

GOLDEN AGE IN BRONZE ISSUE!

# BACKISSUE!

THOMSON  
August 2018  
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## THE '70s REVIVAL OF THE JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA



**ROY THOMAS headlines an all-star cast: GERRY CONWAY • RICK HOBERG • ARVELL JONES • BOB LAYTON  
PAUL LEVITZ • TOM MANDRAKE • DOUG MOENCH • JERRY ORDWAY • JOHN OSTRANDER • JOE STATON**

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**BACK ISSUE**

Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!

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# EVERYTHING GOLD IS NEW AGAIN

## The 1970s

The Justice Society of America first appeared in *Justice League of America* #113 (Oct. 1974). We all know that's not true, but just stay with me for a minute. The issue featured a team-up between the two groups that was really my first exposure to the JSA. The comic was also one of the giant-size 100-page beauties that DC was publishing at the time (see *BI* #81 for a thorough examination of those Super Spectaculars). So, in addition to the lead tale, there was also a reprint of a Golden Age adventure of the Society that came from *All-Star Comics* #41 (June–July 1948).

I suspect a lot of other readers were first exposed to the JSA around that time—not as a group per se, since they had been teaming up with the JLA on an annual basis since issue #21 (Aug. 1963) of the League's title, but as the stars of their own adventures. *Justice League of America* #110 (Mar.–Apr. 1974) before, and #115 (Jan.–Feb. 1975) after, also featured reprints of Golden Age Justice Society stories, but there was certainly little or no chance that we youngsters would have ever seen or in most cases been aware of the original comics.

However, when the Justice Society returned to headline their own book once more with *All-Star Comics* #58 (Jan.–Feb. 1976), we were ready. Slight glitch here, though. When the JSA returned, they were, kind of, sort of, not really the stars of the book.

### THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

It begins with the cover. In the Golden Age, the group never had a real logo on the cover of *All-Star*. Upon revival there was a little shield mid-right saying, "Featuring the Justice Society of America." Great. Also, preceding that was "All-Star Comics presents... Super Squad!" To reinforce the idea, the JSA lay defeated in the foreground while the Squad races in to save them. Welcome back, guys.

The Super Squad was not composed of total unknowns, for the most part. They consisted of the Star-Spangled Kid, a Golden Age hero who had returned from limbo in *Justice League* #100–102 (Aug.–Oct. 1972); the Earth-Two Robin, who had previously appeared in two JLA/JLA team-ups; and a new character identified on the banner atop the cover as Power Girl.

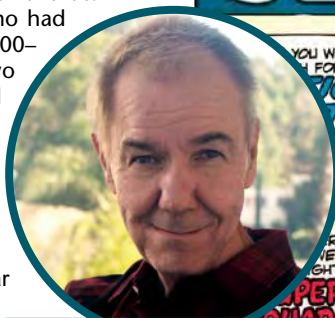
The new group name came about because "I had this theory," begins initial writer and editor Gerry Conway. "Putting out this book with the All-Star Super Squad would seem brand new and would gain more attention than putting out a book called Justice Society of America, which people might confuse with the Justice League of America."

The creative team on this historical relaunch consisted of scribe Conway, Ric Estrada wielding the pencil, and industry legend Wally Wood finishing the art. Estrada has since passed away, but he commented in the *All-Star Companion* (ASC) vol. 3 that he got the job

# ALL-STAR Comics

## Revival

by Brian Martin



GERRY CONWAY

Courtesy of Gerry Conway.

### Earth-Two Titans

Make way, JSA, for the Super Squad! *All-Star Comics* #58 (Jan.–Feb. 1976), featuring the first appearance of Power Girl. Cover by Mike Grell.

TM & © DC Comics.



because "my style was very direct and very simple—plus I happened to be available at the time."

Inside, the JSA does get the benefit of first appearance, as the six members showcased at the start (Flash, Hawkman, Dr. Mid-Nite, Wildcat, Dr. Fate, and Green Lantern) gaze at a computer screen as they evaluate a threat they received the day before. The computer confirms that three disasters will occur at different locations on Earth, and if allowed to happen could wipe out life on the planet. Suffice to say the heroes do not want this to happen and split up to handle these crises.

Why those six to start with? "The ones I picked were my favorites of the JSA," says Conway. "But also they were characters I thought had potential, characters who had interesting speech patterns and personality traits, characters I thought sat well with the kind of stories I wanted to tell."

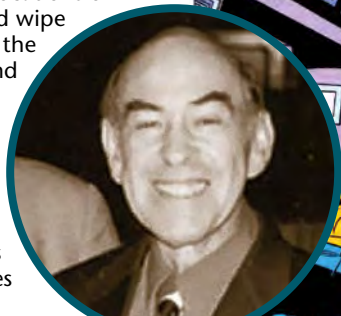
The issue's story structure mirrors the construction of early *All-Star* and *Justice League* issues where the team would split up to handle various aspects of a menace. In this case it also allows each JSA pairing to meet up with and to introduce one of the Super Squad. Further, it acted as a device for storyteller Conway. "I felt when you are introducing a bunch of what were new characters to most readers, the most effective way to get to the essence of them is to have them play off against one other character. You would have the contrast, have time to develop characterization, potential conflict, and so on."

Hawkman and Dr. Mid-Nite encounter the Star-Spangled Kid in Seattle, Washington, as that Pacific Northwest city is struck by an earthquake. The Kid has been given a power boost since previous appearances when he was merely another youngster in a costume who fought crime. Here he is in possession of Starman's Cosmic Rod, as the Golden Age crimefighter has bequeathed it to him while laid up with a broken leg.

In Capetown, South Africa ["Capetown" in the comic but "Cape Town" in reality—*ed.*], Green Lantern and Dr. Fate meet up with Robin to combat a massive leak of fluorocarbons into the atmosphere, while Flash and Wildcat gain the assistance of Power Girl when a volcano erupts in Peking.

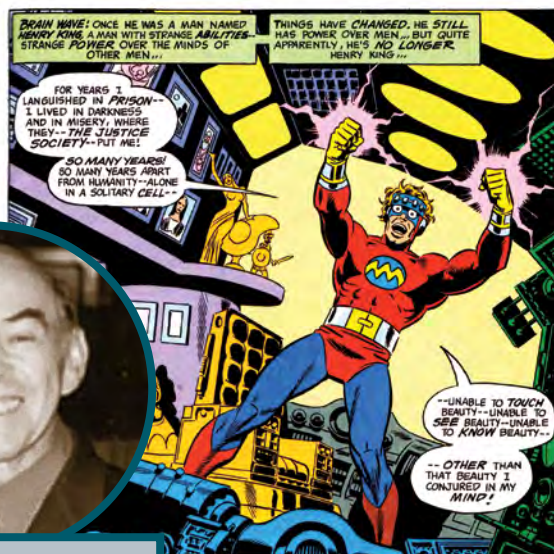
Much has been written in many other places [including *BI* #33 and 71—*ed.*] about Power Girl's costume and physical attributes, so we will merely quote Ric Estrada from *ASC* on his contribution to the character. "I do know they liked the way I drew women, because I had done a lot of romance stories. I drew girls sexy, but not too muscular like they became later. I think they gave me a prototype for the costume and I sort of slicked it up a bit." [Editor's note: That costume prototype was by Joe Orlando and was shown in *BACK ISSUE* #33.]

Since this is the first-ever appearance of Power Girl, she explains to Flash and Wildcat that she is the cousin of their Earth's Superman while citing a lack of time to relate her history. Conway tells *BI* his plans for an origin were not concrete, but "I wanted to portray her as much



RIK ESTRADA

DC Wikia.com.



## Wise Guy

Brainwave thinks up trouble for his arch-foes in *ASC* #58. By Conway/Estrada/Wood.

TM & © DC Comics.



## Breakout Star

We can't take our eyes off of the dynamic Power Girl on this stunning Estrada/Wood art page from *All-Star* #58. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions ([www.ha.com](http://www.ha.com)).

TM & © DC Comics.



## Cat vs. Bird

The Fiddler and Solomon Grundy make mischief on this beautiful original art page (by Giffen and Wood) from ASC #63, Levitz's first as the solo scribe.

TM & © DC Comics.

named Zanadu (a play on Xanadu from poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge), who has kidnapped Hawkman's wife.

This causes the group to call in some help: in this case, a retired and very Joe Shuster-looking Superman. "That was right out of one of the old Fleisher cartoons," Giffen revealed in ASC. "To me, no one should ever know what color Superman's eyes are because he is always squinting." Strangely, they leave behind Hourman, who had arrived with the Flash, causing this first-generation hero to have second thoughts about how he might fit in with the current incarnation of the JSA. The generation gap widens.

Appearing in Tokyo, Zanadu prepares to sink the island. While Power Girl and Superman confront the mad wizard, Hawkman and Wildcat attempt to help the populace, until Wildcat hears music and assaults his teammate proclaiming himself a member of the Injustice Gang! (Problem is, Earth-Two's version is

actually the Injustice Society. The story reprinted in JLA #113 had featured the group and later letters pages pointed out the error. Levitz had already realized this and it is corrected in the next issue.)

That next issue reveals that the music is courtesy of the Fiddler, of course. For muscle he has brought Solomon Grundy with him. Luckily, the Kryptonian pair, frustrated by Zanadu, help defeat the two villains. Unfortunately, their Lemurian foe has escaped, still holding Hawkman's wife captive.

Back home, last-ditch efforts to save Dr. Fate prove futile, causing Dr. Mid-Nite to contemplate giving up the superhero life, another elder statesman confronted by the passage of time. Just then Zanadu appears overhead, still intent on destruction. This prompts

Hourman and the Star-Spangled Kid to attack him, and during the battle the Kid sends Zanadu crashing into JSA headquarters.

Finally having had enough, the wizard marshals all of his Chaos energy to destroy them. Unbeknownst to him, this concentration of mystical energy reawakens the almost-dead brain of Order servant Dr. Fate, reviving him. Taking Zanadu by surprise, Fate defeats him.

As the dust settles, Superman realizes that he should stay retired, but another theme that runs through these issues—that of *succession*—appears as Supes insists the JSA take Power Girl as his replacement. Until this point PG and the Kid were not JSAers, just Super Squad members.

Changes on the creative side continue as we arrive at issue #64 (Jan.–Feb. 1977). Keith Giffen is gone as penciler, and Wally Wood takes over complete art chores.

Just so no one thought Power Girl was the only one championing the youth in this series, as the issue begins, Star-Spangled Kid reveals he has returned the Cosmic Rod to Starman and replaced it with a Cosmic Converter Belt he developed himself, adding in the jibe that "ideas are the province of youth." Power Girl comments that it is fitting he has a new device since they have both been made Justice Society members. This pretty much puts an end to the Super Squad concept, though it would hold on to the cover spot a little longer.

Signaled that Dr. Fate has recovered, the Flash and Hawkman return, but they are not alone. Hinted at in the previous couple of issues, the Shining Knight arrives with them. Strangely, there is no reunion between he and the Kid, even though they had served together in the Seven Soldiers of Victory (a.k.a. the Law's Legionnaires) in the Golden Age. Maybe it was simply due to the fact that the Knight has a vital message to deliver.

It seems someone is attempting to change history, and Merlin (yes, *that* Merlin) has summoned the Knight to help. Our heroes quickly agree to provide assistance, with Superman remaining just a bit longer. Fortunately, Flash reveals he has developed a Time Vortex—similar to his Earth-One counterpart's Cosmic Treadmill—that will allow them to travel into the past.

The group decides that Hourman should man the controls, further fueling the older hero's alienation. The real shocker is when Green Lantern leaves, declaring he has neglected his business for too long—behavior that was probably unique to a senior character.

Heading back to the time of Camelot, the JSA discovers the chronometric finagling is all a plan of Vandal Savage, another Golden Age foe returned. Savage was always known as an immortal, but now reveals he has lost that



PAUL LEVITZ

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[Editor's note: UnKnown Marvel is a new, rotating department, written by Robert Menzies and examining rarities from Marvel's UK division of the Bronze Age. UnKnown Marvel will return in BI #110.]

*They say that you should never meet your heroes, but perhaps the reverse is truer: maybe heroes should never meet their fans! It really wasn't my intention to make Bob Layton squirm at his early artistic efforts. If that wasn't enough, I also made him feel the weight of his years, not only through the art but by presenting him with a cake on his 63rd birthday. Bob, characteristically, coped with my terrible welcome to Scotland with his usual good humor.*

The MCM Scotland 2016 con, over the weekend September 24–25, 2016, was the fourth con where I had encountered Bob but his first trip to my homeland. Bob also graciously accepted my invitation to a meal—at his request, at a vegetarian restaurant—with some members of the Scottish comic scene after our interview.

I spent most of the Glasgow con in Bob's company and he clearly appreciates his fans and consciously embraces the idea that comics creators have a debt to repay. He is especially encouraging and positive with young fans—for instance, one of his "rules" is not to charge young fans for sketches. On the Friday prior to the con I arranged for him to meet Ben Wright, a young fan and the son of a work colleague, and when Ben was too ill to appear, he suggested we film a video message and send it to Ben. It was a spontaneous and genuine gesture that was much appreciated. On Sunday, a slightly seedy Ben met Bob and commented that Bob made him feel "amazing."

The one problem that weekend was caused by British Airways, which lost Bob's portfolio on Friday on his way from Florida. All his commissions, sketches, and prints worth many thousands of dollars were in the portfolio, which appeared to be hiding somewhere in London's Gatwick Airport. BA couldn't locate it on Friday night...

...or Saturday, which meant that Bob didn't make a bean with sketches or prints and had to repeatedly apologize to fans.

By Sunday morning Bob was understandably and inevitably becoming less forgiving and posted the following message on Twitter: "Don't understand how British Airways totally lost my bag in post 9/11 era. I urge FAA Safety Brief and DHSgov to investigate their procedures!" At the mention of the Federal Aviation Authority and the Department of Homeland Security, BA managed to find the bag within the next half hour. Coincidence? Bob didn't think so! Despite the recovery, the portfolio did not arrive until 9 p.m. that night, so Sunday was also a washout. Hopefully, Bob will return and Scottish fans—including Ben Wright—will be able to get a sketch from him.

This interview took place in City Centre Comics, Glasgow, on Friday, September 23, 2016. The owner, Chris O'Brien, and I had covered the walls with comics with Layton covers. Bob, unsurprisingly, loved it.

— Robert Menzies

## In an Alternate Reality...

Layton's very first published Marvel art, part 1:

*The Avengers and the Savage Sword of Conan* #135 (Apr. 17, 1976). Marshall Rogers pencils,

Layton inks, on a new title page for a story reprinted from *The Avengers* #85 (Feb. 1971).

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# BABY'S FIRST STEPS:

# BOB LAYTON'S

# FIRST PUBLISHED WORK FOR MARVEL

by Robert Menzies





# The LIBERTY LEGION™

by Dewey Cassell



When it comes to athletes, musicians, and actors, there are some good second- and third-tier ones that get overshadowed by the stars in their field. You never hear much about them and they often fade into obscurity without ever receiving their due, in spite of whatever strengths they bring to their endeavors.

Comic-book characters are no different. The Golden Age of Comics brought us Superman and Batman and Wonder Woman, household names even today, but it also brought us characters you probably never heard of, like the Gay Desperado and Zanzibar the Magician. However, sometimes comic-book characters get a second chance.

In May 1975, Marvel Comics launched *The Invaders*, the brainchild of editor and writer Roy Thomas, its first issue cover-dated August 1975. *The Invaders* featured the heroic exploits of the Golden Age stars of Marvel (then called Timely)—Captain America and Bucky, Human Torch and Toro, and Sub-Mariner—set against the backdrop of the Second World War. Early reaction to *The Invaders* was positive, so Thomas looked for a way to expand on the idea. Thus was born the Liberty Legion.

The first Liberty Legion story weaved its way through *The Invaders* issue #5 and 6 and *Marvel Premiere* issues #29–30. Issue #5 (Mar. 1976) of *The Invaders* depicted Captain America, Human Torch, Toro, and Sub-Mariner captured and hypnotized by the villainous Red Skull. The Skull leaves Bucky behind because the lad does not possess any special powers, saying what readers have probably long thought themselves: “You were merely a mascot—a camp-follower—and I’ve no use for you.” The [former] *Invaders* wreak havoc under the Skull’s control. So Bucky recruits a new team to do battle with his old friends, using a radio program to plead with the other “heroes of America” to answer the call.

Roy Thomas explains the origins of the new team’s name: “Back when I was about 12 or so, the very early ‘50s, I made up a comic. It was about 60 or 70 pages that I wrote and drew. It was very crude stuff, but it told a story called the Liberty Legion. It was mostly made-up characters, although I think I had a character who looked just like the old Atom and I called him Tornado, and I think Green Lantern was in it. I don’t know why I used him. Then, two or three years later, I had this idea about a crossover comic book between DC and what I always thought of as Marvel or Atlas, and two or three other companies. This would have been about 1955. By that time, the Human Torch and Captain America had been discontinued. So I made up this group that was like the surviving heroes of comics. It was Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman from DC, Sub-Mariner, Plastic Man, and Blackhawk (without his other Blackhawk members), and the Blue Beetle, who was on his last legs at Charlton after having been revived, as well as the character Crimebuster. Sluggo from the Little Wise Guys and *Daredevil* comics was sort of their mascot. I did this whole comic, wrote it all out and drew it and even colored some of it, and it was called the Liberty Legion. Then about ‘63

## Homefront Heroes

Bucky faces front on the cover to the first of two *Marvel Premiere* appearances for the Liberty Legion. MP #29 (Apr. 1976) cover by Jack Kirby and Frank Giacoia.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



explains. "I was just trying to get a balance of characters. To some extent, I suppose, my prototype was the Justice Society. I ended up with seven members, not counting Bucky, but I didn't have a one-for-one relationship [with the Justice Society] in mind. I was just trying to get a nice mix of characters. For example, I thought there should be one good Captain America type, so that became the Patriot, who was the most popular of the Captain America types in the old Timely comics, after Cap himself. Red Raven was the Hawkman type. I felt I should also have a Sub-Mariner type and, in a way, Jack Frost kind of fit that bill. Of course, the Whizzer was the Flash type character. He and Miss America were two of the more popular characters among the also-rans back in the '40s. Miss America sort of had her own comic for about one issue. She and the Whizzer had also both been members of the All-Winner's Squad. To some extent, the All-Winner's Squad had been a precursor of the Invaders, so I wanted to have those two characters be a part of the Liberty Legion. And then I played around a little bit with the Blue Diamond. I made him bigger and stronger. In the original comics, he's just a guy about the same size as everybody else, and I bulked him up to make him a little more unique for that series." Other characters received costume changes, particularly the Thin Man, whose original red and blue costume was deemed too much like other members of the Legion.

Not everyone made the new team. In *Marvel Premiere* #29 (Apr. 1976), Bucky also mentions the Challenger, the Fin, and the Thunderer. The omission of these other Golden Age characters wasn't for lack of merit, though, as Thomas notes, "I must have considered the Fin because it's a Sub-Mariner kind of character, also created by Bill Everett. I probably would have brought the Fin in at some stage. Another character, the Challenger, was very interesting. Phil Seuling pointed him out to me back in the middle '60s when we first met. Phil noted that the Challenger was a really great character that nobody ever did much with because his motif was that he would challenge a villain to fight him with a weapon of the villain's choice, and he would beat him. That might be a limited gimmick, but it was an interesting gimmick and it made him a unique kind of character. However, it didn't necessarily lend itself very well to being in a group, because he wouldn't have the scope to do his main shtick in a group the way he would in a solo story, and that's probably why I didn't put him in there." The explanation given in the story for why these other characters did not join the Legion is that they apparently did not hear—or chose not to answer—Bucky's call, but Thomas admits, "That was just my excuse for why I didn't use them. I did the same thing with *All-Star Squadron*. 'Some people just didn't show up.' It was intended as a tease for the readers to make them think that at any time some favorite of theirs might show up, or they could ask for a particular character and maybe that would inspire me."

Don Heck drew the Liberty Legion stories in *Marvel Premiere* and Jack Kirby did the covers, giving the book a nostalgic feel. The use of Kirby was no accident, as Thomas recalls, "I did, starting with *The Invaders*, go after Kirby as the cover artist. As soon as he became available, I started having Jack do all the covers. I thought, 'How could I go wrong?' and I'm really happy with those covers." Coupled with Thomas' writing, it was a truly compelling package. As for the new team, they had an immediate and urgent mission, but that didn't make these seven people who had just met into best buddies. There were occasional disagreements and infighting, as we had come to expect from Marvel team books since the early days of the *Fantastic Four*. Thomas' intent was "to differentiate them by having the Invaders spend more of their time in Europe and the Liberty Legion become the home-front heroes."



For some characters, *Marvel Premiere* served as a launching point for their own book. Not so with the Liberty Legion. According to Thomas, it wasn't for lack of trying, "For a little while we had a Liberty Legion book scheduled as a full title. Don Heck had drawn the first Liberty Legion story that I had worked out. I think it was just the fact that *The Invaders*, after the first seven or eight issues, began to lose a little steam. Therefore, if the title that had been the reason for the Liberty Legion's being was sinking a little bit, then it was maybe time to put it on hold. Had *The Invaders* picked up [sales] at some later stage, we might still have done it. But as it was, *The Invaders* lasted only a relatively few years. It wasn't a failure as a title, but still not a huge success, either."

After issue #6 (May 1976) of *The Invaders*, the Legion made guest appearances with the Thing in *Marvel Two-in-One Annual* #1 (1976) and *Marvel Two-in-One* #20 (Oct. 1976). Two years later, Thomas brought the Legion back to *The Invaders* beginning with issue #35 (Dec. 1978), which featured artwork from the unpublished first issue of the Liberty Legion solo title, as did issue #38. Issue #36 debuted a new villain, the Iron Cross, for which Thomas drew from his past experience. "That story involved a takeoff on Iron Man—the Iron Cross character—and I had some fun with that. I lived

### Patriotic Pugilists

The Legion mixes it up with the Invaders on the Jack Kirby/ Joe Sinnott cover of *Invaders* #6 (May 1976).

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



The airwaves got a little more crowded in 1941 when the FCC approved FM radio for commercial use. Touted for its higher sound quality than AM, the band Steely Dan would later proclaim in their 1978 hit "FM" that there was "no static at all." The same didn't hold true for a certain DC Comics hero introduced in December 1941's *Detective Comics* #60, but Air-Wave got along just fine for nearly seven years.

Clad in a green and yellow costume with antennae on his hood and a lightning bolt on his chest, the hero unnerved crooks by broadcasting his voice through metal objects like a gun. "I developed this belt radio to draw the natural radio-electric energy that exists all around us," he declared in his debut. "It powers my radio set. My antennae enable me to hear conversations miles away and to send my voice by microphone. When I want to speed, I use these retractable skate-wheels on my boots." The skates were also useful for what became an Air-Wave trademark: racing along electrical wires strung high in the air.

The newcomer was really Larry Jordan, a law clerk who wore glasses and a fake mustache in the offices of District Attorney Cole. Seven episodes into the feature (*Detective* #66), Cole was murdered and Larry was named his replacement. (Ironically, Air-Wave had already displaced another D.A. when his feature replaced the long-running "Steve Malone, District Attorney" strip.)

With Cole's demise and the exit of recurring nemesis Professor Gurn (*Tec* #61, 65), the supporting cast was reduced to a chatterbox parrot named Static whom Air-Wave picked up in *Detective* #64. Together they fought the likes of Doctor Silence (*Tec* #77), Snake Eyes (*Tec* #88), the Beam (*Tec* #113), and an array of nondescript crooks. By the time the feature ended in 1948's *Detective* #137, the duo was dealing with bicycle thieves.

Believed to have been created by either Mort Weisinger or Murray Boltinoff, Air-Wave began and ended his career with the pencils and inks of Harris Levy (signing his work as "Lee Harris"). After he joined the military in 1942, Levy ceded the art assignment to his friend George Roussos (*Detective* #75–112, 1943–1946). The latter's tenure is perhaps the most memorable of the feature's run, less for his line art than the often groundbreaking color techniques he employed. A Roussos Air-Wave story was reprinted more than two decades later in 1971's *Superman* #245 (a 100-Page Super Spectacular) and reprint editor E. Nelson Bridwell kept the Air-Wave love coming when he included a 1942 Levy-illustrated tale in 1972's *World's Finest Comics* #212.

### AIR WAVE'S BRONZE AGE DEBUT

One can't help but sense Bridwell's hand in the eventual revival of the hero in October 1977's landmark *Green Lantern* #100 (cover-dated Jan. 1978). GL was, after all, Hal Jordan, and the continuity-oriented ENB (assistant to editor Julius Schwartz) must have surely posited a relationship with the earlier Larry. If that was the case, though, *GL* #100 scripter Denny O'Neil has no recollection of it.

"Alas, I remember little of the Air Wave saga," he tells *BACK ISSUE*, "and what I do remember might not be accurate. Anyway, here's what I think happened: Somewhere along the line, I became aware of A.W. Maybe I remembered him from my comics-reading childhood, maybe I found him while rummaging through DC's library. He seemed like a lightweight and maybe his obscurity wasn't undeserved. But something in him seemed deserving of another chance, so I gave him one. I don't recall what parts Julie and Nelson played in all this."

O'Neil revealed early into issue #100's tale that the Golden Age crimebuster had died in the 1960s. Larry's legacy was carried on by a teenage son who took the Air Wave name (note the lack of hyphen), but roller-skates and a loquacious parrot wouldn't cut it in the 1970s. Instead, the novice utilized helmet-based technology conceived by his

### Air Wave Tunes In

Our young hero's debut, on the cover of *Green Lantern* #100 (Jan. 1978). Cover art by Mike Grell.

TM & © DC Comics.

# NO STATIC AT ALL:

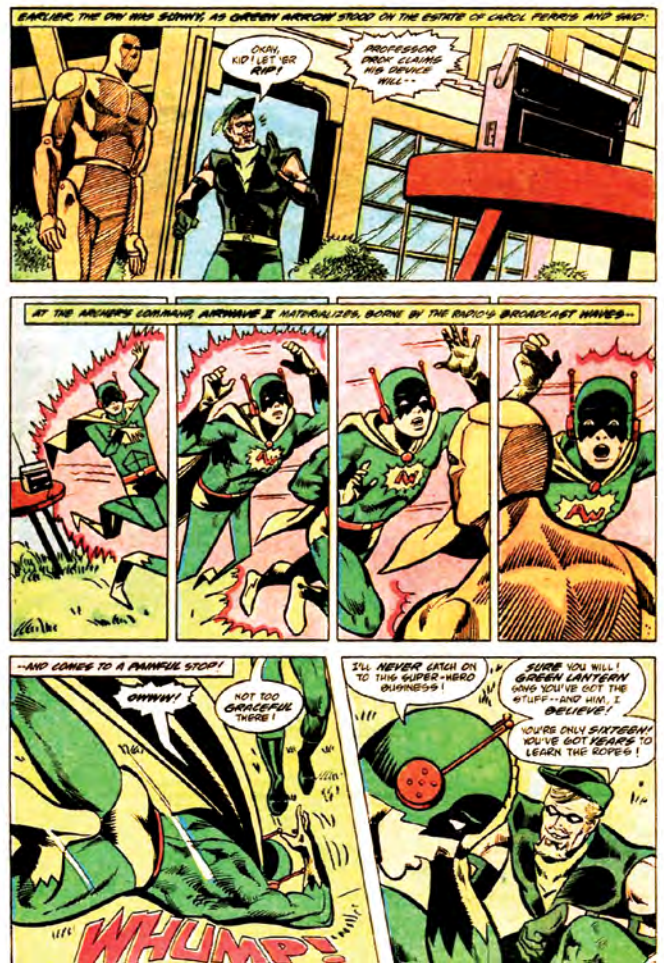
# Air Wave

## in the Bronze Age

by John Wells







dad to literally transform into electrical energy. "It enables me to travel along any radio, radar, or television wave," the young man explained.

What Air Wave II lacked was experience. After mistakenly punching Green Lantern and getting socked in return, the kid admitted that he didn't have "the remotest notion of how a super-hero is supposed to do his thing." GL generously volunteered to mentor the kid and they joined forces to defeat a villain-for-hire called Master-Tek, who was soaking up broadcast energy and expelling it as waves of force.

Afterwards, Air Wave revealed to GL that he'd deduced his civilian identity... with the kicker that he was also named Hal Jordan! Reflecting on the plot twist, Green Lantern realized that the teenager must be the son of his Uncle Larry. "I'm pretty sure [that idea came from] Julie," Bob Rozakis tells *BACK ISSUE*. "It's the kind of thing he would suggest, particularly if Nelson Bridwell told him the two were cousins."

The revival of Air Wave ultimately came down to his surname. If Larry had been named anything other than Jordan, the GL story and everything that followed would never have happened.

In fact, the story itself almost hadn't happened. When *Green Lantern* was revived in May 1976, the intention was for Denny O'Neil to write and edit three issues with co-star Green Arrow. After that, Julius Schwartz would take over the editing with issue #93 and switch to GL solo adventures. Once new DC publisher Jenette Kahn saw sales figures on the first issue of the revival, however, she insisted that Green Arrow had to stay. Consequently, a two-page epilogue was tacked onto GL #93 that returned the Ace Archer to the book.

By that point, O'Neil had already written a script for *Green Lantern* #94, one that introduced a new regular partner for the Emerald Crusader who was as far removed from Green Arrow as possible. When *Green Lantern* #100 appeared on his schedule a year later, Julius Schwartz saw an opportunity. He was already sitting on an unpublished Green Arrow/Black Canary meant for *1st Issue Special* in early 1976. By doing a double-sized issue for GL #100, he could use that and the Air Wave story meant for issue #94. He just had to get it illustrated.

Enter Alex Saviuk, a recent graduate of New York City's School for Visual Arts. The artist had done only a few short stories to that point, the most recent of which had been a two-page horror piece for editor Murray Boltinoff. "I was doing this Neal Adams thing where I was staggering the panel sizes and having characters' heads breaking the panel borders, etc." Saviuk detailed to Keith Dallas in *The Flash Companion* (2008).

"And Murray hated it!" Saviuk continued. "He said, 'Oh, this is terrible! It's so hard to read! It's hard to follow.' And he brought it in to show to [then-art director] Vince Colletta and within minutes Murray—may he rest in peace, and that's probably why I'm getting away with telling this story—Murray came back and he looked in a bit of a huff, so I wanted to avoid him at all costs. Vince then called me into his office and he said, 'Hey, kid, I just saw your story. It looked great!' I said, 'Gee, thanks! I don't think Murray really liked it.' Vince said, 'Well, don't worry about that. Hey, how would you like to draw *Green Lantern*?' And I literally said, 'What?'"

Colletta explained that the book's regular artist Mike Grell was otherwise occupied with drawing an upcoming *Legion of Super-Heroes* tabloid and they needed a

## Hero in Training

(left) Splash from *Green Lantern* #100, showing Air Wave tangling with Master-Tek.

(right) Green Arrow tutors Air Wave in *Green Lantern* #104 (May 1978). By O'Neil/Saviuk/Colletta.

TM & © DC Comics.



# The Men Who Fell to Earth-Two

It was much more than a Justice Society of America revival. When Roy Thomas, whose name was second only to Stan Lee's as THE Marvel Comics writer/editor, vacated the House of Ideas for DC Comics in 1981, one of his projects was a World War II-based series featuring not just the JSA but just about every character that ever graced a DC book during comics' Golden Age. The result was All-Star Squadron, a monthly title premiering with a Sept. 1981 cover date (after a preview the month prior in Justice League of America #193), blending retroactive DC continuity with US and world history. The series enjoyed a run of 67 issues with three Annuals, plus a spin-off (Infinity, Inc.) and a continuation (Young All-Stars). Initially drawn by penciler Rich Buckler and inker Jerry Ordway, ASS (insert your own sophomoric gag here) witnessed a squadron of amazing illustrators during its run, including Arvell Jones, who joined Roy, Jerry, and me (as moderator) for this panel at HeroesCon in Charlotte, North Carolina, on June 17, 2017.

— Michael Eury



ROY THOMAS

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia.

**MICHAEL EURY:** Any objections to my recording this for transcription in BACK ISSUE?

**ROY THOMAS:** How about recording it for *Alter Ego*? [laughter]

**JERRY ORDWAY:** I'd like to record it for the FBI... [laughter]  
**EURY:** I'm Michael Eury, the editor of BACK ISSUE magazine, and I am honored to bring you to Earth-Two today and introduce to you our All-Star Squadron panel. We'll start with Arvell Jones. [applause] Then Jerry Ordway. [applause] And last, but not least... Roy Thomas. [applause]

Before we get started, let's observe a moment of silence to remember Rich Buckler, the original artist of this series, who passed away on May 19th. [silence]

Thank you. Roy, we're going to start with you. You've told this story many times before, but for the record, how did All-Star Squadron come about?

**THOMAS:** I just wanted to do it, you know. I had just left Marvel, and DC wanted to keep me happy but they didn't really want a Justice Society comic, because the Justice Society comic that Paul Levitz had been writing at the end had just died in the previous year or two, and I didn't really want to revive it. I loved that group, but just bringing it back again a year or two later... I could have done it, but... I had been doing *Invaders* at Marvel for a number of years and I just got into the thing where I sort of liked doing World War II comics.

I didn't want to just write the Justice Society, I wanted to write *everybody*. Everybody, every character that ever existed at DC, maybe a few more. So I talked them into the idea of the *All-Star Squadron*, and that's how it happened.

It was a good seller for the first couple of years. When Ordway wandered off it didn't help anything, but we struggled on. Arvell came aboard and we had some other good artists. It did okay. If it hadn't been for that damn *Crisis*,

## The Gang's All Here...

...and if they're not, eventually they'll show up in *All-Star Squadron*. Cover to issue #1 (Sept. 1981) by Rich Buckler.

TM & © DC Comics.

# The ALL-STAR SQUADRON Interview

by Michael Eury

transcribed by Brian Martin







it might still be going. We'd be up to about issue three or four hundred and I might even have gotten to 1943. [laughter] EURY: Was there any opposition to setting it during World War II? Because the last time the Justice Society had been seen, they were set in contemporary times.

THOMAS: No, there really wasn't a lot. I think probably because the previous JSA comic, having just failed in the present, made it easier for me to do despite the fact that *Invaders* had never been a huge hit. I was not under the illusion that *All-Star Squadron* was going to be the biggest hit ever—that was not my interest. I had very little interest in my audience anymore. If my audience was interested in what I wanted to do, and I had made them interested enough for me to make a living... but other than that, I had zero interest in writing comics for anybody except myself. But I had to fool the publisher and the editor into thinking that I did, and it sort of worked. It was a reasonably popular comic, and I think I probably did some things that didn't make it more popular. Like having a cast of 80 people, or maybe not focusing on the same four or five or six over and over, but that wasn't my interest. You know, I was interested in a tapestry, not just the usual group where you've got four or five people and a few others. I wanted to be dealing with everybody, and I was aware how risky that was and that it might not work. It lasted [67] issues, and then the *Young All-Stars* for another 30 issues after that. It wasn't a bad run, and again, if it hadn't been for *Crisis* it probably would have limped along, gotten back on track, and done well again.

I was very lucky in the artists that I had. Buckler and Jerry in the beginning, then Jerry turned out he could actually draw! [laughter] First when they wanted him to, they said Jerry's going to draw it, and I said, "Whaaat!?" We knew he could ink, and then I saw a few pages that great. Then I went to Arvell and a few other people later on to pick up the slack after Jerry left. In between we had Rick Hoberg, who did a really nice job for a while, and a few other people.



EURY: Adrian Gonzales... [Adrian Gonzales penciled issues #6-18 as well as Annual #1.]

THOMAS: Yeah, Adrian Gonzales, he was really good, and especially, of course, there Jerry became really important, because Adrian did a pretty good job of storytelling and Jerry tied it together to give it that slick look. Well, he'll tell you more about it.

ORDWAY: Right. Adrian didn't really have the same connection. I'd already been on it for a while, so I kind of understood the main characters and their appeal or whatever. So I think that was a big deal. Also costumes. I still think of that when I'm doing a sketch.

THOMAS: I was a little particular about costumes.

ORDWAY: But you know what, it made me think about it, too. I was drawing the Golden Age Green Lantern recently and I was like, "Wait, he's left-handed," and I remember that because—

THOMAS: I don't remember that.

ORDWAY:—I always thought about it. Then Jade became left-handed with *Infinity, Inc.*

THOMAS: You remember that?

## Some Assembly Required

(left) Rich Buckler/ Dick Giordano cover for the *All-Star Squadron* preview story in *Justice League of America* #193 (Aug. 1981). (right) Original art page from the preview by Buckler and Jerry Ordway. Courtesy of Heritage.

TM & © DC Comics.



**The Cost of Victory**  
Jaw-dropping original art (courtesy of Heritage) for the cover of issue #20 (Apr. 1983), by Jerry Ordway.

TM & © DC Comics.

and I drew her with light hair. Well, maybe they'll catch it..."

**ORDWAY:** That's what the inker gets to do!

**EURY:** *Were there ever any legal concerns from DC over likenesses? They used to be kind of gun shy about having real people in their books.*

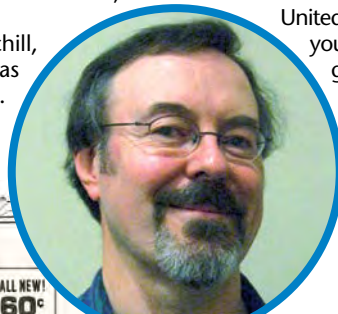
**THOMAS:** They never gave us any that I know of.

**ORDWAY:** You know, I think the likeness issue arose... Roy, did you use Einstein or something?

**THOMAS:** Oh, yeah, later on, in the *Young All-Stars* [*Young All-Stars* #21–25, a reworking of the Superman vs. Wonder Woman *All-New Collectors' Edition* since post-Crisis, Superman and Wonder Woman no longer existed during WWII]. They had to turn him backwards on the cover to show his back, so you can't see him.

**ORDWAY:** His likeness is an intellectual property. To go back to Winston Churchill, I'm lucky, the only picture I had was a tiny picture. If you didn't have that, you would be out of luck.

**JONES:** For me it was just Hitler, Churchill, President Franklin Roosevelt... Hitler was easy—just add the little mustache. I couldn't draw Winston Churchill at all, but my Roosevelt was okay.



JERRY ORDWAY

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia.

those characters, but if you ever do a story set in World War II, I'll do it."

That could be kind of interesting. Let's see, I could have Churchill come to the United States... [*laughter*]

**ORDWAY:** That would have been for their Red Circle stuff...? [*Editor's note:* Archie's Red Circle/Dark Circle imprint will be covered next month in *BACK ISSUE* #107.]

**THOMAS:** It might have been, I don't know, otherwise I could have done something in the present, but I was trying to get something I really wanted to do. Everyone has his own theme, and by that time, you were starting out new, but by the time I did *All-Star Squadron* I'd been in the field for 15 years. I'd even written a couple dozen issues of a World War II comic, so I was really looking for something different to do and I wasn't as interested as I should have been for my own sake, I suppose, in the commerciality and things of that nature. Except to the point of survival, it just did not interest me.

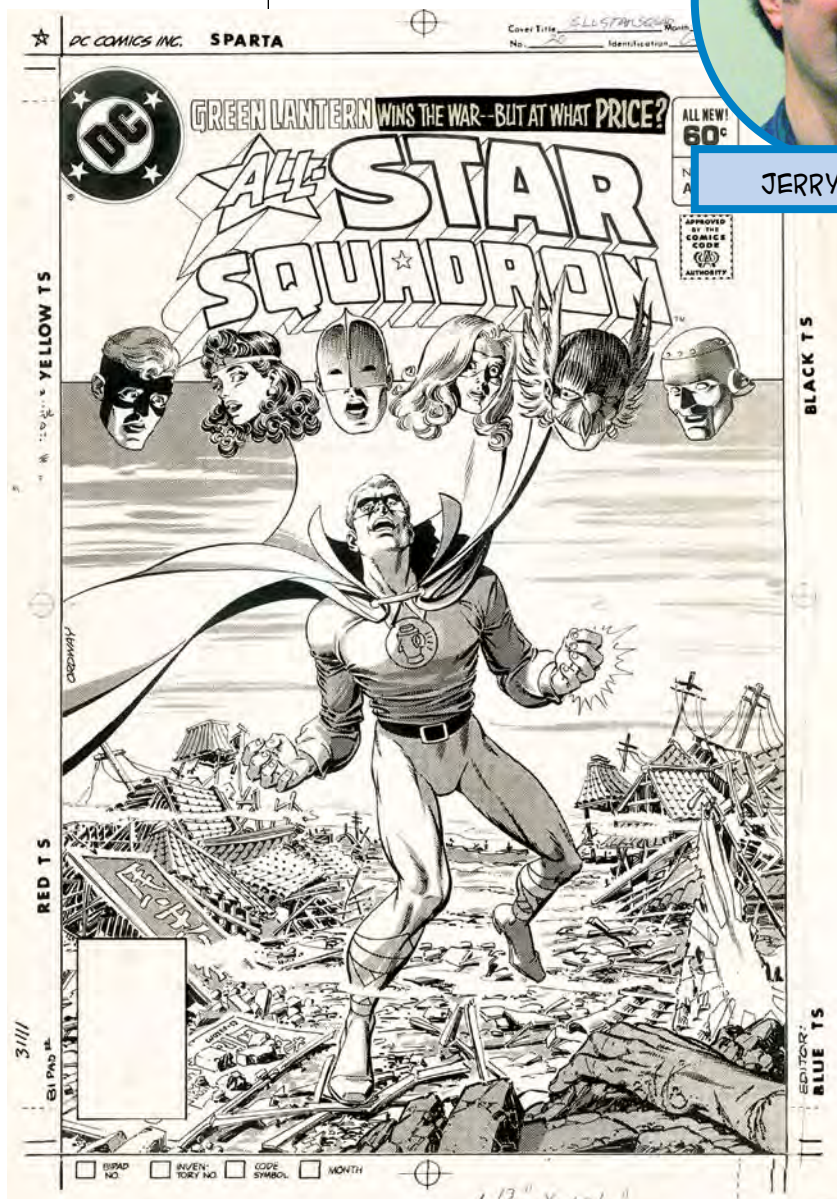
**ORDWAY:** But you know, if you were thinking about that, then [*All-Star Squadron*] wouldn't have been what it was.

**THOMAS:** Whatever it was.

**ORDWAY:** I went through that with [*The Power of*] *Shazam*. There was always a bit of a bubble, but I was able to do Tawky Tawny and stuff that I wouldn't have been able to do if I had thought, "Oh, it's got to be a top seller." I was given that freedom, and I think that you benefit as a reader from those stories because you followed your heart.

But I think that's the thing I was doing on *All-Star Squadron*. I understood the crowd scenes—I hear you on that, the crowd scenes are tough, especially when you have fights, because you have to come up with something good for each guy and you almost have to match them up in some way that made sense. So it wasn't Liberty Belle fighting some molten lava guy or something weird. But the thing I always went back to was the fact that Roy loved this stuff. He wasn't doing this to torture any of us—

**THOMAS:** That was just a by-product! [*laughter*]



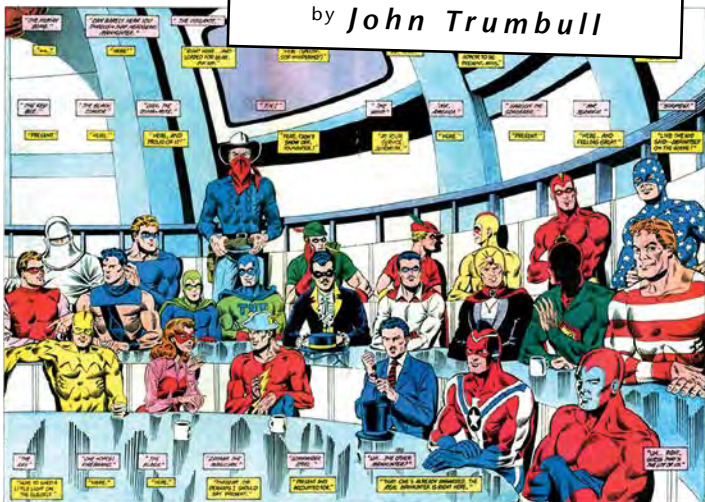




# STAR ARTIST:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH RICK HOBERG

by John Trumbull



### Roll Call

That's a whole lotta heroes in Roy Thomas' *All-Star Squadron* #31 (Mar. 1984). Penciled by Rick Hoberg and inked by Mike Machlan.

TM & © DC Comics.

**Rick Hoberg took over as the new penciler of *All-Star Squadron* shortly after Jerry Ordway's run.** A veteran designer and storyboard artist from such animated shows as *Godzilla*, *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and *G.I. Joe*, Hoberg had previously collaborated with Roy Thomas at Marvel Comics on such titles as *Star Wars* and *What If?* Hoberg drew many of the seminal moments of *All-Star Squadron*, such as the death of *Dian Belmont* in #18, the origin of *Amazing-Man* in #23, the first meeting of the *All-Stars'* full membership in #31, the origin of the *Freedom Fighters* and the death of the *Red Bee* in #32–35, and the *Detroit race riot* story in #38–39. He took the time to chat with me about his *All-Star* days via email in November 2017.

— John Trumbull

**JOHN TRUMBULL:** You'd done some fill-in work on *All-Star* before you became the regular penciler, inking *Adrian Gonzales* on issues #16–18 and penciling *Amazing-Man's* six-page origin sequence in issue #23. How did these assignments come about?

**RICK HOBERG:** Roy [Thomas] had been doing his best to get me in at DC when he went over. I was continuing to work in animation for companies like Marvel and Ruby Spears, but really wanted to get back into comics again. The break finally came through Len Wein, who was editing *Brave and the Bold*, gave me some work inking *B&B* over Ross Andru [issue #199's team-up with *Batman* and the *Spectre*], which came out really well. [Author's note: Hoberg also inked *B&B* #198, a *Batman/Karate Kid* team-up, over Chuck Patton.] After a few jobs, I was handed the inking work over that trio of stories by *Adrian Gonzales* on *All-Star Squadron*. [DC executive editor] *Dick Giordano* really took a shine to my work and had me penciling in no time, including *JLA* Annual #1, the *Amazing-Man* backup, and issues of *Captain Carrot* [assorted stories in #15–20].

**TRUMBULL:** How did you get the regular assignment for *All-Star Squadron*?

**HOBERG:** Roy had been leading up to it with the *Amazing-Man* backup. He was planning on launching

*Infinity, Inc.* with Jerry and wanted me to become the penciler on *All-Star*.

**TRUMBULL:** According to the bio you wrote in issue #32, you had a pretty steady career in animation going when you left the field to return to comics. What prompted you to make the switch?

**HOBERG:** Not so much a switch as I had been doing extra work in comics while still doing animation work. I loved both, but animation was much more stable and comics could never pay a comparable wage at that time. It still can't, unless you have some sort of star status in the medium. Anytime that work ran out in comics, I could return to the animation work.

**TRUMBULL:** Did your animation and comics jobs overlap at all? Did that cause you any difficulties?

**HOBERG:** Yes, there were overlaps, and they certainly caused difficulties like sleep deprivation, but seldom deadline problems, since I tried to balance the work. Still, it is the art life to take as much work as one can handle. You never know which job might be your last.

**TRUMBULL:** *All-Star Squadron* #31, your first issue as the regular penciler, featured a staggering 61 (!) different superheroes, including two double-page spreads. Did you know this was coming beforehand? Were you tempted to quit right then and there?

**HOBERG:** No, I loved the opportunity to be the first to draw the initial meeting of all these classic heroes. It has become a signature piece of mine and the original art for it sold immediately after publication to a high roller who paid a ridiculous price at the time. I have also recreated the entire four pages for a couple of collectors as well. These big groupings of superhero teams were a lot of fun for me.

**TRUMBULL:** By the time you joined *All-Star Squadron* on a regular basis, Roy Thomas was the editor as well as the writer of the book. Did that ever cause any difficulties between you two?

**HOBERG:** No, I thoroughly enjoyed working with and for Roy every time I had the opportunity. I don't even recall a deadline problem or design problem that cropped up during my times working with Roy.



RICK HOBERG

Facebook.



# JONNI THUNDER

## A.A.A. Thunderbolt™

by Ed Catto



Fans in the Bronze Age witnessed a perpetual reintroduction and reimagining of comics' premier super-team, the Justice Society of America. The demand was almost insatiable. Many rabid fans eagerly awaited each new iteration of these fabled characters.

Imagine their surprise when, in 1984, DC Comics introduced a new Johnny Thunder. Despite the fact that the original character was instrumental in bringing the JSA together in their first published adventure, this new version would change the character's gender, tweak the spelling of the character's name, and eschew the character's superheroic history.

Despite all that, writers Roy and Dann Thomas and artist Dick Giordano created a refreshingly memorable treasure with the miniseries *Jonni Thunder a.k.a. Thunderbolt*, spotlighting a female private eye who just happens to harness a mystical Incan thunderbolt.

### NOT QUITE A HOUSEHOLD NAME

Indeed, the name Jonny Thunder has had a rich history at DC Comics. But the earlier versions were very different from the protagonist Jonni Thunder.

The first Jonny Thunder was a hapless everyman, often played for a stooge, who ended up doing heroic things despite his own incompetence. Johnny Thunderbolt, as he was originally (albeit briefly) called, started adventuring in *Flash Comics* #1 in 1940. Johnny, along with his mystic Thunderbolt, sort of a modern-day genie, were created by John Wentworth and Stan Aschmeier. Soon, Johnny became a member of comics' first super-team, the Justice Society of America. He was running with the big dogs of the day, and probably doing better than anyone had expected he would. His popularity waned over the years, eventually losing his membership in the JSA, as well as his publishing spot, to his girlfriend, Dinah Lance, better known as the Black Canary. As a focused, competent crimefighter with a Veronica Lake peekaboo hairstyle, Black Canary had more in common with the Jonni Thunder who would debut in the 1980s than the bumbling Johnny Thunder.

By the later part of the 1940s, experts predicted that superheroes' days in comics were numbered and Western stories were the next big opportunity. With that in mind, DC Comics developed a Western hero named Johnny Thunder, debuting in *All-American Comics* #100. This version of Johnny Thunder was actually the secret identity of John Tane, a mousy schoolteacher. Tane consistently failed to live up to his father's expectations of what it meant to be a real man and a real cowboy. Thus, he developed a convoluted scheme to impress and fool his father, performing heroic acts as his fictional alter ego. He was often helped by his horse, Black Lightning, and his teenage sidekick, Swift Deer. On one hand, it's hard to understand the enduring appeal of this feature through the lens of modern times. On the other hand, with the vibrant art of top-notch artists like Gil Kane, Mort Drucker, Sy Barry, and Alex Toth gracing this feature, it makes sense. The Western Johnny Thunder would switch to *All-Star Western* and stay in the saddle until the end of the '50s.

### LIGHTNING STRIKES: THE CREATION OF JONNI THUNDER, A.K.A. THUNDERBOLT

DC's third Johnny Thunder almost came back as an American Indian. Roy Thomas, the legendary comics writer, reveals that he thought, at one stage, of revamping the character as a Native American.

For a character, Roy liked the name Johnny, and he liked the detective characters that had used that name: Jonny Double and Johnny Dynamite in the comics; Johnny Dollar from old time radio. "For some reason," he says, "Johnny just goes with the idea of a private eye."

It was a suggestion from friend and fellow comic writer Gerry Conway that sparked the notion creating a new Johnny Thunder as a female detective. The two writers would co-plot what would become the *Jonni Thunder a.k.a. Thunderbolt* miniseries.

Although Roy was familiar with other female private eyes like V. I. Warshawski series of detective novels and *Ms. Tree* from comics, he wanted to try something a little different. This series would employ superhero elements, but was intended to stand alone from the rest of the superhero world. He thought that at some point down the road, there might be an opportunity for a superhero guest-star, but they'd



### Make Room, Magnum and Marlowe!

Cover to Roy and Dann Thomas' *Jonni Thunder a.k.a. Thunderbolt* #1 (Feb. 1985), drawn by Dick Giordano.

TM & © DC Comics.



**"I NEED SOME KIND OF COSTUME FOR THE PARTY TONIGHT."**

Between Superman and Batman lie the inspirations for many other subsequent superheroes published right up to the present day. However, chronologically, between Superman and Batman came the Crimson Avenger. With a first appearance in *Detective Comics* #20 (Oct. 1938), the Crimson Avenger followed Superman's first appearance in *Action Comics* #1 (June 1938) and preceded Batman (*Detective Comics* #27, May 1939), making the character DC's second costumed crimefighter and first masked hero. Although destined not to become a household name in the way that those other two characters did, the Crimson Avenger has continued to make appearances in the DC Universe. Rarely, though, has he been the headline act. In a several-year run (1938 to 1944) in *Detective Comics*, the Crimson Avenger shared the pages with Batman and others, and only twice appeared on the cover (#22, Dec. 1938, and #34, Dec. 1939). The Crimson Avenger also appeared regularly in *Leading Comics* from #1 (Winter 1941-1942) to 14 (Spring 1945), but only as part of the group the Seven Soldiers of Victory. Later appearances in *Justice League of America* and *All-Star Squadron* were also guest shots. That all changed in 1988 when the Crimson Avenger starred in a four-part miniseries that sought to explore and develop the roots and motivation of the character.

**"YOU'LL BE THE ONE DRESSED AS A BLEEDING HEART."**

In fact, the story started earlier, with the Crimson Avenger starring in the fifth issue of *Secret Origins* (Aug. 1986) [see *BACK ISSUE* #98 for more on this incarnation of *Secret Origins*—ed.]. This version of *Secret Origins* was partly designed to focus on Golden Age characters. New retellings of the origins of Superman and Captain Marvel appeared in the first and third issues, respectively. The next berth scheduled for a Golden Ager went to the Crimson Avenger. Roy Thomas explained this perhaps surprising selection in the editorial of issue #5: "The Crimson Avenger never had an origin. He was already there, with a sometime supporting cast which included Wing and his secretary Miss Stevens. For the most part, I'm just as happy his origin wasn't told in the old days—'cause that gave me a chance to give him one."

*Secret Origins* #5 is a great comic, worth hunting down. Roy Thomas and his co-scripting wife Dann are joined by the art team of Gene Colan on pencils and Mike Gustovich on inks. The 1938 setting suits Colan's

**The Original Dark Knight**

Covers to DC's four-issue *Crimson Avenger* miniseries of 1988. Cover artists: Greg Brooks and Mike Ebert (#1), Rick Stasi and Dick Giordano (#2 and 4), and Keith Wilson and Giordano (#3).

TM & © DC Comics.

# THE CRIMSON AVENGER™

## DC COMICS' FIRST MASKED HERO

by Ian Millsted





The years 1986–1987 were a seminal period for DC Comics as it launched its post-Crisis on Infinite Earths universe. During this fertile creative period emerged *The Spectre* #1 (Apr. 1987), in which a more obscure but steady hero from the 1940s was relaunched by writer **Doug Moench** and artists Gene Colan and Steve Mitchell. For the first time, readers followed the exploits of a severely depowered Spectre. Gone was writer Michael Fleisher and artist Jim Aparo's omnipotent, punishing, godlike Spectre who (in)famously starred in *Adventure Comics* #431–440 (Feb. 1974–Aug. 1975). In fact, during my interview with him, Doug commented on this controversial interpretation of the character: "When Sir Robert Greenberger called me up to see if I wanted to write *The Spectre*, I would ask if I could write the book in a certain way, and he would tell me that he would let me do it in that manner. It was that simple. Still, I asked him, 'I don't have to do the Fleisher ridiculous mutilations?' " Fortunately, Bob Greenberger gave Doug carte blanche to recraft the Spectre as a diminished supernatural figure who was forced to coexist with his human host, private detective Jim Corrigan. Thanks to his new energetic take on the Spectre/Corrigan pairing, readers witnessed the two working together in the form of a complex partnership that added new dimensions to each character.

After having the unique privilege of interviewing the living comic-book writer legend who is Doug Moench in his Bucks County, Pennsylvania, home for my article on his *Electric Warrior* run (BACK ISSUE #98), my wife Amanda and I were constantly talking about when we would see Doug again. Luckily, BI editor Michael Eury contacted me and asked if I were interested in a follow-up interview with Doug concerning his run on *The Spectre*. Hence, Amanda and I found ourselves on a warm Saturday evening in October 2017 once more kindly being welcomed into the Moench's beautiful home. (For more on its "true" origins, see the sidebar feature!)

Wishing to impress Doug with the culinary wonders of the Teriyaki Chef, a Japanese restaurant located in the Quakertown Farmers Market, we arrived at his place with such delicacies as harumaki (a fried roll filled with a beef stuffing) and gyoza (potstickers) as our appetizers. For our main course, we ate chicken karaage (a fried dish that requires a three-day marinating process), katsudon (a fried pork cutlet with eggs and mushrooms over rice in a bowl, which Doug compared to egg foo young), and the special of the day, a grilled salmon platter. As we unpacked the cuisine, Doug brewed coffee, and we sat down to eat at his spacious rounded-booth dinner table, reflecting upon the recent death of Len Wein, whom Doug knew quite well. Then, he switched up the mood by entertaining Amanda and me with his lively anecdotes of his early 20s concerning an interaction with Roger Ebert when they both worked at the *Chicago Sun Times* (see *Alter Ego* #146, May 2017, for his hilarious version of this tale) and his unfortunate encounter one night with some outrageously spicy Indian food at a Chicago party.

Yet, this interview isn't just about chilling with Doug over Japanese food, but his thought-provoking work on *The Spectre*, right! On that note, we gradually flowed into his spacious rec-room and began discussing how he became involved with the book. (And, if you're curious to see what he said to me first about several minor [\*cough\*] discrepancies in my BI #98 piece, see the aforementioned sidebar.)

– Thomas Powers

# GHOSTLY REFLECTIONS: DOUG MOENCH AND

# The Spectre

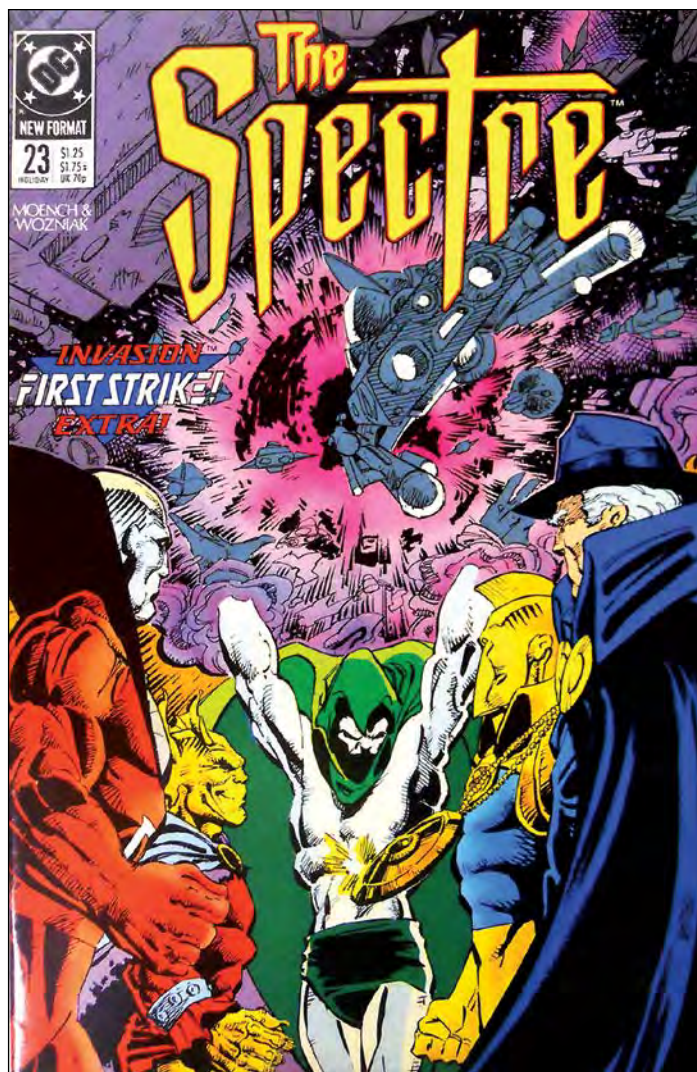
by Thomas Powers



DOUG MOENCH

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Batman, Wonder Woman, and the Spectre. Vertigo later could, but not with the main DC characters. Regardless, you have pencils, inks, and coloring, all of these stages. When the pencils came in showing Madame Xanadu unclothed, I called Greenberger and said, "What the hell is Gray doing? If you don't fix her being naked, this is going to be so horrible." He replied, "Oh, Gray's amusing himself. Once it goes to inks, he will fix it." Just by fluke, I happen to be up there in the DC offices when the inked pages came in. I showed Greenberger that she was still naked in the inks. He said, "Yeah, oh, well, he was not supposed to do that. Don't worry. We will fix it in the coloring." I said that there is no color dark enough to cover the black India ink! You can't do this. So at all three stages, I warned them that you can't do this, and it got to print, and all of these mothers had a fit and threw the fit at the comic-shop owners. DC had all this blowback from the comic-shop owners. The underground comics would be in the back room. The only way they know it is safe to sell it to a kid is because of the Mature Readers label. Greenberger can't say he wasn't warned. That drives me crazy. Afterwards, DC was really upset. Maybe Greenberger did not get fired, but he got called on the carpet. And the sales went down after this issue.

**POWERS:** *Thanks for the background on that situation! Around this period of the book, you also start to have Kimmie and Madame Xanadu flirting with Corrigan and the Spectre respectively, and, in issue #9, you pretty much present Madame Xanadu having sex with the Spectre!*

**MOENCH:** Okay, maybe she was feeling ecstasy, but they weren't really having sex. They were feeling love, but it is not physical.

**POWERS:** *But, Doug, with the mist-like form of the Spectre floating around her body in the issue, aren't you suggesting that she is making love to him in some sort of way?*

**MOENCH:** The way I did it, a mother flipping through the issue would never see a thing that would alarm her. A kid who was too young for this kind of stuff wouldn't be able to see it, but anyone over the age of knowing what is going on would be able to handle it.

**POWERS:** *Is this the idea of her making love to a man, or is it perhaps more of a spiritual thing?*

**MOENCH:** Madame Xanadu is making love to a ghost. Even with her naked, you are not seeing pornography-like penetration because that is not happening. But it is making her feel like that and more. Like this is better than a f\*\*k!

**POWERS:** *What about Corrigan and Kimmie becoming a couple at the end of this issue? Were you going to hold off on this romance, because it felt like the 1980s television show Moonlighting for a long time?*

**MOENCH:** Yes. It was deliberate. Slowly but surely we would reveal this. Each issue, I would advance the relationship a quarter of a millimeter, very deliberately.

**POWERS:** *Two issues later, one of the most horrifying moments of your Spectre run occurs in issue #11 (Feb. 1988). You have this character, Deschanta, who is a member of the Cult of the Blood Red Moon. She sort of looks like Grace Jones and is part of a truly shocking scene.*

## Justice League Dark

Moench's *Spectre* series tied in to DC crossover events *Millennium* and *Invasion!* (left)

*Spectre* #11

(Feb. 1988) cover by Jerry Bingham.

(right) Issue #23 (Holiday 1988) cover by Chris Wozniak.

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Writer John Ostrander and artist Tom Mandrake's 1992 *The Spectre* ongoing series earned them accolades for their fresh take on Jim Corrigan, the hard-boiled (but very dead) human host of DC's avenging spirit. Outside of Corrigan, the series also portrayed an array of fully realized supporting characters dealing with issues of faith, loss, love, bigotry, and redemption.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Ostrander and Mandrake via email throughout September and October of 2017. Upon rereading the series in preparation for our conversation, I found *The Spectre* to be just as powerful of a read today as it was upon its release 25 years ago.

— Shannon E. Riley

**SHANNON E. RILEY:** John, Tom—thanks so much for offering to revisit your seminal work on *The Spectre*. I'd like to go back to the very beginning: How did the two of you get paired up on the series? Did you pitch it together? What was your brief from DC editorial?

**JOHN OSTRANDER:** Tom and I had been working on *Firestorm* and I was leaving after issue #100. Tom thought he would stay on but then DC decided to cancel the book when I left, so Tom became available. Tom and I really work well together, so I wanted to see what else we could get into. We had earlier talked about how much we both loved the Spectre and this seemed like the time to pitch it. The Spectre had a series only about a year or so before that, so DC was initially a little leery of doing another. Also, some had said that you couldn't do an ongoing series about the Spectre—he was too powerful. You needed to reduce his powers to have a viable threat go up against him. We disagreed; downgrade the Spectre's powers and you would lose the visuals that helped sell the character. We convinced DC that we had a clear vision and could make the character work. With the help of our editor, Dan Raspler, we got the go-ahead from DC, and our only brief was "Don't screw up."

**TOM MANDRAKE:** As John says, we pitched the idea, and although editorial at DC felt the Spectre was a one-note character that couldn't support an ongoing series, Dan Raspler helped us push it through. John and I talked at length about what we wanted to do and he wrote a great, concise proposal. I still have a copy of it! I worked up some character sketches of Corrigan, the Spectre, [supporting characters] Amy, Nate Kane, and Danny Geller. I ran across those recently as well; the characters weren't quite jelled but I can see I was on the right track.

**RILEY:** Did you feel beholden to any of the established Spectre mythology—specifically Michael Fleisher and Jim Aparo's take on the character from their 1974–1975 *Adventure Comics* run?

**OSTRANDER:** Yes and no. I'm a big fan of continuity in the broad sense, but I didn't want to be tied to chapter and verse. We felt that if we included elements from as many of the previous incarnations as we could, then we were playing fair.

**MANDRAKE:** I'm a fan of the various incarnations of the Spectre but also aware that over the many years and wide

### *Spirit of Vengeance*

Detail from Tom Mandrake's cover for *The Spectre* #1 (Dec. 1992).

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## Man with a Mission

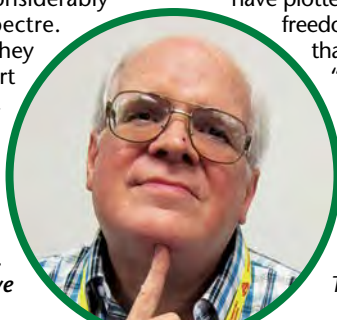
The tormented Jim Corrigan, on page 1 of *Spectre* #1. Note the nod to *Spectre* co-creators Jerry Siegel and Bernard Bailly (misspelled as Bailey).

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variety of creators who worked with the character there was never any continuity regarding his powers or focus regarding his mission. That made it considerably easier to feel we could redefine the Spectre.

I loved the Fleisher/Aparo issues, but they aren't the model for our series, just part of the background we could draw from. **RILEY:** *You'd previously collaborated on Grimjack and Firestorm the Nuclear Man, and a few years after this series you'd work together again on the Martian Manhunter monthly. Clearly, you two have discovered a synergy. What can you recall about your creative process for The Spectre? How collaborative was it?*

**OSTRANDER:** I think that synergy is based on respect for each other's talents. We were working plot first and I would break down the story into page and panels. I told Tom what the story was but, outside of an occasional suggestion,



JOHN OSTRANDER

Superman Celebration, Metropolis, IL.

not *how* to draw it. I used to joke that I would plot the story and then Tom would draw the story he felt I should have plotted. Not *entirely* true, but Tom did have the freedom to adjust the plot for the best visual and that was okay. The goal for both of us was, "What is the best story that we can make?"

Ego always was to take a backseat to story. That's not to say we didn't have disagreements, but we both share a similar story sensibility. Besides, I knew that so long as I threw in an occasional flaming zombie, Tom would be happy.

**MANDRAKE:** By the time we got to *The Spectre*, John and I were cruising as a creative team. We knew how to get the best out of each other. The process usually involved long discussions on the phone or in person about where we wanted to go with the story, [then]

story pitches to the editor [Dan Raspler or Peter Tomas] before John would write the plot. We always worked plot-style, but there was never any restriction on how much or how little needed to be said, so plots could be extremely loose if scenes were largely visual or relatively intricate if subtleties in storytelling needed to be expressed. We were lucky to have editors that trusted our abilities. If I suddenly had an idea for a great visual I felt free to throw it in, knowing that John would fly with it and make it even better... and yeah, flaming zombies.

**RILEY:** *Tom, The Spectre is distinct in that it looked like nothing else DC Comics was publishing at the time. Some of your more macabre scenes actually reminded me of Hieronymus Bosch's hell panel from The Garden of Earthly Delights triptych. Were there particular artists or works that influenced you? Did you have a vision for how you'd approach the book when you landed the assignment?*

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ing to fit into any more than I am (Dec. 1992) was a nt to approach redesigns for that with the exception The Spectre was nded with horror. oughout the series. t homage/swipes s field throughout Goya, and N. C. ny fine artists who e along including m Aparo. I wasn't my own interpre-

o when we were eries. My thought dead, therefore he e Spectre, and his . So why was the at two reasons: superhero, and 2) ly clothe himself. tain some sort of and I really wasn't did like the classic costume. However, I did quietly ease away from the pointed, structured collar in favor of a cowed hood.

**RILEY:** *The cover art was as integral to the vibe of the book as your interiors. By my count, you produced 12 covers out of the 63 issues (I'm including the #0 issue published in support of DC's 1994 Zero Hour event). The works of luminaries like Rafael Kayanan, Alex Ross, Timothy Truman,*