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BACK seat driver

by Roger Ash

When partnerships in comics are mentioned, a number of fans, myself included, automatically think of the teen sidekick. But there are many different kinds of partnerships aside from that. There are friends, employees, teammates, romantic parters, co-workers, and assorted combinations of these. I'm sure there are many that I'm leaving out. This issue, we look at different kinds of partnerships in comics.

I'd hazard a guess that the longest partnership in superhero comics belongs to Lois Lane and Clark Kent/Superman. They've been co-workers, rivals, friends, romantic partners, and even got married. This pairing is a great example of how good partnerships can enhance characters and stories.

A partnership that comes close to that level of longevity is Bruce Wayne/Batman and his faithful butler, Alfred. Sure, people always think of Batman and Robin, but his relationship with Alfred is just as important. And it's an even longer partnership as there have been at least four Robins but only two Alfreds.

Part of the thing that made me relate to Peter Parker growing up was his dating mishaps. Sure, he dated some incredible ladies, but things rarely ran smoothly. One of his partners that I always liked was Debra Whitman. Something about her was very relatable to me. Largely forgotten today, she was treated poorly by Peter and the writers alike. She deserved a better partner.

One of the most popular and influential independent comics of the 1980s was *Love and Rockets*. One of the reasons (or two, depending on how you look at it) is the partnership between Maggie and Hopey. Their relationship as both friends and lovers is one that touched many readers. The friendship they still share keeps them as popular characters today.

The partnership between Hawkeye and Mockingbird is an interesting one as they were married shortly after they met and worked out their relationship as teammates and co-founders of the West Coast Avengers. Their partnership has had some major ups and downs, but it's all made for interesting reading.

For pure friendship, there are few more true friends than those purveyors of mayhem, Milk & Cheese. If you've never encountered these dairy products gone bad, you're in for a treat. Or you'll run away in sheer terror. Either is a solid possibility.

And we couldn't do an issue on partners without teen sidekicks, but with a twist. Rick Veitch's *Brat Pack* is a scathing commentary on the teen sidekick trope. These are toxic partnerships through and through.

Partnerships enhance comics. They help define characters and make them more well-rounded. They help to enhance the world in which the stories take place. They make for better stories, and they deserve to be celebrated.

Since there's no "Back Talk" this time (it'll be back next issue), let's take this opportunity to spotlight what's coming next issue.

In* BACK ISSUE *#167, we celebrate "Girls, Women, and Ladies," as we spend some quality time with Squirrel Girl, Sue Richards, the Invisible Woman, Phantom Lady, Saturn Girl, and more. Featuring the work of STEVE DITKO, DOUG MOENCH, JOHN BYRNE, MARK WAID, PAUL LEVITZ, ROY THOMAS, CHUCK AUSTEN, ALAN MARTIN, JAMIE HEWLETT, KAZUYA KUDO, RYOICHI IKEGAMI, and others. Plus, a Pro2Pro interview with TOM DEFALCO, RON FRENZ, and PATRICK OLLIFFE about May "Mayday" Parker a.k.a. Spider-Girl! Spider-Girl cover by PATRICK OLLIFFE and AL WILLIAMSON.

Don't ask, just BI it! See you next time!

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Torn Between Two Lovers

SUPERMAN LOIS LANE

CLARK KENT AND THE EVOLVING TRIANGLE

by John Wells

FlashBack!

She was feeling generous that day, so the girl reporter gave the office milksop a break and went out on a date with him. It did not go well, less because of the outing than due to the fact that she was kidnapped by a lecherous hoodlum immediately thereafter. Within minutes, however, the young brunette was standing next to a crumpled car and watching a man in blue and red tights hang her would-be rapist on a telephone pole. "You needn't be afraid of me," Superman told the shivering woman as she leaned back in disbelief. "I won't harm you." Flying his charge back into the city, he advised the Daily Star reporter "not to print this little episode." And what did she say in response? Absolutely nothing! Lois Lane would never make that mistake again.

This was what constituted "meet cute" in *Action Comics* #1 (April 1938), Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's landmark comic book that introduced Superman and Lois Lane to an unsuspecting world. Unaware that her hero was secretly the coworker she dismissed as a spineless weakling, Lois reunited with Superman proper in *Action* #2, peppering him with all the questions she'd been too speechless to ask last time. Brushing her off as *she* had Clark Kent, the Man of Steel was finally cornered in *Action* #5. Awestruck after being rescued from a flood, Lois locked lips with her dream man between panels and his stoic façade crumbled. "*Wow!*" he exclaimed. "What a kiss!" It was, she declared, "a super-kiss for a Super-Man!"

From there, it was a short trip to Superman's elevation to multi-media phenomenon, with a syndicated newspaper strip (1939), a radio show (1940), and animated movie shorts (1941) cementing the folk hero's place in pop culture. Lois Lane was at the heart of it, an assertive, competitive reporter for the renamed Daily Planet who rejected coworker/rival Clark Kent most of the time but still liked him well enough to accept the occasional date.

The romantic triangle provided a large dose of wish fulfillment for males—including creators Siegel and Shuster—who longed for the women who spurned them to see the hero within. It became such a signature element of the feature that, in 1941, Siegel's plan to have Lois discover Superman's alter ego was soundly rejected by his bosses. Other mystery-men, including the Flash, Hawkman, Doctor Fate, and the Sandman, allowed their girlfriends in on the secret but *they* weren't household names.

Instead, Siegel went in a different direction, penning a script for 1942's *Superman* #17 wherein Lois began to actively suspect that Clark was Superman. In the quarter-century that followed, a veritable sub-category of stories arose in which the Man of Steel had to refute the dogged

Superman is late for his date with Lois on the José Luis Garcia-Lopez Silver Age variant cover to *Superman Unchained* #1.

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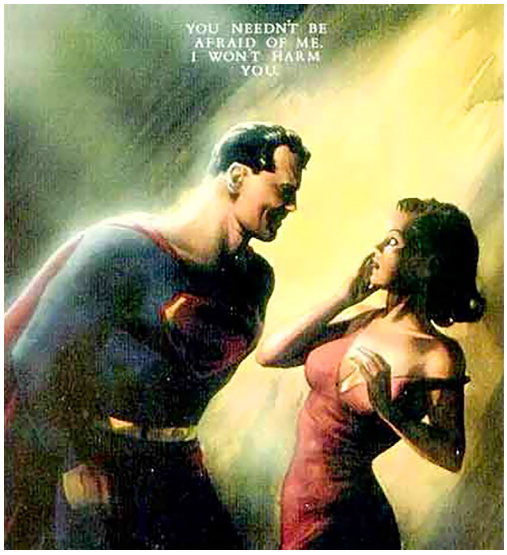

(top) Superman and Lois Lane meet in *Action Comics* #1 (art by Joe Shuster), and again (middle) in a stunning Alex Ross recreation. (bottom) Lois chooses Captain Marvel over Superman in this Kurt Schaffenberger illustration.

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reporter's latest irrefutable proof that he and Kent were one and the same. Those tales mingled with scores of others that found Lois fruitlessly attempting to win Superman's hand in marriage. Failing that, she allowed herself to be courted by a multitude of suitors, including Clark Kent himself. The two reporters were actually wed in a December 1949 newspaper sequence, until February 1952's revelation that it had all been a dream.

By that time, the live action *Adventures of Superman* TV series (starring George Reeves) was in production, and it was perhaps deemed prudent to have the strip on the same page as the comic books and television show. Phyllis Coates and Noel Neill, alumni from recent movie serials, played Lois on the small screen, the former only in its first season. Jack Larson's Jimmy Olsen became so popular that DC went so far as to launch a *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* comic book in 1954.

The logical follow-up premiered during mid-1957 in issues #9 and #10 of the tryout title *Showcase*. Entitled "Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane," the issues codified the reporter's status in the Man of Steel's life, regardless of how much he downplayed his romantic interest. To the surprise of no one, an ongoing *Lois* comic book went on sale in January 1958. Issue #1 brought veteran Fawcett Comics artist Kurt Schaffenberger aboard as the series' primary artist and virtually defined Lois Lane for the next decade.

With a polished style that married realism with a light cartoony quality, Schaffenberger was the perfect person to draw strips that ranged from slapstick comedy to crime drama between the covers of a single issue. Viewed objectively, the tales often didn't make their star look very good. For every story that played up Lois' investigative skills and empathy, there was another that depicted her as variously petty, vindictive, jealous, gullible, and foolish. Superman, required to be prominent in both Lois and Jimmy's books, sometimes came away with mud on his face himself, particularly when he'd play pranks on his so-called girlfriend to "teach her a lesson." The characterization was positively schizophrenic but, approached on their own terms, the stories were often as hilarious as a classic sitcom.

Lana Lang, created in 1950s *Superboy* #10 as a teenage precursor to Lois, wound up (following a few trial balloons) as a regular in *Lois Lane* as of issue #7 in late 1958. Now a TV reporter in Metropolis, she became the Betty to Lois' Veronica. Sometimes they were best friends, other times bitter rivals when it came to a certain superhero. Unlike Archie Andrews' dueling girlfriends, though, there was really no contest on who had the edge in a battle for the heart. Lois had the seniority, name recognition, and comic book with "Girl Friend" in the title.

In *Lois Lane* #80 (Nov. 1967), Lois literally tore those very words off the cover, setting up a Leo Dorfman-scripted two-parter where she finally concluded that Superman was never going to treat her as more than a good friend. Heading off for a new life with an astronaut boyfriend, Lois temporarily acquired telepathic powers in issue #81's conclusion. Reading Superman's mind, she discovered that he *did* truly love her and that his longtime assertions that—as his wife—she would be murdered by his enemies was a sincere deeply-rooted fear. It was, as readers pointed out over the years, a shaky rationalization since Lois was a prime target for retaliation whether she wore a wedding ring or not. Regardless, it was enough for Lois to return to Metropolis, content that Superman genuinely cared for her.

The two-parter was Kurt Schaffenberger's grand finale on the feature, reluctantly replaced by penciler Irv Novick and reassigned to the Supergirl strip as part of an artistic shake-up on the Superman titles. Another shift followed two years later as the franchise's powerhouse editor Mort Weisinger retired and his books were divvied up among multiple men. Weisinger's assistant E. Nelson Bridwell was assigned *Lois Lane* itself, beginning with issue #105 (Aug. 1970).

Citing the Dorfman/Schaffenberger two-parter in issue #107's letter column, Bridwell emphasized that the excesses of the Silver Age had no place in the 1970s. "Superman's love for Lois, once stated, cannot be retracted. Nor would we want to do so. We want a hero with believable emotions, not one who goes around challenging two girls—and the reader—to guess which one he's really in love with."

Bridwell also conceded that Lana's role in the feature—already dimmed in the post-Schaffenberger period—was a problem since there was no longer a point in her playing spoiler. It fell to writer Cary Bates (with artists Art Saaf and Vince Colletta) to tackle the subject in *LL* #109. A former professor of Lana's took it upon herself to hypnotically strip Lois of her ability to love, requiring a compassionate Superman to help revive her feelings. Having already come to terms with the fact that she no longer had a chance with the Man of Steel, Lana took the crisis as a sign to get a fresh start. In the last panel, she left Metropolis for a new job as European correspondent with Galaxy Broadcasting. Lana was "gone for the time being," Bridwell wrote in *LL* #108, "until we decide definitely what to do with her. We are open to suggestions."

Lois' primary writer Robert Kanigher tended to push more into romance comic territory, as in issue #105's contrivance where a death-row prisoner convinced the reporter to marry him before his execution.

The following issue's "I Am Black (Curious)" famously had Lois use Kryptonian technology to become an African American woman to gain perspective on discrimination against black citizens. An awkward scene found Lois asking Superman if he'd marry her as a black woman. It was, the hero noted, a cheap shot since she knew he wouldn't marry anyone lest they be a target. Bridwell revealed in a January 1971 syndicated newspaper article that one reader took issue with the sequence because she "didn't believe in interracial marriages."

Although later generations of readers delight in mocking the story (inspired by John Howard Griffin's 1961 memoir *Black Like Me*), it was greeted warmly by many correspondents in 1970. There were exceptions, of course, as Bridwell noted in the aforementioned article. A blistering missive postmarked Jamaica, New York "was plain racist. He didn't want [expletive]—spelled with one 'g'—in magazines. The letter was written either by a young kid or by an adult who couldn't write."

Bridwell's editorial run culminated with a shocker in January 1972's *Lois Lane* #120 that revealed that Lois' sister Lucy was secretly a spy for the 100

(top) Lois no longer wants to be Superman's Girlfriend. Cover by Curt Swan and Neal Adams. (bottom left) Lana Lang departs. Art by Werner Roth and Vince Colletta. (bottom right) Lois uses Kryptonian technology to become African American. Art by Roth and Colletta

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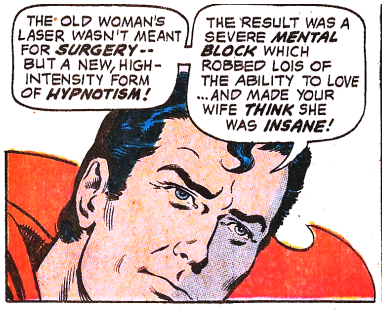

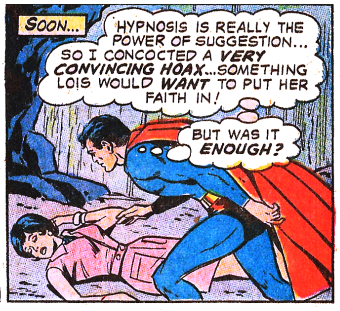

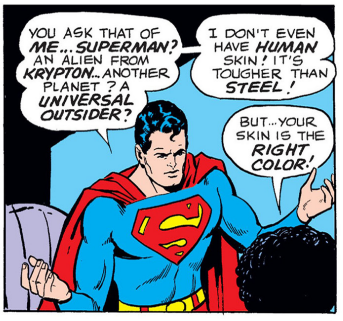

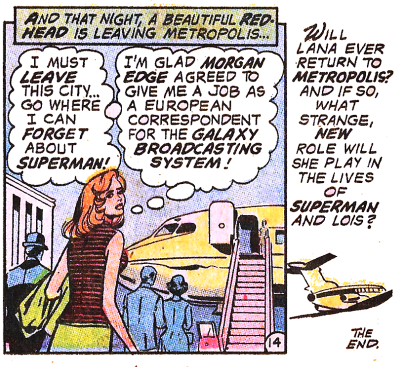

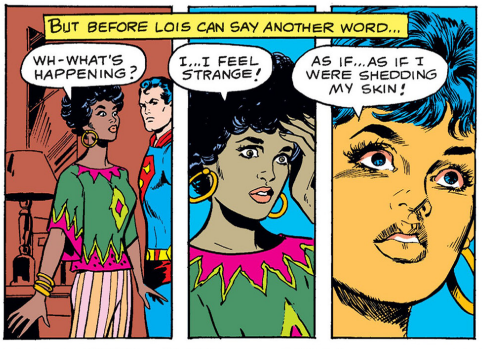

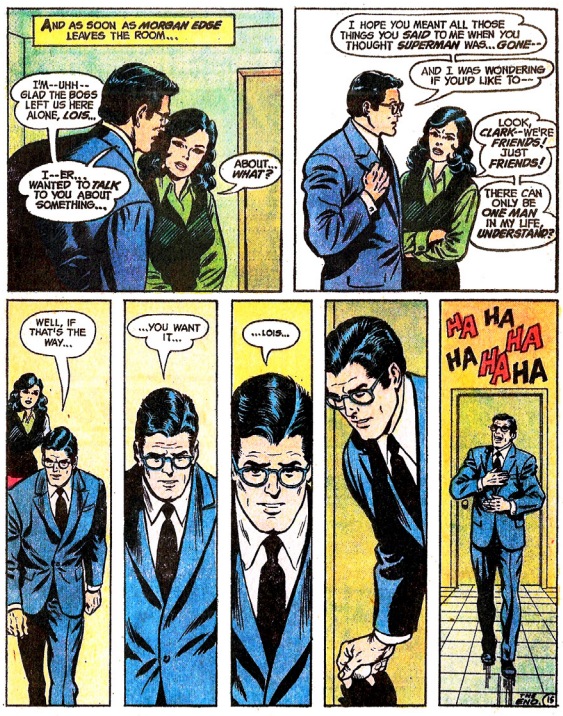

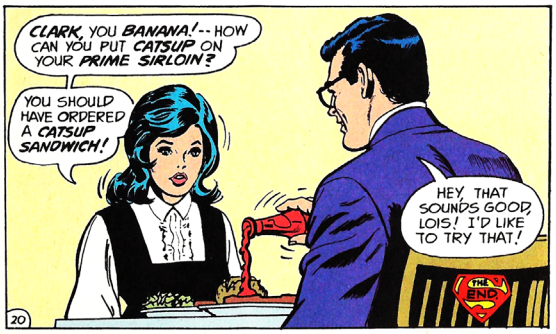

(top left) Lois informs Superman that it's time to move on. Art by Werner Roth and Vince Colletta. (top right) Clark laughs at Lois. Art by Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson. (bottom) Prime rib and catsup. Mmmm... Art by Curt Swan and Bob Oksner.

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crime combine—and that she'd been murdered, her body washed out to sea. The plot came from fan-turned-pro Irene Vartanoff, who found herself too inexperienced to revise the story as Bridwell requested. Instead, Cary Bates was drafted to rework and script the tale for publication.

Vartanoff, the first female to plot a Superman-related adventure, was followed by the first woman to edit any title in the franchise. In issue #121, Dorothy Woolfolk oversaw a modest, short-lived shake-up of the status quo by way of Cary Bates. Reeling from Lucy's death, Lois grasped a fresh start, quitting her staff job at the Daily Planet to become a freelance journalist while informing Superman that it was time for them to move on. "I still love you," she declared, "but I have my own life to live."

Like a New Year's resolution, Lois' intentions soon evaporated. She was back at the Daily Planet and Galaxy Broadcasting in the Kanigher-scripted *LL* #125 as if nothing had ever happened. And when Kanigher succeeded Woolfolk as editor with issue #128 (Oct. 1972), his opening script found Lois once again openly soliciting Superman's hand in marriage. This was part of an elaborate fake wedding ceremony that culminated with a robotic Lois being "murdered" by a madman... all so that the Man of Steel could prove to his girlfriend that marriage wasn't a good idea.

Virtually the only thing from *LL* #121 that stuck was Lois' longer new hairstyle, a look that defined the heroine throughout the 1970s and carried over into *Action Comics* and *Superman*. Lois' appearance in the early 1970s Superman solo titles, though, tended to be sparse and rarely more than cameos, perhaps a consequence of the fact that she had a book of her own.

Action #424 (on sale in March 1973) offered a refreshing exception, with newcomer Elliot S. Maggin (and artists Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson) presenting a sharp angle on the eternal triangle. At the climax of a battle with Gorilla Grodd in the shadow of the United Nations, Superman appeared to have been mortally injured. Distraught over the tragedy, Lois gratefully accepted a hug from Clark Kent, remarking, "I've always felt so close to you, Clark [...] There were so many times I suspected you were Superman... because I *hoped* it was true. But now, *he's* gone..."

Obviously, Superman—having faked his death—was still alive, returning to catch Grodd unaware. Afterwards, Maggin told Eddy Zeno in *BACK ISSUE* #22 (2007), "Lois took back some things she said earlier, in a manner that ought to have hurt Clark's feelings. [...] Clark walked through the hall down-in-the-dumps until he was out of earshot. When he was sure he was alone, he burst out laughing. A friend told me at the time that it was a cruel thing for Clark to do to Lois, but I thought about it and didn't think so. I still don't. It hurt no one."

"[I] had lunch one day with Gerry Conway and he was all excited," Maggin recalled in a 1997 interview for *Supermanthroughtheages.com*. "He was going to kill off [Spider-Man's girlfriend] Gwen Stacy. So, I decided I wanted to kill off Lois. I didn't much like her, after all, and I wanted Supes to go around picking up alien babes all the time. Bad idea."

Later, he continued, "I got to know this nice old lady who had played Lois in the *Superman* TV series, Noel Neill. So, I decided Lois was the love of my life and I insisted over and over again it was time to give the thing some boogey and marry the two of them off. Nobody let me do it."

Nonetheless, Maggin and Cary Bates, under the editorial oversight of Julius Schwartz on *Action* and *Superman*, began to restore the old romantic

friction between the reporters. Bates' Lois was ruthless in her pursuit of a story about Star Sapphire (*Superman* #261) and alternately icy and condescendingly maternal in her treatment of Clark when they first met football player Steve Lombard (*Superman* #264). For his part, Clark played up his geekiness around Lois, as in the closing scene of Maggin's *Superman* #276 where she watched him smother prime rib with catsup.

May 1974s *Action* #438 opened with Clark presenting Lois with a birthday necklace, prompting a heartfelt kiss on the lips…right before she transformed into a monster. The balance of the story followed the Man of Steel's attempt to figure out what happened and set things right, climaxing with another kiss in the last panel.

Bates had a unique perspective on writing Superman, having started in the 1960s under Mort Weisinger. "During Mort's tenure there was a decided emphasis on classic Silver Age tropes," he told *BI*, "such as playing up the 'meek and mild' Clark Kent persona, or a Lois who would often go to extreme if not absurd lengths to prove Clark was Superman. Another example was the ongoing rivalry between Lois and Lana as they competed for Superman's affections. By the '70s when Julie took over, there was general agreement Lois would drop the wacky stunts and accept that Clark and Superman were two separate people."

By 1974, Lois' own comic book had been cancelled (with issue #137) and her feature shifted to every third issue of the umbrella *Superman Family* giant. Now edited by Murray Boltinoff, Lois became a full-on action heroine as an agent of the Secret Intelligence Agency in two Bates-scripted adventures (*SF* #166, 169). The strip also teased romantic rivals for Lois, first ill-fated SIA operative Simon Cross and then, in May 1975's *SF* #172, Lex Luthor! In the latter, Lois played a long game, romancing and agreeing to marry the bald villain while secretly gathering evidence that his alleged reformation was a fraud.

Bates' also repurposed Lois' once-relentless quest to prove Clark was Superman. In January 1975's *Action* #446, she concluded that her easy-going coworker had a secret method of summoning the Man of Steel in a crisis…and she was going to figure out what it was. She eventually came up with an answer, one that got her off Clark's back even if it was wrong.

Running from November 1975 through February 1976 in *Superman* #296-299, a Bates/Maggin opus (drawn by Curt Swan and Bob Oksner) brought the

(top left) Lois plants one on Clark. Art by Curt Swan and Bob Oksner. (bottom left) Clark can signal Superman with his hair! Art by Swan and Oksner. (top right) Lois Lane: action hero. Art by John Rosenberger. (bottom right) The adventures of Clark Kent. Art by Swan and Oksner.

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relationship to a new level. Presented with the odd conundrum of mysteriously losing his powers while dressed as a civilian, the Man of Steel explored the situation by operating exclusively as Clark for a time (#297) and strictly as Superman for another period (#298).

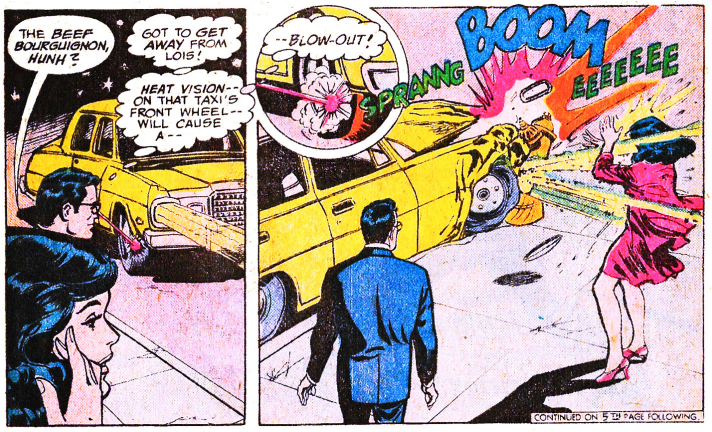
No longer feeling compelled to hide under a meek façade, Clark suddenly spoke up for himself and his newfound confidence thrilled Lois Lane. Arriving at his apartment with a bag of groceries, Lois' prepared beef bourguignon as an appetizer for a night of good food and conversation. In the post-midnight glow of a TV, boy kissed girl and Lois Lane asked, "Clark…where have you been all my life?"

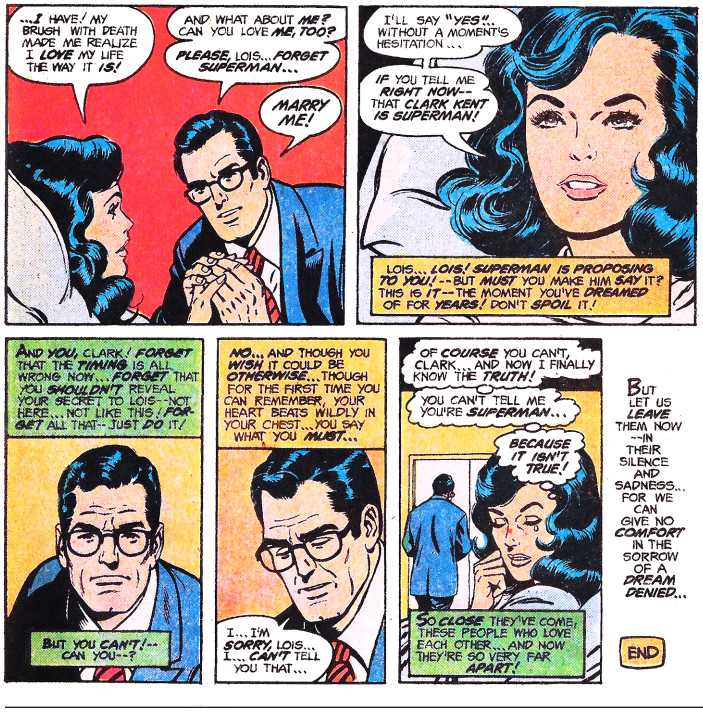
"Would you believe," he responded, "*the office next door*?"

Inevitably, the Metropolis Marvel solved the puzzle of his on-again/off-again powers and embraced the fact that both timid Clark Kent and the mighty Superman must coexist. The new office romance was a casualty, though, with Lois left to speculate on exactly what had gotten into her short-lived new boyfriend.

Reflecting on the story for *BI*, Bates said, "While it was an interesting experiment for deconstructing the Clark/Superman personas to degrees never seen before, looking back it seemed a little contrived and plot heavy in retrospect. But it did offer a unique opportunity to explore the Lois/Clark relationship on a whole new level."

That might have been the end of things had writer Gerry Conway not been recruited to take over the writing on *Superman* a few months later. Enchanted by the possibilities teased by his predecessors, Conway decided Lois shouldn't give up so easily. Pressured as to why he suddenly became such a tiger, Clark opined that it must have been the beef bourguignon. And that, despite a Superman-induced debacle involving a burst fire hydrant, is what Lois Lane served to Clark Kent in his apartment later that evening (*Superman* #303, June 1976).





Conceding that Clark's alternately charming and graceless behavior was an issue, Lois frankly said, "we both know you're just a *consolation prize* to me—because I can't have the man I *really* love—*Superman*. Who are we kidding, Clark? Our relationship isn't *honest*…and that's not fair to *you. Or* me."

Superman #311 offered an amusing take on public perception of Lois, whose conversation with the Flash (Central City's local hero) was interrupted by Iris Allen (secretly the Flash's wife). "Rumor has it that you're a kind of superhero groupie," she snapped, launching into a diatribe that concluded with, "Central City doesn't like homewreckers!"

The laughs faded quickly when Lois and scores of others at a journalist's convention were left comatose by an alien plague. The crisis was finally reversed in issue #314 (May 1977), after which Clark Kent rushed to Lois' bedside. Upon hearing her say that she was staying in Metropolis, he begged her to forget the Man of Steel and marry *him*."

"I'll say *'yes'* without a moment's hesitation," she replied, "*if* you tell me right now—that *Clark Kent is Superman*."

In captions paired with expressive headshots by Curt Swan and Dan Adkins, Pasko chastised Lois for pushing the issue and Clark for not rolling with it. But in the end, the mild-mannered reporter could only say, "I…I'm *sorry,* Lois. I…*can't* tell you that."

Tears running down her cheeks, she thought, "Of *course* you can't, Clark…and now I finally know the *truth*. You can't tell me you're *Superman…because it isn't true.*"

The page inspired a torrent of mail, prompting Julius Schwartz to expand issue #318's letter column to two pages for reader reaction. "Whew!" assistant editor E. Nelson Bridwell declared at the end. "We never realized there were so many fans who wanted Clark and Lois to marry. If this sort of sentiment keeps building, we may wind up letting them marry—any decade now!"

Pasko penned an eight-page coda for June 1977's *Superman Family* #185, wherein Clark and Lois spent time in a hotel room waiting for an interview subject. After hearing that Superman had been active during the whole time, Clark remarked that it was more proof that he wasn't the Man of Steel. Lois' response was to describe—accurately, it turned out—how Clark could have slipped away at various intervals while they were in the room.

"Lois kept going on about how we don't really *know* each other," he mused, "but she knows me well enough to *anticipate* the very way I *think* in a moment of crisis. Maybe she knows me better than even she realizes. Hardly any *married couples* know each other *that* well. And this whole experience has reminded me of how much Lois and I were still a 'thing.' I wonder…maybe we should get back together."

Lois had moved on, though, conceding to Lana Lang in *Superman* #319 that she was "ashamed" of her "very dumb move. […] Any *real* man would've throttled *me* for pulling such

(top) It was the beef bourguignon. Art by Curt Swan and Bob Oksner. (bottom) Clark proposes to Lois. Art by Curt Swan and Dan Adkins.

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a *demeaning, insulting* stunt. But you know *Clark*—the perennial *human doormat*. He acts as if I never treated him badly."

Over the next few issues, Pasko worked to get Superman (as opposed to Clark) and Lois back together, including a key scene in issue #321. With the Man of Steel's powers amplified by the Parasite, it was Lois who quietly moved in to urge him to focus on her voice and regain control. His emotions were intensified, too, and he effusively declared his love for Ms. Lane, squeezing the air out of her in an overzealous hug.

Once all was well, the Man of Steel stopped by her apartment to present her with the Kryptonian equivalent of a mood ring. Accepting an invitation for dinner, he declined her offer to make beef bourguignon and proposed a meal his biological mother had made. "The recipe calls for roast babootch…but if you have a couple pork chops, you can fake it."

The beef bourguignon references outlived the 1970s, incidentally, revisited in a Mark Waid and Alex Ross' epilogue for 1997's *Kingdom Come* collection where Clark—visiting the Planet Krypton restaurant—inquired about the dish. In early 2000, writer Jeph Loeb cemented its place in Super-mythology with *Superman* #153s revelation that "beef bourguignon with ketchup" was a coded message that Clark shared with Lois in moments of danger.

Throughout 1978, Pasko shifted the romantic conflict to Lana Lang, returning to Metropolis as Clark Kent's co-anchor on WGBS' evening news. She'd accepted the job in hopes of snagging Superman, unaware that he'd soon be back with Lois. "What I *really* want is to be Mrs. Superman," she declared in issue #324. "Once I'm *sure* that Clark is Superman, I can put the moves on Clark."

All of Lana's efforts to entice Superman were disasters, only making her look petty and superficial in his eyes. Witnessing a heartfelt conversation between Superman and Lois on New Year's Eve 1978 in issue #333, Lana realized there was no contest. *Superman* #334 contrasted Lois' trustworthiness against Lana's unreliability, with the Man of Steel remarking, "I may never find a way to share this crazy life of mine with a *woman* but if I ever *do*, it's going to be with *Lois*."

"The Lois I wrote provided Superman's touchstone with humanity," Pasko said in a 2013 interview at Nerdspan.com "She was the means by which writers could dramatize the emotional vulnerability in Superman—he was able to show her that side of himself, knowing she wouldn't judge him negatively for it—and that was always what seemed to me to be her main function in the series."

Pasko's final issue (February 1979's *Superman* #335) opened with an amusing exchange where Supes once again dismissed matrimony as an impossibility. Lois' rebuttal: "In the past three years *alone*, I've been *kidnapped* 17 times, *shot* at an average of *twice a month*, and been a victim of various *other* kinds of murder attempts on no less than *38* separate occasions. So by *now*, I've gotten the *message*: If nothing else, being *your girlfriend* isn't exactly going to *lower* my *life insurance premiums*!"

(left) Mr. and Mrs. Superman, courtesy of José Luis Garcia-Lopez and Dick Giordano. (top right) Lana takes herself out of the picture. Art by Curt Swan and Frank Chiaramonte. (bottom right) Clark and Lois tie the knot on Earth-2. Art by Curt Swan and Joe Giella.

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So, *should* they get married? Schwartz asked that very question in a text feature published in August 1977's *DC Special Series* #5 (a.k.a. *Superman Spectacular*). Responses split along gender lines with fans Liz Smith and Beth Montelone voting yes and male creators Cary Bates, Gerry Conway, Denny O'Neil, Curt Swan, and Len Wein among those saying no. Martin Pasko was noncommittal.

Co-creator Jerry Siegel liked the idea in theory but "I don't think it would be good for the longevity of the Superman comic books. Once the novelty of such a unique change in format wore off, we would be stuck with too drastic an alteration from the original and successful." Rather, he suggested a return to the "imaginary tales" of the 1960s, a number of which he'd written himself.

Veteran Superman editor Mort Weisinger had a similar response. "My solution is to have Clark confess his secret to Lois, then marry her in his civilian identity. Their wedded bliss could be detailed in a newly spun-off magazine, *Mr. and Mrs. Superman*. The newlyweds could settle down as ordinary citizens in a suburban home, raise a family, and make beautiful music together. Those opposed to this concept can continue reading the current group of magazines."

Recognizing a good idea when he heard one, Julius Schwartz commissioned Cary Bates to write a pilot for just such a series. Illustrated by Curt Swan and Joe Giella, "Superman Takes a Wife" ran in the 40th anniversary issue of *Action Comics* (#484, on sale in March 1978) and related an endearing account of how the evil Wizard magically made Superman go away. The spell had a glitch, though, that left Clark Kent alive and well, simply without memories of his alter ego and unencumbered by the need to play a weakling. Won over by this more forceful version of Clark, Lois Lane ultimately wed the man of her dreams. On their honeymoon, she watched him obliviously survive what should have been a fatal shooting and realized she'd unwittingly married Superman. Weighing her own happiness against the needs of the planet, Lois began pursuing leads to restore his memories. And when she succeeded, she prepared to walk away since Clark would never have married her under normal circumstances. Superman wouldn't hear of it and a long, happy marriage began.

The twist was that this all took place on the parallel world of Earth-Two, the locale that was home to the Justice Society of America and other DC heroes who had operated since the 1940s. Its Superman had been known to have married his version of Lois in the 1950s but virtually no details had ever been published. *Action* #484 was the first step in rectifying that. As christened by Mort Weisinger, a "Mrs. and Mrs. Superman" feature continued the story, first as a back-up in mid-1978's *Superman* #327 and #329 and later in *Superman Family*, starting with issue #195 (1979) and concluding in issue #222 (1982).

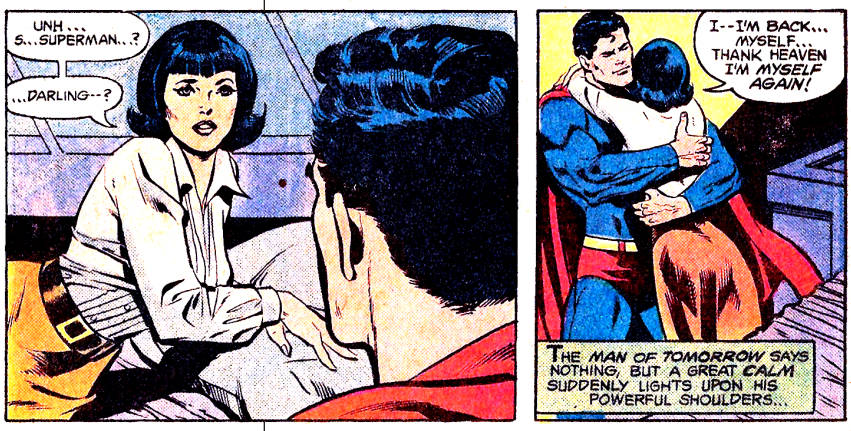
Despite the appeal of "Mr. and Mrs. Superman" and Pasko's treatment of the contemporary couple, neither was on the radar of many comics fans—who regarded Superman as their father's superhero—or the general public. In December 1978, Warner Bros. dealt with the latter problem in a big way. In development for years, *Superman the Movie* hit the big screen and instantly enchanted a whole new generation.

Central to its success was the casting of Christopher Reeve in the title role. Eschewing early live action treatments, his Clark Kent was shy and painfully awkward, even slumping to distinguish himself from the charming, aggressively upright Man of Steel. Margot Kidder's Lois Lane was a perfect complement, at once embarrassed by Clark while deeply attracted to his magnetic alter ego.

From Superman's rescue of Lois as she fell from a helicopter ("You've got me? Who's got you?") to their subsequent interview of her terrace ("Pink!"), one couldn't help but root for their romance. As they flew above Metropolis, the couple even got their own love song, with Kidder reciting the lyrics of "Can You Read My Mind," released as a proper single by Maureen McGovern that hit #5 on the U.S. Adult Contemporary charts.

"In the '50s TV show, Lois and Clark had an antiseptic relationship," movie reviewer Gene Siskel wrote in the December 15, 1978 *Chicago Tribune*. "They both looked as if they were virgins. Not this time. […] One cannot deny the terrific impact of the Lois-Superman relationship. They make *Superman* worth seeing."

The romance was central to 1981's *Superman II*, which brought the comics' old school trope to life



(top) Superman helps Lois regain her memory. Art by Bob Oksner and Vince Colletta. (bottom) Christopher Reeve and Margot Kidder as Superman and Lois Lane.

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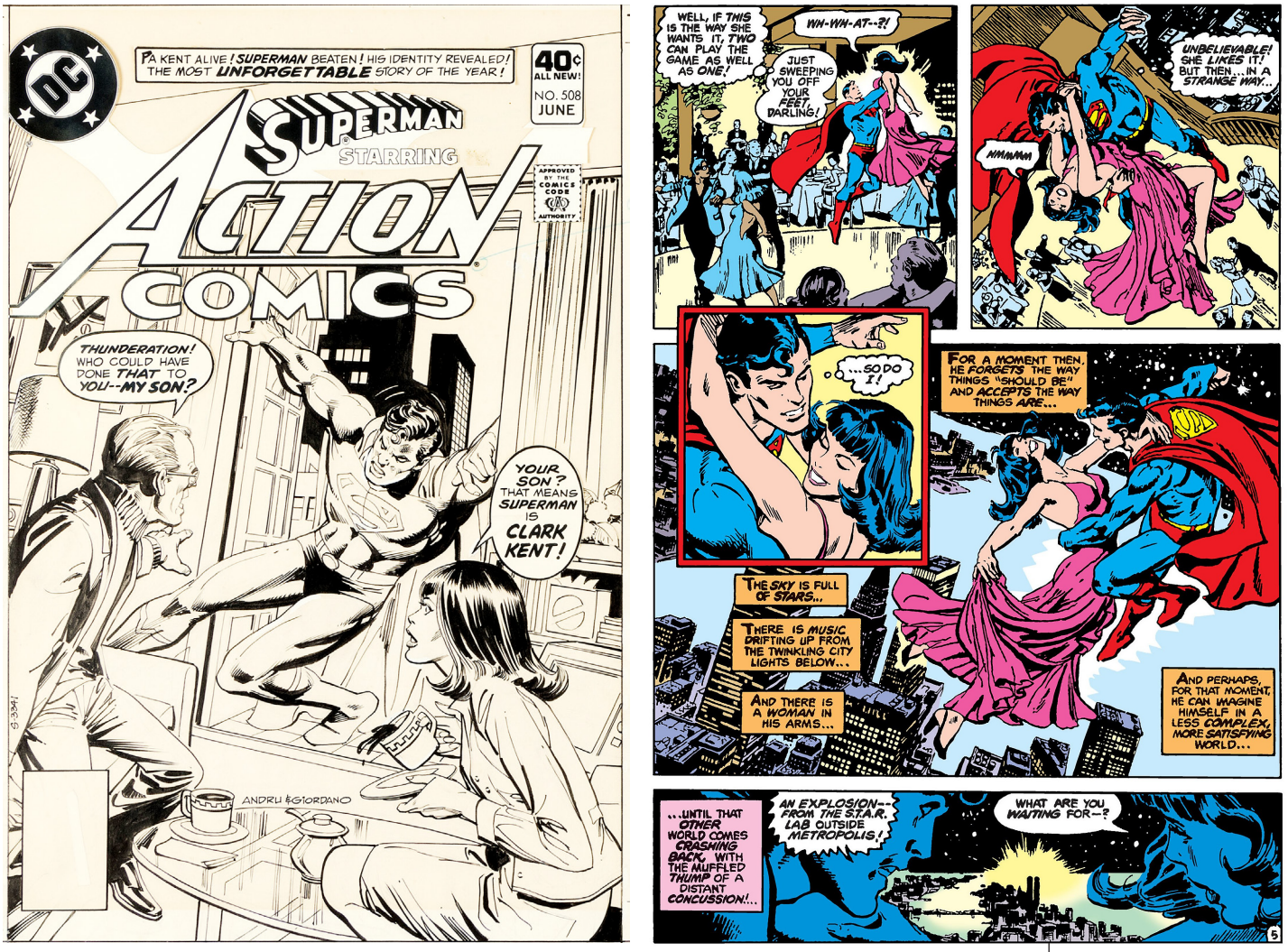

(left) Pa Kent reveal's Superman's secret. Cover by Ross Andru and Dick Giordano. (right) Superman and Lois go on a date. Art by José Luis Garcia-Lopez.

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by having Lois try to prove that Clark was the Man of Steel in a manic sequence set at Niagara Falls. Soon after, an accident confirmed her suspicions, and the couple flew off to the Arctic Fortress of Solitude to consummate their relationship. In an odd development never seen in comic books, Superman was required to relinquish his superpowers before sleeping with Lois. He quickly came to regret that decision when Earth was terrorized by a trio of Phantom Zone criminals that Clark Kent alone couldn't hope to defeat. Regaining his powers and defeating the villains, the Man of Steel uncomfortably tied up loose ends as the film closed with another element never seen in print.

With what fans would later refer to as an "amnesia kiss," Clark literally wiped away Lois' memories of recent events with a powerful smooch! The rationale was that he was sparing her the pain of knowing he was Superman but not being able to be in a relationship with him. Still, the whole scene was uncomfortable and underscored the fact that there was no chance of further progression in the theatrical romance.

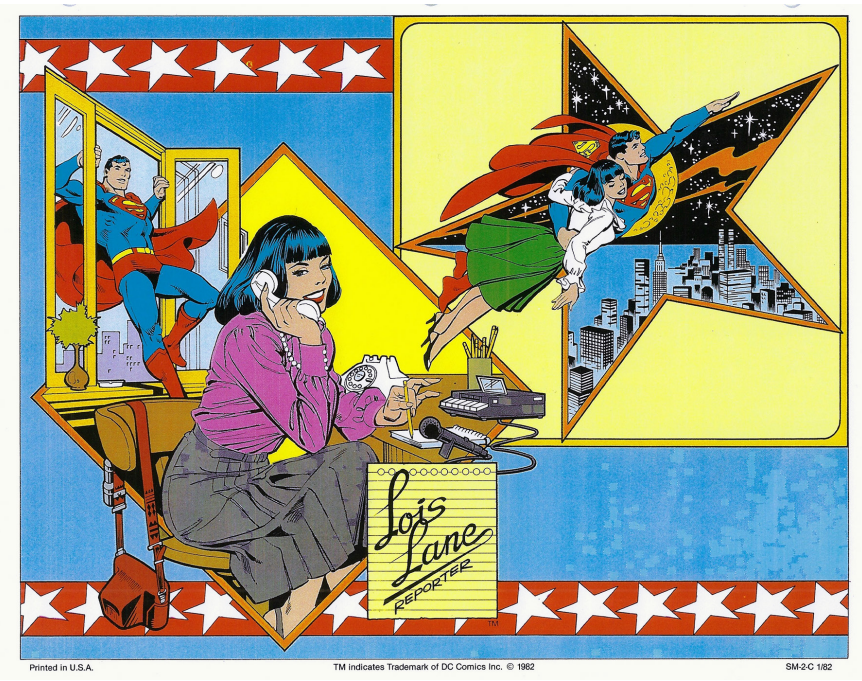
Back in newsprint, Cary Bates (with artists Curt Swan and Frank Chiaramonte) countered with an inspired scene in March 1980's *Action Comics* #508. In response to a wish he'd made before his death, Clark Kent's adoptive father Jonathan was resurrected for 24 hours so that he could see how his son fared as an adult (with everyone but Superman's memories adjusted for the time period to accept him being alive). Watching how Lois Lane jumped to his son's aid in a crisis, Pa saw no reason why she shouldn't know Superman's secret identity.

Clark was none too happy about the development but Lois, Pa observed after his son flew off, took the news almost in stride. "You're sweet, Mr. Kent," she replied, "but *think* about it. For all *you* know, maybe I had *already* figured out for *myself* that Clark was *Superman*…and I've just been *smart* enough not to let *on*."

Flabbergasted, Pa asked if she was joking. "Now that would be *telling*, wouldn't it?" Lois replied. "Anyway, I'm so *glad* I finally *met* you."

Once the 24 hours were up, everyone forgot about Pa Kent's return and everything he'd done, but Bates had accomplished what he set out to do. "I think Lois knowing more than she let on had long been my private take on her," the writer told *BI*.

"That got a tremendous response," Bates noted in *Comics Feature* #8 (1981). "Now whenever we refer to that relationship, we have to do it on two levels, one where she knows Clark and Superman are the same and the other where she doesn't. The reader is in a 'Lady-and-the-Tiger' situation. You never really know now. I think that tantalizes the reader. There is now a mystique to Lois' character that differentiates her from Lana even more so



(top, left and right) Lois Lane model sheets by Garcia-Lopez. (bottom right) Superman's there when Lois needs him. Art by Curt Swan and Frank Chiaramonte.

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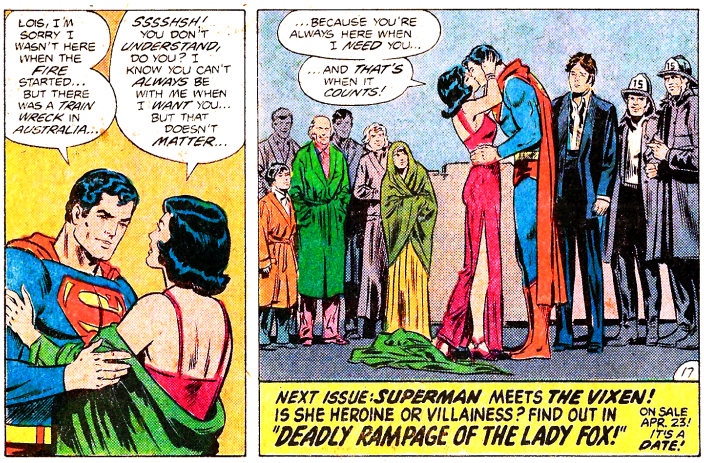

than her personality already does. There are ways like that to infuse new tensions in old established relationships."

Elsewhere, enthused by the movie romance, Gerry Conway penned two stories during that era that played up the relationship. February 1980's *Superman* #347 included a few pages of pure character wherein the Man of Steel and Lois were on a very public date in a skytop restaurant. Puzzled at his girlfriend's exuberant behavior, Superman ran with it, taking her on a dance high above Metropolis as beautifully rendered by Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez. Called away to an emergency, a bemused Superman laughed when *she* cut the date short in order to report the story to the Daily Planet.

A second Conway tale in March 1981's *Action* #520 (drawn by Swan and Chiaramonte) looked at the cracks in the relationship's foundation. In this one, wealthy Eric Burton set his sights on Lois, clandestinely disrupting her dates with Superman with news bulletins. After Eric accidentally set Lois' apartment on fire, though, his true colors emerged. While she raced door to door to rescue neighbors, Eric ran for the nearest exit. Not bright enough to head to stairs instead of an elevator, he was the only person Superman had to rescue once the flames were snuffed out.

Apologetic for not having arrived sooner, the Man of Steel was reassured by his girlfriend. "I know you can't *always* be with me when I *want* you…but that doesn't *matter*…because you're always here when I *need* you…and that's when it *counts*."

In 1979 and 1980, Conway had also been writing Lois' solo feature in *Superman Family*, now penciled by Bob Oksner. With the Mr. and Mrs. Superman series fulfilling the book's obligatory involvement of the Man of Steel, Ms. Lane was proving her worth as a crime reporter and fighter without so much as a cameo by her boyfriend in her own stories.

Conway's run was interrupted in issues #203-206 (1980) by a Marv Wolfman multi-parter that crossed over with the Jimmy Olsen feature. Having discovered the existence of a major criminal combine called the H.I.V.E., Lois was targeted by the group and stripped of her memories. Escaping her captors, the amnesiac Lois stumbled into a small coastal town and began a sweet romance with a local widower. Inevitably, she wound up back in Metropolis but all the basic details from her life were still gone. Superman used Kryptonian technology to restore Lois' memories, that final chapter emphasizing what a close relationship the couple had.

Over in *Action Comics*, where Wolfman was now the regular Superman writer, a sequel found the H.I.V.E. putting another hit on Lois in issues #532-533 (March-April 1982). Following the Bates and Pasko models, this Lois was quite capable of defending herself against the assassins…not that she didn't appreciate the help from her boyfriend.

Clark, on the other hand, was still a sticking point. "You talk like a coward but you and I both know you're *not*," she snapped in *Action* #531. "You're *too good* a reporter to play the frightened sheep. You've gotten too many *stories* to feign fear. Why do you *act* this way, Clark?"

If one bought into Bates' tease that Lois already knew the answer, that might figure into what happened in January 1983's *Action* #542. In the opening pages, dramatically rendered by Curt Swan and Dave Hunt, she and Superman had their latest heart to heart about their relationship on issues that had come up before. Missed dates. A failure to commit. "You *bury* yourself in your work so you don't have to *express* your feelings," Lois declared just before she broke up with him.

Ironically, it was Clark who soon opened up to his co-anchor and childhood friend Lana Lang. "It's purely Clark and Lana," Wolfman said of the romance in *Comics Interview* #3 (1983). "No love for Clark because [she thinks] he's Superman." Writer Paul Kupperberg paralleled the development in the *Superman* newspaper strip months later, albeit with a Lois/Clark pairing after Ms. Lane split with the Man of Steel.

"Essentially, the idea was to blow up the characters, and see what happens," Wolfman detailed in *Comics Interview* #3. "This was [publisher Jenette Kahn's] idea. She called us in and said, 'I want complete changes. I want everything moving on the book. Superman's been stagnant for too long. Let's liven it up!' And Julie Schwartz took to that great."

The shake-up involved subplots running between Wolfman's *Action* and Bates' *Superman*, including Lois' efforts at a fresh start by taking international assignments far from Metropolis. Even that backfired when Superman made a failed effort at a reconciliation with Lois, taking her off the grid at a point when a crucial story broke. Instead, it was Lana who got the accolades for sitting down with two feuding Middle Eastern leaders. This all culminated with a callback to Silver Age catfights in the Bates-scripted *Superman* #388. Tearing into each other at the Galaxy Broadcasting party, Lois and Lana wound up in tears, finding common ground in their mutual struggles with life after being Superman's girlfriend.

Wolfman envisioned further soap opera, remarking in *Comics Interview* #3 that Lois would get a new boyfriend who was eight years her junior. That never happened. By 1984, Julius Schwartz had gotten cold feet on the experiment, which had not helped sales. When *Superman* and *Action* reverted to primarily episodic adventures, the continuing Clark/Lana romance was the only indication that the makeover had ever happened.

Even that didn't survive *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, the seismic 1985 event that allowed creators the opportunity to start fresh on select DC characters. Enter superstar writer-artist John Byrne, lured from Marvel with the promise of starting Superman from scratch in 1986's six-part *Man of Steel* miniseries. Afterwards, Byrne helmed *Action Comics* and a relaunched *Superman* book. Marv Wolfman, returning to the franchise for the first time in two years, joined artist Jerry Ordway on *Adventures of Superman*, retaining the numbering of Superman's first volume.

It was Wolfman who sold Byrne on the idea of shifting Lex Luthor from a criminal scientist to a corrupt, untouchable billionaire. He also wanted Luthor's girlfriend to be Lois Lane! "My view is that she's drawn to power," Wolfman explained in *Amazing Heroes* #96 (1986). "That's one of the weaknesses in her character. I think if Superman or Luthor were not there, she'd go after the next most powerful man in Metropolis. But I think that once she meets Superman, he's just so overwhelmingly special that there's no way that she could ever see anyone else again."

Byrne passed on that take although Luthor's unrequited desire for Ms. Lane made it into the reboot. Still,

(top) Lois confronts Clark. Art by Joe Staton and Frank McLaughlin. (middle) Lois confronts Clark... again. Art by Curt Swan and Dave Hunt. (bottom) A similar scene in the *Superman* comic strip.

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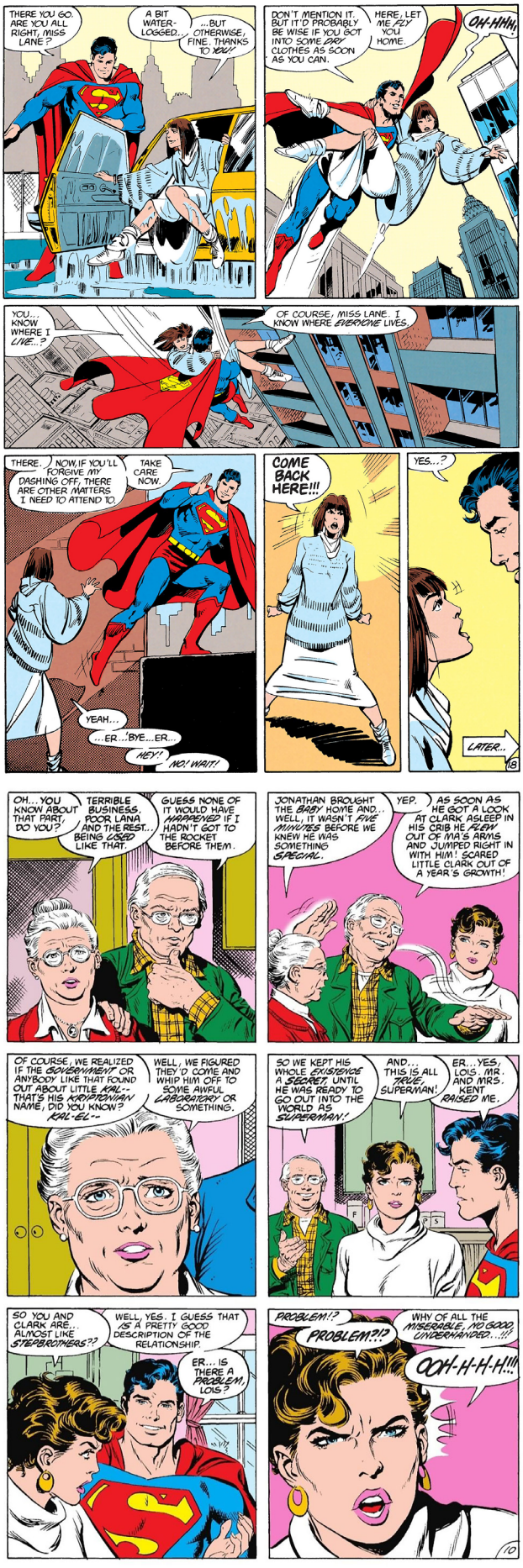

the incoming creator had no desire to return to mild-mannered Clark Kent. Byrne's take on Lois's dislike of Kent had nothing to do with him being a wimp and everything to do with professional jealousy. After spending most of *Man of Steel* #2 pursuing Superman, Lois was furious when newcomer Clark Kent beat her to the Daily Planet with an exclusive interview with the most famous superhero in the world.

"It will not be a romance," Byrne said of the reporters' relationship in *Amazing Heroes* #96, "but it will be something beyond admiration. She resents, and will always resent, that he beat her to that first Superman story and continually beats her to stories. They're rivals. She admires him and he certainly admires her. He has no reason to dislike her. Every once in a while, she has to remind herself how much she hates him."

That said, Byrne continued, "if there's any romance at all in there, it has to be more between Superman and Lois, because that's more real. She can have a romance with Clark Kent. She can't have a romance with God." In *Superman* [Vol. 2] #1, Clark admitted that it would be "too easy" to win Lois as a superhero and vowed to do so as her co-worker.

Byrne's Lois was distinguished from her earlier counterparts in other fundamental ways. For one, the pre-Crisis Lois made no secret about her desire to date and marry Superman. This version kept her feelings to herself. And she also had no inkling that the Man of Steel and Clark might be one and the same. In Byrne's view, the fact that Superman wore no mask would lead people to assume that he had no secret identity to hide.

For Lois, that blindspot lasted until *Action* #597 (1988) when a surprise visit to Smallville turned up Superman at the Kent farm. She had to ask: was the Man of Steel secretly Clark Kent? On the fly, Jonathan Kent declared that he had discovered the infant Kal-El's spacecraft and raised him alongside baby Clark as virtual stepbrothers. Lois bought it…but now she was livid at the "brothers" for having put one over on her for years.

In the aftermath, Lois threw herself into a tepid romance with schoolteacher-turned-superhero Jose (Gangbuster) Delgado even though he regarded himself as a "rebound" (*Adventures of Superman* #439: 1988). Indeed, Lois increasingly found herself warming up to Clark, culminating with him expressing his desire to officially begin dating. As they sealed the deal in *Adventures* #466 (1990), a dejected Delgado witnessed their hallway kiss from a distance and walked away.

The courtship continued for much of 1990, reaching a turning point while Lois' mother Elinore was gravely ill. "I wrote the plot for *Superman* #50," Jerry Ordway told *BI*, "which was to be drawn by others as well as myself. The idea was, Clark had lost his powers due to Red Kryptonite a few issues earlier. He was a normal guy now, and basically did something he had wanted to do for some time, without the burden of being Superman. He was proposing, using Ma Kent's family ring with the ending of the story leading to Lois turning him down, saying it was not the right time.

"While I was drawing the layouts for the sequence, I was overwhelmed with the idea that Lois would accept Clark's offer. It just felt right. I had gotten married around then and maybe didn't want to treat it as a plot turn. The characters' emotions were always real to me, as a creator. I called editor Mike Carlin and told him Lois should accept Clark's proposal. He was silent for a beat, then said 'You're right. Now I have to call the other writers!'"

First, though, Carlin told *BI*, "I needed the okay from the bosses. Jenette Kahn loved what we were doing and she immediately agreed that after more than fifty years, it was okay to take the 'love triangle' in another direction. Then we told Paul Levitz and Dick Giordano…and then I called the team [notably, Roger Stern and Dan Jurgens] with the full support of DC's brass."

Ultimately, *Superman* #50 ended with Lois—her feelings buoyed by her parents' newfound admiration for Clark during Elinore Lane's latest health crisis—putting her finger to Clark's lips and making a simple

(top) Clark scoops Lois. Art by John Byrne and Dick Giordano. (bottom) Super brothers. Art by John Byrne, Leonard Starr, and Keith Williams.

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declaration: "Yes. I *want* to share my life with you." Ordway drew the lovely final pages himself, declaring them a favorite among his memories on the series.

"It seemed a logical step for the two of them," Dan Jurgens told *BI*. "Plus, if people reacted negatively, we could simply have them break up for a bit. We also thought it might be a long engagement that could last several years. One of the main things behind all of it is that we were always trying to build off of Clark's humanity. The idea of Superman marrying an earth woman really emphasizes that and helps to define his character, so we saw that as a plus."

Carlin's discussion with *Action Comics* writer Roger Stern added another wrinkle. Ordway adds that they "discussed the idea that Clark couldn't enter into the engagement with a lie—meaning his secret identity as Superman. So, Clark's next step was revealing his secret to Lois. Now, I had little to do with Carlin's and Roger's conversation, but I recalled a favorite moment in the generally mediocre *Superman: The Quest for Peace* film [1987]. Clark and Lois talk heart to heart, and she either said or implied that she had known Clark was Superman for a while. I loved that: she was an award-winning reporter, after all. So that was where my head was when drawing the proposal sequence."

Stern got the ball rolling at the end of the Bob McLeod-illustrated *Action* #662 (Jan. 1991). "Being married to me might not be the safest thing in the world," Clark said as part of a preamble to coming clean on the historic last page.

Ordway picked up moments later in *Superman* #53, where a reeling Lois conceded that, on some level, it wasn't a complete surprise. "In my heart, I think I've known for a long time," she observed, "but my brain would always dismiss the notion. Suspecting something and acting on it are two different things."

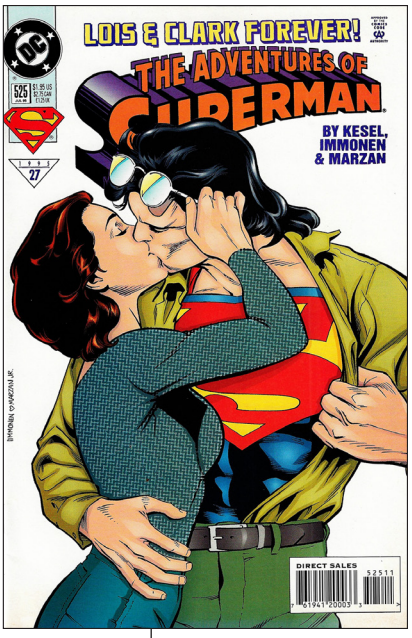
She eventually processed and accepted the revelation, with writer-penciler Dan Jurgens later adding a nice episode entitled "Superman's Fiancée, Lois Lane" in July 1991's *Superman* #59. As had been the case in his pre-*Crisis* existence, Superman was eternally being pulled between his obligations to the world and those closest to him. In this story, the Man of Steel emphatically put Lois first, flying her to Mount Fuji for hours of uninterrupted conversation on the forces that shaped him and the implications of marriage. Miraculously, no crisis interrupted the couple as they built "a bedrock that [mirrored] the core of their relationship. In fact, the "miracle" was the result of a member of the Linear Men who secretly manipulated the passage of time as a gift to Superman.

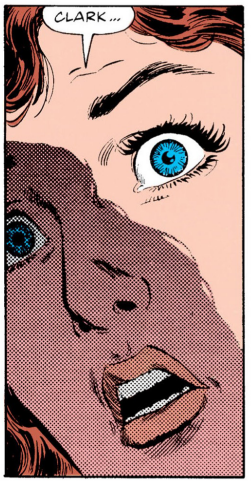
"The cover and story for *Superman* #59 stands out" as one of Jurgens' favorite Superman/Lois memories. "It helps for Superman to have a partner," Jurgens observed to *BI*, "and also helps to bring his concerns down to Earth. I see it as a huge plus. Again, that goes back to Superman's humanity and even the morals he was raised with, and what he witnessed with the Kents. I have always said that it was *both* Lois and Superman who debuted in *Action Comics* #1, so it's been in effect from the very beginning."

Carlin and his well-coordinated creative team had shored up the shaky foundation of the Byrne relaunch to great effect, the stories flourishing with both fine adventures and strong character development. Ordway took pride in what that meant for the young lovers.

"I am proud of the small moments in their relationship," he told *BI*. "Clark changes a battery in a smoke alarm while Lois is getting a stepladder! She is bemused. [*Adventures* #484] That was fun. Another bit was a small tip about hanging wrinkled clothes in the bathroom after a shower, with the moisture in the room helping to smooth out wrinkles. A working person could benefit from the advice! I think those small things are what people still remember fondly from our comics, not who the villain of the issue was. Fans still love the Jimmy Olsen, Bibbo, and Jose Delgado character stuff, when I chat to them at comic shows. That was the 'special sauce' of that era of Superman.

"As a newly married man," Ordway continued, "I had married my own Lois Lane, a strong, capable, and smart woman. I really just channeled emotions and some circumstances into my stories. The idea that Clark risked his life as Superman, while his parents watched the news and worried, was one thing. Lois had to report on it all, while





(top left) The secret is out. Cover by Kerry Gammill and Brett Breeding. (top right) Lois and Clark are finally together. Cover by Stuart Immonen and Jose Marzan, Jr. (bottom) Clark reveals his secret. Art by Bob McLeod.

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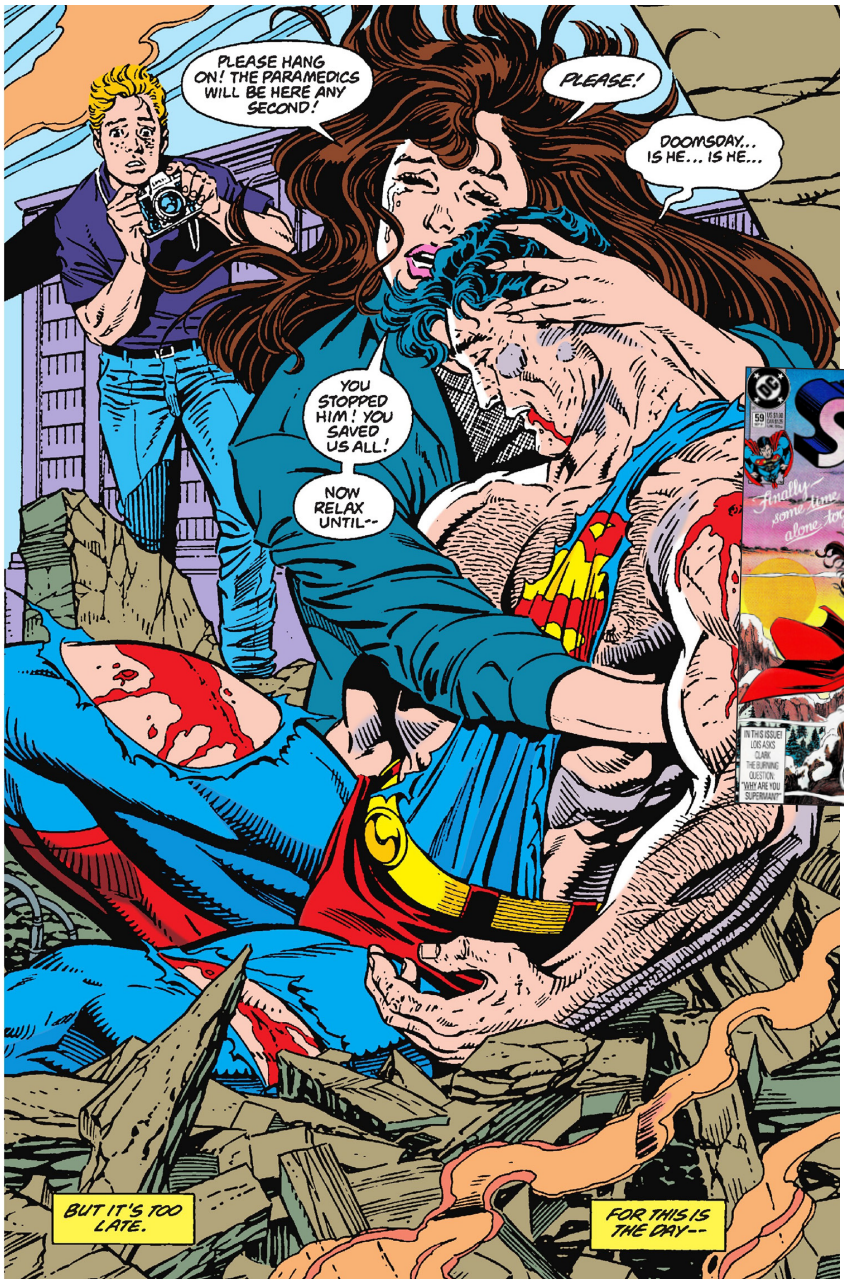


(top) Dean Cain and Terri Hatcher as Superman and Lois. (bottom) The death of Superman. Art by Dan Jurgens and Brett Breeding. (inset) Superman and Lois head to Mt. Fuji. Cover by Jurgens and Breeding.

TM & © DC Comics.

remaining professional in her observations, while knowing her fiancé was the person in action, and possibly in jeopardy. That in itself amped up the emotions of any story you might want to tell."

The next trick was spreading word of the series' qualities beyond comics fandom. To that end, Mike Carlin told *BI*, "Jenette [Kahn] and I put together a bible we called *Lois Lane's Planet* with clippings from our comics focusing on the advancing L&C romance as well as other characters at the Daily Planet and in Metropolis. We pitched it to Warner Bros. television. They liked it and hired Deborah Joy Levine to develop it for TV and it became *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*."

With Teri Hatcher and Dean Cain in the title roles, the ABC series premiered on September 12, 1993. The romantic dramedy played up the rivalry and sexual tension of Lois, Clark, and Superman—making a star of Hatcher in the process—and conveyed the modern, more youthful dynamic of the current DC comic book. By the time the pilot aired, though, said comics were capping a year of success and notoriety beyond anything its creators might have expected.

In 1992, Carlin had assembled all the Superman creators for a Super Summit to map out the next year's worth of stories. Most in attendance anticipated laying the framework for a historic wedding in *Superman* #75. "Jenette […] and I thought that with the [eventual] publicity for the *Lois and Clark* TV show, that we should try to time our wedding with a wedding on the show," Carlin recalled in *The Death of Superman 30th Anniversary Deluxe Edition* (2022).

"[When] we told [the team] we didn't want to do the wedding yet, that was not my favorite meeting. [They] were rightfully disappointed that they weren't going to get to do the story [they'd] been building up. And then [they] were worrying out loud like, 'What happens when you get to it and I'm not on these books anymore?' and that was a real thing. That actually happened for Jerry."

It was Ordway who joked—not for the first time—that they should just kill off Superman instead. Running with the idea, Carlin asked all in attendance for ideas on doing just that. The result was a serial running through Autumn 1992 where the Man of Steel fought a juggernaut called Doomsday and—in the last pages of *Superman* #75—died doing so. The final spreads depicted a devastated Lois cradling her lover's body in the

rubble of a Metropolis street. Writer-penciler Jurgens cites it as another favorite moment from his Superman run.

The ensuing months presented new sides of Lois, involuntarily cast as a guardian of Superman's legacy and intimate secrets as well as a vocal skeptic of those who claimed to be the hero reborn. Her bond with Jonathan and Martha Kent deepened in those months, none of them able to publicly mourn Clark Kent, officially listed only as a missing person.

News of the upcoming death hit on the proverbial slow news day, resulting in the mainstream media—and scores of readers and viewers—believing that Superman's demise was both real and permanent. With sales skyrocketing and all eyes on them, the creative team rose to the challenge, delivering an almost-weekly run—save for a two-month pause—that remains celebrated today. The Man of Steel was unequivocally back in *Superman* #82 (on sale in August 1993) and Clark Kent—said to have been trapped underground—was right behind him in September's *Action Comics* #692.

Lois & Clark began airing only weeks later, its first season taking an unused element from Marv Wolfman's 1986 concept by having Lois romanced by Lex Luthor and nearly marrying him. Season Two put the focus on the traditional romantic triangle, its season finale (May 21, 1995) ending with a fateful marriage proposal from young Mr. Kent. Lois replied in September 17, 1995's third season premiere: "Who's asking? Clark or Superman?"

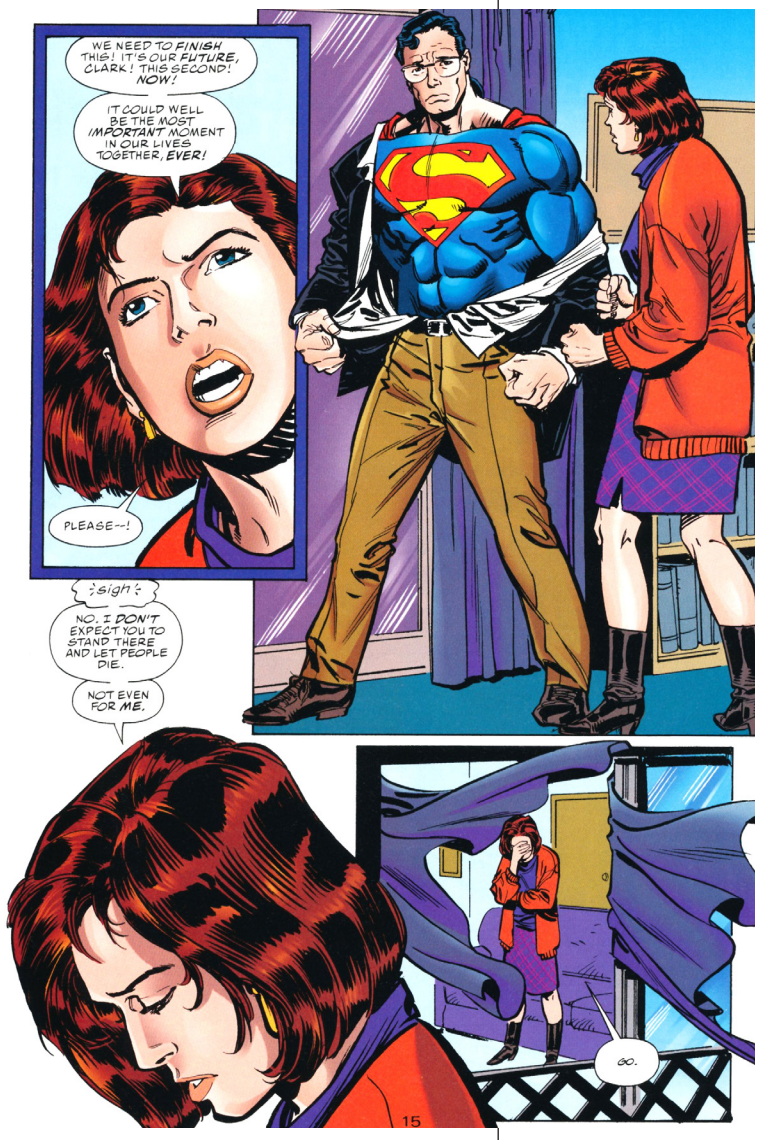
A much-ballyhooed wedding episode on February 11, 1996 ended with a campy twist when the Lois whom Clark just married was revealed to be a clone with a penchant for eating frogs! The genuine article was rescued within a couple episodes, but the authentic nuptials were still unscheduled when the third season wrapped.

Back in the comics, the happy couple was no longer together at all. The David Michelinie-scripted *Action Comics* #720 (on sale just as the notorious clone episode aired) had Lois end the engagement. It was the culmination of several slights and frustrations in recent months but boiled down to her fear that she would also be less of a priority in Clark's life than Superman. In July 1996, Lois left the country altogether for a job as a foreign correspondent (*Superman* #115).

The Man of Steel had little time to dwell on her departure thanks to an extinction level event wherein Earth's sun was literally snuffed out. As the main story played out in *The Final Night* (a weekly miniseries), all four Superman comics in September 1996 followed the hero's dimming strength in the absence of the solar energy that fueled his power. Although the sun was rekindled through the sacrifice of Hal Jordan, Superman's abilities did not reemerge afterwards. A four-parter was on tap to restore the Man of Steel's might but things didn't quite go as planned.

Back for its fourth season, *Lois & Clark* was ready to air a real wedding episode (entitled "Swear to God, This Time We're Not Kidding"), a fact that was not initially communicated to DC. Once word reached the New York offices, October's Superman schedule went out the window. Instead, *Superman* #118 (by Dan Jurgens, Ron Frenz, and Joe Rubinstein) followed Lois overseas as she realized that she truly loved Clark and needed to reconcile.

That led into the mammoth 96-page *Superman: The Wedding Album*, wherein Lois and Clark reunited and set a wedding date at the earliest opportunity. Dan Jurgens, Karl Kesel, Louise Simonson, and Roger Stern—all present when the wedding comic was first envisioned—scripted chunks of the story along with a portion by current team member David Michelinie. Although he was unable to



The engagement is off. (top) Cover and (bottom) interior art by Kieron Dwyer and Denis Rodier.

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write any of the story, Jerry Ordway inked Jurgens pencils for the last eight pages, including the ceremony itself. Most major artists of recent years also contributed as did those from decades past like Al Plastino, Jim Mooney, Nick Cardy, and the late Curt Swan (the latter via unpublished pages). Lois and Clark's co-creator Jerry Siegel—who died in January 1996—was present as well as the priest who united the couple in holy matrimony.

"It was a slight rush for us," Louise Simonson told Matthew Brady in *Wizard: The Comics Magazine* #63 (November 1996), "simply because we had to accommodate the television show's schedule, which isn't necessarily the schedule we would've preferred to work on. We didn't have time to work up to the wedding in the course of the previous year, so we had to fit all those scenes we would have fit around other continuity. We rushed a little in preparing it, but it won't appear that Lois and Clark rushed."

"The thing that I'm very pleased with," Roger Stern added in *Wizard* #63, "is that unlike comic book weddings, we were able to develop their relationship over the years so that they grew together as a couple. […] I'm looking forward to doing years of 'young married stories.' I'm not saying that the Superman books will turn into DC's version of *Mad About You*, but that type of relationship wouldn't be too wrong."

Also in *Wizard* #63, Dan Jurgens rejected the possibility that the Kents might someday split. "The one thing Clark Kent never, ever does is admit defeat or give in to failure in anything, even marriage. According to my understanding of the characters, a divorce is impossible." Although DC had no plans for following the marriage with children, Jurgens admitted that he'd "love to do one of those imaginary stories with super-toddlers flying around the room."

Karl Kesel insisted in *Wizard* #63 that Lois' greater presence in the 1990s adventures would not change after the honeymoon. "I'm looking forward to writing the Lois and Clark team. They sort of have this 'Nick and Nora Charles' feel to them that will be fun to play with. […] Lois and Clark are on the short list that I hold in my heart of hearts of people who were actually meant to be a couple. This is just destiny working itself in comics."

The story was a heartfelt tribute to DC's long-suffering lovers and a sharp contrast to *Lois & Clark*'s counterpart on October 6, 1996. Superman historian Richard Morrissey opined in *The Comics Buyer's Guide* #1238 (August 8, 1997) that it "was poorly thought out and even reflected the worst excesses of the '60s *Batman* TV series by casting Delta Burke as an ill-conceived 'Special Guest Villain' [called the Wedding Destroyer]. [It was] the worst script of the season [and] the one that received the most attention, simply out of curiosity."

The wedding is back on! (left) Interior color guide art by Stuart Immonen and Jose Marzan Jr. Colors by Glenn Whitmore. (right) *Superman: The Wedding Album* cover by John Byrne.

TM & © DC Comics.

"Ours was better, IMHO," Carlin remarked to *BI*. "Our comics inspired the show into existence, but we stayed in our own separate lanes."

Clark was mortal throughout *Wedding Album*, continuing into the companion issues that followed the Kents onto an action-packed Hawaiian honeymoon (*Adventures* #541; *Action* #728; *Superman: The Man of Steel* #63). November's "Power Struggle"—originally meant to take place *before* the wedding—got Superman back up to full strength.

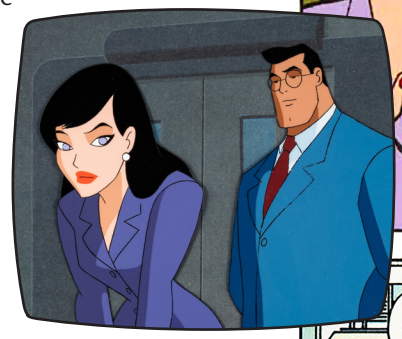
For *Lois & Clark*, the wedding was the beginning of the end. The final episode (June 14, 1997) found the couple grappling with the fact that they could not have children. A surprise ending found a baby in a Superman blanket in their living room along with a note declaring that the child was theirs.

In a 2003 interview with Craig Byrne, writer/executive producer Brad Buckner recalled unrealized plans for Season Five (*https://www.kryptonsite.com/loisclark/buckner2003.htm*) "Lois and Clark became very attached to the little boy who began to grow at an abnormal rate, turning into a preteen in a matter of a few months. He also began to develop superpowers, not all of which he used responsibly since he was a troubled kid. Turns out he was Kryptonian royalty, stashed by his mother to keep him safe from assassins. In the end, he had to (tearfully) leave the only parents he'd ever known (L&C) and return to save his imperiled people."

Amidst the lead-up to the wedding, a third iteration of Lois and Clark emerged on September 6, 1996. They were part of *Superman: The Animated Series*, airing on KidsWB and produced by Alan Burnett, Paul Dini, and Bruce Timm. Romance wasn't much of a factor here but there were sparks aplenty in the rivalry between the Daily Planet's Clark (Tim Daly) and Lois (Dana Delany).

Then best-known for the TV series *China Beach*, Delany was a longtime fan of Lois and elated at the opportunity to get the part. Although the cartoon owed little to the post-*Crisis* relaunch, Delaney—like John Byrne—modelled Lois on Rosalind Russell's fast-talking, independent reporter Hildy Johnson in the 1940 comedy *His Girl Friday*.

"She plays it—if anything—almost too hard-boiled sometimes," Bruce Timm told Rob Alstetter in *Wizard: The Comics Magazine* #59 (July 1996). "We've had to pull her back and say, 'We're getting carried away with this. We don't want to make her come off as unlikable.' She brings a real edge to the part. She's interesting, and Lois is a fascinating character coming out of her mouth."



Delaney's Lois saw Clark Kent as a hick, derisively referring to him as "Smallville" at every opportunity. It was a detail that struck a chord with fans, one of whom was writer Jeph Loeb. He brought the nickname into comics as part of his and Tim Sale's *Superman For All Seasons* (1998) and continued

(inset) *Superman: The Animated Series* offered a fresh take on Lois and Clark, voiced by Dana Delaney and Tim Daly. The series took Lois back to the fast-talking no-nonsense reporter of yesteryear. (top) Lois opens a "difficult" jar in *Superman Adventures* #15. Art by Rick Burchett and Terry Austin. (bottom) Another take on Lois and Clark in *Superman For All Seasons*. Lois even adopts the nickname "Smallville" (from *The Animated Series*) for poor Clark. Art by Tim Sale.

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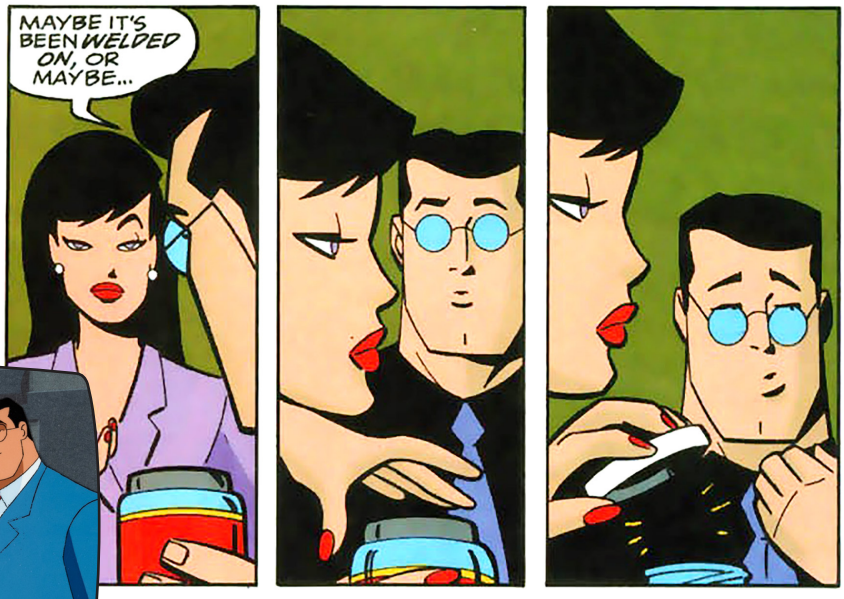

using it after becoming the regular writer of *Superman* with issue #151 (on sale in October 1999).

Loeb and company's run came on the heels of a rejected 1998 pitch by Grant Morrison, Mark Waid, and Mark Millar. In their proposal, Superman and Lois would have been forced to strike a devil's bargain with Mr. Mxyzptlk, who magically changed history so that Lois never knew Clark's secret and never married him. Instead, while their relationship was tested periodically by the whims of writers, Superman and Lois remained loving partners for another decade. With the advent of 2011's "New 52" initiative, the DC Universe started from scratch and superhero marriages vanished across the board.

In the new world order, Lois no longer knew Clark was Superman, but she also no longer seemed to care. The old romantic triangle was gone, and she was dating a non-descript man named Jonathan Carroll. After two decades as a full partner in the Man of Steel's life, she now seemed almost irrelevant at times. Superman's Acquaintance, Lois Lane.

In a nostalgic 2015 company event called *Convergence*, cities from various defunct DC timelines were revealed to have been stolen away by Brainiac to a hidden planet. Among those communities was one that was home to the 1986-2011 version of Superman and Lois Lane, who became the parents of Jonathan Samuel Kent at the end of *Convergence: Superman* #2. Written by Dan Jurgens and drawn by Lee Weeks, that particular miniseries set the stage for the Kent family to take refuge on the New 52 Earth under the radar of its native heroes. Following Jurgens and Weeks' *Superman: Lois and Clark* #1-8 (2015-2016), a complex chain of events began that culminated with the married Clark and Lois becoming the only Superman that reality had ever had. As of this writing, it remains the status quo in the mainstream DC Universe.

Back in 1996's *Wizard* #63, Jurgens acknowledged that marriage was "a substantial change in the characters, and you can only hope it is the right thing. For instance, I thought it was a mistake for Spider-Man to get married. He's supposed to be this young hip superhero, not encumbered with the responsibilities of being a family man. However, I think that Lois and Clark getting married is entirely appropriate, because it is an entirely logical step for the two characters to take."

Comics Buyer's Guide editor Maggie Thompson scoffed at a reader's fear that Clark and Lois would be "mired down in marriage." In *CBG* #1202 (November 29, 1996), she replied, "It seems to me that, as comics have supposedly 'grown up' over the decades, it's logical that at least a *few* characters can demonstrate that intelligent, exciting people can find long-term, strong relationships."

Lois and Clark welcome a new family menber in *Convergence: Superman* #2. Art by Dan Jurgens and Norm Rapmund.

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Characterization had come a long way for Metropolis' power couple, building on the greater freedom that the series' writers had in the Bronze Age. "Under Mort," Cary Bates told *BI*, "there were stricter baselines writers had to follow, so the treatment of relationships (both Lois/Clark and Lois/Superman) were skewed to remain superficial. Once the Silver Age baggage was gone, the Lois/Clark/Superman triangle was more fluid and interesting for writers to explore. We could introduce nuances and subtleties that could help at least approximate recognizable human couple behavior."

Superman's decision to tell all to his true love also fundamentally changed the characters. "As I see it," Bates added, "once Lois knew the secret, the triangle as we knew it ceased to exist. I'd imagine there have been instances since where Lois has had to 'play act' being in the dark in order to help Superman maintain his secret identity around others, but I still miss the classic triangle."

Kurt Busiek, who scripted a *Superman* run featuring the happy couple in 2006-2008, agreed in *BI* #22 (2007). "Superman without the eternal triangle of Clark loving Lois, who loves Superman (Lois seeing the ideal but not recognizing it when it's in a human approachable package in front of her) is weaker than Superman with it. That's not to say it's not strong on its own—it's fun to write and there's plenty to work with—but I think there was even more to work with before."

In the same *BI* interview, Roger Stern contended that "Clark and Lois marrying doesn't close the door on a story, it opens new doors, creates new opportunities. And it allowed Lois to see beyond the dysfunctional family she grew up in, to the possibilities of life as a wife and partner, and to really grow out of the one-note character she was forced into being for so many decades. And Lois is just too smart and interesting to be that limited."

Whatever changes come in the years ahead, readers needn't be any more afraid than a certain girl reporter in 1938. Superman and Lois Lane aren't going anywhere.

***JOHN WELLS** is a comics historian specializing in DC Comics. He is the author of the TwoMorrows books* ***American* Comic Book Chronicles: 1960–1964** *and* **1965–1969**, *and co-author (with Keith Dallas) of the book* **Comic Book Explosion**.

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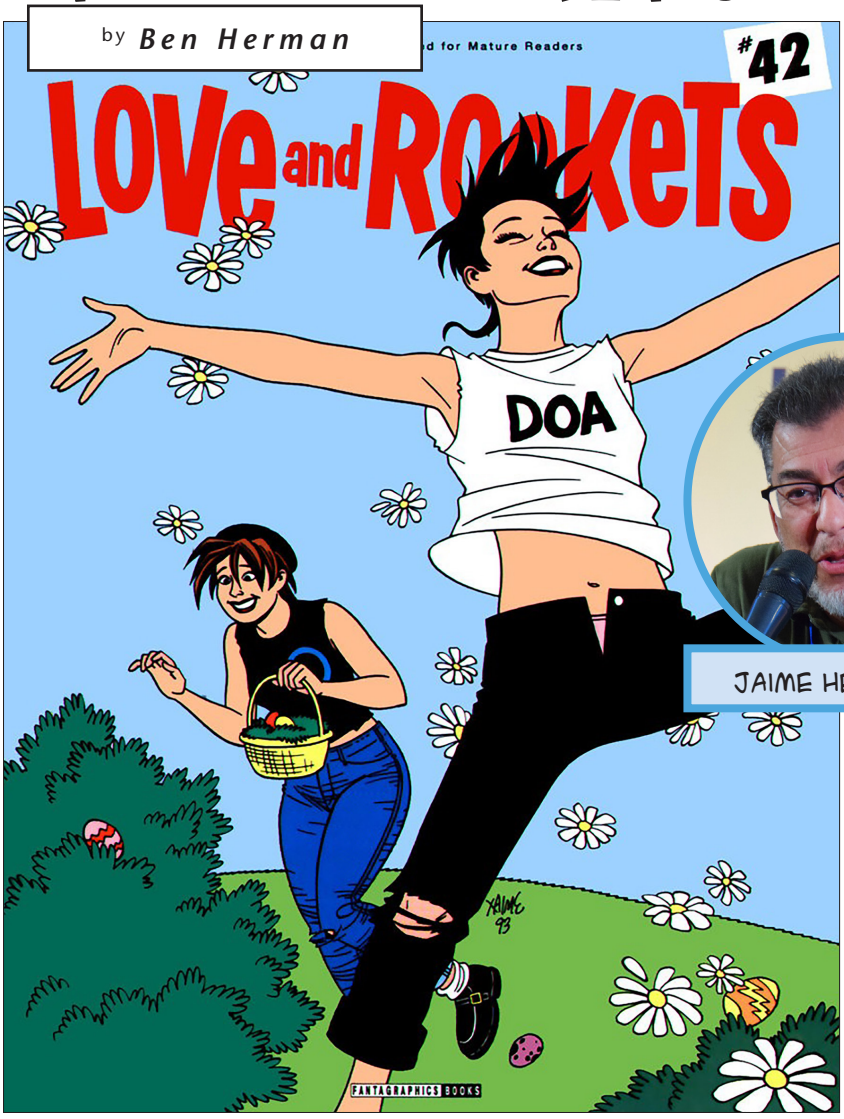
MAGGIE AND HOPEY

ANATOMY OF A FRIENDSHIP

by Ben Herman



JAIME HERNANDEZ

Ferran Cornellà / Wikimedia Commons.

"Truly great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave, and impossible to forget."

— G. Randolf

***One of the longest running American creator-owned comic book series is* Love and Rockets.** The series is written and drawn by two brothers, Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez, with a third brother, Mario, making occasional contributions.

Love and Rockets made its debut in 1981 with a single self-published issue released by the Hernandez Brothers. The series was then picked up by Fantagraphics Publishing, with the first issue of the ongoing *Love and Rockets* being released with a September 1982 cover date.

Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez both have had regular features that have run through *Love and Rockets* over the years. For Gilbert, he has chronicled the stories of a small Central American town named Palomar. For Jaime, his "Locas" stories have looked at the lives and loves of the residents of the Mexican American farming town of Huerta, California, nicknamed "Hoppers," a fictionalized version of the Hernandez brothers' hometown of Oxnard. The two main characters in Jaime's stories, and the first we meet, are teenage girls Margarita Luisa Chascarrillo and Esperanza Leticia Glass, or, as they are better known, Maggie and Hopey.

Where did the characters of Maggie and Hopey come from? Jaime Hernandez explains to *BACK ISSUE* the inspirations for the duo. "Maggie was created when I was in high school and took on different forms over the years until we did *Love and Rockets* so you could say she's based on many different personalities and looks. Hopey came along a little later and was based on the looks and attitude of certain punk girls in late seventies Los Angeles."

Through flashbacks, we discover that Maggie and Hopey were introduced to each other by a mutual friend Isabel "Izzy" Ortiz Reubens. After Maggie's parents separated, Maggie was sent to live with her aunt, wrestling superstar Vicki Glori, in Hoppers. Izzy ended up helping to raise Maggie.

When Maggie was 13 years old, her best friend Letty was killed in a car accident. Soon after this tragedy, Izzy introduced Maggie to Hopey, who was already a hell-raising juvenile delinquent. Izzy knew that the two teenagers had something in common: they both liked punk rock music. It seems likely that Izzy hoped the two teenage girls would benefit from getting to know each other;

Even Maggie and Hopey frolic sometimes.

TM & © Jaime Hernandez.

Maggie would gain a new friend, and Hopey would gain a calming influence in her life. And although Hopey's initial reaction to Maggie was to want to beat her up, soon enough the two teenagers began hanging out, eventually becoming inseparable best friends, as well as occasional lovers. The two teenagers moved into Izzy's house, sleeping on the fold-out sofa in her living room.

From a young age, Maggie showed a remarkable aptitude for repairing machinery, and she trained to be a mechanic. In the early *Love and Rockets* stories, one of her ambitions is to become a "prosolar mechanic." Initially, Hernandez included such fantastical elements in his stories as rocket ships, robots, and dinosaurs, and prosolar mechanics repaired rockets, often commanding high salaries and gaining fame. Maggie goes to work for celebrity prosolar mechanic Rand Race, who she has a crush on. In the "Mechanics" story, Race's team, including Maggie, are sent to the foreign nation of Zhato to try to fix a rocket ship that crashed in the jungles. There Maggie meets her aunt Vicki's wrestling rival, the globe-trotting Rena Titañon aka "La Toña" and has a number of misadventures, all of which she relates to Hopey in a series of letters.

Maggie's initial role in Hernandez's *Love and Rockets* stories was as the main protagonist, having exciting adventures and traveling the world, whereas Hopey is a supporting character, remaining in Hoppers, reading Maggie's letters. Did Hopey's role and importance develop over time, or did Hernandez always know that down the line she would have a larger presence in the stories? As Hernandez explains, "I didn't want Hopey to be part of Maggie's space mechanic world. I wanted her to be in Maggie's real Hoppers world. Hopey seemed to work better there so her character grew because I wanted Maggie's home life to become the main setting for stories."

An early appearance of Maggie and Hopey, along with their friend, Daffy. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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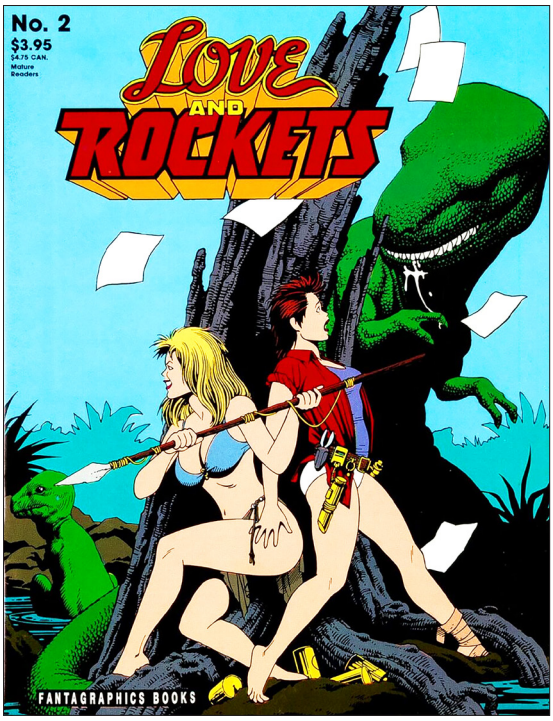
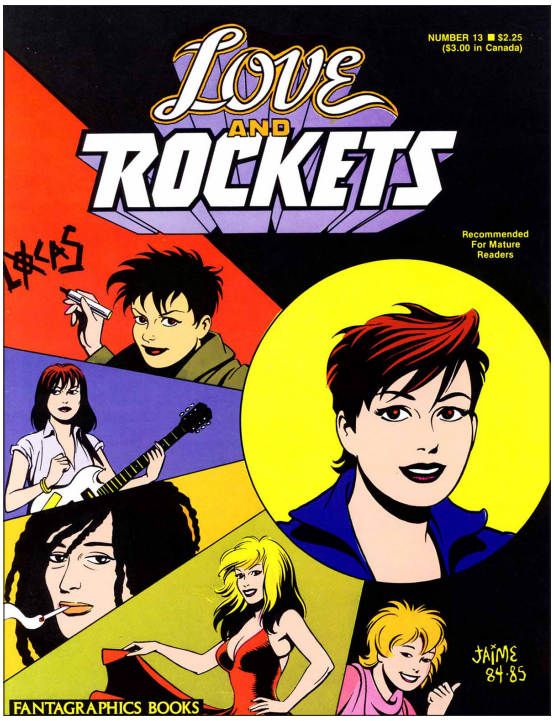




(top left) The early fantasy elements in Jaime's stories are on full display on this cover featuring Maggie and Penny Century. (top right) The major "Locas" characters on the cover of *Love and Rockets* #13. (bottom) Stunning art from "100 Rooms". Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

TM & © Jaime Hernandez.

In the story "100 Rooms," following Maggie's return to Hoppers, she, Hopey, and Izzy are invited by their friend, the gorgeous Penny Century, to stay in the West Coast mansion of eccentric billionaire H.R. Costigan, with whom Penny is having an affair. There, Maggie discovers a man named Casey hiding out, who is seeking to meet Costigan. Maggie and Casey have a brief affair. Finding out about this, Hopey becomes jealous. Afterwards, during a lavish party that Maggie and Hopey attend, the two teenagers get into a fight. Casey is forcibly ejected from the mansion by Costigan's bodyguard. The next day, sneaking back in, Casey explains to Maggie that he's leaving the country, and he asks her to join him. Maggie responds by telling him:

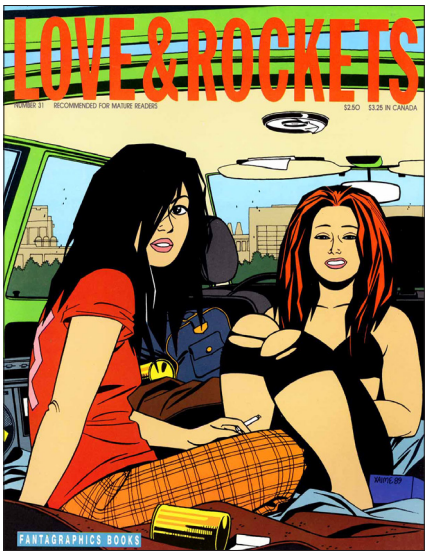
"Maybe I could run away with you five years from now, but not right now… Right now, there's no one I'd rather spend my life with than my friend Hopey. I wish she was here this very minute. But, I'm afraid I may have blown that sky high. Now, I don't know if she'll ever come back. I don't… know…"

Casey kisses Maggie goodbye and leaves. And then Hopey appears, revealing that she heard everything that Maggie said, and the two friends make up.

Soon afterwards, in the story "Las Mujeres Perdidas" ("The Lost Women" in English), Maggie accompanies Rand Race overseas on another assignment, this time to the politically unstable island of Chepan, where she once again encounters Rena Titañon. Revolutionaries are blowing up buildings to protest the dictatorial rule of the eccentric and cruel Dr. Beaky. Maggie and Rena are caught in one of the explosions and presumed dead. The news of their apparent demises reaches the inhabitants of Hoppers, and Hopey is understandably devastated.

It turns out, though, that Maggie and Rena escaped through a tunnel underneath the warehouse. After several days of wandering through the sewer systems and deserts of Chepan, the two women finally reach civilization. Following a short stay in the hospital, Maggie returns to Hoppers.

Later on, Maggie and Hopey have another argument. Going to Izzy to discuss this, Maggie explains that she's



concerned that "Hopey's gone really Loca lately." Izzy then reveals what's been on Hopey's mind:

"You know, when we all heard on the news that you were killed in Chepan… that story really kicked our asses, but good! All except Hopey. She took it real well. She never cried or lost her cool. She felt life should go on, even without you. But, still it scared her. She got a bad case of loneliness, emptiness, and worst of all… responsibility. You know, I think for the first time in Hopita's life, she thought about the next day…"

Shortly after this exchange, though, Izzy is evicted from her house. She quickly finds a new home but having grown tired of having Maggie and Hopey crashing with her, she tells the two girls that they need to find a new place to live. Maggie and Hopey initially move in with Hopey's ex-girlfriend Terry Downe, but soon after Maggie's aunt Vicki, having just lost her world wrestling title, calls her niece up and insists that Maggie move back in with her. And, so, Maggie and Hopey are separated for the first time in years.

While Maggie is living with Vicky, Hopey's punk rock band goes on tour, further putting distance between the two women. Ray Dominguez, an artist who grew up in Hoppers and who moved to the East Coast after high school, returns to the area for the first time in three years. Maggie previously had a crush on Ray, and there is an instant attraction between the two. They soon enter into a relationship.

Maggie's aunt Vicky strongarms her into working with her on the wrestling circuit, although eventually Vicky fires Maggie. Rather than returning to Hoppers, Maggie continues to travel with Vicky's wrestling rival Pepper Martinez on the East Coast, hoping to be able to locate Hopey, a quest that is ultimately unsuccessful. Maggie returns to Hoppers and rekindles her relationship with Ray.

What prompted the introduction of Ray Dominguez? "Ray was invented because I wanted a male Maggie," Hernandez reveals. "One more main character to add to the 'Locas' circus. The cool thing was that they were both invented so I could put my own thoughts into them but eventually they started to write themselves and in many ways are not me at all."

Time passes. Maggie and Ray have been living together for two years when Penny Century, now married to H.R. Costigan, returns. Penny, believing that Maggie and Hopey are meant to be together, reveals to Maggie where Hopey is now living. Traveling east with Ray, Maggie is reunited with Hopey in the town of Badgeport,

(top left) Jaime draws Maggie. (top right) Hopey and Maggie in their hippy phase. (bottom) The Locas enjoy a night out. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

TM & © Jaime Hernandez.

and the two women soon once again pick up their tempestuous friendship. Ray returns to Hoppers alone, while Maggie and Hopey remain together in Badgeport. Ray and Maggie stay in touch, but Ray cannot help but feel that their relationship has come to an end. He eventually begins dating Maggie's friend Danita Lincoln, although soon after Danita loses her job and moves back in with her mother, ending that relationship, as well.

Still on the East Coast, Maggie and Hopey have another breakup after Maggie accuses Hopey of downplaying the behavior of some racists they meet at a hip fashion party. Hopey's mother is Hispanic, but her father is of Scottish ancestry, and Maggie angrily tells her "Just 'cause you can turn off your 'ethnic' half whenever it's Goddamn convenient!" With that Maggie angrily storms off.

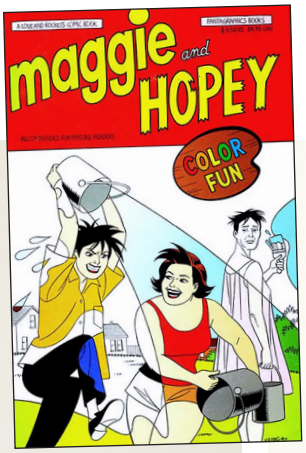
Not wanting to return to California, Hopey crashes with several different women, having various affairs. Maggie, finding herself broke, accepts an offer to sleep with a man for money, and buys a bus ticket for California, although she ends up only making it as far as Texas. There, Maggie is reunited with her aunt Vicky, who has opened a camp to train female wrestlers. Maggie meets Gina, a lesbian who has a crush on Maggie's cousin, fellow wrestler-in-training Xochitl. Maggie advises Gina, "You know, some say you should never fall in love with your best friend." There's no doubt that Maggie is speaking from experience here.

Since Maggie's father lives in the area, she decides to stay, sharing an apartment with her younger sister Esther. Hopey eventually makes it back to Hoppers, where word reaches her that Maggie is now in Texas. Wanting to see Maggie again, Hopey goes on tour with her new band, making sure they travel to Texas. Hopey finally catches up to Maggie just as the latter woman is in the middle of an altercation that gets her arrested. Rushing forward, Hopey dumps a garbage can over the head of the person Maggie was fighting with, ensuring that she also gets arrested. And so, as *Love and Rockets* volume one comes to its conclusion with issue #50 (May 1996) the two lovers, after several years apart, are happily reunited in the back of a police car.

So, why did Hernandez keep Maggie and Hopey apart for so long? "I don't remember," he confesses. "It just unconsciously turned out that way."

The next time we saw Maggie and Hopey together was in the *Maggie and Hopey Color Special* published by Fantagraphics in May 1997, which saw the two of them now back in California. They were now in an open relationship, and the *Color Special* saw a mischievous Hopey futilely pursuing her brother Joey's fiancée Janet Polo.

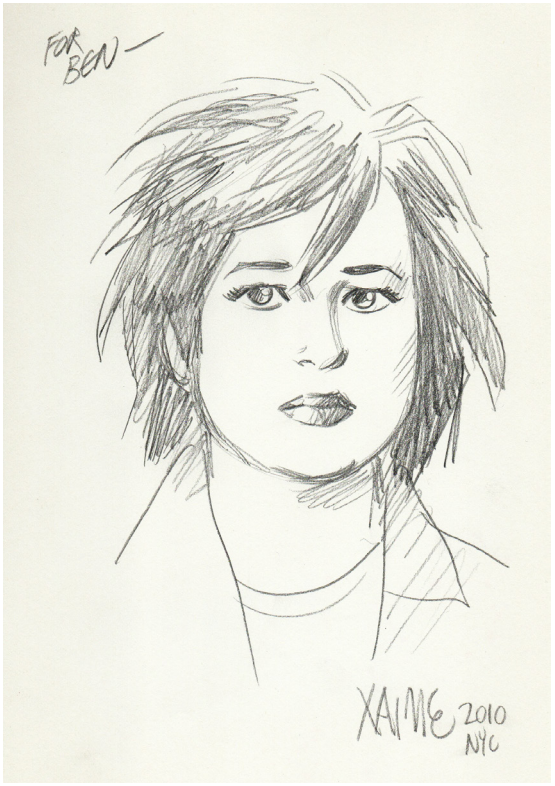
Love and Rockets was revived as a quarterly series by Fantagraphics in 2001. *Love and Rockets* volume two ran for 20 issues between Spring 2001 and Summer 2007.



(left) Maggie and Hopey hit the Big Apple on this *Village Voice* cover. (right) The original art for a Maggie and Hopey limited edition print. Original art scans courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (inset) Maggie and Hopey became popular enough that they got their own color special.

TM & © Jaime Hernandez.

WE CAN PULL THIS OFF ANYWHERE ELSE, BUT NOT IN A POLICE STATION!
OH, JUST PRETEND YOU'RE BLIND, OR...
G-GO AHEAD, LITTLE HOPEY. DADDY WILL STAND RIGHT HERE WHILE YOU USE THE POTTY...
?!?
OK, PERVERT. OUTSIDE. NOW.
I'M GOING. HOPEY? YOU COMING?
HO... HOPEY! HO...
SHE SAID OUTSIDE, FAT BOY!
YOU GOT HIM, DEE?
AAAAH, YOU'RE A HIPPIE!
HI, TEXAS. YOU SEEN HOPEY AROUND?
THERE IS NO MORE TEXAS. THERE IS ONLY THE TURDMAN OF ALAKAZAM...
RICO
YOOHOO, RAY! WOULD YOU COME OUT HERE FOR A MOMENT, PLEASE?
13



(opposite page) Hopey and Maggie unexpectedly meet in a police station. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com). (above) A convention sketch of Maggie. Courtesy of the author.

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Maggie and Hopey are now in their mid-30s. The two of them, while still friends, are no longer romantically involved. After a short, disastrous marriage, Maggie is now single and working as an apartment manager in San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles. Hopey is living in LA with a woman named Rosie, but they split up after the insecure Rosie tires of Hopey's wandering eye. Maggie has a brief fling with the bombshell beauty trouble magnet Vivian "Frogmouth" Solis. Ray Dominguez encounters Maggie for the first time in over a decade and a half and realizes he still has feelings for her. And Hopey tells Maggie "I love you" for the very first time.

After *Love and Rockets* volume two ended, the series re-started as *Love and Rockets: New Stories*, which came out annually. *New Stories* ran for eight issues between 2008 and 2016. In "The Love Bunglers" storyline in *New Stories* #3 and #4 (July 2010 & July 2011), Maggie and Ray are tentatively dating again, but Maggie is uncertain if she wants to enter into another relationship with him. However, when Maggie's mentally disturbed brother Calvin hits Ray over the head with a brick, causing him brain damage, Maggie helps nurse Ray back to health, and the two fall in love again. Maggie leaves her apartment management job and opens her own garage with help from Hopey, who loans her the money to get the business started.

Several years later, in *New Stories* #7 and #8 (July 2015 & Feb. 2016), Maggie and Hopey are now in their mid-40s. Maggie and Ray are still together. Hopey is married to a woman named Sadaf, and the two of them have a child together.

What led to Maggie and Hopey eventually splitting up and going into different long-term relationships? "Another unconscious move," Hernandez admits. "Like I said before, these characters mostly write themselves and I try to write them as humanly possible."

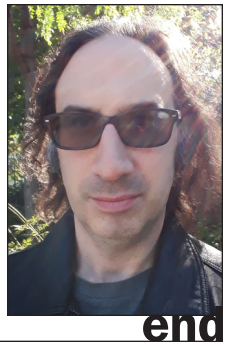
Maggie and Hopey reunite to return to Hoppers for a reunion of their old gang, and we see that even though they are no longer lovers, they are still the best of friends, inseparable, and probably always will be. To the end, they will always be true friends.

Special thanks to Jaime Hernandez for taking the time to assist with the writing of this article.

***BEN HERMAN lives in Queens, NYC. He shares a one-bedroom apartment with his girlfriend, two cats, a turtle, and too many comic books. He has also been published in* Alter Ego.**

Maggie and Hopey are featured on the cover of this collection. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (www.ha.com).

TM & © Jaime Hernandez.



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TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

Debra Whitman: SPIDER-MAN'S NEARLY FORGOTTEN LOST LOVE

by Joseph Norton

The romantic life of Peter Parker, the Amazing Spider Man, has always been an integral part of his mythos. Peter's woes with women are woven into his stories and largely defined by two characters, Gwen Stacey and Mary Jane Watson. Both of those ladies have a deep connection to Peter and have become household names, whether as a costumed hero in their own right or Peter's wife. Moving beyond the big two loves of his life, there certainly has been a long list of ladies that have caught Peter's eye and attention; Betty Brant and Felicia Hardy (The Black Cat) are often mentioned next. There are more, of course, too many to do justice to in this article, but there is no character in Spider-Man history as poorly treated and casually dismissed by Peter (and arguably Marvel editorial) than Debra Whitman.

A love interest who was a consistent supporting character in all the Spider-Man titles for the better part of two years, most of Debra's appearances came during the well-regarded Bill Mantlo run in *Peter Parker The Spectacular Spider Man*. Debra was also present for the kick off of the critically acclaimed and character defining Roger Stern run in *Amazing Spider Man*.

Stay tuned for the sad tale of Debra Whitman, the girl who discovered Peter's secret identity and got a lot more than she bargained for before being shuffled off abruptly into Spider-Man's history.

A much larger part of modern comics than maybe most of the readers are familiar with is the place romance comics play in their origin. The major creators of the medium we love, including Joe Simon, Stan Lee, and Jack Kirby most notably, were the driving force behind titles like DC's *Heart Throbs* and *Young Love*, Charlton's *Romantic Stories* and *Teen Confessions*, and Marvel's *Patsy Walker* and *Millie the Model*. These titles were displayed on the newsstands side by side with the superheroes we all know.

Certainly, romance comics sales had diminished into the Bronze Age before completely disappearing from shelves (The last issue of *Millie* was cover dated December 1973, well into this magazine's zone of interest), but romance and that specific style

The Debra Whitman story comes to a head in *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man* #74. Art by Bob Hall and Al Milgrom. (inset) Romance by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

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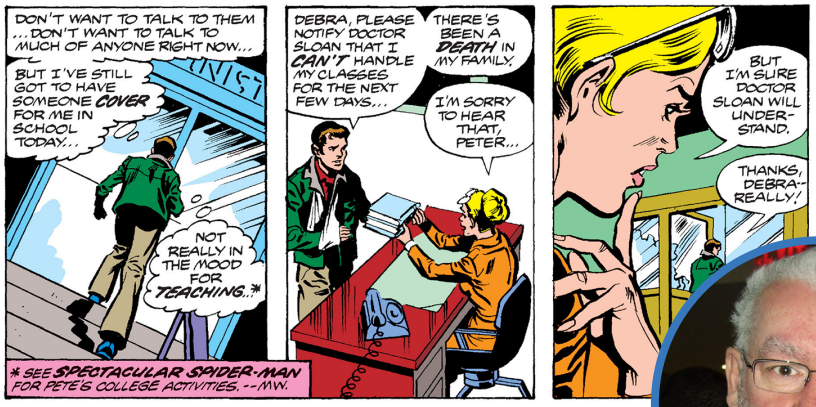

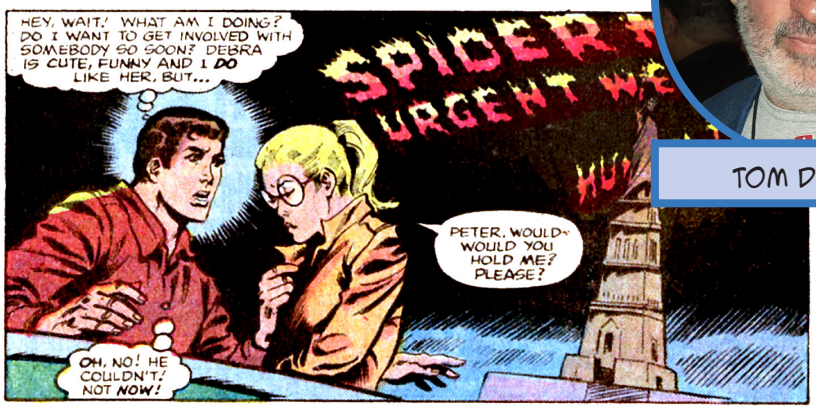

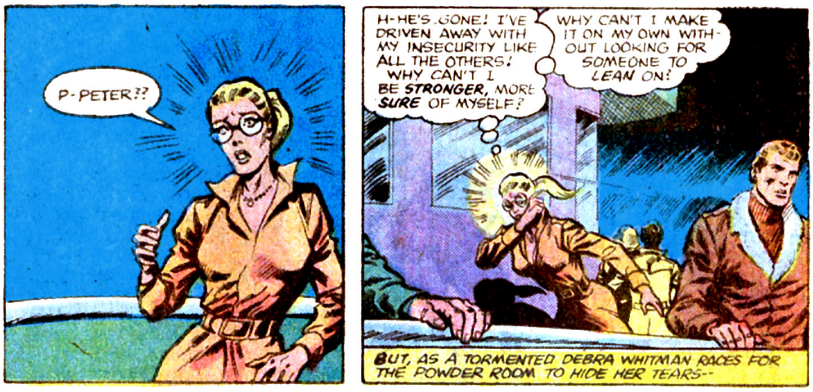

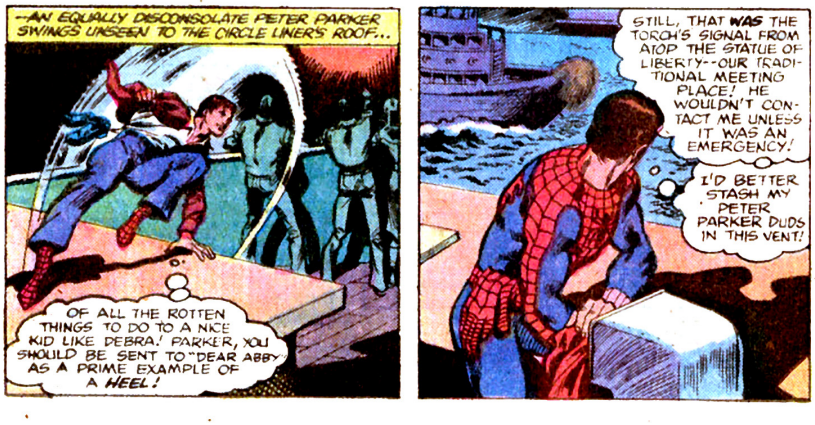

An inauspicious debut for Debra Whitman in *Amazing Spider-Man* #196. Art by Al Milgrom, Frank Giacoia, and Jim Mooney. (bottom) Peter and Debra's romance does not begin well in *Pater Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man* #42. Art by Mike Zeck and Jim Mooney.

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TOM DEFALCO

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of storytelling is noticeably present in the DNA of the superhero stories we grew up loving. You can't read the first years of the *Fantastic Four* and not see the soap operatics of Namor and Sue. Look at *The Avengers* and watch Hawkeye and Black Widow's tango. Former Marvel Editor in Chief Tom DeFalco reveals to *BACK ISSUE,* "Stan Lee's greatest contribution to the medium was the introduction of soap opera into the superhero comics." Perhaps a bit of an understatement, but his point is unquestionable.

The *Amazing Spider-Man* title was a fine example of the times. These stories always had their fill of soap opera elements, most noticeably Peter's driving self-flagellation over Uncle Ben's death always played as inspirational but there is no denying the melodramatic overtones that seeped into every panel because of it. Peter's approach to women always played more *General Hospital* than high school love. Peter's ups and downs never stopped all through the Silver Age. Gwen Stacey, Harry Osborne, Mary Jane Watson, and their drama would have played as well in *Young Romance* as it did in Stan Lee's and Steve Ditko's seminal run of the first 38 issues of *Amazing Spider-Man* and beyond. Future writers took their cues from those issues and did not stop there as Spider Man comics rolled into the Bronze Age with drug use and Aunt May's marriage to Doctor Octopus. But no character's portrayal personified the soap opera tendencies of comics, and specifically Spider-Man titles, than Debra Whitman.

Debra first appearance was in *Amazing Spider-Man* #196 (Sept. 1979) written towards the end of Marv Wolfman's impressive time on the title. While Wolman's more famous comics work was soon to follow at DC with *New Teen Titans*, his signature Spider-Man creation (along with artists Keith Pollard and Dave Cockrum) the Black Cat, was to become a major love interest. In fact, Debra was only a minor character at her introduction as the secretary to Doctor Morris Sloan, the Dean of the Bio-Physics department. Sloan was Peter's boss during his time as a Graduate Assistant at Empire State University. When asked about Debra Whitman, Wolfman was honest and told *BI* that she was not a memorable character.

Obviously, Wolfman had higher hopes for Black Cat's future as a possible love interest than Debra's, but that was to come later. At first, Debra was just a face at a desk, occasionally playing a damsel in distress, but mostly someone for Peter to talk to while doing his ESU work. Debra was just another supporting character as Peter's role at ESU created new friendly faces and avenues of adventure for Spider-Man. It was not until Marvel's Bronze Age master writer Bill Mantlo took over *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider Man* that Debra began moving into a bigger role. DeFalco tells *BI* "She was introduced as someone who had a crush on Peter Parker, but a fear of Spider-Man." Certainly a situation ripe for melodrama.

Debra and Peter's relationship played out in early appearances as many real-life friendships do. Idle banter turns into interest which turns into

affection. Except Peter never really felt much affection towards Debra, as the reader would soon see. In *PPTSS* #42 (May 1980), only her third appearance, the reader was given some insight into Peter's thoughts (or lack of) toward Debra. Licking his wounds from a recent break-up with Mary Jane, Peter was daydreaming when Debra approached and started a conversation. Before the talk went too much further, Peter had to quickly ditch her after an appearance of Electro masquerading as the Human Torch. That sighting led Spider Man into a showdown with the Frightful Four that finished in *Fantastic Four* #218 (May 1980).

This turn of events was the template for Debra over her time in Peter Parker's life. Debra is tossed aside as Peter gets swept up into bigger events. Mantlo treated us to a very *Young Romance*-esque thought balloon from Debra who, in her surprise at Peter's sudden absence thinks, "He's gone. I've driven him away with my insecurity. Like all the others!" Add in artists Mike Zeck and Jim Mooney's pencils depicting her emotional distress, and the reader gets a classic Marvel Spider-Man scene, the first taste of what Debra had in store the rest of her time in Peter's life.

Writer Roger Stern followed up with more of the Peter and Debra whirlwind. In the very next issue *PPTSS* #43 (Jun. 1980), Peter absent-mindedly asked Debra to dinner as a thank you for something she did. While Peter quickly moves on, Debra thinks, "I think I like that man…very much!" Seasoned Spider-Man readers can see what's coming. This type of Peter/Debra interaction was repeated fairly often between *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider Man*, and *Marvel Team-Up* over the next two years, in stories written by several creators. Debra was just the new supporting player in Peter's cast of characters, a foil to be disappointed by Peter time and time again. Except there would be a cost for that turmoil that Debra was soon to pay.

More broken dates with Debra started to take their toll. Peter stranded Debra in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual*#14 (Oct. 1980) to help Doctor Strange face Dormammu and Doctor Doom. In *Amazing Spider-Man* #210 (Oct. 1980), he abandoned Debra to fight Mesmero. In *PPTSS* #47 (Oct. 1980), Peter ran off to investigate a crime possibly committed by the Prowler. This was to go on and on in their relationship.

But then writer Denny O'Neil in *ASM* #213 (Jan. 1981) gave the relationship some hope by having them spend a day together before Peter let Debra down easy saying he did not want to move any faster. Soon after, Spider-Man started another showdown with the Frightful Four's Wizard before

(left) An invitation to dinner. What could go wrong? Art by Mike Zeck and Steve Mitchell. (right) Debra didn't appear on many covers, but this one by Frank Miller and Joe Rubinstein is a beauty.

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Inside *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man* #51, Debra holds her own against Mysterio. Art by Marie Severin and Jim Mooney. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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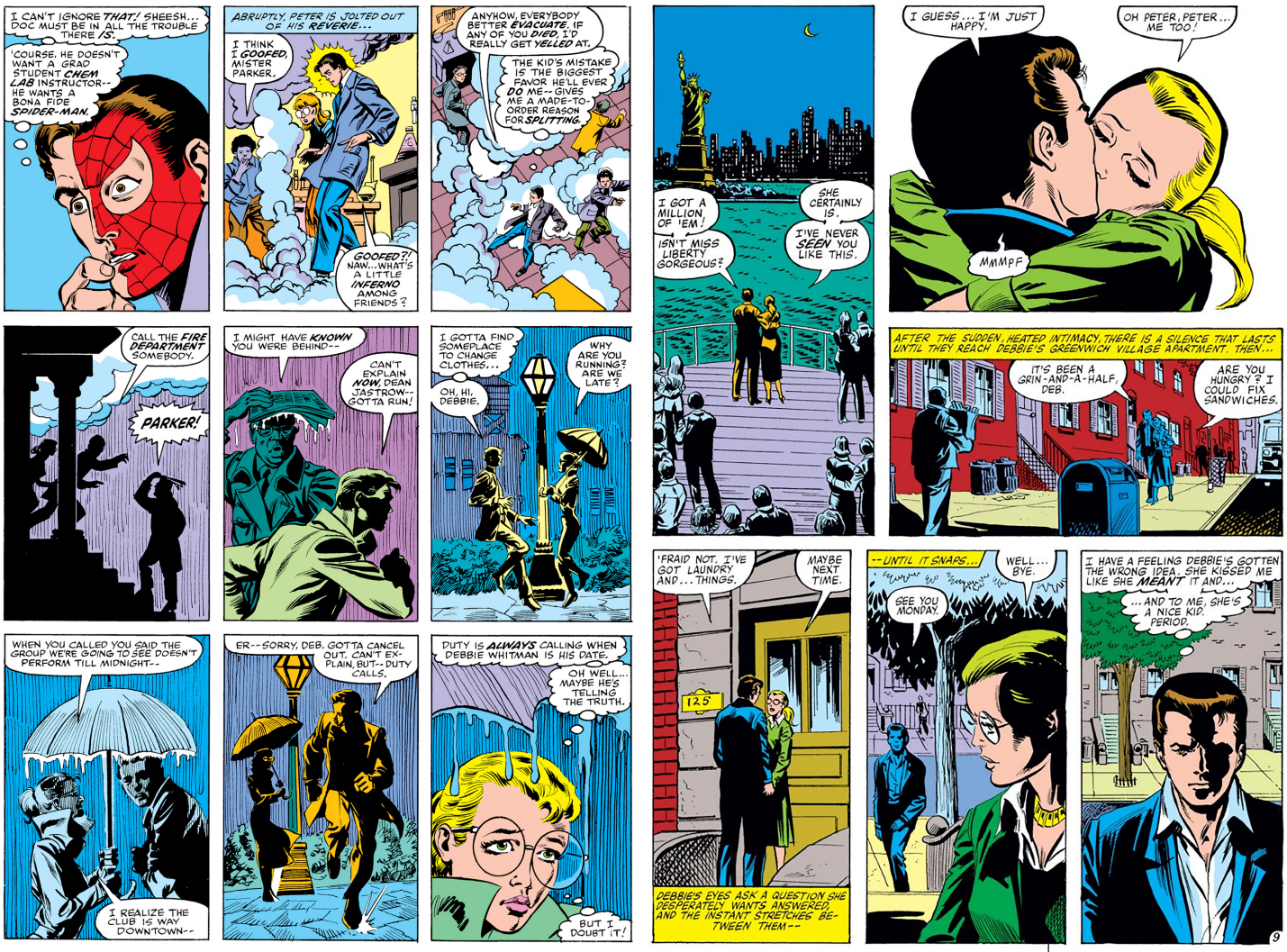

being able to explain things fully to Debra in a follow up phone call. Peter's actions towards Debra never appeared hurtful, but the reader could see how this back and forth was affecting Debra. With every longing thought balloon, it was clear that she liked Peter more than he was aware of, or seemingly capable of, returning. The cracks in Debra's psyche were growing.

The soap opera DNA runs strong just a few issues later in O'Neil's *Amazing Spider-Man* #216 (May 1981). O'Neil was no stranger to a bombastic style of storytelling in comics as his Green Lantern/Green Arrow stories at DC Comics were lauded for more than their super-heroes, touching on themes like drug use instead of just focusing on costumed fighting. The reader sees a beaten, stressed out, and exhausted Peter start to reconsider taking things to another level with Debra, despite his recent rebuff of her. The reader was treated to a thought balloon of Peter realizing, "There might be room in my life for another woman, for Debbie." This was accompanied by Marvel's house-style floating heads of Gwen, Mary Jane, and Debra, if Peter's internal thoughts were not enough to sell the scene. Peter stopped by Debra's apartment, but instead he is met by a new face, Biff Rifkin, Debra's friend. (O'Neil certainly dipped into the soapy end of potential names available for Biff.) In typical Peter Parker fashion, he swings off disappointed and contemplates his love life or lack of it. Later in *PTPSS* #60 (Nov. 1981) Stern had Biff and Peter share a couch watching the news as Debbie contemplates her two suitors, summing up her dilemma with an all-time character defining analysis of our web slinging hero, "Peter is much nicer but I never know when he will up and leave." Even taking into consideration the dense storytelling style of the Bronze Age, Stern was leaning heavily into the romance comics side of the medium with these panels. The Peter/Debra yo-yo continued on for the time being. But Rifkin later revealed a bigger piece of the Debra Whitman drama and headed readers further into daytime drama territory.

A creative change on both Spider-Man titles accelerated Debra Whitman's story. Stern's time at *PPTSS* was a fan-favorite, and he was switched over to replace O'Neil on the flagship *Amazing Spider Man* title. His run on *Amazing* would lead to the Hobgoblin saga and unforgettable tales like "Nothing Can Stop the Juggernaut." At the same time, Mantlo was assigned *Spectacular Spider-Man* and would eventually give the reader of the B-title in Spider-Man's world some truly A-level work, introducing Cloak and Dagger, the gang war between the Owl and Doctor Octopus, and fleshing out the romance of Spider Man and Black Cat. But

(left) Another in a long line of broken dates. This one from *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #14. Art by Frank Miller and Tom Palmer. (right) Things seem to be going Debra's way. If only she could read Peter's thoughts. From *Amazing Spider-Man* #213. Art by John Romita Jr. and Jim Mooney.

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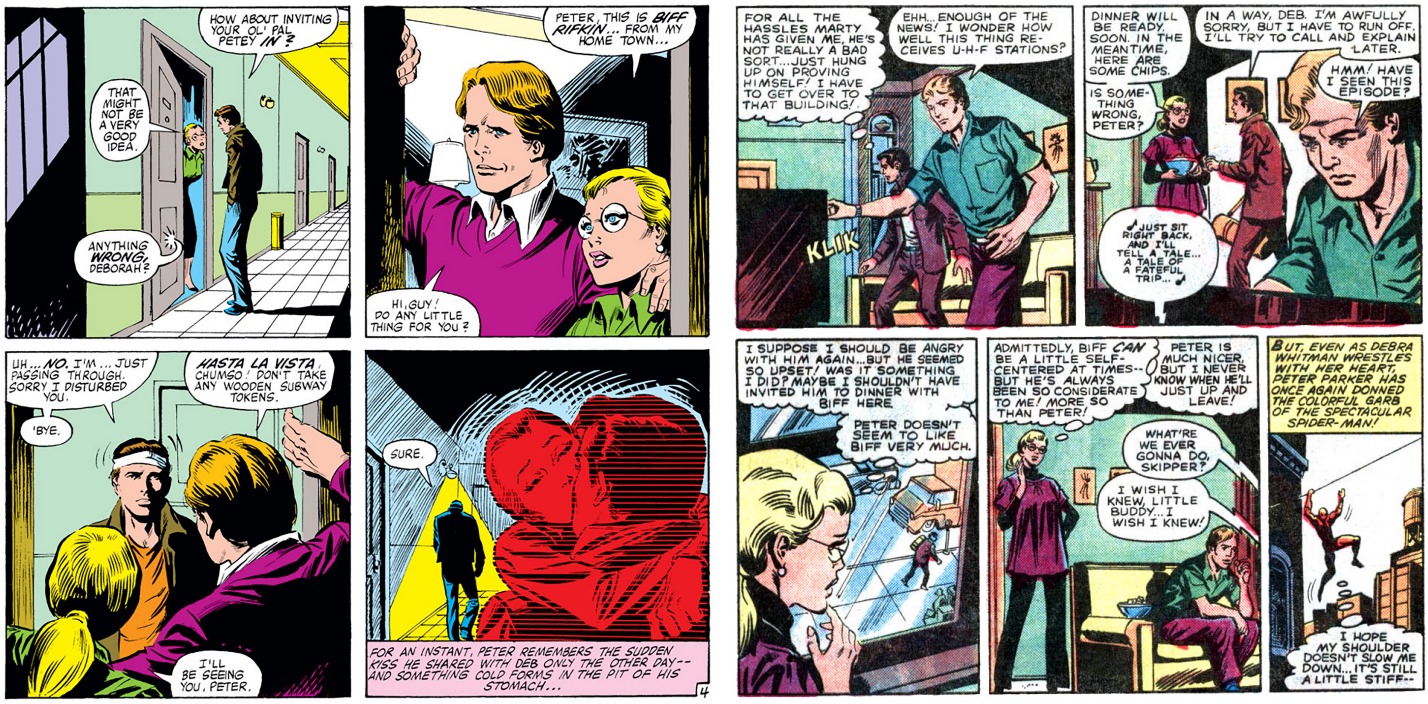

(top left) Peter meets his rival for Debra, Biff Rifkin. From *Amazing Spider-Man* #216. Art by John Romita Jr. and Jim Mooney. (top right) Debra ponders the merits of her two suitors. Art by Ed Hannigan and Jim Mooney. (bottom) Debra Whitman reveals to her therapist that she believes that Peter Parker is Spider-Man. From *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man* #72. Art by Ed Hannigan, Al Milgrom, and Rick Magyar. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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first, the loose end of Debra Whitman needed to be dealt with. DeFalco, the editor of the Spider-Man titles at this time, discusses Mantlo's time on *Spectacular* with *BACK ISSUE*, "If memory serves—he was the one who originally proposed writing her out of the series."

Whitman had already been portrayed by Stern, Mantlo, and O'Neil as less than emotionally stable and Peter's own constant personal and professional turmoil only contributed to her frame of mind. Mantlo turned up the heat a little when he began to have Debra suspect Peter was Spider-Man. By now, Debra had witnessed Peter smash some furniture, knock Biff out in a very un-Peter like tantrum, and then watched as Spider-Man swung off a roof where Peter had just visited. In *PTPSS* #72 (Nov. 1982), we see Debra at an office revealing her suspicions to psychiatrist Dr. Barry Kulkin who in the next issue confronts Peter in a great comics splash page with "Peter Parker you are the Spectacular Spider-Man!" before revealing his plan to help Debra.

Kulkin asks Peter to dress up as Spider-Man as Debra was "schizophrenic" and hoped that the confrontation would snap Debra out of her delusions. Peter declined at first, not out of any concern for Debra, but as he gamed it out "something could go wrong and I might really

give away my secret identity!" Peter relented and, in a surprisingly touching cliffhanger, called Kulkin back, which led to *PPTSS* #74 (Jan. 1982) "Fantasia," the culmination of the Debra Whitman story.

Kicking off with a jarring Bob Hall/Al Milgrom cover of several tiny Spider-Mans crawling over a startled Debra, the issue leads Peter to Biff Rifkin, who tells his part of the story. Debra had an abusive husband in "the midwest" whom she was still married to. She came to Empire State University after being released from the hospital, but never really got healthier or dealt with the trauma. Biff admitted his strong feelings for Debra, but he was afraid she was repeating the same cycle of failing to see people for who they are with her fixation on Peter.

After some soul searching, Peter realized what had to be done. That night, dressed as Spider-Man, he confronted Debra in her bedroom and removed his mask, admitting the truth. That "shock" of Peter's admission seemed to snap Debra out of her delusion and she thanked him for being "the best friend I've ever had!" before leaving town. Mantlo's abrupt and absurd conclusion felt rushed and confusing at the time to the contemporary reader and 44 years later, it reads insensitive or worse, casting Peter in a selfish and uncomplimentary light. "Bill's method must have made sense to me at the time, but—in hindsight—it was rather a cruel end to the character. Knowing Bill, he based the story's mental shock therapy on some kind of therapy that existed in the late '70s/early '80s—a therapy that would be considered crackpot today," DeFalco admits.

Debra Whitman was quickly forgotten by Peter in the very same issue as he was reunited with the Black Cat and the Owl/Octopus war continued on. Years later, the soap opera elements of Peter's world would get more intense with his marriage to Mary Jane, the identity of the Hobgoblin, and Gwen Stacey's forgotten children to say the least. As DeFalco said, soap opera elements were always there, they just seemed more amplified in Peter's world.

There was an interesting and well thought out update on Debra Whitman decades later in writer Peter David's title, *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man* #14 (Jan. 2007). Set after Marvel's "Civil War" event, which led to Peter revealing his identity to the world, David cleverly re-visited Debra Whitman by having her appear in Manhattan on a book tour for her Peter Parker tell all, "Two Faced." Apparently, Whitman was none

(left) Debra's doctor makes a surprise appearance at Peter's apartment. Art by Al Milgrom and Jim Mooney.

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(right) Spider-Man reveals his secret identity to Debra Whitman in *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man* #74. Art by Bob Hall and Jim Mooney. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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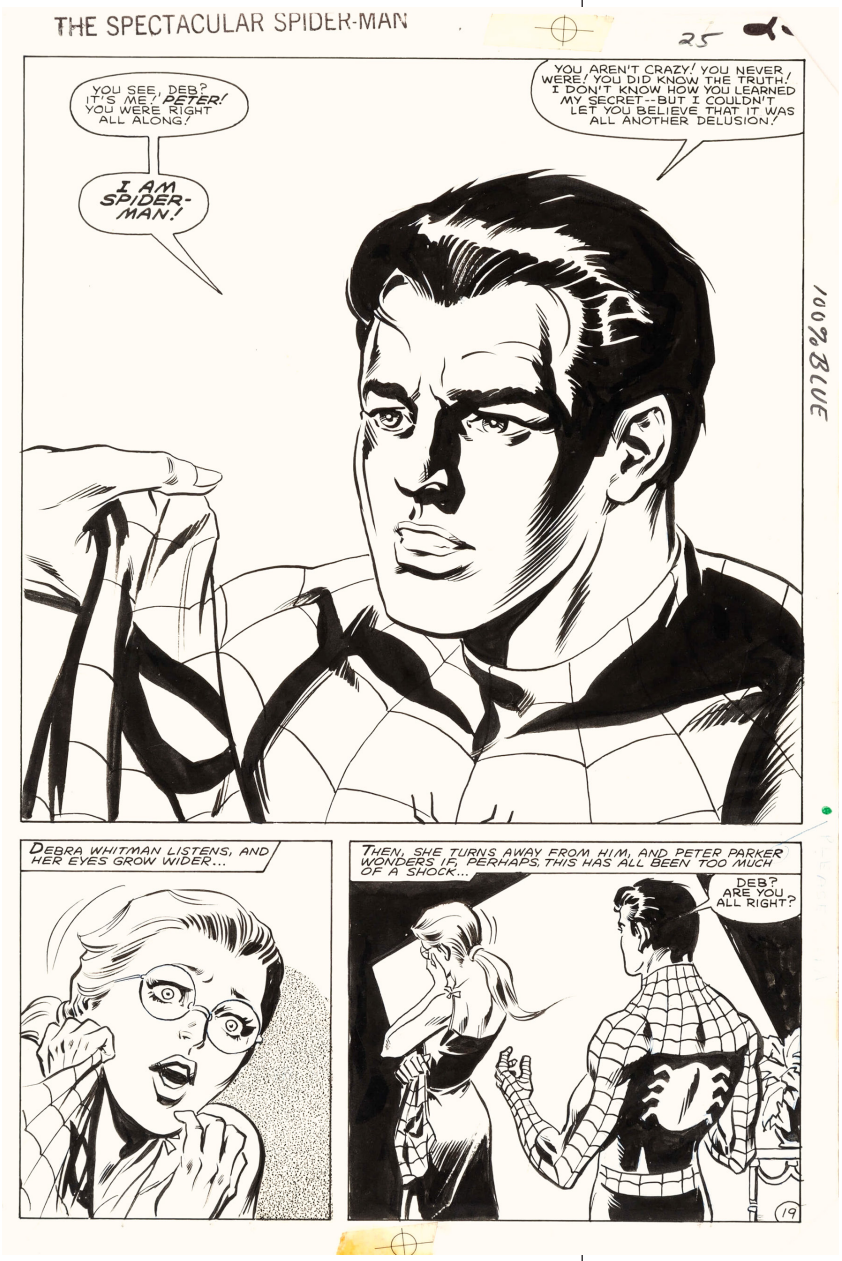

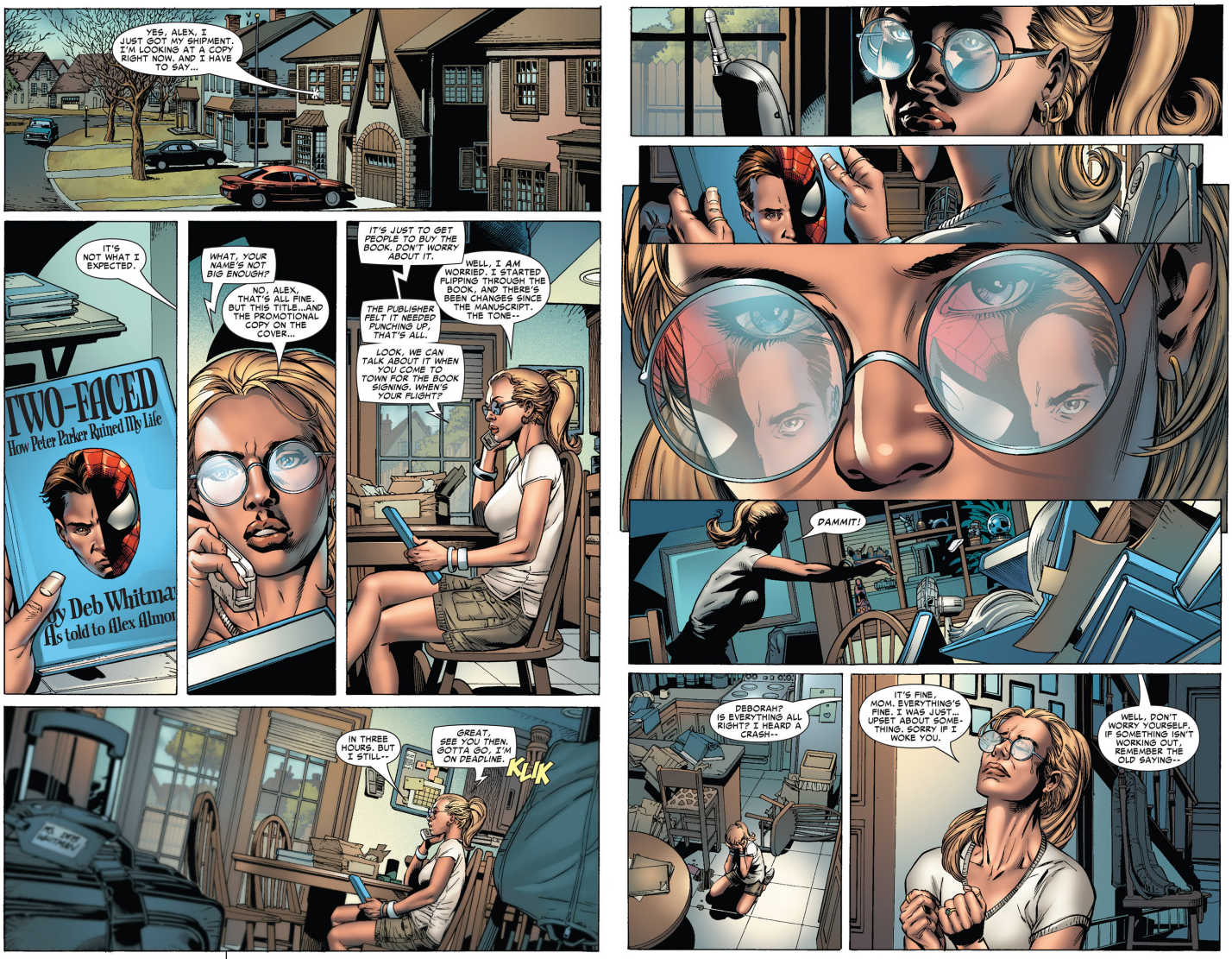

Debra makes a return appearance, with a tell-all book, in *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man* #14. Art by Scott Eaton and John Dell.

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too happy to be fooled by Peter back then and had a lot to say about it. But even that took a soap opera turn of events with another one of Pete's former love interests, Betty Brant, now a newspaper reporter, uncovering that Debra had been targeted by Daily Bugle publisher J. Jonah Jameson.

J.J.J. had Debra agree to co-author the book that he had created, in an attempt to further destroy Spider-Man's reputation. In typical Debra fashion, she tearily admitted to Betty the deception, the fact that she did it to earn money to cover her mother's medical bills, and helped set the story straight. Leave it to the tangled web of Peter's world to have one of his ex-girlfriends help out another, all while protecting Peter. While not truly addressing the circumstances of the break-up, it served as a nice coda to the unfortunate Debra Whitman story by giving her a more dignified exit.

Peter Parker was never meant to have an easy life. It was built into Spider-Man for him to suffer and have doubts. But when paired with an equally flawed supporting character, like Debra Whitman, the ride could get messy. A throw away character briefly developed into a possible love interest for Peter, Debra unfortunately was treated worse than just a plot device, often repeating herself in a brief panel or two of inner monologue which served to further diminish her agency, calling to mind unflattering tropes and tired cliches. Nobody reads Spider-Man to see who he brought to a dinner date, but even in a title with a long history of sub plots and a deep cast of characters, Debra Whitman was handled poorly by several good writers. Tom DeFalco states, "Debra Whitman was one of the many who failed to gain any real momentum with the readers or the writers of Spider-Man. We failed to develop her as a character and never gave her much of a personality."

Peter Parker's love life will always be fair game to writers, but as other depictions of partners have proven, those romantic interests did not have to be handled as poorly as Debra Whitman. DeFalco again sums up the obvious when weaving the soap opera melodrama into modern comics "Sadly, very few of us had Stan's skill."

Joseph Norton has never dressed up as Spider-Man and broken into a woman's bedroom. Though he has often run out on a check during a date. This is his 9th article for BACK ISSUE.

end

TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

PRINCE STREET NEWS

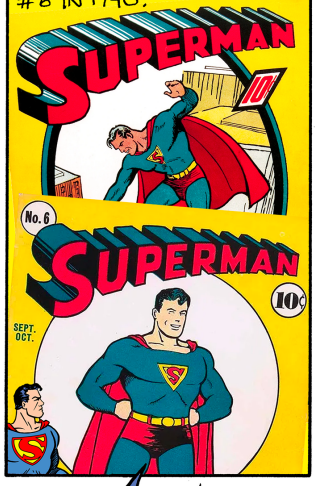
by Karl Heitmueller Jr.

BACK IN BI #162, I TALKED ABOUT MY AFFINITY FOR COMIC BOOK HAND LETTERING AND ITS DYNAMICS. THIS ISSUE, I WANT TO RHAPSODIZE ABOUT A SIMILAR ELEMENT OF THE MEDIUM,

the LOGO!

AS WITH TEXT LETTERING, MOST LOGOS ARE NOW DONE DIGITALLY, BUT WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT THE PRECISE, QUALITY WORK THAT WAS DONE BY HAND IN THE 20th CENTURY, IT'S MIND-BLOWING!

...SUCH AS ONE OF THE MOST ENDURING, THE SUPERMAN LOGO, DESIGNED BY JOE SHUSTER AND REFINED BY THE LEGENDARY IRA SCHNAPP FOR SUPERMAN #6 IN 1940!



THAT LOGO STOOD UNTOUCHED FOR 45 YEARS (!!!) UNTIL IT WAS AGAIN TWEAKED BY MARSHALL ARISMAN IN SUPERMAN #386. THE SHOCK OF SEEING THAT ROUNDED U ON THE COVER AFTER A LIFETIME OF THE SQUARED ONE WAS NOT UNSUBSTANTIAL (AND MANY PURISTS WERE NOT PLEASED).

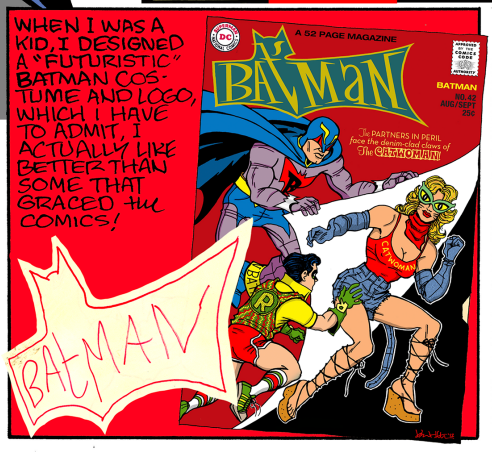
OF COURSE, THE LOGO'S BEEN PLAYED WITH NUMEROUS TIMES SINCE THEN, BUT IT REMAINS THE SAME BASIC, ICONIC DESIGN (WHICH CAN BE SAID OF ACTION COMICS' LOGO AS WELL).

CONVERSELY, BATMAN'S LOGOS HAVE CHANGED OFTEN, AND HE'S HAD SOME OF THE BEST. THE BAT IMAGERY JUST LENDS ITSELF TO EXCITING DESIGN CHOICES.

WHICH IS WHY IT'S SO CONFOUNDING HOW MANY STAID LOGOS THE GUY'S HAD IN MORE RECENT YEARS. I MEAN...WHY SO SERIOUS??

BATMAN

WHEN I WAS A KID, I DESIGNED A "FUTURISTIC" BATMAN COSTUME AND LOGO, WHICH I HAVE TO ADMIT, I ACTUALLY LIKE BETTER THAN SOME THAT GRACED THE COMICS!



IRA SCHNAPP DESIGNED SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE LOGOS OF THE GOLDEN AND SILVER AGE, WITH EVEN HIS MORE STRAIGHTFORWARD HEADERS CONVEYING DYNAMISM!

SCHNAPP'S SLEEK MIDCENTURY LETTERING DEFINED DC'S CALLIGRAPHIC IDENTITY FOR MANY YEARS, AND HIS DISTINCTIVE HOUSE ADS DESERVE AN ENTIRE BOOK ALONE!

BUT IT WAS SCHNAPP'S SUCCESSOR, GASPAR SALADINO WHO CREATED SOME OF MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE LOGOS FOR DC...

SALADINO DID SOME MEMORABLE WORK AT MARVEL, TOO, INCLUDING THE AVENGERS HEADER THAT MILLIONS NOW KNOW DUE TO ITS USAGE IN THE MCU*:

*Did Saladino get credit in any of those films?

end

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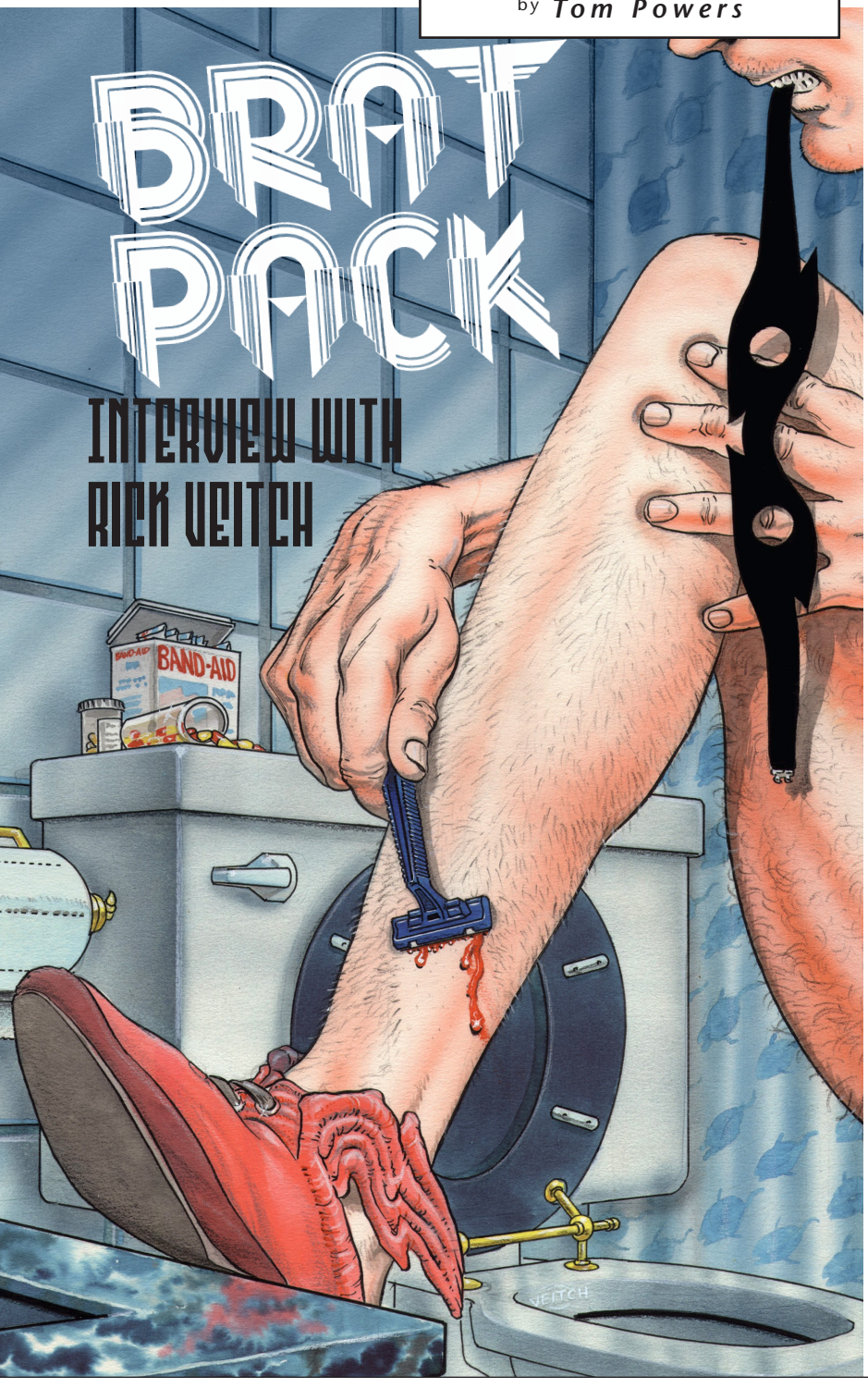
TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

TEENAGE-SIDEKICK WASTELAND

by Tom Powers



Rick Veitch's* Brat Pack *five-issue miniseries (Aug.1990-May 1991) is a paradigm-shifting reinterpretation of the superhero-sidekick dynamic set against the seedy urban backdrop of Slumburg with its many troubled denizens. Comparatively, while *The New Teen Titans* showed readers how sidekicks can successfully grow up into young adults and *Batman: A Death in the Family* explored the darker end of this spectrum with the tragic—and phone-voted-in—murder of Jason Todd, *Brat Pack* boldly exemplifies what happens when the mentor-superhero uses and destroys the adolescent sidekick in a repetitive cycle involving sex, drugs, and abuse. Specifically, Veitch's takedown of the corporate-branded superhero-sidekick dynamic via the twisted pairings of Midnight Mink-Chippy, Moon Mistress-Luna, Judge Jury-Kid Vicious, and King Rad-Wild Boy explores the darker edge of how ostensibly responsible adults affect the lives of vulnerable teenagers. In other words, *Brat Pack* works on a twofold level: as both a meta dissection of the problematic superhero-sidekick pairing in relation to reality and an indictment of how these younger characters are exploited on a corporate level in order to achieve a bump in sales after they have attracted the media to cover their sensationalistic plot developments. With this appropriately cynical viewpoint in mind, I spoke with Rick via email about his edgy post-modern miniseries as well as his expansion of the *Brat Pack* universe through his entire King Hell Heroica Cycle.

TOM POWERS: ***Rick, could you please share the origins of* Brat Pack *as a creative project?***
RICK VEITCH: It grew out of the creative ferment that I was part of at DC in the mid-1980s. *Swamp Thing* had rearranged a lot of editorial thinking up there, and I was part of that team, assisting Steve Bissette occasionally and doing fill-in issues, then taking over as penciller. Alan Moore was still writing the book and was also beginning work on what would become *Watchmen*. He and I were on the phone a lot, and there was much discussion and cross pollination concerning how we might evolve superheroes beyond what served as normal fare for mainstream comics. I was also talking a lot with Bissette, John Totleben, and Neil Gaiman; and we all freely shared ideas about what we were working on.

The sales success of *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* opened the door for us to pitch more edgy stuff and me, being from the Underground Comix scene in San Francisco, thought I'd really like to take it to whatever DC's limit was. I originally pitched it to them in 1988, I think. They wanted to do it as part of a new cutting-edge imprint, Piranha Press. They sent me a contract, but my *Swamp Thing* run blew up over the Jesus story, and I was out of there.

Chippy prepares for a night out. Original art for *Brat Pack* #1 cover, art by Rick Veitch. Scanned from the *Brat Pack* trade paperback.

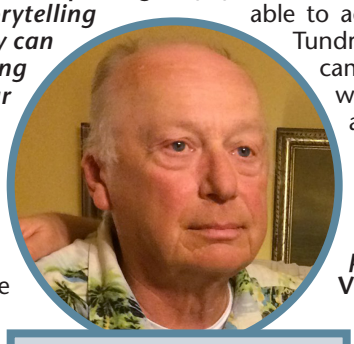
TM & © Rick Veitch.

The Brat Pack and their mentors.

TM & © Rick Veitch.

POWERS: ***What aggravated you about DC's treatment of kid sidekicks in 1988 via the phone-in vote for Robin (Jason Todd) to live or die campaign?***
VEITCH: The naked greed and cynicism.

POWERS: ***Did resigning from* Swamp Thing *as writer due to DC not running your Swamp-Thing-meets-Jesus issue affect your storytelling choices for* Brat Pack*? I mean, they can encourage fans to vote for killing a teenager but can't accept your vision of Jesus?***
VEITCH: I was really angry after it all went down, and that anger fed *Brat Pack*. I was ripsh*t at what I'd experienced inside the industry, and those feelings encompassed a lot more than the dial-a-death thing.



Facebook

POWERS: ***You were quite brave for self-publishing* Brat Pack *under your King Hell label. As a professional, how did you feel going into that uncharted territory?***
VEITCH: I had been drawn into the group of self-publishers who were trying to empower creators and reform the business practices which were pretty abhorrent in the late '80s. So, Kevin Eastman, Peter Laird, Steve Bissette, Dave Sim, and Gerhard were showing me a new business model with which, if I was lucky, I could free myself from situations like I'd just experienced at DC.

POWERS: ***In terms of your publishing choices for* Brat Pack*, why did you go with black and white for this story?***
VEITCH: It was way more difficult and expensive to do color in those days. I originally planned it as simple black and white line art on cheap pulp paper, but when I joined forces with Tundra, I was able to add the grey tones and nice stock. Tundra also made it possible to run an ad campaign to retailers, providing them with point of purchase stuff to build awareness.

POWERS: ***What drawing tools did you utilize for* Brat Pack *and how did you approach illustrating a panel or a scene for this comic?***
VEITCH: The boards were smaller than the usual 10" x 15" we were using back in the day. Probably 8" x 12." And I was working very fast. So that gave the art a rougher and tougher feel, I think. I would first work out a page or a spread in my sketchbook, then start laying it out with tracing paper, starting in light pencil, and then hitting the drawing again in darker pencil. Once I was happy, I'd lightbox it as tight as I could onto the boards. Then tighten the pencils. Then brush, pen, and India ink for the line work. Then lay in the basic gray tones with dyes and model those with color pencils. Go back and touch up the blacks. I'd also use airbrush sometimes and collage. The lettering, by Gary Fields, was done on overlays.

POWERS: ***Could you please discuss your design choices for some of the so-called superheroes and their sidekicks' costumes? (For instance, Midnight Mink wears this perverse mink cape; Moon Mistress looks as if she's stepped out of a 1970s exploitation film; King Rad resembles a punk wearing paramilitary garb; and Judge Jury could be mistaken for a KKK member, while his sidekick, Kid Vicious, comes off as a jock-cowboy—not to mention Wild Boy's burnout skater gear, and Chippy's and Luna's fetishistic outfits.)***
VEITCH: They are all broad parodies, with some mixing and matching, of various superhero tropes. The thing to remember about *Brat Pack* is that it isn't just a meditation on mainstream heroes. It's very much informed by Underground Comix like *Wonder Wart-Hog.*

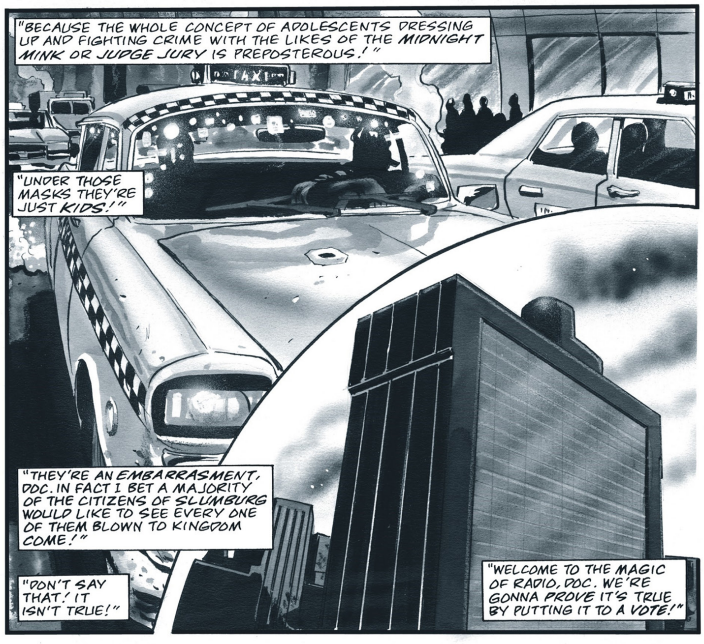
POWERS: ***When you were writing* Brat Pack*, did you initially see it as beginning in medias res, a la* The Odyssey *or* Star Wars: A New Hope*, especially in considering that, like the original* Star Wars *film being retitled Episode IV, you subtitled it Volume Four of your King Hell Heroica Cycle?***
VEITCH: No, I originally conceived it as a single miniseries that would be collected as a stand-alone graphic novel. After it seemed to strike a nerve in the marketplace, Tundra wanted more *Brat Pack*, but I'd gotten a lot of the poison out of my system. So, I conceived of a more sweeping narrative exploring the Maximortal, who was a character in *Brat Pack*. I wanted to explore making different types of comics. Still do!

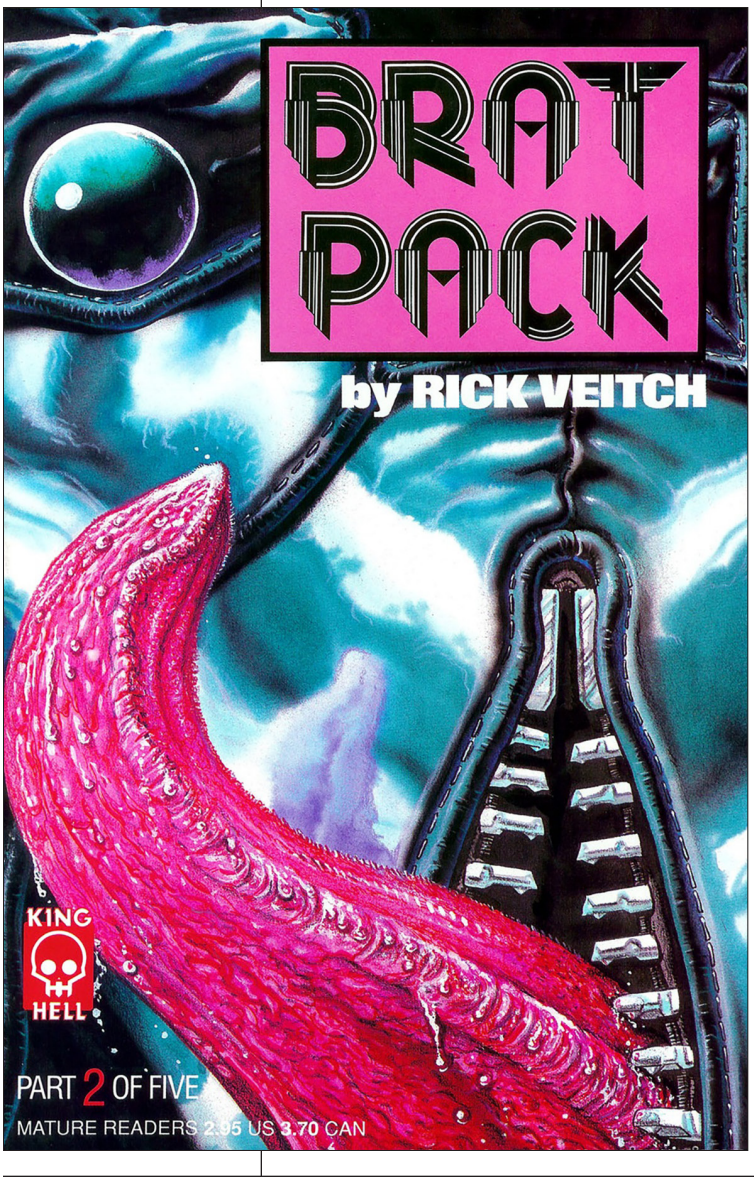
POWERS: ***Taking your amazingly dark creative process in mind, can you please discuss how the so-called superhero "mentors" in* Brat Pack *relate to what I believe to be their DC/Marvel analogues: Midnight Mink/Batman, King Rad/Green Arrow, Moon Mistress/Wonder Woman, and Judge Jury/Captain America (or the Punisher).***
VEITCH: All of them are meant to hit broader targets than just the DC/Marvel analogues. I wanted to satirize the sheer kinkiness of superheroes that somehow passed under the radar of the Comics Code all those years. After horror comics were banned, the publishers had figured out how to make stories for kids that reeked of subliminal sex, violence, and vigilantism. I wanted to shine a light on that.

POWERS: ***I notice that you often employ what I am calling a four-square format for telling the concurrent tales regarding Midnight Mink, King Rad, Moon Mistress, and Judge Jury's recruiting***

(left) Voting to see if kid sidekicks die. That seems familiar. (right) The votes are in, and the original Brat Pack dies.

TM & © Rick Veitch.





(top) Chippy checks out his action figure on the cover of a collected edition. (bottom) Doctor Blasphemy takes the cover of the second issue.

TM & © Rick Veitch.

of—and misadventures with—their sidekicks, Chippy, Wild Boy, Luna, and Kid Vicious. What went into this complex—yet quite effective—approach?

VEITCH: It was done on the fly. The whole series was blasted out at a frantic pace, and I was throwing whatever I could come up with at the wall. I probably did one layout like that and liked it, so I developed that line of design further as I went along.

POWERS: ***In terms of the sidekicks, what did they mean to you? Put simply, why do Cody, Karlo, Shannon, and Beau take all of their mentors' awful mental and physical abuse?***

VEITCH: Well, I think in its heart of hearts, *Brat Pack* is a metaphor about toxic parenting. When you're a kid and your parent is nuts, you are put in a peculiar position of survival. Part of that was personal; I grew up under challenging circumstances. Another part was reflecting on the parental role the publishing companies took in relation to creators and readers.

POWERS: ***At one point, Beau, who will become Kid Vicious, checks out books from the library on Nazi regalia. You had created these pages in 1989-91, but they feel quite relatable to our current era of the rising alt-right, neo-Nazi movements in the United States. Likewise, in the sequence where Judge Jury and Kid Vicious watch immigrants scour a Slumburg landfill for heavy meatal, Judge Jury comments, "They are nothing but starving maggots aswarm on the gangrenous pus-filled abscesses of society. They come into this city. No money. No green card." Here we are three-and-a-half decades later, and this ideology still infects society and our current government. What are your thoughts on these real-life parallels?***

VEITCH: America was full of that kind of thinking then as well. Remember, I grew up in the '60s with the race riots, the assassinations, the war, and MK-Ultra. There was a nasty stew of hate and prejudice boiling just beneath the official surface. Today, politicians have figured out how to ride that sh*t into office. That's because it was always there.

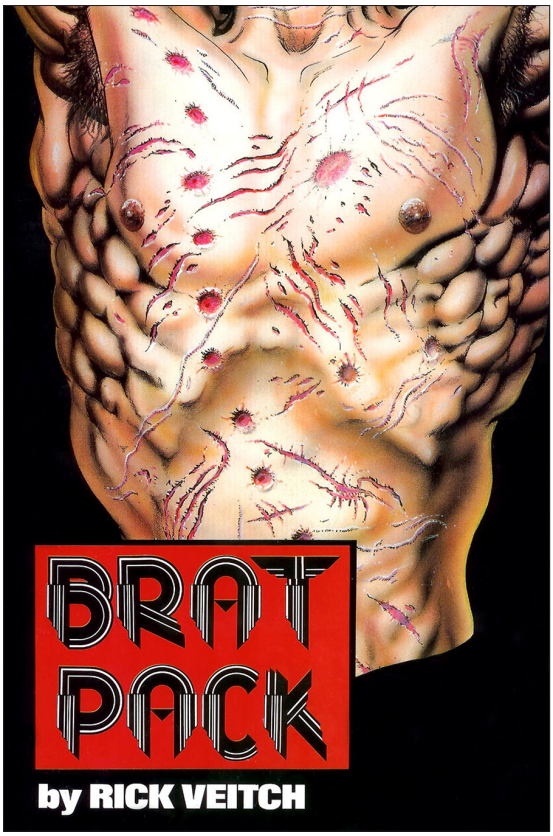
POWERS: ***Also, in terms of your writing for Beau's story arc, there's a thoughtful scene that occurs earlier in*** **Brat Pack** ***when Ling brings him home to her immigrant family, and they ask him during dinner, "What gives your existence richness and meaning? What do you believe in?"—to which he sadly responds, "Well, I guess I… I… I don't know." Why was it important to include this scene?***

VEITCH: I was trying to express the emptiness that some young people experience. It seems to be a byproduct of modern living. With Beau, I was trying to point out how that emptiness can be filled by something really dangerous.

POWERS: ***On the topic of drug usage, Wild Boy's parents are addicts, and, after they are killed in a fire "accident," he is taken in by King Rad, who is also a drug user and encourages his "ward" to indulge in consuming brews and pills. What influenced this strong commentary on substance abuse?***

VEITCH: By the time I did *Brat Pack*, I was in my early forties and had lived through the sixties and seventies. Fortunately, I never got into hard drugs, but I knew many people who did and paid for it with their health, their homes, their families, their sanity, and, in some cases, their lives. I could see that same kind of scenario playing out in the younger generation coming up behind me, and I wanted to send a message.

POWERS: ***When Moon Mistress later half-castrates a man who attempted to rape Luna at a baseball game, we learn about one of the special ingredients for her "victory treats."***



Are her vigilante acts justified?

VEITCH: No, they are an absurdist reaction to a very real power imbalance between the sexes. In terms of comics, I'm playing out a theme that was always built into the archetype of the warrior amazon.

POWERS: ***In both iterations of the Brat Pack sidekicks, they talk about wanting to perform together as a team again, but we never see them actually function as one (unless you count the scene at the end of the story in the church where they drink Cody's augmented blood in an effort to stand against their mentors). What went into this storytelling approach?***

VEITCH: They are hopeless and hapless. Like real teenagers, they talk about doing things but can't get their act together. And we are watching their personalities deform under the tutelage of their tops.

POWERS: ***Slumburg itself is such a visually provocative place, so what does this city mean to you? (Plus, you later revealed in* The Maximortal *that Slumburg is located in Pennsylvania!)***

VEITCH: I was responding to the policies of the Reagan administration that were making the rich richer and the poor poorer. Slumburg is a place where the old neighborhoods, once vibrant but now impoverished, exist in the shadow of the shining steel and glass towers of the corporations. Needless to say, we are living the consequences of those policies Reagan put in place today.

POWERS: ***The WSLM radio narrator evokes the spirit of similar boisterous narrators in such movies as* American Graffiti, The Warriors, *and* Talk Radio. *Did any of these films influence this character?***

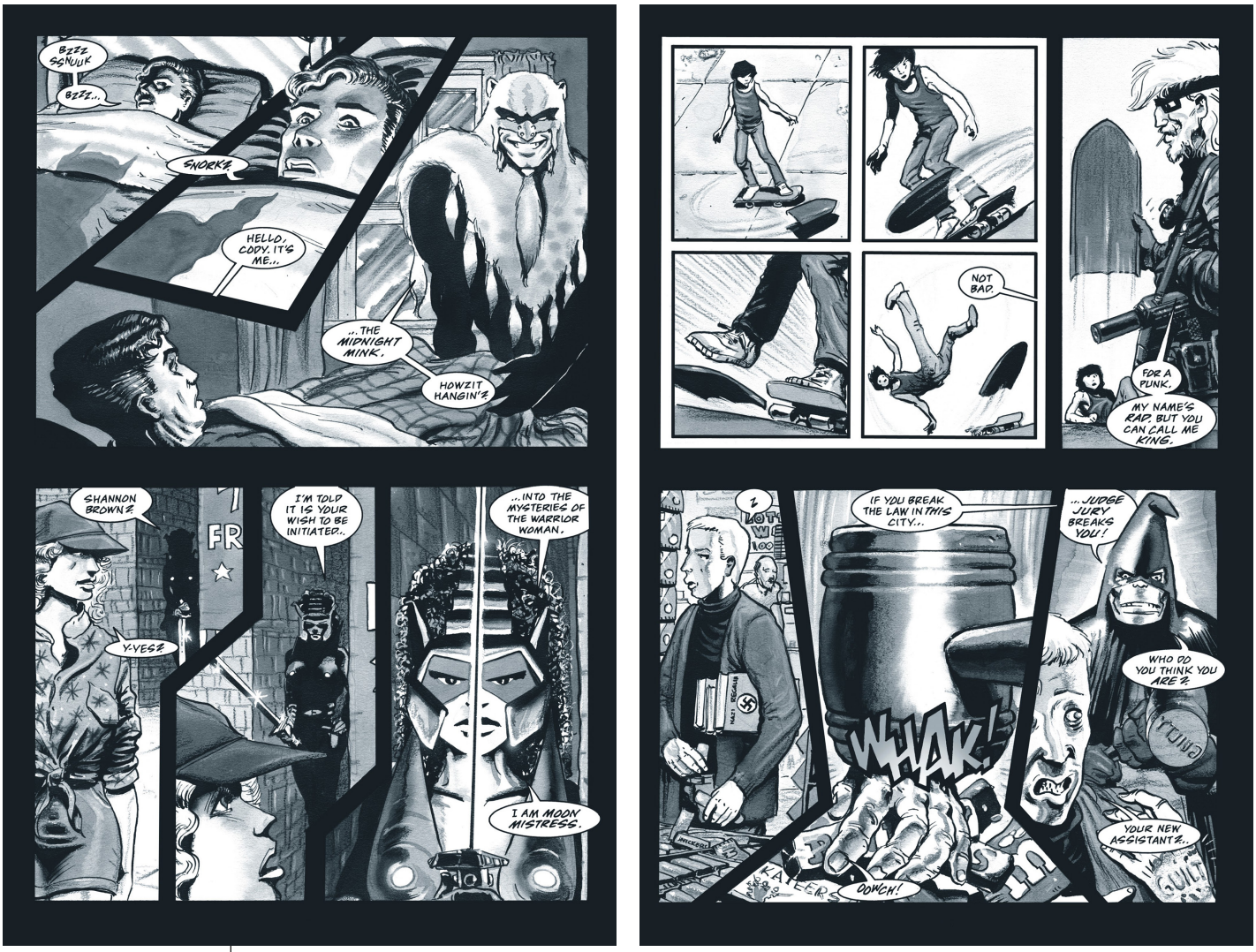
VEITCH: Not those films so much as the actual effects of talk radio as it existed in the late '80s. It was one of the things that changed people I knew. The Baby Boomer generation started out anti-war, anti-pollution, back-to-the-landers, and the many who tuned into Rush Limbaugh turned into bitter cranks.

POWERS: ***Father Dunn is a very troubled Catholic priest. Also, Chippy, who will be sexually abused by Midnight Mink, is originally an altar boy. Did you have a Catholic upbringing that influenced these two characterizations?***

VEITCH: Yes, my family was Catholic, and I went to Catholic grade school. I was never an altar boy, and, growing up, I didn't have a clue about the abuse going on between the priests and their charges. A few years ago, the Vermont diocese finally released a list of priests who had been

(left) The cover to *Brat Pack* #3 left its mark (s). (right) The heroes approach Father Dunn to help them find new sidekicks.

TM & © Rick Veitch.



The heroes meet their new sidekicks.

TM & © Rick Veitch.

involved with pedophilia, and five of them were from my parish!

POWERS: ***The first Chippy depicted in* Brat Pack *survives the hero-villains' car-bombing of the newest permutation of the sidekicks seen at the start of the story. However, he's a wrecked, rotting monster, eating birds and stuff—like an undead sidekick. What led to this wretched depiction of this poignant character?***
VEITCH: Besides the foreboding and mirroring he brings to the new Chippy, he's the first hint that there is something keeping superheroes alive when they should be dead.

POWERS: ***Doctor Blasphemy is another great conflicted character in* Brat Pack*. Do you see him as a villain or antihero? (Can we also talk about his obviously vagina-like face?)***
VEITCH: It's kind of left open and hanging at the end of *Brat Pack*. But I have been exploring his character and origins in the *Maximortal* stuff with more to come. And it's not just the vagina mouth of his mask; it's the tongue (which predates Venom at Marvel).

POWERS: ***Presciently, two of the four symbols on Doctor Blasphemy's costume—the @ and #—predicted two omnipresent email/internet symbols. Have you thought about this?***
VEITCH: I haven't. I was bouncing off the comic book onomatopoeia we employ to say *sh*t, f*ck, piss*. But I did think of the design as being similar to chakras.

POWERS: ***You likewise offer such an iconic catch-phrase for the Brat Pack team with "Live Fast. Love Hard. Die with Your Mask On." How did you come up with this catchy slogan (that, despite its ironic subject matter, sounds quite cool)?***
VEITCH: "Live fast. Die young" has been around forever, and Nick Lowe morphed it into a pop song lyric: "Live fast, love hard, die young and leave a beautiful memory." I further morphed it by adding the superhero element.

POWERS: ***True-Man is referenced/foreshadowed throughout* Brat Pack*, and he does show up is a quasi (or literal) fashion as a* deus ex machina *in the final pages of story. What led to this unexpected (but somewhat abrupt) ending to this story?***
VEITCH: It's me realizing what I really wanted to do in comics, which was to explore the archetypal nature of the superhero in depth, its philosophical and cultural underpinnings, which is what I've been doing in the rest of the

Heroica. So, I have him arrive at the end of *Brat Pack* and show how weak and impotent King Rad, Mink, Judge Jury, and Moon Mistress really are in comparison to the real thing.

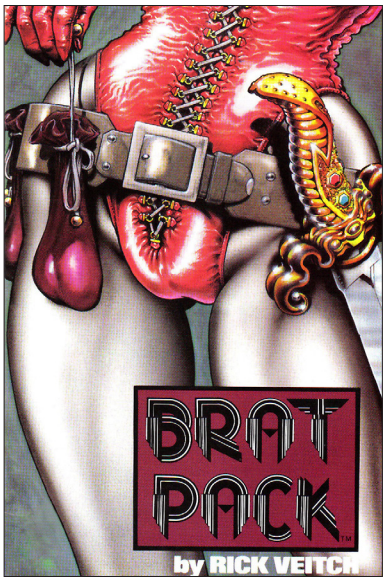
POWERS: ***You mentioned earlier that you and Alan Moore had shared conversations about the evolution of the superhero. Are there any comparisons that one can draw between True-Man and Dr. Manhattan (of* Watchmen*) considering that are both near-omnipotent beings who evolve into a state where they don't find the need for clothing?***
VEITCH: Obviously, I was riffing on what Alan and Dave had done, and it worked in the context of my story, but I think it got a little too close when I had the Maximortal popping in and out of time. Later in the Heroica, I began changing him so that he was more of an energy being than a giant, naked bald guy like Dr. Manhattan.

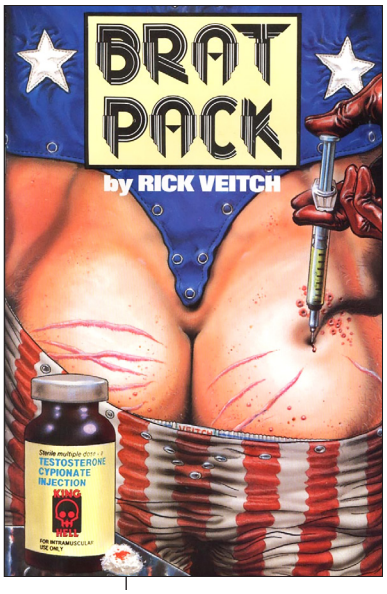
POWERS: ***In 1992, you published the* Brat Pack *collected edition, which expanded upon the character of Fredo—King Rad's depressed butler—who's revealed to be Doctor Blasphemy in your revised ending. Why was it vital to make him a more crucial character in the story?***
VEITCH: I expanded his role when I reworked the book for the graphic novel collection. What happened was when I finished the comic series, all my buddies who I mentioned earlier told me the original ending was weak. Then, Tundra got a deal to do a mass market collection with Dell. So, I had a budget to go back and rework a few things. But then the Dell deal collapsed, and so we released the collected edition through Tundra/King Hell.

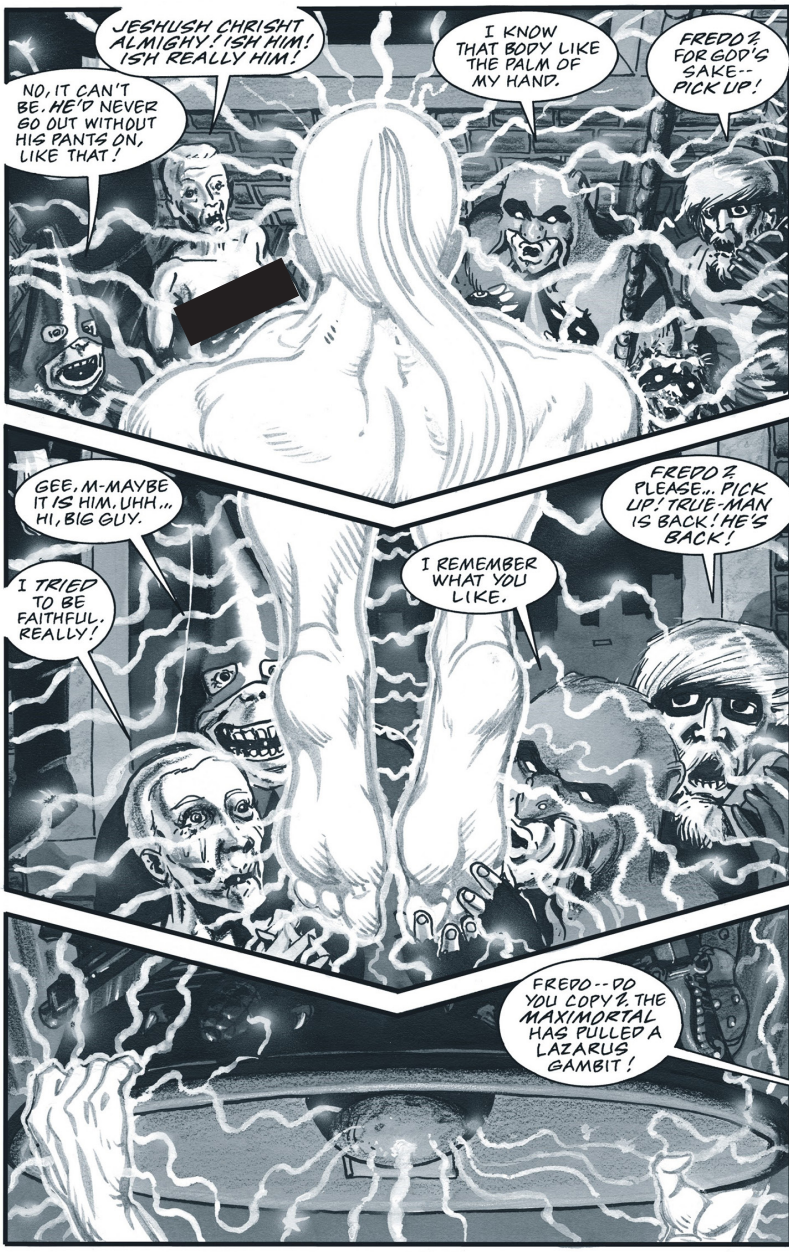
POWERS: ***The new ending also shows all of the Brat Pack as potentially still being alive. Could one assume that their story could be continued in a potential "Volume Five" of the King Hell Heroica Cycle?***
VEITCH: Assume nothing in a Veitch comic.

POWERS: ***How do the two 1996* Brat Pack/Maximortal *issues hold up with your current vision of the cycle?***
VEITCH: Perfect. I've reprinted them in the back of *Boy Maximortal* #4, so everyone who is interested can be up to speed.

POWERS: ***If you were telling the tale of* Brat Pack *today, what would be your approach, especially in taking into consideration contemporary attitudes to superhero storytelling?***
VEITCH: I'm doing it with *Maximortal*. Superheroes have become a huge cultural force in the twenty-first century, very much powered by the creative explosion of the form in the '80s. But the core idea goes back to the late nineteenth century when Nietzsche came up with the übermensch and predicted its effect on society. I want to get to the heart of that—to use a fictionalized version of actual history to demonstrate how the concept developed and the effect it had on those people caught in its grip.

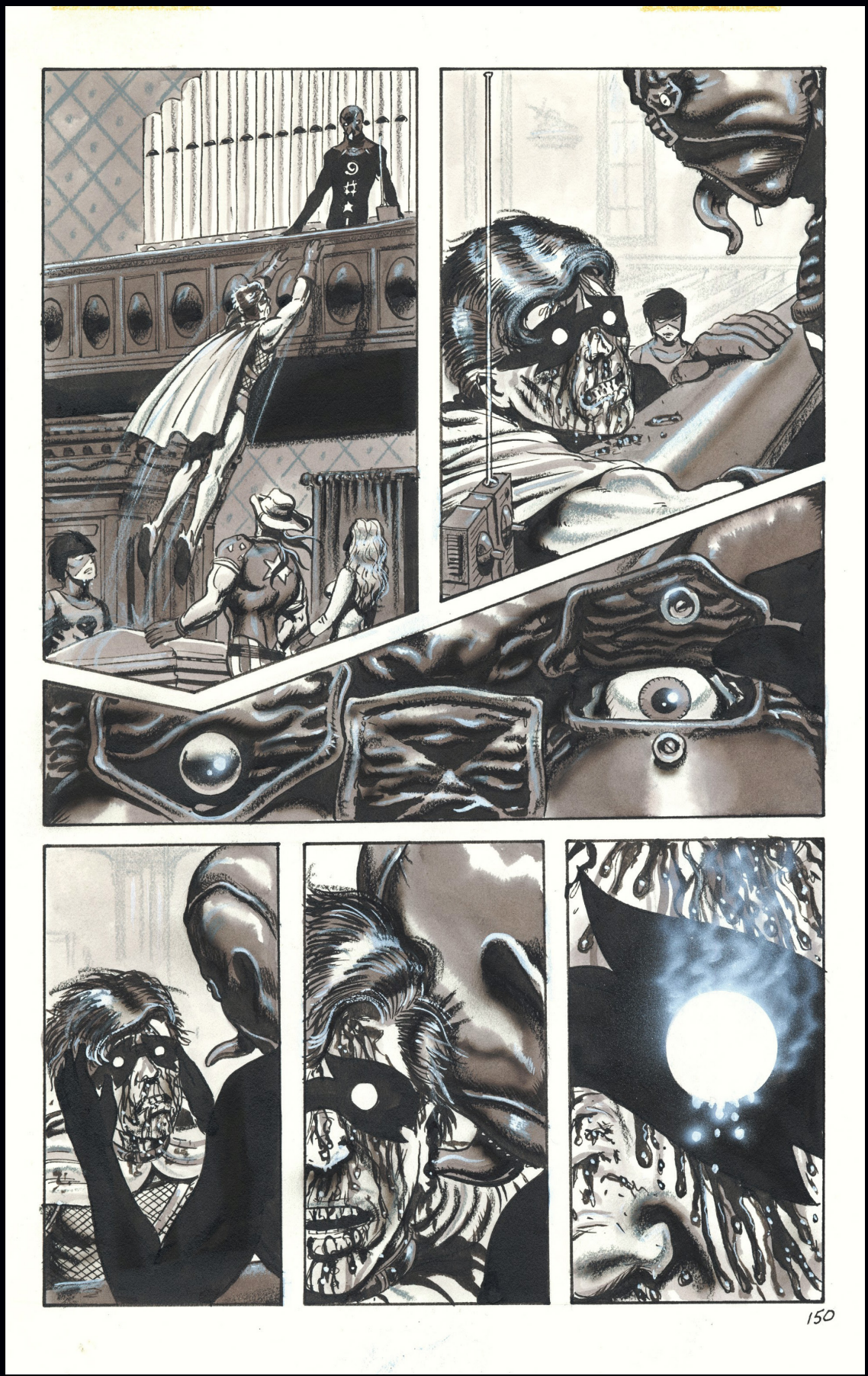






(top, left and right) Things get up lose and personal on the covers of *Brat Pack* #4 and 5. (bottom) True-Man returns to set things right.

TM & © Rick Veitch.



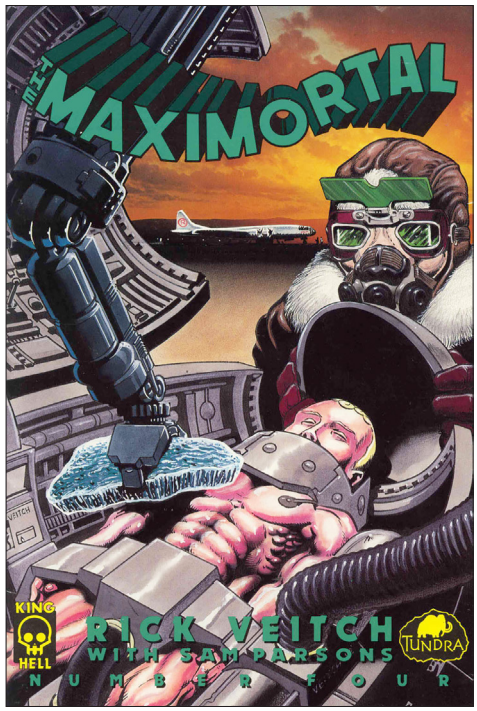
Chippy encounters Doctor Blasphemy.

TM & © Rick Veitch.

POWERS: ***Equally, if a film or television adaptation of* Brat Pack *were to at last happen, then what would be essential to you in terms of the story's translation to live action?***
VEITCH: I hope a *Brat Pack* film never happens. We've already got *The Boys* doing a bang-up job of giving viewers a potent taste of twisted superheroes. I got all that out of me back in 1990. I want to think other types of thoughts and tell stories about different things now.

POWERS: ***On the subject of telling new stories within the* Brat Pack *continuity, via its prequel,* The Maximortal*, you offer another stunning indictment of the DC superhero pantheon, this time with True-Man offering a refinement of Superman. Why was it imperative to tell this story, which also acts as a vindication of sorts for Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster?***
VEITCH: When I began *The Maximortal*, the story of Siegel and Shuster had been buried and forgotten—same with Kirby at Marvel and all the other freelancers who got screwed in the old days. Being a young professional, I got to meet a lot of creators from previous generations and heard many horror stories about how they had been treated. There was kind of an oral history being passed down among comic-book people. Pairing what they endured to my vision of the übermensch just seemed to work very effectively. And I hope it helped get the truth out to the greater world.

POWERS: ***At the end of* The Maximortal*, which is set in Slumburg, Pennsylvania on October 10, 1983, you once more draw Doctor Blasphemy as he first encounters a confused, troubled True-Man. What did you enjoy about depicting their first meeting?***



(rop right) The beginnings of the story are revealed in *The Maximortal.* (left and bottom right) Veitch returned to the story with *Boy Maximortal.*

TM & © Rick Veitch.

Both sides of a mobile that retailers could hang from the ceiling to promote the *Brat Pack* collection.

TM & © Rick Veitch.

VEITCH: I liked the idea of setting in stone where the whole thing was going, then shaping the earlier parts of the narrative to fit.

POWERS: ***In 2020, you at last returned to the King Hell Heroica Cycle with* Volume Two: Boy Maximortal*, which delineates an adolescent True-Man's life with his human stepfather, Wisely, who has been living undercover as a small-town shop owner. How did you feel returning to his story?***
VEITCH: It's always difficult to pick up something from the past, but once I got *Boy Maximortal* going, I was happy as a clam. It feels really right to be bringing this story and my comic book career full circle.

POWERS: ***Also, if you don't mind me saying,* Boy Maximortal *is an impressive refinement to the storytelling approach you have been taking with True-Man's story, especially with your employment of multiple narrators. How did time help you to further perfect your writing and art for this saga?***
VEITCH: I wrote and drew a sh*t ton of comics between 1993 and 2017. So, I'd had plenty of opportunity to hone my craft. But I think the transition to working digitally has been beneficial too. I now work Marvel style with myself, drawing the whole comic before I script and letter it. This seems to give everything a deeper, clearer tone than when I was working on paper and doing the scripting and hand lettering at an early stage in the process.

POWERS: ***Currently, Volume Three,* True-Man: The Maximortal*, is bringing us closer to the "present" of Volume Four—Brat Pack's story. What are your goals with this volume, and how do you feel about finally completing the circle of your King Hell Heroica Cycle?***
VEITCH: Without giving too much away, I want to develop how the government's mind control program affects True-Man as he assumes his place on the world stage. And I'm introducing all the Brat Pack characters, showing what kind of people they were before they became the dark superheroes of *Brat Pack*.

POWERS: ***On the note of self-publishing, you have been enjoying a career renaissance through your Sun Comics imprint, which you primarily sell and distribute through Amazon. Why was this the right choice for you, and how could it benefit other talented creators who wish to self-publish?***
VEITCH: I am finally free to explore my chosen art form without having to give any thought to the needs of publishers, distributors, retailers, or the market in general. I can just focus on making the kind of comics I want. I can't begin to tell you how good that feels after all the years of bullsh*t. As I type this, Diamond is in the throes of bankruptcy, and no one knows how it's going to play out for the publishers or retailers. They shaped American comics as a collectors' market rather than a readers' market, and now the bill has come due. Manga and Scholastic are eating their lunch.

The Amazon Kindle print-on-demand system insulates me from all that madness. I've got a direct pipeline to readers, not hoarders. I like the fact I can do the whole thing myself, from inspiration to creation to file production and uploading on Amazon's servers. I like the fact I can work at my own natural speed and not be strapped to some publisher's schedule. I like that Amazon takes and fulfills orders worldwide and then deposits royalties in my account every month. I like how my backlist stays available forever (or at least until Bezos pulls the plug). And I very much enjoy how making comics is more like play now rather than work.

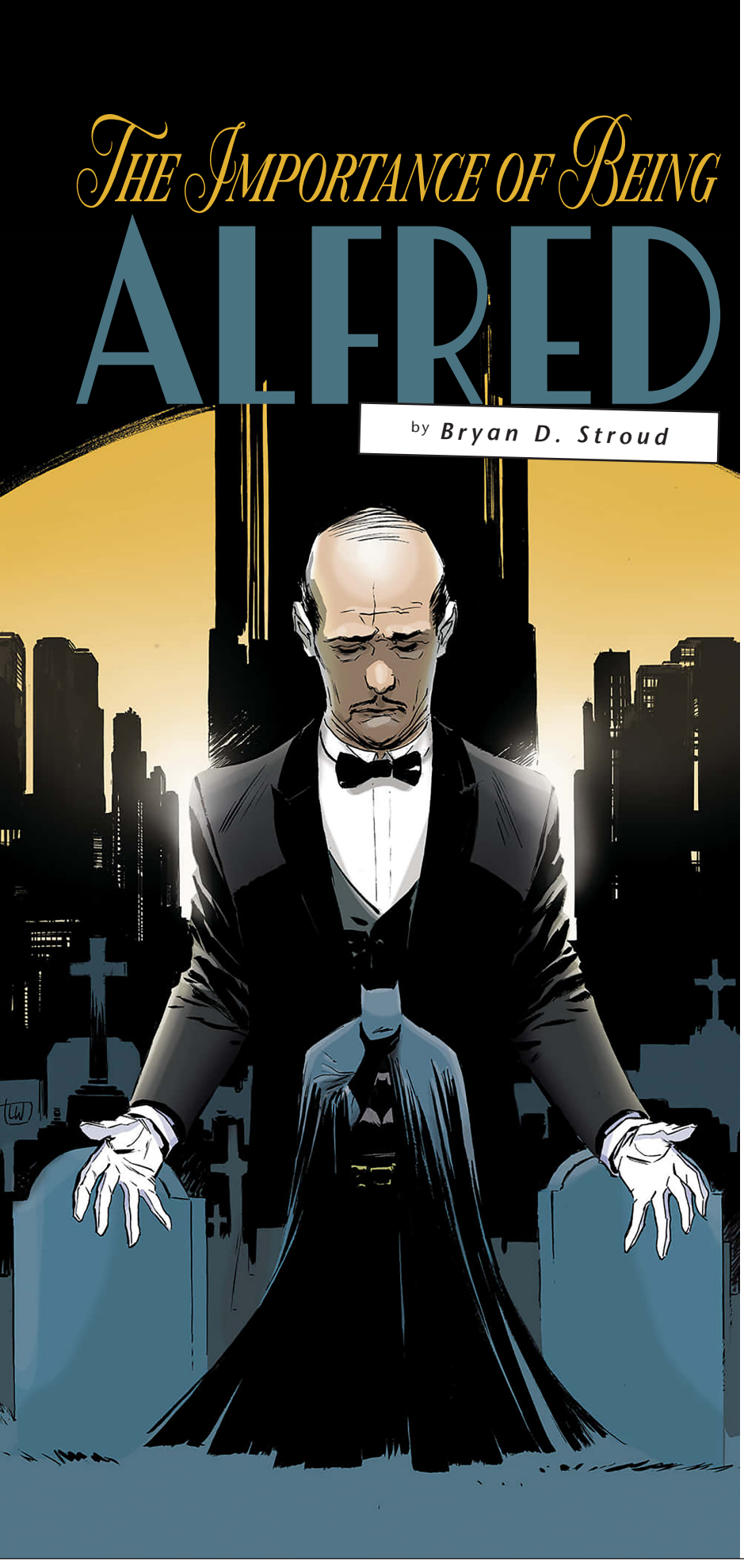
Whether it's right for others, I can't say. As the Direct Sales Market collapses, I think many creators will be forced to consider it as a viable alternative, along with Kickstarter and other crowdfunding schemes. It would be nice if we could all work towards building a reading audience for comics.

TOM POWERS teaches English at Montgomery County Community College, which is located in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. He is also the author of* Gender and the Quest in British Science Fiction Television: An Analysis of Doctor Who, Blake's 7, Red Dwarf and Torchwood *(McFarland, 2016).

end

The Importance of Being Alfred

by Bryan D. Stroud



FlashBack!

"A partner brings something to the relationship that you lack; they inspire you to up your own game."

-Bill Gates *Source Code*

We sometimes think of Batman as a loner, meeting out justice as only the Dark Knight can, but is that truly the case? During his long run in *The Brave and the Bold,* for example, he appeared to be the ultimate team-up partner, seemingly allying himself with everyone in the DC Universe. He's obviously also been a charter member of the Justice League of America, founded the Outsiders, and back in March of 1940, specifically in the pages of *Detective Comics* #38, he gained a sidekick in the form of Robin, the Boy Wonder, a mere 11 issues after his own beginnings in the magazine.

A few years later, another vitally important partner joined the Batman mythos under the title, "Here Comes Alfred." It was in *Batman* #16 (May 1943) when the new butler to Wayne Manor appeared, and he came to stay. This essay will explore the character and some of the more notable highlights in his history with a particular focus on our beloved Bronze Age and a bit beyond.

At the time of that initial appearance, he was known simply as Alfred (later with the surname Beagle), and unlike the svelte and mustachioed version most of us are familiar with in later continuity, the first Alfred was larger, clean-shaven, and more in the mold of comedy relief than what the character eventually became.

Bob Greenberger's very useful *The Essential Batman Encyclopedia* (2008/2012) informs us that "Alfred Beagle was a portly gentleman's gentleman who forsook an acting career to serve Earth-2's Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson. He did this to honor a promise he'd made to his father, Jarvis, who lay on his deathbed in England after having served the Wayne Family years earlier. Early on, the two tried to keep their secret identities of Batman and Robin from their butler, but he accidentally discovered their secret and happily joined their efforts."

Creator credits for that initial introduction of Alfred from the Grand Comics Database list Don C. Cameron as scripter, Bob Kane as penciler and Jerry Robinson inking with George Roussos on background inks and lettering. In a conversation with Jerry Robinson, back in December of 2007, he suggested Alfred, along with additional classic characters, were more often a group effort: "I was able to play a creative role in the development of other major Batman characters including Penguin, Alfred, Catwoman, Two Face, and others."

The splash page to that debut story contained the classic element of an oversized figure, namely Alfred, bedecked in a Sherlock Holmes inspired deerstalker hat, Calabash pipe, and magnifying glass as he gazes over a copy of "How to Be a

A touching tribute by Lee Weeks from the cover of *Pennyworth RIP* #1.

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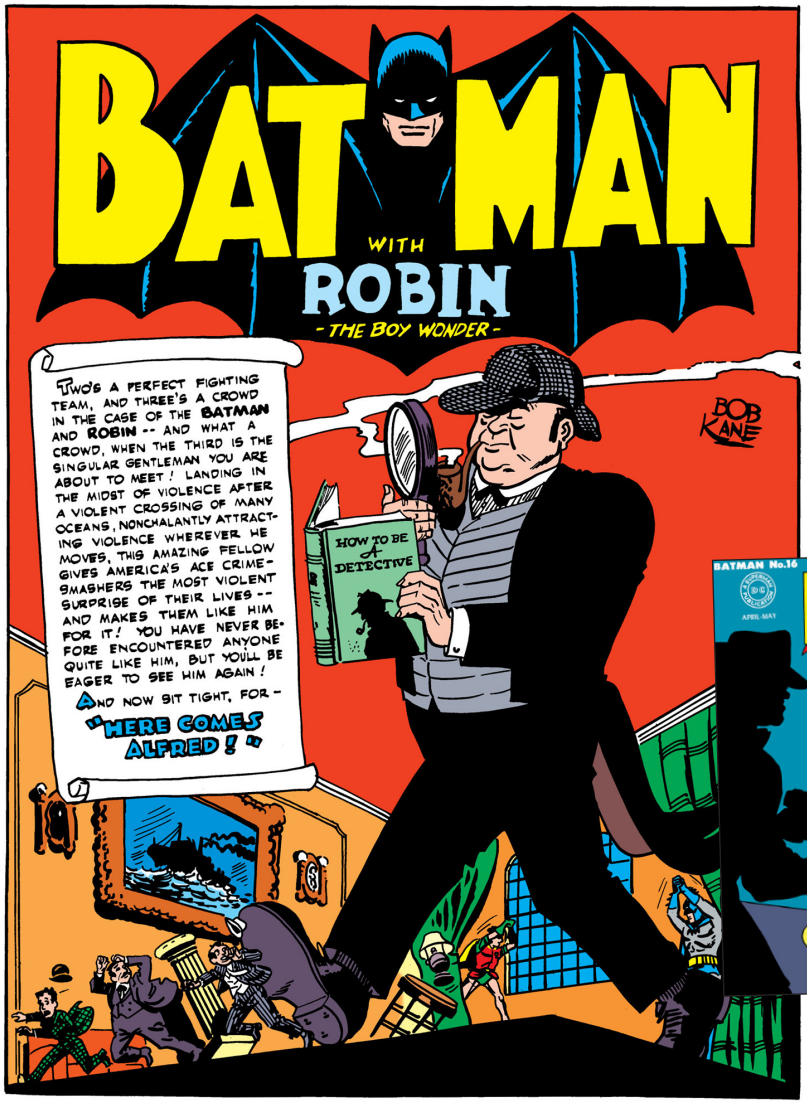

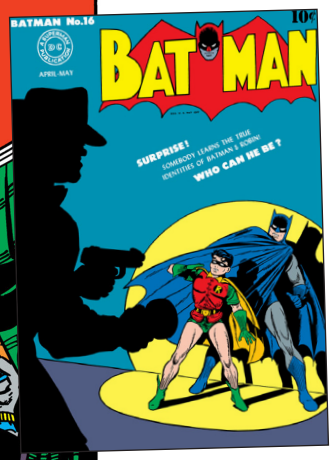

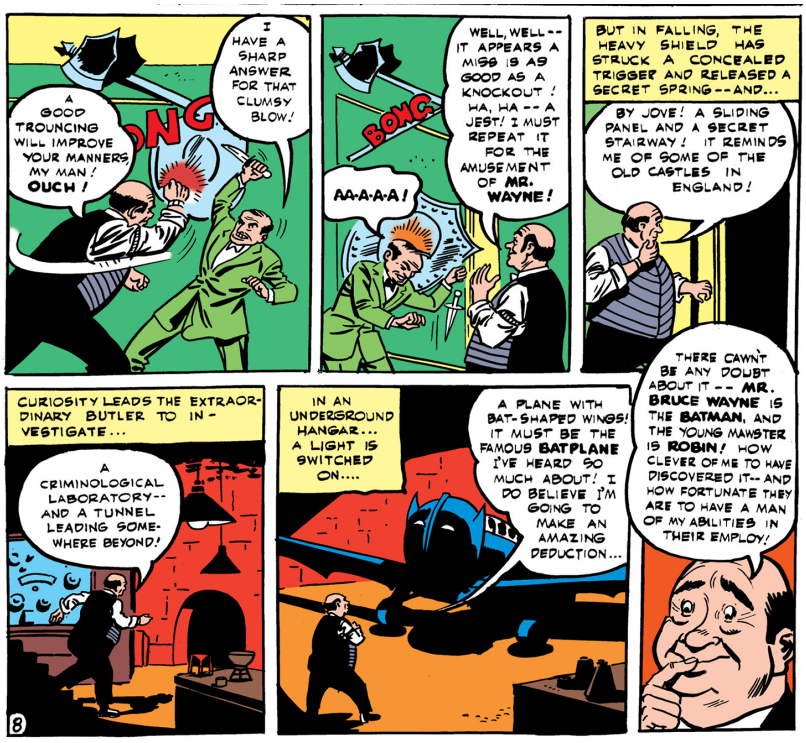

Detective," while in the background, miniature figures of Batman and Robin along with a scattering of criminals flesh out the scene.

Soon, we see Alfred leaving a ship and bidding farewell to a traveling companion named Leduc and shortly after, he notes that he's already two years late, so perhaps he'll follow Leduc, but before that can happen, he is accosted by crooks demanding that he surrender his valise. Not one to be intimidated, Alfred uses the suitcase as a weapon to fend them off and soon none other than Batman and Robin have arrived to send the would-be thieves scurrying away. A grateful Alfred informs the Dynamic Duo that he is an amateur criminologist and would be glad to assist them in their endeavors. Batman suggests he call on them to further discuss possibilities and they depart.

Later, at Wayne Manor, Batman and Robin are back in their civilian attire when they hear the doorbell and are shocked to see Alfred, who tips his bowler and promptly describes his harrowing journey, followed by his announcement that he is their new butler. He goes on to describe that his father, Jarvis, had served Thomas Wayne in that capacity and had been disappointed when his son chose not to go into the family business, but embarked on a career as an actor. On his deathbed, Jarvis secured the promise of Alfred to go and serve the Wayne family as he had.

Uncertain how to proceed, despite Robin's fears that Alfred's amateur sleuthing could uncover their secret identities, Bruce says he hasn't the heart to turn him away and will decide how to proceed in the morning.

Predictably, the criminal element who showed such interest in Alfred have not given up their quest and have followed him to Wayne Manor, accosting the gentleman just after he'd discovered a cache of old newspapers showing that Gaston Leduc is the Duke of Dorian, who has fled a Nazi invasion. The criminals again demand the valise and, in the nick of time, thanks to a clever burglar alarm alerting the Dynamic Duo, Batman and Robin burst into Alfred's quarters and subdue one of the party and send the rest of the gang running.

While Batman and Robin go in pursuit, Alfred is left to make sure Bruce and Dick are all right, but after finding an empty bed in Dick's quarters, the thug revives and takes another attempt at harming Alfred, who takes a valiant swing that misses, but dislodges an ornamental shield from the wall, knocking the thief out, but also revealing a hidden passageway that the curious Alfred follows to discover the Batcave.

Elsewhere, the Caped Crusaders have followed the gang to an abandoned theater, but before they can

(top) Alfred's first appearance in *Batman* #16. (bottom) Alfred just gets to town and discovers the Batcave. He is good! Art by Bob Kane, Jerry Robinson, and George Roussos. (inset) The ominously deceptive cover to *Batman* #16.

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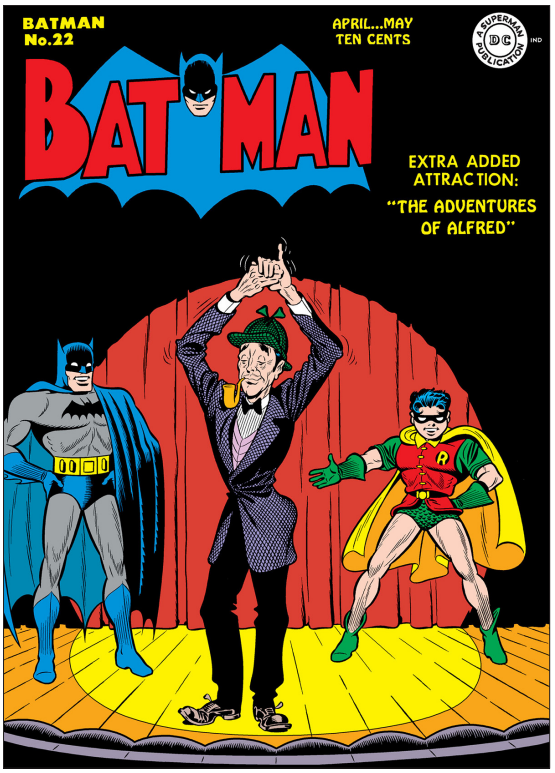

locate them, the crooks tangle the pair in weighted curtain ropes. They promptly gag and hoist our heroes above the stage to be dealt with later.

Soon, their companion arrives at the theater, secretly followed by Alfred, who had allowed him to escape. Once inside, the butler is overtaken with nostalgia from his own time on stage and begins acting out scenes from memory while Batman and Robin hang helplessly above, ultimately beginning to swing back and forth until the Caped Crusader manages to dislodge a rope that knocks the bowler from Alfred's head, alerting him to their plight.

A swift change of scenery and the busy criminals have captured the Duke and the crown jewels in his possession before transporting him to the old theater where they plan to dispose of him along with our heroes. Fortunately, with the Dynamic Duo freed of their bonds and with a quick assist by the butler, the thieves are captured and brought to justice.

In the closing panels of the tale, Alfred brings the uniforms of Batman and Robin to Bruce and Dick after seeing the famed bat-signal and alerting them that he knows of their dual identities, and with that introduction, Alfred became a partner with Batman.

Alfred continued to be something of a comedy relief element in future adventures and even stood in the spotlight on the cover of *Batman* #22 (April/May 1944) which rolled out a new feature in the anthology with little 4-page stories, typically with art by Jerry Robinson, where our favorite manservant is still trying his hand at being a detective. This was a perfectly logical move for the typical storylines in the DC Universe at this time, per Michael Uslan,

MICHAEL USLAN

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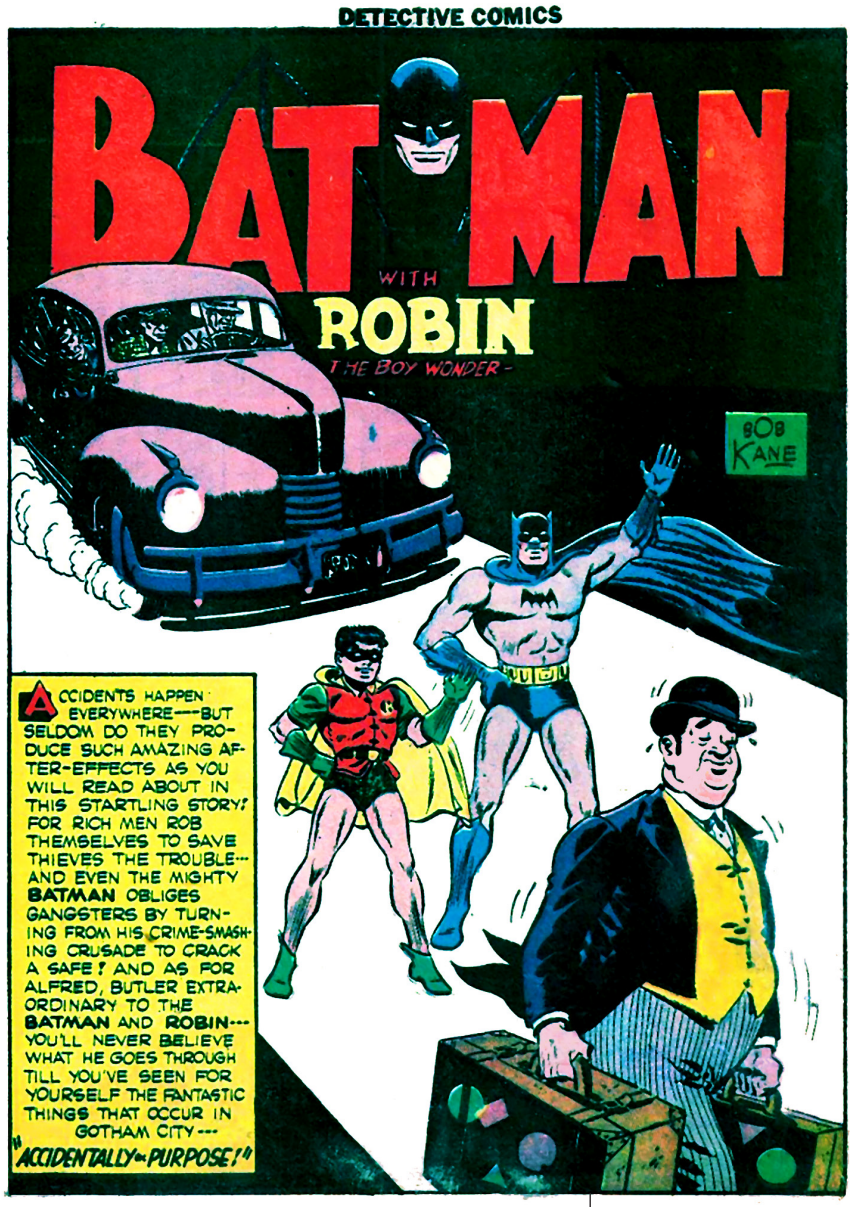
who is arguably the curator of all things Batman thanks to his long involvement with the character, particularly on the Silver Screen: "Back at the time of Alfred's creation, the comic book superhero world became more and more inundated with comic relief supporting characters: Percival Popp was with the Spectre. Doiby Dickles was with Green Lantern. Thorndyke was with Hour-Man. Flash had his Three Dimwits. Wonder Woman had Etta Candy. Plastic Man had Woozy Winks. Blackhawk had Chop Chop. So, Batman was bequeathed round and pudgy and funny Alfred, the wanna-be detective."

Michael Uslan further elaborates on the influence of the first movie version of Batman to the comic book evolution of Alfred: "Batman was first released to theaters, one chapter per week, beginning on July 16, 1943, introducing the serious version of Alfred as played by William Austin and as written by screenwriters



(left) Alfred looks a bit different on the cover of *Batman* #22. Art by Dick Sprang. (right) In *Detective Comics* #83, Alfred goes off to slim down. Art by Jack Burnley and George Roussos.

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(top left) Movie serial Alfred, actor William Austin (right) with Bruce Wayne/Batman (left). (bottom left) Alfred looks like a new man. Art by Jack Burnley and George Roussos. (right) Alfred saves Batman and Robin, but no one can save him in *Detective Comics* #328. Art by Sheldon Moldoff and Joe Giella.

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BOB GREENBERGER

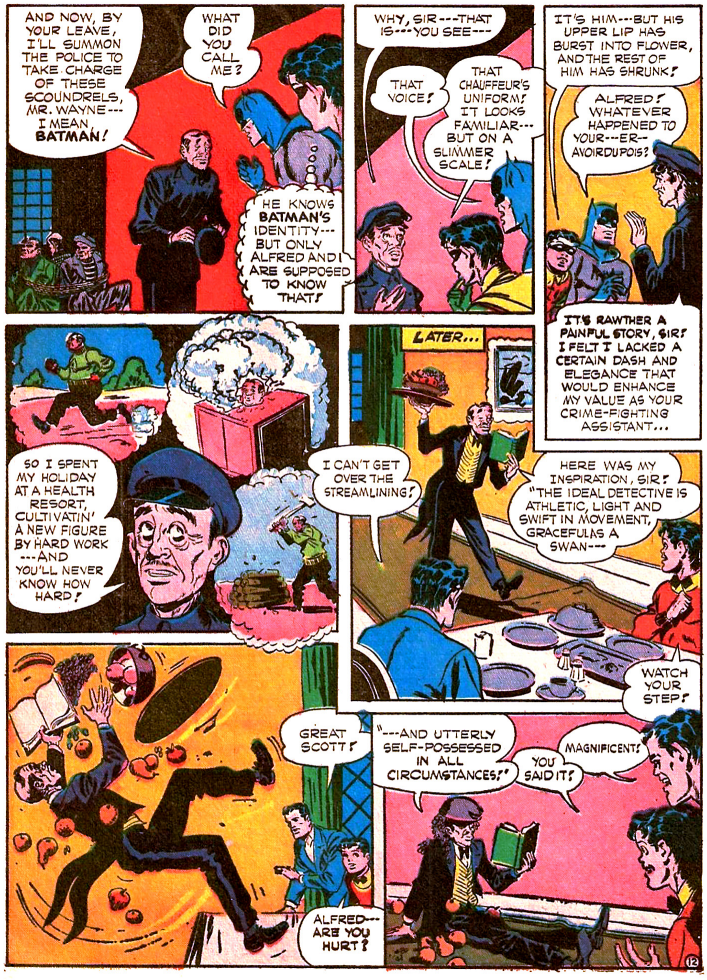
Victor McLeod, Leslie Swabacker, and Harry Fraser. Not that they also were the creators of what was initially called 'The Bats Cave.'

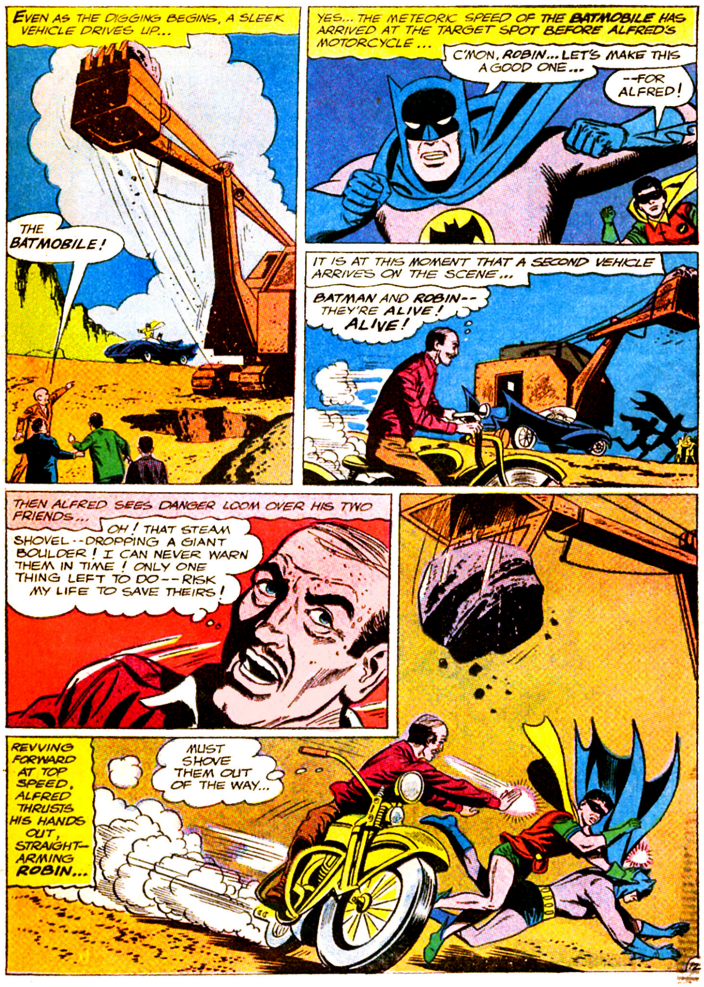
In *Detective Comics* #83 (Jan. 1944), Alfred vacationed at a health resort, where he lost weight and grew a mustache in order to conform to the image of William Austin. (Bill) Finger and (Jerry) Robinson created that comic book look inspired by the movie serial."

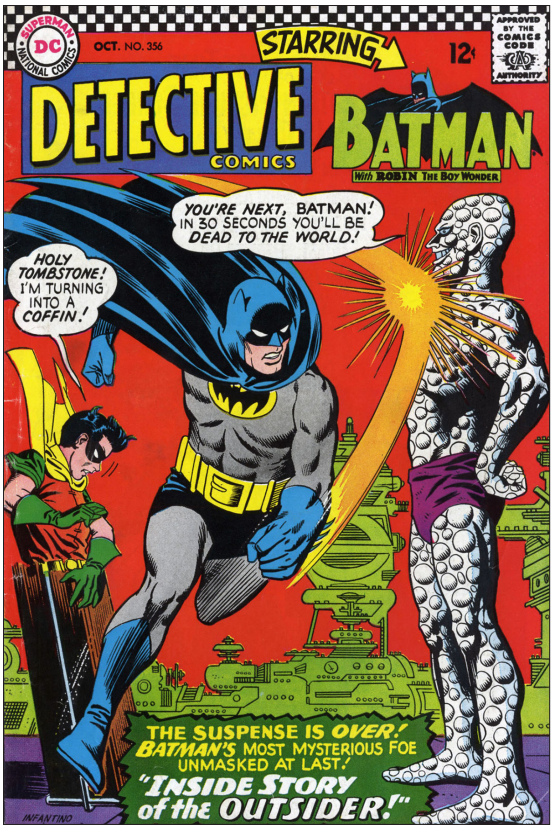
Bob Greenberger shared his take on Alfred for BACK ISSUE: "When introduced, he was essential to Bruce Wayne as Commissioner Gordon was to Batman, an adult to talk to. Also, he was the comic relief since Robin was the action partner. Over time, though, that evolved until the 1970s when he grew into the confidante and advisor, which creators under Denny O'Neil's guidance evolved. The archness in *Dark Knight* was Frank Miller's creation, and others have used it at will. It's interesting to note that he may be gone in the main continuity. Still, so many alternate realities and flashback stories continue to use him, showing his vitality and necessity to the mythos."

For many years, Alfred served as little more than an extra. Often in the background and, as previously mentioned, serving as someone for Bruce Wayne to talk to rather than endless thought balloons containing internal monologues. He would be seen as the caretaker of Wayne Manor, the cook, mechanic on the Batmobile, and sometimes chauffeur, but seldom much more.

One significant storyline from the Silver Age directly involving our gentleman's gentleman was the intriguing saga of the Outsider, which begins, surprisingly enough, with what seemed to be the death of Alfred in *Detective Comics* #328







(left) After bedeviling our heroes for many issues, The Outsider finally appears in the flesh in *Detective Comics* #356, and his secret is revealed. Art by Carmine Infantino and Joe Giella. (right) The dramatic cover to *Batman* #216. Art by Irv Novick and Dick Giordano.

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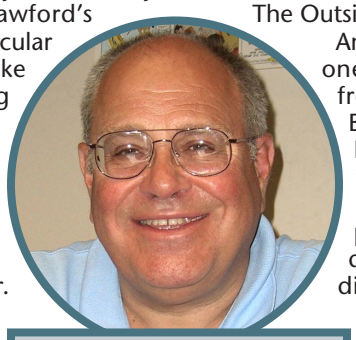
(June 1964) when the loyal manservant sacrificed his own life to save Batman and Robin from being crushed by a boulder. Following this insurmountable loss, The Dynamic Duo honored their friend with the Alfred Foundation, muddling along with Aunt Harriet in Alfred's stead, a cross-pollination from the television series, and only later did it come to light in *Detective Comics* #356 (October 1966) through an extended flashback sequence that Alfred had been brought back to life by scientist Brandon Crawford, but much like Dr. Frankenstein and his infamous experiment, things didn't go quite according to plan and a very altered creature emerged, both physically and mentally, from the cell regeneration equipment in Crawford's laboratory. The bone-white figure, covered in circular markings sans any hair, looked nearly statue-like and was endowed with weird abilities including telekinesis and was bent on the destruction of Batman and Robin. He dubbed himself The Outsider, as in being outside the human race.

Another strange consequence of the bungled experiment was that Brandon Crawford himself was transformed, into a duplicate Alfred, so the Outsider placed him into the coffin for cover. From that point forward, the Outsider vexed our heroes, often through surrogates. The World's Greatest Detective is suspicious that the Outsider's knowledge of their operation spells out Alfred and in a final showdown in Crawford's lab, the theory is proven out when they defeat the Outsider and restore Alfred (and the scientist) to their natural state. The faithful butler further has no recollection of his time as the Outsider, so things return to normal at Wayne Manor.

Michael Uslan had these insights on this timeframe as well: "The next depth change to Alfred came with the advent of the "new look" Batman in *Detective Comics* #327-329, which culminated in the death of Alfred. This was intended by editor Julius Schwartz to be a permanent change as part of the revolutionary new approach to Batman. But as soon as the TV series bloomed large, and they determined to make Alfred an essential character in that series, the orders came down to DC to bring Alfred back to life in the comic books. What we later learned was that Alfred had not exactly died but had become a villain cloak and mystery and known only as 'The Outsider.' All these stories, therefore, lent depth to the character of Alfred as we had never seen quite before."

Bob Rozakis, the famed "Answer Man" and writer and editor at DC Comics confirmed the notion to do away with the character by Julie Schwartz. "He (Alfred) was expendable when Julie Schwartz took over as editor, replaced by Aunt Harriet. The Outsider storyline was Julie's way of killing him off."



BOB ROZAKIS

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Another significant milestone in the '60s included one of the more memorable portrayals of Alfred from the small screen in the afore mentioned Batman television series by Alan Napier, whom Bob Rozakis listed as his favorite live action actor for our favorite butler. Longtime Batman editor Jordan Gorfinkel further elaborated on his preference for the actor: "Alan Napier, hands down. Unflappable, loyal, smart, kept Aunt Harriet distracted. Although it always confused me that Alfred had a mustache and Commissioner Gordon did not. As a kid, I thought Gordon looked like Alfred and the reverse."

In *Batman* #216 (Nov. 1969), Alfred loomed large, beginning with that dramatic cover by Irv Novick and Dick Giordano where he appears to have been felled by a mysterious cloaked female figure. Inside, we see that the same art team handles the Frank Robbins scripted "Angel—or Devil?" The piece is lettered by Ben Oda with editing by Julius Schwartz.

It seems a Shakespeare festival from London has descended upon Gotham City, and drama is already in the air when a young blonde girl at the stage door of the Gotham Theater is being menaced by a pair of men with British speech patterns, insisting she perform some sort of unspoken task that she is

refusing. Just then, the Batman arrives to aid the girl, but after cold cocking one and preparing to take on the other, the girl stops the Batman, causing him to suffer a blow while she dashes off into the rainy evening with a briefcase and stating, "Y-you win! I'll do it!"

In a quick change of scenery, we are back at Wayne Manor and Alfred is tending to an ailing Dick Grayson when the former thespian spies a piece in the theater section of the newspaper reporting that his older brother, Wilfred Pennyworth, is in Gotham City with his traveling repertory company. Alfred is taken aback that his brother is in town and hasn't bothered to contact him and declares, "Well, we Pennyworth's have our pride! If, for whatever reason…he chooses not to call me---I shan't approach him!"

Perhaps easily missed by the casual reader is that this is the first reference to Alfred's surname, which he would use from this point forward, while the old Alfred Beagle would be relegated to Earth-2 status.

A somewhat complex story unfolds, but the highlights include Wilfred's daughter, Daphne, the blonde we saw before, visiting Wayne Manor and meeting her Uncle Alfred. Unfortunately, she's also been blackmailed by that earlier pair of her fellow acting troop members, including her hot-headed boyfriend, with her father's life hanging in the balance. She is therefore forced to aid in the theft of the original manuscript by Shakespeare of Romeo and Juliet, carefully stored in Wayne Manor.

In the finest traditions of the day, the evildoers are caught and punished, and the Pennyworth family enjoy their reunion, despite the confusion of all that drew them together.

As the timeline moved forward, it seemed Mr. Pennyworth gained more depth while still spending most of his time keeping the home fires burning. Bob Rozakis suggested that in the '70s and '80s, writers like Len Wein, Denny O'Neil, and others began to flesh out a more three-dimensional version of Alfred. One tale by Denny, "No Hope in Crime Alley" in *Detective Comics* #457 (March 1976), is a good example, wherein Alfred is there to help to both open and close the classic story, as he and Bruce Wayne have left behind the trappings of stately Wayne Manor and moved into a penthouse in Gotham City, so it stands to reason they would interact more now that Dick Grayson/Robin has flown the nest. Serving nearly as the omniscient narrator, Alfred is seen as not only serving, but looking after Bruce in a nearly fatherly way, which is surely one of the more important aspects of this character.

Michael Uslan went back a little further in his assessment: "I always felt that Alfred was given additional depth when he began to chronicle the adventures of Batman 2 and Robin 2, imaginary

(left) The new Alfred gets a last name. Art by Irv Novick and Dick Giordano. (right) Alfred and Bruce interact in *Detective Comics* #457. Art by Dick Giordano.

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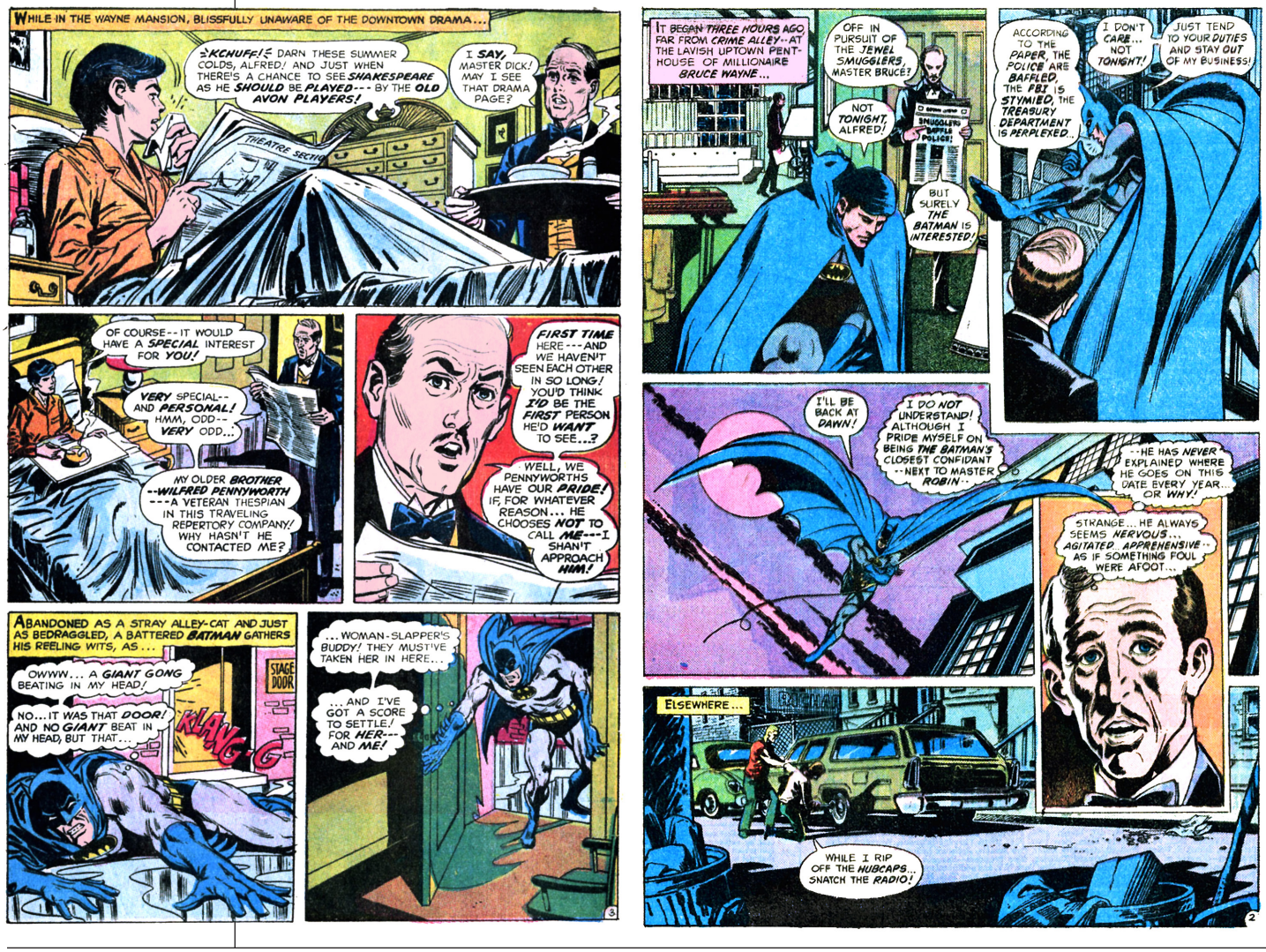

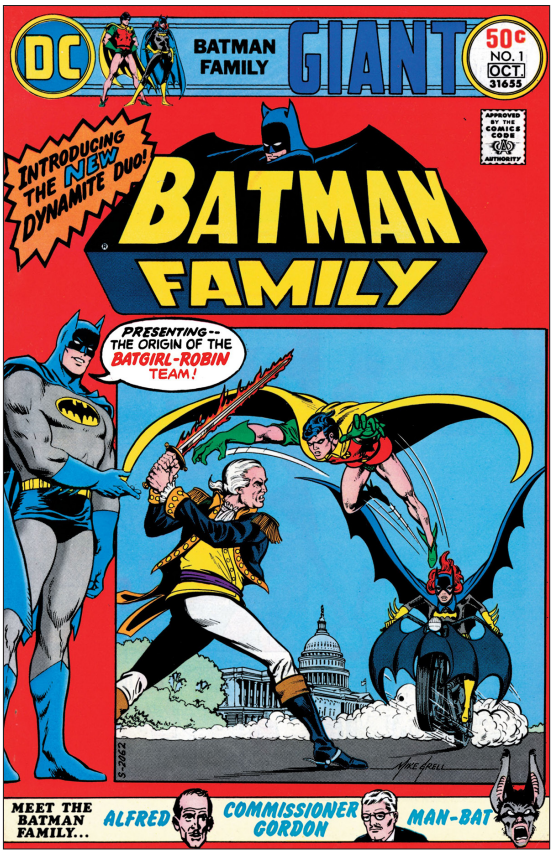

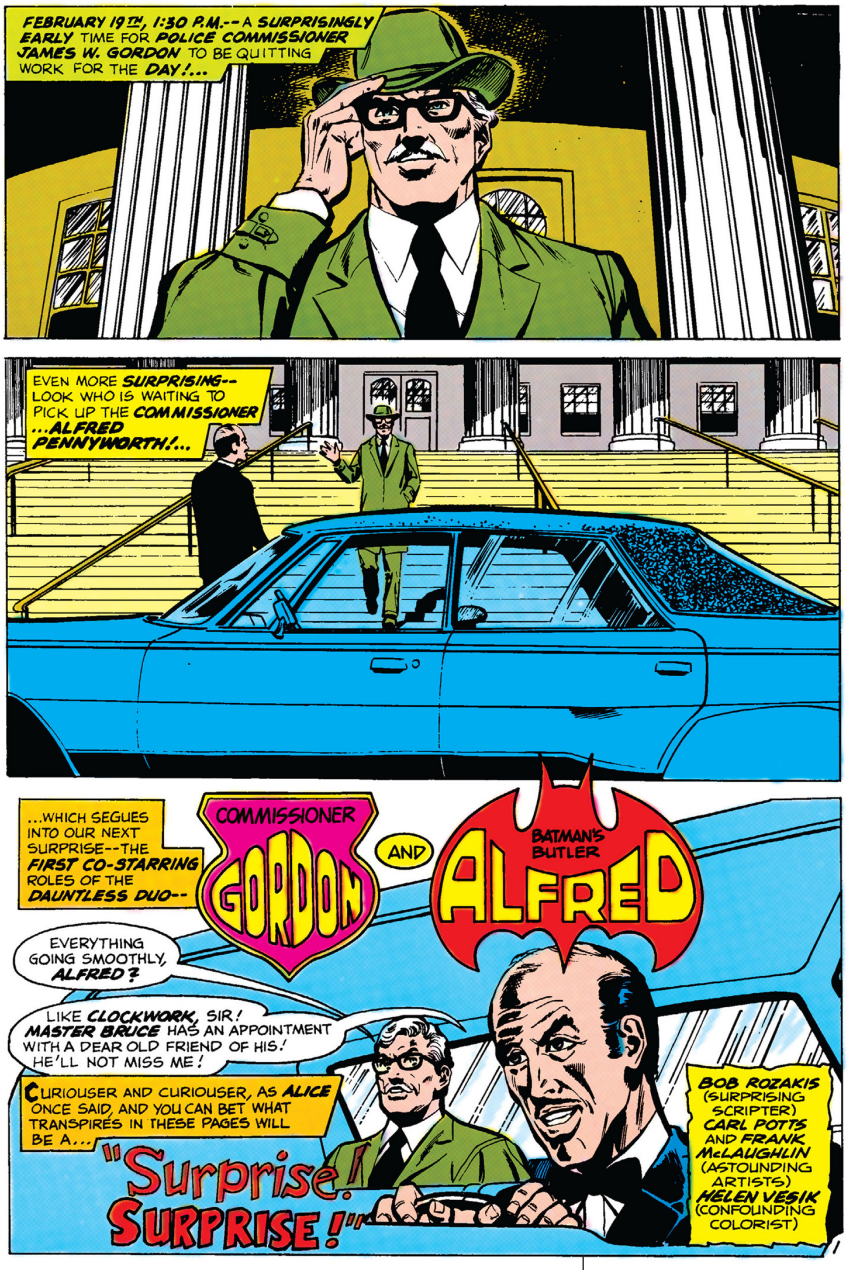

stories taking place many years in the future. That first adventure took place in *Batman* #131 (April 1960)."

Jordan Gorfinkel was a bit more philosophical in his musings on the question: "Honestly. like all great Batman characters, (Alfred's) a bit of a trickster. His characterization rebalances according to the Batman he's supporting."

Alfred had a couple noteworthy appearances in the mid-'70s, both in anthology books. When the famed 100-page Super Spectacular issues were rolled out, the *Detective Comics* series, beginning with issue #438 (Dec./Jan. 1973/1974) reprinted key stories from the Outsider storyline. Additionally, a new anthology book made its debut in 1975 with issue #1 of the *Batman Family*, cover dated October of that year. This book proved popular, and while it often included the World's Greatest Detective, it leaned more toward featuring various supporting cast members of Batman, including Batgirl, Robin, Man-Bat, Huntress, and in a few of the issues, our favorite butler, though most were also reprints.

Issue #1 had a 4-page reprint from the Golden Age *Adventures of Alfred* series from 1945. Alfred also got the spotlight in a 1-page filler called "The Alfred Story!" It was basically a collection of panels sharing a few key points in Alfred's history, narrated by Robin and then Batman, showing his first appearance, describing his weight loss and gaining a mustache, and that his acting ability had been useful to our caped crimefighters, displaying as an example one of the many times he impersonated the Batman, and then going briefly into the Outsider storyline.

Issue #2 (Nov./De, 1975) included a more contemporary, but still reprinted, "Adventures of Alfred" from 1967, while Issue #6 (July/Aug. 1976) has another Golden Age "Adventures of Alfred" reprint with the same treatment in issue #9 (Jan./Feb. 1977).

Issue #11 (May/June 1977), however, broke the mold with a new story by Bob Rozakis, and illustrated by Carl Potts and Frank McLaughlin. "Surprise! Surprise!" was a 7-page effort, teaming up Commissioner Gordon and Alfred. The blurb on the splash page proclaims it as "The first co-starring roles of the Dauntless Duo," complete with logos for the two characters. Alfred's has "Batman's Bulter Alfred" on a bat-shaped background.

The basic plotline has the pair setting up a surprise birthday party for Bruce Wayne at the Manor, and Alfred doing his level best to keep James Gordon from discovering anything he shouldn't, up to and including bringing his acting skills to bear by impersonating a burglar to throw Gordon off the scent. In the end, the surprise party comes off well, but thanks to Gordon's noting Alfred's

(left) Alfred takes his place in the *Batman Family*. Cover by Mike Grell. (right) Meet the new team of Alfred and Commissioner Gordon in *Batman Family* #11. Art by Carl Potts and Frank McLaughlin.

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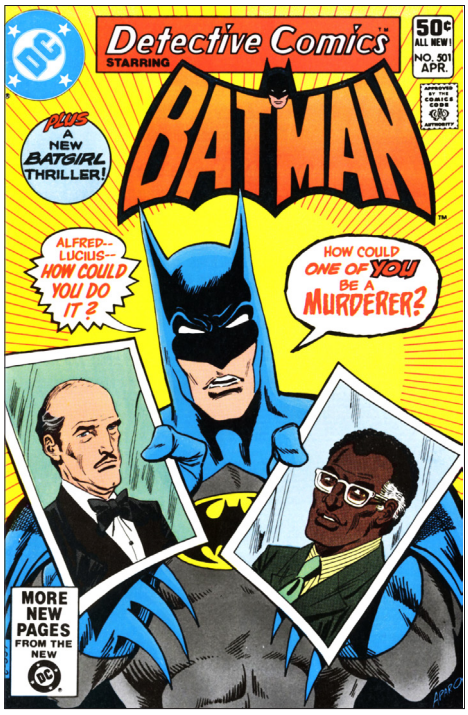

(top) Things don't look good for Alfred. Art by Jim Aparo. (bottom) Alfred defends his daughter in *Detective Comics* #501. Art by Don Newton and Dan Adkins.

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shoes when they had grappled while he was disguised as the thief, the commissioner's suspicions are aroused and in the final panel, he comments that Batman is there…in spirit, leaving Bruce, Dick, and Alfred speechless.

Alas, all good things must come to an end, and while there is a mention, yet again, of the Outsider in issue #13 (Sep. 1977), the *Batman Family* series came to a close with issue #20 (Oct./Nov. 1978).

In the early '80s, an interesting background addition for Alfred came along in *Detective Comics* #501 (April 1981) where it is revealed in a Gerry Conway scripted story, "The Man Who Killed Mlle. Marie!" that Alfred had a daughter named Julia as the result of an affair with none other than Mlle. Marie when they'd crossed paths during World War II where she was a key figure in the French resistance while Alfred was serving with British intelligence. Michael Uslan commented on this development: "I just love the fact that he apparently was in World War II with Mademoiselle Marie, my favorite character back in the days of *Star-Spangled War Stories* when she was drawn by the magnificent Mort Drucker. That was cool!"

Batman #400 (Oct. 1986), had a complex storyline by Doug Moench involving nearly all the significant characters in Batman's world, including Alfred, with the rogue's gallery being freed from Arkham Asylum by Ra's Al Ghul and they, in turn, kidnapping Alfred and his daughter Julia, among others. The Dark Knight obviously saved the day, but things got harrowing and foreshadowed, to an extent, the similar Arkham breakout portrayed by Denny O'Neil in the *Knightfall* novel, based on the series from 1994, where our hero drives himself to complete exhaustion, despite Alfred's best efforts to save him from himself, ultimately leading to Pennyworth leaving Batman for a period of time.

Batman Annual #13 (June 1989) included a short story by Kevin Dooley and illustrated by Malcolm Jones III titled "Waiting in the Wings," that features Alfred, delving into his origins coming from a long line of butlers who had served the Wayne family. It specifically recounted Alfred's own work taking care of Bruce early in his Batman career and calling into play his Army medical training, though his ultimate desire is to return to the stage. Ultimately, Alfred realizes that his role in Bruce Wayne's life is the most important one of all.

Speaking of roles, a host of talented actors have been called upon to portray our favorite gentleman's gentleman on the silver screen. In addition to the previously discussed William Austin in the 1943 *Batman* movie, Eric Wilton took on the role in the 1949 *Batman and Robin* film. Even Alan Napier made a big screen showing in *Batman: The Movie* in 1966.

Michael Gough was tapped to play Alfred in the Tim Burton directed *Batman* movie released in 1989 that handily jumpstarted the Batman film franchise and maintained the role in follow-up movies *Batman Returns* (1992), *Batman Forever* (1995), and *Batman and Robin* (1997), even though the actors playing the Caped Crusader were not as consistent. It should be noted that in *Batman and Robin*, Alfred's niece, Barbara Wilson appears, perhaps inspired by the storyline in *Batman* #216, despite the name change.

Leaping ahead to the Christopher Nolan trilogy of movies and Alfred is capably played by Michael Caine, whose character is given some added dimension, starting with *Batman Begins* (2005) where he has been given ownership of Wayne Enterprises during Bruce's 7-year absence, and actually saving Wayne's life. Next up in *The Dark Knight* (2008), Bruce and Alfred have relocated to a penthouse in downtown Gotham City (sound familiar?) due to the

destruction of Wayne Manor and the butler continues to try to be a voice of reason in Bruce/Batman's self-imposed and nearly self-destructive mission. Finally, in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), Alfred is even more vital to the reclusive Bruce Wayne, who has been off the grid for approximately 8 years and shows a fatherly concern toward Bruce, ultimately submitting his resignation to try and get him to throttle back in his quest to defeat Bane.

Michael Uslan, when queried about his favorite Alfred Pennyworth actor, shared the following: "They ALL brought dignity and depth to the character. Michael Gough was my favorite fantasy version of Alfred and Michael Caine was my favorite "real world" version of Alfred, but I love every actor who has portrayed him."

Added notable film performances include Jeremy Irons from both *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) and *Justice League* (2017), Douglas Hodge had the detail in *Joker* (2019) and, most recently, Andy Serkis in *The Batman* (2022). Serkis' character taps into the notion of Alfred being a former MI6 intelligence officer in his native England.

STEVE ENGLEHART

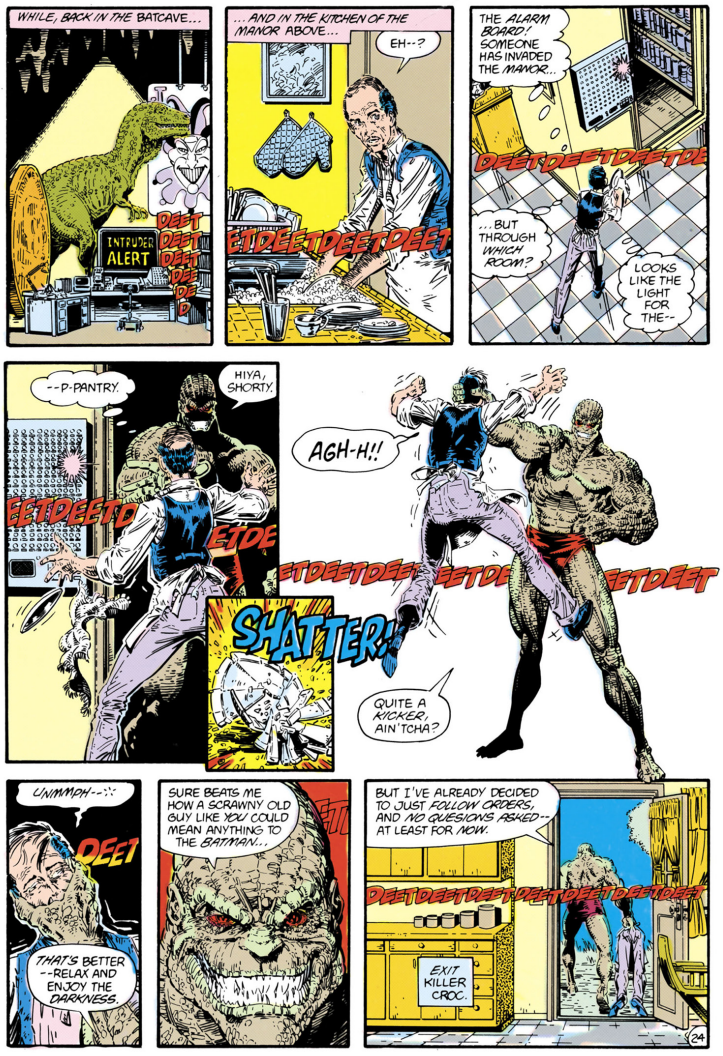
steveenglehart.com.

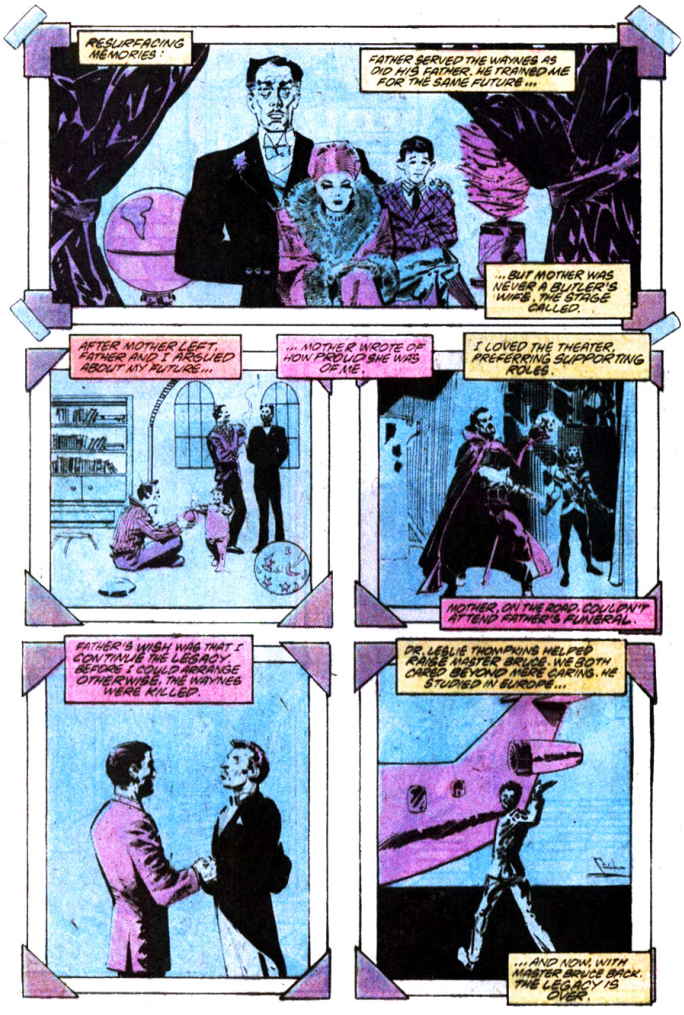
And now, back to the books where the "Hush" storyline offered a view of how valuable Alfred is in Batman's world. *Batman* #609 (Jan. 2003) has our hero severely injured from a devastating fall and Alfred is seen utilizing all his skill as a combat medic to help save Bruce until a surgeon can be engaged and, of course, a proper and plausible backstory as to how Mr. Wayne got into such a state in the first place.

As the last couple of decades of continuity have rolled along, Alfred has been there, often in the shadows, but never far, and providing vital support where needed. As of this writing, Alfred had been felled in the "City of Bane" storyline from 2019, but in this writer's opinion, it would be a grave mistake to count Alfred out.

In sum, who is Alfred and what does he bring to the table? By way of conclusion, a coterie of creators was kind enough to weigh in with their observations:

Steve Englehart: "I wrote him as the completely loyal factotum, with no special shading. I totally buy into the idea that he devoted his life to Bruce (Wayne) as the parents would have wished. (I guess there weren't any uncles or aunts, despite Aunt Harriet from the '60s TV show.)





(left) Alfred is kidnapped in *Batman* #400. Art by Arthur Adams and Terry Austin. (right) Alfred reminisces about his past in *Batman Annual* #13. Art by Malcolm Jones III.

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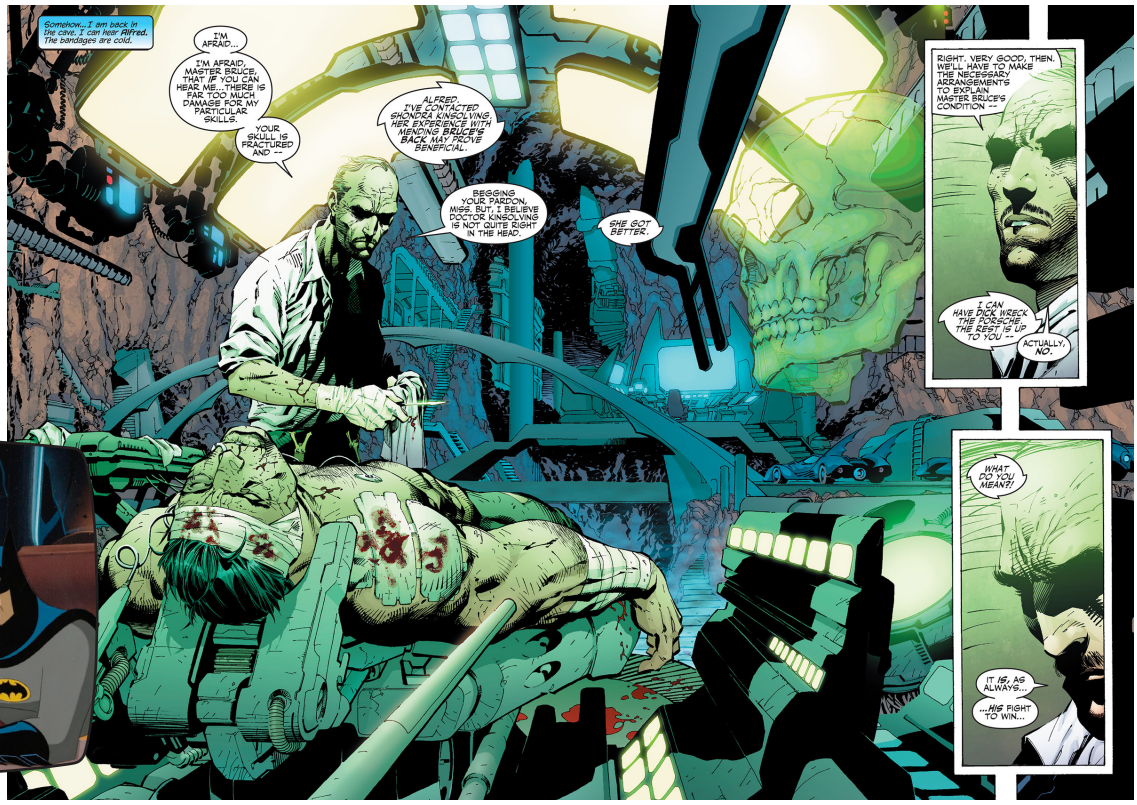


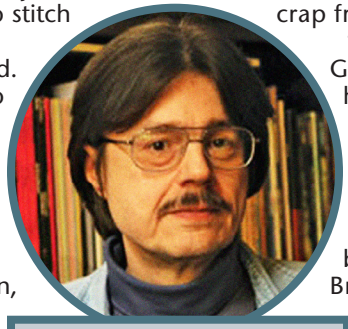
Alfred tends to Batman in *Batman* #609. Art by Jim Lee and Scott Williams. (inset) *Batman: The Animated Series*' Alfred, voiced by Efrem Zimbalist Jr. and Clive Revill.

TM & © DC Comics.

Doug Moench: "Back when we had the 'Bat-meets,' I will say that people who think Bruce Wayne is crazy or obsessed or whatever are wrong, and a good way to prove that is to just have them talk to Alfred, and he is a stabilizing influence. That's what I would say at those meets all the time. He keeps him grounded and reminds him who he is. He's always there if there's any problem, whether to talk it out or to stitch up the suit or to treat the wound.

"I think (Bruce) prefers having Alred around. He's a good guy to have around. It's not just so that the writer can have a character for Batman to talk to. It's so that Bruce Wayne can have someone to talk to and not feel so isolated. Just to be more grounded in the reality of normal people as opposed to all the freaks he has to fight at night.

"If you go back to the traditional gentleman, the British kind of thing, the devotion to excellent service, that kind of thing, I guess Alfred came from that. He's proud that he's a good butler. Of course, he became a lot more."



DOUG MOENCH

Jordan Gorfinkel: "The father figure we all have in our lives who can speak truth to power because he's not family by blood, he's family by choice. We all have someone in our lives whom we love and respect in this way, which makes him relatable and beloved.

"Alfred's most important role is inhabiting all of these traits (foil, guardian, father figure, and stabilizing influence). He's the Swiss army knife of psychological balance. (He brings) intergenerational wisdom and the voice of reason. From a structural standpoint, every detective needs a Waston, someone to talk out the problem. Alfred probably became more "serious" when Robin left the Batcave and Batman needed a new sounding board. He personifies loyalty to the Wayne family. I don't want to say guilt. But he unquestionably gets something in return. With the Wayne's, it was serving the public good through philanthropy. With Batman, it's serving the public good with, well, Batman."

Bob Rozakis: "I think his role as a stabilizing figure is most important. He has become the voice of reason over the years as Batman has become, frankly, more unstable.

"Over the 85 years of Batman, Alfred went from being a loyal servant to the vital glue that held Bruce Wayne and Batman together. He provides sage advice when Batman needs it, but also some dry humor when the situation calls for it. And he's developed into someone who doesn't take crap from Bruce.

"He has a feeling of responsibility to and for Bruce. Going back to the version in which Alfred's father had been Thomas Wayne's butler and so it was a family thing. I think that's ultimately what makes Alfred tick.

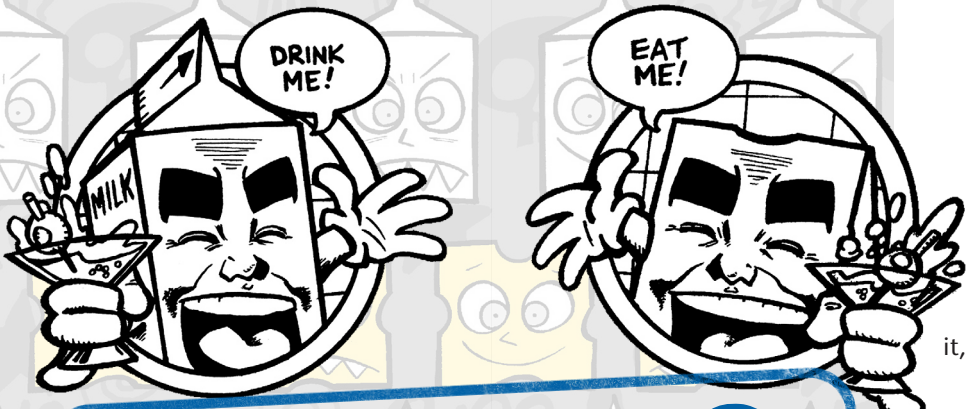
"I think I wrote two Alfred stories. In one, he and Commissioner Gordon planned a surprise party for Bruce. In the other, he foiled some burglars to get them out of Wayne Manor before Bruce showed up as Batman. In both, I tried to show him as a bit more than just a man with a feather duster."

Michael Uslan: "Most importantly, when young Bruce Wayne saw his parents murdered, he could easily have turned to the dark side and become a Joker. But it was Alfred who anchored him to his humanity. And as Bruce Wayne evolved into Batman and then the Dark Knight, it continues to be Alfred who tethers him to his humanity and keeps Bruce Wayne from being totally consumed by the Batman."

For those reasons and more, despite his current absence in continuity, and for nearly all the years Batman has been in existence, Alfred has been right there, too, as his most enduring and loyal partner.

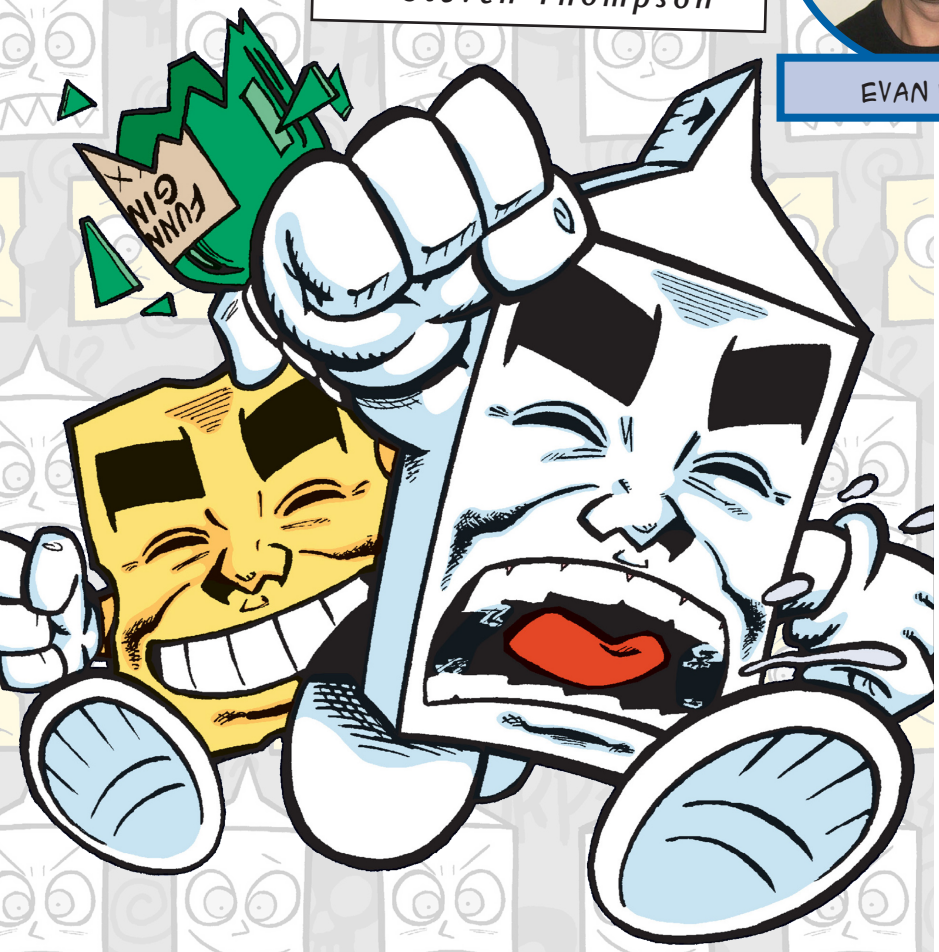
***BRYAN D. STROUD** is a longtime fan of DC Comics, particularly the Silver and Bronze Ages, and has been contributing to the website of his lifelong best friend, Ron Daudt, for over a decade, doing reviews of those classics.*

end



WARNING: THE FOLLOWING CONTAINS DAIRY PRODUCTS (AND THEY AREN'T HAPPY)

by Steven Thompson



EVAN DORKIN

What the...?!

"I don't mind giving people what they want, as long as I'm happy doing it. I've got a lot of irons in the fire. I'm usually working on six things at once. I know where they fit into my scheme of things, and I enjoy Milk & Cheese. If I didn't enjoy it, you would stop seeing it."
-Evan Dorkin in *Hero Illustrated* (Mar. 1995)

Laurel and Hardy, Wheeler and Woolsey, Abbott and Costello, Burns and Allen, Sacco and Vanzetti… In the tradition of all of those great double acts of history, the late 20th century brought us…Milk & Cheese. While they are, yes, a self-described comedy duo, Milk & Cheese actually could be said to have more in common with Sacco and Vanzetti, two violent anarchists controversially tried, convicted, and subsequently executed in the 1920s. Like that notorious Jazz Age pair, Milk & Cheese are also anarchists long past their expiration dates.

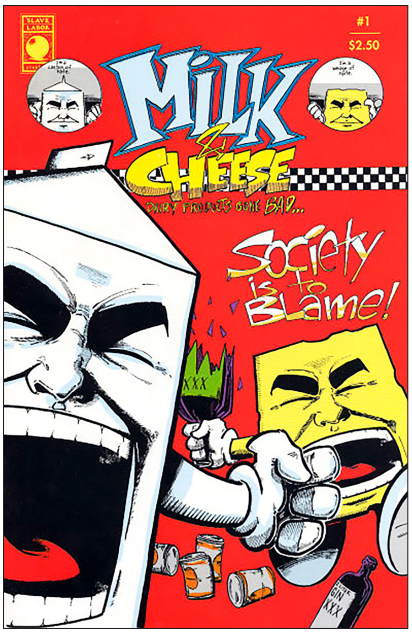
Then and now, the warped genius behind these two destructive dairy products is Evan Dorkin, a man with an impressive resumé besides the little imps we're here to discuss. He's written for TV's *Superman: The Animated Series*, *Batman Beyond*, *Ben 10*, and *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*. He also wrote the unsold animated pilot, *Welcome to Eltingville*, based on his own cult favorite strip about comics and gaming nerds.

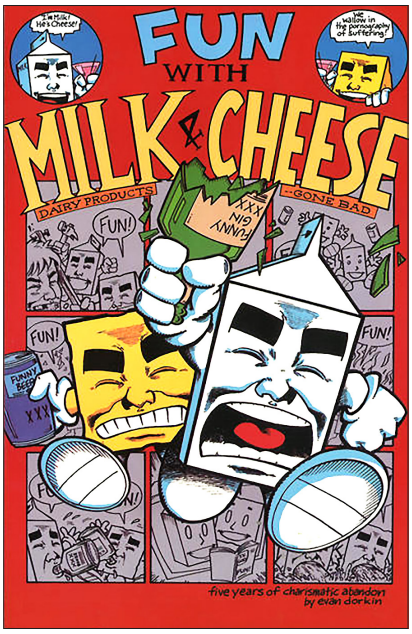
Dorkin tells *BACK ISSUE*, "I worked in comics retail for roughly six years. Over that time, I started weaning off Marvel and DC titles and getting into indie genre stuff like *Nexus*, *Judge Dredd*, and *American Flagg*. And I became a huge fan of alt/indie titles like *Love and Rockets*, *Eightball*, *Hate*, *Weirdo*, *Sin*, *Dirty Plotte*, Jim Woodring's work, and many others. I was also following the comics in *The Village Voice* and New York press free weeklies, which ran Mark Newgarden, Mark Beyer's *Amy and Jordan*, Matt Groening's *Life in Hell*, Charles Burns, *Steven* by Doug Allen, Carol Lay, Kaz. My boss, Jim Hanley, got me into *The Spirit* and old comic strips and I saved up enough pay to eventually buy my first Russ Cochran EC library. It was a great time to fall into all sorts of work. Heady times."

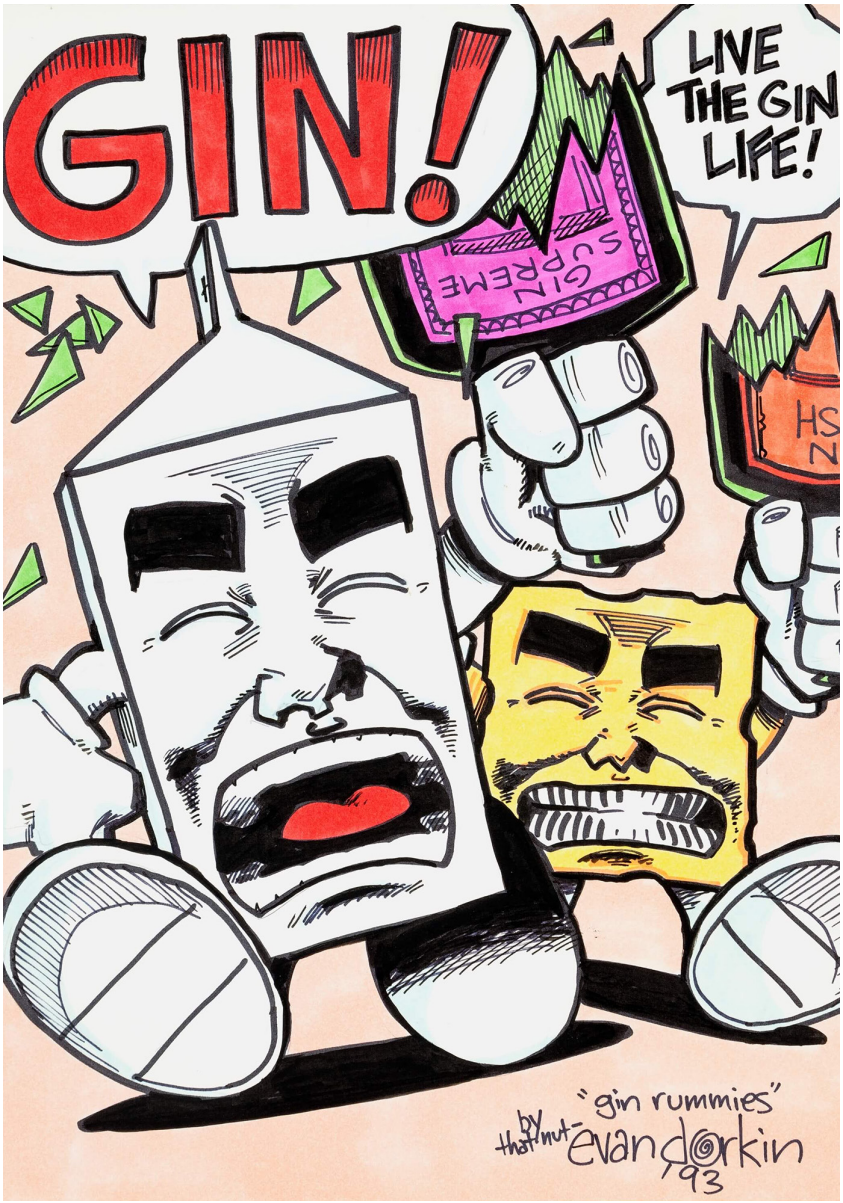
One late entry neo-underground indie series that stood out among all the rest in the overcrowded market was Evan Dorkin's own *Milk & Cheese* from 1991, a comic about cheerfully pure cartoon anarchy in the form of two dairy products gone bad. Milk & Cheese were, literally, a small carton of milk and a tiny wedge of cheese — "a carton of hate; a wedge of spite." No real background or context.

Dairy products gone bad, Milk and Cheese. Art by Evan Dorkin from *Fun With Milk & Cheese*.

TM & © Evan Dorkin.







Just pure idiotic insanity on a page, as our protagonists insult and/or assault celebrities, events, politicians, hippies, stand-up comics, people, places, and things…even their own readers and fans feel the brunt at times!

Dorkin draws them as awfully cute, though, with big expressive faces and thick black brows. Their endearing looks draw you in and before you know it, their relentless attacks on what they perceive as stupidity are underway... and they perceive pretty much everything as stupidity. "They're brothers from different udders," says Dorkin, "a bonded pair. I love both of my hate children equally."

On a 2019 episode of *The Awesome Podcast*, the host tells Dorkin he writes the best angry people ever, to which the artist replies, "Thank you? I guess."

Milk & Cheese certainly weren't the first comics characters ever to spend their entire time "on camera" attacking or railing against something they perceive as wrong in some way or another. That distinction would possibly belong to Everett True, star of *The Outbursts of Everett True*, a single or double-panel strip dating all the way back to 1905, the very infancy of comics, but one that shows up rather a lot on the Internet even today. A collection of Everett True strips appeared in 1983, and another as recently as 2015.

Even closer to their time period were other precedents such as David Boswell's *Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman*, who began his sounding off and blustering in 1978, and the irascible real-life comic book character, Harvey Pekar, star of his own *American Splendor* comic which began in 1976.

If the "adventures," and I use the term loosely, of Milk & Cheese, reminded me of anything already in comics, though, it was Alan Moore's *2000 AD* strip, *D. R. & Quinch*, drawn by Alan Davis, the difference being that in that case, those two violent non-humans were alien juvenile delinquents.

Dorkin says, "I had the Titan edition of *D. R. and Quinch* back in the '80s, but they weren't an influence or inspiration. The initial inspiration for my characters was alcohol. I drew them on a napkin while waiting for food after a show at CBGB's with friends. I was three sheets to the wind at the time. Milk & Cheese were just characters I'd doodle on envelopes and backing boards at cons, but one year, at the San Diego Con, I was asked to draw a comic with them for *Greed* magazine. That lead to more appearances and, eventually, the comics from Slave Labor Graphics."

Reid Fleming, *American Splendor*, and, as Dorkin notes, even *D.R. and Quinch,* have all been published in collected editions. There's a wonderful

(top left) Blaming society seems appropriate. (top right) Who wouldn't want to have *Fun With Milk & Cheese*? (bottom) The boys celebrate their favorite beverage. (opposite page) A fairly typical outing for our fun-loving duo. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

TM & © Evan Dorkin.

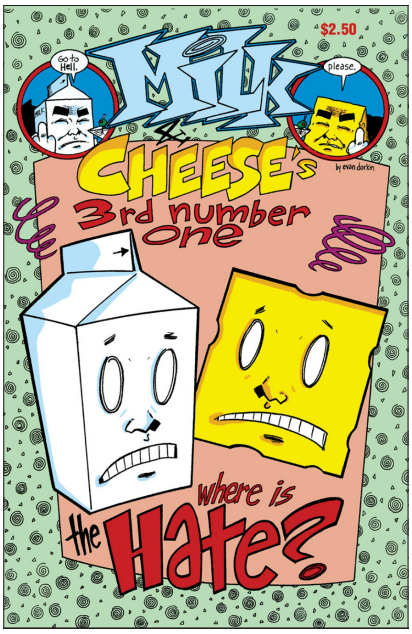
I'M MILK!
HE'S CHEESE!
MILK & CHEESE
dairy products gone bad-in-
CAR TROUBLE!!!
WE'VE GOT CAR KEYS!!
©1991 evan "drivers" dorkin
WHOA-O-HO! EVERYONE SCATTER- BECAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE CAR TROUBLE!!!
sounds like a strip-title!
760-DIE
WE'RE TOO SMALL TO CONTROL THIS VEHICLE!
AND TOO NUTS TO CARE!! HA HA!!! (I crack me up, Milk my friend!)
USA TODAY
HEY! I JUST HAD THIS THING WAXED! LAY OFF!
Cheese- I'm a hungry boy!
O.K!
LET'S USE- THE DRIVE THRU!
BURGER K
HA HA HA
12
LOOK! A DRIVE IN MOVIE THEATER! AND THEY'RE SHOWING "Return to the Blue Lagoon!"
WE MUST DO THIS!
WE'RE A SCREEN HIT!
CARS ARE GOOD! THEY LET US CAUSE TROUBLE FASTER & BETTER!
WE ARE TRULY CRAZED AT 90MPH!
END of the line!
to Dan— thanks ola-city! evan dorkin '93
13

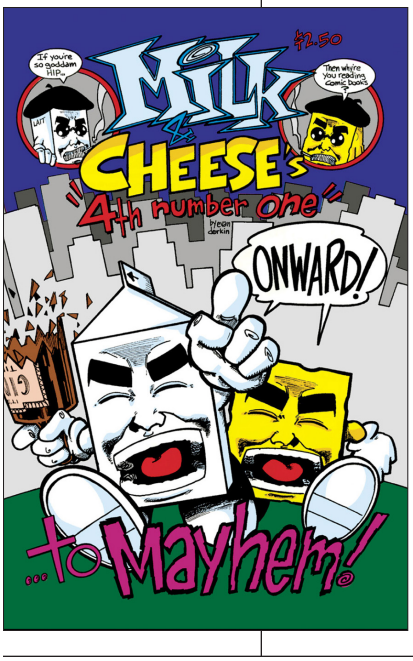
collection of Milk & Cheese rants and rampages, too, released by Dark Horse in 2011. Entitled *Milk and Cheese, Dairy Products Gone Bad* (and subtitled "They Hate What You Hate…And They Hate You!), the book collects most of the characters' appearances to that point, particularly the seven issues *of Milk & Cheese* published in the 1990s by SLG, most of them perversely labeled as a new number one as they came out, and going through multiple printings.

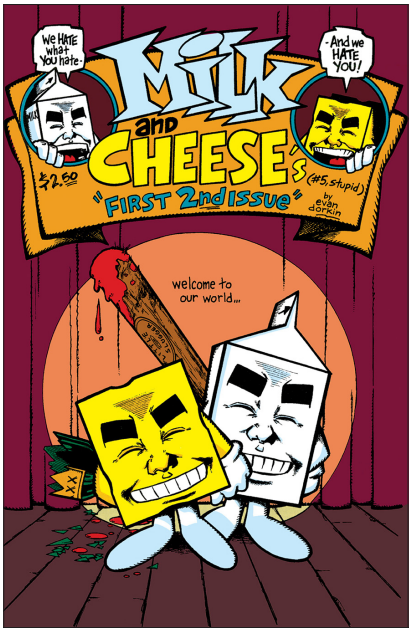
"It sold well," Dorkin tells us, "for a small press humor comic. The first printing of the first issue sold around 3000 copies initially if I remember correctly. It went through nine printings total; I don't recall the final tally. All the issues were reprinted, some multiple times, except for the seventh and final one, which SLG printed more of. The SLG collection was reprinted multiple times and then we did a second edition with a new cover, which also was reprinted."

(top left) More chaos is in store. (top right) Something seems wrong here. (bottom left) Wait, there's *another* first issue??!? (bottom right) Milk & Cheese finally get a second issue.

TM & © Evan Dorkin.







According to the author, "The Dark Horse hardcover collection was reprinted a few times, too, same goes for the paperback version. Now Dark Horse is reprinting it as part of an omnibus edition that will also include *Dork* and *The Eltingville Club*."

Due to its relative repetition, the Dark Horse volume is not a book one can easily read straight through, but it is one that the reader can return to over and over for weeks or months and bask each time in the utter chaos of all-new settings.

The strips, especially early on, generally follow a basic formula, and alcohol is quite often involved. A typical start has our heroes (?) drinking gin or beer, sitting around their abode surrounded by empty bottles, watching their favorite game shows or cheesy reality shows. They start to complain about something to one another and that complaint builds into a rant. That rant then builds into a hateful, destructive binge, that usually spills out into the streets, leading up to some sort of punchline.

Their exploits are cartoonish and excessive, blending slapstick with satirical rage. Panels are packed with jagged word balloons ferociously shouting: "DESTROY!!" "KILL!!" "SMASH!!" The number of exclamation points tends to be excessive at times, as well. It's a simple concept, but surprisingly cathartic to read, and for Dorkin to write and draw as well. While it seems a one-joke premise—and was often criticized for exactly that as the strips came out—it's actually impressive to see how many variations the artist was able to create.

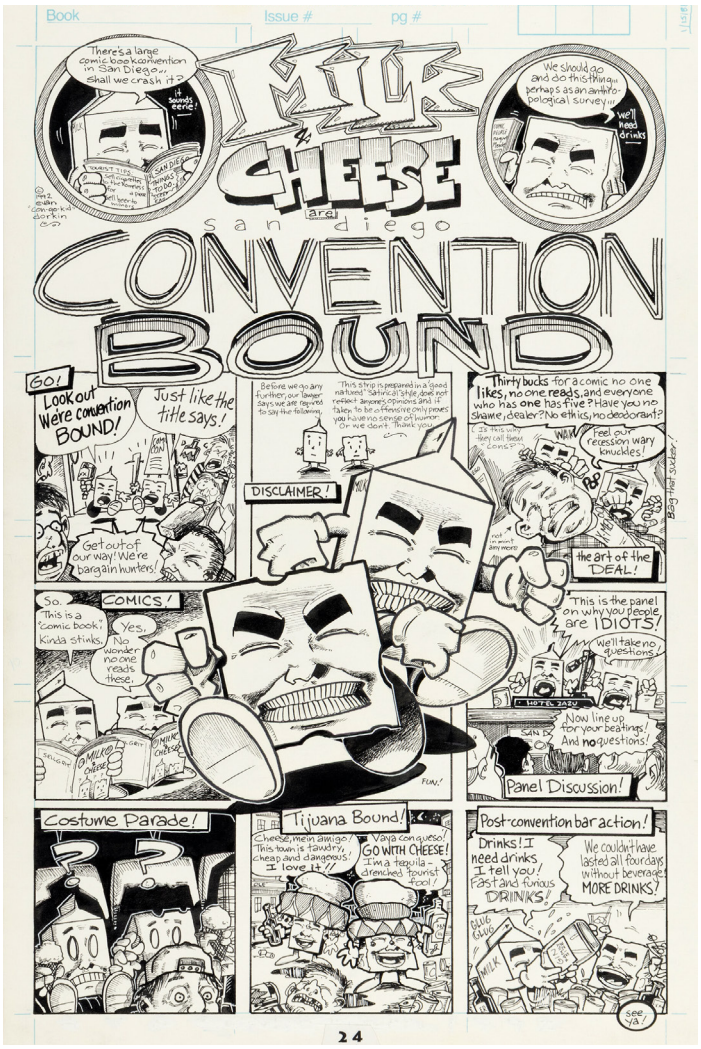
Some of their strips are only single-pagers, others no more than three or four pages, but Dorkin's panels are packed like Will Elder's "chicken fat" panels in the original *MAD* color comics, crammed with often unrelated background gags.

It should go without saying that Dorkin counts Elder and his top collaborator, *MAD* creator Harvey Kurtzman, among his personal artistic heroes. On a podcast, Dorkin affirmed, "*MAD* was a huge influence. My biggest influences in comics were Marvel Comics, *Peanuts*, as a kid, newspaper comic strips…*Tin-Tin* was running in a children's magazine out here!"

The stories and panels are crowded but often with surprisingly subtle satire, with occasional genuine social, emotional, or political points being made amongst the craziness (There's some early Trump-bashing for example).

There are a number of amusing, throwaway jokes that not everyone would get. Some of the funniest gags are in the title headers of the strips. There's one where the header has them recite "Savoir-Faire…" and "…is everywhere." This, as I'm sure everyone knows, is a catchphrase from a mid-'60s cartoon entitled *Klondike Cat*. There's no question that Dorkin knows his pop culture. In another strip, we have Cheese saying "Vogue" whilst Milk says, "Strike a poseur" and proceeds to do so.

If there's one Milk & Cheese strip that's better known than any others, it would have to be the "Merv Griffin!" strip from *Milk and Cheese* # 1 (the first one) (Sept.1991). If you ask anyone familiar with the characters to name their favorite strip, it's nearly always "Merv Griffin!" If you post on social media anything about Milk & Cheese, one of the first comments on your post will inevitably be, "Merv Griffin!"



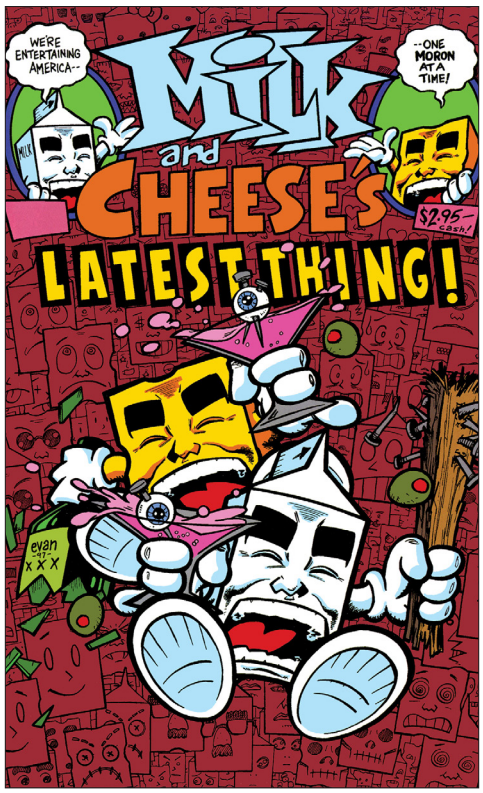
The Grand Comics Database summarizes this single-page phenomenon with, "Milk and Cheese commit mayhem while chanting "Merv Griffin!"' and yes, that is literally all that happens. (A similar strip from 1991 has them ravaging the town while yelling "Sorry!") Even Milk, in the header, says, "I don't get it." Cheese replies that it must be "art," and as unlikely as that seems, he may be right!

In six panels, we see them yelling the name of the former singer, TV talk show host, and creator of *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy* in increasingly loud-looking fonts as they crash a jeep into a mailbox, shatter a window with a brick, upset an apple cart, punch shoppers and hit them on the head with a bat with a nail through it, bounce a can off of someone's face, kick a baby carriage (with baby!) out into traffic, pull a woman's hair at a restaurant, and finally set fire to the city itself!

Dorkin describes it up front as "their greatest strip ever" and adds, "Wasn't that great?!!" under the final panel. Many fans clearly agree.

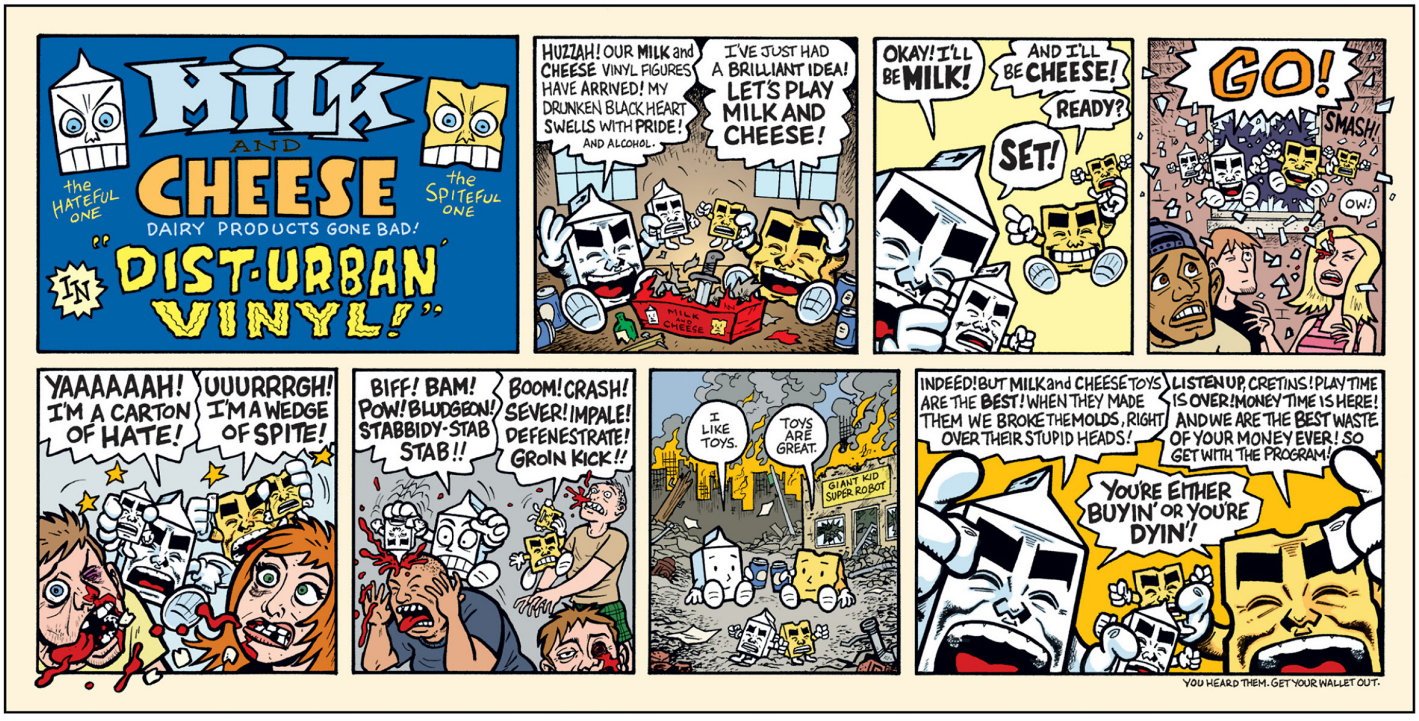
The real-life Mervyn was still alive when the strip came out and lived another 16 years afterward. One has to presume that someone showed it to him at some point in all that time but no comments from him can be found. When asked if he ever heard from the TV legend, Dorkin says, "No, I never heard from Merv. To my eternal regret."

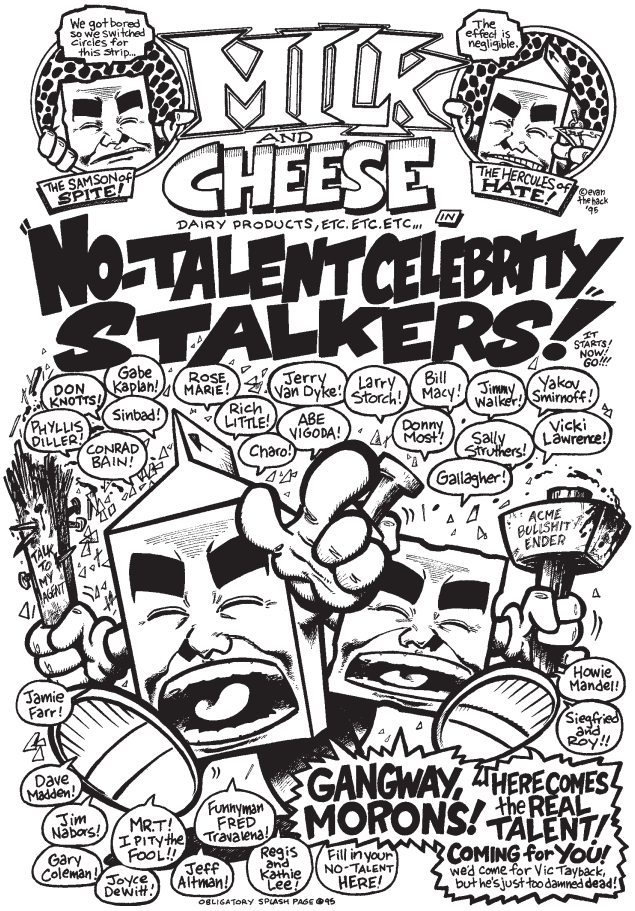
Why Merv Griffin? Well, one could argue that calling out the popular and successful TV personality symbolizes



(top left) Look out, San Diego! Milk & Cheese are on the way. (top right) The fellas assault the Pittsburgh Comic Con in this promotional art. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

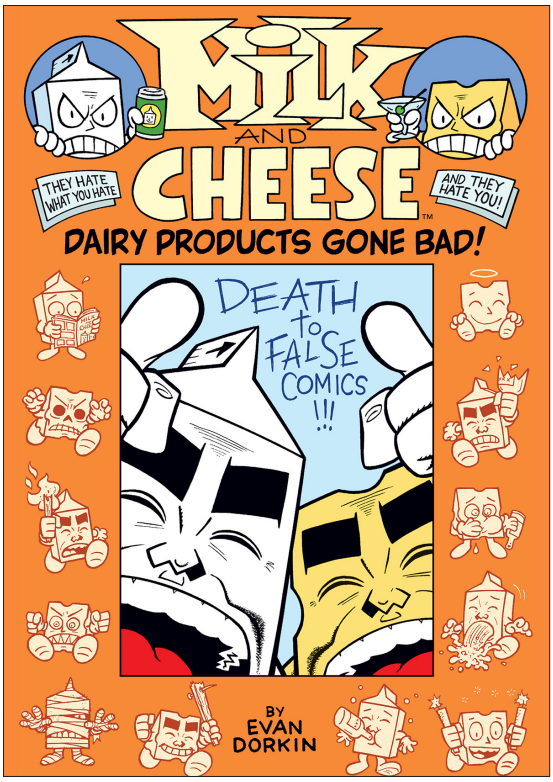
TM & © Evan Dorkin.





(top) The boys role play with their vinyl dolls, from the back of the packaging for their action figures. (bottom left) A black-and-white page of mayhem. (bottom right) A stupid little boardgame.

TM & © Evan Dorkin.



that Milk & Cheese hate everything and need little excuse to lash out at any target. Remember, though, they aren't attacking Griffin, himself, at all, just yelling out his name as they destroy the town. Surrealism doesn't have to make sense, and no one ever said that art had to be pretty.

Over time, Dorkin became more ambitious with his characters playing around with meta tricks such as breaking the fourth wall or having Milk stab someone with his own word balloon. He also dabbled with strips that broke the mold, like the one where Milk & Cheese go out into the world to learn about sex, only to end up back in front of their television set, safely watching Cartoon Network. There was a lot of marketing as well, with posters, t-shirts, and, in 1995, he even produced a series of full-color trading cards.

I had to wonder what kind of reaction Milk & Cheese got from readers back in the day. I asked Evan if he ever got any actual fan mail for it. "Quite a bit, actually," he replied. "I answered almost all my fan mail, something I still do now, between e-mail and DMs. My address was in all my SLG comics. Eventually I had to get a P.O. Box. I still have a box of old fan mail! I have some mail from folks who ended up breaking into the comics industry. I'm going to use it to blackmail them."

Through the years, there were numerous rumors of an animated version of M&C, but Evan says, "There was never serious talk about optioning the characters for anything. In the '90s there were a number of tentative offers, but they all included buying the characters, which was a dealbreaker for me. That's how *The Eltingville Club* pilot came to be at *Adult Swim*. Originally, I was asked to do a *Milk & Cheese* show."

Had there been a show, what would their voices have sounded like? "No idea," he says. "I've never been able to pin down voices for them in my head. It would be an East Coast dialect, though. New York City or New Jersey." He added, "Put a gun to my head? I'd say Ed Brophy and Edgar Kennedy. Old character actors, both long dead."

So, as you can probably tell, Milk & Cheese is, of course, not appropriate for everyone. Some people are lactose-intolerant, after all. But if you can stand the heat, keep out of their way, and aren't easily offended, you might find yourself laughing along with Evan Dorkin's sharp social parodies and pop culture references, in spite of the absurd violence.

It might make you feel a lot better, too. Primal Scream therapy works! Sometimes we all just need to run around yelling out, "MERV GRIFFIN!!!!!" (Feel free to substitute the name of a current or former talk show host of your choice, or, you know, perhaps a politician.)

***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, and currently writes a regular column in TwoMorrows'* **Comic Book Creator**.

(left) The cover to the Dark Horse collection. (right) Merv Griffin! Merv Griffin!

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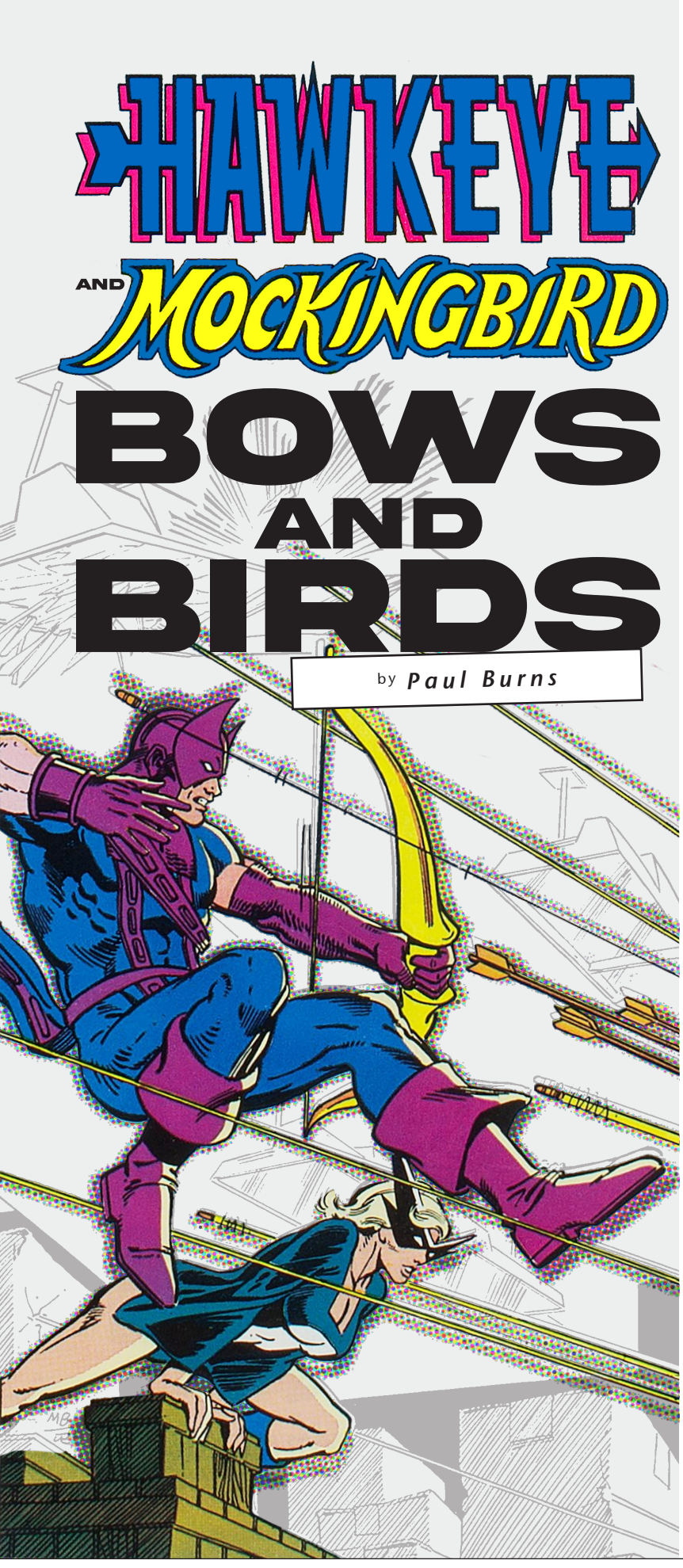
TWOMORROWS AD PAGE

HAWKEYE AND MOCKINGBIRD

BOWS AND BIRDS

by Paul Burns



FlashBack!

"I suppose I should swear off chicks, after Wanda and the Widow dumped me…but that'd be like swearin' off air."

Thus proclaimed Hawkeye in *The Defenders* #9 (Jul. 1973) immediately after planting a smacker on the lips of a very unappreciative Valkyrie. Clint Barton is as much interested in following the ladies as battling crime, and he was different to most male superhero characters, in that he favored costumed heroines to civilians. Clint's love life was, up to this point, a bit of a disaster. His first romantic interest, the Black Widow, favored a relationship with Daredevil, while the Scarlet Witch fused with the synthezoid Vision.

In the early Eighties, married Marvel superhero couples were limited to Reed and Sue Richards, Hank and Janet Pym, and Vision and the Scarlet Witch. While the latter couple's union was complex, the former two partnerships had their origins in the Sixties and followed the patriarchal template of overbearing husband and somewhat subservient wife. The marriage of Hawkeye and Mockingbird created a different kind of dynamic during the more enlightened Eighties.

Hawkeye was created by Stan Lee and Don Heck in *Tales of Suspense* #57 (Sept. 1964). Dr. Barbara 'Bobbi' Morse was created by Len Wein and Neal Adams in *Astonishing Tales* #6 (Jun. 1971) as a nameless supporting character in the Ka-Zar series. Gerry Conway, Roy Thomas, and Gary Friedrich all had a hand in developing her.

Bobbi became Mockingbird in *Marvel Team-Up* #95 (Jul. 1980). For detailed histories of Hawkeye and Mockingbird, see *BACK ISSUE* #56 (May 2012)

Mark Gruenwald, fascinated by the world of DC, always intended Mockingbird to be teamed with Hawkeye, as Marvel's analogue to the Direct Competition's Green Arrow and Black Canary, as Steven Grant explained to Jarrod Buttery in the aforementioned *BI* #56: "Mark's early love was always DC superheroes, and he had a long-term dream of creating a Marvel version of the Justice League. One of the characters was a Marvel-earth version of Black Canary, who he intended to pair up with Hawkeye."

Gruenwald, a lifelong fan of Clint Barton, got his chance to write his favorite character in the first Hawkeye limited series. In an article in *Marvel Age* #6 (Sep. 1983), the writer explained the purpose of the book: "A good limited series, in my opinion, is a quartet of stories which feature a major crises and resolution in the life of a hero-the outcome of which will in some way alter the hero's life thereafter." Gruenwald was also keen to right a few romantic wrongs. "The hapless Hawkeye seems to have a penchant for getting involved with women who can't or won't return his love. He's still searching to find out what it is about him that makes him a loser in the game of love. This series will present a dramatic turning point on that score. His romantic interest will be an ex-S.H.I.E.L.D. agent named Mockingbird. What happens when two of love's losers get together is another major storyline of the book."

Hawkeye and Mockingbird leap into action; from the cover of *Solo Avengers* #1. Art by M. D. Bright and Joe Rubinstein. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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(top left) Hawkeye debuts in *Tales of Suspense* #57. Cover by Don Heck. (top right) Bobbi Morse debuts as Mockingbird in *Marvel Team-Up* #95. Cover by Frank Miller and Bob McLeod. (bottom) Clint and Bobbi first cross paths in *Hawkeye* #1. Cover by Mark Gruenwald and Brett Breeding.

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Clint Barton meets his future wife in *Hawkeye* #1 (Sept. 1983) written and illustrated by Gruenwald (with finishes by Brett Breeding). His romantic luck is running true to form as his current girlfriend turns out to be using Cross Technological Enterprises to manufacture a mind control device. Enter Mockingbird, who Hawkeye catches breaking into CTE. In what will become a common trait in their relationship, Mockingbird gives a demoralized Hawkeye some tough love: "So this is what they taught you in the Avengers? What a bunch of jerks! They should see you now. I'll bet you let them down in a pinch too."

The remainder of the limited series sees Hawkeye and Mockingbird face Crossfire, the brains behind the plot, alongside navigating their complex new relationship. *Hawkeye* #4 (Dec. 1984) features "Stan Lee presents Hawkeye and Mockingbird" on the splash page. This cements their superhero partnership, and the final page reveals they have also gotten married.

In the introduction of the *Hawkeye* trade paperback, Gruenwald gave more insight into the pairing: "Mock fit the bill as an ideal counterpart to the maladjusted marksman-athletic, brainy, and as sharp-tongued as Hawk himself. Hawk had always been unlucky in love, falling for one unobtainable woman after another. I felt it was high time he had somebody hot for him. Mockingbird was a former spy, like the other great love of Hawkeye's life, and the idea of a Ph.D. in biology falling for a carnival archer who barely finished high school has a bizarre appeal to me."

Roger Stern would be the writer to bring Hawkeye back into the Avengers fold. It would be the first time Clint Barton leads his own team of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, with his new bride by his side. *Avengers* #239 (Jan. 1984) sees Hawkeye carrying Mockingbird over the threshold of Avengers mansion to meet the holographic Vision and he relays the events of his limited series to the ghostly synthezoid. In the same issue Hawkeye introduces Mockingbird to former girlfriend, Black Widow who greets Bobbi with: "It's always a pleasure to meet a woman as brave as you must be!"

Mockingbird meets the whole team in *Avengers* #242 (Apr. 1984) with art by future *West Coast* artist Al Milgrom. Captain America tells Hawkeye: "Getting married is the most responsible thing you've ever

done." Thor offers his good wishes in his usual florid style: "Marriage is a bold adventure, Hawkeye…may you face its challenges with wisdom, and reap its harvest of joy." In the same issue Hawkeye tells Mockingbird he fears a membership reshuffle will see him ousted from the team again.

The overcrowded membership issue is resolved by Avengers chairman Vision in *Avengers* #243 (May 1984) when he creates a West Coast division of the team, with Hawkeye appointed their leader.

West Coast Avengers #1 (Dec. 1984) featured the newlyweds, along with Iron Man (James Rhodes), Wonder Man, and Tigra. Roger Stern explained to the Marvel Masterworks Resource Page the genesis of the team: "I came up with WCA at a weekend convention that I attended with Mark Gruenwald. Gruenie wanted me to come up with a miniseries, and I wanted to nail down some of the non-active Avengers."

Artist and co-creator of the *West Coast Avengers*, Bob Hall, explained to the West Coast Davengers YouTube channel in 2023: "Boy, did I hate doing team books. But I'm pretty sure I got assigned team books because I was trained by John Buscema, who was the ultimate team book guy. *West Coast* was my favorite team book because it was a controllable number of people and I liked the characters. It had a comic spirit to it even when it was being serious."

West Coast Avengers #4 (Dec 1984) saw the team triumph over Graviton, winning the official seal of approval from Vision. *Avengers* #250 (Dec 1984) saw the East Coast and West Coast teams join for the first time. Hawkeye fears his team looks like second stringers and Mockingbird uncharacteristically diminishes her abilities to "an acrobatic ex-spy." In future, she will become considerably more confident.

Stern's plans to mix and match members from the East and West teams was scuppered by the success of the *WCA* limited series, which quickly earned itself ongoing status, but not with Stern as the writer: "Steve Englehart had been lured back to Marvel," Stern explains. "There was obviously some interest in having him write a series that would recapture what he'd done with *The Avengers* in the '70s."

Steve Englehart began writing the team's adventures in *West Coast Avengers* #1 (Oct. 1985), crossing over with a title featuring another married couple: "Well, I started my *WCA* run connected to Vision and the Scarlet Witch who I got married back in Avengers," he explains, "so that sort of relationship wasn't rare for me. I saw Clint and Bobbi as having their natural married bond as a subset of WCA bonds. They were both pros, so their relationship never impacted the group until she dropped the Phantom Rider off a cliff, and we saw the fundamental schism between an Avenger and a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent."

Englehart realized the fundamental differences between the couples: "When I took over *Avengers*

(left) Well, that was fast. Clint and Bobbi are married at the end of *Hawkeye* #4. Art by Mark Gruenwald and Danny Bulanadi. (right) Hawkeye and Mockingbird arrive at Avengers Mansion. Art by Al Milgrom and Joe Sinnott.

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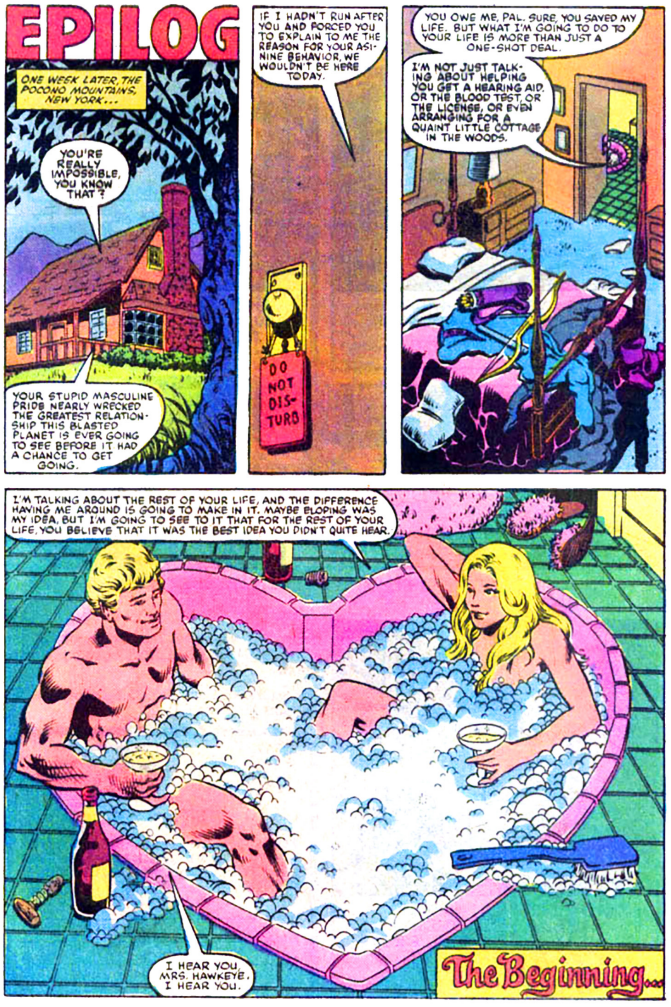

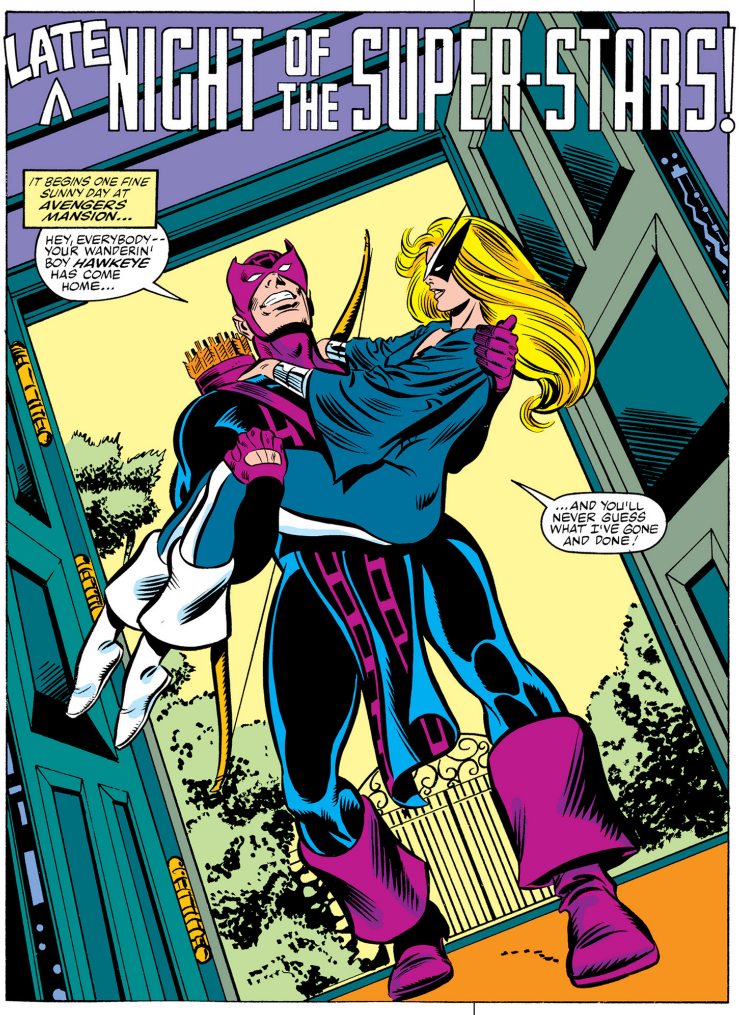

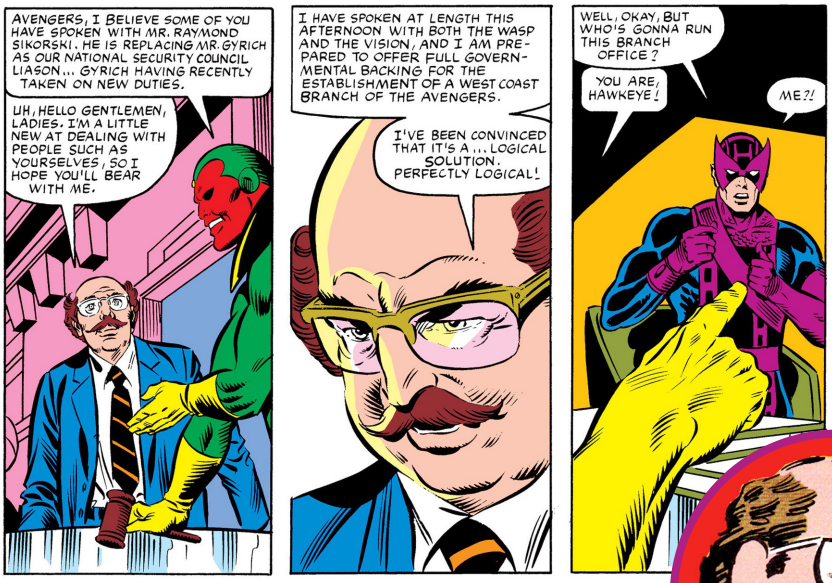

AL MILGROM

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(issue #105, Nov. 1972), I was told Wanda should do one hex and then fall back exhausted. I thought that was pretty limiting for an Avenger, so I amped her up, and my very first story began with her filling the splash page telling us readers to go to hell, so I never had any trouble with strong women. And Bobbi was definitely a strong woman-but she wasn't Wanda. She had her particular background, her particular husband, and her particular way of relating to him. Wanda has to take charge of the relationship a lot because Vizh is quiet, but Bobbi and Clint were pretty much equals, comfortable with their job and each other."

Joining Englehart on *WCA* was artist Al Milgrom: "I sort of backed into the assignment," he explains. "I took a hiatus from the *Avengers*, and the plan was I would come back to it after I finished the *Kitty and Wolverine* series (the 1984 six-issue miniseries, written by Chris Claremont). When I was ready to come back to the *Avengers*, they said we had to have a few fill-in issues, and lo and behold, John Buscema was available. My feeling was, if you have a choice between John Buscema and me, you always take John Buscema. I couldn't blame them. That would be my choice too. So, they said 'Wait, we just did this *West Coast Avengers* miniseries' I said, 'Ok, great. I'll be happy to draw it.' They said, 'Hey, we'd like to team you up with your old pal Steve Englehart.'"

Milgrom recalls working with Gruenwald. "Mark was a great guy, a terrific editor, people loved working with him. He felt a little bad I had been thrown off the *Avengers*, although I think he was the one doing the throwing. It was only because I had greedily gone off to do *Kitty and Wolverine*, so when they decided to do the new *West Coast Avengers* book, he very kindly offered it to me."

The defining Mockingbird story begins in *West Coast Avengers* #17 (Feb. 1987). The "Lost in Space-Time" saga, written by Englehart, sees the team travelling back to the old west in 1876, courtesy of Doctor Doom's time machine. Mockingbird becomes separated from the other members thanks to the Phantom Rider who declares her a "goddess." After drugging her to fall in love with him, he rapes her. Did Englehart need approval for this controversial story? "No resistance from Marvel. I obviously couldn't specify what happened to her under the Code, which meant that everyone could read whatever they wanted into it. But it was enough to make her take her vengeance, as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent."

In *WCA* #21 (Jun. 1987), the Two-Gun Kid, in a costume similar to Hawkeye's, brings Bobbi back to her senses. She promises to kill the Phantom

(top) Hawkeye and Mockingbird are charged with setting up the West Coast Avengers. Art by Milgrom and Sinnott. (bottom) The West Coast Avengers arrive! Cover by Bob Hall and Brett Breeding.

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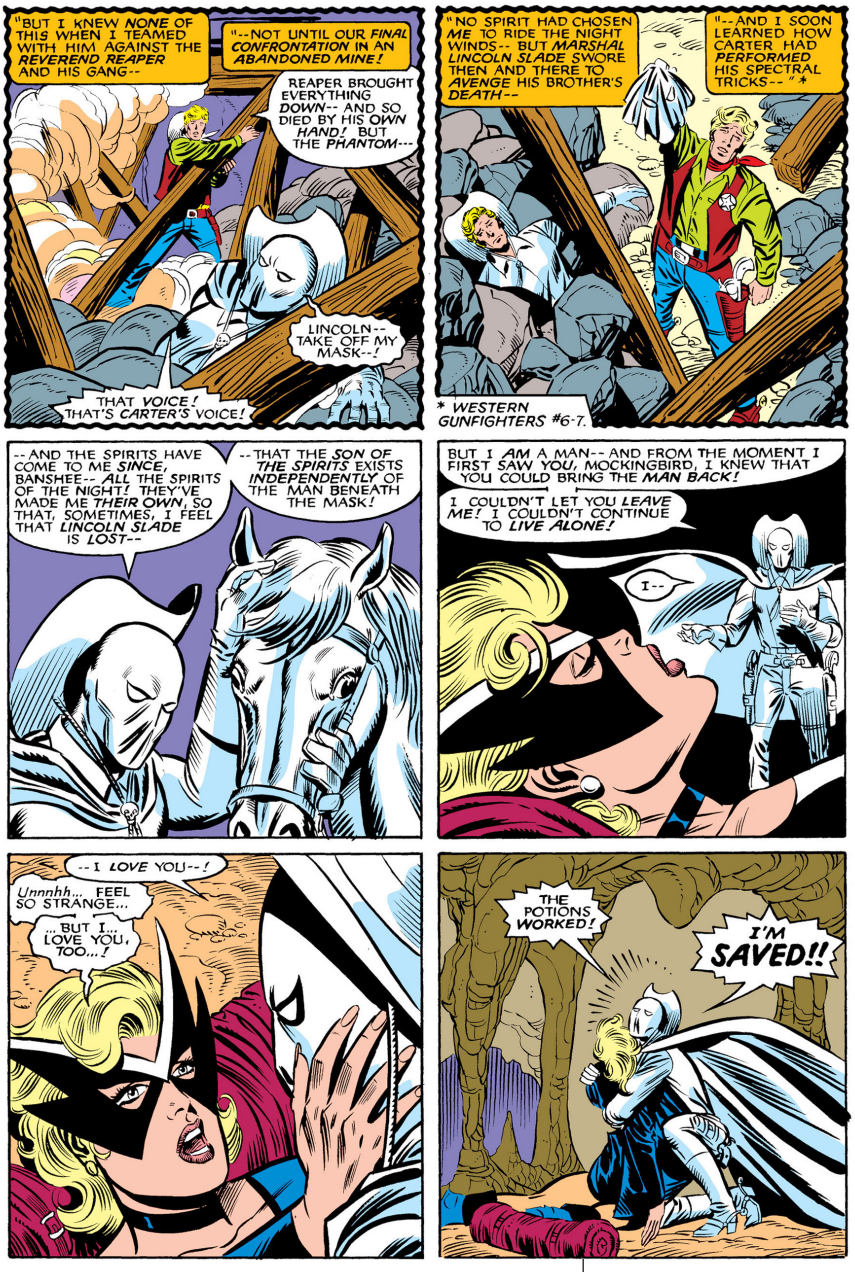

Rider for what he's done to her. In *WCA* #23 (Aug. 1987), her fury from the previous issues is finally let loose: "You're dealing with a 20th century woman now, you freak.... a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, trained to see with clear eyes when she's not drugged by a psychopath... an Avenger... who's come to avenge!!" During their tussle, the Rider falls off the cliff ledge, but manages to hold on, commanding Bobbi to save him. "Drop dead," she replies, and he falls to his death.

"That's when she showed me who she was," explains Englehart. "Personally, I was in total sympathy with her, but I had her drop him off a cliff because that was her."

Milgrom remembers illustrating this pivotal scene: "This is an example of subjects that Marvel would tackle sometimes that DC probably wouldn't have," he states. "So here she was, a superhero, and any woman would be outraged, humiliated, and want vengeance in that scenario. She said, you know what, I'm taking the law into my own hands and I'm gonna get this guy, 'cause I can't live with myself if he's still walking around. You knew it was at least in the back of her mind, and maybe the front of her mind, that she wanted this guy dead, but she was a heroine. She was a good person at her core and was she willing to commit murder, even though you could certainly make the case that it was justifiable to kill a guy. So instead, it's a moral grey area."

The cover to *WCA* #23, illustrated by Milgrom, features Mockingbird standing on top of the cliff edge as Phantom Rider holds on with the rain lashing down. "There's a raging storm in her mind and her conscience also," states Milgrom. "But ultimately, she says, 'I'm not gonna help this guy. I have too much enmity for him to actually reach a hand out and help him scramble up.' So, she just said 'He violated me. I may never be able to come 100% back from this so I'm not gonna help him.' If he actually managed to pull himself up, would she have let him walk away or just given him a swift kick and finish the job? Steve wrote it very cleverly in a way that you never knew."

The ramifications of Mockingbird's actions continue in the next several issues of *West Coast Avengers* with Bobbi feeling guilty for lying to Clint. She confesses all to a Hawkeye LMD in *WCA* #27 (Dec. 1987) which is just as well as the real Hawkeye makes it clear to Moon Knight in *WCA* #29 (Feb. 1988): "Avengers not only don't kill, they can't even look like they might." A sheepish Mockingbird offers: "Clint! You should keep in mind that we're putting together a new team of Avengers here, under new circumstances! I think we need to be more flexible than the old team was..!" This is the first sign the team will soon be torn apart by Mockingbird's revelation.

(left) The West Coast Avengers get an ongoing series. Cover by Al Milgrom and Joe Sinnott. (right) A terrible moment for Mockingbird from *West Coast Avengers* #19. Art by Al Milgrom and Joe Sinnott.

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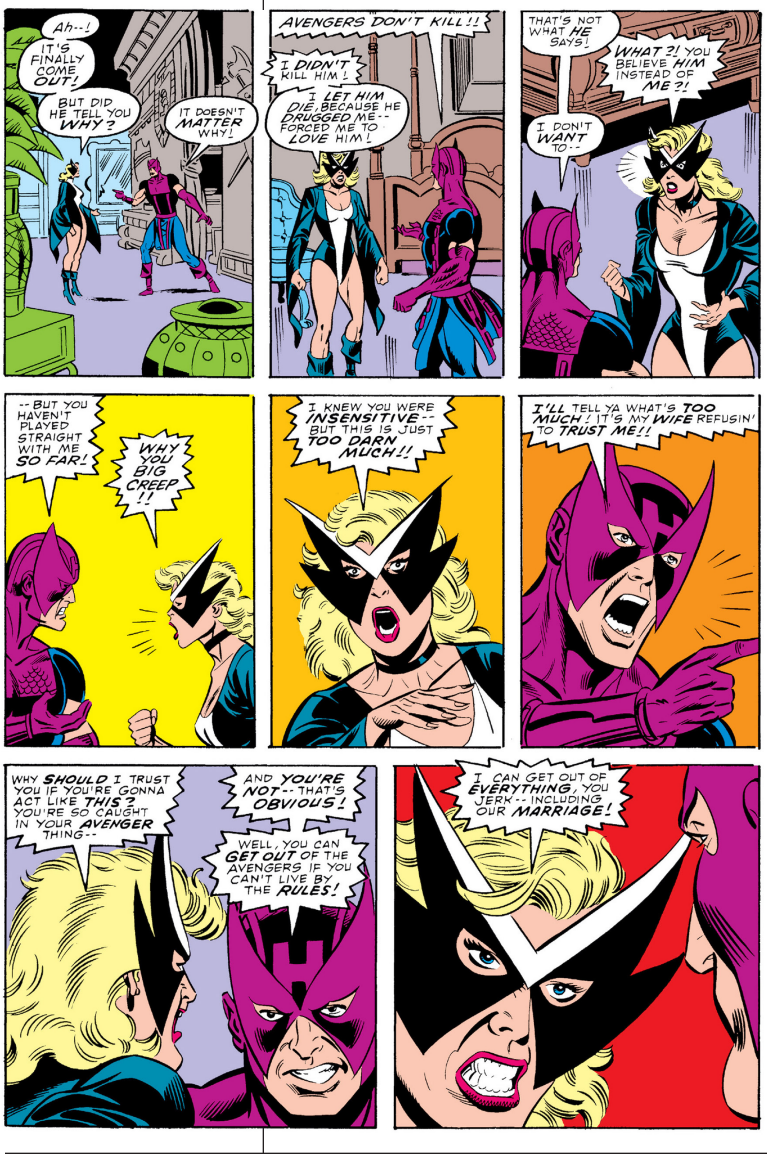

(top) Mockingbird takes her revenge. Cover by Al Milgrom. (bottom) Hawkeye and Mockingbird argue over what happened with the Phantom Rider. Art by Al Milgrom and Mike Machlan.

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In *WCA* #31 (Apr. 1988), the modern-day Phantom Rider, Hamilton Slade, possessed by the spirit of his 19th century ancestor, leaves Mockingbird in a similar predicament to the one she left the original Rider. He disappears, leaving Bobbi to swing to safety. The following issue sees Moon Knight stopping Mockingbird beating Hamilton Slade to death.

The Phantom Rider reveals the truth to Hawkeye in *WCA* #34 (Jul. 1988). The following issue's confrontation between Clint and Bobbi doesn't go well. Hawkeye displays his usual level of empathy by telling his wife: "You can get out of the Avengers if you can't live by the rules." She angrily retorts: "I can get out of everything you jerk… including our marriage!"

WCA #37 (Oct. 1988) seems to call time on the couple's relationship, with Hawkeye telling Mockingbird he can't run a marriage or team without trust and she telling him she never felt as if she belonged in the Avengers in the first place. Moon Knight and Tigra leave with Mockingbird in support of her.

Englehart's abrupt departure from the book scuppered his plans. "When I saw that she and Hawkeye would have trouble reconciling what she did (and what she was not backing down from), I started down a road I didn't get to finish. The plan was to split both East and West Coast teams based on whose side you were on, which would lead to two new teams, ending in what was later repurposed as the Civil War. Do not ask me what would have happened, including how it would turn out, because I always let things develop month by month."

Steve Englehart left the *West Coast Avengers* with issue #39 (Dec. 1988). He saw the potential for a separated Clint and Bobbi: "I liked them both and didn't feel she should be punished in any way but having them end up divorced was certainly possible. That would have made for some good stories." Englehart had a final chance to write Bobbi in the 2000 *Hellcat* miniseries: "I strongly rebuilt her character, because I felt she got a raw deal but wasn't giving into it, even in hell."

Tom DeFalco wrapped up the Phantom Rider saga In *WCA* #41 (Feb. 1989). Mockingbird sees Daimon Hellstrom finally exorcising the spirit of Lincoln Slade from the body of Hamilton Slade. It seemed this chapter of Bobbi Morse's life was over.

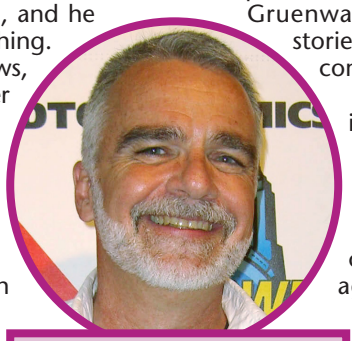
The success of *West Coast Avengers* fueled a third Avengers book in 1987, with Hawkeye as the main feature, backed with solo tales of Avengers members. This new title allowed Tom DeFalco the opportunity to look at Hawkeye and Mockingbird's lives away from the West Coast Avengers.

Solo Avengers #3 (Dec. 1987) sees Clint knocking Bobbi unconscious to go to Paris to confront his mentor Trick Shot, who issues him a death challenge. Bobbi let's her feelings be known about that in *Solo Avengers* #8 (Jul. 1988) with not only a sock to the jaw but with a tirade: "You stupid, miserable, lying, deceitful, conceited, mule-headed, inconsiderate, irresponsible, careless, swashbuckling, brainless, sneaky BUM!"

Solo Avengers #14 (Jan. 1989) sees Clint and Bobbi about to go on a reconciliation date, which is then ruined when Bobbi learns Clint has stood her up to meet Black Widow. She follows Hawkeye and surreptitiously aids him and the Widow battle AIM. At the end of *SA* #16 (Mar. 1989), Clint remains completely unaware of his ex-wife's involvement in his battle. Bobbi walks away, not realizing how much Clint misses her and still needs her.

Howard Mackie replaced Tom DeFalco on the Hawkeye strip in *Solo Avengers* #18 (May 1989) having cut his

Marvel teeth on *Iron Man* #211 (Oct. 1986) "I was, as many were at the time, a huge fan of Hawkeye," he explains. "I think part of the appeal that Hawkeye brought to the table was that he was an everyman type character, the accent being on the MAN part. He was a strictly skill-based hero. He was not a mutant, nor an alien, and he wasn't exposed to radioactive anything. It was him, a bow, some trick arrows, and his athletic skills against whoever or whatever was in front of him. I think this made him identifiable to young readers. Plus...a bow and arrow is just cool."



HOWARD MACKIE

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Mackie approached the relationship between Clint and Bobbi with a very specific inspiration in mind. "As a writer, there is an ease of having two characters being able to play off of one another. At the time, there was a TV show called *Moonlighting* (starring Bruce Willis and Cybil Shepherd), and I think the repartee between the two lead characters influenced my approach to the relationship between Hawkeye and Mockingbird."

While *Solo Avengers* only allowed 11 pages for the Hawkeye strip, Mackie didn't see that as a limitation to telling a good story. "It can be difficult to tell a story in 22 pages, and WAY more difficult telling a story in 48, 64, or 100 pages. This was my training ground as a fledgling writer. Writing a self-contained story in 11 pages teaches one to cut away the fat and focus on character and plot. I had the honor of working with Mark Gruenwald as my editor on these early stories, and he taught me how to write comics 11 pages at a time."

Mockingbird wasn't a title character in Mackie's *Solo Avengers/Avengers Spotlight* run, but she makes a significant appearance in *Avengers Spotlight* #22 (Sept. 1989) when she and Hawkeye attend a marriage counsellor. "The editor (Mark G again) had pretty strong opinions on both characters," he explains. "So I was probably following his lead." The couple's marriage therapy is interrupted by an attack by a host of Hawkeye's rogues gallery.

Mackie worked on the title with Al Milgrom. "I was very fortunate to enter the comic book industry when I could meet and work with the giants of the industry. When STORYTELLING counted more than anything else. Working with Al Milgrom was such a blessing, and education, for a new comic book writer. Al is hands down one of

(left) An attempt at reconciliation goes horribly wrong in *Solo Avengers* #14. Art by Al Milgrom and Jose Marzan Jr, (right) Mockingbird and Hawkeye meet with a marriage counselor in *Avengers Spotlight* #22. Art by Al Milgrom and Don Heck.

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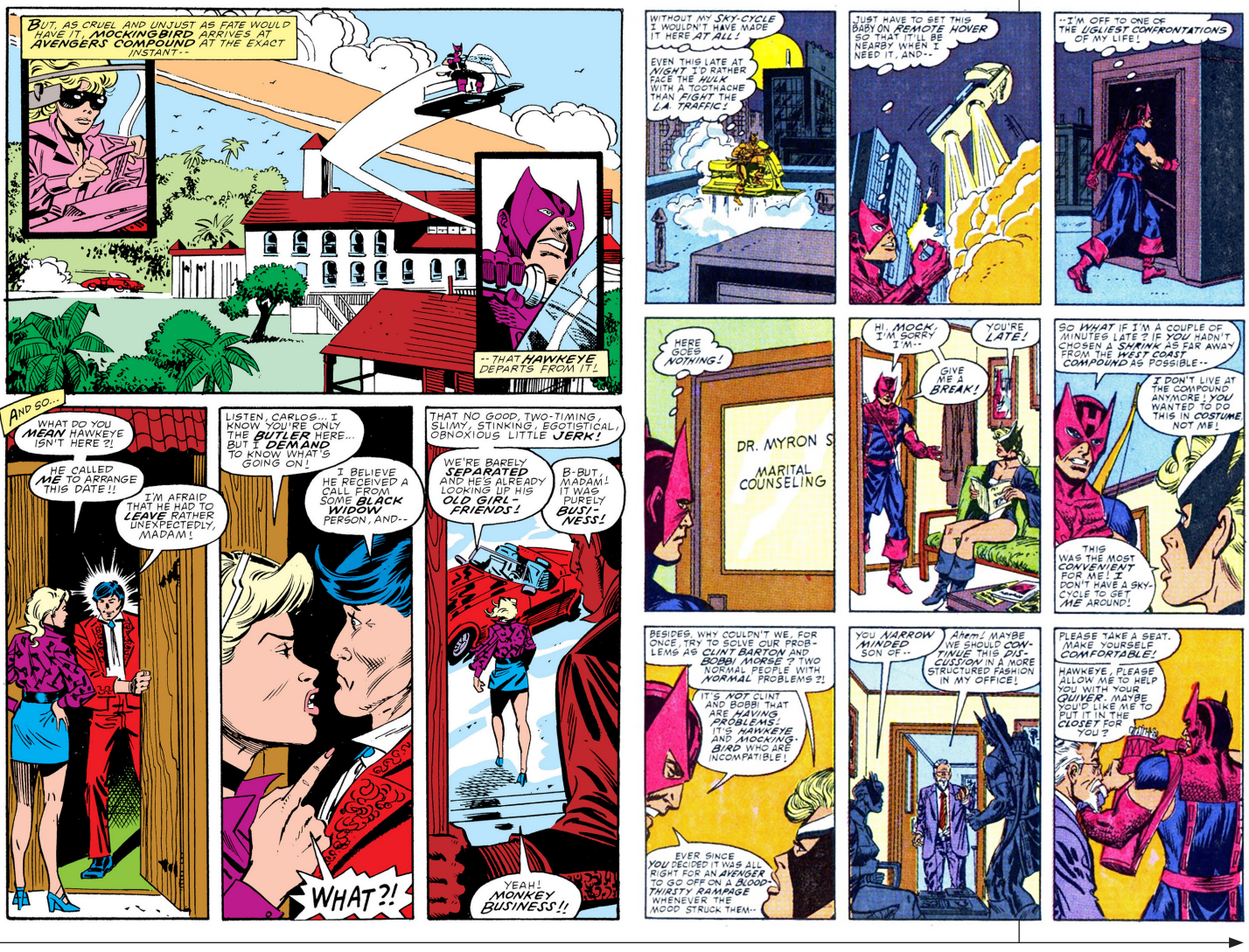

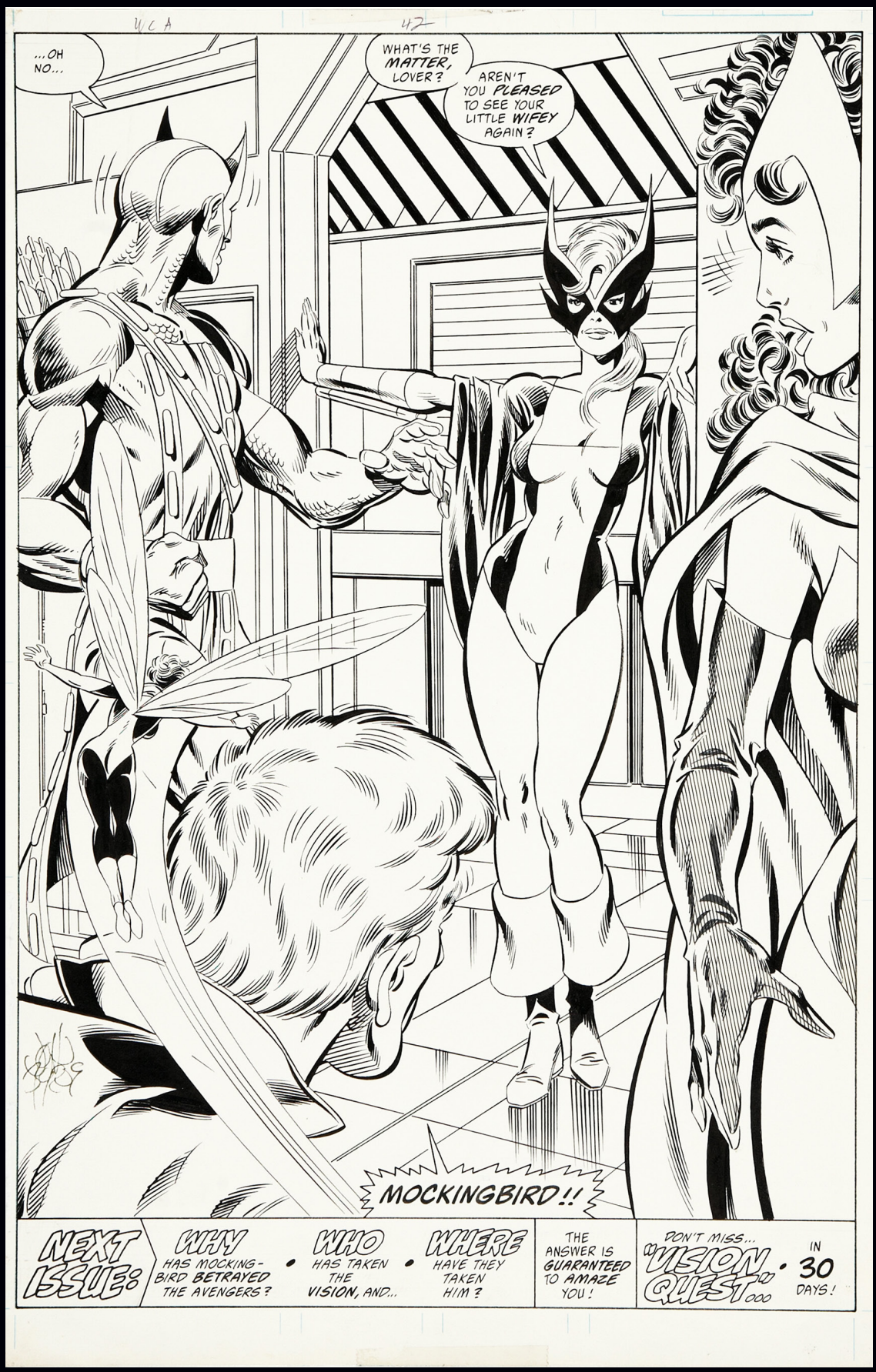

Mockingbird returns to the team in *Avengers West Coast* #42. Art by John Byrne and Mike Machlan. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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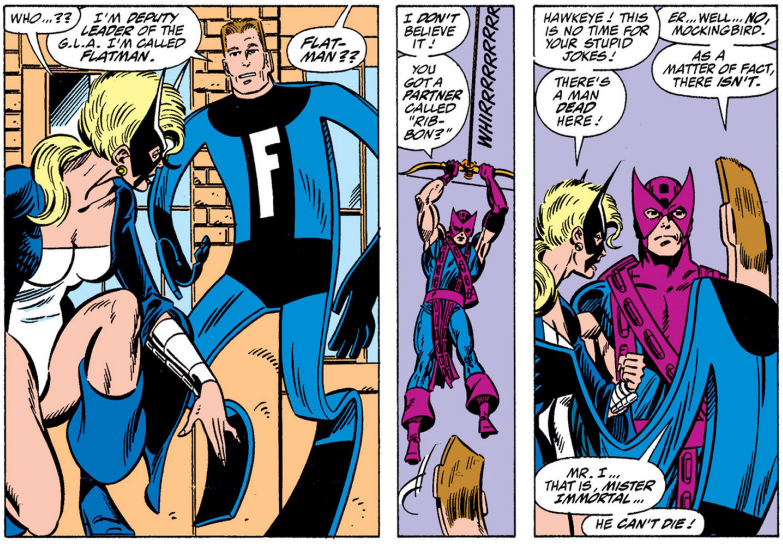

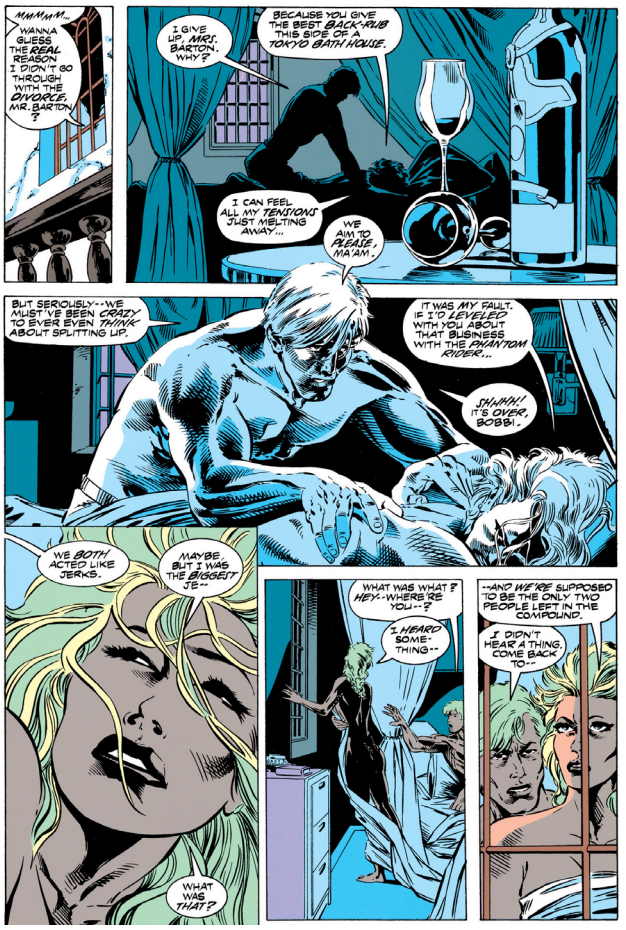

(left) Hawkeye and Mockingbird meet the head honcho of the Great Lakes Avengers. Art by John Byrne and Mike Machlan. (top right) Things get much better for Clint and Bobbi. Art by David Ross and Tim Dzon. (bottom right) Bobbi sacrifices herself to save Clint. Art by David Ross and Tim Dzon.

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the BEST storytellers out there. Working with him (and later Alex Saviuk) taught me how my words could be translated into pictures and into story. These guys are amongst the best of the best."

Mockingbird returns in *West Coast Avengers* #42 (Mar. 1989), the first in John Byrne's run, revealing she was duped into participating in the capture of Vision by an organization claiming to be S.H.I.E.L.D.

WCA #45 (Jun. 1989) has a furious Hawkeye quitting the team after the Government insists U.S. Agent join. Mockingbird follows him and the couple begin to resolve their differences, mentoring the strange new group of heroes dubbed the Great Lakes Avengers in *WCA* #46 (Jul.1989). This new team have their baptism of fire in the renamed *Avengers West Coast* #49 (Oct. 1989) and with Mockingbird referring to Hawkeye as "lover," it's safe to assume they have halted their divorce.

The late artist Paul Ryan started inking John Byrne's art with *AWC* #54 (Jan 1990) as he explained to *Comic Book Marketplace* in a 2015 interview: "I have only a little experience inking other artists' pencilled art, but John Byrne does stand out in my memory. It was on *West Coast Avengers*. John asked me to take on the inking chores on that title. His pencils were so finished and complete you could have scanned them and dismissed the inker. It took me about two hours of fretting over his work before I got up the courage to put ink to paper. I think we did well for the four issues we shared before John moved on."

Ryan took over full pencilling duties on *AWC* #60 (Jul. 1990) which also saw the debut of new *West Coast* writers Roy and Dann Thomas. They bring Hawkeye back to the team, but he is without his wife. He tells the Wasp that Mockingbird is still working with the Great Lakes Avengers in Milwaukee.

AWC #69 (Apr. 1991) not only debuts Hawkeye's new costume but also brings Mockingbird back to the team. Or, as Hawkeye charmingly puts it: "You want to crawl back to Avengers West…and dump the Great Lakes bunch!" This leads to a membership vote with just one vote for Mockingbird. Hawkeye makes it clear that it didn't come from him, a weird inconsistency, given that the couple were on very good terms during Byrne's run.

Artist David Ross began pencilling the book with *AWC* #71 (Jun 1991) with a striking cover homage to *X-Men* #101 (Oct. 1976). He was a popular choice among his peers: "I had just wound up work on *Alpha Flight*, had worked with Roy Thomas on *Last Days of The JSA*, and was

also recommended for the job by fellow artist, Paul Ryan," Ross explains. He was especially pleased with the team line-up: "I preferred the roster of Avengers in *AWC* over the group featured in the original *Avengers* series. The *AWC* cast had more nostalgic value for me, and I just thought that their social dynamic worked better during that time period."

Ross stayed with the book until its final issue, with the team growing and changing considerably: "I enjoyed the challenge of it; and as a reader, I always gravitated to group titles."

DAVID ROSS

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Mockingbird comes off the reserves bench in *AWC* #87 (Oct. 1992) and there's obvious friction between her and Hawkeye, as he snaps at her after learning about the death of Tony Stark. *AWC* #90 (Jan. 1993) sees Ultron capture Mockingbird, intending her to be his bride. Hawkeye tells Wanda he has always loved Bobbi and resumes his Goliath identity to rescue her. But Ultron has turned Bobbi into Alkhema (designed by Ross), or War Toy as he calls her. *AWC* #91 (Feb. 1993) reveals Ultron merely copied Bobbi's brain patterns, as he did The Wasp when he created Jocasta (*Avengers* #162. Aug. 1977), and Bobbi is alive and well.

This drama with Ultron serves to finally reunite Clint and Bobbi. All thoughts of divorce are well and truly behind them in *AWC* #92 (Mar. 1993) with Roy and Dann Thomas displaying how perfect they are as a couple: beginning the issue with a romantic backrub and ending it with a slugfest with Eric Josten in his Goliath guise. Goliath (Clint) and Mockingbird are the perfect fighting unit, with Mockingbird using Hawkeye's bow and arrow to take down Josten. It was seemingly a joy for David Ross to illustrate: "While there is always a lot of 'choreography' to work out, drawing these kinds of scenes was always fun!"

Clint abandons the Goliath identity in *AWC* #97 (Aug. 1993). He quits as chairman in the following issue stating he wants to spend more time with Mockingbird, and for them to try for a baby. Tragically, the couple would not have much longer together as Satannish takes Bobbi to hell in *AWC* #99 (Oct. 1993).

The cover of *AWC* #100 (Nov. 1993) proclaims "In This Issue: The Death of An Avenger!" The West Coast Avengers are caught in the middle of a battle between Mephisto and his demonic alter-ego, Satannish. The climax of the issue sees Mockingbird killed by one of Mephisto's "Brimstone Balls." As Bobbi Morse dies, she tells Clint she sacrificed herself to save him rather than the rest of the team. In the back-up strip, by Roy Thomas and Don Hudson, Clint stands by Bobbi's grave, remembering the day they first discovered the West Coast compound and fighting Crossfire once again. Realizing the villain could have killed them both on that day, Clint thinks to himself "Every moment we had together after that.. each second.. was a gift."

It is interesting that Roy Thomas, who contributed to the development of Bobbi Morse in the Ka-Zar series, would be the writer charged to dispatch her, but not through choice, as he admitted in *BI* #56 (May 2012). "The editor (or people over his head) ordered me to kill Mockingbird. I didn't like the idea, but of course I did it." Editor Neil Yomtov added: "I know one of the reasons was the frequent need for the Marvel titles to have special 'events' that could be promoted by our sales department to boost sales. We decided it would make sense to create such an event for the anniversary issue #100. Bobbi was the unlucky victim we chose."

The contrast between Hawkeye's original limited series in 1983 and his second one in January 1994 could not be greater. Writer Chuck Dixon takes the archer in a grittier direction, with Clint admitting he feels empty inside. *Hawkeye* #3 (Mar. 1994) sees mentor Trick Shot telling Clint he needs to deal with the fact Bobbi will be with him until his dying day.

Luckily, Bobbi got better. (inset) Cover by Jo Chen.

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Avengers #11 (1998) by Kurt Busiek and George Perez sees the Grim Reaper bring back several 'dead' Avengers, including Mockingbird. This is followed up in *Thunderbolts Annual 2000* by Fabian Nicieza and Norm Breyfogle. Hawkeye, now leading the team, enters hell to save Mockingbird's soul. It transpires this was a ruse by Daimon Hellstrom to save his own wife, Patsy Walker's soul. In the *Hellcat* limited series (2000), Patsy discovers Mockingbird in hell, but all was not as it seemed.

Brian Michael Bendis was the writer who brings Mockingbird back in the 2008 series *Secret Invasion*. Bendis believed Mockingbird "had the worst death in the history of Marvel comics. So here was a good reason and chance to bring her back." He does this with the revelation Bobbi had been replaced by a Skrull, believed to have happened around her abduction by Ultron. The real Bobbi Morse is reunited with Hawkeye at the climax of *Secret Invasion* #8 (Dec. 2008).

The aftermath of *Secret Invasion*, and the impact of Bobbi's abduction, is played out in *New Avengers: The Reunion* miniseries by Jim McCann and David Lopez in 2009. McCann spoke to *Comic Vine* in 2010. "When I knew we were bringing someone back at the end of *Secret Invasion*, and that Mockingbird was a contender, I pushed hard-core for her to be the one. I was then asked '"Ok, what would we do with her, what would make her stand out from any other character in the Marvel U, and what would her relationship to Hawkeye be?' That's when the Mr. & Mrs. Smith of the MU came in and my pitch for *The Reunion* was born."

McCann and Lopez follow *The Reunion* with a new *Hawkeye & Mockingbird* ongoing series in 2010. Lasting six issues, the pair once again face the Skrulls, who continue to cast long, malevolent shadows over their relationship. The couple also face other ghosts from their pasts which eventually drive them apart once again.

Hawkeye and Mockingbird cross paths again in Nick Spencer's 2013 series, *Secret Avengers*, which sees Bobbi go through yet more trauma via a mind controlled split personality. The couple then receive individual ongoing titles, with Bobbi making appearances in the 2012 Matt Fraction and David Aja *Hawkeye* series and Clint attending therapy with his ex-wife in the 2016 Chelsea Cain and Kate Niemczyk *Mockingbird* series-which also features The Phantom Rider possessing yet another host. Sadly, to this day, Clint and Bobbi have not resumed their partnership or relationship, with Clint falling back in love with Black Widow and Bobbi having a fling with Spider-Man.

However, it would be a very unwise man to think this is a full stop to Clint Barton and Bobbi Morse's story. Particularly with Clint, after a traumatic encounter with Nightmare, asking Bobbi for a coffee at the end of *Thunderbolts* #5 (Dec. 2022). Despite divorce and death, Cupid's arrow has struck these lovebirds more than once and surely, it's only a matter of time before it does so once again.

Paul Burns is a writer from the UK. He has had many* Doctor Who *stories published and is an ardent comics fan, originally encountering Marvel characters in the '70s UK reprint weeklies. Paul would like to thank Steve Englehart, Al Milgrom, Howard Mackie, and David Ross for their invaluable help with this article.

A gorgeous portrait of Bobbi and Clint from the cover of *Mockingbird* #4. Art by Joelle Jones. Original art scan courtesy of Heritage Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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