THE CRISIS COMPANION

from Flash of Two Worlds to Infinite Earths and beyond

by Kevin Miller


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o Infinite Earths and beyond

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For Mike Fedyk,
One of the brightest lights in the darkest days of my youth

PREFACE

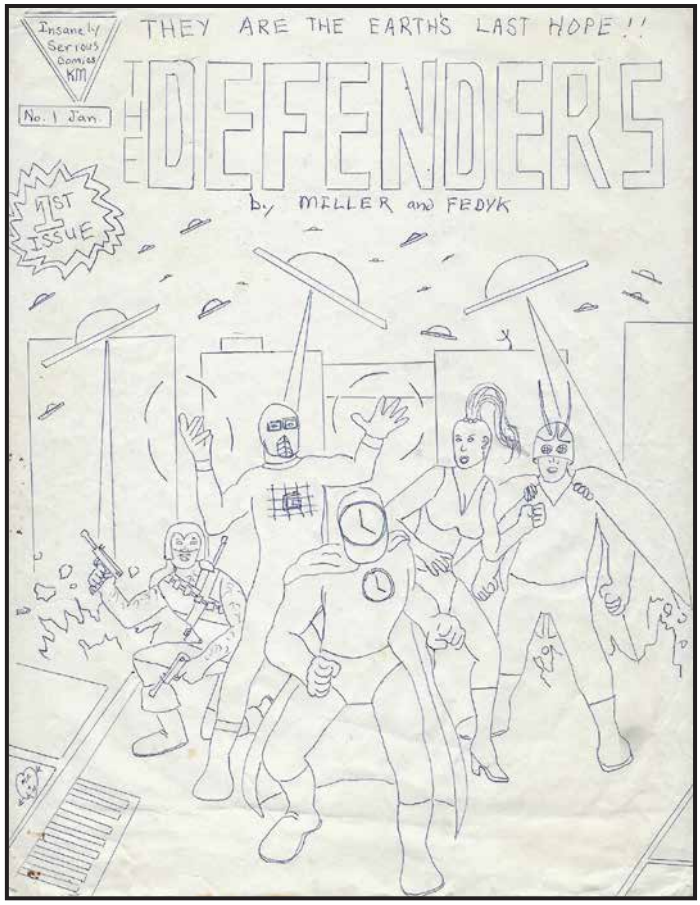
A Love Letter To The Event That Shaped A Universe

Let me make one thing clear up front: I didn't write this book because I *am* an expert on *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.[1] I embarked on this journey because I wanted to *become* an expert on something I love.

Crisis is a twelve-issue comic book maxi-series published from 1985–1986 that took a story-based approach to paring down DC Comics' (not quite) infinite number of parallel worlds to a single, unified universe. Although it wasn't the first major comic book crossover—Marvel's *Secret Wars* beat it by eight months—it was by far the most ambitious, groundbreaking, and influential such event up to that point. And unlike *Secret Wars,* which merely resulted in a few minor cosmetic changes to the Marvel universe, *Crisis* completely reshaped not only the DC universe (DCU), but also the entire comic book industry for decades to come.

In addition to its cultural significance over the past 40 years, *Crisis* has held a special place in my heart for an entirely different reason: it served as my gateway into comic book fandom. Like most kids born in the early 1970s, during the 14 years I had been alive prior to *Crisis*, comic books were an ongoing source of fascination, particularly war and Western books, horror and fantasy comics, a handful of superhero titles, and tons and tons of Archie. However, I didn't become serious about comics until 1984. That was largely due to one person—my social studies teacher, Mike Fedyk. Mike was an avid comic book fan (and prolific amateur creator in his own right) who had a collection that numbered in the thousands. Once he learned about my interest in comics, he did something for which I will be forever grateful: he lent me dozens of bagged-and-boarded issues from his precious collection to read. One of my fondest memories from my youth is the 1984 Christmas holidays, during which I spent many happy hours alone in my bedroom, reading every issue of the *New Teen Titans* that had been published up to that point.

Mike didn't just lend me comics, though. On his frequent trips to the city (I grew up in a small town on the Saskatchewan prairies where comics were hard to find), he also brought back

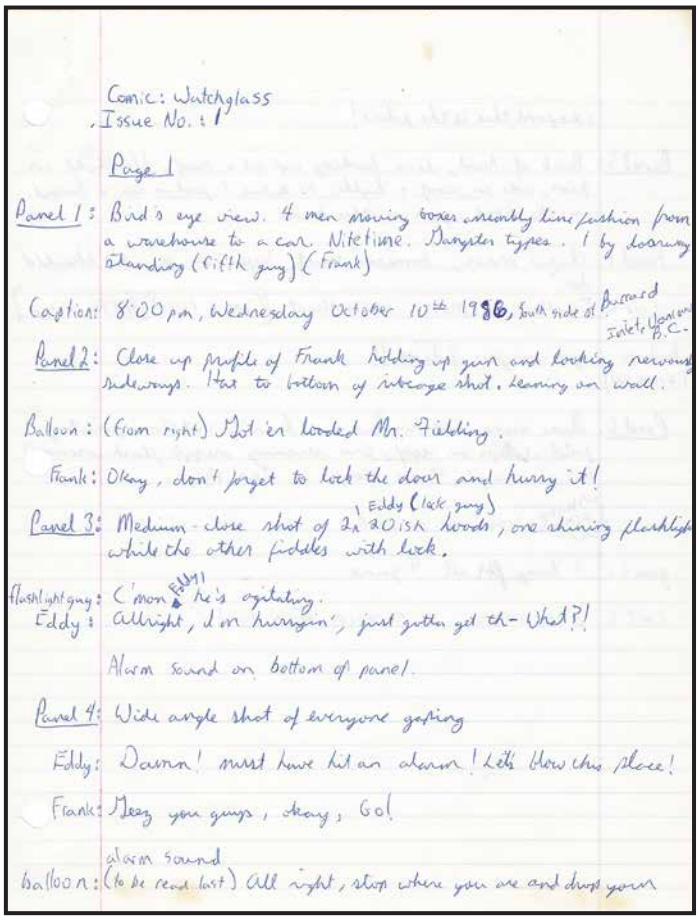


The Defenders! No, not those Defenders; this is the cover for the author's first-ever comic book series, created when he was in high school. It was composed primarily of analogues for DC characters, including Watchglass (Batman), the Purple Cockroach (Blue Beetle), the Reaper (the Comedian) and Vishanti (Starfire), among others. Cover illustration by Mike Fedyk.

1 Hereafter referred to as *Crisis.*

issues of comics that he thought I should read. These included Alan Moore's *Watchmen,* Frank Miller's *Dark Knight*, and issue #1 of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. I still remember the first time I saw George Pérez's gorgeous wraparound cover while standing in the back of our classroom, a sight that never ceases to delight.

Although I was primarily a DC fan, prior to *Crisis* I didn't even realize DC had a multiverse. Furthermore, I knew next to nothing about the history of the DCU or the convoluted continuity that eventually compelled Marv Wolfman and co. to decide that a cataclysm on the magnitude of *Crisis* was required to clean it up. However, my lack of awareness did nothing to dampen my enjoyment of the series. In fact, my ignorance of the intricacies of the DCU and how *Crisis* fit into that legacy could have been the very thing that caused me to enjoy it so much. Rather than read it with the sort of hyper-critical, geek-style mindset I developed later in life, questioning


Comic: Watchglass
Issue No.: 1
Page 1
Panel 1: Bird's eye view. 4 men moving boxes smoothly line fashion from a warehouse to a car. Nite time. Gangster types. 1 by door standing (Fifth guy) (Frank)
Caption: 8:00 pm, Wednesday October 10th 1986, South side of Bernard Inlet, Yonkers N.Y.
Panel 2: Close up profile of Frank holding up gun and looking nervously sideways. Hat to bottom of trenchcoat shot. leaning on wall.
Balloon: (From right) Hot in here, Mr. Fielding.
Frank: Okay, don't forget to lock the door and hurry it!
Panel 3: Medium-close shot of 2 (Eddy (lock guy)) 30ish heods, one shining flashlight while the other fiddles with lock.
Flashlight guy: C'mon Eddy! He's agitating.
Eddy: Allright, I'm hurryin', just gotta get th- What?!
Alarm sound on bottom of panel.
Panel 4: Wide angle shot of everyone gasping
Eddy: Damn! must have hit an alarm! Let's blow this place!
Frank: Move you guys, okay, Go!
alarm sound
Balloon: (to be read last) All right, stop where you are and drop your

The author's handwritten script for the first issue of *Watchglass*, leader of the Defenders. Note the date in the caption, which was likely the very date and time when this script was written (which makes the author 15 years old). With no sample scripts available as a model, the author created his own script format. Using Gary Brodsky's *How to Publish Comics* (1987) as a guide, the author planned to self-publish this and other series, but despite copious planning and dreaming, those plans never came to fruition.

every decision the creators made, all I knew was that it was an epic tale with cosmic consequences, and I was more than happy to go along for the ride.

As I pushed past the warm glow of nostalgia while writing this book, I was afraid my love for this series wouldn't be able to withstand such intense scrutiny. After all, wasn't I old enough now to see past the spandex and spectacle, dismissing such stories as mere childish distractions, unworthy of adult attention? (As Mr. Stubbs puts it in *Multiversity* #1, "D'ya think it's normal to be reading comics at our age, boss?") Thankfully, that didn't happen. *Crisis* certainly has its shortcomings, with Wolfman and his collaborators often committing or exacerbating some of the very errors they set out to correct. But despite these flaws, my appreciation for the series, the creators' towering ambition, and the sheer scale of its execution grew far more than I expected. More than that, writing this book deepened my love for comics as a medium and for the countless people who've helped shape it over the decades.

As a point of fact, this project didn't start out as a book. My original vision was to make a feature-length documentary about *Crisis*. By 2019 I had spent nearly 15 years working on documentaries about all sorts of controversial issues. Tired of duking it out over so many serious topics, I felt it was high time to make a film just for the fun of it about something I loved—comic books! To that end, I contacted Marv Wolfman and penciller George Pérez to see if they would participate. Both of them were willing, but due to a lack of funding, I was unable to follow through with the project.

It wasn't until early 2024 when I received a copy of *American Comic Book Chronicles: 1980–1989* for my birthday that the idea of creating a *Crisis*-related project was reignited in my mind. It seemed especially pertinent, seeing as the 40th anniversary of *Crisis* was just around the corner. I got back in touch with Marv, who agreed to answer some initial questions. Sadly, George had passed away in the interim. That led me to go down the masthead and seek out everyone else involved in the series who would talk to me. When Paul Levitz, vice president and publisher at DC while *Crisis* was published, refused to do an interview until I had a publisher attached, I approached the company behind *American Comic Book Chronicles,* TwoMorrows Publishing, with a brief proposal. In a turnaround so quick it would have made the scarlet speedster blush—one of them, anyway—I had a deal.

Based on my experience as a documentary filmmaker, I knew that to become an expert on *Crisis,* I had to become an expert—or at least an exceptionally well-informed layperson—on a wide variety of other topics. These include the history of the American comic book industry; the central role that DC played in shaping that history; the growth of comic book fandom; the business of comic book retailing and distribution; the internal workings of DC before, during, and after *Crisis*; the complicated narrative continuity within the DCU before and after *Crisis* was published; and how *Crisis* fits into the broader history of stories about parallel worlds and apocalyptic, world-ending events. Then there are all the



Deadpool variants from the movie *Deadpool and Wolverine* (2024). Building on the TV series Loki, the film played fast and loose with the multiverse while at the same time criticizing its overuse in cinematic storytelling.

individuals involved in that history, from writers and pencilers to inkers, letterers, colorists, editors, publishers, publicists, production managers, retailers, distributors, and fans. For, as much as this book is about *Crisis,* it's also about the soil from which the series emerged and those who seeded, watered, and fertilized what grew into one of the most influential pieces of pop culture history ever created.

While that last sentence may sound like it overstates the cultural impact of *Crisis*, my deep dive into the series has only reinforced my initial suspicions about the long shadow it has cast over comic books, novels, film, television, and every other form of storytelling during the past four decades. *Crisis* certainly didn't invent the concept of the multiverse, the idea that a potentially infinite number of parallel universes might exist alongside our own. But perhaps more than any other cultural work, it's responsible for introducing this idea to mainstream readers and viewers—even as it systematically attempted to dismantle DC's version of it. Not only did *Crisis* ultimately fail to do away with the multiverse, over the past forty years the concept has spread to virtually every other medium, including our perception of reality itself. In fact, the multiverse concept is so ubiquitous today that many people are experiencing "multiverse fatigue." Even Deadpool is fed up with it: "Can we just be done with the whole multiverse thing?" he says in *Deadpool and Wolverine* (2024) prior to engaging in battle with a mob of bloodthirsty Deadpool variants from various worlds. "It's not great. It's just been miss after miss after miss." Nevertheless, we remain captive to the same "What if?" question that drove the creation of the multiverse in the first place—the restless urge to peer across worlds and imagine the lives we might have lived instead.

For better or worse, *Crisis* also popularized the idea of the "event comic," a large-scale mini- or maxi-series that has ramifications beyond the series itself, affecting characters, storylines, and/or the entire universe (or universes) in which the story takes place. As Andrew J. Friedenthal notes in his book *Retcon Game,* "*Crisis* changed not just the narrative DC Universe, but also the way of doing business for publishers of comic book 'universes.'"[2] To which *Slugfest* author Reed Tucker adds,

> *No longer would it be enough for Superman to defeat the villain of the month. Readers had now gotten a taste of a big, important story that was perceived to matter more than the now-pedestrian yarns that filled the books month after month. ...*
>
> *As the comic publishers would quickly discover, anything branded an "event" sold to the comic book diehards, regardless of whether it was any good. They, like any addict, had to get their fix—even if they hated themselves for it afterward.*[3]

Concurrently, *Crisis* also brought the idea of continuity to the foreground, driven by the demand for not just comic book characters, but all fictional characters to exist within a shared universe that represents our own universe as closely as possible in terms of completeness and consistency. From *Star Wars* to *Star Trek* to the fictional worlds of authors like Michael Moorcock, Terry Pratchett, Roger Zelazny, Stephen King, and Brandon Sanderson, fans love nothing more than to master the arcane lore of such imaginary worlds—and critique any gaffes or inconsistencies that appear along the way. As Mark J. P. Wolf argues in his book, *Building Imaginary Worlds,*

> *If a secondary world is to be believable and interesting, it will need to have a high degree of invention, completeness, and consistency. Of course, no secondary world can be as complete as the Primary World, inconsistencies are increasingly likely as a world grows, and no world can be the product of invention to the point that there is no longer any resemblance to the Primary World. Nevertheless, unless an effort is made in all of these directions, the resulting subcreation will fail to create the illusion of an independent world.*[4]

While the desire to impose coherence on fictional worlds is often written off as the purview of detail-obsessed, romance-deprived fanboys, it actually reflects a deep human need. As the real world grows increasingly fragmented and unpredictable, more than ever we are turning to imagined universes not just for escape, but also for order. Where religious narratives once offered a sense of cosmic structure and meaning, the decline of such faith

2 Andrew J. Friedenthal, *Retcon Game* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 80.

3 Reed Tucker, *Slugfest* (London: Sphere, 2017), 191.

4 Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2012), 9.

communities means that fictional continuities are stepping in to fill the void. And the more chaotic reality becomes, the more we demand that our fantasy worlds make sense. We ask our stories not merely to entertain, but also to reassure us that somewhere, at least, everything fits. For comic book readers in the 1980s, what scholar Ann Larabee labels the "Decade of Disaster,"[5] *Crisis* tried to fulfill this role in its own flawed way, and fans have been chasing the dragon ever since.

Finally, by completely reimagining and rewriting the DCU's past, comic books like *Crisis* challenge us to reconsider how we conceptualize and rewrite our own history, reinforcing the idea that "the real world is, to some degree, imaginary, relying on contingent narratives that are subject to challenge and change,"[6] as Friedenthal argues, going on to say:

> *The very job of a historian in the 21st century is to mine the past for untold narratives that reshape the way we view and understand that past. Historians do not simply reify a predetermined view of history, but rather they unearth information and craft arguments to continually shape that view. Although Orwellian fears of an altered past may apply in totalitarian states, in a society with open access to information and a panoply of voices debating about history, the process of historical revision is productive rather than repressive.*[7]

Comic book writers like Roy Thomas were employing a form of historical revisionism, a.k.a. "retroactive continuity" or "retconning," years before *Crisis*, the ultimate retcon, was released. Retconning involves revising previously established facts within a fictional universe to reframe our understanding of past events or how a particular character or event fits into that narrative. It's usually employed to resolve inconsistencies or to update stories for new audiences.

The term "retroactive continuity" first showed up in E. Frank Tupper's 1973 book, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, in which he argues that Pannenberg viewed the past as a product of the future due to the narrative nature of historical accounts. However, the term didn't enter common parlance until it appeared on the letters page of *All-Star Squadron* #18 (1983). Perhaps unaware of Tupper's usage, Thomas credited a fan at a comic convention with inventing the term to describe what Thomas was up to in *All-Star Squadron.* This involved expanding on the history of DC's Golden Age characters, while integrating new characters into that narrative who had no Golden Age pedigree. As with the multiverse, although comic book creators didn't invent retconning, the tales they wrote are responsible for popularizing this idea in other media.

All that to say, whether we're talking about entertainment, history, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, sociology, religion, or science, we're living in a world that comic books like *Crisis* have played a key role in creating. Hence, not only is *Crisis* important to me personally, I would argue that it's important to all of us, whether we realize it or not.

In several interviews, Marv Wolfman has remarked that he always saw *Crisis* as more of a roadmap than an end in itself. "As far as I'm concerned, we're creating a new DC universe," he told *Comics Interview* as *Crisis* was being released. "I don't want to be morbid and dwell on the characters who are dying—I'd much rather talk about where DC's going to be next year."[8] Years later he reiterated this point when speaking to the *Village Voice:* "Crisis was created to solve a specific problem: to make the confusing DC universe accessible to new readers. I had thought it would do its job, and the focus of attention would then be on the new books and not the title that changed them."[9] Not long after the series was released, however, Wolfman realized that many people—people like me—had fallen in love with the roadmap instead.

While I hope this book encourages those who have never read the series to give it a go, my efforts are directed primarily to fans of *Crisis* in general, and also what scholar Adam C. Murdough refers to as "Crisisologists," those whose obsession over every little detail of *Crisis* borders on the pathological. Writing for this latter group is a daunting task. Not only has a wealth of material on *Crisis* already been produced in print, online, and in audio and video formats, some of it approaches a scale of granularity that not even Ray Palmer, a.k.a. the Atom, could hope to penetrate. While this book doesn't strive to go toe to toe with or outdo such approaches, it does aim to learn from such folks and to incorporate their methodology and insights in a manner that can serve as a launching point for serious and casual fans alike.

To that end, I must thank the numerous people who consented to be interviewed for this project, including Marv Wolfman, Paul Levitz, Bob Greenberger, Jerry Ordway, Anthony Tollin, Peter Sanderson, Mike DeCarlo, Bob Rozakis, Dan Jurgens, Cary Bates, Roy Thomas, and Mike Gold. I would also like to thank those who, without realizing it, contributed significantly to my understanding of various aspects of *Crisis*, comic books, and the comic book industry in general. This list includes Adam Murdough, Andrew J. Friedenthal, Todd Klein, Jim Shooter, Peter Rios, Sean Guynes, Alex Grand, Bill Field, Jim Thompson, Chuck Rozanski, Peter Watson, and David Steel. I couldn't have written this book without you.

Whether or not I have earned the title of "expert" as a result of this journey, I hope that what follows is a fitting tribute to all those who have contributed to this book and to your overall appreciation of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

5 See Ann Larabee, *Decade of Disaster* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999)

6 Friedenthal, 2017, 9.

7 Ibid., 11.

8 Patrick Daniel O'Neill, "Spotlight: DC Crisis," *Comics Interview* No. 26 (1985), 18.

9 Harry Siegel, "Marv Wolfman on What's Got to Die for a New DC World to Live," *Village Voice,* August 31, 2011, https://tinyurl.com/yc37brf6.

INTRODUCTION

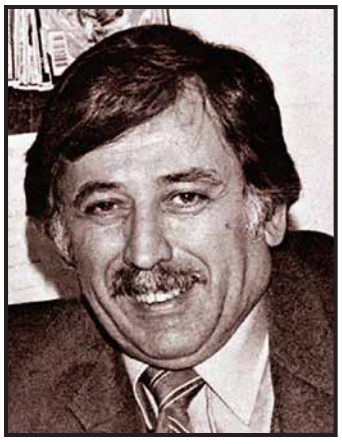
A Permanent Crisis— How Change Became The Norm At DC Comics

Let me take a moment to discuss change. Many people, usually ardent fans of a series, resist change because they fear it will ruin what they have come to love. Yes, this can happen, but since every one of our writers and editors is working with Len, Marv, and me on the projects,[10] we're making sure that the changes will be positive ones.

And they will be permanent ones.

— Dick Giordano

The above quote comes from Dick Giordano's April 1985 "Meanwhile" column, a regular feature in DC comics throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. It provided company news, engaged with readers' questions and concerns, and strove to create a personal connection between DC and its readers, similar to what Stan Lee had been doing since the early 1960s at Marvel. This particular installment is significant because Giordano used it to pitch fans on the dual centerpieces of the company's 50th anniversary celebration, *Who's Who* and *Crisis on Infinite Earths,* which he described as an effort to "salute the best of our past" and "make us viable for the next 50 years—and beyond." Whether Giordano realized the full weight of his words or not, the concepts of *permanence* and *viability* are particularly poignant when one considers the corporate and creative climate in which this column was written, not to mention the notion of *change.*



Dick Giordano (1932–2010) helped shape DC Comics behind the scenes and on the page. Hired as an editor in 1968, he returned in 1980 to oversee the Batman line, then rose to managing editor (1981) and vice president/ executive editor (1983–1993). Along the way he was also a prolific penciler and inker, lending his distinctive finishes to numerous projects during his tenure at the company.

Viability had been an ongoing concern for DC for several years prior to *Crisis.* Over the past two decades, the company had watched its market share steadily decline, while Marvel's sales continued to grow. Just a year prior to when this column was written, DC's parent company, Warner Communications Inc., had formed such a negative outlook on the publisher's prospects that they offered Marvel the opportunity to license DC's seven biggest properties—Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, the Justice League of America, the Legion of Super-Heroes, and the New Teen Titans—and publish them under the Marvel banner. So, even while *Crisis* was in the works, behind the scenes, DC was facing an existential crisis of its own, with the company's very survival teetering on the brink.

Marvel Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter recognized the opportunity immediately, writing to Executive VP of Business Affairs Joe Calamari that DC's best-known characters have "enormous comics sales potential which [DC] seem incapable of developing." Shooter estimated that Marvel could sell 39 million issues of these new titles in the first two years alone, and generate a tidy pre-tax profit of $3.5 million (about $10.5 million in today's dollars). When Shooter's superiors crunched the numbers, they told him his calculations were ridiculous. "We'll do more than *double* these numbers," VP of Circulation Ed Shukin said, barely suppressing a smile.[11]

Despite their growing enthusiasm for the deal, the powers-that-be at Marvel were skittish due to a lawsuit that had been launched against the company by up-and-coming publisher First Comics, producer of creator-owned titles like Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg,* John Ostrander and Timothy Truman's *Grimjack,* and Mike Grell's *Jon Sable*. The suit

10 *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and *Who's Who: The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe*

11 Read Shooter's version of events here: http://jimshooter.com/2011/08/superman-first-marvel-issue.html/.

included accusations of antitrust violations in response to Marvel allegedly flooding the market with titles to prevent new publishers from gaining a foothold. At that time Marvel controlled around 69 percent of the American comic book market—with 70 percent being the threshold for anti-competitive market dominance—while second-place DC was at around 18 percent. As Shooter put it: "I think it's safe to say that when you're being sued under antitrust laws, it's a bad time to devour your largest competitor." Hence, the brass at Marvel felt they had no choice but to back away from the deal.

Shooter wasn't the only person who recognized the unrealized potential of DC's core properties. Regardless of flagging comic book sales in the early 1980s, the company's "big three"—Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman—were still some of the most popular and recognizable characters around, with interest driven by the *Wonder Woman* TV show, the recent string of *Superman* movies, and the *Super Friends* cartoon series and toy line. *The New Teen Titans,* written and illustrated by the same team behind *Crisis,* was also a surprise hit, giving Marvel's best-selling *Uncanny X-Men* a run for its money. Even so, DC's first PR manager, Mike Gold, says the fan perception of DC in the early 1980s was anything but flattering. "Also-rans, old, stuffy, behind the times, and kind of boring," are a few of the words he used to describe DC's image when interviewed for this book. "And there was more than a little truth to those perceptions. Many of the editors had been there since the Beatles first saw musical instruments, and our culture had evolved enormously since those days. It wasn't the continuity per se that was the problem. The problem was that continuity reflected a much older, much stuffier, and often contradictory DC universe. … There was all kinds of young, new talent champing at the bit to make DC exciting, so we had a real opportunity."

Marv Wolfman shared Gold's feelings. Not only did he believe the DCU had become too confusing for new readers, crammed full of parallel universes and doppelgängers of various characters, the company had also failed to grow up alongside its audience. "DC kept writing stories for 8–12-year-olds even though the readership now included high school and college kids who loved Marvel's irreverence and not DC's staid and childish storylines," Wolfman said in a 2019 interview.[12] "Longtime readers had no problem with the DCU, and liked it, but honestly, there weren't enough of them. For DC to thrive we needed to come up with a way of luring Marvel fans over. And that's when I proposed *Crisis*."

In that same article, Paul Levitz, argued that "DC was on an up curve at the time, helped by [Marv's] work with George Pérez on *Teen Titans,* and titles that were effectively catering to the newly growing direct market of comic shops." However, it seems the people in corporate who had pitched the licensing deal to Marvel begged to differ. Hence, if DC hoped to survive, it had to change—and quickly. But how?

This brings us back to the concept of *permanence.*

12 Dana Forsythe, "*Crisis on Infinite Earths* Creators Reflect on the Internal Battles and Major Moments in the Landmark DC Event," *Syfy Wire,* Jan. 22, 2019, http://bit.ly/4447yYA .



Mike Gold (b. 1950) joined DC in 1976 as its first public-relations manager. After co-founding First Comics, he returned to DC in 1986 and as senior editor and group editor/director of editorial development, guiding projects like *Legends*, *The Question*, *Green Arrow: The Longbow Hunters*, and *Hawkworld* while also championing creator-owned sensibilities.

Viewed through over 40 years of post-*Crisis* history, during which DC has repeatedly tried to reboot, reinvent, reset, relaunch, renew, revitalize, refresh, reactivate, rebirth, and retcon virtually every aspect of its storyworld, Giordano's (literally) bold declaration that the changes wrought through *Crisis* would be *permanent*—i.e., irreversible or unalterable—seems hopelessly naïve. Little did he or anyone else involved realize that what was initially proposed as a final solution to the complexity and confusion that riddled the DCU would wind up becoming the very model that multiplied those problems exponentially. Rather than introduce "change as permanence," as Giordano hoped, *Crisis* initiated a seemingly never-ending cycle of "change as norm."

By way of example, look up the Wikipedia entry on DC's 2021 *Infinite Frontier* reboot, and you'll read that not only was it a follow-up to the 2018 *New Justice* relaunch—which was a follow-up to 2016's *DC Rebirth,* which restored the DCU to a state similar to what it was prior to 2011's *Flashpoint,* which was a follow-up to 2008's continuity-altering *Final Crisis,* 2005's *Infinite Crisis,* and 2004's *Identity Crisis*—the continuity repercussions that *Infinite Frontier* created led to the 2023 *Dawn of DC* relaunch. And let's not forget *Dark Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which occurred just one year earlier. Then there are all the other continuity-altering events that happened along the way, including *Legends, Millennium,* and *Invasion!* (all in the 1980s); *War of the Gods*, *Armageddon 2001* and *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time* (both in the 1990s); *Crisis of Conscience* (2005); *52* (2006); *Countdown* (2007); *Blackest Night* (2009); *Brightest Day* (2010); *The New 52* (2011); *Convergence* (2015); *The Darkseid War* (2015–2016); *Dark Nights: Metal* (2017–2018); *Doomsday Clock* (2017–2019); and *Absolute Power*

(opposite page) Jim Shooter's memo. Few people realize how close DC's marquee characters came to being published under the Marvel banner. With DC struggling financially in the early 1980s, discussions took place between Marvel and DC to see if an agreement could be reached. Shooter claimed things advanced to the point that John Byrne came into his office one day with a finished cover for Marvel's first issue of *Superman*, but no evidence of that cover has ever surfaced.

CADENCE **Internal Correspondence**

From Shooter

Date February 21, 1984

To Joe Calamari

Subject Buying DC Comics

I think that we should consider making an offer for DC Comics.

Their recently-published statements of ownership show that their sales are embarrassingly low, and that, almost across the board, they have fallen during the last year.

I think that their best-known characters -- Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern and one or two others have enormous comics sales potential which they seem incapable of developing. We could develop that potential and make a lot of money publishing comics featuring those characters.

I suggest that we license DC's characters for publishing the same way we license the Star Wars characters -- pay them an advance and guarantee against a very small royalty. Let them keep the licensing and merchandising rights (something they insisted upon last time we made a offer, a few years back). Maybe we could negotiate a percentage of any increase in licensing and merchandising revenue for us.

What's in it for Warner Com is, of course, guaranteed no-hassle money -- the elimination of a huge overhead cost and the possibility of new life for their dying properties.

What's in it for us is the money we'd make publishing those characters and the elimination of an irritation. Intelligent and creative editorial management can make the DC characters profitable without hurting our own line.

I've got a plan. If you're interested, let's discuss it!

cc: Mike Hobson

(2024), among others. As Andrew Herbison said in a 2022 article with the hopeful title of "Is DC Abandoning Reboots for Good?", "For nearly 40 years now, [DC's] solution to their most complicated continuity problems was to rewrite reality so that those problems no longer existed."[13]

In his introduction to the *Crisis on Infinite Earths: The Absolute Edition,* Wolfman lamented this unintended consequence of the groundbreaking maxi-series, not only at DC but also across the entire American comic book industry.

> *After the astounding success of* Crisis*—which was created only to simplify the DC universe for new readers—every publisher, even those who were brand-new, jumped onto the bandwagon with a company-changing series of their own, whether they needed to clean house or not. In many ways, I fear the annual stunt has taken over comics publishing. If it isn't big, if heroes don't die, if worlds don't change, then many [people] feel the stories aren't worth reading.*[14]

Dick Giordano made a similar remark in a postscript to the *Absolute Edition.*

> *In many ways,* Crisis *became the template for all crossover series that followed its publication, not only by DC comics but by other publishers as well. Alas, neither we nor they have since put together a crossover series that truly challenged the unique nature of* Crisis*. The reason why is simple … most of the others were constructs rather than a story that needed telling, a story that made permanent, irreversible changes in a superhero universe.*[15]

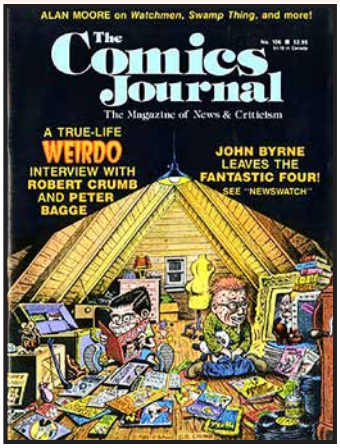
Even some of DC's characters have weighed in on this problem over the years. In *Justice League* #40 (2015) the cosmic observer Metron muses that:

> *The dark secret of existence is that history has been destroyed and then reborn over and over. … And over time, that cycle has accelerated. Because of that acceleration, the fabric of this universe is losing its cohesion. Reality has been taken apart and put back together too many times. Therefore, creation has not only stalled, it is under great threat. … Reality cannot survive another crisis.*

Although Metron appears to be addressing the world in which he lives, it's hard to avoid interpreting this as writer Geoff Johns' thinly veiled criticism of DC's overreliance on event series and reboots, even though this story serves as a prologue to yet another one—and Johns himself played a key role in several previous efforts!

13 Andrew Herbison, "Is DC Abandoning Reboots for Good?", *CBR,* Jan. 29, 2022, https://www.cbr.com/is-dc-abandoning-reboots-for-good/.
14 *Crisis on Infinite Earths: The Absolute Edition* (New York: DC Comics, 2005), 8.
15 Ibid., 357.

***The Comics Journal* #106 (1986), in which Heidi MacDonald published a highly critical review of *Crisis*. *The Comics Journal*, published by Fantagraphics, became the sharpest forum for comics journalism in the 1980s, pairing candid creator interviews with unsparing criticism of Marvel, DC, and the direct market.**



Such unintended consequences aside, the notion of permanent, irreversible change was exactly what *Crisis,* or any other proposed solution to DC's economic woes in the early 1980s, required if the company hoped to survive. Modest, incremental modifications wouldn't cut it. The only way for the series to achieve the level of gravitas required to prove that DC was serious about reinventing itself would be to convince readers that once the story was over, there was no going back.

The problem is, as the numerous attempts to replicate the success of *Crisis* over the decades have revealed, once the stakes are raised to such a high level, there's nowhere left to go. "Each subsequent crossover event brings diminishing returns," comic book creator and commentator Tom Kaczynski says. "If every event changes everything, then everything after every event is a rerun."[16] Hence, subsequent promises that "The explosive finale of *Absolute Power* will change the DC Universe forever!", as the August 2024 issue of *DC Connect* claimed, sound increasingly hollow. Peter Sanderson, who did the original research on which *Crisis* and *Who's Who* was based, summed up many readers' feelings about this problem: "DC's continual revamps are a mistake. It's like, 'Don't get too attached to any one story at DC anymore because, wait a few years, and they'll undo it.'"[17]

In a caustic review of *Crisis* published in the March 1986 issue of *Comics Journal*, critic Heidi MacDonald describes *Crisis* as "a book born of desperation. It's the work of men with nothing to lose."[18] That may have been true on a corporate level, but just as necessity is the mother of invention, so can desperation push individuals to seek out innovative and creative solutions to their problems that they wouldn't have dared to consider. While MacDonald goes on to argue that *Crisis* left the DCU "a smaller place, a sadder place," over four decades of fandom beg to differ. Not even Wolfman and Pérez would argue that the series is perfect. In fact, Pérez was already pointing out glaring errors in *Crisis* within months of

16 Tom Kaczynski, "Infinite Crisis: Universe as Product," *Comics Journal,* August 6, 2020, https://www.tcj.com/infinite-crisis-universe-as-product/.
17 Comic Book Historians, "Peter Sanderson Biographical Interview," October 15, 2023, YouTube video, 1:16:46, https://youtu.be/l45lrOIqx5U.
18 Heidi MacDonald, "Crises at Infinite Companies," *Comics Journal* #106 (March 1986), 36.

the final issue's release![19] But its lasting impact—evident in the countless reprints, rereleases, references, adaptations, analyses, and parodies—suggest that something much more significant than desperation lurks at its core.

Notwithstanding the bleak market realities for DC at the time that *Crisis* was created, it wasn't just fear or greed that motivated those involved. Instead, it was a deep, abiding love for the characters, the concepts, and the stories that make up the DCU, alongside a desire to see them thrive into the next century. "*Crisis* was made so that the men who made *Crisis* could experience the pleasure of making *Crisis*," *Comics Journal* writer Tegan O'Neil says, adding that "a book like that could only come from a place of deep love. … It's a passion project of a very specific type of passion, an incredible effort that could only have been the fruit of years and years of monkish devotion and research on the part of every single person involved."[20]

While there's no question that the series ultimately made a lot of money for DC, Wolfman said the thought of getting rich off the project was the furthest thing from his mind. "Let me state, right off the top, when I first proposed the concept and presented it to Len Wein, and we presented it to Jenette [Kahn]—that was before royalties. We had no anticipation of making any money. In fact, Len and I thought we'd be splitting our page rate, since we were writing it together. We thought it would be a money loser for us."[21]

In the introduction to the *Absolute Edition,* Wolfman added that, "*Crisis on Infinite Earths* was, in many ways, not just a job, but a calling: the story I had wanted to write ever since I was a kid reading comic books on my stoop … in Brooklyn, New York." He went on to describe his affinity for the team-up books of the 1960s and 1970s that united the Justice League of America (JLA) with their Golden Age counterparts, the Justice Society of America (JSA), among other groups. However, as a self-described "greedy" fan, Wolfman "always wanted to see a single story featuring all the DC superheroes from the past, present, and future."

That idea stuck with Wolfman as he grew up and became a professional writer, and the concept finally found a home at DC, the very company whose comics had ignited Wolfman's passion for such an epic tale. And his vision found the perfect partner in George Pérez, another fan turned pro who had already positioned himself as a team book specialist at Marvel and DC, his lifelong dream to pencil an issue of *Justice League of America*.

Wolfman and Pérez's love of comics extended beyond the DCU to the medium as a whole, the unique storytelling opportunities that comic books offer, and the sense of community, identity, and camaraderie that comes from a shared enjoyment of a fictional world. And it was this love, along with the scope and ambition of the series, that resonated with millions of readers. While *Crisis* might have failed in its original goal to create a single universe free of continuity problems, comics scholar Julian Darius argues that it succeeded in other unanticipated ways.



Dan Jurgens helped define modern DC by creating Booster Gold, co-creating Doomsday, and becoming a principal architect of *The Death of Superman*. As a writer and artist, he shaped Superman's mythology and DC's post-*Crisis* identity, blending strong storytelling, superhero spectacle, and commercially seismic event-making across decades of work for readers.

> *[T]he ambition of* Crisis *and the opportunities it provided attracted top-notch creators to the company, eager to chronicle these characters afresh.* Batman: The Dark Knight *and* Watchmen*, published during and after* Crisis*, got more critical acclaim, but the three—along with the new creative directions* Crisis *allowed—made DC the place for cutting-edge comics, routinely beating Marvel creatively, though not financially, for the next decade and a half.*[22]

Despite the outpouring of support that *Crisis* received, the changes it brought to the DCU weren't universally embraced by ardent fans. Even some of Wolfman and Pérez's fellow creators at DC questioned or resented them. "My general thought at the time was I didn't think DC's continuity was a barrier," creator Dan Jurgens said when interviewed for this book. "If we did better comics, I thought we could overcome that. But I also think that notion became something people could latch onto to give *Crisis* more of a reason for existing."

Like it or not, in a quest for viability, the series accidentally stumbled upon a whole new type of permanence in the DCU and beyond, the consequences of which we're still coming to terms with. As Kaczynski says, "In the end, *COIE* … succeeded too well. It did not usher in a new consistent continuity—a new normal—but the exact opposite: the ongoing addiction to continuity-shattering, multi-issue crossover events. A permanent crisis, if you will."

To help understand how that happened, this book tells the story of how DC's multiverse evolved, why creators like Wolfman came to see it as a bug rather than a feature, why *Crisis* was proposed as the best solution to this perceived problem, how the series came together, and why it still matters. By the end of this journey, we'll have a much better understanding of *Crisis* and how change, permanence, and viability have worked for and against DC throughout the company's long, colorful, and complex history.

19 See Mark Waid's interview with him in the March 15, 1986, issue of *Amazing Heroes.*

20 Tegan O'Neil, "Crisis in Time," *Comics Journal,* April 6, 2018, https://www.tcj.com/crisis-in-time/.

21 O'Neill, 17.

22 Julian Darius, *Classics on Infinite Earths* (Edwardsville, IL: Sequart, 2015), 184.

PART I

PRE-*CRISIS* FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 1

Accidentally Infinite— The Early Origins Of Dc's Continuity Crisis

When most people think about who got the ball rolling on *Crisis*, Marv Wolfman is the first name that leaps to mind. And so it should, seeing as he was the one who finally convinced DC to take a story-based approach to cleaning up the company's tortuous continuity.[23] But according to Wolfman himself, *Crisis* owes its genesis to another individual entirely—Gary Thompson of Dearborn, Michigan.[24] That's because it was Gary's letter in *Green Lantern* #143 (1981), which pointed out a continuity error in *Green Lantern* issues #136 and 137 (written by Wolfman), that finally made Marv declare that enough was enough. Here is Gary's letter in full, with the second paragraph being of most importance.

> *Dear DC;*
>
> *Green Lantern's futuristic epic in #136–137 was simply superb. It was a little depressing to learn that the Gordanians will still be buzzing around centuries from now. You mean the* TEEN TITANS *are* never *going to get rid of those pests?*
>
> *What I found interesting was Myra's explanation for why they failed to recognize Green Lantern: "And records don't exist before … the GREAT DISASTER!" (which should indicate that Space Ranger and Iona Vane follow the OMAC-KAMANDI-JAXON timelines). However, Myra evidently didn't have access to* SHOWCASE *100. In their first team-up they do recognize each other. Oh, well, maybe JCH [editor Jack C. Harris] can come up with a clever explanation to bail out Marv.*

After acknowledging that Gary wasn't the only reader to spot this gaffe, Wolfman appears to have written off his concern, saying the story was merely a "fun get-together," what longtime DC editor Mort Weisinger might have termed an "imaginary story," a non-canonical "what if" scenario. Therefore, it "should not be considered as part of the 'DC true mythos.'" This term was apparently meant to refer to what we might call "canon" today, that is, "the body of works taking place in a particular fictional world that are widely considered to be official or authoritative," as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it. Or perhaps a better term might be "continuity," which scholar Adam C. Murdough defines as "the idea that every story told about a particular character becomes an indelible part of a historically established timeline of events for that character, to which future stories may make reference, but which no future story may ignore or contradict."[25]

Following this apparent dismissal, Wolfman went on to muse that, "One day … we (meaning the DC editorial we) will probably straighten out what is in the DC universe, excluding that which isn't in direct reference with Earth One and what



Marv Wolfman, 1982. Photo by Alan Light. Wolfman (b. 1946) aspired to be an artist before fandom led him into writing, including his fanzine *Stories of Suspense*, which published an early Stephen King story. He went on to become a major comics writer at Marvel (*The Tomb of Dracula*) and DC, where he and George Pérez revitalized The New Teen Titans prior to collaborating on *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

23 Wolfman wasn't the first person to approach DC with such a pitch. Gerry Conway often joked about taking a "big bang" approach in the 1970s that would reset the clock on the DC universe. "We'd sit around bullshitting," Paul Levitz recalled in an interview conducted for this book. "And these were the sort of questions we'd ask. What would make things better?" Even Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter made this suggestion to publisher Jenette Kahn shortly after she took on the job. But not until Wolfman's pitch did DC officially decide to run with the idea.

24 While attempting to track down Gary to interview him for this book, I discovered that he passed away on Sept. 10, 2023, at age sixty-six.

25 Adam Murdough, "World Will Live, Worlds Will Die: Myth, Meta-text, Continuity, and Cataclysm in DC Comics' *Crisis on Infinite Earths,*" Master's Thesis, Bowling Green University, 2006, 3.

is outside." Although the latter part of Wolfman's response is somewhat opaque, it's safe to say that he meant one day DC would find a way to clean up its disjointed continuity. Not only were such errors a perpetual irritant to longtime readers like Gary, there was a growing sense amongst DC's editorial staff that the company's byzantine fictional universe was also posing a barrier to new readers, which the company needed desperately if it hoped to avoid being subsumed by Marvel.

Little did Gary or anyone else at the time realize that "one day" would become "*that* very day," as Wolfman put it in his introduction to *Crisis On Infinite Earths Companion Vol. 1*.

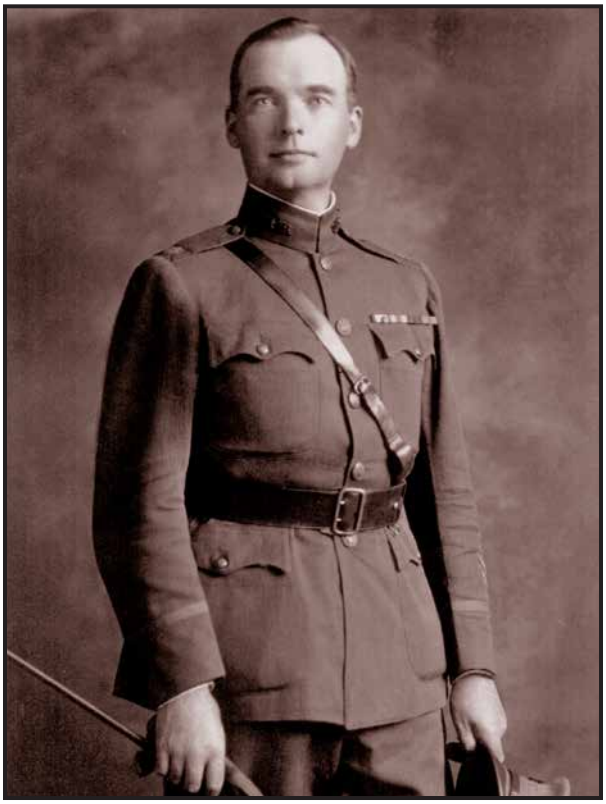
> *While I was waiting for the train to take me and other DC folk to a convention in Pennsylvania, the entire concept of CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS ignited in my mind.*
>
> *The following Monday, I pitched the idea to DC president Jenette Kahn and editor-in-chief Dick Giordano, and they immediately agreed.*
>
> *And the DC Universe would never be the same.*

This question is, how did DC's continuity become so convoluted in the first place, leading Marv and others to believe that such extreme measures were necessary to correct it? One way to answer this query is to say it was an accident of history. Unlike the Marvel universe, which was the brainchild of a handful of people—namely, Stan Lee and his close collaborators, Jack Kirby, Joe Simon, and Steve Ditko—the DCU had numerous founding fathers over several decades, many of whom were highly territorial and loathe to collaborate with one another. Combined with the complex origin of DC Comics itself, which is as twisting and labyrinthine as any fictional world that the company created, the genesis of the DC universe, inasmuch as one can even call the world(s) that DC's original characters inhabited at first a "universe," was hardly the product of a well-orchestrated plan, if any thought was given to it at all.

Another response is to say that DC's confounding continuity was an inadvertent side effect of the effort to provide a plausible explanation for the discontinuities created by the DCU's incidental evolution. As comic writer Grant Morrison puts it, "DC's incoherent origins formed an archipelago of island concepts that were slowly bolted together to create a mega-continuity involving multiple parallel worlds that could not only make sense of pre-Silver Age versions of characters like the Flash, but also fit new acquisitions from defunct companies into a framework that made Marvel's universe look provincial."[26]

Seeking to forge a narrative connection between the "islands" of DC's past and present, the seemingly simple suggestion put forward by editor Julius Schwartz that DC's Silver Age heroes exist on one earth while their Golden Age counterparts exist on another—first proposed in *The Flash* #123 (1961)—didn't close the gap so much as blow it wide open, unleashing a flood of new narrative possibilities that no one had previously considered. As former DC vice president and publisher Paul Levitz put it when interviewed for this book, "This is a universe that was never meant to be unified. It wasn't created with that goal."

To understand why this attempt at unification happened anyway and how it went astray, we begin by delving into the earliest days of DC Comics to see how the DCU was born. Once we have a clearer picture of this "accidental" phase of the DCU's evolution, we'll move on to the "intentional" phase to see how the attempt to create a more coherent fictional world fixed some problems, but also led to a host of unintended consequences. By the time this process is complete, it will be much clearer why *Crisis* was proposed as the best way to fix these problems, and why that apparently simple solution triggered yet another cascade of subsequent crises that seems as infinite as the very multiverse that the Anti-Monitor tried to destroy.



Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson (1890–1965), founded National Allied Publications in 1935, the seed of DC Comics. He launched *New Fun*, the first comic book made entirely of original material, as well as *Detective Comics*.

Although 1985 is heralded as the 50th anniversary of DC Comics, no company by that name existed in 1935. However, one of a handful of companies that was amalgamated into the entity that eventually became known as DC Comics did. That company was National Allied Publications, founded by Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson (1890–1965).

Following a colorful career in the US Cavalry, Wheeler-Nicholson returned home in the early 1920s and reinvented himself as an author. In addition to writing adventure stories for pulp magazines like *Argosy* and *Adventure*, he also created a comic

26 Grant Morrison, *Supergods* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2012), 114.

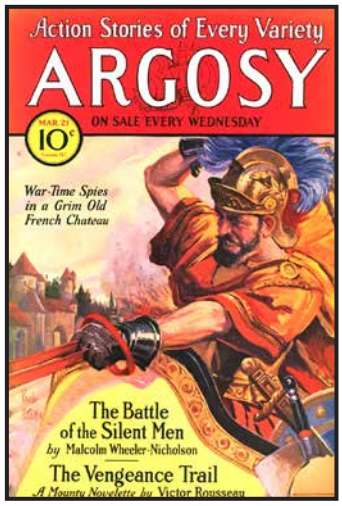


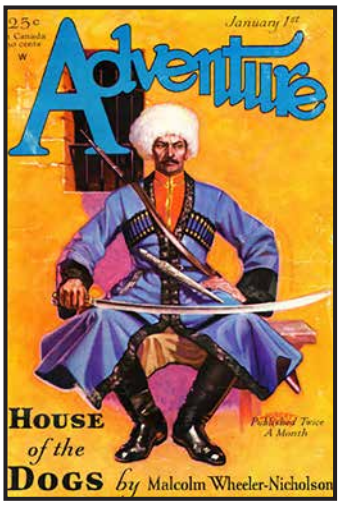
strip adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, hoping to cash in on the growing interest in newspaper strips.

The late 1920s and the early 1930s marked a turning point for Wheeler-Nicholson, and comics in general, with the release of a series of publications that laid the foundations for what we know as comic books today. While books that reprinted newspaper strips had been around for decades, they were just that—books, printed and priced like other hardcover books, which put them out of the reach of working-class consumers. That began to change in 1922 with the release of *Comic Monthly,* a selection of the previous year's most popular newspaper strips. The goal was to widen the audience for these comics by printing them on cheap paper and selling them on newsstands for ten cents a pop (about $1.50 in today's money). The experiment only lasted a year, but it was a crucial step in the development of the comic book.

The next significant publication in this regard was *The Funnies* (1929), devised by Dell Publishing to test the idea of distributing a weekly comic publication to newsstands. It featured 16 pages of original material, and was essentially "a Sunday comic section without the rest of the newspaper."[27] Apparently, it was a little too similar to the Sunday supplement, because people were hesitant to pay for something that they felt should've been included for free with their weekend newspaper.

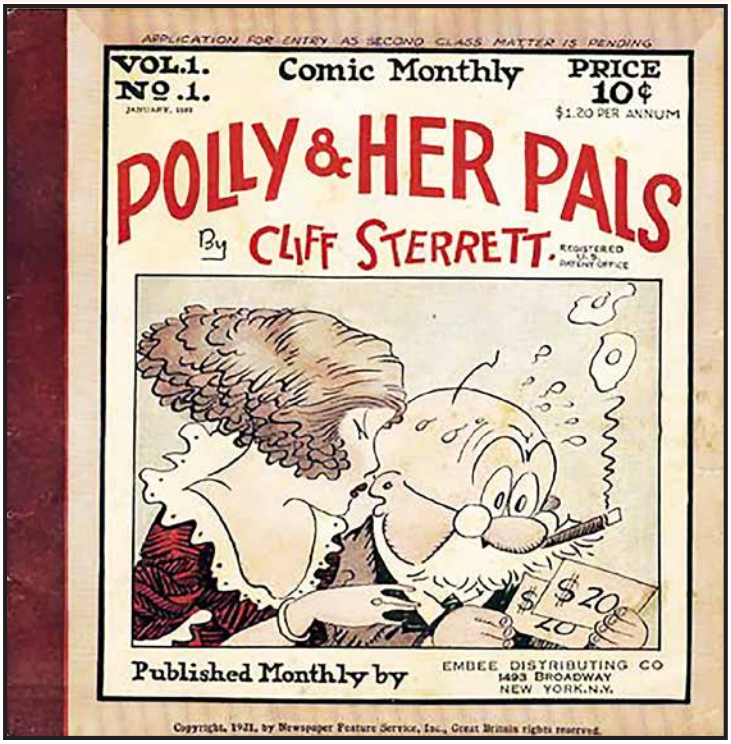
Unwilling to give up on the concept, in 1933, Harry I. Wildenberg, a salesman for Eastern Color Printing Company,





(top) In 1925, years before founding DC's forerunner, Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson syndicated a daily comic-strip adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Running from October 19, 1925 ,into early 1926, it helped test his ambitions in mass-market comics and classic-story serialization newspapers. (bottom) *Argosy* and *Adventure* helped define the American pulp era, establishing a mass market for serialized fiction, especially action, mystery, and science-fiction. They also launched major writers and shaped the cliffhanger-driven storytelling that carried over into comics, radio, film serials, and paperbacks.

27 Ron Goulart, *Comic Book Encyclopedia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 163.





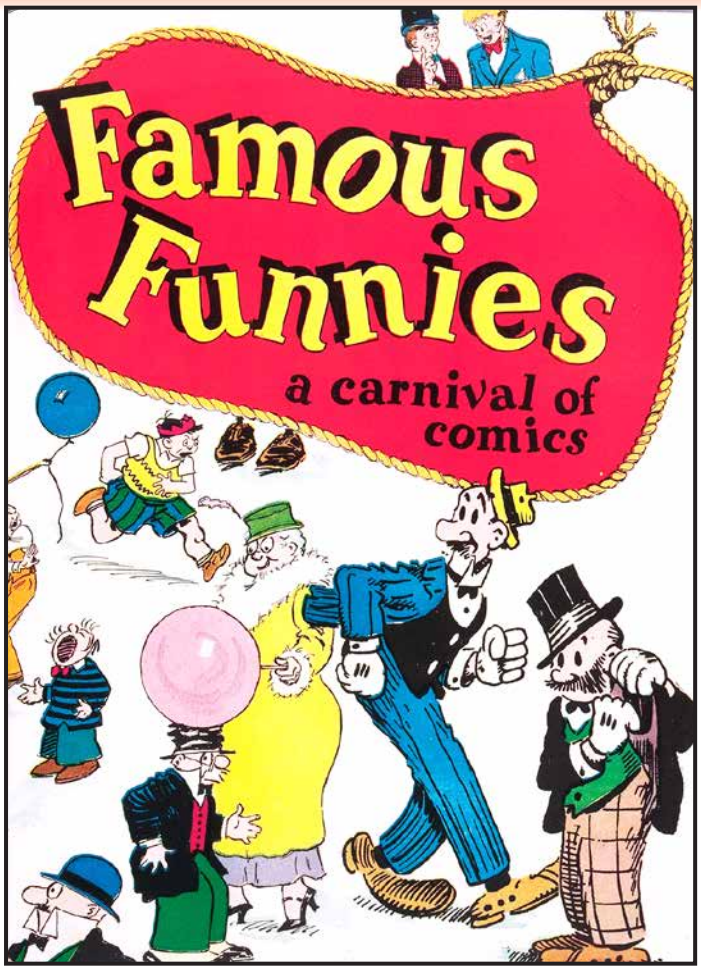
(top left) *Comic Monthly* (1922) is often cited as the first monthly comic book, packaging newspaper strips into a newsstand-friendly format. Distributed in drugstores, department stores, and trains, it helped prove comics could be sold like magazines, paving the way for the monthly comic-book business model. (bottom left) Launched in 1933 as *Gulf Comic Weekly* (soon retitled *Gulf Funny Weekly*), this four-page, tabloid-sized giveaway at Gulf service stations reached millions—advertised at 2.7 million weekly circulation by 1938. Produced by Eastern Color, it proved comics could be mass-distributed as premiums and helped pioneer the promotional-comics model nationwide.

which printed *The Funnies* for Dell, sold Gulf Oil on the idea of giving away a free comic book with every fill-up. Called *The Gulf Funny Weekly,* it reprinted several popular newspaper strips, and was a quarter the size of a regular newspaper (approximately 8" x 11") and stapled in the middle. The promotion ran for 13 weeks and served as a successful proof of concept, so Wildenberg and one of his employees, Max C. Gaines, took the idea to Proctor and Gamble, convincing the company to give away copies of a new publication called *Funnies on Parade* in exchange for a mail-in coupon. The 32-page publication was cheap to print because it was small enough that eight pages could be printed on one sheet of standard-size newsprint, and it could be done during Eastern Color's third shift, when business was slow. It was cheaper to keep the presses rolling 24/7 than to stop and restart them each day, so printers were always looking for new opportunities to keep production going.

That book also found an audience, and it soon led to the publication of *Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics,* considered to be the first official comic book, in 1933. Thirty-six pages long, its first print run was 100,000 copies. According to legend, Gaines came across some extra bundles of *Famous Funnies* in a warehouse, decided to put a ten-cent sticker on them, then took them to a few local newsstands to see how they did. The comics sold out over the weekend, and the vendors clamored for more, leading Gaines to realize he had just stumbled across an entirely new revenue stream.



Max Gaines (1894–1947) was a key architect of the modern comic book. At Eastern Color in 1933, he helped create *Funnies on Parade*, then partnered with Dell on *Famous Funnies*. He later co-founded All-American Publications, which launched characters such as Green Lantern and Wonder Woman.



Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics (1933) was Eastern Color's proto-comic book, reprinting newspaper strips in a stapled, magazine-like package that was sold and used as a giveaway premium. This early experiment helped prove that the format could work on a national scale, directly leading to the ongoing Famous Funnies series launched in 1934, a key milestone in the development of modern comic books.

That same year, Dell published *Famous Funnies: Series 1*, a combination of reprints and original strips. Even though its 35,000-issue print run sold out, Dell was reluctant to continue with the venture, so they gave the rights to Eastern Color. They distributed 250,000 copies of *Famous Funnies: Series 2* to newsstands across the country in the spring of 1934. By the sixth issue, they turned a profit, and by the twelfth issue, *Famous Funnies* was netting Eastern Color about $30,000 each month (around $720,000 in 2026 dollars). Most importantly, it proved that people were willing to pay for material that had already been published in newspapers. If that was the case, Wheeler-Nicholson thought, would they be willing to pay for original material too?

He decided to find out by releasing *New Fun: The Big Comic Magazine* in 1935 (with the title changed to *More Fun* as of issue #5). The mostly black-and-white comics were one-page stories that were originally developed for newspapers. Rather than license existing material, Wheeler-Nicholson sought out comics that had been rejected by the syndicates, picking them up for cheap. Because *New Fun/More Fun* was published in a tabloid-style format (10" x 15"), and most of the strips were originally developed for newspapers, which were larger, the comics often didn't reach to the bottom of the page. Therefore, ads—a new innovation in comic books—and an Oswald the Lucky Rabbit strip by Walt Disney and Ub Iwerk were added to fill the empty space.

The comics in *New Fun/More Fun* spanned a wide range of genres, from funny animal tales to Westerns to science-fiction stories. While only a handful of these characters endured for more than a few issues, *More Fun* #6 (1935) is notable for introducing a character who plays a pivotal role in defeating the Anti-Monitor in *Crisis*—Doctor Occult. He was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (under a pseudonym) and published three years before the Man of Steel's debut in *Action Comics* #1. The "Doctor Occult" strip was the first original material commissioned for *More Fun,* which is why many people regard this issue as the beginning of the DCU. He also donned a superhero-like costume, complete with a flowing cape and a symbol on his bare chest, for issues 14 to 17, making him look remarkably similar to Siegel and Shuster's first iteration of Superman.

Doubling down on his gamble, Wheeler-Nicholson brought out a second title, *New Comics,* in 1935. By issue #12 it was renamed *New Adventure Comics* and then *Adventure Comics* by issue #32 (The title lasted for almost 50 years, ceasing publication in 1983 before being brought back from 2009–2011.) Like *New Fun, Adventure Comics* featured an anthology of genres, but instead of single-page episodes, the stories ran for two or more pages each.

Although no one can question Wheeler-Nicholson's enthusiasm, he faced the unfortunate situation of being a few years ahead of his time. Newsstand owners were hesitant to stock a magazine that featured unfamiliar comics from an unknown publisher, especially when similar publications featuring popular characters from newspapers were readily available. Wheeler-Nicholson had also overextended himself financially by launching multiple titles before he had a reliable revenue stream to support them. The costs associated with producing comic books were high. Unfortunately, so was the growing number of returns as his titles failed to catch on, putting Wheeler-Nicholson in an increasingly precarious position.

Perhaps thinking the third time would be the charm, in 1937 he launched *Detective Comics*. This was yet another anthology series, but unlike his previous titles, it was the first comic book based around a single theme. Pulp magazines featuring the word "detective" in the title were hot, so taking the same approach with a comic book seemed like a no-brainer. *Detective Comics* also distinguished itself by featuring longer stories and breaking away from the newspaper strip layout, which featured rows of small, uniformly shaped panels. "The Claws of the Red Dragon" in issue #3 is a good example of these innovative layouts, as is another pre-Superman Siegel and Shuster creation, "Slam Bradley," with their story in *Detective Comics* #2 being a prime

National Periodical PUBLICATIONS INC.

AN ALL-AMERICAN PUBLICATION

A DC PUBLICATION

Examples of early logos for National Periodicals Publications Inc. and it's sister company, All-American, which eventually merged into the company we know as DC Comics today, although that name didn't become official until the mid-1970s.

specimen. *Detective* also marked a move away from humor, its stories striking a more sinister tone.

To launch the new title, Wheeler-Nicholson formed a partnership with his primary creditor, Independent News, one of the many publishing and distribution companies owned by Harry Donenfeld, who ran it alongside his partner, Jack Liebowitz. They registered their new venture as Detective Comics Inc. Shortly after the publication of *Detective Comics* #1, however, Wheeler-Nicholson was forced to declare bankruptcy, so Donenfeld and Liebowitz seized National Allied Publications and its assets, merged it with Detective Comics Inc., and renamed it National Comics Publications.

A year after the success of Superman's debut in *Action Comics* #1 (1938), Max C. Gaines approached Donenfeld about forming his own company, All-American Publications, which would focus exclusively on comic books. An enthusiastic early proponent of the medium, Gaines was confident that comics could make a positive contribution to society—and generate a lot of money in the process. National Comics Publications and All-American Publications operated as sister companies for six years until Gaines sold out to Liebowitz in 1944. Following the merger, National Comics Publications became National Periodical Publications Inc.

In case any of this is confusing, we started with Wheeler-Nicholson's National Allied Publications, which partnered with Independent News to form Detective Comics Inc. After Wheeler-Nicholson went bankrupt, Detective Comics Inc. merged with National Allied Publications to become National Comics Publications. Once it merged with All-American Publications, National Comics Publications became National Periodical Publications Inc.



***New Fun* #1 was cover-dated February 1935 and hit newsstands on January 11, 1935, published by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's National Allied Publications (the seed of DC). It was among the first US comic books made entirely of original material rather than newspaper-strip reprints, helping establish the format, business model, and editorial pipeline that soon led to *Detective Comics* and *Action Comics*.**

As for when the name "DC" first showed up, in 1940 National started putting a seal on the cover of each issue that said, "A DC Publication." As Superman grew in popularity, in 1941 the seal was changed to "A Superman DC Publication." Then in 1949, the seal was changed to "A Superman DC National Publication." As a result, from the early 1940s onward, people tended to refer to National as "DC," although the company didn't officially adopt the name until 1977. Therefore, while one could say DC began with the publication of *New Fun* #1 in 1935, the actual date when the company that we now know as DC Comics was established is somewhat nebulous, with perhaps a better year being 1937, when Detective Comics Inc. was founded.

Considering the Frankenstein nature of all these mergers and acquisitions (with more to come), it's hard to say if any thought was given to how the various characters and worlds featured in National's four original anthology titles—*New Fun, New Adventure Comics, Detective Comics,* and *Action Comics*—fit together. Remember, many of the comics featured in the early issues of *New Fun* were newspaper rejects rather than titles developed specifically for *New Fun*, so it wasn't as if any of the creators were working according to a master editorial plan. Plus, considering the wide variety of genres represented—funny animal stories, detective thrillers, caveman tales, literary adaptations, and outer-space adventures—asking whether these characters inhabited the same world or even an amalgam of parallel universes would have seemed like a ludicrous question. Rather than focus on forging a single, coherent storyworld or even a multiverse of storyworlds, the primary concern was filling the pages with a wide variety of material that met a minimum standard of quality, hoping that at least some of the characters would resonate enough with readers to finance the next issue. No one was certain if comic books would even be around in a year, much less nearly a century later, so angst-ridden questions about long-term continuity that afflicted creators and readers later was the furthest thing from anyone's mind.

But thanks to a certain caped crusader's leap onto the scene, all that was about to change—faster than a speeding bullet.

CHAPTER 2

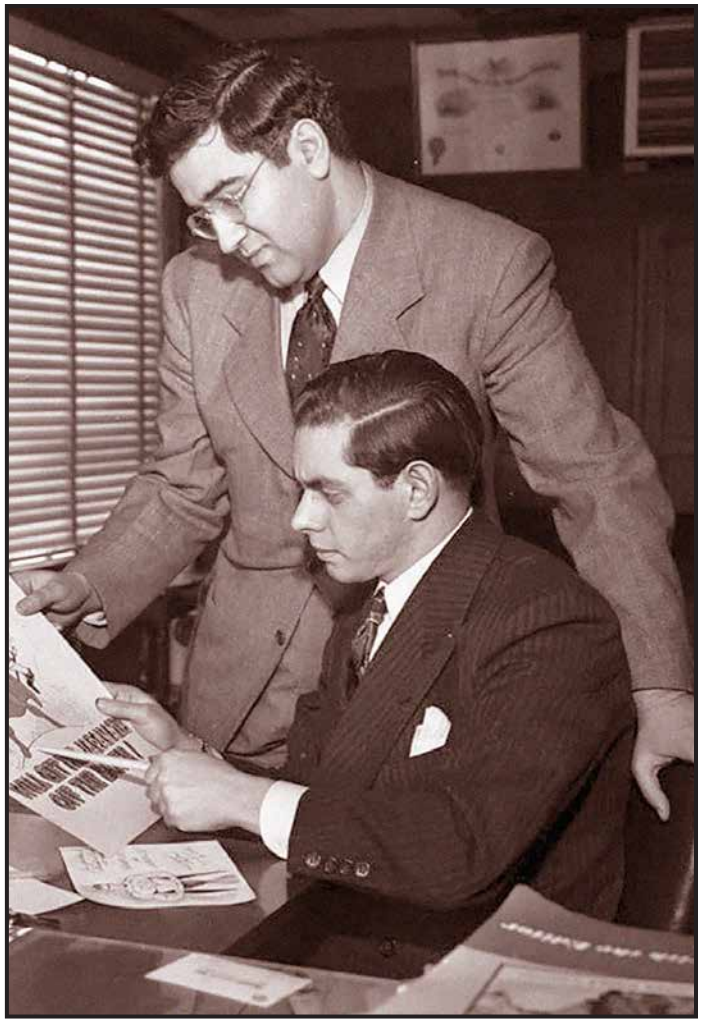
Crude Icons And Cultural Earthquakes— The Rise Of The Superhero

Perceptions regarding the viability of comic books underwent a marked shift in the spring of 1938 with the publication of *Action Comics* #1, famous for the first appearance of the character who almost single handedly gave birth to his own genre—Superman.

On the surface, Superman shared many key elements with the numerous pulp fiction and newspaper strip heroes who preceded him, including an adherence to a strict moral code, a tendency to take the law into his own hands, battles against criminals and corrupt authority figures, and an alter ego and/or a disguise that kept his crime-fighting activities separate from his civilian life. However, a few key characteristics set Superman apart.

First, while most of his pulp fiction predecessors were ordinary humans who relied on exceptional skills or gadgets, Superman was an immigrant from another planet. And due to his alien origin, he possessed phenomenal powers, including super strength and super speed, the ability to leap incredible distances, and enhanced invulnerability. Also, unlike contemporary characters such as Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, and John Carter, whose adventures occurred in otherworldly settings, Superman's escapades took place in a world just like our own. As Jerry Siegel stated in his unpublished autobiography, *Creation of a Superhero,* he saw this as one of the keys to Superman's appeal: "why not have a comics hero's astounding adventures take place right here on Earth … He would battle the type of wrongs we read about in our daily newspapers. He would use his magnificent abilities to help ordinary people like you and me. I figured a lot of people could identify with that."

Like many world-changing innovations, the revolutionary nature of Superman's arrival wasn't recognized at first. Although *Action Comics* #1 sold 64 percent of its 200,000-issue print run (with 50 percent being the break-even point), it took a while for National to realize that Superman was the character responsible. That's partly because even though the 13-page Superman tale was the lead story, and a panel from that story was adapted for the cover, *Action*



Jerry Siegel (1914–1996) (seated) and Joe Shuster (1914–1992), two teenagers from Cleveland, created Superman and helped ignite the superhero age. They debuted the Man of Steel in *Action Comics* #1 (1938), blending pulp science-fiction, newspaper-strip dynamism and Depression-era wish fulfillment into a new kind of modern myth.

Comics was an anthology magazine, featuring ten other stories that *didn't* include superheroes.

It probably didn't help that the first Superman story is disjointed, strange, and crudely drawn, with nothing on the face of it to indicate that Superman is poised to become one of most iconic characters of all time. One of the reasons for this "homemade" look was that the story was cobbled together using pages that Siegel and Joe Shuster had submitted to various newspaper publishers over the past five years, along with some new material that they banged out at the last minute. As Siegel said, "Joe and I took the daily strips of 'Superman', which were drawn in newspaper style format, cut up the panels, and pasted them into comic book page form. We also added a couple of original drawings." Apart from this cut-and-paste approach, the art looks shoddy and unfinished. It's also full of inconsistencies, including several panels where Shuster neglected to draw Superman's cape. Sometimes the emblem is missing on his chest too, and the red "S" in the middle of his emblem doesn't show up until the final panel. Plus, in the first of a trio of panels where Superman hoists the criminals' car over his head, it looks like he has a receding hairline.



Joe Shuster original art for *Funnyman* #2 (Magazine Enterprises, 1948). Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Shuster is credited for layouts while John Sikela reportedly finished the pencils and the Siegel and Shuster Studio supplied inks. An example of Shuster serving as architect instead of solo artist.

Also, unlike later iterations of the character as the embodiment of truth, justice, and dignity, Superman comes across as coarse and brutish, taking sadistic joy in the opportunity to destroy property and terrorize his foes, which could be a carry-over from Siegel's previous versions of Superman, in which he was as a villain rather than a hero. Rather than offend, Gerard Jones argues that these crude tactics and the enjoyment Superman derived from them could have been the very thing that resonated with young readers. "The Superman as practical joker was something new," he says. "This may have been the most important gift Jerry and Joe could bring, the moment when their unbreakable boyishness lifted them above all the self-important hero makers of the adult world: the sheer delight in having all the power a kid could wish for."[28]

Explanations for Superman's appeal aside, to illustrate how long it took National to catch on to the Man of Steel's commercial potential, he didn't appear on the cover again until issue #7, and he didn't become the permanent cover character until issue #19. Starting with issue #10, however, a banner or a vignette appeared on each cover, promising, "Superman! Appearing in this issue and every issue!"

This delay could have been intentional on publisher Harry Donenfeld's part, with longtime DC editor Sheldon Mayer remembering that when Donenfeld "first saw that cover of Superman holding that car in the air, he really got worried. He felt nobody would believe it; that it was ridiculous … crazy."[29] However, as R. C. Harvey notes in his detailed investigation into who discovered Superman, this hesitation on Donenfeld's part is disputed.[30] Donenfeld must have suspected something was up, though, because he issued a newsstand survey to find out why *Action*



Harry Donenfeld (1893–1965) was the hard-driving publisher who, with Jack Liebowitz, turned Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's struggling venture into National/DC. He co-financed and marketed *Detective Comics*, *Superman*, and *Batman*, helping build the company's Golden Age powerhouse of titles.

28 Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 125.
29 Anthony Tollin, "Mayer," *Amazing World of DC Comics* Vol. 2, No. 5, March–April 1975, 4.
30 R. C. Harvey, "Who Discovered Superman," *Comics Journal,* January 6, 2014, https://www.tcj.com/who-discovered-superman.



DC's early publishing brain trust (left to right): Robert Maxwell, Paul Sampliner, Harry Donenfeld, Jack Liebowitz, M.C. (Max) Gaines, and Whitney Ellsworth—executives and editors who steered National/DC through the late 1930s–1940s boom, from newsstand distribution and business expansion to shaping the company's editorial direction.

Comics was surging in popularity versus National's other titles. He also ran a questionnaire in *Action Comics* #4, offering prizes to readers for listing their five favorite stories out of the eight that were included in that issue. "Of the 542 responses," Harvey says, "404 listed Superman first; another 59, second." As for the newspaper survey, "Children were clamoring not for *Action Comics,* but for 'that magazine with Superman on it.'"[31]

Even though it took a while for people to realize what was happening, no one can dispute that when *Action Comics* #1 hit the newsstands, a new type of hero and an entirely new genre of storytelling was born, with comic books going on to reach an unprecedented level of popularity over the next few years. To get a sense of how significant this impact was, Wonder Woman creator William Moulton Marston, who had been researching comic book sales for over a year by 1940, said:

> *There are about 108 comics magazines on the newsstands. Sales figures show that between 10,000,000 and 12,000,000 [comics] magazines are sold every month ... There are, besides, another 3 million or 4 million comics magazines sold quarterly. Surveys show that on average four children read every book sold. That makes it a total of somewhere between 40,000,000 and 50,000,000 juvenile readers per month. And another 12,000,000 to 16,000,000 readers every three months.*[32]

31 Ron Goulart, *Great American Comic Books* (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, 2001), 78.

32 Marston, 10.



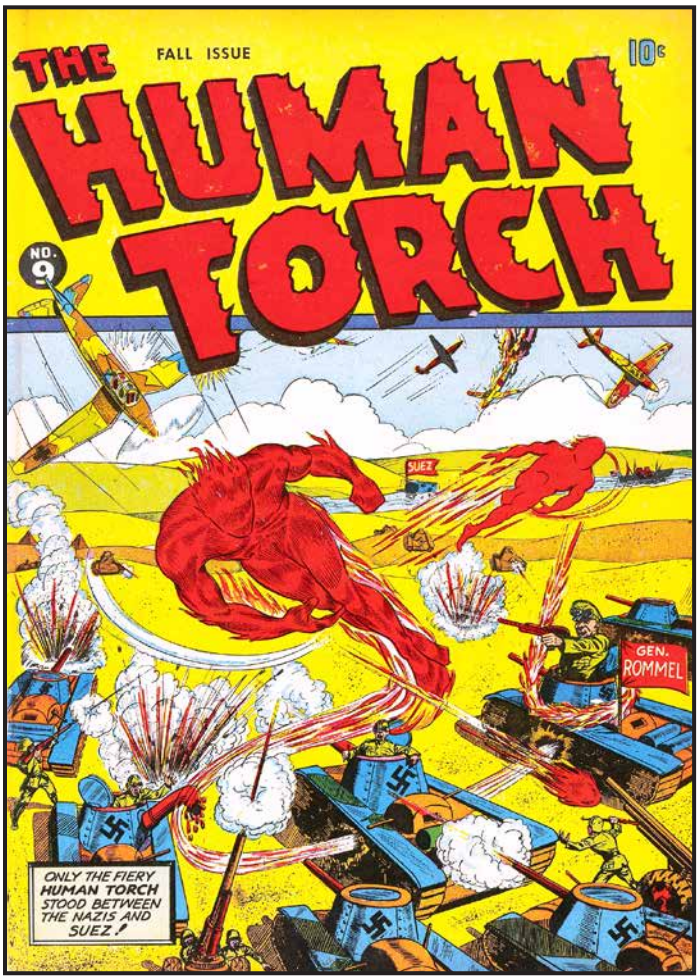
Magazines and comic books at a newsstand in Saint Louis, Missouri, 1938. Credit Line: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives.Although the issues of *Action Comics* #9 and *Adventure Comics* #35 are dated February 1939, they were released several months earlier, a practice aimed at prolonging a publication's shelf life.

Between 1940 and 1944, comic book sales leaped from 3.7 to 28.7 million copies per month. While most titles were selling between 200,000 and 400,000 copies monthly, *Action Comics* was selling 1.3 million copies, and *Superman,* published bimonthly, was selling 1.4 million copies. These two titles alone accounted for about ten percent of the total comic book market.

By 1941, about 160 comic book titles were being published in the United States, with cumulative monthly sales reaching somewhere between 10 to 15 million copies. Even more titles would have been published during that time if not for a worldwide paper shortage due to World War II, which also forced comic books to







A sampling of Timely's comics. Timely's first landmark comic, *Marvel Comics* #1, introduced the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner in 1939. Captain America followed in 1941, famously punching Hitler before America entered World War II. Together, these heroes helped define the Golden Age, proving comics could blend fantasy, patriotism, and cultural urgency into enduring mythology worldwide.

use just one staple per issue. By 1953, the number of comic book titles in America had grown to 500, and by 1954, they peaked at 650. "Total tales were similarly spectacular," researcher Michael R. Levin says, "with 500 million copies sold in 1950, 816 million in 1953, and more than one billion in that magic year of 1954."[33] Going by Marston's assertion that each comic was read by up to four people, the level of cultural penetration that comic books achieved during this era is astounding. These sales totals were the equivalent of every man, woman, and child in the country reading 25 comic books that year. For a point of comparison, by 1979, one of the lowest points in the history of the comic books industry, sales had fallen to just 48 million copies annually.[34] Meanwhile, America's population had risen from 158.2 million to over 225 million people.

The success of Superman in 1938 paved the way for a number of other superheroes at DC, including super-powered individuals like Wonder Woman, Aquaman, and the Flash, gadget-toting good guys like Green Lantern and Starman, and masked mystery men like the Crimson Avenger and Batman. Outside of DC, Timely Comics, which evolved into Marvel Comics in the 1960s, had Captain America, the Sub-Mariner, and the Human Torch. And Fawcett Comics had its own flagship hero, Captain Marvel, who became one of the most popular characters of the era, at times even outselling Superman. Dozens of other superheroes came and went as other publishers jumped on the bandwagon, hoping to cash in on the comics craze by creating carbon copies of successful characters. This led to multiple cease-and-desist orders from DC's lawyers. As comics historian Bradford Wright observes, "In the comic book industry, imitation was not only a high form of flattery, it was company policy. Most publishers took the successful examples of Superman and Batman and flooded the nation's newsstands with stories of outrageous, brightly colored costumed heroes."[35]

With such a high demand for new titles, characters, and stories, the last thing on anyone's mind were the continuity concerns that Marv Wolfman set out to solve with *Crisis*. All that mattered was coming up with the next clever gimmick, the next hot character, and the next dramatic cover that would make a title stand out amongst the burgeoning mushroom cloud of four-color competition.

As an example of how fast and loose things were at first, by the time Superman migrated to his own self-titled book in the summer of 1939—the first comic book character to do so—instead of drawing Superman's logo once and making copies to put on each cover, artist Joe Shuster was redrawing the logo each time from scratch,

33 See more at https://tinyurl.com/jem4adss.
34 Ibid.
35 Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 17.





(left) Ira Schnapp, 1955.Photo credit: Martin Schnapp Schnapp (1894–1969) was DC/National's defining logo designer and letterer. Beginning in 1940 he polished the Superman logo, used for decades, then while on staff from about 1949–1967, he created cover lettering and house ads, revised the "DC Bullet" emblem. (right) Self-taught artist Will Eisner (1917–2005) elevated comics through *The Spirit*, innovative visual storytelling, and *A Contract with God*, which helped to establish the graphic novel as a serious art form.

"with wildly differing results."[36] This continued a trend that began with Superman's first appearance in *Action Comics* #1, in which the logo is drawn three different ways in those first 13 pages alone. This situation persisted for five issues in *Superman* until legendary letter and logo designer Ira Schnapp took over, at the publisher's behest, and standardized the logo.

Furthermore, seeing as comics were sold primarily on newsstands, there was no guarantee that readers had read previous issues. Therefore, rather than adhering to a lengthy, detailed continuity, all anyone cared about was that each issue told a good story that could stand on its own, with no concern given to what came before, what might happen next, or what was happening in the company's other titles.

And it wasn't like comic books were regarded as high art either, which diminished concerns for continuity even further. "Comic book work for freelancers was neither prestigious nor profitable," Wright says, "and it was for the most part an anonymous affair. Few artists received credits or bylines for their work, and those who did frequently used pseudonyms anyway."[37] Looked down upon as material written for "ten-year-old cretin children," as legendary creator Will Eisner put it, the field was regarded as a kind of artistic ghetto. "Most comic books were very insipid, and that's all the publishers expected from us," Eisner added. "Comic books then were regarded as a very cheap, low art form, and I was not proud of being part of it."[38]

Editor Mort Weisinger, who worked for DC from 1941 to 1970 and played a key role in developing Superman's mythos, used to tell people at parties that he was a freelance writer (which he was, penning over 1,000 articles for some of the biggest magazines of his day) rather than admit to working in the funny book business. "I've found that nobody in the writing field really respects a comics writer," he said. "Mentioning it is a liability."[39] Even for Siegel and Shuster, publishing Superman in comic book form was a distant second choice to having him appear in a syndicated newspaper strip, which, unlike comic books, was where all the money and the prestige were.

Nevertheless, for other writers and artists, comic books represented a new land of opportunity, or at least a steady income. "So much material was needed that sometimes just walking through the right door was enough to start a career, and just meeting deadlines was enough to sustain it," author Gerard Jones says. "Call it an opportunocracy, a fluke-ocracy, a dumb-ass-luck-ocracy. The truest kind of American enterprise."[40]

Although several names rose to prominence during this time, artists such as Joe Shuster, Bob Kane, and Will Eisner were more like figureheads who fronted vast armies of assistants and fill-in artists, racing against the clock in assembly-line fashion. "We made comic book





(left) Mort Weisinger in 1958. (right) Bob Kane. Weisinger (1915–1978), known for his abrasive and perfectionist editorial approach at DC, expanded Superman's mythology throughout the Silver Age and also helped create Aquaman, Green Arrow, and other characters. Kane (1915—1998) co-created Batman with Bill Finger, helping launch one of popular culture's most enduring icons. For decades, Kane received sole credit for Batman, but in 2015, DC finally acknowledged Finger as Batman's official co-creator.

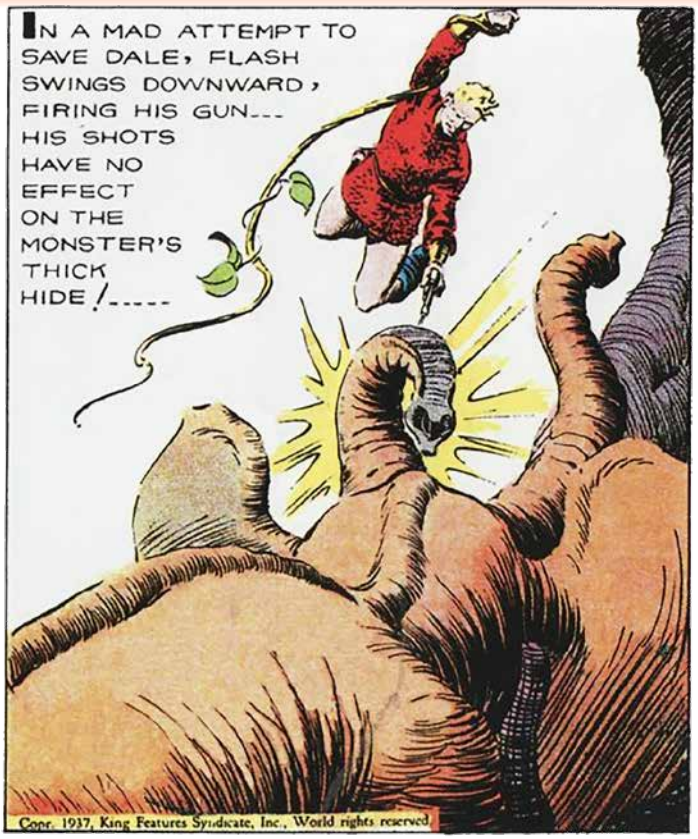
36 Todd Klein, "Logo Study: Action Comics/Superman Part 2," Todd's Blog, last accessed June 20, 2025, https://kleinletters.com/Blog/logo-study-action-comicssuperman-part-2/.

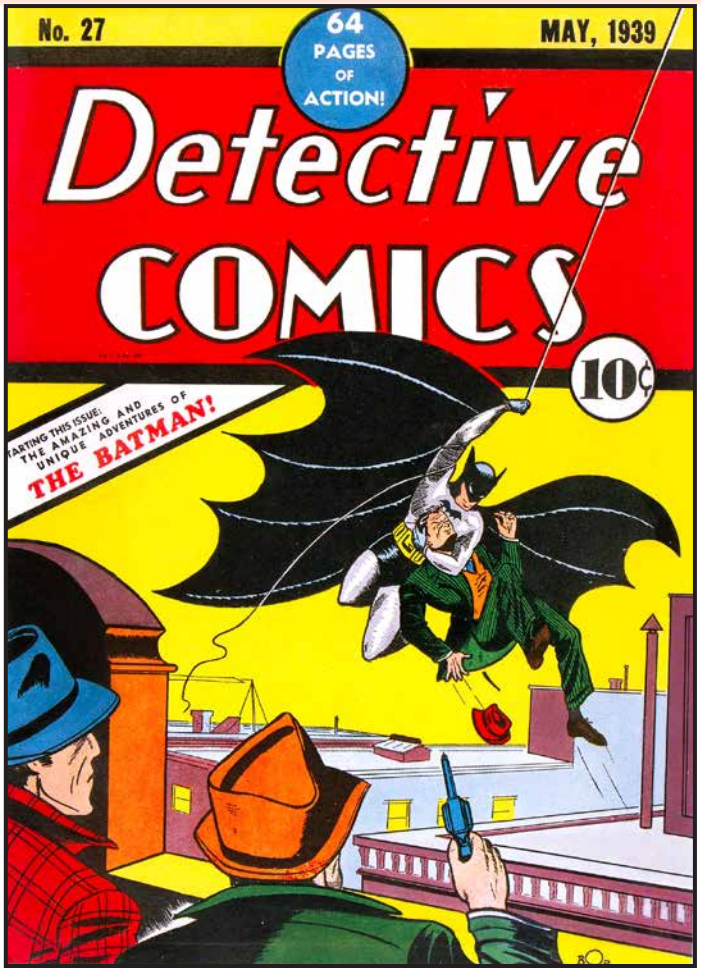
37 Wright, 6.

38 As quoted in ibid., 7.

39 Guy H. Lillian III, "Mort Weisinger: The Man Who Wouldn't Be Superman," *The Amazing World of DC Comics* Vol. 2, No. 7 (July-August 1975: 6).

40 Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 203.





The iconic cover of *Detective Comics* #27 (right)—Batman's first appearance—didn't come out of thin air. It was lifted almost directly from a panel in Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* newspaper strip (January 12, 1937, left). Raymond's dynamic compositions were so influential that other artists repeatedly "borrowed" his poses and layouts.

features pretty much the way Ford made cars," Eisner remarked.[41]

To keep up with the frenetic pace, creators would swipe ideas from wherever they could get them, sometimes even tracing whole panels from daily newspaper strips and then changing the details. This didn't just apply to obscure titles either. No less than the cover of *Detective Comics* #27, which gave us our first glimpse of Batman, was copied from a panel in the January 12, 1937, *Flash Gordon* newspaper strip. *Flash Gordon* artist Alex Raymond was a common target for other artists, too, as was Hal Foster (*Tarzan, Prince Valiant*), with creators swiping not only their artwork but also character attributes, abilities, and other story elements. Siegel and Shuster even borrowed from themselves, modeling Slam Bradley and Superman's look and physique on Dr. Occult, one of their first creations. The same sort of thing happened on the writing front. Not only did writers mine the pulps and daily newspaper strips for character and story ideas, ghostwriters stepped in to help big-name writers and publishers meet their deadlines.

41 As quoted in Wright, 6.

Thinking back to the concepts of change, permanence, and viability, this frenzied rush to produce meant that viability ruled the day. Change of any kind was embraced as long as it led to more sales, the long-term narrative consequences be damned. Although certain elements of continuity began to solidify around key characters, such as Superman working at the *Daily Planet* and Lois Lane never learning his secret identity, when it came to stories, writers felt no compunction about conjuring new ideas out of thin air to spice things up.

As for permanence, even though comics were flying off the newsstands as fast as publishers could produce them, most people thought the superhero gold rush was nothing but a passing fad, so the only thing that mattered was making as much money as possible before the blinding spotlight of reader attention turned elsewhere.

As the industry began to stabilize and a few publishers rose above the rest, the question of how these increasingly popular characters fit together—if at all—became impossible to ignore. For DC, the dominant force in comics at the time, that question found an unexpected answer in the pages of a new anthology series, where a groundbreaking issue made continuity not just a curiosity, but a defining principle of their burgeoning storyworld.

CHAPTER 3

From Anthology To Alliance— The Jsa And The Birth Of Continuity At Dc

With most early comic books being anthologies, featuring up to a dozen stories in each issue, it wasn't uncommon for multiple superheroes to appear in the same title, right from the beginning. For instance, *Flash Comics* #1 (1940), which debuted Jay Garrick as the Flash, also included the first appearance of Hawkman and Johnny Thunder. Three issues after introducing Green Lantern in *All-American Comics* #16 (1940), the (Mighty) Atom joined him in the same title. *More Fun Comics,* which launched the Spectre in issue #52, followed up with Doctor Fate three issues later. In *Adventure Comics,* Sandman was soon joined by Hour-Man and Starman. And let's not forget *Action Comics* #1, which launched Zatara the magician a few pages after Superman first bounded across the literary landscape.

Even though these characters' adventures were often published in the same title, there was no overlap between their stories, nor did they ever interact with one another, not that anyone at the time would have expected them to do so. Remember, those same comics also included numerous non-superhero characters, such as the Whip and Sergeant O'Malley of the Red Coat Patrol. None of these characters' stories intersected either, so why should the superhero stories?

Then came *All Star Comics* in the summer of 1940. An editorial in the debut issue said its aim was to showcase the top two features from each of All-American and National's monthly titles, promoting what the publishers called "the largest and finest group of comic magazines in the world." Similar to previous anthology titles, for the first two issues, none of the superheroes' adventures overlapped. That changed with issue #3, however, when the Justice Society of America (JSA) was introduced. The brainchild of writer Gardner F. Fox and editor Sheldon Mayer, for the first time ever, National and All-American's superheroes didn't just share the same title; they also occupied the same room.

The story opens with Johnny Thunder at a newsstand in which National and All-American's most popular titles are highlighted. This makes sense in light of *All-Star's* function as a marketing tool, but it also raises some interesting questions



Sheldon Mayer (1917–1991) was one of the most influential figures at DC. An editor, writer, and cartoonist, his taste shaped the company's identity. He helped steer DC through the Golden Age, nurtured new talent, and played a pivotal role in reviving superhero comics in the 1950s, championing the return of the Flash, a spark that helped ignite the Silver Age.

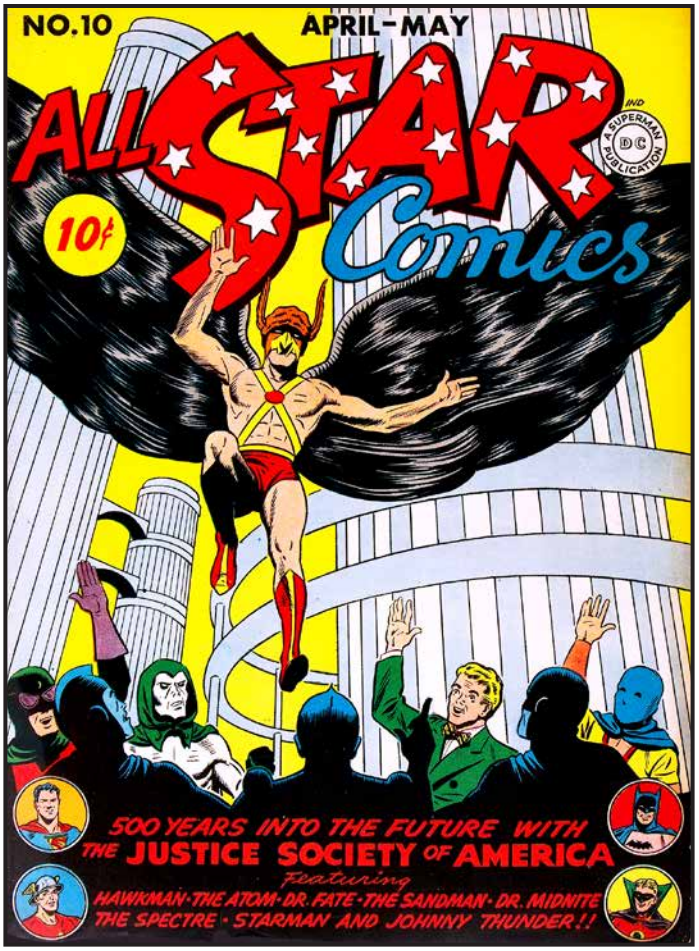
from a multiversal standpoint. For one thing, it indicates that the same comic books that exist in our world also exist in Johnny's world. Only the logos are visible, but considering how the presence of comic books and their similarities and differences to comic books in our world were treated in later DC titles, one wonders if any thought was given to such matters when this detail was added, or if it was merely a humorous, self-referential touch.

Johnny is frustrated because he's been left out of the JSA's first meeting. No explanation is given for why he wasn't invited or why the meeting is taking place (see *DC Special* #29 [1977] for that). All we're told is that it's their first gathering, and it's supposed to be a secret. Sandman even puts some people to sleep in the hotel lobby, so the heroes won't be seen as they go to their "club rooms."

Johnny eventually earns his place at the table by suggesting that each member of the JSA tell the most exciting adventure they've had to entertain one another while they eat. Rather than a true "team-up," the issue proceeds much like previous anthology books, with each character embarking on a separate escapade. The only difference is that the storytelling gimmick is used as a framing device, as each character narrates his tale and then passes the baton to the next hero. True to *All Star's* purpose as a marketing vehicle, each story ends with a

tagline that says, "Read THE FLASH each month in FLASH COMICS," or something similar, informing readers where they could follow the further adventures of each character.

Anticipating the fourth-wall breaks that were made famous in titles like *Animal Man* and *Ambush Bug* decades later, Johnny Thunder prefaces his tale by saying, "The editors have written a story about something that happened to me." Then the last panel of the issue has the Flash asking readers to make sure they don't miss an important announcement from the editors on the next page. He addresses the readers as "boys and girls," leaving no doubt as to the primary audience for these stories. While fourth-wall breaks are usually considered a way of bridging the gap between characters and readers, this one creates a wall of separation, indicating that the world the JSA inhabits is different from ours. Viewed from a multiversal perspective, it also makes one wonder how the members of the JSA became aware of our presence, what they call our world (Earth-V for "voyeur"?), how we're able to observe them, how their awareness of our watchful eye affects their behavior, and how they're able to communicate with us across the interdimensional void. It may seem unfair to ask such questions at this early stage in the genre's development, seeing as "the writers of the heroes' chronicles are more interested in telling an entertaining story than maintaining Reality," as fan turned pro Mark Gruenwald argues.[42] Be that as it may, such incidental nods to the existence of parallel worlds planted the seeds that eventually sprouted in the minds of Wolfman and many others who tried to figure out how all this worked.



***All Star Comics* #10. *All-Star Comics* didn't just launch the Justice Society of America in 1940; it also proved DC's heroes could share one stage. By bringing characters from different titles together, the JSA normalized crossovers, continuity callbacks, and a sense of a single lived-in world. This became the template for later shared-universe logic across DC Comics.**

"This happy combination of costumed heroes was a bestseller right from the start," Gardner Fox noted two decades later.[43] Hence, *All Star* continued in a similar fashion for several issues, having the members of the JSA meet up at the beginning on some pretense and then go off on separate adventures. It wasn't until issue #10 that we get a glimpse of the JSA working together to thwart a crime, in this case stopping a gang of thieves from stealing a device that will make America safe from aerial bombardment. But that battle only lasts for two panels before a scientist uses a time ray to send the JSAers into the future to retrieve a key piece of the bomb-defense formula.

Issue #13 also sees the JSA attacked as a group, although they have no time to fight back before they're each rocketed to a different planet in the solar system by Nazi spies. This story, called "Shanghaied into Space!", was elaborated on at length in *All-Star Squadron* decades later, and became part of a series of *Crisis* crossovers, beginning with issue #50.

We don't see another true team-up until issue #35 (1947), this one lasting for three pages. It occurs in another time-travel story, "The Day That Dropped out of Time," in which perennial JSA foe Per Degaton is introduced. At the tale's end, everyone returns to the present, with neither the JSA nor Degaton remembering what happened. The truth only comes out due to a magic sphere that Wonder Woman borrows from her mother that can reveal the past of any object with "proper stimulus." This was the first time that the device of the heroes engaging in a cosmic battle and then forgetting it happened was employed at DC, but as anyone who has read *Crisis* and the JSA/JLA team-ups that preceded it knows, it was far from the last.

Membership in the JSA continued to change throughout *All Star's* initial 58-issue run, with the most popular characters, such as the Flash and Green Lantern, spinning off into their own series, and less popular characters, such as Hour-Man, retiring and being replaced by others. It served well as a promotional platform and as a

42 Mark Gruenwald, *A Treatise on Reality in Comic Literature* (M. Gruenwald, 1976), 1.

43 See the feature "Inside the Atom" in *Showcase* #35.

way to test the readers' appetite for new characters without the risk of investing in an entirely new series. In doing so, *All Star Comics* didn't just introduce the first superhero team; it also laid the foundation for the idea that DC's heroes lived in a single, interconnected universe, a concept that would define the publisher's storytelling for decades to come.

The Seven Soldiers of Victory was a lesser-known superhero team that also came out during this time, first introduced in *Leading Comics* #1 (1941). With the exception of Green Arrow, it consisted primarily of second-string, non-powered characters, including the Crimson Avenger, Vigilante, Speedy, Stripesy, and the Star-Spangled Kid. Joining them was one super-powered being, the Shining Knight.

The Seven Soldiers of Victory had all appeared as backup characters in other titles, but this was the first time they were brought together as a group, once again confirming that they all lived in the same storyworld. While similar in structure to the JSA's adventures, where each issue started with the team assembled before they went off on separate quests, by issue #2 we see several pages of the entire group entering battle together. This pattern continue through the next few issues, with the heroes' separate adventures followed by a reunion where they wrap things up. Breaking from the formula in issue #6, the Seven Soldiers take a team approach from the beginning and then break into smaller squads. The remaining eight issues revert back to each hero or duo starring in their own chapter, following a brief setup, with the entire group reassembling at the end. As a quarterly comic filled with bottom-rung characters—and inferior art and writing to match—the Seven Soldiers of Victory weren't nearly as influential as the JSA, but they were still an important step toward building a shared universe for DC's characters.

Even though *All Star Comics* and *Leading Comics* brought DC's superheroes together, establishing that they all inhabited the same world, that world and the characters who lived in it weren't always portrayed consistently across titles, or even within the same title. And such team-ups seldom affected the characters' individual adventures, nor were they mentioned in their other titles. For example, while Wonder Woman seems content to play second fiddle to the boys in the JSA—serving as their secretary for numerous issues before she becomes a full member—in her solo adventures, she's a powerful, independent hero on par with the Man of Steel himself. And although the first meeting of the Seven Soldiers of Victory takes place in Gotham City, Batman never appears in any of their adventures, nor is he mentioned.

Character origins and powers were moving targets too. For instance, when Luthor first appeared in *Action Comics* #23 (1940), he had a full head of red hair. He retained it until *Superman* #10, which came out less than twelve months later. In that issue, Luthor was portrayed as bald, which became his signature look for the next four decades until he was reintroduced with hair in *Superman Family* #205. This change was due to a mistake made by artist Leo Nowak, who was ghosting for Joe Shuster on the *Superman* newspaper strip, published on February 24, 1941.[44] Theories vary as to why it happened, with some believing Nowak confused Luthor with the Ultra-Humanite, who was also bald during that phase of his career, and others positing that Nowak mistook Luthor for one of his hairless henchmen. Either way, the mistake wasn't caught, and baldness became Luthor's trademark look for decades.

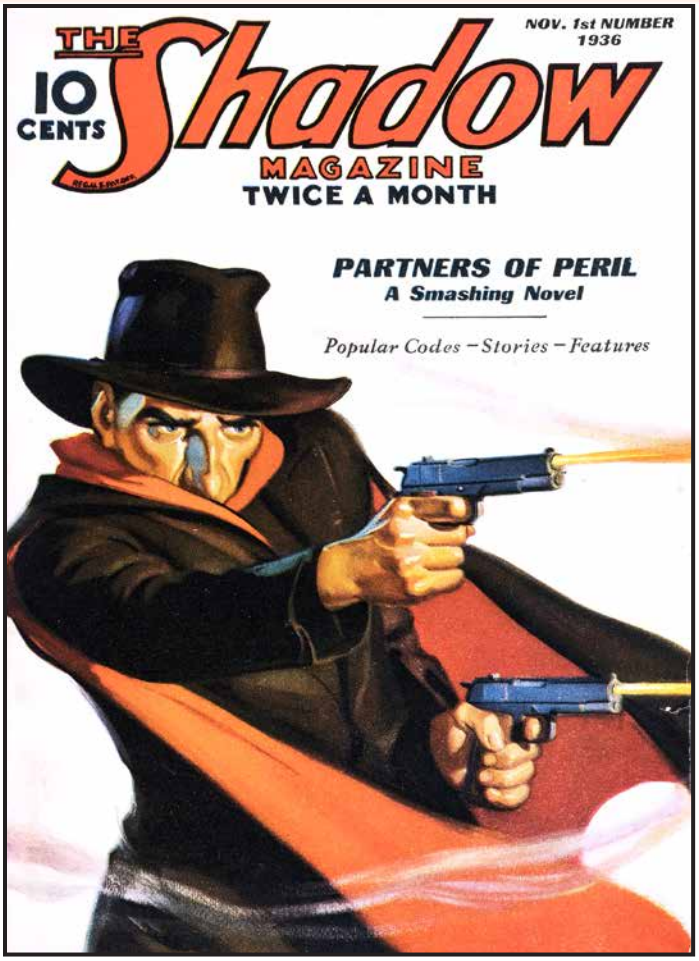


Leo Nowak (1907–2001) was a key Golden Age DC artist, assisting Joe Shuster on Superman, drawing early adventures and Robotman, and perhaps accidentally helping establish Lex Luthor's bald look—small contributions with lasting influence on Superman's visual mythology and DC history overall.

Rushed production schedules were one reason for such discrepancies. Another issue had to do with the fact that, like the genre itself, the Golden Age characters were still in the process of being defined, often in real time right on the page. This led to ongoing revisions to their backstories, powers, costumes, and personalities. As Jerry Siegel complained in his autobiography, it seemed like every time a writer couldn't figure out an idea for the next Superman story, they simply gave him a new power. In no time at all, the Man of Steel's abilities went from jumping vast distances, super strength, limited invulnerability, and super speed, to flight, virtual indestructibility, X-ray vision, telescopic vision, microscopic vision, heat vision, super breath, the ability to travel underwater or through outer space without breathing, super hearing, super intelligence, super memory, super ventriloquism, the ability to speak and understand every language, super hypnotism, super healing, and even the power to transmit his power into another person to cure them. If not a new power, a new cast member was added, including Superboy, Supergirl, the residents of Kandor, Krypto the Superdog, Bizarro, and even Beppo, the monkey who supposedly stowed away on the spaceship that brought Kal-El to earth.

Batman's relationship with guns also underwent a drastic change in the early days. In *Detective Comics* #32, he melts down some silver statues to create bullets, which he uses to dispatch two vampires. In the next issue, Batman has a holster hanging from his utility belt on the cover, and he uses a pistol to shoot some death ray machines. The final panel of the story depicts him in a pose that's reminiscent of the Shadow, with his cape concealing half of his face and a smoking gun in his

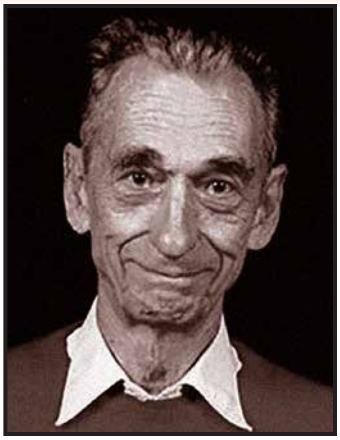
44 This occurred 30 years to the day before my birth, a mistake that made it possible for me to portray Luthor for a brief period on the TV show *Smallville* (season eight, episode 14, "Requiem"). It was like a pre-birthday present, delivered three decades before I was born!



The Shadow's 1930s pulp mystique fed directly into Bill Finger's and Bob Kane's early Batman concept. But the Shadow was a ruthless vigilante who routinely carried and fired pistols. Batman defined himself against that model: after a brief, gun-toting infancy, he adopted a strict no-guns ethos, making restraint part of his identity.

hand. Then there's issue #35, where half of the first page is taken up by Batman holding a smoking gun, though it's never revealed who or what he's just shot. While Batman fires a gun to get the police's attention in the next issue, it isn't until *Batman* #1 that he uses a gun once again with lethal intent. "Much as I hate to take human life," he remarks as he opens fire with a gun mounted to his Batplane, "I'm afraid this time it's necessary." The cover of *Batman* #15 also shows him firing a belt-fed machine gun, assisted by Robin, presumably as part of a WWII battle, and #30 depicts Batman handing a soldier in the Pacific Theater a rifle. Numerous other issues show him commandeering guns from criminals and using them to shoot things other than people.

Perhaps the strangest depiction of Batman with a gun appears in *Batman* #21 where he's fed "loco weed," which causes him to temporarily lose his mind. "Hee! Hee! Gun! Want gun!" he says as he pulls a sheriff's hat over his face, so he can steal his pistol. "Make big noise! Bang! Bang!



John Broome (1913–1999) was a key DC house writer, shaping Golden Age team-ups and the Silver Age revival. He also scripted landmark runs on The Flash and Green Lantern, co-creating Sinestro, Star Sapphire, Black Hand, and Guy Gardner while also writing All Star Comics and many science-fiction anthologies. His crisp, twisty plotting helped define DC's modern superhero voice.

Hee! Hee!" The next panel shows a silhouette of Batman riding a broomstick horse as he continues to carouse and fire the pistol in the air. Finally, to the relief of one and all, Robin knocks him out.

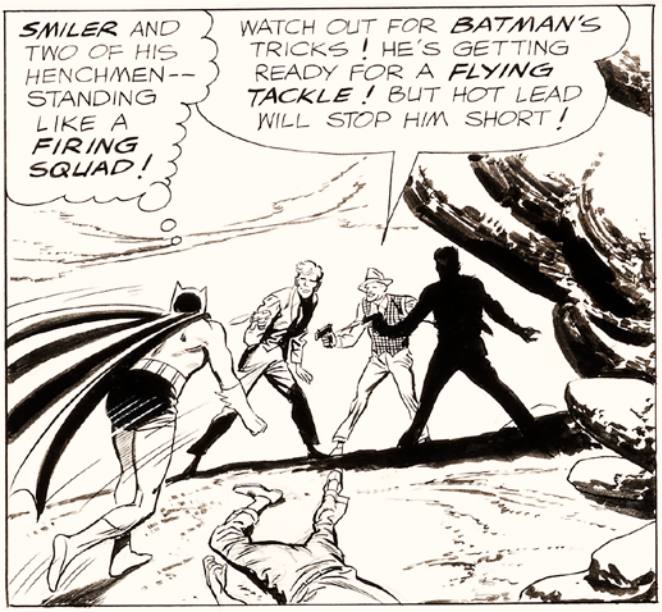
"We didn't think anything was wrong with Batman carrying guns because the Shadow [one of the key inspirations for Batman] used guns," Batman co-creator Bob Kane said in his autobiography, *Batman & Me.* However, after *Batman* #1 was published, writer Bill Finger was "called on the carpet by [DC editorial director] Whitney Ellsworth. He said, 'Never let Batman carry a gun again!' The editors thought that making Batman a 'murderer' would taint his character, and mothers would object." Nonetheless, Batman picks up a gun just three issues later to shoot a machine-gun-wielding criminal, but an editor's note in that issue assures us that even though Batman may scoop up a discarded gun from time to time and put it to use, "The Batman never carries or kills with a gun."

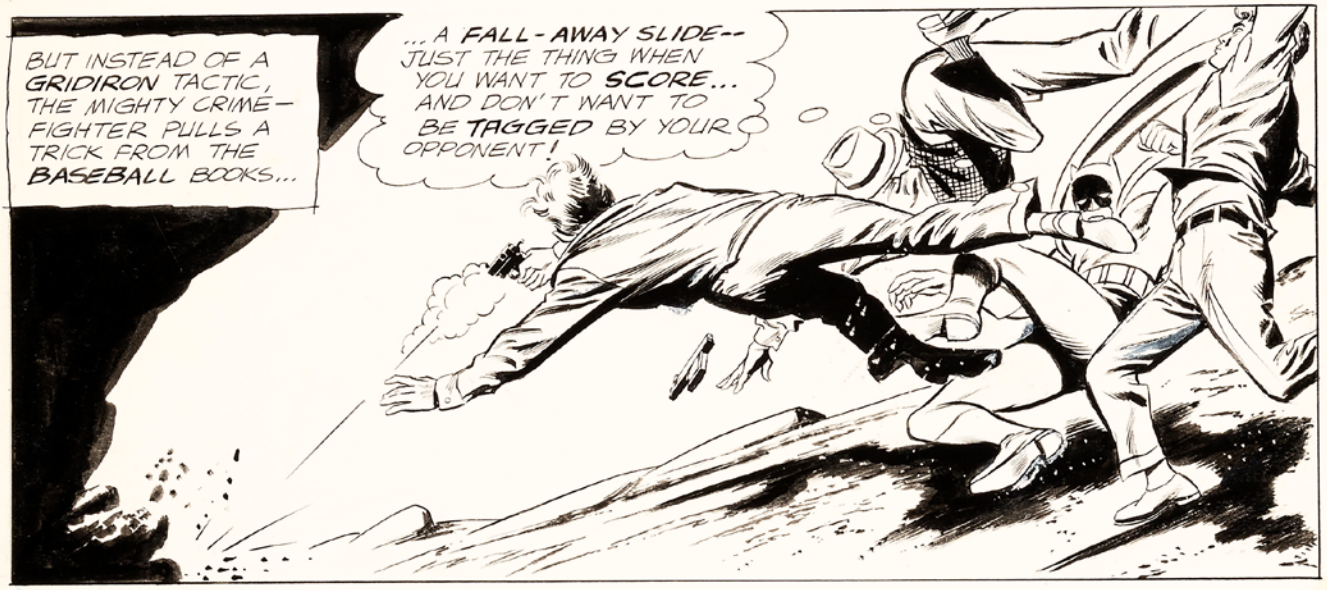
Despite this prohibition, mistakes still happened. When Julius Schwartz took over editing the Batman titles in 1964, launching the Caped Crusader's "New Look," he wasn't very familiar with the character's history. Apparently, neither were artist Carmine Infantino and writer John Broome. The climax of the Batman story in *Detective Comics* #327 depicts the Caped Crusader grabbing a discarded handgun and using it to hold off some criminals until the police show up. DC's offices were buried by letters from fans, pointing out this gaffe, but at least one reader, Joe Murray Jr., loved it: "One thing that caught my fancy was *Batman* holding a gun on the crooks. I hope that happens often." One wonders if Joe was alive to read *Infinite Crisis* #7 (2006) when Batman is pulled back from the brink by Wonder Woman as he is about to put a bullet in Alexander Luthor's head, or *Final Crisis* #6 (2008) when Batman makes another significant exception to his lifelong prohibition against firearms while facing down Darkseid.

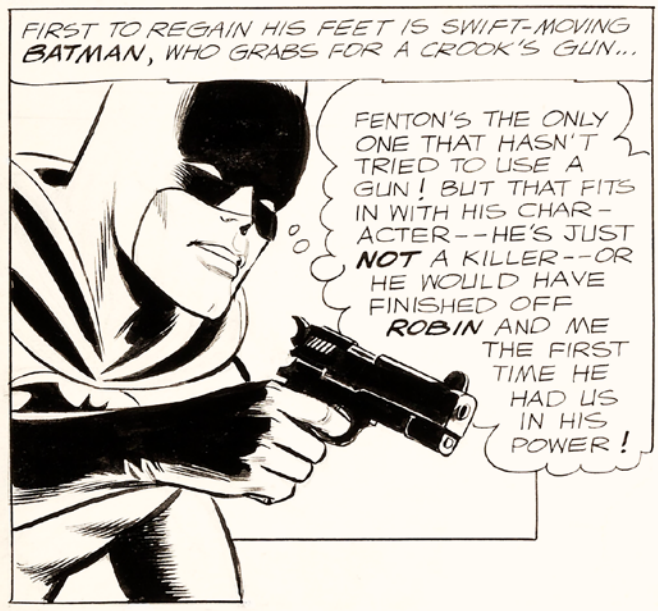
In a similar vein, when Alan Scott, the Golden Age Green Lantern, first appears in *All-American Comics* #16 (1940),

(opposite page) Batman uses a gun in *Detective Comics* #327. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www. ha.com*). Batman's changing attitude toward guns was one of many issues that was worked out in real time on the page as the character developed.


WITH THE VERVE OF ACROBATS, THE FAMOUS PAIR MOVES TO THE ATTACK...
THATAWAY, ROBIN! HE HAD A BEAD ON ME--!


SMILER AND TWO OF HIS HENCHMEN--STANDING LIKE A FIRING SQUAD!
WATCH OUT FOR BATMAN'S TRICKS! HE'S GETTING READY FOR A FLYING TACKLE! BUT HOT LEAD WILL STOP HIM SHORT!


BUT INSTEAD OF A GRIDIRON TACTIC, THE MIGHTY CRIME-FIGHTER PULLS A TRICK FROM THE BASEBALL BOOKS...
...A FALL-AWAY SLIDE--JUST THE THING WHEN YOU WANT TO SCORE... AND DON'T WANT TO BE TAGGED BY YOUR OPPONENT!

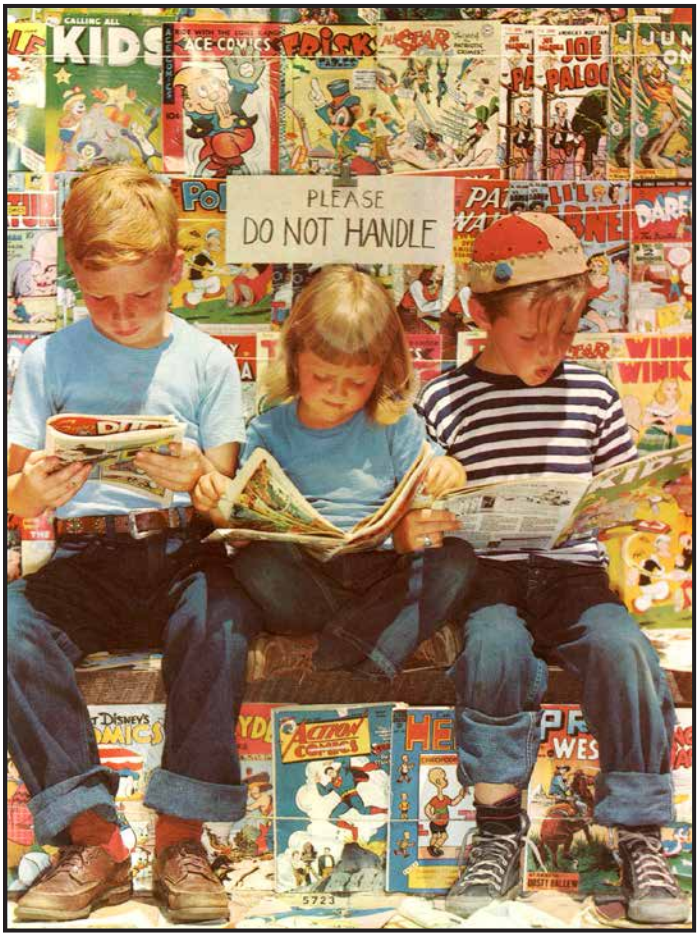

FIRST TO REGAIN HIS FEET IS SWIFT-MOVING BATMAN, WHO GRABS FOR A CROOK'S GUN...
FENTON'S THE ONLY ONE THAT HASN'T TRIED TO USE A GUN! BUT THAT FITS IN WITH HIS CHARACTER--HE'S JUST NOT A KILLER--OR HE WOULD HAVE FINISHED OFF ROBIN AND ME THE FIRST TIME HE HAD US IN HIS POWER!


AND A FEW MOMENTS AFTER THE RAGING BATTLE BEGAN...
ALL OF YOU--ON YOUR FEET!
ROBIN, KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR ANY OTHER CROOKS THAT MIGHT BE DOWN HERE!

after being hit by a thug with a wooden club, he concludes he is only immune to metals. But three issues later, another criminal clubs him with a rifle stock, and the caption says, "Unwittingly, Slade uses the only weapon that could down the Green Lantern—wood—a non-metal," which establishes wood as Green Lantern's primary vulnerability going forward. However, in issue #43 he says his ring's green ray won't work against concrete either, something that is never brought up again. And in *All-American Comics* #35, he is hit over the head by a ceramic vase, with a caption indicating that the vase stuns him because it is not made of metal.

The various titles in which Wonder Woman appeared during the war years contradict themselves too. When World War II broke out, *All Star Comics* #11 showed Wonder Woman heading to the Pacific Theater to fight the Japanese. But in the first four issues of *Comic Cavalcade*, she is fighting the Nazis on the home front. Meanwhile, in *Sensation Comics,* she spends the first few issues pining after Steve Trevor on the East Coast while working as a nurse and as a secretary to Colonel Darnell, so she can remain near Steve.

Apart from outright mistakes and real-time character and world building, audience expectations and market considerations also contributed to such incongruities. In the Golden Age, comic books were a relatively new medium. Not only that, readers were assumed to be quite young, between ages eight to twelve, so expectations regarding continuity weren't anywhere close to what they are today. Hence, the primary goal during the early years of the Golden Age was to capture the imagination of young people and to sell as many issues as possible each month. Continuity was less important than creating action-packed, standalone stories—not to mention exciting covers that would catch people's eye on the increasingly crowded newsstands.



Kids and their comics in 1948. Apparently, they can read comics but not the sign! The way they're handling them demonstrates why so few comics from this era survived. Made to be read and enjoyed, not treated as museum pieces.

Lack of central editorial oversight was another factor in the DCU's inconsistent development. Although much of the early development work was outsourced, even when creative control was moved in-house, DC's characters were developed by multiple teams of writers, artists, and editors who were often working independently of one another. These teams didn't always communicate, read each other's books, or coordinate their efforts, leading to incongruities in terms of how characters were portrayed. Even when characters were "borrowed" to be used in another title, their primary editors and writers felt no obligation to incorporate those events into the character's continuity or to mention the incidents in their solo adventures.

When describing this period at DC, historians often refer to it as the "fiefdom era," during which various editorial domains essentially operated as independent departments within National and All-American. This corporate culture continued throughout the first 50 years of DC's history, with Marv Wolfman writing as late as 1985 that "DC is not a company where one editor rules supreme. We have slightly more than a half-dozen editors who work pretty much independently, with one eye on their titles and the other eye on the rest of the line. There is no 'house style' at DC, no form imposed on everyone, no method of working that everyone must follow."[45]

There's no question that this decentralization of editorial control fostered a climate of creative freedom, but it also led to inconsistencies across the line. This became increasingly difficult to keep track of as, from 1938 to 1943, DC's list expanded from the "Big Four" to the "Big Six," the "Big Seven," and the "Big Eight" monthly titles, in addition to six bi-monthly and six quarterly magazines, all but two of which were dominated by superheroes.

Taken together, all these influences—mistakes caused by rushed production schedules, low reader expectations regarding continuity, an emphasis on exciting stand-alone stories rather than ongoing narratives, the real-time evolution of the characters, and de-centralized editorial oversight—were the key contributors to the "accidental" phase of how the DCU developed. Ironically, it was a waning interest in superheroes and a war against comic books in general that triggered DC to take a more strategic approach to the development of its storytelling universe, inadvertently laying the foundation for *Crisis*.

45 See his editorial, "Cooperation, DC Style" in *Crisis* #3.

CHAPTER 4

Superheroes, Scapegoats, And Seduction— Comic Books Under Fire

The popularity of superhero comics continued to surge throughout World War II, serving as escapist entertainment and patriotic propaganda not only for children, but also for adults. In fact, some of the most enthusiastic readers of superhero comics were servicemen fighting abroad.

"It's no news to anyone who has ever killed a Sunday sprawled on his sack in a barracks that GIs go for comic magazines in a big way," an article in the Nov. 23, 1945, issue of *Yank: The Army Weekly* said. "At PXs in the States, purchases of these books run 10 times higher than the combined sales of the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Reader's Digest.* What's more, we've got Market Research's word for it that 44% of all Joes in training camps read the books regularly, and another 13% take a gander at them now and then."[46]

Artist Marv Levy (1925–2012) provides a good snapshot of how this looked when posted overseas. One day while he was recovering in an American Army hospital in England after being wounded in the Battle of Normandy, someone at the far end of the row of beds got a copy of *Speed Comics* #33, published by Harvey Comics. Once the soldier finished reading it, it was passed from bed to bed until, a couple of



The *Saturday Evening Post* was selling about 3.5 million copies per week in 1944. Despite these stellar numbers, the top comic books in the 1940s were selling over a million copies per issue, with many of these comics read and enjoyed by American soldiers who were fighting overseas.

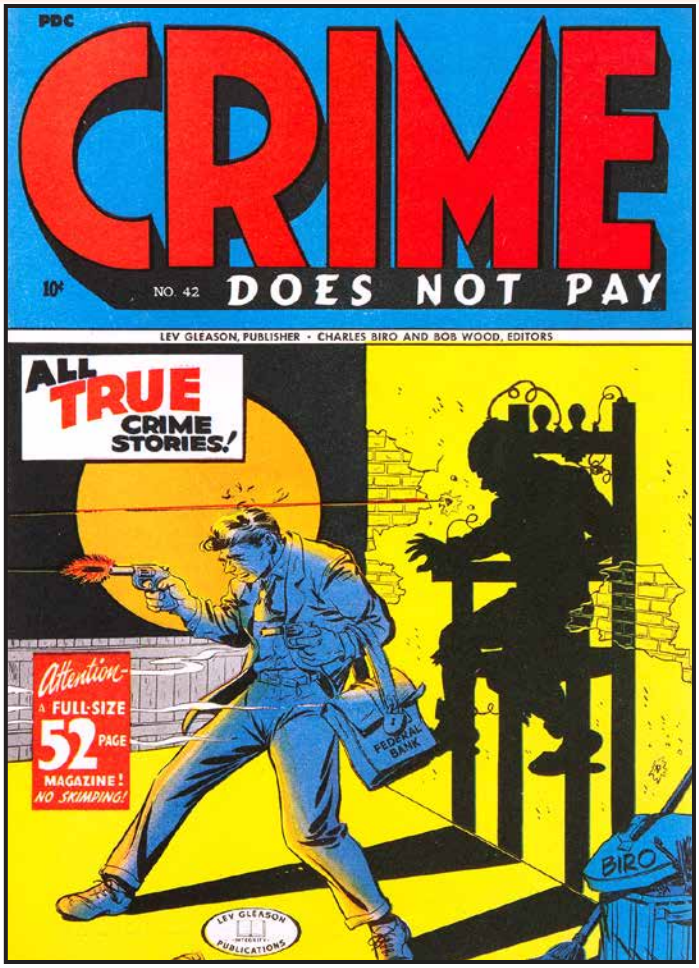


***Captain America Comics* #1 (cover-dated March 1941) exploded onto newsstands with a single image: Cap's star-spangled fist smashing Hitler's jaw, months before Pearl Harbor. Created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, the cover announced an unapologetically anti-fascist hero and a new kind of political punch in comics— part propaganda, part pop icon, and all kinetic bravado that readers could recognize instantly anywhere.**

46 Sgt. Sanderson Vanderbilt, "The Comics," *Yank,* November 23, 1945, https://archive.org/details/1945-11-23YankMagazine



A sailor reads a comic book aboard the *USS Doran* in 1942. During WWII, comics gave soldiers cheap, portable entertainment, familiar heroes, and morale-boosting patriotism. They also reinforced the war effort. Nearly half of servicemen read comics regularly during wartime.



***Crime Does Not Pay* #42. Lev Gleason's Crime Does Not Pay (1942–1955) invented the crime-comics boom: lurid "true crime" tales hosted by the ghoulish Mr. Crime, aimed at older kids and teens and selling in huge numbers (it bragged of millions of readers). Its violence became a lightning rod in the anti-comics backlash that spurred industry self-censorship. As a result, the series was canceled in 1955.**

hours later, it reached Levy. To his surprise, when he opened it he found a filler story, "Youngin' and Tagalong," that he had drawn before entering the service.[47] Apart from Levy's page, the main stories featured characters like Captain Freedom, Shock Gibson, and the Girl Commandos, who took the battle straight to the enemy.

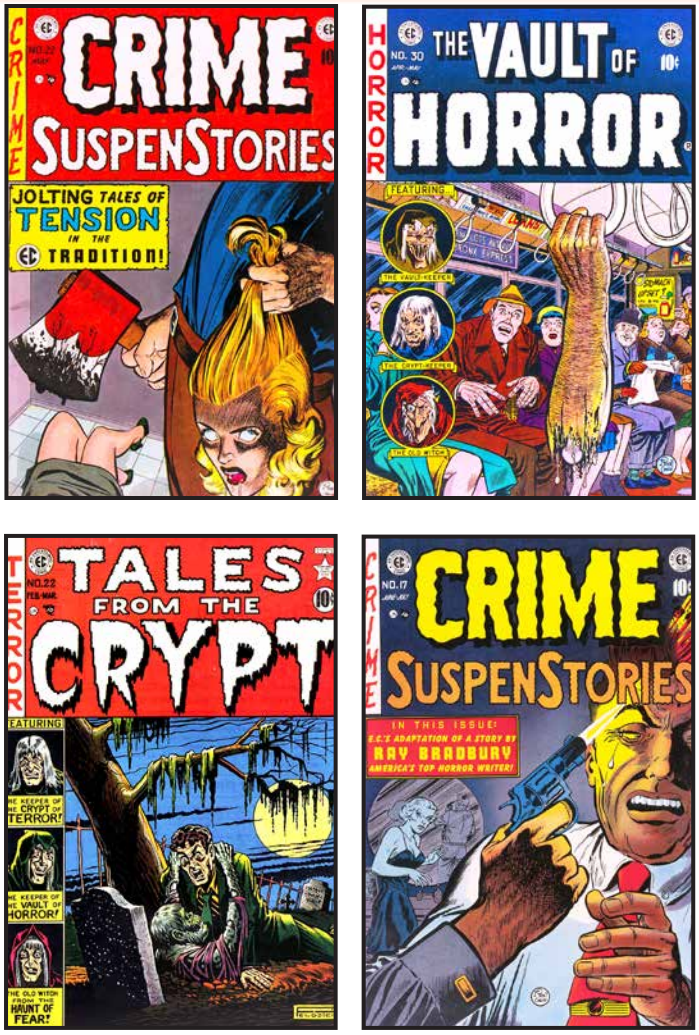
As the war drew to a close, people's focus shifted from fighting the enemy abroad to rebuilding their lives back home. Hence, stories of heroism and jingoistic propaganda didn't resonate like they had a few years earlier. It didn't help that by the mid-1940s, the comic book market had become saturated with dozens of superhero titles, many of which were of poor quality. As a result, readers experienced the first wave of what we now refer to as "superhero fatigue."

Not only that, by 1945, the first generation of comic book readers had essentially aged out of the market, turning to more "mature" forms of entertainment, including radio, movies, and television. To demonstrate the ubiquity of these other influences, in 1946, just 8,000 homes in America had a television set. By 1955, that number had grown to 37.4 million, with TV programs stealing hours of time each week that might have otherwise been devoted to alternate pastimes, such as reading comic books.

Such factors might lead one to believe the decline of superhero comics after WWII was a wholly organic process, which is how it's often portrayed. However, DC's litigious approach to their competition made it almost impossible for other publishers to compete against them on the superhero front. With their lawyers issuing a blizzard of cease-and-desist letters, not only did DC seek to suppress any competitors who came even close to mimicking their characters' names and likenesses, they also sought to copyright various powers and abilities. And they experienced remarkable success, forcing the cancellation of Wonder Man, Marvel Man, Master Man, and Captain Marvel, among others. "DC Comics' legal team used these methods to establish their company's ownership of the superhero genre for decades by preventing the growth of other publishers, which helped manifest their characters as industry leaders," comics historian Alex Grand said.[48] And it wasn't as if their legal challenges were completely without substance. Some cases found that not only had certain powers been copied, so had specific poses and panels.

47 Comic Book Historians, "The Marv Levy 1998 Shoot Interview by David Armstrong," October 21, 2022, YouTube video, 20:07, https://youtu.be/LLWOXWfpEJA?si=-89ahzZMn_-tJ2AM.

48 Alex Grand, *Understanding Superhero Comic Books* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2023), 182.



***Crime SuspenStories* #22, *Vault of Horror* #30, *Tales From the Crypt* #22, and *Crime SuspenStories* #17. These and other titles by EC transformed crime and horror comics into punchy, twist-ending morality plays, drawn with clarity by some of the top artists in the field. Their popularity sparked a flood of imitators, which led to an inevitable backlash.**

In response to the waning interest in superhero stories, the sheer impossibility of anyone other than DC publishing them, and the rising interest in other genres, such as romance, horror, science fiction, crime, and Westerns on TV and in the movies, comic book publishers began to experiment with these other genres too. It was during this phase of the industry's development that crime titles became particularly popular, coinciding with a resurgence of gangster movies in the theaters. When Lev Gleason's *Crime Does Not Pay* premiered in 1942, it sold 200,000 copies per month. Six years later, it was selling over a million copies per month.[49]

Publishers of horror comics also struck gold. Started by Max Gaines and then taken over by his son, William, after Max's tragic and untimely death, EC Comics captured readers' imaginations with titles like *The Haunt of Fear, The Vault of Horror,* and *Tales from the Crypt.* As such titles gained traction, more publishers crowded in, leading to a glut of similar horror-themed titles, including *This Magazine Is Haunted, Weird Chills, Weird Mysteries, Journey into Mystery,* and *Tomb of Terror.* There were so many copycats that in 1951, EC ran an editorial warning readers to avoid "inferior imitators."

To give a sense of how fast these genres were growing, "In 1947, three crime comic books made up about one and a half percent of all comic-book titles published that year. By 1948, however, 38 crime comics suddenly represented 15 percent of all comic-book titles!"[50] From 1950 to 1954, "the industry saw no fewer than 100 new horror titles; by 1954, more than 40 horror comics came out each month, sometimes ten appearing on a single day."[51]

Between crime and horror, these titles continued to push the boundaries of sex, violence, and the macabre, so it was only a matter of time before the government and other authorities took notice. Even though such comics were meant primarily for older readers, the fact that they were sold on newsstands alongside Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman had some parents, teachers, and religious leaders concerned. This led to a moral crusade against comic books, led by its undisputed champion, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham.

In a series of magazine articles and his landmark book, *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), Wertham argues that comic books were one of the leading causes of juvenile delinquency, a phenomenon that was of great concern at the time. Not only does Wertham believe comic books promoted violence, crime, and racism among children, he also states they stifled children's reading ability and desensitized them to finer types of literature. Wertham doesn't just attack obvious targets like the increasingly graphic horror and crime comics either. He also goes after the "Superman-Batman-Wonder Woman group," which he calls a "special form of crime comics."[52]

Wertham accuses Superman of promoting racism and fascism, "with the big S on his uniform—we should, I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S. S.," he writes, arguing that such characters cause children to either fantasize about solving all social problems through violence or else making them susceptible to strongmen who do the same.[53] In a more humorous vein, he also accuses Superman of giving children the wrong idea about basic physical laws. "Not even Superman … should be able to lift up a building while not standing on the ground, or to stop an airplane in mid air while flying himself."[54]

As for Wonder Woman, Wertham refers to her as a "horror type" and "a cruel, 'phallic' woman. While she is a frightening figure for boys, she is an undesirable ideal for girls,

49 Wright, p. 79.

50 Mike Benton, *The Comic Book in America: An Illustrated History* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company: 1989), 44.

51 Jeremy Dauber, *American Comics: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co.: 2021), 111.

52 Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1954), 24.

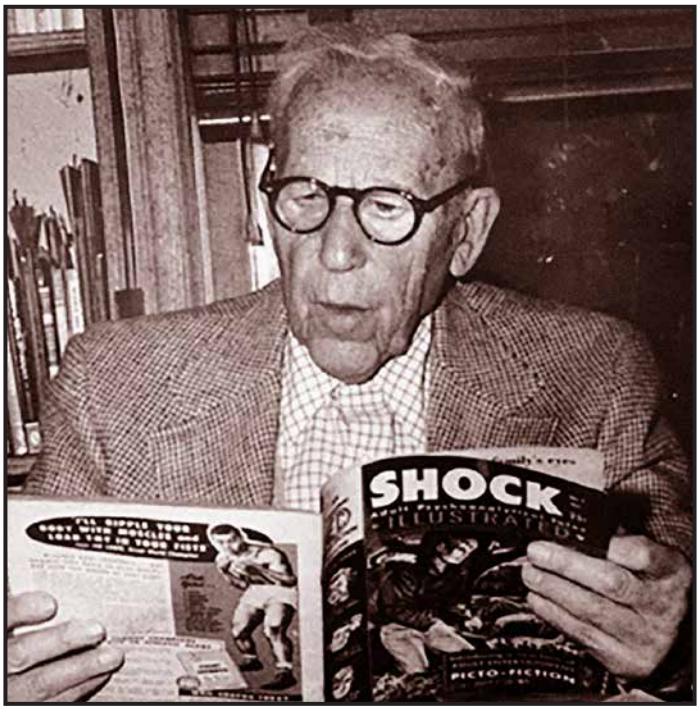
53 Ibid. As other commentators have pointed out, the mention of the SS in this circumstance is laughable considering that Superman was created by two young Jewish men.

54 Ibid.

being the exact opposite of what girls are supposed to want to be."[55] Likewise, he says, "The homosexual connotation of the Wonder Woman type of story is psychologically unmistakable," and that she promotes hatred of males.

Wertham doesn't stop there. He even goes after the ads in superhero comics, particularly those that advertised guns, claiming they created the impression that "even if you can't become Superman, at least you can rise above the average by using force."[56]

While Wertham's charges were bold, extensive, and at times outlandish, this was far from the first time such accusations had been launched against comics. In *American Comics: A History,* Jeremy Dauber lists numerous articles going back to 1906 that accused comics of promoting moral laxity, causing night terrors, debasing readers' ability to appreciate more sophisticated forms of art, and stunting their intellectual growth. Remember, this was two decades before the first comic book came out, and over 30 years before Superman or any other superheroes hit the newsstands. That means the types of comics these critics were railing against included titles like *The Katzenjammer Kids, Little Nemo in Slumberland, Krazy Kat, Bringing up Father,* and *Polly and Her Pals!*



Dr. Frederick Wertham, a psychiatrist, became the face of the anti-comics crusade with *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), arguing that crime and horror comics harmed children and encouraged delinquency. His claims helped fuel public panic and US Senate hearings, pressuring publishers into creating the Comics Code Authority. The Code's strict rules reshaped the industry for decades, wiping out entire genres and sanitizing mainstream superheroes.

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.

As David Hajdu notes in *The Ten-Cent Plague,* beneath all this hand-wringing were the rumblings of a class war. Echoing criticisms that had been brought against dime novels in the late 19th century and pulp magazines, movies, jazz music, and radio shows in the early 20th century, comic books were seen as a crude, vulgar, low-class form of entertainment which threatened to erode the country's aesthetic sensibilities and "devalue the United States' emerging status as a civilized world power," especially if such comics were exported overseas.[57] In other words, for some people comics presented an image problem. They didn't want to risk confirming Europeans' views of America as an unsophisticated nation of uncultured ingrates.

The comic book controversy was different from previous moral panics, however. On the one hand, "The war had demonstrated the capacity of the mass media to mold public opinion. When harnessed for sinister purposes, as it had been by Nazi propagandists, it would work to turn citizens against fellow citizens," Wright says. On the other hand, "The war had disrupted families. As fathers went overseas and mothers went to work, a generation of children came of age under reduced parental supervision, raising alarm about an impending outbreak of juvenile delinquency."[58] Comic books were one of the first expressions of culture that young people could truly call their own, just like rock 'n' roll music became for subsequent generations, and many adults' complete ignorance of this material made it doubly alarming.

Apart from the potential of comic books to foment teenage rebellion, the dulling of young people's aesthetic sensibilities was another pressing concern. Ironically, Hajdu says, "Magazine articles derided comic strips as infantile, brutal, unsophisticated, and subliterate; and the funnies were all that, though by design—a possibility lost to critics applying the standards of other forms of art and literature created for one class to a new form invented for another class."[59]

For people like artist Will Eisner, who grew up poor in the 1920s and went on to become one of the most influential comic book artists in America, the funnies were his only exposure to art of any kind. In an article lamenting the effects of comic books written for the *New Republic* in 1947, Marya Mannes bemoans this state of affairs, saying, "Comic books are the addiction of three out of four American homes. In two of these three homes, they are virtually the only reading matter."[60] But Eisner saw this as a feature, not a bug. "The comic strips in the newspapers of the time were everything to me, as they were for every other kid I knew then," he said. "They made me want to be an artist."[61]

A concentrated attack on comic books themselves picked up steam in 1940, epitomized in an editorial called "A National Disgrace" by Sterling North, literary editor of the *Chicago Daily News*.[62] In this scathing, hyperbolic

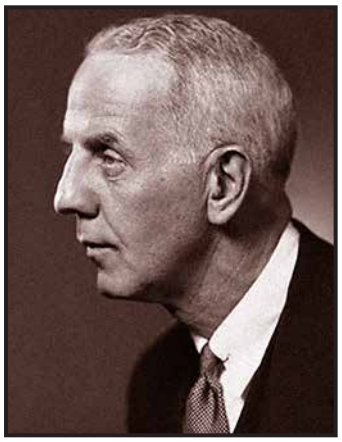
57 Hajdu, 12.
58 Wright, 87.
59 Haiju, 12.
60 Marya Mannes, "Junior Has A Craving, *New Republic* (February 17, 1947).
61 As quoted in Haiju, 16.
62 Ironically, that same year, *Superman* #19 included a story where Clark

piece, North refers to comic books as a "poisonous mushroom growth of the last two years" and "sex-horror serials."[63] After lauding old dime novels in which an occasional "redskin" bit the dust as "classic literature compared to the sadistic drivel pouring from the presses today," he refers to comic books as:

> *Badly drawn, badly written and badly printed—a strain on young eyes and young nervous systems—the effect of these pulp-paper nightmares is that of a violent stimulant. Their crude blacks and reds spoil the child's natural sense of color, their hypodermic injection of sex and murder make the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories. Unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the "comic" magazine.*

Like earlier critics of newspaper strips, North's criticisms can be interpreted in part as an attack on "low" art versus what he refers to as the "antidote" to comics—classic children's literature, such as *Treasure Island.* Never mind the overt racism that such texts often contained. Seeing as North was the author of such "classic" literature, his diatribe against comics wasn't wholly disinterested either. No doubt as comic books soared in popularity, he feared a coinciding reduction in sales of his own books. And such fears weren't unfounded. As Dauber notes, comic books grossed four to six times what traditional children's books did in 1941 alone.

Voicing similar concerns, drama critic John Mason Brown wrote an incendiary critique of comic books for the *Saturday Review of Literature.* He also read it on the March 2, 1948, radio broadcast of *America's Town Hall Meeting on the Air,* which featured a debate about comic books that included *Li'l Abner* creator Al Capp. Here's a brief taste of Brown's rhetoric:



John Mason Brown (1900–1969) was a prominent American drama critic whose 1948 anti-comics attacks, including "The Case Against the Comics," helped legitimize postwar hostility toward comics and fuel censorship campaigns. Such opposition wasn't wholly altruistic, as the authors of books were losing sales due to the popularity of comic books.



Stacks of comic books burn in a bonfire in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, 1949, part of the postwar "comic panic" that reached a fever pitch in the mid-1950s. Similar burnings, organized by schools, churches, and youth groups, flared up across the United States, feeding the moral panic over comics' influence and setting the stage for censorship.

> *My allergy to comics … is complete, utter, absolute. I know there are bad comics, and I presume there are good comics. I have read a few of both—under protest. But I regret them both. I deplore them. And, to continue the understatement, I abhor them.*
>
> *… [A]s a writer, I resent the way in which they get along with the poorest kind of writing. I hate their lack of both style and ethics. I hate their appeal to illiteracy and their bad grammar. I loathe their tiresome toughness, their cheap thrills, and imbecilic laughter.*
>
> *I despise them for making only the story count and not the* how *of its telling. I detest them, in spite of their alleged thrills and gags, because they have no subtlety, and certainly no beauty …*
>
> *What riles me when I see my children absorbed by the comics is my awareness of what they are not reading, and could be reading.*[64]

Motivated by such criticisms, church and community groups staged comic book burnings, letter-writing campaigns, and all sorts of other protests. Even legendary comic book creator Roy Thomas' family was swept up in the furor. In the mid-1950s, his parents were "dragooned" into going along with a comic book burning on the grounds of the school that

Kent and Lois Lane realize that a rash of recent crimes are being inspired by characters from the funny pages. "It's almost as tho someone were using the comic pages as a chart for crime," Clark says. Talk about DC shooting itself in the foot!

63 Read the full piece here: https://crisisofinnocence.library.torontomu.ca/items/show/201.

64 Listen to the full show here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0B-2vgWv-zHQ.



In 1954, the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency held hearings on crime and horror comics. Driven by fears about youth violence, the inquiry intensified anti-comics panic, and hastened creation of the Comics Code Authority.

Thomas attended. "It was all peer pressure," he said. "My parents didn't agree with it particularly … but they said, well, you gotta take some of your comics, and they didn't care which. So I took the worst stuff, you know the stuff that was banged up and I didn't like anyway … and I took it in and dumped it on the pile."[65]

Although sad at having to go through with the charade, Thomas's experience came with an ironic silver lining. While trying to sneak away before the comics were ignited, unable to bear the sight of his beloved books going up in flames, Thomas spotted two comics on the pile with covers that he had never seen before. One was an issue of *Space Busters,* and the other was a copy of *Wild Boy of the Congo.* When no one was looking, Thomas snatched the books and brought them home. "I'm the only person I know who ever came home from a comic book burning with two comics he hadn't had when he went there."

The furor that Wertham and many others created culminated in three days of high-profile hearings to investigate the "comic book menace" as part of the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in the spring of 1954, with Wertham as a star witness. Despite the spurious nature of his claims, which were already being criticized at the time, in 1954 comic book publishers took matters into their own hands and formed the Comics Code Authority (CCA) in the hopes of warding off government censorship.

65 Dollar Bin Bandits, "Roy Thomas," August 21, 2024, YouTube video, 1:07:56, https://youtu.be/-SwVmWaYd6Q?si=CxJdaTI7JunJ19tF.



The Comics Code Authority seal marked comics approved under the industry's 1954 self-censorship system. Printed on covers, it reassured retailers and parents, became a symbol of creative restriction, and for decades signaled which comic books major distributors would carry nationally.

The CCA included a strict set of guidelines that dictated what could and could not appear in comic books. The primary goal was to eliminate excessive violence, sexual content, profane language, substance abuse, and other themes that were considered inappropriate for young readers. Vampires, werewolves, and other monsters were also out, as were supernatural or occult topics. Meanwhile, respect for authorities, traditional marriage, and family values were in.

Participation in the Code was voluntary, but any publisher that refused to abide by it soon found themselves barred from the newsstands. To illustrate the Code's impact, in the early 1950s, somewhere between 30 and 40 comic book publishers were operating in America, pumping out 650–700 titles per month. By 1960, six years after the CCA was implemented, only nine of those publishers were left, with their output reduced to 250–300 titles each month. This contraction of the industry isn't entirely attributable to the CCA. Economic and demographic shifts, as well as a declining interest in comics due to competition from other forms of entertainment, also played a significant role, as did the 1955 collapse of the American News Company, which distributed over half of the comic books sold in the US. But there's no question that the CCA and the moral panic that led to it had a considerable dampening effect.

As much as comic book fans decry the furor that Wertham and others whipped up against comic books, in a roundabout way, fans of *Crisis* should be thankful it happened. For, by eliminating or severely restricting other popular genres, such as horror and crime, and by encouraging a type of storytelling focused on clear morality, good triumphing over evil, and respect for authority, the CCA inadvertently paved the way for the return of a genre that perfectly represented those values—superheroes. And with the decks cleared of so many competing genres and publishers, by the time the dust settled in the mid-1950s, DC was virtually the only publisher still publishing such stories. Even so, not even DC could afford to sit on its laurels if it hoped to retain readers' interest, especially with so many other sources of amusement on offer. Therefore, the company realized it had to do something completely different with its superheroes, and they knew just the man to call on for help.

CHAPTER 5

Showcase of a New Age—How Julius Schwartz Brought Superheroes Back

Julius "Julie" Schwartz had no background in comic books before he was hired as an editor at All-American Publications in 1944. For the past twelve years, he had worked as a literary agent for Solar Sales Service, an agency he co-founded with his good friend Mort Weisinger in 1932. Weisinger moved on to work as an editor in the pulps and then at National/DC, but Schwartz continued to represent a number of high-profile science-fiction and fantasy authors, including H. P. Lovecraft, Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Robert Heinlein, and Leigh Brackett, the latter of whom went on to co-write a little movie called *The Empire Strikes Back.*

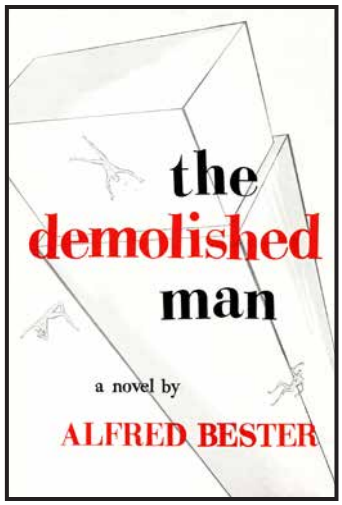
When demand for pulp magazines waned during WWII, so did Schwartz's sales. In search of a more stable income, he decided to act on a tip from one of his clients, Alfred Bester, who was writing stories for *Green Lantern,* and apply for a job at All-American Comics. To compensate for Schwartz's lack of knowledge regarding comic books, Bester advised him to buy some comics on the way to the interview and read them on the subway. "They cost a dime a piece back then, and to this day, that 30 cents was the only money that I have ever spent on comics in my entire career," Schwartz said in his autobiography, "But it turned out to be the best investment in my life."[66]

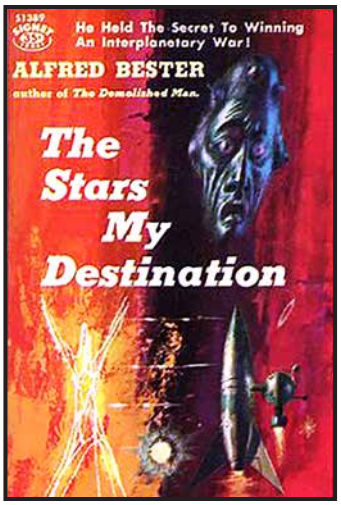
At the interview, editor Sheldon "Shelly" Mayer could tell that in terms of his comics background, Schwartz "didn't have too much going for him. … But it would not have been fair to say that he was batting zero. … His responses to my comments were sharp and discerning … [a]nd above all, there was that patient look to him … I think that's what finally sold me."[67]

Schwartz was hired on the spot, and with Mayer pulling back from editorial duties shortly thereafter, Schwartz was thrust right into the fire. "I now had the responsibility of plotting stories, looking over the artwork, arranging for covers, doing proofreading to make sure everything would come









(top left) 1985 Julius Schwartz, photo by Albert DeGuzman. Schwartz (1915–2004) helped reinvent DC Comics. A pioneering sci-fi fan and literary agent, he sparked the Silver Age, relaunching the Flash and Green Lantern and shaping the Justice League. (top right) Alfred Bester (1913–1987) bridged comics and science fiction. At DC s All-American line in the 1940s, he scripted some of Green Lantern's sharpest early adventures.

66 Julius Schwartz, *Man of Two Worlds* (New York: HarperEntertainment, 2000), 69.

67 Guy H. Lillian, "Strange Schwartz Stories," *Amazing World of DC Comics* Vol. 1, No. 3, November–December 1974, 7.

out right."[68] Not long after that, All-American merged with National, which reunited Schwartz with his old pal Weisinger.

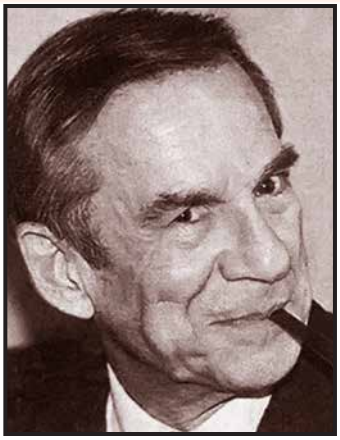
Over the next several years, Schwartz edited numerous titles, including *All-American Comics, Flash Comics, Green Lantern, All Star Comics,* and *Sensation Comics,* which enabled him to work with a variety of iconic Golden Age superheroes. As interest in the genre waned and superhero titles were canceled, he also edited *Strange Adventures, Strange Worlds,* and *Mystery in Space*, which allowed him to indulge his passion for science fiction.

In fact, while editing *Mystery in Space* #35 (1956), Schwartz presided over one of DC's first parallel-earth stories. "The Counterfeit Earth!" Is about an alien invasion that is thwarted by Earth's scientists when they create a phony version of the planet that will cause a chain reaction of explosions if the aliens attempt to land on it. Two astronauts who are fleeing the aliens must land within the hour or risk running out of oxygen. They solve the riddle of which Earth is real when they spot a flaw in the counterfeit planet's design: it is missing the Great Wall of China—the only man-made structure visible from space.

By 1956, in the wake of the industry implosion caused by the comic book scare, DC was looking for a low-risk way to test new characters and features. The concept they came up with was a series called *Showcase.* "The most novel idea ever seen in the comic book publishing industry," an editorial in issue #1 proclaimed. "A magazine inspired by you!"

"Our idea on *Showcase* was simple," Schwartz said. "We would use it to put out a single issue showcasing a new character or concept, then wait to see how it sold before we turned it into a regular monthly title."[69]

Showcase was highly experimental, giving creators room to explore various genres, from science fiction to war stories to adventure tales to Westerns. Issue #1 focused on firefighters and included three stories about Fireman Farrell, who made a cameo appearance in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #7. The second issue, "Kings of the Wild," included a collection of wilderness stories. Issue #3 featured a trio of stories about Navy frogmen. Despite high hopes for the series, "The first three *Showcases* flopped," Schwartz said.[70]

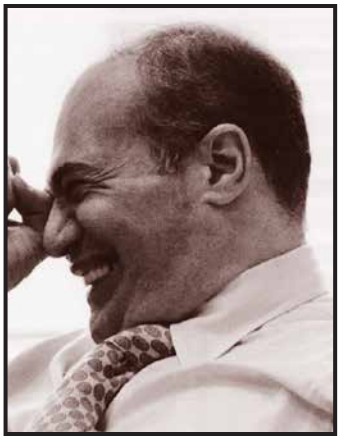


Robert Kanigher (1915–2002) was one of DC's most prolific writers, shaping the company's war, western, and superhero lines for decades. He defined Sgt. Rock and the combat comics that made DC a leader in the genre, co-created the Silver Age Black Canary, and helped steer Wonder Woman and countless anthologies. His punchy, high-concept storytelling became DC's signature rhythm.

While batting around ideas for issue #4, Schwartz suggested they revive the Flash, whose termination was part of a wave of cancellations that also took out the JSA, Green Lantern, Doctor Fate, the Spectre, and most other DC superheroes in the late 1940s and early 1950s. "Some of my co-workers were incredulous and asked me why I thought Flash would succeed now, having failed so dismally a few years before, thus resulting in his demise," Schwartz said.[71] In his defense, he pointed out that the average comic book reader was between ages eight and twelve. With seven years having passed since *Flash Comics* was on the newsstands, "[T]here was a whole new audience out there who really didn't know that the Flash had flopped, and maybe they might give it a try."[72]

Working with writer Robert Kanigher and artist Carmine Infantino, Schwartz redesigned the Flash from the ground up. No longer Jay Garrick, a research chemist in Keystone City, he was now Barry Allen, a forensic scientist at the Central City Police Department. Like Jay, a lab accident leads to Barry gaining his superpowers. But instead of inhaling hard water vapors, Barry's lab is struck by lightning, which moves at the speed of light. The blast douses him with a mixture of chemicals that give him super speed and stamina, enhanced reflexes, and the ability to vibrate his molecules at different frequencies. They also redesigned his costume, exchanging Jay's shirt, pants, and winged silver helmet for a skin-tight red bodysuit and cowl and a lightning bolt on his chest. As a nifty bonus feature, Barry stores his costume in a ring on his finger. When exposed to air, a chemical solution causes it to swell to life size, then a special gas makes it shrink when it's not needed.

While depicting how Barry gained his powers, his origin story builds a firm connection to the past by showing Barry reading a copy of *Flash Comics* #13 just before the lightning strikes, transforming him into the fastest man



Carmine Infantino (1925–2013) gave DC its Silver Age look, co-creating the streamlined Barry Allen Flash and visualizing speed with bold motion lines. He later refreshed Batman with the 1964 "New Look," then rose to art director, editorial director, and publisher, recruiting new talent and steering the line through a turbulent era. His clean design sense reshaped DC's modern style.

68 Comic Book Historians, "The Julius Schwartz 1999 Shoot Interview by David Armstrong," YouTube video, 34:03, https://youtu.be/NXuPDM-w7uQ0?si=zHtuRIceDaYvx9Xc.

69 Schwartz, 87.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.



H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) helped define modern science fiction by turning time travel into a repeatable act. A nameless "Time Traveller" rides his invention to the distant year 802,701 where the childlike Eloi and subterranean Morlocks reveal a grim evolutionary class divide. Its mix of adventure, speculative biology, and social critique became a template for countless time-travel stories.

alive. Interestingly, the cover of *Flash Comics* #13 pictured in *Showcase* #4 bears no resemblance to the cover of *Flash Comics* #13, as we know it. The comic that Barry is reading shows Jay on the cover, running across a cityscape, but ours depicts Hawkman hurling a dark-skinned assailant in a scene that doesn't actually appear in the story. This could be a mistake, but it could also be a subtle indicator that Kanigher and Schwartz were already planting the idea that Barry lived on a parallel world. This theory loses a bit of steam when one considers that in *The Flash* #137, Barry consults an issue of *All Star Comics* #37, and its cover is the same as *All Star Comics* #37 in our world, but it's still fun to ponder the possibility.

Shortly after deciding to follow Jay's example and use his super speed to help humanity, Barry engages the Turtle Man, the slowest and perhaps most annoying villain on Earth. Not only does Turtle Man move slowly, he … also … speaks … slowly, no … doubt … using … up … the … full … quota … of … ellipses … allotted … to … DC … that … month.

The second story, "The Man Who Broke the Time Barrier," allowed Schwartz to indulge his love of sci-fi. In this tale, the Flash encounters a thief who is supposed to be exiled to the 50th century as a punishment for his crimes. Due to an error, he winds up in the 20th century instead. At the end of this story, Barry employs his super speed to transport the villain back to the future. "By traveling fast enough, close to the speed of light," he conjectures in a flash of inspiration that became a trademark of his character, "I can set up vibrations that will project our bodies into the future." This time-travel method was similar to the one employed by Wonder Woman in *Wonder Woman* #59 (1953), also written by Kanigher, where she vibrates into the future to avoid casting a reflection in a mirror, so it was probably borrowed from there. As we'll learn later, the concept of vibration did *a lot* of heavy lifting in the DCU over the next several decades, becoming foundational to the action in *Crisis.* Time travel played a key role too, creating its own share of problems, which will also be covered in a subsequent chapter.

Because the first three issues of *Showcase* had bombed, and since issue #4 was premised on the revival of a superhero who had worn out his welcome several years earlier, no one at DC was betting that it would turn the series around, much less kick off a new era in the superhero genre. But that's exactly what *Showcase* #4 did. Today, it's generally regarded as the beginning of the Silver Age of comic books.[73] But because it took three to four months for sales figures to come in, it was a while before anyone figured out what was happening. Even when DC realized it might have a hit on its hands, the company still employed a cautious approach. After bringing the Flash back for *Showcase* #8, they devoted two issues to "Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane" and two more issues to the Challengers of the Unknown before the Flash returned in issues 13 and 14, with each one selling better than the last. "Finally, they said, okay, that's it, let's put out the Flash in his own comic," Schwartz said. "It's a proven success."[74]

When the Flash came out in his own title in early 1959, rather than start at issue #1, DC decided to continue the numbering where *Flash Comics* left off ten years earlier, which meant starting at #105. Never mind that by the time *Flash Comics* was canceled, the Golden Age Flash wasn't even featured on the cover! (He and Hawkman had been trading off as the cover story for a while before the title ceased publication.) This may seem like a strange decision now, when the first issue in any series is the most coveted. But back then, readers were more likely to buy comics that had a proven track record than try something new. This sensibility was shared by creator Dan Jurgens while growing up in the 1960s. "As a kid, if I saw a series that was up to issue 212 rather than 4, I figured if it had been around for a while, then it was good. *Spider-Man* #78 and a second series? It must be really, really good."

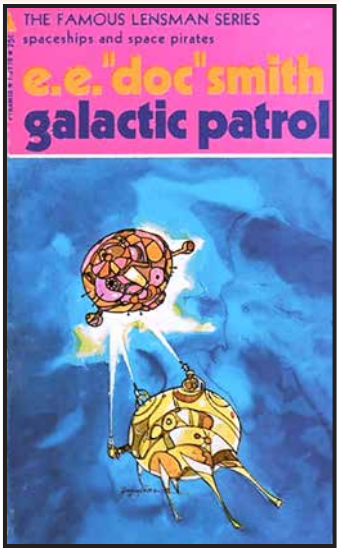
With the revamped Flash off and running, so to speak, next up for a makeover was Green Lantern. "Once again, I said I'm making a complete change," Schwartz recalled. "Nothing is going to be alike except the name."[75] The only problem is, that was almost completely untrue!

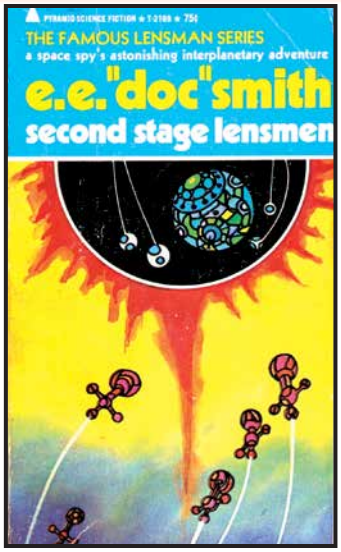
Rather than a construction engineer who gains his powers from a mysterious green lantern following a train accident (see *All-American Comics* #16), the new Green Lantern is ace test pilot Hal Jordan, whose origin story is depicted in *Showcase* #22 and then repeated almost note for note in *Green Lantern* #1. Like Alan, Hal is a "chosen one," but instead of the lantern choosing him, this time the "battery of power"

73 Some argue that the Silver Age actually began with the introduction of "John Jones, Manhunter from Mars" (later J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter) in *Detective Comics* #255 (1958). He was one of the first new superheroes that DC created after the Golden Age, marking a shift back to the genre after several years of publishing mostly crime, horror, and science-fiction stories. However, seeing as he was a back-up story rather than a feature character, his introduction didn't have the same level of impact as the reintroduction of the Flash. Furthermore, the introduction of Captain Comet, a mutant who was "born a hundred thousand years before his time" predated the Martian Manhunter by four years (*Strange Adventures* #9, 1951). So, if anyone should be awarded the title of the first Silver Age hero, it should be him, as Julius Schwartz argued in his autobiography, *Man of Two Worlds.* Like J'onn J'onzz, though, Captain Comet truly was a man ahead of his time.

74 Comic Book Historians, "The Julius Schwartz 1999 Shoot Interview by David Armstrong," YouTube video, 34:03, https://youtu.be/NXuPDM-w7uQ0?si=zHtuRIceDaYvx9Xc.

75 Ibid.





E. E. Smith's Lensman novels are widely seen as a major influence on DC's Silver Age Green Lantern mythology. Although Julius Schwartz denied a direct borrowing, the parallels have long been obvious to readers, including an interstellar police force organized by sectors and beholden to a central authority, and lens/power rings that grant users special abilities, including the capacity to communicate telepathically over vast distances.

is commissioned by a dying alien named Abin Sur to find someone who is entirely without fear to replace him.

Once the battery finds Hal, it teleports him to Abin Sur, who uses his final moments to explain that he's a member of a group of "space-patrolmen in the super-galactic system" (no Green Lantern Corps yet), and he's chosen Hal as his replacement because Hal is fearless and honest.

Just as the original Green Lantern is vulnerable to wood, Abin Sur tells Hal that an impurity in the battery makes it powerless against anything yellow (later retconned to be due to the fear-empowered cosmic entity known as Parallax, as revealed in the "Emerald Twilight" storyline, beginning in *Green Lantern* Vol. 3, #48). Also similar to his Golden Age counterpart, Hal must recharge his ring every 24 hours. Unlike Alan, however, rather than fashioning his ring from part of the lantern, Hal's ring is a gift from Abin Sur, as is his costume, a sleek black-and-green bodysuit with white gloves and a lantern symbol on the chest.

Like Alan's ring, Hal's ring is fueled by willpower. And similar to his predecessor, every time Hal charges his ring, he utters an oath. Perhaps to forge a thread of continuity between the characters, Hal's oath is virtually identical to the one Alan Scott finally settled on after test driving several others: "In brightest day … in blackest night, no evil shall escape my sight! Let those who worship evil's might beware my power—Green Lantern's light!" Although we never learn the origin of Alan's oath, *Green Lantern* #10 explains how Hal's oath was the result of three adventures during his first week with the ring.

So, despite Schwartz's claim that nothing would be alike between the two characters except the name, in both cases we have: 1) a man of science who is 2) chosen by an intelligence from outer space that 3) imbues him with a lantern-like device and a ring of power that 4) must be charged every 24 hours and which has 5) one vulnerability. For Alan and Hal, the key to using the ring is 6) willpower, and both characters 7) adopt a secret identity to devote their lives to fighting evil and 8) use essentially the same oath. And the similarities don't end there.

While Hal's situation involves many sci-fi trappings, including an alien and a crashed spacecraft, when the central power battery on Oa is revealed in *Green Lantern* #9, it's referred to as the power source "from which all the smaller individual power batteries all over the cosmos draw their *mystic* energy" (emphasis added). Hal also refers to power batteries as "mystic lamps" in *Green Lantern* #2. This is affirmed by the fact that Hal *and* Alan's rings can be charged using the Guardians' battery (see *Green Lantern* #111). Plus, as late as *Green Lantern* #195 and 196, the power that fuels the Green Lanterns' rings is referred to as "magick." Hence, despite the sci-fi veneer, the source of Hal Jordan's power seems just as ethereal as the mystical flame from outer space that triggers Alan Scott's transformation.

The only real differences between the two Green Lanterns were purely cosmetic—their occupations, their costumes, their one weakness, and the hand on which they wore their ring.[76] And even some of the new innovations were borrowed from elsewhere. As Schwartz admitted, "John [Broome] and I didn't have much of an idea about who the Guardians really were, and we basically took their name from an old Captain Comet story that John had previously scripted (*Strange Adventures* #22 'The Guardians of the Clockwork Universe')."[77] The concept of the Guardians wasn't the only thing that Schwartz and Broome borrowed from that story. They also lifted the idea of someone receiving a telepathic summons informing him that he is an exceptional individual, and his help is required to prevent a galactic catastrophe from occurring.

Another incident of self-plagiarism is evident if one reads *The Flash* #107, in which the Flash encounters a "hominoid" (a human-like robot) named Kyri, who was created by a group of bald beings known as the Rulers of the Galaxy to prevent a cosmic disaster from occurring.[78] This issue came

76 Some future writers, artists, and editors forgot this distinction. See *All-Star Comics* #59, for example, in which Alan wears his ring on his right hand instead of his left, including on the cover where his right hand is glowing to emphasize the point. The same goes for the cover of *Who's Who* #9, which is a major faux pas, seeing as the series billed itself as "The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe."

77 Schwartz, 76.

78 *Flash* #107 is also significant as a precursor to *Crisis* in terms of the problem Kyri was created to solve. "On the planetoid F203 near the center of the galaxy, there is a weak spot," Kyri informed the Flash as they traveled there in a spaceship, "where the terrible forces of another dimension threaten to break through! Every few years the barrier holding back those forces must be repaired or the galaxy will be destroyed!" While this other dimension wasn't named, one can imagine that such stories inspired Wolfman and his creative team when concocting the threat posed by the anti-matter universe in *Crisis*.



Created by editors Mort Weisinger and Leo Margulies in 1940, Captain Future was a pulp "super-scientist" space adventurer (Curtis Newton), popular enough to define a whole magazine run. A decade later at DC, Julius Schwartz and his team patterned Captain Comet on the Captain Future template—pulp-style cosmic heroics translated into a DC superhero. Just one example of the "borrowing" that typified the industry.

out less than a year before *Green Lantern* #1, in which the Guardians of the Universe make their first appearance. Both issues were written by Broome and edited by Schwartz, so they probably repurposed the Rulers of the Galaxy for Green Lantern too. The Rulers of the Galaxy appeared in a single panel in this issue and were never seen or referenced again, so we have no idea how they fit into the pantheon of ultimate beings alongside similar characters like the Guardians of the Universe. This failure to outline the cosmic hierarchy of the DCU was an ongoing problem throughout the first 50 years of the company's history, with many supreme beings introduced on an ad hoc basis like this, never to be seen again.

As a case in point, consider the Guardians depicted in *Strange Adventures* #22. They are pictured as tall, old men with long hair, similar to the Oans before they migrated from Malthus, who keep watch over the cosmos from an unnamed planet. However, the universe they oversee is quite different from the one that the Guardians in Green Lantern's stories monitor. "The universe is like a clock!" Nestro,[79] the head Guardian, tells Captain Comet. "If any part in it fails or changes position, the entire mechanism may stop! From this tiny globe, since time immemorial, our race has kept a ceaseless vigil to prevent such a catastrophe!" Seeing as these Guardians only appear one other time (in *Strange Adventures* #35), little else is known about them. As for Captain Comet, prior to *Crisis,* he appears to be firmly rooted in the Earth-One universe. But if the Guardians depicted in Green Lantern's adventures inhabit the same universe as Captain Comet, does that mean the Earth-One universe has two sets of Guardians?

Considering the distinctive clockwork nature of the universe where the Guardians from *Strange Adventures* dwell, a possible solution could be that while Captain Comet resides on Earth-One, the "thought-beam" that summons him to the Guardians' planet actually comes from a parallel universe. Therefore, while he thinks he merely travels "far out into space … beyond the reaches of our solar system," he inadvertently traverses an interdimensional barrier. This theory is difficult to sustain in light of *Strange Adventures* #35, in which the Guardians task Captain Comet with representing Earth in an interplanetary chess tournament on Pluto. This indicates that the universe the Guardians are overseeing is the same one in which Captain Comet resides, unless the Guardians just want him to *think* he is in the same universe for fear that if he learns otherwise, he might not help them. Such are the gymnastics required when continuity fails to remain consistent.

The Green Lantern mythos continued to unfold in an extemporaneous manner over *Showcase* #22–24 and the first several issues of *Green Lantern* once the character got his own series in 1960. Not only were his ring's seemingly boundless capabilities expanded and refined, so was the background of the Guardians and the nature of the anti-matter universe, a.k.a. Qward, which will be discussed at length later.

Like the revitalized Flash, the new version of Green Lantern was a huge hit with readers. A poll published in *Green Lantern* #3 revealed he was more popular than Superman and Batman, receiving 888 votes to Superman's 600 and Batman's 512.[80] Even the Flash was ahead of the Caped Crusader, with 521 votes. Clearly, Schwartz was onto something. Therefore, he decided to overhaul several other Golden Age heroes, starting with Hawkman and Hawkgirl, who went from reincarnated versions of ancient Egyptians to police officers from the planet Thanagar (*The Brave and the Bold* #34). While never attaining the status of DC's top-tier heroes, the Hawks developed a niche fan base among readers who preferred science-fiction stories that weren't as mainstream as DC's other titles, and they became prominent

79 The name "Sinestro" was likely inspired by this name as well, yet another example of self-plagiarism.

80 Will Jacobs and Gerard Jones, *The Comic Book Heroes* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1984), 41.

members of the JLA.

The Atom also got a Silver Age facelift, going from small, scrappy college student Al Pratt to nuclear physicist Ray Palmer, whose encounter with a fragment of a white dwarf star gave him the power to shrink and grow his body and also control his weight (*Showcase* #34). Like the other revamped Silver Age heroes, the Atom starred in three issues of *Showcase* before receiving his own title in June/July 1962.

At the same time that DC was creating new versions of its retired Golden Age heroes, the handful of characters who had survived the first wave of superhero fatigue—Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, and Green Arrow—and remained in publication in one form or another were also retooled for a new generation of readers.

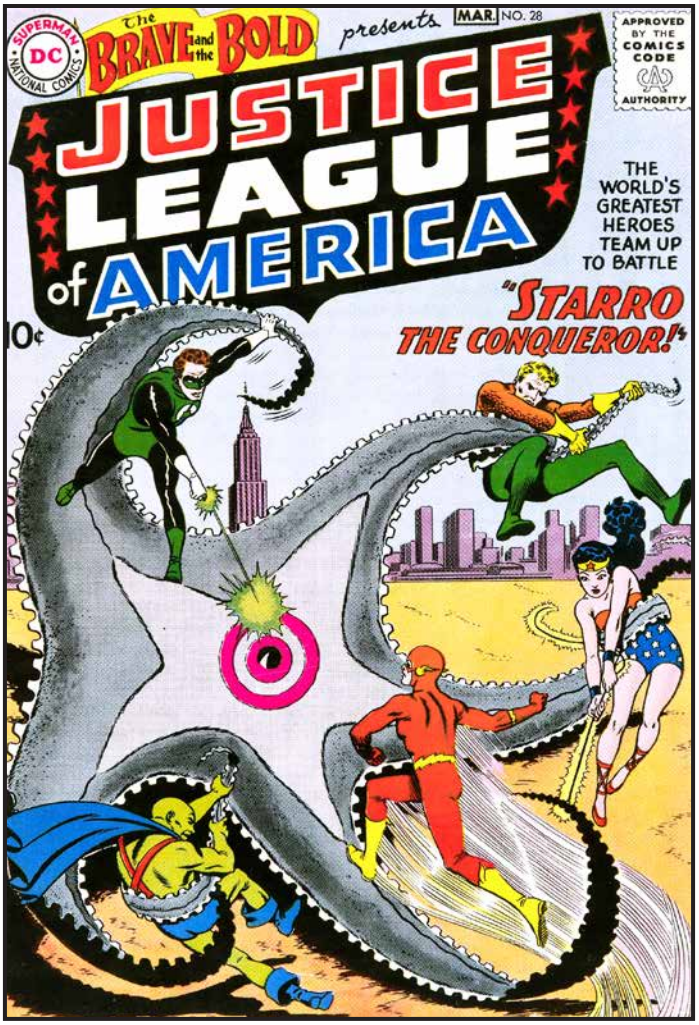
In *Adventure Comics* #260 (1959), Aquaman's origin was rewritten so that rather than the son of a man who'd discovered Atlantis and learned how to live underwater (*More Fun Comics* #73), he's the offspring of a lighthouse keeper and a mysterious woman named Alanna whom the lighthouse keeper rescues from the ocean one night during a storm. Not until she is on her deathbed does she reveal her secret. "I come from Atlantis, a continent that sank into the sea ages ago! Our people had to adapt to a watery existence! We gradually became like fish … capable of all underwater feats!" Alanna had been exiled from Atlantis due to her curiosity about the surface world, but she says young Arthur has the potential to become the ruler of the oceans.

Most of Aquaman's powers from the Golden Age were retained for the new version of the character, such as his ability to communicate with sea life. The Silver Age Aquaman was also given a crucial vulnerability: he has to return to water at least once every hour, or he'll weaken and die. This limitation helped balance out his powers and gave his stories a sense of urgency, but it also led to some unintentionally humorous developments, such as Aquaman getting some octopi friends to milk some cows for him, so he can submerge himself in a trough full of milk because water isn't available (*Adventure Comics* #256).

Aquaman also received a love interest in the form of Mera, the queen of "a watery world in another dimension" whose residents have hydrokinetic powers and can turn water into all manner of constructs. When an "evil pretender" named Leron seeks to take over her kingdom, Mera escapes through a dimensional warp that a scientist creates. Leron follows her through the portal, but Aquaman, Mera, and Aqualad defeat him, and Mera continues to show up regularly after that. Soon, she becomes an honorary Atlantean, and she and Aquaman get married and have a child.

The debut of Mera's "watery world" was one of many such introductions of alternate realities presented in an impromptu manner during this period to serve the needs of a particular story. Interdimensional travel became an ongoing theme in *Aquaman* as he, Mera, and Aqualad battled a host of characters and creatures who continued to slip through from Mera's homeworld, which was eventually named Dimension Aqua.

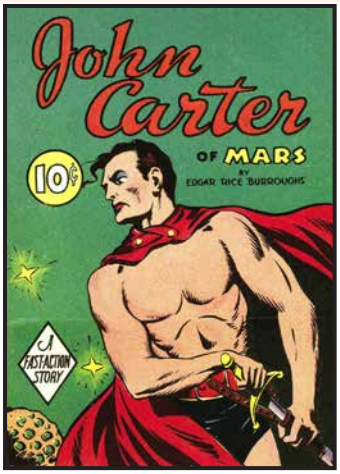
Like Aquaman, Green Arrow survived the transition from the Golden Age to the Silver Age as a backup feature in several of DC's titles. He was given a new origin in *Adventure Comics* #256 (1959). Rather than a wealthy collector of Native American artifacts, Oliver Queen is portrayed as a "wealthy playboy, world traveler" who falls off his ship one night while on a voyage in the South Seas. He makes his way to a deserted island, where he fashions a bow and develops all sorts of trick arrows to aid his survival efforts. These include a rope arrow, an arrow that can deploy a fishing net, and a "drill arrow" that is driven by the tensile strength of an elastic band from his sock. He also creates a green suit out of leaves to camouflage himself while hunting game. The trick arrows in particular help this new version of Green Arrow stand apart from his Golden Age counterpart, including boxing glove arrows, diamond-tipped arrows, glue



***The Brave and the Bold* #28 (1960) introduced the Justice League of America, DC's first modern super-team. It proved that a shared-universe team book could thrive, and it spun into the ongoing *Justice League of America* series, one of DC's most popular titles.**



Though not a direct inspiration, the Golden Age Green Arrow echoes Robinson Crusoe through Oliver Queen's island ordeal: a privileged man isolated from civilization, surviving by ingenuity, mastering primitive tools, and returning transformed. Crusoe survives with salvaged gear; Green Arrow with a bow, trick arrows, and a new secret identity.



Early Superboy stories inherited Superman's original sci-fi logic: on Earth, a Kryptonian gained tremendous strength and leaping power because Earth's greater gravity made moving about on Earth comparatively easy. This mirrors John Carter on Mars, where lower gravity gives him similar abilities. Both heroes utilized planetary physics for mythic effect.

arrows, explosive arrows, magnetic arrows, fan arrows, electric-shock arrows, fire-extinguisher arrows, and suction-cup arrows, among others. He also gets an Arrowcar, an Arrowcave, and even an Arrowplane, leading some critics, including David Steel of the *Earth-2 Podcast,* to regard him as nothing more than a "Batman knock-off in a Robin Hood costume."

As for the "big three"—Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman—while they didn't undergo total overhauls during this time, subtle changes took place that were later interpreted to indicate that the focus of their titles had shifted from the Earth-Two versions of these characters to their Earth-One counterparts.

Many people point to *Superman* #76 (1952), where Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne discovered each other's secret identities for the first time while sharing a state room on board a cruise ship, as the official transition from the Superman of Earth-Two to his Earth-One double. Other people regard the introduction of Superboy seven years earlier (*More Fun Comics* #101, 1945) as the line of demarcation between the two characters. This story retroactively introduces a teenage version of Superman (and later a toddler and baby version) that is incompatible with the Earth-Two Superman's continuity, seeing as he didn't begin his superhero career until he was an adult. Therefore, most people conclude that these stories must fit into the Earth-One Superman's continuity.

Adding credence to this theory is that this issue was the first to introduce the idea that Kryptonians lacked superpowers on their home planet, unlike the ancestors of the Earth-Two Superman. Instead, Superboy's abilities were attributed to Earth's weaker gravity (no mention of the red sun/yellow sun connection is made until *Action Comics* #262, which came out 15 years later). Additionally, the concept of Superman growing up in a small town was mentioned for the first time here. Unfortunately, this contradicts *Superman* #46 (which came out two years after Superboy's introduction), which showed Clark "Specs" Kent as a graduate of Metropolis High School when one of Clark's old classmates recounted a story about Superboy saving his neck. Due to these and many other inconsistencies, many people regard the years 1948–1958 as a nebulous and almost forgettable time for the character. Because no one in the 1940s and 1950s had any idea of the multiverse yet, any attempt to establish a clear dividing line between the two versions of the character is speculative at best.

When it comes to Batman, the traditional line of demarcation between the two versions of this character is *Detective Comics* #327 and *Batman* #164, both of which feature Batman's "New Look," yet another innovation driven by Julius Schwartz. The most distinctive change was the yellow oval around the bat symbol on his chest. But this can't be taken as a firm separation, because previous stories, such as Batman's appearances in *Justice League of America,* which definitely feature the Earth-One Batman, predate his New Look by several years, and there was no yellow oval around his chest in those issues. Also, during the New Look period, some of the stories make it clear that the yellow oval was a recent costume change, not a retcon of his earlier appearances. See *Batman* #183, for instance, where an ex-con who tried to impersonate Batman was foiled because his costume featured the old logo. Flashbacks to the Earth-One Batman's earlier adventures (e.g., *Batman* #200 and #213 and *World's Finest* #271) also confirmed that he didn't always sport the yellow oval. Considering that most writers and editors at DC weren't even aware of the Earth-One/Earth-Two distinction until 1961 when "Flash of Two Worlds" made it official, it may be best to assume that the Golden Age stories are canonical to both versions of the character.

Wonder Woman's rebirth on Earth-One is a bit easier to nail down, seeing as *Wonder Woman* #98 (1958) did a soft reboot of her origin story. As in the original tale (*All Star Comics* #8), her revamped origin began with a call from the divine to choose an Amazon to fight evil in man's world. This led to a contest to see who would represent Paradise Island, but in this case Wonder Woman rescued Steve Trevor *after* the contest rather than *before* the event. Also, unlike her Earth-Two counterpart, the new Diana didn't fall in love with Steve at first sight. She was too distracted with her first task in the world of men—to turn a penny into a million dollars within 24 hours—to worry about love. Even though this was clearly an attempt to modernize her character, no mention is made of parallel earths, seeing as this took place three years prior to *The Flash* #123. Hence, this update should probably be regarded as a conveniently timed reboot rather than an attempt to align her title with Earth-One continuity.

While these updated origin stories and the introduction of new versions of Golden Age characters put a fresh spin on things, they also created a number of unexpected continuity problems that began to rumble beneath the surface of the DCU over the next few years. Such issues became more apparent once these heroes were brought together with the formation of the Justice League of America in *The Brave and the Bold* #28 (1960). The initial roster included Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, who had all been in operation since 1938, 1939, and 1941, respectively. Meanwhile, the Silver Age Flash, Green Lantern, and Aquaman were also part of the team, with the Atom and Hawkman joining later, but all of these characters appeared to be in their late twenties. If Superman was 25 when he started his career in 1938, by 1960 he would have been pushing 50. The same goes for Wonder Woman and Batman, but none of them appeared to be this age when serving with the JLA.

There's also the issue of the missing JSA. Early Silver Age stories didn't clarify whether the new Justice League members had any connection to the JSA or if they were even aware of their Golden Age counterparts. Nor did the former JSAers—Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman—ever mention having been part of that group or working with heroes who shared the same names as their new companions. This created the potential for confusion for anyone who was familiar with the Golden Age heroes, as it was unclear if the new heroes were meant to replace the JSA members, or if they even existed in the same universe.

This may not have been a problem for the new crop of young readers whom Schwartz and co. imagined they were writing for—children ages eight to twelve who had no memory of the Golden Age. However, due to the growth of comic book fandom, the age of the average comic book reader was moving up from children to teens to young adults. This was driven in large part by the renaissance of Marvel comics, beginning with the publication of *Fantastic Four* #1 in 1961 and Stan Lee's emphasis on more mature, psychologically complex, and socially relevant storytelling. As a result, for an increasing number of fans, comic books were no longer regarded as a throwaway medium, and they were eagerly scooping up back issues wherever they could find them. And as letter columns first introduced as a regular feature in *Superman* #146 (1958) indicate, these fans cared deeply about the stories they were reading and the need for them to adhere to continuity. Reader Robert Klein is a good example, saying at the opening of a letter written in response to *Wonder Woman* #156 (1965), "Before I go into my opinion on Wonder Woman, I'll warn you that I am a member of 'fandom.' I read 'fanzines,' and I have read *Wonder Woman* for many years." In the midst of criticizing the title's recent experiment with imitating a Golden Age art style, he added "Today's comics are more sophisticated in story and plot, and appeal to the reader who is older than twelve." Presumably, by "today's comics," he was referring to comics published by companies other than DC, i.e., Marvel, which had done a better job of keeping up with readers' changing tastes.



***Fantastic Four* #1 (1961) by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby kicked off the "Marvel Age," replacing do-gooders with a bickering, relatable family of adventurers. Its mix of soap-opera emotion, science-fiction spectacle, and ongoing continuity introduced Mr. Fantastic, Invisible Girl, Human Torch, and the Thing—plus foes like Mole Man—and proved that a shared superhero universe could sell, launching Marvel's explosive Silver Age.**

Schwartz didn't have much use for continuity himself. Who needed the added creative burden of ensuring that no story contradicted some cherished aspect of the past, especially when such details had likely been dreamed up on the spur of the moment to meet a fast-approaching deadline? Instead, he preferred the traditional approach of making each story stand on its own with no need to adhere to what preceded it. However, rather than dismiss his readers' growing concerns outright, Schwartz came up with an innovative way to address them. Like Dick Giordano with *Crisis,* Schwartz probably believed his solution would bring a "permanent" end to the continuity problems at DC. Little did he or anyone else realize it would reshape the DCU for decades to come.

CHAPTER 6

A Simple Trick, a Complex Legacy—Flash of Two Worlds

Writers like to complicate matters, and what began as a dream of a story—"Flash of Two Worlds"—had turned into a nightmare. DC continuity was so confusing, no new reader could easily understand it, while older readers had to keep miles-long lists to set things straight. And the writers … well, we were always stumbling over each other trying to figure out simple answers to difficult questions.

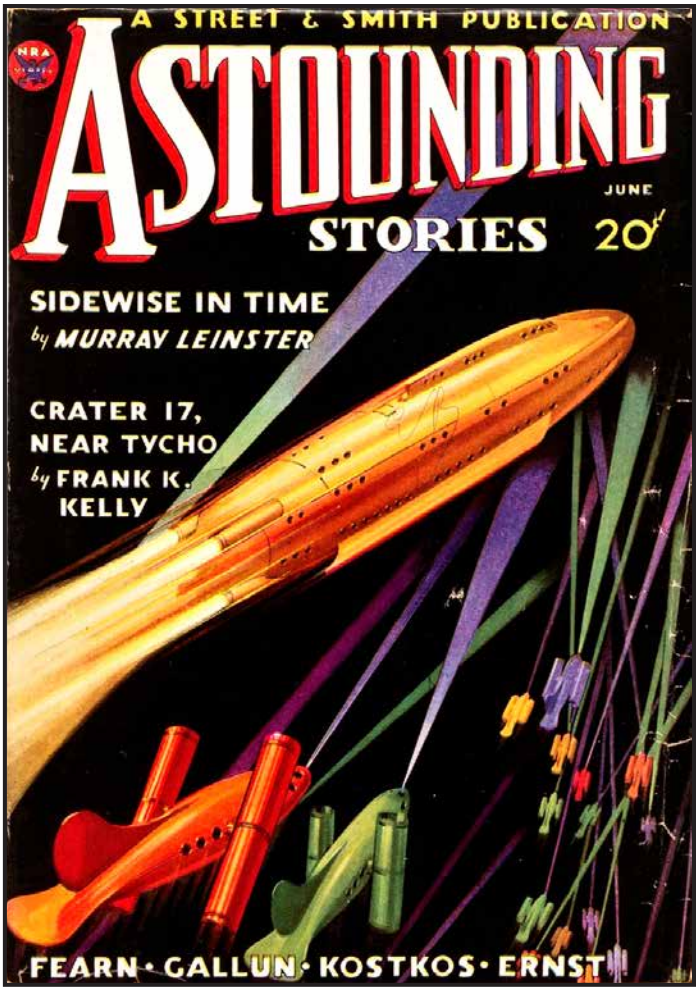
— Marv Wolfman (*Absolute Crisis*)

Ironically, the decision that opened the door to the parallel universes and multiple versions of various characters that Wolfman and others at DC saw as such a threat to the company's viability in 1981 was viewed as a landmark event that revitalized the company's sales just two decades earlier. That event took place in *The Flash* #123 (1961) in the aforementioned story, "Flash of Two Worlds!"[81]

In this tale, Barry Allen met up with his childhood inspiration, Jay Garrick, the Golden Age Flash, when Barry's ability to vibrate his molecules at super speed accidentally caused him to cross over from his world to the one that Jay inhabited. Later, Barry's world came to be known as Earth-One (or Earth-1) and Jay's as Earth-Two (or Earth-2), but at this early stage, no such nomenclature was used.

The critical event that led Barry to Jay's world occurred when Barry was doing something seemingly trivial—performing a stage show for a group of orphans as a favor to his girlfriend, Iris. The climax of his act was a trick where he spun a rope so fast, it stood straight up in the air. Then he planned to climb the rope and disappear, making his big exit. He made an exit, alright—right out of the building!

It's unclear where Barry expected to end up, but he was surprised to find himself on the outskirts of what he assumed to be his hometown of Central City. His initial assumption was that he vibrated so fast, he passed through some sort



Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time" (*Astounding Stories*, June 1934) is a foundational parallel-worlds tale. When reality "slips," chunks of Earth swap with counterparts from alternate timelines, and Professor Minott and his students navigate a mosaic of different histories. The story helped define the modern scifi toolkit for parallel Earths and alternate history. It was so influential that the Sidewise Award took its name from it.

81 Grant Morrison offers a completely different take on this story to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Silver Age Flash in *Secret Origins* Vol. 2 #50.


SUPERMAN
DC
NATIONAL COMICS
10¢
SEPT.
NO. 123
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
The FLASH
FLASH! HELP ME!
I'M COMING!
I'M COMING!
Featuring "FLASH of TWO WORLDS!"
--A SPECTACULAR STORY THAT IS SURE TO BECOME A CLASSIC!

(opposite page) *The Flash* #123.
This cover, drawn by Carmine Infantino makes the impossible instantly legible: two Flashes racing side by side. It distilled the multiverse into one image and inspired decades of homages, riffs, and recreations.

of "space-warp," or that he'd traveled back in time. But as he raced back into town, he noticed several subtle and then glaring differences, including the fact that the community center where his disappearing act took place appeared to be old and abandoned. The clincher came when Barry realized he was not in Central City at all, but in a place called Keystone City. That twigged a memory—and then a theory—that seemed too bizarre to be true. But with no other viable explanations presenting themselves, he decided to investigate.

Until then, Barry thought Jay Garrick was merely a character in a comic book, the very storybook hero who inspired Barry to assume his own secret identity as the Flash once he gained his superpowers. But when Barry found Jay's name and address—5252 78th Street—in the phone book for Keystone City, the city where Jay lived in the comics that Barry read, he realized there quite literally might be more to the story.

After telling his outlandish tale to Jay and his wife, Joan, Barry offered a comprehensive theory of what he thought had happened.

> *The way I see it, I vibrated so fast—I tore a gap in the vibratory shields separating our two worlds! As you know—two objects can occupy the same space and time—if they vibrate at different speeds! My theory is, both earths were created at the same time in two quite similar universes! They vibrate differently—which keeps them apart! Life, customs—even languages—evolved on your earth almost exactly as they did on my earth! Destiny must have decreed there'd be a Flash—on each earth!*

Considering the circumstances, not only is the speed at which Barry reached this conclusion remarkable, so are several assumptions that underlie it, many of which became foundational to the DCU.

First, the phrase "As you know" indicates that Barry assumed the possibility of two objects occupying the same space and time if they vibrate at different speeds was common knowledge. As mentioned earlier, the concept of vibration is central to the DCU and *Crisis,* but where Barry got this notion isn't explained, nor was any indication given of why Jay and Joan might be familiar with it. In Marv Wolfman's novelization of *Crisis*, Barry reflected that, "Even before I learned there was something called a Multiverse, I knew scientists theorized the existence of many alternate dimensions, each one separated by the slimmest of temporal vibrations," so maybe this was common knowledge on Jay's world too.[82]

Second, Barry leaped from this basic concept of coexisting objects vibrating at different frequencies to a far grander theory that his world and Jay's world were not only created at the same time, they also occupied the same space but were kept separate by the same vibratory principle. Once again, Barry offered no explanation for why he believed in the simultaneity of their creation, nor did he speculate about the potential existence of a third, fourth, or fifth earth, never mind an infinite number of them. When one considers Barry's frequent interdimensional adventures prior to this issue,[83] his failure to extrapolate beyond just one parallel earth is surprising. As for the former connection, according to certain theories of the multiverse, it's just as likely that new universes are constantly springing into being whenever a sufficiently divergent event occurs rather than all of them being created at once. The prologue to *Crisis* #1 offered a clear endorsement of Barry's intuition that all parallel universes were created simultaneously, but why Barry gravitated toward this theory of the multiverse is not explained.

Finally, Barry brought destiny into the picture, implying that an unnamed guiding intelligence may have been behind it all. He offered no evidence for this belief either, but it's an articulation of a theistic assumption that tacitly underpins the entire DCU, an idea developed in more depth by later writers.

Taken together, what Barry presented to Jay and Joan was such a grand theory, arriving in a "flash" of inspiration, so to speak, no wonder writer Gardner Fox felt compelled to end not only the title of this story but also each sentence of Barry's explanation with an exclamation mark! But wait! There's more!

The tale takes a meta turn when Barry referenced Fox himself, saying the writer of *Flash Comics* in his world claimed to get his story ideas about Jay from dreams. One might be tempted to presume this is a reference not only to the author of the Flash stories that Barry read but also a cheeky nod to the writer of *The Flash* #123 itself, which readers no doubt assumed was a resident of our world. Years later, however, it was revealed that the Gardner Fox who wrote *Flash* #123 actually lived on Earth-Prime, a world much like ours where, until Barry crossed over there



Gardner Fox (1911–1986) was one of DC's master builders, co-creating characters and concepts that defined the company's shared world. He helped create the Golden Age Justice Society, co-created the Silver Age Flash and the Justice League of America, and wrote countless science-fiction-inflected adventures. Fox's fast, idea-rich scripts made team-ups, continuity, and cosmic scale feel natural.

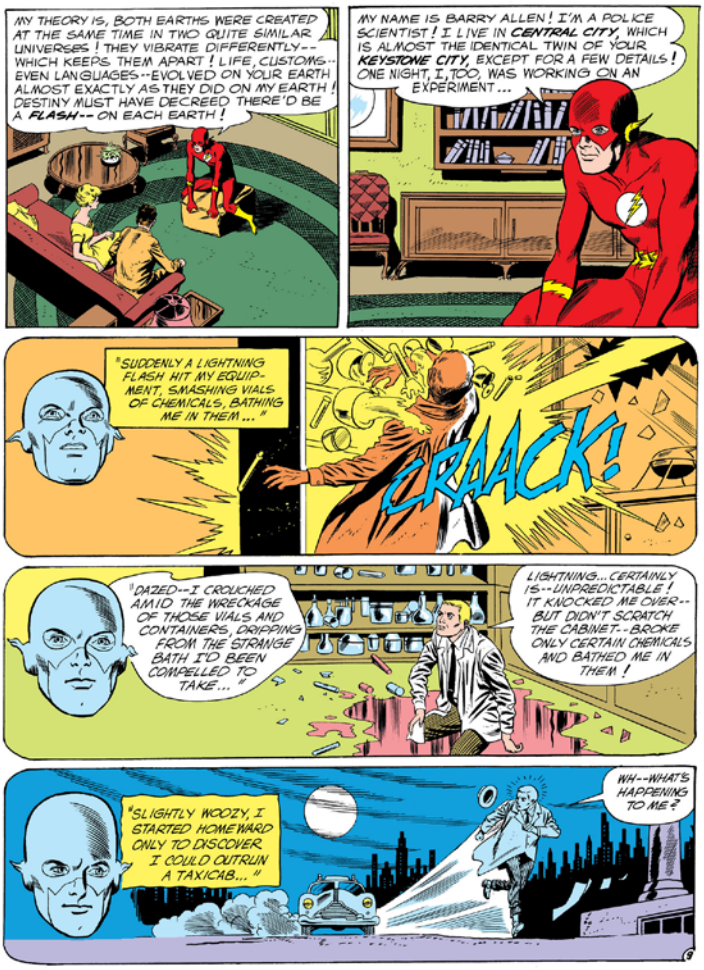
82 Marv Wolfman, *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (New York: iBooks, 2006), 2.

83 See, for example, *Flash* #107, 108, 113, 116, and 120.

in *Flash* #179 (1968), he himself was viewed as nothing but a comic book character.

In light of Fox's claim that he got his story ideas about Jay from dreams, Barry made yet another ambitious assumption: "Obviously when Fox was asleep, his mind was 'tuned in' on your vibratory earth! That explains how he 'dreamed up' the Flash!" As if to confirm his theory, Barry notes that the *Flash* magazine was discontinued in his world in 1949, the same year that Jay retired. Barry doesn't seem to be aware that Jay continued his career with the JSA until March 1951 (see *All Star Comics* #57), nor does Jay mention it. Perhaps Jay's career ended in 1949 in the comics that Barry read, even though his career as the Flash continued for a bit longer in real life. Or maybe Barry didn't read his world's version of *All Star Comics*!

Barry didn't speculate about how such information might have been transmitted between worlds, but such explanations eventually arrived from people like writer Sergio J. Andrade. His article, "The Reflection/Echo Effect," printed in Mark Gruenwald's influential fanzine *Omniverse* #1, suggested



An excerpt from *The Flash* #123 where Barry Allen breaks down his theory of the multiverse. It remains one of the Silver Age's most charming leaps of logic: a police scientist, faced with the impossible, arrives at a grand totalizing explanation for parallel Earths and duplicate lives across reality

"carrier waves" or "vibration waves" containing information about one earth might warp the probability field of a second earth "such that a given event has a greater than 50% chance of occurring" there. Going further, he proposed that:

> *[E]ach dimension's vibration rate ... possesses the property of the recording and transmission of information. Events would then be recorded and transmitted much like sound is recorded and transmitted by radio waves. But instead of being broadcast through space, vibration waves would be propagated through the interdimensional medium. Traversing the medium, the waves would be able to be received on parallel Earths which are harmonic to the earth transmitting them.*

The closer the earths, the stronger the effect, just like radio waves are stronger the closer one is to the transmitter. Therefore, the closer two worlds are, and the more "harmonized" their vibration rates, the more alike they will be. This could explain the numerous similarities between Earth-One and Earth-Two, which were each other's closest neighbors in the multiverse.

As for how one might determine the direction of influence between different worlds, Andrade said the key factor is something called "transitions," which he defined as pivotal historical events that have a disruptive effect on society and which weaken one earth's vibrational waves, rendering it more susceptible to another world's influence. This may be why the events on Earth-Two had a greater influence on Earth-One rather than vice versa. Presumably, Earth-One experienced more transitional events than Earth-Two, though how that might be determined isn't accounted for in Andrade's article.

This also raises the question of what set these vibrational waves in motion in the first place. Was it some sort of psychic energy generated by the scale of the events and/or the power of the personalities involved? If so, wouldn't periods of transition have created stronger rather than weaker vibrational waves, making a world more likely to have influenced than have been influenced? Andrade doesn't address such questions, nor does he offer an adequate theory for the 20-year time lag between Earth-One and Earth-Two. If Earth-Two had such a profound impact on Earth-One, why did it take so long for the similarities to manifest?

Although Andrade sees no evidence that this mechanism was responsible for the two accidents that gave Jay and Barry similar powers, his "reflection/echo effect" could have been the means by which information was transmitted between worlds, thus influencing the dreams of the Earth-One Gardner Fox, who wrote Barry Allen's version of *Flash Comics,* and Earth-Prime's Gardner Fox, who wrote *The Flash* in which Barry Allen appeared. If a version of Gardner Fox existed on Earth-Two, one can only imagine what world he was receiving information from and what sorts of Flash stories he was telling and so on and so on!

Reaction to "Flash of Two Worlds" was swift and positive, with reader Donald Thompson writing in to say, "Although I must confess, I felt like you were merely blowing your own horn by stating that 'Flash of Two Worlds' was sure to become a classic, I am now so convinced of this that I am buying a couple of extra issues. Something I have never done before." Schwartz was so pleased with Thompson's "rave letter," describing him as "one of Comicdom's harshest critics," that he awarded him with the original cover artwork, a common perk given to readers before publishers and creators realized how valuable such artwork could be. The cover art eventually showed up in a traveling DC exhibition, so perhaps Thompson used it to fund his retirement.

Meanwhile, reader B. J. White expressed a question many others were probably wondering about: "Ever since the new Flash came into being, I've resented the new uniform, name, etc. But now Gardner Fox has scooped the comic world in the startling introduction of the one and only Flash. By bringing Jay Garrick out of retirement, you have given a greater reality to the new Flash. … There's just one thing that bothers me about all this. Which one of these two earths do I exist on?"

Schwartz's reply? "How on 'earths' should we know?" A question that lingered for decades to come.

Nevertheless, by unlocking the door to the multiverse, "Flash of Two Worlds!" was the spark that ignited a cosmological revolution. With one accidental trick on stage, Barry Allen officially vibrated his way into a multiverse that had already been quietly taking shape in scattered stories across DC's publishing history. What Fox and Schwartz provided was a name, a structure, and, most importantly, a narrative logic upon which creators could build. From that moment forward, the DCU was no longer a single universe but an infinite constellation of worlds, each one pulsating with narrative possibilities. As prolific comic book writer and editor Paul Kupperberg put it, "From my point of view, one of the most important comic books DC ever published was 'Flash of Two Worlds!' The company is still feeding off of the idea that was put forth in that comic book. The multiverse *is* comics now … and that's where that [idea] was really born."[84]

Seeking to capitalize on the positive reception to *The Flash* #123, Barry and Jay were teamed up for another parallel-world adventure just six issues later in "Double Danger on Earth!" This story had Jay traveling to Barry's world in search of a meteorite that could save Jay's planet from a catastrophic radiation storm caused by a comet smashing into their sun.

Prior to leaving for Earth-One—which still hadn't received that moniker yet—Jay reflected on how Barry's visit prompted him to come out of retirement, but ever since then, there'd been nothing for him to do. He wistfully recalled his adventures with the JSA, which ended with a case called "The Mystery of the Vanishing Detectives!" (*All Star Comics* #57). Jay's reminiscence also served as an informal reintroduction



Mike Sekowsky was one of DC's defining Silver Age artists, best known for giving the Justice League its early visual identity. His clean, energetic figure work and brisk storytelling made the new team concept feel modern, helping the *Justice League of America* take off. He later brought the same punchy clarity to other titles across DC's line, including *Wonder Woman*.

of his fellow JSAers, including Wonder Woman, the Atom, Hawkman, Dr. Mid-Nite, and Black Canary, subtly preparing readers for their imminent relaunch too.

But before the old guard stepped back into the spotlight, Schwartz planned to recreate their success for a brand-new era. Working with Gardner Fox, who co-created the JSA, and artist Mike Sekowsky, Schwartz fashioned a new group that teamed up DC's revamped lineup of heroes. To match the group's modern spirit, Schwartz also decided to give it a new name. "I hate the word 'society,'" he told interviewer David Armstrong in 1999. "It sounds like a social club! Youngsters identify with leagues. Societies they don't know from nothing."[85] As just like that, the Justice League of America bounded onto the stage.

The team debuted in *The Brave and the Bold* #28, where they battled an alien creature named Starro the Conqueror. The JLA's original lineup included Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Green Lantern, J'onn J'onzz (Martian Manhunter), and the Flash, but in this first adventure, Superman and Batman excused themselves from the action. One might be tempted to assume that Superman editor Mort Weisinger and Batman editor Jack Schiff were reluctant to lend their characters to this new venture. As Grant Morrison reminded us in *Supergods,* "Editorial offices at the publishing giant [DC] were all rivals, which is why their universe came together more by accident than design."[86] However, an editorial response to a fan letter in *The Brave and the Bold* #30 said, "And to answer the pleas of many readers to feature SUPERMAN and BATMAN more prominently, these two popular heroes appear in so many other DC magazines, that we thought it would be more appropriate to play up the other members."

Following the model established by the JSA, after a brief setup to establish the group, the story was split into chapters, each one featuring an individual hero or duo as they tackled a different aspect of the mission. This same basic setup continued for two more issues in *The Brave and the Bold* before the JLA got its own book in August 1960. The Justice League was an immediate hit, becoming a flagship title for DC and the basis for many of the parallel-world stories that led to *Crisis*.

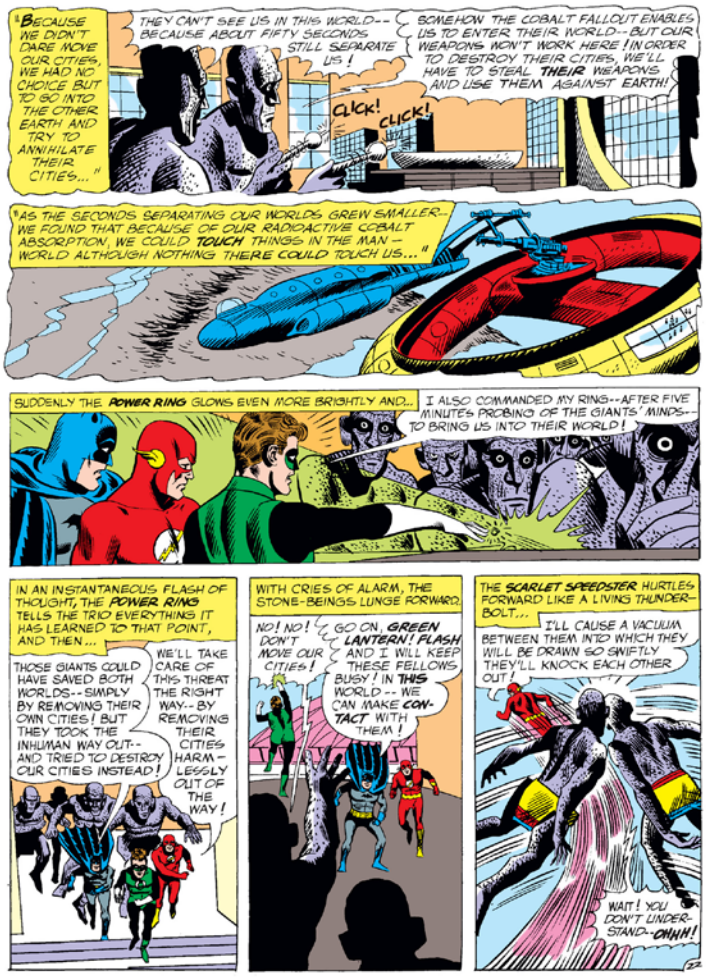
84 Dollar Bin Bandits, "Paul Levitz & Paul Kupperberg Return," Podcast, 1:05, February 13, 2025, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/paul-levitz-paul-kupperberg-return/id1576289731?i=1000645260253.

85 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXuPDMw7uQ0

86 Morrison, 111.

The first such tale took place in *Justice League of America* #15, "The Challenge of the Untouchable Aliens!" In this story, the JLA was confronted by a series of baffling events involving some intangible stone giants that were threatening three of Earth's cities. These beings originated from an unnamed Earth that was separated from "man-Earth" by "a single minute of time!" A pair of simultaneous explosions in the same location on both worlds had disrupted the time continuum, putting the two planets on a collision course. "Since no two objects can occupy the same space at the same time," one of the giants said, "when our cities touch Central City—or Tokyo—or Brasilia—the result will be disastrous!" Another giant compared it to a meeting of positive and "anti-positive matter," warning that, "Every atom in each one of those cities will explode in a worldwide nuclear holocaust!"

A scene from "The Challenge of the Untouchable Aliens!" in *Justice League of America* #15 (left), a proto-*Crisis* tale and one of the first DC stories to feature the threat of parallel worlds threatening to destroy each other. *The Flash* #137 (right) is a key Silver Age moment that features the return of the JSA, transforming Earth-Two from a one-off gimmick into the foundation for parallel-world storytelling.





As the seconds ticked down, the giants sought to destroy Earth's cities to prevent this catastrophe. Once the JLA realized what was happening, rather than battle the giants, Green Lantern used his ring to restore Earth-One to its original position, averting disaster without the need to destroy anything. This was the only appearance of these giants and their world, which was eventually dubbed Earth-Fifteen, named after the issue number itself. This convention was often employed retroactively for worlds that didn't receive an official name in the issue in which they appeared.

In terms of *Crisis,* this story is remarkable for a few reasons. For starters, it provided our first glimpse of time being given equal weight to vibrations in terms of what kept the parallel worlds separate, a detail that was referenced but not explained in *Crisis,* as we shall see.

Second, it was the first time in DC's history that the danger of parallel worlds colliding entered the picture. This trope was repeated on numerous occasions, such as *Justice League of America* #82 and *All New Collector's Edition* #C-58. *World's Finest* #208 featured an alternate version of this potential calamity when some aliens attempted to smash two continents together in an attempt to propel their minds to a new level of psychic power. Significantly, the threat of parallel worlds colliding also showed up in *DC Comics Presents* Annual #1 (1982), which was written by Marv Wolfman. Not only did this

issue feature the introduction of Alexander Luthor, whose son played a pivotal role in *Crisis,* it also included an intangibility ray gun developed by Luthor that Superman used to prevent Earth-One and Earth-Two from annihilating each other as the two planets converged. Seeing as Wolfman would have been developing *Crisis* at this time, it's a wonder he redeployed this same colliding worlds gimmick for the series itself rather than coming up with a completely new threat. Also, why didn't he deploy the intangibility ray gun as well to prevent the final five worlds from converging?

That said, it's worth asking why the recurring image of parallel earths colliding was so compelling for writers and readers alike, especially in the pre-*Crisis* DCU. On the one hand, it combined cosmic spectacle with subconscious dread. Two worlds smashing together signaled colossal stakes and an unstoppable, apocalyptic threat, similar to Cold War fears of mutually assured destruction, which were prevalent at the time. But it could also be regarded as a subconscious admission that the multiverse, as a storytelling device, was already being viewed as unsustainable, and it was only a matter of time before it collapsed under its own weight. Thus, the threat of colliding worlds carried narrative urgency and symbolic depth, embodying real-world anxieties while also setting the stage for subsequent editorial resolution a là *Crisis.*

Finally, this story demonstrated the incredible capacity of Green Lantern's ring. Not only was it able to transport Green Lantern, Batman, and the Flash to the giants' world, it was powerful enough to move an entire planet. No wonder Wolfman felt it necessary to incapacitate the Guardians and the Green Lanterns early on in *Crisis,* or they could have easily stopped the Anti-Monitor in his tracks.

The JSA received their official reintroduction six months later in *The Flash* #137, which started by teaming up Jay and Barry once again. Considering the role that red skies played prior to the anti-matter cloud's arrival in *Crisis,* it's interesting that this story began with mysterious pink lights appearing in the sky above six cities on Earth-One, bringing everything that relied on electricity to a stop. Could these lights have been the first (unwitting) reference to what later became known as the Bleed, a red trans-dimensional space that existed between universes, allowing characters to travel from one reality to another?

Puzzled by the phenomenon, Barry's intuition led him to consult a map of Earth-Two (still unnamed up to this point). That's when he realized the six afflicted cities on his world corresponded to the six cities where members of the JSA resided on Jay's world. To supplement his research, he also consulted a copy of *All Star Comics* #37, the cover of which was just like the one in our world.

Deciding to investigate, Barry returned to the community center stage from which he first traveled to Earth-Two, underlining the significance of some locations being more conducive to inter-universal travel than others. This is similar to the notion of "thin places" in Celtic mythology, liminal spaces where the boundary between the physical world and the spiritual realm is believed to be especially thin. Such locations are thought to allow for easier communication between the mortal and the supernatural world, which could have been what inspired this idea in *The Flash*. Outside of stories involving the Flash, however, writers tended to ignore the concept of such focal points, and even *The Flash* was inconsistent in how such locations were used.

To answer the question of how Barry knew the frequency at which to vibrate his body so he can travel to Earth-Two, a clue arrived in *The Flash* #151. While trying to determine the origin of the "Invader from the Dark Dimension!", Barry revealed that "Just as fingerprints leave their telltale marks, so do vibrations!" After battling a shadow creature, he used the vibrations lingering in his body to trace the creature's origin to the Shade, whom he battled on Earth-Two in *The Flash* #123. So, perhaps this same "fingerprint effect" was what he and others use to find their way through the multiverse.

"By vibrating at a certain speed I'm sure to cross over the spatial helix linking my Earth with that of Jay Garrick!" Barry said as he did just that. His use of the term "spatial helix" differed from the term "vibratory shields," which he used on his first trip, but it seems like an apt description, seeing as a helix is a corkscrew-shaped structure, and crossing the divide involved spinning rapidly. Then again, the barriers between worlds were never illustrated in such a manner. This also brings up the issue of why there would be any barrier between the parallel Earths at all, seeing as they all occupied the same space, kept separate by the rate at which they were vibrating rather than any sort of physical or metaphysical barrier. As we shall see, even though such interstitial spaces don't make sense logically, creators employed them time and time again in parallel-world stories.

When Barry got to Earth-Two, the same pink lights were manifesting there. He met up with Jay, who confirmed that the members of the JSA who lived in each afflicted location had disappeared. When the two Flashes investigated, they soon discovered the culprit—Vandal Savage, former member of the Injustice Society of America, last seen in *All Star Comics* #37 (1947), the very comic that Barry consulted prior to his arrival on Earth-Two. Having spent the last 16 years in prison after he and his fellow Injustice Society members were defeated by the JSA, Savage was out for revenge. Using the strange lights as bait, he had already captured Dr. Mid-Nite, Wonder Woman, the Atom, Johnny Thunder, Green Lantern, and Hawkman (no mention was made of Hawkgirl or why she wasn't looking for her husband or the rest of the JSA members). All that remained to complete his collection was the Flash. In what Savage saw as a brilliant two-for-one deal, he captured both Flashes, but they outwitted him once again.

Once Savage was back behind bars and the other members of the JSA were free, Wonder Woman suggested it might be a good idea for the members of the JSA to "meet every so often—come out of retirement, as it were—to prevent anything like this happening again!" The others agreed, and three months later, the JSA exploded onto the pages of *Justice League of America*, setting the stage for an entirely new era of storytelling.

PART II

"CRISIS" ENTERS THE DC LEXICON

CHAPTER 7

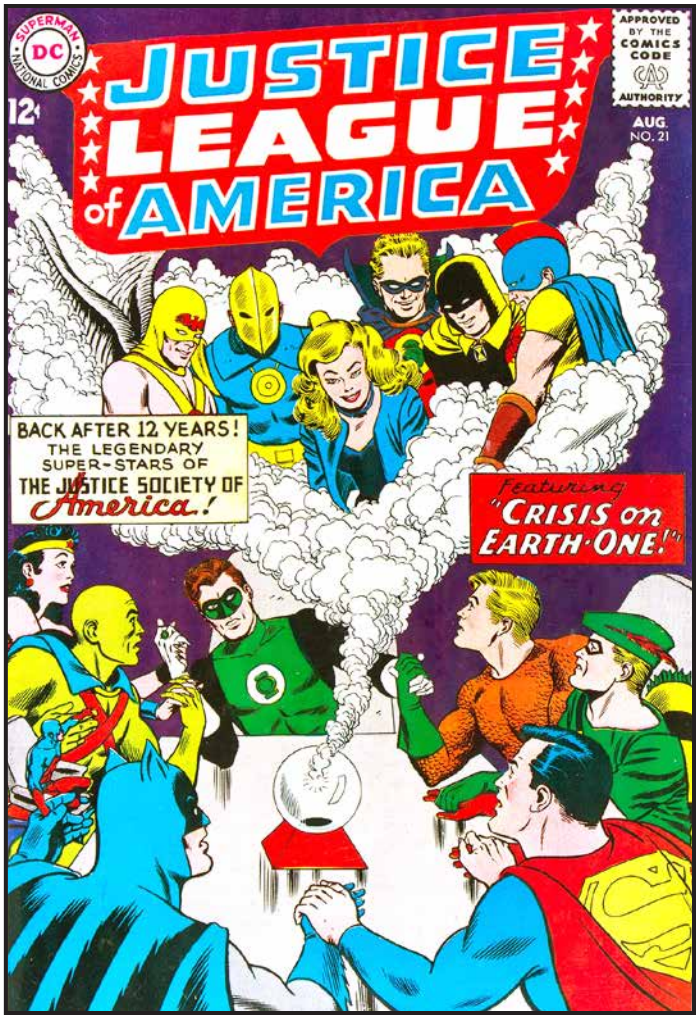
"Nuisance on Earth-One!"— The First Crisis and the Expansion of the Multiverse

As any reader of comics knows, the term "crisis" has a rich and varied history at DC, becoming a shorthand for stories that affect the entirety of the DCU and its characters. Following *Crisis on Infinite Earths,* numerous crossover events employed the term, including *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time* (1994), *Identity Crisis* (2004), *JLA: Crisis of Conscience* (2005), *Infinite Crisis* (2005–2006), *Final Crisis* (2005–2006), *Heroes in Crisis* (2018–2019), and *Dark Crisis* (a.k.a. *Dark Crisis on Infinite Earths*) (2022). Apart from its actual meaning, derived from the Greek word *krisis,* which means "decision," "judgment," or "turning point," fans associate the term with grand universe- or multiverse-spanning narratives. The word embodies the essence of superhero storytelling, a climactic moment of conflict that requires unity, sacrifice, and heroism. It's hard to beat as a word that evokes a sense of paramount urgency, danger, and transformation, which could be one reason why DC has stuck with it for so many years.

As for why such stories continually resonate with readers, scholar Wynn Gerald Harmonic identified several functions of apocalyptic narratives, the most significant of which is their ability to help us make sense of our place in history. Drawing on the work of Frank Kermode, author of *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction,* Harmonic said:

> *[H]umans are profoundly uncomfortable with the idea that our lives form only a microscopically short period of time in world history. We feel trapped in the middle. So much has transpired before we were born and so much will take place after we die. To make sense of this disconcerting fact we look for a "coherent pattern," and invest in the thought that we find ourselves in the middle of a story. In order to make sense of our lives we need to discover some "consonance" between the beginning, the middle, and the end.*[87]

87 Wynn Gerald Harmonic, "Global Catastrophe in Motion Pictures as Meaning and Message: The Functions of Apocalyptic Cinema in American," *Journal of Religion and Film* Vol. 21, Issue 1, Article 36, April 2017, https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol21/iss1/, 2.



***Justice League of America* #21 (1963) launched DC's "crisis" tradition by staging the first JLA/JSA crossover, splitting heroes across Earth-One and Earth-Two and letting villains exploit the gaps. The story's title, "Crisis on Earth-One!", turned multiverse crossovers into an annual event, a template that DC repeated for years.**

To provide a sense of purpose for the middle phase in which we find ourselves, Kermode explained how many stories draw on the creation/fall/renewal narrative of Christian apocalyptic thought:

> *[T]he beginning was a time of prosperity and advancement. The middle period is the age in which we now live, and is distinguished by "decadence," where what was good has declined and is in need of "renovation." In order to usher in a new age, a process of painful purging (or "terrors") needs to be endured. This allows us to explain the chaos and "crisis" we see unraveling around us.*[88]

The idea of a golden age followed by a period of narrative "decadence" (i.e., the Silver and Bronze ages) that requires renovation is a perfect fit with the perception of the DCU that Wolfman and others had formed by the early 1980s, with *Crisis* promising to provide the painful but necessary purging required to usher in a new age of storytelling.

While *Crisis on Infinite Earths* is regarded as the definitive "crisis," the term first gained parlance at DC 22 years earlier in *Justice League of America* #21, which featured the first official JSA/JLA team-up in the seminal story "Crisis on Earth-One!" Considering the relatively trivial problem that the heroes are called upon to solve in this two-part story, it might have been more appropriately called "Nuisance on Earth-One!" or "Clean-up on Aisle Two!" Be that as it may, it began a tradition that had a profound effect on how the multiverse developed and the central role it assumed at DC.

The story began with the Crime Champions—Chronos, Felix Faust, and Doctor Alchemy—issuing a challenge to the JLA to stop them from committing three crimes. As per protocol, the eight members of the JLA—Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Martian Manhunter, Green Arrow, Green Lantern, and the Flash—broke into three teams to tackle the three dastardly plots.

Meanwhile on what was referred to merely as a "duplicate Earth," the JSA is issued a similar challenge to stop a trio of million-dollar robberies by their old foes the Fiddler, the Wizard, and the Icicle (last seen in *All Star Comics* #47 [1949]). When one considers that the members of the JSA had been retired for twelve years, the timing of this summons is suspiciously convenient. Back in *The Flash* #129, Joan Garrick said that ever since Barry Allen's first visit prompted Jay to come out of retirement, there'd been no call for his services as the Flash. "I know!" Jay replied. "I'm like an old fire horse waiting for the sound of the alarm!" This leads one to wonder, did the criminals on Earth-Two retire when the JSA did? If so, why? And why had they waited until now to resume their activities? Could the vibrations created by Jay and Barry have stirred something in the criminals too?

From there the action returned to Earth-One, where the villains pulled off all three thefts, besting the JLA at every turn. While the other heroes were merely defeated, the Flash was shown disintegrating. Then each criminal vanished with the loot.

The villains were revealed to have retreated to a misty borderland between the two worlds, protected by a great "vibratory sphere of energy." But they were not just floating out there in empty space; they were in what looked like a cozy mid-century-modern room, where they met up with their criminal counterparts from Earth-Two, who gloated about how they outwitted the JSA. Just as Barry disintegrated on Earth-One, Jay underwent the same process on Earth-Two. "Those awful vibrations shaking me up," he said, "into drifting atoms!"

The villains' conversation revealed that while escaping from prison, the Fiddler struck a note on his violin that transported him and his companions to the community center on Earth-One that Barry had been using to travel between worlds, right in the middle of a show. Coincidentally, Chronos, Felix Faust, and Dr. Alchemy were about to rob the proceeds of that show. Recognizing the Fiddler and his companions as fellow criminals, Felix Faust and co. spirited them away and worked out a deal to swap places. That way each group would have been able to spend their ill-gotten gain without being recognized, seeing as the JSA weren't aware of the Earth-One criminals, and the JLA don't know their Earth-Two counterparts.

Incidentally, it's the Fiddler who first labeled his own world as Earth-Two in this scene. This seems like an odd choice for such a self-centered character, seeing as it implied his world was playing "second fiddle" (pun intended) to Earth-One, a sentiment a self-centered criminal like him would never agree with. As Ultraman declared when informed he lived on Earth-Three in *DC Comics Presents Annual* #1, "Any Earth I am on is Earth-One!" Schwartz himself later admitted this was a mistake on his part, but the moniker stuck, an error that numerous characters commented on over the years.

The only heroes who would recognize both sets of criminals, Jay and Barry, were caught in vibratory traps. "[They] were dissipated into their molecular structure and reassembled inside these small spheres!" the Fiddler boasted. The spheres also countered the vibratory speeds of both Flashes, preventing them from using vibration to escape.

Before we proceed, a few problems with this setup should be addressed. As mentioned previously, it's not necessary to go too deep into the illogical nature of the "misty borderland" between worlds, except to acknowledge it's just one of many such places that shouldn't exist according to how DC's multiverse was conceptualized. If every version of Earth occupied the same space, kept separate by vibrating at

88 Ibid., 3

(opposite) *Justice League of America* #21, p. 1, original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Like many JLA stories, this tale features a seamless blend of sci-fi and fantasy elements, with a magical crystal ball, a gift from Merlin himself, proving to be the device that saves the day.

JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA

TRAPPED IN THEIR HEADQUARTERS--IMPRISONED BY A TEAM OF MASTER VILLAINS--THE **JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA** TURNS TO THE **JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA** FOR HELP! IN TURN, THE **JUSTICE SOCIETY** WILL USE THE ASSISTANCE OF THE **JUSTICE LEAGUE** IN THIS STRANGE GAME OF TURNABOUT IN TWO WORLDS! NEVER BEFORE HAVE BOTH BANDS OF SUPER-HEROES MET--BUT NEVER BEFORE HAS THERE BEEN SUCH A ...

crisis on EARTH-ONE!



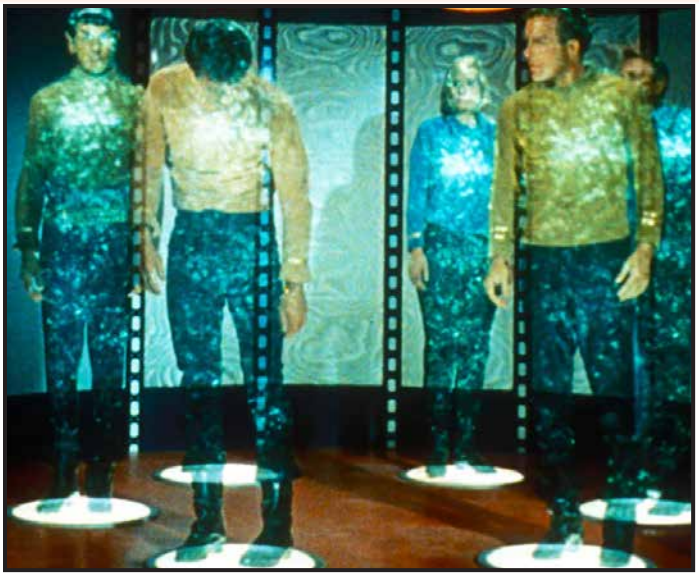
The ROLL CALL

ATOM
AQUAMAN
FLASH
GREEN ARROW
GREEN LANTERN
J'ONN J'ONZZ
SUPERMAN
WONDER WOMAN

and representing THE JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

ATOM ☆ BLACK CANARY ☆ DOCTOR FATE ☆ FLASH ☆ GREEN LANTERN ☆ HAWKMAN ☆ HOURMAN

INDICIA GINO-35¢ JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA AUG. #21



One theory treats *Star Trek*'s transporter as a sophisticated fax machine. It scans a person at quantum detail, disassembles their body, and then rebuilds them elsewhere from the pattern. The person who appears at the other end is a perfect copy, complete with the original's memories, but are they the same person, or does the original die in transit?

different frequencies, there'd be no room for an in-between world to exist unless it, too, was a completely separate universe, vibrating at its own unique frequency.

The second problem lies with the supervillains themselves. Some of them had the ability to traverse worlds, and yet they remained fixated on such petty crimes (as Darkseid pointed out when he recruited them in *Justice League of America* #184, another JSA/JLA team-up). Great power may come with great responsibility, but apparently, a prodigious imagination isn't part of the deal. The trivial and sometimes laughable nature of their schemes plagued this entire two-part story, hence the "Nuisance on Earth-One!" reference.

Finally, we have the issue of Jay and Barry being disintegrated into their composite atoms and then reassembled inside the spheres. This is reminiscent of how a transporter works in *Star Trek,* disassembling a person at the molecular level, and then reconstructing them at a new location. Such a mode of transportation has raised a significant philosophical question: does this process preserve the original person or create a perfect copy while destroying the original? Some people believe that dismantling the original body, even if the new one is an exact replica with identical memories and personality, constitutes death for the original person. The "new" person may not recall any interruption of consciousness and believe they are the same as the original, but from an outsider's perspective, the original consciousness ceases to exist, if only for a moment, seeing as no such process could be instantaneous. All that to say, while *Crisis* #8 is famous for the death of Barry Allen, it could be that fans unwittingly witnessed Barry's (and Jay's) death way back in 1963.[89] And if the transporter that beamed the JLAers back and forth from the JLA satellite to Earth functioned in a similar fashion—dematerializing them and then reassembling them at another location—who knows how many times the Flash and all the other heroes "died" prior to *Crisis*?

The Earth-Two criminals soon grew bored of their lives of luxury on Earth-One and decided to rob Casino Town, where they're staying. They disguised themselves as their Earth-One counterparts, so the JLA wouldn't be able to anticipate the powers that were about to be used against them. When the JLA arrived to stop them, the criminals sprang a trap that imprisoned the JLA in their Secret Sanctuary.

With various attempts to break through the magical barrier that surrounded them having failed, Batman came up with the idea of fighting magic with magic, using a crystal ball given to them by Merlin the magician in *Justice League of America* #2 (another interdimensional adventure that takes the JLA to "Magic-Land"). The JLA used the crystal ball to contact Barry. After explaining what happened to him and Jay, Barry also disclosed the existence of Earth-Two. Then he encouraged the JLA to use the crystal ball to summon the JSA for help.

The next panel depicted a historical moment as the members of the JLA and the JSA encountered each other for the first time. As future comic book artist Dave Cockrum wrote in a fan letter, it was a "glorious mass of superhumanity." Following this meet-and-greet, Doctor Fate used a spell to send the JLA to Earth-Two to battle the Earth-One villains, while the JSA dispatched the crooks on Earth-One. Meanwhile, the two Green Lanterns entered the misty borderlands between the two earths to rescue Jay and Barry.

The action continued in *Justice League of America* #22, "Crisis on Earth-Two!" The JSA caught up with the Fiddler attempting to steal a "special museum fund," of all things. It's a wonder they didn't catch him knocking over a little kid's lemonade stand, snatching the jackpot money from a senior citizens' bingo hall, or stealing the tip jar at a coat check. He used his fiddle to turn several stuffed animals in the museum against the Atom and Hourman. It's fitting this showdown happened in a museum, seeing as the JSAers were close to becoming little more than historical curiosities themselves.

While the JSA gained the upper hand against their foes, the two Green Lanterns freed the Flashes. Once again, the two Flashes were disassembled, this time into photons, and then reassembled outside of the spheres. Did we just witness Barry Allen's second death?

As soon as they regained their freedom, the Flashes and Green Lanterns blinked out of existence. The same thing happened to the rest of the heroes on Earth-One and Earth-Two, thanks to a clever trap concocted by Felix Faust. All 16 heroes found themselves trapped in cages, floating somewhere in the depths of space.

89 For more on this topic, see this excellent video: https://mindmatters.ai/2021/11/physicist-does-captain-kirk-die-going-through-the-transporter/.

Once the heroes freed themselves, the Green Lanterns transported them inside a protective bubble to Earth-Two where all six criminals were assembled. Sensing the heroes' imminent arrival, the criminals realized they had to escape, but where?

"I've got it!" the Fiddler exclaimed. "There is an Earth-One and an Earth-Two! Somewhere there must be an Earth-Three! If we can find the doorway into it—before the Justice Champions find us—we can escape them forever!" Before they can locate that doorway, though, the JSA and the JLA arrived, making short work of the bad guys. The issue concluded with Hawkman saying that the two super groups will have to keep in touch. "There's no telling when we may be called upon to join forces again!"

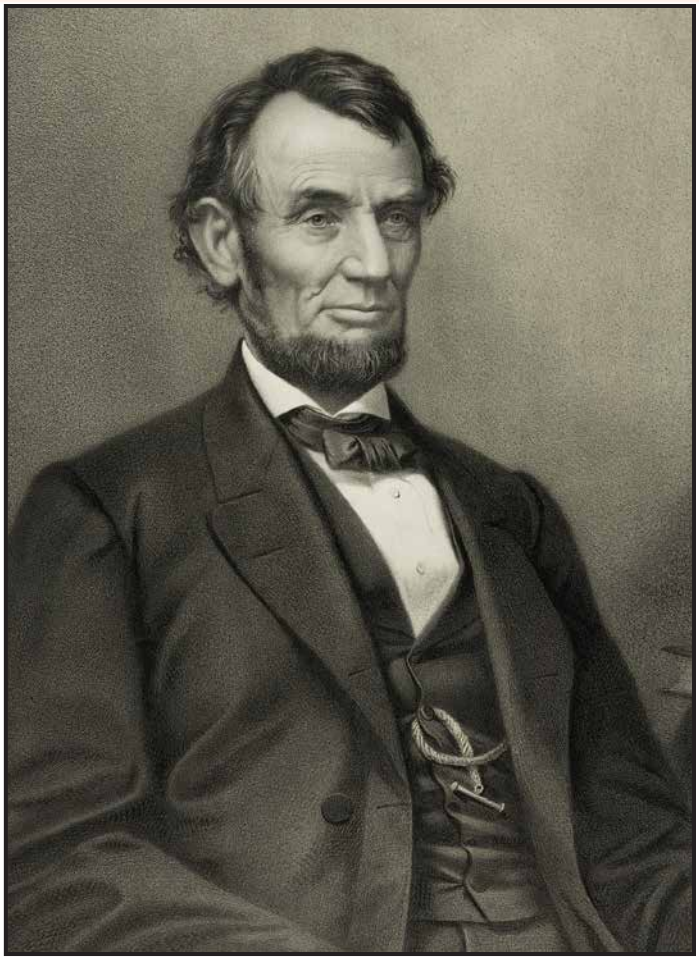
Hawkman and the others didn't have to wait long for that to happen, with "Crisis on Earth-Three!" kicking off just seven issues later in *Justice League of America* #29 and 30. Although the new world anticipated by the Fiddler was called "Earth-Three" on the cover, it was referred to as "Earth-3" inside the book. This inconsistency regarding how the various earths were named was retained in *Crisis,* either as a mistake or as an homage to such Silver Age discrepancies.

Earth-Three was distinguished by the fact that the only super-powered individuals who lived there were villains. They included parallel versions of the Flash (Johnny Quick), Wonder Woman (Superwoman), Batman (Owl Man), Green Lantern (Power Ring), and Superman (Ultraman) who banded together to form the Crime Syndicate of America. Many other things were backward on Earth-Three too. For instance, Columbus was an American who discovered Europe, England won her freedom from the United States, and actor Abe Lincoln assassinated President John Wilkes Booth.

When we meet the Crime Syndicate, even though they lived on Earth-Three, they were facing what feels like a "first world" problem. "We've reached a crisis!" Owl Man said. "Here we steal everything we want! Our super-powers make it so easy—we've lost our fighting edge!"

Ultraman arrived with the answer. Unlike Superman, for whom green kryptonite was deadly, every time Ultraman was exposed to it, he gained a new power. (The existence of kryptonite on this world indicated Krypton blew up in this universe too, but there was no sign of a Superman.) A recent exposure gave him "ultravision," which allowed him to see into another world. To his astonishment, he discovered super-powered beings using their abilities to *stop* crimes rather than commit them. "At Ultraman's suggestion, Power Ring opens the dimensional barriers between Earth-Three and Earth-One so that the others can see what he has seen," a caption said. "Right!" Superwoman exclaimed. "We'll go to Earth-1 and set up some crimes to trigger those super-heroes into action against us!" How did she know that the world they were looking at was called Earth-1? Maybe cosmic cartography was one of her unmentioned super powers.

When the Crime Syndicate showed up on Earth-One, conveniently, the only JLAers available to stop them were the Crime Syndicate's doppelgängers. But overcoming their



Earth-Three (later Earth-3) was DC's "mirror" world, built on reversals: heroes are villains, villains are heroes, and many historical events are reversed. On Earth-Three, Christopher Columbus discovers Europe, Britain breaks away from the American empire, and President John Wilkes Booth is assassinated by disgruntled actor Abraham Lincoln.

counterparts wasn't the Crime Syndicate's goal. When each criminal was about to be overpowered by a JLAer, they uttered the world "Volthoom" (a name that took on much greater significance after *Crisis*), which transported them and their opponent to Earth-Three, after which the Crime Syndicate easily bested the heroes on their home turf. Despite their victory, the villains still weren't satisfied. "All we've proved is that you are better than we are on Earth-One," Power Ring said, "while we are better than you on Earth-Three."

In search of a neutral battleground, Ultraman peered between the dimensional barriers again and found an ideal location—Earth-Two. But before they could do battle with the JLA there, they'd have to eliminate the heroes who protected that world, the JSA.

Their plans hadn't gone unobserved, though. Thanks to Starman's cosmic rod, the JSA saw Ultraman peering at them from his world. Wondering if the mysterious figure was from Earth-One, they checked in on the JLA and found them in a

trance. Doctor Fate freed the JLA long enough to learn of the Crime Syndicate's plans and the "Volthoom" trap, so the JSA didn't fall victim to it.

The action continued in issue #30 with the Crime Syndicate and five members of the JSA squaring off against one another. The JSA members overcame their adversaries while also preventing them from saying "Volthoom," only to discover that Power Ring had turned the tables. "This time I planned matters so that—even if the Justice Society members didn't come in contact with us and give us a chance to say Volthoom—they'd automatically defeat themselves by saying that they had won!" Power Ring proclaimed. When that happened, a trigger that Power Ring had planted into his and his fellow Crime Syndicate members' bodies transported them and their foes to Earth-Three. The question remained of why the Crime Syndicate would change their strategy. Did they have an inkling that the JLA and the JSA would contact each other, revealing the secret of "Volthoom," or was it pure coincidence?

Of interest to *Crisis* fans, anti-matter made an appearance in this story when Starman was battling Ultraman. At one point, Ultraman seized Starman's cosmic rod, only to discover it was composed of anti-matter. "Yes, Ultraman," Starman says, "it's a duplicate rod I created with my true Cosmic Rod! This is one trap not even you can escape from." Starman defined anti-matter as particles with electric charges that are opposed to the electrical charge in normal matter, followed by a warning that if the two types of matter come into contact, "the result is an explosion that makes a nuclear bomb look like a bursting toy balloon!" The problem was, Starman, who was holding the rod before Ultraman grabbed it, was made of positive matter, as was Ultraman, whose response to Starman's warning was not to let go of the rod but to clutch it with both hands. Why Ultraman thought clinging to the rod rather than throwing it away was the best solution to his predicament isn't clear, but seeing as he had a wealth of powers that hadn't been revealed, it could be that he was able to alter the electrical charges in his body to neutralize the anti-matter's effect.

After imprisoning the JSA, the Crime Syndicate transported the JLA to Earth-Two, so they could fight them in "one final, knock-down, drag-out battle." However, by using teamwork and turning the Crime Syndicate's powers against them, the JLA made short work of the criminals.

The Crime Syndicate's defeat was followed by a strange sequence during which the villains, who weren't constrained in any way, stood in silence while the JLA decided what to do with them. After gauging the criminals' facial expressions to see how they reacted to various possibilities, the JLA decided to imprison the Crime Syndicate in the "vibrational barrier lands" between Earth-Two and Earth-Three.

As the triumphant heroes returned home, the Crime Syndicate languished in their interdimensional prison, which was posted with warnings in various languages not to release them. It's interesting that no one thought to visit Earth-Three to let the authorities there know what happened to the Crime Syndicate, and that people were now free to live their lives without being oppressed and controlled by the villains.



DC's Uncle Sam turns the figure from US military recruiting posters into a superhero: the living Spirit of America. Created by Will Eisner, he transforms patriotic propaganda imagery into a costumed symbol who fights for national ideals rather than enlistment, his powers tied to the preservation of America's founding documents.

DC's multiverse continued to grow in a similar fashion over the next two decades, with the JSA/JLA team-ups becoming an annual summer event, and *Justice League of America* serving as the primary gateway for "official" new worlds to enter the canon. Soon, the first three earths were joined by Earth-S, home of Captain Marvel and other characters formerly published by Fawcett; Earth-X, adopted home of the Freedom Fighters, who were previously owned by Quality Comics; and Earth-Prime, a place where superheroes only existed in comic books until some of those so-called fictional characters began popping up in real life (e.g., *The Flash* #179). These parallel-world stories were also used to reintroduce characters and teams who had languished in the long boxes of DC history, such as the Seven Soldiers of

Victory, or to more fully integrate places that existed on the margins of the DCU, such as Jack Kirby's Fourth World, into mainstream continuity.

Contrary to how the story is often told, it wasn't as if the sheer number of worlds introduced through these JSA/JLA team-ups was overwhelming to readers, especially considering that Earth-One and Earth-Two remained the primary focus of such tales. Even when a new earth was introduced, it didn't often lead to a plethora of ongoing stories involving that world. For instance, after being introduced in *Justice League of America* #29 and 30 in 1964, Earth-Three didn't appear again until *Crisis* #1—over 20 years later—only to be destroyed. And its most famous residents, the Crime Syndicate of America, didn't show up again until *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #13 and 14 in 1978. A few exceptions include Earth-S, which became the basis of Captain Marvel's adventures in his own and other titles; Earth-X, which was an integral part of the short-lived *Freedom Fighters* series and *All-Star Squadron*, beginning with issue #31; and Earth-C, home to Captain Carrot and the Zoo Crew.

Furthermore, most parallel-world stories included multi-panel or even full-page explanations of the multiverse concept to bring readers up to speed. A good example is a lengthy caption that appears in *Justice League of America* #82 (1970), a "planet-smashing" JSA/JLA crossover written by Denny O'Neil.

> *Twin earths ... twin galaxies ... twin realities—occupying the same physical-space, yet separated by a gulf more vast than mere distance! Each atom and electron, each proton and neutron, vibrates in harmony with internal cosmic rhythm ... and, although the evolution of between the universes is nearly parallel, they vibrate differently! Thus time is slower on Earth-Two ... and its inhabitants will reach mankind's ultimate destiny—or ultimate doom—twenty years later than the creatures of Earth-One.*
>
> *Vast though the gulf is, it can be breached—and has been! Every twelve months, the temporal matrices of the Earths come together briefly! For twenty-one days, super-powered men and women can cross to the other existence ... can and have! So the Justice League and Justice Society have often met and teamed up to fight extraordinary menaces which threatened both.*

Unfortunately, sometimes such explanations did more harm than good when it came to sorting things out. For example, the use of the word "twin" here implies that Earth-One and Earth-Two had some sort of exclusive relationship separate from the theoretically infinite number of other parallel earths. Sure enough, Earth-One and Earth-Two did enjoy a privileged relationship throughout the pre-*Crisis* years, with even the Monitor referring to them as a nexus point. However, this seems more like a narrative convenience than a cosmological necessity.[90] A theoretically infinite number of other earths had been suggested numerous times by this point (see *Wonder Woman* #59, *Green Lantern* #32, and *Superboy* #116, for example), but for some reason this caption neglected to mention them.

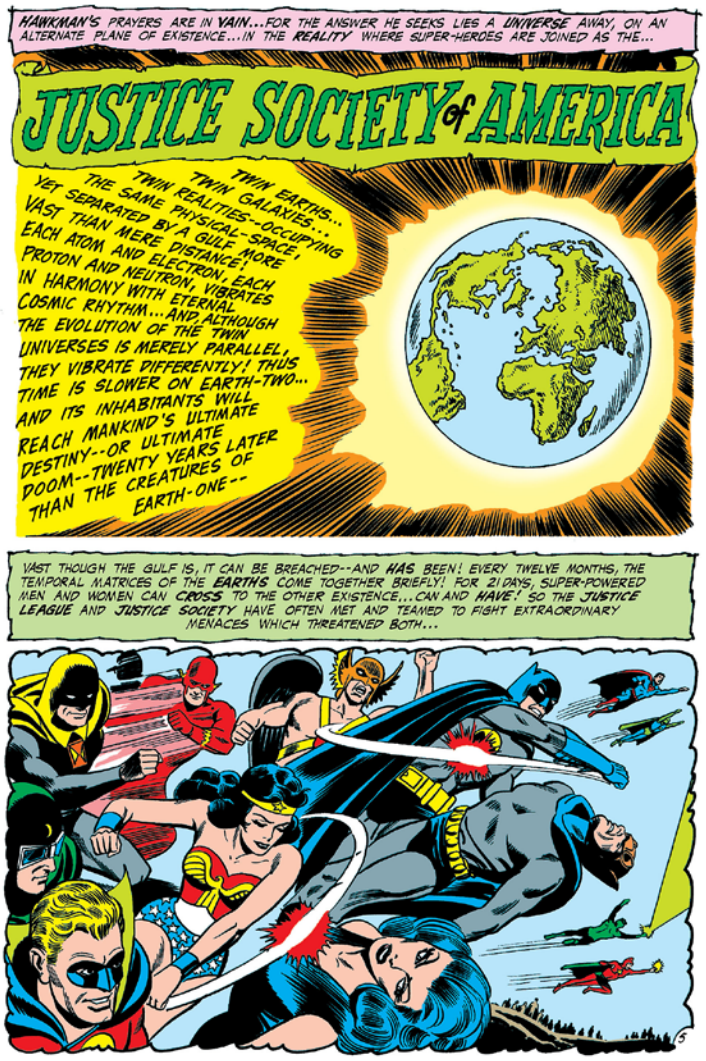
Second, this description contradicted everything readers had been taught about how time passed differently between the two worlds. According to this caption, time moved slower on Earth-Two, creating a 20-year time lag between the two worlds. But exactly the opposite appears to be true. Remember, the Flash, Wonder Woman, Batman, Superman, and all the other Earth-Two superheroes predated their Earth-One counterparts by 20 years. This suggests time passed *faster* on Earth-Two than on Earth-One. Of course, this notion becomes nonsensical if one tries to work out the possible explanations for this time lag. For instance, if Earth-Two's orbit around the sun was slightly smaller than Earth-One's, that could account for the difference in how quickly time passed. It could also be that Earth-Two orbited the sun at a faster speed than Earth-One. But rather than remaining at a fixed 20-year gap, both cases would have created a time lag that grew wider as each year passed.

Third, for the first time the concept of "temporal matrices" was introduced, along with the idea that they were aligned for only a few weeks each year. This seems to be an in-story justification for why the JSA and the JLA tended to team up every summer. However, seeing as many of these team-ups were caused by multiversal threats, it requires us to accept the idea that such threats only occurred when the temporal matrices were aligned, even though some of those threats didn't employ the matrices. It also poses a problem for stories that gave no indication that they were occurring within this 21-day window. And at no other point prior to this issue did any characters run into a problem traveling between worlds because it wasn't the right time of year.

Finally, it restricts travel between worlds to super-powered men and women, but as many parallel-world stories prior to this illustrated, nothing prevented non-super-powered people (and other beings) from passing between universes if assisted by super-powered (Green Lantern's ring), magical (Dr. Fate's eldritch magick), or technological means (the transmatter cube). In fact, over the years the methods of transport between worlds included everything from vibrating at the right frequency (e.g., the Flashes and the Earth-One Superman) or striking a certain note on a violin (e.g., the Fiddler); to flying in circles around the Rock of Eternity (*DC Comics Presents* #33); breaking the speed of light (*Shazam* #15) or sound (*Batman* #116); lightning (*Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #43); lightning *and* a whirlpool (*Action Comics* #308); explosions (*Superboy* #116, *World's Finest* #213); entering a mirror (*The Flash* #126, *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #94) or a painting (*The Brave and the Bold* #37); to pressing a glowing rivet on a water tower (*Teen Titans* #16).

90 In *Blackest Night* #7, it was revealed that Earth-One's privileged position was derived from the fact that all life started there rather than Malthus, the Guardians' homeworld, a secret the Guardians had hidden for billions of years to justify their authority, at least according to Sinestro.

Some might argue it became far too easy to cross between worlds, and that such stories might have been more interesting if characters had faced some sort of consequences each time they did so. This brings to mind fantasy author Brandon Sanderson's "three laws of magic," the second of which states that, "It isn't what the heroes can do that is most important to who they are, but what they have trouble doing."[91] In other words, limitations are more interesting than capabilities. While the ability to travel between dimensions and across parallel universes creates tremendous storytelling opportunities, if characters were made to pay a price each time they did so—such as a temporary or permanent diminishment of their powers or perhaps a shortened lifespan—they would have been less glib about employing this ability, which some of them indulged merely to make a social call to friends or to seek advice (*Batman Family* #17). If the price paid grew higher each time a character moved between worlds, similar to how Sauron's ring gained more power over Frodo each time he used it to make himself invisible, it would have raised the stakes of such stories considerably.



***Justice League of America* #82 (1970) turns DC's parallel earths into a collision course when Creator² captures the Red Tornado and uses his energies to crack the Earth-One/Earth-Two barrier, spawning doppelgängers and a merger threat that was typical of DC's crossover stories.**

When interviewed for this book, Bob Greenberger said something similar was proposed post-*Crisis* regarding time travel, but they had trouble making it stick. Furthermore, if the negative effect of traveling between universes or through time were cumulative, and multiple writers and editors were working with the same characters across various titles, keeping track of this snowballing effect would likely have created another massive continuity headache, leading to yet more mistakes and contradictions.

The lengthy caption in *Justice League of America* #82 was probably an attempt to iron out some longstanding wrinkles and anomalies that had grown throughout the haphazard development of the multiverse. But it's yet another example of how offering a seemingly simple solution to a complex problem tends to make things worse rather than better. Not only did this caption introduce new inconsistencies and contradictions, it also suggested heretofore unexplored story ideas that may not have occurred to creators otherwise.

In light of this, it seems fair to argue that rather than the sheer number of worlds, it was the inconsistencies in how these worlds were treated and the difficulty writers and readers had in keeping track of it all that was the real problem. Recall that Gary Thompson's letter in *Green Lantern* that put Wolfman in "*Crisis* mode" wasn't chiding him about introducing yet another world, but for forgetting two characters had met before in another title.

Such discrepancies were especially prevalent outside of the Justice League's adventures, where parallel worlds continued to pop up, often unnamed and appearing only once or twice to serve the needs of a particular story. Such worlds materialized and vanished at a writer's whim, frequently with no explanation or follow-up, only to reappear in a completely different form in another title, sometimes years later. Readers might never know if a new earth or dimension introduced in one issue still existed, had been destroyed, or had simply been forgotten. And in keeping with DC's tradition of editorial silos, little attempt was made to connect these worlds and/or weave them into any sort of ongoing continuity.

Wolfman cited Atlantis as one such example that made *Crisis* necessary, but Mount Olympus may be an even better illustration of how confused DC's cosmology had become. Throughout DC's pre-*Crisis* stories, Olympus was sometimes portrayed as existing in a separate dimension, but at other times it was shown to be a physical location on Earth-One or Earth-Two. Adding further confusion, sometimes it existed in the present, but other times the only way to access it was to travel into the past.

One of the earliest depictions of Mount Olympus was in *Superman* #28 (1944). It showed Superman traveling back in time and then riding a centaur along with Hercules to the top of Mount Olympus, which was an actual mountain in Greece,

91 See more here: https://www.brandonsanderson.com/blogs/blog/sandersons-second-law



Mount Olympus, in northern Greece, is the real mountain behind the myth. As it did with Atlantis, pre-*Crisis* DC continuity became so convoluted that various versions of Mount Olympus appeared in different titles, bearing no relationship to one another.

its peak concealed by clouds. Those clouds could be cloaking a portal to another dimension, but the story neither stated nor implied such a possibility. A few years later in *Wonder Woman* #27 (1948), Diana visited Mount Olympus and found it to be a barren peak with a 100-ton boulder on top to prevent anyone from accessing the Olympic clay from which Wonder Woman was made, which was hidden underneath. Superman found the ruins of the temple of the gods there in *Action Comics* #353 (1967), having just returned from a visit to the temple thousands of years in the past, during which it was a thriving place. When Supergirl went looking for Medusa's tomb in *Supergirl* #8 (1973), she found it under Mount Olympus on Earth in the present, with no indication that the gods were living above. And when Arak scales Mount Olympus in *Arak, Son of Thunder* #10 (1982), he didn't find any gods or temple ruins or a 100-ton boulder at the summit, but he did find a Mt. Rushmore-style collection of enormous faces carved into the summit—including his own!

Taken together, these stories indicate that even though the gods may have lived on Mount Olympus in the past, they were no longer there. *Action Comics* #267 affirmed this when Hercules visited modern-day Metropolis. An oracle had to use a pinch of "time dust" to summon the ancient gods and their temple on Mount Olympus from the past into the present, where they could remain for only one hour. *Action Comics* #353 also had Superman flying into the past to visit Mount Olympus, and Aquaman and Aqualad did the same in *Aquaman* #17.

Such depictions are problematic, though, when one considers *Wonder Woman* #131, which showed Jove (the Roman name for Zeus) hurling thunderbolts in the present from atop a cloud-covered peak on Earth while other gods floated on a nearby cloud. Mount Olympus was portrayed in a similar fashion in *Sea Devils* #14. The same goes for *The Adventures of Captain Marvel* #50, which showed Zeus and the six Shazam gods floating on a cloud above Earth as Zeus threw lightning bolts every time Billy Batson shouted, "Shazam!" While Zeus's location was not identified as Mount Olympus, that was the clear implication.

Contrast these depictions with *Wonder Woman* #159, in which Aphrodite and Mars observed Earth from a cloud, but rather than a physical cloud floating above Earth, it seemed more like a window to another realm. Athena is portrayed in a similar fashion in *Blue Devil* #5 when Wonder Woman summoned her, a ghostly figure surrounded by clouds. *DC Comics Presents* #32 affirmed the otherworldly status of Mount Olympus when it said, "There are two physical entities by the name of Mount Olympus … One is a true mountain, nestled in the Greek hills, and scaled by many mortals, from antiquity to the present. The other Olympus exists perhaps a microsecond away from the first, in time if not in space." Then there's *New Teen Titans* #12, which described Olympus as "the center of all that is! It is power, and the power is without equal!" This is difficult to square with the Rock of Eternity, which was also described as the nexus of time and space, seemingly pitting the two against each other as the center of reality—never mind the role Oa played as the physical center of the Earth-One universe. In this Teen Titans story, Olympus also appeared to be located at the top of a physical mountain on Earth rather than in an otherworldly realm. The peak was concealed by clouds, so as suggested earlier, perhaps the clouds concealed an interdimensional portal.

The History of the DC Universe #1 asserted the otherworldly status of Mount Olympus by revealing that the so-called gods who lived there were merely "ravagers from another world," who returned to Earth many times before they "forsook our planet for the grandeur of Olympus." While this located Mount Olympus as somewhere other than Earth, it didn't specify if it was on another planet in the multiverse, or if it was in another dimension altogether, and there was no verification of the grandiose claims made about Mount Olympus in *New Teen Titans* #12 (penned by Marv Wolfman, no less), which came out four years before *Crisis*. Following *Crisis,* the *Last Days of the Justice Society Special* #1 said, "Wonder Woman and her husband General Steve Trevor left this mortal coil, to dwell for all time upon a Mount Olympus no cartographer will ever map," which implies the Earth-Two version of this place existed outside of time and space.

Olympus and its residents appeared in a single panel in *Crisis* #10 that was part of the "Monitor Tapes" rather than the main story. "Even the golden halls of *Olympus* itself were bloodied in the battle against the forces your brother [the Anti-Monitor] unleashed," Lyla said. "Three of the gods perished, two more are dying. Whomever destroys the gods *must* be mad!" The wounded and dying gods were never named, but the panel showed Olympus overrun by shadow demons, so it must have been located somewhere in the positive-matter multiverse. Seeing as heroes from Earth-One and Earth-Two visited Mount Olympus most often, it was probably located



Before *Crisis*, DC's multiverse piled up competing versions of Olympus and its pantheon of gods. With multiple divine lineages and overlapping divine histories, editors and readers struggled to track what was "true," making mythology a prime candidate for streamlining after *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

in one of these two universes—or both if there was more than one version of Mount Olympus, but it's impossible to say which one the shadow demons attack.

The uncertain status/location of Olympus also highlights the question of how to distinguish a parallel universe from an alternate dimension in the DCU. One way to think about it is that a parallel universe is an alternate version of the baseline reality within the multiverse. The fundamental laws of physics are the same across each universe, but the history, characters, and events within each universe have developed differently due to a combination of chance, choices, and other contingencies. Each universe in the multiverse contains its own version of Earth and every other planet (except Oa for some reason), populated by alternate versions of familiar superheroes like Superman and Batman as well as regular folks. This leads to designations such as Earth-One, Earth-Two, Earth-X, and so forth. As Paul Levitz put it when interviewed, it's similar to author Harry Turtledove's theory of alternate history. His novels explore "what if" scenarios—points where history could have diverged due to key events or decisions, leading to vastly different outcomes. For example, "What if the South had won the American Civil War?" (*The Guns of the South*) or "What if the Byzantine Empire had never fallen?" (*Agent of Byzantium*). "Parallel worlds and their universes need to be parallel," Levitz says, "like Earth except for a divergent factor or moment."

A different dimension, on the other hand, refers to a plane of existence that (sometimes) operates according to a completely different set of physical laws from the multiverse (see *Wonder Woman* #97 for example, another pioneering parallel-world story). Alternate dimensions "permit different fundamentals," as Levitz puts it. They can be magical, mystical, or completely alien in nature, and they are located outside of or orthogonal to the normal space-time continuum. A few well-known examples include the Fifth Dimension, home to Mister Mxyzptlk and many other magical or impish characters; the Phantom Zone, where time is suspended, and prisoners are rendered intangible and invisible to the physical world; limbo, a catch-all term for everything from the space between parallel worlds to a holding area for spirits after death; the Rock of Eternity, a mystical location at the center of the Earth-S universe that serves as the source of power for Shazam and his allies, and a prison for evil spiritual entities; Gemworld, a crystalline world of sorcery and feudal houses that serves as the home of Princess Amethyst; and the Fourth World, home to the New Gods, New Genesis, and Apokolips.

Keep in mind that while such a distinction between parallel universes and alternate dimensions is helpful from an analytical point of view, DC's creators gave no indication that they were working from such a premise. For instance, when queried about the distinction between parallel worlds and alternate dimensions for this book, no less a luminary than Marv Wolfman replied, "I'm sorry but I have no idea about any of this. I don't even understand the question."[92] Furthermore, over the first 50 years of DC's history, the words "parallel universe," "alternate dimension," "space-time continuum," and "plane of existence" were often used interchangeably to describe the same alternate realities, sometimes in the same sentence. For example, in *Action Comics* #238, Tommy Tomorrow said, "Under the influence of gravity, I turned solid gradually, since I'm really part of this dimension-universe!" And in *Superboy* #117, the boy of steel said, "Many similar *universes* co-exist in the same space but in an infinite number of different *dimensions*." Then in *Action Comics* #273 we had, "Our world and Mr. Mxyzptlk's world [the Fifth Dimension] both occupy the very same space … but each is invisible to the other because they are on different dimensional planes." And in *Green Lantern* #15, Sinestro trapped Hal Jordan on the planet Gryx, which was said to be located in the eighth dimension within the anti-matter universe.

All that to say, even after the multiverse was formally introduced in *The Flash* #123 and fleshed out in a relatively systematic fashion in the annual JSA/JLA team-ups, DC's creators tended to use it as more of a narrative plaything than a basis for a grand cosmological framework, similar to how they had been conjuring parallel worlds and alternate dimensions prior to "Flash of Two Worlds." Therefore, it's no surprise that Wolfman—who had contributed his own fair share to the problem—became convinced that the narrative costs of allowing the multiverse to proliferate had come to outweigh the benefits, and it was time to consolidate DC's sprawl of worlds into a single, more manageable reality.

And so, with *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, DC undertook its most ambitious narrative reset to date, an effort to merge decades of disparate stories into a unified continuity. It was a bold gamble with significant consequences—both intended and unintended—that would reverberate for years to come.

92 The author is willing to admit Wolfman's confusion could have been due to a faulty question!

CHAPTER 8

Red Skies Get the Green Light

As Marv Wolfman recalled in an editorial published in *Crisis* #2, the day he wrote his response to Gary Thompson's letter in *Green Lantern* #143, he, Len Wein, and artist Joe Staton were scheduled to go to a comic convention in Philadelphia. Having arrived early to the train station, Wolfman had plenty of time to mull over the problem of DC's tangled continuity and how it could be fixed, and by the time Wein and Staton showed up, Wolfman was bursting with ideas, which they spent the rest of the day discussing.

Even though Wolfman was skeptical that DC editorial would bite on such a big project, the following Monday morning, he and Wein pitched managing editor Dick Giordano on an epic series that would span DC's history all the way from "A to K"—Anthro the first boy to Kamandi the last boy on Earth. Not only did their plan allow for some major house cleaning within the DCU, it would also open the door for the company to do a line of side projects, such as Frank Miller's *Ronin* and Mike W. Barr and Brian Bolland's *Camelot 3000*, that would exist outside of DC's main continuity. "We can have the best of both possible worlds," Wein insisted, which seems like an ironic thing to say, seeing as eliminating possible worlds was one of the primary goals of this exercise!

Giordano liked the pitch so much that, within a week, Wolfman and Wein found themselves in DC President Jenette Kahn's office, seeking to sell her on the idea. She gave them the green light immediately, but she also put them in charge of coordinating the project with DC's other editors and writers.

The first official mention of the series came out at the end of that year. In a preview of upcoming DC titles, the December 1981 issue of *Comics Journal* noted that, "Also in the works, but not yet scheduled, is Marv Wolfman's 12-part maxi-series that will propose to tie together the entire history of the DC Comics world."[93] This quote alone should put to rest any theories that *Crisis* was an attempt to imitate or cash in on



Marvel's *Secret Wars* (1984–1985) and DC's *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1985–1986) still spark "first event" debates. *Secret Wars* was a company-wide crossover miniseries with many tie-ins, born from merchandising and designed to pull heroes into one shared storyline.

93 "DC Schedules Eight Titles for 1982," *Comics Journal* No. 69 (December 1981): 14.

Marvel's *Secret Wars* maxi-series, seeing as that project wasn't even announced until the February 1984 issue of *Marvel Age,* and this mention was published nearly three years earlier.

Before we move on, this is a good spot to address another theory regarding how *Crisis* came about, arising from the following claim that artist/writer John Byrne made on his website on December 28, 2004.

Some time in the early 1980s—I can't pinpoint the exact date, but I do recall that I was attending a convention in Atlanta—DC's then-EiC [Editor-in-Chief] Dick Giordano—approached me about writing and drawing something that had the working title "The History of the DC Universe." This was proposed as a 12-issue "maxi-series" which would use the first 11 issues to lay out all the established DC lore, doing the best that could be done to shuffle all the conflicting details into some kind of cohesive whole. Then, in the 12th issue, everything would "blow up" due to some terrible cosmic catastrophe, and the next month all the DC books would "restart" with first issues.

As it happened, I was having dinner with Dick, Frank Miller, and Frank's then-girlfriend, Laurie Sutton, when Dick made the offer, and Frank was quick to say I would have to be crazy to accept such a project. I agreed—but in any case, acceptance was unlikely since, as I told Dick, my knowledge of the history of the DCU was not as extensive as of the Marvel universe. There were, in fact, huge tracts of DC lore (such as the Legion of Super-Heroes) about which I knew almost nothing.

So I passed on the project, and over the next couple of years it floated around, mutating as it went, until it became CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS.[94]

This is difficult to square with Wolfman's version of events, especially considering Giordano's pitch to Byrne supposedly included the idea of restarting DC's titles at number one following the series, an idea that editorial rejected.

When asked about this topic, Wolfman replied, "George [Pérez] hadn't signed on to draw *Crisis,* as he wanted to write and draw something else—I forget what. We were looking for an artist, so it's possible Dick asked John about drawing it. He certainly would have been good. But as it was always my pitch, and I was the writer and editor, I doubt Dick would have asked him if he wanted to write it too."

Unfortunately, John Byrne did not respond to requests for a comment on this issue.

Originally, *Crisis* was supposed to come out in the spring of 1983, but once Wolfman and Wein got a clearer sense for how much research was required, the project was pushed back to 1985. This would also coincide with the company's 50th anniversary—as determined by Wolfman. Recall that earlier this book argued that a more appropriate date for the company's founding is 1937, the year Detective Comics Inc. was established by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, Harry Donenfeld, and Jack Leibowitz. If Wolfman had reached a similar conclusion, it would have bought him and his creative team another couple of years to plan.



Comics fan/historian/author Peter Sanderson was hired by DC in the early 1980s to comb through decades of back issues, reading and taking notes on every issue, character, and continuity thread. His research became the backbone for *Who's Who* and provided essential reference support as *Crisis on Infinite Earths* took shape.

The initial research for *Crisis* was done by writer/critic Peter Sanderson. He landed every fan's dream job—to go into DC's archives and read every comic book the company and its polyonymous forebears had published over the last 46 years.

"They knew from my many letters to the editor and from meeting me that I was really interested in continuity and history," Sanderson said when interviewed. "Originally, they thought the job would mean me coming in twice a week for three months. It turned into me coming in three times a week for over a year."

Continuing every fanboy's fantasy, many readers might picture Sanderson's work taking place in a dimly lit, temperature- and humidity-controlled room surrounded by shelves of comic books, with the rarer ones kept under glass. At the center of the room is Sanderson, standing at a special table and having to turn the brittle pages with a white-gloved hand as a fastidious archivist looks on, perhaps reaching out every so often with a pristine white linen handkerchief to swab the sweat from Sanderson's brow. But reality rarely lives up to fantasy, not even in the offices at DC.

"DC has always had a very good library," Sanderson says. "They had everything in bound volumes, like you'd find in a legal library, going back to 1935. For the '40s and '50s, they had two volumes of everything. For the '60s and onward, they had three volumes. They didn't have a full-time librarian. Instead, it was something that the secretary to [publisher] Jenette Kahn did on the side. Eventually, they hired a full-time archivist."

Sanderson notes that the quality of DC's library was quite the contrast to Marvel's, which he managed for a while. "At Marvel it was very bad, with things sloppily organized. They had only one copy of everything, and so many volumes had been stolen over the years. DC had some problems with that from time to time, but for the most part, they had a very good, intact library."

As for Sanderson's notes, "I made a complete cast of characters for each issue. I didn't mention somebody who was a passerby on the street, only anybody who had a significant role in the issue, and anything that seemed important in terms of continuity. Like, this is the first appearance of Captain Cold,

94 https://www.byrnerobotics.com/FAQ/listing.asp?ID=7&T1=Miscellaneous+Questions#132

or this is the first issue with Iris West, Barry Allen's wife. Things like that. I also took notes on who wrote and drew each issue. I don't know if they intended for me to do that, but I thought it was important to know."

Sanderson's records eventually filled two thick three-ring binders, "which suddenly became the company's bible."[95] These were handed off to Wolfman and his initial co-plotters, Len Wein and recently hired associate editor Bob Greenberger. For years, comic book fans (including Paul Levitz as a teen) had been creating informal indexes similar to what Sanderson was doing, but none of them had access to the company's complete publication history. Therefore, Sanderson's notes became the most comprehensive index of DC comics in existence. The importance of his work may be difficult to comprehend today, seeing as anyone can access virtually any comic book ever published or summary thereof through one website or another. But back then, such information was priceless in terms of getting the full scope of what DC had published and how it all fit together—or in this case, how much of it *didn't* fit together, hence the need for *Crisis.*

"Peter compiled extensive notes," Wolfman said in an editorial in *Crisis* #1, "literally reams of paper which have not only proved invaluable to the CRISIS, but to WHO'S WHO and the rest of DC's editorial and business departments." When interviewed for this book, however, Wolfman appeared to walk this quote back. "Years earlier when I was an intern at DC, I had read all the books and remembered most of it. So, we moved all of Peter's research over to *Who's Who,* where his research was very much needed. Because I knew the structure of *Crisis,* I didn't need to consult with any earlier writers or artists." Whatever role Sanderson's notes played in *Crisis,* his original handwritten pages joined the DC archive, where they are still preserved today.

Even before Sanderson's research was complete, the development of *Crisis* began over a series of weekly lunch meetings attended by Wolfman, Wein, and Greenberger.

"I was specifically hired by Dick [Giordano] to work with Len and Marv on *Crisis* and *Who's Who,*" Greenberger said when interviewed. Having known DC's vice president and publisher, Paul Levitz, since their fandom days, when Greenberger graduated from college in 1980, Levitz got him a summer job at DC, after which Greenberger went to work at *Starlog* magazine and then *Comics Scene.* "When *Comics Scene* was canceled, I spoke to Dick [Giordano] at the 1983 San Diego Comic-Con where I basically begged for a job," Greenberger says. Nothing was available then, but Giordano called him back for an interview in December, and by early January, Greenberger was on the payroll, thrown straight onto the *Crisis* team.

On top of their primary task of paring DC's sprawling multiverse down to a single universe, the trio had one other monumental mission—to tell an epic tale that would justify the changes they were about to make, while also standing on its own as a satisfying story, even for readers who were unaware of the purpose behind it.

"Len, Marv, and I would order takeout daily and sit in the conference room and ask, what started the multiverse?" Greenberger says. "Where did the multiple earths come from? How do we collapse the multiverse? Who's the big bad? How is he so powerful? Where's he been all this time? We'd keep asking those questions and throw stuff against the wall."

"Invariably, we'd come up with something that we all thought was wonderful and come storming out of the conference room, telling everybody how wonderful it was," Greenberger told *Comics Interview* while still midway through the series' release. "Twenty minutes later, somebody would find the fallacy in it, and the next week we'd go back into the conference room to try again."[96]

One of those "great ideas" was linking the origin of the DCU with the development of atomic weapons. "The first splitting of the atom took place in 1938," Greenberger said. "What other significant event occurred in 1938? ACTION #1, the first appearance of Superman! We thought, 'Boy, what a great connection that is!' But then Julie Schwartz and Nelson Bridwell pointed out that it didn't work as you went through the timeline. The primary problem was, for Superman to be in his early 20s in 1938, he would have had to arrive on Earth sometime during World War II, so the dates didn't quite line up."[97]

"Every now and then we'd run down to Julie Schwartz's office where he kept a bunch of science books," Greenberger added when interviewed for this book, "and we'd pull stuff out. It took a while for things to start to coalesce organically."

"Finally, at a lunch, right downstairs at Pastrami 'n' Things, Bob and I were talking," Wolfman told *Comics Interview*, "and suddenly it all clicked into place."[98]





(left) Len Wein, photo by Albert DeGuzman and (right) Bob Greenberger. Len Wein (1948–2017) was a writer-editor who helped steer DC's 1980s line, including editing *Crisis*-era projects. Bob Greenberger, longtime DC writer and editor, cut his teeth on *Who's Who* and *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

95 *Crisis Compendium,* 8.

96 O'Neill, 7.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.



George Pérez was one of DC's defining artists, famed for intricate, character-packed pages and a talent for making sprawling universes feel coherent. His dynamic storytelling elevated everything from *Teen Titans* to *Wonder Woman*, but his signature achievement is *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. His visuals sold the scale of DC's multiverse collapse, making the event iconic.

That spark of insight ignited when they reviewed the origin of the Guardians of the Universe, as recounted in *Green Lantern* #40 (1965). "We said, ah, Krona had that big bang when he peered back in time," Greenberger says. "Is that where the multiverse started? Once we saw that hand coming through the swirling cosmic mist, we said, yeah, there's something there, which was great."

With momentum building behind *Crisis* and *Who's Who,* and Len Wein committed to both projects, it wasn't long before something had to give. "Eventually, for a number of reasons that had a lot to do with where Len was at in his career," Greenberger recalls, "Dick very wisely said, 'You know what, Marv? You and Bob continue on *Crisis* with George [Pérez]. Len, you do *Who's Who* with Bob being the go-between.'"

"I'm stronger in terms of plotting anyway," Wolfman told *Amazing Heroes* at the time, "and Len is a fanatic about the 'who's who' type of stuff."[99]

"Len and Marv had a deep bond, having started together at DC in 1980," Greenberger adds, "but this was the point where their career paths were definitely diverging. Len left staff and relocated to California, in need of a break. It was the end of the road for that particular partnership." Even so, Wein and Wolfman continued to consult with each other as their individual projects progressed.

"A couple of times I'd go sit at Marv's house for an entire day, or we'd go meet at a diner with George [Pérez] and brainstorm," Greenberger says. "But slowly but surely it went from Marv and I to more of George and Marv, because that's what worked with *Titans*. And they had such a wonderful relationship. The rest of us weren't really needed, except to help shape the ideas once they came back to us. And then I had to communicate it to everybody else."

"I've been saying that *Crisis* is a giant, 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle, with 1000 characters running around, and my job is to take those pieces, along with George Pérez, and make the complete picture with no seams," Wolfman told *Comics Interview*. "If George and I are successful, you won't know there was ever a puzzle. I think we have succeeded about 90 percent of the time."[100]

99 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 24.
100 O'Neill, 15.

Heaping yet another creative burden onto their mandate, in addition to cutting down the DCU and crafting a coherent story that tied together hundreds of characters across five decades of history, Giordano asked them to *add* a host of new characters too. Specifically, he wanted them to incorporate as many characters as possible from Charlton Comics, whose "Action Heroes" roster DC had recently acquired. These included Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, the Question, the Peacemaker, Nightshade, and Judomaster.

Established in 1945, Charlton was unique among other comic book publishers in that it operated entirely in-house, from editorial to printing to distribution. It was also notorious for paying some of the lowest rates in the industry. However, many notable writers and artists worked for Charlton from time to time, including Steve Ditko, Jim Aparo, John Byrne, Dennis O'Neil, and Giordano himself.

Dick got his first inking job at Charlton in 1952 and eventually worked his way up to editor-in-chief, which meant overseeing all 34 of the company's bimonthly publications. "Can you imagine that I was editing 17 books a month?" he remarked when reflecting on his career. "When I think of that now, I can't believe it."[101] He also made it his mission to raise rates for creators, but in the meantime, his sales pitch to writers and artists included the line: "You won't make any money, but you'll have fun."

Giordano left Charlton for DC in 1968, joining the staff as an editor, but also inking and performing other artistic duties. When the Charlton characters became available in 1983, Paul Levitz purchased them for a sum of $5,000 each, largely as a gift for Giordano to use in any way he pleased. Hence, finding a way to graft Charlton's characters into DC was a way of bringing things full circle for Dick. After a couple of false starts, he hoped *Crisis* would be the ticket.

"At one point, Dick wanted to try a weekly comic book featuring the characters, which was handed to me," Greenberger says. "We did a trial issue, but Jenette and Paul felt it wouldn't sell. So, part of our mandate was to find a way to integrate them into the DC universe through *Crisis*. We made Blue Beetle part of the original group that we would meet in issue one. Then we spotlighted Captain Atom when it was time to bring in the big guns in issue six. But after that we couldn't quite figure out what to do with them. Peacemaker, Nightshade—we just had no plans for them. They showed up, and they were part of all the action, but they were lower-level characters, and we just couldn't do much with them."

By late spring 1984, Wolfman et al. felt confident enough in their progress to send a memo to DC's editors that outlined the crux of the series. It was accompanied by a plea for help from Wolfman.

101 Michael Eury, *Dick Giordano: Changing Comics, One Day at a Time* (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2003), 37.



Charlton's "Action Heroes" were a lean, morally charged stable of 1960s superheroes—Captain Atom, Blue Beetle (Ted Kord), The Question, Nightshade, Peacemaker, and others—published on a shoestring budget but bursting with strong concepts. DC bought the characters in the early 1980s, folded them into its continuity during *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, and retooled them as key players in DC's post-*Crisis* universe.

> *I strongly urge anyone, whether it's to help DC, to assist in the project, to help me because I'm on my knees begging, or for personal greed reasons to protect their own characters, to please offer advice, help, suggestions and anything else to improve what is a fairly straightforward plot. … Whether one agrees with CRISIS EARTH or not, the series has been mandated as the official new version of DC mythology. Everyone, for good or bad, will be living with this thing, and your help now will make it easier for all concerned later on down the road.*[102]

In the initial pitch, rather than threaten to annihilate the multiverse with anti-matter, the story called for the Anti-Monitor to accelerate the multiverse's natural tendency to expand. Through some unnamed mechanism, he would hasten this inflation until the finite life force that fueled the multiverse was exhausted. "The Monitor is aware of this," the memo said, "and needs champions to go throughout time and space, to specific crux points, and prepare to bring the positive multiverse into alignment, once more creating a universe."[103] In other words, rather than prevent the remaining five earths from merging prematurely, which is one of the heroes' main goals in *Crisis,* in this early draft of the story, they are tasked with doing the complete opposite.

Also in contrast to *Crisis,* instead of going ahead of the heroes and setting up his "tuning fork" towers, which needed to be activated, in the initial outline, the Monitor didn't know where the crux points were, but he equipped the heroes with "some form of talisman that will act as a divining rod," so they could find the specific locations in time and space where they were required to defend the multiverse against the Anti-Monitor's attack. There was no mention of the primary threat faced by the multiverse in *Crisis*—the relentless cloud of anti-matter that was negating everything.

Somewhat in line with the way *Crisis* turned out, the memo also indicated that the Monitor would die roughly halfway through the series, leaving the heroes on their own to "stop the anti-Monitor and bring the multiverse together before their very existences are rendered null." The memo went on to say that, "When the Anti-Monitor is defeated, cosmic tuning forks are created and positioned throughout the Multiverse and at the proper moment struck. The vibrational differences, generating the universes, are removed and the Multiverse again becomes the Universe." Once again, while the tuning fork towers made it into the final draft, the role they played—or didn't play, as it turned out—was quite different, particularly in regard to defending against the anti-matter.

Along with the story details, the memo to the publishing team also included provisions for some dimensions, such as the Fourth World, to be sealed off from the crisis, as well as rough plans for how to involve the Guardians of the Universe. Finally, there were warnings that some characters would change their powers and/or costumes or retire, new characters would be created, and other characters would die.

In regard to characters dying, an oft-told tale recounted a *Crisis* "death list" being passed around the office. "I realize that I'm saying this callously, because I don't know how else to say it," Wolfman told *Amazing Heroes,* "but some characters have outlived their usefulness."[104] In a later interview, he refined this to certain characters "who were essentially doppelgängers who had no real purpose in the coming DC universe—and characters who would be, for lack of a better term, cannon fodder."[105]

A revised version of an original "Crisis Death List" reproduced in *Crisis on Infinite Earths: Deluxe Edition* (2019) included the following characters, with certain names struck through sometime after the list was made.

102 *Crisis Compendium,* 19.

103 Ibid.

104 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 30.

105 Brady, 46.

CRISIS DEATH LIST-Revised

HEROES
Air Wave II (to be harmed or made good)
Atomic Knight (used, not harmed)
Green Arrow I
Hawk or Dove
Insect Queen (E-2)
Kana the Ninja Master
Lori Lemaris
Man-Bat
~~Prez~~
Prince Ra-Man
Robin (E-2)
Huntress
Sargon the Sorcerer
Shade the Changing Man
Space Ranger
Starman (Paul's)
Vartox
Zatara
Shadow Lass' ancestors

VILLAINS
Aegeus
Angle Man
Black Manta (?)
Blackrock
Black Spider
Bug-Eyed Bandit
Clayface (1-II-III)
Clock King
Deadshot
Dummy (wood)
The Gang
Golden Glider
Headmaster Mind
Hector Hammond
Icicle
Immortal Man
Killer Moth (wounded only)
Lord Satanis
Maaldor the Darklord
Mad Hatter (pick one)
Matter Master
The Mist
The Monocle
Myrwhydden
Dr. Anamoly
~~Queen Bee~~
Scavenger
Shaggy Man
Sunburst
Ten-Eyed Man
~~Terra-Man~~
Thinker
~~Wizard~~

At an unknown date, this list was revised further to "The Top Secret DC Death List," including only a few carry-overs from the original list and several-high profile additions.

THE TOP SECRET DC DEATH LIST

Supergirl

Arion

Mirror Master

Mister Freeze

The Atom

Red Tornado

Batgirl

Zatara

Thomas Kālmaku (Pieface)

Morgan Edge

Dr. Light

The Immortal Man

Nathaniel Dusk

The Losers

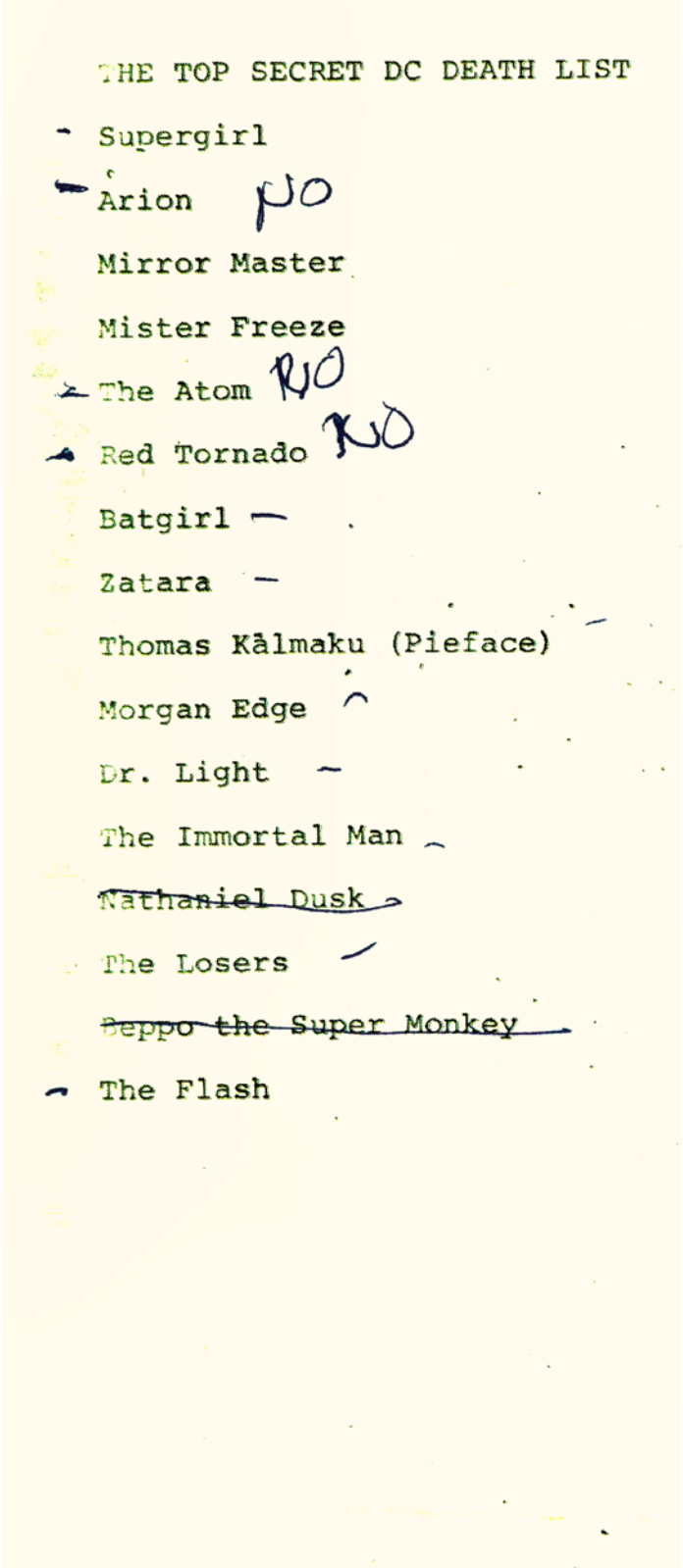
Beppo the Super Monkey

The Flash

Sandman (E-2)
Robin (E-2)[106]

A second version of this list was also included, with the additional notations in (presumably Bob Greenberger's) handwriting:

106 These last two names were written in pencil at the end of the typewritten list.



THE TOP SECRET DC DEATH LIST

- Supergirl
- Arion NO
- Mirror Master
- Mister Freeze
- The Atom NO
- Red Tornado NO
- Batgirl
- Zatara
- Thomas Kâlmaku (Pieface)
- Morgan Edge
- Dr. Light
- The Immortal Man
- ~~Nathaniel Dusk~~
- The Losers
- ~~Beppo the Super Monkey~~
- The Flash

"Many of us had characters we were not particularly fond of," Greenberger adds. George Pérez was no exception.

"I have to admit … that there were some characters that I wanted to kill because I couldn't stand being in a company that would print them," Pérez said. "Bug-Eyed Bandit was number one on that list. When I did the cover of *Who's Who,* I had never heard of him before. 'We have a character named Bug-Eyed Bandit? I have to tell my wife when she asks who this guy is that his name is Bug-Eyed Bandit? I'm sorry.'"[107]

As Greenberger argues, though, if *Crisis* was going to have the level of gravitas they were aiming for, they had to think much bigger. "The Bug-Eyed Bandit is a second-tier Atom villain that hadn't really been seen much in the '70s and '80s. Nobody was going to care. It's one thing to kill secondary villains or a supporting character, but we needed to kill off some major, significant characters who were beloved, respected, and powerful in the history of the DC Comics, so their deaths would have meaning."

"My attitude was that characters had to die in order to prove to readers that DC was not only changing, but it would never again be predictable," Wolfman added.[108] To be a good sport and to show he also had some skin in the game, Wolfman even created a character, Kole, in the *New Teen Titans* (#9) specifically to die during *Crisis*. "I knew from the day that she was created that that was what was going to happen," Wolfman said. "I resented it afterward, because I really fell in love with the character. But that was her purpose originally, so she died."[109] Over time, Wolfman came to regret some of the other characters' deaths too. "My belief as a writer is that there is almost no reason to ever kill a character, and certainly none to kill someone *else's* character. If you don't like the character … you just don't use them."[110]

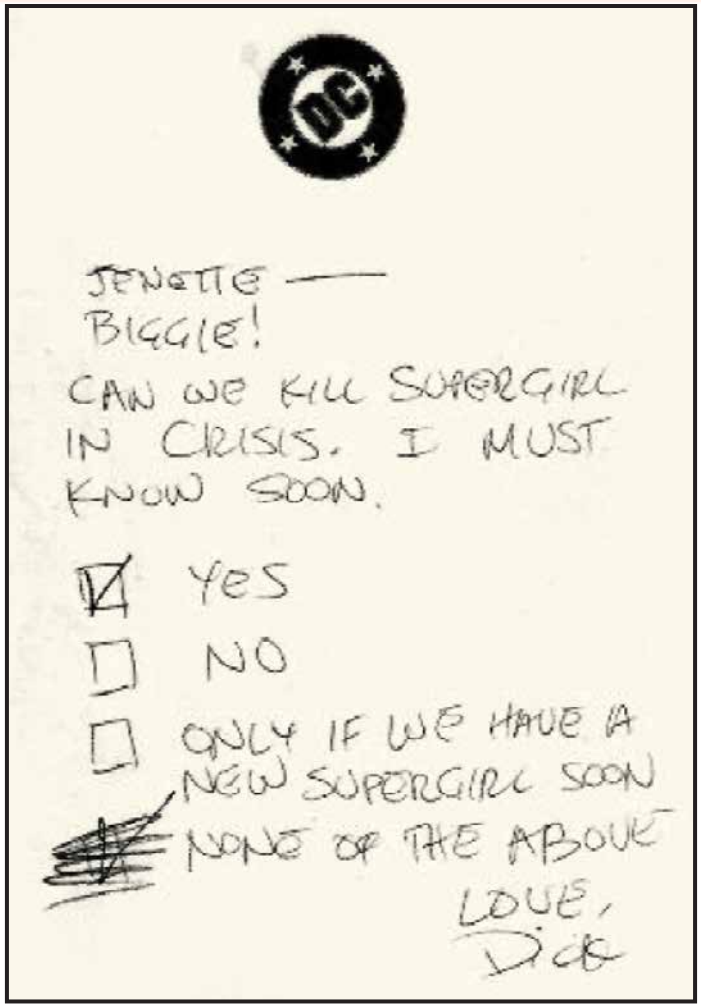
When they presented their list of potential victims to publisher Jenette Kahn, she said, "It's not daring enough," and encouraged the team to be bolder. Taking her at her word, Wolfman said, "I proposed that we kill Supergirl, almost jokingly, but with a strong reason behind it. My feeling was that Superman needed to be the sole survivor of Krypton. By 1984, the entire population of Krypton had been on Earth at least once, and it seemed that only about three Kryptonians were actually killed when Krypton blew up. The rest had survived in various ways, and that all took away from the unique nature of Superman."[111]

Wolfman's suggestion led to an infamous handwritten note from Dick Giordano to Jenette Kahn, asking if they could kill Supergirl in *Crisis*. It included four options with a check box beside each:

Yes
No
Only if we have a new Supergirl soon
None of the above.

A reproduction of the note in the *Crisis Compendium* showed the "none of the above" box checked but then scratched out and a checkmark placed beside "yes."

107 *Amazing Heroes,* March 15, 1986, 23.
108 Siegel, *Village Voice.*
109 *Amazing Heroes,* March 15, 1986, 23.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.



A copy of Dick Giordano's note to DC president and publisher Jenette Kahn requesting permission to kill off Supergirl as part of *Crisis*. Kahn's check mark—after a bit of wavering—greenlit Kara's sacrificial death. Her demise in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #7 and that issue's cover are iconic in comic book history.

Supergirl's death was tricky due to the *Supergirl* movie coming out in July 1984. If it was a success, it was likely that DC's parent company, Warner Communications Inc., would want to keep the character alive. For better or worse, the movie bombed, earning just $14.3 million in the US against a $35 million production budget, which sealed Supergirl's fate. "Everyone was holding out hope that the movie would be good," Greenberger says, "and then they saw it. And Jenette said, 'Kill her.'" Paul Levitz lobbied for Supergirl to be brought to the future and made part of the Legion of Super-Heroes, but Kahn refused to grant a stay of execution.

Because of declining sales—from 321,000 copies per month in 1968 to just 67,881 in 1985—due in no small part to the overly long "Trial of the Flash" storyline (*The Flash* #323–350), Khan wanted to put the Scarlet Speedster on the chopping block too.



Cary Bates (b. 1948) was a powerhouse DC writer—the company's longest-serving Superman scripter and a key Bronze Age Flash architect. With artist Carmine Infantino he delivered landmark stories like Iris West's death and "The Trial of the Flash," pushing for real consequences. Post-*Crisis*, he also helped relaunch Captain Atom, blending superhero drama with science-fiction ideas.

"I remember Dick Giordano calling Paul Kupperberg and myself into a closed-door meeting where we were solemnly informed that the Flash and Supergirl would not survive the upcoming Crisis event," recalled Cary Bates, who had been writing *The Flash* since 1972 (beginning with issue #216).[112] "It wasn't good news by any stretch from my perspective because of the loss of income, though I did appreciate being informed so far in advance, so I could thoroughly plot out Flash's final adventure. Originally, the plan wasn't for the Flash trial arc to last so long, but given the timetable that *Crisis* imposed on the book, I didn't see the point of starting another story arc that would've been condensed or truncated."

Wolfman balked at this directive too, especially considering the Flash was among the first of the Silver Age characters. "To me, all three Flashes [Barry Allen, Jay Garrick, and Wally West] could have existed simultaneously, because that was a grandfather-father-son dynamic I would have played to, had I been involved," Wolfman said.[113] By that point, he had also worked out a code of ethics when it came to knocking off characters. It was aimed in part at honoring history, but also to ensure he didn't step on any of his colleagues' toes. "My feeling was that I could do things with 'generic' DC characters, but not with any that were created under the contracts that were put out after Jenette came in. I didn't feel that I had any right to alter those more proprietary characters without their creator's permission. I also didn't feel I had a right to kill anybody who was created before I was born. That left a middle ground I was free to play with."[114]

Unfortunately for Wolfman, the Flash didn't occupy that middle ground, but that didn't mean Wolfman couldn't find a loophole. "I was asked to kill Barry, so I did that. While I couldn't save the Flash outright, what I *was* able to do was plant something in the death of the Flash that could bring him back, and I immediately informed the other editors, in case they decided to do

112 In an interview conducted for this book.
113 *Comic Buyer's Guide,* 46.
114 Mark Waid and Mike Tiefenbacher, "Crisis Obituaries," *Amazing Heroes,* March 15, 1986, 23.

that." Wolfman elaborated on that "something" years later: "I came up with the idea of Flash moving back through time, flashing into our dimension even as he was dying. So, I thought, what if Barry was plucked out of the time stream at one of those moments he appeared?!"[115]

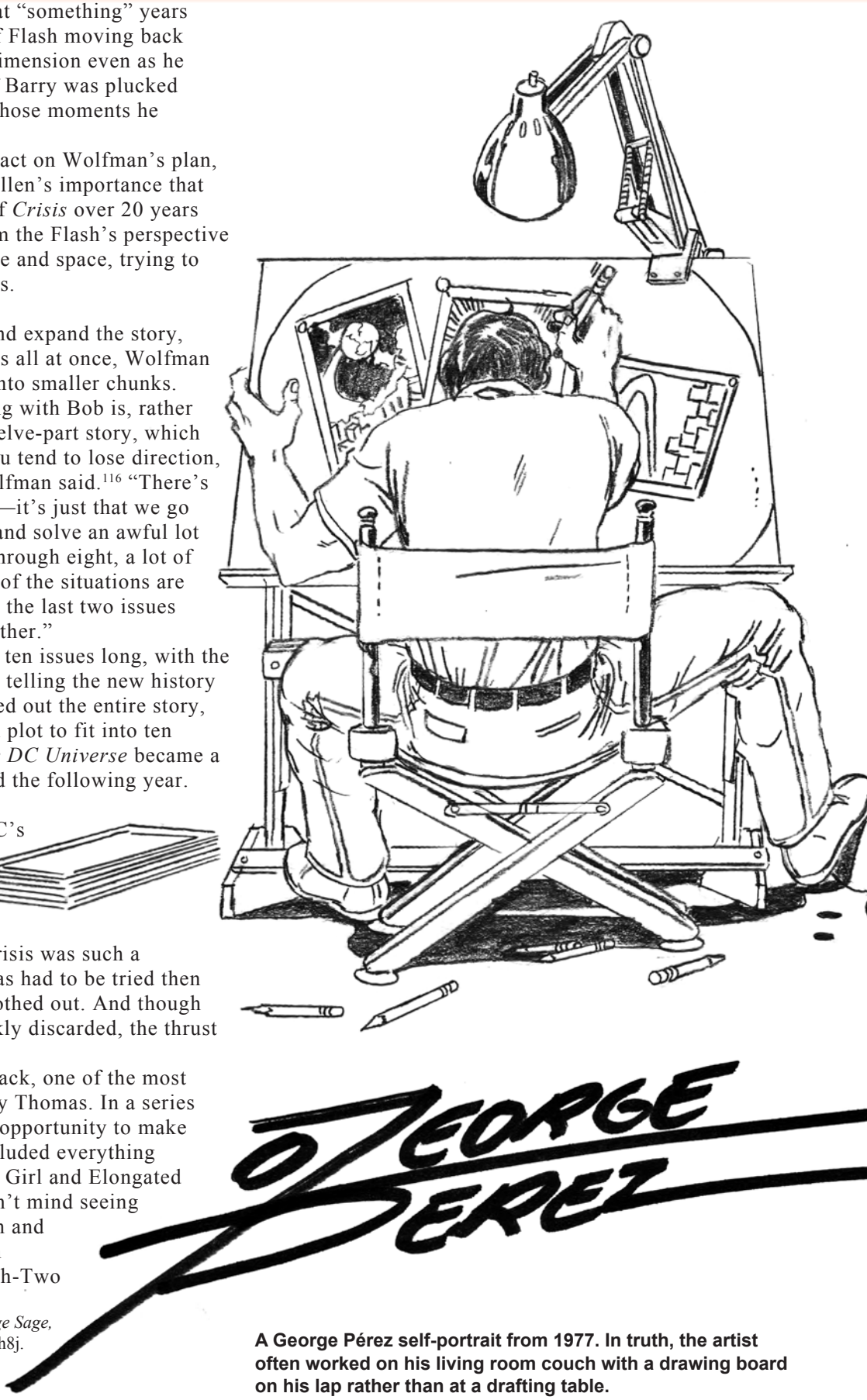
Although DC editorial didn't act on Wolfman's plan, he felt so strongly about Barry Allen's importance that when he drafted a novelization of *Crisis* over 20 years later, he told the entire story from the Flash's perspective as Barry Allen raced through time and space, trying to reunite with his beloved wife, Iris.

As they continued to revise and expand the story, rather than tackle the entire series all at once, Wolfman and Greenberger broke it down into smaller chunks. "The way I plotted the story along with Bob is, rather than try to make this into one twelve-part story, which for me does not work because you tend to lose direction, it's three four-issue stories," Wolfman said.[116] "There's no break at the end of issue four—it's just that we go from one place to another place and solve an awful lot of the problems. By issues five through eight, a lot of the world has changed, and a lot of the situations are different. Then, as it stands now, the last two issues are where everything comes together."

Crisis was intended to be just ten issues long, with the final two issues being devoted to telling the new history of the DCU. But once they worked out the entire story, Wolfman said they had too much plot to fit into ten issues. Hence, *The History of the DC Universe* became a separate project that was released the following year.

Once they had a twelve-issue breakdown, they sent it out to DC's editorial staff for input. "The plot obviously morphed and shifted," Wolfman said. "Scenes and concepts were dropped and new ideas added. Crisis was such a vast, complex story that … [i]deas had to be tried then discarded. Pacing had to be smoothed out. And though much of this early plot was quickly discarded, the thrust was there early on."[117]

Among those who gave feedback, one of the most enthusiastic contributors was Roy Thomas. In a series of lengthy memos, he seized the opportunity to make dozens of suggestions. These included everything from costume changes for Power Girl and Elongated Man to a list of heroes he wouldn't mind seeing killed (e.g., the original Sandman and Sandy, Stripesy, Ultra-Man, both versions of Wildcat, and the Earth-Two



A George Pérez self-portrait from 1977. In truth, the artist often worked on his living room couch with a drawing board on his lap rather than at a drafting table.

115 "Marv Wolfman Interview," *Silver Age Sage,* March 24, 2018, https://tinyurl.com/muuhah8j.
116 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 24.
117 *Crisis Compendium,* 11.



DC president and publisher Jenette Kahn and writer-editor Joe Orlando, who guided DC's horror and mystery line in the late 1970s and 1980s. Kahn led DC from 1976 to 2002, modernizing the company's business strategy, recruiting top talent, and overseeing numerous ambitious, line-wide projects.

Robin). "And death to all Robins everywhere!" Thomas added, voting in favor of Shiera Hall's demise too, if it were done "tastefully." Some characters he didn't want to touch for fear of interfering with storylines he was developing. He also made suggestions for new characters, such as a son for Lois and Superman of Earth-Two, "a guy who's halfway between Kryptonian and human. He leaps 1/8 of a mile, etc., and never progresses beyond there … perhaps emphasizes his mind, not his body . . . and oh yes, he becomes a bad guy."[118]

Thomas' willingness to contribute to *Crisis* is ironic, seeing as, of all the creators at DC, he had the most to lose from the series. That's because he was in charge of the company's Earth-Two continuity and titles (*All-Star Squadron* and *Infinity Inc.*). But with *Crisis* preparing to erase Earth-Two from existence, would Thomas even have a job when it was all over?

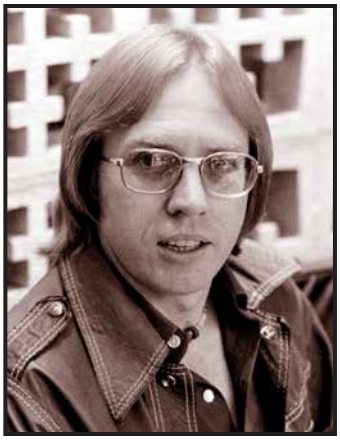
Furthermore, Thomas was never a fan of the "one-big-Earth" idea in the first place. "I disagree with Marv and others who felt *Crisis* was necessary at all," he said when interviewed for this book. "What was needed was intelligent coordination between editors, not the wholesale wrecking of past continuity. To me, *Crisis* was a well-written, well-drawn series that was totally without need or use. But once DC made up its mind to do that thing, I cooperated as a professional. But if, at any moment, I could have halted it, I would have done so." Thomas admits he also felt that he was in a weak bargaining position, seeing as *All-Star Squadron* wasn't selling as well as he had hoped.

Thomas's "good soldier" attitude was bolstered by assurances from "the highest authority" that, following *Crisis,* he would be able to continue using Superman, Batman, Robin, and Wonder Woman in *All-Star Squadron,* even though those stories took place during World War II, and DC's new, singular timeline had those same heroes living in the present. But that deal fell apart when Thomas attended a comic convention in London in the summer of 1985, during which Wolfman informed him that the option to use those characters was no longer on the table. "That was the death of my feeling for DC as a company," Thomas says. "I felt betrayed—not by Marv but by those above him. I've never seen any reason to change my mind."

So much for Bob Greenberger's hope that "nobody's going to run around crying sour grapes later on, I don't think," as he expressed to *Comics Interview* when recounting his discussion with Thomas and other creators regarding how the problems created by all the duplicate characters was going to shake out.[119]

"Roy's certainly got a point, because everything that happened in *Crisis* dealt a body blow to his books," says Jerry Ordway, who penciled *All-Star Squadron* and also co-created *Infinity Inc.* with Thomas. "He's the continuity guy, and suddenly he had to reinvent continuity to make it make sense. Power Girl was no longer connected to Superman. And Huntress, who was Batman and Catwoman's daughter, was no longer that. The character could survive, but she needed a new origin [spoiler alert: she dies in *Crisis* #12]. It was hard on him, and I felt bad, as a person who had worked on those books, that a lot of that stuff had to go. On the one hand, I could see why the company did it. On the other hand, I kind of liked things the way they were.

"As a creator, though, I know there's a danger of being dictated too much by your childhood, of being too precious or too protective of the things you loved as a kid. And no offense to Roy—because I worked on those books—but they didn't sell very well. They sold to a

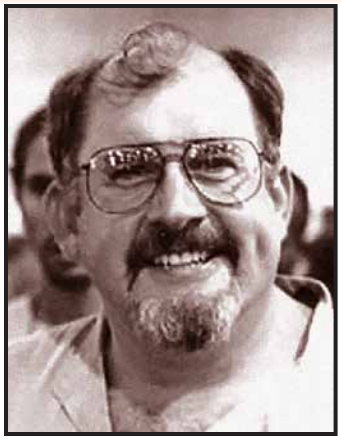


At DC, Roy Thomas became the company's continuity engineer. Through *All-Star Squadron*, *Infinity Inc.*, and *Secret Origins*, he fashioned DC's Golden Age history into a readable timeline, footnoting cuts and reconciling contradictions. He also loved folding DC's acquired heroes—such as Quality characters like Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters—into Earth-Two's WWII tapestry.

118 Ibid.

119 O'Neill, 19.





(left) Dan Mishkin co-wrote *Amethyst, Princess of Gemworld* (with Gary Cohn and artist Ernie Colón), and *Blue Devil* (with Gary Cohn and artist Paris Cullins), blending fantasy elements with superhero vibes. (right) Mike W. Barr wrote *Camelot 3000*, DC's early proof-of-concept for the direct market—one of its first projects aimed squarely at comic shops, and DC's first maxi-series. He also helped redefine Batman post-*Crisis*.

steady audience, but they weren't best sellers. If they had been, maybe they would have been left alone."

In addition to suggestions from Thomas, Greenberger also singled out writer Dan Mishkin (*Blue Devil, Amethyst: Princess of Gemworld*) as "a fountain of suggestions," contributing all sorts of ideas to the project. These included two lengthy, humorous memos on how to turn Red Tornado into a villain, a concept that was eventually discarded in favor of him becoming one of the Anti-Monitor's puppets. "Even though [Dan's] in Michigan, he's in constant phone contact," Greenberger told *Amazing Heroes* in Spring 1985. "We just got a several page memo from him regarding Amethyst's role in the crisis. A couple of weeks before, we had finished hammering out this wonderful, wacky crossover starting in *Blue Devil,* going into *Crisis,* and ending up in *Omega Men.* We're talking about a lot of fun and a lot of help. I single him out because he's been the most prolific, but everyone has been very, very helpful all the way."[120]

Helpful, perhaps, but not always happy. When it came to supporting *Crisis* across DC's other titles, "Some old-school editors like Murray Boltinoff and Julie Schwartz said, 'Yes, sir,' because that's how it used to be," Greenberger says. "Others said, alright, I'm losing a page or two to this. I guess I can do something with it."

When interviewed, Wolfman painted a slightly less rosy picture. "Most of the editors and staff at the time did not like the idea of *Crisis,* or that characters would have to die. But we were restructuring all of DC. The editors were also fans and were very passionate, as was I, but because of sales, this was something that had to be done. So, there were arguments all the time."

Writer/editor Mike W. Barr (*Batman and the Outsiders*) is a good case in point. On the final day of a three-day staff retreat in May 1984 when Giordano insisted that editors showcase the Monitor two times prior to the release of *Crisis* #1, Barr "was so pissed with it he just got up and basically hid in the dining room for a stretch of time," Paul Levitz recalls, with the *Crisis Compendium* adding that Barr "fumed the entire ride back to New York City, not uttering a word."[121]

Having participated in several event comics and tie-ins over the years following *Crisis,* Ordway sympathizes with Barr's reaction. "Crossovers and tie-ins may help a couple of the lower-rung books, bringing their sales up a bit. But for the main books, all it does is derail whatever storyline the creators were doing. What I didn't like about crossovers as a creator was that your stories got hijacked sometimes. Other times you just rolled with the flow. If they let you participate, fine. If they made you participate, it was harder."

As Ordway indicates, the Monitor and Lyla's pre-*Crisis* appearances weren't the only detail that had to be worked out among the various editors and writers. So did the story's crossovers into DC's other titles. "A whole bunch of us sat down in San Diego [Comic] Con last year and worked out a number of storylines connected with *Crisis* that will affect all our books," Wolfman told *Amazing Heroes*.[122] Some of those ideas were captured in a memo written by Greenberger afterwards, including plans to kill, maim, or destroy Immortal Man, have Jimmy Olsen of Earth-One and Earth-Two meet just in time for both of them to die, cure Wally West of the fatal disease that was causing his body to deteriorate every time he used his super speed, introduce a consistent set of deities, have Wonder Woman and Steve Trevor of Earth-Two either move to Paradise Island or die in a blaze of glory, get Batgirl to hang up her cape for good, and potentially kill Hal Jordan to avoid comparisons between the new Green Lantern and Iron Man. This was just one of dozens of memos crafted by Greenberger, who served as a one-man clearing house for all things *Crisis.*

"I was writing a lot of the memos to the editors, saying these are the months we need crossovers," Greenberger adds. "Can you offer us anything? We were *asking* for participation, not demanding. But we said if you don't cross over with us, your books that come out in July and August at least need to have red skies. Do your characters have to interact with the red skies? No. Do they have to acknowledge that they're there? At least have some guy on the street say, 'Hey, why is the sky red?'"

On November 4, 1984, Wolfman himself wrote a lengthy memo to "all concerned parties," urging them to participate.

120 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 25.

121 *Crisis Compendium,* 11.

122 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 25.






1985
DC
OLYMPICS





(opposite page) Jenette Kahn rallies the troops at a DC retreat in Great Gorge, New Jersey, in 1985, which featured three days and two nights of meetings about DC's plans. (Photo courtesy of Bob Rozakis, standing at right in the top left photo, DC's "Answer Man" from 1977–1981.) Kahn led with an emphasis on big-picture planning, professionalization, and culture-building while also championing creative growth and boundary-pushing projects.

> *We're asking that you, as DC Editors, encourage your creators to tie in with the Crisis wherever they can and to whatever extent possible. They will help give the feeling of overall DC cooperation with the project ...*
>
> *You can tie in to The Crisis in any number of ways. It can be as small a connection as having some manner of natural catastrophe occurring in your book: an earthquake, volcanic eruption, flood, building collapse, etc. Your hero/es solve the problem on the way to their regular story ...*
>
> *Or you can tie in completely with The Crisis. You can center your stories on the events of The Crisis, making your comic an offshoot of the main series. Your heroes become embroiled in the ongoing disaster. ... If you want, we can arrange for your character to pop up in The Crisis, leave and segue into the stories you're working on ...*
>
> *If there is any way you can come up with to tie in to The Crisis, talk to me. ... But do it QUICKLY!*[123]

This was followed by a second memo four days later in which Wolfman explained that the entire Crisis event took place within three weeks of "comic book time," but that it would affect all issues on sale from July to September 1985. Then he provided a detailed timeline of the "funny weather" events that would take place during the event. An undated third memo also included a list of astronomical phenomena and cosmic calamities, including the moon rotating faster than normal, exposing the dark side for the first time and causing tidal disturbances; familiar constellations changing shape; sunspot activity increasing, knocking out radio and TV transmissions; timepieces stopping; gravity going haywire; nuclear weapons detonating spontaneously; and continental drift accelerating, among others.

These are all fascinating ideas, but as we shall see, due to the voluntary nature of these crossovers, many of them feel more obligatory than vital to the story, with some writers taking a minimalist approach. As a result, the term "Red Skies Crossover" came to refer to a crossover or tie-in that is merely a token shout-out to the main event rather than something that is integral to the plot of the main story. But to be fair, the *Crisis* team was in uncharted territory.

"It had never been done before," Greenberger says. "We didn't know how to make them fully integrate." *Secret Wars,* a twelve-issue event series that came out the year before, also included tie-ins to other titles, "but it was still smaller in scope," Greenberger says. "It didn't have much of an impact on the X-Men universe, and it didn't touch on the cosmic elements. *Crisis* was much larger in scale."

As Pérez put it, "*Secret Wars* was playing with continuity. *Crisis* is changing it."[124] Adding later, "No meaning to sound snotty, but one of the things *Secret Wars* was showing us was what we *didn't* want to do. *Secret Wars,* to us, seemed to have no real purpose other than getting all these characters together—it was basically a slugfest."[125]

The need to tie in to so many other titles was the part of the project that almost crushed Wolfman. "I'm on the phone four, five, six, seven times—as many times as it takes—to work with any individual writer," he told *Comics Interview* while still midway through the series. "I think I've spoken to Steve Englehart more times in the past two months than in the twelve years I've known him."[126]

"There were no crossovers planned when we created the series, because nothing like this had ever been done before," Wolfman added shortly after the series was complete.[127] "Before [*Crisis*] came out, there had been talk among the other writers, some of whom felt that we were going to make money off their characters. So I came up with the concept of doing the crossovers as a way for them to make some money with *Crisis* as well. It's a mercenary thing and one of the many compromises that had to be made on the book. Once we added in the crossovers and dealt with the political situations, it became a chore and was almost not worth it."

Logistics and scheduling also played a role in how things turned out. "A lot of the plotting on *Crisis* was still being done while the books that were going to come out at the same time were being written and drawn," Greenberger says. "We needed a roadmap probably about four months earlier than we had, so everybody could properly tie in."

The skies were red and the light was green, but now came the hard part—transforming a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle into twelve tight issues while racing against a relentless ticking clock.

(following page) The first house ad for *Crisis* that appeared in DC books. Note the differences in the title and slogan.

123 *Crisis Compendium,* 24.

124 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 28.

125 Eric Nolen-Weathington, *Modern Masters Volume Two: George Pérez* (Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2003), 48.

126 O'Neill, 11.

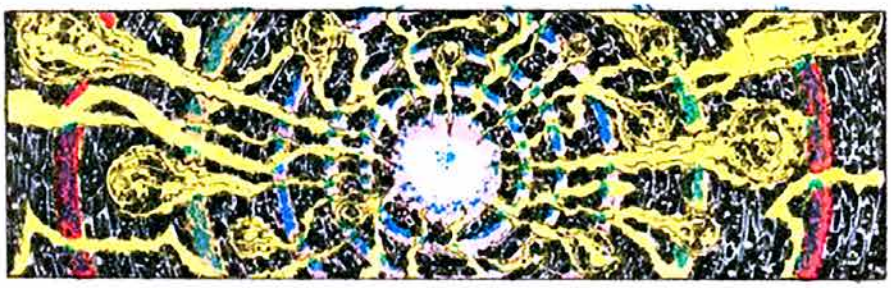
127 *Amazing Heroes,* March 15, 1986, 54.

THE MOST EAGERLY-AWAITED COMIC BOOK EVENT IN 50 YEARS!

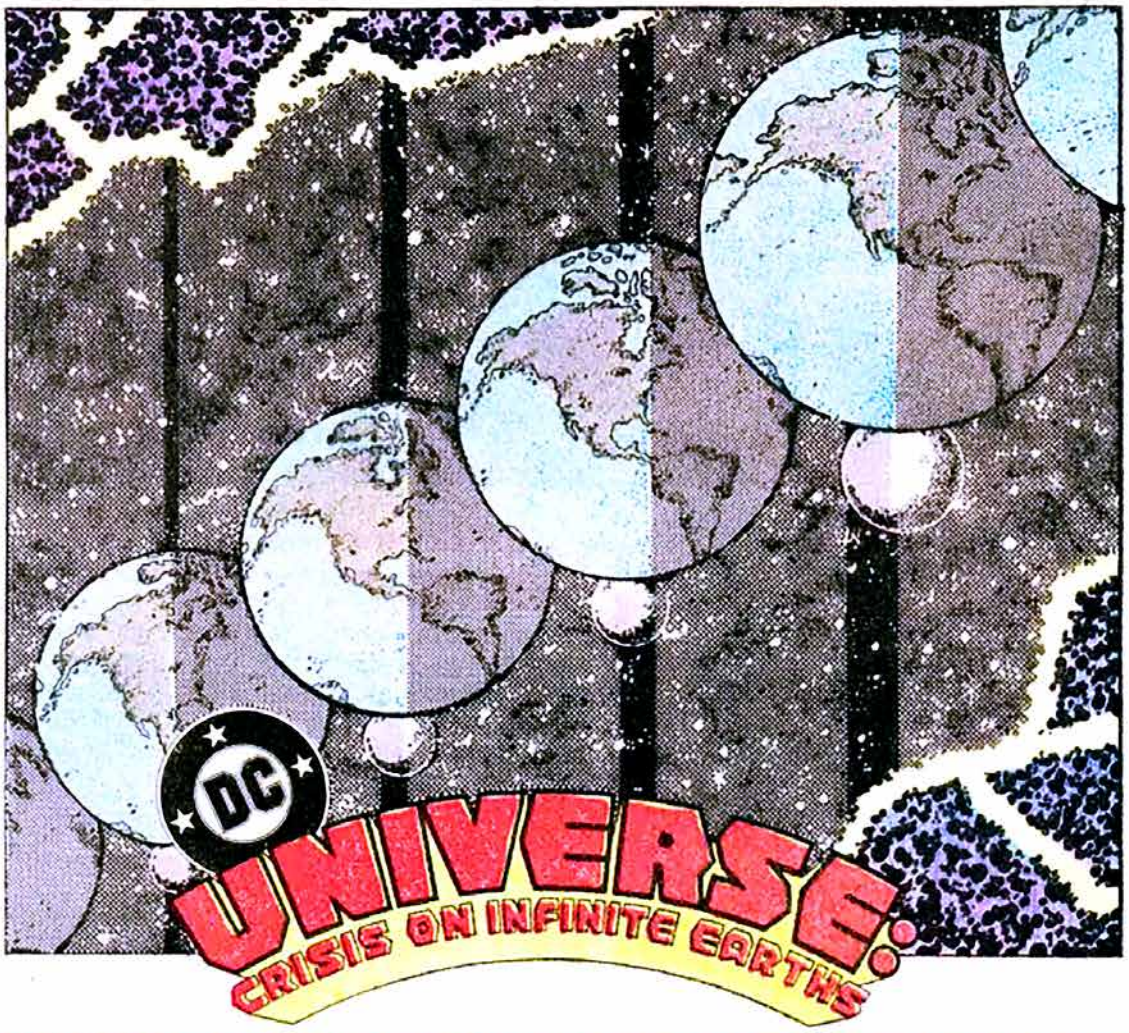
WORLDS WILL LIVE...



WORLDS WILL DIE...



...AND THAT'S ONLY THE BEGINNING!!



THE DC UNIVERSE WILL NEVER BE THE SAME!

CHAPTER 9

From Plot to Pencils—Writing *Crisis*

"The first four issues [of *Crisis*] were really difficult to do, I did full plots on them, and it was starting to get quite confusing," Wolfman told *Amazing Heroes*, even though earlier in the same article, he said he had outlined the entire story months in advance.[128] The problem was, not only was Wolfman the writer on *Crisis,* he was also the editor. He received some input from Greenberger, but as associate editor on *Crisis* and *Who's Who*, Greenberger was really more of a go-between. "Bob was the one who made everything run on time, so to speak," Ordway says.

"Bob Greenberger was brand-new at DC and probably, quite understandably, felt a little ill-at-ease in trying to correct Marv," Pérez noted. "As a result, Marv was lacking feedback on the book, and a lot of stuff started slipping through the cracks."[129]

A key mistake occurred when Wolfman accidentally ended issue #4 the same way he ended issue #3, with Harbinger coming up behind the Monitor and declaring she is going to kill him. "Since the artwork on #3 was already in-house," Pérez said, "I told Bob about the problem, but he didn't have time to get it back to me, so we compromised—and unfortunately this wasn't made clear enough—by saying that Harbinger was looking at Monitor through a viewscreen [at the end of issue #3]. The curving of the border panels there was to indicate that."

"My memory is quite poor and George's is quite good," Wolfman admits, so when Pérez offered to come on board as co-plotter, starting with issue #5, Wolfman was elated. "I have only good things to say about George," Wolfman says. "If George hadn't been there, I think I would have left the book part of the way through. He was the only thing that kept it going."

Returning the compliment, Pérez had nothing but praise for Marv regarding their collaboration on *Titans* and other works. "Marv used to be an art teacher, so I take his advice to heart, because obviously, he does know what he's talking about.



Pérez had already shown he could stage a crowd without losing clarity in Marvel's *Avengers* (from issue #181). His crisp layouts juggle a large cast, proof he was built for *Crisis*-scale storytelling, a skill he developed in the hope of drawing *Justice League of America* one day.

128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.

Marv is one of the best technicians that comics has ever had. Not only is he a good writer, but he knows how to make things work and why things work."[130]

Their collaboration consisted of a hybrid version of the "Marvel style," as popularized by Stan Lee. This involved giving the artist a brief outline, sometimes verbally over the phone, after which the artist drew and paced the story, then the writer added dialogue and captions to the finished pages. "I never wrote a full script for George, as that was unnecessary," Wolfman says. "The detailed plot was enough for him. George loved taking what I gave him and then building on that. But the thing about *Crisis* is it was more than just a big story; it had to accomplish a lot of things all at once, so the plots had to be more detailed than what we did on *Titans*, so we didn't forget anything."

After receiving the plot from Wolfman, Pérez did rough layouts, including figures and labels to indicate who was who on the page. These were sent back to Wolfman for scripting and lettering, and only then did Pérez proceed to pencils. "Based on what Marv has written, I sometimes alter things," Pérez noted while in the midst of drawing the series. "It gives me a chance to get the gut level storytelling out first and then, when I get the artwork back, sit down and really get fancy with characters or panel layout."[131]

Remarkably, despite the complexity of his page designs, some of which include over 20 panels, Pérez eschewed thumbnails—simple drawings that capture the essential features of the layout—preferring to take a more organic approach. "When I do a panel design, it's basically so that one page does not look the same as another. To me it's totally instinctive. I have no rules. … I keep in mind that the characters are constantly moving, and I'm just freezing one frame every time I draw them … and that will lead to another angle. So I try to keep a cinematic flow. … I try to use the restrictions of a rectangular panel and apply cinematic techniques to that without changing the construction of an actual comic book page."[132]

Often working twelve to 15 hours per day, Pérez's "office" was his living room. "You see that couch?" he told *Comics Journal* back in 1983. "That's my drawing board. That's my seat. I lie on that couch, have a lap board which is just an old drawing slate, which I lay on here, put my piece of paper down and draw. And the TV's usually on too."[133]

"George was a storyteller," Ordway adds. "Even when he was working from a full plot, he would still be adding value. For *Crisis,* what he would do on one page, other artists couldn't do in five pages. I don't think he's ever been equaled in that. Nobody else could stage as much content in as few pages. He knew how to use the space really well. I don't know if he saw it in his head first and then drew it, but it was an amazing thing."

"He really wanted to make good comics, and sometimes it just comes down to that," Dan Jurgens adds, having collaborated with Pérez on numerous projects. "That's why he would be willing to put 18 panels on a page and break down the story in this minutiae of detail that was just incredible. He really was singularly unique."

On top of the opportunity to collaborate with Wolfman on such an epic project, the chance to draw virtually every character in the DCU was another key drawing card for Pérez, who had long dreamed of penciling *Justice League of America.* In fact, when Wolfman invited Pérez to pencil *New Teen Titans*, he wasn't too enthused about working on the series*,* thinking the reboot wouldn't last more than a few issues. "But (I told DC), 'I would do it as a favor if you guys let me draw *Justice League* at least once," he said. "I just wanted one issue. 'If Dick Dillin ever goes on vacation… [L]ittle did I realize within a month after I said that, Dick Dillin died of a heart attack. So I got *Justice League*."[134] Starting with issue #184, Pérez penciled nine issues of the series, his dynamic and detailed artwork leaving a lasting impact on the title.

"I pretty much had carte blanche [on *Crisis*]" Pérez told *Amazing Heroes* shortly after the series was complete.[135] "For the most part Marv would suggest certain characters that he definitely wanted in there, and any characters I wanted to add on were fine as long as they were in the DC universe. … Essentially, I was going after a representation of DC Comics as a whole, which is why I put in heroes like Firehair, Shining Knight, and other characters from different eras."

"George just instinctively draws them all correctly," Wolfman said as the series was drawing to a close. "I don't know how he can make Sivana and Tawky Tawny work in the same panel with Wonder Woman, the Changeling, and Supergirl, but he did it. He somehow blends the styles magnificently. I have no problem writing Sivana in an argument with Dr. Cyber, T. O. Morrow, or any of the other villains, even though he is obviously a cartoon. George is altering his style for each character, down to having them pose correctly."[136]

For visual references, Pérez would often rely on Bob Greenberger to supply him with information, but he also had another secret weapon at his disposal. "A joke started coming around that you could tell when a new issue of *Who's Who* came out by who was in *Crisis*. In trying to avoid that, I'd sometimes make a list of characters who specifically had

(opposite page) Marv Wolfman's initial plot summary for the first issue of *Crisis*. Most of these early building blocks made it into the final draft, although Pariah's role had yet to be fully developed as the connective tissue that ties the various calamities together.

130 *Comics Journal* 80, 59

131 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985

132 Paul Ringgenberg, "'I Love This Job': An Interview with George Pérez," *Comics Journal,* March 1983, 60.

133 Ibid., "An Interview with the Most Popular Artist in Comics: George Pérez," *Comics Journal,* January 1983, 82.

134 Dan Greenfield, "George Pérez: Why I'm a Natural for Team Books," *13th Dimension,* May 9, 2022, https://13thdimension.com/george-perez-why-im-a-natural-for-team-books/.

135 *Amazing Heroes,* March 15, 1986, 56.

136 O'Neill, 21.

DC CRISIS #1 Rough Plot

OPEN: The Universe/Multiverse is formed from the Big Bang/ Solar Systems form/Earths cool/the Multiverse continues to split at an unnaturally fast pace

CUT TO: An Earth in its death throes/Natural disasters rip the planet apart/Pariah winks out of existence/the Universe wavers and fades as a black objects begins to materialize and the Multiverse shutters

REACTIONS from familar and unfamiliar Earths (1,2,X,S) until we tighten the focus to Earth-3

CRIME SYNDICATE OF AMERICA, we learn, were freed fromtheir interdimensional prison by Lex Luthor to combat the natural disasters threatening to kill all life/Over the months some of the members have died (especially Owlman)/Lex and Lois have a private moment where we meet their infant son/Pariah arrives only to learn he's too late to save this world and he cries, "Not again!"/Planet shakes, ready to dissolve and Luthor launches his son with a warning beacon/As Luthor and Lois fade, the blackness arrives

FOLLOW the rocket through the dimensions until it appears in Earth-1 space/The rocket lands into orbit around the remains of the JLA satellite

CUT TO: Monitor's satellite/He sees the signal on his board and tells Lyla the time has come/He will retrieve the infant, she will get the chosen/She flies out of the ship and splits into a dozen or so Lylas and they disperse

COLLECTION SCENES:

One goes to the future for Dawnstar, flying in space

One beseeches Solivar for his wisdom and presence to save a universe

One waits for the Blue Beetle to finish fighting some crooks before bringing him

One comes for Cyborg at Titans Tower and talks to the Titans

One appears at a War Bond Rally to collect Danette Reilly (aka Firebrand)

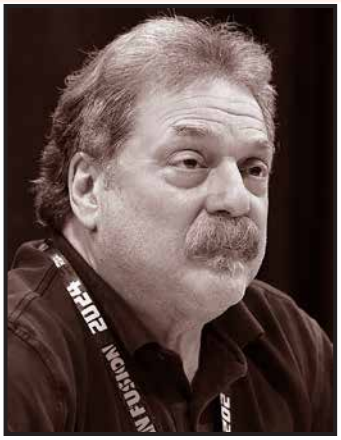
One collects the Psycho Pirate, then Firestorm then frees Killer Frost from her forzen prison and uses the PP to keep her in check

One appears over Ice Age Atlantis and finds Arion wandering in search for something wonderful

BACK AT THE SATELLITE, everyone is gathered including the Golden Age Superman/Obsidian/Geo-Force/Green Lantern (John Stewart)/ Psimon/Dr. Polaris/They talk and murmur amongst themselves as Lyla watches/Finally the figure behind the chair rises and turns to announce himself

TO BE CONTINUED

Note: There should be four full pagers in this issue to segment the story. The final full page is the introduction of the Monitor at the end



Mike DeCarlo, photo by Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia Commons. DC inker-artist Mike DeCarlo brought his talent to the biggest stage when he inked—and in one issue finished—George Pérez's layouts on *Crisis*. A protégé of editor-artist Dick Giordano, DeCarlo had a lengthy career at DC, working on *Tales of the Teen Titans*, *Legion of Super-Heroes*, and *Atari Force*.

not been in *Who's Who* yet. … Even if I have no interest in a particular character, I will still draw him as if he were my favorite. I treated the Sea Devils with as much affection as I treated Superman and Batman. Every character was drawn with love."

Ordway regards characterization as one of Pérez's greatest strengths. "He liked to do character acting within the panels. He would group characters in a way that made sense. He was just really smart about superheroes. Anybody who's ever tried to do a crossover knows it's daunting, because if you have ten guys in a panel, they can't all be in the same pose. You have to know what every character's power is, and you have to know what their personality is. Because when you're drawing, you're kind of like an actor; you have to inhabit each of them. It's all personality stuff, and George excelled at it. He knew how the characters would interact and interrelate. So, when the fans read it, they got a lot more than just the words on the page. They got acting too."

Beyond his affinity for characters, another distinctive aspect of Pérez's art was his ability to create an immersive, richly detailed "storyworld," as described in Patrick L. Hamilton's recent examination of Pérez's art, "providing a clear sense of a world surrounding and thus inhabited by the characters."[137] As Pérez himself remarked, "I was hired for the sense of grandeur that [*Crisis*] required."[138] But sometimes his obsession with detail worked against him. "One thing I had to sacrifice after the first couple of issues of *Crisis* was: I was doing tight little pencils, and I had to abandon that if [I wanted] to maintain a schedule and meet my deadlines on the book."[139]

"That's the burden on the penciler," Mike DeCarlo said when interviewed for this book. He assisted Dick Giordano on inking duties for the first three issues of *Crisis,* and then took over sole inking duties on issue #4. "You have a blank page in front of you, and you have to bring something to life, tell a story, and tell it in an interesting way. Pencilers weren't expected to be line-for-line accurate back then. They were a little loose, and they trusted inkers to fix a little of this, fix a little of that, because they were telling a story, and the creative process didn't allow them to be super tight with everything. The inker was the guy whose responsibility was to take the conceptual art that the penciler had laid down and make it shine." This "looseness" was reflected in DeCarlo's credit on *Crisis* #4, where he was referred to as the "finisher," and Pérez was credited for "layouts," not penciling.

"George was going toward a certain comic book realism," adds Ordway, who inked issues #5 to 12 of *Crisis.* "And basically, I would take it the rest of the way, mostly with line weights, and with lighting effects on faces, and things like that to make things look more dramatic. With inks it's almost like cinematography tricks. You're putting lighting on a figure without overwhelming it."

DeCarlo notes that collaborating with such a high-profile artist like Pérez came with an additional set of challenges. "You not only had to do a good job artistically, but you had to make it look like George Pérez. Nobody was buying the book because I was inking it. They were buying it because George Pérez did it. It was demanding beyond belief. On *Titans* [which DeCarlo also inked], George was doing a lot of layouts. So, I would get this page that had a ton of stuff, but it was kind of just hinted at or sketched out. I knew if George drew a cityscape, he would draw every damn window in that cityscape, so I had to do the same, or people would say, 'Mike DeCarlo, what is he doing to George Pérez?' If I could get through an entire page of George's by the end of the day, I was really doing something. One page of his was equal to two or three pages of someone else."

As demanding as *Titans* was for DeCarlo, *Crisis* took things to a whole new level. A few months before *Crisis* was launched, he was riding to work on the train with Giordano when Dick told him to "gear up." When DeCarlo asked him what was going on, Giordano told him about *Crisis* and its importance to DC's future. "George is going to be penciling it," Giordano added, "and you know what George is like. We're going to need many hands on this, because George is going to take it over the top."

"I'd never seen Dick so doggone serious about something before," DeCarlo says.

"But I remember looking at the artwork and thinking, 'No wonder Dick needs so much help. This is mind-boggling.' I think *Crisis* was George's *Sgt. Pepper's.* It was him going to the limit of what it meant to be George Pérez. I mean, he did good work after that, but my god, when I look at those pages, they still astound me to this day, almost 40 years later."

Pérez himself used a similar musical analogy to describe his work on the series. "Since I plan to get off regular monthly books for some time after this, this is kind of my swan song for series work. Obviously then, I want it to be my best work to date."[140]

Even with DeCarlo's help, the duties associated with Giordano's full-time job as DC's managing editor eventually became too much for him to continue on the series. "Dick was

137 Patrick L. Hamilton, *George Pérez* (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 2024), 21.

138 *Amazing Heroes,* March 15, 1986, 55.

139 Steve Ringgenberg, "George Pérez, 1954–2022," *Comics Journal,* May 9, 2022, https://Awww.tcj.com/george-perez-1954-2022/.

140 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 27.

working more than a full-time staff job," Ordway says. "He not only worked full time Monday through Friday, he also commuted two hours a day or more to and from home. He'd get up at four in the morning, ink until six, take a shower, eat a little breakfast, and then take the train to New York City. It became overwhelming for him to keep up with that."

With Giordano forced to step aside, DeCarlo inked issue #4 on his own as a stop-gap measure, but everyone involved—including Pérez—agreed that, although a good artist, DeCarlo wasn't the best fit. "No offense to Mike," Greenberger says, "but he was not the guy to finish the series."

"Mike was a little too timid with his inks," Ordway adds. "I think he didn't want to impose too much on top of George."

Pérez also may have been gun-shy because of a printing debacle involving issue #1. Instead of printing it using metal plates, as was standard procedure, DC tried the new Flexographic printing process, which used plastic plates and was typically used for things like milk cartons. "The problem is the plastic plates didn't print well if you had a longer print run," Ordway explains. "So, after, say, 80,000 comics going through, the plastic would wear down, and you'd get little, squiggly lines, and details dropping out. Plus, it was on really bright newsprint because it used a different process. So, you just got raw red, blue, yellow, green—it was garish."

With temperatures rising, Ordway agreed to start inking on issue #6, but then he received a panicked call from DC's editorial coordinator, Pat Bastienne. "She said, 'We need you to start on *Crisis* sooner, because George is going to quit. That's how she put it to me: George is gonna quit. I don't know if that was just meant to goose me into doing it, but I felt I had to jump in."

Ordway had a history with DC going back to the early 1980s when he worked closely with Roy Thomas on *All-Star Squadron* and *Infinity Inc.,* but at a certain point, he began to feel stifled. "I enjoyed doing those books, but I felt like I wasn't available to the whole DC universe. Roy would keep me busy because he didn't want some other editors to send me work that would keep me from working for him. It was very territorial. I felt like I was being kept in one spot and not given the options of doing other things." That and a dispute with DC over page rates led Ordway to go to Marvel, who had been offering him better page rates for the past few years. Despite his loyalty to DC, moving from penciling books that were selling maybe 100,000 copies per month to inking titles like *Fantastic Four,* which were selling 270,000 copies per month, was a huge step up. "It was like I had suddenly hit the big time."



A Flexographic printer (the real villain of *Crisis*). When *Crisis* debuted, DC tried Flexographic printing, using softer plastic plates meant to yield brighter color on newsprint. The plates warped due to heat ,and registration drifted, producing blotchy, pinkish hues, muddy fills, and lost line detail.

The moment he left, DC offered Ordway their top rate, but by then he was already committed to *Fantastic Four.* He still had a few issues left to go on that series when he received the panicked call from Bastienne. Plus, he was also committed to do a *DC Comics Presents* annual, which was due on the same day as *Crisis* #5. To make things work, Ordway got fellow inker Al Vey, with whom he was sharing a studio, to erase the pencil lines once the inks were done, and to help on backgrounds. Even then, the two of them were toiling away in the studio seven days a week. "It was a life saver to have Al do that," Ordway said, likening his experience on *Crisis* to being in combat.[141]

"When I started, I was getting maybe two pages on a given day. We'd get a FedEx package in the morning, and I would immediately start working because, more often than not, I would have to put those pages back into a FedEx box by six o'clock that night, and then the next person in line got it, whether it was coloring or lettering.

"By the time I got on the book, Marv and George were doing this thing where they would talk over the plot. Marv would write up key notes of what was happening in each issue and send them to DC, so they knew what was going on in each issue. But George would improvise as he penciled. It was his way of co-plotting. He was framing and staging things. Several issues had no word balloons on them, so I had no way to follow the story except for what George was doing and his little notes in the margins. That's because while I was inking, Marv had Xeroxes of George's pencils, and he was putting the script in and marking where the balloons would go, but I didn't know that. So, I was constantly wondering, 'Is Marv going to fill that whole area with captions?' I'd have to sit with a little white paintbrush and create a star field or a building, and I'd be inking all those windows, only for them to be covered up later. It's a shame, but that's how it worked. It was better on the issues where the balloons were already in there, because then we weren't wasting effort inking something that wasn't going to be seen."

Even as a lifelong comic book fan with several years of working for DC under his belt, dealing with so many characters presented another challenge for Ordway. "If you look at the book, there's literally hundreds of characters on a

141 Hear more about his experiences on *Crisis* here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH3oDbgdTJw.



Jerry "the Extraordinary" Ordway is a cornerstone DC creator, a writer, penciler, and inker who helped keep *Crisis on Infinite Earths* on schedule, stepping in when Dick Giordano's workload and deadlines collided. His finishes made George Pérez's elaborate pages shine. (right) Jerry's inks of John Byrne's pencils on *Fantastic Four* #277.

given page. And not only that, they're all heroes or villains with distinct costumes. So, when I first started I said, look, I'm happy doing finishes [a more detailed level of inking], but I'm not going to know who some of these characters are, because a lot of them were very obscure characters. I said the one thing I would like is to make sure that their costume detail is there. 'You don't have to fill in blanks or do shading; I'll do that. But just make it clear who the character is,' I told him because we were working really fast."

An early speedbump for Ordway was the two-page spread on pages seven and eight of issue #5 that features virtually the entire cast of heroes and villains on the Monitor's satellite. In the *Crisis Compendium,* Ordway said those were the first pages he received to ink, but when interviewed, he said he's gone back and forth on that claim over the years, not remembering if those pages came first, or if DC sent him some easier pages first to ease him into the job. Either way, it was intimidating. It also put Ordway's knowledge of DC's characters to the test. As a case in point, on that two-page spread, Ordway thought Pérez had accidentally drawn two versions of Clayface. With no time to consult him, Ordway inked the second character to look like Tarantula, only for Pérez to tell him later that it was supposed to be Plasmus. "From that point on, I trusted every line George put down on paper. He clearly knew these characters better than anyone."[142]

As Ordway indicated, the team was continually working against the clock. "Trust me, we were *behind,*" Greenberger says. "George had this grandiose idea that he'd still be able to draw *Titans* and *Who's Who* covers at the same time as *Crisis.* That didn't last long."

"*Crisis* is getting in on time, but it's always very, very tight," Pérez told *Amazing Heroes* when he was eight issues into the series. "By the time I started the first issue, it was already late! On top of that, I couldn't fit Marv's plot into 25 pages, and when I told them [DC] that, they went to 32, plus a wraparound cover. Talk about pressure!"[143]

Even though they were constantly racing against the clock, Ordway says Pérez still found time for fun. "Comic fanboy that he was, George said, 'I want you to pencil a page, and I'm going to ink it.' I thought, 'Oh really? How are we going to do



that?' He sent me a rough layout, and I finished it." Readers can see the finished result on page 14 of *Crisis* #12.

Deadlines aside, as a consummate professional, much of the pressure that Pérez felt was self-imposed—and self-inflicted. "George loved a challenge," Paul Levitz recalls, "particularly a challenge that related to how much you could do with something. 'Oh, I can solve this problem with twelve characters, or I could solve this problem with 24 characters,' George would say. 'Let me try for 36.' He loved that, God bless him. And he would work himself to the bone over a period of usually a couple of years until he would reach a stage of literal collapse. And then he'd have to take some time and pull himself back together. And then he'd start doing it again. But George put more detail into his work than any one of his generation. In the superhero world, George stood alone for a long time."

"Everyone involved in *Crisis* was in it for the sheer love of the project," Pérez said, "and from issue #1 to issue #12, that love on my part did not wane."

142 *Crisis Compendium,* 33.
143 Ibid., 27.

CHAPTER 10

Introducing . . . the Monitor!

"Fascinating!" a voice says as the aftermath of a battle involving Raven and Starfire appears on a video screen. "The extent of their power is greater than I had imagined! Such information will prove valuable to my clients." A caption that follows asks, "Who is this mystery man? That is a story for another day."

This question was fitting, considering that, as will become apparent once we survey the Monitor's other pre-*Crisis* appearances, not even Wolfman had a good answer at this point. The most we can glean from these two panels is that this mystery being has considerable technological prowess, as evidenced by his satellite and his observational capabilities, and he is working for someone interested in information regarding the extent of Raven and Starfire's powers. The ambiguous nature of his role might have been designed to make readers wonder whether he was a villain, a hero, or something in between, but it could also have been designed to allow plenty of room for Wolfman to fill in the blanks as the plot of *Crisis* developed.

Considering we didn't get another preview of the Monitor for over a year, it feels as if Wolfman jumped the gun here, so eager to get the ball rolling on *Crisis* that he couldn't wait to start planting seeds, even though not even he knew what to expect when they sprouted. However, in a 1998 interview with *Comics Buyer's Guide*, Wolfman said he wrote the Monitor into *The New Teen Titans* #21 *before* DC approved *Crisis*. "The Monitor, under a different name [the Librarian] but serving the exact same purpose, was a character I created when I did fanzines. … When I realized that I would never do this type of maxi-series at DC because it was just too big, I put him into *The New Teen Titans* as the mysterious Monitor, a character who was playing behind the scenes for his own purpose."[144] After *Crisis* was approved, he said, "I had to jury-rig the Monitor stories that were done in *Titans* to make sense with



The Monitor (Mars Novu) is the enigmatic architect of *Crisis*, a cosmic being who has watched DC's multiverse for eons. Introduced in a series of shadowy cameos beginning in 1982, he pulls heroes and villains together to battle the Anti-Monitor. Once thought to be a singular being, later series revealed him to be a member of a race of beings called Monitors, cosmic overseers whose function is to watch the multiverse, track its worlds and timelines, and intervene when reality is threatened by contamination, collapse, or crisis. Shown is George Pérez' designs for the Monitor.

144 Matt Brady, "Mastering 'Crisis': A Visit with Marv Wolfman," *Comic Buyer's Guide* No. 1300 (Oct. 16, 1998): 46.



To: All Editors

From: Len, Marv and Bob

Date: April 18, 1984

Re: The Monitor

Copies:

Memorandum

Plans are proceeding on the DC Crisis project and we are now confident enough in our plans to share them with you.

The Monitor is the catalyst for the maxiseries, as we told you long ago. However, we have made him a more important figure than originally planned so his appearances in all of our titles are deceiving.

The DC multiverse has the various earths and dimensions including the anti-matter dimension where the Weaponers of Qward hail from. Just as our multiverse has a positive Monitor, so there exists an anti-Monitor. It is the anti-Monitor who has taken the naturally expanding multiverse and accelerating the process, taxing the finite life force in the positive multiverse. The Monitor is aware of this and needs champions to go throughout time and space, to specific crux points, and prepare to bring the positive multiverse into alignment, once more creating a universe.

Our heroes and villains will be dispatched throughout the various earths and times to find these crux points while the Monitor prepares for a final confrontation with his anti-matter counterpart. This will occur about halfway through the maxiseries and the Monitor will lose--and die. Our characters will then have to stop the anti-Monitor and bring the multiverse together before their very existences are rendered null. Some will live, some die--others will change costumes or powers while others will be introduced into the DC Universe. We end with one universe, one Earth and one common groundwork to launch our second 50 years.

Therefore, after you use the Monitor twice, please do not use him again. He'll be gone by next summer. Lyla, his "dumb bunny" associate is actually a super-powered herald who will collect and transport our characters from place to place. She, we expect, will survive and be available for use after the maxiseries comes to an end.

Thanks for your understanding and help in uniting our books.



A Warner Communications Company

the rest of *Crisis.* That allowed the *Titans* stories to serve as a prologue of sorts to the series." Wolfman suggested something similar in the March 1, 1985, issue of *Amazing Heroes.* "Because we decided to use him [the Monitor] this way 'after the fact,' there were some minor discrepancies between his first two appearances and the way he came across afterwards." The problem is, this doesn't square with the timeline recounted by Wolfman and others elsewhere, which indicates the development of *Crisis* was already well underway by the time the Monitor first appeared. Perhaps this is merely a matter of Wolfman misremembering the sequence of events. Furthermore, it's not just the first two appearances of the Monitor in *Titans* that don't square with how he was portrayed in *Crisis.* As we'll see, virtually every one of his pre-*Crisis* appearances is problematic.

Making the imminence of *Crisis* even more formal, in comics cover dated February 1983, Dick Giordano made the first official mention of the series within the pages of DC. "Tentatively titled *The History of the DC Universe*, current plans are for the first issue to appear in the spring of 1983." Obviously, this schedule was soon altered, with fans having to wait another year for more news on the project.

That came via Giordano's June 1984 "Meanwhile" column, by which point the Monitor was popping up in other titles as well. Rather than mention *Crisis* by name, Giordano referred to "the previously announced *History of the DC Universe*" maxi-series, adding, "We felt it was appropriate to save this blockbuster maxi-series for this anniversary year [1985] because the changes in our universe and the startling events that will unfold within its pages will alter forever the DC universe and provide some wonderful stepping stones for the next 50 years." Giordano also mentioned *Who's Who,* though it was anticipated to be just twelve issues long instead of the 24, plus updates, that it turned out to be.

Crisis began to make its presence known in a more significant way in 1983 with the publication of *The New Teen Titans Annual* #2. Unlike the Monitor's debut a year earlier, which consisted of just two panels that could have been excised from the story without anyone noticing, this time his involvement was integral to the plot.

The story opens with an ambulance rushing to the hospital after New York District Attorney Adrian Chase's apartment is firebombed. He's been targeted by a local criminal named Anthony Scarapelli, but Scarapelli had made a fatal mistake: he didn't seek permission from Godmother Donna Omicidio before doing the deed, and now he must pay. Realizing he's going to need an exceptional level of protection, he calls on the one person he's confident can provide it—the Monitor.

Enter Lyla, the Monitor's busty, blonde, feather-haired associate. She is introduced aboard the Monitor's satellite, providing him with some files he'd requested. Dressed in a pink bodysuit with a neckline that plunges to her waist and a white necklace, she exhibits no personality here beyond that of "beautiful female assistant." As for the Monitor, our first glimpse of him amounts to a blue-gloved hand. He informs Scarapelli that he can only round up six guards rather than the requested dozen. The Monitor describes what he does as a referral service, for which he receives a commission. This helped answer a question regarding his alignment that had lingered since his first appearance. Seeing as he is aiding and abetting a criminal, the Monitor is clearly in the villainous category, or at least he appears to be.



Wolfman's early conception of the Monitor as the "Librarian" is similar to Marvel's Watcher. Archivists of history, detached from the events they survey, they gain narrative force when neutrality is impossible to sustain.

Considering the heroic and, indeed, self-sacrificial role that the Monitor played in *Crisis,* many readers found this characterization puzzling in retrospect. However, in Wolfman's early drafts of the series, the Monitor was originally conceived of as the primary villain of the story.[145] He hinted at this in a *Comics Journal* interview from March 1983 in which interviewer Heidi MacDonald queried him about the "guy up in space" in *The New Teen Titans* #21. "I had the character about 18 years ago. I called him the Librarian," Wolfman said. "You know, one villain that the whole company could use."[146] He went on to explain how he had provided instructions on how much of the character

145 He got his turn to play the villain, renamed Mandrakk, as part of the *Final Crisis* storyline.

146 Heidi MacDonald, "Marv Wolfman on the New Teen Titans," *Comics Journal* No. 80 (March 1983): 88.



George Pérez's character designs for Harbinger, Lyla Michaels' cosmic alter ego in *Crisis*. She serves as the Monitor's messenger and recruiter, gathering heroes across worlds for the coming battle. Empowered to duplicate herself, like the multiple earths, she becomes both a symbol and an instrument of the crisis.

writers could reveal each month, but those directives were never passed on, so he had to start over. Interestingly, when MacDonald asked if this character was going to be around for a while, all Wolfman said was "Oh yeah," confirming his role wasn't restricted to *The New Teen Titans*. But then the conversation moved on from there with no mention of *Crisis,* even though it would have been an opportune time to pitch the series.

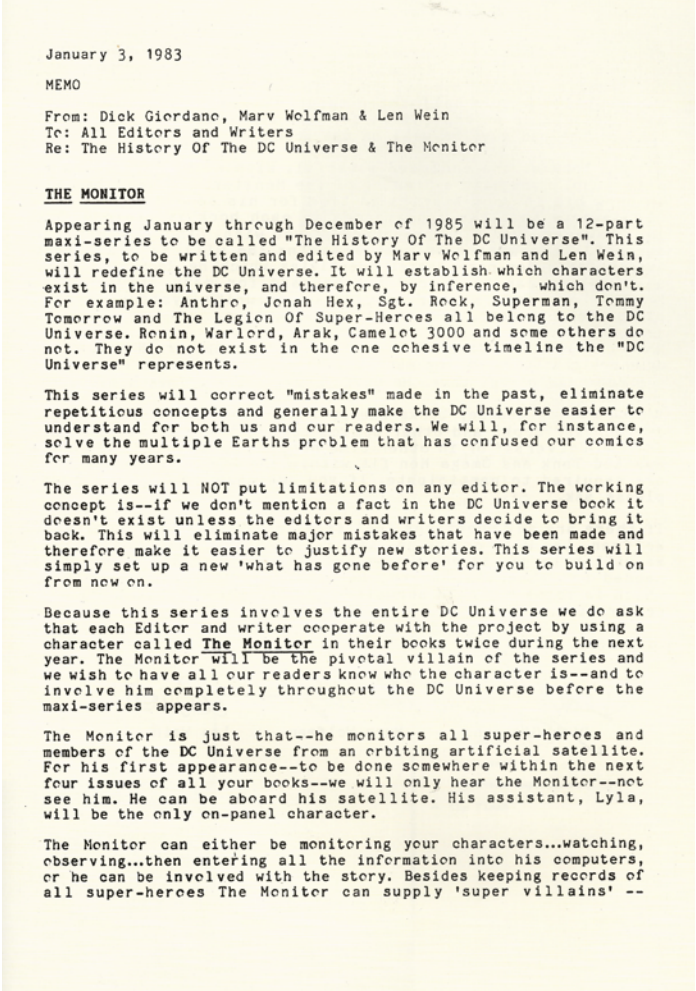
Whether these were the instructions that Wolfman was referring to or not, on January 3, 1983, a memo was drafted by Dick Giordano, Wolfman, and Len Wein and addressed to all editors and writers at DC regarding *The History of the DC Universe*, as *Crisis* was still being called, and the Monitor. After describing the series and its purpose, the memo asked each editor and writer to "cooperate with the project by using a character called the Monitor in their books twice during the next year. The Monitor will be the pivotal villain of the series and we wish to have all our readers know who the character is—and to involve him completely throughout the DC universe before the maxi-series appears." After this came a more detailed description of the character.

> *The Monitor is just that—he monitors all super-heroes and members of the DC universe from an orbiting artificial satellite. For his first appearance—to be done somewhere within the next four issues of all your books—you will only hear the Monitor—not see him. He can be aboard his satellite. His assistant, Lyla, will be the only on-panel character.*
>
> *The monitor can either be monitoring your characters ... watching, observing ... then entering all the information into his computers, or he can be involved with the story. Besides keeping records of all super-heroes, the Monitor can supply 'super villains'—gimmicked villains for any of your villains to use. ... So the Monitor almost acts as an employment service for villains, as he keeps tabs on the bad guys as well as the good. ...*
>
> *Since the Monitor can sell information to your villains (he will sell any info except for the super-hero secret identities which he knows but won't divulge) he can be a good springboard for many stories. The Monitor can inform your baddies on security systems, secret plans, weapons, etc. He's an all-knowing type.*

In addition to the restriction on showing the Monitor during his first appearance—which was accompanied by a promise that concept art of the Monitor would arrive in time for his second appearance—another caveat followed: "Please refrain from ever having him appear IN action. He does not get involved. He merely sells his service for money plus a percentage of any take. He NEVER commits the crimes himself."

While this memo was written at the start of the year, it could be that it was never sent out. Either that or it was followed by another memo that put the plan on hold until more story details were worked out. Whether intentional or by accident, that could explain the lengthy time lag between the Monitor's first appearance in April 1982 and *New Teen Titans Annual* #2 in September 1983, and the fact that the character didn't begin appearing with any sort of regularity in DC's titles until the latter half of 1984. This delay also could have saved Wolfman's bacon, seeing as he decided that a greater cosmic force (the Anti-Monitor) would serve the story better as a villain, with the Monitor taking on the role of tragic guardian instead.

The *Crisis on Infinite Earths Compendium* said Wolfman was well aware of this inconsistent portrayal but "decided to ignore what he had already done and make a passing line somewhere in the story that the Monitor had been watching Earth for a while and tested heroes and villains along the way," hoping that would be enough to explain the discrepancy (see the end of *DC Comics Presents* #78 for this mention). "It must have worked," the *Compendium* declared. "In the twenty



January 3, 1983

MEMO

From: Dick Giordano, Marv Wolfman & Len Wein
To: All Editors and Writers
Re: The History Of The DC Universe & The Monitor

THE MONITOR

Appearing January through December of 1985 will be a 12-part maxi-series to be called "The History Of The DC Universe". This series, to be written and edited by Marv Wolfman and Len Wein, will redefine the DC Universe. It will establish which characters exist in the universe, and therefore, by inference, which don't. For example: Anthro, Jonah Hex, Sgt. Rock, Superman, Tommy Tomorrow and The Legion Of Super-Heroes all belong to the DC Universe. Ronin, Warlord, Arak, Camelot 3000 and some others do not. They do not exist in the one cohesive timeline the "DC Universe" represents.

This series will correct "mistakes" made in the past, eliminate repetitious concepts and generally make the DC Universe easier to understand for both us and our readers. We will, for instance, solve the multiple Earths problem that has confused our comics for many years.

The series will NOT put limitations on any editor. The working concept is--if we don't mention a fact in the DC Universe book it doesn't exist unless the editors and writers decide to bring it back. This will eliminate major mistakes that have been made and therefore make it easier to justify new stories. This series will simply set up a new 'what has gone before' for you to build on from now on.

Because this series involves the entire DC Universe we do ask that each Editor and writer cooperate with the project by using a character called **The Monitor** in their books twice during the next year. The Monitor will be the pivotal villain of the series and we wish to have all our readers know who the character is--and to involve him completely throughout the DC Universe before the maxi-series appears.

The Monitor is just that--he monitors all super-heroes and members of the DC Universe from an orbiting artificial satellite. For his first appearance--to be done somewhere within the next four issues of all your books--we will only hear the Monitor--not see him. He can be aboard his satellite. His assistant, Lyla, will be the only on-panel character.

The Monitor can either be monitoring your characters...watching, observing...then entering all the information into his computers, or he can be involved with the story. Besides keeping records of all super-heroes The Monitor can supply 'super villains' -- gimmicked villains for any of your villains to use. For example-- as shown in Teen Titans Annual #2--a Mafioso badguy contacted the Monitor for several special operatives to battle the Titans. He was supplied with a half-dozen super-villains. So the Monitor almosts acts as an employment service for villains as he keeps tabs on the bad guys as well as the good.

Please look at the enclosed material. Within the next weeks we will supply you with a drawing of The Monitor. You will be able to show him in your stories in time for his second appearance. Please note that two appearances in each book is minimum. You may, however, use him more often if you wish. Since The Monitor can sell information to your villains (he will sell any info except for super-hero secret identities which he knows but won't divulge) he can be a good springboard for many stories. The Monitor can inform your baddies on security systems, secret plans, weapons, etc. He's an all-knowing type.

However, please refrain from ever having him appear IN action. He does not get involved. He merely sells his service for money plus a percentage of any take. He NEVER commits the crimes himself.

There are, of course, books exempt from using The Monitor. These are our war books and other comics taking place either outside the "DC Universe" or in other time periods or planets. Although Haunted Tank and Omega Men fit within the DC Universe, neither are required to participate. If you are unsure of your status, please ask.

If there are any questions feel free to ask Dick Giordano, Marv Wolfman, Len Wein or our new associate editor, Bob Greenberger. We will help you in any way we can. Your cooperation is not only needed but essential to the success of DC's Universe project which is to be the main showpiece for our 50th Anniversary year celebration.

Sincerely,

Dick Giordano Marv Wolfman Len Wein

Another DC memo from the *Crisis* editorial team, this one outlining the problems the then-titled *History of the DC Universe* was created to solve, including that pesky multiple-earths problem. Interestingly, it says whatever isn't mentioned in the series doesn't exist *unless* the editors and writers decide to bring it back, which seems go against the so-called "permanent" changes that Dick Giordano promised when he introduced the series to the public. This memo in general highlights the tension between wanting to tell creative stories while at the same time requiring a cohesive universe in which those stories take place.

years since the *Crisis* nobody has ever asked why the Monitor's first appearances were so different from his later incarnation." That might have been true back in 2005 when the *Compendium* was written, but even a cursory online search reveals multiple acknowledgments of this discrepancy. It's also difficult to reconcile with the fact that as early as April 18, 1984, a memo went out to all editors announcing a change of direction regarding the Monitor and the decision to make the "anti-Monitor," as he was then called (no capitalization, indicating the name was probably a placeholder), the central villain instead. "Therefore, after you use the Monitor twice, please do not use him again."[147] Ironically, the Monitor's inconsistent on-page evolution placed *Crisis* firmly in alignment with DC's past, where so many character details were worked out on the fly, with retcons introduced later in an attempt to explain any lingering anomalies.

As for the *New Teen Titans* story, the Monitor rounds up six assassins for Scarapelli; all of them seem familiar with the Monitor, which implies he'd been doing this sort of thing for a while. Considering the ruthless nature of the crimes they are shown committing, this moves the Monitor even further into the shadows of the dark side.

Rather than merely protect Scarapelli from his criminal overlords, the assassins take their fight to the Teen Titans themselves, attempting to kill them. And they might have succeeded if not for some help from an unknown sniper, who is later revealed to be Adrian Chase in his new persona as the Vigilante.

Apparently, the Monitor was able to round up even more baddies, because Scarapelli arranges to meet Godmother Donna Omicidio at a remote desert location, only to deploy dozens of rocket-powered assassins against her and her men. This time it is the Titans who intervene to stop the bloodshed, with Cyborg wondering afterward where a hood like Scarpelli

147 *Crisis Compendium,* 8.

found such souped-up killers.

Alas, he had to wait until 1984 for an answer, and he got it thanks in no small part to a memo dated January 9, 1984, to all editorial staff from Dick Giordano, stating that, "The need to include The Monitor in your plans is not optional but absolutely required for all designated titles." A follow-up memo on February 24 included a list of which titles were required to showcase the Monitor and which were exempt, as reproduced below.

As for how this distinction was made, Wolfman told *Comics Interview:* "One of the things we have to worry about is—are we going to hurt the integrity of something that doesn't totally fit into the superhero universe? We can fit it in the superhero books, because it doesn't hurt us. But is it right for Sgt. Rock to be facing intergalactic menaces?"[148] Apparently, they eventually concluded the answer to this question was "yes." Although the Monitor doesn't show up in *Sgt. Rock,* Rock and Easy Co. are eventually caught up in the crisis.

Starting with *Green Lantern,* the Monitor gets a full page in issue #173, during which we learn that his satellite is "protection-cloaked" and is whirling in an ever-changing orbit around Earth to avoid detection. He receives a request from Congressman Bloch who is seeking help in his campaign against Ferris Aircraft. The Monitor says Green Lantern's return from his year-long exile (see issue #150) will complicate matters for Bloch, but it could be good for business, so he instructs Lyla—still sporting her pink bodysuit, Farrah Fawcett hair, and high-heeled boots—to put the call through.

Three issues later, Bloch calls the Monitor again, this time to inform him that, with Green Lantern in a coma due to his recent battle with the Shark, now is the time to destroy Ferris Aircraft. The Monitor tries to get him to reconsider, but Bloch insists, so the Monitor reaches out to Rosie, the tough-as-nails head of the Demolition Team. When he informs Lyla that he has just earned another commission, she responds to him as "my love," the same term of endearment he used for her earlier. So far, this is the first indication we have that they are more than mere business associates, though the true nature of their relationship, romantic or otherwise, remains unclear.

In issue #178, when Bloch hears that Green Lantern has recovered, he places a frantic call to the Monitor, asking him to call off the Demolition Team, but the Monitor says it is too late. Not only that, he says his role is limited to facilitating connections, not meddling in his clients' "petty problems."

The Monitor was also showcased in the first two pages of *The Fury of Firestorm* #28, playing his cosmic villain persona to a T, complete with diabolical laughter that wraps around Lyla like a loving caress. He is on the phone once again, this time with Ms. Clemens of the 2000 Committee, a secret cabal that plans to seize control of the United States government by the year 2000. They are seeking an operative who can help them capture Firehawk, the daughter of a prominent politician. The 2000 Committee kidnaps Lorraine and subjects her to genetic experiments, hoping to create a super-powered agent whom they can control. But rather than become their pawn, Firehawk works with Firestorm instead. The Monitor's laughter is motivated by how much money he is going to make from this and subsequent deals with the 2000 Committee, making him seem like nothing but a small-minded villain rather than the cosmic entity that he is. As for Lyla, she still hasn't changed her outfit, nor has she uttered a word, her personality as blank as the look on her face.

The Monitor—or at least his hand—returns in the last couple of panels of this story. No longer laughing, he can't even bear to watch the failure of the operative, Slipknot, a chemist who'd developed an adhesive that allows ropes to bind to anything, whom the Monitor had supplied to the 2000 Committee.

The Monitor have another "blink and you'll miss it" cameo in *Tales of the Teen Titans* #47. Following the

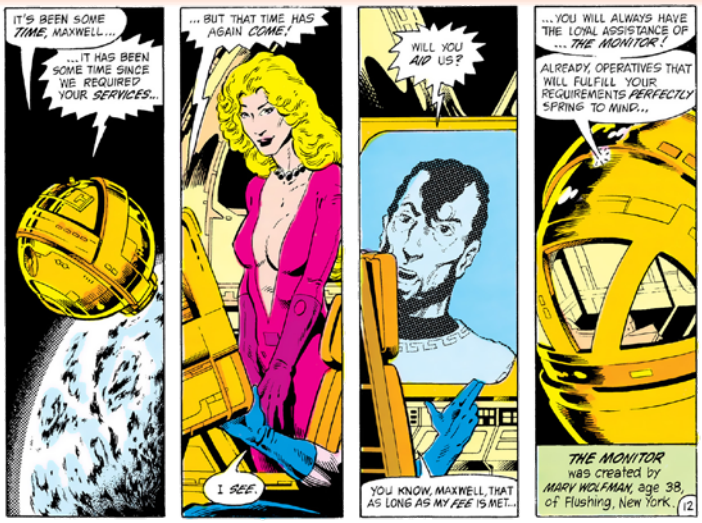
148 O'Neill, 13.

MONITOR – YES

The New Teen Titans or *Tales of*
Justice League of America
Wonder Woman (& Huntress)
DC Comics Presents
The Fury of Firestorm
The Vigilante
Legion of Super-Heroes or *Tales of*
Superboy/Supergirl
Batman/Detective Comics
The Flash
G. I. Combat (Haunted Tank only)
Superman
Action Comics
Saga of the Swamp Thing
Batman and the Outsiders
Green Lantern
Warlord
Infinity Inc.
Blue Devil
Jonah Hex
World's Finest Comics
All-Star Squadron
Amethyst

MONITOR – NO

Atari Force
Spanner's Galaxy
Jemm, Son of Saturn
Sun Devils
Sgt. Rock
Arion
Arak
Omega Men
Jonni Thunder
Thriller
Star Trek
Super Powers
DC Challenge
New Talent Showcase



A pre-*Crisis* appearance of the Monitor's golden satellite—and Lyla's cleavage—from *Batman and the Outsiders* #14. This four-panel coda, featuring the Monitor acting like a space-age godfather dispensing hardware and henchmen, was as typical as it was confusing considering his actual mission.

Titans' assault on the underwater base of the H.I.V.E. (Hierarchy of International Vengeance and Extermination) to thwart their plans to destroy Atlantis, a final panel shows the Monitor's satellite as Lyla informs him of the organization's demise, with the Monitor adjusting his records accordingly.

He and Lyla get four panels in *Batman and the Outsiders* #14, where the Monitor provides some operatives to Maximillian Zeus, a.k.a. Maxie Zeus, a former Greek history teacher who'd gone insane following the death of his wife. A panel at the end of this sequence says, "THE MONITOR was created by MARV WOLFMAN, age 38, of Flushing, New York." This was a humorous reference to a feature in *Dial H for Hero* in which readers could submit their superhero and villain ideas. If DC used a fan-created character in a story, the submitter received credit in the comic, including their name, age, and where they were from. They also received a *Dial H for Hero* T-shirt. Whether Wolfman received a *Batman and the Outsiders* T-shirt in exchange for the use of the Monitor here is unknown.

The team that the Monitor supplies, referred to as the New Olympians, faces off against the Outsiders during the Olympic ceremonies, competing in a variety of contests. But Maxie Zeus's ultimate goal is to impress a female Olympic athlete, whom he hopes will serve as a mother figure to his daughter. As Maxie Zeus is led back to Arkham, Lyla expresses her worry that he might betray the Monitor's involvement to the authorities, but the Monitor assures her that although Zeus is "as mad as a march hare," he is a man of honor, and they are safe.

The Monitor moves from recruiter of personnel to supplier of merchandise in *Action Comics* #560 when he equips escaped convict John Doe with some manacles that emit sonic blasts. John Doe uses them against Superman, who is suffering from recurrent amnesia due to his exposure to two alien elements in a development that was purely coincidental to the plot.

The Monitor doesn't show up on panel in *The Flash* #338, but Captain Boomerang describes him as someone who knew all about the underworld, even though no one in the underworld knows anything about him. The Weather Wizard isn't happy about having to shell out so much of their loot for some "outsider's" help against the Flash, but Captain Boomerang assures him it will be money well spent. In this case the criminals' money is going toward some futuristic armor, which they use to equip former mental patient Dufus P. Ratchet, a.k.a. "Big Sir," to battle the Scarlet Speedster.

An unexpected level of antagonism is introduced between Lyla and the Monitor in the following issue when she remarks on the bizarre use that the Flash's enemies have found for the armor they'd purchased. The Monitor reminds her that once a client has paid for his goods and services, how that merchandise or information is used is of no interest to him. "I observe and record events, I do not editorialize upon them," he says. "Understood, Lyla?"

"Y-yes, Monitor," is her faltering response.

While much has been made of how inconsistent the Monitor's portrayal was during his pre-*Crisis* appearances, the same can be said for Lyla, with *Blue Devil* #5 being a prime example. While she and the Monitor watch Blue Devil and Zatanna battle the demon Nebiros, Lyla, who has changed to a more conservative one-piece green outfit, gushes over Blue Devil's muscles. "And those long horns are so cute!" She must have had an affinity for bad boys, because prior to admiring Blue Devil, she also remarked on how awesome the demon Nebiros was. This fangirl persona is completely different from the stoic face she'd shown so far. Once again, this is difficult to understand, seeing as the same April 18, 1984, memo that introduced the Anti-Monitor as the main villain of the series included the following note about Lyla: "Lyla, his 'dumb bunny' associate, is actually a super-powered herald who will collect and transport our characters from place to place." Why we didn't get any hints of the herald side of her character prior to *Crisis* is unknown. On the plus side, we get our first glimpse of the Monitor's face in this issue, although it is veiled in shadow and hidden by his hands.

The Monitor makes his first recorded visit to the 30th century in *Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes* #317, revealing his ability to transcend time. He and Lyla are there to observe Dev-Em, a Kryptonian who first appeared in *Adventure Comics* #287 (1961). Saved from Krypton's destruction when the bomb shelter that he and his parents took refuge in was blasted into space, he eventually arrived on Earth, where he continued his feud with Superboy, which began on their home planet. Unlike Superboy, who used his powers for good, Dev-Em was more of a prankster and

a minor criminal. But then he traveled to the 30th century, where he reformed and joined the Interstellar Counter-Intelligence Corps, often working alongside the Legion of Super-Heroes. Considering that Dev-Em only has a brief cameo in *Crisis,* one wonders why he is the focus of attention here. It could be that Wolfman was thinking about giving Dev-Em a more prominent role, as indicated by the Monitor saying he prefers Dev-Em's style to that of Superman or Supergirl, only to change his mind later.

In a continuation of her "gun moll" persona, as Wolfman described her initial characterization,[149] Lyla remarks that she prefers the Monitor's style. And when he tells her it is time to leave, she laments that there is no time to check out 30th-century shopping.

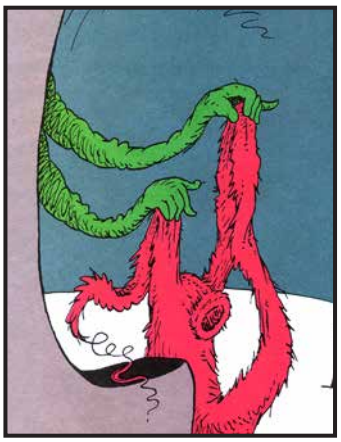
The element that was oddly lacking from all of these appearances so far was any sense of the cosmic story that was coming down the pike. We got no hints about the scale of the existential threat that the multiverse was facing, how the Monitor and Lyla were working to prevent it, the Monitor's extra-terrestrial origins, or the true measure of his power. Instead, in what could be taken as an unintentional homage to past "crisis" stories, we seem to have yet another small-minded villain who has tremendous technological means at his disposal, but instead of crafting an ingenious plan that matches those abilities, the best he can come up with is using his talents to earn money from other criminals whose aspirations can be described as petty and vindictive at best, and homicidal or genocidal at worst.

Wolfman tried to salvage these appearances by claiming, "What he's been doing these past months (in his guest-appearances) is pitting villain against hero to achieve a very specific blending of powers,"[150] but that's not apparent at all when all these cameos are taken together, especially since most of the heroes and villains he was involved with didn't play a significant role in *Crisis*. Even artist Jerry Ordway, who drew the Monitor teaser in *Infinity Inc.* #8 could tell something was amiss. "I don't even know if George and Marv one hundred percent knew what was going on, because it was a year in advance," he told the *Dollar Bin Bandits* podcast. "So, it was like, here's the guy, and this is the Monitor, and here's somebody else. If you look back on any of those, it's just funny. You can tell the people who did those teaser panels were not given much info."[151]

Overall, it seems like a wasted opportunity to position the Monitor (and Lyla) properly and to foreshadow the universal stakes that *Crisis* precipitated. One can only conjecture as to why this was the case. It was likely a combination of a rushed production schedule and the fact that Wolfman still didn't have enough of the story and character details worked out by the time these issues went to print. But seeing as the elimination of the multiverse was the primary goal of *Crisis* from the outset, one would think at least that aspect of the series would have been hinted at along the way. The fact that DC's other writers and editors were merely told to include the Monitor in a couple of issues, and to show him interfacing with various criminals rather than giving each creative team a specific part of the story to tell, could also have been part of the problem. There's no sense that a grand master plan was unfolding on the page or behind the scenes at DC and that if readers collected all these issues, the full picture would emerge. But to be fair, it was the first time DC—or any publisher—had attempted such a vast, line-wide event, so, as Greenberger says, they were working without a map. This lack of consistency is also part of the charm of *Crisis,* making it feel more like an organic creative enterprise that was taking shape before readers' eyes rather than a canny strategy to extract as much money as possible from readers' pockets, as subsequent event series often came across.

The final JSA/JLA team-up didn't help matters in regard to giving *Crisis* a proper setup. Called "Family Crisis," the story begins in *Justice League of America* #231 when a scientist named Joshua Champion becomes possessed by an alien being called the Commander while experimenting with interdimensional travel. The Monitor shows up in the second part of this story. On board his satellite, Lyla complains that the Monitor has been watching events unfold for days now. What gives? He responds with a six-panel summary of the story thus far. After his explanation, he asks Lyla if she understands. "No," she replies, continuing her "dumb bunny" persona. "But never mind—I'll figure it out later."

When the Monitor turns his attention to the battle, the Commander senses he is being observed, though he doesn't know by whom, but he promises he will soon be leaving his home dimension—forever! At this point, Lyla does a literal facepalm as the Monitor tells her to make note that the Commander is more powerful than they realized. Like the Once-ler in Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax,* all we see of the Monitor in these panels is his arm, and instead of gauntlets, his hand is encased in a skin-tight blue sleeve.



In Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, the Once-ler is an entrepreneur who chops Truffula trees to feed his voracious Thneed factory, sparking ecological ruin. In the build-up to *Crisis*, the Monitor likewise lurks offstage, shown only by his gloved arms and hands, a mysterious manipulator whose hidden face amplifies the feeling of menace and intrigue that surrounds him.

149 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 25.

150 Ibid.

151 Dollar Bin Bandits, "Jerry Ordway," December 22, 2021, YouTube video, 1:12:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH3oDbgdT-Jw.

Talking villain that he is, before the Commander delivers his final, crushing blow, he seizes the opportunity to tell his story. While he is distracted, Doctor Fate and Professor Champion's family pool their psychic powers to open an interdimensional rift. As the rest of the heroes attempt to shove the Commander through it, the action cuts back to the Monitor's satellite where he decides to check in on the Commander again while Lyla looks on in stunned silence. Sensing the Monitor's presence, the Commander is distracted just long enough for the heroes to defeat him. Rather than fall into the rift, though, he explodes, scattering his essence throughout reality and sending the heroes tumbling through the dimensions. Alan Scott uses his power ring to encase them in a protective green bubble, saving the non-powered individuals from certain death.

Their voyage through the void is a "frenetic parade of worlds," apparently meant to serve as a reminder of the various realities that comprise the multiverse, even though only Earth-One, Earth-Two, and Earth-S are shown. They also stumble across representatives of Earth-Three—Superwoman, Johnny Quick, and Power Ring of the Crime Syndicate—who are still trapped in a green bubble in interdimensional space, which goes back to *Justice League of America* #29. Why Owlman isn't with them is unclear, seeing as he and the rest of the Crime Syndicate were spirited back to "their proper time and place" at the end of *Justice League of America* #209. In the intervening period, we know Ultraman escaped (see *DC Comics Presents* #1), so it makes sense why he is missing. Apart from these discrepancies, this "tour" was a clear nod toward *Crisis,* which debuted five months after this issue appeared. The reminder of the Crime Syndicate's existence was especially poignant, considering their key role in the opening pages of *Crisis*.

The missed opportunities and inconsistent characterization of the Monitor and Lyla continued throughout the remainder of their pre-*Crisis* appearances that rounded out the rest of 1984. Prominent among them is *Wonder Woman* #321, where the Monitor and Lyla are shown watching Huntress at the end of her backup story. After experiencing disturbing nightmares and unexplained blackouts tied to Gotham burglaries, Huntress seeks psychiatric help, fearing she might be the culprit, only for her psychiatrist to attempt to kill her. Meanwhile, rookie cop Gary Minelli, who is obsessed with Huntress, reveals he's been secretly tailing her and insists she was innocent. Helena is unsettled and confused by his affection. The story ends on a cliffhanger, hinting at deeper conspiracies tied to Arkham Asylum, but this mystery is never solved due to *Crisis* removing Huntress from DC's continuity. A caption at the end of the story promises that Huntress will return in a mini-series "coming soon to a comic rack near you!" But that didn't happen until 1989, and it featured a new version of Huntress, now reimagined as Helena Bertinelli, a mafia daughter turned vigilante.

Observing this play out from his satellite was the Monitor, who expresses wonder at Huntress' dogged independence and her refusal to team up with or accept help from others. "You're a woman, Lyla," he says. "Maybe you understand her! What does she hope to gain?"



Alan Moore. Photo credit: Fimb/Wikimedia Commons. Alan Moore transformed DC in the 1980s by proving mainstream superheroes could support literary ambition and moral complexity. His revitalization of *Swamp Thing* pioneered "mature readers" horror, while *Watchmen* deconstructed the genre with unprecedented formal control.

Try her independence, Monitor, Lyla thinks as she stalks off, hands on her hips. *Try her freedom.* Gone is her airhead persona, replaced by a fierce sense of determination and yet another hint that she is perhaps being held against her will. But this thread wasn't developed here or elsewhere, nor did it reflect the actual nature of their relationship, which was more like that of a loving father and daughter.

Infinity Inc. #8 devotes half a page to the Monitor and Lyla. Wanting to savor his recent victory but neither having nor wanting friends to share it with, the Ultra-Humanite calls the Monitor to gloat about how well the equipment the Monitor arranged for him to buy is working. "The murder and mayhem here have only begun," he says.

"Fine," the Monitor replies, showing no compunction that he is aiding and abetting such horrible crimes. "Why bother telling me about it?"

"Why, I just thought that, as my silent partner, you might want to know—"

"Partner?" the Monitor replies as Lyla looks on. "Read your contract, Ultra. I'm a supplier, nothing more."

Writer Alan Moore got in on the act in *Swamp Thing* #30. When introducing the Monitor, he added a plug for his own upcoming maxi-series, with the opening line being "and above the sky a *watchman* watches" (emphasis added). For once, assuming a role that goes beyond mere observer and receptionist, Lyla observes a "wave-portrait" around the 800 mark in Louisiana. The Monitor notes that any measure above 600 means they are dealing with power users in the supernatural category, and only two individuals occupy that slot—Trigon and the Spectre. Seeing as those two are "currently beyond this continuum," as Lyla notes, something new must be afoot. Indeed, it is. Recently resurrected Anton Arcane is spreading his malevolent forces across the country and drawing various forms of evil toward Houma, Louisiana.

"What should we do?" Lyla asks.

"Do?" the Monitor replies, subtly plugging Moore's upcoming series once again, "We watch."

But observing becomes harder to do in issue #31 as Arcane continues to torment Swamp Thing, having hurled his lover Abby Cable's soul into hell. "I am attempting to suppress for the first time in my life … the uncontrollable urge to look away," the Monitor says as Lyla stares at a computer screen in horror. No longer just an arm clad in a skin-tight sleeve, the Monitor is now wearing a blue glove and an outfit with a thick blue sleeve.

In what feels like an obligatory rather than integral appearance in *DC Comics Presents* #76, Lyla and the Monitor watches Superman battle a creature made from the same living clay used to create Wonder Woman. Lyla, who is sitting casually on a computer workstation, observes that "the Kryptonian" is in trouble. Unperturbed, the Monitor assures her that they are about to see "that most crucial quality … teamwork!"

Right on cue, Wonder Woman shows up to help. "Yes, my dear," the Monitor says, "I think this is one battle we will want to keep a permanent record of in our files." In light of the looming crisis, where all of reality is at risk of being wiped out, the notion of "permanent" files seems like an oxymoron. On the plus side, these few panels allow us our first glimpse of the Monitor's costume beyond his arm. Like his glove and beefed-up sleeve, it is blue with straps or armor criss-crossing his chest.

Displaying the Monitor's temporal powers yet again, he and Lyla make their first visit—or rather, video call—to the past in *All-Star Squadron* #40. Despite their propensity to stick around Earth-One, a caption says they are located in "a dimension far, far away, yet nearer by far than Willow Run." Frantic at the loss of the robot he purchased from the Monitor, which had been masquerading as a figure called the Real American, the Phantom Emperor demands a replacement. The Monitor refuses his request, then severs ties with him, causing the device that the Phantom Emperor used to call the Monitor to disappear as well. Lyla looks on with a stunned expression, her hand over her mouth in apparent shock at the Monitor's harshness.

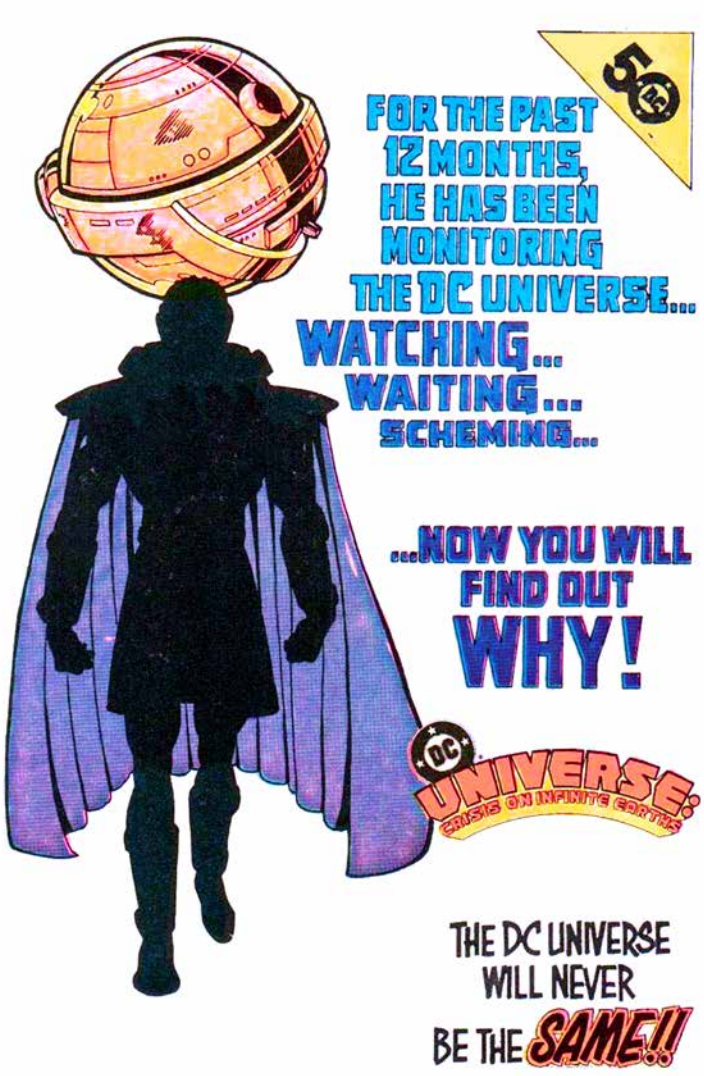
Some visitors from the future pay an exorbitant price to the Monitor in exchange for information that will allow them to track down Superman in *Superman* #402. They're not after the Man of Steel per se, but an escaped mental patient who thinks he is Superman and has commandeered a temporal transporter. Knowing Superman's powers will help them track down the imposter, they begrudgingly pay the Monitor's steep fee. All we see of the Monitor in this issue is his satellite.

A latecomer to the Monitor's pre-*Crisis* appearances was released the same month as *Crisis* #1 itself, and yet it doesn't seem to have benefited from the extra time it had to get the details correct. At the end of a strange story in *World's Finest* #314 that involves a company trying to pass off faulty steel that causes bridges and vehicles to malfunction, the Monitor makes another one of his "Onceler" appearances, with only his arm visible. But instead of the gauntlets we've seen before, it looks like he's wearing Batman's costume, complete with skin-tight blue gloves and sleeves. Lyla's hair has lost her curl, and her necklace is missing. And as if seeking to portray her more modestly, in one close-up panel her cleavage is colored the same pink shade as her bodysuit, only for the flesh tone to be restored a couple of panels later where her bust isn't as prominent.

The two of them are watching Superman who has just rescued the villain of the story, Executrix, from drowning. "You might call it justice, Batman," the Man of Steel says as he emerges from the water with Executrix in his arms, "but death doesn't fit my definition of the term!"

"I think we've discovered the weak link in this team, Lyla," the Monitor says, citing Superman's compassion and his "infinite capacity for mercy."

"The last time we watched them at work together, you spoke of Batman … and his … similar weakness," Lyla replies, revealing a weakness of her own—a fondness for ellipses.



In *DC Sampler* #3 (November 1984), DC ran the first house ad for *Crisis*—note the title change mere months before issue #1 hit the stands. It also says the Monitor has been watching the DC universe for just twelve months, but by then he'd actually been at it for at least two years. The ad was probably far more prescient than its creators realized because the DCU truly has never been the same ever since *Crisis* came out.

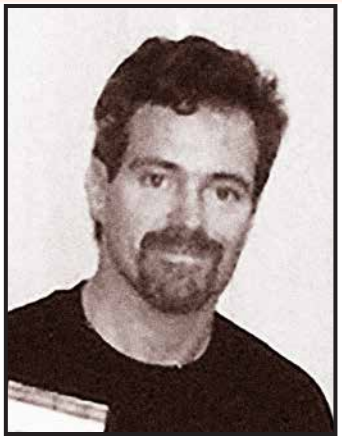
"So I did, so I did," the Monitor replies while making notes not on a computer but a clipboard, a singular low-tech anomaly in his house of gadgets. For some reason still playing his villain role even though the two of them are alone, he remarks on how they might be able to use such information against the heroes and how others will pay well for such observations. It feels so far off the mark from how the Monitor and Lyla are presented in *Crisis* that one must conclude this story was written much earlier, and by the time it finally made it to print, no one bothered to ensure it matched the transformation that Lyla and the Monitor had undergone in *Crisis*.

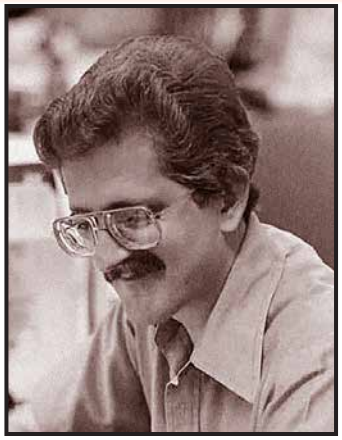
In September 1984, readers who were lucky enough to get their hands on a copy of *DC Sampler* #3—a short-lived series that offered a preview of what DC was publishing at the time—got their first full-body glimpse of the Monitor in DC's first house ad for the series. The ad shows the Monitor in silhouette, standing in front of his satellite as his translucent cape hangs from his shoulders. He's relatively slim and is wearing boots and a tunic that reaches to his mid-thigh. His thick sleeves and/or gauntlets are also visible, as are the ridges created by his cornrow hair. The Monitor isn't referred to by name in the ad, but the text says he's been monitoring the DCU for the past twelve months. If one considers his first appearance in *New Teen Titans* #21, cover dated July 1982, it's actually been over two years, but this could add credence to Wolfman's claim that he began using the Monitor before *Crisis* was given the green light. The ad goes on to say he's been "watching … waiting … scheming …" which sounds like they were still trying to position him as a villain. Whether that's because Wolfman was still leaning in that direction or it was meant as a bait and switch is unknown.

A "Meanwhile" column in this same issue referred to the series as *Crisis on Infinite Earths,* but in the ad, the full title was *Universe: Crisis on Infinite Earths*, and the distinctive *Crisis* logo was missing, as designed by Neal Pozner with additional input from Todd Klein. In addition, rather than the famous "Worlds will live. Worlds will die. And the DC Universe will never be the same!", the ad merely said, "The DC Universe will never be the same!" This same ad and variations of it were used until comics cover dated April 1985, the month *Crisis* #1 came out. The variations show the birth of the multiverse with the tagline "Worlds will live … Worlds will die … And that's only the beginning!" followed by "The DC Universe will never be the same!"

DC Sampler #3 also included an ad for *Who's Who,* which by then was being billed as a 24-issue series rather than just twelve issues.

Rather than use the "Anthro to Kamandi" approach that Wolfman and Wein included in their initial pitch for *Crisis*, Giordano's "Meanwhile" column said, "We'll be going from the time of Anthro through Abra Kadabra's 64th century," extending the timeline much farther into DC's future. Seeking once again to underline the "permanent" changes that the series would introduce, Giordano added:





Neal Pozner (left) (1955–1994) was DC's award-winning design director and first production designer, later group editor, creative services, writing Aquaman's 1986 miniseries and recruiting new talent. Todd Klein (right) was DC's award-winning letterer and logo designer, shaping titles from *Swamp Thing* and *Batman: Year One* to *Sandman* in the Vertigo era. The two of them collaborated on the logo for *Crisis*.

> *No, we're not just going to kill a handful of characters and make cosmetic changes that will be reversed as soon as the series is over. We wanted to do something long-lasting that will help make the recognized DC Universe a place that won't befuddle new readers, confuse continuity buffs, or hamstring our writers and artists. ...*
>
> *We'll also be introducing new characters along the way, some who we hope will go on to star in their own series and make contributions to the entire line. There will also be plenty of surprises involving life, death, new costumes, new powers, and new allegiances.*

By 1985, the Monitor and Lyla were popping up in even more titles across the DCU, including books that were excused in the initial memo because "They do not exist in the one cohesive timeline the 'DC Universe' represents" but were added later. Two titles mentioned in this regard were *Warlord* and *Jonah Hex.* Plans must have changed because both of these books showcased the Monitor, however brief or obscure these appearances were.

Jonah Hex #90 falls into the "obscure" category. After losing his horse in a rockslide and battling a cougar for possession of a cave, Jonah Hex pounds on the door of a farmhouse one night, looking to borrow a horse, so he can ride back into town. The mustachioed farmer who lives there is happy to oblige, calling out to someone named Molly inside to boil some water, so they can treat Hex's wounds. But Hex refuses the help, saying all he needs is the horse.

As Hex rides away, he sees a shooting star that seems to strike right where the farmer was standing, only for Hex to realize the farmer is no longer there. Rather than go back to

check on him, Hex continues into town, assuming the farmer went inside before the meteorite hit. "Good thing fer him, too!" he remarks to himself.

Why the Monitor chose to intervene personally in this way—something he said repeatedly in previous issues that he would never do—and why he disguised himself (another unprecedented move) is unknown. As for how we know the old farmer was actually the Monitor, *The Official Crisis on Infinite Earths Cross-Over Index* says it was so.[152] Plus, Bob Greenberger adds, "there are captions [in this issue] that astute readers would have picked up on."[153] The thing is, there are almost no captions in this issue beyond one-word transitions such as "Elsewhere," "Meantime," and "Shortly." Nevertheless, Greenberger was part of the inner circle, so we'll have to take his word for it.

Lyla got a new orange jumpsuit and white gloves for her cameo in *Warlord* #91. The back of the Monitor's head is also shown here, complete with wavy hair! Perhaps he just washed it and had yet to braid it into cornrows. The conceit of the Monitor reviewing the "Morgan history tapes" was used as a framing device to remind readers how Colonel Travis Morgan, a.k.a. the Warlord, first came to Skartaris, a mystical, prehistoric world that exists at Earth's core.

As for why *Warlord* was initially excluded, ever since introducing the gun-toting, sword-wielding Air Force pilot Travis Morgan in 1975, creator Mike Grell had worked hard to establish Skartaris as a timeless, self-contained world inspired by Edgar Rice Burroughs' Pellucidar, which also existed at the world's core. Given the unique nature of Skartaris, DC's editorial team debated whether it should be affected by *Crisis*, which was primarily about restructuring DC's mainstream continuity. However, the decision was eventually made to change the status of Skartaris, so it could be incorporated into DC's plans moving forward.

This transformation can be tracked in the pages of *Who's Who*. In the earliest entries, such as the one featuring Deimos, one of Travis Morgan's main antagonists, Skartaris is described as "that primitive world within the hollow center of the Earth" (*Who's Who* #6, August 1985). This same understanding would have been in place when Lyla and the Monitor review Morgan's history in *Warlord* #91, which is cover dated March 1985. By the time we get to Machiste, one of Morgan's staunchest allies (*Who's Who* #14, April 1986), Skartaris is described as a "mysterious realm." The entry for Skartaris itself is a bit confusing (*Who's Who* #21, November 1986). It features a map labeled "The Inner World of Skartaris," but the entry itself says, "Skartaris is an extradimensional world accessible from Earth's North or South Pole. Originally believed to have been a realm existing inside Earth's hollow core." Why it's referred to as an "inner world" on the map when the entry says it's not is a mystery.

Leaving no doubt as to whether the crisis affects Skartaris, Travis Morgan shows up onboard the Monitor's satellite in *Crisis* #5, where he makes a comment, only to be reprimanded by the Phantom Stranger. He's also in the top-right corner of the cover for issue #7, standing amongst those who are mourning Supergirl's death. His daughter, Jennifer Morgan, a sorceress, is the first to spot Krona's viewscreen while lending her power to the Spectre as he arm wrestles the Anti-Monitor in issue #10. And Travis Morgan is shown defending Skartaris against the shadow demons in issue #12. This final issue came out one month prior to Skartaris's "mysterious realm" phase, as defined by *Who's Who* #14. Considering the future state of Skartaris, this implies that the Anti-Monitor's attack didn't just affect parallel universes but also alternate dimensions, an inference that's confirmed by Darkseid having to shield Apokalips from the Anti-Monitor's view and the invasion of Gemworld by shadow demons, as will be covered shortly. This makes one wonder about worlds with a similar status, such as the Fifth Dimension and the Phantom Zone, and why they and their residents weren't shown during *Crisis*.

Although DC's war titles were initially excused from participating in *Crisis,* one exemption was *Haunted Tank.* This series followed Lt. Jeb Stuart, a WWII tank commander who is guided by the ghost of his ancestor, Confederate General J. E. B. Stuart. Initially, the spectral general appeared only to Jeb, offering cryptic advice and ominous warnings about battles to come. As the stories progressed, Jeb's crew became aware of the ghost's presence. It could be this supernatural twist that made *Haunted Tank* the lone exception for inclusion in *Crisis,* although other war heroes, such as Sgt. Rock, Easy Company, and the Losers also found their way into the epic tale.

Even though Wolfman regarded *G. I. Combat* as "a book that almost no fan cares about,"[154] issue #274 is exceptional because it offers readers their first glimpse of the Monitor's face. Shown first from behind, only his cape, shoulder armor, and corn-row hair are visible. Then an inset panel shows him from mid-nose up, including his heavy, prominent brow, which is remarkably similar to the Martian Manhunter.

His sudden appearance startles General Stuart. When



Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Pellucidar* imagined a hollow Earth lit by an inner sun, teeming with prehistoric beasts and lost civilizations. Mike Grell's *The Warlord* channels that pulp template into DC's Skartaris, where Navy pilot Travis Morgan crashes through a polar opening and becomes stranded in an inner world of dinosaurs, lost civilizations, and sorcery—pulp adventure refit with a mythic sheen.

152 Murray R. Ward, ed., *The Official Crisis on Infinite Earths Cross-Over Index* (Guerneville, CA: Independent Comics Group, 1986), 6.
153 O'Neill, 13.
154 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 24.

he asks who the Monitor is and where he came from, the Monitor replies by naming himself, adding that he is "new to this realm of blood and death! That is all I can reveal now!" It seems like a strange thing to say, seeing as over the past 18 months, the Monitor has been shown aiding and abetting the merchants of death, and judging from his reputation among the criminals, he was carrying out such activities long before readers became aware of him. But maybe his reference to blood and death is meant to imply this is the Monitor's first visit to a World War II battlefield. This cameo also demonstrates that the Monitor can project himself not only into the past but also into the spiritual realm, an ability that isn't shown again.

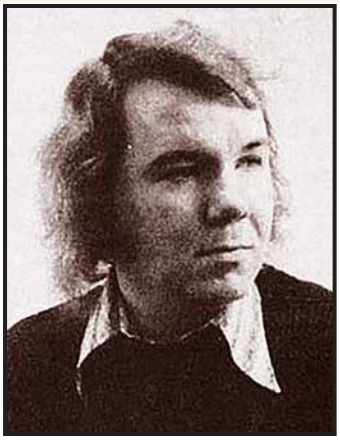
The Monitor's satellite returns for two panels in the next issue. As General Stuart reflects on how, if they'd had General Patton on their side, the South would have won the Civil War, he floats past the Monitor's satellite, seemingly unaware of its presence. Taken together, these feel like two more obligatory rather than necessary cameos, with the Monitor's arrival contributing nothing to the story and revealing little about his character other than his appearance.

Amethyst, Princess of Gemworld was another title that existed on the fringes of the DCU in its own self-contained universe when the Monitor and Lyla showed up in issue #2. They're surprised to discover a powerful energy reading from Hudson, New York, considering no superheroes live there. The reading leads them to young Amy Winson, a seemingly ordinary girl who discovers she is actually Princess Amethyst, heir to the magical realm of Gemworld. When Amy enters Gemworld, using an amulet given to her by the sorceress Citrina, her body transforms into that of an older teenager, Princess Amethyst, and she discovers latent mystical powers, which is probably what the Monitor detects.

Beyond these relatively minor titles, the Monitor and Lyla made tour stops in several of DC's mainstream superhero books, starting with *Superman* #403. A compulsive thief from the planet Ramox purchases information from the Monitor that confirms Earth-One is ripe for the plucking. The Monitor appears in silhouette on a screen, then is shown in profile, his prominent brow clearly visible.

The Monitor and Lyla got a bit more page time in *Justice League of America* #234. With the old JLA disbanded following the Earth/Mars War (see issues #228–230), Aquaman has formed a new version of the group, consisting of members who are younger and less experienced than the old guard but who are willing to commit full time to the team rather than just when it's convenient. With the JLA satellite destroyed, the team has relocated to Detroit. This ushered in what became known as the "Detroit Era" of the JLA before they were disbanded and reformed yet again in *Legends* (1986), the next event series after *Crisis*.

It's in this context that the Monitor and Lyla tune in to the new team, watching as Vibe and Steel run off to inform the other JLA members that Vixen has just broken into a bank. "This new Justice League represents an intriguing wild card, Lyla," the Monitor says. "I wonder how they will affect



1973 photo of Gerry Conway, writer of *Justice League of America* #234. Conway was a major DC writer-editor whose work helped shape the Bronze Age. In addition to co-creating Firestorm, Power Girl, Jason Todd, and Killer Croc, his long run on *Justice League of America* made him one of the era's defining architects of DC continuity.

the plans of the other entity whose activities we've been observing." One could be forgiven for assuming that "other entity" is the Anti-Monitor, but no, it's the Overmaster, a cosmic villain introduced in the previous issue who is forming his own criminal group, the Cadre.

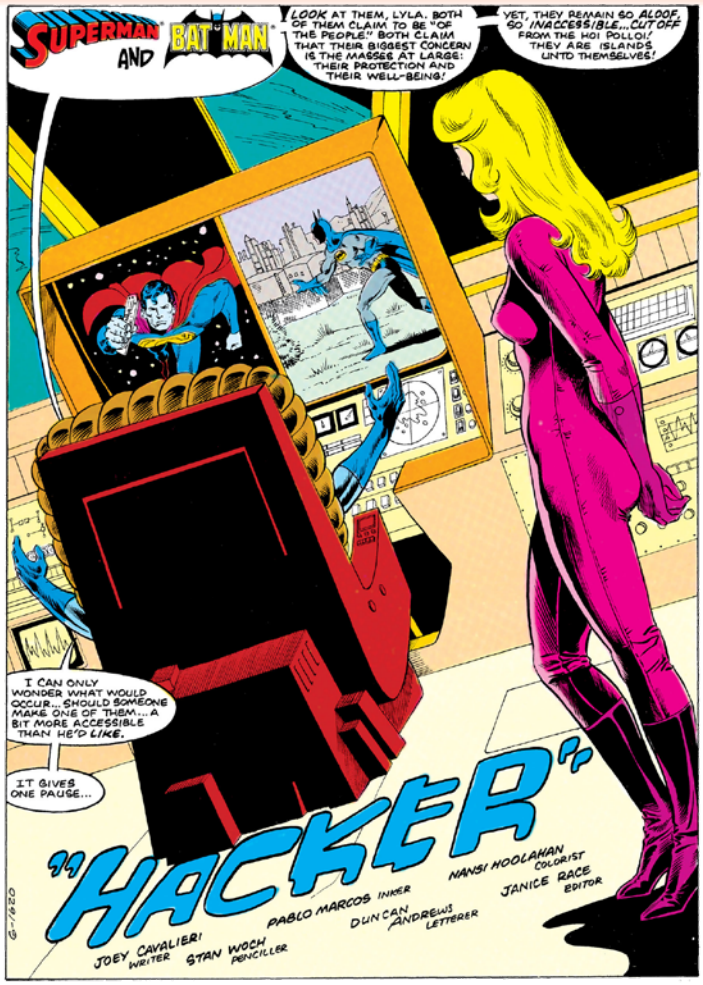
A surge of unusual activity directs the Monitor and Lyla's attention to a monastery in South Korea where they spot another of the Overmaster's recruits, Shatterfist, a martial arts master with indestructible fists. "Matters are coming to a head, I think," the Monitor says. "It's only a matter of days, perhaps hours, before they explode …" Is he talking about the oncoming wave of anti-matter that's about to destroy the multiverse? No! In yet another fake out, he's merely referring to events in the next issue where the Cadre makes its first move against the JLA.

The Monitor and Lyla, in a two-and-a-half–page appearance in *World's Finest* #311, observe Superman and Batman, with the Monitor expounding on how both heroes claim to be "of the people," but they remain aloof. Lyla suggests they put Batman and Superman to the test to reveal their true nature, but contrary to his behavior in *Jonah Hex* and *Haunted Tank,* the Monitor reminds her that he simply watches, storing the data for another day.

After watching Batman and Superman battle various menaces unleashed by a teenager who hacks into the Fortress of Solitude's computer, the Monitor concludes that both heroes temper their justice with far too much mercy, repeating the critique of Superman he made in an earlier appearance. Thinking he's found the perfect fit for his next client, the Monitor asks Lyla to call the Network, a group of supervillains whose powers are modeled on audio and visual effects found on TV and radio.

Lyla and the Monitor return to the 30th century in *Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes* #319. The Legion is in disarray due to Lady Memory facing off against Shadow Lass, and Mon-El apparently having lost his mind. Lyla wonders if they can use the chaos to their advantage, but the Monitor says no; their client has merely sent them to procure a certain item, or find someone who will.

The next issue reveals that "someone" to be an alien thief named Magpie, a.k.a. Merg Gaterra. The client is Universo, a former Green Lantern who was stripped of



The Monitor reveals his his propensity to speak the language of logos in *World's Finest* #311. Considering the similarity between his costume here and Batman's on the screen, readers could have been forgiven for wondering if the Caped Crusader himself was the mystery man in the golden satellite.

his ring, and the object of interest is a time-travel device. When the Magpie fails to procure it, the Monitor offers to provide more resources for a second attempt, but Universo declines, having come up with a new plan to deal with the Legion. In yet another contradiction, when Lyla asks if they should withhold part of their commission because the Magpie didn't return some of their equipment, the Monitor tells her not to bother; they're above such meager interests as money. This is difficult to square with the love of money he's shown so far, with wealth being his only apparent motive up to this point.

Vigilante #14 is often mentioned when it comes to pre-*Crisis* Monitor appearances, but the Monitor neither appears in this issue, nor is he mentioned. While many people assume the $1 million shadow suit used by the criminals in this issue was purchased from the Monitor, there's no evidence to support that theory. However, such a hypothesis could be based on issue #6 where Godmother Donna Omicidio, who showed up in the *New Teen Titans Annual* #2 when the Vigilante made his debut, mentions that "for a fee the Monitor will supply information and services to anyone."

The original memo requesting writers and editors to use the Monitor in their series promised that artwork of the Monitor would be forthcoming. No mention was made of concept sketches for Lyla, which could be why she looks so different in *Wonder Woman* #323, penciled by Don Heck, compared to how she appears in almost every other issue. She's still wearing the same skin-tight pink jumpsuit, but her hair is much shorter, and her face is completely different. Then again, considering that, as Harbinger, she can divide herself into more than one person, perhaps what we're seeing here is a duplicate version—or multiple different versions, seeing as by page 14, her hairstyle and facial features have changed entirely.

Regardless of these inconsistencies, far from the ditzy, bland, and sometimes fearful character we've seen before, this version of Lyla is bold and outspoken, questioning the Monitor's decisions and almost mocking him. As for the Monitor, rather than act as a mere facilitator of personnel and equipment, he oversteps his self-imposed boundaries once again by playing Doctor Psycho/Captain Wonder, Silver Swan, and Cheetah off against one another as they battle Wonder Woman, with the Monitor drawing delight from his machinations.

Most significantly, this issue is also the first hint we get of the Anti-Monitor's existence. On the opening page when Doctor Psycho brags to the Monitor that the world will soon tremble before his wrath, the Monitor warns, "As for wielding power over me and my kind—there is only one other like me … and you would not wish to cross either of us!"

Superman reappears on the Monitor's radar in *Action Comics* #564 when his old foe the Master Jailer purchases a device from the Monitor that strips Superman of his memory and traps him in the civilian identity of Mike Benson, stevedore. We get a fuller look at the Monitor here than in previous issues, with most of his body and face shown in partially silhouetted profile. Lyla remains a mute onlooker.

Deciding they need to put Batman down after Dr. Fang's death in *Batman* #380, Fang's cronies place a call to the Monitor in issue #384. He connects them with the Calendar Man to do the job. In his one-panel appearance, only the Monitor's hands are shown, and he's wearing yellow gloves. Lyla is in her pink jumpsuit, but she seems to have put on a considerable amount of weight and removed her necklace. The Calendar Man is reluctant to kill his old foe, but as he says in *Detective Comics* #551, "The money offered through the intermediary who calls himself the Monitor is simply too much to resist."

The Monitor and Lyla's final pre-*Crisis* appearance was written by Marv Wolfman himself and takes place in *DC Comics Presents* #78. In an exercise in revival that could have been designed to prepare readers for *Crisis*, this story pits Superman and the "Forgotten Heroes" (Cave Carson, Immortal Man, Congorilla, Rip Hunter, Animal Man, Rick Flagg, and Dolphin) against the Forgotten

Villains (Mr. Poseidon, the Faceless Hunter from Saturn, the Atom-Master, Krakow, Ultivac, and the Enchantress). Also showing their faces for the first time in a while are the Space Cabby, Chris KL-99, Jero, and Halk, all of whom debuted in the early 1950s. Once the dust clears on this time-traveling, interplanetary adventure, we cut to the Monitor's satellite, where Lyla informs the Monitor that she detects "the energies forming."

"I have been aware of the energy-increases for hours now," the Monitor replies, "and yes—I believe the reason I began the role as Monitor is begun!" It's noteworthy that he refers to "Monitor" as a role rather than a name, seeing as people have been addressing him as "Monitor" or "the Monitor" as if it were his name rather than a mere function. Also, on some occasions, such as when he meets General Stuart, he refers to himself by this name. Was Wolfman still undecided on the Monitor's name at this late date?

"Cancel all frequencies to Earth's criminal population!" the Monitor continues. "They have all been tested. We know their strengths and weaknesses. We no longer must continue the sham of providing counsel. Our true purpose here has begun!" This is the retcon referenced in the *Crisis Compendium,* meant to reframe the inconsistent nature of the Monitor's previous characterization as part of an elaborate ruse. However, considering the amount of murder and mayhem that the Monitor has sponsored (with revelations of more to come in the crossovers, including aiding and abetting the Third Reich), his character seems to be permanently sullied by such wanton bloodshed. It also doesn't explain why he maintained the ruse of the greedy, remorseless criminal even when he was alone with Lyla—who is guilty by association, by the way. Nor does it explain the inconsistencies in Lyla's personality, in her and the Monitor's relationship, or the changes in her looks across DC's various titles. Such discrepancies continue right into this issue, which shows her wearing a pink necklace rather than her usual white number. Then again, maybe she finally got a chance to hit the mall on their second trip to the 30th century. Considering that Wolfman wrote this issue and that it served as the final lead-up to *Crisis,* it's the last place one would expect to find such irregularities. But as Wolfman told *Comics Buyer's Guide*, his plate was rather full at the time: "Not only was I writing *Crisis,* I was writing four other titles and editing full-time at DC. *Crisis* was the most nightmarish project of all time. I should have done that and nothing else."[155] In light of this, it shouldn't come as a surprise that, in the midst of Wolfman's scripting frenzy, a few details were overlooked. But that doesn't explain the larger mistakes, the Monitor's next line being a case in point.

"Now—scan Earth-Three!" the Monitor says. "I fear the trouble we have sensed begins there!" This is a reference to *Crisis* #1 where Earth-Three's Crime Syndicate are the first named characters to succumb to the wall of anti-matter that's erasing the multiverse. But on the page before their demise, as Pariah watches a world perish in the face of the relentless white wall, he laments that he's seen hundreds of earths die before it. If so, why didn't the Monitor and Lyla detect this energy increase far earlier? And why would the Monitor say the trouble begins on Earth-Three when by the time the wall of anti-matter arrives there, most other universes are already gone? How fast is the anti-matter moving? Furthermore, does it maintain a consistent speed, or does it vary according to some factor or factors?



George Pérez's character designs for Pariah, the tragic witness of *Crisis*. His real name later revealed to be Kell Mossa, he is a scientist cursed to watch universes die after his experiment unleashes the Anti-Monitor. Haunted by guilt and unable to stop the destruction, he embodies cosmic remorse and the cost of the multiversal catastrophe.

The series doesn't say, but in Wolfman's novelization of *Crisis,* two hours after Earth-3 is obliterated, the Monitor tells the assembled heroes that, "In the past fifteen hundred hours, more than nineteen thousand universes have been destroyed."[156] That's an average of 12.7 universes per hour, if this has been going on for 1,500 hours (the equivalent of 62.5 days). If so, why didn't the Monitor do something about it sooner?

"At last," a caption at the bottom of the final page of *DC Comics Presents* #78 says, "the Monitor's scheme! It begins in 'Crisis on Infinite Earths!"

Perhaps that's where we'll find the answers we seek.

155 Brady, 81.

156 Wolfman, *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, 87.

PART III

CRISIS COMMENTARY

CHAPTER 11

"The Summoning"—Crisis #1

Nothing communicated the cosmic threat of *Crisis* and the heroes' inability to stand against it better than the wraparound cover for issue #1. It's a shame that to get its full effect, one needed to open the comic all the way and lay it out flat—something no serious collector would ever do! Thankfully, digital options today allow us to absorb the image in all its grandeur without creasing the spines of our precious floppies.

With Pariah's silent, anguished cry in the bottom-right corner of the front cover establishing an appropriate level of gravitas, a chain of parallel earths extended into infinity, which was represented by a glowing white ball. The question was, were the planets issuing from the white ball or being sucked into it? Based on this image alone, it was impossible to tell. Tendrils of white and pink energy were either spewing from the nearest earth or penetrating it from without. Either way, shards of the planet were careening off into space. And drifting helplessly before it, his eyes clenched shut as he too seems to cry out in agony, was Superman of Earth-Two, the very hero upon which DC was built. If ever there was a sign that the entire multiverse was unraveling, this was it.

But Superman and Pariah were not alone in their torment. Floating in space before the chain of parallel worlds, two more of which were also being inundated by tendrils of destructive energy, were 21 other characters in various stages of agony and distress. Many of them were superheroes, the epitome of power and strength, more accustomed to triumphing over evil than being defeated by it, as appeared to be happening here. Sprinkled amongst the heroes were a handful of villains, including all five members of the Crime Syndicate of America, which was fitting considering they were about to meet their demise. In the past, covers depicting these characters' adventures showed either the heroes or the villains in charge. But for once they were all on the same level, completely powerless in the face of whatever calamity had afflicted the multiverse. Many of these characters, such as Cyborg and Psimon from DC's top-selling *New Teen Titans,* were familiar to readers. But for some of these characters, including Pariah and Blue Beetle, this was their first appearance in the DCU.



George Pérez's cover for *Crisis* #1 instantly announced event-comic grandeur: heroes suspended above splintering worlds as reality itself breaks apart. It sold scale, panic, and cosmic consequence, promising readers that DC's entire multiverse was under siege.

The only person who appears to be unaffected by the chaos was a woman in the top-left corner of the back cover. Her long blonde hair flowed out from under a red helmet, the rest of her body clad in sparkling blue armor and stiletto boots. Parallel lines extending horizontally across the page from her head reinforced her solidity, as did the look of determination on her face.

And lurking behind her was a grim, silhouetted visage, only one eye of which was visible. Attentive readers probably recognized this as the Monitor, and the blonde woman that partially obscures his face as Lyla, soon to be revealed in her alter ego as Harbinger. But considering the inconsistent way they were portrayed in their pre-*Crisis* appearances, it's likely that some people were wondering, are they the cause of the disaster that's unfolding, or the solution?

The answer to this question must be put on hold as we move to the opening page of issue #1, which takes us from destruction to inception—or a combination of the two. Here's how Wolfman described this page in his initial outline for Pérez.

> *Several panels running the width of the page, each strip larger than the preceding one. Blackness of space. Nothingness. Only one twinkling light can be seen. It is a COSMIC CLOUD, and it explodes ... we see stars and worlds form and even the planets burn. Then there is a ripple wavering through space, an aftershock (most likely indicated in caption) and in the largest panel on the page we see in overlays and other artistic trick fashion the aftershock of universal birth created [sic] the multiple earths and dimensions. We see earth backed up by earth backed up by earth, etc.*[157]

That's pretty much how things played out, with Pérez using four panels to achieve Wolfman's effect. The final panel, which depicted the parallel earths, took up the bottom half the page. True to previous representations of parallel earths, rather than show them overlapping one another, virtually occupying the same space—which would be impossible to illustrate—the planets were shown side by side to suggest the same thing.

Wolfman's captions on this page attempted to establish an appropriate feeling of grandeur, echoing the first words of Genesis 1:1 by opening with "In the beginning …" Then, similar to the biblical text it sought to emulate, the description just as quickly descended into an impenetrable opaqueness that invited almost as many interpretations as there were worlds in the multiverse.

"In the beginning there was only one, a single black infinitude … so cold and dark for so very long … that even the burning light was imperceptible." This was written over a horizontal panel that was mostly black with a small, star-shaped white light in the center. This left one to wonder what the term "black infinitude" was meant to represent. Was it the universe? If so, what was the light at the center? Was



"God creates the sun, moon and earth" etching by Henry Moses. Public domain image from the Wellcome Collection, a website operated by Wellcome Trust. Wolfman drew upon the language and imagery of such creation narratives when crafting the opening of *Crisis*.

that the universe, a term typically defined as all of space and everything it contains? If so, what was the blackness surrounding it? Furthermore, the caption said it was so cold and dark that the burning light was imperceptible. But clearly, the light was perceptible, though admittedly minuscule against the darkness. This begs the question: imperceptible to whom?

The next panel was also horizontal and mostly back, but we were closer to the light, which was now blue at the center, surrounded by white, and tinged with yellow. "But the light grew, and the infinitude shuddered," the next caption said, "and the darkness finally … screamed, as much in pain as in relief." The scream could be taken as metaphorical, but the contrast between pain and relief could also be interpreted as an indication of intelligence, or at least the ability to feel sensations of pleasure and pain. Does that mean the infinitude was conscious? If so, was this an allusion to panentheism, the idea that the universe—soon to become the multiverse—existed inside an intelligent being?

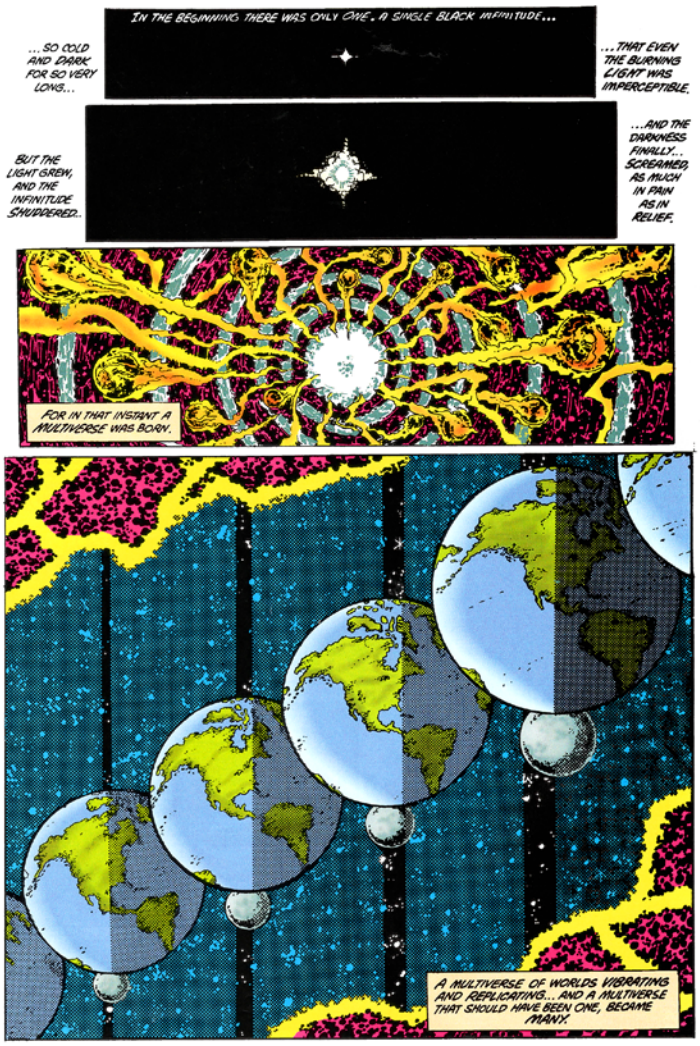
The next panel featured an explosion of fiery planetoids shooting out from a ball of white-and-blue energy. In the background, concentric circles of blue, white, pink, and black radiated out as a caption said, "For in that instant a multiverse was born." From this moment of extreme chaos we went straight to the parallel earths and their moons. They were fully formed and in rigid alignment, overlaid with a series of vertical blue bands that reinforced a sense of order. The contrast between chaos and order was so dynamic here that one wonders how this steady state was achieved and how long it took the multiverse to arrive at this inflexible configuration after its explosive beginning.

"A multiverse of worlds vibrating and replicating," the final caption on this page said, "and a multiverse that should

157 *Crisis Compendium,* 19.

have been one, became many." Several ideas were introduced here, all of which raised still more questions.

First, the previous panel showed fiery balls of matter careening into space, flying in different directions. At what point did vibration enter the picture? According to the lore that had been established going back to *The Flash* #123, different vibrational rates were all that kept the parallel universes and the worlds they contained apart (although some stories, including *Crisis,* added a time element as well). If so, was it the initial "big bang" that caused them to vibrate at different frequencies? That seems to be the implication, but if they were all created at the same time by the same event, as this image indicated, wouldn't their vibration rates have been virtually the same? Also, when something like a guitar string is plucked, it vibrates at a given rate for a moment but then slows down as the initial energy that caused it to vibrate dissipates. Wouldn't the same thing have happened to these parallel universes? If so, wouldn't their natural tendency have been to slow down



***Crisis* #1, p. 1. This narrative, which describes the dawn of the DCU, a tiny spark that ignites an explosion of creativity, eventually aligning itself into a series of parallel worlds can be used to describe the narrative evolution of DC itself, from a single creator to a multitude of editorial fiefdoms.**

until they all reached the same vibrational rate, at which point, according to the theory, they would have interfered with each other and exploded? If not, what power allowed the parallel worlds to maintain their various frequencies over billions of years? Could it have been the equivalent of the dark energy that scientists theorize is causing our own universe to expand at an ever-increasing rate?

The word "replicating" is also problematic. Are we to believe that the multiverse was constantly expanding, indeed, making copies of itself as this word implied? If so, this would have been similar to the many-worlds interpretation of quantum physics, which says that every quantum event causes reality to branch into countless non-interacting worlds where all possible outcomes occur, and observers find themselves in one branch. However, weren't the parallel universes created simultaneously? This was the assertion that Barry Allen made when he first explained his theory of the multiverse to Jay and Joan Garrick, and it seems to have been the working assumption among characters and writers ever since. But perhaps this was an innovation that Wolfman was adding here, one of many that he introduced throughout *Crisis.* Even if he was, though, this possibility was never developed or mentioned beyond this page.

Next, we have "a multiverse that should have been one, became many." In his master's thesis on *Crisis,* scholar Adam Murdough drew our attention to the phrase "should have been one" and the role it played in the ideological project behind this series.

> *This phrase takes for granted that there is, and always has been, something inherently flawed and unnatural about the multiversal structure of the DC Universe. DC's multitude of "parallel Earths," instituted in the 1960s in response to fan concerns about continuity but perceived in the 1980s as a threat to the company's commercial viability, is here singled out as an aberration, a dangerous anomaly that compromises all of existence. This sentiment is repeated a few times over during the story, in a rather transparent attempt to guide the reader into accepting that the imminent destruction of the multiverse is "meant to happen" in order to correct something that "went wrong" in the familiar world of DC Comics.*[158]

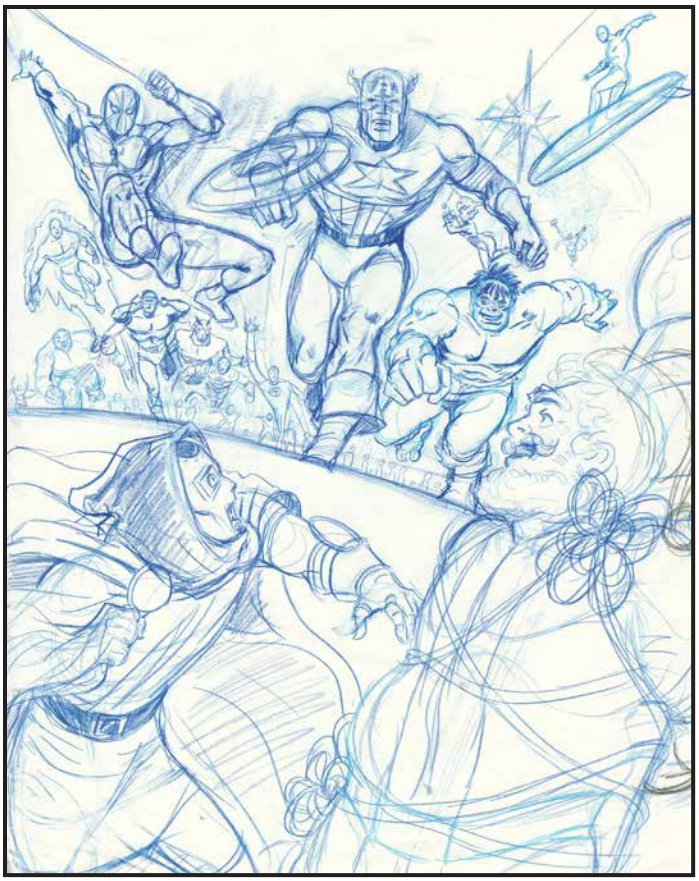
Put another way, it's as if Wolfman placed Schwartz's decision to introduce parallel earths in *The Flash* #123 in the same category as Krona's attempt to probe the origins of the universe in *Green Lantern* #40. It's the "original sin" that *Crisis* was created to solve. As Rip Hunter remarked in *The Kingdom* #2 regarding the Linear Men, a group of time-traveling agents who enforced temporal order and prevented paradoxes across the multiverse, "They think orderly, catalogued continuity is preferable to a kingdom of wonder." Could the same be said of Wolfman?

158 Murdough, 61.

Finally, should this caption not read, "a *universe* that should have been one became a *multiverse*" rather than "a multiverse that should have been one became many"? Or was Wolfman already sowing the seeds for an omniverse of multiverses? Any assumptions that this was a typo are dispelled by the fact that this wording is repeated through various reprints. All that to say, we were barely out of the starting gate, and rather than beginning the process of simplifying and streamlining the DCU, it feels like we were left with more questions than answers.

The following two-page spread jumped from the beginning to the end of the unnamed world pictured here. This spread is a masterwork of "Pérezian" composition, one of the best of the entire series. It's also bursting with symbolism, a visual essay meant to prepare readers for the epic emotional journey on which they were about to embark.

The main image showed a figure in a green cloak flying over a cityscape that stretched across both pages while citizens fled in terror before a wall of white energy that was consuming everything in its path. Whenever a person or object came into contact with the wall, they didn't just disappear; they were reduced to the equivalent of "blue lines." To understand the significance of this, a bit of background on how comics are created is required.



Example of a blueline pencil drawing, which lets the inker preserve the original pencils while finishing the line art. It reflects a production step where penciled storytelling becomes printable, polished black-and-white imagery.

In the early stages of comic book art, non-photo blue—a color that doesn't show up when scanned, photocopied, or reproduced using traditional graphic arts cameras—was often used to rough out figures, backgrounds, and panel layouts and to provide notes for the colorist. Inkers used these blue lines as a guide for their work, inking on top of them, and when the final artwork was scanned or printed, only the black ink showed up. Not only did this eliminate the need to erase pencil lines, which could mess up the inks, it also allowed the original pencil art to remain untouched. In summary, blue lines represented the underlying sketch, the rough draft, or the guiding structure that led to the final image. They were crucial in the creative process, but they were meant to be invisible in the finished product. They were not the "real" version; they were merely a prelude to permanence.

Within this framework, when the anti-matter wave reduced people and objects to blue lines before erasing them, it was not just a cool visual effect. It was a reversal of the creative process. Normally, blue lines were the beginning of creation, but here they appeared right before the end. Like the anti-matter universe itself, this imagery represented an inversion of the normal state of affairs. Instead of sketching first and inking later, *Crisis* rewound the tape of history, reducing finished art to concept and then the blank page. It was not just death; it was the realization that the worlds that were being erased were always just a sketch, something expendable in service of a larger narrative reset.

No one mourned these lost earths more than the figure flying over this fleeing crowd, whom we'd soon learn was named Pariah. Apart from him, no other super-powered beings were on display here, which was a telling detail, as we were about to discover.

This scene of mad panic was overlaid with three series of six panels. The number six was significant in light of the biblical allusion at the start of this issue. Just as Genesis said the world was created in six days, the same number of panels was used to offer various perspectives on this world's destruction, yet another inversion introduced by the incursion of the anti-matter threat.

The first six-panel sequence showed a cloud of white energy, which had yet to be named as anti-matter, approaching Earth from space. It struck the North American continent and demolished the city as its residents looked on in horror. This established the pattern of destruction that would continue to threaten numerous worlds throughout this series.

The second set of six panels gave us a closer look at Pariah. In the first three panels, his face was hidden by the shadow of his hood, with only his eyes visible. In the last three panels, he pulled his hood back, revealing himself to be a youngish man with purple hair, each panel moving progressively closer until all we could see was one of his eyes, a single tear falling from it. Just as the world was being undone, so was Pariah. Eyes were central to this series, with Pérez returning to this motif again and again. Even a cursory glance at the main image on this spread reveals the panicked eyes of the fleeing people as one of its most striking details.

This focus on eyes and observing was fitting in a story about witnessing and monitoring.

"Don't you people understand that there is no hope in running?" Pariah said at the start of this sequence. "Or maybe they do understand. They see their world fraying, fading away before their terrified eyes." (Note his use of that last word.) "Ten thousand years of civilization stolen without explanations or alternatives. Oh, they understand all too well. But they run because they fear prayer is not enough." Who exactly were these people, what was this place, and why did Pariah care so much about them?

Most commentaries on *Crisis* assume this was a generic world created by Wolfman for the sole purpose of destroying it in this scene, a mere model for the disasters that were about to afflict the worlds that "count," that is, named worlds within the DCU. But what if this world wasn't in the DCU at all? Remember, apart from Pariah, who was a mere visitor to this place, there were no superheroes or supervillains in this scene, just ordinary people. What if instead of a fictional world, this was the real world (i.e. Earth-Real), and the people running from the disaster—the erasure of the multiverse—were comic book fans? For, by erasing the multiverse, a big part of their world—their childhood—was fraying, fading away before their eyes, and they were powerless to stop it.

Even though running from the threat was futile, fleeing wasn't possible for Pariah. "No, I am drawn to it," he said, "forced to observe the death-rattle of the multiverse." On one level, Pariah, whose name means outcast or reject, could be interpreted as the voice of fandom, articulating the cry of the panicking masses on this page. At least one astute reader made this suggestion at the time. In a letter published in *Crisis* #6, Thomas A. Marquardt said, "I feel that the character Pariah represents me, the reader and longtime fan. He, like I, looks on with horror and sadness at the events that will change things forever."

Like the people fleeing below him, Pariah remembered the histories that others forget. Moreover, those fictional histories had become a part of him, as tangible as reality itself. Powerless to halt the destruction of his beloved multiverse, as he watched countless worlds die with a stroke of Wolfman's editorial pen, all he could do was mourn, for his voice, the voice of fandom, which lionized the past, was no longer wanted. As Wolfman took great pains to make clear throughout *Crisis*, this story was meant to redirect our attention toward the future, not the past. At the same time, like Pariah, who felt responsible for what was happening, asking how much longer he must suffer for his sins, fans also bore a measure of guilt for the disaster that was unfolding. As willing participants in the development of the multiverse, their obsessive cataloging of continuity and castigation of anyone who dared deviate from it had made the DCU a hostile place for readers and creators alike, no longer viable in a creative or a commercial sense. Having once been a source of pleasure, creating a sense of "realism" through the interconnectedness of DC's various characters and settings, DC's continuity had become an overwhelming burden. Rather than inspiring innovation, it stifled it, as writers feared provoking the vocal segment of fandom that insisted every story must conform to what came before. And yet, catering to such demands risked alienating new readers, who were daunted by the sheer volume of arcane lore they must master to enter this world. Hence, the only solution was to wipe the slate clean and start over.

This symbolic interpretation of Pariah as the voice of fandom is supported by an eight-panel sequence on this spread that showed his failed attempt to rescue a child from the encroaching white wall. Of all the people he could have rescued, he chose a little boy who looked to be about ten years old—the median age of the eight- to twelve-year-old children whom DC imagined was their core audience for so many years. It was like Pariah was an adult comic book fan who was desperate to hold on to the last vestiges of his childhood, only to see it deconstructed and erased too. This amalgamation of the DCU from a multiverse to a single universe wasn't just destroying fictional worlds; it was stealing people's childhoods.

But unlike the common fans below, Pariah had a power they lacked. Somehow he was literally above the fray. That's because Pariah wasn't merely a "fan" of these worlds and a witness to their deletion; he was the man responsible for triggering the very phenomenon that was causing it—or so he thought. Viewed from this perspective, it's hard not to interpret Pariah as a stand-in for Wolfman himself. The tears he cried could be seen as an expression of the grief and guilt that Wolfman felt for what he was about to do. By initiating *Crisis,* he'd set an editorial process in motion, and now he was powerless to stop it. As a lifelong comic book fan, it was not just his readers' beloved storyworlds and childhood memories that were being erased. He loved these stories too. In fact, they were the very things that made him want to become part of the industry. But now he found himself in the unenviable position of being the very individual who was making it go away, all for the sake of saving the comic books he loved so much. So, when Pariah tried to save that little boy, it was like Wolfman was trying to save that young, innocent part of himself who watched *Batman* on TV one night in the 1960s, saw an ad at the end of the episode that encouraged viewers to follow the Dark Knight's adventures in comic books, then ran down to the corner store and had a whole new world opened up to him at the spinner rack.

Consistent with Pariah's elevated status, when it was time for him to leave this world, the process was slightly different. Rather than reduce him to blue lines and then eradicate him, the white wall left him untouched for a moment in all his four-color glory, agonizing in an empty white void. Before he disappeared, Pariah was reduced to a black outline. The reversion to ink rather than blue lines could be taken to mean that even though the worlds of the multiverse had been declared non-canonical, Pariah's sorrow preserved them—and him—for just a moment longer. He was reduced to an ink outline because black is the color of mourning, and his grief was lasting**,** his memory not so easily erased. He was the reader who carried the emotional continuity "in his

bones," so to speak, even when the page was wiped clean. The black lines were like a last gasp of dissent, refusing to be wiped away. Fans may have been powerless to stop what was happening, but they wouldn't "go gentle into that good night." Neither would Wolfman, though he would continue to agonize not only at *what* he was about to do but *how* he was going to do it.

"Another earth is to be swallowed by the dark," Pariah said right before he began to fade. This is curious, seeing as the world whose destruction he had just witnessed was swallowed not by darkness but by whiteness. But an explanation can be found in the final six-panel sequence on this spread. In the first panel, only a tiny corner of positive matter remained, the rest of the space overwhelmed by the white anti-matter cloud. This implies we were entering the story at its final stage, right before the end. The second panel was pure white, representing the totality of the anti-matter's destruction. This wasn't just death; it was absence, total annihilation. Returning to Murdough, "Just as water is the primal medium from which 'real' human life emerged, the blank page is the primal medium for superheroes, and so in both the biblical flood and in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* beings are reabsorbed by their birthing element, with only a chosen few spared."[159] This pure white panel symbolized the moment where DC's history had been deleted, but the new continuity had yet to be written. It was a pause between eras, an intake of breath between one world's end and another's beginning. Like "the construct" in *The Matrix,* this white panel was an empty, dimensionless virtual workspace into which anything could be uploaded. Some people may have viewed this with relief. Finally, a new beginning! But as every writer and artist knows, nothing is more terrifying than the blank page. Sure, it represents infinite possibility, but that can be paralyzing because it also confronts the artist with self-doubt and uncertainty. "Do I have anything worth saying?" It's a void that only courage and ink can conquer. Can the creator rise to the challenge?



Neo's mind in the process of being blown during *The Matrix* (1999). In the film, "the construct" is an empty white "sandbox"space where Morpheus and his crew can summon clothes, weapons, training simulations, and tools for teaching, testing, and preparation outside the Matrix.

159 Murdough, 62.

An ominous answer arrived in the third panel. Rather than beginning with blue lines that sketched out a new reality and then filling that space with the joy we tend to associate with moments of rebirth and the four-color vibrancy of comic books, a tendril of swirling black smoke probed the void. Or better yet, was it ink, spilled in frustration?

Over the next three panels, it grew darker and bolder until it consumed the space. It was like once the ink was spilled, a new, more sinister form of inspiration struck. Just as the anti-matter wiped away all that was vital, colorful, and alive, the clean slate itself was obliterated by something shadowy, noxious, and malevolent, smeared across the page. Nature abhors a vacuum, and so, it seems, do artists—especially fans turned pro who have a vested interest in the status quo. As a die-hard "fan" of the DCU, Pariah refused to be reduced to his blue-line structure, holding onto his inks until the last moment. In the same way, when the playground that DC's creators had enjoyed for so long was taken away and a new world was mandated from on high, rather than seize the opportunity for a fresh start, some artists chose to negate the blank page itself, filling it with the very darkness that Pariah bemoaned. What seemed like a fresh start instead revealed a lingering tension behind this series. It was as if Wolfman himself, the quintessential fan turned pro, was deeply conflicted regarding what he was about to do. But with DC itself teetering on the edge of disappearing, what other choice did he have? These six panels were like a silent scream of creative frustration before the story marches on.

The relentless white wall continued to Earth-Three—or Earth-3, as it was written here. Throughout *Crisis*, the naming convention used for various worlds changed from "Earth-1" to "Earth One" to "Earth-I." This was likely a proofreading oversight, though a more charitable interpretation could regard it as yet another homage to past crisis events where the system used to label the various earths remained in flux.

The first panel showed the white wall of energy approaching through space. Down below, Power Ring and Ultraman were battling a series of volcanoes that had erupted across the city, but not even their incredible powers could contain the destruction. Furthermore, Ultraman's telescopic vision had revealed the problem wasn't just on Earth-Three. The entire universe had been destroyed, and their planet was all that was left. Two other members of the Crime Syndicate of America, Owlman and Johnny Quick, also confronted the all-consuming white wall, with both of them remarking they'd never felt so helpless. "Why?!? Why did the gods give us these powers if we can't use them to save our own lives?" Johnny Quick lamented, a polytheist to the end. In case anyone is wondering why the Crime Syndicate wasn't still trapped in limbo, the *Who's Who* entry for Alex Luthor, Earth-Three's sole superhero, indicated he'd freed them from their prison in the failed hope that they could help protect their world from destruction.



***Crisis* #1, p. 5. The opening pages of Crisis give the members of the Crime Syndicate an ironic end. Having spent their lives terrorizing the planet, when faced with annihilation, they spend their final moments trying to save it.**

Speaking of Alex Luthor, he shared the villains' feeling of helplessness as he flew over the city. He was the first person in the series to identify the white energy as anti-matter. How he reached this conclusion was not explained, but he said that not even his science could stop it. This is curious considering when he was first introduced in *DC Comics Presents Annual* #1, Earth-One and Earth-Two were saved through one of Luthor's devices, a ray gun capable of turning not one but two planets to an immaterial state, allowing them to pass harmlessly through each other. Couldn't he have deployed the same device here, rendering his planet immaterial until the wall of anti-matter passed through it? Or could it have been that such a device only worked with positive matter? Then again, the anti-matter wasn't just wiping out planets; it was also eliminating the very space in which they existed. So, even if Luthor's ray had worked, where would Earth-Three have been once the anti-matter passed? Either way, it feels like he should have at least considered or attempted to use the ray gun here, seeing as Wolfman himself wrote the story in which the device was introduced.

Luthor was just in time to see the wall of anti-matter sneaking up behind Superwoman. Why she didn't notice it was unclear, but when Luthor tried to warn her, he was too late, and she was consumed. It was one of several unsatisfying ends for the super-powered beings of this world. There was no question they were all going to die, but it's one thing to perish while trying to perform some last-ditch effort to defeat the all-consuming threat. It's another thing not to notice it bearing down on you.

This was followed by another moment of apparent forgetfulness on Wolfman's part. Speaking of Superwoman, Luthor said, "Gone, as if she never existed. Lord, though we battled time and time again—I never wanted her to die like that." The problem was, as far as we knew, they never battled even once, never mind time and time again. Throughout Luthor's brief superhero career, Superwoman was trapped in limbo. The only member of the Crime Syndicate that Luthor ever faced in his superhero identity was Ultraman.

Luthor went to his wife, Lois, and informed her that the end was near. They and their world were doomed, but there may be hope for their infant son. "I know where other heroes live," he said as their son disappeared in a whirling tornado of energy, protected inside an interdimensional capsule or "top" built for one. "They will care for our son." Why he didn't make the device large enough to accommodate his entire family, or at least Lois and the baby, was unclear from a story point of view, but it was clear from Wolfman's perspective. If all three of them had been saved, we'd have lost the nifty parallel to Superman's origin story.

This similarity was far from incidental. Just as Superman's arrival on Earth became the foundational event of the first 50 years of DC's history, Alex Luthor's arrival had the potential to become the foundation for the next 50 years. Both characters were children rocketed away from disaster, bearing the burden of hope from their dying worlds. The difference was that Superman's planet was pure and enlightened, even if its residents had become arrogant, and Alex's world was corrupt and villainous. Superman landed on a world that was flawed but needing hope. Alex arrived in a better world but at the worst possible moment, right when that world and the entire multiverse were on the brink of collapse. Nevertheless, Alex was the proof that even in a world of pure evil, a force for good could arise. His story (and that of his parents) was a redemption of Earth-Three's narrative. Despite the Crime Syndicate's dominance of that world, it still birthed a savior. This provided hope that even in the face of the anti-matter universe devouring the positive-matter multiverse, a thread of salvation might slip through the cracks. After all, *Crisis* wasn't just about evil forces—literal or fictional—collapsing universes; it was about finding hope in the face of seemingly absolute destruction.

Unlike Superman, who was the epitome of perfection, a symbol of moral clarity, Alex was a fusion of what was and what could be. He embodied all that is good—positive


JOHNNY QUICK--
JOHNNY QUICK?!?
WE'RE--
IT'S EVERYWHERE, POWER RING.
I USED TO REVEL IN MY POWERS, BUT WHEN I NEED THEM THE MOST--
--THEY'RE USELESS. IT'S IRONIC, ISN'T IT?
WE'VE SPENT A LIFETIME TERRORIZING THIS WORLD, YET OUR LAST MOMENTS ALIVE ARE SPENT TRYING TO SAVE IT.
FROM THE MOMENT I FIRST LEARNED OF THE OTHER EARTHS, AND THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS--
--I STROVE TO FIND SOME WAY TO BRIDGE THE VIBRATIONAL GAP WHICH SEPARATES US.
THIS IS A PROTOTYPE, LARGE ENOUGH FOR ONLY ONE.
WE WILL DIE, BUT OUR SON SHALL LIVE.
HE APPEARS...
...AMIDST THE CHAOS AND CONFUSION...
...AND HE KNOWS.
ULTRAMAN--LOOK! WHO ARE YOU, MAN?
THEN YOU CAUSED THIS? I'LL KILL YOU FOR...
NO...MINE IS NOT THE HAND WHICH SLAYS WORLDS.
THEN I GUESS THIS IS IT.
ULTRAMAN--WAIT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I AM CALLED... PARIAH! AND I MOURN FOR THIS WORLD ABOUT TO DIE!
I CAN DO NOTHING MORE THAN CRY.
7

matter—and all that is evil—anti-matter. Which one would win out? Was there a way to forge them together into some sort of unexpected synthesis? In this sense, Alex could be seen as a more "honest" hero than Superman, or at least the way Superman has been portrayed throughout much of his history. There was no hiding Alex's dark side; it was visible for all to see. He realized he couldn't save the world by being perfect. The only hope for the multiverse was not to deny or suppress his dark side but to embrace it. In this way he eventually became a literal doorway between worlds, the only being who could bridge the multiverse and the anti-matter universe and, by extension, DC's past and its future. Later stories (e.g., *Final Crisis*) had him succumb to his dark side, but for the time being at least, goodness prevailed.

Witnessing Earth-Three's demise was Pariah, portrayed in a series of panels that function as a counterpoint to the main story, going from his cloaked face with only his eyes showing to a close-up of a tear falling from his eye. Considering the enormity of the devastation he'd been forced to witness for however long this had been happening, it's a wonder he had any tears left. Furthermore, was a world where evil prevails really worth crying for? When he appeared before Power Ring and Ultraman, Power Ring thought Pariah was responsible for what was happening, but Pariah denied any culpability and said he could do nothing but cry.

Not to be undone by Superwoman's pointless death, rather than use his super speed to flee the anti-matter for as long as possible, which would have been in keeping with his self-centered personality, Johnny Quick allowed it to consume him, as did Owlman. The only one who appeared to have an ounce of self-preservation left was Power Ring. "Ultraman! Ultraman!" he cried as the big lug flew straight into the encroaching wall of white. But he was too late, and in the next panel, Power Ring was consumed too.

Baby Luthor's top narrowly escaped, just keeping ahead of the white wall and vibrating its way to the JLA satellite, orbiting Earth-One. Presumably, Alex Luthor targeted it, knowing Earth-One's heroes gathered there. But the satellite had been lifeless and abandoned since *Justice League of America* #229, when it was damaged beyond repair during the Earth-Mars war. Nearby, though, another satellite "burns with life," the Monitor's headquarters.

Before we go there, it's worth asking why Wolfman decided to begin this story with the destruction of Earth-Three, a world dominated by villains, rather than a world where heroes prevailed. Apart from the parallels to the Superman myth discussed earlier, it could also have been Wolfman's way of drawing a line in the sand when it came to the sort of playful inversions of traditional storytelling that this world represented. Remember, Earth-Three was a place where



Still shot from "Mirror Image," an episode of *The Twilight Zone* that may have inspired Earth-3, where everything is the opposite of how things are in our world. In the episode, a young woman confronts the possibility that a double from another dimension is replacing her life.

everything was backward. Europeans didn't discover America; Americans discovered Europe. John Wilkes Booth didn't kill President Lincoln; Lincoln, a disgruntled actor, shot him. The destruction of Earth-Three could have been Wolfman's way of saying playtime was over. Such gimmicks may have seemed like a good idea at the time, but they were not sustainable if you wanted a single, coherent universe.

The psychological effect of such powerful beings being eliminated so quickly and easily was another motivating factor. "I wanted to show how powerful the villain was, because in four pages he got rid of [versions of] Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman instantly!" Wolfman told *13th Dimension.* "Without even, really, a struggle! And that was purely psychological, because I knew the fans would not piece that together but they'd suddenly realize, 'This is a really powerful villain because he just destroyed Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman!' even if that wasn't quite their names."[160]

"It begins again, Lyla," the Monitor said from his main observation room in the satellite, which was filled with, you guessed it, monitors, two big screens and dozens of porthole-size ones, each one showing another world under threat. "The shudder of one universe ending … and the plaintive cry of another about to die. It was time, my dear, for us to act." This raised still more questions about the rate at which the anti-matter was advancing and whether or not that rate was consistent. If it was beginning again, did that mean it had stopped at some point? The last time we were onboard the satellite, we established (according to Wolfman's novelization) that 15,000 universes had been destroyed (an average of 12.7

(opposite page) *Crisis* #1, page 7 original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). The red lines are production marks, not part of the printed art. They indicate color, energy effects, glows, outlines, or other special handling required during the reproduction process.

160 Dan Greenfield, "Why Marv Wolfman Didn't Like the Ending to Crisis," *13th Dimension,* September 12, 2018, https://13thdimension.com/why-marv-wolfman-didnt-like-the-ending-to-crisis/.

universes per hour over the past 62.5 days). So, wouldn't the shuddering followed by the plaintive cry have been an ongoing process rather than something that was happening in fits and starts? And wouldn't it have been happening simultaneously across dozens of universes rather than sequentially, leading to a cacophony of endless screaming?

The Monitor told Lyla that she knew whom to summon, but she questioned his judgment, wondering why he wasn't mustering the most powerful beings they'd observed, such as both Supermans and Wonder Womans. The question she didn't ask was why he'd just let the villains on Earth-Three die, seeing as they were just as powerful as the Earth-One and Earth-Two heroes they resembled. And why did she mention just two versions of Superman and Wonder Woman? If the multiverse was truly infinite, wouldn't she have referenced the untold number of such beings? Or were most of them gone already?

In response, the Monitor said he'd analyzed all those with power in the past, present, and future, and their greatest hope would come from "so-called heroes and villains fighting alongside each other." He also mentioned an unexpected third option, the infant from Earth-Three. He planned to retrieve the boy while Lyla summoned the chosen ones.

Before Lyla energized, she reminded the Monitor that they were equals, and she would no longer tolerate being treated as his slave. This seems like a strange thing to say, considering there'd been no indication she was being held against her will except for the one pre-*Crisis* appearance where she seemed to be fearful of the Monitor. But considering how inconsistent her character had been so far, this was merely par for the course.

A caption told us Lyla "concentrates and her body fairly explodes with power…" Then she reached deep into the center of her being where she sensed "each atom within her as an independent force." Just as the universe once divided into many parts, she did too. And, like the multiverse, each version of Lyla was weaker than the whole. "She must divide her power among many," a caption said, "each with power yet powerless as well." Whatever this apparent contradiction was supposed to mean, the end result was she was no longer a mere woman named Lyla but something more—Harbinger! Underlying this transformation was a sense of foreboding, with Lyla wondering if the Monitor understood the risks of this metamorphosis. Viewed in retrospect, it served as one more whisper of the series' moral: division weakens and dilutes, and only unity endures.

As for how her transmutation occurred, midway through writing the series, Wolfman told *Amazing Heroes* that Lyla "has a cosmic power that is semi-undefined. Her basic ability is machine-given—she has no natural abilities of her own—which is why, in the very first issue, she has to enter a machine that filled her with the energy she needed to carry out her initial mission."[161] Sure enough, these pages showed her doing exactly that, although how her ability to concentrate and sense each atom within herself affected the process is unclear. Perhaps it was a form of meditation that the Monitor had taught her, so she could interact with the machine. More importantly, Wolfman also said, "This machine is essentially the Monitor's way of tapping into the negative dimension, which also explains how the villain is able to take Harbinger over."[162] Ostensibly, when Wolfman said, "negative dimension," he meant "anti-matter universe." The fact that Harbinger's power came from the anti-matter universe was never mentioned in the series itself, which is a pity, as it would have created some interesting story possibilities. It may have also explained why it was so easy for the shadow demon to possess her later in this issue. Wolfman went on to say that Harbinger/Lyla couldn't stay divided for long, "the effect is like a battery that drains very quickly. … She needs reenergizing on a regular basis."

To emphasize the parallel between Lyla dividing and the universe splintering into the multiverse, the panel that showed her separating is similar to the third panel on page one that showed the universe exploding. We'd find out later that she'd gone to summon 15 heroes, which meant she should have divided into 15 parts, but this panel showed her dividing into 20 duplicates. Were five backup versions of her created just in case any of the initial 15 failed, or was this an editorial oversight?

The next page had the Monitor musing that he'd observed the multiverse and the "many planet earths" for months. The thing is, we know he'd been doing it for years, at least as far back as 1981, and even then it was indicated that he'd been at it for a while before that. Also, what was his fixation with the various versions of Earth? Why hadn't he been focused on other planets too? And his observations seem to have been focused on only a handful of those earths. Why?

Such thoughts were cut short as he said he needed the Luthor child, "I need him now." This introduced yet another question. With all his careful planning, why did the Luthor child jump to the top of his to-do list? We were about to learn that Alexander Luthor has the anomalous condition of being composed partly of matter and partly of anti-matter, but when the Monitor discovered this, it came as a complete surprise. That being the case, what did he see in the child at this time that made him such a priority?

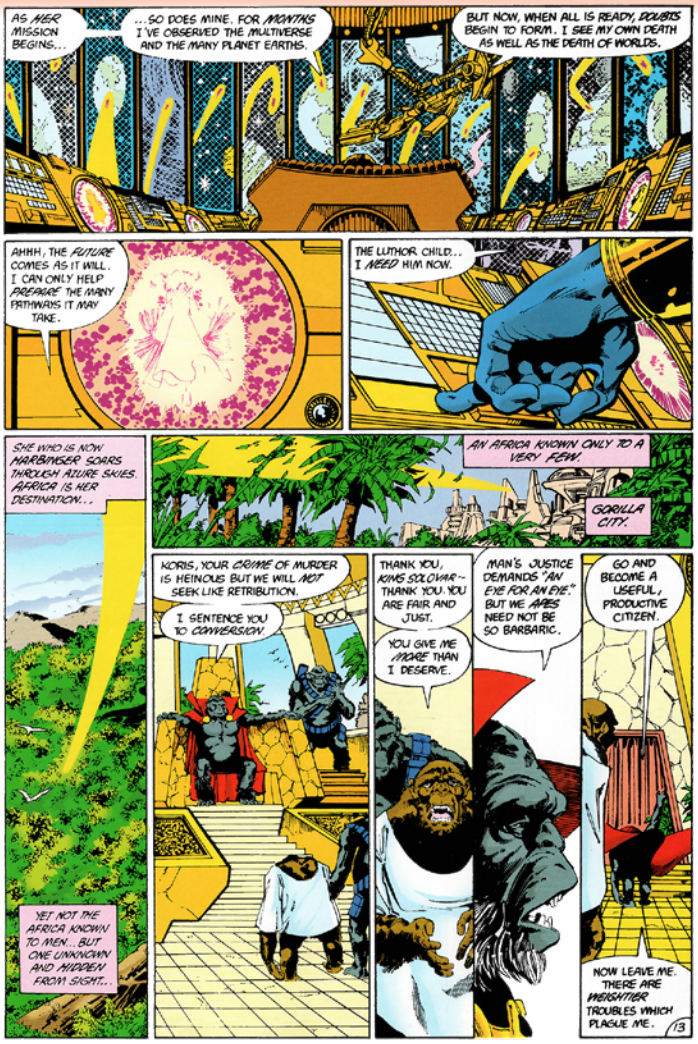
Harbinger's first destination on her recruitment drive was Gorilla City, a hidden civilization in Africa inhabited by highly intelligent, telepathic gorillas and ruled by the benevolent King Solovar (misspelled as "Solivar" in the first printing of *Crisis*). First appearing in *The Flash* #106, Solovar teamed up with the Flash to capture Gorilla Grodd, who frequently sought to conquer Gorilla City and the world. Solovar and the Flash became close allies as a result. Considering Solovar's close relationship with the Flash and the Flash's centrality to *Crisis,* it was fitting that Harbinger began her recruitment efforts here, but there could have been more to it than that.

Solovar was consistently portrayed as a noble leader who prioritized the welfare of his people. True to form, in this issue we met Solovar in the midst of pronouncing a sentence of "conversion" rather than death for a citizen found guilty

161 *Amazing Heroes,* March 1, 1985, 25.

162 Ibid.





(left) *Crisis* #1, p. 13 with the misspelling of "Solivar." Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (right) The same page with corrected spelling in the *35th Anniversary Deluxe Edition of Crisis*. Such reprintings are often used as an opportunity to correct mistakes made in the original, whether dialogue, description, or the art itself.

of murder. He had complete power over this individual, but instead of using it, he acted with restraint. "Man's justice demands 'an eye for an eye,'" Solovar said, "but we apes need not be so barbaric. Go and become a useful citizen." Solovar represented someone who had mastered power without falling into hubris. By choosing Solovar first, Harbinger was building a foundation of wisdom and peace rather than raw power, a point the Monitor made before he commissioned her. It's also significant that Harbinger's first recruit was an animal. This sent the message that the crisis wasn't just affecting humans. All of nature was at risk, but that also means non-humans could play a role in finding a solution.

Gorilla City's scientists had already detected a threat to the planet. As Solovar wondered why the humans hadn't done anything about it, Harbinger materialized through the wall. Rather than explain who she was and why she was there, she merely announced, "We have need of you," saying that a great adventure awaited him. Solovar was shocked at the presence of a human in Gorilla City, seeing as the Flash was the only outsider who knew it existed.

Reeling in shock, Solovar reached for Harbinger, only to be knocked unconscious as his arm passed through her. Solovar's guards attempted to capture and kill her, but she disappeared with their king. As she faded away, she lamented how similar apes and humans were, with violence being their first instinct. But in the apes' defense, had she provided them with an explanation for who she was and why she needed Solovar, such unpleasantness could probably have been avoided.

Sticking to her policy of "Never issue a straightforward invitation when a wild goose chase is an option," Harbinger's next stop was the 30th century. It was fitting that we went from a proto-human to a human-animal hybrid in Dawnstar, a winged member of the Legion of Super-Heroes who had the ability to track "one errant pebble spinning through the Mutaran asteroid belt." The fact that she was not native to Earth was also noteworthy, building on the idea that even though the various versions of Earth were prioritized in this story, other planets throughout the multiverse were affected too. (Note that Solovar and his fellow gorillas also originated from the planet Calor, as shown in *DC Super-Stars* #14).

Dawnstar was also angelic in form, symbolizing humanity's aspirations toward spiritual purity, a stark contrast to the seemingly primitive gorillas.

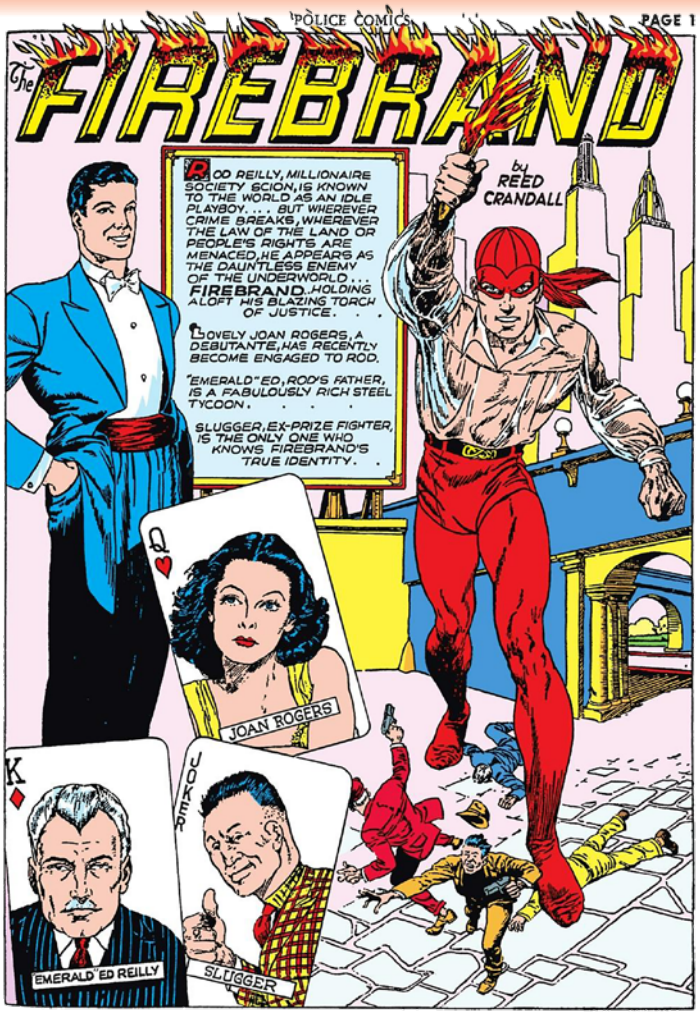
Dawnstar was in the midst of responding to a mysterious summons to the recently rebuilt Legion headquarters (destroyed by Wildfire in *Legion of Super-Heroes* #251 as part of the "Omega" storyline). While wondering who had called her, she saw a strange light in the sky. She tracked it to Suicide Slum, a dangerous part of Metropolis that she'd never visited before, then a hand materialized out of a wall, accompanied by a voice that said, "I need you Dawnstar" before it whisked her away. Considering Dawnstar's abilities as a tracker, it seems a fitting way to trap her into coming along on the journey.

The significance of Suicide Slum as the location of Harbinger's recruitment effort should not be overlooked. Dawnstar was defined by her connection to the cosmos. But rather than summon her to a galactic battlefield, Harbinger led her to a place associated with filth, desperation, and decay. Dawnstar was like a fallen angel cast into a broken, corrupt world, the very name of which, "Suicide Slum," foreshadowed the omnipresent presence of death in this series. Through this juxtaposition of purity and corruption, cosmic freedom and street-level grittiness, Wolfman and Pérez signaled that even the brightest lights must confront the darkest corners of the multiverse and perhaps themselves before unity could emerge from the crisis.

From the 30th century we leapt back to 1942 on Earth-Two (though it was not labeled as such) where a similar abduction was about to take place. This time it was Firebrand, a.k.a. Danette Reilly. She was actually the second Firebrand in comicdom, although she was the first Firebrand in the DCU. The first Firebrand was her brother, Rod, a Quality Comics character who debuted in *Police Comics* #1 (1941). He was an Olympic-level athlete who had exceptional hand-to-hand combat skills but no superpowers. Danette, a volcanologist, gained pyrokinetic abilities after being struck by a mystical bolt fired by Wotan (a frequent foe of Doctor Fate who debuted in *More Fun Comics* #55) and falling into some artificial lava during an attack orchestrated by Per Degaton. After discovering her brother's secret identity and his incapacitation due to injuries, she adopted the name Firebrand to continue his legacy, becoming a prominent member of the All-Star Squadron.

This time Harbinger's avatar appeared in the midst of a war bond rally where Danette was helping in the kitchen. Harbinger froze everyone in place, then revealed she knew Danette's secret identity. To prove it, she burned away Danette's clothes, revealing her Firebrand costume beneath. Despite the gratuitous theatrics, Firebrand felt she could trust Harbinger, and the two women vanished.

"But their disappearance does not go unnoticed," a caption told us, and a shadowy figure issued a "deep, throaty laugh" that echoed throughout the room. The figure's resemblance to what had been seen of the Monitor would not have been lost on readers, with this perhaps being Wolfman's attempt to create suspense by continuing to raise doubts about the Monitor's true intentions.



The first Firebrand from *Police Comics* #1, Quality Comics, 1941. Though later eclipsed by Plastic Man, Firebrand helped anchor one of the Golden Age's most important superhero anthologies.

Once again failing to inform readers which world we were on, the story moved to a tense hostage negotiation atop a building on a planet later designated as Earth-Four, recently created homeworld for Charlton's "Action Heroes." As the criminals demanded a chopper and cash, they were interrupted by the Blue Beetle. "And here I thought I'd be forgotten after all this time," he said as he descended on a cable from his airship, known as the Bug. Like Firebrand, this was actually the second Blue Beetle, a.k.a. Ted Kord, created by Steve Ditko and premiering in a backup story in *Captain Atom* #83 (1966), published by Charlton. Ted Kord was a scientist and inventor, an expert in engineering and hand-to-hand combat. Unlike his predecessor, Dan Garrett, who gained superpowers from a mystical scarab, Kord didn't possess any superpowers. Instead, Kord relied on his intellect, physical training, and a variety of gadgets. Kord was a student of Garrett's and took up the mantle of the Blue Beetle following his mentor's death. Prior to *Americomics Special* #1 (1983), he last saw action in his own title in *Blue*



Fox's Blue Beetle, Dan Garret, debuted in *Mystery Men Comics* #1 in 1939, making him one of the anthology's signature heroes. After Fox collapsed in 1950, Dan Garrett moved to Charlton. DC bought the Charlton Heroes in 1983, folding Blue Beetle into its universe through Ted Kord, who makes his first appearance on the cover of *Crisis* #1.

Beetle #5 (1968), both of which were published by Charlton, hence his surprise at being remembered.

As he dispatched the kidnappers and flirted with their captive, Harbinger appeared and issued her invitation. "Why not?" Blue Beetle said. "It's a lousy night for TV anyway!" Considering he had no powers, it seems his sense of humor was the most potent asset he'd bring to the team that Harbinger was assembling, though even that ability was questionable.

Back in history we went, this time 45,000 years into Earth-One's past. As Harbinger flew over a frozen wasteland, she wondered where the wizard Arion was, worried that the Monitor would be furious if she couldn't find him and that she'd have no excuse for her failure. It was as if Wolfman fell victim to his bad memory yet again. Just a few pages earlier, she'd reminded the Monitor that they were equals, and she was no longer his slave, so why did she seem so afraid of him here?

Such inconsistencies were swept aside by a new peril. The same shadowy figure we'd witnessed on Earth-Two pursued Harbinger. By the time she realized what was happening, it was too late. In a panel that was rendered in black and white rather than full color, she recognized the figure, saying, "What? No—not you!" as it disappeared into her midsection. The next time we saw her, Harbinger's eyes had turned black, indicating she'd been possessed. This may have seemed like a relatively minor moment—indeed, the possession sequence occupied just five panels in a story that consisted of hundreds—but it was a crucial turning point in Harbinger's journey and the development of the central metaphor at the heart of *Crisis*.

The Monitor, as cosmic observer, cataloging all the alternate earths and watching the vast multiverse unfold, was like the ultimate fanboy. His obsession with gathering data and pitting heroes and villains against one another so he can catalog their strengths and weaknesses mirrored the compulsive indexing of long-time comic book fans who also preserved, organized, and mapped the complex web of timelines, worlds, and characters in the DCU. The Monitor represented the ideal of archival integrity, the conviction that all stories matter and can be made to fit if we study them carefully and take time to understand them. He believed in preservation, not deletion. He regarded contradictions not as problems to be solved but as layers of myth that accrued over time, contributions that enriched the story by adding various perspectives as the tale was repeated again and again around the campfire. Therefore, his goal was to understand, not simplify, to find logic and harmony within a seemingly chaotic, sprawling mythos. But when the decision was made that this multiverse was too much for new readers and those tasked with telling new stories within it, he had to find a way to unify it all into one Earth, one history, and one canon.

As the Monitor's emissary, gathering champions from across the multiverse to facilitate this goal, Harbinger is like the Monitor's hands-on historian, reaching into each timeline and parallel universe to rescue what matters. If the Monitor is the editorial archivist, Harbinger is the continuity fixer, curating which stories and characters from throughout the DCU that can survive into the next version. In a word, she's Marv Wolfman.

However, despite the Monitor and Harbinger's efforts to preserve and balance the multiverse, we know almost from the beginning that their mission is doomed. No amount of curation, indexing, or fan reverence can prevent the inevitable loss. Furthermore, there's no way to engage in this process without being tainted, if not consumed, by it. As the embodiment of reverent stewardship, when Harbinger is possessed by the shadow demon, it's like she becomes a slave to the Anti-Monitor's editorial mandate. The agent of preservation is transformed into an unwilling executioner of continuity itself. It's not she who chooses to kill the Monitor. It's the invisible force of change, of narrative simplification, that compels her. Like Harbinger, Wolfman may have started out with good intentions, but in this possession scene, the shadow demon could be taken to represent the commercial pressures, the demands of new readers, and executive edicts to "Trim the fat. Lose the confusion. Make it modern and accessible." Whatever the cause, it's portrayed here as inherently evil, a force that, for a moment, bleeds all color from the world, reducing Harbinger to a series of black and white lines, then turns her into a slave to that shadow, which is evidenced in her black eyes. This brings to mind a passage from the Gospel of Matthew: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22–23) How great indeed!

Harbinger's possession can be taken as a metaphor for when love of continuity is twisted into the very weapon that kills it. Harbinger doesn't revel in her actions; she mourns them. This reflects the guilt of creators who participate in retcons and reboots, knowing full well what will be lost in the process. Even though Wolfman, Pérez, and the rest of the creative team undertook this project willingly, they did so knowing that unless drastic action was taken, DC itself was doomed to fail. The multiverse might be lost in the process, but hopefully the essence of DC would survive, the benefits outweighing the heavy costs.





Mr. Paradox (left) from *Deadpool and Wolverine* (2024) and Mobius. M. Mobius (right), Mark Gruenwald's proxy in the Time Variance Authority (TVA). A TVA judge, Mr. Paradox managers resemble continuity guru Mark Gruenwald, embodying editorial order, timeline policing, and Marvel's deep fixation on continuity.

In these opening pages, therefore, Wolfman and co. could be seen as subtly critiquing their own project. Harbinger's emotional journey—betrayal, guilt, action—mirrors the inner conflict of a creator asked to participate in the erasure of what they love. It's as if they're saying, "We tried to respect the old stories. We loved them. But the reboot was coming, and if we didn't do it, someone else would, so the least we could do was try to save a remnant of what we love." As Mr. Paradox says in *Deadpool and Wolverine,* "the multiverse does not need a babysitter; we need a mercy killer," and with this series, Wolfman and his collaborators are charged with that role.

The good news is, even though the Monitor dies, Harbinger doesn't. Instead, she becomes instrumental in leading the battle to shape the new reality. She helps guide the survivors and records the transition. Symbolically, she becomes the continuity historian who feels duty bound to document the new canon, even though she helped destroy the old one. This is the ultimate metaphor for a comic creator post-reboot. They remember what was lost, and they regret the role they played, but they also lend a hand in helping shape what comes next.

Still apparently acting under her own control—is only one facet of Harbinger possessed or her entire being?—another Harbinger avatar goes to present-day Earth-Two, where she recruits Roger Hayden, a.k.a. Psycho Pirate. He's in mental anguish, wearing a straitjacket in a padded cell, suffering from the pain that comes from manipulating other people's emotions. He's like an addict in rehab, sweating his way through the agony of withdrawal. He claims he wants no further part in it, but when Harbinger unveils the Medusa mask that initially gave him this ability, he's like a junkie presented with a free score, allowing it to meld to his face before she whisks him away. Seeing as she can travel to any point in history, why Harbinger doesn't recruit him earlier in his career before he was so emotionally damaged is unclear, but perhaps the Psycho Pirate's unhinged state will make him easier for the Monitor to manipulate.

When Harbinger's avatar finally tracks down Arion, he is out on an ice floe, musing about the threat that the encroaching ice poses to Atlantis—perhaps a metaphor for the impending end of his series, which ceased publication in September 1985. It could be because she's possessed, but she doesn't even bother with an invitation. Instead, she shatters the bridge he just used his magic to build, then spirits him away.

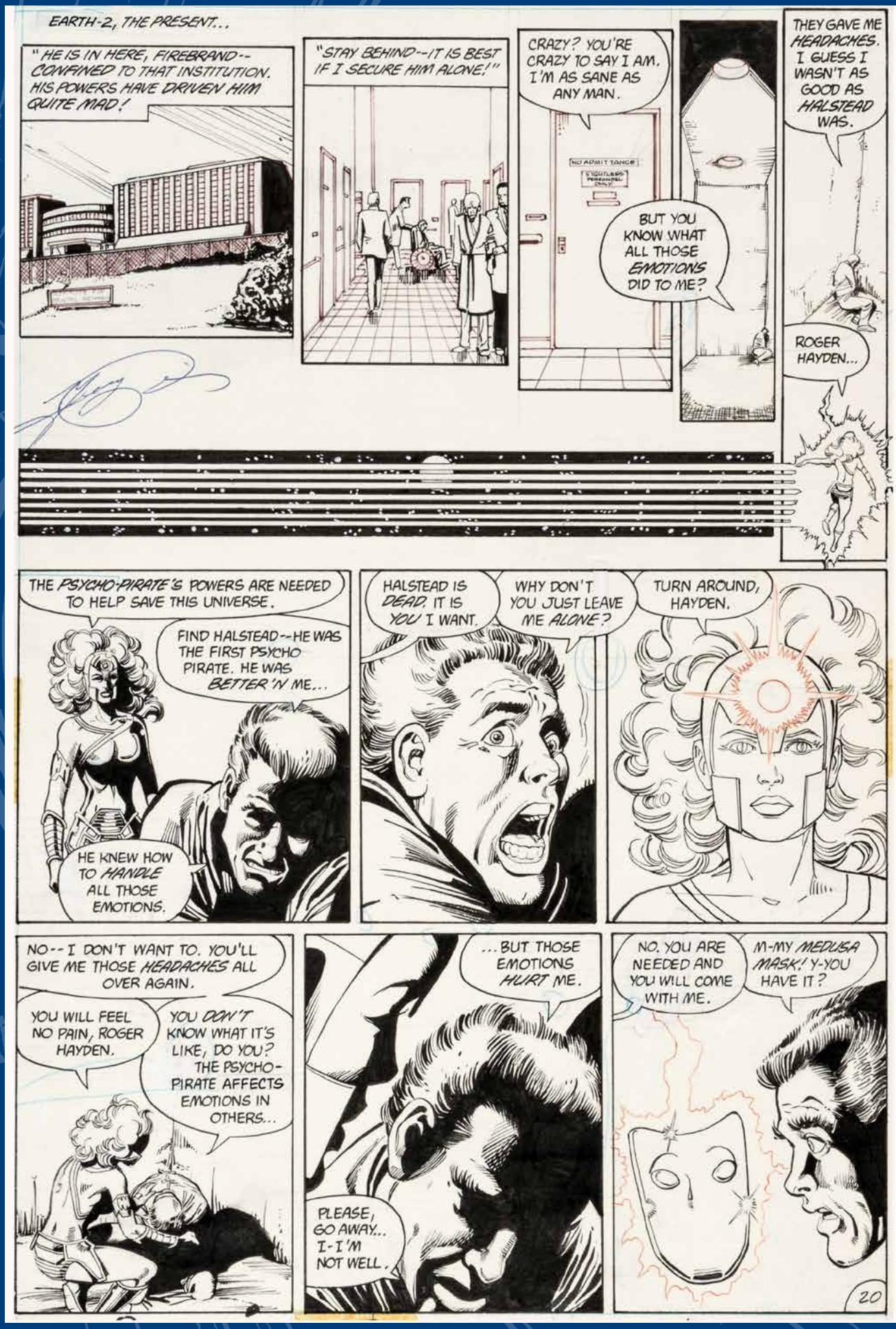
Continuing the "Earth-One/Earth-Two-centrism" that has characterized the DCU up to this point, we return to the present on Earth-One where Firestorm, whose recruitment is shown in *The Fury of Firestorm* #41, helps Harbinger spring Killer Frost from prison. They get some help from Psycho Pirate, who makes Killer Frost fall in love with her archenemy, much to Firestorm's chagrin. Psycho Pirate's presence indicates that this Harbinger is the same avatar who recruited him from Earth-Two.

We pull back from the scene where the Monitor reminds us that time is running out and that another earth has perished, along with five heroes he needed, none of whom are named, nor is their world. But based on his speech to the heroes in the opening pages of issue #2, it's safe to assume he's referring to Earth-Three, home of Ultraman, Owlman, Superwoman, Power Ring, and Johnny Quick. Why he wasn't able to save them—or Alex Luthor—is unclear, especially considering his ability to travel through time. Why didn't he get Harbinger to pluck them from Earth-Three before the anti-matter wave hit? In fact, considering his time-travel abilities, he could still do that. For someone who is capable of traveling anywhere on the timeline, the notion of time running out should be irrelevant, but it's a theme he returns to over and over. Instead of doing the obvious, he says he has dispatched Harbinger's replicants to find replacements for these lost heroes. This is odd too because she seemed to be the one in charge of her duplicate selves, declaring herself to be equal with him. Nothing ever comes of this plot point either. Could this be the explanation for the five extra replicants shown previously? Were they under the Monitor's control? Perhaps this is the reason for her resentment toward him earlier.

We also get our first peek into Lyla's backstory here. The Monitor notes she's from Earth-One, that he found her as a child lost at sea, and that she's been with him for twenty years. He also says he loves her like a daughter and never suspected she would become his killer, a fact that he accepts as inevitable. It's the first bit of heavy-handed foreshadowing regarding what's to come.

The next two-page spread showcases some of Pérez's "character acting" in his depiction of the first round of

(opposite page) *Crisis* #1, p. 20 original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Why the Monitor chose to recruit Psycho Pirate at a point on the timeline when he was psychologically unstable rather than before his powers drove him mad is a mystery that also appears to be a tactical error.


EARTH-2, THE PRESENT...
"HE IS IN HERE, FIREBRAND--CONFINED TO THAT INSTITUTION. HIS POWERS HAVE DRIVEN HIM QUITE MAD!
"STAY BEHIND--IT IS BEST IF I SECURE HIM ALONE!"
CRAZY? YOU'RE CRAZY TO SAY I AM. I'M AS SANE AS ANY MAN.
NO ADMITTANCE
BUT YOU KNOW WHAT ALL THOSE EMOTIONS DID TO ME?
THEY GAVE ME HEADACHES. I GUESS I WASN'T AS GOOD AS HALSTEAD WAS.
ROGER HAYDEN...
THE PSYCHO-PIRATE'S POWERS ARE NEEDED TO HELP SAVE THIS UNIVERSE.
FIND HALSTEAD--HE WAS THE FIRST PSYCHO PIRATE. HE WAS BETTER 'N ME...
HE KNEW HOW TO HANDLE ALL THOSE EMOTIONS.
HALSTEAD IS DEAD. IT IS YOU I WANT.
WHY DON'T YOU JUST LEAVE ME ALONE?
TURN AROUND, HAYDEN.
NO--I DON'T WANT TO. YOU'LL GIVE ME THOSE HEADACHES ALL OVER AGAIN.
YOU WILL FEEL NO PAIN, ROGER HAYDEN.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE, DO YOU? THE PSYCHO-PIRATE AFFECTS EMOTIONS IN OTHERS...
...BUT THOSE EMOTIONS HURT ME.
PLEASE, GO AWAY... I-I'M NOT WELL.
NO. YOU ARE NEEDED AND YOU WILL COME WITH ME.
M-MY MEDUSA MASK! Y-YOU HAVE IT?
20

conscripts on board the Monitor's satellite. Not only are they posed in ways that befit their character, everyone gets a line or at least a thought balloon. Many of these characters were recruited either off panel (Cyborg, Geo-Force, Superman of Earth-Two, and Dr. Polaris) or in a crossover (Firestorm, Obsidian, Green Lantern (John Stewart), and Psimon). A caption describes this group as those who have been assembled from Earth-One and Earth-Two, seemingly overlooking Blue Beetle's presence. Considering that his Earth wasn't named when Harbinger approached him, many readers at the time probably assumed Blue Beetle was from Earth-One rather than Earth-Four. A letter from John Ordover in *Crisis* #4 addresses this oversight, earning the following terse response from Wolfman: "About Blue Beetle—it doesn't make any difference what Earth he and his fellow 'Charlton' heroes were on. It ain't there no more."

Alrighty then.



***Crisis* #1, p. 32. The Monitor finally reveals himself in one of the few splash pages to be found in the series. Attentive readers would have noted the differences in his costume compared to the pre-*Crisis* peeks, but perhaps he just has different outfits for different occasions.**

Flying overhead is Firebrand. She recognizes Superman but notes that he appears to be much older than the Superman she knows. That's because even though they're both from Earth-Two, Harbinger recruited an older version of Superman rather than plucking him out of the timestream at the same moment she nabbed Firebrand. With many of his pre-*Crisis* adventures making a big deal about how Superman's powers have waned over time, one wonders why she didn't recruit him at his prime. It could be because what he lacks in power he makes up for with wisdom and experience. However, a more cynical view suggests that recruiting an older version of Superman would make it easier for readers to distinguish him from his Earth-One analog, seeing as for most of their history they looked almost exactly the same.

While the heroes and villains take in the satellite, size each other up, and wonder why they're there, they're attacked by shadowy figures that are carbon copies of the one that possessed Harbinger. With Superman declaring they've been caught in a trap, they seek to defend themselves from what appear to be living shadows. Prior to sending Lyla/Harbinger on her mission, the Monitor said, "Our greatest hope lies with both so-called heroes and villains fighting alongside each other." What comes next is the first test of this theory.

Green Lantern's ring is powerless against the shadow creatures, but plain, old fisticuffs are effective. Never mind the fact that, later, a mere touch from the "shadow demons," as Killer Frost dubs them, will be enough to burn someone. Are they merely testing the heroes and villains here rather than using their full power? For the moment, it's like a UFC cage match, with Firebrand blasting them with flames, Cyborg slamming them with his signature "million decibels of white sound," and Obsidian realizing they can't touch him while in his shadow form. Arion, Dr. Polaris, Killer Frost, and Psimon's powers are able to slow the shadow demons down, if not defeat them. As for Harbinger, she's nowhere to be found. That's because she's reverted to her Lyla form, having reintegrated her replicants but utterly spent from using her powers.

In the midst of the melee, a blast of blinding white light sends the shadow demons fleeing. When it fades, another shadowy figure informs the group that the attack was not planned, though it was not unexpected, and it wasn't Harbinger's fault. This leads one to wonder what the purpose of the attack was, why light causes the shadow demons to flee (why isn't this tactic used later in *Crisis*?), and why whoever is behind the light didn't intervene earlier. Was this another test?

As the light fades, that figure is revealed to be the Monitor, shown in full for the first time. He's wearing a skin-tight navy bodysuit under silver and gold armor and a kilt. His corn-row hair forms a widow's peak on his forehead and is accompanied by mutton-chop sideburns. With his protruding brow, he looks similar enough to the Martian Manhunter that someone should have asked whether he also originated from the red planet. Along with the reveal of his name—no longer a role but a proper noun—the Monitor also has some grim news to share. "I have summoned you here because your universes are about to die!"

CHAPTER 12

"Time and Time Again" — Crisis #2

A caption at the end of *Crisis* #1 promises the next issue will span from the dawn of man to the Great Disaster, echoing the "from Anthro the first boy to Kamandi the last boy on Earth" spiel that Wein and Wolfman used when first pitching the series. While Anthro is absent from the cover of *Crisis* #2, Kamandi is front and center. He's shown at a moment of deep distress as he and several of the heroes that Harbinger recruited face off against a shadow demon, whose looming black figure dominates the scene. In the foreground, a gold tower rises above the ruins of the Great Disaster. The Statue of Liberty is poking up from the debris behind it, leaving no doubt about the location—the post-apocalyptic ruins of New York City. A title above the logo says, "From Anthro to the Legion of Super-Heroes and BEYOND!" even though the Legion is absent from the cover.

Just as issue #1 opened at the dawn of time, this issue begins at the dawn of humankind, or at least the first generation of what we might call humans. And similar to how the first issue started with people fleeing the anti-matter cloud while Pariah flew above, this issue opens with a group of people threatened by a different type of natural disaster—a herd of woolly mammoths or "serpent-noses," as they're called here. They are threatening to trample the Bear people's village, which is home to Anthro and his family. And like Pariah, Anthro is literally above the fray, riding the lead mammoth as he attempts to steer them away from his people.

Created by Howard Post and first appearing in *Showcase* #74 (1968), Anthro is a young Cro-Magnon born to Neanderthal parents. This represents a huge leap forward in human evolution, hence his designation as the "first boy." After his short-lived solo title, which ran for six issues, Anthro was seen infrequently until his appearance here. Anthro isn't just the first boy, though. Chronologically, he's also DC's first hero—at least he's trying to be.

Digging his spear into the mammoth's neck, he tries to redirect the herd away from his village, but it's not working. Like Pariah, Alex Luthor, and the members of the Crime Syndicate, he seems powerless to stop the menace that's



The cover for *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #2. Although the setting is the far-flung future world of Kamandi, members of other away teams who were dispatched to different eras and locations are shown in this mash-up of their battles to protect the Monitor's towers from the shadow demons.



A woolly mammoth. These shaggy Ice Age elephants roamed northern Eurasia and North America, coexisting with humans for tens of thousands of years. Isolated populations survived until about 4,000 years ago, perhaps wandering as far south as Gotham and Metropolis.

threatening his people. As his father (Ne-Ahn), pregnant wife (Embra), younger brother (Lart), and the rest of his people watch with fear, Anthro shouts a warning to them, but they can't hear him.

Then, in a departure from the feeling of hopelessness that prevailed in the opening sequence of the first issue, at the last second he gets the mammoths to turn. As Embra cheers him on, calling Anthro a hero, he goes into celebration mode a bit too early and hits his head on a low-hanging branch. It knocks him off the mammoth, and when he sits up, he's astounded to see a ghostly, futuristic city, which he interprets as a village. This would have made sense if his frame of reference were limited to the prehistoric age. But *Showcase* #100 has Anthro and his father travel to the future, where they see all sorts of similar technological wonders. However, perhaps this event takes place prior to that excursion. At any rate, when Anthro draws the others' attention to the city, it's gone, leaving even Anthro to wonder if it was merely an illusion caused by the blow to his head. But as Lart notes to himself, not only is the "village" gone, so are the mammoths.

That's because they've been transported to 30th-century Metropolis, where they're the Legion's problem now. This seems to imply that the land that Anthro and his people once roamed eventually became the site of Metropolis. Could it also mean that the people who live there in the future are Anthro's descendants, with him and Embra playing the role of Adam and Eve? This theory could be confounded by the fact that when various epochs begin to bleed together in issue #5, Anthro and his fellow tribe members pop up in Wayne Manor, which is in Gotham, not Metropolis. However, as recently as *World's Finest* #279 (1979), Gotham and Metropolis were shown to be located across the bay from each other, so it could be that Anthro and Embra are the progenitors of both cities.

Either way, this scene helps establish a baseline for what it means to be a hero in the DCU. Lacking superpowers, Anthro represents heroism in a raw, unformed, and even innocent state. With only his wits and his primitive tools to rely on, Anthro is engaged in a constant battle against nature. But hubris has already entered the picture. Even before he's completed his mission, Anthro is anticipating how he'll be celebrated by his people for saving his village and the stories he'll tell his children. Having Embra call him a hero is the icing on the cake, but it's also the very thing that causes him not to see the tree branch that brings his celebration to an abrupt end.

It's fitting, then, that the moment after this happens, the first thing Anthro sees is what could be called the epitome of hubris—30th-century Metropolis. It's a perfected version of the civilization that the Bear Tribe is seeking to establish, the ultimate triumph of man over nature. In fact, there's not a shred of nature to be seen in this city. It's nothing but buildings.

French philosopher Jacques Ellul sees cities as inherently evil because he believes they symbolize human rebellion against God and nature. He bases this on the biblical story of Cain, who founded the first city to protect himself from the consequences of murdering his brother, Abel. In Ellul's reading, this act makes cities the product of violence and sin. For him, cities aren't just a place where people live; they're a symbol of humanity trying to create its own order and security apart from God and nature.[163] Furthermore, cities aren't just physical spaces; they are engines that amplify human pride, domination, and environmental destruction.

One doesn't have to agree with Ellul to see the connection that Wolfman was making here. The future city that Anthro glimpses isn't just a technological achievement; it's a symbol of humanity trying to build a self-sufficient future divorced from the natural world in which Anthro and his people are immersed, potentially motivated by the very pride that knocked him off the mammoth. As a result, that city is about to be judged by nature itself. The complete suppression of the natural world in the futuristic version of Metropolis is made all the more apparent when the mammoths that Anthro was redirecting away from his village stampede through that city. This leads to yet another scene of a crowd fleeing impending disaster. The residents of Metropolis are so divorced from nature that a citizen passing overhead in a flying car doesn't even know what the creatures are.

Taking control of the situation are a group of teenagers similar in age to Anthro. Just as their city represents the epitome of civilization, this group is the embodiment of the hero that Anthro aspires to be. They even call themselves the Legion of Super-*Heroes*. Like Anthro, they've taken it upon themselves to save their people from disaster, but rather than mere wits and primitive tools, they have an assortment of superpowers and technology at their disposal. Even though they have every reason to be proud, unlike Anthro, they are motivated by a sense of selfless duty rather

163 For more on this, see his book, *The Meaning of the City*.

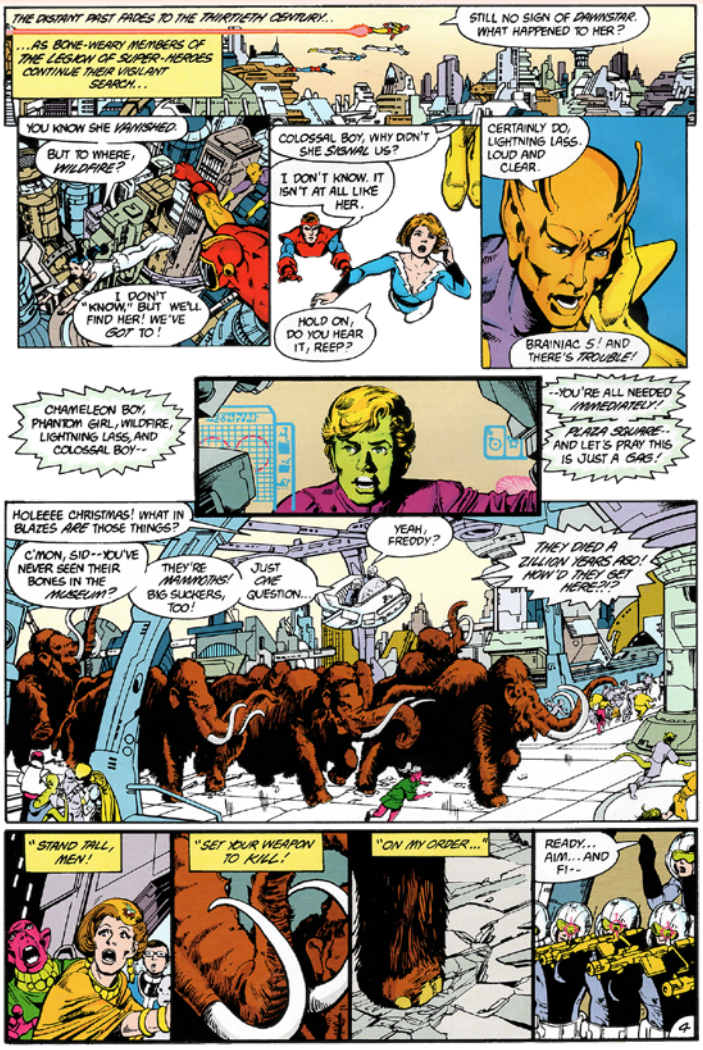
than a quest for glory. This presents an optimistic view of humanity contra Ellul, demonstrating that even though cities may amplify some of humanity's worst tendencies, they can also have the opposite effect.

Guided by Brainiac-5, fellow Legionnaires Phantom Girl, Wildfire, Colossal Boy, Lightning Lass, and Chameleon Boy interrupt their search for Dawnstar to deal with the mammoths, only for the beasts to disappear. As the others try to figure out why, Brainiac-5 realizes they've got a bigger problem on their hands. "[H]igh-intensity frequency waves on the alpha/omega scale," a.k.a. anti-matter, are moving toward Earth, "Enough energy to destroy not only us," Brainiac-5 says, "but the universe!"

Anthro's vision of Metropolis and the mammoths appearing there is our first indication that the crisis isn't just causing natural disasters; it's also causing temporal anomalies, which are only going to increase. However, this also raises the conundrum of how the anti-matter can be attacking at various points in space *and* time. If the anti-matter destroys parts of Earth in the past, wouldn't that mean those areas in the 30th century would cease to exist? And if it's threatening Earth in the past, why doesn't the Monitor send his tuning fork towers and his 15 champions—or every super-powered being he can get his hands on—to that point in history to defeat it rather than spreading them out across the timeline? Furthermore, why does the Anti-Monitor dilute his attack across time? Why not focus all of his energy in just one era, preferably deep in the past, henceforth eliminating any potential opposition before it has a chance to exist? It could be that, with a handful of DC's characters being avid time travelers, the Anti-Monitor wants to prevent them from stopping him by attacking multiple points on the timeline simultaneously. However, that assumes there is only one timeline in the DCU, which doesn't appear to be the case.

Throughout DC's pre-*Crisis* history, time travel was a mainstay across the multiverse. Numerous characters traveled into the past or the future at one point or another, leading to the sort of conundrums and paradoxes which attempts to influence the past and the future create. In fact, one of the central arguments that Wolfman used to justify *Crisis* was the existence of different versions of the future within the DCU. For instance, the version of the 30th century in which Superboy visits the Legion of Super-Heroes and the one that Barry Allen visits (and which his wife, Iris, is from) are not the same, even though all these characters live on Earth-One. Complicating matters, *Adventure Comics* #373 reveals that Barry and Iris have descendants (the Tornado Twins) in the 30th-century version of Metropolis in which Superboy and the Legion have their adventures.

Then there's *Superman* #295, in which the Man of Steel uses his "time-screen" to home in on his stolen super suit, only to discover a bearded man wearing it as he rides a horse through the ruins of a city in the future, waving a sword. What Superman sees bears no resemblance to the future he recalls visiting, so he travels there to figure out what's going on. Along the way, he passes through a cataclysmic event



***Crisis* #2, p. 4. Chaos is unleashed on the streets of 30th century Metropolis as a pack of mammoths that had been threatening Andro's tribe are transported into the future as a byproduct of the Anti-Monitor's multi-temporal attack.**

that could be the Great Disaster described in Jack Kirby's *Kamandi* series. The near extinction of the human race due to some unspecified cataclysm is followed by the rise of mutated intelligent animals who are then overthrown by a race of super-developed humans. When Superman arrives in 2975—30 years after Iris West was born and around the same time the Legion of Super-Heroes stories take place—instead of either of their versions of the future, he finds Metropolis in ruins and populated by humans who are living in a primitive state. After treating Superman as an interloper who must be destroyed, their leader, Jaxon, who is wearing Superman's stolen super suit and has some of his powers, comes to revere him as the long-awaited second coming of their god.

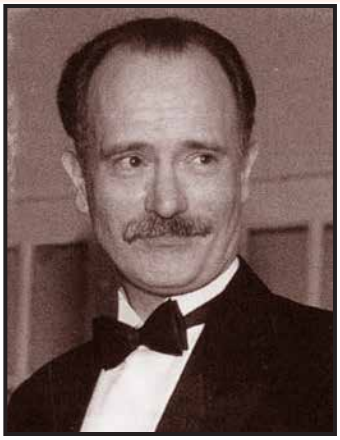
Kamandi #29, in which Superman's costume is an object of worship among the apes following the Great Disaster, seems to forge a link between these two futures, especially considering that this story and *Superman* #295 came out within a year of

each other. But the *Crisis Compendium* gives the future world of *Superman* #295 its own designation (Earth-295), with Kamandi's world regarded as merely one potential future for Earth-One or else relegated to its own earth, known as Earth-AD (After Disaster), a name that first appeared in the letters column of *Freedom Fighters* #3.

An argument for Kamandi's world being a future version of Earth-Prime can be made due to the presence of a copy of *The Brave and the Bold* #118 that a shaman shows to Kamandi in *The Brave and the Bold* #120. This happens as the shaman explains that he used magic to summon Batman to the future to help him and his people escape the animal slave patrols that are keeping them confined to Mount Rushmore. The cover of that comic is an exact duplicate of the one from our world, as comics on Earth-Prime tend to be. Plus, Earth-Prime's comics are usually about Earth-One heroes while comics on Earth-One are about Earth-Two's heroes.

Although never officially released, following the cancellation of *Kamandi,* two more issues were published as part of *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade,* a two-issue "ashcan" series consisting of unpublished issues and partially completed stories from various canceled DC titles that was printed to create an official copyright record. Picking up where the final issue of *Kamandi* leaves off, in the first of the unpublished issues, he enters the Vortex, which is believed to be the source of the Great Disaster that devastated Earth. As he floats in the void, a seemingly endless number of earths extends into infinity as a voice explains the multiverse to him. The voice says that just as there are many different earths, "each created differently depending on the twists and turns of certain times," including earths where the Great Disaster never happened, there's an infinite number of Kamandis as well. The path he chooses to go within the Vortex will determine which one of these many potential futures will come about. This goes against the idea of every parallel universe being created simultaneously and aligns more with the "many worlds" interpretation of quantum physics mentioned earlier, whereby when a quantum event occurs, such as the measurement of an electron's spin, the universe splits into multiple versions, one for every possible outcome.

Adding another layer of confusion, the unfortunately named Green Lantern "Xenofobe" tells Superman at the end of *Superman* #295 that the anomalous future he saw was the work of the Time Trapper—a mysterious, hooded villain who exists at the end of time and often opposes the Legion of Super-Heroes. Xenofobe explains that 1,000 years in the future, the Time Trapper sent the power from all the Green Lanterns' rings into the "time-dimension, wiping out all of Earth's possible futures but one—a future in which a natural disaster ended mankind's reign on Earth … so that the Trapper's foes—the Legion of Super-Heroes—never existed!" To fix this problem, Xenofobe arranged a battle between Superman and Jaxon, "mightiest of future beings," as a way to generate enough power to counteract the power rings' stolen energy and restore all possible futures. It worked, and now "the Legion exists in one parallel future, Jaxon in another!"



Mark Gruenwald (1953–1996) was a writer, editor, and continuity expert whose passion for shared-universe logic helped define superhero comics. Best known for his Marvel work, especially *Captain America* and *Squadron Supreme*, he championed rigorous continuity thinking, multiverse order, and encyclopedic world-building across comics culture.

In a detailed discussion of time travel in *A Treatise on Reality in Comic Literature,* Mark Gruenwald argues that such "inconsistencies" are merely apparent rather than actual, seeing as the nature of time travel dictates that "there is more than one possible future for any given parallel Earth."[164] Put another way, all time-travel stories are parallel-world stories in disguise.

Gruenwald's theory starts with a process he calls "Chronal Displacement Inertia." Imagine a time traveler "dropping out of gear" so that "one's vibration rate becomes zero, and one enters the Timeless World thru which time travel is possible."[165] To reach a specific era, the time traveler must recalibrate their vibrational rate to that time period, similar to how the Flash recalibrated his vibrational rate to pass between universes.

But here's where things get tricky. To account for alternative versions of the future within the same universe, Gruenwald introduces the concept of "Sideways Slippage," which he says is a necessary corollary of time travel and the vibrational nature of the multiverse. This means the act of time travel is a divergent event that creates a parallel timeline, which vibrates at a different frequency than the original timeline. Which version of the future a time traveler ends up in is determined by the means of time travel they employ and the vibration rate they attain after emerging from Gruenwald's "Timeless World." Time travel into the future can't be strictly linear, Gruenwald argues, for if a time traveler returned to their original vibration rate afterward, they would find that their world had diverged due to the time-travel event, and their previous vibration rate would correspond to a future that doesn't exist. Therefore, time travel is never linear; it must always be tangential to the original timeline. This also implies that return visits to the same point in the future never take place in the same timeline because each trip to the future is a divergent event that creates a parallel timeline, even if it's only slightly different from the original. In accordance with this theory, which seems to align well with how the DCU operates, no definitive version of the future exists.

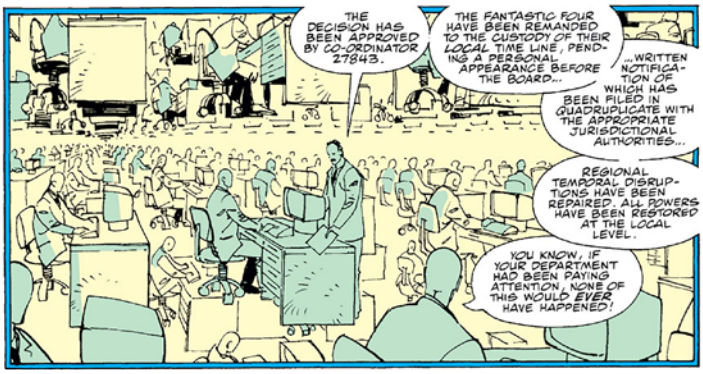
As for time travel into the past, due to the divergent nature of reality, Gruenwald argues that "many futures have

164 Gruenwald, 43.
165 Ibid., 44.

a common or shared past, and if one would trace events far back enough, an entire Primary System would have an early segment of the past in common."[166] This implies that the farther one travels into the past, the fewer divergent reality lines one will encounter, leading to what Gruenwald refers to as the "Funneling Effect." This describes "the tendency of a time traveler journeying into the past to remain near to the Reality Lines of his own (remembered) past."[167] The farther one travels into the past, the fewer reality lines one will encounter because fewer divergent events will have occurred. Just as in the future, no definitive version of the past exists except for the point at which all timelines first diverged.

If a time traveler created a divergent event in the past, rather than affect all the future timelines that stem from that point, it would merely create a new parallel timeline. Otherwise, one would encounter a paradox, where altering the past would affect all future timelines, thus negating the conditions that made travel into the past possible and potentially erasing the time traveler's existence. This is in keeping with Gruenwald's "Omniversal rule of reality," which states, "Nothing can be truly undone, the undoing is merely another possibility."[168] It also means that any "attempts to alter the past are exercises in futility since all one is doing is making the present more diverse"[169] by creating an alternate timeline.

Wolfman tries to get around this in *Crisis* #10 by having a group of heroes travel to the dawn of time to prevent the Anti-Monitor from reshaping all of existence into a single universe under his control, thus eliminating the multiverse. Following a linear time-travel model, however, this would create a paradoxical situation where cause and effect blur together. By intervening at the moment of the multiverse's creation, the Anti-Monitor and the heroes who oppose him would risk altering the very conditions that made the confrontation possible. Whether they succeeded or failed, it would



The Time Variance Authority from *Fantastic Four* #346. Marvel's TVA is a bureaucratic agency that monitors timelines and polices temporal interference across the multiverse. Operating from the Null-Time Zone, it serves as judge, jailer, and regulator.

166 Ibid., 52.
167 Ibid., 54.
168 Ibid., 55.
169 Ibid.

theoretically erase their timelines, creating a feedback loop where their actions negated their ability to travel back to the dawn of time in the first place—not to mention their existence. Although Gruenwald's theory of divergent events in the past creating parallel versions of the future eliminates this paradox, it also means the heroes' actions at the dawn of time don't overwrite the original multiverse but instead spawn an entirely new branch of reality. Thus, the multiverse they are trying to save is still destroyed in the original timeline, untouched by their actions and no longer accessible to them.

Some might argue that this detracts from the story's emotional stakes, seeing as the heroes believe they are saving what remains of the multiverse, when all they're actually doing (at least according to Gruenwald's theory) is creating a new timeline where a remnant of the multiverse survives. But the loss of the original multiverse still creates a feeling of irreversible change and grief, leading to a bittersweet victory. Hence, instead of saving the multiverse, the heroes' actions create a new and better reality but at great personal and cosmic cost. Even though the heroes thwart the Anti-Monitor's plan to annihilate all existence, ensuring that life will continue in some form, the heroes (and the readers) experience a deep sense of loss that the world they once knew and loved and those who inhabited it are no longer accessible to them.

If we bring Mark Gruenwald's time-travel theory to bear on the Anti-Monitor's multi-temporal assault, the anti-matter cloud is not striking different points along a single timeline. Instead, it is attacking multiple points across separate timelines. Each of these would already be distinct from the original timelines where the Monitor planted his tuning fork towers, since both trips to the past would be divergent events that spawned new branches. Therefore, even if the towers saved one version of the past, others would remain unaffected. This raises the specter of an endlessly multiplying problem—a regression without end. However, another perspective on the nature of time and time travel might resolve this paradox.

Einstein's special theory of relativity fundamentally changed our understanding of time in several key ways. According to this theory, space and time are united as a four-dimensional continuum called "spacetime." This transforms time into a dimension similar to the three spatial dimensions (length, height, and width) rather than something that flows independently of them. One of the most striking implications of this idea is that time becomes relative to movement through space. What that means is, two events that appear simultaneous to one observer may not appear simultaneous to another observer who is moving at a different velocity. This challenges the notion of a universal "now." The mathematics of relativity doesn't privilege any particular moment as "the present"; all moments in spacetime have equal status mathematically. This suggests that past, present, and future all exist at once at different coordinates in spacetime. Therefore, according to this theory, the Anti-Monitor would have to attack the multiverse at virtually every point on the timeline—past, present, and future—and the Monitor would have to defend the same. Whether Wolfman had this theory in mind when he contrived

the Anti-Monitor's plans is unknown, but it at least offers a way to avoid potential contradictions created by the Anti-Monitor's multi-temporal attack.

Returning to *Crisis* #2, Wildfire's inclusion here is intriguing in light of the wall of anti-matter or what Brainiac-5 refers to as "anti-matter energy" that's encroaching on the multiverse. Wildfire was once Drake Burroughs, an astro engineer who was working on a new type of propulsion system when he was hit by a blast of anti-matter energy (*Superboy* #195). Rather than kill him, it transformed Drake's body into a mass of "anti-energy," which his fellow scientists contained inside a special suit. While the accident gave Drake super powers, it also created a profound sense of isolation, rendering him unable to interact physically with others. His identity was intact, but his body was gone. As a result, on a personal level Drake has already endured the threat that's now facing the entire multiverse, and he's lived to tell the tale. If that's so, could he hold the key that might enable the multiverse to do the same? How did Drake survive the accident? Was it something special about him? The circumstances? The anti-matter energy to which he was exposed? Whatever it was, could that same quality be replicated at scale to save the multiverse? Maybe, but unfortunately, such questions are never acknowledged, much less explored, with Wildfire playing a relatively minor role in *Crisis.*

Back in 1985, we catch the Joker in the middle of what appears to be a typical theft and murder—standard fare for the Clown Prince of Crime during this era. But look closer, and the crime feels strangely off-kilter, even for him, brimming with symbolic undercurrents tied to the deeper ideas brewing beneath *Crisis.*

Having recently escaped Arkham Asylum yet again—as Detective Bullock informs Batman at the end of *Detective Comics* #558, a *Crisis* tie-in—the Joker has murdered a millionaire named Harold J. Standish III (remember that name), so he can steal the copyright to something of historical and cultural significance—silent comedy films. The Joker refers to ownership of these films in their original state as a "piddling matter," but now that they've undergone a new computer colorization process, they're worth millions. He's seizing the past not to preserve it but to profit from a clever repackaging of it, all the while laughing over the corpse of the films' former owner. This mirrors every fan's fear that when the companies that own the stories and characters they love change hands, those properties will be destroyed, misused, or altered beyond recognition. Like a careless or clueless studio executive, the Joker has no personal connection to the material. To him, the films are merely another commodity to bleed dry in the name of profit before they, too, are cast into the dustbin of history.



Buster Keaton's *Convict 13* (1920) offers a silent-comedy cousin to Arkham Asylum: a deadpan innocent trapped inside a lunatic institution of guards, riots, mistaken identity, and elastic gallows. Could this be one of the comedy films the Joker attempted to steal in *Crisis* #2?

In this case, silent comedy films could be seen as stand-ins for Golden and Silver Age characters and stories. Why comedy films in particular? Because comics were originally referred to as "the funnies," "the funny pages," or "funny books." Rather than preserve them in their original form, they're about to be corrupted for financial gain, with new technology playing a key role. It's like Wolfman could already feel the Hollywood studios breathing down the comic industry's neck, rubbing their hands together in gleeful anticipation of strip mining what, until then, had been the preserve of geeks, nerds, and obsessive-compulsive indexers. Cultivated with care over decades of devotion, one trip through the star-making machine threatened to reduce their beloved characters to little more than thin blue lines, faint sketches of what they once were, then traced over with broad, garish strokes, transforming them into corporate logos posing as personalities, smiling theme park mascots engineered to sell tickets and toys, fast-food versions of the myths they once were. At the same time, market realities and cultural shifts being what they were, it was a poison pill that the comic book industry would be forced to swallow over the next several decades. Even as many die-hard fans recoiled at the hollowed-out versions of their beloved heroes that appeared on the silver screen, Hollywood's money and mass appeal kept the medium from bankruptcy. The comic book industry faces the same dilemma every artist faces: the uneasy trade-off between staying true to the soul of their work and bowing, however reluctantly, to the demands of survival and the unrelenting pressures of the marketplace.

The Joker's theft is like a dark joke aimed at corporate meddling in the creative process. Silent films are viewed as obsolete and outdated, having no inherent value except for "the big ©," as the Joker puts it. He says this in a panel that shows a close-up of his face as he breaks the fourth wall and addresses readers directly, leaving no doubt as to Wolfman and Pérez's desire to emphasize this point. Ownership is everything, with the true value of such cultural artifacts being found not in what they are but what they can become. As the final pages of *Crisis* #12 made painfully clear, Wolfman thought nostalgia was for wimps and losers—and psychopaths—those too weak to cope with the uncertainty of the present or the future. The Joker killing the man who owned these films and claiming the rights for himself is a form of symbolic vandalism. It's like Wolfman was saying the wrong kind of people are taking control of our





(left) *The Prisoner* (1955), starring Alec Guinness. (right) The British TV series *The Prisoner* (1967–1968). The former is part of the Joker's elaborate clue for the Batman in *Crisis* #2, a clue that may reveal Marv Wolfman's inner turmoil regarding *Crisis* and the economic and corporate forces that made the series necessary.

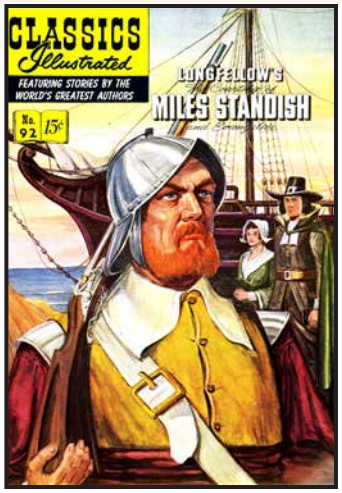
cultural history. In this case, a trickster archetype is stealing the past and seeking to change the way we remember it, which is exactly what *Crisis* was trying to do! Was Wolfman not only Pariah and Harbinger but the Joker too?

Viewed through this lens, the Joker could also be seen as the anti-archivist, a mocking echo of Harbinger. Where she gathers to preserve, the Joker plans to use a bastardized version of these films for personal gain. He hopes to elevate his stature and place himself among the legendary movie producers of the past—Mayer, DeMille, the Warner Brothers (the latter being DC's corporate owners at the time). This suggests a critique of the cynical commercialization of nostalgia and the commodification of legacy, two elements that *Crisis* was counting on to sell books. Through this act, the Joker becomes a living embodiment of what *Crisis* was about to do. Was this Wolfman's tacit acknowledgment of what he hoped *Crisis* would do for him and his career and his own inner conflict between his personal ambitions and his community-minded desire to save DC? It feels like yet another subtle self-critique of the very enterprise that Wolfman and co. were undertaking.

Interrupting the Joker's dreams of movie moguldom is Batman, who smashes through the window and declares that the only sequel the Joker will make is a follow-up to *The Prisoner,* "And I don't mean the one with the village!" This is a reference to the cerebral British TV show, *The Prisoner,* which ran from 1967 to 1968. It's about a British intelligence agent called Number Six who wakes up to find himself in a mysterious seaside village following his abrupt resignation from the British secret service. Like Number Six, the other residents have also been stripped of their identities and reduced to mere numbers. The village authorities, particularly his enigmatic captor, Number Two, attempt to break his will and extract the reason for his resignation, using psychological manipulation and deception. "I am not a number," is Number Six's repeated refrain, "I am a free man!", a line immortalized in the preamble to Iron Maiden's 1982 classic musical tribute to the show (see their album *The Number of the Beast*).

If the Joker's not going to make a sequel to *this* TV series, what other options are there? One possibility is the 1955 film *The Prisoner,* starring Alec Guinness. In this movie, Guinness plays a cardinal in an unnamed totalitarian state who is arrested and subjected to psychological interrogation. The cardinal is a man of conscience, integrity, and faith, but the state wants him to confess to fabricated crimes—not because he's guilty but because they want to destroy his moral authority. If Batman is referencing this film, it could be that he views the Joker as being like the interrogator who constantly questions the cardinal, but instead of working for the state, the Joker represents editorial authoritarianism. Remember, he just murdered a silent film copyright holder, seizing control of a narrative heritage. And very shortly, we're going to see him open fire on Barry Allen, the embodiment of the Silver Age and, arguably, the moral center of the multiverse. As fan Gerry Desrosiers wrote in the letter column for *Crisis* #5, "Please let us not forget that the Flash was to the Silver Age what Superman was to the Golden Age, its progenitor and strongest symbol."

Batman, on the other hand, is like the cardinal, the personification of editorial continuity—calm, rational, and grounded. Whatever you throw at him, Batman stands firm. Morally and narratively, Batman is one of the few constants in DC's shifting multiverse. No matter the reboot, from grim detective to campy superhero to trauma-driven dark knight, Batman endures. He represents permanence, structure, and resistance to the very type of co-opted meaning that the colorization of silent comedy films represents. Like the cardinal in *The Prisoner,* people in Batman's world are constantly trying to make him the villain, but in truth, he's the only one who's still playing by the rules. The Joker may have the upper hand at the moment, but who's the real prisoner? Even though the Joker now "owns" the copyright to



***The Courtship of Miles Standish* in *Classics Illustrated* #92.Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1858 narrative poem turns Plymouth Colony history into romantic legend. It tells how John Alden woos Priscilla for Captain Miles Standish, only for Priscilla to prefer Alden himself. Popular in its day, it mythologized early New England for many readers. Little did Longfellow realize it would one day be used by the Joker.**

these films, that doesn't make him a creator. He has no ability to make anything new. Instead, he's doomed to become a captive to his own narrative loop, repeating the same cultural thefts and misappropriations again and again, only to wind up in Arkham as a result.

To expand this metaphor further, consider the names involved in the Joker's elaborate clue, which he left for Batman to discover before committing this crime—Miles Standish, John Alden, Plymouth Films, and Captain's Hill. John Alden was a *Mayflower* pilgrim, traditionally portrayed as an earnest, honest, everyman. Miles Standish was the *Mayflower* colony's military advisor, a brave but gruff individual. The two men are fictionalized in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1858 poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish," where Standish asks Alden to speak on his behalf to win the love of fellow colonist Priscilla Mullins, only for Alden to fall in love with her instead, a plot echoed in Edmond Rostand's 1897 play *Cyrano De Bergerac.*

Captain's Hill is a real location in Duxbury, Massachusetts, where a massive statue of Miles Standish is located. The Joker's reference to it could represent commemoration of heroic myth—a statue constructed to honor a figure whose historical memory has been shaped more by Longfellow's poem than by the actual facts of his life. So, referencing Plymouth Films and Captain's Hill is like invoking the mythologization of early American identity—people turned into legends, legends turned into property, and property exploited for status and personal gain. This is another metaphor for false claims of narrative ownership, of using the names of the past to legitimize manipulative storytelling in the present and colonizing these myths for new and possibly corrupt purposes, i.e., the colorization of silent comedy films. Just as Alden speaks for Standish in Longfellow's poem—the historical details of what actually happened between these two men remain sketchy—so too do modern figures rewrite or steal old narratives and pass them off as their own. By invoking founding figures of American myth and debunking their misuse through the Joker's clue, Batman is defending historical and narrative truth, calling out false authorship, and preserving the sanctity of legacy in the face of corporate appropriation. Just as he did with the "Prisoner" comment, Batman is reclaiming narrative authority. In essence he's saying, "Just because you stole the copyright doesn't mean you get to rewrite the past or claim its cultural legacy to justify your violence or elevate your status." Yet again, it seems like what's being expressed here is Wolfman's deep ambivalence regarding the very story he's attempting to tell and the market forces that made such an event necessary.

As for Harold J. Standish III, the unfortunate copyright holder, this could be a reference to Harold Joseph Standish (1919–1972), a Canadian modernist writer and poet, best known for his experimental poetry and prose, resistance to mainstream literary norms, and his conflicted relationship with traditional forms of nationalism and cultural identity. His primary literary concerns included alienation and the freedom of the individual versus the cultural narratives that are imposed on us, artists in particular. He also grappled with the challenge of being part of the so-called "next generation" of Canadian writers and wrestled with the burden of perpetuating the national myth. This multi-generational angle is a good fit with the fact that the Harold J. Standish in *Crisis* is the third person to bear that name, and his legacy has just been stolen from him and his heirs, meaning neither he nor they will have a chance to play their role as the next generation of myth makers. As a member of the first generation of fans-turned-pros, did Wolfman fear the same sort of legacy had been stolen from him and future generations? Or was he like Batman, smashing through the window and saying, "Enough is enough"?

The sad thing is that this sort of misappropriation isn't inevitable. "You didn't have to die," the Joker says as he stands over Standish's corpse, holding a smoking gun. "Oh, I appreciate it that you did … but it wasn't mandatory!" Never one to pass up a theatrical moment, the Joker seems to be saying he doesn't just want to own the films; he wants to remove the original voice and cut off his legacy to Standish's heirs because, in their absence, the Joker will thrive. Now there'll be no competition with his version of the history that those films represent. When the Joker says, "You didn't have to die, but I appreciate that you did," on a metatextual level, it's like Wolfman was saying, "We didn't have to destroy these parallel worlds, but now that they're gone, it's easier to control the story. With them out of the way, my version of DC's past—the new canon established by *Crisis*—will be the only one that matters." This is a graphic portrayal of retcon as an act of extreme violence. It's not just a murder; it's a thrill kill, a severing of narrative continuity, a violent reboot, a claim of supremacy over memory itself, and a seizing of narrative control. In a story like *Crisis,* where who gets remembered is everything, this is the most terrifying crime of all.

For those who think this may be reading too much into what, on the surface, seems like a simple scene, consider how the Joker taunts Batman, and, by extension, the reader. "You actually deciphered my clue? Amazing!" Later on as he flees, he adds, "He actually got the 'Plymouth' clue? Amazing!" Like the Joker, it's as if Wolfman wanted to be caught with a smoking gun, standing over the corpse of DC's past. Or did he

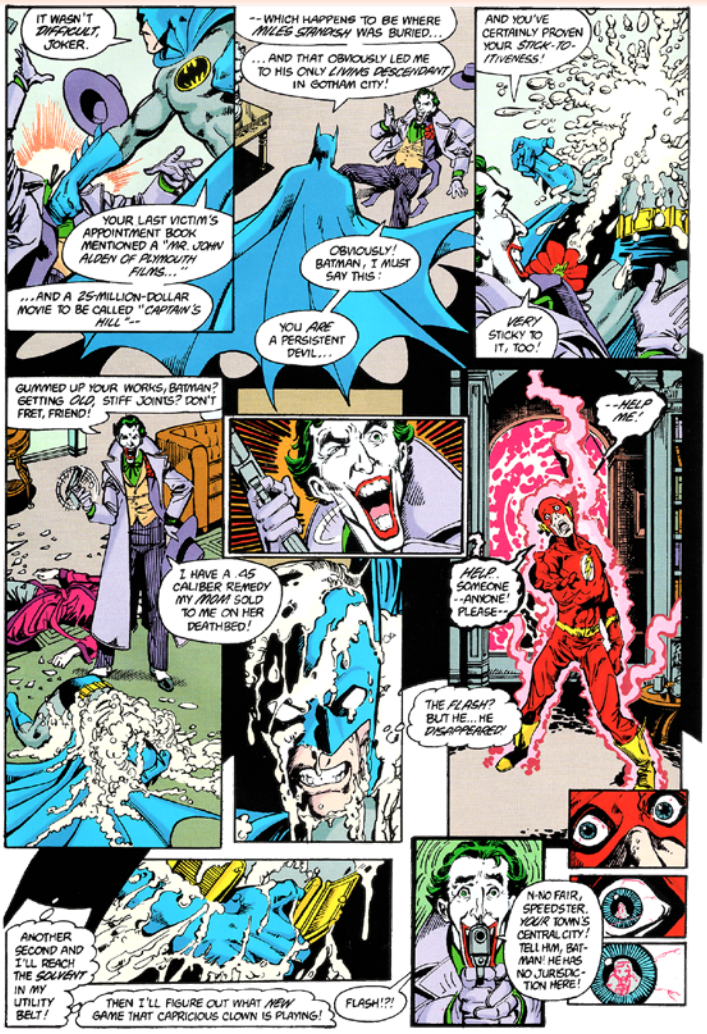
hope someone would smash through the window of his writing studio in time to prevent him from committing the crime in the first place? Could this scene be viewed as a cry for help by Wolfman, a plea for someone to stop him from what he's about to do before it's too late? Joker's follow-up comment takes things to yet another level when he says, "Even I was stumped … and I wrote it!" Was this Wolfman's way of saying not even he quite understood the gravity of what he was about to do? Could it also have been an appeal for mercy? At the risk of sacrilege, it brings to mind a paraphrase of Jesus' prayer on the cross for the Roman soldiers who crucified him: "Forgive me, fans, for I know not what I am about to do."

The two rivals battle it out in a classic showdown, with the Joker covering Batman with paste and the Caped Crusader reaching into his utility belt for something to counteract it. On the surface, it may seem like a final, classic, old-time conflict between these two. But in a sly metatextual twist, the Joker's weapon of choice evokes the very paste-up stage that defined comic book production in 1985. Paste was what production artists used to literally glue logos, captions, and corrections into place before a book went to press, a fragile but necessary step in holding the fragments of continuity together. By smearing Batman with paste, the Joker transforms a tool of editorial cohesion into a weapon of paralysis, mocking the idea that DC's sprawling mythos can be tidied up with scissors and glue. What was once a medium's invisible adhesive here becomes the emblem of entrapment, as though Wolfman and Pérez were hinting at the futility—and absurdity—of trying to paste the multiverse together into a new type of order.

And yet, just as in the production office where paste-ups could only ever provide a temporary illusion of cohesion—pages eventually yellowed, peeled, and sometimes fell apart—the Joker's sticky trap doesn't hold. And then the unthinkable occurs: a spectral Barry Allen bleeds through the panel borders. The ghost of the Silver Age arrives like a misaligned photostat that refuses to stay pasted down, proof that no amount of glue can suppress what continuity wants to remember. In this way, the Flash's plea for help feels like the rebellion of the medium itself, a reminder that legacies can't be permanently fixed or erased with wax and rubber cement.

"Help me!" he pleads. "Help … someone—anyone! Please." If the Flash is the embodiment of DC's Silver Age legacy, and the Joker has just stolen the copyright, it's like the ghost of what he's stolen has just come back to haunt him. Quaking with fear, the Joker turns his gun on the Flash, claiming it's no fair; Gotham is outside his jurisdiction. Central City is the Flash's beat. It's like he's saying what the Flash represents—the moral clarity, optimism, and heroism of the Silver Age—has no place there. This is followed by a series of three panels that play out like a silent movie, taking us closer and closer to the Flash's haunted eyes until just one iris and pupil fills the frame. Reflected within his pupil is the Joker, his gun drawn.

Considering the fate that befalls the Flash in this series, this is a pivotal moment. Especially when one views it in light of the interpretation of the Joker as anti-archivist. As the owner of



***Crisis* #2, p. 7. On the surface, this may seem like yet another iconic encounter between Batman and his archenemy, the Joker. But even before the Flash makes his disturbing appearance, a careful examination of the subtext, including the paste that the Joker uses to trap Batman here, reveals much more going on than meets the eye.**

the copyright, he can do whatever he wishes with these cultural artifacts, but now that he's literally staring down the barrel of his own gun, as reflected in the Flash's eyes, he experiences a moment of self-awareness that causes him to hesitate. It brings to mind the famous quote from Friedrich Nietzsche: "If you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you." If the Joker pulls the trigger, nullifying the Flash's existence—and by extension, the Silver Age and the man who brought us the multiverse—what will that mean for him? His hesitance could be motivated by the same thing that's prevented him from killing Batman for all these years. Without heroes and the rules they represent for him to mock, what meaning does the Joker's life have? Hence, if he kills the Flash, it would be akin to killing himself. Furthermore, if he kills the past, won't that leave him in a state similar to Superman of Earth-Two at the end of *Crisis,* as a man with no history? What place is

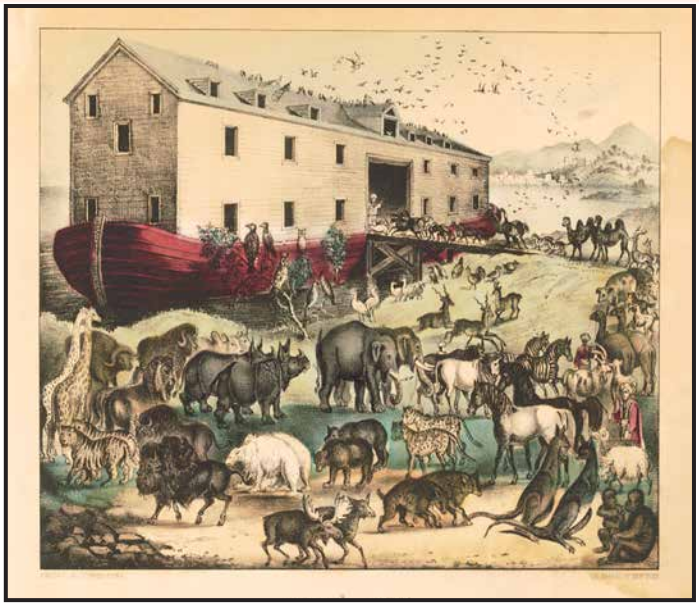
there in the present for a person no one remembers? Could his hesitance also represent Wolfman's own ambivalence when he was mandated to kill the Flash? Did Wolfman, like the Joker, fear he may have also been at risk of nullifying his own existence by doing away with the multiverse he loved so much growing up? If he vanquished his own memories, who would he be? Did Wolfman wish he owned the copyright to DC's characters, thinking he could have managed them in such a way that a multiverse-ending stunt like *Crisis* wouldn't have been necessary? Was Wolfman the man holding the gun, the hero covered in paste and fumbling with his utility belt, or the spectral image pleading for help?

In the depths of the Joker's existential dread, he calls out to Batman for help, but his moment of introspection passes in a blaze of gunfire as he tells himself that Batman and the Flash are probably in cahoots. This could be an allusion to the idea that, as one of DC's marquee characters, a member of the so-called "Trinity," Batman is too closely tied to the editorial regime to prevent the Flash's mandated execution. If Wolfman was the Joker, calling out for help to save him from the specter of the past that's haunting him, a representation of the guilt he feels over what he's about to destroy, turning to Batman would be like reaching out to the very editorial system that put him in this position.

The Joker almost aligns with Batman, seeking stability and even salvation by joining forces with his enemy, but his paranoia wins out. Because he can't bring himself to trust the figure who represents order, he must exist in opposition to it, even if that means falling into the void. Maybe this was Wolfman's way of depicting why he was not only the writer of *Crisis* but also the editor. The Joker's rejection of Batman's help is like Wolfman expressing his fear that too much corporate interference in the series would flatten his vision or blunt his edge. It's a war between the impulse to be part of the canon and the instinct to destroy it. And in that moment, the Joker reveals the ultimate truth about himself. He doesn't fear death; he fears being rewritten. That's why he needs to own the copyright. The Joker/Wolfman fears/fears being tamed, and Batman/DC corporate is the instrument of that taming. Hence, the Joker must take matters into his own hands and fire away.

A batarang puts an end to that, and Batman is about to collar the Joker for good, putting him back in Arkham where he belongs. But before Batman can collar the Joker, his attention is drawn back to the Flash, whose appearance he assumed was a trick by the Joker to gain an advantage in their fight. When the Flash mentions Iris, though, Batman realizes the Joker wouldn't know about Barry's late wife.

"Please … can't you see the world?" the Flash says to Batman. "I-it's dying all around me!" He's right. The world that began with him—the multiverse—is dying. Seizing on the distraction, the Joker makes his escape, leaving Batman alone with the image of the Flash. An uncharacteristic look of fear seizes the Caped Crusader's face as Barry pleads for help and calls out for Iris as he is reduced to a skeleton and disintegrates before Batman's eyes across a series of four gripping panels. "Dear God—what is happening?" Batman asks as he too is reduced to nothing more than a pair of eyes, staring at the reader. Was this vision of the Flash Wolfman's way of confronting DC corporate, represented by Batman, with the enormity of what they were about to do through *Crisis*?



Noah's Ark lithograph published by Currier & Ives between 1856 and 1907. Public domain image. In addition to the apocalyptic framing of *Crisis*, Christian imagery and language permeates the story, coming to the fore in Wolfman's 2005 novelization of the series.

Batman's invocation of the divine is one of numerous references to God that saturate this series. It's to the point that at times one wonders if *Crisis* wasn't secretly published by the same people who brought us Spire Christian Comics, a series of Christian-theme *Archie* titles published in the 1970s. This aspect of the story is particularly evident in Wolfman's novelization, with Barry Allen and Harbinger frequently crying out to God, and Harbinger even reading the Bible at one point. As the Flash looks over Harbinger's shoulder while she's shuffling through scenes from the past, he witnesses Noah's ark, Abraham speaking to God, and Moses leading his people through the wilderness, introducing not just a biblical point of view but a literalist, young-earth perspective.[170]

With so many godlike beings introduced throughout the first 50 years of DC's history, the question of who or what ultimately created and oversees the multiverse was an open question that received a special focus in a JSA/JLA team-up called "Crisis on New Genesis," which spanned *Justice League of America* #183 to 185 (1980), the final two installments of which were drawn by George Pérez. This time in addition to the JSA and the JLA, the New Gods are brought into the mix. In a sense, this tale can be seen as a continuation of a two-part story in *Adventure Comics* #459–460, at the end of which, Darkseid dies (one of many times this happens to him). This story picks up a short

170 See p. 188 of Wolfman's novelization.

time later when the JSA and the JLA decide to add an unusual twist to their annual meet-up. Half the JSA will travel to Earth-One, and half the JLA will travel to Earth-Two, using their transmatter cubes to make the trip. However, something goes wrong during the exchange, and instead of Earth-One or Earth-Two, the heroes find themselves on New Genesis, home of the New Gods, which Superman recognizes from a previous visit there (see *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* #147).

When Wonder Woman of Earth-Two hears a description of the place, she's offended by the title "New Gods," declaring, "The only gods I acknowledge are the gods of Mount Olympus … and he who is the only true 'god'—whose nature remains unknown." Her distinction between the gods of Mount Olympus and the "only true god" raises questions not only about the ultimate cosmic hierarchy of the DCU but also this: at what point is a being considered a god? After all, the multiverse is bursting with nigh-immortal super-powered beings, so what differentiates characters like Superman, Doctor Fate, the Spectre, and Wonder Woman from the pantheon of Olympian gods that she references here?

Traditionally speaking, gods:

- Are immortal beings who possess superhuman powers
- Exist in some sort of hierarchy in a higher plane of existence outside of time and space
- Shape civilizations by granting knowledge and gifts and performing miracles
- Demand worship
- Personify different aspects of existence, such as war, love, death, creation, fertility, and chaos.

Apart from these latter two qualities, everything gods can do, many superheroes can do too—sometimes better! Admittedly, superheroes tend to be invulnerable rather than immortal, but just try to kill one of them! They almost always find a way to come back. Also, unlike most gods, superheroes walk among us, concealing their true identity from the public. But even this might be viewed metaphorically, with the heroes' secret identity functioning as a different plane of existence. And in a more literal sense, the JLA spends a lot of their time in a satellite orbiting 22,300 miles above Earth, observing the world through their monitors, similar to the Greek gods looking down from Mount Olympus.

All that to say, in many ways, the line between some superheroes and some so-called gods in the DCU is a fine one indeed. This is especially true of the New Gods, who don't seem much different from the superheroes who have just shown up on New Genesis. Even the strongest among them, Darkseid, is just a cosmic conqueror who exists in time and space, so perhaps Wonder Woman is right to be offended by their claim to this title.

As for the "only true god,"[171] is the distinction between him—Wonder Woman assigns it a male gender—and the other so-called gods a difference of degree or of kind? That is, is the only true god quantitatively different in terms of power, strength, and ability, or is he fundamentally different in terms of his nature or essence? Furthermore, why is this god so absent from the DCU, especially during *Crisis*? Apart from brief acknowledgments like this one or references to the Source in Kirby's titles, such a being is rarely mentioned outright in the pre-*Crisis* DCU, although the dialogue is often riddled with references to God and prayer, as if a cloak of tacit theism overlays the multiverse. Considering this ultimate being's apparent absence and silence, he could at best be described as a sort of deist god who set the multiverse in motion but doesn't interfere with it afterward, at least not directly. Following the act of creation, the universe is driven primarily by secondary causes.



Mark Waid is one of DC's most influential modern writers, celebrated for redefining Wally West in *The Flash*, co-creating *Kingdom Come* with Alex Ross, reshaping Superman in *Birthright*, and helping map DC continuity through concepts like *Hypertime*. His work bridges superhero spectacle, emotional clarity, and continuity-minded imagination.

The question of the DCU's metaphysical hierarchy was settled most recently by Mark Waid's *The New History of the DC Universe* (2025), in which the Source is portrayed as the ultimate force behind the multiverse, followed by the Hands, the Monitor, the Anti-Monitor, the World Forger, and so on. This merely codified a number of working assumptions that had developed over the past few decades. Whether this pantheon sticks remains to be seen, considering the tendency for creators to rebel against or subvert such official proclamations.

In case anyone missed the first issue of *Crisis*, after Batman's confrontation with the Joker and the Flash, we're reintroduced to the 15 heroes and villains whom Lyla recruited. Wolfman went out of his way not to make Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman the focus of this series, at least in the early stages, wanting to showcase other aspects of the DCU instead. "I was adamant about not playing up the major characters in the early issues," he told *Comics Interview*. "I wanted it to be obvious that the story was more important than any individual character. … I could have made the Titans, the Outsiders, and the Legion a central part of the story and brought in more readers, but I thought that would have been cheating. I wanted the story to be important."[172] Later, he admitted that market considerations also played a role in this decision: "My feeling was that if the Marvel fans did not like DC, it's probably because they tried Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman at the time and didn't

171 Also referred to as "the Presence," "Fate," or "the Source," the latter of which Highfather uses later in this story.

172 O'Neill, 17.

like the characters and they didn't know all these other characters that DC had."[173] Therefore, Wolfman took it upon himself to introduce new readers to the breadth of characters that DC had to offer.

Such thinking may undergird the Monitor's claim that power is not the main criterion when choosing this group. Instead, through careful testing, he's seeking the right balance of powers and abilities. Hence, he has everyone from Superman of Earth-Two, who is probably the most powerful member of the team, to Blue Beetle, who has no powers. Apart from Blue Beetle, who is from Earth-Four, the rest are from Earth-One and Earth-Two. Considering all the worlds—not just earths—that the Monitor had to draw from, this over-representation seems curious too.

Then there's the number 15, the significance of which is never explained. Considering the biblical allusions in the creation narrative that opens this series, one would have thought twelve, to parallel the number of Jesus's disciples, or seven, which represents wholeness or completeness in the Old Testament, would have been a better fit. Furthermore, as R. A. Jones asks in a scathing review of *Crisis* in *Amazing Heroes,* isn't the impending threat reason enough to activate *all* the heroes immediately?[174] As much as the Monitor claim this group was carefully chosen due to the balance of abilities represented rather than brute strength alone, as the ensuing conflicts with the shadow demons, the Thunderers of Qward, and the Anti-Monitor himself bear out, brute power (mixed with a dash of ingenuity) is the deciding factor nearly every time.

In an effort to figure out the in-story and extra-textual reasons for the members of this group, we should begin by listing them in full and the worlds from which they originate.

Earth-One	Earth-Two
Psimon	Superman
Solovar	Firebrand II
Geo-Force	Psycho Pirate
Cyborg	Obsidian
Arion	Earth-Four
Dr. Polaris	Blue Beetle
Dawnstar	
Green Lantern (John Stewart)	
Killer Frost	
Firestorm	

Dividing them according to their place of origin is one way of grouping them. Another method is to divide them by alignment, which means we have four villains (Psimon, Dr. Polaris, Killer Frost, and Psycho Pirate) and eleven heroes. We also have twelve males and three females. Various power sources are also represented, including magic (Arion, Obsidian), science (Cyborg, Dr. Polaris, Firestorm, Geo-Force, Blue Beetle, Firebrand II, and Green Lantern), psychic powers (Solovar and Psimon), and even solar energy (Superman). Several elemental powers are also covered, with Geo-Force connected to the earth, Killer Frost linked to water, and Firebrand and Firestorm able to summon and deploy flames. We also have two extraterrestrials (Superman and Dawnstar) and a member of the animal kingdom (Solovar). Plus, seeing as the Green Lantern mythos is at the heart of the creation-and-fall story that animates *Crisis,* we have not one but two representatives of that narrative, with John Stewart representing the Earth-One branch and Obsidian, the son of Alan Scott, standing in for the Earth-Two lineage. There's also an intergenerational angle, with Superman functioning as the elder statesmen, Cyborg, Firestorm, and Obsidian representing the latest generation of heroes, and the others falling somewhere in between. We have multiple time periods too, with Firebrand II and Arion representing the past, Dawnstar embodying the future, and the others holding down the fort for the present. Finally, some of these characters tend to be solo operators (e.g., Blue Beetle, Dr. Polaris, Arion, and Solovar) while others are well known for their group affiliation, with the JLA, the Outsiders, the Teen Titans, the Legion of Super-Heroes, the Green Lantern Corps., the Fearsome Five, the All-Star Squadron, the JSA, Infinity Inc., and the Secret Society of Super-Villains all represented.

Although no natural connection that ties them all together leaps out, they represent a diverse mixture of personalities and powers. From a publishing standpoint, they also showcase a broad range of titles. That said, there's certainly an over-representation of heroes, males, Earth-One characters, and Caucasians. Rather than a bias on Wolfman's part, this seems like a true representation of the state of DC publishing at the time, something Wolfman was determined to change through *Crisis*.

The Monitor informs the group that more than one thousand universes have perished. This is a far cry from the 15,000 universes he mentions in the novelization, never mind infinity, but it's a close match to the hundreds of universes that Pariah says he's seen die in issue #1. He also mentions the anti-matter cloud having to shatter the dimensional barrier, so perhaps this accounts for the start/stop movement of the anti-matter progress hinted at earlier. While the cloud can consume universes with ease, maybe the barrier between worlds poses more of a challenge. Then again, technically speaking, there should be no barriers between worlds, seeing as all that separates them is the frequency at which they vibrate. Therefore, the delay could be due to the anti-matter having to pause while it adjusts its vibrational rate so that it effectively cancels out the next positive-matter universe's vibrational

173 Dan Greenfield, "Why Marv Wolfman Didn't Like the Ending to Crisis," *13th Dimension,* September 12, 2018, https://13thdimension.com/why-marv-wolfman-didnt-like-the-ending-to-crisis/.

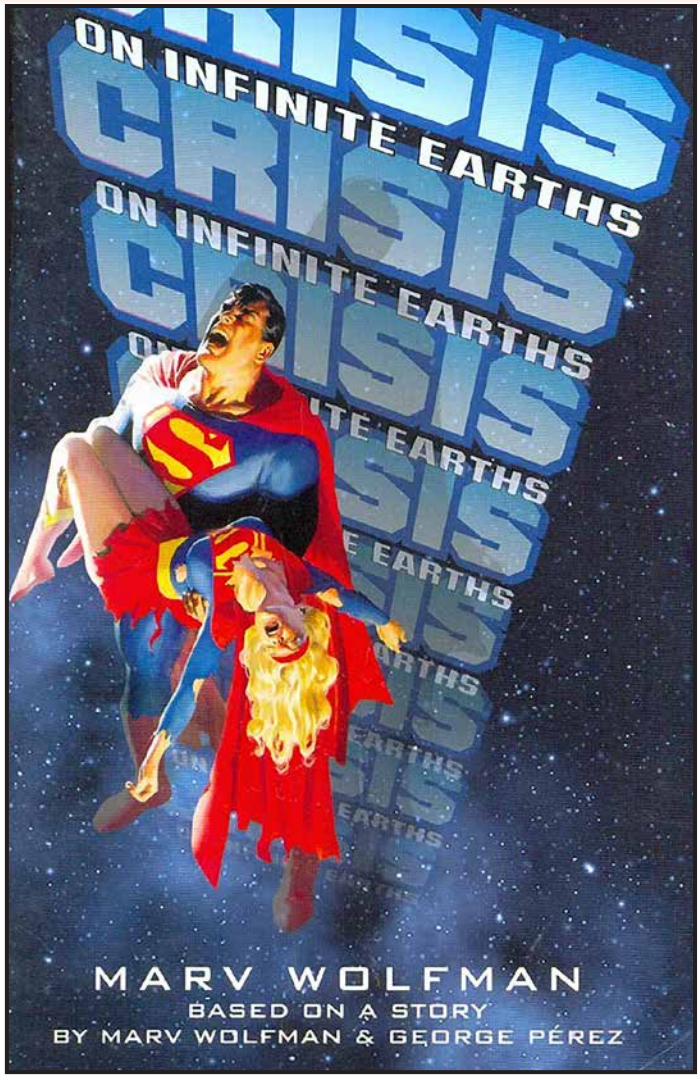
174 R. A. Jones, "Crisis in Review," *Amazing Heroes,* March 15, 1986, 100.

waves. Even if it did, though, wouldn't that cancel out the anti-matter as well? Alan May of Scranton, Penn., brought up a version of this question in a letter published in *Crisis* #6: "If a wave of anti-matter is destroying the universe of matter, is a wave of matter destroying the anti-matter universe?"

In the real world, a phenomenon called *destructive interference* occurs when two waves overlap so that their peaks and troughs line up exactly out of phase (peaks aligning with troughs), temporarily canceling each other out. After passing through each other, the original waves emerge unaffected. For example, when noise-canceling headphones play sounds that counteract ambient noise, the unwanted sound waves appear canceled to your ears, but the waves themselves don't permanently destroy each other; they just briefly produce regions of minimal or zero amplitude. Therefore, when seeking to determine the mechanism that drives the negativity dominance of anti-matter, which enables it to obliterate positive matter while the anti-matter wave continues unimpeded, another phenomenon must be at work.

Turning to nature once again, we find a couple of conditions under which two waves might meet with only one of them surviving the encounter. First, if a wave interacts with a material or system capable of absorbing energy (e.g., a sound wave encountering acoustic foam or a light wave striking a dark surface), the wave's energy can be transferred and converted into heat or other forms of energy, essentially making the wave disappear. Meanwhile, a wave that didn't interact with the absorbing medium continues unimpeded. That doesn't really apply here, seeing as when the anti-matter wave encounters the positive-positive matter universe, no third-party energy-absorbing material or system is present.

This brings us to the second scenario—nonlinear interactions. A nonlinear medium is any material, such as a crystal, whose response to waves (e.g., light, sound, or vibrations) can be affected by the waves' amplitude or intensity. For example, at low intensity, light passes through the crystal unchanged. But when the light is intense enough, the crystal's internal structure responds differently, causing the wave's frequency to double, thus creating a new wavelength of light. As a result, the crystal outputs light at twice the original frequency (e.g., infrared light becomes visible green light). Through this process, the wave's characteristics are fundamentally changed, demonstrating nonlinear behavior. This phenomenon can also lead to complex interactions between waves. For example, imagine two light waves—Wave AM (Anti-Matter) and Wave PM (Positive Matter)—passing through a nonlinear crystal. Wave AM is a strong, high-energy wave. Wave PM is weaker and oscillating at a slightly different frequency. As both waves pass through the crystal, due to the crystal's nonlinear nature, energy from Wave PM is gradually transferred into Wave AM, or Wave PM could even be transformed into a completely new wave at a different frequency. Either way, Wave PM essentially disappears. Meanwhile, Wave AM emerges from the crystal stronger, though perhaps slightly altered, and continues on its merry way.



Published in 2005, Marv Wolfman's prose novelization reimagined *Crisis on Infinite Earths* beyond the comic book page, often through Barry Allen's eyes. The book added interior monologue and modern details, enabling Wolfman to revisit DC's defining multiversal epic in a more reflective character-centered form.

This seems to be the closest we can come to offering a scientific explanation for how positive matter and anti-matter might interact and why anti-matter always wins. It could also explain why the anti-matter doesn't just obliterate the positive matter but transforms it into something else, something darker. Instead of being annihilated, the positive matter is converted into the noxious black substance that fills the six panels along the bottom of pages two and three in issue #1. Wolfman seems to have hinted at this in his description of the process in his novelization of *Crisis*.

> *This was the way things worked: Every time the Anti-monitor destroyed a positive matter universe, its energies were sucked into his antimatter universe.*

The transmitter globe processed then returned that energy to the positive matter universe as a white wall of antimatter. The wall would then destroy another world.

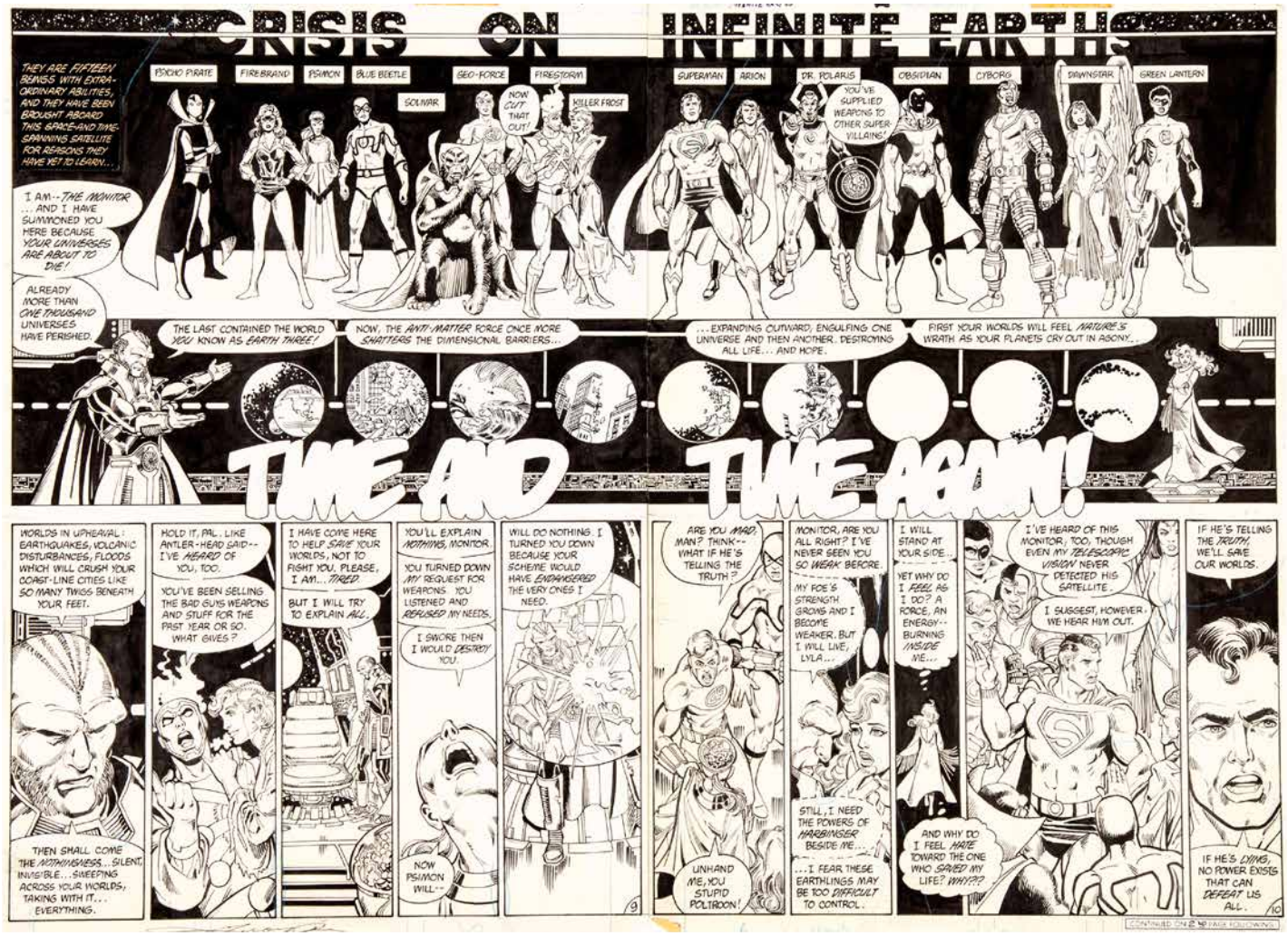
The Anti-Monitor had in essence created near perpetual motion: his transmitter created death and death then fed the transmitter.

As for the non-linear medium through which the anti-matter and positive-matter waves pass, could it be the black infinitude referred to on the first page of issue #1, the comic book version of dark matter, a.k.a. the Overvoid? Once again, it's doubtful Wolfman worked things through to such an extent, but it's an interesting thought to consider in light of how the DCU has developed since then.

Something else the Monitor mentions here is a phenomenon we first witnessed on Earth-Three—volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters triggered by the encroaching anti-matter. No explanation is given for why the anti-matter would have this effect, but we know this was called for in Wolfman's initial outline of the series. We've also seen a similar phenomenon in previous stories, with the planet crying out in agony as a cosmic disaster approaches or a super-powered being arrives on Earth. An excellent example is *Green Lantern* #40 when the story of Krona's sin is first told. To punish him for his crime, Krona's fellow Oans reduce him to "a disembodied state in a prison of energy" and condemn him to circle throughout all universes forever. However, Krona's interaction with the beam from Alan Scott's ring allows him to escape his energy prison and hitchhike to the Earth-One universe, where his mere presence on Earth causes nature to run amok.

Tired of the Monitor's explanation, Firestorm and Psimon lash out at him, asking how they can trust him, seeing as he's been selling weapons to criminals—or in Psimon's case, refusing to sell him the weapons he requested. The Monitor promises to provide answers, but before he can, he's hit by a wave of fatigue, explaining that his body is growing weaker as his unnamed foe grows stronger. That's because the Monitor is linked to all positive matter, which flows through him. The

Crisis #2, pages 9 & 10 original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). The Monitor gives his "chosen fifteen" the lowdown on the threat facing the multiverse. They're all still trying to decide if he's a hero or a villain, a question in the minds of the series' original readers as well.



more positive-matter universes are destroyed, the weaker he gets. The members of the Monitor's initial strike force are divided on whether or not to believe him, but with the stakes so high and Green Lantern's ring and even Psycho Pirate not detecting any deceit or madness in him, they decide to give the Monitor the benefit of the doubt.

Their willingness to trust the Monitor is bolstered by the reappearance of Harbinger. She informs them that the Monitor has planted devices in five crucial eras to halt the anti-matter tide. "Five eras which coincide with the existence of heroes such as you," she says. "For the presence of such heroic ideals creates its own focal point." Their mission is to protect the devices and then trigger them upon the Monitor's command. Once again, we're met with a flood of words that provokes confusion instead of clarity.

First of all, she says the purpose of the towers is to halt the anti-matter, but when the Monitor explains the purpose of the towers to Pariah in issue #4, he says, "The worlds are separated by vibration and time … my machines will bring them together!" He doesn't say anything about anti-matter. It could be that the towers can perform both functions, but another possibility is that Wolfman still hadn't quite figured out the purpose of the towers at this point.

Second, Harbinger isn't just addressing heroes; she's also addressing villains. So, are these five eras focal points for villainous activity too? If so, do heroic ideals attract villainy, as the citizens of Metropolis were led to believe about Superman when the city was under Vandal Savage's control in *Action Comics* #515 and 516, or does the villainy come first, acting as a magnet for heroes to counter it?

Third, she says the eras coincide with the existence of heroes. As we all know, correlation does not imply causation. Therefore, similar to the previous question, are these eras crucial because a number of heroes happen to exist during those time periods, or are heroes more prevalent in these areas due to something inherently "heroic" about the eras themselves—or something evil that heroes are required to counter?

Fourth, returning to the subject of numbers, why five eras? Why not six, seven, or twelve, all of which tie into creation and completeness in the biblical narratives that influenced this story? From a metatextual perspective, one could interpret the five eras as a way of showcasing the various genres that DC has to offer, but with many of these genres—such as Western and war comics—about to be canceled, why bother?

Another way to look at it is to say these five eras represent five different types of heroism. Arion's Atlantis, our first stop, symbolizes the fall of a type of utopia, similar to the Metropolis of the 30th century. The sophisticated heroes of that era are the handful of people who are fighting to preserve what they can of that civilization before its inevitable decline. Like the multiverse, Atlantis was once beautiful and sprawling, but it's collapsing as a result of hubris, and Arion and his companions are trying to save his people from themselves.

The Great Disaster, our second era, is a glimpse of what happens after civilizations like Atlantis fall. It's a return to the primal, animalistic form of heroism that we encountered in the Anthro sequence that opened this issue—man against nature. Somewhere in the future, humanity found a way to destroy itself, but the seeds of heroism, represented by people like Kamandi, may enable it to sprout once again from the ruins.

World War II, our third heroic age, represents collective self-sacrifice for the greater good, ordinary men and women working together to overcome an overwhelming evil. Like the soldiers and civilians of World War II, the heroes must unite against the looming threat of the Anti-Monitor to save the multiverse. This is also the era in which superheroes were born.

The Old West, our fourth era, was a time when people had to create order and justice on their own. Heroes were those who chose right over might without the structure of civilization to support them. This is one of the most prevalent forms of heroism in the DCU no matter the era.

Then we have the medieval period, a time of chivalry, virtue, and honor. In many ways, it was a brutal world, but it was also a time of valor, with the heroes of this age being those who fought and died for ideals larger than themselves.

By anchoring the multiverse's survival to these five "frequencies" of heroism, it's like the story is saying that heroism is not just one thing. It's many things across many ages, and they're all needed to save the multiverse—or what's left of it.

As satisfying as this explanation might be, there's also the question of how the Monitor built the towers in the first place, how he transported them to the different periods in history, and whether that action itself would have created five divergent timelines. Also, who's been protecting the towers until now? And why didn't he build an automated security system into them instead of requiring heroes to protect them?

As mentioned earlier, there's also the matter of an attack that happens simultaneously in the past, present, and future. What's the point of attacking Earth at different points on the timeline? Why doesn't the Anti-Monitor focus all his energy on some point in the past to prevent the heroes who oppose him from ever existing? And from the perspective of defense, why battle the Anti-Monitor at every stage in history? Why doesn't the Monitor focus all his strength on one point in the timeline, preferably the era when the anti-matter initially shows up? Considering his ability to travel through time, this should have been easy for him to do.

From the Anti-Monitor's perspective, one could say he's not just trying to destroy space; he's attempting to erase history itself. Seeing as the multiverse is made up of parallel histories, full of characters who are able to move back and forth through time, if he only attacks one point on the timeline, other points could splinter off and survive. Therefore, he needs to attack "everything everywhere all at once," so to speak. For this same reason, the Monitor can't focus all of his defenses on a single point in time either. If the Anti-Monitor is attacking simultaneously across time, it's not like a domino effect where if they stop him early in the timeline, they also stop him later.

They must defend every era because if the Anti-Monitor wins in even one, the whole structure will collapse.

This brings us back to the question of why just five eras. Has the Monitor determined these are the five weakest points on the timeline that are most vulnerable to the Anti-Monitor's attack? But if the Anti-Monitor faces opposition at one point in history, why wouldn't he just move to another?

This becomes even more complicated if every trip through time creates a divergent timeline rather than characters moving back and forth on the same timeline. That would mean the Anti-Monitor's attack in the past would create one parallel timeline, the Monitor's placement of his devices would create another, and the heroes' journeys forward and back in time to the devices would create a third and a fourth. Therefore, even if the Anti-Monitor fails in one timeline, he'll succeed in another, and even if the heroes prevail against the Anti-Monitor in one timeline, at least one other branch will be annihilated. Then again, for all we know, this theory of time travel may be faulty too. We'll just have to wait for a real time traveler to show up and explain things to us.

As if one needed any further evidence of Wolfman's dire need for an editor, not even the panel that shows the teams being dispatched to the different eras is correct, with not five but *seven* light beams extending out from the nexus point. This is followed by more heavy-handed foreshadowing as Harbinger alerts "the other" of recent developments. Tears drip from her eyes as she finds herself unable to resist the Anti-Monitor's command to betray the Monitor. Was this more subconscious angst from Wolfman now that the wheels of his multiverse-ending epic were in motion?

The next page is a bit of strategic housekeeping—how to neutralize the Guardians of the Universe. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, seeing as Krona, an Oan, is responsible for creating not only the multiverse but also the anti-matter universe and the Anti-Monitor, no group is more closely tied to the threat that the entire DCU is facing. More importantly, as some of the most powerful beings in the DCU, no one is better equipped to counter this menace. Therefore, from a writing point of view, if Wolfman wanted the series to last beyond the end of this issue, the Guardians had to be taken off the table. His solution? Plead ignorance. Despite the Guardians' long awareness of the anti-matter universe and the danger that it and its minions pose, the sense of responsibility the Guardians feel because one of their own unleashed this threat, and the various breaches between the anti-matter universe and its positive-matter counterpart that they've known about over the years, they claim that somehow the wave of anti-matter that's devouring the other "dimensional planes" evaded their detection.

No matter how one examines this claim, it seems impossible to accept. As they've told Hal Jordan, even though they have no power in the anti-matter universe, they keep a close eye on it (see *Green Lantern* #7 for example). And remember, for one million years after Krona's sin, the Monitor battled the Anti-Monitor while based on one of Oa's moons. Wouldn't the Guardians have noticed that and then kept a close eye on both figures once they knocked each other unconscious? Or did this battle somehow happen without their awareness too? And even if somehow they didn't notice the anti-matter wave at first—maybe the Anti-Monitor did something to blind their sensors—why do they only notice it at this late stage in the game?

When the Guardians announce the need to assemble the entire Green Lantern Corps to combat this menace, a voice addresses them through the central power battery, saying, "What began with you so many centuries ago—ends with you now!!" This is true both literally and also on a metatextual level, seeing as it was Krona's sin that created the anti-matter universe and Gary Thompson's letter in *Green Lantern* that got Wolfman going on *Crisis.* To offer one final nitpicking note, if Krona's sin occurred ten billion years ago, as Harbinger establishes in *Crisis* #4, why would the voice not choose a unit larger than centuries to indicate the tremendous period of time that's passed? It's like measuring the distance from Los Angeles to New York in millimeters rather than miles. It's possible, but why bother? Regardless, this pronouncement is followed by a blast of energy that incapacitates the Guardians. Whether they're dead or merely unconscious remains to be seen.

Over on Earth-One, Batman summons Superman to tell him about his vision of the Flash. On the way there, Superman acknowledges the fear in Batman's voice, something he's never heard before.

As they're trying to figure out what's happening, Pariah shows up, issuing a warning similar to the Flash's, only for Pariah to disappear, leaving Superman and Batman more confused than ever. Readers may have been perplexed too, seeing as before he vanishes, Pariah says, "Your legends reached my world long before my exile." As we'll learn later, Pariah was exiled millions of years before the events of *Crisis,*



Though not as direct an influence as *Planet of the Apes*, Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog* parallels Kamandi in its post-apocalyptic wasteland, solitary youth, and memorable canine companion, reflecting 1970s science fiction's fascination with survival after civilizational collapse.

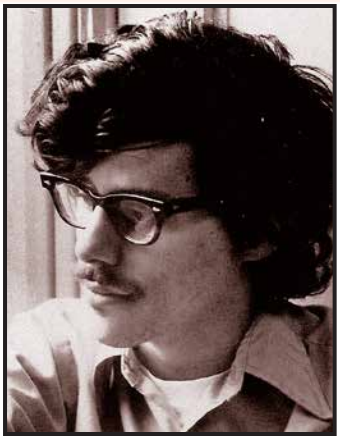
so how could he have possibly heard about Superman and Batman back then?

The mechanism that drew him to this rooftop meeting is also unclear. So far, all we know about Pariah is that he's drawn to witness worlds when they're on the brink of dying. That's not the case on Earth-One, and Batman and Superman aren't engaged in anything related to the crisis, so why does Pariah show up? From a narrative point of view, his appearance certainly moves the threat from something symbolic—Batman's vision of the Flash—to something immediate and tangible, but it would have been nice to have a stronger in-story explanation for why Pariah appears to them at this moment.

Jumping ahead to the Great Disaster, we get a full-page image of an elaborate golden tower jutting out of the ruins of New York with the Statue of Liberty in the background. Scaling the tower is Kamandi. Like Anthro, he's also spotted a technological anomaly, but this one is no illusion. Unlike Anthro, Kamandi has no community to protect or to cheer him on. He's alone, the "last boy on Earth," which could make him the last of Anthro's line—if they exist in the same continuity, that is.

A caption tells us we are "sometime in some future, in a time line that at times stands between modern Earth and a 30th century which knows nothing of its existence," a description that's as oblique as it is frustrating. To help clarify it, let's break it down phrase by phrase.

For starters, "*sometime* in some future" seems designed to keep the actual date nebulous. This is in keeping with Jack Kirby's dating of the Great Disaster in *Kamandi* #1. All we know is that Kamandi emerges from Command "D," the underground bunker complex from which he gets his name, at least two generations after the Great Disaster or the "great shocks," as they're described. As *Who's Who* #13 says, "Exactly what the Great Disaster was is unclear. It has been referred to as a natural disaster, but also linked to a mysterious energy source called 'the Vortex.' It has been speculated that nuclear war brought the Disaster about, for radiation was involved." Due to this latter point, some people have sought to link it with the post-apocalyptic world inhabited by the Atomic Knights (*Strange Adventures* #117), which was devastated by a nuclear war that took place in 1986. Paul Levitz indicates this in an attempt to sort out DC's confusing continuity in *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #12.[175] If Kamandi was born two generations after this event, with a generation being 25 years on average, and Kamandi being about 18 years old when he first appears, that would peg the date of the Great Disaster at around 2054. Then again, *DC Comics Presents* #57 reveals the world of the Atomic Knights is a fabrication created by the mind of Gardner Grayle. Nevertheless, judging from the 20th-century architecture visible in the background, this date seems like a reasonable enough assumption. But 68 years after a nuclear war that devastated the entire planet seems a little soon to go out exploring, seeing as the radiation could remain deadly for hundreds of years. Plus, by this point animals have mutated into intelligent beings that hunt humans. So, perhaps designating it as sometime between the present (1985) and the 30th century is the best one can hope for.



Paul Levitz was one of DC's defining writer-editors, renowned for his work on *Legion of Super-Heroes*. As publisher and president, he helped guide DC's modern expansion, hiring key talent and shaping the company's 1980s revitalization and long-term identity. He also helped broker a deal to ensure Superman's creators received fair compensation.

To move to the second part of the phrase, "in *some* future" implies that Earth has more than one future. As discussed previously, this principle was established in *Superman* #295 when a Green Lantern named Xenofobe averts the Time Trapper's plan to wipe out all of Earth's possible futures except one. As mentioned in a previous chapter, it's also a possibility presented to Kamandi in *Cancelled Comics Cavalcade* #2. Plus, it's congruent with Mark Gruenwald's theory of time travel, wherein rather than move back and forth along a single timeline, any attempt to visit the future or the past creates a divergent timeline, thus eliminating all time-related paradoxes. By implication, this means the Monitor's device pictured in this scene exists in just one of Earth-One's many possible futures. The question is, which one of those timelines did the Monitor choose to protect and why? Furthermore, doesn't this imply that the Anti-Monitor is victorious in at least one other possible future, if not all others? Or are we operating from an Einsteinian theory where the past, present, and future exist simultaneously?

The waters become cloudier when Wolfman says the timeline "*at times* stands between modern Earth and a 30th century future which knows nothing of its existence." How could this timeline exist at some moments and not others? Does it phase in and out of existence? If so, why? And is this a property of just this timeline or do all timelines adhere to this principle? Finally, why does the 30th century not know of its existence? And which version of the 30th century are we talking about?

As Kamandi uses a vine to scale the mysterious tower, he appears to be as confused as we are, noting that he's ridden through the area dozens of times, and he's never seen the tower before. (How he anchored the vine so far up the tower is yet another mystery to add to the mix.)

Midway up the tower, a shadow demon emerges, severing the vine. Assuming he's plummeting to his death, Kamandi is surprised to be rescued by someone he recognizes—Superman. But this is the Earth-Two version, whom he's never met before, not his Earth-One counterpart. In a clever line

175 Paul Levitz, "Earth After Disaster!", *Amazing World of DC Comics* Vol. 3 No. 12, July 1976, 8.



Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth **grew from DC's failed attempt to secure rights to *Planet of the Apes* (1968). Jack Kirby built his own post-apocalyptic saga of intelligent animals and degraded humanity, turning a commercial inspiration into something stranger and distinctly his own.**

of metatextual commentary that references the contracting multiverse, Superman says, "It's a small world. And getting smaller if we don't do something to help."

Kamandi is also shocked to meet Solovar, at first assuming he's a killer hired by Czar Simian, one of Kamandi's gorilla archenemies. When Solovar tells him that he's no such thing, Kamandi looks into his eyes and realizes there's something different about Solovar compared to the other apes Kamandi has encountered. This meeting of the minds is a brief but significant moment.

Kamandi comes from a ruined future where intelligent animals have replaced humans as the dominant species. Meanwhile, Solovar is from a hidden, advanced city of intelligent [extraterrestrial] gorillas in the modern world that bears no animosity toward humans. This is Kamandi's first inkling that perhaps the way things are is not the way things have to be. Kamandi comes from the end of the world, and Solovar is a guardian of a hidden, almost utopian civilization. One embodies despair about civilization's failure; the other offers hope that peaceful societies can exist even when populated by seemingly brutish creatures. On a symbolic level, Wolfman appears to have been using their relationship to reinforce one of the core themes of *Crisis*—reconciliation across divides. First it was hero and villain. Now it's human and animal. With Superman and Dawnstar (the third member of the trio that shows up, whom we'll address shortly), we also see a unity between human and alien. This fits with one of Wolfman's key goals with *Crisis,* which was to "heal" the DCU. It had become fragmented and overly complicated through the decades with multiple Earths, conflicting continuities, and characters who were redundant or derivative of each other. Kamandi and Solovar's friendship becomes a model for Wolfman's vision of unity for DC, combining old and new, disparate genres, and different earths, timelines, and characters into a single, coherent universe where cooperation (not division) is the key to survival.

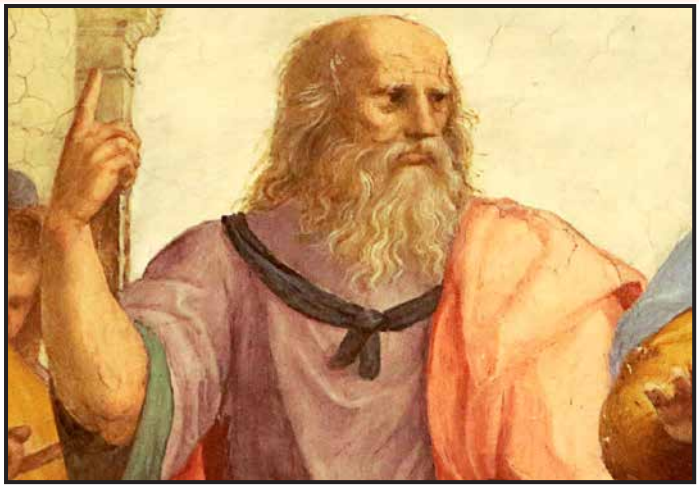
Teaming up Solovar, Dawnstar, Superman of Earth-Two and sending them to the Great Disaster may seem like Wolfman simply drew their names out of a hat. But a closer look reveals some logic behind this decision. While not quite as strong as his Earth-One counterpart, Superman still contributes a hefty amount of raw power, which is needed to protect the team and the Monitor's tower. But he's more than just a beefcake. He's the moral foundation of the group, a natural leader who's able to raise people's spirits and keep them focused on the task at hand. Dawnstar is a tracker or scout. In a chaotic world like that of the Great Disaster, finding anyone or anything is almost impossible, but not for Dawnstar. As someone with more of a spiritual focus, Solovar balances Superman's practical morality with a sense of cosmic purpose. He's also the diplomat of the group. Not only can he read minds, he's also wise, thoughtful, and slow to anger. Despite his fierce appearance, he's committed to peace, which makes him a mediating presence, as demonstrated the moment he meets Kamandi.

As for sending this group to the Great Disaster, Superman of Earth-Two is another "last boy." As originally written, he was the sole survivor of his own world's version of the Great Disaster. In addition, as the original superhero, he's a living embodiment of the past, representing the antidote to what doomed Kamandi's world—crime, hubris, corruption, and self-destruction. Unlike Krypton, this version of Earth has a second chance. Though devastated, the ideal of heroism that Kamandi represents must survive, and Superman is there to help fan it into flame.

Dawnstar represents an alternative future, one in which humanity somehow found a way to achieve extraordinary technological progress without destroying itself. Her presence says there's a future worth fighting for. Narratively, it's also a way of uniting her future with Kamandi's, offering tacit confirmation that her adventures and Kamandi's take place on the same world/timeline.

Solovar's contribution has already been detailed above, but he's also proof that evolution and intelligence can thrive in unexpected forms, even in the face of those whom we consider the enemy. Perhaps if we get close enough to look into the "other's" eyes, as happens on the tower with Kamandi and Solovar, we'll see we're not so different after all.

Before Kamandi has time to ask the group why they're there, the shadow demons attack in force. Like the one that severed Kamandi's vine, these ones also emerge from inside the tower. This begs the question of what they were doing there. Were they trying to destroy the tower from within? Is the tower spawning them somehow? After all, the last time the heroes encountered them was on the Monitor's satellite. Could they be a byproduct of his tech? It would have been natural for the initial readers of this series to assume as much. Alternatively, were the shadow demons waiting to ambush the heroes? That turns out to be the case, but it also raises a key question: if the Anti-Monitor is aware of the towers' existence,



Plato's Atlantis was a mighty island empire, larger than Libya and Asia Minor combined. For Plato, it served as a moral/political warning: a wealthy, advanced civilization that became arrogant, attacked Athens, and destroyed by earthquakes and floods in a single day.

location, and purpose, why doesn't he have his shadow demons destroy the towers rather than wait for the Monitor to activate them? After all, he or at least his minions can travel through time too, so why not go back in time to prevent the Monitor from placing the towers?

As Dawnstar fights the shadow demons, she remarks that they're not as strong as they were on the Monitor's ship. She also notes how similar they look to the Monitor, which may have been a ploy by Wolfman to rekindle our suspicions of the Monitor. Even though the heroes find them easy to defeat, for some reason one touch of a shadow demon's hand burns Kamandi's shoulder. Then, inexplicably, the shadow demons flee. Dawnstar wants to pursue them, but Solovar reminds her that they are there to protect the tower, nothing more. From a distance, Harbinger chuckles to herself, saying their faithfulness to the Monitor's directive will be rewarded … with death! But this turns out to be nothing more than mustache-twirling posturing because at no point does their adherence to his directive threaten their lives.

Harbinger returns to the Monitor's satellite where a caption tells us it's only been hours since she "embraced the path of the Monitor's deadly foe," but soon she will be given her final command. This scene takes place across three tall, narrow panels that force the reader's eye to move up and down rather than just across. This slows the pacing, which builds tension, but it could be taken to illustrate a narrowing of Harbinger's perspective. The fact that she's rendered so small at the bottom of each panel also conveys a contrast between her and the immensity of the cosmic events that she's about to set in motion.

Dispatched by the Monitor to get the Luthor baby from where it's being kept in an incubator of sorts, Harbinger is shocked to discover he's no longer a baby but a little boy. Even more surprising, although the artwork fails to make this as clear as it should, half of his body is composed of a dark substance that's riddled with stars.

Forty-five thousand years in the past, Arion, Psycho Pirate, and Obsidian approach another of the Monitor's machines, this one towering over Atlantis. They are greeted by Lady Chian, Arion's love interest and a member of the city's royal bodyguard. Before Arion can explain what's going on, Obsidian informs him that Psycho Pirate is missing. We learn he's gone off to sulk after Arion's warning not to mess with his citizens' emotions. When Pariah materializes before Psycho Pirate, asking where he is, Psycho Pirate seizes the opportunity to make him "lighten up," sending Pariah into fits of laughter. The experience is agonizing for Pariah, who begs Psycho Pirate to stop. Forcing him to laugh at the death and destruction he's witnessing mocks everything Pariah believes in, no doubt making him feel complicit in the horror.

Arion puts a stop to Psycho Pirate's playtime with a blast of magic, but having absorbed power from Pariah, Psycho Pirate uses it to send Arion and his people into a fit of terror. Arion tries to resist with his magic and is almost overcome before Obsidian cloaks him in his shadow form to protect him. Psycho Pirate is about to take on the other Atlanteans when he disappears in a flash of yellow light. When he vanishes, Psycho Pirate is no longer holding his Medusa mask, which he dropped when Arion blasted him. Something to keep in mind for later.

Once again, it pays to pause here and ask why this trio was assembled and why they were sent to Atlantis. The kingdom is Arion's home, so his presence there is a no-brainer. But Arion is also a representative of one of the oldest and most advanced civilizations on Earth. Therefore, similar to Superman, he represents history, stability, and tradition, even though his world—and the title in which his adventures are published—is about to end. As a lord high mage, he's also the most powerful member of the group. Unlike Superman, however, he also represents the hubris that will lead to his civilization's collapse, which sets a different tone for this group than the one that was sent to the Great Disaster.

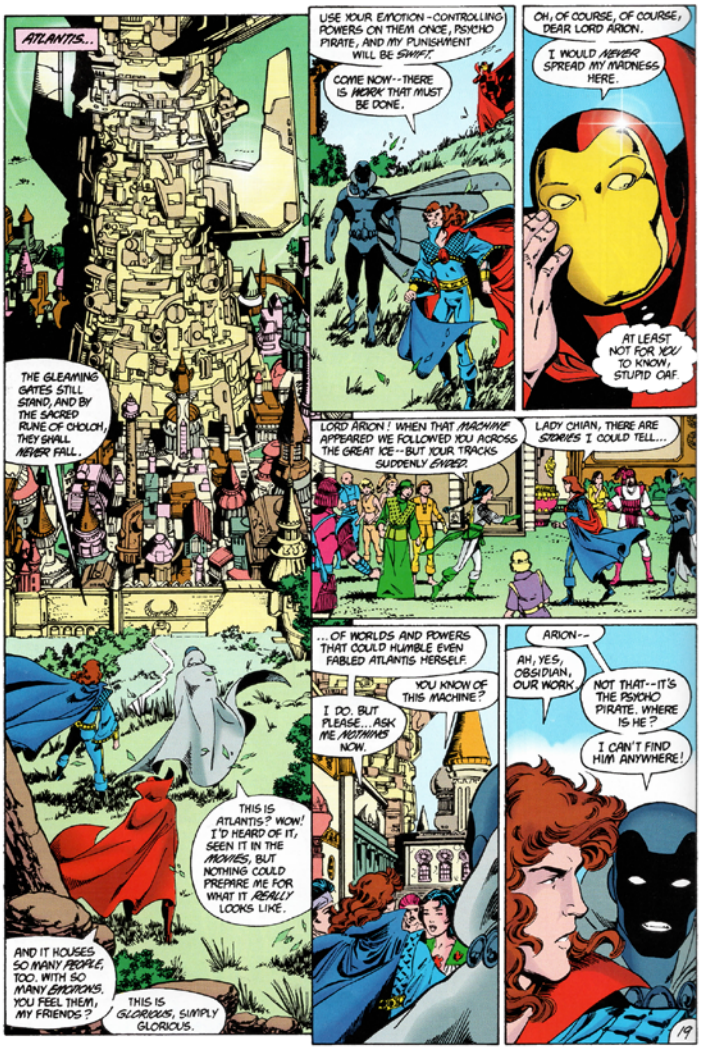
Emotional instability is reflected in Obsidian. Separated from his twin sister (Jennie-Lynn Hayden, a.k.a. Jade) and raised in a series of foster homes with no knowledge of his true parentage or his powers, he had a troubled youth. As a result, he often struggles with fear, depression, and a sense of abandonment. He wants to be heroic like his father, Alan Scott, but he's afraid of the darkness within him, both literally and figuratively. His mystical powers complement Arion's, but he's also plagued by insecurity and concerns about his identity, unsure if he's a hero or something darker. For this reason, confronting the shadow demons is a perfect fit for Obsidian because his shadow form is one of the few powers that's able to overcome them. It also comes in handy protecting Arion from Psycho Pirate's influence. So, perhaps these encounters are helping to tip his self-perception toward the hero side of the scale.

Psycho Pirate takes things one step further along the emotional instability spectrum, going all the way from

insecurity and self-doubt to sadism, chaos, and insanity. Not only is he selfish and unstable, he gets a kick out of manipulating others, sometimes to do his bidding but often merely for his own amusement.

Taken together, it's like the old ways, represented by Arion, are being put to the ultimate stress test. Arion tries to anchor them with power and knowledge, but Obsidian is emotionally raw and vulnerable, teetering between darkness or heroism. Meanwhile, Psycho Pirate is a destabilizing agent who feeds on emotional collapse and does everything he can to engineer it. Unlike the previous team, this one demonstrates that not everything in the DCU can be reconciled, so some of them will have to disappear, including the multiple versions of Atlantis that have accrued across DC over the past five decades.

In fact, to give a brief taste of "the Atlantis problem," in a story that has the Nazis invade Atlantis, *Batman* #19 (1943) shows Kano, the high priest of Atlantis, explaining that the city's existence reaches back just 10,000 years. Then, when seeking to find a gun that's fallen back through time, Earth-Two's Green Lantern sets the dial on a time machine to the year 9638 BC (*All Star Comics* #53, 1950), which puts him there just in time to witness Atlantis sink under the ocean.[176] This being the case, why Superman feels he has to travel at least eight million years into the past in *Superman* #146 to prevent this event is unknown.



***Crisis* #2, p. 19. The Monitor's hand-picked away team arrives at Arion's version of Atlantis, situated somewhere in the North Atlantic 40,000 years in the past. A prehistoric yet advanced sword-and-sorcery civilization, it is ruled by mages and mystic destiny, having yet to sink under the waves like the Atlantis inhabited by Aquaman.**

In addition to the timeline problem, the Atlantis that Green Lantern visits is so technologically advanced that upon his arrival he exclaims, "Great Stars! Is this the [sic] 9638 B.C. … or 2000 A.D.? It looks more like the future than the past!" This conflicts with the Atlantis that Superman visits, which looks more like an ancient Muslim city. It also diverges from the Atlantis that Batman visits, which resembles the ancient Near East, and the Atlantis that Wonder Woman visits in *Wonder Woman* #57 (1953), which looks like ancient Greece. Furthermore, Wonder Woman's Atlantis is located beneath the seabed, as Batman's Atlantis appears to be, but the Atlantis that Superman travels back in time to save merely sinks beneath the ocean, as does the one Green Lantern visits. It's possible that these versions of Atlantis continued sinking below the seabed too, but the Atlantis Superman visits is merely located beneath the waves rather than under the ocean floor. The same goes for the versions of Atlantis inhabited by both versions of Aquaman.

With the contradictions continuing to multiply, some of these versions depict Atlantis as a single city while others portray it as a vast world consisting of multiple cities. Furthermore, in the Batman and Wonder Woman stories, the residents of Atlantis sink themselves willingly to separate themselves from the rest of the world, but Batman and Superman's versions of Atlantis portray the event as a terrible calamity. The same goes for the Atlantis in *Adventures Comics* #269, from which Aqualad was exiled due to his fear of fish!

Arriving much later in the publishing game on Earth-One is Arion's Atlantis, an advanced, mystical civilization that thrived during the Pre-Cataclysmic Age, thousands of years before recorded history. It is a hub of magical power, with sorcery integrated into every aspect of society. The city is characterized by towering spires, elaborate architecture, and enchanted landscapes. Regardless of its beauty, Atlantis is plagued by internal strife and a cosmic struggle between the forces of order and chaos, which threaten its existence. The city's eventual demise is due to an attack by Chaon, Lord of Chaos (see *Arion: Lord of Atlantis Special* #1). Instead of following their city beneath the waves, Arion rescues as many of its residents as possible, vowing to build a new future elsewhere.

Following Psycho Pirate's disappearance, we have the first series of black "slab" panels that create a claustrophobic effect as Psycho Pirate finds himself held captive in an undisclosed

176 This issue also presents an intriguing theory of time travel, depicting time as a mountain that keeps growing, creating ledges in the past on which things moving backward through time can get stuck.

location while a mysterious voice addresses him. Psycho Pirate is defiant at first, but when his captor removes Psycho Pirate's face, he promises to do whatever is asked of him, never wanting to endure the torment of being unable to express his emotions again.

These "slab" panels are a recurring motif as various characters interact with the Anti-Monitor. On the surface, black is often associated with death, which is fitting here. However, it's like the characters in these scenes are inhabiting the sixth panel of the third "anti-creation" sequence at the start of issue #1, the panel that was filled with inky blackness once the anti-matter cloud swept through. Gone are Pérez's elaborate cityscapes, swirling cosmic vistas, and technological marvels. The black panels erase all context and plunge the characters into pure nothingness—or less than nothingness. This symbolizes the Anti-Monitor's quest not just to destroy the multiverse but also to erase the very concept of existence itself. Not only is Psycho Pirate's context removed, with it goes his identity—and for a moment, his face—making him feel small, isolated, and alone. Even before he meets the Anti-Monitor, his universe and identity is stripped away. The fact that he can hear the Anti-Monitor but not see him makes him all the more frightened and easier to manipulate.

Psycho Pirate's absence from the universe is detected by the Monitor, with Harbinger remarking that his powers aren't that crucial. "My dear Lyla," the Monitor replies, ignoring the fact that she's in her Harbinger garb, "I needed him more than either Obsidian or Arion. The menace we deal with is one of emotion." This seems like a curious thing to say, seeing as the *literal* menace they're dealing with is the unrelenting wall of anti-matter that's erasing the multiverse. But once again, careful excavation reveals that what's really at stake in *Crisis* goes much deeper than saving worlds.

The encroaching anti-matter represents a literal existential peril, but uncontrolled or corrupted emotions, as represented by Psycho Pirate, are the ultimate threat. Fear of loss causes people to resist change and remain rigid when survival depends on their ability to change and adapt. Despair causes people to give up. Hatred drives conflict between people and groups, causing them to turn against one another instead of uniting. All of these threats could prevent the heroes and villains from working together to save the multiverse.

Taking things outside the text, Wolfman also seems to have been speaking directly to readers here, knowing that, like Pariah, they will grieve the death of the multiverse. However, if we're unwilling to let go of the past, how can we create room for the future? If the Monitor had been given an opportunity to address readers at this moment, he might have said, "The menace we deal with is nostalgia." As "crisisologist" Adam Murdoch puts it: "Emotion is one of the main themes of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*—the devastation in the story is framed as a state of mind as much as a physical occurrence. … [T]he series itself was conceived in anticipation of the emotions of DC fans, serving as an expressive catharsis and a meaningful transition for them—and the character of the Psycho-Pirate is crucial to the expression of that theme."[177] The full power of the emotional spectrum was explored in a much more literal way by Geoff Johns in later years, most notably in "The Sinestro Corps War" storyline and subsequent Green Lantern tales.

At first glance, the Monitor's decision to recruit someone like Psycho Pirate, whose mind is so far gone, may itself seem like an insane move. Corrupt, selfish, whiny, and sadistic, he's the last person one would trust with anything important. However, with the Anti-Monitor weaponizing fear, hatred, and despair to destabilize and destroy worlds, Psycho Pirate may be the multiverse's best defense. The Monitor needs someone who can turn fear into courage, hatred into unity, and despair into hope, rallying the heroes and preventing mass hysteria. The Monitor knows Psycho Pirate is unstable, but he's willing to take the risk. As mentioned earlier, this raises the question of why, if he's able to send Harbinger's avatars to any point in history, the Monitor didn't recruit Psycho Pirate *before* he went insane. And it's not like the Monitor didn't have more stable emotion-based characters to choose from. As Harbinger suggests at one point, why not use Raven instead? But the Monitor says he can't find any trace of her. This is due to her being in her father's home dimension of Azareth, as shown in *New Teen Titans* #5. However, if that's the case, once again, why not send Harbinger back in time to a moment *before* Raven disappeared? The Monitor's inability to detect Raven in Azareth also indicates a limitation to his powers. Are they restricted only to parallel universes but not alternate dimensions?

Either way, the Monitor's gamble fails. Psycho Pirate's emotional instability and selfishness make him easy prey for the Anti-Monitor. Instead of being used to stabilize emotions, the Pirate becomes a weapon of emotional collapse, which is exactly the opposite of what the Monitor intended. This represents a key miscalculation on the Monitor's part, proving sometimes you can't fight fire with fire. He can't save the world by manipulating people's feelings. That's the Anti-Monitor's ploy. The Monitor must inspire them honestly instead, a role that eventually falls to Harbinger, Pariah, and Alexander Luthor as they rally the heroes and villains to save the multiverse.

With the emotional angle having failed, the Monitor turns to plan B—the new Dr. Light. "It is time for me to create her!" One might wonder why he doesn't just turn to the "old" Dr. Light instead. However, considering his failure with Psycho Pirate, the answer should be obvious. Dr. Light, a.k.a. Arthur Light, was a scientist at S.T.A.R. Labs who discovered how to manipulate light to create solid-light constructs, laser blasts, teleportation beams, and illusions (see *Justice League of America* #12). After stealing experimental light technology from Thanagar (see *DC Super-Stars* #14), he turned to a life of crime. Like so many villains, he regarded himself as a criminal mastermind, but he frequently underestimated heroes and made foolish mistakes. As a result, he became something of a punching bag in the DCU, repeatedly defeated by the Justice League, the Teen

177 Murdough, 68.



George Pérez's character sketches for the new Doctor Light, a creation of the Monitor who was first introduced in *Crisis* #4. Also known as Kimiyo Hoshi's, a brilliant Japanese astronomer, she was transformed into a heroine of pure photonic power, her costume derived from the villainous Arthur Light and her initial attitude to match, although she eventually takes a more heroic turn.

Titans, and others. A pathetic, tragic figure, he was talented, but he was also emotionally weak and easily humiliated. Hence, not only would he be an untrustworthy choice, he is too selfish and unstable, which would have made him ripe for the Anti-Monitor's plucking.

Before we meet the new Dr. Light, we return to Atlantis where Arion confronts Pariah, who explains he's from the first earth to fall victim to the peril that's now threatening Earth-One. Not only that, he says his curse began long before that for an evil act he committed, something he has paid for a thousand times over. Considering how long this has been going on, one wonders why Pariah doesn't use the term "millions" instead. As a perennial witness to disaster, he warns that his presence in Atlantis means a calamity is imminent. Sure enough, moments later the wall of anti-matter is spotted, and Pariah warns that in a matter of hours, this earth will die. This begs the question once again: once the wall of anti-matter arrives, how fast does it move? Is its speed constant, or does it change due to some unknown factor? It seems as if its speed is determined by editorial convenience more than anything else.

Arion and Obsidian feel betrayed by the Monitor, with Arion saying, "the Monitor swore our presence here would divert such *crises*," the first time a form of that word sneaks into the series. The other heroes may have felt just as betrayed, seeing as if the anti-matter destroys Earth 45,000 years in the past, why weren't all of them sent there to stop it rather than protecting the Monitor's towers at points in the future that will no longer exist if Arion and Obsidian fail? Furthermore, if the anti-matter does destroy even some parts of Earth back in Arion's time, why is there no evidence of that destruction in the future?

Considering the tenuousness of the time-travel elements of this story, commenting repeatedly on it may be a futile effort, but for the sake of completeness, it feels necessary to point out these issues. Especially because when Harbinger returns to the Monitor's satellite, she notes "the fraying" is beginning again, this time threatening the Earth-One universe, but it already threatened that universe 45,000 years earlier!

"And I haven't completed the arrangements for the new Dr. Light," the Monitor says while wearing some sort of gold technological headpiece. "My foe moves faster than I anticipated." If that's the case, couldn't the Monitor just step back in time to buy himself a few extra hours, days, weeks, months, or even years? What does "running out of time" even mean to someone like him?

Now it's Harbinger's turn to enter the black slabs, where she reports to the Monitor's foe. Shown only in silhouette, he looks similar to the shadow demons but nothing at all like the Anti-Monitor who is revealed in issue #5. Could it be that the concept art hadn't been developed for him yet? Or is this how he appears when not in one of the "shells" he creates to house his essence? Also, unlike the Monitor, who has multiple screens through which he observes the destruction of the multiverse, the Anti-Monitor has a single screen. As Adam Murdough and Peter Rios point out in their podcast commentary on this issue, this could be taken to represent the Anti-Monitor's singular vision.[178] He regards the diversity, creativity, and chaos of the multiverse as a threat that must be eliminated. In this way, he could be interpreted as a personification of the editorial impulse and market realities that had spurred Wolfman and co. to prune the multiverse in the first place.

Harbinger reports that most of the Monitor's heroes are in position. The Anti-Monitor tells her to go, saying there's work to be done. Then he gloats to himself, confident that the Monitor will fail, as he always has, even though we're going to learn later that the two are so evenly matched that they fought each other to a standstill that lasted millions of years.

The final page of this issue provides a glimpse inside Harbinger's head, which is projected against the blackness of space as the voices of the Anti-Monitor and the Monitor battle for control of her mind like an angel and a demon on her shoulders. In the background are Earth-One and its moon. Nearby, a beam of light shoots out of the Monitor's satellite to a destination that won't be revealed until issue #4.

178 Comic Geek Speak, "The Crisis Tapes 12 — Crisis on Infinite Earths #2 Part 2," YouTube video, May 5, 2015, 2:40:30, https://tinyurl.com/4v8pawaw.

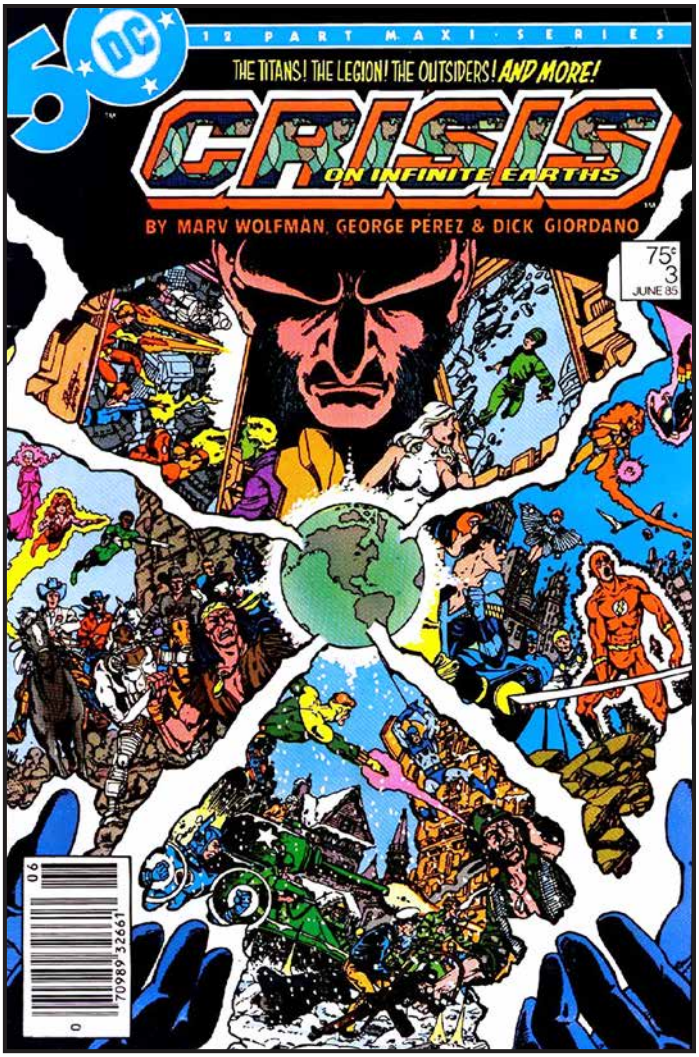
CHAPTER 13

"Oblivion upon Us"—Crisis #3

The theme song for the cover of *Crisis* #3 might be, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." That's because it portrays the Monitor's shadowy face floating above an image of Earth as his hands cradle vignettes that show his five "away teams" in the midst of battle, each image separated by a bolt of white energy that is either striking or radiating out from the planet. Hinting at the various historical focal points that this story will cover, we see glimpses of everything from the Old West to World War II to the 30th century. As a playful touch, in place of his signature, Pérez wrote "Guess Who?", stylized to look like his name.

The opening splash page takes place on the Monitor's satellite, which is described as "somewhere beyond all space and time," even though it tends to hang out in orbit around Earth-One. Poor Alex Luthor, who has somehow aged from infancy to adolescence in a matter of days, is sitting inside a glass sphere while the Monitor examines him with the help of an elaborate golden machine, a perfect example of the detailed "Pérezian" tech that he loved so much. With Alex buck naked and his legs spread while a beautiful woman like Harbinger looks on, it's every teenage boy's worst nightmare. However, his nakedness is also a mirror image of the Monitor's nascent state on Oa's moon prior to encountering his anti-matter rival. Furthermore, it raises the question of how Alex is able to exist in the positive-matter universe without some kind of containment suit like Wildfire wears to prevent the anti-matter part of him from having a destructive interaction with his environment.

The Monitor is intrigued by the impossibility of Alex being a combination of what he calls "positive and negative energy," a transformation that occurred when Alex hurtled through the vibrational gap that separated his universe from Earth-One. Why this happened is a mystery to the Monitor, but *Who's Who* #14 says it's because "The top spun through the anti-matter wave, imbuing the child with both positive and anti-matter energy, making young Alex a living matter transformer." The real mystery is why the anti-matter didn't outright destroy Alex and the top, but it could be because he encountered it in the limbo between worlds rather than in one universe or another. As his vibrational rate changed from one universe to the next, it may



***Crisis on Infinite Earths* #3. The cover promises "The Titans! The Outsiders! The Legion! And more!", and Pérez delivers exactly that. Rather than one spotlighted showdown, he stages four battlefronts, reinforcing *Crisis* as a war fought across centuries, genres, and realities.**

have altered the anti-matter's otherwise devastating effect.

Due to the boy's unique makeup, the Monitor is convinced that Alex is "the key to the terror at hand," though he's not sure how. Despite being poked, prodded, and scrutinized in the buff, Alex is willing to help however he can.

"My heart cries for you, child," the Monitor says, "for an innocent must be corrupted that a universe may live." As Adam Murdough argues, the idea of lost innocence is one of the core themes of *Crisis,* with young Alex being a prime example. "He is symbolic of 'childhood's end' for DC Comics and their longtime fans, the lost innocence of the old DC Universe of the Golden and Silver Ages," Murdough says, "sacrificed in the name of enhanced 'maturity' and marketability, to help DC Comics meet the supposed demands of new readers in the 1980s."[179]

Building on this meta-analysis, does Alex represent the "innocent" DC reader, caught between the old world and the new, about to be sacrificed so the DCU can continue? Then again, could such readers have been the very thing that would help DC bridge the past to the future, the substance of their being altered as they passed from one world to the next? Maybe Alex is the first "*Crisis* kid," as Peter Rios of *Comic Geek Speak* calls readers who came of age with *Crisis.* After all, Alex literally crosses between universes in a "top," i.e., a child's toy. Like Alex, such readers were also metaphorically rocketed from an "evil, corrupt" world—DC's past, dominated by the accursed multiverse—to a world that was dying—the DCU, which was in dire need of a miracle if the publisher hoped to keep the doors open. When Alex says, "But what if I can't help? What if I'm not what you're looking for? What then, Monitor? What happens then?", could this be interpreted as an indication of the "Hail Mary" status of this series? If *Crisis* failed to reinvigorate DC's sales amongst such readers, then what?

"There is no answer," a caption says. "Indeed, there can be none." Sure enough, considering that a company-wide course correction like this had never been attempted before, no one knew what the outcome would be.

Harbinger attempts to get the Monitor's attention, but either he's too consumed by his work to hear her, or he's ignoring her. Harbinger fears the latter, wondering if he already knows she's in league with the enemy.

Speak of the devil, she flies off to deliver a report to the yet-unnamed adversary in a full page of narrow black-slab panels—not only narratively effective but also a great way for Pérez to meet a tight deadline! She says she has news of the Monitor, but the antagonist—who still looks nothing like the Anti-Monitor as he's revealed later—tells her that such reports are unnecessary, as he knows all. He orders her to kill the Luthor child, noting that "the dead can present no threats." (The "Blackest Night" storyline begs to differ!) Oddly, she never acts on this command. Throughout

179 Murdough, 74. As "the Irredeemable Shag" points out in an episode of *The Monitor Tapes* podcast, this is also an unintentional "call forward" to when Alex essentially goes insane during *Infinite Crisis* while seeking to create the "perfect Earth" ("Tape #13: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #3," *The Monitor Tapes: A Crisis on Infinite Earths Podcast*, January 27, 2026..





(left) Adam Murdough in 2015 and (right) Peter Rios. With Murdough a self-proclaimed "Crisisologist" and Rios a "*Crisis* kid" (someone who read the series as it came out during adolescence), the pair hosted *The Crisis Tapes*, which takes a deep dive into all things *Crisis*. Murdough's academic bent and Rios's encyclopedic knowledge of comics make the series a treasure trove of insights.

the exchange, Psycho Pirate prattles on, wanting to turn Harbinger's "jangling mass of contradictory emotions" into blind loyalty or love, but the Anti-Monitor tells him to keep his powers to himself for the moment.

The next page shows the Flash running across a cityscape under a stormy sky; it's the first time he's appeared in the series where he isn't in the midst of dying. A caption informs us that this scene takes place on "Earth-1: our future." Does this mean Wolfman was conflating Earth-One with our world? Also, is this the same version of the 30th century in which the Legion lives?

Legends of the DC Universe: Crisis on Infinite Earths #1, written by Wolfman and published in 1999, could have offered an answer to this latter question. This issue is regarded by many as *Crisis* #4.5, seeing as it fills in some of the story gaps between issue #4 and 5 of the original series. It shows Barry and Iris enjoying the best that 30th-century life has to offer, including champagne and flying cars in a pristine cityscape that's full of natural beauty under a clear blue sky. Even though the city's architecture resembles the version of Metropolis where the Legion resides, there's no sign of the Legion, and this city isn't named.

When a strange weather anomaly interrupts their bliss, Barry is hesitant to investigate, insisting his career as the Flash is over. But Iris can tell he's been itching to put on his super suit ever since he arrived, and she urges him to check it out. Little do they realize it's the last time they'll ever see each other. In light of that, one would think Wolfman would have made their "final" farewell a bigger deal than it is. Instead, Barry merely puts on his costume and runs off. He doesn't even say goodbye.

Back to *Crisis* #3, as Barry runs, a thought bubble indicates he's only been in that city for a month, "a month of happiness … a month of hope," as we've just seen. Another

caption directs us to *The Flash* #350, which is still months away from being published. Future readers knew he was in the 30th century, where he and Iris were transplanted after his trial. Flash's plan was to retire, but the Anti-Monitor's plot is about to kibosh all that.

As Barry runs, he sees a mysterious white light up ahead. "It's coming right at me," he says. "Only one hope … one chance." Then he resorts to the very ability that led to his discovery of the multiverse in the first place—vibration!

Crisis #3 doesn't show us where he goes, but *Crisis* #4.5 does. Barry tries to relax his inner vibrational rate, which is all that's keeping him in the 30th century, so he can return to his own time period. But the anti-matter's too fast, once again moving at a speed that may have been convenient for Wolfman but is not at all consistent with its rate of motion in other parts of the series.

Instead of returning to his present, Barry finds himself in a parallel world. A caption later in the story says it "should be called Earth-D." Why this designation? Perhaps it's short for "Earth-Diversity." After all, Barry is right in time to witness an African American version of Mirror Master render a Japanese version of the Flash into a two-dimensional being. This is followed by a "mirror image" of the scene from *Crisis* #1 where the Joker holds a gun on the Flash while spewing metatextual commentary. This time it's Mirror Master about to shoot a two-dimensional version of the Flash while commenting on the Flash's one-dimensional personality, which is what makes him so predictable. Lest anyone think this is a subtextual indication that Wolfman had had a change of heart regarding his love for the Flash, recall that six years after this issue was published, he released a novel retelling *Crisis* primarily from Barry Allen's perspective.

Seeking to find out where he is, Barry follows the other Flash (Tanaka) home. As he watches Tanaka greet his wife (Hoshi), Barry muses, "I've always had to use the cosmic treadmill to cross the dimensions from Earth-One to Earth-Two," which creates a true record-scratch moment. What would have caused Wolfman to say this when the entire discovery of the multiverse occurred not when Barry created the cosmic treadmill but when he accidentally vibrated his way to Earth-Two? Yes, he has *sometimes* used the cosmic treadmill to traverse worlds (see *Flash* #179, for example), but why would Wolfman have had Barry say he *always* does?

Fearing he's trapped in that world and despairing of ever seeing Iris again, Barry has a moment of anguish. Then he reenacts a version of his first meeting with Jay and Joan Garrick, intruding on Tanaka and Hoshi's night of television watching with their kids. Like Barry, Tanaka is a comic book fan, and he recognizes Barry immediately, even showing him a few issues of that world's comic books. After introducing them to the concept of the multiverse, Barry asks for help to return to his world.

Tanaka takes Barry to meet his friends, the Justice Alliance of America (JAA). At JAA headquarters, which is located underwater, Barry meets analogues of the JLAers, only these characters are far more racially diverse, which was in keeping



The Flash isn't the only one who's met parallel versions of the Justice League. The Avengers met proxies of the JLA via Squadron Supreme in *Avengers* #85 and 86. Squadron Supreme functions as a thinly veiled Justice League mirror. Hyperion stands in for Superman, Nighthawk for Batman, Power Princess for Wonder Woman, Doctor Spectrum for Green Lantern, and the Whizzer for the Flash. Roy Thomas used these proxies to critique, and reframe DC's iconic team.

with Wolfman's goals for the DCU following *Crisis*. On the way there, Tanaka notes that he used to assume his world and Barry's were similar. But then the stories in Tanaka's comic books changed, and it seemed like the joy left Barry's world. What happened? Could this have been Wolfman's not-so-subtle critique of the so-called "Dark Age" that was precipitated shortly after *Crisis* by titles like *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns,* leading to an era dominated by increasingly grim and gritty storytelling?

We'll depart from the action at this point in favor or *Crisis* #3, but we'll return to *Crisis* #4.5 when it intersects once again with the ensuing narrative.

Back in 1985 on Earth-One, New York is being devoured by a wall of whiteness that's consuming everything it

touches, from birds to people to buildings. Seeking to stop it are members of the Teen Titans and the Outsiders. Returning to the theme of helplessness in the face of this onslaught, a pair of captions tells us, "Their powers are almost without limit … Unfortunately, they won't be enough." But you can't blame a hero for trying, and that's exactly what they do. The scenes are rich in detail, with Pérez showing his flair for architecture, mayhem, dramatic camera angles, and rubble—lots and lots of rubble. There are some playful touches too, such as a frightened man running past the heroes wearing a T-shirt that reads, "Belly Dancers Do It Better," an homage to Pérez's wife, who was a belly dancer.

Apart from sharing the same base of operations, the Teen Titans and the Outsiders are a natural pairing, seeing as both groups represent youth and rebellion. They also have a common link through Batman, and like him, they tend to operate outside the system. The Titans are led by Nightwing, Batman's former sidekick who left to form his own identity. The Outsiders, a group of younger heroes, were assembled by Batman because he was frustrated with the Justice League's bureaucracy (see *The Brave and the Bold* #200). Despite these commonalities, the Outsiders and the Titans aren't natural teammates. They have different styles, different leadership, and different missions, but once again, the crisis is forcing characters to cooperate across boundaries that would normally divide them, another way of forging the disparate pieces of the DCU into a cohesive whole.

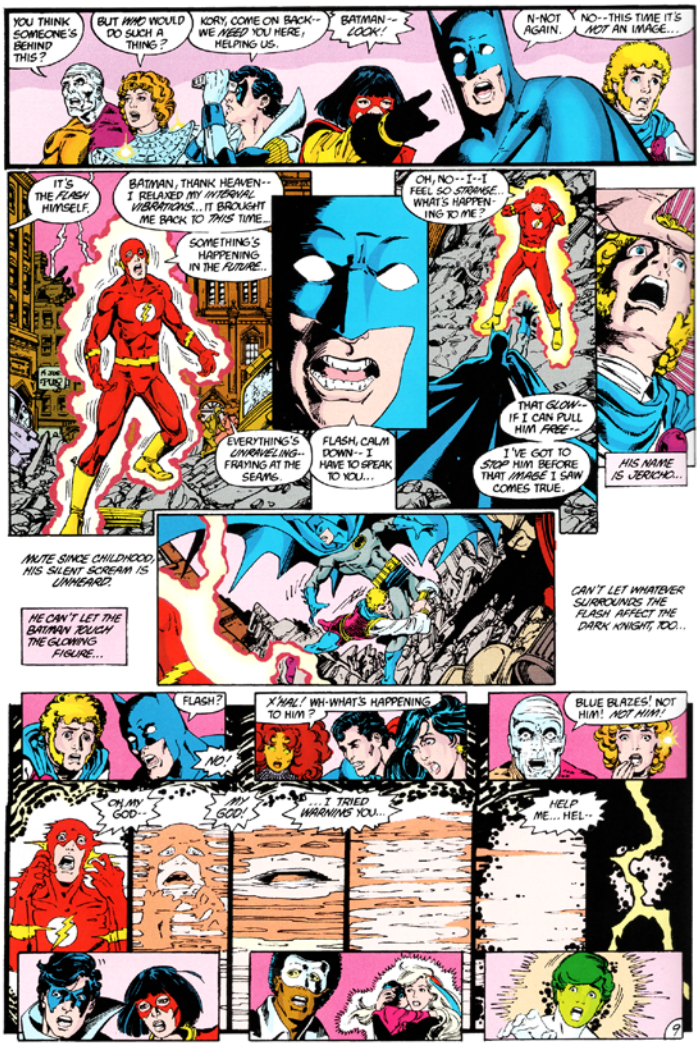
"Newest" Teen Titan Kole, whom Wolfman created for the sole purpose of having her die in this series, makes her first appearance here. Maybe that's why she adopts a "see cow, say cow" approach to using her powers, explaining what she's doing while she's doing it, including such expository lines as "Mine is the power to spin crystal … anything from a piece of art … to a safety slide!" while she creates the latter. She also erects a crystal barrier to keep the public away from the heroes as they work and a crystal lattice to prevent a building from collapsing.

This is a scene where the speed at which the anti-matter cloud is moving becomes confusing—and convenient for Wolfman. The first time we glimpse it, it's approaching Earth-One from outer space. A few panels later, it's reduced a pigeon and the top of the Empire State Building to blue-line sketches. As the heroes run around saving people and reminding readers of their various powers—or lack of powers in the case of Katana—the anti-matter works its way down the building, but it doesn't seem to progress horizontally. Why it's causing buildings that aren't being touched by the anti-matter to collapse isn't clear either. But it's probably part of the wave of natural disasters caused by its approach.

With the young Turks struggling to hold their ground, the old guard shows up in the form of Superman and Batman. They're just in time for Superman to save Wonder Girl from being crushed by a collapsing building, showing that these veterans still have a thing or two to teach the next generation.

"Then all is well?" Katana asks once Nightwing confirms that Wonder Girl is okay.

"Not even close," Batman says as he approaches. "Something's out there … and we don't know how much time we have." Considering their immediate circumstances, this seems like an incredibly odd question and an equally nonsensical reply. First, clearly things are not okay! Second, they're not facing some vague threat somewhere "out there," as Batman indicates. It's a clear and present danger right in front of them—the white wall of anti-matter that's "blue lining" everything it touches! As for how much time they have, it should be a simple matter for someone as scientifically minded as Batman to track how quickly the anti-matter is advancing. The answer? As fast or as slow as Wolfman needed it to move. This lack of consistency is one of the most frustrating aspects of the first "movement" of this series (issues #1–4) because it deviates from one of the core requirements of an imaginary world—consistency. One could strive to find an in-story reason for why the pace of destruction slows. For instance, Earth-One and Earth-Two have pride of place in the



***Crisis* #3, p. 9. Barry Allen frightens the Caped Crusader yet again as the Teen Titans and the Outsiders try to save NYC from the anti-matter wave. Metaphorically, it's like the baton is about to be handed off to the next generation of heroes, and Batman is torn in between both eras.**

DCU, and even the Monitor refers to them as "primary earths," so perhaps they have a special quality that makes them more resistant to anti-matter than other earths. But this feels like it's pushing the limit of charity. As we've seen on Earth-Three and with Barry Allen in the future, the anti-matter isn't just descending; it's advancing so fast that not even the Flash can evade it, and he can move at or even beyond the speed of light (See *The Flash* #209 where he runs at the "speed of life," "the ultimate speed at which living beings can exist.") The Monitor also keeps saying how he's running out of time because his enemy is moving faster than he expected. And views from orbit show the anti-matter essentially drilling into the planet while chunks of Earth fly off into space. Wouldn't this alone lead to a global calamity long before the world is erased?

Adopting a one-dimensional approach that's typical of her character when she loses her temper, Starfire insists on firing energy bolts at the anti-matter cloud, even though it has no effect. She's distraught because she doesn't want to see her adopted world conquered the same way her homeworld of Tamaran was. Superman, another refugee from a destroyed world, seeks to comfort her.

Crashing the party once again is the Flash, who warns them that reality is unraveling. As we've just seen, though, in *Crisis* #4.5 the anti-matter's encroachment interfered with the Flash's attempt to return to the 20th century on Earth-One, sending him to a parallel world instead. And later in that issue, he goes straight from there to the Anti-Monitor's black void with no stops in between, which would make this moment impossible. This begs the question of why Wolfman contradicted his own story 14 years later. It's also one of many reasons why it might be best to regard *Crisis* #4.5 as a piece of fan fiction rather than canon, even though it was penned by the author of the original work.

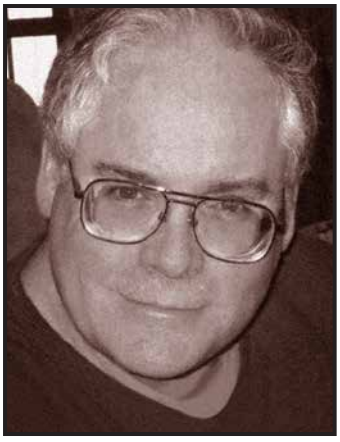
Seeking to help Barry, Batman reaches out to rescue him from the glow that's surrounding him. But Jericho, another new member of the Teen Titans, senses that's a bad idea, and he tackles Batman before his hand makes contact. Although Jericho has the power to control other people by looking into their eyes, there's no time for that, and the Dark Knight's orbs are fixed on his speedy companion anyway. It's not clear what would have happened if Batman had touched the Flash. Maybe he would have been dragged into the Anti-Monitor's prison too. Or perhaps he might have disrupted Barry's fragile existence, killing him. Either way, how Jericho knew this was dangerous is unclear, and as a mute, he isn't about to explain it. Jericho was still a fairly new character, having debuted less than a year earlier in *Tales of the New Teen Titans* #42, which is part one of the famous "Judas Contract" storyline, so he and his powers were still being established. But he was obviously perceptive and proactive enough to avert disaster.

Viewed symbolically, one could interpret Batman reaching for the Flash as him reaching for the past. Barry is already "dead" in a sense, a fading memory. Having a new hero like Jericho stopping Batman could signify the need to let go of the old ways because *Crisis* is about change and rebirth, reaching toward the future rather than the past. DC is in the process of doing away with the Flash, and Batman doesn't want to get sucked into that, or he might be the next character on the chopping block. Better to stay focused on the next generation, as he's doing with the Outsiders. Despite some of the inconsistencies and discrepancies that often riddle Wolfman's work, it's amazing how much symbolism he and Pérez wove into such seemingly incidental moments.

Seconds later, the Flash cries out to God as he's torn apart and disappears in a flash of lightning while everyone looks on in fear. Wide eyes and gaping mouths are the order of the day, with Metamorpho crying, "Not him! Not him!" Does he realize the metatextual significance of what's happening too?

The next page is one of the only traditional nine-panel grids to be found in *Crisis.* Pérez said he used this approach to emphasize the cold, calculating, machine-like nature of Brainiac, who is the sole subject of this page. Floating somewhere in space in his "brain ship"—co-designed by Wolfman and artist Ed Hannigan in *Action Comics* #544—Brainiac watches as the anti-matter tears through stars and planets alike, noting it's moving faster than he calculated. Yet another reference to speed that isn't consistent with observation. Realizing the only way to save himself from destruction is to save the universe, Brainiac sets course for Earth-One. He gives no indication of his plan, but for reasons unexplained, he's convinced the one person who can help him is Luthor.

From there we jump to the location of the third tuning fork tower, the fictional nation of Markovia in late spring 1944. The Germans are attacking the town where the tower is located, but an assemblage of DC's war heroes have gathered to repel the assault. These include Sgt. Rock and Easy Co., Jeb Stuart and the crew of the Haunted Tank, and the Losers. As for the earth on which this tower is located, Wolfman told *Comics Interview*, "I purposely indicated that it [this battle] took place on Earth-2. You'll notice that he [Sgt. Rock] knew about the 'mystery man' of the All-Star Squadron."[180] But Bob Greenberger and interviewer Patrick O'Neill were quick to point out that Sgt. Rock had previously teamed up with Wonder Woman and Batman of Earth-One. "It really won't make any difference by the time we're done," Wolfman replied, appearing to blow off the criticism, "because of the



At a DC Christmas party, Dick Giordano asked artist Ed Hannigan to design the new Brainiac. Hannigan later said he sold the concept "lock, stock and barrel." That redesign helped Marv Wolfman transform Brainiac into a skull-faced terror whose imagery led to 1983's Superman skull-ship revamp. Beyond Brainiac, Hannigan is a versatile artist, drawing *Batman* covers, *The Defenders*, *Spectacular Spider-Man*, and *Green Arrow*.

180 O'Neill, 13.

way we're structuring the ending. It's the simplest, most direct, and easiest to follow end."

Even if this scene does take place on Earth-Two, five earths are left, so wouldn't it have been a better strategy to put one tower at five crucial time periods on all five earths? As we'll see, continuing the Earth-One/Earth-Two–centrism that characterizes this series and multiversal stories as a whole, two of the towers are on Earth-Two and three of them are on Earth-One (if one accepts that Kamandi's world exists in a future timeline of Earth-One rather than Earth-AD).

The soldiers aren't the only ones there. Also on the scene are three more of the Monitor's champions—Geo-Force, Dr. Polaris, and Blue Beetle. Geo-Force's presence there is to be expected, seeing as he's the prince of Markovia. This was established in *The Brave and the Bold* #200, where Batman teamed up with him, leading to the founding of the Outsiders. Similar to transporting Arion to Atlantis, sending Geo-Force to his kingdom's past during a time of crisis makes things personal. He's literally trying to "hold the ground" for his people.

When it comes to explaining why these three characters from the future are teamed up, the connections are a bit harder to see. One the one hand, all three of them have science-based powers, able to affect magnetism, geological forces, and technology. With World War II often viewed as the first fully mechanized war, with the emphasis of the conflict shifting from soldier vs. soldier to machine vs. machine, this is an ideal fit. It enables them to be "grounded," so to speak, which is important in a genre like war comics that tended more toward realism than DC's other books, the Haunted Tank being one exception. That said, it would have been nice to see the Creature Commandos, Gravedigger, and/or Ghost Patrol thrown into the mix to add an otherworldly quality to a war that was growing increasingly bizarre due to the Anti-Monitor's attack. Mademoiselle Marie, a French Resistance fighter, would have diversified the group too, as would have the Unknown Soldier and the Viking Commando.

As for how the three heroic personalities fit together, Dr. Polaris literally has two poles, the good Neal Emerson and his villainous alter ego. He represents what science becomes when it loses moral control. This is epitomized by the Third Reich, whose technological superiority gave it an edge at the start of WWII. They also attempted to apply technology in increasingly dreadful and malicious ways in their concentration camps. The connection between technology and morality was also a key concern when the atom bomb was developed toward the end of the war. With his powers rooted in the earth, Geo-Force represents stability in a collapsing world. Blue Beetle is a bit of a wild card. He's a master of technology, but he constantly runs up against the limits of his inventions, proving that human ingenuity isn't enough to save the day. Geo-Force and Dr. Polaris also tend toward the serious end of the spectrum, and Blue Beetle offers some much-needed comic relief.

As the battle against the Germans proceeds, various members of DC's war chest get their moment in the spotlight.



Wernher von Braun worked in Nazi Germany's rocket development program. He and his team developed the V-1 "buzz bomb" and the V-2, the world's firstlong-range guided ballistic missile. After the fall of Nazi Germany in WWII, Von Braun was recruited by the United States to help expand their space rocket technology rather than have him fall into the hands of the Soviets.

Prominent among them is Farmer Boy, a member of Easy Co., who is mistakenly referred to as "Flower" in this issue. Proving a rose by any other name isn't always just as sweet, the peace-loving soldier meets his demise in this issue. As for the Germans, they're convinced the Monitor's tower is a new Allied weapon, and they plan to protect it until their scientists can uncover its secrets.

Eager to prove they can rise above their derisive name, the Losers initiate an assault on the Germans, leading the way for the members of the Haunted Tank and Easy Co. Sgt. Rock and Jeb Stuart greet each other, during which Rock asks if Stuart's still talking to ghosts, a reference to their past adventures together in the pages of *G.I. Combat* (see issue #150, for example).

While the battle rages, Capt. Storm of the Losers climbs the tower to examine it, only to be attacked by a shadow demon. When the others hear Storm's scream of anguish, Geo-Force tells the soldiers to stay back while he investigates, but Sgt. Rock says, "Like hell, Mister. This war's for soldiers, not mystery-men like you all-star heroes." This is the line that Wolfman was referring to when he said this scene (and all of Sgt. Rock, the Haunted Tank, and the Losers' stories) take place on Earth-Two. But if Rock is referring to *All Star Comics,* as far as we know, that's an Earth-One publication that features characters from Earth-Two. Think back to *All Star Comics* #3, for example, where the JSA first appears. When Johnny Thunder stops by a comic book rack prior to talking his way into the JSA meeting, the titles shown include *Detective Comics, Fun Comics, All-American Comics, Flash Comics,* and *Adventure Comics* but not *All Star Comics*. Other comics are on the rack, but their titles aren't visible, so one of them might have been *All Star Comics*. At any rate, it's nice to imagine Sgt. Rock among the thousands of other soldiers who consumed mountains of comic books during his down time when not at the front.

Misunderstanding Rock's supposed reference to *All Star Comics*, Geo-Force is about to deny that he's part of the All-Star Squadron when they witness the shadow demons blue lining not just Capt. Storm but also the rest of the Losers. All four of them get a close-up of their anguished faces before they disappear.



***Crisis* #3, p. 13. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). This sequence was a hotbed of mistakes. First, Farmer Boy is referred to as "Flower," an error that later printings didn't correct. Second, Blue Beetle claims to have the magical scarab, which he doesn't. Plus, Sgt. Rock and Easy Co. fought in WWII on Earth-One, not Earth-Two.**

The Losers' departure from the DCU received special treatment in *The Losers Special* #1, which was supposed to be the first in a series of specials that played off the events in *Crisis*. After a brief recap of each characters' origin, the story shows them dying on the field of battle in circumstances that don't bear any resemblance to how they meet their demise in this issue. In fact, even though it's a bannered *Crisis* crossover, there's no mention of the crisis at all. Was this meant to depict a parallel version of the Losers who existed on a world other than Earth-One (or Earth-Two, according to Wolfman)?

"I think Murray Boltinoff**,** the editor, took as his mandate to work off the Losers' role in CRISIS but make the book work for the war fans without too much intrusion from the superhero and anti-matter elements," Bob Greenberger told *Comics Interview*.[181]

181 O'Neill, 11.



Murray Boltinoff (1911–1994) was one of DC's longtime editors, working at the company from the 1940s to the 1980s. He edited the original *Doom Patrol*, helped shape *The Brave and the Bold*, and became a steady behind-the-scenes hand across various superhero, war, humor, and mystery titles.

"As a CRISIS crossover, I don't think it worked," Wolfman added during the same interview. "As the last Losers story, I do think it works. However, to make it work [with *Crisis*], in issue #10, we cut back to the death of the Losers and make it connect to THE LOSERS SPECIAL.[182] That way, at least people who bought it thinking it was a total CRISIS crossover won't be too disappointed."

The other soldiers open fire, only to realize bullets are useless against the shadow demons, and Flower is killed in the process. Dr. Polaris and Geo-Force team up, with the former using his magnetic powers to stretch a demon and the latter using his gravity powers to hold it back, their combined forces succeeding in shattering it.

Up above, Blue Beetle tries to figure out what he can do, his scientific expertise dwarfed by the Monitor's machine. While he's examining it, a shadow demon grabs his shoulder. Blue Beetle is gripped with pain, but then the shadow demon explodes. Blue Beetle is confused at first, but then he attributes it to the scarab that the original Blue Beetle, Dan Garrett gave him. There's just one problem: that never happened. All Garrett passed on to Ted Kord was his name (see *Secret Origins* Vol. 2 #2). A response to a letter in *Who's Who* #14 that pointed out this boo-boo admitted that "The use of the scarab in *CRISIS #3* WAS A MISTAKE, plain and simple." Perhaps realizing this, when the Monitor sees that Blue Beetle is in over his head, he spirits him and "the other wounded one" back to his own time period to await their fate. (The identity of this unnamed other will be revealed shortly.) This decision makes Blue Beetle's inclusion in this part of the story rather pointless, as if Wolfman couldn't decide what to do with him, so he just pulled the ripcord, only to realize his mistake regarding the scarab later.

Jumping forward to the Great Disaster, there's a pause in the action as the heroes stand guard at the tower under a stormy red sky. "Is it wrong for a Superman to say he's frightened?" the Man of Steel asks, speaking about himself in third person as he sends his love to Lois, wherever she is. The down time also allows Solovar and Kamandi to bond, only for Kamandi to realize Solovar was gravely injured while protecting him from the shadow demon. Even though they've just met, Kamandi—who appears to be struggling with some

182 See "The Monitor Tapes" on p. 22 of *Crisis* #10.

serious abandonment issues—is in torment at the thought of Solovar dying, only for the great ape to disappear in a flash of pink light, thus revealing the identity of "the other wounded one." Before he goes, though, Solovar channels his inner E.T., urging Kamandi to "B-be good. B-be good." When Kamandi, the last boy, refuses to accept what's happening, wailing that everyone he's ever known has abandoned him, he could also be speaking as the "last fan." Serving as the soothing voice of editorial wisdom (or Marv Wolfman), Superman urges young Kamandi to accept the fact that everything is changing, and they have no choice but to stay together or perish alone.

Moving to the fourth heroic era, we jump to Coyote, Tex., in 1879. In response to a summons from Ke-Woh-No-Tay, a.k.a. Scalphunter, ne'er do well Western troubadour Bat Lash travels to an abandoned mine where the Monitor's tower juts out of the ground. How these two characters, the former debuting in *Weird Western Tales* #39 (1977) and the latter in *Showcase* #76 (1968) know each other is unclear, seeing as they've never appeared together in the same issue. But apparently, Scalphunter is quite the networker, as he's also invited fellow Western heroes Jonah Hex, Johnny Thunder, and Nighthawk to the party. Considering Madame .44's close relationship with Johnny Thunder and Miss Liberty's friendship with Tomahawk, one wonders why they aren't there too. The same goes for Cinnamon, a masked female gunslinger who appears later in *Crisis.* That could have helped balance out this all-male cast of Western characters. And seeing as talk of spirits is about to come up, El Diablo, a cursed vigilante in the Old West, would have been a nice addition to the group too.

They're about to investigate the tower when four of the Monitor's hand-picked champions appear—Cyborg, Green Lantern, Firebrand, and Psimon. At first, Johnny Thunder and Bat Lash panic, thinking they're ghosts, but Jonah Hex, who has encountered such super-powered beings before (see *Justice League of America* #198, for example) talks them down.

Once again, it pays to examine the composition of this team and the setting to which they're sent. Considering the prejudices against visible minorities and women that existed during the time of the Old West, it's significant that two members of the super-powered team are black, and one of them is female. Upending cultural expectations of that era even further, Firebrand, a woman, takes the lead when it comes to explaining what's going on. The Old West, both in real history and in classic pop culture, is often depicted as white, male, and rugged, ignoring the reality that the actual frontier was far more diverse. This is another subtle way to suggest that the old ways are breaking down. If the world—i.e., the DCU—is going to survive, we need to let go of past prejudices and take hold of new possibilities. Taking the analogy a step further, Psimon's powers are rooted in his mind, which has been corrupted by Trigon. He's an embodiment of the sort of bad thinking that has to go, which could be why he is literally spirited away in the midst of the battle that's about to erupt. On a less obvious note, all four of the Monitor's champions have powers that are rooted in science and technology. Not only does that make them fish out of water in this rugged, low-tech world, their powers probably seem like magic to the Western heroes, another way of merging the divergent streams of the DCU into one.

No sooner do the two groups get acquainted than the shadow demons attack. Psimon is the first to respond, but his mental powers don't work. At the last second, he disappears in what looks like an explosion of shattered glass. As Cyborg unleashes yet another "million decibels of white sound," Green Lantern attempts to use his ring, only to discover it's not working, the cause of which will be revealed later.

As the others fight, Nighthawk flees on his horse to a nearby town, only for the red skies and lightning to manifest along with a big ball of white anti-matter that starts blue lining everything. The chaos spooks his horse, and Nighthawk dies in agony as he fires his gun into the encroaching cloud. Seeing as the anti-matter is consuming everything in its path in 1879, one wonders what this area looks like in 1985. Does it suddenly cease to exist then as well? How would this area look in the future? As a blank white space? It would have been interesting if the narrative had done a flash forward to the future at this point. Nevertheless, as with the anti-matter's assault on Arion's Atlantis, this is yet another of the many problems created if one ponders the intertemporal nature of this threat.

People in the 30th century don't have time to worry about such questions as the silent white wall consumes Metropolis. In a demonstration that the more things change, the more they stay the same, just as their Western predecessors and Starfire can think of no better way to respond than to fire blindly into the cloud, that's exactly what Wildfire, Cosmic Boy, Starboy, and Lightning Lass do, to no avail. As Brainiac-5 tries to coordinate the global defense and Dream Girl agonizes over why she didn't foresee this calamity, we witness the death of Kid Psycho. A bit player at best in the Legion's adventures over the years (introduced in *Superboy* #125 (1965)), he doesn't even yelp in fear, much less utter a line of dialogue before his demise, which makes one wonder why his death received such a prominent treatment.

Even though we have yet to see the fifth heroic age, the final page of this issue informs us that the anti-matter is everywhere in every time period and on every earth. So, maybe the Anti-Monitor truly is attacking everything, everywhere, all at once, but we only see glimpses of it. As the Monitor watches the destruction from his satellite, he hangs his head in despair, lamenting that instead of days, only hours remain. Talking out loud to himself, he says it's time for his plan to begin. Again? It's the same thing he's been saying since his final pre-*Crisis* appearance. Never mind the fact that key parts of his plan are already in motion. But in a final, spectacular panel, Harbinger tells him that he's wrong. His plan isn't about to begin. He's about to die.

Or is he?

The cover for issue #4 appears to leave no doubt about this question, with a dramatic overhead shot that shows Harbinger and Pariah standing over the Monitor's smoking corpse and a big red arrow pointing at it that says, "Death of the Monitor!" But let's not leap to such drastic conclusions just yet.

CHAPTER 14

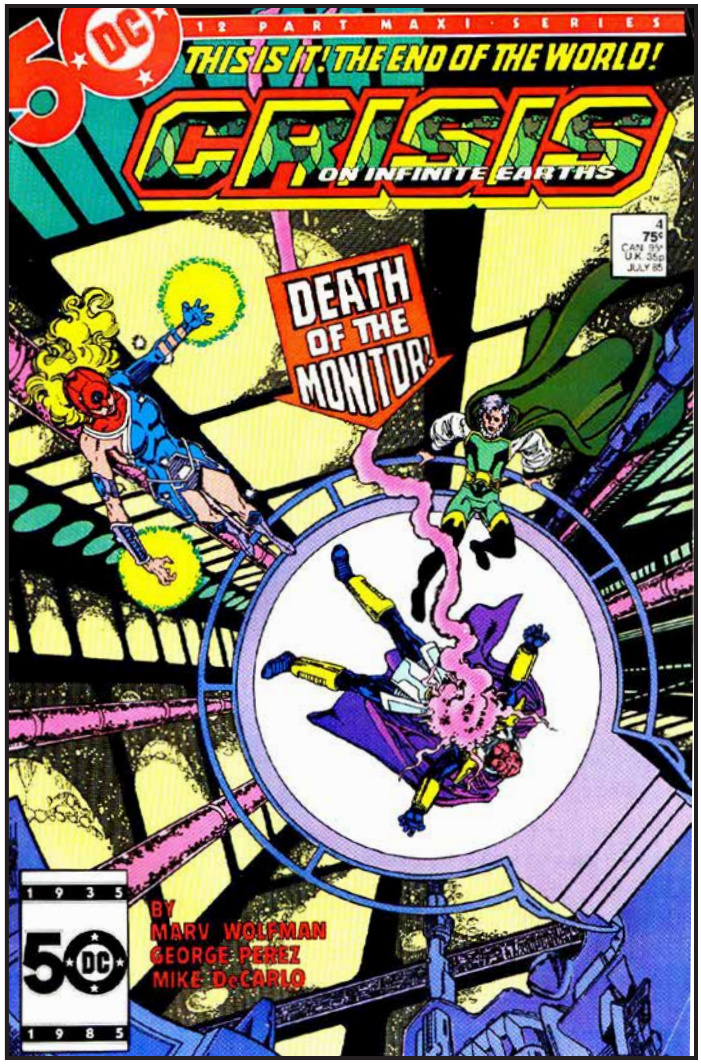
"And Thus the World Shall Die!"—Crisis #4

Rather than pick up on the dramatic ending of the previous issue, *Crisis* #4 begins on a somber, reflective note with Supergirl flying over a city at night. The black sky is riven with lightning, and a series of captions inform us that no one is even paying attention to the red skies anymore. Now it's all about the weather anomalies and electrical storms, increased sunspot activity, and the fact the constellations are no longer aligned as usual. There's just one conspicuous omission from this description—the white wall of anti-matter that's chewing its way through the city in the background!

Not only do the captions fail to mention it, so do Supergirl and Batgirl, whom Supergirl is flying to meet. This despite the fact that as the two of them confer on top of the tallest building in the city, Batgirl scans the horizon with her binoculars and Supergirl does the same with her telescopic vision, so there's no way they can miss the anti-matter's encroaching destruction. On the previous page, we saw similar buildings reduced to blue lines as the anti-matter works its way down from the sky. Therefore, shouldn't these two women and everyone else be in a rush to get away? Instead, Batgirl remarks how empty the city is, with most people inside, huddling with their loved ones. She says this time she thinks the end is really coming, to which Supergirl replies, "But there must be a way to stop whatever's out there." Whatever's out there? Is there any doubt about what that is? It's roaring straight toward them! Or at least one assumes it is. Maybe for some reason the anti-matter cloud has halted. It's difficult to tell, seeing as each panel consists of a single moment, frozen in time.

Whether by accident or design, the pause allows them to return to the theme of powerlessness in the face of the threat that's bearing down on them. Batgirl confesses she feels scared and useless, wondering why she ever put on a costume in the first place. But Supergirl says Batgirl is just as worthy of the name "hero" as all the other ordinary people who put themselves on the front lines when disaster strikes.

Their conversation is interrupted when Supergirl spots a plane inexplicably flying straight toward the anti-matter cloud.



***Crisis on Infinite Earths* #4. George Pérez penciled and inked this cover, although Mike DeCarlo inked the interior. This is also the only Crisis cover that features exclusively new characters introduced in the series and no one else.**

Never mind its suicidal course, why it's even in the air while such anomalous weather patterns are at play is a mystery in itself. The plane is struck by lightning and disintegrates, but Supergirl saves the pilot, who doesn't see the point in living now that the world is ending.

Throughout it all, Batgirl watches through her binoculars, remarking on Supergirl's selflessness in contrast to her own self-centeredness. "My God—what have I become?" Even the pilot is amazed that Supergirl bothered to save him. What's the point if they're all going to die? While Batgirl watches Supergirl rescue the pilot through her binoculars, they're rendered in blue-line fashion, as if they're already fading away, perhaps a subtle foreshadowing of Supergirl's impending doom.

Their seeming passivity regarding the anti-matter cloud aside, this is a classic "calm before the storm" moment that's ripe with symbolism regarding the story and DC's editorial direction post-*Crisis*. For starters, it's difficult to ignore the parallels between this scene and the one that takes place between Superman and Batman on the rooftop of the *Daily Planet* building in issue #2. In both scenes, a member of the Batman family summons a member of the Superman family to inform them of troubling news, only for the encounter to be interrupted. The rooftop setting is significant for a couple of reasons. First, rooftops are typically places of watchfulness, safety, and control. How many times have we seen Batman on the roof of a building, brooding over Gotham, or Superman scanning Metropolis with his telescopic vision, similar to what Supergirl does in the scene? But when Batgirl summons Supergirl to the rooftop in *Crisis* #4, she doesn't feel safe or powerful; she feels exposed, vulnerable, and afraid. Her sense of self-worth is dwarfed not only by the impending disaster but also by the sprawling cityscape around her. She and Supergirl are tiny figures against the backdrop of a cosmic disaster as the city is literally crumbling around them. What hope do they have? Furthermore, as the anti-matter cloud descends, it's the high places that are erased first. Hence, height, once a symbol of power, becomes a representation of vulnerability as even the superheroes are brought low. Batgirl is feeling this collapse both literally and figuratively, wondering what, apart from her costume, separates her from the masses.

On a deeper level, high places are where sacrifices took place in ancient cultures, at the top of mountains or at the peak of manmade ziggurats and pyramids. Supergirl's presence there, however brief, could be taken as yet another subtle way of foreshadowing her impending sacrifice for the sake of humanity.

This scene also offers a meditation of what it means to be a hero and what the hierarchy of heroes will look like in the DCU post-*Crisis*. When the scene opens, Batgirl has all but given up. Rather than inspire heroism, as it does in Supergirl, the crisis causes Batgirl to turn inward, making her feel like a fraud. She recognizes all the attributes of a hero in Supergirl, but she can find none of them in herself. "I-I'm nothing," she says. Batgirl feels useless because she's "just a person in a mask," but Supergirl tells her



Stephen Bissette was a key visual architect of Alan Moore's celebrated *Swamp Thing* run (issues 20 to 64). With Moore and John Totleben, he helped shape the series' lush, grotesque horror and co-created John Constantine, the trench-coated occultist firstintroduced in *Swamp Thing* #37 in 1985, a month after the first issue of *Crisis* was released.

it's not the amount of power a person has but the will to help that matters. This attitude represents the hopeful, community-oriented Silver Age ethos from which both of these characters were born—Supergirl in *Action Comics* #252 (1959) and Batgirl in *Detective Comics* #359 (1967)—a world where personal courage mattered more than cosmic power. It's ironic that Supergirl is seeking to comfort Batgirl because it's the very sensibility that Supergirl represents that *Crisis* is about to wipe away. Rather than the rah-rah "This is a job for Supergirl!" approach that she demonstrates in this scene, the grimmer, grittier post-*Crisis* DCU will be dominated by heroes who are riddled with the same sort of angst that's paralyzing Batgirl. Even when the "This is a job for…" language returns, as it does in the *Final Crisis* storyline, it's used in a self-referential and ironic way. Batgirl believes the crisis has made her obsolete. Little does she realize, the exact opposite is true. It's Supergirl and everything she represents that no longer fits in the new DCU.

Mirroring the contrast between Batgirl's angst and Supergirl's naïve optimism, we transition to a scene between the world's fifth-richest man, Steve Dayton—formerly Mento of the Doom Patrol—and occult detective John Constantine, who was just introduced in the pages of *Swamp Thing* #37 (June 1985). Once again, we get a contrast of Silver Age idealism and modern sensibilities. As Mento, Steve Dayton wore a silly helmet and wanted to be a "proper" superhero to impress Elasti-Girl, also from the Doom Patrol. He's a relic from a more hopeful, cheesier heroic age. Now, despite his wealth, he's broken and mentally unraveling.

Constantine, by contrast, is a pure mid-1980s anti-hero—sarcastic, self-aware, and cynical. Having only made his debut the month before in *Saga of the Swamp Thing* #37, he's one of the first glimmers of the post-*Crisis* world, populated by heroes who are darker, grittier, and emotionally distant. Contra Supergirl, Constantine believes heroic sentiment isn't enough. He's already living in the kind of harsher world that *Crisis* is creating, and he's fine with it. Meanwhile, all Dayton can do is numb the pain with alcohol, resigned to the inevitability of death, which is really the death of the era in comic book storytelling that he represents. Ironically, he's the one who accuses Constantine of being naïve in this scene when

Constantine declares that not only are they going to survive, so will their world. This leads one to wonder: could Constantine's confidence derive from his knowledge of Hypertime?

First introduced in *The Kingdom* #2 (1999), this much maligned but narratively fruitful concept was developed to explain the multitude of alternate realities, timelines, and continuity inconsistencies within the DCU. Unlike the pre-*Crisis* multiverse, which was composed of parallel Earths existing side by side, Hypertime operates more like a stream of time with countless branching paths. Hypertime says that all stories are true somewhere, sometime, and in some way, which could explain Constantine's glib response to the crisis. Even if he dies and this version of Earth is destroyed, countless other versions of Constantine will exist somewhere, somehow. Had Mark Gruenwald been around to witness it, no doubt he would have championed this concept, which aligns well with his thoughts on the nature of comic book reality, particularly the effects of time travel and its tendency to create branching versions of reality.

As someone who can sense more than others, Constantine is one step ahead of everyone, especially when it comes to supernatural forces and cosmic threats. He understands that the crisis isn't merely a battle of heroes and villains; it's the collapse and remaking of existence itself. His cryptic remark that he knows what's happening to one and all, "and especially to the Swamp Thing. Yes, especially to him," points to the events unfolding in *Swamp Thing* at that very moment, where Alec Holland is learning he is a plant elemental rather than a plant that was formerly human. Constantine recognizes that Swamp Thing's transformation is part of a much larger upheaval, the death of old systems and the birth of new, uncertain powers. Therefore, he's not surprised by the cosmic-scale destruction they're facing. In fact, he embodies it. It's a world where survival demands hard truths, blurred morals, and heroes who can live with the cost of winning—and losing.

A caption that follows tells us that as anti-matters sweeps over Earth-One, it's finishing its destruction of Earth-Six, the first time that world is mentioned in the DCU. A subsequent caption says only four other earths remain, a mistake that was corrected in later editions.

The illustration that follows shows the anti-matter presumably attacking Earth-One, with pieces of that world flying off into space. Not only does that make one wonder what effect such an assault would have on the planet's rotation and other natural processes, the anti-matter is shown destroying Africa, not North America, which is where the epicenter of the attack was shown to be located. Is this image a mistake, or is it from an earlier stage in the anti-matter's assault? If the latter, by the time it reaches North America, most of the world would be destroyed, so it's probably an error. Following this, we're told only four other earths remain, and somewhere "he" laughs a deep and heady laugh, the "big bad" still not identified.

Drawn to yet another world on the brink of death, Pariah materializes on the aforementioned Earth-Six as the people flee for their lives. Rather than fly above them, as he did in a similar scene in issue #1, this time he stands facing the people as they fall over each other in their rush to escape. Somehow he senses this world is a cosmic anomaly with no duplicates of people or locations from other earths, which is strange, seeing as it was theoretically formed at the dawn of creation just like every other parallel universe. Every earth we've seen so far is a variation on a theme with duplicates of core characters, similar timelines, and mirror-image mythologies. Even if the circumstances are completely reversed, as on Earth-Three, the basic pattern remains. Earth-Six breaks the mold of "Earth as remix," setting it apart as a fresh lens through which to observe the destruction of a universe. The fact that this world is destroyed almost immediately after it's introduced signifies that it's not just old ideas that are being erased by *Crisis;* even bold new ideas can be wiped away by the need to consolidate the DCU. As with the destruction of Earth-Three, this could have been another way of Wolfman saying the new DCU would be tighter and cleaner with less room for frivolous experimentation and innovation than before.

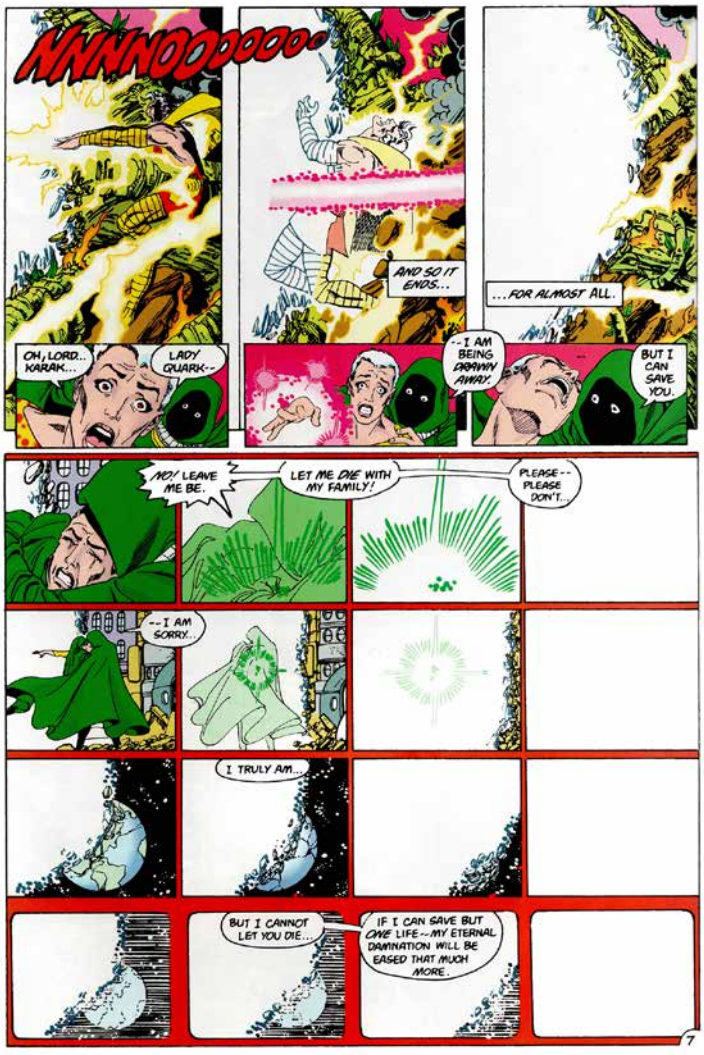
Even though this world lacks duplicates of familiar DC characters, it's not without heroes. Not only do Earth-Four's heroes protect this world, they also rule it as monarchs. Principle among them are Lord Volt, Lady Quark, and their daughter, Liana. Lord Volt has the power of flight and electrical or energy-based abilities that we don't get an opportunity to see much of prior to his swift death. However, we see enough to know he's committed to protecting his family and his world. Lady Quark can absorb, store, and release nuclear energy in destructive bursts. As for Liana, she helpfully informs us that she has the power to control nature as she causes enormous vines to rise out of the ground in the vain hope that they'll stop the encroaching anti-matter cloud.



Karen Berger (right), with Dick Giordano, helped create DC Comics' Vertigo imprint in 1993, serving as its executive editor until 2013. She also oversaw *House of Mystery*, *Swamp Thing*, *The Sandman*, *Fables*, *Hellblazer*, *The Invisibles*, *100 Bullets*, *Preacher*, *V for Vendetta*, and *Y: The Last Man*.

As on Earth-Three, Pariah's sudden appearance makes him an object of suspicion, with Lord Volt accusing him of being responsible for the attack. But when he puts his hand on Pariah's shoulder, Volt's own electrical energy rebounds at him. Lady Quark lashes out at Pariah with a blast of nuclear energy, but Pariah emerges from the smoke unharmed. Rather than do his weeping, wailing schtick, as we move closer and closer to his eye, this time no tears are visible. Furthermore, instead of appearing as a mere witness and mourner, he says he's there to assist if he can, which is a significant departure from the pattern of helplessness that's been established.

Before anyone can question him further, for some reason the anti-matter wall causes the vines that Liana has grown to light on fire instead of just obliterating them. Rather than flee from the anti-matter, she freezes in place and calls out to her parents. They rush to save her, but she's consumed by the flames before being reduced to a ghostly blue-line image. Lord Volt is so torn with grief that he takes the Starfire approach and fires an energy blast into the white wall prior to being erased by it.



***Crisis* #4, p. 7. This 16-panel grid is one of the most innovative panel designs in the series, the seemingly simple layout invites readers to read it in multiple directions that draw out the moment and its consequences.**

As Lady Quark looks on in horror, Pariah feels himself being pulled away. Rather than leave her to die, though, he does something that's so far proven impossible: he saves her, drawing her into his cloak and spiriting her away.

This rescue takes place in a series of 16 panels arranged in a four-by-four grid, and the fourth panel in each row is white. While the dialogue is stretched across the panels horizontally, encouraging us to experience the images in that direction, they can also be viewed vertically, which creates a completely different dynamic.

Starting with the horizontal, the first row begins with a close-up of Lady Quark's anguished face as Pariah holds her in his arms. This is followed by the same image, only now they've been reduced to mere outlines filled in with a pale green hue as a burst of blue energy takes over. The third panel shows an explosion of blue energy against white, and the final panel is pure white. The second row repeats this sequence of shots, only from a distance, so we see their entire bodies. The third row shows a sequence of three panels where Earth-Six is destroyed by the anti-matter cloud, followed by a white panel, and the fourth row shows the same scene but from farther away in space. Hence, even though there are four rows, it's just two events observed from different distances—the disappearance of Lady Quark and Pariah and the destruction of Earth-Six. Read vertically, the first three columns follow the standard sequence of close-up, medium shot, long shot, super-long shot. The question is, why did Pérez employ this two-pronged approach, and why repeat each scene from two different perspectives rather than just showing it once?

First, the repetition creates a sort of rhythm. Read horizontally, each panel is like a ticking clock, the final beeps of a heart monitor until it flatlines, or the gong of a funeral bell. By repeating the image from various angles, Pérez makes us linger in the scene. The fact that we can experience these panels horizontally and vertically stretches time even further. We don't just watch Earth-Six die; we're forced to live through its death over and over again, just like Pariah has had to do with countless earths. This repetition turns the scene into a kind of visual dirge, a slow funeral march through a dying world's final moments. This pattern emphasizes that *Crisis* isn't about worlds being wiped out in an instant. The entire DCU is being slowly stripped away, layer by layer. Whether we read these panels horizontally or vertically, we start with the personal and end with the universal, showing that small but important moments happen in the midst of larger calamities. Together, the grid creates a multidimensional experience of loss**,** a "slice and dice" approach that mimics the collapse of time, space, and relationships that's happening all around the characters.

To take things one step further, in earlier scenes when the anti-matter cloud consumes something, rather than end on white, the blank panel fills with ominous, swirling blackness. Why doesn't that happen here? The answer may be found in the fact that for the first time ever, Pariah is able to save someone from annihilation. Up to this point, his role has been purely passive and tragic: he arrives, he mourns, and he watches worlds die. But now for the first time, he breaks

the pattern. Rather than fly above the people and bemoan their fate, Pariah walks among them, takes action, and saves someone's life. So, the white panels at the end of each sequence don't just represent annihilation; they also hold a promise of possibility. Rather than the terror of the blank page, we see purity and potential, a future yet to be written. Could this small victory be an indication that the tide of battle is already beginning to turn in the heroes' favor?

From this perspective, when read vertically, the panels are like a drop of water falling into a pool and creating an ever-widening set of concentric rings. We're witnessing the reverberation of Pariah's saving act as it spreads throughout the universe, refusing to let the darkness consume it. The rescue of Lady Quark may seem insignificant in the scale of cosmic warfare, but it's a moment of moral clarity. It's like the parable about a child who is throwing starfish back into the ocean after hundreds of them have washed ashore, only for an adult to look at the starfish gasping on the beach and scoff at the child's efforts, saying they can't make a difference. The child, however, holds up a starfish and says, "It makes a difference to this one," then tosses it back into the ocean. Lady Quark may not be the one who's going to bring down the Anti-Monitor, but remember, the Monitor said the menace they face is one of emotion. Hence, saving her is a moment that reasserts the values for which the heroes are fighting. In this war of erasure, it's the small acts of kindness and mercy that literally "draw the line" between victory and defeat.

Another key distinguishing feature of the fourth row is that the panels have rounded corners, which is a telltale sign they're being watched on a monitor. Sure enough, the next page takes us not to *a* monitor but *the* Monitor. Only his eye isn't on Earth-Six. Instead, he's focused on an unstable star in the Vegan system, the destination of the beam of light we saw leaving the Monitor's satellite at the end of the previous issue. It rebounds off the star and then heads to Japan on Earth-One.

This brings us to an astronomy lab where a group of scientists realize there's no way to escape the encroaching anti-matter, which has already destroyed vast areas at high altitudes. This confirms that it's descending on Earth rather than merely creeping across it.

Chastising the scientists for their "cowardice" is Dr. Kimiyo Hoshi. Never mind the fact that one of the scientists is her father, she berates them for surrendering to their baser instincts rather than seizing the opportunity to study the phenomenon. To set an example, she sits down at a telescope, only to realize the rules of physics no longer apply. "How else do you explain my being able to see light years away in space?" she asks. Wolfman couldn't have been well versed on astrophysics, or else he would have known that under normal conditions, even the naked eye can see light years into space. In fact, everything we see in the night sky is incredibly far away**,** and the light from some of those objects has traveled thousands of years to reach us. Nevertheless, Kimiyo sees an anomaly in the Vegan star system and realizes it's heading straight for her. A caption directs readers to *Omega Men* #26, which explains that the anomaly she observed was caused



Doctor Solar, later Solar, Man of the Atom, debuted at Gold Key in 1962 as a scientist transformed by radiation into a being of immense energy power. He belongs to the same comics tradition as DC's Nimbus and Auron, godlike figures whosebodies are living energy. Where Solar reflects atomicage science fiction, Nimbusand Auron push that idea into DC's cosmic-mystical mode through the Omega Men and X'Hal mythology.

by a battle between Nimbus and Auron, two god-like beings made of pure energy. The Monitor redirected some of the energy produced by their conflict to Earth-One. It slams into the observatory, obliterating the telescope and causing Dr. Hoshi to disappear. This otherworldly origin of her powers is probably meant to mirror that of the original Dr. Light, who gained his abilities when a device he used to observe the future created a space warp that allowed him to steal advanced technology from Thanagar.

In the following sequence, which resembles a set of Russian nesting dolls, the Monitor observes the scene on a monitor while Harbinger observes him on a monitor and young Alex Luthor observes her on a monitor as she monitors the Monitor on a monitor. And if you want to add the reader to the mix, we're monitoring Alex as he monitors Harbinger monitoring the Monitor on a monitor as he monitors the scene in Japan on yet another monitor, which depicts Dr. Hoshi monitoring the stars.

Phew!

When the Monitor says Dr. Hoshi is being recreated, Harbinger burns with rage, her hands glowing with energy as the power that has possessed her compels her to kill him. Alex empathizes with her, but we also learn that the Monitor has confided in Alex. Not only does the Monitor know what Harbinger is planning, it serves his purposes, and Alex has come to terms with what must be done. Her eyes filled with blackness, Harbinger flies off to do the deed.

Before we see the outcome, we return to where Psycho Pirate is being held by the Monitor's foe. In what's becoming a tiresome routine, every time Psycho Pirate opens his mouth, the Anti-Monitor tells him to shut up and threatens him with what will happen if he doesn't. In addition to wielding the stick, however, the Anti-Monitor also dangles a carrot, promising that soon Psycho Pirate will have an entirely new world to play with.

As they stand together, they watch an image of Red Tornado on the viewscreen. He's in the midst of saving people from disaster when the Anti-Monitor plucks him out of his world and brings him to the dark space inhabited by Psycho Pirate. Red

Tornado is angry, recognizing Psycho Pirate for the criminal he is. As Psycho Pirate prattles on, the Anti-Monitor issues another warning, threatening to replace him with Phobia. When Red Tornado asks why he was brought there and if his abductor is responsible for what's happening to Earth, the Anti-Monitor says it's not just his world that's afflicted. Then he tells him to come, "We have a universe to destroy!" Why he thinks such an invitation will appeal to Red Tornado isn't clear.

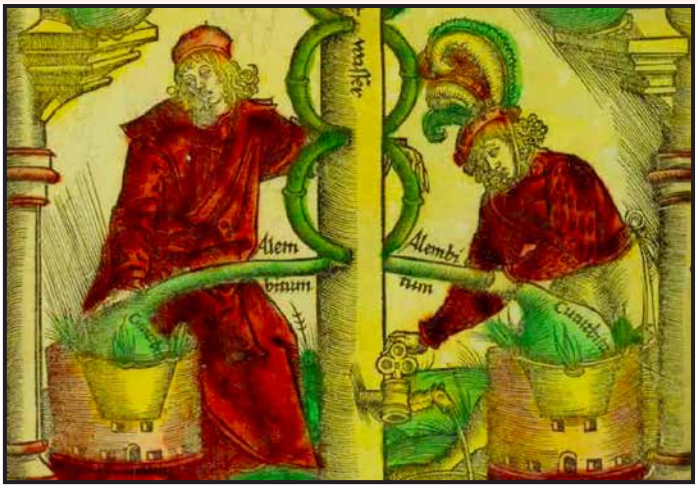
From there we go to our fifth heroic age, medieval England on Earth-Two, during the time of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. If we consider the location of the towers, not only do they privilege Earth-One, with three of them located there, they also favor certain areas of Earth. Atlantis is somewhere in the North Atlantic, Markovia and England are in Europe, and New York City and Wyoming are in North America. One wonders why this is. We've already seen the anti-matter cloud attacking Africa on Earth-One, so if the towers are designed to stop the anti-matter, wouldn't it have made sense to put one of them there instead—perhaps in Gorilla City? Then again, not many heroes in the DCU come from Africa, so could these towers have been placed not just in five heroic ages but also five locales where heroes tend to cluster?

Only two of the Monitor's champions are dispatched to guard this tower—Firestorm and Killer Frost. Despite Killer Frost's obsessive love for Firestorm—due to Psycho Pirate's spell—these two are complete opposites in nearly every sense. He's a hero; she's a villain. He controls fire, heat, and fusion; she absorbs heat to project deadly cold. Once again, Wolfman used a pairing of contrasting energies to dramatize one of the central themes of *Crisis*—opposing forces colliding to produce transformation.

The partnering of Firestorm and Killer Frost becomes even more powerful when read not just as elemental opposites but as symbolic forces in tension. Firestorm, powered by nuclear fusion—the same process that powers stars—is a figure of creation, energy, and evolution. He himself is the product of literal fusion—Ronny Raymond and Professor Martin Stein, two opposites merged into one being. His entire identity centers on transformation and the reconciliation of dualities—youth and wisdom, body and mind, raw impulse and scientific intellect. He's a living symbol of change and potential.

Killer Frost, by contrast, embodies entropy. She absorbs heat—the source and sign of life—and replaces it with cold, stasis, and death. Her power halts movement, kills momentum, and renders systems inert. She freezes things in place—literally and figuratively—making her a potent symbol of stagnation, emotional paralysis, and resistance to change. Somehow these two forces must find a way to cooperate. Their uneasy partnership mirrors the struggle DC was facing at the time—how to preserve what's familiar with the equally urgent need for transformation and growth.

On one level, sending these mismatched "lovebirds" to the Middle Ages—a time steeped in romanticism—feels ironic and almost playful. But the medieval period was also an era when mysticism coexisted with the fledgling study of science, most notably in the practice of alchemy, which sought to transmute



During the Middle Ages, alchemy blended chemistry, philosophy, medicine, and mysticism. Alchemists sought to transform matter, perfect the soul, and create gold or the philosopher's stone. Their symbolic and spiritual experiments, helped lay the groundwork for science.

matter through the interplay of elemental forces. Within this context, Firestorm and Killer Frost seem less like costumed figures and more like mythic archetypes of these very forces. Their presence in that world could elevate them to godlike status or mark them as heretics and witches.

As it turns out, they are met by both types of reactions, though not from the sources one would expect. The first comes from Vandal Savage. Apparently at a point in his timeline before he's met any costumed heroes, he dismisses the idea that Firestorm and Killer Frost might be responsible for the red skies that have afflicted the world. And yet, something about them triggers his curiosity.

Sir Justin, a.k.a. the Shining Knight, should be their ally, but he goes in the opposite direction, accusing them of being evil wizards, a suspicion that appears to be all but confirmed when shadow demons emerge from the Monitor's tower and attack.

As a point of order, even though Sir Justin comes from this time period, he shouldn't have been active. Instead, he and his horse, Winged Victory, should be frozen in a block of ice following their battle with the giant Blunderbore. Then again, in *Adventure Comics* #66 when Sir Justin receives his horse and his magic armor from Merlin as a reward for rescuing him from a curse, a caption at the bottom of the page says, "And so Justin continues on his quest with renewed vigor!" The first panel on the next page shows him and Winged Victory flying over ice-capped mountains as "league upon league flash by." This is followed by the confrontation with Blunderbore, which ends with Sir Justin and Winged Victory plummeting into the icy abyss, where they remained for centuries. Therefore, it could be that this showdown in *Crisis* took place in the two-panel gap between when Sir Justin received his gifts from Merlin and his battle with Blunderbore.

With no time to argue, Firestorm and Killer Frost

engage the shadow demons. As Vandal Savage watches, he wonders if he was wrong about the duo. Either way, he decides he needs to know more about such powers if he's going to control the world. The shadow demons are so easy to defeat that Firestorm wonders "why anyone created 'em in the first place," a question that no doubt many readers were asking at this point. This becomes especially pertinent when we learn that the shadow demons are actually the most loyal Thunderers of Qward, so they should be immensely powerful. If so, why are they holding back?

Firestorm and Killer Frost's valor in the face of danger convinces Sir Justin that maybe they aren't evil after all. Rather than fight against them, he joins them. Then he does something we've never seen before: he blasts the shadow demons with a burst of energy from his sword. Was this a one-time visual flourish added by Pérez to make Justin more dynamic alongside his new super-powered friends?

The blast obliterates the shadow demons, but the victory is short-lived as they demonstrate a heretofore unseen ability to combine themselves into a single super-sized shadow demon. Worst of all, it doesn't just happen on Earth-Two. It also happens in the other eras where the Monitor's towers are located. A series of panels shows all the champions staring in horror as a similar transformation occurs, and several captions inform us that the world is indeed at its end.

"Two worlds separated by a mere second's worth of time," another caption says. This is likely a throwback to *Justice League of America* #15 where the world of the "untouchable aliens" was said to be separated from "man earth" by one minute of time. However, it's the first time in *Crisis* that we learn that the parallel worlds aren't just separated by their vibrational frequencies but also by some sort of temporal offset.

Speaking of chronological chaos, back in New York City, 1985, whatever's afflicting the sky intensifies, then something new shimmers out of the darkness—one of the Monitor's towers! In his review of *Crisis* in *Amazing Heroes,* R. A. Jones mistakenly calls this a sixth tower that pops up out of nowhere,[183] but it's actually the same tower that shows up in the ruins of NYC during Kamandi's time, further connecting his future to that of Earth-One.

While this may be the same tower, its appearance in the present suggests something larger—the emergence of a sixth heroic age, distinct from the five focal points that Harbinger described. If so, what sets this age apart is loss and transition. More than any others, this is the age of endings. Primarily, it's about the end of innocence as a darker, more mature tone seeps into the DCU. Where previous ages revolved around preserving something old—the status quo, the integrity of the timeline—this age is about doing away with all that and forging something new. Whether the heroes realize it or not, they're not just defending reality; they're witnessing its death and rebirth.

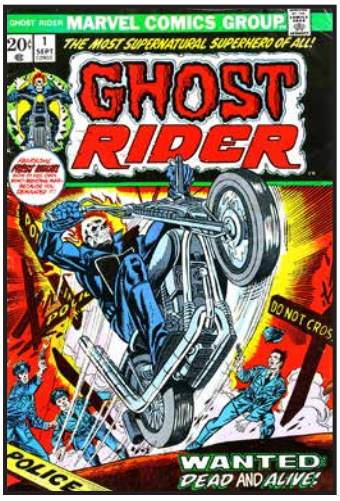
This era also boasts the highest concentration of heroes, with characters from multiple earths uniting in unprecedented numbers. Some cross-temporal and interdimensional unity was present in the other five time periods, but those battles were still isolated and mostly era-specific. Here, the convergence is total, with heroes, timelines, and earths colliding. This era is the epicenter of the crisis, the pivot between the multiverse and a singular continuity, the moment when DC turns the page to a new era of storytelling.

As so many characters are prone to do in this series, the moment Starfire and Halo see something new, they assume it must be responsible for the disaster at hand, so they jet off to attack the tower. But before they can launch their assault, a new character appears, shouting at them in Japanese to stand back. This is Dr. Kimiyo Hoshi, reborn as the new Dr. Light and garbed in the same costume as her villainous predecessor. Why the Monitor chose to forge such a clear continuity between her and Arthur Light instead of giving her a new name and costume isn't clear. Maybe he was running out of time, or perhaps he saw something in the original Dr. Light that he wanted to redeem but was unable to do so with Arthur.

From a storytelling point of view, this is an example of Wolfman making good on his promise prior to *Crisis* that some heroes would become villains (which we don't see much of), and some villains would become heroes. It was a radical move, and it had its fair share of detractors, one of the foremost of whom was R. A. Jones.

> *This started a rather disturbing trend: creating new heroes by simply giving the same name (and usually the power) of an existing male character to a female (who are always of some ethnic group as well—black, Oriental, Hispanic). ...*
>
> *I think it is at least mildly insulting to women (and minorities). The implied message is this: We don't really think you're worth the time and trouble to develop new original female characters for, but we'll gladly let you assume the mantles of white male characters we no longer want anyway.*[184]

This critique echoes similar accusations that have been launched against Disney in recent years over the apparent



Over the years, characters like Ghost Rider have had multiple incarnations, with Golden Age and more modern takes on the original character. The first Ghost Rider was awestern hero from Magazine Enterprises in 1949. Marvel later reimagined the concept through Johnny Blaze, Danny Ketch, and others, turning the concept of a masked rider into a supernatural engine of vengeance.

183 Jones, 102.

184 Jones, 102.



Some critics frame recent Star Wars and MCU changes as "feminization." Both franchises have expanded women-led stories and marketing, from Rey-centered *Star Wars* films to Marvel's "Women of Marvel" branding. The real question is whether this storytelling direction feels earned or imposed.

feminization of the Star Wars universe and the so-called "MSheU" (a play on "MCU"). In both cases, the core complaint centers on the perceived displacement of traditional (often white male) protagonists in favor of women or visible minorities. These critiques often frame such changes as unearned or symbolic rather than substantive, accusing creators of injecting "diversity for diversity's sake." What they miss is that characters like Kimiyo or Rey in *Star Wars* aren't mere empty gestures; they're acts of narrative reclamation and evolution. Just as Kimiyo redefines what it means to be Dr. Light, characters like Rey challenge the assumption that heroism must look a certain way. In both universes, these new protagonists aren't just replacing the old; they're reframing what heroism means. In doing so, they're confronting long-held expectations about who gets to carry the story forward.

Kimiyo isn't just another Dr. Light. She's a repudiation and transformation of her namesake. Where he was selfish, stupid, cowardly, and corrupt, she's intelligent, fierce, and righteous, though she retains his abrasiveness. This contrast is contingent on their shared name and costume. It's what gives her story weight. Contrary to what Jones argues, Kimiyo represents not a lack of imagination but a deliberate inversion of cultural norms. Giving her a legacy name allows her to rewrite the narrative of who gets to wield power and represent the DCU in the age to come. Furthermore, she's not just a side note. She's center stage at a pivotal moment. Wolfman didn't give her Arthur Light's legacy because he was out of ideas. Kimiyo's new role is a reclamation, a bold statement that power, legacy, and centrality in the DCU are no longer limited to the same familiar (white male) faces. She embodies not tokenism but transformation—although she has a few things to learn about being a hero first.

When the charging heroes don't listen, Dr. Light gives them a taste of her new powers, knocking them out of the air. As the other heroes rally to stop her, Katana reminds everyone that she can speak Japanese. So can Superman, and in an apparent undoing of the progressive stance that Wolfman just assumed with Dr. Light, instead of allowing two strong Asian women to resolve the conflict, the Man of Steel steps in and takes control. When Dr. Light explains that the anti-matter threat that is currently chewing up New York is happening across the multiverse, he offers to do whatever he can to help, even sacrifice his own life if necessary.

Speaking of strong female characters, the story moves to Paradise Island where Wonder Woman is frustrated with her mother Hippolyta's refusal to get involved in the struggle now that they've received word from the gods that not even they can save themselves, as revealed in "The Monitor Tapes" in *Crisis* #10. Wonder Woman laments that even as the world is ending, she's unable to make peace with her mother, a reference to a three-part *Crisis* crossover that will be examined later.

On his satellite, the Monitor frets once again over how he's running out of time. In the background, whatever Earth he's orbiting has been all but consumed by anti-matter, which makes one wonder how anyone on it could still be alive. As he remarks that he, Harbinger, the Luthor child, and Pariah are all that stands between existence and disaster—what about his chosen champions?—the weeping man in the green cloak appears. The last time we saw Pariah, he rescued Lady Quark from the wall of anti-matter, but there's no sign of her here.

To find out where she is—sort of—we need to return to *Crisis* #4.5. Prior to Barry Allen introducing himself to the Flash of Earth-D, Pariah and Lady Quark are shown materializing in that world's version of New York City. The JAA are battling a giant squid-like creature called Mollusk the Marauder that's a clear reference to Starro the Conqueror, whom the JLA faced during their first outing (*The Brave and the Bold* #28). Though disoriented, Pariah and Lady Quark jump right into the fray. Lady Quark vents her anger by firing a blast of energy at a villain named Medulla who's controlling the beast, spewing such murderous vitriol that the members of the JAA are forced to restrain her.

When Barry meets the JAA at their headquarters, Lady Quark and Pariah are there too. Considering her recent temper tantrum and the trauma of watching her husband and daughter die, Lady Quark seems surprisingly unfazed, admiring the displays in that world's Fortress of Solitude like a tourist walking through a museum.

When the weather anomalies begin to afflict that world too, Pariah gives them the lowdown on what's happening. Barry says if only his friends were there, they might be able to do something about it. In response, Pariah overrides the unknown force that brought him to that world and spirits himself away. He returns moments later with a cadre of Earth-One heroes, including Superman, Batman, Cyborg, Nightwing, Supergirl, Green Lantern (John Stewart), Starfire, and Dawnstar. Hey, shouldn't five of them be guarding a tuning fork somewhere? This is followed by some painful dialogue, typified by the two

versions of Superman glibly comparing notes on when their respective Kryptons exploded.

They might not be so facile if they knew all this was being witnessed by the Anti-Monitor. Angered that the heroes dare to believe they have a hope of standing against him, he unleashes a "time bomb" (the consequences of which are never shown in this issue or elsewhere) and then orders Psycho Pirate to release the "shadow guard." This is the first time the shadow demons are referred to as such—14 years after the original series came out. And since when is Psycho Pirate in control of them? So far, he's been nothing but a sniveling toady, told to sit down and shut up every time he dares to open his mouth.

The banter between heroes affords Batman the opportunity to question the Flash about the vision he saw of him. The Flash has no recollection of that, seeing as those moments are still in his future. "Excuse me?" Batman says, seemingly offended when the Flash suggests he might have been seeing things, to which the Flash replies "Uh … nothing. Forget I said anything," as if he's intimidated by Batman's anger.

Offering more heavy-handed commentary from Wolfman, that world's Robin asks Batman why he looks so angry, to which Batman replies, "The situation is grim. Perhaps you should take matters more seriously."

"I do," Robin says. "I just don't take myself all that seriously," suggesting we might all do the same when it comes to how we regard our four-colored friends.

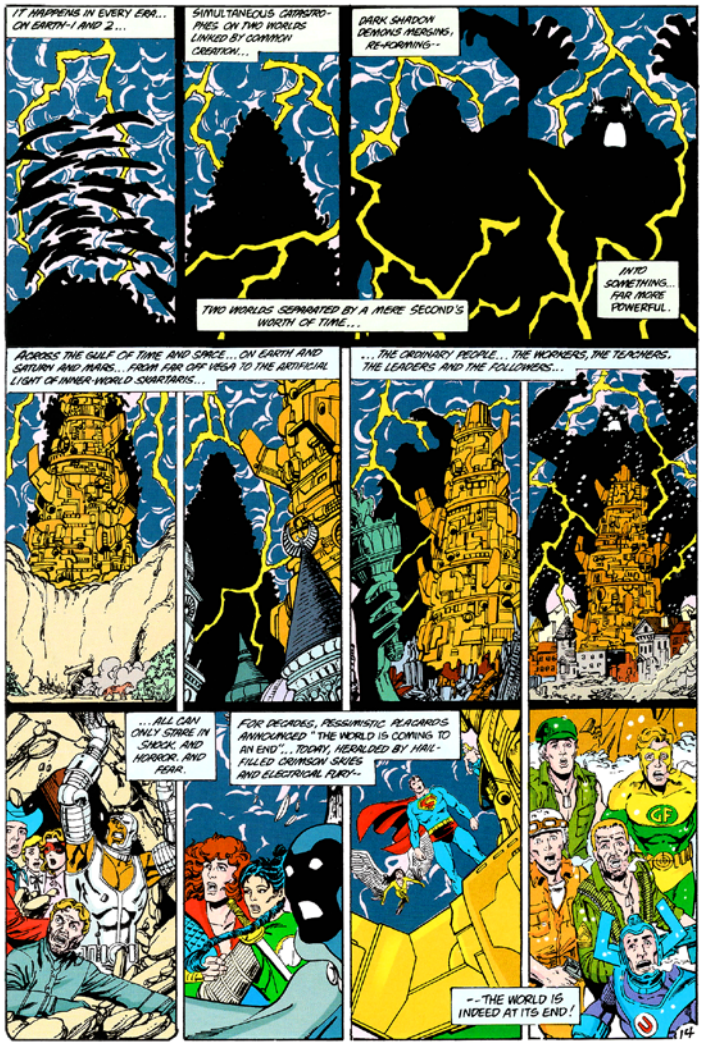
As shadow demons close in on the fortress, Earth-One's Superman says they only have Pariah's opinion that whatever phenomenon they're facing can't be stopped. Lady Quark, a super-powered being who has witnessed the destruction of her world firsthand, could easily corroborate Pariah's account. Instead, she remains mute as she stands beside him, smiling.

That smile turns upside down when the shadow demons attack. Lady Quark fights alongside the others, saying, "They murdered Liana and Karak! They destroyed my world … my universe. I swear to the great creator they will suffer for their evil." An admirable sentiment, but there's a bit of a hitch: in the few moments that Earth-Six appeared in *Crisis* #4, there was no sign of the shadow demons, just the white wall of anti-matter. Did Wolfman forget that, or is Lady Quark referring to an encounter with the shadow demons that we didn't see? Even if she has encountered them before, she of all people should have known it was the anti-matter that killed her husband and daughter, not the shadow demons.

During the battle, that world's Hawkman and Hawkwoman bite the dust, which was no doubt a relief to continuity buffs. The *last* thing the DCU needed at that point was another Hawkman to muddy the turbulent Thanagarian waters. Earth-D's Superman also dies at the hands of a shadow demon, but instead of consuming him as it does other victims, it irradiates him with some kind of lethal energy. Perhaps the effect is different because of Superman's invulnerability.

The heroes flee the Fortress of Solitude to regroup. They also take time to hold a funeral for Superman under a red sky, complete with a huge headstone and flag, both of which are emblazoned with his logo. Did they know he was going to die, or did someone fashion these items on the spot? And who has time for such formalities considering the imminent danger that the world is facing? It's supposed to be a poignant moment, with Supergirl comforting Superman's wife and Kal-El forced to confront his own mortality, but it just feels like more heavy-handed foreshadowing regarding Supergirl's impending death.

Speaking of which, Batman pulls Robin aside and warns him that he needs to toughen up if he hopes to survive, but Earth-D's Batman steps in, not appreciating the way Batman is speaking to his *son*. He says things function differently on their world. They merely try to stop the bad guys, not cripple them. Continuing his rebuke, he tells Batman his personal life has always come before his superhero career because without it, his work is meaningless. Interestingly, the Flash is shown in the background, listening, as a further reminder of the simpler, more innocent Silver Age. While Earth-D's heroes drift away to get their houses in order, fearing they may not return from this mission, Batman of Earth-One is



***Crisis* #4, p. 14. Just when the heroes thought the situation couldn't get any worse, the shadow demons display a heretofore unknown ability to combine into a super-sized shadow demon, with some over-the-top captioning to match this new development.**

left standing all alone. Was this Wolfman's quiet indictment of the increasingly grim and isolated Batman of the 1990s? It's difficult not to interpret this as a suggestion that in the drive toward darkness that had typified Batman ever since *The Dark Knight Returns*, something essential—family, connection, humanity—had been lost.

When the wave of anti-matter appears in New York, the heroes fight to save people from it. For some reason, John Stewart's ring works on Earth-D, even though we just saw it fail in *Crisis* #4. Was this another moment of forgetfulness on Wolfman's part? Probably. However, this scene is prefaced by a three-page sequence showing the origin of Earth-D's Green Lantern in which that universe's Guardians also appear. Could they somehow be powering John Stewart's ring? Perhaps, but their appearance in this story raises further questions. For example, where do these Guardians live, seeing as Oa only exists in the Earth-One universe? Shouldn't this imply that the Guardians are without equal too? Or does the fact that they migrated to Oa from Malthus open yet another continuity escape hatch for Wolfman, allowing parallel versions of the Guardians to exist but not on Oa? If so, why haven't we ever met any other versions of them before or since?

As the anti-matter encroaches, Earth-D's heroes drop like flies. Robin is the first to go while trying to save an old woman from disaster. Maybe he *should* have listened to Earth-One's Batman. Earth-D's Wonder Woman dies saving a little boy from the encroaching wall. She tosses him to Green Arrow right before she succumbs, succeeding where Pariah failed in *Crisis* #1. "Don't look back, kid," Green Arrow says as he runs away with the boy in his arms. "Always look ahead." This feels like more pro-*Crisis* propaganda from Wolfman, echoing Harbinger's words at the end of *Crisis* #12. The message gets blurrier, though, when one considers that this line is delivered by an alternate version of Green Arrow in a comic book that's *looking back* to a series published 14 years earlier.

This is followed by what Wolfman no doubt thought was a clever reference to *The Flash* #123. When Barry and Tanaka show up to hustle Green Arrow along, the bowman erupts in surprise. "Flash?"

"Of two worlds," Tanaka replies. "We're both here."

Realizing that fleeing the anti-matter is hopeless, Tanaka suggests they build an enormous version of Barry's cosmic treadmill and use it to migrate Earth-D's population to Earth-One. It's a long shot, and they know they won't be able to save everyone, but Barry agrees to try.

Prior to its construction, the heroes say goodbye to their loved ones. This includes a moment between Superman and Superwoman of Earth-D, who wishes she could be with her husband. "In time, Kara, we'll all be together again," Superman assures her, yet another nod to the tacit theism that underlies this series and the DCU. Completing the Sunday School lesson, while the treadmill is being set up on the Brooklyn Bridge, Starfire asks Nightwing about a story he told her about someone named Moses. "He held the staff of God and with it parted the Red Sea," Nightwing replies. He then led his people into the new Promised Land," which is similar to what they're attempting to do. But then he adds a seemingly contradictory footnote: "God isn't leading us, Kory, but let's pray he's on our side, too." If God's not leading them, who is? And if he's not leading them, why pray to him?

As the super-fast heroes get the treadmill up to speed, cars line up and drive through the portal that it opens. Meanwhile, the anti-matter continues to encroach, and the shadow demons launch another attack. One may wonder why a sudden influx of traffic on Earth-One's Brooklyn Bridge is never shown in the original series. Leave it to Barry "leap of logic" Allen to provide an answer: "If I'm right, they'll merge with their Earth-One counterparts. I'm not sure if families will be left intact, but at least they'll be alive."

Huh?

If they merge with their Earth-One counterparts, whose personality and sense of identity will dominate, these people or their Earth-One doppelgängers? Will it create millions of fused personalities similar to the one formed by Ronnie Raymond and Martin Stein when they become Firestorm? Furthermore, with Earth-One's New York City also being consumed by anti-matter, won't the heroes merely be delivering these people from the frying pan into the fire? Most of the Earth-One heroes were presumably spirited away in the midst of trying to save people from the anti-matter in Earth-One's NYC, so at least one of them should have mentioned this flaw in the plan.

Wanting to remove all vestiges of hope, the Anti-Monitor plucks Barry away, saying he's the fastest of them all and it's his speed that initially powered the treadmill. Seemingly forgotten is the Anti-Monitor's original reason for abducting the Flash—his mistaken belief that Barry is the only being able to travel from one parallel world to another unassisted.

Without Barry there to channel the treadmill's power through his body, the device fails, but the portal remains open just long enough for the Earth-One heroes to return home. To buy them time, Superwoman sacrifices herself by luring the shadow demons to her while Superman and Supergirl look on. Superman wants to save her, but in a final bit of foreshadowing, Kara urges him to leave, saying they're needed back home.

Rather than "home," they wind up on the Monitor's satellite in the big crowd scene at the start of *Crisis* #5, which we'll cover in the next chapter. However, the way the scene appears in this issue, particularly Alexander Luthor's dialogue, deviates substantially from the original. In *Crisis* #5, Alex points to an image of earths and other planets merging and says the Monitor's enemy seeks the destruction of all five universes, but in this issue, he only refers to Earth-One and Earth-Two. Also, in the original he says the planets are

(opposite page) *Crisis* #4 cover. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). The overhead perspective turns the Monitor's death into a plunge through space. It makes his body seem isolated, and exposed, the circular machinery framing him like a target.

COVER: CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS #4

17-3



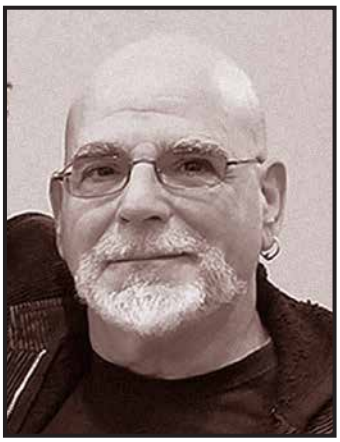
separated by vibrations, but in *Crisis* #4.5 he says they're separated by "vibrational moments," which must have been Wolfman's attempt to combine other references to the parallel worlds being separated temporally and spatially. Finally, while in the original Alex mentions the Monitor's plan to merge the five remaining universes, he makes no mention of the Monitor in this issue and only refers to two universes. Why Wolfman would introduce these amendments/errors so long after the fact is unknown.

As Earth-D's heroes race toward almost certain death, two characters who remain unaccounted for are Pariah and Lady Quark, both of whom were last seen in the background during the battle with the shadow demons at the Brooklyn Bridge.

All that to say, when Pariah shows up in the Monitor's satellite without Lady Quark in *Crisis* #4, this issue still brings us no closer to understanding why. Talk about a missed opportunity to fill a gaping plot hole, only to introduce all sorts of other narrative inconsistencies instead!

While this conflict plays out, we observe heroes in various time periods and locales as they battle super-size shadow demons and natural disasters. These include characters we've seen before as well as others, such as Blue Devil and Dolphin, who are making their first appearance in this series. In every case, the heroes appear to be losing. Presumably, these are all video feeds because judging from the horrified look on Pariah's face, he's watching it all unfold.

Over top of this panorama of disaster, the Monitor explains how the universe was split apart at the dawn of time, separated by vibration and time, each world weaker than the whole it was meant to be, and how his towers are meant to bring them back together. He (or perhaps Wolfman) seems to forget that the multiverse wasn't created at the dawn of time; it was created ten billion years later when Krona conducted his forbidden experiment. The Monitor also says the fates of Earth-One and Earth-Two are inextricably linked. This reflects the editorial prioritization of these worlds narratively up to this point, but it could also be because their vibrations are the most similar to each other, as suggested by Sergio J. Andrade "Reflection/Echo Effect," discussed earlier in this book.





Gary Cohn (left) and Paris Cullins (right), co-creators (along with Dan Mishkin) of Blue Devil. Mishkin and Cohn originally conceived the character for Steve Ditko, blending superhero action, monster imagery, and comedy. When Ditko declined to draw it, Cullins embraced the idea, helping turn *Blue Devil* into one of DC's most popular series in the early 1980s.

Pariah still isn't buying it, saying the Monitor isn't altering the future, and it's impossible to change the past, so what gives? As the Monitor offers a cryptic explanation, during which he notes his enemy is able to move quicker than he is, "unfettered by morals or restraint," he opens a hatch to reveal a button. Before he presses it, he asks Pariah to do him a favor and not harm "her" until all is made clear. Before he can explain any further, Harbinger appears, her eyes as black as the devil's grin, and lets the Monitor have it with a blast of energy, finally making good on her promise at the end of issue #3. The attack must have taken all her strength because in the next tall, skinny panel, she's shown plummeting into a black void.

Overcome with shock and confusion, Pariah goes to check on the Monitor, but he's already dead. As a series of monitors show one or several earths being inundated with anti-matter, and with the only hope of stopping the disaster lying dead in his arms, "the man called Pariah can only cry!" Anyone who felt this was a pathetic, ineffectual response was in good company. As George Pérez himself told scholar Adam Murdough, many people in DC's offices were so disgusted by the character that they used to walk around, singing "The wimp they call Pariah" to the tune of "They Call the Wind Maria" from the musical *Paint Your Wagon.*

The next page shows a series of six panels that cuts diagonally across the page from the top-left to the bottom-right corner. The first five panels repeat the same image of Pariah's crying face as it grows fainter and fainter, his colors fading rather than being reduced to blue lines, followed by a sixth panel that's pure white. Back to the blank page we go! In the background we see heroes from the six heroic focal points looking on in horror, accompanied by images of Earth-One and Earth-Two, which are all but destroyed by anti-matter. Once again, though, there seems to be a bit of a mix-up, as the anti-matter is shown hitting the west coast of North America and the South Pacific rather than the east coast, Europe, and the North Atlantic where the anti-matter is actually assaulting those worlds. Regardless, with so much of the planet obliterated, it's a wonder life is still possible on those worlds at all.

The second-last page shows a series of six long vertical panels in another undoing of creation as not just Earth but also a string of planets goes from full color to lighter and lighter shades of blue, with the final panel being almost pure white. A series of captions on the previous page says Earth-One and Earth-Two must die, but the fact that we end on white rather than black indicates that, just as when Pariah saved Lady Quark, perhaps this isn't the end after all. The final page appears to remove that hope, however, as the noxious black smoke probes the whiteness, tentatively at first, then rushing in to fill the void, obliterating everything in its wake.

CHAPTER 15

Interlude the First — Crisis Crossovers and Tie-ins

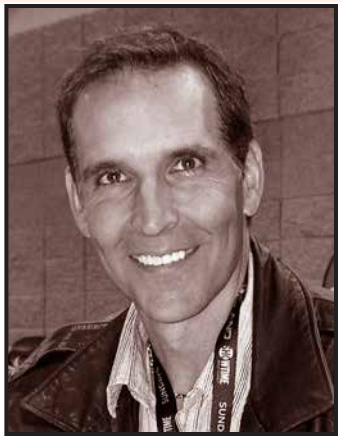
Thus ends the first movement of *Crisis,* which means it's a good time to pause and look at some of the side stories and embellishments that have been occurring in the crossovers and tie-ins and how they link into this part of the story. For the sake of argument, this book defines "crossovers" as those issues that had the *Crisis* banner across the top and "tie-ins" as stories that were not branded as such but which still acknowledged and contributed to *Crisis* proper. As for how this distinction was made within DC: "If it's a major crossover, if it's the root of your plot, 'Blurb it,'" Wolfman told his fellow creators. "If it's a minor crossover—one or two pages, which is very nice for the book—we ask them, 'Do not blurb it. … I think we've only had one or two cases, of all the different crossovers, that the title was put on incorrectly."[185]

The first official "bannered" *Crisis* crossover took place in *Infinity Inc.* #18, written by Roy Thomas and featuring early penciling work by superstar creator Todd McFarlane. The heroes are battling their new foes, Helix, a team of teenagers whose super powers originate from genetic experiments. Bitter over how they've been exploited and betrayed by Hollywood, Helix takes the battle to the City of Angels when Harbinger shows up and freezes everyone in place. She tells Obsidian he needs to come with her. Though reluctant, he accepts her invitation, and time resumes. This is followed by a caption that says, "All right, so now you know how Obsidian came to join the assembled cast of heroes and villains in our monumental *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #1." The tone of this caption makes Thomas sound just as reticent as Obsidian, if not downright resentful that the equivalent of an entire page had to be sacrificed for this tie-in. Could this have been an early sign of his indignation regarding *Crisis* and its implications for his beloved Earth-Two characters?



Unlike many *Crisis* cross-overs that offer little more than token references to the series, *All-Star Squadron* #50 puts Harbinger front and center on the Jerry Ordway's cover, directly linking the issue to the recruitment of Firebrand in the Monitor's war, which takes place in *Crisis* #1.

185 O'Neill, 11. *The Losers Special* #1 could be considered one of those incorrectly labeled crossovers, seeing as it contains no mention of *Crisis* and portrays a completely different scenario for how the Losers died.



Todd McFarlane, artist for *Infinity, Inc.* #18. McFarlane became one of comics' breakout superstar artists, later transforming Spider-Man and creating Spawn. Before that, he built his reputation at DC on *Infinity, Inc.*, where his energetic, distinctive pencils helped define the series look during the mid-1980s, announcing a major talent.

Maybe so, but there's no evidence of such feelings in *All-Star Squadron* #50, also co-written by Thomas. Far from a mere "red skies" moment, Harbinger is front and center on the cover as the heroes flail in the void, similar to how they're portrayed on the cover of *Crisis* #1, and the story itself is called "Crisis Point!" It's also a super-size issue to celebrate the 50th installment of *All-Star Squadron.*

The story offers an alternate take on *All Star Comics* #13 (1942) when an Axis scientist seals the members of the JSA into eight rockets and launches them into space, each one bound for a different planet, hopefully for good. While on each planet, the heroes engage in a series of adventures, helping to solve a problem on that world. Then they all find their way back home in time to defeat the villains. In this revamped version, something goes awry at the launch, and instead of traveling to different planets in Earth-Two's solar system, Harbinger's arrival to recruit Firebrand sends each rocket into an alternate dimension. Furthermore, we learn the rockets themselves were purchased from the Monitor during his previous career as an international/interdimensional/intertemporal arms dealer. Retconning at its finest.

From there we get a sneak peek at the events leading up to Harbinger's meeting with Firebrand at the war bonds rally. Having just returned from battling the Nazis in England, the All-Star Squadron are the main, albeit unenthusiastic, attraction. Firebrand and Phantom Lady are volunteering in the kitchen as their alter egos, Danette Reilly and Sandra Knight. The original Firebrand, Danette's brother, Rod, is also in attendance, having just emerged from a several-month hospital stay after being wounded at Pearl Harbor. On crutches and dressed in Navy whites, he arrives just in time to have his sister tease him about his Firebrand costume's see-through shirt in front of an image of him on a WWII recruiting poster. (A native of Earth-X, Firebrand joined the Freedom Fighters in issue #11 of their eponymous comic.)

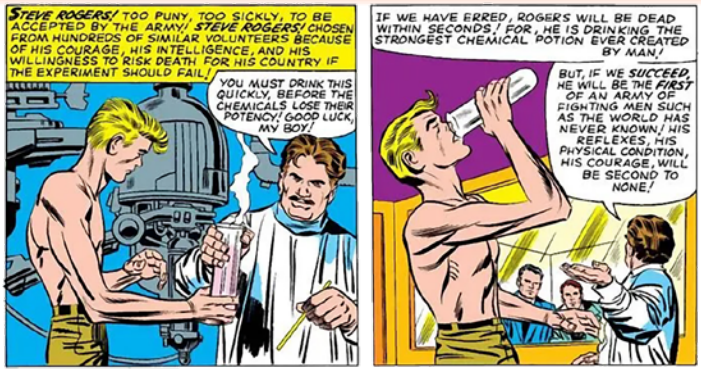
We proceed to a reenactment of Harbinger's conscription of Firebrand from *Crisis* #1, followed by "the rest of the story." Harbinger tries to return to 1985 with Firebrand, only to run into a temporal barrier created by another apparatus that the Monitor sold to the Nazis, yet again making him complicit in helping one of the most heinous political regimes in history. Perhaps "the ends justify the means" is his motto. That seems to be the case for Harbinger as she decides that no matter what evil the Nazi engineers are up to, she must continue with her mission and "let befall what may, no matter who is harmed!" Never mind that the number of those harmed includes millions of men, women, and children being exterminated in Nazi death camps. Did the Monitor supply equipment to facilitate that effort too?

As Harbinger breaks through the time barrier, the resultant radiation overloads the Nazis' apparatus, frying the scientist and freeing Steel, who was being held captive by the Reich. It also creates a portal that transports Steel to Earth-One. By way of background, Steel is Hank Heywood, a patriotic college student in the 1940s who volunteers for experimental surgery after being gravely injured in a terrorist attack. His grandfather, Dr. Gilbert Giles, replaces much of his damaged body with mechanized components, granting him enhanced strength and durability. Donning a red, white, and blue costume, Hank becomes the superhero Steel: The Indestructible Man, fighting Nazi saboteurs and domestic threats during World War II. Debuting in *Steel, the Indestructible Man* #1 (1978), his adventures were short-lived before he was folded into the All-Star Squadron.

When the All-Star Squadron realizes Firebrand is missing, they assume she's been kidnapped, so they go after her. In the process, the Freedom Fighters show up and recruit Phantom Lady and Plastic Man to go to Earth-X to fight the Nazis there. The other members of the Squadron catch up to Harbinger and Firebrand right as Harbinger opens a portal to take them back to 1985. At the last second, Liberty Belle, Johnny Quick, and Green Lantern (Alan Scott) are pulled in after them.

Overall, this issue is the epitome of what a good crossover should be. It doesn't just acknowledge the main story; it makes it central to the plot and fleshes out what happened leading up to it and afterwards. While it's not necessary to read this story to understand *Crisis* #1, it provides some enjoyable supplemental material, and the story stands on its own. The tie-in with *All Star Comics* #13 is a fun bonus. This connection continues as a back-up feature in the next several issues, following the individual heroes' adventures on the other planets.

The *Crisis* connection isn't quite as prominent in *All-Star Squadron* #51, which has the remaining members of the Squadron confronting the newly reformed Monster Society of Evil, but it's still integral to the plot. While en route to Earth-Two from the Earth-S universe's version of Venus to meet one of the radio stars he loves so much (having listened to their broadcasts for years), Mr. Mind finds himself stuck in interdimensional space until Harbinger and Firebrand whip past. By tracking their energy trail to its source, he finds a portal to Earth-Two, only to discover that his favorite radio star is a fraud. Disappointed, he goes to meet his second choice, the JSA, but their headquarters is abandoned. In a rage, he forms the Monster Society of Evil to get revenge for his disappointment.



Steel's origin parallel's Captain America's. Both begin as ordinary men remade by science into patriotic protectors: Steve Rogers through the Super-Soldier Serum, John Henry Irons through armor that he engineers.

All-Star Squadron #52 reveals the fate of Green Lantern, Liberty Belle, and Johnny Quick, who find themselves on Earth-S or "Earth-Shazam," as it's called in this and subsequent issues in this series, after following Harbinger and Firebrand through the void. They wind up face to face with Captain Marvel, who they fear has "gone Nazi" again, following his possession by the Spear of Destiny in issues #36 and 37. Instead, he's on the run from some shadow creatures, whom he's been fighting "ever since the sky suddenly turned flame-red."

Captain Marvel smashes the shadow demons into pieces, but they reform into a black bolt of lightning that zaps him back into Billy Batson, an innovative but unprecedented ability that the shadow demons have never demonstrated before. Liberty Belle tries her recently acquired sonic powers on them, but even though she blows them apart, they reform into a giant shadow creature. Unlike the ones we've seen earlier, these shadow demons aren't just black; their bodies are covered in white specs that look like stars, and their mouths are filled with jagged teeth. Could it be a different breed of shadow demon? Whatever the case, Green Lantern utters his oath and then blasts them with his ring, which seems to do the trick.

Afterward as they get acquainted with Captain Marvel, the visiting heroes puzzle over where Firebrand might be. While Johnny Quick wonders if maybe the few seconds they were behind the ladies caused them to emerge from the portal miles away, Green Lantern suggests the delay could have sent them to a completely different dimension. "If there can be two earths, after all," he says, "there can just as easily be three—or a thousand."

As the heroes brainstorm how to return home, we learn that the red skies and shadow creatures have yet to afflict Earth-Two. In fact, as we'll see, this is the only crossover so far where the two phenomena—the red skies and the shadow creatures—are linked.

Finally, Captain Marvel hits on a solution. After leading the others down into the abandoned subway tunnel where he first encountered Shazam, he lights a brazier, and the old wizard appears. Shazam helps the visitors leave by releasing a red ball of light that leads them to the Rock of Eternity, but he forbids Captain Marvel from going with them. After pausing to nab a piece of the rock as a souvenir from the Rock of Eternity, the trio follows a huge green arrow—an actual arrow, not the character—that emerges from Green Lantern's ring and leads them home.

Back in the subway tunnel, Captain Marvel goes to ask Shazam why he wasn't allowed to follow, but the wizard is gone. Meanwhile, we learn that in Captain Marvel's timeline, this happened several years before *Crisis*. Indeed, it occurred "several years before Captain Marvel first flies to that gateway to all time and space," i.e., the Rock of Eternity. That means it took place well before December 1939 when *Whiz Comics* #2 came out, which was Cap's first visit to the Rock.

This is Shazam and the Rock of Eternity's only appearance in the *Crisis* narrative, although Captain Marvel himself plays a minor role in the series. Considering Shazam's incredible power and the Rock of Eternity's supposed locale as the nexus of all time and space, one can't help but wonder why Wolfman didn't make this aspect of the DCU more prominent in the *Crisis* narrative. While no in-story explanation is given, an editorial response to a query about the Marvel family in *Who's Who* #6 indicated that rather than own these characters outright, they were being used under a license with Fawcett at the time *Crisis* was written. DC didn't acquire full ownership of the characters until 1991. Therefore, making them a pivotal part of *Crisis* and the DCU going forward would have created an awkward situation if that license had lapsed, and DC was no longer able to use these properties.

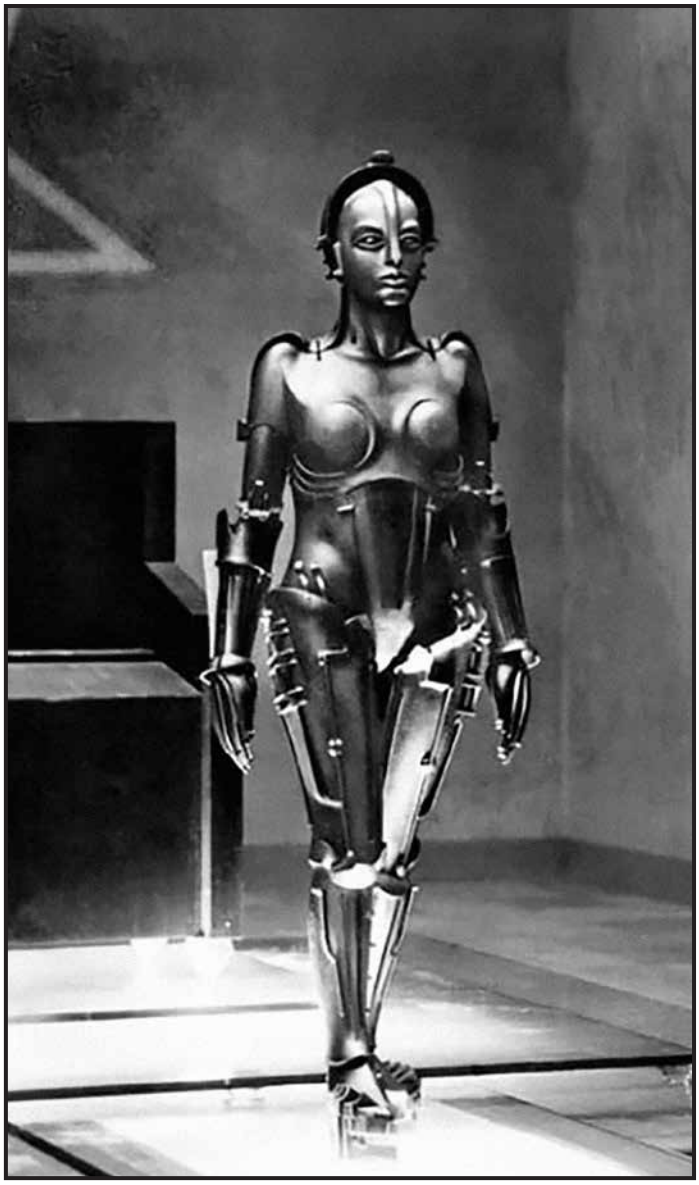
Firestorm's enlistment by Harbinger is front and center in *The Fury of Firestorm* #41, which showcases her and Psycho Pirate on the cover. The story opens with Harbinger "powering up" on board the Monitor's satellite, including her warning to him that she will no longer be treated as a slave. In a sign that suggests one of Bob Greenberger's many memos might have gone missing, just as Harbinger splits into 20 rather than 15 avatars in *Crisis* #1, in this issue she splits into 16 replicants. Close but no cigar.

Ronald Raymond and Professor Martin Stein, the two personalities that make up Firestorm, have just moved to Pittsburgh, ready to pursue their separate lives as professor and student. But the arrival of Harbinger, Psycho Pirate, and a storm that turns the skies red disrupts their plans. As Harbinger confronts Ronald, Psycho Pirate seizes on the distraction to run amok on campus, instilling fear in Professor Stein. When the two of them fuse together to form Firestorm, Stein's fear takes over, followed by anger when Psycho Pirate shows his face to Firestorm. He turns against Harbinger until she realizes what's going on and orders Psycho Pirate to set Firestorm free. She tells Firestorm that the storm is "both prelude and echo of the true menace" that is to come. Then they're off to find Killer frost, with Firestorm still bursting with questions.

We get to see a lighter side to Harbinger in this issue as she deals with Psycho Pirate and Firestorm's erratic behavior. Her

helmet is also drawn quite differently here, seeming to cover more of her head than it does in *Crisis.* Either that or her hair doesn't quite poof out the same way it does elsewhere. Once again, however, this crossover does an excellent job of making *Crisis* essential to the plot and showing us where Firestorm's life was at before the Anti-Monitor's attack on the multiverse interrupted his plans.

Infinity Inc. #19, bills itself as the last JLA/JSA team-up in a story fittingly titled "Last Crisis on Earth-Two!" It picks up shortly after Obsidian's disappearance, with Fury remarking that she thought she saw a glimpse of a blonde woman dressed in blue and gold, a.k.a. Harbinger. They hardly have time to respond to that before Nuklon directs their attention to the sky, which has turned red not just there but all over the world. "Red sky at morning—sailor take warning," Scarab says, a couplet that someone inevitably had to recite at some point. For some reason a black-and-white image of the Monitor is superimposed on this page along with a banner at the bottom that shows a string of parallel earths overlapping one another. This is followed a few pages later by a string of earths being inundated and apparently destroyed by yellow lightning.



Roy Thomas's Mekanique is DC's comics translation of Maschinenmensch, a female robot from Fritz Lang's 1921 classic *Metropolis*. Because of copyright concerns, Thomas gave the character a new name, but the homage is unmistakable in origin, design, and function.

As the members of Infinity Inc. travel to Earth-One to help Commander Steel and Mekanique save the "renegade" JLA, the JSA wonders what to make of the red skies. Doctor Fate is the bearer of bad news, saying, "What is at stake is not the earth, not the universe … but all earths, all universes. In a word … everything." Jay Garrick makes light of it at first, but when Doctor Fate sends out his "ankh-probes" to confirm his intuition, there's no need for further validation of his theory. "His eyes tell the story," Wonder Woman says. "And it's a tale of death without end!"

The story picks up in *Justice League of America* #244 in an installment called "The Final Crisis.*"* After the JLA is defeated by the Infinitors at their Detroit headquarters, they retreat to the JLA satellite, hoping to use the transmatter device to get help from the JSA against Steel, who has deceived Infinity Inc. into serving his own purposes. As this is happening, the skies over Earth-One turn the color of blood, and hailstones the size of footballs pummel the ground.

When the JSA shows up to help, a battle ensues in the JLA's bunker, with Commander Steel and Mekanique on one side and everyone else on the other. By the time it's over, the storm has penetrated the bunker itself, with Doctor Fate warning that the storm they face is beyond mortal comprehension. Others sense something different in the air too, particularly Zatanna. "I can't explain it," she thinks, "but I know this storm—bizarre as it is—is just a prelude. A prelude to what I cannot imagine!" Such foreboding strikes the perfect chord for a cosmic event like *Crisis.* It overshadows the seemingly petty rivalries and misunderstandings that seemed so important until the true nature of the calamity that will command their attention is revealed.

Swamp Thing #39 is a "red skies" crossover of the worst kind. After a couple of pages that show John Constantine and Swamp Thing under skies that are various shades of pink, orange, purple, blue, and finally, red, Constantine remarks on "these red skies and funny weather patterns we've been having," noting that it's the perfect time for whoever is behind a recent vampire uprising to pull off their plan.

The same goes for *Detective Comics* #555 where Batman and Robin meet with Commissioner Gordon and Detective Harvey Bullock on the rooftop of the Gotham Police Department at night under a bright red moon. In a caption, Robin, who is recalling this story in retrospect, says, "the sky took us off the subject before the subject was even introduced."

"So red up there, even at night," Bullock remarks. To which Batman replies, "The experts assure us there's nothing

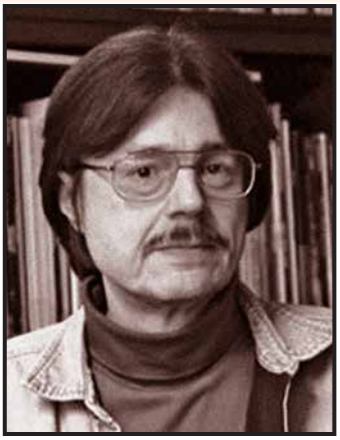
to worry about." The skies are intermittently red for the rest of the issue, but no further commentary is included.

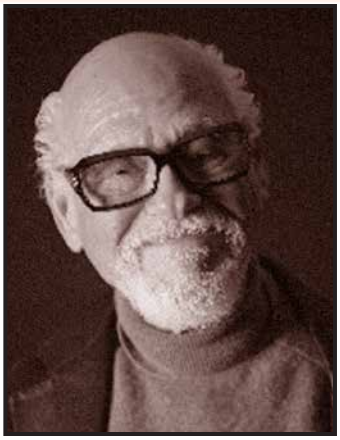
That changes in a lengthy non-bannered tie-in that ping-pongs between *Batman* (#389–391) and *Detective Comics* (#556–558), the first installment of which is called "Red Skies," followed by "Bleeding Night." The storyline revolves around the return of Nocturna, a.k.a. Natalia Knight. A former astronomer at the Gotham Astronomical Observatory, she was studying the properties of stellar light in a vacuum when an accident exposed her to high levels of radiation that turned her skin pale and made her highly sensitive to light. To fund her medical treatments, she partnered with her adoptive brother and lover, Anton Knight, who became the villain Night-Slayer. Together, they began committing high-end thefts under the cover of darkness. Later, Nocturna developed a romantic relationship with Bruce Wayne, even though she was a criminal, creating a morally complex situation for Batman. She also became a mother figure to young Jason Todd (Robin) and at one point tried to adopt him, resulting in a custody battle with Bruce.

In this story, after a lengthy absence, Nocturna returns to the abandoned observatory, concerned about the red skies and attendant astronomical and weather phenomena. She's worried it could lead to "the death of the night, perhaps the end of the world," and she hopes by observing the sky, she might find a solution.

Her arrival creates a double-bind for Batman, who is torn between his feelings for her and the recently reformed Catwoman, a.k.a. Selina Kyle. Complicating matters is the Night-Slayer's determination to track down Nocturna and kill her, Catwoman's attempt to catch him (so the murders he's been committing won't be pinned on her), and Robin's yearning for Nocturna to fulfill her role as a mother figure. It's a visceral, violent story written by Doug Moench and beautifully illustrated by Gene Colan and Tom Mandrake. The tale is literally and figuratively soaked in blood, with practically every scene taking place under a crimson sky as red rain and hail pelt heroes and villains alike. If any of the crossovers and tie-ins were to take top prize for establishing the sense of apocalyptic dread that *Crisis* was meant to invoke, this storyline is it. As a special bonus, the cover of *Batman* #390 is an homage of sorts to *Crisis* #7, with Batman cradling Nocturna in his arms similar to how Superman is holding Supergirl on the latter cover.

The Marv Wolfman–edited *Vigilante* #22 trades a "red skies" tie-in for a "yellow-and-black skies" nod to the maxi-series in its opening panel. Beneath a stormy, discolored sky, a series of captions acknowledges the "seething hell the skies above Earth have become," then directs us to *Crisis* while this issue focuses its attention on more everyday concerns. Considering Wolfman's pleas for other creative teams to hop on board the *Crisis* bandwagon, one would have expected him to use this opportunity to show everyone how it was done. Instead, he opted for a less than minimal approach, perhaps because he was already tearing his hair out trying to accommodate all the other crossovers and tie-ins.





Doug Moench (left) and Gene Colan (right). Moench is a writer whose long *Batman* runs at DC, plus creations like *Black Mask*, made him central to Gotham's post-Crisis evolution in comics. Colan brought moody draftsmanship to DC, becoming a defining *Batman* artist in the early 1980s while also drawing *Wonder Woman* and *Night Force*.

Wolfman did a bit better in *Tales of the Teen Titans* #58, which shows how Psimon was summoned to the Monitor's satellite. In danger of drowning after being blasted into the Hudson River by one of Starfire's energy bolts, Psimon disappears in a flash of light, only to find himself face to face with Harbinger and the big man himself. Behind them are a series of three monitors on which three earths can be seen at various stages of destruction.

When Psimon demands to know where he is and who has captured him, Harbinger and the Monitor's response makes the encounter look more like a plug for the series than a scene from the story. "I am Harbinger and you are aboard the Monitor's satellite," Harbinger says.

"Three months from now," the Monitor adds, "shall begin the crisis on infinite earths." Adding to the sales pitch feel, rather than a normal font, when the Monitor says the name of the series, it's written in the same font as the *Crisis* logo.

In light of the Monitor's first line, are we to believe Psimon was aboard the Monitor's satellite for three months prior to *Crisis?* If so, why? And why was his presence there never revealed? Or was he merely given this message and then sent back to Earth until the time was right? If so, why? *The Official Crisis on Infinite Earths Index* says he remained on the Monitor's satellite for the next three months, but no evidence is provided to support this assertion.[186]

Furthermore, according to the Monitor's last pre-*Crisis* appearance and the novelization, they had only a few hours' notice prior to Earth-Three's destruction, not months, so this still doesn't make sense. On top of introducing yet another inconsistency—the very problem Wolfman set out to solve with *Crisis*—he took a minimalist approach to promoting his own series, with these three panels having almost no bearing on the plot of this issue or the maxi-series itself.

186 Murray R. Ward, Ed. *The Official Crisis on Infinite Earths Index.* (ICG, 1986), 3.

How John Stewart (Green Lantern) found himself aboard the Monitor's satellite is shown in *Green Lantern* #194. Returning from a mission in space with fellow Green Lantern Katma Tui, he's just in time to help Green Arrow and Black Canary rescue some citizens from an earthquake. Not only has the sky turned red, the weather has turned stormy, and the ground is shaking. Black Canary also mentions that Firestorm has gone missing.

Harbinger chooses that moment to show up, saying she's responsible for Firestorm's disappearance. She also asks Green Lantern to come with her, saying if he doesn't, his world will be destroyed. Having just returned from building a world in the last issue, Green Lantern is in no hurry to leave, especially with a complete stranger. He attempts to contain Harbinger with his ring, so he can interrogate her about her claims, but she breaks free. The others join in, but Harbinger easily overpowers them, and Green Lantern finally acquiesces to her request. Katma Tui wants to go with him, but Harbinger says she was instructed to take John Stewart, not her.

Before they leave, for some reason Harbinger asks Green Lantern to put on his mask, but he tells her he doesn't wear one anymore. She's not sure how to respond to that, so he uses his ring to make one, then they disappear in a burst of yellow light. He arrives on the Monitor's satellite in the midst of the scene from *Crisis* #1 when the rest of the inductees are checking the place out, right before the shadow demons attack.

Back on Earth, Katma Tui decides she must warn the Guardians of the disaster that Harbinger told them about, so she sends her energy twin to Oa.

"You are certain the name was Monitor?" a Guardian asks after she tells her tale. Is this because the Monitor's name is well known to them, with his million-year battle with the Anti-Monitor while based on Oa's moon having become the stuff of legend? Or is it because he doesn't know who the Monitor is? It's impossible to tell from the context, but it's hard to believe the Guardians haven't heard of him before. "This is very serious … very serious indeed!" he continues. "It corroborates the recent finding of anti-matter anomalies!" Once again, the Guardians' seeming ignorance of what's happening doesn't square up. They have thousands of Green Lanterns posted all over the universe, so it should have been reported to them from multiple fronts as soon as the anti-matter cloud arrived. Plus, seeing as they're some of the most powerful beings in the universe, shouldn't one of the Guardians have been summoned by Harbinger at the beginning of this story to serve as a member of the Monitor's "great fifteen"? Furthermore, with the Monitor having been born and raised so close to Oa, wouldn't he have developed a relationship with the Guardians prior to embarking on his mission, making them and the Green Lantern Corps a core part of his plan from the beginning?

After the Guardian sends Katma Tui home with strict instructions to keep them informed, she thinks, "Never have I seen a Guardian so agitated! Can this anti-matter really threaten the end of the universe?" Just to be sure, when she returns to Earth, she uses her ring to send her energy twin back to the planet Timron, where she and John Stewart were in the previous issue, but she finds nothing there but a black void. Alarmed, she returns to Earth.

On Oa, the Guardians are confused over how the threat could have escaped their detection, noting that their instruments monitor all galaxies and track all universal anomalies. They also mention they discovered "its presence" twelve cycles ago—equivalent to twelve billion earth years—presumably referring to the creation of the anti-matter universe. This point is also mentioned in *Crisis* #2. But the math doesn't quite add up, seeing as Krona supposedly conducted his forbidden experiment ten billion years before the crisis occurred, not twelve billion years ago. At any rate, when one considers the close link between the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor's origin and the Green Lantern mythos, the Guardians' seeming ignorance of this threat until so late in the game is one of the biggest flaws of *Crisis*.

The Guardians are taken out of commission by a mysterious blast, as covered in *Crisis* #2, which causes Katma Tui to crash. "A ripple in the magic," she says, which seems odd considering her ring is supposed to be science-based. Sensing the Guardians are in danger, when she tries to send her energy twin there, for the first time ever, she finds her way blocked. Why her ring doesn't cease to function at that point, as happens to the other Green Lanterns in *Crisis* #2 isn't revealed.

Seeking an explanation, she goes to former Green Lantern Hal Jordan, whose ring was taken from him and given to John Stewart in *Green Lantern* #181 after he chose to remain on Earth with Carol Ferris rather than continue his heroic duties full time. Apart from noticing the strange weather, he isn't much help, but the meeting does give them a chance to reconcile their differences, and it helps Hal come to terms with the fact that he's no longer Green Lantern.

Wanting to share the good news with Abin Sur, who first recruited Hal to the Corps., he travels to the alien's grave, only to find Guy Gardner—the Guardians' second pick for Green Lantern when Hal was chosen (*Green Lantern* #59)—trying to exhume Abin Sur's body. Hal is surprised to find Guy up and about, seeing as he's been in a coma since *Green Lantern* #123 when Sinestro abducted him from the Phantom Zone into the anti-matter universe. But Guy isn't interested in talking about that. All he wants is Abin Sur's ring and his power battery, so he can become Green Lantern.

A fistfight breaks out between the two rivals, but it's interrupted by a representative of a splinter group of Guardians who says they were the ones who woke Guy from his coma. The Guardian has come "in our hour of gravest crisis" to spirit Guy away to Oa and make him a Green Lantern, saying Hal is no longer part of their plans.

And finally, although attentive readers may have noted that Wolfman teased a crossover in *The Flash* at the end of his editorial in *Crisis* #3, such a connection was not to be, no doubt due to the continually evolving nature of the Crisis storyline.

CHAPTER 16

"Worlds in Limbo"—Crisis #5

Wanting to give Pérez a break from the crushing weight of his penciling duties, Wolfman suggested a simple idea for the cover of *Crisis* #5.

> *I designed a cover for George that was supposed to have three heads on it—big heads—and something in the middle, I forget what it was. I left George's house, and his wife, Carol, said to me, 'Are you making it hard for him?'*
>
> *'No, this is the easiest one in the world! Three big heads and the blowing up of the Earths.' Then I saw the cover—96 heads in detail!*
>
> *The man is insane and he's great! I think his insanity makes him great—he loves drawing lots of figures.*[187]

At the center of the cover are two earths that are beginning to crack and overlap, with the cover itself bisected by a thin white line. Gazing out at us from the point of intersection is a face that's an amalgamation of Wonder Woman of Earth-One and her Earth-Two double. One might wonder why the two Flashes aren't front and center, seeing as *The Flash* #123 is typically regarded as the foundational multiverse story. However, as we've seen, the first true parallel-earth story and the first image of parallel worlds appeared in *Wonder Woman* #59, so it's fitting that she receives pride of place.

This blending of faces continues down the centerline, with the Earth-One version of the character on the left and the Earth-Two character version on the right. Seeing as we read from left to right, and the Earth-Two versions came first chronologically, it might have made more sense to put them on the left instead. Beyond that, this is yet another example of privileging these two earths in the DCU and this story, as if they're the only two worlds that really matter.

Moving from top to bottom, we start with the two versions of the Flash, which is fitting considering their role in multiversal history; then the Supermen, founding fathers

187 O'Neill, 9.



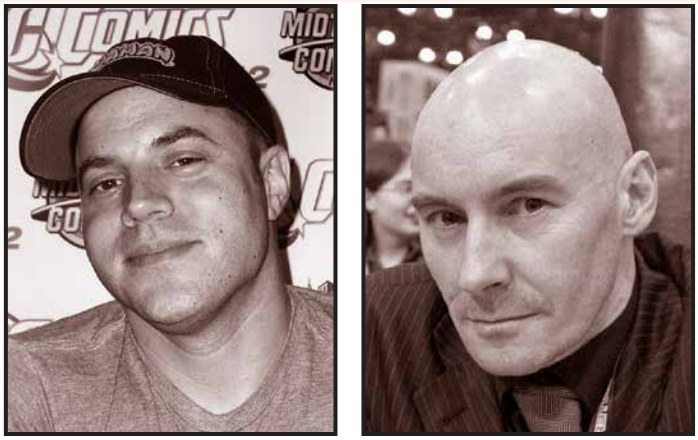
***Crisis on Infinite Earths* #5. Pérez's cover abandons action for a gallery of faces, crowding heroes and villains from Earth-One and Earth-Two into a single tableau. The head-shot design suggests a world under judgment, while its stern portraits foreshadow the issue's dark revelations.**

of the DCU; the Hawkmen; the Wonder Women; the Atoms; the Green Lanterns; the Green Arrows; and the lone villain pairing, the Lex Luthors. The one glaring omission from this "column of champions" is Batman, seeing as he was as much of a founding father of the DCU as Superman. Swapping out Batman for Luthor would have made sense, making the center column solidly heroic, but perhaps that wasn't Pérez's goal.

Moving beyond the center column, the left side of the cover is filled with faces from Earth-One, and the right side is populated with characters from Earth-Two, but there are a couple of exceptions. One of them is Black Canary, whose roots are on Earth-Two (see *Justice League of America* #73 and 74 for the strange Wolfman-inspired story of how she—or rather, her daughter, whose brain has been injected with Black Canary's memories—migrated to Earth-One). The other is Red Tornado, who started on Earth-Two when T. O. Morrow "created him," then moved to Earth-One before returning to Earth-Two. (The word "created" is in quotes here because he's actually an android inhabited by the Tornado Champion, as recounted in *Justice League of America* #193.)

One could probably spend a lifetime trying to come up with an explanation for why Pérez arranged the faces the way he did in each row and column. For instance, why is Sgt. Rock next to the new Dr. Light? Why is the Star-Spangled Kid beneath the Spectre? Did Pérez arrange them by powers? Gender? Moral alignment? Mask vs. no mask? Planet of origin? Age? Timing of first appearance? It doesn't help that some faces are obscured by the two earths in the middle of the page, and some of them merely peek out from behind others. Hence, rather than seek to come up with an explanatory grid, one might be tempted to infer that apart from the faces in the center column and dividing the page according to residency, Pérez picked the names at random. But as Peter Rios and Adam Murdough point out in their deep-dive examination of this cover,[188] all sorts of fascinating connections can be inferred. For example, Rios notes the second line of Earth-One faces is composed of aliens, orphans and "sole survivors," including Dawnstar, Martian Manhunter, Batman, Firestorm, and Superman. The third line is peopled with characters from genres other than superhero comics, including war, fantasy, Silver Age "super science," and alternate future/Fourth World characters. Such speculation is fun and insightful, though Pérez isn't on record explaining his strategy for how he designed this image.

Apart from the arrangement of faces, another thing to note about this cover is the use of color. Apart from the two earths, which are rendered in green, all the faces are in blue, and the ones visible in the overlapping sections of the earth are riddled with halftone dots. Harkening back to the idea of characters being "blue-lined" by the anti-matter, the halftone dots could be interpreted as yet another reminder that these characters are mere printed constructs whose continuity is in the process of being rewritten. Their reality is literally pixelating or decaying, in danger of vanishing altogether. Considering where things



Geoff Johns (right) became DC's great myth rebuilder, restoring legacies and clarifying continuity. Grant Morrison (left) pushed in the opposite direction, expanding DC through multiversal, "everything matters" meta fiction. Together, they reshaped DC's storytelling grammar.

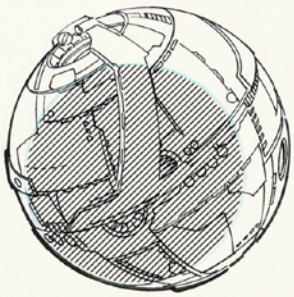
were left at the end of the previous issue, such an effect couldn't be more appropriate.

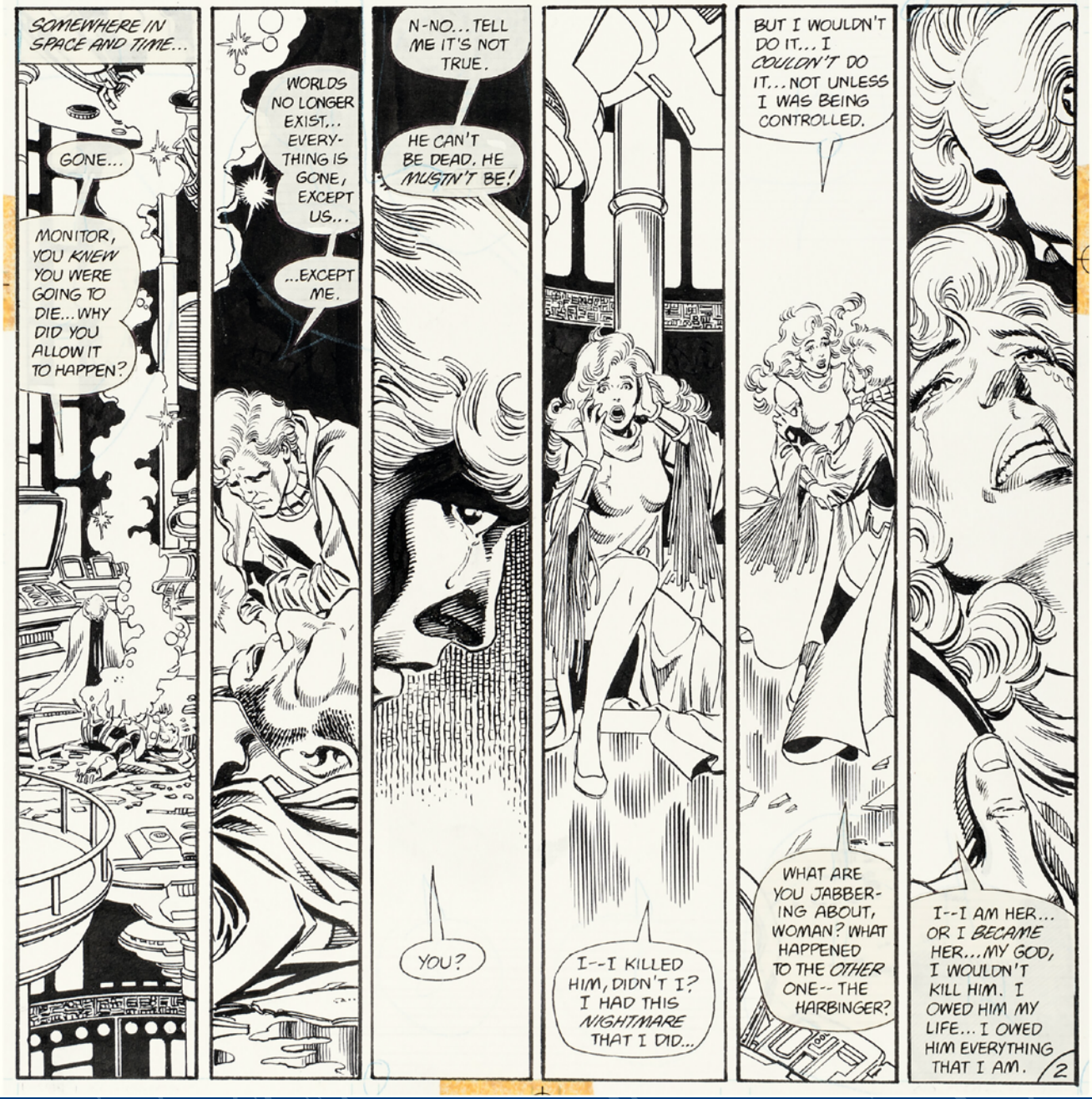
The story opens with a stack of black slabs and the Anti-Monitor's dialogue written over it in white text. He says the first two "prime universes," i.e., the ones that contain Earth-One and Earth-Two, are gone, but for some reason his strength hasn't increased. His use of the term "prime" makes sense editorially, seeing as they were the central pillars of DC's multiverse—the most developed, most populated, and most narratively significant worlds. But what about in-story? One might say that these are the two most influential universes, seeing as they contain a high concentration of heroes, and they play a central role in resisting the Anti-Monitor's power. But seeing as we haven't seen most of the thousands of other universes that have been destroyed, who's to say other universes didn't rally a similar response, only to fall to the wave of anti-matter and shadow demons? Then again, the Monitor himself places a high priority on these worlds, for this is where he chooses to make his last stand against his foe, so he must recognize something significant about them too. Later writers such as Geoff Johns and Grant Morrison strove to explain the significance of these two universes as "the foundation stone of a monumental cosmic mega-structure made of parallel universes and parallel worlds, all vibrating at different frequencies" (*DC Universe* #0).[189] They formed the mythic center of the multiverse where the heroic ideal began, but up to this point in DC's history, it's hard not

(opposite page) *Crisis* #5, p. 2. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Pérez's narrow vertical panels squeeze each moment into a sliver of space. The page reads like grief in slow motion, compressing Harbinger's fragmented confession and Pariah's anguish.

188 Comic Geek Speak, "The Crisis Tapes 19 – Crisis on Infinite Earths #5 part 1," YouTube video, February 2, 2024, 3:16:55, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asGK6hnlNJg.

189 See also *The Sinestro Corps War* (2007), *Final Crisis: Legion of 3 Worlds* (2008), and *The Multiversity* (2014–2015) for further development of this idea.




SOMEWHERE IN SPACE AND TIME...
GONE...
MONITOR, YOU KNEW YOU WERE GOING TO DIE... WHY DID YOU ALLOW IT TO HAPPEN?
WORLDS NO LONGER EXIST... EVERY-THING IS GONE, EXCEPT US...
...EXCEPT ME.
N-NO... TELL ME IT'S NOT TRUE.
HE CAN'T BE DEAD, HE MUSTN'T BE!
YOU?
I--I KILLED HIM, DIDN'T I? I HAD THIS NIGHTMARE THAT I DID...
BUT I WOULDN'T DO IT... I COULDN'T DO IT... NOT UNLESS I WAS BEING CONTROLLED.
WHAT ARE YOU JABBER-ING ABOUT, WOMAN? WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHER ONE-- THE HARBINGER?
I--I AM HER... OR I BECAME HER... MY GOD, I WOULDN'T KILL HIM. I OWED HIM MY LIFE... I OWED HIM EVERYTHING THAT I AM.
2

to see this focus as merely a matter of editorial convenience, if not storytelling necessity. Even if the multiverse had an infinite number of worlds, this was hardly the time to run off and catalogue them all, especially considering they were about to be destroyed. Wolfman had his hands full with the ones we already knew about.

The Anti-Monitor's conundrum is followed by yet another interaction between him and Psycho Pirate where he tells Psycho Pirate to sit down and shut up, which makes one wonder why the Anti-Monitor doesn't just put Psycho Pirate in stasis until he's needed. Then the Anti-Monitor says something that anyone who has done a thorough survey of DC's interdimensional and parallel-earth stories will find curious: "The Flash is the only being capable of traversing dimensions unaided." As mentioned earlier, this is supposedly why the Anti-Monitor is holding him captive. But we know this is far from true. Not only can Barry Allen travel between universes unaided, so can Jay Garrick, Superman, Wonder Woman, the Spectre, the Phantom Stranger, Doctor Fate, Zatanna, Mr. Mxyzptlk, Solomon Grundy, and Johnny Thunder's Thunderbolt, among others. Then there are characters who can do so with the help of artifacts, such as the Green Lanterns, Starman, the Marvel Family (via the Rock of Eternity), and Kid Flash (using the cosmic treadmill). All that to say, if the Anti-Monitor was truly worried about interdimensional travelers threatening his plans, he should have had an entire menagerie of people held captive rather than just the Flash.

Following this, the Anti-Monitor says he plans to use Red Tornado to help him control his new universe. Once again, this raises questions. The Anti-Monitor already controls the entire anti-matter universe. Why would he need Red Tornado or anyone else's help? After all, he already has the shadow demons and his other minions, including the remaining Thunderers. For at least the third time, this sequence ends with the Anti-Monitor saying a version of "Come on! There's work to be done," although what that work consists of is unclear. All he seems to do is stand around and watch events unfold.

On the Monitor's satellite, Pariah is mourning over the Monitor's lifeless body when Lyla appears, shaken and unsure as she struggles to comprehend her actions. Her murder of the Monitor feels distant and dreamlike now that she has returned to her human form. Presumably, the shadow demon that possessed her has departed too. Pariah doesn't recognize her at first until she clarifies the Harbinger connection.

This exchange unfolds across six long, narrow, vertical panels. Juxtaposed against the stack of dark, narrow, horizontal panels that preceded it, these understated compositional choices help to reinforce the clashing ideological and cosmic forces in *Crisis*. The vertical panels invite the reader to look up and down, a subtle prompt to look up for inspiration and then down or inward for understanding. It also makes each figure appear smaller in the midst of a grand, universal structure, emphasizing the Monitor's role as a cosmic architect. In contrast, the narrow, horizontal panels reflect the Anti-Monitor's limited perspective and the flattening of reality in the wake of the antimatter cloud.

Lyla and Pariah's mourning is interrupted by a recorded message from the Monitor in which he informs Lyla that he was aware she was possessed and planned to kill him. But all is not lost. When he died, his essence was released not only to activate his machines but also to create a netherverse—a subdimensional or alternate reality—that absorbed the Earth-One and Earth-Two universes and is protecting them from the Anti-Monitor. More Earth-One/Earth-Two favoritism at work! But there's a problem: in his haste to protect their worlds, the Monitor wasn't able to properly attune his vibrational forks, so all time periods on the two earths are merging. He's used some of his energy to calm the populace—a task he probably planned to hand off to Psycho Pirate—but the vibrations that separate them are slowing. When the worlds merge, occupying the same place at the same time, they will destroy each other. In other words, they face the same threat we've seen in numerous previous JLA/JSA team-ups, most recently in *DC Comics Presents Annual* #1, written by Marv Wolfman and published just three years before *Crisis*. Despite the magnitude of *Crisis,* it was as if Wolfman couldn't come up with a new, original threat, so he decided to borrow from himself and previous writers instead. Then again, considering the amount of self-plagiarism that occurred in the early days of comics, could reusing this concept have been Wolfman's way of paying homage to DC's past?

Heaping revelation upon revelation, Alex Luthor appears, now a full-grown man with a bushy red mullet. He assures the others that the Monitor also shared his plans with him. Before Alex reveals those plans, though, it's time for a short funeral. Rather than cremate or otherwise dispose of the Monitor's body, they shoot it off into space—that is, the netherverse, which is the Monitor's essence, so are they actually shooting his physical self into a manifestation of his spiritual self? Either way, it seems reckless. With the Monitor being such a powerful figure, what if the wrong people get their hands on his body and seek to extract some element or energy from it to use for nefarious purposes? Remember, his essence is inextricably connected to the multiverse, so wouldn't some of that latent energy remain in his corpse? This very idea regarding the Anti-Monitor's "rotting husk" is exploited in the "Blackest Night" storyline, though it's first hinted at in *Green Lantern* Vol. 3 #27. Furthermore, Harbinger creates a similar problem when she shoots the "Monitor Tapes" into space to served as a permanent record for future generations. They're intercepted by the Manhunters, who use the data to infiltrate the superhero community as part of their plan in the 1988 event *Millennium*.

Somehow the Anti-Monitor realizes what's happened, and he's furious about it, so he sets his sights on the remaining three earths. Meanwhile, he allows Psycho Pirate to use his emotional powers to toy with the Flash. Psycho Pirate leaps at the opportunity, sending the Flash groveling across the floor.

On Earth-One, people are grappling with the sudden merging of past, present, and future, with WWI triplanes and 30th-century spaceships battling for airspace while pedestrians and 18th-century carriages scramble out of the way of dinosaurs. While reporting on the strange turn of events, Lana Lang remarks that despite the circumstances, little panic

is evident. She also notes that 20th-century earth seems to prevail, which feels like yet another example of editorial convenience rather than an in-story necessity.

As she reports over images of Native Americans, cavemen, and Pilgrims overshadowed by pterodactyls, Lana raises a couple of interesting questions. First, are people in other eras having a similar experience, with manifestations of the 20th century showing up there? Second, if someone finds a way to correct the temporal anomaly, will anyone remember what happened? Considering that whether anyone would remember the crisis was one of the key bones of contention between Wolfman and editorial, it's as if she's voicing a question that had yet to be decided at this point in the scripting process.

The following two-page spread is the one that threatened to give Jerry Ordway fits when he was brought on midway through as inker, seeing as it depicts 162 characters from the DCU gathered in the Monitor's satellite as Harbinger, Alex Luthor, and Pariah address them. How they were transported there isn't clear, but judging from the surprised expression on many faces, the process was probably immediate and unexpected.

The crowd contains a mixture of heroes and villains from Earth-One and Earth-Two, including the Monitor's 15 champions, who have been recalled from guard duty at the towers. Presumably, now that these worlds are inside the netherverse, the shadow demons are no longer a threat, so there's no need to protect the towers. However, seeing as they're misaligned, shouldn't some heroes be dispatched to deal with that? Scattered amidst the super-powered individuals are several ordinary folks, including the members of Easy Co. and the Haunted Tank, and Western characters like Jonah Hex. Why they're included in this group makes sense editorially to show the range of genres that DC published (even though its war and Western titles were about to be canceled), but an in-story explanation for their presence is elusive. Alex Luthor and Pariah prepare the characters and the readers for some exposition, promising that the story they have to tell is beyond belief. If those gathered don't hear them out, their worlds will die just like the *hundred* other universes Pariah has already seen die—a fraction of the thousands of dying worlds he claimed to have witnessed when we first met him and a far cry from the infinite number promised by the title of this series.

Crisis #5, pages 7 & 8. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). The colossal inking challenge faced by Jerry Ordway after George Pérez drew a scene that featured virtually the entire cast of *Crisis* together on board the Monitor's satellite.



This spread offered all sorts of opportunities for Pérez to indulge his love of creative composition and character moments. While the majority of characters are looking up in surprise and bewilderment, little stories are happening throughout the two-page spread. For instance, Katana and members of Easy Co. are reacting in fear to Swamp Thing, who is standing behind them, Superman is holding Dawnstar in his arms (a continuation from the action when they were in Kamandi's world), Teen Titans Changeling and Cyborg are having a heartfelt reunion, and Solomon Grundy is shouting and raising his fist, probably wanting to smash everyone and everything as Phobia regards him in fear.

Having encountered Harbinger before, some people, such as Firebrand and the new Dr. Light, don't trust her, but when Pariah says they need the "so-called heroes and villains" to work together, Superman and Wonder Woman say they're on board.

After Harbinger confesses to killing the Monitor while possessed, Alex Luthor informs them of the Monitor's plan



***Crisis* #5, p. 14. It's "Crisis cameo hour" on board the Monitor's satellite as several characters who are marginal to the series get some face time and a throwaway line or two while Alexander Luthor lays out the multiverse theory firstproposed by Barry Allen in *The Flash* #123.**

to merge all universes into one to escape the anti-matter attack. He repeats an earlier mistake by saying the universes were split at the dawn of time rather than 10 billion years ago, which was when Krona's experiment took place. Nevertheless, they must continue the Monitor's work and find a way to merge the remaining universes, or all will be lost. This would have been a great time to introduce the idea of aligning the towers, but it's never addressed.

In what feels like an opportunity to give walk-on roles for a variety of characters, Travis Morgan, the Warlord, objects, saying that what Luthor is proposing is impossible. A resident of Skartaris, he happens to be standing next to the leader of another other-dimensional realm, Princess Amethyst of Gemworld. The next panel depicts a pair of mystical characters—the Spectre and the Phantom Stranger—and a quasi-mystical character, the Creeper, who has somehow been transported across the room compared to where he was in the two-page spread. This is followed by a mashup of Sgt. Rock and Ice-Cream Soldier of Easy Co., Swamp Thing, and Lt. Jeb Stuart of the Haunted Tank. Their dialogue amounts to little more than expressions of bewilderment at what's happening.

Luthor goes on to show them that what's happening on the earths is also happening on other planets, including Rann, where Adam Strange lives when he's not on Earth. This prompts Starfire to wonder and worry about her homeworld of Tamaran.

The bottom-left panel of this page includes an intriguing exchange between Alan Scott and John Stewart. "You're not the other Green Lantern," Alan says, "but can't you call the Guardians?" Alan knows Hal Jordan well, so why doesn't he refer to him by name rather than using this generic term? Furthermore, when John informs him that his ring isn't working, wouldn't a natural next step be for Alan to test his own ring to see if it works? Furthermore, in a previous parallel-earth story called "Thoroughly Modern Mayhem!" (*Green Lantern* #61), Alan was able to transport the entire population of Earth-Two to Earth-One. Wouldn't he at least try his hand at using that same power to see if he can hold the two earths at bay or separate them and the other populated planets one at a time?

Even though they've already seen the chaos on various video screens, Alex Luthor says he's going to send everyone back to their homeworlds to witness the danger firsthand. Then they can decide whether or not they want to help. This feels like an unnecessary pause in the story, as if the action is moving backward instead of forward. But it does lead to one of the funniest sequences in the series, where Lois Lane goes from interviewing a signer of the Declaration of Independence to a woman from the 30th century to a caveman, who tears into her microphone with his teeth.

A contingent of Green Lanterns arrive on Oa in a spaceship, seeking to solve the dual mystery of why their rings aren't functioning and why the Guardians aren't responding. They find the Guardians trapped in a stasis beam that suddenly explodes.

On Earth-One, Superman of Earth-Two saves Lois of Earth-One from a saber-toothed cat. He notes how calm most people and animals are, concluding that the Monitor must be responsible. How he arrives at this deduction is unknown.

When Lois goes to thank him, she's surprised to discover how old he is. Then *her* Superman shows up, leaving the two Men of Steel with some explaining to do.

As they describe how time periods have merged, we see examples of this with Rip Hunter and his crew caught in a time storm and Anthro and his fellow tribe members emerging from a cave in the middle of Wayne Manor. Several members of the Batman family, the Outsiders, and Batman's rogues' gallery are on hand to witness this second event. For some reason, so are Per Degaton, Nuklon, Monsieur Mallah, and others who have no association with the Dark Knight. Alfred almost gives away Batman's secret identity when he refers to Batman and Jason Todd (a.k.a. Robin) as "sirs" when they show up.

In contrast to what appears to be merely an opportunity to give cameos to a number of unrelated characters, the appearance of Anthro's cave in the middle of Wayne Manor is a highly symbolic moment, forging a link between the beginning and the potential end of human civilization. Anthro, the "first boy," represents the dawn of human consciousness—the start of creativity, tool use, storytelling, and heroism. Batman, whose origin is likewise tethered to a cave, represents the apex of those same traits. He's like a fully actualized version of the vague ideas of heroism that first formed in Anthro's brain, with a heavy dose of myth making thrown in. The Batcave beneath Wayne Manor isn't just Batman's secret headquarters; it started as a place of transformation, similar to how caves functioned back in the age when young men were sent on vision quests to find their spirit animal. According to some versions of Batman's origin, the cave is where a frightened boy named Bruce Wayne descended into darkness and emerged as a symbol of justice and wrath, epitomized by his own version of a spirit animal—a bat. This fusion of the two caves across time could be seen as a way to depict the DCU confronting its past, present, and future simultaneously.

This is driven home visually in a panel that depicts Batman, Robin of Earth-Two—both of whom are in costume—and Jason Todd/Robin, who is in street clothes, which suggests his superhero identity has yet to be cemented. As Batman gapes at Anthro and his crew, Robin stares at Jason, who is facing the tip of Anthro's spear. It's as if Robin is drawing a comparison between the Boy Wonder and the more primitive version in front of him. It's as if Robin is wondering what separates the two or whether Jason might regress to circumstances similar to Anthro's if they can't find a way to avert the impending disaster.

Apparently doing a tour of the planet to assess the state of affairs, a "fire and ice" team composed of Starfire, Firebrand, Firestorm, Sun Boy, Killer Frost, and Polar Boy fly to the Soviet Union to see how things are unfolding there. They run into the "other" Starfire, a.k.a. Red Star, that nation's sole superhero, battling a dinosaur. As the annotations on crisisonearthprime.com point out, "If we take Russia to mean the Soviet Union (this is 1985 remember) then that's one superhero in approximately 288 million people compared with the hundreds of heroes in America's 243 million people." This is followed by an interesting point: "That Red Star is the only hero of the Soviet Union (one of the most powerful countries



***The Outer Limits* episode "The Architects of Fear" (1963). Fearing nuclear annihilation, scientists surgically transform Allen Leighton (Robert Culp) into a horrifying fake alien to unite humanity against a common threat, a plot that may have inspired Ozymandias's scheme in *Watchmen*.**

in the world) should surely have guaranteed his place on the Monitor's satellite to hear his plans—there were plenty of villains there, so why not him?"[190]

Regardless of this slight, in a move that's surprisingly progressive for the time, Starfire offers to help. Perhaps being an alien herself, she doesn't feel the bitter divide between those on either side of the Iron Curtain. It also doesn't hurt that she's met Red Star before (*New Teen Titans* #18). He refuses her help at first but then acquiesces, realizing how silly such divisions are in the face of a world-ending calamity. This is the very sentiment that Ozymandias attempts to exploit when he fakes an alien attack on Earth in *Watchmen*.

As Starfire and Red Storm forge an alliance, the one previously imposed on Firestorm and Killer Frost falls apart as the spell that made her fall in love with him wears off. Although reluctantly paired with her at first, the Ronald side of Firestorm seems sad once it's over.

In the black expanse of the Anti-Monitor's realm, Red Tornado cries out in anger and pain, demanding to know what's happening as he undergoes a "conversion" process. Having discerned Red Tornado is neither a man nor a machine, the Anti-Monitor reveals him to be something more, a primal force of nature. After transforming into a literal tornado, the formerly conflicted automaton/cyborg/robot disappears in a flash of light.

To emphasize that worlds *and* time periods are merging, the following sequence shows an old couple from Earth-Two catching a glimpse of a "blue line" version of their deceased hippie daughter on Earth-One. Whether she's manifesting or fading from existence is unclear. Meanwhile, heroes on Earth-Two see visions of Legion headquarters on Earth-One while members of the Legion see people on their twin world. This is followed by a reminder from Brainiac-5 that if they can't find a way to merge the earths soon, both worlds are doomed. What

190 https://crisisonearthprime.com/coie/coie05/

will happen to the parallel versions of people from the various earths when this happens is not addressed. Will they merge somehow, as the Flash postulates in *Crisis* #4.5? If so, whose consciousness and memories will prevail?

On the following page, the full power of Red Tornado is unleashed in the form of an otherworldly, lightning-spewing cyclone. Among those who watch it in horror and amazement is Lady Quark, who has mysteriously reappeared with no explanation for how she got there. Has she been hidden in the folds of Pariah's cloak since they left Earth-D?

As Johnny Quick, Doctor Fate, Mon-El, and Power Girl fly up to deal with this new menace, Wildcat works to save people below, wondering what good an overaged prizefighter can do in the midst of such chaos. He might have wanted to hold that thought because, a few seconds later, he's struck by lightning.

Unable to stop the cyclone on his own, Doctor Fate teams up with Zatanna, Thunderbolt, and Sargon the Sorcerer, finally ending its destruction. When Jay Garrick and a passel of other heroes rush in to see who was behind the cyclone, they're shocked to find Red Tornado lying unconscious in the rubble. Readers might have been just as surprised. *This* was why the Anti-Monitor kidnapped Red Tornado and reduced him to his primal self? What did he hope to achieve through such a seemingly trivial localized threat? Whatever it was, the fact that Red Tornado was overcome so easily makes this feel like yet another "red" herring of the first order.

Other heroes are gathered around another unconscious form—Wildcat. Ultra Boy uses his X-ray vision to scan Wildcat's legs. He's no doctor, but even he can tell Wildcat's superhero days are over. Enter Yolanda Montez, who helped the girl that Wildcat was trying to rescue when he was struck by lightning. Secretly, she's prepping to take up his mantle as the new Wildcat in the pages of *Infinity Inc*. She acts as if she doesn't know Wildcat here, even though she knows his alter ego as "Uncle Ted," but she's likely feigning unfamiliarity with him to help conceal his secret identity.

By the end of it all, if any doubt remained among the heroes and villains, what they've witnessed convinces them to join Harbinger's cause. One by one they contact her using communication devices she must have given them off panel, informing her that they're ready to join the battle.

In response, Harbinger transports a select group of heroes to the satellite where Alex Luthor informs them that they're needed for another mission that the Monitor was setting up before he died. This group includes Starfire, Hawkman of Earth-Two, Northwind, Dr. Light, and Steel. Luthor tells them that three other universes remain, "and there, as before—the crux point is the infinite earths!" It would have made more sense for him to say "parallel earths" instead. Nevertheless, once again we're given the impression that of all the planets in every universe, each version of Earth is central. Just as Alex is about to send them on their way, Pariah—who for some reason isn't being drawn to these other worlds even though they're being overwhelmed by anti-matter—senses the satellite is under attack.

As the satellite disintegrates, Psycho Pirate and the Anti-Monitor watch it on his widescreen TV. "It's incredible,"



Marvel Comics has its own doppelganger pair in Adam Warlock and Magus, the hero and his malevolent future self. *Crisis* works out a similar game through the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor, leading to a war between positive and anti-matter realities. Each figure reflects and defines the other through absolute opposition, the multiverse becoming the sprawling battleground for their divided existence and ongoing struggle for domination.

Psycho Pirate says. "That satellite's disintegrating. B-but I didn't see you use any weapons!" The Anti-Monitor says he doesn't need any weapons. This raises the question of why he didn't destroy the Monitor's satellite earlier. And if he can pull off this stunt remotely, why does he need the shadow demons, Red Tornado, Psycho Pirate, the Flash, or anyone else? Or was he incapable of such feats while the Monitor was alive? Perhaps so, but that is never explained. Still, his power seems far from unlimited, as even he admits his attack will merely delay his enemies, not defeat them.

Perhaps to dispel any speculation in the minds of readers regarding who the still unseen and unnamed antagonist of this story is, Psycho Pirate asks about a place named "Apokalips," to which the Anti-Monitor replies, "Darkseid and his sycophants shall not escape me."

This leads the Flash to taunt him. The Anti-Monitor talks a big game, but he has yet to show his face. What's he afraid of? Taking the bait—while claiming not to be doing so—the Anti-Monitor finally steps into the light. This leads to a splash page, one of only a handful in the series, which gives us a close-up view of the antagonist's face. Rather than call himself the Anti-Monitor, however, he urges them to call him the Monitor. Readers at the time must have wondered, is this the same Monitor whom Harbinger killed, now reborn as the destroyer of the universe? Was his other persona a mirage meant to lure the heroes into doing his bidding?

Whatever the case, he's a frightening, cadaverous figure, simultaneously imprisoned by and sustained by cold, merciless technology. His pale, deathly visage is encased in a dark, angular helmet, its harsh lines accentuating his ghastly features, and his yellow eyes pulsating with evil.

The final page of this issue takes us to Earth-X, where most of North America has been obliterated by the antimatter cloud. As panic reigns in the streets, the Freedom Fighters stand firm, having no idea what they're up against but refusing to surrender. Emulating the villains on Earth-Three, rather than flee from the menacing white cloud, they race straight toward it, ending the issue on what appears to be a suicidal last stand.

CHAPTER 17

"3 Earths! 3 Deaths!"—Crisis #6

Following up on the previous issue's splash page, the cover of *Crisis* #6 gives us an even closer look at the principal antagonist of this series. He appears to be attempting to break the fourth wall, staring directly into the reader's eyes as if daring them to plumb the abyss of his shadowy soul. This is also the first time Jerry Ordway's name makes it onto the cover, getting equal billing with Wolfman and Pérez, as Mike DeCarlo did on issue #4. But most arresting of all, rather than introduce the villain as "the Monitor," as he revealed himself to the Flash and Psycho Pirate, a headline above the title says, "At Last—The Anti-Monitor!"

Wolfman himself has joked that not only is the name "Anti-Monitor" unlikely to win any awards for creativity, it also severely limits the character's career options. Rather than anyone's first choice of a name, development memos indicate it was a placeholder that was only meant to be used until a better option came along. For better or worse, before that happened, DC found itself up against a publication deadline, and history was made.

The preamble to this story seems to slightly contradict the creation story that Harbinger shared in issue #4. Instead of attributing the creation of the anti-matter universe to Krona's forbidden experiment, it refers to the event as an accident with no mention of Krona. While it's true that Krona never intended to create the anti-matter universe or the multiverse, labeling the event as purely accidental omits an essential detail—that it was born out of a deliberate transgression of Oan tradition. Mentioning this would have provided crucial context, reinforcing the narrative that was established earlier.

In another apparent contradiction, the first line uttered by the Anti-Monitor is, "The Monitor is dead!" This is followed by Psycho Pirate begging for a world to play with, his opening line being, "Monitor, please." Seeing as Psycho Pirate knew the other Monitor, one would think he would express confusion here or at least a desire for clarity. "Are you really *the* Monitor, the one who first recruited me?" he might have asked. "Have you been double dealing everyone the entire time? Or do you just happen to have the same name?"



***Crisis on In inite Earths* #6. Contrasting with the multitude of faces that appeared on the cover of issue #5, *Crisis* #6 takes a more focused approach, daring us to peer into the abyss of the Anti-Monitor's soul, with no telling what we might find staring back at us.**

As this exchange occurs, the Flash is lying on the floor, a look of terror on his face, but thought bubbles reveal Psycho Pirate's spell is wearing off, and soon the Flash will be able to act.

The Anti-Monitor continues his schtick of insulting Psycho Pirate and making empty threats, saying Raven or Phobia would have done just as well in his place, but now there's no time for a replacement. Nevertheless, he finally grants Psycho Pirate's wish for a world to manipulate, only he's going to raise the ante. Rather than give him just one world, he gives him three—Earth-S, Earth-X, and Earth-Four—saying he'll use Psycho Pirate's abilities to achieve his final victory. To help Psycho Pirate meet the challenge, the Anti-Monitor also imbues him with some of his power. As an image of the three worlds floats in Psycho Pirate's eye, the look on his face is not one of pleasure but horror.

In the same way that Psycho Pirate is overwhelmed by this opportunity, readers may have been confused by it. After all, up to and including this scene, we've been led to believe that the Anti-Monitor's plan isn't to control the multiverse but to destroy it with his anti-matter cloud, so what's the point of having



***Crisis* #6, p. 1. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). As if proving his insanity, Psycho Pirate is unfazed when the Anti-Monitor declares the Monitor is dead, referring to the Anti-Monitor by the same name.**

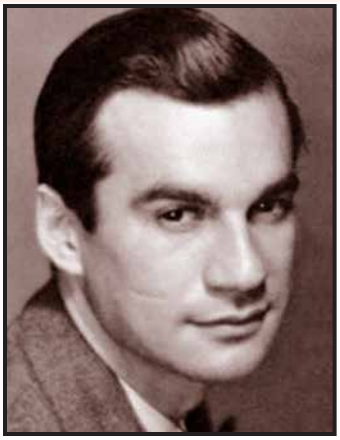
Psycho Pirate manipulate the emotions of the people who live on those worlds? Why not just wipe them out as he has countless others? And if the Monitor is able to quell people's emotions, couldn't the Anti-Monitor use his power to do the opposite? Or does he need the Psycho Pirate as a conduit? Then again, as he's sending some of his power into Psycho Pirate, he mentions that the Monitor's champions are being sent to save those worlds, so maybe he's not 100 percent convinced he can defeat them, and Psycho Pirate's emotion-controlling abilities are a form of insurance. But that still begs the question: considering how much power the Anti-Monitor has absorbed from the countless positive-matter universes he has destroyed, how could even the strongest heroes stand a chance against him?

With the Monitor's satellite continuing to disintegrate, everyone on board scrambles to escape. Alex Luthor urges the struggling heroes to hurry, though it's not clear what he wants them to do. Dr. Light is her typical recalcitrant self, refusing Hawkman's effort to help her. As if Wolfman was seeking to offset her belligerence with another character of Japanese descent who is far more agreeable, Katana is all too willing to accept J'onn J'onzz's assistance. Despite the Martian Manhunter making no predictions about the satellite's imminent demise, in a strange bit of dialogue that wasn't corrected in later reprints, Harbinger says, "The Martian Manhunter is right … the Monitor's ship can't survive … it's up to me then."

Even stranger is the fact that Martian Manhunter and Katana are there at all, not to mention Dawnstar, Jay Garrick, and Blok, seeing as none of them were shown to have been recalled to the satellite at the end of the previous issue. Even more faces show up on the next page, including Changeling, Cole, Supergirl, Black Canary, and Wonder Woman of Earth-One, leading one to believe either we weren't shown the complete contingent of heroes at the end of the previous issue or Wolfman and Pérez forgot to take attendance in this one.

As the heroes are tossed about and Alex Luthor urges everyone to remain calm, Pariah is pulled away, which means an even worse disaster must be occurring elsewhere. Alex concludes that the only way to save everyone is to use his matter/anti-matter energy to draw the final three earths into the netherverse. Thinking this might kill him and unwilling to have his blood on her hands too, Harbinger renders him unconscious with a blast of energy, then flies into the device that is the source of her power. The bottom of this page shows close-ups of everyone on board the satellite in varying degrees of distress except for Alex Luthor, who is out cold. A careful observer will notice that the two rows of heroes are shown in alphabetical order, a common Pérezian detail. Wonder Woman's hair was mistakenly colored to make her look like the Earth-Two version of the character, something that was corrected in later printings.

As Harbinger flies into the device, we're told "Hers is a different power … a power created from the mind," and that the machine allows her to access untapped cerebral powers. Another caption says, "She returns to her mechanical womb … where her earthly body awaits." This leaves one to wonder, is Harbinger merely a projection of Lyla's mind, or does she have a corporeal self too?





Bill Finger (1914–1974) and Irwin Hasen (1918–2015) created Wildcat for DC in *Sensation Comics* #1 (1942). Finger supplied the concept and story while Hasen's lively art gave boxer Ted Grant his visual staying power.

Whether by accident or design, this is yet another "creation" process that takes place across six panels. Harbinger is reduced from full color to a yellow version of herself, trailing pink energy. Once inside the machine, she reunites with Lyla, who has been reduced not to blue lines but to pink lines against a white background. The two combine in a maelstrom of pink energy, with Lyla/Harbinger screaming in agony as the Monitor's satellite is destroyed in a fiery explosion.

On Earth-Two, that world's Atom carries Wildcat not to an emergency room where his shattered legs can be treated but to Ted Grant's apartment. No mention is made of how they got there from Earth-One, which is where Wildcat was injured.

As the Atom attempts to comfort his wounded friend, Yolanda watches through the window. She laments the great team she and Ted could have made, if only she had told him about her special abilities. While Ted's days as Wildcat might be over, she vows that hers are about to begin.

Hopefully, the Atom at least called 911 because the last we see of him, he's waving goodbye to Ted, who already appears to be unconscious. Maybe when he left, Yolanda climbed through the window to assist her heroic namesake.

Entering midway through a scene that takes place at the end of *Superman* #413, Lex Luthor is battling Superman when he's sucked into a mysterious vortex in the sky. He finds himself upon Brainiac's ship, though at first he doesn't recognize the villain. That's because he's the "new Brainiac," as introduced by in *Action Comics* #544 (1983), the same issue that brought us the "new Luthor" in his purple-and-green battle armor, which became his signature look for a time. This meet-up is a payoff of Brainiac's desire to team up with Luthor in issue #4 and the setup for the villain war that is the main focus of issue #9. Brainiac offers Luthor an opportunity to become co-rulers of "this universe." Considering the current state of flux, one is left to wonder which universe he's referencing. Also, the last time we saw Brainiac, he said he was in search of Luthor to help him save the universe, so clearly his plans have changed.

Jumping to Earth-X, a group of heroes from the Monitor's satellite—Northwind, Dr. Light, Hawkman, Steel, and Starfire—materialize on a rooftop in a city that's being consumed by anti-matter. As they're trying to figure out which earth they're on, Steel spots a gigantic apparition of Harbinger floating in the midst of the anti-matter, her eyes closed and her arms extended to her sides. Before they have time to process what that might mean, they realize the people below, though calm, are rushing headlong into the anti-matter. When the heroes try to stop them, not only do the citizens attack them, so do that world's defenders—the Freedom Fighters. It seems like they're all possessed by a spirit of fear and anger, determined to kill the interlopers.

As the outsiders fight back against the Freedom Fighters while also trying to save the citizens from self-destruction, the Ray hits Dr. Light with a power blast, causing her to fall into Hawkman's arms. Surprisingly, she doesn't complain about being saved this time, but even more surprising, she can suddenly speak and understand English. Perhaps it's a side effect of whatever procedure Harbinger used to send them to Earth-X.

Hawkman is certain the people are being controlled—"heroes don't battle other heroes," after all. Sure enough, we move to the Anti-Monitor's realm where Psycho Pirate is nearing his breaking point. All along he's been begging the Anti-Monitor to give him a world to control. Now that he's manipulating the emotions on three worlds, he's pleading with the Anti-Monitor to make it stop.

Another group of heroes undergoes a similar experience on Earth-Four. In the midst of a rainstorm, Azrael (who is as yet unnamed), Jay Garrick, Blok, Katana, and Martian Manhunter witness an apparition of Harbinger in the sky, only to be attacked by a contingent of former Charlton Action Heroes—Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Peacemaker, Nightshade, Judo-Master, Thunderbolt, and the Question, the latter six making their first appearance in the DCU. They're aware that they're being compelled to fight the outsiders and kill themselves as well, but they're powerless to resist.

The action shifts to Atlantis on the rapidly merging Earth-One and Earth-Two. A caption tells us "the underwater cities of Tritonis and Poseidonis have been shifted to a future Earth which may never come to pass," which is perhaps an indication that the fate of Atlantis in the post-*Crisis* DCU was still being sorted out. For the moment, Aquaman, Aqualad, Aquagirl, and Lori Lemaris swim to the former location of those cities, only to realize they're gone. This is the first indication of a group of characters whose history is being erased by the crisis, leaving them adrift in the uncharted abyss of time and space both literally and figuratively.

As Aquaman races off in a rage, having hoped to reunite with his wife, Mera, his archenemies Ocean Master and Black Manta look on. Watching them is Dolphin. As she wonders if she should warn Aquaman about what she's seen, the villains disappear in a flash of light.

On Earth-S, Changeling is living his best life, accompanied by a bevy of beautiful heroes, including Black Canary, Supergirl, Kole, and Wonder Woman. They have no time for



"I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced." This line by Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars* is one of many pop culture references found in *Crisis*.

romance, though, their hands full as they battle the entire Marvel family, who are also possessed with anger. When Supergirl remarks that the Marvels are victims of blind rage, Black Canary concludes that Psycho Pirate must be controlling them. Why she doesn't assume an Earth-S villain is behind the Marvels' transformation is unclear, but sudden leaps of logic have been a tradition ever since *The Flash* #123, so why stop now?

Kole erects an enormous crystal barrier to prevent people from running into the anti-matter cloud. As the people pound on it with their fists, desperate to race into oblivion, Kole sees an apparition of Harbinger floating in the white expanse. When Black Canary's cry brings the Marvels under control, the heroes all stare at the spectral image, wondering what it could mean.

From there the action cycles from Earth-X to Earth-Four as hero battles hero. While J'onn J'onnz and Blok hold back Blue Beetle's ship, Blok reaches the same conclusion as Black Canary, concluding that the mania that has gripped their opponents must be Psycho Pirate's handiwork.

As the conflict reaches a crescendo on all three worlds, the cosmos shudders, and all three universes are drawn away from the anti-matter cloud, straight into the image of Harbinger.

"No!" Psycho Pirate exclaims, channeling his best Obi-Wan Kenobi as he loses contact with the trio of worlds. "Billions of souls—crying out at once!"

The following splash page shows a pink silhouette of Harbinger in the center of dozens of circles as lightning crackles out from her. A caption informs us that the three earths have just joined the other two in the netherverse that the Monitor created with the last of his energy.

The following page shows Harbinger reduced to thick pink lines against white, thinner pink lines, then a blank panel, followed by a look of amazement on Lyla's face in all her four-color glory. "Are they saved?" she asks. "Did I do it?"

The scene pulls back to reveal she's asking the question while floating on a cone-shaped rock in what appears to be outer space, accompanied by Alex Luthor. He assures her that she saved the universes, which are pictured as a swirling mass of planets down below. The perspective employed here leaves something to be desired, seeing as we're talking about *five entire universes,* not a mere solar system. There's no way Lyla and Alex could even begin to grasp the immensity of the scene, much less take it in all at once. Instead of emphasizing the vastness of it all, in one of Pérez's few faux pas throughout the series, the perspective seems to diminish her accomplishment. Also, as they look down at the five universes, they're floating in what appears to be outer space, with hundreds of stars glittering in the background. Is this part of the netherverse the Monitor created or another universe entirely? The Overvoid, perhaps? And once again, if a universe is, by definition, everything that is, how can one universe—never mind five—exist inside of anything? It seems the best approach here is to chalk up another win to "comic book science" and move on.

On Earth-Two, a group of heroes and villains are traveling across an unnamed city, observing that the other earths are becoming more visible. As Green Lantern asks what they can do about it, the three villains—Star Sapphire, Per Degaton, and Deathbolt—disappear in a flash of light, just like other villains before them. More groundwork being laid for the villain war in issue #9.

Elsewhere on Earth-Two, Ted Grant has yet to receive any medical attention other than sedatives when Yolanda peeks in on him again. Saying the world needs a Wildcat, she vows to take his place, debuting her new costume on a rooftop as a pterodactyl soars overhead. For readers who followed *Infinity Inc.,* this may have been a pivotal moment, but those who didn't probably uttered a collective "Meh." Wildcat hadn't exactly set the DCU on fire since his Golden Age debut, and as a non-powered hero, he was a C-lister at best, so why Wolfman felt the need to make such a big deal of his replacement's unveiling at the end of this issue is a bit of a mystery. It could have been a way of throwing a bone to Roy Thomas, whose Earth-Two titles were about to take a hit. Or maybe Wolfman's invitation to other creators to tie into the series had come back to bite him, and this was the only way he could make her debut fit. Either way, it creates a lackluster ending to this issue. With no cliff-hanger to keep readers on the edge of their seats, they have no reason to buy the next issue to see what happens next.

The best we get in that department is Lyla and Alex Luthor sitting on the space rock and gazing down at the five universes as Alex wonders how they're going to stop the worlds from merging and annihilating one another. Seeing as merging the universes was the Monitor's original plan, shouldn't they be excited to have brought things to this stage? A logical next step would be to figure out how the Monitor planned to use the vibrational towers to facilitate this process and then attempt to tune them, so they achieve vibrational harmony and create a successful merge. Sadly, this idea doesn't occur to Lyla or Alex, and the towers are never seen or mentioned again. They turn out to be much ado about nothing, even though the effort to protect them drives the action of the first few issues. That said, an ominous, reconstituted version of the towers that includes the Anti-Monitor's corpse appears in *Infinite Crisis* (2005), so at least they weren't a total waste of time.

CHAPTER 18

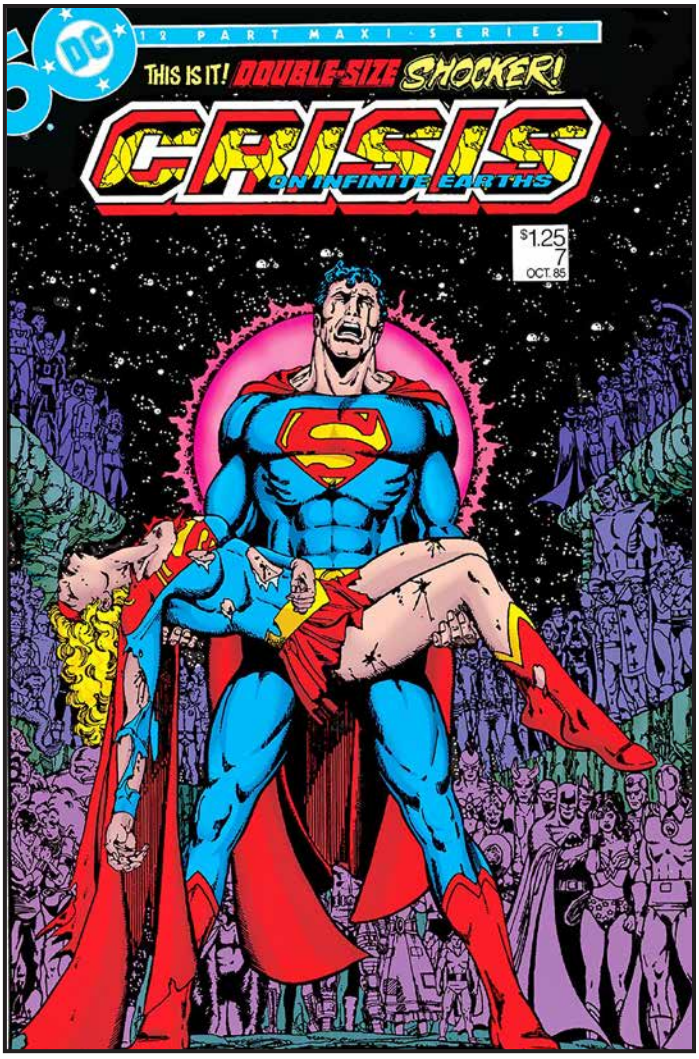
"Beyond the Silent Night"—Crisis #7

Though billed as a "Double-Size Shocker!", the cover for *Crisis* #7 and the revelation of Supergirl's death had been an open secret for some time. Months before this issue was released, ads featuring this cover had appeared throughout DC's titles, including a color reproduction of it at the end of the letter column in issue #6.

Standing before tiers of mourners from various earths, Superman cries out in anguish as he cradles Supergirl in his arms. The wounds on her body and her battered costume leave no question as to her status. The huge red sun behind them, which signifies powerlessness for Kryptonians, emphasizes the dire circumstances. Hence, the question was never really *if* Supergirl was going to die in this issue but *how*.

This is one of the most iconic covers in the history of comics, having been referenced or parodied dozens of times since it was published,[191] but this cover is also an homage in and of itself. Initially, many fans assumed Pérez was inspired by John Byrne's cover for *The Uncanny X-Men* #136, which came out five years earlier and shows Cyclops cradling Phoenix in his arms in a pose that's nearly identical to *Crisis* #7. Some fans went beyond assuming such a connection and accused Pérez of ripping Byrne off. Things reached such a point that Pérez felt the need to clear the air, writing a lengthy letter to *Comics Buyer's Guide* #954.

> *The incredible similarity between the Crisis #7 cover and the* Uncanny X-Men *("Death of Phoenix") cover was simply one of those crazy coincidences that pop up in this industry from time to time. …*
>
> *When I was first approached about it by a fan years ago, I admit that I was bowled over. I hadn't read an issue of Uncanny X-Men in some time and could honestly not recall ever having seen John's*

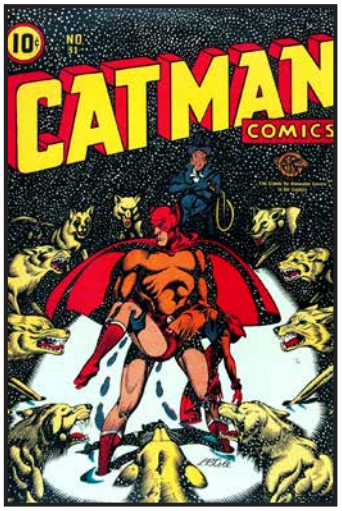


***Crisis* #7. With dozens of imitators, the most recent being *Batman/Deadpool* #1 (2025), this is one of the most iconic covers of all time. In terms of coloring, though, the gradient should go from red to purple rather than vice versa, a detail that the *Batman/Deadpool* cover gets right.**

191 For a comprehensive list of the dozens of covers before and after *Crisis* #7 that show characters in a similar pose (including a photo of George Pérez cosplaying his own *Crisis* cover), visit https://crisisonearth-prime.com/coie/coie07homages/. Even the recent *Batman Deadpool* one-shot (2025) features a cover variant that pays homage to this image.









Michelangelo's *Pietá* (top right)—Mary cradling the dead Christ—became a visual shorthand for sacred grief, sacrifice, and heroic mourning. Created circa 1498 to 1499, this iconography echoes through numerous comic book covers, from *The Mighty Thor* #127 and *Cat-Man* #31 to *The Uncanny X-Men* #136, eventually also finding its way into *Crisis* #7, among dozens ofother titles. Through this dramatic image, loss of oneof their own is staged as a solemn, almost liturgical spectacle for modern superheroes.

cover, and I definitely didn't use it as my design guide. However, the layout was so startlingly similar that even I began to doubt whether or not I was inadvertently inspired by it.[192]

Rather than Byrne's cover, Pérez directed readers to the cover for *Mighty Thor* #127 (1966), which shows Odin cradling Thor. Returning to Pérez:

I wanted to get the same impact, but designed it totally on my own without actually referring to the Kirby piece to suit the needs of the comic book on which I was working. It's like having a super-hero fly and immediately imagining Curt Swan's Superman as an inspiration without deliberately aping his style or composition. If John (or anyone else for that matter) thinks I actually took my Crisis *cover idea from him, I just want to say here and now that it wasn't so. If it were, I certainly would have acknowledged it. However, having been a fan of John's work for many years, it wouldn't surprise me if some of his design sense just rubbed off on me, much as it has with so many artists whom I have admired.*

If Byrne himself responded to this controversy, no record of that has been found, but we have every reason to take Pérez at his word.

Before we reach the climactic moment depicted on this cover, however, some housekeeping is in order. It begins on the floating rock where Lyla and Alex Luthor were marooned after the Monitor's satellite exploded. Despite the impending

192 Read his entire letter here: https://weheartmusic.typepad.com/gpz/2022/12/jack-kirbys-thor-art-inspired-crisis-on-infinite-earths-7-cover.html.

disaster of five universes annihilating one another, the two of them appear to be serene. What better moment for Pariah to show up, ready to spew more doom and gloom and self-flagellation over his "sins," which have yet to be revealed? With no explanation of where he disappeared to last time or why he appears here, seeing as no disaster is imminent, he begs Lyla to tell him how he can find eternal rest. She agrees to do so, but rather than tell him alone, she wants to gather representatives from six universes—the five ones that remain plus Lady Quark—and tell them all at once. Displaying an ever-expanding bag of tricks, Pariah enfolds the other two in his cape and spirits them away to Earth, although which one isn't specified.

From there we travel to Earth-S where Dr. Sivana cackles to Ibac, another one of Captain Marvel's enemies, about how this is the perfect time to take over all five earths. While standing outside a cluster of old and futuristic buildings, Ibac remarks, "That don't look like Fawcett City to me." This is the first mention ever of that name as a designation for where the Marvel family lives, an homage to the defunct publisher who first published their adventures.

Captain Marvel arrives just in time to spoil their fun, but before he can indulge in one of his favorite pastimes—sending them directly to jail—the two crooks disappear in a flash of light. They're as surprised at the strange turn of events as anyone. Cap is so astonished that he even gets Ibac's name wrong, calling him "Ibbac" instead. This is no trivial error, for "Ibac" isn't just a name; it's also an acronym, just like the word "Shazam." But in this case, each letter stands for a rogue from history:

I – Ivan the Terrible (ruthlessness)
B – Cesare Borgia (cunning)
A – Attila the Hun (barbarism)
C – Caligula (cruelty)

Together, they bestow Ibac with the strength, will, and villainy to challenge the Marvel family.

Also on hand to witness the villains' disappearance are Captain Marvel Jr., Tawky-Tawny (who has a humorous exchange with Changeling), Wonder Woman, and Supergirl. Unbeknownst to them, Dr. Sivana and Ibac have become Brainiac's latest recruits, part of a "a very select group that will soon rule the universe!"

After confirming that whatever was controlling the Marvels and causing them to fight against the Earth-One heroes is gone, Wonder Woman remarks on how this earth was shifted into the netherverse. How she knows this isn't explained. As the rest of the Marvels and the other heroes congregate, Lyla appears and says she needs Captain Marvel to come with her. "So much has to be explained," she says.

On Earth-Two, the new Wildcat observes members of the All-Star Squadron talking on a rooftop, wondering if it's a good time to introduce herself. She's already feeling nervous, and when she overhears the Atom saying her predecessor is irreplaceable, she decides it might be better if she proves herself first.

Over on Earth-Four, where it seems to be perpetually raining, Pariah floats in midair in front of a cluster of heroes from that world and others, with only his eyes visible beneath the hood of his cloak. If he's trying to win their trust, revealing his face would have been a good first move, especially because, for many of them, this is their first encounter with the idea of parallel earths. Nevertheless, his presentation is enough to win over Blue Beetle, who's already had one earth-hopping experience. "Can the telethon, pal," he says with his trademark snark. "I'll join your gabfest."

Similar scenes play out on Earth-X, Earth-One, and Earth-Two as the heroes formerly controlled by Psycho Pirate



IBAC was one of Fawcett's nastier Captain Marvel foes: petty crook Stanley "Stinky" Printwhistle transformed by hellish magic into a superpowered brute. Debuting in *Captain Marvel Adventures* #8 (1942), he drew his strength from Ivan the Terrible, Borgia, Attila, and Caligula—evil counterparts to Shazam's heroic patrons in Fawcett's Golden Age. Along with the other Fawcett heroes and villains, IBAC was acquired by DC in the mid-1980s. However, he made his firstappear in *Shazam*! #2 (in a photo on a museum wall) in 1973 when DC was just licensing the characters.

come to their senses, reconcile with the heroes they were battling, and try to figure out what comes next. We also get cameos of heroes who haven't seen much, if any, play in the series yet, including Cinnamon and Firehair from DC's Western titles, the Sea Devils, Enemy Ace, and Fireman Farrell from *Showcase* #1, who warns Lady Quark to stand back as his team battles a blazing building.

"The fire cannot harm me," she replies. "And I must listen." Instead of the fire, her focus is on the two Supermen as they confer with Alex Luthor. "I do not know those two," she says, referring to the Men of Steel, "but I sense their greatness."

An unspecified length of time later, she joins the Supermen, Uncle Sam, Captain Marvel, Blue Beetle, Lyla, and Alex Luthor on their floating rock. Pariah is there too, though he is facing away from the group as Alex addresses them.

The significance of the number six as an integral part of the creation narrative shows up here once again as the faces of the representatives from the six universes are shown along the bottom of the page. Above each is a descriptor from Alex, noting their significance. Lady Quark is the sole survivor of her universe. He might have also singled her out as the sole female representative called to this meeting. Alex refers to Superman of Earth-One as the greatest of all heroes, though a couple of panels later Alex refers to Captain Marvel as the world's mightiest mortal. Which is better, greatest of all or mightiest? Introducing further ambiguity, he calls Superman of Earth-Two "the legend from whom all others have come." This makes sense editorially, seeing as he was the foundation of DC's superhero genre, but what does Alex mean by "legend?" Is he using the term literally or figuratively? Their respective status aside, the distinctive facial features of the two last sons of Krypton is never more apparent than it is here, with Superman of Earth-One having finer, more handsome features than his older Earth-Two counterpart. The latter's head is blockier, his facial expression resembling the mischievous brawler who first appeared in *Action Comics* nearly 50 years earlier.

Uncle Sam is described as "the embodiment of peace and hope." Considering America's status as one of two superpowers holding the entire world on a knife's edge of nuclear annihilation (and engaged in all sorts of skullduggery behind the scenes, as revealed in the Iran-Contra scandal that erupted the year this issue came out), some people might have called Alex's description of the American spirit naïve, to put it mildly. Nevertheless, it was probably true to how many Americans regarded their country at the time, even though those who had been on the receiving end of some of America's more questionable foreign policy maneuvers may have begged to differ.

Finally, we have Blue Beetle, but before Alex can extoll his accolades, he's interrupted by a blatant product placement. "Can the 'who's who," Blue Beetle says. "Get on with it, pal." It's fitting that he and Lady Quark bookend the four older heroes, with the former representing the brash, self-aware, sarcastic heroes who were just around the corner and the latter depicting their moody, angst-driven side. Regrettably, this is an all-white and mostly male cast, and all of them are human. Considering what a pivotal moment this is and that creating a more diverse universe was one of Wolfman's goals with this series, it would have been nice to see more representation in terms of race and gender.



A photo from Iran-Contra Affair hearings (1987), which exposed a shadow foreign policy run from the White House and the National Security Council. (opposite page) *Crisis* #7, p.10. As Harbinger provides backstory on the Guardians,the Green Lantern Corps, and the Controllers, we get aforetaste of the narrative style Wolfman and Perez employed in *The History of the DC Universe* (1987).

From here we get a foretaste of *The History of the DC Universe*, with Lyla narrating how the crisis began ten billion years ago on Oa while Earth "was little more than cooling gases." She describes Oa as a world of limitless hope, even though it appears to be nothing but an orange ball of rock, riven with cracks. The Oans themselves lived in peace, spending their days developing their minds and bodies to perfection. But as the saying goes, every paradise has its serpent, and in this case, the serpent's name was Krona, who was obsessed with probing the beginning of all things.

"Krona, there is a legend of timeless age among us," another Oan warns in *Green Lantern* #40, where this story first appears, "that if we ever learned the truth about our secret origins, we and our universe would be instantly destroyed!" A man of science, Krona scoffs at such superstitions and continues his research.

His hard work finally pays off when the monitor on his time-probing device shows an image of "a shadow like a giant hand … with something … a cluster of stars in it—!" It looks like a hand holding the Milky Way. Still not satisfied, Krona attempts to probe even further, only for a "terrible cosmic lightning bolt" to destroy his machine. Krona survives the blast, "but from that moment on, evil was loosed on the universe!" To punish Krona for his crime, his fellow Oans reduce him to "a disembodied


"KROWA WAS SENT SPACEWARD AND SEEN TWICE AGAIN...
THE OANS KNEW OF THE EVIL ANTIMATTER UNIVERSE AND THE MULTIVERSE THAT WAS CREATED.
GUILT CONSUMED THEM...
...AND THEY CREATED A FORCE FOR GOOD TO ATONE FOR THEIR BROTHER'S EVIL DEED.
"THEY FIRST CREATED A RACE OF ROBOT MANHUNTERS TO ACHIEVE THEIR ENDS...
"...THEN ABANDONED THE MACHINES AND RECRUITED LIVING CREATURES...
"THE OANS' OWN ENERGY WAS FED TO A POWER BATTERY, AND EACH OF THEIR WARRIORS WAS GIVEN A RING WITH WHICH THEY COULD TAP THAT POWER.
"SO WAS BORN THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS.
"BUT THERE WERE THOSE OANS NOT PLEASED WITH THE CORPS..."
EVIL MUST BE DESTROYED, NOT CONTAINED. OUR WEAPONS MUST BE USED TO ELIMINATE THE UNDESIRABLE.
NO, MY FRIEND... IT ISN'T OURS TO DECIDE ON EACH MAN'S MORALITY.
LET US USE OUR POWERS TO HELP, NOT TO TEAR ASUNDER.
YOU ARE BLIND TO THE TRUTH. AND YOU ARE WEAK.
"THE CIVIL WAR LED TO HALF THE POPULATION LEAVING OA FOR ANOTHER DIMENSION. THERE THESE OANS BUILT WEAPONS OF GREAT DESTRUCTIVE POWER."
THEY CHANGED, EVOLVED--AND EVENTUALLY THEY TOOK THE NAME THE CONTROLLERS.

state in a prison of energy" and condemn him to circle throughout all universes forever.

Interestingly, Krona is told the legends forbid such investigations, but those legends are never articulated, nor are the reasons behind them. Did someone in the past carry out what Krona is about to attempt, only to pay a horrible price? Is that how the universe itself came to be? Also, it seems strange that a race devoted to science would place so much credence in what sounds like a myth. Why is their origin a secret, and why would discovering it cause the universe to be destroyed? (Much more is made of the Oans' religious tendencies once the Book of Oa is introduced in *Green Lantern* #188 in a backup story written by *Watchmen* team Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons.)

Krona's crime is rebelling against the elders and dismissing what he regards as an outdated legend, which seems forgivable enough. After all, throughout history, scientific progress has been driven by such individuals. We regard those who flout outdated myths and conventional thinking in their quest for knowledge as heroes rather than villains, so it's curious that Krona is portrayed in such a negative light. This is especially true when one considers that this story was written in the midst of the space race, a time when scientists and astronauts who were determined to probe the vast reaches of the cosmos were regarded as heroes, not villains. Then again, the Cold War was also in full swing, so it's not surprising to see a science-fiction story take on a pessimistic or ambivalent tone in regard to technology and human inquisitiveness, as many sci-fi films and novels from this era also did. Our desire to probe the fundamental nature of all things led to our discovery of nuclear power *and* nuclear weapons, and the world has been living in the shadow of atomic annihilation ever since. Even so, Krona's punishment seems cruel and unusual, not to mention disproportionate to his crimes. While his experiment unleashed evil on the universe, that was never his intention, nor is it clear that he was ever made aware of that outcome prior to his sentence. Rather than condemn him for eternity, why didn't they seek to tap into his intellect to see if he could help solve the very problem he had created?

Krona's defiant attempt to witness the origin of the universe echoes a deep tradition in world mythology where mortals transgress divine boundaries in pursuit of forbidden knowledge. Consider Prometheus stealing fire from the gods, a metaphor for divine knowledge and power, and giving it to humanity, or Icarus flying too close to the sun, another metaphor for divine revelation. Pandora opens a forbidden box that unleashes chaos. Adam and Eve transgress God's command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They gain moral awareness but lose paradise. The knowledge they gain isn't inherently evil, but their inability to handle it leads to exile, suffering, and murder. In the story of the Tower of Babel, the desire to achieve godlike heights dissolves into chaos and confusion. Such stories, like Krona's, feature humans who are driven by hubris camouflaged as curiosity that unwittingly releases uncontrollable forces that fracture the world.



Jacob Peter Gouwy's "The Fall of Icarus" (c. 1636–1638). Like Icarus, Krona pursues forbidden knowledge, proving that hubris often masquerades as curiosity, inviting ruin upon the seeker and their world.

In mythic stories, creation is an act of imposing order on chaos. Light is separated from darkness, day from night, and water from land. The knowledge of how the cosmos came to be is regarded as taboo because the human mind is incapable of grasping it. When the mind seeks to comprehend something too vast, too contradictory, or too primal, it doesn't grow; it fractures, just like the multiverse. It's like trying to perceive infinity or one's own non-existence. In this way, fragmentation isn't punishment; it's a natural consequence of dabbling with powers beyond our control. The seeker becomes unhinged from meaning, selfhood, and reality itself, which is why taboos are erected against such inquiry. They're meant to protect rather than punish.

The origin of the universe is often treated as the ultimate mystery—a singularity like the Big Bang or a black hole where logic, time, and causality break down. Myths suggest that knowledge of such things destabilizes not only the individual but also the cosmic, social, moral fabric. It's a breaking of the very structure that holds the universe (and the self) together. When someone crosses the line into knowledge that's meant to remain veiled, the price is not just individual ruin but social and cosmic disintegration. The story of Krona fits perfectly into this tradition.

The seeking of such knowledge is often regarded as a form of rebellion. To pursue the origin is to challenge the creator's authority, an attempt to rival or even replace them. In Krona's case, we suspect he doesn't just want to learn; he's also seeking control. One detects an unspoken desire to gain this knowledge and then lord it over his fellow scientists. Whoever the creator of the DCU is, they may have good reasons for keeping such knowledge a secret, but Krona is unwilling to accept that, and the result is an unprecedented catastrophe. The unity of existence shatters, the anti-matter universe is born, and evil infects the cosmos. By crossing this forbidden line, Krona doesn't just endanger himself; he unravels the fabric of reality itself.[193]

On a metafictional level, Krona's experiment could also be interpreted as a metaphor for comic book fans peering behind the curtain and attempting to decode the myriad threads of continuity, origins, and retcons that have been stitched together to create the DCU. In this case, the pursuit of forbidden knowledge symbolizes the breakdown of narrative coherence. In *Crisis*, the multiverse becomes a metaphor for storytelling entropy—too many realities, too many characters, too many timelines, and too many contradictions. The boundaries between them blur, and it's no longer possible to keep them separate. Therefore, a reckoning is inevitable. They all need to be collapsed into a single reality and a unified timeline or risk unraveling. Ironically, it was the obsessive power of fandom itself, with its encyclopedic memory and hunger for order, that triggered this narrative crisis. Through fans' painstaking efforts to catalog every deviation, inconsistency, and anomaly, the DCU had become too self-aware of its own incoherence and was beginning to fracture. *Crisis* was Wolfman's attempt to "recontain" this forbidden knowledge, to restore narrative innocence—which is why he didn't want anyone to remember the crisis occurred—and begin anew.

Having no idea what he's about to unleash, Krona ignores his fellow scientists' pleas and continues to probe the past until he spies the giant hand holding the cluster of stars, one of the most iconic images in the DCU. Indeed, an entire cottage industry has grown up around this symbol. In John Byrne's *Ganthet's Tale* (1992), the image of the hand is revealed to be a myth perpetuated by the Guardians to instill fear and prevent curiosity about the origin of the universe. In *Green Lantern* Vol. 5 #17 (2013), the hand is wearing a power ring and belongs to Volthoom, the first Green Lantern. The Empty Hand is personified as a cosmic villain in *The Multiversity* (2014–2015), later revealed to be a manifestation of the Great Darkness (*Justice League Incarnate* #4 (2022)) and leader of the Gentry, a group of nightmarish beings that invade and corrupt the multiverse. Going full meta, Grant Morrison says this character represents "The empty hand of the reader when he puts the comics down and everything ends. But like the bad guy, he can also come back in full force and say, 'You'll meet me again.'"[194] Others interpret it as the editors at DC who continually wipe the slate clean and reboot the multiverse.[195] *Doomsday Clock* #12 (2017) implies it's Dr. Manhattan's hand that resets reality, and *Justice League* Vol. 4 #22 (2019) says the hand belongs to Perpetua, a cosmic architect created by a group called the Hands—mysterious, godlike entities who oversee the creation and destruction of multiverses—to design and oversee her own multiverse.

After the hand comes a bolt of lightning, followed by the creation of the anti-matter universe and then the multiverse. Lyla's use of this latter term is the first time it ever appears in the DCU. Perhaps because Oa was ground zero of this transgression, it's the only planet that isn't duplicated throughout the multiverse. Like Qward, its sister planet in the anti-matter universe, it stands alone.

Krona's punishment is also shown, with the head of those who condemn him saying that his forbidden experiments "unleashed an evil universe," which is a reference to the anti-matter universe. Strangely, no mention of the multiverse is made. It's an important omission, seeing as the infinite replication of the universe is said to be what diluted its ability to stand against the anti-matter realm.

Harbinger also tells how the Guardians' first response to the evil that Krona unleashed was to create a race of robot Manhunters, as recounted in *Justice League of America* #141.



John Byrne, creator of *Ganthet's Tale*, is one of comics' defining writer-artists, revitalizing Marvel's *X-Men* and *Fantastic Four* before reinventing Superman for DC after Crisis. His clean storytelling and dynamic design helped define superhero comics in the 1980s.

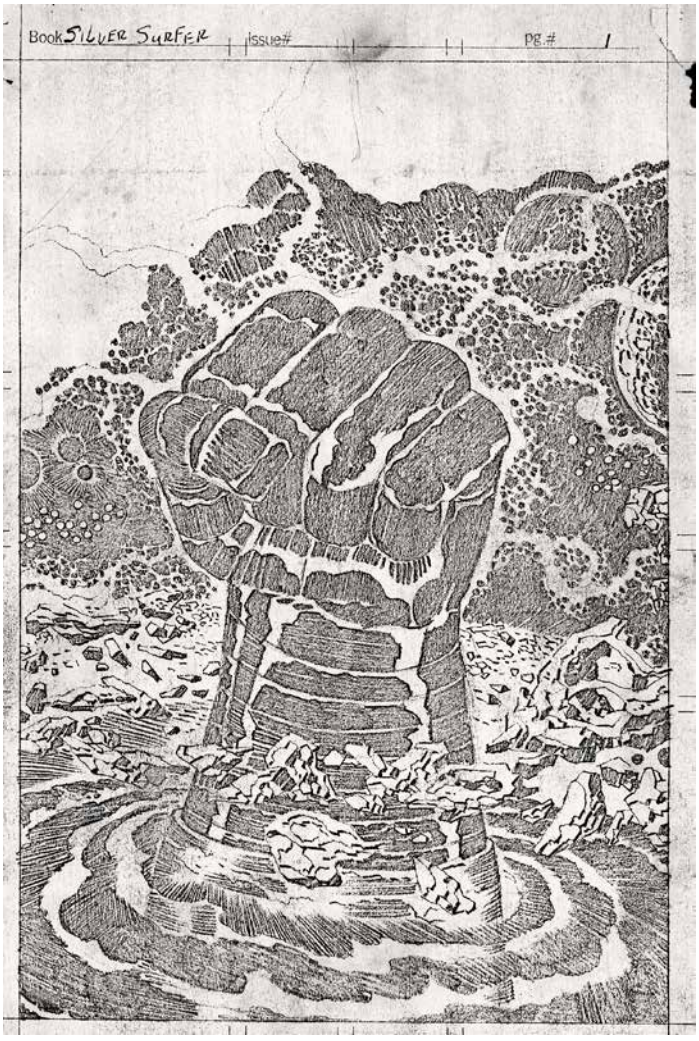
193 The five survivors (a.k.a. the "Five Inversions") of the Manhunters' massacre of sector 666 break a similar taboo by attempting to glimpse not the past but the future, as recounted in *Green Lantern* Vol. 4 #30. All they see is darkness, "a black so devoid of life, even the Guardians' light could not penetrate it." Hell-bent on destroying the Guardians for unleashing the Manhunters on their sector, they "seek to take the darkness for themselves" and turn it against the Green Lanterns.

194 Jesse Schedeen, "Grant Morrison on Finishing Multiversity and What's Next at DC," *IGN,* Oct. 21, 2015, https://tinyurl.com/3aeswebv.

195 "Fanboy Theories: Who Is the Empty Hand?" *Weird Science DC Comics,* May 6, 2015, https://tinyurl.com/yc46j9uy.

When the Manhunters rebelled, the Oans recruited an army of living creatures instead, the Green Lantern Corps. This was followed by a civil war between the Guardians as they argued over the best way to police the universe. Half the population left for another dimension and became the Controllers, a retcon of the villainous beings who harass Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes in *Adventure Comics* #357, written by 16-year-old Jim Shooter.

From there we move to the origin of the Anti-Monitor and the Monitor, with the former born on Qward's moon and the latter born on the sole moon that orbited Oa. Why were they born on moons rather than planets, seeing as moons are typically devoid of life, with many of them being mere rocks floating in space? One thought is that moons don't emit their own light; they reflect the light of their parent stars. In the same way, the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor could be seen as reflections of the conflicting impulses that led Wolfman to create them—fandom and editorial pruning, respectively. Moons also occupy a transitional space between their parent planet and the wider universe, just as the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor are neither gods nor mortals but something in between. Moons are also dependent on the planets they orbit. Having them born on moons puts them close to the center of cosmic power but also keeps them distinct from it. Finally, in classic mythology, powerful beings are often born in unusual or symbolic locations. Having these two titanic beings emerge from celestial bodies evokes the feelings of such stories and portrays them as elemental forces birthed from the very rudiments of reality itself.



"Behold! The hand of Galactus! Behold! The hand of him who is like unto a God! Behold! The clutch of unharnessed power—about to be released!" Thus begins *Silver Surfer: The Ultimate Cosmic Experience* (1978), accompanied by the image above, proving that DC wasn't the only publisher who fixated on hands as a defining creative entity.

The Anti-Monitor was born first, and apparently, he arrived fully clothed. His gloved hand is shown reaching up like a zombie from the grave as rocks go flying, and dark energy wafts up from it. The Monitor, in contrast, reaches a bare, glowing hand up from the primordial ooze. Considering the centrality of a hand to Krona's vision of the creation of the universe, readers were probably wondering if it was one of these hands that Krona glimpsed—and half of them would have been right, as we shall see. As for the birth order, if one imagines the Anti-Monitor representing the editorial forces of the DCU and the Monitor signifying fandom, it makes sense that the Anti-Monitor would come first, for it's the creation of characters and stories that gives rise to fans.

Harbinger says the Anti-Monitor was "weaned on the evil of that anti-matter universe." This raises the question of whether the anti-matter universe is inherently evil or whether the evil one finds there is a matter of social conditioning. In early Green Lantern stories, characters like Telle Tig (*Green Lantern* #1) and Gnaxos, an artificially intelligent robot, choose good over evil once they're exposed to it, so it seems to be a matter of nurture rather than nature. However, this makes one wonder how the Anti-Monitor and the Monitor were nurtured at all, not to mention born. What life force gave rise to them? What sustained them? Furthermore, who or what socialized them? Wouldn't spending so much time alone have driven both of them insane? It's not surprising that the Anti-Monitor would turn out evil under such circumstances. The real question is how the Monitor learned to be good.

We also get the origin of the shadow demons here. Harbinger says they started out as Thunderers, an army of thunderbolt-wielding warriors created by the Anti-Monitor. He transformed the most elite Thunderers into his personal guard, the shadow demons, then set off to conquer the anti-matter universe. But not even that was enough for him. Perhaps due to his rapacious hunger, somehow he sensed the existence of the positive-matter universe and the Monitor. Realizing his counterpart was all that stood between him and conquering that realm, they engaged in battle—the Anti-Monitor dressed in armor and the Monitor in the nude, like a symbolic clash between the forces of industrialism and pure nature. How they accessed each other isn't mentioned, but perhaps they discovered a rift between their two worlds, a phenomenon that has been evident in previous Green Lantern stories, right from the beginning.

After a million years, a final blast of energy rendered them unconscious for more than nine billion years. One is left to wonder why the Oans never noticed—or at least never remarked on—this epic battle throughout the history of the DCU, seeing as it occurred right next to their homeworld. Maybe their legends told them to keep that part of their history a secret too.

The Monitor's nakedness in this story could be taken to symbolize vulnerability, innocence, and a symbiosis with the natural order of existence. The Anti-Monitor's machine-like armor, by contrast, represents fear, domination, and the cold dehumanization of unchecked industry. His armor isn't just a source of strength; it's also a fortress built out of alienation and a desire for control. Their divergent appearances express their competing cosmic philosophies. One is open to sacrifice and renewal, and the other is sealed inside a machine bent on annihilation.

On a deeper level, their conflict also reflects the struggle between the imaginative purity of fandom and the commodification of that very impulse. The Monitor, like comic book fans, bears witness, gathers stories and heroes, and seeks understanding. The Anti-Monitor, like the commercial machinery of publishing itself, consumes and destroys, ultimately reduces everything to a pure white nothingness, overtaken by black. This is similar to the worst aspects of the comic book publishing industry, which seeks to replicate, rewrite, and exploit, reducing everything to the lowest common denominator and seeking to wring every last dollar from the very worlds, characters, and stories that once inspired awe. And the Anti-Monitor's hunger knows no bounds. He won't stop until all of reality has been consumed. He has no interest in conquering or ruling the multiverse, merely consuming it.

Through these two characters, *Crisis* seems to be at war with itself. On the one hand, the heroic Monitor suggests that true strength lies not in consolidation or control but in the willingness to embrace all of reality. In contrast, the Anti-Monitor, a relentlessly reductive force, is viewed as the enemy. While the Monitor is also seeking to reduce the multiverse to a single reality, he's doing so out of necessity rather than desire. If he had his choice, the multiverse would continue to expand and proliferate. But better one universe survive than all of reality be replaced by the Anti-Monitor's desire for negation.

Deepening the irony, to counter the Anti-Monitor's plan, the Monitor must take several steps toward his "brother," not only donning armor but also employing high technology in the form of his satellite and his towers. Rather than a capitulation, however, the Monitor's evolution reflects a synthesis of his and the Anti-Monitor's philosophies. He realizes that contemplation alone isn't enough to save the multiverse. Action is also necessary. Unlike the Anti-Monitor, who uses machinery to enslave and annihilate, the Monitor adopts technology as a tool for preservation. The Monitor's minimal armor isn't meant to instill fear but to indicate his readiness to fight and, if necessary, to lay down his life for the multiverse. As for the practical question of how the Monitor is able to build anything at all, that is never addressed.



"Sacrifice of Cain and Abel" by Pieter Jalhea Furnius (c. 1550–1625). Stories of two brothers engaged in a murderous rivalry are as old as humankind, a mythic archetype that inspired the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor.

Similar to Krona's sin and its parallels with previous mythological and religious narratives, the rivalry between the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor taps into one of humanity's deepest mythic patterns—sibling rivalry. We see this cosmic dualism in one of the world's oldest religions, Zoroastrianism. The god Ahura Mazda represents truth, order, and light. He is opposed by Angra Mainyu, the spirit of lies, chaos, and darkness. They are locked in a primordial battle for the fate of existence, just like the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor. A more familiar example is the story of Cain and Abel. Like Cain, the Anti-Monitor represents destruction, rage, and rebellion against the cosmic order. The Monitor, similar to Abel, represents devotion to life, nature, and service to a higher good. We see a similar dynamic throughout the Old Testament with Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, and Sarah and Hagar. In Egyptian myth, Osiris is the god of order, fertility, and kingship. Set is the god of chaos, violence, and the desert. He murders Osiris and



"Romulus en Remus" by Philippe Lambert Joseph Spruyt (c. 1747–1801). Like Cain and Abel, the story of Romulus and Remus is another founding myth of feuding brothers that leads to bloodshed but also boundaries and order.

scatters his body across Egypt. Like Set tearing apart Osiris, the Anti-Monitor doesn't merely oppose the Monitor; he seeks to dismantle the cosmos itself. In Roman mythology, Romulus and Remus are twin brothers raised by a she-wolf. They quarrel over the founding of Rome, and Romulus kills Remus, becoming the city's founder. Like *Crisis,* in this story violence between cosmic twins sets the stage for a new universal order. Some versions of Christianity, such as Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses, also have a rivalry between Lucifer and Jesus, who are portrayed as warring brothers. Lucifer proposes to "save" everyone by annihilating their agency, just as the Anti-Monitor seeks to stabilize existence by collapsing it into nothingness. In each case, the greatest threat is not an external invader but a fracture within the family of existence itself, suggesting that the universe's deepest instability comes from its own divided heart. *Crisis* recasts this ancient myth on a cosmic scale. The multiverse is torn between preservation and annihilation, requiring sacrifice, heroism, and renewal to be healed.

When Superman of Earth-Two asks what finally freed the Anti-Monitor, it's Pariah's turn to fess up, saying it's one of three sins for which he must atone. Once again he says he "set loose a force which has destroyed a *thousand* universes," though we know it must be far more than that. When giving his backstory, Pariah says he comes from an unnamed earth (a detail developed in *Infinite Crisis* and *Dark Crisis on Infinite Earths*), where he was his world's most brilliant scientist. His research led him to discover the multiverse and the anti-matter universe. As with Krona, when he said he wanted to discover its origin, his fellow scientists warned him against it, citing legends that said such queries would lead to the destruction of the universe. Ignoring their admonitions, Pariah created an anti-matter chamber from which he could witness "that which formed all life." Unbeknownst to him, while he was entranced by the same vision of the giant hand that Krona witnessed, his experiment set off a chain reaction whereby anti-matter destroyed his universe. Only Pariah, protected by his anti-matter chamber, survived. There he stayed for millions of years. How he survived or didn't go insane during that time isn't revealed.

Somehow the destruction of his universe freed the Anti-Monitor, Pariah's second sin, the implication being that the collapse of his universe created a rift to the anti-matter universe. The anti-matter universe grew to fill the void left behind by Pariah's universe. But it didn't just fill the empty space; the growth of the anti-matter universe increased the Anti-Monitor's power. Once he got a taste of that, there was no stopping him, which was Pariah's third sin.

"Not so fast!" Harbinger says, explaining that Pariah's actions didn't just wake the Anti-Monitor; they also revived the Monitor. Still naked, he fashioned an energy globe that allowed him to see Pariah floating in his "netherversal chamber" and realized how he could use Pariah to save the multiverse from the Anti-Monitor's relentless predation. Somehow Pariah is able to sense where the Anti-Monitor will strike next. Left unexplained is how Pariah developed this ability and how the Monitor realized he had it. It also seems to be of limited use. As we've seen multiple times so far, by the time Pariah senses something terrible is going to happen, it's already too late, and he arrives just in time to issue a hopeless warning and then witness yet another world's destruction.

Forming the caboose of the expository train is a brief backstory for Harbinger. While scouring the earths for heroes to rally against the Anti-Monitor, the Monitor spotted Lyla, then a little girl, clinging to a piece of wood at sea after the ship she was on sank. What motivated him to help her is unknown, considering he had probably witnessed numerous such scenarios in his multiversal travels, but he whisked her away to his satellite to raise her. This is reminiscent of other one-off attempts to save an individual in the face of a calamity, including Pariah's attempt to save the little boy in the open pages of *Crisis* #1 and his rescue of Lady Quark. It also extends the Monitor's examination of Earth well beyond the twelve months claimed by early house ads for the series or even the two years indicated by his first appearance in *New Teen Titans* #21. Lyla appears to have been about ten years old when the Monitor first found her, and she looks to be about 30 in this series, so he's been lurking around Earth-One for decades.

Lady Quark wants to kill Pariah for what he did, but Uncle Sam pleads for patience, arguing that the heroes, like the universe, are stronger if they're united rather than divided amongst themselves. More pro-*Crisis* propaganda from the king of recruiting posters himself.

The following page reminds us of the ticking clock as the five universes continue to merge. The heroes who haven't been recruited to go to the anti-matter universe worry about those who have or wish they had been chosen instead. An odd example in this latter category is

Peacemaker who says he should have been sent in place of Captain Atom. Why Peacemaker, a non-powered hero, thinks he can contribute more than his nuclear-powered counterpart makes one question his assessment of himself, Captain Atom, and the threat they face. The Human Bomb, meanwhile, advocates prayer.

Some of DC's magic users—Deadman, the Phantom Stranger, and the Spectre—are sidelined because their "magicks" can't survive in the anti-matter universe. No explanation is given for why this is the case or how they know this. It could also be viewed as a contradiction of *Justice League of America* #46 and 47 where the Spectre and Doctor Fate play key roles in opposing "Anti-Matter Man." Then again, that battle takes place in the limbo between worlds rather than in the anti-matter universe itself, so perhaps events would have unfolded differently there. Nevertheless, one can't help but feel like Wolfman was sidelining the magic users here in an effort to prolong the series rather than due to some sort of in-story necessity. Because, really, what separates science from magic?

The dichotomy between science and magic was a fixture of the DCU throughout its first 50 years. *Justice League of America* #2 is a good example of this. A trio of sinister sorcerers moves Earth-One to "Magic-Land," nullifying all science-based technology, while their Earth is transported to the Earth-One universe, a.k.a. the "Science Dimension," rendering magic useless. Later stories like *Green Lantern* #111 and 112 echo this theme, with writer Denny O'Neil writing a contradictory, heavy-handed story that first attempts to enforce a clear demarcation between science and magic, but then contradicts that by attempting to forge a link between Alan Scott's magic-based powers and Hal Jordan's science-based ones to a single source—the Guardians of the Universe.

In truth, the boundary between these two forces is more porous than it appears. As famed sci-fi author Arthur C. Clarke once said, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." An excellent illustration of this can be found in Mike Grell's *Warlord* series where the villain Deimos discovers the technical manual for the B-100-D computer (which he calls the "Scrolls of Blood") and uses the holograms it generates to pass himself off as a wizard. However, as Deimos soon learns, the illusion can only hold until someone uncovers the mechanism behind it. In other words, what appears to be magic is often revealed to be technology in disguise. Indeed, every time the veil of ignorance is pulled aside, magic and technology become virtually indistinguishable. Both forces create extraordinary effects, often through processes that are incomprehensible to the untrained observer. Yet when studied closely, magic and science operate according to the same underlying structure. Both draw on a power source (mystical energy/electricity), rely on a body of knowledge that explains how to access and control that power (spellbooks/technical manuals), use a medium to channel that power (magic wand/firearm), require training (memorization of spells/engineering knowledge), and transmit effects through an unseen carrier (ether/electromagnetic waves). In short, the distinction between science and magic is not fundamental; it is merely a matter of perspective. What we call "magic" is often just technology we don't yet understand. Or, as Captain Marvel puts it in *Thunderworld Adventures* #1, "Wisdom of Solomon says science and magic are the same thing. Two sides of the same human coin."

Therefore, rather than "magicks," it would be more accurate to say the mysterious *technologies* employed by Deadman, the Phantom Stranger, the Spectre, and others are somehow ineffective in the anti-matter universe. This framing also sheds a new light on Superman and Supergirl, who traditionally are vulnerable to magic but experience partial power failures in the Anti-Monitor's world. Perhaps their abilities, though usually explained as a byproduct of yellow-sun radiation, also draw on the same poorly understood force that powers DC's sorcerers. Why only some of the Kryptonians' powers falter remains unclear, but the overlap suggests that "science" and "magic" in the DCU may be less like rivals and more like two dialects of the same mysterious language.

Jettisoning the premise of heroes and villains working together, a contingent of 15 heroes—including Supergirl—is assembled on Lyla and Alex Luthor's floating rock, ready to go after the Anti-Monitor. How or when this plan was announced or how the heroes were transported there isn't explained. Nor is the reason why these 15 weren't assembled in the first place rather than Lyla making such a big deal out of having only one representative from six earths. Speaking of Lyla, she has mysteriously disappeared.

When the question is raised of how to get to the Anti-Monitor, Pariah reveals another heretofore unmentioned power—the ability to travel wherever evil or danger lurks. Previously, all we've seen is an ability to be drawn to disaster, and this power has only been shown to work against or despite his will. Apparently, the rules have changed. So, while Pariah acts as their homing device, Alex Luthor uses his dual nature to create a portal to the anti-matter universe.

It's tempting to speculate that Wolfman had either abandoned or forgotten the Monitor's insistence that mere power isn't enough to confront this enemy, that the battle



Former journalist Denny O'Neil (1939–2020) was one of DC's most important writers and editors, helping restore Batman's dark, urban roots and, with Neal Adams, making *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* a landmark of socially conscious superhero comics. His influenceshaped DC's tone and moral seriousness for decades afterward. Photo by Ray Alma, 1986.



The concept of anti-matter gets a mention in a Doctor Strange back-up story in *Strange Tales* #165. When Dr. Strange destroys a device created by "Scientist Supreme" Yandroth, the villain invokes the "ninth theorem of anti-matter," with no mention of what the other eight theories of anti-matter might be.

they fight is one of emotion. This is especially enticing when one reads a caption that says, "Through the breach they fly … the mightiest, the bravest … the greatest beings who ever lived!" Indeed, apart from magic users like the Spectre or Doctor Fate, it's hard to imagine a more powerful group, which includes not one but two Supermen, Supergirl, Captain Marvel, and the Earth-Two Green Lantern, among many others. Conspicuously absent is Jay Garrick or any other speedster. Wildfire is among them, which is fitting considering how pivotal anti-matter energy is to his nature and his powers. But sadly, that aspect of his character isn't even mentioned, and Wildfire is little more than an extra in this and subsequent scenes. Other problematic participants include Jade, Alan Scott, and Captain Marvel. If magic doesn't work in the anti-matter universe, which is the excuse the Spectre gives for why he and the other magic-based characters aren't joining the team, how are these magic-based characters able to operate there? One could excuse Captain Marvel by suggesting that maybe the magic in his universe is different, but Jade and Alan Scott come from Earth-Two, just like the Spectre, so presumably, they're tapping into the same sort of mystical power source as he is.

The heroes' transition to the anti-matter universe begins with them flying in formation as they approach a mass of swirling pink energy. But then they're blasted apart into a similar state of helplessness as they appear on the cover of issue #1. Crying out in agony, they are reduced to the visual equivalent of black-and-white film negatives. This visual shows how fragile their existence is when they leave the relative safety of the multiverse and approach the Anti-Monitor's stronghold. The overwhelming power of the anti-matter universe is already threatening to negate who they are and what they represent. For his part, Pariah's face is reduced to almost pure white with only his eyes visible. Once again, rather than purity, white represents the threat of obliteration, with the transition across realms nearly erasing his sense of self. This is an amplified version of the agony Hal Jordan and others felt in past stories when the polarity of their atoms was reversed while passing between universes.

When they finally punch through to the anti-matter universe, they spot a glowing asteroid, and Pariah senses evil there. In terms of composition, this page (21) is one of the weakest in the issue, if not the series. It's filled with a handful of filler panels that do nothing to advance the plot, merely showing the characters flying through space with their arms extended, looking like superhero zombies. Supergirl is featured prominently in two of these panels, and in one of them she appears to have her eyes closed as she flies. Considering how this issue is going to end, it would have been nice to use this moment to create a sense of foreboding regarding her fate.

The term "foreboding" is an apt description of the Anti-Monitor's fortress, which sprawls across the next two pages, filled with intricate yet unsettling imagery. Constructed from stone, the structure resembles a chaotic, free-form sculpture, riddled with hidden "Easter eggs." These include a blocky female figure with bare breasts, a clown face in repose, a crouching gargoyle, a disembodied paw with lengthy claws, and numerous animal faces, one resembling the Egyptian god Anubis. While it showcases George Pérez's signature fascination with rubble and debris, the fortress seems strangely at odds with the Anti-Monitor's character. From the moment he emerged from his cosmic "womb " cloaked in armor, the Anti-Monitor has sought to impose rigid order on everything around him. Yet his stronghold suggests exactly the opposite. It's like a monument to every half-formed thought, suppressed instinct, and stillborn idea he's ever harbored over the millennia. The various figures are like ghosts of all the wild, organic creativity he despises and is seeking to erase. The fortress feels less like a seat of power and more like a crumbling mindscape, a place with no clear center, so jumbled and contradictory that it's unclear whether it's still under construction or was abandoned eons ago, perhaps when the Anti-Monitor finally plunged into madness. Could he be like Adolph Hitler, a frustrated artist who channeled his inner rage into a desire to conquer the world?

As the heroes fly toward the fortress, they react in awe, with Captain Marvel giving us a signature "Holy Moley!" Once again, it would have been nice to hear something from Supergirl, but she remains in the background, mute in this scene as well.

Somewhere within the fortress, the Anti-Monitor observes the heroes' approach on his widescreen viewer. Unlike previous scenes when this screen looked like it was in a sleek, high-tech environment, now it is surrounded by the same asymmetrical gray blocks from which the rest of the fortress is constructed. Is this a different room, or were the blocks concealed by darkness before? Or does this represent yet another midstream creative change on the part of Wolfman and Pérez?

In light of the "blue lining" effect described earlier, it's significant that the heroes now appear on the Anti-Monitor's screen as mere blue outlines, ghostly wireframes of their former selves. This visual suggests that the anti-matter universe has already begun the process of deconstruction

and erasure, stripping them of their substance and identity, at least in the Anti-Monitor's eyes. The color blue, often associated with cold detachment or sterile environments—think "code blue" in a hospital setting, which indicates a medical emergency—underscores this process metaphor.

Thinking on the fly, the Anti-Monitor calls on Psycho Pirate for assistance, wanting him to turn the heroes into slaves, but Psycho Pirate still hasn't recovered from his attempt to control the three earths. In a rage, the Anti-Monitor casts him aside and takes matters into his own hands.

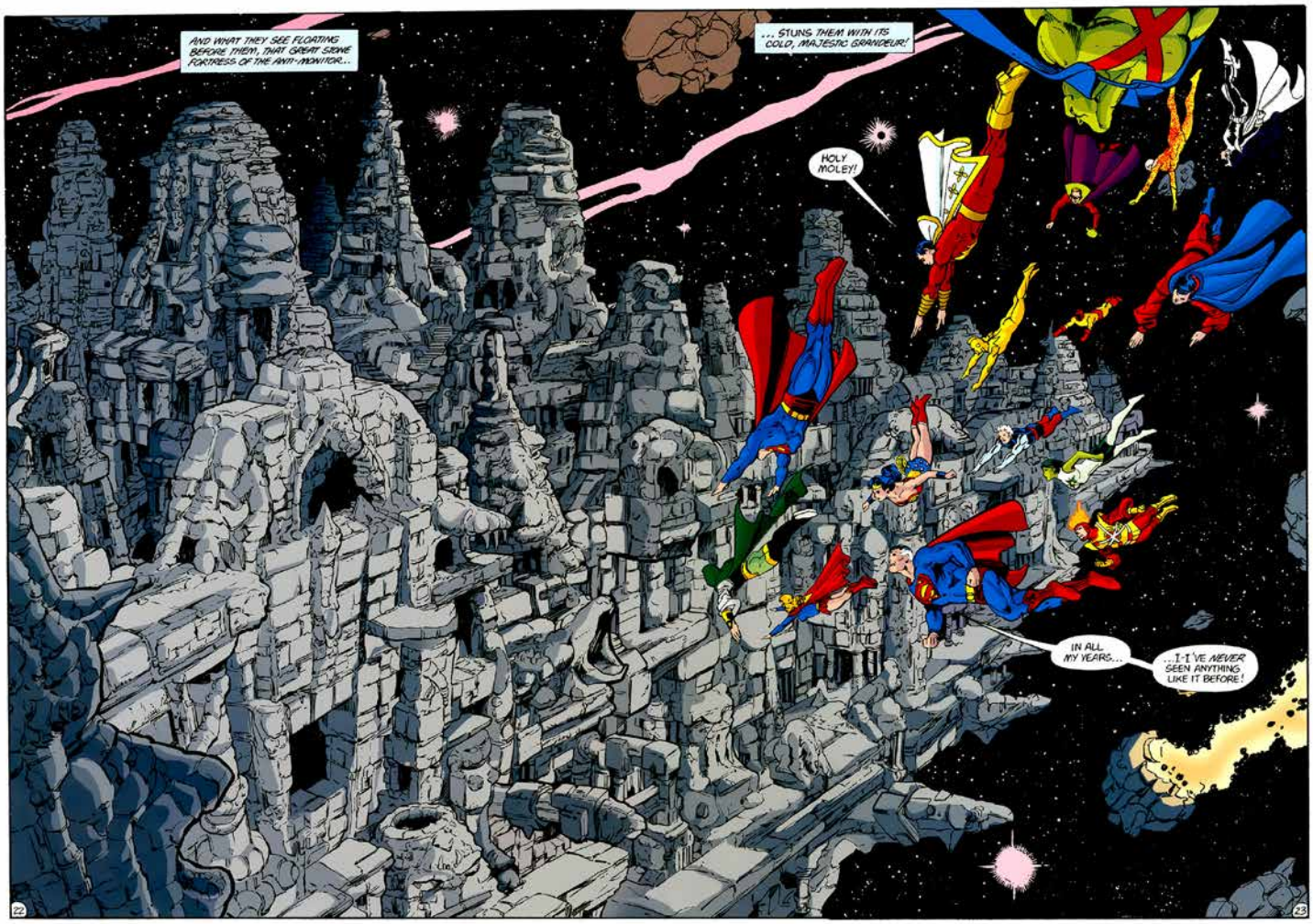
We finally get more of a focus on Supergirl when Kal-El expresses his worries to her, and she asks what happens if their mission fails. It's a small moment in a panel where neither of their faces are discernible, but at least the spotlight is slowly turning toward her.

As she and Kal-El try to use their powers, Kara realizes her X-ray vision isn't working. Superman reminds her they're in the anti-matter universe where the physical laws are different, which makes Captain Atom wonder about his powers. Most of the laws of physics in the anti-matter universe, such as gravity, seem similar to those in the positive-matter world, so having others be inconsistent feels like yet another editorial contrivance to limit the heroes' abilities rather than an in-story necessity.

For example, in real life X-rays are a form of electromagnetic radiation with wavelengths shorter than visible light. They pass through soft tissues like skin and muscle but are absorbed by denser materials like bone or metal. In medicine, X-rays are projected through the body, and the resulting image is captured on a detector behind the target.

Characters like Superman and Supergirl don't just emit X-rays; they also perceive the results, their brains interpreting the data in real time. Seeing as Supergirl's normal vision functions in the anti-matter universe (i.e., she can detect visible light), her X-ray vision—which merely receives data from a different part of the electromagnetic spectrum—should work too. After all, the physiological "equipment" for it to function—her eyes and brain—is in her head, not in the external world, so if her eyes can produce normal visual information in the anti-matter universe, her X-ray vision should be able to do so

***Crisis* #7, pages 22 & 23. For a technophile like the Anti-Monitor, his fortress seems decidedly primitive. The vast stone labyrinth looks more like the crumbling necropolis of an ancient civilization than the command center of a would-be multiversal conquerer.**





Superman and Kara's X-ray vision failing in the anti-matter universe, while their strength and flight remain intact, feelsless like coherent world building and more like editorial convenience, as if *Crisis* wants a moment of vulnerability for the two heroes without paying the full price of admission.

too. Therefore, from a scientific (or even quasi-scientific) standpoint, there's no obvious reason why X-ray vision wouldn't function in the anti-matter universe unless the atomic structure of anti-matter interacts differently with certain wavelengths of the electromagnetic radiation, or her powers are weakened or altered by the Anti-Monitor's influence, tech, or the environment (e.g., it could be lead-based). None of that is made explicit in the text, but any one of these explanations would have been more satisfying and more plausible than the vague, hand-waving rationalization Superman offers when he claims the laws of physics are simply "different." In his (and Wolfman's) defense, Hal Jordan made the same observation in *Green Lantern* #123 when he realizes there's air in space in the anti-matter universe.

With Pariah's sensation of the Anti-Monitor's presence growing stronger, the heroes venture deeper into the fortress, their unease growing as they realize this has all been a little too easy. Along the way some incidental dialogue between the Ray and Firestorm reminds us, "None of us know if we're going to make it out of this crisis alive." Sadly, Supergirl is missing from this and subsequent panels where her mere appearance in the background when such words are spoken would have been a nice hint of her fate.

Suddenly, the statuary erupts, with the various life forms we glimpsed earlier coming to life (excluding the bare-breasted woman). Kal-L and Lady Quark's powers are unable to stop the creatures. While Pariah remains confident in his invulnerability, he may want to think twice as, for the first time in his life, Kal-L is bleeding. While the Anti-Monitor looks on, everyone gets tossed around as minor team-ups form—Kal-L and Lady Quark, the Ray and Firestorm, Wonder Woman and Mon-El, Jade and Alan Scott, Captain Marvel and J'onn J'onnz, and Superman and Supergirl. Captain Atom appears to be faring the best, and Supergirl's heat vision is having some effect, but as quick and as hard as they hit the stone giants, the creatures reform with ease.

Taking a completely different tack, rather than rely on brute force, Supergirl uses her super-breath to scatter the pieces across the galaxy. One can almost hear Wolfman speaking through her when she says, "Super-breath may be one of my dumber powers … but it sure comes in handy now and then!" There shouldn't be any air to breathe on that rocky fortress floating in space, never mind enough to send the rock fragments flying, but thankfully, Hal Jordan's previous adventures there established a precedent.

The physical laws seem to work reliably enough for everyone else, with the statues' ability to reform themselves being the only real obstacle between the heroes and victory. As mentioned, Wildfire should have a distinct advantage in this environment, but that idea is never explored, and the best he gets is a couple of throwaway lines as he battles in the background.

While the heroes fight, Pariah slips in a reminder that the five earths are only hours away from merging, a comment that raises an important question: does time pass at the same rate in the anti-matter universe as it does in the positive-matter one? Does it even move in the same direction? Like so much about the anti-matter realm, the nature of time there remains unexplored, despite its enormous narrative potential. For example, what if the characters underwent a de-aging process while in the anti-matter universe, their memories unraveling along with the seconds, minutes, and hours? Such a condition would introduce a literal and psychological ticking clock. Not only would they be racing to stop the multiversal collapse, but the longer they stayed in the anti-matter world, the more they would be at risk of forgetting why they went there in the first place and how to get back home. It's a missed opportunity that could have added another layer of existential tension to the story's apocalyptic stakes.

Dr. Light and Pariah take the lead, but a falling pillar appears to crush Pariah to death. Moments later, Kal-El shows up, and Dr. Light vows to make the Anti-Monitor pay for Pariah's death. Her determination to avenge Pariah causes Superman to wonder if maybe she isn't as evil as he thought.

In the heart of the fortress, Dr. Light and Superman find an enormous solar collector that's converting starlight into energy and using it to reduce the vibrational energy between the earths, which is why they're merging. As a scientist, Dr. Light wants to study the device, but Superman's goal can be summed up in a single word—destroy! But then the darkness shifts, screams … and attacks!

Hearing Superman's scream as he's blasted with an explosion of light, Supergirl races to his aid, with the captions reminding us that she's the true definition of a hero, a selfless individual who will sacrifice anything, including her life, for those she loves.

As the Anti-Monitor whales on Superman, Dr. Light attempts to make good on the purpose for which she was created—to destroy the Anti-Monitor—but he easily dispatches her.

Meanwhile, Supergirl battles her way through the statues to save her cousin. Along the way, she passes Pariah as he claws his way out of the rubble. In his typical gloomy fashion, he warns her that death is all around her, but she's in her "This is a job for Supergirl!" mode, and there's no stopping her. "You can't give up hoping," she says. "Not ever!"

When Supergirl makes it to the solar collector, she seems surprised at how insignificant the Anti-Monitor is as she smites him in the face. "You!?! You're the one responsible for all this insanity! For all those deaths!" While she pounds him into the rubble, Dr. Light steps into Batgirl's boots, amazed at Supergirl's disregard for her own well-being. "Sh-she is a hero … totally selfless and concerned only with others. While I have wasted away my life with selfishness."

And Supergirl seems to be winning too. Driven by anger and a determination to protect Superman, she has the Anti-Monitor on his heels. "Stop it!" the villain cries. "You are destroying my life-shell!" But in yet another proof of Newton's Third Law of Motion—for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction—the Anti-Monitor rallies his dissipating energies in preparation to deliver a final, crushing blow. Maybe this is why the Monitor was hesitant to rely on brute force alone to battle the Anti-Monitor's threat. As peace activist Walter Wink once said, "Violence can never stop violence because its very success leads others to imitate it. Ironically, violence is most dangerous when it succeeds." Had Supergirl been able to rein in her emotions, she might have found a way to defeat the Anti-Monitor without sacrificing her life. Instead of bringing great power against him, she could have found a way to turn his power against himself.

As Supergirl prepares to make her final stand, she asks Dr. Light to look after Superman, who is unconscious. "Anything you want," Dr. Light says, still amazed at Kara's heroic display. "You can't know what you've already done for me."



A 1999 recreation of the *Crisis* #7 cover by George Pérez. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). The most significant difference between itand the original is the degree of angst on the Man of Steel's face.

Rather than go after the Anti-Monitor directly, Kara destroys his solar collector first. As she and the Anti-Monitor are engaged in combat, Dr. Light cries out in horror, worried the Anti-Monitor is killing Kara. That momentary distraction proves to be Supergirl's undoing. "You turn in battle, girl?" the Anti-Monitor says. "That is a fatal mistake!" Then as Superman watches in horror, the Anti-Monitor unleashes a "THOOOMMM" of energy that blasts through Supergirl's torso. With his body destroyed, the Anti-Monitor takes off in a rocket that appears to be made of the same stone as his stronghold. "It is not yet over!" he shouts. "I shall stand triumphant at the dawn of time!"

As the heroes regroup, they realize their mission was a success, and the machine that was causing the earths to merge has been destroyed. But as Wildfire reports, they've had a casualty. This sets up one of the most emotionally charged moments in the series as Superman cradles Kara in his arms. He begs her to hold on, but right up to the end, she's all about the mission. In yet another sequence of panels that ends with a close-up of an eye, Supergirl reminds Superman that all she's ever done is seek to live out everything he's taught her. When Kara breathes her last, Superman unleashes a silent scream against a red sky that plumbs the depths of his personal pain and everything else that's been lost so far more powerfully than any clever lettering could.

Superman is furious, filled with a burning desire for revenge, but Kal-L, himself a hothead, talks him down, urging him to act on the chance Kara gave them. With the Anti-Monitor's essence gone, his fortress begins to collapse, and the heroes race back to the positive-matter universe where the five earths find themselves in a strange sort of stasis, neither fully merged nor wholly apart. How they get there isn't shown, but presumably Alex Luthor has either been holding the portal open all this time, or he taps into the anti-matter part of his being and opens it again. Either way, he was conspicuously absent from their battle with the Anti-Monitor. Did Wolfman forget about him, or was it by design?

Back at home, Supergirl's life is celebrated in a massive, televised funeral, with Lana Lang, Lois Lane, and other members of the Superman family in attendance. Providing a bookend to their rooftop meeting, Batgirl reads the eulogy, emphasizing some of the same points Supergirl made to her before flying off and prioritizing the need to hold on to hope. "Kara is a hero," she concludes. "She will not be forgotten." Indeed, while Supergirl as a character was fading in popularity during this time, as is often the case, it was her death that reminded readers how much they cared for her, but by then it was too late.



***Crisis* #7, p. 38. Supergirl's death is rendered as a catastrophic explosion: a series of narrow panels followed by a burst of blinding color. Pérez depicts her demise not as a fade-out but as violent, horrifying erasure.**

The final page of this issue has Superman saying goodbye to his cousin at his Fortress of Solitude, folding his hands in a unique way that is likely inspired by Raoism, the primary religion on Krypton. He recalls her early days in the orphanage as "Linda Lee" as she secretly practiced her powers before he finally introduced her to the world.

As he flies her cape-shrouded body into space, Superman heads toward a yellow sun, which counterbalances the red sun on this issue's cover. Along the way, he slips in a bit of *Crisis* propaganda, reminding himself and readers, "We live on remembering and honoring the past, but always looking to the future," a refrain that will be repeated more than once before the final curtain falls.

Once again, rather than depart on a cliff-hanger that makes fans slaver for the next issue, we end on this somber note and a quote that ties in with the title of this issue, "Beyond the Silent Night," providing no indication of where the story is going next. But perhaps Wolfman was banking on the fact that the rumor was already in the wind, and fans were well aware of the next winged boot that was about to drop.

CHAPTER 19

"A Flash of the Lightning!"—Crisis #8

Even though the cover for *Crisis* #7 gets all the love, the cover for issue #8 is one of the starkest and most thematically charged images in the series. Barry Allen stands at the center, gripping Psycho Pirate's unconscious body with one hand while his other hand is clenched into a fist. His muscles are taut, and his face is contorted in anguish, rage, and defiance, ready to make his final stand. Behind him, violent arcs of yellow and orange energy echo the color scheme of his costume, erupting across a landscape of mechanical ruin. The entire scene is framed between a pair of looming black legs that are like a set of cosmic curtains, ready to close on the final act of Barry's life.

The stark lighting, the dramatic angle, and the explosive color palette heighten the sense of a climactic reckoning. For what's about to die is not just a man but an entire narrative worldview rooted in optimism, moral clarity, and the belief that science, order, and self-sacrifice can hold chaos at bay. In its place, *Crisis* clears the ground for the dark, morally ambiguous terrain of the Modern or Dark Age of comics, a world where identity is defined by trauma, continuity is fluid, and stories reflect fragmentation rather than coherence, even as *Crisis* itself strains to create narrative unity. This image conveys the idea that Barry's death is both a sacrifice and a symbolic handoff, marking the moment when the world that gave birth to idealistic heroes like him is about to yield to a new, uncertain storytelling landscape.

The issue itself begins not at the dawn of time, as suggested by the Anti-Monitor's parting words in the previous installment, but aboard his rock-like spaceship. The Flash is unconscious, constrained in a glue-like substance while Psycho Pirate raves to himself, fearful of the Anti-Monitor's retribution for his repeated failures. Is the substance used to constrain Barry a callback to the paste-up metaphor hinted at during the Joker's confrontation with Batman? Psycho Pirate's only hope is that the Anti-Monitor died while fighting Supergirl. But just in case that didn't happen, he asks the Flash if he wants to team up with him against the Anti-Monitor.



***Crisis on Infinite Earths* #8. While well-intentioned, terms like "final" and "permanent" found their meaning diluted as changes that were supposed to affect the DCU "forever" were eventually overturned, including Barry Allen's apparent death in this issue.**





Two examples of Jack Kirby's "between the legs" layout on covers, which may have inspired Pérez's composition of the cover for *Crisis* #8. (opposite page) *Crisis* #8, p. 3 original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Darkseid's relationship with Desaad mirrors that of the Anti-Monitor and Psycho Pirate, with the latter playing the role of sniveling underling, perhaps cowed by Darkseid's affinity for "scare quotes."

No sooner have these words escaped his mouth than the Anti-Monitor appears, bigger and badder than ever. He explains that all Supergirl destroyed was his outer shell, and now that he's constructed a new one, he's ready to deliver a final death blow to the remaining earths.

On Apokolips, Desaad, one of Darkseid's most loyal and sadistic lieutenants, draws his leader's attention to a computer screen where he's tracking the Anti-Monitor's ship. When Desaad asks how they can stop the Anti-Monitor, Darkseid responds in a dismissive manner similar to the way the Anti-Monitor treats Psycho Pirate. Displaying a penchant for scare quotes, he informs Desaad that he has taken "certain precautions," diverting the entire planet's energy to "cloak" their presence while he awaits the outcome between the Anti-Monitor and the heroes. If the heroes win, the "status quo" will be maintained. If not, the Anti-Monitor will be sufficiently weakened for Darkseid to defeat him. "With patience shall come victory. Remember that 'lesson,' Desaad," Darkseid says, throwing in a final scare quote for good measure. "It has served me well throughout eternity."

On Oa, the surviving members of the Green Lantern Corps confront the Guardians, who were freed from the stasis beam once the merging of the earths was halted by Supergirl's destruction of the solar collector. The Green Lanterns are furious, demanding to know how the Guardians could have overlooked such a threat—something we've all been wondering about for a while now. The Guardians admit to underestimating the danger, but a division amongst them regarding how to deal with it is also revealed, an argument that is still ongoing.

In the 30th century on Earth-One, the Legion of Super-Heroes also realizes that the merging of the Earths has temporarily halted, but Brainiac-5 warns that the danger is far from over. Still reeling from Supergirl's death, he lashes out at the others, his normally composed demeanor shattered



SURPRINT: ~~BLUE~~ RED.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TWO-PAGE SPREAD: BUTT PAPER AT EDGES, TAPE ON BACK. DO NOT OVERLAP AT CENTER! EACH HALF SHOULD MEASURE 10⅛" wide. FULL SPREAD = 21⅛" wide.

DC Comics, Inc.

STORY PAGE #: 5

BOOK: Crisis on Infinite Earths | ISSUE/MONTH: 8 + Breakdowns

DC COMICS PRESENTS

CRISIS LOGO

MARV WOLFMAN	GEORGE PEREZ	JERRY ORDWAY	JOHN COSTANZA	TOM ZUIKO
WRITER - EDITOR	PENCILER	EMBELLISHER	LETTERER	COLORIST

THE 30TH CENTURY ON EARTH-1, AND THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES...

A FLASH OF THE LIGHTNING!

IT APPEARS THE MERGING OF EARTHS HAS STOPPED...

IF ONLY FOR THE MOMENT.

BUT AT WHAT COST, BLOK?

SUPERGIRL DIED TO SAVE THE FIVE UNIVERSES.

BUT THEY STILL OVERLAP IN PLACES... AND WHERE THEY DO THE TIME DIFFERENTIAL IS MAINTAINED.

I'VE GOT TO FIND A WAY TO REPAIR THAT DAMAGE.

BRAINIAC-5, PLEASE... THERE'S NO REASON TO DRIVE YOURSELF LIKE THAT.

WE KNOW WHAT KARA MEANT TO YOU, BUT...

SHUT UP, ELEMENT LAD. YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING.

UNTIL THE UNIVERSES ARE GET RIGHT NONE OF US ARE SAFE.

HIS MIND'S IN TURMOIL OVER KARA'S DEATH... HE'S REFUSING TO ACKNOWLEDGE IT.

WE'VE GOT TO HELP HIM, OR HE'LL BREAK.

BELIEVE ME, SATURN GIRL... I WANT TO HELP HIM...

WE ALL DO, LIGHTNING LAD... WE ALL DO.

5

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TWO-PAGE SPREAD:

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BRAIN explains what happens. Ease up NO. trying to block

by grief. His sharp retort to Element Lad underscores how deeply Supergirl's death has affected him. Fans of the Legion will know that Brainiac-5's grief is rooted in the long, convoluted bond that he and Supergirl shared, a relationship strained by time travel and Brainiac-5's emotionally repressed, hyper-logical personality, making her loss not just the death of a comrade but the collapse of a connection that he never fully got to explore.

Though Brainiac-5's instincts are correct, and the threat remains, it's clear to everyone that his drive to find a solution is fueled as much by emotional anguish as by scientific urgency. The scene unfolds inside Legion headquarters, where he sits above the others in an elevated chair, facing a massive viewscreen that displays the five Earths overlapping along their edges. At one point, he notes that "the time differential is maintained" where the worlds intersect. This line is difficult to parse, but it suggests that even as the worlds collapse into a shared spatial framework, each Earth is still experiencing time differently. The inhabitants now occupy the same physical space but not the same historical continuity. While the focus is on Earth, the implication is that this temporal instability extends across the entire cosmos.

Picking up a story thread from issue #5 where Red Tornado ran amok in his new elemental form, Firestorm and Firehawk meet up just in time to get a message from Vixen who has tracked down Red Tornado's "creator," scientist T. O. Morrow. He's going to help them repair Red Tornado, whether the villainous scientist likes it or not.

They transport him to the JLA satellite where some of the machinery is still functioning despite the damage inflicted during the Mars-Earth war (see *Justice League of America* #228–230. They're joined by J'onn J'onnz, Cyborg, and Al Palmer, the Earth-One Atom, who makes his first appearance in this series. At this point in his career, the Atom had no ongoing title. Ray was presumed dead after a plane crash in South America, where he discovered a hidden jungle civilization of six-inch-tall people. He abandoned his civilian identity and became a sword-wielding barbarian-style hero, fighting tyranny and corruption in a pulp/fantasy setting, as shown in the mini-series *Sword of the Atom* (1983–1984).

Having tossed away his size-reducing belt, the Atom borrows Superman's reducing ray to make himself small enough to enter Red Tornado's body, only to discover the android's insides have been completely reconstructed due to whatever the Anti-Monitor did to him. Not even T. O. Morrow understands what he's looking at.

The team is so desperate for solutions that they call in Blue Devil for help, hoping the knowledge that allowed him to construct his bio-suit might be an asset. He arrives just in time for Morrow to remove Red Tornado's head,

(opposite page) *Crisis* #8, p. 5. Scanned from the *Crisis 35th Anniversary Deluxe Edition*. Brainiac-5 is trapped in the anger stage of grief over Supergirl's death. His bitterness is sharpened by a romance that dates back to *Action Comics* #276, which came out in 1961.



Ant-Man gives Vision a thorough inspection from the inside in *Avengers* #93 (1971), similar to how the Atom seeks to uncover what's wrong with Red Tornado in *Crisis* #8. While in Crisis, the Atom realizes Red Tornado has been internally altered beyond his creator T. O. Morrow's design, Ant-Man encounters an artificial immune system that attacks him.

which triggers a catastrophic explosion. In the chaos of the ensuing fire, Wolfman seized an opportunity to introduce a new costume for Firehawk after the flames burn her original one away.

Even though there's nothing outside the satellite except cold, empty space, Morrow tries to escape. Blue Devil gives chase, only for Morrow to disappear just like so many other villains have done in previous issues. When Blue Devil rounds the corner, he sees a swirling pink-and-white portal. Moments later, Blue Devil is sucked into it. Instead of taking him to wherever Morrow is, the portal transports Blue Devil to the Omega Men's ship somewhere in the Vegan star system. They themselves have just passed through a space warp, as detailed at the end of *Omega Men* #31, a bannered *Crisis* crossover that will be covered later. Before the ship's startled occupants have a chance to figure out who Blue Devil is, their ship disintegrates, and they and Blue Devil are left clinging to a whirling maelstrom of debris, with a caption directing us to *Blue Devil* #18 if we want to learn their fate.

Returning to the anti-matter universe, we learn it "stretches on for more than thirty-two zillion light-years." No, "zillion" isn't a real number; it's merely shorthand for really, really, *really* big. Within that vast space are 53 million worlds, over two million of which contain sentient life. Why Wolfman felt compelled to tell us this now isn't clear, but considering what a vast and presumably diverse universe it is, it's a pity that all we've seen of it up to this point is Qward and one of its moons.

On Qward, the Anti-Monitor observes construction of his anti-matter cannon as his Thunderers oversee the slaves who have been conscripted to build it. Once the cannon is complete, he plans to use it to obliterate the five remaining

worlds. While it's not stated explicitly, it seems apparent that the anti-matter cloud that destroyed the other universes is unable to penetrate the netherverse in which the remaining five universes now reside. Therefore, he's turned to plan C—plan B being the solar collector that was causing the universes to merge.

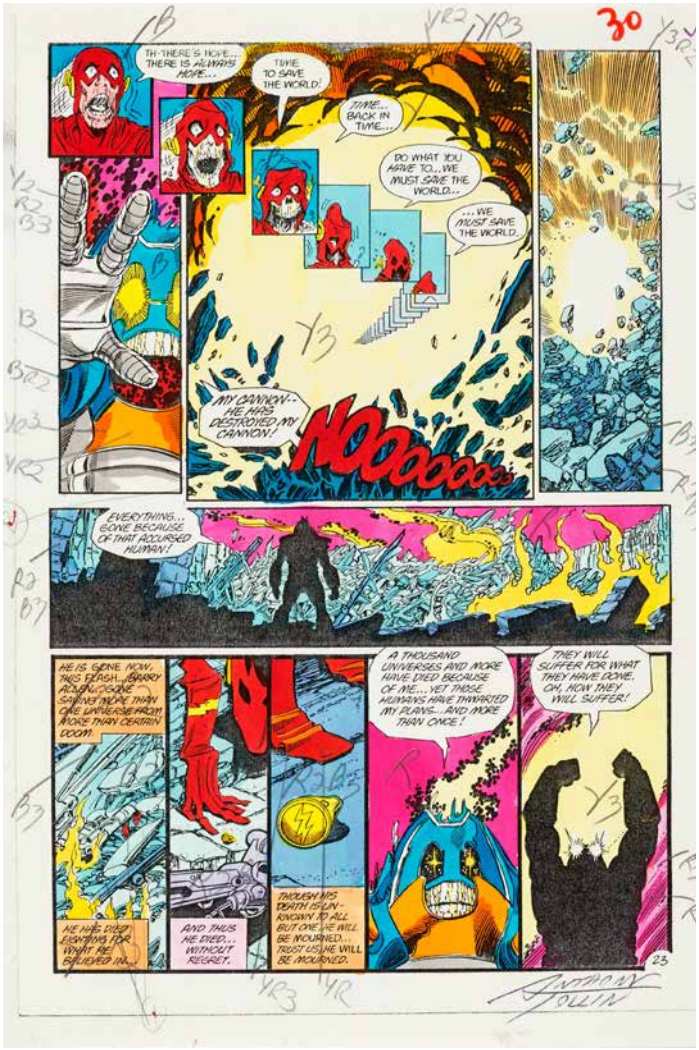
The slaves are bald, resembling the Weaponers who first appeared in *Green Lantern* #1. When one of them falls down on the job, a Thunderer destroys him with a bolt of lightning as an example to any others who might falter.

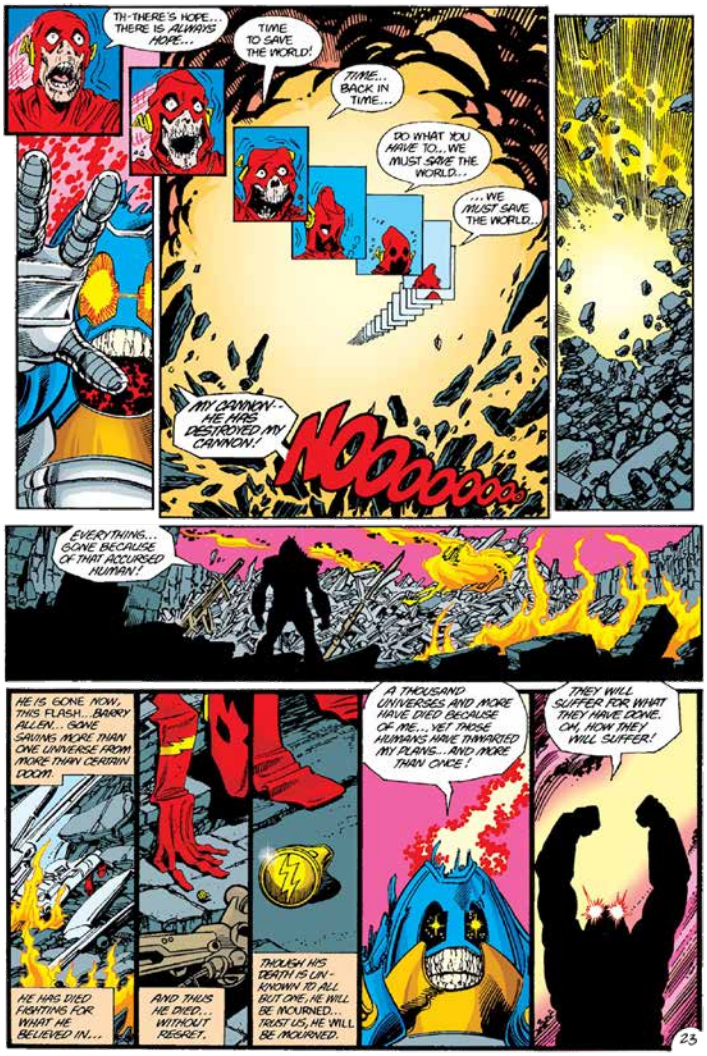
His emotion-controlling powers having recharged, Psycho Pirate returns to the Flash, ready to instill him with fear. It's a reflex, a last-ditch effort to control something—anything—in a situation where he's been utterly dominated by the Anti-Monitor. But the Flash has other ideas. Using his super speed to spin free of the glue that's holding him to the wall, he takes out Psycho Pirate and the Thunderer who's been guarding him. Down but not out, Psycho Pirate tries to inflict the Flash with fear once again. Barry nearly succumbs to it, but with a burst of anger, he breaks free of Psycho Pirate's grip and beats the daylights out of him. "I was convicted once of a murder I didn't commit," Barry says between punches, referring to the final story arc in his own series. "What difference would it make if I committed it now?"

There's nothing like a good beating to move the shoe to the other foot. As Psycho Pirate begs for mercy, Barry concocts an ingenious plan to deploy Psycho Pirate's emotion-manipulating powers against the Anti-Monitor. Carrying Psycho Pirate at super speed, the Flash shows the villain's face to each Thunderer, filling them with hate for their master. You may not be able to fight fire with fire, but if the menace that Barry and the other heroes face is one of emotion, what better weapon to use against it than emotion itself?

As the Thunderers lash out against the Anti-Monitor, the Flash turns his attention to dismantling the anti-matter cannon. When he gets inside, though, he realizes it's powered by concentrated anti-matter. Even though he's in the anti-matter universe, which should mean the

Crisis #8, p. 23. On the left is the color guide by Anthony Tollin, who colored 8 of 12 issues of _Crisis_. In the 1980s, colorists marked photocopied line art with codes showing percentages of cyan, magenta, yellow, and black, guiding the separators who prepared the printing plates.





DC Comics, Inc.
CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS ISSUE/MONTH #7 8/NOV 31 31

MY UNIVERSE SHALL PROVIDE THE POWER I NEED.

I WILL ABSORB THE ANTI-MATTER ENERGY OF MORE THAN ONE MILLION WORLDS!

THEY WILL INSTANTLY PERISH-- ALL THE LIVES CONTAINED THEREON SHALL DIE...

LET THEM KNOW THAT THEY DIE SERVING THE GREATER GOOD!

LET THEM KNOW THEY DIE SO THAT TIME ITSELF CAN BE CHANGED!

LET THEM KNOW THEY DIE SO THAT I--THE MONITOR--SHALL BE VICTORIOUS!

EARTH-1... CHALLENGER MOUNTAIN, HOME TO THE CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN...

THERE... YOU SEE IT AGAIN, PROF?

I SEE IT, RED... BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS.

JUNE, WHAT ABOUT THE SUB-SPACE READINGS SUPERMAN ASKED US TO CHECK.

READING POSITIVE, PROF. I'M SCARED.

THE CHALLENGERS MAY ALL BE LIVING ON BORROWED TIME...

...HAVING CHEATED DEATH TIME AND TIME AGAIN...

...BUT WE USUALLY KNEW WHAT WE WERE FIGHTING.

SO, WHAT IS GOIN' ON OUT THERE, ACE?

NOBODY KNOWS, ROCKY... NOBODY!

THE BLIP ON THE SATELLITE READINGS INDICATES SOME KINDA FLUX OUT THERE IN SPACE.

ACE, ROCKY... QUIET DOWN. I'M PICKING UP SOME OTHER NOISE NOW.

MY GOD, IT'S LIKE SOME AGONIZING SCREAM PERMEATING THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE.

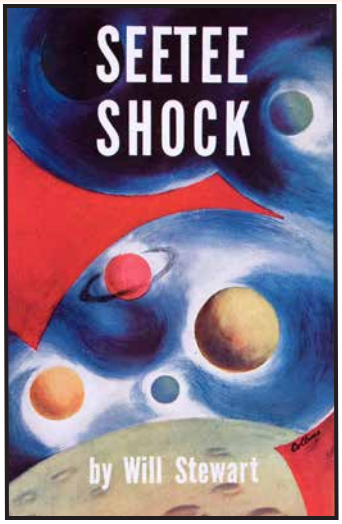
MY EARS!

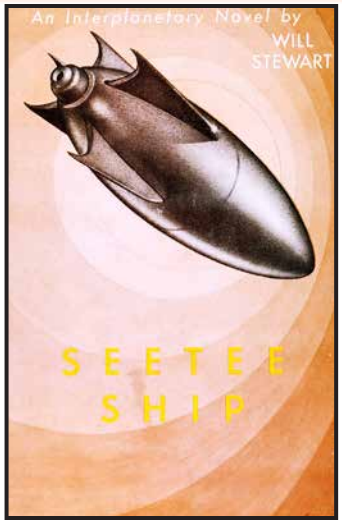
IT'S COMIN' FROM EVERYWHERE AT ONCE!

WHAT IS IT?

BUT THE ANSWER LIES NOT HERE ON EARTH... OR EVEN IN THIS UNIVERSE.

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Jack Williamson's *Seetee Shock* (1950) and *Seetee Ship* (1951) center on "seetee," a phonetic form of CT, or contraterrene matter, an early term for anti-matter. In these asteroid-belt adventures, anti-matter promises power, political upheaval, and revolutionary technology.

atoms in his body have been reversed, he feels radiation emanating from the swirling pink maelstrom, draining his strength. Despite the price he might pay, Barry runs in the opposite direction of the swirling anti-matter energy, hoping to turn it back against itself. The pain is excruciating, but he presses on, knowing he must run faster than he's ever gone before. As he runs, his mind wanders to the significant people in his life, despairing of ever seeing them again.

The Flash's actions don't go unnoticed by the Anti-Monitor, who does away with his rebellious Thunderers with a blast of energy. But by then the cannon's outer casing has been destroyed, and its energy is escaping. The Anti-Monitor vows the Flash will pay for what he's done.

As Barry runs, he senses an anomaly in the timestream and realizes the Anti-Monitor is opening a temporal portal. (Barry refers to him as the Monitor in this scene, probably because he isn't aware of the *real* Monitor.) With the Flash aging before our eyes, we see ghostly blue-line renderings of other moments in the series, including his appearances to Batman and the Joker and a future encounter with Kid Flash, which Barry misinterprets as a memory from his past. The choice to render these flashbacks and flash forwards in blue line is striking. The Flash, who is literally disintegrating, appears the most real, but it's the world he's trying to save that's fading, embedded in the very continuity that *Crisis* is erasing.

Taking the metatextual angle one step further, we've read Wolfman into Pariah, Harbinger, and the Joker. Might he also have been the Flash, racing around a machine built by the Anti-Monitor, who could be said to symbolize the unrelenting and market pressures that made *Crisis* necessary? As he seeks to stop the last five Earths from merging, which will destroy what remains of the multiverse, Barry cries out, "Help … someone—anyone! Please—" Could this have been a final subliminal cry from Wolfman, the reluctant executioner of the Flash and the world he inhabits, pleading with anyone who will listen to make it stop?

In a cascading series of panels that resembles the string of parallel earths on the cover of issue #1, Barry goes from aging to skeletal to disintegrating bones to nothing but an empty costume. In his final moments, he's fixated on two things—hope and saving the world, an optimistic, self-sacrificial mindset that mirrors Supergirl's outlook. Like her, the Flash's "death" is not in vain. He destroys the cannon, sending the Anti-Monitor into a rage.

"A thousand universes and more have died because of me!" he yells. "Yet those humans have thwarted my plans … and more than once!" This brings us back to the same number that Pariah and others have mentioned, leaving us to wonder just how "infinite" the multiverse actually was. The power differential he articulates here also reminds us of a crucial question: if the Anti-Monitor has absorbed the power of a thousand or more universes, how could a handful of humans, even super-powered ones, possibly threaten him? Furthermore, why does he need the anti-matter cannon at all? The Monitor was so weak by the time he created the netherverse that one wonders how it could possibly withstand the full brunt of the Anti-Monitor's power, especially when the Anti-Monitor claimed earlier that he doesn't require technology to do his bidding. This is demonstrated on the next page as he absorbs energy from more than one million worlds directly into his body, then disappears in a burst of energy.

A series of captions over scenes of the Flash's costume and ring lying in the rubble confirm the Flash's fate. A final caption punctuates his loss, saying, "Though his death is unknown to all but one, he will be mourned … trust us, he will be mourned." It sounds like Wolfman's final lament. But don't forget, he built a back door into this tragedy, even though it took decades for another writer to trigger it. After appearing briefly from the Speed Force in *Infinite Crisis* #4 alongside Bart Allen, Jay Garrick, and Wally West to pull Superboy Prime into it when he's run amok, Barry emerges again in *Final Crisis*, and this time his return is "permanent," as Dick Giordano might say.

On Earth-One, the Challengers of the Unknown get some page time when they detect a strange flux in space, followed by a scream that permeates the entire universe. As they cover their ears in agony, wondering what it is, we learn the answer lies not in their universe but in a netherworld occupied by a single anguished being—the Spectre. "And what he fears may destroy us all!" a caption informs us. Apparently, he senses what the Anti-Monitor is about to do back at the dawn of time, but he's powerless to stop him, which causes him to scream in frustration. Before he can find a more productive outlet for his rage, however, the villains are going to have their day in the sun.

CHAPTER 20

Interlude the Second — Crisis Crossovers and Tie-ins

With the second movement of *Crisis* drawing to a grim close, it's time to catch up on the many tie-ins and crossovers that help fill in the gaps of this story.

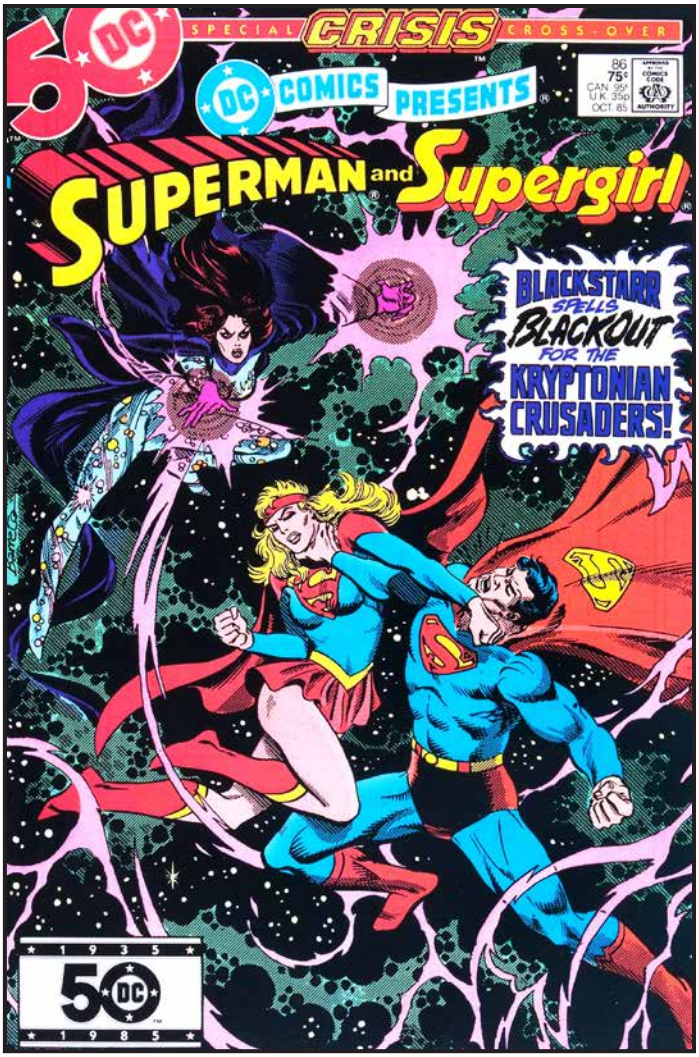
DC Comics Presents #86, a bannered crossover, provides another perspective on Supergirl's rooftop meeting with Batgirl in *Crisis* #4. In a heavy-handed story called "Into the Valley of the Shadow" (a reference to the valley of the shadow of death in Psalm 23), Supergirl expresses several times that she has a bad feeling something terrible is going to happen. And no wonder, seeing as this issue came out the same month as *Crisis* #7 (October 1985), which featured her death.

Even though the anti-matter cloud is munching its way through the city and most people are hunkered down in their homes, business at the *Daily Planet* is carrying on as usual. Spotting an anomaly in the Rennial V sector with his super vision that he suspects might be the cause of the strange phenomena, Superman flies off to investigate.

Following her meeting with Batgirl, Kara joins him. On their way to Rennial V, Superman takes time on the way to remark, "You look like hell," which seems out of character for him. The word "crisis" also pops up several times in this story, including in Superman's thoughts as he notices something is bothering Kara beneath her brave exterior.

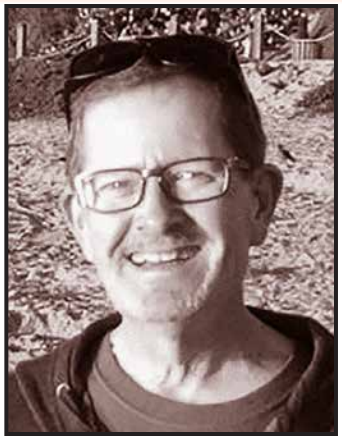
When they get to Rennial V, they find two black holes next to each other but not consuming each other, which should be impossible, and for once a tremendous leap of logic fails as they incorrectly conclude this irregularity must be responsible for what's happening back on Earth.

Suddenly, out of one of the black holes emerges Blackstarr, one of Supergirl's archenemies. Originally known as Rachel Berkowitz, the daughter of Supergirl's landlady, she became a scientist who probed too far into Einstein's unified field theory. That unleashed a cosmic power that gave her godlike abilities, but it also put her on a path toward dominance and destruction. When they last clashed in *Supergirl* #15, it appeared as if Blackstarr was torn apart, but we're about to learn that was not the case.



***DC Comics Presents* #86, written by Paul Kupperberg with art by Rick Hoberg and Dave Hunt, is somewhat of a low point in the *Crisis* cross-over collection, providing a melodramatic, heavy-handed perspective on Supergirl's imminent demise in *Crisis* #7.**





Paul Kupperberg (left) is a longtime DC writer and editor, scripting Superman-family titles, *Doom Patrol*, and *Vigilante*. Rick Hoberg (right) is another DC veteran, having penciled *Batman*, *Green Lantern*, *All-Star Squadron*, and *Justice League*, among other titles.

As they fight, Kara asks Blackstarr to stop whatever she's doing to the universe. Surprised at the accusation and the dire state of the cosmos, Blackstarr denies she's behind it. Instead, she determines Superman is the problem. When Blackstarr traps Superman in a space warp, Supergirl tries to rescue him, and they both end up in an alternate reality on the other side of a black hole. Moments later, they pop out again. Plus, they notice a star that's gone nova is no longer where it used to be. They conclude that the universe is shrinking. But how and why?

Getting the super cousins to fly in opposite directions, Blackstarr takes on a role that usually falls to the Spectre and attempts to use her powers to reverse the gravitational flow of the cosmos. The strategy appears to work, but in the process, Blackstarr disappears. Too bad because with such incredible power, she might have been able to stand against the Anti-Monitor.

In case we *still* haven't gotten it yet, the story ends with a close-up of Kara staring into the camera as she says, "Can't shake this ominous feeling!"

Taking a similar approach to John Constantine and Steve Dayton's cocktail hour in *Crisis* #4, *Swamp Thing* #44 shows us that same scene from a different angle. Trying to get Dayton to lighten up, Constantine convinces him to go outside, where they have a true "Look at the red sky" moment. Batman shows up, warning them it's dangerous to be outside, at which point Constantine reintroduces him to Dayton/Mento. Apparently, Batman has forgotten who Dayton is, even though he was at Dayton's wedding to Rita Farr, Elasti-Girl/Elasti-Woman of the Doom Patrol. With things to do, Batman runs off while nefarious events take place in the swamp.

In a bannered crossover, *Wonder Woman* #327, our favorite Amazon's plane is battered by a cosmic storm as the skies turn red due to the anti-matter's approach. The storm spits her out over South America where Tezcatlipoca, the Aztec Lord of Chaos, is overseeing a massive human sacrifice ceremony. With yet another leap of logic leading a hero astray, she assumes Tezcatlipoca is behind the weather anomaly that threw her plane off course. While he's not responsible for the storm, he does create a time loop where Wonder Woman is forced to witness the sacrifice of Major Keith Griggs three times before she breaks free. She flies Griggs and his companions home through the storm, but the issue ends with Wonder Woman full of dread, wondering if even all the heroes of their world will be enough to stand against what's coming.

As the multiverse teeters on the brink of collapse, *Wonder Woman* #328 (another official crossover) finds Diana and the Amazons reckoning with their place in the unraveling cosmos. The goddess Demeter appears on Paradise Island moments before the shadow demons attack and urges the Amazons to set aside their internal political conflict and unite for a higher cause.

While the Amazons engage in battle, during which many of them are killed, back in man's world, Hermes outs Diana's secret identity in front of her peers and says Zeus himself has ordered her to return to Paradise Island and fight alongside her mother. Before Wonder Woman can do that, though, she has to dispatch some Weaponers who show up to stop her, the first and only time they appear in *Crisis* apart from their role overseeing the slaves who are building the Anti-Monitor's anti-matter cannon.

Wonder Woman fashions a "cannon" of her own, using the purple healing ray (the same device used to save Steve Trevor in *Wonder Woman* #1) against a gigantic shadow demon, hoping it will have the opposite effect. It works, but her mother, Queen Hippolyte, is so disillusioned by the demise of Paradise Island that she gives up, refusing even to assist the gods as they make a last stand.

The conclusion of this storyline—and the *Wonder Woman* series—takes place in issue #329. The story opens with the Anti-Monitor teaming up with Hades, so not even the underworld will be safe for the Amazons if they die. This seems like an odd thing for the Anti-Monitor to do. If his ultimate goal is to destroy the multiverse, why doesn't he concentrate on that rather than involving himself in this conflict? After all, isn't Hades part of the positive-matter side of the equation too? Or do the gods pose a threat to him that isn't made explicit elsewhere? It also seems out of character for such an independent operator who prefers lackeys over partners.

Wonder Woman and her mother get a foretaste of this when the dead Amazons on the battlefield are resurrected and attack, but they're put down by Hades' wife, Kore, who says her husband's ultimate goal is to attack Mount Olympus, home of gods.

After a quick reunion with Steve Trevor in the midst of the chaos and carnage, he and Wonder Woman jet off to save Mount Olympus. When they arrive, they find Ares, who is in league with Hades, has amassed an army of the dead, declaring himself ruler of Olympus. Things look dire, but then Kore shows up with her own army, composed of Amazons from the *real* Amazon in South America.

Before Wonder Woman joins the fray, she and Steve say a touching goodbye, made all the more poignant by her fate at the end of *Crisis* #12, which came out one month after this issue. Readers didn't know that yet, but writer Gerry Conway and penciler Don Heck certainly did, and they rendered the moment beautifully.

As Wonder Woman battles Ares, Kore reconciles with Hades, convincing him to break his allegiance with the Anti-Monitor and Ares, which causes the zombie army to disappear. Meanwhile, Steve follows a hunch and realizes the gods have been trapped inside statues. He topples the one that contains Zeus, and Ares is crushed by it.

Although the battle is won, Zeus declares the war against the cosmic threat posed by the Anti-Monitor is far from over. Seizing the moment, Diana and Steve ask Zeus to marry them. After they consummate their union, something that's been 43 years in the making, they share a final moment together, during which Diana assures Steve they'll be together till the end of time.

Their moment of post-coital bliss is undercut by a headline at the end of the story that exclaims Wonder Woman will face her greatest and final challenge in *Crisis* #12, and nothing will ever be the same again!

Infinity Inc. #20 is a bannered crossover that's cleverly titled "Crisis on Infinitors' Earth." With the action focused on a hospital in Earth-Two's version of Milwaukee, the story has them battling the effects of the storms caused by the encroaching anti-matter cloud.

To put a cherry on top of the *Crisis* connection, the cover shows Nuklon cradling Beth Chapel in his arms similar to Superman and Supergirl on the cover of *Crisis* #7. A dark, menacing figure lurks in the background, its eyes glowing and its arms raised in triumph. It could be a shadow demon, but no shadow demons appear in this issue. Another contender is the Monitor, but why would he be portrayed as evil? It seems more likely that it's meant to be the Anti-Monitor. Although this issue is cover dated November 1985, perhaps it was drawn much earlier than that, prior to pencilers Todd McFarlane and Mike Hernandez getting proper concept art for the character, who revealed his face three months earlier at the end of *Crisis* #5.

When the hospital that the Infinitors and a handful of JSAers are fighting to save collapses, an explosion blinds Beth, but it also gives her the ability to see in the dark. In the next issue, she becomes the new Dr. Midnight alongside Rick Tyler, son of Hourman, who assumes his father's mantle as a Miraclo pill popper.



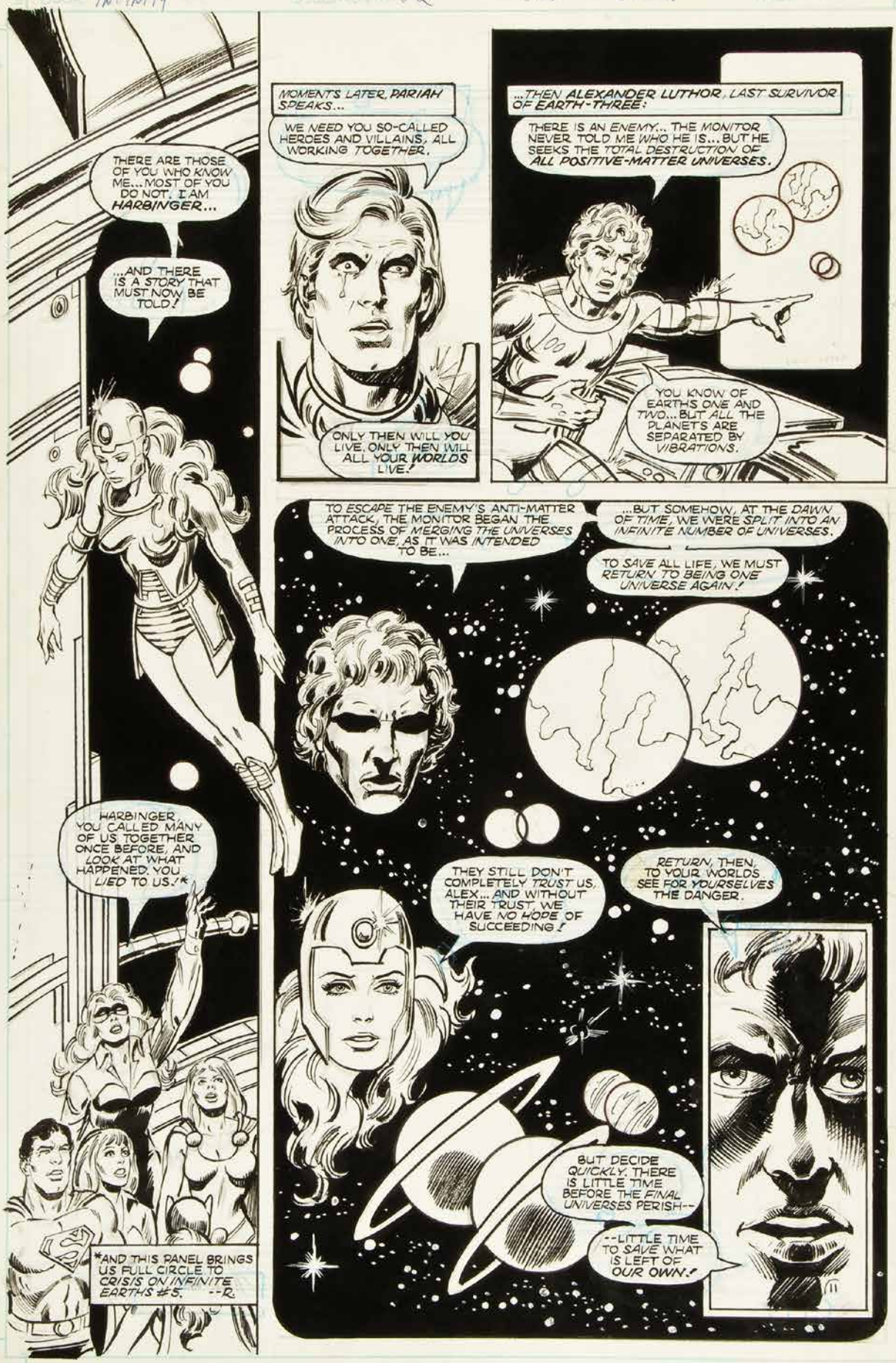
Don Heck (1929–1995) brought a smooth, elegant line to DC in the 1970s and 1980s, drawing *The Flash*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Justice League of America*, and co-creating Steel, the Indestructible Man with Gerry Conway. His DC work showed his versatility beyond Marvel stardom as an artist.

While branded as an official *Crisis* crossover, *Infinity Inc. Annual* #1 focuses less on *Crisis* and more on resolving some longstanding character arcs within *Infinity Inc.* First, Jade and Obsidian uncover the truth about their lineage when it's confirmed that their father is Alan Scott, and their mother is Rose Canton, who suffered from a split personality, one of which was the villainous Thorn. This revelation comes about when Thorn attempts to take control over Rose's body. Rather than succumb to her darker half, Rose stabs herself and dies in Alan Scott's arms.

The issue concludes with Harlequin revealing her true self as Molly Mayne, her youthful appearance an illusion created by her special glasses. Once she discloses her true age and her feelings for Alan, he does the same. (Who knew he wore a rug?) The issue ends with the two of them getting married in a campy conclusion that feels like it could have come straight from the pages of *All Star Comics* circa 1942, which was probably writer Roy Thomas' intent. We even get a visit from Doiby Dickles and Princess Ramia, last seen in *Green Lantern* #45 (1966).

Infinity Inc. #21, another bannered crossover, shows Harbinger appearing after Alan and Molly's wedding. Uttering a single word, "Come," she spirits the JSA and the Infinitors off to the Monitor's satellite.

Later in the issue, the new Dr. Midnight and Beth Chapel battle a pack of shadow demons who attack them for no apparent reason. After experiencing a bit of a wardrobe malfunction in the fight, Beth's mother refashions her choir robe into a more appropriate costume for her daughter.


THERE ARE THOSE OF YOU WHO KNOW ME... MOST OF YOU DO NOT. I AM HARBINGER...
...AND THERE IS A STORY THAT MUST NOW BE TOLD!
MOMENTS LATER, PARIAH SPEAKS...
WE NEED YOU SO-CALLED HEROES AND VILLAINS, ALL WORKING TOGETHER.
ONLY THEN WILL YOU LIVE. ONLY THEN WILL ALL YOUR WORLDS LIVE!
...THEN ALEXANDER LUTHOR, LAST SURVIVOR OF EARTH-THREE:
THERE IS AN ENEMY... THE MONITOR NEVER TOLD ME WHO HE IS... BUT HE SEEKS THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF ALL POSITIVE-MATTER UNIVERSES.
YOU KNOW OF EARTHS ONE AND TWO... BUT ALL THE PLANETS ARE SEPARATED BY VIBRATIONS.
TO ESCAPE THE ENEMY'S ANTI-MATTER ATTACK, THE MONITOR BEGAN THE PROCESS OF MERGING THE UNIVERSES INTO ONE, AS IT WAS INTENDED TO BE...
...BUT SOMEHOW, AT THE DAWN OF TIME, WE WERE SPLIT INTO AN INFINITE NUMBER OF UNIVERSES.
TO SAVE ALL LIFE, WE MUST RETURN TO BEING ONE UNIVERSE AGAIN!
HARBINGER, YOU CALLED MANY OF US TOGETHER ONCE BEFORE, AND LOOK AT WHAT HAPPENED. YOU LIED TO US!*
THEY STILL DON'T COMPLETELY TRUST US, ALEX... AND WITHOUT THEIR TRUST, WE HAVE NO HOPE OF SUCCEEDING!
RETURN, THEN, TO YOUR WORLDS SEE FOR YOURSELVES THE DANGER.
BUT DECIDE QUICKLY. THERE IS LITTLE TIME BEFORE THE FINAL UNIVERSES PERISH--
--LITTLE TIME TO SAVE WHAT IS LEFT OF OUR OWN!
*AND THIS PANEL BRINGS US FULL CIRCLE TO CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS #5. --R.





Dann Thomas (left) was a frequent collaborator with her husband, Roy Thomas, co-scripting *All-Star Squadron*, *Arak*, and *Infinity Inc.* Tony DeZuniga (right), co-created Jonah Hex and Black Orchid, helping open American comics to Filipino artists through DC assignments.

Infinity Inc. #22 gives us a rather painful glimpse behind the scenes as the heroes and villains are gathered on the Monitor's satellite in *Crisis* #5. The discomfort is largely due to the inane banter and bickering that takes place between various Earth-Two heroes and the villainous group Helix, led by Mr. Bones (introduced in *Infinity Inc.* #16), even though none of the members of Helix are shown in the two-page group shot in *Crisis* #5. Furthermore, why would Harbinger and the others even think to invite this group of numbskulls? This feels like a creative low point for writers Roy and Danni Thomas, who were perhaps already beginning to phone it in now that they knew the gig was up for their beloved Earth-Two. Making matters worse, Pariah, Harbinger, and Alex Luthor are all rendered in a way that makes them almost unrecognizable from how they're drawn in the main series. Alex is far more muscular, his hair is wavy instead of curly and is styled differently, and his facial structure is wrong. Apart from his purple hair, Pariah looks completely different, including a close-up where a tear falls from his eye, even though he wasn't crying in the original version of this scene. Harbinger's helmet and hair are also different from the original, although her facial structure is more accurate than the other two characters.

While this is happening, the new Dr. Midnight and Hourman II grapple with some time-warped Civil War soldiers and a dinosaur, demonstrating the time fluctuations that are happening on Earth-Two as a result of the worlds merging. While this latter story isn't quite as painful as the first part, rather than banner this crossover, it might have been better not to attract such official attention to it, seeing as its overall effect is to detract from rather than add to the enjoyment of the main series.

Infinity Inc. #23 gives us another scene extension, this time showing what happened right after the new Wildcat chickened out from introducing herself to the JSA in *Crisis* #7. After nearly spotting Wildcat, the Star-Spangled Kid and Jonni Thunder are yanked into the past by a tornado that's "half-wind, half-electrical energy—and all deadly!" It's caused by a female Thunderbolt that became attached to Jonni a few months earlier in the *Jonni Thunder* four-issue mini-series. They are pursued by Knodar, a criminal from the year 2447 (first introduced in *Green Lantern* #28) who has been pulled into the present due to the chronal disruptions created by the crisis.

In the second part of this issue, Jade and Brainwave II travel with Northwind to his homeland, the hidden city of Feithera. There, joined by Solomon Grundy—who was brought to the Monitor's satellite by Harbinger and then returned—they work to stop a massive glacier from annihilating the city's population before the entire civilization is destroyed, with Grundy appearing to die when the city collapses. Along the way, Jade and Brainwave II take time for a full-on sex scene in a cave. Fredric Wertham be warned!

The next issue of *Infinity Inc.,* the ninth bannered crossover in this series, opens on the brief scene in *Crisis* #7 as Huntress attempts to comfort Power Girl, who is brooding about why she's been left behind while a handful of other heroes assault the Anti-Monitor's citadel. The other Infinitors share Power Girl's frustration, but Brainwave II assures them that they'll be called on sooner or later. As if to remind readers of the crisis, images of the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor and strings of parallel earths overlay the scenes.

Continuing their time-travel adventure, the Star-Spangled Kid and Jonni Thunder find themselves on Hollywood Boulevard where a time warp has divided the street right down the middle, with half of it in 1935 and the other half in 1985, the perfect way to remind readers of DC's golden anniversary. Wouldn't it have been great if they stumbled across a copy of *New Fun Comics* #1 at a newsstand on the 1935 side of the street? They don't. Then again, they're on Earth-Two, and the history of comic books was different there. Together, they prevent Knodar and his newly adopted gang from taking over Infinity Inc.'s headquarters in a battle that isn't relevant to *Crisis.*

Swamp Thing got a bannered crossover in issue #46. After witnessing a bizarre combination of weather anomalies and time distortions, including Neanderthals defecating in a disco and dinosaurs assaulting people

(opposite page) *Infinity, Inc.* #22, p. 11. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Many of the visual inconsistencies between this issue and *Crisis* are on display here, including Superman's face, which looks like it was lifted straight out of an issue of *Mad* magazine.

in back alleys, Swamp Thing and John Constantine are transported onto the Monitor's satellite, with Constantine somehow knowing beforehand what their destination is. Rather than a simple trip from A to B, for the Swamp Thing at least, the transition is a bewildering psychedelic trip. Before joining the rest of the group, as shown in *Crisis* #5, Swamp Thing examines what looks like a mini version of the Orrery of Worlds that shows the remaining five earths, all of them overlapping. Constantine brings Swampy up to speed on the multiverse concept, explaining there's more to life than the material world, something Swamp Thing of all "people" should already know. Constantine also joins the list of characters who mistakenly say the crisis has been brewing from the dawn of time, when it actually began just ten billion years ago.

Feeling out of place amongst the "surreal and glimmering Mardi Gras of costumes" (including a brief cameo of Ambush Bug, who isn't included in the two-page group shot in *Crisis* #5, but why not throw him in here?), Swamp Thing seeks out the one person he recognizes—the Phantom Stranger. After a brief exchange, Constantine takes Swamp Thing to meet "the man in charge," Alex Luthor. To Swamp Thing's surprise, Alex has already talked to Constantine about how Swamp Thing will be dealing with the spiritual fallout of the crisis and those who will try to take advantage of it. This is an interesting thread, but sadly, it isn't addressed outside of this series.

Back on Earth, amidst the chaos of merging timelines, cosmic storms, and spiritual horrors, Swamp Thing retreats to the Green—the mystical elemental force that governs all plant life on Earth—where he confirms that a profound spiritual upheaval is taking place. When he emerges, Constantine introduces Swamp Thing to a deeper menace, the Brujería, a South American cult that is causing dark things to surface all over the world. Their ultimate goal is to resurrect an all-powerful cosmic being like H. P. Lovecraft's nightmarish Cthulhu, so they can launch an assault on heaven itself.

The story adds a fitting level of horror and gravitas to the *Crisis* story. But it also illustrates the issue of conflicting cosmologies that continued to plague the DCU. We've just seen the Anti-Monitor stepping into the Greek pantheon and forming an alliance with Hades, god of the underworld, but now the Brujería are fixated on destroying a specifically Christian version of heaven. How do these two vastly different cosmologies fit together? It brings to mind Grant Morrison's quote regarding how DC's "incoherent origins formed an archipelago of island concepts that were slowly bolted together." Such stories made a unifying cosmology virtually impossible to retcon into the mix, thus necessitating a table-clearing event like *Crisis,* so things could begin anew.

A tie-in with a mere mention of *Crisis* in an editorial note at the beginning, *DC Comics Presents* #95 is one





Tony Isabella (now Jenny Blake Isabella) (left) created Black Lightning for DC, helping introduce the company's first major Black superhero. Alan Gold edited *Blue Devil* and *Thriller* at DC, helping shape an energetic, eccentric part of the publisher's 1980s line.

of the last appearances of the pre-*Crisis* Earth-One Superman before he's replaced by John Byrne's rebooted version in the six-issue *Man of Steel* mini-series, which began three months after this issue was released.

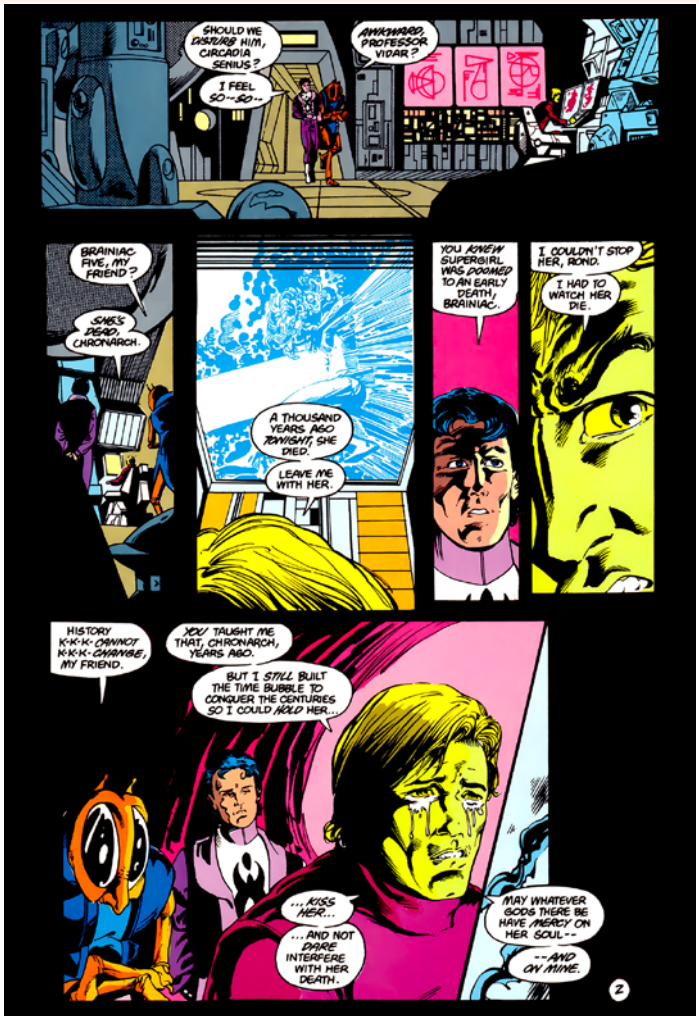
In the story, Superman feels that something is wrong, that the universe has changed in ways he can't quite identify. He teams up with Hawkman to stop Kasta, a rogue Thanagarian who gains immense power by harnessing energy from a black hole. Seeking to prove his superiority, Kasta travels to Earth to challenge Superman. Alerted by the Gentleman Ghost, Hawkman joins the battle. Despite Kasta's strength, the heroes outmaneuver him, using a tornado to trap him until he's retrieved by a Thanagarian vessel.

The story concludes on a melancholic note that foreshadows the departure of this version of Superman. As Hawkman watches Superman fly away, a caption says, "Between one heartbeat and another, Earth's greatest superhero takes off and is lost to sight! The storm threatens with a preternatural rage, but Hawkman stands unmoved. He has lost a friend."

Didn't we all?

Maintaining his "good soldier" status, Roy Thomas wrote four more bannered crossovers in *All-Star Squadron* #53 to 56. As storm clouds gather, Nyola channels Aztec god Tlaloc to help the Monster Society of Evil break out the Dummy, whose underwhelming presence underscores the absurdity of such petty acts amidst the cosmic cataclysm. A disagreement with Oom sends Mr. Mind on an interdimensional journey through the portal created by Harbinger when she recruits Firebrand in issue #52. Thinking he's heading to a new world to conquer, Mr. Mind instead returns to Earth-S, which Thomas insists on calling "Earth-Shazam," to the point of saying the name is "forever enshrined in legend."





***All-Star Squadron* #56 concludes a four-issue *Crisis* cross-over arc, with Roy Thomas doing yeoman's duties despite the negative effect Crisis had on his career. In *Legion of Super-Heroes* #16 (right), Brainiac-5 pulls off his best Pariah impersonation as he mourns Supergirl's death yet again.**

Meanwhile, the All-Star Squadron is trying to account for the disappearance of various heroes, including Green Lantern, Liberty Belle, and Johnny Quick, who pursued Harbinger and Firebrand. The issue shows how the latter two, along with Tarantula and Amazing-Man, wound up on the Monitor's satellite with the other heroes, followed by their encounter with the rogue Red Tornado. This story also reveals that Liberty Belle saved Wildcat from certain death when he was struck by lightning, having to choose between saving Johnny Quick, whom she just married, and the aging prizefighter. We also learn that the Alan Scott who's on the satellite is from later in his timeline than the one who was with Liberty Belle and Johnny Quick as they pursued Firebrand and Harbinger, making for an interesting time warp connection.

In the next issue, the All-Star Squadron grapples with the escalating chaos caused by the Monster Society's antics, the erratic storms, and the missing members of the JSA. When Jay Garrick debriefs with the team, he says, "If there really are alternate earths, and they're experiencing the same phenomena—it can only mean that whatever's happening may be a very real threat to the existence of the whole universe—or universes, as the case may be." Would it have killed him to say the word "multiverse"?

Aside from that, this brings to light a time-travel paradox created by *Crisis* affecting the past, present, and future if we think of this scene in conjunction with Jay's first meeting with Barry Allen, which occurs about 20 years after this scene. When Barry explains the multiverse concept in *The Flash* #123, Jay's first response is, "Two earths? What are you talking about?" However, seeing as the events recounted in *All-Star Squadron* #54 would have been part of Jay's history, he would have been well aware of there being more than one earth prior to Barry's arrival, so why does he express such surprise? A possible retcon is that he remembers it well, being one of the heroes who was present at the dawn of time to battle the Anti-Monitor, but he feigns ignorance for Joan's sake, so as not

to give the game away. Another solution is that Barry's trip to Earth-Two created an alternate timeline, and this is another Jay Garrick.

In 1985, Firebrand heads to Cape Canaveral to honor her promise to check on Nuklon's mother, a NASA technician named Terri Rothstein, only to encounter a menagerie of other time-displaced heroes, all of them recruited by Harbinger. They include Western characters like Miss Liberty and the Roving Ranger, swashbucklers Don Caballero and the Black Pirate, and warriors like the Viking Prince and the Golden Gladiator, giving Thomas a chance to feature some deep cuts from the Golden Age and early Silver Age. But when they arrive at the Cape, they discover it's under attack by "a whole horde of wild Indians," as Firebrand puts it, led by Super Chief under a blood-red sky riven by lightning.

Firebrand and her eclectic team attempt to stop the Ultra-Humanite from stealing the space shuttle in a battle that's complicated by attacking Native American warriors, temporal disorientation, and weird weather events. When Firebrand saves Super Chief's life, he and his group team up with the heroes to fight the "evil white one inside the big teepee"—Super Chief's description of the Ultra-Humanite inside the shuttle. They're unable to stop the launch, but Terri programs the craft to head into the sun, after which she is unwittingly saved by her father, Cyclotron, who only learns of his progeny in this issue, moments before he fades from existence.

With this storyline all but wrapped up, the final issue in this batch of All-Star Squadron crossovers focuses on the Seven Soldiers of Victory as they seek to solve the mystery of their missing comrades and the red skies. Instead, they run afoul of the Sense Master, a.k.a. the Sixth Sense, a.k.a. Dr. Brett, whose only other appearance was in *Leading Comics* #4 (1942). It's like Thomas is determined to exhume as many obscure DC characters as possible before they're all swept away. Otherwise, neither this story nor the backup feature that tracks Dr. Mid-Nite's voyage to Neptune, stemming from issue #50, have a direct bearing on *Crisis*. The closest we come is the Shining Knight saying that now the Seven Soldiers are assembled, it's time to investigate the strange red skies over their world.

Rounding out this group of interstitial tales is a two-issue tie-in that spans *Legion of Super-Heroes* #15 and 16 (or *Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes* #340 and 341). The only connection to *Crisis* in issue #15 is a mention of the "recent wave of anachronistic incidents" on the final page and Brainiac-5's reference to the thousand-year anniversary of "the saddest day in history by my reckoning," an allusion to Supergirl's death. However, another link could have been forged through Wildfire, who is the focus of the first two pages of this issue. After being reduced to a "puddle of anti-energy," he dons a new containment suit, lamenting that each one is different, causing some unpredictability in the way his anti-energy operates. Could this irregularity in his suits be why he played such a small role in *Crisis?* Then again, wouldn't traveling to the anti-matter universe have been a fantastic opportunity for him to shed the suit and embrace his true self for once?



Steve Lightle (1959–2021), who illustrated the *Legion of Super-Heroes* #16 *Crisis* tie-in, was a key DC artist, best known for his work on *Legion of Super-Heroes* and *Doom Patrol*. He followed Keith Giffen on *Legion*, co-created Tellus and Quislet with writer Paul Levitz, and brought crisp design sense, expressive figure work and striking covers to DC's mid-1980s line.

In the next issue, Brainiac-5 turns into a blubbering mess, doing his best Pariah impression as he continues to mourn Kara. He says he knew every detail of her death before he even met her. "Her death was part of her legend." Does that mean he knew all about the crisis too, that it's been a matter of history for 1,000 years? If so, why didn't he warn anyone—including Kara? And why did he seem so surprised when he first detected the approaching wave of anti-matter? As prolific letter hack T. M. Maple pointed out:

> *The situation points up the inevitable paradoxes that come up with time travel. It is stated that he [Brainiac-5] came to care for Supergirl despite knowing she was doomed, since it was a matter of historical record. ... And even if it wasn't recorded for Brainiac to see, his involvement with her was part of her life, a life that ended over a thousand years before they met! Is then his life fixed, its course known and unchangeable before it has happened? And, if not, how do you explain the interaction between Supergirl's past "fixed" life and Brainiac's current "free" life? (If her life was over and thus its events unchangeable—even before Brainiac met her in his 30th century life—how could his yet unlived life be free to change course if his relationships [sic] with Supergirl happened before he was born?)*

An editorial response ducks the question but assures readers that issues #16 and 18 were consistent with DC's past theories of time travel and that Marv Wolfman and Bob Greenberger both read the issues to "carefully relate" the storyline's logic to *Crisis*. If this is what passed for "carefully related," it's little wonder *Crisis* left behind as many contradictions as it resolved.

CHAPTER 21

"War Zone"—Crisis #9

On the cover of *Crisis* #9, DC's villains aren't just assembled; they're racing straight toward the reader. At the center, a scowling Lex Luthor in full battle armor leads the charge, his finger extended in a gesture of accusation, as if to implicate the audience in what's coming next. With *Crisis* collapsing continuities, killing off characters, and redefining DC's canon, it's as though the villains are seizing a final opportunity to assert their right to exist. "You caused this disaster—your nostalgia, your nitpicking, your obsessive indexing—but we're still here, and we're not leaving without a fight!"

Like a circus ringmaster relishing the chaos that's about to unfold, the Joker grins as he fires his trick gun and beckons us to take in the spectacle. A smirk can also be seen on the faces of Captain Cold and the Silver Ghost, but nearly every other figure is consumed by a single emotion—rage. Everyone, that is, except Brainiac, whose skull-like visage looms behind the others. His cold, calculating, emotionless expression contrasts with the surrounding red skies and crackling lightning, the signature markers of fragmentation and impending collapse.

The layout feels intentionally claustrophobic. Villains are stacked atop one another as if they're all trying to steal the spotlight. Too many identities are being squeezed into not enough space, a fitting visual metaphor for the collapsing multiverse. As the eye searches for a pattern or hierarchy in the image, it finds only a mass of faces and bodies pressing inward, echoing the very storytelling pressure that *Crisis* was designed to resolve—too many timelines, too many worlds, too many characters, and too many contradictions coming at us all at once.

While male characters dominate the group, a number of female villains are also present. Many of them, such as Killer Frost and Enchantress, derive their powers from biological mutation or mysticism, setting them apart from tech-based criminals like Dr. Sivana, Per Degaton, and Gizmo. Others, like Cheetah, Giganta, and Shimmer,



The cover for *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #9 is another Pérezian masterpiece of composition and character staging. Dozens of DC's villains jockey for a place in the spotlight as the anti-matter wave threatens to bring an end to their evil schemes once and for all.



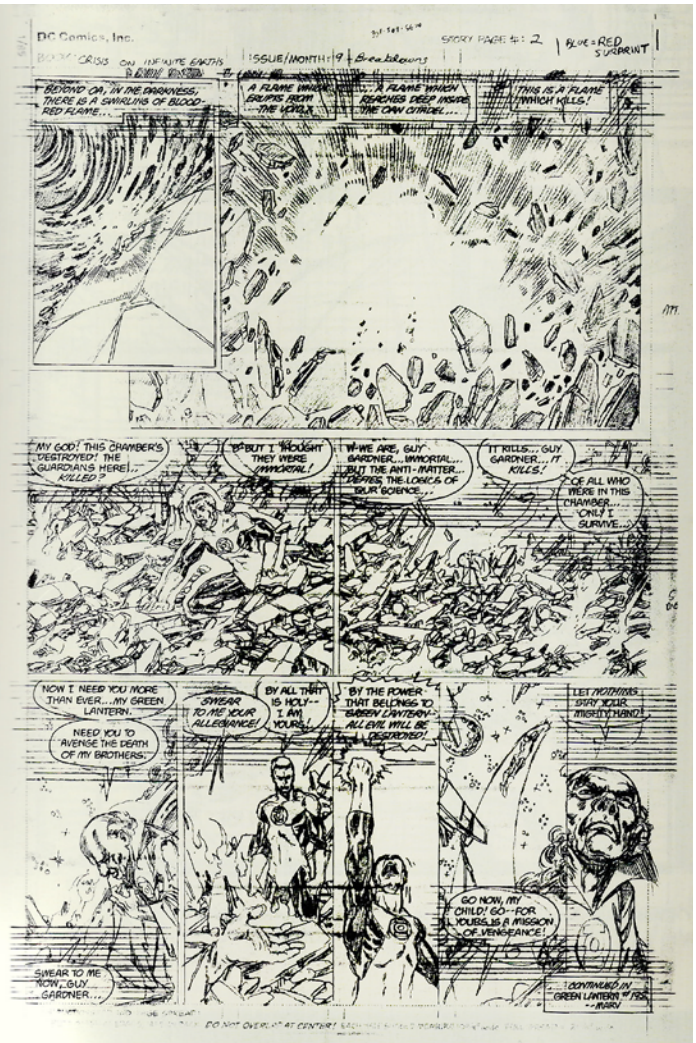
reflect DC's then-limited archetypes for female villainy—feral, seductive, or emotionally unstable.

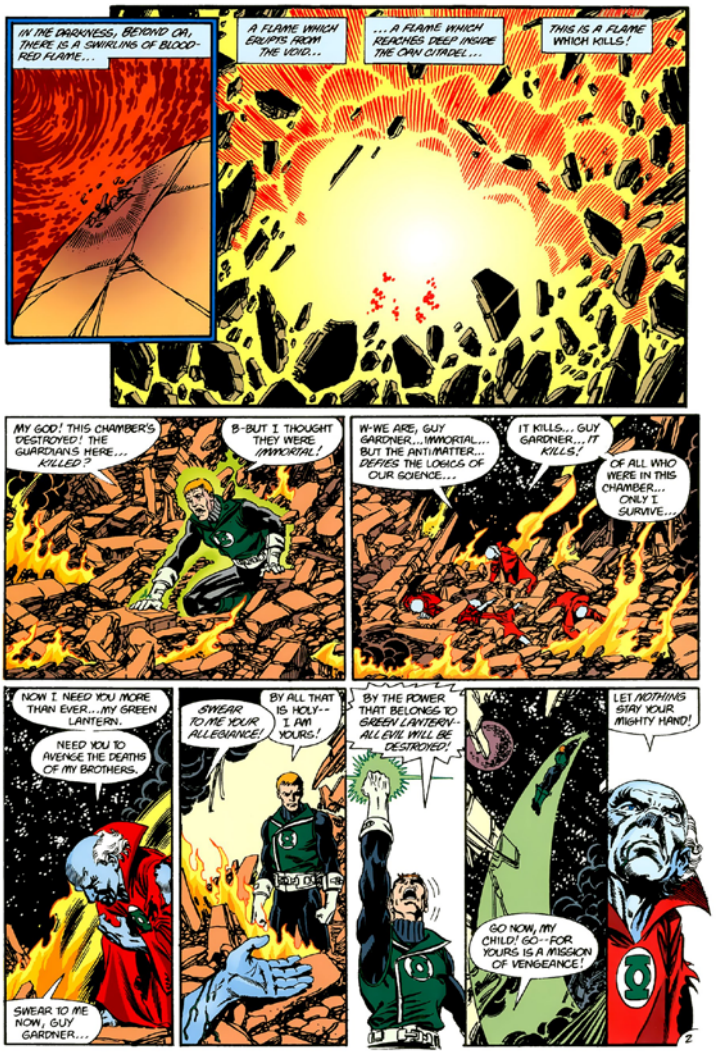
The cover also displays a wide range of power sources—tech-based, elemental, and psychic—reinforcing the idea that evil in the DCU takes many forms. The most underrepresented power source is magic. While Earth-One villains dominate, their presence is interwoven with figures from Earth-Two, Earth-X, and Earth-S, reflecting their worlds' partial survival. The only one of the five remaining Earths not represented is Earth-Four, though Dr. Spectro, one of that world's villains, appears in the story itself.

Taken together, the cover is like a tidal wave of villainy, anger, and unresolved storylines, demanding not just recognition but also a final act worthy of the chaos from which they were born. The villains could be seen as charging not just at the heroes and readers but also at the creators who helped build the multiverse—and anyone who attempts to take it away.

Despite the villainous momentum conveyed by the cover, the story begins not with a criminal but with a hero of sorts—Guy Gardner, the newly anointed Green Lantern. Like his predecessor, Hal Jordan, Guy

Beyond Joe Staton's redesign of Guy Gardner's costume (left) debuted in *Crisis* #9. The comparison between George Pérez's pencils (bottom left) and the finished art (bottom right), inked by Jerry Ordway and colored by Anthony Tollin, show the change in Guy's costume was a last-minute revision that happened on the fly.







Joe Staton was one of DC's most dependable Bronze Age and post-Crisis artists, especially on *All-Star Comics*, *Green Lantern*, and *Green Lantern Corps*. He co-created the Huntress, Kilowog, and the Omega Men, bringing crisp storytelling, lively faces, and an energetic, accessible style to DC's superhero titles for generations of readers.

is aligned toward the good, but his brash personality gives him a quasi-villainous feel. While anointing him in his new role, the Guardians admit to being partially responsible for the evil that has been unleashed in the universe, and they charge Guy with finding it and eliminating it. Why they're unable to do so on their own is a lingering mystery, but perhaps their impotence is due to the division in their ranks over how to handle this threat.

Such questions prove to be moot a moment later when a blood-red flame strikes Oa and kills all but one of the Guardians, the anti-matter too much even for their supposedly immortal bodies. In a departure from standard protocol, the lone surviving Guardian commissions Guy to avenge his brothers' deaths, a mission that Guy is all too ready to accept. A caption directs us to follow the rest of the story in *Green Lantern* #195, which we will do in a subsequent chapter.

On board Brainiac's ship, T. O. Morrow is the last rogue to join the band of villains who have been mysteriously disappearing throughout *Crisis*. Brainiac informs the group that he is unable to detect the Anti-Monitor in their universe or his. This is the first time we learn that Brainiac is able to scan the anti-matter universe as well. If so, why didn't he detect the Anti-Monitor's actions sooner than he did? Assuming the crisis is over, Brainiac has determined that now is the time to strike the five remaining earths.

When Brainiac lays out the hierarchy of their team, appointing Luthor as his field commander, Luthor of Earth-Two objects, calling his counterpart a "second-rate lab rat." Brainiac agrees that only one Luthor is needed and without further ado, incinerates the red-headed upstart. Any further objections?

Orbiting on the other side of the planet, representatives from Starfire's homeworld of Tamaran have arrived to take Princess Koriand'r home to marry Captain Karras to cement a political alliance (part of a storyline in the two bannered *Teen Titans* crossovers, which will be covered in a later chapter). Having no idea what's going on, Starfire shows up with Jericho and Nightwing, the latter of whom she introduces as her lover, which complicates matters considerably. Starfire and Nightwing remain oblivious, but Jericho, though mute, watches, listens … and worries.

Back on Earth-One, people are doing their best to return to normal life—as normal as one gets in a world that features a "warp zone" where people and creatures from every era in Earth's history intersect. Members of the Teen Titans are joined by Firehawk on a rooftop above New York as Donna Troy worries about her husband, Terry Long, who is somewhere in the warp zone. Various reporter characters, including Tawny Young, former love interest of John Stewart; Lois Lane; Jack Ryder (a.k.a. the Creeper); Bethany Snow, a reporter who used her TV show to attack the Teen Titans; and Megan O'Dell, a character from *Blue Devil,* interview several science-based characters who have arrived along with hundreds more to study the warp zone. These include Rip Hunter, Time Master; Dr. Jenet Klyburn of S.T.A.R. Labs, frequent collaborator with members of the Superman family and the JLA; Dr. Will Magnus, creator of the Metal Men; and Dr. Darwin Jones, chief of the Department of Scientific Investigation (DSI). It seems like an opportunity to show the current status quo while also giving cameos to characters who haven't been seen in a while. For example, Darwin Jones had only recently made a return in *Daring New Adventures of Supergirl* #7 (May 1983) following a nearly 20-year absence when he frequented the pages of *Strange Adventures*.

Having received permission to enter the warp zone (no mention is made of who controls access to the area), Wonder Girl is determined to go on her own, but she accepts Firehawk's offer to help her find Terry. While they take off, Clark Kent announces on TV that Alexander Luthor will be addressing the leaders of all five earths at United Nations headquarters. As Clark's boss, Morgan Edge, and Lana Lang discuss Clark's grim demeanor, Pérez seized the moment to squeeze in a couple more cameos, including the back of Bernie the Brain's head and a photo of Sugar and Spike on a side table as a boy watches Clark on TV. Who knew Mr. Kent appealed to such a young demographic?

We also get a peek into the past, catching up to Sgt. Rock, Easy Co., and the Haunted Tank crew as they try to make sense of what's happened. In his typical stoic fashion, Rock says what's done is done, and it's time to get back to the business at hand—fighting "Krauts." But a swirling pink anomaly in the sky hints that the "strange days" they've experienced may not be over just yet. Whether this is a residue of the same energy that destroyed the Guardians' temple on Oa isn't clear, but presumably, it's either an artifact of the Anti-Monitor's voyage back to the dawn of time or a manifestation of the villains' impending attack. This same anomaly shows up on the other four earths as well.

Three of those worlds are also hit by another menace—the villains' invasion. Left largely unguarded as the more powerful heroes converge on Earth-One to hear Alexander Luthor's speech, these worlds are hit by a plague of darkness as Brainiac and Luthor's army descend. For some reason Earth-Four appears to be hardest hit, with

DON'T BELIEVE IT, PSIMON... MY SCIENCE AND BRAINIAC'S SAVED YOU.

WERE IT NOT FOR US--YOU WOULD HAVE PERISHED.

INDEED, OUR FOE HAS FLED OR HAS DIED.

FOR NOT EVEN I--A LIVING COMPUTER--CAN DETECT HIS PRESENCE, EITHER IN OUR UNIVERSE OR HIS.

MY CALCULATIONS MUST BE TRUE, THE CRISIS HE CREATED IS OVER...

...BUT NOW THE EARTHS ARE IN CHAOS--SEEMINGLY NORMAL, YET PARTIALLY MERGED.

WE, ALTHOUGH FOR DIFFERENT REASONS, ALL CRAVE POWER... NOW DURING THIS CRISIS IT IS TIME FOR US TO STRIKE!

NOT EVEN THE HEROES OF THE FIVE REMAINING EARTHS CAN WITHSTAND OUR COMBINED POWER.

LISTEN NOW TO LUTHOR OF EARTH-1--FOR HE SHALL BE OUR FIELD COMMANDER.

WE HAVE THE WORLDS WITHIN OUR GRASP. IT IS OUR TIME NOW.

WAIT ONE BLOODY SECOND! WHO APPOINTED THAT SECOND-RATE LAB-RAT OUR SPOKES-MAN?

I'M THE LUTHOR OF EARTH-2! MY GENIUS IS FAR GREATER THAN HIS! YOU DON'T NEED HIM!

YOU SPEAK LOGICALLY, LUTHOR! BUT I ASSEMBLED THIS GROUP! THE DECISION FOR LEADER IS MINE. BUT YOU ARE CORRECT. WE DO NOT NEED TWO LUTHORS!

FAREWELL!

GOOD! OKAY, BOYS AND GIRLS... HERE'S THE PLAN!

CONTINUED ON 2ND PAGE FOLLOWING.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TWO-PAGE SPREAD: BUTT PAPER AT EDGES, TAPE ON BACK. DO NOT OVERLAP AT CENTER! FULL SPREAD = 21¼" wide.

Nightshade, Captain Atom, and Blue Beetle's Bug, if not the Beetle himself, taken out.

On Earth-One, not just Alexander but also Lyla and Pariah address the UN. Having not been seen since he used his body to create a gateway to the anti-matter universe, Alexander informs the crowd that just as the anti-matter universe has disappeared, the half of his body that was composed of anti-matter has reverted to a positive-matter state—something that would have been fun to witness on panel rather than be told about it after the fact. Lyla tells the group that she has transferred much of the information gained by the Monitor to the UN's secretary general. This leads us to wonder what information she held back. For example, did she redact the superheroes' secret identities and weaknesses? Sadly, this avenue is never explored in this series or subsequent stories. Pariah also assures everyone that although the linking of the five earths is inconvenient, it's not dangerous. How does he know this? Simple: "For I remain here on Earth and have not been summoned elsewhere." Contrary to his assertion, if one of his primary powers (or weaknesses, depending on how one looks at it) is to be summoned to scenes of calamity, shouldn't he and everyone else view his presence there as an ominous sign of impending doom?

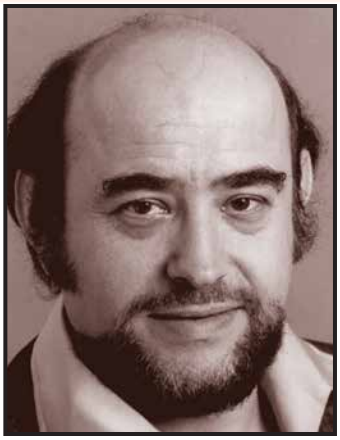
As Pariah's interrogators demand proof of his claim, saying not even the nations on one earth can be trusted to get along with one another, never mind the nations of five earths, Pariah gets that sinking feeling again. Before they can finish grilling him, he's whisked away to some unknown location.

While everyone is still recovering from the shock of Pariah's disappearance, a huge holographic image of Brainiac's head appears, informing the crowd that Earth-Four, Earth-X, and Earth-S are now controlled by "all those you humans call super-villains." He is accompanied by a hologram of Luthor, who gives those assembled 15 minutes to surrender, or the villains will destroy the other three worlds, creating a chain reaction that will also annihilate Earth-One and Earth-Two. This seems like a self-defeating threat, seeing as if they go through with it, no earths will be left for them to rule. Is plan B to make the same offer to another planet? As Luthor speaks, we see scenes of villains gloating on the other three earths. Alexander also can't help but note the uncanny physical resemblance between this Luthor and his father.

Inspired by Kara's sacrifice, Superman is unwilling to stand by and let this happen. "This is a job for Superman!" he thinks as he flies off, proving that the Silver Age sensibilities that inspired his Kryptonian cousin didn't die with her. Maybe there's room for a glimmer of hope in the post-*Crisis* DCU after all.

(opposite page) *Crisis* #9, p. 4. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Lex Luthor of Earth-Two gets a sudden and shocking sendoff when he dares to defy Brainiac and the Earth-One Lex Luthor's leadership as the villains plan their assault.





Steve Ditko (left) and Don Segall (right), co-creators of the Creeper, who premiered in *Showcase* #73 (1968). Ditko also co-created Spider-Man, Doctor Strange, and the Question, the latter being a "Comic Code friendly" version of his independent creation, Mr. A (*witzend* #3, 1967).

Another reporter/superhero also answers the call—Jack Ryder/the Creeper (co-created by Steve Ditko and Don Segall in 1968 and debuting in *Showcase* #73). While attempting to rescue a kidnapped scientist, Dr. Yatz, Ryder stumbled upon a bizarre costume consisting of a green wig, yellow skin dye, red gloves, and a boa-like fur cape, which he used as a disguise. Yatz injected Ryder with a serum that gave him enhanced strength, agility, rapid healing, and a pain-suppressing laugh, but his abilities came with a catch: he couldn't be cured. However, before he died, Yatz implanted a device in Ryder's body that allowed him to switch back and forth from his Creeper persona at will. As Ryder activates the device in an alley, Ambush Bug gets a cameo in the form of a poster on the wall behind him.

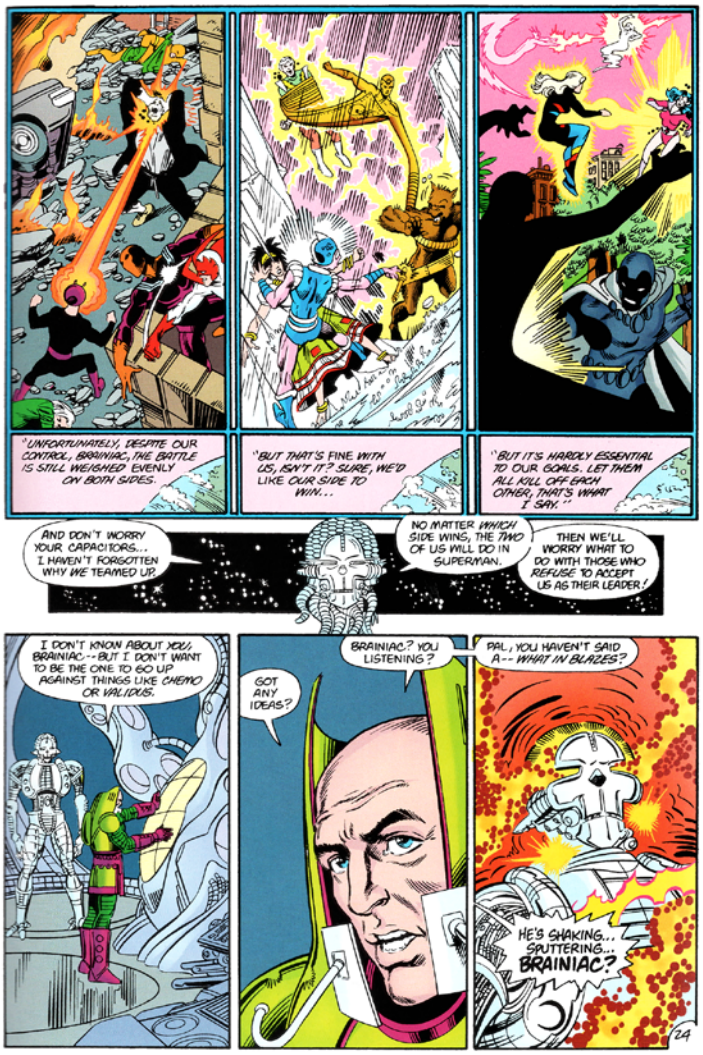
The Balloon Buster also gets a brief scene as we travel back to 1917 just in time for him to witness a pink anomaly in the sky. Seeing as Brainiac and Luthor's assault is limited to the present, we're left to assume that this energy is probably associated with whatever the Anti-Monitor has planned.

On Earth-Two, Superman, Power Girl, various magic-based heroes, and members of the JSA and Infinity Inc. attempt to break through the barrier that the villains have erected between their world and Earth-Four, to no avail. Radio signals are able to get through, though, with Superman on Earth-One urging his Earth-Two double to keep in touch as the Creeper watches from the wings.

Although no longer able to manifest her Harbinger persona, Lyla embarks on another recruitment effort. This time she's accompanied by Jay Garrick. That's because the object of their conscription is Wally West, formerly known as Kid Flash, who retired from the Teen Titans in *New Teen Titans* #39 after learning his speed powers are declining—a problem that's elaborated on in *Crisis* #10. He's reluctant to join them until they invoke his mentor Barry Allen's name.

In no time he's helping Jay put the finishing touches on a cosmic treadmill as dozens of other heroes look on. Even though Barry originally designed the cosmic treadmill to facilitate travel through time (see *The Flash* #125), Wally notes that Barry also used it to travel between earths, as we've seen in previous parallel-world stories, such as *The Flash* #159 when Wally and Barry employ it to make such a trip together. But this time there's a twist: the plan is to use the power generated by Jay and Wally running on the treadmill to transport dozens of heroes to the three earths held captive by the villains. These heroes, who are standing on a series of circular platforms connected to the treadmill, include the new Wildcat, who makes her first public appearance here, the Metal Men, the Doom Patrol, the Outsiders, the Teen Titans, the JLA, the JSA, and many others.

The plan works, and the heroes breach the villains' defenses, but Brainiac has anticipated such a move,



***Crisis* #9, p. 24. In a rare moment of humility, Lex Luthor asks someone else for ideas rather than pushing his own. Brainiac suffers a seemingly similar lapse in villainous certainty when he experiences a catastrophic meltdown, only to reveal he anticipated Psimon's attack all along.**

calculating a 60 percent loss for the villains and an 80 percent loss for the heroes. When confronted with those odds, Luthor scoffs, saying even if all three earths are destroyed, there are thousands of other worlds out there, ripe for the plucking. Looks like he was serious about following through on his threat to destroy all five earths. He's happy to see villains fall too because neither he nor Brainiac want any rivals to hamper their plans. He's come a long way from *DC Comics Presents Annual* #1 where he became squeamish at the thought of losing his sister when Luthor of Earth-Two planned to destroy Earth-One and Earth-Two. As Luthor cackles with glee while watching battles take place on all three earths, a figure observes from the shadows.

In the various melees that take place on land, in the air, and at sea, Aquagirl, a.k.a. Tula, an Atlantean orphan adopted by a noble family in Poseidonis (*Aquaman* #33), falls victim to toxic waste created by Chemo. Accidentally created by scientist Ramsey Norton while attempting to sequester the chemicals from a failed experiment aimed at enlarging plants to feed the hungry (*Showcase* #39), Chemo is a semi-sentient being who can spew a wide array of hazardous chemical substances from his mouth and hands.

As Brainiac observes various battles taking place on Earth-S, which a quartet of villains have literally put on ice, he notes that although the villains have an advantage in terms of power, the heroes have cooperation on their side. Even so, the villains remain in control, with Warp teleporting Steel to parts unknown.

On Earth-X, the situation is the same, only instead of ice, Poison Ivy and Floronic Man have ensnared the Freedom Fighters in vines. The Joker flirts with Phantom Lady, but she's not having it. The Silver Ghost isn't above gloating either, saying for every hero that exists, the villains have five more on their side, ready to fight. Mr. Mind warns them they'd better call in the reinforcements then because more heroes are on their way. The newly arrived heroes fight valiantly, but Hawkman of Earth-Two is critically wounded by Dr. Phosphorus.

On Brainiac's ship, Luthor's triumphant tone wavers as he realizes the battle is evenly weighted on both sides. When he seeks assurance from Brainiac, he realizes something is terribly wrong with his mechanical host. Seconds later, Brainiac's robot body explodes. As Luthor reels in shock, the identity of the figure who has been spying in the shadows is revealed—Psimon. Apparently, this guy makes a hobby of lingering in the shadows on spaceships. First the Monitor's satellite and now here. Having overheard how expendable Luthor considered his fellow villains to be, Psimon decides to do away with Luthor instead.

Along with that cliff-hanger, this issue ends with a promise: "At last! The final fate of the multiverse!"

But wait a second. *Final* fate? Aren't there three issues left?

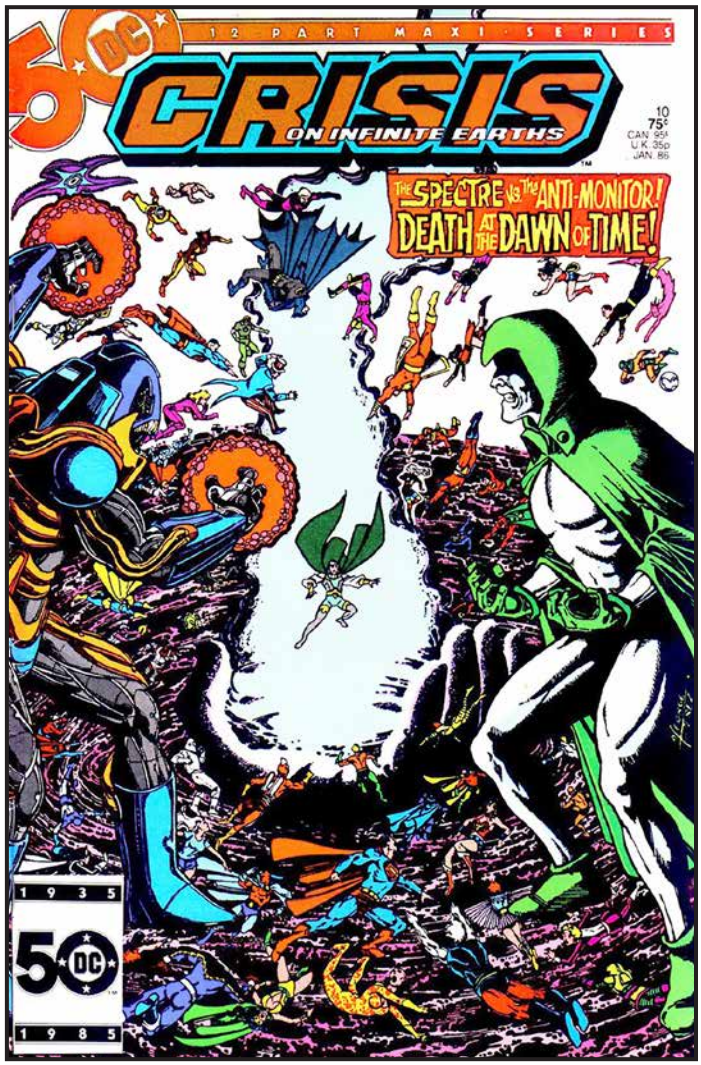
CHAPTER 22

"Death at the Dawn of Time!" — Crisis #10

The cover of *Crisis* #10 is composed in such a way that one's attention is drawn first to the Spectre's vengeful visage on the right, locked in confrontation with the Anti-Monitor on the left. Only afterward does the eye travel down to Pariah, who's suspended in the air between these two towering figures against a plume of white smoke. And only then does one realize the smoke is emanating from the mysterious hand that Krona glimpsed when he dared to peer back to the origin of existence. Further reflection reveals that the way the Spectre and the Anti-Monitor's hands are posed subtly mirrors that of the cosmic hand, raising the question of who will ultimately hold the "upper hand" in this battle for creation.

Swirling around the cosmic hand is a maelstrom of crackling pink energy. Dozens of DC's heroes—and a handful of villains—are caught up in the vortex. Some fly into it under their own power; others flail helplessly, yet again evoking the disordered poses on the cover of *Crisis* #1. There is no hierarchy here, only chaos. Titans, JSA veterans, JLA members, Freedom Fighters, and even icons like Superman all spiral together, suggesting not just physical disorientation but also a total loss of narrative grounding as this epic tale hurtles toward its conclusion. The spiraling vortex evokes thoughts of the Big Bang and a black hole, forces of destruction and creation coiled into the same cosmic moment. The implication is clear: no continuity, legacy, or character is immune from obliteration—or reinvention.

These forces are personified by the Anti-Monitor, who is attempting to erase and overwrite the multiverse from its inception, and the Spectre, a living embodiment of divine wrath who stands as the last line of defense against the Anti-Monitor's plans. They represent more than characters; they are metaphors—editorial synthesis versus narrative entropy, order versus deconstruction. And between them whirl the heroes of the DCU, caught in the gravitational pull of collapsing storylines and fractured realities. It promises not just a battle for the multiverse but a confrontation with the very concept of continuity, a final reckoning between which stories will be preserved and which ones will be sucked into oblivion.



***Crisis on Infinite Earths* #10. Super-sizing himself is something the Spectre is prone to do during crisis situations, as seen in *Justice League of America* #46 and 83, where he literally puts his body between parallel versions of Earth to prevent them from smashing together.**

The issue begins with a brief recap of Psimon gloating after his surprise attack on Brainiac. But his victory is short-lived as, in one of the most striking panels of the series, a beam of yellow light shatters the transparent dome that houses his brain, killing him. The beam came from Brainiac, who knew about Psimon's presence all along and transferred his digital self into his ship right before Psimon's attack. Luthor puts on a brave front, but the sweat pouring down his face reveals he's rattled by his close call with death, or perhaps by how ruthlessly Brainiac just eliminated a potential rival. Could Luthor be next?

A new feature introduced in this issue is "The Monitor Tapes," a black-and-white strip that runs along the bottom of the page. In it, Lyla (Harbinger) discovers that before his death, the Monitor transferred his accumulated observations to Earth, and she vows to continue his work, preserving the knowledge for posterity.

Visually, the strip is reminiscent of the first issues of *New Fun,* where the comics didn't reach the bottom of the page, leaving space for ads or filler comics like *Oswald the Rabbit*. Here, however, the space is reimagined not as an afterthought but as an additional narrative layer, a quiet undercurrent flowing beneath the chaos of the cosmic battle. Narratively, this device also allowed Wolfman and Pérez to offer a broader perspective on the scope of the crisis, documenting the fates of other worlds, realms, and characters that Wolfman couldn't find a way to fit into the main narrative. Thanagar, Mount Olympus, Starman, Immortal Man, and others are accounted for, whether marked by death or left in uncertain limbo, like Swamp Thing and Earth-Two's Hawkman. This feature also st Lyla with a platform for philosophical reflection as she contemplates the nature of heroism and the common thread that binds all intelligent life together—the drive to survive and resist tyranny. "The Monitor Tapes" could be read like a eulogy written in the margins of a dying multiverse. It's somber, reflective, and composed not to stop the collapse but to ensure that the people and places that once existed won't be forgotten. This seems to go against Wolfman's desire for no one to remember the crisis, but perhaps the Monitor Tapes was another one of his creative "back doors" that he hoped would be exploited later.



***More Fun* #7, p. 18. An example that may have inspired "The Monitor Tapes." In the early issues of More Fun, many of the comics didn't reach the bottom of the page, so a filler comic or some other feature was used to fill the empty space.**

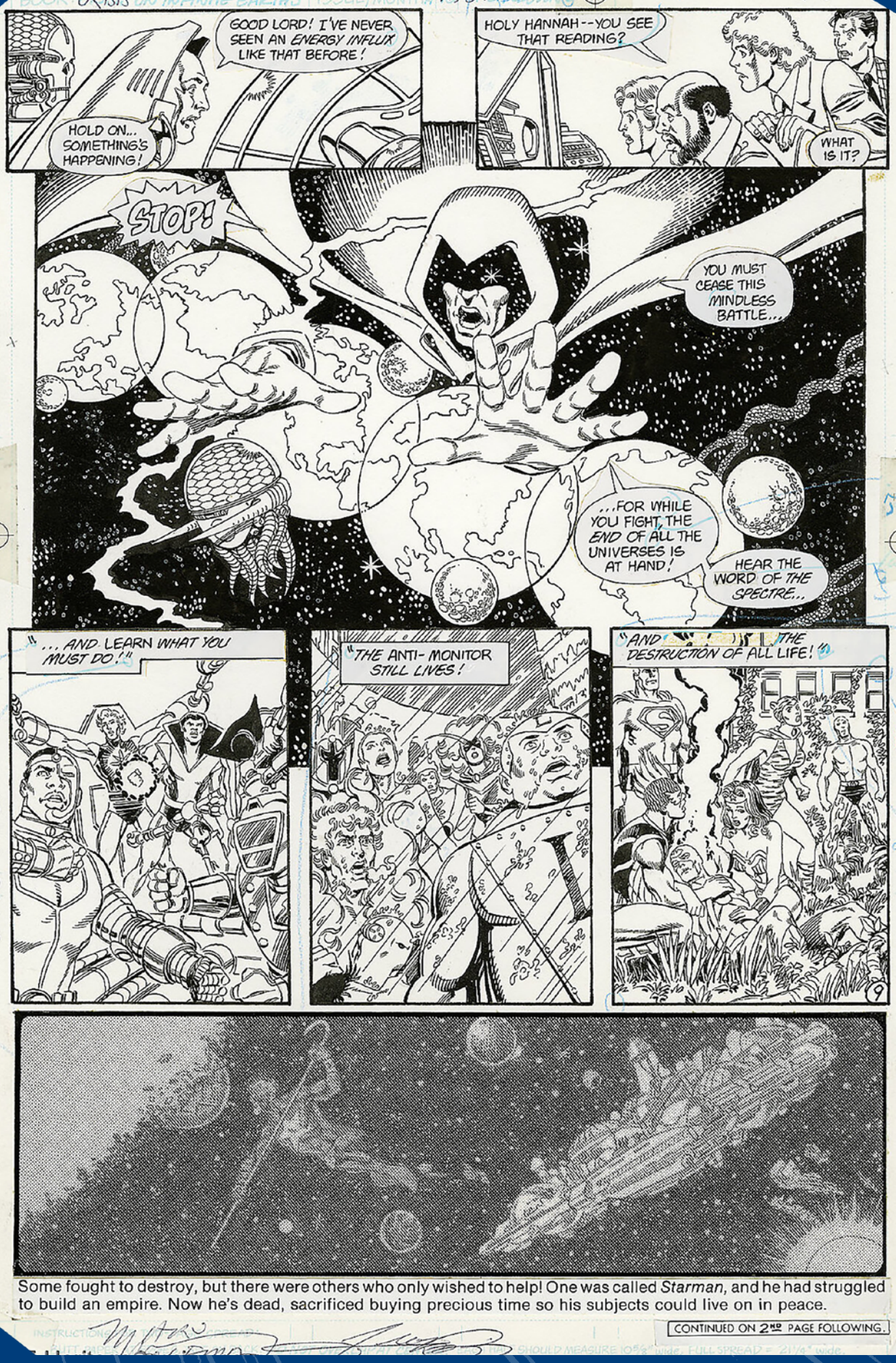
On Earth-Four, Negative Woman destroys Chemo, but she's too late to save Tula. In that world's version of New York City, Kole, Dove, and Robotman battle Black Adam while Cyborg and Celsius take on Quakemaster and another villain who is obscured by the fire spewing from Celsius's hand.

More gloating is taking place on Earth-S where the villains still have the entire Marvel family, along with Mr. Tawky Tawny, on ice. But T. O. Morrow warns his cronies not to break out the champagne just yet, as more heroes are on the way. Leading the charge are the Martian Manhunter, Platinum of the Metal Men, and the Atom from Earth-One. The Atom sets young Billy Batson free, and with one utterance of his magic word, "Shazam!", the Marvels are back in business.

On Earth-X, the tide is also turning in the heroes' favor, with members of various groups teaming up against the villains. In the commotion, Speedy—who is incorrectly colored as Green Arrow in one panel, which was fixed in later editions—seizes the opportunity to destroy Shaggy Man once he realizes the creature isn't actually alive. Like Chemo, Shaggy Man is another accidental creation. As recounted in *Justice League of America* #45, scientist Professor Andrew Zagarian was trying to develop a new plastic alloy (plastalloy) that could be used to make replacement body parts. When he tested it on an oversized body he created, it mutated into a massive, hairy, brutish beast with no intelligence, no speech, and a singular instinct—attack anything that moves!

As Luthor laments the heroes' stubborn refusal to die, the battles on all five worlds are interrupted by a tremendous energy flux, followed by a colossal apparition of the Spectre.

(opposite page) *Crisis* #10, p. 9. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Unlike the main story, "The Monitor Tapes" was a separately typeset strip meant to reproduce directly from Pérez's pencils. Improper screening turned its textures into distracting dot patterns, leaving Pérez dissatisfied.



Some fought to destroy, but there were others who only wished to help! One was called *Starman*, and he had struggled to build an empire. Now he's dead, sacrificed buying precious time so his subjects could live on in peace.

CONTINUED ON 2ND PAGE FOLLOWING.

DC Comics, Inc.

BOOK: Crisis on Infinite Earths | ISSUE/MONTH: ~~10~~ Breakdowns | STORY PAGE #~~12~~



who she? Dr Light

Jerry: 10 more pages
— at least 6 more —
Tomorrow

George —

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TWO-PAGE SPREADS: BUTT PAPER AT EDGES, TAPE ON BACK. *DO NOT OVERLAP AT CENTER!* EACH HALF SHOULD MEASURE 10⅝" wide, FULL SPREAD = 21¼" wide.

He informs villains and heroes alike that, despite appearances, the Anti-Monitor is alive and well. He's fled to the dawn of time, where he plans to ensure the positive-matter world will never come into existence, and only anti-matter will prevail. The Spectre says the only way to stop him is for half the heroes and villains to travel to the beginning of time to battle the Anti-Monitor and the other half to go to Oa where they will attempt to change history.

Making a tactical calculation, Brainiac orders a temporary truce. Soon, over a hundred heroes and villains gather in Death Valley on Earth-One in a scene that feels strangely reminiscent of the cosmic treadmill scene in the previous issue. Regardless, Death Valley is the perfect pre-apocalyptic staging ground where the most powerful beings in the multiverse gather before descending into the ultimate conflict. In mythological terms, it's akin to the plains before Ragnarök or the shore of the Styx before crossing into Hades. It's a symbolic gateway where old divisions dissolve, and all forces gather, the last remnant of the old world before the universe is remade, serving as a place of mourning and a launching pad for the most mythic confrontation in DC's history up to that point.

Characters who specialize in time travel, including Rip Hunter, the Legion of Super-Heroes, and the Lord of Time take the lead, deploying their technology to ferry everyone else to their chronal destinations. Jay Garrick and Kid Flash are also fitted with converters that will transfer their speed power to aid the effort. One wonders why they don't just use the cosmic treadmill again, but then again, that really would feel like a repeated story beat.

Away from the crowd, Superman of Earth-Two and Lois say a final, heartfelt goodbye, which is observed by Alex Luthor. It's a touching moment for the couple, but one must also imagine it from Alex's point of view. For the first time that he can recall, he's looking at his mother, or at least a reasonable facsimile of her.

Meanwhile, the other Superman confronts the Spectre, insisting that history can't be changed—an assertion grounded in hard-won experience (see *Superman* #146, for example). But the Spectre claims to have found a loophole, which involves going back to the dawn of time. His rebuttal is left unchallenged in the text, but it warrants a closer examination here.

First, even if the heroes arrive at the moment "before time began," they will still move, strategize, and act in chronological sequence. Therefore, by definition, time will still be unfolding—at least in a subjective sense. Cause-and-effect cannot function without temporality. So, it's a contradiction to claim they've escaped time while still participating in a linear sequence of events. This is a familiar science-fiction paradox: invoking a "timeless" setting while adhering to narrative logic that depends on the passage of time. The Spectre's supposed loophole is that history can be rewritten at a point prior to its emergence, but even that explanation requires temporal language to describe it. Such a move may be a narrative necessity, but it's far from logically satisfying, which is probably why it's given such short shrift on the page.

In the midst of the preparations, a surprise visitor appears—Superboy of Earth-Prime, who was last seen disappearing into a cosmic vortex at the end of *DC Comics Presents* #87 (covered later). No explanation is given for where he went after that or how he arrived here—indeed, not even Superboy knows—but as Earth-Prime's last survivor, he's determined to join the team. Considering that he was created as "a final parallel worlds gimmick introduced with a wink by Julius Schwartz," as an editorial note in *Who's Who* #23 said, it's not surprising that no attempt was made to work out the logic of his sudden arrival.

Following a cornball speech from Uncle Sam about freedom, the moment arrives to power up the time-travel devices. With Gold from the Metal Men linking them all together, the power is generated by the electrical-based characters, the magnetism-based characters, and the speed-based characters.





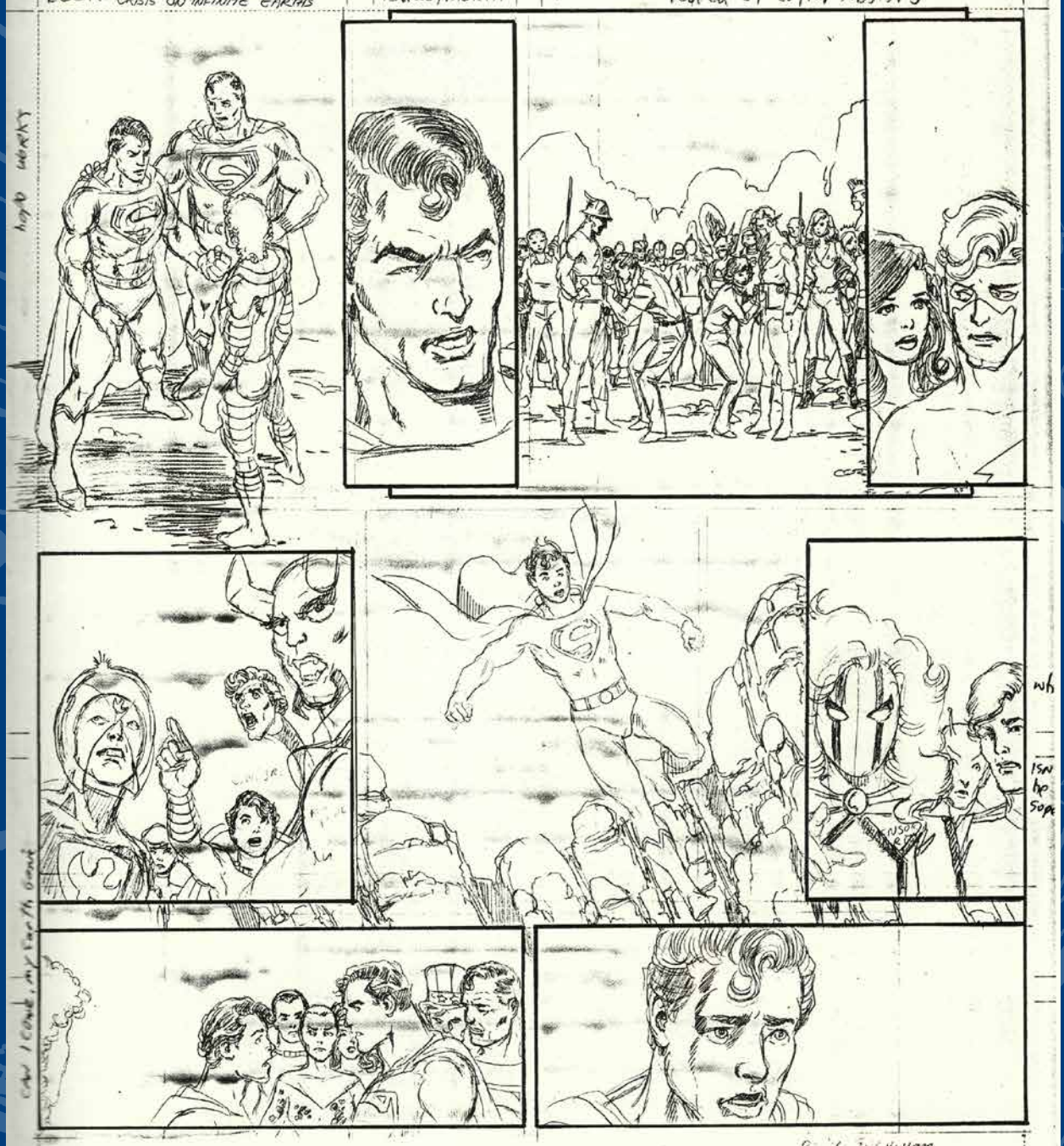
Sanda (top) from *War of the Gargantuas* (1966), a creature similar to Shaggy Man, who debuted that same year. "Aeneas and the Sibyl" (bottom) by John Martin (c. 1795–1805), which features the banks of the river Styx, the boundary of, Hades, separating the land of the living from the shadowy abode of the dead in Greek mythology.

(opposite page) *Crisis* #10, p. 12 pencils. Scanned from the *Crisis 35th Anniversary Deluxe Edition*. Alexander Luthor sees what might have been when he observes a tender moment between Lois and Clark, the loss of his own parents triggering a mental breakdown years later.

DC Comics, Inc.

STORY PAGE #: 13

BOOK: CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS | ISSUE/MONTH: 10 - Breakdowns Hooked UP (by RIP'S ASSIST)



INSTRUCTIONS FOR TWO-PAGE SPREAD:
CUT PAPER AT EDGES, TAPE ON BACK. DO NOT OVERLAP AT CENTER! EACH HALF SHOULD MEASURE 10⅝" wide. FULL SPREAD = 21¼" wide.

As Wally runs, we learn that the problem Lyla mentioned in the previous issue isn't just a matter of him slowing down. The faster he goes, the faster he's killing himself. And yet, if there's one thing he's learned in all his years, "it's that some things are more important than your own life." On a more selfish note, Brainiac places his own odds of survival at 0.00436 percent.

While the launch is taking place, we go "beneath the seven seas" where we learn Tula has succumbed to her injuries. As Aqualad grieves, he says with so many heroes assembled, surely someone has the power to bring her back to life, but Lori Lamaris tells him no one has that ability. Clearly, she hasn't read *Justice League of America* #123, where the Spectre's plea to his master revives the deceased members of the JSA after the JLAers accidentally kill them. If only he wasn't occupied with more pressing matters.

The Lord of Time's ship is the first to leave, traveling to Oa ten billion years ago, right before Krona is to conduct his forbidden experiment. Other characters, such as Superman of Earth-One, travel under their own steam, though they are essentially surfing the wave of electromagnetic energy created by the others. Superman is carrying Alex Luthor, who's desperate to get to the dawn of time first, so he can open the door to the anti-matter universe.

That isn't necessary, though, because when they arrive at the dawn of time, which is represented as the ultimate blank page, "this nothingness, this time before time, before thought, before creation," the Anti-Monitor is there waiting for them. At this stage in the process, not having to draw backgrounds would have been a relief to Pérez, but it was also a logical narrative choice.

Pariah, suspended in a glowing field between the Anti-Monitor's hands, pleads with the heroes to retreat, only to reverse course, urging them to strike instead. In the process, he accepts full responsibility for reviving the Anti-Monitor, claiming his failed experiment so many eons ago was the spark that unleashed the destroyer of the multiverse. However, the Anti-Monitor mocks this confession. "Did you truly believe mere scientific investigation could unleash forces great enough to destroy a universe?" According to him, Pariah's experiment only opened the anti-matter portal to the dawn of time. Once that gateway was breached, the Anti-Monitor harnessed the anti-matter energy released by that contact, growing stronger until he could break free from his ancient prison. This contradicts what we learned earlier, which was that absorbing the power of Pariah's universe is what gave the Anti-Monitor his first taste of what could be his if he could conquer the entire multiverse.

Pariah takes this as exoneration, and surprisingly, Lady Quark agrees. But the logic doesn't hold. The Anti-Monitor may have gained the power on his own, but if Pariah hadn't breached the barrier between their worlds, that power would have remained dormant. However unintentional, his experiment was the key that unlocked multiversal annihilation. Therefore, Pariah's hands are far from clean.

As the super-powered beings attack, Robin stands among a group of non-powered beings and asks, logically enough, what they can do. "We can share our courage," Batman replies. "We can give them hope." That seems like a rather lame excuse for putting themselves in such a perilous situation. Couldn't they have done more good fighting the inevitable crime wave that would erupt back home once word got out that all the superheroes were gone?

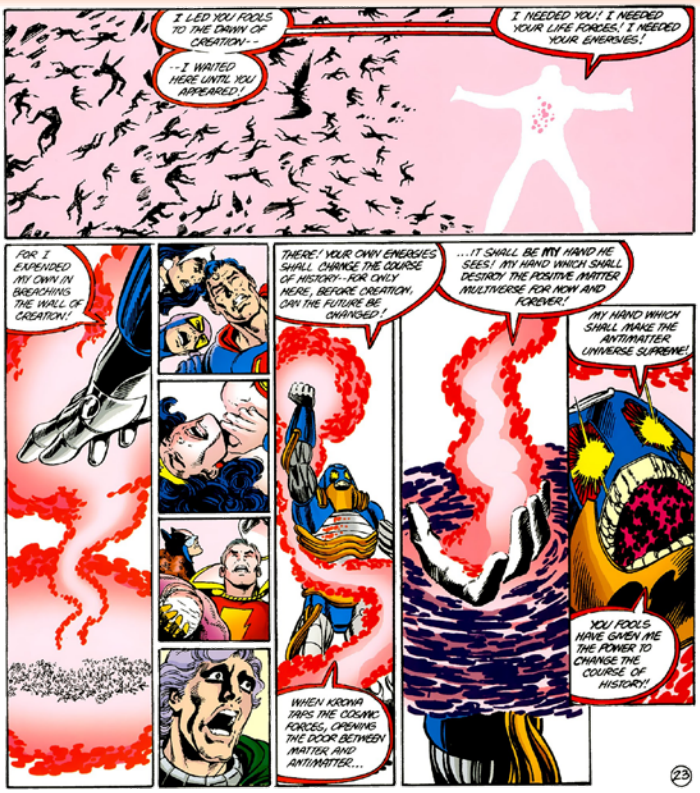
On Oa, a group of villains attacks, determined to prevent Krona from conducting the experiment that created the multiverse and birthed the anti-matter universe. But this raises a key question: isn't this mission redundant, given what the heroes are attempting to accomplish at the dawn of time? More importantly, if the narrative has just established that history cannot be changed except at the dawn of time, then this detour to Oa is a blatant contradiction of the in-story logic that Wolfman just established. They are attempting to change the past from within the timeline, something *Crisis* itself (and 50 years of DC's history) insists is futile. Even if they could succeed, that would mean doing away with the multiverse, which would mean many of these same characters would cease to exist, which means their attempt to stop Krona and the Anti-Monitor at the dawn of time could never happen in the first place.

Logical contradictions aside, thanks to the Oans' superior mental powers, the attack is doomed to fail, as they easily dispatch the villains. Not even Maaldor, who has supposedly absorbed the power of an entire universe (see *DC Comics Presents* #15), can stand against them. Krona himself executes Maaldor in an explosion that also takes out Mirror Master and the Icicle.

At the dawn of time, the Anti-Monitor reveals that he lured the heroes there to absorb their life forces, having exhausted his own energy breaching the wall of creation. Unfortunately, this claim introduces yet another contradiction. According to the narrative, all it took for the heroes to reach that primordial point was the pooling of their electromagnetic and speed powers, an effort that was difficult but not catastrophic. Yet moments later as they launch their assault, the narration tells us that "combined, their powers could decimate a solar system. But the Anti-Monitor has absorbed the total energy of his entire universe." Furthermore, he hasn't just absorbed the total energy from his universe; he's absorbed it from *every* positive-matter universe he's annihilated, at least a thousand of them. So, which is it? If the Anti-Monitor wields the power of countless destroyed realities, why would he need to lure comparatively weaker beings to the dawn of time, so he can use their relatively puny power to refuel? And if breaching the dawn of time required such extraordinary effort on his part, how did the heroes pull it off using far less power than the Anti-Monitor possesses? The math doesn't add up. Unless the real energy he craves isn't physical but symbolic. By luring the icons of the DCU to the beginning of creation, maybe

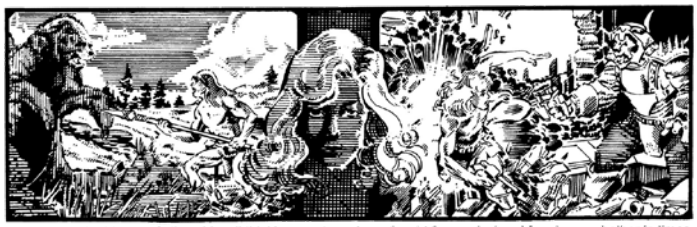
(opposite page) Crisis #10, p. 13. Scanned from the *Crisis 35th Anniversary Deluxe Edition*. This stripped-down version of the page, including only Pérez's pencils reveals how many layers—backgrounds, inks, colors, and lettering—to create the dramatic impact of the finished product.







Hawkman of Earth-2 was also an immortal; the reincarnation of Khufu—an Egyption Prince. But now this valiant hero is dying, wounded in the villain war. Monitor, I pray there's still life for him in his godson's land of Feithera.



Throughout the history of all worlds, all thinking creatures have fought for survival and freedom—whether in times when they battled with little more than stone, or when their enemies possessed weapons far greater than theirs.

***Crisis* #10, p. 19 (left) and p. 23 (right). Is Pariah guilty for awakening the Anti-Monitor and initiating the crisis or isn't he? The Anti-Monitor himself seems to absolve Pariah in this scene, but a careful reconsideration of his explanation doesn't quite let Pariah off the hook.**

instead of absorbing their raw strength, he's consuming the symbolic power they represent. "The menace we deal with is one of emotion," the Monitor told Lyla near the start of this story. Could feelings be what ultimately fuels his rival? Geoff Johns, who expanded the power of the emotional spectrum substantially in the *Blackest Night* (2009–2010) storyline—which included the Anti-Monitor—would no doubt agree.

With the Anti-Monitor having seized the heroes' combined power, all that remains is for Krona to activate his viewer. When he gazes back at the dawn of time, it will be the Anti-Monitor's hand he sees, emerging from a vortex of swirling energy, poised to make the anti-matter universe supreme.

Why the Anti-Monitor needs Krona to witness this moment remains murky. As critic R. A. Jones asks, "Are we to believe the only way he can create a totally anti-matter universe is by having Krona watch him?"[196] If observation is the mechanism of creation, then the Anti-Monitor's plan hinges not on action but on being seen carrying out that action, a metafictional flourish that places the fate of the universe in the eye of the observer, i.e., the comic book reader, a metatextual flourish that Grant Morrison exploited in later years. This parallels the "observer effect" in the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, where a quantum system does not take on definite properties until it is measured, existing until then only as an infinite waveform of possibilities.

In a final clash that echoes his first confrontation with the Monitor, the Anti-Monitor and the Spectre unleash their full power in a mutually annihilating explosion of energy. The Spectre screams in agony, seemingly doomed once more to die while trying to save worlds that can never quite be salvaged (see *Justice League of America* #47 and 74). "And from the dawn of creation … comes death," a caption declares. "It is the end of all that was. To be continued … ?"

It's a fitting question since this was, at one point, meant to be the end of the series, with the latter two issues taken up by *The History of the DC Universe*. But fear not! We haven't seen the end of the Spectre, the Anti-Monitor, or *Crisis* just yet.

196 Jones, 107.

CHAPTER 23

"Aftershock"—Crisis #11

The cover for *Crisis* #11 may seem like nothing but a pastiche of scenes from the story itself, as if Pérez and Wolfman were running out of ideas this late in the series, so they threw everything at the wall. But a closer look reveals a narrative resonance that captures the in-story climax and the extratextual themes of this story.

The top image shows a desperate scene as Jay Garrick and the Earth-Two Superman struggle to stop the Earth-Two Superman from falling into a black void while Kid Flash clings to their makeshift platform. This vignette reminds us of the precariousness of existence as the multiverse collapses. No one—not even multiple Supermen—can escape this unraveling reality, and at least one of them may succumb to it. That Jay Garrick, one of the key players in DC's "first" multiversal story, serves as the anchor to the Men of Steel is fitting. Wally's ambiguous position on the sidelines reflects his character's uncertain fate. Will the mysterious force that's consuming him cause him to burn out, or will he step into Barry Allen's legacy?

Below and to the left is a scene of the Earth-One Wonder Woman facing her Earth-Two counterpart, which dramatizes a key narrative motif of this series—duplication. Two versions of the same hero meet, signaling the impending consolidation of timelines and characters. As Hawkman of Earth-Two laments in *Last Days of the Justice Society Special* #1, "When Earth-One, Earth-Two, and so many other earths became one, we in turn became, in a very real sense … redundant." It's a moment of confrontation and perhaps mourning as we realize one of them must go—or in this case, both of them. Similar to Kid Flash in the previous image, Wonder Girl and Fury (daughter of Earth-Two's Wonder Woman), representing the next generation of heroes, look on to see how the conflict will be resolved.

To the right, chaos reigns. It looks as if Amethyst, Princess of Gemworld, has been branded a witch, held aloft by a frenzied mob as Dr. Occult, Doctor Fate, and Etrigan the Demon swoop in to save her. This panel reminds us that while cosmic forces clash in the heavens, fear and violence



***Crisis on Infinite Earths* #11. Rather than promising a last heroic clash, this cover fixates on aftermath. The gathered figures stand not as combatants but as witnesses, confronting the consequences of the crisis, shifting the emphasis from battle to reckoning.**

continue to ripple across the ground. The image turns human terror into a visual metaphor, showing how ordinary people react when reality itself breaks down. It doesn't take long until the hunt for a scapegoat begins.

The bottom panel presents one of the most emotionally charged images on this cover: Earth-Two's Robin and Huntress clinging to each other while staring at an off-panel threat, an image that foreshadows their imminent deaths. Their posture suggests not just fear but helplessness in the face of annihilation. Around them, heroes from across the five surviving Earths (along with Lady Quark) react with shock, grief, and horror. The convergence of eras and worlds in this moment underscores the final collapse of continuity. A universe once rich with divergent timelines and mythologies is being compressed into one, and it's terrifying even for those who will survive the merger.

At the center of it all is Harbinger, her face hovering over Earth as she gazes down with passive resolve. Her positioning suggests her central role in what's to follow as witness, messenger, and fulcrum of the multiverse's destiny. And let's not forget Brainiac's ship floating in space behind her, suggesting the villains' role in this story isn't over yet.

Taken together, the images offer far more than a recap. It's a visual thesis that provides a farewell to multiplicity and a signal of the painful rebirth to come. Through layered composition and emotional gravitas, Pérez delivers a collage that mirrors the series' lofty ambition to bring order to the infinite while also mourning what must be sacrificed in the process.

The story opens by revisiting the creation narrative that began issue #1, even reusing some of the same language. The first panel is pure black. In the second, a star-shaped light emerges at the center. The third panel mirrors its counterpart from issue #1—an explosive burst of fiery orbs—but this time they represent stars and planets rather than entire universes. The final panel reveals not a sprawling multiverse but a single Earth. While the structure of the sequence is nearly identical to the original, this version inverts its meaning. What began as a cosmic multiplication has now contracted into a singularity.

As a callback to issue #1, the sequence is understandable, echoing the form of the opening to reinforce the contrast. But it also feels like a missed opportunity to visually embody the narrative's core premise, which is about consolidation, not expansion. The original creation myth was about chaotic creative energy exploding into an infinite number of parallel worlds—a narrative Big Bang. But *Crisis* is about a collapse, fusion, and compression of narrative possibilities into a single streamlined continuity. The art, however, still leans toward explosion and spectacle rather than convergence. Even though issue #10 ended in a cataclysmic clash between the Spectre and the Anti-Monitor, this moment called for imagery evoking the Big Crunch rather than the Big Bang, as multiple realities fold into one. Instead, Pérez and Wolfman merely presented another detonation, then declared that only one Earth remained. As in the original creation sequence,

(opposite page) *Crisis* #11, p. 7. One of the most arresting images of the entire series is the attempt to return to Earth-Two, only to discover a void in its place, signaling that whatever has happened to the multiverse, the consequences appear to be irreversible.

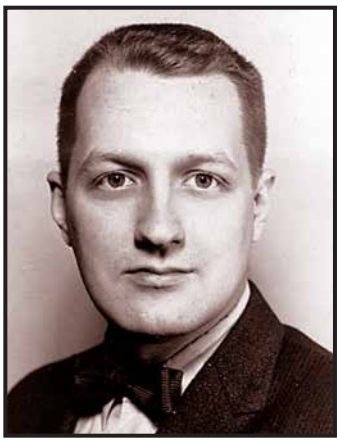
where an uncontrolled burst somehow resulted in a series of neatly aligned parallel worlds, this redux skips the process and jumps straight to the conclusion. Once again we're left wondering: how did we get from there to here? The emotional and metaphysical weight of what was lost when timelines and realities merged is obscured by this visual shorthand. The text tells us everything has changed, but this crucial moment stops short of showing us how it happened.

From there we proceed to one of the best sequences in the series. Superman of Earth-Two wakes up at home, thinking he's had a terrible dream. He walks to work in a daze, wondering if maybe it's time to consider retirement. When he enters the office of what he assumes to be the *Daily Star,* reading a paper to catch up on the latest news, the other employees give him strange looks, especially when he enters what he assumes to be his office.

That illusion is punctured by the shouting voice of *Daily Planet* editor Perry White who demands to know what Clark is doing in his chair. Only then does Clark realize he's on Earth-One, not his homeworld. Thankfully, the other Clark Kent arrives in time to save the day, passing off his elder lookalike as his uncle and implying that Clark inflated his role at the *Daily Planet* to impress him.

Problem solved, or so they think, the two Supermen set off for the warp zone, so Kal-L can return home, but when they get there, the warp zone is gone. Not only that, Kal-El informs his fellow Kryptonian that although people know Supergirl died, they don't know how, and they have no recollection of the strange weather anomalies that have been plaguing the planet.

Mystified, they approach a nearby policeman who identifies himself as Jerry Thomas, no rank mentioned. This may seem like an odd inclusion, but this name is actually an amalgam of fan-turned-writer Roy Thomas and "Father of Comic Book Fandom" Jerry Bails. As two of the key figures



Jerry Bails (1933–2006), the "Father of Comic Book Fandom." His scholarship, fanzines, and relentless enthusiasm helped legitimize the comic book collecting. A Justice Society devotee, he championed Golden Age heroes, organized fandom around them, indexed DC's creators, and was honored in the book *Fifty Who Made DC Great* in 1985.

DC Comics, Inc.



who helped formalize comic book culture and community in its early days—and Thomas's role as a "continuity cop"—it seemed fitting to include a nod to them at this pivotal point in DC's history. Then again, considering Bails' obsession with *All-Star Comics* and Thomas' fixation on Earth-Two characters, it's ironic that Jerry Thomas doesn't recognize the Earth-Two Superman, asking, "Didn't he get that 'S' insignia all wrong?"

The men of steel head to Central City, hoping to use the Flash's cosmic treadmill to get Kal-L to Earth-Two, but when they arrive, a sign welcomes them to "The Twin Cities of Central and Keystone." Once again, the Earth-One locale gets top billing, even though Keystone City came first. Stranger still, when they arrive, they find not Barry Allen's house but Jay Garrick's. Jay's wife, Joan—who for some reason is barbecuing T-bone steaks in the morning—doesn't recognize Kal-L, but Jay does. What's going on?

The three of them go to Jay's home laboratory to confer, where they find Wally West working on the cosmic treadmill. Jay explains that people remember Barry Allen and his trial, but they say Jay has lived there all his life too. All four heroes are confused. What earth are they on? To find out, they decide to take a trip on the treadmill. But when they hit the speed and vibration rate that should take them to Earth-Two, there's nothing there but a black void. This triggers a version of the scene we saw on the cover, only now we learn that Kal-L was in peril because he makes a suicidal plunge into the abyss, figuring if his world and Lois no longer exist, why should he? Jay reaches a similar conclusion about his world's nonexistence—sans the suicidal tendencies. And in true Flash form, he makes a huge leap of logic based on Earth-Two's absence to conclude that the same thing must have happened to all the other parallel worlds too. "Nothing exists but one Earth … one universe!"

With Kal-El clutching Kal-L's cape, the Flashes hit the gas on the treadmill to head "home," wherever that is now. When they arrive, for some reason the cosmic treadmill is destroyed, "this time beyond repair," Wally notes, kiboshing any further attempts to test Jay's theory about the fate of the other earths. Perhaps Wolfman was hoping we'd forget that Jay doesn't need the treadmill to travel between worlds, and Wally may not either, depending on where his speed powers are at. Furthermore, Kal-El has been known to travel interdimensionally without the aid of technology too. And couldn't they track down that world's Julie Schwartz and give him a shopping list of new parts (see *The Flash* #179), so they could build a new treadmill? Before they carry out any further investigations, Wally suggests they call in the other heroes for an emergency meeting.

Meanwhile in the timestream, Rip Hunter and a motley crew that includes the Atomic Knight, Adam Strange, Captain Comet, Dolphin, and Animal Man are confused too. Captain Comet notes that time is realigned



The pilot (right) from the movie *Alien* (1979), who met his demise courtesy the chest-bursting "Xenomorph." Yet another recent pop culture reference that pops up in in *Crisis*. Such riffing is like an homage to DC's long tradition of borrowing from other comics and cultural works.

(whatever that means) and Animal Man says he recalls battling the Monitor (not the Anti-Monitor), only to find himself back in bed with his (Animal Man's) wife. The others have all had a similar experience, which begs the question of how they ended up in Rip Hunter's time bubble, seeing as these heroes haven't been known to collaborate before. Did they all travel together in Hunter's time bubble to fight the Anti-Monitor? Even if they did, Animal Man and Hunter have interacted with others between that event and the present moment, so did they reassemble afterward?

While they're trying to sort out what's happening, they spot Brainiac's ship and decide to investigate. Once on board, they realize the ship itself is alive, but when they find Brainiac's robot body, it's anything but. The panel that depicts their discovery of Brainiac is a dead ringer for a scene from the movie *Alien* (1979) where the crew of the USS *Nostromo* finds the pilot whose spacecraft crashed on planet LV-426 and was killed by a Xenomorph or "chest burster" alien.

The other heroes assemble at Titan's Tower, where everyone shares a similar story of trying to return to their homeworld, only to discover it doesn't exist. "It appears as if only one Earth exists," Lady Quark remarks in case anyone still doesn't get it.

"A new Earth … one which combines parts of all the others which came before," Pariah adds for good measure.

The meeting is interrupted by Harbinger, who has inexplicably regained her powers even though the machine that gave them to her was destroyed along with the Monitor's satellite. Not only that, she also claims

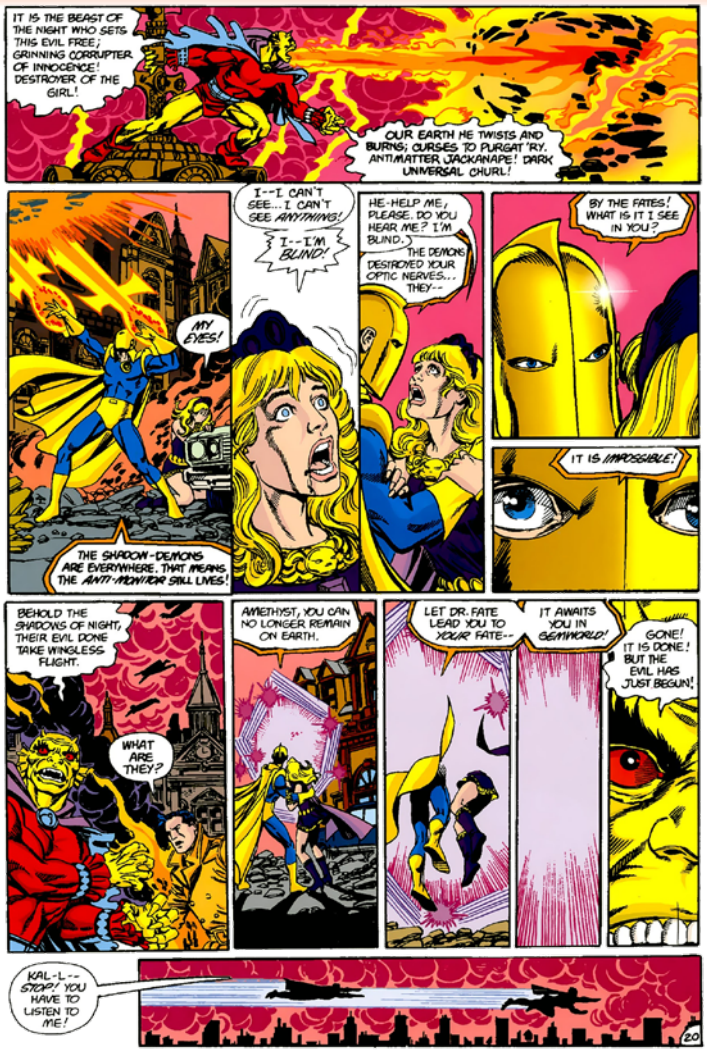
to have summoned everyone there, despite the fact that the heroes are surprised to see her, and they seem to have assembled of their own accord. She explains that in the rebirth of the universe, many things have changed. For example, because Kal-L existed before the remnants of the multiverse were consolidated, he still exists, but his world does not. Other characters who no longer have a home chime in, including Superboy of Earth-Prime. "What about my Earth?" he asks. "It never existed, either? How's that possible?" This is a strange conclusion to draw from Harbinger's words. For one thing, he already knew his universe had been destroyed, but how does he leap from that to his universe having never existed?

Huntress and Robin of Earth-Two tell similar tales of woe, describing how there is no record of their presence on this reformed world. When they ask Harbinger why, she explains that in the battle with the Anti-Monitor, a single universe was reborn. Giving us another preview of *The History of the DC Universe,* she summarizes the flow of history up to the present as it followed a single timeline, which favors Earth-One's version of events. Why that is or how she learned of it is unclear. Unable to handle the revelation, which means Lois is gone for good, Kal-L flies off in a fit of grief and rage, and Kal-El gives chase, hoping to console him.

In an unknown mystical location, shrouded by roiling black clouds and lightning, the Phantom Stranger and Deadman stand over the Spectre's unconscious body. It seems the battle to save reality isn't quite over yet, and the Spectre is the only one with the power to achieve victory, but how are they going to wake him?

At a detectives' convention in Las Vegas, Detective Harvey Bullock, Angel O'Day, Johnny Double, Jonni Thunder, and Christopher Chance (all of whom are wearing name tags, which is thoughtful considering how obscure some of them are) discover a mysterious smoking corpse in a hotel room. Jonni extracts a triangle from the carnage, and Bullock identifies it as belonging to Angle Man, a member of Wonder Woman's rogues' gallery. The series never returns to this subplot, and seeing as Angle Man's death occurs off panel, we can only speculate about the cause. But considering the angler's origin on Apokolips, it could be that Angle Man's attempt to use it during the multiversal realignment created an explosion. Even if it did, this subplot is never addressed again, and this scene feels like a weak attempt to shoehorn some of DC's detective characters into the story.

At his tower in Salem, Doctor Fate is with Etrigan the Demon when he conjures a vision of Amethyst being seized by a mob, with the people accusing her of being a witch who brought the shadow demons. Dr. Occult shows up to save her, using the mystic symbol of the Seven to calm the crowd. As comics historian Jonathan Woodward points out, "Prior to *Crisis,* Doc had made exactly one

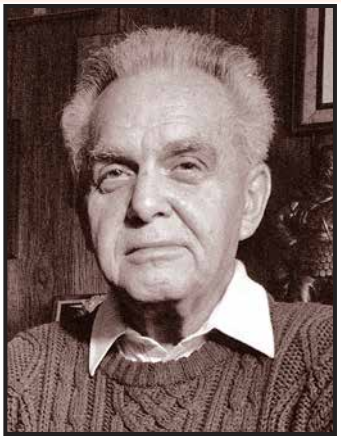


***Crisis* #11, p. 20. When Amethyst is struck blind during the shadow demons' attack, what appears to be an affliction is recognized as a sign of something much more epic, a new development that goes to the heart of DC's revised cosmology, a thread that's picked up in *Amethyst* #13.**

appearance (in *All-Star Squadron* #49) since 1938. Remarkably, he plays a significant role in *Crisis*."[197]

No sooner does he save her than the shadow demons return. Amethyst tries to stop the demons, who kill everything they touch, but a terrible explosion renders her blind. Doctor Fate and the Demon join the fight, and when Doctor Fate looks into Amethyst's sightless eyes, he sees something he can't believe. Realizing she can no longer remain on Earth, he spirits her away to Gemworld, a storyline that's picked up in *Amethyst* #13, which we will examine later. "Gone, it is done, but the evil has just begun," the Demon says, sticking to his tradition of rhyming couplets (a feature that was added *after* Jack Kirby's original run on his eponymous series, which ran for 16 issues from 1972–1974). If the shadow demons

197 https://crisisonearthprime.com/coie/coie11/



Jack Kirby (1917–1994) transformed DC in the 1970s by unleashing the Fourth World—Darkseid, the New Gods, Mister Miracle, and the Forever People—then adding OMAC, Kamandi, and Etrigan, the Demon. His cosmic scale, explosive design, mythic imagination, and surreal storytelling expanded what DC stories and characters could be.

are back, that means the Anti-Monitor is still alive somewhere too.

Kal-El catches up to Kal-L, and like a comic book fan who can't accept the loss of the multiverse that *Crisis* has created, Kal-L insists he no longer has a place in this world, especially without Lois. "It seems only those of us who stood at the dawn of time remember there was ever a multiverse," Kal-El says, trying to console him. "It will take time to forget." Could this have been Wolfman's way of trying to console disgruntled readers? If so, perhaps it's an appropriate time to reflect on the old saying: "They say time heals all sorrow and helps us to forget, but time has only proven how much we miss you yet."

Wonder Girl tells the other heroes about her recent experience on Paradise Island where Wonder Woman of Earth-Two and Fury showed up, only to realize the Hippolyta who survived the crisis isn't her mother, and Hippolyta has no knowledge of a duplicate version of her daughter.

Power Girl is also confused, wondering why people have forgotten Kal-L, but they remember her and Jade. Batman, Robin, and Alexander show up in time to answer that question. They've just returned from thanking Lex Luthor for helping them against the Anti-Monitor, but Luthor scoffed at them, having no recollection of doing so. As if seeking to surpass Jay Garrick's logical leap, Batman jumps from this revelation to conclude that the multiverse was reborn as a single universe with only one version of most people, excluding those who were present at the dawn of time. "Only the guys who fought Monny at the dawn of time remembered the confusin' good ol' days," Changeling observes, which makes one wonder why he doesn't say "Anti-Monny."

There's no time to deal with such considerations, though, because just then, the red skies and wacky weather return, sweeping across the globe. In some cases, it's accompanied by shadow demons, which only those who were at the dawn of time remember. Even Gorilla City is hit, and the anomalies show up 3,000 miles underground where renowned spelunker Cave Carson and his team are exploring.



"Jonah Spat Up by the Whale" by Johannes Sadeler I (c. 1582). A reluctant prophet who is ordered by God to issue a warning to his enemies, Jonah's refusal brings a curse upon his ship, and he is tossed overboard, then swallowed by a whale, in which he remains for three days.

Back in Titan's Tower, Pariah feels the tug of evil again, but this time he doesn't disappear, and Alexander Luthor's body reverts back to part anti-matter.

In outer space, a "yawning maw" opens in the universe, and Earth is eclipsed by a black shadow. "Suddenly, it is gone, swallowed whole, a cosmic Jonah lost to some inter-universal whale." Readers in the 1980s were probably biblically literate enough to pick up the reference to the Old Testament story of Jonah being swallowed by a whale after refusing to deliver a prophecy to his enemies, the Ninevites. As for modern readers, it may prompt a quick Google search.

On the rooftop where they're having their heart-to-heart, the two Supermen look up at the black sky. "We're no longer in the positive matter universe," Kal-L says, possibly recognizing the anti-matter universe from his recent trip there. As if to confirm his worst fears, a huge image of the Anti-Monitor's face appears against a backdrop of stars and floating rocks. "Welcome to my universe!" he says. "Welcome to your doom!"

CHAPTER 24

"Final Crisis"—Crisis #12

The cover of *Crisis* #12 is a masterwork of Pérezian composition, detail, character acting, and mythic imagery. At its center looms the Anti-Monitor, now transformed into a towering, mechanical god of destruction. His gaping pink maw is like a black hole, threatening to devour not just the heroes who are attacking him from nearly every angle but the very fabric of reality itself. The heroes' bright, saturated colors blaze against the grayscale cityscape in the background like a flash of defiance in the face of the encroaching void. This is not just a fight between good and evil; it's a last stand against a singular, erasing force. Each hero represents a different narrative thread from DC's multiverse, now converging in desperate unity against a common enemy. Ever the fanboy, Pérez gives even obscure characters a moment of resistance before they vanish into post-Crisis oblivion. Some are already caught in the Anti-Monitor's grip, his hands no longer the open symbols of creation but the closed fists of oppression.

The cover is both a funeral and a celebration, a farewell to the contradictory sprawl of DC's multiverse and a cosmic Ragnarök rendered in four-color fury. By staging an all-out war on the Anti-Monitor's seemingly invulnerable shell, Pérez literalized the war over DC's soul. On one level, the heroes are hurling themselves at a villain, but they're also battling the machinery of editorial control. They're fighting to live, to have their stories be remembered. In this way, Pérez did more than illustrate; he also eulogized, commemorated, and critiqued in one blazing, chaotic composition. The result is a perfect distillation of *Crisis,* a battle not just for survival but for meaning, memory, and legacy.

The story opens on board Brainiac's ship where Rip Hunter and co. make two startling discoveries. First, "New Earth" is no longer where it's supposed to be, and second, Brainiac is still very much alive. Like the other villains, he has no recollection of helping the heroes defeat the Anti-Monitor, but when he confirms they're not lying, he consults with his ship and learns the truth. Realizing he lacks the power to confront the Anti-Monitor on his own, he sets a course for someone who might be able to help.



***Crisis on Infinite Earths* #12. Ever the perfectionist, George Pérez penciled and inked the cover to this issue, which is a tremendous achievement considering how detailed it is and how tight the production schedule for *Crisis* was.**

We return to New Earth, which is surrounded by a force field to prevent anyone from leaving as an enormous image of the Anti-Monitor's face looms in the sky. His voice booms a warning, complaining how a thousand universes before theirs perished (a number Harbinger referenced yet again in her recounting of the new Earth's history in the last issue), but all those victories are meaningless because this one world won't give up. But he declares it's going to die, just like Supergirl and the Flash. This is the first confirmation anyone has had that the Flash is dead. Wally West, the character who's closest to him, responds with a predictable level of anguish. The Anti-Monitor finishes with a final warning that his warriors are everywhere, and they can't be stopped, then the swirling pink sky turns to black.

As the two Supermen try to figure out what that means, Harbinger shows up to recruit them for a final mission. It seems she's split into her component parts again because another version of her recruits the new Dr. Light in Japan. Is her division into component parts the first hint that the multiverse hasn't quite disappeared yet either?

In the process we get a cameo from Japanese hero Sunburst, a.k.a. movie star Takeo Sato, who arrived late in the pre-*Crisis* DCU in the pages of *New Adventures of Superboy* #45 (1983). Like many international heroes created in the early 1980s, Sunburst was part of DC's effort to reflect a more diverse, global superhero community, though such characters were rarely developed in depth. But at least this solar-powered character gets his "moment in the sun" here.



"First day of creation: God creates heaven and earth" (c. 1581–1656) by Nicolaes de Bruyn. While creation "ex nihilo" (creation from nothing) is how such stories are often depicted, such myths more often involve establishing order from chaos through a separation of elements.

We return to a version of the creation sequence that opened issue #11, starting with two black panels, then a star-shaped burst of light. But in a clever twist, instead of the creation of a new world, these panels herald the destruction of the sole remaining earth when the darkness is revealed to be millions of shadow demons.

The Challengers of the Unknown are the first to recognize what's afoot. Imbued with more power than ever, shadow demons annihilate each person they touch. In city after city across the world, on land, in the sea, and in the air, the heroes fight back. This allows for more cameos from DC's international heroes across Asia, Europe, and South America, but even with their help, the world is overwhelmed by the sheer number of attackers.

A subplot is brewing in the unknown realm where DC's magic users are attempting to resuscitate the Spectre. But for some reason it seems the Spectre is resisting them. Maybe he's finally had enough of growing to an enormous size and wrapping his arms around the planet, only to be blasted to smithereens.

Harbinger has assembled a final "great fifteen" (along with Alexander Luthor and Pariah) to break through the barrier that's surrounding Earth and attack the Anti-Monitor. Why she keeps returning to this number is unknown. Even though she's addressing both Supermen, Captain Marvel, Superboy, and Wonder Woman, she feels led to make a disclaimer that the members of this group may not be as powerful as some others. Is she referring to the magic users—Alan Scott included—who are sidelined in their efforts to revive the Spectre, or is she talking about some other notable absences, like the Green Lanterns from Earth-One and Jay Garrick? Jade makes an excuse for her father, noting his ring is mystical, not scientific, which means it won't have any effect in the anti-matter universe. But seeing as her powers were inherited from the same Starheart energy, wouldn't that sideline her too? And what about Captain Marvel? At any rate, the key qualification to be part of the team seems to be the ability to fly and to project energy from one's body, which all these heroes can do in one form or another.

As Deadman watches and commentates, Alexander Luthor opens a portal in the barrier that surrounds Earth. When the heroes pass through it, they're followed by an unidentified speeding figure.

Meanwhile, Brainiac's ship arrives at its destination—Apokolips—where they beseech Darkseid for his help.

Back on Earth, Hawk and Dove are rushing to save people from the shadow demons, continuing their ongoing banter about the differences between their violent and peaceful methods, when one of the demons grabs Dove and incinerates him. This happens on live TV as Lana Lang, Lois Lane, and the entire viewing audience watches in horror.

(opposite page) *Crisis* #12, page 11. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). DC's limited cast of international heroes get a chance to participate in the crisis, which also paved the way for a more diverse range of characters in addition to cleaning up the multiverse.

DC Comics, Inc.

BOOK: CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS ISSUE/MONTH: #12 THE FINAL CONFLICT 15

WHILE THE EARTH, FIGHTING FOR ITS LIFE AS WELL AS THOSE WORLDS STILL IN THE POSITIVE MATTER UNIVERSE...

...FINDS THIS IS A WAR WITHOUT BOUNDARIES, A WAR THAT IS BEING FOUGHT EVERYWHERE AT ONCE.

JAPAN IS DEFENDED BY SUNBURST AND THE GLOBAL GUARDIAN KNOWN AS THE RISING SUN.

POLITICS MEANS NOTHING TO THE ANTI-MONITOR'S DEMONS. THE SOVIET UNION IS ATTACKED...

...AND RED STAR, HER GREATEST HERO, FIGHTS BACK UNTIL HIS WOUNDS FORCE HIM OUT OF BATTLE.

TWO OTHER GLOBAL GUARDIANS, THE IRISH JACK O'LANTERN AND THE BRITISH GODIVA, PUT THEIR DIFFERENCES ASIDE...

...UNITING TO SAVE DUBLIN FROM DESTRUCTION.

IN VIETNAM, THE BROTHERS THUNDER AND LIGHTNING COMBINE FORCES WITH THUNDERLORD FROM TAIWAN...

THESE THREE HOLD THEIR OWN FAR LONGER THAN EXPECTED.

GEO-FORCE OF THE OUTSIDERS RETURNS TO FIND HIS MARKOVIAN HOMELAND UNDER SIEGE...

HIS EARTH-BORN POWERS REPEL THE INVADERS.

WHILE IN SOUTH AMERICA, GREEN FURY AND THE LIEUTENANT MARVELS BATTLE TO SAVE BRAZIL...

THEY FIND THEMSELVES OVERWHELMED.

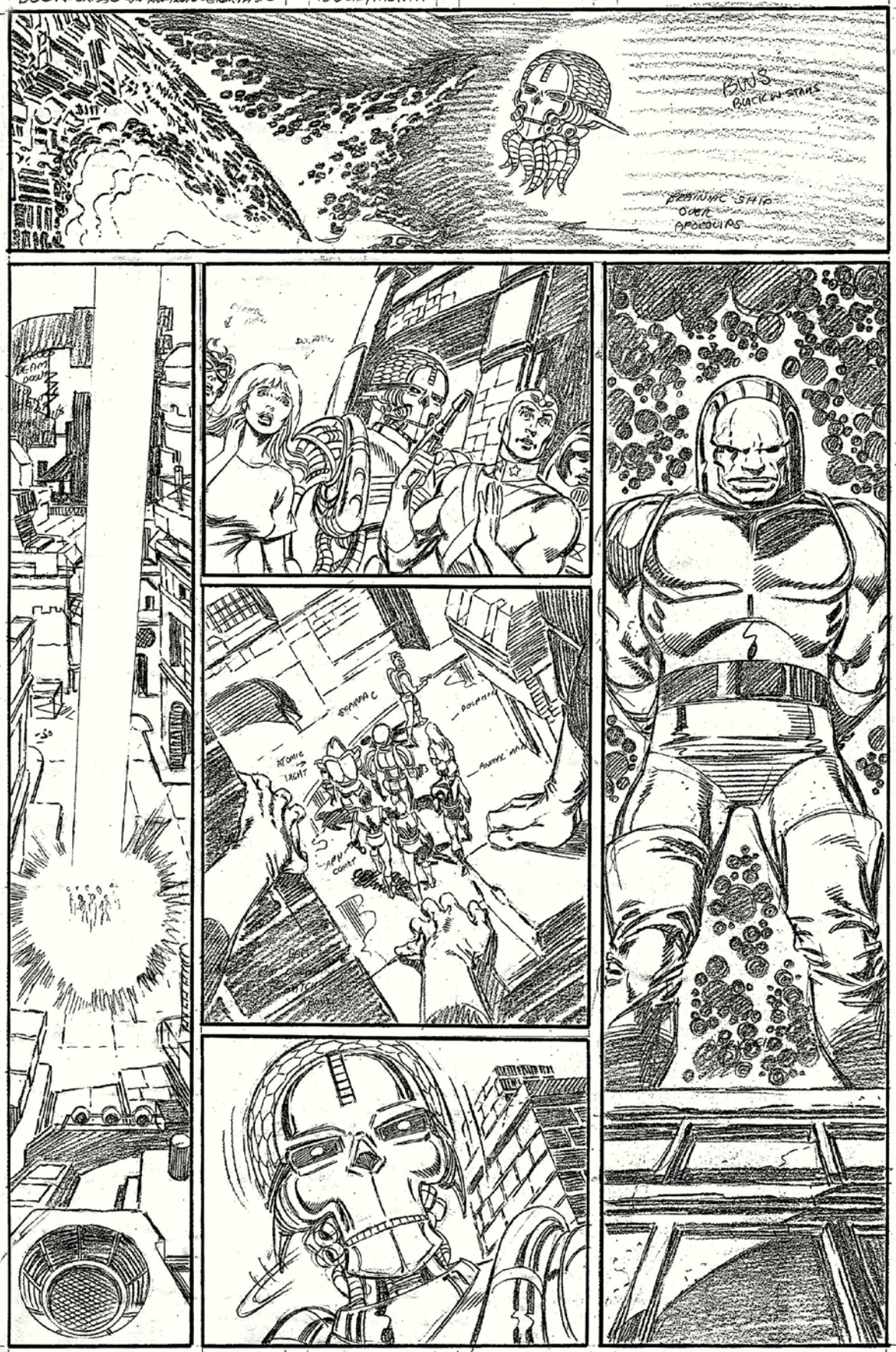
COLOR: RED SKIES

JERRY ORDWAY

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ... PAGE SPREADS
BUTT PAPER AT EDGES, TAPE ON BACK. DO NOT OVERLAP AT CENTER!

DC Comics, Inc. this page pencils: JERRY ORDWAY / INKS: GEORGE PÉREZ STORY PAGE #14

BOOK: CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS | ISSUE/MONTH #12 THE SIGNOFF ISSUE



INSTRUCTIONS FOR TWO-PAGE SPREAD:
BUTT PAPER AT EDGES, TAPE ON BACK. DO NOT OVERLAP AT CENTER! EACH HALF SHOULD MEASURE 10 5/8" wide, FULL SPREAD = 21 1/4" wide.

In Doctor Fate's tower, DC's mystics are gathered in a circle, at the center of which sit Alan Scott and Dr. Occult, their heads bent over Alan's green lantern. Floating above the lantern is a red-and-black disk, Dr. Occult's mystic symbol of the Seven. Given to him by a mystic cult called the Seven which saved him from being sacrificed to a demon when he was an infant, it's able to repel demons and spirits, ward off dark magic, break enchantments, track or identify magical presences, and project mystical energy or force fields. Together with the lantern, it functions as a nexus to concentrate the other mystics' power.

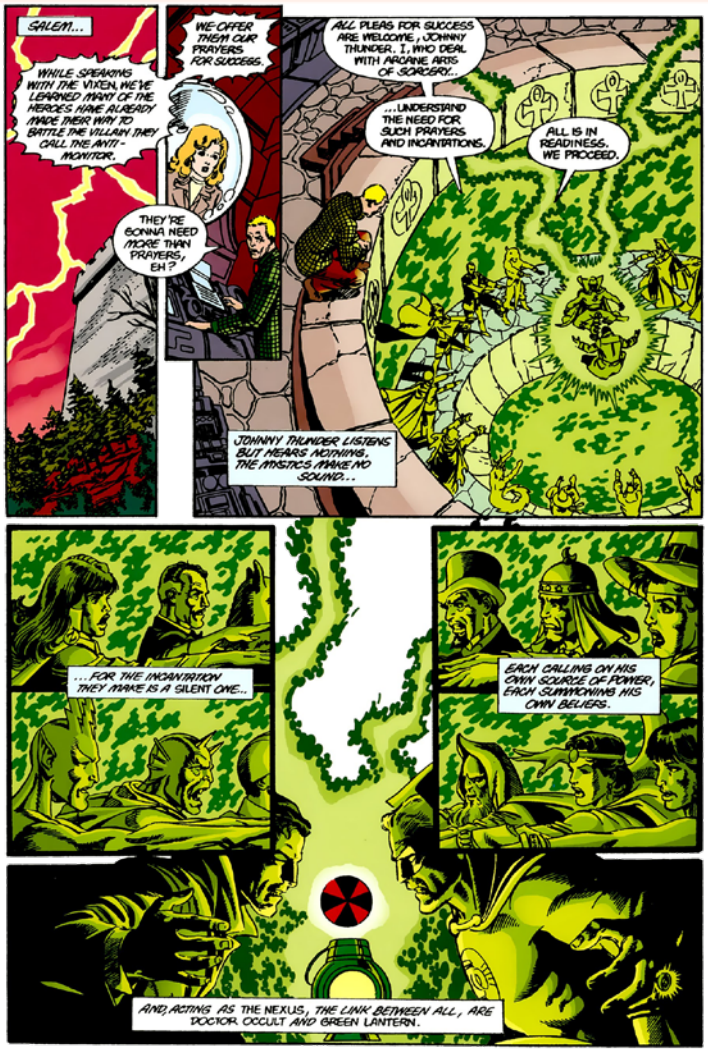
On Qward, the heroes struggle to locate the Anti-Monitor. While Kal-El says he's not going to sit around and wait, above him on a tower, Superboy of Earth-Prime is doing just that. As they struggle to come up with a plan of attack, the streaking "stowaway" reveals himself—Kid Flash. For him, this fight is personal. As if to prove the point, while Wally is seeking to justify his presence there, the Flash appears one last time, calling him name. After Barry disappears, Captain Atom of all people remarks that this isn't the first time the Flash has phased in and not, noting that Batman saw him too. Somehow he also knows that the Flash was moving through time. How Captain Atom developed this theory and when he conferred with Batman about it isn't revealed. It feels like this line should have been given to someone who had a closer connection to Barry and Batman, but considering what Bob Greenberger said about how difficult it was to work the Charlton characters into this story, perhaps Wolfman saw it as a chance to give an underutilized character a speaking role.

Wally races through the rubble, chasing the after-image left behind by the Flash, only to find Psycho Pirate, who is trying to pull Barry's costume out from under the rocks, begging the Flash to save him. Even though Superman has known the Flash for years, for some reason he feels compelled to ask, "That's Barry's uniform, isn't it?" Lady Quark also finds the ring that once housed it. Now Wally has no doubt. Barry is dead.

Feeling an overwhelming concentration of evil just ahead, Pariah beckons the heroes, but it's too late. In a rare splash page, the Anti-Monitor is revealed in all his power-spewing glory, declaring, "This is the day the universe dies!"

Under the ocean on Earth, DC's aquatic heroes battle the shadow demons, with Lori Lemaris noting that the city of Tritonis has already fallen to them. Moments after saving Mera by shooting a shadow demon, Lori herself is killed.

This is followed by a quick succession of deaths that take place across a two-page spread, including Earth-Two's Green Arrow, Prince Ra-Man, Clayface, Kole, Huntress, Robin of Earth-Two, and last but not least, the Bug-Eyed Bandit. Pérez probably leaped up from his couch and did a belly dance with his wife after drawing that panel. At the center of this collage of carnage, the magic users' wills remain locked in concentration,



***Crisis* #12, p. 16. This is a deeply symbolic moment for DC as Dr. Occult, the publisher's earliest recurring original character (created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster), plays a central role in helping concentrate the magic-users' power, working alongside the original Green Lantern, Alan Scott.**

summoning long-dormant powers to life. And it works too. Taking the form of a slithering tendril of green-and-yellow energy, it rises up from Doctor Fate's tower to envelop the entire planet. Its ascendance is accompanied by screams as the shadow demons are drawn into space and imprisoned in "a shell of burning pyro-sorcery." One can't help but draw a direct parallel between this scene and *Justice League of America* #231 where Doctor Fate, Wonder Woman of Earth-One, and Earth-Two's Green Lantern combine their powers to transform the Commander's monsters into a quivering mass of black "glop."

On Qward, the battle against the Anti-Monitor commences with a series of attacks from every direction, reenacting the assault that appears on the cover, but no matter what the heroes throw at him, he's impervious to it all. While he's distracted, Harbinger directs Dr. Light to absorb solar energy from a nearby star that the Anti-Monitor is using to power himself.

(opposite page) *Crisis* #12, p. 14 pencils. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Jerry Ordway's original pencils, prior to George Pérez inking them in a fun turnabout of their typical working relationship that was initiated by Pérez.

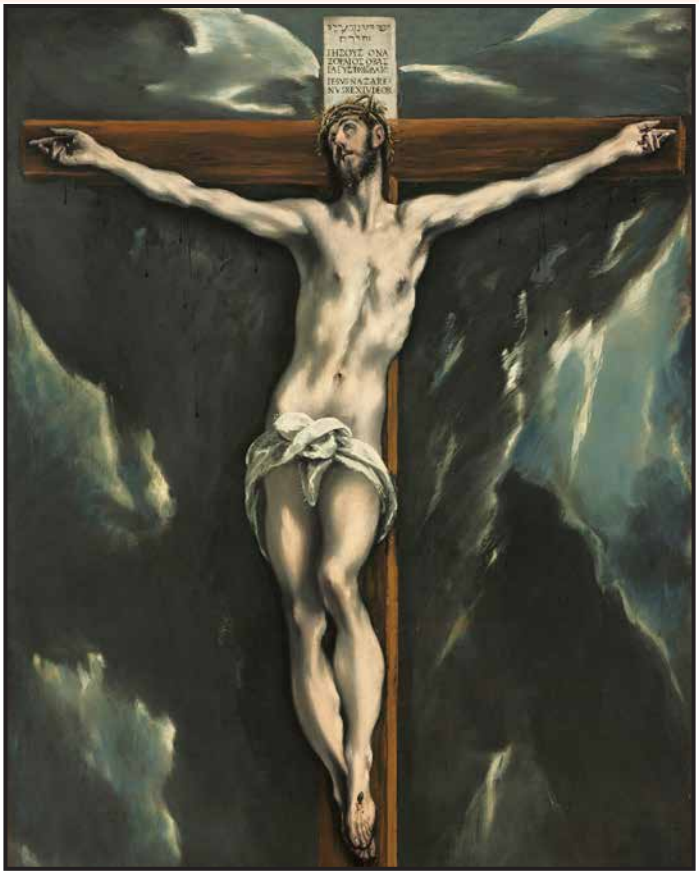
Still struggling against the remnants of selfishness, Dr. Light agrees to fulfill her assigned role, the reason for which she was created, then sends Harbinger and Alexander away to join the attack. This raises a question about the Monitor's prescience. Did he create Dr. Light because he foresaw this exact scenario developing, or did he simply know that such concentrated light was the Anti-Monitor's weakness? Speaking of which, if the Monitor could create a new Dr. Light, couldn't he have created an entire squadron of champions based on preexisting characters to create the perfect mix of powers and abilities that he required to defeat the Anti-Monitor?

While Dr. Light drains power from the star, Alexander uses his anti-matter side to drain energy from the Anti-Monitor. Adding to the mix, Negative Woman elongates her "Negative Spirit" and wraps it around the Anti-Monitor from head to toe, hoping her burning touch will weaken him. The other heroes concentrate their energy on the Anti-Monitor too, including heat vision from the eyes of the Supermen and Power Girl. While Supergirl's X-ray vision didn't function in the anti-matter universe earlier, it appears whatever was blocking it doesn't work against this other power. Narrative convenience to the rescue once again!

When the Anti-Monitor falls, Dr. Light hits him with an enormous blast of solar energy, sending his body "smashing through stone and rock as if it were water." Indeed, it seems like he really is dead this time, his glowing eyes and mouth having gone dark like a lantern extinguished by the wind. As the heroes remark on how easy it seemed, Alexander informs them that he absorbed enough energy from the Anti-Monitor to open a portal back to the positive-matter universe that will allow Earth to pass through. But they'll have to hurry, or their world will be stuck in the anti-matter universe forever.

Adopting a Christlike pose, Alexander creates a portal shaped like his body. But as the heroes pass through it, a glimmer of light flashes in the Anti-Monitor's eye. Then the heroes notice the bundle of shadow demons are being drawn toward the Anti-Monitor's body. A fiery explosion ensues, and the Anti-Monitor is back on his feet, having absorbed the power of the "anti-matter demons," as he calls them, claiming to be indestructible. Once again, this move is borrowed almost note for note from *Justice League of America* #232 (1984), another JSA/JLA team-up where the Commander does virtually the same thing with his vanquished minions. But this time the math doesn't add up. How could the power contained in the shadow demons confer that ability on him when the energy of at least a thousand positive-matter universes and two million worlds in his own universe couldn't?

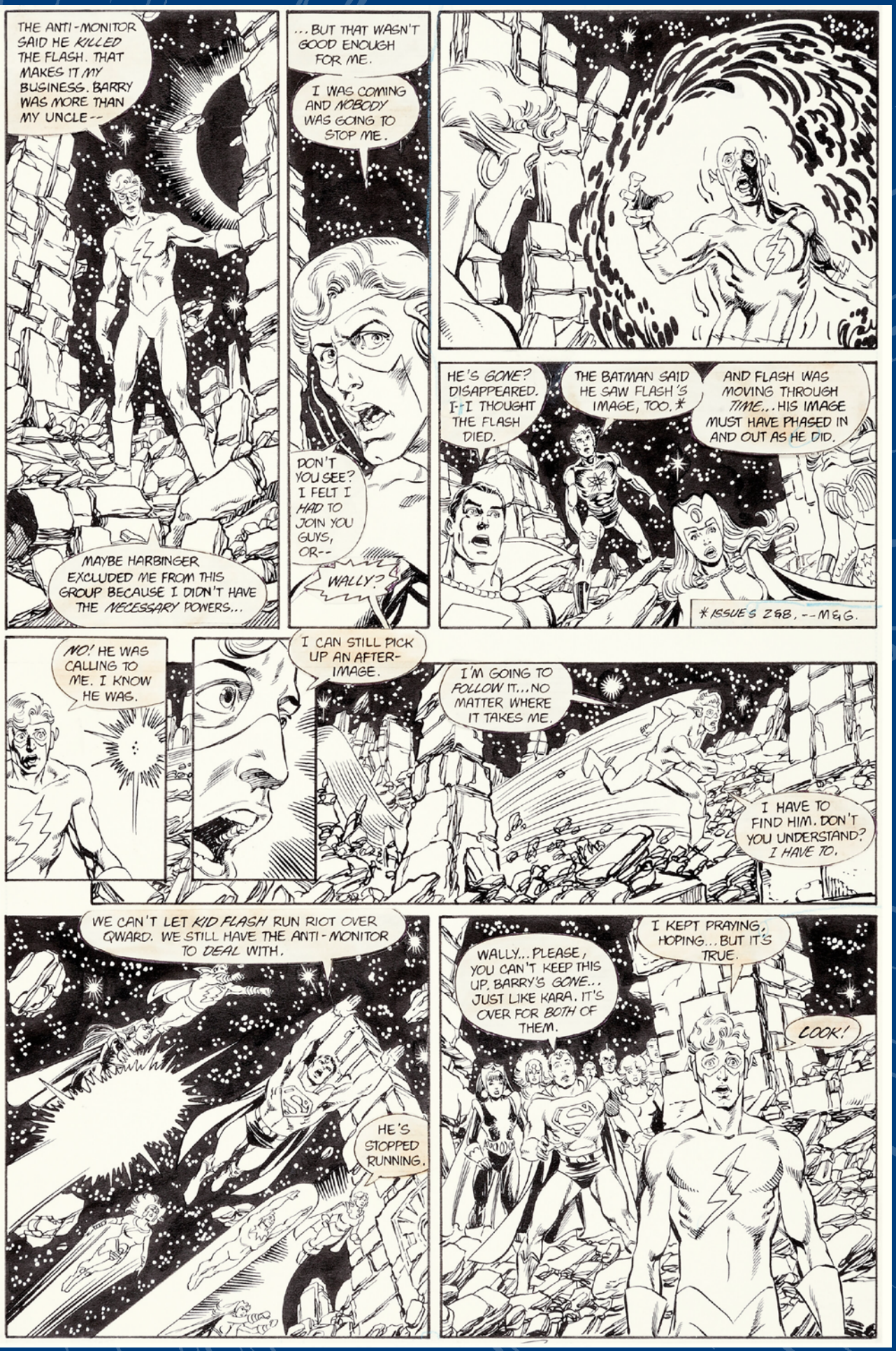
His first order of business is to incinerate Wonder Woman of Earth-One, a "death" that didn't get anywhere near the press earned by the demise of Supergirl and the Flash. Firestorm ferries Psycho Pirate and Kid Flash back to the positive-matter universe, vowing to return to help fight "Monny," as he calls the Anti-Monitor, echoing Changeling's nickname for him in the previous issue. But Superman of Earth-Two won't have it. As a man without a world or a wife, he designates himself as the one most suited to make a last stand. In a rare moment of



"Christ on the Cross" by El Greco (c. 1600–1610). (opposite page) *Crisis* #12, p. 22. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). The image of Barry that Wally sees is the last echo of the Barry who dies in *Crisis* #8 and comes after Barry' warning to Batman in *Crisis* #2.

self-centeredness, his grief seems to blind him to the fact that Superboy, Lady Quark, Pariah, and many of his Earth-Two compatriots are in a similarly homeless position. Nevertheless, as Superboy flies Kal-El and Lady Quark, who were knocked unconscious by Kal-L so they couldn't argue with him, through the shrinking portal, he's amazed at Superman's heroism.

As Superman and the Anti-Monitor face off, the villain goes into gloating mode, only to be wracked by terrible pain. Superman reveals it was all part of the plan. "The shadow demons were created out of the Anti-Monitor's own power," he muses. "We knew he'd absorb them when our attack began. But the demons were changed by the sorcerers … instead of repowering the Anti-Monitor, they're destroying him from inside." This is interesting because just two pages earlier when Kal-L sees the bundle of shadow demons being sucked toward the Anti-Monitor, he watches in fear and says, "I don't like this." Shouldn't he have been rubbing his hands together in glee a là Mr. Burns from *The Simpsons* while thinking something along the lines of "Excellent! It's all falling into place"? And if he knew the shadow demons' power was going to consume the Anti-Monitor from within, why stay behind and sacrifice his life to fight him? Or was Superman


THE ANTI-MONITOR SAID HE KILLED THE FLASH. THAT MAKES IT MY BUSINESS. BARRY WAS MORE THAN MY UNCLE--
MAYBE HARBINGER EXCLUDED ME FROM THIS GROUP BECAUSE I DIDN'T HAVE THE NECESSARY POWERS...
...BUT THAT WASN'T GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME.
I WAS COMING AND NOBODY WAS GOING TO STOP ME.
DON'T YOU SEE? I FELT I HAD TO JOIN YOU GUYS, OR--
WALLY?
HE'S GONE? DISAPPEARED. I--I THOUGHT THE FLASH DIED.
THE BATMAN SAID HE SAW FLASH'S IMAGE, TOO.*
AND FLASH WAS MOVING THROUGH TIME... HIS IMAGE MUST HAVE PHASED IN AND OUT AS HE DID.
*ISSUES 268, --M&G.
NO! HE WAS CALLING TO ME. I KNOW HE WAS.
I CAN STILL PICK UP AN AFTER-IMAGE.
I'M GOING TO FOLLOW IT... NO MATTER WHERE IT TAKES ME.
I HAVE TO FIND HIM. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? I HAVE TO.
WE CAN'T LET KID FLASH RUN RIOT OVER QWARD. WE STILL HAVE THE ANTI-MONITOR TO DEAL WITH.
HE'S STOPPED RUNNING.
WALLY... PLEASE, YOU CAN'T KEEP THIS UP. BARRY'S GONE... JUST LIKE KARA. IT'S OVER FOR BOTH OF THEM.
I KEPT PRAYING, HOPING... BUT IT'S TRUE.
LOOK!


I CAN FEEL HIM RESISTING... FIGHTING BACK WITH INCREDIBLE FORCE.
READY FOR YOUR TURN, NEGATIVE WOMAN?
PARIAH, DO I HAVE ANY CHOICE?
PLEASE, HURRY! THE PAIN IS OVERWHELMING... I--I CAN'T KEEP ABSORBING ALL THIS ENERGY.
THIS IS WHAT I HAVE BEEN DREADING.
I AM RADIOACTIVE. IF I WISH IT, MY TOUCH CAN BURN!
BUT TO BURN THE ANTI-MONITOR, I MUST TOUCH HIM, AND I--I CANNOT FORGET THAT HE HAS ALREADY KILLED SO MANY OF MY COMRADES-IN-ARMS.
HE COULD JUST AS EASILY SLAY ME, TOO.
KEEP IT UP! WE CAN'T FALTER... NOT EVEN FOR A MOMENT.
I'M EXHAUSTED... THIS IS TOO MUCH...TOO HARD.
HE'S STAGGERING. THE DRAIN ON HIS POWER MUST BE TERRIBLE.
THIS TIME WE JUST DIDN'T ATTACK WITH A MASSIVE DISPLAY OF FORCE.
WE HAD A DEFINITE PLAN, AND IT'S WORKING!
HE'S FALLEN, DOCTOR LIGHT. DO IT NOW!
THANK THE HEAVENS! I COULD NOT HAVE ABSORBED ANOTHER ERG OF POWER.
THE SUN'S ENERGY IS SEETHING INSIDE ME. BUT, AT LAST--I CAN USE ALL THAT POWER --

uncertain if the altered energy would destroy the Anti-Monitor completely, and he wanted to make sure the job was done?

On the threshold of the portal, Superboy has a change of heart. He doesn't have a world to return to either, so why not stay and fight alongside Superman? He tosses his two passengers through the portal, then rejoins Kal-L.

As Alexander warns that he can't hold the portal open any longer, he also reveals that the rift can only be closed from the anti-matter side, which means he knew all along that he would be marooned there. Then a strange sensation overcomes him, and his eyes start to glow. As he watches Superman hurl a planetoid at the Anti-Monitor, Alex has no idea someone else is observing the scene through his eyes—Darkseid.

With the combined power of Superman and Superboy insufficient to defeat the Anti-Monitor, even in his weakened state, Darkseid directs a blast of energy through Alexander's eyes that sends the Anti-Monitor flying into the heart of the very star from which he was drawing his power. Having done his good deed for the day, Darkseid orders Brainiac and his companions to leave, warning that the next time they meet, it won't be as friends.

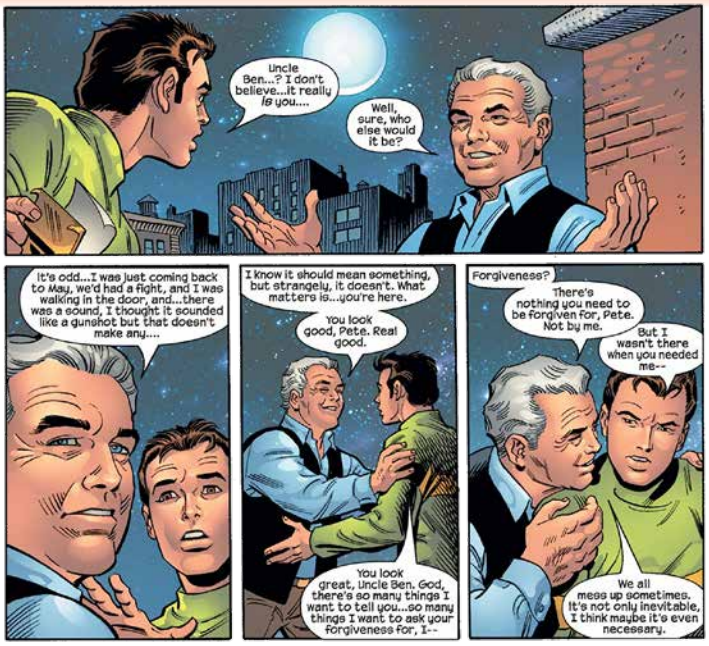
Having assembled on a floating rock, Superboy asks Alexander if he can reopen the portal. As Alexander explains that's not possible, the Anti-Monitor rises yet again, now reduced to a screaming, flaming head. "I have had enough!" Superman shouts in all his lantern-jawed glory. And with a mighty right hook, he causes this last vestige of the Anti-Monitor to explode, the remnant falling back into the star and making it implode. Maybe this is a way of fusing the power/emotion duality that's been lurking beneath this entire series. To paraphrase Peter Parker's uncle Ben, "With great anger comes great destructibility."

Shockwaves ripple out from the star, threatening to destroy everything, including the three heroes. As Superman and Superboy stare down certain death, Alexander reveals he has one last card to play. To Kal-L's astonishment, Lois emerges from Alexander's body, which has taken on a spectral form. She explains that she's been inside him "in a place that was so beautiful." Alexander invites the others to go to that place too.

"Better to go into the unknown than die here alone," Superboy says.

"Do not worry, young Superboy," Alexander says. "Where we go now there will be no more fear … only peace … everlasting peace." This language echoes a promise about heaven in Revelation 21:4 of the New Testament, which says, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." However, this depiction is belied by their actions in *Infinite Crisis* (2005–2006), during which Superboy, Alexander, and Kal-L emerge from this place in a rage, determined to "make the DCU great again" in response to their hatred of the darker, grittier status quo. It wasn't a heaven at all. It was more like

(opposite page) *Crisis* #12, p. 31. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Oddly, in the showdown against the Anti-Monitor, everyone has something to contribute except Wonder Woman, who soon dies.



Like *Crisis* #12, *Amazing Spider-Man* #500 travels through defining traumas to decide what parts of the past must be preserved for the hero—and the franchise—to continue.

hell, and it transforms Alexander into the devil, with Superboy his demonic accomplice.

With the Anti-Monitor "permanently" destroyed, all that remains is a denouement. This is led by Lyla, who has returned to her duties as archivist/exposition hack. The first thing she tells us is that Wonder Woman didn't actually die when the Anti-Monitor's beam of energy struck her. Instead, she devolved back through time to the original substance of her creation—clay from the top of Mount Olympus—which was spread across Paradise Island. Devolution seems to be a trend with Wonder Woman, starting with *Wonder Woman* #122 when the Sinister Seer of Saturn attaches her to a pendulum of a clock and reduces her to Wonder Girl and then Wonder Tot. This was the beginning of Robert Kanigher's "Impossible Tales" era, similar to Julius Schwartz's "Imaginary Stories," many of which featured Wonder Tot's adventures. Wonder Woman devolves one step further to Wonder Baby ten issues later, so she can interpret the testimony of another infant who witnessed an alien abduction. And let's not forget *Wonder Woman* #175, where she and Steve Trevor are de-aged to the point that her evil twin from another world lets them go, having lost interest in the prepubescent captain. Wonder Woman was reformed from this clay in the new *Wonder Woman* series that began in 1987, penciled and eventually written by George Pérez.

Like Kal-L and Lois, Earth-Two's Wonder Woman and Steve Trevor also enter a paradise of sorts, transported to Mount Olympus by Zeus himself where they live "happily ever after." Unlike Kal-L and Lois, as far as we know, their subsequent existence truly was blissful.

Various deaths are also noted, including Sunburst, who must have died off panel while defending Japan against the



"Prometheus brings Pandora to life" (c. 1781) by Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki. Both Pandora and Wonder Woman emerge from sculpted clay animated by divine power, making them artificial women shaped to embody ideas. But where Pandora ushers trouble into the world, Wonder Woman redeems this ancient clay-born motif through heroism, compassion, and a sense of divine purpose.

shadow demons. Lyla says the bodies of Robin, Huntress, and Kole were never found, which seems to open a loophole to revive them, but Roy Thomas put an end to that in the opening pages of *Infinity Inc.* #30, which takes place at Huntress and Robin's graves. A lengthy funeral scene also occurs there in *The Last Days of the Justice Society of America Special* (July 1986), which served as an epilogue for the group following *Crisis*. In an editorial that follows this story, Thomas confirms that the two characters actually died. As for Kole, a reanimated version of her returns as a Black Lantern in *Blackest Night: Titans* #1 (2009), but this is a temporary, twisted version of her and not a resurrection of her true self.

There's good news too. When Wally was struck by the Anti-Monitor, his body chemistry was altered so that his speed ability is no longer killing him, though his maximum velocity is now capped at the speed of sound. He decides to come out of retirement not as Kid Flash but as the Flash, donning the costume of his namesake, which he first wore back in *The Flash* #108. He began a new series of adventures in this persona in *The Flash* (Vol. 2) #1, which launched in 1987.

From there, Lyla shifts her focus to the future, noting that no version of it survived intact. There's no more Great Disaster, as Kamandi's *Who's Who* entry says, but Kamandi will still be found in the Command D bunker, where he will be raised by his grandfather, Buddy Blank (a.k.a. Omac). In this new world, he'll be renamed Thomas, with the implication being he becomes Tommy Tomorrow of the Planeteers. Jonah Hex is also shown to have been transported to the future—2050 to be exact—with the transplanted gunfighter's adventures there documented in a new series called *Hex* that was already underway as *Crisis* was being released. She also mentions a split amongst the Guardians of the Universe, which is yet another reminder that they and the Green Lanterns are conspicuously absent from the final issues of *Crisis*.

Lyla's final recording session is interrupted by Pariah and Lady Quark, who are eager to explore their new world. Her response is cheerfully optimistic to the point of naïveté. "We should never forget the past, but we should always look to the future," she says, "because that's where we're going to spend the rest of our lives." In another context, Lyla's words might adorn a cheesy motivational poster, but here they serve a more pointed function. It's like she becomes the voice of Marv Wolfman, encouraging readers to embrace DC's new singular continuity, even if it means letting go of their beloved past. Viewed through this lens, her final line—"I don't know about you guys, but I can't wait to see what tomorrow will bring"—reads less like dialogue and more like yet another piece of pro-*Crisis* propaganda.

The final page offers us a decidedly different view on the changes wrought by *Crisis*. In Arkham Asylum, two doctors remark on a peculiar case of a patient gibbering about multiverses (not a multiverse) and thousands (not a thousand) universes dying. Considering the numbers he's spouting, he really must be insane!

The patient is Psycho Pirate. Returning to his eye motif for a final time, rather than starting from far away and moving in close, as Pérez did with Pariah in the opening pages of this series and with other characters elsewhere, he begins with a super close-up of Psycho Pirate's eye, pulling back over a series of six vertical panels—there's that number again—to reveal he is bound in a straitjacket, sitting in the corner of a padded room.

Where Lyla embraces the future with canned optimism, Psycho Pirate is trapped in the past, reliving the non-existent multiverse with pathological intensity. "Worlds lived, worlds died, nothing will ever be the same," he mutters, echoing the series' iconic tagline, now portrayed as a symptom of madness. His final words—"I like to remember the past because those were better times than now. I mean, I'd rather live in the past than today, wouldn't you?"—seem to mark him as a stand-in for the kind of reader who resents the consolidation of continuity and fetishizes what's been lost. If Lyla speaks for Wolfman, invoking the need for change to ensure viability (as Giordano framed it in his first "Meanwhile" column), then Psycho Pirate serves as a cautionary counterpoint. A relic of the multiverse, his memory has driven him mad, and he's clinging to a reality that no one else remembers (at least not that he's aware of). In the end, *Crisis* presents us with a clear choice not just between two characters but between two worldviews. One welcomes change and innovation. The other is left babbling all alone in an empty room that no one visits anymore. It's hard not to read this as Wolfman's final, biting critique of readers who can't or won't let go of the history he had just vanquished, literally depicting such people as pathological.

A grim ending indeed.

And yet, that pathos was real. As reader James K. King wrote in *Who's Who* #25, "The effects of the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* were even more far-reaching than I had first imagined. Many of my most cherished childhood memories have simply vanished! A vast chunk of my life is missing—stolen!" He wasn't alone in feeling this way. For many, the erasure of parallel worlds was more than a narrative convenience; it was a kind of grief. *Crisis* didn't just restructure a fictional universe; it disrupted a personal cosmology, forcing readers to confront what it means to lose a past they once believed was permanent.

CHAPTER 25

Interlude the Third—Crisis Crossovers and Tie-ins

In the final batch of crossovers, *Blue Devil* #17 shows us what the title character was up to prior to being recruited by John Stewart to help repair Red Tornado in *Crisis* #8. A cloud-seeding experiment goes horribly wrong due to whatever's causing the skies to turn red, unleashing a horde of tiny, wriggling creatures. The situation is complicated by the arrival of the Fisherman (first appearance, *Aquaman* #21, 1965), who crashes a beach party and makes off with the guests' valuables.

The following issue shows us the fate of Blue Devil and the Omega Men after Blue Devil attempted to follow T. O. Morrow through the space warp in *Crisis* #8. In what's called "The Last Parallel World Story" (as if), Blue Devil and the Omega Men are rescued by a parallel version of his Earth-One companions, who are sucked through an "anti-matter black hole" while attempting to film it. This is the only time such an anomaly shows up related to *Crisis,* and it's also the only time anti-matter is rendered black prior to appearing white. Could this be a unique manifestation of the anti-matter in this unnamed universe, or is it an effect created by its interaction with the black hole?

As the two groups get acquainted, the newcomers explain that they're from a world where all technological advancement is driven by filmmaking. But soon they begin vanishing one by one—turning to blue lines before they disappear. The same goes for parts of their ship. Doc of the Omega Men realizes the alien ship and its crew retain an affinity for their home universe and are being pulled back there, but now that their universe has been consumed by anti-matter, they're stranded in interdimensional space created by the interplay between the black hole and the anti-matter.

Building on what he learned from the heroes back home about various worlds occupying the same space but vibrating at different frequencies, Blue Devil hypothesizes that the ship and its crew never fully synchronized with the vibration rate of the Earth-One universe. This could have been inspired by what Mark Gruenwald predicted would



***Blue Devil* #18. This issue kicked off a three-issue story arc that asked an interesting what-if question about how antimatter might interact with the presence of a black hole, leading to all sorts of unexpected consequences.**



Shawn McManus, who drew the *Crisis* crossover *Omega Men* #33. He became an influential artist at DC in the 1980s, bringing a moody, expressive line to Swamp Thing, Doctor Fate, Batman, and Sandman. His work balanced horror, fantasy, and psychological nuance, helping define the stranger, darker corners of the DCU during a creatively fertile era.

happen to a time traveler who returned to a vibrational rate of a future state that no longer existed due to a disruptive chronal event in the time traveler's home universe. Using a communication device called an interossitter that "narrowcasts on a variable vibrational frequency that circumvents real-space distances," Blue Devil and his counterpart rig the machine to synchronize and stabilize the missing team's vibration rates. They lament the loss of their home universe, but at least now they'll be able to explore the Earth-One realm—or will they?

As for Blue Devil, they use their projection room to send him back to his homeworld—at least that's the plan. After bouncing around a couple of other universes in issue #19, including Earth-X and an alternate universe where Blue Devil's boss, movie producer Jock Verner, is a woman, he finally makes it back home, only to get in trouble for being late.

The story arc concludes in *Omega Men* #33. The Omega Men scout for a new refuge for survivors of the Spider Guild invasion and discover a seemingly ideal planet, only to learn it's Kuraq, a patchwork world formed when the goddess X'Hal reached across dying realities during the crisis to fuse six different versions of the same world into one, trapping Nimbus at its core (the aftermath of the battle recounted in issue #26 and hinted at in *Crisis* #4).

Justice League of America Annual #3 picks up with Red Tornado after the explosion that rocked the JLA satellite in *Crisis* #8, but somehow he and the satellite survived at least partially intact. Seeking to understand what the Anti-Monitor meant when he referred to him as "more than machine … more than man," Red Tornado accidentally detonates another explosion that destroys the satellite and his body, sending debris raining down to Earth. As former and current JLA members squabble while literally picking up the pieces, Firestorm recalls something he learned in *Justice League of America* #193: that Red Tornado is inhabited by a being called the Tornado Champion.

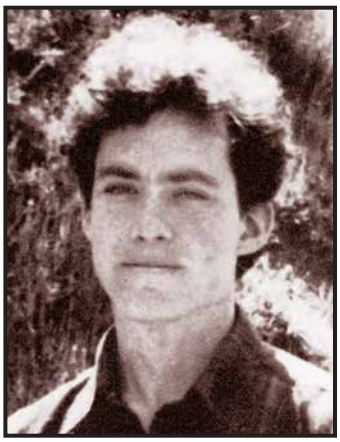
Starting out as the Tornado Tyrant on the planet Rann, through his battles with Adam Strange and the Justice League, the Tornado Champion realized the error of his ways and sought to emulate the heroes he admired so much. He even went to another world that he remodeled into a new kind of Earth, then transformed himself into a new version of the JLA. But his evil side got away from him and defeated his JLA, so he came to Earth to see if the original JLA could succeed where he failed. Feeling like a failure and hoping for a fresh start, the Tornado Tyrant traveled to Earth-Two, which was where he stumbled across T. O. Morrow who was in the midst of creating Reddy. Not wanting to pass up the opportunity to take on a new identity, the Tornado Tyrant entered Red Tornado's body, only for a short circuit to erase his memory, hence Red Tornado's relentless quest to find his identity.

Due to the explosion, the Tornado Champion's dark side is unleashed again in this issue. Now that he's a force of nature, he sees the world much differently, no longer confined by their "narrow mortal vision—nor blinded by mistaken notions of heroism!" The JLA tries to contain the Champion/Tyrant, and his love interest, Kathy Sutton, tries to reason with him, to no avail. Afforded new powers by the crisis, he's determined to remake the world. But that's a job for another day. First, he needs to take some time to "find himself," his seemingly endless quest for his true identity remaining one of the defining features of this character.

"This world remains in your hands, then!" he says as he spins away. "Save it from the Anti-Monitor's scheme—if you can! But someday not long off … there will be a reckoning!" Post-*Crisis,* he continued his career as an air elemental, renamed Ulthoon, similar to how Swamp Thing was retconned as an earth elemental and Firestorm as a fire elemental.

The aftermath of Steel's disappearance through a portal created by Warp during the battle against the villains in *Crisis* #9 is revealed in *Justice League of America* #245. He finds himself on a version of Earth that he doesn't recognize. Too weak to move or even think, he's attacked by a swarm of giant green robotic insects. On the verge of being overwhelmed, he's saved by a beautiful woman named Olanda, who informs him that he's on Earth in the year 1,000,000,000. The creatures are controlled by a group called the Six. Not only are they Olanda's brothers, they're also clones of the Lord of Time, one of the JLA's old enemies, who is now an old man.

After seeking refuge in the far-flung future, the Lord of Time felt lonely, so he cloned himself to create seven



Luke McDonnell, artist on *Justice League of America* #245. McDonnell became an important DC artist in the mid-1980s, drawing *Justice League of America* and *Suicide Squad*. With John Ostrander and Kim Yale, he helped introduce Oracle in *Suicide Squad* #23, linking his work to one of DC's many exciting new reinventions.

children—six boys and Olanda. The brothers grew jealous when the Lord of Time favored his daughter over them, so they stole his Chrono-Cube and used it to amass an army of killer robots from another era. Now they're trying to use the robots to destroy their "father."

With Steel's help, the Lord of Time regains control of the cube, then travels back in time to prevent his younger self from making the male clones—which should have caused the circumstances that allowed him to travel back in time to cease to exist, but this late in the game, is anyone still keeping score? He offers to use the Chrono-Cube to send Steel back to his own time period, but Steel decides to spend a bit of quality time with Olanda first. Never mind that Steel's world is in the midst of being destroyed by anti-matter, and one would think he'd be eager to go back there and help out. Speaking of which, why isn't there any sign of the crisis at this distant point in the future? Could it have been a potential place of refuge for people to flee the Anti-Monitor's attack while the heroes battled him? Furthermore, if the Chrono-Cube is so powerful, why wasn't the Lord of Time recruited as part of the Monitor's plans?

Green Lantern #195 has Hal Jordan pursuing Guy Gardner and the rogue Guardian through hyperspace to Oa, determined to lend a hand in the crisis. But a barrier prevents Hal from reaching the planet. On Oa, the Guardian fills Guy in on all that's happened since he was put into a coma in issue #123. Even though he was never officially commissioned as a Green Lantern before, the Guardians are about to change that.

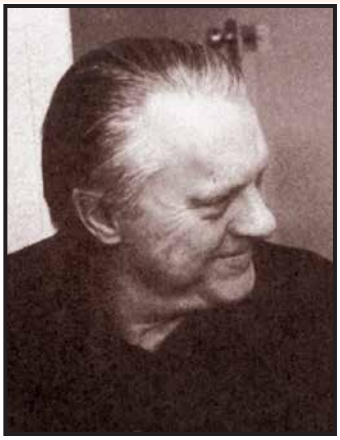
From there we go to what a caption says is "the center of the crisis—Earth!" It doesn't say which Earth, but seeing as Katma Tui is there, we can assume it's Earth-One. She's dealing with numerous natural disasters, only for her ring to fail. The same thing happens to John Stewart, with both incidents being a recap of the previous issue. Once again, Katma Tui refers to magic surrounding Oa, only this time it's spelled "magick."

Stranded in a desert region on Oa, Hal is determined to get his ring back, so he can help in the crisis. His willpower is so strong that the sand in the desert, which contains residual radiation from the central power battery after millennia of exposure, enables him to fly. It also opens a tunnel that leads to the Guardians' citadel, with Hal also referring to the sand's power as "magick" rather than a science-based source. He finds a craft that will allow him to get to the citadel, but he has to fight a huge beast first.

While that battle rages, the Guardians fill Guy in on what's happening with the crisis, noting they detected "the anti-matter anomaly" 30 cycles ago, with some of them wondering why it took them so long to notice and others taking action. Those who delayed are the ones caught in the stasis beam, as shown in *Crisis* #5. Six of the remaining Guardians give Guy a small power battery imbued with their energy and a ring, saying they're going to use selected individuals to "destroy the Anti-Monitor and restore order to the stars!"

Missing from this scene is the ensuing explosion, as shown in *Crisis* #9, which kills all but one of the six breakaway





Elliot S! Maggin (left) became one of DC's key Superman writers, adding warmth, intelligence, and major concepts like Superboy-Prime to continuity. Curt Swan (1920–1996) was DC's definitive Superman artist, drawing the Man of Steel for decades and shaping his classic visual identity.

Guardians. And absent from *Crisis* #9 is the mini power battery that the Guardian gives to Guy in *Green Lantern* #195. These issues are both cover dated December 1985, so this discrepancy should have been obvious to anyone reading—and editing!—these series. No doubt, the rapid publication schedule played a role in this oversight.

When Hal finally makes it to the citadel, he finds another group of Guardians who have decided that rather than fight, they should just accept their fate as punishment for Krona's sin. "Just as the universe is truly a multiverse, so are the Guardians of diverse minds," one of them says when Hal tells them about the Guardians who have equipped Guy. Is this meant to imply that, like the multiverse, the Guardians are weaker due to their diversity of opinion? It feels like more subtle pro-*Crisis* propaganda. When Hal insists that he wants to do something too, the Guardians send him away, wishing him well until the end, which they believe is coming very soon.

Superboy of Earth-Prime's origin is revealed in *DC Comics Presents* #87. While Superman is mourning Kara's death on the moon, members of the Superman Revenge Squad—which started out as the Superboy Revenge Squad (*Superboy* #94, 1962)—seize the opportunity to zap him over to Earth-Prime.

Due to his canny knowledge of geography, Superman soon figures out where he is, but one thing puzzles him. Earth-Prime isn't supposed to have any superheroes, so why does he have a midair encounter with Superboy? He can thank the crisis for that. Born on Krypton and jettisoned to Earth, just like his Earth-One counterpart, Superboy-Prime's powers remained latent until the very night Superman showed up. Cosmic anomalies caused by the crisis triggered them while he was out walking on the beach with his love interest, Laurie Lemmon, continuing Julie Schwartz's tradition of giving Superman a love interest with the initials "L. L."



"Halley's Comet. Seen at Duluth, Minn." postcard (c. 1910). Courtesy of the Library of Congress. When Superman and Superboy flew to Halley's Comet in *DC Comics Presents* #87 (Nov. 1985), it was in the inner solar system, near Taurus and the Pleiades, about 57.6 million miles from Earth.

Following a quick trip to Halley's Comet, where they engage in an odd conversation that consists of using part of the comet's tail to write out their words in space, Superman and Superboy team up to stop some alien invaders posing as tourists. It's after they send the aliens packing that Superboy is pulled into the cosmic void mentioned when they meet up again in *Crisis*.

That's it for Superboy-Prime until *Crisis* #10. As for Kal-El, his embroilment with the Superman Revenge Squad continues in *Superman* #414 where the villains attack New Krypton, transplanted home for the people of Kandor. Also known as Rokyn, it's a planet orbiting a red sun that the Kandorians moved to after Superman enlarged them and their city to normal size, only for Kandor to crumble to dust (*Superman* #338).

With Superman incapacitated, the Revenge Squad attempts to enslave the Kandorians, using a form of mind control. But they haven't accounted for the Superman Emergency Squad—or the wiles of the Man of Steel himself!

Lacking superpowers under Rokyn's red sun, the aliens turn Superman against his own cousin, Van-Zee. The two of them engage in a fistfight that ends with Kal-El cowering in the corner, his cape pulled over his head. But he's helped out of the situation by Van-Zee's wife, Sylvia, who is immune to the aliens' mind control because she's from Earth, not Krypton. She slips Superman a handheld Phantom Zone projector, which he uses to dispatch the aliens.

Before leaving New Krypton for the last time, Superman retrieves Supergirl's body from where it's orbiting in a "little pocket of suspended gravity exactly opposite the position of the moon relative to the earth!" and leaves it with her natural parents, Zor-El and Alura. Why he didn't think to do that earlier is unknown, but perhaps he had planned to do so after his grieving session on the moon if the Revenge Squad hadn't so rudely interrupted.

The mourning of Kara continues in *Superman* #415, another bannered crossover, where we learn Kara had a short-lived marriage after she lost her memory following a collision with a meteor made of kryptonite. Superman and Kara's husband, Salkor, are at odds at first when Salkor breaks into the Fortress of Solitude to steal a small, round object called a Hokku.

After he and Superman sort things out, Salkor explains that the object was a wedding gift to his beloved that could record her thoughts. He also recounts the circumstances of their marriage, which include battling an alien invader named Naxx. Then one morning when Salkor woke up, Supergirl was gone.

As Salkor and Superman confer, Naxx shows up outside the Fortress of Solitude, having tracked Salkor there. Once the pair dispatches Naxx, a holographic recording of Kara is triggered due to the Hokku being in the presence of the two men she loved most. Why it wasn't triggered earlier in the story isn't explained. Nor is Supergirl's disappearance from Salkor's bed. All she says is that when her original memories returned—possibly when she got up to go to the bathroom?—she forgot all about Salkor. Her memories of him returned in the aftermath of her battle with Blackstarr (*Supergirl* #13–15), hence this recording.

Adding yet another layer of confusion, at the end of her missive Kara says if they're listening to this message, she must be dead. How she would know that when she recorded the message is unclear, seeing as no connection is made between her death and the playback. But perhaps that's a built-in function of Hokkus that isn't explained in this story.

Continuing the Guy Gardner saga, *Green Lantern* #196 has him return to Earth to resurrect one of Hal Jordan's oldest enemies, the Shark who first surfaced in *Green Lantern* #24 (1963). Originally an ordinary tiger shark, he was mutated by a nuclear explosion, which gave him a humanoid form, heightened intellect, telepathic powers, and an unrelenting, feral rage. He died when a ship exploded at the end of *Green Lantern* #176 (one of the Monitor's pre-*Crisis* appearances), but Guy is about to exhume him from his watery grave, using a time warp to do it. The reanimated Shark proves too much for Guy, but rather than kill him, the Shark casts him aside, determined to feed on the "real" Green Lantern.

If by that he means Hal Jordan, he has returned from Oa, determined to do what he can to stop the crisis, even if he'll never be a Green Lantern again. He introduces himself to Earth-One's *other* Green Lantern, John Stewart, who didn't know Hal's secret identity previously.

John is convinced the Anti-Monitor is dead and that the crisis is over, but when he projects his astral self to Oa, he discovers the barrier around the Guardians' homeworld is still in place. He arrives back on Earth just in time to save Hal from the Shark. But then Guy shows up, saying he needs the Shark for his mission to "gather the toughest creeps in the cosmos to destroy the Anti-Monitor's home base, the moon of Qward!" There's only enough room for one Green Lantern in this quadrant, though, and this sets up a showdown between Guy and John that carries over into the next issue.

During their fight, the Shark is freed, then he and Guy take off to round up more "creeps" to "destroy the Anti-Monitor's power base—the [white] spot where he was born on Qward's black moon." This is the first time such a potential weakness for the Anti-Monitor is mentioned. The significance of white being the color of the spot where the Anti-Monitor first clawed his way to the surface on Qward's black moon should not go unnoticed, considering the color of the anti-matter cloud that sweeps away the multiverse and the black, inky substance that replaces it. It's as if the Anti-Monitor is replicating an inverted form of his homeworld throughout the multiverse. Whereas white birthed him on Qward's moon, that same color, or lack thereof, now brings death, replacing it with the black, lifeless substance that surrounded the white spot on Qward's moon.

While John is off looking for Hal, whom John flung into space in a protective bubble prior to battling Guy, Katma Tui projects herself to her home sector, confirming that the crisis isn't over yet, and it's wreaking havoc there just as it is back on Earth. She races home to inform John.

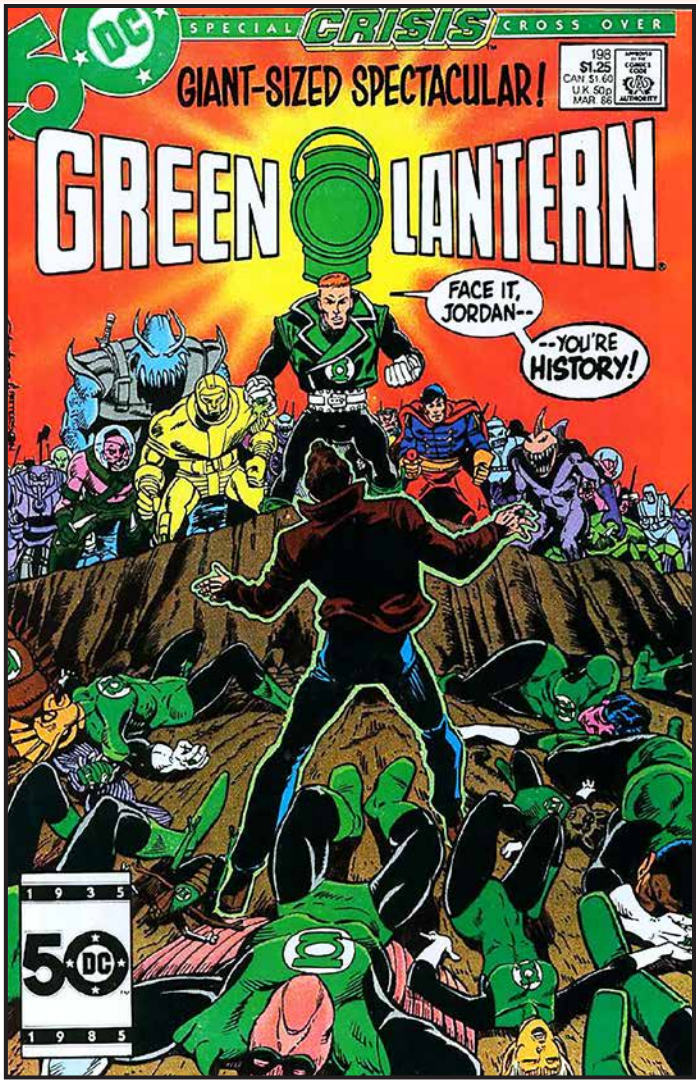
Guy continues his recruitment drive, rounding up a cadre of Green Lantern villains old and new, including Hector Hammond, Sonar, and his buddies, Throttle and Blindside. When Hammond tries to use his mental powers to control Guy, he drops the paralyzed telepath in favor of Goldface.

Ready to head out with his new team, Guy is confronted by John and Katma Tui, who stop them in the name of the Green Lantern Corps. But then Hal shows up and stops *them* in the name of the Green Lantern Corps. Will the real Green Lantern please stand up?

As Hal recalls in a flashback, while floating above Earth, encased in John's bubble, the Guardian who spearheaded the creation of the Green Lantern Corps spirited him away to Oa, insisting there's still a way to stop what Krona unleashed so many billion years ago. While not officially reinstating Hal as a Green Lantern, the Guardian gives him a ring in exchange for him agreeing to join Guy's assault team.

As Hal, Guy, and the motley crew of criminals fly off, John laments how complicated life has become. But it's about to get even more confusing. In the last panel of this issue, Sinestro appears. Having traveled there from Qward, he informs John and Katma Tui that if Guy and his team pull off their mission, it will "precipitate the end of time for all of us, in and of itself!"

This storyline wraps up in the last bannered *Green Lantern* crossover, #198. After Katma Tui gives a slightly edited version of Sinestro's history as the first renegade Green Lantern, Sinestro shares a slightly altered version of Krona's sin. His innovations include naming Krona as the creator of the multiverses and the anti-matter universe. He also adds that the Monitor was born in a black spot on Oa's white moon, just as the Anti-Monitor was born on a white spot on Qward's black moon. If only someone had sent a memo about this to colorist Tom Ziuko, who worked on *Crisis* #7 in which the origin of the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor is told. In that issue, Qward's moon is shown to be brownish, later recolored gray, and Oa's moon is light gray or whitish in the original printing, later colored the same dark gray as Qward's moon. Furthermore, the spot where the Anti-Monitor emerges is brown rock, and the Monitor's womb looks like pink goo with red veins running throughout. Considering how significant this plot point becomes in this storyline, it's a wonder that whoever was overseeing all the crossovers—Bob Greenberger?—didn't fix this inconsistency. This detail aside, Sinestro claims that a symmetry exists between the two birthplaces, and if either of them is destroyed, it will plunge all universes into chaos even before the Anti-Monitor pulls off whatever he's up to at the dawn of time. The existence of these white and black spots feels like a plot point that was considered and then abandoned for the main series, then picked up again here. In addition, what is Sinestro's relationship to the Anti-Monitor, if any? If he was on Qward, why didn't he factor into the Anti-Monitor's plans?



***Green Lantern* #198. Despite the central role that the Green Lantern mythos plays in *Crisis*, Hal Jordan doesn't appear at all in the series. However, he plays a significant role in the *Green Lantern* cross-overs, a storyline that eventually leads to him being reinstated as a Green Lantern.**

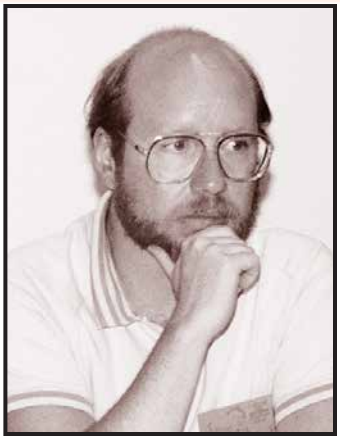
Not knowing whom to believe, John uses a combination of his green energy and Sinestro's yellow energy to propel himself to Oa, where he hopes his physical body can get through the barrier surrounding that planet. The plan works, and he arrives to find several other Green Lanterns and a handful of Guardians there. The Guardians tell him Sinestro was lying, but it doesn't matter, as the universe is ending. Then Sinestro himself shows up, and John realizes it was all a trick to enable Sinestro to get to Oa's moon, so he could destroy the dark spot and cripple the Earth-One universe. But the Guardians freeze him in green energy before he can do it.

Then Green Lantern Tomar-Re surprises everyone when the central power battery speaks through him. It confirms Sinestro's warning, informing the group that "the white spot on Qward's moon is the genesis point for the Anti-Monitor—his greatest single tie to the material world! Rather than cripple him, its destruction would free him from all physical restraints." Once again, if the white spot is this important, why wasn't it mentioned in *Crisis* itself? Shouldn't the heroes who battled the Anti-Monitor in the anti-matter universe have been warned about this before they left? Something along the lines of, "No matter what else you do, don't damage that spot!" Furthermore, couldn't the Anti-Monitor have destroyed it himself, thus severing his ties to the material world and giving himself godlike power? After all, as the central power battery goes on to say through Tomar-Re, it only learned this detail while it was possessed by the Anti-Monitor, so he must know this secret. Why not exploit it?

After a debate over whether or not the battery's revelation can be trusted, the Guardians send the Green Lanterns to the nearest portal that opens to the anti-matter universe in Tomar-Re's ship. But why do they need a ship to go there? Why not just use their rings as Hal has done several times in the past? And considering all that's happening, do portals to the anti-matter universe still exist? Why haven't they all been sealed to prevent sneak attacks?

On Charon, Pluto's sole satellite, Guy, Hal, and their band of criminals prepare for their assault on Qward's moon. For reasons unexplained, a portal to the anti-matter universe opens above them, "the hole to the black beyond," as Guy calls it, then the team flies through it. As they do, Hal talks them through the process, explaining what they will experience as they're experiencing it, and before they know it, they're on the other side.

No sooner do they get there than they're attacked by a squadron of Weaponers. Hal and Guy get into an argument over how to deal with them. Hal just wants to incapacitate them, but Guy wants to kill them. When Hal refuses, Guy takes Hal's ring and leaves him to die, floating amongst a group of Weaponer and villain corpses. When the other Green Lanterns arrive, they're just in time to save Hal, who grabbed a dead Weaponer's space helmet to provide himself with oxygen. Writer Steve Englehart must have forgotten *Green Lantern* #123 and *Crisis* #7, both of which establish that there's air in space in the anti-matter universe, though perhaps there's not enough to sustain life.



Steve Englehart, writer on *Green Lantern* #198. Englehart helped modernize DC in the late 1970s, especially through his celebrated *Detective Comics* run with Marshall Rogers, which darkened Batman, sharpened the Joker's homicidal edge, and introduced Silver St. Cloud, influencing later comics and even Tim Burton's 1989 film.

As Guy and the surviving villains approach Qward's moon, a second wave of Weaponers attacks, at which point Guy says, "There's the black moon!" The problem is, the moon isn't black; it's white with a shadowy black spot on it. Are they actually above Oa's moon, or is this another coloring error? It turns out to be the latter, as the moon is colored white, then pink, throughout the remainder of this issue.

After they dispatch the Weaponers, a battle ensues between the Green Lanterns and Guy's villains, during which Guy slips away in search of the white spot. "This looks like a place the Anti-Monitor would be born—it's nothing but boulders and slag," he thinks. "The white spot won't be easy to find in this mess!" Yes, especially because the entire moon is colored white!

No one could ever accuse Guy of lacking initiative, though, and he finally locates the spot, but just as he's about to blast it with green energy, Hal redirects the beam. Guy turns on Hal, ready to destroy him and the white spot, but John Stewart intervenes, and the two of them face off, blasting each other with their rings' energy in a manner that's probably meant as a callback to the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor's million-year standoff.

Somehow, John's ring prevails—did it have more charge in it than Guy's?—then all at once, the multiverse shakes. "And friend and foe alike understand without possibility of error or doubt that somewhere else in time and space—the Anti-Monitor has failed in his quest! The destruction has ended! The crisis is finally finished!"

This leaves one to wonder how they could possibly know this, especially to such a high level of certainty. Do their rings communicate it to them via the Guardians? Probably not, seeing as it's already been established that the Guardians can merely observe the anti-matter universe, but they have no power there.

The issue ends with Tomar-Re's death, as indicated in *Crisis,* and a game of switcheroo, with John returning Hal's ring to him and John taking Tomar-Re's ring. "Once a Green Lantern, always a Green Lantern!" a caption says at the end. Hal is officially reinstated as part of the Corps in the next issue, for better or worse as subsequent event series would explore.

Fury of Firestorm #42 follows Wonder Girl and Firehawk as they enter the warp zone in New York City, as

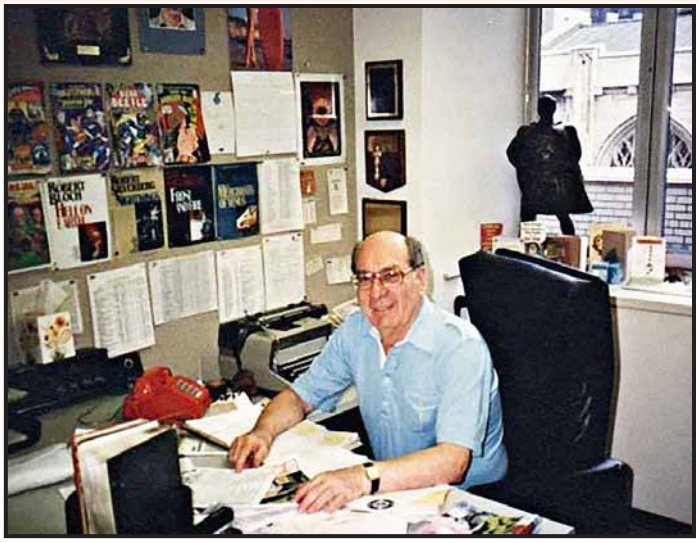
shown in *Crisis* #9. It gets a few things incorrect right out of the gate. First, Wonder Girl says, "I hope we can find Terry and your father down there," but in *Crisis* #9, there's no mention of Firehawk's father. Second, Firehawk thanks Donna for the Titans' help, saying, "When this thing started, I almost went nuts. You guys helped pull me back together." A caption directs us to *Crisis* #8, but there's no sign of Firehawk "going nuts" there. She merely loses her old costume in the explosion aboard the JLA satellite when Red Tornado blows up and has to fashion a new one. Third, Wonder Girl says going into the warp zone was Firehawk's idea, but in *Crisis* #9 Wonder Girl was already planning to go in when Firehawk insisted she come along. Clearly, some wires got crossed between the editors of these two titles.

When they get to where Firehawk's dad should be, they find a prehistoric landscape and realize his neighborhood has probably been sent to the Jurassic period. After Wonder Girl is attacked by a giant octopus, they go searching for her husband, Terry. But Wonder Girl is hit by a cannonball unleashed by a ship in the harbor, which has swapped places in time with the Revolutionary War version of that locale. When Firehawk changes to her civilian identity as Lorraine Riley and enters a pub looking for a doctor, the two women are mistaken for Tories (British sympathizers) and are about to be attacked. But Tomahawk (first appearance, *Star-Spangled Comics* #69, 1947) intervenes.

When they get to a doctor, they realize Wonder Girl, who is unconscious, probably picked up an infection from the octopus, and the doctor says they have no choice but to allow the infection to run its course. Tomahawk asks Lorraine who she and Wonder Girl really are, so Lorraine decides to reveal her Firehawk persona. Not only does he take it in stride, he asks Firehawk if she'll help defend Washington's forces against the British in a crucial battle that night. Firehawk is hesitant, not wanting to mess with history, but considering the circumstances of his request, it seems like that train has already left the station.

Firehawk creates a diversion, joined by Wonder Girl, who has recovered enough to help, and the rebels gain the advantage. As the two women set off to continue their search for Terry, Firehawk, who has been questioning this whole "super-hero shtick" throughout this adventure, finally embraces her new identity as a superhero.

After being blinded while fighting the shadow demons in *Crisis* #11, Princess Amethyst is spirited back to Gemworld by Doctor Fate in *Amethyst* #13. While en route, he muses that if what he senses about her is true, she could be the most powerful creature in the universe. That's quite the statement, with a lot of other beings vying for that title over the years. But he's not using hyperbole. Through a retelling of Gemworld's history, Fate reveals that Amethyst isn't just royal blood of the House of Amethyst but the first Lord of Order to assume human form. Now it's her job to rid Gemworld of every last vestige of Chaos. As she grapples with her lost sight and newfound destiny, Amethyst realizes the cosmic stakes behind her magic and the role she must play to save her world, but she's far from happy about it.

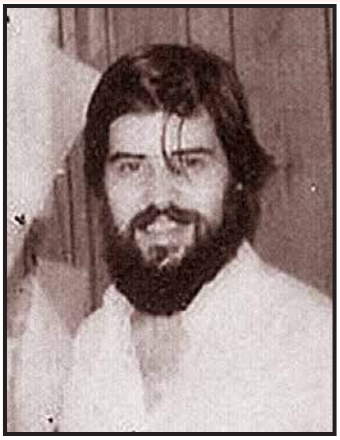


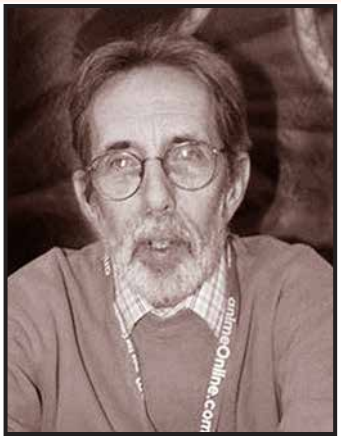
Julie Schwartz at the 666 5th Ave. DC Comics offices. Photo courtesy of Paul McCall and *kleinletters.com*. Schwartz was one of DC's most influential editors, reviving heroes in the Silver Age and beyond. His vision helped launch the modern DC universe and reshape comics.

New Teen Titans #13 covers a lot of ground, beginning with the arrival of the red skies and Cyborg's recruitment by Harbinger, following his "breakup" with Sarah Simms. He plays hard to get, hitting Harbinger with his signature "million decibels of pure white sound" before finally succumbing to her will. Along the way, this Wolfman-penned story has a fun sequence where Cyborg crashes through DC's offices, which were then located at 666 5th Avenue in New York. Several well-known DC staffers, including Julius Schwartz, Dick Giordano, and the artist for this story, Eduardo Barreto, make an appearance.

The action jumps ahead one week to the scene in *Crisis* #3 where the Titans and the Outsiders work to save people from the anti-matter onslaught. It doesn't provide much in the way of context for this scene except to show the Titans are still trying to figure out who's behind the attack, with Trigon being a top contender, even though he was killed (apparently) in *Teen Titans* #5.

A collage of scenes involving the Titans and other heroes against a backdrop of the Anti-Monitor shows the crisis developing over the next several days. Surprisingly considering Wolfman's involvement, the Anti-Monitor's appearance here doesn't quite match the way he's drawn in *Crisis*. For instance, the shape of his helmet is different, as is the opening for his mouth. He has extra gray hardware around his mouth and coming up from his chest, a black-and-gray piece covering his mouth that doesn't appear elsewhere, and additional lines on his helmet. His gauntlets are incorrect too. In *Crisis* #6, for instance, his gauntlets are segmented, but





Eduardo Barreto (left) brought cinematic draftsmanship to DC on *Atari Force*, *New Teen Titans*, and *Batman*. Keith Giffen (1952–2023) helped redefine DC through *Legion*, *Justice League International*, *Ambush Bug*, and *Lobo*, blending cosmic invention with absurdist humor.

in this issue they look more like gloves. This issue came out several months after the Anti-Monitor first revealed himself, so artist Eduardo Barreto should have had access to the concept art. But was he possibly working from an older sketch? Even if he was, why wasn't this discrepancy caught on such a high-profile book written by the author of *Crisis* himself?

The issue ends with another perspective on the arrival of the delegation from Tamaran shown in *Crisis* #9, but this version is inconsistent with the original too. First, the design of the Tamaranian spaceship has several structural discrepancies from the version shown in *Crisis*. More importantly, Taryia, who plays a key role in the *Crisis* version, conferring with Captain Karras before and after they meet the Titans, is absent here and in the next issue after Starfire, Nightwing, and Jericho beam aboard. And in *Crisis* #9, Karras is waiting nervously on the ship with Taryia, but here he beams up with the Titans. Finally, the Tamaranian crew members' uniforms are also different. How could so many obvious errors get through on such a high-profile book at such a crucial time in DC's publishing history?

The following issue, also a bannered crossover, has Raven's mother, Arella, looking for her daughter. Recall that the Monitor said he couldn't locate Raven in *Crisis* #2. But in this issue, she returns from her father's realm of Azareth minus her memory and embarks on a career as a faith healer in the American South.

The Titans argue over who, if anyone, should accompany Starfire back to her homeworld, with Nightwing and Jericho making the cut. The rest of the Titans are called in to deal with Steve Dayton, who has been driven mad while trying to use his Mento helmet to heal himself. Apparently, John Constantine's little pep talk in *Crisis* #4 didn't do the trick.

A note prior to the credits of *DC Comics Presents* #88 indicates this was a "new approach" to the series, and Keith Giffen's art style certainly was. Resembling some of his more abstract, impressionist work on *Son of Ambush Bug,* his penciling style and panel layouts were quite the deviation from standard superhero team-up fare. In this issue, Jack Ryder, a.k.a. the Creeper, uses his TV show to air the warnings of every doomsayer and crackpot claiming the world is ending due to the crisis. One guest, however, has discovered ancient runes that turn him into a psychic conduit for a primordial demon, broadcasting its influence directly into viewers' minds. As a plague of fear spreads across Metropolis, Superman and the Creeper trace the signal back to its source—the TV studio. There, they confront the demon mid-broadcast, shatter the rune-based link, and banish the creature, restoring hope (and the broadcast's ratings) before the two of them part on decidedly grouchy terms.

The Legionnaires are alarmed to discover a strange temporal field erasing all knowledge of the crisis from 30th-century records in *Legion of Super-Heroes* #18. Even Brainiac-5 is losing his memory of Supergirl's death despite watching a video of it over and over again. While tracing the source of the disturbance, they discover the time-powered villain known as the Infinite Man has blocked history's collective memory of the crisis event. First appearing in *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes* #233, the Infinite Man's real name is Jaxon Rugarth, a scientist whose investigations into the nature of space and time imbued him with extraordinary powers.

After a fierce battle, the Legion strips him of his powers, sending him back to the dawn of time from whence he came, allowing the suppressed details of history to reassert themselves. With Infinite Man defeated, echoes of the original crisis—its reshaped timelines and vanished worlds—begin flowing back into their era, with the Legion wondering if they might have just doomed the world. A caption at the end of the story refers readers to the final issue of *Crisis* for an answer to this question. However, apart from a couple of glimpses toward the revised future for Kamandi and Jonah Hex, no mention is made of the 30th century, and the Legion is conspicuously absent.

This was the beginning of an awkward era for the Legion as writers and readers struggled to reconcile the removal of Superboy from DC's continuity, seeing as he was the hero who inspired the formation of their group. That problem was resolved in a multi-title crossover (*Cosmic Boy* #1–4, *Superman* #8, *Action Comics* #591, and *Legion of Super-Heroes* #36–38), which revealed that the Superboy remembered by the Legion came from a pocket universe created by the Time Trapper. Unbeknownst to the Legion, every time they traveled into the past, their time sphere was secretly diverted to this alternate world. The solution didn't satisfy everyone—the Legion would be rebooted multiple times in the years ahead—but it remains a clever example of how post-*Crisis* constraints didn't stifle creativity at DC. On the contrary, they forced writers to think creatively within the new limits imposed by the singular timeline and universe, sparking a fresh wave of experimental storytelling that has continued in one form or another ever since.

CONCLUSION

Bluelines and Baggage—Crisis as DC's Eternal Battleground

Recall that Marv Wolfman's original plan following *Crisis* was for a hard reboot. He saw the maxi-series as a chance to wipe the slate clean, destroying the multiverse and replacing it with a single, cohesive DCU, and then move straight into a brand-new era. In his initial pitch, once the heroes returned from battling the Anti-Monitor at the dawn of time, none of them would remember what happened. Every title would begin afresh in January 1986 with a new #1, free of all pre-*Crisis* baggage. Revamped versions of flagship characters like Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and the Flash would be introduced as if readers and citizens of the DCU were encountering them for the first time. There would be no need to explain old backstories or reconcile contradictory histories because everything pre-*Crisis* would be gone, and the event itself would vanish from continuity, never to be mentioned again.

"The beauty of the way we're ending the Crisis, and the way we're rebuilding everything, is that all of … the dumb stuff is gone, and somebody's going to have to go out of his way to bring it back," Wolfman said as the series was winding up. "It's corrective history. There's a big eraser that's gone over all of that. … Starting in January, we use only the past that was good."[198]

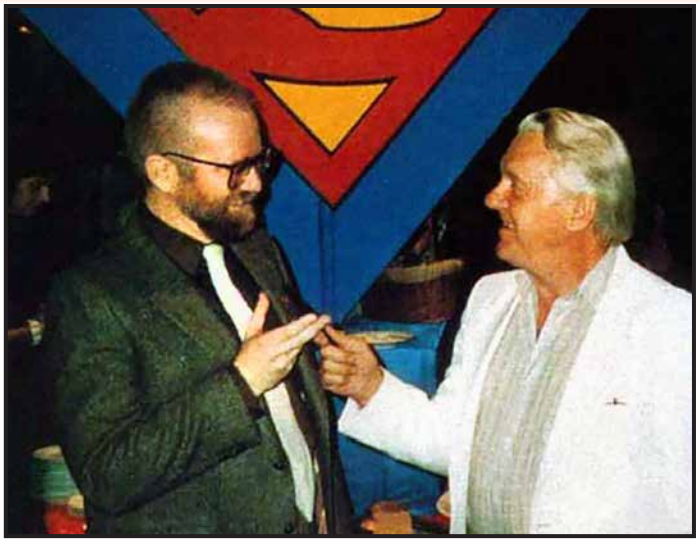
If only.

Fan reaction suggests the clean break that Wolfman envisioned was already beginning to unravel within months after *Crisis* concluded. In a letter published in *Who's Who* #22, Lewis Call of Las Cruces, NM, voiced a sentiment many readers likely shared but few expressed so pointedly: "Is it just me, or is DC's continuity just as convoluted and confusing as ever?" For him, *Crisis* merely replaced one kind of complexity with another. Now, instead of parallel Earths, there were "parallel dimensions" like Captain Carrot's world or Gemworld, which he viewed as a narrative sleight of hand, and *Who's Who* #16 revealed that two versions of Camelot existed. "I thought if I waited until the Crisis had passed altogether, I might be able to see its benefits," Call wrote. "But that simply hasn't happened. … If I'm right, the Crisis becomes nothing

198 O'Neill, 25.



***History of the DC Universe* #1 (1986). Published after *Crisis* as a two-issue prestige-format companion, *History of the DC Universe* has Harbinger narrating DC's unified past, fulfilling her vow to the Monitor and functioning as an official map of continuity after the multiverse collapsed.**



Curt Swan passes the torch to John Byrne in expectation of his 1986 *Man of Steel* miniseries. The reboot redefined Superman for the post-*Crisis* era, serving as his official origin until 2003. The two-cover release for issue #1's is cited as comics' first marketed variant cover.

(opposite page) *History of the DC Universe* #2, p. 7. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). Rather than take a pane-by-panel approach, the mini-series opted for composite illustrations supplemented by a prose summary of key points in DC's history.

more than an excuse for Marv Wolfman to kill off some of his least favorite characters. Any comments?"

As Call's letter indicates, DC ultimately took more of a hybrid approach, rebooting some of their key characters and series but allowing others to retain their pre-*Crisis* continuity, with a few modifications necessitated by the elimination of the multiverse. As for Camelot, the opportunity for stories like *Camelot 3000* and *Ronin* to exist outside of DC's main continuity was part of Wolfman and Wein's initial pitch, so this wasn't quite the problem that Call made it out to be.

There were many reasons for DC's piecemeal approach to establishing the new DCU, one of the foremost being financial. The success of *Crisis* may have prevented DC from being consumed by a real-life version of the anti-matter cloud, but the company was still in no position to launch such a radical reset.

"It was too big of a thing," Paul Levitz said when interviewed for this book. "There weren't that many people ready to do something fresh, exciting, and memorable. And there wasn't a financial upside for doing it in many cases. There wasn't that kind of money in the marketplace. So, if we're relaunching Superman now, it's not a good idea to relaunch Batman or to focus attention on Batman in the same month. Wait two months, wait three months, whatever it is, till the cash is available."

Apart from the danger of spreading fans' monthly comic book budgets too thin, such a comprehensive overhaul also ran the risk of alienating DC's long-time readers, many of whom were already rankled by the modifications wrought by *Crisis*. "A lot of people were polarized by specific changes," Jerry Ordway says. "Nobody likes change, especially if they've been reading comics for a long time. People like the *illusion* of change, changes that don't alter things too much. That was one of the big criticisms thrown at *Crisis,* that it was too broad. Why did they need to do this?"

Editorial pushback was another significant factor. DC may have amalgamated the multiverse, but its siloed approach to editing persisted. "About halfway through the series, there was an editorial meeting, and the editors argued that, if the heroes forgot the *Crisis,* it would invalidate the larger story," Wolfman said. "I absolutely disagreed with that."[199] In the end, Wolfman was overruled, but there was a bittersweet follow-up. In the fall of 1985, Dick Giordano told him that he thought they had made a mistake, and Wolfman's original ending should have been left intact. "I always wished that we could have implemented Marv's post-*Crisis* idea that we should have faded to black at the conclusion of *Crisis,* and, after a short hiatus, launched reboots of all the major characters left after *Crisis,*" he said in a 2009 interview. "I declined even to try as I firmly believed that we could not marshal the resources to do it justice."[200] Despite this vindication, by then it was too late. "Unfortunately, because of that, the next five years of continuity were so complex because there were too many conflicting memories [among the characters]," Wolfman says.

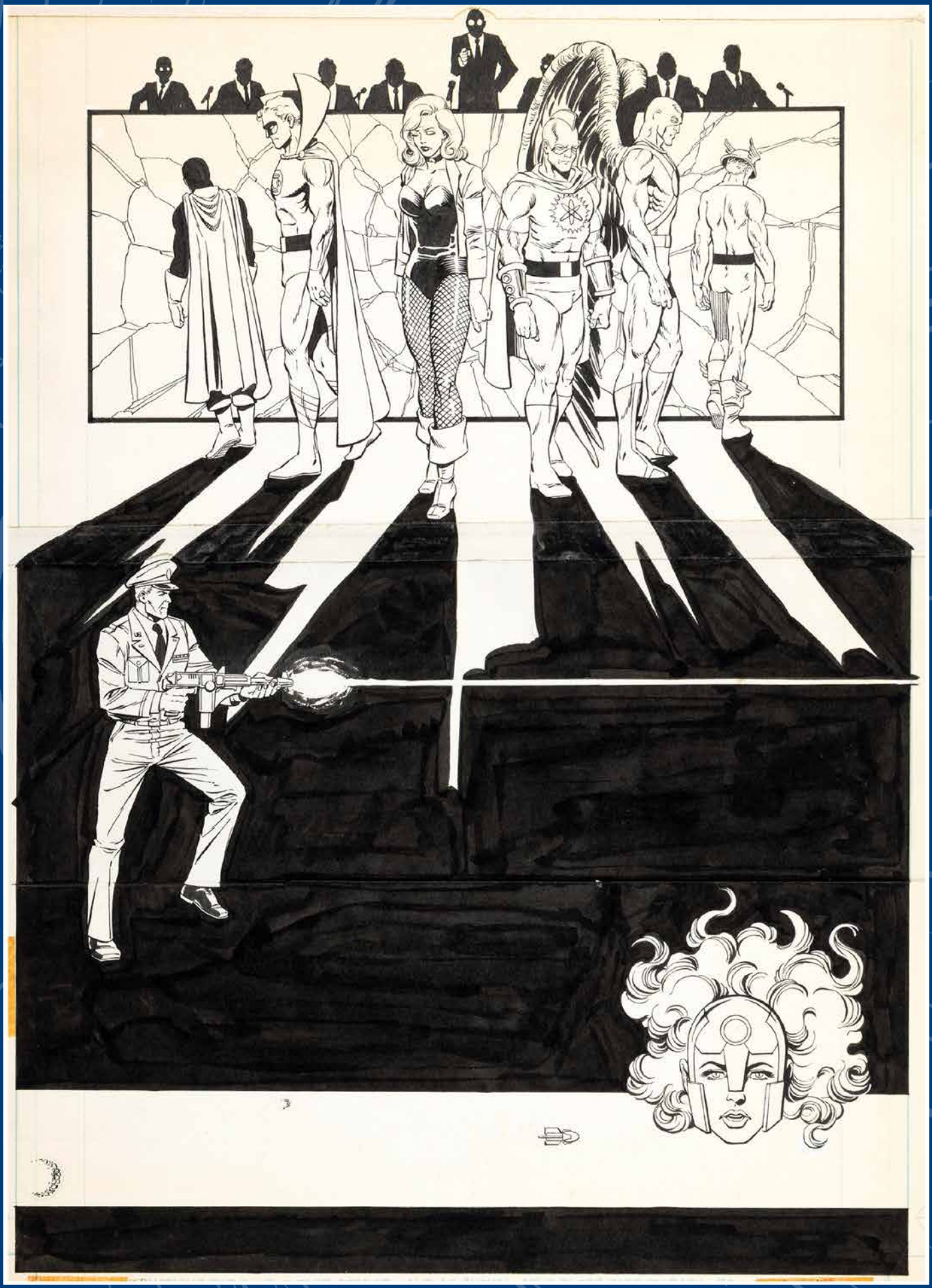
Jerry Ordway makes a similar observation. "In the '80s, I would read stories from other people and I'd say, 'Wait a minute, this character is talking about *Crisis.* They're not supposed to remember that.' Or they remembered that there was something called the Crisis, but they couldn't remember what it was. It became the fault of editorial in that they didn't clamp down. They let things slide, and that basically softened the rule, and then suddenly everyone started remembering *Crisis.*"

Even Ambush Bug got in on the act, asking readers if they were ready for the crisis on "the only earth we're allowed to use!" (*Ambush Bug Stocking Stuffer* #1)

Giordano identified such inconsistencies as the biggest failure of the series: "Our seeming inability to hold the course on *Crisis* and some of the mistakes made, intentionally or unintentionally, in stories that gave lie, big and small, to the conclusions of *Crisis.*"[201]

Due to these and other factors, even though *Crisis* was marketed as a line-wide event, DC didn't fully commit to a post-*Crisis* publishing plan. In an effort to formalize the new status quo, Wolfman and Pérez created *The History of the DC Universe* (1986), a two-part series intended to serve as the official origin and cosmology of the newly unified DCU. But not every creator stuck to this roadmap. Some people within DC agreed with readers who felt the changes *Crisis* mandated were too extreme. Rather than regard the multiverse as a liability, they thought it was the very thing that made DC

199 Brady, 80.
200 Eury, 39.
201 Ibid.



unique. Others felt that while *Crisis* may have solved some problems, it created all sorts of new continuity headaches, like how to handle the Earth-Two characters, whose creative teams were now as homeless as Kal-L himself, and some of them just as grief-stricken. Hence, even with *History of the DC Universe* attempting to codify a singular lore, there was no central enforcement of this continuity. As a result, writers often created their own interpretations of what it meant for their characters to operate in the post-*Crisis* DCU.

This selective, disjointed approach to rebooting continuity laid the groundwork for decades of retcons, rebirths, revamps, patch jobs, and confusion—not to mention the eventual return of the multiverse, omniverse, and so on. The question is, does this mean *Crisis* was a failure?

A good way to answer this query is to measure the series according to the three factors that Dick Giordano invoked when he first introduced *Crisis* to the world—change, permanence, and viability.

No less an authority than Wolfman himself argues that change is an inevitable aspect of comic book storytelling. It's the very engine of renewal, especially when dealing with characters and concepts that no one thought would last more than a few years, never mind multiple decades. "Every generation has a right to change its characters," he told *Amazing Heroes*, "to progress its characters and move them along and make them relevant to their generation."[202] To which he later added, "This happened by accident in the past: Comics were created in 1938 with Superman. About 25 years later, between 1956–1961, the Silver age was created with no direct regard for what happened before. About 25 years after that, I did Crisis with George Pérez and that once again updated the DCU."[203]

Indeed, an openness to change has been one of DC's greatest assets since its inception. From its Golden Age experiments to its Silver Age reboots to its Bronze Age tonal shifts to *Crisis* and beyond, DC has never hesitated to reinvent its characters, swap identities, redesign costumes, and update, merge, expand, or destroy its storyworlds. The company has also displayed a remarkable degree of responsiveness to its readers' suggestions and complaints, constantly adapting its storytelling approach, genre emphasis, and business model to fit with current cultural trends and to suit fans' ever-changing tastes. "I think the reason why we still have Superman and Batman comics is that they keep getting reinvented," Ordway says. "If they'd been monolithic and never changed, they might have gone the way of Flash Gordon or any number of characters that used to be popular like the Shadow or Doc Savage."

Wolfman takes an even stronger position.

> *The line I've been using since before* Crisis *is, "Continuity holds the best writer hostage of the worst." I believe continuity held to the extreme stifles creativity. Comics should expand your thoughts, not restrict them, and the more continuity that exists the smaller field you have to explore. I think you need to clear the field every so often and let the writers breathe. Let them come up with the wackiest, craziest ideas and not worry that ten years before someone did a story that prevents that new great idea from being done.*[204]



BeyondGeorge Pérez recreates the most iconic cover from *Crisis* (issue #7) at a comic-con. No word on who the young woman is or whether she survived the photo shoot. True nerds will note her direction is reversed from the actual cover, indicating this may have occurred on a parallel earth.

That said, sometimes this propensity for change has been a liability for DC, such as when it has happened accidentally, unevenly, too suddenly, or too frequently. The rapid pace of major events (especially from 2005 onward) in particular has at times led to "event fatigue," where every story feels like little more than the setup for the next reboot rather than a meaningful tale in and of itself. Readers have less time to invest themselves emotionally in a particular set of characters and are increasingly leery to do so, knowing it's only a matter of time before the status quo shifts again.

"*Crisis on Infinite Earths* was great as a series, great as a means to expand DC's audience and even bring back some lost readers, and to show the creative communities that DC could be an exciting place to create magnificent comic books," former DC editor Mike Gold says. "However, it became a brand. The latest new Oreo flavor. Crisis has been done over and over and over, and most of the subsequent Crisis series fell way, way short of the mark set by Marv and George. It devolved into just a marketing stunt. Those stories could be exciting and truly great—if done maybe once every five to ten years or so. But that's our culture: take a great idea that proves successful and wring every drop of blood out of it until few people really care any longer. It's inevitable. We live and create by trends."

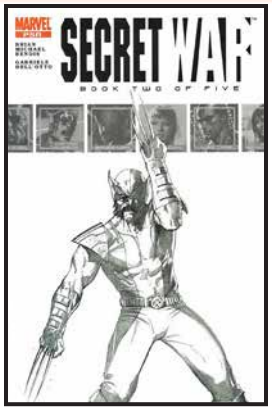
Furthermore, the reversibility of the so-called "major" changes introduced by these events (e.g., character deaths) undermines their narrative weight and creates an increasing

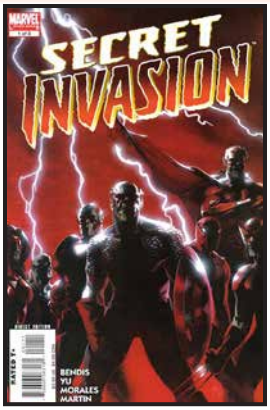
202 Ibid., 81.
203 Siegel, 2011.
204 Siegel, *Village Voice.*











sense of skepticism that something other than narrative necessity—i.e., money—is driving them. Such changes are meant to reinspire current readers and win over new ones, but they also run the risk of having the opposite effect. Alan Moore issued a warning about this very problem in his pitch for an unpublished DC event series, *Twilight of the Superheroes*:

> *The readers of long standing, somewhere along the line, are going to have some slight feeling that all the stories that they followed avidly during their years of involvement with the book have been in some way invalidated, that all those countless plotlines weren't leading to anything more than what is in some respects an arbitrary cut-off point. By extension, the readers of today might well be left with the sensation that the stories they are currently reading are of less significance or moment because, after all, at some point ten years in the future some comic book omnipotent, be it an editor or the Spectre, can go back in time and erase the whole slate, ready to start again.*[205]

While the scale of change that *Crisis* introduced makes it exceptional, the series stands firmly in the center of DC tradition. Its proposal to eliminate the multiverse was no more radical than Julius Schwartz's formal acknowledgement of said multiverse 24 years earlier. Judged by its lasting influence, sustained reader engagement, and the many attempts to imitate its formula, *Crisis* stands out as a landmark success in this regard—even if much of what it changed was eventually undone. That's because, more than any specific alteration to characters or continuity, *Crisis* carved out space for future reinventions, proving the DCU could survive—and even thrive—through radical, cosmic-scale transformation as new trends in storytelling demanded it.

This brings us to the concept of permanence. Even Giordano backed off on this word when reflecting on *Crisis* years later, conceding that no matter how absolute the rules that he or any other editor laid down, they could always be undone by the next administration. "Everything is subject to change … *always,*"

205 Rich Johnston, "Let's All Read Alan Moore's Proposal for DC Event Comic, Twilight of the Superheroes," *Bleeding Cool,* March 18, 2020, https://tinyurl.com/bda9yr4j.

Just as "crisis" became a marketing buzzword for DC to signal an event of epic proportions, Marvel has based its event series around the terms "secret" and "wars." Like DC, Marvel has returned to the well repeatedly in an attempt to reset its universe and reignite reader interest and sales.

he told *Back Issue!* magazine in 2009. "The dead are rendered undead, planets recreate themselves, and what you thought you knew, you don't. I never expected that the events of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* would be etched in stone forever. Every new regime has to create a sandbox that they are comfortable playing in. … The new kids on the block are entitled to have their fun."[206] That said, the fact that Barry Allen remained "dead" for 24 years and a rebooted version of Supergirl wasn't introduced for nearly two decades is a remarkable demonstration of editorial restraint in an industry that isn't exactly known for it. In a medium where death is often a revolving door and legacy characters cycle back into prominence with each new crossover, *Crisis* managed—however briefly—to enforce a new status quo that creators and subsequent publishing regimes largely respected. This period of enforced narrative absence gave Barry and Kara's deaths a rare weight and symbolic finality, reinforcing the idea that *Crisis* had changed something fundamental about the DCU not just in terms of continuity but also in tone and stakes. The longevity of these losses suggests that, at least for a time, DC was serious about letting the consequences of *Crisis* settle and allowing their deaths to become part of the DCU's emotional architecture. The apparent finality of their loss echoed through storylines that shaped the tone of an era and created a generational memory that became an emotional touchpoint for readers and creators alike. It wasn't the literal finality that mattered but the sustained illusion that these deaths meant something, and that meaning endured long after the multiverse was rebuilt.

And let's not forget the death of the multiverse itself. While hints and echoes of it began to creep into stories like *The Kingdom* (1998), which introduced the concept of Hypertime, and *JLA: Earth 2* (2000), which featured an anti-matter version of Earth, the multiverse didn't officially return until issue #52 of *52* in 2007, over 20 years after *Crisis* concluded. All that to say, while *Crisis* may not have achieved permanence

206 Eury, 39.

in the strict editorial sense that Giordano intended, it created something even more powerful—a *feeling* of irreversibility.

In terms of viability, *Crisis* made several key contributions to the long-term sustainability of DC Comics, addressing the many creative and commercial challenges facing the company in the early 1980s. First and foremost, by providing an editorial reset, consolidating decades of convoluted continuity across multiple earths into a more or less single, streamlined universe, it made DC's characters and storylines more accessible to new readers. It also freed creators to push things in bold, new directions, unburdened by having to adhere to decades of established lore. *Crisis* also demonstrated the commercial power of event-driven storytelling, uniting nearly the entire publishing line in a high-stakes, line-wide crossover, creating a model that became a staple of the industry. Artistically, it proved that superhero comics could tackle sweeping, mythic themes with real emotional stakes. In doing so, *Crisis* not only reinvigorated core franchises like Superman, Wonder Woman, the Flash, and Batman, it also laid the foundation for a more coherent, mature, and marketable shared universe, enticing the biggest names in the business to come play in their sandbox. Ironically, while *Crisis* was initially seen as a defensive maneuver against Marvel's growing market dominance and potential takeover, it was Marvel—not DC—that filed for bankruptcy just ten years later, brought low by overexpansion, internal power struggles, reader fatigue, and the collapse of the very speculator bubble that it had worked so hard to create.

Change, permanence, and viability—the challenges raised by these dynamics never go away, and various creators and editorial regimes have met these challenges in different ways, operating from completely different mindsets. Some creators, such as Geoff Johns, Grant Morrison, Scott Snyder, and Joshua Williamson have emulated the hyper-rational approach modeled by Roy Thomas, weaving intricate mythologies where every narrative thread, character origin, and cosmic event is retroactively explained or connected. Johns is known for reengineering continuity through detailed cause-and-effect logic, such as redefining the emotional spectrum in Green Lantern or layering backstory into *Flashpoint*. Morrison's meta-architectural style, particularly in *Final Crisis* and *The Multiversity,* treats the multiverse itself as a self-aware narrative construct governed by symbolic and metaphysical laws. Snyder, especially in works like *Dark Nights: Metal* and *Death Metal,* builds grand cosmologies that seek to explain the underlying structure of DC's reality through dark matter, anti-crisis energy, and multiversal science. Williamson continues this tradition in *Dark Crisis on Infinite Earths*, which reimagines the multiverse once more not as a problem to fix but as a legacy to understand. Through Pariah's distorted vision of the Great Darkness and the heroes' struggle to restore balance, Williamson rationalizes past crises into a unified cosmology. In different ways, all four writers behave like string theorists searching for a narrative "theory of everything"—a unifying framework that connects the gravity of myth with the fundamental forces of serialized storytelling. In doing so, they reflect a modern compulsion to rationalize the irrational and map the unknowable, turning DC's sprawling mythos into an elaborate system of interconnected meaning. This drive to synthesize narrative sprawl reveals a deeper psychological need to find coherence and meaning in an increasingly chaotic world. The hyper-rational model satisfies readers and creators alike who crave structure, grand design, and the comfort of explanatory closure.

This approach stands in contrast to an equally rich tradition within DC that thrives on mythic ambiguity and narrative fragmentation, a tradition embraced by writers like Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, and even early Grant Morrison, who treat the DCU not as a single equation to solve but as an open world where mystery, contradiction, and multiplicity are features rather than bugs. This approach echoes the earlier editorial sensibility of figures like Julius Schwartz, Bob Haney, and Mark Gruenwald who prioritized bold, self-contained tales over adhering to long-term continuity, trusting that the strength of an individual story mattered more than its placement in a larger system. In this mode, the DCU becomes less a world to be mapped and more of a mythic landscape to explore. It's a place where not everything connects, but that's part of the magic. As Dr. Light says toward the end of *Dark Crisis on Infinite Earths* #7, "Pariah and the others before him failed to save the infinite earths because they wanted to control them . . . to find perfection. But perfection is boring. The multiverse needs to be free . . . and infinite!" The tension between these two impulses—systematization and play—continues to define the evolving identity of DC's storytelling.

In the end, this is what makes *Crisis* so enduring. It was never just a publishing stunt or a continuity fix. It was a statement of purpose, a declaration that the DCU was flexible enough to be rewritten, rich enough to support reinvention, and resilient enough to endure contradiction. Whether interpreted as a cosmological unification project or a meta-commentary on the impossibility of total narrative control, *Crisis* inaugurated a new era of self-awareness in superhero storytelling. It revealed the limits and the allure of continuity and set in motion a multi-generational conversation between systematizers and improvisers, engineers and mythmakers, architects and dreamers about what kind of world the DCU should be. The very contradictions that *Crisis* exposed and amplified—between change and stability, coherence and fragmentation, grand design and creative freedom—continue to animate DC's storytelling to this day. Despite Wolfman's initial intentions, *Crisis* didn't resolve those tensions; it revealed them. And in doing so, it ensured its own lasting relevance not as the end of anything but as the beginning of everything that followed. This is why so many people view *Crisis* as the hinge point in DC storytelling and why it still resonates over four decades later. As Tegan O'Neil says in a *Comics Journal* article that reflects on their unambiguous love for the series, "It's a dividing line. There's pre- and post-*Crisis*—you don't need to specify *which* Crisis."[207]

There couldn't be a more ringing endorsement of its legacy than that.

207 O'Neil, 2018.

About the Author

Kevin Miller is an award-winning novelist and filmmaker. Over the past 30 years, he has applied his craft to a wide range of projects, including feature films, documentaries, novels, non-fiction books, and comic books. Kevin has been featured on CBC Radio, CNN, and numerous other radio and TV outlets and podcasts, and his work has been written about and reviewed in dozens of publications, including the *New York Times, Variety, The Globe and Mail,* and the *Vancouver Sun.* His comic book bona fides include *Meth: The Immortal,* his short-lived series about a pig who accidentally gains immortality when he eats an apple that falls from the Tree of Life, and a brief stint portraying Lex Luthor on *Smallville* after Michael Rosenbaum left the series. To learn more about Kevin and his work, visit *www.kevinmillerxi.com*.

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