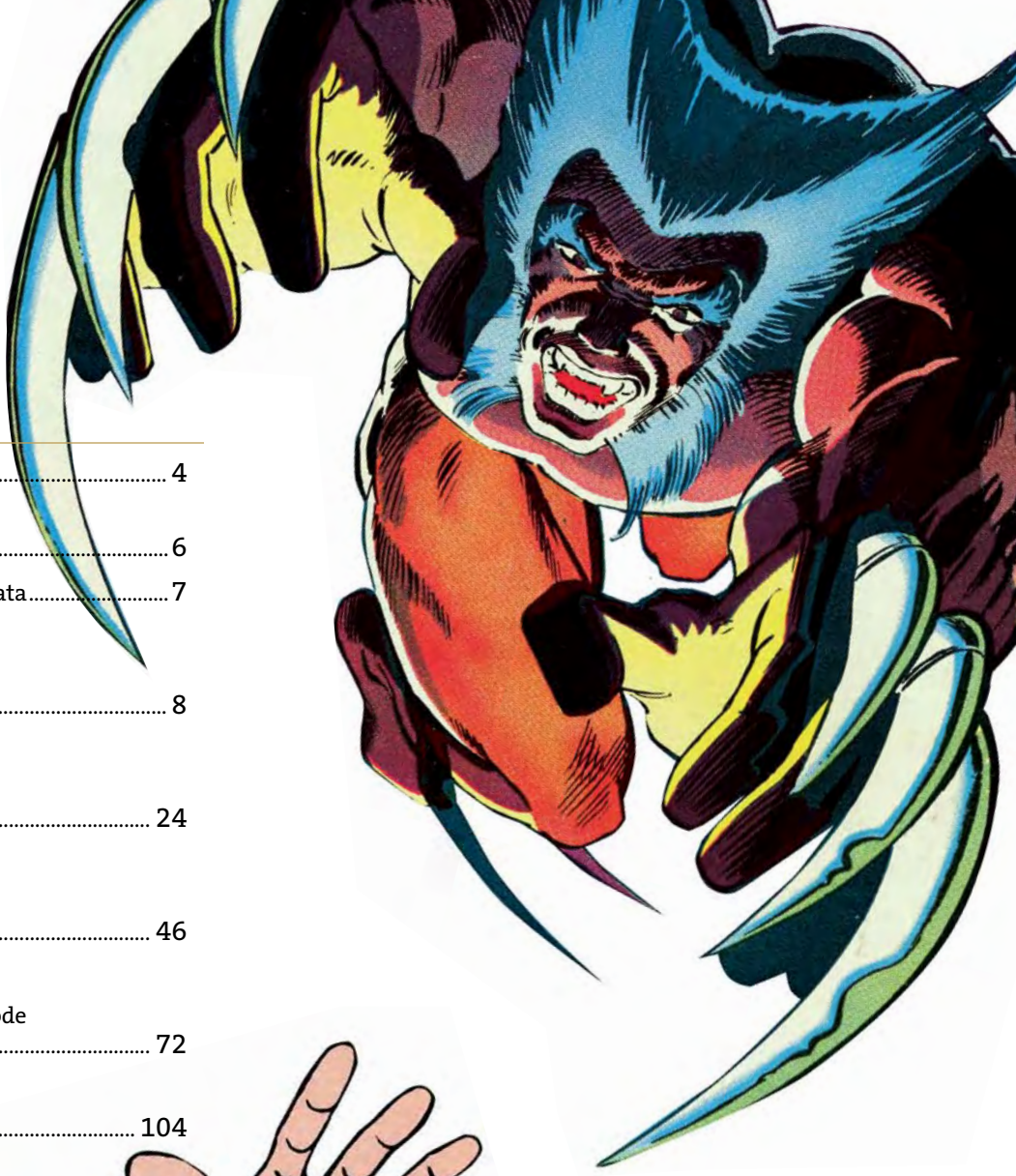
TWO MORROWS

AMERICAN COMIC BOOK CHRONICLES

THE 1980s

1980–1989

by KEITH DALLAS



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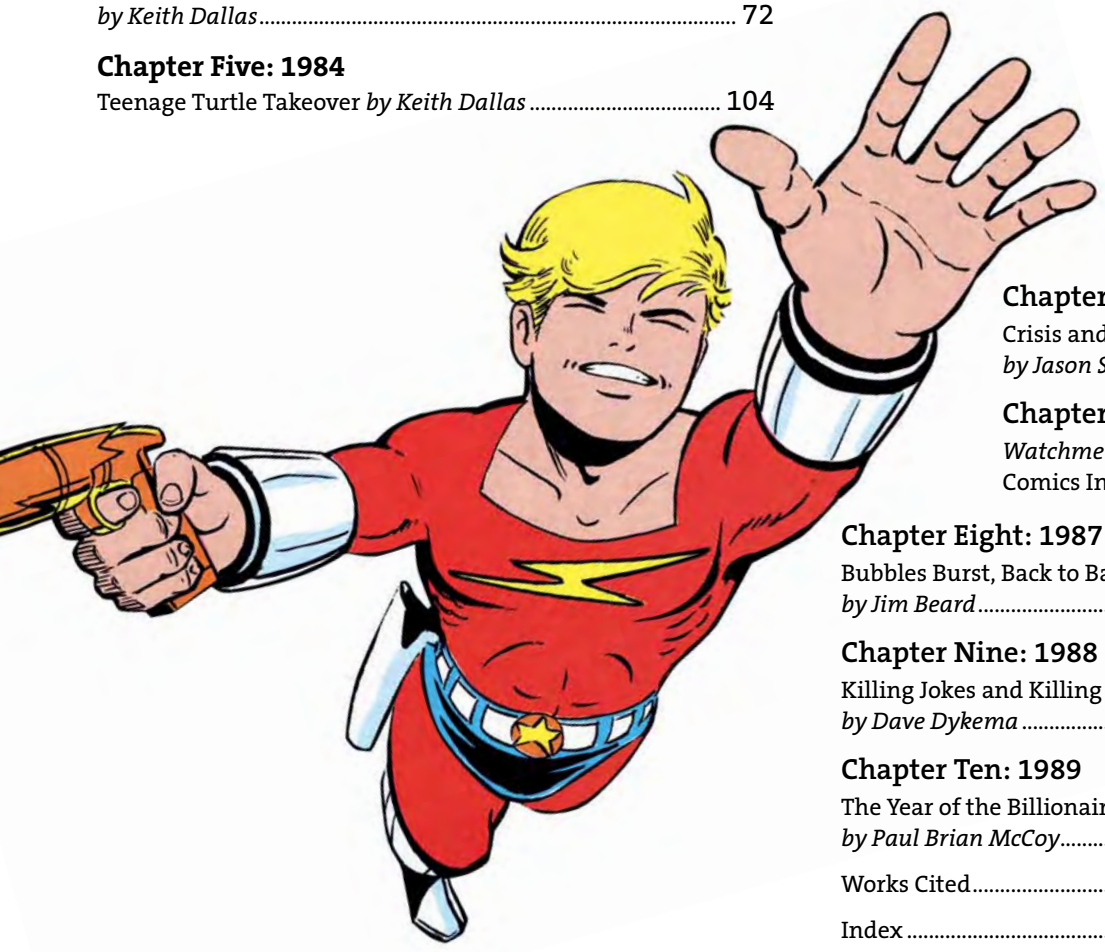


The Times they were a' Changin'

Ask comic book aficionados about the 1980s and many will immediately reference such seminal publications as Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen,* Frank Miller's *Dark Knight,* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus.* Others will mention such crowd-pleasing series as Marvel Comics' *Uncanny X-Men, Amazing Spider-Man,* or *Secret Wars.* Even others will point to the decade's plethora of new creator-owned titles, like Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,* Mike Baron and Steve Rude's *Nexus,* Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg!,* or Los Bros. Hernandez's *Love and Rockets.*

This book's most prevalent message is that none of these publications would have been printed if not for the proliferation and ascension of a new sales venue for comic books: the specialty comic book stores known as The Direct Market. As the 1980s dawned, the comic book industry was in critical condition due to the dwindling sales supplied by newsstand outlets. By the time the 1980s ended, however, the industry's fortunes had reversed as the Direct Market had fully replaced the newsstand as the principal point-of-sale for comic books.

Unquestionably for the comic book industry, the 1980s were boom years, both financially and creatively. For the first time in their histories, the two biggest publishers, DC Comics and Marvel Comics, offered royalties to writers and artists working on their best-selling titles. The lure of royalty payments incentivized professionals to be imaginative and strive for excellence. And then there were the many writers and artists who released their own creations exclusively to the Direct Market and found themselves financially and critically rewarded for doing so. Their success encouraged many more professionals (and publishers) to take the Direct Market plunge. In turn, because the Direct Market wasn't beholden to the restrictive standards of the newsstand's regulatory Comics Code Authority, contents of comic books became more explicit. Along with that, the norms of the medium changed. Narrative techniques became more sophisticated, and embracing it all was a comic book readership that was more mature than it had ever been before.

But the decade had its share of misfortunes too. A glut of product in the mid-1980s threatened to undermine the Direct Market just as it was flourishing. There was also a pervading fear that if the comic book industry didn't police itself, outside watchdog groups would find the explicit content produced in comic books unacceptable and demand censorship. By the end of the 1980s, some grew concerned the comic book industry was becoming too reliant on the Direct Market for its success, and it was a concern that turned prophetic...

But that's a tale to be told in a different volume of *American Comic Book Chronicles* and by a different author. As far as this volume goes, I cannot emphasize enough that it was as much a collaborative project as an individual one. This book was produced through the efforts and assistance of many, many people. Foremost among them are four writers who were called upon to help me finish this volume in a timely manner: **Jim Beard, Dave Dykema, Paul Brian McCoy** and **Jason Sacks.** I designate them my "cavalry" because they rode in and saved the day.

Love and Rockets TM and © Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez.

Left: 'Mazing Man makes off with a rack full of 80s-era comics on the cover of Amazing Heroes Preview Special *#3. Above: The girls of* Love and Rockets *enjoy some of the best-selling comics of the 1980s, on the cover of* Amazing Heroes *#62.*

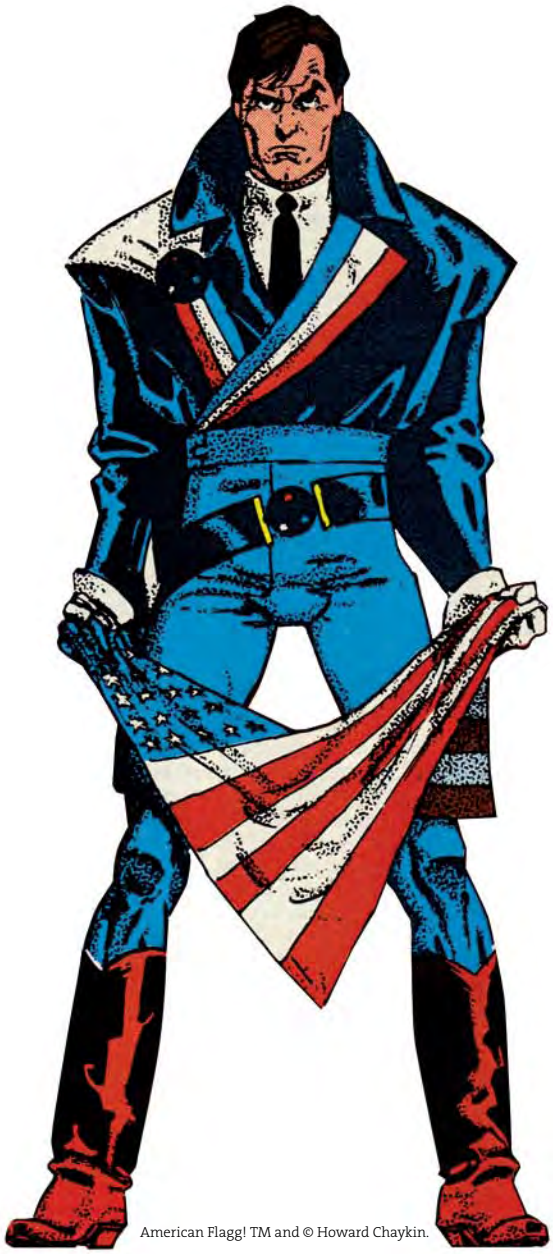
And then there are those who offered direct testimony about the 1980s comic book industry, who verified (or corrected) information, who provided much needed scans of 1980s comic books, or simply offered feedback as each chapter was finished. In other words, these people provided the kind of invaluable aid this kind of book couldn't do without, and they include: Tom Brevoort, Rich Buckler, Rich Cincotta, Dr. Brannon Costello, Brian Cronin, J.M. DeMatteis, Dave Elliott, Steve Englehart, Robert Greenberger, Fred Hembeck, Rand Hoppe, Thomas Iaiello, Scott Kolins, J.T. Krul, Paul Kupperberg, Ralph Macchio, Andy Mangels, Jonathan Mankuta, Ron Marz, Mark McKenna, John Jackson Miller, Doug Moench, Doug Murray, Zane Reichert, Bill Reinhold, Bob Rozakis, James Sherman, Jim Shooter, Louise Simonson, Walter Simonson, Dr. Matthew J. Smith, Joe Staton, Roy Thomas, Chris Tolworthy, Mark Waid, Dave Wallace, Len Wein, and the "Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez Fans" Facebook page. A special mention goes to Glenn Fischette and his entire staff at Fourth World Comics in Smithtown, New York for their support and for allowing me to use their (very well stocked) store as an essential library.

Of course, I am grateful to John Morrow for approving *American Comic Book Chronicles* and for trusting me to turn it into a publication worthy of the distinguished TwoMorrows Publishing brand.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't single out the contributions of two individuals: **John Wells** and **Bill Walko.** John Wells' knowledge of comic books (and comic book history) is unparalleled. I cannot overstate how much of a vital resource he was during the production of this book. The manner in which John checked facts, offered advice, and responded to my (near daily) queries went above and beyond the call of duty. Similarly, I cannot ask for a better designer than Bill Walko. He is this book's true *maestro.* My prose doesn't deserve—as it cannot hope to match—the visually stunning work that Bill provided for *American Comic Book Chronicles.*

So I am eternally grateful to both men, and I can only hope they—and my cavalry of writers—are all gratified by the experience of producing this book.

Keith Dallas
November 16, 2012



American Flagg! TM and © Howard Chaykin.

Introductory Note about the Chronological Structure of American Comic Book Chronicles

The monthly date that appears on a comic book cover doesn't usually indicate the exact month the comic book arrived at the newsstand or at the comic book store. Since their inception, American periodical publishers—including, but not limited to, comic book publishers—postdated their issues in order to let vendors know when they should remove unsold copies from their stores. In the 1930s, the discrepancy between a comic book's cover date and the actual month it reached the newsstand was one month. For instance, *Action Comics* #1 is cover dated June 1938 but actually went on sale in May 1938. Starting in 1940, comic book publishers hoped to increase each issue's shelf life by widening the discrepancy between cover date and release date to two months. In 1973, the discrepancy was widened again to three months. The expansion of the Direct Market in the 1980s, though, turned the cover date system on its head as most Direct Market-exclusive publishers chose not to put cover dates on their comic books while some put cover dates that matched the issue's release date.

This all creates a perplexing challenge for comic book historians as they consider whether to chronologize comic book history via cover date or release date. The predominant comic book history tradition has been to chronologize via cover date, and *American Comic Book Chronicles* is following that tradition. This means though that some comic books that were released in the final months of one year won't be dealt with until the chapter about the following year. Each chapter, however, will include a yearly timeline that uses a comic book's release date to position it appropriately among other significant historical, cultural and political events of that year.

- Keith Dallas

Zot! TM and © Scott McCloud.

Note on Comics Book Sales and Circulation Data

Determining the exact number of copies a comic book title sold is problematic, regardless if the sales outlet under consideration is the newsstand or the Direct Market. The best one can hope to learn is a close approximation of a comic book's total sales. This is because the methods used to report sales figures were (and still are) fundamentally flawed.

During the 1980s, most comic books sold on the newsstand would print an annual "Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation" in one of their issues as was required by the United States Post Office for all periodicals. These statements divulged—among other information—a comic book title's average print run, average paid circulation, and average returns from the newsstand. The data in these statements were as accurate as the publishers could provide. The publishers certainly knew how many copies they printed, but they relied on the distributors to inform them of how many copies were sold on the newsstand and how many unsold copies were being "returned" for a refund. Most distributors actually didn't return unsold copies—or even stripped covers of the unsold copies—back to the publishers; instead they sent to the publishers notarized affidavits of the number of unsold copies they destroyed. In essence, an "honor system" was in place that relied on the newsstand distributors to be truthful about the number of copies bought by consumers and the number of unsold copies being destroyed. And perhaps unsurprisingly, once the publishers couldn't dispute what the distributors were reporting in their affidavits, the whole system became corrupted.

In an interview conducted for this book, Jim Shooter detailed a scenario that he described as emblematic of the newsstand system's corruption:

> Let's say a distributor orders 1000 copies of a comic book. So the publisher sends him 1000 copies. But because the distributor doesn't really care about comic books, he maybe only sends 300 copies to his newsstand dealers. Of those 300, maybe 200 are bought by the consumer. That's a 66% sell-through. That's pretty good. But that's really only 200 out of the 1000 that was ordered. Now because affidavit returns are the industry standard, the local wholesaler will skew the sale numbers in his favor. So he'll report total sales of 125 copies. Even though he really sold 200 copies, he's only paying the publisher for 125 copies. Then the remaining 800 copies he received from the publisher—which he's supposed to destroy—he puts into bricks and sells to the local Costco OR throws them into the paper wolf and sells the pulp OR sells them for a nickel apiece through the black market.

Indeed, in his milehighcomics.com column, comic book retailer Chuck Rozanski relates how he became aware of certain east coast warehouses that illegally sold 'affidavit returns' comic books ("Tales from the Database" 99).

It's perhaps even more understandable then why comic book publishers in the early 1980s looked to the Direct Market as a replacement sales venue. However, the fact that Direct Market retailers couldn't return comic books sent to them doesn't not necessarily make determining exactly how copies a comic book title sold less problematical. That's because Direct Market distributors didn't require their retailers to keep track of how many comic books were purchased by their consumers and how many comic books became unsold inventory. Famously, Direct Market retailers ordered 428,000 copies of Marvel's first Direct Market exclusive comic book, *Dazzler* #1 (cover date March 1981). The on-going historical inquiry though is how many copies of *Dazzler* #1 did retailers order to satisfy consumer demand and how many copies did they order as a speculative investment for themselves. This inquiry can be transferred to any comic book sold exclusively to the Direct Market.

American Comic Book Chronicles then recognizes the flawed nature of newsstand and Direct Market circulation data but is resigned to the fact that it is also the only data available and will consider it a close approximation of a comic book's total sales numbers.

Nexus TM and © Mike Baron and Steve Rude.

Left: Zot is crazy for comics on the cover of Amazing Heroes Preview Special *#1. Above: Nexus and friend enjoy some indie comics favorites in* Amazing Heroes Preview Special *#2.*

1980

CHAPTER ONE

by Keith Dallas

Dark Phoenix, and the Darkness Before the Direct Market

On January 23, 1980, President Jimmy Carter opened the first State of the Union address of the new decade with a despondent acknowledgment: "This last few months has not been an easy time for any of us." The President was specifically alluding to the 52 American diplomats being held hostage in Iran since November 4, 1979 as well as the Soviet Union's invasion of its neighboring nation of Afghanistan beginning in December 1979. But the United States was facing other considerable challenges, including a skyrocketing inflation rate that reached 13.9% by January 1980, a seemingly unshakeable dependence on foreign oil that weakened the national economy, and an omnipresent possibility of a global nuclear war. In the face of America's adverse circumstances, President Carter concluded his address with a rally call, "Together let us make of this time of challenge and danger a decade of national resolve and of brave achievement."

As the 1980s dawned, the comic book industry faced considerable challenges of its own as the last few *years* had not been an easy time. As comic book historian Mike Benton notes, "Distribution problems and inflation... were undermining efforts of the comic-book companies as they struggled out of the 1970s. Many of the traditional comic-book outlets were vanishing, and comics were being displayed less frequently on magazine racks" (81). The grim reality was that since 1977 monthly comic book sales had been significantly declining. In 1980, the average number of comic books sold per month was 5.4 million for **Marvel Comics** and 2.8 million for **DC Comics**. Just three years earlier, Marvel and DC were respectively selling on average 7 million and 4.2 million comic books per month (Tolworthy). It was evident to all interested parties that the comic book industry had seen better times, but many fans and professionals didn't expect a recovery. Instead they foretold aloud that the industry's death knell was about to ring and that the comic book medium would soon expire from its many wounds. One person who didn't share the pessimistic outlook though was **Jim Shooter**, Marvel Comics' Editor-in-Chief since 1978. In an interview with *The Comics Journal*'s Gary Groth in September 1980, Shooter declared:

> I keep seeing letters from people, and I keep hearing people at conventions and so forth talking about the imminent demise of the comic book industry... I don't know what I have to do to correct this erroneous information. We're not going out of business. We're making good money. We're not setting the world on fire, but at this point, in this country, very few people are. We're doing well. Marvel is a healthy company... It's not a bad year, or even a mediocre year. It's a *good* year. (60)

While Shooter could assure readers that Marvel was prospering, the fact of the matter was that by 1980 the comic

book industry had shrunk so considerably that only a handful of comic book publishers remained in business. With Marvel Comics and DC Comics leading the market, **Archie Comics** continued to offer its Riverdale High School-focused titles, and **Harvey Comics** produced *Casper The Friendly Ghost* and a slew of Richie Rich books (*Richie Rich Cash*, *Richie Rich Diamonds*, *Richie Rich Profits*, among others). Long standing publishers **Charlton** (*Billy the Kid, Fightin' Army, Fightin' Marines, Ghostly Tales, War*), **Gold Key** (*Battle of the Planets, Bugs Bunny, Donald Duck, Looney Tunes, Mickey Mouse, The Pink Panther, Popeye, Tom and Jerry, Uncle Scrooge*) and **Warren Publishing** (*Creepy, Eerie, Vampirella*), on the other hand, were all struggling, and none would last to the end of the decade. In fact, at the start of 1980, Gold Key re-branded itself as **Whitman Comics** and began packaging three different comic books together in a single plastic bag in order to distribute them exclusively to retail outlets like K-Mart; it was a cost saving move that still didn't save the publisher. Charlton had been reduced to reprinting previously published material, like *Fightin' Army*. Their one title that presented new material, *Charlton Bullseye*, didn't even monetarily compensate its creators. Instead, creators received complimentary copies of the issue in which their work appeared. The idea of the title was to give aspiring professionals needed exposure of their talents. Finally, **Fawcett Comics**—whose Captain Marvel titles were best-sellers throughout the 1940s—abandoned comic book publishing altogether in 1980 with its final issues of *Dennis the Menace: Pocket Full of Fun* and *Dennis the Menace and His Friends*.

The decade began with one of Marvel's most celebrated story arcs: "The Dark Phoenix Saga."

Newsstand Wasteland

What was crippling the comic book industry was its continued reliance on the newsstand market (e.g. supermarkets, stationary stores, convenience stores, toy stores, magazine vendors) to sell its product. Comic books had been part of the newsstand since the comic book industry's infancy in the 1930s, but by 1980 it was clear that the newsstand wholesalers had lost the incentive to provide its retailers with comic books to sell, primarily because their profit margin distributing $0.40 and $0.50 comic books was significantly lower than what could be had distributing the more expensive magazines, like *Time* and *Sports Illustrated*—both of which retailed for $1.50 in 1980. As DC Comics editor **Dick Giordano** explained in a 1981 *Comics Journal* interview, comic books had become an afterthought to the newsstand market:

> Comic books are considered fodder. If [the newsstand distributor has] that much room in the back of the truck, they'll put that many comics, and they don't bother to check them by title. "Just grab a handful of comics, Charlie, and throw it in the truck." Is that a way to sell a comic book? (Groth, "Brushes & Blue Pencils" 54)

Consequently, the sell-through rates—the percentage of shipped books which actually get sold to consumers—kept falling. Since the newsstand market could return all unsold copies to the publishers for a full refund, the financial consequences for the comic book industry become obvious: when wholesalers don't bother to distribute comic books to their retailers, only to get a refund for them, the publishers can't even recoup the cost of printing, never mind the greater cost of production. While that is a worst case scenario, consider the sales figures for *Justice League of America*, one of DC Comics' better selling titles in 1980. According to its Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation located on the letters page of issue #190, the average print run per issue of *Justice League of America* during 1980 was 329,301 copies. But of that print run, the newsstand returned on average 194,574 copies per issue.

1980 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 1: Marvel Comics' *Star Trek* comic book debuts on newsstands; its first three issues reprint *Marvel Comics Super Special* #15, which adapted 1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture.*

March 1: Dick Dillin – *Justice League of America* penciller since 1968 – dies at the age of 50.

April 22: *Untold Legend of the Batman* – DC Comics' second foray into the mini-series format – debuts on newsstands.

April 22: Roy Thomas – after writing and editing Marvel Comics for the previous 15 years – signs exclusive contract with DC Comics.

April 24-25: The U.S. military "Operation Eagle Claw" attempts to liberate 52 U.S. diplomats being held hostage in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran. Ultimately, the mission is aborted with the death of eight U.S. servicemen.

June: As of this month, the retail price of a standard comic book is $0.50; DC Comics' titles now have eight additional story pages while Marvel Comics adds five more story pages a couple of months later.

June: The Comics Code Authority refuses to approve a Roger McKenzie-written/Frank Miller-drawn story intended for *Daredevil* #167 depicting children using (and addicted to) drugs. "Child's Play" is shelved until 1982 when it is published in *Daredevil* #183.

June 17: Jean Grey dies in *Uncanny X-Men* #137 as the soon-to-be-named "Dark Phoenix Saga" story arc concludes.

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

February 22: In a "Miracle on Ice" the United States men's hockey team – composed of amateur and collegiate players – defeats the heavily favored Soviet Union team during the Olympic Winter Games at Lake Placid, New York; the United States team would go on to win the gold medal after it defeats Finland.

February 12: *Epic Illustrated* – a Marvel Comics magazine modeled after then-popular *Heavy Metal*, featuring content aimed at a more mature audience – debuts on newsstands.

May 22: The arcade game Pac-Man debuts in Japan.

May 21: The *Star Wars* sequel, *Empire Strikes Back*, premieres in movie theatres.

May 20: 710 families in the Love Canal area of Niagara Falls, New York evacuate due to toxic chemical contamination.

May 18: In the worst volcanic disaster in U.S. history, Mt. Saint Helens erupts in the state of Washington.

May 8: Norman Mingo – longtime *Mad* magazine cover artist as well as the man who formalized the image of Alfred E. Neuman – dies at the age of 84.

This means that in 1980 far more copies of *Justice League of America* were returned than sold. Contrast this to the World War II era when many comic books averaged sell-through rates higher than 60% (Rozanski, "Evolution of the Direct Market: Part I").

"The old business was dying," Paul Levitz remarked in an interview conducted for this book. "If something didn't replace the newsstand system, the old comic book business would probably have been extinct by 1984 or 1985, in my opinion. The comic book as it was born in America—cheap, casual purchase, impulsively bought, disposable—lived a life cycle beginning in the 1930s that was pretty clearly ending as we got into the 1980s."

The Burgeoning Direct Market

Fortunately for the comic book industry, it wasn't married to the newsstand until death did it part. An alternative method of distributing comic books was already in use: the Direct Market. Comic book art dealer and convention organizer **Phil Seuling** created the Direct Market in 1972 when he proposed a new distribution system to DC, Marvel, Archie, Harvey and Warren. According to Seuling's Seagate Distributing arrangement, the comic book publishers agreed to package and ship new comic books *directly* to retailers that specialized in comic books. In exchange, these books were non-returnable. Under this system, everyone benefited. The publishers wouldn't have to worry about refunding unsold copies, and the retailers received comic books at a better discount than if they had purchased them through a newsstand wholesaler. Comic book retailers in the 1970s and early 1980s also didn't consider unsold new comics a burden on them. On the contrary, in those days comic book retailers wanted stock for their back issue bins—the product they offered that the newsstand didn't. The very few comic book stores that existed back then had control over the supply of back issues.

But the scarcity of comic book stores at that time testified to the Direct Market's limited influence. The number of comic book stores operating in the world had grown from 30 in 1974 to 800 in 1979 (Tolworthy), and several other Direct Market distributors, like Pacific Comics and Capital City, emerged to compete with Seagate. While an impressive expansion, this was still not considerable enough to designate the Direct Market as the apparent cure to the industry's ailments. As Mile High Comics owner **Chuck Rozanski** describes the situation, "While the Direct Market comics shops did manage to transfer a great number of fans to themselves that otherwise had been purchasing through newsstand outlets, the harsh reality was that newsstand sales were dropping far faster than the Direct Market was growing" (Rozanski,

1981

CHAPTER TWO

by Keith Dallas

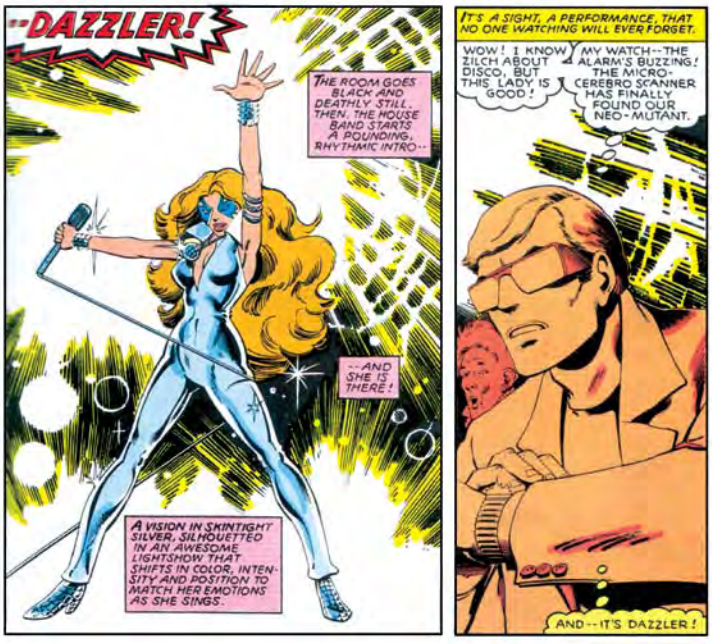
The Roy Thomas Renaissance, Royalties, and The Return of the King

January 20, 1981 marked the end of a crisis as Iran released 52 Americans it had held hostage since November 4, 1979. It was the end of a 444-day ordeal that simultaneously dismayed and united the American people. It sparked a resurgence of American patriotism as well as partly contributed to Jimmy Carter's defeat in the November 1980 Presidential election.

January 20, 1981 also marked the beginning of a new American era as Ronald Reagan was sworn in as the 40th President of the United States. In his inaugural address, Reagan outlined his remedies for the economic maladies America was suffering; in doing so, he declared, "We must act today in order to preserve tomorrow. And let there be no misunderstanding—we are going to begin to act, beginning today."

By January 1981, DC and Marvel Comics had both already begun to act in order to preserve their tomorrows. Executives from both publishers recognized that the newsstand—comic books' primary sales venue since the 1930s—could no longer sustain the comic book industry. An economically viable alternative was required, and scrutiny was turned to the Direct Market. But to embrace the Direct Market, the publishers needed proof that it could be relied upon to generate far more revenue than it had up to this point.

For Marvel, that proof came in the form of the first book they sold exclusively through the Direct Market: ***Dazzler* #1** (March 1981).



The Dazzler makes her debut in these panels from **X-Men** *#130.*

Dazzling The Direct Market

The Dazzler was a disco music-themed super-heroine Marvel Comics had been tinkering with for three years. She was originally conceived in 1978 as "The Disco Queen" for a multi-media cross-promotion proposed by Casablanca Records. Artist John Romita Jr. even modeled the character after Jamaican-American singer Grace Jones. When Casablanca elevated Jim Shooter's treatment for an animated special into a feature-length film project, the endeavor seemed destined for greatness. Financial concerns, however, forced the record label to bow out of the undertaking completely. Despite this, the film project moved forward, even having its name changed from "The Disco Queen" to "The Dazzler"—courtesy of writer Roger Stern. "The Dazzler" eventually became attached to *10* It-Girl Bo Derek—which meant the character's physical features had to be changed to resemble the blonde actress. However, Bo Derek ultimately passed on the project when the film company refused to let her husband—John Derek—direct the film, and Marvel was left searching for new film partners. Dazzler's official first appearance in a Marvel comic book came in *X-Men* #130 (Feb. 1980), but according to Dazzler writer Tom DeFalco, the long-planned publication of the character's own title was cancelled five or six times because of all the Hollywood false starts (as quoted in Cronin).

Dazzler *#1 was the first comic book that Marvel sold exclusively through Direct Market stores.*
Dazzler TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc.

So *Dazzler* could accurately be categorized as "stuck in limbo," never mind the fact that the character was tied to a form of music whose popularity was waning quickly. Nevertheless, Jim Shooter saw *Dazzler* as the perfect candidate for Marvel's first Direct Market-exclusive book. Shooter set out to prove to Marvel's upper management that the Direct Market could support Marvel titles on its own, but at the same time he was concerned about upsetting the newsstand consumers. In an interview conducted for this book, Shooter explained that the reason he didn't want an issue of *X-Men*, *Fantastic Four*, *Thor,* or any other established Marvel title to be sold exclusively to the Direct Market was because those titles already had acquired a devoted newsstand audience. Since they didn't patronize comic book stores, newsstand readers wouldn't take kindly to the prospect of one of their favorite Marvel titles being distributed solely to an outlet they didn't frequent (or possibly didn't even know existed considering how few Direct Market stores existed in 1981). Dazzler, however, was a new character, albeit one that Marvel had been developing over the past few years. If such an untested character as the Dazzler could sell well on the Direct Market, Shooter would prove his point to his superiors while simultaneously avoid incurring the wrath of the newsstand audience.

When Marvel Comics solicited *Dazzler* #1 solely to the Direct Market, the comic book store retailers rewarded the publisher with total orders of 428,000 copies, almost double the number of copies most Marvel titles sold on the newsstand (DeFalco 200). By any measure, it was a tremendous success, but Shooter wasn't surprised as he believes the comic book retailers simply showed their eagerness to sell a Marvel product given exclusively to them: "I think the comic book store owners felt, 'Hey, we alone are getting this comic book. We're not competing with the newsstand. People have to come to *my* shop to get this book.'"

While Shooter's ploy did indeed avert widespread newsstand reader outrage, some were nonetheless still put off by the Direct Market-exclusive release, and others saw *Dazzler* #1 as a harbinger of a future where comic books disappeared altogether from the newsstand. In the pages of their favorite fanzines, they voiced their concerns. Mike Friedrich—then head of Marvel Comics' Direct Sales department—wrote to *The Comic Reader* to assuage its readers' fears by emphasizing the Direct Market's potentially massive expansion:

1981 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 8: Fourteen years after relinquishing art duties on *The Flash* in order to become DC Comics' editorial director, artist Carmine Infantino returns to the title with issue #296.

January 20: Ronald Reagan is sworn in as President of the United States; the same day 52 American diplomats who had been held hostage in Iran for 444 consecutive days are freed.

March: After a dispute with Marvel's editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, artist Gene Colan leaves Marvel for DC Comics.

March 30: Outside the Washington D.C. Hilton hotel, John W. Hinkley Jr. shoots and wounds President Ronald Reagan and three others. Claiming he was attempting to impress actress Jodie Foster, Hinckley was found not guilty by reason of insanity at his 1982 trial. Consequently, many states rewrite their laws regarding the insanity defense.

April 21: John Byrne begins his five-year stint as the writer/artist on *Fantastic Four* with issue #232.

April 12: After many delays, the first space shuttle, Columbia, makes its maiden voyage when it launches from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

April 23: DC Comics' *Madame Xanadu* one-shot – a Steve Englehart/Marshall Rogers collaboration originally intended for the cancelled *Doorway into Nightmare* – arrives exclusively to the Direct Market where it sells over 100,000 copies.

April 24: IBM introduces its Personal Computer with an operating system designed by Microsoft and microprocessor circuitry manufactured by Intel.

April 24: Veteran comic book artist Howard Purcell dies of complications from emphysema. He drew the first adventures of Golden Age heroes like Sargon the Sorcerer and Johnny Peril and contributed to Marvel and DC into the 1960s and early 1970s.

June: *Amazing Heroes* – a Fantagraphics magazine featuring comic book industry news, interviews, reviews and articles – debuts.

June: Mike Gustovich's *Justice Machine* debuts on the Direct Market as a magazine-sized comic book.

June 4: DC Comics launches The *Krypton Chronicles* and *Arak, Son of Thunder,* the latter created and written by Roy Thomas. Another Thomas creation, *All-Star Squadron,* debuts June 18.

June 5: The Centers for Disease Control publishes the first report of a mysterious outbreak of a sometimes fatal pneumonia among gay men. Originally called "gay related immune deficiency" (GRID), the syndrome is re-named Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in 1982.

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

February 13: DC Comics president Sol Harrison retires. Publisher Jenette Kahn becomes DC's president as well as its editor-in-chief. Joe Orlando becomes DC's vice president-editorial director.

February: Writer Michael Fleisher files a $2 million lawsuit against Harlan Ellison, *The Comics Journal,* and its editor Gary Groth for published statements Fleisher perceives to be libelous. (When the matter is decided in court in 1986, Ellison and Groth prevail.)

March 18: *The Greatest American Hero* – starring William Katt as a school teacher who is given a super-powered suit by an alien race to help him save the world – premieres on ABC-TV.

April 14: *Marvel Treasury Edition* #28 is a joint Marvel/DC publication teaming Superman and Spider-Man against Doctor Doom and The Parasite in a 68-page oversized book written by Jim Shooter and Marv Wolfman with art by John Buscema.

May 25: Wearing a Spider-Man costume, Daniel Goodwin scales Chicago's Sears Tower – then the tallest building in the world – in seven and a half hours.

May: *Cerebus* #26 – which begins the two year long "High Society" story arc – arrives in stores.

June 12: George Lucas' *Raiders of the Lost Ark* – directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones – opens in movie theaters; it grosses more money at the box office than any other film released during the year.

June 19: *Superman II* – with Christopher Reeve reprising his role as the Man of Steel – opens in movie theaters; the film grosses $24 million in its first week of release, a record at the time.

John Romita Jr.'s original design for Dazzler was modeled after Jamaican-American singer Grace Jones.
Dazzler TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc.

You express a very valid concern about the future of comics if the comics publishers "restrict" themselves to specialty shop sales. However, I feel you needn't worry too much... We are trying at Marvel to reach the widest number of people with our comics. Our enthusiasm for the Direct Sales program comes precisely because we believe these wholesalers are creating new business for us, first by servicing the specialty shops, and second, by reaching out and bringing their expertise to other outlets and thereby help them sell comics to more people.

Only the first issue of *Dazzler* was offered exclusively to the Direct Market. Subsequent issues could be bought at the newsstand. With the success of *Dazzler* #1, however, the Direct Market had passed Marvel's viability test, effectively giving Jim Shooter the green light to make more titles Direct Market exclusives. Late in 1981, *Micronauts*, *Ka-Zar*, and *Moon Knight* became those titles, principally because, according to Shooter, they sold well at the Direct Market but not at the newsstand. Removing these titles from the newsstand saved them from cancellation.

Moon Knight, though, was one of Marvel's six titles that sold on average over 200,000 copies per month in 1981. The others were *Dazzler*, *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Avengers*, *Star Wars,* and *Uncanny X-Men*. Average monthly sales for nearly every Marvel title dropped from the previous year (*Uncanny X-Men* was a notable exception), and therefore total publishing sales dropped from 1980 to 1981 (Tolworthy). This was partly due to—again—the declining newsstand market, but Marvel also published fewer comic books in 1981 compared to 1980. That's because in January

July: Distributor Pacific Comics launches into the comic book publishing business with Jack Kirby's *Captain Victory and the Galactic Rangers*, selling 70,000 copies in Direct Market stores.

July 19: Mike Grell becomes writer-artist on the *Tarzan* Sunday comic strip.

July 29: Britain's Prince Charles marries Lady Diana Spencer at St. Paul's Cathedral in London; 700 million worldwide television viewers watch the wedding.

September 1: DC Comics' Production Manager Jack Adler retires to be replaced by Bob Rozakis who will serve in that capacity until 1998.

September 12: The *Spider-Man and his Amazing Friends* Saturday morning cartoon debuts on NBC network.

September 24: *DC Special Series* #27 is a joint DC/Marvel publication teaming Batman and The Hulk against The Joker and the Shaper of the Worlds in a 68 page oversized book written by Len Wein with art by José Luis García-López and Dick Giordano.

October 18: Responding to a reporter's question, President Reagan acknowledges for the first time that the United States is in an economic recession; five days later, the U.S. national debt reaches $1 trillion.

November: DC Comics announces that retroactive to its July 1981 releases it will pay royalties to its writers and artists working on comic books that sell over 100,000 copies per issue.

November 2: Award winning comic book writer-artist Wallace Allan ("Wally") Wood commits suicide at the age of 54.

November 18: Psychiatrist Fredric Wertham – whose 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent* indicted the comic book industry for corrupting America's youth leading to a U.S. Congressional hearing on the matter as well as the creation of the Comics Code Authority – dies at the age of 86.

December 1: Russ Manning, best known for his work on *Magnus, Robot Fighter* and *Tarzan* (both the comic book and comic strip) dies of cancer at the age of 52.

December 3: DC's *Justice League of America* celebrates its 200th issue with a 72-page story written by Gerry Conway with art contributions from George Perez, Jim Aparo, Brian Bolland, Pat Broderick, Dick Giordano, Carmine Infantino, Gil Kane, and Joe Kubert.

December 8: The first issue of *Marvel Fanfare* – a Marvel Comics bi-monthly anthology book printed on magazine style slick paper and retailing for $1.25 – debuts exclusively in Direct Market stores.

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

MUSIC TELEVISION

August 1: MTV, a 24 hour a day cable network channel devoted to music video, launches at 12:01AM with the Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star".

August 12: Under direct orders from President Reagan, U.S. fighter jets attack targets in Libya. Seven days later, in a dogfight over the Gulf of Sidra, two U.S. Navy F-14s shoot down two Soviet-built Libyan jet fighters that had attacked a U.S. aircraft carrier.

October: Beginning this month, the retail price for a standard DC or Marvel comic book increases to $0.60.

October: Marvel Comics' *Ka-Zar The Savage* and *Moon Knight* are now sold exclusively to the Direct Market; *Micronauts* joins them the following month.

October: Eclipse Comics publishes Jim Starlin's *The Price* – a black-and-white graphic novel continuing the "Metamorphosis Odyssey" story arc started in Marvel's *Epic Illustrated.*

November 24: As of this date, DC Comics and Marvel Comics jointly own the trademark to the term "super-hero".

November 24: Comic book distributor Capital City becomes a comic book publisher when the first black-and-white, magazine-sized issue of Mike Baron and Steve Rude's *Nexus* arrives in Direct Market stores.

December 17: Keith Giffen begins his decades-long association with DC Comics' super teens from the future with *Legion of Super-Heroes* #285.

December 22: Marvel Comics announces it will begin paying royalties to creators, writers and artists working on books that sell over 100,000 copies per issue.

December 24: The first issue of DC Comics' *Captain Carrot and his Amazing Zoo Crew* – featuring the sentient animal super-heroes of "Earth-C" – arrives on newsstands.

1981, Jim Shooter concluded his editors were "horribly overworked." To relieve this, Shooter cancelled several titles over the course of the year, specifically *Man-Thing*, *Marvel Premiere*, *Marvel Spotlight*, *Marvel Super Action*, *Sgt. Fury*, the Children's Television Workshop tie-in *Spidey Super Stories,* and *Star Trek*, a series that was doomed to fail before its launch, as Shooter explained in an interview for *American Comic Book Chronicles*:

> We got screwed six ways to Sunday on *Star Trek*. We wanted from Paramount *all* of Star Trek: the motion picture, the 1960s television series, everything. But what we got was *only* the motion picture. Once we already committed to all these publishing plans, we were told we couldn't do what people wanted: the television series. We got the lame first movie. Not only did people not want to buy anything associated with *just* the Star Trek movie, my creators didn't want to work on the comic book series! I couldn't get anybody to pay attention to the damn thing! So that was a disaster, but it was a disaster that was foisted upon us. If we had gotten what we thought we were originally going to get, I think that would have worked out fine. It wouldn't have been *Star Wars*, but I think it would have been a success.

In January 1981, Shooter also tried to aid Marvel's exhausted editors by hiring David Anthony Kraft and Lynn Graeme as "interim editors." By February though, Graeme, Jo Duffy, and Danny Fingeroth were out as editors (Duffy and Fingeroth would continue working for Marvel as freelance writers), and Tom DeFalco was added to the existing staff of Louise Jones,

In this 1981 house ad Marvel Comics informs its readers that three of its titles will be available only at comic book stores.
TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Al Milgrom, Denny O'Neil, and Jim Salicrup.

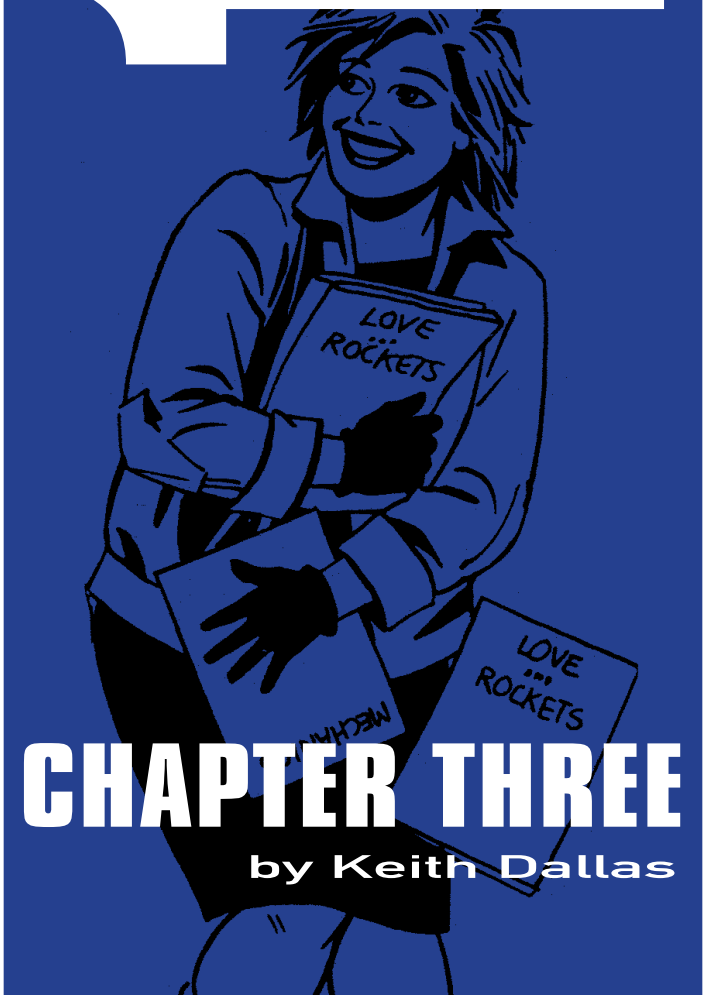
Marvel Comics Goes Hollywood

Despite all its title cancellations and editorial turbulence, Marvel could hardly be categorized as a company on the decline. In fact, they were branching out to other media. In 1981, Marvel purchased Depatie-Freleng Enterprises animation studio, which they renamed Marvel Productions and put to immediate use by creating two Spider-Man animated series. The more popular of the two was ***Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends***, which debuted as a Saturday morning cartoon on the NBC television network on September 12, 1981. The cartoon had the friendliest neighborhood web-slinger fighting alongside former X-Man Iceman and a new heroine created just for the series, Firestar. The animated series guest starred heroes and villains easily recognized by devoted Marvel Comics readers: the Green Goblin, Doctor Doom, Thor, and Captain America, among many others. In her civilian identity, Firestar even resembled long-time Spider-Man love interest Mary Jane Watson. All in all, the cartoon attempted to adapt the Marvel comic book universe to the small screen.

Back in New York, Jim Shooter was stuck with the task of adapting several motion pictures into Marvel comic books. The success of the *Star Wars* comic book convinced Marvel's executives that the publication of more movie adaptations would be lucrative. Jim Shooter didn't agree with the reasoning though as he considered *Star Wars* a "once in a lifetime deal." Nonetheless, he was under orders by his superiors to do more. So in 1981 Marvel published adaptations of the new James Bond film *For Your Eyes Only* (written by Larry Hama with art by Howard Chaykin and Vince Colletta), the medieval fantasy *Dragonslayer* (written by Denny O'Neil with art by Marie Severin), and the George Lucas-Steven Spielberg blockbuster *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (written by Walt Simonson with art by John Buscema and Klaus Janson). Months before *Raiders* was released in theaters, Shooter had read the film's script and was so unimpressed with it that he

Top: Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends *concept art by John Romita.*
Above: Panels from Marvel Comics' adaptation of the second Star Wars film, The Empire Strikes Back.

1982



CHAPTER THREE

by Keith Dallas

New Publishers, New Formats, New Talent, and New Mutants

As 1981 came to an end, an editorial in *The Comics Journal* celebrated the year's successes and foretold more great times for comic book readers:

> I'm so excited, I just don't know where to begin! It's no secret that these are thrilling times for comic book fans!... The fan market has grown so large that it's now able to financially sustain individual titles and specialty magazines.... Pacific Comics is now publishing comics that are every bit as good as Marvel's or DC's.... And Marvel and DC are rising to the challenge of the alternative press that are calculated to appeal directly to this market—and what could be better than that? Alternative publishing efforts like *Eclipse*, *The Justice Machine*, *Nexus*, and *Galaxia* are providing true alternatives and giving the fans just what they want. Despite the whining of a few grumpy critics, we are, without any doubt—dare I say it?—entering into a renaissance of comics art. (Decker)

The editorial is actually a bit of a sham as *TCJ*'s new managing editor Dwight R. Decker decided to have some fun by masquerading as *TCJ*'s executive editor Gary Groth in order to write a gushing assessment of the comic book industry that flew in the face of Groth's usual jaded negativity.

Nonetheless, the editorial reflected many readers' optimism that with the doldrums of the late 1970s behind them, happy comic book days were here again. And some comic book professionals even took the time to fan their fans' enthusiasm even further. Take, for instance, Marv Wolfman's remarks in the *Green Lantern* #154 letters page (July 1982): "For too long, DC [Comics] was a sleeping giant. Well, we're awake and rarin' to go ahead at full steam. In the next few months we'll be coming out with all new comics and ideas.... DC's on the move—so climb aboard the wagon. We think you'll enjoy the ride!"

DC Comics: Where the Action Is!

The wagon ride that Wolfman wanted readers to take equated to the biggest expansion in DC Comics' line since the ill-fated "DC Explosion" of 1978. Clearing some room on their slate was necessary, so DC cancelled several long-running titles that executives felt would no longer perform well as the industry became more reliant on the Direct Market for sales. In order, *Secrets of the Haunted House*, *The Unexpected*, and *Ghosts* all published their final issues between cover date February and May 1982. DC's managing editor Dick Giordano had some qualms about the cancellation of these horror/mystery anthologies because for years they had been used as training grounds for promising, inexperienced artists hoping to break into the industry. After proving himself on a couple of short stories for one of the mystery titles, an artist could earn promotion

to a regular DC assignment. Alex Saviuk and Paris Cullins—to name just two professional artists—began their careers in this fashion. But now DC's sole remaining horror title was *House of Mystery*, and the combined inventory of completed stories from the three cancelled horror titles would have to be published there. That inventory was so considerable that Giordano estimated it would take three years before DC needed to commission new work for the title. Therefore, *House of Mystery* could no longer serve as an artist's training ground. Giordano's solution to the problem was the creation of a workshop at DC Comics for promising new talent. While DC couldn't pay the artists who participated in this workshop, Giordano hoped that the expansion of DC's line of books would mean these artists could soon graduate to paid assignments (Kim Thompson).

The cancellation of the three horror/mystery titles cleared the way for new books of a variety of genres. The first was something that billed itself as "Not Just Another Funny-Animal Comic!" in a 16-page insert debut in *New Teen Titans* #16 (February 1982): ***Captain Carrot and His Amazing Zoo Crew***. The concept's origins dated back to **Roy Thomas**' tenure at Marvel Comics. A childhood fan of funny-animal super-heroes, Thomas had designs as far back as 1969 on reviving Marvel's Golden Age-era Super Rabbit. Nothing ever came of the idea at Marvel, though. In 1981, Thomas pitched to his new DC Comics bosses a funny-animal super-hero title to be drawn by Herb Trimpe who was ready to jump Marvel Comics' ship because of dissatisfaction with his page rate. Marvel eventually gave Trimpe the pay raise he desired, leaving Thomas without an artist. By this point, Thomas had expanded his idea—with the help of his then-fiancée Danette Couto and fellow writer Gerry Conway—into a funny-animal super-hero version of the Justice League of America: "Just'a Lotta Animals." DC publisher Jenette Kahn and editorial director Joe Orlando liked the idea but not the name. So the title became changed to "Super-Squirrel and the Super-Animal Squad." When Joe Staton declined DC's invitation to serve as the series' artist, Hanna-Barbera animator **Scott Shaw** came on board, and he and Thomas produced a two-page sampler of the funny-animal JLA confronting a giant carrot version of Galactus. For licensing reasons though, the two creators were then directed to create new characters that didn't resemble existing DC properties (Roy Thomas 10-14). Thus was born Captain Carrot whose Amazing Zoo Crew included Alley-Kat-Abra, Fastback, Pig-Iron, Rubberduck, and Yankee Poodle. Their introductory team-up with Superman established that these super-heroes existed within DC continuity on the parallel world "Earth-C." With each issue, the series parodied a recognizable character or genre (e.g., "Frogzilla," "Bow-Zar The Barkbarian," The Indiana Jones-inspired "Oklahoma Bones"), and from its start, the series sold well, over 100,000 copies per issue, making it one of DC's best-sellers that year. ABC television even optioned *Captain Carrot* for a Saturday morning cartoon, but plans never progressed beyond the pre-production stage, despite a proposal to pair up the funny-animal super-heroes with Wonder Woman (Roy Thomas 16).

Wonder Woman, by the way, received a new costume emblem in 1982. Unveiled in a preview insert in *DC Comics Presents* #41 (January 1982), the new emblem—mandated by Jenette Kahn and designed by Milton Glaser (who had created DC's bullet logo in 1976)—consisted of two connected "W"s, and as such, had greater potential as a merchandising insignia than the eagle emblem found on Wonder Woman's costume since 1941. The emblem change also inaugurated Roy Thomas and Gene Colan's short tenure on *Wonder Woman,* which began with

Above: Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez's Wonder Woman sheet for DC's in-house Style Guide shows the Amazon warrior's new emblem. Right: Roy Thomas and Gene Colan's collaboration on **Wonder Woman** *began with issue #288.*
Wonder Woman TM and © DC Comics.

1982 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 8: American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) agrees to divest itself of its regional and local "Baby Bell" phone companies in order to settle a U.S. Justice Department antitrust lawsuit against the company.

January 12: The first Marvel Comics graphic novel – *The Death of Captain Marvel*, written and drawn by Jim Starlin – goes on sale exclusively at Direct Market stores.

January 13: Soon after take-off, an Air Florida 737 jet crashes into the Washington D.C. 14th Street Bridge over the Potomac River, killing 78 people.

March 2: Science Fiction pioneer Philip K. Dick dies five days after suffering a stroke.

March 2: Priced at $1.50, the first issue of Marvel's *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* – featuring characters from Hasbro's new action figure line – goes on sale. Television commercials promoting both the toys and the comic book soon follow.

May 1: The World's Fair opens in Knoxville, Tenn. The event attracts over 11 million people during its six-month run.

June 4: The second *Star Trek* film, *The Wrath of Khan*, opens in movie theaters.

June 5: Budapest, Hungary hosts the first Rubik's Cube World Championship.

June 12: Over a half-million anti-nuclear demonstrators protest in Central Park, New York City.

June 30: The Equal Rights Amendment, intended to guarantee equal rights under the law for all Americans regardless of their sex, is ratified by 35 states, three states short of the minimum of states needed for Constitution ratification.

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

January 20: Heavy metal singer Ozzy Osbourne bites off the head of a bat during a performance at a Des Moines, Iowa concert.

February 19: Directed and written by Wes Craven, *Swamp Thing* – based on the DC Comics character – opens in movie theaters.

March 5: At the age of 33, comedian John Belushi is found dead of a cocaine and heroin overdose at a rented Hollywood bungalow.

April 2: The Falklands War begins when Argentine troops seize the south Atlantic Falkland Islands from Great Britain. The conflict lasts until June 14 when Argentina surrenders.

June 1: The first issue of Marvel's *Wolverine* limited series – written by Chris Claremont with art by Frank Miller and Josef Rubenstein – goes on sale.

Batman, Swamp Thing, the Teen Titans TM and © DC Comics. Captain Marvel, The New Mutants, Wolverine, and the X-Men TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc. G.I. Joe TM and © Hasbro.

issue #288 (February 1982) and ended with #296 (October 1982). Thomas quickly lost his patience with the *Wonder Woman* assignment when an editorially-directed three-issue arc was foisted upon him. *Wonder Woman* #291 launched a story that guest starred almost a dozen other DC super-heroines. After that, Thomas had to deal with the unwanted intrusion of a Huntress back-up feature. Writing nine issues of *Wonder Woman* was all Thomas could muster: "I felt [DC] had sabotaged what they had wanted us to do... If they had just left us alone..., I'd have stayed on it for a long time" (Cassell 30).

Gene Colan had no particular fondness for his *Wonder Woman* assignment either: "[DC] asked me to do it, but I really didn't want to do it. It had nothing to do with the writing... Whatever [DC] gave me to draw, I did it. I felt I had to" (Cassell 29-30). So despite Thomas' departure, Colan stayed on *Wonder Woman*, and he also co-created another title added to DC's lineup in 1982: ***Night Force***. Originally titled *The Challengers* and then *The Dark Force*, *Night Force* was written and conceived by Colan's 1970s *Tomb of Dracula* collaborator, **Marv Wolfman**. It introduced and featured the sorcerer Baron Winters who would dispatch from his Washington, D.C.-based Wintersgate Manor a team of hand-picked operatives—his "Night Force"—to combat supernatural threats in various time periods. As a nod to their previous *Tomb of Dracula* work, one of Baron Winters' operatives created by Wolfman and Colan was Vanessa Van Helsing, the granddaughter of Dracula's fabled arch-enemy, Professor Abraham Van Helsing. *Night Force* debuted as a 16-page insert in *New Teen Titans* #21 (July 1982) before the first issue of its own title premiered the following month. Besides writing *Night Force*, Wolfman also served as its editor, his first opportunity to be a writer/editor since leaving Marvel in 1980.

Along with these new properties, DC revived several characters already in its catalog. One was **Swamp Thing**, the plant monster created by writer Len Wein and artist Bernie Wrightson in 1971. The character's original series was cancelled in 1976 after 24 issues. The new series, *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*—written by Martin Pasko, drawn by Tom Yeates, and edited by Wein—involved the title character in a complex year-long story that saw him pursued by the evil Sunderland Corporation and ultimately pitted against the Antichrist. The February 11 release of the first issue of the new comic book preceded the theatrical premiere of the Wes Craven directed *Swamp Thing* movie by one week. DC even published an "official" adaptation of the film in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing Annual* #1, written by Bruce Jones, drawn by Mark Texeira and Tony DeZuniga, and edited, again, by Len Wein.

July: The Coca-Cola company introduces Diet Coke.

July 25: Harold "Hal" Foster, creator and artist of *Prince Valiant,* dies at the age of 89.

August 10: *Marvel and DC Present: The Uncanny X-Men and The New Teen Titans* #1 joins both publishers' top selling teams against Darkseid and Dark Phoenix in a 64-page offset printed book written by Chris Claremont with art by Walt Simonson and Terry Austin.

September 7: The fourth Marvel Comics graphic novel – introducing The New Mutants – goes on sale exclusively at Direct Market stores.

September 16: *Camelot 3000* #1, printed on high-quality Baxter paper, goes on sale exclusively at Direct Market stores.

October 1: Disney World's EPCOT Center opens in Orlando, Florida.

October 7: The Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice musical *Cats* opens on Broadway.

November 10: Washington D.C.'s Vietnam Veterans Memorial, presenting the names of every serviceman who died during the Vietnam War, officially opens.

November 10: Soviet Union's Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev dies at age of 75 of a heart attack. Yuri Andropov becomes the new leader of the most powerful Communist country in the world.

December 4: The U.S. unemployment rate reaches 10.8%, its highest rate since 1945.

December 16: *Batman* #357 – introducing young circus trapeze artist Jason Todd – goes on sale.

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

August 12: film actor Henry Fonda dies from heart disease at the age of 77.

August: Commodore Business Machines (CBM) releases the Commodore 64 home computer, retailing at $595. Over the next four years, the Commodore 64 dominates the home computer market and becomes the best-selling home computer up to that time.

August 1: Israeli planes bomb West Beirut in an attempt to force the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to withdraw from Lebanon, which it did on August 30.

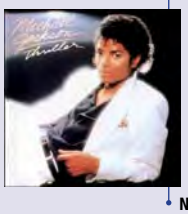
September 30: Extra-Strength Tylenol capsules laced with cyanide kill seven people in the Chicago area, prompting Johnson & Johnson to recall and destroy 31 million bottles as well as create a triple-sealed safety package.

September 30: sit-com *Cheers* premieres on NBC-TV.

September 23: Gene Day, artist most famous for his work on *Master of Kung Fu,* dies at the age of 31 of a coronary.

September 15: The first issue of *USA Today* hits newsstands.

September 14: Grace Kelly, Princess of Monaco, dies at the age of 52 of injuries suffered from a car crash the day before.



December 26: For the first time in the publication's history, *Time* magazine's Man of the Year is not a human being; it's the computer.

December 2: 61-year-old Barney Clark receives the world's first permanent artificial heart in a surgery conducted in Salt Lake City. He will live for 112 days before dying of multi-organ failure.

November 30: Singer-songwriter Michael Jackson releases the album *Thriller,* which would become the best-selling record ever.

Another character revival title edited by Len Wein was ***The Fury of Firestorm***. As a result of a nuclear reactor disaster, high school student Ronnie Raymond and physicist Martin Stein are fused into the super-hero Firestorm with the power to rearrange the molecular structure of inanimate objects. The creation of Gerry Conway and artist Al Milgrom, Firestorm's inaugural series lasted only five issues, another casualty of DC's 1978 "Implosion." But the character remained a visible presence in DC Comics' fictional universe. He joined the Justice League of America in issue #179 (June 1980) and became the back-up feature of *The Flash* with issue #289 (Sept. 1980). On cover date February 1982 though, *Flash* editor Mike W. Barr replaced Firestorm with Dr. Fate for the book's back-up feature. Barr did so because he considered Firestorm "a tremendously derivative character" and one whose adventures were too similar to the book's lead feature (Dallas 100-1). Like The Flash, Firestorm was a brightly colored super-hero who grappled with an array of brightly colored super-villains. Dr. Fate—as a mystical super-hero engaging supernatural enemies—offered *Flash* readers something different from the lead feature. That, at least, was Mike Barr's line of reasoning, and Len Wein—the former *Flash* editor who instituted the Firestorm back-up in the first place—disagreed with it. Privately, Barr and Wein argued about Firestorm's removal as a back-up feature, but the bottom line was that Barr wanted nothing to do with the character. If Firestorm wasn't going to be a back-up feature, then Wein figured there was only one other sensible course of action: let the character have his own on-going title again (Dallas 101).

For the Firestorm relaunch, Gerry Conway remained at the writing helm, joined by artist **Pat Broderick** who had been drawing Marvel's

DC Comics house ad promoting the launch of a new Swamp Thing *series.*
Swamp Thing TM and © DC Comics.

Micronauts since 1980. According to Broderick, Jim Shooter prompted his departure from Marvel in 1981 when the editor-in-chief told Broderick that he wasn't fond of the artist's work and therefore would never give him a page rate increase (Offenberger). So Broderick left for DC, which assigned him to *Legion of Super-Heroes*, a title he intended on drawing for at least a year. When he was subsequently offered *Fury of Firestorm*, Broderick felt the opportunity to launch a new DC title was too good to pass up (Cadigan 138). In *Fury of Firestorm*'s first issue letters page, Conway explained that Firestorm was intended to be a super-hero who just got pleasure out of being a super-hero, "a hero... who still feels a little *joie de vivre*," unlike his dour and insecure contemporaries. And with Broderick, Conway shaped *Fury of Firestorm* into a lighthearted super-hero romp with its protagonist confronted by his nemeses both already established (Killer Frost and Hyena) and new (Black Bison and Plastique).

Wein had one more revival to edit in 1982, a decades-old property whose movie rights had just been optioned by Steven Spielberg: ***Blackhawk***. Rather than relaunch *Blackhawk* with a new first issue, DC instead continued the series' numbering where it left off in 1977 with issue #251. Written by Mark Evanier and drawn by Dan Spiegle, with covers by Dave Cockrum, the *Blackhawk* comic book of 1982 returned to the concept it began with in 1941 when introduced in Quality comics: The Blackhawks were a team of World War II-era multi-national fighter pilots battling the Axis powers.

By late summer, Wein inherited editorial responsibilities on the Batman titles (*Batman*, *Detective Comics*, *The Brave and the Bold*) and consequently had to relinquish the reigns on some of the other titles he was editing. So

1982 house ads promoting two new DC Comics series: The Fury of Firestorm *and* Captain Carrot and His Amazing Zoo Crew.

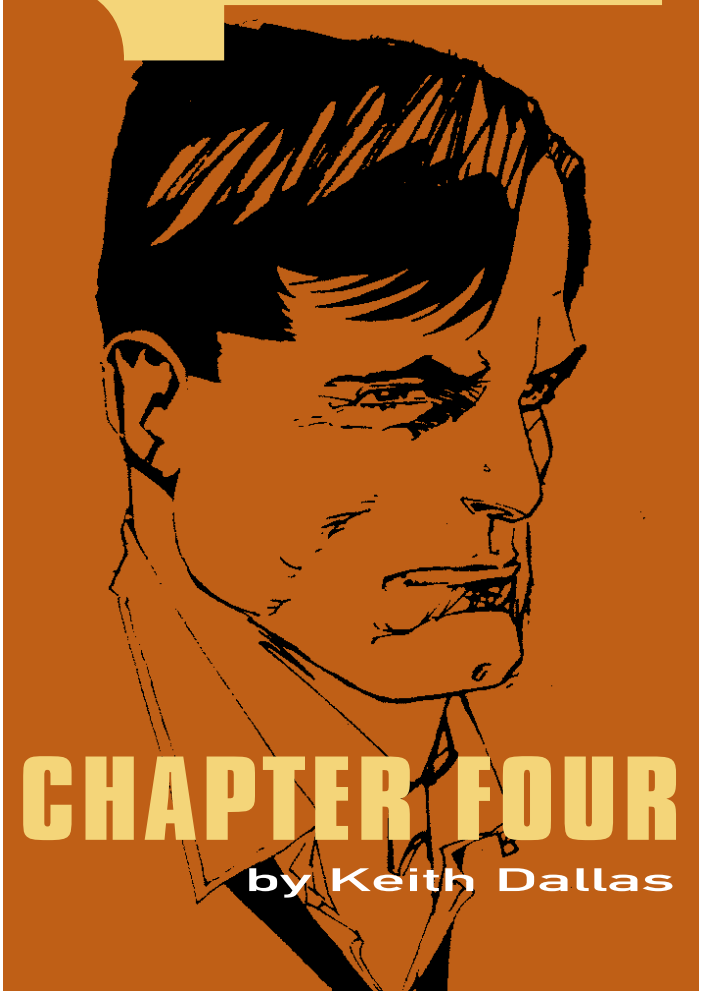
with issue #252 (November 1982) Marv Wolfman assumed *Blackhawk* editing duties. There is perhaps no better indication of Wein's burdensome workload than the fact that his adventure hero comic book *Pandora Pann*—which early in the year DC announced as part of its 1982 lineup—had to be postponed indefinitely because Wein never found the time to write it ("DC News").

Replacing *Pandora Pann* on DC's schedule was ***Arion: Lord of Atlantis***, a sword-and-sorcery title about an immortal mage protecting the kingdom of Atlantis in pre-historic times. Created by writer **Paul Kupperberg** and artist **Jan Duursema**, Arion first appeared as a back-up feature in *Warlord*, from issue #55 (March 1982) to issue #62 (October 1982), before graduating to his own title (November 1982).

Kupperberg also wrote DC's final new addition to its 1982 slate: ***The Daring New Adventures of Supergirl***, whose first issue (cover date November 1982) was published two months after the cancellation of *Superman Family*. DC's second attempt at giving the "maid of might" her eponymous title had Linda Lee Danvers enrolling as a psychology major at Chicago's Lake Shore University—this despite the fact that in her civilian identity Supergirl had already graduated from Stanhope College in *Adventure Comics* #406 (May 1971) and completed post-graduate drama work at Vandyre University in *Superman Family* #165 (July 1974). Handling art on the title was Carmine Infantino, who also continued to draw *The Flash* every month.

One of DC's 1982 publications couldn't be bought at either the newsstand or the Direct Market. Instead ***Atari Force***—created and written by Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway and drawn by Ross Andru and Gil Kane—was published as a serialized insert in five Atari 2600 video games: *Defender, Berzerk, Star Raiders, Phoenix,* and *Galaxian*. Operating in the (then-distant) year 2005, the Atari Force was a multi-national team of astronauts, charged with searching other dimensions for humanity's new home to replace the war-ravaged, ecologically-devastated planet Earth. Their adventures mimicked the game play of the Atari cartridges themselves. Even though the Atari Force accomplished its mission by the end of its

1983



CHAPTER FOUR

by Keith Dallas

Controversy Over A Proposed New Comics Code

In 1982, comic book publishers—both new and established—provided the Direct Market consumer with innovatively fresh material of varied genres: sci-fi epics like *Camelot 3000* and *Dreadstar*, adventure stories like "The Rocketeer" and *Starslayer*, horror anthologies like *Twisted Tales*, and even eclectic, experimental fare like *Love and Rockets*. What's more, every Direct Market-exclusive comic book publisher was profiting, as First Comics' Managing Editor **Mike Gold** asserted at the time:

> Comics are a boom industry right now. New comic sales, comic stores and the like have never been stronger. In an environment where the unemployment rate is more than 11 percent, the economy is absolutely horrible, and people are starving and freezing to death, comic book sales are going up. (Johnson 51)

In 1983, even more new publishers introduced more new titles to the Direct Market, but some industry professionals began to scrutinize all these new titles, and upon finding provocative material in some of them, they grew concerned. They had foreboding visions of outraged parents, highly publicized litigation against retailers, congressional hearings and a new Dr. Fredric Wertham-like authority figure taking center stage to vilify the comic book industry. They argued that labeling comic books would prevent troublesome attention from outside sources. Others disagreed. Ultimately, the debate over the merits and flaws of a new self-imposed ratings system would dominate the comic book industry discourse of 1983.

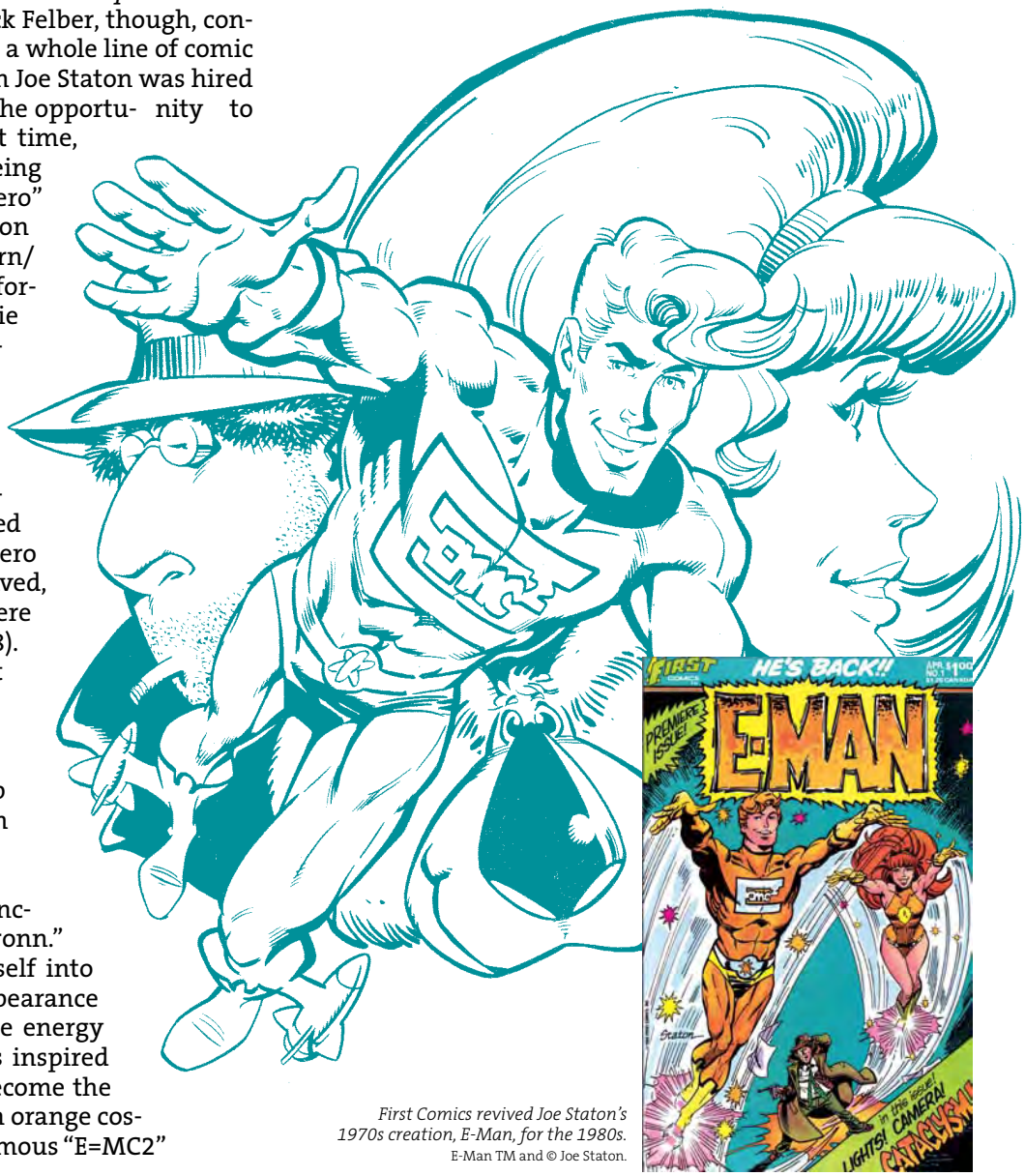
First Impression

But that debate wouldn't begin until the summer. Until then, publishers kept rolling out their new offerings, starting with **First Comics**. The very first First comic book was ***Warp*** #1 (March 1983), a spin-off of a science fiction stage play trilogy of the same name, originally performed in 1971 by Chicago's Organic Theater Company. The trilogy—about a bank teller who discovers he is truly Lord Cumulus, "avenger of the universe"—remained in production since its inception and even had a Broadway run in February 1973. **Rick Obadiah** served as the managing director of the *Warp* stage plays in 1980, when it performed at—among other venues—Mike Gold's Chicago Comicon. In 1981, Gold and the Organic Theater Company co-produced a 16 page promotional comic book titled *Weird Organic Tales*, drawn by **Joe Staton**, reproducing scenes from several of Organic's plays, including *Warp*. After that, Obadiah and Gold discussed adapting *Warp* into an on-going comic book, consequently becoming the impetus for the formation of First Comics, with Obadiah as its publisher and Gold as its managing editor (Johnson 52). Writer **Peter B. Gillis** and artist **Frank Brunner** were hired to collaborate on *Warp*'s twenty-page feature story while other

creators, principally writer **John Ostrander**, contributed to the title's eight-page back-up stories. For Frank Brunner, it was a return to regular comic book work after a long hiatus. Brunner distinguished himself as a comic book artist in the mid-1970s—most notably on Marvel's *Doctor Strange*—until he turned to other artistic endeavors, like paperback novel cover illustration and fine art painting. When he returned to the comic book industry, he made clear that he would never again work for the "House of Ideas." In an open letter printed in the cover date March 1983 fanzines, Brunner condemned Marvel's "medieval dictum" (a.k.a. its work-for-hire contract) which stipulated creators relinquish their rights to anything they've written or drawn for Marvel. Brunner labeled Marvel a "fascist organization" and even chastised fellow artists Jim Starlin and Barry Windsor-Smith for acquiescing to Marvel's demands, thereby "allowing themselves to be exploited." Brunner disseminated his letter the same month that Marvel released *Doctor Strange Special Edition* #1 (March 1983), a Direct Market-exclusive reprint of four 1974 *Doctor Strange* issues by Steve Englehart and Brunner.

It was also the same month that *Warp* #1 was released, and initially, First Comics planned to publish *Warp* as its first *and only* title. Business manager Rick Felber, though, convinced Gold and Obadiah to publish a whole line of comic books (Johnson 54). So in 1982, when Joe Staton was hired as First's art director, he was given the opportu- nity to create his own comic book. At that time, Staton was concerned he was being pigeonholed as a "funny super-hero" artist. To buck that stereotype, Staton created a NASCAR-themed Southern/Midwestern super-hero that he felt former *Daredevil* scribe Roger McKenzie would be the perfect writer for because of his familiarity with Southern culture. Staton spent months developing this new concept, but just before he could figure out an appropriate name for the character, Mike Gold rhetorically asked why he was creating a new super-hero when an existing one could be revived, a character that Joe Staton's fans were already very familiar with (Read 38). With that, First's next title was put on its 1983 schedule: a re-launch of the funny super-hero published by Charlton from 1973 to 1975, ***E-Man***. Created in a star gone nova, a glob of sentient energy wanders through space until arriving on Earth where he turns himself into a human male. The first person he meets, exotic dancer Nova Kane, christens him "Alec Tronn." With the ability to transform himself into pure energy, alter his physical appearance into any imaginable shape, and fire energy bolts from his hands, Alec Tronn is inspired by the reading of comic books to become the super-hero E-Man, complete with an orange costume emblazoned with Einstein's famous "E=MC2" formula as a chest emblem.

After purchasing the rights to E-Man from Charlton, First transferred them to Staton, who repaid First's expenses via deductions in his page rate. Originally, Staton was to be paired with his *E-Man* co-creator, writer Nick Cuti, but Cuti's editorial obligations with DC Comics made him unavailable. Substituting for Cuti was **Marty Pasko**, whose approach to E-Man was drastically different than that of his predecessor. With Cuti at the helm, Chalton Comics' *E-Man* was a lighthearted, action-packed romp. With Pasko at the helm, First Comics' *E-Man* was a no-holds-barred, action-packed parody, taking vicious jabs at various targets. After ridiculing Steven Spielberg in *E-Man* #1 (April 1983), Pasko took aim at the most popular comic book of the 1980s. In the second and third issues of *E-Man*, Alec Tronn encounters a group of super-heroes calling themselves "The Unhappy F-Men", led by its blind founder, Ford Fairmont. The allusions to The Uncanny X-Men and its writer, Chris Claremont, were obvious. They were made even more obvious by the physical appearances of the F-Men closely resembling Marvel Comics' best-selling mutants, never mind the fact that The F-Men had names like



First Comics revived Joe Staton's 1970s creation, E-Man, for the 1980s.
E-Man TM and © Joe Staton.

1983 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 28: 1970s *Superman* inker Frank Chiaramonte dies of cancer at the age of 40.

March 8: President Reagan labels the Soviet Union an "Evil Empire."

April 18: 63 people die when the U.S. Embassy in Beirut is attacked by a suicide bomber.

April 25: Soviet Union leader Yuri Andropov invites Samantha Smith, a 10 year old schoolgirl from Maine, to visit the USSR after reading her letter in which she expresses fears about nuclear war.

April 26: The Dow Jones Industrial Average moves past 1200 for the first time in its history.

May 19: The first issue of *Batman and the Outsiders* – in which Batman quits the Justice League in order to form a new super-hero team – goes on sale.

May 25: *Return of the Jedi*, the third *Star Wars* film, opens in movie theaters.

June 13: The U.S. space probe *Pioneer 10*, launched in 1972, becomes the first spacecraft to leave the solar system.

June 17: *Superman III*, starring Christopher Reeve and Richard Pryor, opens in movie theaters.

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

February 28: The last episode of *M*A*S*H*, the award winning and popular television show about a "mobile army surgical hospital" operating in the Korean War, airs on CBS.

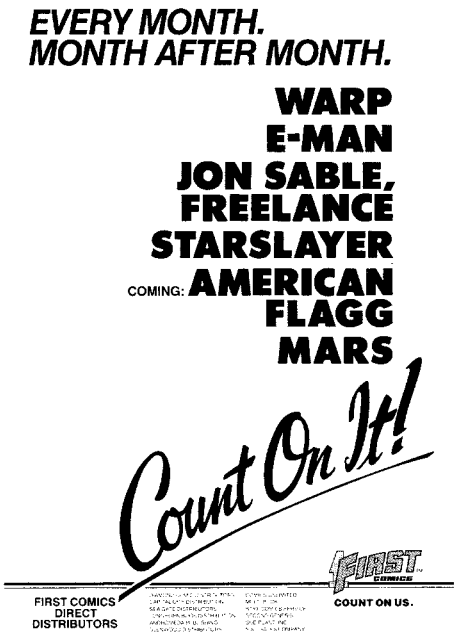
March 23: President Reagan proposes the "Strategic Defense Initiative": the development and deployment of technology to intercept incoming enemy missiles; the media dub the plan "Star Wars".

April 28: Priced at $2.50, the first issue of Frank Miller's *Ronin* goes on sale exclusively at Direct Market stores.

June: The first issue of First Comics' *American Flagg!* – written and drawn by Howard Chaykin – goes on sale exclusively at Direct Market stores.

June 1: *Synchronicity*, the fifth and final album by rock band The Police, is released and includes the number one single "Every Breath You Take."

Superman TM and © DC Comics. Ronin TM and © Frank Miller. Marvel Comics, Thor TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc. Star Wars: Return of the Jedi TM and © Lucasfilm.



A late 1983 house ad lists First Comics' line-up.
TM and © First Comics.

Snott Slummers, Ororeo, and Kitty Porn. Not content just to send up the X-Men characters, Marty Pasko also lampooned Claremont's X-Men narrative style, providing the F-Men with overwrought, verbose thought balloons, like this one for Ororeo as she confronts E-Man's partner: "By the positive role model! Nova is fantastic—such power, such ability, such beauty! I admire her, even as I know I must bash her upside the head and kidnap her, though I am loathe to do it." *E-Man* #2 also featured unflattering caricatures of Stan Lee, Jim Shooter and John Byrne. To be sure, throughout 1983 *E-Man* sought to give anyone and everyone a bloody nose.

But in an editorial printed in the 1989 Comico revival of *E-Man*, Joe Staton admitted that he didn't appreciate First Comics using his creation for "heavy-handed put-downs and unintelligible in-group jokes." He felt his E-Man property was being damaged, perhaps irrevocably so. Fortunately for Staton, he didn't have to wait long for a creative change to occur; with *E-Man* #9 (Dec. 1983), Pasko was no longer the regular writer on the series, allowing Staton and editor Rick Oliver to restore *E-Man* to its former benign flippancy.

As mentioned earlier, Joe Staton served as First Comics' art director. In an interview conducted for this book, Staton explained the position was a misnomer; Staton really didn't have the authority to edit or "direct" artists, nor did he want that authority since the titles First was publishing were creator-owned. That is to say, Staton felt he didn't have—and didn't want—the right to impose himself on books that were very personal projects to the professionals who created them.

Case in point: **Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg!***. By the time *American Flagg!* arrived in Direct Market stores in June 1983, Chaykin had been

July 15: The Nintendo Entertainment System goes on sale in Japan.

September 1: Korean Air Lines 747 is shot down by a Soviet Union jet fighter when the commercial aircraft enters Soviet airspace. All 269 on board are killed.

September 5: Tom Brokaw becomes lead anchor for *NBC Nightly News.*

October 1: Billy Joel's 1978 album *52nd Street* becomes the first compact disc (CD) available for purchase.

November 2: President Reagan approves the creation of a federal holiday on the third Monday of every January to honor Martin Luther King Jr.

November 3: The Reverend Jesse Jackson announces his candidacy for the 1984 Democratic Party presidential nomination.

November 9: Marvel Comics' parent company, Cadence Industries, becomes a private corporation.

November 20: *The Day After,* a television movie dramatizing a fictitious nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union, airs on ABC. Almost 100 million viewers tune in.

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

August 2: *Thor* #337 – introducing Beta Ray Bill in the first issue of Walt Simonson's new tenure on the title – goes on sale.

September 17: Vanessa Williams becomes the first African-American to be crowned Miss America.

September 19: *The Love Connection,* a Chuck Woolery-hosted television game show that sent its contestants out on dates, begins airing in syndication.

October 23: 241 U.S. Marines die and 80 others are injured when a Muslim terrorist crashes his explosive-filled truck into the Marine barracks near the Beirut International Airport in Lebanon.

October 25: A military force, led by 1,800 U.S. Marines and Rangers, invade Grenada, an island in the Caribbean. President Reagan says the action is intended to protect American medical students in Grenada.

December 2: The music video for Michael Jackson's "Thriller" is broadcast for the first time.

a comic book professional for over ten years, having written and drawn for Marvel, DC, Warren, Red Circle, Atlas, and *Heavy Metal* magazine. In 1977, he became a star on the rise when he drew Marvel's comic book adaptation of *Star Wars*. But Chaykin had no interest parlaying his *Star Wars* success into opportunities to work on any of the commercially popular super-hero titles. Instead, Chaykin chose to tackle subject matter that engaged his personal interests, like graphic novel adaptations of Samuel R. Delany's *Empire* and Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*. None of these works proved commercially successful though, so by the early 1980s, Chaykin found himself in considerable debt. Despite his financial situation, Chaykin's experiences with unproven, new comic book publishers (e.g., Atlas) made him reluctant to work with First. Once Mike Gold detailed how profitable a creator-owned comic book published by First could be, Chakykin's concerns were alleviated. He then formulated *American Flagg!* which the self-professed "patriotic liberal" would later describe as "the apotheosis of all the things he'd been reading, studying, and learning since a teenager" (Schweier 3). It would also become one of the 1980s' most critically acclaimed comic books.

Written and drawn by Chaykin, *American Flagg!* presents the planet Earth in the year 2031 governed by the corporate entity called "The Plex." A series of economic, political and environmental calamities in the late 20th century forced the United States government to relocate to Mars. Reuben Flagg, a famous actor, gets drafted to serve as a law enforcement "Plexus Ranger" in the Chicago Plexmall. He quickly learns the country's status quo consists of graft, rampant paramilitary gang violence, and a population agitated by televised subliminal messages. With bold audacity, Flagg acts to obliterate the status quo.

Just as bold and audacious as its protagonist, *American Flagg!* was a dystopian tale in which Chaykin extrapolated a nightmarish future from conditions that disconcerted him in his present. Through *American Flagg!*—and its portrayal of an America taken over by corporations, consumerism, ideological zealotry, and vulgar popular culture—Chaykin expressed his viewpoint of "Reagan's 80s" and what it would yield. Or perhaps Mike Gold puts it best, "If Howard [Chaykin] was the creative spirit doomed to always be ahead of his time... then *American Flagg!* was uncannily in its time" (Schweier 5).

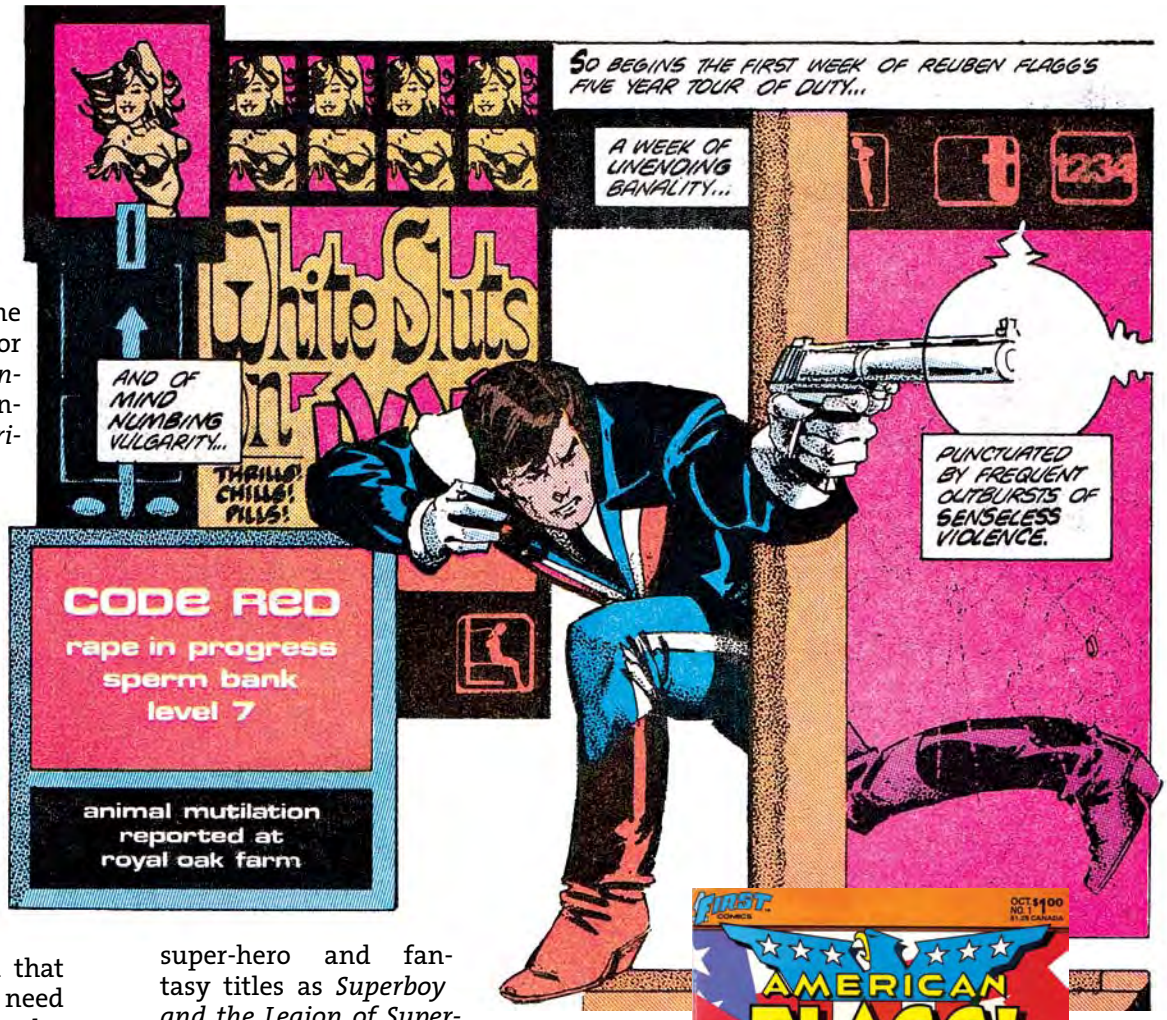
American Flagg!'s content was energetic, satirically profane and often risqué, but the manner in which Chaykin *presented* this content garnered as much praise as the content itself. For an unconventional comic book, Chaykin used unconventional storytelling techniques. He designed

jagged panel arrangements. He dropped out borders to cause elements of one panel to spill into adjacent panels. He had sound effect lettering serve as visual effects. And perhaps most noticeably, he created a grainy shaded art style through the use of Craftint artboard. For *American Comic Book Chronicles*, Chaykin authority Brannon Costello explains *American Flagg!*'s significance:

> *American Flagg!* was a major contribution not just to comics but to the comic *book*. The eye-popping formal innovations, the political satire, the depth of characterization, the snappy dialogue—*American Flagg!* was proof that while comics in their monthly serial form tended to be disposable and forgettable, they didn't *have* to be. Chaykin showed that the comic book didn't need to be "transcended" in order to be sophisticated, that the supposed limitations of the comic book were really only limitations of imagination, dedication, and ambition.

American Flagg!'s brilliance was immediately recognized by comic book readers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean as the comic book's 1983 output earned it—and its creator—ten nominations for Great Britain's prestigious Eagle Award (Favorite Penciller, Favorite Inker, Favorite Writer, Favorite Comic, Favorite Character, Favorite Supporting Character, Favorite Story, Favorite New Comic Title, and twice for Favorite Comic Cover). It ultimately won seven of those categories.

A fellow Eagle Award nominee also became part of First Comics' inaugural roster of creative talent: writer/artist **Mike Grell**. Having been acquainted with Mike Gold for years—and with his tenure on the syndicated *Tarzan* newspaper strip ending in February 1983—Grell eagerly seized the opportunity to create a title for First. A fan favorite on such sci-fi, super-hero and fantasy titles as *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes*, *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, *Warlord,* and *Starslayer*, Grell produced a more down-to-earth comic book for First. Using his military experience as inspiration, Grell created ***Jon Sable, Freelance***. The titular character is a New York City-based costumed mercenary whose alter ego is a best-selling children's book author. Written and illustrated by Grell, *Jon Sable* was one part James Bond, one part Mike Hammer, with no shortage of gunplay. In the series' first issue (June 1983), Sable saves President Reagan from an assassination attempt.



Top: An example of the innovative layouts Howard Chaykin designed for American Flagg!
American Flagg! TM and © Howard Chaykin.

First Comics' inaugural lineup was consummated with another Mike Grell title, one that had already debuted with a different publisher. With issue #7 (August 1983), *Starslayer* was no longer published by Pacific Comics; its home was now First Comics, where it would remain for the rest of its volume. Grell partly brought *Starslayer* over to First because of his friendship with Mike Gold and partly because he felt Pacific had insurmountable organizational problems (Sanford). Even though he removed *Starslayer* from the problems he saw at Pacific, Grell had no time to devote himself to the title. His hands were tied writing and drawing *Jon Sable*, so he left *Starslayer* after issue #8, passing the baton to writer John Ostrander and newcomer artist Lenin Delsol.

To be expected, Bill and Steve Schanes—Pacific Comics' publishers—weren't happy with Grell's departure. It was a public relations black eye that potentially threatened Pacific's viability if other creators

The Teenage Turtle Takeover

From Jim Shooter's point of view, Marvel Comics' state of affairs had completely turned around from the time he became the company's editor-in-chief in 1978. In the early 1980s, not only had Marvel become a more profitable publisher, its operations and staff morale improved considerably as well:

> We were in comfy new offices. We had gotten more or less on time, relieving, to some extent, the grinding oppression of the schedule. The books were selling like Popsicles in Death Valley. The business was expanding so there was plenty of work to go around. Rates had escalated dramatically. There were creator-owned opportunities, incentive plans, benefits and royalties. People were making money—some, a lot of money. Funny how when people are making good money, a *lot* of the stress drains away. (Shooter, "More Strange Tales: War at Marvel")

Apparently, enough stress drained away that Shooter let Marvel's cover date January 1984 slate go goofy for an event dubbed **"Assistant Editors' Month."**

The pretense of Marvel's "Assistant Editors' Month" was that Shooter left the assistant editors in charge while he and the editors traveled west—attending San Diego Comic Con and then meetings in Los Angeles. With the bosses away, the assistant editors—led by **Mike Carlin**—ran amok. Aunt May became a herald of Galactus in *Marvel Team-Up* #137. Comics humorist Fred Hembeck drew *Spectacular Spider-Man* #86. In *Avengers* #239, Earth's Mightiest Heroes appeared on the Late Night With David Letterman television show. The covers to Mike Carlin's books displayed DC Comics' 1960s-era "Go-Go checks" (with an "MC" bullet logo). Other covers paraphrased the U.S. Surgeon General's warning about smoking: "Warning: Surgeons Have Generally Determined That Assistant Editors' Month Is Dangerous to Your Health." Across Marvel's line, either in the stories or in the letter pages, hilarity ensued, all because without Jim Shooter keeping them in line, the assistant editors couldn't help but indulge themselves.

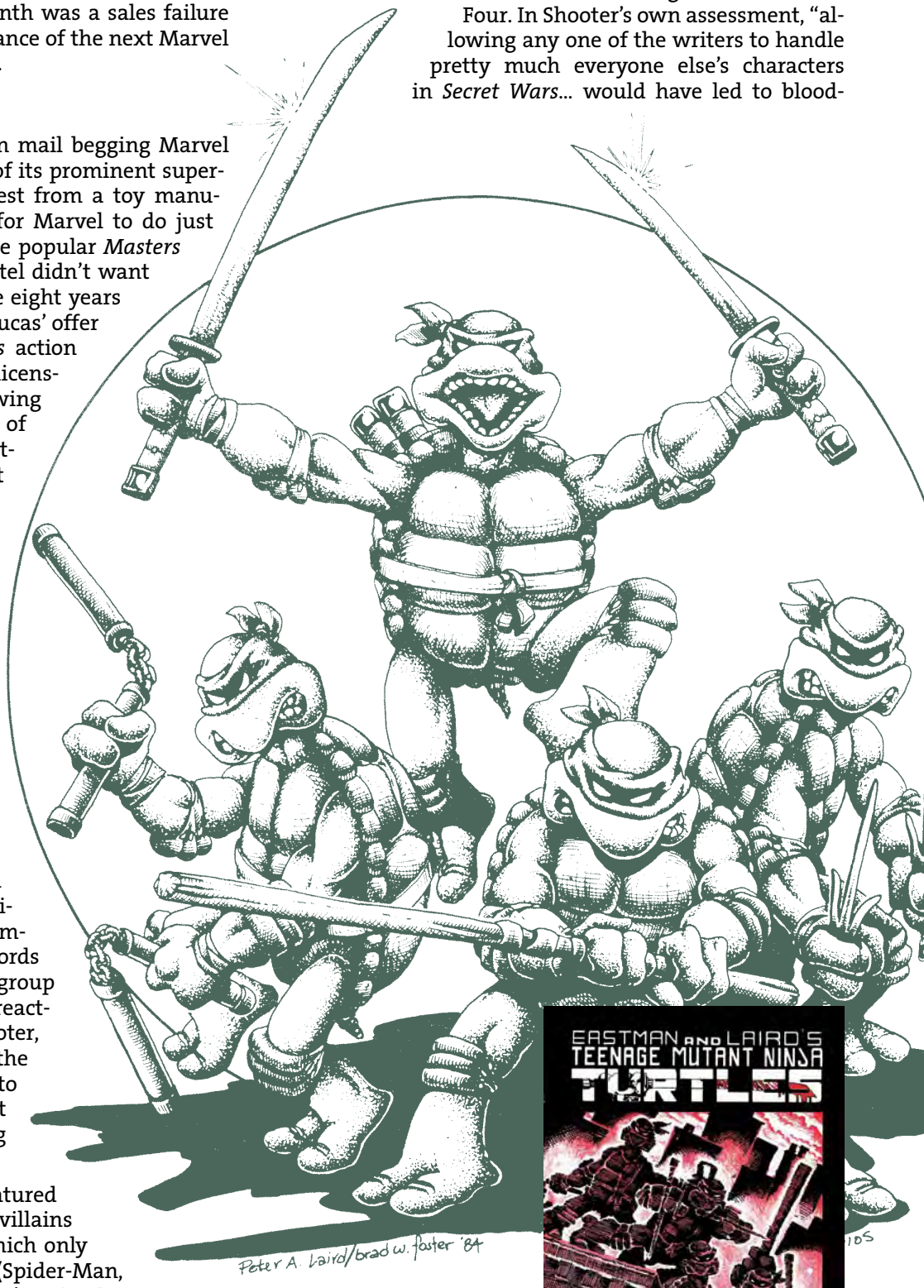
That was the pretense at least. The reality was something else as Danny Fingeroth—Marvel's Spider-Man line editor at the time—explains, "it was the most carefully planned, plotted, and strategized stunt that we had probably ever done, up to that point" (Fingeroth 33). While the assistant editors did indeed take over Marvel's helm for a month, they did so under the direct supervision of not only the senior editors but also Jim Shooter who brainstormed the stunt as an opportunity to give Marvel's readers a change of pace. Since the cover date January 1984 books were conceived and approved—and in some cases completed—well in advance of the editors' West Coast trip, the assistant editors had their bosses sitting right next to them as they worked on the comic books.

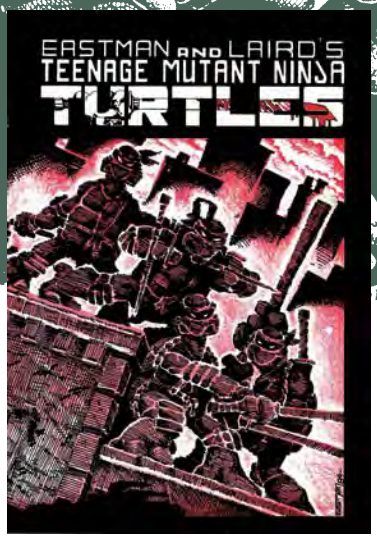
Carlin recollects the whimsically irreverent stunt didn't sell particularly well, possibly becoming Marvel's worst selling month ever, according to one legend he heard (Fingeroth 33). Given the flourishing mid-1980s comic book marketplace and the high volume of titles Marvel was producing at that time, this most assuredly could not have been the case. In fact, Assistant Editors' Month was a sales failure only if judged against the performance of the next Marvel event that began four months later.

Secret War Profiteering

For years, Jim Shooter received fan mail begging Marvel to publish a story that starred *all* of its prominent super-heroes and super-villains. A request from a toy manufacturer created the opportunity for Marvel to do just that. Despite already producing the popular *Masters of the Universe* action figures, Mattel didn't want to make the same mistake it made eight years earlier when it passed on George Lucas' offer to have Mattel produce *Star Wars* action figures (Levisohn). The *Star Wars* licensing rights fell in Kenner's lap, allowing Mattel's competitor to sell millions of toys based on the movie series, starting in 1977. In 1984, Kenner was set to unveil its DC Comics-themed *Super Powers* action figure line. On the chance that super-hero action figures would become the next toy sensation, Mattel approached Marvel Comics, seeking to license Marvel's characters for a similar toy line. To cement the licensing agreement, Mattel required from Marvel a special comic book that the action figure line could tie into. Shooter suggested Marvel produce the star-studded story many of its readers have been clamoring for, which he had tentatively titled "Cosmic Champions" (Kraft 17). Mattel, though, recommended a title that included the words "wars" and "secret" after focus group tests indicated that young boys reacted positively to those words (Shooter, "Secrets of the Secret Wars"). So the title of the event was changed to ***Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars***. It would become Marvel's best-selling comic book of the decade.

The twelve-issue limited series featured far more super-heroes and super-villains than Mattel's action figure line which only offered eight Marvel characters (Spider-Man, Captain America, Iron Man, Wolverine, Dr. Doom, Dr. Octopus, Magneto, and Kang). Shooter lured penciller **Mike Zeck** and inker **John Beatty** away from their two-year run on *Captain America* to handle art duties. Assigning a writer to the series wasn't going to be as easy. The problem was that Marvel's writers were possessive of the characters in their care. If David Michelinie were assigned to write *Secret Wars*, Shooter knew Chris Claremont would throw a fit over Michelinie handling "his" X-Men. Likewise, if Shooter tapped Claremont, John Byrne wouldn't let Shooter hear the end of how he didn't want Claremont touching "his" Fantastic Four. In Shooter's own assessment, "allowing any one of the writers to handle pretty much everyone else's characters in *Secret Wars*... would have led to blood-





Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles *would have a surprisingly transformative impact on the comic book industry.*
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
TM and © Viacom International Inc.

1984 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 1: The court-ordered reorganization of AT&T into seven independent regional telephone companies takes place.

January 10: A Wendy's restaurant television commercial asks, "Where's the Beef?" The question would soon become part of the American lexicon.

January 31: Spider-Man's new black costume is introduced in *Amazing Spider-Man* #252.

February 8: The Winter Olympics open in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

March 7: Carl Burgos – creator of The Human Torch that first appeared in *Marvel Comics* #1 – dies at the age of 67.

April 1: Soul singer Marvin Gaye is shot to death during an altercation with his father.

April 3: Motorola introduces a brick-sized cell phone, costing $3,995.

May 23: Directed by Steven Spielberg, produced by George Lucas, and starring Harrison Ford, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* opens in movie theaters.

June 1: *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* opens in movie theaters.

June 4: *Ghostbusters* – starring Bill Murray, Dan Ackroyd, Harold Ramis and Ernie Hudson – opens in movie theaters.

June 4: Former vice president of Marvel Comics Sol Brodsky dies after a brief illness at the age of 61. Brodsky became Marvel's production manager in 1964. Stan Lee described Brodsky as his "right hand man."

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

January 24: Apple Computers unveils its Macintosh personal computer.

January 24: The first issue of the 12-issue limited series *Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars* – which would become Marvel's best-selling comic book of the decade – goes on sale.

February 28: First Comics files a federal lawsuit against Marvel Comics and World Color Press claiming the two separately engaged in anti-trust and anti-competitive activities since November 1982.

February 9: At the age of 69, Yuri Andropov dies, less than 15 months after succeeding Leonid Brezhnev as the Soviet Union's General Secretary. He is succeeded by Konstantin U. Chernenko.

May 1: The first issue of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* goes on sale. The initial 3000-copy print run immediately sells out.

June 18: Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA* album lands on the Billboard Top Ten; it will remain there for 84 weeks.

June 28: Artist Pete Costanza dies at the age of 71. He illustrated dozens of Captain Marvel stories for Fawcett during the 1940s and then drew for DC Comics in the 1960s mostly on *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen*.

June 29: *Conan the Destroyer* – with a story by Gerry Conway and Roy Thomas and with Arnold Schwarzenegger reprising his role as Robert E. Howard's famous hero – opens in movie theaters.

Mike Zeck and John Beatty's cover to the first issue of Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars.

SECRET WARS SCORE CARD

Super-Heroes	Super-Villains
Spider-Man	Dr. Doom
Hulk	Galactus
Captain America	Dr. Octopus
Iron Man	The Lizard
Thor	Ultron
Wasp	Kang
Hawkeye	Absorbing Man
Captain Marvel	Enchantress
She-Hulk	Molecule Man
Mister Fantastic	The Wrecker
The Thing	Thunderball
Human Torch	Piledriver
Cyclops	Bulldozer
Wolverine	
Storm	
Colossus	
Nightcrawler	
Rogue	
Professor Xavier	
Magneto	

shed in the hallowed halls" (Shooter, "Secrets of the Secret Wars"). To avoid this, Shooter had to select a writer who (1) was experienced at writing stories with a large cast of characters, (2) was up to date on the goings-on of all of Marvel's titles, and (3) could withstand being hated by the rest of Marvel's writers. Given that criteria, Shooter felt only one person was qualified to write *Secret Wars*: Jim Shooter. Assigning himself to the task didn't stop the other writers from arguing with Shooter about how he was misusing "their" characters, but they all knew that Shooter always had the last word as editor-in-chief, and that eliminated the prospect of any protracted arguments.

In advance of *Secret Wars*' launch, *Marvel Age* #12 (March 1984) unabashedly declared it "the most cataclysmic development in the Marvel Universe since the origin of the Fantastic Four!" (Lerer 9). The following month, several Marvel titles

July 18: Oliver Huberty, an unemployed security guard, enters a McDonald's in San Ysidro, CA and opens fire with a rifle, shotgun and pistol, killing 20 and wounding 16 before he is killed by police sharpshooters.

July 19: "Justice League Detroit" – composed of Aquaman, Martian Manhunter, Elongated Man, Zatanna, and new members Vixen, Steel, Vibe and Gypsy – debuts in *Justice League of America Annual* #2.

July 23: Vanessa Williams becomes the first Miss America to resign her title. Nude photographs of her had been published in *Penthouse* magazine.

July 28: The 23rd Summer Olympics opens in Los Angeles. It is boycotted by the Soviet Union and other Communist countries like Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, and the Eastern Bloc as well as by Iran and Libya. The United States would go on to win 83 gold medals.

September 16: *Miami Vice* – a New Wave police procedural drama produced by Michael Mann and starring Don Johnson and Philip Michael Thomas – premieres on the NBC television network.

September 20: *The Cosby Show,* a sitcom starring Bill Cosby, debuts on NBC television networks.

September 24: Canadian customs officials seize a copy of the *Void Indigo* graphic novel – written by Steve Gerber and drawn by Val Mayerik – on the suspicion it violated the country's pornography standards.

October 31: Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is assassinated by two Sikh security guards. In the ensuing riots, some 2,700 Sikhs are killed.

November 6: Ronald Reagan is elected for a second term as President of the United States, defeating Democratic nominee Walter Mondale with a record 525 electoral votes.

November 11: *The Transformers* cartoon show debuts on syndicated television.

December 3: In Bhopal India, gas leakage from a Union Carbide pesticide plant causes the deaths of more than 2,000 people and injures more than 500,000 others, some of whom will later die from their injuries.

December 19: British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher guarantees the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, when Great Britain's 99-year lease on the territory expires.

JULY | **AUGUST** | **SEPTEMBER** | **OCTOBER** | **NOVEMBER** | **DECEMBER**

July 30: Prince's album *Purple Rain* becomes the best-selling album in the nation and will continue to be for the next six months.

July 12: Democratic Presidential nominee Walter Mondale selects New York Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate. Ferraro becomes the first woman to be placed on a presidential ticket.

July 12: Madonna's "Like a Virgin" video premieres on MTV.

August 30: Pacific Comics ceases its publishing operations.

August 21: Comic book distributor and convention organizer Phil Seuling – credited for creating the comic book industry's Direct Market distribution system in 1972 – dies at the age of 50.

August 19: Comic book artist Don Newton – best known for his work on DC's Comics *Batman* and *Detective Comics* – dies of a heart attack at the age of 49.

October 26: *The Terminator* – directed by James Cameron and starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as a homicidal cyborg from the future – opens in movie theaters.

November 29: "Band Aid" – a collection of British musicians brought together by Bob Geldof that includes Phil Collins, Duran Duran, U2, Sting, George Michael, David Bowie, and Paul McCartney – releases the single "Do They Know It's Christmas?" in order to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia.

November 21: *Supergirl* – starring Helen Slater as Superman's cousin – opens in movie theaters.

December 22: Bernhard Goetz shoots four black youths on the New York subway, who he claims were about to rob him.

(*Amazing Spider-Man* #251, *Avengers* #242, *Incredible Hulk* #294, and *Uncanny X-Men* #180, among others) show their protagonists investigating an enormous alien construct that mysteriously appeared in Manhattan's Central Park. The heroes all feel compelled to enter, and when they do, they vanish in a flash of light. *Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars* #1 (May 1984) reveals where they all went: "the distant reaches of the universe, far, far from planet Earth." Floating in space are two alien constructs: one holds 20 super-heroes, the other holds 13 super-villains. After they all witness the destruction of a galaxy and the construction of a new planet—later dubbed "Battleworld"—a light shines from the void of space, and a voice declares, "I am from Beyond! Slay your enemies and all you desire shall be yours." They're all then transported down to Battleworld where the conflict begins. Over the course of twelve issues, the heroes and the villains battle each other. Many, many times. Over and over again.

While the first melee on Battleworld gets under way at the end of *Secret Wars* #1, that very same month other Marvel titles show its heroes returning from the conclusion of the conflict. Readers would have to wait eleven more months before they had the chance to buy the final *Secret Wars* issue, but revealed to them immediately were the changes ultimately wrought by the event. Instead of returning to Earth with his colleagues, the Thing chose to remain on Battleworld. She-Hulk took his place on the Fantastic Four roster. The X-Men had a determined new combat leader in Professor X as well as an emotionally devastated Colossus who ended his romantic relationship with Kitty Pryde. The most significant *Secret Wars* development, however, was Spider-Man's new black costume.

Secret Wars *#8 explains how Spider-Man obtained his black costume.*

The (Spider-)Man in Black

In 1982, a comic book fan named Randy Schueller contacted Jim Shooter and pitched him a story in which Spider-Man donned a black costume that would let the hero blend into the night and better cling to walls. Shooter paid Schueller $220 for the proposal and assigned then-Spider-Man editor **Tom DeFalco** to help Schueller shape the idea into a publishable story (Cronin). After months spent guiding and tutoring the would-be professional writer, DeFalco threw in the towel; Schueller just wasn't up to the task of crafting a professional-quality story. So the black costume idea got discarded sometime before DeFalco got promoted to executive editor and handed the Spider-Man editorial reins to Danny Fingeroth in 1983. But as Mattel and Marvel began coordinating their *Secret Wars* plans, Shooter remembered the black costume idea and decided to incorporate it into the event (Johnson 48). Shooter's decision mostly affected two people: the *Secret Wars* editor and the *Amazing-Spider-Man* writer. In 1984, one person held both those positions, and as fate would have it, it was the same person Shooter assigned to deal with the black costume concept in the first place: Tom DeFalco.

Shooter's decision also obviously affected the artists drawing the comic books featuring Spider-Man. At the start of 1984, **Ron Frenz** had the art duties on *Amazing Spider-Man*. When Frenz received the plot for *Amazing Spider-Man* #252 (May 1984)—the second issue of Frenz's nearly three year long tenure on the title—it included design sketches by Mike Zeck of Spider-Man's new black costume. Having been given no forewarning about the costume change, Frenz at first thought a new Spider-Man villain was being introduced. When he was finally informed of the development, Frenz had one reaction: "You've got to be kidding me! I waited all my life, since the age of eight, to draw Spider-Man, and now he's got a new suit!" (Johnson 48).

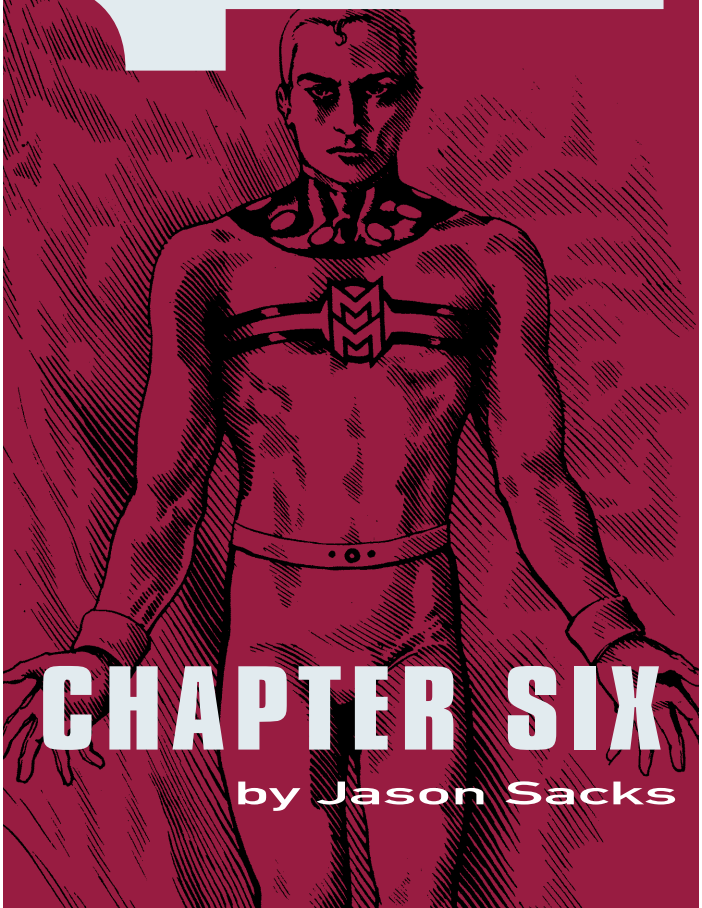
Spider-Man's black costume makes its debut in Amazing Spider-Man *#252.*
Spider-Man TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc.

The initial fan reaction to Spider-Man's black costume was equally vociferous. Before issue #252 even arrived in stores, outraged readers flooded Marvel with letters demanding the character return to wearing his traditional red and blue costume. Even Marvel's own licensing personnel were unhappy with the change. They were concerned that the new costume would confuse the Spider-Man brand among licensees. Given the clamor that came both internally and externally, Shooter decided to return matters to the previous status quo. He told DeFalco, "The costume is introduced in [*Amazing Spider-Man*] #252. Get rid of it in #253" (Johnson 49). DeFalco, however, felt that reversing course would undermine the *Secret Wars* event, which at some point would have to introduce the black costume, months after it was ditched for good in *Amazing Spider-Man*. After some passionate arguing, DeFalco persuaded Shooter to let the black costume stay, at least until it made its appearance in *Secret Wars*.

When *Amazing Spider-Man* #252 reached the newsstands and Direct Market stores, the unexpected happened: suddenly the mainstream media wanted to report on Spider-Man's costume change. Major national newspapers and news outlets contacted Marvel for interviews about the new costume. Subsequently, sales of *Amazing Spider-Man*—already one of Marvel's best-sellers—skyrocketed. Issue #252 sold nearly double the number of copies the preceding issue sold (Shooter, "Something Groovy"). The issue also instantly became a hot commodity on the secondary market, selling for $50 in some areas mere days after its release (Johnson 50).

Six months later, *Amazing Spider-Man* #258 revealed that the black costume is actually a sentient alien parasite seeking to graft itself permanently onto its host. With the help of Mr. Fantastic, Spider-Man separates himself from the parasite, which is then isolated in a sealed chamber. The following month the cover to *Amazing Spider-Man* #259 (Dec. 1984) featured Spider-Man in his familiar red and blue costume with the declaration,

1985



CHAPTER SIX

by Jason Sacks

Crisis and Creation

DC Comics celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 1985 with the release of a special publication titled ***Fifty Who Made DC Great***. The comic-sized, 58-page book profiled fifty individuals and companies who contributed to DC Comics' success. This included company co-founders M.C. Gaines and Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, Superman co-creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Batman co-creators Bob Kane and Bill Finger, actors who portrayed DC Comics' characters in television and film (George Reeves, Adam West, Burt Ward, Christopher Reeve, Lynda Carter, Helen Slater) as well as such contemporaneous comic book creators as Marv Wolfman, George Pérez, and Frank Miller. The book also featured short comments by a diverse group of prominent men and woman like United States Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, science fiction author Ray Bradbury, horror novelist Stephen King, musician Gene Simmons, Marvel Comics publisher Stan Lee, actress Whoopi Goldberg and social activist Gloria Steinem.

As DC's anniversary began, though, not everything at the venerable company was festive. While profitable, DC still dealt with a troubling status quo: despite possessing some of comic books' most recognizable characters, DC's sales were much lower than Marvel's, particularly in the burgeoning Direct Market. Thanks to Marvel's blockbuster *Secret Wars*, the sales gap between the two publishers had widened even further. Comic book fans in 1984 were buzzing about Spider-Man's black costume and the presence of She-Hulk on the Fantastic Four rather than about the latest adventures of Superman or Infinity Inc. According to one Phoenix, Arizona-area dealer, Marvel outsold DC ten-to-one in the Direct Market in 1984 (Webb 17).

Fueling this sales disparity was the widespread reader perception that much of the DC Universe was too stodgy. DC's most famous characters were in titles that were written and illustrated by veterans who no longer commanded fan devotion (like Curt Swan on *Superman*, Carmine Infantino on *The Flash*, and Don Heck on *Wonder Woman*). Parts of DC's line were truly moribund. Sales on *The Flash*, for instance, had dropped from a monthly average of 102,297 copies in 1980 to 67,881 copies in 1985, a disastrous 33% decline in five years, and a shocking 80% drop from the title's late 1960s high (Webb 14).

Add to this the concern that the DC Universe had grown too complex over the years. The idea of multiple parallel dimensions had been intriguing and exciting when Infantino and Gardner Fox collaborated on 1961's classic "Flash of Two Worlds!" in *Flash* #123. But over twenty years later, DC had created so many alternate universes that it became near impossible for the casual fan to keep them all straight. Each major DC character had two (or more) iterations. One Superman was married, one Wonder Woman had a daughter, and one Batman was dead!

Long established was the idea that the super-heroes that DC introduced during the late 1950s/early 1960s "Silver Age" inhabited Earth-1 while their Golden Age predecessors

hailed from Earth-2. Earth-3, on the other hand, positioned DC's familiar super-heroes as villains. The Fawcett Universe characters (headed by the Captain Marvel family) resided on Earth-S while Earth-C was where Captain Carrot and His Amazing Zoo Crew lived. It didn't stop there. DC's whole complex universe was an alphabet soup of letters and concepts that required readers to keep an encyclopedic amount of information in their heads. Unfortunately, DC's line of titles was perceived as too boring to inspire such fanaticism in many fans. It was clear to some that DC needed to take the radical step of simplifying its universe.

And thus was born ***Crisis on Infinite Earths***.

The idea to reduce the number of parallel Earths was one that writer/editor **Marv Wolfman** had carried around since at least 1982. He had been discussing the prospect of simplifying the DC Universe with his lifelong friend **Len Wein** and with other DC editors and executives, including DC publisher **Jenette Kahn** and executive editor **Dick Giordano**. Wolfman takes credit for presenting *Crisis* to DC's management:

> Because of a letter I printed in *Green Lantern* saying, "You really should fix up DC continuity," to which I answered, "Yes, we should," I began seriously thinking about it again, and started talking this old project over with Len Wein and some other people as a special series at DC. They loved it, because they saw it as a way of getting around all the convoluted, confusing series of universes and Earths and futures and pasts. (Waid 24)

Giordano added, "I'm happy to relate that at a mass out-of-office meeting attended by all the in-house editors, Jenette Kahn, Paul Levitz, and myself, a lively exchange of ideas gave us confidence that all parties would, at least outwardly, participate. There were no threats and Jenette, Paul, and myself were there to contribute creatively, not as managers" (Eury 35).

DC played the long game with *Crisis*, and the series was the result of several years of diligent planning. In 1982, DC brought in **Peter Sanderson** as staff researcher, and he was assigned to read and take notes on every DC comic published since 1935. The reams of paper that Sanderson filled with his research helped create the back-story and panel margins of not only *Crisis* but also its companion book, *Who's Who: The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe*.

Once DC's executives gave Wolfman the formal green light for *Crisis*, he started planting seeds for the event through-

George Pérez's wraparound cover for Crisis on Infinite Earths *#1.*

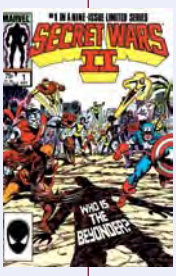
1985 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 3: The first issue of DC Comics' ultimate status-quo altering maxi-series, *Crisis on Infinite Earths,* goes on sale.

March 11: The day after the death of Konstantin Chernenko, Mikhail Gorbachev is chosen to succeed him as General Secretary of the Soviet Union's Communist Party.

April 16: Four months after the final issue of *Secret Wars* is published, the first issue of its sequel, *Secret Wars II,* goes on sale.



May 27: Starring Roger Moore in the final time he will play British super-spy James Bond, *A View To A Kill* opens in movie theaters.

June 14: A TWA jet carrying 139 passengers is hijacked by Lebanese extremists shortly after takeoff from Athens, Greece. A 17-day intercontinental ordeal ensues that includes the murder of a U.S. Naval officer.

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

February 26: Tina Turner's "What's Love Got to Do With It" wins Grammy Awards for Record and Song of the year. Cyndi Lauper wins Grammy Award for Best New Artist.

March 3: *Moonlighting,* a romantic comedy/private investigator television show starring Cybill Shepard and Bruce Willis, premieres on the ABC television network.

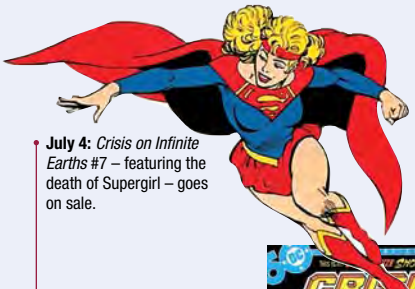
May 11: Chester Gould – creator of the comic strip detective Dick Tracy – dies at the age of 84.

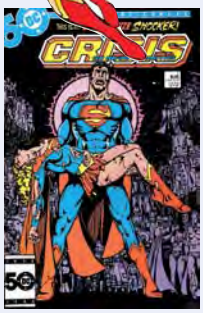
DC Comics house ad that teases the impact of Crisis on Infinite Earths.
TM and © DC Comics.

out various DC titles starting with 1982's *New Teen Titans* #21. In that issue, the cosmic being called The Monitor makes his debut. In 1984, the Monitor unleashed villains in the pages of *Green Lantern* and *Flash* and then began observing such heroes as the Justice League, the All-Star Squadron, and Swamp Thing.

Just as the Monitor's appearances became more frequent and involved more DC titles, fan-favorite artist **George Pérez** was assigned to illustrate *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. As Pérez explained, he was called to duty "for the sense of grandeur that [Crisis] required, and because I'm capable of juggling as many characters as it took to tell the story." Pérez also admitted that he was excited to take a little bit of vengeance on Marvel Comics: "It was to get revenge for not being able to do the JLA-Avengers book, as well as a way of getting back at *Secret Wars*, which did phenomenally well with a minimum of effort" (Waid 55-56). Since their tremendous success with *New Teen Titans* had made Wolfman and Pérez DC's team supreme, it was only fitting that they collaborate on DC's most important project in decades.

Crisis on Infinite Earths #1 hit the stands at the beginning of January 1985 (cover dated April). Pérez's spectacular wraparound cover features an array of heroes juxtaposed against a countless array of Earths. Astute readers recognized Firestorm, The Teen Titans' Cyborg, The Outsiders' Geo-Force, and the John Stewart Green Lantern on the cover, but they had to be surprised at seeing former Charlton hero Blue Beetle, a character never previously seen in a DC comic book (despite DC acquiring him and most of the other Charlton Action Heroes in 1983). The cover to *Crisis* #1 also presented the Earth-2 Superman (complete with white hair in his temples) and two other unidentified characters.





July 4: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #7 – featuring the death of Supergirl – goes on sale.

July 13: Live Aid, a Bob Geldof-organized dual-venue concert in London and Philadelphia featuring dozens of popular musical artists, raises money to relieve famine in Ethiopia.

September 1: The wreckage of the *Titanic,* which sunk in 1915, was located by a U.S.-French expedition over 500 miles from Newfoundland, Canada.

September 3: *Heroes for Hope Starring the X-Men* – the Ethiopian famine relief comic book with contributions from over 100 creators, including Stephen King – goes on sale.

September 22: FarmAid, a concert organized by Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp, and Neil Young and performed by rock and country music artists, takes place in Champaign, Illinois and raises over $9 million for struggling American farmers.

September 27: Hurricane Gloria makes landfall in North Carolina and moves northward, eventually causing over $900 million in damage.

December 6: *The San Francisco Chronicle* describes a "super cocaine" that is being sold on the streets. It soon becomes known as "crack" or "rock" cocaine.

December 16: Organized crime boss Paul Castellano is shot to death outside a New York City restaurant. The hit was ordered by John Gotti who uses Castellano's death to seize power in the Mafia.

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

July 7: Starring Michael J. Fox as a time-travelling teenager, *Back to the Future* opens in movie theaters. It would become the highest grossing film of the year.

August 1: Three weeks after the final issue of his own series is published, The Flash dies in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #8.

September 10: The creative teams of *Alpha Flight* and *Incredible Hulk* titles trade places. John Byrne assumes control of *Hulk* with issue #314. His run would end five issues later.

October 2: Film star Rock Hudson dies of AIDS complications at the age of 59.

October 7: The Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro* is hijacked in the Mediterranean Sea by four PLF (Palestinian Liberation Front) gunmen who demand Israel release 50 Palestinian prisoners. After two days, the hijackers surrender to Egyptian authorities and are turned over to Italy.

October 16: Intel introduces its 32-bit 80386 computer chip.

November 18: *Calvin and Hobbes,* Bill Watterson's comic strip about a six year old boy and his stuffed toy tiger, makes its first appearance in newspapers across the country.

The issue opens with a universe-spanning spectacle unlike any other: the Big Bang. That display transitions to an Earth that is quickly being consumed by antimatter. On that world is a mysterious cloaked man who desperately tries to stop the utter destruction of an entire universe. Clearly the stakes of this series were high and getting higher. A turn of the page reveals an equally intense battle on Earth-3, where slightly familiar characters like Ultraman, Power Ring, and Superwoman try in vain to stop the flood of antimatter from destroying their world. One by one, the heroes of that alternate Earth attempt to save their world, only to be destroyed by all-powerful cosmic forces.

The rest of that issue spans both time and space, from the 30th century future of the Legion of Super-Heroes to the distant past of Arion, Lord of Atlantis, and from Gorilla City, African home of the infamous Gorilla Grodd, to Manhattan, Firestorm's base of operations. A ragtag group of heroes are gathered. Ultimately, in a majestic final page, the person responsible for bringing them together is revealed in all his glory: The Monitor.

The opening chapter of this cosmic story was epic in scope and surprisingly intimate in its details. The worlds that were destroyed were populated by empathetic heroes who were instantly relatable and almost as instantly killed. The quick pace of Wolfman's script, combined with the meticulous details of Pérez's artwork, made this first issue immediately intriguing for new readers and kicked the twelve-issue maxi-series off in great style.

Just about the only thing that marred the first issue was its horrible printing via the flexographic press, which produced blurry, off-register pages. The printing process caused Pérez's artwork to lose much of its definition. After completing the series, Pérez confessed, "The one thing that almost took me off the book was the flexograph printing on issue #1. I threatened to quit the book on the spot if issue #2 was as bad as the first one" (Waid 58). But thankfully for comic fans, DC abandoned the flexograph process and the printing quality promptly improved. Pérez remained on the series.

And Pérez's involvement was essential because few other artists had the ability (or stamina) to draw the enormous collections of DC heroes and villains that the series showcased. The artist had a boundless enthusiasm for depicting characters both famous and obscure. *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #5, for instance, has pages that feature literally dozens of characters in incredibly dense shots. The spread on pages 7 and 8 includes a mind-bogglingly huge group of nearly 180 heroes. Undaunted by what the series tasked him to do, Pérez took great pride in what he produced: "It was a lot of work, but the

Spread page from Crisis on Infinite Earths *#5 that features almost 180 different characters.* All characters TM and © DC Comics.

reaction has been very gratifying. The incredible amount of characters to be drawn, and trying to make a coherent storyline with a cast of hundreds, was a true challenge" (Waid 58).

Dick Giordano inked Pérez's pencil work for the first three issues. Despite a desire to complete the series, executive duties impeded Giordano from continuing beyond the third issue. DC Editorial Coordinator Pat Bastienne unceremoniously removed her close friend from the job rather than force him to work all nighters to complete his inking assignments. After Mike DeCarlo inked *Crisis* #4, **Jerry Ordway** took over the inking chores with issue #5. Ordway was originally scheduled to start with issue #6, but as he explains it: "there was a deadline problem and [DC] sent the pages to issue #5... all but pages 7 and 8, the massive 178-character double page spread. Those were the last two pages of the book that I got. I guess they figured that if I took them too early on, they'd have to look for someone else to do the book. This way, they figured by waiting, they'd at least get one complete issue out of me" (Waid 59). Ordway would ink the remainder of the series.

As *Crisis on Infinite Earths* progressed, it involved virtually every hero and villain ever seen in the DC Universe. They become united to battle the horrible threat of the Anti-Monitor, a soulless destroyer bent on annihilating all life across the infinite universes through the use of his antimatter devices. As the heroes traverse space and time to protect cosmic tuning forks that will prevent the merger of the various universes, they end up in epic battles against the Anti-Monitor's deadly shadow warriors.

And as one might expect from epic battles, casualties occur.

A Super Farewell

Along with streamlining the DC Universe, *Crisis* needed to clear out some dead wood and do it in a way that would grab fans' attention. In an interview conducted for *American Comic Book Chronicles*, Bob Greenberger—who served as a DC Comics editor in 1985—claimed that as *Crisis* was being put together, a "death list" of characters that would be killed in the series was circulated around DC's offices. Though the list went through several iterations, two names were always on it: **The Flash** and **Supergirl**.

Both characters starred in lackluster eponymous series for many years. Supergirl, in particular, had been an irrelevant character for a long time. She had wandered from one solo series to the next for over a decade, never selling many copies of whatever book she starred in. The Supergirl series that launched in 1982 as *The Daring New Adventures of Supergirl*, was cancelled in 1984 as one of DC's lowest-selling comics. Furthermore, Supergirl had appeared in a 1984 feature film that was a major flop. While the box office bust didn't put Supergirl on the proverbial chopping block, it did,

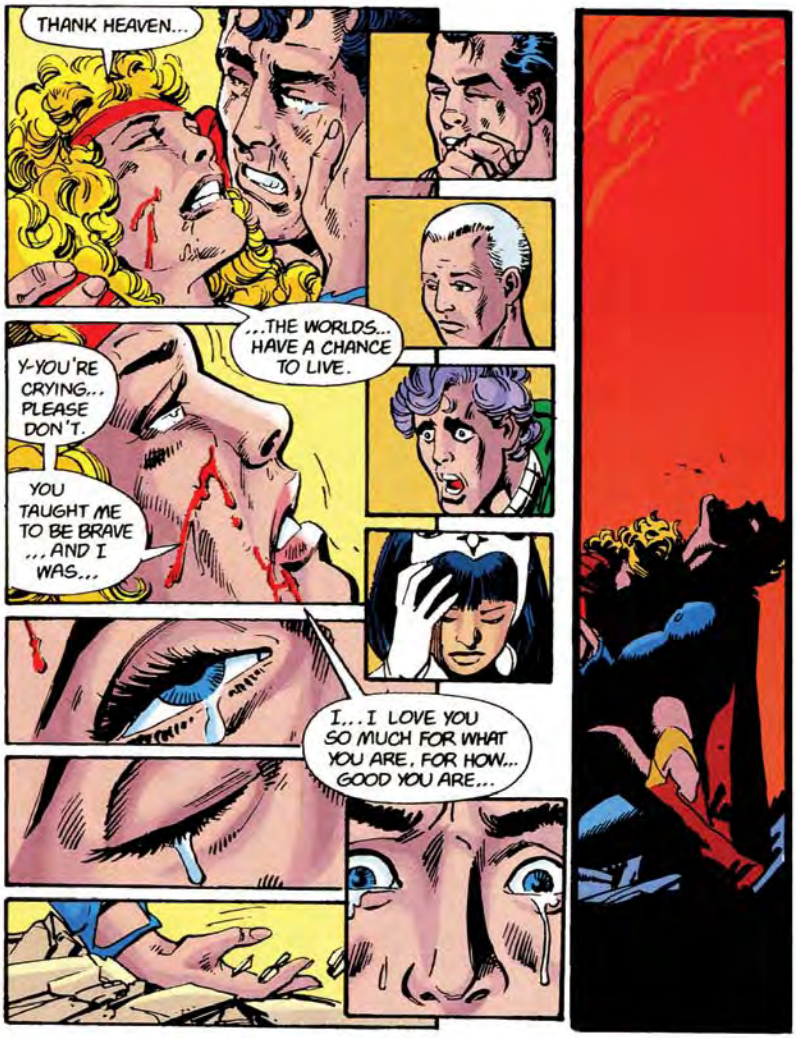
according to Greenberger, prevent Jenette Kahn and Dick Giordano from ultimately giving the "Maid of Might" a stay of execution.

Besides, Kahn and Giordano both wanted to use *Crisis* to reboot Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, along with their respective "families" of supporting characters. Pruning the Superman mythos—which had accumulated an enormous collection of characters over the preceding decades—was particularly important. In 1985, Supergirl was at her absolute lowest ebb in terms of her merchandising worth, her popularity among comic book readers, and her importance to the future of the DC line. Those facts added up to making Superman's cousin expendable.

But Pérez and Wolfman didn't treat Supergirl as an unpopular character who needed to be discarded like so much flotsam. With *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #7 (Oct. 1985), the two creators actually made their readers care about a character they hadn't paid attention to in years. With what would be recognized as one of the most iconic covers of the 1980s, the death of Supergirl in *Crisis* #7 was an immediate classic.

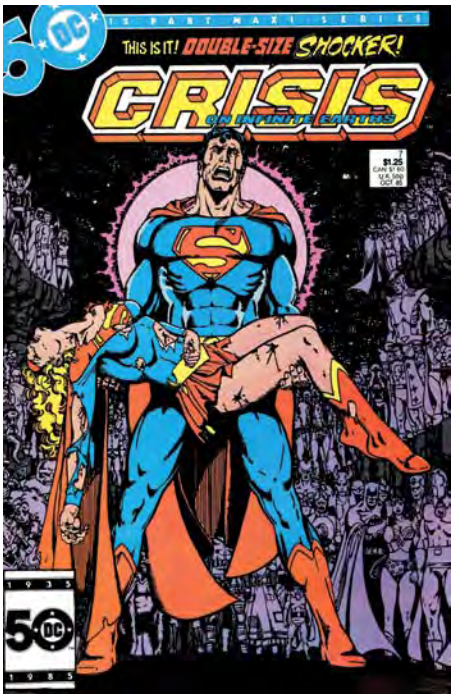
In this issue, the female Kryptonian is transported, along with a group of a dozen heroes from six Earths, to the antimatter fortress of the Weaponers of Qward. In that seemingly impregnable fortress, the band of heroes fights a frantic battle to prevent the nefarious plans of the Anti-Monitor from coming to fruition. As the battle rages on, it seems more and more likely that the Anti-Monitor will succeed in destroying the entire multiverse with his antimatter cannons. Rather than give in to despair, Supergirl marshals her heroism. Kara reminds herself of the inner strength of Superman: "I may never be as good as he is, but Kal always taught me to do my best. Nothing else matters. Be true to yourself. Be the best that you are able to. Don't ever give anything but your best. I've lived with his ideal, and heaven knows I've tried my hardest to live up to it. And I think for the most part I have." The Anti-Monitor proves mightier than Supergirl, but the Kryptonian heroine refuses to succumb. She takes horrifying damage, but she battles through her pain and takes strength in her struggle.

The Anti-Monitor's power soon grows to a level that can ravage the entire multiverse. Supergirl, though, will not yield. With a fierce intensity that readers had seldom seen in her before, she fights. Pérez masterfully illustrated the strength of Kara's will, and readers see an emotional power that belied the character's lack of direction in recent years. Through horrific pain, Supergirl finally destroys the Anti-Monitor's body as she sacrifices her life for her friends' survival.



In a heartbreaking denouement, Supergirl greets her final fate with class and equanimity as she tells Superman, "Y-you're crying. Please don't. You taught me to be brave... and I was.... I... I love you so much for what you are. For how... good you are." And with those final words, Kara Zor-El passes from the multiverse. It was one of the most classy and most moving character deaths that ever appeared in any comic, and it instantly made Supergirl a character that fans actually missed instead of one they were apathetic to.

Wolfman gave much of the credit for the success of *Crisis* #7 to Pérez: "The thing I want to make clear to everyone is that George's work on the Supergirl issue, specifically more than any other issue, really made the story work. The way he set scenes up is just so great" (Waid 55).



Top: Page from Crisis on Infinite Earths *#7 that displays the death of Supergirl. Above: one of the most iconic comic book covers of the 1980s.*

Watchmen and the Watchers of the Comics Industry

By 1986, Marvel was beginning to be seen by the showbiz industry as a major entertainment company rather than just a comic book publisher. The September 17, 1986 issue of *Variety* ran a story headlined "Marvel Now $100-Million A Year Hulk." In that story, writer Dan Gilroy reported that "Marvel publishes some 350 comic book titles per year, selling roughly 7,000,000 copies per month. Rounding out Marvel's publishing line are limited-run books and special editions, which have been tied in with the release of feature films" (81).

The article emphasized the diversity of Marvel's titles, quoting Marvel Publisher James Galton as he discussed how the comics group had progressed over the years: "Marvel was a one-product company in 1975. It published comic books, for boys primarily, and had a very narrow demographic. I decided to take the core business and build from that." The article notes that Marvel had expanded to an adult line, Epic Comics; a children's line, Star Comics; into graphic novels, into coloring books, and into licensing and animation, which, according to Galton, was "all part of an ongoing process, and that is to keep Marvel characters in the forefront of the American consciousness" (Gilroy 92).

Marvel's New Universe Is a Big Bang

June 1986 marked 25 years since *Fantastic Four* #1 appeared on the newsstands, and hence the 25th anniversary of the beginning of the "Marvel Age" of comics. This was to be a big event, and the planning began early for it. **Jim Shooter** reports, "Eighteen months or so before Marvel's 25th anniversary, there was a meeting called by Galton to discuss how to 'celebrate' the anniversary – that is, how to capitalize on it and make money on it" (Johnson 21). At that meeting, Shooter proposed a radical break from the past: "I proposed that we do a Big Bang – that is, bring the Marvel Universe to an end, with every single title concluding – forever – in dramatic fashion in May of 1986 and in June begin relaunching the entire universe. We'd start each title again from #1" (Johnson 21). It was the same kind of reboot of Marvel's fictional universe that Doug Moench claims Shooter wanted to do back in 1982. Shooter now had the political capital inside Marvel to execute the idea as part of the discussion of the company's 25th Anniversary celebration.

Marvel's executives at the time, however, feared loss of the company's market share—nearly 70% of the entire American comics market in 1986—and so shot down Shooter's grand idea. In doing so, they might have been considering the declining sales of Marvel's "Distinguished Competition." After DC Comics rebooted its line in the wake of the historic *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, its group-wide sales dropped by over 20% between 1985 and '86, and its

market share dropped by five percentage points in two years (Tolworthy).

Rebuffed in his first proposal, Shooter proposed a slightly less radical idea: "Since they wouldn't let me do Plan A, I proposed Plan B—celebrate the 25th anniversary of one universe by creating another one—a New Universe. That flew. I was given a budget of $120,000—big money in those days—to develop eight new titles with which to launch the New Universe and promised a massive advertising, promotional and PR campaign as well as other support—staff, bonus money to insure that we'd be able to get top-drawer creators" (Johnson 23).

However, as quickly as that large budget was committed, it was pulled away. Marvel's parent company, Cadence Industries, was preparing to sell Marvel Comics and pocket some major profits. To prepare for the sale, Marvel's expenses were cut to the bone. Among those expenses was the budget for the **New Universe**. The executives at Cadence allowed Shooter to go ahead with his plans for the New Universe but determined that no extra expense would be spent on the new line. Shooter had pushed to promote the line outside of the comics industry, advocating for TV ads and magazine placements, but the best that Marvel management at the time would muster were some point-of-sale store displays for comic shops.

The financial aspects of the pending sale also affected the creative teams on the New Universe series. In early promotional materials and conversations about the line, Shooter noted that he hoped to get some of the most popular creators in comics to work on the New Universe titles; however, due to the tightness of the budget, books were mainly filled with standard rank-and-file Marvel writers and artists. This approach decreased the fan buzz about the New Universe, since the creative teams didn't seem all that different to fans from the creative teams working on many ordinary Marvel titles.

After some initial work on the New Universe line, in which series such as *Speedball* and *Strikeforce: Morituri* were considered for inclusion, the founding editors made a major decision about the direction of the New Universe titles. Shooter and his editorial staff decided the New Universe would represent what would happen to "the world outside your window" if suddenly people gained super powers. As editor/writer Mark Gruenwald put it in a memo during the planning stages of the New Universe, "The world was absolutely like our 'real world' until yesterday when the White Event occurred. Then things got a bit stranger, but not so much that you would notice it every day" (Johnson 22).

In his "Universe News" column in the first issue of the first month of the New Universe comics Shooter summed up the approach of the line this way:

> During the summer of 1986, Archie Goodwin, Tom DeFalco, a number of other people at Marvel Comics and I created the New Universe. Or, more correctly, we simply decided to use a universe hitherto unused in comics. Our *own*. The one we live in. Real pipes. Real people. Real bathrooms. No mer-people. No repulsors. No unstable molecules. In fact, no fantasy or fantastic elements *at all* except for the very few we introduce. Carefully. Does it make sense? You bet. As much as the universe outside your window does. A universe where time passes and things change, and... well, you know. You live in it. Startling.

It was a "ground-level" universe that deliberately and strongly contrasted with the fantasy-filled universe of the Marvel superheroes, a universe that was intended to provide a new brand for Marvel. The New U. was to be based more on reality than the great leaps of imagination that the standard Marvel Universe required.

Four titles in the New Universe line premiered in July 1986

To celebrate its 25th Anniversary, Marvel Comics unveiled a "New Universe" of titles.

1986 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 28: A rocket booster failure causes NASA's Space Shuttle *Challenger* to explode 73 seconds after launch. All seven crew members are killed. Space shuttle flights are suspended until 1988.

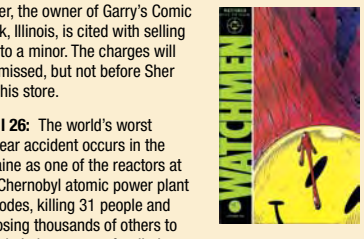
February 7: Haitian President Jean-Claude Duvalier is ousted from power. He flees to France as Henri Namphy becomes the new leader of Haiti.

February 9: Halley's Comet reaches its closest approach to the Sun during its visit to the solar system which occurs every 75 years.

February 25: Corazone Aquino, wife of murdered senator Benigno Corazon, becomes the 11th president of the Philippines after the People Power Revolution opposes Ferdinand Marcos' fraudulent re-election. Marco and his wife Imelda go into exile in Hawaii.

April 2: Garry Sher, the owner of Garry's Comic Stop in Edgebrook, Illinois, is cited with selling harmful material to a minor. The charges will eventually be dismissed, but not before Sher chooses to close his store.

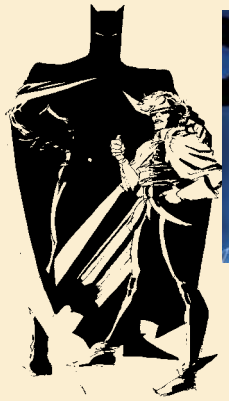
April 26: The world's worst nuclear accident occurs in the Ukraine as one of the reactors at the Chernobyl atomic power plant explodes, killing 31 people and exposing thousands of others to near lethal amounts of radiation. Parts of the Ukraine and Belarus become uninhabitable.



June 5: The first issue of DC Comics' 12-issue *Watchmen* series – written by Alan Moore with art by Dave Gibbons – arrives in stores.

June 26: Julius Schwartz's tenure as DC Comics' Superman editor comes to an end with the publication of *Action Comics* #583, a special send-off issue written by Alan Moore, penciled by Curt Swan, and inked by Kurt Schaffenbeger.

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE



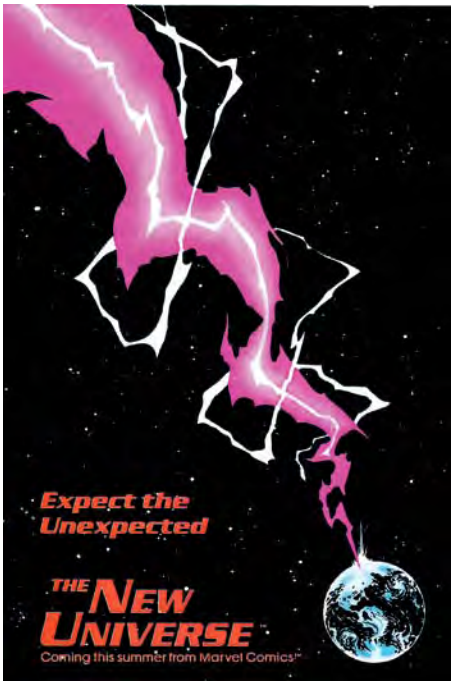
March 20: DC Comics publishes the first issue of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns,* written and penciled by Frank Miller with inks by Klaus Janson and colors by Lynn Varley.

April 15: President Reagan orders air strikes against Libya in retaliation for the April 5 West Berlin discotheque bombing that killed three U.S. servicemen. The airstrikes cause the deaths of at least 15 Libyans and injure at least 100 more.

May 16: *Top Gun,* starring Tom Cruise, opens in movie theaters. It will gross more money at the box office than any other movie that year.

May 13: Marvel Comics publishes *Fantastic Four* #293 – the final issue of John Byrne's five-year run on the title.

May 25: At least 5,000,000 people participate in "Hands Across America" by forming a human chain that extends from New York City to Long Beach, California for the purpose of raising money to fight hunger and homelessness.



1986 house ad announcing Marvel Comics' New Universe.
TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc.

while the final four launched in August. July brought:

Mark Hazzard: Merc by Peter David and Gray Morrow, telling the story of a soldier of fortune;

Nightmask by Archie Goodwin, Tony Salmons and Bret Blevins, about a hero who can enter and manipulate dreams;

Spitfire and the Troubleshooters by Eliot Brown and Herb Trimpe, featuring a woman trying to prevent the armor that her family created from being taken by the government;

and ***Star Brand*** by Jim Shooter, John Romita, Jr., and Al Williamson, starring a regular guy who suddenly is granted powers from space but isn't quite sure how to use them.

In August, the final four titles appeared:

D.P. 7 by Mark Gruenwald, Paul Ryan, and Romeo Tanghal, about young paranormal people coming to grips with their powers;

Justice by Archie Goodwin and Geof Isherwood, about a man whom aliens appoint as a violent peace-keeper;

Kickers, Inc. by Tom DeFalco, Ron Frenz, and Sal Buscema, telling the story of a super-powered football team;

and ***Psi-Force*** by Steve Perry, Mark Texiera, and Kyle Baker, featuring another set of paranormal teens on the run, who can combine together to create the powerful Psi-Hawk.

The creative teams quickly shifted on most of the New Universe titles soon after their release. DeFalco and Frenz left *Kickers, Inc.* after issue #2, and Brown left *Spitfire* after plotting issue #1 (he was fired as a Marvel editor in July). Goodwin also only took part in the earliest issues of his titles, leaving *Nightmask* after issue #2 and only scripting *Justice* #1. Gruenwald and Shooter stayed with their series, however, and those ended up being

July 8: The "Mutant Massacre" begins with *Uncanny X-Men* #210, an 11-issue story arc that will involve five different Marvel titles (*Uncanny X-Men, X-Factor, New Mutants, Thor, Power Pack*) over four consecutive months.

July 15: Marvel Comics' New Universe launches with the publication of Jim Shooter and John Romita, Jr.'s *Star Brand* #1.

July 16: Directed by James Cameron and starring Sigourney Weaver, the sci-fi action movie *Aliens* opens in theaters.

September 8: Oprah Winfrey begins her syndicated TV talk show.

September 15: The first episode of *L.A. Law* airs on NBC network television.

September 15: Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* arrives in book stores. The work will earn Spiegelman a special Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

November: New World Pictures purchases Marvel Comics from Cadence Industries for $45.5 million in cash.

November 25: The Iran-Contra scandal begins as President Reagan and Attorney General Edwin Meese reveal that profits from secret arms sales to Iran have been diverted to Nicaraguan rebels. National Security Council member Oliver North and his secretary, Fawn Hall, begin shredding incriminating documents.

December 10: Michael Correa, the manager of Friendly Frank's Comics in Lansing, Illinois is arrested for intent to disseminate obscene material. Publishers Denis Kitchen of Kitchen Sink Press and Ron Turner of Last Gasp Publishing donate money to aid in the store's legal defense. These donations initiate the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund.

December 19: Written and directed by Oliver Stone, and starring Tom Berenger, Willem Dafoe and Charlie Sheen, the Vietnam War movie *Platoon* opens in theaters.

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

July 10: Courtesy of writer/artist John Byrne, Superman is revamped with the publication of the first issue of *Man of Steel,* a six-issue mini-series released bi-weekly.

August 26: Written by Len Wein and John Ostrander with art by John Byrne and Karl Kesel, the first issue of DC Comics' *Legends* mini-series is published.

October 12: After two days of discussion in Reykjavik, Iceland, U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev fail to reach an agreement about nuclear arms reduction.

November 6: *Wonder Woman* #1 – written by Greg Potter and plotted and penciled by George Pérez – goes on sale. The issue redefines the Amazonian Princess for DC's post-*Crisis* continuity.

November 13: *Batman* #404, presenting the first part of "Batman: Year One" by writer Frank Miller and artist David Mazzucchelli, goes on sale.

November 26: The fourth Star Trek movie, *The Voyage Home,* opens in theaters.

December 24: At the age of 75, comic book writer Gardner Fox dies. Having written thousands of stories since the comic book industry's "Golden Age," Fox is perhaps most famous for creating both the Justice Society of America and the Justice League of America.

the best-selling New Universe books.

Despite all the hype around the new line, the New Universe failed to generate huge sales from the start. An article published in *The Comics Journal* #111 (Sept. 1986) surveyed a number of comic shop owners about the New Universe's sales performance. Reports were that at its premiere the line sold mediocre numbers at best; sales then trailed off as additional issues of each series were released. On average, New Universe books sold like mid-range Marvel titles. *Star Brand*, the best-seller, sold as well as an average issue of *Amazing Spider-Man*, while *Kickers, Inc*., the worst-seller, sold as well as an issue of *Incredible Hulk*. The article notes that "Capital City's *Comic Dealer's Newsletter* for August listed drops in orders for five New Universe titles; in two issues *D.P. 7* dropped 27 per cent; *Psi Force* dropped 33 per cent; *Justice* dropped 32 per cent; and *Merc* dropped 40 per cent; and in three issues *Star Brand* dropped 42 per cent" (Fryer 14).

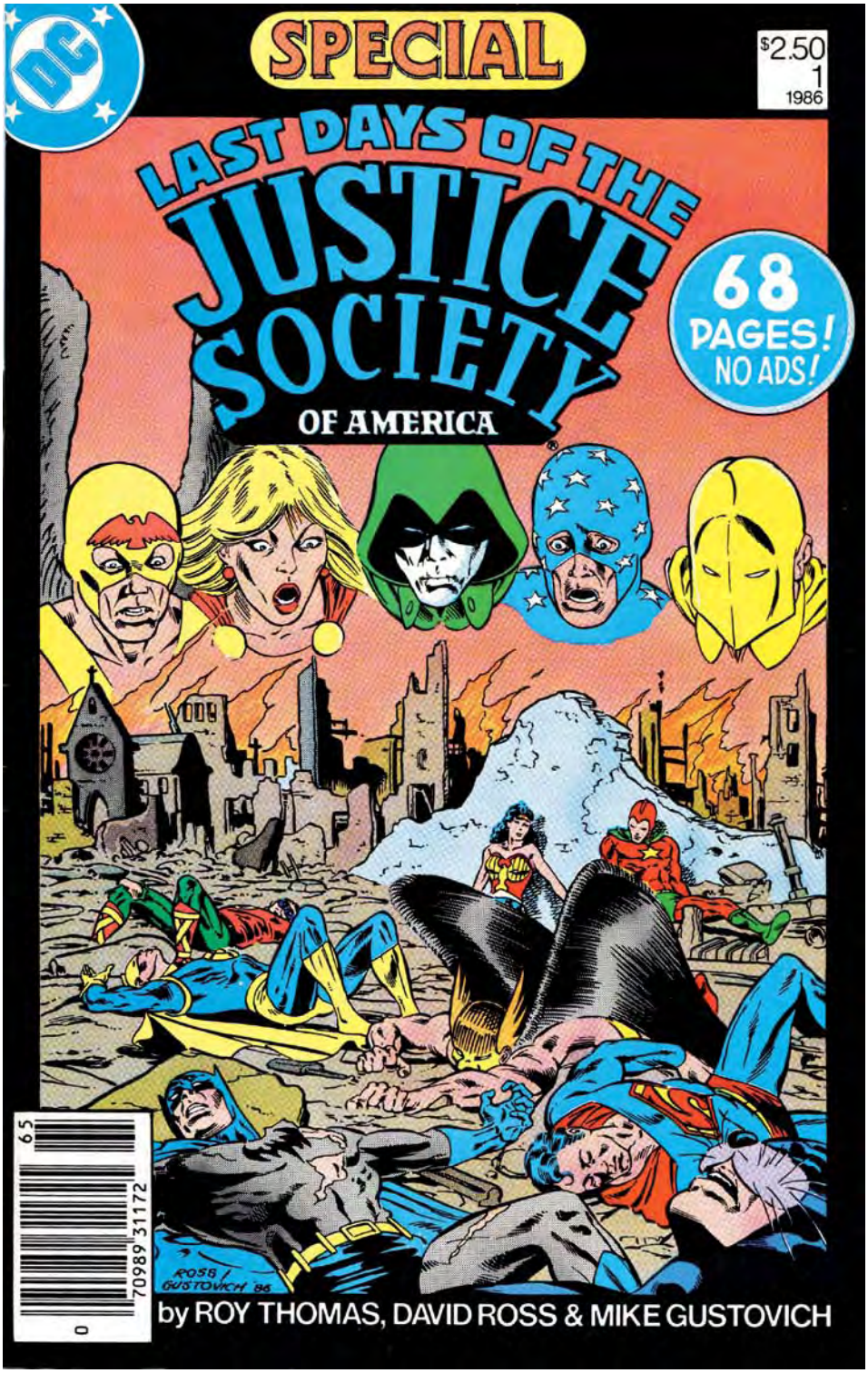
Retailers' complaints were perhaps best explained by Richard Finn of Second Genesis in Portland, Oregon who said, "I didn't like [Marvel's] marketing techniques. Eight new titles in the space of one month is way too much at one time to expect collectors to buy. [Marvel] were way too conservative in publicity. They kept [the New Universe] under wraps too long. They sent out lots of promotions too late" (Fryer 14).

Star Brand ended up being perhaps the most critically acclaimed title in the New Universe line, garnering strong reviews from R.A. Jones and Gerard Jones in *Amazing Heroes* for the obvious passion that Shooter put in his writing and for the book's realistic atmosphere. While some critics faulted Shooter for appropriating aspects of Green Lantern's origin—specifically that the title's protagonist received his powers via an artifact given to him by an alien—the consensus was that the series had a strong launch. Gruenwald's *D.P. 7* also proved to be popular, achieving a consistent level of quality that many of the other New Universe comics lacked.

A New World for Marvel

The biggest news for Marvel in 1986 was that the company was sold from Cadence Industries to New World Pictures in November. Cadence had been looking to sell Marvel for some time, positioning the company's financial statements and comics line to make it attractive for sale. After initial nibbles from American Greetings and Western Publishing, an agreement was reached with New World, whose executives agreed to buy Marvel from Cadence Industries for $45.5 million in cash. Cadence's shareholders received $17 per share, less than half of the stock's actual value at that time.

The sale netted large profits for Cadence's executives, but the sale cost



Roy Thomas scripted—what was intended to be—the JSA's final adventure in The Last Days of The Justice Society of America *one-shot.* Justice Society of America TM and © DC Comics.

Superman, Carmine Infantino drew the origin of Adam Strange, Murphy Anderson drew the origin of the Black Condor, and Gil Kane penciled an origin of the Ray, which was never published.

However, office politics doomed Thomas's run on *Secret Origins*, as they doomed much of his other work during his second DC exclusive contract. Before the series even launched, there was confusion about which issues would feature Golden Age characters and which would feature other origins (Waid 105, 107). Then with issue #6, the comic expanded to double-sized length to feature two stores per issue, once again revealing editorial uncertainty on the title. Before too long, a backstage power grab at the company pushed Thomas off the series. The Golden Age origin stories ended shortly thereafter (Amash 49-50).

The Maus that Roared

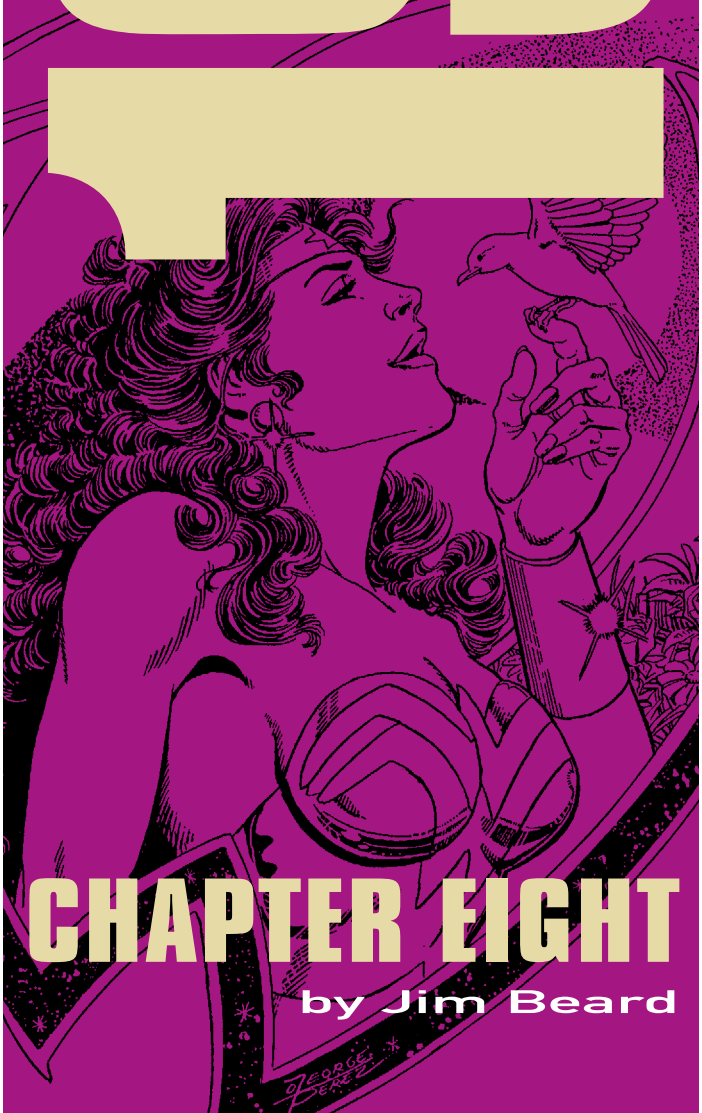
In a year in which comics like *Watchmen* and *Batman: the Dark Knight* showed that the graphic story medium could produce works of tremendous quality, **Art Spiegelman**'s epochal ***Maus: A Survivor's Tale*** stood out for its deep level of quality and remarkable artistic passion. Even though it was only half of the entire story that Spiegelman would eventually present, this first of two books stood well on its own and garnered massive critical acclaim.

Maus told the story of Spiegelman's extremely difficult relationship with his father Vladek, of his mother's suicide, and, perhaps most importantly, of Vladek's experiences as a Jew caught up in the Nazi Holocaust. In the book, Jews are drawn as mice and the Nazis as cats (with other nationalities also presented as animals: Poles are pigs, Americans dogs). Vladek's experiences are presented directly and clearly, without an excess of sentimentality and also with clean and crisp line-work. By this point, Spiegelman was already an acknowledged comics innovator, presenting stories like "Two-Fisted Painters" that played with the two-dimensional space of the page and the interesting ways that it explored space and time.

But for *Maus*, Spiegelman eschewed fancy effects to tell an incredibly harrowing story in an extremely direct and affecting manner. Readers endured the same horrors that Vladek did: his life as a Polish soldier and his terrified reaction to killing a German soldier, the rounding up of Jews into cattle cars, and the unspeakable horrors of Auschwitz. But the combination of Spiegelman's thoughtful and straightforward line work, the distancing effect of the use of animals as a design element, and the contrasting story of the exploration of Art's relationship with Vladek made the events of the book at least a bit more palatable for many readers.

Maus: A Survivor's Tale did not spring full-born into the Pantheon Books volume. Spiegelman had actually been exploring these ideas for quite

1987



CHAPTER EIGHT

by Jim Beard

Bubbles Burst, Back to Basics

And the tsunami created a wave and the wave created bubbles, then one giant bubble. And then, as these things go, the bubble burst.

By all accounts, the end came quickly. The explosion of comic companies churning out black-and-white product continued throughout 1987 despite portents of doom all around them. Some industry professionals like Bud Plant had predicted the crash as early as 1985, but the flood of quickie cash-in books increased as the final crash drew nearer. An industry that sustained ten or so independent publishers in 1984 had mutated into one that had 170 houses by the end of 1987 (Frankenhoff).

February's bitter chill brought the first bad news: the first of the companies stopped sending their product to distributors. Then, in March, a *Comic Buyer's Guide* report showed that the sales of more than a few titles had dropped anywhere from 80% to 90% as compared to only the previous summer (Frankenhoff). But, again, the glut of black-and-white books continued unabated through the remainder of the year, the comic book equivalent to the string quartet playing on while the *Titanic* sank.

One enterprising distributor tried to keep the boat afloat, or at least as much as he could. **Scott Rosenberg**, president of Sunrise Distribution, took it upon himself to shore up six different publishers in early 1987 when the writing was on the wall for each of them. Aircel, Adventure, Eternity, Malibu, Imperial, and Wonder Color could keep their work and some of the staff above water for a while through the efforts of Rosenberg; at first he kept the companies separate, due to their widely different output, but eventually he merged them into one company: Malibu.

Rosenberg claims that it was the lure of Direct Market distribution that led many of the black-and-white companies to the edge of the precipice: "What happened was a lot of creators and entrepreneurs who wanted to start up little companies...said, 'Gee, we can get distribution, so let's start making comic books!'" (Brady). He, too, predicted the crash, noting its inevitability as a "supply and demand thing," the fire being fed by fans who jazzed on the great breadth of titles and genres available during the glut, but whose appetites for it all too quickly sated (Brady).

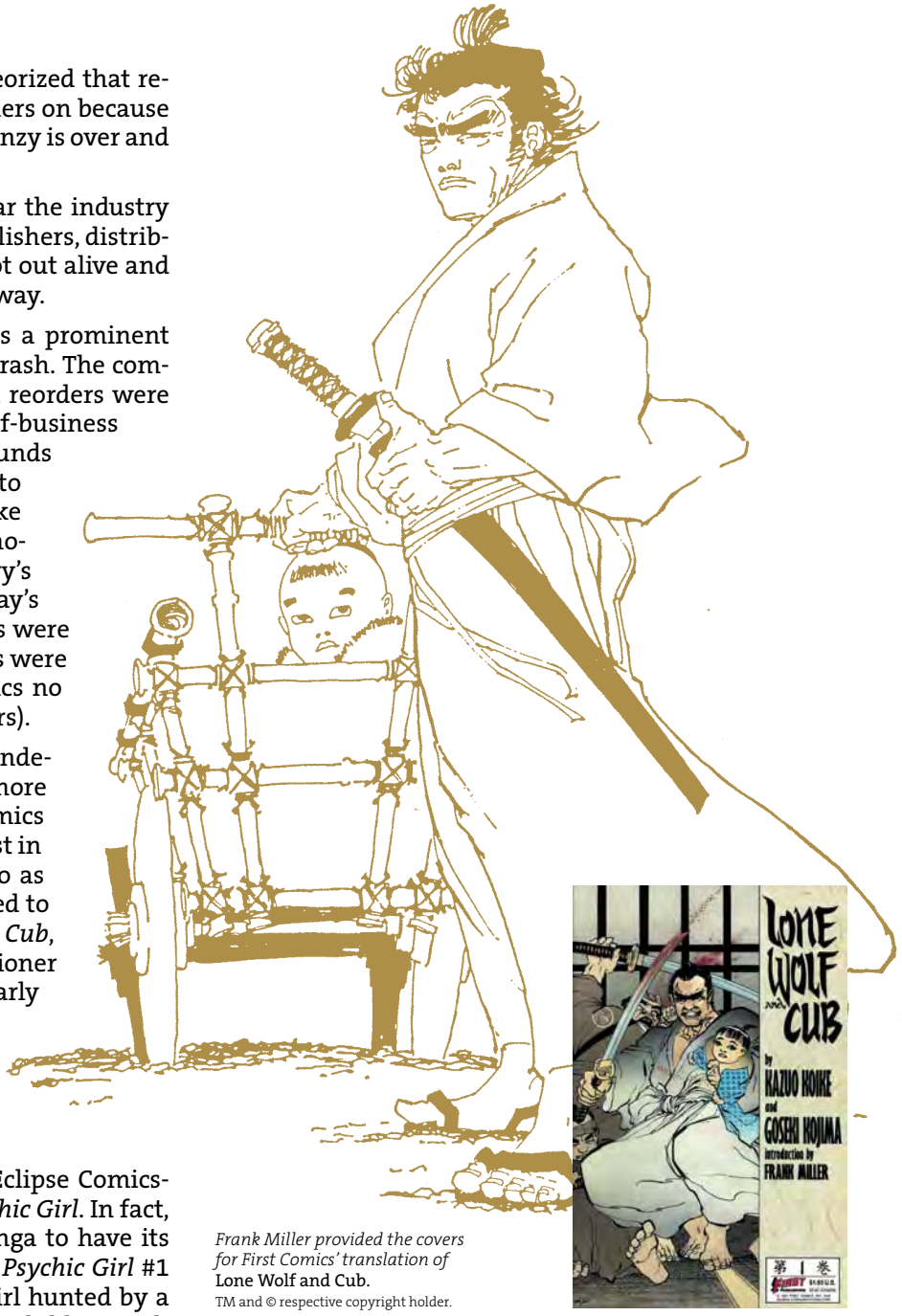
Or as publisher and pundit Gary Groth put it, "you cannot shovel shit into a finite market forever" (Groth 8). Groth also pointed out that speculators carried much of the blame for the bust, buying immense quantities of the small print runs of black-and-white material and essentially driving up those runs to ridiculous numbers. A book that would have gotten a 10,000 copy print run just a few years earlier wound up with a 100,000 copy run: "[The speculators] were cutting their own throats because the audience for black-and-whites was never that large to begin with and it wasn't likely the audience would grow exponentially just because a gang of speculators started buying up tons

of the stuff" (Groth 8). Furthermore, he theorized that retailers moved forward into 1987 with blinders on because "no retailer wants to believe a consumer frenzy is over and dead" (Groth 9).

But dead it was, and by the end of the year the industry was littered with causalities, including publishers, distributors, retailers and consumers. Very few got out alive and virtually none of them unscathed in some way.

The story of **Glenwood Distributors**' fall is a prominent example of the tone and timbre of 1987's crash. The company was ordering more than it could sell, reorders were in the toilet and unpaid invoices from out-of-business comic shops were piling up. Glenwood's funds began to run short and when they began to miss payments to the large publishers like Marvel and DC, they were cut off. One moment Glenwood was one of the industry's prominent players, the next it was yesterday's news (or black-and-white comic). The doors were closed forever on Glenwood. Its warehouses were stacked to the ceilings with boxes of comics no one wanted and no one had paid for (Biggers).

There were a few bright spots among the independents: the year saw the extension of a more global feeling with a wave of Japanese comics called **manga**. Fueled by a consumer interest in Japanese animation, sometimes referred to as "Japanimation," American publishers looked to *manga* to expand the trend. *Lone Wolf and Cub*, a manga series about a Shogun's executioner that was first published in Japan in the early 1970s, was translated into English and republished by First Comics with new covers drawn by *Lone Wolf and Cub* enthusiast Frank Miller.



Frank Miller provided the covers for First Comics' translation of Lone Wolf and Cub.

Other manga being introduced to an American audience in 1987 included the Eclipse Comics-Viz Comics joint production of *Mai the Psychic Girl*. In fact, that book is considered to be the first manga to have its entire series published in English. *Mai the Psychic Girl* #1 (May 1987) told the tale of a 14-year-old girl hunted by a world-dominating group bent on controlling children with powerful psychic abilities. The series reprinted the translated work for over a year and then Viz also published it in four digest-sized books, approximating the original Japanese format.

The Direct Market continued to increase in distribution and sales in 1987, but the dwindling number of comics on traditional newsstands meant fewer "civilians" were being exposed to the medium. In addition, video/computer games increased in popularity after a 1983 crash of that industry led to a fourth-generation of gaming consoles being introduced in 1987. Young people who a generation before may have looked to comic books for entertainment now devoted increasing amounts of time and money to computer and arcade gaming. The year produced many popular games, including *Maniac Mansion*, *Metal Gear*, *Street Fighter*, sequels to the popular *Zelda* and *Castlevania* and the first in the long-running *Final Fantasy* franchise. The games' increasingly in-depth stories and characters began to supplant those of comic books, inaugurating a kind of "golden age" of video/computer games during the 1980s.

Super-heroes still prevailed in the 1987 comic book industry, though smaller houses tended to publish alternative genres and left the costumed antics to Marvel and DC. "Events" proliferated at this time, with the Big Two houses putting out line-wide stories that promised major changes in their respective fictional universes. That trend would continue to grip the industry for years to come. DC, in fact, crafted an entire cottage industry using their 1985 *Crisis on Infinite Earths* house-cleaning as a foundation to rebuild their line of titles. They started with the biggest foundation block of them all.

DC Comics Aren't Just For Kids Anymore

Heading into her eleventh year as DC Comics' president and publisher, **Jenette Kahn**, along with vice-president **Dick Giordano**, steered the company into what had to have been their most ambitious period to date. Throughout the year DC wrought an across-the-board revamping to all of

1987 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 23: E. Nelson Bridwell – a writer and editor for DC Comics since 1964 – dies of lung cancer at the age of 55.

February 26: After probing the Iran-Contra affair, the Tower Commission issues its report, rebuking President Reagan for allowing his national security staff to mislead him.

March 2: The Macintosh II computer goes on sale for a retail price of $3,898. This first color Mac had a CPU speed of 16 MHz.

March 5: *Flash* #1 – written by Mike Baron and penciled by Jackson Guice – goes on sale. It presents the former Kid Flash, Wally West, as DC's new "Fastest Man Alive."

April 5: The Fox Broadcasting Co. makes its prime-time television debut by airing the premiere episodes of *Married ... With Children* and *The Tracey Ullman Show.*

May: Jack Kirby receives and signs an amended version of Marvel's original art release form. The artist will soon receive almost 2000 pages of original art that he drew for Marvel in the 1960s.

June 5: In a ceremony presided by Stan Lee, Spider-Man marries Mary Jane Watson at home plate of Shea Stadium prior to a New York Mets baseball game. All attendees receive a copy of *Spider-Man Annual* #21, which features the wedding of Peter Parker and Watson. The annual arrives in comic book stores four days later.

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

February 5: *Justice League* #1 – written by Keith Giffen and J.M. DeMatteis with art by Kevin Maguire – goes on sale.

February 20: Wayne Boring – artist most famous for his Superman work during the Golden Age of comics – dies at the age of 80.

March 4: President Reagan addresses the nation on the Iran-Contra affair, taking full responsibility and acknowledging mistakes had been made.

April 15: After serving nearly 10 years as Marvel's Editor-in-Chief, Jim Shooter is fired from the company. He is replaced by Tom DeFalco.

June 12: At Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, President Reagan publicly challenges Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev by saying, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

June 23: *Web of Spider-Man* #31 – written by J.M. DeMatteis with art by Mike Zeck and Bob McLeod – goes on sale. It begins a six-issue story that will be published over two months, involving all three Spider-Man titles. Eventually, the story will be known as "Kraven's Last Hunt."

its major characters and titles, plus a host of new first issues and experiments. The venerable company touched upon almost every single property and concept in its extensive library and changed them to one extent or another.

But just as Kahn and Giordano were getting the revamp started, they introduced a matter that threatened to undermine DC's relationship with its creators. For 1987, DC intended on implementing new editorial standards that included a labeling system. Appearing on the cover of every DC title would be one of two labels: either "For Universal Readership" or "Suggested for Mature Readers." The "Universal Readership" titles were meant for readers of any age as they were devoid of profanity, nudity or excessive violence. "Mature Reader" titles, on the other hand, didn't automatically preclude adolescent readers, but they might be considered inappropriate by an adolescent's parents. In a letter sent out to all of DC's freelancers Kahn acknowledged that more adults were reading comic books than ever before, but since the general public still considered comic books as entertainment solely directed towards children, a labeling system became necessary to help parents identify material that was (and wasn't) suitable for their children (Fryer 16).

Even before DC's new guidelines were made public, the industry's creative community cried foul. Led by Frank Miller, 24 prominent comic book writers, artists, and editors signed a petition to denounce the fact that the guidelines (described in the petition as "new standards of in-house censorship") were formulated without any creator's consultation (Fryer 17). An outraged Miller declared, "I really thought it was a sign of contempt all around... [creators] simply never heard that it was being contemplated" (Fryer 18). He found the new guidelines would inevitably neuter the content of comics and he also theorized they were produced solely to appease the demands of censorship from distributors such as Diamond's Steve Geppi (who in 1986 had vociferously objected to the graphic depiction of childbirth in Eclipse Comics' *Miracleman* #9) and retailers like Lone Star Comics' Buddy Saunders (who in an open letter demanded that comic book publishers self-censor the content of their titles).

The petition turned DC's new guidelines into an industry preoccupation for months, drawing in fans, retailers and professionals alike as they debated and argued the matter in the pages of *Comics Buyer's Guide* and *The Comics Journal*. For some creators, though, petitions and guest editorials in the fanzines weren't protest enough. Some took an additional step. On January 19, 1987, a letter co-authored by Frank Miller, Alan Moore, Howard Chaykin, and Marv

July 1: DC Comics Publisher and President Jenette Kahn informs DC's freelancers via letter that DC has decided not to label books with the term "for universal readers." DC continues to use the "for mature readers" label.

September 22: Two days into the new season, NFL players go on strike in an effort to gain free agency and other benefits. Football owners respond by continuing the season with substitute players. The strike ends 24 days later without a new labor agreement.

September 26: Starring Patrick Stewart as Captain Jean-Luc Picard, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* debuts on syndicated television.

December 8: President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev sign the INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) Treaty, under which the two countries agree to dismantle their arsenals of intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

July 7: Lt. Col. Oliver North begins testifying at the Congressional Iran-Contra hearings. He soon becomes a household recognized figure.

September 22: The first *Marvel Masterworks* hardcover – reprinting *Amazing Fantasy* #15 and *Amazing Spider-Man* #1-10 – goes on sale with a retail price of $29.95.

October 19: The stock market crashes as the Dow Jones Industrial Average, amid frenzied selling, plunges 508 points. It's the biggest one-day decline up to that point. The day becomes known as "Black Monday."

October 16: An Iranian missile hits a Kuwaiti ship guarded by the U.S. fleet in the Persian Gulf. The U.S. retaliates by bombarding Iranian oil platforms.

October 14: 18-month-old Jessica McClure slides down an abandoned well in Midland, Texas. Her dilemma rivets the attention of the nation as hundreds of rescuers work to free her. She is saved two days later.

October 11: Over 200,000 homosexual rights activists march through Washington D.C. to protest discrimination and demand more federal money for AIDS research and treatment. The AIDS Memorial Quilt is also presented for the first time.

Wolfman was sent to Jenette Kahn. It stated that they would each honor their contractual obligations with DC but beyond that, they would all refuse to produce new work if DC's new guidelines remained in place. The letter was subsequently printed in the February 13 issue of *Comics Buyer's Guide*.

For his public display of defiance, **Marv Wolfman** was fired from his position as DC editor, a role he had served since 1982. Wolfman told *The Comics Journal* that he intended the letter to be a private matter between his compatriots and DC's leadership. But when it became clear that DC was turning a deaf ear, Miller urged his fellow creators to go public with their complaints. Soon after the aforementioned *CBG* issue was published, Wolfman was let go via a phone call from Dick Giordano and then formally through a letter. As for the official reasons given, the writer had this to say in a press release:

> For publicly speaking out against possible censorship, DC Comics fired me as creative editor. It is easy for me to say I am disappointed, but I am certainly not surprised. DC has made it policy to fire any editor or part-time editor who negatively comments on DC policy in public. It is a shame that they feel they must rule through fear... (Fryer 10).

Rumors abounded that a rift had been developing between Wolfman and Dick Giordano for some time, even before Wolfman had signed the petition against DC's new guidelines. One report even had Giordano's assistant, Pat Bastienne, offering *X-Men* scribe Chris Claremont the job of writing *New Teen Titans*, a title Wolfman had been helming since he created it in 1980. Claremont declined the assignment and relayed the offer back to Wolfman who was informed

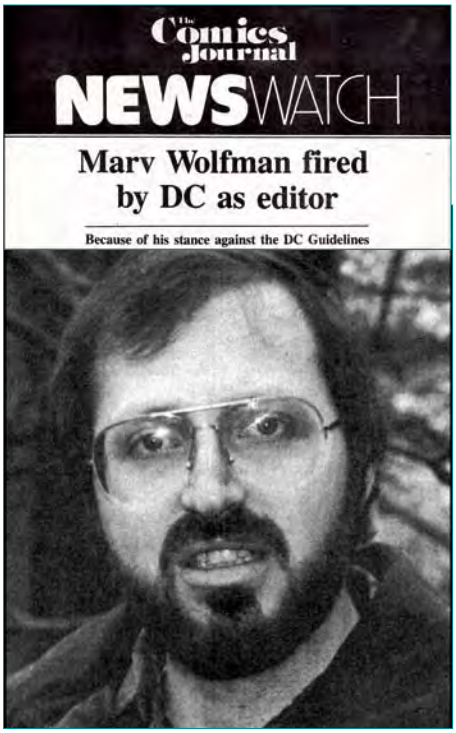

The Comics Journal
NEWSWATCH
Marv Wolfman fired by DC as editor
Because of his stance against the DC Guidelines

Photo of Marv Wolfman that originally appeared in The Comics Journal *#115.*

by Giordano that it had been made in jest (Sacco 19). Although dismissed as an editor, Wolfman continued on as a DC writer, most notably on *New Teen Titans* and *The Adventures of Superman*.

And then DC altered its editorial policies once more. In a letter dated July 1, 1987, Kahn informed DC's freelancers that, "we have decided not to label books of more general interest with the term 'for universal readers.' Feedback convinced us that this was not necessary" (Powers 11). So before any DC title could be labeled "For Universal Readership," the tag was dumped. At a panel at the August San Diego Comic Con, Giordano added that the "Suggested for Mature Readers" tag—which by that point had already appeared on the covers to *The Question*, *Swamp Thing*, and *Vigilante*—would remain in use. Furthermore, Prestige format books that contained profanity, sex, or gore wouldn't be labeled. Kahn felt that the near three dollar cost of a Prestige book along with its square bound spine was enough of a signal to consumers that it wasn't intended for children (Groth 82).

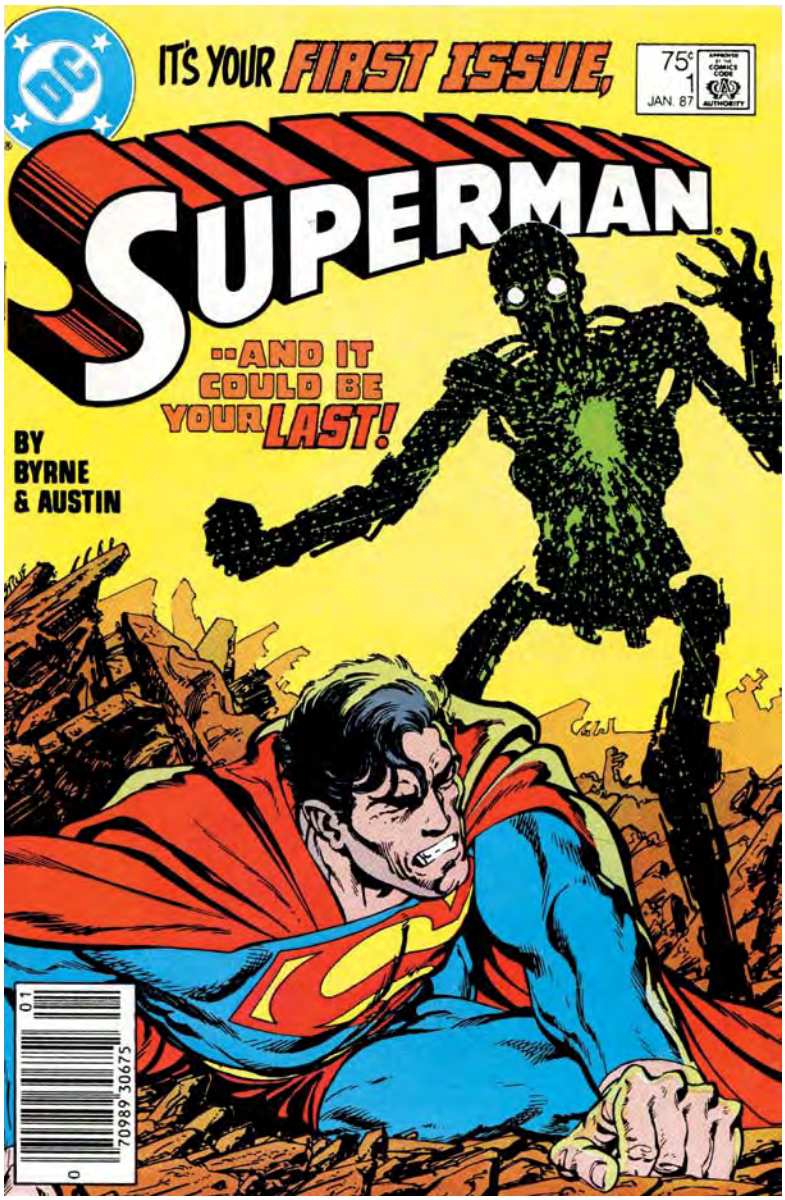
The changes appeased most of the creators. Frank Miller announced, "I do not believe DC has a rating system any more... the issue is resolved. I've no longer ruled out the possibility of working for DC" (Powers 12). Howard Chaykin and Marv Wolfman reiterated that sentiment with Wolfman declaring "I'm very pleased and I'm anxious to get started on my new work with DC" (Powers 12). Alan Moore, however, remained dissatisfied with DC's initial handling of the matter. He still refused to produce any more new work for DC, so he set about fulfilling his contractual obligations as quickly as he could.

"It's Your First Issue, Superman..."

Kahn and company began the realignment of the DC Universe in grand fashion, with the first issue of the second volume of their most popular character's title – a publication that had not been restarted or revamped or, essentially, remodeled in its entire decades-long history. It was a bold move, to make a statement of the company's intent to refresh and modernize their line by rebooting the Man of Steel himself, inarguably one of the most-recognized fictional characters on the planet.

***Superman* #1** (Jan. 1987) arrived on the heels of 1986's *Man of Steel*. To keep the momentum going and to set the cornerstone of the new DC universe created during 1985's *Crisis on Infinite Earths* series, the new *Superman* #1 moved past the Man of Steel's origin and accelerated the action to the present. The book was joined by *The Adventures of Superman*, which picked up the numbering from the first volume of the original *Superman* run, and a re-purposed *Action Comics*, which teamed-up the Man of Steel and other DC characters.

Writer/artist **John Byrne**, the man who'd garnered praise for orchestrating *Man of Steel*'s success the year before, eschewed the common practice of a representational image for *Superman* #1's cover. Instead, as if to signal his and DC's intentions to truly shake up the status quo, he adorned that first cover with an image of Superman defeated.



The first issue of the relaunched Superman *title.*
Superman TM and © DC Comics.

As he says in his text piece in *Superman* #1, Byrne viewed what he had done on *Man of Steel* and what he'd be doing going forward not only as a statement on the character and its universal standing, but also on himself as a professional:

> First off, the response was overwhelmingly favorable. For that, and for all who made their approval known, heartiest thanks. I was nervous, to say the least. I was messing with a Legend, and there was ample opportunity to end up with super-egg on my face. (I say "I" here not to exclude the others associated with the revamping of Superman, but because the Fan Press and much of the reading public perceived it as *John Byrne* messing with Superman. If the project was a disaster, I was the one who was going to

Killing Jokes and Killing Calls

American Conservatism continued its political reign in 1988 as George H. W. Bush easily bested Democratic Party nominee Michael Dukakis in the November general election. In doing so, Bush became the first sitting Vice President of the United States to be elected President in 200 years.

Social Conservatism remained in its heyday as well, and those who seemingly violated the nation's conservative values found themselves under fire. Case in point: Michael Correa, the manager of Lansing, Illinois comic book store Friendly Frank's who was arrested on December 10, 1986 for attempting to disseminate obscene material, specifically copies of select issues of Catalan Communications' *The Bodyssey*, Last Gasp's *Weirdo*, and Kitchen Sink Press' *Omaha the Cat Dancer* and *Bizarre Sex*. Correa's trial before Illinois Judge Paul T. Foxgrover began in October 1987 and included testimony from Eclipse Comics' editor-in-chief **Cat Yronwode** (who paid her own way to travel to Illinois and aid Correa's defense). With Yronwode on the stand, Illinois prosecutor James Knibbs asked her to read and describe several comics, panel by panel. When Knibbs got to *Weirdo* #17, specifically a parody of the television sitcom *Gilligan's Island* called "Isle of Lust," Yronwode had to testify to the sexual shenanigans of the Skipper's little buddy. When she quoted, "My ass hurts," Yronwode saw the court clerk "laughing so hard she could barely type" ("Filth on Trial" 103).

Ultimately though, the trial was no laughing matter. On January 13, 1988, Foxgrover found Correa guilty, fined him $750, and gave him a one-year probationary sentence. With regards to Yronwode's testimony, Foxgrover found it very weak. In his decision he declared, "The Court ... disregards the purported testimony of the young woman who testified in this case.... She added nothing to the case as to the basic question of obscenity" (Powers 5). Correa subsequently appealed the verdict but also resigned his position as manager of Friendly Frank's.

Back in December 1986 after his manager's arrest, Friendly Frank's owner, Frank Mangiracina, reached out to Kitchen Sink founder **Denis Kitchen** for aid. Kitchen recalls, "Frank called me because I was one of the publishers who got him busted. He was pretty distraught.... What frustrated me was that Frank was struggling to take care of this himself and it didn't seem fair" ("CBLDF Case Files — Illinois v. Correa"). So Kitchen set out to rally the troops, asking artists and creators to donate work to help raise funds to cover Correa's legal costs. This included a gathering of comic book professionals at Hollywood's Golden Apple Comic Shop exactly one month after Correa's guilty verdict came down. A virtual who's who of industry names attended: Frank Miller, Steven Grant, Harlan Ellison, Sergio Aragonés, Marv Wolfman, Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez, Gary Groth, Dave Stevens, Doug Wildey, Brent Anderson, Paul Smith, Mike Barr, Jan Strnad, Mark Evanier, among others.

Original artwork was auctioned off and autographs were sold. Approximately $1,500 was collected, and this money went to Kitchen's now officially named **Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF)**. Several other fundraising efforts sprang forth, more portfolios were auctioned off, and the address of the CBLDF was printed in comics-related publications for interested parties to contribute to the cause (Powers 6).

Ultimately, the CBLDF gave its financial support to help hire Burton Joseph, a Chicago attorney with 36 years of constitutional law experience. On November 16, 1989, Correa's conviction was overturned on appeal. The appellate judge found the specific comics "bizarre" but not obscene ("CBLDF Case Files — Illinois v. Correa"). For his part, Kitchen had a surplus of $20,000 from his money raising efforts. He used that money to incorporate the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund as a non-profit organization, which, according to its website, is dedicated to "the preservation of First Amendment rights for members of the comics community."

1988 was dominated by two events featuring The Joker: The Killing Joke *and "A Death in the Family."*
Batman TM and © DC Comics.

A Creators' Bill of Rights

As 1988 began, **Diamond Comic Distributors** had already taken steps to protect its retailers from the kind of legal troubles Friendly Frank's found itself in. The previous year Diamond president **Steve Geppi** explained to his retailers why Diamond was deliberately steering clear of books he found morally questionable:

> Diamond values its retailers too much to take chances on such a dangerous situation.... We are not censors. We no more want someone deciding for us than you do. We cannot, however, stand by and watch the marketplace become a dumping ground for every sort of graphic fantasy that someone wants to live out. We have an industry to protect; we have leases to abide by; we have a community image to maintain (Duin 125-6).

To that end, Diamond stopped carrying both Vortex Comics' *Yummy Fur* and Kitchen Sink's *Omaha the Cat Dancer,* along with most underground titles. Many publishers—and retailers, for that matter—considered Diamond's decision an arbitrary one, mostly because the distributor had no problem carrying Marvel's *Elektra: Assassin* and DC's *Green Arrow*, both of which had adult content. In late April, Geppi admitted Diamond's policy was "being applied unequally." He then announced that going forward, Diamond's decision on whether or not to carry a title would be based on artistic quality and financial terms (McCubbin 20).

Earlier, though, Diamond chose not to distribute a comic book for a completely different reason: payback. It began when Aardvark One International/Aardvark-Vanaheim publisher **Dave Sim** chose not to have Diamond carry his *Cerebus* graphic novel *High Society*. Diamond countered by refusing to distribute Aardvark's *Puma Blues*. In a letter printed in *Puma Blues* #15 (Feb. 1988), Diamond representative Bill Schanes declared, "If it is your intention to pick and choose which products you want distributors to carry, it should be our privilege to choose what we wish to distribute. Therefore, it is our feeling we should no longer carry and promote *Puma Blues*." At the time, Diamond was responsible for one-third of *Puma Blues*' print run, and obviously the refusal to distribute the book meant a significant loss of revenue for the *Puma Blues*' creators: writer Stephen Murphy and artist Michael Zulli. Through an open letter, the two creators vowed to continue production even without Diamond's support.

Diamond eventually relented, agreeing in late March to distribute *Puma Blues* once again (McCubbin 7). Nonetheless, the dispute incited Sim. Throughout the year he held a series of summits where he spoke out about creators' rights and publishing. **"A Bill of Rights for Comics Creators"**

1988 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January 12: *Amazing Spider-Man* #300 – revealing the origin of Venom in a story written by David Michelinie and drawn by Todd McFarlane – goes on sale.

January 13: Illinois Judge Paul T. Foxgrover finds Friendly Frank's comic book store manager Michael Correa guilty of possession with intent to disseminate obscene material.

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

February 4: Comic book inker Frank Giacoia dies at the age of 63.

February 13: The Winter Olympics begin in Calgary, Canada.

March 4: The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the unemployment rate has dropped to 5.7 percent.

March 25: In New York City's so-called "preppie murder case," Robert E. Chambers Jr. pleads guilty to first-degree manslaughter in the death of 18-year-old Jennifer Levin. Chambers is sentenced to a 5-to-15 year prison term.

March 7: Two years into his run on *Superman,* John Byrne resigns as its writer and artist.

March 29: *Batman: The Killing Joke* – a 48-page Prestige format one-shot written by Alan Moore and drawn by Brian Bolland – goes on sale. In the story, the Joker shoots Barbara (Batgirl) Gordon through the spine, crippling her.

April 3: Milton Caniff – cartoonist most famous for creating the *Terry and the Pirates* and *Steve Canyon* newspaper strips – dies at the age of 81.

April 5: With its 601st issue, *Action Comics* once again becomes an anthology comic book as it changes its title to *Action Comics Weekly.*

May 15: The Soviet Union begins withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, more than eight years after Soviet forces had entered the country. At least 40,000 Soviets troops died during the conflict.

May 17: The first issue of DC Comics' *V for Vendetta* – a dystopian adventure by writer Alan Moore and artist David Lloyd – goes on sale. The first seven issues reprint material originally published in the British magazine *Warrior.* The final three issues present new material. *V for Vendetta* is the last original work Moore would write for DC Comics.

May 29: President Ronald Reagan begins his first visit to the Soviet Union for a summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The two ratified their nuclear arms treaty from December.

June 23: NASA climatologist James Hansen tells Congress that world-wide temperature increases were probably a sign of human alteration of the atmosphere. The greenhouse effect is brought to the attention of the American public.

JANUARY FEBRUARY MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE

ended up being drafted in November at the Northampton Summit, held in Northampton, Massachusetts and hosted by *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* creators Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird. *Zot!* creator **Scott McCloud** was the principal author of the bill that stressed full creator rights of ownership as well as control over licensing and guarantees of the return of original artwork after its use. Years later, McCloud observed that one of the bill's main relevancies is that "comics creators already have the right to control their art if they want it; all they have to do is not sign it away" (McCloud). McCloud downplayed the influence of the Creators' Bill of Rights, but while the original summits Sim put together were going on, DC Comics' Jenette Kahn announced to freelancers on June 7: "...from now on DC Comics will acquire wholly new properties on a basis more favorable to you, our creators. We will no longer purchase these properties under the work-for-hire provision and the copyright will be in your name or [your] company's name" (McCubbin 5). DC was the last major comic book publisher to retain full ownership over characters created by its freelancers. As such, some freelancers expressed the belief that the new policy helped DC keep its competitive edge within the industry (McCubbin 5).

Diamond *extended* its competitive edge by purchasing the nation's third largest comic book distributor, Bud Plant Comic Distributors, on July 15. For the Eastern U.S.-based Diamond, this opened up the West, as it gained warehouses in San Diego, Los Angeles, northern California, and Denver. The purchase gave Diamond a 40% market share, leapfrogging over the Wisconsin-based Capital City Distribution to become the country's biggest comic book distributor (Powers 9). Astoundingly, Diamond would only become bigger before the end of the next decade.

Comic Glut Punch in the Gut

The headline read "New Glut Predicted." It appeared in the April 1988 issue of *The Comics Journal.* The adjoining article warned of a major influx of product that retailers wouldn't be able to move that spring. Buddy Saunders, the owner of the Texas-based Lone Star Comics chain, sounded the alarm in a guest editorial published in *Comics Buyer's Guide* #749 that *The Comics Journal* reprinted:

> The glut is coming from the super-hero genre and is being brought about primarily by DC and Marvel. Both are fighting for the first place in the industry. Both are publishing more and more high-ticket items. Many titles have gone to new, more costly formats. Weeklies and bi-weeklies are coming on line.
>
> Marvel has boosted the cover

October 8: The first episode of *Superboy* – starring John Haymes Newton as the Boy of Steel and Stacy Haiduk as Lang Lang – premieres on syndicated television. The series would last four seasons.

July 3: An Iranian passenger jet is shot down by the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf. All 290 people aboard were killed after the plane was misidentified as an Iranian F-14 fighter jet. In 1996 the U.S. pays over $131 million in compensation for the incident.

October 11: The first issue of DC Comics' next crossover event – *Invasion!* – goes on sale.

November 8: Sitting Vice President George H. W. Bush is elected the 41th President of the United States in a landslide victory over Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis.

December 5: A federal grand jury in North Carolina indicts Christian televangelist Jim Bakker on fraud and conspiracy charges. He is later convicted of all counts.

December 21: A bomb causes a Pan Am passenger jet to explode over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people. Years later, Libya accepts responsibility for the bombing.

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

September 17: The Summer Olympics begin in Seoul, South Korea.

October 18: *Batman* #428 – the penultimate chapter of the "Death in the Family" story arc – goes on sale. In the issue Batman discovers the lifeless body of Jason Todd. Robin is dead.

November 30: Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. takes over RJR Nabisco Inc. with a bid of $24.53 billion.

November 15: At the close of a four-day conference in Algiers, The Palestine National Council proclaim the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

> price of better selling titles by 33%. Several of Marvel's flagship titles, *X-Men* included, will be bi-weekly through the summer. All these things can't be absorbed by a retailer's budget without some give elsewhere (McCubbin 5).

Saunders found that his budget for April's books was completely consumed by DC and Marvel product that had recently increased in price. After adding his orders for independent publishers to the total for his April books, he was 28.5% over budget—a rate he couldn't sustain because he predicted that consumers' spending budgets wouldn't increase commensurately. Rather than spend more money to obtain the same number of books, consumers would simply spend the same amount of money they have been spending to obtain fewer books. Just like with the black-and-white glut that occurred in 1987, Saunders believed this new glut would produce casualties, both among retailers and independent publishers (McCubbin 6).

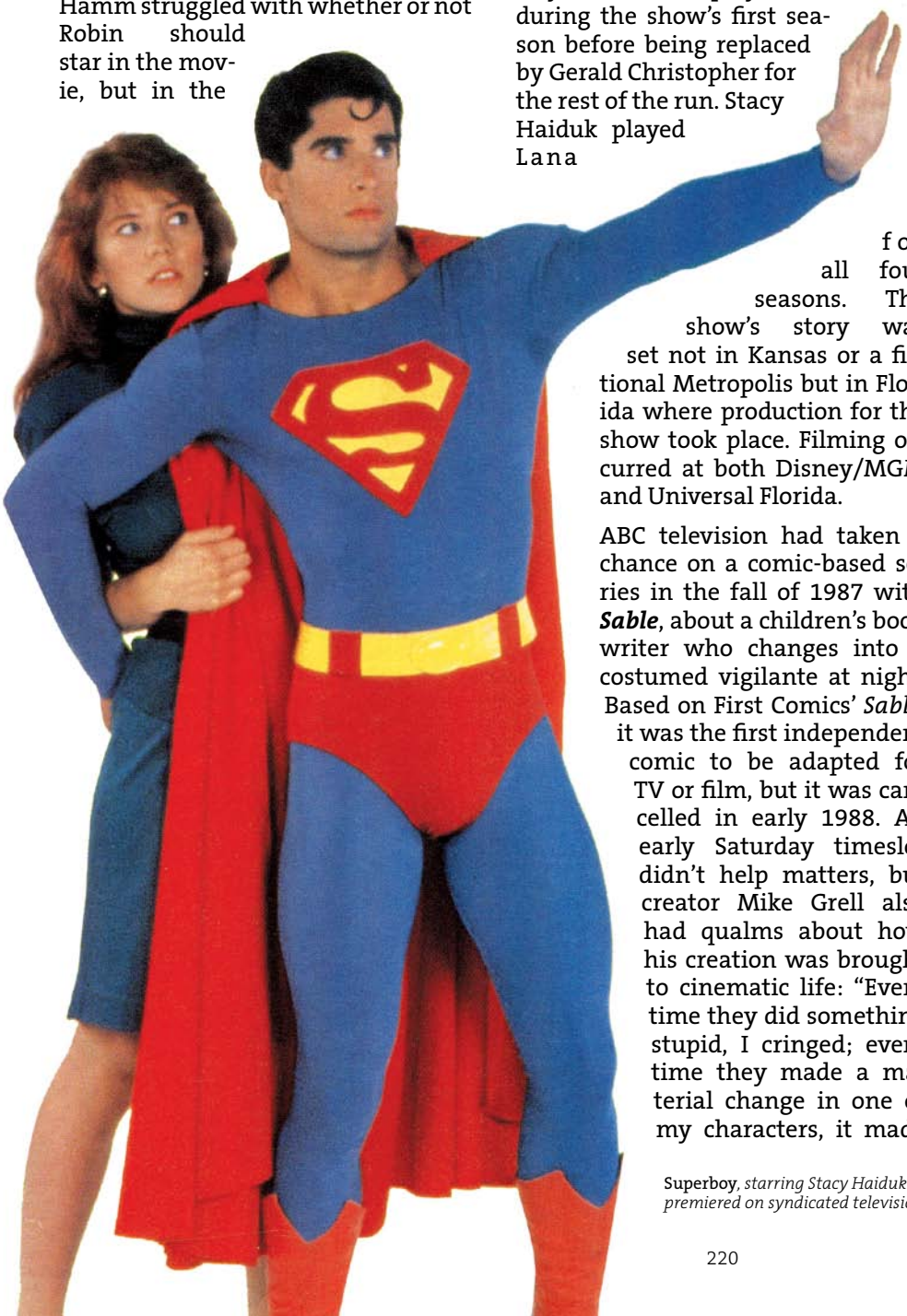
In its defense Marvel claimed it wasn't glutting the market; instead, Marvel contended the entire industry was producing "a great diversity of product" (McCubbin 6). Bud Plant Distributors (before they were sold to Diamond) advised retailers to reduce their stock of a greater range of titles and to reorder best-sellers instead of getting stuck with large amounts of stagnant material. "As Marvel and DC put out more highly priced titles it sucks away money from less popular independents," Steve Bond, purchasing manager for Bud Plant, told *The Comics Journal* (McCubbin 6). But, many independent publishers also got on board. The main goal was to break into the expanding bookstore market where a softcover book had a better chance of selling than floppy periodicals. Slave Labor Graphics and Blackthorne both took conventional comics they were publishing and converted them to graphic novels in hopes of saving the books. Eclipse, First, and Fantagraphics all upped their output in early 1988. The *Amazing Heroes Preview Special* announced more than 140 graphic novels and trade paperbacks scheduled for the first half of 1988.

Comics on the Screen

While more comic-related material moved into mainstream bookstores like Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Waldenbooks, the television and movie studios cast their eyes toward comic books too. Word reached fandom that plans were underway for a slew of Hollywood super-hero projects, among them *Iron Man*, *Wolverine*, *Spider-Man*, *Fantastic Four*, *Daredevil*, *Elektra*, *The Flash*, *Sgt. Rock* (starring Arnold Schwarzenegger), *Watchmen*, and *Superman V*. And they were all going to be live-action entertainment, not cartoons. While—

at least at the time—none of those projects got off the ground, the rights to the comic book properties were optioned and studio discussions took place. Some, like *Watchmen*, were even scripted. Sam Hamm penned that screenplay. He also wrote the script for a movie that did go before the lens in July of 1988: ***Batman***. "After eight years *Batman* is *finally* going to be made!" director **Tim Burton** announced. "We're not going to turn this movie into a psychological poem. The basic theme is along the lines of 'Here's a child who has a life-changing experience. Instead of getting therapy, he deals with it by fighting crime'" (Shapiro). Before shooting began, Burton mentioned that he and Hamm struggled with whether or not Robin should star in the movie, but in the end "we want to make this movie for everybody so we decided to include him" (Shapiro). Evidently, the *Batman* script still had some revisions to go through, since Robin didn't appear in the final film. Burton's take on the Dark Knight would swoop into theatres June 23, 1989.

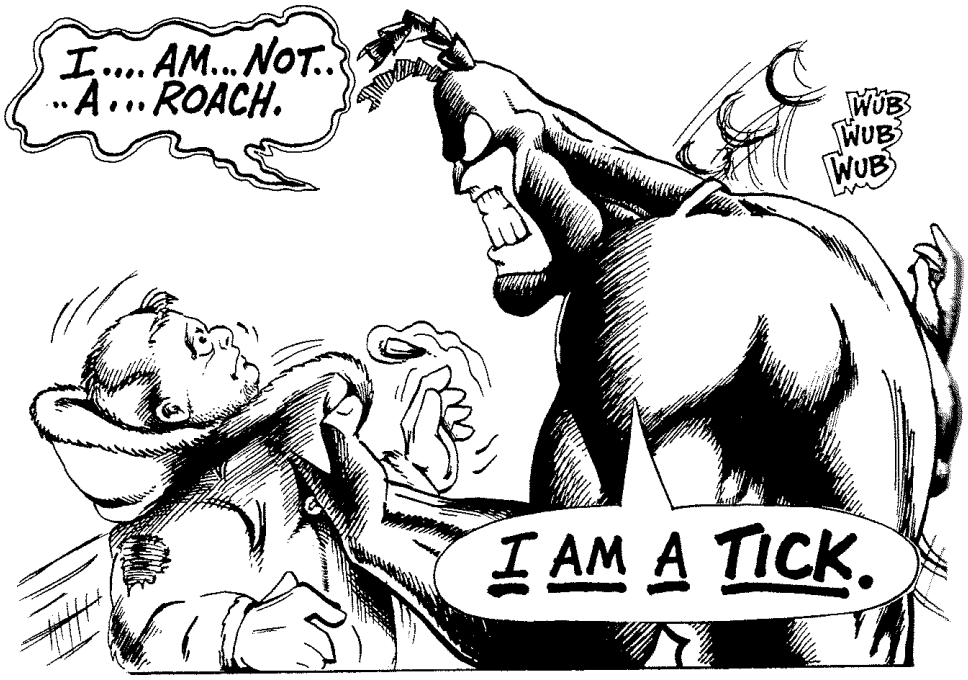
Meanwhile, DC Comics' other iconic super-hero hit television screens in the syndicated ***Superboy***. Ilya Salkind, the executive producer for *Superman I, II*, & *III*, as well as *Supergirl*, produced this series about Clark Kent and Lana Lang as college students. Clark attended the Siegel School of Journalism at Shuster University. The show lasted four seasons. John Haymes Newton played Clark during the show's first season before being replaced by Gerald Christopher for the rest of the run. Stacy Haiduk played Lana for all four seasons. The show's story was set not in Kansas or a fictional Metropolis but in Florida where production for the show took place. Filming occurred at both Disney/MGM and Universal Florida.



ABC television had taken a chance on a comic-based series in the fall of 1987 with ***Sable***, about a children's book writer who changes into a costumed vigilante at night. Based on First Comics' *Sable*, it was the first independent comic to be adapted for TV or film, but it was cancelled in early 1988. An early Saturday timeslot didn't help matters, but creator Mike Grell also had qualms about how his creation was brought to cinematic life: "Every time they did something stupid, I cringed; every time they made a material change in one of my characters, it made me want to hide my head." Grell conceded there was only so much control he could have over the production and was glad it wasn't messed up too badly (Kim Howard Johnson).

One indie comic that would eventually go on to have two TV series was the super-hero parody ***The Tick***. It first became an animated show on Fox that ran three seasons in the mid-1990s. It then later became a short-lived—though cult favorite—live-action show on the same network in 2001. Before all that happened, The Tick was a 300-pound, 7-foot-tall, blue-suited buffoon first created in 1986 as a mascot for the New England Comics (NEC) chain of comic stores by 18-year-old cartoonist **Ben Edlund**. The Tick appeared regularly in NEC's newsletters until 1988 when NEC gave the character its own comic book, publishing *The Tick* #1. The issue was an instant hit, somewhat ironic given the fact it took Edlund a year and a half to write and draw it. Speed was never Edlund's forte as he confessed years later, "I strung *The Tick* fans along with a minimum amount of material—twelve issues in five years" (Reber). He attributed the popularity of his creation to the detail-orientated storylines and the densely written humor: "each issue that came out provided a reasonably enjoyable experience for the reader" (Reber).

Superboy, *starring Stacy Haiduk as Lana Lang and John Haymes Newtown as the Boy of Steel, premiered on syndicated television on October 8, 1988.*



Ben Edlund originally created The Tick as a mascot for comic book retailer New England Comics.
Tick TM and © Ben Edlund.

Jim Shooter Takes Aim At Marvel

Despite his ouster from the company in 1987 (or perhaps because of it), Jim Shooter tried to buy Marvel Comics in 1988. He spent a "nightmarish" year putting together a partnership of investors, calling it a "full-time job" (Thomas). At the time, New World Entertainment owned Marvel, having acquired it in 1986 for $45.5 million. As a Hollywood production company, New World "garnered very limited payoffs from made-for-television movies featuring the Incredible Hulk and other Marvel Comics superheroes. New World had gone flat and wanted to pump itself up with new genres of TV and movies" (Raviv 11). So New World went looking for buyers, putting Marvel on the auction block. Shooter and his investors offered $81 million. Years later, Shooter explained their intended business plan:

> We were going to liquidate Marvel Studios and Marvel Books. I could drop twelve million dollars to the bottom line like that, because those operations were losing a fortune—and comics publishing, my area, was making a fortune. Comics were making hand over fist money. The British publishing did okay, and I would've left them alone for a while. Licensing was a train wreck, and I would've improved that. Anyway, we had a good plan, and we would've tried to bring them all home. (Irving)

With his $81 million bid, Shooter thought he'd won. He even signed a letter of intent (Thomas). To hear his account, the rug was pulled out from under him at the last minute and Marvel was sold behind his investors' backs to **Ron Perelman** for $82.5 million: "[Perelman] was an insider, because he owned 20% of New World Entertainment. Legally, he needed an 'arm's length bid' to be allowed to buy Marvel, and we provided that, unwittingly.... It was a totally corrupt deal" (Irving).

An "arm's length" transaction meant that the buyer and seller are familiar with each other or the property—in this case Marvel—and therefore the agreed upon price might differ from fair market value. Since Shooter already ran the company once, it provided the loophole for Perelman to make his winning bid.

It would be years later, when Marvel entered bankruptcy proceedings in the mid-1990s, before Shooter would try to buy the company again. Before then, though, Shooter would regain industry prominence with a completely different publishing venture.

The Death Throes of the New Universe

In 1986, Jim Shooter brought Marvel's **New Universe** imprint to life and nurtured it as best as he could. Two years later, the New U. was on life support. Four of its inaugural eight titles—*Kickers, Inc.*, *Mark Hazzard: Merc*, *Nightmask*, and *Spitfire and the Troubleshooters* a.k.a. *Codename: Spitfire*—had been cancelled in 1987. The newly appointed showrunner for the New U., **Howard Mackie**, tried to revive the line by recruiting some new blood for the titles. He called a creator he considered a personal friend: **John Byrne**. Mackie recounts, "That was, honestly, one of the most absurd phone calls I had ever made... I said, 'You don't have to give me an answer now, but if you happen to think of any *Star Brand* stories, let me know,' and I hung up" (Dan Johnson 30). An hour and a half later, Byrne called back: "It turned out that indeed he did have some stories in mind. That was how I got John Byrne involved with New Universe. All I needed to do was plant the seed, leave it in a dark room somewhere, and it would sprout" (Dan Johnson 30).

That seed grew into a story that would set the New Universe off into a radical new direction: a graphic novel titled ***The Pitt*** (March 1988). After Byrne agreed to take over *Star Brand*, he, Mackie, and New U. editor-in-chief **Mark Gruenwald** got together one day and sat on Byrne's side porch to throw around ideas. They discussed how the Star Brand that affected character Ken Connell could only be passed along to animate objects. As the men talked, they considered what would happen if the Brand was passed on to an *inanimate* object (Dan Johnson 32).

In the story arc they brainstormed, Connell learns that his recurring nemesis, the Old Man, has been branded, just like Connell. The brand, however, has driven the Old Man insane. To avoid the same fate, Connell immediately decides to rid himself of the Star Brand. He flies into space to release the energy on the other side of the moon, but on the way there, he second-guesses himself and releases the energy closer to Earth in case he has difficulty trying to return from outer space. While releasing the energy at the end of *The Star Brand* #12

The Year of the Billionaire, the Bat and the Brits

As the 1980s sped to a close, Marvel Comics kept building larger and larger crossovers while DC Comics tried to rein theirs in. One of the largest independent publishers, Comico, struggled to pay its bills, and a couple of young writers from the UK were poised for superstardom. It was a year marked by controversy both legal and social, as Revolutionary Comics pushed the boundaries of free speech and everyone was put on alert to all the sex and violence in the pages of America's most popular comics.

Marvel, as had been the case for the previous five years, reinforced their hold on the marketplace by producing event comics that coerced readers to pick up titles they might not have normally purchased in order to be able to read the event's entire story. At the same time, Marvel spun out popular characters into two or three separate titles each. DC Comics, on the other hand, mainly focused on two things: expanding their new, Post-*Crisis* Universe with reimaginations of classic (and not-so classic) characters and, to put it simply, the Batman.

For DC, it was all Batman all the time in 1989 as not only was the publisher gearing up for the 50th anniversary of Batman's first appearance in *Detective Comics* #27, parent company Warner Brothers began to build the marketing juggernaut that would lead to the June release of Tim Burton's big-budget *Batman* film. Fandom didn't just raise their collective eyebrows at the announcement that Michael Keaton would be playing Batman; they lost their collective mind. Many fans accused Warner Brothers of planning a secret sendup of Batman rather than a serious attempt to present the character on-screen (Hughes). Batman's creator, Bob Kane (who also served as a consultant on the film) even had to speak out in an attempt to calm fan anxiety, saying, "The movie isn't a comedy at all. It's going to be heavy melodrama... [and the Joker] is a psychotic murderer, a maniacal killer. It's all very evil" (Hughes). But even that didn't slow things down, and Don Thompson, co-editor of *Comics Buyer's Guide* observed, "No one seems to have taken [Kane] seriously." He added that *CBG* had received over 500 protest letters decrying the film—all before anyone had seen any footage (Hughes).

Code? What Code?

The final revision to the Comics Code went into effect in 1989, and it was the most dramatic revision yet. Of course, by this point, the Comics Code Seal meant very little, thanks to the rise of the Direct Market. Newsstands and other sources of comic book distribution may have continued to pay attention, but the publishers didn't seem to worry. Given the coming summertime fuss that would be made over sex and violence in comics, there were very few real repercussions to violating the code, and comics were more violent and sexual than ever.

The 1989 revision was no longer concerned with things like what types of monsters could be used (thanks to the

1971 revision). Instead the code focused on maintaining a responsible and respectful tone regarding social changes. The most notable change was the fact that the Code openly mentioned homosexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual preferences and instructed that they all be treated with respect, rather than hinting surreptitiously that they shouldn't be mentioned at all under the catch-all description of sex perversions ("Sealed With Approval 1989").

The ban on rape was also dropped, so there was bad to go with the good. Regardless, it appeared that what the companies wanted most, was the freedom to make as much money as possible, by virtually any means necessary (Irving).

Meet the New Boss, Almost the Old Boss

Marvel started the New Year with a dramatic change in ownership. The Marvel Entertainment Group's made-for-television movies featuring The Hulk and other Marvel Comics super-heroes had garnered little profit for New World Entertainment (Raviv 11). **Ronald O. Perelman**, the chairman of Revlon, then stepped in and bid $82.5 million dollars for the company, snatching Marvel away from **Jim Shooter**'s partnership and their $81 million dollar bid (Thomas).

> MacAndrews & Forbes, the shell company owned personally and wholly by Perelman, cut a check for just $10 million. More than $70 million was borrowed from a syndicate of banks, led—as was becoming standard for Perelman—by Chase Manhattan. Chase would handle all the paperwork and formally make the loan offer, while recruiting other banks to take on portions of risk. (Raviv 11)

At the time this seemed like a great move both for Perelman and for the company, even though the Marvel Productions unit was excluded from the sale because it had merged with New World's television and movie business (Hicks). Right out of the gate, Perelman had a plan: "Marvel's operations were analyzed, top to bottom, stem to stern. Departments deemed unprofitable or unpromising were shut down and writers were fired. Net income quickly doubled" (Raviv 15).

When discussing his interest in and goals with the company, Perelman was clear: "[Marvel] is a mini-Disney," he said. "Disney's got much more highly recognized characters and softer characters, whereas our characters are termed action heroes. But at Marvel we are now in the business of the creation and marketing of characters" (Raviv 12). As such, Perelman believed that Marvel "should waste less time and money on artists thinking up new ideas that were slow to develop popularity and should concentrate instead on cash flow, selling more licensing rights based on the comic book characters that were already hot" (Raviv 36).

And it worked for a while, as Perelman kicked off "an era of gimmicks meant to goose sales and impress corporate bosses" (Raviv 36).

Crossover Nation

Perelman's arrival inaugurated Marvel's "Event Storytelling" as a way to increase profits. Marvel had been developing mini-series events for the better part of the decade. Up to this point, though, these events generally stayed focused around a single mini-series that would have tie-in issues throughout the Marvel Universe of titles (e.g. 1985's *Secret Wars II*). 1989 was, however, the first time that the

The villainous Mr. Sinister headlined Marvel Comics' premiere 1989 event, "Inferno."

1989 TIMELINE

A compilation of the year's notable comic book industry events alongside some of the year's most significant popular cultural and historical events.

January: Ronald Perelman purchases the Marvel Entertainment Group, the parent company of Marvel Comics, from New World Entertainment for $82.5 million, outbidding Jim Shooter's partnership.

January: Comico and DC Comics reach an agreement where Comico will pay DC a fee to print, solicit, and distribute its titles.

January 4: U.S. fighter planes shoot down a pair of Libyan MIG-23s over international waters off the coast of Libya.

March 5: Time Inc. and Warner Communications Inc. announce a deal to merge into the world's largest media and entertainment conglomerate.

March 24: The oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* runs aground in Prince William Sound in the Gulf of Alaska, causing the worst oil spill in U.S. history up to that point; more than 11 million gallons of oil are dumped into the Sound, resulting in massive damage to its environment and wildlife. Exxon spends over $2.5 billion to clean up the spill.

March 26: Ballots are cast in the Soviet Union's first democratic national election since 1917's October Revolution. Boris N. Yeltsin and other anti-establishment candidates are subsequently elected.

May 8: DC Comics' Piranha Press imprint launches with the publication of Dave Louapre and Dan Sweetman's *Beautiful Stories for Ugly Children* #1.

May 12: *The Return of the Swamp Thing*, starring Louis Jourdan, Heather Locklear, and Dick Durock – reprising his role as Swamp Thing – opens in movie theaters. The movie grosses less than $200,000 at the box office.

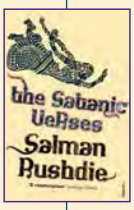
June 4: Chinese troops crush a pro-democracy movement in Beijing's Tiananmen Square where for weeks hundreds of thousands had been protesting official corruption and calling for democratic reforms. Hundreds die in the assault.

June 13: Tim Drake – who will eventually become the third Robin – is introduced in *Batman* #436.

June 21: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that burning the American flag is a form of political protest protected by the First Amendment.

JANUARY | FEBRUARY | MARCH | APRIL | MAY | JUNE

January 20: George Bush is sworn in as the 41st President of the United States.



February 14: Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini sentences author Salman Rushdie to death for his book *The Satanic Verses*, which many Muslims deem sacriligeous.

April: Archie Goodwin submits his resignation as editor of Marvel's Epic imprint. A month later, Goodwin is working for DC Comics while Carl Potts becomes Epic's new line editor.

March 30: Former *Justice League of America* and *Wonder Woman* artist Mike Sekowsky dies at age 65.

May 24: George Lucas's third Indiana Jones film – *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* – directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Harrison Ford and Sean Connery – opens in movie theaters.

June 23: Directed by Tim Burton and starring Jack Nicholson as the Joker and Micheal Keaton in the title role, *Batman* opens in movie theaters. It would set a then-box office record of $100 million in its first 10 days of release, and go on to become the highest grossing film of the year.

crossover events continued virtually without pause from one to the next for the entire year.

It began with "**Inferno**" whose seeds were planted in late 1988 with *Uncanny X-Men* #239 (which served as a prologue to the story) which then led into the *X-Terminators* mini-series. As 1989 dawned, Marvel upped the ante and instead of sticking mainly to the X-Titles as previous X-Family crossovers had done, the "Inferno" logo was seen on the covers of *The Avengers*, *Cloak and Dagger*, *Damage Control*, *Fantastic Four*, *Daredevil*, *Power Pack*, *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Spectacular Spider-Man*, and *Web of Spider-Man*.

The main "Inferno" storyline ran through *New Mutants* #71-73, *Uncanny X-Men* #239-243, *X-Factor* #36-88, and *Excalibur* #6 and #7, telling the tale of a demonic invasion from Limbo that transforms New York into a demonic state. But New York wasn't the only thing undergoing a transformation. The story centered on the corruption of Madelyn Pryor into the Goblin Queen and Illyana Rasputin into the Darkchilde, and it stayed center-stage through April.

April also debuted "**Atlantis Attacks,**" which replicated the format Marvel used the previous year for "The Evolutionary War." "Atlantis Attacks" was a 14-chapter crossover story spread through nearly every Annual Marvel released that summer, beginning with *Silver Surfer Annual* #2 (released alongside comics cover dated June) and ending in July's *Fantastic Four Annual* #22 (released alongside comics cover dated November). But unlike "The Evolutionary War," "Atlantis Attacks" was written as a serial with many of the Annuals ending with cliffhangers that led directly into the next chapter.

The story revisits themes of invasion and transformation from the "Inferno" crossover, as The Silver Surfer inadvertently awakens and frees the Deviant High Priest Ghaur, who then returns to Earth and attempts to restore the Serpent Crown and unleash the seven-headed serpent god, Set, on Earth. As such, the titular attack from Atlantis is a bit of a bluff. The real story involves the search for mystical artifacts, the mutating of ordinary humans into serpent-people, and the gathering of seven brides for Set. Ultimately, the combined efforts of The Avengers, The Fantastic Four, and Namor defeat Ghaur's plans and maintain Set's banishment from this dimension. In addition, each Annual also contained a back-up story, "The Serpent Crown Saga," which explored the history of one of the Marvel Universe's most mysterious and dangerous artifacts.

Without missing a beat, books cover dated December 1989 initiated the next Crossover Event, "**Acts of Vengeance**," which would run through February 1990. This time out The Avengers, rather than the usual

October 3: Written by Grant Morrison with painted art by Dave McKean, the 212-page *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* graphic novel arrives in stores.

October 5: *The Punisher,* starring Swedish muscleman Dolph Lundgren as Marvel Comics' resident vigilante, opens in movie theaters… in West Germany. The movie would not be seen in the United States until March 1990 when it is shown at the Los Angeles Comic Book and Science Fiction Convention. In 1991, the movie is released in the U.S. video market.

November 6: The Batman newspaper strip is revived with an opening story by Max Allan Collins and Marshall Rogers.

November 9: The Communist government of East Germany collapses. For the first time in decades, travel between East and West Germany is unrestricted, and Germans begin to tear down the Berlin Wall.

November 22: Captain Marvel creator C.C. Beck dies at the age of 79.

December: Alan Moore finishes his run on *Miracleman* with issue #16. He transfers his 30% share of ownership in the character over to new *Miracleman* writer Neil Gaiman.

December 20: U.S. troops invade Panama in order to capture that country's ruler, General Manuel Noriega, for his role in international drug trafficking. Noriega seeks political asylum with Vatican officials in Panama City but eventually surrenders to U.S. authorities in early January 1990.

August 8: Co-creator of the Green Arrow and 1950s *Superboy* artist, George Papp dies at the age of 73.

JULY | AUGUST | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER | NOVEMBER | DECEMBER

October 10: Billed as "The First New Batman 'Solo' Book Since 1940!", *Legends of the Dark Knight* #1 arrives in stores with five different covers.

October 17: Just minutes before the start of a World Series baseball game at San Francisco's Candlestick Park, an earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale hits the San Francisco Bay area, causing $7 billion worth of damage and the death of 67 people.

November 14: Written by Brian Augustyn with art by Mike Mignola and P. Craig Russell, *Gotham by Gaslight: An Alternate History of the Batman* imagines the Batman as a Victorian-era detective.

December 22: A pro-democracy revolution causes Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu to flee from power. He and his wife Elena are eventually captured and executed.

August 24: Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti bans Cincinnati Reds manager Pete Rose from Major League Baseball for gambling.

autumn crossover focus, The X-Men, were at the center of the event which spanned over twenty titles. The main thrust of the story involved Loki attempting to defeat the Avengers by manipulating Doctor Doom, Magneto, Kingpin, Wizard, Mandarin, and Red Skull (a.k.a. the "Prime Movers") into the confrontation. Their plan involved engineering a super-villain jailbreak and then shuffling up the villains to attack the heroes, so that the heroes would be caught off-guard in battles against foes they'd never faced before. As such, the event was essentially a series of unexpected match-ups between heroes and villains (including the Fantastic Four being attacked while appearing before Congress to argue against a Superhero Registration Act) with no real immediate impact on the Marvel Universe as a whole. "Acts of Vengeance" did, however, feature the first appearance of Psylocke in the body of Kwannon, transforming her from the twin sister of Captain Britain into an Asian ninja assassin. Also appearing for the first time were The New Warriors in the pages of *Thor* #412 (Dec. 1989).

One aspect of Perelman's takeover came to light as these crossovers developed, particularly during "Atlantis Attacks." According to Dan Raviv, author of *Comic Wars*, "[w]riters and editors of the various books inevitably clashed when trying to coordinate the stories, and the staff ultimately felt that the Atlantis series was way more trouble than it was worth" (36).

Better to Byrne Out Than Fade Away!

John Byrne had returned to Marvel in 1988 to take over and revamp the failing *Star Brand* title in Jim Shooter's New Universe, but sales weren't improving so the title was eventually cancelled with issue #19 (May 1989). Byrne's tenure at DC had been controversial, to say the least, and his return to Marvel brought controversy, and sales, as well.

The multi-chapter/multi-title "Acts of Vengeance" story arc included Avengers *#313.*

The first mainstream Marvel title he took on was ***The West Coast Avengers***. His debut in issue #42 was a clearing of the decks, and characters who had been gone (like Wasp and Hank Pym) were suddenly back in the line-up with no explanation. Previous team leader, Hawkeye, was demoted and played as less competent than he'd been during the previous 41 issues, and by issue #46, he took a leave of absence from the team. Pym took over the leadership position and reunited with his estranged wife as per Byrne's inclinations (Sanderson 22).

But it was Byrne's treatment of The Vision that really ruffled feathers. Byrne's first West Coast Avengers story arc was titled "Vision Quest." It focused on the Vision's abduction by an international group effort to neutrali[illegible] thre[illegible] "Unl[illegible] *Aver*[illegible] whe[illegible] ture[illegible] his [illegible] the [illegible] him[illegible] inhu[illegible] emo[illegible] fam[illegible] Byrn[illegible] gin [illegible] start[illegible] was[illegible] and[illegible] Torc[illegible]

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John Byrne drawn cover to Sensational She-Hulk *#1.*
She-Hulk TM and © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Before long, Byrne was also writing *The Avengers*, taking over with issue #305 (July 1989) and initiating a rotating roster that allowed him to essentially recruit whichever groups of heroes were appropriate for an adventure. Writing both books allowed for more overlap and interplay between the titles, although it was with *Avengers West Coast* (renamed with issue #47) where he seemed to be the more comfortable, with these characters found another outlet in the Byrne-written and illustrated *Sensational She-Hulk*, which debuted cover date May.

Sensational She-Hulk was a straight humor comic from its very conception. The main source of the comedy was, in Byrne's words, "the fact she knows she's in a comic book. So her reactions are based on that knowledge" (Sanderson 13). She-Hulk would regularly comment on the events going on around her and break the fourth wall, addressing the readers directly. The rogue's gallery for the title was drawn from the odder villains in the Marvel Universe, echoing, for the first few issues anyway, *The Incredible Hulk*'s original run-ins with The Ringmaster and the Circus of Crime as well as the alien Toad Men.

But Byrne left the title with issue #8 (Nov. 1989) due to editorial interference. As Byrne tells it: