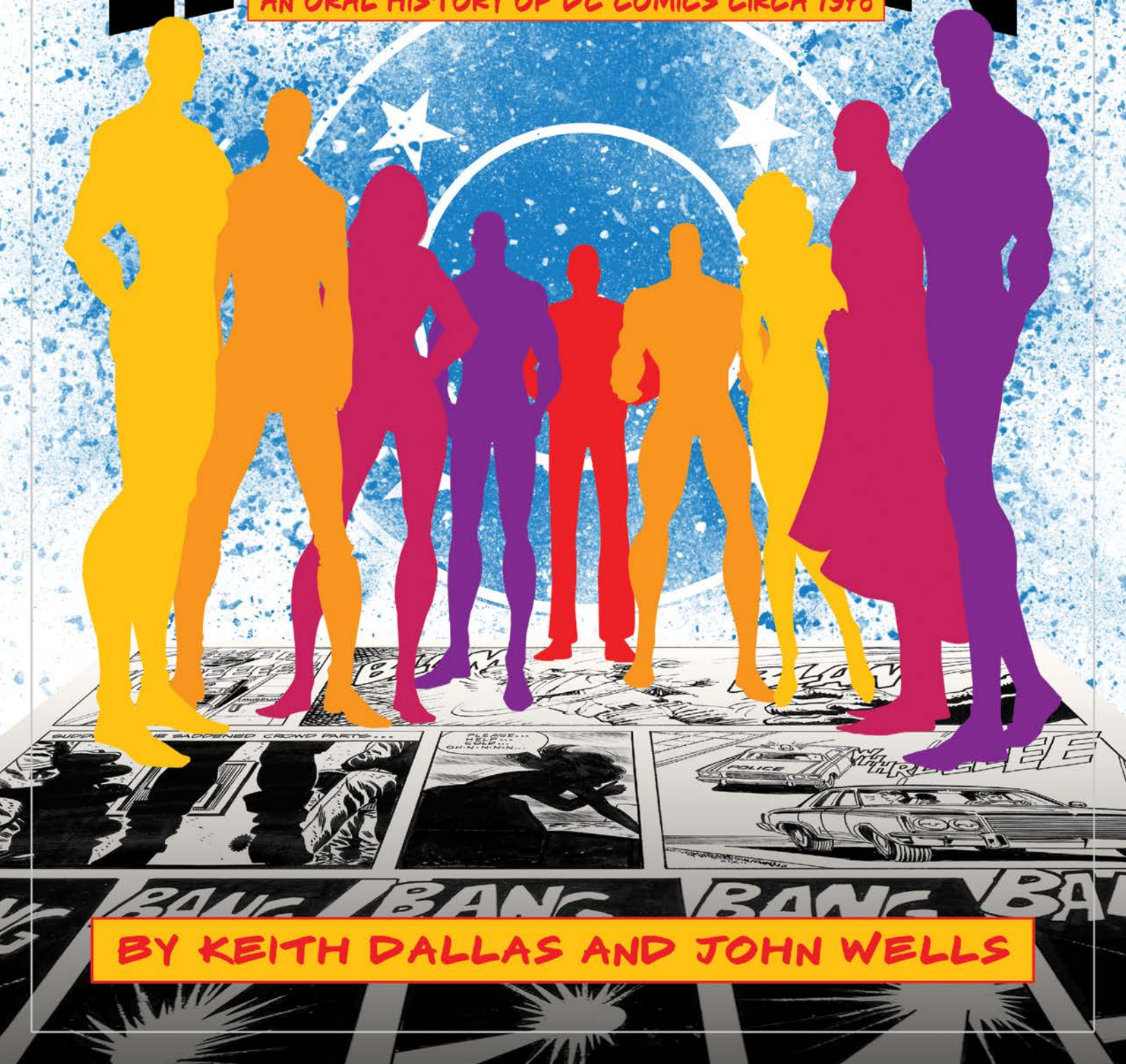


COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION

AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978



BY KEITH DALLAS AND JOHN WELLS



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PART 1: PRE-EXPLOSION (1976-1978)

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Creepy* #85 (January 1977)ⁱ:

“[Warner Communications’] publishing division had its second consecutive yearly loss of \$5 million in 1975. Even the final disposal of Warner’s money-eating foreign publishing operation may not offset 1976 declines because of a sudden, unexpected slowdown in this year’s [1976] second and third quarters. For the record, both National Comics and Warner Paperback Library lost money in 1975 while profits for Independent News and *Mad* declined from 1974 levels.

Moreover, the two-year loss of \$10 million in publishing compares very unfavorably with Warner’s three other wholly-owned divisions: Warner records and music publishing earned \$96.8 million profit in the same two years; Warner TV and motion pictures made \$95.6 million in profits in 1974 and 1975; and 1975 marked the first profitable year (\$2 million) for Warner’s much-touted cable communications division.”

Carmine Infantino, former Publisher and President of DC Comics in his autobiography *The Amazing World of Carmine Infantino* (2001)ⁱⁱ:

“In January 1976, I had just returned from a whirlwind promotional tour for the Superman/Spider-Man treasury edition. Marvel and I worked out a deal that made this first-ever, landmark crossover book possible and, to my memory, the thing sold an amazing 500,000 copies! The promo tour included radio and TV interviews, and convention appearances. When I got back into the office, I was called to a meeting with some Warner Bros. brass [including Warner director and Licensing Corporation of America cofounder Jay Emmett]. Honestly, it was not a surprise to me

to find out both Marvel and DC showed financial losses in 1975. The much-speculated paper shortage never occurred. Faced with 1975’s final numbers, the Warner Bros. executives above me decided to withdraw their support. I was understandably quite upset.”

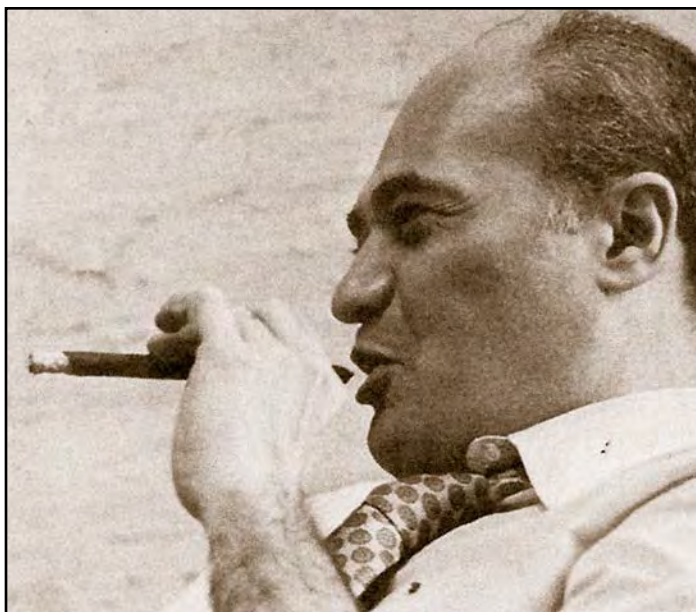
Joe Orlando, then DC Comics editor in an interview printed in *Comic Book Artist* #1 (Spring 1998)ⁱⁱⁱ:

“[Carmine Infantino] was in the middle of an editorial meeting with us and I remember him saying that he was going to fire all of us if we didn’t get our books out on time—his usual threat—and he was called upstairs in the middle of the meeting. Then he came down and said, ‘I’ve been fired.’ We all laughed—a Carmine joke—but it was true. He took his coat, and left. They said that they would send his things after him. And he has never set foot on the premises again.”

Lead story of the “Direct Currents” section in DC Comics’ in-house fanzine *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #11 (cover date March 1976)^{iv}:

“After eight years at the creative controls of DC, Carmine Infantino has relinquished his post and turned the company over to a new management team, while he moves on to new challenges elsewhere. During his tenure as Editorial Director, Publisher, and finally Publisher and President, Carmine changed the shape of the entire company, bringing in several of our most talented editors (Joe Kubert, Joe Orlando, Denny O’Neil and Gerry Conway) and adding many new magazines and characters to the line (including super-stars Tarzan and Shazam)...

In the prophetic department, [*Amazing World of DC Comics*] racks up a high score since Carmine’s departure took place



DC Comics President-Publisher Carmine Infantino was all smiles in this publicity photo circa 1971. At the time of his ouster in January 1976 DC had just published the highly-publicized *Superman Vs. the Amazing Spider-Man* tabloid.

while our tenth issue was on the press... the very issue that spotlighted the 40-year career of his successor as President of [National Periodical Publications], Sol Harrison. After that in-depth survey, there's little more we can add... except to say that no one knows more about our field, and no one deserves the honor more.

Sharing the responsibilities with Sol will be a newcomer to DC, Jenette Kahn, who joins the company as its new Publisher. Jenette's background isn't in comics, but it isn't far removed. In the past 6 years, she's created and edited three magazines for young people...

With this ideal balance between established expertise and incoming enthusiasm, DC looks forward to a new era of even greater creativity, great investigation of the new fields and formats for our comics and our characters."

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Creepy* #85 (January 1977)^v:

"Marvel's parent corporation, Cadence... is a small conglomerate—by comparison to Warner—and seems to be constantly racked by internal corporate haggling between chairman Sheldon Feinberg and dissidents like Bernard Sack. Cadence simply doesn't have much money to waste these days since it carries a number of marginal subsidiary firms. Marvel, operating on monthly profits of less than \$1,000 on some titles and at a loss on others, is still being operated because its existence makes a profit for another division, Curtis Circulation."

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics associate editor in a recollection posted online in 2011^{vi}:

"Marvel was a mess throughout the mid-1970s and during my two years as 'associate editor,' from the beginning of 1976 through the end of 1977. Almost every book was late. There were unscheduled reprints and fill-ins, and we still just plain missed issues here and there. Many books, despite my best efforts to shore up the bottom, were unreadable. Not merely bad. Unreadable. Almost all were less than they ought to be. There were a few exceptions... A few books had parts that were great and things not so great about them that crippled them. We can debate the above at length.... However, what can't be debated is that sales were bad and falling. It was almost all newsstand sales then, by the way. This was before the Direct Market was a significant factor. The comics overall were breakeven at best. Upstairs, the cheesy non-comics magazine department was losing millions. It seemed like the company as a whole was in a death spiral."

[Whatever its internal troubles, Marvel had an undeniable "cool" factor. It was rooted in the foundation created by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and others in the 1960s but a new generation of twenty-something Marvel fans-turned-pros brought distinctly 1970s voices to the table. Relative traditionalists like Len Wein, Gerry Conway, and Marv Wolfman mingled with experimental writers like Steve Englehart, Steve Gerber, Don McGregor, Doug Moench, and Jim Starlin who pushed both form and subject matter, tackling race, politics, religion, and other heavy topics.]

Steve Englehart, then writer of Marvel Comics' *The Avengers* and *Doctor Strange* in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #51 (September 2011)^{vii}:

"DC was really moribund at that point. Everybody who was a big star for DC had largely gone to Marvel. Neal Adams had gone over to Marvel. Gil Kane, Mike Friedrich, and Bob Brown had gone over to Marvel. Gardner Fox had gone over to Marvel. People were bailing on DC. Marvel was where the action was at. Marvel had the better books, the more fun books. DC was just stuck and didn't know how to get unstuck. They had been convinced for so long that they were the #1 company that when they became #2, they didn't really have a plan of what they were supposed to do about it. They got rid of Carmine Infantino, who I always liked, and brought in Jenette, because you always fire the coach when the team is losing."

[The distinction between the nation's comic book publishers was lost on most retailers and distributors.]

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Creepy* #81 (May 1976)^{viii}:

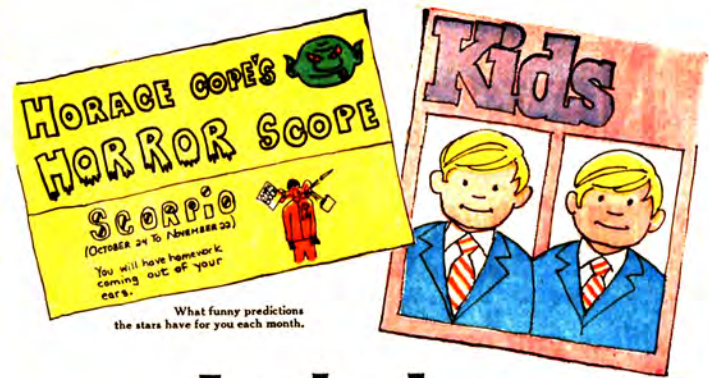
“According to the best calculations I could compile from Postal Service records, the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) notices and a series of conversations with many of the nation’s leading independent magazine distributors, comic book sales are down about 30% during the last six-to-twelve months. And they’re getting worse.

‘My records show comic sales down about 50%, one half since [July 1975],’ said an executive of the nation’s leading independent distributor of comic books. His gloomy assessment of the comic book business is shared by most of the independent distributors. They’re unhappy with the comic book business already—they don’t make much money even when comics are selling. Most of them plainly indicate they’re not about to keep concentrating on comic books if sales continue to drop... Without the independent distributors, there are no comic books. None. Goodbye. Pack it in and blow away.”

[This was the world that 28-year-old Jenette Kahn was entering. A comic book fan since childhood, the Harvard graduate wasted little time in making a name for herself in the publishing industry. In 1970, she co-founded a magazine called *Kids* whose content was actually created by children. That, in turn, led to her development of two more periodicals—*Dynamite* and *Smash*—in 1974 and 1975, respectively. Passionate and outgoing, she made a good impression on Warner Books chairman William Sarnoff and accepted his offer to head up National Periodical Publications. Unexpectedly, she had company at the top in the form of Sol Harrison. Present at the dawn of the four-color comic book industry as a color separator, the 58-year-old had worked his way up to become DC Vice-President during Infantino’s tenure.]

Jenette Kahn, then DC Comics publisher in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #57 (July 2012)^{ix}:

“I can’t really say that Sol and I had much of a working relationship. He, more than anybody, resented my being hired because he felt that the job was rightfully his. I had been hired by Bill Sarnoff as the president of the company. But before I arrived at DC, Bill phoned to say, ‘I’m really sorry, but Sol has gone to Jay Emmett with some of the staff to say they’re leaving if he isn’t made president. I know that’s not the basis on which you were hired and if you don’t want to come, I understand. But I really have to give Sol the title of President. It was an unexpected reversal, but by the time it occurred, I had shut down *Smash* and was emotionally committed to DC. I tried very hard to work with Sol, to forge some kind of relationship, but it was hard. He always saw me as the person who was trying to steal what was rightfully his, and as such, we were never close. Sol’s sense of betrayal was so large that he always seemed to wonder if I was trying to oust him. He didn’t say that and we were always polite to one another, but we never truly had a collaborative relationship.”



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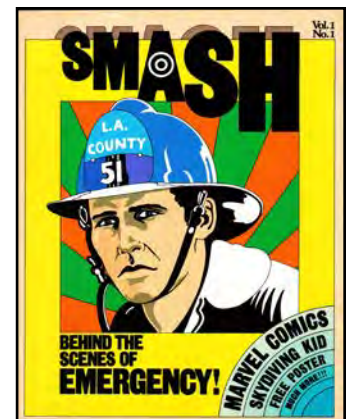
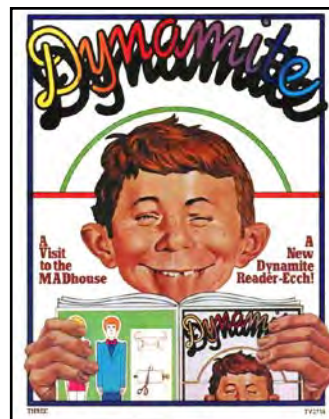
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Jenette Kahn's career first intersected with DC in 1972, when an ad for her *Kids* magazine appeared in most of the publisher's titles. In 1974's *Dynamite* (created for Scholastic), she included a regular origin feature on various superheroes and spotlighted Marvel Comics in the first issue of 1975's *Smash*.



know what your publishing plans are or if there's a market for it or anything, but *I* think it's terrific. I want the chance to do it.'

Well, that's the beginning of how we produce most comics at DC these days. We believe an idea that comes from a creator's deep personal enthusiasm carries with it an excitement and sincerity that cannot help but be communicated to the reader. In nine out of ten cases, we'd rather publish a comic book that originates with an artist or writer rather than one that we manufacture because the time seems right.

Still, there are many stages between the inception of an idea and its actual publication. So that we only publish those concepts to which we're truly committed, we've developed a pilot program through which every would-be creator must submit his work.

First, the creator must write an in-depth treatment which includes a detailed description of all the characters, the nature of their interaction, a lengthy synopsis of the first story, and some idea of where future stories will go. Joe Orlando and I examine each one of these proposals. Some we reject out of hand, some we send back for revision, and a select few we designate to 'go to pilot.' When a treatment moves into the pilot stage, a writer is assigned an editor and creates a full script. For this script the writer is paid a bonus rate since it's always on a first story that you truly scramble your brains.

If we like the script, we choose who we think is the best artist for the project and pay for model sheets of all the characters and props. When they're approved, the artist pencils the story. When the story is finally drawn, Joe and I scrutinize the entire project. Is it a comic *we'd* like to read? If it is, we have it inked, lettered, and colored and go to press."

News item printed in *Mediascene* #19 (May-June 1976)^{xxxi}:

"Artists and writers who actively create new characters and/or series will benefit from their efforts, at least for the first issue, with a special bonus. Plans now call for an extra ten dollars per page for writers on the first issue of their creation. Similar additions will of course be passed along to artists if they create series.

In the reprint area, residuals will now be sent to artists, writers and inkers every time one of their old stories is published. Pencilers will receive \$4.50 per page, inkers \$3.00 and writers \$2.00.

Artists will receive some extra money if their artwork is used in any merchandising capacity involving DC comics. This means that any artwork appearing on games, dolls, toys and gimmicks will turn into additional revenue for the DC artist who drew it."

[A memorable vehicle for promoting all DC titles premiered in select titles during the week of May 3, 1976. "The Daily Planet" was a faux newspaper/house ad that plugged DC comics scheduled to go on sale the following week and offered features like trivia quizzes and an outlet for reader questions called "Ask the Answer Man." The Answer Man was writer and

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VOLUME 76 ISSUE 1
WEEK OF MAY 3rd, 1976
BOB ROZAKIS: EDITOR

GIANT SUPERMAN BATTLES LUTHOR


Super-Sized Man of Steel Fights For Life (Metropolis) — When Clark (Superman) Kent awakes to find the seams of his pajamas split, it doesn't take long for him to realize he's suddenly grown a foot taller! But that's only the beginning of the problem because now he's "Seven-Foot-Two...and Still Growing!"

Joined by his fellow Justice Leaguer, *The Atom*, the Man of Steel soon discovers his problem is much greater than it seemed—while his body is increasing in size, his brain is not! In effect, Superman will become like a dinosaur—losing his reasoning power as his brain cells struggle to control the massive body!

The mastermind behind this scheme, arch-villain Lex Luthor, has his toe right where he wants him this time and he's getting ready for the kill! What will be the outcome of this colossal battle? Don't miss **SUPERMAN #22**, on sale the week of May 10th, where Elliot St. Maggin, Jose Luis Garcia Lopez and Bob Oksner will provide the answers!



WHO IS RAGMAN? (The City) — A new hero rises from the junk piles and rags to avenge the deaths of his father and his friends—his name: **RAGMAN!** Who is he? What are his bizarre powers? Who are the killers he seeks? These are the questions Joe Kubert, Bob Kanigher and The Redondo Studio will answer in "The Origin of the Tatterdemalion!" in **RAGMAN #1**, on sale the week of May 10th.



TRIVIA QUIZ #1
The Star Spangled Kid has been seeing a lot of action with the Justice Society in **ALL-STAR COMICS**, so he's the topic of our first trivia quiz. Do you know (1) his real name, (2) the name and secret identity of his partner, and (3) in what magazine they shared their adventures? The answers will appear in next week's **PLANET**!

DIRECT CURRENTS

ON SALE THE WEEK OF MAY 10th:

BATMAN #278: Batman and a visiting inspector from New Scotland Yard are on the trail of *The Winger*, who begs them to "Stop Me Before I Kill!" Story by David V. Reed, art by Ernie Chua and Tex Blaisdell.

HOUSE OF MYSTERY #244: A duo of devilish delights as George Kashdan and Frank Thorne present "Kronos-Zagros-Eborak" and then Doug Moench and Franc Reyes join forces for "Your Epitaph Is Only a Birthday Card." Plus a page of chilling chuckles by John Albano.

MUSKETEERS TO TRIM BEARD OF SPANISH KING (France) — When Musketeer Porfios boasts and bets that he can trim the beard of the king of Spain, he has no idea of the adventure he will involve himself and his sword-swinging compatriots in. And when D'Artagnan's sword is stolen by a young woman, it is the master swordmakers of Toledo who will replace it.

So it's off to Spain for the Musketeers as they set out to uncover "The Secret of the Spanish Blade" as narrated by Bob Haney and Lee Elias! You'll find this exciting tale along with two classic stories of Robin Hood and his Merrie Men in **DC SPECIAL #23** (starring **THE 3 MUSKETEERS**) on sale the week of May 10th.



METAL MEN #47: The Metal Band travel to the South Pole in search of missing government money and find themselves victims of "The X Effect" by Gerry Conway and Walt Simonson.

STAR SPANGLED WARSTORIES #201: It's a full-length battle drama in New York City for the Unknown Soldier as only David Michelinie and Gerry Talaoc can present it. Don't miss "The Back-Alley War!"

AND ON SALE RIGHT NOW:

OUR ARMY AT WAR #295

KAMANDI #44

GREEN LANTERN #90

SWAMP THING #24

STARFIRE #1

HOUSE OF SECRETS #141

SUPERMAN FAMILY #178

The first edition of Bob Rozakis' *Daily Planet* promotional page appeared in *House of Secrets* #141 and *Our Army At War* #295, on sale in early May 1976. The wavy lines on the page were the result of printer World Color switching from metal plates to cheaper plastic ones.

DC production staffer Bob Rozakis, who'd conceived the page earlier in the year and successfully convinced DC President Sol Harrison to run the feature in many of DC's titles each week. Beginning with issues on sale in December 1976, Jenette Kahn supplemented the *Daily Planet* with a monthly page in which she spoke directly to the reader. The goal was to emulate the chummy, conversational quality that Stan Lee had brought to Marvel Comics in the 1960s. Unlike the increasingly detached mid-1970s Stan, though, Kahn was actively involved in the goings-on at her company and well-positioned to pitch projects herself in the feature eventually dubbed the "DC Publisherial." The first 1976 page included a caricature of the new publisher by Neal Adams, the artistic superstar whose advertising age realism and visual dynamics had a huge influence on the look of superhero comics in the late

Kurt Schaffenberger illustrated this advertisement for the Direct Currents Hotline.

Fans primarily heard pre-recorded responses from various DC writers, artists, and editors but several callers in early 1976 were polled about the hero they'd most like to see along with Aquaman, Batman, the Flash, and Green Lantern in that summer's *5 Star Super-Hero Spectacular*. The winning character was the Atom.

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #137 (November 1977)^{xi}:

“DC will open a toll-free telephone service that will provide a taped message concerning the latest DC comics by DC artists, writers, and editors that will change weekly. The service is called the DC Direct Currents Hotline and will begin on Monday, November 1, 1976... The national service will be operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week... Individuals who receive busy signals are asked to call back at a later time.”

John Morrow, future comic book historian in a 2018 recollection^{xii}:

“As a 15-year-old in Montgomery, Alabama in the late 1970s, for a wonderful but all-too-brief few weeks, I’d rush home every Monday from school, and madly dial the DC Comics Hot-Line 800 number to get their weekly news update. Marvel was fine, but I was a DC guy, so it was worth the finger-numbing dialing (we still had a rotary phone then), patiently waiting through dozens of busy-signals till it connected.”

Steven Thompson, future comic book historian in an article posted online in 2009^{xiii}:

“You called the number, originally once a week but later

less often, and you were regaled by one of your favorite creators with hard-to-hear news and information about upcoming comics and related topics via the miracle of... taped messages. A few years later this might have been a pay call but the Hotline was free!”

[Propelled by a house ad in all of DC’s titles, the Hotline received 24,000 calls in November 1976. Once 88,256 calls were logged in March 1977, a second line was installed.]

Announcement appearing in multiple DC comic books sold in August 1978 (cover date November):

“At times, the volume of busy signals has been so great the telephone company asked us to consider dropping the service. During the two hours immediately following the end of the school day, for example, circuits have been often jammed all across the United States.

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news item printed in *The Comic Reader* #147 (August 1977)^{xliii}:

“DC discontinued its Hotline as of August 8, 1977—because it got too hot. The line, originally structured to handle a peak of 60,000 calls a month, was receiving an average of 100,000 the last few months, far too many for the technical abilities of the phone company.”

INTERLUDE:

RING OUT THE OLD... RING IN THE NEW

“Why would I kill a book that was selling? I will not go into why a lie like that was spread around, but I can tell you that I worked with distributors’ figures. A book lived or died by these numbers. DC was paid by distributors on the first return number. We got to keep that money, or give some

back if the book did not live up to the first return. Sometimes we received more money when final sales exceeded the first number, and other times we had to give back money if the book fell short of the first number. I had to answer, good or bad, to someone above.” – Carmine Infantino, *Comic Book Artist* #3 (Winter 1999).



The cover for the unpublished *Swamp Thing* #25 was drawn by Ernie Chan, then known as Ernie Chua. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

Often derided for canceling titles prematurely, Infantino might have taken some small satisfaction in the fact that his successors wasted little time in pulling the plug on a number of books... and quite abruptly in some cases. Faithful readers of the *Daily Planet*, DC’s recently-introduced coming attractions page, were mystified that summer by seeing references to comic books that were never published.

First up was *Swamp Thing* #25, meant to be the third installment of a radical makeover that transformed the atmospheric horror series into a soapy superhero feature. “Hawkman battles Swamp Thing in Portland,” a bulletin in *Daily Planet* #10 declared. “What will be the outcome? Ask David Kraft, Ernie [Chan] and Fred Carrillo. They’ll tell you to check out the answers in ‘The Sky Above’ in *Swamp Thing* #25, on sale the week of July 5th.”

The one-time critical favorite had been losing readers for some time and the revamp had been a last-ditch effort to save it. According to writer David Anthony Kraft, Hawkman was intended—on direction from Infantino—to become a co-star in *Swamp Thing*, in the hope of attracting superhero fans. Completely written and illustrated, the issue was spiked by the new administration and remains unpublished to date. The original art for its cover and several interior pages have since surfaced via sites like Heritage Auctions.

By contrast, the contents of the never-published *Blitzkrieg* #6—with an intended on-sale date of August 9—were left vague in a write-up appearing in *Daily Planet* #14. The unconventional series had explored World War Two from the perspective of three Nazi soldiers and the contents of its unreleased final issue—presumably by writer Bob Kanigher and artist Ric Estrada—were never used elsewhere.

A week later, *Daily Planet* #16 plugged issue #10 of *Claw the Unconquered* (by David Micheline, Keith Giffen, and Bob Layton) as going on sale on August 16. It did not.

“The book’s sales kept falling somewhere within the twilight zone of profit and loss—not *losing* money, but not really *making* it, either. So we tried new directions, adding penciller Keith Giffen with issue #8, and we felt that we were on our way to the right combination of imagination and



[Although the news of Anne Archer's casting was premature (Margot Kidder ultimately starred as Lois Lane), Christopher Reeve had the role locked down and visited the DC offices late in February.]

Michael Catron, then *The Comics Journal* editor in a news item printed in *The Comics Journal* #33 (April 1977)^{iv}:

"Everyone at DC was excited over Reeve's visit. [Superman writer Martin] Pasko showed signs of nervousness, Sol Harrison was positively beaming, and Mike Gold was running around trying to make sure that everything went smoothly. Reeve was just as nervous. I could see he wanted to make a good impression on Superman's biographers. The atmosphere was charged with cautious, hopeful tension. It reminded me of two people trying to make a good impression with each other on the first date. Both Reeve and the DC staff seemed to feel that this could be the start of something big."

[Flushed with enthusiasm, Mike Gold got to work on "The Great Superman Movie Contest," wherein readers were encouraged to clip coupons from various DC titles in exchange for a chance at winning a cameo in the film. Advertised on every cover published in May and June 1977, the promotion generated thousands of responses and Christopher Reeve himself drew the names of the winners on July 20: teenagers Ed Finneran of San Lorenzo, California and Tim Hussey of Springfield, Massachusetts. The duo ultimately appeared in the movie as Smallville football players.]

When the film crew was shooting in New York City on July 13, 1977, Sol Harrison was on hand to witness the action. Shortly after 9:30 that evening, the cumulative effects of a series of lightning strikes knocked out power and left most of the city in the dark until the following day.]

Sol Harrison, then DC President in an interview printed in *Comics Feature* #20 (October 1982)^v:

"I was there the day they photographed the scenes of Superman's first appearance. I went to say hello to the producer, to see what they were going to be shooting. And that



Christopher Reeve visited the DC offices to draw winners in 1977 (middle photo, with Jenette Kahn and Sol Harrison) and 1979 (top photo) for the publisher's two Great Superman Movie Contests.

Winners Tim Hussey and Ed Finneran met former screen Superman and Lois Lane (Kirk Alyn and Noel Neill)—now cast as Lois Lane's parents—while on the movie set. Photos from *Direct Currents Newsletter* #14 (1979), *All-New Collectors' Edition* #C-62 (1978) and *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #16 (1977).

was the evening we had the blackout. New York City blacked out. Now, they had their own generators that could have lit up the immediate scene, but the buildings across the street had to have their lights on. So they made a decision about half an hour later, that they were not going to shoot anything the next day. I was there with one of my writers, and I said, 'I'm going to call my wife, and tell her where I am, that there's a blackout, and I'll be home as soon as we can make it.' And I go to the phone and put in a dime, and there's nothing. I said, 'I wonder if the telephone lines are down? That's funny.'

And one of the movie men came over, and said 'Mr. Harrison, that's a prop.' And that was the prop—y'know the bit where Clark Kent runs over to the telephone booth? That was a gag that, no matter who you are, that's the one point that you bring out. And later, I told the story to [former DC proofreader] Gerda [Gattel], and she sent it to *Reader's Digest*, which printed it [in its August 1978 issue as "All in a Day's Work."]."

[Along with the forthcoming movie, DC could also boast of the *Wonder Woman* TV show, which moved from ABC to CBS—and a present-day setting—in 1977. On Saturday morning, ABC's *Super Friends* reruns were replaced in the fall with new episodes and new characters: Zan and Jayna—the Wonder Twins—and pet monkey Gleek, plus guest-heroes Atom, Flash, Green Lantern, Hawkgirl, Hawkman, Rima, and the made-for-TV Apache Chief, Black Vulcan, and Samurai. Meanwhile, CBS began airing a new *Batman* animated series that—with the impish Bat-Mite as a regular—was far from the Dark Knight that comic book fans were accustomed to.

In partnership with Warner Books, DC also hoped to spin off its heroes into prose.]

Michael Catron, then *The Comics Journal* editor in a news item printed in *The Comics Journal* #33 (April 1977)^{vi}:

"Neal Adams is drawing covers for the Warner paperback novels featuring DC characters: *Batman*, by Denny O'Neil; *Superman*, by Elliot Maggin; and *Wonder Woman*, by Jane Lynch, former wife of Underground cartoonist Jay Lynch. Dell Books will be publishing a *Challengers of the Unknown* novel by Ron Goulart."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Comic Media News* #32 (August-September 1977)^{vii}:

"One of the major differences between DC and Marvel is the way the corporations are set up. Marvel is the most lucrative part of Cadence Industries, in fact an awful lot of Cadence is losing money hand over fist—it's an unfortunate situation with them. Whereas DC Comics, as a part of Warner Communications,



Lynda Carter's spot-on portrayal of Wonder Woman elevated the popularity of the DC Comics heroine to a level she hadn't experienced since the 1940s. Launched as a TV movie in 1975, the *Wonder Woman* series aired on ABC during 1976 and 1977 and on CBS from 1977 to 1979.

is an extremely profitable operation not only for publishing's sake—we do not publish books that lose money, we cancel them—but also for the other peripheral reasons which I'll get into in a minute, it is still one of the lower ends of the totem pole. DC makes millions and millions of dollars, but something like *A Star Is Born*, which is just one movie that Warner Brothers has released, makes more money. You add all the other movies and record labels and the book publishing operation and the cable TV and television games they make into it [and DC is just a drop in the ocean].

But it's a prestigious thing for them. Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman are prestigious. But this is the important thing: Cadence owns Curtis Distribution which distributes Marvel. Warner owns Independent News which distributes DC Comics but Warner also owns the Licensing Corporation of America which licenses all of our characters to toys and stuff. So DC makes money out of licensing and LCA makes money out of licensing and both DC's and LCA's profits go to Warner. Whereas Marvel makes money off licensing and Columbia Pictures, which

director; but he came up to me one day, very early in the project ... and told me he had no faith in the comic, since earlier movie adaptations Marvel had done hadn't sold all that well... It bothered him that we'd be doing six issues of *Star Wars*, because if it didn't sell, we'd be locked into printing half a dozen issues of a comic that no one was buying. That kind of thinking—which was not unreasonable—is why I'm fairly sure the print run of the earlier issues of *Star Wars* was on the low side.

In the last few weeks or even days before *Star Wars* opened in late May of '77, Ed Summer [co-owner of New York's Supersnipe comic book store and a friend of George Lucas] went up to Marvel... and he had a talk with Shukin... He said Shukin had told him, 'We're really going to take a bath with that adaptation of your friend George Lucas' movie!' Ed told him, 'Well, I don't think so.' Yeah, Marvel took a bath, all right. A bath of money."

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in a recollection posted online in 2011^{lxxx}:

"The first two issues of our six-issue adaptation came out in advance of the movie. Driven by the advance marketing for the movie, sales were very good. Then about the time the third issue shipped, the movie was released. Sales made the jump to hyperspace. *Star Wars* the movie stayed in theaters forever, it seemed. Not since the Beatles had I seen a cultural phenomenon of such power. The comics sold and sold and sold. We reprinted the adaptation in every possible format. They all sold and sold and sold. In the most conservative terms, it is inarguable that the success of the *Star Wars* comics was a significant factor in Marvel's survival through a couple of very difficult years, 1977 and 1978."

Jeffrey H. Wasserman, then journalist in a column printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{lxxxi}:

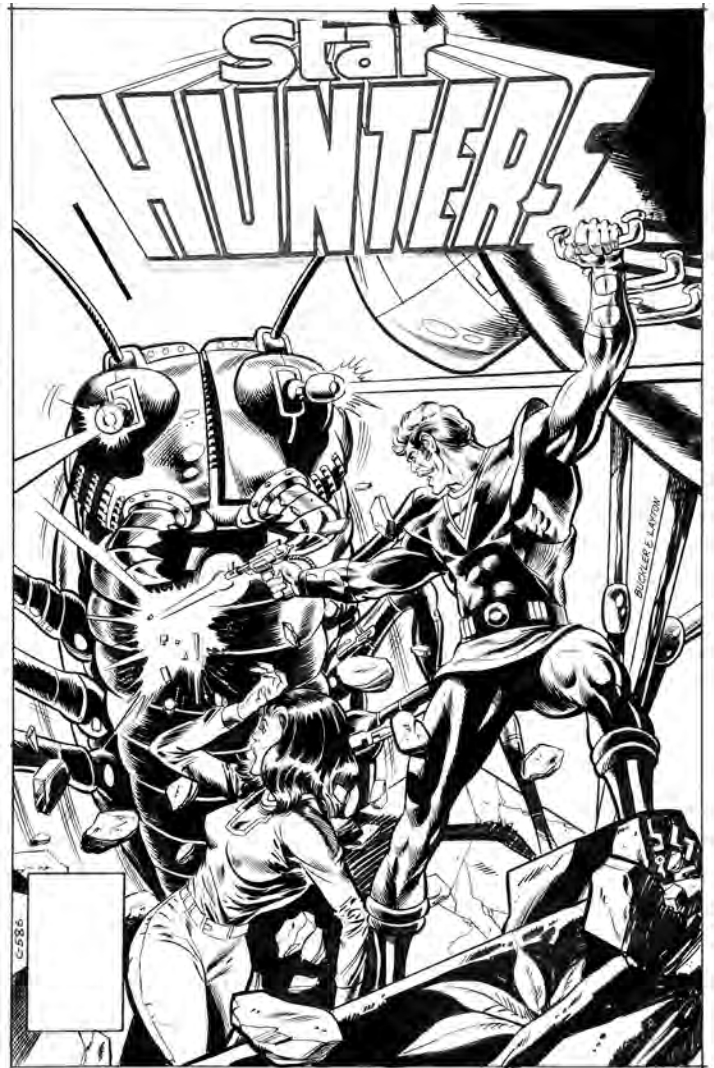
"Marvel's operating revenue for 1977 was \$15,323,000 (15% of Cadence Industries Corporation's total operating revenue) and for 1976 was \$11,213,000 (12%). These figures do not include licensing fees [...which...] can come to four million dollars for Marvel in 1977. The increase in operating revenue this past year was chalked up to higher cover prices on comic books (a nickel increase to 35¢), increased licensing income, and lower rates of return on Marvel's publications. Marvel initiated a system of direct sales of non-returnable comics to supermarkets and book stores [in 1977] which contributed to this lower rate of returns. These direct sales have taken the form of tabloid-sized *Star Wars* comics and packages containing three Marvel Comics, both distributed by Western Publications Inc."

[During the months leading up to *Star Wars*' release, DC coincidentally had its own science fiction project in development. Dating back to Autumn 1975, it was first pitched to Carmine Infantino by writer David Michelinie.]

"The Story Behind the Story" column printed in *DC Super-Stars* #16 (September-October 1977):

"David called the series *The Survivors*. The premise was that a team of people were secretly infected with a disease germ by the authorities. While the disease didn't infect them, [it] was deadly to anyone else who might be exposed to it. Since the team would then be a menace to anyone on Earth, the very authorities who had infected them supplied them with a spaceship to leave the planet. Their mission would be to find other habitable worlds and colonize them for the Earth. Of course, once they had prepared a world for Earthlings to live on, they would have to leave, since they were still infected with the disease."

[Renaming the series *The Outcasts*, Infantino tentatively signed off on the project only to reject it in a follow-up meeting. Michelinie resubmitted the proposal to Jenette Kahn in 1976 and



***Star Hunters* #2 cover art by Rich Buckner and Bob Layton (1977), sans published copy. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.**

break of it, and start all over, than to sit there working for both companies and have nobody like me. My emotional make-up is just fragile enough that I couldn't cope with that for very long. So, I came back to Marvel the following day and told Archie that I was going to leave. And I did. That's why I ended up back at DC."

[As the new books arrived on the schedule in 1977, poor-selling old ones dropped off. *Ragman* was cancelled in March, followed by *Young Love* in April, *Hercules Unbound* in May, *Plastic Man* and *Starfire* in July, *Richard Dragon*, *Kung Fu Fighter* in August, *Isis* in September, *DC Super-Stars* in October, *Metal Men* and *Teen Titans* in November and *Super-Team Family* and *Welcome Back, Kotter* in December. *DC Special* also ended with issue #29 in May but it was essentially relaunched with issue #1 in June as *DC Special Series*. Its first issue ("5 Star Super-Hero Spectacular") included a Batman story that tied up loose ends from the discontinued Kobra title. Such closure was also extended to some of 1977's cancelled books, notably *Teen Titans* (which revealed the team's origin as the group disbanded) and *Hercules Unbound*.]

Walter Simonson, then artist on *Hercules Unbound* in *The Art of Walter Simonson* (1989):

"It became clear that *Hercules* wasn't faring well commercially. [Writer] Cary Bates and I liked the character a lot and wanted to give him a good send-off, so we spruced up his costume... and created a storyline to explain much about the character that had been mysterious to that point. Our final story, however, required two issues to complete... and we were told that the book was being cancelled with issue #11, the first issue of our two-part climax. Cary and I spoke to DC about it and together, Jenette Kahn, Paul Levitz, and Joe Orlando gave us permission to go for one extra issue in order to complete the saga. In a business where the unfit are ruthlessly weeded out, I have never forgotten that extra consideration Cary and I were shown, and I have always been grateful for it."

[By the end of the year, Kahn took pride in what DC's creators had accomplished in 1977. In the greater empire of Warner Communications Inc. (WCI), such things didn't even register.]

Jeffrey H. Wasserman, then journalist in a column printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978):

"Warner Publishing, Inc. (E.C., Independent, DC, and Warner Books) accounts for less than one-half of one percent of WCI's total operating revenue. Warner Publications' operating revenue for 1977 was \$52,235,000; for 1976, \$48,407,000; for 1975, \$40,189,000. Revenue after expenses yielded a loss of \$2,009,000 in 1975, lending credence to the rumor that WCI wanted to sell DC back then. The increase from 1976 to 1977 was attributed in part



Walter Simonson originally took the *Hercules Unbound* assignment for the opportunity to provide layouts for the legendary Wallace Wood but ultimately wound up drawing the entire feature himself. Original art for issue #12—minus cover copy—via Simonson's Twitter account.

to a great rise in licensing revenues of DC superheroes. DC will be receiving a share of the gross receipts of the Salkinds' Superman movie to be distributed by Warner Bros. in Winter, 1978."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in a comment printed in *Mediascene* #27 (September-October 1977):

"Even we are not sure exactly what form our future plans will take, because we have to present the ideas to Warner's finance people at a budget meeting on December 5 and 6. We will propose a scheme of mass expansion, involving a total program providing more material for all our books. The real test will come when we try to convince Warner's accountants to invest thousands of dollars that they won't see again for months."



PART 2: EXPLOSION (1978)

Jack C. Harris, then DC Comics editor in a comment printed in *Time Warp* #1 (October-November 1979):

“From the sky it came: snow, ice and bitter cold. People huddled in their homes as the worst winter in decades coincided with a critical oil shortage. Many of the doom stories of science fiction seemed to be becoming all too true. People didn’t venture out into the elements. People stayed home! People didn’t buy comics!”

Kurt Busiek, future comic book writer in a 2018 recollection^{ciii}:

“I remember the snowstorm that caused all the trouble — we normally had a week off school in February, but that year we went three weeks straight with no school, and I’d actually put on snowshoes to trudge over to friends’ houses. That part, at least, was a blast.”

Tom Brevoort, future Marvel Comics editor in a 2018 recollection^{civ}:

“I do remember that crazy winter, and the absolute tons of snow that got dumped on New York—enough so that it completely submerged the fence surrounding our house, allowing one to walk right over it. At that point, I wasn’t still dependent on transportation from my parents in order to get my comics—I could make the walk or bike ride to the 7-11 myself. So I didn’t notice any particular disruption of service. I didn’t miss any issues for the most part.”

Jim Shooter, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #40 (June 1978)^{cv}:

“Between being behind so far and [production manager] John Verpoorten’s death [in December 1977] and the change-over and being shorthanded on staff for a while, while I gathered up the people who are working here now, and two and a half blizzards and God knows what else—every kind of natural disaster in the world... we had a situation where mail coming in from the Philippines [where artists drawing for Marvel were sending artwork from], the plane couldn’t land in New York, and had to land someplace else. I mean, the last blizzard, everything was paralyzed, and so through no fault of ours, Chemical Color just took an entire week of Marvel’s books and moved them into next month. They had no choice. They couldn’t move the plates, they couldn’t do anything. Everything was frozen. So, the best laid plans...”

[Huddled over a warm typewriter in February 1978, Bob Rozakis didn’t worry overly much about the blizzard raging outside. DC Comics was expanding and he had scripts to write. “There are some summer days in Dallas,” his new story began, “when the sun roasts you like an oven...”]

Story printed in the “Newswatch” section in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cvi}:

“DC has announced a major combination price change and page count increase for all its regular-sized comics. The move, effective with the June releases (cover-dated September), will raise prices from the current 35¢ to 50¢ and boost the number of pages from 32 to 40, according to publisher Jenette Kahn. The additional eight pages will be filled with new back-up features in some titles and expanded story lengths in others. This raises the total number of story pages from the current 17

COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978

to 25. The current 13 pages of advertising per book, including four pages of house ads, will remain unchanged. The two pages of letters and 'house features' such as the Daily Planet and Kahn's 'Publishorials' will also remain unchanged.

DC's two 60¢ titles, *Justice League of America* and *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes*, will also convert to the new format, dropping eight pages and reducing their price to 50¢. The bimonthly line of 60¢ 'specials,' which alternates with bimonthly Dollar Comics Spectaculars, will be discontinued."

News item printed in *Mediascene* #28 (November-December 1977)^{cvii}:

"The move was announced by Jenette Kahn, in a prepared statement on December 14, in which she explained the format change as a more desirable alternative than a 32-page comic with a 40¢ price tag. 'There was no way in good conscience we could ask our readers to shoulder a 15% increase,' Ms. Kahn noted. 'By increasing the number of pages while increasing the price, our readers will actually pay slightly less per page of comic book story, and certainly less than if we had taken the traditional step of raising our prices by 5¢.'

The work on this new size and price has been going on since late October, so DC was fairly certain of its ground when the time came to convince Warner in December. A solid sales period over the summer reinforced their arguments that comics were a viable product, and the necessity for some positive change has been evident for at least five years."

Paul Levitz, then DC Comics Editorial Coordinator in an interview printed in *The Comics Journal* #39 (April 1978)^{cviii}:

"Every six months, the printer comes down and says, 'Well, it will cost you more to do the same thing. You have a choice. Do you want us to find a new, imaginative way to do it worse and we'll keep the price the same, or do you want to raise your price?' Frankly, I'm not sure there is a new, imaginative way to do comic books any worse as far as physical production goes. We're on a grade of paper that was invented for comics, because it was never worthwhile for magazines. It was too embarrassing. We're using inks that are water-based compared to what they once were. We're on plastic plates. What's left? Printing ink on paper using paper plates?

I give World Color Press a lot of credit for continually finding cheaper methods because that's what we told them to do. And by 'we,' I take the sins of a lot of forefathers on that. To produce a comic book for even 35¢ was the end result of an awful lot of cost cutting. If you use the '60s-grade paper, the '60s-grade ink, and the old metal plates, that same 35¢ comic probably would have been 60¢.



The bleak winter of 1977-1978 was at its worst during a brutal nor'easter that pummeled the east coast of the U.S. from February 5 to 7, 1978. Boston, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island received more than 27 inches of snow and other cities along the coast broke records. One hundred people lost their lives in the catastrophic storm and damages were tallied at \$520 million.

So we came to the point where we realized that we had a 35¢ comic and the next step was 40¢. We may be able to hold it till the summer of '78 or the winter of '78. Nobody at DC had a great belief that we could sell a 40¢ comic. There's no way that we could add a substantial amount of new material to make that 40¢ more worthwhile. And it's a stupid price, physically. Bad marketing. Three pieces of change. It's an uncomfortable three pieces of change. I don't think there's any evidence that the audience is ready for all dollar comics, either.

We tried to invent a bastard-size comic that we can charge more for and hopefully have work. So, we've raised the cover price of our magazines, but for the first time in ages we have not passed along the increased printing cost to the reader, in terms of what he pays for a page of comic art. You're paying the same thing for a page of comic art as you did before. It will be worth it in some books like *Brave and Bold*, in my opinion, where we're giving you something worthwhile in the other eight pages. Clearly, there will be other books where it will not be worthwhile.

These things are always conceived in think-tank sessions. We were all petrified with the 40¢ comic. The idea has been shaped by, I think, every executive at the company in one way or another. I think Jenette pushed for it very strongly. I think Sol pushed the printer very strongly to invent a way to do it.

What it amounts to is that we found a way to produce a 40-page comic book at an economical price. It's not vastly more profitable for us. We're going to have to sell the same number of comic books to make the same profit. We just think it's vastly more economical than a 40¢ comic book that we don't believe we could sell. Marvel will be out there with a 35¢ comic because Marvel's economics permit them to hold their price generally six months longer than we do. That's how they approach their business. I can't tell you why. They might have a slight difference in their cost factor, they may just have a difference in what profit they choose to accept on a book.

Marvel will have to do something. They can't remain 35¢ in 1980. I don't think they can remain 35¢ in 1979. I think it depends on how well they see we're doing, and how well they find themselves doing at 35¢ against the 50¢. If they see themselves being outpaced, distributors not accepting their books, they'll try to make the shift to 50¢. If they feel they're doing better, we may both end at 40¢. I can't tell you that this is going to work. We're going to try it. I believe that if the editors up and down the line, myself included, do good jobs with their books, we have the talent available to make the books worth it. If we don't, it's our fault. And if the readers don't buy it, we haven't given them what they want, and we should be 40¢. But we're going to try it."

[At Marvel, where Jim Shooter was about to succeed Archie Goodwin as editor-in-chief, the reaction was restrained.]



One of comics' most respected creators, Archie Goodwin had a long, diverse résumé in the industry, both as writer and editor. Along with comic books, he also scripted several newspaper strips, including *Secret Agent Corrigan* and *Star Wars* with artist Al Williamson. Photo by Michael Catron from *Amazing Heroes* #1 (June 1981).

Stan Lee, then Marvel Comics publisher in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cix}:

"What we'll do is what we always do—wait and see what happens with them. It's not a matter of life and death. We'll wait until their new books come out and follow them closely."

Archie Goodwin, then Marvel Comics editor-in-chief in a news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #38 (February 1978)^{cx}:

"I think that larger format books succeed with a smaller, steadier market, but the largest audience buys the cheaper format. Comics are a general, casual reading material that can be read in one sitting. If you move too far away from that, you lose a lot of impulse buyers."

News item printed in *Mediascene* #28 (November-December 1977):

"Most Marvel editors and writers seem to be somewhat baffled by this change in size and price, and feel that the 15¢ price differential will be DC's undoing. There is no discernable difference in weight and feel, they argue, between 32 pages and 40 pages, and flipping through the book will not really makes much difference when compared to the cost. Last summer's price war, with Marvel at 30¢ and DC at 35¢, found both sides enjoying a healthy sales boom. The summer of '78 will be a different matter, pitting the two companies against each other along clearly drawn battle lines.

According to one Marvel editor, 'DC's line-up doesn't justify such a risk. They go after the little kids in their books, and those kids would rather get three exciting Marvel characters rather than two run-of-the-mill DC heroes and a few mediocre eight-page fillers.'"

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978)^{cxxvi}:

“In regards to the artwork receipt/waiver, we have used exactly the same printed form for years now, and can produce file copies of Neal’s signature, accompanied by several examples of the employee for hire stipulation.”

Neal Adams, then head of Continuity Associates in an interview printed in *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978)^{cxxvii}:

“I must concede the possibility of such a situation, but I also plead a certain degree of innocence. It was not until the ’78 copyright changes came up that I understood the meaning of work for hire, so I may have unknowingly allowed this to get by. Nobody warns you when they are taking advantage of your lack of legal knowledge, but I’m no longer ignorant of my rights. The law has also been reinforced and amended since January, so it’s a whole new ball game now.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in an interview printed in *Mediascene* #29 (January-February 1978)^{cxxviii}:

“Adams is asking for copyright adjustments beyond our current capacity to invoke. DC *is* improving its professional relationships, and the situation *could* change, but our most intense efforts are directed towards improving the books and the industry.

We have begun cutting in creators, and even costume-designing artists, for a percentage of any merchandising money. Most significantly, Bob Kane, Siegel and Shuster, and the William Marston heirs all receive some fee for Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman.

We try to remain flexible. Any time any art is to be reproduced out of the format for which it was originally commissioned, we contact the artist to negotiate a suitable fee. We also make deals for merchandising with the creators while Marvel does not.”

[Marvel’s own response to the new law only created more controversy when all employees were asked to sign an agreement wherein they agreed to surrender all rights to any material they had produced in the past or would create in the future. Adams was at the forefront of an effort to fight back in May 1978 but his efforts at creating the Comic Book Creators Guild ultimately came to nothing. Still, the situation eventually cost DC two forthcoming books: Adams and Mike Nasser’s *Ms. Mystic*—which Adams later claimed never to have offered DC—and Larry Hama’s *Bucky O’Hare*.]



Larry Hama later took Bucky O’Hare to Neal Adams’ Continuity Associates, where Michael Golden joined the project as artist. In 1981, the team produced a story for a magazine-format album but had to wait until 1984 when Adams began serializing it in *Echo of Futurepast* #1.

Larry Hama, then DC Comics editor in an interview printed in *Back Issue* #43 (September 2010)^{cxxix}:

“Bucky is sort of my tribute to Wally Wood. It came out at a time when nobody wanted to do funny-animal comics.

One day they said, ‘Hey, we’re going to do creator-owned properties and we want you and Milgrom to come up with creative stuff and you’ll have a creator contract and you’ll own a good piece of it.’ So I developed Bucky and DC had no contract but told me we would own it. So I went to Ed Preiss, [publisher] Byron Preiss’ dad, who had also been the lawyer for Siegel and Shuster. He was just a great guy and really smart. Ed said, ‘No, an oral agreement is worth the paper it’s printed on.’”

[Meanwhile, DC was still banking on Siegel and Shuster’s greatest creation as the June release of *Superman The Movie* approached. Unfortunately, word came down in February that the film’s premiere was being postponed until December. The news came as a blow to Warner Books, which had

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST 1978 (THE DC EXPLOSION)

Action Comics (starring Superman, with the Atom and Air Wave as alternating back-up features)
Adventure Comics (Dollar Comic starring the Flash, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman, and Deadman with the Elongated Man and New Gods as opening bonus features)
All-Star Comics (starring the Justice Society of America)
Army at War (war short stories)
Batman (now including "The Unsolved Cases of Batman" and "The Public Life of Bruce Wayne" as alternating back-up features)
Batman Family (Dollar Comic starring Batman, Robin, Batgirl, Man-Bat, and the Huntress)
Battle Classics (reprints from DC's 1960s war series)
Black Lightning (now including the Ray as a back-up feature)
The Brave and the Bold (Batman team-ups with assorted DC heroes, plus the Human Target as new back-up feature)
DC Comics Presents (Superman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)
DC Special Series (Dollar Comic umbrella title for extra-large editions of DC's regular titles)
Detective Comics (starring Batman, with Hawkman as new back-up feature)
Doorway to Nightmare (starring Madame Xanadu)

Dynamic Classics (reprint title featuring the best of DC's early 1970s superhero stories)
Firestorm
The Flash (now including Kid Flash as a back-up feature)
Ghosts (supernatural short stories)
G.I. Combat (Dollar Comic starring the Haunted Tank, O.S.S., and "Women At War," plus various war short stories)
Green Lantern (featuring Green Lantern/Green Arrow and now including the Golden Age Green Lantern and the Green Lantern Corps in alternating back-up trilogies)
House of Mystery (supernatural short stories)
House of Secrets (supernatural short stories)
Jonah Hex
Justice League of America
Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth (now including OMAC as a back-up feature)
Men of War (starring Gravedigger with "Dateline: Frontline" and Enemy Ace as back-up features)
Our Fighting Forces (starring the Losers with Capt. Storm and "H.Q.: Confidential as back-up features)
Secrets of the Haunted House (supernatural short stories)
Sgt. Rock (with war short stories as back-ups)

Showcase (umbrella try-out title with O.S.S., Deadman, and the Creeper scheduled for the summer)
Star Hunters
Steel the Indestructible Man
Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes
Super Friends (now including the Wonder Twins as back-up feature)
Superman (now including "Mr. and Mrs. Superman" and "The Private Life of Clark Kent" as alternating back-up features)
Superman Family (Dollar Comic starring Superman, Superboy, Supergirl, Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, Krypto, and Nightwing & Flamebird)
Unexpected (supernatural short stories)
Unknown Soldier (with war short stories as back-ups)
Warlord
Weird War Tales (supernatural war stories)
Weird Western Tales (starring Scalphunter with Cinnamon as new back-up feature)
Witching Hour (supernatural short stories)
Wonder Woman (now including "Tales of the Amazons" as new back-up feature)
World's Finest Comics (Dollar Comic starring Superman & Batman, Green Arrow, Black Canary, the Creeper, and Shazam!)

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST 1978 (UNPUBLISHED)

Aquaman (with the Martian Manhunter and the Vigilante as back-up features)
Claw the Unconquered
Demand Classics (reprint title featuring the best of DC's 1960s superhero stories)

Mister Miracle (now including Big Barda as back-up feature)
New Gods
The Secret Society of Super-Villains (now including super-villain origins and Captain Comet in alternating back-up features)

Shade, the Changing Man (now including the Odd Man as back-up feature)
The Vixen
Western Classics (reprint title featuring the best of DC's 1950s-1960s western stories)

PART 3: IMPLOSION (1978-1980)

Murray Bishoff, then reporter in a news story printed in *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom* #241 (June 30, 1978)^{cxlii}:

"Business is brewing over at DC... Publishers have sustained the rather unbelievable number of titles on sale instead of building fewer, stronger sellers largely on the notion that there is only so much rack space, and 'if we give up a space, they will just fill it with one of their titles.' DC has declared Enough of This. DC now believes numbers are not the answer, and will make an effort to eliminate the less worthy series by raising the bottom line for cancellation. A number of marginal titles will go. Also, series that 'have not quite jelled' will be cancelled without looking at sales figures... Most of the cancellations depend on editorial opinion, *not* sales figures. If a series could do better quality-wise in someplace other than in its own book, it will go elsewhere. As a concerted effort to remove the glut on the stands, this action will only prune DC's stock, not injure it. In the next few weeks, the editors will decide what will go first."

Don and Maggie Thompson, then news/opinion writers in a news story printed in *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom* #243 (July 14, 1978)^{cxliii}:

"Rumors are flying of a cutback of 40% of the staff at DC. We called our friendly news source at DC (Mike Gold), who called the rumor 'absolute nonsense.' No massive layoffs are planned; what *is* happening is a cutback on the titles being done just to hold press space. All reprint books are cancelled for example."

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news story printed in *The Comic Reader* #159 (August 1978)^{cxliv}:

"DC has eliminated their short-lived 50¢, 40-page line, after only three months' trial. Obviously, the reason has nothing to do with

sales. The people at Warner feel that the new system of distribution should be given a chance with DCs looking like the rest of the industry's books, since there will be some risk of alienating wholesalers. So, beginning in September (books cover dated December), all DCs that are not dollar books will be 32 pages with 17 pages of story again, but now for 40¢... All non-dollar-sized bimonthly books have either been cancelled or upgraded to monthly status."

Independent News newsletter (August 1978)^{cxlv}:

"Starting with editions released in September, DC's standard comics will be cover-priced at 40¢. This will keep DC the most profitable comics line published, giving retailers 14½% greater profit on all DC Comics sold than on the comics of other publishers. The extra profit on DC should continue to enable wholesalers to open new accounts and should also retrieve any of the consumers temporarily lost at the 50¢ cover price. 'The 50¢ cover price, previously in effect, has been tabled indefinitely,' reports DC Comics, 'until we are sure there will be no consumer resistance.'"

Lead story of the "Newswatch" section in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{cxlvi}:

"In an unprecedented move that has caused waves of shock and consternation to ripple throughout the comics industry, DC Comics has initiated a massive cutback by cancelling 17 titles and postponing indefinitely four new titles already scheduled for publication. In addition to this, DC has laid off five full-time staffers, and has changed its 50¢/25-page story format to a 40¢/17-page story format.

DC has cancelled *Army at War*, *All-Star Comics*, *Batman Family*, *Battle Classics*, *Black Lightning*, *Claw*, *Doorway to Nightmare*, *Dynamic Classics*, *Firestorm*, *House of Secrets*, *Kamandi*, *Our Fighting Forces*, *Secrets of Haunted House*, *Showcase*, *Star Hunters*, *Steel*, and *The Witching Hour*. *Demand Classics*,

DC has been selling *fewer* individual books, and compensating by putting out *more* titles; and that sales vary with the seasons.

Both problems could be attributed to the fact that we have a very large overhead—rent, contract, salaries, production costs—and the fact that the distributor tells us how many copies of a book we must print before he will even consider handling it. The distributor is paid a flat fee, based on the print run, whether he does his job or not, and literally thousands of comics never leave the warehouses. It's a really archaic system that relies on saturating the stands by sheer force of numbers, despite the dwindling amount of space available. What makes this situation worse is the fact that our distributor, Independent News, is part of the Warner Communications conglomerate, as we are—obviously an untenable arrangement.”

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Eerie* #97 (September 1978)^{ciii}:

“Warner Books chairman William Sarnoff and Jay Emmett, a Warner Communications director, ordered an immediate 40% cutback in the DC line... Warner initiated the cutback without consulting Jenette Kahn and she wasn't even in town when the order came down... Sources at Marvel report Stan Lee and Jim Shooter have discussed a title cutback, too.”

[Indeed, Marvel ultimately cancelled 21 titles between September 1978 and February 1979 while adding only three (*Micronauts*; *Shogun Warriors*; *Battlestar Galactica*) but escaped the notoriety that DC received. The cancelled titles consisted of *Devil Dinosaur*, *Machine Man* (final issues on sale in September), *The Flintstones*, *Hanna-Barbera TV Stars* #4, *The Human Fly*, *Marvel Classic Comics*, *Scooby-Doo* (November), *Hanna-Barbera Spotlight*, *Laff-A-Lympics*, *Yogi Bear* (December), *Kid Colt Outlaw*, *Marvel Triple Action*, *Ms. Marvel*, *Tomb of Dracula* (January), *Black Panther*, *Captain Marvel*, *Howard the Duck*, *Invaders*, *Nova*, *Rawhide Kid*, and *Red Sonja* (February). Final issues of *Tomb of Dracula* and *Invaders* were belatedly published in May and June 1979 respectively while *Machine Man* resumed publication in May 1979 after an eight-month gap.]

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative, in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{ciii}:

“Marvel will probably be up to 40¢ soon enough, because paper costs have jumped again as of July 11. All Marvel will probably do is sell more comics overall, but not more copies of any single title, which keeps their overhead printing costs higher than ours.”

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a news story printed in *The Comic Reader* #159 (August 1978)^{civ}:

“DC and their parent company feel that the decrease in volume will relieve the glut on the stands that has existed since 1969 and enable them to build the paid circulations of their longtime

bestsellers that the distributors know and feel an affinity for. No new titles are expected to be released in the near future, though their goal is to increase the dollar book line to eight, by next year, probably by expanding a current title. Since this is a long-term experiment, we'll probably see a return to the stability in titles that have been absent since the early sixties.

Mike Gold feels that the delay of [*Superman: The Movie*] had nothing whatsoever to do with the decision. His opinion is that the decision came as the result of 15 years of declining comic sales, possibly spurred on by the low winter sales (figures seriously out of whack because of the blizzard), and the new size would not have been saved even if a phenomenal sales push had been garnered from the film.”

NEWSWATCH

The DC Implosion

DC Adopts New Distribution Strategy
Cuts Line by 40%

The Comics Journal #41's coverage of DC's corporate cutback was headlined with a phrase that would be permanently associated with the incident: “The DC Implosion.”

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative in news story printed in *The Comics Journal* #41 (August 1978)^{civ}:

“Today we've gone into an entirely different distribution system wherein we're using fewer titles and reduced print runs. There are other reasons, too. We got slaughtered during the blizzard, absolutely slaughtered. Everybody got slaughtered during the blizzard and, quite frankly, that didn't help matters. Sales of comic books have fallen off dramatically over the last decade. It's a question of taking what we perceive as radical measures to stabilize that steady decline. Magazines as a whole are in a very precarious position in that regard, and comics in particular because they are a non-essential item. People perceive that they need *TV Guide* to the tune of 19 million copies an issue. But comics aren't perceived as that necessary.

There are a lot of different reasons for [the decline in sales]. I think the most important reason is that there are way too many titles coming out for too few people. They can't get the newsstand exposure. The other reason is that it isn't worth the wholesalers' time or the retailers' time to go out there with a 25¢ or 35¢ or maybe even a 40¢ comic book. The profit is just too low. The entire magazine publishing field dropped at a certain percentage [of sales]. The distributors worked out an average percentage. Comics dropped a higher percentage because wholesalers are going to let *Playboy* go out before *Superman* because *Playboy* will make five times more than a copy of *Superman*. But the Dollar Comics dropped significantly less than the drop-off of comics sales in February and March.

If we were selling 5% or 10% or even 20% better than we are selling, it would justify changing the distribution system. A book that's selling 50,000 copies today was selling 500,000 copies ten years ago."

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative, in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clvi}:

"What Warners [decided] was to follow a plan that we had proposed in late May, designed to produce fewer titles, but get them all into supermarkets and new outlets. Our dollar books seemed to be able to break into these areas, but nobody would ever accept our other 32 titles in a lump—it was just too much material for them to handle.

We cut ourselves back to 20 top money-making monthly books and six bimonthly dollar titles so that our schedules could be streamlined and our distribution package more easily handled. All of our books make money, so it was just a matter of weeding out the marginal titles, and sticking with the high profit books."

Joe Brancatelli, then business writer for Fairchild Publications and comics industry observer in an article printed in *Eerie* #97 (September 1978)^{clvii}:

"Some Warner executives believe [Mike Gold] helped save Jenette Kahn's job during the summer purge. 'When (Warner president) Bill Sarnoff and (Warner director) Jay Emmett came in and made the cutbacks, they would have loved to axe Jenette,' one executive says, 'but Gold has pushed so much crap about her brilliance in the press, we decided it was better to let her stay. Anything else would have been an embarrassment for the corporation and we don't need that with the *Superman* movie coming up.'"

Mike Gold, then DC Comics public relations representative, in a July 1978 interview printed in *Mediascene* #31^{clviii}:

"My own personal observation, stepping out of my DC public relations role for a moment, is that Jenette is an excellent manager. In the last two years, I've seen that she can accept these situations for what they are, and adjust to cope with them. So while I know she may feel bad, she is able to grasp the new circumstances and begin to immediately pursue the positive factors, such as taking more time to polish and promote the entire line."

Mike Tiefenbacher, then editor of *The Comic Reader* in a comment printed in *The Comic Reader* #160 (September 1978)^{clix}:

"Nothing in DC's history portended anything as drastic as what happened, there was no paper strike, and under Jenette Kahn and Sol Harrison, the company really looked pretty healthy. The 40-page experiment had just begun, there was expansion every time you turned around, and everybody seemed content. So when Warner Publishing and Independent News lowered the boom, everyone was caught by surprise.



Jenette Kahn—seen here with Sol Harrison in photos from *The Comics Journal* #53 (Winter 1980) and *The Amazing World of DC Comics* #11 (March 1976)—was placed in the awkward position of having to announce the abrupt end of an initiative that she'd spent months championing.

The long-term ramifications are still unclear. DC's decrease in titles might be expected to cause Marvel to attempt to fill the hole created by an onslaught of new and reprint titles. It hasn't happened yet, though: They're launching two new books this winter, but cancelling a couple to make room. DC spokesmen seemed to feel that if Marvel made the move they'd be making a mistake since adding more to the already overcrowded stands would only hurt total sales on their other books without adequately ensuring that the new titles would even break even. Still, since DC did have to [let a lot] of freelance talent go to keep their contracted people busy, the basic manpower is there to create new books. Marvel might, despite the miserable winter sales figures, decide to take the initiative and return to the scattergun assault they made on the market in '74-'75 when they approached 80 titles.

Then we have the price difference. DC, at 40¢ to Marvel's (and everyone else's) 35¢, is in a vulnerable position, notwithstanding the new distribution system. It still makes no sense to me why, if the desire to make DC's product the same as everyone else's to assuage wholesalers was the reason for the format change, the ultimate result was a product that remains different due to price. Consumers aren't looking at what price DC was last month, they're comparing the price to Marvel's. Marvel looks to have an advantage here too.

The most confusing thing to me, however, was the unwillingness of the higher-ups to look forward to the impact of [*Superman: The Movie*] on the total sales of the line. From every report and indication, the film should be a success. Of what I saw in the film slide show at the Chicago Comicon, we won't be cheated when it comes to production values. So here comes a \$25 million film with a direct connection to the backbone of the comic line, almost certainly meaning a large increase in the sales of anything with Superman's name on it, and the size reduction,

Richard Burton, then editor of *Comic Media News* in an editorial printed in *Comic Media News International* #37 (August-September 1978)^{clxxxii}:

“DC is going to look very static for some time to come. But the casualties can’t just be measured in terms of scripts and artwork, the more important ones are less obvious—like DC’s own credibility, a major factor the company has fought hard for and won back since Jenette Kahn took over the publisher’s hot seat in 1976. Since that time there has been a steady policy of expansion and experimentation that has gathered interest and enthusiasm from both the fan and pro camps, so much so that when the 50¢ conversion was announced at the beginning of the year, it was greeted with genuine excitement from fans instead of the customary gripes about more price rises.

Now those same fans have to swallow the bitter pill of shelling out an extra 5¢ for the same tired old half-and-half package of ads and story. How prepared will they be to put their support behind DC again when and if DC decides to try another new format in the future.”

Mike W. Barr, then DC Comics staff proofreader in an article printed in *Back Issue* #2 (February 2004)^{clxxxiii}:

“If the DC Implosion had no other positive benefits, it at least made the remaining DC staffers and freelancers much more atten-

tive to their tasks. Though writers may still have been planning to move to Hollywood to write sitcoms or movies, such talk was never heard anymore. Indeed, some freelancers began making more appearances at the DC offices, sniffing around, glad-handing editors and trolling for whatever extra work there might be, for example from a writer who had missed a deadline. No honor among thieves.

Those of us who were spared from the Implosion didn’t have to be reminded that, despite the alleged fact that sales of the remaining DC titles were more or less steady (such information, once a more or less open secret, was now closely guarded), the Warner Communications ax could fall again, without warning.”

[A side effect of the Implosion also killed the publisher’s budding character-centric fan club, the DC Super-Stars Society. In September, the \$4.00 membership fee was refunded to everyone who had subscribed earlier in 1978. Meanwhile, the in-house magazine *Amazing World of DC Comics* was also discontinued with issue #17. *AWODCC* editor Mike W. Barr had planned to spotlight the 20th anniversary of *Flash* #105 in issue #18 and later repurposed a Fred Hembeck feature for the issue in 1982’s *Flash* #300. The typical comic book buyers in 1978 had no access to the low-print-run fanzines and were left to wonder for months or years afterwards what exactly happened.]

DC COMICS' LINEUP OF TITLES: EARLY 1979 (POST-DC IMPLOSION)

Action Comics

Adventure Comics (Dollar Comic starring the Flash, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Deadman and the Justice Society of America)

Batman

Brave and the Bold (Batman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)

DC Comics Presents (Superman team-ups with assorted DC heroes)

Detective Comics (Dollar Comic featuring “The Batman Family”)

Flash

G.I. Combat (Dollar Comic starring the Haunted Tank, O.S.S., and “Women At War,” plus various war short stories)

Ghosts (supernatural short stories)

Green Lantern (starring the team of Green Lantern, Green Arrow and Black Canary)

House of Mystery (supernatural short stories)

Jonah Hex

Justice League of America

Men of War (starring Gravedigger)

Sgt. Rock

Super Friends

Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes

Superman

Superman Family (Dollar Comic starring Supergirl, Jimmy Olsen, Lois Lane, “Mr. and Mrs. Superman,” and “The Private Life of Clark Kent”)

Unexpected (Dollar Comics featuring supernatural short stories)

Unknown Soldier

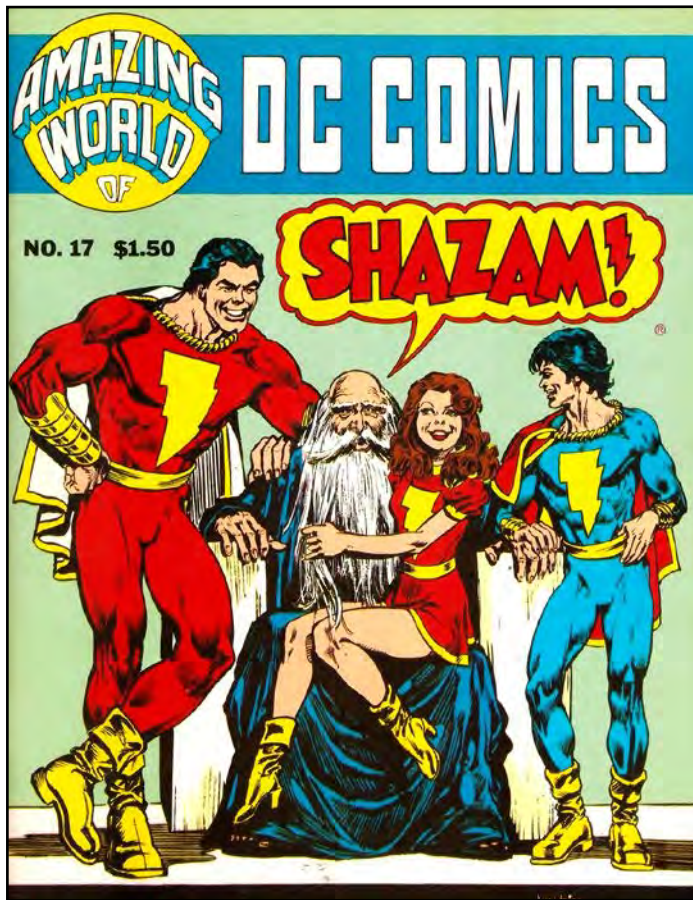
Warlord

Weird War Tales (supernatural war stories)

Weird Western Tales (starring Scalphunter)

Wonder Woman

World’s Finest Comics (Dollar Comic starring Superman & Batman, Green Arrow, Black Canary, Hawkman, and Shazam!)



Launched in 1974, *The Amazing World of DC Comics* offered subscribers access to advance news, creator interviews, and unpublished artwork. Originally bi-monthly, it was released more sporadically from 1976 to 1978. *AWODCC* #17—the final issue—was a *Shazam!* spotlight with cover art by Alan Weiss.

Mark Waid, future comic book writer in a 2018 recollection^{clxxxiv}:

"I was a 15-year-old kid living in the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia in the summer of 1978, and there was not within a thousand-mile radius of me a fan so ferociously dedicated to DC Comics. I had been planning and budgeting around the DC Explosion for weeks and had committed to memory all the upcoming titles, from *Demand Classics* to *Showcase Presents Deadman* and everything in between.

I was also living next door to a large family with boys around my age, and I'd hang out at their place a lot after school. What I came to notice was that there were a lot of subscription magazines sitting around with the name 'Michael Flynn' on their labels. The name sounded familiar. Surely, I asked, this couldn't be the same Mike Flynn who was a Legion of Super-Heroes booster and fanzine writer known to everyone in comics fandom. Could it? It's not an uncommon name.

And yet, when I asked my friends, I was told that, oh, yeah, come to think of it, they did have a cousin who read comic books and, huh, he'd be coming to visit in two weeks. This was

the greatest news imaginable to a 15-year-old Mark Waid, who worshipped at the altar of Go-Go Checks. It was tantamount to discovering that Santa, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy were going to visit all at once. I began preparing a long list of questions for Mr. Flynn. Who was the Odd Man? Why can't I find *Demand Classics* on any newsstand since it's supposed to be out? Did I miss the first issue? That makes no sense—I have the release dates of all my favorite comics committed to memory! I know which books ship during which weeks! (I still do.)

Sure enough, Mike—who was in touch with Mike Gold, DC's publicity man—came to town and settled into an easy chair as I perched at his feet, voracious for inside information. And that's when Mike Flynn told me about the DC Implosion and went over all the details as he watched my face get longer and longer. But—but how could this be? *This* is cancelled? *That's* cancelled? Ridiculous! Everyone loves DC Comics! I'm a dedicated fan! I even bought *Superman Salutes the Bicentennial*, that's how hardcore I am! You mean there were *less* DC comics in my future, not more?

It was a sullen evening in the Waid household as I began the long process of pining for stories that never were, stories that would never be. I would never know the Deserter. I would never see the ultimate showdown between the Freedom Fighters and the Silver Ghost. Steel, the Indestructible Man and Firestorm had passed from existence. I walked the rest of the year a ghost, a hollow shell of a young man. Someday, I will fully recover.

Someday."

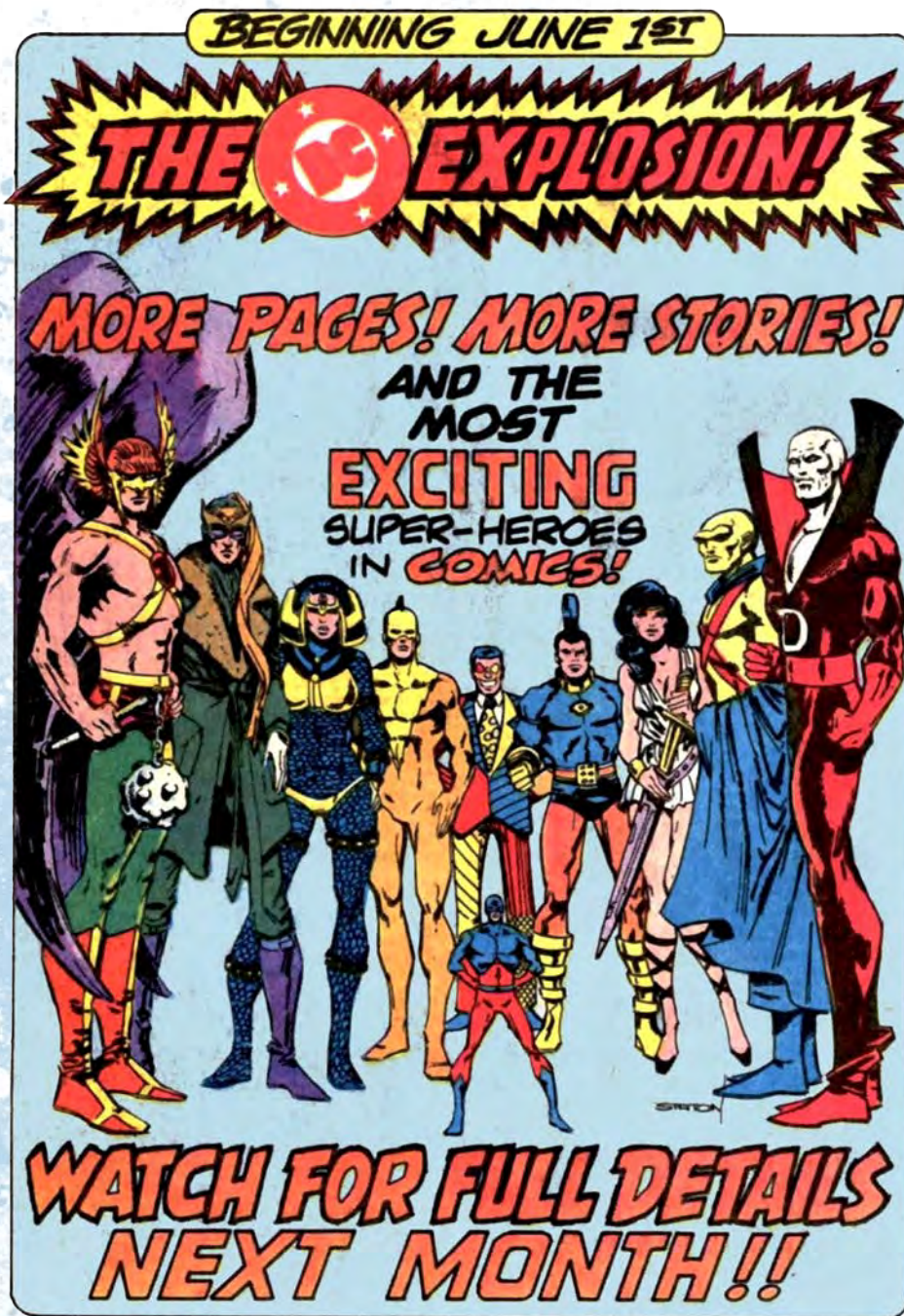
John Morrow, future comic book historian in a 2018 recollection^{clxxxv}:

"A couple of days [after our first local comic book club meeting], the new issue of *The Buyer's Guide* arrived, announcing the 'DC Implosion' cancellations. It was devastating, as I was really excited by DC's new expanded comics, even with their increased cover price. But I guess the budding publisher in me was equally enthused to get this hot news into print in 'The Comics Explosion.' So I threw together the second issue for our upcoming meeting, with details of the Implosion. Sadly, only Matt and Ken showed up that week, and since I saw them all the time anyway at school, there didn't seem much point in continuing the club. Thus, like DC's books of that era, my first fan publication, and our comics club, imploded."

Kurt Busiek, future comic book writer in a 2018 recollection^{clxxxvi}:

"And then the Implosion hit. I mostly heard about it through *The Comic Reader* and through conversation at the comics shop. As a reader, it was disappointing, but I still had plenty to read, so I wasn't devastated or anything.

I did like the promise of all those backup series, and had been buying *Kamandi* just for the Starlin OMAC series, so it was sad to see that go away. Aside from that and Huntress, though — and *Firestorm*, when it shifted to *Flash* post-Implosion — I don't remember being all that excited about the results. I liked the idea of it, though."



In April 1978, a full-page Joe Staton illustration heralded the DC Explosion with an array of heroes slated to receive their own features in existing books: Hawkman (in *Detective Comics*), Enemy Ace (*Men of War*), Big Barda (*Mister Miracle*), the Ray (*Black Lightning*), the Odd Man (*Shade the Changing Man*), the Atom (*Action Comics*), OMAC (*Kamandi, the Last Boy On Earth*), the Amazons (*Wonder Woman*), the Martian Manhunter (*Aquaman*), and Deadman (*Adventure Comics*). By the time the ad saw print, though, DC had already decided to cancel several of the titles intended for the Explosion. They joined other recently-terminated books in limbo. The final issues seen here are *Aquaman* #63 (on sale in May 1978), *Freedom Fighters* #15 (April 1978), *Karate Kid* #15 (April 1978), *Mister Miracle* #25 (May 1978), *Shade the Changing Man* #8 (May 1978), *Shazam!* #35 (February 1978), *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #15 (March 1978), *Super-Team Family* #15 (November 1977), and *Teen Titans* #53 (November 1977).

COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF DC COMICS CIRCA 1978



Produced by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano's Continuity Associates, this promotional sequence sang the virtues of DC's Dollar Comics initiative to distributors and retailers. One of the new format's most subtle qualities was the fact that each issue stood a quarter-inch taller than regular comic books. Also seen here are the first four Dollar Comics from December 1976 and January 1977: *G.I. Combat* #201, *House of Mystery* #251, *Superman Family* #182, and *World's Finest Comics* #244.

INTERLUDE:

CANCELLED COMIC CAVALCADE: THE INDEX

Published—all 40 copies of it—as a means of preserving stories killed by the DC Implosion, *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* also curiously included the cover of the unpublished *Ragman* #6 from 1977 and a trio of oddball stories left over by editor Joe Simon circa 1973 (*Green Team*; *Prez*). The latter had been unearthed by Al Milgrom in 1977 at the same time he discovered an unpublished Jack Kirby story that he'd intended to use in *Kamandi* #61.

On the other hand, several stories that actually were derailed by the Implosion were absent in the photocopied behemoth. Some, like the cover of *Battle Classics* #2 (with Sgt. Rock), *Dynamic Classics* #2 (featuring Superman) or *Wonder Woman* #250's "Tales of the Amazons" story were probably assumed to be viable enough to be used someday. Other omissions in CCC such as the covers for *Claw the Unconquered* #13 and *Firestorm* #6 just seem to be a case of things getting lost in the shuffle.

Cancelled Comic Cavalcade #1:

Cover art: Al Milgrom, with Todd Klein on the CCC logo and paste-ups. "Still 10c. No ads!"

Description: Black Lightning, Claw, the Creeper, the Deserter, Mr. Miracle, the Odd Man, the Ray, Shade, Steel, the Secret Society of Super-Villains (Chronos, Mirror Master, Wizard), and the Vixen all lie dead in the foreground as a DC truck drives off and Deadman floats overhead.

"An Editorial, of Sorts" explains the origin of *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade*: "We had a whole mess of material ready to go to the engravers (or ready for last-minute corrections); it was felt it would be a shame if this material would never see print."

Contents:

Black Lightning #12

Cover: Rich Buckler and Vince Colletta.

Lead story: "Lure of the Magnetic Menace" (17 pages)

Script: Denny O'Neil

Pencils: Mike Nasser

Inks: Vince Colletta

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Jefferson Pierce's search for a runaway student leads him to the teen's Uncle Baxter Timmons, alias Green Lantern foe Dr. Polaris. (The villain's real name was Neal Emerson in his earlier *GL* appearances.)

Approximate original scheduled

on-sale date: August 24, 1978

Later published in: *World's Finest*

Comics #260 (December 1979-

January 1980) and—with cover art—*Black Lightning, Volume One* (2017).

Back-up story: The Ray – Untitled (Eight pages)

Script: Roger McKenzie (plot); Mike W. Barr (dialogue)

Pencils: John Fuller

Inks: Bob Wiacek

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Recovering from his injuries in the previous installment, the Ray flashes back to his origin. Unbeknownst to the hero, a villain called the Dark vows to destroy him.

Black Lightning #13

Cover: Mike Nasser

Claw the Unconquered #13

Story: "The Travelers of Dark Destiny" (25 pages)

Script: David Michelinie

Pencils: Romeo Tanghal

Inks: Bob Smith

Editor: Larry Hama

Description: Having severed his demonic hand in the previous issue, Claw agrees to help the mysterious Trysannda pursue the wizard Dalivar the Unethical who cursed her with magical powers. Horrified to find that his enchanted hand has reattached itself while he slept, Claw continues his quest and discovers the Dalivar's castle is a massive elemental formed of earth. Elsewhere, Prince Ghilkyn is lured away with false news about Claw.

Letter column: "Of Swordsmen and Sorcerers."

(The column is highlighted by a letter from Martin Greenberg, "the first hardcover publisher, in the 1950s, of Robert E. Howard's Conan stories, as well as the first publisher of Fritz Lieber's *Fafhrd* and the Grey Mouser stories.")

Note: Joe Kubert's cover for this issue is not included here.

Approximate original scheduled

on-sale date: July 11, 1978

Claw the Unconquered #14

Cover: Joe Kubert

Story: "When the River of Ravenroost... Ran Red" (25 pages)

Script: Tom DeFalco

Pencils: Romeo Tanghal

Inks: Bob Smith

Editor: Larry Hama

Description: After vanquishing the elemental, Claw falls to defeat while Trysannda is captured by the wizard (now called Validarr). Elsewhere, Prince Ghilkyn is captured by the Shadow-gods, who intend to use him in their war against the Lords of Elder Light. Back in Ravenroost, Claw saves Trysannda from being sacrificed to the demonic Sha-Gasa only to fall into "the Lair of Lunacy" ruled by a hunchbacked king.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 12, 1978

The Deserter #1 (a.k.a. *Showcase* #107)

Cover: Joe Kubert

Story: "The Deserter" (25 pages)

Script: Gerry Conway

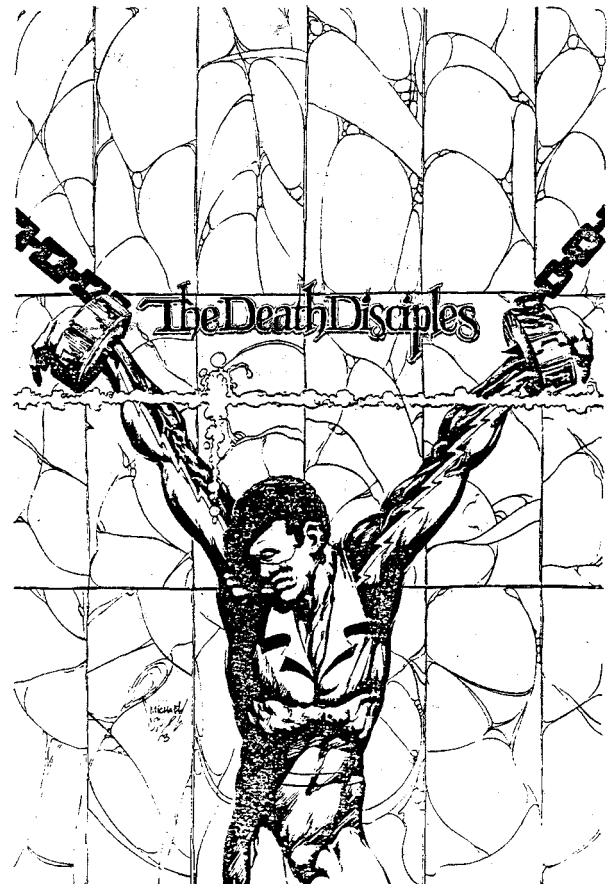
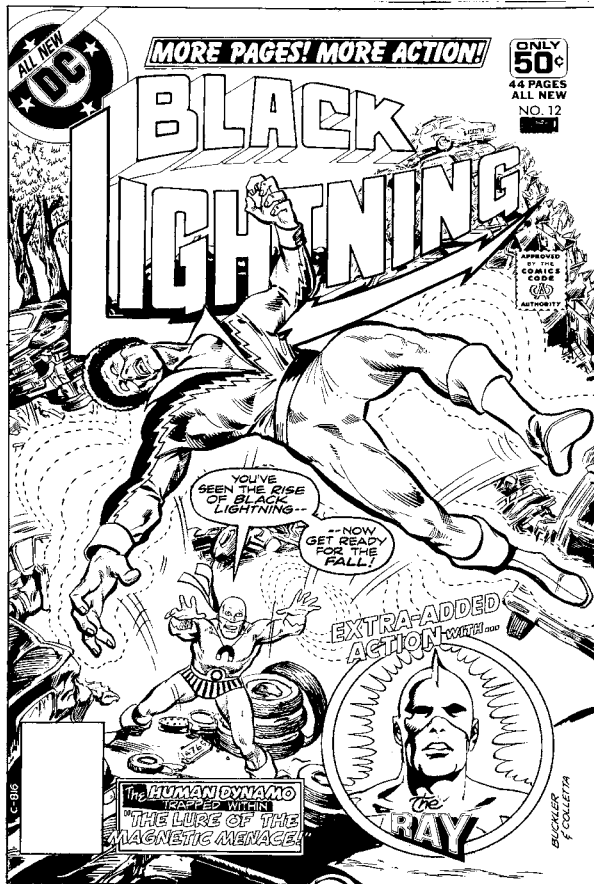
Pencils: Dick Ayers

Inks: Romeo Tanghal

Editor: Paul Levitz

Description: In the Arizona territory of 1874, Aaron Hope befriends the sheriff of Cooper's Canyon and his daughter Marcy. Steadfastly

(opposite page) From *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1: (top left) The cover to *Black Lightning* #12, (top right) *Black Lightning* #13, (bottom left) *Claw the Unconquered* #14, and (bottom right) *Deserter* #1.



refusing to use a gun, Hope stops the violent plot of a landowner to buy up land and resell it to the railroad. Meanwhile, ex-sergeant Willie Dredge arrives in pursuit of Hope, who was traumatized a decade earlier during the Civil War and deserted. Grateful that the sheriff didn't turn him over to Dredge, Aaron prepares to tell his side of the story (which was to be titled "Night of the Inferno").

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 19, 1978

Doorway To Nightmare #6

Cover: Michael Kaluta

Story: "Tapestry of Dreams" (25 pages)

Script: Cary Burkett

Pencils: Juan Ortiz

Inks: Vince Colletta

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Madame Xanadu helps Stephen Prince defeat the incubus Mr. Hazel who has been preying on Stephen's girlfriend Laurel.

Text page: Tarot Reading

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: August 3, 1978

Later published in: *The Unexpected* #190 (March-April 1979)

Firestorm #6

Story: "The Typhoon is a Storm of the Soul" (25 pages)

Script: Gerry Conway

Pencils: Al Milgrom

Inks: Jack Abel (erroneously credited to Bob McLeod)

Editor: Jack C. Harris

Description: Scientist Jonathan Shine, son of mobsters faced by *Firestorm* in earlier issues, is irradiated during an accident involving his atomic-powered submarine and becomes the tornadic Typhoon. Meanwhile, Liam McGarrin deduces that Ronnie Raymond may be connected to Martin Stein's blackouts and mobster "Spit" Shine kidnaps Bradley High's Principal Hapgood in search of information on a man named Rockwell (who looks like Ronnie's dad).

Note: Al Milgrom's cover for this issue is not included here.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: September 21, 1978

Later published in: *Firestorm: The Nuclear Man* (2011)

The Green Team #2

Story: "The High Price of Food" (20 pages)

Script: Joe Simon

Pencils: Jerry Grandenetti

Inks: Creig Flessel

Editor: Joe Simon

Description: Skyrocketing seafood prices draw the Green Team into conflict with Russian fishermen that have discovered mutated giant lobsters.

Note: Technically, there was no first issue of *Green Team*. Writer-editor Joe Simon produced three issues circa 1973 for a proposed series and only the first was published in 1975's *1st Issue Special* #2.

The Green Team #3

Story: "The Deadly Paper Hanger" (20 pages)

Script: Joe Simon

Pencils: Jerry Grandenetti

Inks: Creig Flessel

Editor: Joe Simon

Description: The Green Team enlist an Adolf Hitler lookalike called the Paper Hanger to redecorate a slum but his organic wall paper becomes a menace.

Cancelled Comic Cavalcade #2:

Cover art: Alex Saviuk, with Todd Klein on the CCC logo and paste-ups. The "\$" symbol was part of the unused original trade dress for the Dollar Comics line.

Description: The Creeper, Deadman, Kamandi, OMAC, Prez, Shade, Steel, and the Vixen are kicked to the curb outside Unemployment, Inc. at 75 Rockefeller Plaza. "A Second Editorial, of Sorts" thanks "Neil of the Magic Finger deep down at Warner Duplicating who kept the spirit of *Plop!* alive when Paul Kupperberg came down with about a ream of original art and asked for 35 collated copies. Neil's hat actually flew off his head, and when he fell stiff-backed straight backward, an audible 'Plop!' sound was to be heard."

"Subscription Department: Annual subscription rate: \$7.65 (couldn't sell any at last issue's rate). Upon cancellation of this publication, all subscriptions will convert

to *Freedom Fighters*, which will convert to *Secret Society of Super-Villains*, which will convert to *Justice League of America*, which, if cancelled, will most likely convert to a revived issue of *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade*. Only West German Marks accepted as payment for subscriptions to this publication."

Contents:

Kamandi, the Last Boy On Earth #60

Cover: Rich Buckler and Jack Abel

Lead story: "Into the Vortex" (17 pages)

Script: Jack C. Harris

Pencils: Dick Ayers

Inks: Danny Bulandi

Editor: Al Milgrom

Description: Drawn into the Vortex, Kamandi is introduced to the concept of a multiverse and that he has infinite counterparts on other Earths. Rejecting the option of entering a new reality where the Great Disaster never took place, Kamandi demands to return to his imperiled friends. He is whisked away by Brute and Glob, who call him "Jed" and declare they're taking him to the Sandman.

Approximate original scheduled on-sale date: August 31, 1978

Later published in: *The Kamandi Challenge Special* #1 (March 2017)

Back-up story: OMAC – "For This Is the New Origin of OMAC" (Eight pages)

Script: Jim Starlin

Pencils: Jim Starlin

Inks: Joe Rubinstein

Editor: Al Milgrom

Description: Watching a video from Quair Tox of the advanced planet Vision, OMAC discovers that his creation was engineered by Professor Z of that world. After foreseeing that humanity would fall to a race of mutated animals, the Visionaries came to Earth and became Global Peace Agents with OMAC intended to lead mankind away from destruction, Donning a new costume, OMAC surrenders to the International Communications and Commerce Mercenaries as they storm the chamber.

Later published in: *Warlord* #37 (September 1980)

Letter column: "The Time Capsule." (The column includes Jack C. Harris' announcement that the following issue would include an unseen Jack Kirby-penciled *Sandman* tale from 1975. "When artist Al Milgrom became one of DC's newest editors, he rummaged through [the inventory] drawer and pulled out the story. Being a true Jack Kirby fan, Al wanted desperately for the last,

(opposite page) From *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #1: (top left) The cover to *Doorway to Nightmare* #6, (top right) *Firestorm* #6, (bottom left) and *Green team* #2. (bottom right) From *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2, *Kamandi* #60.

INTERLUDE: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO—?

The following is an attempt at tracing the eventual homes of all the other comics DC scheduled for publication in 1978. News items originally reported in *The Comic Reader* #145, #146 and #153-159, *The Comics Journal* #38-40 and *Direct Currents Newsletter* #2-6 were particularly useful in putting it all together.

Action Comics #490's Air Wave back-up appeared in issue #511 (1980) while the script for #491's Atom story was illustrated and expanded from eight pages to ten for *World's Finest Comics* #260 (1979).

Adventure Comics #459's Dollar Comic premiere was supposed to include the debut of Roger McKenzie and Don Newton's "The Man Called Neverwhere," described in *The Flash* #263 as "a mysterious hero who operates behind the iron curtain." Paul Levitz added in *Adventure* #457's letter column that "we think it's going to shock quite a few people's preconceived notions of what a comic book superhero is all about" and McKenzie himself vaguely recalled it in a 2013 Facebook post as "some sort of elvish/magical/time-travel superhero mishmosh of a concept." Whatever its particulars, the series was postponed to insert material meant for *New Gods* #20. An Elongated Man story was hastily commissioned to fill the page difference in issue #459. Unfortunately, *Adventure* continued to be a clearinghouse for cancelled comics (*All-Star Comics*; *Aquaman*) and "Neverwhere" never was.

Nor were the previously announced Metal Men (by Gerry Conway and Ramona Fradon, for *Adventure* #461-462), Manhunter From Mars (*Adventure* #461-463), and Doctor Fate (by writer Steve Gerber for *Adventure* #463-465). The unpublished first installment of the Metal Men two-parter—involving an insecure Lead transferring his consciousness into a handsome new body—was actually penciled by an unknown artist and inked by Romeo Tanghal. Years later, Doctor Fate finally received a short-lived back-up series and writer Martin Pasko recalled the Gerber scripts when he was in a deadline pinch. With editor Mike W. Barr's blessing, Pasko worked the story into his own continuity and they were finally published as a four-parter (rather than three) in *The Flash* #310-313 (1982).

All-New Collectors' Edition's Justice League 72-pager was broken apart in *Justice League of America* #210-212. "Superman's Life Story," planned to coincide with the June (then December) release of the feature film, finally saw print in *Action Comics* #500 in mid-1979.

Material intended for 1978's Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer tabloid (including "Will a Stitch In Time Save Christmas?" and "The Secret of the Lucky Dragon's Egg") appeared one year later in the digest, *Best of DC* #4. Five pages of puzzles slated for the tabloid were published in Robin Snyder's *The Comics* [volume 7] #12 (1996). At least one other unpublished Rudolph story, the 16-page "A Whale of a Christmas Visit" exists, excerpted in multiple issues of *The Comics*, beginning with [volume 5] #12 (1994).

Page seven of the Romeo Tanghal-inked Metal Men story meant for *Adventure Comics* #459. Original art courtesy of Heritage Auctions.



the dimensional barrier earlier. When the Freedom Fighters appeared, the Ghost was sure they'd lead him to Firebrand and—in a roundabout way explained in *FF* #11—they did. The final fight between Firebrand and the Ghost ended with both of them being transformed irreversibly to silver, locked together in a death-grip. The rest of the team escaped the traps of the Secret Society and decided they had had enough of Earth-One [and] returned to Earth-X.”

Issue #17's back-up (also left unillustrated) would have matched Star Sapphire against Justice Society member Johnny Thunder, who surrendered to the villainess rather than risk the lives of his wife and grandchildren. Flashbacks would have divulged the origin of the villainess, as described by Bob Rozakis in *Justice League of America* #174's letter column: “Star Sapphire was originally Remoni-Notra of the planet Pandina. She was chosen by the Zamarons to be their queen—an honor previously bequeathed upon Earth's Carol Ferris but refused. Remoni-Notra was given one of the five star sapphire gems and was told of the existence of the other four. Using her powers, she came to Earth to locate and steal Carol Ferris' gem and hooked up with the SSOSV in the hopes of finding the gem. Whether Remoni-Notra, who has masqueraded as French real estate agent Camille and also Captain Comet's sometimes girlfriend Debbie Darnell, will eventually succeed in her task is up in the air at present—and will be determined by the next writer who decides to use her.”

A Captain Comet back-up strip had also been planned for the book, alternating with villain backstories. Issue #18's unillustrated installment found Cap fighting the Icicle and the Fiddler on Earth-One while a flashback revealed that the mysterious gun holstered on his hip was an ultimate weapon whose power would be directed on its target and the person firing it with equal force. Rozakis intended

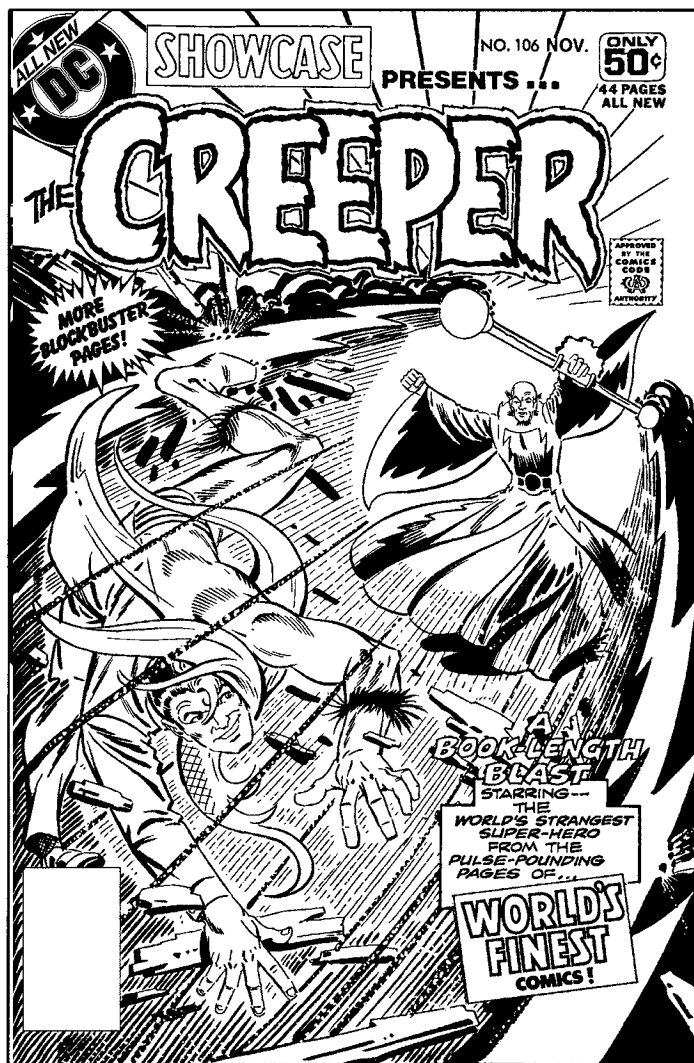
to employ the device in the climax of the ongoing “War of the Worlds” story but he never worked out how. Instead, the fate of the Wizard's branch of the Secret Society was resolved in *Justice League of America* #166-168 (1979).

Shade, the Changing Man #9 would have plunged its title character into the Zero Zone and an uncomfortable alliance with the malevolent Xexlo. “The Deadly Ally” was included in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2 and published decades later in *The Steve Ditko Omnibus* (2011). A resolution to Shade's battle with Doctor Z, left unresolved in *Shade* #8, was finally depicted in *Suicide Squad* #16 (1988). “The Odd Man” back-up story slated for *Shade* #9 (“The Pharaoh and the Mummies”) was rescheduled for the ultimately unpublished *Black Lightning* #14. After an appearance in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2, an edited version of the story was finally released to the general public in *Detective Comics* #487 (1979). The unedited original story was included in *The Steve Ditko Omnibus* (2011).

Showcase #105's Deadman story appeared in *Adventure Comics* #465 (1979), minus a two page action sequence and its cover. Issue #106 was slated to star the Creeper in a 25-page opus by Steve Ditko that found Jack Ryder's Creeper alter-ego imperiled while fighting a villain named Doctor Storme. The issue appeared in *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade* #2 (as did an uncut version of issue #105) and later in *The Creeper By Steve Ditko* (2010). The Creeper story also featured a cameo by the Odd Man, cast here as a character on a TV show.

A trilogy featuring popular Justice Society member, the Huntress, had been scheduled for *Showcase* #107-109 but was replaced by a new western strip, the Deserter. By the time the decision was made, the Huntress story's placement had been mentioned in a house ad seen in several September cover-dated comic

Steve Ditko's cover
for *Showcase* #106.



CANCELLATIONS BY MONTH OF PUBLICATION

1976 Cancellations by month of publication –

DC Comics:

January:

1st Issue Special #13

May:

Swamp Thing #24

June:

Blitzkrieg #5

Claw the Unconquered #9
(revived in January 1978)

The Joker #9

August:

Plop! #24

Tarzan Family #66

October:

Blackhawk #250

Four-Star Spectacular #6

Limited Collectors' Edition
#C-50 (revived intermittently between 1977-1978)

November:

Tarzan #258

December:

Kobra #7

Marvel Comics:

April:

Astonishing Tales #46

June:

Mighty Marvel We
#46

July:

Black Goliath #5

Marvel Adventure,

Daredevil #6

Marvel Chillers #7

Warlock #15

August:

Amazing Adventure

Chamber of Chills #25

Jungle Action #24

(relaunched as *Black*

Panther #1 in October)

Marvel Feature #7

(relaunched as *Red Sonja*

#1 in October)

Ringo Kid #30

Skull the Slayer #6

Strange Tales #188

Tomb of Darkness #23

September:

Adventures On the Planet
of the Apes #11

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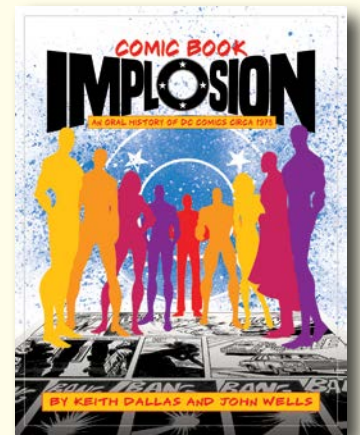
COMIC BOOK IMPLOSION

In 1978, DC Comics implemented a bold initiative to combat plummeting sales: Give readers more story pages with a higher cover price, to better compete on news-stands. This "DC Explosion" brought with it many creative new titles, but just weeks after its launch, they pulled the plug, cancelling numerous titles and leaving stacks of completed comic book stories unpublished. It quickly became known as "The DC Implosion", and TwoMorrrows Publishing marks the 40th Anniversary of one of the most notorious events in comics with an exhaustive oral history from the creators involved (Jenette Kahn, Paul Levitz, Len Wein, Mike Gold, and others), plus detailed analysis of how it changed the landscape of comics forever!

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March:

Ragman #5

April:

Young Love #126

May:

DC Special #29 (re-
launched as DC Special
Series #1 in June)

Hercules Unbound #12

July:

Plastic Man #20
Starfire #8

Marvel Comics:

January:

Deadly Hands of Kung Fu
#33 (black and white
magazine)

Marvel Spotlight #33

Two-Gun Kid #136

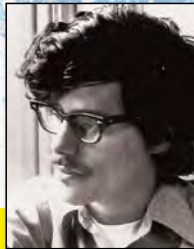
February:

Weird Wonder Tales #22

March:

Doc Savage #8 (black and
white magazine)

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Things looked bleak for comic books throughout the 1970s because of plummeting sell-through rates. With each passing year, the newsstand became less and less interested in selling comic books. The industry seemed locked in a death spiral, but the Powers That Be at DC Comics had an idea to reverse their fortunes. **In 1978, they implemented a bold initiative:** Provide readers with more story pages by increasing the price-point of a regular comic book to make it comparable to other magazines sold on newsstands. Billed as “**The DC Explosion**”, this expansion saw the introduction of numerous creative new titles.

But mere weeks after its launch, DC’s parent company pulled the plug, demanding a drastic decrease in the number of comic books they published, and leaving stacks of completed comic book stories unpublished. The series of massive cutbacks and cancellations quickly became known as “**The DC Implosion.**”

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