

SPECIAL GIANT-SIZED "TABLOIDS AND TREASURES" ISSUE

# BACKISSUE!



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**BACKISSUE**  
Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!



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# THE PERILS OF THE DC/MARVEL

## TABLOID ERA

by John Wells

**A DRAMATIC  
BREAK-THRU  
FROM--** **DC** **THE LINE OF  
Super-Stars!**

**LIMITED COLLECTORS' EDITION**  
**WITH ONE MAGIC WORD**  
**SHAZAM!**  
**THE ORIGINAL CAPTAIN MARVEL**

**6 KING-SIZE STORIES**  
★ HOW-TO-DRAW SHAZAM FAMILY  
★ SUPER-SIZE PIN-UP  
★ SPECIAL FUN PAGES  
★ 3D DIORAMA CUT-OUT  
★ BEHIND THE SCENE WITH C. C. BECK (SHAZAM'S ARTIST)

**IN THE GIGANTIC NEW SUPER-SIZE!**

**WARNING-- THIS IS A VERY LIMITED EDITION!**

**ON SALE-- THE FOURTH WEEK IN MAY!**

**RESERVE YOUR COPY OF THIS BLOCK-BUSTER ISSUE NOW!**

**\$1.00**

C.C. BECK 1973

**FlashBack!**

For many 1970s comics fans, few things were as wonderful as the tabloid editions. Measuring 10" x 14" (versus a standard comic's 7" x 10"), every issue wrapped a cardboard cover around a thick collection of carefully chosen stories that popped as much because of their content as the huge size at which they were printed.

As a young engraver and color separator, DC Comics vice president Sol Harrison had worked on many of the industry's earliest comic books and recalled publisher Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's *New Fun* (1935), whose 10" x 15" issues were at odds with the 8" x 10" comics that became the industry standard. Other publishers had dabbled in oversized comics since then, but no one had made a real go of it. Recognizing that readership was declining, Harrison believed that tabloids could be a lifesaver.

"We were looking for a new format," he explained in *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #10 (Jan. 1976), "because our magazines weren't getting proper placement among the 120 magazines on the newsstand at the time. Returning from a trip to the World Color Press plant at Sparta, Illinois, I began to play around with different sizes for comics. None of the sizes seemed to work, since they couldn't be put on a newspaper high-speed color press. But by opening the comic up, with one less fold, we could create a tabloid size comic that would stand out on the newsstand."

There were obvious attractions to the format. A thick 80-page \$1.00 package made more money for retailers than a slim 20-cent comic. The permanence of a sturdy cardboard cover invited comparisons to more respectable children's books and offered an entrance into mass-market retail chains and variety stores. (Some outlets, unaware that these were magazines whose unsold copies could be returned for credit, racked them with coloring books and gave a few early volumes a shelf life of years.)

### THEN ONE FOGGY CHRISTMAS EVE...

With publisher Carmine Infantino's blessing, Harrison assembled a trial issue starring Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Composed entirely of reprints from DC's 1950s *Rudolph* series, the 80-page issue went on sale October 24, 1972, and evidently had a strong sell-through by the end of the Christmas season.

*Shazam!*, a hugely anticipated Captain Marvel revival, was launched the same season and Golden Age reprints from the feature were gathered for DC's second tabloid in May 1973. Under the umbrella title *Limited Collectors' Edition* (curiously beginning its numbering with C-21), the series continued in the late summer and fall with issues devoted to *Tarzan*, *House of Mystery*, and another *Rudolph*. Intent on expanding the readership, Harrison tried out a variety of genres rather than simply spotlighting fan-favorite superheroes.

Their turn came soon enough when the tabloids went bimonthly in 1974 with a pair of issues arriving every two months and filled with reprints chosen by editor E. Nelson Bridwell. *Batman* (LCE #C-25), *Shazam!* (#C-27), and *Superman* (#C-31) were followed by

### Direct to Your Door

DC's house ad for its first superhero tabloid, *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-21 (*Shazam!*).

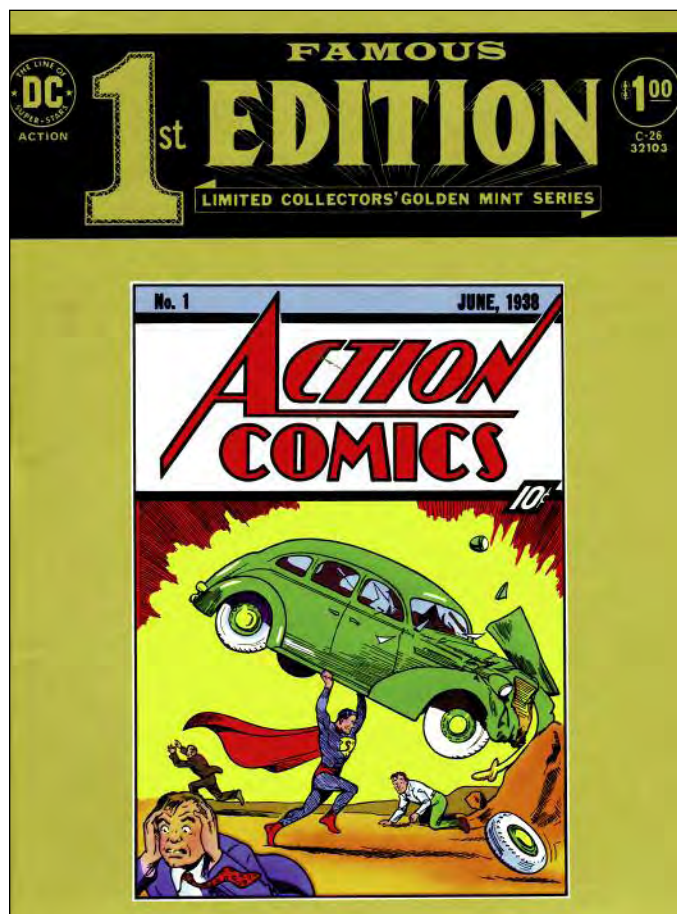
TM & © DC Comics.



Marvel aggressively promoted its inaugural *Spider-Man* volume, offering signed and numbered copies of the first thousand issues for \$5 each. Mail order was a key component in the tabloids' success. Both DC and Marvel stockpiled each issue and pitched them relentlessly in house ads.

(below right) Marvel got into the tabloid game in 1974 with *Marvel Treasury Edition* #1, starring your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man. (below left) This *Daily Bugle* mockup was included in that issue.

© 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.



***Don't Be Fooled***  
Some dishonest folks removed the outer cover to *Famous First Edition's* reprinting of *Action Comics* #1 (a full-sized *Action* #1 cover repro was inside) and sold the replica as the real deal.

TM & © DC Comics.



Vol. 1. No. 1.

## Stan Lee and Steve Ditko Introduce Green Goblin in Spider-Man #14

**ALL THIS, AND THE INCREDIBLE HULK, TOO**



A rare 1964 photo of Stan Lee and Steve Ditko discussing the latest issue of SPIDER-MAN

Marvel Press International, June 1964. — It's universally known by now that in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (August 1962), the creative team of writer editor Stan Lee and artist Don Heck created the masked super-villain known as Spider-Man by waiting word. So too instantly popular was this unique super-doer — and so certain was Stan of Spider's potential stardom — that, even though *Amazing Fantasy* #15 was slated to be a last issue, Stan had even managed to find him a publisher: Max Goodman, who put out a regular magazine devoted solely to the witty, introspective dialogue and characterization of Steve for his somehow awkward yet graceful portrayal of Spider. This time they pulled out all the stops, and produced one of the most important

the spinster's escapades. *The Amazing Spider-Man* (11 March 1965) was the first comic book to combine the force of an exploding bombshell almost immediately rivaling even *The Fantastic Four* in popularity. By the thirteenth issue, Spidey had already met and defeated his arch-enemy, the brilliant and memorable supervillain, Doctor Octopus. The following issue (p. 5) saw Doc back in his fringed, "My Sun the Doctor" (p. 6) to his old grey-tinted mentor, the Lizard, Mysterio. Electro

was introduced in the twelfth (p. 6) and really something special. Stan was already famous for his

table laundries of all time – the Green Goblin – at the same time peopling the story with the likes of the evil Enforcers, the Daily Bugle, even personifying the city of New York as a character (p. 10). Thompson, located at Aunt May's, a bunch of nutty Hollywood types, plus the incredible (if mildly incoherent) Hulk, who was currently in limbo between various phases of his own green-theater career.

The twelfth was pure, dazzling dynamite, in the Lee-Ditko manner. (For the Spider-Man, see p. 6) The opening sequence of the full-story, Stan's powerful suggestion of the city as a character (p. 10),

— Thompson, p. 10, p. 23.

**THE PICTURE**  
New York, N.Y. 10017

**JOHN ROMITA PULLS OFF  
ARTISTIC TOUR-DE-FORCE  
IN SPIDER-MAN #42**

### Spidey Becomes the Greatest Super-Star of All

When Steve Ditko moved on to different pastures, Stan and Ray were fortunate in having recently obtained the talents of one of the finest superhero artists in the field — who had spent the previous decade buried thigh-deep in romance comics at another company. This was Johnny Romita (surname: Jety), who had previously drawn the wall-crawler in a couple of now-classic issues of *Spider-Man*, and who now was destined to become the longest-running, perhaps most important Spider artist ever.

For, over the next year or two, under Johnny's pencil-point and Stan's typewriter, *Spider-Man* was able to surpass even the firmly-entrenched *Fantastic Four* as Marvel's (and maybe the world's) most popular superhero comic-book. John combined the characterization which he'd learned doing romance strips, his own vital interest in dynamically power-packed drawing, and some of the clearest, smoothest storytelling in the history of the medium.

Besides introducing such new super-villains as the Rhino, the Kinnipin, and others, Stan and John also more fully developed the personality of *Daily Bugle* publisher J. Jonah Jameson's son, John — and, beginning with the startling, memorable final panel of *Comic #42* (Johnny's fourth), we finally met one of the most famous Spidey characters of all — Mary Jane Watson.

For the full, unfettered story, see p. 38.



Revealed at last! Artist John Romita works from real-life situations.



# BUGLE

Tuesday, June 18, 1974.

**WEATHER:** Mostly

## BULLPEN BRAIN-TRUST KEEPS SPIDER-MAN A FAMILY AFFAIR



A composite photo of the hard-working heirs of the Lee-Ditko-Romita legacy.

## The Torch Is Passed – But The Grandeur Goes On And On

[illegible]

Several early *Spider-Animals*, too, were penciled with loving care by *Larry Lieber*, under John R.'s personal supervision. Working for months on a single tale, *Larry* wound up being responsible for one or three of the loudest, most momentous wall-crawler winners of all. [For a special pin-up by *Larry*, see p. 98.]

...Another fine artist, working within the tradition of both Remita and Ditko, is Gil Kane, one of the magazine's top writers. Kane is Len Wein, who has the formidable yet difficult task of *digesting* up a new Marvel super-team to face Spidey every month, either in *Marvel Team-Up* or in the new *Giant-Size Spider-Man*. Len works closely in conjunction with his old friend Gerry Conway (see next article) to keep our web-bred hero's adventures colorful and well coordinated.

...While *Spider-Man* and *Spider-Man* are the





# You Know Dasher and Dancer...



## Rudolph The RED-NOSED REINDEER

by Mark Arnold



The character of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer was originally created by Robert L. May in 1939 for a series of ads for retailer Montgomery Ward. May's brother-in-law Johnny Marks turned Rudolph into a hit song that was popularized by cowboy singer Gene Autry.

A Rudolph theatrical cartoon was released in 1947 by Max Fleischer independently after he was ousted from his own Fleischer Studios in 1944. (Ironically, Sheldon Mayer worked as an opaquer for Fleischer in the early 1930s before entering the comic-book field, and funny-animal cartoonist Rube Grossman was a Fleischer animator as well, but neither worked on this cartoon.)

This version became a Christmas perennial in the early days of television until the Animagic Rankin-Bass version superseded it in 1964, which still airs to this day. Rankin-Bass recruited original songwriter Johnny Marks to write more songs to bring the project more authenticity, but the Rankin-Bass version also created a number of other characters not associated with any previous versions of the story and redesigned Rudolph to make him more cute and cuddly.

Rankin-Bass' success was so great that they came back with two other shows: a 1976 TV special called *Rudolph's Shiny New Year* and a 1979 theatrical release called *Rudolph and Frosty's Christmas in July*. Despite these latter-day shows being produced concurrently with the DC treasures, there was no crossover or connection whatsoever, other than the Rudolph name and the facts that he had a red nose and was a reindeer that hung around with Santa Claus.



SHELDON MAYER

Sheldon Mayer (1917–1991) was already known for his work on *Scribbly* and *Sugar and Spike* when the DC Comics assignment came through to take on a new version of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, which had previously appeared

in 12 annual standard-size and one giant-size comics from 1950 through 1963. These earlier editions were all drawn by Rube Grossman (1913–1964), who also did a comic-strip version.

Grossman and Mayer had worked on similar assignments before, most notably many DC funny-animal humor titles such as *Peter Porkchops*, *The Three Mouseketeers*, *Funny Stuff*, *Leading Screen Comics*, *Nutsy Squirrel*, *Flippity and Flop*, *Hollywood Funny Folks*, and many others. They had similar drawing styles, but many consider Mayer the better of the two and Mayer had created many of these characters including Doodles Duck and J. Rufus Lion.

Merrily Mayer Harris, Sheldon's daughter and the inspiration for Sugar of *Sugar and Spike*, says, "My father was born on April Fool's Day in a poor Jewish neighborhood in Harlem."

Harris says of Grossman, "I met Rube Grossman when I was six or seven. He was a short, fat, Jewish bald

### Midnight Riders

Santa Claus takes a red-nosed ride on this original cover painting by Sheldon Mayer for *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-53, the 1977 *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* annual.

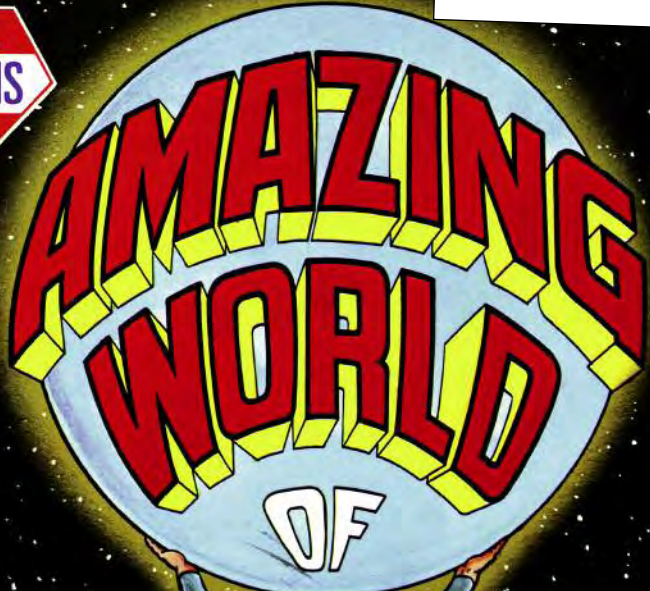
Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

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# THE AMAZING WORLD OF SUPERMAN TABLOIDS

by Michael Eury



# SUPERMAN

Special BONUS! GIANT POSTER "MAP of KRYPTON"

Was there any character more deserving a showcase in comics' biggest format than its first superhero, Superman? In addition to the reprint editions headlined by the Action Ace, Superman starred in four exceptional tabloids of interest to virtually every Fan of Steel.

## THE AMAZING WORLD OF SUPERMAN

Superman theme-park rides are common today, thanks to the Six Flags franchise, but they certainly didn't exist during the *BACK ISSUE* era. So imagine the fervor among comics readers in 1972 when plans were announced for an amusement park solely dedicated to the Man of Steel: Superman Land!

DC had floated such a concept almost 20 years earlier: The 1955 opening of Disneyland inspired the story "Superman in Superman Land," by writer Bill Finger, penciler Wayne Boring, and inker Stan Kaye, in *Action Comics* #210 (Nov. 1955). That didn't fly, and most DC readers in 1972 weren't even aware of that earlier notion of a Superman park when a small Midwestern town with the good fortune of sharing a name with one of pop culture's most famous fictional cities, Metropolis, Illinois, brokered a deal with DC Comics to market the town (population: roughly 7000) as "Superman's hometown." The Metropolis Chamber of Commerce proclaimed January 21, 1972 as "Superman Day" and invited Carmine Infantino, then-president of National Periodical Publications, Inc. (now DC Comics) to the ceremony, as Superman was officially designated a "Distinguished Son of Metropolis." An ambitious goal of building a Superman Land amusement park there was announced.

To commemorate the event, in 1973 DC published a tabloid-sized one-shot titled *The Amazing World of Superman: Metropolis Edition*. Edited by DC's production manager Sol Harrison (abetted by Superman editor Julius Schwartz and assistant editor E. Nelson Bridwell), *Amazing World* instantly became, at the time, the must-have sourcebook for all things Super! Published in black-and-white (with washtones), this 68-page treasury opened with the story that first presented the dream: the 12-page classic "Superman in Superman Land." It was followed by a "How to Draw Superman" page by artist Curt Swan and reprints of the "Guide to Characters in Superman Family Portrait" and "How the Super-Family Came to Earth" features from Silver Age Superman Annuals.

*BACK ISSUE* readers would definitely appreciate the photo-heavy article "How a Comic Magazine is Created," depicting the process, from script to printing press, of the production of a DC comic book. Depicted therein are Infantino, Schwartz, Swan, Harrison, Nick Cardy, Denny O'Neil, Murphy Anderson, Gaspar Saladino, Jack Adler, and many other DC staffers, allowing readers a rare glimpse of the people behind their favorite comics. This fascinating feature even includes photographs of the engraving plant at Chemical Colorplate in

### "Official Metropolis Edition"

This 1973 tabloid not only engendered enthusiasm for the Superman theme park that never was, it also created an "Amazing World" brand used by Superman comics, a Carmine Infantino biography, and a comics website. Superman art by Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson.

TM & © DC Comics.





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Carmine Infantino

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**ASSISTANT EDITOR**  
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**CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS**  
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Murphy Anderson  
Wayne Boring  
Bob Brown  
Curt Swan

The Amazing World of Superman, Metropolis Edition, Published by National Periodical Publications, Inc., 909 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. Copyright © 1973, National Periodical Publications, Inc. Printed in U.S.A. For additional copies send \$2.40 each, (check or money order only) to Metropolis Recreation, Inc. P.O. Box 809, Metropolis, Illinois 62960.

1



Shortly after this one-shot was published, Neal Adams revealed his conceptual drawings for Metropolis' proposed real-world Superman Land, a park which was to be called the Amazing World of Superman. Artist Rick Bryant, who worked on DC's production staff at the time the *Amazing World of Superman* one-shot was assembled, vaguely recalls the tabloid but cannot forget the day Adams presented his commissioned drawings: "I did see the Neal Adams art as he brought it in, and there was excitement for this to actually be built." Adams' designs included a giant statue of Superman, standing arms akimbo, at the entranceway, and attractions representing a voyage to Krypton, the Bottle City of Kandor, Smallville, Superman's Rogues' Gallery, and a Fortress of Solitude.

Despite these grand plans, Bryant laments, "it just did not go forward." The theme park was stalemated by economic setbacks including the oil embargo of the early '70s, and the concept was eventually scrapped. Metropolis, Illinois, which now boasts a Superman statue in its town square and a Superman Museum, has since continued the tradition of an annual Superman Celebration each June, blending the excitement of a comic convention with the intimacy of a small-town street fair. Each Celebration features special guests from the world of Superman comics and cinema. I had the honor of being a guest in 2008, after the publication of my book, *The Krypton Companion*, and had a wonderful time.

The disappointment of the implosion of the amusement-park project aside, the *Amazing World of Superman* tabloid is the perfect complement to the Superman reader's library. Seek it out.

## SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE MAGAZINE

The 1970s might have started with dashed hopes for Superman fans as the theme park fizzled, but nearing the end of the decade, director Richard Donner and actor Christopher Reeve convinced millions that a man could fly in the 1978 box-office hit, *Superman: The Movie*. Commemorating this milestone was *Superman: The Movie Magazine*, published by DC Comics—in the tabloid format—as *All-New Collectors' Edition* #C-62.

"I vaguely recall there being some talk about the fact that 'movie magazines' were cashing in on the Superman movie and DC had nothing at all coming out," says then-DC staffer Bob Rozakis, who contributed

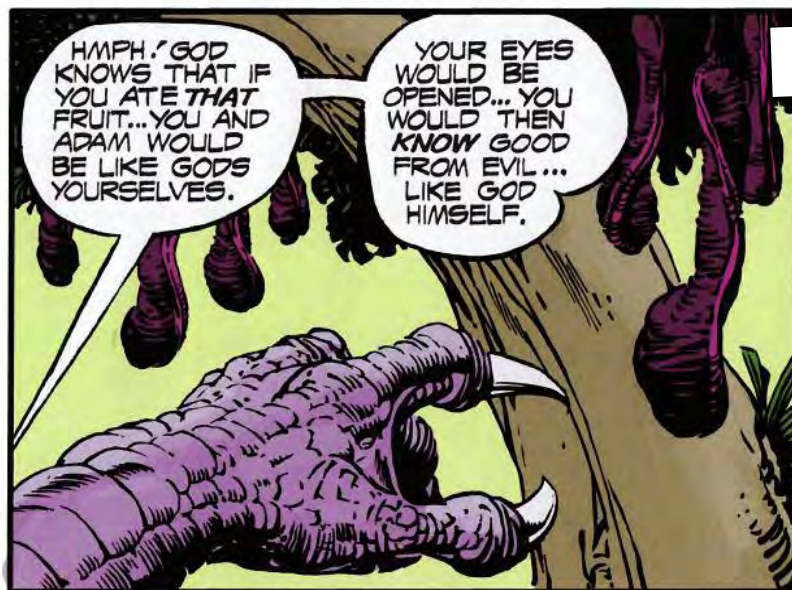
**Simply Amazing!**  
(left) If the contents of *Amazing World of Superman* don't excite you, you're certainly not a Superman fan!  
(right) Lead-in page for the article "How a Comic Magazine is Created."

TM & © DC Comics.





# DC COMICS' *BEYOND Capes!* THE BIBLE



by Eddy Zeno

## Forbidden Fruit

In the Garden of Eden, Eve is tempted by the Serpent in this sequence from DC's *The Bible*, lushly rendered by Nestor Redondo, over Joe Kubert layouts and a Sheldon Mayer script.

TM & © DC Comics.



A unique, tabloid-sized comic book appeared on magazine stands in 1975. Dated June-July of that year, its full title was *The Most Spectacular Stories Ever Told .. from the Bible*. It will hereafter be referred to as *The Bible*, or as *Limited Collectors' Edition* (LCE) #C-36. Carmine Infantino, Sheldon Mayer, Joe Kubert, Nestor Redondo, and Sol Harrison were listed as contributors. On the inside back cover, editor/writer E. Nelson Bridwell was also acknowledged for his expertise as "DC's resident Biblical scholar." Planned as the first in a series of Old and New Testament illustrated tales, unfortunately, no sequels appeared.

### THE GENESIS OF AN IDEA

In a sense, one can trace the 1975 *Limited Collectors' Edition* back to M. C. "Max" Gaines. A youthful Sheldon "Shelly" Mayer worked for Max at McClure Syndicate, joining him in 1936. Mayer followed the boss when Gaines left McClure to partner with Harry Donenfeld and more directly with Jack Liebowitz, forming All-American Comics. The year was 1939 and Mayer became editor of the line. Max sold his interest in All-American in 1946 to Donenfeld and Liebowitz. He left his

superheroes to merge with theirs but took *Picture Stories from the Bible* with him and began Educational Comics (EC).

*Picture Stories from the Bible* began in 1942. It had primitive art, nor were the events dynamically portrayed. Perhaps it was at this time when Mayer stored the thought in the back of his mind that he would like to play the lead on such a project one day using the best available talent.

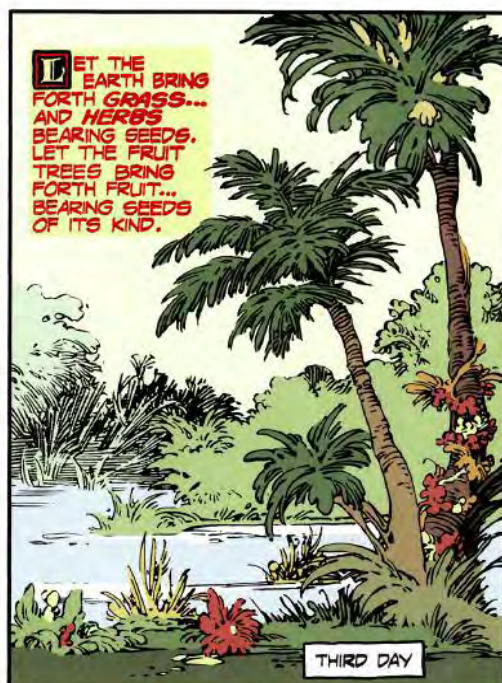
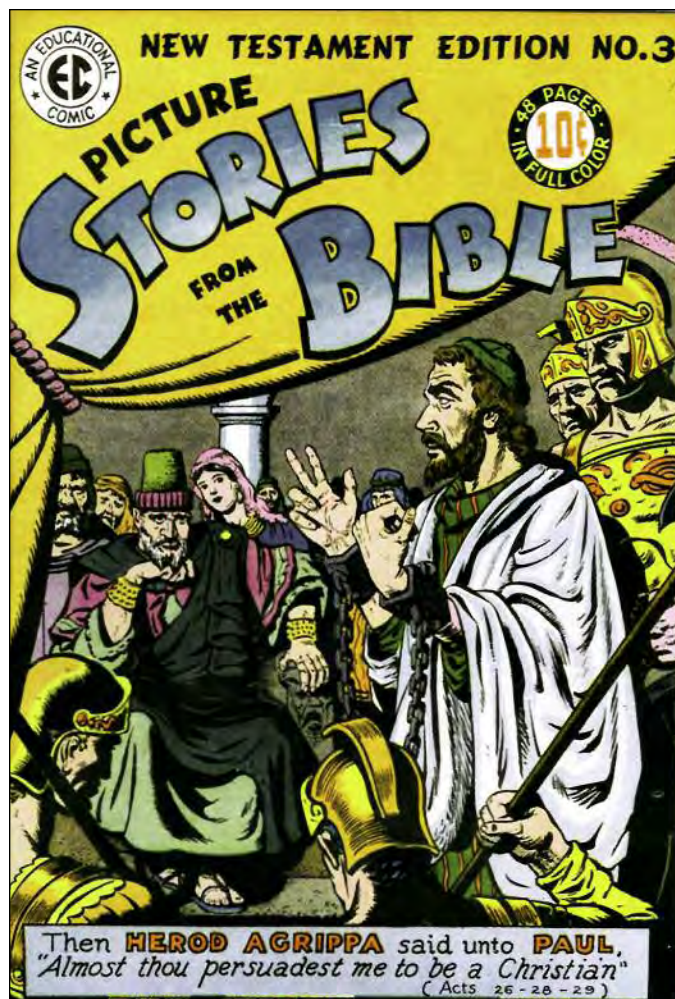
Gaines was killed in a boating accident in 1947. Mayer had stayed at All-American but gave up his editorship in 1948 to return to his first love, cartooning. He would go on to create features like *Sugar and Spike*, babies whose language was perfectly intelligible to them but babble to adults. Though the mischievous tykes became as well known as his semi-autobiographical boy cartoonist, Scribbly, Sheldon was hardly limited to humor. When cataracts began affecting his sight, he wrote horror, mystery, and superhero stories for DC Comics. By the early to mid-1970s, he was also considered a consultant to the company—not as official as, say, Bill Gaines (Max's son), whose *MAD*



## Long Before Limited Collectors' Edition #C-36...

...Picture Stories from the Bible presented Old and New Testament tales to comic-book readers. Don Cameron was the cover artist for this third New Testament issue (Mar. 1946). (below) From DC's *The Bible*, a page from the story of Creation.

© 1946 EC Publications.



magazine had been so profitable that he officially went over DC's financial records and kibitzed with then-president and publisher Carmine Infantino, but enough that DC paid for Mayer's health insurance while continuing to benefit from his advice, a win-win for both corporate and creator.

Infantino played a primary role in pushing 1975's *Bible* project toward publication in large-size format. In *Comic Book Artist* # 1 (vol. 1, Spring 1998, TwoMorrows) he remembered:

"I called him [Shelly Mayer] once in a while and we just talked. I remember asking him about doing the *Bible* tabloids and he wrote those for Joe Kubert. He also wrote about the New Testament but that was never printed. It was in script form—he wrote his scripts with little pictures. He did them all that way."



CARMINE INFANTINO

In *Amazing World of DC Comics* #5 (Mar. 1975), Mayer said, "I ... completed an assignment to convert 'Genesis,' (the first book of the Old Testament) into a 64-page comic book. I rough-sketched that script rather than typed it because I needed the advice of several theologians, and it was easier to look at pictures than to wade thru the scene descriptions."





"In the great Hall of the Justice League, there are assembled the world's four greatest heroes..."

In late 1975, an even greater assembly occurred at said Hall of Justice, as those three junior Super Friends—Wendy, Marvin, and Wonder Dog—were introduced to the entire Justice League of America!

#### HI, I'M ROBIN, AND I'LL BE YOUR TOUR GUIDE

Fans who picked up the *Super Friends* tabloid (actually *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-41) with the rainbow-blasting cover held the very first Super Friends comic in their hands. The Hanna-Barbera-produced television series had been airing for over two years, with no tie-in comic offered by DC. The logo and art style on the cover demonstrated just how closely this comic would be related to its television counterpart. Cover artist Alex Toth was the chief character designer on the series, so the heroes looked just like their animated versions, minus a redrawn Superman face. DC's production department infamously pasted a ten-year-old Curt Swan/George Klein-drawn Superman head over Toth's Man of Steel. Toth was in good company, as DC did the same thing to no less than Jack Kirby's art during the decade!

The SF vibe continued in the interiors, with Toth handling the art chores on the contents and first pages, and series consultant E. Nelson Bridwell providing the script. Robin, the Teen Wonder was leading created-for-television characters Wendy, Marvin, and Wonder Dog to the Hall of Justice (HOJ) for a secret surprise.

When the Teen Wonder opened the doors to the HOJ (and readers turned the page), the meddling kids and their dog were astounded to find the *entire Justice League* greeting them!

Aside from the main Super Friends—Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Aquaman—the junior trio had also met Flash and Green Arrow over the course of the television series. They (and readers) got their first glimpse of what the Atom, Hawkman, Red Tornado, Green Lantern, Elongated Man, and Black Canary would look like if Toth had designed them for television.

The Leaguers then gave the kids a tour of their trophy room. Having worked as an editorial assistant under both Mort Weisinger and Julius Schwartz, Bridwell's superpower of continuity shined through here, as old JLA members and foes were discussed, from Snapper Carr to Amazo. Marvin even tried on Green Arrow's original, pre-Neal Adams uniform, which managed to get a chuckle out of the Man of Steel. Marvin's masquerade reminded him of a JLA case, and as he reminisced, on the next page, the true nature of this book was revealed...

It was mostly a bunch of JLA reprints!

#### Rainbow Coalition

TV's Justice League, the Super Friends, in their first comic-book appearance in *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-41 (Dec. 1975–Jan. 1976). Note the Swan-patched Superman face, and that cover artist Alex Toth's interior content is blurred in the text.

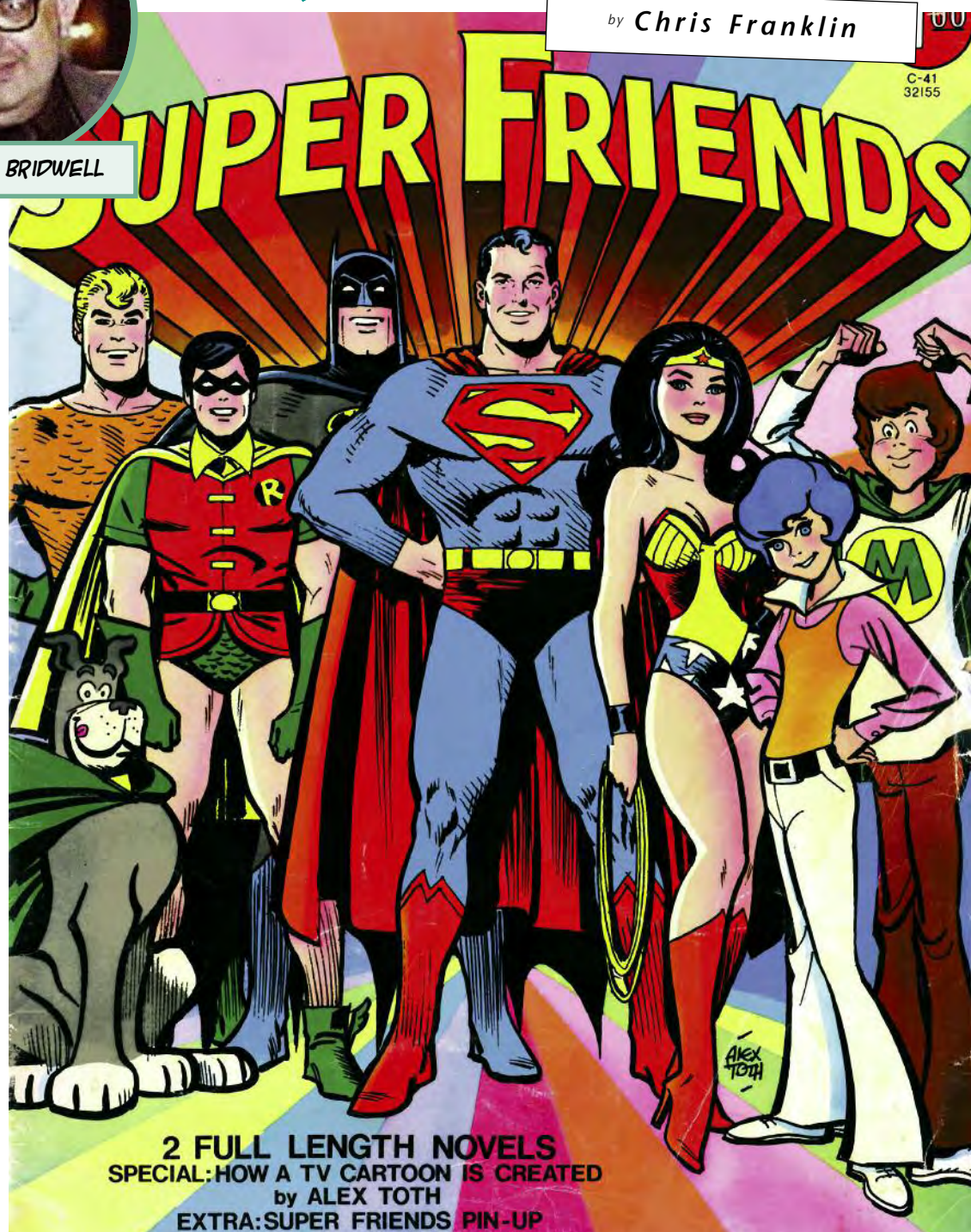
TM & © DC Comics.

# The Kids in the Hall (of Justice): A WHIRLWIND TOUR WITH THE SUPER FRIENDS

by Chris Franklin



E. NELSON BRIDWELL





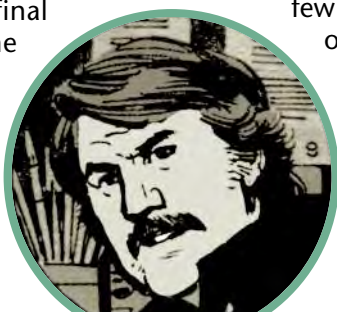


### CREATED FROM THE COSMIC LEGENDS OF THE UNIVERSE

Now, this wasn't the kind of bait-and-switch DC pulled a year later in the *Superman Salutes the Bicentennial* tabloid, which contained nothing but stories of Revolutionary War hero Tomahawk, with the Man of Steel only appearing on the cover [see *BACK ISSUE* #41]! No, at least these tales *did* feature the same characters from the *Super Friends* TV series, and after all, the *Super Friends* and *Justice League* names were used interchangeably on the show.

Superman's memories gave way to a reprint of "Operation: Jail the Justice League!" from *Justice League of America* #61 (Mar. 1968) by Gardner Fox, Mike Sekowsky, and Sid Greene. In it, the entire JLA masquerades as Green Arrow, when the real GA mysteriously quits the team and abandons his superhero career, warning his fellow Leaguers that to question his decisions or follow him would be disastrous. Determined to solve this mystery and help their friend, each of the heroes disguise themselves as the Ace Archer and run afoul of Dr. Destiny, who was masquerading as their individual foes. He uses his Materioptron weapon to switch the disguised Justice Leaguers with their actual enemies, and then incarcerates them as Green Arrow himself. The actual story is just as confusing as it sounds, but it culminates in a final battle with the assembled heroes and the real villains duking it out, and in some ways presages the later *Challenge of the Super Friends* incarnation of the television series, fondly remembered for featuring a similar villain grouping known as the Legion of Doom, and plots that are just as ambitiously nonsensical but fun!

Following the reprint, the book segues back to the new Bridwell/Toth material, where Marvin asks about a set of statues that include Robin and a few heroes unknown to him. The Teen Wonder tells Marvin that they are "heroes who, like me, aren't JLA regulars but have helped out from time to time." Continuity-cop Bridwell couldn't resist pointing out Robin's non-JLA status, despite his permanent place on the *Super Friends* roster. *Super Friends* guest star Plastic Man is depicted with non-members Metamorpho and Sargon the Sorcerer, neither of whom appeared on the TV show but had been seen in *JLA*.



ALEX TOTH



Wendy's feminism is riled by the lack of women, and she asks Wonder Woman and Black Canary if any other women have worked with the JLA. All she had to do was turn around to see statues of Batgirl, Mera, Supergirl, and Zatanna, as Toth depicted them right behind her! Hawkman then proudly steers Wendy toward a statue of his wife Hawkgirl, who at that time hadn't yet become an official League member. She would later make a few guest appearances in the next incarnation of the *SF* television series, *The All-New Super Friends Hour*.

Wendy and Marvin had taken the floor, but what of the canine component of these junior *Super Friends*? In an imaginatively rendered sequence, Wonder Dog pantomimes a question for the JLA, and Wendy and Marvin play interpreter for him. Superman answers the question, noting that no other dog has ever been a member of the JLA, not even Krypto, Kal-El's own Dog of Steel.

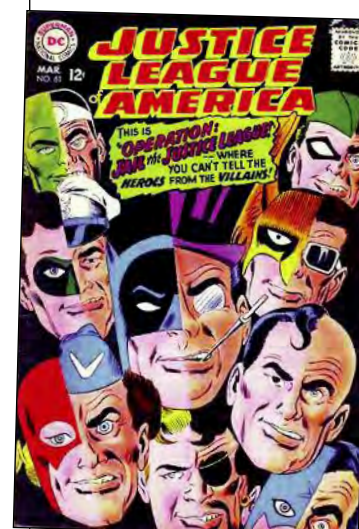
Bridwell again manages to sneak another continuity name-drop here, and shows readers that there is a precedent for canine superheroes in the DCU, despite Wonder Dog's creation as a stand-in for a Scooby-Doo-type character.

Batman points out that although Wonder Dog is the first four-legged Leauger, he himself had, once upon a time, four legs, and the Flash only had one! Wonder Dog is aghast and perplexed at the details of Batman's strange tale. Time for another JLA reprint!!!

### JLAers, Sound Off!

The Junior *Super Friends* meets the entire Justice League. Words by Bridwell, art by Toth.

TM & © DC Comics.



TM & © DC Comics.



# The Secrets of Z Revealed

by Jack Abramowitz



## Follow the Yellow Brick Road ... to Co-Publishing

Marvel and DC Comics present ... MGM's *Marvelous Wizard of Oz* #1 (and only), from 1975. Detail from its cover by John Romita, Sr.

TM & © MGM.

### A QUIZ FOR YOU

Here's a simple quiz for the longtime comics fan: What was the first comic jointly published by Marvel and DC? Just to be fair, we'll throw in a hint for those who need one: It was a tabloid-sized comic released in the mid-1970s. If you said 1976's *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man* ... you're wrong! The first Marvel/DC joint venture was actually a year earlier and it featured neither DC nor Marvel superheroes. What third party's tale was so huge it took both of these comics giants to tell it? It was an adaptation of the MGM film version of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Nowadays, Oz-themed comics are commonplace. Marvel has been adapting L. Frank Baum's novels in a series of miniseries. From *Dorothy to Oz/Wonderland Chronicles* and from *The Legend of Oz to No Place Like Home*, there have been over a dozen Oz-based series since DC's 1986 *Captain Carrot* miniseries, *The Oz-Wonderland War*. When the Marvel/DC tabloid came out, however, it was untapped potential. *Classics Illustrated Junior* #535 had adapted the original book five years earlier, but the MGM film has not been adapted before or since.

An adaptation of MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* differs from adapting its source material, L. Frank Baum's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, in more than just character likenesses. Some differences are cosmetic in nature. One obvious example is that, for the movie, Dorothy's silver shoes were changed to the more visually exciting (and now iconic) ruby slippers. An example of a major plot change is the consolidating of Glinda and the Witch of the North into a single character. Perhaps the most significant change occurs in the dénouement. The idea that "it was all a dream" is not found in Baum's original work. Far from a dream, Oz was always meant to be a real place, visited by Dorothy and many others repeatedly over the course of numerous sequels.

### WHY TWO TITANS?

The first question about the Oz adaptation is why Marvel and DC saw fit to collaborate on such a project. Roy Thomas, who scripted and edited both Oz tabloids, sheds some light on this. "I forgot a lot of details, since it's well over 35 years ago now," Thomas says, "but the basic thing is that [then-Marvel publisher] Stan [Lee] and I came up with the joint notion to adapt L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* as a new entry in Marvel's brand-new tabloid line of comics. John Buscema was chosen as artist, and he liked the idea. He did a few designs, a more realistic rendering than W.W. Denslow's art for *Wizard*. Then, from the book and my suggestions, John had broken down just the first eight pages or so, which just got Dorothy and Toto to Oz, when suddenly, Stan learned that DC was just beginning work on its own adaptation, which, I've learned since, was being done by Shelly Mayer of *Sugar and Spike* fame."

This information came to Lee's attention at an event in which "some toy company" was promoting the launch of a line of Oz figures based on the movie versions of the characters. Timing suggests that this was Mego, best known for its "World's Greatest Super-Heroes" figures. Not only did Mego release a series of Oz movie figures at this time, they also hosted a gala event at Toy Fair to promote the line.

"I never saw any pages or thumbnails of that," Thomas continues, "and for a time Stan and I believed that [DC publisher] Carmine [Infantino] was bluffing when he told Stan that work had already been begun, but apparently not. By some weird coincidence, Marvel and DC were poised to launch dueling *Wizard of Oz* adaptations, book and movie. The two men decided to join forces and make it the first inter-company collaboration. For reasons that escape me, Marvel wound up totally producing the issue—John as artist, me as writer, and Tony DeZuniga, then working for Marvel, as inker, with other Filipino artists of his studio. I've no recollection of DC seeing the job before it was printed, though you'd think they must have."



## The Conan Team Heads to Oz

A peek inside *The Wizard of Oz*, where Roy Thomas' script was brought to life by John Buscema and Tony DeZuniga.

Thanks to Jack Abamowitz for the scans.

TM & © MGM.



### THOSE PRE-INTERNET DAYS

Thomas was awestruck at Buscema's artwork—not just for the quality of it, but for the creative process as well. "I've said before and I'll say it again that John Buscema absolutely astounded me on this project," Thomas reminisces. "I had recently watched the *Wizard* film at the home of John Verpoorten, who owned a 16mm copy of it, and I offered to write up a detailed synopsis for him. John said, 'Nah, I've seen the movie.' Apparently, as I realized later, he'd seen it a time or three but not anything like recently, and certainly not with the idea of adapting it into comics form in mind. I seem to recall that he told me later that it had been several years since he had last seen it. And yet, without any written notes from me, he drew the entire story perfectly—except that one or two minor scenes were transposed in order. I was able to have those few panels re-pasted in the proper sequence, and the pencils were just as you would glean them from seeing the printed book. Amazing!"

The creative process was different in other ways. Nowadays, we could download a copy of the script from online or transcribe the dialogue just by pausing *The Wizard of Oz* on our Blu-Rays. Thomas' workload, however, was more labor-intensive, he explains: "In those pre-VCR days, and lacking a copy of the screenplay, I had to buy audio cassettes of the movie, which had been made privately, and play them over and over and over and over to get the dialogue just right, which is the way I wanted it. I did that late at night on a number of occasions, while my first wife Jeanie was trying to sleep in the same room of our Manhattan apartment. That's probably why I refer to her now as 'my first wife.'"

Another amusing anecdote involves Thomas trying to get the names of the screenwriters in order to give them proper credit for their dialogue: "I phoned the MGM people I was instructed to phone about this, and the person I talked to just couldn't seem to get his tiny mind around the fact that I would care who had written the *Oz* screenplay. Like, I knew about Judy Garland and the actors, and I knew the director, why should I want

to give the writers credit? I explained, keeping as calm as I could when dealing with this idiot, that since virtually all the words I'd be putting into balloons in the comic would have been written by those scripters, not made up by Garland and company or even by L. Frank Baum, who was also getting due credit, I felt they deserved recognition and I was determined to give it to them." While Thomas never convinced the aforementioned "idiot" as to the rightness of his cause, he was ultimately able to acquire the names so that Noll Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allen Wolfe are all prominently credited on the splash page.

The Marvel/DC *Wizard of Oz* tabloid does an admirable job adapting the film. For example, while the first ten pages have yellow caption boxes and red sound effects, the art is colored in blue-and-purple knockout, simulating the sepia tones of the film's first 20 minutes. The only part of the MGM experience truly conspicuous by its absence is the music. "We had no right to use the songs," Thomas laments. "This was not something about which we had a choice. Me, I'd have found a way to work in pieces of the songs if I could have."

The tabloid also includes a number of featurettes. Among these are movie stills, biographies of Baum and the cast, and a map of Oz. The last page, labeled "Coming Oztractions," announces the second issue in

what was being called the "Marvel Treasury of Oz"—a clear indication that DC was onboard for the first volume only.

### A SEQUEL OF SORTS

There are some continuity bumps between the two tabloids because *The Marvelous Land of Oz* is a sequel to the book and touches on aspects completely absent from the film. For example, the cast members must don sunglasses before entering the Emerald City, ostensibly to protect their eyes from the glare. (In actuality, it is the glasses' green tint that makes the city appear to be emerald.) This is a detail omitted from the MGM musical and its comic-book adaptation. Similarly, the Tin Woodsman calls upon the Queen of the Field Mice for assistance.



ROY THOMAS



# TABLOID TEAM-UPS

## The Giant-Size DC-Marvel Crossovers

by Glenn Greenberg



It had long been a story that existed solely in the imaginations of comic-book fans: *Superman and Spider-Man sharing an adventure*. Of course, reality dictated that such a tale could never actually happen. After all, Superman was DC's flagship character. Spider-Man was Marvel's. Weren't the two companies bitter rivals, slugging it out at the newsstands month after month for dominance of the comic-book industry? How could they possibly put that animosity aside and cooperate on a project that would bring together their two most valuable properties?

But in 1976, it happened. DC and Marvel co-published *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man*, a 92-page tabloid-sized epic entitled "The Battle of the Century!" Written by Gerry Conway and illustrated by Ross Andru and Dick Giordano (with uncredited art contributions by Neal Adams, John Romita, Sr., Terry Austin, Joe Rubinstein, and Bob Wiacek), it was inarguably one of the biggest events in the history of the industry. Making it a reality was actually not as difficult as one might think. [Editor's note: For the full story behind the uncredited artists' contributions to *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man*, see BACK ISSUE #11.]

### BIRTH OF A DREAM

For one thing, DC and Marvel had already been involved in a joint publishing venture the previous year: 1975's MGM's *Marvelous Wizard of Oz*, a tabloid-sized adaptation of the classic 1939 movie, scripted by Roy Thomas and illustrated by John Buscema, Tony DeZuniga, and "the Tribe." [Editor's note: See previous article.]

There was also the fact that when the idea of bringing Superman and Spider-Man together was pitched to both companies, their top creative executives were amenable. Conway notes that this would not have been the case just a few years earlier:

"Before Stan [Lee] became Marvel's publisher, you had people like Martin Goodman and his son Chip who were the ultimate business people there, and who would tend to hold a grudge. And at DC, you had [publisher] Carmine Infantino, who *also* tended to hold a grudge! So this was not a good mix."

The atmosphere changed a bit when the Goodmans were out of power at Marvel and Lee was in the publisher position. "Stan was a total pragmatist," Conway recalls. "If it was a matter of making his characters more popular, he had no problem with it."

But how did the idea of *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man* come about? It's of note that the project

### Were You There?

If you were one of the tens of thousands of fans who bought this landmark one-shot when it arrived at newsstands on January 2, 1976, you probably still remember that exhilarating moment! Front cover to *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man* by penciler Ross Andru and inker Dick Giordano (with Neal Adams "inking with a pencil" over the Superman figure and Terry Austin on background inks). Cover design by Carmine Infantino.

Superman TM & © DC Comics. Spider-Man © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.



## Rock 'em, Sock 'em Heroes

Luckily, DC's publisher Carmine Infantino was also one of the industry's top cover designers. Note the evolution of his cover roughs, building to a balanced composition where both companies' characters get equal weight. Special thanks to Jerry Boyd for the art photocopies.

Superman TM & © DC Comics.  
Spider-Man © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.



was proposed not by any of the people who actually worked on it, but by an outside source.

"Around 1973 or '74, the writers Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein—this is how oblique this gets—wrote *All the President's Men*," Conway explains. "They were actually approached to write that book by a New York agent named David Obst. He then set it up with a Hollywood studio and he was the toast of the town, seen as this incredibly smart agent. Stan was looking for ways to develop himself outside of comics, and I guess he and Obst had lunch. Obst ... was someone who knew the comic-book business in a general sense [and] asked why there had never been a crossover or team-up between [Marvel] and DC. And Stan said that Marvel would be happy to do it but those guys [at DC] would never do it! And Obst said to him, 'Look, if I could set it up, would you be willing?' And Stan said, 'Sure.' So Obst then went to DC and again, he's this guy with this incredible credibility, because he represented Woodward and Bernstein, and he offered to negotiate between DC and Marvel, and that's how it happened. He was the guy who made it happen." (Attempts to reach David Obst for comment were unsuccessful.)

### THE ART OF THE DEAL

As Obst, Lee, and Infantino negotiated the deal, Conway moved from Marvel, where he had risen to become one of the company's top writers, to DC, where he would work as an editor.

"As a result of their negotiations, they came up with a formulation whereby Marvel would provide the artist and DC would provide the writer," Conway explains. "As I said, Carmine was a guy who had this kind of tendency to carry grudges and liked to poke people in the eye. He was really proud of the fact I had left Marvel and come over to DC, where I was writing things like Superman stories for Julie Schwartz and so on. So he told Marvel he was going to put me on as the writer, which was kind of like a poke at Marvel, because I had just left Marvel! And I had just left writing *Spider-Man*! But, from a practical point of view, it actually made perfect sense. I was a guy who knew both sets of characters."

The same logic applied to choosing the artist.

"I wanted to work with Ross Andru, who I had worked with on *Spider-Man*," says Conway. "And Ross was a brilliant choice by Marvel, because Ross had also worked for DC and had drawn Superman. He was a really smart guy and a really good storyteller." (Andru passed away in 1993.)



## When Bruces Battle

(right) Bruce Wayne vs. Bruce Banner—

*Batman vs. the Incredible Hulk!* Cover to *DC Special Series* #27 (Fall 1981) by José Luis García-López.

(left) García-López's evolution of the *Batman/Hulk* cover, with notes by DC's and Marvel's project caretakers, Dick Giordano and Al Milgrom.

Batman and Joker TM & © DC Comics.  
Hulk © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.

## A TALE OF TWO BRUCES

*Batman vs. the Incredible Hulk* was published in the tabloid-sized *DC Special Series* #27 (Fall 1981), as a 64-page tale entitled "The Monster and the Madman." Len Wein was the obvious choice for writer.

"I was somebody who had extensive experience writing both characters," Wein explains. "So, like Gerry (on the first *Superman/Spider-Man* book), they came to me and said, 'Do you want to do this?' And I said, 'Are you kidding?! They're my two favorite characters—I would love to do this!'"

Like its predecessors, the story takes place on a "Crossover Earth" where Batman and the Hulk and their respective casts co-exist. (Ahhh, but is it the same Earth as the one in the *Superman/Spider-Man* books? You'll have to decide that for yourself.) As far as continuity was concerned, Wein's approach was the same as Conway's: "These things were outside continuity. They didn't count for anything except for fun."

The Dark Knight and the green-skinned behemoth cross paths when the Joker strikes a deal with the Shaper of Worlds, an alien being who can reshape reality based on the dreams of others. It turns out that the Shaper, who first appeared in *The Incredible Hulk* #155 (Sept. 1972), is rapidly losing his abilities and in danger of going insane. His only hope: a prototype "gamma-gun" that could replenish him. The Joker steals the device from Wayne Enterprises—much to the dismay of Dr. Bruce Banner, who's been working there disguised as a janitor so that he can gain access to the gamma-gun and use it in an attempt to cure himself. The Batman arrives on the scene as the Joker is making his getaway and finds himself face to face with an angry Hulk, who decides he wants to smash "pointy-ears." Things get even worse when the Shaper, eventually rejuvenated by

the gamma-gun, lives up to his end of the deal by agreeing to reshape all of reality based on the Joker's twisted imagination. The Batman must convince the Hulk to work with him to end the chaos.

Having the Joker in the story was pretty much a no-brainer. But why did Wein select the Shaper over one of the Hulk's better-known adversaries?

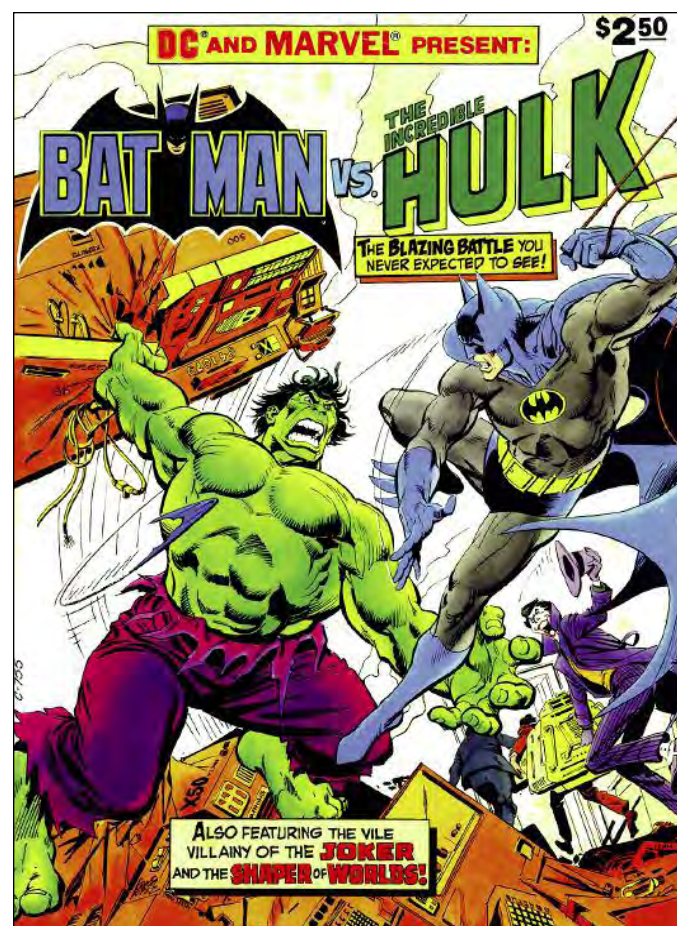
"The Abomination, to me, was always more of a henchman type," he explains. "He's muscle, not brains. You've got brains with the Leader, but I never liked him until Todd McFarlane made the top of his head look like it was a brain and I said, 'Finally, an interesting visual!' My feeling was, what happens if you take the Joker, who's utterly insane, and let him do whatever he can possibly think of? I thought that would be fun."

Amongst fans, probably the biggest controversy is the way in which Batman and the Hulk's first encounter is resolved. Batman, desperate to end the woefully one-sided fight, releases knockout gas—but the Hulk holds his breath. Then, with all of his might, Batman kicks the Hulk in the solar plexus, causing the creature to gasp and inhale the sleep-inducing fumes. Down goes the Hulk. Some fans have argued that there's no way a non-powered human being could ever be strong enough to do such a thing to the Hulk. Wein disagrees.

"Trust me, someone punches you in the solar plexus, it's an involuntary reaction—you gasp for breath," he insists. "And that's what Batman does. He puts everything he's got into one perfect shot at the Hulk's solar plexus and it forces the Hulk to gasp and he breathes in the gas and falls right over." As Wein correctly notes, the Hulk had long been established as being susceptible to knockout gas—as long as you could get him to breathe it in.

It's also important to note how humanely Batman is portrayed. He shows real sympathy for Bruce Banner and bestows kindness and compassion upon him, despite the great danger posed by Banner's brutish alter ego. It's a stark contrast to the harsh, judgmental Batman of recent years, who condemned Green Lantern Hal Jordan for the atrocities Jordan committed while he was possessed by Parallax.

"There's a great deal of humanity and compassion in Batman," says Wein. "He does what he does as much out of compassion for his fellow man as he does out of a sense of obligation—at least my Batman does."





The bicentennial celebrations of 1976 serve as a reaffirmation of what makes the United States of America a great country. In the wake of the controversial Vietnam War and President Nixon's resignation, Americans were looking to the glories of the past in order to shape their beliefs and goals for the future of the country and themselves. To express these ideas in comic-book form, what more worthy creator was there than Jack "the King" Kirby? And what better character than Captain America himself, Kirby's most iconic co-creation (along with writer Joe Simon), could have served as the creative lens for the King's patriotic love of America at its two-century mark in the landmark June 1976 *Marvel Treasury Special, Captain America's Bicentennial Battles*?

In the opening splash page for "Chapter One – Mister Buda," the reader immediately beholds the image of Captain America entering the eastern-tinged sanctuary of Mister Buda, a bald, diminutive man who is sitting in the lotus position within a golden, triangular-shaped structure. If one were to substitute Dr. Strange for Cap, the image would not be as incongruously striking to a reader who would sooner be expecting Captain America to be infiltrating a Hydra fortress or engaged in fisticuffs with the likes of the Red Skull or Batroc the Leaper at the beginning of his tales. Then again, this is 1976, not 1964 or 1941, and comics have moved on to embrace a worldlier, multicultural perspective in their storytelling. Buda, subsequently, serves as the catalyst for Captain America's stunning journey across the landscape of America's past, present, and future. Mark Evanier, longtime friend and biographer of Jack Kirby with *Kirby! – King of Comics* (Abrams 2008), offers his thoughts on why Kirby chose this Buddha-like character to expand Cap's perspective on America. "I'd just be guessing," Evanier admits, "because Jack operated on a lot of instinct and hunches. But I'd say he wanted a figure who would have the importance of a religious icon but didn't want to be as obvious as to make the guy God."

If indeed Kirby was ambiguous about his feeling regarding the place of religion in a *Captain America* comic, he was not so uncertain in asserting his position on the Nazis three decades after the end of World War II. Even though Captain America rejects Mister Buda's offer to help him view his role as a symbol of America with a newfound universal eye, Buda opens a hidden fold in the universe, into which the departing Cap unwittingly steps. Finding himself in a mysterious fortress, Captain America quickly infiltrates an interrogation of his long-dead partner Bucky that is being brutally conducted by a few Nazis, the Red Skull, and Adolf Hitler himself! What reader, consequently, would not feel a nostalgic rush in witnessing Cap knocking



JACK KIRBY

### A Star-Spangled Celebration

Cover to *Marvel Treasury Special* featuring *Captain America's Bicentennial Battles* (1976). Cover pencils by Jack Kirby, inks by Frank Giacoia. The Grand Comic-Book Database ([www.comics.org](http://www.comics.org)) notes that Marie Severin and John Romita, Sr. made art corrections to the background images, Mirthful Marie drawing the colonial characters on the left, and Jazzy Johnny adding the Cap figure on the right.

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# KIRBY CELEBRATING AMERICA'S 200TH BIRTHDAY:

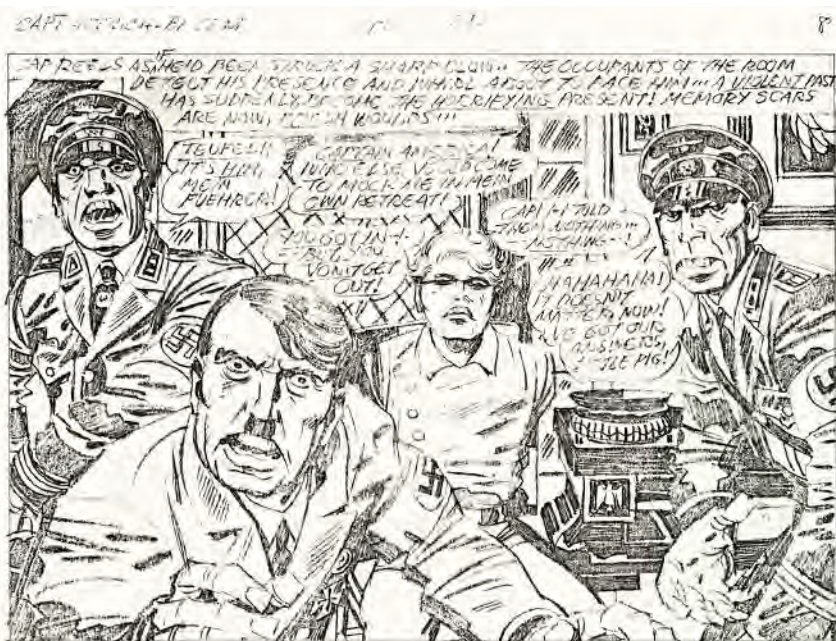
## CAPTAIN AMERICA'S BICENTENNIAL BATTLES

by Tom Powers

MARVEL TREASURY SPECIAL™







out the Red Skull and smashing Hitler's face directly into the mug of one of his henchman's while rescuing Bucky from certain doom? Once Captain America returns to his foe's trippy domain, Buda does not reveal whether or not what Cap experienced in that brief excursion to World War II was an illusion or some sort of alternate reality. Nevertheless, concerning Cap's mini-adventure, Buda does reveal to him, "You believed in what you saw because it *truly* existed in that place." While this comment encapsulates the idea that what we believe to be true defines the moments of our lives, it could also be interpreted as Kirby's wry view of comic books in general and how adventures such as Cap's become something more than an illustrated fantasy world in the reader's mind!

A man of perplexing wisdom indeed, Buda secretly plants a glowing psychic talisman upon the Star-Spangled Avenger's palm while Cap once more tries to part ways with the man. As he is leaving Buda's building, however, upon the walls and ceiling he beholds a series of visions of what appear to be Civil War soldiers engaged in battle. Kirby depicts this dramatic and fearsome scene of American fighting American in a two-page spread running across the top two-thirds of pages 14-15, visually essaying "widescreen" action to a generation of readers years before the term would be in vogue! Touching upon the epic scope of the treasury format for Kirby's storytelling, Evanier exclaims, "You know what I like about this book? The size of it. When Jack first heard about the treasury-sized format, he was excited because he liked the idea of drawing big pages. He was horrified when he saw that what DC and Marvel initially wanted to do with their treasuries was to run enlarged reprints of comics drawn for the smaller format. With this



MARK EVANIER

book, the 2001 special, and not much else, Jack finally got the chance to draw pages that would be printed big."

Kirby's perception of his co-creation, Captain America, had obviously shifted by the time he had returned to Marvel in the mid-'70s and was producing *Bicentennial Battles*. John Morrow, editor of *The Jack Kirby Collector*, comments on this creative shift in Kirby's focus: "My sense with all of Jack's 1970s Marvel work is that he just wanted to be left alone to produce the kind of material he enjoyed, within the confines of whatever established characters he was working on, such as Cap. He totally ignored the continuity just prior to his return to the Cap comic with #193 (Jan. 1976), and, in typical Kirby fashion, set out on his own to produce something different. But in the several years since he'd last handled Cap, he'd changed and evolved in his storytelling, concentrating on more epic storylines in his work. He also seems to have lost touch a little with the character, which is to be expected after so long away from him."

Morrow adds, "By this point, you can also tell he was affected by some of his recent commercial failures and wasn't trying to produce quite as *deep* of concepts as he had in the past, in most cases. While the 'Madbomb' storyline had a lot of potential leading up to issue #200 (Aug. 1976), the subsequent stories mostly seemed to fall short. Even the two *Captain America* Annuals Jack did seemed to be a little padded, pulling together a story that could've been done pretty effectively within one regular-size issue."

"But this lengthy *Bicentennial Battles* treasury was a very satisfying read from start to finish for me. I loved seeing different inkers on Jack in that book, especially Barry Windsor-Smith, and seeing Cap run through various eras in time was a great plot idea. What better way to celebrate

## Cap vs. Nazis

A before-and-after, pencils-to-print comparison of a *Bicentennial Battles* page featuring Bucky, Hitler, and the Red Skull. Inks are by Barry Windsor-Smith (yes, you read that right!). Penciled page courtesy of John Morrow and *The Jack Kirby Collector*.

© 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.



FlashBack!

# KRYPTONIAN AND AMAZONIAN NOT LIVING IN PERFECT HARMONY

by Andy Mangels

## You Wouldn't Hit a Girl, Wouldja?

Detail from the  
*Superman vs. Wonder  
Woman* cover. As the  
signatures read, art by  
José Luis García-López  
and Dan Adkins.

TM & © DC Comics.



No young comic-book fan has ever failed to engage in flights of wild fancy about which superhero or superheroine is stronger or faster or just plain better. Marvel Comics storytellers traded on this trope almost monthly, with guest-star heroes battling the star heroes of whichever book they appeared in, before they both realized they had a common enemy. But at DC Comics, the tendency from the 1940s forward was that the heroes worked together for common goals; they would become the World's Finest or the Brave and the Bold. By the 1970s, DC's heroes were even branded in the public eye as the "Super Friends."

Readers had to feel astonished, then, when DC announced for summer 1977 release an all-new book-length treasury *All-New Collectors' Edition* called *Superman vs. Wonder Woman*. But how and why would the Man of Steel and the Amazing Amazon be at each other's throats, and who could truly win this match?

The tabloid release was the second of DC's books that pitted Superman against a popular hero, following *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man*, also the first cross-company team-up between DC and Marvel. Released in 1976, the epic tale was scripted by Gerry Conway and illustrated by Ross Andru and others. [Editor's note: See this issue's article on this and the other DC/Marvel team-up tabloids.]

Conway had been one of Marvel's star writers from 1970–1975—when he was age 18–25—before defecting to DC in 1975, and causing a tug-of-war to ensue between the companies. "I was actually at Marvel in '76 for about six months," Conway says today. "I originally left Marvel in 1975 after

being passed over for the position of editor-in-chief. At the time I felt I'd been promised it by Stan Lee, when I'd filled in for Roy [Thomas] a few times when he was on vacation. Rightly or wrongly—probably wrongly—I felt betrayed by Stan, so I took my ball and bat and went home. Or, to be more precise, back to DC, where I'd worked at the beginning of my career."

It was then that Conway wrote *Superman vs. Spider-Man*. "When I came to DC in 1975 Carmine Infantino considered me a 'catch' because I'd been writing Marvel's top books, and Carmine was a very competitive man. The *Superman vs. Spider-Man* book was a high-profile project, and I was a natural fit for it, having scripted both *Superman* and *Spider-Man* in the past. And Carmine wanted to stick it to Stan. Like I say, he was a competitive guy."

That book was quite a success, and Conway found himself courted by the company that he felt had spurned him. "In early 1976, I was offered the editor-in-chief role at Marvel, and because it was what I thought I wanted at that point in my life, I left DC and grabbed it. Turned out it wasn't what I wanted after all. Along with the obvious fun of getting to participate in the management of Marvel Comics at a high level, I found myself at the center of an office-politics nightmare. I alienated people whom I considered to be friends, and was alienated by people I considered to be friends. After five or six weeks I couldn't stand it anymore, and decided to return to DC. Stan asked me to remain at Marvel and offered me a contract, and we negotiated over it for a few months, but ultimately I felt I'd be happier at DC."



## A PLAN COMES TOGETHER

Back at DC in 1976, Conway conceived of an idea with fellow ex-Marvelite Roy Thomas to do another DC tabloid titled *Superman vs. Shazam!* After all, Captain Marvel was the star of Filmation's popular Saturday morning live-action series, and the two heroes did share a combative history in the real world, if not in the comic-book realm. But DC had another hero on TV—and one who was a much bigger hit: Lynda Carter was capturing ratings and racing pulses on the *New Original Wonder Woman* series on ABC.

Plans were quickly put into place to make *Superman vs. Wonder Woman* a reality. Joe Orlando had recently been made managing editor at DC, and he shepherded the project, choosing Conway to script the 72-page story (the equivalent of about five monthly comics). The decision had already been made to move the adventures of Wonder Woman to World War II to reflect the milieu of the TV series, necessitating the tales to be set on Earth-Two, where the iconic heroine had existed since World War II and been a member of the Justice Society.

The chronological change in the main *Wonder Woman* comic came with issue #228 (Feb. 1977), and Conway was pleased that this would give him a unique setting for his tabloid story as well. "Even before the TV series was set in WWII, I thought Wonder Woman—like Captain America—was a more successful character in that milieu. So I was glad for the opportunity (or excuse) to set stories in that time frame." Still, as he crafted his tale, Conway didn't concentrate overly much on the TV series tropes, leaving aside the famous "Wonder Spin" for the heroine's costume change. Because nobody knew what the upcoming *Superman* film would be like—it was then filming with star Christopher Reeve—Conway wasn't influenced by that media venture either. Finally, despite the fact that the story was set on Earth-Two, that fact is never mentioned in the book. "This was a new format book intended to reach a different audience than the comic-book fan," Conway explains, "so if we thought about it at all, we probably felt that discussing the Earth-Two mythology would have unnecessarily confused a new reader."



JOSÉ LUIS GARCÍA-LOPEZ

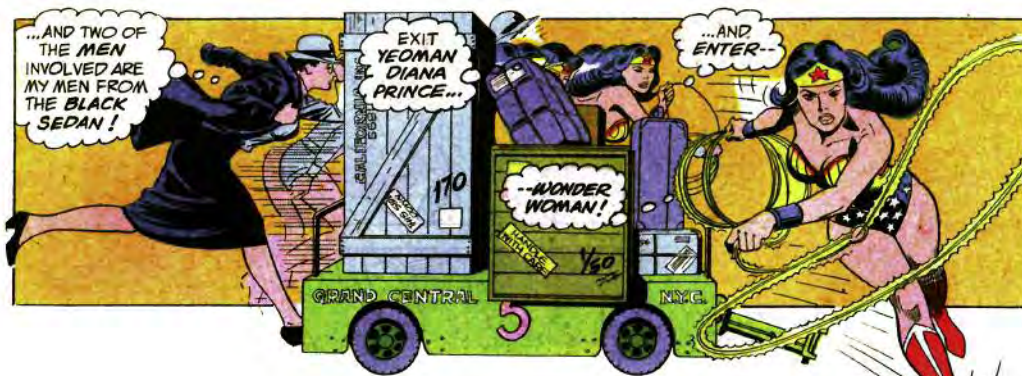
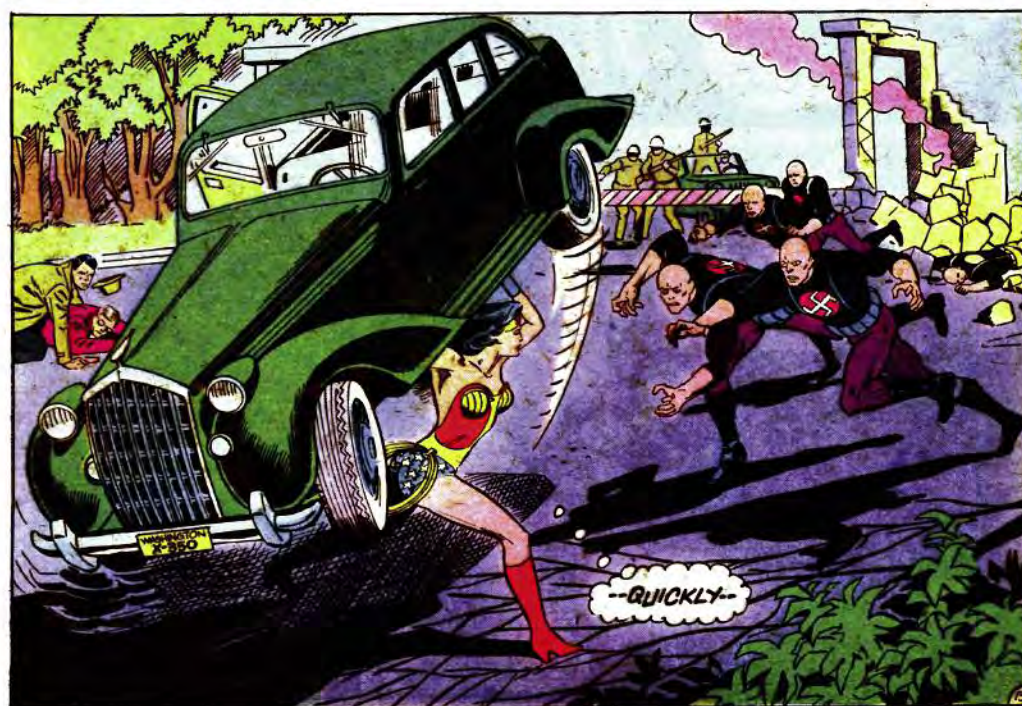
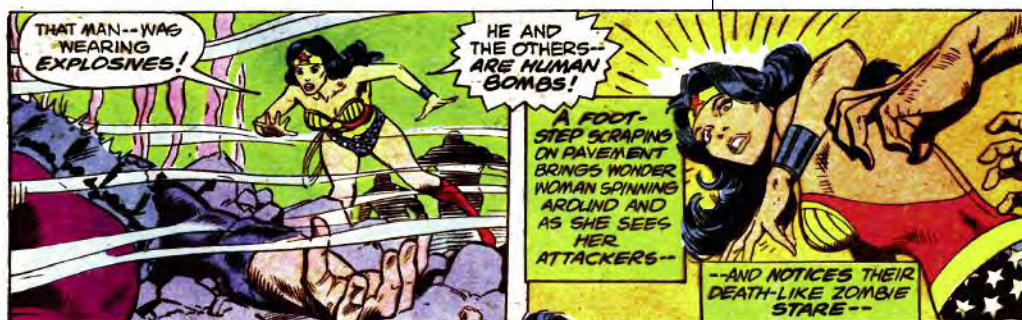
Chosen to illustrate the story was Spanish-born artist José Luis García-López, who actually began his comic art career at the age of 13, penciling comics for Argentinean publishers. At the age of 18, he got through an agent his first American work for Charlton Comics, drawing several romance comics. In 1974, he moved to the United States and began freelancing for DC Comics and Western Publishing, as both a penciler and an inker. He produced series such as *Hercules Unbound* and *Jonah Hex*, as well as backups and inventory stories.

García-López recalls today that he was fairly green when it came to major super-heroes when he got the treasury job in the spring of 1976: "I had less than a year in the States, working for DC. I think my first and only *Superman* story until then was with Bob Oskner. Joe Orlando brought me to Carmine Infantino's office and they

## She's a Wonder

(left) The popularity of TV Wonder Woman Lynda Carter (with Lyle Waggoner) paved the way for her tabloid tango with Superman. (top right) Borrowing a car-hoisting cue from *Action Comics* #1, and (bottom right) a costume change.

TV image © 1975 Warner Bros. Television.  
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# SUPERBOY

## AND THE

# LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES

FlashBack!



by Jim Ford

### Mr. and Mrs. Ranzz

A double-page spread from *All-New Collectors' Edition* #C-55 (1978), featuring the wedding of founding Legionnaires Lightning Lad and Saturn Girl. Note the none-too-subtle cameos of Legion writer Paul Levitz and penciler Mike Grell in the lower left and right corners, respectively. Words by Levitz, pencils by Grell, and inks by Vince Colletta.

TM & © DC Comics.

**The Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes tabloid has everything!** It is a gigantic comic with an electrifying wraparound cover and interior artwork by fan-favorite Mike Grell! It has several pages highlighting "The Origins and Powers of the Legionnaires," reminiscent of the best bonus features of the Silver Age! It has a poster-sized double-page pinup of all the Legionnaires, past and present! Paul Levitz wrote the story that finally revealed the secret of the Time Trapper at the End of Time, and best yet, he fulfilled a divination from the very beginnings of the Legion as Saturn Girl and Lightning Lad got married!

Officially entitled *All-New Collectors' Edition* #C-55 and published in 1978, this was the first and only *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes* tabloid to present original material. "You have to remember," Levitz said in an interview with Glen Cadigan in *The Legion Companion* (2003, TwoMorrows Publishing), "once you get to '76 or so, part of my job was at least to be in the room in all of those discussions, and over time it evolved into more and more of my responsibility, so whether it was the double-sized format or going monthly or getting a tabloid, the Legion had a pretty good advocate in the room. The book was doing fairly well at that time, so it wasn't unreasonable to argue for it, but it also had somebody there really with definite interest in promoting it."

### THE WEDDING OF SATURN GIRL AND LIGHTNING LAD

Saturn Girl and Lightning Lad, along with Cosmic Boy, were the only Legionnaires seen in many of the Legion of Super-Heroes' earliest appearances beginning with *Adventure Comics* #247 (Apr. 1958). They were later acknowledged as the team's founders many years later in *Superboy* #147 (May-June 1968). Although Lightning Man was shown to be married to Saturn Woman in early Legion stories where they appeared with Superman as adults, the relationship between their teenaged counterparts was nothing more than that of devoted comrades. Saturn Girl, as team leader, learned that one Legionnaire was destined to die in *Adventure Comics* #304 (Jan. 1963). Despite her every effort to ensure that she was that Legionnaire, Lightning Lad was killed. It was from a deep sense of guilt at her failure, and not any evident emotional attachment to Lightning Lad, that she again plotted to sacrifice herself so that Lightning Lad might be revived from a death-like coma in *Adventure Comics* #312 (Sept. 1963). Protty, Chameleon Boy's telepathic and shape-changing pet, died in her place.

Nothing more was intimated about their deepening relationship until, in *Adventure* #337 (Oct. 1965), Saturn Girl and Lightning Lad were married. Although the ceremony was actually a hoax perpetrated to draw enemy spies out into the open, the event nonetheless



## Legion Under Fire

Mike Grell's breathtakingly beautiful wraparound cover for *All-New Collectors' Edition* #C-55. Note the placement of Superboy and the three founding Legionnaires on the front cover, with the other LSHers on the back.

TM & © DC Comics.



crystallized their romance in the minds of readers and editors alike. By the time writer Jim Shooter crafted an Adult Legion story in *Adventure* #354-355 (Mar.-Apr. 1967), which would foretell upcoming events in the Legion's future that subsequent writers might feel obligated to follow, their marriage was ordained by a higher power. "Then I got a call, not from Mort [Weisinger], but from E. Nelson Bridwell, and I'm not sure to this day that it was a call that was authorized by Mort," Jim Shooter said in an interview with Hassan Yusuf, in the fanzine *Interluk '93: The Seven Year Itch* (1993). Bridwell was an editorial assistant to *Adventure Comics* editor Weisinger at the time. "I think that when Nelson heard I was doing this story, his heart leapt into his throat, and he wanted to make sure that certain things came about 'right,' the way he wanted them to," Shooter said. "So I think he took it upon himself to make the call, ostensibly at Mort's behest, and said, 'Now, look; Saturn Girl marries Lightning Lad' ... like all the obvious ones, he dictated to me."

Paul Levitz was a long-time reader of the Legion who found Shooter's stories deeply inspirational. "Memory: a child of ten, sitting on the stoop a summer's day in 1966, reading a subscription copy of *Adventure Comics* #346 [July 1966], enthralled," Levitz wrote in his autobiographical sketch in the back pages of the tabloid, referencing Shooter's first published story. Levitz continued, writing of his childhood self in the third person, "...a child of ten, on that same stoop a few months later, as he learned that the story that had so deeply affected him was written by [Jim Shooter, who was] only three scant years older. And deciding that maybe he could do that ... someday." It is not at all surprising that when given the opportunity to write the adventures of these heroes he would draw again and again from the events foretold in Shooter's Adult Legion story. "Once we decided to do a Legion tabloid, to try and do something that would make it an event, that was the most logical first major event in the Legion, [to] come back to fulfilling the beginnings of where the book came from," Levitz said of the wedding of Saturn Girl to Lightning Lad in *The Legion Companion*. Levitz tells *BACK ISSUE* that he "probably decided on the story after the opportunity came up ... seemed 'large' enough to justify the event," and that he was, "probably influenced by Stan [Lee] and Jack [Kirby]'s wonderful *FF Annual* wedding of Sue and Reed," which took place in *Fantastic Four Annual* #3 (1965).



PAUL LEVITZ

## THE FUTURE ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

Taking place immediately following the regular monthly comic series *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes* (SLSH) #236 (Feb. 1978), "The Millennium Massacre" opens as Superboy speeds one thousand years into the future to attend the long-anticipated wedding of Saturn Girl to Lightning Lad. He finds 30th-century Metropolis is nothing like he remembers. The city he knew had been at the center of the peaceful United Planets. Now, Metropolis is a fortified military garrison constantly under bombardment from enemy starships.

The Legionnaires gather in front of the Legion Headquarters for the second Legion wedding. The small ceremony is attended by a handful of special guests, including the Legion's benefactor R. J. Brande, Duplicate Boy, the Legion of Substitute Heroes, and comic creators Paul Levitz and Mike Grell. The celebration is short lived. As the newlywed couple departs, their small cruiser is captured by attacking Lunite Raiders from Earth's own Moon.

The Legion splits into two factions, following either Wildfire on a rescue mission to the Moon or Superboy into the past to find the source of the altered timeline. Lightning Lad and Saturn Girl escape their captors only to find themselves stranded on the Moon. Wildfire's team locates them at the last instant before the life-support system in their small, commandeered craft fails. Elsewhere in the past, Superboy and his team track a mysterious man whose actions are key to instigating the disastrous events that will lead to nuclear warfare and a militaristic future. Observing helplessly from outside the time stream, Superboy watches his team defeated by the mysterious Time Trapper.

## OUT OF TIME

An impenetrable "Iron Curtain of Time" erected by the enigmatic Time Trapper always prevented the Legion from travelling into their own future, until recently. Rond Vidar, an honorary Legionnaire whose knowledge of time travel rivals that of Brainiac 5, uses the hypertime travel device he had recently tested in SLSH #233 (Nov. 1977) to send the Legionnaires to the very End of Time. They find themselves outside the fortress of the Time Trapper on the burnt-out husk of Earth. Having had millennia to prepare for their arrival, the Time Trapper effortlessly entraps the Legion.

The Time Trapper first appeared as a shadowy, cloaked villain in *Adventure Comics* #317 (Feb. 1964), who committed crimes in the Legion's own time but always retreated into the future beyond their reach. He plotted to destroy the Legion from behind his "Iron Curtain," and had once tried to steal an early precursor to the



# SUPERMAN<sup>®</sup>

VS.

# MUHAMMAD ALI<sup>®</sup>

FlashBack!

by Brett Weiss

SUPERMAN,  
**WE**  
ARE THE  
GREATEST!



***“Floats Like a Butterfly” Meets  
“Bends Steel in  
His Bare Hands”***

The iconic handshake that wrapped up one of comics’ greatest epics, *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali* (published in 1978 as *All-New Collectors’ Edition #C-56*). Art by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano.

Superman TM & © DC Comics.  
Muhammad Ali © 2012  
Muhammad Ali Enterprises LLC.

***The tabloid-sized Superman vs. Muhammad Ali is much more than a big, bold, brash, beautifully illustrated comic book. At least it is to me.***

Before I break down the storyline and pepper you with fresh quotes from the great Neal Adams, who penciled and co-plotted this bulky bad boy, let’s hop aboard the Tardis and travel back in time to 1978, to a small suburb of Fort Worth, Texas, where *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali* graced me—free of charge—with its four-color goodness.

As a kid I loved comic books more than just about anything in the whole wide world. During the long, hot Texas summers, when I wasn’t riding my bicycle, building models, digging in the dirt, or playing basketball, I was usually planted on my bed, the couch, the front porch, or anywhere else I could find some solitude, thrilling to the exploits of such stalwart arbiters of justice as Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, the Flash, and Green Lantern.

Money was pretty tight in those days—my buck-a-week allowance was enough to purchase three new issues, give or take a few cents. To supplement my collection, I would trade with my best friend, who lived next door. Better yet, my mom would take me to a couple of used bookstores in the area, where comics were typically half of cover price. Still better was the local thrift store that sometimes had comics for just ten cents each—score!

When *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali* hit the stands, I was mesmerized by its now-classic cover, its massive size (I was unfamiliar at the time with any previous tabloid releases), and its pitting of two of the world’s most well-known figures against one another. I wasn’t much of a boxing

fan, but everyone knew Muhammad Ali was a great fighter, and I was intrigued by the premise.

However, as with the AMT KISS van model kit that came out the previous year, *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali* was something I desperately wanted, but couldn’t afford. The \$2.50 cover price was a deal-breaker as I just couldn’t bear spending two-and-a-half weeks’ worth of allowance on a single comic book, regardless of its size or its overall awesomeness.

Enter my older cousin Randy, who, at the age of 16, owned thousands of comic books, mostly Marvels, DCs, and Warren magazines (his mom paid for subscriptions to several titles per month). When my family would visit his family, the big kids would run off to who knew where, and the adults would sit in the kitchen talking, leaving me with hours and hours of reading time in what I considered to be the greatest library in the history of humankind. I was like Henry Bemis in the classic *Twilight Zone* episode “Time Enough At Last” (1959), but without the tragic ending.

One day during the summer of ‘78, while Randy’s family was visiting my house, he walked in the front door, *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali* in hand. After the obligatory hugs and “hellos” and such, Randy asked me if I wanted to borrow the sacred tome. My eyes must have bugged out of my head because Randy, the kind soul that he was (and still is), asked if I’d like to keep it. Needless to say, I took him up on his offer, plopped down on the nearest chair, and devoured the issue like a man in the desert chugging a cold glass of Gatorade. Brain freeze had never felt so good.



## THE PLOT

After a brief introduction of the two far-famed contestants, *Superman vs. Ali* begins in Metropolis, with Clark Kent, Lois Lane, and Jimmy Olsen searching for boxing great Muhammad Ali in order to do an exclusive interview. They find the Louisville Lip shooting hoops with some neighborhood kids, but before the interview can get underway, the fabulous foursome is interrupted by the sudden appearance of Rat'Lar, the green-skinned leader of a savage alien species called the Scrubb.

Backed by an armada of 100 powerful warships orbiting the planet, Rat'Lar demands that Earth's greatest champion battle the mightiest Scrubb warrior. Ali and Superman each argue that they should be chosen as champ, with Rat'Lar insisting that the dueling duo fight one another to determine Earth's true champion. To make things fair for Earthling Ali, the match takes place on Rat'Lar's home planet, Bodace, which has a red sun. As Superman fans well know, the Man of Steel requires the energy of a yellow sun to have superpowers.

Ali trains Superman on the finer points of the "sweet science" at the Kryptonian Crusader's vaunted Fortress of Solitude, but when the actual match begins, it quickly becomes clear that Ali is the vastly superior pugilist. With Jimmy Olsen acting as broadcaster, and with citizens of thousands of intergalactic worlds looking on, Ali dances around the ring, connecting blow after blow

("float like a butterfly, sting like a bee," the real-life Ali famously said, describing his fighting style), pummeling Superman to a bloody pulp.

As an impressionable 11-year-old, the image of Superman lying unconscious on a stretcher, his face bruised and swollen, shook me up considerably (I was equally stunned—but in a good way in this case—by an earlier scene in which Superman stopped a tidal wave by crashing his fists together).

Crowned Earth's champion, Ali must now face Hun'Ya, a big, bald, blue, musclebound bruiser. Paying homage to Ali's cocky reputation for predicting the round in which the fight will end, Rat'Lar asks the famous fighter to do just that. For those who haven't read the issue, I won't reveal the final round or the victor, but it's a close, dramatic fight, with Ali and Hun'Ya each getting in his share of punches.

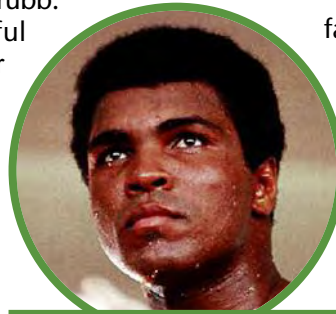
During the epic bout, Superman, having quickly recovered from the beating dished out by Ali, disguises himself as Bundini Brown, Ali's corner man, and steals the Scrubb command ship, sabotaging the alien armada in the process. The space battle takes its toll, however, and Superman is once again down for the count.

Naturally, the heroes—along with a surprise help-mate—eventually save the day, with Ali proclaiming at the end of the issue (via a striking two-page spread): "Superman, WE are the Greatest!"

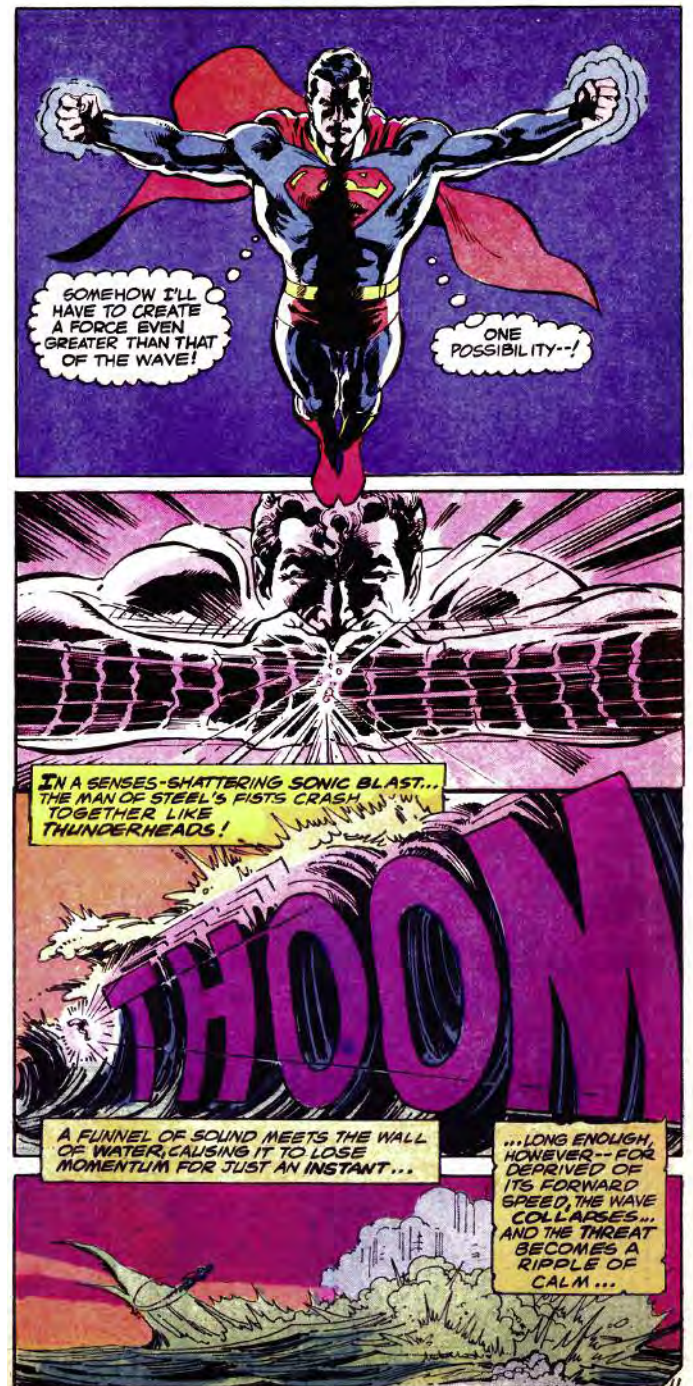
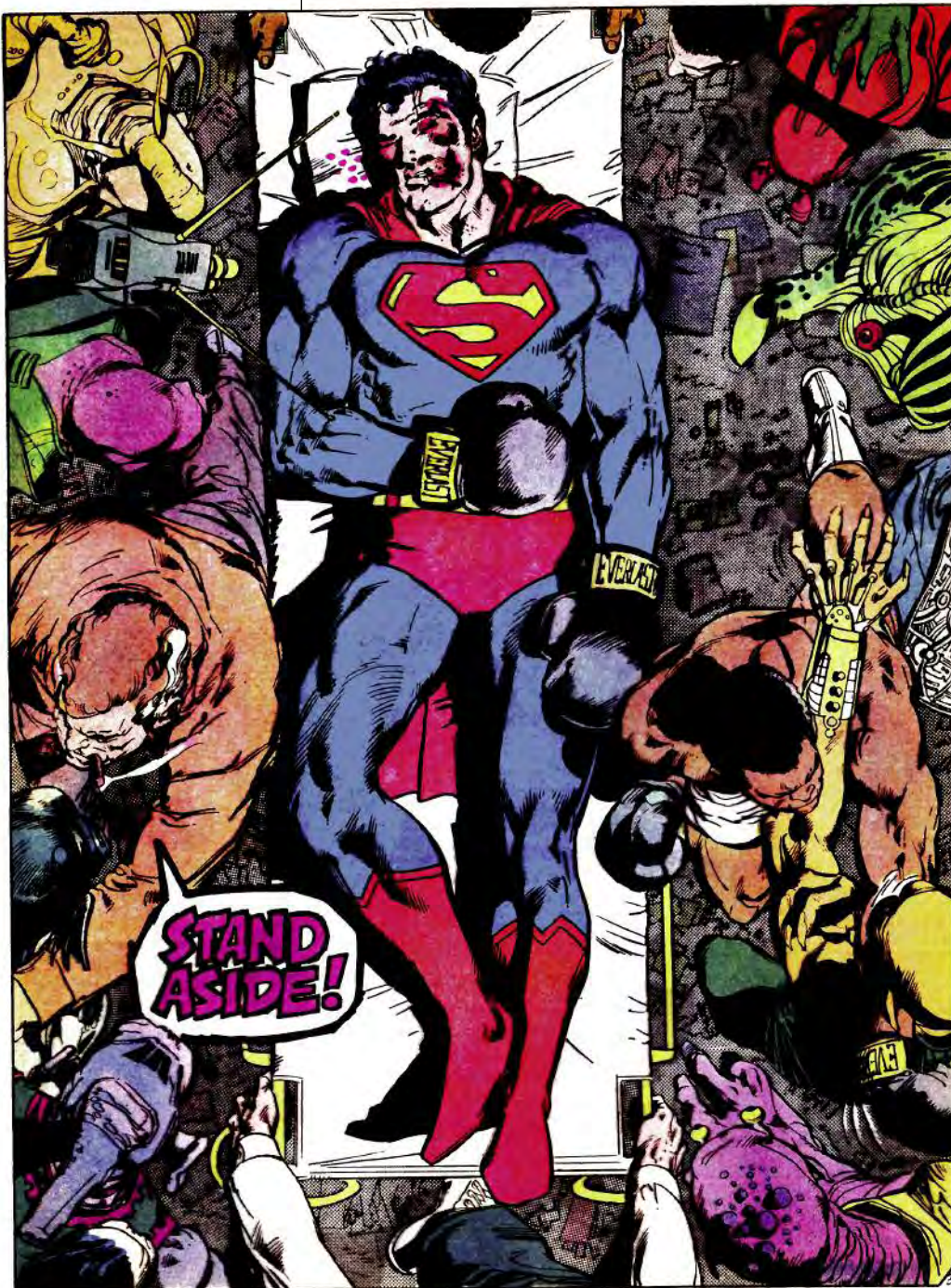
## The Man of Bruises

(left) A bloodied Superman, after his bout with Ali. (right) Our hero shows a tidal wave who's boss.

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MUHAMMAD ALI





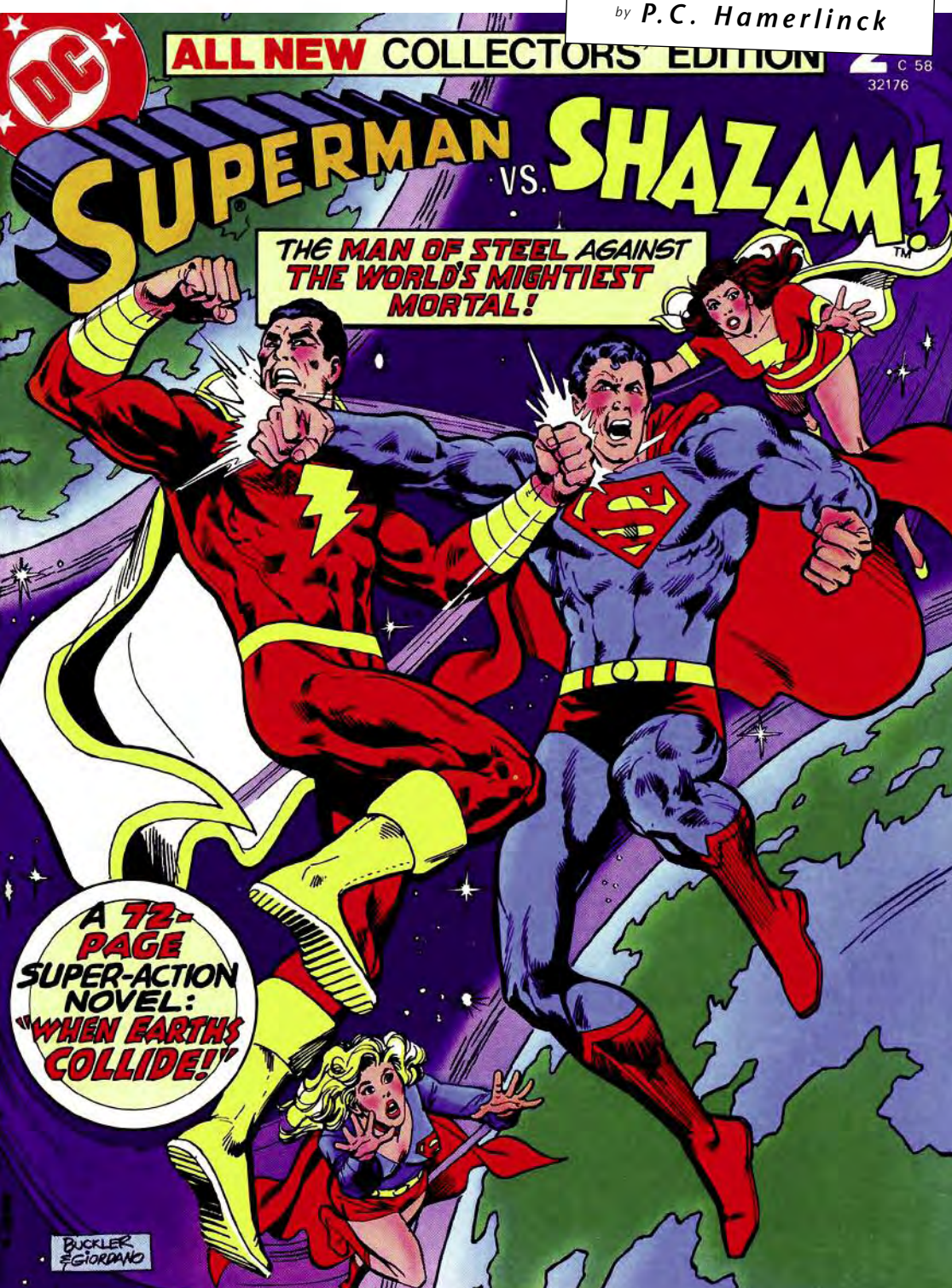
# WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

FlashBack!

## THE COLOSSAL-SIZED CONFRONTATION BETWEEN

# SUPERMAN AND Captain Marvel

by P.C. Hamerlinck



"The Battle Nearly Four Decades in the Making!" declared a 1978 DC Comics advertisement for the tabloid-sized, maladroitly titled comic-book epic, "Superman vs. Shazam!"—more formally known as *All-New Collectors' Edition* #C-58—which marked the first genuine full-length fracas between Superman and Captain Marvel that restless readers had patiently anticipated since DC acquired the publishing rights to Captain Marvel, due to the heroes' harried history together.

The conflict first began during ostensibly simpler times when the two found themselves at odds in a courtroom—where one hero's probably only true crime was outselling the other one. After the lengthy litigation concluded, roundabout rematches would tease readers over the ensuing years, with "Superduperman" and "Captain Marbles" trading jabs in *MAD* #4 ... a decked, dazed and confused Marvel's succinct and subtle slot in *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #42 ... a faux Big Red Cheese's scuffle with the Big Red "S" in *Justice League of America* #103 ... a thunderous CM-doppelganger meeting the Man of Steel in *Superman* #276 ... an Earth-One/Earth-S showdown in *Justice League of America* #137 ... Superman scoundrel Lex Luthor involuntarily transporting himself to Captain Marvel's universe in *Shazam!* #15 ... and the World's Mightiest Mortal's mêlée with a Sivana-designed Superman robot in *Shazam!* #30. But by 1978, writer Gerry Conway, artist Rich Buckler, and inker Dick Giordano finally made the two superheroes' worlds collide in a big way over the course of 72 over-sized, potent pages.

After being treated to a comparison chart of our two heroes, we're introduced to an eyeball earring-wearing Martian named Karmang the Evil. Formerly an ancient scientist known as Karmang the Good, he devises a way to resurrect his dead race by colliding the parallel worlds

### Heroes Behaving Badly

Rich Buckler and Dick Giordano's cover to *All-New Collectors' Edition* #C-58, *Superman vs. Shazam!* Note that the cover features the story's co-stars, Supergirl and Mary Marvel. Cover art by Rich Buckler and Dick Giordano.

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## Not Playing Nice

Both villains—(left) new baddie Karmang and the so-called Sand-Superman, the Quarrmer—and heroes—(right) Superman and Captain Marvel—were punchy in the Conway/Buckler/Giordano opus, *Superman vs. Shazam!*

TM & © DC Comics.

of Superman (Earth-One) and Captain Marvel (Earth-S) and thereby amassing the remnants of energy released by the two world's big bang. But in order to do so, he needs to sidetrack both of each world's foremost superheroes by fooling them into fighting each other while he plants his deadly space-time devices on each of the Earths.

In order to accomplish his deviltry, Karmang enlists Black Adam—disguised as Marvel—to go after Superman ... and the Quarrmer—disguised as Superman—to bother Captain Marvel. They each begin their skirmishes and employ a “judgment ray” upon the heroes to infuriate and cajole them into attacking each other.

Under the mind-controlling mechanism, Superman and Captain Marvel begin a drawn-out slugfest. Supergirl and Mary Marvel notice something is off with their boys and join forces to realize the reason behind the ruse. Black Adam and the Quarrmer give up Karmang's scheme to the heroines and the gals fly off to Mars and take care of Karmang once and for all. Back on the home front, Marvel and the Man of Steel had finally refrained from further thumping of one another and instead focus on dismantling Karmang's volatile apparatuses on both Earths. With the tasks duly fulfilled and both Earths spared, Mary Marvel kisses Superman, Supergirl kisses Captain Marvel, and a new alliance is formed at long last.

The big book's Bronze Age superstar writer, Gerry Conway, discusses the origin of the project for *BACK ISSUE*: “There had been the ‘Crisis in Eternity’ trilogy a couple of years earlier in *Justice League of America* that introduced Earth-S, which had left many people dissatisfied. Roy Thomas had a whole bunch of suggestions of things for me to do when I returned to DC, including a Superman/Captain Marvel encounter. (Roy ended up fulfilling a lot of those ideas himself when he later came to DC.) Roy and I talked a lot ... we were good friends and had very similar points of view about what would be fun to do in comics.”

From a marketing position, DC saw their large-sized comic books as a way to reach a different and larger audience. Reprints, table-top dioramas, pinups, and puzzles were ultimately scrapped for all-new material. From a creative standpoint, Conway—who says his pay scale remained the same on big editions as it did on regular-sized comics—found the format “fun for writers and artists because we were able to work with a ‘bigger screen’ ... it was to comics as Cinemascope was to television in the ‘50s, where you had a larger canvas to do your stories on.” Almost immediately after the success of the Conway-written *Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man*, and with the imminent release of the *Superman* movies, DC sought to further capitalize on the format.

Julie Schwartz, who facilitated the “Collectors’ Editions” format from their beginning (and who considered Captain Marvel to be the “lowligh” of his career), was chosen to edit *Superman vs. Shazam!* How did Conway like working with DC's prominent editor? “When I first started writing for DC back in late ‘60s-early ‘70s, everyone was heavy-handed with me because I was just a kid. When I came back to DC for about a year in the mid-‘70s I did some work under Julie's editorial control, which led to one confrontation between us over a *Justice League* script I had written where almost every single line had been rewritten. I later discovered that Julie wasn't even doing it himself because he was handing off scripts to Bob Rozakis to edit. At the time I blew up at Julie, which was really shocking to me because he was a hero of mine. Julie's comics were the kind of comics that I had always wanted to write. But then, from that point on, we got along very well and did some really good work together.”

Conway also praises Rich Buckler's artistry on the book: “The beauty of *Superman vs. Shazam!* was that it really gave Rich an opportunity to go hot and do the kind of work that he was capable of doing.”



# PAUL DINI & ALEX ROSS



## DISCUSS A TREASURED FORMAT

by Zack Smith



The tabloid-sized treasury format was a beloved staple of 1970s comics, offering both reprints of classic stories and the occasional new epic tale in an oversized package. But times change and printing costs go up, and by the mid-1980s, the format was virtually dead.

But nostalgia is powerful, and so are proven creators. And in the late 1990s, two of the most acclaimed names to come up that decade teamed up to revive that classic format with some of DC's most classic characters.

Writer **Paul Dini**, who'd become an Emmy-winning fan-favorite for his work on *Batman: The Animated Series* and other DC animated series and tie-in books, teamed with **Alex Ross**, whose photorealistic painted artwork on such series as *Marvels* and *Kingdom Come* had made him one of the most in-demand artists in comics.

From 1998 to 2003, they produced a series of fully painted, oversized books featuring DC's biggest heroes: *Superman: Peace on Earth*, *Batman: War on Crime*, *Shazam!: Power of Hope*, *Wonder Woman: Spirit of Truth*, and the *JLA* books *Secret Origins* and *Liberty and Justice*. The books featured more character-based, contemplative looks at DC's icons,

and have since been collected in the (alas, slightly-reduced-in-size) volume *The World's Greatest Super-Heroes*.

We got Dini and Ross on the phone to discuss their collaboration, what made these works special, and of course, their love for the treasury format.

— Zack Smith

**ZACK SMITH:** *I was curious about how familiar you were about the treasury format, and what it meant to you, and if there were any editions that were particularly meaningful to you growing up.*

**PAUL DINI:** Well, I remember as a kid, if a story was in a treasury edition, that meant you had to sit up and take notice, because this was a story you couldn't get in any other format. There was the *Spider-Man/Superman* book—there was something about the biggest character at Marvel, meeting the biggest hero at DC, and that format reflected how big it was. I had to have it.

**ALEX ROSS:** I remember when I was a teenager and had missed out on buying the various treasury editions that came out when I was younger—and I found out

### World Watch

Four Justice Leaguers (five, counting the uninvited Batman, seen in the last panel) inside the Pentagon. From *JLA: Liberty and Justice* (2003), Alex Ross' art, sans Paul Dini's script. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

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most were extremely affordable, because they were reprints and seen as having no back-issue potential.

**DINI:** Neal Adams was my favorite artist, and I'd try to get regular-sized back issues he'd drawn, and I'd go to a comic shop and they were like, eight, nine dollars. And I bought *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali*, thinking, "This is great, and it'll be worth like a hundred dollars someday." [laughs]

**SMITH:** *That's actually going for a few hundred these days.*

**DINI:** [stunned] Really?

**ROSS:** I've got two or three copies of that in decent shape! I should cash in!

I think the format was great in particular for Adams and Jack Kirby—for appreciating what their artwork was to this medium. Comics pack you into a tight format—I know I was always screaming for whatever larger formats were available, and why I hoped to revive this one.

**DINI:** I remember I was disappointed Adams didn't draw *Superman/Spider-Man*—they had Ross Andru, who was great, but he was the regular *Spider-Man* artist. I wanted to see Adams take on *Spider-Man*.

**ROSS:** Actually, he did do a little of it. He was in the studio at the time and did some touch-ups. I believe *BACK ISSUE* revealed this! [Editor's note: Alex is right! See BI #11.]

**SMITH:** *When I first discovered treasury editions, what I loved were reprints, like the Galactus Saga in Fantastic Four, or the Mordru story with the Legion of Super-Heroes, and how it made these stories seem even more big and epic. Did you ever discover any classic stories through these editions?*

**ROSS:** Well, those were some of the first reprints, aside from a few things like 100-page Super-Spectaculars and stuff like that. So the way I got knowledge of many characters—of their powers, their personalities, their histories—were from books like the ones they did with the origins of supervillains.

**DINI:** It became more of a special occasion to see them—at the time, I remember what I really loved was the Howard the Duck/Defenders crossover. Gerber was firing on all cylinders, and that was a fun book. That was sort of when they were moving away from those big, world-ending stories, though—like if they'd done something like Howard vs. Donald Duck, that would have been huge. [laughs] I understand the need to maximize the characters' appeal by doing something in a magazine format, moving them off the spinner rack, but I miss how these formats would have that special punch.

## Superman: Peace on Earth

(top) Cover to *Peace on Earth* (Jan. 1999).

(bottom) Alex Ross' pencil art featuring the Man of Steel speaking to the US Congress about world hunger. Courtesy of the artist.

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