

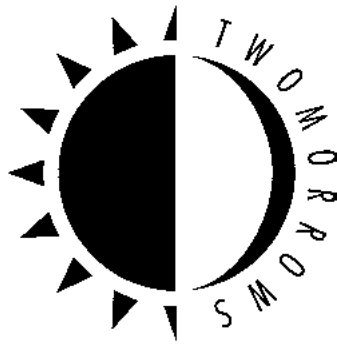
IMPLOSION

EXPANDED EDITION



AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978
BY KEITH DALLAS & JOHN WELLS

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and John Wells
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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2018 marks the fortieth anniversary of DC Comics' failed initiative to boost the sales of its comic book line by offering more story pages at a higher price point. It was called "The DC Explosion." After months of heavy promotion (in terms of both in-house advertisements and fan press coverage), the event was rolled out in June 1978 with titles that had 25 story pages at the cost of 50¢. (Comic books published by other companies—like Marvel, Archie, and Harvey—had 17 story pages and cost 35¢.) DC Comics hoped to appeal to consumers with added value and incentivize newsstand retailers with the allure of greater profit for them. If successful, the DC Explosion would reverse a decade-long downward sales trend.

Alas, it wasn't to be. In mid-June, it was announced that executives of Warner Communications (DC's parent company) had ordered a drastic reduction in both DC's staff and comic book output. In one fell swoop, DC Comics had its line cut nearly in half. Almost immediately, the DC Explosion acquired the more infamous tag of "The DC Implosion."

Over the years, however, numerous misconceptions about the DC Implosion have been circulated and accepted as truth, including the notion that the decision handed down by the Warner executives was based on how poorly the DC Explosion was faring. In fact, Warner's concerns began before the first 50¢ issues had even arrived in stationery stores and groceries. Nor was their decision based solely on the poor sales of the preceding winters, although that was certainly a factor. This book then is partly an attempt to "set the record straight" by documenting not only the DC Explosion and its aftermath but also the mid-1970s comic book market

conditions that prodded DC's brain trust to attempt the bold endeavor in the first place. As this book will prove, the DC Implosion serves as a marker of the end of a particular era in the comic book industry. It became a time when DC Comics learned a hard-to-fathom reality: the newsstand—whose dealers had been selling comics for over 40 years—could no longer be depended upon to sustain the comic book industry. An alternative sales venue had to be found. Given the scant number of specialty comic shops in operation around the world in 1978, few could have predicted then that the Direct Market would expand to the point where it supported the entire industry. Nonetheless, the search for a viable replacement to the newsstand had begun.

Comic Book Implosion chronologizes this momentous era of comic book history through a combination of explanatory text, title lists, descriptive entries, and, most importantly, oral narrative. Above all else, *Comic Book Implosion* is an oral history, and the advantage of that format is that it presents historical events through the testimonies of the people who were most involved in them. To that end, this book provides accounts from various participants including: DC Comics executives and editors like Jenette Kahn and Paul Levitz who implemented the DC Explosion; writers and artists like Len Wein, Neal Adams, and Steve Englehart who were prominent comic book creators at the time; journalists like Mike Tiefenbacher who reported on the comic book industry; people like Tom Brevoort, Kurt Busiek, and Mark Waid who experienced the DC Explosion as adolescent comic book readers. Through such sources as *The Comic Reader*, *The Comics Journal*, and *Back Issue* magazine, among many others, *Comic Book Implosion* presents scores of

MEET Cinnamon
BY ROGER MCKENZIE AND JACK ABEL

SHAZAM!
BY E. NELSON BRIDWELL, DON NEWTON AND KURT SCHAFFENBERGER

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- 4—Super Friends
- 5—Batman
- 11—Beave and Bold
- 12—Detective
- 14—Flash
- 15—Justice League
- 18—Green Lantern
- 20—Wonder Woman
- 22—DC Comics Presents
- 30—Ghosts
- 31—House of Mystery
- 32—House of Secrets
- 34—The Unexpcted
- 35—Witching Hour
- 36—Demand Classics
- 46—Secrets of Haunted House
- 48—Jonah Hex
- 47—Firestorm
- 51—Black Lightning
- 61—Sgt. Rock

62—Our Fighting Forces

63—Unknown Soldier

64—Weird War Tales

66—Men of War

67—Star Hunters

69—Weird

70—Weird Western Tales

71—Strange Adventures

72—Army At War

73—Dynamic Classics

79—Steel

80—Battle Classics

81—Showcase

82—Western Classics

85—Claw The Unconqueror

90—Doorway To Hightmaic

91—The Vision

94—All Star Comics

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- 7—World's Finest
- 52—Batman Family
- 60—G.I. Combat

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THE FIRST EARTH-2 TALE!

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WESTERN CLASSICS #1

featuring **BAT LASH** and **JOHNNY THUNDER**

ON SALE JULY 13th!

testimonies that date all the way back to the mid-1970s to as recently as a few months before the publication of this book. As a result, and inevitably, contradictions in the narrative occur. Because of the subjectivity of recollection (or perhaps even personal bias), the account of one person may conflict with that of another, and readers must resolve these discrepancies by determining on their own which statements they find to be the most valid.

Comic Book Implosion could not have been completed without the invaluable assistance of those who responded to our requests for aid. We are particularly grateful to Tom Brevoort, Kurt Busiek, Michael T. Gilbert, Phil Jimenez, Bob Rozakis, and Mark Waid for their illuminating testimonies that enriched the narrative. Thanks also to Russ Maheras for providing scans of the rare 1978 issues of *The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom* that covered the Implosion. As always, Mike Tiefenbacher supplied insightful feedback and information, while Jon Cooke furnished us with many scans, including those of Bill Alger's copy of "Cancelled Comic Cavalcade." Rich Fowls deserves special praise for turning the manuscript into a beautifully designed volume that is a pleasure to leaf through. And of course our eternal gratitude to John Morrow for his support and enthusiasm of this project and in his unwavering faith in our ability to produce it. We are honored that *Comic Book Implosion* is included in the esteemed TwoMorrows catalog.



PROLOGUE

Bigger is better. That simple phrase was the driving force behind everything that preceded one of the most mythologized events in DC Comics' history.

In its 1940s heyday, the typical American comic book was a 64-page package with a 10¢ price tag, a cost that was shared by many of the magazines of the era including the venerable *Life*. A funny thing happened on the way to the 1950s, though. The magazine industry began adjusting its prices upward to account for inflation. *Life*, for instance, jumped to 15¢ (1946) and then to 20¢ (1948) and then to 25¢ (1957). But comic book publishers took a different tack, clinging desperately to that one thin dime and progressively reducing their page count until 32-pages was the new industry standard by 1954.

A quarter-century into its existence, the 10¢ comic book was untenable and industry leader Dell took the inevitable step of raising its prices to 15¢ in 1960. Absolutely no one followed that lead. Holding fast, National Comics (better known as DC) and other publishers reaped the rewards as Dell's sales plunged on racks full of competitors' 10¢ comics but they knew they would soon have to follow suit...up to a point. In October 1961, most other purveyors of color comics notched up their retail to 12¢. However minor that may seem by 21st century standards, those two pennies had a devastating effect on industry sales.

At National/DC, the average issue for much of the 1950s and 1960s had contained 25 pages of story and seven pages of editorial content and advertising but the ratio progressively shifted downward. As the story content shrank, prices rose again to 15¢ in 1969. By 1971, the 20¢ comic seemed inevitable.

Mark Hanerfeld, editor of *The Comic Reader*, had anticipated the latest increase in issue #70 (October 1968). "There are factors other than rising costs that are causing this change," he wrote. "One of them is the dwindling number of retail outlets that are willing to handle comics. In New York City, the retailer makes 3¢ on every 12¢ comic he sells, while in certain areas of California, the retailer makes only 1¢ on each 12¢ comic sold. A dealer must sell several hundred copies if he is to make any sort of decent profit, and many feel that it is not worth the effort to carry a line of comic magazines at such a small profit margin.

"There is also the problem of newsstand 'pollution.' The average local dealer has space on his racks for only between 50 and 100 titles at a time, the rest of his rack space being devoted to magazines with a far higher 'rate of financial return per space involved.' Since there are over 200 comics titles on the market at present, that means that some books are going to be bumped off the stands before they have a chance to sell to their full potential."

Most mid-1960s comics start-ups—Tower, M.F. Enterprises, Lightning—had eschewed the traditional format for thicker giants retailing for a quarter. Despite their ultimate failure, Hanerfeld believed they had the right idea: "The answer lies with the 64-page 25¢ comic and 80- or 96-page 35¢ giants. This larger size would allow for more advertising to be carried, which would help keep the books going, and for some room for further page reduction, should a similar occasion arise in the future."

Hanerfeld also suggested merging several titles into a single anthology, "similar to the multi-feature books of the '30s and '40s. The system would also allow for features that cannot make it on their own in this current 'do it big or die' comics situation to continue as secondary features in some book or other, rather than face total oblivion. Further, the reduction in the number



of titles produced, with no reduction in quantity of material, should go far in helping the newsstand ‘pollution’ problem.

“[DC editor] Dick Giordano has suggested a 48-page book for 20¢ might be the answer. (For production reasons, the interior section of the comics magazines—sans covers—is made up of 16-page segments, and so the size of a comic must be limited to multiplications of 16.”

Giordano’s solution was the one that ultimately came to pass but it wasn’t realized until the industry was facing an increase to 20¢ without an expanded page count. DC publisher Carmine Infantino pitched a 25¢ comic book with the additional 16-page signature of pages. Effective with books going on sale in June of 1971 (cover-dated August), all of DC’s comics expanded from 32 pages to 48. The number of story pages (then set at 22) rose back to 25 within a few months. An additional 12 to 15 pages of reprints filled out each issue.

Harvey Comics joined DC in converting to the new format as did Marvel...but only for a moment. Martin Goodman, the latter’s publisher, immediately changed his mind and returned to the 32-page package one month later, now priced at 20¢. In a further blow, Goodman also authorized a 10¢ profit for retailers on each Marvel title as compared to the 5¢ takeaway on a DC book. By the time DC returned to 32-pages—and 20¢—in May 1972, Marvel had overtaken them as industry leader.

A nationwide paper shortage in the fall of 1973 once again applied pressure on DC to revisit the larger format, this time as a 100-Page Super-Spectacular format that DC had been exploring for two years. In October, select titles began going to the Super-Spec format permanently, still featuring the 20 pages of new story that they’d have had at 20¢ but now backed up with enough reprints and special features to hit the 100-page mark. *Batman* #254 and *Young Romance* #197 were first, followed by *Detective Comics* #438 and *Young Love* #108 in November, and *Justice League of America* #110 in December. One standard format title per month would also be temporarily boosted to Super-Spec size as a special, too, beginning with *The Witching Hour* #38, *Superman* #272, and *Wonder Woman* #211.

Initially retailing at 50¢, the giants rose to 60¢ in January. While they now cost the same as three 32-page comics, the cost

of printing one thick issue versus three was significantly less, particularly since DC would be using less of the slick paper stock for which prices had leapt. Consequently, when word of the escalating paper shortage was announced in the fall of 1973, Infantino issued a kill order on several of DC’s marginal titles while demoting two (*G.I. Combat* and *Star-Spangled War Stories*) to bi-monthly schedules.

The final issues that comprised the death list were *Champion Sports* #3, *Forbidden Tales of Dark Mansion* #15, *Korak, Son of Tarzan* #56, *Prez* #5, *Secret Origins* #6, *Supergirl* #9, *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* #136, *Weird Western Tales* #21 and *Weird Worlds* #10.

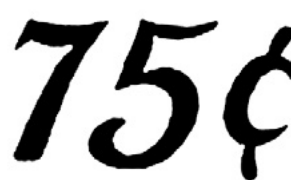
That opened up extra pages that could be added to seven stronger-selling books which would become ongoing Super-Specs in January and February 1974: *The Brave and the Bold* #112, *House of Mystery* #224, *Shazam!* #12, *Tarzan* #230, *The Unexpected* #157, *World’s Finest Comics* #223 and a new/old title *The Superman Family* #164.

Continuing the numbering of the 20-year-old *Jimmy Olsen* title, *Superman Family* fused the book with two other cancelled titles which had been slated for new directions. Issues #165 and #166 featured stories meant for *Supergirl* #11 and *Lois Lane* #138. Likewise, *Korak* was merged with its parent title, the contents intended for issue #57 added to *Tarzan* #230.

Secret Origins #7, *Supergirl* #10, *Lois Lane* #137 and *Weird Worlds* #10 were left in limbo for months past their December 1973/January 1974 release dates. They were finally published that summer when kids were out of school and comics sales typically peaked. Meanwhile, the cancelled *Weird Western Tales* earned a last-minute reprieve and returned with issue #22 in February after a four-month gap. Fatefully, that issue’s Jonah Hex installment was the first episode in the series written by Michael Fleisher, destined to be the character’s signature author.

The cumulative effect of DC’s scaled-down output (296 issues versus 402 in 1973) was good news for profits. In *Inside Comics* #3 (Fall 1974), Infantino boasted, “In the first three months of 1974, National [DC] alone made more than the whole of [Marvel’s] Cadence Industries.” Years later, in *The Amazing World of Carmine Infantino* (2000), he added that “we did about \$800,000





in publishing alone in '74. I had brought the company up from being creamed by Marvel to being dead even with them.”

In a reversal of the 1971-1972 debacle when Marvel's 20¢ comics undersold DC's 25¢ ones, standard Marvel issues raised to 25¢ in February (dated May 1974) but Infantino held the line at 20¢ until October (issues dated January 1975). At 1974's Detroit Triple Fan Fair, DC's publisher announced more good news: Alexander and Ilya Salkind had signed a deal to produce a series of Superman films. Coupled with the live-action *Shazam!* series that premiered on CBS' Saturday morning schedule on September 7, DC's heroes seemed poised for an expanded presence in live action.

Even the threat that new superhero publisher Atlas (bankrolled by former Marvel publisher Martin Goodman) was courting industry talent had positive effects at DC, albeit spurred by self-preservation. On August 13, 1974, Infantino drafted a letter to all of the company's creators with news of DC's own benefits program: increased pay rates, the return of original art and (for colorists) colored silverprints, reprint fees, and an immediate bonus check “because the results of our operations during the first half of the year have been favorable.” There was a condition, of course: The creators had to work exclusively for DC “unless our editors and I have agreed that specific other activities create no conflict of interest.”

The euphoria was short-lived, though. “Our printer told me late in 1974 there might be a paper shortage in '75,” Infantino recalled in his 2001 autobiography. “Marvel was launching a huge expansion which, among other things, could tie up all the available paper... The only way I could protect DC's rack space position was to go head to head with Marvel's expansion. I knew many of the new Marvel and DC titles would lose money, but if I didn't match their production, we would lose existing titles and be blown off the racks by the new Marvel books.” Consequently, the Super-Specs had to go effective with the December releases so that more standard 25¢ titles could be published in their place.

The Comic Reader #113 (December 1974) confirmed that DC would use “the press time formerly used to print the giants for new titles and increasing the frequencies of many of the titles that have been selling well. No fewer than 15 titles have been

increased from bi-monthly status, and nine new titles, excluding one-shots, are scheduled.”

All told, DC launched or revived 28 titles in 1975 but had cancelled 11 (*1st Issue Special*; *Beowulf*; *Justice, Inc.*; *Kong the Untamed*; *Man-Bat*; *Sandman*; *Secrets of Haunted House*; *Stalker*; *Tales of Ghost Castle*; *Tor*; *Warlord*) by January 1976 along with another eight pre-existing books (*House of Secrets*; *OMAC*; *Phantom Stranger*; *Rima the Jungle Girl*; *The Shadow*; *Weird Mystery Tales*; *Young Love*; *Young Romance*). Newcomers that survived into 1976 were *All-Star Comics*; *Batman Family*; *Blackhawk*; *Blitzkrieg*; *Claw the Unconquered*, *DC Special*; *DC Super-Stars*; *Four-Star Spectacular*; *Freedom Fighters*; *Hercules Unbound*; *The Joker*; *Karate Kid*; *Kobra*; *Plastic Man*; *Richard Dragon*; *Kung Fu Fighter*; *Super-Team Family*; and *Tarzan Family*.

For comparative purposes, Marvel cancelled 19 pre-existing 32-page color comics in 1975 along with excising its Giant-Size line—extending to 24 titles—it had created to compete with DC's Super-Spectaculars. The impact on creative personnel was largely negligible since the majority of the titles had been reprint books aimed at saturating the market. Inevitably, the battle for rack space didn't go well for anyone. The upstart Atlas perished while DC and Marvel each had to suffer the consequences when the first 1975 sales figures rolled in.

Elsewhere, Superman's architects Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—long cut off from DC—were inconsolable as they read report after report on the forthcoming theatrical production featuring their creation and its astounding budget...not a penny of which would reach their pockets. Now living in near-poverty conditions, the duo reached out to the news media with their plight, eventually finding comics industry crusaders like Neal Adams and Jerry Robinson to champion their cause. Through their efforts, a triumphant announcement was made on December 23, 1975 that Jerry and Joe were awarded a lifetime pension from DC along with other concessions that included the addition of a “created by” credit on every Superman story published from April 1976 onward.

Executives at DC's parent company Warner Communications were relieved to have the public relations nightmare behind them but the waters around the comic book division were still choppy. Once the New Year arrived, Carmine Infantino's corporate bosses took a look at 1975's sales figures.



DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: EARLY 1976

Action Comics (starring Superman, with “Green Arrow & Black Canary,” “The Private Life of Clark Kent” and others as back-up features)

Adventure Comics (starring Aquaman, with the Creeper as back-up feature)

All-Star Comics (starring the Justice Society of America)

Batman

Batman Family (50¢ giant starring Robin and Batgirl, with Batman-related reprints)

Blackhawk

Blitzkrieg (starring Nazi soldiers Franz, Hugo, and Luigi)

The Brave and the Bold (Batman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)

Claw the Unconquered

DC Special (50¢ reprint anthology title featuring various DC superheroes)

DC Super-Stars (50¢ reprint anthology title featuring various DC heroes)

Detective Comics (starring Batman, with Man-Bat as back-up feature)

The Flash (including Green Lantern as back-up feature)

Four Star Spectacular (50¢ reprint anthology title featuring Superboy, Wonder Woman and two other heroes)

Freedom Fighters

Ghosts (supernatural short stories)

G.I. Combat (starring the Haunted Tank, plus various war short stories)

Hercules Unbound

House of Mystery (supernatural short stories)

The Joker

Justice League of America

Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth

Karate Kid

Limited Collectors' Edition (\$1.00 reprint tabloid featuring various DC superheroes)

Metal Men

Our Army At War (starring Sgt. Rock, plus various war short stories)

Our Fighting Forces (starring The Losers, with back-up features starring individual squad members)

Plastic Man

Plop! (weird humor short stories)

Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter

Secret Society of Super-Villains

Shazam!

Starfire

Star-Spangled War Stories (starring the Unknown Soldier, plus various war short stories)

Superboy (starring the Legion of Super-Heroes)

Superman

Superman Family (50¢ giant, starring Supergirl, Jimmy Olsen and Lois Lane in alternating new lead stories, plus reprints)

Super-Team Family (50¢ reprint giant featuring various DC superheroes)

Swamp Thing

Tarzan

Tarzan Family (50¢ giant starring Korak, with Edgar Rice Burroughs-related reprints)

Unexpected (supernatural short stories)

Weird War Tales (supernatural war stories)

Weird Western Tales (starring Jonah Hex)

Witching Hour (supernatural short stories)

Wonder Woman

World's Finest Comics (starring Superman & Batman)



PART 1: PRE-EXPLOSION (1976-1978)

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Creepy* #85 (January 1977)ⁱ:

“[Warner Communications’] publishing division had its second consecutive yearly loss of \$5 million in 1975. Even the final disposal of Warner’s money-eating foreign publishing operation may not offset 1976 declines because of a sudden, unexpected slowdown in this year’s [1976] second and third quarters. For the record, both National Comics and Warner Paperback Library lost money in 1975 while profits for Independent News and *Mad* declined from 1974 levels.

Moreover, the two-year loss of \$10 million in publishing compares very unfavorably with Warner’s three other wholly-owned divisions: Warner records and music publishing earned \$96.8 million profit in the same two years; Warner TV and motion pictures made \$95.6 million in profits in 1974 and 1975; and 1975 marked the first profitable year (\$2 million) for Warner’s much-touted cable communications division.”

Carmine Infantino, former Publisher and President of DC Comics in his autobiography *The Amazing World of Carmine Infantino* (2001)ⁱⁱ:

“In January 1976, I had just returned from a whirlwind promotional tour for the Superman/Spider-Man treasury edition. Marvel and I worked out a deal that made this first-ever, landmark crossover book possible and, to my memory, the thing sold an amazing 500,000 copies! The promo tour included radio and TV interviews, and convention appearances. When I got back into the office, I was called to a meeting with some Warner Bros. brass [including Warner director and Licensing Corporation of America cofounder Jay Emmett]. Honestly, it was not a surprise to me

to find out both Marvel and DC showed financial losses in 1975. The much-speculated paper shortage never occurred. Faced with 1975’s final numbers, the Warner Bros. executives above me decided to withdraw their support. I was understandably quite upset.”

Joe Orlando, then DC Comics editor in an interview printed in *Comic Book Artist* #1 (Spring 1998)ⁱⁱⁱ:

“[Carmine Infantino] was in the middle of an editorial meeting with us and I remember him saying that he was going to fire all of us if we didn’t get our books out on time—his usual threat—and he was called upstairs in the middle of the meeting. Then he came down and said, ‘I’ve been fired.’ We all laughed—a Carmine joke—but it was true. He took his coat, and left. They said that they would send his things after him. And he has never set foot on the premises again.”

Lead story of the “Direct Currents” section in DC Comics’ in-house fanzine *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #11 (cover date March 1976)^{iv}:

“After eight years at the creative controls of DC, Carmine Infantino has relinquished his post and turned the company over to a new management team, while he moves on to new challenges elsewhere. During his tenure as Editorial Director, Publisher, and finally Publisher and President, Carmine changed the shape of the entire company, bringing in several of our most talented editors (Joe Kubert, Joe Orlando, Denny O’Neil and Gerry Conway) and adding many new magazines and characters to the line (including super-stars Tarzan and Shazam)...

In the prophetic department, [*Amazing World of DC Comics*] racks up a high score since Carmine’s departure took place



DC Comics President-Publisher Carmine Infantino was all smiles in this publicity photo circa 1971. At the time of his ouster in January 1976 DC had just published the highly-publicized *Superman Vs. the Amazing Spider-Man* tabloid.

while our tenth issue was on the press... the very issue that spotlighted the 40-year career of his successor as President of [National Periodical Publications], Sol Harrison. After that in-depth survey, there's little more we can add... except to say that no one knows more about our field, and no one deserves the honor more.

Sharing the responsibilities with Sol will be a newcomer to DC, Jenette Kahn, who joins the company as its new Publisher. Jenette's background isn't in comics, but it isn't far removed. In the past 6 years, she's created and edited three magazines for young people...

With this ideal balance between established expertise and incoming enthusiasm, DC looks forward to a new era of even greater creativity, great investigation of the new fields and formats for our comics and our characters."

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Creepy* #85 (January 1977)^v:

"Marvel's parent corporation, Cadence... is a small conglomerate—by comparison to Warner—and seems to be constantly racked by internal corporate haggling between chairman Sheldon Feinberg and dissidents like Bernard Sack. Cadence simply doesn't have much money to waste these days since it carries a number of marginal subsidiary firms. Marvel, operating on monthly profits of less than \$1,000 on some titles and at a loss on others, is still being operated because its existence makes a profit for another division, Curtis Circulation."

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics associate editor in a recollection posted online in 2011^{vi}:

"Marvel was a mess throughout the mid-1970s and during my two years as 'associate editor,' from the beginning of 1976 through the end of 1977. Almost every book was late. There were unscheduled reprints and fill-ins, and we still just plain missed issues here and there. Many books, despite my best efforts to shore up the bottom, were unreadable. Not merely bad. Unreadable. Almost all were less than they ought to be. There were a few exceptions... A few books had parts that were great and things not so great about them that crippled them. We can debate the above at length.... However, what can't be debated is that sales were bad and falling. It was almost all newsstand sales then, by the way. This was before the Direct Market was a significant factor. The comics overall were breakeven at best. Upstairs, the cheesy non-comics magazine department was losing millions. It seemed like the company as a whole was in a death spiral."

[Whatever its internal troubles, Marvel had an undeniable "cool" factor. It was rooted in the foundation created by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and others in the 1960s but a new generation of twenty-something Marvel fans-turned-pros brought distinctly 1970s voices to the table. Relative traditionalists like Len Wein, Gerry Conway, and Marv Wolfman mingled with experimental writers like Steve Englehart, Steve Gerber, Don McGregor, Doug Moench, and Jim Starlin who pushed both form and subject matter, tackling race, politics, religion, and other heavy topics.]

Steve Englehart, then writer of Marvel Comics' *The Avengers* and *Doctor Strange* in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #51 (September 2011)^{vii}:

"DC was really moribund at that point. Everybody who was a big star for DC had largely gone to Marvel. Neal Adams had gone over to Marvel. Gil Kane, Mike Friedrich, and Bob Brown had gone over to Marvel. Gardner Fox had gone over to Marvel. People were bailing on DC. Marvel was where the action was at. Marvel had the better books, the more fun books. DC was just stuck and didn't know how to get unstuck. They had been convinced for so long that they were the #1 company that when they became #2, they didn't really have a plan of what they were supposed to do about it. They got rid of Carmine Infantino, who I always liked, and brought in Jenette, because you always fire the coach when the team is losing."

[The distinction between the nation's comic book publishers was lost on most retailers and distributors.]

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Creepy* #81 (May 1976)^{viii}:

“According to the best calculations I could compile from Postal Service records, the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) notices and a series of conversations with many of the nation’s leading independent magazine distributors, comic book sales are down about 30% during the last six-to-twelve months. And they’re getting worse.

‘My records show comic sales down about 50%, one half since [July 1975],’ said an executive of the nation’s leading independent distributor of comic books. His gloomy assessment of the comic book business is shared by most of the independent distributors. They’re unhappy with the comic book business already—they don’t make much money even when comics are selling. Most of them plainly indicate they’re not about to keep concentrating on comic books if sales continue to drop... Without the independent distributors, there are no comic books. None. Goodbye. Pack it in and blow away.”

[This was the world that 28-year-old Jenette Kahn was entering. A comic book fan since childhood, the Harvard graduate wasted little time in making a name for herself in the publishing industry. In 1970, she co-founded a magazine called *Kids* whose content was actually created by children. That, in turn, led to her development of two more periodicals—*Dynamite* and *Smash*—in 1974 and 1975, respectively. Passionate and outgoing, she made a good impression on Warner Books chairman William Sarnoff and accepted his offer to head up National Periodical Publications. Unexpectedly, she had company at the top in the form of Sol Harrison. Present at the dawn of the four-color comic book industry as a color separator, the 58-year-old had worked his way up to become DC Vice-President during Infantino’s tenure.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{ix}:

“I can’t really say that Sol and I had much of a working relationship. He, more than anybody, resented my being hired because he felt that the job was rightfully his. I had been hired by Bill Sarnoff as the president of the company. But before I arrived at DC, Bill phoned to say, ‘I’m really sorry, but Sol has gone to Jay Emmett with some of the staff to say they’re leaving if he isn’t made president. I know that’s not the basis on which you were hired and if you don’t want to come, I understand. But I really have to give Sol the title of President. It was an unexpected reversal, but by the time it occurred, I had shut down *Smash* and was emotionally committed to DC. I tried very hard to work with Sol, to forge some kind of relationship, but it was hard. He always saw me as the person who was trying to steal what was rightfully his, and as such, we were never close. Sol’s sense of betrayal was so large that he always seemed to wonder if I was trying to oust him. He didn’t say that and we were always polite to one another, but we never truly had a collaborative relationship.”



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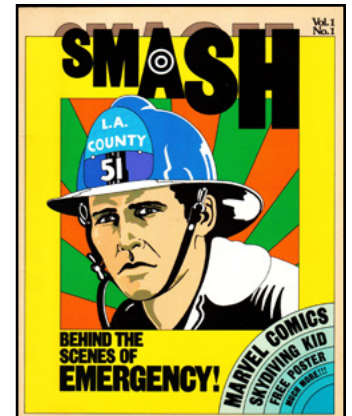
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Jenette Kahn’s career first intersected with DC in 1972, when an ad for her *Kids* magazine appeared in most of the publisher’s titles. In 1974’s *Dynamite* (created for Scholastic), she included a regular origin feature on various superheroes and spotlighted Marvel Comics in the first issue of 1975’s *Smash*.



[As publisher to Harrison's president, Kahn began to assemble a team.]

Lead story of the "Direct Currents" section in DC Comics' in-house fanzine *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #12 (cover date July 1976)^x:

"Joe Orlando has become the Managing Editor of two-thirds of the DC line, and will be supervising the editorial side of some 40 titles with the aid of Story Editors Denny O'Neil, Paul Levitz, Jack C. Harris, and Tony Isabella. These titles include the ones Joe used to edit solo, some new magazines, some mags that other DC editors used to work on, as well as all the titles formerly edited by Denny and Gerry Conway (who has returned to his old stamping grounds at Marvel Comics).

Vince Colletta is now the Art Director of the DC line, supervising all the artwork and designing the covers. He'll also be responsible for polishing the look of our comics, and getting us the best art team in the business.

And aiding both of them is Paul Levitz, now Editorial Coordinator of the titles in question and responsible for fighting off the Dreaded Deadline Doom that so often has caused your favorite comics to have unannounced fill-in issues.

Editors Julius Schwartz, Murray Boltinoff, and Joe Kubert will continue to function as before, although the specific titles they are working on have changed a bit. And E. Nelson Bridwell remains Julie's Associate Editor and dean of the reprint department. Bob Rozakis, however, has moved from the editorial department to become the new DC proofreader, as Anthony Tollin turns in his dictionary for a paste-up board in the Production Department."

Bob Rozakis, then DC Comics assistant editor in a 2018 recollection^{xi}:

"At the time of Jenette Kahn's hiring, I think our main concern was that Warner corporate was sending in someone who had no history in the comic book business. The 'old

guard' felt that they knew how to produce comics (though they never did understand what it was that made Marvel Comics more popular) and were gradually moved aside as the new generation was brought in.

There was a lot of behind-the-scenes politicking going on, with some of my compatriots jockeying for positions of power in the new regime. I was in the editorial department for only a few months after Jenette arrived, then moved into Production as a result of some of that.

Looking back now, I realize that my career might have gone in a different direction had I engaged in the politicking, but my primary loyalty was to the DC brand and to making it the best it could be, both as a writer and head of Production."

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #37 (December 1977)^{xii}:

"The company, when I got there, had a number of severe problems on both the editorial and business sides. One was that our editors were—well, really—of another generation. They were, when I came to DC in 1976, 65, 60, and 48-years-old respectively. We had [only] two younger editors, one of whom [Gerry Conway] left within the month for Marvel, where he was given much more autonomy and a chance at their top books, something not offered our younger editors. And also our editors at that time were encouraged to have their own mini-companies within DC.

Morale was low, and in an effort to create an atmosphere where artists and writers would be excited to work for DC, we gave out raises and reprint money...in contract form, a commitment to giving back original artwork, and also a commitment to reimburse an artist if we ever lose his original artwork or if it's mutilated at the printers, or, God forbid, stolen. I also gave licensing revenue to whatever creative team develops a new licensable character, whether that character is developed within an [established] book or as a wholly new title."

[Among those paying attention to the newcomer was Paul Levitz. Not yet 20-years-old, he already had a level of familiarity with DC's operations that belied his age. At 14, he created—with pal Paul Kupperberg—a fanzine full of comics industry news and used the connections he made in the early 1970s to get his foot in the door at DC, assisting editor Joe Orlando. Ultimately, though, the entire experience was something of a lark to the young man, an entertaining means of paying for his college tuition as he studied business at New York University. In Levitz's eyes, comic books were a dead end, something he'd leave behind when he graduated and joined the real world.]

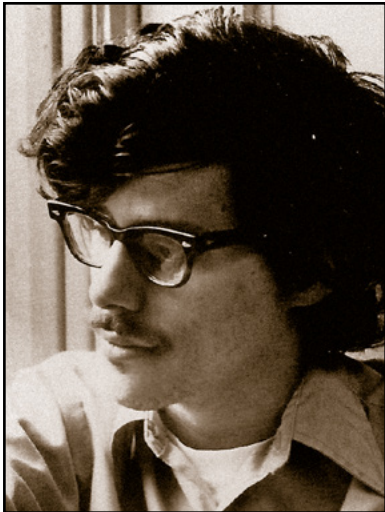
Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator in an interview printed in *Write Now!* #12 (May 2006)^{xiii}:

"I was an assistant editor from '73 to the beginning of '76. Then the company started to change around the time Jenette

Jenette Kahn, as first seen by most fans in *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #11 (March 1976).



Kahn got here as Publisher. It became much friendlier to young people in terms of career ambitions at that stage. She was, of course, only 28 when she got here. Shortly after she got here, Gerry Conway left to become very, very briefly, the editor-in-chief at Marvel. That opened up a tremendous amount of writing and editorial chores. At that point, I went from part-time to full-time and became both an editor and what we called in those days the editorial coordinator—sort of a traffic manager for the editorial department.”



Not yet 21-years-old, Paul Levitz was already a rising star at DC when Jack Adler took this photo circa 1977. Photo from *The Comics Journal* #39 (April 1978).

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{xiv}:

“There was a sense of shock and dismay that I’d been hired from all these men who seriously resented my hiring, but thought I had the power to make a difference in their lives and livelihoods. To protect their jobs, they would say ‘yes’ to me, no matter what I proposed. But Paul was the one person who would say ‘no,’ and he said no with cogent, well-argued reasons. And I thought, ‘He says no to me. He could make me better than I am. He’ll go very far.’ And that was the beginning of my promoting Paul through every possible position.”

[One of the men shaken by the news of Kahn’s arrival was Joe Orlando. The gregarious 48-year-old had a diverse résumé that ranged from a stint as artist on E.C.’s legendary 1950s horror comics to political caricature to ghost-writing *Little Orphan Annie* to bringing a modern spin to multiple DC titles as editor since 1968.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{xv}:

“In later years, Joe Orlando, the wonderful artist and editor, disputed this, I was told by more than one person that he was throwing up in the men’s room when he



Joe Orlando and Jenette Kahn in a celebratory mood in 1980. Photo by Michael Catron from *The Comics Journal* #59 (October 1980).

heard the news... I came in with a love of comics and an appreciation of the medium, both as a reader and as someone who saw it as an art form. There was so much potential and I believed that if we focused on that, we could work together and find common ground. I just had to get the lay of the land and tread carefully... Joe seemed to be someone who appreciated talent, who was a talent himself, and someone who would just be great to work with. And he was. He was a joy.”

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World’s Favorite Comic Book Heroes* (1995)^{xvi}:

“Paul and Joe and I would talk late at night. We would hang out in my office and say it would be great if we could do this or that. Joe has such a love of creativity and rises to any challenge. And Paul, who was only 19, would say no to me, but with reasons why he was saying no and with solutions, so there was a chance of a real dialogue. The three of us were a little core group, and we still needed some very good editors.”

[Kahn grew to depend on Orlando and Levitz in day-to-day decision making. Art director Vince Colletta had less of an impact. The 52-year-old illustrator brought with him a complicated reputation that saw him hailed by editors for the speed with which he could ink a story and condemned by a segment of comics fans for that same quality, which they believed diminished the integrity of the pencillers he was working with.]

Bob Layton, then inker on DC Comics' *All-Star Comics* and *Star Hunters* during 1977 and 1978 in an interview printed in *Comics Feature #2* (May 1980)^{xvii}:

"DC never really had an accessible art director, somebody you could go to any time. Joe Orlando was like one. Vinnie was so busy drawing most of the time...he was inking something like seven pages a day and it was very hard to get access to him. Joe would always go over my stuff and talk to me about this or that."

[Colletta's position also resulted in a curious breakdown of responsibilities. Editors were now "story editors," paired with writers while Colletta doled out assignments to artists.]

Tony Isabella, then DC Comics editor in a letter published in *Back Issue #63* (April 2013)^{xviii}:

"I had been a full editor at Marvel Comics and, when DC asked me to join its staff, the position offered and accepted was as a full editor. On my first day, I learned DC had failed to honor another agreement made with me. Ultimately, the company would fail to honor almost every agreement it made with me..."

I usually refer to the six months or so I spent in the DC editorial offices as 'my mercifully brief time at DC.' It was a nightmare of arrogant and petty decisions... I saw the writing on the wall when I was told I couldn't personally give Dick Ayers his first *Freedom Fighters* script. I had to give it to Levitz to give to Colletta so that Colletta could then give it to Dick. Yeah, it was as stupid as it sounds.

I had worked with Dick at Marvel. We were friends. I knew he did his best work when given a pep talk by an editor or a writer. But I was told I had to somehow deliver this pep talk through Colletta. My goal was, as always, to create the best comic books I could. I didn't see how I could do this if I couldn't talk to the artists. Madness."

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue #57* (July 2012)^{xix}:

"Vinnie seemed to have relationships with artists. He didn't prove to be the same kind of wonderful decision that Joe was or that promoting Paul was. I probably should have taken more time and been more circumspect, but I was keen to get started. Vinnie did a number of good things for DC, but where Joe and Paul were there for the long run and made invaluable contributions, the Vinnie hire wasn't nearly as successful."

News item printed in *Mediascene #19* (May-June 1976)^{xx}:

"New three-year contracts are now being offered to many artists, guaranteeing them a specific number of pages per month, at a page rate superior to freelance prices. All artwork is returned, and both editor and artist have an arbiter (Vince Colletta) should difficulties arise through misunderstanding or disagreement."

Best known for his work on Marvel's *Avengers*, *Conan the Barbarian* and *Thor* titles, John Buscema nearly switched allegiance to DC in 1976. Photo from the 1979 Comic Art Convention booklet.



[The impact of DC's new offer was first felt during April 23's Marvel Comics Convention when signature Marvel artist John Buscema nearly defected to the "Distinguished Competition."]

News item printed in *Mediascene #19* (May-June 1976)^{xxi}:

"Through misunderstanding and carelessness, Buscema's name was left off a contract that he and Stan Lee were to sign for an upcoming project not directly related to comics. Stan signed the contract without noticing the error, and John took offense that Stan would sign such a document. For some reason, Stan and John could not get together to sort the problem out, so Buscema started looking around for a more trustworthy home... It was discovered that Buscema was to take advantage of DC's new contract deals, and would soon be drawing Tarzan, Superman and a brand-new barbarian hero. Frantic phone calls and a personal visit between Stan and John soon straightened out the matter, and Buscema was back in the Bullpen."

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader #127* (May 1976)^{xxii}:

"Steve Englehart has left Marvel and will become a writer for National [DC], effective immediately. Steve was miffed because he was taken off *Avengers* after plotting the next two issues and the *Annual*, and tendered his resignation."

[The defection of Englehart, a fan favorite thanks to his intricately-plotted, well-characterized work on books like *Avengers*, *Captain America*, and *Doctor Strange*, was the most publicized event from the short-lived tenure of Gerry Conway as Marvel Editor-in-Chief. The youthful Conway had been a star writer at Marvel earlier in the 1970s and had been lured back to DC in 1975 to accept an editorial position. When he abruptly returned to Marvel for the high profile job

in early 1976, Conway was greeted with anger over his efforts to enforce deadlines and a general resentment from many creators. After three weeks, he surrendered the post in favor of less stressful work as a Marvel writer-editor.]

Steve Englehart, then writer of *Justice League of America* and *Detective Comics* in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #51 (September 2011)^{xxiii}:

“[Jenette] couldn’t get John Buscema, but she could get me. I was unemployed! I had lunch with her and she discussed how she wanted me to fix all their characters. I said, okay, I could do that, but that I also wanted to write Batman because I’d always liked the character.

“When I started to work out the Justice League, I said to myself that I’ve got to give each one of the League members characterization and I’ve got to include all of them in a story. They’ve got to have good supervillains to fight. I very quickly realized that that was simply not possible with only 17 pages, which was the industry standard at the time, to work with. There were no rules where I came from, so I suggested a monthly book that was double-sized. Fortunately, *Justice League* was drawn by Dick Dillin, who could do that many pages.”

[Englehart was only the first of several Marvel creators moving to DC over the course of 1976. Dick Ayers, Rich Buckler, and Jack Abel along with Charlton alumni Paul Kupperberg and Don Newton were among those also making the move. Charlton actually announced that it was discontinuing its production of new comic books in 1976 while Gold Key killed most of its adventure line in the same time frame.]

News item printed in *Mediascene* #20 (July-August 1976)^{xxiv}:

“Now virtually locked into a head-on encounter for comics’ domination, Marvel and DC are being forced... to *bid* for the talented writers and artists of comics, much to their dismay.”



Steve Englehart’s approach to writing established characters was to build on what came before rather than declare that everything readers knew was wrong. “I like to move the characters,” he said in *The O’Neil Observer* #1 (Summer 1999). “I like them to develop and show new facets of themselves, but I take them as given.” Photo from *Comics Feature* #5 (September 1980).

Archie Goodwin, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in a news story printed in *Mediascene* #20 (July-August 1976)^{xxv}:

“We don’t really want to get into the practice of simply reacting to DC’s moves. But we are working on our own policies in terms of more contracts, paying for reprints and, of course, raises in certain cases.”

Marv Wolfman, then Marvel Comics writer-editor in a news story printed in *Mediascene* #20 (July-August 1976)^{xxvi}:

“They must match DC’s standards or it will hurt the company. And to get ahead of the competition, Marvel must take the initiative in some areas.”

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #137 (November 1976)^{xxvii}:

“Gerry Conway is back at DC, having signed an exclusive contract after his short stay at Marvel. Also signing exclusive contracts are Bob Brown, who’s doing *Teen Titans* and *Batman Family*, and Joe Staton, who will continue to draw *Metal Men*.”

News item printed in *Mediascene* #20 (July-August 1976)^{xxviii}:

“For reasons not fully explained or understood, Gerry simply went up to DC and hammered out a deal to write 140 pages per month, rather than spend time battling for concessions from Marvel.”

[For creators who weren’t known quantities, it was tougher getting in the door. A newcomer named Marshall Rogers had been doing sporadic work for Marvel’s British department until a missed assignment left him financially strapped. At the suggestion of Marie Severin, Rogers paid a visit to Vince Colletta at DC and found a champion for his unconventional art style. The 26-year-old was eventually assigned two episodes of a back-up serial featuring a Bob Rozakis-created villain called the Calculator (*Detective Comics* #466 and #467) and its full-length climax with Batman (*Detective* #468).]

Marshall Rogers, then penciller on *Detective Comics* in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #54 (March 1980)^{xxix}:

“I did the job [*Detective* #468] and I brought it back down, and the reception at DC wasn’t good. As a matter of fact, there was a possibility that it might not have seen press. Fortunately, the deadline was so close, they didn’t have the time to get someone else to do it, and Vinnie Colletta and Julie Schwartz were two people who did like it. And they pushed for me. And they pushed a lot. And they wanted to see the job go through because

even though the drawing was crude, they thought the storytelling and the little visual bits that I put in there were more than adequate to bypass the crude drawing at the time, and they wanted to see it printed.”

Terry Austin, then inker on *Detective Comics* in an interview printed in *The Batcave Companion* (April 2009)^{xxx}:

“I always told Marshall that I owed him one, because on the occasion of his turning in the pencils for that Batman story, I waited outside Joe [Orlando’s] office while he shrieked his displeasure at Marshall for about half an hour, knowing that when he finished, it would be my turn in the lion’s cage!

Finally, Marshall stumbled out, ashen-faced and shaken, and I was nervously ushered in for my 40 lashes. Joe stood there, beet-red and panting, having literally worn himself out giving poor Marshall his due, and had no strength left to fling his vitriol at me. I innocently asked what approach he wanted me to take in inking the job and he barked, ‘Do whatever the hell you want—you can’t save it!’”

[The combination of Rogers’ stylized pencils and Terry Austin’s crisp, detailed inking generated a flood of enthusiastic mail. Schwartz and Colletta’s faith had been justified and any doubters were silenced.

As the number of fresh writers and artists at DC increased, so did the number of pitches for new series.]

Marshall Rogers was joined by inker Terry Austin on their acclaimed Batman run with Steve Englehart but the artist contributed pencils and inks for *Detective Comics* #473’s cover. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

“The Story Behind the Story” column printed in *DC Super-Stars* # 16 (September-October 1977):

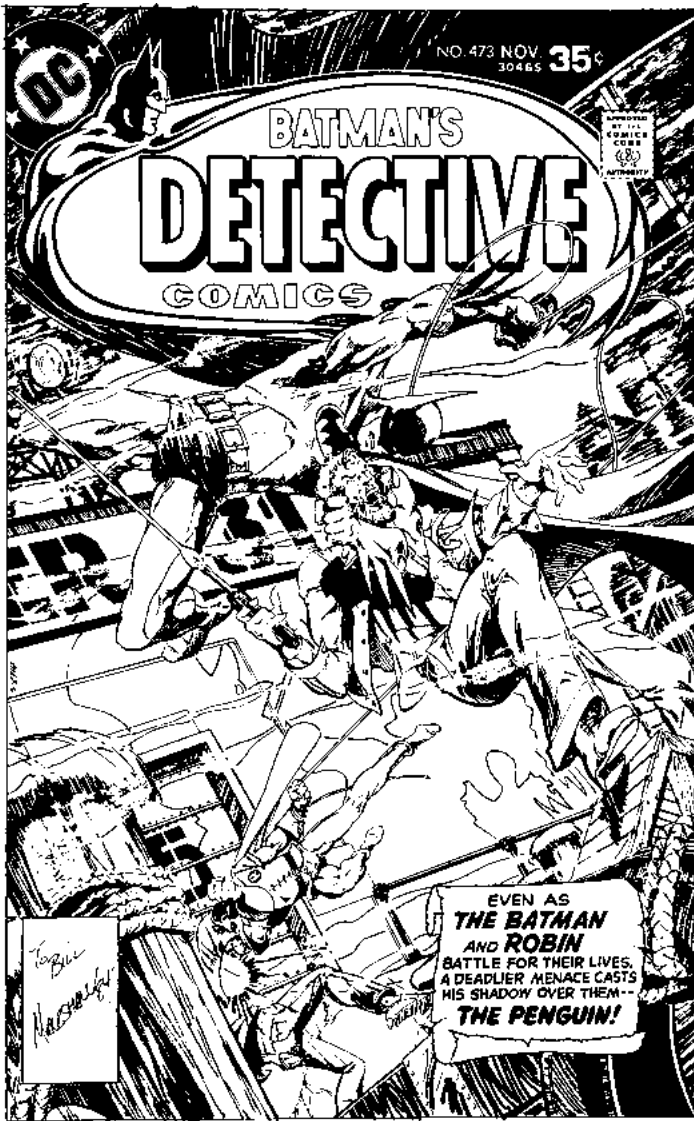
“In March of 1976, Jenette Kahn called for ideas for new books. As a result, her desk was deluged with stacks of submissions, each one demanding careful consideration.”

Jenette Kahn’s “Publishorial” that appeared in multiple DC comic books sold in November 1977 (cover date February 1978):

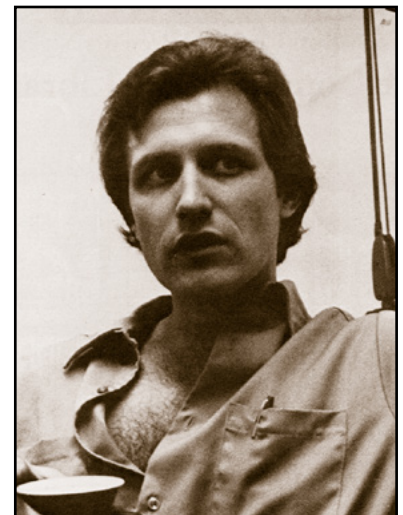
“There are two basic ways that a comic book company can produce magazines for you. The first way is to generate ideas from the top. Someone in a position of authority says: ‘*Star Wars* is really big. The public is hungry now for space opera. Let’s either try to get a license for *Star Wars* or, short of that, come out with a semi-science-fiction, inter-galactic battle book. If there’s ever a time when that kind of book will sell, now is it.

If the right people are agreed, an editor puts together an artist-writer team and commissions them to come up with a comic that fits the bill.

There is, of course, a second way for a book to be conceived. A writer or an artist (or both) approaches an editor and says: ‘There’s this idea I’ve been dying to do. I don’t



Working from Steve Englehart’s scripts for *Detective Comics*, Marshall Rogers readjusted the pacing in some scenes for greater impact and even restored a Joker soliloquy that editor Julius Schwartz had replaced. Photo from the 1979 Comic Art Convention booklet.



know what your publishing plans are or if there's a market for it or anything, but *I* think it's terrific. I want the chance to do it."

Well, that's the beginning of how we produce most comics at DC these days. We believe an idea that comes from a creator's deep personal enthusiasm carries with it an excitement and sincerity that cannot help but be communicated to the reader. In nine out of ten cases, we'd rather publish a comic book that originates with an artist or writer rather than one that we manufacture because the time seems right.

Still, there are many stages between the inception of an idea and its actual publication. So that we only publish those concepts to which we're truly committed, we've developed a pilot program through which every would-be creator must submit his work.

First, the creator must write an in-depth treatment which includes a detailed description of all the characters, the nature of their interaction, a lengthy synopsis of the first story, and some idea of where future stories will go. Joe Orlando and I examine each one of these proposals. Some we reject out of hand, some we send back for revision, and a select few we designate to 'go to pilot.' When a treatment moves into the pilot stage, a writer is assigned an editor and creates a full script. For this script the writer is paid a bonus rate since it's always on a first story that you truly scramble your brains.

If we like the script, we choose who we think is the best artist for the project and pay for model sheets of all the characters and props. When they're approved, the artist pencils the story. When the story is finally drawn, Joe and I scrutinize the entire project. Is it a comic *we'd* like to read? If it is, we have it inked, lettered, and colored and go to press."

News item printed in *Mediascene* #19 (May-June 1976)^{xxxi}:

"Artists and writers who actively create new characters and/or series will benefit from their efforts, at least for the first issue, with a special bonus. Plans now call for an extra ten dollars per page for writers on the first issue of their creation. Similar additions will of course be passed along to artists if they create series.

In the reprint area, residuals will now be sent to artists, writers and inkers every time one of their old stories is published. Pencilers will receive \$4.50 per page, inkers \$3.00 and writers \$2.00.

Artists will receive some extra money if their artwork is used in any merchandising capacity involving DC comics. This means that any artwork appearing on games, dolls, toys and gimmicks will turn into additional revenue for the DC artist who drew it."

[A memorable vehicle for promoting all DC titles premiered in select titles during the week of May 3, 1976. "The Daily Planet" was a faux newspaper/house ad that plugged DC comics scheduled to go on sale the following week and offered features like trivia quizzes and an outlet for reader questions called "Ask the Answer Man." The Answer Man was writer and

FREE DAILY PLANET FREE

VOLUME 76 ISSUE 1

WEEK OF MAY 3rd, 1976

BOB ROZAKIS: EDITOR

GIANT SUPERMAN BATTLES LUTHOR

Super-Sized Man of Steel Fights For Life (Metropolis) — When Clark (Superman) Kent awakes to find the seams of his pajamas split, it doesn't take long for him to realize he's suddenly grown a foot taller! But that's only the beginning of the problem because now he's "Seven-Foot-Two...and Still Growing!"

Joined by his fellow Justice Leaguer, *The Atom*, the Man of Steel soon discovers his problem is much greater than it seemed—while his body is increasing in size, his brain is not! In effect, *Superman* will become like a dinosaur—losing his reasoning power as his brain cells struggle to control the massive body!

The mastermind behind this scheme, arch-villain Lex Luthor, has his toe right where he wants him this time and he's getting ready for the kill! What will be the outcome of this colossal battle? Don't miss *SUPERMAN* #322, on sale the week of May 10th where Elliot S! Maggin, Jose Luis Garcia Lopez and Bob Oksner will provide the answers!



WHO IS RAGMAN?

(The City) — A new hero rises from the junk piles and rags to avenge the deaths of his father and his friends—his name: **RAGMAN!** Who is he? What are his bizarre powers? Who are the killers he seeks? These are the questions Joe Kubert, Bob Kanigher and The Redondo Studio will answer in "The Origin of the Tatterdemalion!" in *RAGMAN* #1, on sale the week of May 10th.



TRIVIA QUIZ #1

The *Star Spangled Kid* has been seeing a lot of action with the *Justice Society* in *ALL-STAR COMICS*, so he's the topic of our first trivia quiz. Do you know (1) his real name, (2) the name and secret identity of his partner, and (3) in what magazine they shared their adventures? The answers will appear in next week's *PLANET*!



ON SALE THE WEEK OF MAY 10th:

BATMAN #278: Batman and a visiting inspector from New Scotland Yard are on the trail of *The Wringer*, who begs them to "Stop Me Before I Kill!" Story by David V. Reed, art by Ernie Chua and Tex Blaisdell.

HOUSE OF MYSTERY #244: A duo of devilish delights as George Kashdan and Frank Thorne present "Kronos-Zagros-Eborak" and then Doug Moench and Franc Reyes join forces for "Your Epitaph is Only a Birthday Card." Plus a page of chilling chuckles by John Albano.

MUSKETEERS TO TRIM BEARD OF SPANISH KING

(France) — When Musketeer Porthos boasts and bets that he can trim the beard of the king of Spain, he has no idea of the adventure he will involve himself and his sword-swinging compatriots in. And when D'Artagnan's sword is stolen by a young woman, it is the master swordmakers of Toledo who will replace it.

So it's off to Spain for the Musketeers as they set out to uncover "The Secret of the Spanish Blade" as narrated by Bob Haney and Lee Elias! You'll find this exciting tale along with two classic stories of Robin Hood and his Merrie Men in *DC SPECIAL* #23 (starring *THE 3 MUSKETEERS*) on sale the week of May 10th.



METAL MEN #47: The Metal Band travel to the South Pole in search of missing government money and find themselves victims of "The X Effect" by Gerry Conway and Walt Simonson.

STAR SPANGLED WAR STORIES #20: It's a full-length battle drama in New York City for the *Unknown Soldier* as only David Michelinie and Gerry Talaoc can present it. Don't miss "The Back Alley War!"

AND ON SALE RIGHT NOW: OUR ARMY AT WAR #295
KAMANDI #44
GREEN LANTERN #90
SWAMP THING #24
STARFIRE #1
HOUSE OF SECRETS #141
SUPERMAN FAMILY #178

The first edition of Bob Rozakis' *Daily Planet* promotional page appeared in *House of Secrets* #141 and *Our Army At War* #295, on sale in early May 1976. The wavy lines on the page were the result of printer World Color switching from metal plates to cheaper plastic ones.

DC production staffer Bob Rozakis, who'd conceived the page earlier in the year and successfully convinced DC President Sol Harrison to run the feature in many of DC's titles each week. Beginning with issues on sale in December 1976, Jenette Kahn supplemented the *Daily Planet* with a monthly page in which she spoke directly to the reader. The goal was to emulate the chummy, conversational quality that Stan Lee had brought to Marvel Comics in the 1960s. Unlike the increasingly detached mid-1970s Stan, though, Kahn was actively involved in the goings-on at her company and well-positioned to pitch projects herself in the feature eventually dubbed the "DC Publisherial." The first 1976 page included a caricature of the new publisher by Neal Adams, the artistic superstar whose advertising age realism and visual dynamics had a huge influence on the look of superhero comics in the late



Prior to the introduction of the Milton Glaser-design in November 1976, the most recent version of DC's corporate logo—with its "Line of DC Super-Stars" tagline—had been around for three years.

1960s and early 1970s. Having largely left newsstand comics behind, he was then overseeing the Continuity Associates art studio with Dick Giordano.]

Michael Netzer (né Mike Nasser), then artist with Continuity Associates in a 2014 interview^{xxxii}:

"At the studio, we'd heard, from [DC writer] Cary Bates, as I remember, that Jenette Kahn was reaching out to experienced industry professionals in order to learn as much as possible about the comics business that she was relatively new to, having been more experienced in the children's magazine area. Some people apparently suggested she talk with Neal, which sent Cary inquiring about it. Neal suggested to Cary that she give him a call. Within a couple of days, they met for dinner to discuss the general state of affairs at DC and in the comics world relative to content, distribution and sales. They apparently hit it off and before you could say Cupid, were going out more frequently and for a while became an item. No need to get into that too much, other than that for a certain period of about a year or so they were together at the top of the game for DC."

Lead item in the DC section of "Newswatch" in *The Nostalgia Journal* #29 (cover date October 1976)^{xxxiii}:

"National Periodical Publications' is no more. The official title of the comics publishing arm of Warner Communications is now DC Comics Inc. (without the comma)."

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #29 (January-February 1977)^{xxxiv}:

"One of the changes I made when I came here was to make sure people knew what this company did. We were called National Periodical Publications Inc. Now that's a very stupid name for a comic book company. When credits on a TV show read 'Based on a book published by National Periodical Publications Inc.'—that told you nothing. I said, look, we're DC Comics, let's incorporate as DC Comics, change our name. Now the credits on a TV show read, 'Based on a book published by DC Comics, Inc.' So people know that it's a comic that *Wonder Woman* is based on, not a book, a comic book that anyone can buy at a newsstand. I've made *Wonder Woman* monthly so that some of the 15 million people who watch the TV show can find a copy of the newsstand as they walk past and hopefully buy it."

[Kahn had previously worked with acclaimed graphic designer Milton Glaser during her time with *Smash* and sought him out again in mid-1976.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{xxxv}:

"I thought we should call the company DC Comics and I wanted a logo that reflected our pride, so I asked Milton if he would design it. And Milton created a logo that hon-

ored our past by incorporating the circle and ‘D’ and ‘C’ we had used on previous covers. But at the same time, he re-drew the elements with freshness and strength so that they looked like a corporate seal.”

[The new DC bullet was unveiled on issues on sale in November 1976 and became a cherished symbol for a generation of fans into 2005. However, some within the industry chafed at its \$25,000 price tag.]

Roy Thomas, then Marvel writer-editor in an interview printed in *Alter Ego* #100 (March 2011)^{xxxvi}:

“They had spent a lot of money designing a new DC logo which basically consisted of tilting the old one 45 degrees. Money they could have paid out in page rates or bonuses went to outside people’s designs, to consultants. I liked Jenette, but she loved to bring in ‘experts’ from outside the field to do things, and I think sometimes that was just a waste.”

[One of the most effective “outsiders” that Kahn hired was Mike Gold, a Chicagoan who helped found the National Runaway Switchboard in the mid-1970s. In the course of promoting the program through children’s magazines like *Dynamite* and *Smash*, Gold had met Kahn and made a point of calling to congratulate her when she became DC’s new publisher.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an essay printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{xxxvii}:

“Several months later she called to ask me if I was interested in working for Neal Adams’ Continuity Associates (Dick Giordano had just left the company) as business manager. I had met Neal at various conventions over the years and we had a serious conversation while at Stuart Gordon’s Organic Theater in Chicago, but the concept of being anybody’s business manager wasn’t something

that would get me out of bed in the morning. However, I knew I was about to be, as the saying goes, ‘between radio shows’ and so I flew out to New York.

As it turns out, Neal was a no-show, but after giving me a tour of DC and meeting the staff (then a mere 35 people!) Jenette and I had a three-hour lunch at a swanky midtown Manhattan joint where we discussed comics with enormous passion. Mind you, this was several years before *Superman The Movie* and at least a decade after the term ‘graphic novel’ became a hi-brow euphemism: passionately discussing comics with a woman in public simply was *not* done, and clearly some of our dining neighbors found all that kind of obnoxious. We couldn’t care less.

I flew back to Chicago that evening, and two days later I received a phone call from Jenette. ‘I don’t want you to work for Neal,’ she said. That was convenient. ‘I want you to work for *me*.’

Hello?

This was a whole different kettle of fish. Jenette wanted me to be DC’s first in-house p.r. and marketing department, expressly (but not exclusively) charged with boosting DC’s presence in the then-burgeoning Direct Sales market.”

Lead item in “Newswatch” in *The Nostalgia Journal* #29 (cover date October 1976)^{xxxviii}:

“Mike Gold is in charge of DC Comics’ new press relations department. This is a major step in the comics industry’s relationship with the fan press. In the past, fanzines and newszines have had to rely on numerous sources, some accurate, some inaccurate. Gold has previously worked in the field of adolescent communications, and came to DC from his own promotion company in Chicago... One of Gold’s innovations is a newsletter of press releases he will be sending to fanzine editors, called Coming Attractions. (It will also be distributed through Phil Seuling’s direct sales service.)”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a cover letter included with the first Coming Attractions and printed in *The Nostalgia Journal* #29 (October 1976)^{xxxix}:

“In past, I’ve always felt that a company that didn’t establish some line of official communication had no right to bitch about being misrepresented by the press. Comic books have always been a victim of this, yet no one here at DC has expressly had the job of being company contact point for the fan (or even professional) press. A lot of things are always happening here—we’ve brought in a lot of new talent, we’re starting new titles, formats, projects...and more often than not, word would get out to the fan press via rumor. Items which might be accurate one day might change the next. You now have the Official Word on DC policies and events.”



Prior to coming to DC, Mike Gold and comic book retailer Joe Sarno were central to transforming Chicago’s modest annual comics convention into the Chicago Comicon, starting with a show spanning August 6-8, 1976. Photo from *The Buyer’s Guide for Comic Fandom* #249 (August 25, 1978).

Kurt Schaffenberger illustrated this advertisement for the Direct Currents Hotline.

Fans primarily heard pre-recorded responses from various DC writers, artists, and editors but several callers in early 1976 were polled about the hero they'd most like to see along with Aquaman, Batman, the Flash, and Green Lantern in that summer's *5 Star Super-Hero Spectacular*. The winning character was the Atom.

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #137 (November 1977)^{xI}:

“DC will open a toll-free telephone service that will provide a taped message concerning the latest DC comics by DC artists, writers, and editors that will change weekly. The service is called the DC Direct Currents Hotline and will begin on Monday, November 1, 1976... The national service will be operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week... Individuals who receive busy signals are asked to call back at a later time.”

John Morrow, future comic book historian in a 2018 recollection^{xII}:

“As a 15-year-old in Montgomery, Alabama in the late 1970s, for a wonderful but all-too-brief few weeks, I’d rush home every Monday from school, and madly dial the DC Comics Hot-Line 800 number to get their weekly news update. Marvel was fine, but I was a DC guy, so it was worth the finger-numbing dialing (we still had a rotary phone then), patiently waiting through dozens of busy-signals till it connected.”

Steven Thompson, future comic book historian in an article posted online in 2009^{xIII}:

“You called the number, originally once a week but later

less often, and you were regaled by one of your favorite creators with hard-to-hear news and information about upcoming comics and related topics via the miracle of... taped messages. A few years later this might have been a pay call but the Hotline was free!”

[Propelled by a house ad in all of DC’s titles, the Hotline received 24,000 calls in November 1976. Once 88,256 calls were logged in March 1977, a second line was installed.]

Announcement appearing in multiple DC comic books sold in August 1978 (cover date November):

“At times, the volume of busy signals has been so great the telephone company asked us to consider dropping the service. During the two hours immediately following the end of the school day, for example, circuits have been often jammed all across the United States.

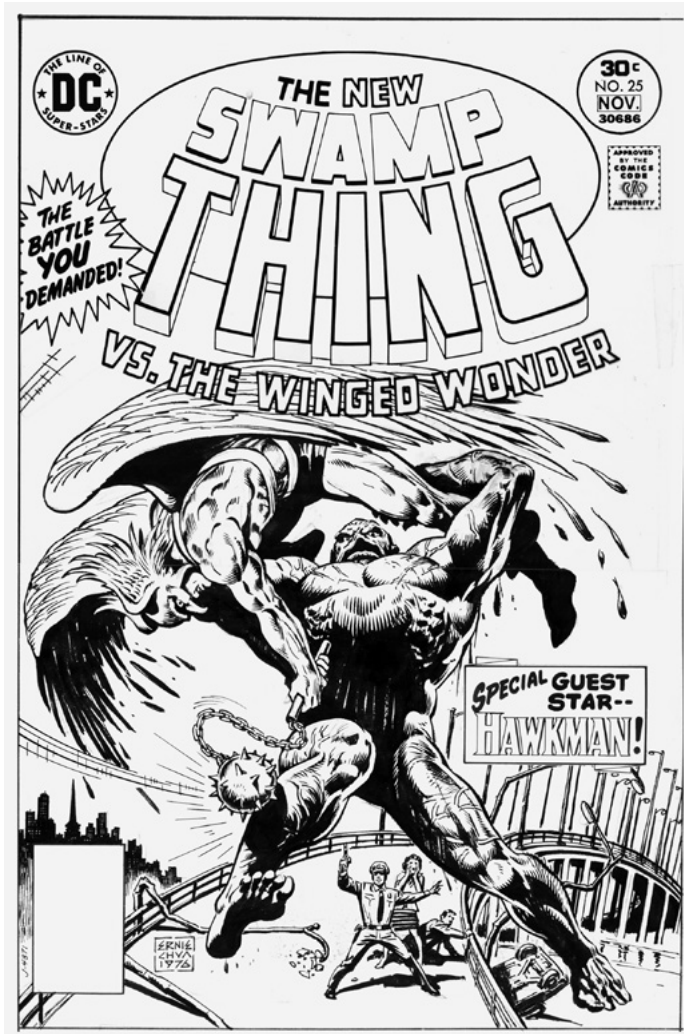
Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #147 (August 1977)^{xIII}:

“DC discontinued its Hotline as of August 8, 1977—because it got too hot. The line, originally structured to handle a peak of 60,000 calls a month, was receiving an average of 100,000 the last few months, far too many for the technical abilities of the phone company.”

INTERLUDE: RING OUT THE OLD... RING IN THE NEW

“Why would I kill a book that was selling? I will not go into why a lie like that was spread around, but I can tell you that I worked with distributors’ figures. A book lived or died by these numbers. DC was paid by distributors on the first return number. We got to keep that money, or give some

back if the book did not live up to the first return. Sometimes we received more money when final sales exceeded the first number, and other times we had to give back money if the book fell short of the first number. I had to answer, good or bad, to someone above.” – Carmine Infantino, *Comic Book Artist* #3 (Winter 1999).



The cover for the unpublished *Swamp Thing* #25 was drawn by Ernie Chan, then known as Ernie Chua. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

Often derided for canceling titles prematurely, Infantino might have taken some small satisfaction in the fact that his successors wasted little time in pulling the plug on a number of books... and quite abruptly in some cases. Faithful readers of the *Daily Planet*, DC’s recently-introduced coming attractions page, were mystified that summer by seeing references to comic books that were never published.

First up was *Swamp Thing* #25, meant to be the third installment of a radical makeover that transformed the atmospheric horror series into a soapy superhero feature. “Hawkman battles Swamp Thing in Portland,” a bulletin in *Daily Planet* #10 declared. “What will be the outcome? Ask David Kraft, Ernie [Chan] and Fred Carrillo. They’ll tell you to check out the answers in ‘The Sky Above’ in *Swamp Thing* #25, on sale the week of July 5th.”

The one-time critical favorite had been losing readers for some time and the revamp had been a last-ditch effort to save it. According to writer David Anthony Kraft, Hawkman was intended—on direction from Infantino—to become a co-star in *Swamp Thing*, in the hope of attracting superhero fans. Completely written and illustrated, the issue was spiked by the new administration and remains unpublished to date. The original art for its cover and several interior pages have since surfaced via sites like Heritage Auctions.

By contrast, the contents of the never-published *Blitzkrieg* #6—with an intended on-sale date of August 9—were left vague in a write-up appearing in *Daily Planet* #14. The unconventional series had explored World War Two from the perspective of three Nazi soldiers and the contents of its unreleased final issue—presumably by writer Bob Kanigher and artist Ric Estrada—were never used elsewhere.

A week later, *Daily Planet* #16 plugged issue #10 of *Claw the Unconquered* (by David Micheline, Keith Giffen, and Bob Layton) as going on sale on August 16. It did not.

“The book’s sales kept falling somewhere within the twilight zone of profit and loss—not *losing* money, but not really *making* it, either. So we tried new directions, adding penciller Keith Giffen with issue #8, and we felt that we were on our way to the right combination of imagination and

high fantasy. However, with space being needed for new books, and with *Claw*'s sales still marginal, our grim-visaged barbarian was sadly condemned to the cancellation axe as of issue #10. A woeful fate but, looking on the proverbial bright side, at least that gave me enough issues to tie up loose ends, reveal *Claw*'s mysterious origins and have him finally battle his longtime foe, Oculas of the Yellow Eye. Thus, *Claw* #10 was written, penciled and the book was dropped—only it was dropped *retroactively*, with issue #9! — David Michelinie, *Claw the Unconquered* #10 letter column (April-May 1978).

A year later, another cancellation provided an opportunity.

“Fate (in the form of DC treasurer Arthur Gutowitz) stepped in, pointing out that the last two dimension-hopping issues of *Claw* had perked sales up noticeably. And, he said, with the cancellation of *Metal Men* leaving room on the 1978 schedule, why not give *Claw* another try? (Bless you, Mr. Gutowitz.) There remained but one catch: since a year-and-a-half had passed since *Claw* #9 hit the stands, a ‘fill-in’ issue was deemed necessary to bring new readers up to date on the characters, conflicts and backgrounds. Ergo, *Claw* #9½. — David Michelinie, *Claw the Unconquered* #10 letter column (April-May 1978).

Claw #10 (which Micheline dubbed “*Claw* #9½”) went on sale in January 1978 and the story originally intended for the issue finally saw print in March’s *Claw the Unconquered* #11.

Also slated for August 16 release (and mentioned as “on sale right now” in Daily Planet #16), *The Joker* #10 wasn’t as lucky. If the issue had contained a standalone story, it seems probable that the effort (by writer Martin Pasko and artists Irv Novick and Vince Colletta) would have eventually seen print somewhere. Unfortunately, “99 and 99/100% Dead” was the first of a trilogy wherein Batman’s foremost foe killed the Justice League...or so he told an imprisoned psychiatrist. Without its concluding chapters, the story was worthless and presumed lost until Pasko found stats for the episode in 2011 and sold them on eBay. Outside of pirated scans, the episode remains unseen by most fans today.

More cancellations followed, although none so abrupt that they were advertised as being on sale. *Plop!*, DC’s three-year-old book of weird humor, ended in August with issue #24. *Blackhawk* #250 (on sale in October) capped a year-long revival of the classic aviator heroes with the death of charter member Chuck.

Four-Star Spectacular ended with issue #6 that same month, a victim more of Jenette Kahn’s dislike of reprint books than its sales. That disdain also prompted the discontinuation of DC’s tabloid collections, effective with July’s *Limited Collectors’ Edition* #C-48 and #49. Aside from the annual Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer edition that was released in October, no further issues were published in 1976.

Finally, DC lost its license to Edgar Rice Burroughs’ famed creations, ending the *Tarzan Family* umbrella title with issue #66 in August and *Tarzan* itself with issue #258 in November. Marvel Comics relaunched the Burroughs properties in March 1977. (Marvel, it should be noted, cancelled twice as many titles as DC—a total of 20—in 1976, while adding only nine new ongoing books to its line-up.)

Meanwhile, a plethora of proposals initiated under Infantino were struck down by Kahn. They included:

A *Green Arrow* and *Black Canary* tryout intended for *1st Issue Special* was, according to *The Comic Reader* #125 (December 1975) upgraded to a three-issue miniseries by Elliot S. Maggin and Mike Grell that would likely follow a similar *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* three-issue run by Denny O’Neil and Grell. The latter premiered in May 1976 to great success but the former stalled, its first issue left in limbo until editor Julius Schwartz incorporated it into October 1977’s *Green Lantern* #100.

(opposite page) Fans wondered for years about the unpublished story intended for *The Joker* #10 (by Martin Pasko, Irv Novick and Vince Colletta). Also struck down in 1976 were completed stories for *Savage World* (by Robert Kanigher and Doug Wildey), *Gorilla City* (by writers Cary Bates and Elliot Maggin and artists Joe Barney, Carl Potts, Terry Austin, and Bob Wiacek) and *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (by Gerry Conway and Nestor Redondo).



John Buscema drew the cover and interiors of Marvel’s first issue of *Tarzan*, written and edited by Roy Thomas.

SOME: A CRIMINAL WIFE OUT SOMEWHERE IN NORTH AMERICA. THE LOCATION IS NOT IMPORTANT-- WHAT'S GOING ON THERE IS!

HERE BEGINS THE STRANGEST SAGA EVER IN THE CAREER OF THE CLOWN PRINCE OF CRIME.

NOT A HOAX! -- NOT A DREAM! -- NOT AN "IMAGINARY TALE!" -- BUT WEIRDER THAN ALL THREE!

AND IN THE SPIRIT OF THAT CRYPTIC "TEASER", WE'LL EXPLAIN NO MORE-- NOT EVEN WHY THIS STORY IS TITLED...

99 and 99/100% DEAD!

SCRIPT: MARTIN PASKO
ART: IRV NOVICK and
EDITING: JULIUS SCHWARTZ
SPECIAL THANKS TO PAUL KUPPERBERG

SAVAGE WORLD #1, K-1537

GORILLA

A THOUSAND AND ONE SCIENTIFIC TAGS OCCUPY THE NATURALISTS ABOUT THE ARK... BUT... WHEN NIGHT CURTAINS THE SEAS, THEY ARE TRANSPORTED TO A DIZZY SAVAGE WORLD, THROUGH THE MAGIC OF FILM!

WHAT WE'RE SEEING, JAN, IS AN ANCIENT AFRICAN RITUAL DANCE! IT'S A FORM OF STORYTELLING...

...DESCRIBING A HUNT FOR A POWERFUL MOUNTAIN GORILLA!!

NOT SOMEONE I'D LIKE TO FIND IN MY BEDROOM, DOCTOR!

LET US MOVE FROM THE TWO-DIMENSIONAL PICTURE SCREEN... TO THE REALITY OF THE WILD AFRICAN JUNGLE!

FOR THE WARRIORS IT'S A MARK OF HONOR TO ATTACK THE WILD JUNGLE MAN...

...WHOSE ANFUL STRENGTH IS AWED BY LIONS AND OTHER FIERCE PREDATORY BEASTS!

OVER 5000 MILES SEPARATE THESE TWO MAJESTIC METROPOLISES-- NEW YORK AND GORILLA CITY! ONE CITY WELL-KNOWN FOR SUCH FAMOUS LANDMARKS AS A STATUE OF LIBERTY AND A WORLD TRADE CENTER-- THE OTHER CITY KNOWN ONLY AS A LEGEND-- FOR IT IS SAID NO HUMAN BEING HAS EVER GAZED UPON THE MONOLITHIC SPINES OF GORILLA CITY-- AND YOU SHALL SOON SEE WHY!

GUEST STARRING
GRODD
THE SUPER-GORILLA

THIS OUR STORY BEGINS IN NEW YORK-- SO PREPARE YOURSELF, READER, FOR A RIDE YOU'LL NEVER FORGET, AS WE FOLLOW...

THE SIMIAN CONNECTION!

HERE ARE LEGENDS BASED ON FACT AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS THE LEGEND OF ARTHUR.

THE BOY WHO BECAME KING

I WAS THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED, BEFORE, AFTER... AND DURING IN A WAY THE EVENTS SHAPED ME AS MUCH AS I SHAPED THEM... AND TOGETHER, THE EVENTS AND I... SHAPED HISTORY.

Gorilla City pivoted off of DC's long-standing love of simians with human intelligence, most prominently represented at the publisher in the mid-1970s by two reprint giants and Gorilla Grodd's membership in *Secret Society of Super-Villains*. The Flash foe Grodd was, in fact, featured in the 20-page *Gorilla City* pilot that was set in his African home. Written by Cary Bates and Elliot Maggin and drawn by Joe Barney, Carl Potts, Terry Austin, and Bob Wiacek, the story was edited by Julius Schwartz and later passed on to Gerry Conway before ultimately being written off. Excerpts from the story were later published in *Back Issue* #16 (April 2006).

King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table was initiated in 1975 as a lavish project meant to capitalize on DC's oversized tabloid editions. First used as a vehicle for reprints, the format was envisioned by Carmine Infantino as a large canvas for new content with features aimed at prospective readers uninterested in superheroes. Writer Gerry Conway (joined by editor Joe Orlando and artist Nestor Redondo) blocked out a four-issue opus that would follow the mythical King Arthur from his fabled boyhood to his death. A very premature ad was carried in all DC titles published in June 1975 but nothing ever came of it. Completed issues for "King Arthur" and Sheldon Mayer's "Rudolph's Easter Parade" each went unpublished as did "The Story of Jesus" (by Mayer and Redondo), a sequel to 1975's all-new "Bible" tabloid.

"We completed the first issue, and The Powers That Be decided that they didn't want to do original material for large format books. They just wanted to stick to team-ups and superheroes, already existing properties, so that seemed to be what happened to it." – Gerry Conway, *Back Issue* #11 (August 2005).

Conway's *Ninja the Invisible* lived up to his name by never gracing the pages of a DC comic book. Editor Murray Boltinoff detailed in *G.I. Combat* #228 (April 1981) that the character was a "friendly enemy of Batman" and that the first issue was drawn before the project was shelved. Inspired by a reader suggestion, Boltinoff revisited the notion of a ninja hero with writer Bob Kanigher shortly thereafter and introduced Kana the Shadow Warrior in *G.I. Combat* #232.

Elsewhere, Conway's "Return of the New Gods" in January 1976's *1st Issue Special* #13 was meant to be followed by another revival. "*Mister Miracle* will be returning in his own magazine later this year," *1st Issue Special* #13's text page reported, "courtesy of Martin Pasko, Ric Estrada, Joe Staton and editor Joe Orlando." That particular relaunch went unrealized but the title did return with a different creative team (including Steve Englehart as writer) in June 1977.

The final abandoned Conway project was an indisputable mercy-killing and one on which he served as editor. The Black Bomber—created and scripted by Robert Kanigher—told the story of a bigoted white man who transformed into a black superhero...with neither persona aware of the other. Charged with somehow salvaging Kanigher's scripts, Tony Isabella rejected it wholesale and created an African American superhero whom DC could actually be proud of: Black Lightning.

Although never published, the Black Bomber lived on in Isabella's later anecdotes and was referenced twice in series published in the 21st century. In 2006, a black hero named Big Thunder appeared in the Grant Morrison-scripted *Seven Soldiers: Bulleteer* #3, clad in a Black Bomber-style basketball uniform along with his Black Lightning-esque name. Two years later, writer Dwayne McDuffie included a more explicit parody of the character in 2008's *Justice League of America* #26 as the Brown Bomber.

Kanigher's *Sextet* (edited by Joe Kubert with art by the Redondo Studio) was problematic in its own right. It followed six female adventurers who were secretly bankrolled by a presumed male chauvinist.

"My concept was of beautiful astronauts, all of whom had qualified for the rigorous training. The six were: Shirley, an American Jewess; Moon, of Chinese ancestry; a Black; a Hispanic; a Caucasian



As writer and/or editor, Robert Kanigher helped create a succession of DC properties, among them the Black Canary, the Barry Allen incarnation of the Flash and Sgt. Rock. Photo by Michael Catron from *The Comics Journal* #85 (October 1983).



A page meant for the unpublished *Sextet* #1, written by Robert Kanigher and drawn by the Redondo Studio. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

beauty, Rose; and another I've forgotten. Their special space mission scratched for monetary reasons, the six advertised that they were willing to go anywhere for people who needed their special talents. One job was voluntary, an emotional freebie. A tribe in the Amazon jungle had been found to have never progressed from the Stone Age. Their natural happiness was about to be exploited by some assholes who were going to exhibit them and ruin them (for money). The Sextet chose to aid the tribe and stop the callousness of the exhibitors. How did the girls get their funds? Unknown to them, their anonymous benefactor was a man they hated, a handsome young multi-millionaire who successfully built his empire selling beauty products. The Sextet thought this outrageous but continued working for him, thinking the continuous checks came from an anonymous feminist." – Robert Kanigher, *The Comics* (vol. 6) #8 (August 1995).

Kanigher's *Savage World* proposal (edited by Joe Kubert and drawn by Doug Wildey) would have followed the lead of his 1956 "Kings of the Wild" concept from *Showcase* #2.

"Three different stories told from the points of view of three different animals. Not like Kipling's. Or Disney's. But in the personal and interpersonal relationships of their own kind, with their prey, or being hunted by other predators. Unlike *Kings of the Wild*, I did so much research on the different animals from *Arachne the Spider*, the legendary Greek spinner who made Aphrodite so jealous she turned her into an ugly spider, then, seized with compassion, made her continue spinning... it took me four times as long to research than to actually write a story. That's how I learned that man's bite is measured in tons. Miss Kahn wasn't taken with Joe's explanation of the concept so I took over and made her okay the book. I told her I would always open with a handsome, grey-at-the-temples Director of Anthropology [Allan Payne], whose beautiful young assistant [Jan Diamond] was secretly in love with him as they traveled. Joe was adamant about my leaving them out. I think I ignored him. Kahn must have thought she'd be present at each plotting. She didn't realize that before she turned around I had written more than three. I believe three issues were produced. Idea, story and art were great. I believe Carmine's replacement thought Joe and I were too independent." – Robert Kanigher, *The Comics* (vol. 6) #8 (August 1995).

Finally, there was Kanigher and artist Lee Elias' *Panzer*. Echoing the *Blitzkrieg* title, the feature had a Nazi tank commander—Lt. Helmut Kass—as its star. The two completed stories for the series were salvaged in the spring of 1978 when they were used as chapters in a larger Sgt. Rock story (*DC Special Series* #13).

Ultimately, the only Kanigher pitch (with editor/co-creator Joe Kubert) that made it to series was *Ragman*, premiering in May 1976. The atmospheric saga of a junkman-turned-crime-fighter was deemed a more commercial property for an audience where the superhero was increasingly king. Elsewhere in May, DC also launched *Starfire*, an otherworldly fantasy series by David Michelinie and Mike Vosburg that was also a rare adventure book with a female lead.

Mediascene #19 (May-June 1976) reported two other works-in-progress that were soon abandoned. Vince Colletta was said to be penciling a series about "a Puerto Rican Serpico-like character named Johnny Lopez, a plainclothes detective" while a *Seven Soldiers of Victory* book was meant to compete with Marvel's *Invaders* as a World War Two-based adventure "with a new cast."

Lastly, May saw the release of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #90, numerically returning where it left off in 1972. At the hands of Denny O’Neil and Neal Adams, the feature had been a critical darling for its exploration of topical hot-button issues but the 1976 revival (now illustrated by Mike Grell rather than Adams) opted for more neutral science fiction plots. Carmine Infantino had approved the update as a three-issue miniseries that would revert to a GL solo series with issue #93. Once she saw preliminary sales figures on *Green Lantern* #90, though, Jenette Kahn insisted that Green Arrow stick around and he was hastily written back into the book with readers none the wiser. The alternate script for *Green Lantern* #94—which introduced teenage hero Air Wave as Green Arrow’s replacement—was eventually illustrated and published in 1977’s *GL* #100.

Other reassessments marked Kahn’s early months at DC. Mike Grell’s *Warlord*, cancelled by a skittish Infantino with little sales data to support the decision, was returned to the schedule with issue #3 in July, seven months after the previous installment. *House of Secrets*, killed after one installment of an abortive Patchwork Man feature in November 1975, returned as an episodic horror title with issue #141 in May 1976. Kahn also feared that DC’s abandonment of the romance genre in 1975 may have been premature. To that end, she okayed the return of *Young Love* as a 48-page giant with issue #121 in July. Three other marginal titles briefly vanished from the schedule in 1976 before being given last chances. Three months passed between *Kobra* #4 and #5 and *Richard Dragon*, *Kung Fu Fighter* #12 and #13 while four separated *Plastic Man* #15 and #16.

Finally, Kahn (via Levitz) reached further into the past to resurrect two teams who hadn’t appeared in new stories since 1972 and 1970, respectively. The Teen Titans returned with issue #44 in August 1976 and the Challengers of the Unknown were close behind in September 1976’s *Super-Team Family* #8. After two more issues in the anthology book, the Challs regained their self-titled comic book in 1977.

Despite having a live-action Saturday morning counterpart on CBS since 1974, the *Shazam!* comic book had seen its sales drop so precipitously that it was reduced to a reprint book published on a quarterly basis. Kahn saw the situation as a wasted opportunity and urged the return of new material to the book that reflected the details of the TV show. Writer E. Nelson Bridwell devised a scenario that elegantly mirrored the TV show’s cross-country trek in an RV and Billy Batson’s “Mentor” while remaining true to the comic book’s continuity.

The new look was unveiled in June 1976’s *Shazam!* #25, which also served as a pilot for July’s companion title, *Isis*. Airing after *Shazam!* on CBS, the Egyptian-themed Isis was owned by Filmation but that didn’t stop DC from licensing the heroine for a comic book of her own. Both titles were rebranded as “DC TV Comics,” a Kahn initiative that was extended to two other titles in August: *Super Friends* and *Welcome Back, Kotter*.

The latter, like *Isis*, was licensed, albeit from a far edgier primetime TV show than the Saturday morning superstar. The *Kotter* comic book was kid-friendly enough, though, and Kahn hoped it would be a gateway to draw non-superhero fans to the line. *Super Friends*, meanwhile, was based on an animated variation on the Justice League of America that had aired on ABC since 1973 but had only appeared in a single comic book tie-in: a 1975 tabloid. Incredulous that no ongoing tie-in comic book had been explored, she insisted on one immediately.

END INTERLUDE

Promotional photo of Joanna Cameron as Isis. The live-action series ran Saturday mornings on CBS from 1975 to 1977 and included occasional team-ups with Captain Marvel from the companion program *Shazam!*



Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #29 (January-February 1977)^{xlv}:

“I think that DC has always owned the younger market, Marvel the older market, and Gold Key the younger still. As soon as you graduate into superheroes, you graduate into DC. Unfortunately, we didn’t have an upper area in which to move after you graduated from our younger comics—you had to graduate into Marvel. I think there’s a way to put out comics which find their own level, reach their own market, all under the same company’s roof. Basically, Marvel Comics—which I admire; they have some wonderful writers and artists—unfortunately they are very hard for a kid to read. A ten-year-old kid who picks up *The Avengers* has to be very sophisticated or totally dedicated fan to get through it because it demands tremendous mental involvement. Even at 29, I find it a bit of a strain to read *The Avengers*, as much as I am thrilled by it. I picked up a copy of Cary Bates’ *Superman* and it’s so easy to read. Like *Superman Family*, it is pure entertainment. That’s a very important part of comics. It doesn’t mean *The Avengers* shouldn’t be brilliant. It should, and *Dr. Strange* should and *Conan* should, but they’re going to be read by kids of ten. And, of course, there’s a certain amount of parental influence in the buying of comics.

A kid is in the supermarket with his mother buying things and he decides he wants a comic. She won’t buy him one that looks violent, gory and horrid, but if it says ‘DC TV’ and she recognizes *Isis* which her kid has been watching on Saturday morning TV, or *Shazam!*, *Welcome Back, Kotter*, or *Super Friends*, it looks all nice and familiar so she’s quite happy about buying those comics.”

Rival publishers Stan Lee and Jenette Kahn talked comic books at Philadelphia’s Temple University on November 15, 1979. Photo from *The Comics Journal* #47 (July 1979).



[Of the quartet, only *Super Friends* proved to be a real success, running for 47 issues into 1981. *Isis* and *Kotter* lasted a respective eight and ten issues, neither making it to 1978 (other than a *Kotter* tabloid). *Shazam!* ended soon after in February 1978 but the feature survived as part of the *World’s Finest* anthology through 1982. (Curiously, the *Wonder Woman* comic book did not display a DC TV logo despite shifting its backdrop to World War Two—effective with November 1976’s *WW* #228—to reflect the popular Lynda Carter TV series.) Kahn’s next attempt at rebranding a subset of the DC line was far more successful. In December 1976, the world was introduced to Dollar Comics.]

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #136 (October 1976)^{xlv}:

“Beginning in December, four titles, *The Superman Family*, *House of Mystery*, *World’s Finest* and *G.I. Combat*, will cost \$1.00, and will be 80-page giants. Before mathematicians start figuring out comparative costs with former 80-pagers, we will mention that these books will contain 66 pages of new material—roughly four times the material contained in a 30¢ book. What these books will resemble for the most part are Golden Age titles, i.e., they will return the multi-character book to the stands.”

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #29 (January-February 1977)^{xlvi}:

“The [current] package is absolutely untenable; 17 pages, and reprints, and a 30¢ cover price. There’s no place to go really. And yet there was a time when you paid 10¢ for a comic book and 10¢ for *Time* magazine. The trouble was that we didn’t keep up with the rest of the industry in price rises. 20 years passed before we dared to make the great leap to... 12¢. Then we tried 15¢... then 20¢, 25¢, and now 30¢. But, still all that is too low. *Time* magazine is now \$1.00, we should be \$1.00, and that’s where we’re headed. It’s a major experiment but I think it’s the answer not just for us but for Marvel, Archie, any comic book company.

The dollar package is just like the Golden Age format in that we will be having 80 pages, 14 of ads and 66 of all-new material. It’ll be a change for writers and artists to do stories of any length that seems appropriate to the story rather than cramming it into a meager 17 pages. It is going to give the wholesaler and retailer a chance to make money. The retailer who for years has not wanted to carry comic books in his shop, saying, ‘Why should I? What does 50% off 30¢ mean to anybody? All they do is clog up my newsstand and keep people from buying *Playboy* and all those other money-making magazines.’ Now a retailer can make more from selling a dollar comic book than he can from selling *Time* or *Newsweek*, because 50% off a dollar from us is more than 40% off a dollar from them.

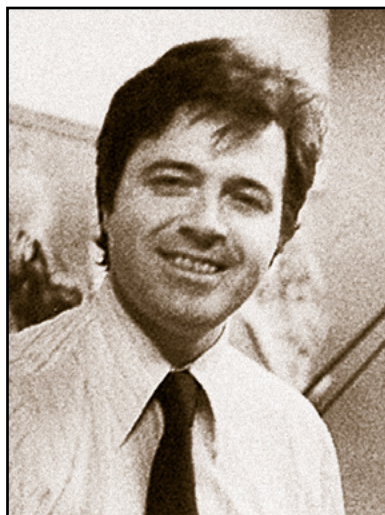
“So there’s something in it for him now, there’s something in it for the wholesaler. There’s certainly something in it for

us because our economics are better. There is something in it for the writers and artists because they have more flexibility, more latitude—and they can make money too. Then there's our reader. They are getting more editorial pages for their dollar than if they bought three and a third 30¢ comic books. They will be getting more, better material because we're paying more for our covers, getting people like Neal Adams, Bernie Wrightson and Curt Swan to draw them. We've designed the first dollar books to be anthology titles so that the reader doesn't feel like he's tying up all his money in one character. In *World's Finest*, for instance, they'll still be Superman and Batman, but also Green Arrow, Black Canary, Wonder Woman, etc. More characters for his money. I hope this will make retailers carry comics who haven't carried them before, and hopefully change the industry."

[Thanks to his new relationship with Kahn, Neal Adams returned to draw covers on several DC titles, including the early issues of all the early Dollar Comics.

Superman Family #182, December 1976's inaugural Dollar Comic, was a mixed bag. Sporting a lovely Curt Swan/Neal Adams cover image of smiling heroes, the issue incorporated Jimmy Olsen stories intended for the old 50¢ format and featured old-school characters like Superbaby and Krypto as well as Supergirl, Lois Lane, and "The Fabulous World of Krypton." Jaded older fans scoffed; general audiences did not. As the rollout continued into 1977, the content of *Superman Family* and *World's Finest* became more attuned to fan interests and sales kept rising.]

After an absence of more than two years, Neal Adams returned to DC in 1976 to draw the covers for its new Dollar Comics titles as well as books such as *Action Comics*, *The Flash*, *Justice League of America*, and *Superman*. Photo by Bob Keenan from *The Art of Neal Adams, Volume Two* (1977).



Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #39 (April 1978)^{xlvii}:

"Very soon you'll be paying 50¢ for a 17-page story. If, indeed, it's even possible to do *that* five years from now. If [Dollar Comics] don't succeed, comic books have a serious long-term problem. So we've gotta keep trying. We can afford to try where Marvel can't, because we're part of a massive con-

glomerate that believes in thinking about things on a long-term basis and not worrying about the money that's in their pocket today. Warner doesn't have to worry. Cadence is a very small company, and it has very little money to play around with. They can't *afford* the same courage, I suspect. We're going to use our courage, we're going to go out there. We think it's a good idea. We think, in our own private thoughts, that it's pretty much the salvation of the business. Creatively speaking, it's the opportunity to do things which you can't do in today's comics. Financially speaking, for the reader, I don't think it's a rip-off. Because you're getting a comic—you're paying a lot of money for it—but you're getting something for it. I don't think that's really true of a 17-pager."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #32 (August-September 1977)^{xlviii}:

"The reason why the dollar books are doing so well and why we're so optimistic about them is that they're more profitable books for the retailer to have. So that a guy who doesn't handle 35¢, or even 60¢ comics—a guy who is in an airport or shopping center—these types of places by and large do not handle comic books because the 6¢ to 8¢ they make off a 35¢ comic book is not worth the hassle, but on a dollar book they're making good money. They're making more than on a dollar copy of *Time* magazine as a matter of fact. The way we have it set up, the books will be on the stands for two months; that's the promise we made to these people. I don't think we'll change it until we have a full line of dollar books, rather than just the three we have scheduled at the moment. It's such a beautiful system we have now there's no reason to jeopardize it.

The first *Superman Family* dollar book: I know the fans didn't like it and I'm not going to apologize for that—the younger readers really did like it. That book was probably the most profitable, in terms of bucks, comic book to be published in maybe five years by anybody. It sold phenomenally well. [Since then, it has been] selling about 140,000 [copies per issue]. That's a real rough estimate off the top of my head. But, every point above break even on a dollar book is three times more profitable than a point on a 35¢ comic—and the book came in about 12 points above break even. That's phenomenal—that's terrific!"

News item printed in *Mediascene* #27 (September-October 1977)^{xlix}:

"According to Mike Gold, [Dollar Comics] seem to have a somewhat cumulative effect, not necessarily selling more on the regular newsstand, but selling in more non-newsstands. The average increase in sales after five issues has been about 200% in these grocery stores, mini-marts, etc. Sales on *G.I. Combat* alone have skyrocketed 320%, partly due to this increased marketing platform and partly due to Joe Kubert's strikingly effective covers."

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: EARLY 1977

Action Comics (starring Superman, with “The Private Life of Clark Kent” and “The Sporting Life of Steve Lombard” as back-up features)

Adventure Comics (starring Aquaman, with Manhunter From Mars as back-up feature)

All-Star Comics (starring the Justice Society of America)

Batman

Batman Family (50¢ giant starring Robin, Batgirl, and Man-Bat)

Black Lightning

The Brave and the Bold (Batman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)

DC Special (50¢ anthology title featuring various DC superheroes)

DC Super-Stars (50¢ anthology title featuring various DC genres)

Detective Comics (starring Batman)

The Flash

Freedom Fighters

Ghosts (supernatural short stories)

G.I. Combat (Dollar Comic starring the Haunted Tank, O.S.S., and “Women At War,” plus various war short stories)

Green Lantern (starring the team of Green Lantern, Green Arrow and Black Canary)

Hercules Unbound

House of Mystery (Dollar Comic featuring supernatural short stories)

House of Secrets (supernatural short stories)

Isis

Jonah Hex

Justice League of America

Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth

Karate Kid

Metal Men

New Gods

Our Fighting Forces (starring The Losers, with back-up features starring individual squad members)

Plastic Man

Ragman

Richard Dragon, Kung-Fu Fighter

Secret Society of Super-Villains

Secrets of the Haunted House (supernatural short stories)

Sgt. Rock (with war short stories as back-ups)

Shade, the Changing Man

Shazam!

Starfire

Superboy (starring the Legion of Super-Heroes)

Super Friends

Superman

Superman Family (Dollar Comic starring Supergirl, Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, Krypto, and Nightwing & Flamebird)

Super-Team Family (50¢ giant featuring the Challengers of the Unknown, plus Doom Patrol reprints)

Teen Titans

Unexpected (supernatural short stories)

Unknown Soldier

Warlord

Weird War Tales (supernatural war stories)

Weird Western Tales (starring Scalphunter)

Welcome Back, Kotter

Witching Hour (supernatural short stories)

Wonder Woman

World's Finest Comics (Dollar Comic starring Superman & Batman, Green Arrow, Black Canary, the Vigilante, and Wonder Woman)

Young Love

[Some in the industry foresaw an endgame wherein new comic books would cease to exist, subsequently sustained only by old material culled from their archives. Harvey Comics was already mixing unidentified reprints with increasingly few new stories. Charlton, after shuttering its comics division on September 17, 1976, returned to spinner racks in the summer of 1977 with a line composed almost entirely of previously-run content. Jenette Kahn recalled a conversation with Warner's William Sarnoff before she was hired.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012):

"Bill said, 'We have four decades' worth of comics, hundreds of titles, and we're thinking we should reprint them since comics lose money and we make all our profits through merchandise and media.

'That's a really terrible idea,' I said (oh, the chutzpah of youth!). 'It's the ongoing exploits and new adventures of the characters that are the lifeblood of the company and make licensing and media possible. If you don't publish new stories, the characters will have a radioactive half-life and eventually all the media and merchandise will disappear.'"

[Kahn put her words into action and stamped out the reprints that had supplemented multiple DC titles over the past several years. Each of DC's 48-page giants—*Batman Family*, *DC Special*, *DC Super-Stars*, *Super-Team Family*—shifted to all-new content in 1977 while the *Limited Collectors' Edition* tabloids were revised initially as "Best of..." showcases that collected material like the early 1970s *Batman/Rā's al Ghūl* serial by Denny O'Neil, Neal Adams, Irv Novick, and Dick Giordano. Similar treatment was afforded Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson's celebrated *Swamp Thing* stories (1972-1974), which were collected two-at-a-time in editions with new wraparound covers by Wrightson.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #29 (January-February 1977):

"I don't really believe in reprint books unless you have a very good reason for reprinting a particular story. Reprints have no justification except that you want them to pad out a comic. Now, there are some classic stories that truly deserve to see the light of day again, for example, the *Rā's al Ghūl* four-part story from *Batman*. It's a wonderful story that we'll be reprinting complete very soon. So that's a good reprint, but reprinting for the sake of money is a terrible idea."

[Most 48-page giants and 80-page Dollar Comics continued to feature multiple stories but Steve Englehart's success with full-length 34-page installments in *Justice League of America* was a testament to the potential of the thicker books. *Superboy*—retitled *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes*—was promoted to the *JLA* format in June 1977 while a series of one-shots—either 48 or 80 pages—allowed writers and artists room to breathe. Published under the umbrella title of *DC Special Series*, the editions included a 63-page Superman adventure in one issue and a 64-page Wonder Woman opus in another. It was a huge departure from the 17-page tales appearing in their regular books.

Englehart also won accolades for his Marvel-esque weaving of multiple threads from disparate DC stories—i.e., linking Jack Kirby's 1975 *Manhunter* revival to the Green Lantern Corps—into a compelling narrative. It was the sort of thing that Kahn encouraged from all of her writers and editors. Tony Isabella, for instance, made a point of peppering his new *Black Lightning* series with details from other DC books such as supporting cast members Inspector Henderson (from *Superman*) and Peter Gambi (brother of criminal tailor Paul Gambi in *The Flash*).

Resident DC—and general history—scholar E. Nelson Bridwell embraced that directive with relish in his *Super Friends* scripts, dotting every story with references to the larger DC Universe and elevating it above its cartoon roots. The occasional in-joke wasn't above him, either, as when a telethon sequence included a pledge from Tony Stark (a.k.a. Marvel's Iron Man) for the American Heart Foundation. For like-minded fans of the era such as Beppe Sabatini, Scott Gibson, and Al Schroeder III, Bridwell's trivia-laden letter columns in *Super Friends* and *Superman Family* (which he edited) were a particular treat, equaled only by Paul Levitz's frank, newsy responses in books like *All-Star Comics* and *Legion of Super-Heroes*.]

One of the first fans to turn pro, E. Nelson Bridwell began working at DC on January 13, 1964 as Superman editor Mort Weisinger's assistant. Photo from *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #17 (April 1978).



Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #29 (January-February 1977)ⁱⁱⁱ:

“I’m for a more united universe here at DC. Eventually I hope to have everybody in the same cosmos, all the cities existing in the same time, Clark Kent being able to talk about Batman’s latest exploits in Gotham City on his news shows, etc. I don’t quite know how I’m going to untangle the present situation and it might take a long time. However, I don’t think the reader is bothered that much because each comic has its own set of rules. So you pick it up and read it within the framework set by the cover, the splash page, etc. It makes sense to you...

I’ve centralized DC itself. We don’t have individual ‘candy shops’ anymore—each editor having his own group of books that are about three universes apart from everybody else’s books. They’ve all started to read each other’s books to see what’s going on. There’s only one maniac needed at the helm and I’ve appointed myself to that task! Then Joe Orlando and Vinnie Colletta help further down as Managing Editor and Art Director, respectively. Everybody from Julie [Schwartz] to Murray [Boltinoff] to Joe Kubert to Denny O’Neil to Jack Adler’s production department have all been totally cooperative in terms of trying to make DC one company.

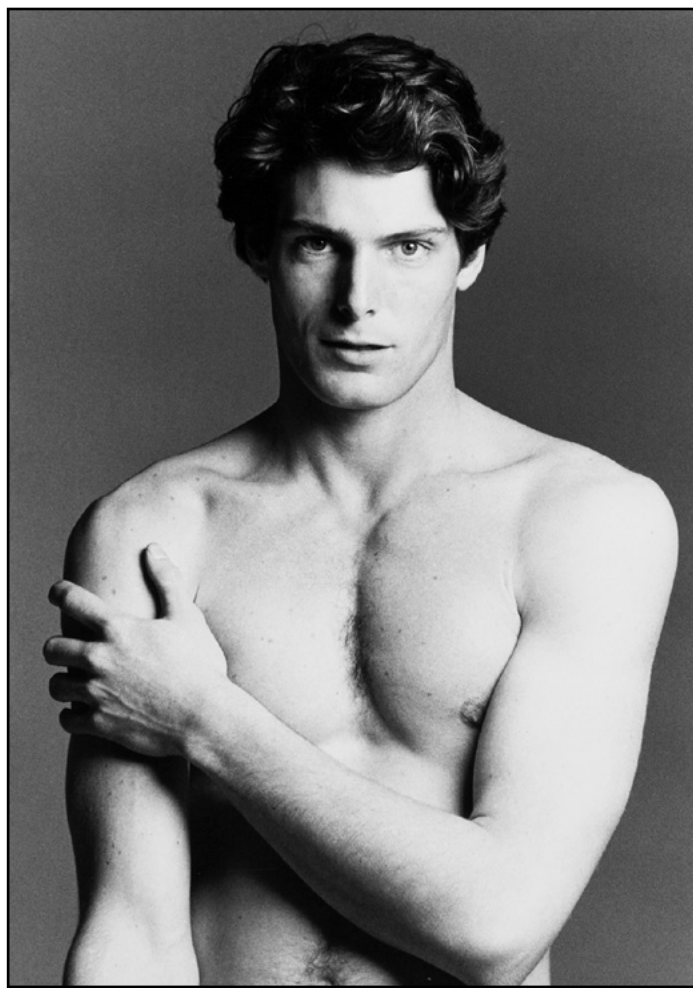
We do ‘dumb’ things now, like give birthday parties for people! Every month we look at the final sales on books and the two editors that have the best-selling books—the ones with the greatest increase in sales—get an award and we put their pictures on display with their books under their photographs. We hope that other people will see that and say, ‘I wonder why the book did so well?’ All the covers now go up on a bulletin board because people didn’t read other people’s books, and to this day may or may not read the entire line for sure, but it is a good thing for them to go by and see how their covers compare to others. Then they think, ‘Hey, I’m really proud of that.’ Or ‘Wow, that’s a really bad cover I did.’ There are small changes that I truly believe in and are happening.

There are other things like giving money to writers and artists for reprinting their work—anywhere. Not just in comics, but in books like *Secret Origins of the Super DC Heroes*. Anybody who creates a new character gets a share in the merchandising. If somebody comes along with a new concept that sounds real good then we’ll pay more for the realization of that script if it seems a necessity. At that point, if we truly believe in it, we will go to the press based on an emotional conviction that it’s a good comic. We’re giving out contracts that include group insurance and a health plan to protect freelancers—something unique in the industry right now. People under contract to us that fulfill their workload during the course of the year get the equivalent of vacation pay. Then there’s profit-sharing. For instance, this book we’re doing, *Superman Vs. Muhammad Ali*. Besides the fact that Julie Schwartz as editor gets paid extra for editing it, he will receive a bonus if it sells well. Denny O’Neil, who’s writing it, and Neal Adams, who’s drawing it, both get contracts in advance that will guarantee them a share of the profits. And that’s true of every special project we do.”

[The prospect of earning a percentage of merchandising monies was no small thing to creators, particularly with the lesson of Siegel and Shuster still fresh in mind. The movie that had triggered their 1975 crusade for justice moved closer to reality in 1977. After months of speculation that saw everyone from Burt Reynolds to James Caan cast in the title role, *Superman: The Movie* finally had its leading man as of February 1977.]

Michael Catron, then *The Comics Journal* editor in a news item printed in *The Comics Journal* #33 (April 1977)ⁱⁱⁱⁱ:

“Broadway actor Christopher Reeve has been chosen as the man from Krypton and Anne Archer, most recently seen in the television miniseries *Seventh Avenue*, will play Lois. As previously reported, Marlon Brando will play Jor-El and Gene Hackman will portray Lex Luthor. Richard Donner will direct. Filming begins March 28, according to a spokesperson for the production.”



Initially a relative unknown in the CBS soap opera *Love of Life* (1974-1976) and Broadway play *A Matter of Gravity* (1975-1976), Christopher Reeve became an overnight star when he was cast as Superman. Photo by Francesco Scavullo from *Scavullo On Men* (1977).



[Although the news of Anne Archer’s casting was premature (Margot Kidder ultimately starred as Lois Lane), Christopher Reeve had the role locked down and visited the DC offices late in February.]



Michael Catron, then *The Comics Journal* editor in a news item printed in *The Comics Journal* #33 (April 1977)^{iv}:

“Everyone at DC was excited over Reeve’s visit. [Superman writer Martin] Pasko showed signs of nervousness, Sol Harrison was positively beaming, and Mike Gold was running around trying to make sure that everything went smoothly. Reeve was just as nervous. I could see he wanted to make a good impression on Superman’s biographers. The atmosphere was charged with cautious, hopeful tension. It reminded me of two people trying to make a good impression with each other on the first date. Both Reeve and the DC staff seemed to feel that this could be the start of something big.”



[Flushed with enthusiasm, Mike Gold got to work on “The Great Superman Movie Contest,” wherein readers were encouraged to clip coupons from various DC titles in exchange for a chance at winning a cameo in the film. Advertised on every cover published in May and June 1977, the promotion generated thousands of responses and Christopher Reeve himself drew the names of the winners on July 20: teenagers Ed Finneran of San Lorenzo, California and Tim Hussey of Springfield, Massachusetts. The duo ultimately appeared in the movie as Smallville football players.

When the film crew was shooting in New York City on July 13, 1977, Sol Harrison was on hand to witness the action. Shortly after 9:30 that evening, the cumulative effects of a series of lightning strikes knocked out power and left most of the city in the dark until the following day.]



Sol Harrison, then DC President in an interview printed in *Comics Feature* #20 (October 1982)^v:

“I was there the day they photographed the scenes of Superman’s first appearance. I went to say hello to the producer, to see what they were going to be shooting. And that

Christopher Reeve visited the DC offices to draw winners in 1977 (middle photo, with Jenette Kahn and Sol Harrison) and 1979 (top photo) for the publisher’s two Great Superman Movie Contests.

Winners Tim Hussey and Ed Finneran met former screen Superman and Lois Lane (Kirk Alyn and Noel Neill)—now cast as Lois Lane’s parents—while on the movie set. Photos from *Direct Currents Newsletter* #14 (1979), *All-New Collectors’ Edition* #C-62 (1978) and *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #16 (1977).

was the evening we had the blackout. New York City blacked out. Now, they had their own generators that could have lit up the immediate scene, but the buildings across the street had to have their lights on. So they made a decision about half an hour later, that they were not going to shoot anything the next day. I was there with one of my writers, and I said, 'I'm going to call my wife, and tell her where I am, that there's a blackout, and I'll be home as soon as we can make it.' And I go to the phone and put in a dime, and there's nothing. I said, 'I wonder if the telephone lines are down? That's funny.'

And one of the movie men came over, and said 'Mr. Harrison, that's a prop.' And that was the prop—y'know the bit where Clark Kent runs over to the telephone booth? That was a gag that, no matter who you are, that's the one point that you bring out. And later, I told the story to [former DC proofreader] Gerda [Gattel], and she sent it to *Reader's Digest*, which printed it [in its August 1978 issue as "All in a Day's Work."]."

[Along with the forthcoming movie, DC could also boast of the *Wonder Woman* TV show, which moved from ABC to CBS—and a present-day setting—in 1977. On Saturday morning, ABC's *Super Friends* reruns were replaced in the fall with new episodes and new characters: Zan and Jayna—the Wonder Twins—and pet monkey Gleek, plus guest-heroes Atom, Flash, Green Lantern, Hawkgirl, Hawkman, Rima, and the made-for-TV Apache Chief, Black Vulcan, and Samurai. Meanwhile, CBS began airing a new *Batman* animated series that—with the impish Bat-Mite as a regular—was far from the Dark Knight that comic book fans were accustomed to.

In partnership with Warner Books, DC also hoped to spin off its heroes into prose.]

Michael Catron, then *The Comics Journal* editor in a news item printed in *The Comics Journal* #33 (April 1977)^{vi}:

"Neal Adams is drawing covers for the Warner paperback novels featuring DC characters: *Batman*, by Denny O'Neil; *Superman*, by Elliot Maggin; and *Wonder Woman*, by Jane Lynch, former wife of Underground cartoonist Jay Lynch. Dell Books will be publishing a *Challengers of the Unknown* novel by Ron Goulart."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #32 (August-September 1977)^{vii}:

"One of the major differences between DC and Marvel is the way the corporations are set up. Marvel is the most lucrative part of Cadence Industries, in fact an awful lot of Cadence is losing money hand over fist—it's an unfortunate situation with them. Whereas DC Comics, as a part of Warner Communications,



Lynda Carter's spot-on portrayal of Wonder Woman elevated the popularity of the DC Comics heroine to a level she hadn't experienced since the 1940s. Launched as a TV movie in 1975, the *Wonder Woman* series aired on ABC during 1976 and 1977 and on CBS from 1977 to 1979.

is an extremely profitable operation not only for publishing's sake—we do not publish books that lose money, we cancel them—but also for the other peripheral reasons which I'll get into in a minute, it is still one of the lower ends of the totem pole. DC makes millions and millions of dollars, but something like *A Star Is Born*, which is just one movie that Warner Brothers has released, makes more money. You add all the other movies and record labels and the book publishing operation and the cable TV and television games they make into it [and DC is just a drop in the ocean].

But it's a prestigious thing for them. Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman are prestigious. But this is the important thing: Cadence owns Curtis Distribution which distributes Marvel. Warner owns Independent News which distributes DC Comics but Warner also owns the Licensing Corporation of America which licenses all of our characters to toys and stuff. So DC makes money out of licensing and LCA makes money out of licensing and both DC's and LCA's profits go to Warner. Whereas Marvel makes money off licensing and Columbia Pictures, which

handles their licensing, makes money but that doesn't go to Cadence. Plus, many of our novelizations are published by Warner Paperbacks. DC makes money off of it, and Warner Books makes money off of it both going to Warner Communications.

The *Wonder Woman* TV show is produced by Warner Brothers Television, the same thing is applicable here. So if we take the whole package operation, the fact that Warner has first crack at all of our material is an extremely lucrative thing for Warner Communications. Like the *Superman* movie. It's being produced by the Salkinds but Warner is distributing it. So again we make money, LCA makes money, Warner Brothers makes money—WCI gets it all.”

[Although Dell's *Challengers* book made it into print later in 1977, only Maggin's novel—buoyed by the *Superman* film in 1978—was ever realized among the Warner trio, albeit with a photo of Christopher Reeve rather than a Neal Adams drawing. Marvel—enjoying live-action versions of Spider-Man and the Incredible Hulk on CBS in 1977—had better luck with prose and kicked off a series of novels—beginning with Spidey—in 1978.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #29 (January-February 1977)^{lviii}:

“I think Marvels really embody the gestalt of the sixties, a time when there was an immediate cult following for anything that was new or different. They founded a college readership that was very avid and collected *Hulk*, *Spider-Man* and *Fantastic Four* in chronological order. It became almost an underground thing in the very beginning, around 1962—it was

considered very good to be ‘into Marvel Comics.’ But it is now 1976, going on 1977. I do not believe in imitating someone even at the right time, but certainly to imitate something I feel is now passé would be a terrible error on our part.

The only way to truly create something new is for an artist and writer, together as a team, or with one of them as the driving force, to come up with something that he, she or they truly believe is terrific; that they want so much to do; would kill to do. Because then that will come through somehow in the comic book. It will be a good comic book that way and it will find people who want to read it. But if comics come out of something that already exists, like TV police shows, then they are going to be pale imitations. They would certainly have no long life. To me it's like selling stock and selling out at the right time. If you can get in while a TV show is hot and get out with a small profit before the ratings start to drop, it is great, but that's not true comics. True comics come from someone lying in bed on a hot summer's night in Ohio, thinking, ‘Wouldn't it be great if I could fly?’”

[The romantic imagery of creation didn't fare so well under the harsh light of the real world. Ohio native Tony Isabella's experience was a case in point. It began with an abandoned Gerry Conway-edited project. Created and written by Robert Kanigher, the Black Bomber was intended to be DC's first African American hero to star in his own book (as opposed to earlier supporting characters Mal Duncan, Vykin, John Stewart, and Tyroc).]

Tony Isabella, then DC Comics writer in an article published in *The Comics Buyer's Guide* #921 (July 12, 1991)^{lix}:

“They had completed the scripts for the first two issues of *The Black Bomber*. Then [Conway] left DC for [Marvel]... DC still wanted to publish *The Black Bomber*, but felt these scripts were not up to snuff. [Paul Levitz] asked me to read them with an eye toward rewriting them and scripting the title thereafter. Despite my aversion to this literary equivalent of claim-jumping, my debt to Paul and my financial situation mandated that I at least read the scripts.”

Robert Kanigher, then DC Comics writer in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #85 (October 1983)^{lx}:

“[*The Black Bomber* was] a white Archie Bunker by day, a longshoreman with all the racial and social prejudices, with a white girlfriend; and a black superhero at night, with a black girlfriend. A white and black Jekyll and Hyde. I took great care in a quasi-scientific explanation for the change in pigmentation. Naturally, neither side of the character was aware of the other... It would have been DC's first black superhero. I wanted to call it *Black and White*.”



The *Marvel Novel Series* (1978-1979) consisted of 11 prose volumes featuring most major Marvel heroes of the day. Seen here are volumes one and four, with Spider-Man and Captain America. Respective cover art by Bob Larkin and Dave Cockrum.

Tony Isabella, then DC Comics writer in an article published in *The Comics Buyer's Guide* #921 (July 12, 1991)^{lxii}:

“In each of the two completed Black Bomber scripts, the white bigot risks his own life to save another person whom he can’t see clearly (in one case, a baby in a stroller) and then reacts in racial slur disgust when he discovers that he risked his life to save a black person. He wasn’t aware that he had two identities, but each identity had a girlfriend and the ladies were aware of the change. To add final insult, the Bomber’s costume was little more than a glorified basketball uniform... Paul asked me if I could be more specific in my complaints. I asked the obvious question. ‘Do you *really* want DC’s first black superhero to be a white bigot?’ I swear Paul smiled. Even with his well-known penchant for thrift, he knew these scripts would *have* to be written off. Paul just wanted someone to come up with one irrefutable reason for doing so.”

[Isabella’s iconic alternative was an inspirational former Olympiad named Jefferson Pierce who now gave back to his community as a school teacher. Pierce’s costumed alter ego came a few weeks later when—inspired by cover copy on *Wonder Woman* #225—Isabella dubbed his hero Black Lightning. The series was first announced in the fan press in mid-1976 but months of development preceded its 1977 premiere.]

Tony Isabella, then DC Comics writer in an article published in *The Comics Buyer's Guide* #1093 (October 28, 1994)^{lxiii}:

“There were still hurdles to be overcome, of course. A high-ranking DC executive wanted Jeff Pierce to be your basic black Clark Kent, who, at that particular juncture of his career, was still a major whiner. Considering the dearth of black heroes in comics, I wanted him to be a positive influence in both of his identities.

Another DC executive came to my rescue. He reminded me that the first executive had the functional attention span of lead and would not remember our conversation. In other words, just ignore what the first executive said. I did.

A third DC executive—it’s a wonder any actual work got done in those days—wanted me to include ‘merchandising possibilities’ in the book. Specifically, he wanted Black Lightning to have a Lightning-Car and a Lightning-Plane. I acted out the following scenario for the executive:

Lightning would pull up in front of a pusher’s building in his Lightning-Car. He enters and beats assorted miscreants to a fare-thee-well. He comes out, and what’s left of his car is now sitting on blocks, stripped. The next night, the Lightning-Plane flies over the neighborhood and strafes it clean.

The executive was not amused. He went in search of somewhat more cooperative individuals.”

[Instances like that were comparatively trivial when contrasted against what would be Isabella’s foremost complaint against DC Comics. Black Lightning, he was assured by President Sol Harrison, would be a ground-breaking character whom Isabella would co-own.]



Tony Isabella’s Marvel writing assignments included a run on prominent black superhero Luke Cage, during which long-time supporting character Bill Foster developed into Black Goliath. Isabella and artist Arvell Jones also introduced African American heroine Misty Knight as a notable figure in the Iron Fist series. Photo from *Fantastic Fanzine Special* #1 (February 1972).

Tony Isabella, then DC Comics writer in a recollection posted online in 2012^{lxiiii}:

“Black Lightning was not a work-for-hire creation. I entered into a partnership agreement with DC Comics to produce comic books with my creation. It was supposed to be an equal partnership with both sides making all decisions jointly to our mutual benefit. As part of this deal, I was to receive 20% of all monies earned from Black Lightning except for the profits from the traditional comic books we would be creating. I would receive my cut from merchandising, from other media use, and, though it was a very small part of the industry at the time, any hardcover, paperback, or trade paperback reprints of material featuring *Black Lightning*. This was a simple straightforward agreement which DC immediately violated.

The first time DC Comics violated our agreement was when it named Bob Rozakis as the editor of Black Lightning without my approval. However, since I liked Bob, thought he’d be a good editor and knew (or thought I knew) that I’d still have creative control of the title, I didn’t object. After the sometimes malicious chaos I had to deal with at Marvel after Roy Thomas stepped down as editor-in-chief, I was eager to make my new relationship with DC work. They loved me, right? They wouldn’t hurt me.”

[Rozakis was succeeded as *Black Lightning* editor by Jack C. Harris, who—along with Joe Orlando—selected young Trevor Von Eeden as artist on the series. Astonished when his submission of art samples prompted an invitation to visit the DC offices, the 16-year-old followed through. Upon discovering that Von Eeden was black, Harris and Orlando quickly warmed to the idea of making him penciller on *Black Lightning*.]

Trevor Von Eeden, then DC Comics artist in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #8 (Feb. 2005)^{xiv}:

“I had no idea that this was their first black superhero [in his own series]. I had no idea it meant anything. It’s just that I heard I was going to be drawing a comic book at 16-years-old and I was standing there, almost fainting. [Orlando] asked me if I’d do it and I said, ‘Sure, I’d be happy to.’ He said, ‘We’re going to give you \$22,’ and I thought he meant for the whole book [instead of per page]. I was so ecstatic. To me, that was an unheard of sum. That was like manna from Heaven.”

Tony Isabella, then DC Comics writer in a recollection posted online in 2012^{xv}:

“The second time DC Comics violated our agreement was when it hired Trevor Von Eeden to draw *Black Lightning* without my prior approval. It had been my intention to recruit one of Marvel’s young artists. DC wanted me to bring that ‘Marvel magic’ to their comics, so that seemed like the way to go. But, after meeting Trevor and seeing his enthusiasm, I was okay with him drawing *Black Lightning*. He did good competent work drawing my scripts. It wasn’t outstanding, but it was good.”

[The one thing that Isabella couldn’t roll with was the fact that Sol Harrison would ultimately renege on their agreement of co-ownership. Even before he realized that, the writer was not a fan of DC’s President.]

Tony Isabella, then DC Comics writer in a recollection posted online in 2010^{xvi}:

“Sol Harrison thought it was hilarious to introduce me as ‘DC’s black writer.’ One of many reasons I loathed the man.”

[January 1977’s premiere of *Black Lightning* #1 kicked off several months of appearances by new African American heroes in the DC line. Writer Bob Rozakis introduced DC’s first black costumed heroine—the Bumblebee—in March’s *Teen Titans* #48, subsequently unmasking her as Karen Beecher, girlfriend of team member Mal Duncan. In May, scripter David Michelinie introduced the company’s first black war hero to star in his own series: Ulysses Hazzard a.k.a. Gravedigger in *Men of War* #1. Michelinie had also introduced African American villain Pulsar in *Karate Kid* #8 and retroactively revealed that Aquaman’s nemesis Black Manta was, well... black. Other debuts of note included South African speedster Impala (*Super Friends* #8), Ben Turner’s Bronze Tiger alter ego (*Richard Dragon, Kung Fu Fighter* #18), and Tempest, part of the new Doom Patrol in *Showcase* #94-96.

The legendary *Showcase* title had been a pivotal vehicle for DC in the 1950s and 1960s, allowing the publisher to successful-

ly test new features like the Flash and Green Lantern before promoting them to series. Hoping that the old magic was still there, DC revived the book in 1977 with three-issue arcs devoted to the aforementioned new Doom Patrol and *All-Star Comics* super-heroine Power Girl. *DC Super-Stars* briefly served a similar function, introducing new *All-Star* heroine Huntress in issue #17 and providing a double-sized launch for David Michelinie and Don Newton’s ambitious science fiction series *Star Hunters* in issue #16. The latter moved to its own comic book in July.

Aside from revivals of *Challengers of the Unknown*, *Secrets of Haunted House*, *New Gods*, *Aquaman* and *Mister Miracle* (spanning March through June), most of DC’s 1977 launches—like the aforementioned *Black Lightning*, *Men of War*, and *Star Hunters*—featured brand-new characters: Scalphunter in *Weird Western Tales* (January), Steve Ditko’s trippy *Shade, the Changing Man* (March), the horror-tinged *Doorway to Nightmare* with the Michael Kaluta-designed Madame Xanadu (October), and a



The full-page ad for *Black Lightning* incorporated Trevor Von Eeden/Frank Springer art from the first issue. The afro-mask that Jefferson Pierce wore over his short hair was a suggestion of original editor Bob Rozakis.

two-fer from Gerry Conway: high-spirited nuclear hero Firestorm and World War Two crusader Steel the Indestructible Man with respective pencillers Al Milgrom and Don Heck (December).]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a comment printed in *The Comic Reader* #151 (December 1977)^{xvii}:

“I think Firestorm is likely to be a good merchandising property five years from now. The *Doorway to Nightmare* concept (with Madame Xanadu, et al.) would make for a great TV show—it could happen. The fact is, we don’t create comics for merchandising and licensing; if that happens, fine. Terrific. The only time I can recall that a book would have been cancelled if not for the licensing is with *Shazam!*”

[The most talked-about book at DC in 1977 was the company’s namesake title *Detective Comics*. As he’d requested when Jenette Kahn hired him, Steve Englehart was writing Batman and envisioned a run of stories that acknowledged the sum of the Dark Knight’s career, from his creature-of-the-night beginnings and his partnership with Robin to his most famous enemies and oft-maligned science fiction phase. One of the through lines in his eight issues was the love affair of Bruce Wayne and new girlfriend Silver St. Cloud, a far more intimate, intelligent romance than fans were accustomed to seeing in comic books. Editor Julius Schwartz assigned Walter Simonson and Al Milgrom to draw the opening installments in *Detective* #469 and #470 (on sale in February and March 1977).



The villain in *Detective Comics* #469 and #470 originated as Phosphor, the boyhood creation of Walter Simonson’s former professor Tom Sgouros and his brother. With Sgouros’ blessing, Simonson suggested the man with the burning touch as the villain in the two-parter and Steve Englehart ran with the idea. Before publication, Julius Schwartz revised the character’s name to Dr. Phosphorus. Photo from *FOOM* #18 (June 1977).

Steve Englehart, then writer of *Detective Comics* in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #54 (March 1980)^{xviii}:

“The first two issues just didn’t gel. Walt could only do the quickest of layouts, and Al’s diligent inks couldn’t pick up the slack... I knew by then just how hot my vision of Batman

was going to be. I could see it all in my mind’s eye—but I had had such visions before, only to have the final printed page look like it had been drawn with Professor X’s foot. By 1976, people would read my stuff no matter who drew it, but comics is a hybrid medium, and if one half of the effect is botched, the lasting impression is botched, and there’s no way around that.”

[By that point, Julius Schwartz had absorbed the reaction to Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin’s Batman/Calculator story in issue #468 and asked Englehart if he’d be willing to settle for these new guys for the duration of the story (*Detective* #471-476). The writer was delighted and readers cheered their agreement throughout 1977 as the adventure built to a high-stakes finish in December.]

Steve Englehart, then writer of *Detective Comics* in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #54 (March 1980)^{ix}:

“I said that I could envision what my strips could look like. Sometimes, when I saw the artist’s vision, I was disappointed. Sometimes, I felt we’d met on equal ground. But only five times in my comics years [up to 1977] did I feel like the artist had taken off from where I’d left him—and four of those times, the artist and I had worked side-by-side. But Marshall, without ever having met me at the time, gave me everything I asked for, and knew everything I didn’t ask for.”

[Englehart’s scripts on *Justice League of America* and *Mister Miracle* (also with Rogers) were highly-regarded, as well, but none garnered the critical response and influence of his, Rogers, and Austin’s *Detective Comics*. For years to come, many fans would point to those issues as “the definitive Batman.” By the time his final issues were published, though, the writer who had been Jenette Kahn’s first big catch was gone from DC. From the start, Englehart had intended to leave comics behind, travel Europe, and write a novel. He made good on that promise but was happy with what he’d accomplished.]

Steve Englehart, then writer of *Detective Comics* in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #63 (May 1981)^{ix}:

“Throughout the year I wrote for them, I had no troubles. All my stuff was in far ahead of deadline, they loved it all, everything got printed the way I wrote it or with minor exceptions, but nothing I could object to, I got a bonus at the end of the year for having gotten all my work in on time, completed my contract.”

[Not all of DC’s standout creators of 1977 originated at Marvel. Paul Levitz’s *All-Star Comics* (with artists Joe Staton and Bob

Layton) had become an engaging look at generational conflict and mutual respect as 1940s members of the Justice Society fought alongside second-generation heroes. Levitz's abiding passion for the Legion of Super-Heroes served him well on that series, allowing him to use almost granular details in stories from the 1960s to deepen the characterization and motivation of heroes who were once almost interchangeable.

While not as explosive as *Detective Comics*, Martin Pasko's *Superman*—with mainstay penciller Curt Swan—made for a strong complement. Reinterpreting creations from the 1950s and 1960s for modern sensibilities, the writer added elements of tragedy to the likes of Bizarro and Toyman and reconsidered the series' cornerstone romantic triangle. Conversations between Lois Lane and Superman had a surprising degree of emotional intimacy but it was the culmination of a courtship between Lois and Clark Kent in *Superman* #314 that garnered the most reader mail. Earnestly proposing to Lois, Clark was taken aback when she declared that she'd say yes if he confirmed he was Superman. Jaw clenched, he told her that he could not and walked away, ironically convincing the love of his life that he could not be the Man of Steel.

Bob Rozakis—a ubiquitous DC presence everywhere from the Daily Planet pages to letter columns to the credits of *Freedom Fighters*, *Teen Titans*, and others—penned perhaps his most unconventional series in *Batman Family*. Turning the conventions of the tragic monster on their head, the writer transformed creature-hero Man-Bat into a doting husband with a pregnant wife who turned to bounty-hunting to pay the bills. A sharp sense of humor pervaded the feature—variously drawn by Rogers & Austin and newcomer Michael Golden—particularly in a Howard Chaykin-penciled tale wherein a fanboy became convinced that Man-Bat was a demon.

Long before he was on the payroll, Bob Rozakis was a presence in DC Comics as a prolific contributor to its letter columns. Following his debut in *Adventure Comics* #321 (June 1964), Rozakis eventually accumulated 135 published missives before being officially hired by DC.

His early assignments included creating filler puzzles and, ironically, assembling letter columns. Photo by Michael Catron from *Amazing Heroes* #3 (August 1981).



There was something to be said for tradition, though, a fact best exemplified in Cary Bates, Irv Novick and Frank McLaughlin's sharp continuation of *The Flash*. Whether it was the clever

speed stunts, a regular supply of colorful rogues, Barry and Iris Allen's domestic bliss, or new wrinkles like a wanna-be comic book artist, the title was selling well enough to earn monthly frequency for the first time in its existence. The question in early 1977 was whether those sales would stay strong when the 30¢ comic book fell by the wayside.]

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #141 (March 1977)^{lxxi}:

"No matter how often it happens, it still is a surprise. DC announced on January 27 that all of the 32-page comics they publish would cost 35¢ as of March 1. The 48-page magazines will go to 60¢, but the 80-page \$1.00 books will remain at that price. The usual inflationary reasons were given for the increases."

Tom Brevoort, future Marvel Comics editor in a 2018 recollection^{lxxii}:

"Back during the 1970s, inflation was a part of life. We saw it in what our parents did--what they bought, and how they complained about gas prices or the rising cost of groceries. But where we kids felt it was in the products that we bought with our own money--candy, trading cards and comic books.

When I started reading comics, they cost 20¢. Shortly thereafter, the price had increased to a quarter, and then several months later, to 30¢ and then 35¢ in turn. These price increases all followed a standard format that you would see coming after a while: Marvel would begin to blurb their books as bring priced at 'STILL ONLY (current price)', and then within weeks, DC's books would increase in price, typically by a nickel. Three months later, Marvel would follow suit, and the process would be complete for now. This happened with enough regularity to become an easily-predicted pattern."

[The escalating prices were accompanied by diminishing printing quality. Readers began to complain about coloring glitches and the presence of wiggly lines in the art.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator in a response to criticism in *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes* #233 (November 1977)^{lxxiii}:

"We're as aware of the problem as you are, and just as unhappy about it. Most of the problem, though not all, is caused by our printer, World Color Press, switching from metal printing plates to plastic for the first time—and learning all the unique nastinesses that plastic plates can cause. They're working on clearing up the problems, but it will probably take some time.

Comic book publishers see black and white proofs of their magazines, but no color proofs of the interior. As a result,

any color problems (or the famous wavy ‘boogie’ lines that the plastic plates can cause) appear for the first time on the press—and we only see the evidence after the press run has shipped to newsstands.

We could correct either problem, of course, by spending tremendous sums of money. Unfortunately, that would make the price of a 32-page comic with interior color about \$1.25, and we don’t think our audience is quite ready for that.”

Bob Rozakis, then DC Comics assistant editor in a 2018 recollection^{lxxiv}:

“After *DC Special #27* (Danger: Dinosaurs at Large) was printed with the 25% red screen and 100% red solid switched on the first page, resulting in a bizarrely ugly page, DC demanded and received from Chemical Color Plate, the separators, a proof of all first pages in addition to the cover proofs. I had pressed for that, in no small part because I was the writer of that particular issue, but also because it seemed apparent no one at the printing plant looked at our books closely enough to even question if something was wrong.”

Martin Pasko, then freelance writer on such DC titles as *Superman* and *Wonder Woman* in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal #37* (December 1977)^{lxxv}:

“In 1970, at one of the first conventions I ever went to, Neal Adams was doing this thing—an ACBA panel, I think—and he was doing his doomsaying number about how in two years, comic books as we know them will be dead. And everybody went ‘Aaaaauuuuuggggghhhh!!!!’ And of course, two years went by and they were still waiting for the sky to fall. So I hate going on record as prognosticator of doom. But it’s getting to the point where I really *do* kind of feel that comics as we know them *will* cease to exist. Very shortly. But I define ‘as we know them’ as a 32-page format, half of which is ads, that sells for 35¢. I say that you have to go into new packages. There have to be different sizes, weird, unusual things, like the *Superman/Spider-Man* book...”

As long as there are still newspapers, and there are still some editors who want a funnies page, I don’t think the *medium* as such—a story told in a sequence of pictures with dialog balloons—will ever die. I don’t think the *medium* will die, but the comic *book* might be totally unrecognizable in as little as ten years. But you can be damn sure that I don’t think the readers will buy 17 pages of story at 35¢ for very long. There is no way you can disguise the fact that they are paying 15¢ for the ‘privilege’ of reading a lot of ads.”

[Marvel Comics was dealing with the same cost issues as DC and the rest of the industry, but they received an unexpected influx of capital from an unlikely source.]

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader #130* (May 1976)^{lxxvi}:

“Marvel and George Lucas are working out a contract in which Marvel would adapt Lucas’ forthcoming film, *Star Wars*, into comic form. Roy Thomas and Howard Chaykin would be the story-art team. Marvel also has plans to adapt *Logan’s Run* to comics.”

[That news, along with Marvel’s acquisition of the comic book rights to Hanna-Barbera’s major cartoon characters in 1977, was shrugged off by DC.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Comic Media News #32* (August-September 1977)^{lxxvii}:

“Marvel is diversifying a little bit with movie adaptations, which is interesting. The Hanna-Barbera stuff is a clear economic thing, having little to do with Marvel and I refuse to put them down for getting involved in that. I think it is a brilliant move, though a risky move too because it does jeopardize their image. But these books have the potential of being very popular. It’s very recently that they’ve moved into these markets, and we have always been out there with the mystery books and the war books and when we create a mystery or a war book like *Men of War* or *Doorway to Nightmare* we put as much time and energy into creating that book as we do a new superhero book, sometimes more because it’s trickier...”



Premiering on September 9, 1975, ABC’s *Welcome Back, Kotter* was one of the top 20 series on TV during its first two seasons. Star Gabe Kaplan (Gabe Kotter) is flanked by John Travolta (Vinny Barbarino), Ron Palillo (Arnold Horshack), Robert Hegyes (Juan Epstein), and Lawrence Hilton-Jacobs (Freddie Washington).

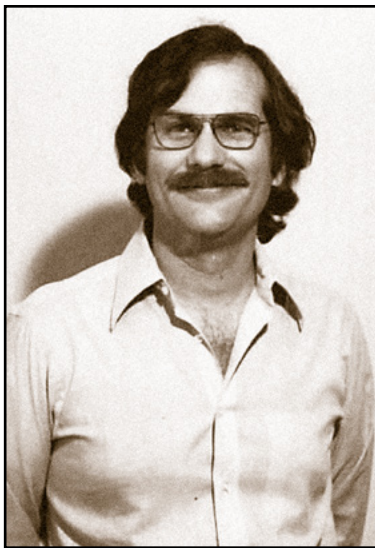
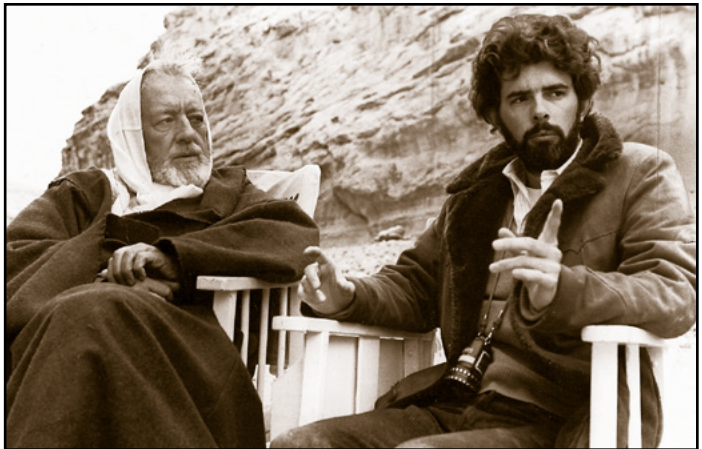
DC is very ambivalent towards picking up licensed projects. We have *Welcome Back, Kotter* the way Marvel has the Hanna-Barbera stuff, and of course we have the TV books of our own characters, *Shazam!* and *Super Friends*, but that's way out there, about a mile away from our regular stuff. I suppose that if we had the opportunity to do a movie adaptation of a film that we truly liked, that we got excited over, we would do it, but we really don't solicit it. It does happen. We have been offered quite a few properties in the last few months. I don't feel comfortable about saying which ones. I don't think it's fair to those people because it makes their movies seem bad for me to say that we turned them down."

Item from "Marvel Bullpen Bulletins" that appeared in every Marvel comic book sold in April 1977 (cover date July 1977):

"Let's kick off this column with a few words about another new title we're springing on you this month. . . *Star Wars!* If that sounds familiar, it *might* be because we've plugged it a bit in the past, but a much better bet is that you've been hearing about the multi-million dollar, super science-fiction film from Twentieth Century Fox upon which our comic is based. *Star Wars* is an epic of the far-flung future where intergalactic war and intrigue run rampant. It was written and directed by George Lucas, the man who gave us *American Graffiti* and *THX 1138*, and features Alec Guinness and Peter Cushing, with Mark Hamill as the interstellar saga's hero, Luke Skywalker. With that kind of talent, you know this is going to be a big one. To do it justice in graphic story format, Mr. Lucas and company handpicked Marvel for the awesome adaptation task, singling out Rascally Roy Thomas as writer/editor and Wholesome Howard Chaykin as artist. After the premiere issue, Surfer Steve Leialoha will be joining the team as inker. To guarantee that the power and scope of the original film are preserved, the adaptation is going to be done in six parts, one issue per month. Don't miss any of them. We think it's going to be one of the most enthralling half-years you've ever spent."

Charles Lippincott, then advertising publicity supervisor on *Star Wars* in a recollection posted online in 2015^{lxxviii}:

"From the very beginning, it was my intention to market *Star Wars* using comics. . . We also decided to go with Marvel, and not DC Comics. I had met Jenette Kahn, who ran DC, but felt they were not on the cutting edge. This was because DC was not as aggressive a company as Marvel. Marvel had come out with *Conan* and other characters which we felt were in line with what we wanted to do with a *Star Wars* comic series. DC had one guy there who was a great historian [E. Nelson Bridwell] that I really liked, but as a whole, they were too staid a company. Roy Thomas had been the editor at Marvel and had done a terrific job expanding their character lineup by bringing in characters from pulp fiction, including the great Robert E. Howard's



Although he once described *Star Wars* as "fairy tale rubbish," Sir Alec Guinness (top left) nonetheless agreed to the pivotal role of Obi-Wan Kenobi, receiving 2.25% of the gross royalties paid to director George Lucas (top right). Charles Lippincott (left, in a 1979 photo) was the central force is building anticipation for the forthcoming *Star Wars* film, including the deal for Marvel to publish an ongoing comic book.

Conan, King Kull, and Solomon Kane. Marvel's aggressive expansion of characters was important because we needed to be with a company who was actively building a science fiction base."

[Joining forces with Roy Thomas, Lippincott sweetened the deal by offering the licensing rights for free on the first five issues. Marvel agreed to do the adaptation.]

Roy Thomas, then writer of Marvel's *Star Wars* comic book in an interview printed in *Alter Ego* #145 (March 2017)^{lxxix}:

"Stan wasn't really pushing the comic that hard—even though it was his decision, really, that Marvel would do a *Star Wars* comic. I suspect he greenlighted the title partly because I was championing it, and he had a certain amount of respect for my sales instincts—though that wouldn't have helped if the deal hadn't been right.

"The next hurdle for the comic was. . . Ed Shukin. . . He had a good reputation in the industry as [Marvel's] circulation

director; but he came up to me one day, very early in the project ... and told me he had no faith in the comic, since earlier movie adaptations Marvel had done hadn't sold all that well... It bothered him that we'd be doing six issues of *Star Wars*, because if it didn't sell, we'd be locked into printing half a dozen issues of a comic that no one was buying. That kind of thinking—which was not unreasonable—is why I'm fairly sure the print run of the earlier issues of *Star Wars* was on the low side.

In the last few weeks or even days before *Star Wars* opened in late May of '77, Ed Summer [co-owner of New York's Supersnipe comic book store and a friend of George Lucas] went up to Marvel... and he had a talk with Shukin... He said Shukin had told him, 'We're really going to take a bath with that adaptation of your friend George Lucas' movie!' Ed told him, 'Well, I don't think so.' Yeah, Marvel took a bath, all right. A bath of money."

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in a recollection posted online in 2011^{lxxx}:

"The first two issues of our six-issue adaptation came out in advance of the movie. Driven by the advance marketing for the movie, sales were very good. Then about the time the third issue shipped, the movie was released. Sales made the jump to hyperspace. *Star Wars* the movie stayed in theaters forever, it seemed. Not since the Beatles had I seen a cultural phenomenon of such power. The comics sold and sold and sold. We reprinted the adaptation in every possible format. They all sold and sold and sold. In the most conservative terms, it is inarguable that the success of the *Star Wars* comics was a significant factor in Marvel's survival through a couple of very difficult years, 1977 and 1978."

Jeffrey H. Wasserman, then journalist in a column printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{lxxxi}:

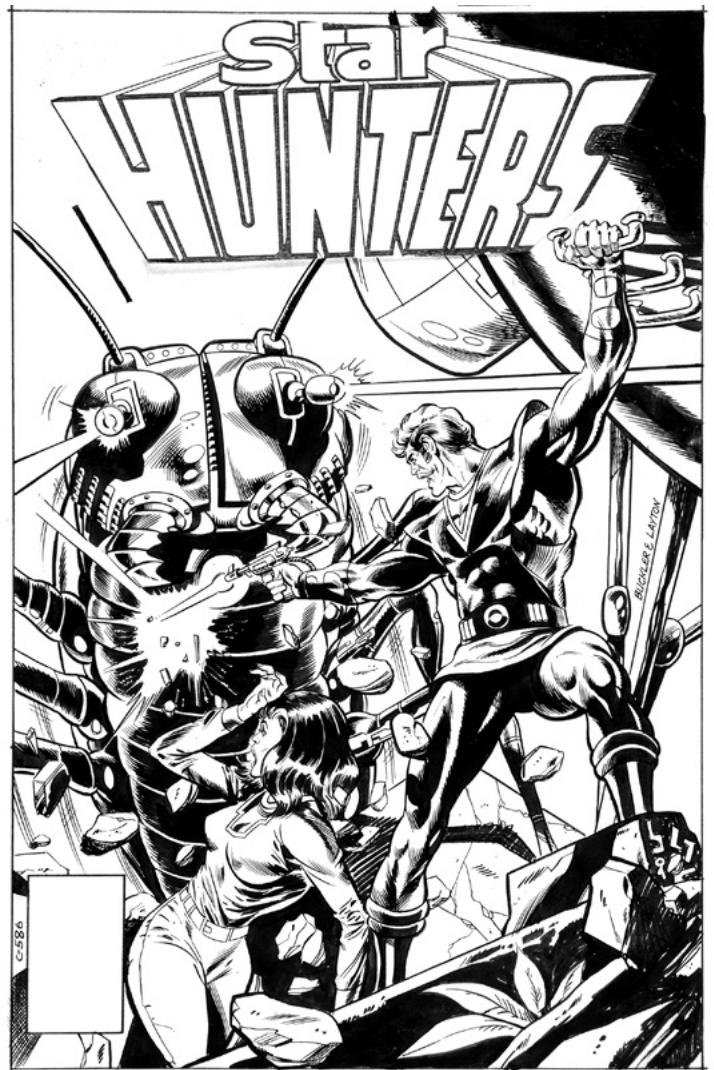
"Marvel's operating revenue for 1977 was \$15,323,000 (15% of Cadence Industries Corporation's total operating revenue) and for 1976 was \$11,213,000 (12%). These figures do not include licensing fees [... which ...] can come to four million dollars for Marvel in 1977. The increase in operating revenue this past year was chalked up to higher cover prices on comic books (a nickel increase to 35¢), increased licensing income, and lower rates of return on Marvel's publications. Marvel initiated a system of direct sales of non-returnable comics to supermarkets and book stores [in 1977] which contributed to this lower rate of returns. These direct sales have taken the form of tabloid-sized *Star Wars* comics and packages containing three Marvel Comics, both distributed by Western Publications Inc."

[During the months leading up to *Star Wars*' release, DC coincidentally had its own science fiction project in development. Dating back to Autumn 1975, it was first pitched to Carmine Infantino by writer David Michelinie.]

"The Story Behind the Story" column printed in *DC Super-Stars* #16 (September-October 1977):

"David called the series *The Survivors*. The premise was that a team of people were secretly infected with a disease germ by the authorities. While the disease didn't infect them, [it] was deadly to anyone else who might be exposed to it. Since the team would then be a menace to anyone on Earth, the very authorities who had infected them supplied them with a spaceship to leave the planet. Their mission would be to find other habitable worlds and colonize them for the Earth. Of course, once they had prepared a world for Earthlings to live on, they would have to leave, since they were still infected with the disease."

[Renaming the series *The Outcasts*, Infantino tentatively signed off on the project only to reject it in a follow-up meeting. Michelinie resubmitted the proposal to Jenette Kahn in 1976 and



Star Hunters #2 cover art by Rich Bucker and Bob Layton (1977), sans published copy. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

was delighted when it was approved. Working with editor Joe Orlando, the pitch was fleshed out and renamed multiple times, variously known as *World-Tamer*, *Donovan Flint: Starhunter* and finally *Star Hunters*. The 34-page pilot (illustrated by Don Newton and Bob Layton) premiered in *DC Super-Stars* #16—on sale June 30, 1977 and a month after *Star Wars* debuted in theaters—with *Star Hunters* #1 appearing a month after that.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a comment printed in *The Comic Reader* #151 (December 1977)^{lxxxii}:

“If I were in Jenette’s position, I would have been skeptical of *Star Wars* for two reasons: we had *Star Hunters* on the drawing board at the time and it would be foolish to compete with a property that we own outright, and secondly, Marvel’s previous track record with s-f movie adaptations was less than spectacular—both aesthetically and financially. Of course, had we known *Star Wars* was going to be the smash hit it turned out to be, we would have jumped on it.

I’m sure we would get involved with a licensing project if the concept turned us on, and/or some of our talent would give their eye teeth to do it. If *Star Trek* became available, I’m sure we would be interested even though it *might* be past its prime (then again, it might not) simply because there are a lot of people here who would love to do it. I think Marvel has the right idea with its full-color magazines, and an adaptation might work in that format. You can take a magazine outside the regular comic book format and sell it to wholesalers and chain stores as something special, so you stand a better chance of spreading around the copies and hedging your bets. But even that is risky: my understanding is the print run of [the Marvel magazine featuring rock group] *Kiss* (as of mid-October’s sales figures) is still nearly 200,000 copies lower than our print-run for *Superman Vs. Muhammad Ali*, and that’s taking the additional *Kiss* printings into consideration. Ali—like *Kiss*—is a character we can do something with; you can’t very well have Spider-Man meet up with Han Solo.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #32 (August-September 1977)^{lxxxiii}:

“The problem is you pay these people a licensing fee—sometimes you get it for free—any way you look at it, you do not make merchandising money off these books. Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel, and Wonder Woman are, oddly enough, four of the top five merchandising characters: numbers one, two, three and five. Spider-Man [is number four]. Robin, by the way, is up there also. Merchandising is not necessarily in relation to the sales performance of a book. Batman, right now, out-merchandises Superman, but that probably won’t be true when the *Superman* film comes out.”

[While *Star Wars* had no bearing on the development of *Star Hunters*, its success opened the floodgates to a succession of new properties in comic books and comic strips that hoped to catch the zeitgeist.]

Jack C. Harris, then DC Comics editor in a comment printed in *Time Warp* #1 (October-November 1979):

“[Joe Orlando] felt that the public was ready for science fiction these days, unlike the naïve days of 25 years ago. But there were other voices; voices that came from people who thought they knew better. ‘Science fiction doesn’t sell,’ they said. ‘It never has! So there was no science fiction anthology comic at DC [in the mid-1970s].

Then came a film called *Star Wars*. Another film followed entitled *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. And waiting in the wings was a multi-million dollar production of *Superman!* The ‘voices’ were having their turn at being shouted down. Jumping rockets—science fiction was selling!

“Now someone was listening! In a brief attack of ‘band wagon fever,’ a title *Cosmic Encounters* was conceived, described as a ‘UFO book.’ Saner heads prevailed and the initial idea somehow swung around to a revival of [DC’s 1950-1973 title] *Strange Adventures*. Time had indeed seemed to warp, Jack C. Harris was going to edit his favorite book of yesteryear! The work was put into production [in the spring of 1978].”

Written and directed by Steven Spielberg, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was the third-highest-grossing movie of 1977, surpassed only by *Star Wars* and *Smokey and the Bandit*. The cover of *Marvel Super Special* #3’s comics adaptation was painted by Bob Larkin.



Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #32 (August-September 1977)^{lxxxiv}:

“With *Star Hunters* #1 [cover date Nov. 1977], we’ve sold 22,000 copies in direct sales to comic book stores across the country. My supposition is that for every book we sell that way, there is another fan somewhere else to buy one off the newsstand, one who doesn’t live near a comic book store (there [are] only about 300-400 of those across the country). So if you

add all that up, it's around 40,000 copies. Now clearly, that's going to plummet with the second issue because people aren't going to be buying ten copies each, but any way you look at it, the fan support on a new book from the early issues can be enough to keep the book alive for it to find its own natural level among fans. Clearly, *Warlord* has been sort of a marginal book until recently. Now it's picking up—the regular readers are out there. But it's been kept alive by these fan sales—it can make a two- or three-point difference in sales. When you think about it, books like *Conan*, *Justice League of America*, etc. have all been cancelled but at the last moment someone has said, 'Well, it looks like maybe we can pick up a little bit—let's give it another chance.' Unfortunately, other books have been cancelled that five years later have been brought back and made successful—*Green Lantern*, *New Gods*, etc...

A good-selling book should be selling over 120,000 [copies per issue]. I mean, that's a nice selling book. Yes, ten years ago it was five times that number. In terms of good sales, if a book sells over 60% [sell-through rate], you're going to add a new wing to your building! You only get one of those once in a while; [Marvel's highly anticipated 1975 launch] *Howard the Duck* only sold 56% and that was with that tremendous, overwhelming direct sale. To illustrate how difficult it is to do that, an awful lot of comic books never make it to the stands—they never leave the warehouse. A guy will keep them in his storehouse; there [are] just too many places for comic books to get hidden and that's really unfortunate. If a book is selling over 100,000 copies, it's probably profitable. If Mickey Spillane and Frank Frazetta (two one-time comics people) are drawing and writing the book, then that book will probably have to sell twice as much to pay for the talent. But outside of that sort of talent, the editorial costs are negligible: they're a couple of thousand dollars for a book. If a book is selling less than 33-35%, it's probably losing money. You can tell how well a book is doing—if a book is being cancelled, it is either losing money or it is marginal, making just one or two points above break even and we'd rather come out with a new book.

Quite frankly, these days very few comic books actually lose money. Of all the books that we cancelled over the last few months, *DC Special* and *DC Super-Stars* were cancelled solely because they were being replaced by the dollar spectaculars, so it's just the titles that are gone, the books are still there. Every month there will be a 60¢ or \$1.00 special...

Marvel does not publish bi-monthly books [with the same philosophy as DC]. They have a few bi-monthly titles but anything that's selling at all is out there monthly. A lot of Marvel's monthlies, if they were published by us and selling at the same rate, would be bi-monthlies. It's just the way we're structured—it's a structural difference. Any book that's being published bi-monthly over there is not selling well; it may be making good money but it isn't making anywhere near the kind of money the monthlies are. *Tomb of Dracula*, of course, is the exception to that, where Marv [Wolfman] and Gene [Colan] just said, 'No, this is all we're going to do. Take it or give it to somebody else.'



Marvel's critically-acclaimed *Tomb of Dracula* owed some of its success to the singular vision of creative team Marv Wolfman (scripter), Gene Colan (penciler) and Tom Palmer (inker) from 1973 to 1979. Cover for 1977's *Tomb of Dracula* #58 by Colan and Palmer.

Although, if *Tomb of Dracula* was doing *that* well, I mean really phenomenally well, they would probably have given it to other people and sabotaged the book—that's happened before. I'm not coming down on Marvel for that. It's happened to us in the past. Luckily, Marvel and DC are in the position now to say, 'No, wait, they're right. We'll do it bi-monthly or not at all.' Over here, if a book is bi-monthly, it is not necessarily a sign of ill health, it's just a structural thing."

[Gold and company were keenly following the highlights of Marvel's line like critical hit *Tomb of Dracula*. Unlike an earlier generation of DC management that had barely noted Marvel's growing impact, Jenette Kahn's team actually understood why such titles were popular and continued to attract the talent that was creating them... while also holding on to those they already had.]

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #142 (April 1977)^{lxxxv}:

"Four more freelancers have signed exclusive contracts with DC. David Michelinie will continue as scripter of *Aquaman*, *Star Hunters* and *Gravedigger* [in *Men of War*]; Don Heck will be penciling *Teen Titans* and *Batgirl-Robin* [in *Batman Family*]; Bob Layton will continue to ink *All-Star Comics* and *Secret Society of Super-Villains* stories; and Philip 'Tex' Blaisdell will continue inking various *Action Comics* stories, among others."

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #143 (May 1977)^{lxxxvi}:

"DC announced last month [April 1977] that Ross Andru is returning to the company. His Marvel contract still has a year

to run, so he will continue to draw *Amazing Spider-Man* until his contract is up, then join DC in an editorial capacity while drawing periodically. Andru spent a year or two as co-publisher/editor of Mikeross Publications with Mike Esposito in the mid-'50s. What he will edit will not be decided [until] he's free to work for DC."

[Even before he returned to DC, Andru had an impact on one of the most impressive talents on the DC payroll: José Luis García-López. As penciller on early 1976's smash DC-Marvel company crossover *Superman Vs. the Amazing Spider-Man*, Andru had made the maximum use of its oversized pages. Joe Orlando now hoped to recreate that sort of spectacle in the 72-page tabloid *Superman Vs. Wonder Woman*, on sale in November 1977.]

Born in Spain and raised in Argentina, José Luis García-López began drawing for Charlton Comics in 1967 but moved to New York in 1974 when he was 26. Incorporating artistic influences like Alex Raymond into his work, García-López was quickly recognized for a style that was dynamic and modern without sacrificing the classic qualities of the characters he drew. In 1982, he was assigned to draw a full-scale DC Comics Style Guide for use as reference and in licensing. Photo from *All-New Collectors' Edition #C-54* (1977).



José Luis García-López, then DC Comics artist in an interview printed in *Modern Masters Volume Five: J.L. García-López* (June 2005)^{lxxxvii}:

"Joe Orlando and someone else... showed me *Superman Vs. Spider-Man*, which was done by Ross Andru and [Dick] Giordano. It was terrific. Really terrific. I guess it was the first thing I saw in comic books that really made an impact on me. I remembered the stuff from Neal Adams and all, but this book was pure comic book stuff. It wasn't illustration, it wasn't the artist trying to show off his talent. It was all about the characters, the movement. And they asked me, 'Can you do something like this?' And I said, 'Well, I don't know. This is terrific. I don't think I would be able.' But they told me, 'No, we think you can do it.' And that was it.

Of course, when they show you that beforehand, in some ways you try to follow the example. Especially in the layouts, when you try to find different angles to show the action and things like that. I don't know if I am very good at that. Basically, my layouts are very conservative. But I owe Ross Andru a lot, because after looking at that book I tried a lot of things I had never tried before."

News item printed in *Mediascene* #26 (July-August 1977)^{lxxxviii}:

"José Luis García-López became ill and the decision was made to have him catch up with only tight layouts. Unfortunately, after a period of no pages, [inker Dan] Adkins began to receive the unfinished pencils in a virtual avalanche of paper, which made the assigned deadline an impossible goal to achieve. [Consequently], Adkins has been forced to relinquish sections of the [Superman/Wonder Woman story's] last 30 pages' inking, so that he can concentrate on the principal figurework. Backgrounds and secondary characters are being completed by [Dick Giordano's assistants], but the first 40 pages are pure Adkins."

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #145 (July 1977)^{lxxxix}:

"Two new editors have been appointed at DC: Allen Milgrom and Larry Hama. Denny O'Neil has relinquished his editorial post to devote more time to writing, and a general reshuffling of the editorial assignments. Milgrom will be editor of *Batman Family*, *Kamandi*, *Karate Kid*, *Superboy* and *the Legion of Super-Heroes* and *Weird Western Tales*. Hama will edit *Jonah Hex*, *Mister Miracle*, *Super Friends*, *Warlord*, *Welcome Back, Kotter* and *Wonder Woman*. Both Milgrom and Hama will continue to draw as well as edit."

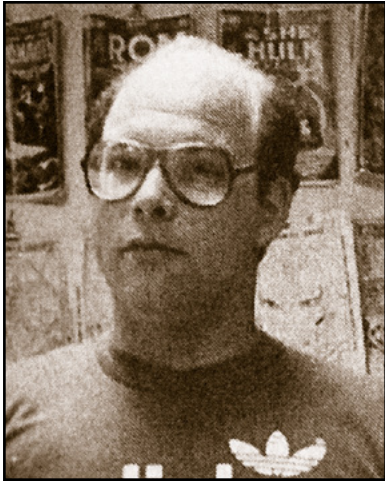
Al Milgrom, then DC Comics editor in an interview printed in *The Best of the Legion Outpost* (November 2004)^{xc}:

"I had been doing covers for both Marvel and DC, because Jenette Kahn had seen some covers I had done for Marvel and inquired, through Joe Orlando, whether I'd be interested in doing some covers for DC. I think at the time Jenette was dating Neal Adams, and I think for some reason Neal thought I'd make a good editor, and maybe suggested it to her. But I'm not 100 percent sure that's how it happened, because I don't know how you'd make the leap from drawing some covers to being an editor. Maybe it was just Neal's subtle way of saying that I had no business being an artist in the business, but I'd be better suited to being an editor. I'm not sure. [laughs]"

[Milgrom's art *did* prove to be an issue early on.]

Al Milgrom, then DC Comics editor in an interview printed in *The Best of the Legion Outpost* (November 2004)^{xc}:

"I went to talk to Joe Orlando, and he basically said, 'Yeah, Jenette really likes your covers over at Marvel, so we want you to do some here.' Then he says, 'But we don't want them to look like those Marvel covers.' And I just... again, I was too



Breaking into comics in 1972 as an assistant to Murphy Anderson, Al Milgrom worked at Neal Adams' Continuity Associates and was penciler on Marvel's *Captain Marvel* (among others) in the mid-1970s. Photo by Michael Catron from *Amazing Heroes* #1 (June 1981).

young to stick up for myself, so I kinda looked at him a little puzzled, like, 'She likes my covers, wants me to do covers, but they shouldn't look like the covers I've been doing?'

Shortly thereafter, I got word that Jenette wasn't happy... and I went to Joe. Joe said, 'Yeah, Jenette's not really happy with the covers you're doing for us. They don't look like the ones that you're doing at Marvel.' And I said, 'Joe, you told me you don't want them to look like Marvel covers,' and he goes, 'I know, I know, but now it's coming from her.' I'm sure Joe didn't volunteer the fact that he's the one who told me not to do them the way I'd been doing them. He looked a little sheepish about it, even at the time."

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #148 (September 1977)^{xcii}:

"Dick Giordano has signed an exclusive contract with DC that will stipulate that he ink some 60 pages per month, as well as penciling some. As this applies only to color comics, he still plans to do about six stories a year for Marvel and Warren's black and white books. His first major regular assignment will be as inker on *Batman*."



Formerly a beloved editor for Charlton and DC, Dick Giordano was also an exemplary artist. He put those skills to good use as Neal Adams' partner in Continuity Associates in addition to regular assignments at DC, Marvel and Warren during the mid-1970s. Photo by Michael Catron from *The Comics Journal* #59 (October 1979).

[Along with the Giordano news, DC also announced that it had signed veteran artist George Tuska to an exclusive contract. Recently a Marvel fixture, Tuska had drawn the *Scorchy Smith* and *Buck Rogers* newspaper strips during the 1950s and 1960s. That specific experience was something DC intended to capitalize on as they simultaneously announced a forthcoming *Justice League of America* newspaper strip that Tuska would pencil beginning in 1978. The deal wasn't without a bit of behind-the-scenes drama, though.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{xciii}:

"[Vince Colletta] and Paul [Levitz] made a deal to bring George Tuska to DC. They hadn't asked me and the deal was already done. Even though they believed George would be a valuable asset to the company, I told Paul and Vinnie that they shouldn't have made the deal without consulting me and I said it in a critical way. And they were *so* wounded and they took it so hard... I don't know if Paul and Vinnie would have felt as wounded or unappreciated if the criticism had come from a man. Perhaps they would simply have masked their feelings more artfully. But I was trying to build morale and trust and didn't want anyone on staff to feel fearful or mistreated. Although Vinnie and Paul took their moping to an extreme, I thought, 'Okay, let me adjust my style and always try first to praise the good things and then express my feelings of how something should have been handled better.'"

[In addition to Tuska, further additions to the DC creative team in 1977 included Marvel fan-favorites Howard Chaykin and Jim Starlin, EC Comics legend Johnny Craig, Archie/Charlton writer Tom DeFalco, Warren contributor Roger McKenzie, Marvel writer Scott Edelman, Marvel penciller Arvell Jones and Marvel inkers Dan Adkins, Frank Chiaramonte, Dave Hunt, and Bob McLeod.

Amidst the established pros being signed up by DC, the publisher also found a rising star named Michael Golden. A commercial artist who had to be prodded by friends into submitting work to comic book publishers, Golden's lush work quickly won him fans at DC. Primarily put to work on atmospheric *Batman* stories (and related series), he was also chosen to succeed Marshall Rogers on *Mister Miracle*.]

Larry Hama, then DC Comics editor in an interview printed in *David Anthony Kraft's Comics Interview* #38 (1986)^{xciv}:

"Both Al [Milgrom] and I just went crazy about his stuff. Some of the other editors complained that he drew the heads too big. They just sort of saw his stuff as being too cartoony. But you would look at his pages and just go, 'Wow! This guy is tremendous!' Both Al and I tried to go out of our way to get him inkers that would not

only complement his stuff but, like, help him along. I think Al got Craig Russell to ink a bunch of Batman stuff. I somehow talked Russ Heath into inking some *Mister Miracles*—I don't know how I did that. And it seemed like Mike just took that stuff home with him. I think when he saw what Russ did with his *Mister Miracles*... he's one of those guys that is a learning machine. He looks at stuff and analyzes it and understands how it works."

[Other newcomers slipped into DC's pages under the radar. Legendary artist/editor Joe Kubert had opened an art school in 1976 that would eventually graduate a veritable Who's Who of comic book talent. The challenge was getting those young men and women in the door, but Kubert had a plan.]

As someone who began his career as a teenager circa 1940, Joe Kubert appreciated the challenges faced by young people hoping to break into the comic book industry. In an era when many of the artist/editor's contemporaries were predicting the imminent death of the industry, Kubert's art school—by its very existence—argued that there was still a future for those interested in creating comics.



Rick Veitch, then student of the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art in a comment posted online in 2012^{xv}:

"The business was a slow motion train wreck in 1977 but Joe somehow got DC to buy an inventory of 'back-up' stories done by the students. The one title he still edited was *Sgt. Rock*, so these were to be war comics done under Joe's watchful eye. Steve Bisette and I received one of the coveted first scripts, a 5-pager called 'A Song For Saigon Sally' [*Sgt. Rock* #311]. But soon everyone who wanted a shot (and was up to date on assignments) got one. This included the bigfoot stylists among us, who had the chance to do gag pages and spot cartoons. There were lettering and coloring gigs as well."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #32 (August-September 1977)^{xvii}:

"DC has been on a talent-acquiring kick, very clear and simple. A lot of people have come over here either because we asked

them if they'd like to work with us and offered them a contract or because they came here and asked us for work. An awful lot of both has been going on, partially because there is a tremendous amount of energy going on here. No matter what it is, the fact that so many people have come to us—people like Bob Layton, Rich Buckler and George Tuska, real professionals—that we can now produce more material. We do not want to get hit by the Dreaded Deadline Doom (a terrific phrase and I'm really sorry it's associated with Marvel because we're as subject to it as they are); we've made a concerted effort to produce those superhero-type books. We do not like going reprint. We've had, I think, two or three reprint issues in the last six months; Marvel, unfortunately, has had three or four times that amount. It's a sad thing and does not help the long-term sales of the book; I think it can hurt a book very badly...

We have moved in that five years from 1971 to 1976-1977 from a time when superheroes were not selling at all to a time when superheroes are selling very, very well. They dropped down a little around 1975-76, but not much, and are now picking up again. The war books are holding their own; they're doing well. I think the fact that Charlton has gone out of business has helped the war books more than the fact that the war books are more popular.

We have two western books, and they're flukes. *Jonah Hex* is our 'class act' here, it's the book that everybody would like to do. It's one of our favorite books. *Scalphunter* is another series that we're trying to develop and it's still in the experimental stage. Whatever market there is out there for the westerns is split among the people that are really into [Marvel's] *Rawhide Kid* reprints and the people that like our stuff. They are totally different styles."

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #39 (April 1978)^{xviii}:

"A given comic is no longer guaranteed profitability. In 1940, if you put out *Superman*, for the first time, your possibilities were: It won't be too popular and we'll only make a lot of money, or it will be very popular and we'll make an awful lot of money. Nowadays you have the possibility that you will put out a relatively conservative product and either make a reasonable amount of money, a lot of money, or no money at all. If you put out something experimental, you have a tremendously greater downside risk. And it makes people more conservative. It makes me more conservative. I am far from the most adventurous editor at DC. Certainly, you'd be more prone to see experimentation from a guy like Larry Hama or Al Milgrom, who have fewer preconceived notions. I've been in the field longer, been behind an editor's desk longer. I'm a little more set in my ways. It'll change as we get new blood."

[Steve Gerber, the most biting satirist and social commentator in the 1970s Marvel Bullpen, took advantage of his status as a freelancer and agreed to succeed Steve Englehart as writer on

Mister Miracle. Marvel writer/editor Len Wein had high hopes of doing the same on *Detective Comics*.]

News item printed in *Comic Media News* #33 (November-December 1977)^{xviii}:

“The second major ‘defection’ from Marvel to DC has taken place. Steve Englehart was the first last year and now it has been announced that Len Wein has joined DC as a full-time writer, leaving behind him Marvel’s top four mainstream titles (*Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four*, *Thor*, and *Hulk*). Len’s first regular assignment will be the Englehart-vacated Batman series in *Detective Comics*, beginning with #477... A possible third major ‘defection’ has been nipped in the bud, as Steve Gerber, widely thought to be joining DC, has been persuaded to work exclusively for Marvel.”

Len Wein, then writer of *Detective Comics* in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #48 (Summer 1979)^{xcix}:

“As editor/writer at Marvel, I was having conflicts with the production department, with John Verpoorten, rest his soul, and some of the other people, over things that were not terribly important, but were becoming life and death issues to me. I would get enraged if I didn’t get the letterer I wanted or over something else very minor and very unimportant. And, I decided to take a weekend off, went away, talked it over with my wife, and came to the realization that I was over-involved. I had become obsessively involved with the books. I was watching my books with such a hawk-like eye that I had no sense of perspective on this stuff anymore. I was involved and I was making myself crazy, and I realized that I had to take a step back and get involved with something else. I got into a conversation with Paul Levitz that weekend and he mentioned to me that there might be some openings at DC and thought I might want to wander by and go ‘Howdy.’ I thought maybe that’s a possibility, maybe that’s what I need to do — get a little variety in there, and not commit myself so fully on an emotional level to Marvel and the books I was doing. So, I went up to see the folks at DC the following week. Coincidentally enough, Steve Englehart

had just left *Detective* and there is no bigger Batman fan than I. I volunteered to take over the strip. It gave me a chance to work with Julie Schwartz, who’s one of the closest people in the world to me. Here was something I wanted to do. I was looking forward to working with Marshall Rogers. I thought what he and Steve had done on the book was just tremendous. I committed myself to the book. Marvel was not happy at all when they found out.

Stan and the other Powers — Archie Goodwin, who was editor-in-chief at the time. None of them were really happy. But there was nothing they could do to me as long as Steve Gerber was writing *Howard the Duck* and *The Defenders* and doing *Mr. Miracle* for DC. If they wanted to jump up and down on me, I told them to talk to Steve first. He’s the one who actually opened the breach in the company’s wall. Things went on for several weeks. DC was really happy about my doing anything at all. Mike Gold and Paul [Levitz] were very enthusiastic. Marvel wasn’t happy nohow. Finally, after several weeks, almost a month, and I hadn’t actually even started my first *Detective* story, Steve Gerber’s situation was resolved. The way it was resolved doesn’t matter here. Then they turned to me and said, ‘All right, the Gerber situation is resolved, now it’s your turn. We don’t want you to do Batman.’ And in my singular obsessive fashion, I said, ‘No, no, I’m committed to this book. Julie Schwartz is closer to me than any editor — I consider him family,’ and he was very happy to have me back. His was the last book I had left when I left DC because I was doing *Detective* with Julie at that time. I wanted to stick with that book. I needed it for my own creative fulfillment. Stan said, ‘I’ll have to think about it.’ A couple of days went by, Stan called me in, and we sat down. Stan finally talked to me. We talked it out. I explained that I didn’t want to leave Marvel. I was very happy doing the books I was doing, but I just would not give up *Detective*. And Stan finally acquiesced. He said, ‘Well, if that’s the case, if you have to, but I don’t like it, and I don’t want to lose you on the other stuff. Do *Detective*, but do it under a pseudonym. It’s not right that Marvel’s top writer is busy working on a book for the competition. It just doesn’t look good. So, do it under a pseudonym. But I won my point. So, I called up DC and told Paul and Mike Gold what the situation was. They, too, were not happy. They were trying to re-establish DC’s credibility, trying to develop a new rapport with the readership, and didn’t feel it was right to have me come over there and work under a pseudonym. They also thought there was some commercial value to my name. And they just did not like the idea. But, they didn’t want to lose me either, and they acquiesced. So here I was. I won my case.

I could do The Batman, I could stay on my Marvel books, and nobody was happy. DC didn’t like the idea, Marvel didn’t like the idea, and I didn’t like the idea that nobody liked the idea. [Laughter:] On a long weekend of soul-searching, I spoke with Marv for a while, I spoke to you, you little devil, and you guys managed to help convince me that it would be to my benefit to go back to where I could write like myself and not be a surrogate Stan. And I decided you guys were right. It was a lot simpler to make a clean



Despite working for Marvel from 1974 through 1977, Len Wein was a regular presence in the DC offices during that time. After creating African American heroine Bumblebee for *Teen Titans*, Bob Rozakis’ recalled Wein opining in Julius Schwartz’s office that she should be called the *Black Bumblebee*. Rozakis ignored the unsolicited advice. Photo by Michael Catron from *The Comics Journal* #48 (Summer 1979).

break of it, and start all over, than to sit there working for both companies and have nobody like me. My emotional make-up is just fragile enough that I couldn't cope with that for very long. So, I came back to Marvel the following day and told Archie that I was going to leave. And I did. That's why I ended up back at DC."

[As the new books arrived on the schedule in 1977, poor-selling old ones dropped off. *Ragman* was cancelled in March, followed by *Young Love* in April, *Hercules Unbound* in May, *Plastic Man* and *Starfire* in July, *Richard Dragon*, *Kung Fu Fighter* in August, *Isis* in September, *DC Super-Stars* in October, *Metal Men* and *Teen Titans* in November and *Super-Team Family* and *Welcome Back, Kotter* in December. *DC Special* also ended with issue #29 in May but it was essentially relaunched with issue #1 in June as *DC Special Series*. Its first issue ("5 Star Super-Hero Spectacular") included a Batman story that tied up loose ends from the discontinued Kobra title. Such closure was also extended to some of 1977's cancelled books, notably *Teen Titans* (which revealed the team's origin as the group disbanded) and *Hercules Unbound*.]

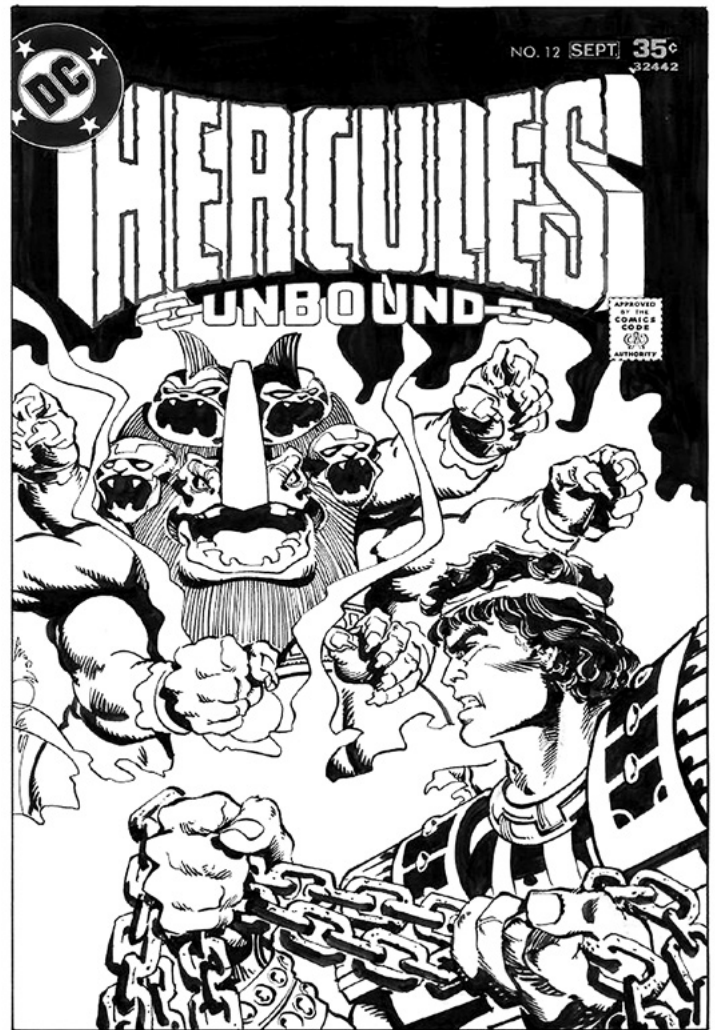
Walter Simonson, then artist on *Hercules Unbound* in *The Art of Walter Simonson* (1989)^c:

"It became clear that *Hercules* wasn't faring well commercially. [Writer] Cary Bates and I liked the character a lot and wanted to give him a good send-off, so we spruced up his costume... and created a storyline to explain much about the character that had been mysterious to that point. Our final story, however, required two issues to complete... and we were told that the book was being cancelled with issue #11, the first issue of our two-part climax. Cary and I spoke to DC about it and together, Jenette Kahn, Paul Levitz, and Joe Orlando gave us permission to go for one extra issue in order to complete the saga. In a business where the unfit are ruthlessly weeded out, I have never forgotten that extra consideration Cary and I were shown, and I have always been grateful for it."

[By the end of the year, Kahn took pride in what DC's creators had accomplished in 1977. In the greater empire of Warner Communications Inc. (WCI), such things didn't even register.]

Jeffrey H. Wasserman, then journalist in a column printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{ci}:

"Warner Publishing, Inc. (E.C., Independent, DC, and Warner Books) accounts for less than one-half of one percent of WCI's total operating revenue. Warner Publications' operating revenue for 1977 was \$52,235,000; for 1976, \$48,407,000; for 1975, \$40,189,000. Revenue after expenses yielded a loss of \$2,009,000 in 1975, lending credence to the rumor that WCI wanted to sell DC back then. The increase from 1976 to 1977 was attributed in part



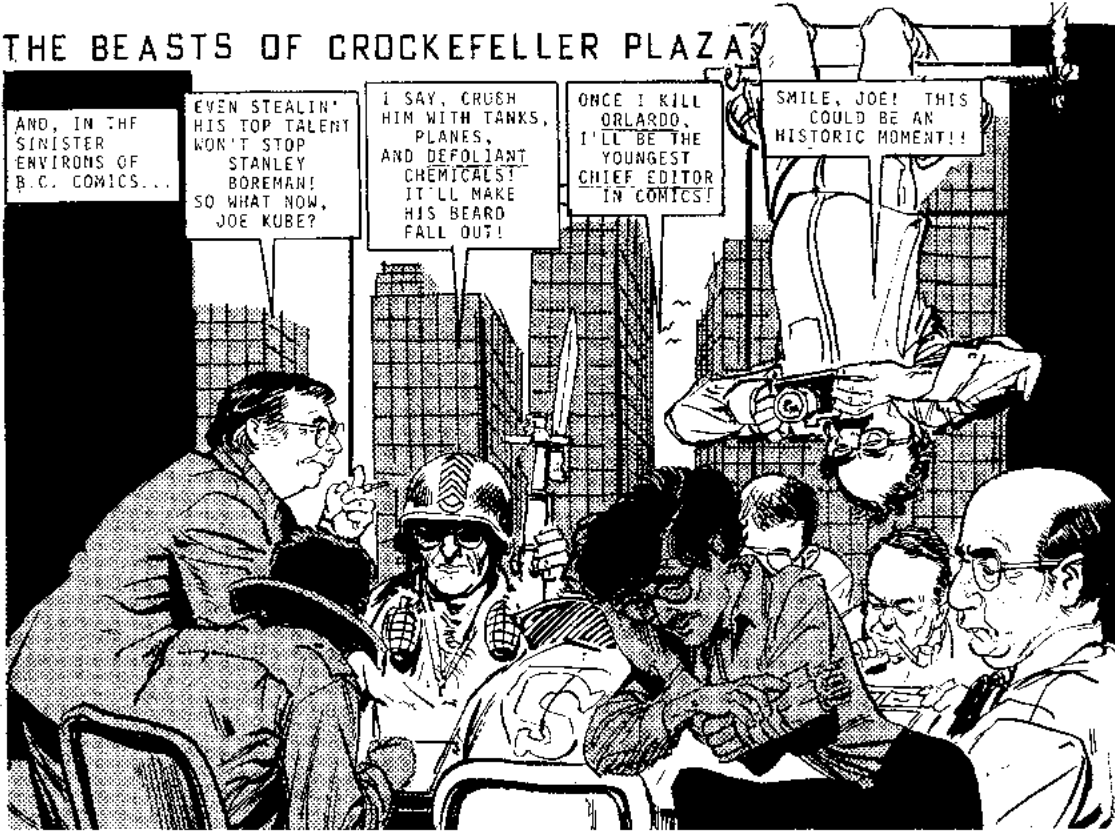
Walter Simonson originally took the *Hercules Unbound* assignment for the opportunity to provide layouts for the legendary Wallace Wood but ultimately wound up drawing the entire feature himself. Original art for issue #12—minus cover copy—via Simonson's Twitter account.

to a great rise in licensing revenues of DC superheroes. DC will be receiving a share of the gross receipts of the Salkinds' Superman movie to be distributed by Warner Bros. in Winter, 1978."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a comment printed in *Mediascene* #27 (September-October 1977)^{cii}:

"Even we are not sure exactly what form our future plans will take, because we have to present the ideas to Warner's finance people at a budget meeting on December 5 and 6. We will propose a scheme of mass expansion, involving a total program providing more material for all our books. The real test will come when we try to convince Warner's accountants to invest thousands of dollars that they won't see again for months."

THE BEASTS OF CROCKEFELLER PLAZA



During 1978, Marvel's Stan Lee was parodied as "Ego-Man" over the course of several issues of *Sick Magazine*. Issue #123's episode turned its attention to DC as writer Arnold Drake and Jack Sparling bit the hands that fed them. Among those caricatured in the panels here are Joe Orlando, Joe Kubert, Paul Levitz, Jack Adler, Murray Boltinoff, Julius Schwartz, Denny O'Neil, Robert Kanigher, Jenette Kahn, E. Nelson Bridwell, and Neal Adams.



COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978

Touted in 1976's *Amazing World of DC Comics* #10 as a forthcoming series, editor Murray Boltinoff and writer Gerry Conway's *Ninja the Invisible* #1 never went forward. Building off a 1969 Batman/Deadman team-up (*The Brave and the Bold* #86), the origin followed 18-year-old Ki Lun's pursuit of the Sensei and the League of Assassins, whom he blamed for his father's death. Endowed with invisibility powers created by his dad (and denied the League), the mysterious Ninja crossed paths with Superman and Batman in his quest before gaining the wisdom to appreciate that his objective shouldn't make him as bad as those he sought.

Boltinoff tapped one of his most prominent artists of the period—John Calnan—to draw the pilot but *Ninja* never moved further. In *Back Issue* #118 (Feb. 2020), Boltinoff's then-assistant Jack C. Harris offered this insight: "I remember giving the script a once-over after Murray edited it and I liked it. Not to shed any bad light on anyone, I believe one of the

reasons the story never saw the light of day was that some people in charge were not happy with the finished art. They didn't think it was up to standards for a new character. Beyond that, I can't really remember any further details, except that nobody thought that it was worth redrawing."

Given the Superman and Batman guest-appearances, Boltinoff planned to repurpose the story for an issue of *World's Finest*, but he was replaced as that book's editor before it could happen. In 1981, a reader request for a ninja character in the letter column of *G.I. Combat* #228 prompted Boltinoff to reminisce about Conway's unused hero. Working with writer Robert Kanigher and artist E.R. Cruz, the editor introduced a recurring ninja adventurer called Kana the Shadow Warrior in issue #232.

Pages 10-17 of the story—some of which are seen here—surfaced at Heritage Auctions in 2018.



The Sensei—a former adversary of Deadman—earned the eternal enmity of *Ninja the Invisible* after the villain ordered the execution of the young hero's scientist father.

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: EARLY 1978 (PRE-DC EXPLOSION)

Action Comics

Adventure Comics (starring Superboy, with Eclipso as back-up feature)

All-Star Comics (starring the Justice Society of America)

Aquaman

Batman

Batman Family (Dollar Comic starring Batman, Robin, Batgirl, Man-Bat, and the Huntress)

Black Lightning

The Brave and the Bold (Batman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)

Challengers of the Unknown

Claw the Unconquered

DC Special Series (60¢ giant and Dollar Comic umbrella title for extra-large editions of DC's regular titles)

Detective Comics

Doorway to Nightmare (starring Madame Xanadu)

Firestorm

The Flash

Freedom Fighters

Ghosts (supernatural short stories)

G.I. Combat (Dollar Comic starring the Haunted Tank, O.S.S., and "Women At War," plus various war short stories)

Green Lantern (starring the team of Green Lantern, Green Arrow, Black Canary, and Air Wave)

House of Mystery (Dollar Comic featuring supernatural short stories)

House of Secrets (supernatural short stories)

Jonah Hex

Justice League of America

Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth

Karate Kid

Men of War (starring Gravedigger, with "Dateline: Frontline" and Enemy Ace as alternating back-up features)

Mister Miracle

New Gods

Our Fighting Forces (starring The Losers, with back-up features starring individual squad members)

Secret Society of Super-Villains

Secrets of the Haunted House (supernatural short stories)

Sgt. Rock (with war short stories as back-ups)

Shade, the Changing Man

Shazam!

Showcase (umbrella try-out title with Power Girl, Hawkman, and a 100th anniversary celebration appearing in early 1978)

Star Hunters

Steel the Indestructible Man

Super Friends

Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes

Superman

Superman Family (Dollar Comic starring Superman, Supergirl, Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, Krypto, and Nightwing & Flamebird)

Unexpected (supernatural short stories)

Unknown Soldier

Warlord

Weird War Tales (supernatural war stories)

Weird Western Tales (starring Scalphunter)

Witching Hour (supernatural short stories)

Wonder Woman

World's Finest Comics (Dollar Comic starring Superman & Batman, Green Arrow, Black Canary, the Creeper, and Wonder Woman)



PART 2: EXPLOSION (1978)

Jack C. Harris, then DC Comics editor in a comment printed in *Time Warp* #1 (October-November 1979):

“From the sky it came: snow, ice and bitter cold. People huddled in their homes as the worst winter in decades coincided with a critical oil shortage. Many of the doom stories of science fiction seemed to be becoming all too true. People didn’t venture out into the elements. People stayed home! People didn’t buy comics!”

Kurt Busiek, future comic book writer in a 2018 recollection^{ciii}:

“I remember the snowstorm that caused all the trouble — we normally had a week off school in February, but that year we went three weeks straight with no school, and I’d actually put on snowshoes to trudge over to friends’ houses. That part, at least, was a blast.”

Tom Brevoort, future Marvel Comics editor in a 2018 recollection^{civ}:

“I do remember that crazy winter, and the absolute tons of snow that got dumped on New York—enough so that it completely submerged the fence surrounding our house, allowing one to walk right over it. At that point, I wasn’t still dependent on transportation from my parents in order to get my comics—I could make the walk or bike ride to the 7-11 myself. So I didn’t notice any particular disruption of service. I didn’t miss any issues for the most part.”

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #40 (June 1978)^{cv}:

“Between being behind so far and [production manager] John Verpoorten’s death [in December 1977] and the change-over and being shorthanded on staff for a while, while I gathered up the people who are working here now, and two and a half blizzards and God knows what else—every kind of natural disaster in the world... we had a situation where mail coming in from the Philippines [where artists drawing for Marvel were sending artwork from], the plane couldn’t land in New York, and had to land someplace else. I mean, the last blizzard, everything was paralyzed, and so through no fault of ours, Chemical Color just took an entire week of Marvel’s books and moved them into next month. They had no choice. They couldn’t move the plates, they couldn’t do anything. Everything was frozen. So, the best laid plans...”

[Huddled over a warm typewriter in February 1978, Bob Rozakis didn’t worry overly much about the blizzard raging outside. DC Comics was expanding and he had scripts to write. “There are some summer days in Dallas,” his new story began, “when the sun roasts you like an oven...”]

Story printed in the “Newswatch” section in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cvi}:

“DC has announced a major combination price change and page count increase for all its regular-sized comics. The move, effective with the June releases (cover-dated September), will raise prices from the current 35¢ to 50¢ and boost the number of pages from 32 to 40, according to publisher Jenette Kahn. The additional eight pages will be filled with new back-up features in some titles and expanded story lengths in others. This raises the total number of story pages from the current 17

to 25. The current 13 pages of advertising per book, including four pages of house ads, will remain unchanged. The two pages of letters and ‘house features’ such as the Daily Planet and Kahn’s ‘Publishorials’ will also remain unchanged.

DC’s two 60¢ titles, *Justice League of America* and *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes*, will also convert to the new format, dropping eight pages and reducing their price to 50¢. The bimonthly line of 60¢ ‘specials,’ which alternates with bimonthly Dollar Comics Spectaculars, will be discontinued.”

News item printed in *Mediascene* #28 (November-December 1977)^{cvii}:

“The move was announced by Jenette Kahn, in a prepared statement on December 14, in which she explained the format change as a more desirable alternative than a 32-page comic with a 40¢ price tag. ‘There was no way in good conscience we could ask our readers to shoulder a 15% increase,’ Ms. Kahn noted. ‘By increasing the number of pages while increasing the price, our readers will actually pay slightly less per page of comic book story, and certainly less than if we had taken the traditional step of raising our prices by 5¢.’

The work on this new size and price has been going on since late October, so DC was fairly certain of its ground when the time came to convince Warner in December. A solid sales period over the summer reinforced their arguments that comics were a viable product, and the necessity for some positive change has been evident for at least five years.”

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #39 (April 1978)^{cviii}:

“Every six months, the printer comes down and says, ‘Well, it will cost you more to do the same thing. You have a choice. Do you want us to find a new, imaginative way to do it worse and we’ll keep the price the same, or do you want to raise your price?’ Frankly, I’m not sure there is a new, imaginative way to do comic books any worse as far as physical production goes. We’re on a grade of paper that was invented for comics, because it was never worthwhile for magazines. It was too embarrassing. We’re using inks that are water-based compared to what they once were. We’re on plastic plates. What’s left? Printing ink on paper using paper plates?

I give World Color Press a lot of credit for continually finding cheaper methods because that’s what we told them to do. And by ‘we,’ I take the sins of a lot of forefathers on that. To produce a comic book for even 35¢ was the end result of an awful lot of cost cutting. If you use the ’60s-grade paper, the ’60s-grade ink, and the old metal plates, that same 35¢ comic probably would have been 60¢.



The bleak winter of 1977-1978 was at its worst during a brutal nor’easter that pummeled the east coast of the U.S. from February 5 to 7, 1978. Boston, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island received more than 27 inches of snow and other cities along the coast broke records. One hundred people lost their lives in the catastrophic storm and damages were tallied at \$520 million.

So we came to the point where we realized that we had a 35¢ comic and the next step was 40¢. We may be able to hold it till the summer of '78 or the winter of '78. Nobody at DC had a great belief that we could sell a 40¢ comic. There's no way that we could add a substantial amount of new material to make that 40¢ more worthwhile. And it's a stupid price, physically. Bad marketing. Three pieces of change. It's an uncomfortable three pieces of change. I don't think there's any evidence that the audience is ready for all dollar comics, either.

We tried to invent a bastard-size comic that we can charge more for and hopefully have work. So, we've raised the cover price of our magazines, but for the first time in ages we have not passed along the increased printing cost to the reader, in terms of what he pays for a page of comic art. You're paying the same thing for a page of comic art as you did before. It will be worth it in some books like *Brave and Bold*, in my opinion, where we're giving you something worthwhile in the other eight pages. Clearly, there will be other books where it will not be worthwhile.

These things are always conceived in think-tank sessions. We were all petrified with the 40¢ comic. The idea has been shaped by, I think, every executive at the company in one way or another. I think Jenette pushed for it very strongly. I think Sol pushed the printer very strongly to invent a way to do it.

What it amounts to is that we found a way to produce a 40-page comic book at an economical price. It's not vastly more profitable for us. We're going to have to sell the same number of comic books to make the same profit. We just think it's vastly more economical than a 40¢ comic book that we don't believe we could sell. Marvel will be out there with a 35¢ comic because Marvel's economics permit them to hold their price generally six months longer than we do. That's how they approach their business. I can't tell you why. They might have a slight difference in their cost factor, they may just have a difference in what profit they choose to accept on a book.

Marvel will have to do something. They can't remain 35¢ in 1980. I don't think they can remain 35¢ in 1979. I think it depends on how well they see we're doing, and how well they find themselves doing at 35¢ against the 50¢. If they see themselves being outpaced, distributors not accepting their books, they'll try to make the shift to 50¢. If they feel they're doing better, we may both end at 40¢. I can't tell you that this is going to work. We're going to try it. I believe that if the editors up and down the line, myself included, do good jobs with their books, we have the talent available to make the books worth it. If we don't, it's our fault. And if the readers don't buy it, we haven't given them what they want, and we should be 40¢. But we're going to try it."

[At Marvel, where Jim Shooter was about to succeed Archie Goodwin as editor-in-chief, the reaction was restrained.]



One of comics' most respected creators, Archie Goodwin had a long, diverse résumé in the industry, both as writer and editor. Along with comic books, he also scripted several newspaper strips, including *Secret Agent Corrigan* and *Star Wars* with artist Al Williamson. Photo by Michael Catron from *Amazing Heroes* #1 (June 1981).

Stan Lee, then Marvel Comics publisher in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cix}:

"What we'll do is what we always do—wait and see what happens with them. It's not a matter of life and death. We'll wait until their new books come out and follow them closely."

Archie Goodwin, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cx}:

"I think that larger format books succeed with a smaller, steadier market, but the largest audience buys the cheaper format. Comics are a general, casual reading material that can be read in one sitting. If you move too far away from that, you lose a lot of impulse buyers."

News item printed in *Mediascene* #28 (November-December 1977):

"Most Marvel editors and writers seem to be somewhat baffled by this change in size and price, and feel that the 15¢ price differential will be DC's undoing. There is no discernable difference in weight and feel, they argue, between 32 pages and 40 pages, and flipping through the book will not really makes much difference when compared to the cost. Last summer's price war, with Marvel at 30¢ and DC at 35¢, found both sides enjoying a healthy sales boom. The summer of '78 will be a different matter, pitting the two companies against each other along clearly drawn battle lines.

According to one Marvel editor, "DC's line-up doesn't justify such a risk. They go after the little kids in their books, and those kids would rather get three exciting Marvel characters rather than two run-of-the-mill DC heroes and a few mediocre eight-page fillers."

Phil Seuling, then comic book wholesaler in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cxli}:

“If there’s more money in it for the retailer, more of them will be willing to sell 50¢ comics. The reason that the Dollar Comics are so successful is because they’re sold in train stations—everywhere. If DC succeeds, I can’t see comic books not succeeding.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cxlii}:

“Whenever DC raised its prices in the last couple of years, the circulation has not fallen off, because we get a better distribution.”

James Warren, then publisher of Warren Publishing in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cxliii}:

“Very little that DC does affects Warren Publishing. I don’t think they’ve ever done anything in the way of format change that has affected us. We dance to a different drummer—excuse me—we *march* to a different drummer. They dance.

Jenette Kahn has attempted, unsuccessfully, to steal two of our people from us. It was the proudest day of my life when these people came to me and said, ‘We aren’t going to leave you, boss.’”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #39 (April 1978)^{cxliv}:

“I quite agree with Jim Warren when he says ‘little that DC does affects Warren Publishing.’ The opposite is also true: little that Warren Publishing does affects DC Comics, except as a training ground for future talent. Some of the best people in the business got their start with Warren—there is no denying

that—and both DC and Marvel would be the poorer without it.

However, we certainly do not follow Warren’s lead in his approach to the marketplace. We are in related media, yes, but not in the exact same medium. We have no plans, for example, to package a bunch of reprints and call it anything like *UFO and Alien Comix*.

Yes, we certainly did offer Louise Jones a job here. She is a talent of the first order, to be sure. But Jim, if people are so damned in love with you, why did we receive about a half-dozen proposals from Warren editors and freelancers during last December’s new projects meeting?”

[A number of cosmetic changes were considered to accompany the expansion, including the elimination of ads in Dollar Comics along with the addition of a square spine to the thick package. The latter plan was ultimately rejected, Mike Gold told Murray Bishoff in *The Buyer’s Guide For Comic Fandom* #241, since it would have cost an additional \$15,000 per title.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a recollection posted online in 2016^{cxv}:

“I remember back around 1978 when Jenette Kahn thought it might be time to replace the Milton Glaser ‘bullet’ logo. Paul Levitz—who may or may not have liked that logo—said consistency is critical to branding and the bullet was only two years old. He turned to their marketing and promotion guy, who at the time happened to be me, and I chirped in agreement.

I wasn’t happy about saying that. I disliked the logo because it boogied up when it was reduced, particularly with those Silly Putty plates World Color was using back in those sing-along days. But Paul was right, and the Glaser logo stuck it out until 2005.”

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a commentary printed in *The Comic Reader* #153 (February 1978)^{cxvi}:

“Once upon a time, price changes and format revisions were unusual occurrences in the comic book industry. In 1978, they’re expectable, and you’d lose your bet if you wagered on today’s readership looking askance at you as you explained the latest one. No, they’re jaded, having experienced six or eight different price-format combination increases in the past ten years—from 12¢ to \$2.50, from 32 pages to 100, and from paperback to tabloid size, they’ve seen them all. So what’s my personal reaction? I’m hesitant to say excited—we have been through this before—but surprisingly, I’m guardedly optimistic...

Each time a new format has been introduced by DC, one could be certain that a year and a half later their comics would be back to the industry-standard-sized 32-pager. But this time, I’m not sure that will happen. Some circumstances exist now that didn’t before that may now allow a bigger format to succeed...

Although the audience for James Warren’s horror and science fiction magazines skewed older than the typical DC or Marvel reader, they had an overlap of talent even in the latter half of the 1970s. Cary Bates, Steve Englehart, Dick Giordano, Carmine Infantino, and others were among those whose work could be found in Warren Magazines of the time.



The page count is unusual, to say the least. The last time DC had 40 interior pages was from 1951-54, and then it was only eight titles out of the entire line (the rest went from 48 to 32 pages) until the experiment ended. What makes the format so strange is that one comic book will be printed on one full sheet of newsprint (for the 32 pages) and one-fourth of another sheet (for the additional eight pages), which must certainly create a binding problem, even though Sparta already handles 80-page formats. Obviously, DC and World Color Press have worked that out, but it is still a size I never expected. Logistics aside, it will certainly be wonderful to have back the 25-page story length, which will hopefully ensure the return of plot pages to supplement the wall-to-wall fighting the 17-page format seems to necessitate. Also, the ratio of ad-text pages to art will change from 15 to 17 to 3 to 5, which will mean you'll be able to read more than two pages in a row without seeing an ad and you'll be able to flip through a comic without seeing only *Grit* and Hostess Twinkies ads. And book-length will again have some meaning...

The format of some of the DC titles will be even more unheard of for these days: triple features. *Aquaman* and *Men of War* will each have three characters featured, the lead story taking 11 or 12 pages, the remaining two splitting the remaining 13 to 14 pages. Doing six- or seven-page stories and making them coherent is a difficult task that few have shown since the mid-sixties, so many new writers will have to learn a new discipline, especially since many of the titles will have eight-page back-ups behind the already-existent 17-page lead features. But adding so many supporting strips is something bolder than I would have expected, having expected to see reprints as former expansions have brought.

But Jenette Kahn, Joe Orlando, and the rest of the decision makers have finally determined that utilizing characters that have been cult favorites should not unduly harm the sales on an already successful book. Deadman, Enemy Ace, Hawkman, the Atom and other characters that either couldn't retain their own book or were never popular enough to get their own will finally get their own regular berths, with their continued existence dependent more on reader reaction and the creators' own satisfaction with their product. Obviously, if the new version of Deadman (let's say) is a horrendous aberration of the character as we'd come to know him, we'd hope they have the sense to either change or stop the strip. But Deadman's presence in *Adventure Comics* shouldn't have a significant sales effect, so if Len Wein and Jim Aparo do a bang-up job, it can continue indefinitely...

The change will have the effect of almost doubling the current roster of continuing features from around 45 to 80. This not only means an increase in available work for professionals, it means that variety will be the main attraction of DC Comics again, something that has always set DC apart from Marvel and is a major part of DC's appeal...

The unfortunate part about the format change is, of course, the price increase. The monthly effect on purchasers of the en-

SPECIAL REPORT DC GOES TO 40 PAGE COMICS!

Last month we promised you news of "a once-in-a-lifetime event so mind-shattering that it will change the course of comics history!" Well, we weren't kidding—hold on to your seats...

Starting with the DC Comics scheduled to go on sale the beginning of June, we will no longer be publishing 32 page comics. From that moment forward, all DC Comics (except our Dollar Comics and our Collectors' Editions) will contain 40 interior pages—and all eight additional pages will be devoted to all-new stories.

The situation is this: longtime readers recognize the fact that every year and a couple months, the price of the standard comic book goes up 5¢. We'll make no excuse for that—everything gets more expensive. Newspapers which now cost 30¢ used to cost 2¢ back when a 64 page comic book cost a dime. However, we didn't want to charge our faithful readers more for their comics, so we had to come up with a format that could give you the same amount of story (a little more, actually) but still be viable on the marketplace. After six months of frantic calculation, we hit upon it: **40 pages, with 25 pages of all-new story, for 50¢.** That's two cents a page, compared with 2.08¢ a page in our 32¢ format (look, I said a little more).

25 pages means a return to two story comic books, and a return to



booklength comics that are really booklength.

And many titles will be booklength. **DC COMICS PRESENTS, ALL-STAR COMICS, SHOWCASE, JONAH HEX, FIRESTORM, STEEL, SUPER FRIENDS, WARLORD and DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE** will each be featuring 25 page stories. **JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA** and **SUPERBOY AND THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES** will drop back from 60¢ to 50¢ and be featuring 25 page stories, although an occasional **LEGION** issue will have two stories. **ADVENTURE COMICS** will be moving up to Dollar Comics size, as detailed last issue.

Other titles will be featuring 25 pages in the same format as before: our mystery titles like **GHOSTS** and **THE UNEXPECTED** and our war comics like **SGT. ROCK** and **OUR FIGHTING FORCES**.

Other comics will be featuring 17 page lead stories featuring the various DC super-stars, and eight page second stories featuring those super-stars you've been clamoring for: **The Atom, The Vigilante, The Manhunter from Mars, The Human Target, OMAC, Enemy Ace** and **The Ray**, to name a few. We'll be creating some brand-new super-heroes for these stories, too, but remember this: all of these features will be **regular series**, not just try-outs that will disappear in a couple months.

Of course, not every second story will be eight pages in length—some

might be nine or ten, some (on rare occasions) might run less—say, if Schwartz, Posko and Swan want an extra page for their **Superman** story. And if any of these new series prove to be overwhelmingly popular, who's to say they won't graduate to regular books in their own right after a time?

The people doing these new features run the gamut of comics greats. Such people as Jim Starlin, Rich Buckler, Len Wein, Denny O'Neill, Mike Golden, Howie Chaykin, Mike Vosburg, Joe Rubinstein, Joe Orlando, Steve Ditko and Scott Edelman will be joined by such talented newcomers as Roger McKenzie, Cory Burkett, John Fuller and Alex Saviuk.

And we're not going to stop here. Even as these words are being printed, no less than three brand-new titles are being prepared. We can't tell you what they will be, mostly because we haven't made our final selection from the dozens and dozens of proposals our top writers and artists (as well as a couple of top talents who are presently working at other comics companies) have laid upon us. So many of them are so good, we can use the next ten years worth of **SHOWCASE** just to preview them all!

Needless to say, the entire crew at DC Comics is tremendously excited at the chance to do real full-length comic book packages again—and of the creative freedom such opportunities present. We're all going to come out ahead on this one!

Just think about it: in these days of rising prices, we're doing the near-impossible. **DC WHIPS INFLATION!**

Stay tuned—we'll have more details next issue.

Mike Gold

Subscribers to DC's new Direct Currents newsletter received this early report from Mike Gold on the impending DC Explosion along with a snippet of Jim Starlin/Joe Rubinstein art from Kamandi's forthcoming OMAC feature.

tire DC line will be something like \$5.00 or more, and there will be a certain number of collectors who cannot absorb that increase. If the format goes over, I expect a few borderline books to fall by the wayside early, with DC's efforts probably redirected into the higher-profit dollar comics. I doubt that the increase will alter the sales level of the DC books, however...

In past size-price increases, DC was alone, with Marvel maintaining the 32-page size from their position of dominance in the sales market, and in each case, DC ultimately backed down. However, I now believe that the balance has shifted to a point where Marvel's own dominance now is in sheer volume of titles. The sales differential that existed in the early '70s is probably gone, and DC can probably match Marvel sales on a book-to-book basis. By June, though, the balance may be shifted in DC's favor with the coming of the Superman film. By all accounts, the film will be big, and will appeal to the exact age group that DC needs to appeal to: The 12-to-18-year-old males that *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* bring in. These days it appears that television (even with Farrah and Fonzie) is taking a backseat to the licensing possibilities of blockbuster motion pictures so the 'Batman effect' everyone expected when Wonder Woman became a regular series or *Spider-Man* and *The Hulk* began to air this spring, have a much better chance of occurring when *Superman* is released. Unless the film is a real turkey, I'd expect sales on the *Superman* comic to double, with a coattail effect on the rest of the line. If Superman is in demand, a 50¢ price-tag isn't going to deter a potential buyer...

Which brings us to the point of DC's approach to selling the new format. I doubt that blurb-ing a big 'More Pages' on each cover will do the trick since it hasn't worked in the past. The big selling points in my opinion are the all-new aspect and the attraction of the new back-up features. I hope that this is the intent, rather than plastering a large *Four-Bit Comics* above the logo. I'm still amazed that *Dollar Comics* doesn't drive the customers away."

[Along with the expansion announcement, DC kicked off 1978 with a highly-publicized bout between Superman and... Muhammad Ali!]

**News item printed in *Mediascene* #19
(May-June 1976)^{cxvii}:**

"The deal started [in early 1976] when Jenette, Sol [Harrison], and [Julius Schwartz] were discussing the fact that, since Ali was merchandising an action-doll for Mego Toys, perhaps they could promote a 30¢ comic about him... After kicking the idea around, Julie humorously noted that Ali



***Superman Vs. Muhammad Ali* was originally meant to be drawn by Joe Kubert (see page 89) but Ali's team didn't care for the artist's style. Nonetheless, Neal Adams followed Kubert's cover design when drawing the official wraparound cover, now packed with celebrity cameos.**

should fight Superman."

[Inspired, Kahn decided to make the quip into reality and spent two months of negotiation with the controversial boxing champion's management team to make it happen, complete with a presentation piece by Joe Kubert and a projected Christmas 1976 release. In a 2010 hardback collection of the story, however, Kahn asserted that Ali's colorful boxing promoter Don King instigated the project after seeing a copy of early 1976's *Superman Vs. Spider-Man* tabloid. Whatever its origins, the fight was on and editor Julius Schwartz, writer Denny O'Neil, and artist Neal Adams (with Dick Giordano and Terry Austin) were charged with documenting it. When O'Neil dropped out, Adams completed the story himself.]

**News item printed in *Mediascene* #23
(January-February 1977)^{cxviii}:**

"Jenette Kahn made a bet with a DC staffer that Adams would have the entire 72-page project done by March 15 [1977], for May 15 publication. The bet was made in October 1976, but as of mid-April, only 29 pages were finished, with Neal promising to spend a solid two weeks trying to catch up. Additional bets are not being accepted."

[Adams was so late that the licensing contract with Ali expired and had to be renegotiated, leaving the artist's receipt of a percentage bonus in doubt.]

**Neal Adams, then head of Continuity Associates in an interview printed in *Mediascene* #29
(January-February 1978)^{cxix}:**

"When I accepted the Superman/Ali project, I was to receive a specific contract and a piece of the sales-action. Due to my progressive lateness, which I admit to, no contract was ever drawn up and I still don't know if I'm due a percentage of the book."

**News item printed in *Mediascene* #26
(July-August 1977)^{cxx}:**

"Adams turned in the final pages in early August, and immediately began rewriting portions of the story. Neal is particularly proud of this prestige project, and has invested a great deal of extra time and effort in the book's production and promotion."

[Working from Joe Kubert's original wraparound cover design, Adams decided to pack the crowd watching Superman and Ali with the faces of real people, not only DC staffers but actors, politicians, and celebrities.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an afterword printed in *Superman Vs. Muhammad Ali Deluxe Edition* (2010)^{cxix}:

“We began filling the arena with well-known people of the day—President and Mrs. Jimmy Carter, President Gerald Ford and his wife Betty, Raquel Welch, Sonny, Cher, Joe Namath, Andy Warhol, Frank Sinatra, Johnny Carson, Lucille Ball, The Jackson Five. But there was a catch. Apparently, we needed permission from everyone whose likenesses we were using.”

[Most actors gave their blessing but a few, like George C. Scott and Carroll O’Connor, flatly refused. The process of tracking down dozens of individuals and redrawing those who wouldn’t consent to appearing on the cover didn’t help the schedule of the oft-delayed project. Like Marvel had done with its oversized *Star Wars* compilations, DC brokered a deal with Western Publishing to sell non-returnable copies of *Superman Vs. Muhammad Ali* (identified with a “Whitman” logo) to various retail chains. All told, according to *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978), the tabloid boasted a massive print run of nearly 650,000 copies “as opposed to Marvel’s total printing of 350,000 *Kiss* magazines. Still, the publisher fretted about releasing the issue to everyone else for its announced December 15, 1977 on-sale date.



From 1978 to 1980, DC partnered with Western Publishing to release three-packs of its comics to mass-market retailers. In order to prevent dishonest clients from returning issues to magazine distributors, the DC bullet was replaced on each issue with the Whitman logo.

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #150 (November 1977)^{cxix}:

“There is a good possibility that the *Superman Vs. Muhammad Ali* won’t be shipped until January to ensure a longer shelf life for the book. In some states, there is a thing called a Floor Tax, in which everything in the hands of a retailer on December 31 has a tax levied on it. DC is afraid that retailers will receive the book in late December and then ship those unsold copies back before December 31 to avoid having to pay the tax on them.”

[The book was finally unveiled at a January 31, 1978 press conference with Kahn, Ali, and his entourage in attendance. Pressed about the comic book, boxing’s then-world champion admitted that he hadn’t read it but he knew that he’d beaten the Man of Steel in the story.]

Muhammad Ali, in a comment printed in an Associated Press article (February 1978)^{cxix}:

“I like the book. It shows how the country is changing. Superman is a brainwash (sic) hero of the white man. So is Tarzan. The book shows that a black man can be the best.”

[The tabloid was also notable for bypassing the usual subpar newsprint of the era for a better grade of paper. The cost was passed along to the reader, though, resulting in a retail price of \$2.50 rather than the \$2.00 charged for other DC tabloids. Whether that played a factor in *Superman Vs. Muhammad Ali*’s undisclosed sales is unknown. In any event, Neal Adams had severed his relationship with the publisher, declaring that he was “on a personal, one-man strike against DC Comics.”

On January 1, 1978, a new copyright law went into effect that altered the long-standing “work for hire” contract in which a writer or artist signed over all rights to his work to his employer. Under the new law, those creators had to agree in writing to surrender the copyright.]

News item printed in *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978)^{cxix}:

“The Marvel gimmick is to rubber-stamp a waiver of all reproduction and copyright claims on the reverse side of its paychecks, making the creator sign away his rights in return for the money earned. DC abandoned this check/contract approach a few years ago in favor of an ‘art protection service’ for the artist. With the 1978 law in effect, even this system has been further embellished. In the past, the art was held until the artist could personally take possession of it, providing he sign a receipt which not only relieved the company of all loss or damage responsibilities, but also relieved the artist of his legal claims under the employee for hire clause. The new copyright law has added the twist, legally, that under work for hire agreements, *nobody* owns the art. It becomes a worthless part of the artist’s services which can be destroyed, but is returned by DC, providing the artist signs the giveaway agreement, which is a waiver of all rights, including personal possession.”

Neal Adams, then head of Continuity Associates in an interview printed in *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978)^{cxix}:

“A crisis situation began for me in relation to a special art exhibition of my Superman/Ali material in January. Mike Gold arranged for an early release of the artwork, and sent over the receipt form, on which I saw *employee for hire*. I tore up the release because of my growing awareness of the copyright revisions, and the particular implications of this legal phrasing.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978)^{cxxvi}:

“In regards to the artwork receipt/waiver, we have used exactly the same printed form for years now, and can produce file copies of Neal’s signature, accompanied by several examples of the employee for hire stipulation.”

Neal Adams, then head of Continuity Associates in an interview printed in *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978)^{cxxvii}:

“I must concede the possibility of such a situation, but I also plead a certain degree of innocence. It was not until the ’78 copyright changes came up that I understood the meaning of work for hire, so I may have unknowingly allowed this to get by. Nobody warns you when they are taking advantage of your lack of legal knowledge, but I’m no longer ignorant of my rights. The law has also been reinforced and amended since January, so it’s a whole new ball game now.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978)^{cxxviii}:

“Adams is asking for copyright adjustments beyond our current capacity to invoke. DC *is* improving its professional relationships, and the situation *could* change, but our most intense efforts are directed towards improving the books and the industry.

We have begun cutting in creators, and even costume-designing artists, for a percentage of any merchandising money. Most significantly, Bob Kane, Siegel and Shuster, and the William Marston heirs all receive some fee for Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman.

We try to remain flexible. Any time any art is to be reproduced out of the format for which it was originally commissioned, we contact the artist to negotiate a suitable fee. We also make deals for merchandising with the creators while Marvel does not.”

[Marvel’s own response to the new law only created more controversy when all employees were asked to sign an agreement wherein they agreed to surrender all rights to any material they had produced in the past or would create in the future. Adams was at the forefront of an effort to fight back in May 1978 but his efforts at creating the Comic Book Creators Guild ultimately came to nothing. Still, the situation eventually cost DC two forthcoming books: Adams and Mike Nasser’s *Ms. Mystic*—which Adams later claimed never to have offered DC—and Larry Hama’s *Bucky O’Hare*.]



Larry Hama later took Bucky O'Hare to Neal Adams' Continuity Associates, where Michael Golden joined the project as artist. In 1981, the team produced a story for a magazine-format album but had to wait until 1984 when Adams began serializing it in *Echo of Futurepast* #1.

Larry Hama, then DC Comics editor in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #43 (September 2010)^{cxxix}:

“Bucky is sort of my tribute to Wally Wood. It came out at a time when nobody wanted to do funny-animal comics.

One day they said, ‘Hey, we’re going to do creator-owned properties and we want you and Milgrom to come up with creative stuff and you’ll have a creator contract and you’ll own a good piece of it.’ So I developed Bucky and DC had no contract but told me we would own it. So I went to Ed Preiss, [publisher] Byron Preiss’ dad, who had also been the lawyer for Siegel and Shuster. He was just a great guy and really smart. Ed said, ‘No, an oral agreement is worth the paper it’s printed on.’”

[Meanwhile, DC was still banking on Siegel and Shuster’s greatest creation as the June release of *Superman The Movie* approached. Unfortunately, word came down in February that the film’s premiere was being postponed until December. The news came as a blow to Warner Books, which had

multiple tie-in publications in the works for the summer. DC was forced to reshuffle, as well. Tabloid editions devoted to the movie itself, a replica of 1939's *Superman #1*, and the brand-new "Superman's Life Story" (by Martin Pasko, Curt Swan, and Frank Chiaramonte) were all rescheduled for the end of the year. Likewise, "World of Krypton" (which followed the life story of Superman's father Jor-El) was moved from *Showcase #104-106* (June-August 1978) to issues #110-112 (December 1978-February 1979).

Two other projects couldn't be delayed. Since the summer of 1977, editor Julius Schwartz had been working with writer Martin Pasko to develop a team-up book that paired Superman with a succession of DC heroes. *DC Comics Presents*, a counterpart to Batman's *The Brave and the Bold*, debuted on schedule on April 4, 1978 for the first of a two-parter guest-starring the Flash (illustrated by José Luis García-López).

Just a day earlier, the same editor and writer (now paired with George Tuska and Vince Colletta) featured the same two heroes

in a newspaper comic strip distributed by the Chicago Tribune-New York Times Syndicate. Ever since Marvel hit it big with its *Amazing Spider-Man* newspaper feature in January 1977, DC had been eager to launch a strip of its own. The intent was to feature all of DC's major heroes with a special emphasis on Superman and Wonder Woman, given their current high profile on film and television. The Syndicate balked at calling it "Justice League of America" so a compromise was reached. The team would still be the JLA in the script but the actual title of the feature would be *The World's Greatest Superheroes*.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a letter printed in *The Comic Reader #155* (April 1978)^{cxxx}:

"The delay of the *Superman* movie won't affect the change [to 50¢], although we would have welcomed the promotional assistance. Don't forget, the summer is the strongest sales period and the best period for making such a move. Had we known [in advance] the movie wouldn't come out until Christmas, I doubt—I'm certain, in fact—the format change would have come down in June nonetheless."



The April 1978 premiere of the *World's Greatest Superheroes* newspaper strip was preceded by promotional imagery like this George Tuska/Vince Colletta line-up of DC crimefighters. The October 15, 1978 Sunday strip featured rare appearances by Black Canary and Green Lantern along with regulars Flash and Wonder Woman.

[With June coming up fast, Jenette Kahn, Joe Orlando, and Paul Levitz analyzed sales with an eye toward trimming the weak links in the line-up before the DC Explosion was ignited. After promoting *Batman Family* to a Dollar Comic with issue #17 in January, they chose to return *House of Mystery* to a standard-size book in June. *Adventure Comics* would be expanded in its place, echoing the lead features of 1942-1948's *Comic Cavalcade* by featuring the Flash, Green Lantern and Wonder Woman as its star attractions. *Shazam!* ended with issue #35 in February but the feature resumed as part of June's *World's Finest #253*. *Challengers of the Unknown* was cancelled with issue #87 in March and *Karate Kid #15* followed in April, its story initially continued in May's *Kamandi #58* before the character returned to the book he spun-off from in July's *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes #244*. *Freedom Fighters #15* concluded that title the following month, promising to resolve its story in *Secret Society of Super-Villains #16-18*. Also cancelled in April was *New Gods*, leaving the completed contents for its first 25-page issue (*New Gods #20*) in limbo. Levitz agreed to run the material in the first two issues of his expanded *Adventure Comics*.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a letter printed in *The Comic Reader #155* (April 1978)^{cxxx}:

"One of the real problems of the format change is that it is a bit more difficult to come out with new books. Scheduling is tighter, as we are already producing 20% more editorial

material. Therefore, we are more likely to make a few cancellations of marginal titles, such as *The New Gods* with #19 (the second time it has been cancelled from a somewhat profitable position). Also, the 50¢ format changes a few rules: *House of Mystery* is now more profitable as a 50¢ monthly than a dollar bimonthly, so we'll probably make the appropriate change and add a superhero or experimental (perhaps western) Dollar Comic later on...

Some aspects of the format change are of an experimental nature: we don't know that the three feature concept is going to work in *Aquaman*. It is a marginal title anyway and it would be interesting to see how it is received...

[The concern] that a few borderline books will fall by the wayside is valid: If you were ambivalent about a title before, and you dislike the second feature, you're likely to drop the book at 50¢ no matter how many pages you're getting. We're now looking at our marginal books and our three-dozen new project proposals and determining how many of the latter should replace the former."

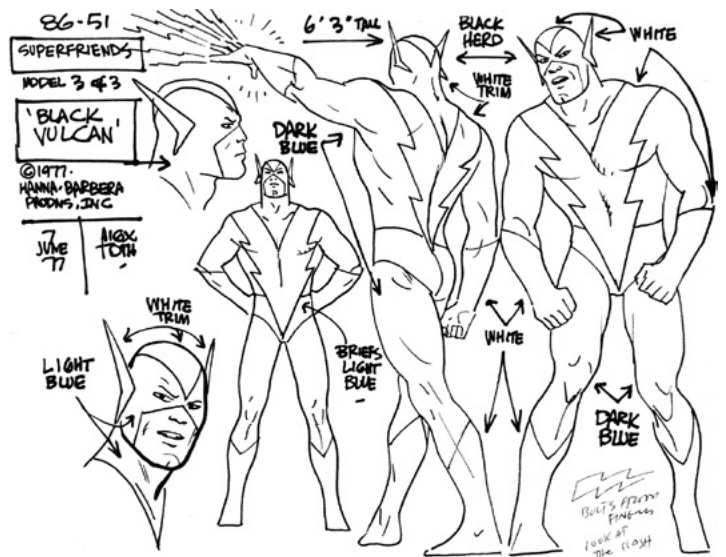
[In March, the cancellation of four more marginal books was announced. *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #15 (on sale in March), *Aquaman* #63 and *Mister Miracle* #25 (May) and *Shade the Changing Man* #9 (July) were reported as their final issues.]

Bob Rozakis, then DC Comics assistant editor in a 2018 recollection^{cxxxii}:

"*Secret Society of Super-Villains* #16 was finished and sent to the separators on schedule. I went to Jenette, Joe and Paul and said, 'Look, this is the first part of a three-part story that may never see its ending published. Why not just end the series with #15?' They saw the logic to that and so #16 was recalled. Issue #17 had already been penciled and #18 was written (including the projected back-up features). In retrospect, had I not suggested axing the book with #15, would the second and third chapters have eventually seen print somewhere?"

[In the case of Steve Ditko's *Shade*, DC opted to end the book with issue #8 instead, promising to publish its lead story in DC's fan magazine *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #18 while relocating its Odd Man back-up feature to Black Lightning #14 in December. (Mike Gold later reported that the high page rates that Ditko received were a tipping point in its profitability.)

Black Lightning, meanwhile, suffered the critical loss of its creator Tony Isabella, who left the title after issue #10 in April. In the fall of 1977, he'd been astonished to see a rip-off of his character on Hanna-Barbera's *All-New Super Friends Hour*.]



Seen in this design sheet by Alex Toth, Black Vulcan was meant to add diversity to the cast of the all-white *Super Friends* animated cartoon. Also added to the show's cast in its 1977-1978 season were the newly-created Native American hero Apache Chief and Hispanic adventurer El Dorado as well as the established South American heroine Rima.

Tony Isabella, Black Lightning creator in an interview posted at mysteryisland.net in 2011^{cxxxiii}:

"Black Lightning was supposed to appear on the show. A DC executive told me as much. My deal with DC called for me to receive 20% of whatever DC made on the use of my character in the series. I wouldn't have received 20% of what DC made from the show, just 20% of—for the sake of argument, let's say there were ten DC characters in the show—one-tenth of what DC made. But DC didn't want to pay me out of their cut. DC told the folks at Hanna-Barbera they would have to pay extra for the use of Black Lightning. Hanna-Barbera balked at this and told DC they would just do their own version of Black Lightning. Which DC let them get away with.

Hanna-Barbera didn't owe me for the use of Black Lightning. It was DC Comics who owed me. I didn't find out my creation wasn't on the show until the first Black Vulcan episode aired. My response was to write a story called "The Other Black Lightning" [*BL* #10] wherein this unscrupulous promoter named Barbara Hanna—subtle, huh?—created her own fraudulent version of Black Lightning. That turned out to be my last script of the first run."

[Meanwhile, David Michelinie walked away from the publisher, too. At the writer's request, penciller Rich Buckler had redesigned the Star Hunters' spacecraft but failed to identify how he created the image. Michelinie didn't discover its origin until the vessel had already appeared in print.]

David Michelinie, then writer of *Star Hunters* in an article printed in *Back Issue* #34 (June 2009)^{cxxxiv}:

“Mr. Buckler had submitted a Xerox of an animation cel from a network cartoon show. I had created *Star Hunters*, had put my professional name and reputation on it. I was embarrassed, humiliated, and angry. I went to the editor and, for the first and only time in my career, asked that an artist be removed from a book I was writing. I was told that my request was reasonable and would be granted. [However,] when issue #7 was finished and I asked who the new penciller was going to be, I was told that minds had changed. Even though they knew I’d quit because of it. So after five years of giving DC my time (and overtime), my best efforts, and my unquestioned loyalty... I called Jim Shooter and asked if I could get some work there. His reply was, and I quote, ‘Would today be too soon?’”

[Inker Bob Layton also left DC in solidarity with Michelinie and took their prospective DC hero The Sorcerer with them but *Star Hunters* remained on the schedule. Writer Gerry Conway and inker Tom Sutton would now join Buckler on the book.

The typical comic reader had no knowledge of such things or any upcoming news outside of what they read in DC’s weekly

Daily Planet promo pages in the comics themselves. They’d never heard of news magazines like *The Comic Reader* or *The Comics Journal* but the success of the Direct Currents Hotline demonstrated that there was a huge hunger for insider information. With the publisher’s in-house *Amazing World of DC Comics* all but discontinued, DC advertised an alternative in early 1978 house ads: *The Direct Currents Newsletter*.

For a one-year \$4.00 subscription, readers got a compact 4.5 x 7 packet that unfolded into a 26 x 13 sheet. One side featured a poster-size black and white reproduction of one of that month’s covers and the other was packed with news and more advance art. Issue #2 (March 1978) divulged full details on the imminent expansion. For everyone else, the DC Explosion was a tantalizing mystery being teased at the bottom of letter columns and in April’s full-page house ad (illustrated by Joe Staton) that spotlighted the stars of many of the summer’s new back-up features. To those out of the loop, the 50¢ price tag was finally revealed in a subscription ad in issues on sale in May...or when they approached their favorite spinner rack in June.]

Jenette Kahn’s “Publishorial” that appeared in every DC comic book sold in June 1978 (cover date September):

“Changes. These days, they come fast and furious.

As you’ve no doubt noticed, we’ve raised our price this month—not totally shocking, as comics have gone up in price every 15 months or so for the past five or six years.

But hopefully you’ve noticed that the number of pages in our standard comic books have also gone up. We’ve added eight pages of all-new story—no ads, no reprints—along with the price increase. With the single exception of our story-packed Dollar Comics, this is the first time anybody in the field is *not* giving you less for your money.

In fact, it’s a 47% gain in story, for a 43% raise in price.

Of course, we didn’t have to do this. We *could* have tacked on another 5¢ for those 17-page stories. Before long, other publishers will be charging 40¢ for their 17-page stories, unless they follow our lead and provide more pages. You’ll be paying 2.35¢ per page of story for *theirs*, and only 2¢ for *ours*. That’s like getting about three pages free from DC.

I don’t have to bore you with the ever-raising cost of absolutely everything. Each time anybody adds another nickel to the cost of the standard comic book, somebody composes a little essay about how phone calls used to cost 5¢ and hot dogs a dime. But we really didn’t want to take from our loyal readers (and even our casual readers, for that matter) without giving at least as much in return.

We’re excited because we believe the 50¢ comic book, like the highly successful Dollar Comics package we introduced 18 months ago, will be a more attractive product for the retailer as well as for the reader. Being in a more profitable format for the retailer, our comics should be a little easier to



Each edition of DC’s Direct Currents newsletter was mailed in a compact digest-size but folded out to reveal an oversized black and white cover reproduction on one side and the latest DC news on the other. Photo by Dan Didio, via Facebook.

find. Some places that do not carry comics will be handling DC titles before long. Most harder-to-find comics will get better distribution.

Better still, the 25 pages of story format gives us something we haven't had for the better part of a decade: the chance to do really full-length stories, with fully-developed sub-plots and characterization. We also have the chance to bring back some of your favorite characters that haven't been able to carry an entire 17 page title: Enemy Ace, The Human Target, The Atom and Omac, for example. And we're able to introduce a number of new characters of a more experimental nature: Cinnamon, The Odd Man, the Amazons.

The new format also gives us a bit of room to experiment. You'll see the return of Swamp Thing, original characters like The Vixen, new western and war titles—we've even be able to schedule a couple of titles which will represent some of the best DC comics printed in the past four decades: Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson's Manhunter series, the famous Bat Lash books, and so on.

And we'll also be making the Dollar Comics look even more attractive, because starting this month, we're taking out all the ads. You'll be getting an additional page or two of story, but now we'll have the freedom to run more two-page spreads and wraparound covers. The Dollar Comics—including our latest addition, *Adventure Comics*—will now have 68-pages of all-new story and art from cover to cover. Not a page of ads.

We've been calling all of this 'The DC Explosion' and that's what it truly is—an explosion of new ideas, new concepts, new characters, and new formats. We now have near-limitless opportunities to experiment, to do longer and indeed better stories, to be more flexible in the type of material we're presenting. The best is getting better.

We couldn't do it without the encouragement and boundless energy of our creative staff—from new talents like Marshall Rogers and Joe Staton to established pros like Gerry Conway and Len Wein to (if they'll forgive me) vets like Curt Swan and now-editor Ross Andru. To each and every creator working with us, my deepest and sincerest thanks.

And to our faithful readers, who have shown us so much support and enthusiasm since we've started planting the seeds of change, I offer my thanks as well. We honestly could not have done it without your help.

But—and I know you're expecting this—we're not stopping here. Even as I write these words, I have working proposals on my desk for no less than ten new projects, not all of which are new titles. We're continuing to grow and branch out, to boldly go where no comics company has gone before.

And we're glad you're there with us—every step of the way. Take care."

[Along with Jenette Kahn's June Publishorial, many DC titles also featured "The Answer Man's Guide to the DC Explosion." A spin-off of Rozakis' popular Daily Planet

After cutting his ties with Marvel in November 1965, Steve Ditko—seen here in a 1959 photo—became increasingly dependent on other publishers for income. By 1977, DC was essentially his only employer, for whom he produced *Shade, the Changing Man*, a revival of his 1968 Creeper series (in *World's Finest*) and various short stories.



Q&A column, it helpfully provided an alphabetical list of what was appearing where in the expanded DC line. The page had largely kept up to date with the spring's revisions save for last-minute developments: *Shade the Changing Man* was still described as an active title and a never-written Huntress trilogy was advertised for *Showcase* #107-109 rather than a new western called the Deserter.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Direct Currents Newsletter* #4 (June 1978)^{cxxxv}:

"We have over a dozen entirely new projects in one phase or another of preparation. While it's only fair to note we couldn't possibly publish them all, we can tell you this list includes three new westerns (from Gerry Conway, Len Wein and Bob Toomey, respectively), a JSA superhero solo book from Paul Levitz, two totally uncategorizable features from Larry Hama and Cary Burkett and Roger McKenzie (the latter two working together), a new superhero from Mr. McKenzie, a new mystery project from Murray Boltinoff, new projects from Shelly Mayer, Michael Fleisher and Gerry Conway, another new superhero from the infinite talent of Steve Ditko, and a new non-superhero title from Mike Grell."

News items printed in *Mediascene* #30 (March-April 1978)^{cxxxvi}:

"Len Wein is also working on a large number of filler features for his comics, bringing back classic characters who never seemed quite able to support books of their own. 'Danger Trail' will bring back King Faraday... and will guest-star a certain General Rip Carter, with or without a wise-cracking commando sidekick.

Five Star Super-Hero Spectacular [first seen as a 1977 one-shot] is being given a new lease on life this summer, starting off with a tale of Zatanna, daughter of Zatarra,

master of magic.

The Spectre is another character waiting in the wings for his opportunity to go on stage for the third or fourth time, along with a host of other old-timers, but the current schedule only has room for so many of these heroes at a time. Plans are underway for a general expansion of the DC line by next Christmas, and ideas are being entertained for new books, new characters and new series.”

John Morrow, future comic book historian in a 2018 recollection^{cxxxvii}:

“[Besides relying on the DC Comics Hot-Line,] I also subscribed to the *Buyer’s Guide for Comic Fandom* to get a weekly news fix, and it came in handy when I decided to start a local comic book club. My friends Matt Turner and Ken Hattaway were the charter members (plus two other guys who I sadly don’t recall now), and we got together in the clubhouse of the apartment complex I was living in with my mom. To kick off the first meeting, I culled all the info I could about DC’s new ‘Explosion’ line from *TBG*, and assembled my first comics publication, which I cleverly (?) called ‘The Comics Explosion.’ It was a simple two-page newsletter that I “typeset” on my family typewriter, pasted up with a little artwork, and then had my dad xerox a handful of copies of at his office. Our club had its first weekly meeting, where I handed out my proud little publication, and we all went our separate ways till the following Saturday.”

Kurt Busiek, future comic book writer in a 2018 recollection^{cxxxviii}:

“I remember the ads for the DC Explosion, and I was interested — I remember that Joe Staton ad with the group of heroes, and I didn’t know who all of them were, but it was like getting the Fall Preview Issue of *TV Guide*, and thinking about all the new series that might be interesting.

For specifics, I remember buying *Dynamic Classics* #1, with a Neal Adams Batman story and a Goodwin/Simonson Manhunter backup, and looking forward to more, because at that time I’d heard a lot about both the Adams Batman stories and Manhunter but hadn’t read much of either.”

Tom Brevoort, future Marvel Comics editor in a 2018 recollection^{cxxxix}:

“I can remember seeing all of the promotion for the new upcoming ‘DC Explosion’ during the ramp-up. Ads ran constantly, calling out all of the new back-up features that were going to run and pointing out the added value-for-money that the readers were going to get. I’ll admit, the effort didn’t make much of an impact on me. I was, for some reason, a fan of the character Air-Wave, so it was nice

to see that he was going to be getting a series alternating with the Atom in the back of *Action Comics*. But this was also the point in time where I had started to really branch out into reading Marvel books, and so that extra 15¢ was a real calculation problem. The added cost wasn’t enough to make me drop any of the DC books that I loved, but it did make it more difficult to branch out and try new things. It was easier to experiment with an issue of, say, *Daredevil*, at 35¢.”

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #40 (June 1978)^{cxli}:

“I don’t like [DC’s] thinking on [the Explosion]. I don’t think it’s going to work out the way they have it planned. Obviously, the people above me don’t think so, either, or else I would be hearing from them. I’m not worried too much about that. Let them mess around with that; if it works out fine, if it doesn’t, then they’re the ones... The people who are experimenting, it would seem to me, would logically be the ones who have a need to experiment. [Marvel Comics is] doing fine. We’re doing great. I feel that if we have the lowest-priced package on the market, that there’ll be an awful lot of kids who will opt for the lowest-priced package, especially because I think our books are pretty good.”



Jim Shooter came to fame in the latter half of the 1960s as the much-envied teenage writer of DC’s Legion of Super-Heroes feature in *Adventure Comics*. Returning to comics after a several-year absence, he moved from DC to Marvel in January 1976 and began a quick ascension at the company. Photo by Michael Catron from *The Comics Journal* #60 (November 1980).

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a letter printed in *The Comic Reader* #155 (April 1978)^{cxlii}:

“If the absolute worst happens, I’d hope we go up to 48-pages at a higher price (or include reprints) than revert to the 32-page format. The 32-pager never should *have* happened, and it certainly should have been killed off back when the 48-pagers ‘returned’ three-quarters of a decade ago.”

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST 1978 (THE DC EXPLOSION)

- Action Comics* (starring Superman, with the Atom and Air Wave as alternating back-up features)
- Adventure Comics* (Dollar Comic starring the Flash, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, and Deadman with the Elongated Man and New Gods as opening bonus features)
- All-Star Comics* (starring the Justice Society of America)
- Army at War* (war short stories)
- Batman* (now including "The Unsolved Cases of Batman" and "The Public Life of Bruce Wayne" as alternating back-up features)
- Batman Family* (Dollar Comic starring Batman, Robin, Batgirl, Man-Bat, and the Huntress)
- Battle Classics* (reprints from DC's 1960s war series)
- Black Lightning* (now including the Ray as a back-up feature)
- The Brave and the Bold* (Batman team-ups with assorted DC heroes, plus the Human Target as new back-up feature)
- DC Comics Presents* (Superman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)
- DC Special Series* (Dollar Comic umbrella title for extra-large editions of DC's regular titles)
- Detective Comics* (starring Batman, with Hawkman as new back-up feature)
- Doorway to Nightmare* (starring Madame Xanadu)
- Dynamic Classics* (reprint title featuring the best of DC's early 1970s superhero stories)
- Firestorm*
- The Flash* (now including Kid Flash as a back-up feature)
- Ghosts* (supernatural short stories)
- G.I. Combat* (Dollar Comic starring the Haunted Tank, O.S.S., and "Women At War," plus various war short stories)
- Green Lantern* (featuring Green Lantern/Green Arrow and now including the Golden Age Green Lantern and the Green Lantern Corps in alternating back-up trilogies)
- House of Mystery* (supernatural short stories)
- House of Secrets* (supernatural short stories)
- Jonah Hex*
- Justice League of America*
- Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth* (now including OMAC as a back-up feature)
- Men of War* (starring Gravedigger with "Dateline: Frontline" and Enemy Ace as back-up features)
- Our Fighting Forces* (starring the Losers with Capt. Storm and "H.Q.: Confidential as back-up features)
- Secrets of the Haunted House* (supernatural short stories)
- Sgt. Rock* (with war short stories as back-ups)
- Showcase* (umbrella try-out title with O.S.S., Deadman, and the Creeper scheduled for the summer)
- Star Hunters*
- Steel the Indestructible Man*
- Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes*
- Super Friends* (now including the Wonder Twins as back-up feature)
- Superman* (now including "Mr. and Mrs. Superman" and "The Private Life of Clark Kent" as alternating back-up features)
- Superman Family* (Dollar Comic starring Superman, Superboy, Supergirl, Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, Krypto, and Nightwing & Flamebird)
- Unexpected* (supernatural short stories)
- Unknown Soldier* (with war short stories as back-ups)
- Warlord*
- Weird War Tales* (supernatural war stories)
- Weird Western Tales* (starring Scalphunter with Cinnamon as new back-up feature)
- Witching Hour* (supernatural short stories)
- Wonder Woman* (now including "Tales of the Amazons" as new back-up feature)
- World's Finest Comics* (Dollar Comic starring Superman & Batman, Green Arrow, Black Canary, the Creeper, and Shazam!)

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST 1978 (UNPUBLISHED)

- Aquaman* (with the Martian Manhunter and the Vigilante as back-up features)
- Claw the Unconquered*
- Demand Classics* (reprint title featuring the best of DC's 1960s superhero stories)
- Mister Miracle* (now including Big Barda as back-up feature)
- New Gods*
- The Secret Society of Super-Villains* (now including super-villain origins and Captain Comet in alternating back-up features)
- Shade, the Changing Man* (now including the Odd Man as back-up feature)
- The Vixen*
- Western Classics* (reprint title featuring the best of DC's 1950s-1960s western stories)

PART 3: IMPLOSION (1978-1980)

Murray Bishoff, then reporter in a news story printed in *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom* #241 (June 30, 1978)^{cxliii}:

“Business is brewing over at DC... Publishers have sustained the rather unbelievable number of titles on sale instead of building fewer, stronger sellers largely on the notion that there is only so much rack space, and ‘if we give up a space, they will just fill it with one of their titles.’ DC has declared Enough of This. DC now believes numbers are not the answer, and will make an effort to eliminate the less worthy series by raising the bottom line for cancellation. A number of marginal titles will go. Also, series that ‘have not quite jelled’ will be cancelled without looking at sales figures... Most of the cancellations depend on editorial opinion, *not* sales figures. If a series could do better quality-wise in someplace other than in its own book, it will go elsewhere. As a concerted effort to remove the glut on the stands, this action will only prune DC’s stock, not injure it. In the next few weeks, the editors will decide what will go first.”

Don and Maggie Thompson, then news/opinion writers in a news story printed in *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom* #243 (July 14, 1978)^{cxliiii}:

“Rumors are flying of a cutback of 40% of the staff at DC. We called our friendly news source at DC (Mike Gold), who called the rumor ‘absolute nonsense.’ No massive layoffs are planned; what *is* happening is a cutback on the titles being done just to hold press space. All reprint books are cancelled for example.”

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news story printed in *The Comic Reader* #159 (August 1978)^{cxliiv}:

“DC has eliminated their short-lived 50¢, 40-page line, after only three months’ trial. Obviously, the reason has nothing to do with

sales. The people at Warner feel that the new system of distribution should be given a chance with DCs looking like the rest of the industry’s books, since there will be some risk of alienating wholesalers. So, beginning in September (books cover dated December), all DCs that are not dollar books will be 32 pages with 17 pages of story again, but now for 40¢... All non-dollar-sized bimonthly books have either been cancelled or upgraded to monthly status.”

Independent News newsletter (August 1978)^{cxliiv}:

“Starting with editions released in September, DC’s standard comics will be cover-priced at 40¢. This will keep DC the most profitable comics line published, giving retailers 14½% greater profit on all DC Comics sold than on the comics of other publishers. The extra profit on DC should continue to enable wholesalers to open new accounts and should also retrieve any of the consumers temporarily lost at the 50¢ cover price. ‘The 50¢ cover price, previously in effect, has been tabled indefinitely,’ reports DC Comics, ‘until we are sure there will be no consumer resistance.’”

Lead story of the “Newswatch” section in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{cxliiv}:

“In an unprecedented move that has caused waves of shock and consternation to ripple throughout the comics industry, DC Comics has initiated a massive cutback by cancelling 17 titles and postponing indefinitely four new titles already scheduled for publication. In addition to this, DC has laid off five full-time staffers, and has changed its 50¢/25-page story format to a 40¢/17-page story format.

DC has cancelled *Army at War*, *All-Star Comics*, *Batman Family*, *Battle Classics*, *Black Lightning*, *Claw*, *Doorway to Nightmare*, *Dynamic Classics*, *Firestorm*, *House of Secrets*, *Kamandi*, *Our Fighting Forces*, *Secrets of Haunted House*, *Showcase*, *Star Hunters*, *Steel*, and *The Witching Hour*. *Demand Classics*,

Left in limbo following the DC Implosion, Mike Grell eventually took his *Starslayer* series—a futuristic reversal on his Warlord creation—to Pacific Comics. Seen here is the cover of issue #2 (1982).



The Deserter, *The Vixen*, and *Western Classics*, all highly touted books for summer release, will not appear. Mike Grell's *Starslayer*, and the [Martin] Pasko-[Joe] Orlando *Swamp Thing* revival, both in the planning stages, have been shelved."

Editorial comment printed in *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980)^{cxlvii}:

"The effects of the final decision were devastating: five salaried employees were fired immediately—editors Larry Hama and Al Milgrom, Public Relations Assistant Paul Kupperberg, Production Artist Steve Mitchell, and Production Secretary Phyllis Weiss."

[Although he retained his job, veteran DC editor Murray Boltinoff was left with just one title: *G.I. Combat*. *Ghosts* and *Unexpected*—the only books of Boltinoff's that escaped cancellation—were reassigned to Jack C. Harris.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a July 1978 interview printed in *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom* #247 (August 11, 1978)^{cxlviii}:

"I stand by my statement that a 40% staff cutback is nonsense. We had 41 people on staff here; we now have 35, a 15% cutback. We may lose one or two more people from attrition, as some folks were planning on leaving this summer, and I suppose a couple of them will not be replaced.

We employ over a hundred freelancers, and I think less than a dozen (including colorists and letterers) are no longer getting any work from DC. Another group of about the same size is getting less work, but most of them will pick up more assignments when our mini-backlog disappears. (We have about a six-month backlog on mystery stories and on non-series war stories.) Occasional freelancers like Steve Englehart are still picking up superhero work. Of course, our contractual talent is working at the same level. A couple folks are doing more work, as things work out."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{cxlix}:

"It was our freelancers who took the worst of the punishment, even though we don't think any of them really deserved to be fired. On the other hand, we simply couldn't support them in our new, streamlined operation. We obviously had to retain our best people, so selections were based on quality and each individual's past performance. We are still sorting out the particulars of this matter, but there are several artists who need not worry, including all our contract employees.

The president of Warner, Jay Emmett, and a number of board members and executives decided what had to be done, but they left it to us to make the personnel and editorial decisions."

Lead story of the "Newswatch" section in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{cl}:

According to DC spokesman Mike Gold, sales were 'not really' the main reason behind the cutback. 'What we're doing,' Gold said, 'is changing our distribution system, changing our books to conform to the distribution system, so that you will see some very major changes in those regards.'"

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative, in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{cli}:

"It all starts with our yearly budget review meeting, which is held six months after our annual budget meeting. One gives you the money, and the other checks to see how you're spending it. In six months anything can happen, and this time it did. What we saw in May was the result of this winter's blizzard, and things just sort of rolled along from there, out of DC's control. To be honest, however, what happened was not solely in response to these figures, but more due to the patterns which have been developing over the past several years.

Prices went up last year, but we have found that our price increases do not necessarily have any influence on our overall sales, and that Marvel generally raises their books soon after ours anyway—this was true of the 25¢ to 30¢ and 30¢ to 35¢ increases. One thing we have all been noticing, however, is a general drop-off in sales when everybody levels out at the same price, a problem which unfortunately coincides with another annual event, the winter slump. The timing of these two situations makes it difficult to tell which is most responsible for poor sales, but last year's version of the trend was staggering.

September through December are not peak sales months to begin with, and there developed a genuine resistance to the 35¢ package when Marvel finally took the step up. Then the winter set in—trucks didn't roll, books were on and off the stands in a week—it was simply a disaster, and our sales figures were abysmal.

When Warners saw these numbers, they decided to take a look at the overall numbers for the last few years. They finally came to notice the trend we've always been aware of: over a ten-year period,

DC has been selling *fewer* individual books, and compensating by putting out *more* titles; and that sales vary with the seasons.

Both problems could be attributed to the fact that we have a very large overhead—rent, contract, salaries, production costs—and the fact that the distributor tells us how many copies of a book we must print before he will even consider handling it. The distributor is paid a flat fee, based on the print run, whether he does his job or not, and literally thousands of comics never leave the warehouses. It's a really archaic system that relies on saturating the stands by sheer force of numbers, despite the dwindling amount of space available. What makes this situation worse is the fact that our distributor, Independent News, is part of the Warner Communications conglomerate, as we are—obviously an untenable arrangement.”

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Eerie* #97 (September 1978)^{ciii}:

“Warner Books chairman William Sarnoff and Jay Emmett, a Warner Communications director, ordered an immediate 40% cutback in the DC line... Warner initiated the cutback without consulting Jenette Kahn and she wasn't even in town when the order came down... Sources at Marvel report Stan Lee and Jim Shooter have discussed a title cutback, too.”

[Indeed, Marvel ultimately cancelled 21 titles between September 1978 and February 1979 while adding only three (*Micronauts*; *Shogun Warriors*; *Battlestar Galactica*) but escaped the notoriety that DC received. The cancelled titles consisted of *Devil Dinosaur*, *Machine Man* (final issues on sale in September), *The Flintstones*, *Hanna-Barbera TV Stars #4*, *The Human Fly*, *Marvel Classic Comics*, *Scooby-Doo* (November), *Hanna-Barbera Spotlight*, *Laff-A-Lympics*, *Yogi Bear* (December), *Kid Colt Outlaw*, *Marvel Triple Action*, *Ms. Marvel*, *Tomb of Dracula* (January), *Black Panther*, *Captain Marvel*, *Howard the Duck*, *Invaders*, *Nova*, *Rawhide Kid*, and *Red Sonja* (February). Final issues of *Tomb of Dracula* and *Invaders* were belatedly published in May and June 1979 respectively while *Machine Man* resumed publication in May 1979 after an eight-month gap.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative, in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{ciii}:

“Marvel will probably be up to 40¢ soon enough, because paper costs have jumped again as of July 11. All Marvel will probably do is sell more comics overall, but not more copies of any single title, which keeps their overhead printing costs higher than ours.”

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news story printed in *The Comic Reader* #159 (August 1978)^{civ}:

“DC and their parent company feel that the decrease in volume will relieve the glut on the stands that has existed since 1969 and enable them to build the paid circulations of their longtime

bestsellers that the distributors know and feel an affinity for. No new titles are expected to be released in the near future, though their goal is to increase the dollar book line to eight, by next year, probably by expanding a current title. Since this is a long-term experiment, we'll probably see a return to the stability in titles that have been absent since the early sixties.

Mike Gold feels that the delay of [*Superman: The Movie*] had nothing whatsoever to do with the decision. His opinion is that the decision came as the result of 15 years of declining comic sales, possibly spurred on by the low winter sales (figures seriously out of whack because of the blizzard), and the new size would not have been saved even if a phenomenal sales push had been garnered from the film.”

NEWSWATCH

The DC Implosion

DC Adopts New Distribution Strategy
Cuts Line by 40%

The Comics Journal #41's coverage of DC's corporate cutback was headlined with a phrase that would be permanently associated with the incident: “The DC Implosion.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{civ}:

“Today we've gone into an entirely different distribution system wherein we're using fewer titles and reduced print runs. There are other reasons, too. We got slaughtered during the blizzard, absolutely slaughtered. Everybody got slaughtered during the blizzard and, quite frankly, that didn't help matters. Sales of comic books have fallen off dramatically over the last decade. It's a question of taking what we perceive as radical measures to stabilize that steady decline. Magazines as a whole are in a very precarious position in that regard, and comics in particular because they are a non-essential item. People perceive that they need *TV Guide* to the tune of 19 million copies an issue. But comics aren't perceived as that necessary.

There are a lot of different reasons for [the decline in sales]. I think the most important reason is that there are way too many titles coming out for too few people. They can't get the newsstand exposure. The other reason is that it isn't worth the wholesalers' time or the retailers' time to go out there with a 25¢ or 35¢ or maybe even a 40¢ comic book. The profit is just too low. The entire magazine publishing field dropped at a certain percentage [of sales]. The distributors worked out an average percentage. Comics dropped a higher percentage because wholesalers are going to let *Playboy* go out before *Superman* because *Playboy* will make five times more than a copy of *Superman*. But the Dollar Comics dropped significantly less than the drop-off of comics sales in February and March.

If we were selling 5% or 10% or even 20% better than we are selling, it would justify changing the distribution system. A book that's selling 50,000 copies today was selling 500,000 copies ten years ago."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative, in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clvi}:

"What Warners [decided] was to follow a plan that we had proposed in late May, designed to produce fewer titles, but get them all into supermarkets and new outlets. Our dollar books seemed to be able to break into these areas, but nobody would ever accept our other 32 titles in a lump—it was just too much material for them to handle.

We cut ourselves back to 20 top money-making monthly books and six bimonthly dollar titles so that our schedules could be streamlined and our distribution package more easily handled. All of our books make money, so it was just a matter of weeding out the marginal titles, and sticking with the high profit books."

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Eerie* #97 (September 1978)^{clvii}:

"Some Warner executives believe [Mike Gold] helped save Jenette Kahn's job during the summer purge. 'When (Warner president) Bill Sarnoff and (Warner director) Jay Emmett came in and made the cutbacks, they would have loved to axe Jenette,' one executive says, 'but Gold has pushed so much crap about her brilliance in the press, we decided it was better to let her stay. Anything else would have been an embarrassment for the corporation and we don't need that with the *Superman* movie coming up.'"

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative, in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clviii}:

"My own personal observation, stepping out of my DC public relations role for a moment, is that Jenette is an excellent manager. In the last two years, I've seen that she can accept these situations for what they are, and adjust to cope with them. So while I know she may feel bad, she is able to grasp the new circumstances and begin to immediately pursue the positive factors, such as taking more time to polish and promote the entire line."

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a comment printed in *The Comic Reader* #160 (September 1978)^{clix}:

"Nothing in DC's history portended anything as drastic as what happened, there was no paper strike, and under Jenette Kahn and Sol Harrison, the company really looked pretty healthy. The 40-page experiment had just begun, there was expansion every time you turned around, and everybody seemed content. So when Warner Publishing and Independent News lowered the boom, everyone was caught by surprise.



Jenette Kahn—seen here with Sol Harrison in photos from *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980) and *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #11 (March 1976)—was placed in the awkward position of having to announce the abrupt end of an initiative that she'd spent months championing.

The long-term ramifications are still unclear. DC's decrease in titles might be expected to cause Marvel to attempt to fill the hole created by an onslaught of new and reprint titles. It hasn't happened yet, though: They're launching two new books this winter, but cancelling a couple to make room. DC spokesmen seemed to feel that if Marvel made the move they'd be making a mistake since adding more to the already overcrowded stands would only hurt total sales on their other books without adequately ensuring that the new titles would even break even. Still, since DC did have to [let a lot] of freelance talent go to keep their contracted people busy, the basic manpower is there to create new books. Marvel might, despite the miserable winter sales figures, decide to take the initiative and return to the scattergun assault they made on the market in '74-'75 when they approached 80 titles.

Then we have the price difference. DC, at 40¢ to Marvel's (and everyone else's) 35¢, is in a vulnerable position, notwithstanding the new distribution system. It still makes no sense to me why, if the desire to make DC's product the same as everyone else's to assuage wholesalers was the reason for the format change, the ultimate result was a product that remains different due to price. Consumers aren't looking at what price DC was last month, they're comparing the price to Marvel's. Marvel looks to have an advantage here too.

The most confusing thing to me, however, was the unwillingness of the higher-ups to look forward to the impact of [*Superman: The Movie*] on the total sales of the line. From every report and indication, the film should be a success. Of what I saw in the film slide show at the Chicago Comicon, we won't be cheated when it comes to production values. So here comes a \$25 million film with a direct connection to the backbone of the comic line, almost certainly meaning a large increase in the sales of anything with Superman's name on it, and the size reduction,

price increase and trimming of the line are instituted, none of which seem like positive moves. Had any one of them occurred singly, it might have seemed less shortsighted to me. As it is, the new distribution system is going to have to make up a lot of lost revenue to make any of those actions worthwhile...

One thing becomes clear with the reduction of titles and that is that DC is now looking forward to the day when the Dollar Comic is their status quo format. The books seem to be doing significantly better than the rest of the line to expand it to six titles, so there seems to be nothing to the idea that a dollar price tag will put off customers. And, with the elimination of the bimonthly, it appears that the dollar format is the only one that will allow experimentation and the use of the 'B' features that fans love. The question remains, what happens when price-increase time comes around next year? Does the dollar book go to 48 pages, add advertising or go to \$1.25? And if DC decides to go entirely to that format, does that eliminate a sizeable chunk of their juvenile audience who don't have that buck to spend?"

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{clx}:

"By far the most expensive part of printing a comic book is the cover stock. Just under half the cost of printing a 32-page comic book is the cover itself. Those four pages of cover stock account for 40% of the print cost of a 32-page comic, less than that for a 44-page package, and a lot less for the dollar package. The shipping costs are also lower—the time it takes to distribute a dollar book is the same amount it takes to distribute a 35¢ or 40¢ book."

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a comment printed in *The Comic Reader* #160 (September 1978)^{clxi}:

"Speaking of advertising, let us hope that DC has made an adequate settlement with their advertisers who bought space at a higher guaranteed circulation before the cut so that story pages in the 40¢ book are not cut to 16 out of necessity. Without the six-dollar books, the line stands at 20 monthly titles instead of 30, a sizeable drop in circulation."

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{clxii}:

"I can only say that we are part of a much larger corporation and, needless to say, everything that happens to the subdivisions is a matter of concern to corporate as well.

We're dealing with our own inner changes on as intimate a basis as we can with our own staff and everyone who is intimately connected with us. We're not in a position to issue public statements. We're just trying to deal with our own internal problems and repercussions and transitions, to make things as smooth and humane as possible."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{clxiii}:

"There's an aura of depression here [in DC Comics' offices] with respect to the fact that some people are not going to be getting work."

Mike W. Barr, then DC Comics staff proofreader in an article printed in *Back Issue* #2 (February 2004)^{clxiv}:

"Jack C. Harris entered my office and closed the door. Jack thrust out his right hand and I automatically rose and shook it, without knowing the occasion. 'Congratulations,' Jack said. 'we get to stay.'

I had met Jack when I had begun work at DC in September of the previous year, and though we weren't close friends, we shared several enthusiasms such as DC Silver Age comics. I had even done a little writing for him. Though I saw a lot of Jack every day—his office was right next to mine as DC proofreader and general man-of-all-work—for him to close the door before he spoke was both unique and a trifle ominous; now I knew why.



Jack C. Harris had more reasons to celebrate than just keeping his job following the DC Implosion. He and his wife had just welcomed their first child—daughter Stacy—in May 1978. Photo from *The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom* #249 (August 25, 1978).

I had known—as had the entire office—that Something Was Up. Rumors had drifted down that the higher-ups of Warner Communications, Inc., DC's parent firm, were unhappy with DC's performance and were determined to take further action...

So Warner execs—none of whom had to worry about their incomes being reduced—had already slashed DC's output from 32 books a month to 23, yet it was rumored further action would be taken, though what form that action would take, no one yet knew. The most extreme story had DC shutting down publication of all original comics immediately, keeping only the 'big three' titles of *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Wonder Woman* alive as reprint books to keep a newsstand presence and merchandising interest alive. None of us quite bought that, but the degree of our worry could be measured by the fact that none of us categorically ruled it out, either.

When the Implosion fell, I and other DC staffers were given a list of freelancers whose assignments had just been

cancelled with orders to tell them to stop work immediately. Even I knew that was nothing more than a signal to a freelancer to pull an all-nighter to finish the assignment before delivery. Amazing how many freelancers I contacted had finished the jobs they were working on just before I told them to quit.

But... 'We get to stay'? I hadn't known things were that bad.

Few people had. The mood at the office in the days immediately preceding what had become known as the 'DC Implosion' (though never loudly, and never within hearing of any DC executives) toward the work of comics was casual, to say the least. Virtually all the freelancers—and most of the staffers—claimed that comics were a way station in their careers, a temporary stop on the way to better things. I was naively delighted to be in comics, even at the low orbit I had attained, having forsaken a job in which I utilized my Bachelor of Arts degree to scrub floors at an Ohio Sears and Roebuck. I vividly recall conversations with Len Wein and Marvin Wolfman (the latter of whom was in those days freelancing at Marvel, but was up at DC a lot), who asked me point-blank *why* was I glad to be in comics. 'We are in a dying business,' intoned Len. 'Don't you know that?' asked Marvin. *If we are in a dying business*, I thought, *one of the reasons is because the books are so damn bad*. 'Okay,' I said, 'why are you still here?'

'Oh, we're not going to be in comics much longer,' Len replied. 'No, we're going to move to Hollywood and write *The Love Boat*,' said Marvin. Most (though by no means all) other comics pros would voice similar career goals at the drop of a cowl—at least, until June of 1978.

Even though I still had a job, other weren't so fortunate... Since these layoffs happened in late June and early July, with the cancellations announced on June 22, 1978, office wags dubbed these actions the 'Summer Solstice Massacre,' though the tag 'DC Implosion' proved more enduring...

Not long after there was a meeting of the entire DC staff to officially explain the new world to us... We were informed, at this meeting, that virtually all staff freelancing would come to a halt, save for those who had their output secured contractually. DC would need all its pages, we were told, for the freelancers who had contracts, and work guaranteed to them. This was particularly bad news personally; I had just begun writing 'The Ray' backup in *Black Lightning*, having taken over the feature from Roger McKenzie, who was now freelancing full-time, mostly for Marvel. (Oddly, I had followed Roger as the staff proofreader, as well.) The exercise of writing and the income would both be sorely missed.

But DC had a lot of freelancers under contract, the most prolific of whom was Gerry Conway. Gerry had at least two monthly titles, *Firestorm* and *Steel, the Indestructible Man* [insert your own joke here], cancelled in the Implosion, and a few more on the drawing board that would never see the light of day like *The Vixen*; DC would need to make sure he had all the work he was contracted for.

The issue of keeping all the balls in the air, of making sure all contracted freelancers had enough work, was addressed in a meeting of the entire editorial department. We gathered in the largest office—Joe Orlando's—as Paul Levitz... in those days

credited as editorial coordinator, handed out a list of DC titles still being published and tallying up the available editorial pages, then produced a list of contracted freelancers and the number of pages they were guaranteed. The rest of the meeting was a matter of seeing which pegs fit which holes. Creativity by the pound.

Some of the choices were no-brainers. For example Cary Bates, who had scripted *The Flash* and *Action Comics* for some time, would continue those titles on a monthly basis. Other, more prolific scripters, like the aforementioned Gerry Conway, were a somewhat different story. It was realized that it might be a difficult task to guarantee Gerry all the pages of script he (and his wife, under his name, for his page rate) had been producing for DC in DC's superhero titles. 'Well,' said Paul Levitz, 'I can pick up Gerry's slack with the mystery titles [*House of Mystery*, *Weird War Tales*].'

'My God,' groaned someone, 'Gerry Conway, our top scripter, is going to be writing mystery stories?'

'Why not?' replied Paul. 'It might be a nice change for him.'

Moving into 1979, Gerry Conway's monthly DC assignments were *Justice League of America*, *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes*, *Superman Family's Lois Lane* and *Jimmy Olsen* features and *Weird Western Tales' Scalphunter*. Photo from *The Comics Journal* #69 (December 1981).



Artists were similarly poured through the same strainer. Jim Aparo, for example, would simply continue on *The Brave and the Bold*, which was his regular assignment anyway, and which had just been made a monthly. Curt Swan would continue to provide yeoman service on *Superman* and *Action*. But others were a tougher fit. José Luis García-López, for example, was barely prolific enough to do more than a monthly title, yet not only was he under contract but DC rightly loved his work. He had been slated to pencil the 'Superman/Batman' strip in *World's Finest*, yet his contract called for a few pages more. My only contribution to this game of editorial Scrabble was to suggest that José also pencil the 'Deadman' strip in *Adventure*, a good matching of artist with subject matter which also topped off his contractual obligation.

But despite the seeming coolness with which these decisions are related on the printed page, we were dealing with people's incomes, and many of those people were loyal employees of years' duration, and sometimes friends. It was extremely difficult to me to juggle my colleagues' lives and incomes in this way; others found it easier. After all, they hadn't been fired, and had been in no danger of same."



In 1978, no active DC artist had been associated with a character as long as Curt Swan and Superman. Nearly 30 years after his first work on Superboy, Swan had come to define the Man of Steel and his extended family. Photo from the 1979 Comic Art Convention booklet.

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative, in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clxv}:

“We are more or less compartmentalizing editors and characters so that they don’t randomly bounce around the titles. Julie Schwartz is overseeing the Superman books, Levitz has the Batman, Ross Andru controls Wonder Woman and the Flash—that sort of efficiency planning. We are also reassigning artists to place them on books that reflect their talents best, or need a little boost.”

Alex Saviuk, then artist of *Green Lantern* in an interview printed in *The Flash Companion* (2008)^{clxvi}:

“I heard about the Implosion. They said there was going to be a big shake-up, a lot of books were going to get cancelled, people were going to get let go, etc. And I’m thinking, ‘I’ve only been in the business like a year. Things don’t look so good. What am I going to do? Maybe this would be a good time to go to Marvel.’

But Jack C. Harris had just taken over editorship of the *Green Lantern* book, and he called me up personally and said, ‘Listen, we had the Implosion in here, and lots of people were let go, primarily the new freelancers, but of all the new freelancers that we kept, you’re the only one.’ And I said, ‘Really!?’ And he said, ‘Yeah, and I’m thinking I want you to continue on the *Green Lantern* book.’”

Mike W. Barr, then DC Comics staff proofreader in an article printed in *Back Issue* #2 (February 2004)^{clxvii}:

“Morale around the office couldn’t help but be affected by the demands of the Implosion.

Part of this had to do with those dismissed. Al Milgrom, for example, was easily the most informal and fun of all the DC editors. His door was always open to shoot the breeze for a few minutes to take the edge off a hectic day (barring fire, flood or deadline, of course) and, as an excellent artist, he was always available for an emergency art correction too complicated to be trusted to the Production department. It was Al who, once we had heard that our 1977 Christmas gift from DC would be red baseball jackets, led much of Editorial in a march down the hall

to then-Publisher Jenette Kahn’s office, leading the chant of ‘Blue, blue, blue, blue!’ our preferred color. And the jackets we received for the holidays were as blue as Superman’s tunic.

The DC offices, whose mood was casual without being relaxed, became even more rigid, more ‘businesslike.’ A long-standing custom, the monthly bagel ‘birthday party,’ was done away with. Hijinks like the stunt where Al Milgrom led chanting outside Jenette’s door evaporated, and you got the impression that some people liked it that way, not realizing that a disciplined, dignified, austere comic-book office is a contradiction in terms.

Even DC traditions of decades’ standing threatened to be altered by the Implosion. *Detective Comics*, one of DC’s oldest, yet lesser-selling titles, was cancelled, while *The Batman Family*, a Dollar Comic, was left intact. It was decreed this would not stand, and *Detective* was revived as a Dollar Comic, ‘featuring The Batman Family.’ Kudos to those who kept alive the title from whose initials DC Comics took its name, largely Paul Levitz, [then the] new editor of the Batman titles.”

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics editorial coordinator in a 2015 interview posted on 13thdimension.com^{clxviii}:

“There was about a day or two in there where we were talking about cancelling *Detective*. I think actually it was Mike Gold who very passionately rose to its defense, pointing out that that’s what the company was named after and we couldn’t do that so... The book would have pretty much been the same book either way but certainly it was a better thing historically to keep the *Detective* name alive. We owe a debt to Mike for that.”

Murray Bishoff, then reporter in a news story printed in *The Buyer’s Guide For Comic Fandom* #245 (July 28, 1978)^{clxix}:

“Past experience shows title cutbacks pay off in increased sales. Certainly this move will not endanger DC’s existence. It does leave the freelance situation rather clouded, and puts a higher demand for quality on those hired. ‘Unless you’re extremely good,’ Mike Gold told me, ‘you will have a hard time breaking into the field.’ For those already in the field, things may be kind of tough, too.”

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{clxx}:

“What I remember most of all, truthfully, is that because of the Implosion, we had to let people go. I was very happy to have Larry [Hama] and Al Milgrom on staff and it was painful to have to release them. We couldn’t afford to keep them with the sales being nothing what we hoped for. Quite the contrary. And so most of all, I remember, really, the human toll of that time period.”

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clxxi}:

“The day after the cutback, I had DC people lined up in the hall waiting for work from Marvel.”

Neal Adams, then head of Continuity Associates in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clxxii}:

“There must have been around 30 people turned out, and we had to find work for them at Marvel, Continuity, wherever.”

Al Milgrom, then DC Comics editor in an interview posted at *TheSilverLantern.com* in 2010^{clxxiii}:

“When [DC Comics] said, ‘Good-bye,’ I said, ‘Okay, back to freelancing,’ and I went over to Marvel and actually said, ‘Hey, DC fired me. Any chance of getting some freelance work?’ And DC, by the way, at the time said, ‘Hey, you guys get first priority in terms of freelance.’ But nobody offered me any work up there at the time. I didn’t really go actively looking for it, but nobody came down to my office and said, ‘Hey, Al, before you leave, you want to become the inker on this, or pencil this or that?’ And probably the truth is, with the cutbacks, they may not have had work available and would have had to can somebody else to give us work. Can freelancers, that is. So I never really thought much about it. I went back to Marvel and said, ‘Hey, any chance of me getting some more work here?’ And Jim Shooter said, ‘I think we might have something for you.’ ‘Great.’ That same day somebody gave me some *Star Wars* pages because it was in a bind, and I thought, ‘Okay.’ I thought they were going to offer me a book or two, but Jim, who was newly minted as the Editor-in-Chief, offered me an editorial position and I thought, ‘Well, I don’t think I really got the full impact of the job after only one year [at DC],’ so he convinced me to take it, so I proceeded to work as an editor for Marvel for five years...”

Murray Bishoff, then reporter in a news story printed in *The Buyer’s Guide For Comic Fandom* #245 (July 28, 1978)^{clxxiv}:

“Larry Hama, whose first love is acting, left his job as editor and immediately got a job in the Paramount film *The Warriors*, directed by Walter Hill.”

Larry Hama, then DC Comics editor in an interview printed in *David Anthony Kraft’s Comics Interview* #38 (1986)^{clxxv}:

“Al and I were imploded simultaneously. We were the last hired so we were the first imploded. (*Laughter.*) I just rebounded to Continuity. Al came pretty much straight over to Marvel. After about, I don’t know, six or eight months, Al called me and said, ‘Hey, look, they’re talking about revamping *Crazy*. Why don’t you come over and have lunch?’ And so I came over and talked to Al and talked to Shooter and came up with a game plan and dived right into doing a funny book. That was really—when I was a kid I had been a *Mad* freak—that was really one big fantasy fulfillment, to run *Crazy*.”

[Freelancers such as Michael Golden, Tom DeFalco and Roger McKenzie, and artists Frank Miller and Jerry Bingham—whose earliest DC work saw print during mid-1978—also picked up assignments at Marvel. Newcomer J.M. DeMatteis—



After taking over *Crazy Magazine*, Larry Hama introduced a vulgar new mascot called Obnoxio the Clown (as seen on Bob Larkin’s cover for issue #69). Photo from the 1976 Comic Art Convention booklet.

whose first script was published in August’s *Weird War Tales* #70—managed to pick up regular assignments from DC over the next two years, initially for anthology titles but ultimately on secondary features like Hawkman, Red Tornado, and his own creations, the Creature Commandos and “I...Vampire,” before moving to Marvel in 1980.]

News item printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clxxvi}:

“Steve Ditko is again illustrating for Marvel Comics. On the day after the DC implosion, Marv Wolfman made his first call to Ditko, asking him to return to the Bullpen after an absence of 12 years. A short time later, accompanied by ex-DC—now Marvel—editor Al Milgrom, Wolfman visited Ditko’s studio, and reached an agreement that would bring Ditko back to the company where he made his reputation and did some of his very finest work... Steve is not going to commit himself to a series or even full-time work just yet, and has completely rejected the possibility of doing either Doctor Strange or Spider-Man simply because he does not wish to compete with his own work, which has achieved a neo-classic status in comic history.”

Paul Kupperberg, then DC Comics public relations assistant in an interview posted at *Comicsbulletin.com* in 2007^{clxxvii}:

“[After the Implosion came down, the mood around DC was] Grim... It was a very unhappy time and frankly, there were moments a lot of us were wondering if there would even be a DC a year from then.

I remember composing a blues song to the tune of ‘Heart-break Hotel’ called ‘Parking Lot Blues,’ because we figured the way things were going, Warners was going to turn our office space over to a sister company, Kinney Parking Services, and we’d all be parking cars instead of publishing comics. I was entirely wrong. I didn’t get to park cars, I got to collect unemployment.”

[Gallows humor also pervaded comments from DC creators at July comic book conventions and in interviews.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clxxviii}:

“We came to work one day last month, and there was this great big parking lot where the building used to be, and it was making ten times the money the comics used to. See, we do try to be philosophical, even when the ship is sinking. And ‘the DC Implosion’ was *my* joke first.

Quite honestly, we were simply caught in a situation over which we had no control, and like it or not, we’ve had to adjust to an entirely new set of circumstances. I won’t pretend we wanted things this way, but in some areas, it has forced us to reorganize into more efficient editorial units. And yes, it has been very embarrassing.”



Upon his return to Marvel, Steve Ditko was assigned to draw the Marv Wolfman-scripted *Machine Man*, continuing the adventures of the Jack Kirby creation following the title’s eight-month hiatus.

Mike W. Barr, then DC Comics staff proofreader in an article printed in *Back Issue* #2 (February 2004)^{clxxxix}:

“News of the DC Implosion was greeted with crocodile tears or indifference by most of the rest of the comic-book business. Warren and Western’s [readers] had little overlap with DC’s audience, and even less with DC’s freelancer pool. The majority of editors and personnel of Marvel felt for the DC employees who had suddenly been let go, but the public face of Marvel’s response—and the remarks of some Marvel staffers, always in hearing of their superiors—to DC’s dilemma was basically ‘more [market share] for us.’ The summary cancellation of a number of DC’s titles was positioned by Marvel as a judgment of the quality of those titles, and of DC in general, which was an unfair verdict. Those DC titles that had ‘exploded’ hadn’t been on sale long enough to generate sales figures. Some at Marvel even took glee in the fact that Marvel now had a much deeper and wider talent pool to dip into, apparently never stopping to wonder if the bell would toll for them, too, if Marvel’s owners might wake up one morning and decide that Warner Communications had had the right idea.”

Michael T. Gilbert, then budding comic book writer/artist in a 2018 recollection^{clxxx}:

“In the mid-1970s I’d tried to break into DC with no success. I then moved to the Bay Area and began making sales to underground comix and Mike Friedrich’s “Ground-Level” comics, *Quack!*, *Star*Reach*, and *Imagine*. By 1978 I was mostly done with DC and Marvel. I was much more into underground comix and alternative titles like *Heavy Metal* and *National Lampoon*.

From my perspective DC in particular had really gone downhill after they’d kicked out Publisher Carmine Infantino. Whatever his flaws, he made DC’s titles more artist-oriented, and was trying some truly innovative titles. But by the mid-70s, many of the books felt like imitation Marvel comics (*Firestorm*, *Steel*), or tired rehashes of old DC comics (*Super-Team Family*, *Secret Society of Super Villains*)—largely produced (in my opinion!) by second-rate talent, and printed on cheap plastic plates. When I heard about the DC Implosion, my basic thought was “Good Riddance!”

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news story printed in *The Comic Reader* #160 (September 1978)^{clxxxi}:

“Incorporated in the new distribution set-up will be a shift in release dates for all DC books. Effective with the September releases, books will be released bi-weekly, on the second and fourth of each month. It is hoped that this will increase the comics’ shelf-life by a week by those dealers who pull comics on a weekly basis.”

Richard Burton, then editor of *Comic Media News* in an editorial printed in *Comic Media News International* #37 (August-September 1978)^{clxxxii}:

“DC is going to look very static for some time to come. But the casualties can’t just be measured in terms of scripts and artwork, the more important ones are less obvious—like DC’s own credibility, a major factor the company has fought hard for and won back since Jenette Kahn took over the publisher’s hot seat in 1976. Since that time there has been a steady policy of expansion and experimentation that has gathered interest and enthusiasm from both the fan and pro camps, so much so that when the 50¢ conversion was announced at the beginning of the year, it was greeted with genuine excitement from fans instead of the customary gripes about more price rises.

Now those same fans have to swallow the bitter pill of shelling out an extra 5¢ for the same tired old half-and-half package of ads and story. How prepared will they be to put their support behind DC again when and if DC decides to try another new format in the future.”

Mike W. Barr, then DC Comics staff proofreader in an article printed in *Back Issue* #2 (February 2004)^{clxxxiii}:

“If the DC Implosion had no other positive benefits, it at least made the remaining DC staffers and freelancers much more atten-

tive to their tasks. Though writers may still have been planning to move to Hollywood to write sitcoms or movies, such talk was never heard anymore. Indeed, some freelancers began making more appearances at the DC offices, sniffing around, glad-handing editors and trolling for whatever extra work there might be, for example from a writer who had missed a deadline. No honor among thieves.

Those of us who were spared from the Implosion didn’t have to be reminded that, despite the alleged fact that sales of the remaining DC titles were more or less steady (such information, once a more or less open secret, was now closely guarded), the Warner Communications ax could fall again, without warning.”

[A side effect of the Implosion also killed the publisher’s budding character-centric fan club, the DC Super-Stars Society. In September, the \$4.00 membership fee was refunded to everyone who had subscribed earlier in 1978. Meanwhile, the in-house magazine *Amazing World of DC Comics* was also discontinued with issue #17. *AWODCC* editor Mike W. Barr had planned to spotlight the 20th anniversary of *Flash* #105 in issue #18 and later repurposed a Fred Hembeck feature for the issue in 1982’s *Flash* #300. The typical comic book buyers in 1978 had no access to the low-print-run fanzines and were left to wonder for months or years afterwards what exactly happened.]

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: EARLY 1979 (POST-DC IMPLOSION)

Action Comics

***Adventure Comics* (Dollar Comic starring the Flash, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Deadman and the Justice Society of America)**

Batman

***Brave and the Bold* (Batman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)**

***DC Comics Presents* (Superman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)**

***Detective Comics* (Dollar Comic featuring “The Batman Family”)**

Flash

***G.I. Combat* (Dollar Comic starring the Haunted Tank, O.S.S., and “Women At War,” plus various war short stories)**

***Ghosts* (supernatural short stories)**

***Green Lantern* (starring the team of Green Lantern, Green Arrow and Black Canary)**

***House of Mystery* (supernatural short stories)**

Jonah Hex

Justice League of America

***Men of War* (starring Gravedigger)**

Sgt. Rock

Super Friends

Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes

Superman

***Superman Family* (Dollar Comic starring Supergirl, Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, “Mr. and Mrs. Superman,” and “The Private Life of Clark Kent”)**

***Unexpected* (Dollar Comics featuring supernatural short stories)**

Unknown Soldier

Warlord

***Weird War Tales* (supernatural war stories)**

***Weird Western Tales* (starring Scalphunter)**

Wonder Woman

***World’s Finest Comics* (Dollar Comic starring Superman & Batman, Green Arrow, Black Canary, Hawkman, and Shazam!)**



Launched in 1974, *The Amazing World of DC Comics* offered subscribers access to advance news, creator interviews, and unpublished artwork. Originally bi-monthly, it was released more sporadically from 1976 to 1978. *AWODCC #17*—the final issue—was a *Shazam!* spotlight with cover art by Alan Weiss.

Mark Waid, future comic book writer in a 2018 recollection^{clxxxiv}:

“I was a 15-year-old kid living in the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia in the summer of 1978, and there was not within a thousand-mile radius of me a fan so ferociously dedicated to DC Comics. I had been planning and budgeting around the DC Explosion for weeks and had committed to memory all the upcoming titles, from *Demand Classics* to *Showcase Presents Deadman* and everything in between.

I was also living next door to a large family with boys around my age, and I’d hang out at their place a lot after school. What I came to notice was that there were a lot of subscription magazines sitting around with the name ‘Michael Flynn’ on their labels. The name sounded familiar. Surely, I asked, this couldn’t be the same Mike Flynn who was a Legion of Super-Heroes booster and fanzine writer known to everyone in comics fandom. Could it? It’s not an uncommon name.

And yet, when I asked my friends, I was told that, oh, yeah, come to think of it, they did have a cousin who read comic books and, huh, he’d be coming to visit in two weeks. This was

the greatest news imaginable to a 15-year-old Mark Waid, who worshipped at the altar of Go-Go Checks. It was tantamount to discovering that Santa, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy were going to visit all at once. I began preparing a long list of questions for Mr. Flynn. Who was the Odd Man? Why can’t I find *Demand Classics* on any newsstand since it’s supposed to be out? Did I miss the first issue? That makes no sense—I have the release dates of all my favorite comics committed to memory! I know which books ship during which weeks! (I still do.)

Sure enough, Mike—who was in touch with Mike Gold, DC’s publicity man—came to town and settled into an easy chair as I perched at his feet, voracious for inside information. And that’s when Mike Flynn told me about the DC Implosion and went over all the details as he watched my face get longer and longer. But—but how could this be? *This* is cancelled? *That’s* cancelled? Ridiculous! Everyone loves DC Comics! I’m a dedicated fan! I even bought *Superman Salutes the Bicentennial*, that’s how hardcore I am! You mean there were *less* DC comics in my future, not more?

It was a sullen evening in the Waid household as I began the long process of pining for stories that never were, stories that would never be. I would never know the Deserter. I would never see the ultimate showdown between the Freedom Fighters and the Silver Ghost. Steel, the Indestructible Man and Firestorm had passed from existence. I walked the rest of the year a ghost, a hollow shell of a young man. Someday, I will fully recover.

Someday.”

John Morrow, future comic book historian in a 2018 recollection^{clxxxv}:

“A couple of days [after our first local comic book club meeting], the new issue of *The Buyer’s Guide* arrived, announcing the ‘DC Implosion’ cancellations. It was devastating, as I was really excited by DC’s new expanded comics, even with their increased cover price. But I guess the budding publisher in me was equally enthused to get this hot news into print in ‘The Comics Explosion.’ So I threw together the second issue for our upcoming meeting, with details of the Implosion. Sadly, only Matt and Ken showed up that week, and since I saw them all the time anyway at school, there didn’t seem much point in continuing the club. Thus, like DC’s books of that era, my first fan publication, and our comics club, imploded.”

Kurt Busiek, future comic book writer in a 2018 recollection^{clxxxvi}:

“And then the Implosion hit. I mostly heard about it through *The Comic Reader* and through conversation at the comics shop. As a reader, it was disappointing, but I still had plenty to read, so I wasn’t devastated or anything.

I did like the promise of all those backup series, and had been buying *Kamandi* just for the Starlin OMAC series, so it was sad to see that go away. Aside from that and *Huntress*, though — and *Firestorm*, when it shifted to *Flash* post-Implosion — I don’t remember being all that excited about the results. I liked the idea of it, though.”

Tom Brevoort, future Marvel Comics editor in a 2018 recollection^{clxxxvii}:

“Where the crunch really hit me was in the DC Implosion. The whole thing was over so quickly that DC settled into its reduced line at the 40¢ price before the first Marvel 40¢ books started showing up. And in the reduction down to only 26 titles, DC cut a number of books that were favorites of mine. In particular, I still mourn the loss of *All-Star Comics* and *Secret Society of Super-Villains*. And the fact that *Demand Classics* #1 never came out meant that it would be close to another two decades before I’d get to read “Flash of Two Worlds.” I hunted all over for that non-existent *Demand Classics* #1 for months, hoping it would show up on the stands every week.

And there’s no question that the whole ordeal definitely benefited Marvel, at least as far as my readership was concerned. Fewer DC books meant that I could buy and read more Marvel titles, even when the prices stabilized at 40¢.”

Bob Rozakis, then DC Comics assistant editor in a comment posted online in 2012^{clxxxviii}:

“From the rubble emerged *Cancelled Comics Cavalcade*, two blank-covered volumes of the material consigned to the filing cabinets. Ostensibly created to protect the copyrights on all the material, *CCC* was also a way for the fanboys on staff to create something of a collectible for the people who worked on the axed features.”

Paul Kupperberg, then DC Comics public relations assistant in an interview posted at Comicsbulletin.com in 2007^{clxxxix}:

“I did the grunt work on [*Cancelled Comic Cavalcade*], assembling all the material from the various editors, arranging it all, and dealing directly with the printing. The printing and binding itself was done in the Warner Bros. print shop, which was in the basement of 75 Rockefeller Center where DC then had its offices, by a gentleman named Neil (credited as “Neil

of the Magic Finger” in *CCC*)...

[*Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* was composed of] Xerox copies between heavy blue paper covers, glued square spine held together by a strip of black binding tape. We went crazy and commissioned covers from Alex Saviuk and Al Milgrom... everybody gets hit by a truck, but they probably worked for free to be in on the joke or to get a copy! Like I said, we did this cheap. This wasn’t made to last. It was made to be sent to the copyright office.

One [copy of *CCC* was reserved] for the [DC] library, two for the Library of Congress, Sol got a copy, Jenette Kahn, myself, a few other staffers, then we counted up the freelancers—I don’t remember exactly who it went out to, but people like Gerry Conway and Dick Ayers whose work was run in it surely got copies. You can probably figure out who got one from the table of contents. And, one copy went to Bob Overstreet, of the *Overstreet Price Guide*, just to prove to the world that it actually existed. We counted 35 copies.

However, we printed 40. Yep, don’t know how many bootlegs there are out there of *CCC*, but there are actually 40 legitimate copies. The other five made their way through channels that I’ve since forgotten to names that I no longer recall...but the real number is 40.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *The Comic Book Artist Collection* #2 (May 2002)^{cxc}:

“We put it in interstate distribution, you could argue it was efficient for copyright purposes, which DC wanted to protect, and copies were made up for the contributors, so the people who had done the work, had reference copies... There was some really nice work, and a lot of stuff that really wasn’t so good. In point of fact, I put those books together, and Paul Levitz actually talked me out of running one or two stories that were really bad. You can only imagine what those stories must have looked like! Because there were some books in there, some stories we reprinted for that purpose that should have never seen the light of day... Of course, the title was based upon the All-American Comics title of the 1940s, *Comic Cavalcade*.”

Entry in Bob Rozakis’ “It’s the Answer Man!” feature in *Action Comics* #503 (January 1980):

“*Q*: How can I get a copy of *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade*?
—David A. Lofvers.

A: Unless you can find a DC staffer or freelancer who is willing to sell his copy, you can’t. (For the uninformed, *CCC* was a limited-publication—35 copies—which included such stories as *Vixen* #1, *Firestorm* #6, *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #s 16 and 17, and *Claw* #s 13 and 14. There were two volumes and it was distributed only to DC staffers and freelancers who had material printed therein.)”

Paul Kupperberg in a 1982 photo by Alan Light. (opposite and following page) The victims of the DC Implosion were alternately run over by a truck and kicked to the curb on Al Milgrom and Alex Saviuk’s respective covers for *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1 and #2.



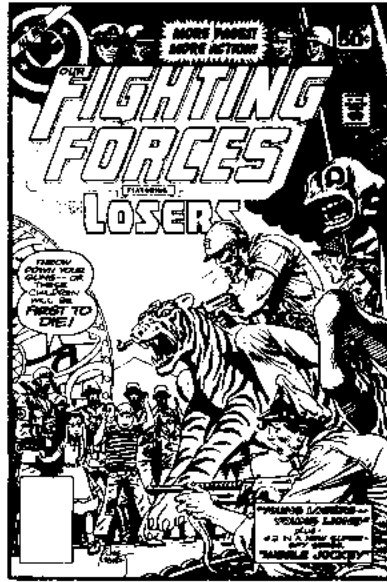


(far left) Material intended for DC's seventh annual Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer tabloid—slated for Fall 1978's *All-New Collectors' Edition*—was eventually used in 1979's digest-sized *Best of DC #4*. Sheldon Mayer's original cover art—courtesy of Heritage Auctions—was never published. (left) *The Flash* #268's cover (by Al Milgrom and Dick Giordano) was revised before publication to eliminate the lower-left spotlight on Kid Flash, whose eight-page story was eliminated due to page cuts.

COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978

Missing from *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* were the covers for *Claw the Unconquered* #13 and *Our Fighting Forces* #182 (both by Joe Kubert) as well as *Firestorm* #6 (by Al Milgrom). Jim Aparo's cover for *Detective Comics* #481 also went unpublished

after the title merged with *Batman Family*. Rich Buckler and Dick Giordano's cover for *Wonder Woman* #250 did see print but was edited to remove the panel promoting the now-excised "Tales of the Amazons" adventure.





BEGINNING JUNE 1ST

THE EXPLOSION!

MORE PAGES! MORE STORIES!
AND THE
MOST EXCITING
SUPER-HEROES
IN **COMICS!**

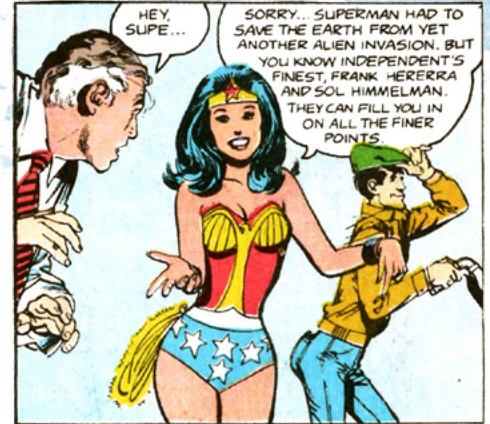
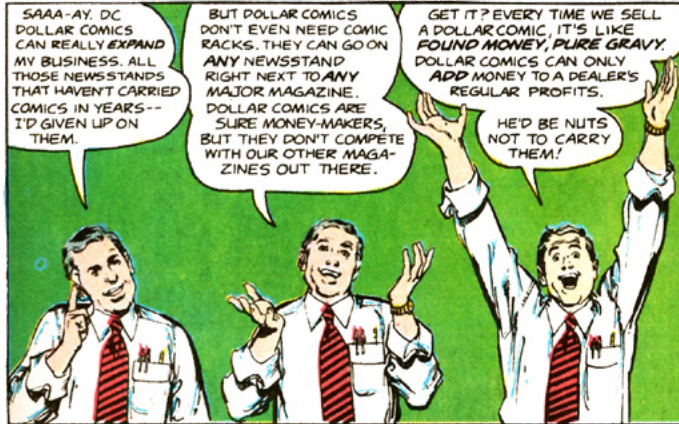
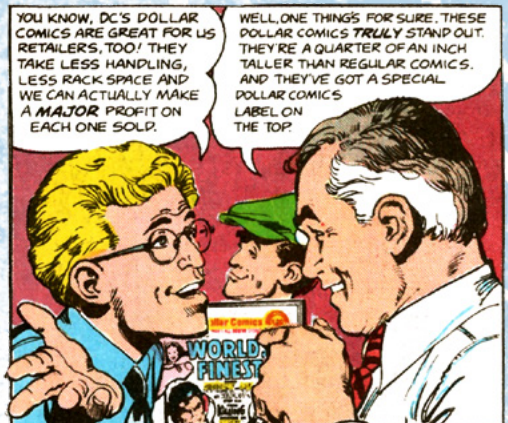


WATCH FOR FULL DETAILS
NEXT MONTH!!



In April 1978, a full-page Joe Staton illustration heralded the DC Explosion with an array of heroes slated to receive their own features in existing books: Hawkman (in *Detective Comics*), Enemy Ace (*Men of War*), Big Barda (*Mister Miracle*), the Ray (*Black Lightning*), the Odd Man (*Shade the Changing Man*), the Atom (*Action Comics*), OMAC (*Kamandi, the Last Boy On Earth*), the Amazons (*Wonder Woman*), the Martian Manhunter (*Aquaman*), and Deadman (*Adventure Comics*). By the time the ad saw print, though, DC had already decided to cancel several of the titles intended for the Explosion. They joined other recently-terminated books in limbo. The final issues seen here are *Aquaman* #63 (on sale in May 1978), *Freedom Fighters* #15 (April 1978), *Karate Kid* #15 (April 1978), *Mister Miracle* #25 (May 1978), *Shade the Changing Man* #8 (May 1978), *Shazam!* #35 (February 1978), *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #15 (March 1978), *Super-Team Family* #15 (November 1977), and *Teen Titans* #53 (November 1977).

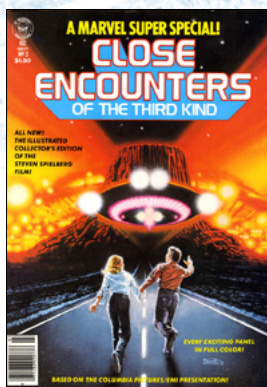
COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978



Produced by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano's Continuity Associates, this promotional sequence sang the virtues of DC's Dollar Comics initiative to distributors and retailers. One of the new format's most subtle qualities was the fact that each issue stood a quarter-inch taller than regular comic books. Also seen here are the first four Dollar Comics from December 1976 and January 1977: *G.I. Combat* #201, *House of Mystery* #251, *Superman Family* #182, and *World's Finest Comics* #244.



Marvel's first tangible connection to the forthcoming *Star Wars* movie was a 1976 poster illustrated by Howard Chaykin. The publisher's adaptation of the 1977 film was a huge moneymaker, prompting reprints in a variety of formats that included tabloid-sized *Marvel Treasury Editions*. Continuing to profit from the science fiction film craze, Marvel also adapted 1977's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and launched an ongoing title based on the 1978-1979 TV series *Battlestar Galactica*. Elsewhere, Gold Key/Whitman licensed other s-f properties like *Battle of the Planets* (1979-1980) and *The Black Hole* (1980) as well as reviving the *Flash Gordon* comic book (1978).



COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978

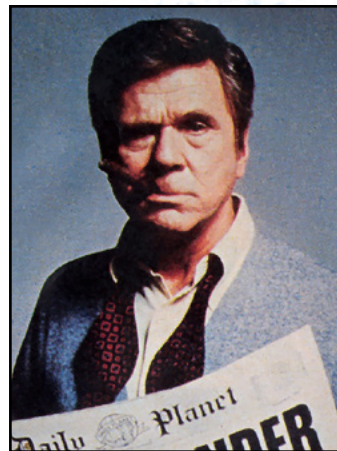
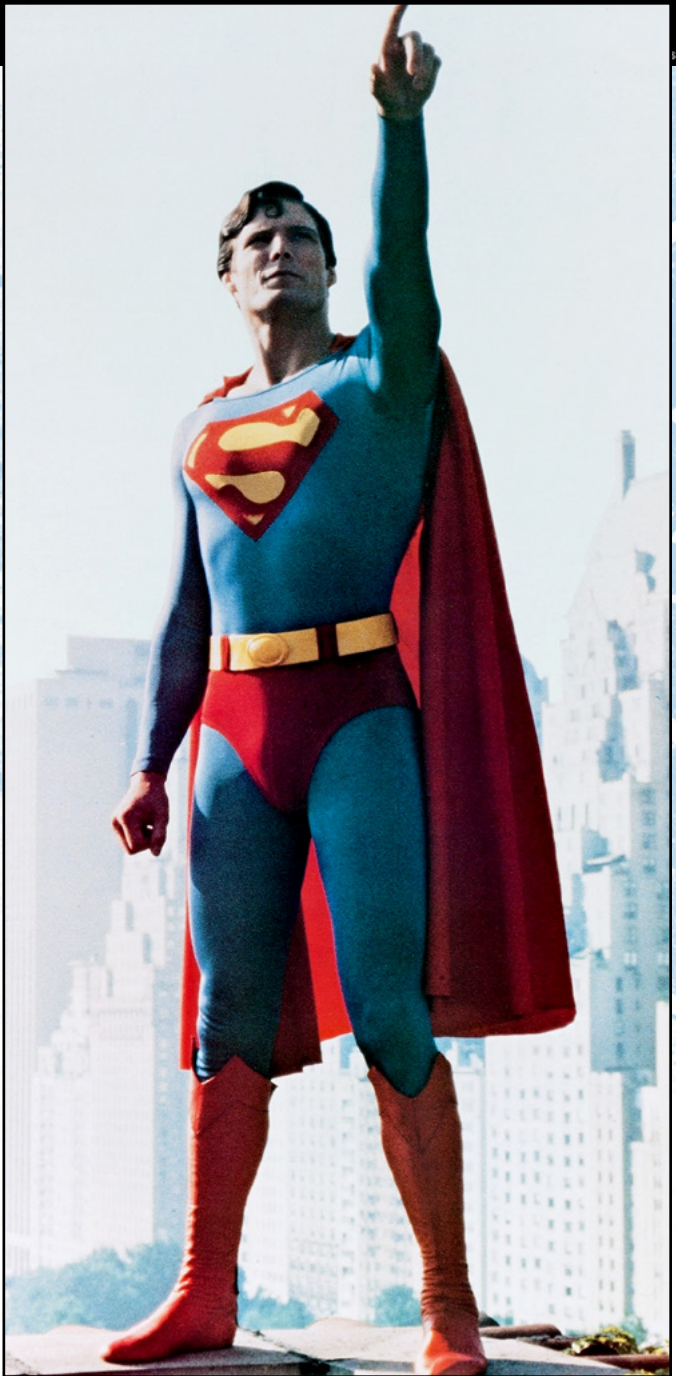


The DC Explosion is here! The sampling of comic books on sale in June, July and August 1978 includes Action Comics #487, Adventure Comics #459, Army At War #1, Battle Classics #1, The Brave and the Bold #143, DC Special Series #16, Dynamic Classics #1, Green Lantern #108, House of Secrets #154, Men of War #9, Our Fighting Forces #181, and World's Finest Comics #253.



Bucky O'Hare, Ms. Mystic, Sorcerer, and Starslayer were each developed for DC in 1977 and 1978 but they all them remained in the hands of their creators. Larry Hama and Michael Golden's Bucky O'Hare debuted in Continuity's *Echo of Futurepast* #1-6 (1984-1985), the last of which is seen here. Neal Adams' Ms. Mystic—expanding on a creation of Michael Netzer—was first published by Pacific Comics in 1982 but was revived by Continuity in 1987, starting with the reprint edition on the left. Bob Layton and David Michelinie's Sorcerer was slated for an early 1980s graphic album from Nautilus Dreams that ultimately never saw print. The duo revisited the concept in Future Comics' *Deathmask* (2003) but this color rendition of Sorcerer appeared as the back cover of *The Comic Reader* #196 (November 1981). Mike Grell's Starslayer finally appeared under the Pacific Comics banner in 1982 and moved to First Comics with issue #7 in 1983.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous presence on licensed product related to *Superman the Movie* was its crystalline variation on the traditional comic book logo. The image of Christopher Reeve pointing skyward also appeared frequently in promotional articles as well as on the cover of Elliot S. Maggin's novel *Superman: Last Son of Krypton*. Also seen here are Reeve as Clark Kent, Margot Kidder as Lois Lane and Jackie Cooper as Perry White.





Although it garnered none of the notoriety of mid-1978's "DC Implosion," Marvel cancelled a significant number of its own titles several months later, 19 of them just between November 1978 and February 1979. The final editions seen here are *Black Panther* #15 (on sale in February 1979), *Captain Marvel* #62 (February 1979), *Godzilla* #24 (April 1979), *Howard the Duck* #31 (February 1979), *Invaders* #40 (February 1979, with a double-sized wrap-up issue later released in June), *John Carter, Warlord of Mars* #28 (July 1979), *Kid Colt Outlaw* #229 (January 1979), *Marvel Triple Action* #47 (January 1979), *Ms. Marvel* #23 (January 1979), *Nova* #25 (February 1979), *Rawhide Kid* #151 (February 1979), *Red Sonja* #15 (February 1979), *Tarzan* #28 (July 1979), and *Tomb of Dracula* #69 (January 1979, with a double-sized wrap-up issue later released in May).



DC abandoned its plans for specialized fan clubs in 1978 but returned to the idea in 1980, narrowing its focus to a single group revolving around Superman. Among the premiums in the membership packet was a poster illustrated by José Luis García-López and Dick Giordano. Superman occupied the center of the image while other DC heroes hovered all around him. The other characters on the poster

are, clockwise from Superman's head, Hawkman, Captain Marvel, Mary Marvel, the Red Tornado, Cosmic Boy, Wildfire, Phantom Girl, Green Lantern, the Flash, Batman, Dr. Fate, Power Girl, Black Canary, Green Arrow, Sgt. Rock, Enemy Ace, Aquaman, Robin, the Huntress, Karate Kid, Dr. Mid-Nite, Black Lightning, Sun Boy, Dawnstar, Wonder Woman, Chameleon Boy, Ultra Boy, and Mon-El.



INTERLUDE:

CANCELLED COMIC CAVALCADE: THE INDEX

Published—all 40 copies of it—as a means of preserving stories killed by the DC Implosion, *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* also curiously included the cover of the unpublished *Ragman* #6 from 1977 and a trio of oddball stories left over by editor Joe Simon circa 1973 (*Green Team*; *Prez*). The latter had been unearthed by Al Milgrom in 1977 at the same time he discovered an unpublished Jack Kirby story that he'd intended to use in *Kamandi* #61.

On the other hand, several stories that actually were derailed by the Implosion were absent in the photocopied behemoth. Some, like the cover of *Battle Classics* #2 (with Sgt. Rock), *Dynamic Classics* #2 (featuring Superman) or *Wonder Woman* #250's "Tales of the Amazons" story were probably assumed to be viable enough to be used someday. Other omissions in *CCC* such as the covers for *Claw the Unconquered* #13 and *Firestorm* #6 just seem to be a case of things getting lost in the shuffle.

Cancelled Comic Cavalcade #1:

Cover art: Al Milgrom, with Todd Klein on the *CCC* logo and paste-ups. "Still 10c. No ads!"

Description: Black Lightning, Claw, the Creeper, the Deserter, Mr. Miracle, the Odd Man, the Ray, Shade, Steel, the Secret Society of Super-Villains (Chronos, Mirror Master, Wizard), and the Vixen all lie dead in the foreground as a DC truck drives off and Deadman floats overhead.

"An Editorial, of Sorts" explains the origin of *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade*: "We had a whole mess of material ready to go to the engravers (or ready for last-minute corrections); it was felt it would be a shame if this material would never see print."

Contents:

Black Lightning #12

Cover: Rich Buckler and Vince Colletta.

Lead story: "Lure of the Magnetic Menace" (17 pages)

Script: Denny O'Neil

Pencils: Mike Nasser

Inks: Vince Colletta

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Jefferson Pierce's search for a runaway student leads him to the teen's Uncle Baxter Timmons, alias Green Lantern foe Dr. Polaris. (The villain's real name was Neal Emerson in his earlier *GL* appearances.)

Approximate original scheduled

on-sale date: August 24, 1978

Later published in: *World's Finest*

Comics #260 (December 1979-

January 1980) and—with cover art—*Black Lightning, Volume One* (2017).

Back-up story: The Ray – Untitled (Eight pages)

Script: Roger McKenzie (plot); Mike W. Barr (dialogue)

Pencils: John Fuller

Inks: Bob Wiacek

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Recovering from his injuries in the previous installment, the Ray flashes back to his origin. Unbeknownst to the hero, a villain called the Dark vows to destroy him.

Black Lightning #13

Cover: Mike Nasser

Claw the Unconquered #13

Story: "The Travelers of Dark Destiny" (25 pages)

Script: David Michelinie

Pencils: Romeo Tanghal

Inks: Bob Smith

Editor: Larry Hama

Description: Having severed his demonic hand in the previous issue, Claw agrees to help the mysterious Trysannda pursue the wizard Dalivar the Unethical who cursed her with magical powers. Horrified to find that his enchanted hand has reattached itself while he slept, Claw continues his quest and discovers the Dalivar's castle is a massive elemental formed of earth. Elsewhere, Prince Ghilkyn is lured away with false news about Claw.

Letter column: "Of Swordsmen and Sorcerers."

(The column is highlighted by a letter from Martin Greenberg, "the first hardcover publisher, in the 1950s, of Robert E. Howard's Conan stories, as well as the first publisher of Fritz Lieber's *Fafhrd* and the *Grey Mouser* stories.")

Note: Joe Kubert's cover for this issue is not included here.

Approximate original scheduled

on-sale date: July 11, 1978

Claw the Unconquered #14

Cover: Joe Kubert

Story: "When the River of Ravenroost... Ran Red" (25 pages)

Script: Tom DeFalco

Pencils: Romeo Tanghal

Inks: Bob Smith

Editor: Larry Hama

Description: After vanquishing the elemental, Claw falls to defeat while Trysannda is captured by the wizard (now called Validarr). Elsewhere, Prince Ghilkyn is captured by the Shadow-gods, who intend to use him in their war against the Lords of Elder Light. Back in Ravenroost, Claw saves Trysannda from being sacrificed to the demonic Sha-Gasa only to fall into "the Lair of Lunacy" ruled by a hunchbacked king.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 12, 1978

The Deserter #1 (a.k.a. Showcase #107)

Cover: Joe Kubert

Story: "The Deserter" (25 pages)

Script: Gerry Conway

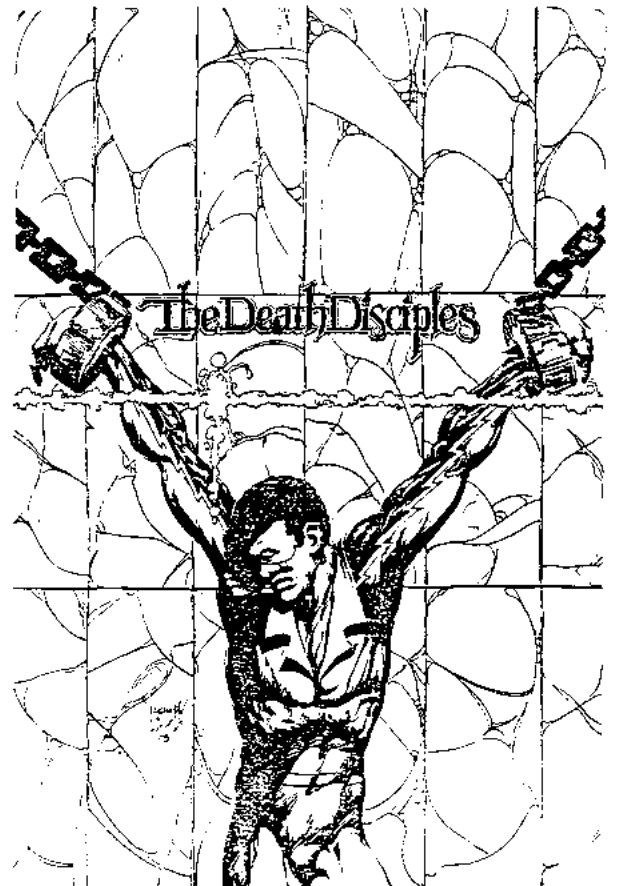
Pencils: Dick Ayers

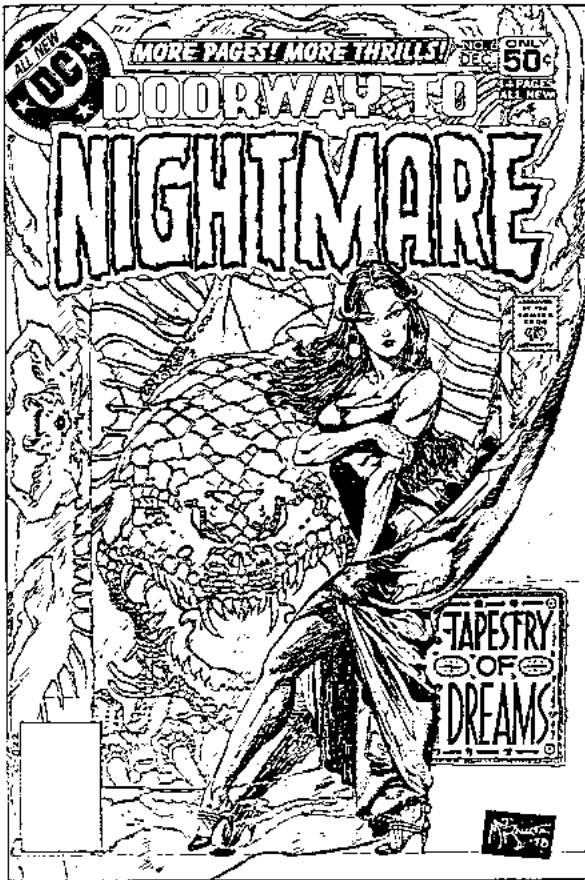
Inks: Romeo Tanghal

Editor: Paul Levitz

Description: In the Arizona territory of 1874, Aaron Hope befriends the sheriff of Cooper's Canyon and his daughter Marcy. Steadfastly

(opposite page) From *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1: (top left) The cover to *Black Lightning* #12, (top right) *Black Lightning* #13, (bottom left) *Claw the Unconquered* #14, and (bottom right) *Deserter* #1.





refusing to use a gun, Hope stops the violent plot of a landowner to buy up land and resell it to the railroad. Meanwhile, ex-sergeant Willie Dredge arrives in pursuit of Hope, who was traumatized a decade earlier during the Civil War and deserted. Grateful that the sheriff didn't turn him over to Dredge, Aaron prepares to tell his side of the story (which was to be titled "Night of the Inferno").

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 19, 1978

Doorway To Nightmare #6

Cover: Michael Kaluta

Story: "Tapestry of Dreams" (25 pages)

Script: Cary Burkett

Pencils: Juan Ortiz

Inks: Vince Colletta

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Madame Xanadu helps Stephen Prince defeat the incubus Mr. Hazel who has been preying on Stephen's girlfriend Laurel.

Text page: Tarot Reading

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: August 3, 1978

Later published in: *The Unexpected* #190 (March-April 1979)

Firestorm #6

Story: "The Typhoon is a Storm of the Soul" (25 pages)

Script: Gerry Conway

Pencils: Al Milgrom

Inks: Jack Abel (erroneously credited to Bob McLeod)

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Scientist Jonathan Shine, son of mobsters faced by *Firestorm* in earlier issues, is irradiated during an accident involving his atomic-powered submarine and becomes the tornadic Typhoon. Meanwhile, Liam McGarrin deduces that Ronnie Raymond may be connected to Martin Stein's blackouts and mobster "Spit" Shine kidnaps Bradley High's Principal Hapgood in search of information on a man named Rockwell (who looks like Ronnie's dad).

(opposite page) From *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade #1*: (top left) The cover to *Doorway to Nightmare #6*, (top right) *Firestorm #6*, (bottom left) and *Green team #2*. (bottom right) From *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade #2*, *Kamandi #60*.

Note: Al Milgrom's cover for this issue is not included here.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 21, 1978

Later published in: *Firestorm: The Nuclear Man* (2011)

The Green Team #2

Story: "The High Price of Food" (20 pages)

Script: Joe Simon

Pencils: Jerry Grandenetti

Inks: Creig Flessel

Editor: Joe Simon

Description: Skyrocketing seafood prices draw the Green Team into conflict with Russian fishermen that have discovered mutated giant lobsters.

Note: Technically, there was no first issue of *Green Team*. Writer-editor Joe Simon produced three issues circa 1973 for a proposed series and only the first was published in 1975's *1st Issue Special #2*.

The Green Team #3

Story: "The Deadly Paper Hanger" (20 pages)

Script: Joe Simon

Pencils: Jerry Grandenetti

Inks: Creig Flessel

Editor: Joe Simon

Description: The Green Team enlist an Adolf Hitler lookalike called the Paper Hanger to redecorate a slum but his organic wall paper becomes a menace.

Cancelled Comic Cavalcade #2:

Cover art: Alex Saviuk, with Todd Klein on the CCC logo and paste-ups. The "\$" symbol was part of the unused original trade dress for the Dollar Comics line.

Description: The Creeper, Deadman, Kamandi, OMAC, Prez, Shade, Steel, and the Vixen are kicked to the curb outside Unemployment, Inc. at 75 Rockefeller Plaza. "A Second Editorial, of Sorts" thanks "Neil of the Magic Finger deep down at Warner Duplicating who kept the spirit of *Plop!* alive when Paul Kupperberg came down with about a ream of original art and asked for 35 collated copies. Neil's hat actually flew off his head, and when he fell stiff-backed straight backward, an audible 'Plop!' sound was to be heard."

Subscription Department: Annual subscription rate: \$7.65 (couldn't sell any at last issue's rate). Upon cancellation of this publication, all subscriptions will convert

to *Freedom Fighters*, which will convert to *Secret Society of Super-Villains*, which will convert to *Justice League of America*, which, if cancelled, will most likely convert to a revived issue of *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade*. Only West German Marks accepted as payment for subscriptions to this publication."

Contents:

Kamandi, the Last Boy On Earth #60

Cover: Rich Buckler and Jack Abel

Lead story: "Into the Vortex" (17 pages)

Script: Jack C. Harris

Pencils: Dick Ayers

Inks: Danny Bulandi

Editor: Al Milgrom

Description: Drawn into the Vortex, Kamandi is introduced to the concept of a multiverse and that he has infinite counterparts on other Earths. Rejecting the option of entering a new reality where the Great Disaster never took place, Kamandi demands to return to his imperiled friends. He is whisked away by Brute and Glob, who call him "Jed" and declare they're taking him to the Sandman.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: August 31, 1978

Later published in: *The Kamandi Challenge Special #1* (March 2017)

Back-up story: OMAC – "For This Is the New Origin of OMAC" (Eight pages)

Script: Jim Starlin

Pencils: Jim Starlin

Inks: Joe Rubinstein

Editor: Al Milgrom

Description: Watching a video from Quair Tox of the advanced planet Vision, OMAC discovers that his creation was engineered by Professor Z of that world. After foreseeing that humanity would fall to a race of mutated animals, the Visionaries came to Earth and became Global Peace Agents with OMAC intended to lead mankind away from destruction, Donning a new costume, OMAC surrenders to the International Communications and Commerce Mercenaries as they storm the chamber.

Later published in: *Warlord #37* (September 1980)

Letter column: "The Time Capsule." (The column includes Jack C. Harris' announcement that the following issue would include an unseen Jack Kirby-penciled *Sandman* tale from 1975. "When artist Al Milgrom became one of DC's newest editors, he rummaged through [the inventory] drawer and pulled out the story. Being a true Jack Kirby fan, Al wanted desperately for the last,

never-published issue of *Sandman* to see the light of day. With the introduction of the 25-page books, Al had his chance and handed our writer the assignment of connecting Kamandi and the Sandman.”)

Kamandi, the Last Boy On Earth #61

Framing story: “I’ll See You In My Nightmares” (seven pages)

Script: Jack C. Harris

Pencils: Dick Ayers

Inks: Danny Bulandi

Editor: Al Milgrom

Description: In the Dream Stream, the Sandman explains to Kamandi that he was known as a boy named Jed on an alternate Earth and details one of their old adventures. Returning to Earth A.D., the Sandman and Kamandi defeat the energy creature that was threatening the boy’s friends.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: October 26, 1978

Later published in: *The Kamandi Challenge Special #1* (March 2017)

Flashback story: The Sandman - “The Seal Men’s War On Santa Claus” (18 pages)

Script: Michael Fleisher

Pencils: Jack Kirby

Inks: Mike Royer

Editor: Joe Orlando

Description: Attempting to win a million dollar charitable donation by proving the existence of Santa Claus, Jed seeks the Sandman and the duo rescue Saint Nick from the Seal Men.

Later published in: *The Best of DC #22* (March 1982) and *The Kamandi Challenge Special #1* (March 2017)

Prez #5

Cover: Jerry Grandenetti and Creig Flessel

Story: “The Devil’s Exterminator” (20 pages)

Script: Joe Simon

Pencils: Jerry Grandenetti

Inks: Creig Flessel

Editor: Joe Simon

Description: Hiring Clyde Piper to deal with an insect infestation in the White House, Prez refuses to pay his five million dollar bill. In retaliation, Piper kidnaps children from the annual Easter Egg Roll. After discovering that political rivals had implanted electronic bugs in the insects, Prez and Eagle Free are able to track Piper and rescue the kids.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: January 24, 1974

Later published in: *Prez: The First Teen President* (2016)

The Secret Society of Super-Villains #16

Cover: Alex Saviuk and Dick Giordano

Story: “Murder Times Seven” (17 pages).

Script: Bob Rozakis

Pencils: Dick Ayers and Mike Vosburg

Inks: Bob Smith

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: The Silver Ghost hires Mirror Master, Copperhead, Chronos, Killer Moth, Quakemaster and Sizematic to kill the Freedom Fighters. After leaving the Ray for dead, the villain next targets Uncle Sam and Doll Man. Meanwhile on Earth-Two, the Wizard’s branch of the Society—specifically Blockbuster—defeats JSA member Mr. Terrific.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: May 25, 1978

The Secret Society of Super-Villains #17

Story: “Death In Silver” (17 pages)

Script: Bob Rozakis

Pencils: Mike Vosburg

Inks: Bob Smith (partially on pages 1-3 and 5; story is otherwise un-inked)

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: The Secret Society systematically defeats all of the Freedom Fighters except Firebrand. The last man standing is stunned when the Silver Ghost un.masks and reveals that his entire campaign was directed toward the two of them being reunited.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: July 27, 1978

Shade, the Changing Man #9

Cover: Steve Ditko.

Lead story: “Into the Vortex” (17 pages)

Script: Steve Ditko (plot) and Michael Fleisher (dialogue)

Pencils and Inks: Steve Ditko

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Trapped in the Zero Zone en route to Earth, Shade is captured by the slave-lord Zekie and must reunite with his adversary Xexlo to escape. Secretly observed by a mysterious entity, Shade makes it to Earth with plans to free the Occult Research Center from the forces of Doctor Z.Z.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: June 20, 1978

Later published in: *The Steve Ditko Omnibus #1* (2011)

Back-up story: The Odd Man – “The Pharaoh and the Mummies” (Eight pages)

Script, pencils, and inks: Steve Ditko

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: The Odd Man—secretly detective Clay Stoner—investigates a

series of jewelry robberies perpetrated by a man dressed as a Pharaoh and working on behalf of a wealthy woman who believes herself an ancient Egyptian queen.

Later published in: *Detective Comics #487* (December 1979-January 1980)—with revised dialogue—and *The Steve Ditko Omnibus #1* (2011)

Showcase #105

Cover: Jim Aparo.

Story: “Requiem For a Deadman” (25 pages)

Script: Len Wein and Gerry Conway

Pencils and inks: Jim Aparo

Editor: Paul Levitz

Description: A séance at a S.T.A.R. Labs psychic division summons Deadman, who befriends scientist Annabelle Lee. Together, they discover that her fellow scientist Conrad Cabel was using his powerful psychic powers to sabotage the experiment.

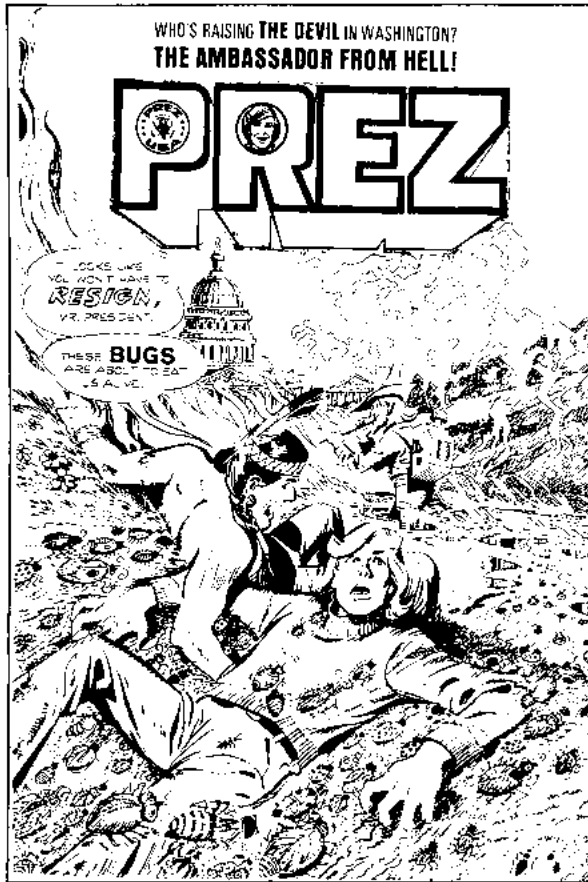
Text page: Critic’s Corner

(Paul Levitz details the story behind the story. The plot Wein initially conceived drew heavily on Neal Adams’ earlier Deadman adventure with appearances by the Sensei and Tatsinda (an alien woman from *Aquaman #50-52*) in the land of Nanda Parbat. “The first chapter was already scripted when we decided that there were too many elements from Deadman’s past to make it a true *showcase* of what the character was about.”

“The second plotting brought us to the S.T.A.R. research lab and the present cast of characters, but with some very different motivation and a method of summoning Boston’s ghost that we reserve for future use. Len went back and rescripted the middle section based on this, and then just as he reached the middle of the story, we plotted the story out yet again to clarify some of the changed elements.”

As the deadline loomed, Wein fell ill and Gerry Conway was drafted to complete the story. “It was relatively easy for Gerry to adapt his style to match Len’s, but to

(opposite page) From *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade #2*: (top left) The cover to *Prez #5*, (top right) *Secret Society of Super-Villains #16*, (bottom left) *Shade the Changing Man #9*, and (bottom right) *Showcase #105*.





allow him maximum creative freedom in finishing the story, he was given no clues to what Len had planned for the last half—just the completed manuscript pages for the first half. Naturally he picked up on the ideas in the first half, but with several novel twists of his own.”

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: July 18, 1978

Later published in: *Adventure Comics* #464 (July-August 1979) and *Deadman, Volume Four* (2014). Each version is missing the bottom two-thirds of page four, all of page five, and the top third of page six.

Showcase #106

Cover: Steve Ditko.

Story: “Enter Dr. Storme” (25 pages).

Script, pencils and inks: Steve Ditko

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Cosmic TV’s weather forecaster Sunny Daze is targeted by the atmospheric-powered Dr. Storme. Hampered by a side effect of the villain’s staff that triggers his transformations from Jack Ryder, the Creeper and his friends at Cosmic ultimately expose Storme as embittered former weatherman Al Whetly. The Odd Man makes a cameo as a TV show performer.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: August 15, 1978

Later published in: *The Creeper By Steve Ditko* (2010)

Steel, the Indestructible Man #6

Cover: Don Heck and Al Milgrom.

Story: “Super Soldier” (25 pages)

Script: Gerry Conway

Pencils: Don Heck

Inks: Frank Chiaramonte (erroneously identified as Joe Giella)

Editor: Al Milgrom

Description: Under pressure from Dr. Giles, Hank Heywood breaks his engagement and relocates to London alongside Major Morton. Learning of Steel’s presence in London, Congressman Kulhammer rages

about the implication that he represents U.S. interests and vows to brand him as a traitor. After rescuing Winston Churchill from the Black Assassin, Steel undertakes a mission to kill Adolf Hitler but winds up imprisoned in a concentration camp. Its commander—The Butcher—plans to examine and replicate Heywood’s cyborg components but the hero throws a bottle of acid in the villain’s face and tries to escape...just as Hitler arrives.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 28, 1978

Later published in: *All-Star Squadron* #8-9 (April-May 1982). Discarding several pages from the original story, Roy Thomas rewrote the remainder for insertion into an *All-Star Squadron* story while Jerry Ordway re-inked or redrew them. The story followed through on Gerry Conway’s intention to reveal that the Butcher became Baron Blitzkrieg.

The Vixen #1

Cover: Bob Oksner and Vince Colletta.

Story: “The Vixen is a Lady Fox” (25 pages)

Script: Gerry and Carla Conway

Pencils: Bob Oksner

Inks: Vince Colletta

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Fashion model and businesswoman Marilyn Macabe is shaken by the news that President C’Tanga Manitoba of the African nation D’Mulla is speaking at the United Nations. Flashing back to her childhood in D’Mulla, she recalls Manitoba murdering her resistance leader father C’Mellu Dantogi. Empowered by animal spirits through the Tantu Totem, Mari becomes the Vixen and kills Manitoba before he can execute the spiritual leader Reverend Peak.

Note: The final page of the story was not yet dialogued so a script page was also included.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: August 8, 1978

Army At War #2

Cover: Joe Kubert.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 7, 1978

Later published on: *Sgt. Rock* #384 (January 1984)

Battle Classics #3

Cover: Joe Kubert

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: October 19, 1978

Later published in: *DC Special Blue Ribbon Digest* #18 (February 1982) as

a pin-up, along with the unused cover for *Battle Classics* #2

Demand Classics #1

Cover: Dick Dillin and Frank McLaughlin

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: July 4, 1978

Demand Classics #2

Cover: Ross Andru and Dick Giordano.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 5, 1978

Dynamic Classics #3

Cover: Jim Aparo

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: October 12, 1978

Mister Miracle #26

Cover: Michael Golden and Russ Heath

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: July 4, 1978

Ragman #6

Cover: Joe Kubert

Note: According to Robert Kanigher’s records—as published in *The Comics* [Vol. 15] #7 (July 2004)—he had written stories for this issue (“3 Minus 3 = 1”) and issue #7 (“The Devil’s Disciple”).

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: May 24, 1977

Weird Mystery Tales #25

Cover: Joe Orlando.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: July 11, 1978

Later published on: *Secrets of Haunted House* #20 (January 1980)

Weird Mystery Tales #26

Cover: Michael Kaluta

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 12, 1978

Later published on: *House of Mystery* #265 (February 1979)

Western Classics #1

Cover: James Sherman and Maurice Whitman

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: July 11, 1978

Western Classics #2

Cover: Ross Andru and Dick Giordano

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 12, 1978

(opposite page) From *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2: (top left) The cover to *Steel* #6, (top right) *Vixen* #1, (bottom left) *Battle Classics* #3, and (bottom right) *Mister Miracle* #26.

INTERLUDE: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO—?

The following is an attempt at tracing the eventual homes of all the other comics DC scheduled for publication in 1978. News items originally reported in *The Comic Reader* #145, #146 and #153-159, *The Comics Journal* #38-40 and *Direct Currents Newsletter* #2-6 were particularly useful in putting it all together.

Action Comics #490's Air Wave back-up appeared in issue #511 (1980) while the script for #491's Atom story was illustrated and expanded from eight pages to ten for *World's Finest Comics* #260 (1979).

Adventure Comics #459's Dollar Comic premiere was supposed to include the debut of Roger McKenzie and Don Newton's "The Man Called Neverwhere," described in *The Flash* #263 as "a mysterious hero who operates behind the iron curtain." Paul Levitz added in *Adventure* #457's letter column that "we think it's going to shock quite a few people's preconceived notions of what a comic book superhero is all about" and McKenzie himself vaguely recalled it in a 2013 Facebook post as "some sort of elvish/magical/time-travel superhero mishmash of a concept." Whatever its particulars, the series was postponed to insert material meant for *New Gods* #20. An Elongated Man story was hastily commissioned to fill the page difference in issue #459. Unfortunately, *Adventure* continued to be a clearinghouse for cancelled comics (*All-Star Comics*; *Aquaman*) and "Neverwhere" never was.

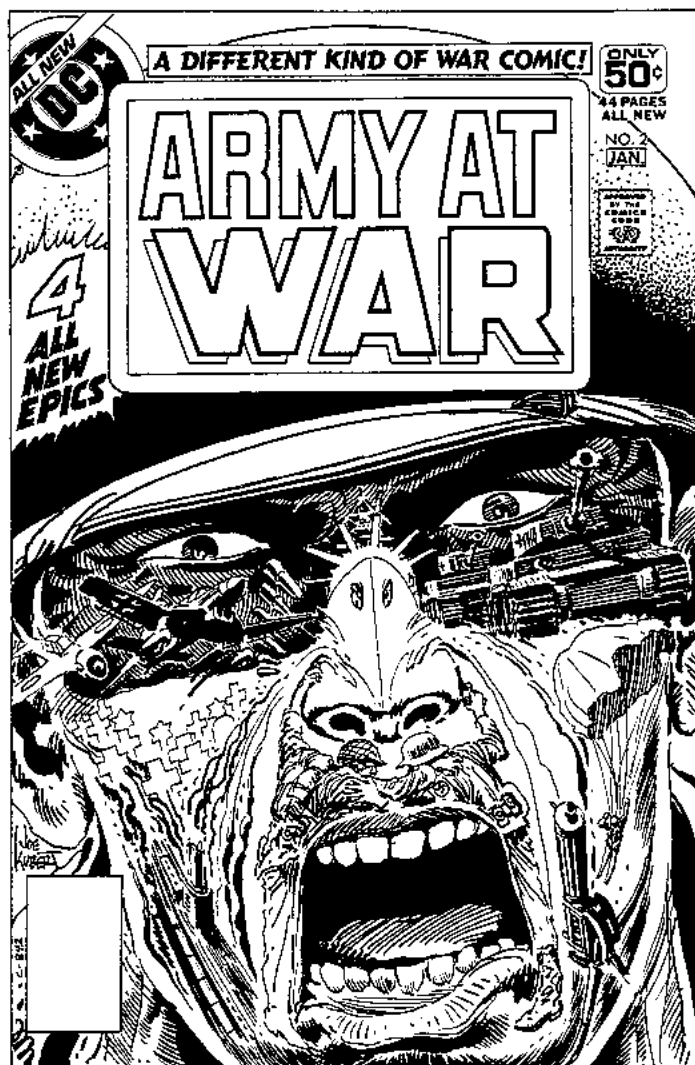
Nor were the previously announced Metal Men (by Gerry Conway and Ramona Fradon, for *Adventure* #461-462), Manhunter From Mars (*Adventure* #461-463), and Doctor Fate (by writer Steve Gerber for *Adventure* #463-465). The unpublished first installment of the Metal Men two-parter—involving an insecure Lead transferring his consciousness into a handsome new body—was actually penciled by an unknown artist and inked by Romeo Tanghal. Years later, Doctor Fate finally received a short-lived back-up series and writer Martin Pasko recalled the Gerber scripts when he was in a deadline pinch. With editor Mike W. Barr's blessing, Pasko worked the story into his own continuity and they were finally published as a four-parter (rather than three) in *The Flash* #310-313 (1982).

All-New Collectors' Edition's Justice League 72-pager was broken apart in *Justice League of America* #210-212. "Superman's Life Story," planned to coincide with the June (then December) release of the feature film, finally saw print in *Action Comics* #500 in mid-1979.

Material intended for 1978's Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer tabloid (including "Will a Stitch In Time Save Christmas?" and "The Secret of the Lucky Dragon's Egg") appeared one year later in the digest, *Best of DC* #4. Five pages of puzzles slated for the tabloid were published in Robin Snyder's *The Comics* [volume 7] #12 (1996). At least one other unpublished Rudolph story, the 16-page "A Whale of a Christmas Visit" exists, excerpted in multiple issues of *The Comics*, beginning with [volume 5] #12 (1994).

Page seven of the Romeo Tanghal-inked Metal Men story meant for *Adventure Comics* #459. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.





Joe Kubert's highly-detailed cover for *Army at War* #2 was later repurposed for use on (below) *Sgt. Rock* #384.



featured *Our Army At War* #115's "Rock's Battle Family." The covers for both issues were used as pin-ups in *DC Special Blue Ribbon Digest* #18 (1981).

Digest Comics #1, edited by Paul Levitz and Ross Andru, was slated to premiere with "The Best of DC," reprinting "Menace of the Dragonfly Raiders" (*Brave & Bold* #42), "The Hundred Dollar Deal" (*All-Star Western* #11), "Must There Be a Superman?" (Superman #247) and "No Evil Shall Escape My Sight" (*Green Lantern* #76). Both it and a second issue featuring Welcome Back, Kotter (edited by Larry Hama) were tentatively scheduled for August release. Follow-up editions were to feature Superman (edited by Andru and Cary Burkett) and a horror theme (edited by Levitz and Al Milgrom). DC finally launched its digest line in June 1979 with *The Best of DC* #1 (starring Superman) and *Jonah Hex and Other Western Tales* #1.

The Black Lightning story from *Black Lightning* #12 appeared uncut in *World's Finest Comics* #260 (1979). The Ray back-up for the issue, reprising the hero's origin, appeared only in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1. The Ray strip had been scheduled to end in #13, replaced by Steve Ditko's "Odd Man" in #14. The covers for *Black Lightning* #12 and 13 appeared in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1.

The Brave & The Bold #145-147's Human Target back-ups appeared in *Detective* #483, #484 and #486 (1979).

The contents of *All-Star Comics* #75 were split into a two-part Justice Society story published in *Adventure Comics* #461-462. A three-page prologue was added to the first part while the issue's unused cover became a splash page for #462's conclusion, depicting the death of the Golden Age Batman.

Aquaman #64's lead story was published in *Adventure Comics* #460, bumping the previously mentioned "Man Called Neverwhere" series. Two never-completed six-page back-ups for *Aquaman* were to have featured the Vigilante (by Roger McKenzie and Gray Morrow) and Martian Manhunter (by Cary Burkett, John Fuller and Bruce Patterson). The Martian Manhunter strip was tentatively rescheduled for *Adventure Comics* #461-463 but never appeared.

The cover intended for *Army At War* #2 later appeared on *Sgt. Rock* #384 (1983). A story intended for that issue ("Wolf Pack") was subsequently published in 1979's *Men of War* #15.

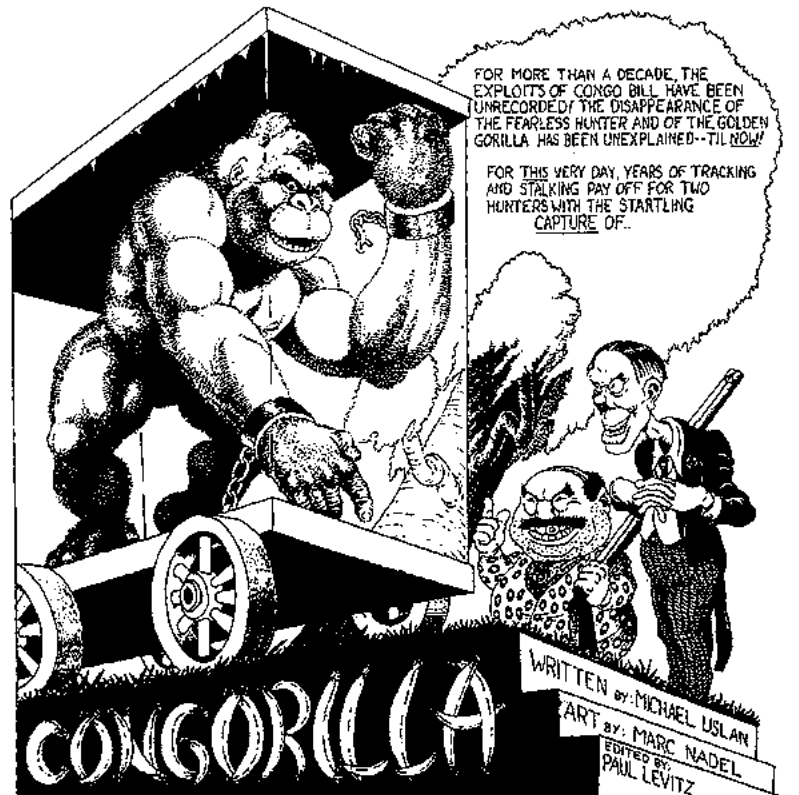
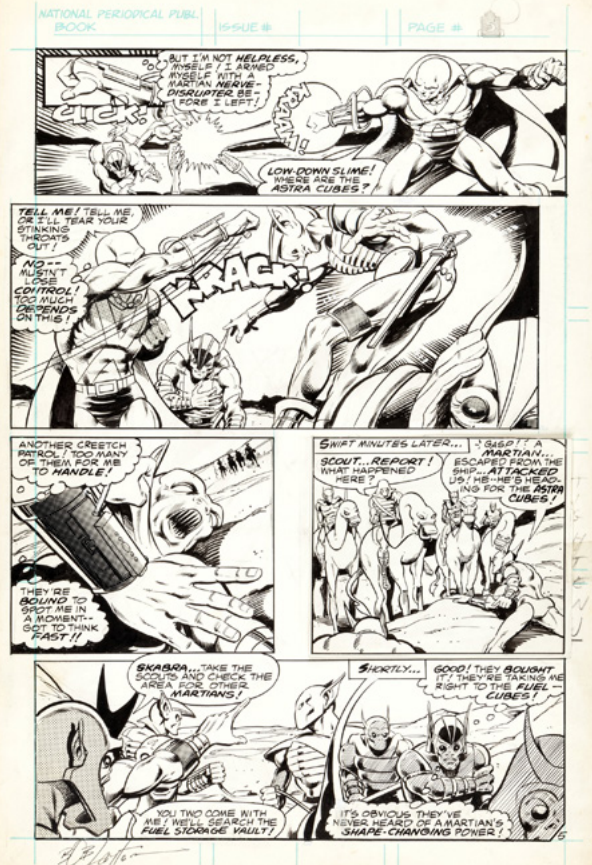
Batman #306 crunched its lead story from 17 pages to 15 while the full-length episode in #308 was reduced from 25 pages to 23. Issue #307's "Public Life of Bruce Wayne" back-up surfaced in *Detective Comics* #483 while #309's "Unsolved Cases of The Batman" story appeared in *Detective* #484 (1979).

The Batman Family ended with issue #20 but issue #21's contents were transferred into *Detective Comics* #481 with only one change: That issue's Demon adventure was pushed back one issue and replaced with the Denny O'Neil/Marshall Rogers Batman story actually solicited for *Tec* #481. A stat of *Batman Family* #21's original cover appeared in the background of the Bat-Mite story in *Detective* #482.

Battle Classics #2 was to have reprinted *Our Army At War* #140's "Brass Sergeant" while issue #3 would probably have featured *Our Army At War* #115's "Rock's Battle Family." The covers for both issues were used as pin-ups in *DC Special Blue Ribbon Digest* #18 (1981).

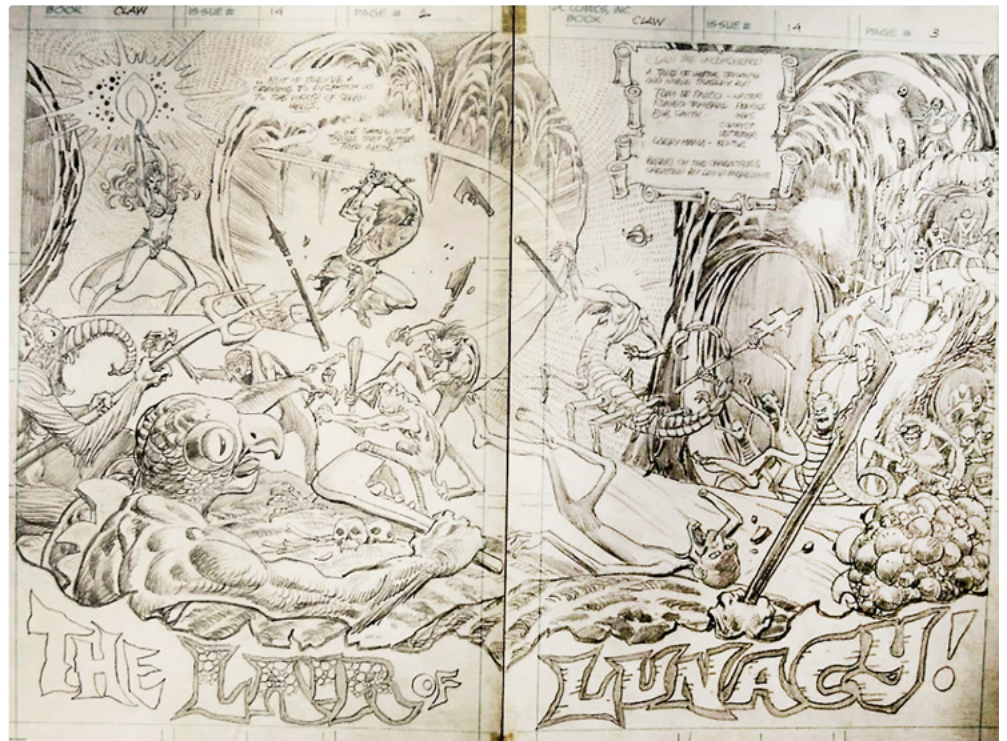
Among the unrealized back-ups of 1978 was a six-page “Manhunter From Mars” feature intended for *Aquaman* #64 by Cary Burkett, John Fuller, and Bob Layton. The original art for the two pages seen here are courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

In June 1978, Michael Uslan successfully pitched a “Tales from Earth-Two” back-up to DC. Foreshadowing the “Whatever Happened To...?” series that later launched in 1980’s *DC Comics Presents* #25, each story would check in on the likes of Hourman, Johnny Thunder, Mr. Terrific, Robin, the Sandman, and the Seven Soldiers of Victory. Uslan’s first script focused on Congorilla but, like the rest of the series, was never realized. The writer later had friend Marc Nadel draw a few samples pages of the tale, the splash of which is presented here. More details on the proposal were published in *Back Issue* #134 (April 2022).



Had Michael Uslan’s “Tales From Earth-2” continued, he would have made Congorilla a charter member of a new Seven Soldiers of Victory alongside Earth-Two’s Aquaman, Green Arrow, Speedy, Crimson Avenger, Robotman, and Sargona the Sorceress.

When news of cancellations came in June 1978, many artists were in the midst of penciling comics that were never completed. Romeo Tanghal had done five pages of "The Lair of Lunacy" (scripted by Tom DeFalco), intended for November 1978's *Claw the Unconquered* #15. Meanwhile, Don Heck had penciled at least ten pages of "The Baron Named Blitzkrieg" (scripted by Gerry Conway), meant for November 1978's *Steel the Indestructible Man* #7. The latter scans are via Anthony's Comic Book Art.



COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978

Larry Hama's *Bucky O'Hare* was first described obliquely by Jenette Kahn in a November 1977 Publisher's column as something "as wonderfully lunatic as *Howard the Duck*," but the project never found its way onto DC's schedule. Hama developed the series with the belief that he would own the property but he pulled out over the failure of DC's lawyers to deliver a contract that said as much. Instead, Bucky wound up with Neal Adams' Continuity Associates and premiered in *Echo of Future Past* #1 (1984), now illustrated by Michael Golden. Along with comics, Adams sold merchandising rights to Bucky O'Hare for action figures, animated cartoons, and videogames. "I did very well from it," Hama said in *Back Issue* #43 (2010). "Golden and I own a nice chunk of it and Neal owns the rest."

The contents of *Claw the Unconquered* #13-14, in which the barbarian regained the hand he lost in issue #12, appeared only in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1. The handful of pages that Romeo Tanghal penciled for issue #15 have never been published. The "official" story of how Claw regained his appendage appeared in 1981's *Warlord* #48-49 (by Paul Levitz and Tom Yeates).

The 25-page stories prepared for *DC Comics Presents* #4 and 5 were each edited into 23-page installments.

DC Special Series' planned Green Lantern/Green Arrow giant was split into a two-parter published in 1978's *Green Lantern* #111-112. Likewise, a Superboy/Legion story was divided between 1979's *Superboy and The Legion of Super-Heroes* #250 and #251, albeit slashed from its original 64 pages to only 42.

The latter story had been plotted and laid out by Jim Starlin in 1977 with the expectation that Joe Rubinstein would do finishes and Paul Levitz would script. As detailed in *The Legion Companion* (2003), Levitz "played essentially 52 card pickup with it. I recreated the story, we threw out a few pages, we had Joe Staton do a new splash for the second part, [and] ran it in entirely different order with a somewhat different plot than what Jim intended—somewhat to his frustration." Indeed, Starlin requested that his name be removed from the credits, replaced by the pseudonym "Steve Apollo."

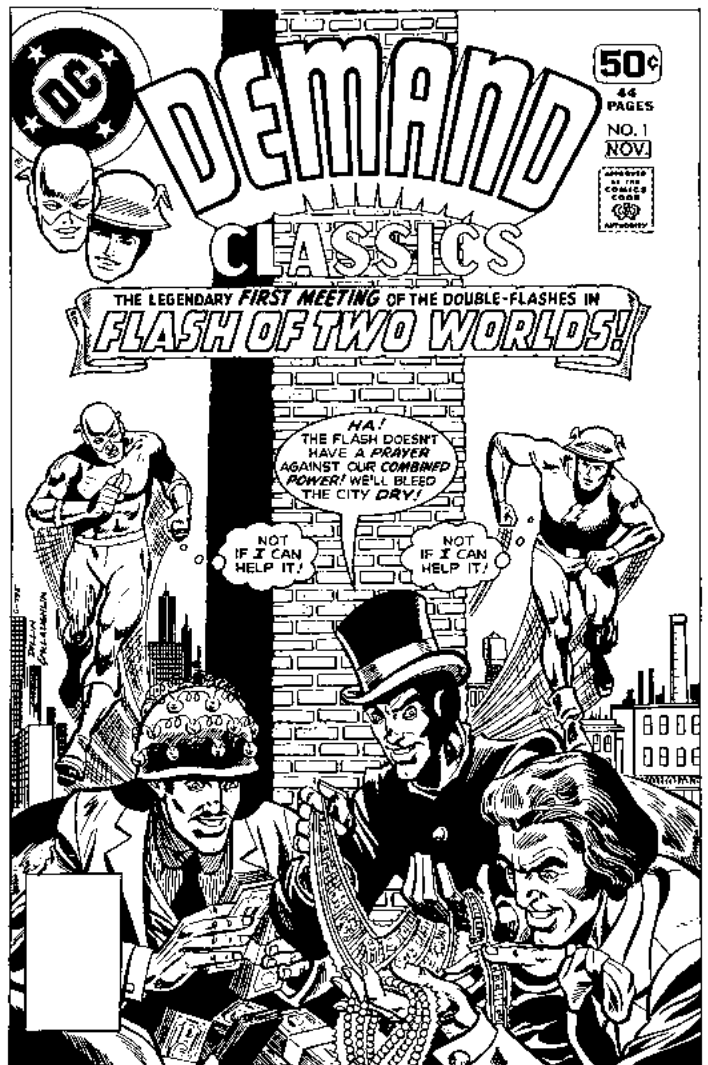
Demand Classics #1 was to have reprinted "Flash of Two Worlds" (*The Flash* #123) while issue #2 would have featured "The Ghost of Ferro Lad" (*Adventure Comics* #357). The covers for both issues appeared in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2.

Detective Comics, the comic book from which DC took its name, was actually among the comic books cancelled in the purge. Fortunately, Mike Gold suggested that the more successful *Batman Family* book be merged with the long-running title. Consequently, the Batman story scheduled for *Detective* #481 was combined with most of the contents of *Batman Family* #21 while *Tec* #481's Hawkman back-up was used in *World's Finest* #256. Jim Aparo's original cover for *Detective* #481 was never published.

Len Wein and Murphy Anderson's never-completed episode for *Detective Comics* #482 would have featured the Gentleman Ghost and led into a Batman-Hawkman team-up in *Batman* #310. Instead, Hawkman was simply written out of the Batman story.

Doorway To Nightmare #6-9's episodes appeared in *Unexpected* #190, #192, #194 and #195 (1979) while issue #6's cover was printed only in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1. Further stories had been scripted but never illustrated. A Steve Englehart/Marshall Rogers installment appeared in 1981's *Madame Xanadu* #1.

The cover to *Demand Classics* #1 featured Dick Dillin and Frank McLaughlin's recreation of the first dual Flash team-up.





Jim Aparo's cover for *Dynamic Classics* #3, featuring Manhunter and the Phantom Stranger.

Dynamic Classics #2 was to have featured “Planet of the Angels” (*Superman* #236) while issue #3 would have been “The Man With No Heart” (*The Phantom Stranger* #14). Back-ups in the two issues would have been the Manhunter installments from *Detective Comics* #438 and #439. A one-page Bernie Wrightson reprint, “The Hound of Night” (*Unexpected* #121), was also to have appeared in issue #2. Issue #3's cover appeared in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2.

Although *Firestorm* #6 appeared only in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1, Gerry Conway eventually used a different version of that issue's villain, Typhoon, in a new story in *The Flash* #294-296 in late 1980. The 1978 version was eventually published in the 2011 trade paperback *Firestorm: The Nuclear Man*. Three pages of Al Milgrom's pencils for issue #7—intended to introduce the villainous Reptile Man—were published online at firestormfan.com.

The Flash #268's Kid Flash back-up, which led directly into #269's Flash/Kid Flash team-up, appeared in issue #325 (1983), edited so that Gail Manners became her previously unseen sister, Jill. A new eighth page eliminated the cliffhanger. Not explained was why Wally West wasn't suffering a severe case of déjà vu, having experienced the same events with Gail a few years earlier (flashbacks from the story had appeared at the beginning of #269). Issue #269, incidentally, was another 25-page story condensed to 23 pages.

Green Lantern #111-113's Green Lantern Corps back-up appeared in #130-132 (1980).

Following its cancellation with issue #154, *House of Secrets* was merged with *The Witching Hour* and *Doorway To Nightmare* in *The Unexpected*, which was expanded to Dollar Comic size to

accommodate the changes. The inventory from the books began to appear with *Unexpected* #189.

More 25-page stories that were trimmed into 23-pagers appeared in *Jonah Hex* #19-21 and *Justice League of America* #161-162. *JLA*, in fact, continued to maintain a 22-page story length through issue #165 although no art was cut from those later issues.

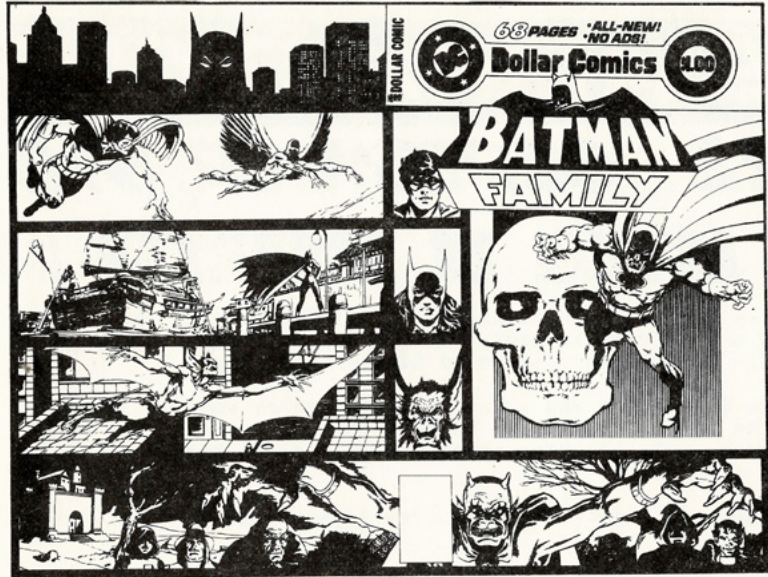
The lead story in *Kamandi* #60 would have sent the last boy on Earth “Into the Vortex,” where, according to the cover copy, he would “see a thousand Kamandis on a thousand worlds.” Issue #61 was to have integrated a Jack Kirby-illustrated Sandman story, first slated for 1975's *Sandman* #7. The detail that enabled the fanciful Kirby Christmas story to connect with the more somber fantasy series was the revelation that the Sandman's pal Jed was actually the Kamandi of another timeline. Years later, in 1985's *Crisis On Infinite Earths* #12, the same explanation was employed to reveal that, in the DC Universe's restructured reality, Kamandi was now Tommy Tomorrow. The contents of both *Kamandi* #60 and #61 appeared in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2 and later in *The Kamandi Challenge Special* #1 (2017). The Sandman sequence was published in color in *The Best of DC* #22 (1981).

A resolution of sorts for the series was prepared for *The Brave and The Bold* #157 (1979), in which Kamandi was temporarily dropped out of the vortex into the 20th Century.

The OMAC story from *Kamandi* #60 ended up in *Warlord* #37 (1980). The next two installments of the story, which presumably had been prepared in 1978 by Jim Starlin, appeared in *Warlord* #38-39.

COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978

Jim Starlin's cover for September 1978's *Batman Family* #21—minus most of its cover copy—appeared only in retailer newsletter *DC Coming Attractions* #22 (Sept. 1978). When the contents were shifted to *Detective Comics* #481, the intended Demon story was pushed back on the schedule and the character's spot on the cover was replaced by a second Batman image.



The lead story for the same month's *Star Hunters* #8 was never published but its Adam Strange back-up ultimately ran in *World's Finest Comics* #263. Rich Buckler and Dick Giordano's original cover art appears courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

In the final published issue of *Star Hunters*, departing writer David Michelinie took inspiration from novelist Michael Moorcock's *Eternal Champion* concept. Issue #7 revealed that the series' star Donovan Flint was represented elsewhere in the multiverse by other DC characters previously written by Michelinie: Claw the Unconquered, Starfire, and the Unknown Soldier.



When the Creeper's feature was replaced by Hawkman effective with *World's Finest Comics* #256 (Jan. 1979), creator Steve Ditko was ahead of schedule and had more stories in the works. Rather than let them go to waste, he revised them to feature characters that he owned himself. Hence, Cosmic Broadcasting security agent Jack (Creeper) Ryder became Starwide TV's Jay Oaker...alias the Shag! In this form, the Shag premiered in *Ditko's World* #1 (May 1986) from Renegade Press. That story was reprinted in 1989's *Ditko Package* from Robin Snyder along with three other Shag adventures. At eight pages, "Shag vs. the Smasher" is a probable candidate for the episode that would have appeared in *WFC* #256.

Ironically, Ditko found himself in a similar situation when Marvel lost the rights to Godzilla and cancelled the comic book with issue #24 (April 1979). He had drawn a complete standalone tale for the title and writer Marv Wolfman refused to let it go the waste. With revised art and script, the tale finally saw print as "Dragon Lord" in *Marvel Spotlight* #5 (Dec. 1979), with cover art by Frank Miller and Bob Wiacek. Ditko's original version of the cover was run in *The Comics Journal* #54 (March 1980).



COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978

Men of War was forced to return from a three-feature book to two features as its two back-up strips began rotating with one another. The immediate result found the Enemy Ace story intended for *Men of War* #11 pushed back one issue in favor of “Dateline: Frontline.”

A Blackhawk trilogy plotted and drawn by Howard Chaykin (with script by Len Wein) for *Men of War* was a prequel of sorts according to *Mediascene* #26 (1977): It “predates *Military Comics* #1, so the Blackhawk isn’t really in uniform yet. Instead, he is fighting in the Spanish Civil War (mid-1930s) and the tale has a surreal quality to it.” Although the story never appeared, Chaykin later incorporated the Spanish Civil war detail into his 1988 *Blackhawk* mini-series. Meanwhile, the David Michelinie/Walter Simonson Captain Fear story first commissioned for *Men of War* in the spring of 1977 ultimately ran in 1981’s *Unknown Soldier* #254-256.

Mister Miracle #26 was to have featured “Freedom Is A Four Letter Word” (by Len Wein and Michael Golden) and a Big Barda back-up (by Steve Gerber and Joe Orlando). Al Milgrom was slated to succeed Gerber as writer in subsequent installments. Only Golden’s cover, seen in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2, was completed. *Mediascene* #28 (1977) reported that Wein would have revived Shilo Norman in his run, a goal that he eventually achieved in 1990’s *Mister Miracle* #21.

The unnamed *Ms. Mystic* was mentioned by Jenette Kahn as an upcoming project from “the team of Neal Adams and Mike Nasser” in a November 1977 Publishorial. The character had her roots in Vince Colletta’s invitation to Nasser to create a new heroine for DC but Adams soon took charge of the concept and created her visuals and history himself. After completing a 17-page story, Nasser (now Michael Netzer) took a sabbatical in November 1977. When he returned, Adams had pulled the project from DC, ultimately reworking it for Pacific Comics in 1982. Adams later contended that he never intended for *Ms. Mystic* to be published by DC at all but he did include her on the cover of the *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali* tabloid, whose inside front cover identified her as a DC character.

New Gods #20 was cut in two pieces for *Adventure Comics* #459 and #460.

Our Fighting Forces #182’s Losers story (“Young Losers—Young Lions”) eventually appeared in *Unknown Soldier* #265 (1982) while its Captain Storm story became part of *G.I. Combat* #213 (1979). Robert Kanigher and Maurice Whitman’s HQ: Confidential episode (“The Missile Jockey”) was never published. Although Kanigher had written scripts for issue #183 and #184’s lead stories (“No Exit For a Loser” and “Terror For Tomorrow”), they were never illustrated (cited in *The Comics* [Vol. 15] #18: August 2004).

The Secret Society of Super-Villains #16-18 was to have featured the conclusion to the Freedom Fighters/Silver Ghost war that had been left unresolved since the FF’s own book was cancelled. None of it made it into print and only issues #16 and #17 were even illustrated (appearing in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2 and 2012’s *Secret Society of Super-Villains, Volume Two*). The details of the story, including #18’s climax, were related by Bob Rozakis in *DC Comics Presents* #62’s text page: With the rest of the Freedom Fighters defeated, “the Silver Ghost revealed himself to [Firebrand as] another refugee from Earth-X, a Nazi leader [that the hero] had double-crossed on their home world. The Ghost had escaped Earth-X and come to Earth-One to find Firebrand, who had similarly crossed

Our Fighting Forces
#183 cover art by
Joe Kubert. Image
via *The Comics* (Vol. 15)
#7 (July 2004).



the dimensional barrier earlier. When the Freedom Fighters appeared, the Ghost was sure they'd lead him to Firebrand and—in a roundabout way explained in *FF* #11—they did. The final fight between Firebrand and the Ghost ended with both of them being transformed irreversibly to silver, locked together in a death-grip. The rest of the team escaped the traps of the Secret Society and decided they had had enough of Earth-One [and] returned to Earth-X.”

Issue #17's back-up (also left unillustrated) would have matched Star Sapphire against Justice Society member Johnny Thunder, who surrendered to the villainess rather than risk the lives of his wife and grandchildren. Flashbacks would have divulged the origin of the villainess, as described by Bob Rozakis in *Justice League of America* #174's letter column: “Star Sapphire was originally Remoni-Notra of the planet Pandina. She was chosen by the Zamarons to be their queen—an honor previously bequeathed upon Earth's Carol Ferris but refused. Remoni-Notra was given one of the five star sapphire gems and was told of the existence of the other four. Using her powers, she came to Earth to locate and steal Carol Ferris' gem and hooked up with the SSOSV in the hopes of finding the gem. Whether Remoni-Notra, who has masqueraded as French real estate agent Camille and also Captain Comet's sometimes girlfriend Debbie Darnell, will eventually succeed in her task is up in the air at present—and will be determined by the next writer who decides to use her.”

A Captain Comet back-up strip had also been planned for the book, alternating with villain backstories. Issue #18's unillustrated installment found Cap fighting the Icicle and the Fiddler on Earth-One while a flashback revealed that the mysterious gun holstered on his hip was an ultimate weapon whose power would be directed on its target and the person firing it with equal force. Rozakis intended

Steve Ditko's cover for *Showcase* #106.



to employ the device in the climax of the ongoing “War of the Worlds” story but he never worked out how. Instead, the fate of the Wizard's branch of the Secret Society was resolved in *Justice League of America* #166-168 (1979).

Shade, the Changing Man #9 would have plunged its title character into the Zero Zone and an uncomfortable alliance with the malevolent Xexlo. “The Deadly Ally” was included in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2 and published decades later in *The Steve Ditko Omnibus* (2011). A resolution to Shade's battle with Doctor Z, left unresolved in *Shade* #8, was finally depicted in *Suicide Squad* #16 (1988). “The Odd Man” back-up story slated for *Shade* #9 (“The Pharaoh and the Mummies”) was rescheduled for the ultimately unpublished *Black Lightning* #14. After an appearance in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2, an edited version of the story was finally released to the general public in *Detective Comics* #487 (1979). The unedited original story was included in *The Steve Ditko Omnibus* (2011).

Showcase #105's Deadman story appeared in *Adventure Comics* #465 (1979), minus a two page action sequence and its cover. Issue #106 was slated to star the Creeper in a 25-page opus by Steve Ditko that found Jack Ryder's Creeper alter-ego imperiled while fighting a villain named Doctor Storme. The issue appeared in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2 (as did an uncut version of issue #105) and later in *The Creeper By Steve Ditko* (2010). The Creeper story also featured a cameo by the Odd Man, cast here as a character on a TV show.

A trilogy featuring popular Justice Society member, the Huntress, had been scheduled for *Showcase* #107-109 but was replaced by a new western strip, the Deserter. By the time the decision was made, the Huntress story's placement had been mentioned in a house ad seen in several September cover-dated comic

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books, thus contributing to the pervasive myth that at least part of the serial had been completed.

The Deserter, in turn, was given his own ongoing title at the eleventh hour only to perish amidst the other cancellations. The origin of tormented Civil War deserter Aaron Hope (by Gerry Conway, Dick Ayers and Romeo Tanghal) appeared only in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1.

Initially scheduled for *Showcase* #104-106 to coincide with the June premiere of *Superman: The Movie*, “World of Krypton” was rescheduled to issues #110-112 when the film’s release date was moved to December. Ultimately, “World of Krypton” was released under its own name in the summer of 1979, one year after it was first to have appeared. Despite the fact that *Showcase* and books like it had been featuring short-run strips for years, the release of *World of Krypton* under its own name awakened publishers to the potential of the miniseries concept, certainly the most significant repercussion of *Showcase*’s cancellation.

A revamped version of *Suicide Squad* created by Len Wein had been slated for release in March-June, 1979 in *Showcase* #113-116. They were described by Paul Levitz—in *Showcase* #105’s unpublished text page—as “a new group of adventurers with a common—and deadly—bond.” *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1979) had previously noted that they were “a group of people who have a short time to live and want to die a heroic death.” The new Suicide Squad may have been based on an unrealized Marvel proposal that Wein was working on with artist Bob Brown a few years earlier. *The Comic Reader* #128 (March 1976) reported that it was about “a group of losers who have nothing to live for—so Destiny rounds them up and gives them something to die for.” Ironically, when an entirely different Suicide Squad was finally revived in 1986’s *Legends* miniseries, John Ostrander’s plot was dialogued by Wein.

The Sorcerer, created by Bob Layton and David Michelinie, was a crusader whose “major objective,” according to the latter, “is to kill crime. Not stop it, *kill* it, destroy it. Utterly. This guy has a bit of a twist in that he’s not totally rational.” Discussing the concept in *Comics Feature* #2 (May 1980), Michelinie added, “Bob had the idea a few years ago when we were at DC working on *Star Hunters* together. I became involved with the character and it became our character. We presented it to DC and if I’m not mistaken they were going to do the character at least as a *Showcase* or in its own book just before we left the company.”

Layton, who regarded the DC version as “watered down,” initially tried to release a more adult, creator-owned version with Michelinie in a 1981 graphic novel but its completed 48-pages were never published. Elements from the concept were ultimately recycled in 2003’s *Deathmask* from Future Comics.

Star Hunters #8’s never-completed lead feature was advertised in issue #7 as “the final battle with the Corporation.” It would have been written by Gerry Conway and illustrated by Rich Buckler and Tom Sutton.

The Adam Strange back-up intended for *Star Hunters* #8 was briefly rescheduled for *Adventure Comics* #467 (1979). After being bumped from that book for a new incarnation of Starman, the twice-spurned episode was finally used in *World’s Finest Comics* #263 (1980). Its sequel, written for *Star Hunters* #9, was illustrated in 1980 and used the same year in *Green Lantern* #132.



An Adam Strange story meant for 1978’s *Star Hunters* #8 was rescheduled for 1979’s *Adventure Comics* #467 only to be replaced by a Starman feature. The tale finally appeared in 1980’s *World’s Finest* #263. Dave Cockrum/Dick Giordano original cover art via Heritage Auctions.

Mike Grell's *Starslayer*—a reversal on *Warlord* that transported a man from ancient times to the far future—had been scheduled for a late fall debut. Instead, it remained in the possession of its creator and appeared at the dawn of Pacific Comics' line in 1981.

Roy Thomas wove excerpts from *Steel, The Indestructible Man* #6 into *All-Star Squadron* #8-9 (1982). Don Heck's pencils were reinked or completely redrawn by Jerry Ordway. The original version of the story appeared only in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2.

A September revival of the science fiction anthology title, *Strange Adventures*, was stopped in its tracks with a handful of short stories already completed. When DC returned to its plans in 1979, the series was expanded from a standard format book into a Dollar Comic now titled *Time Warp*.

Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes #246 had two pages of story cut from its contents while issue #247 lost three. There were two more 25-page Legion issues, intended as bookends to a never-published issue of *DC Special Series*. The first appeared in issues #248 and #249 with a newly-added cliffhanger and splash page. After the recycled *DC Special Series* tale appeared (in #250-251), the stories prepared for the latter issue were used as the lead in *SLSH* #252 and back-up in issue #257.

Splash page for *The Vixen* #1, by Gerry & Carla Conway, Bob Oksner and Vince Colletta.

Super Friends #15's Wonder Twins episode appeared in issue #29 (1979) while issue #16's installment was completed for use in issue #34 (1980).

Superman #330's story was reduced to 23 pages while the "Private Life of Clark Kent" and "Mr. and Mrs. Superman" back-ups intended for issues #331 and #332 were used in *Superman Family* #195 (1979).

Marty Pasko's fall revival of *Swamp Thing* was rescheduled for July 1979 but didn't ultimately come to fruition until early 1982. The 1978 version would have begun with issue #25, edited by Paul Levitz with Joe Orlando as top candidate for the book's artist. Ironically, Pasko had quit one of his regular writing assignments on *DC Comics Presents* (where Len Wein succeeded him) to pen the relaunch.

Unknown Soldier #222-224 were meant to feature a back-up trilogy called "Andy Stewart, Combat Nurse" that was postponed until issues #226-228 in 1979.

After being touted in house ads during the summer, details regarding *The Vixen* #1 appeared in a Daily Planet text page in *Batman* #305 and *The Flash* #267. Ultimately, "Who Is The Vixen?" was printed only in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2. Determined to get his character into print, Gerry Conway ultimately introduced her in a Superman story in *Action Comics* #521 (1981). In 1985, Conway recycled elements of the Vixen's origin for use in *Justice League of America* #234 and #239.

The Vixen was intended to have a back-up series beginning with issue #2. It was initially to have starred a Bob Haney creation known as Matt Treadway, who—along with "a scientist friend... discover that an evil presence is behind a worldwide mob-cult movement, and Treadway is the only one left to fight it." Instead, the decision was made to go with another woman: Bob Rozakis' Harlequin (previously seen in *Batman Family* and *Teen Titans*). Rozakis' script for the first Harlequin episode reunited the heroine with her criminal father Two-Face. Compelled by his two-headed



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coin to act heroically, he warned his daughter of a criminal enterprise linked to her and Dick (Robin) Grayson's Hudson University.

The action was to continue in *Batman Family* #22, where Robin fought an agent of MAZE called the Card Queen. As the story closed, a MAZE agent cryptically referred to the villainess' father being "a big man in this operation." At that point, a shadowy figure agreed to take a contract to kill the Teen Wonder and was revealed in the final panel to be the Calculator, a hugely popular Rozakis-created villain previously seen in *Detective* #463-468 (1976). "Can the Computer of Crime succeed?" a teaser asked. "Or will Robin be able to defeat him...with the aid of Batgirl and Man-Bat? Don't dare miss next issue's 'Calculated Killings!'"

Thanks to *Batman Family*'s cancellation, issue #22's Robin tale was published in *Detective Comics* #482...with a twist. In the interim, Rozakis learned that he was being replaced by Jack C. Harris on both the Batgirl and Robin strips effective with issue #484. Rather than compromise his plans for the Calculator, the writer revised the last page and replaced the Calculator with a generic MAZE leader. And for issue #483's conclusion, Rozakis wrapped things up in a simple ten-page Robin story minus any guest-stars—except for the Card Queen, who was unmasked as the heroic Duela Dent halfway through.

Cancelled in 1975, *Weird Mystery Tales* was placed on DC's schedule as a two-issue summer miniseries "to reserve press space for other new projects" but neither was published. Issue #25's "Talisman of the Serpent" (including the cover) appeared in *Secrets of Haunted House* #20 (1980). The eventual home of "The Long Arm of The Law" was *House of Mystery* #286 (1980). The cover and lead story of issue #26 ("The Perfect Host") were used in *House of Mystery* #265 (1979). The covers for each issue were included in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2.

The Cinnamon back-up story intended for *Weird Western Tales* #50 has never appeared.

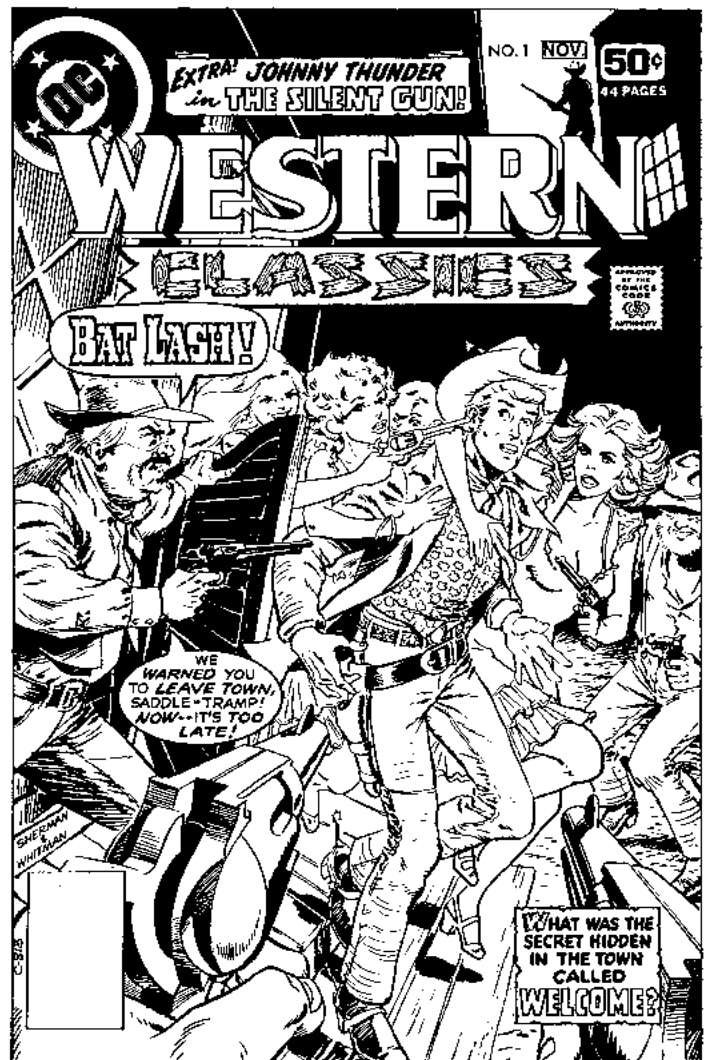
Western Classics #1 and #2 would have split Bat Lash's debut from *Showcase* #76. The balance of the two issues would have been Johnny Thunder in "The Silent Gun" (*All Star Western* #105) and "The Origin of Johnny Thunder" (*ASW* #108). The covers for both issues appeared in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2.

Following issue #85, *The Witching Hour* was merged with *House of Secrets* and *Doorway To Nightmare* in *The Unexpected*, beginning with issue #189. *Witching Hour* #86's cover and lead story ("Dracula's Daughter") were used in *Unexpected* #199 while its other contents appeared in *Unexpected* #197 ("A Pound of Flesh...and Blood"), #213 ("Bring Me Back to Life") and *Secrets of Haunted House* #34 ("Haunt of Hate").

After the Amazons installment in *Wonder Woman* #250 ("Siege of Thunder"), Steve Ditko was to succeed Maurice Whitman and Vince Colletta as artist on the series beginning with issue #251. Neither episode ever appeared although plot threads from the series were partially dealt with in *Wonder Woman* #252 and #253 late in 1978.

END INTERLUDE

Western Classics #1
cover art by
James Sherman and
Maurice Whitman.





When the shelved *Ms. Marvel* #24 was finally published in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #11, it included the Dave Cockrum/Terry Austin cover with full trade dress as it would have appeared in 1979.

Despite their cancellations in February 1979, three Marvel titles briefly lived on in other books. Following *Black Panther* #15, the stories intended for its next three issues ran in *Marvel Premiere* #51-53 between September 1979 and January 1980. Elsewhere, the material produced for *Howard the Duck* #32-34 comprised the entirety of August's black and white *Howard the Duck Magazine* #1.

Following *Captain Marvel* #62, Doug Moench and Pat Broderick's run on the character came to a proper conclusion in *Marvel Spotlight* #1-3 (April-Aug. 1979).

Cap's female counterpart was less fortunate. After *Ms. Marvel* ended in January 1979, two completed issues remained on the shelf. Once the heroine's life was upended in 1980's *Avengers* #200 and 1981's *Avengers Annual* #10, it seemed unlikely they'd ever see the light of day. In 1992, however, *Marvel-Super-Heroes* #10 and #11 finally published the stories meant for *Ms. Marvel* #24-25. The latter was revised to reflect subsequent events in Carol Danvers' life.

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With the cancellation of the licensed *John Carter, Warlord of Mars* title in July 1979, a completed 29th issue by Chris Claremont, Carmine Infantino, and Alan Kupperberg still existed. Determined that those pages not to go to waste, editor-in-chief Jim Shooter directed editor Louise Simonson to somehow transform it into a Star Wars story! With the help of Walter Simonson, Tom Palmer, and a few others, the unlikely objective was achieved

and ran in 1981's *Star Wars* #52 and #53.

The cancellation of another licensed Marvel titles saw the contents of its next issue relocated into a black and white magazine. "Master of Shadows" (by Christy Marx, John Buscema, and Tony DeZuniga) was meant for April 1979's *Red Sonja* #16 but ran in August's *Savage Sword of Conan* #45.



Prior to his involvement with the *Star Wars*/John Carter story, Walter Simonson had joined writer Steven Grant in reworking an unused Sal Buscema-penciled *Tarzan* tale for use in 1980's *Battlestar Galactica* #17 and #18 with hero Apollo standing in for the Lord of the Apes on a "jungle planet."

Editorial comment printed in *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980)^{exci}:

“The DC Implosion was far from a myth—it was the grimmest period the company has faced in recent memory. And no verbal shellgame can hide the facts that 23 titles—40% of DC’s output—were axed in a single day, people were thrown out of work, and the company’s plans for an improved product were scuttled. In the eyes of some people, DC may never regain the credibility it lost in June 1978.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{excii}:

“The 32-page comic will be extinct in five years, and there will be fewer titles around; in all probability, only the titles such as *Superman*, *Batman*, *Wonder Woman*, *Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four*, *The Hulk*, and maybe *Conan*. There will be more dollar books and trade-sized paperback books similar to [European albums like] *Tintin*.”

Editorial comment printed in *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980)^{exci}:

“Four [other salaried DC employees] resigned or were fired in the months following—Editorial Assistant Cary Burkett (although he had announced his resignation prior to the Implosion, the date of his departure was moved up), Public Relations Director Mike Gold, assistant to the president Mike Catron, and Production Artist Morris Waldinger.”

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news story printed in *The Comic Reader* #160 (September 1978)^{exciiv}:

“Mike Gold is leaving DC as of August 18 for reasons divorced from the recent cutback. He says his intention was to stay in New York only one or two years since he does not ‘want to become a New Yorker.’ His plans include unspecified comics projects as well as the production of a series of TV public service announcements for the National Runaway Switchboard and other production work in the social service field. His position will be filled by Jack C. Harris, who is retaining his editorial position and also editing *DC Coming Attractions*, the dealer promotion sheet. Paul Kupperberg and Mike Catron continue as assistants.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an essay printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{exciiv}:

“I’m proud to say that during my two-year tenure I quadrupled DC’s sales in that arena, and I had a great time doing so.”

Jack C. Harris, then DC Comics editor, writer and Mike Gold’s successor as public relations representative in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #55 (April 1980)^{excvi}:

“I wouldn’t say [being editor and public relations rep. are the equivalent of two full-time jobs]. I sort of tie the two of them in. Michael did some very grandiose things and I’m not quite able to do as grandiose things as he did because he could devote more time to it. But I still get the *Coming Attractions* out every month. I get the covers and everything out to the fan magazines. I do promotional work with some conventions. It’s all incorporated into the realm. Also, Michael had an assistant so that there were two people working on the job....

I incorporated it all in there. Also, I’m in here at seven o’clock every morning, and I work until 4:30. There’s some freelance stuff done there in the middle, sometimes in the morning, but I’m here for quite some time. I do a full load of work, and a little more. I enjoy it. It’s fun.”

[One of Harris’ immediate projects was a tabloid-sized magazine devoted to the now-imminent *Superman: The Movie*.]



All-New Collectors' Edition #C-62's Superman movie magazine was the final issue of the six-year-old tabloid title.

Jack C. Harris, then DC Comics editor, writer and Mike Gold's successor as public relations representative in a letter printed in *The Comics Journal* #59 (October 1980)^{cxvii}:

"The project had been begun some months earlier and the outside people who had been hired's contract had expired; and the book was not yet complete. It was up to me to finish the book within the next six weeks. After using two of those weeks going over all the material that had been compiled I noticed that the entire thrust of the publication was a 'movie' magazine. Since this was supposed to be a 'DC Comics' publication, I felt that comics should be an important part of it. I spent the third week preparing a new proposal to present to Jenette Kahn and Sol Harrison wherein we would show that every aspect of the film was originally somewhere in the comic books.

They liked the idea. The only problem now was that we only had three weeks in which to complete the entire book. Managing editor Joe Orlando and I spent sometimes 14 hours a day redesigning the book from scratch; 20 hours a day if you count the work we did in our respective homes. After the first night, we realized that we needed someone to write all the copy around the designs we were laying out. We needed someone who could give us exactly what we wanted; someone who was a top professional who could produce excellent and informative information under the tightest possible deadline. It was a demanding assignment, but we did find someone who could do it. Someone who, it turned out, far exceeded our expectations. That writer was Michael Fleisher" [then best known as writer on *Jonah Hex* but someone who had literally written a Superman Encyclopedia that was being released by Warner Publishing as *The Great Superman Book*].

[Despite a long, optimistic run of advance notices and publicity, there was still considerable delight and relief in the DC offices once *Superman The Movie* finally premiered on December 15, 1978. Audiences and critics alike raved about the film, its mix of tragedy, comedy, action and romance propelling it to become the second highest-grossing movie of the year with \$300 million in worldwide earnings. It had special meaning for the men who created the Man of Steel and Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were honored guests at the film's Washington, D.C. premiere.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{cxviii}:

"Jerry had tears in his eyes and said, 'You know, this is just how I imagined it.'"

[A second Superman Movie Contest was promoted in issues on sale in October and November 1978, this time requiring readers to track down 25 trivia questions in various titles, answer them correctly, and mail them to DC. Each postcard that scored 100% was thrown into a box. Fortuitously in town on January 29, 1979, Christopher Reeve agreed to draw the win-



DOES SUPERMAN HAVE THE POWER TO SAVE HIS CREATORS?

The plight of Superman's destitute creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster was publicized in 1975 by cartoonists such as Neal Adams—who drew this image—and Jerry Robinson. Through the efforts of them and others, Siegel and Shuster received a pension from DC for the rest of their lives.

ners. He was no longer the unknown he had been when he visited the offices two years earlier and that presented a problem.]

Bob Rozakis, then DC Comics assistant editor in a comment posted online in 2013^{cxci}:

"He picked the... winners and then graciously settled in to sign autographs for all the DC staffers who asked. At the time, DC was nowhere near the size it is now. In fact, the company shared a single floor at Warner Communications headquarters at 75 Rockefeller Plaza with another division.

Word spread quickly that Christopher Reeve was there and signing books. Suddenly, people who worked in the other division were showing up in Sol's doorway to get autographs. Then people from the floor above started to arrive.

After about two hours, Chris announced that he really had to go. Even Superman could get writer's cramp. Fellow staffer Jack C. Harris and I were entrusted with the duty of escorting him out.

We walked Chris up the hall, but when I opened the door to

the lobby, I was startled to find it packed with people. Word had spread throughout the building and fans from everywhere were showing up, hoping for a signature or three. Far more quickly than I had opened the door, I shut it.

‘Now what do we do?’ Jack asked.

‘More than one way to get out of here,’ I replied and led them to the freight elevator. Moments later, it arrived. We stepped in and I told the operator to take us to the building lobby.

‘Can’t do that,’ he replied. ‘You have to take the regular elevator for that.’

‘We can’t take the regular elevator. We’re sneaking *him* out of the building.’

The operator looked at Chris for the first time. His eyes widened in recognition. ‘Say, aren’t you—?’

Chris smiled and nodded.

‘Wow...’ whispered the operator.

‘Down, down and away!’ I said.

Moments later, Chris walked out of the building and Jack and I went back upstairs in the regular elevator. The lobby was still mobbed. One woman grabbed my arm and said, ‘Say, I

see you on the subway platform every morning. Can you get me in to see Mr. Reeve?’

‘I’m sorry, he’s left the building.’

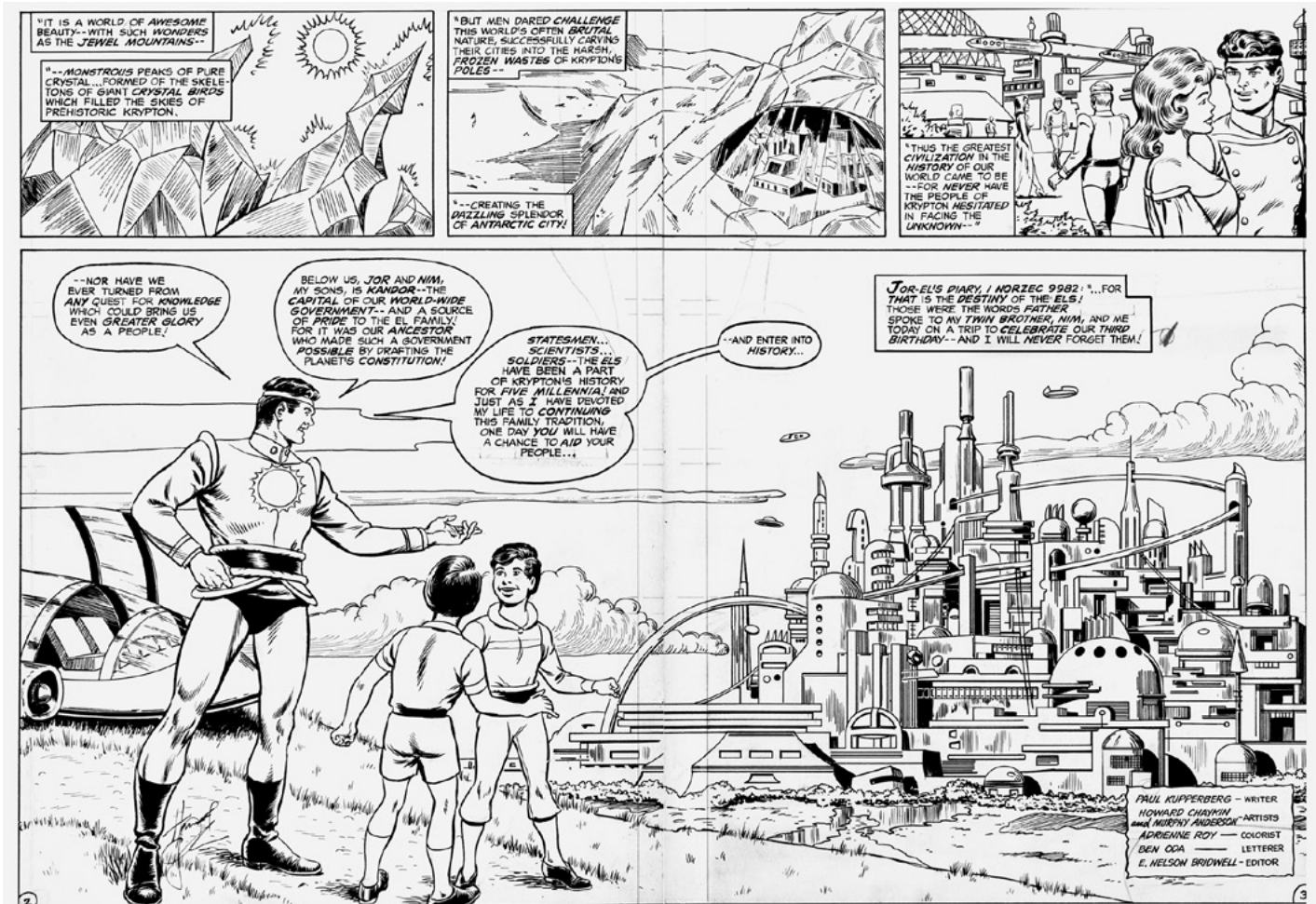
‘No, he hasn’t. I’ve been right here for an hour.’

‘Well, ma’am, he *is* Superman.’”

[In early 1979, attention turned to the World of Krypton trilogy that been meant as a tie-in during 1978. The umbrella title *Showcase* no longer existed so the then-radical decision was made to publish the three issues under their own name, advertising up front that it was a finite miniseries running from April through June.]

Paul Kupperberg, then-writer for DC Comics, in an interview published in *Back Issue #62* (February 2013)^{cc}:

“The reason *World of Krypton* was published as a miniseries was, simply, a need for Superman-related product to take advantage of the enormous amount of hype surrounding the movie. Due to some screwy legal problems with the Mario Puzo



Writer Paul Kupperberg, penciler Howard Chaykin and inker Murphy Anderson’s opening spread for *World of Krypton* #1 featured Superman’s grandfather, father and uncle. Editor E. Nelson Bridwell heavily incorporated established Kryptonian lore into the story.

screenplay, DC couldn't do any direct adaptations of the film, so they had to go with original material based on the comic book version—that's why the Elliot S. Maggin novel, *Last Son of Krypton*, which bears the *Superman: The Movie* logo and photos of Christopher Reeve on the cover, has nothing to do with the movie itself."

[The miniseries amounted to the life story of Superman's father Jor-El and editor E. Nelson Bridwell passionately worked to add every preexisting detail about the character into the script. Writer Paul Kupperberg was compelled to pull back from some of the minutiae for the sake of his narrative but highlights from two decades' worth of Krypton-based tales still peppered the three issues. Any fears that retailers or buyers might reject a miniseries were erased once DC management saw the surprisingly strong sales on the prospect. By fall, plans were underway to produce further standalone trilogies in 1980 and Marvel would eventually embrace the concept, as well.]

Paul Kupperberg, then-writer for DC Comics, in an interview published in *Back Issue* #62 (February 2013):

"I don't know that I quite considered it a milestone at the time. I was just glad the thing was finally getting published. It took a few years for me to realize and appreciate that I was associated with something new in the field and relatively new in media in general. Television had done only a few miniseries prior to then—*QB VII* in 1974, *Rich Man, Poor Man* in 1976, *Roots* in 1977—so it was all new territory. And with most of comics distribution still via newsstands, where a familiar title was important to the vendors who didn't want to waste their rack space on unknown comic book titles, it was probably a little risky. But then, the *Superman* movie hype was massive, so having Superman on the covers likely eased concerns."

[The fact that Jor-El and Lara died at the end of *World of Krypton* was not exactly a surprise but the body count in DC's titles between July 1978 and July 1979 was surprisingly high. In that time, readers bore witness to the deaths of Steve Trevor (*Wonder Woman* #248), substitute Wonder Woman Orana (*WW* #251), Batgirl's brother (*Detective Comics* #482), the Earth-Two Batman (*Adventure Comics* #462), Zatanna's mother (*Justice League of America* #165), Batwoman (*Detective Comics* #485), and Mr. Terrific (*JLA* #171) plus the seeming demise of Travis Morgan's son (*Warlord* #21), although fans knew that wasn't true. Most controversial of all was the murder of Iris Allen in *The Flash* #275, ending her 13-year marriage to the Scarlet Speedster as Cary Bates raced into Marvel-style melodrama with new editor Ross Andru.

Best known as an artist, Andru came to dominate DC's covers in 1979, his agreeably open style paired with inker Dick Giordano on many superhero titles and with the grittier Luis Dominguez on horror books and westerns. Editing, however, was not as comfortable a position for him.]

With three decades in the comic book industry, Ross Andru accumulated a résumé that included penciling such features as *Wonder Woman*, *Metal Men*, the *Flash*, *Superman*, and *Spider-Man*. Photo from *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #15 (August 1977).



Mike W. Barr, then DC Comics staff proofreader, in an interview published in *The Flash Companion* (July 2008)^{cc1}:

"To be an editor, you have to have both the creative skills and the organizational skills to do a good job of it. Ross had the creative skills, but he was *really* very disorganized, so he needed to have someone help him do that. So I would not describe myself as his official assistant, because I was not. I would describe myself as his 'unofficial' assistant because I helped him out a lot with organizational matters and things like that.

At one point, for instance, when I came into the office one morning, Ross—who always got there earlier than I did—immediately followed me into his office and shut the door behind me. He said, 'Mike, you have to help me. I've made a terrible mistake. I've done something very bad.' And I said, 'Well, Ross, you haven't told me what it is yet, but I'm sure it can't be something we can't find a solution to, so tell me what it is.' And he said, 'I bought two covers for *The Flash* this month.' And I said, 'Ross, that's obviously not something that you ought to do, but surely there's some way around it. Maybe the story can be a two-parter so you can use the other cover for the next issue or you can use it as a pin-up or some kind of special feature or something along those lines.' And he nodded his head very quickly and he said, 'Yes, but you don't understand. I did the same thing last month.'"

[Early in June 1979, Andru handed off the superhero titles he edited—*Adventure Comics*; *Flash*; *Justice League of America*; *Wonder Woman*—to Len Wein in favor of the new position of Special Projects Editor. The job offered the prospect of doing more artwork.]

Ross Andru, then DC Comics editor in a news article in *The Comics Journal* #48 (Summer 1979)^{cc2}:

"I had a choice to make in terms of whether I wanted to be editing or whether I wanted to be drawing...should I think of myself as an editor/writer or as an editor/artist?"

Editorial comment printed in *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980)^{cciii}:

“It wasn’t until 1979 that DC was able to make any additions to its pared-down staff and even then the situation remained unstable—although that instability does not seem to have been strongly related to the Implosion.

In February, Richard Rozakis was hired to work in the Export Department and Katherine Pritchard was hired to work for the Editorial Coordinator. In March, Vince Colletta turned down a contract offer to continue as Art Director in favor of returning to full-time freelance inking. DC then decided to eliminate the position of Art Director from its staff, so no replacement for Colletta was sought. In May, proofreader Mike W. Barr resigned but was almost immediately replaced by former Comics Code reader Laurie Sutton.

In June, Len Wein was hired as editor and took over most of Ross Andru’s books; Andru was named Special Projects Editor. In August, Rozakis resigned and the following month, Pritchard was fired. Pritchard’s position was filled shortly thereafter by Karen Berger and in late November, Leslie Leantman replaced Rozakis in the Export Department. In October, the company restored the Production Department to its former size by hiring Nancy Hollahan and Lynne Gelfer as production artists.”

Bob Rozakis, then DC Comics assistant editor in a 2018 recollection^{cciv}:

“Richard Rozakis is my younger brother. He was between jobs in the winter of ’79, so I recommended him for the film library position when it opened up. He got a full-time teaching job that fall, which is why he left in August, and continued his career in education, rising through the ranks and retiring as a superintendent of schools for a local district in 2015.”

[Kahn, Levitz, and Orlando looked toward the 1979 summer schedule to consider the prospect of adding new titles. Evaluating sales of the books struck down in the DC Implosion, they even returned *Secrets of Haunted House* to the schedule with issue #15 in May. Given the strong sales on the two Swamp Thing reprint collections in 1977 and 1978, DC once again placed a revival with issue #25 for July release. When writer Martin Pasko dropped out, the project was cancelled again. The reprint collection of the older Wein-Wrightson Swamp Thing stories did resume, however, in no-frills Dollar Comics volumes in May and October.

Dollar Comics were still perceived as the wave of the future and plans were made to introduce a pair of non-superhero books in June and July, respectively. The first—editor Murray Boltinoff’s *All-Out War*—featured a trio of features created by the prolific Robert Kanigher: *The Viking Commando*, *Black Eagle*, and *Force Three*. The second—Jack C. Harris’s *Time Warp*—saw the realization of the science fiction anthology first envisioned as *Strange Adventures* in 1978. Plans for a new superhero Dollar Comic did not go as well, conjuring up bad memories of the post-Implosion feature shuffling.



Dick Dillin and Dick Giordano’s cover for the unrealized *Five-Star Super-Spectacular* #1. A paste-up of Hawkman was also created to replace Plastic Man on the cover. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

With sales softening on *World’s Finest Comics*, plans were made to return it to a standard 32-page comic book starring the Superman-Batman team under editor Julius Schwartz (with current *World’s Finest* editor Jack C. Harris moving to *Time Warp*). Meanwhile, three of *World’s Finest*’s back-up features—Black Lightning, Green Arrow, and Shazam!—would be moved to a new Dollar Comic titled... *Five-Star Super-Hero Spectacular* (with Ross Andru as editor). Fulfilling its mandated number of heroes, the book would also include Wonder Woman (transferred from *Adventure Comics*) and a revival of Plastic Man. With Wonder Woman still starring in a CBS TV series and Plas slated for a Fall 1979 animated cartoon on ABC, the duo were the obvious headliners of the book. As plans solidified, though, Hawkman was added to the roster and Wonder Woman was moved back to *Adventure Comics*. There were also reservations about the new book’s title and it was rechristened *DC Super-Hero Spectacular*.]

Jack C. Harris, then DC Comics editor in a text page in *World's Finest Comics* #260 (December 1979-January 1980)^{cvv}:

"Then, Editorial Coordinator Paul Levitz checked over the later sales reports. Something odd there. It seemed that *WFC* was picking up, a steady climb upwards while still in the Dollar Comic format. Maybe the decision to reduce its size and price was a bit premature. A quick meeting with [Jenette Kahn] and the decision was reversed... Paul rushed in and said, 'You don't have time to do whatever it is you're doing! Gather up all of Julie's *World's Finest* material and Ross' *Five-Star* stuff and re-do *WFC* as a Dollar Comic!'"

[That was easier said than done. The 64-page ad-free Dollar Comic format had just been dropped and Harris had—even by dropping the letter column—a maximum of 55 pages to play with when he re-constructed *World's Finest* #259. Cutting a page from the Superman-Batman lead and combining two pages in the Green Arrow-Hawkman story, Harris made it work. The other two stories in the issue—Black Lightning and Shazam!—ran uncut.

Now attention turned to *Adventure Comics*. When advertisements returned to Dollar Comics for the first time in a year, a Green Lantern story was dropped from June 1979's *Adventure* #465 to accommodate them. Issue #466 concluded the fan-favorite Deadman and Justice Society strips and plans were made to refocus the title on characters with more perceived mainstream appeal. *Adventure* #467 was scheduled to star Wonder Woman, Green Lantern (in the story meant for issue #465), the Flash, Aquaman, and the Atom. Once a Jim Aparo cover had been commissioned for the issue, though, Paul Levitz looked at *Adventure*'s sales. They weren't good. Suddenly, it was being converted to the 40¢ 32-page format and issue #466 abruptly became its last Dollar issue.

The twice-spurned Green Lantern story finally ran in *GL* #128 (May 1980), the Atom episode in *Detective Comics* #489 (April 1980), the Flash story in *Flash* #293 (January 1981), and the Wonder Woman tale—along with the conclusion intended for *Adventure* #468—in *WW* #265-266 (March-April 1980). Elsewhere, the Aquaman story ran in *World's Finest* #262 (April-May 1980), with the series continuing in that title for a few more issues.

The Joe Staton-pencilled Plastic Man relaunch first scheduled for *Five Star Super-Hero Spectacular* #1 now co-headlined the new *Adventure Comics* #467 in October 1979 alongside a contrasting science fiction series...Adam Strange. That was the original plan, at least. The Adam story had been written and drawn in 1978 as a back-up for *Star Hunters* #8 but that series' cancellation left it in limbo. Instead, editor Len Wein opted for an all-new version of Starman (by Paul Levitz and Steve Ditko) in *Adventure* #467. The cast-off Adam tale finally ended up in *World's Finest* #263.

In a further reassessment, *The Unexpected*'s tenure as a Dollar Comic came to an end when it returned to a standard 40¢ book effective with issue #196 in December. That same

month, *Men of War* became the first survivor of the DC Implosion to be cancelled. It ended with issue #26, two episodes before Len Wein was to begin scripting the Gravedigger series with a new team called Force 13.

Meanwhile, DC's exploration of other venues for comic books led them to the digests that were put on hold in 1978. Premiering in June, the 100-page volumes were consciously aimed at capturing readers who never visited spinner racks. Packaged for display on checkout lanes, *Jonah Hex and Other Western Tales* aimed to attract the same audience that bought western paperbacks while *The Best of DC* spotlighted a succession of recognizable properties like Superman, Batman, the Super Friends, and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. The latter was a hit but the former faltered out of the gate, badly enough that DC cancelled its fourth issue despite advertising it for sale in December 1979. It was replaced by the superhero-centric *DC Special Blue Ribbon Digest*, starting with a Legion of Super-Heroes spotlight.]



Jim Aparo's cover art for *Adventure Comics* #467 was meant for the unpublished Dollar Comic version of the issue.

News story printed in *The Comics Journal* #50 (October 1979)^{ccvi}:

“Comics writer Denny O’Neil announced September 5 that he would be leaving his freelance assignments for DC Comics to become an editor for the Marvel Comics Group. He said he expected to begin work at Marvel September 17... O’Neil described the parting from DC as ‘very, very amicable’ and said the two major reasons behind his decision to leave were his desire to apply his editorial abilities to comics and his dissatisfaction with the way DC has been handing the assignment of special projects to freelancers.”

[After early work for Marvel and Charlton, O’Neil had come to DC in 1968. From that point forward, he was a pivotal scripter for the publisher, writing watershed moments in the history of both Batman and Green Lantern among a huge list of credits. He also served as an editor for periods in the 1970s.]



As an editor at Marvel in the early 1980s, Denny O’Neil was associated with fan favorite titles such as Frank Miller’s *Daredevil* and Doug Moench and Bill Sienkiewicz’s *Moon Knight*. Photo of O’Neil—with colorist Carl Gafford in the background—from *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #4 (January-February 1975).

Denny O’Neil, then writer of DC Comics’ *Detective Comics* and *Green Lantern*, in an interview in *Comics Feature* #4 (July-August 1980)^{ccvii}:

“I had done the same thing for 11 or 12 years and it looked like I was slated to do the same thing, I didn’t think I was going stale yet, but it was a distinct possibility that I would. I’ve seen people go stale and I wanted to avoid that. I wanted to do something other than write all the time. I was beginning to feel a little like a Xerox machine: I would pull my ear on Monday afternoon and by Thursday afternoon at 2:00, I would have 17 pages and take them in and then begin the whole process again, I wanted to find some way to use my knowledge of comic books in a way other than writing them.

I went to Jim Shooter and mentioned these things... Actually, I went to see him about getting permission to use Marvel characters in [a] book I’m writing. He said ‘okay,’ and offered me four deals. I took the most conventional one. What surprised me about my decision was that I agreed to work 9 to 5, which I hadn’t done for years, and am not comfortable doing even now...

I talked to Joe Orlando and Jenette Kahn and said, ‘This is

the deal I’ve been offered and this is what I find attractive. If you have anything to say about that, I’m certainly willing to listen.’ What they offered me was okay in terms of money, but it just meant more writing, and more involvement with projects that I did not exactly find exciting. They were not comic book projects; they were publishing contracts. I served as an editorial consultant on one of them [for DC]. It was a job, and I did it, but I was not turned on by it.”

News story printed in *The Comics Journal* #50 (October 1979)^{ccviii}:

“Editorial Coordinator Paul Levitz said that he was sorry to see O’Neil go and said that DC regarded him as ‘one of the finest writers the business ever saw.’ But DC could not hire O’Neil as an editor, Levitz said, ‘because the comparable situation did not exist. We’re not in the process of expanding our editorial staff. Marvel is. We wish him every bit of luck in the world. He should be very good for their staff.’”

[O’Neil had scarcely left the building when a Marvel writer came knocking at DC. A succession of disagreements with Jim Shooter had driven Marv Wolfman to quit the company after eight years and offer his services to DC when his contract was up at the end of 1979. With credits that most recently included *Fantastic Four* and his and Gene Colan’s signature *Tomb of Dracula*, Wolfman was quickly handed a fistful of assignments for 1980, including *Superman*, the Jimmy Olsen and Lois Lane features in *Superman Family* and tales for *The Brave and the Bold* and *DC Comics Presents*. Ironically, Wolfman also received O’Neil’s old book *Green Lantern* even as O’Neil succeeded Wolfman on *Amazing Spider-Man*.



Marv Wolfman broke into the industry at DC with scripts for features like *Blackhawk* and the *Teen Titans*—the latter with pal Len Wein—but didn’t truly make a name for himself until he moved to Marvel to write titles such as *Tomb of Dracula*, *Nova* and *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Photo by Michael Catron from *The Comics Journal* #79 (January 1983).

News story printed in *The Comics Journal* #50 (October 1979)^{ccix}:

“DC Comics has begun to license its properties, both characters and published material, to publishers active in the alternative comics field. The first to take advantage of this new policy

is Roger Slifer, whose Excalibur Enterprises will be releasing two books this fall: *Manhunter, the Complete Saga* and *Shade, the Changing Man, the Complete Adventures...* Mike Friedrich has a verbal agreement with DC to publish an all-new Batman graphic novel, which will probably appear as *Star*Reach* #20. The story will be written by Steve Englehart, illustrated by Marshall Rogers, and edited by Friedrich. DC has script approval, but will otherwise not be involved in the project, which Friedrich has tentatively scheduled for next summer. Englehart is said to claim that this story will feature ‘the definitive Batman’ while Friedrich himself referred to it as ‘the Batman of the ‘80s.’”

Steve Englehart, then freelance writer in an interview published in *The Comics Journal* #63 (May 1981)^{ccx}:

“[DC] put a few restrictions on it, the basic one being that so long as we kept the number of copies printed very small, we could do anything we wanted. If we wanted to do a more visible project, they wanted editorial control. The other part of it was that Mike was looking to recoup a lot of losses that he’s had and so he was trying to spend absolutely the minimum amount possible. [Marshall and I] were both kind of looking toward fashioning our careers at that point, and we wanted to be in Brentano’s [book store] next to Frazetta. He and DC both wanted us in comic book stores. The project didn’t seem worthwhile by the time it was actually worked out.”

[Of the projects cited, only Slifer’s black-and-white *Manhunter* volume—reprinting Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson’s acclaimed 1973-1974 series—came to fruition but the implications were concerning. DC’s critically-lauded series often didn’t translate into commercial success but they helped elevate the publisher’s overall standing among fans and pros alike, pushing boundaries and attracting talent away from rivals like Marvel. In 1979, though, there was a sense that DC was focusing more on the shrinking general readership of the newsstand market. Their best-known heroes were shrugging off a decade’s worth of changes and returning to situations that the general public was familiar with:

TV anchorman Clark Kent returned to the Daily Planet; Barbara (Batgirl) Gordon left Congress to return to Gotham City under her father’s roof—and would soon lose her knowledge of Batman and Robin’s real names; Hal (Green Lantern) Jordan was once again a pilot for Ferris Aircraft, going solo in his book again after years with Green Arrow; Barry (The Flash) Allen was once again a bachelor, albeit under tragic circumstances; Batman and Robin were reunited, if only for the summer; Superboy once again starred in a comic set in his boyhood Smallville (*New Adventures of Superboy*) as the Legion of Super-Heroes split off into a

title of their own without him.

Ironically, it was the Boy of Steel who delivered hard evidence that the seeming niche fan market might be something more. *Superboy Spectacular* #1 was a largely-reprint compilation created for sale through Scholastic’s elementary school book program but someone decided it would be a shame to keep it out of the hands of fans. Consequently, the issue was also offered for sale... but only through comic book retailers, not the newsstands. That exclusivity made the edition tremendously attractive to collectors, who elevated it to DC’s best-selling title in the Direct Market for December 1979.]

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #174 (November 1979)^{ccxi}:

“The experiment is far-reaching in its implications: if DC is able to print only enough copies to cover orders, the savings compared to normal distribution, which causes nearly 55% of every title to be wasted, could be enough to alter the structure of comic book publication in the future.”

[One drawback of the Direct Sales alternative was unscrupulous dealers who were profiting off returns on the supposedly unreturnable comic books. Marvel responded in 1979 by distinguishing its comics shop editions with a diamond symbol around the issue number and price, something it previously done with issues packaged by Western Publishing in 1977 and 1978.]



A non-returnable Direct Sales comic book was distinguished by a diamond around the issue number and price as opposed to a rectangular box found on newsstand copies.

**News story printed in
The Comics Journal #47
(July 1979)^{ccxii}:**

“According to Jonni Levas of Seagate Distributors, the procedure was initiated to prevent the kind of fraud whereby a dealer received books on a non-returnable basis and returns stripped covers to another wholesaler for reimbursement. Suspicion that this was occurring arose when it was discovered that some dealers returned unnaturally large quantities of comics compared to what they were buying, or returned comics they had not purchased at all under the return plan.

Harold Schuster of New Media spoke of what he called ‘one-way shops,’ who would purchase comics on a non-returnable basis at the standard 40% discount and then return them to a different distributor with whom they dealt on a return basis, demanding reimbursement for ‘unsold’ issues. Since the discount for returnable issues is only 30%, they were making a 10% profit without selling a single comic book.

After attempts to counter the problem by adding a slash through the UPC symbol (a method abandoned because it was relatively ineffectual and esthetically displeasing), the decision to use the ‘diamond’ symbol was made rapidly—so rapidly, in fact, that it was not until they had received several weeks’ worth of ‘diamond’ comics that the dealers were officially notified by Marvel.”

[By mid-1980, both Marvel and DC were identifying their Direct Sales copies by dropping the UPC code entirely, replacing it with Spider-Man’s face on the former and a slogan with the DC Bullet on the latter.]

**News story printed in *The Comics Journal* #53
(Winter 1980)^{ccxiii}:**

“DC has once again announced a major combination price rise and increase of story pages for all its regular-size comics. The move, effective with the June releases (cover-dated September), will raise prices from the current 40¢ to 50¢ and boost the number of story pages from 17 to 25 while maintaining the 32-page format. The extra eight pages of story content will be culled from the advertising pages of the books; there will be considerably fewer pages of paid ads and virtually no house ads (these will be relegated to the Dollar Comics).”

Echoing the DC Explosion rollout two years earlier, Spring 1980 house ads once again touted a burst of new back-up features that would debut when DC added eight story pages to its standard titles in June. Joe Staton drew the headshots promoting the new features.

**Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator
in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #53
(Winter 1980)^{ccxiv}:**

“We’d discussed for about six months to a year what we would do next time we had to raise the price. You always have to be concerned with that in inflationary times. We didn’t like the 45¢ price tag. I think, understandably, because it’s four pieces of change, it’s a really uncomfortable amount.”

**Bob Rozakis, then DC Comics assistant editor in a
2018 recollection^{ccxv}:**

“I recall more than one of us questioning Paul about his ‘four pieces of change’ comment. A quarter, a dime and two nickels rather than a quarter and two dimes? Someone said that he was talking about three pennies and a new 42¢ coin.”

**Len Wein, then DC Comics editor and writer in
a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #53
(Winter 1980)^{ccxvi}:**

“I thought [DC Comics] would do it at the end of the year but it seemed a more logical step to do it with the summer books, which generally sell better and get a broader audience.”

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980)^{ccxvii}:

“This way we will be able to satisfy two needs: our need to meet the printer’s increases, union increases, paper increases, and our desire not to have readers pay more and more for less and less from year to year.”

Jack C. Harris, then DC Comics editor in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980)^{ccxiii}:

“Let’s put it this way: We have a confidence that [an Implosion] won’t happen again. You can’t guarantee anything in publishing.”

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980)^{ccxix}:

“[DC Comics’ story page increase] doesn’t really impress me. I don’t think it impresses the people upstairs [at Marvel] either. Our reaction to it is no reaction. One of my writers came in yesterday and said he heard about this DC thing and there’d be lots and lots of work at DC because they had lots more pages to fill. He said the last time that happened, he and other people rushed over to DC and got work and found themselves out of work a couple months later. And he was not inclined to do it again. I think the reason they’re doing this is not because it’s a bold new innovation but because they just can’t get enough advertising to fill the pages.

Maybe we’ll all be surprised and it’ll make a big difference but historically, it hasn’t. Back in the ’60s when DC was consistently 24 or 26 pages and Marvel was never more than 20, it didn’t make any difference. It doesn’t make any difference now. It’s what the story is, I think, that makes the difference. If the story’s bad, six more pages of it don’t matter to a kid—or to anyone else.

Their situation is so much different than ours that there is not any real comparison. It’s getting close to the point where we’re closing in on outselling them two to one. When you do that, you can charge more for your ads, more people are interested in your advertising. We can consider our options; when we talk about the possibility of changing our format, it’s because we have an excess of ads. I think [DC] is in a position of bopping around looking for something that works.”

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980)^{ccxx}:

“Marvel was being rumored for a period to be looking at some new formats and that sort of reminded us to take another look, and looking again at our economics, we felt we’d be better off going with the summer sales.”

News story printed in *The Comics Journal* #55 (April 1980)^{ccxxi}:

“Marvel Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter announced in the beginning of March that the price of all Marvel’s 32-page four-color titles will be boosted from 40¢ to 50¢ this summer. Concurrently, the story page count of the comics will be upped to 22, five pages more than the 17 pages that have been the norm at both DC and Marvel for several years. Although the decision to switch to this price and this page count was made two months after DC’s decision to do the same (albeit with a page count of 25 rather than 22), both companies will release their first 50¢ issues in the same month: June.”

James Galton, then Cadence Industries president in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #55 (April 1980)^{ccxxii}:

“I changed my mind. I do that sometimes.”

Arriving at Marvel in 1974, CEO James Galton presided over a tumultuous period in the publisher’s history. On his watch, Marvel shed its association with the Martin Goodman-era men’s magazines and established Marvel Productions and Marvel Books to oversee superhero projects that had previously been licensed to others. Photo from *David Anthony Kraft’s Comics Interview* #1 (February 1983).



Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in a news story printed in *Comics Feature* #2 (May 1980)^{ccxxiii}:

“We didn’t have any dramatic increase in sales the last few times DC increased its price [before Marvel did]. It’s not reasonable to hold the line. We have to go to 50¢ eventually.”

[The rest of the industry followed suit with Archie, Charlton, and Harvey also increasing their cover prices to 50¢ in June.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #55 (April 1980)^{ccxxiv}:

“We’re very pleased that they’ve seen the wisdom of our move. [It’s] a good one for the kids and for ourselves.”

[As they’d done in 1978, Levitz, Kahn, and Orlando ran the numbers on the current DC line and cut the weak links in advance

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST 1980

Action Comics (starring Superman, with the Atom and Air Wave as alternating back-up features)

Adventure Comics (starring Aquaman, Plastic Man, and Starman)

Batman (now including Batman & Robin team-ups as new back-up feature)

The Best of DC (reprint digest)

The Brave and the Bold (Batman team-ups with assorted DC heroes, plus Nemesis as new back-up feature)

DC Comics Presents (Superman team-ups with assorted DC heroes, plus “Whatever Happened To—?” as new back-up feature)

DC Special Blue Ribbon Digest (reprint digest)

Detective Comics (Dollar Comic starring Batman, Robin, Batgirl, Black Lightning, and “Tales of Gotham City;” reverts to 32-pages in August)

The Flash (now including Firestorm as a back-up feature)

Ghosts (supernatural short stories; Dr. Thirteen feature begins in September)

G.I. Combat (Dollar Comic starring the Haunted Tank and O.S.S., plus various war short stories)

Green Lantern (now including Adam Strange as new back-up feature)

House of Mystery (supernatural short stories; “I...Vampire” feature begins in December)

Jonah Hex (now including Scalphunter as new back-up feature)

Justice League of America

Legion of Super-Heroes

Mystery In Space (science fiction short stories)

The New Adventures of Superboy (now including “Superboy’s Secret Diary,” Krypto, and Superbaby as alternating back-up features)

The New Teen Titans

Secrets of the Haunted House (supernatural short stories; Mister E feature begins in September)

Sgt. Rock (with war short stories as back-ups)

Super Friends (now including Jack O’Lantern, the Seraph, and the Wonder Twins as alternating back-up features)

Superman (now including “The Fabulous World of Krypton,” “Bruce (Superman) Wayne,” and “Superman 2020” as alternating back-up features)

Superman Family (Dollar Comic starring Supergirl, Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, “Mr. and Mrs. Superman,” and “The Private Life of Clark Kent”)

Unexpected (supernatural short stories; Johnny Peril feature begins in September)

Unknown Soldier (now including “Dateline: Frontline” as back-up feature)

Warlord (now including OMAC as back-up feature)

Weird War Tales (supernatural war stories; recurring Creature Commandos feature begins in August)

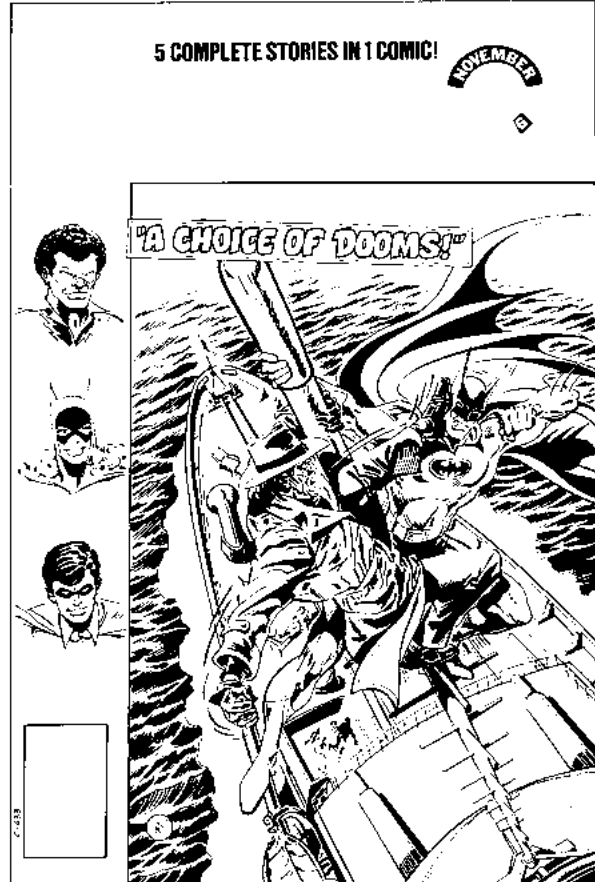
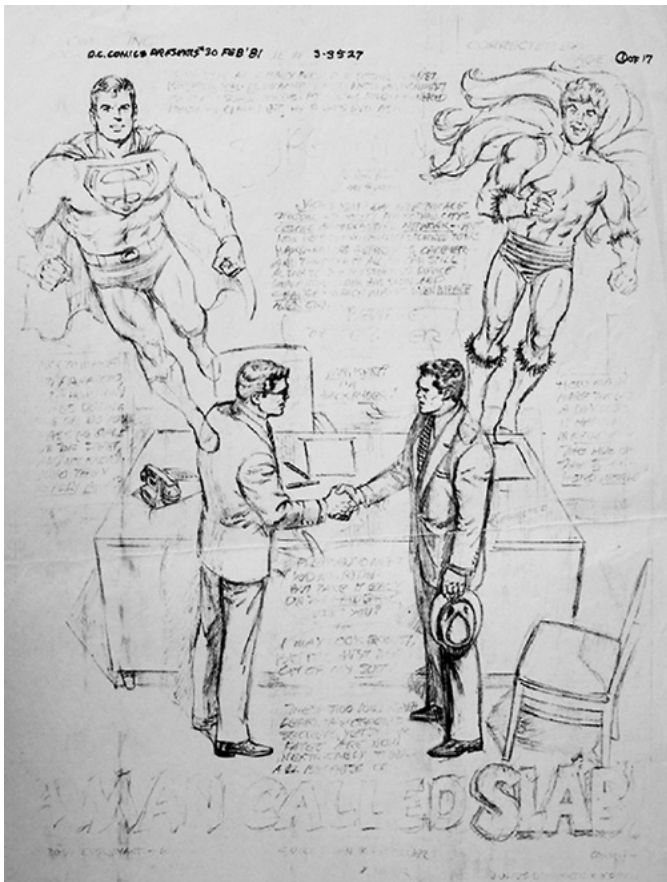
Wonder Woman (now including “The Huntress” as new back-up feature)

World’s Finest Comics (Dollar Comic starring Superman & Batman, Green Arrow, Hawkman, Red Tornado, and Shazam!)

of the expansion. *Time Warp* ended with issue #5 in March and *All-Out War* with issue #6 in April while *Detective Comics* and *G.I. Combat*—each thriving as Dollar Comics—were promoted to monthly. Both titles had complete follow-up issues in the can but the *Time Warp* inventory would be funneled into a new 50¢ revival—*Mystery In Space* #111—beginning in June. Although Robert Kanigher had scripted all the series in *All-Out War* through issue #8, only issue #7’s Viking Commando tale ever saw print—in 1982’s *Unknown Soldier* #266-267. The venerable *Weird Western Tales*—nearly discontinued four times during the 1970s—was finally cancelled for real with issue #70 in May and Scalphunter

moved into the back of *Jonah Hex*. Plans were afoot for writer Gerry Conway to launch a new western book later in the year.

Unlike 1978, the June 1980 expansion was a model of restraint. Other than the *Mystery In Space* revival, no new titles were on the first month’s schedule. Any new features were back-ups in existing books, including—to name a few—hold-overs from the DC Explosion (Air Wave and the Atom in *Action Comics*; OMAC in *Warlord*), fan-favorites (Firestorm in *The Flash*; The Huntress in *Wonder Woman*) and newcomers (Nemesis in *The Brave and the Bold*). Waiting in the wings was a new horror/suspense book from Marv Wolfman and a “white-hat



(opposite page) Joe Kubert covers graced two DC titles that never saw print: *All-Out War #7* and *Mystery In Space #118*. Also seen here are Curt Swan's pencils for the aborted Superman/Creeper team-up meant for *DC Comics Presents #30* and Jim Aparo's original cover art—courtesy of Heritage Auctions—for *Detective Comics #495*. When the latter was abruptly downgraded from Dollar Comic status, the central Batman image was enlarged for publications and the Black Lightning and Robin headshots dropped.

western” from Gerry Conway (edited by Len Wein) that would feature Marshal Jeremiah D. Hart (unofficially titled *Dakota*).

The surprise success of 1979's *World of Krypton* prompted two new mini-series in 1980: April-June's *Untold Legend of The Batman* and October-December's *Secrets of the Legion of Super-Heroes*. Although he'd previously turned down an offer from Len Wein to draw *Wonder Woman*, John Byrne—then the red-hot penciller/co-plotter of Marvel's *X-Men*—was tantalized by the prospect of doing a finite Batman project. Since he had a three-month opening in his schedule, he offered to pencil *Untold Legend*.]

John Byrne, then penciller/co-plotter on Marvel Comics' *X-Men* in comment posted online in 2007^{ccxxv}:

“A short time later, one of the Powers That Were at DC got in touch with me, saying they would be thrilled to have me work on the project, but unfortunately they would not be able to match my Marvel page rate. No problem, said I. This was Batman! I would just about do it for free. So I agreed to do the series, and Terry Austin signed on (figuratively) to ink.

Then I waited for the plot for the first issue. And waited. And waited. The whole first month of my three month window went by, with nothing forthcoming. Finally, into the second month, the plot arrived. I was a little disappointed to see it was basically a “cut-and-paste” story, requiring me to do little beyond redrawing previous scenes, but it was *Batman!* And I really wanted to do Batman. I looked at my schedule and decided I could fit the four issues into two months, provided there were no further slips.



Although he worked almost exclusively for Marvel from 1976 to 1985, John Byrne made no secret of his love for DC's major heroes. In letters to *The Comic Reader* during the early 1980s, he expressed his admiration of *Superman The Movie* and his desire to overhaul the iconic hero. Photo by Michael Catron from *The Comics Journal #57* (Summer 1980).

I got the first issue penciled, and it was lettered and even shown to Terry, who was in the office around this time. And I waited for the second plot. And waited. And waited.

The third month of my three month window slipped into the Past. The window closed. I called the editor and said I would not be able to finish the project. He said he could get me the first half of the second plot in ‘a week or two’ if I could just be patient. I reminded him that I had said from the beginning I had three months in which I could do this. The three months were gone. I could no longer do it.

Then, the same Higher Up who had called to tell me that they could not match my Marvel rate called to offer me *double* my Marvel rate if I would finish the job. I bristled at this—where was all this extra money suddenly appearing from??—and still declined.

When the project was finally announced, DC added insult to injury by reporting to the fan press that I had ‘quit’ the project unexpectedly, that Jim Aparo was being called in to finish, and to ink ‘Byrne’s very loose pencils’ on the first issue. Terry, who, as noted, had seen the first issue, sent around a couple of letters to various ‘zines informing them that the pencils were every bit as tight—i.e., very—as what he was inking on *X-Men*.

It was a long time after that before I felt like doing anything for DC again.”

[Months later in mid-1980, Steve Englehart had his own issues with DC. Since completing his novel (*The Point Man*) and returning from Europe, he had written several one-off scripts for the publisher and Jack C. Harris offered him a tempting new assignment. Englehart and Rogers had done a standalone *Doorway To Nightmare* story in 1978 that was still sitting in inventory. Harris proposed that the fan-favorite team produce two more *Madame Xanadu* stories and DC would release all three as a mini-series. With the understanding that he would be paid more than DC's top rate of \$31-per-page, Englehart wrote the scripts along with a Superman/Creeper team-up for Julius Schwartz that would run in *DC Comics Presents*.]

Steve Englehart, then freelance writer in an interview published in *Comics Feature #5* (September 1980)^{ccxxvi}:

“I handed those three scripts in. Jack Harris told me this was the big news item this month, that Englehart and Rogers were going to do something again, and told me they were going to do a lot of direct sales numbers and make a lot of extra money off the project. Then I went down the hall to talk to Paul Levitz and negotiate my rate. I had been figuring \$32...about \$34 was what I was shooting for. Levitz offered me \$31 and said, ‘Take it or leave it.’ I said ‘Wait a minute. Jack Harris promised me more than \$32, so we’re talking at least \$33.’ He said, ‘Jack Harris has no authority to do that.’ I said, ‘I don’t care if he has the authority. He promised me this money.’ ‘Take it or leave it,’ he said. ‘\$31.’ I was so thunderstruck. I couldn’t believe they would do this. He wanted to talk to Jenette about the whole situation and it got to be 5 o’clock and no decision was reached so I went away.”

Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers retooled their unrealized *Madame Xanadu* plot into a *Scorpio Rose* mini-series for Eclipse. Rogers' original cover art for issue #1 is courtesy of Heritage Auctions.



[Two days later, Englehart returned to the DC offices and was once again offered no more than \$31. After Jenette Kahn told him that she supported her editors' decision, the writer demanded his scripts back. The move prompted a higher offer of \$32-a-page but Englehart had had enough. He took the stories with him, revising the new Madame Xanadu stories for Eclipse Comics' *Scorpio Rose* #1-2 (1983) and the Superman/Creeper tale for *Eclipse, the Magazine* #1 (1981), all of them with Marshall Rogers. The writer remained struck by the difference between the Jenette Kahn he met in 1976 and the one in 1980.]

Steve Englehart, then freelance writer in an interview published in *The Comics Journal* #63 (May 1981)^{ccxxvii}:

“Behind that sort of unfocused smile is a real hard lady, I think, and when I negotiated with her since then she’s been a lot harder about the whole thing. Once I lost the confrontation, the second time I won the confrontation, but it was definitely a confrontation. It was no longer the same.”

[Len Wein and Marv Wolfman had a much different experience to tell.]

Len Wein, then DC Comics editor, in an interview published in *Comics Feature* #6 (October 1980)^{ccxxviii}:

“I was scheduled to do the new western [Dakota], Marv was going to do a mystery-oriented character for Ross Andru—not Dracula, but in the mood, like the Phantom Stranger—and we got into a discussion. We wanted to do the [Teen] Titans. We just had an affinity for it and had talked about reviving it. It was a book we had always enjoyed

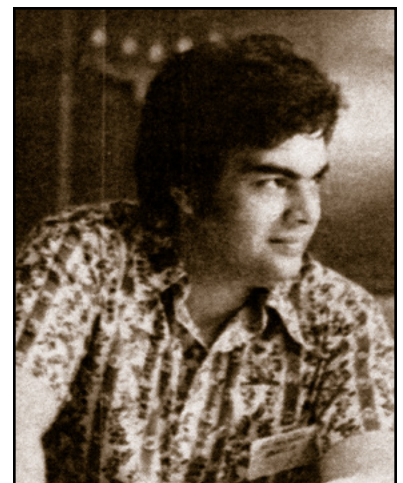
and was a book that had been done perfectly miserably in its past several incarnations, and they had spoken of reviving it before they decided to create these other two books. Marv and I went in to see Jenette. We said, ‘How come we are doing these? Why were these settled on instead of the Titans like we had discussed?’”

Marv Wolfman, the DC writer, in an interview published in *The Comics Journal* #79 (January 1983)^{ccxxix}:

“She wasn’t thrilled about the idea because she hated the last run of the *Teen Titans*. She was much more interested after I spoke to George Pérez. George entered it after Len and I had already determined that we wanted to do it. I met George up at the Marvel offices and said I was going to DC and he said, ‘Don’t forget, I’m a freelancer.’ And I asked him how he’d like to do the *Teen Titans*, and he said he’d love to. Because we had worked fairly well on the one story that we did together, and all we ever did at Marvel was an *FF Annual*. I like George personally beyond that, despite the fact that we hadn’t worked together that much. And we lived near each other, which also made it nice. We went in with the fact that George would draw it, I would write it, and Jenette said, ‘Okay, but show me what you’re going to do,’ because even with us she hated the concept of the Titans so much. We told her what we were going to do and she loved it from that point on.”

[The pitch for what became *The New Teen Titans* paired three original members of the team (Robin, Kid Flash, Wonder Girl) with three new creations (Cyborg, Raven, Starfire) and a tangential character from earlier Titans stories named Beast Boy. Wolfman added the latter at Wein’s insistence but refused to use a name he considered silly. Instead, the character was rechristened Changeling. There would be big-screen action sequences, more adult themes, and plenty of soap opera but it was the humanity

Before embracing Marvel Comics in his boyhood, George Pérez had been a fan of DC Comics and Superman, citing Curt Swan as his earliest artistic influence. Photo from *The Buyer’s Guide for Comic Fandom* #245 (July 28, 1978).



of this accidental family that sold the concept. Jenette Kahn was delighted, so much so that she requested an unprecedented 16-page preview comic book be inserted in July 1980's *DC Comics Presents* #26 with no increase in price. Internal enthusiasm notwithstanding, George Pérez had few expectations, viewing *New Teen Titans* as merely a stepping stone to the book he really wanted: *Justice League of America*.]

George Pérez, then-*New Teen Titans* artist, in an interview published in *The Comics Journal* #80 (March 1983)^{ccxxx}:

“Realistically, I was doing a new book for DC, and DC’s track record being what it was at the time, I figured the book was going to die. Even if we produced our best work, I didn’t think enough people were going to take a look at it... It was a book I did strictly for Marv and a shot to do one issue of the *JLA*. So I did it, figuring five issues, not counting the [preview]. So a total of six issues, and I’ll be off, the book will have been cancelled, I’ll have done my best, and everyone will be happy.”

[As work began on *New Teen Titans*, Pérez received the offer he’d been hoping for—but under the most tragic circumstances possible. Dick Dillin—who had penciled nearly every issue of *Justice League of America* since 1968—suffered a fatal heart attack on March 2, 1980 at the age of 52. Effective with August’s *Justice League of America* #184, George Pérez was drawing two monthly 25-page comic books...but he still expected *New Teen Titans* to be short-lived.

Pérez’s concerns were certainly valid and fractures emerged in the DC line as the summer wore on. *Detective Comics*’ upgrade to monthly had been a sales disaster and, two years after it became a Dollar Comic, it reverted to a standard 32-pages again in August with issue #496. The Plastic Man/Starman version of *Adventure Comics* (now a triple feature with the addition of Aquaman) was dropped equally abruptly in September with issue #478. A Marv Wolfman-conceived revamp of “Dial ‘H’ for Hero” was scheduled as the book’s new headliner, but it wouldn’t be ready until December. Sales were so bad that Paul Levitz thought it better to simply put the book on hiatus for two months rather than lose more money. Finally, in December, *Mystery In Space* went down in flames with issue #117.

In the case of *New Teen Titans*, something else was going on. Each month, *The Comic Reader* reported the best-selling 100 comic books at Direct Market stores, based on sales reports from across the country. Marvel typically had the top 25 all to itself, but for all comic books released in August 1980, *New Teen Titans* #1 ranked #4, surpassed only by *Moon Knight* #1, *X-Men* #139, and *X-Men Annual* #4. The numbers dropped on *New Teen Titans* for the next few months but, with issue #6, they started heading back up.]



George Pérez’s cover pencils for 1980’s *New Teen Titans* #1. Pérez paid homage to the layout several times in his career, including a recreation for the 2005 *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*.

George Pérez, then-*New Teen Titans* artist, in an interview published in *The Comics Journal* #80 (March 1983)^{ccxxxi}:

“The sales were going up slowly, but were still no match for any of the Marvel books. But it finally started catching on. By issue #13, #15 we had broken 100,000 in direct sales. No DC books had done that during the time there were direct sales markets. We were attracting a lot of attention, the book was succeeding.”

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Manager of Business Affairs in an interview printed in *Pacesetter: The George Pérez Magazine* #11 (Winter 2011)^{ccxxxii}:

“In many ways, I think it was the most human of the books that succeeded in that first wave of the comic shop customers becoming the dominant audience. Both *Legion of Super-Heroes* and *X-Men* had characters with more fantastic powers, and more set apart from humanity. Even Starfire had a very human part to her life, and Cyborg certainly wanted to regain his.”

Phil Jimenez, future comic book artist and writer in a 2018 recollection^{ccxxxiii}:

“Along with *The Uncanny X-Men* and the *Legion of Super-Heroes*, the *New Teen Titans* was the reason I started reading superhero comics, and DC Comics in particular.

My first issue of the *New Teen Titans* was #12, ‘Clash of the Titans,’ and it couldn’t have made a more profound and timely impact on my teen-age brain. A book starring superheroes, gods, and Amazons?! Focused on the female characters of the team—Wonder Girl! Starfire! Raven! And drawn in epic glory by George Pérez, whose art from that moment on would influence me more than anyone else in the industry? It was if someone had reached into my brain and said, ‘this is exactly how you would draw comic books if you could.’ It was a revelation—and I don’t think George can ever get enough credit for the artwork, which got exponentially better with each issue, and design-eyed storytelling he was doing during his time on the *New Teen Titans*—and it forever cemented Wonder Girl as my favorite Titan, and one of my favorite comic book characters, of all time.

What Marv and George accomplished in their five or so years together on that book is extraordinary in hindsight. Taking a cast of B-list characters, sidekicks and wannabes, and transforming them into an A-list, industry-changing title—through sublime art, extensive subplots and supporting casts for each character, the incredible tale of Terra and her betrayal of the team, and the seemingly unusual and so very powerful ‘Day in the Life’-type stories that made these teen characters flesh and blood real. Does anyone not look back at ‘Who is Donna Troy’ and think, no one could have done this but George and Marv!? The two together were an incredible team, and what they did defined a generation of comics, and a generation of DC Comics. And their work certainly helped define what kinds of comics I wanted to draw and work on, and my passions and dreams for decades to come.”

[*The New Teen Titans* played a critical part in eliminating the stigma that DC Comics was a stodgy runner-up to hipper, cooler Marvel Comics. It also encouraged the publication of more books like it.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Manager of Business Affairs in an interview printed in *Comics Feature* #7 (November 1980)^{ccxxxiv}:

“One of the long-time problems with this business is that although you can have very successful, very good books, you can also have *Ghosts* or *Ghost Rider* or whatever out there maintaining a viable commercial existence with material of limited quality. It would be nice to see that something really good can sell much better than something that’s just...printable.

If you can go back to a universe where good books sell an awful lot better than okay books, it’s much easier to have motivation to put out good books. And to clear okay books off the schedule to make room. No matter what, you can only put out so many comic books whether you’re DC or Marvel. At some point, you reach physical exhaustion. And if a book like *Ghost Rider* or *Ghosts* is selling well enough to maintain its position, it’ll stay there unless you’re given some reason to believe that doing something vastly more creatively different will do a lot better.”

[The next step was to attract more talent that could maintain the momentum that Wolfman and Pérez had started. Perhaps no writer other than Stan Lee was more associated with Marvel Comics than Roy Thomas, who had scripted most of the publisher’s key titles over the years and essentially defined the sword and sorcery comics genre in the 1970s on *Conan the Barbarian*. Long accustomed to editing any book that he wrote, Thomas was at loggerheads with editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, who refused to permit such a thing.]

Roy Thomas came to New York City in mid-1965 with the intention of working as Mort Weisinger’s assistant. The overbearing DC editor quickly became too much for the 24-year-old and Thomas readily accepted an offer from Stan Lee to work for Marvel instead, beginning 15 years with the publisher. Photo from *FOOM* #19 (Fall 1977).



Roy Thomas, then DC Comics writer in an interview published in *Alter Ego* #100 (March 2011)^{ccxxxv}:

“[Jenette Kahn] and one of two others at DC had made it plain that, if I wasn’t happy at Marvel—and they knew that increasingly I wasn’t, after Jim Shooter became editor—I could have a job at DC. I couldn’t be writer/editor there, since they didn’t have that position then, but I was assured I’d have something close to editorial authority over the scripts I wrote. So when I had my final blow-up with Shooter, I phoned Paul Levitz... and told him I wanted to leave Marvel, since I felt Shooter had dealt less than honorably with me with regard to contract negotiations, something I took very personally and hard. Paul said ‘Fine,’ and that was that.”

[On April 22, 1980, Thomas signed a three-year contract with DC, which would begin on September 1 after his current deal with Marvel expired. Between those two dates, another surprising name returned to DC.]

Carmine Infantino, then freelance artist in his autobiography *The Amazing World of Carmine Infantino* (2000)^{ccxxxvi}:

“[Joe Orlando] called regularly and tried often to get me to return to *The Flash*. I’d given DC my all, and was very hesitant to return. But Joe was relentless, assuring me I’d only be dealing with him. Ultimately, because of our close relationship, I caved in and accepted... I then found out sales on *The Flash* were slipping and Joe was hoping my return would save the book from cancellation. I guess I did pretty well, taking over in [January 1981 with issue #296]. And I continued—through the special 300th issue—all the way up to #350, quite a run!”



Although he was said never to have set foot in the DC offices again after his 1976 ouster, Carmine Infantino nonetheless continued to draw projects for DC from 1980 into the 1990s. Those included stints on *The Flash*, *Supergirl* and the *Batman* newspaper strip.

[Late in the summer of 1980, Joe Orlando was promoted to Managing Editor while Paul Levitz was named Manager of Business Affairs. Each of them would now be more active in DC-related projects beyond comic books but the

promotions left a void. Cognizant of the fact that the company needed a strong hand to compete with Marvel and the growing independent market in the 1980s, Levitz and company reached out to Dick Giordano. A gifted, sought-after artist, Giordano had also been a first-rate, creator-friendly editor at Charlton and DC in the 1960s and early 1970s. After rejecting earlier overtures, the 48-year-old received an offer he couldn’t refuse.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Manager of Business Affairs in a recollection printed in *Dick Giordano: Changing Comics, One Day At a Time* (2003)^{ccxxxvii}:

“My most vivid memory of this is Dick’s incredible gentlemanly behavior: he was being hired to replace my old spot, but was offered a higher salary than I’d been getting—higher, in fact, than any line editor had received in the company’s history, with the possible exception of Mort Weisinger, years before in Superman’s heyday. He wouldn’t accept without asking me if the salary situation bothered me, which of course it didn’t, since he had decades more experience and skill.”

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{ccxxxviii}:

“I said we were going to have to raise the pay scale for everyone because Dick was essential, and that’s what happened. Dick had the respect of the freelancers and was also respected as an editor, as someone who was tolerant and open and supportive, and he contributed tremendously.”

[Giordano and Infantino were both on hand on December 1980’s *Detective Comics* #500, penciling Batman stories that book-ended a host of talent in between. Giordano’s contribution—in partnership with writer Alan Brennert—was particularly well-received in its moving exploration of a world where the murder of Bruce Wayne’s parents might never have happened. The anniversary issue as a whole was a virtual love letter not only to the title that birthed Batman but, according to Paul Levitz, its readership.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Manager of Business Affairs in an interview printed in *Comics Feature* #7 (November 1980)^{ccxxxix}:

“This book isn’t a present from DC the corporate entity. ‘Cause it’s not that DC did anything enormous. It’s a present from what really is DC—which is the sum total of the people. An awful lot of the major creative people either at DC or who have done work for DC over the years sat down and did something for the people who did comics. They had fun doing it. But the end of the [comic book] really says what we think it’s all about. There’ll be a little thank you card there to the readers.”

[*Detective Comics* #500 also marked Levitz's farewell to editing as he moved up the corporate ladder. Less than two months after its release, there was another change at the top. On February 13, 1981, Sol Harrison retired after 38 years with company. Jenette Kahn finally had the title of President and Publisher. As he left the company, Harrison had nothing but good things to say about his life in comic books.]

Sol Harrison suffered a heart attack shortly after his retirement but bounced back and began painting watercolors as a new avenue for his artistic inclinations. He died in Florida in 1989 at the age of 72. Photo from *DC Special Series #25* (Summer 1981).



Sol Harrison, then DC Comics President, in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #63 (May 1981)^{ccxi}:

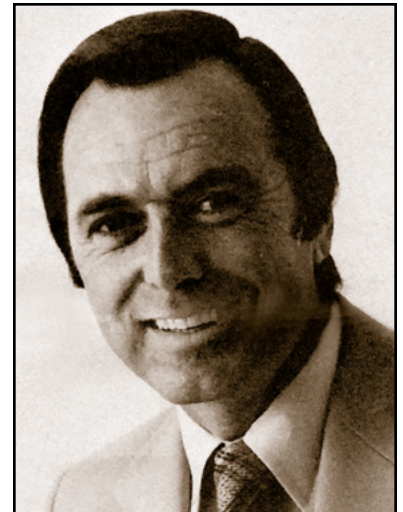
"How can you not enjoy something like that? I started at the bottom of the ladder trying to learn something and I actually made it to the top. I had a career that I guess is enviable to a lot of people. I love my work, and I love comics."

[Just days before Harrison retired, the man partially responsible for both the firing of Carmine Infantino and the DC Implosion pleaded guilty to a bribery scheme involving stock purchases in the mob-controlled Westchester Premier Theater.]

Article published in *The New York Times* (September 17, 1981)^{ccxlii}:

"Last Feb. 10, the long investigation resulted in a guilty plea by Jay Emmett, a former top Warner executive, who admitted that he had signed false invoices to issue checks involved in the stock-buying scheme. Mr. Emmett resigned as one of the three executives who shared the office of president under Steven J. Ross, the corporation's chief executive. Warner is a large conglomerate that produces films, records, books and games and also operates cable television systems. When Mr. Emmett pleaded guilty, the Government agreed to drop other charges accusing him of accepting \$70,000 in bribes involving Warner's purchase of the theater stock. Leonard Horwitz, a former Warner consultant, pleaded guilty with Mr. Emmett. They are waiting to be sentenced."

Thanks to his Uncle Jack Liebowitz, young Jay Emmett was working as a stockboy and writing Hollywood-related fillers for the future DC Comics in the 1940s. When this photo was published in *Warner Ink* #10 (Fall 1973), Emmett had just been named Senior Vice President of Warner Communications.



[Emmett, the nephew of former DC owner Jack Liebowitz and a co-founder of DC's merchandising division, Licensing Corporation of America, withstood his fall from grace and was active at the executive level of several sports teams as well as 4Licensing Corporation before his death in 2015. In 1981, few at DC gave him more than a passing thought, reflecting instead on how much their company had changed over the past five years.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Manager of Business Affairs in an interview printed in *Comics Feature* #15 (January 1982)^{ccxlii}:

"Five years ago, by my count, I think we were publishing three books a month I could read. And I don't think my taste is incredibly dissimilar from the average member of the fan market... I was prejudiced. I liked myself on Aquaman, what David Michelinie was doing on Unknown Soldier, and what Mike Fleisher was doing on Jonah Hex. There wasn't really much of anything else that I cared about circa 1976, just before Jenette came in, and Sol was promoted. The rest of the line... some were professional, competent, solid; some were a real big yawn; some really should have been burned—preferably before they ever saw the light of day. I think the proportion is almost the reverse now. I think all of our books are *at least* professional and competent, and I think a fairly high number of them are worth reading. I think that's the root of why fan perception of DC changed."

[As the 1980s progressed, *New Teen Titans* soon had plenty of competition for DC's fan-favorite titles. Roy Thomas's *All-Star Squadron* was an early contender as was Levitz's own *Legion of Super-Heroes* (with Keith Giffen). Titles became progressively more daring, whether in the adult themes of *Camelot 3000* or the upending of DC's very history in *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, encouraging entirely new interpretations of the publisher's most recognizable heroes. With each passing year, the dying newsstand business model was less relevant.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Manager of Business Affairs in an interview printed in *Comics Feature #7* (November 1980)^{ccxliii}:

“One of the nice things about the whole evolution of direct sales and fandom as an identifiable commercial force is that frankly I can tell you this book will sell to a fan audience. Without looking at it, I can show you not the cover but just the list of names on the cover and you could give me a fair estimate of how it will fare against *X-Men* or whatever else is the ‘fan icon’ these days. I can’t do that for the general public.”

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Manager of Business Affairs in an essay printed in *75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking* (2010)^{ccxliv}:

“The comics shops were rapidly becoming the only growth area for DC’s publishing program, and although just 10% of the business, they became more and more the focus for the future. There were only a few hundred of them scattered across the country, almost all of them opened with very little investment by young comic fans who viewed them as a cross between bookstores and sports bars: places where people could come to get the entertainment they enjoyed, but also hang out and talk about it with like-minded folks. This was an audience more committed to comics, and waiting for DC to publish titles with them in mind.”

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics President and Publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue #57* (July 2012)^{ccxlv}:

“Paul [Levitz] and I looked very carefully at what was happening in the comic-book market and you certainly didn’t need to be a rocket scientist to see that the newsstand business was a business of humongous returns and therefore, of diminishing returns. And at the same time, there was this infant business, the direct-sales market, where you could actually print to order. It didn’t have the depth at the time to support the comic-book industry, but there seemed to be an avid following within it. There were comic-book fans who were no longer frequenting newsstands but buying their comics at collectors stores. And we thought, ‘Could we help the collector stores expand? Could we help them become a little more sophisticated and become more sophisticated ourselves?’

You know, we ourselves were young and unpolished in that area as well, but we thought that perhaps we could grow together. And, of course, it was a risk because we were going to put a lot of time, energy, and resources against it. But we felt that it made no sense to put time, energy, and resources against the newsstand market and this was the only viable bet.

Because Paul and I were fledglings in this area, I brought in a consultant who turned out to be terrific for us.

His name was Leon Knize, and he had done a lot of work developing credit plans to help businesses grow. We wanted to help the comic-book stores expand, to extend them credit so they could grow, but we didn’t want to be so extended ourselves that we would take a terrible hit. Leon came in and worked hand-in-hand with Paul. Paul would tell you that it was an incredible learning experience because Leon really knew his stuff and was very generous in sharing it. Together, they crafted a plan to help us do just what we hoped: extend credit to these fledgling stores, help them grow, help them expand, and in doing so, expand the market for DC.”

[Thanks to the Direct Sales comic book retailers, DC and Marvel were able to take risks in ways that never could have been done on the newsstand. As the price of the standard newsprint comic book rose to 60¢, then 75¢, and finally \$1.00 over the course of the 1980s, publishers were successfully marketing select ongoing titles exclusively to comic book shops on heavy, white paper. The hypothetical \$1.25 comic book on better paper that Paul Levitz described in 1977 was reality in the 1983 Direct Market.



Executive Paul Levitz—seen here in a photo circa 1997—had to deal with situations quite different from those he experienced as a writer and editor. When Warner Communications merged with Time in 1989, for instance, DC Comics’ management suddenly had to deal with its superiors being based across the country in California rather than New York.

Levitz continued to write for DC, most notably a hugely-popular run on *Legion of Super-Heroes* with penciler Keith Giffen and others (1981-1989), but his succession by Dick Giordano was a pivotal moment in his career.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Manager of Business Affairs in an interview printed in *The Comics Buyer’s Guide #879* (September 21, 1990)^{ccxlvi}:

“That’s really the significant turning point when I ceased having any serious editorial responsibilities. I kept on doing a few things—talent coordination, for example—for a little while longer, but basically that’s when I moved over to working full-time on the business side of the company.”

[DC thrived in the 1980s, even as it found new competition in the Direct Market that it and Marvel were progressively staking their future on. Among the decade's foremost new publishers were Pacific Comics, Eclipse Comics, and First Comics, the last of which was co-founded by a familiar name: Mike Gold. Boasting an impressive roster of talent and titles for its 1983 launch, First was both a critical and financial success but Gold himself took his leave after a few years. Effective in January 1986, he returned to DC Comics as a Senior Editor almost simultaneously with another prodigal son: Dennis O'Neil. Both men would have a major impact in shaping the direction of DC's superhero line over the rest of the decade.

In 1989, Paul Levitz became Publisher of DC Comics, joining Jenette Kahn as President/Editor-In-Chief. Their longtime partner Joe Orlando retired in 1996, although he continued to be a presence at DC, contributing to *Mad* until a week before his death in 1998.]

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Publisher in a remembrance printed in *The Comics Buyer's Guide* #1315 (January 29, 1999)^{ccxlvii}:

"Joe Orlando decided I was a writer before I did, guided me in the work where I learned to write and edit, and protected me while I grew. My personal and professional debts to him are immeasurable, and my personal and professional respect for him are even greater."

[A few years later, Jenette Kahn received an offer from Christie's Auction House to be its second-in-command. Although the job didn't come to be, she was struck by the emotions that had been stirred inside her. 26 years after succeeding Carmine Infantino, Jenette Kahn left DC Comics and proudly passed the torch to President and Publisher Paul Levitz on February 8, 2002.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics president and editor-in-chief in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{ccxlviii}:

"I realized then that as much as I loved DC, I wasn't challenged anymore. What had excited me so much about Christie's, apart from the fact that it played into one of my passions, was the thrill of taking on a totally new arena and having the exhilaration, the excitement, the anxiety, and the pleasure of that. When I realized that, I also understood that maybe I had been at DC a little too long... Originally, I planned to stay for a full year after announcing I was stepping down, but Paul was my successor and I felt that my presence made the transition harder. I thought it would be better for the staff and better for Paul if I gave him some space, so I moved next door to another Warner Bros. building and let Paul begin to leave his own considerable imprint on DC."

One of Jenette Kahn's first post-DC projects was the book *In Your Space: Personalizing Your Home and Office* (2002), the source of this photo.



[Levitz held the post through 2009 when Warner Bros rebranded the company DC Entertainment. He continued to write for DC for several years thereafter along with pursuing a passion for comic book history and theory in books like *Will Eisner: Champion of the Graphic Novel* (2015) and the massive *75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking* (2010). In the big picture of the publisher's history, the DC Implosion was merely a bump in the road. The creators affected never forgot, though, and the fans who were reading in 1978 still wondered what exactly happened in all those comic books they never got to read.]

Mark Waid, future comic book writer in a 2018 recollection^{ccxlix}:

"Since shortly after the Implosion, the existence of a two-issue *Cancelled Comics Cavalcade* had been reported in the fan press. Allegedly, staffer Mike Gold had created for the freelancers a very limited number of photocopies comprising all of their material that no longer had a home in the post-Implosion DC Universe. How many copies were there? Some said 35. Some said 50. Reports varied. Was this even real? Once *The Comic Reader* showed covers of the two issues from Al Milgrom and Alex Saviuk, this crossed over from 'possible hoax' to 'want' in my head. But there was no way I'd ever get my hands on *CCC*. Too few copies, too little access. Still, I dreamed of its mysteries for a decade...until I began working on staff as a DC editor and, my jaw dropping, I stumbled across copies of both issues hidden deep within the DC library. I couldn't believe my luck. Dropping everything, I dove into those pages to find... a whole lotta junk. What an EC Comics ending. Choke. I'd pursued this holy grail for ten years, only to discover that it hid no true gems. The Deserter! The Green Team! By unpopular demand, more Prez! Sure, I finally got to see who the Odd Man was, but what a tiny victory. Kids: be realistic about your dreams."

CANCELLATIONS BY MONTH OF PUBLICATION

1976 Cancellations by month of publication –

DC Comics:

January:
1st Issue Special #13

May:
Swamp Thing #24

June:
Blitzkrieg #5
Claw the Unconquered #9
(revived in January 1978)
The Joker #9

August:
Plop! #24
Tarzan Family #66

October:
Blackhawk #250
Four-Star Spectacular #6
Limited Collectors' Edition
#C-50 (revived intermit-
tently between 1977-1978)

November:
Tarzan #258

December:
Kobra #7

Marvel Comics:

April:
Astonishing Tales #36

June:
Mighty Marvel Western
#46

July:
Black Goliath #5
Marvel Adventure, Starring
Daredevil #6
Marvel Chillers #7
Warlock #15

August:
Amazing Adventures #39
Chamber of Chills #25
Jungle Action #24
(relaunched as *Black*
Panther #1 in October)
Marvel Feature #7
(relaunched as *Red Sonja*
#1 in October)
Ringo Kid #30
Skull the Slayer #6
Strange Tales #188
Tomb of Darkness #23

September:
Adventures On the Planet
of the Apes #11

November:
Ka-Zar #20
Marvel Double Feature
#21
Son of Satan #8

December:
Planet of the Apes #29
(black and white
magazine)
Werewolf By Night #43

1977 Cancellations by month of publication –

DC Comics:

March:
Ragman #5

April:
Young Love #126

May:
DC Special #29 (re-
launched as DC Special
Series #1 in June)
Hercules Unbound #12

July:
Plastic Man #20
Starfire #8

August:
Richard Dragon, Kung Fu
Fighter #18

September:
Isis #8

October:
DC Super-Stars #18

November:
Metal Men #56
Teen Titans #53

December:
Super-Team Family #15
Welcome Back, Kotter #10

Marvel Comics:

January:
Deadly Hands of Kung Fu
#33 (black and white
magazine)
Marvel Spotlight #33
Two-Gun Kid #136

February:
Weird Wonder Tales #22

March:
Doc Savage #8 (black and
white magazine)

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April: <i>Logan's Run</i> #7	June: <i>All-Star Comics</i> #74 <i>Battle Classics</i> #1 <i>Black Lightning</i> #11 <i>Doorway To Nightmare</i> #5 <i>Dynamic Classics</i> #1 <i>Kamandi, the Last Boy On Earth</i> #59 <i>Our Fighting Forces</i> #181 <i>Showcase</i> #104	November: <i>The Flintstones</i> #9 <i>Hanna-Barbera TV Stars</i> #4 <i>The Human Fly</i> #19 <i>Marvel Classic Comics Series</i> #36 <i>Scooby-Doo</i> #9	April: <i>Godzilla</i> #24
May: <i>Inhumans</i> #12 <i>Iron Fist</i> #15 <i>Marvel Presents</i> #12	July: <i>Army At War</i> #1 <i>Batman Family</i> #20 <i>Firestorm</i> #5 <i>House of Secrets</i> #154 <i>Secrets of Haunted House</i> #14 (revived in May 1979) <i>Star Hunters</i> #5 <i>Steel, the Indestructible Man</i> #5 <i>The Witching Hour</i> #85	December: <i>Hanna-Barbera Spotlight</i> #4 <i>Laff-A-Lympics</i> #13 <i>Yogi Bear</i> #9	July: <i>John Carter, Warlord of Mars</i> #28 <i>Tarzan</i> #28
June: <i>2001, A Space Odyssey</i> #10 <i>Omega the Unknown</i> #10	July: <i>Super-Villain Team-Up</i> #14 (three more issues published sporadically in 1978-1980)	1979 Cancellations by month of publication –	1980 Cancellations by month of publication –
October: <i>The Champions</i> #15 <i>Eternals</i> #19	August: <i>DC Special Series</i> #16 (revived intermittently between 1979-1981)	DC Comics: October: <i>Jonah Hex and Other Western Tales</i> #3	March: <i>Time Warp</i> #5
1978 Cancellations by month of publication –	December: <i>All-New Collectors' Edition</i> #C-62	DC Comics: October: <i>Jonah Hex and Other Western Tales</i> #3	April: <i>All-Out War</i> #6
DC Comics: February: <i>Shazam!</i> #25	Marvel Comics: May: <i>Funtastic World of Hanna-Barbera</i> #3 <i>Man From Atlantis</i> #7	December: <i>Men of War</i> #26	May: <i>Weird Western Tales</i> #70
March: <i>Challengers of the Unknown</i> #87 <i>The Secret Society of Super-Villains</i> #15	June: <i>Dynomutt</i> #6	Marvel Comics: January: <i>Kid Colt Outlaw</i> #229 <i>Marvel Triple Action</i> #47 <i>Ms. Marvel</i> #23 <i>Tomb of Dracula</i> #69 (one more issue later released in May)	December: <i>Mystery In Space</i> #117
April: <i>Freedom Fighters</i> #15 <i>Karate Kid</i> #15 <i>New Gods</i> #19	July: <i>Kull the Destroyer</i> #29	February: <i>Black Panther</i> #15 <i>Captain Marvel</i> #62 <i>Howard the Duck</i> #31 <i>Invaders</i> #40 (one more issue later released in June) <i>Nova</i> #25 <i>Rawhide Kid</i> #151 <i>Red Sonja</i> #15	Marvel Comics: June: <i>Fun and Games Magazine</i> #13 <i>Marvel Treasury Edition</i> #27 <i>Shogun Warriors</i> #20 <i>Tomb of Dracula</i> #6 (black and white magazine)
May: <i>Claw the Unconquered</i> #12 <i>Mister Miracle</i> #25 <i>Shade, the Changing Man</i> #8	September: <i>Devil Dinosaur</i> #9 <i>Machine Man</i> #9 (revived in May 1979)	October: <i>Amazing Adventures</i> #14 <i>Battlestar Galactica</i> #23 <i>Fantasy Masterpieces</i> #14 <i>Marvel's Greatest Comics</i> #96 <i>Tales to Astonish</i> #14	November: <i>Machine Man</i> #20
		December: <i>Marvel Spotlight</i> #11	December: <i>Marvel Spotlight</i> #11



AFTERWORD

One quantum physics theory posits that everything in the universe that *can* happen *does* happen, only played out in alternate quantum realities. If true, this theory allows us to imagine an alternate universe in which the eastern seaboard of the United States didn't get buried under snow in February 1978. That universe, conceivably, had such an unseasonably warm winter that Americans didn't confine themselves to the shelter of their homes. Adults and children alike went about their business, frequenting their usual shops and stores. In that case, comic book sales during the winter months never plummeted to the point where Warner executives stepped in and ordered a drastic reduction in DC's comic book line. In that alternate reality, the DC Explosion carried on as planned, allowing faithful fans to enjoy expanded stories of their favorite series and new characters that made their debut years before they did in our "quantum reality." Surely, in such a universe, the uninterrupted DC Explosion would have been an unqualified success. Comic book sales would have improved to such a degree that DC Comics would have become the undisputed market share leader, leaving Marvel to lick the wound of its lost hegemony. Writers and artists would have lined up outside DC's offices, fighting for the opportunity to work for the company that ushered in a comic book Renaissance. Jenette Kahn and her colleagues would have been heralded as the saviors of the industry, the recipients of innumerable accolades and awards. Surely, a successful DC Explosion would have irrevocably altered the course of comic book history, right?

Actually, it wouldn't have. In truth, the DC Explosion was assured to fail, regardless of the winter weather conditions, because the real problem plaguing DC Comics (and every other comic book publisher, for that matter) wasn't blizzards

or draconian corporate executives or even the quality of the comic books themselves. The real problem was the newsstand distribution system. Simply put, publishers were at the mercy of distributors who had little incentive in delivering comic books to their newsstand dealers. As far as the distributors were concerned, comic books were fodder, hardly worth their attention because of how little revenue they generated. As Dick Giordano told the *Comics Journal* in a 1981 interview, "If [the newsstand distributor has] that much room in the back of the truck, they'll put that many comics, and they don't bother to check them by title. 'Just grab a handful of comics, Charlie, and throw it in the truck.' Is that a way to sell a comic book?"

What's more, by the late 1970s too many comic books were being published for too small a dealer's rack space, which had to be reserved for better selling magazines like *Newsweek*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Time* (all of which sold for a retail price of one dollar in 1978). Even if a newsstand dealer had sufficient rack space to display the entire gamut of comic books, there was no guarantee he would receive them because thousands of comic books never left the distributors' warehouses. Ultimately, the distributors declared those undelivered books as "returned copies" deserving of a refund by the publishers. In a time when sell-through rates (the percentage of copies that were actually bought by consumers out of the overall print run) greatly determined each title's profitability, those undelivered copies significantly cut into the comic companies' bottom line. (Adding insult to this financial injury was the reality that newsstand distributors often sold "returned" copies of comic books to unscrupulous Direct Market retailers who stocked them in their own



stores.) Beyond that, the distributors also skewed the sales data in their favor, not just for comic book companies but for all publishers. The number of copies sold at the newsstand was likely significantly higher than what the distributors reported, but the publishers weren't really in a position to dispute the data provided to them. The publishers of the more popular magazines (like the aforementioned *Sports Illustrated* and *Time*) didn't have much to worry about since the revenue they earned from advertisements was considerable. Comic book publishers didn't have that luxury. They relied on Sea-Monkeys and toy soldiers ads that barely paid for the paper they got printed on.

For that reason, no comic book company was truly in a position to gloat over the DC Implosion. DC's misfortune was being shared by everyone else. For example, Charlton and Harvey Comics were dealing with their own sets of fiscal difficulties. To cut down on costs, both publishers had already eschewed the production of new original content in favor of reprinting old stories. Even Marvel Comics had run into troubled waters. Often overlooked in most discussions of the DC Implosion is the fact that shortly after DC drastically contracted its line of comics, Marvel did as well. Between November 1978 and February 1979 Marvel cancelled 19 titles, a sure sign that not all was right within the "House of Ideas." In many ways, then, the DC Implosion could be considered a blessing in disguise (although certainly not for the professionals who lost their jobs at the time) as it prompted the realization that the newsstand could no longer support the comic book industry. The manner in which comic books were being sold had to

change or the format was going to die. By Jenette Kahn's own admission, the Implosion hastened her and Paul Levitz's investigation into the viability of the Direct Market. Their research was desperately needed and something that would end up benefitting all publishers.

As much as the DC Explosion is considered a failure, the assumptions supporting its implementation proved accurate. In other words, despite what many of her contemporaries asserted, Jenette Kahn was right: comic books *did* need more story pages and they *did* need a higher price point. For proof, consider how dependent comic book companies have become on the sales of trade paperback and hardcover collections of their single issues. These books, which have retail costs that range between ten and 100 dollars, are *de facto* reprints, once considered the bane of comic book publishing. The individual 32-page comic book is now part of the process that underwrites the cost of producing the more profitable trade paperback. If Kahn erred, it may have been her decision to implement a 50¢ price point. That wasn't high enough to move the needle. It's no coincidence that book stores like Barnes & Noble didn't have "graphic novel" sections until the price of a graphic novel became *significantly* higher than that of a comic book.

Ultimately, this should be the DC Implosion's legacy, not as something ignominious but as the starting point of a new age for the comic book industry. From the nadir of the newsstand era came the burgeoning of the Direct Market and a true epoch of comic book explosion.



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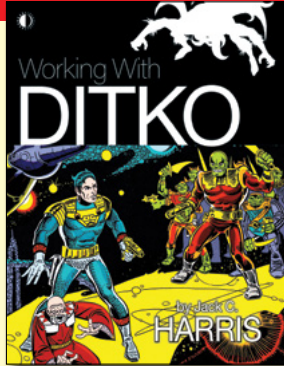
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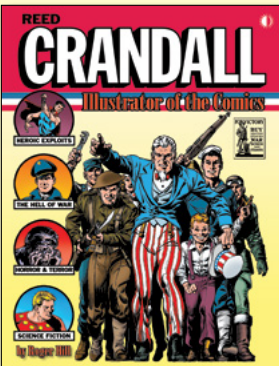
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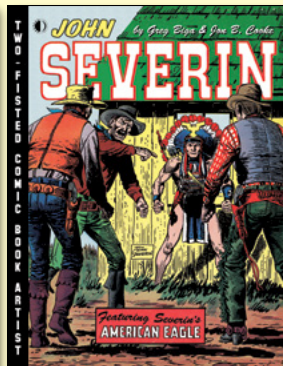
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