

THE RETRO COMICS EXPERIENCE!



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BACK ISSUE!



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AVENGERS IN THE 1980s • WEST COAST AVENGERS
HAWKEYE • MOCKINGBIRD • WONDER MAN & MORE
with BUSCEMA • HALL • MILGROM • PÉREZ • STERN

Volume 1,
Number 56
May 2012

**Celebrating
the Best
Comics of
the '70s, '80s,
'90s, and Beyond!**

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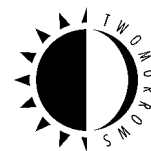
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The Retro Comics Experience!



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by Jerry Boyd

Dead Man

Simon Williams, Wonder Man, in a 1997 George Pérez commission done for writer Jerry Boyd (and colored by our designer, Righteous Rich Fowlks), is backed up by a quartet of *Avengers* comics in which he appeared: (top left) his premiere issue, #9 (Oct. 1964), cover by Jack Kirby; (top right) lying in state on the Rich Buckler/Joe Sinnott cover for #102 (Aug. 1972); (bottom right) #155 (Jan. 1977, cover by Kirby and Al Milgrom), continuing a tale started in *Super-Villain Team-Up* #9; and (bottom left) in his bright red duds in #162 (Aug. 1977), by the dynamic drawing duo of Pérez and Pablo Marcos.

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Tepid Reaction

When he returned to Marvel to write *West Coast Avengers* (see the Pro2Pro on page 60), Englehart didn't warm up to the once-dead Simon. Still, he recapped Wondy's origin in *WCA* vol. 2 #2 (Nov. 1985), with artists Al Milgrom and Kim DeMulder.

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Loose ends, forgotten subplots, unfinished story arcs—whatever you wish to call them, they sure can play heck with an incoming creative team after they've taken over an ongoing and successful superhero title.

In the early 1970s, Marvel Comics scribes Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, and Gary Friedrich made way for some new writers, fully expecting that the flower of Mighty Marvel would continue to flourish with this infusion of new blood. This new blood would take the House of Ideas into inspired, exciting directions, indeed. And Wonder Man, one of those "loose ends," would be revived through the talents of a new *Avengers* writer who'd previously been putting his energies into standard romance and horror stories—Steve Englehart.



STEVE ENGLEHART

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH!

Steve had been mightily impressed by the possibilities of the medium. On his college campus in the '60s, he'd shown "The Galactus Trilogy" (*Fantastic Four* #48–50) to friends. Selected by Marvel editor-in-chief Roy Thomas (after the Smiling One, Stan himself, got promoted to publisher), Steve got the keys to the front door of Avengers Mansion.

I asked Steve if part of the interview process included a *decent knowledge* of Marvel continuity. He recalls, "No, I think it sort of got there by osmosis. You had to go to New York and it was assumed that you knew what you were doing and what you were getting into. By that time, Gary Friedrich didn't want to write a six-page monster story, so they looked around and thought about

who could do that and other jobs. I had been doing some artwork but writing was part of me, obviously, and I was better at it than drawing. I got *Captain America* and *The Defenders* at the same time and I don't really recall Roy asking, 'Do you know who the Hulk is?' I was expected to know all of that. In those days, you knew the characters, had a feel for them,

Fear the Reaper

The Grim Reaper made his diabolical debut in Roy Thomas' *Avengers* #52 (May 1968; cover by John Buscema and George Tuska). The Black Panther spoiled his plans and became a team member by issue's end.

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On the Slab

Lying Frankenstein-like again, Wonder Man's death provided the spur for the machinations of his brother, Eric. Art by Heck, Cockrum, and Sinnott. From *Avengers* #108 (Feb. 1973).

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and the books. If not, you got them by osmosis—by being in the Marvel offices and being exposed to the history of them, and in the early '70s, those were not long histories for most of them. Now, the editors at Marvel tell you what's been going on the past 10–15 years! That's their job!!"

I asked Steve if he asked for *The Avengers*. His reply was, "No, I was just happy to be there. They gave me the Beast [in *Amazing Adventures*]. I was having a good time with the Beast. In those days, it was all assignments. It was Roy's idea to give me *The Avengers*. I was sorry to see him get off that book because he'd done it so long and so well, but I guess he saw something in me that told him I could do the book."

"Stainless" Steve Englehart's scripting began with *Avengers* #105 (Nov. 1972). But his writing began in earnest when he finished up a multi-parter with the Grim Reaper and the Space Phantom (*Avengers* #108, Feb. 1973). The Grim Reaper had been plaguing the Vision with "dreams" (pun intended) of having his mental imprints placed inside the body of Captain America. In the background lay the presumed-dead Wonder Man. This would prove somewhat fortuitous. Why? Because Mr. Englehart would return to Wonder Man before long, and in happy surprises for those who glommed onto his writing style, Steve would turn his attention to those pesky little loose ends, those unfinished subplots that had sometimes baffled Roy and Stan and their letter-answerers for years!

Before Englehart's tenure, the Assemblers belonged to Roy Thomas, who'd admirably guided the team through many trials and tribulations. And it was the Rascally One who created Eric Williams, the Grim Reaper, whose first appearance was in *Avengers* #52 (May 1968). Reaper's sole motivation as a baddie was to "avenge" (ironically) the death of his brother, Simon Williams—Wonder Man. As the dangerously deranged Eric saw it, it was the *Avengers* who killed his brother at the end of *Avengers* #9 (Oct. 1964), not the Masters of Evil.

Thomas, like Englehart, enjoyed toying with the diverse elements and characters of the Marvel Universe and bringing them into a coherent coexistence that longtime Marvel fans could understand, even if they had been readers since the Timely and Atlas days! Two Timely heroes, the Vision (in *Avengers* #57) and Red Raven (in a brief appearance in *X-Men* #44), had been retooled for the 1960s by Roy.

Wonder Man may have been resurrected under Thomas in the late '60s, but that notion was shot down by Marvel's "Distinguished Competition."

Thomas notes for *BACK ISSUE*, "I don't recall any 'big plans' for Wonder Man, only using him as part



ROY THOMAS



of the basis of the Vision, since Wonder Man was presumably prescribed from coming back by whatever letter Marvel received from DC (complaining re Wonder Woman's 'similarity' of name, I believe)."

Still, Wonder Man was a name that came up often. Every time the Grim Reaper showed up to bedevil the Assemblers in the late '60s, Simon was usually mentioned.

Englehart came up to bat next. In *Avengers* #108, the Vision rejected Eric's offer of obtaining Captain America's body (even though the idea briefly intrigued him—by then, the android was in love with the beautiful Scarlet Witch), but the regular super-doer heroics set up by the Star-Spangled Avenger and the others pushed the Wendy controversy way back

... into the background.

I asked Roy if he gave Steve any ideas for Wonder Man's resurrection as he left the book, when he was editor-in-chief of the Marvel line. "Far as I know,



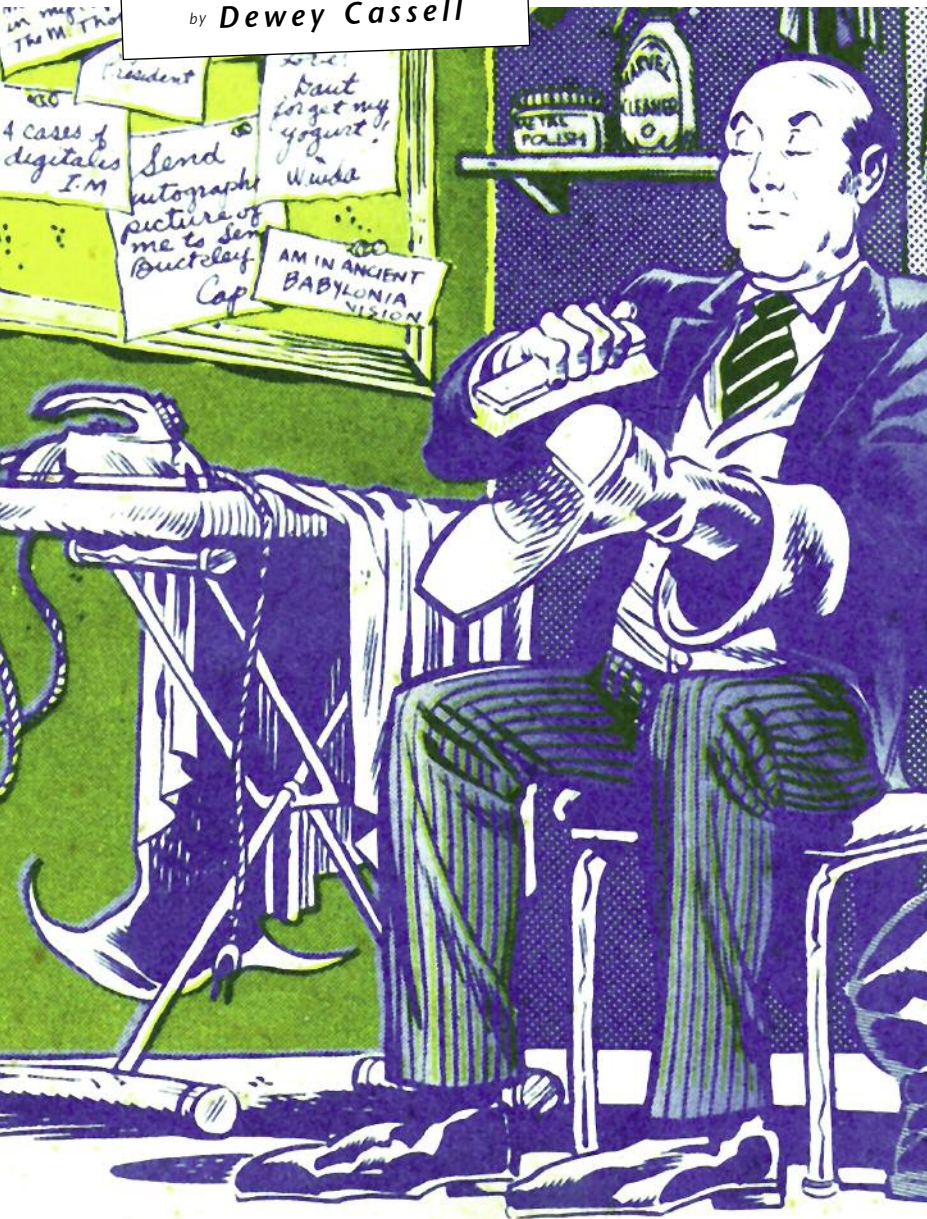
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If Only Those Walls Could Talk...



THE AVENGERS MANSION

by Dewey Cassell



It seems that every great superhero team must have a place to call home that befits their stature. For the Justice League of America, it is an orbiting satellite 22,300 miles above the Earth. For the Legion of Super-Heroes, it was originally a cylindrical building resembling an upturned rocketship, later replaced by a sprawling headquarters complex in futuristic Metropolis. And for the Avengers, the place to assemble was a mansion at 890 Fifth Avenue in the borough of Manhattan, New York City.

Like with most things, when it comes to being a superhero team, it pays to have wealthy friends. The benefactor of the Avengers was none other than millionaire inventor Tony Stark. Stark inherited the mansion from his father, industrialist Howard Stark, who built it in 1932. Shortly after the formation of the Avengers, Tony Stark (whose alter ego Iron Man was a founding member) donated the mansion to "Earth's Mightiest Heroes." The dwelling occupies an entire city block and was reportedly patterned after The Frick Collection, a museum at 1 East 70th Street that was originally built as a private residence by architect Thomas Hastings in 1914 for industrialist Henry Clay Frick. The first appearance of the mansion was in issue #2 of *The Avengers*.

The mansion has three floors above ground and three basement levels. The top floor of the building houses the hangar and runway for the Avengers' primary mode of transportation (at least for those who can't fly)—the Quinjets, a VTOL aircraft designed by the Wakanda Design Group, led by T'Challa (a.k.a. the Black Panther).

The second floor encompasses living quarters for Avengers in residence, short- or long-term. Most Avengers maintain a residence elsewhere, but some have lived at the mansion, including Thor, Moondragon, Hellcat,

Man About the House

The keeper of Avengers Mansion: Jarvis, trusty butler and confidant, as immortalized by artist Marie Severin on the cover of Marvel's fanzine, *FOOM*, issue #6 (Summer 1974). Scan courtesy of Dewey Cassell.

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FlashBack!

ROGER STERN'S

AVENGERS™

by Jason Shayer

Roger Stern was perhaps the most underrated writer for Marvel Comics during the 1980s.

Despite the volume and quality of his work, which included major titles like *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Avengers*, *Captain America*, and *Doctor Strange*, he never broke into the superstar category, like Chris Claremont, John Byrne, or Frank Miller.

What made Stern's five-year run on *The Avengers* so successful and memorable were his characters. Each character had their distinct attitude and direction, as well as flaws, which set them apart from the typical superhero stereotype.

Stern understood what it meant to be a hero: Being a hero, even at the power levels of the Avengers, required a human connection. It was never about their god-like powers or superhuman abilities—it was about their humanity with all of its strengths and weaknesses.

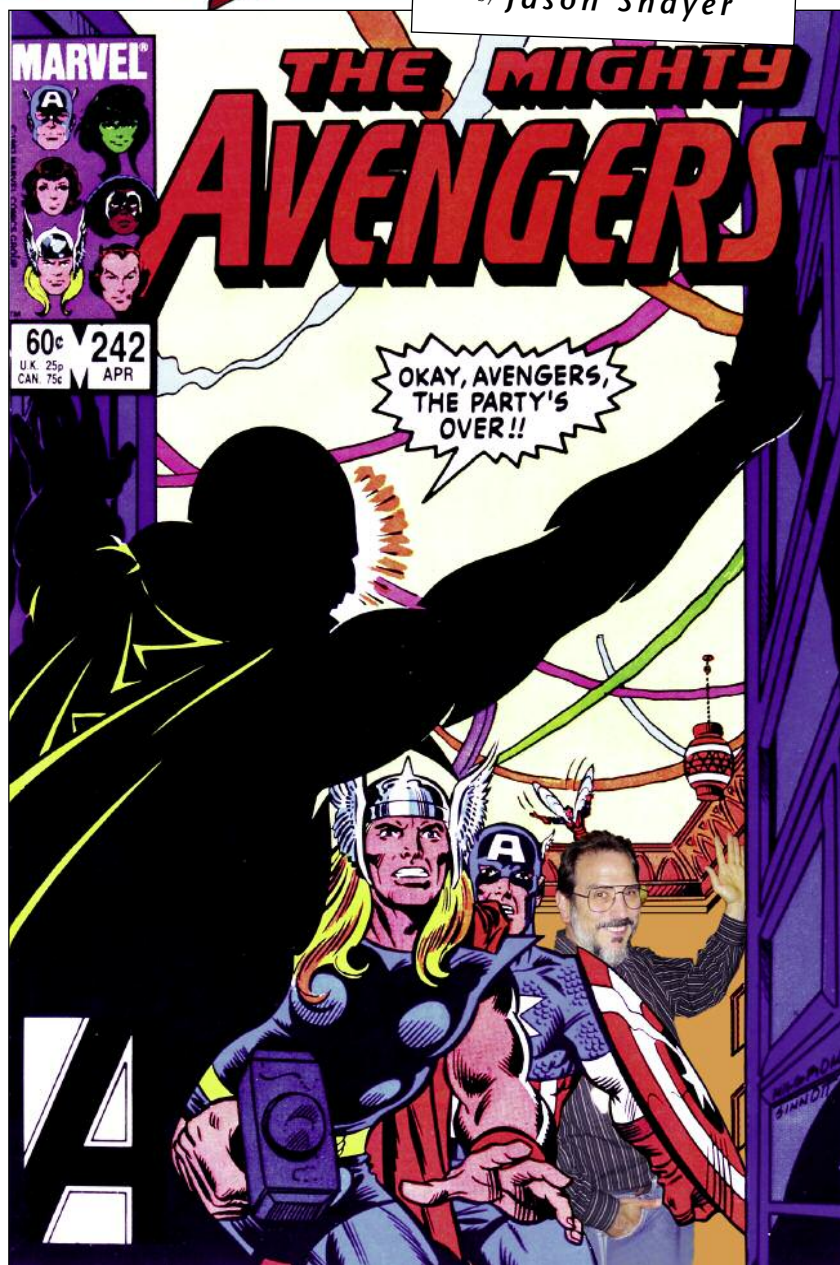
While he deftly handled the more popular and iconic characters like Captain America and Thor, Stern naturally gravitated toward the second-tier characters, like the Wasp, She-Hulk, and new recruits like Captain Marvel and Starfox. His approach balanced the team's roster and allowed him the storytelling flexibility to make broader changes to their lives, as they didn't have their own ongoing books. While these second-tier characters didn't possess earth-shattering powers, they reflected the heart and the soul of the Avengers.

This "Flashback" article will dive deep into Stern's work on *The Avengers* and walk you through some key character moments throughout his unforgettable run.

Wrong, Vision—The Party's Just Getting Started!

We take liberties with the gripping Al Milgrom/Joe Sinnott cover of *The Avengers* #242 (Apr. 1984) to celebrate the half-decade, full-throttle run on the title written by Roger Stern (seen waving, alongside members of Earth's Mightiest Heroes).

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ENTER STERN

On how he got the *Avengers* writing assignment, Roger Stern says: "I asked for it. Seriously, *The Avengers* was the first assignment that I actively sought out at Marvel. Before that, on *Doctor Strange*, *The Incredible Hulk*, or *The Amazing Spider-Man*, an editor had always asked me to write the series. But with *The Avengers* ... well, I'd edited the book for a couple of years, and it had always been one of my favorites. So when I heard that Jim Shooter was going to be stepping down from writing *Avengers*, I called Mark Gruenwald and tossed my hat in the ring."

Avengers #227 (Jan. 1983) kicked off with a test of Captain Marvel's powers that served as her audition for the team and as her introduction to the readers. Captain Marvel and her alter ego, Monica Rambeau, were created by Stern in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #16 (Dec. 1982). He had the idea of her becoming an Avenger in mind from the outset. Her 17-page origin was a fine example of how to concisely and effectively introduce a new superhero that hit all the necessary character marks.

"With Captain Marvel, I did my best to create a character in the Lee/Kirby/Ditko tradition, a down-to-Earth person who suddenly acquired extraordinary power," Stern says. "And I wanted her to be a straightforward, likable superhero. At the time, so many of the then-newly minted super 'heroes' didn't seem very heroic. We already had Wolverine and the Punisher. I wanted there to be at least one new character who wasn't homicidal or a jerk."

Captain Marvel was a rookie superhero with access to almost unlimited powers and Stern leveraged her perspective as a vantage point into his story for new readers. She was learning to use her powers and found



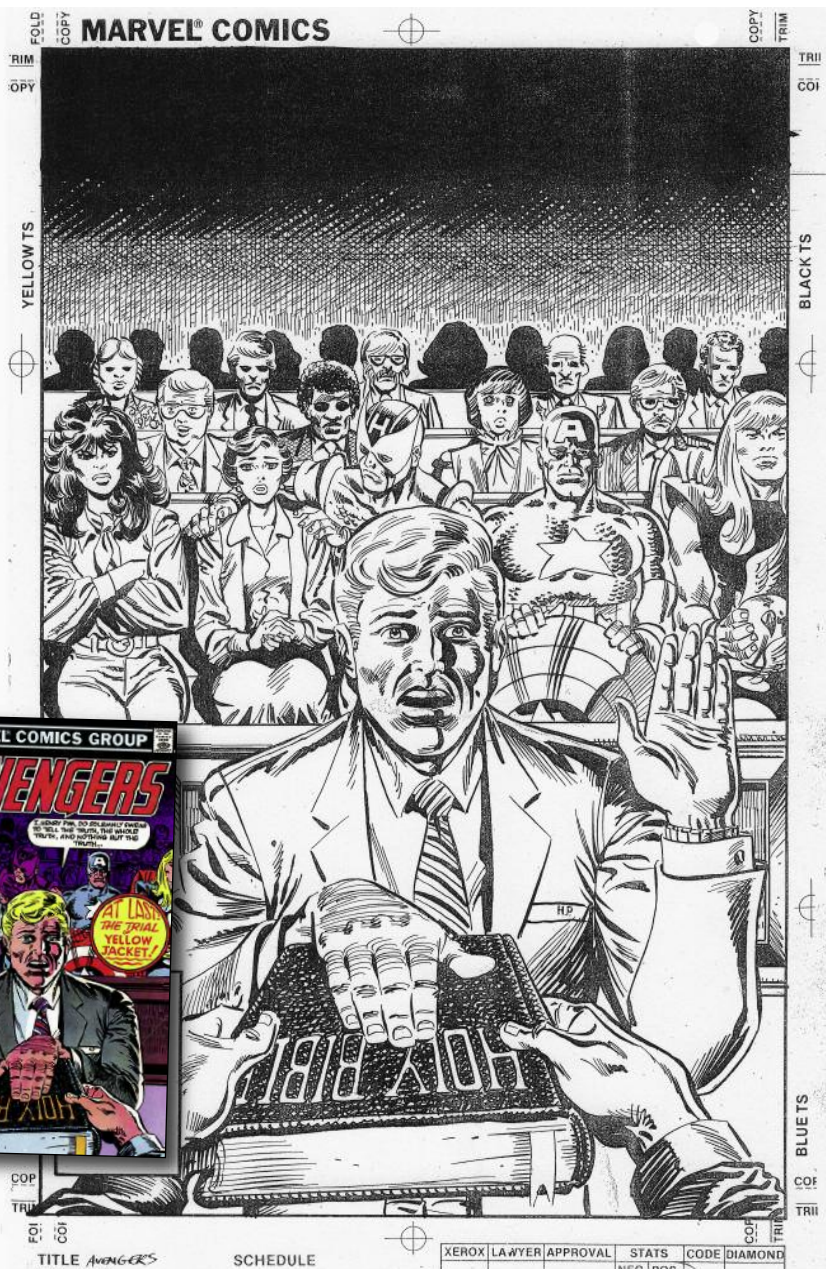
herself in awe of the legendary heroes that surrounded her, much like young readers might imagine themselves in the same role.

Stern paid particular attention to his female characters and developed them into strong, leading women that were great role models for young girls. Captain Marvel joined the team as an Avenger-in-training, and would gradually become more skilled with her powers and gain confidence as an Avenger, both of which would prepare her for her eventual leadership role.

THE REDEMPTION OF HANK PYM AND RENAISSANCE OF THE WASP

As the new regular writer, Stern didn't waste time getting settled in. He took on the Henry "Hank" Pym subplot, which had been dangling since Jim Shooter's tenure as writer, and had him face the public charges of kidnapping, theft of government property, and treason.

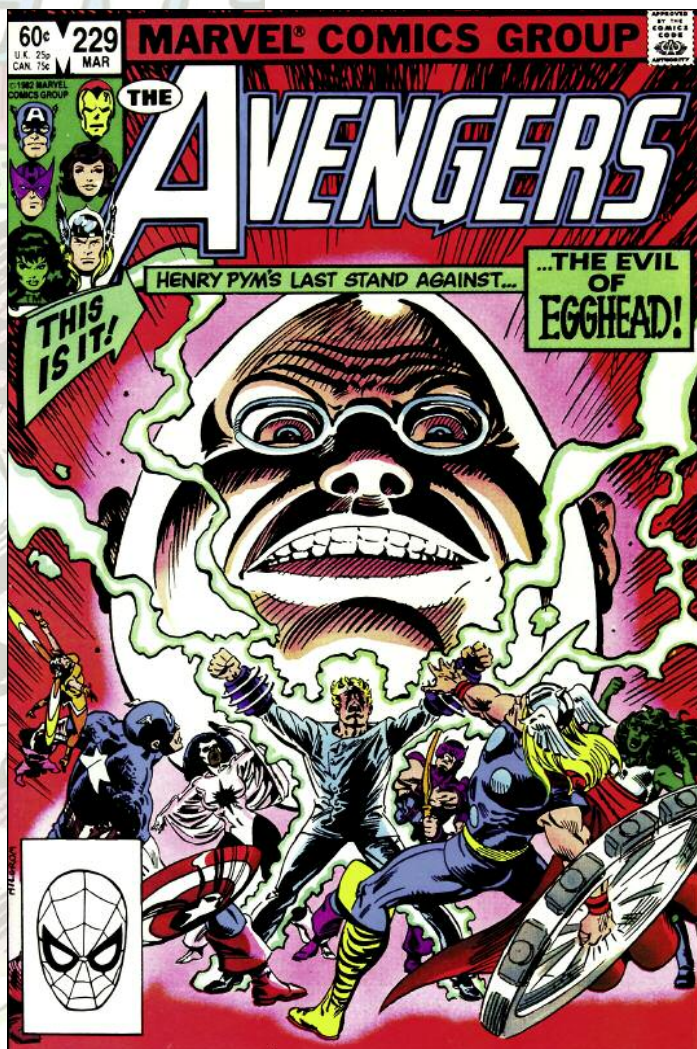
Stern cleverly used a psychiatrist, trying to determine Pym's mental fitness to stand trial, to flashback through Hank's past. Pym recounted his early history



Which Hand Do I Place on the Bible?

(above) Affable Al Milgrom shares with us his original, unused cover for *Avengers* #228 (Feb. 1983). Compare it with the inset of the published version to see how Hank Pym's hands were changed. (left) Brett Breeding's cover to *Avengers* #227.

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Family Matters

(left) The Pym saga continues in *Avengers* #229 (Mar. 1983).

Cover by Milgrom.

(right) The Wasp came into her own under Roger Stern's tenure as *Avengers* writer. Page 21 of #230, by Stern/Milgrom/Joe Sinnott.

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as a scientist, his relationship with the Wasp, his career as an Avenger, and his fall from grace. His narrative was compelling and moving and wove together 20 years of convoluted history written by several writers, each with their own take on the character.

At the same time, Stern also focused on the Wasp as the leader and chairwoman of the Avengers, and her struggle to find her place without Hank Pym. Despite being a founding member of the Avengers since way back in 1963, her presence on the team wasn't anything more than as a sidekick, fashion diva, or plot device, usually the damsel in distress. She had always lived in the shadow of Hank Pym and his various superhero incarnations. Her most significant developments as a character seemed to be her exhaustive wardrobe.

"Don't forget, the Wasp was a kid when she first became the Wasp—she was a debutante, just barely 20—not that much older than, say, Spider-Man," Stern reminds *BACK ISSUE* readers. "We saw her come of age in the Avengers."

The Wasp worked around the team's government clearance that mandated only seven Avengers by instituting the Avengers-in-Training program. She did so by pulling some strings, as the First Lady and she had the same masseur! From Stern's first issue, he was already taking Wasp in a new direction and expanding her character. She was confident, driven, and resourceful.

And as impressive as her new attitude was, Stern showed the depth of her personality as she struggled to

hold it all together: "Maybe I don't have Hank around to lean on anymore—but I can tough it out! I'll show 'em ... I don't need him ... don't need anybody! After all, I'm an Avenger. I'm the leader of the Avengers."

Stern recalls, "At the time, there were a few readers who thought it was crazy to have the Wasp leading the Avengers, but seen in the overall context of her life, it really was a natural development. The Wasp was a founding Avenger, and had been with the team for most of her adult life. She was recently divorced from a troubled marriage, and getting her life back together. At that point in her life, Jan was reinventing herself, looking for new challenges, and taking on new responsibilities."

Stern also invested time with the other Avengers, especially touching on the newly rejoined Hawkeye and new member She-Hulk. Each member was given some face time in which their human vulnerabilities were highlighted. For example, Iron Man regretted having romantically pursued the Wasp as Tony Stark while she didn't know he was Iron Man.

Stern accomplished all of this in just his first issue!

From the letters page of *The Avengers* #227, Stern wrote: "Needless to say, I'm thrilled and honored to be writing the adventures of Earth's Mightiest Heroes—but said thrill and honor does not preclude an occasional gulp of insecurity. Like most of you, I've been a big fan of Jim Shooter's tenure on the book and stepping into his size-13 sneakers is not going to be an easy task. Still and

Quips and Quivers:

by Adam Besenyodi

FlashBack!

A Non-Superpowered Hero in a Superpowered World

Ace Archer

Clint Barton, Hawkeye, in an undated pen-and-ink commission by Bob Hall (colored by BI's own Rich Fowlks), courtesy of Edd Walker. Behind Hawkeye is a fantastic foursome of covers starring the Battling Bowman: (top left) his first appearance, *Tales of Suspense* #57 (Sept. 1964), cover by Don Heck; (top right) joining Earth's Mightiest Heroes in *The Avengers* #16 (Oct. 1965), cover by Jack Kirby and Dick Ayers; (bottom left) winging it solo in *Avengers* #189 (Nov. 1979), cover by John Byrne and Dan Green; and (bottom right) cover art by Mike Perkins for the miniseries *Hawkeye: Blindspot* #1 (Apr. 2011).

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Comics' First Hawkeye??

(center) What the--?!

Ye ed stumbled across this while looking for Hawkeye art for this issue and thought it too delicious to overlook.

In 1958, Dell Comics'

Four Color #884

published this adaptation of the short-lived (39 episodes, 1957–1958)

TV series *Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans*. As this photo cover shows, it

starred John Hart as

Nat "Hawkeye"

Cutler, a fur trader ...

and yes, that's the

Wolf Man himself,

Lon Chaney, Jr., as

Hawkeye's American

Indian ally,

Chingachgook, the

last of the Mohican

tribe! Who says this

isn't the *BACK ISSUE*

Age of Useless But

Too Cool Trivia?

(top) Ol' Eagle-Eye's

quite full of himself as

he bows in the Iron

Man tale in *Tales*

of *Suspense* #57.

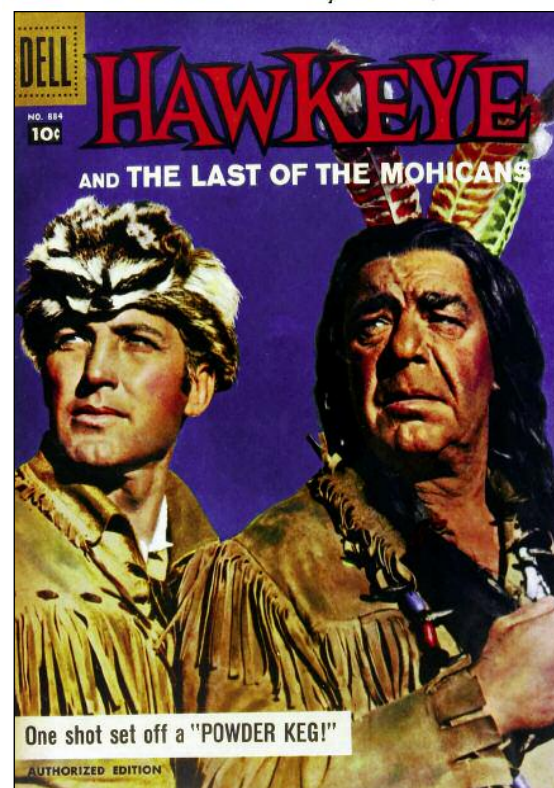
Words by Stan the

Man Lee, illos by

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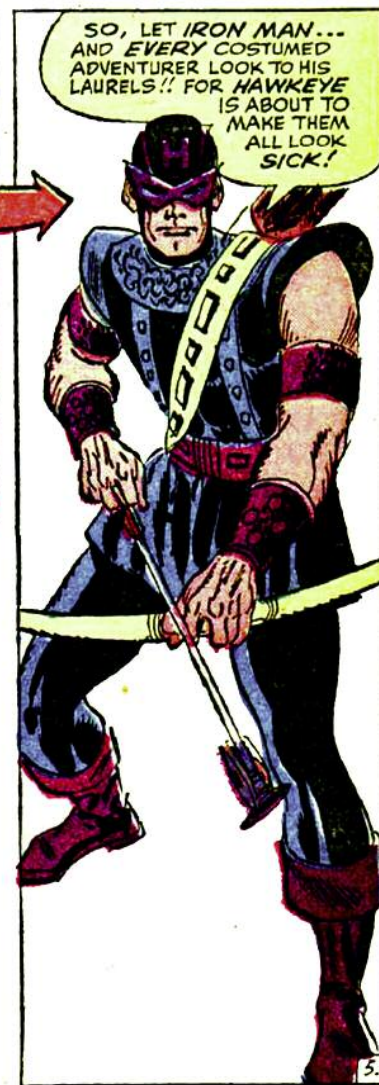
Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans © 1958 Incorporated Television Company (ITC).

Hawkeye © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.



In 1941, a certain comic-book company created an archer who employed trick arrows and didn't play well with others. The character would go on to join that comic universe's premiere team, have plenty of woman trouble, and marry a fellow superhero with a bird-themed name. Almost 25 years later, Marvel took that blueprint for DC's Green Arrow and created the same character. Hawkeye "was an example of how Marvel could take a DC character," *Avengers* and *West Coast Avengers* limited series penciler Bob Hall says, "and make him even better." He may have been "a blatant rip-off," according to Hall, but he was one that that "really worked."

What makes Hawkeye/Clint Barton so compelling is the depth of character added by his strengths and flaws. The staggering amount of egotism required of a non-superpowered superhero to be successful in the world he inhabits is repeatedly contradicted by the overwhelming insecurity



resulting from that same set of circumstances. Throw in habitual girl problems and a perpetual dose of money trouble, and you have decades' worth of material to mine.

Debuting on the pages of *Tales of Suspense* #57 (Sept. 1964), Hawkeye's insecurities manifest almost immediately. Hawkeye's archery show was a purposely unromantic distraction for a mistaken-intentions Coney Island Circus date between Iron Man's alter ego Tony Stark and his secretary Pepper Potts. However, the midway marksman is upstaged when Iron Man shows up to save an out-of-control flying pinwheel ride. Spurred on by "blazing jealousy" of Iron Man's heroics, the archer—Hawkeye—is inspired to create a costume and trick arrows. His first night out, he botches stopping a jewelry store robber, and the police blame Hawkeye. The mistaken-identity scenario leads Hawkeye right into the arms of Natasha Romanova, the Black Widow, who offers the archer her communist technology ... if he offs Iron Man.

Using explosive, rust-tipped, and nylon-rope-strand arrows, Hawkeye holds his own against Iron Man, but his "demolition blast warhead" arrow ricochets off the Golden Avenger and inadvertently nicks Black Widow. Hawkeye abandons his attack on a stunned Iron Man, grabs Natasha, and steals away by motorboat under cover of the fog.

GIRL TROUBLE

Hawkeye shows up in two more issues of *Tales of Suspense* over the next seven months, both times as Iron Man's foil and Black Widow's fool. "Originally I planned to use my talents to serve mankind!! If only I hadn't met the Black Widow," Hawkeye thinks while raiding Stark's factory for weapons plans in issue #60 (Dec. 1964), "and yet ... without her, life would be meaningless to me!" The charms of a woman and a few lies are all it takes for Hawkeye to commit treason.

Four months later, the Black Widow, who had previously fled to Russia, returns to once again bait Hawkeye into battling Iron Man. They fight to a draw on the pages of *Tales of Suspense* #64 (Apr. 1965), until Natasha is hurt and Hawkeye abandons the battle to rush her to safety, all while being chastised by the object of his affection for giving up on the fight because of his love. It's a love that never really completely fades, and is even proven to be at least somewhat reciprocated: In *Avengers* #211 (Sept. 1981), when Natasha and Hawkeye run into each other at the Avengers Mansion, the Black Widow wishes she and the archer had a chance to talk more, yet thinks, "I'm sure he doesn't care [for me] anymore!"

What begins as a crush for Hawkeye soon evolves into a pattern of unfortunate, and often unrequited, love interests, because from Natasha, he transfers his special brand of emotionally stunted love to Wanda Maximoff, a.k.a. the Scarlet Witch.

Meeting on the pages of *Avengers* #16 (May 1965), the team's first really big roster shakeup resulted in Captain America leading a trio of former villains: Hawkeye, the Scarlet Witch, and Quicksilver. Hawkeye immediately sets about hitting on his teammate with a brashness that speaks to the sexism of the day. That impudence habitually blinds Hawkeye to the reality of his romantic situations. He remains oblivious to the deep love that develops over the years between Wanda and fellow Avenger the Vision, and continues to pelt her with borderline sexual harassment behavior. But early '80s *Avengers* scribe Roger Stern sees things a bit differently. To him, "Hawk's not so much a sexist, as he is an all-purpose butt-head."

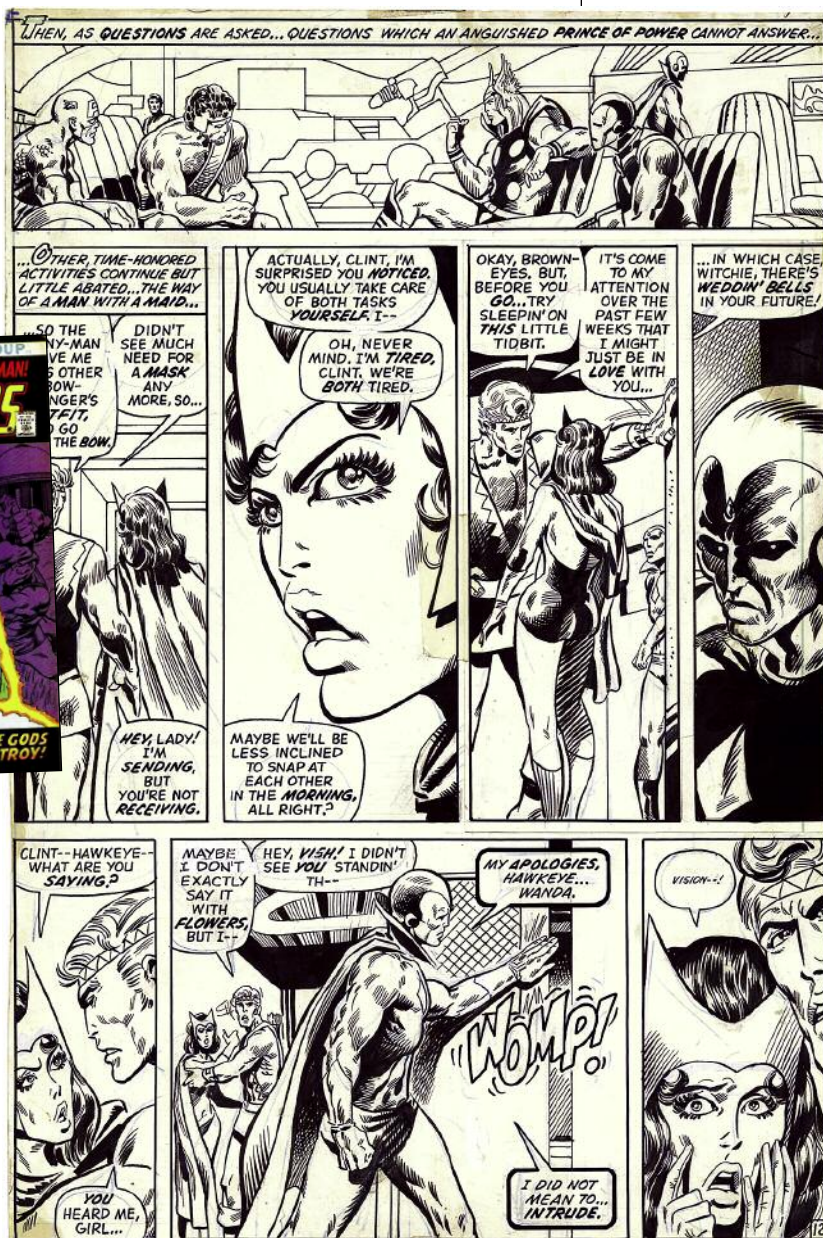
After his heroic return from the life-changing events of the Kree-Skrull War in *Avengers* #99 (May 1972), Hawkeye notices "ol' Wanda's as fine as ever" and chats her up. Wanda completely

shuts him down, telling him just how self-centered and unobservant he is. Undeterred by pointblank rejection, Hawkeye actually proposes to her! No bended-knee proposals for this roustabout, though: instead it's all about *him*. He informs Wanda that he's realized over the course of the war that he "might just be in love with you," and because of that, "There's wedding bells in your future!" Gotta love that confidence.

Hawkeye's delusion about their relationship begins to come to a head in *Avengers* #102 (Aug. 1972), when he decides to lay his cards on the table with Wanda once again by first making a remark about him being "the future father of [her] little witch-brood," then proceeding to tell her he's always "dug" her and that "it's time we let it all hang out!" Wanda attempts to let him know her heart belongs to another, but Hawkeye misappropriates the Women's Liberation Movement ("No more a that 'ladies first' bull") and plants a kiss on a very surprised Scarlet Witch. When she doesn't kiss him back, things start to sink in for the amiable



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Pulling on Heartstrings

Hawkeye tells the Scarlet Witch he's got a thing for her—overheard by the Vision—in *Avengers* #99 (May 1972). Words by Roy Thomas, art by Barry Windsor-Smith and Tom Sutton. Original art page courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

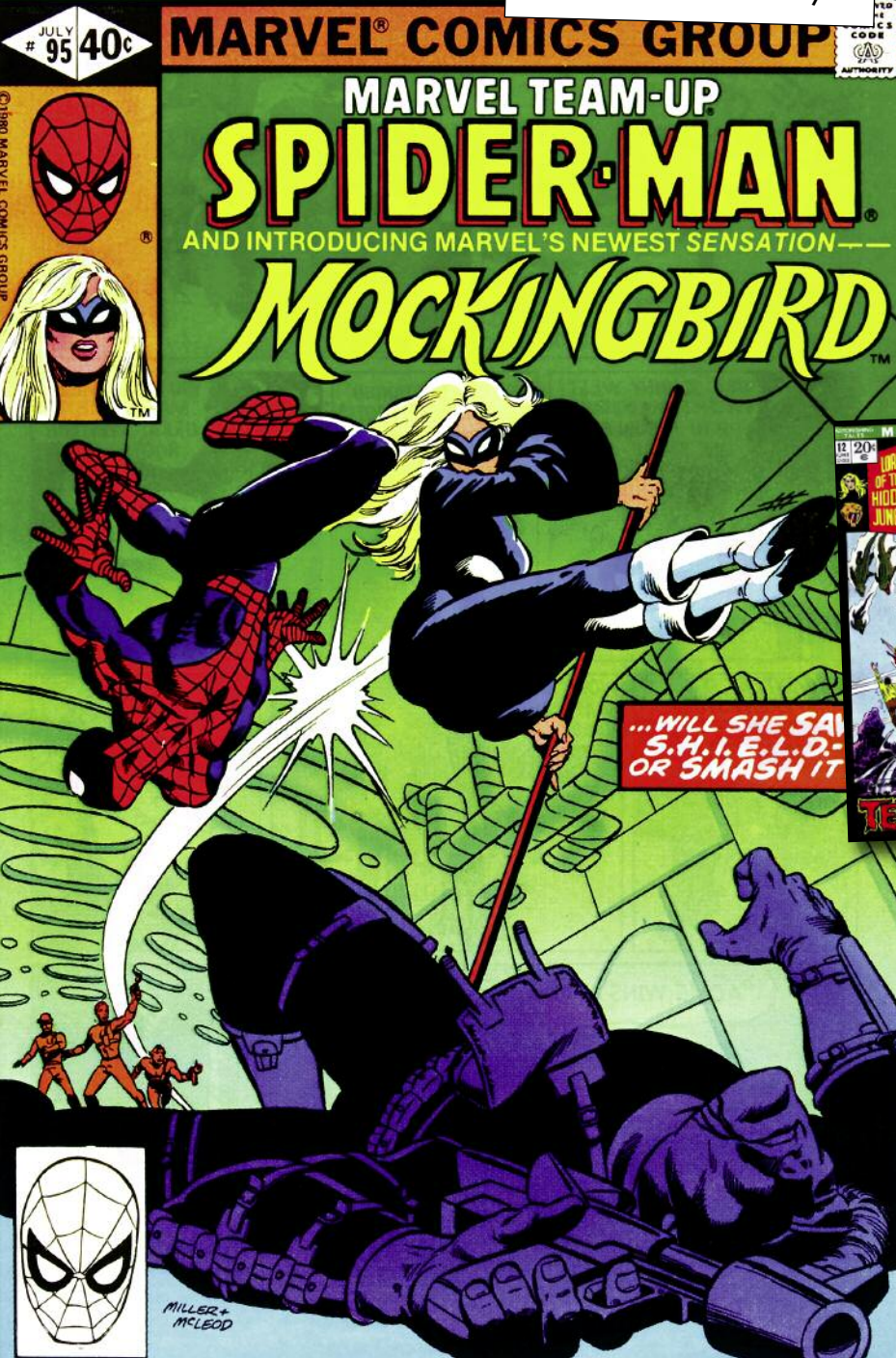
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Listen to the

FlashBack!

Mockingbird™

by Jarrod Buttery



Avengers Assemble! Thor, Iron Man, Hulk, Giant-Man, Wasp! Captain America, Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, Quicksilver! Black Widow, Hercules, Black Knight, Vision, Black Panther! And, more recently, Spider-Man, Wolverine, Doctor Strange, Iron Fist, Luke Cage! So ... where did this Mockingbird come from? That was the question asked by Mark Gruenwald in an editorial box in the letters page of *Marvel Team-Up* #95 (July 1980).

FROM THE EVERGLADES TO THE SAVAGE LAND

Our story starts with Marvel's muck-monster, the Man-Thing. As discussed in *BACK ISSUE* #6 (Oct. 2004), Man-Thing first appeared in *Savage Tales* #1 (May 1971), but the magazine was temporarily canceled and a planned follow-up for issue #2 wasn't published.

The follow-up depicted Dr. Barbara Morse and fellow scientists working to recreate the Super-Soldier serum that originally produced Captain America. They were also searching for missing colleague Ted Sallis who, unknown to them, had been transformed into the Man-Thing after the terrorist organization A.I.M. had tried to steal the serum.

This Len Wein/Neal Adams tale eventually saw print in the middle of *Astonishing Tales* #12 (June 1972). Marvel's Jungle Lord, Ka-Zar, had received a solo series in the title and, in issue #6 (June 1971), in a story by Gerry Conway and Barry Windsor-Smith, an unnamed brunette woman rushes to Ka-Zar's English estate. Admitted entrance by the butler, she demands, "Lord Kevin Plunder! Where is he? I must speak with him! 'Tis a matter of the fate of worlds!" When she is calmed, she admits, "Lord Kevin and I have never met, and yet I feel that I know him! You see, I can

...

"Marvel's Newest Sensation"

Marvel Team-Up #95 (July 1980) was the "first appearance" of the soon-to-be Avenger Mockingbird—but it was not the first time readers encountered her alter ego, Bobbi Morse. Cover art by Frank Miller and Bob McLeod.

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Backdoor into the Marvel Universe

An early appearance of the woman who would eventually become Mockingbird. Page 18 of *Astonishing Tales* #18 (June 1973), by writer Mike Friedrich and artists Dan Adkins and Frank Chiaramonte. Original art courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions.

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... can 'feel' people ... in my mind! And I know that unless I speak with him, Lord Kevin will die!"

That was Conway's last issue. When asked if he had any recollection of the scene, Conway admits, "Wow, wish I could help, but it was loooooonnnng ago and far away. You might ask Roy Thomas; I have a feeling he could have been involved in plotting those issues." Indeed, Thomas wrote issue #7 (Aug. 1971), wherein the aforementioned butler tells the brunette girl that Lord Kevin has returned to his jungle abode.

Issue #8 (Oct. 1971) opens with a light aircraft crashing into the Savage Land, and a blonde girl parachuting to safety. Ka-Zar finds the pilot, Paul Allen, who insists that they must find his fiancée, Barbara. Paul also reveals how they found the Savage Land: "All I have to go by is this map, which your servants back in England gave her," thus confirming that blonde Barbara is the unnamed *brunette* girl from the previous issues. Herb Trimpe was the artist for issues #7 and 8 and says, "It probably was a mistake on the part of the colorist. We tried to maintain quality in the time allotted,

but we had to make the deadlines to avoid late fees with the printer. Of course, there may have been other reasons for the sudden change in hair color."

Explanations eventuated in *AT* #12 (June 1972), written by Thomas. Dr. Barbara Morse and Dr. Paul Allen were revealed to be "Part of a US Scientific Project, working at a secret lab in the Everglades, to achieve a certain ... biochemical breakthrough." They enlisted Ka-Zar to use his jungle abilities to search for the missing Sallis. The story then gave way to the seven-page Man-Thing flashback.

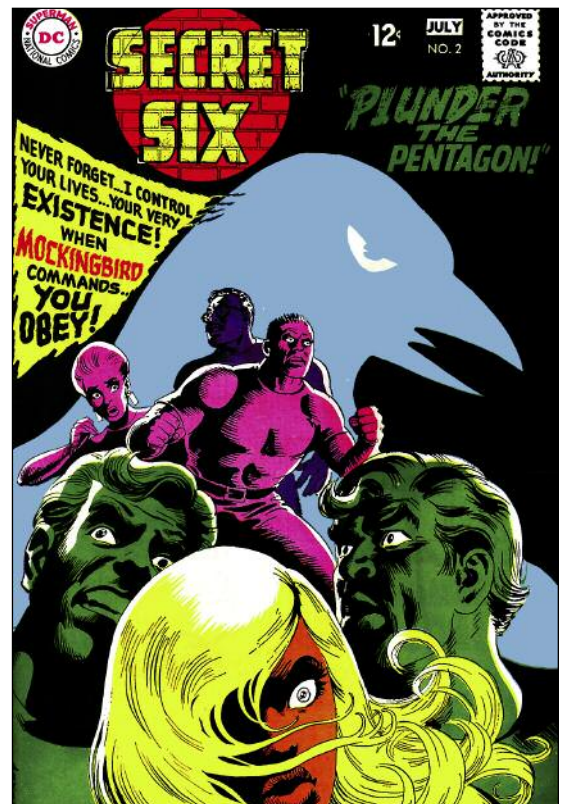
Roy Thomas recalls, "I know that I wanted to find a way to integrate that second Man-Thing story into *Ka-Zar*, but I don't remember any specific details." Although memories have faded over the years, it seems that whatever initial plans were held for Conway's mysterious brunette girl, Thomas saw an opportunity to change her to blonde Barbara Morse in order to make use of the unpublished Man-Thing story. Or we could be charitable and assume that, pursued by A.I.M., Barbara was wearing a wig and exaggerating her urgency in her first appearance.

AT #13 (Aug. 1972) concluded the storyline. Not only was Barbara a biologist, but an agent of

Comics' First Mockingbird

Let's not forget that before Bobbi came along, DC Comics had its own Mockingbird, the mysterious puppeteer of the covert squad known as the Secret Six. Cover art to *Secret Six* #2 (June–July 1968) by Nick Cardy (who'd no doubt draw one gorgeous Bobbi Morse, if given the chance!).

TM & © DC Comics.





S.H.I.E.L.D. She was only pretending to love Paul Allen, who was, it turns out, working for A.I.M. Paul is killed by the Man-Thing, A.I.M.'s Everglades base is destroyed, and Ka-Zar admits he is sorry that he didn't get to know Barbara better.

A fill-in followed but a new direction accompanied new writer Mike Friedrich. AT #15 (Dec. 1972) finds Ka-Zar (and Zabu!) in New York, following A.I.M.'s trail and enjoying the hospitality of Barbara Morse. The façade of meek fiancée over, Barbara is the relaxed and confident character of later years. She flirts with Ka-Zar and invites him to "Call me Bobbi."

The nickname stuck and she is treated as co-star of the title. Nick Fury assigns Bobbi, Agent 19, the task of stopping A.I.M. and A.I.M.'s Super-Soldier: Victorious. At the end of issue #20 (Oct. 1973), with Victorious—not victorious—Ka-Zar returns to the Savage Land. Bobbi admits to herself, "Despite our differences, I'm still wrapped up in this guy! I've made my intentions plain, but I can't possibly see myself in his awful jungle."

Accompanied by Shanna the She-Devil, Bobbi returned to the Savage Land in *Savage Tales* #8 (Jan. 1975)—where she does not fail to notice the chemistry between the jungle characters. Writer Gerry Conway explained, in *BACK ISSUE* #43 (Sept. 2010), that he wanted to provide an alternative love interest for the Lord of the Savage Land. Ka-Zar and Shanna eventually married while Bobbi disappeared for a year.

HUNTED BY THE HUNTRESS

Barbara Morse could have disappeared from continuity altogether had not Mike Friedrich come to her rescue. According to the editorial from Archie Goodwin in *Marvel Super Action* #1 (Jan. 1976), Goodwin had proposed a new character: the Huntress. "I suggested the title and the notion of using S.H.I.E.L.D. to writer Mike Friedrich. He decided to draw upon a character he'd helped develop while scripting the color *Ka-Zar* comic, and wound up revamping her totally," wrote Goodwin.

Birds of Prey

(left) Barbara "Bobbi" Morse in her first costumed guise. Washtone-rich splash page to her one-and-only Huntress outing, from the black-and-white magazine *Marvel Super Action* #1 (Jan. 1976). By the Friedrich/Evans/Springer team. (It's interesting to note that inker Frank Springer was the illustrator of DC's aforementioned *Secret Six* series—home of that other Mockingbird!) (right) While DC's original Huntress was a Golden Age supervillainess that debuted in 1941, Bobbi Morse relinquished her Huntress moniker in 1977 when DC introduced Helena Wayne as the Earth-Two superheroine Huntress. Seen here is Huntress' bio from *Who's Who* #10 (Dec. 1985); text by Len Wein, art by Joe Staton. (Of course, post-Crisis, the Huntress character has continued to change. Sheesh! All these Huntresses and Mockingbirds are enough to make your temples throb!)

Marvel Super Action © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc. Huntress/Who's Who TM & © DC Comics.

AVENGING THE LEFT COAST...



HOLLYWOOD



West Coast Avengers writers **ROGER STERN** and **STEVE ENGLEHART** recall working with these superhero “WACKOS”

by **Michael Aushenker**



Hawkeye. Wonder Man. Mockingbird. Tigra. Moon Knight. Even Iron Man (the Jim Rhodes version, anyway).

West Coast Avengers first appeared in 1984 as a four-issue limited series (Oct.–Jan. 1985) written by Roger Stern and drawn by Bob Hall and Brett Breeding.

A West Coast Avengers ongoing series soon followed, running 102 issues (Oct. 1985–Jan. 1994). It was originally written by Steve Englehart and drawn by Al Milgrom, through #41. John Byrne followed, writing and drawing the series from issue #42–57, and various creative teams followed Byrne until its 1994 finale. The title was renamed Avengers West Coast as of issue #47 in 1989.

The following is a parallax view of West Coast Avengers through separate interviews with writers Stern and Englehart conducted in August 2011.

– Michael Aushenker

ROGER STERN

MICHAEL AUSHENKER: *How did the West Coast Avengers four-issue miniseries come about? Was it based on solid sales for the regular Avengers series? How were you chosen to write this mini?*

ROGER STERN: I actually remember the origins of this project pretty well, because it happened to coincide with my birthday, back in 1983. I was attending a comic-book convention in Rome, Georgia, along with Mark Gruenwald, my editor on *The Avengers*. And while we were there, we batted ideas around for the project, which eventually became the *West Coast Avengers* miniseries. (“West Coast Avengers,” by the way, was just supposed to be a placeholder name. But we were never able to think of a better title. Sorry about that.)

Anyway, WCA was originally conceived as a fun little miniseries that would A) help expand the scope of the Avengers as a team, and B) solve a problem we’d been having with other editorial offices. See, at the time, there were a couple dozen Avengers—or former Avengers—and I had plans for most of the ones who didn’t have their own series. However, I had also limited the number of active Avengers in any given issue, in order to allow more space to each individual character and to avoid giving my artists interminable crowd scenes to draw. As a result, it seemed as if every time we turned around, some other writer would be glomming onto any Avenger who wasn’t currently on the active roster for one miniseries or another—and all too often under the supervision of someone other than Mark.

And there was little we could do to prevent this because we “weren’t using them.” I think that we even had to get permission to use the Beast in a story because he had become a Defender.

Star Power

Some of Marvel’s mightiest became Tinseltown Titans in this *Avengers* spin-off. Headshots by Bob Hall/Brett Breeding and Al Milgrom, grabbed from various *West Coast Avengers* covers.

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AVENGERS

PRIORITY IDENTIFICATION

Roger Stern

AUTHORIZED CARDHOLDER

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So we came up with this scheme for an *Avengers* limited series, which would have Hawkeye moving to the West Coast to establish a second Avengers base there—as part of the “Ultimate Vision” storyline I was developing in the main book. [Editor’s note: See this issue’s “Roger Stern’s Avengers” article for more on the “Ultimate Avengers” story arc.] And then, after the Vision storyline had been wrapped up, the plan was for the West Coast compound to continue to periodically appear in the *Avengers*. In that way, we could have about a dozen Avengers on active duty, but usually no more than five or six in any given issue. And if other people wanted to use them, they’d have to come to Mark for approval first. Unfortunately, it didn’t quite work out that way.

AUSHENKER: *Can you talk about your collaboration process with Bob Hall and Brett Breeding?*

STERN: We worked together in what was then called the traditional “Marvel style.” I would write a plot, from which Bob would pencil the story. Then I would get photocopies of Bob’s penciled art and write my script based on what he had drawn. And then, once the story had been lettered—in India ink, right on the art boards, in those days—it would go off to Brett for inking. I was already living in Upstate New York by then, and I think Bob was living in the metropolitan area. And Brett was living in Delaware, I believe. So we never saw each other the whole time we were working on the miniseries. And, in those pre-Internet days, the art pages—actual 11" by 17" pieces of Bristol board—physically traveled several hundred miles in the process.

AUSHENKER: *The cover of the first issue of the mini made a big game out of which members would be selected. Who, behind the scenes, selected the characters that made the final cut? Why this mix of characters?*

STERN: I would guess that the cover was probably Mark Gruenwald’s idea—maybe with input from Mike Carlin, who was then Gruenie’s assistant editor. I rarely had any input into the covers.

AUSHENKER: *Did you have a favorite or least favorite character in this group, writing-wise? Was it fun to write the female characters Tigra and Mockingbird?*

STERN: Oh, I liked them all. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have used them. But I’d had a soft spot for Tigra since her old days as the Cat. And I’d liked how Steve [Grant] and Mark [Gruenwald] had developed Bobbi as Mockingbird. I thought that Tigra and Mockingbird both made good Avengers.

AUSHENKER: *Would you like to comment on any aspect of the storyline that culminated with the group slipping into Graviton’s lair incognito (Tigra disguised as Madame Masque, Mockingbird as a bartender, etc.) to spring a battle on him?*

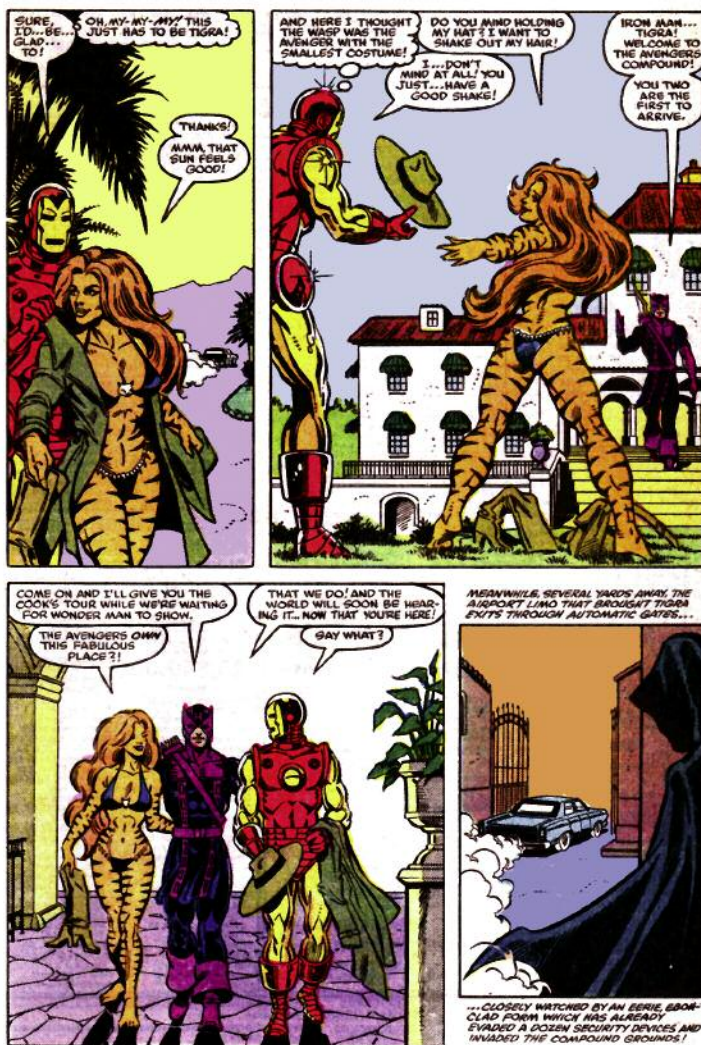
STERN: I remember deciding on Graviton as the main villain of the piece, because I wanted the new team to



Casting Call

When the Avenging Archer put out the word for a California-based team of heroes, little did the limited series’ writer, Roger Stern, realize that he would be a victim of the concept’s success. *West Coast Avengers* #1 (Sept. 1984) cover art by Bob Hall and Brett Breeding.

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go up against someone who wouldn't be easy to beat. The Blank, whom I'd originally planned to introduce as a Spider-Man villain, seemed to make a good stooge for Graviton. (And since no one ever used the Blank after this story, I was finally able to have him bedevil Spider-Man ... some 24 years later.)

As for the Avengers going undercover to take the fight to Graviton—well, they knew that they had a fight on their hands, and that their strongest member had been captured. Of course, they would use disguises. That's just how smart they were.

AUSHENKER: *I'm guessing that the success of the miniseries is what led to the permanent series that Englehart wrote? Or was that planned from the beginning? How were sales on the WCA mini?*

STERN: Oh, our sales were great. *The Avengers* regularly sold over 200,000 copies a month, and the first issue of *WCA* sold an additional 100,000 copies over that. Now, of course, that was for the first issue of a new *Avengers* book. Sales dropped off after that. But the last issue still sold about 20,000 copies more than *Avengers* #250, which it led into.

Remember, the original plan was to establish a second branch of the Avengers, based in California. Once the miniseries was over, I was supposed to have the members of both branches to draw upon for my stories, which I was already planning out. If I came up with a story wherein—oh, let's say, Moses Magnum was creating a super-volcano in the middle of Kansas

... I could mix and match Avengers from both coasts to assemble a select team to deal with the challenge.

It was never my intent for the West Coast branch to be spun off into a separate series. But, as I said, *WCA* sold so well that a decision was made to turn it into a regular monthly book—written and drawn by somebody else. In a way, Bob and I were victims of our own success.

From a marketing standpoint, it sort of made sense. Steve Englehart was returning to Marvel, and there was obviously some interest in having him write a series that would recapture the excitement that he'd made with *The Avengers* in the '70s. And he and Al Milgrom had always worked well together. I certainly never blamed them.

But things could have been handled better by the office. The *West Coast Avengers* series was already a done deal, by the time I was told. Suddenly, I had only half of the Avengers I thought I was going to have. I had to scrap plans for about a year's worth of stories, and scramble to devise new ones. I was months getting caught back up.

Could have been worse, though. At least, both *Avengers* titles were under the same editor.

AUSHENKER: *How did you feel about Englehart's take on WCA and where he and artist Al Milgrom took the long-running series after your version?*

STERN: Geez, that was what ... 26, 27 years ago? At this point, the only thing I remember about Steve's and Al's stories were that they went off in their own

Spin Cycle

(above) Graviton vs. the left-coasters on the Hall/Breeding cover to issue #3 (Nov. 1984) of the limited series. (left) Iron Man gets an eyeful of Tigra in *WCA* vol. 1 #1.

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Return Engagement

Cover to the first issue (Oct. 1985) of the WCA ongoing monthly. Art by Al Milgrom and Joe Sinnott.

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STEVE ENGLEHART

In 2008, Steve Englehart, writer of the West Coast Avengers series, told this reporter how he decided on setting the group's headquarters in the affluent Los Angeles neighborhood of Pacific Palisades. He had driven down from his home base in Oakland, California, to visit his cousin, who lived in Westchester at the time. The cousin drove Englehart on a day-long tour around the L.A. area, describing each of the enclaves, while Englehart scribbled notes on an AAA map. They drove down the coast past Manhattan Beach and Palos Verdes, over to Long Beach, up the 710 past Compton, to downtown Los Angeles, Mulholland Drive, Topanga Canyon, and Pacific Palisades, winding up in Santa Monica.

Through this road trip, Englehart gained a comprehensive, if superficial, understanding of L.A., and he decided that the sunny, hammy, well-heeled West Coast Avengers would be stationed in Pacific Palisades, while the more secretive Green Lantern Corps set up their headquarters on Mulholland.

AUSHENKER: You had already quit writing comics when you received the West Coast Avengers assignment...

STEVE ENGLEHART: I was working for Atari at the time. I was doing game design and writing manuals.

AUSHENKER: Did you think you had left comics for good?

ENGLEHART: Yeah, up until that Sunday night. Both [Marvel editor-in-chief Jim] Shooter and [DC Comics executive editor Dick] Giordano asked me to come work for them. I told them, I'm not writing

I Am Iron Man!

Jim Rhodes proves his mettle as Iron Man to mouthy Hawkeye on page 5 of the fourth issue of the West Coast Avengers mini.

From the Stern/Hall/Breeding combo.

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direction. Didn't they have Wonder Man become a motion-picture action hero? Nothing wrong with that. But my plan was that—in his free time—Simon [Williams, a.k.a. Wonder Man] would have become the world's greatest stunt man.

AUSHENKER: Was it a fun challenge working with the Jim Rhodes Iron Man and the overall dissatisfaction Hawkeye and others had with dealing with this ersatz Iron Man?

STERN: Hey, Rhodney was a real Iron Man. He just wasn't the original. And I don't think the team really had time to become dissatisfied. After all, most of them hadn't known that Tony Stark was Iron Man ... at least, not at that point in time.

AUSHENKER: Looking back, how do you feel about the miniseries in respect to your canon of writing achievements with Amazing Spider-Man, Doctor Strange, etc.? Do you consider it a major or minor note in your body of comics work?

STERN: I'd say that it's a nice little sidebar to my Avengers stories. It was very nice to see it collected in a hardcover edition after all these years.

ASSEMBLE THEM ALL!

FlashBack!

AVENGERS ACTION FIGURES IN THE BACK ISSUE ERA

by *Chris Franklin*



Earth's Mightiest Megos

Courtesy of Chris Franklin, this article's writer, Mego's 8-inch action figures of a quintet of Quinjet-riders: (left to right) Falcon, Iron Man (with his '70s faceplate nose), Captain America, Hulk, and Thor.

Walk into any retail store with a toy department today, and you'll probably find figures based on Earth's Mightiest Heroes. The cinematic adventures of Iron Man, Thor, and Captain America have increased their profile so much that toys from each film are a sure bet.

But that wasn't always the case. During the childhoods of most *BACK ISSUE* readers, the selection of heroes wasn't nearly as great. Those characters that made it onto bubbled cards were a rare breed indeed. But the Avengers did assemble ... at least in part. In their early years of the 1960s, Avengers figures were pretty scarce, but that would change in the next decade. The story of who made it and who didn't, and why, is truly a tale to astonish. From Mego to Mattel and beyond, this is the story of the Avengers in plastic!

THE MEGO DECADE

The Mego Corporation released its World's Greatest Super-Heroes line in 1972. Utilizing 8-inch-tall bodies and removable cloth costumes, Mego produced figures of both Marvel and DC characters [as well as Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan and Robert E. Howard's Conan; at the time those savage heroes headlined their own series at DC and Marvel, respectively]. Between 1973 and 1976, Mego assembled five of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, starting, of course, with the First Avenger himself.

Mego's Captain America lacked the white lower-sleeve portion and red gloves of his comic-book uniform. Today, while most collectors agree

that while Captain America is a bit to be desired: "because he had an a Heiler of the Mego have changed that,

Captain America adapted by Mego, flesh hands instead to use whatever pa figures have hairy concurrent Planet c it still raises the eye

Tony Stark's alter Iron Man's fisted, cut over the plastic "c One oddity that p helmet was sculpted intended the Iron M have a nose on his

Mego's Incredible standard Mego figu did not diminish the be short, but he's

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BACK ISSUE #56

"Avengers Assemble!" Writer ROGER STERN's acclaimed 1980s Avengers run, West Coast Avengers, early Avengers toys, and histories of Hawkeye, Mockingbird, and Wonder Man, with art and commentary from JOHN and SAL BUSCEMA, JOHN BYRNE, BRETT BREEDING, TOM DeFALCO, STEVE ENGLEHART, BOB HALL, AL MILGROM, TOM MORGAN, TOM PALMER, JOE SINNOTT, and more. PÉREZ cover!

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