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BACK seat driver

by **Roger Ash**

While putting together articles for BACK ISSUE #164, the "Alien Invasion" issue, I realized that we had never covered the "Kree-Skrull War." Perhaps it had never been covered for some reason I was unaware of, so I reached out to John Morrow to find out. I learned there was no reason, so it was full steam ahead. Except the story was too big to fit in with the other articles planned for #164, so it was set aside for this issue, which would obviously be a war issue.

Except this isn't a war issue. Try as I might, I was having a difficult time finding enough war stories, characters, or titles to fill out an issue that we hadn't covered before. So, I reached out again, this time to Michael Eury. He said I was limiting myself too much and I should expand the topic. Among his suggestions was rivalries. That was something I could work with.

Rivalries make for great stories with a high potential for drama. As I write this, I'm seeing some rivalries played out in the MLB postseason and the first few weeks of the NFL season. Rivalries can be friendly, deadly, and nearly everything in between. Rivalries make for good comics.

There's no bigger rivalry than war, so the "Kree-Skrull War" is a perfect story to feature. Aside from being a gripping tale, it's a classic of the Bronze Age as well as one of the linchpins of the Marvel Universe. Roy Thomas, Neal Adams, Sal Buscema, and John Buscema all worked on it. You've gotta admit that that's an incredible lineup of creators. It's something worth celebrating.

One of my favorite titles of the Bronze Age was *New Teen Titans*. Creators Marv Wolfman and George Perez made it a must read every month. And when you're speaking of

rivalries, they don't come much nastier than the feud between sisters Starfire and Blackfire. And the rivalry had huge consequences as it also affected the people they were born to rule.

On the other end of the scale, we have one of my favorite running rivalries in the Marvel Universe, the floating poker game. It was always fun to see heroes kicking back and playing a hand or two of poker before some yahoo showed up to ruin their fun. This was one of the things that attracted me to Marvel as it made their heroes feel more human and relatable.

Two of our articles attempt to answer eternal questions in comic book fandom. We've got the classic who's stronger, the Thing or the Hulk? We also have the equally classic who's faster, Superman or the Flash? Will these articles end the debate? I highly doubt it, but just like the rivalries, they make for entertaining reading.

But you don't have to be a superhero to have a rival. This look at rivalries checks in on two evergreen examples. First up, we've got Archie Andrew and Reggie Mantle. Heck, there was even a series that called Reggie Archie's rival in the title, so you know it's a classic. Last, but certainly not least, is the rivalry between Donald Duck and his seemingly supernaturally lucky cousin, Gladstone Gander. Gladstone's luck always gets Donald's goat and makes him do something rash that seems to lead to hilarity.

Rivalries was certainly the way to go. I tip my hat to you, Mr. Eury. After all, I hear that war is good for absolutely nothing. It's time to dig in, dear readers. I hope you enjoy this issue.

We had so much great art for this issue, these covers nearly didn't make the cut! Bonus covers from (left) Neal Adams with Marie Severin, (middle) Dan Jurgens and José Marzán Jr., and (right) Alex Ross.

The Avengers, Fantastic Four, Thing, and Hulk TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. Flash and Superman TM & © DC Comics.



THE KREE-SKRULL WAR

1971: A SPACE ODYSSEY



by **Jarrold Buttery**



*Rivalries don't get much bigger than between **Galactic Empires**. As one of Marvel Comics' linchpins, the "Kree-Skrull War" owes its origins to a rich, shared universe.*

CELESTIALS

Scene-setting: Many of the characters featured in the "Kree-Skrull War" were created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, but later creations—the Celestials—belong to Kirby alone. *Eternals* #1 (July 1976) reminds us that: "Every myth and legend to emerge from the distant past points to a strange visitation from the stars!!" The blurb for the following issue promises "Celestials From Space" and, indeed, we (and archaeologist Dr. Daniel Damian, and his daughter Margo) meet the Celestials (one of them at least) in *Eternals* #2 (Aug. 1976).

Marvel's first volume of the series *What If?* occasionally featured back-ups entitled "Untold Tales of the Marvel Universe." Issue #23 (Oct. 1980) expands upon Kirby's details. In "The First Celestial Host," writer Mark Gruenwald explains how the Celestials voyage across the galaxy seeking worlds which have birthed life with the potential for intelligence. Gammenon the Gatherer collects indigenous lifeforms. Ziran the Tester irradiates the specimens, altering their genetic blueprint, creating creatures with unstable genetic phenotypes—creatures that will one day be called Deviants. Meanwhile, Nezzar the Calculator tests specimens for durability and longevity, creating beings possessing the ability to tap the energy of the cosmos—a new breed which will one day be called Eternals. With a name to strike terror into all, Oneg the Prober imbues specimens with a latent gene and allows that species to mature naturally—one day becoming Human.

SKRULLS

The Marvel Age of Comics commenced with *Fantastic Four* #1 (Nov. 1961) and we were introduced to Mister Fantastic (Reed Richards), the Invisible Girl (Susan Storm), the Human Torch (Johnny Storm), and the Thing (Ben Grimm). Superheroes were making a comeback but Marvel—then primarily known for monster and fantasy comics such as *Strange Tales* and *Journey Into Mystery*—continued to hedge its bets. The cover to *FF* #1 prominently portrayed a monster emerging from beneath a city street. Heck, one of these new super-characters looked like a monster himself!

In their second issue, the *Fantastic Four*—still depicted in civilian clothes—encounter "The Skrulls From Outer Space!" The issue opens with the fabulous foursome apparently committing crimes! Have they turned evil in only their second

Neal Adams' cover art for a 2019
"Kree-Skrull War" reprint collection.

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(top left) The Celestial Tefral is featured on the cover of *The Eternals* #7. Art by Jack Kirby and John Verpoorten.

(top right) The Skrulls debuted in *Fantastic Four* #2. Art by Jack Kirby and George Klein.

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appearance? No, they are being impersonated by shape-shifting aliens called Skrulls. This conniving quartet is the advance guard for an alien invasion force—but they must first discredit their only potential opposition: the Fantastic Four!

It's clearly shown that—whilst Skrulls can change their shape—they have no real powers of their own. The faux-Thing uses a detonator (not strength) to destroy an oil rig. The larcenist "Imitation Girl" simply shrinks out of sight, rather than becoming invisible. The phony Torch uses a jetpack (and some sort of protective outfit), and the elasticated ersatz Mr. Fantastic explains, "As for me, I needed no special devices! For it's an easy matter for me to alter my body in any way I desire!"

The true FF are arrested, but they escape and uncover the counterfeit culprits. We see that the four Skrulls are captured and tied up. The real FF use the Skrulls' shuttlecraft to fly to the Skrull mothership orbiting Earth. Our FF pretend to be

the Skrull imposters reporting to their superiors. Our Mister Fantastic presents clipped art from *Strange Tales* and *Journey Into Mystery* as proof of Earth's defences. Aliens were seemingly more gullible in the 1960s, and the panicking Skrull commander orders that the invasion force leaves Earth forever!

After receiving the Skrull medal for bravery, for volunteering to stay behind, our FF return to Earth. We see that there are only three Skrulls at their old hideout, but Reed postulates that, "The fourth one is on his way to another galaxy now with the rest of his invasion fleet!" Reed tells the Police Chief that he has an idea to deal with the three remaining Skrulls. Reed orders the Skrulls to change into cows and subsequently hypnotises them so that they will forget they're Skrulls. And they never caused any trouble ever again...

To be fair, in *Fantastic Four Annual* #17 (1983), Sue tells us that: "Reed's examination of the captured Skrulls had determined their eyes were much less complex than ours, rendering them incapable of more subtle visual perceptions." She also acknowledges that, "Although one of the masqueraders escaped, we were able to capture the other three and learn their plans to invade and conquer our planet."

By definition, a quadrant is one of four parts: a quarter. But Skrulls are so devious, their home planet is in the FIFTH quadrant of the Andromeda Galaxy, as we discover in *Fantastic Four* #18 (Sep. 1963). Emperor Dorrek VII is seething that his invasion of Earth was thwarted by the Fantastic Four. He has commissioned his scientists to create a Super-Skrull, who possesses all the powers of the FF—and more!

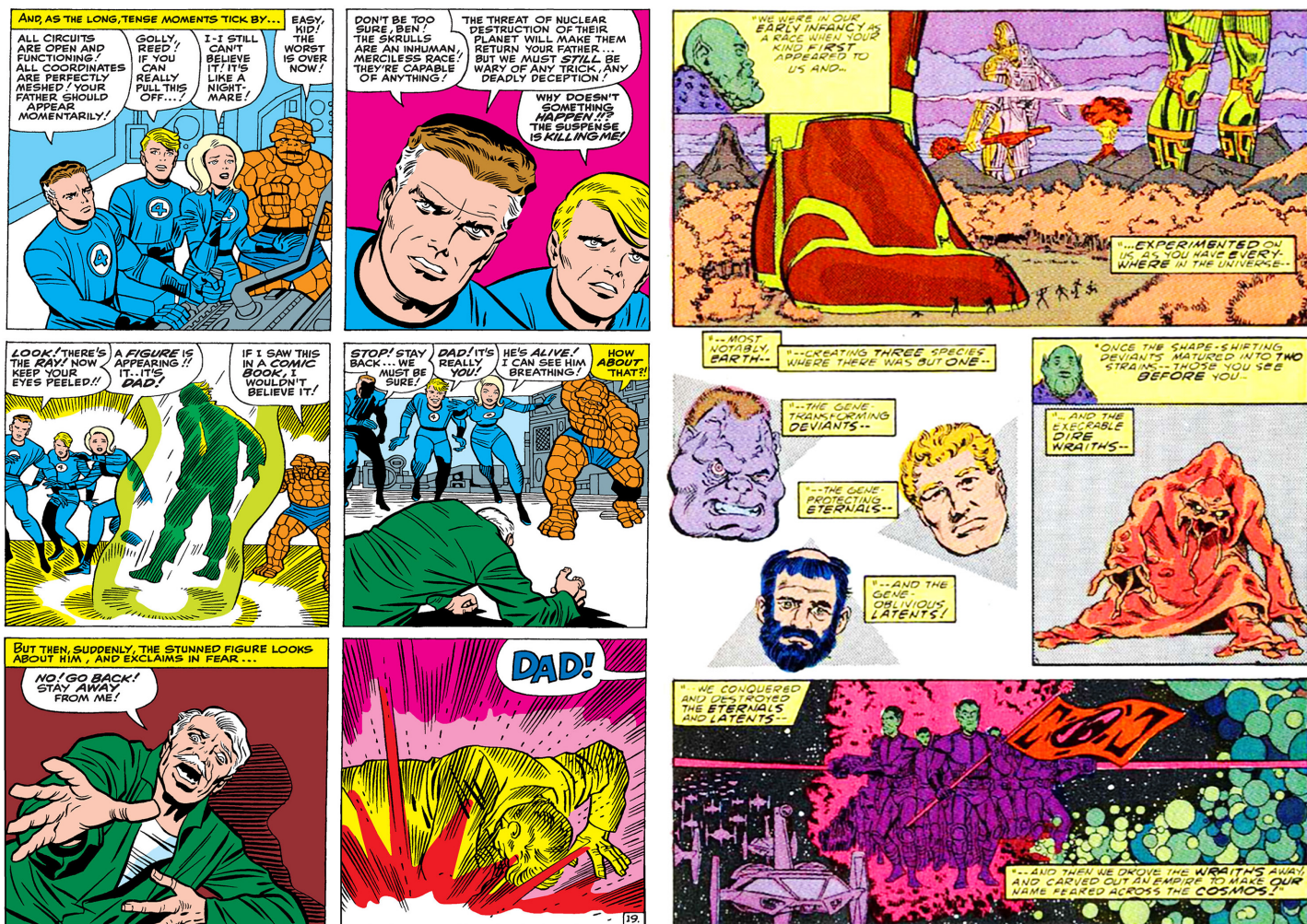
The Super-Skrull certainly lives up to his name by overpowering our heroes. Correctly deducing that someone so powerful must be tapping an external energy source, Reed constructs a "jammer" to block this energy source, and the Super-Skrull is defeated. Disguised as the Invincible Man, the Super-Skrull returns in *FF* #32 (Nov. 1964) and is returned to his home planet. Tragically, Sue and Johnny's father—Dr. Franklin Storm—is killed by a Skrull booby trap. Our heroes travel to the Skrull homeworld in *FF* #37 (Apr. 1965), seeking justice. There, Sue saves the life of Emperor Dorrek's daughter—the Princess Anelle—and Dorrek swears off conquering Earth.

The shape-changing ability of the Skrulls is occasionally attributed to their deviant genetic code. In *Silver Surfer* #5 (Nov. 1987) it is specifically stated that the Celestials visited the Skrulls in their early infancy as a race and experimented upon them. The resultant shape-shifting deviants matured into two strains: the Skrulls that we know, and the Dire Wraiths. The Deviant Skrulls drove away the Wraiths and exterminated the Eternal and Latent Skrulls. Canonically, the Skrulls of the Marvel Universe are the Deviants of their race.

This Walter Simonson/Tom Palmer cover graced an early collection of "The Kree-Skrull War."

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INHUMANS

What's a super-team without an analogous baddie-team? The Fantastic Four meet the Frightful Four in *FF* #36 (Mar. 1965), introducing Madame Medusa—who has complete control over her voluminous red hair. We later discover that Medusa is a member of the royal family of the Inhumans: a genetically advanced side-species which became highly civilised while humans still lived in caves. Medusa had suffered an accidental temporary memory-loss (and joined the Frightful Four) but was soon obligated to return to The Great Refuge—housing the advanced civilisation of Attilan nestled in the Andes. [Although later revealed to be the Himalayas.]

A back-up series in *Thor* revealed the origin of the incomparable Inhumans. Issue #147 (Dec. 1967) follows the robotic Sentry 459 as it visits Attilan during Earth's Stone-Age. The mechanoid monologues: "My supreme masters, the all-powerful Kree, elected to test the power-potential of the savages whom they found inhabiting this hostile wasteland. Thus, they isolated one small tribe, subjecting the earthlings to an evolutionary speed-up, while slightly altering the basic pattern of their genes."

Whereas the Eternals are earthlings that were genetically manipulated by the Celestials, the Inhumans are earthlings that were genetically manipulated by the Kree. Another "Untold Tales of the Marvel Universe" in *What If?* #29 (Oct. 1981) depicts the Eternals assisting the Inhumans in finding the Himalayan location for the Great Refuge (in the 1950s).

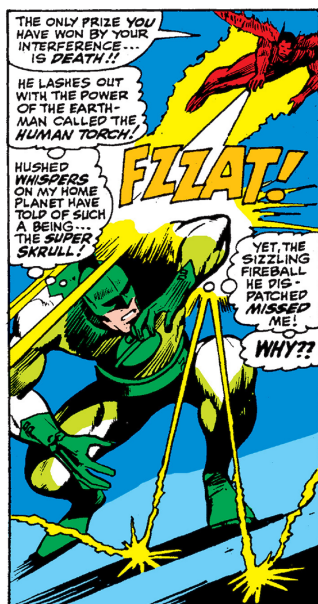


(top left) Dr. Franklin Storm saves his children from a Skrull booby trap in *Fantastic Four* #32. Art by Jack Kirby and Chic Stone.

(top right) Some Skrull history is revealed in *Silver Surfer* #5. Art by Marshall Rogers and Joe Rubinstein.

(bottom) A classic *Fantastic Four* cover by Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott featuring the Inhumans Royal Family.

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THE KREE

Dr. Daniel Damian discovers an ancient alien outpost, on a South-Pacific Island, in *Fantastic Four* #64 (July 1967). In doing so, Damian awakens Inter-Galactic Sentry 459, whose mission is to protect the outpost under the orders of its alien masters—the Kree. The Sentry engages a vibrational screen around the island. The Fantastic Four investigate and are attacked by the Sentry, who proclaims, "This area has been designated as a Space Port, to be used only by the Kree race!" During the battle, some part of the alien equipment is damaged causing the entire outpost to explode. The Fantastic Four escape (rescuing Dr. Damian and his assistant), while the Sentry makes a final report...

Fantastic Four #65 (Aug. 1967) opens with our heroes being telepathically contacted by the Supreme Intelligence of the Kree, who blames our heroes for the destruction of his outpost and loyal Sentry. The Supreme Intelligence—simply depicted as a green head with tendrils—declares that the FF will be sentenced by Ronan the Accuser.

Ronan is an extraordinarily powerful being. Armoured, cybernetically-enhanced, and over seven-foot tall, he is armed with the Universal Weapon, which can do—well—anything Stan and Jack can imagine. Ronan (Caucasian in this debut appearance) accuses and sentences the FF to the extreme penalty. The FF seem outmatched until Ben wrestles Ronan to fall upon his own weapon—just as it discharges—causing Ronan to be teleported away. Reed mulls that, "The Kree now know that they are dealing with an intelligent race—and a fighting race!"

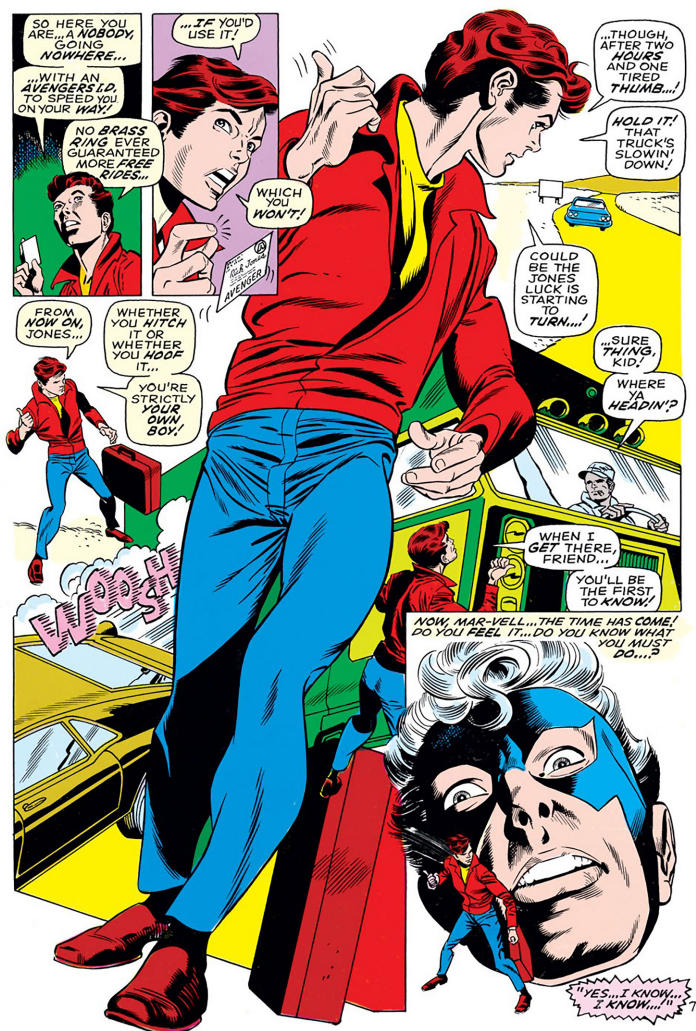
CAPTAIN MARVEL

"Stan Lee didn't want to co-create a hero named Captain Marvel—but he did, just the same. Because Martin Goodman told him to," writes Roy Thomas in his introduction to *Marvel Masterworks: Captain Marvel* Vol 1. "Goodman's directive was, as Stan told me at the time, to devise a hero named Captain Marvel; the details were left to him. Stan, I recall, was not thrilled about doing this. The original [Fawcett Publications] Cap had been so popular that he didn't want to create a hero with the same name. But Stan at that stage was a good soldier—so he informed artist Gene Colan that he was going to be drawing a new hero called Captain Marvel.

"The Lee/Colan Captain Marvel was created an alien—one of the star-spawned Kree, whose android Sentry and then avenger Ronan the Accuser had popped up in *FF* #64-65 only a few months before, the brainchild of Stan and Jack Kirby; so, the Kree were on his mind at the time. Why *shouldn't* this

(top) The Fantastic Four encounter the Supreme Intelligence of the Kree. Art by Kirby and Sinnott. (middle left) The Fantastic Four face Ronan the Accuser. Art by Kirby and Sinnott. (middle right) Captain Marvel debuts in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #12. Cover by Gene Colan and Frank Giacoia. (bottom) Captain Marvel faces a familiar foe in the second issue of his own series. Art by Gene Colan and Vince Colletta.

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(left) Rick Jones played a pivotal role in "The Kree-Skrull War." Art by Kane and Adkins. (middle) Captain Marvel gets a spiffy new costume in issue #16, and it appears on the cover of #17. Cover by Gil Kane and Dan Adkins. (right) An ominous and disturbing cover by Sal Buscema.

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other-galactic race send an expedition to punish the Earth for its ill-treatment of the Sentry and Ronan?"

With the score at Humans: 2, Kree: 0, the Supreme Intelligence sends a reconnaissance mission to Earth, under the command of Colonel Yon-Rogg, in *Marvel Super-Heroes* #12 (Dec. 1967). Yon-Rogg is the epitome of Machiavellianism. He sends Captain Mar-Vell planet side—solo—to study our world to help the Kree decide whether it should live or die. Yon-Rogg is desperate to woo (a euphemism) Mar-Vell's girlfriend, Una, and would like nothing better than to hasten Mar-Vell's demise.

In *Marvel Super-Heroes* #13 (Mar. 1968), Mar-Vell infiltrates Cape Canaveral—meeting Head of Security, Carol Danvers—and discovers that their lab has recovered Sentry 459 from the South Pacific Ocean. Yon-Rogg reactivates the Sentry from afar. Mar-Vell dons his battle-suit to combat the android, and Earth assumes that Mar-Vell is a new superhero named Captain Marvel.

The story continues immediately into *Captain Marvel* #1 (May 1968). Issue #2 (June 1968) sees Skrull Emperor Dorrek monitoring these developments: "So... after all these millennia the infernal Kree have sent another emissary to the world called Earth! But why? I must learn what part the long-forgotten Earth is to play in our centuries-old intergalactic rivalry with the Kree!" And Dorrek sends the Super-Skrull to investigate. Shenanigans ensue.

These early issues of Mar-Vell's own mag were written by Roy Thomas. From the same Masterworks introduction, Thomas writes: "In *Captain Marvel* #2 I brought in another *Fantastic Four* foe—the Super-Skrull. After all, the Kree and the Skrulls were both predatory races roaming about out there among the galaxies, so I figured their emissaries should clash. I didn't know it at the time, but I was setting the stage for what would

eventually emerge a couple of years later in the *Avengers* as the legendary 'Kree-Skrull War!'"

Bit by bit we learn more about the Kree. Mar-Vell's home planet is Kree-Lar. The homeworld of the Kree Empire is Hala, orbiting the sun Pama, in the Greater Magellanic Cloud. Upon Hala resides the Supreme Intelligence—an amalgamation of the most fantastic Kree minds from thousands of centuries... preserved together as one collected will. In *Captain Marvel* #16 (Sep. 1969), the Supreme Intelligence has uncovered a potential coup staged by his Imperial Minister, Zarek, and Ronan. Both are Blue Kree—original Kree, native to Hala—who have taken exception to the liberal policies of the Supreme Intelligence.

Zarek explains his plot to turn a Kree hero (Mar-Vell) into a traitor through Mar-Vell's defence of Earth. The lax policies of the Supreme Intelligence would be blamed. Zarek and Ronan would be hailed for uncovering such and would be able to overthrow the Supreme Intelligence. But the Supreme Intelligence fights back, apprehends Zarek and Ronan, and rewards Mar-Vell with a sexy new costume with matching Nega-Band bracelets. No longer resembling a spinach and cottage cheese platter, Mar-Vell departs Hala—but is hurled into the Negative Zone!

Captain Marvel #17 (Oct. 1969), written by Roy Thomas, focuses on former Hulk-sidekick, and former Captain America-sidekick, Rick Jones. Rick has been rejected by Captain America (actually, the Red Skull impersonating Cap) and hitchhikes out of New York. Lured to an abandoned Kree base in the middle of nowhere, Rick is compelled to don a couple of "far-out bracelets" which are also Kree Nega-Bands. Mentally contacted by Mar-Vell, Rick slams the Nega-Bands together—and he and Mar-Vell trade places. Mar-Vell returns to Earth whilst Rick is transported to the Negative Zone. Repeating the process reverses the transfer.

In *Captain Marvel* #18 (Nov. 1969), Yon-Rogg employs a Kree device known as the Psyche-Magnitron to give himself vast mental powers to destroy Mar-Vell. During the battle, the Psyche-Magnitron explodes, Yon-Rogg is killed, and a kidnapped Carol Danvers is exposed to the device's strange energies. After a New York adventure in issue #19 (Dec. 1969), *Captain Marvel* went on hiatus.

(left) An important moment from *Avengers* #89 that leads to "The Kree-Skrull War." Art by Sal Buscema and Sam Grainger.

(right) Ronan seems to have everything going his way. Art by Sal Buscema.

Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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THE AVENGERS

At this time, *Avengers* was also being written by Roy Thomas. Our heroes had recently defeated Ultron in issue #68 (Sep. 1969) and Kang in issue #71 (Dec. 1969). Issue #72 focuses on Rick Jones. Still smarting from his assumed rejection from Captain America, Rick attempts to contact Nick Fury—but is ambushed by the villainous Scorpio. Rick contacts the Avengers but they are then ambushed by Scorpio! However, Rick chooses to join the fight himself rather than reveal his connection to Mar-Vell.

Rick's next *Avengers* appearance is in issue #89 (June 1971), by Roy Thomas and Sal Buscema. Mar-Vell features prominently on the cover accompanied by the blurb: "The Only Good Alien... is a Dead Alien!" Therein, we find both Mar-Vell and Rick, on Earth and separated! A flashback informs us of how Mar-Vell—in the Negative Zone—witnessed a visit by Reed Richards in *Fantastic Four* #110 (May 1971). Through their mental bond, Mar-Vell entreats Rick to swap places with him. Now on Earth, Mar-Vell flies to the Baxter Building: headquarters of the Fantastic Four. Rather than requesting assistance (the Kree are not famed for their patience), Mar-Vell simply forces entry, opens the portal to the Negative Zone, and urges Rick to return to Earth.

One may ask, "Where is Reed Richards during all of this?" and the answer would be, "conveniently

out of town." However, Mar-Vell's forced entry activates an intruder alarm at Avengers Mansion, and the Vision, Quicksilver, and the Scarlet Witch race to the Baxter Building. Annihilus—the living death who walks, and Lord of the Negative Zone—attempts to follow Rick to Earth but is tricked back into the Negative Zone. Mar-Vell departs, and the Avengers discover Rick and a wildly glowing radiation detector. It seems Mar-Vell has picked up some Negative Zone radiation which could build into a chain reaction sufficient to destroy the Earth! The Avengers track, trap, and transport Mar-Vell to Cape Kennedy (Canaveral) in an attempt to drain his excess radiation.

All seems under control until we segue to the Kree Galaxy in the last two pages. We find that Ronan is again challenging the authority of the Kree Intelligence Supreme (sic). Seeking revenge against Mar-Vell, Ronan remotely reactivates Sentry 459 (still stored at Cape Canaveral) to kill Captain Marvel! This, then, is the first chapter of the Kree-Skrull War.

THE KREE-SKRULL WAR

Avengers #90 (July 1971), also by Roy Thomas and Sal Buscema, sees Sentry 459 making short work of the Vision, Quicksilver, and the Scarlet Witch. But the Sentry has received new orders to commence Plan Atavus, and it teleports away with a captive Mar-Vell.



(top) The first salvo in the war from *Avengers* #91. Art by Sal Buscema. (bottom) The roots of the enmity between the Skrull and the Kree are revealed in *Avengers* #133. Art by Sal Buscema and Joe Staton.

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Completely coincidentally, the Wasp contacts Goliath (Clint Barton) that she and her husband Hank (Yellowjacket) have been investigating some missing technicians in Alaska—and found a jungle on the outskirts of the Arctic Circle! Goliath informs the rest of the Avengers, and they head north—unaware that they are approaching Ronan’s base.

Ronan tells the captive Mar-Vell: “A planet which can produce such a race—which can go from steam power to atomic power in less than a century—is a potential threat to Kree supremacy in space—a threat which cannot be allowed to grow and fester.” Plan Atavus uses Evo-Rays to devolve... “Every type of life in their path—yea, even the very elements themselves are affected—hurled back upon an evolutionary path to the state which the Kree first found them, eons ago. Nor shall that hurling back end until a million years of human history on this planet is eradicated—wiped out!”

The Evo-Rays, of course, have devolved this section of the Arctic—catapulting the environment back in time to an age of mammoths and smilodons. Caught in its effects, Hank Pym, too, has been devolved into a bestial primitive—and the cliffhanger ending sees the man who was once called Yellowjacket descending upon his helpless wife! But still no Skrulls.

Ronan cackles maniacally on the splash page of *Avengers* #91 (Aug. 1971) still by Roy Thomas and Sal Buscema. Yellowjacket is devolved, Goliath is entranced, Mar-Vell is manacled, and our three remaining Avengers are besieged. Soon, the Vision and Scarlet Witch are captured—leaving free only Quicksilver (and Rick Jones). However, as Quicksilver breaks into Ronan’s fortress, Rick frees Mar-Vell and disrupts Ronan’s delicate equipment. As the Kree base begins to sink beneath the Arctic ice, Ronan receives a transmission from the Kree Galaxy: “An emergency, fifth magnitude, has occurred in the short time since you left us. The Kree Galaxy... is at war! Our space lanes have once more been invaded—our stellar freighters decimated—by our inter-nebular rivals. The entire Kree Galaxy is under assault from the Skrulls!”

Ronan declares: “The Skrulls! They are our avowed foes—since time out of mind. No longer can I toy with this miserable blemish upon the map of the universe. For, usurper though I be... my place is still... with my people!” and he cuts bait and runs. The Avengers find the missing technicians (whom they were looking for in the first place) and everyone attempts to find some warm clothes as the Arctic reclaims the jungle.

Flashback: the Fantastic Four gained their powers upon a failed attempt to fly to the stars in *FF* #1. Their next spaceflight, in *FF* #13 (Apr. 1963), is decidedly more successful. Reed specifically navigates towards the mysterious Blue Area of the Moon and finds: “There’s the reason it photographs blue! There’s a long-dead city below us! The remains of some ancient civilisation! Man isn’t first on the moon!” The FF also meet the Watcher—who didn’t build the ancient city but nevertheless lives there.

Fast-forward: Travelling through time, several Avengers witness the first meeting between Kree and Skrulls, in *Avengers* #133 (Mar. 1975), by Steve Englehart, Sal Buscema, and Joe Staton. We see that, in Kree Year Zero—their first year of recorded history—the Kree border on barbarism, but already they are a warlike people... strong, brutal, and quick to anger. The planet Hala is co-occupied by a telepathic plant race—the Cotati—who have climbed the evolutionary ladder from algae to the point of near-parity with the humanoid Kree. Co-existing, the meat-eating Kree consider all plants beneath their notice, and the Cotati consider the barbarians to be frenetic and unstable.

In this Kree Year Zero, Hala is visited by a Skrull starship. Emperor Dorrek I tells both races that the Skrulls have perfected interstellar vessels within the past decade and seek trade. The Skrulls are not warriors but offer knowledge and technology in exchange for loyalty and resources. However, because Hala is home to two races, Dorrek



(top) Neal Adams' first work on "The Kree-Skrull War" was the cover to *Avengers* #92. (bottom) Neal Adams officially arrives in *Avengers* #93. Art by Adams and Tom Palmer.

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STEVE ENGLEHART

steveenglehart.com.

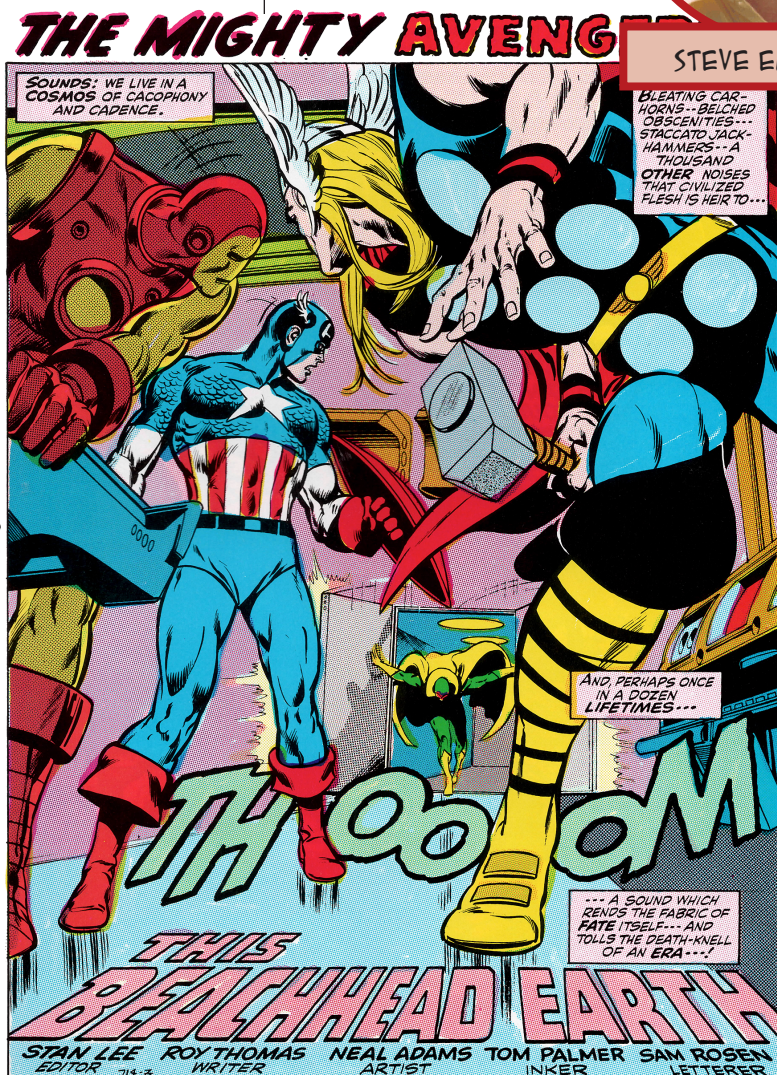
sense for current readers. But I liked it while it lasted."

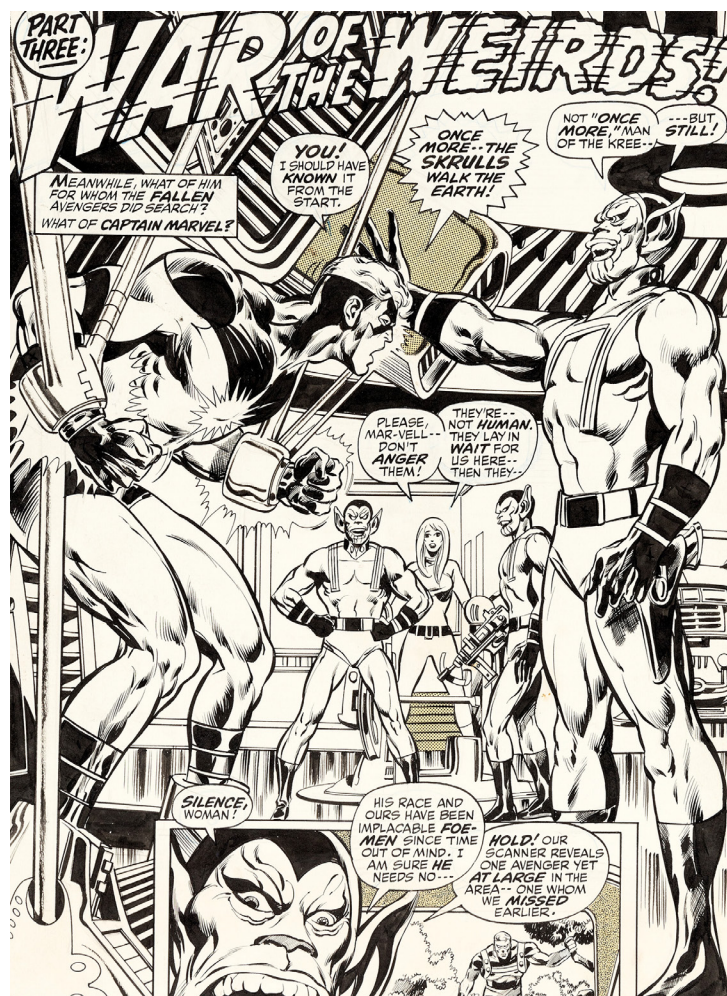
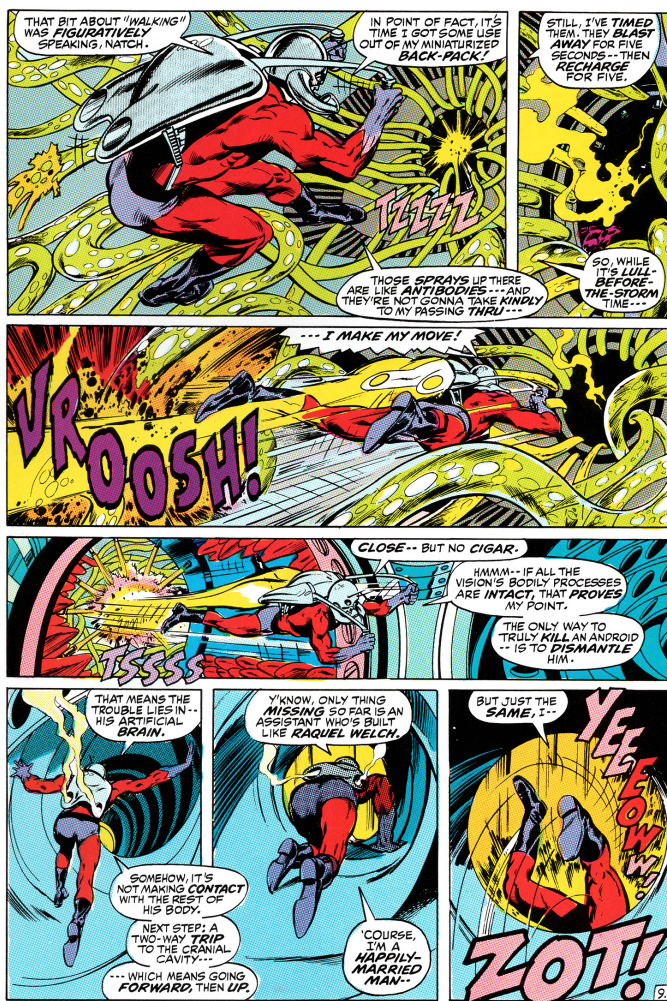
AS THE WAR BEGINS—ALL THINGS MUST END!

Back to *Avengers* #92 (Sep. 1971)—again by Roy Thomas and Sal Buscema. The Scarlet Witch could have enjoyed a nice stroll in the park were it not for the Avengers' butler, Jarvis, bursting into the room with the latest edition of the Daily Bugle newspaper: "Alien Plot to Conquer Earth Disclosed!" proclaims the headline. Followed by: "Technicians Tell of Top-Secret Alaska Battle Between Avengers and Mysterious Race Known Only as 'The Kree'. President Acts Quickly to Appoint Special Commission."

As Quicksilver turns on the television, we see and hear: "Coming this way is H. Warren Craddock—fresh from his appointment by the president as head of the new Alien Activities Commission." Craddock tells reporters that aliens will be swiftly and firmly dealt with, and that he has a list of 'model citizens' who are actually alien spies. There are also allusions that Captain Marvel is 'one of these aliens' and that he has befriended the Avengers. Almost immediately, we see protestors around Avengers Mansion, carrying placards such as 'Avengers are Traitors!' and 'Earth—Love it or Leave it!' and 'Avengers Dis-Assemble!'

Mar-Vell leaves Avengers Mansion in a borrowed Quinjet and outruns S.H.I.E.L.D. pursuers. Craddock accuses Nick Fury of letting Mar-Vell escape. The Avengers are subsequently summonsed before the Alien Activities Commission and are accused of aiding and abetting these alien enemies of freedom. Reed Richards and Ben Grimm are called as witnesses. Reed shares his knowledge of the Kree and opines that if the Avengers vouch for Mar-Vell, then he'd be inclined to accept their judgment. Ben is less circumspect, stating that he knows Iron Man and Thor but doesn't know these Avengers—declaring that they shouldn't have helped Mar-Vell to leave.





Amongst all this, Rick reminisces about his youth; about how he grew up reading old comics featuring Captain America, the Sub-Mariner, the Human Torch, and more. It was a simpler time, where super-powered joes had a clear idea of truth, justice, law 'n' order. "These days, you can't tell the good guys from the bad guys without a scorecard—and there ain't no scorecard!"

Rick has a vision of Mar-Vell being attacked and runs off. The Avengers return to their mansion to find that it has been trashed by protestors. Suddenly, Thor, Iron Man, and Captain America arrive. Cap accuses Goliath, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch, and the Vision of acting irresponsibly in shielding Mar-Vell, and declares the Avengers disbanded—for all time.

THREE COWS SHOT ME DOWN

Artist Neal Adams arrives in *Avengers* #93 (Nov. 1971)—an oversized issue at a time when Marvel briefly experimented with larger page-counts. But why does Neal's cover depict the Fantastic Four attacking the Avengers? "This Beachhead Earth" opens with an injured Vision staggering into Avengers Mansion, asking Thor, Iron Man, and Captain America for help, and then collapsing. Unable to discern any vital signs from the android Avenger, our heroes are relieved when Hank Pym arrives in his Ant-Man identity. Undertaking a fantastic voyage to the center of the android, Pym reconnects a damaged wire and the Vision recovers.

The Vision recounts what happened after 'Captain America' disbanded the Avengers: Goliath, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch, and the Vision drive to the farm where Mar-Vell is supposed to be hiding. The Vision is blasted from the sky and lands at the feet of three cows—three cows who transform into the Fantastic Four and capture Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch!

Of course, these three cows are the Skrulls that were hypnotised by Reed Richards in *Fantastic Four* #2. They were revived by a Skrull hyper-beam from space and are now working with the Super-Skrull. As the Avengers battle the faux-FF, the Super-Skrull takes off in his starship with captives Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch, and Mar-Vell.

Adams pencils the first chapter (six pages), and the third chapter (seven pages), of *Avengers* #94 (Dec. 1971). We learn that the three cow-Skrulls impersonated Thor, Iron Man, and Captain America to disband the Avengers so that Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch could be more readily kidnapped. The Super-Skrull taps their mutant brainwaves to detect others with similar brain-waves—others whom he must destroy because of their Kree heritage—others who are called the Inhumans! The Super-Skrull attempts to destroy The Great Refuge, but it is protected by an energy-dome.

In the middle chapter of the issue—penciled by John Buscema—the Super-Skrull takes his three captives to the Skrull homeworld. Emperor

(left) Ant-Man gets the inside story on Vision. (right) Captain Marvel is captured by the Skrulls. Art by Adams and Palmer. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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NEAL ADAMS

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(top left) The Super-Skrull in action by John Buscema and Tom Palmer.

(top right) Iron Man defeats the Mandroids and Triton arrives. Art by Adams and Palmer. Original art scans courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

(bottom) The Mandroids enter the fray. Art by Neal Adams and Tom Palmer.

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Dorrek VII recognises that Mar-Vell, as a Kree Captain, must know the secret of the Omni-Wave Projector—the sole means of instantaneous communication between galaxies. With such a secret, Dorrek could send a doom ray through the Kree's stoutest defences, wiping their homeworld out of existence in the twinkling of an eye! Mar-Vell—of course—refuses to divulge such information, until Dorrek threatens the lives of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, much to the disgust of Dorrek's daughter, Anelle.

Back on Earth, Neal Adams depicts H. Warren Craddock railing against the Avengers for defying him and sends Mandroids—specially trained agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. in super-sophisticated armor—to arrest our heroes. During the melee, Triton of the Inhumans emerges from a manhole!

SOMETHING INHUMAN THIS WAY COMES

Avengers #95 (Jan. 1972)—penciled by Neal Adams—shows Iron Man defeating the Mandroids. Well, one would hope so, considering that Tony Stark designed the armored suits. Triton explains that he was searching for the Fantastic Four, but perhaps the Avengers can provide help. The rightful king of the Inhumans—Black Bolt—is missing in San Francisco, whilst Black Bolt's brother—Maximus the Mad—has used his mental powers to make himself ruler of the Great Refuge. Compounding events, Maximus has made a deal to turn Earth over to the



Kree—drafting the Inhumans as Kree soldiers—in return for regency of our planet.

The Avengers locate Black Bolt—whose powerful voice shatters the protective dome around the Great Refuge. The Kree are routed and Maximus is deposed. However, Rick Jones is abducted by a fleeing Kree soldier. And back on Hala, the Kree Intelligence Supreme announces ominously that: “The players are all in place. Let the final phase begin!”

Finally free to pursue their kidnapped comrades, the Avengers fly to meet Nick Fury on the S.H.I.E.L.D. orbiting space station, in *Avengers* #96 (Feb. 1972). Fury lends them a starship, which—powered by Thor’s hammer—is able to enter hyperspace. Almost immediately, the Avengers encounter and engage a massive Skrull armada. Boarding the Skrull flagship, the Avengers are met with a video link to Emperor Dorrek from the Skrull homeworld. A gloating Dorrek shows an image of Mar-Vell constructing an Omni-Wave Projector, which Dorrek will use as the ultimate death-ray! Bwa-ha-ha!

However, the image of Mar-Vell is just that: an image. The real Mar-Vell appears on screen to tell us that an Omni-Wave Projector can also project holograms. Mar-Vell has escaped and freed Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. Hijinks commence. A furious Dorrek shouts, “Execute Plan Delta!” This is an unsportsman-like nuclear arsenal aimed at Earth. Goliath pursues in a shuttlecraft...

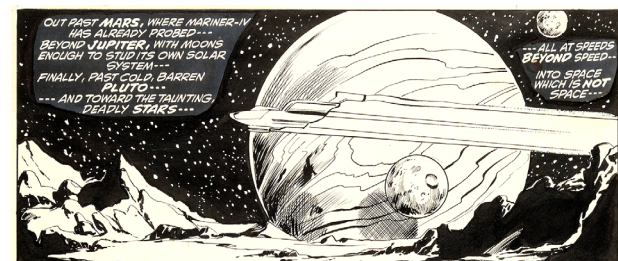
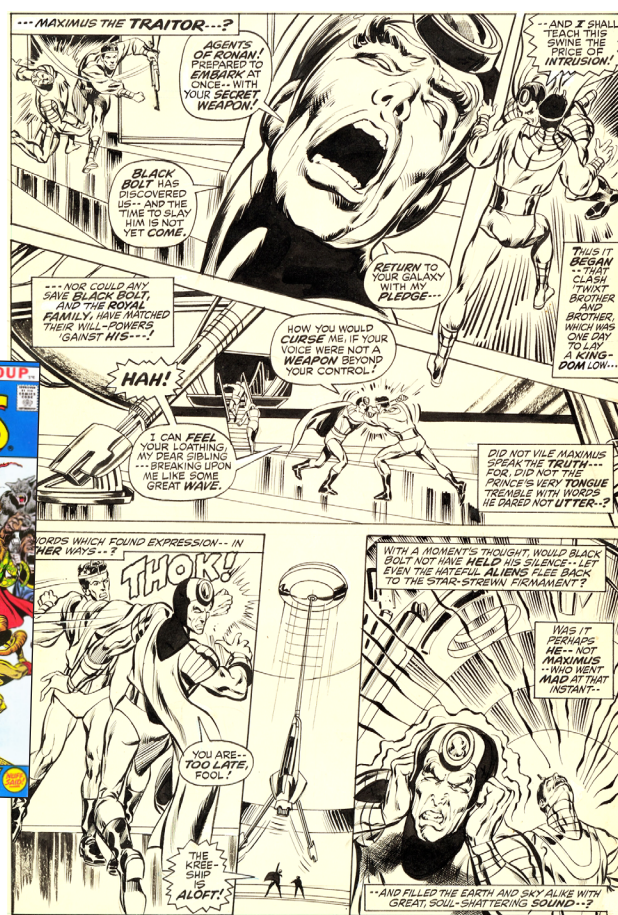
Concurrently, on the Kree homeworld, Ronan is gobsmacked that one of his soldiers has brought him Rick Jones. (The soldier claims it was on a momentary impulse.) Rick stands up to Ronan, who is amused at Rick’s bravery. Ronan shows Rick the Kree armada, launching toward Earth, and brags that: “Earth lies almost midway between the Andromeda Galaxy and our great cosmos. Hence, you are now of the utmost strategic value, and must be either occupied or annihilated.” Rick again tries to escape and is locked away.

Mistake or subtle mental manipulation? Rick is locked in the same room where Ronan has imprisoned the Kree Intelligence Supreme. The mental waves of the Intelligence Supreme cannot penetrate Kree or Skrull energy shields, and so the Intelligence Supreme had reached out to Earth. It fomented Rick’s vision of Mar-Vell being attacked and caused the Kree soldier to abduct Rick. And now the Intelligence Supreme compels Rick through a space-warp to the Negative Zone—where Rick is confronted by Annihilus!

This penultimate issue of the “Kree-Skrull War” was penciled by Neal Adams, and inked by Adams, Tom Palmer, and Alan Weiss—suggesting some hurriedness. The letters page in the following issue states: “After doing two or three issues of *Avengers* beginning with ish #93, Neal became so enmeshed in deadline problems that there was naught to do but have valiant John Buscema come to our rescue by penciling the final Skrull/Kree issue virtually overnight (from the plot which Roy and Neal had previously worked out).”

RICK JONES CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE

At least that’s what the cover copy to *Avengers* #97 (Mar. 1972)—by Roy Thomas, John Buscema, and Tom Palmer—tells us. Unfortunately for Rick, this doesn’t seem likely, as Annihilus establishes a death-grip. Suddenly, a mental beam emanates from Rick’s mind and blasts Annihilus away. Another space-warp appears, and Rick is hurled back into the presence of the Intelligence Supreme.



(top) Black Bolt battles Maximus. Art by Adams and Palmer.

(bottom) The Avengers take the battle off the earth. Art by Adams, Palmer, and Alan Weiss. Original art scans courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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The Intelligence Supreme opens another space-warp, summoning all the involved Avengers. The only way in which Rick's overloaded body can be saved is by merging once again

The animosity between Kree and Skrulls is not over, and tensions often flare. When the Skrulls attack the planet Xandar, Princess Adora travels to Earth seeking help. In *Fantastic Four*

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#205 (Apr. 1979) we are told that the Skrulls are losing their war against the Kree and seek to procure the Living Computers of Xandar. In *FF* #209 (Aug. 1979), Emperor Dorrek VII is assassinated by his wife R'Klll. When Galactus consumes the Skrull Homeworld in *FF* #257 (Aug. 1983), R'Klll and daughter Anelle are seemingly killed.

Prior to this, both R'Klll and the Supreme Intelligence are consulted by Shi'ar Empress Lilandra concerning the fate of the Phoenix—in *X-Men* #137 (Sep. 1980). The Skrulls and Kree both send representatives to observe the trial in the Blue Area of Earth's moon. Unsurprisingly, Skrull Warlord Raksor and Kree Colonel Bel-Dann end up fighting each other.

The Inhumans move their Great Refuge to the Blue Area of the moon in *Fantastic Four* #240 (Mar. 1982). In *Fantastic Four Annual* #18 (1984) we discover that Raksor and Bel-Dann are still fighting! Surprisingly, for two such proud races, the Supreme Intelligence and Empress R'Klll admit that their eternal war is draining on both empires. Thus, they propose that Raksor and Bel-Dann act as champions—with the winner of their combat determining the ultimate victor in the eons-old war of empires.

It's a noble idea but—unfortunately—the continuing battle is a serious threat to the Great Refuge. Consequently, Reed Richards and Black Bolt devise a plan for the *Fantastic Four* and the Inhuman Royal Family to take the fight to Raksor and Bel-Dann. The aliens are forced to team up to defeat our heroes (who conveniently throw the fight). The Watcher declares the combat ended, declaring that Raksor and Bel-Dann are both winners and it is the Earthlings who have lost. The Kree-Skrull War is finally over—concluding in a draw.



Until it starts again in *Silver Surfer* #6 (Dec. 1987). Years later, in *Young Avengers* #10 (Mar. 2006), we learn that the young hero Hulkling is the son of Princess Anelle, and that his true name—his royal title—is Dorrek VIII. In the following issue, we learn that his father was Mar-Vell, and that Hulkling was conceived during the Kree-Skrull War. Anelle's father—Dorrek VII—was furious about the child's heritage, and so the infant was smuggled off-world and raised on Earth. As a Kree/Skrull hybrid of royal blood and extraordinary mettle, Dorrek-Vell has unified the two empires at last.

THIS BEACHHEAD EARTH

Although he's spoken about it many times, Roy Thomas kindly shared some thoughts with *BACK ISSUE*: "I've always credited Raymond C. Jones' novel *This Island Earth* as the inspiration for the idea of the Earth caught between two alien space races at war. However, while writing the first volume of my autobiography, I was reminded

(left) The final chapter is here. Art by Gil Kane and Bill Everett. (right) John Buscema and Tom Palmer's stunning splash page for *Avengers* #97. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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(left) Heroes spring out of Rick's head. That's a pretty good trick. Art by Buscema and Palmer. (right) Then Rick does something really strange. Art by Buscema and Palmer.

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that—at least a year or so before *This Island Earth* was filmed—I wrote at least a number of pages of a projected ‘novel’ I called *Between Two Worlds*, in which, at the beginning, a horde of alien space-ships appears in the sky above the Earth, forming a sort of patchwork of alternating warships—half from Venus, half from Mars. Those two planets were at war, and Earth was caught in the middle. I didn’t get that far in the ‘novel,’ but I had the whole idea for it. I can be pretty certain that it was inspired by George Pal’s 1953 film *The War of the Worlds*, with me just adding the Venusians to the Martians and giving them space-ships... but clearly I did have that idea before *This Island Earth* appeared, even if I kind of forgot about it over the years till I started jogging my mind about my early attempts at writing. Of course, I suppose it could be argued that even Raymond Jones might have been inspired in part by the Pal movie, right?”

Thomas was asked if he had considered the war for the pages of *Captain Marvel*, before that title was suspended. “No, I didn’t do anything with Mar-Vell in anticipation of the “Kree-Skrull War” prior to *Avengers* #88—because I didn’t have that idea

until right before I plotted #88—getting Stan’s permission to do that storyline involving two alien races that were the ‘property’ of *Fantastic Four*.

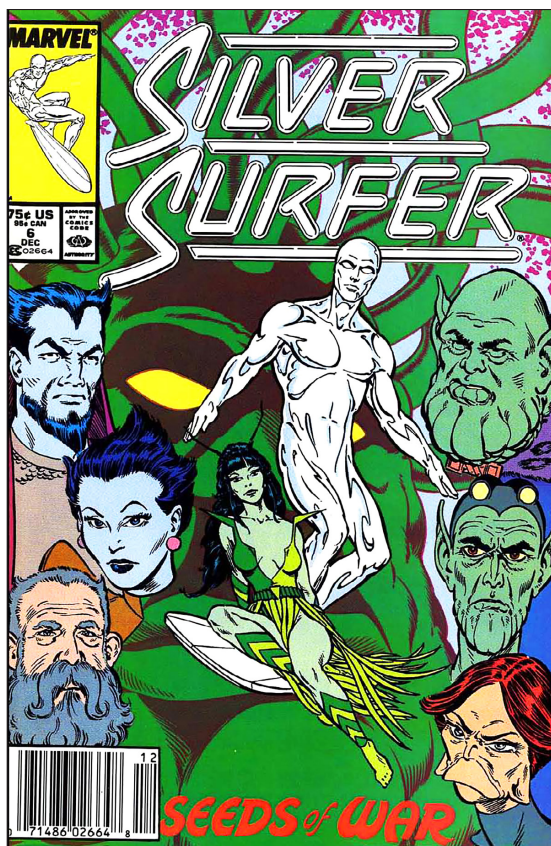
“In the early days of the War, before Neal piped himself aboard and we henceforth plotted the issues together, all I knew was that the War would eventually carry over to space (as it did in *This Island Earth*—couldn’t keep it earthbound for the whole series), that Senator Craddock would turn out to be the ‘fourth Skrull’ from the end of *FF* #2, and that Rick Jones would unleash the super-heroic memories from his mind at the climax to illustrate my main point—which was (as stated, in the final issue)—that the Kree and Skrulls were at an evolutionary dead-end, and that the despised human race was destined eventually to surpass them.”

Avengers #93-97 were reprinted in a prestige two-issue miniseries in 1983 with a lovely Walter Simonson illustrated prologue summarising *Avengers* #89-92. All nine issues were finally collected in a trade paperback in 2000. In his Afterword, Thomas wrote, “The War started out slowly, as artist Sal Buscema and I moved our players into place. Then, about the time that we



ROY THOMAS

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were ready to get moving in earnest, Neal Adams—with whom I had already worked on the much-acclaimed *X-Men* and 'Inhumans' series—volunteered to draw the *Avengers*. Sal moved onto other things and the 'Kree-Skrull War' (not yet so named) moved into high gear."

Neal Adams provided an introduction to the trade paperback: "The 'Kree-Skrull War' was just to my liking. I asked if we could work pretty much like we did on *X-Men*, Roy said okay, and we were off. Where to begin the story? We needed to begin with an opening salvo of misdeeds by the Skrulls... or the Kree. Then I remembered Jack Kirby's first Skrull story. Stan and Jack had Reed Richards super-hypnotize the four Skrulls and told them they were cows. But as fate would have it, when the cows-in-the-field frame was drawn by Jack, for some reason, he only drew three cows. I called Roy and told him that I'd like to use these cows/Skrulls to begin the story. He named the story 'This Beachhead Earth'. A good title. But in my mind that story would ever be titled 'Three Cows Shot Me Down'.

Thomas continues: "Neal and I had an almost symbiotic relationship—so much so that, today, it would be impossible for the two of us to agree on who contributed what to the saga. Just to use one prominent example: I'm 100% certain it was my idea to bring back the 'three Skrull cows' in *Fantastic Four* form; Neal is equally certain he suggested it to me.

"Perhaps the most striking sequence in the whole epic, however—even though it has virtually zilch to do with the actual war—is the 'Journey to the Centre of the Android' segment in *Avengers* #93. That was Neal's idea, pure and simple. He



told me he wanted to have Ant-Man return to the *Avengers* long enough to go inside the Vision—and I told him to go for it."

Appropriate final words come from Thomas's Afterword: "Thus it was that, with the work of three excellent artists—Neal Adams and the brothers Buscema—the 'Kree-Skrull War' became one of the linchpins of the Marvel Age of Comics. And if I may be unabashedly immodest for a moment, I think it holds up fairly well."

It does indeed.

The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to Steve Englehart and Roy Thomas for their generous help.

Jarrod Buttery lives in Western Australia and has penned over thirty articles for BACK ISSUE. Try as he might, he has not yet succeeded in summoning comic book heroes from his mind—but never say never!



(left) The Kree and the Skrulls are back at it in the '80s. Art by Marshall Rogers and Joe Rubinstein. (right) One last look at Neal Adams and Tom Palmer's dynamic art from "The Kree-Skrull War." Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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end

TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

Sister Act

The **STARFIRE** **BLACKFIRE**

Rivalry

by **Brian Martin**



FlashBack!

Ladies and gentlemen, let's get ready to ruuumble! Tonight's bout is scheduled for eight rounds and has a dramatic twist to it! Tonight's two combatants are sisters, and the prize is an entire planet!

LET'S MEET OUR COMPETITORS

Before the fisticuffs begin, we're going to introduce the fighters. In the purple corner, hailing from the planet Tamaran, we have Princess Koriand'r. Introduced, along with the other members of the New Teen Titans, officially in the special insert in *DC Comics Presents* #26 (Oct. 1980), the princess arrived a little earlier in the DCU timeline very soon after within *New Teen Titans* #1 (Nov. 1980). A little different than the other two characters created from whole cloth by Marv Wolfman, George Perez, and Len Wein, those two being Raven and Cyborg, Starfire was given a less completely detailed history in the early issues of the title. Though we find out some about her home planet, we are not given any information about her sister who is her opponent in our match. [For a detailed examination of the early days of Starfire, please refer to James Heath Lantz's article in your copy of *BACK ISSUE* #123 which gives a hero history of the Tamaranian princess]. This was understandable at the time, as Raven's backstory was integral to the creation of the Titans group as well as the storyline that encompassed the first six issues of the title, while Cyborg's was the foundation for issue #7.

In the black and silver corner, also from Tamaran, is Queen Komand'r. Like her sister, she debuted relatively early in the New Teen Titans narrative. The final page of issue #22 (Aug. 1982) introduces her in very dramatic fashion with a full page shot as she announces her intentions towards her sister.

ROUND 1: TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

Following up on her debut, Blackfire begins her assault on her sister, and by extension Kory's compatriots in *NTT* #23. But before we get to that, we have a couple of rounds that take place chronologically earlier than this.

Published the same month as *NTT* #23, was the fourth and final issue of *Tales of the New Teen Titans*, a series that capitalized on the success of the young team and spotlighted the three new Titans and the rebranded Changeling, each having their history told in one issue.

Starfire's turn to shine begins the first round of our tussle extremely early as the two sisters are pitted against each other from birth! Komand'r 'despised' her sister upon arrival and quickly made that contempt manifest by killing Koriand'r's first pet. It should be noted that, though she reserves a special type of hatred for her sister, even as a small child Komand'r is shown to be full of hate

Blackfire and Starfire battle to the death on the cover of *New Teen Titans Annual* #1. Art by George Perez.

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(top) Starfire's history is revealed in *Tales of the New Teen Titans* #4. Cover by George Perez.
(bottom) A beautiful Portrait of Starfire from *Tales of the New Teen Titans* #4. Art by George Perez and Ernie Colon.

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for almost everything and everyone around her. Born without the ability to fly shared by most Tamaranians, this labels her as a freak, unfit for leadership. This development might be considered the genesis of all the hatred she would exhibit as she grew. Blackfire is the decisive winner of the first round as, supposedly due to her sister laughing at her handicap, she bloodies her fists.... against her sister's face! Starfire relates that the gulf was more like a chasm as the two sisters did not even speak to each other as they grew up.

ROUND 2: SCHOOL'S OUT

The same issue details the next fusillade in their conflict. Those familiar with the Vega star system as depicted in DC comics, mostly in *NTT* and *Omega Men*, know that a number of still free planets in the system were at war with the evil Citadel. The children of royal families on these planets are sent off to the planet Okaara to be trained by that world's Warlords. The sisters from Tamaran are no exception. It should surprise no one that the two sisters have diametrically opposite attitudes towards this training. Komand'r sees it as a glorious opportunity to learn how to kill, while Koriand'r is overcome with awe by the mystical aspects of the Warlord's legend.

Under the Warlord's training regimen, the younger sibling learns compassion, but also that war is sometimes a necessity and that you must be proficient in those arts as well. The senior daughter only wants to learn to kill.

As their training nears an end, they face their final exam, if you will. The Tournament. Armed with weapons and mounted on fantastic beasts, the sisters are pitted against one another in battle. Komand'r breaks the rules and slices the leg of Koriand'r's mount, sending her to the ground. She then proceeds to mercilessly drag her sister behind her. Starfire finally frees herself and as her opponent pivots to renew her assault, Koriand'r knocks her off her saddle. And sends her plunging into a gorge.

Horrified, Starfire flies and saves her sister. Mortified by what she feels is the humiliation of being rescued, Komand'r proceeds to beat her sister to a pulp and draws her sword to kill her. The Okaaran's intercede, disgusted at the pure evil before them. Komand'r is expelled, but not before vowing revenge.

On the physical side of things, Komand'r is, of course, the winner of this round. On a psychological scorecard, it is not quite so clear. One sister plunges down a slippery slope on the path to hate, while the other is taught the first lesson of, what must be conceded to be many, in the course of learning what her older sister truly is. This knowledge will be put to good use in later rounds as we will see.

ROUND 3: BACK IN BLACK

Just a small aside before we continue. We are still examining events from that one *Tales* issue. Detailing as it does the foundations, and early rounds of our conflict, we do have to score the events therein quite carefully. We will move on though, rest assured.

Komand'r did come back. And not long after. And with friends. Now allied with the Citadel, she provides them with information that allows them to successfully invade Tamaran. It is not a decisive victory however, and a truce is soon called. The punchline to the agreement is that Princess Koriand'r is given over to become a slave of the Citadel. And into the care of her sister. Basically,





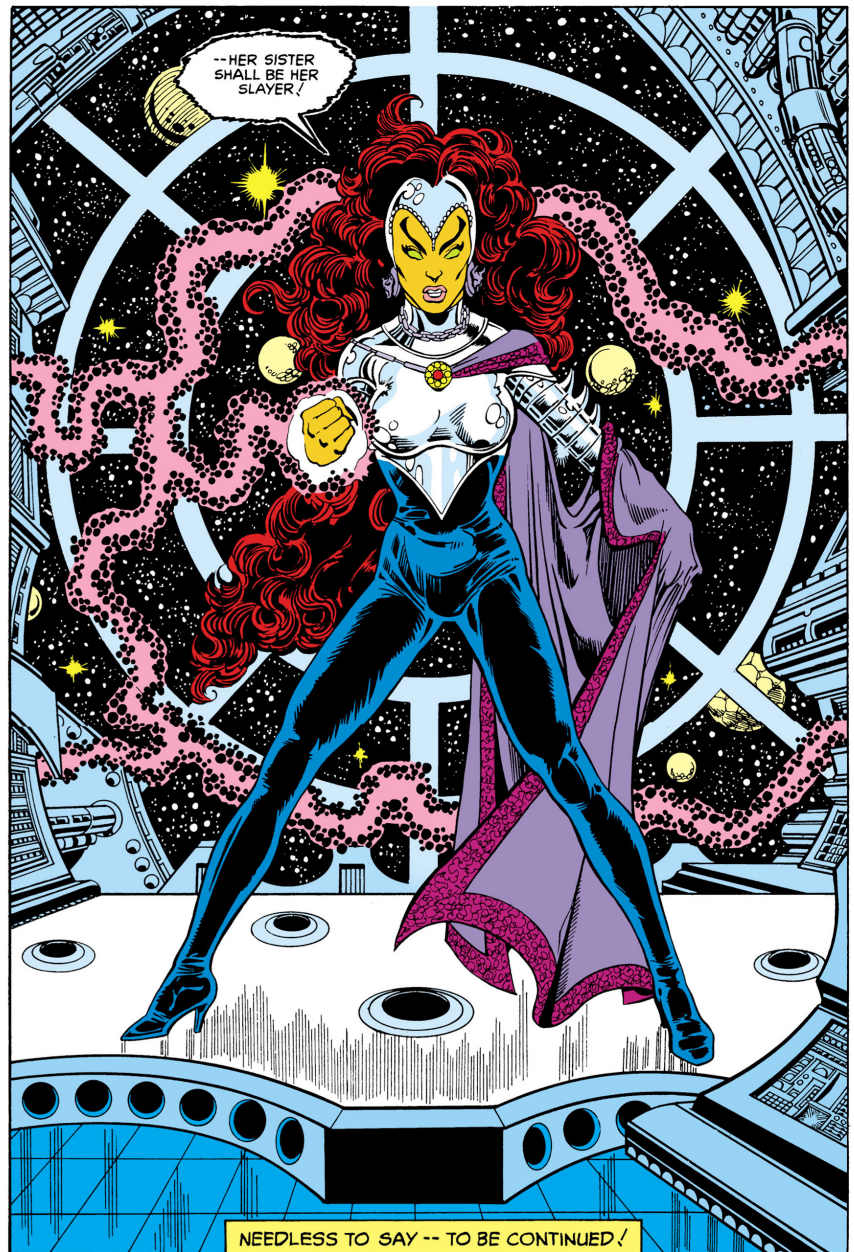
rented out by the year, Starfire would always return to the, ahem, tender loving care of her sibling when her year of servitude was done. Only to be subjected to further degradations while back in her sister's clutches. Clearly this round is won by Komand'r.

ROUND 4: THE POWERS THAT BE

Our deep dive into *Tales* #4 concludes with a pivotal occurrence in the life of both sisters. As Kory is once again returned to Komand'r's clutches, their ship is attacked by Citadel enemies, the Psions. Dedicated purely to science, the aliens decide to perform experiments upon the two sisters to ascertain the extent of their races' Sun absorption ability that allows them to fly. A fortuitous Citadel attack frees the Tamaranians at a crucial juncture. But not before an unforeseen but significant side effect occurs. The sisters are imbued with Starfire's signature superpower, the ability to fire energy bursts from their hands. Since she stayed connected to the machine longer, Blackfire actually becomes the more powerful of the duo.

Of course, once again Koriand'r shows compassion towards her sister, freeing her from the machine. And Komand'r berates her sibling for it and tries to kill her. The Citadel raid separates the sisters and puts the younger daughter in the position we find her in at the beginning of *New Teen Titans* #1. Since that event led to such positive gains in her life, we will give Koriand'r the victory in this round on points.

As we mentioned, both Raven and Cyborg had their histories well fleshed out early in the new Titans series. *BACK ISSUE* asked writer Marv Wolfman if he had Starfire's background fleshed out that early as well. "I had lots of Kory's background sketched out. I like detail but don't want to overdo it to give room



for making changes when necessary." To go into further detail, Wolfman told the *Comics Journal* in their seventy-ninth issue (Jan. 1983), "The Starfire storyline on Tamaran, which is the last one of the miniseries, almost all of which I had worked out even before the first issue came out. I knew what she had done, how she had escaped, how she was tortured, all the things with her sister. I wanted someone who had gone through all this and still emerged pretty much an optimist."

While we are dealing with the genesis of these characters, George Perez commented on one of his regrets when it came to the look of Blackfire when he was interviewed in *Comics Interview* #50 (1987). "The one thing I regret from other artists's point of view is that I gave her such a harsh face; I wanted it attractive yet strong, and many people, if you don't get those angles of that face right, she comes out ugly—and Blackfire is not an ugly woman, she's just very harsh looking." And acting, if Mr. Perez doesn't mind us interjecting that.

(left) Blackfire has Starfire right where she wants her on the cover of *New Teen Titans* #23. Art by George Perez and Dick Giordano. (right) Blackfire makes her presence known at the end of *New Teen Titans* #22. Art by George Perez and Romeo Tanfhal.

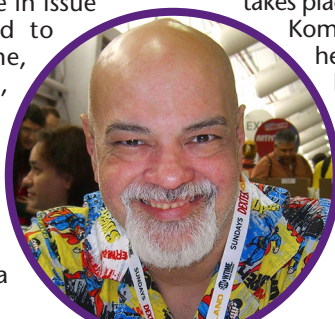
TM & © DC Comics.

(left) Kory remains under Blackfire's control for six miserable years. Art by George Perez and Ernie Colon. (right) George Perez's sense of design and storytelling is on full display on the page from *New Teen Titans Annual* #1. Inks by Romeo Tanghal. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

TM & © DC Comics.

ROUND 5: BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS

Blackfire makes her dramatic entrance on the last page of *NTT* #22 as mentioned. But it could have been a little different artistically. "My tribute to women in leather," Perez noted in *Comics Interview*, but in that issue of *Comics Journal* he revealed, "In the first appearance of Blackfire in issue 23 of the *Titans* she's supposed to wear black leather. But at that time, I was doing layouts on the book, there were no blacks put on her costume. I didn't put blacks and neither did Romeo (Tanghal, long time *NTT* inker). And since she had already been drawn two or three times, and I had already drawn her on the cover. I drew a fully rendered version of her in the issue before so they could have some guidelines. When that wasn't caught and she appeared throughout the entire issue without the black highlights on her costume to give the look of leather, that annoyed me because that established the character. And now you have a character named Blackfire without any black on her costume." So, there is yet another reason why Komand'r was so angry all the time. She wanted her leather!



GEORGE PEREZ

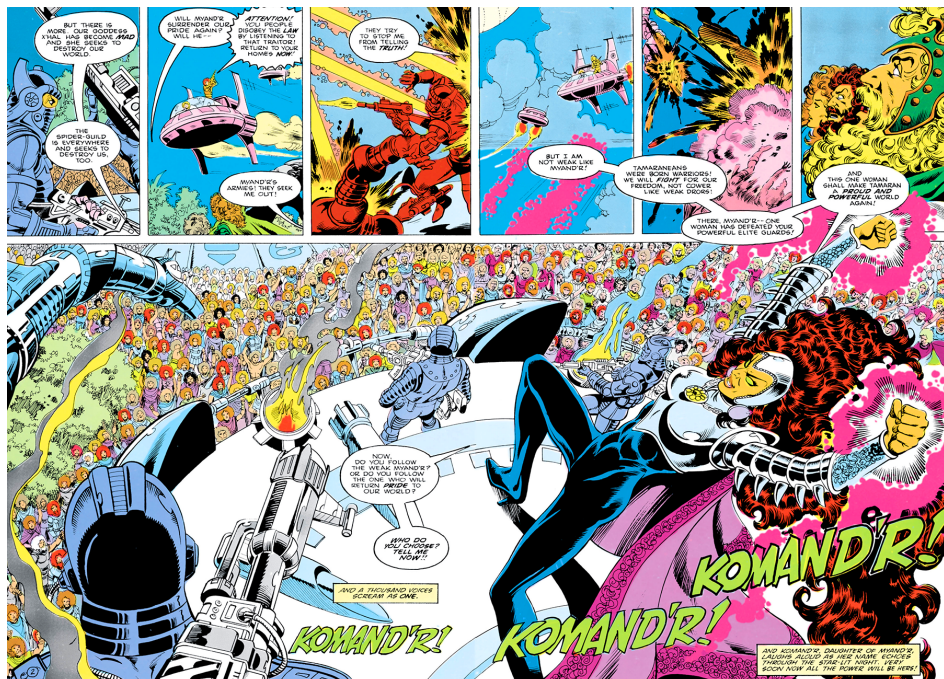
© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

Carrying over elements from the previous issues, *Titans* #23 leads into an epic tale that would culminate in the first *New Teen Titans Annual* as DC brought back those special issues after too long an absence. The previous rounds of this tussle can be considered only preliminaries to the battle that takes place here. Over the space of three issues, Komand'r kidnaps Starfire, then tries to kill her friends, the rest of the Titans. She beats Kory in a short skirmish aboard her slave ship. She presents her to a Citadel commander and subjects her to humiliation in front of him. She allows a Psion to perform more experiments on her. Finally, Komand'r kills the Citadel leader and proclaims her intentions to kill their parents and destroy Tamaran. This pushes Koriand'r over the edge and leads to the climactic battle in the aforementioned annual.

Before we see the outcome of this crucial round, we should mention an important item on the visual side of the ledger. This storyline brought to focus how artist George Perez had begun to differentiate the individual Titans, Starfire in particular. In *Amazing Heroes* #50 (July 1984) he noted, "There's also a little secret in handling Starfire, and it's one that makes her face work.

*CITADEL SLAVERY WAS *UNLIKE* THE SLAVERY THAT EXISTED ON *YOUR* WORLD.





If you go back to the Blackfire storyline, you'll notice, since Kory is—in a lot of cases—very angry, her hairline is slightly higher, so her eyebrows can be seen. When she's in that soft, demure, sad or happy type look, her eyebrows aren't shown at all because the curls are so low and they curl upwards, thus making an upward movement on the eyes right where they meet into the nose area to the forehead. Gives the eyes a slightly upraised, innocent look. So, the curls end up softening her face, and they're swept back any time I don't want her to have the soft look." So, remember, if you see Starfire's eyebrows, watch out.

Now, back to the main action. Starfire lashes out with her full fury as the climactic battle of this round begins. Vicious fighting ensues and the two appear evenly matched until the Psion steps in and stops the fight. It must have been for a standing eight count as the fight is nowhere near decided. Instead, he takes control and offers to relocate the fight to Tamaran and make it a winner take all contest that the Citadel will officiate and enforce. Both participants agree.

The battle is to be to the death, and the combatants are not to use their star bolt powers. Given weaponized staffs, the fighting begins. Over the course of the battle, Komand'r's staff is broken, and Starfire begins to insult her sister and threatens to laugh at her. This is something Blackfire cannot stand, and she breaks the rule of not using their powers and attempts to fry her sister. Koriand'r proceeds to fly them around, knowing this will panic Komand'r.

The battle is decided when the duo plunge into a stream. As Komand'r unleashes her power again, Starfire screams at her, asking if she knows where they are. Blackfire does not care and moments later the water in the stream boils and a massive explosion is unleashed. Only Starfire surfaces.

Later, when help arrives, no trace of Blackfire is discovered, and only a strip of her cape remains. Komand'r is dead.

Yea, right. "I never get rid of good characters so quickly." Marv Wolfman tells *BI* very succinctly. Even at the time, I doubt there were many comic readers who thought we had seen the last of her. That being said, this round definitely goes to Princess Koriand'r. She survived all that her sister could throw at her and more, and was still in a, at the least, neutral position when Blackfire "blowed up real good." At story's end, she is reunited with her family, all of the Titans survive relatively unscathed, and she is headed back to Earth with them, her new family. In the back of her mind, she realized that there were more rounds to come in this titanic tussle.

INTERMISSION

While the scantily clad lady parades around the ring with the card with a big number on it, let's look at a flashback that occurred to keep Blackfire in people's minds and to reinforce just how dastardly a character she is/was.

Issue #11 (Feb. 1984) of the *Omega Men* (a series examined in *Back Issue* #148, don't you know) was crafted by Roger Slifer, Tod Smith, and Mike DeCarlo, and examined the back story of the Harpis character from that series. Consigned to a brothel at that point in her life, Harpis had the misfortune to be present when Komand'r arrived with a new idea. Since the force she was currently commanding was comprised of soldiers from different planets and races, she thought she should tailor some of the courtesans to be exact matches for some of her more valued subordinates. This is a painful and traumatic process for Harpis as she goes from being thought of as very beautiful, to looking a way that even she finds vaguely repugnant. The changes this made to her personality would be examined in that series, but that is not our focus and the action in the main event is about to recommence. Just one more thing before the punches fly again. Name recognition was sufficient that Blackfire is featured and name checked on the issue's cover. Now back to the fight.

(left) Blackfire even bedevils the Omega Men. Cover by Tod Smith and Mike DeCarlo. (bottom) The tide is definitely turning as the people of Tamaran rally around Blackfire. Art by Eduardo Barreto and Romeo Tanghal.

TM & © DC Comics.



MARV WOLFMAN

© Facebook.

(left) Why can't more weddings be like this? Art by Eduardo Barreto and Romeo Tanghal.

(right) This looks like a fun wedding. Cover to *New Teen Titans* #17 by Eduardo Barreto.

TM & © DC Comics.

ROUND SIX: GOING TO THE CHAPEL

By the time *The New Teen Titans* received a new number one issue printed on classy Baxter paper in 1984, over in that *Omega Men* title, the Citadel had been defeated and the Vega system, including Tamaran, had been liberated. The first issue of the new *Titans* series even featured a teaser depicting Koriand'r's parents dispatching a ship to gather her up and bring her home. The ship must have taken the scenic route as it would not arrive on Earth until issue #13 (Oct. 1985), and in the following issue *Starfire*, along with Nightwing and Jericho, are convinced to travel to Tamaran. They have no idea what they will be arriving to as a last page teaser shows Komand'r very much alive and ominously foretelling the next round of their bout.

That inkling of trouble is brought to full fruition in issue #15, by which time Eduardo Barreto had taken over as the regular penciller of the series, with the same writer and inker in harness. We see

Tamaran is now a planet divided. King Myand'r, father of our two combatants, is now seen as a very weak leader after sacrificing his daughter to appease the Citadel. So weak in fact, that the planet is now engaged in a civil war between various factions, and the king has again pledged his daughter to help gain at least a temporary peace, this time by marrying her off to the son of the ruler of a rival state. As we soon learn, there is also a revolutionary faction that has fallen in behind a new, strong leader. Princess Komand'r.

Let us just take a little aside here and examine the psychologies of the various players in this drama so we may better explore why there is so much hatred involved. I know, I know, behind the scenes melodrama is much more suited to wrestling than to knock down drag out combat like we have here, but at *BI* we are nothing if not flexible.

The schism that develops on Tamaran is understandable when you explore the culture that exists around King Myand'r's decisions. A proud warrior race, they were not only disappointed that their king gave in to Citadel demands, but that the decision also robbed them of the chance to engage in battle. Much like older Earth societies, such as ancient Sparta, they almost believe that battle is their calling and death with honor is preferable to a life of peace. In the *Omega Men* title at the time, a new menace to the system, the Spider Guild was making its presence felt. Fear that Tamaran may again opt for a peaceful, possibly subservient solution fuels many citizens' desires to rush to the side of the much more militant Komand'r.

This warrior mentality also meant that the society as a whole was much more fueled by passions. This trait was one that often caused a rift between *Starfire* and Nightwing as her fierce nature some-



times scared Dick Grayson. The fact that Tamaranians followed their amorous passions equally as vociferously would often cause issues and certainly factored into this portion of the narrative. As this round of their battle progresses, we will see Starfire threaten to battle Blackfire to the point of seeing her “burn in Hell.” Not quite a heroic proclamation, but one in line with her passionate nature. Whether it ever would have come to that point is something Marv Wolfman questions, telling *Back Issue*, “Tamaranians react emotionally. Therefore, her first statements would be over the top. Whether she would have even thought of killing Komand’r is doubtful.”

In a similar vein, before we let Komand’r off the hook, we have to examine the back-up story that appeared in issue #16, ably illustrated by Dick Giordano, no slouch when it came to depicting attractive women. Filling in the backstory after the explosion in the *Titans Annual*, it shows us a blinded Komand’r who is befriended by a male supporter named Dor’ion. This story is about the only time we see a humble, beaten, almost nice Komand’r. Battered and blinded, she has lost her... mojo, I guess is the only way to put it. She has no desire to fight and rule anymore. This is unacceptable to Dor’ion who believes The Cause must come first. As she regains her sight, he drills her in fighting techniques but cannot seem to rekindle her bloodlust. So, he takes extremely drastic measures. Dor’ion tricks Komand’r into killing him. Thus, she regains her killing edge and adopts his mantra that she has, “Got to be a killer.” Remember this, as it is almost the only time we will see any compassion from Blackfire. The ref has separated the combatants, so back to the pugilistic portion of our program.

As the inevitable wedding arrives in issue #17, so do the forces of Komand’r. Harkening back to our examination from a few paragraphs previous, we come to realize the depths of the enmity her forces feel for the king. They believe he surrendered their principles and that Komand’r only allied with the Citadel to destroy them from within, and further, she will embrace those principals they hold dear if she becomes ruler.

Starfire and Blackfire engage in another battle, although this one is short lived. Interestingly, as the forces of her sister assault the capital, Starfire notices that the people on her side seem to have become quite soft under the rule of her father. Is this an inkling that maybe the sisters share just a smidgen of the same feeling? Regardless of their feelings, the battle does not last long. Komand’r blackmails her father into abdicating by claiming she has planted an ion bomb which will destroy the city. In the aftermath, as King Myand’r makes his proclamation and asks the citizens who they wish to rule them, Komand’r is the overwhelming choice.

Knowing she must send her family into exile or risk dissension, Komand’r does just that, packing them into a ship headed for Okaara. But just to show she has not become soft, she surreptitiously arranges for the ship to explode en route. This round most definitely goes to Blackfire.

ROUND SEVEN: HONEYMOON SUITE

Though the round has ended, the storyline did not, but the follow up is worthy of a round of its own. Of course, Koriand’r and family were not killed, escaping in a shuttle moments before their primary craft detonated. They do arrive on Okaara and train to retake Tamaran, dwelling there for the next few issues.

Things ramp up again with a short story penciled by Rick Leonardi in *Titans* #22 in which the two sisters’ actions are paralleled. Komand’r consolidates her rule, while Koriand’r strategizes to depose her. Insights into the two sisters’ thinking is the crux of these nine pages. Koriand’r is intent on deposing her sister, but when her parents do not come with her, she wonders about the wisdom of returning her father to power.



(top) That is one pissed off Starfire. Art by George Perez. (bottom) I told you she was angry. Art by Eduardo Barreto and Romeo Tanghal.

TM & © DC Comics.



For her part, Komand'r, even amid machinations to make the people hate her family more, is seen making sure humanitarian aid is provided for people in crisis and openly wonders why her sister is fighting her when the people seem so happy with her in command.

This is just a warmup for the climax of this section of the story in #23, however. Behind a powerful George Perez cover showing a close up of a very angry, charging Starfire, we are first treated to a conflicted Blackfire, who is herself surprised that, despite her initially only wanting power, she has come to care about her people and feels she is doing much good for them.

As the sisters head for another head-to-head confrontation, we see evidence of the old adage, there are two sides to every story. As mentioned, Komand'r reiterates the good she has done for her people and laments the destruction Koriand'r's forces have wrecked. For her part, Kory argues with her parents who now feel the people are happier under the rule of their eldest daughter, and she begins to evince an almost equal amount of hatred to what her sister exhibits, to the point of committing acts of war that cause innocents to be killed. The line between who is right and who is wrong becomes quite blurred and culminates in the next fist to fist and bolt to bolt battle.

That battle is quite a vicious and extended one, rivalling the clash in the first *Titans Annual*. The two combatants hurl insults at each other as well as blows and bolts. Both also try to justify their positions. In the end, Starfire is triumphant and prepares to unleash a bolt that will kill her sister. But she is stopped by her parents. They are convinced that their planet will be better off under Komand'r's rule. They stay on as advisors,

but Blackfire has what she has always wanted. Starfire abides by the decision and leaves, extremely unhappy but willing to acquiesce. Komand'r meanwhile assures her that she will do what is best for Tamaran. I doubt many readers were believers in her newfound conscience. Only time would tell.

This round highlights just how difficult it is to score this fight. On the physical level, Koriand'r is clearly the winner of this round. However, to the victor go the spoils, and Komand'r ends up the ruler of Tamaran. It's hard to argue with that logic.

INTERMISSION

About a year later, in *Teen Titans Spotlight* #15 (Oct. 87), writer Todd Klein with artists Erik Larsen and Dell Barras give us an update on the Omega Men, but in doing so, they provide a snapshot of life on Tamaran. Komand'r is true to form as she insults and attacks her and Koriand'r's brother, Ryand'r. He leaves soon after to catch up with the Omega Men.

Other than that, all was fairly quiet on Tamaran until it was decided to, "Resolve the Starfire conflict."

ROUND EIGHT: WHO COMES BETWEEN ME AND MY SISTER

That "resolve" line is from a caption on the cover of the 1990 *New Titans Annual* (#6 in a series, collect 'em all) and seemed to indicate we could be in for the final round in our monumental tussle. Marv Wolfman wrote the tale with artists Paris Cullins, Curt Swan, Tom Grindberg, and Al Vey assisting.

We receive a glimpse of Tamaran under Komand'r's rule, and things seem to have changed a bit. Tracking down some rebels, the queen instructs her troops to capture them instead of killing them. She even remarks that she would have done the latter in the past. Things are not stable though as another planet invades Tamaran, wounding Blackfire and forcing her to realize that to survive she will need the assistance of her sister. Ryand'r leads a mission to Earth to retrieve Starfire.

The Titans go with her and battle the invaders. At one point Starfire's parents are wounded. Komand'r asks Kory to fly them to safety and, gasp, thanks her!

The invaders are defeated, but it turns out to have all been a plan by a woman named Xyannis and her lover. Xyannis just happens to be the sister of Karras, the man Starfire wed those many months ago. Further wrapping up loose ends, Karras is killed by story's end.

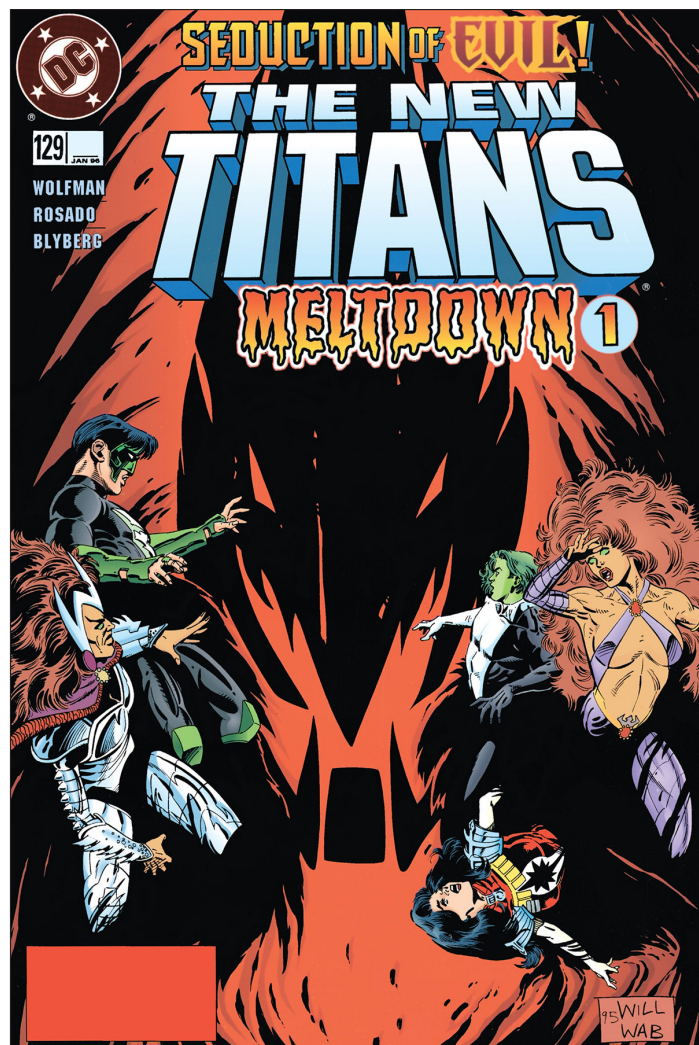
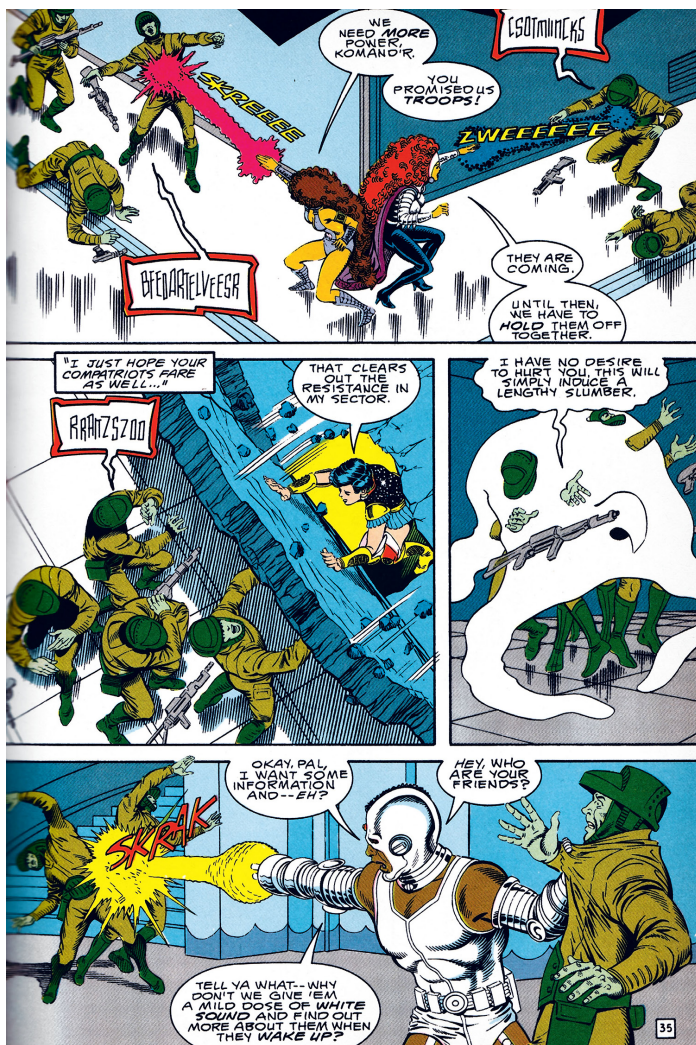
Now I know what you're saying. Wait a second, if this is the final round of this match, when do the two sisters start throwing punches and starbolts again? The simple fact is that the conflict ends with more of a sigh than a bang. At the end of the tale, Starfire realizes that her sister is good for Tamaran and good for its people. And we see how much Komand'r has grown into the role of queen. The two embrace and Starfire heads back to Earth, told she is welcome back any time. If this disappoints anyone who wanted it to end in blood and thunder, that is the way the cookie crumbles.

Who won? Well, on points I would probably give the bout to Komand'r. She certainly seemed to land more heavy blows. That coincides with what our judges think (The esteemed firm of Dewey, Cheatum, and Howe) who give the decision to Blackfire. Yes, Kory is the superhero in this and comes out for the better. Her sister though, gets all she ever wanted. She is queen of Tamaran. Now I know the prize is not everything, but she also showed significant character growth, going from someone who was truly evil, to someone who could be considered one of those oh so very rare birds, a benevolent dictator.

I somehow doubt the conflict will end here. Art by Tom Grummett and Dick Giordano.

TM & © DC Comics.





"I wanted Komand'r to be a villain who was actually right," states Mr. Wolfman. "She was passed over for being next in line because she was crippled in the sense of power. It was unfair. She should have been given the title and Kory should not have been made next in line. When she was given it, it turned out she did deserve it. I like to create villains who might actually be right rather than crazy."

I DEMAND A REMATCH!

We could easily end this article there, as it neatly ties up the sister's relationship, and basically takes us out of the Bronze Age. But comics do not end, and characters keep getting new leases on life, so let's take a look at what became of the Terrible Tamaranian Twosome after that. For simplicities' sake, we are mostly going to examine what happened with Komand'r except where the two intersect. There is a lot less to review, and besides, as mentioned, Kory received her own article in *Back Issue* #123. We have to give Blackfire equal time, right? We don't want them to start fighting or anything.

Almost immediately after the annual discussed above, the Titans went through monumental changes beginning with issue #71 (Nov. 1990). These changes occupied the book for quite some time and had a climactic 100th issue that almost saw Starfire and Nightwing get married. The repercussions of that aborted union eventually led

to Starfire returning to Tamaran in issue #128 (Dec. 1995) where Mr. Wolfman remained writer along with artists William Rosado and Will Blyberg. In that issue, the Psions destroy Tamaran while Starfire and Blackfire are off world! The Titans defeat the invasion and in issue #130, Starfire stays behind with the survivors on a planet they dub New Tamaran. Suffice to say events in the DCU would bring her back to Earth before long. In fact, New Tamaran was destroyed in the *Final Night* crossover event of 1996, with Starfire and Blackfire taking center stage in the Special Sneak Preview for that series. The sisters argue over a suspected spy, and only Kory seems to escape the doomed planet.

INFINITY WAR (WHY DOES THAT TITLE SEEM FAMILIAR?)

Komand'r's survived, although her next appearance was in the *Rann-Thanagar War* series that was a prequel to the *Infinite Crisis* event in 2005. (I hope you can keep all of these crossovers and events straight, goodness knows sometimes I can't.) Therein she joined the heroes to battle a character named Onimar Synn in a tale by writer Dave Gibbons and artists Ivan Reis, Joe Prado, and friends. Reverting back to her old ways, Komand'r betrays her allies and kills one of the DCU iterations of Hawkwoman, siding with a Thanagarian general. A truce in the war leaves her rather at sea again as she flees, only

(left) Starfire and Blackfire working together? Will wonders never cease? Art by Curt Swan and Al Vey. (right) Things do not look good for Starfire, Blackfire, and the Titans. Cover by William Rosado and Will Blyberg.

TM & © DC Comics.

A beautiful rendition of Blackfire by Arthur Adams from *Who's Who in the DC Universe* #13. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com). (inset) Hawkman vs. Blackfire in *JSA Classified* #22 by Walter Simonson.

TM & © DC Comics.



to turn up in issue #32 of *The Outsiders* (March 2006) in an *Infinite Crisis* crossover fashioned by Jan Van Meter, Matthew Clark, Dietrich Smith, and Art Thibert. This issue actually features another clash of the Tamaranians that Starfire wins rather quickly, but Blackfire escapes due to a siphoning of power from Kory and events connected to that *Crisis* send the sisters in different directions.

Blackfire followed that up with an attack on another version of Hawkgirl in that character's own book in issue #59 and issues #21-22 of *JSA Classified* (Feb. - March 2007) which featured Hawkman. Significantly, in those issues, the Hawks defeat her and remove her powers!

The Tamaran sisters meet up again in *R.E.B.E.L.S.* #16 (July 2010) and Komand'r ends up living on the planet run by Vril Dox, while Koriand'r is a member of his team. When she first reappears, Komand'r reveals that she tracked down the Psion who initially gave the duo their powers and forced him to repeat the experiment and restore hers. Writer Tony Bedard, mostly with artists Claude St. Aubin and Scott Hanna, make the Tamaranian Queen a steady character. Significantly, after an initial

skirmish, the sisters do not interact very much for the remainder of the series which lasted until #28.

In that final issue, while fighting a common foe, Komand'r confides to her sister, "I never stopped hating you." Interestingly, as the series concluded, Blackfire had Dox become her consort as a way to cement peace on the planet.

TAG TEAM PARTNERS

Then, The New 52 happened. That initiative commenced after the *Flashpoint* event (There's that word again) that restarted the DCU (for a while at least) and rebooted the Starfire/Blackfire relationship, to the point that they were actually friendly! Heck, in this reality, Komand'r actually took care of Koriand'r when they were young. Add to that the fact that Starfire's abilities are now attributed to a force called the Starfire, and you have a total shift in the dynamic, and one we are not really going to go into save to say that at the end of the tale in *Red Hood and the Outlaws* #13 (Dec. 2012), a kind of status quo is restored as Koriand'r leaves for Earth and Komand'r is ruling Tamaran.

Another shake up in the DCU (Has everyone been keeping track in case there's a quiz?), resulted in Starfire appearing with another team in *Justice League Odyssey* beginning with a first issue dated November 2018. Significantly, Tamaran is trapped in an area referred to as The Ghost Sector created by the inhabitants of Colu. After various and sundry adventures, Komand'r joins this team and the sisters are once more teammates. If that doesn't tell you how different things had become, Darkseid is a part of this team. I told you the DCU was shaken up.

As you can tell, after the main events that transpired in the, basically continuous, narrative that was the DC Universe, really up until *Flashpoint* reset a lot of character relationships, the Starfire/Blackfire one was a pretty consistent one comprised of mutual hate.

We stand by our original decision as to who won the knock-down drag-out in question. But there may be more rematches in the future. As this article was being written, DC published *Green Lantern Corps* #1 (April 2025), in which a group of lanterns travel to Tamaran. There they meet the ruler of the planet, Blackfire. So even at this late date, Komand'r is still in control. And that may very well mean another match is in the offing. So, keep an eye out at your local arena, pay-per-view station, or comic bookstore for the next clash in maybe the biggest sibling hate on since Cain and Abel.

The author would like to thank Marv Wolfman for his recollections that assisted in the composing of this article.

Brian Martin has no sisters, but a pair of brothers. Thankfully, our lives have been nowhere near as contentious as the pair in this article. We do all currently reside in Oakville, Ontario, Canada, so there is still time.



end

THE RIVALRY OF Archie Andrews AND Reggie Mantle

by Mark Arnold

ALL NEW
STORIES

NO. 9
SUMMER

Archie's Rival



REGGIE

ANC
10¢



Much has been said about the Archie love triangle with Archie, Betty, and Veronica. What hasn't been said as much is that Archie Andrews has a rival in the name of Reggie Mantle, who not only competes with Archie on a popularity level and on a sports level, but he also competes with Archie for this love triangle level.

Though both Betty and Veronica have gone out with Reggie from time to time, both of their hearts are really sold on Archie. As such, Reggie sometimes has a hard time getting a date and, as a result, dangerously goes after and dates Moose's girlfriend, Midge, from time to time.

Archie: A Celebration of America's Favorite Teenagers by Craig Yoe says about Archie, "Archie is the average American teenage boy, with an average mom and dad, living in the average town of Riverdale. The difference is that Archie has two girlfriends! What's more, they're always fighting over him. He is forever caught in a love triangle between the sweet girl next door, Betty, and the uber-rich girl in the mansion, Veronica. He's always juggling the two girls, which keeps him in endless trouble. He's clean cut, well-mannered, and well-meaning, but is extremely impulsive and easily distracted. He brings home average grades and plays on the school sports teams. He has had assorted part-time jobs to earn date money."

Archie's full name is Archibald Andrews. His nickname is Chick. He is of Scottish ancestry. He plays lead guitar and is the lead singer of his band called The Archies. His first appearance was in *Pep Comics* #22, December 1941.

Archie: A Celebration of America's Favorite Teenagers by Yoe says about Reggie, "Reggie is the ultimate wise guy; he is always looking to pull a fast one over on someone (and that someone is usually Archie). He will be the first to tell you how handsome he is and he believes that he is the best at everything. With his all-around athletic abilities and handsomeness, he really thinks of himself as the school hunk. Despite his good looks, he often has trouble getting dates because girls can usually pick up on what a louse he is. Archie is his rival in almost every field of endeavor, especially where Veronica is concerned. Reggie is constantly pulling pranks, which drives the whole gang crazy."

Reggie's full name is Reginald Mantle III. He has some Native American ancestry. His nickname is "I-Love-Me". His self-appointed nickname is "Mantle, the Magnificent". His crushes are on Veronica Lodge and Midge Klump (Moose's girlfriend). Reggie plays bass guitar and sings for The Archies band. He also plays football, baseball, basketball, and ice hockey and has been a stand-up comedian at the Riverdale comedy club.

Of course, Archie has had many, many titles featuring his name over the years, but Reggie, on the other hand, has had a more modest series of

Archie and Reggie have been needling each other for decades. *Archie's Rival*, Reggie #9.

© Archie Comics.

(top left) The Archie and Reggie rivalry goes way back. Archie #66, 1954. Art by Samm Schwartz.

(top right) I told you they were rivals. It says so right on the cover. Archie with the scorching burn. Art by Samm Schwartz. (bottom) Frenemies, I think not! Archie even has a photo of Reggie on his wall! Bonus: an action-packed Evilheart thriller!

© Archie Comics.



titles. The main Reggie title was originally called *Archie's Rival*, *Reggie*, with #1 cover dated February 1950. The series was canceled with #15, August 1954, and then resumed in September 1963, quickly losing the "Archie's Rival" part of the title. *Reggie* ended with #18, November 1965. Next, *Reggie* became *Reggie and Me* and resumed publication in August 1966. The *Reggie and Me* title stuck around for a while, finally ending with #125, September 1980.

The other main Reggie title, based on *Archie's Joke Book*, was *Reggie's "Wise Guy" Jokes*, which lasted for 55 issues from August 1968 through September 1980. The most recent attempt to do a Reggie-titled book was a series called *Reggie's Revenge* which lasted for three issues from 1994-1995.

Both of these titles don't really focus on the Archie-Reggie dynamic, especially the *Jokes* title, however Reggie does feature as Evilheart in many of the Archie Captain Pureheart superhero stories which appear frequently in the early issues of *Reggie and Me*. These stories can be considered the ultimate version of the Archie-Reggie feud.

According to Dan Markstein's *Toonopedia*, "*Life with Archie*, launched in 1958 as one of the carrot-topped teen's ancillary titles, tended to run longer, more adventure-oriented stories than the rest of the Archie Comics line. In the 42nd issue (Oct., 1965), at the suggestion of publisher John Goldwater, writer Frank Doyle (long-time Archie Comics contributor) and artist Bob White (*Cosmo the Merry Martian*) arranged for Archie to acquire super powers, put on a skin-tight costume, take on the name "Pureheart the Powerful", and do mighty battle with the forces of crime and/or evil. They posited a "PH (for Pure Heart) Factor", which Archie could invoke to give himself generic super powers (strength, flight, invulnerability), and pitted him against the super villain Ice Cube (billed on the cover as a "diabolical super-fink"). Afterward, the PH Factor blanked out the memory of everyone in the vicinity, including Archie.

"Pureheart was back two issues later, and back again in #s 46, 48 and 50. It was in the 46th issue that he got his origin story. #48 introduced the villain Evilheart, who was secretly

Archie's rival, Reggie. In #50, he was joined in his crusade for good by two stalwart allies — Captain Hero (whose secret identity was Archie's pal Jughead) and Superteen (in reality Archie's sometimes-girlfriend, Betty, who had become a superhero the same month Archie did, in *Betty & Veronica* #118). The 50th issue also had Evilheart team up with Mad Doctor Doom (no relation), the villain who had been menacing Little Archie for the past few years.

"But the glory was short-lived. *Pureheart the Powerful/Captain Pureheart* lasted six issues, exactly as long as Superteen's tenure in *Betty & Me*. Little Pureheart made only three appearances, the last in *Little Archie* #44. Evilheart was out of Reggie's comic after five. *Jughead as Captain Hero* bucked the trend by hanging on for seven issues, but it too was gone as of November, 1967, and the entire "Pureheart" scenario became a fond memory for fans of superhero comics.

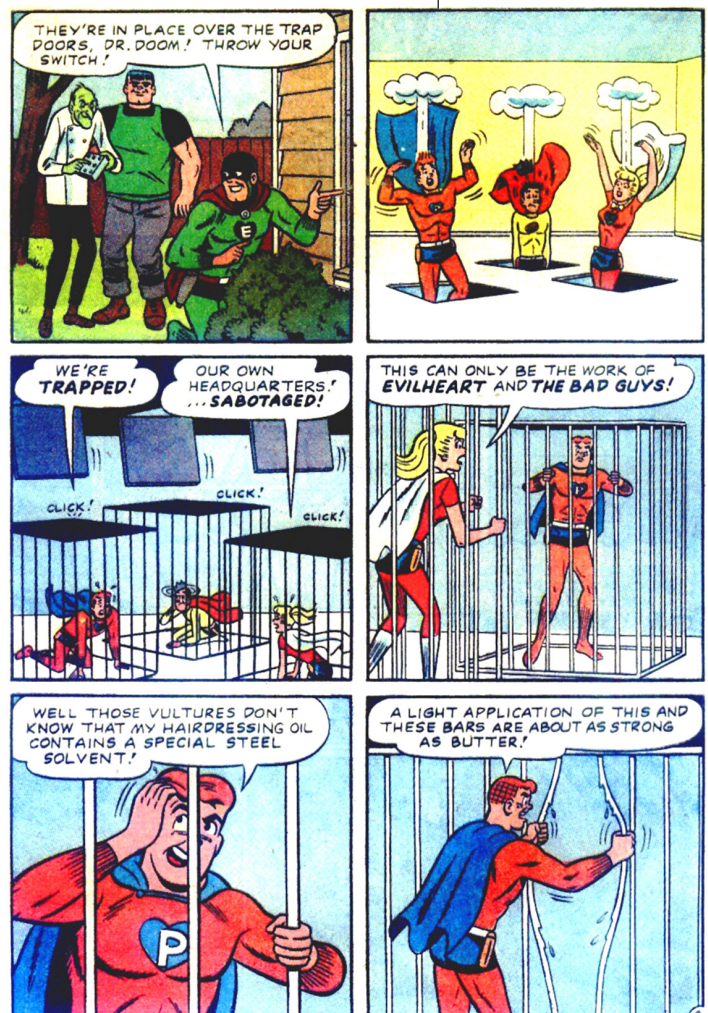
"They were back decades later, tho, in *Archie's Super Teens* #1 (no month, simply dated 1994). This time, Veronica joined them as Miss Vanity, who devoted her awesome super power (money) to the aid of fashion victims. But that glory, too, was short-lived—four issues, to be exact. Pureheart and his entourage haven't been seen since."

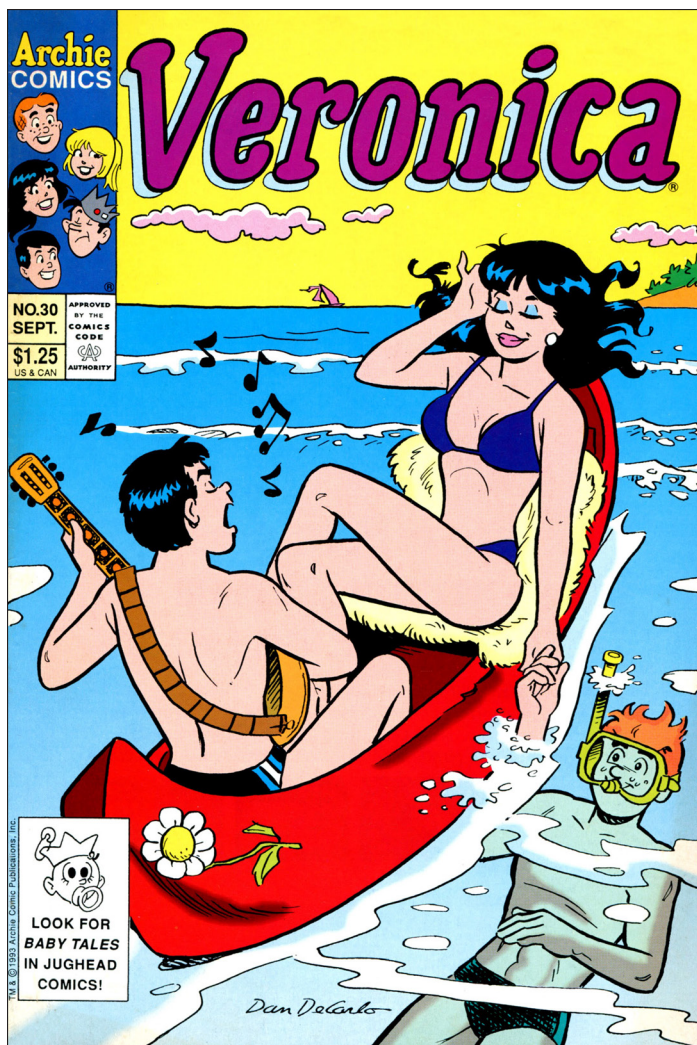
Dan Parent has worked for Archie Comics since the late 1980s and has drawn the Archie vs. Reggie rivalry many times. In a recent interview



(top) Throwing your rival over a wall. Classic! From *Archie's Pals 'n' Gals* #11. Art by Samm Schwartz. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com). (bottom left) Evilheart and Pureheart mix it up. Art by Bill Vigoda. (bottom right) Evilheart and Mad Dr. Doom attempt to capture Pureheart, Superteen, and Captain Hero in *Life With Archie* #50. Art by Bob White and Marty Epp.

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(left) Dan DeCarlo takes the Archie-Reggie rivalry to a different level in *Veronica* #30. Art by Dan DeCarlo.

(bottom) Reggie makes an off-color comment about Archie in *Archie & Friends* #7 by Dan Parent and Rudy Lapick.

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by this writer, Parent was asked about his career, "When I was in high school, I decided it was what I wanted to do for a career so I went to the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon Art which a lot of professionals in our industry have attended. I was fortunate when I went there because Archie Comics would come there every year and look for talent and luckily when they came back in my second year of school, they liked some of my samples, and they hired me. I was still in school, so I was doing simple, one-page gags.

"I then started working in the actual offices. I was mentored by Dan DeCarlo. They would always try to get us to work when DeCarlo would come into the office one or two days a week. When he came in, they would have us show him our work. He would go over it a little bit, which was very helpful. Back in the early nineties when I was at Archie for a few years, Dan was trying to slow down a little bit, so what he would do is be late on the layout pages and I would finish them. He'd bring in really pretty rough layouts and I would tighten them up and we did that for a couple of years, so you'll see a

lot of it like this. Sometimes you'll see some of the old issues of *Betty and Veronica Digest* and *Betty and Veronica Summer Spectacular*, you'll see that it says art by Dan DeCarlo and Dan Parent. I would finish those, and my art improved a lot at that point because I was drawing right over Dan DeCarlo's art.

"I got my first five-page story. At that time, we had five— and six— page stories, so I would start getting those kinds of stories. I started doing a lot of stuff for the digests because the digests at the time needed so much new material. They put out several new stories, so there was a lot of material that needed to be filled, so I did a lot of stories for the digest and specials.

"I didn't have a regular series until I did the *Veronica* book in 1989. That was my first full book.

I was working in the office during the day and freelance at home. It was a learning experience. Now you're allowed to do your freelance work at work. Basically, you're getting paid your freelance rate for that. I was getting a salary at work and tried to keep that separate, so that lasted for about 10 years. I think in 1996 or '97, they told me to go



DAN PARENT

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JOSIE #98 OCT. ONLY! FLAT 7 - PAGE 7

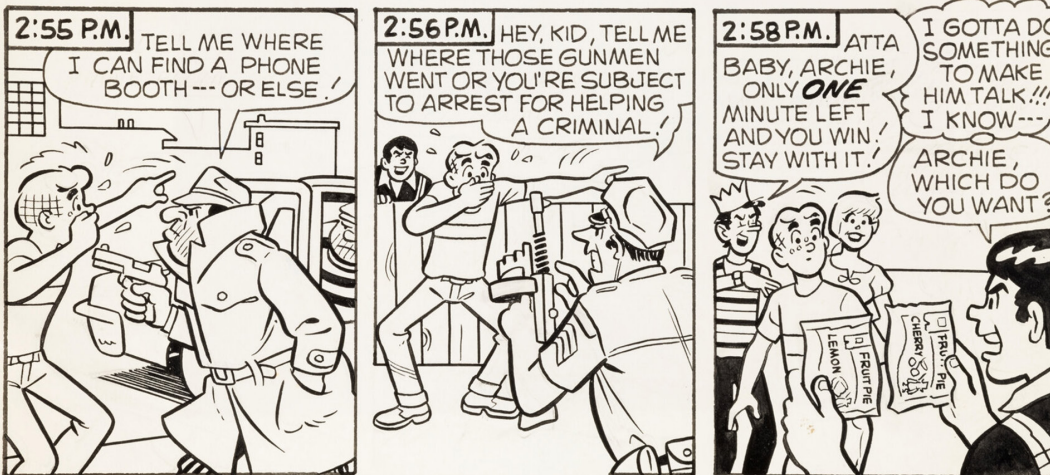
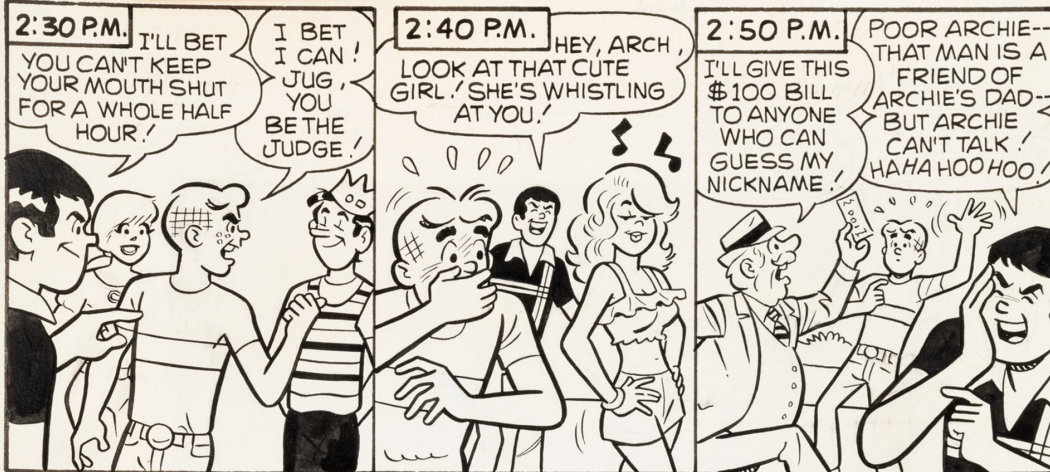
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Reggie uses Hostess Fruit Pies to trip up Archie. Art by Dan DeCarlo and Jim DeCarlo. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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* Separate in Coverpt.

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"In more recent times there's been the mini-series like *Your Pal*, *Archie* and things like that, so I guess it's the original story that style made it come back. I can't say that's the original style either because DeCarlo style is different from say Montana's, but you can still tell the classic style pretty easily over the new style.

"They've done ones in the past where the cover says Archie's in the military and of course he's younger than military age and then of course it turned out it was just test recruiting or something. It wasn't the real thing. The exact story is what is kind of on the horizon for Archie nowadays. It seems the TV show *Riverdale* and now *Katy Keene*, they're pretty popular."



After Archie became more realistic in 2015, Mark Waid was the keeper of the flame of this classic Archie-Reggie rivalry. After a few casual appearances in various Archie digests in 2013 and 2014, Waid became the primary writer on the new *Archie Comics* #1, September 2015. The Archie-Reggie rivalry heated up from time to time, most notably in #20-22, 24, 31 and 32. #32, September 2018, was the final issue of the new *Archie* series, after which they reverted the numbering to #699, and continued on through #713, September 2020, which is the final regular *Archie* issue published to date.

On The Mary Sue website on April 24, 2017, Teresa Jusino interviewed Mark Waid about the ultimate Archie-Reggie feud. Archie Comics touted it as, "The BIGGEST comic event in ARCHIE HISTORY! Archie and Reggie's ongoing feud reaches a fever pitch that pits the two against each other in a thrill ride on the deadly Dead Man's Curve!"

When asked by Jusino about this epic, Waid said, "Reggie digs so deeply under Archie's skin this time that, as teenagers (and I) often do, Archie does something stupid. Reggie goads Archie into a drag race—and as a consequence, someone in the cast, someone we love, pays a horrible, horrible price and fades to black. As a result, the kids (and half the adults) of Riverdale go through some heartbreaking emotions, parents are at war with one another, and the whole town changes for the worse. And that's just the start."

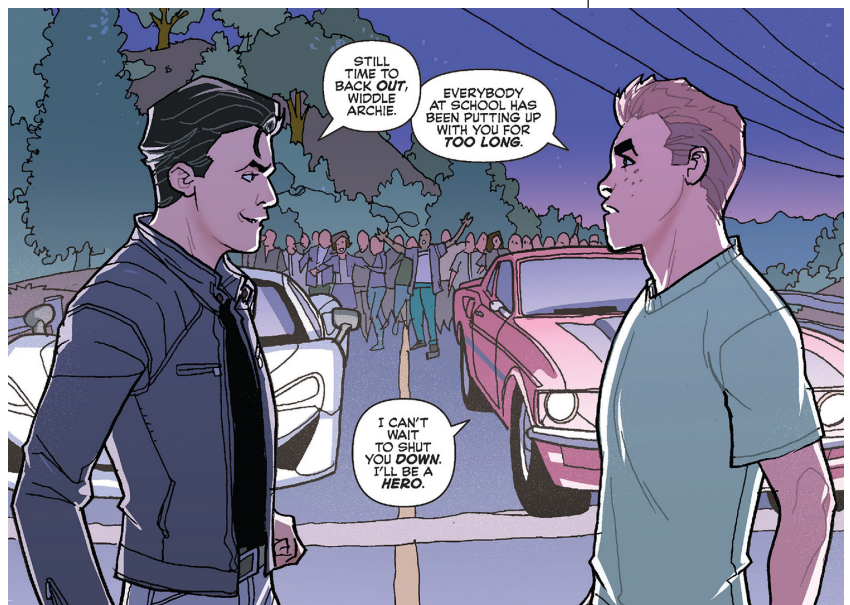
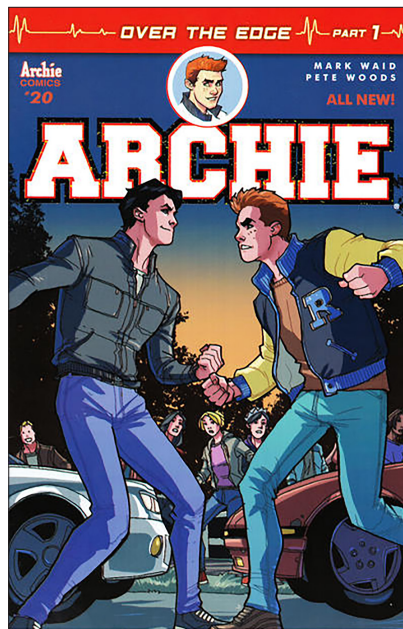
"In Archie and Reggie's case, Reggie is a bully, full stop. If I learned anything during my first eighteen years on this earth, it's that it's impossible to stay away from a bully because they will happily track you down. In this specific relationship, Archie's generally pretty good about letting Reggie's bullying roll off his back, but this time, as we'll see, he strikes a very sensitive nerve right here and right now in Archie."

Waid continued on CBR, in an interview with Albert Ching on June 23, 2017, "Reggie's got more to worry about right this second than remorse. He's a wanted man. He'd better hope the cops actually catch up to him before someone—or someones—in Riverdale exact vengeance on Betty's behalf."

"It was the best way I could think of to show how the news impacted the cast far and wide—how everyone would drop everything they were doing instantly in order to be at Betty's side. I really enjoy changing up my pitch whenever I can. After the last issue, readers were pretty confident they were going to get 20 pages of angst out of this story, and I hate giving the readers exactly what they expect."

"I'm confident we can keep the tone balanced. Yes, what happened to Betty is heartbreaking, and yes, it will shake everyone for months to come, but I'm able to find comedy despite that with the ways in which the other kids try to fill her shoes. Regardless of the tragedy at hand, regardless of the emotional gravitas, I still stand by my mantra: it's not an Archie story unless Archie ends up with a bucket on his head at some point."

"It's the same philosophy. Hippocratic Oath. Do no harm. Keep the characters grounded in who they are, go back to ground and drill down to see what makes them tick and what's kept them alive



for nearly 80 years, and then rebuild from there. This honestly, truly, was not an attempt to emulate the show in any way—we already have a *Riverdale* comic for that very purpose. It just felt like it was time to remind the readers and the characters that sometimes actions have major consequences."

As Archie reaches his 85th year in 2026, two things are for sure, Archie will be in love with both Betty and Veronica, and Archie's rival will always be Reggie.

Mark Arnold is a Pop Culture Historian with over 20 books to his credits on subjects such as *Alvin and The Chipmunks*, *The Pink Panther*, *Harvey Comics*, *Dennis the Menace*, *MAD*, *Cracked*, *Crazy*, *Disney*, *The Beatles*, *The Monkees*, *The Turtles*, *Pac-Man*, *Underdog* and many others. He contributed to Craig Yoe's book on Archie called *Archie: A Celebration of America's Favorite Teenagers*.



(top left) The rivalry hits new heights and things don't end well. Art by Pete Woods. (top right) Archie and Reggie are still rivals in the future. Art by Rex Lindsey. (bottom) I have a feeling that this won't end well. Art by Pete Woods.

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the **BRAVE** and the **BOLD**

presents

AND

SWING WITH

APPROVED
BY
ME
MYSELF
(CA)
AND I!

BATMAN & SCOOTER

JULY
NO. 152

NOT TO
QUIBBLE, OLD
CHAP, BUT I
BELIEVE YOU MAY
HAVE MIS-
INTERPRETED
ONE OF THE
WORDS IN MY
FLIPPIN' LOGO!

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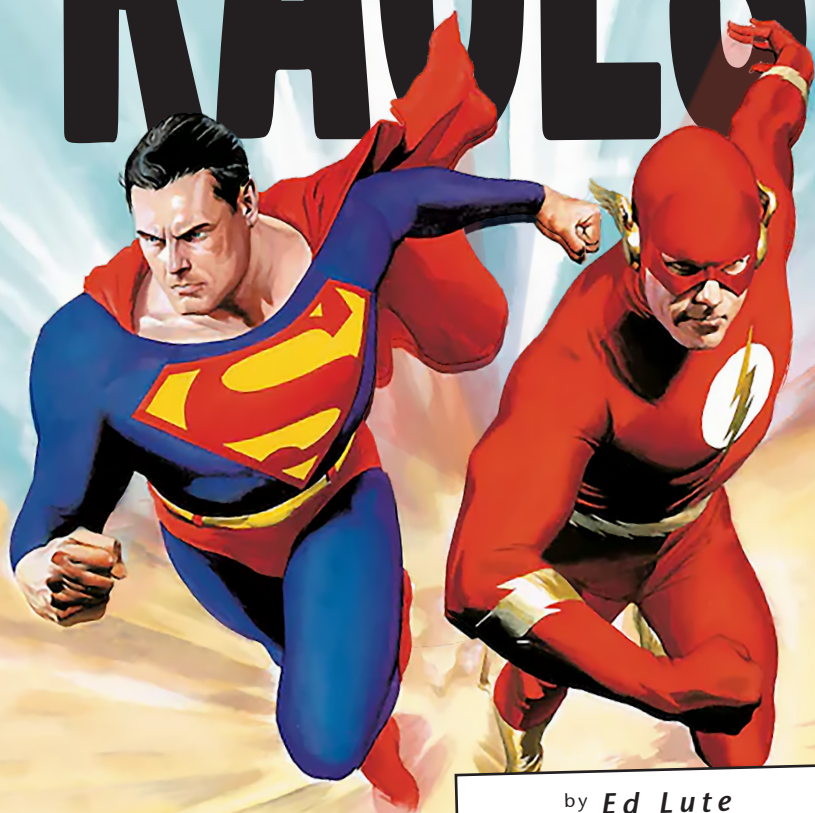
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THE BIG BLUE BOY SCOUT VS. SCARLET SPEEDSTER:

DC'S

SUPERMAN AND THE FLASH

RACES



by Ed Lute

FlashBack!

Many comic readers like to argue about various comic book minutiae such as who is stronger, the Thing or the Hulk, or who else can pick up Thor's hammer, or who is the best Robin, or which publisher is better, Marvel or DC? For decades, comic book fans have pondered these questions amongst themselves with defenders standing their ground and with some fans maybe even offering convincing arguments to sway those on the fence. These arguments are usually purely for fun with no real objective way to come to a conclusion, but one question that fans have pondered for decades could be answered: Who is faster Superman or the Flash? That's because the heroes' friendly rivalry has graced the pages of comics for decades.

BACK ISSUE takes you from the starting gate to the finishing line to offer you this fast-paced article (is there any other kind when you are talking about two of the fastest comic book characters?) that will examine their many four-color races and beyond. Come along for the photo finish of this storied but friendly competition.

THE STARTING LINE

Despite the fact that both Superman and the Flash have been around since the Golden Age of Comics, their first race didn't take place until the Silver Age and towards the end of the age at that. Thus, it wasn't the original Golden Age Flash Jay Garrick but the Silver Age Flash Barry Allen, who debuted in *Showcase* #4 (Oct. 1956), that first faced off against the Man of Steel in a race around the world for charity in *Superman* #199 (Aug. 1967).

If you thought the premise sounded like it could have come from the imagination of a comic book fanboy, you would be correct and with the emphasis on "boy." Writer Jim Shooter's first published story appeared when he was only 14 years old. So, he was still a teenager when this Superman issue that he wrote appeared the following year. The young writer was given the keys to one of the most popular comic books of the time and used that freedom to bring this story to life. Not surprising either is that this idea had been percolating for years even before Shooter started writing for DC. In *TwoMorrows' The Krypton Companion*, Shooter stated, "My idea, but way before I was a teenager. I think I was about six years old when Julius Schwartz and company revived the Flash. Cool. I immediately wondered who was faster. In my first-grade school tablet I used to draw pictures of the two of them racing."

Don't feel like racing around to find the individual issues mentioned in this article? Just pick up the collected edition! Cover art to *Superman vs. The Flash: Seven of the Greatest Races of All Time!* by Alex Ross.

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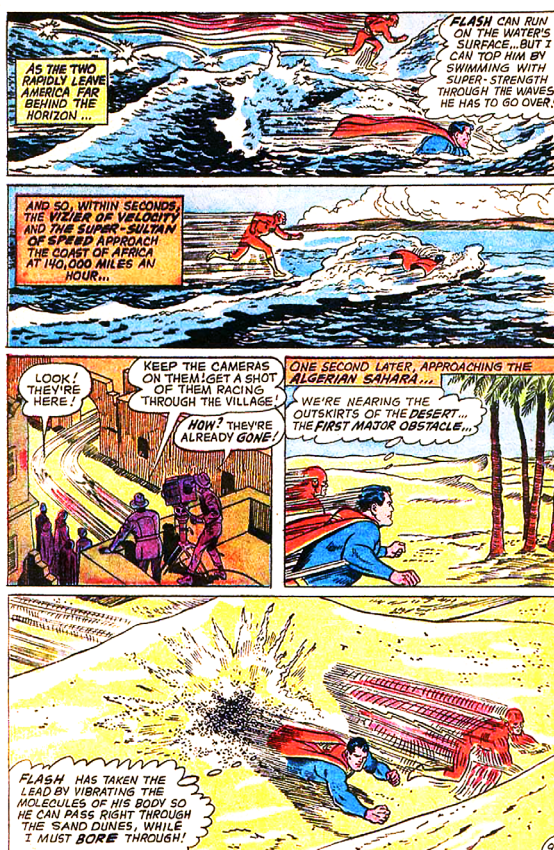
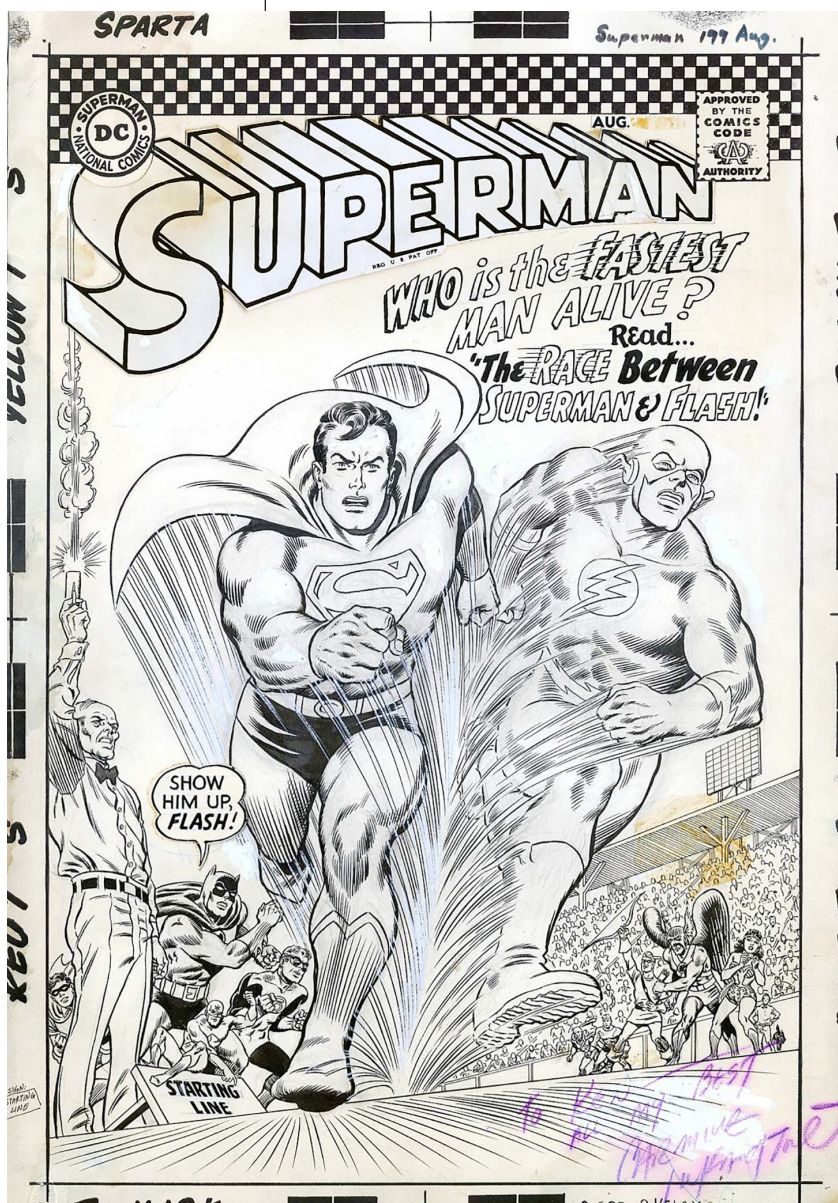
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In the story, such a high-profile race brought in many illegal bets. The American mob bet heavily on Superman to win, while the European mob backed the Flash. Each side created obstacles so their respective superhero would win. In the end, the heroes decided that the race should end in a tie so that neither mob would profit. It's a good thing that Shooter brought the childhood wonderment with him to the Superman book because this story set off a series of Superman and Flash races.

Since this story didn't get a chance to answer the question that fans wanted to know, maybe the next story in this fast-paced rivalry would. Readers wouldn't have to wait long for the rematch because it took place just four months later in the pages of *Flash* #175 (Dec. 1967).

Would readers ever get a definitive answer to their burning question? Let's race into the Bronze Age and see!

As the Bronze Age of Comics dawned, more Superman and Flash races were on the horizon. However, the next two races wouldn't appear in either a solo *Flash* or *Superman* comic, but in *World's Finest Comics* (a title that began as a Superman and Batman book, but with this issue temporarily changed into a Superman team-up title) and *DC Comics Presents* (a Superman team-up book). Even with the move, these races continued to thrill readers. From the far reaches of outer space to the tides of time, the races of the Bronze Age took the heroes to new heights.



Writer Martin Pasko (who would go on to write for DC Comics including a Superman and Flash race) wrote a fan letter regarding issue #198 that was published in issue #202. He opined, "'Race to the Save the Universe' was one of the most refreshing stories to be had in any comic publication in quite some time, much less a member of the Superman line!

"There is so much to this story that was original, exciting, and joyous to behold that it can't all be set down in one letter. The inclusion of the Guardians, the digression into the 'other-dimension,' the clever device of the color-changing sun (which, however, changed color at intricate moments that were too coincidental for comfort), and Jimmy Olsen's nerve-wracking plight (serving as a tension-intensifying sub-plot) were the many elements that made up the myriad joys of *WF 198*.

On the same letter page, editor E. Nelson Bridwell told readers why this story was published, "Do the readers even care about which hero is faster?!? It was a flood of letters reproving us for hedging on the outcome in past issues that prompted us to renew the contest."

Not to be outdone by O'Neil's story, artists Curt Swan (#198) and Neal Adams (#199) continued the trend of outstanding cover artwork for these matchups. Dick Dillan and Joe Giella produced exciting interior artwork.

APPROVED BY THE
DC
COMICS CODE
AUTHORITY
DEC. 10 1978

The **FLASH**

SUPERMAN--
I QUIT...
I CAN'T
BEAT YOU...

I FINALLY GOT YOU TO
ADMIT YOU'RE **NOT**
THE FASTEST MAN ALIVE,
FLASH!

FLASH
vs. SUPERMAN
IN THE SUPER-SPEED
REMATCH YOU'VE
BEEN WAITING FOR!

RACE to the END of the UNIVERSE!

(top) It's the first rematch between the Flash and Superman. Cover by Carmine Infantino and Mike Esposito. (bottom) Superman and Flash engage in a literal space race.

SOON... THE METROPOLIS MARVEL CATCHES UP WITH THE CRIMSON COMET IN ANOTHER SOLAR SYSTEM...

I'VE TRIED MY SIGNAL DEVICE... BUT THOSE VILLAINS HAVE FOULED IT UP! THEY PROBABLY DID THE SAME TO THE OTHERS, TOO! SINCE I CAN'T SPEAK IN SPACE, I MUST TALK TO FLASH WITH MY HANDS!

FLASH... DANGER... URGENT WE TURN BACK!

JUST THEN, ANOTHER OBSTACLE ON THE RACE-COURSE LOOMS BEFORE THEM...

KRYPTONITE METEORS! THAT'S THE ONE SUBSTANCE THAT CAN KILL ME! I'LL HAVE TO DETOUR... AGAIN!

ANOTHER BREAK FOR ME!

MY TELESCOPIC VISION SHOWED FLASH WAS ENDANGERED THE LAST TIME I PARTED FROM HIM...

I'D BETTER KEEP AN EVEN CLOSER WATCH ON HIM THIS TIME!

AS THE FIGURE OF THE MAN OF MIGHT VANISHES FROM THE MONITOR SCREEN...

GOOD! FLASH IS RUNNING ACROSS THE METEORS, WHICH HAVE FORMED A PATH FOR HIM!

EVERYTHING'S GOING PERFECTLY! AND WITH SUPERMAN OUT OF THE WAY...

WHO SAYS I AM?

SUPERMAN! IMPOSSIBLE! I EVEN YOU COULDN'T HAVE COME BACK HERE THAT FAST!

DON'T WORRY... I BROUGHT ALONG SOMETHING FOR JUST SUCH AN EMERGENCY...

(top) *Flash* #175 leaves it up to the readers to decide who won the race. Art by Ross Andru and Mike Esposito. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com). (bottom) Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson illustrate the cover to the heroes' next race in *World's Finest* #198.

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"I love Ray Bradbury, and not just for his extraordinary writing. I first ran into him at a Writers Guild function—having to excuse myself for reaching across him for my drink at the open bar—and we got to chatting. When I mentioned Julie Schwartz, his face lit up and he stuck out his hand and said, 'Any friend of Julie's is a friend of mine.'"

Pasko's story did not feature a race in the traditional sense as it was the Flash running to the end of time to create a loop to get to the beginning of time in an attempt to stop an alien from changing history so that two warring alien races would never begin their centuries long battle. Superman seemed to be trying to stop the Flash but was secretly working with him. The convoluted story also featured the Reverse-Flash, Superboy, and the Legion of Superheroes. Not being a traditional race, there was no winner unless you count the human race.

The legendary Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez was the penciler for the DCCP stories with Dan Adkins handling inking duty. In an interview for *The Krypton Companion*, Garcia-Lopez told Michael Eury "I took everything DC gave me. It was all new to me, and I was not aware it was a team-up book, or whatever you call it. I just did a few [DCCPs] for the simple reason I couldn't keep up with the deadlines. The same happened with other projects they gave me." Garcia-Lopez left the book after the fourth issue. Even though he wasn't on the title long, he delivered the goods for both the interiors and the covers for this storyline as well as the next two issues.

RACING WALLY AND IMPULSE

In DC's universe-altering epic *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, Barry Allen sacrificed himself in issue #8 (Nov. 1985) to save the multiverse from the Anti-Monitor. That, however, did not bring an end to the Superman and Flash races as Barry's replacement (and former Kid Flash) Wally West would now line up at the starting gate against the Man of Steel as well.

In *Adventures of Superman* #463 (Feb. 1990) by writer/penciler Dan Jurgens, Superman faced off against Wally and a new rivalry was born. This story added another twist to the competition as

Superman adversary Mister Mxyzptlk was involved. The mischievous imp from the 5th dimension wanted to know if the Flash was faster than Superman. Jurgens tells *BI* why Mxy was used, "It was a natural way to get them to race and do so with another twist. It just seemed like a fun and reasonable way to engineer the story and work the two of them into that situation."

Throughout the race, Mister Mxyzptlk created obstacles for both racers to overcome. In the end, Wally won the race as a surprised Mister Mxyzptlk looked on because he thought Superman would win. According to Jurgens, "I was absolutely a fan of those first Superman/Flash races. I had to swap a couple of comics to a neighbor friend who had *Superman* #199, which was the first Superman/Flash race. I thought it was brilliant, and my friends and I had endless debates about who was fastest."

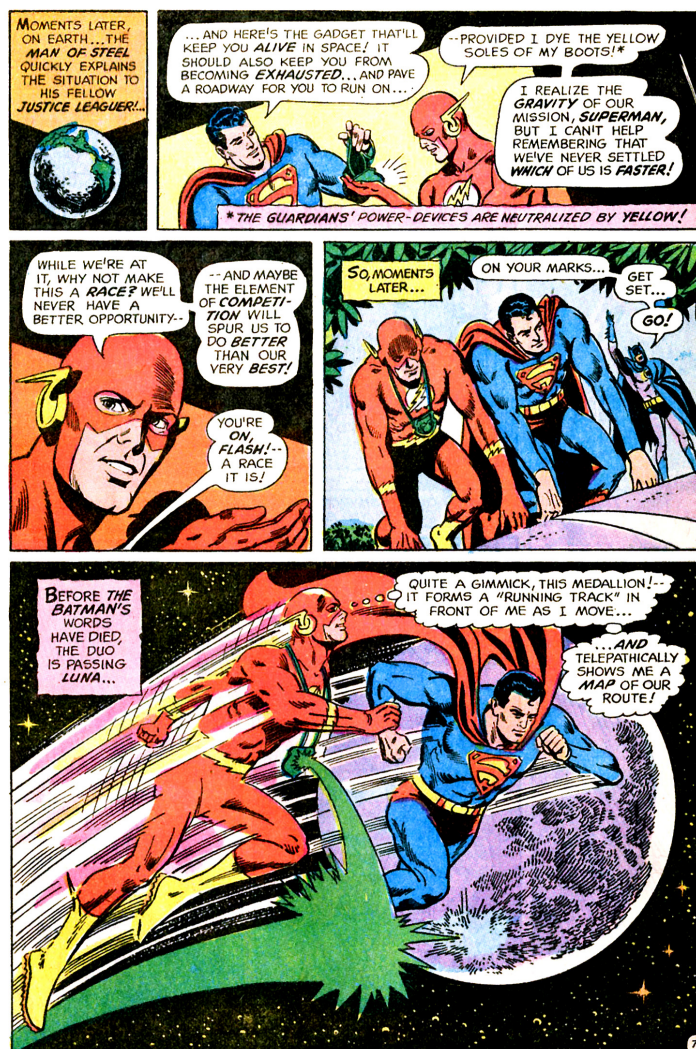
"So, the answer I gave about endless debates about who was faster is one that continued into adulthood. Once I was on the *Superman* books, I thought it would be great to revisit that. When we first talked about it in one of our Superman summits, we all agreed that Superman has so many powers, that Flash should be a step faster. After all, he is the fastest man alive!"

This was another exciting contest between the two heroes and the addition of Mister Mxyzptlk



(top) The race so long it took two issues to complete. Cover by Neal Adams. (bottom left) Superman and the Flash compete in the "Race to Save the Universe!" Art by Dick Dillin and Joe Giella. (bottom right) The readers are finally given what they wanted in *World's Finest* #99 as a winner is announced. Art by Dick Dillin and Joe Giella.

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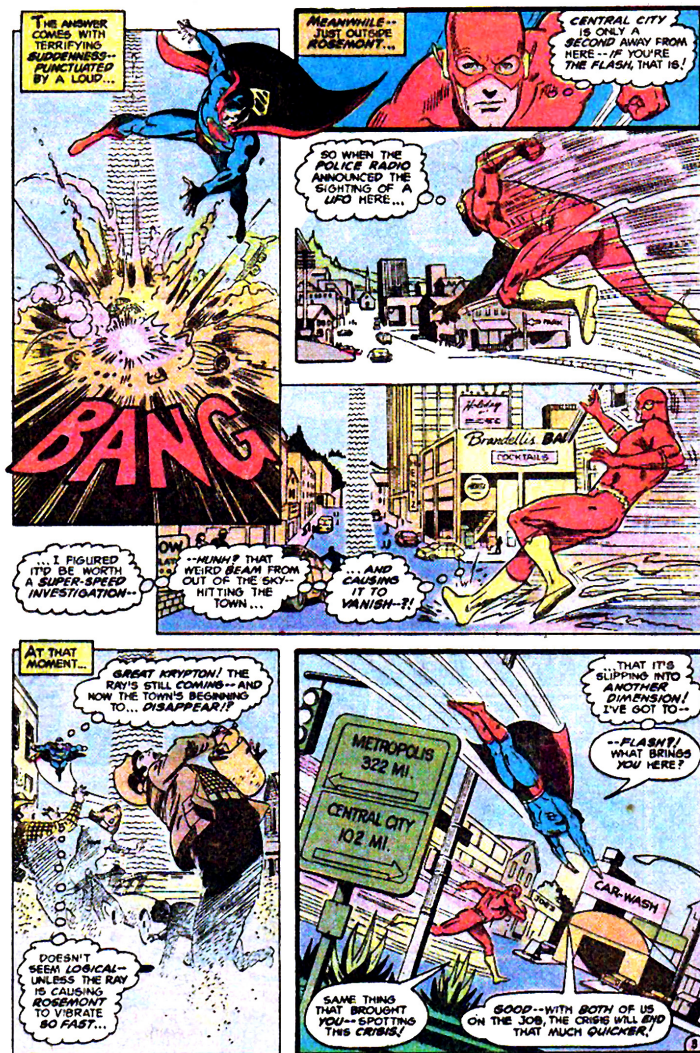
(left) DC Comics Presents is launched with a Flash/Superman race. Cover by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez and Dan Adkins. (right) Racing to the start of the race. Art by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez and Dan Adkins.

TM & © DC Comics.

into the mix brought even more fun to the proceedings. Along with the story, fans got another fantastic entry into the Superman/Flash race cover gallery. This one by Jurgens and Brett Breeding. "It was also fun to do an homage to that great Infantino/Anderson cover that captured our imaginations in the first place. It was great fun to be able to play around with it. The notion of a race between the two is one of those fun things that worked great for readers at the absolute maximum level possible," Jurgens remarks.

Even the legacy characters Superboy Connor Kent and Impulse (Bart Allen) suited up to take on each other in *Superboy and the Ravers* #7 (Mar. 1997). Connor, a clone of Clark Kent and Lex Luthor, is the post-Crisis version of Superboy. Bart, the grandson of Barry Allen, is from the 30th Century and has superhuman speed. Impulse was clearly the fastest. He even outdistanced Superboy when running backwards.

This fun story ended with a somber note as the racers stopped running as they entered the former Coast City. The city had been destroyed by Superman foe Mongul in *Superman* vol. 2 #80 (Aug. 1993), part of the "Reign of the Supermen!" event. Neither hero felt like continuing the race. Their stopping the race



said a lot about their character as they showed that the race wasn't as important as the memory of lives that were lost when the city was destroyed. The issue was written by Karl Kesel and Steve Mattsson with artwork by Paul Pelletier and Dan Davis.

Superman and the Flash have been racing each other since the Silver Age, but Superman has never faced off against the original Golden Age speeder Jay Garrick until the one-shot *DC 1st - Flash/Superman* (July 2002). Abra Kadabra put a spell on Wally West that caused him to age rapidly. Superman and Jay raced to reach Wally with the first person touching him saving him but bringing upon his own aging to death. Jay reaches Wally first, but Superman and Wally were able to save DC's original Fastest Man Alive in this exciting tale.

This story by writer Geoff Johns and artists Rich Burchett and Prentis Rollins showcased what makes these races so popular. They offer exhilarating tension that keeps the readers turning the pages to see what happens while also continuing with this friendly competition. The dynamic cover by Kevin Nowlan was reminiscent of earlier Superman versus Flash covers and continued on with the series of outstanding cover artwork for the race issues.

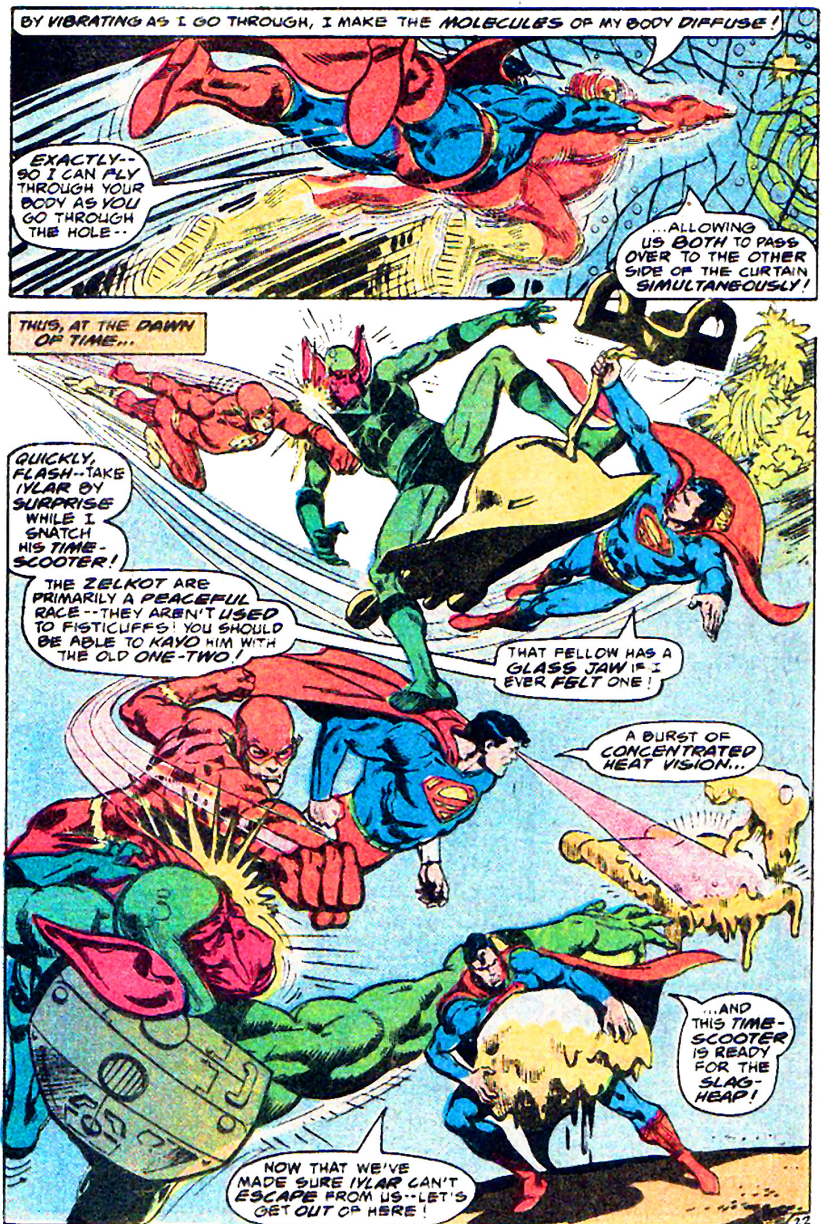
RACING INTO OTHER MEDIA

The races between these two iconic characters have not been limited to the comic book page as they also zoomed into other media. Fans of *Superman: The Animated Series*, *Smallville*, and even the big screen blockbuster *Justice League* have all been treated to versions of these races.

Superman: The Animated Series writer Rich Fogel penned the episode "Speed Demons" in which Superman and the Flash faced off in a "Fastest Man Alive" race around the world. He tells *BACK ISSUE* about the genesis of the episode, "I was sort of the resident Silver Age comic expert on the staff. Now I had the comic from 1967 when Superman races the Flash. That was always an iconic sort of thing. It just seemed like a natural thing to try and do in the series. It was our first sort of crossover attempt and stuff like that. It was fun to take that on."

While many shows feature writers' rooms where groups of writers get together to develop stories for the television shows, this wasn't the case for *Superman: The Animated Series*. Fogel reveals, "Not really. It was kind of interesting in that we had a bunch of writers on staff, but it was more of a casual kind of thing. I can't remember whether this episode was started as an assignment, or I pitched it as an idea. But then we worked one on one with Alan Brennart on it and sort of talked it out a little bit. And then we would have morning meetings where we went through what everybody was working on and if anybody had a thought to contribute. Basically, each writer went off to their own rooms and worked on the stories they were working on. It was a little different than the collaborative writers' rooms that most shows have. People took real ownership of the stories that they were working on."

Besides the race, the episode also stands out for its great interplay between the two heroes. Even though it's never mentioned just who was wearing the red costume with the yellow lightening bolt, you can bet that viewers knew it was Wally West under the mask. Fogel states, "One of the problems with the classic DC characters was that with a lot of them, they were interchangeable good guys. The Barry Allen persona isn't that different than the Superman persona. They are heroes. We needed to have something to have sparks fly off of it. So even though we didn't specifically say that this was the Wally West version of the character in here, clearly the personality that we were dealing with was a more Wally West kind of thing. He presented more contrast and more fun to have them play off of each other. So having him be the more cocky, wise cracking fast guy really worked well off of Superman. He was annoying as hell for most of the episode and then he's heroic when he needs to be. The episode gives each of them their moments."



(top left) The stakes are clearly laid out on the cover of *DC Comics Presents* #2. Art by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez and Dan Adkins. (top right)

A wonderfully retro *Adventures of Superman* #463 cover by Dan Jurgens and Brett Breeding. (bottom) Whatever you say, Superman. Art by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez and Dan Adkins.

TM & © DC Comics.

Mr. Mxyzptlk makes things interesting for the racers. Art by Dan Jurgens and Art Thibert. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

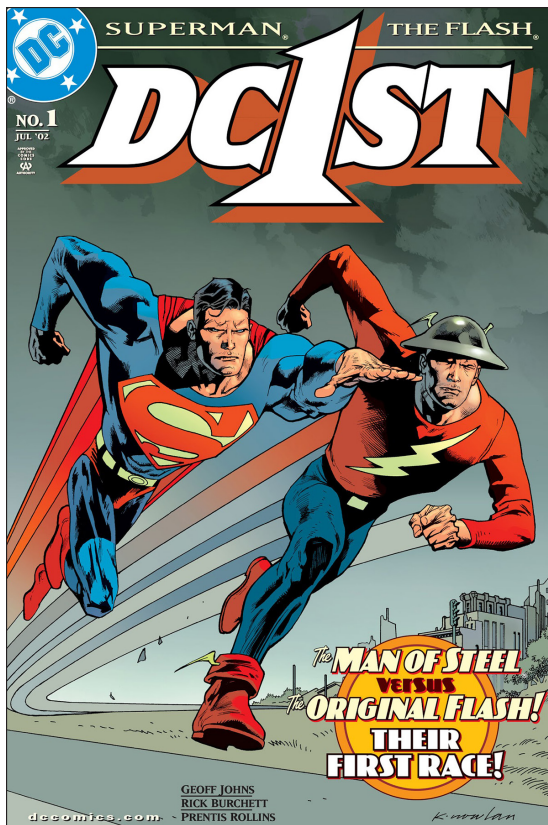
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DAN JURGENS

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Just like the first Superman and Flash race in 1967, their race from the "Speed Demons" episode saw the heroes compete for charity. Of course, the race got derailed as they had to handle weather-related catastrophes. Fans of the Scarlet Speedster probably knew that long-time member of the Flash Rogues, the Weather Wizard, was behind the disasters.

Fogel discusses, "I think we were looking for something to tie the stories together. My recollection of the comic book is that they are doing their race and that they come across things that need to be dealt with. They stop the race, they deal with it, and then they go and continue on with the race. We felt that there needed to be some sort of connective tissue there. The race couldn't be a separate thing from the action that took them away from the race. The idea that there's a lot of power being generated from the two heroes racing seemed to work well as a way to connect to the villain with the Weather Wizard using the power generated by the heroes to power his weather machinery. I can't remember if that was my idea or Alan's idea, but it seemed like a natural way to bring all the elements of the story together.

"One of the things that was interesting about the development of this particular story was that we were looking for an angle on the Weather Wizard to make him so that he wasn't a goofy Silver Age villain. That he had some depth to him. I went back and looked at his origin story and it turns out that he didn't invent the Weather Wand that he uses. His brother did. In the original story, his brother was dead when he found him. He just picks up the wand. I thought this is kind of interesting that if the brother isn't dead, the Weather Wizard is bullying him and wants to try to use the



technology for his own purposes. He tries to kill his brother. Then we've got a lot more to deal with in terms of the character of the villain in that. It gave him a lot more depth. It also builds up tension because you wonder if the brother is going to die until the heroes come up and rescue him."

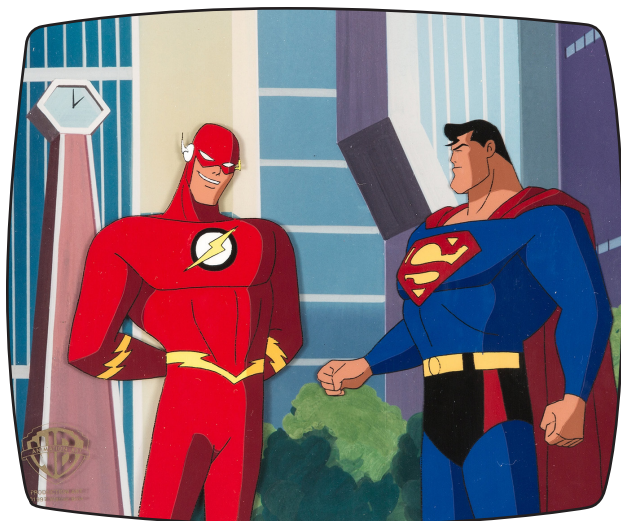
Fogel reveals, "I remember also making a connection (and this is going to sound really weird) with the Una bomber because the place where the brother was found was a shack out in the woods where he was inventing all of this stuff, and we originally were dealing with the idea of that of an eco terrorist. It sort of evolved as we told the story, but that was the jumping off point."

"One of the things," Fogel continues, "that was fun about working on this particular series (and Batman as well), was that we were on staff full time and when we weren't working on a particular story, we were being paid to develop ideas. In order

(left) Superman finally races Jay Garrick. Cover by Kevin Nowlan.

(right) Superboy and Impulse carry on the tradition in *Superboy and the Ravers* #7. Art by Paul Pelletier and Dan Davis.

TM & © DC Comics.



(top and middle) Superman and the Flash meet for another race in *Superman: The Animated Series*.

Original art scans courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com). (bottom) That's one heck of a race!

TM & © DC Comics.

to do that, basically we were being paid to read comic books. So that's a pretty good gig. And you come across things in doing that like the origin of the Weather Wizard that I didn't remember from reading the stories originally, but when I saw it, a little light bulb went off, and I said that's interesting."

The episode ends on a cliffhanger as Superman and the Flash resume their race as the end titles begin. Fogel did not want to reveal who won this race. He tells *BACK ISSUE*, "It's always been something that's been mostly unsettled in DC Comics lore. It seemed like a fun way to deal with the question. Obviously, Flash has his fans, and he's known as the fastest man alive. But is he really? And Superman has his fans and he's Superman, so he's really fast too. It's fun to have the fans speculate about it and not be really settled."

While the episode didn't reveal the winner, *BI* wanted to know who Fogel thought should win the race. He replies, "That's a tough one. I kind of lean a little bit towards Flash because that's his power. It would be nice for him to own that. It's always fun as fans to play those sort of things out. For Marvel fans it who's stronger, the Hulk or the Thing? That kind of thing. In terms of Superman, he's Superman. He's super fast. An argument could be made for that. It's fun as fans to keep that conversation going and not to have it be like all settled and this is it. I count myself as a fan."

Justice League Unlimited was another animated series set in the same DC Animated Universe as the *Superman* one. While the *StAS* episode did not feature the ending to the race, the *Justice League Unlimited* episode "Flash and the Substance" showed that it was the Scarlet Speedster who crossed the finish line first. In a scene set in the Flash Museum, there is a globe with a banner declaring that the Flash won the "Fastest Man Alive" race.

During the early 2000s, fans were given new adventures of a young Clark Kent for ten years with the live-action *Smallville*. During the fourth season of the show, Clark raced Bart Allen. While some stories leave the outcome up in the air, there really wasn't any doubt who was the fastest in the "Run" episode as Bart easily outdistanced Clark even when Bart ran backwards just like in the *Superboy and the Ravers* issue. Not only was this another exciting addition to the list of Superman and Flash races, but it was also a wonderful addition to the television series itself.

Not to be outdone by the small screen showdowns, Zach Snyder/Joss Wedon's 2017 *Justice League* film featured a race between the two league members. The race was shown in a post-credit scene. Like the race that ended the "Speed Demons" episode, the outcome was not shown, leaving fans speculating as to who would win. It was only a small scene in the film, but it added a lot of fan service to the movie.

While these rivals aren't as antagonistic as some of the others in this issue, their races have kept readers engaged for decades, with no finish line in sight. These stories are fun and action-packed. Readers don't keep coming back to them because they are huge, continuity changing stories, readers keep coming back because these are just exciting stories. While not every race provided fans with a definitive answer to the question of who was faster, the tales where these races appeared were always must have issues for fans. That's a great thing for a comic book starring two of the industry's biggest stars to deliver. While we don't know what the future results of this long-time rivalry will hold or even who will be wearing the costumes, we do know that fans will pick up the issues, tune into the television series, or buy a ticket to a movie to see who would win because after all these years, we still love to see these characters race in their friendly competition.

The author would like to thank Rich Fogel and Dan Jurgens for their invaluable insight. A special thank you also goes out to comic book historian and frequent *BACK ISSUE* contributor John Wells.

It figures that the fastest article that Ed Lute has written would be based on the Superman and Flash races. He is a southern New Jersey based teacher, writer, and comic book historian. His work has also appeared in *The Jack Kirby Collector* and *RetroFan*.



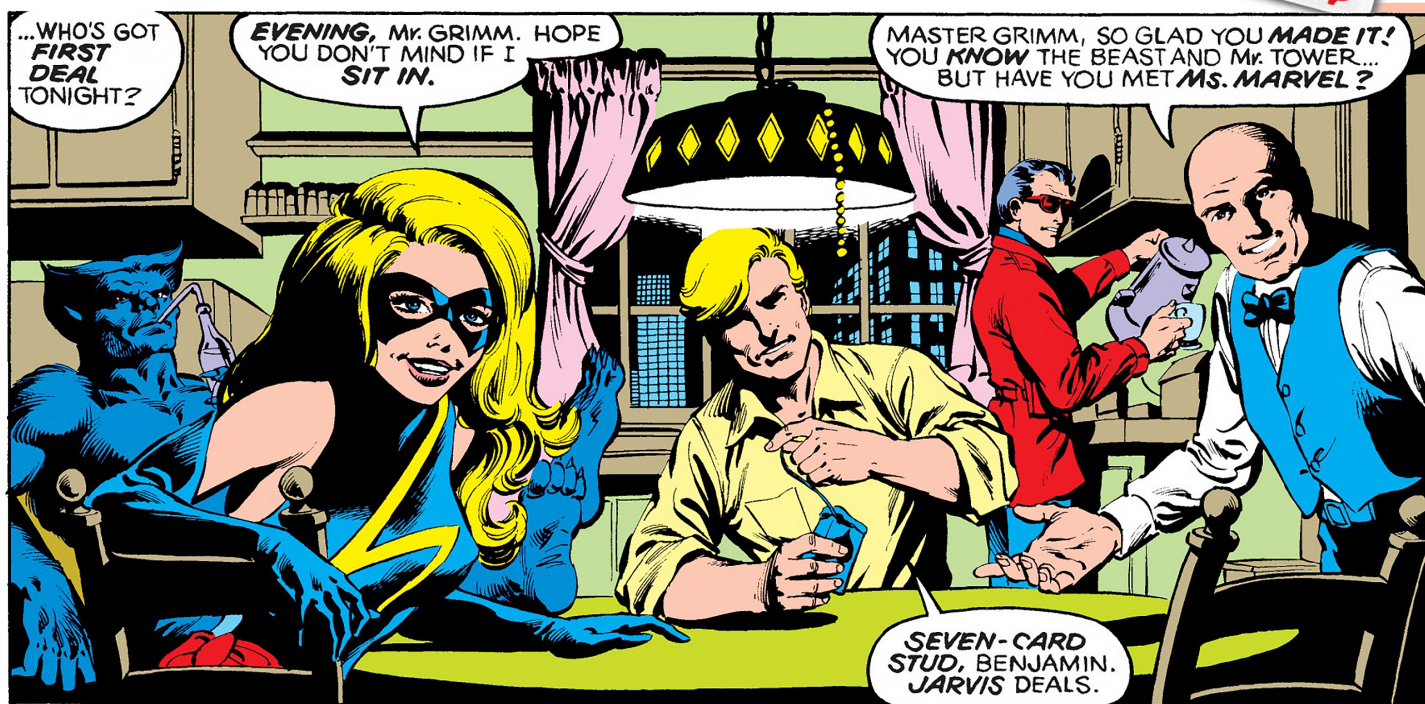
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DEAL ME IN

by Doug Zawisza

THE MARVEL FLOATING POKER GAME

What the--!!



"I wonder why they call it a poker hand, hm?"

The Beast (Hank McCoy of the X-Men and, at the point *Marvel Two-in-One* #51 (May 1979) was published, an Avenger) posits some poker philosophy for his card-playing colleagues (and us readers!) to consider as he gazes upon the cards he holds with his right foot. The Floating Poker Game as it has come to be known debuts in *MTIO* #51. While it hasn't been as prevalent as Wolverine being the best there is at what he does, or the Thing shouting out, "IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!", the heroic hold 'em hoopla has become a grand tradition Marvel fans revel in whenever and wherever it pops up. And before you fire up the letters to the editor, I am aware that Texas hold 'em is not the usual flavor of poker popping up in Marvel Comics, but the alliteration worked better than anything I could write centered around "five-card stud."

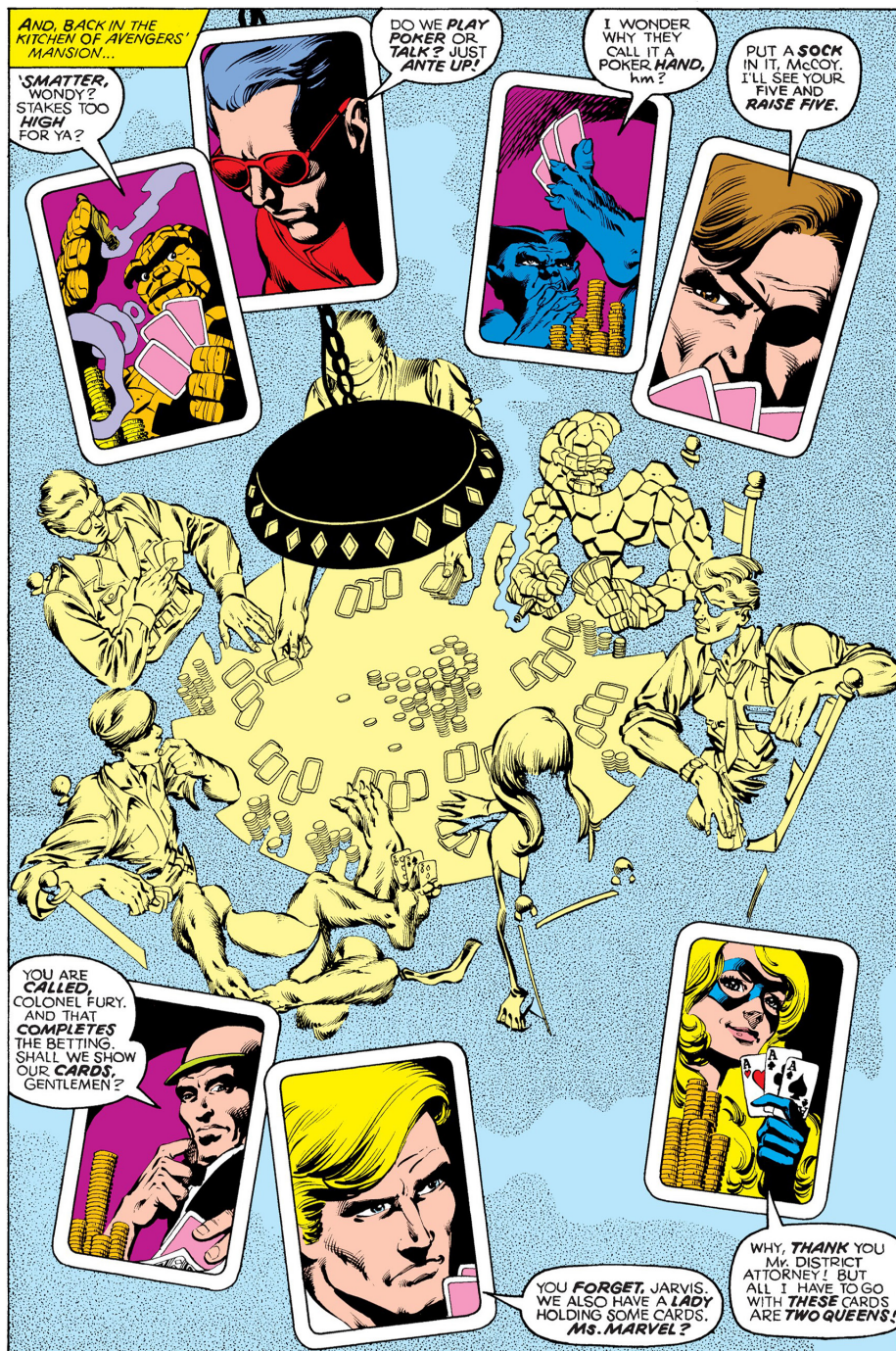
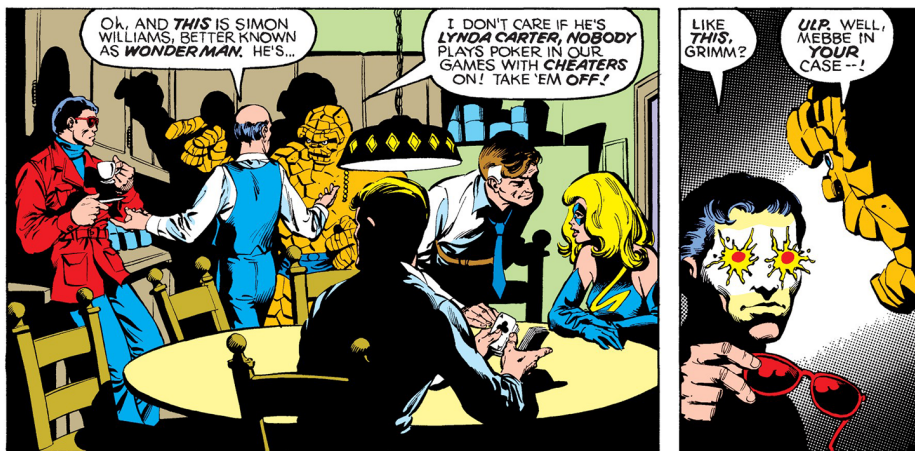
Showcasing the connectivity of the Marvel Universe, *Marvel Two-in-One* #51 delivers a cover comparable to any team comic on the rack, promising a team-up featuring a gathering of heroes including guest stars the Beast, Ms. Marvel, Nick Fury, and Wonder Man as they all charge the reader. Gorgeously drawn by George Pérez and inked by Joe Sinnott, the cover of *MTIO* #51 is a sight to behold, jam-packed with the promise of awesome adventures within.

While each of the characters mentioned above get their own logo treatment on the cover, "Full House—Dragons High" is billed internally as a team-up between the Thing and the Avengers. The cover co-stars—Thing, Beast, Ms. Marvel, Nick Fury, and Wonder Man—are joined inside by Avengers' butler, Edwin Jarvis, and Marvel Comics' New York City District Attorney

Grab a seat at the table, it's time to play. From *Marvel Two-in-One* #51.

Art by Frank Miller and Bob McLeod.

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Blake Tower. Written by Peter Gillis, drawn by Frank Miller, inked by Bob McLeod, lettered by Tom Orzechowski, and colored by Glynis Wein, the interiors deliver on the promise, giving the reader everything from Thing being put in his place verbally by both Wonder Man and Jarvis to an impromptu pause of the poker shenanigans in exchange for a super heroic slugfest as the inevitable supervillain attack breaks out.

As *BACK ISSUE* editor-in-chief emeritus Michael Eury summarizes *Marvel Two-in-One* #51 in his ultimate guide to team-up comics, *The Team-Up Companion*, "This being the Marvel Universe, however, poker nights, like wedding days, were magnets for trouble...and in this case a rogue military officer with a mad-on at S.H.I.E.L.D. was the antagonist who was not quite playing with a full deck."

Sheesh. Weddings, birthday parties, poker games - can't a hero ever catch a break without some riff raff tryin' ta take over da world?

I'm sure weddings and birthday parties have been covered elsewhere in the grand history of *BACK ISSUE*, so pull up a chair, grab your favorite snacks, pour

(left, top and bottom) Stakes are high around the poker table. Art by Frank Miller and Bob McLeod. (right) Heroes gather—to play poker! Cover art to *Marvel Two-in-One* #51 by George Perez and Joe Sinnott.

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yourself a beverage, and let's regale one another in past hands dealt as we take a look at the Floating Poker Game.

What are ya waiting for? Cut the deck and turn the page already!

According to "Two-Fisted Tom" (as Tom DeFalco recalls Jim Shooter dubbing him during a real-world round of poker) the game in *Marvel Two-in-One* #51 had its own secret origin.

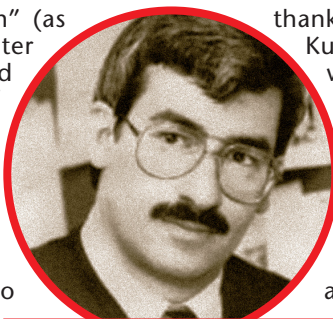
"The floating poker game that appeared in a few Marvel Comics was actually based on a real weekly poker game that was usually hosted by Paul Levitz and Martin Pasko in the apartment they shared," DeFalco revealed during a recent email exchange, "Regulars at the game included Jim Shooter, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Mike Barr, Al Milgrom, Jack Abel, and myself."

Future Marvel Universe poker games would include at least one of the players from *MTIO*

#51, and, more often than not, more than one. A grand new tradition in the mighty Marvel manner to be sure!

Surprisingly, the Floating Poker Game makes a return in *Marvel Two-in-One* #56 (Oct. 1979), thanks to well-known comic book writer Kurt Busiek. Well, at least before he was a comic book writer. Busiek is known to have popped up in a letters page or seven, but regarding *MTIO* #51 specifically, he wrote, "Every so often a comicbook (sic) comes along that communicates something so powerful, so important, that fandom must hail that comic as a classic. *Marvel Two-in-One* #51 was not one of those comics."

Not the most glowing endorsement, but Busiek continues, highlighting the real reason most folks read comics in the 1970s by adding, "It should, however, still be considered a classic because it had one thing going for it that set it apart from most other comics with great

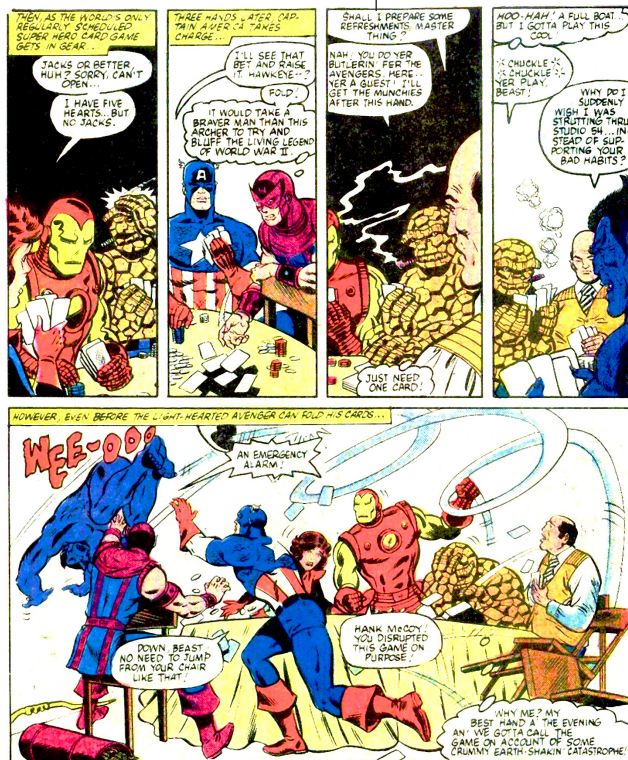
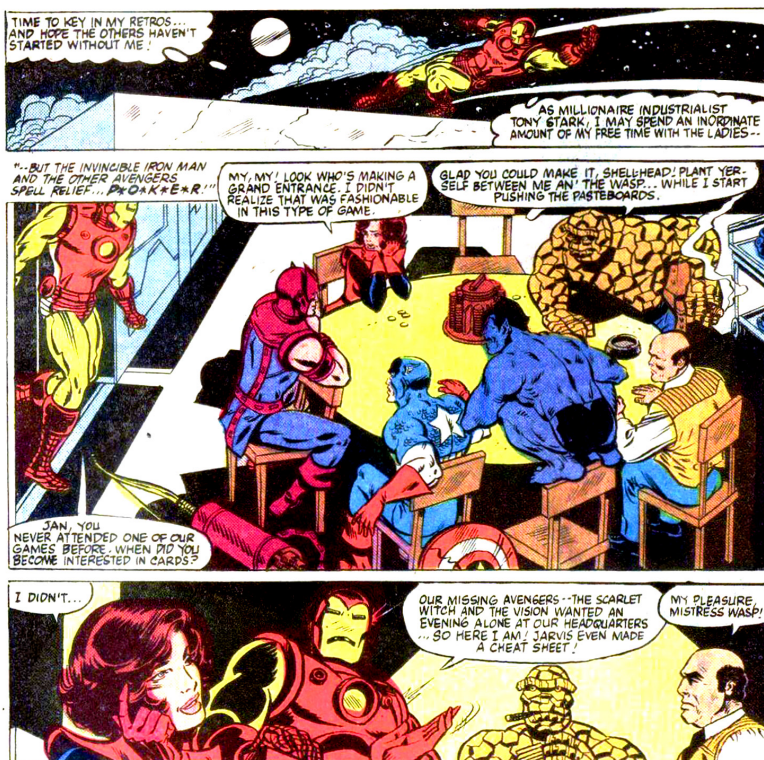


TOM DEFALCO



(top) Carol Danvers cleand the boys out in *Marvel Two-in-One* #51. Art by by Frank Miller and Bob McLeod. (bottom, left and right) It never fails. You get a good hand, and suddenly there's an emergency. Art by Alan Kupperberg and Chic Stone.

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stories and excellent artwork: *Marvel Two-in-One* #51 was fun! Sheer, unadulterated fun from start to finish."

From the letters page in *MTIO* #56, it is clear that readers enjoyed seeing super-heroic characters letting their collective guard down to be human, enjoying mundane events like a poker game, alongside everyday citizens of the Marvel Universe. Supporting the historic happiness around the event, current Marvel editor Tom Brevoort shared his modern-day insight, "The Floating Poker Game is uniquely Marvel in that it's in no way superhero based. Rather, it's superheroes acting like real people, socializing, competing, and just being normal. It doesn't have anything to do with fighting evil at all."

Marvel Two-in-One #75 (May 1981) puts Ben back at the poker table with the Avengers as Earth's Mightiest Heroes elect to spend Friday night (in their uniforms) at the Baxter Building. Human Torch heads out for a night on the town while Reed, Sue, and Franklin rocket (literally) off to the Himalayas. With his best girl, Alicia Masters, at an art show, Ben is ready for poker night, and so is the Baxter Building.

Readers follow Iron Man zooming towards the "world famous penthouse headquarters of the Fantastic Four" and get to listen in on the Golden Avenger's thoughts: "As millionaire industrialist Tony Stark, I may spend an inordinate amount of my free time with the ladies, but the invincible Iron Man and the other Avengers spell relief p-o-k-e-r!" Relief, indeed, with fellow Avengers Beast, Captain America, Hawkeye, Wasp, and the Avengers' most responsible member, Edwin Jarvis.

Marvel Two-in-One #75 is Wasp's first Floating Poker Game, so there's a bit of beginner's luck at play. At least until a distress call alarm—from the Negative Zone!—sends the horde of heroes into action.

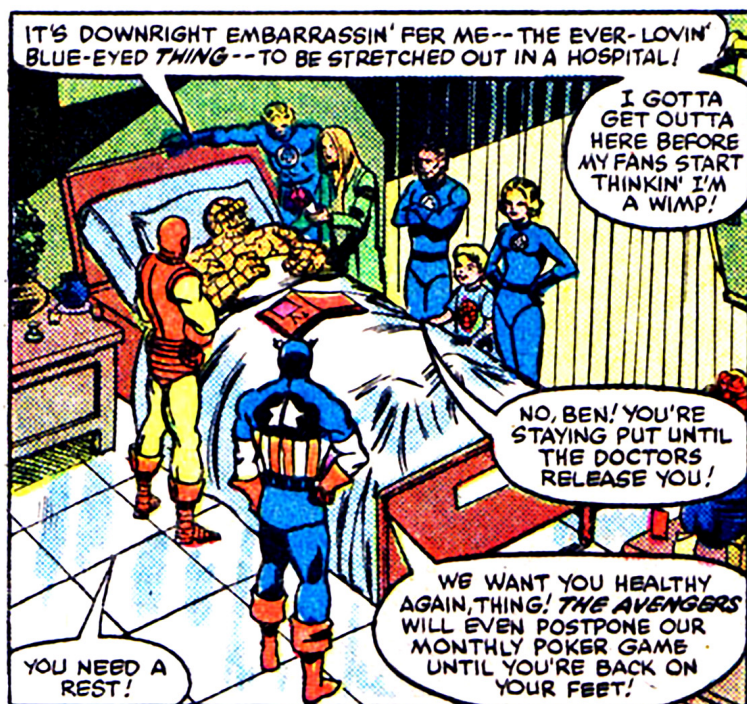
Written by Tom DeFalco, penciled by Alan Kupperberg, inked by Chic Stone, lettered by Jean Simek and Mike Higgins, with colors by George Roussos, the special, double-sized issue includes poker-related dialog from Blastaar, "I play for the greatest stakes of them all!" Blastaar was not invited, nor were the other antagonists of the tale, Annihilus and the Super-Adaptoid.

As this is comics, the heroes prevail, and, as comics of this era do, there's a bow of dialog to wrap up *MTIO* #75 quite nicely. Ben enlightens one and all by sharing, "Real life ain't like poker—ya gotta do yer best and play the game, long before ya learn the rules!"

Ironically, DeFalco also shared, "I remember one particular participant always employed a 'cheat sheet' so that he knew the hierarchy of hands and would always point at the hand he held—so we always knew exactly what he held in his hand and if we could beat him."

Speaking of beating, the Thing takes a couple of solid losses before the Floating Poker Game pops up once more.

The poker game gets mentioned—but not played—in the pages of *Marvel Two-in-One* #96 (Feb. 1983), while Captain America, Iron Man, the other members of the



(top) The Mighty Marvel poker game returns in *Marvel Two-In-One* #75. Cover art by Alan Kupperberg and Joe Sinnott. (bottom) While visiting an injured Ben Grimm in the hospital, the heroes even mention postponing the regular poker game in *Marvel Two-in-One* #96. Art by Ron Wilson and Mike Esposito.

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Fantastic Four, and more visit a convalescing Ben Grimm, hospitalized following back-to-back beatings from the Shi'ar Imperial Guard's Gladiator in the pages of *Fantastic Four* #249 (Dec. 1982) and Tryco Slatterus, the self-proclaimed Champion of the Universe, in *Marvel Two-in-One Annual* #6. Captain America, as always, has the right thing to say, "We want you healthy again, Thing! The Avengers will even postpone our monthly poker game until you're back on your feet!"

Backing up Captain America is something Tom Brevoort has done a time or two, adding, "The game was said to be run by the Thing, even though the first story to feature it was set in Avengers Mansion and the Avengers were clearly the hosts. But it fits in with Ben's blue-collar ethos, and so it stuck to him more than anybody else. Beyond the Thing, you need about a half-dozen other players, preferably with diverse backgrounds and personalities so as to create opportunities for interesting interactions."

I'm sure it was just a few months in comic book time, but it would be years before we witnessed another round, rife with diversity and personality. The next poker game is a bit of a surprise in its locale, not Marvel Universe-wise, as it is back at the Avengers mansion, but in terms of the comic book it appears in: *Marvel Fanfare* #24 (Jan. 1986), a direct market only title.

The tale opens not unlike the first poker game from *Marvel Two-in-One* #51, with Nick Fury guiding the Thing along through Avengers security. As they enter the Avengers abode, two shadowy figures watching from across the street are revealed to be Wolverine and, well, we don't get the other reveal right away.

Written by Chris Claremont, drawn by David Ross, inked by Bob Wiacek, colored by Bob Sharen, and lettered by Rick Parker, "Elegy" features a full house...of heroes (and supporting characters) with Edwin Jarvis once more hosting the game, Beast and Wonder Man taking a pair of chairs, and Nick Fury and Blake Tower rounding out the table. Wolverine and mystery guest Carol Danvers show up, with Carol sitting in for an as-yet-to-arrive Avenger.

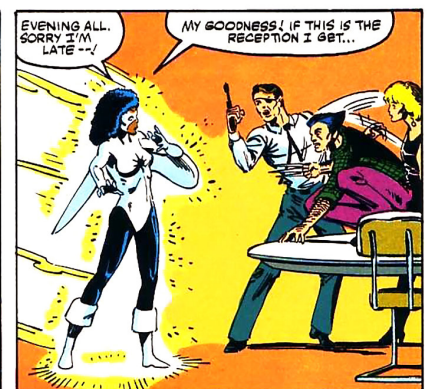
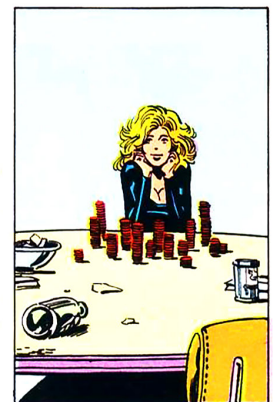
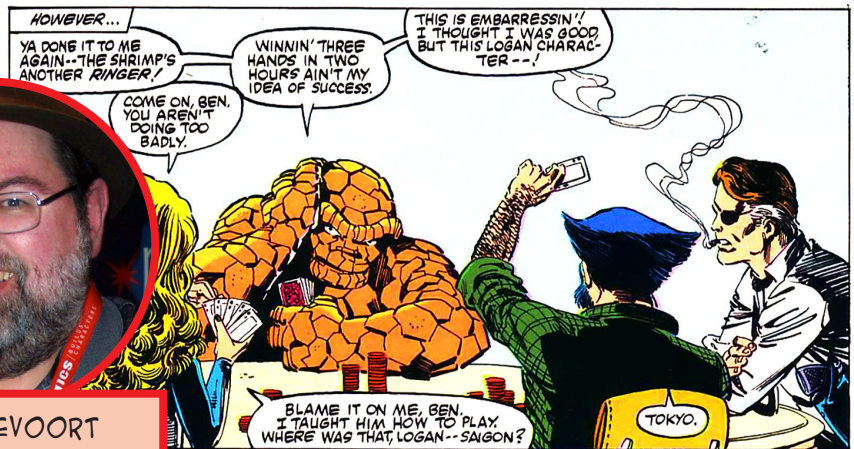
Through the poker festivities, old acquaintances are rekindled with warmth, humor, and humanity as Claremont does. And, keeping with the theme of this *BACK ISSUE*, rivalries are renewed as Carol Danvers wins. Again. As she reveals her full house, another revelation occurs in the form of a blinding light. Fury, Logan, and Danvers all leap to the ready, but Ben settles the event, assuring all gathered, "This is one o' the Avengers newest members...Carol Danvers, meet Captain Marvel."

Needless to say, from that point, the cards take a back seat. Claremont turns the focus onto Carol and her attempt to understand, accept, and make peace with what has occurred in the time and space between Danvers losing her Ms. Marvel powers in *Avengers Annual* #10 (1981) and returning to the poker table in *Marvel Fanfare* #24.



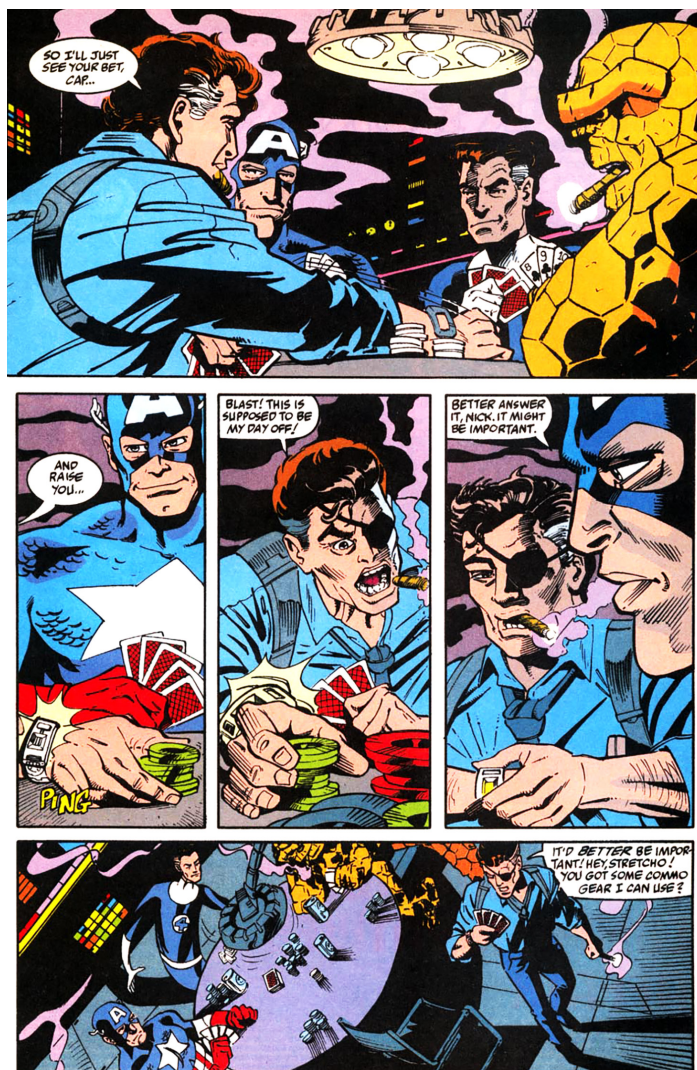
TOM BREVOORT

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Blushin' Ben Grimm's luck remains the same as usual: bad. Carol Danvers is introduced to... Captain Marvel. From *Marvel Fanfare* #24. Art by David Ross and Bob Wiacek.

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(top, left and right)
Can't we ever play
a game in peace?
From Nick Fury,
Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.
#24. Art by Norm
Dwyer and Jack
Torrance. (bottom)
You can't keep
a good poker
game down. Art by
Butch Guice.

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Five years after *Marvel Fanfare* #24 hit the stands, it's time for another round. Written by Doug Murray, drawn by Norm Dwyer, inked by Jack Torrance, lettered by Rick Parker, colored by Steve Buccellato, and edited by Mike Rockwitz, *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* #24 (June 1991), features the star of the book, Nick Fury, at the table with the Thing, Reed Richards, and Captain America.

Unknowingly following DeFalco's belief that, "I always thought the game needed Ben Grimm and/or Nick Fury," Murray brought the game to the Baxter Building once more and deals in both of DeFalco's required players.

As Eury noted of the first published poker powwow, the game is a magnet for trouble. Trouble, in this case, comes in the form of a worldwide rampage of statues, which then spins off into a melee with the Mandarin. Reluctantly leaving the game, but confident he finally had a winning hand, Fury is the only one of the poker players to take on the challenge of the surly statues, declining the others' offers to help. Maybe you'll win next time, Nick.

That next time is the pivot between a pair of storylines. Written by Larry Hama and easily overlooked on a quick flip through the pages of *Wolverine* #53 (April 1992), the game glimpsed in "The Chemical Mystery Tour" includes Wolverine (naturally), Nick Fury (as promised), Beast, Thing, and Gambit, all

drawn by Marc Silvestri, inked by Daniel Green, lettered by Patrick Brosseau, and colored by Joe Rosas. Logan snaps out of a wild adventure spanning most of the issue to find himself in the story's present at a poker table, only to have that moment interrupted by his protégé, Jubilee, phoning from Japan, having found herself in trouble and in desperate need of her mutant mentor's help.

Providing additional insight into the comic creator collectively loving a good poker game, Larry Hama shared that, "There were a number of floating poker games besides the Marvel game. Jenette Kahn hosted a DC poker game that was open to Marvelites. She had it catered from Zabars, I believe—anyway, the food was always good. The Marvel poker game was a bit more serious. The food was more potluck. I think I showed up at one game with two shopping bags of White Castle burgers. It's hard to imagine DC super-heroes playing poker with each other. Whereas it seemed perfectly natural for all the cigar-chomping Marvel tough guys kicking back for a night of Texas Hold 'em together."

Card night comes around again in the third volume of *Strange Tales*. Written by former letter hack turned comic book professional, Kurt Busiek, *Strange Tales* #1 (Nov. 1994) puts Nick Fury and Ben Grimm back at the table, with Human Torch Johnny Storm and Doctor Stephen Strange rounding out the quartet of card players. Illustrated in a 1990s semi-vogue painterly style

by Ricardo Villagran, the issue features adventures from each of the characters who once enjoyed the solo spotlight in *Strange Tales*, retold by the players around the poker table. It's a fun done-in-one that ends without a conclusion to the game or an interruption dragging the players away. Busiek's choice to treat the poker game as a chance for folks to come together and shoot the breeze makes it feel all the more human and presents as a true tradition in the mighty Marvel manner. For all we know, the four players could still be playing.

As comic book story milestones, many point to *The Crossing* (Sept. 1995) in the Avengers jacket-wearing era as the end of one age and the unfortunate start of the next. With writing

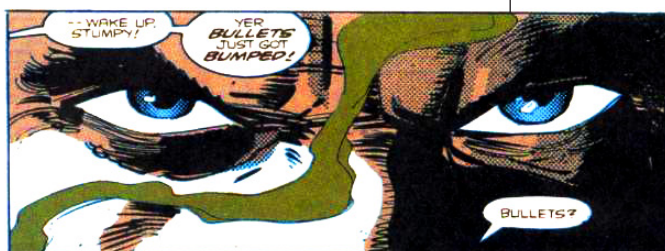
(left) No, Mojo. You aren't invited to the game. Art by Marc Silvestri and Dan Green. (right) Hey, Logan! Get your head in the game! From *Wolverine* #53. Art by Marc Silvestri, Dan Green, Hilary Barta, and Klaus Janson.

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LARRY HAMA

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A good game of cards always brings friends together. Art by Ricardo Villagran.

Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com). (inset) The stars of the original *Strange Tales* play poker in 1994's one-shot. Art by Ricardo Villagran.

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credits to both Bob Harris and Terry Kavanagh, *Avengers: The Crossing* is a one-shot drawn by Mike Deodato with all the 1990s stereotypical trademarks: lots of sketchy lines, pouches, beyond-exaggerated anatomy, and (in combination with the writing) lots of angst. Seated 'round the poker table this time are Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, Hank Pym, Beast, Quicksilver, and Crystal. New to the tradition of the Floating Marvel Poker Game, after Beast declares himself the winner with a full house, Crystal offers forth a challenge: "I didn't know you could deal from the bottom of the deck."

Following that, Wanda and Pietro let the Beast out of the bag by sharing that Beast's cheating is his way of initiating amateurs into the game. Following a round of laughter, Tony Stark asks to be dealt in. Stark's request leads to a very angsty exchange with Hawkeye, ending the game for all and pivoting the story towards its catastrophic conclusion.

Through the end of the 1990s, the Floating Poker Game keeps the Thing at the table and brings Wolverine back a couple of times as well. In *X-Men* #48 (Jan. 1996), writer Scott Lobdell puts a number of X-Men around the

table for Luke Ross to draw under Andy Lanning's inks, Richard Starkins' letters, and Steve Buccellato's colors. "Five Card Studs" brings Cannonball in for the first time, joining Beast, Storm, Iceman, Gambit, and Thing. As the game finds its conclusion, Thing eventually excuses himself, claiming he has to "go save the universe or somethin'."

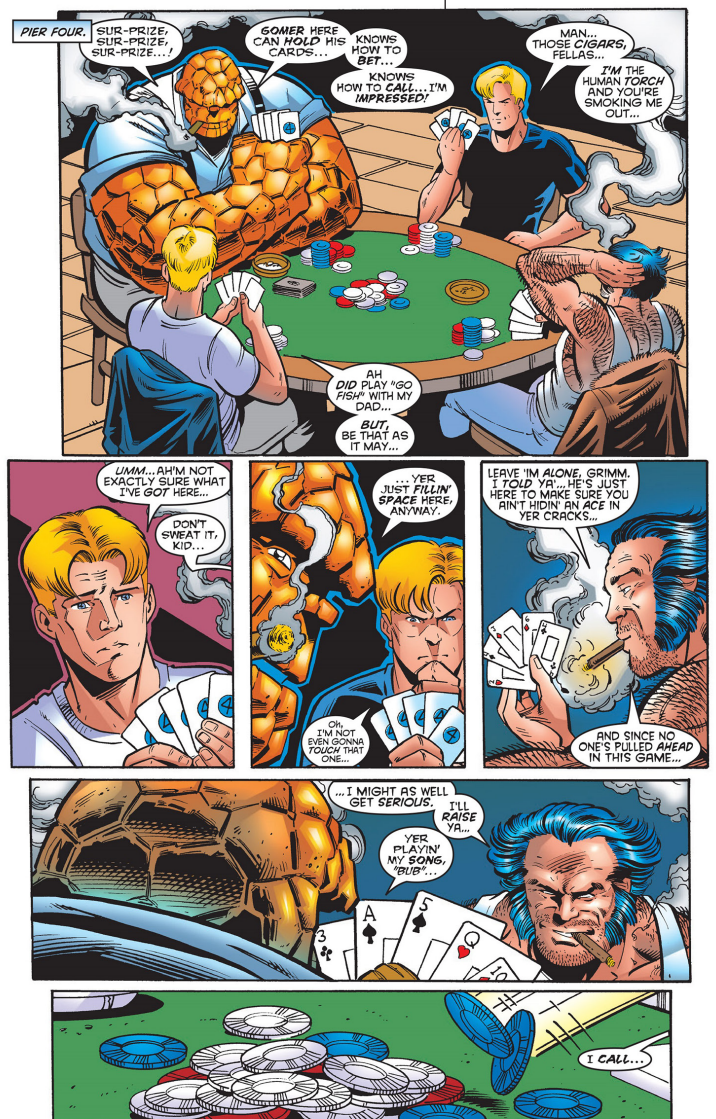
Joe Casey writes *Uncanny X-Men/Fantastic Four Annual* 1998, drawn by Paul Pelletier and Leo Fernandez, wherein the game between Thing, Cannonball ("Kid Blast-Off" as Ben calls him), Human Torch, and Wolverine gets interrupted in the mighty Marvel manner by Psycho-Man of all the possible card-cuttin' crumbs.

Wolverine Annual 1999 deals in the quintet of Captain America, Nick Fury, She-Hulk, Thing, and Wolverine, drawn by Massimiliano Frezzato as writer Marc Andreyko delivers Wolverine's best line of dialog in the issue: "I'm the best there is at what I do. Playin' cards is not what I do." A beer run ruins the festivities but adds to the overall entertainment of the issue.

As beloved as the Floating Poker Game is, it has some pretty lengthy delays between hands. The next time it pops up is in the pages of

(left) A scene from *Avengers: The Crossing*, it's poker, '90s style! (right) Human Torch, but no blaze. Ben's poker game from *Uncanny X-Men/Fantastic Four Annual* 1998.

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(top) The floating poker game finally makes it onto a cover! Cover by Talent Caldwell and Robert Campanella. (bottom) This time, the distraction (The Kingpin) joins the game.

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Spectacular Spider-Man #21 (Jan. 2005) in a tale titled "Read 'Em and Weep!" under a fun cover depicting the table of card night—with Angel on the card backs, Spider-Man's unmistakable mask on the chips, and Thing popping up on a card face as the king, and Spider-Man as the jack.

Written by Paul Jenkins, drawn by Talent Caldwell, inked by Robert Campanella, lettered by Randy Gentle, and colored by Edgar Delgado, this issue introduces the annual (first time we've heard it as such) no limit Texas Hold 'Em game, wherein the proceeds go to the charity of the winner's choice. The Invisible Woman and Wong are present, but more interested in the consumables than the cards, as Thing, Human Torch, Spider-Man (his first appearance at the Floating Poker Game!), Doctor Strange, Black Cat, Angel, and Mister Fantastic play to win. Making it more interesting, Wilson Fisk—the Kingpin—shows up to raise the stakes by giving each player \$50,000 to wager with. The thought process is that if he wins all (as he expects) this would be the greatest victory Fisk has ever had over those gathered, watching them squirm as their charitable intentions are squashed. Except Spidey wins.

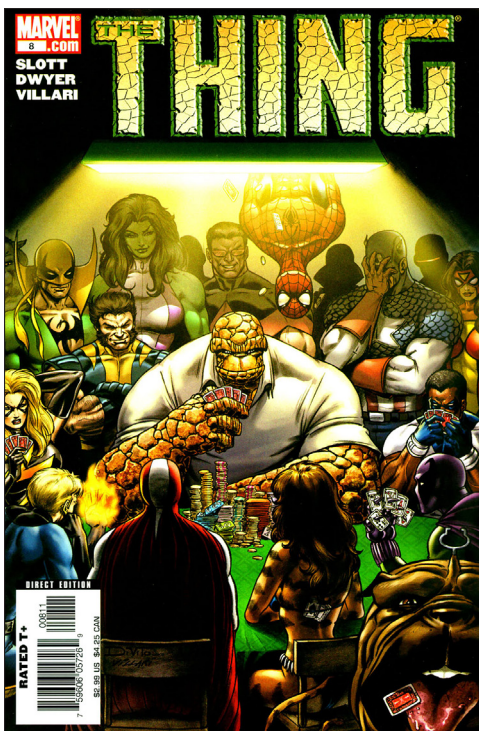
The Floating Poker Game definitely has a spot in the short-lived *Thing* series written by Dan Slott. In *Thing* #1 (Jan. 2006), Wonder Man and Ms. Marvel are discussing the game as they fly away from Avengers Tower in a story drawn by Andrea DiVito. The final issue of the series, *Thing* #8 (Aug 2006), features the first-ever Super-Hero Poker Tournament. Drawn by Kieron Dwyer, the story is a fun romp across the Marvel Universe, showcasing lots of interactions Marvel characters have had with Thing through character-centric flashbacks, despite this being a regularly sized issue. Slott is an unabashed fan of Ben Grimm, and this issue showcases that. It also is, as Kurt Busiek would say, "Sheer, unadulterated fun from start to finish," including little tidbits like Namor asking Spider-Man about his new costume to which the wall-crawler wittily retorts, "Wanna see it? It'll cost you twenty bucks," as the pair sit in with Falcon and Captain America for a round of poker.

It's this insight and character building that doesn't have a chance to occur naturally during fights with villains. Brevoort once again added some wisdom about the benefits to a poker tournament by sharing, "Superhero fistfights can be fun, but after you've read a bunch of them, they can start to feel dull and repetitive. So doing stories that are about personality and characterization can make for a good palate-cleanser. And we care about these heroes because of who they are, and we learn as much about who they are from interactions as from fistfights."

There are a bunch of additional appearances of the Floating Poker Game throughout the 2000s, including a skewed version of strip poker in *Fantastic Four* #650 (Feb. 2019), as well as more traditional rounds in issues of *Guardians Team-Up*, *A+X*, and, of course, *Wolverine* and *Fantastic Four*, among others.

One of the more noteworthy recent appearances puts Ben at the table against Gambit once more (in addition to Fury and Thing, Gambit just seems like a natural to keep the connective tissue of the card game going). The Floating Poker Game makes its way to the X-Men's quarters during the Krakoa era in *X-Men* #2 (Oct. 2021). Written by Gerry Duggan, drawn by Pepe Larraz, colored by Marte Gracia, and lettered by Clayton Cowles, "Catching the Wave" is set in the X-Men's Central



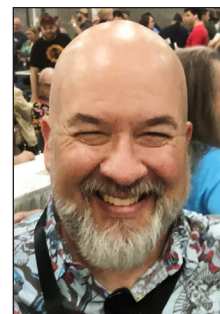


Park-based Treehouse. The players on hand include Thing, Rhino, Black Cat, and Gambit.

When asked about the game, Duggan shared, "It was always so charming to dip into the poker games. I wanted to put some black hats in to honor Gambit's status as a gray hat. Regarding the inclusion of the Rhino, Duggan said, "I thought it added a little bit of interesting grit for the Thing to play cards with some characters that he probably, literally and figuratively, butted heads within the past. And likely would in the future."

As for what makes the Floating Poker Game so appealing, it's a moment most folks can relate to, regardless of if your card playing is poker, Pokémon, or Old Maid. DeFalco certainly agrees, "Marvel Comics always seemed to focus a lot more on the characters' private and social lives than any other comic book company. Marvel also tended to have a lot more fun with its characters and the poker game was pure fun."

Doug Zawisza prefers to play euchre instead of poker. Sometimes the cards don't understand the assignment, and he finds himself with a poker hand instead. Maybe Doug is just better off writing for BACK ISSUE more often.



(top left) The Thing tells you how it's done. Art by Kieron Dwyer. (top right) That's how you end a game quickly. *X-Men #2*, written by Gerry Duggan, art by Pepe Larraz. (bottom) It's not just a poker game, it's a tournament. *The Thing #8* cover by Andrea Di Vito.

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TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

DUCK, YOU LUCKY GOOSE!

by Steven Thompson



In this corner, wearing his classic blue and yellow sailor shirt with its matching cap and a red bow tie, the one, the only, Donald Duck! Not the "fictional" Donald Duck of the Walt Disney cartoons, this is rather the Barksian everyman (everyDUCK?). We don't really need to go over Donald Duck's history, do we? While the brilliant and long unknown writer/artist Carl Barks didn't create Donald, he is to be credited for completely redefining the short-tempered, blustery character seen on the screen to work in the context of comic book stories.

While continuity in Disney comic books has never been strict, Donald is generally depicted as an old-fashioned guy, just trying to get along in Duckburg, court his girl, and raise his three nephews—Huey, Dewy, and Louie. On a regular basis, however, he's interrupted by his ultra-rich, Uncle Scrooge McDuck, who sends him, or takes him along, on adventures all over, under, and sometimes above the world!

Barks also, in late 1947, created Donald's cousin, Gladstone Gander. A "gander," of course, is not a duck at all, but rather a goose.

There he is now, over in the other corner, dapper in violet and curls, Gladstone Gander, a fellow to whom the laws of probability have never applied. The inherently lazy but stylish Gladstone has rarely had to work a day of his charmed life as lady luck incessantly rolls her dice in his favor, often in the most unlikely ways. One might think the character was inspired by the phrase, "you lucky goose," but in the beginning, Gladstone's defining gift had not yet been conceived. He was simply a cousin who, the reader was informed, had always attempted to get the better of Donald...and usually did. For more than seven decades now, Donald and Gladstone have been at odds nearly every time they meet.

Donald resents Gladstone for having it so easy while he has to struggle and cow-tow to Scrooge's every whim at a moment's notice. Gladstone resents Donald for leading the perfectly normal life he himself has never been able to have.

While the characters were already shown as somewhat antagonistic rivals, it wasn't until the Barks story "Race to the South Seas," (*March of Comics* #41, 1949) that we learned of Gladstone's supernatural hold over the laws of fortune. Surprisingly, outside of the Barks hardcovers, this story wasn't available in actual comics format again until Gemstone's *Donald Duck Adventures* #26 (July 1992).

After that, and throughout the 1950s, Gladstone and Donald squared off regularly in several titles, even coming to physical blows off-panel in *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #117 (June 1950), which left them with two black eyes each!

Donald and Gladstone nearly come to blows on the cover of *Gladstone Comic Album* #15. Art by Daan Jippes.

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(left) The first appearance of Gladstone Gander from *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #88. Art by Carl Barks. (right) One example of Gladstone's luck from "Race to the South Seas!" in *March of Comics* #41.

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Gladstone also appeared in a series of stories in Dell's semi-regular *Four-Color Comics* title in which Donald often didn't appear at all. Gladstone pits his luck against Scrooge in an effort to acquire a rare painting in one story. In another, he sells good luck charms to Daisy and all the other women in Duckburg who are entering a baking contest. In yet another, Scrooge attempts to outwit Gladstone's mastery of chance in order to claim a rare silver dollar in his nephew's possession. Gladstone even aspires to be a bullfighter in one, only to run up against a friendly, Ferdinand-like bull. We even meet, briefly, Shamrock Gander, Gladstone's young nephew who proves that the luck gene runs in the Gander family!

In 2009, Dark Horse Comics, under license from Disney, produced a series of collectible Syroco-style statues of Donald, Gladstone, and other ducks, all designed by writer/artist and

comics historian Craig Yoe. With tongue firmly in cheek, Yoe tells us, "When I was a tender age, my dear old mother got me a subscription to *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*. With that, she unwittingly started me on my road to ruin: a comic book addiction. I was especially hooked on the Donald vs Gladstone battles. I later berated "pusher-man" Carl Barks when we were both guests at a Disneyana convention. I told that bad duck artist I couldn't live without reading and re-reading his stories, like the one where Donald and Gladstone ruthlessly fought to win a prize for growing the best apples. Pity me, Bark's gateway duck and that damn charmed goose caused me to spiral down to become strung-out on harder drugs like *The Thing* vs *The Hulk*.

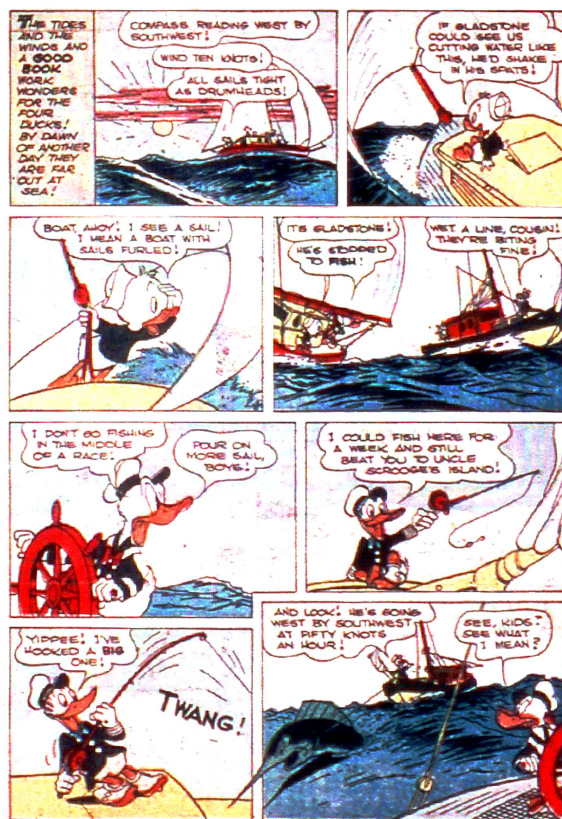
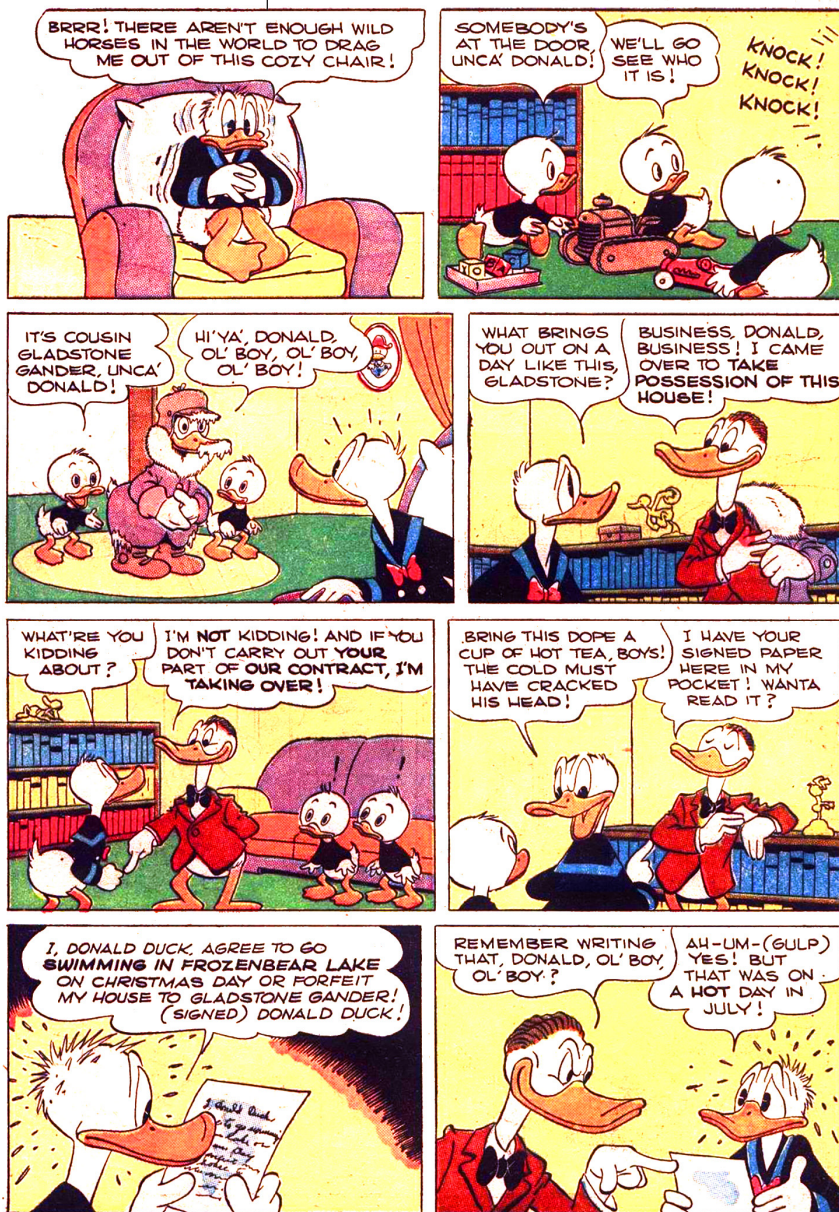
I myself was one unlucky duck, but may my downfall be a stern warning to all!"

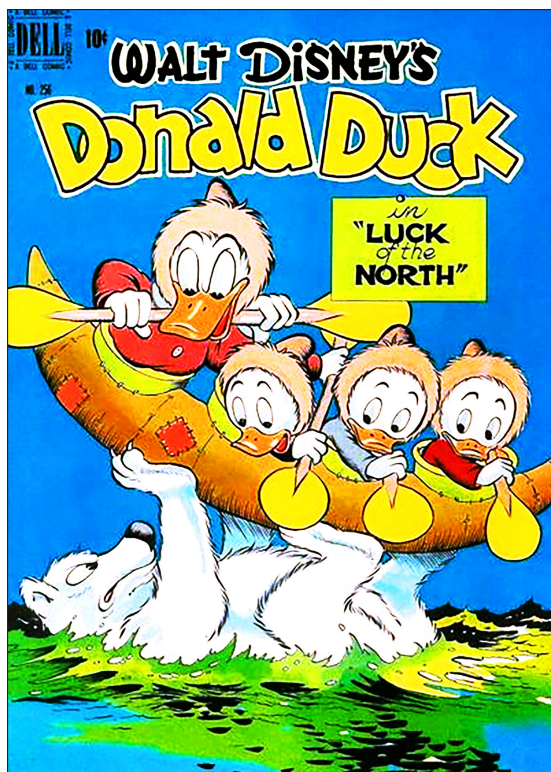
One of the best-known stories highlighting the rivalry of the avian cousins is "Luck of the North." Originally presented in a *Donald Duck* issue of Dell's *Four-Color Comics* (#256, December 1949), this exciting 32-page Carl Barks epic has been reprinted in the US in 1967, 1973, 1986, 1990, and 2010! The story starts off slowly, with Donald randomly bumping into Gladstone. The latter suggests that the two hang out together so that the former can witness his much-vaunted luck in action. He finds wallets, wins raffles, and when a creditor threatens to beat him up if not paid \$5.00 immediately, the wind blows a \$10 bill into his hand, so he not only pays his debt but gets change. Sick and tired of watching it all unfold so effortlessly, Donald fakes



CRAIG YOE

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a map of a uranium mine in the Arctic and makes sure Gladstone finds it! Donald then sits back to enjoy at least a couple of weeks of peace and quiet whilst his cousin is off on a literal wild goose chase, only to be unable to sleep out of guilt for the trick he's played. His brain convinces him that luck can't save anyone from being eaten by a polar bear, so he packs up the kids and off they scramble to rescue Gladstone. From there, we get dog sleds, kayaks, icebergs, a frozen Viking ship, a raft, and, yes, a polar bear. No uranium mine, of course, but a number of historically important gold items and a real ancient map do turn up.

Gladstone is shown to be relatively humble and accepting of his luck, while Donald's jealousy is what sets the adventure off. Eventually, though, it's Donald's good nature that comes through, as he simply can't allow Gladstone to be hurt because of the fake map he had crafted.

Barks historian and Disney writer/editor/translator Geoffrey Blum once wrote, "He is attractive because all magic is fascinating, and because, in his perverse way, Gladstone is sincere, believing wholeheartedly in his own myth. As Barks suggests in one story, Gladstone might easily have stepped from the pages of a fairy tale: 'Once upon a time there was a great king of luck! He was so lucky that nothing bad could ever happen to him!' So his perfect luck propels the story like a familiar legend, a plot to which we already know the ending."

Despite using the character in more than 50 stories over a 17-year period, Carl Barks is said to have found the character very limiting. "I don't think anybody likes a character who gets by with so little effort in the world," he later wrote.

Others seem to have agreed. After Barks (officially) retired in 1966, Gold Key continued to publish Disney titles during the early Bronze Age, but



Gladstone Gander wasn't around all that much anymore. When he was, he might as well have been any old duck.

One example is a story that originally appeared in *Uncle Scrooge* #77 (October 1968) and was reprinted a decade later in *Uncle Scrooge* #158 (November 1978). Written by Vic Lockman and drawn by Phil De Lara, it's a back-up story in which Gladstone gets co-star billing with the eccentric inventor Gyro Gearloose. While there's mention of his magical luck, there's little of it on view and he even exits the storyline before the ending.

Gladstone even turns up in a *Beagle Boys* story (*Beagle Boys* #44, September 1978) printed for the first time in the US but originally done in Italy. In fact, it was the European writers and artists who actually figured out what to do with Gladstone as a character, in time developing him far beyond the limitations Barks saw.

(left) Carl Barks' cover for *Four-Color Comics* #256 featuring "Luck of the North." (right) The Gladstone Sycro-style statue.

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(left) A Don Rosa portrait of Gladstone. (right) Gladstone's luck runs out in *Donald Duck Adventures* #14. Art by Jukka Murtosaari.

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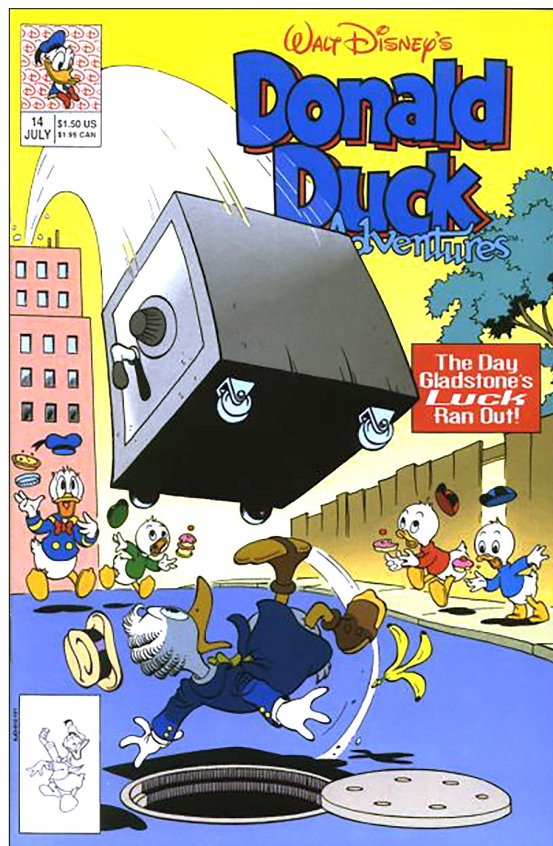
When a writer says there's nothing left to do with a character, even if that writer is the great Barks, sometimes that character just needs another writer. The European duck tales seem to have had little problem in finding new and interesting things for Gladstone to get involved with, such as the "Unlucky Duck" storyline from *Topolino* in which our lucky goose has his luck stolen from him by Scrooge's archenemy, Magica Da Spell. It's unlike any Gladstone story before or since, as he turns to his rival, Donald, to help him get his superpower back!

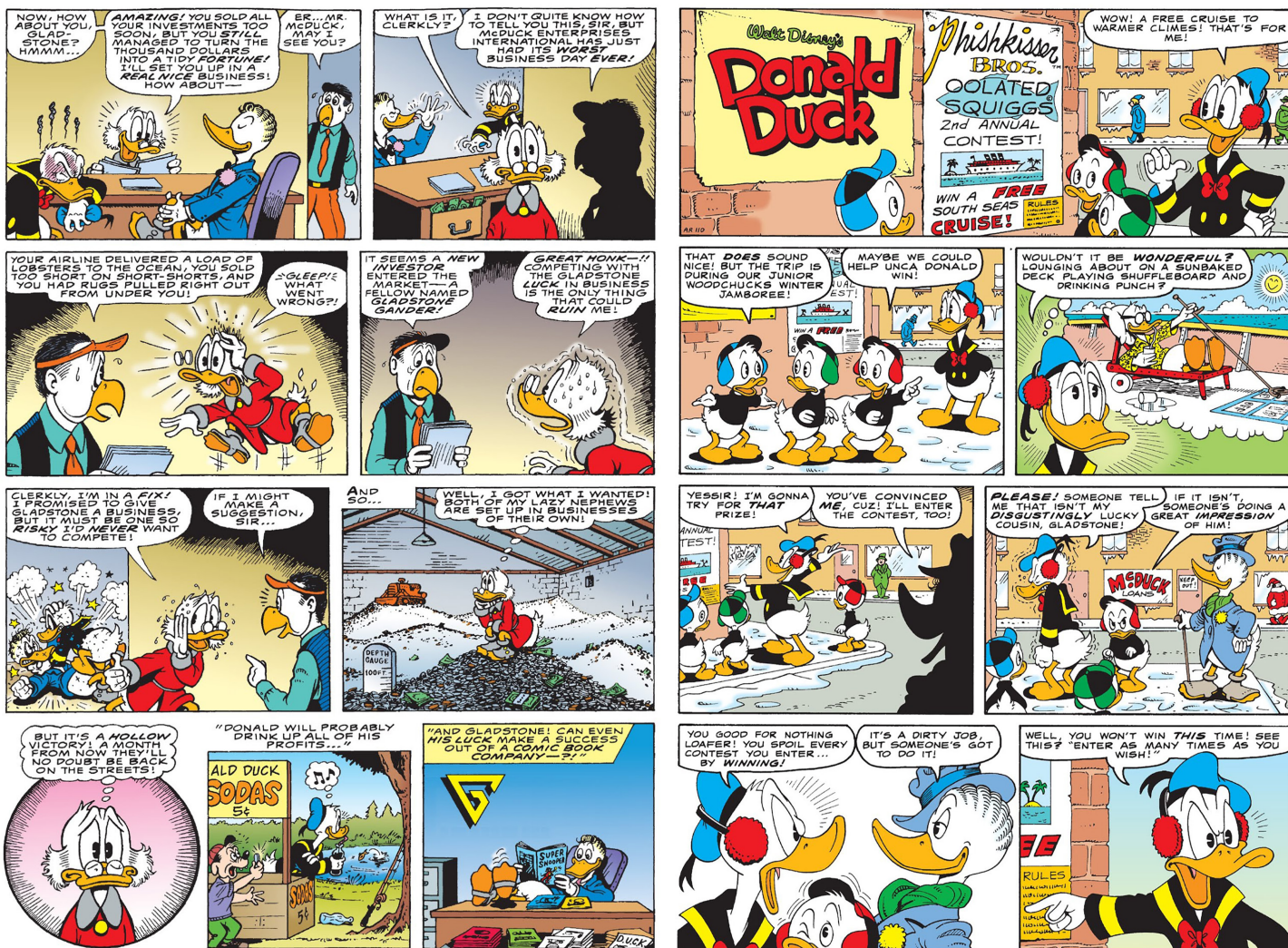
In the US, though, two new creators, William Van Horn and Don Rosa, rose to prominence on Disney duck comics in the 1980s (now published by Gladstone Comics. Hmm...wonder where they got that name?) Both men had been hovering around comics for some time by that point. Van Horn had been doing children's books and animation while Don had become known mainly for his fanzine art, his vast knowledge of comics

and their history, and his regional newspaper strip, *Captain Kentucky*.

Rosa, the international superstar of the new Disney comics, presented "Oolated Luck" in *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #528 (April 1988). Donald wants to win a cruise, but his interest sparks his cousin, Gladstone, to be interested as well. Donald tells his rival that he will buy as many tickets as possible so he's sure to win. Gladstone assures his opponent that only one ticket is needed to win, "because Gladstone Gander always beats the odds!" After some hilarity with Rosa's over-the-top humor, the nephews actually come up with a way to beat Gladstone at his own game, at least this once.

Van Horn featured Gladstone in numerous stories for both the US and European markets. The artist's biggest story of their ongoing competition was "A Double Dose of Triple Trouble," written by John Lustig. Originally done earlier for Egmont, the story made its US debut in Gemstone's *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #690 (March 2008). It opens with Donald and Gladstone feuding over Daisy's attentions...as usual. This time, though, she's ready for them, having entered the boys as a team in the big picnic's three-legged race in an effort to force cooperation between them. It's fun to watch the pair bicker all the time they claim to be trying to be nice to one another. During the race, they encounter a bear, wasps, a wildcat, and quicksand. Gladstone thinks Donald's bad luck has rubbed off on him, but it turns out to be his good luck after all, forcing them to survive dangerous shortcuts to actually win the race. In the end, Daisy attempts to reward their cooperation...only to have them jointly decide to share the picnic with two other ladies who were in the race instead!





Despite his nearly 80 years in American comics, Gladstone Gander has only once been given his own title, shared even then with Donald. Fittingly, *Donald and Gladstone* was published during the Gladstone Comics era, as *Gladstone Comic Album* #15 (1989). This series of thin, oversized trades mimicked the long-popular European comic album format and featured a combination of reprints and new-to-the-US Disney tales. In this particular case, we get four vintage Barks stories of the rivalry between the two cousins and a Swedish story from Egmont, drawn by Argentinean artist Beatriz Bolster.

Barks' "King of Luck" story that Geoffrey Blum referenced above was so well received that it was one of the ones reprinted in this Gladstone album. Originally printed in *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #143 (August 1952), the Old Duck Man himself wrote and drew the near-definitive story of the rivalry of our friends. In it, Donald manages to bamboozle lady luck and briefly come out on top, only to have Gladstone's good fortune return, literally crashing down from the heavens in as dramatic a fashion as one might ever see.



MICHAEL T. GILBERT

After Gladstone, the company, lost the rights to the Disney characters, Disney itself took over for a period through the newly created Disney Comics line. It was during this time that another seminal Gladstone Gander story was printed. It was written by Michael T. Gilbert with art by Pete Alvaredo and Larry Mayer. "The Day Gladstone's Luck Ran Out" was one of two new Donald and Gladstone stories appearing in *Donald Duck Adventures* #14 (July 1991). In it, the two rivals go head-to-head in various contests to win sweet treats like doughnuts and cakes, and Donald seemingly has usurped his cousin's good fortune, until the twist at the end.

"As far as 'The Day Gladstone's Luck Ran Out,'" Michael T. Gilbert writes, "I believe that was my first duck story, written and laid out after my Mickey Mouse stint at Disney Comics. If memory serves, I tried to get Don Rosa to draw it, but he was only doing his own stories. Again, it's been almost 40 years since I wrote it, but I think I did it on spec and sent it to the editor, who bought it." Michael adds, "I like my Gladstone story, but I was a little disappointed by the art. I wish it had been drawn

(left) In Don Rosa's "Nobody's Business" from *Uncle Scrooge* #220, Gladstone buys a comic company. I wonder what he calls it? (right) Donald and Gladstone are at it again in Don Rosa's "Oolated Luck."

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by Rosa or Bill Van Horn, but it still turned out decently. I like Gladstone as an occasional character. His lucky 'shtick' is a bit too limiting, but he's a lot of fun in small doses. It's always a challenge to come up with a new angle for stories with him... as Carl Barks found out!"

Shortly after that, Gilbert—like Rosa and van Horn before him—began doing Donald Duck stories for Egmont in Copenhagen, "for a lot more pay and more respect!"

The foreign markets have long treated Disney comics as more than just for kids and various creators from around the world have found room to make Gladstone Gander a more rounded character.

One such European epic that found a new angle is a 60-page Italian story from 1991 whose title translates as "Ekol's Pendulum," written by Bruno Sarda, with artwork from Franco Valussi as a parody of author Umberto Eco's novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*. As in so many European stories, Gladstone is here teamed with Donald and the ditzzy and inexplicably popular Fethry Duck.

Donald and Fethry, working as reporters for Scrooge's newspaper, recruit Gladstone and his luck to help them find info about a centuries-old secret society of alchemists searching for the legendary philosopher's stone. When they find a long-lost message missing letters, Gladstone fills them in using his imagination, only to have his crazy luck mean he actually chooses the correct letters! After Fethry is kidnapped, our intrepid trio finds themselves in a castle after midnight, confronted by the costumed members of the Blue Alchemists Society, the extra added attraction of the Beagle Boys, and what appears at first to be a genuine ghost! In this story, as in so many of the European Disney duck adventures, there's little trace of the rivalry between Gladstone and Donald.

One short and sweet four-pager from an unknown late issue of the Italian *Topolino* has Donald on the run from creditors when he bumps into Gladstone. Donald begs his cousin to lend him some of his renowned luck so he can get away and Gladstone has to tell him, "It doesn't work like that,



A William Van Horn painting illustrating the Barks story, "Lost Ruby." Intended as a cover, a Barks cover was ultimately used instead. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

(inset) The cover for Topolino #3532 featuring "The Skies of Farmtown." Art by Stefano Zanchi.

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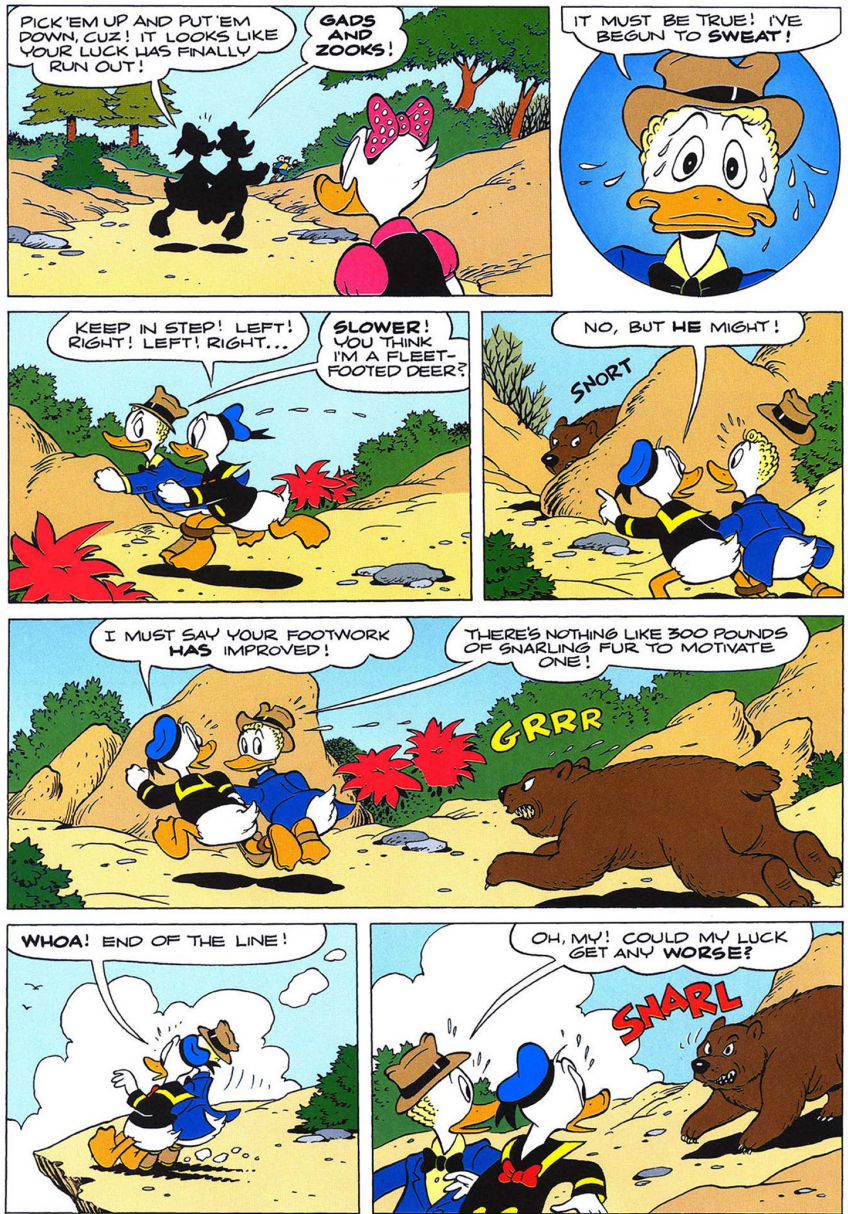


Donald. My good luck is my own. No refunds, exchanges, or transfers."

One of the longest recent Gladstone stories doesn't have much Donald at all. It starts with a 53-page prequel entitled "Gladstone and the Solitude of the Four-Leaf Clover," written for the European market in 2021 by Marco Nucci and drawn by Stefano Zanchi. The story continues in the two-part, 68-page, "The Skies of Farmtown."

Ostracized on his birthday, Gladstone feels that his luck is actually a curse. He decides to leave Duckburg for a little house he once won in Farmtown. Avoiding the locals as much as possible—"No people, no luck" becomes his mantra—when he does meet someone, he tells them his name is... Donald. Although he has the time of his life living an ordinary small-town existence, it turns out that his absence in Duckburg has led to catastrophic disasters there that have everyone fleeing the city for their lives. In order to save Duckburg, he's forced to give up his "secret identity" and restore the balance of power in the big city. This doesn't sit well with a certain young duck lady named Priscilla who had grown sweet on her "Donald."

We learn that Gladstone's "good luck gene" comes from his Aunt Olivia. As a child, she told him, "Trust yourself and trust your luck. It's the only thing that will never lie to you." Later, when Priscilla moves to Duckburg to be near Gladstone as well as to follow her dream of opening a bookstore, Aunt Olivia is brought in to tamper her nephew's luck. Gladstone is afraid that if Priscilla sees what he thinks of as the "real" him—the vain, lazy, contest-winning, recipient of daily free meals—she won't like him. His goal is to make her bookstore fail so she can go back to Farmtown and be her sweet, innocent self.



In the end, though, Gladstone learns his lesson, and he and Priscilla become partners in managing the bookstore (a job!), while still returning to Farmtown to visit friends and relatives...including Aunt Olivia, who moves there after listening to Gladstone proselytize about it for months.

Just as Carl Barks humanized Disney's Donald Duck, Gladstone Gander, too, has belatedly morphed into a well-rounded character. Rivals? Sure. But both of these sterling examples of waterfowl have finally come to realize that there's more to life than rivalry, a lesson we all should learn.

STEVEN THOMPSON has been writing about comics, movies, TV, and radio since 1988. He has worked in various capacities on more than 150 books and magazines to date. He currently writes a regular column in *TwoMorrows' Comic Book Creator* and maintains multiple blogs online.



(left) Fethry, Donald, and Gladstone join forces in "Ekol's Pendulum." Art by Franco Valussi. (right) Donald and Gladstone encounter some unexpected trouble in "A Double Dose of Triple Trouble." Art by William Van Horn.

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TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

SILVER AGE FIGHT THE THING VERSUS THE HULK



by **James Heath Lantz**

One of the greatest rivalries in the Marvel Universe is that of the Ever-Lovin' Blue-Eyed Thing and Incredible Hulk. Since their first encounter way back in the March 1963, these two gargantuan powerhouses have been duking it out for more than half a century in various Marvel periodicals. It's clobbering and smashing time as we take look at the *BACK ISSUE* era Hulk and Thing bouts. Just watch out for any debris while reading on, True Believers.

SMASHING HISTORY

Sharing a universe isn't new in comic books. The various members of the Justice Society of America met regularly for adventures while also having solo outings in numerous comic books, and the Sub-Mariner battled the Human Torch in what is considered the first major crossover of the medium. These events occurred in the Golden Age. However, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby made the concept more prominent roughly two decades later when the Fantastic Four took on the Incredible Hulk in *Fantastic Four* #12. That issue started the rivalry between the Green Goliath and Benjamin J. Grimm, better known as the Fantastic Four's Thing. Their actual first battle lasted only a few panels. Yet, fans wanted more. They got their wish in *Fantastic Four* #25-26, (Apr.-May 1964) a story that was too big for a single issue. While the Thing and the rest of the Fantastic Four fought hard, they also needed help from the Avengers to battle the Hulk. The Thing would take on the Hulk again in *The Incredible Hulk* #122 (Dec. 1969) when Bruce Banner sought Reed Richards' assistance in one of his many attempts to cure himself of his green alter ego.

Starting out, the Thing and the Hulk's fights could be seen as the Marvel equivalent of *Godzilla* or *Gamera* films in which the title creatures must combat another gigantic monster. Yet there was, and still is, something more to their clashes than that. Both the Thing and the Hulk were just starting out in their respective adventures in the Silver Age, and they were perceived as monsters upon people seeing them for the first time. Yet, Ben Grimm is eventually accepted by mankind because of his willingness to be part of the Fantastic Four. However, the Hulk, while also seeking acceptance, tended to lock horns with other founding members of the Avengers and the rest of the Marvel Universe. The Thing often disagreed with the other members of the Fantastic Four, particularly the Human Torch, who teased poor Ben Grimm. Yet, his sparring with Marvel's First Family is generally more good-natured. The Hulk tends to be more unpredictable when interacting with others. This is perhaps due to Bruce Banner's Dissociative Identity Disorder caused by his father's abuse. Now, Ben Grimm's

A classic Thing vs. Hulk image from the cover of *Fantastic Four* #112 by John Buscema and Frank Giacoia.

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(left) The first round in the battle was fought in *Fantastic Four* #12. Cover by Jack Kirby and Dick Ayers. (middle) The Thing and the Hulk are back at it again in *Fantastic Four* #25. Cover by Jack Kirby and George Roussos. (right) This time, the Thing comes to the Hulk's comic. Cover by Herb Trimpe.

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childhood was not a bed of roses. His family lived in poverty, and his parents and brother died. Yet, the love and nurturing from his Uncle Jake and Aunt Petunia helped prevent Ben from being as, for lack of a better term, mentally fractured as Bruce.

BRONZE AGE BOUTS

If you thought the Hulk and the Thing's rivalry mellowed in the *BACK ISSUE* era of comic books, you'd be quite mistaken, dear reader. Case in point, *Fantastic Four* #111-112. (June-July 1971) In most cases of their fights, the Thing must stop the Hulk's rampages. However, the Thing is the one running amok in these issues. The last page of #111 and the entirety of #112 consist of "The Battle Of The Behemoths". Reed Richards' experiment to help Ben Grimm transform from the Thing to a human and back again has failed, causing Ben to rage through the streets of New York. Reed needs Bruce Banner's help to see where he went wrong, but a cab ride to Baxter Building is cut short when Banner sees the Thing and becomes the Hulk. Both gargantuan heroes get their punches in, but the advantage is the Hulk's when the Thing notices that debris from their tussle is about to hit his girlfriend, Alicia Masters. The Hulk knocks out the Thing with the final panel leading into the next issue.

In the Silver and early Bronze Ages and beyond, much of the Hulk and the Thing's conflict with one another looks like a contest of which character is stronger. Sure, the Thing often tries to prove he can beat the Hulk, and he has, from time to time, come out on top. Yet, the matches and re-matches are close ones. The Thing, normally, is determined to stop the Hulk's rampages. Yet, one thing sometimes kept the Thing from winning. The Hulk is more of a force of nature, a being full of rage. Basically, this makes the Jade Giant the victorious one because the angrier the Hulk gets, the stronger he becomes.

The next match on our bout sheet took place in *The Incredible Hulk* #153 (July 1972). Gary

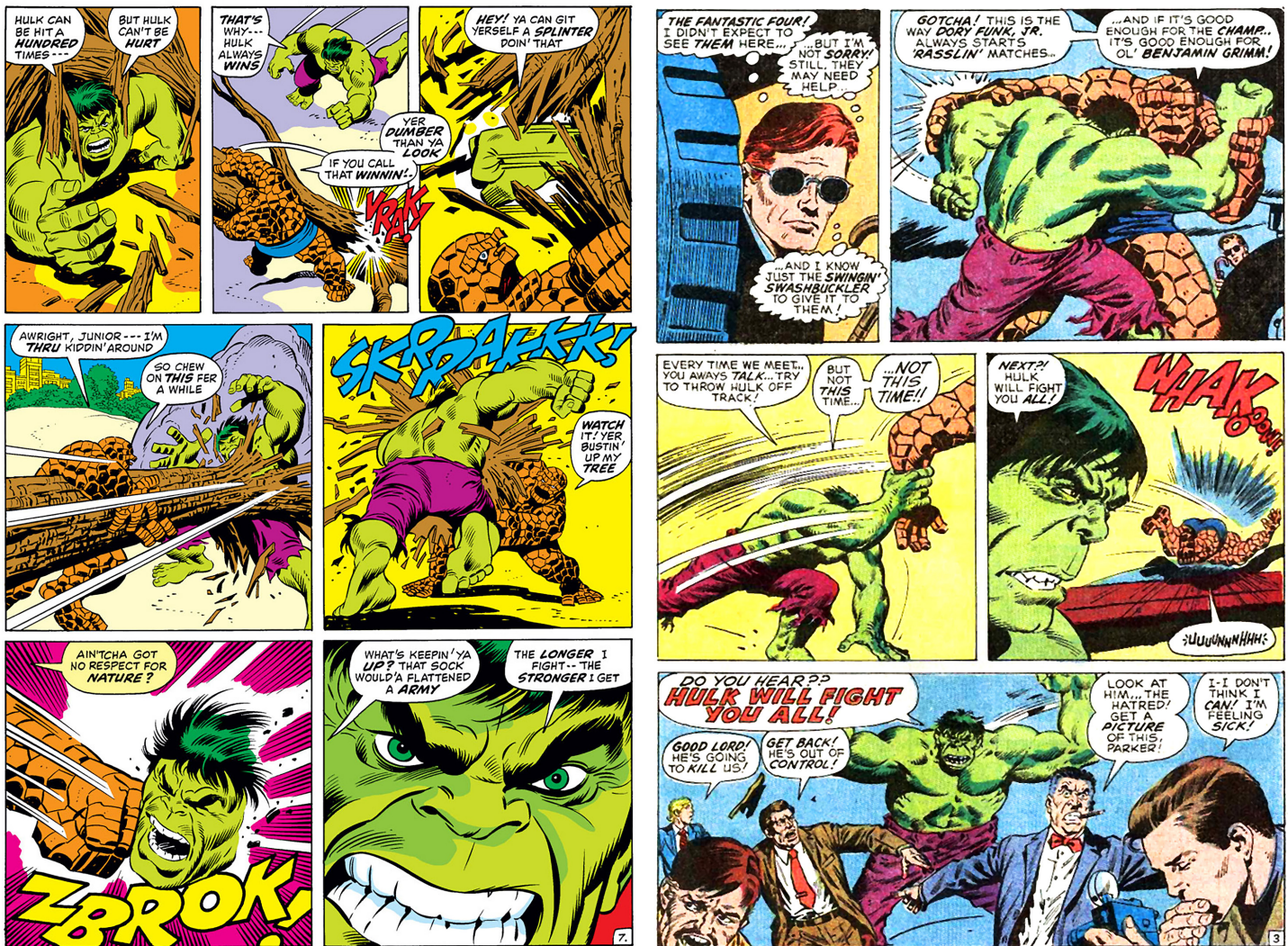
Friedrich, Roy Thomas, Dick Ayers, Herb Trimpe, and John Severin tell a tale of the Hulk on trial. The Fantastic Four, Daredevil, and Spider-Man must all take on the green skinned powerhouse. Yet, as Ben Grimm points out, even the Thing's strongest punch doesn't seem to faze the Hulk.

The Incredible Hulk #153 displays something that is common throughout the early Bronze Age issues in the series—the Hulk's feelings of being betrayed by friends. That's not to say the Thing has not had such things happen to him. He has. The Hulk, particularly the savage green persona, represents Bruce Banner's childhood need to be accepted and liked in spite of the Hulk at times saying that he wants to be left alone.

Jim Starlin, perhaps best known for the creation of Marvel's Thanos, refereed the Hulk and the Thing's fights on three different occasions. In *Marvel Feature* #11 (Sept. 1973), a precursor to the *Marvel Two-In-One* title by Starlin and Len Wein, Kuurgo, last seen in *Fantastic Four* #7, and the Hulk's old foe the Leader have staged a contest between Ol' Greenskin and the Thing. As with many villains' plans, it backfires, and the Hulk and the Thing put aside their differences to return home from the planet New Xanth.

Starlin's second ringside seat went beyond the standard monthly format *Fantastic Four*, *Marvel Two-In-One*, and *The Incredible Hulk* with *Marvel Fanfare* #20 and 21's "Clash." (May-July 1985) Doctor Strange needs the Thing's help fighting creatures under the command of Strange's old foe Xandu. By the first chapter's conclusion, Ben and Doctor Strange discover Xandu has taken the mindless Hulk from the Crossroads dimension where Strange had banished him in *The Incredible Hulk* #300, using the Green Goliath as a pawn in his battle against the Master of the Mystic Arts.

Instead of having the two powerhouses fight each other in Starlin's third outing, he and Bernie Wrightson would have them in a somewhat



uneasy alliance in the graphic novel *The Incredible Hulk and The Thing: The Big Change* (1987). Regular *BACK ISSUE* readers will recall that *The Big Change* and other Marvel Universe graphic novels were discussed in *BI* #156. Starlin, according to his interview with Comic Book Historians.com, had a lot of fun working on that with Bernie Wrightson, who preferred working in the DC Comics style of full script rather than the Marvel one of the plot. Wrightson also contributed to the story with his ideas and visuals. One example of this occurs when the Thing and the Hulk must be in disguise, and the Hulk merely puts an octopus-like creature on top of his head. That bit of comedic action feels like something out of a Peter Sellers movie. Yet, Starlin and Wrightson make it work perfectly with the graphic novel's overall tone. That's not to say that Ben and Hulk don't hold a grudge against one another. They do. This is particularly shown in the scenes on Earth that bookend *The Big Change*.

Like Starlin and Wrightson in *The Big Change*, writer/artist Alan Kupperberg put a lighthearted spin on the Thing and Hulk's rivalry. Kupperberg did so in *Marvel Two-In-One* at a time when both characters could be seen on television. NBC had broadcast the 1978 *The New Fantastic Four* animated series starring Ted "Lurch" Cassidy as the Thing. Cassidy also would provide the famous opening credits' narration and the snarls and

growls of the Hulk in the live action series *The Incredible Hulk* starring Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno that aired on CBS in the same period.

Marvel Two-In-One #46 (Dec. 1978) and *Annual* #5 (Sep. 1980) were Kupperberg's take on the Thing and the Hulk's clashes. *Annual* #5 has the Hulk and Thing help the Stranger fight Pluto in order to save their catatonic loved ones in a tale that is similar to *Marvel Feature* #11. It has its share of laughs here and there. Yet, it's "Battle in Burbank" from *Marvel Two-In-One* #46 that puts a truly humorous spin on Ben Grimm's fights with the Green Goliath.

The Hulk and the Thing are both angry about *The Incredible Hulk* TV series, albeit for different reasons. Ben is wondering why the Hulk got a show instead of him, and the Hulk doesn't like having a series about his life: This leads the two main characters to once again punch each other a bunch while increasing Hollywood studios' insurance rates. Many of the jokes function perfectly while being products of their time. For example, Ben stars in *A Thing In The Family* in the comic book's conclusion. This spoofs Norman Lear's *All In The Family* with the Thing playing a parody of Rob Reiner's Michael "Meathead" Stivic character. *All In The Family*, an American version of Britain's *Till Death Us Do Part*, ran on CBS from 1971 until 1979 and was popular when *Marvel Two-In-One* #46 was produced and published.

(left) The Thing and Hulk go at it in *Fantastic Four* #112. Art by John Buscema and Joe Sinnott. (right) The Hulk and the Thing trade blows in *Incredible Hulk* #153. Art by Dick Ayers and John Severin.

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One thing the Thing and the Hulk have in common in their Silver and Bronze Age comics' adventures is that both Ben Grimm and Bruce Banner want to rid themselves of their monstrous alter egos. Their attempts to do so, however, tend to fail and/or go awry. *Giant-Size Super-Stars* #1 (May 1974) shows such an attempt with an interesting twist. Gerry Conway and Rich Buckler have Bruce Banner use Reed Richards' psionic amplifier to cure himself and Ben, only to have succeeded in switching their minds. The Thing finds himself in the Hulk's body, and the Thing is being controlled by a confused Hulk. This shows more evidence of Banner's Dissociative Identity Disorder with the savage Hulk being the dominant persona. The pair exchange punches until Reed Richards injects a tranquilizer into the Hulk's body, forcing the brains of each combatant to return to their rightful heads.

Now, one look on the surface of *Fantastic Four* #166 (Jan. 1976) would give readers the typical Hulk Versus Thing tropes. The military needs the Fantastic Four to fight the Hulk in the guise of wanting to cure Bruce Banner. Reed Richards has since perfected the psionic amplifier for this. The Thing, perhaps seeing a bit of himself in the Hulk, questions why they should battle the Green Goliath. Roy Thomas and George Perez put an interesting twist to the end of that issue. The Thing sees that Bruce Banner desperately needs help, frees him, and releases gamma radiation that allows him to become the Hulk again. By *FF* #167 (Feb. 1976), the Thing and the Hulk work together against the army and Ben's teammates. Dizzy spells caused by the Thing's prolonged exposure to the same gamma radiation within the Hulk made him revert back to Ben Grimm's human form. Thus, the Hulk believed his friend the Thing had left him like all of his friends do.

Now, readers probably ask why the Thing would help the Hulk after all the times they've pummeled each other senseless. The simplest answer is because, like those oatmeal commercials said years ago, it's the right thing to do. Yet, there is something more to Ben's reasons for aiding Bruce. As stated before, the Thing sees a bit of himself in the Hulk. The Hulk could be what the Thing could become if his power goes unchecked. Ben did get a bit of a taste of that back in *Fantastic Four* #112. Like Bruce Banner with the Hulk, Ben Grimm is scared of losing control of his rocky alter ego. Ben also holds on to the hope that if Bruce Banner can be completely free of his monstrous self, there is a chance that the same thing can happen to him, and both Ben and Bruce

have been completely human, albeit temporarily, throughout their adventures in the Marvel Universe.

A couple of Thing and Hulk bouts are sort of lost in the waves of time, the post-BI era *Fantastic Four: The World's Greatest Comics Magazine* #5 (June 2001) and 1998's *The Rampaging Hulk* #5 (Dec. 1998). *The World's Greatest Comics Magazine* series takes place after Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *Fantastic Four* #100, and *The Rampaging Hulk* occurs between pages four and five of *The Incredible Hulk* #209.

Technically, Bruce Banner's angrier half is not battling Ben in *The World's Greatest Comics Magazine* #5, at least in the beginning of the book. Doctor Doom has imbued a Hulk robot with power from the Cosmic Cube which eventually tricks the Thing into battling the real Hulk. Doom's scheme was intended to get information from Bruce Banner's mind.

Glenn Greenberg and Rick Leonardi's *The Rampaging Hulk* #5 has General Ross once again seeking the Fantastic Four's aid to bring in the Hulk. Reed Richards still hopes to cure Bruce Banner. Meanwhile Ben Grimm, seeing how people look at him, sympathizes with the Hulk. He tries to reason with the Not-So-Jolly Green Giant, but the Hulk will not listen. Yet, the Thing lets him get away because of his similarity to the Hulk.

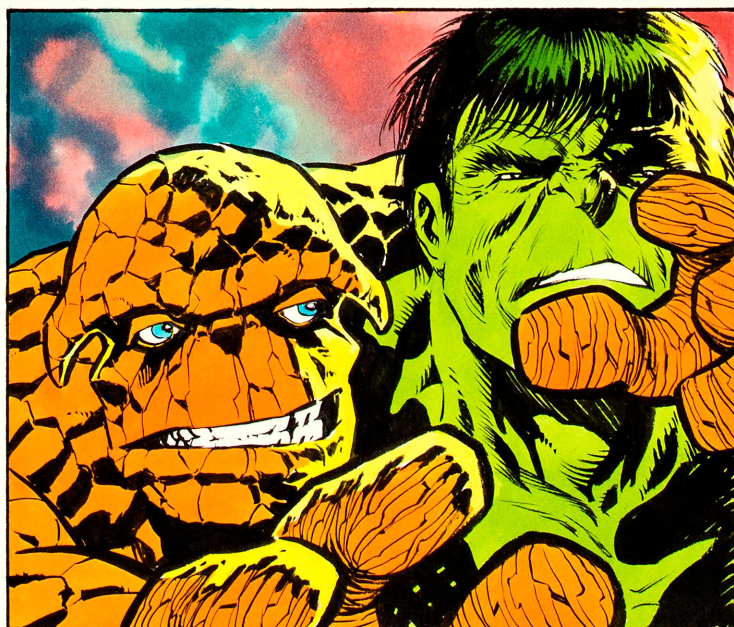
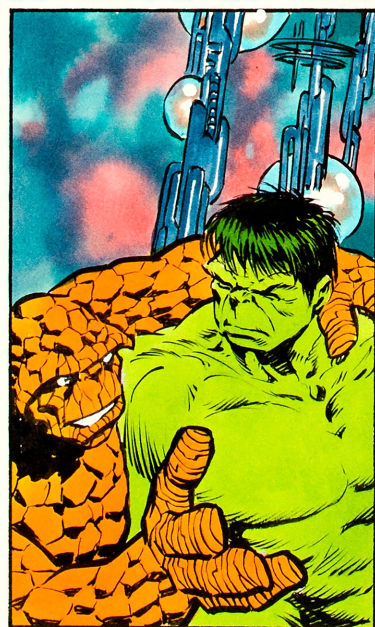
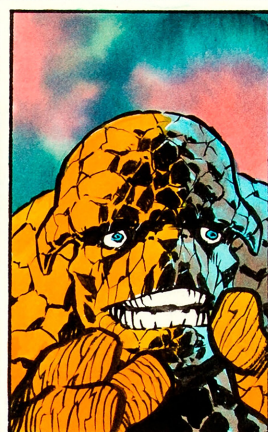
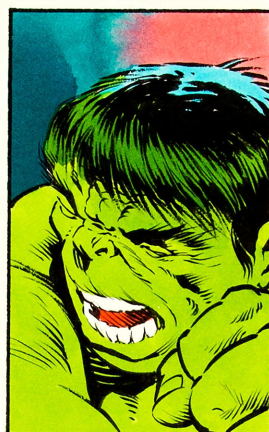
Glenn Greenberg gave *BACK ISSUE* his perceptions of the Thing and the Hulk's rivalry while discussing *The Rampaging Hulk* #5. "I think the rivalry between the Thing and the Hulk is like any rivalry between two individuals with key similarities and healthy egos who think they're top dog and want to be seen as such," Greenberg stated. "But for much of the Hulk's existence, he's been stronger than the Thing, especially when

(left) Doctor Strange gets in the middle of a battle between the Thing and the Hulk. That's not a very safe place to be. Art by Jim Starlin and Al Milgrom. (right) Is it clobberin' time?

The Hulk doesn't think so in *Marvel Feature* #11. Art by Jim Starlin and Joe Sinnott.

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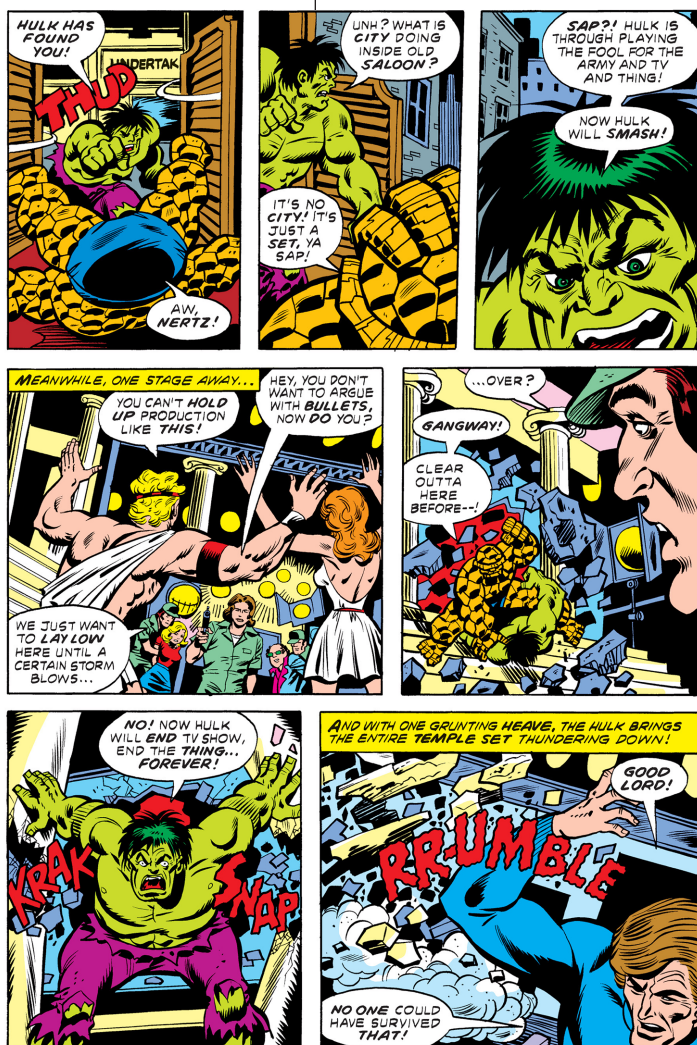


The Thing tries to reason with the Hulk in *Marvel Graphic Novel: The Big Change*. Art by Bernie Wrightson. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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(top) Things get Stranger for the Thing and the Hulk. Art by Alan Kupperberg and Joe Sinnott. (bottom left) The Hulk and the Thing rampage through the old west and ancient Rome, sort of, in *Marvel Two-In-One* #46. Art by Alan Kupperberg and Chic Stone. (bottom right) This page from *Giant-Size Super-Stars* #1 really packs a wallop. Art by Rich Buckler and Joe Sinnott. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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this on several occasions when he talks about things like giving Alicia Masters a hug.

Bruce Banner, on the other side of the coin, knows the damage of which the Hulk is capable. He is Banner's repressed anger personified, and when that proverbial genie is let out of his bottle, there's no telling what the Hulk will smash with his gigantic green or gray hands. Doctor Strange's old foe Nightmare uses Banner's apprehension to plant his seeds of revenge on the Master of the Mystic Arts in *The Incredible Hulk* #293 (Mar. 1984) by Bill Mantlo and Sal Buscema. The Thing is on the receiving ends of the Hulk's savagery in Banner's bad dream in that issue.

Sometimes, the Thing and Hulk run amok due to other forces controlling, convincing, or brainwashing them. The Mad Thinker, The Wizard, Doctor Doom, and the Leader are among those who have used both the Hulk and the Thing for their own ends. One of the Hulk's early sparring partners, Tyrannus, took control of him in the 1999 *Hulk* series, and Ben Grimm's father-in-law, the Puppet Master, used his puppet making ability on Ol' Greenskin to ruin the Thing and Alicia Masters' honeymoon in Dan Slott's more recent *Fantastic Four* #12-13 (Sept.-Oct. 2019). While Ben tends to be less susceptible to suggestion than the Hulk, Karisma, a villain who debuted in John Byrne's celebrated *Fantastic Four* run with #266, proves the Thing can be manipulated. The Hulk, especially the childlike green one, falls prey to such things more often due to his desire to be accepted and to have friends.

By the early 1980s, the Thing was busy with the *Fantastic Four* in the aforementioned John Byrne run of their comic. Meanwhile, Bill Mantlo and Sal Buscema were going in a different



direction with the Hulk. Mantlo had given the Hulk Bruce Banner's mind because he had grown tired of writing, "Hulk Smash!" Both series' man-monsters are too busy in their own stories to fight each other beyond the nightmare sequence in *The Incredible Hulk* #293. They would work together in the first *Secret Wars* miniseries, thereby temporarily putting aside their differences. Yet, the Thing and the Hulk would clash again as their character arcs progressed throughout the Marvel Universe.

GRAY AREA

By 1988, a mutated Ben Grimm had become the leader of the *Fantastic Four* which consisted of himself, Crystal, the Human Torch, and the She-Thing. The dominant Hulk persona was the gray-skinned one who first appeared in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *The Incredible Hulk* #1 and resurfaced in #324. The Thing would meet the gray Hulk, who was living in Las Vegas as Joe Fixit, in a two-part crossover of *Fantastic Four*

(left) *Fantastic Four* #167 presents an interesting twist in the Thing/Hulk rivalry. Cover by Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott. (right) Hulk vs. Ben Grimm? That can't be good. Art from *Fantastic Four* #167 by George Perez and Joe Sinnott. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

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(top) Joe Bennett and Al Milgrom team up for a dramatic page in *Fantastic Four: World's Greatest Comic Magazine* #5. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com). (bottom left) The pair are still up for a tussle in the 1990s. Cover by Rick Leonardi and Dan Green. (bottom right) This battle's a real nightmare. Cover by Bret Blevins.

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#320 (Nov. 1988) and *The Incredible Hulk* #350 (Dec. 1988), with She-Thing taking on the She-Hulk in FF #321's (Dec. 1988) epilogue to the story. Steve Englehart, Keith Pollard, Peter David, and Jeff Purves got together to bring a Thing that, according to fans, looked like a giant pineapple and the dapperly dressed, more verbal Joe Fixit Hulk to the streets of Las Vegas thanks to the plotting of Doctor Doom. Gray Hulk is promised a seat in Latveria's government if he helps Doom in his plans to reclaim Latveria. He uses the Hulk's rivalry with the Thing and the Gray Goliath's ego to make him fight a stronger Thing. The Thing is about to win when a Green Hulk robot intervenes. Joe Fixit collects his wits and, thanks to Doom's further jeering him, gains the upper hand.

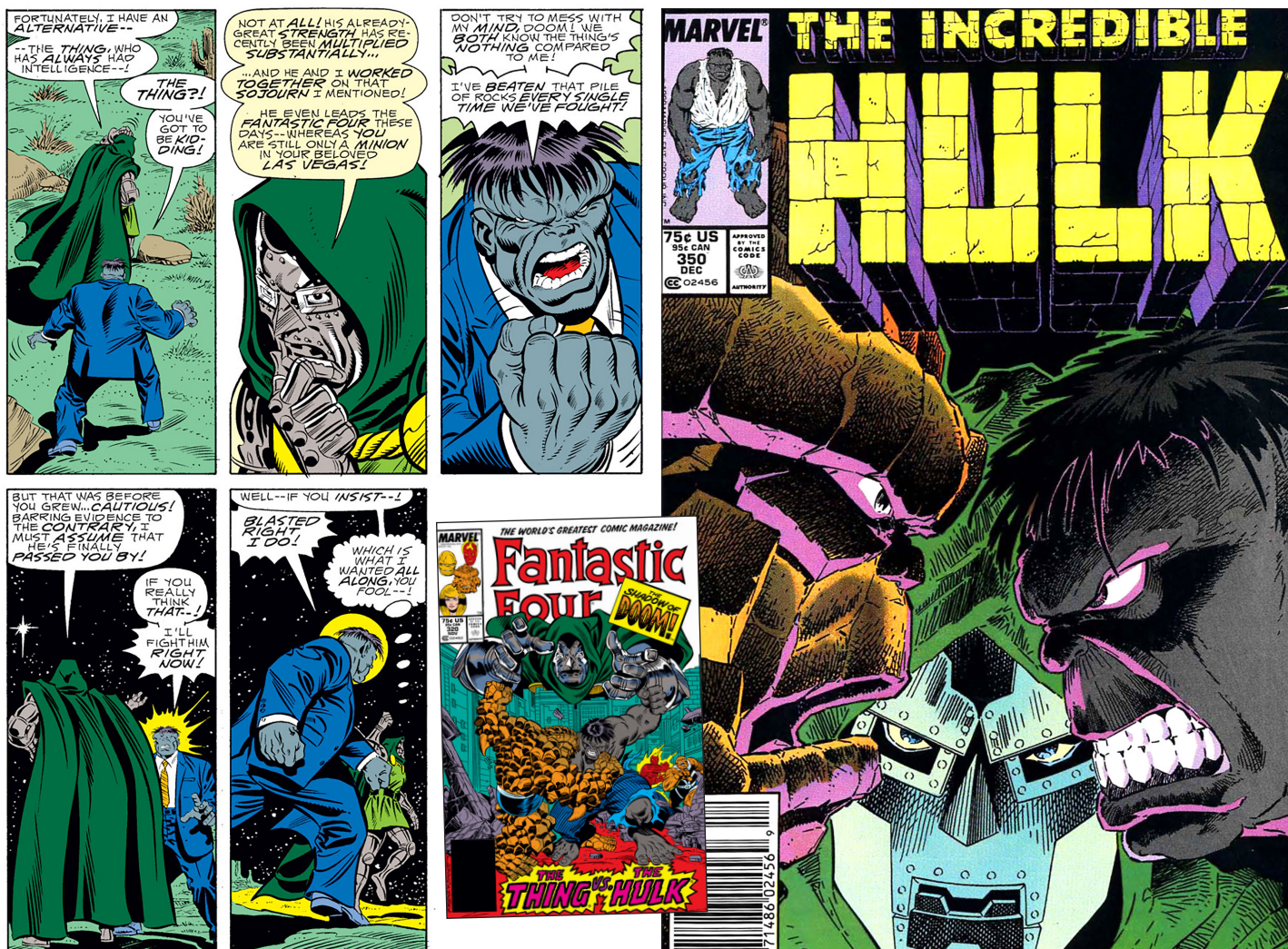
Steve Englehart discussed *Fantastic Four* #320 and *The Incredible Hulk* #350's crossover and the Hulk and the Thing's rivalry with *BACK ISSUE*. "There had been several such battles before us," He began. "Once we decided how the fight would turn out, it was simple. I'm sure Peter and I talked about it. That was the way Marvel writers settled things among ourselves. I think it was my idea. In any event, once he and I decided we wanted to do it, that was it. We didn't have to pitch it."

"Ben Grimm, at least in my time on the books, hated being the Thing," Englehart continued, "But he wasn't about to lose to a green or gray monster, so he always fought his heart out. The Hulk would fight anybody and usually won, so the orange monster was just something in his path to roll over. The fact that neither one won all the battles left them both ready to rumble at any time."

Now, despite being an Avenger and a Defender, unlike the Thing, the Hulk isn't much of a team player. Ben works well with the Fantastic Four and the Avengers. The Hulk, on the other hand, is more unpredictable. One moment he could be friends with a group, and he can want to knock them into the Empire State Building the next. This did not stop Joe Fixit, who tended to be more reasonable than his emerald self, from becoming a member of the Fantastic Four. Now, if you are wondering how one of the most beloved FF members' toughest opponents could become part of Marvel's First Family, you needn't look further than Walter Simonson and Arthur Adams' *Fantastic Four* #347-349 (Dec. 1990-Feb. 1991).

The three-part saga was released around the same time as Peter David and Dale Keown's run on *The Incredible Hulk* in which the Hulk's dominant personalities—Bruce Banner, Gray





Hulk, and Green Hulk—were being merged after psychic battle for control was taking its toll on Banner's physical self. The latter named Professor Hulk has aspects of all three personae, but his skin was green. *Fantastic Four* #347-349 showed the Gray Hulk dressed as Joe Fixit. Therefore, the serial took place *before* the Hulk trio got together as the Professor.

The Hulk, along with Spider-Man, Wolverine, and Ghost Rider were called by a renegade Skrull impersonating Susan Richards to be a new *Fantastic Four* intended to avenge the supposed death of the original group. The Skrull actually wants the neo FF to find a Skrull ship that crashed. Old and new squads must eventually work together to stop Sue's doppelganger. The new *Fantastic Four* later return in FF #374-375, *Wolverine* #148, the more recent *New Fantastic Four* miniseries by Peter David and Alan Robinson, and Dan Slott's *Fantastic Four* comics that tied in with 2020's *Empyre* crossover. These are among the comics that show that both the Hulk and the Thing's cooperation with the discussed groups gives them more common ground beyond their superhuman strength.

Peter David's much applauded run on *The Incredible Hulk* expanded on what previous comics established while adding its own elements to Bruce Banner and his green and gray skinned

alter egos. There is a blend of humor and psychology that works perfectly with the superhero battles in every issue. "Countdown" from *The Incredible Hulk* #364-367 (Dec. 1989-Mar. 1990) is among these gems. It discusses something that the Hulk rarely admits openly—his need for help. A poison using the Hulk's healing abilities against him is consuming his body. If he becomes Bruce Banner at sunrise he will die. Issue #365 has Ol' Grayskin seeking aid from Reed Richards. This leads to a misunderstanding, which in turn leads to battle with the She-Thing. Ben Grimm has reverted to human form and cannot become the Thing during this time period's *Fantastic Four* comic books.

One classic element Peter David expanded upon in *The Incredible Hulk* #365 was the Hulk's rivalry with the Thing, and he did this without Ben and Hulk throwing a single punch at one another. Ben is angry that Reed is helping the Hulk after all the times he and the Thing have locked horns. While waiting for some test results, the Hulk walks into a bar where Ben is drinking. Their discussion not only delves into their past and their feud, but it also gives both characters' points of view. Plus, David and Purves point out some of the aspects previously mentioned in these pages on the Thing and Hulk's antagonism for one another.

(left) Doctor Doom manipulates the Hulk into battling the Thing. Art by Keith Pollard and Joe Sinnott. (inset) Doctor Doom's involved with this fight? That can't be good. Cover by Ron Frenz and Joe Sinnott. (right) This is going to be an intense battle.

Cover by Jeff Purves and Terry Austin.

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LATER CLOBBERIN' TIMES

As the Hulk was becoming a more integrated version of himself in his own series, Ben Grimm had returned to being the Thing in *Fantastic Four* #350. This meant the powers that be at Marvel had to get creative with the Hulk and the Thing's titanic clashes. *The Incredible Hulk Annual* #18 (1992) began with a short story that did exactly that. "Mano A Mano" by Peter David, Travis Charest, and Dan Green had the Hulk and the Thing arm wrestling and ignoring their respective foes' attacks on them. The conclusion of this comedic take on Ben and the Hulk's competition literally has a bomb drop on them before they promise to meet again the following week.

The *Infinity War* sequel to the *Infinity Gauntlet* crossover event came out roughly a year after The Hulk and the Thing arm wrestled. The Hulk and the Thing were forced to work together to stop a common foe in that series within a series. However, they almost fought each other over some snarky comment the Hulk made in *Fantastic Four* #368 (Sept. 1992). The timely, and some would say insane, intervention of Speedball makes them realize they must cooperate if the villainous Magus is to be defeated.

Tom DeFalco, in addition to his duties as Marvel editor-in-chief, worked on numerous Marvel titles in 1980s and 1990s. This includes an extensive run on *Fantastic Four* with Paul Ryan, with #368 among those comics. DeFalco shared his thoughts on the Thing and the Hulk with *BACK ISSUE*. "Ben is a former athlete and believes in competition," DeFalco observed. "He knows that the Hulk is stronger, but he still believes he can find a way to beat him—especially since Ben never gives up. As for the Hulk, I doubt he ever thinks of the Thing. The Hulk knows that he's the strongest one of all and isn't in a rivalry with anyone."

Speaking of former Marvel editors-in-chief, Roy Thomas covered the next Thing versus Hulk match along with Herb

Trimpe in "The Main Event" from *Fantastic Four Unlimited* #4 (Dec. 1993). A lot has happened to Ben Grimm and Bruce Banner in the time of this comic. Ben's rocky face was scarred by Wolverine, and he wore a helmet to hide his features. Reed Richards is believed to be dead. Susan Richards now leads the Fantastic Four. The recently merged Hulk now commands a group of renegade heroes called the Pantheon. The Hulk and the Thing are duking it out in *FFU* #4 to benefit AIDS research in Joe Fixit's old stomping grounds in Las Vegas. Delphi, the Pantheon's clairvoyant, has a vision of the Thing killing Atalanta. The Hulk must be the voice of reason when the childlike Ajax begins pounding on the Thing. The Fantastic Four, the Pantheon, and the Hulk encounter the Mole Man during their search for Atalanta. He is attempting to save his love Kala with energy from the Thing and the Hulk.

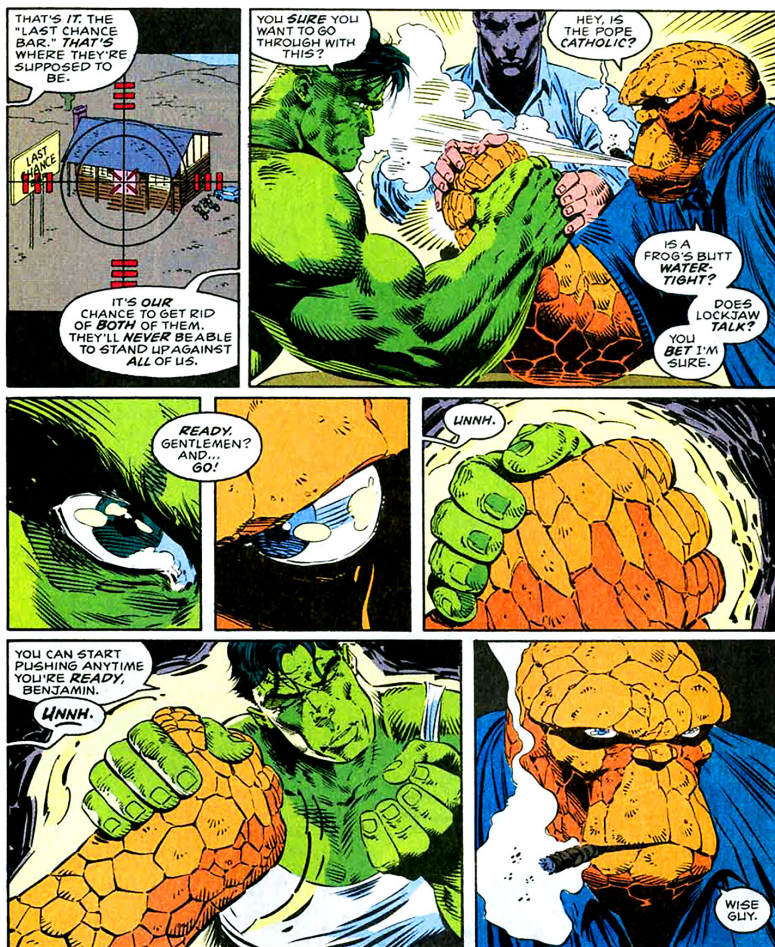
Roy Thomas has handled both the Thing and the Hulk in various Marvel titles throughout the Bronze Age. He told *BACK ISSUE* what he thought of the Hulk and the Thing's rivalry, "All I can say, really, is that I always considered the Thing the original, authentic character, and the Hulk was merely a copy of him that, by dint of circumstances, became better-known over time. The battles between the Thing and the Hulk were the earliest Marvel epics, because they were all but unprecedented in comics. The Human Torch/Sub-Mariner fights were the closest things to them, but those weren't a battle of brute force versus brute force. I appreciated the fact that the Hulk was deemed the stronger for no other reason, really, than that he was larger. The old saw of a good big guy can always beat a good little guy is not always true, but it enabled the Thing to 'lose' the fights and not suffer any real indignity."

The mid-to-late 1990s saw *Fantastic Four* and *The Incredible Hulk* restart with issue #1. The FF got two new series due to the *Onslaught* and *Heroes Reborn* events that divided Marvel fans, and John Byrne and Ron Frenz began *Hulk* in 1999.

(top left) The Hulk becomes the power in the new *Fantastic Four*. Cover by Arthur Adams and Art Thibert. (bottom left) The Hulk attacks Ms. Marvel, thinking she's the Thing. Cover by Walter Simonson. (right) The Hulk and Ben Grimm have a battle of words in *Incredible Hulk* #365. Art by Jeff Purves and Marie Severin.

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Byrne talked about the Thing and the Hulk's battles in his Byrne Robotics forum. He stated that the Hulk has only his enormous strength as an advantage when the character is written properly, while the Thing has intelligence and some degree of agility going for him.

Byrne left *Hulk* after only seven issues, but Ron Garney stayed on the book until *The Incredible Hulk* #20. Garney and Jerry Ordway brought the last Hulk and Thing battle of the 1990s to *Hulk* #9's "Chip On My Shoulder" (Dec. 1999). The Hulk has returned to his savage green persona and made friends with prospector and moonshiner Arch Leopold. The Thing is searching for the Hulk after his recent destruction of a small town while under the control of Tyrannus. The Hulk thinks the Thing is going to hurt Arch, which leads to another slugfest.

From an evolutionary storytelling standpoint, The Hulk had taken some steps backward in *Hulk* #9. Future issues do explain this. Yet, the comic did feel more like something from the early years of the Thing and the Hulk's clashes.

Post-BACK ISSUE era battles between the Hulk and the Thing consisted of a mostly verbal debate about the events of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *Fantastic Four* #12 in Bruce Jones and Jae Lee's *Hulk/Thing: Hard Knocks*. *Babylon 5* creator J. Michael Straczynski and Mike McKone had the Thing give Reed Richards the idea of blasting the Hulk off into space in *Fantastic Four* #533-535's prelude to *Planet Hulk* and *World War Hulk*. Ben Grimm and the Hulk would continue their rivalry

even beyond the early 2000s. It would eventually evolve into a friendship in 2023's *Clobberin' Time* #1 by Steve Skroce. Yet, nobody knows what the future holds for battles between the Hulk and the Thing. In the meantime, the past clashes of these titans still entertain fans to this very day. You can check them out digitally, at your local bookstore, or back issue bin.

Dedicated to my beautiful and incredible wife Laura whose love is stronger than any cosmic ray or gamma bomb, Jadis, Pupino, Odino, and our four-legged powerhouses, my nephew Kento, who could truly defeat both the Thing and The Hulk, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Roy Thomas, Steve Englehart, Jim Starlin, John Byrne, Glenn Greenberg, and all the creators past, present and future of the Hulk and the Thing's rivalry in the Marvel Universe. May you always find love, hope, joy, and happiness.

James Heath Lantz is a freelance writer who was heavily influenced by television, film, old time radio shows, and books—especially comic books—growing up in Ohio. He's co-authored Roy Thomas Presents Captain Video with Roy Thomas. He also wrote the introductions for Pre-Code Classics: Weird Mysteries Volumes One and Two and Roy Thomas Presents Sheena—Queen of the Jungle Volume Three (All published by PS Artbooks.), self-published his Trilogy of Tales e-book (Available at Smashwords.com and other outlets), and reviews various media for Superman Homepage. James currently lives in Italy with his wife Laura and their family of cats, dogs, and humans from Italy, Japan, and the United States.



(left) The Hulk and the Thing arm wrestle for superiority in *Incredible Hulk Annual* #18. Art by Travis Charest and Dan Green. (right) It's time for "The Main Event" in *Fantastic Four Unlimited* #4. Art by Herb Trimpe and Steve Montano. (inset) Yep, they're at it again. Art by Ron Garney.

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end

BACK TALK

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Before we get to letters regarding BACK ISSUE #161, Terry Austin sent us a missive regarding the recently published Marshall Rogers: Brightest Day and Darkest Knights:

I'm writing to ask if I could usurp a tiny bit of space to correct a couple of mistakes in *Marshall Rogers*:

Brightest Day And Darkest Knights, the recent publication of the fine folks at TwoMorrows.

The first mistake (more of a mis-remembering instead) occurs when my old pal Marshall is asked about the *Super Powers: The Justice League of America Skyscraper Caper: A Three-Dimensional Game* ("Some Assembly Required"). The interviewer asks if he inked it himself and Marshall responds in the affirmative. A mere blip in memory by my old pard, as I well remember the day he thrust the original penciled buildings into my hands and with a big grin on his face, he pointed out the "Austin Art Stuff" emporium he had drawn right next to the "Roger's Records" store. Marshall says in another of the interviews that if he only penciled a piece then he signed it "Rogers" and if he both penciled and inked it then he signed it "Marshall" (which is something that I never knew before reading this book!), so if any further proof is necessary, the downshot of the buildings on the front cover (we weren't allowed to draw the figures—they dropped in some Jose Luis Garcia figures from DC's then current Style Guide) is clearly signed on the lower left corner "Rogers and Austin". I happened across one of the actual games when they were closing them out at Toys'R'Us and gave it to my Mom, who dutifully kept it sealed in the box until she passed on and now it sits on my shelf, still in the shrink-wrap. I assume the artwork ended up in some dumpster—ditto for the oddball *Aquaman Activity Book* that we also did.

The second mistake is more of a clarification: I said in my interview/essay that Marshall's last job (*Dark Detective* # 7) remains uninked and unfortunately, instead of the penciled pages that I provided them with, the authors chose to print several inked pages by a fan artist from Finland (as I found

out from Steve Englehart) which has led to understandable confusion on the part of many readers. Again, those pages are inked, but NOT by me!

The last mistake can be blamed on this modern age of auto-correct, as I mentioned that the *Excalibur* issue that we worked on was a title so new that Marvel's production staff mis-spelled it when top-lining the art pages. Despite John Morrow checking with me to make sure that the INCORRECT spelling made it into print in the book, the CORRECT spelling appears twice—as the example of both! For the record, and so auto correct won't do us the same "favor" again, I'll write that the incorrect spelling that was lettered at the top of the original art had *Excalibur* spelled with an E in place of the U.

Let's see AI screw that up!
Terry Austin

Thanks, Terry!

Now, on with our regularly scheduled letter column.

SHORT AND SWEET

I write to congratulate you on your X-Men edition of *BACK ISSUE*. It looks so good on the eye, crammed with a profusion of wonderful memories. Back in the day, these comics were absolutely essential. I used to save the *X-Men* and *Master of Kung-Fu* until I had read all of the other monthly titles I was then picking up. This is a fantastic trip down memory lane.

Peter Normanton

Glad you enjoyed the trip, Peter.

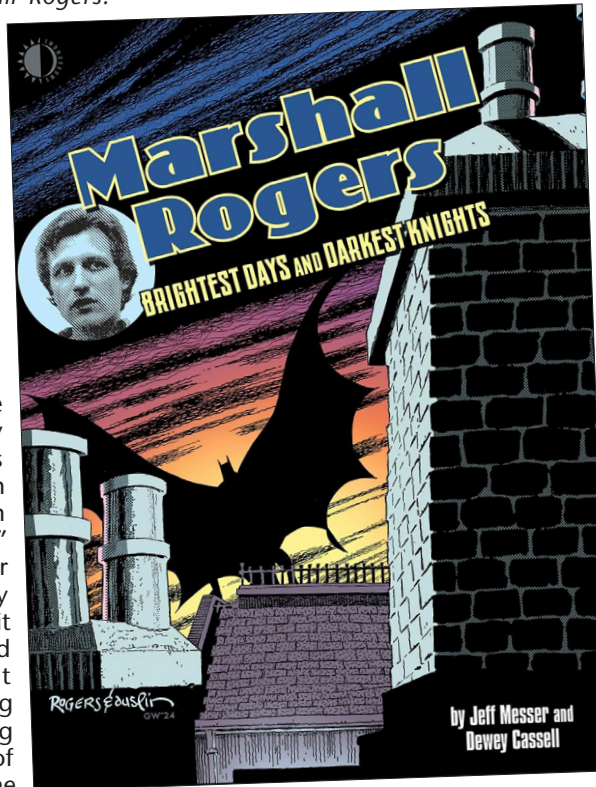
BI #161, the "Mutant Mayhem Issue," was a great read. I have my own favorite X-Men creators and storylines, some of which were featured in *BI* #161, and some which weren't. Thoroughly enjoyed the look at the villain Arcade. A well thought out character with a great personality. Whenever Arcade was in the books back then you knew it was going to be a fun read. I also enjoyed the Havok & Polaris piece. Two characters with a very interesting history in the books. The article about the *Nightcrawler* series by Dave Cockrum was a delight. A very personal book for Dave. Who could forget Bamf

and Pirate Kitty? Love the samples of original art with the article and throughout the whole issue. Another highlight was the Ann Nocenti interview. She's a genius by any literary standard. She's had an amazing history with the X-Men, and she truly loves the franchise. Rogue, The Brood, the whole issue was very enjoyable. Excellent research and funny too. Seeing these older books, the memories came flooding back. The X-Men readers aren't just fans, they're family.

This issue of *BI* captured that feeling. Excellent work from everyone involved!

Mario Botte

I'm glad the issue brought back many pleasant memories, Mario. That's something we strive to do.



SOME INTERESTING QUESTIONS

Lots of interesting tangents in your "Mutant Mayhem issue.

Chris Claremont was justifiably praised for his storylines and characterization but what's not mentioned, nor explained, is, if that's the case, why was he off the book? His decision?

Also, as he's still around, why couldn't he return, if desired? Has he retired? Or just not been invited back?

After, what, seventeen years, no one's obligated to stay. He, or anyone, might like a break or a change. Fair enough. But if his departure was less than voluntary, which I've no way of knowing, why not an invitation back? Even if it's just to do graphic novels on his own time and schedule.

Ann Nocenti, in your article, was given an offer to return. As have others involved in the mutant titles, for an issue or two or a miniseries. That's a nice start, but what about regular assignments? I could better understand the lack of ongoing work if the talent was overlooked or the line just had too few titles for them to work on. But with seventy-plus titles a month, I'd think finding an open assignment would be no tremendous effort.

Granted, as most of the writers and artists of the '70s and '80s books are past retirement age, many, wishing for a rest from deadlines, could decline. But how does the company know unless they ask? There are still many comics pros who did good work in that era and are underutilized today.

Her comment about the "imposter syndrome" made me laugh. In writing fictional characters, of course, the author won't know everything. They're being paid for their imagination. And, as Ann mentioned, she's free to do research. Really, it's more important that the players act in character, as individuals, than Storm knowing every aspect of the weather. You could hire a meteorologist.

Also, as the characters have superpowers, where does one Google that? If it seems plausible and doesn't show glaring errors, they're doing a good job.

What I liked about the "Weapon X" concept, besides the tremendous BWS art, was his notion to do it in eight-page segments. That way, the storytelling, per chapter, was more concise.

I was also amused that the collection might have been a graphic novel, but the source material, from the original printing, was a lowly comic book.

I read, in *Comic Book Creator* #25, that Barry didn't care to do more comic work. Too stressful for him. Okay, but that's his decision rather than being ostracized for age or company politics.

No one's obligated past the point they've had enough. But talent, unlike milk, doesn't have an expiration date. It doesn't cost anything to ask.

Rarely cared for the X-Men as a kid. I read issues #s 26-66. Some highlights, but

mostly short-lived and inconsistent. Imagine my surprise when I enjoyed the revamped '75 Claremont/Cockrum rendition. Or more startling, my absolute delight with the Claremont/Bryne/Austin run. When I saw covers and pages from those, here, I was all smiles.

Conversely, some of the later renditions, by others, were a bit more off-putting.

Not that there's a brick wall in what you publish but is it from the Bronze Age to, say, the early '90s? Or is that more fluid as the years go by?

Thanks, also, for the continuation and latest installment of "Terry's Toons." Recognized the *X-Men* #141 layout right away. I didn't know it was based on an Ed Hannigan design until Terry noted it in the bottom credits.

I'm glad the characters utilized were Paul Terry cartoon creations rather than comic book superheroes. Don't feel so bad I only recognized a few before, of necessity, I researched the rest. But that's fine, giving me the thrill of rediscovery. I knew Heckle and Jeckle, Mighty Mouse and the name Crabby Appleton. So, this prompted a good half hour of playful online searching and watching a few YouTube snippets to refresh my hazy pre-school memories.

Even in earlier segments, Terry threw in some DC characters I wasn't aware of. So, fun and educational. A single picture, but an identification game as well. Hopefully, my score will radically increase with future examples, before you have to call a parent/editor conference.

Joe Frank



I can't answer the questions you pose about Chris Claremont and other Bronze Age creators as I simply don't know the answer. What I can answer is what BACK ISSUE covers. If you look at the subhead of the title, you can find it on the table of contents, it reads "The Bronze Age and Beyond." That's something that's been in place for many years. What we cover has always been fluid. That doesn't mean we're going to start covering books published in the last 20 years anytime soon. I don't think anyone would like that, especially me. Where I think that the "and beyond" works best is in, for example, character overviews where we can include what the character has been up to since the Bronze Age. That said, the focus of the article should be on the Bronze Age. This issue's Thing/Hulk article is a good example of what I'm talking about.

So, there is some fluidity, but it all comes back to the Bronze Age. I started reading comics in the Bronze Age, they remain my very favorite comics, and I do my best to bring the joy those comics brought me to our readers.

Nest issue: It's time to Partner Up! Whether it's teammates, friends, employer/employee, sidekicks, or significant others, we look at the partnerships between Superman and Lois Lane, Love and Rockets' Maggie and Hopey, Batman and Alfred, Milk and Cheese, and others. Plus, behind-the-scenes with RICK VEITCH's Brat Pack. Featuring the work of JERRY ORDWAY, DAN JURGENS, MARV WOLFMAN, JAIME HERNANDEZ, BILL MANTLO, DOUG MOENCH, EVAN DORKIN, STEVE ENGLEHART, AL MILGROM, and others. Clark Kent and Lois Lane cover by John Byrne and Terry Austin. Don't ask—just BI it!

Roger Ash, editor



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