed by Danielle Panabaker. Appearing first on CW's *Arrow* as Caitlin Snow before becoming part of the main cast on *The Flash*, Panabaker's Frost undoubtedly helped propel the character's popularity in and out of comics. In a 2017 conversation with the website TVLine, Dnaielle Panabaker shared, "In the research that I did about Killer Frost, she always wore boots, which was something that I was really pulling for," she explained.

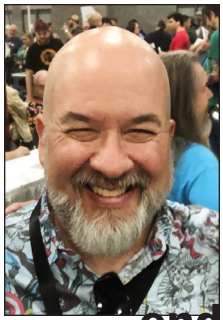
"And I know some of our producers really loved this long cape version [of the character], which is great and feels very villainous," she added. "I love the sleeves on it because a lot of Killer Frost's action is with her hands, and hopefully the light will really catch all the different details on that.

"Obviously, I was hired to play the very sweet scientist, but I've been super-excited about playing Killer Frost ever since I signed onto the show. It's something that I really wanted," Panabaker effuses. "It's a great way for people to see that this cast is capable of pulling off multiple characters."

Even a couple years after the original air date for the final episode of *The Flash*, Caitlin Snow continues to be the most prolific Killer Frost. Wonder if the forecast calls for more Killer Frost any time soon?

PARTING THOUGHTS

I closed out my interview with Gerry Conway the same way I do with any creator about any character: asking what other thoughts they have. Regarding final thoughts on Killer Frost, Conway replied with this, "I hope when they eventually do a Firestorm movie, that they make her the main villain."



Doug Zawisza was fortunate enough to have a conversation with Gerry Conway weeks before Conway's passing. Doug dedicates this article with sincere gratitude to Gerry Conway.

end

THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

by Doug Smith



Bring on the BAD GUYS!

RIDDLE ME THIS ...

Among Marvel's roster of cosmic heavyweights, the Sphinx remains one of the most intriguing mysteries-a character whose history is as sprawling as the universe he keeps trying to reshape.

Inspired by the famous challenge of mythology's Sphinx, the riddle of Marvel's Sphinx can be posed simply as: "Who is the Sphinx?"

The answer begins in *The Man Called Nova* series. Starting in issues #2 and #3 (Oct. & Nov. 1976), readers learn of a character only referred to as "The Dreaded One" by three of Nova's supervillains the Condor, Powerhouse, and Diamondhead.

The mystery grows and in *TMCN* #6 (Feb. 1977), we are introduced to the one who the Terrible Trio feared. He is known as The Sphinx! The intimidating man consults with his mystical companion Sayge. This hooded character has the ability to show others their fates which, in the case of the Sphinx, causes immense fear. Sayge also reminds the Sphinx how his existence will continue until he finds the answer to one special question.

In issue #7 (Mar. 1977), the Condor reveals to Nova how the Sphinx's story began 5,000 years ago in the court of Egypt's pharaoh Ramses. The Sphinx had once been the pharaoh's chief wizard until the arrival of the prophet Moses. After losing his serpent battle with Moses, the wizard was exiled to wander the desert. After 90 years, he discovered a hidden temple and the powerful Ka Stone inside of it. The gem commanded the wizard to place it on his forehead to become the Sphinx!

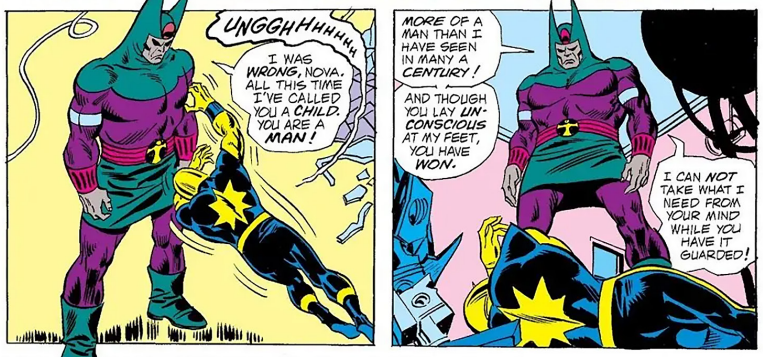


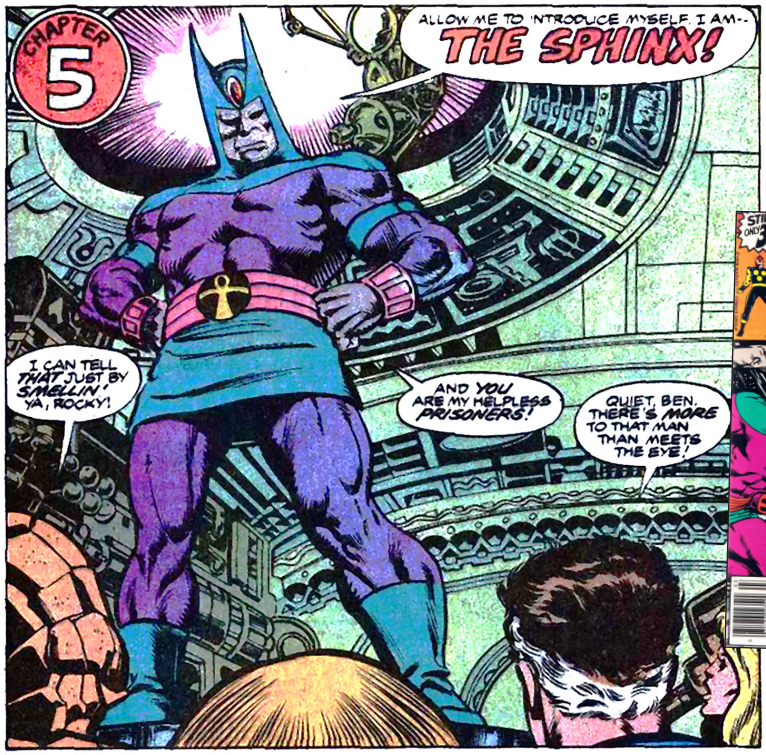
The Sphinx's creator, Marv Wolfman, recalls the genesis of his character; "I don't fully remember but I think I was watching the movie *The Ten Commandments* and while seeing the part where the Egyptian sorcerer tossed his staff and it turned into a snake. Moses did the same. But his snake was more powerful and it destroyed the sorcerer's. I'd seen that scene many times but it suddenly struck me that the Egyptian had power, too. Just not enough to fight Moses. I started to think about this and realized with his power he could be a biblical super-villain."

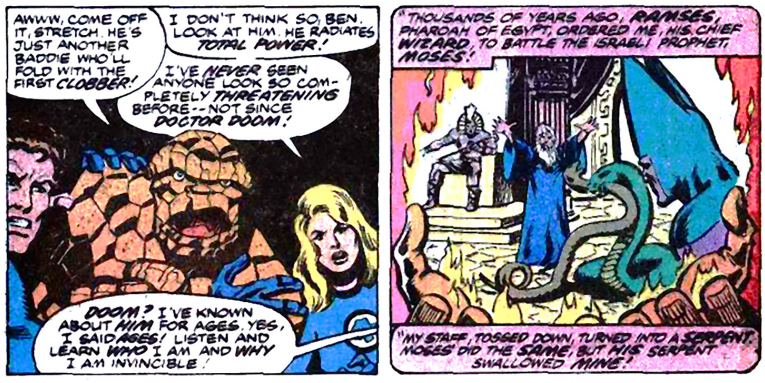
The Sphinx goes after the Fantastic Four! Cover by Dave Cockrum, Keith Pollard, and Joe Sinnott. (inset) Nova battles the Sphinx on the cover of issue #11. Art by Rich Buckler and Frank Giacoia.

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(top) The Sphinx decides to let Nova live at the end of *TMCN* #11. Art by Buscema and Giacoia. (bottom) The Sphinx takes on the FF in *Fantastic Four Annual* #12. Art by Keith Pollard and Bob Wiacek. (inset) The Sphinx is back and causing more trouble in *Nova* #24, cover by Carmine Infantino and Joe Rubinstein.

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The first story arc of the Sphinx comes to a conclusion in *TMCN* #10 and #11 (June & July 1977). During an attack by the Terrible Trio and Nova, the commanding Egyptian continues his quest to search every mind he can in the hope someone has the answer he seeks. The Sphinx has grown tired of immortality and wants to learn how to end his life despite the Ka Stone's power.

During the fight, the Sphinx learns that Nova himself contains the answer he seeks but it is hidden inside his mind as a result of his powers! However, he cannot get the information without destroying Nova first. The Sphinx suppresses Rich Rider's access to his Nova powers hoping he can find a way to extract the knowledge he desperately needs. He fails and following an epic battle, the Sphinx leaves the defeated Nova alive but swears he'll find a way to get the knowledge later.

The Sphinx expands his search for his desired knowledge in *Fantastic Four Annual* #12 (Nov. 1977). He made an alliance with an Inhuman named Thraxon and they rebuilt the damaged Great Refuge into a fortress.

One of the large buildings in the rebuilt city is revealed to be a giant space vehicle powered by the captured Inhumans, built by Thraxon, and designed by the Sphinx! The spaceship launches itself into space and eventually into Earth orbit.

The Sphinx intends to use the amplified power of Black Bolt to assimilate every mind on Earth in his quest to discover the knowledge to end his existence. Later, Black Bolt engages in a brutal battle with the Sphinx. Black Bolt defeats his foe and the Sphinx is hurled a light year into deep space.

The next chapter of the Sphinx's story takes place in a crossover between *TMCN* and the *FF*. The Fantastic Four's portion of the crossover begins in #202 (Jan. 1979) with the cybernetic villain Quasimodo. After stealing a rocket ship from the super quartet, Quasimodo detects the Nova Prime Starship in orbit. The Sphinx later scans the cyborg's mind and learns of Nova's ship and its link to Xandar's Living Computers.

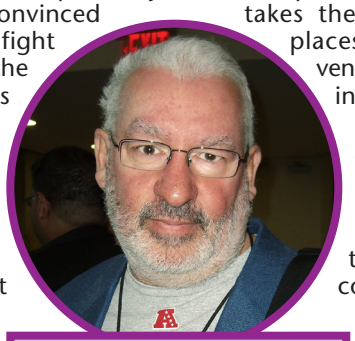
The Sphinx next appears in *TMCN* #23–25 (Jan.–May 1979) as he pirates the starship and, along with a group of super powered characters, pilots the ship back to the four-domed world of Xandar.

The immortal Egyptian's story continues in *FF* #206, #208-213 (May, July-Dec. 1979). Once on Xandar, the Sphinx invades the Living Computers of Xandar and absorbs its knowledge and energy. The now-gigantic Sphinx no longer desires death. His new goal is to conquer the Earth!

The now-insane Sphinx makes his way to Earth and remakes Egypt to appear as it had thousands of years

ago when the country was a world power. In order to stop the world from being conquered by the Sphinx, the Fantastic Four convinced the world devourer, Galactus, to fight the Sphinx. The war between the two powerful beings rages across Egypt with Galactus ultimately defeating the Sphinx and pulverizing the Ka Stone into dust with his bare hand.

The final humiliation from the victor is to send his defeated foe back through time to the point when he first discovered the Ka Stone in the desert. As a result, the Sphinx will now be locked in an eternal time-loop destined to repeat his life for all eternity! This is the tragic fate the Sphinx always saw in Sayge's hood and fought so hard to prevent and failed.



TOM DEFALCO

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An equally tragic note comes from the Sphinx's appearance in *What If?* #15 (July 1979). In the story, the Sphinx eliminates all of Earth's superheroes and supervillains in his quest for the secret to end his existence. This includes a supervillain version of Nova who possesses the knowledge which the Sphinx unknowingly also destroys as a result.

ALL THE KAS ARE DUST IN THE WIND!

The tale of the Sphinx continues a few years later in *Marvel Two-In-One* #91 (Sept. 1982). A reader at that time would have been justifiably excited and confused by the cover of this issue. It features what appears to be a crossover between the Thing and … Batman.

However, inside the issue, readers discover that instead of the Darknight Detective, it is the Enigmatic Egyptian who would battle Ben Grimm! An archaeological team unintentionally revive the Sphinx in Egypt. Soon after, a new pyramid is uncovered in the desert.

The Thing journeys to Egypt to investigate and he discovers the Sphinx is very much alive! Ben Grimm is soon captured by a blast from the Sphinx's blaster ray.

The mysterious immortal reveals to the Fantastic Four's strongman that even the godlike Galactus is capable of making a mistake. The Sphinx reveals that by sending him back in time to perpetually relive his life, Galactus inadvertently created a time-paradox. This allowed the Sphinx to exist as two separate people in the same timeline!

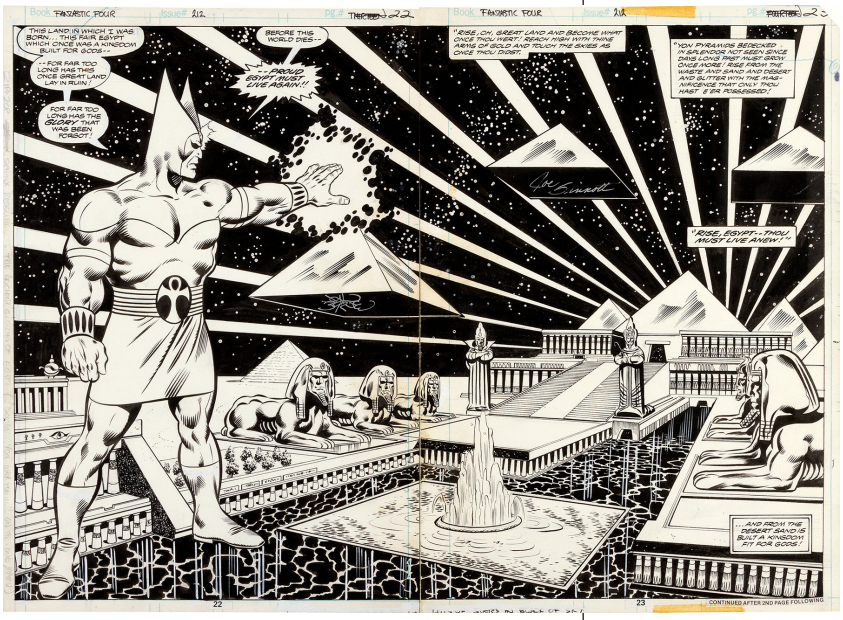
After the time-displaced Sphinx explained the situation to his younger counterpart, the two Egyptians quickly conceived of a daring plan. Using advanced technology garnered over the ages, the Sphinxes created a restoration ray to reconstruct the pulverized Ka Stone.

Once the machine was constructed and placed in the hidden pyramid, one Sphinx was hypnotized to forget the incident and continued existing in the time-loop while the other was placed in suspended animation. The suspended Egyptian, now revived, activates the device from the uncovered pyramid which begins reforming the Ka Stone.

Meanwhile, the Thing bursts free of his restraints and the two combatants engage in a fierce battle with the fate of the planet in the balance! The Thing destroys the restoration ray before it can complete its mission. Enraged, the Sphinx takes the partially rebuilt Ka Stone and places it on his forehead. Swearing vengeance, the powerful villain departs in his flying pyramid.

As for why he selected the Sphinx to face the Thing in this particular issue, writer Tom DeFalco admits; "I'm afraid I don't recall. Back in the day, I was often told to tie-up some bit of Marvel continuity. I think someone wanted to use the Sphinx, but didn't care to get bogged down, explaining his return—so that was left to me. I don't think that Sphinx story ever materialized."

The Sphinx's attempt at revenge took place in *The Thing* #34 (April 1986). Readers discover the

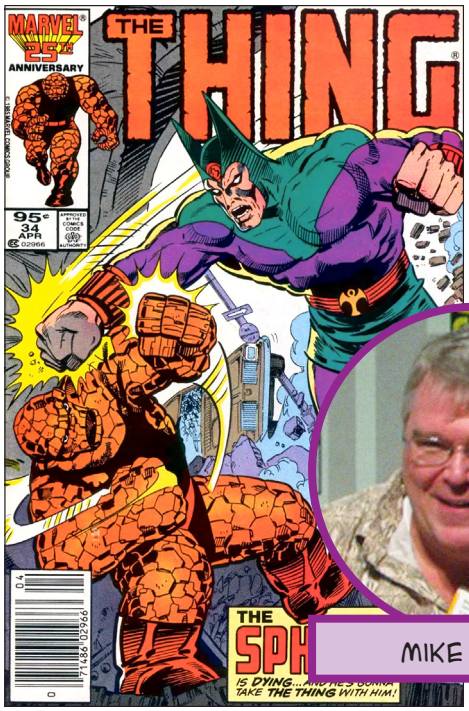






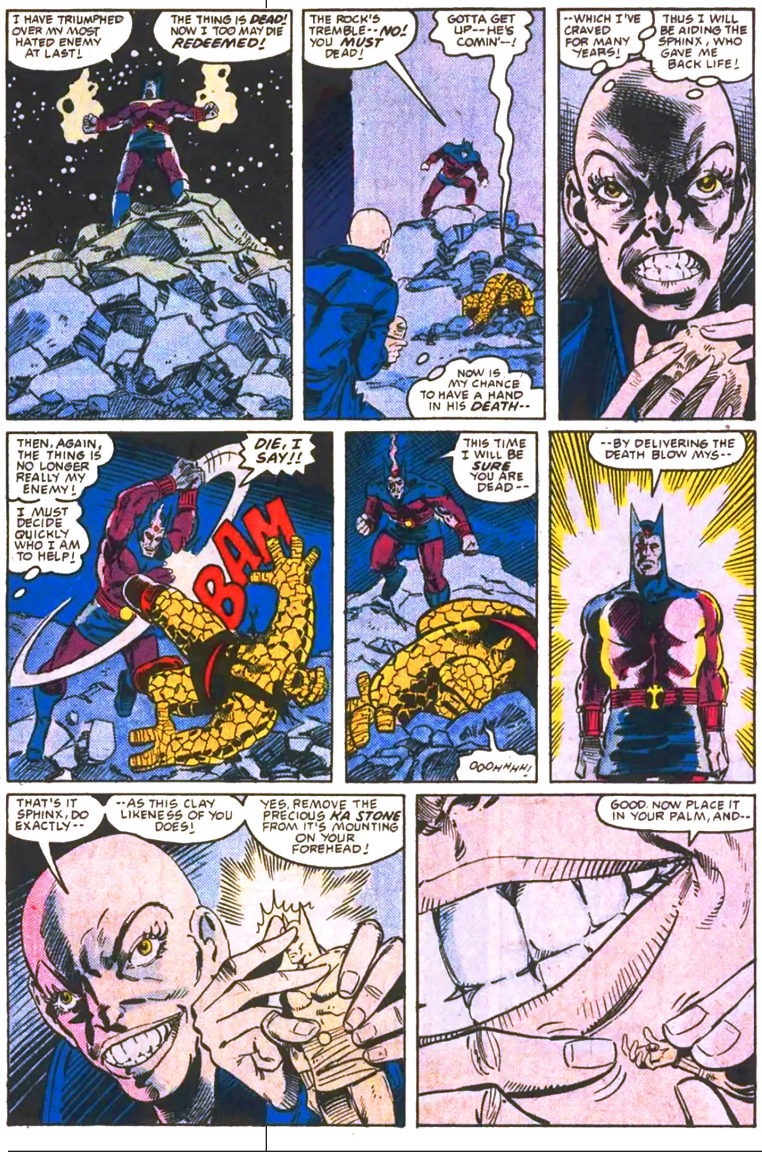
(top) The Sphinx looks impressive on this spread from *FF* #212. Art by Byrne and Sinnott. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions. (bottom left) Galactus vs. the Sphinx. Cover by Walter Simonson. (bottom right) Who's that Ben is meeting? Cover by Ron Wilson and Chic Stone.

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(top) The Sphinx just won't leave the Thing alone. Cover by Paul Neary and Kim DeMulder. (bottom) The Puppet Master joins the fight in *The Thing* #34. Art by Neary and DeMulder.

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Sphinx is now dying due to the rapid disintegration of the malformed Ka Stone.

When the Egyptian detects a mineral-based energy source he can use to finish the restoration of the stone, he uses his flying pyramid to collect the "lifeless clay" from a landfill. Energized by the Ka Stone, the clay is reformed into the Puppet Master!

The villain reveals to his rescuer that he had been turned to dust in a battle with the Thing. The Puppet Master offers to help the Sphinx destroy their mutual foe. The possessor of the Ka Stone dispassionately throws him out of the flying pyramid!



MIKE CARLIN

Later, as the Sphinx is about to kill Ben Grimm, the rock-skinned hero is saved with the unexpected aid of the Puppet Master! The clay-shaping artist has created a figure of the Sphinx which allows him to control his Egyptian foe. As a result, the Sphinx crushes his Ka Stone into dust with its dying master doing the same afterwards.

The combination of Puppet Master and the Sphinx isn't one that readers would instinctively put together. As to why he chose that particular combo, the story's writer Mike Carlin reveals; "We wanted to use villains who had personal beefs with Ben Grimm's… Puppet Master had several reasons to hate Ben—the most recent was his disintegration at Ben's hand. But more importantly he hated Grimm for dating his stepdaughter, Alicia—but that situation had recently changed, so PM would have reason to actually help Ben against another adversary.

I'm not sure who picked The Sphinx, me or Mark Gruenwald—whose knowledge of the vast Marvel Universe was always a resource I'd have been foolish to ignore—but the Sphinx was another villain with a personal vendetta against the Thing (as opposed to the whole Fantastic Four) due to that *MTIO* issue (#91). And Puppet Master would have the ability to stop the Sphinx so it was a good combo.

The added irony that the Sphinx restores the disintegrated Puppet Master, only to end up himself being disintegrated by the same Puppet Master was an added bonus."

What inspired the story's writer to create a sequel to *MTIO* #91? Carlin explains; "I guess I liked things like the sneaky "Batman" misdirect on the cover of *MTIO* #91… stuff like that was the kinda 'fun' I always liked—and the lawyers didn't. That's just another reason the Sphinx may have lodged in our fanboy heads… when Gruenwald and I were plotting out the issue."

As the 1990s began, fans of the Sphinx learned more about the origin of the character. In *Doctor Strange, Sorcerer Supreme* #27 (March 1991), it is revealed the Egyptian immortal was originally a mutant created by the alien Caretakers of Arcturus to be part of a superhuman army but eventually escaped. It's possible that this mutation allowed the Sphinx to perform magic in the pharaoh's time and eventually control the Ka Stone.

I BELIEVE IN YESTERDAY

There are ancient Egyptian themes galore in the Sphinx's next appearance! In the epic "Forever Yesterday" story arc in *New Warriors* #11–13 (May–July 1991), the Sphinx returns… sort of.

The world in "Forever Yesterday" is very different than the one we know. This planet's altered history had events beginning with the Sphinx (as the pharaoh's wizard) winning his fight against Moses and Egypt becomes the ruling country of Earth influencing the major events in its history.



We are introduced to a new character named Meryet Karim. During Egypt's long reign, Karim discovered the Ka Stone in the desert and presented it to the wizard who became the Sphinx. The Sphinx married the woman while granting her immortality as they became benevolent rulers.

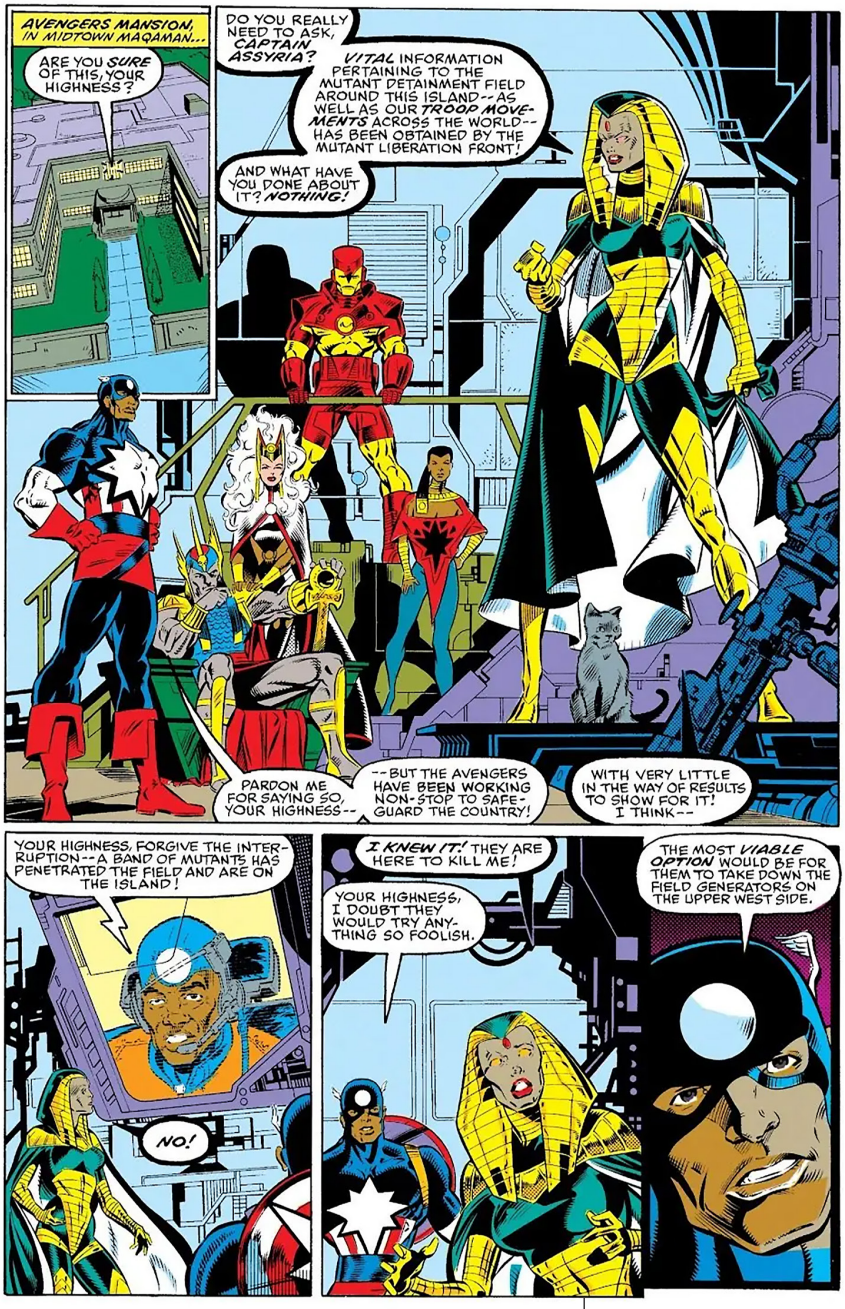
We also discovered the Sphinx had survived a nuclear attack with an energy shield. Exhausted afterwards, he gave the Ka Stone to his wife. He also granted immortality to their cat as a gift to remind her of his love. The Sphinx died and his wife became the new Sphinx.

As the story moves along, the truth of the altered reality of this world is revealed to Nova by the mystical Sayge who informs him that he must restore the Earth to its original history before the female Sphinx destroys everything.

Sayge reveals that in the true universe, Meryet Karim had found the Sphinx after he first merged with the Ka Stone thousands of years ago. Her proximity to the stone's energy gave her everlasting life different than the immortality granted to Anath-Na Mut. Meryet Karim was granted perpetual incarnation whereas she would die and be reborn in another body yet retained all the memories of her past lives.

Eventually, the Egyptian woman used the Scepter of Ka which allowed her to absorb the dissipated energies of the Ka Stone destroyed by Galactus. However, the woman was not prepared for the power of the restructured stone and she accidentally altered reality into its new form.

After a prolonged battle between the female Sphinx and the heroes of the altered reality, Nova forces her to change reality back to its true state by threatening to kill the cat given to her by the male Sphinx. She relents but swears vengeance after her cat disintegrates because it was not real to begin with.



The world building involved for the storyline was extremely detailed and required a large amount of research on the part of the story's writer Fabian Nicieza. The writer remembers; "I'd been planning the storyline from before the first issue had even come out, so I had taken a lot of time to prepare. All the advance work helped make the actual writing of the plot more in line with a regular issue from a schedule standpoint, though it was a lot of information to convey.

The not-so-humble truth is that by that point, the book, me, Mark (Bagley), Larry Mahlstedt, and editor Danny Fingeroth were firing on all cylinders. We were very comfortable with each other and confident in what we were doing. The book's unexpected success gave all of us a little bit of swagger."

(right) The female Sphinx rules in a world different from our own. *New Warriors* #12 art by Mark Bagley and Larry Mahlstedt. (right) The female Sphinx makes her cover debut on *New Warriors* #13. Art by Bagley and Mahlstedt.

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Part of the exquisite world building involved the designs of the Egyptian-ruled Earth. For his part in the planet's look, Nicieza recalls; "Oh, geez, I wish we had the internet and Google Images back then. In order to inform the architecture, clothing, etc. I did a lot of research and sent Mark a truckload of reference from several books and National Geographic magazines that I had. After that the genius of the actual work–which was like doing twice as much work as a normal issue–all fell to Mark and, of course, he did a fantastic job."

When asked why he created a new female Sphinx instead of bringing back the original, Nicieza replied; "I knew I wanted to end the year with a 'big story' that was really going to cement the themes I wanted the book to be about. I knew I wanted the story to be Nova-centric and also served as the point where he chooses to mature, to get out of the rut he had been in and embrace who he was as a hero.

I didn't want to bring the original Sphinx back yet, mostly because I thought her story was more interesting to tell than his–and that his story would be more interesting when he did actually return because of her (I knew I planned that for issue #50–having him come back in the Annuals was an unexpected choice).

So, I remember wanting the story to very much be about the truth and love, which is what I thought *NW* was going to be about."

KA-NETIC ENERGY

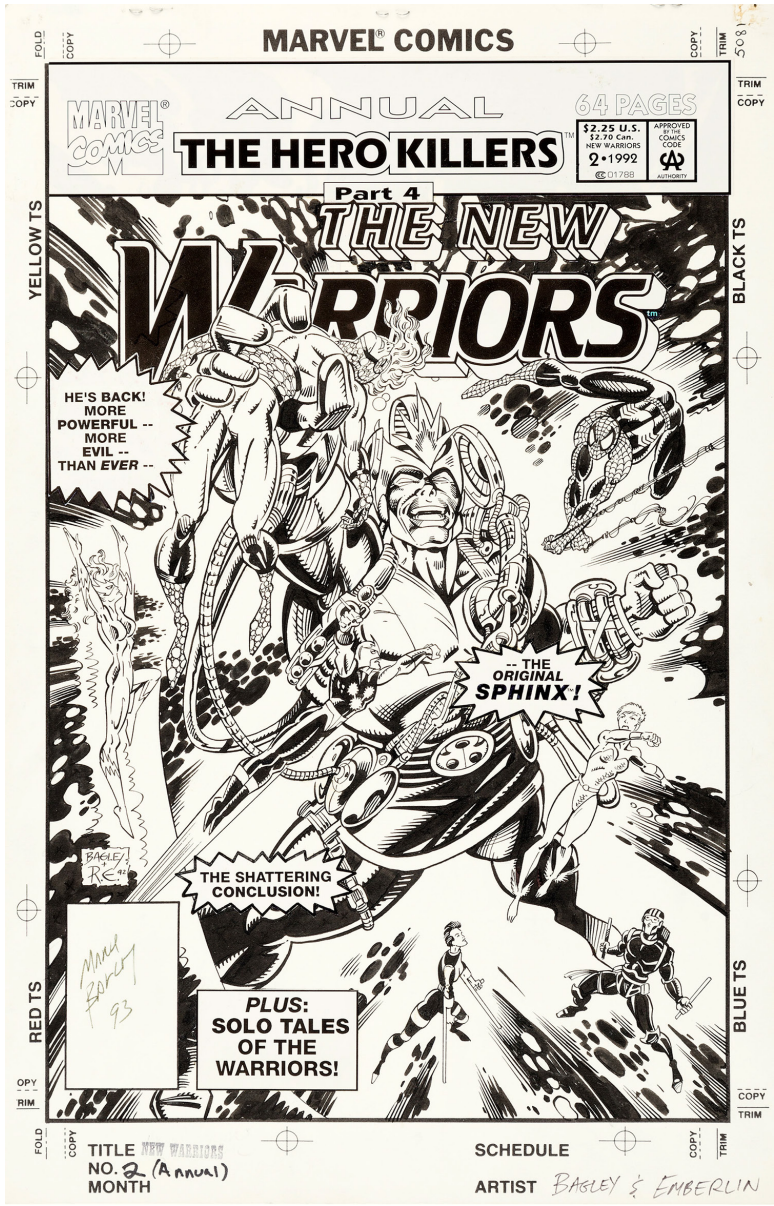
As Nicieza mentioned, the crossover of the *Spider-Man* annuals and *New Warriors Annual* #2 (June 1992) was unexpected. However, for fans of the Sphinx, it was welcome!

The immortal Egyptian returns to his crime lord persona (including a 1990s Armani suit!) as he and a cartel of evil corporate magnates manipulate a group of supervillains to capture the New Warriors and Spider-Man.

The Sphinx plans to use the kinetic energy generated by Speedball to retake the Ka Stone from the Lady Sphinx. The scheme ultimately fails due to the teamwork of Spider-Man and the New Warriors with Speedball destroying the Sphinx's high-tech armor. Following the explosion, the Sphinx disappears into the shadows.

As for how the Sphinx made his surprise return ahead of the New Warriors' writer's schedule, Nicieza recalls; "I wasn't the driver of the 'Hero Killers' bus. I think that was Danny (Fingeroth) and David Michelinie, if I recall. I know they had discussed the storyline but didn't have the main villain masterminding all of it. Pretty sure it was Danny who suggested the original Sphinx and only if that wouldn't throw off anything I might have planned down the road. It didn't and I'm pretty sure I was in agreement that it made sense and was a good way to reintroduce him.

I'm sure that I was also being a bit lazy since that would mean I wouldn't have to worry about figuring out his return in the *NW* book if it had already happened in the Annuals."



The Sphinx is back in all his glory in *New Warriors Annual* #2. Cover by Bagley and Randy Emberlin. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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HOW MANY TIMES

The Sphinx next appeared in a major eight-part crossover titled "Time and Time Again" which was contained within the New Warriors series of titles including *NW*, *Nova*, and *Night Thrasher*.

In *NW* #47 (Mar. 1994), the male Sphinx tricks the female Sphinx into meeting him under the guise of love. He steals her portion of the Ka Stone's power to become the one-and-only Sphinx again and sends the New Warriors throughout time. After multiple crossover issues, Meryet Karim and a new team of Warriors are able to return the team to the present for a showdown with the Sphinx in *NW* #50 (Aug. 1994).

In the conclusion, the former Lady Sphinx and the Warriors, along with Sayge, convince the Sphinx that the power of love triumphs over the love of power. Anath-Na Mut and Meryet Karim use the Ka Stone to merge into a new single being and depart for new adventures.

Along with bringing back the Sphinx, Nicieza was the first writer to give the Sphinx his true Egyptian name of Anath-Na Mut. As for any particular inspiration for the name, he explains; "I think I had a lot of Egyptian research at hand. I probably just improperly conjoined words or concepts to give Sphinx his name just as I had (or would, I don't remember the timeline) for Apocalypse calling him En Sabah Nur."

TIME KEEPS ON SLIPPIN' INTO THE FUTURE

The first, and only, adventure of the merged Sphinx was the "Future Shock" storyline which ran from *NW* #68-71 (Feb.–May 1996).

The character appears in the present day to kill an enhanced duplicate version of Speedball in order to save the timeline but without preventing his own creation. The Sphinx easily defeats the New Warriors and slays the duplicate Speedball. His actions rewrite the time continuum which replaces the Speedball duplicate with the character Timeslip thus saving the timeline. With the universe and his own existence safe, the time-hopping Egyptian disappears in a burst of energy once more.

As for the genesis of the story, *NW* editor Tom Brevoort recalls; "Bringing back the Sphinx in that storyline was something that Evan pitched, but I was all for it. By that time, the Sphinx had been established as a recurring foe for the group—Fabian had used the character twice in big stories, and he had that longer history with Nova before that. So, it only made sense, especially as we were doing a time travel story and the Sphinx was a character entangled in time."

The writer of "Future Shock," Evan Skolnick, elaborates; "The Sphinx in this story was unstoppable but also very mysterious as to what his motivations were. His appearance was part of a storyline I had been slowly building up to for about a year, so I was excited to finally begin to really pay off on the 'future visions' that Timeslip had been having regarding the team, specifically Speedball's apparent death.

This was less about the Sphinx being selfish and more about him being practical. He couldn't step in to solve this particular temporal problem because doing so would have unmade him in his current form and thus prevent him from solving the problem. So, he had to go about it in a much more roundabout way."

HERE COMES THE SUN

Beginning in *Nova: The Human Rocket* #2 (June 1999), in Giza, Egypt, a tomb raider discovers the hidden tomb of the Sphinx. When he opens the sarcophagus to steal the Scepter of Ka containing the Ka Stone held by a skeletal corpse, his life energy is drained by the stone. The energy restores the corpse who is revealed to be the Sphinx!

Over the next two issues, the Sphinx continues his life-from-death march through Egypt until he's ready to confront Nova. In *NTHR* #6 (Oct. 1999), the Sphinx attempts to understand his mysterious resurrection. He knows the time loop creates "the slightest variations" with each rebirth. The Egyptian also recalls he was merged with the female Sphinx and Ka Stone but is now back to his original form. His new goal is to find Nova and absorb the knowledge of Xandar's Super Computer from the hero's mind.

The two foes begin battling in New York as the Sphinx reveals to Nova that his plan is to gain enough energy and knowledge to destroy Galactus and free himself from the endless time loop.

As he absorbs more life energy, the insane immortal grows to an enormous size causing death and destruction in his path. In a final desperate act, Nova rips the now giant Ka Stone from the scepter and throws it into the sun!

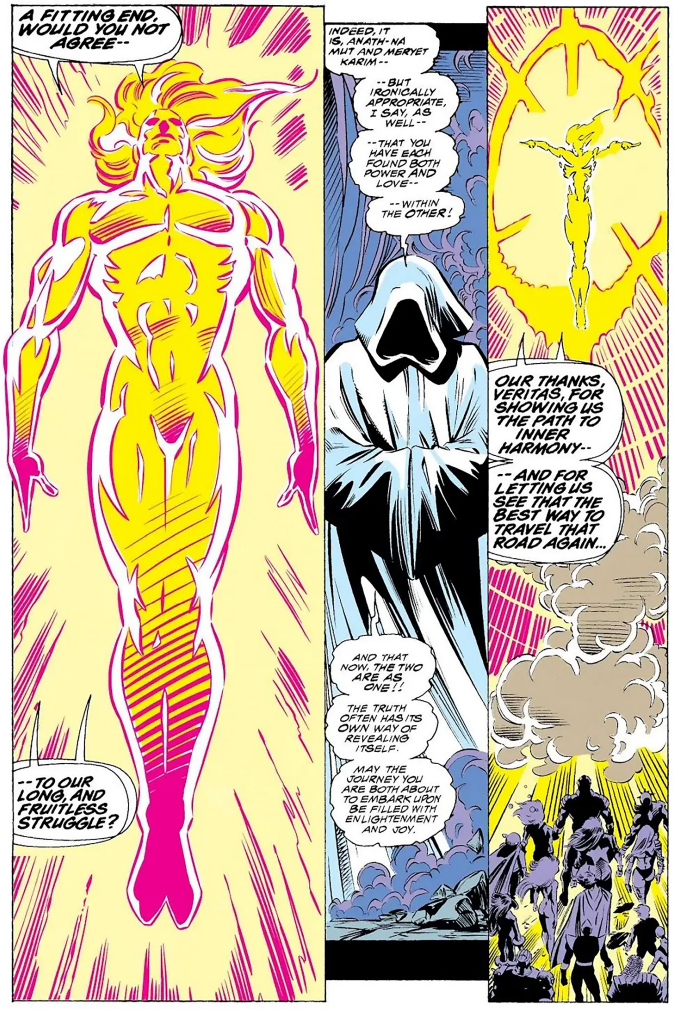
With the gem seemingly destroyed, the Sphinx turns to stone and he's pulverized by Nova. His actions cause time to reset itself and everything is restored to the way it was earlier.

Given its scope, was the original plan to have the story be part of a longer arc? The writer of the series Erik Larsen explains; "I don't quite recall what (if anything) I had in mind with that. With a lot of stories, I essentially plant seeds with the hope that they grow into something that I can use down the road. There isn't always a solid plan at that stage-I'm just putting revolvers in the room for the toddler to play with. The thought being that something could come of that.

Since the Galactus stuff was set up earlier, I felt a certain obligation to address it. I wasn't sure I'd be able to rope Galactus himself into a story down the road but that was the hope. I was pretty much reestablishing the characters at this stage. I was setting the table."







(top left) The male and female Sphinx meet in *New Warriors* #47. Cover by Darick Robertson and Larry Mahlstedt. (bottom) The male and female Sphinx merge into one being at the end of *NW* #50. Art by Darick Robertson and Mahlstedt. (top right) The Sphinx is back and bedeviling Nova. Cover by Erik Larsen and Al Gordon.

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(left) Nova and the Sphinx face each other again in *Nova: The Human Rocket* #6. Art by Joe Bennett and Armando Durruthy. (right)The Sphinx is back and up to no good. Cover by Brandon Peterson.

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A KA STONE'S THROW

Our next revelation of the Sphinx's legend is not about the character but the Ka Stone. In *Thunderbolts* #46 (Jan. 2001), it is revealed that the powerful stone was once part of the ancient Lifestone Tree. According to the issue, the tree on the planet Kree-Lar had been "created by a multi-species scientific endeavor to create an evolutionary advanced group of guardians of the galaxy".

This Chosen Eight of Fate protected the galaxy for two centuries before their numbers either died or retired. With them gone, peace ceased to exist and the lifestone gems were taken via space ark. Under attack, the ship imploded which created a rift in space and a number of the gems found their way to Earth. The Ka Stone was eventually discovered by Anath-Na Mut while the remaining stones were later found by other Marvel characters.

The issue also revealed that the lifestones were also "biosynaptic processors" containing the archived memories of its wearers and could interact with the current stone holder. This explains the voice Anath-Na Mut heard on occasions from the Ka Stone.

Did the issue's writer Fabian Nicieza select the Ka Stone for any particular reason given his history with the Sphinx? Nicieza answers; "I included it for the same reason I included any of the other Lifestones: it fit the category of what I was looking for among the many 'Marvel mystery rocks' that have empowered characters to that point in the history of the MU.

The Sphinx as a character had little to do with my choices regarding that storyline."

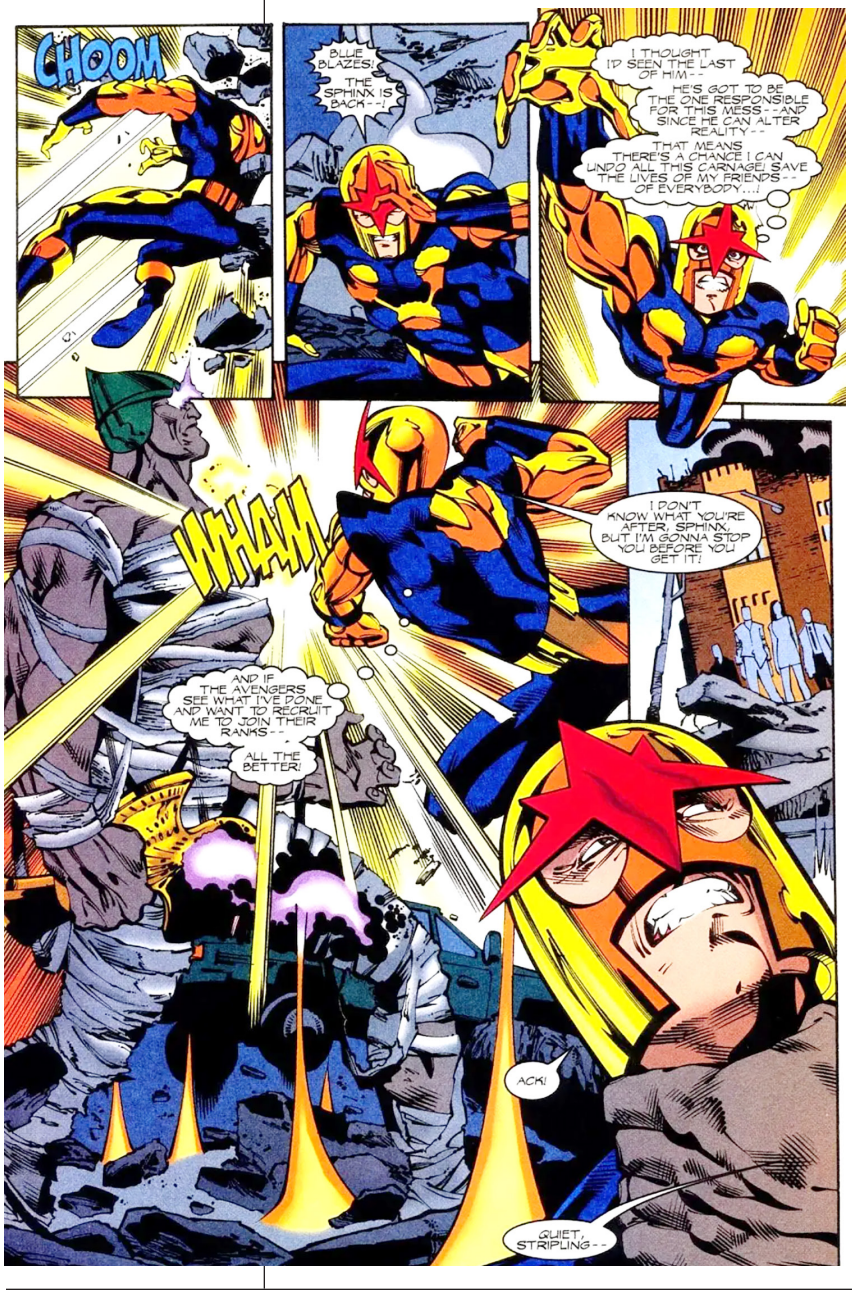
WHOSE FAULT IS IT?

Due to the time reset, the Sphinx walked off being stone-cold dead to return in a few non-descript scenes inside the Negative Zone's Vault prison in the *Fantastic Four: Foes* miniseries (2005). However, the character roared back to full-glory in *Nova* #32-35 (Feb.–May 2010).

In the Pyramid Kathedril, the Sphinx coerces Nova to be a participant in a contest of gods. This contest takes place on a crystalline-shaped construct created by the Sphinx's Ka Stone and transported to the Fault. The now-aged Sphinx reveals that he is dying due to temporal cancers caused by his constant manipulations of time.

As the story arc develops, the other god the Sphinx was speaking of was … himself! Or at least a younger version thereof. The elder Sphinx had brought his younger counterpart to the magical construct and explained that by avoiding his future mistakes, Galactus's time-loop will be broken.

Unfortunately, the plan means the elimination of the younger Sphinx's existence. The younger Sphinx chooses not to be sacrificed in order to







A younger and an older Sphinx, along with their chosen warriors, meet in an amazing battle in *Nova* #34. Art by Mahmud Asrar and Scott Hanna.

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empower the elder Sphinx. The fate of the Sphinx will be determined by one Ka Stone possessor eliminating the other.

However, the Sphinxes are unable to destroy each other so they chose proxies to fight for them. A number of the contest's proxies are possessors of other Lifestone Tree gems similar to the Sphinxes. One of the participants, Reed Richards of the Fantastic Four, surmises the Sphinx's pyramid is a "chronal accelerator" capable of rewriting the time-space continuum using the power of the two Ka Stones.

Following the end of the contest, the elder Sphinx obtains the stones, grows to enormous size, and begins to restructure time. The Sphinx is ultimately defeated as Nova opens a stargate through the Sphinx's body which hurtles him back into the true universe before he could finish executing his plan. The resulting implosion resets time to normal.

Writer Dan Abnett explains why he used the Sphinx and felt two Sphinxes were better than one: "The Sphinx is pretty overlooked. He's a major character, with vast powers, but not in the front rank of Marvel Big Bad. It was fun to bring him back (both of him!) and showcase his potential. And the story itself was quite unconventional, with a motley assortment of heroes (and villains) ripped out of their timelines and put together in an artificial reality. The ingredients were pretty unusual.

The notion was that inside the Fault, almost anything was possible, including impossible things outside the universe. The regular rules and laws of reality did not apply. It seems like an ideal environment for the Sphinx to go about repairing his lethally flawed timeline, circumventing paradoxes and physical laws.

The Sphinx is a classic villain for Nova and the New Warriors, so it seems like a great idea to bring him back, but his previous storylines had been so complex and tangled, and so conclusively ended, I thought the only way to do it was to step 'outside' that continuity and have him trying to fix his own timeline… rather than it just be a rematch. And who might try to stop him doing that? His younger self! So, two Sphinxes, battling over their fate, and TWO Ka stones (which could not happen in "regular" reality)."

Following his climactic ending in the story, the Sphinx returned as the supervillain in 2015-2016's *Howling Commandos of S.H.I.E.L.D.* miniseries. In it, the Egyptian took on a protégé by the name of Navid Hassan. Hassan's latent powers were awakened by the Sphinx which allowed the protégé to be possessed by the Sphinx's mysterious benefactor known as the Adversary.

Navid Hassen was eventually freed of the possession and the Adversary was destroyed by an ancient Egyptian artifact called the Mask of Amenhotep. Obtaining the mask had been the Sphinx's goal as it would allow him complete control of the supernatural but the Commandos got possession of it first. Afterwards, the Sphinx once again disappears.

AND THE ANSWER IS …

Ultimately, the answer to the article's opening riddle is; For all his cosmic power and immortality, the Sphinx is a tragic character locked into an endless cycle of resurrection, regret, and escalating ambition.

His many clashes with heroes including Nova, the New Warriors, the Fantastic Four, and the Inhumans aren't just superpowered showdowns; they're chapters in a much larger story about a man who's had too much time, too much power, and far too many chances to rewrite his own fate only to be defeated by his own failings.

It's that blend of myth, ambition, and cosmic drama that keeps the Sphinx firmly planted in Marvel's pantheon of enigmatic characters.

All creator quotes are from interviews with the author.



Doug Smith runs the Nova Prime Page website, produces the Xandar Radio podcast, and publishes the Rocket Boosters fanzine.

end

TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

JUGGERNAUT

BLUE COLLAR SUPER-VILLAIN

by Austin Gorton



Bring on the BAD GUYS!

Juggernaut is the second-to-last of the classic X-Men villains to be introduced in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's inaugural run on *X-Men*. And outside of Magneto and the Sentinels, he has proven to be the most long-lasting and impactful of that initial sinister coterie. But in contrast to Magneto (who, especially in his early goings, is characterized by the grandiose megalomania typical of Silver Age Big Bads) and the Sentinels (who exist as physical representations of anti-mutant prejudice) Juggernaut, right from the outset, is presented as something different. He is a villain driven not by a desire for world domination or personal ideology, but simply to get revenge on the person he hates the most: his stepbrother Charles Xavier.

In introducing Juggernaut as a villain driven by a more personal, down-to-Earth motivation, Lee and Kirby not only offer a contrast to the villains of the time but set a template for the character's future appearances. Throughout Juggernaut's long publication history, that initial resentment-fueled desire for revenge gradually expands to define Juggernaut as a villain of the people, so to speak, a villain you might be comfortable sharing a beer with, despite his massive, mystically sourced power. Again and again, Juggernaut turns up in stories where his villainy is driven not by complex plots or grandiose ambition, but relatable desires: revenge on a hated family member (or a hated family member's superhero students), robbing a bank to line his own pockets, or busting his long-time friend and partner out of jail. In fact, long before he makes his peace with Xavier and actually joins the X-Men, some of the most memorable Juggernaut stories don't even feature him as a villain.

With that in mind, let's take a closer look at the long career of the unstoppable Juggernaut, and how he cemented his place as a relatable villain.

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

Juggernaut makes his first appearance in the final panels of *X-Men* #12 (May 1965) by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Alex Toth, the climax to an issue which is a masterclass in building tension. All throughout the comic, Professor X directs his students, the X-Men, in an increasingly desperate defense of their mansion headquarters against an unseen, seemingly unstoppable foe who draws ever closer as Xavier simultaneously reveals the tragic origin of the enmity between he and his stepbrother, Cain Marko, and Cain's transformation into the Juggernaut now attacking them.

In *X-Men* #13 (Sep. 1965) Juggernaut is ultimately defeated following an assist from the guest-starring Human Torch in the manner which will come to be definitive: the removal of his helmet, leaving him

The cover says it all. Art by John Romita Jr. and Al Milgrom.

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vulnerable to the vast mental powers of his stepbrother. It represents the first proper two-part *X-Men* story (while earlier issues would feature plot threads carrying over from one issue to the next, *X-Men* #12 & #13 represents the first time a full story begins in one issue and concludes in the next), a suitable tribute to the massive power of the Juggernaut.

While that issue ends with Juggernaut being handed off to the authorities, in *X-Men* #32 (May 1967), it turns out Xavier is keeping him sedated and locked in his basement as he searches for a means to remove Juggernaut's power. Woken by the villainous organization Factor Three, Juggernaut fights his way past the X-Men in an effort to meet up with his would-be benefactors. By then, Stan Lee had left the series in the hands of Roy Thomas, and the return of Juggernaut in *X-Men* #32 marks the first time Thomas brings back one of the classic Lee/Kirby villains in the series. When asked via email why he turned to Juggernaut first, ahead of all the other introductory X-Men villains, he said, "I chose the Juggernaut, I suspect, because he was so powerful that he could give all five (or six, counting Xavier) of the X-Men a hard fight and have a good chance at winning. Juggernaut instantly turns the young mutants into underdogs, and that's a good starting point for a battle."

Sure enough, as in his first appearance, Juggernaut's defeat in *X-Men* #33 (June 1967) is predicated on an assist from an outside superhero. In this case, the X-Men reach out to Doctor Strange, who aids them in exiling Juggernaut to the Crimson Cosmos (source of the Crimson Gem of Cyttorak which grants him his massive power) before he can unite with Factor Three.



ROY THOMAS

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

In doing so, Thomas establishes a status quo of sorts for the next ten years of Juggernaut stories, which generally involve him either trying to escape imprisonment in one extradimensional realm or another, or getting out briefly, only to get sent back by the end of the story.

Thus, when Juggernaut next returns, in *X-Men* #46 (July 1968), he escapes the Crimson Cosmos via an automated device left running by Professor X, only to discover that Professor X has seemingly died and the X-Men are on the verge of going their separate ways. Spotting the headstone of Xavier (don't worry, he gets better), Juggernaut cries out, "I've been cheated…robbed of the revenge I exist for!" Returned to the Crimson Cosmos by story's end, Juggernaut next appears in *Doctor Strange* #182 (Sept. 1969) in which he teams-up with Nightmare





(top) The Juggernaut makes his pulse pounding debut in *X-Men* #12. Cover by Jack Kirby and Frank Giacoia. (bottom left) Juggernaut is back and causing more trouble in *X-Men* #32. Cover by Werner Roth and John Tartaglione. (bottom right) Juggernaut isn't just a thorn in the side of the X-Men. *Doctor Strange* #182 cover by Gene Colan and Tom Palmer.

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to try to escape the Crimson Cosmos, only to end up banished to a different dimension altogether. It's a story which perfectly illustrates the dichotomy driving Juggernaut as a character: he is stomping through dimensions, interacting with the literal manifestation of existence in Eternity, but driven by the most human of goals: to get back home.

His dimensional ping-ponging continues in his next appearance, *Amazing Adventures* #16 (Oct. 1972), in which he briefly returns to Earth to battle a recently transformed Beast in the midst of one the famous Rutland Halloween stories, only to seemingly die when the energy keeping him on Earth gives out. Then *Incredible Hulk* #172 (Feb. 1974) reveals he was merely returned to his extradimensional home when an experiment intended to banish the Hulk off Earth instead returns Juggernaut to Earth. Following a brief skirmish with the Hulk, Juggernaut finds himself permanently back home, ending his long running journey.

PARTNERS IN CRIME

When Juggernaut next appears, it is to face a very different team of X-Men. When his original students are captured by the mutant island Krakoa, Professor X (see, he got better) gathers a new, more international, team of X-Men in *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 (May 1975). These new X-Men soon take over as the stars of the regular X-Men comic, and a few issues later, Juggernaut appears for his first encounter with these new X-Men in the closing pages of *X-Men* #101 (Oct. 1976), having laid a trap for the X-Men in the basement of new X-Man Banshee's ancestral home. Not only are the X-Men he's facing entirely new, but Juggernaut is now working with a partner: Black Tom Cassidy, Banshee's villainous cousin. Years later we learn that the pair first met in jail and bonded over their shared hatred of family members: Tom's cousin and Juggernaut's stepbrother.

The introduction of Black Tom is a watershed moment in the development of Juggernaut. Not only does it give Juggernaut someone to talk to and a new avenue for stories, but their relationship further humanizes Juggernaut, making him a far more complex character. A whole new suite of relatable motivations is introduced, with Juggernaut now drawn to occasionally act in the interests of another person. Chris Claremont and Dave Cockrum showcase this immediately in this first Black Tom/Juggernaut story, which concludes in *X-Men* #103 (Feb. 1977) with Black Tom getting knocked off a castle parapet and Juggernaut immediately ending his battle with Colossus to leap into the ocean in an effort to save his partner, crying out, "he was the only friend I ever had, X-Men-and so help me, if you've killed him-I'll make you pay!" It is the first time we see Juggernaut act selflessly, putting aside his own desires—revenge on Xavier by proxy via the X-Men—to help someone he obviously cares about.

(left) Hulk joining forces with the Juggernaut? That can't be right. Cover by Herb Trimpe. (right) Juggernaut and the Hulk come to blows in *Incredible Hulk* #172. Art by Herb Trimpe and Jack Abel. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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For a long time after this, it is rare for Juggernaut to appear without Black Tom. In *Spider-Woman* #37 (April 1981) the pair are joined by Black Tom's "niece," the young mutant Siryn. Actually the daughter of Banshee, Siryn had been raised by Black Tom and reluctantly pressed into criminal activities by her "uncle." Though the intervention of the X-Men eventually help Siryn cut ties with Tom and Juggernaut (leading to a reunion with her father), for a short time the trio operated as a kind of twisted "My Two Dads"-style family—something which will come up again in later Juggernaut stories.

Juggernaut's connection to Black Tom is also showcased in a story involving a different spider-themed character. In *Marvel Team-Up* #150 (Feb. 1985), the final issue of the long-running series, Juggernaut tracks down a second gem of Cyttorak, not to increase his own power, but to allow him to share his power with Black Tom as a birthday present for his friend. The ensuing rampage of the two Juggernauts, with Black Tom struggling to control the massive power that has become second nature to Cain, eventually draws the attention of both Spider-Man and the X-Men. In the end, Black Tom rejects the power, Juggernaut hurls the second gem into outer space, and importantly, the entire plot never deepens beyond "Juggernaut trying to give his partner a birthday present."

"NOTHING CAN STOP THE JUGGERNAUT!"

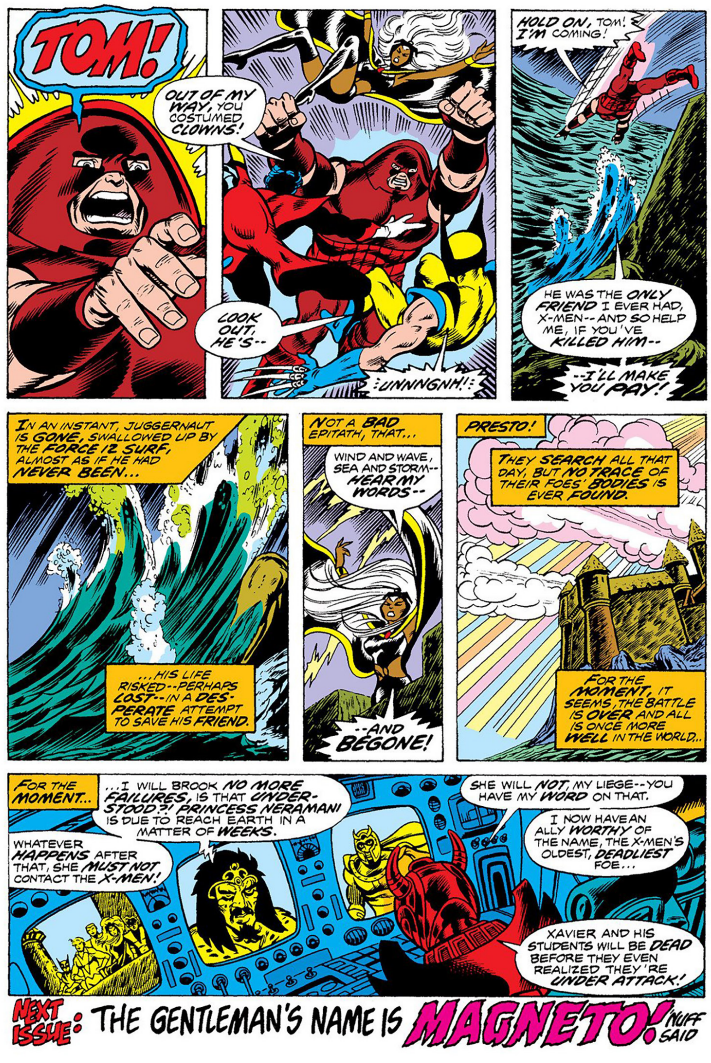
Of course, *Marvel Team-Up* #150 isn't the most notable Juggernaut/Spider-Man encounter. That can be found in *Amazing Spider-Man* #229 & #230 (June & July 1982), a standout installment of the highly regarded run from writer Roger Stern and artist John Romita Jr. It is, understandably, remembered principally as a showcase for Spider-Man's creativity and determination as he refuses to give up in the face of the raw power of Juggernaut, ultimately finding a way to win the day despite being physically outmatched. Echoing Roy Thomas, Roger Stern said in *Comic Creators on Spider-Man* that he, "wanted Spider-Man to fight someone who posed a real physical threat. It had to be someone who could pound the living daylights out of him, someone that Spider-Man couldn't possibly beat. I don't know why but I just thought of Juggernaut. After all, his power is that he can't be stopped, so what if Spider-Man has to find a way to stop him and all the other heroes are out of town?"

Yet even here, the circumstances which draw Juggernaut into conflict with Spider-Man are consistent with his previous portrayals. Hoping to get a leg up in future crimes, Black Tom sends Juggernaut to retrieve Madame Web, a precognitive quasi-ally of Spider-Man, in the hopes of convincing her to use her abilities to help them. Once again, the Black Tom/Juggernaut partnership is focused

(left) The new X-Men face the Juggernaut. *X-Men* #102 art by Dave Cockrum and Sam Grainger. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (right) Juggernaut ends the fight to save his friend. *X-Men* #103.

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Spidey never gives up. *Amazing Spider-Man* #230 art by John Romita Jr. and Jim Mooney. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (inset) Juggernaut slugs it out with Colossus on the cover of *Uncanny X-Men* #183. Art by John Romita Jr. and Dan Green.

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on straightforward goals—personal gain, revenge—versus any kind of grandiose schemes of domination. Not only is Juggernaut more or less acting at the behest of his partner, but he also goes after Madame Web simply because he's grown a bit stir crazy and itching for action. Machiavelli, he ain't.

ASM #230 ends with Spider-Man "defeating" Juggernaut by luring him into some wet cement, which slows him down and hardens enough to trap him. But nothing stops the Juggernaut for long and, off panel, he eventually escapes from the concrete. His next two notable appearances come sans Black Tom yet humanize him more than ever. In *Uncanny X-Men* #183 (July 1984) Wolverine and Nightcrawler take Colossus into the city to give him some tough love following his break-up with teammate Kitty Pryde (prompted by a fling Colossus had with an alien woman in the *Secret Wars* miniseries). Unbeknownst to the X-Men, the bar they end up in happens to be one of Juggernaut's favorite watering holes, and he happens to be there wetting his whistle after escaping from the cement. Even then, it takes a rude bump from a belligerent Colossus to draw Juggernaut's ire, and after delivering a thorough beat down to the young mutant (helped, in part, by Wolverine holding back Nightcrawler, viewing the bar fight as a way to teach Colossus a lesson) Juggernaut is more than happy to let the X-Men—once the targets of his Xavier-fueled rage—walk away unscathed. He even tosses Wolverine a wad of cash to give to the bar owner, in order to cover the damages wrought by the fight and ensure his favorite bar stays in business. It's downright civil of the super-villain.



Claremont takes this "wrong man at the wrong time" approach with Juggernaut even further in his next appearance, turning the unstoppable Juggernaut into a victim in order to prop up a new X-Men villain. In *UXM* #194 (June 1985) Juggernaut is conducting ordinary business at a bank when he's targeted by Nimrod, a super-Sentinel from the future. The ensuing fight successfully establishes the sheer power of Nimrod, as he manages to essentially stop the unstoppable Juggernaut and causes the X-Men to intervene on the behalf of their one-time enemy, barely managing to fight Nimrod to a standstill as they prevent it from killing Juggernaut. Of course, the general public simply view this as the X-Men intervening on the behalf of a super-villain, which does little to help their public image, but for readers, it's a key event in Juggernaut's development. He's gone from villain to victim, and become a richer, more relatable character as a result.

ACROSS THE POND

Chris Claremont continues to humanize Juggernaut in his next appearance. Following the devastating "Mutant Massacre" storyline, in which key, fan-favorite X-Men like Kitty Pryde, Nightcrawler, and Colossus are seriously injured and taken out of commission, a new batch of recruits came in to take their place, including Longshot, Psylocke, and the mutant pop star Dazzler. Under the eye of veteran member Rogue, the trio of newbies were taken to the Muir Island Mutant Research Facility in Scotland where they watched over the survivors of the massacre while training. In *UXM* #217 (May 1987), Dazzler goes into town looking to blow off steam and runs across none other than Juggernaut.

Determined to prove her worth as a superhero, Dazzler attempts to apprehend Juggernaut. In Spider-Man fashion, she is outmatched yet determined, yet her greatest advantage comes from the fact that Juggernaut himself is a huge fan of Dazzler's music, making him reluctant to use the full force of his powers against her. The ensuing confrontation, in which Juggernaut is mostly annoyed (at best) by Dazzler's attack while she's giving her all, yet his heart isn't in the fight because of how much of a fan he is, smartly deepens both their characters. When it appears Juggernaut has killed Dazzler, he cries out, "It isn't fair, I didn't want-I never meant-this wasn't supposed to end like this! I worshipped her! I killed her!" It is a far cry from the kind of manic glee a typical villain would express about a victory.

Of course, it turns out Dazzler survived the fight, and rallies the X-Men to her side, working alongside her new teammates to succeed together where before she had failed. Similar to the way Claremont previously used the established power of Juggernaut to beef up the threat of Nimrod, here he uses Juggernaut's status as a long-standing and powerful foe of the X-Men to show how far the newer X-Men have come and what they can accomplish when working together. In the end, it turns out their victory is slightly pyrrhic, as while Juggernaut was distracting everyone, Black Tom robbed a bank, once again reinforcing the relatively small stakes of Black Tom and Juggernaut's schemes.

(left) Captain Britain meets Juggernaut in *Excalibur* #3. Art by Alan Davis and Paul Neary. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (right)Thor vs. Juggernaut. This'll be good! Cover by Ron Frenz and Joe Sinnott.

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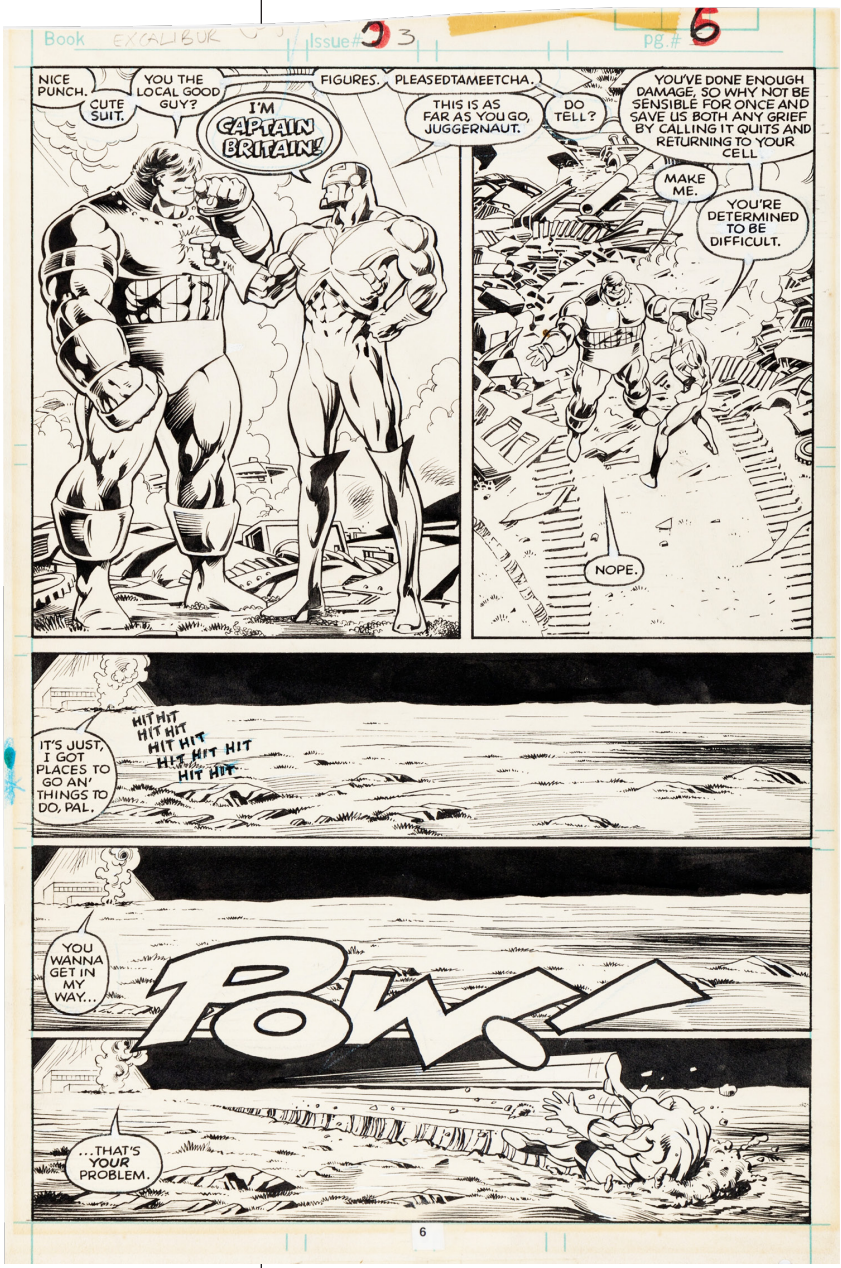
THE MIGHTY THOR

Similar to his earlier forays in and out of extra-dimensional realms, Juggernaut's defeat at the hands of the rookie X-Men leads to a series of stories in which he escapes from and returns to a Scottish prison. In *Excalibur* #3 (Dec. 1988), the crime lord Vixen busts Juggernaut out of his cell, essentially to serve as a distraction (not unlike the play Juggernaut ran with Black Tom in the previous story), but by the end of the issue and a battle with Captain Britain, he's back in lockup.

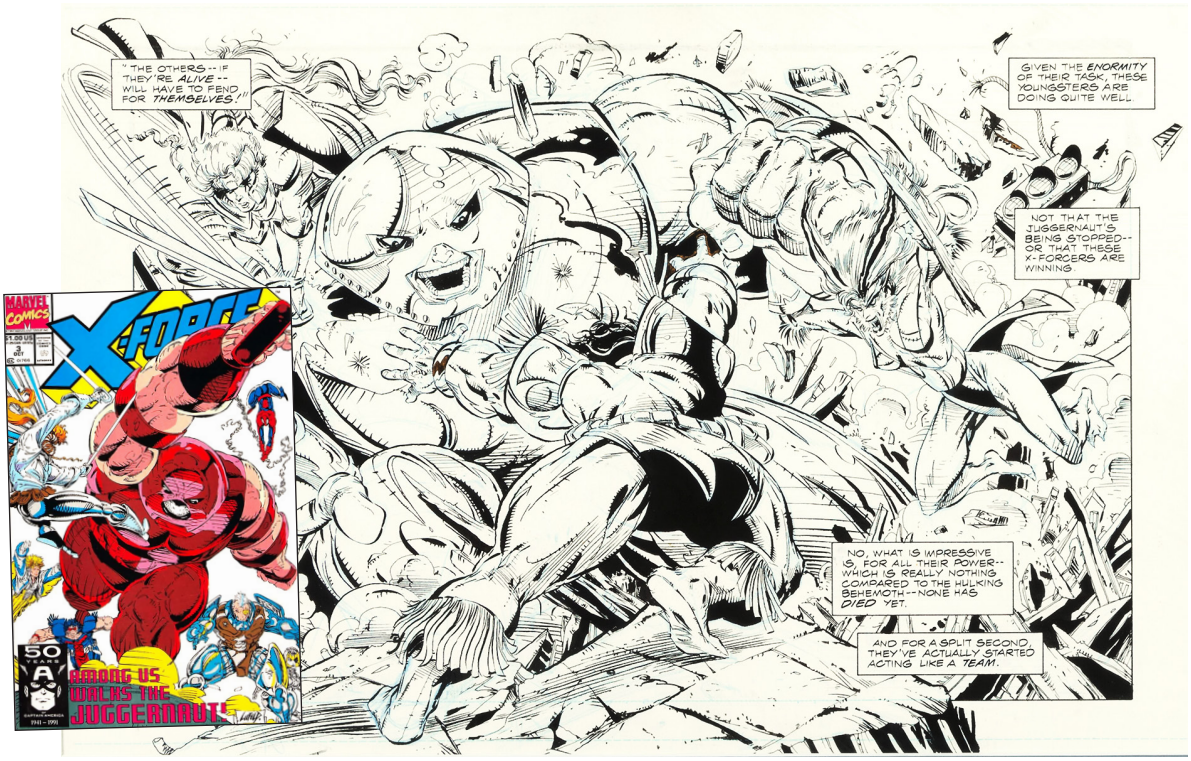
The supervillain/God of Mischief Loki has better luck during the "Acts of Vengeance" storyline, in which Loki orchestrates a series of "switch 'em up" battles where heroes are forced to fight villains with which they're unfamiliar. In *Thor* #411 (Dec. 1989), Loki teleports Juggernaut from Scottish prison to the streets of New York, hoping to distract Thor. As was well-established at this point, Juggernaut is not a man who requires deep motivations to act, and despite not knowing who his benefactor is or what he wants, Juggernaut just (rightly) assumes he was freed to do what he does best, and proceeds to smash up the city, drawing the attention of Thor. Just as Loki intended.

Juggernaut holds his own against both Thor and the newly formed New Warriors (who debut as part of the story) and in the end, Thor and the teen heroes are forced to fall back on an old trick to stop the unstoppable Juggernaut: Thor uses the powers of his enchanted hammer to teleport Juggernaut into another dimension. In *Thor* #427 (Dec. 1990), the British Excalibur comes to New York seeking Thor, hoping to confirm the account that Juggernaut (who essentially escaped from their jurisdiction) was indeed banished from Earth. Following a super-villain aided misunderstanding fight between Thor and the mutant heroes, Thor uses his hammer to teleport himself and Excalibur to the realm where he sent Juggernaut. In *Thor* #429 (Feb. 1991) they discover that Juggernaut was rescued from his imprisonment and has become the ruler of the aliens who rescued him. Thor curses himself for having sacrificed another world to Juggernaut's villainy in order to save Earth from it, but Juggernaut tells him that the peasants of this world are actually benefiting from his rule: the previous ruler exploited them, whereas Juggernaut likes, "sticking it to rich folks."

"Juggernaut, Champion of the People" seems at first blush a humorous prospect, but it is very much in keeping with, and a natural evolution of, his development over the preceding decades of existence. Never has he sought power solely for the purpose of enforcing his will on others, and once he finds himself with that power, it makes perfect sense that he'd stick up for







The Juggernaut battles X-Force in *Spider-Man* #16. Art by Todd McFarlane. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (inset) Juggernaut busts up X-Force. Cover by Rob Liefeld.

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the people who he views like him: victims of the elite and (politically) powerful. In the end, Thor and Excalibur dislodge Juggernaut from his position (with Thor once again winning the day by sending Juggernaut even further away) and inspiring the people he was ruling to govern themselves, but a case can be made that everyone might have been better off if Juggernaut had stuck around.

AN X-FORCE TO RECKON WITH

Whereas previously, Juggernaut had to escape from his various extradimensional exiles on his own, since then, he made a friend, and it is Black Tom who facilitates Juggernaut's return to Earth following his run-in with Thor. In *X-Force* #2 (Sep. 1991) by Fabian Nicieza and Rob Liefeld, Black Tom enters into an agreement with Ariana Jankos, who promises to return Cain to Earth in exchange for Black Tom's help preventing the buyout of her company. When a device built by Jankos succeeds in locating Juggernaut and teleporting him home, Black Tom proceeds to hold hostage the would-be buyers of Jankos' company.



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The ensuing story, in *X-Force* #3 & #4 (Nov. & Dec 1991) and *Spider-Man* #16 (Nov. 1991) hasn't aged well, thanks to its setting atop the World Trade Center in New York and the action taken by Black Tom in *X-Force* #3, when he detonates a bomb atop one of the towers. Notably, Juggernaut is less of a driver of the action in this story; he spends most of the story battling X-Force and his old foe Spider-Man, cutting and running to once again help his partner when Black Tom is seriously wounded by Cable.

Nicieza would turn in a more measured, nuanced depiction of Juggernaut in *X-Force* #31 (Feb. 1994). Ostensibly a story meant to showcase Siryn's struggle with alcoholism with the help of her teammate and would-be paramour Warpath, the familial connection between Siryn and Black Tom makes Juggernaut's inclusion in the story a natural fit. For all of X-Force's early reputation as the loud, "shoot first, ask questions later!" X-Men titles, under Nicieza's direction, it had become more character driven, and *X-Force* #31 is a great example of that, a story in which no one—including Juggernaut—appears in costume, nary a punch is thrown, and the conflicts involve intricate family drama and characters with complicated, conflicting desires. With Black Tom both wanted by the authorities for the World Trade Center bombing and continuing to suffer as a result of Cable's attack, Juggernaut is torn between getting his friend the help he needs at the cost of losing him to prison. It's arguably the most human depiction of Juggernaut yet.

The idea of a sympathetic, less antagonistic Juggernaut continues in his next big storyline: "Onslaught." Initially envisioned as a linewide X-Men crossover before getting repurposed into an even bigger event encompassing the entire Marvel Universe, "Onslaught" would dominate the X-books for years, with Juggernaut playing a key role. Once again slotted into the "get beat up to show how powerful the new villain is" role, in *UXM* #322 (July 1995), Juggernaut kicks off the storyline when he gets punched halfway across the country by Onslaught, uttering the villain's name to a group of X-Men before falling unconscious.

Speaking about the genesis of Onslaught and the use of Juggernaut as a "stalking horse" of sorts for the new creation, Scott Lobdell said in *Comic Creators on X-Men*, " I wanted to do a story where the X-Men are at home and they suddenly hear a whistling sound. They run out to the front yard and see this massive object flying through the air. It hits the ground in flames and skids the length of a football field. As the dust settles, everyone runs up and they see that it's Juggernaut. He manages to utter just one word before passing out, and the word is 'Onslaught'. Everybody in the room was really intrigued and they demanded to know who Onslaught was. I told them I had no idea, but I just thought it was a cool way to open a story. Imagine someone so strong that they could hurl Juggernaut across the sky!"

Juggernaut plays a key role in the eventual reveal of Onslaught's identity and, notably, not a villainous role. Rather,







(top left and bottom) Juggernaut is actually scared of Onslaught. That can't be good. *UXM* #322 art by Tom Grummett and Dan Green, Mark Pennington, Al Milgrom, and Matthew Ryan. (top right) Juggernaut joins *X-Men Forever*. Cover by Kevin Maguire and Margaux Pepoy.

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the oft-unstoppable Juggernaut, a victim of Onslaught's wrath, becomes a figure seeking the help of the X-Men, someone living in constant fear of Onslaught, the details of Onslaught's identity locked in his mind. In *UXM* #334 (July 1996) he returns to the X-Mansion desperate to evade the villain, and in *X-Men* (vol. 2) #54 (July 1996) he and Jean Grey frantically try to hide themselves from Onslaught while combing Juggernaut's mind to discover Onslaught's true identity: Professor Xavier. Once the man who fueled Juggernaut's unstoppable rage, a corrupted Xavier was now a villain turning his own formidable power against a largely helpless Juggernaut, a role reversal that continues Juggernaut's relatable, sympathetic portrayal.

X-MAN FOREVER

Fabian Nicieza, alongside artist Kevin Maguire, returns to continue Juggernaut's more sympathetic portrayal in *X-Men Forever* (2001), a miniseries in which a random group of characters—Iceman and Jean Grey, along with Toad, Mystique, and Juggernaut—are sent on a mission through time to protect the future of human and mutant evolution from the cosmic being known as the Stranger (who made his first appearance one issue before Juggernaut).

I asked Nicieza why he included Juggernaut in his team of X-Men for the miniseries, and he said, "I thought he was a lynchpin to the earliest days of the X-Men who had been given glimpses of redemptive potential which made for a good fit for the storyline."

In the course of their mission and his travels through his own history, Juggernaut came to realize how much he had squandered his massive power. More importantly, he also saw how much his tremendous physical strength overbalanced his strength of character. The Juggernaut who emerged from *X-Men Forever* was more introspective than the one who entered, a fact that would not be lost on later writers. Asked whether he intentionally worked to get Juggernaut into a place where he could join the X-Men, Nicieza said, "I thought I left him in a good place for a future status quo, but it was up to subsequent writers and editors to do whatever they wanted."

But having served on an *ad hoc* team of X-Men and come out a stronger character, both in-universe and out, for it, it was indeed easy for future writers to follow the breadcrumbs left by Nicieza. With Black Tom's condition deteriorating and his own power mysteriously diminished, Juggernaut swallows his pride and reaches out to Xavier for help in *UXM* #410 (Oct. 2002). A team of X-Men arrive at Cassidy Keep to find an out-of-control, raving Black Tom and a brusque, but conciliatory Juggernaut. In *UXM* #412 (Dec. 2002), torn between his affection for Tom and desire to help his friend in the face of Tom's increasing megalomania, Juggernaut is thrown from the roof of Cassidy Keep into the ocean by Black Tom, a callback to the conclusion of the first Black Tom/Juggernaut team-up when Juggernaut gave up his attack on the X-Men to save his friend. The X-Men manage to defeat Black Tom, but a weakened Juggernaut is rescued from the ocean by a young mutant named Squidboy. In the aftermath of Tom's attack, Professor X offers Juggernaut a place at his old home to recover, and he accepts.

Entering into an uneasy detente with his once-hated step-brother, Juggernaut's time at the mansion-characterized by a burgeoning friendship with Squidboy—culminates in him becoming a full-fledged member of the X-Men in *UXM* #425 (Aug. 2003). It is a face-turn made less abrupt by the previous decades of stories which saw Juggernaut: a villain always operating from believable, down-to-Earth motivations, gradually become more sympathetic and relatable as he formed a strong partnership with Black Tom, found himself routinely suffering to build up bigger, badder foes, and becoming an occasional ally of the X-Men all while avoiding descent into the baser instincts and desires of many other supervillains.

Juggernaut's biggest test as one of the X-Men comes when Black Tom, madder than ever, arrives at the head of a new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in *X-Men* (vol. 2) #161 (Nov. 2004). Juggernaut pretended to betray the X-Men by throwing in with the Brotherhood, secretly planning to betray them and warn the X-Men the first chance he gets. But tragedy strikes when Squidboy spots Juggernaut with the Brotherhood and believes his friend has reverted to his old ways. Desperate to maintain his cover and prevent Black Tom from realizing how much he cares for the boy, Juggernaut leans into Squidboy's assumption, breaking his heart, just before Black Tom, annoyed at Squidboy's outburst, casually kills him. Enraged and dropping all pretense, Juggernaut attacks his former friend and partner, leading to a full-on battle between the X-Men and the Brotherhood. In the end, the Brotherhood are defeated when the mutant Xorn creates a black hole to transport them away; Juggernaut, desperate to prevent the Brotherhood from harming anyone like they did Squidboy, follows them into the black hole.

No stranger to extradimensional travel, Juggernaut found himself in the realm of extradimensional entertainment mogul Mojo. With the help of Brotherhood member Nocturne (the child of Nightcrawler and Scarlet Witch from an alternate reality), another mole within the group, Juggernaut finds his way back to Earth in *UXM* #461 (Aug. 2005). Along the way, he makes peace with Squidboy's death and rejoins the X-Men.

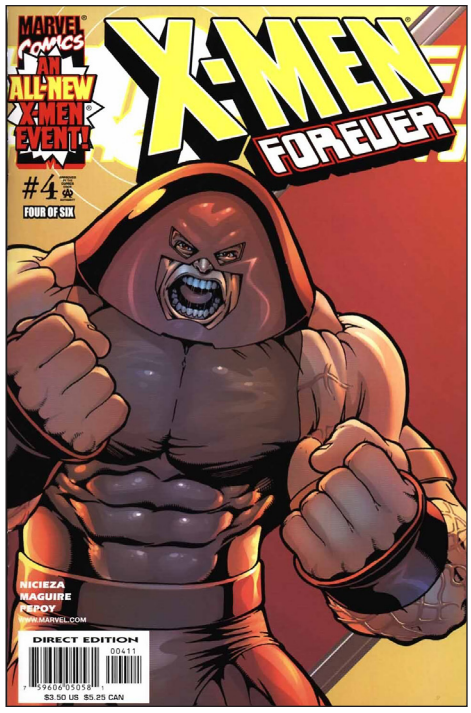
In the years that followed, Juggernaut's heroism is further tested, often dictated by the whims of storylines and creators outside the X-Men office, a sad reality of modern comic storytelling. But his tenure on the X-Men, evolving as it does naturally from years of character development, has proven foundational. For all his subsequent dalliances with villainy, a return to heroism (if always a coarse heroism, befitting his salt-of-the-Earth nature) always occurs. Presently, Juggernaut is a steadfast member of the X-Men under writer Jed MacKay, sharing a particularly strong friendship with Illyana Rasputin, sister of his longtime foe, Colossus.



While the X-Men are no strangers to bringing redeemed villains onto their roster, Juggernaut's path from super-villain to superhero has always felt more natural than some of his peers. This is thanks to the portrayal of Juggernaut as a much more relatable, down-to-Earth kind of villain, both initially and consistently over his long publishing history. Motivated by family drama rather than dreams of conquest, humanized by a long-standing partnership with Black Tom Cassidy, willing to show begrudging respect for his foes and to grow and change over time, Juggernaut truly is—for all his tremendous, unstoppable power—a villain to which we can all relate.



Austin Gorton is a freelance pop culture critic, comic book historian and X-Men X-Pert. He is also an aficionado trading cards, Star Wars and baseball. Austin, his wife and two sons live outside Minneapolis where, sometimes, it is not cold.





(top) Juggernaut even gets his own cover by Maguire and Pepoy. (bottom) Juggernaut actually asked the X-Men for help? *UXM* #411 art by Ron Garney and Mark Morales. (inset) Juggernaut a member of the X-Men. Whoda thunk it? Cover by Salvador Larroca.

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BACK to the Drawing Board

THE TEN-EYED MAN

by Joshua Winchester

Over the course of 80-plus years of history, there have been a lot of characters created for comic books that give people pause when they show up. Whether it was heroes or villains or even supporting characters, these are individuals that, when appearing on the printed page for readers to see for the first time, it is more than likely they were left scratching their heads and thinking out loud, "Who on Earth thought THIS was a good idea?"

And so, we are kicking off a new feature entitled "BACK to the Drawing Board", wherein we will dig deep on these storied yet stupendously silly characters. To kick things off, it's none other than one of the true bottom-rung bad guys from Batman's Rogues Gallery: The Ten-Eyed Man. First appearing in *Batman* #226 (Nov. 1970), the Ten-Eyed Man was created by the powerhouse team of Frank Robbins and Irv Novick. For those who dig deep into their comic book history memory banks, those names stand out as titans. Robbins, in addition to his tenure on the adventure strip *Johnny Hazard*, was a celebrated artist whose works even appeared in the Whitney Museum. Novick found his footing in the Golden Age at MLJ Publications (now Archie Comics) as the original artist for the Shield and the Hangman.

So how is it that two absolutely dynamite creative personalities—who, during the late 1960s, helped redefine Batman—could have considered a villain whose superpower is 360-degree vision a viable foe for the Dark Knight? On paper, he sounds like a perfectly decent villain with a tactical advantage. The drawback, however, lies in exactly *where* that power comes from.

To understand, let us draw back the veil of time to 1970. Comics were entering a new phase. Horror titles were in the works for the Big Two and Batman was undergoing a metamorphosis to return to his Gothic roots after the campy "Biff! Bam! Pow!" era of the 1966 TV series.

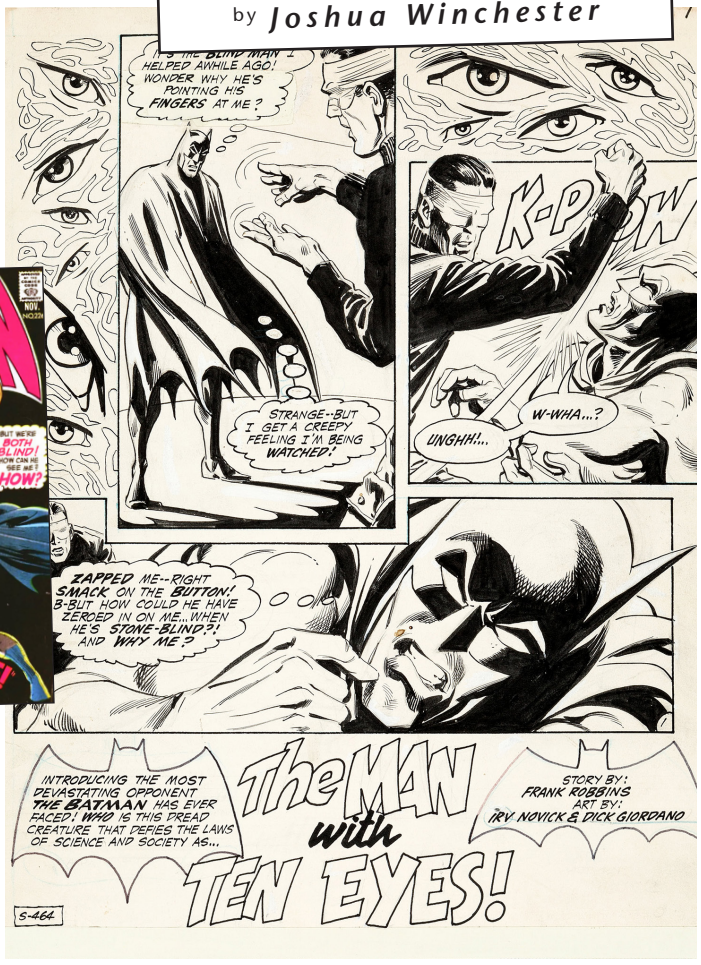


Philip Reardon was an ex-Special Forces operative who received an honorable discharge from Vietnam after a grenade fragment left him with a scar between his eyes, earning him the moniker "Three-Eyed Reardon." In civilian life, he became a night watchman who ran afoul of a criminal gang while on duty one evening. After a blow to the head blurred his vision, Reardon mistook Batman for a crook. In the ensuing struggle, explosives went off that permanently burned Reardon's retinas.

Enter the "Drawing Board" moment: An experimental ophthalmologist performed surgery that connected Reardon's optic nerves to the sensory cells in his fingertips. Blaming Batman for his condition, Reardon embarked on a revenge campaign that sent him down the path of villainy.

Let that sink in: he "sees" through his fingers. While this sounds effective for a lookout, the practical application is a nightmare. In the internal logic of the Bronze Age, Reardon now had particularly sensitive hands. Throwing a punch—the bread and butter of a Gotham villain—would be the equivalent of someone punching you directly in the eyeball.

In researching this minor figure, one finds his defeats were as ludicrous as his origin. In his debut, Batman simply used his cape to "blind" the villain's hands. In his second appearance, the World's Greatest Detective defeated him by... making him touch mud. It wasn't exactly a clash of the titans.



The Ten-Eyed Man debuts in *Batman* #226. Art by Irv Novick and Dick Giordano. (inset) Neal Adams contributes the cover for his first appearance.

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If we look closer at Robbins and Novick's run, the "sad" element of the character becomes clear. Because he had no eyelids on his fingers, Reardon lived in a state of constant sensory vulnerability. He had to wear special protective gloves just to sleep or walk down the street. One stray grain of sand or a bright flashlight was agonizing.

This logistical hurdle made him a "book killer." Aside from his two-issue *Batman* stint, he was retasked as a foe for the short-lived *Man-Bat* series in 1976. When that title folded, Reardon effectively dropped off the map. He was a character defined by his limitations rather than his strengths—a literal "look but don't touch" villain in a medium built on physical conflict.

The sheer physics of Reardon's existence provided a gold-mine of unintentional comedy for Bronze Age readers. Think about the simple act of a stakeout. While Batman can crouch behind a chimney and peer around the corner with just his eyes, Reardon has to physically extend his hands past the cover to see what's happening. He is constantly leading with his eyes, making him the easiest target in the DC Universe for a well-timed Batarang to the knuckles.

Furthermore, his second appearance in *Batman #231* (May 1971) really leaned into the absurdity. In a sequence that feels more like a Three Stooges sketch than a noir thriller, Batman manages to defeat the master of 360-degree vision by simply hiding in some shrubbery and eventually causing Reardon to stumble into a swamp. Once his hands were coated in thick, opaque mud, the Ten-Eyed Man was essentially trapped in a sensory deprivation tank of his own making. For a man who was supposed to be a Special Forces elite, his career ended up being a series of slapstick mishaps where his greatest tactical advantage was also his most glaring 'off' switch.

The Ten-Eyed Man didn't show up again until the final issue of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, where he was summarily dispatched by the shadow demons of the Anti-Monitor. If you think that is a harsh end for a one-trick pony, a quote from the late, great George Pérez in *Amazing Heroes* #91 (1986) fills the bucket nicely:

"I have to admit, too, that there were some characters I wanted to kill because I couldn't stand being in a company that would print them... Ten-Eyed Man was another. When I got the reference on this character, I briefly remembered his first story, but this was the first time I'd really gotten a good look at him. At that point, I decided that he was definitely going to buy it. And no one noticed!"

For decades, George Pérez's assessment held true. The Ten-Eyed Man was a punchline, a relic of a time when DC was throwing everything at the wall to see what stuck. But the beauty of the "Drawing Board" is that no idea ever truly dies in comics; it just waits for a writer with a darker imagination to sharpen the pencil.

In the 1990s, the *concept* of the Ten-Eyed Man found a spiritual successor in The Corinthian from Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*. By moving the eyes from the fingertips to the eye sockets (and adding teeth), Gaiman proved that ocular displacement wasn't the problem—it was the spandex. Taking a cue from that horror aesthetic, 21st-century creators finally figured out how to make Philip Reardon work by leaning into the "Body Horror" potential that Robbins and Novick could only hint at in 1970.

The true "Drawing Board" redemption occurred when creators realized that Reardon's tragedy wasn't his blindness, but his insight. In the 2021 miniseries *Arkham City: The Order of the World*, writer Dan Watters and artist Dani reimagined Philip Reardon as a haunting, skeletal figure draped in rags. He no longer looked like a supervillain; he looked like a saint of the gutters. In this iteration, the "Ten-Eyed" aspect is treated as a curse of hyper-awareness. He doesn't just see shapes and colors; he sees the "hidden" things.

Modern writers like Watters and Gerry Duggan (in *Arkham Manor*) leaned into the "sad" part of his history, portraying him as a man overwhelmed by the sensory rot of Gotham.







(top left) The Ten-Eyed Man returns in *Batman* #231. Cover by Neal Adams. (top right) He even menaced the Man-Bat. Cover by Jim Aparo. (bottom) The modern take on the Ten-Eyed Man from *Arkham City: The Order of the World* #1. Art by DaNi.

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He became a mystical hermit, a creature of "Arkham Gothic" horror who believed his finger-eyes allowed him to see the "true" spiritual filth of the city. He went from a guy who got beaten by a handful of mud to a disturbing, occult presence that even Batman found unsettling. By stripping away the green jumpsuit and the revenge-plot cliches, modern DC has turned Pérez's "ludicrous" casualty into one of the most effective atmospheric tools in Batman's modern mythos.

Ten-Eyed Man's absurdity eventually earned him a badge of honor in animation. In the *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* episode "A Bat Divided!", the show embraced the Robbins/Novick era's eccentricity. Seeing Reardon animated—using his fingertip-vision to track multiple threats—reminded fans that while the concept was "silly," it possessed a visual flair that was suited for the world of cartoons.

Philip Reardon's 20th-century career may have been short-lived, but his journey back to the drawing board proves a vital point about the medium. Even the most "ludicrous" ideas—born from the minds of legends like Robbins and Novick—can find a second life if you just change the lens through which you view them.

George Pérez might have been happy to see him go in 1985, but in the modern era of psychological horror, the Ten-Eyed Man has finally found his place. He's no longer a joke; he's a nightmare. And people are definitely noticing.

end

BACK TALK

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We've got a lot to cover, so let's get to it…

WHO WAS THAT LADY I SAW YOU WITH?

Flashback: Phantom Lady: I have Dee Tyler's appearances in *Action Comics* and may have her other appearances. I forgot that she was killed in *Infinite Crisis*. I liked Stormy Knight, though it's a shame she's not related to Sandra, or Ted, in any way. As for Jennifer, I knew nothing about her as I missed out on the whole "lower48" thing (my pet name for the New52). A four-issue miniseries and never seen again. Not shocked. Long live Sandra Knight!

Invisible Woman: Marvel's First Lady: No mention of the retconned oddball date Sue Storm went on with Spider-Man in the *Untold Tales of Spider-Man Annual #1*? That was an amusing tale.

Delmo (The Saint) Walters Jr.

I really enjoyed* Untold Tales *but have no memory of that story. Must be time to read the series again.

MARVELOUS CHARACTERS

Offhand, I don't recall a recent issue with such a huge range. Two of the articles—Squirrel Girl and the Invisible Woman—were of tremendous interest and, to counterbalance that, coverage of Tank Girl made me pleasantly satisfied I'd barely heard of, much less bothered with, it. Think I'll swipe left on *that* dating profile.

I liked the Squirrel Girl story when I first encountered it. I was so pleased to see Steve Ditko once again drawing Iron Man and inking it, too. His earlier work on the character (*Tales of Suspense* #47-49) suffered from unflattering, if not inappropriate, inking. His fill-in issue, in contrast, showed the character looking like he should. I mean, why use Steve Ditko and then do everything possible to disguise or lessen his contribution? Thumbs up to Will Murray for striving to give him both the penciling *and* inking assignments. Steve had a few good inkers over the years, but his work always was best solo.

Yes, Squirrel Girl had an innocent charm. No contention there. I do, however, question her inclusion as the decisive force between heavy-hitters Iron Man and Dr. Doom. It elevates her at the expense of their dignity and reputation. Still, because it was something light at a time things were way too grim and gritty, that aspect could be overlooked. The story attempted to be playful and introduce new elements and characters.

It was a shame it took a while for her to catch on and acquire the interest of a fan base. By then, both Murray and Ditko were elsewhere.

The one thing early Marvel had in the '60s and not the '90s was patience and faith in a character. They would strive to keep it in play.

Squirrel Girl was compared here to the Impossible Man; supposedly too comedic and, therefore, off-putting. I think, in addition, she might have overlap, in reception, to the pre-hero Groot. That is, not an overnight sensation but popular, many years later, when revised.

I found it interesting, too, reading the divergence of opinion between Murray and Ditko on the handling and specifics of the character. If so, this could have been a mere starting point where they'd have worked out particulars had they gone to a series.

The look at Sue Storm Richards was welcome as it's rare to see her isolated and in the spotlight. Usually, it's Ben or the FF as a group.

Strange to think it was seemingly a considered option to publicly note some dissatisfaction with her contributions to the team. Thankfully, Stan and Jack eliminated the problem by escalating her powers. They also had her behaving just as bravely as the other team members. For instance, taking on Klaw (#56) and the cosmic-powered Dr. Doom (#60).

I can think of only a couple instances when they needlessly let her down. First, at the Wedding of Reed and Sue (*FF Annual* #3) where she did little if any fighting. She had to be protected by teammates and guest-star wedding crashers. Or when she had Franklin and was absent from not only the Negative Zone brawling—understandable—but not even featured with her thoughts, hopes, and dreams in the context of the unfolding story. She was just there at the very end holding the baby.



Greg and Tim Hildebrandt preliminary sketch of Sue Storm for the 1992 "Marvel Masterpieces" card set. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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For two industry talents who did plenty of romance comics in their day, Stan and Jack didn't make either issue as emotionally involving as it could have been.

In that sense, her early flirtation or interest in Sub-Mariner, prior to deciding on Reed, was a more involving situation.

Though I didn't follow Spider-Girl, two things of interest:

First, you immediately credited the original Spider-Man to *both* names: Stan *and* Steve. Pretty basic, but for decades such notations were elusive.

Secondly, if companies would stand behind their creative teams, promote the work, etc. they could have far longer runs. If the focus is cutting potential losses at the earliest opportunity, no wonder so many books were short-lived. They weren't allowed time to catch on and build on a solid fan base. Their company. Their choice.

Here, in contrast, we see what happens when the company acknowledges fan interest and loyalty.

Joe Frank

I'm glad that you enjoyed the spotlight on the Invisible Girl/Woman. She's long been a favorite of mine and I felt that she deserved a feature. After all, she was at the dawn of then Marvel Age.

DRAGONS FOR THE WIN

As a fan of those treasure-hoarding, fire-breathing, virgin sacrificing, villainous creatures my hand flew to pick up *BI* #168, the "Dragons" issue. What a delightful read it was, too. The Dragon Man article was wonderful. A superb creation of Lee & Kirby. His appearance in the Stern/Byrne/Rubinstein *Captain America* is definitely a favorite of mine with exquisite art by Byrne/Rubinstein. What an amazing interview with Jeff (*Bone*) Smith by Amanda Powers. *Bone* is a timeless classic full of charm, wonder, and courage. The interview was insightful and fresh. Not an easy task for an old *Bone* reader like me. Again, I'm a big fan of The Daughters of the Dragon and I got a big kick out of seeing them getting star treatment in the mag. I like the play on the Dragon theme throughout the issue. Very clever.

I've been a fan of Colleen and Misty in the books for years as any true Marvel fan should be. It's always a delight to see Marshall Rogers art. There's a cartooniness to it unlike a lot if his peers who played It straight. You'd spot funny sight gags in the background. Wonderful. Also, "Terry's Toons" is brilliant. For me all the wonderful books and covers he's worked on transcend the term "Inker." He takes an artist's pencils and creates The Sistine Chapel. One of the greats of the field. *BI* continues to be a heartfelt and stunning mag!

Mario Botte

Thank you for the kind words, Mario. We're glad we featured a theme so much to your liking. I hope that's a trend we can continue.

SHARED STORIES

I've read recent issues and a couple of stories come to mind.

BI 168—The Daughters of the Dragon article. I'm referring to the *Bizarre Adventures* #25 story with the vampire named Angie Freeman. Not so well known is that that was Angie's second appearance. She first appeared in a Chris Claremont written story in *Vampire Tales* #6 from 1974 in a story called "Angie's Soul." It's the best story in the issue and a haunting tale. If you know it, the *Bizarre Adventures* story becomes that much more poignant.

Ten to 15 years ago, I was at a Mid-Ohio Con where Chris Claremont appeared. I wanted to get his autograph and tell him how much his work had meant to me. He had been signing X books for hours (and I had a couple more for him). He looked bone weary and told me he was pretty tired at that point. I had just read *Vampire Tales* #6 and asked him about Angie Freeman and if that was meant to be her years later in *Bizarre Adventures* #25. He perked up, smiled, and talked all about Angie, the characters, and that story. He seemed happy to talk about some of his more obscure excellent stories. It was only a few minutes, but they were meaningful ones for me. He seemed to enjoy it, too.

My only experience with a great from my childhood but it was wonderful.

I'm also enjoying the *BI Annual* on Neal Adams. About 13 years ago, I won an award at work. I got some money with that. I had stopped going to conventions as they seemed to be evolving into something I didn't care to be a part of.

But the annual fall con in Columbus Ohio had William Shatner there and I always had wanted to meet him. It clinched it for me because I saw Neal Adams would be there and Neal was the art God for me growing up.

I went and made it to Neal's table and met him. I had a couple of books to get signed and he proceeded to show me his art prints and put the hard sell on me to buy one. I typically didn't buy things like that, but Neal was very persuasive. I ended up buying one of them where he redrew the *Batman* #251 cover. Neal said I would never regret it.

Someone else was buying something and said they needed to hit the ATM. Neal then began to instruct us on ATM's and how they work. You could only get $20's back then, but Neal described the machines and said it was ridiculous. We should be able to get denominations of bills like 10's and 1's also. He said the industry would catch up and do that someday.

Flash forward to now and ATM's do exactly what Neal said they could do that day years ago. He was an incredibly bright and charismatic man who knew a lot and turned out to be right a lot, as he said.

He was also right in that I've never regretted buying that Batman and Joker print from him either.

He was just such an amazing man, as amazing as his artwork. Thanks for a fabulous annual!

Keith Hammond

Thank you, Keith, for sharing your stories with us. It's always a treat to hear about good interactions between fans and creators.



Next issue:* BACK ISSUE *#173 is heading "To the Stars!" Just in time for the 50th Anniversary of "A New Hope," we're taking a look back at Marvel's original* Star Wars *run. Then there's more galactic adventure with* Space Family Robinson *and* Close Encounters of the Third Kind. *Plus, spotlights on Starhawk, Desaad,* Dalgoda, *DC's* Twilight, *and "The Ballad of Halo Jones." Featuring the work of ARCHIE GOODWIN, WALTER SIMONSON, ROY THOMAS, JACK KIRBY, STEVE GERBER, AL MILGROM, ALAN MOORE, IAN GIBSON, JAN STRNAD, DENNIS FUJITAKE, HOWARD CHAYKIN, JOSÉ LUIS GARCÍA-LÓPEZ, and others. Featuring a Starhawk cover by RON WILSON and FRANK GIACOIA.

Don't ask—just* BI *it!

Roger Ash, editor

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