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BACKISSUE!

TM



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Volume 1,
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December 2013

**Celebrating
the Best
Comics of
the '70s, '80s,
'90s, and Beyond!**

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BACK ISSUE

Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!



Proudly invites you to join in
The 10th Anniversary Celebration
of

BACK ISSUE

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FlashBack!

THE HOUSE OF IDEAS' HERCULEAN 100th ISSUES!! MIGHTY MARVEL CELEBRATES IN STYLE

by Jerry Boyd



Those Merry Marchin' Marvels

Marvel's heroes take over the world in this 1969 promo piece drawn by "Mirthful" Marie Severin, sent to us by this article's writer, Jerry Boyd—and colored by *BI* designer Rich Fowlks.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

It was a wave of excitement that never seemed to relax or relent—that was Marvel Comics in the 1960s. Redefining the superhero genre (and not doing too shabbily with its teen humor and Western titles, also), "Smiling" Stan Lee and his more-than-capable artisans pioneered the ocean depths, the Earth's interior, other worlds, the edges of outer space, and adjoining dimensions.

In a time fraught with changes—a war raging in Southeast Asia, marches and counter-marches, the assassinations of socio-political architects, pop art, color television, and diversification in the phenomenon known widely as rock 'n' roll—Marvelmania emerged. It was its own "power trip," and working through its own playbook it "dwarfed" the biggest events in the real world (while respectfully and sensitively incorporating some of them into its mythology). During the '60s, real-world figures could die or be voted out of office, and space missions could succeed or fail, but Marvel's larger cast of heroes, villains, and supporting characters

had shown enough popularity to solidly move into the 1970s. And we fans loved it! How would Stan, Jack, Roy, Jim, Gil, "Jazzy" John, Marie, Sal, Herb, Gary, Dan, Larry, and "Big" John (just to drop a few names) dazzle us as a new decade loomed ahead? The year 1970 was about to begin and the fabulous *Fantastic Four*, flagship title of the company and the jumping-off point for all modern "masked Marvels," would celebrate its 100th issue. More excitement was definitely on the way...

MARVELOUS MOMENTS!!

Before we jump into the Fantasti-Car in search of adventure and analysis, it behooves us to concentrate briefly on what was termed "the Mighty Marvel Manner." That phrase graced many a cover and splash page in the 1960s, and it came to mean not only a stylish approach to superhero storytelling, but a way of working between collaborators.

Stan Lee had a Baxter Building full of comics to edit, write, give suggestions to, and look over for art or production discrepancies. Lee had talks with those who wanted to use his characters for cartoons, games, puzzles, buttons, paperbacks, etc. He hired new talent as well. With a full plate always before him, Stan sometimes let his talented co-plotters have their way if he felt their changes/suggestions/concepts were better than his. Jack "King" Kirby (and "King" proved to be an underwhelming title in light of Mr. Kirby's unleashed imagination, as most of us know) came up with a veritable army of characters replete with the coolest superhero costumes imaginable. Most of these costumes haven't been improved upon since their inception. Marvel hired enthusiastic but knowledgeable youngsters like Gary Friedrich, Roy Thomas, Barry Smith, and Jim Steranko. Then there were solid veterans like Kirby, John Buscema, Steve Ditko, Larry Lieber, John Romita, and Marie Severin. It all worked. The House of Ideas was a star-spanning party, and aspiring young talents and tested veterans wanted to be a part of the company's ever-expanding dimensions.

Stan would reportedly get caught up in the wonderful wildness of it all when he collaborated with his artists—leaping onto his desk and acting out how Thor or Iron Man or the Thing would perform a particular action. A few offices away, Marvel publisher Martin Goodman had to be pleased. He'd hit marvelous heights before in the '40s with his own Big Three—Captain America, the Sub-Mariner, and the Human Torch. These men of mystery and others had patriotically marched, run, or flown off to face the Axis aggressors, and sales during the war years were every good. Trends changed after World War II, and sales slumped on most costumed-crimefighter books. Very few titles, regardless of genre, would get to see their 100th issues. No one really minded; it was just the way things were. Books like DC's *All Star Comics* simply morphed into *All Star Western* and would mosey along to the new trend that favored gunslingers. But Goodman's *Kid Colt*, *Outlaw* and *Millie the Model* would quietly move up and past their centennial issues.

Largely, these were exceptions to the rule. Trends dictated where publishers needed to look next. Funny animals, funny teens/working girls, sci-fi aliens/space explorers, cops and robbers, horror-hosted stories, soldier boys, etc.—if readers wanted them, they'd be available. Martin Goodman provided titles for all of these genres. However, for the Marvel Age of Comics, a new sensation had taken root and created, as Stan called them, "the new breed of Marvel reader."

His co-creations were allowed to evolve. They reveled in their powers, sometimes hated them, and improved on them through endurance tests and scientific growth. They had romantic ups and downs, sometimes married, or found new mates. Their problems ran the gamut. Spider-Man had his amazing abilities negated by the common cold; he also broke an arm and believed his radioactive blood was killing him.

Geez, wasn't crashing our wedding enough for you jerks??

Villains line up, but our heroes just knock 'em down! Lee/Kirby/Sinnott showed us how it was done on page 14 of *FF* #100.

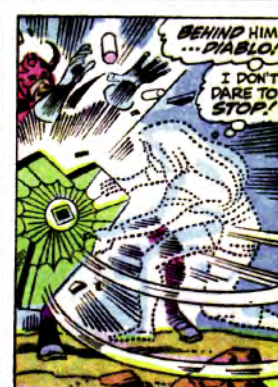
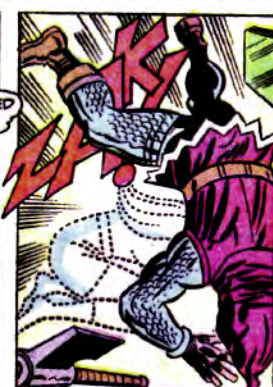
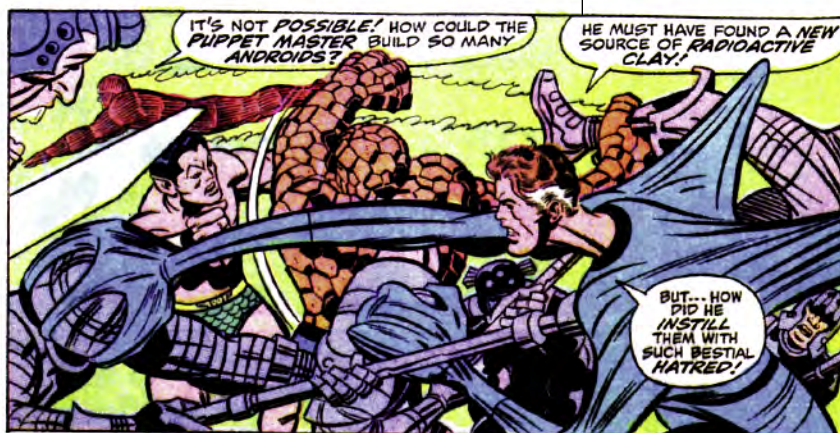
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Stan the Man

Stan Lee and his smile of sweet success in this Marvel office photo taken in 1970. Courtesy of Jerry Boyd.

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Throughout this anniversary issue of BACK ISSUE you are going to read, or most likely have already read, some stirring accounts of many of the best anniversary issues that the Bronze Age of Comics has to offer. This article, I am politely forewarning you, is going to be different.

Yes, I, too, have a small wealth of DC anniversary issues to present and discuss, but there is an intriguing, disparate side to them that slowly unveiled itself as I perused and researched the individual books. While mostly celebratory issues, these comics still, in one way or another, go against the grain of traditional comic-book anniversaries. They are, in order of publication, *Our Army at War* #200 (Dec. 1968), *House of Mystery* #200 (Mar. 1972), *House of Secrets* #100 (Sept. 1972), *Star Spangled War Stories* #200 (June–July 1976), *Our Army at War* #300 (Jan. 1977), *G.I. Combat* #200 (Mar. 1977), *The Unexpected* #200 (July 1980), *Ghosts* #100 (May 1981), *Weird War Tales* #100 (June 1981), *House of Mystery* #300 (Jan. 1982), *Sgt. Rock* #400 (May 1985), and *The Warlord* #100 (Dec. 1985). Quite the eclectic bunch: five mystery comics, five war comics, one war and mystery comic, and an adventure comic thrown in to make it an even dozen.

So sit right back, relax, and enjoy this brief respite from superhero universes as we explore other comic-book genres, and I explain what makes these anniversary issues also “antversary” issues.

OUR ARMY AT WAR #200 (Dec. 1968)

Editor: Joe Kubert

If you take away the “200th Anniversary Issue” banner from the cover of *Our Army at War* #200, then the book becomes no different than any other issue of OAAW. While “The Troubadour” is a fine Sgt. Rock and Easy Company story (set during World War II, as are all Rock stories by Robert Kanigher), equally good are OAAW #199’s “Nazi Ghost-Wolf” and OAAW #201’s “The Graffiti Writer.”



The short, somewhat amusing comic strips, the two-page Battle Album, and the backup tale (in this

At the Earth’s Core

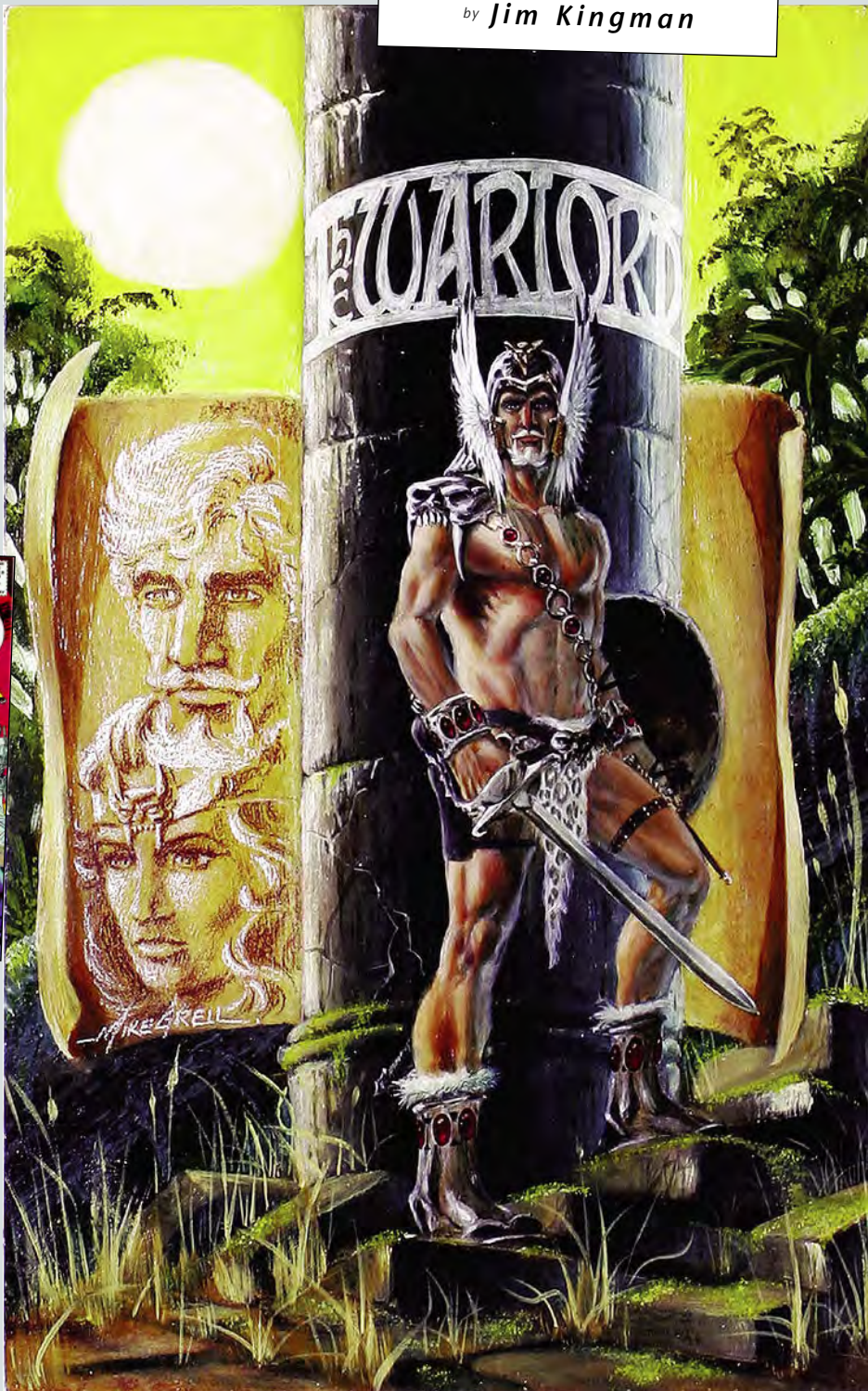
Although we ran this in black and white way back in *BI* #25, here’s another look—in glorious color—at Mike Grell’s cover painting for *The Warlord* #100 (Dec. 1985). Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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THE ANTI-ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

WHY SOME DC ANNIVERSARY ISSUES FROM THE BRONZE AGE OF COMICS DO NOT ALWAYS SEEM LIKE ANNIVERSARY ISSUES

by Jim Kingman



case, "The Ace and the Joker," with art by George Evans and set during World War I) were all ongoing features. There is a Sgt. Rock and Easy Company pinup page by Kubert, but it's not touted as part of the anniversary, and could have appeared as a bonus in any issue.

Interesting, though, is the letters column, where a number of readers wrote in to point out and scold editor Kubert that OAAW #197's Rock story, "Last Exit for Easy," should not have had Easy Company and the Kid Guerillas (children in combat) of Unit 3 at Dunkirk in 1940 as the United States did not enter the war until 1941.

HOUSE OF MYSTERY #200 (Mar. 1972)

Editor: Joe Orlando

This issue and the one following it, *House of Secrets* #100, are prime examples of "antiversary" issues. There are no "anniversary" announcements on either cover. One book quickly acknowledges its anniversary on the splash page; the other makes no mention of it at all. Still, they are both special, because at this point every mystery book published at DC was special.

The easing of some restrictions in the Comics Code Authority in 1971 allowed DC's mystery comics—essentially a horror line, but "horror" was still a no-no term—an edge they hadn't had in years. Also that year, DC had started recruiting a number of talented Filipino illustrators who were beginning to make an impressive artistic impact in 1972.

House of Mystery #200 and *House of Secrets* #100 are fine models of a mystery line just entering its peak, an impressive creative plateau that sustained itself unquestionably for three years, arguably five.

Similar to *Our Army at War* #200, if you remove the opening line of Cain's introduction on the splash page, where he welcomes readers to the 200th issue of *House of Mystery*, the book is no different in style and mood than *HOM* #199 or 201. Different stories, of course, but they're interchangeable; for example, *HOM* #201's "The Demon Within," a classic tale climaxing with the lobotomy of a young boy who has been terrorizing the neighborhood as a demon, could just as easily been published in #200.

The first tale in *HOM* #200, "The Beast's Revenge," with art by Michael W. Kaluta, is certainly anniversary-worthy material. While Kaluta's seductive, atmospheric artwork appeared frequently on DC's mystery line covers throughout the 1970s, it was rare for him to pencil and ink an interior horror story (although his exquisite work could be found at that time on "Carson of Venus" in the back of DC's *Korak, Son of Tarzan*). Kaluta's art enhances the simple tale of a brother's evil desire to rid himself of his sister to acquire the family land. But here's the twist: The woman is peacefully at one with the animals, not only those on the farm, but also with the mountain lion that lives in the hills nearby and the rats that the brother has hidden under the hay in the barn. Though John, the brother, has planned an elaborate scheme to murder his sister, an argument between the two gets violently out of hand and the sister is killed sooner than expected. This does not sit too well with the animals, and try as he may to escape them, John does not make it through the night. This seven-page story is briskly paced, with excellent dialogue. And for the reader there's a true mystery—who wrote the story, as no credit is given.

"I remember the job," chimes in Kaluta. "The only memorable point for me: it was my first-ever comic-book cover!"



MICHAEL W. KALUTA



In the Doghouse

The Michael W. Kaluta-drawn "The Beast's Revenge" made the otherwise ordinary 200th issue of *House of Mystery* a special edition indeed. Although uncredited in the comic, the story's scribe, according to the Grand Comic-Book Database (www.comics.org), is John Albano.

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In the final issue of the series 52, Booster Gold and Rip Hunter witness the birth of the new multiverse. To Booster, the aligning of the 52 parallel Earths appears as if they are disappearing. Rip, however, clarifies the situation by explaining, "You're only seeing what your brain can comprehend."

That's the way the human mind works; it protects us from things that would fracture our psyches. This is not limited to perceiving parallel Earths aligning or Lovecraftian horrors arriving from space. Even something seemingly mundane is capable of breaking people who are ill-equipped to handle it. For this reason, there were many who simply could not acknowledge that George Lucas would craft a trilogy that begins with tariff negotiations, continues with racist caricatures, and concludes with repeated use of the word "younglings." These were people who for the most part grudgingly accepted Ewoks, but Midi-chlorians were more than they could handle. In order to protect these aficionados' brains from exploding, their minds do not permit them to perceive *Star Wars* I-III. As far as these fans are aware, episodes IV-VI are the only *Star Wars* movies ever made. (See also: *Matrix 2-3*, *Indiana Jones and the Crystal Skull*, *Batman Forever*, et al.)

For similar reasons, many comics fan are incapable of perceiving *Adventure Comics* #400 (Dec. 1970). As far as they can tell, that issue was skipped, never to be brought into existence. For the sake of your brain, I implore you: Do NOT read this article if you can't handle the truth!

The audience having been warned, let us now examine Supergirl's epic battle against her greatest enemies: the Black Flame and three Z-list villains never seen before or since!

Our tale begins with Supergirl sewing one of the many variations of her costume that she wore in those days. A newscaster announced an urgent message for Supergirl, flashing an address and phone number on the screen at subliminal speed (because newscasters typically do such things upon the request of anonymous parties). Anyway, Supergirl rushed to the address, where a trap lay waiting.

Supergirl's enemy Zora, a.k.a. "the Black Flame," had escaped from her imprisonment in Kandor. So far so good. Now things start going downhill at an increasingly rapid pace. The first thing Zora did was to steal a "space flyer." (Kandor had spaceships? Krypton really could have used more of those!) We are not shown Zora escaping from the bottle in which Kandor was kept, nor are we shown how she enlarged herself to human size. We *are* shown that she took her space flyer to the Phantom Zone. Or did she?

As readers of the Superman family of comics know, the Phantom Zone was a dimension where Kryptonians sent their most dangerous criminals. There, the convicted existed as immaterial wraiths. Zora flew her ship to a planet, where "the criminals of many galaxy's (sic) are kept." Once there, she "blasted the guard bubble."

Continuity-Free Zone

Supergirl has seen better days. *Adventure Comics* #400 (Dec. 1970); cover by Mike Sekowsky and Dick Giordano.

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ADVENTURE COMICS #400: ...Really?

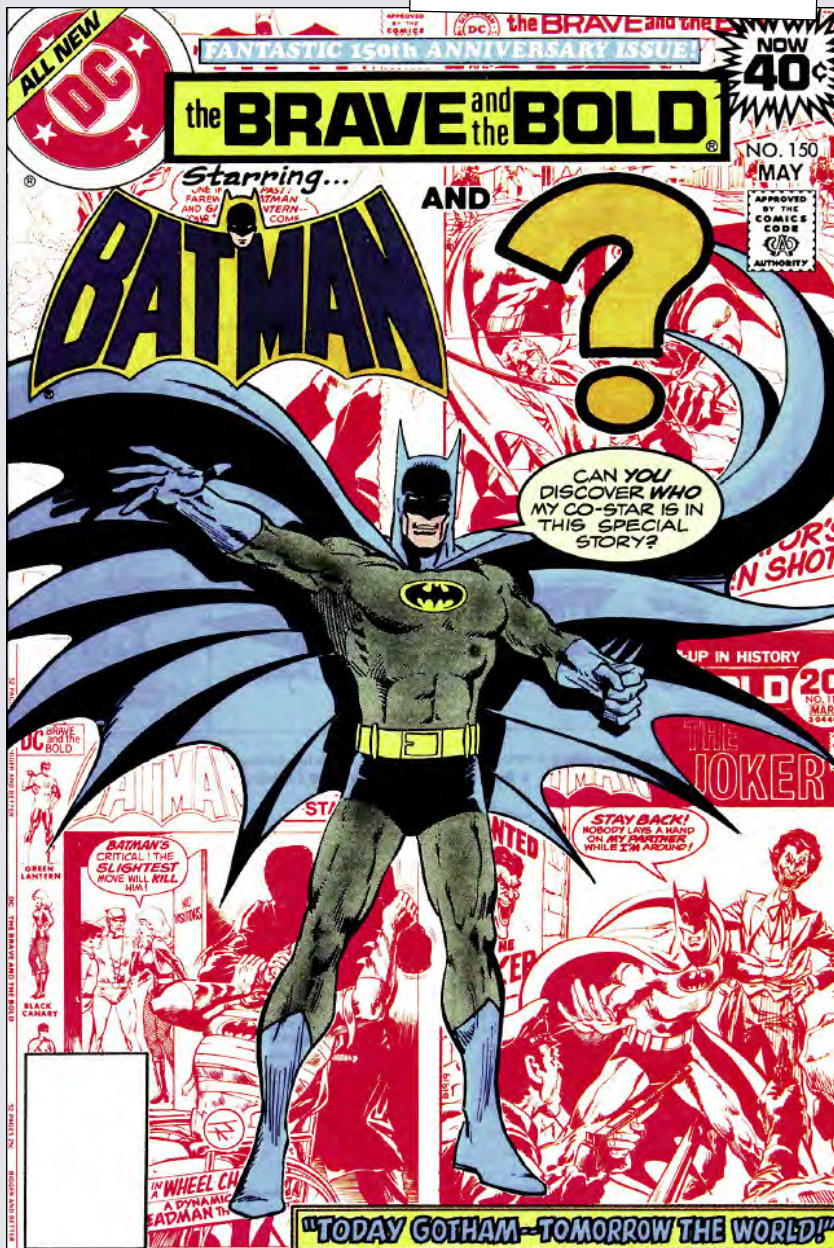
by Jack Abramowitz



the BRAVE and the BOLD

ANNIVERSARY ISSUES

by Michael Eury



Holy Blue Hannah! This anniversary edition of *BACK ISSUE* gives your friendly neighborhood editor-in-chief yet another opportunity to revisit his favorite comics series, *The Brave and the Bold*, best known throughout fandom as the “Batman team-up comic.”

For the record, when *B&B* reached its centennial milestone in late 1971, that did not mark the 100th Batman team-up. When it premiered in 1955, *The Brave and the Bold* was a “high adventure” anthology edited by Robert Kanigher, featuring swashbucklers like the Viking Prince, the Shining Knight, and the Golden Gladiator. It became a tryout title in 1959, most famously launching the Justice League of America, the Silver Age Hawkman, and the Teen Titans. The team-up format kicked off with the Green Arrow and the Manhunter from Mars in 1963’s issue #50, followed by a hodgepodge of cohabitating heroes hopping in and out of the title. Occasional headliner Batman proved the most popular team-up star and as of his first meeting with the Metal Men in 1967’s issue #74, *The Brave and the Bold* officially became “his” series. And so the Batman *B&B* beat began...

THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD #100 (Feb.–Mar. 1972)

Sequestered away in his continuity-free bunker, notorious plotmaster Bob Haney, with his tacit enabler, editor Murray Boltinoff, concocted something truly special for *B&B*’s centennial edition: a team-up of Batman and “4 Famous Co-Stars.” Two of those co-stars were the titular titans from the pages of the critically acclaimed *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series by Denny O’Neil and Neal Adams, with GA’s gal pal Black Canary along for the ride; a crisis in the issue lured Batman’s away-at-college partner, Robin, into the mix to complete the quartet.

“Warrior in a Wheel-Chair,” the second Batman/*B&B* story drawn by Jim Aparo (becoming the series’ regular artist with this issue), opens with a sniper critically wounding the Darknight Detective. With a bullet dangerously caressing Batman’s heart, the hero is confined to a wheelchair and ordered to rest at home while a heart surgeon wings his way to Gotham City. Batman’s convalescence derails his mission of busting up a heroin-smuggling operation, and thus our hero calls into action his 4 Famous Co-Stars, orchestrating their moves via radio.

Haney’s *Ironside-meets-The French Connection* scenario stretches credibility in a few instances, most notably with the wheelchair-bound Batman, his wound bandaged over his costume, commanding his cohorts

Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?

If you don’t know the identity of Batman’s co-star, you’ll discover it once you read this article. Cover to *The Brave and the Bold* #150 (May 1979) by Jim Aparo.

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**Just Another Day
on the Job**

(top) Green Arrow shows no remorse after killing a criminal. From

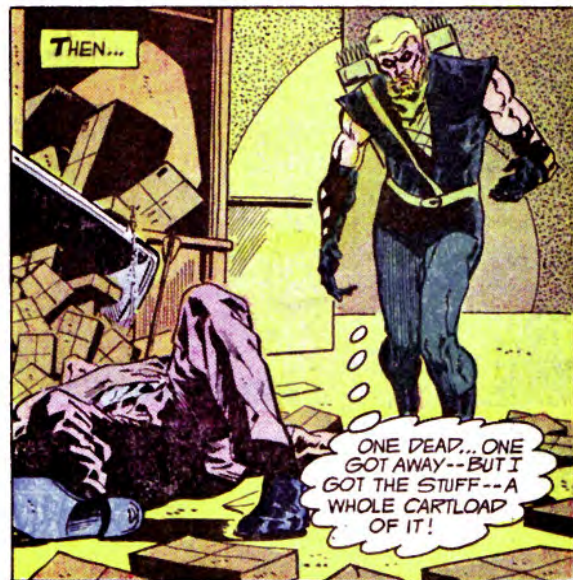
The Brave and the Bold #100. (bottom)

Guess there wasn't room for GL on this crowded but gripping cover by Nick Cardy

for *B&B* #100

(Feb.-Mar. 1972).

TM & © DC Comics.



from the penthouse patio of Bruce Wayne, in plain view of anyone peeking from a neighboring skyscraper. Black Canary is portrayed ridiculously out of character in one scene when she misses a call to duty when primping under a hair dryer. And this tale infamously depicts Green Arrow twanging a shaft into the chest of a drug runner, ho-humming the murder with a cavalier "One dead ... one got away" remark. As mentioned in two recent editions of *BACK ISSUE*, that scene prompted *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* scribe O'Neil to pen a story in response, where a distraught Oliver (GA) Queen goes on a spiritual sojourn after accidentally taking a life.

But that nitpicking aside (other than a mention of GL's gloves being mistakenly colored green throughout the story), "Warrior in a Wheel-Chair" delivers the goods! Aparo is in fine form, ably rendering each of the characters as if he'd been drawing them for years, and Haney's anniversary adventure features a nail-biter of an ending. Published during DC's phase of 52-page comics priced at 25¢, *B&B* #100 included a 13-page *Deadman* reprint from *Strange Adventures* #210, drawn by Neal Adams. While there are no actual special anniversary features, the multi-hero team-up definitely makes #100 special.

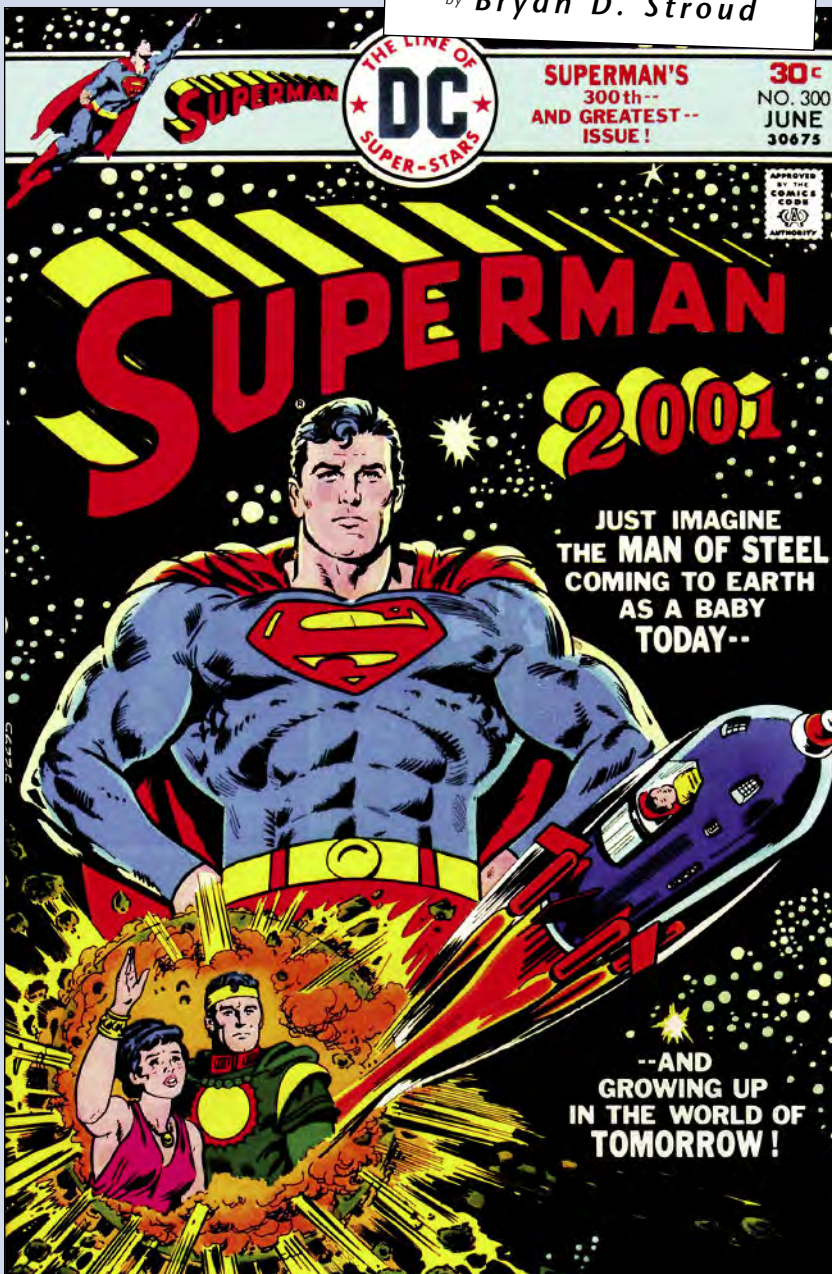
THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD #150 (May 1979)

"Fantastic 150th Anniversary Issue!" touts the copy above *B&B* #150's logo, tantalizing fans with an Aparo-drawn Batman, challenging the reader to guess the identity of his co-star in a team-up billed as "Batman and ?" Behind the Gotham Guardian is a quartet of significant *B&B* covers (in red), depicting four significant moments in Batman's history in the title: issue #59, his very first *B&B* team-up (with Green Lantern); #85, the penultimate issue of Neal Adams' celebrated run on the title, debuting co-star Green Arrow's new look (his beard and updated costume); anniversary edition #100; and #111, featuring the offbeat—but wildly popular—pairing of Batman and his arch-nemesis, the Joker.

With this cover, editor Paul Levitz offers a wistful nod to cover-montage DC anniversary editions of the past, most notably *Batman* #200. Other editorially added touches make this issue truly special, from the splash page's introductory use of *The Brave and the*

SUPERMANTM #300

by *Bryan D. Stroud*



It was a story 37 years in the making. That's how long it took Superman in his self-titled series to go from issue #1 in 1939 to issue #300 in 1976. While America was celebrating the bicentennial, Superman marked the tricentennial of his magazine, and what better way than with an imaginary story? The title: "Superman, 2001!"

The plotline poses the rhetorical question as to what it would be like if baby Kal-El had landed on Earth in the present. With that premise and the Cold War in full swing, the first conflict involves the North Pacific splashdown of the rocket in international waters. The date is February 29th, which is Kal-El's birthday per "Answer Man" and co-editor Bob Rozakis. Naval vessels from both the United States and the USSR were dispatched to intercept, but only one survives the collision of competing recovery helicopters—Navy Lieutenant Thomas Clark.

At a sequestered military base, while the spacecraft is examined a panel opens, revealing a toddler, who quickly displays advanced and otherworldly abilities. Later, "Skyboy" is decked out in a familiar uniform and kept under top-secret wraps.

Fast forwarding into 1990 reveals such innovations as floating seaports and a protective dome over the US Capitol. A woman has been elected president of the United States, but conflict continues with the Soviets, and a major point of contention is the alien visitor, finally acknowledged. Russia demands that the US surrender it as a ward of the United Nations, giving a mysterious third-world power an opening to trigger a third World War. Their method makes it seem that missiles originating in the USSR have been launched against America, and a mirror-image scenario in Moscow appears on their surveillance equipment. Massive retaliatory strikes are ordered and the entire horror unfolds in front of the eyes of the general, who has looked after Skyboy, and Skyboy himself, monitoring at a secret installation. A guilt-ridden Skyboy acts in the only way he sees fit, by singlehandedly stopping the threat. Succeeding, he vanishes, but not before clandestinely attending the funeral of his "father," General Kent Garrett. He silently acknowledges that the world isn't ready for him, so he takes the name of Clark Kent, combining the names of frogman Thomas Clark and Kent Garrett and vowing to keep his secret forever, disposing of the suitcase holding his uniform into a nearby body of water.

Segue to 2001 and the dawn of a new century, where anchorman Clark Kent is helping herald it in. Included in the observance is the merging of the metro area from Boston to Washington, D.C., which is now "Metropolis." However, something is amiss at Times Square.

A four-armed humanoid figure calling itself Moka claims status as a "savior," taking full credit for averting holocaust in 1990. Moka is being operated by the nameless third-world nation.

Superman, 2001

The new millennium seemed distant in 1976 when this anniversary edition was produced. Cover to *Superman* #300 (June 1976) by Curt Swan and Bob Oksner.

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The Battle of the Century

by **Larry Tye**



Jerry Siegel

Joe Shuster

Founding Fathers

Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, as rendered by Shuster in pen and ink in 1942. This piece was originally published in Martin Sheridan's book, *Comics and Their Creators*, in 1942. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

Superman TM & © DC Comics.

[Editor's note: As Superman's 75th anniversary draws to a close, the award-winning author of Superman: The High-Flying History of America's Most Enduring Hero (now available in paperback) shares with BACK ISSUE the story of comics' most contentious "custody" battle in the following excerpt from his book:]

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster's Superman creation story had read like a movie script from the beginning, and the drama didn't end with their deaths in the 1990s.

To Jerry's widow, Joanne, it was a tragedy and after decades of Jerry being the victim now she and her daughter Laura assumed that role. Joanne may have been the model for Lois Lane's looks, but it was Laura who lived Lois' life as an award-winning radio newscaster and talk-show host, TV reporter and anchor, and news and documentary producer. Now Laura had multiple sclerosis and couldn't work, and Joanne was getting old. They notified DC Comics, Warner Bros., and Time Warner in 1997 that they planned to reclaim the copyright Jerry had signed away in 1938 and had tried repeatedly and fruitlessly to grab back over the years. So much for his promise not to sue again, made in 1948 and reaffirmed in 1975. That was before federal laws

made it easier to redress perceived wrongs from the past, and before the Siegels had had two more decades to stew over how shabbily they had been treated. It was Jerry's dying wish that they set things right, his daughter said. What she and her mother wanted was less another lawsuit than the nest egg they felt they deserved. So their attorneys and DC's sat down to talk.

They talked and talked some more. Finally, in the fall of 2001, it looked like the lawyers had agreed on a deal. On October 16, DC set out the general terms of a plan to pay Joanne and Laura nearly \$1 million a year each for the rest of their lives. Three days later, their lawyers signed on. Sensing how near they were to a resolution, DC had already given the Siegels a non-refundable advance of \$250,000, and four months later the company sent them a full-blown agreement. That is when things imploded, although why remains a matter of heated dispute.

"We were stabbed in the back with a shocking contract" that included "new, outrageous demands," Joanne wrote to Time Warner boss Richard Parsons. "The document is a heartless attempt to rewrite the history of Superman's creation and to strip Laura and

While mostly remembered today for its updated revivals of Golden Age superheroes, DC's *Showcase* title actually featured a wide range of different comic-book genres. Introduced in 1956, *Showcase* was an "umbrella" magazine to test concepts on readers while avoiding the need to release several new titles concurrently. At the time, comics were at their lowest ebb; they were widely reviled by the general public, and the once-dominant superhero was almost extinct. *Showcase* was DC's attempt to find "the next big thing" in comics. Ironically, as the first three attempts at new concepts (firemen, animal adventures, and a naval frogman) failed to find a market, it was the superhero that proved most popular with readers and got *Showcase* on a roll with successful features that were later spun off into their own titles.

The most durable characters were new interpretations of Golden Age Justice Society heroes (Flash, Green Lantern, the Atom, the Spectre), while science-fiction heroes (Space Ranger, Adam Strange, Rip Hunter—Time Master) were also popular, as were teams of non-powered adventurers (Challengers of the Unknown, Sea Devils). *Showcase* also provided a platform to spotlight supporting or backup characters such as Aquaman, Lois Lane, Tommy Tomorrow, and Enemy Ace. In its later years, the magazine was used as a springboard for titles that were immediately launched in their own series (*Beware the Creeper*, *The Hawk and the Dove*, *Bat Lash*, *Anthro*, *Angel and the Ape*).

Of course, not all features proved successful, and several issues were composed of reprints. New concepts B'wana Beast, Dolphin, Manhunter 2070, and Nightmaster fared poorly. *Showcase* was canceled with issue #93 in 1970, although the tryout concept was continued in 1975 with *1st Issue Special*, which lasted for 13 issues. In 1977, *Showcase* was revived with issue #94, introducing the New Doom Patrol, followed by a three-part spotlight on the JSA's Power Girl. [Editor's note: Both *1st Issue Special* and the revival of *Showcase* will be featured in *BACK ISSUE* #71, "Tryouts, One-Shots, and One-Hit Wonders."]

CENTENARY ISSUE

To celebrate this important magazine reaching its landmark 100th issue (cover-dated May 1978), editor Joe Orlando suggested a double-length story featuring a number of characters who had made their debut in the first 93 issues of *Showcase*. The first choices for writing the story were Steve Englehart and Len Wein, but when they proved unavailable, the assignment was passed to Paul Levitz. Due to a heavy workload, Levitz was unable to complete the issue, but he wrote a plot outline and then handed it over to Paul Kupperberg, writer of the New Doom Patrol issues. Penciling and inking were done by Joe Staton, who had illustrated the six preceding issues of *Showcase*.

The Gang's All Here...

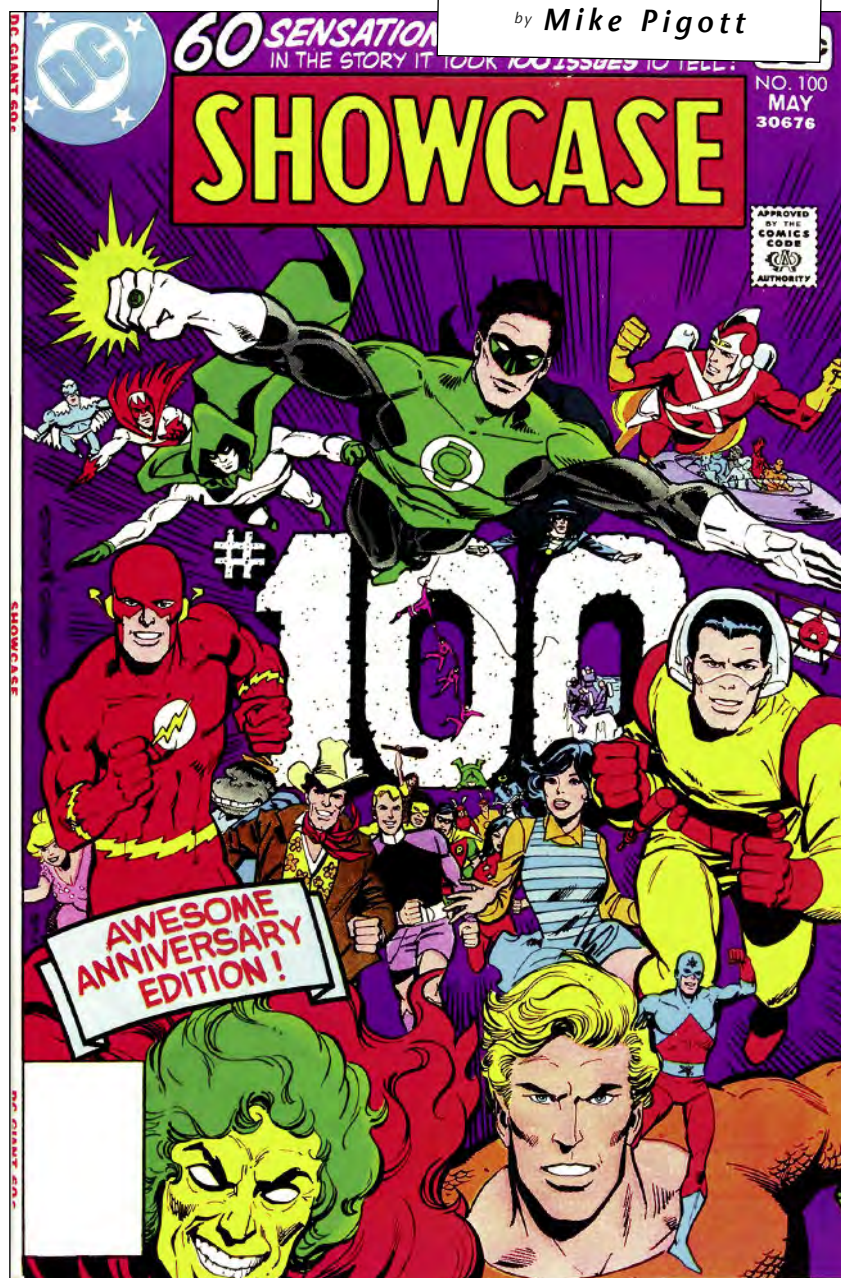
...yep, the Inferior 5, Bat Lash, and Enemy Ace, too. The character-crammed cover of *Showcase* #100 (May 1978), penciled by Joe Staton and inked by Dick Giordano.

TM & © DC Comics.

SHOWCASE™ CENTENARY

A Look at the Landmark 100th Issue of DC's Tryout Comic, *Showcase*

by Mike Pigott



Casper #200

AND RICHIE RICH #200

by Mark Arnold



Anniversary issues of comics publications have now become *de rigueur*. They mark an important milestone, and often much is made of it with a special interior story or at the very least, a cover designation.

HARVEY'S ANNIVERSARY ISSUES

For Harvey Comics Publications, few of their comics made it to the honorary 100-issue mark, and even fewer made it to the 200-issue mark. None made it to 300. The highest number of issues assigned to a Harvey comic was for *Sad Sack Comics*, which ran 287 issues during its original run (a further five issues were published later on by Lorne-Harvey, but the grand total still falls short of 300).

The first Harvey Publication to make it to the 100-issue milestone was *Dick Tracy* in June 1956, but this Harvey series was inherited from Dell as of #25. *Blondie Comics* made it in March 1957, but Harvey inherited it from David McKay with #16. *Joe Palooka* was the first series that originated at Harvey to reach #100, in April 1957.

Over the years, many Harvey titles made it to #100: *Baby Huey*, *Blondie Comics*, *Dagwood Comics*, *Dick Tracy*, *The Friendly Ghost Casper*, *Devil Kids*, *Felix the Cat*, *Harvey Hits*, *Hot Stuff*, *Little Dot*, *Little Lotta*, *Playful Little Audrey*, *Richie Rich*, *Richie Rich Dollars and Cents*, *Richie Rich Millions*, *Richie Rich Success Stories*, *Sad Sack Comics*, *Sad Sack and the Sarge*, and *Spooky*. Special mention must be made to *Richie Rich Diamonds*, which honored its 50th issue on the cover, the only time an honor for an issue #50 was done.

The 100-issue milestone wasn't even mentioned on the covers of *Baby Huey*, *Dick Tracy*, *The Friendly Ghost Casper*, *Harvey Hits*, *Hot Stuff*, *Little Dot*, *Richie Rich*, and *Spooky*. It was just business as usual.

Of those, only *The Friendly Ghost Casper*, *Richie Rich*, and *Sad Sack Comics* made it to #200, and only *Casper* and *Richie Rich* acknowledged the milestone with a story inside.

CASPER #200 (Oct. 1978)

Casper the Friendly Ghost was originally published by St. John. Harvey took over with the sixth issue and continued to publish it until #70. Then, they restarted the series at #1 with the somewhat awkward title of *The Friendly Ghost Casper* after Harvey's purchase of the Casper Paramount animated cartoons. When *The Friendly Ghost Casper* made it to #100 in 1966, nothing much was made of the fact. By #200 in October 1978, the issue was graced with one brand-new story.

This was significant because *The Friendly Ghost Casper* had been in reprints since #173 in May 1974, with only two issues (#179 in May 1975 and #185 in April 1976) featuring new stories, all with a Cub Scout theme.

The first story in *The Friendly Ghost Casper* #200, "The Enchanted Forest Foreman," is brand new. This story

I Ain't Afraid of No Ghosts

A gaggle of specters and witches haunt the cheerful cover of *The Friendly Ghost Casper* #200 (Oct. 1978).

TM & © Harvey Publications.

Fantastic Four #200 (Nov. 1978) and Amazing Spider-Man #200 (Jan. 1980) bring back fond memories for those who have read them. Both books had the same fantastic creative team: writer Marv Wolfman and artist Keith Pollard.

Wolfman was part of a new wave of Marvel writers—including Gerry Conway, Len Wein, and earlier, Roy Thomas—who worked on Stan Lee’s creations in the early 1970s after Stan the Man stopped writing them ... specifically, the two then-flagships of Marvel, *Fantastic Four* and *Amazing Spider-Man*. At that time, the pool of writers was limited, and it was common to see the same person writing both titles.

Yet Marv Wolfman would be the last person for some time to write both series. It would take years before another writer, Tom DeFalco, would write significant runs on both titles, but not at the same time.

Wolfman took over both books from Len Wein, who had decided to go back to DC Comics. As Marv said in Tom DeFalco’s *Comic Book Creators on Spider-Man* (Titan Books, 2004), “I asked Archie [Goodwin, Marvel’s editor-in-chief at the time] for *Fantastic Four* because I really wanted to write it. I loved that book. Archie told me that he would only give me *Fantastic Four* if I would also take *Amazing*. (...) I learned within two issues that I had no facility for writing *Fantastic Four*, and absolutely loved writing *Amazing*.”

WOLFMAN ON FANTASTIC FOUR

His run as writer/editor on *FF* began with a fill-in recap issue (#190, Jan. 1977), and after a few issues plotted by Wein and scripted by other writers, Wolfman took over the book with issue #195 (June 1978) and would stay until issue #216 (Mar. 1980). But he never really enjoyed writing the book, as he told DeFalco: “I think *Fantastic Four* intimidated me because it was my favorite title at Marvel. (...) The frustration of not being able to do what Stan and Jack [Kirby] did was just awful.”

For his debuts, *Fantastic Four* #190 is an odd recap issue, as it re-presents all the times when one of the members left the team. As one reads it, it looks like the *FF* spent most of the 1970s arguing, changing its roster, or losing their powers. But basically, such was the situation when Wolfman took over. The team had split, Reed Richards had lost his powers and taken a job in a research company, the Thing and the Human Torch were living on their own, and Susan Richards was offered a part in a movie in Hollywood.

One of Wolfman’s goals was to write the team with its classic roster, not with the substitute members that transitioned in and out of the group. In the countdown to issue #200 (Nov. 1978), Wolfman reunites the team, adds a mastermind villain (Dr. Doom), gives Reed his powers back, and provides a plot that would permit a grand finale with an epic battle and a memorable victory.

Stretcho Strikes Back

Mr. Fantastic vs. Dr. Doom on the Jack Kirby/ Joe Sinnott cover of *Fantastic Four* #200 (Nov. 1978). The issue’s interior penciler, Keith Pollard—abetted by inker Joe Rubinstein—reimagines this image as the cover of next July’s *BACK ISSUE* #74, our “*Fantastic Four* in the Bronze Age” issue.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

MARV WOLFMAN'S BICENTENNIAL BATTLES

by Franck Martini

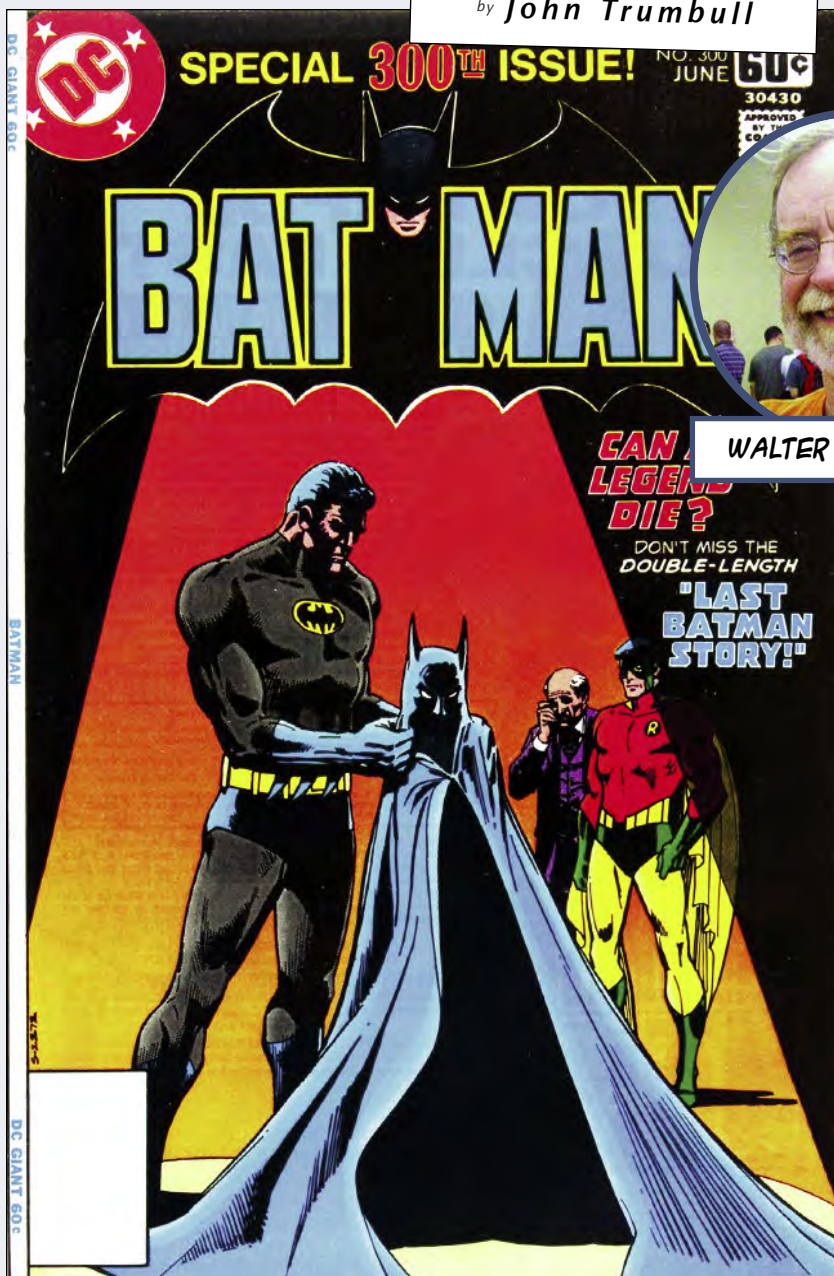


A NEW BEGINNING... AND A PROBABLE END

BAT MAN™

#300 AND #400

by John Trumbull



WALTER SIMONSON

Anniversary issues. They're always a sure bet for a publisher to give you more bang for your buck (much like the issue you're now reading). But with the passage of time, they can also provide an unexpected bonus: a peek into the era in which they were made.

BATMAN #300 (June 1978): "THE LAST BATMAN STORY -- ?"

Like most anniversary issues, 1978's double-sized *Batman* #300 is a reflection of the time in which it was produced: It's a densely plotted standalone story by a single writer and artist team, with editor Julius Schwartz's penchant for scientific trivia peppered throughout. The script is by David V. Reed (an alias for 1950s Batman writer Dave Vern, who returned to the Caped Crusader in the 1970s), with Walter Simonson and Dick Giordano providing the striking visuals for the issue.

Layout artist Walter Simonson recalls how he got the assignment for *Batman* #300: "Initially, Dick Giordano was supposed to pencil and ink the issue. I got a phone call one day, pretty much out of the blue, from Paul Levitz. Paul at that time was kind of the keeper of the schedules. The book was coming up on eight weeks from shipping. Paul wanted to know if I could do layouts that Dick would be able to ink straight from. The book was close enough to deadline that there was some concern of missed shipping. This was before royalties were being offered by companies, so they offered what was then called hazard pay, which meant it was one-and-a-half times your page rate. That was a bonus for doing it and doing it in a hurry, and for helping out DC. I said, 'Sure.' So they sent me David's script, I did the layouts, Dick inked it, and it made it out on time."

Years before *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Batman* #300 offers a glimpse into how Batman might retire. Decades in the future, Gotham City has grown into part of Megalopolis-East, a massive city encompassing most of the East Coast. At Gotham International Airport, the now-adult Robin (in the Neal Adams-designed costume of his Earth-Two counterpart) is supervising the emergency transfer of a comatose patient to Columbia Space Hospital.

When the transfer capsule is attacked by three villains in a helicopter, an aged Batman arrives just in time to save the day. The three attackers are dressed all in blue, with their skin painted to match. When the leader of the blue-man group spontaneously

(Bat-)Man of Tomorrow

Dick Giordano's powerful cover to *Batman* #300 (June 1978). And look—it's another appearance of that awesome 1970s adult Robin costume!

TM & © DC Comics.

Visi-Phoning Gordon

(left) *Batman* #300's depiction of the retired—but still helpful—Commissioner Gordon. Art by Walter Simonson and Dick Giordano. (right) Panels from page 7.

TM & © DC Comics.

combusts, the Dynamic Duo is left mystified as to who's behind it all.

Back at the Batcave underneath the Wayne Foundation Building, Wayne International President Richard Grayson fills in the now-gray-templed Bruce Wayne on the situation: After a mysterious encounter with a bullet-scarred man at a party, Dick is threatened and Wayne International falls victim to several acts of industrial sabotage. Dick hires the intelligence operative Annie Morgan (the patient going to the space hospital) to investigate, but she is only able to get out two cryptic messages before she's discovered and incapacitated.

The Dynamic Duo follow the clues and discovers the existence of a villainous organization with divisions numbering 475 and 760. The 475-Connection's botched attack on Annie Morgan results in her killing being reassigned to 760. After foiling a second assassination attempt on Morgan by red-garbed

assassins at the Columbia Space Station, Batman deduces that 475 and 760 refer to the color wavelengths of blue and red, leading him to the name of the organization—Spectrum. The need to stop them becomes even more critical when Spectrum steals Wayne International's primary computer banks, threatening the crash of the entire Wayne empire.

Aiding the duo in their investigation are Alfred (still a faithful butler even in his twilight years) and a balding Commissioner Gordon (retired in Maine and writing his memoirs), the latter of whom offers some tantalizing teases on the final fates of the Joker, Penguin, Two-Face, Catwoman, and the Riddler.

Ultimately tracking Spectrum to the pueblo cliff dwellings of Colorado's Mesa Verde National Park, an increasingly nostalgic Batman, along with Robin, infiltrates a summit meeting at a natural amphitheater. There, they uncover the real, invisible powers behind the Spectrum organization—villains called Infrared and Ultraviolet. Infrared panics upon their discovery, accidentally setting off the air-mines around he and his partner, killing them instantly. Without their ringleaders, the Spectrum syndicate is brought to justice, and the Wayne data banks are recovered.

In an epilogue at the Wayne Foundation, Bruce finally reveals what's been eating at him for the entire case: He's been asked to run for governor by a political-reform coalition. Discouraged by both his age and the growing mechanization of crimefighting, Bruce tells Dick that he's strongly considering accepting the nomination:

"True, I've gained a measure of vengeance ... and what one man can do, I've done! But now perhaps it's time—in this day and age—and at my age—to continue the fight in another way ... on another front, with other means! And there's something else to consider—the woman I love, and marriage—and perhaps, children ... like those fine twin sons of yours, Bruce and James!

"So ... the fact is, I've thought things out to a point where I have only two questions: One to ask—will she marry me? And one to answer—will I run for governor?"

"And when do I get the answers?" Dick asks.

"Tomorrow!" Bruce snaps back, leaving Dick alone to contemplate the past—and possible future—of Batman and Robin.





DC Comics' *Detective Comics*, the long-running title from which the company took its name, didn't begin celebrating anniversaries until issue #387 (May 1969). There, marking the 30th anniversary of the Caped Crusader, the influence of the fans was clear as letter-hack-turned-writer Mike Friedrich retold Batman's first adventure, "The Case of the Chemical Syndicate," under the title "The Cry of the Night is—'Sudden Death!'" Friedrich and artists Bob Brown and Joe Giella took 17 pages to cover the same territory that Bill Finger and Bob Kane mined in the first six-page Batman story, which was handily reprinted in the same issue.

A few years later, editor Julie Schwartz used the occasion of *Tec* #400 (June 1970) to usher in a brand-new foe, using a variation on the title character's name. Writer Frank Robbins and artist Neal Adams introduced Kirk Langstrom, a.k.a. Man-Bat, who caught on with the fans and has remained a fixture ever since. Oddly, #450 (Aug. 1975) was a fairly ordinary issue, as Schwartz was clearly losing interest in Batman. Four years later, he opted to retain the Superman titles, letting rising editor Paul Levitz inherit the keys to the Batcave. In fairly short order, the young editor revamped *Detective* and *Batman*, and for the first time ensured that *The Brave and the Bold* would be consistent with current events in Gotham City.

As the company's editorial coordinator as well as editing a handful of titles, Levitz noted that *Detective Comics* #500 was rapidly approaching the horizon and set to work. While the handful of earlier anniversary issues were fun events, Levitz wanted to make this one extraordinary. By 1980, comics shops and the direct-sales market had grown deep roots, and publishers knew they could cater a bit to the fans. As a result, Paul received approval for the most momentous anniversary issue the company had ever attempted: an 80-page, squarebound book without ads, selling for a whopping \$1.50, three times the price for a normal issue.

With the book carrying a March 1981 cover date, it had a December 22, 1980 on-sale date, meaning it was shipping from World Color Press in Sparta, Illinois, around Thanksgiving. Paul had to close editorial production on this mammoth book in early October, but being the hyper-organized person he is, work was well underway in the spring.

When I arrived at DC's 75 Rockefeller Plaza offices in June 1980, I was there on a temporary basis. I had graduated college a few weeks before, but my job at Starlog Press wasn't going to start until September, so Paul kindly hired me on to do some work that needed doing. It resulted in a hodgepodge of assignments, usually starting every morning as Karen Berger, his assistant editorial coordinator, handed me the lettered pages that had arrived (some from freelance production artists, plus a

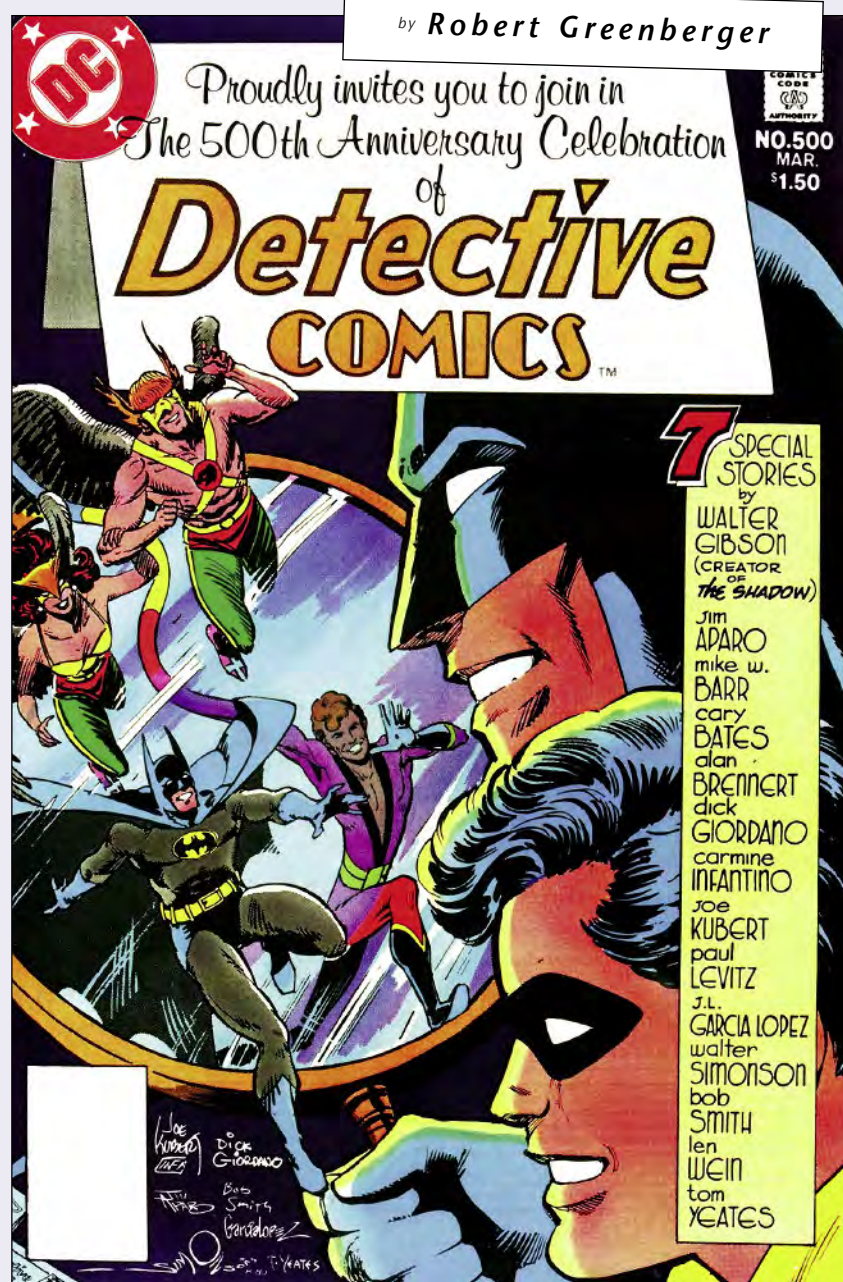
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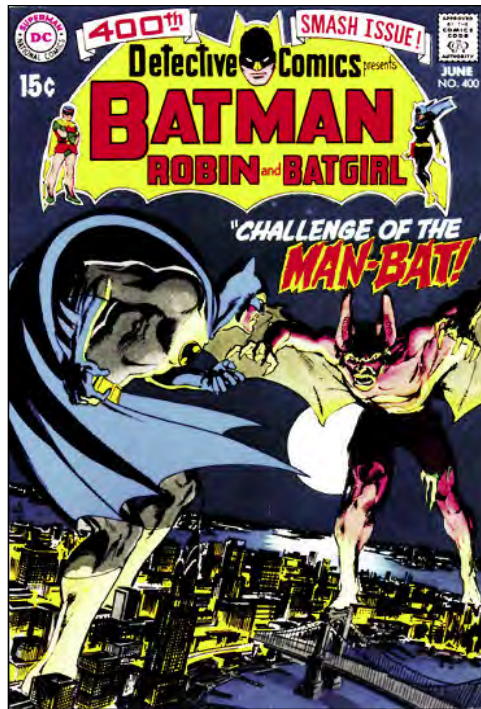
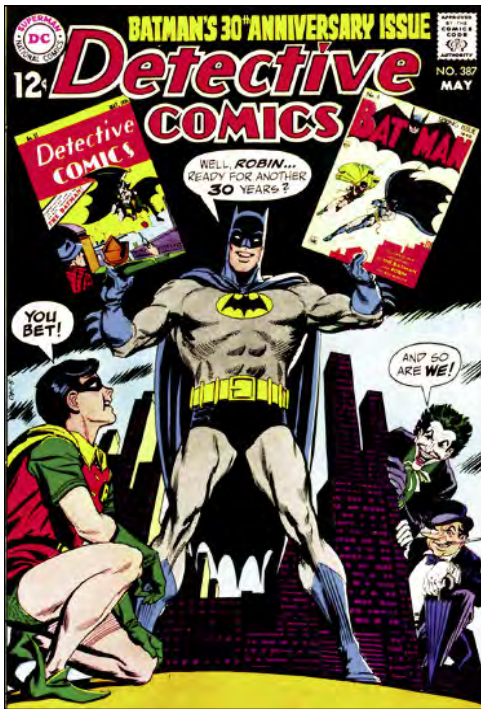
The interior artists of *Detective Comics* #500 (Mar. 1981) also provided its jam cover.

TM & © DC Comics.

Memories of **Detective** **COMICS #500**

by Robert Greenberger





Gotham Anniversaries
 (top left) As the Silver Age was winding down, *Detective Comics* #387 (May 1969) celebrated Batman's 30th anniversary. Cover by Irv Novick. (top right) Issue #400 (June 1970) did little to toast its milestone numbering, but it did introduce the first new Bat-"villain" of the Bronze Age, Man-Bat. Cover by Neal Adams. (below) Screenwriter and novelist Alan Brennert penned one of his few DC stories for 'Tec #500, "To Kill a Legend," illustrated by Dick Giordano.

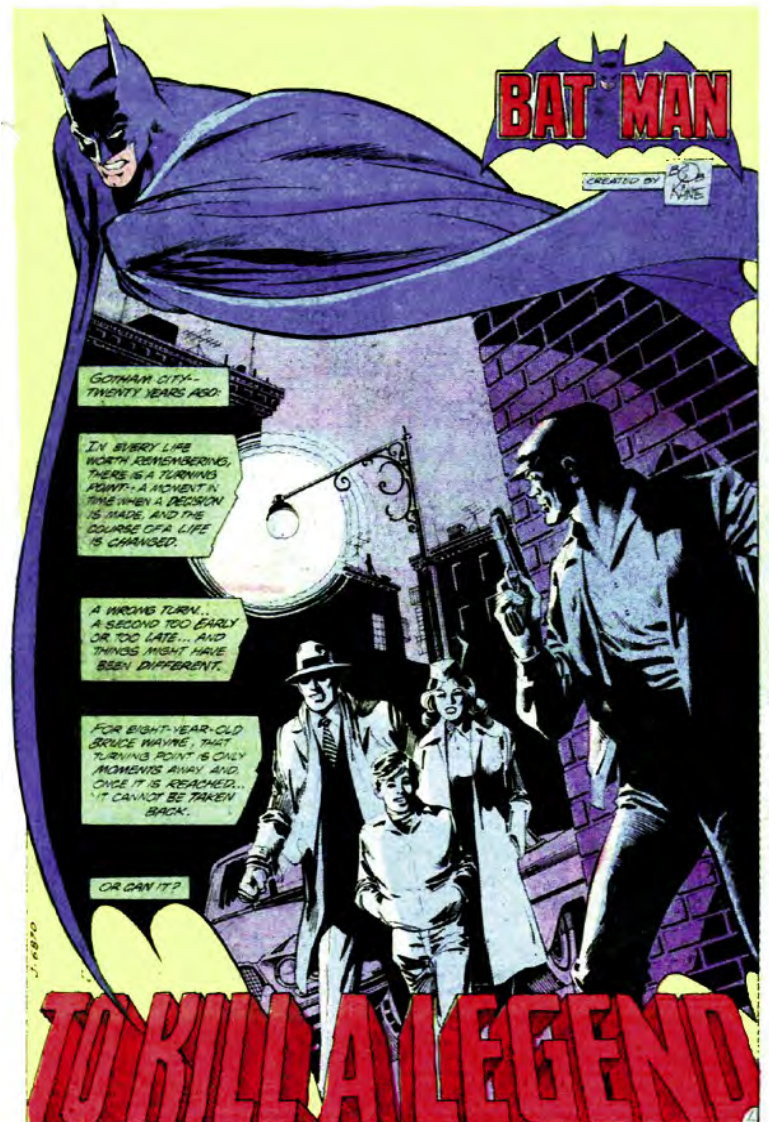
TM & © DC Comics.

huge stack from legendary letterer Ben Oda, who had labored deep into the night at a drawing table). These were copies of penciled-and-lettered pages as a hedge against pages getting lost. I was also charged with reading everything in the print library to help create what became the company's first property catalogue. Thankfully, I was housed in a centrally located (tiny) office, with two desks jammed against one another. The other desk was occupied by another temp, a guy president Jenette Kahn hired weeks earlier to help her plan a 40th-anniversary celebration for Wonder Woman: Andy Helfer and I were the same age and shared the space quite happily.

With most of the freelance talent at that time residing in the tri-state area, this meant we met many of the writers and artists we admired since childhood. Every Friday, writer Bob Haney would come in to deliver scripts and regaled the two of us with stories late into the afternoon. Up-and-coming writer [J. M.] Marc DeMatteis was also hanging out with us when he visited, so we got to see both ends of the spectrum, of writers seasoned and new. Across from us was Murray Boltinoff's office, and at least once a week the halls were filled with the rising voices between the veteran editor and Bob Kanigher, the prolific writer. They'd be arguing over stories and editorial decisions Boltinoff made to Kanigher's work, but it also gave us an insight into the process.

Soon after arriving, if memory serves, we had a special guest visitor to the offices. Walter Gibson, the pulp writer who turned radio's unseen narrator of Street & Smith's *Detective Story Hour* into the two-gunned crimefighter The Shadow, was delivering his anniversary contribution to *Detective* #500. Levitz, a fan of Gibson's *Shadow* pulps thanks to the paperback reprints in the 1960s and early 1970s, thought it would be fun if the writer provided a prose Batman tale for the book. While Batman and The Shadow met twice in 1973, Gibson was not involved in those stories. Gibson, 82 at the time, was introduced around to everyone, including the young "interns" (or whatever we were dubbed).

It meant, though, that we'd be pulled off assignment du jour for whatever needed doing *right then* on *Detective* #500. On more than one occasion, Paul would grab me after lunch and hand me a package. Within was the wrap-around cover to the issue that was going to be a jam piece from all the interior artists. Someone, possibly Ross Andru, who was in the offices daily, worked out the layout, and Levitz carefully saw to it that each character and artist had space while keeping with the title's theme. Back in the pre-Federal Express days, that meant I was dispatched to the



For collectors who like milestone issues, *The Flash* #300, which was released in 1981, is a double-sized dose of super-speedy goodness. Not only does it celebrate the nice, round figure of 300 issues, it's also the 25th anniversary issue for Barry Allen, the Silver Age Flash, who first appeared in *Showcase* #4 in a story called "Mystery of the Human Thunderbolt."

Showcase #4, which revived the superhero genre, introduced Barry as a police scientist on his lunch break, reading an old issue of *Flash Comics* that starred the original Golden Age Flash, Jay Garrick. After returning to his workstation after lunch, a bolt of lightning streaks through a nearby window, dousing Barry with chemicals and giving him super-speed.

Inspired by the original Flash, Barry quickly designs a costume and starts fighting crime; the Turtle Man, a.k.a. the Slowest Man on Earth, is the first supervillain he battles. Thus, the Silver Age of Comics is born.

The Flash #300 (Aug. 1981) retells Barry's origin in a story entitled "1981: A Flash Odyssey." However, rather than simply rehashing the events, it adds an overriding element of drama. Instead of granting him superpowers, the chemicals have burned Barry horribly from head to toe and trapped him in a suspended state of paralysis.

Barry is confined to bed. His mind is largely unaffected, but he can't move. His loving parents bring him reading material, including issues of *Flash Comics* he enjoyed as a child.

Barry becomes the Flash, but only in his mind, as the psychiatrist counseling him reveals: "This 'Flash' character had been something of a boyhood idol of yours ... you often used to run around your backyard in a crude, makeshift Flash costume ... imagining and pretending what it would be like to have the same impossible speed as your hero ... your subconscious blotted out your perception of reality long ago as a defense mechanism for coping with the unbearable immobility and stagnation of total paralysis ... you have to face reality again, Barry Allen ... the Flash must die!"

As Barry lies helpless, pondering his predicament, he can only assume he's not crazy, given the erratic and scheming nature of his foes—he knows someone must be the "mastermind behind this hoax." After recalling how Jay's origin is so similar to his own, Barry begins wondering which of his rogues has put him in such a bind.

This ingenious plot device gives readers a look at the origins of Mirror Master, Pied Piper, Captain Boomerang, Weather Wizard, Abra Kadabra, Heat

Running the Gauntlet

The Carmine Infantino/Dick Giordano cover to *The Flash* #300 (Aug. 1981).

TM & © DC Comics.

The FLASH #300

by Brett Weiss

DOUBLE-SIZED SPECTACULAR!

THE 25th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE OF...

AUGUST \$1.00 NO. 300

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

The FLASH

The FASTEST MAN ALIVE!

NO ADS!

2 COMICS IN 1!
DC
DOUBLE THE THRILLS!

**THIS IS IT!
A THRILLING
300th ISSUE
EXTRAVAGANZA!**



CARY BATES

NIGHTMARES AND DREAMSCAPES: The Highlights and Horrors of

WONDER WOMAN #300

by **Andy Mangels**



FlashBack!

As comicdom's preeminent superheroine, Wonder Woman may have been the ninth DC Comics character to celebrate their 300th issue, but she was the first one to celebrate a tricenennial with a killer bout of narcolepsy, a new daughter, and a runaway groom.

Although she had been published longer than most other long-running series—since 1942 and throughout the Golden Age, the Amazing Amazon had appeared regularly in not only *Wonder Woman*, but also *Sensation Comics* and *Comics Cavalcade*—due to a mostly bimonthly publishing schedule, Wonder Woman didn't reach her 300th issue until the cover-date of February 1983. By that time, the Lynda Carter-starring TV series was long into a cycle of syndicated reruns, and even the long-running *Super Friends* cartoon was in its waning years. In the comics and licensed products, Wonder Woman had been rebranded only a year prior, in *DC Comics Presents* #41 (Jan. 1982) and *Wonder Woman* #288 (Feb. 1982), exchanging her golden-eagle bodice design for a more logo-friendly double-W design [see *BACK ISSUE* #57]. Those stories were crafted by longtime comics scribe Roy Thomas, but he exited the book with #296 (Oct. 1982), leaving it in the hands of scripters Paul Kupperburg and Dan Mishkin.

Today, Roy recalls that there was nothing significant about Wonder Woman as she existed in that *current* DC Universe that called to him: "I liked Wonder Woman as she had been back in the latter 1940s when I was first reading the book, and felt she and I could both benefit from our getting together. I didn't lobby to do the book, though ... I was asked to do so by DC." After Thomas left, he was asked to return to the series for the 72-page anniversary issue. The move, he says, "surprised me, since I had left the book several issues earlier because of my dissatisfaction [see *Alter Ego* #100]. I don't recall being asked to work in anything particularly, just to make it special. They were rather non-directive, which was fine by me."

The story Roy crafted, with his wife Dann Thomas, was an eight-chapter mini-epic that didn't arise out of any current storyline, but was hardly standalone given the topics it covered. In the tale, titled "Beautiful Dreamer, Death Unto Thee!," Wonder Woman is plagued by nightmares and a recurring battle against a menacing shadowy figure. Arriving to help her battle the dream monster is the Bronze Age Jack Kirby/Joe Simon Sandman character, who had not been seen since his few 1970s appearances. In the process of helping her, Sandman reveals that he's been viewing her sleeping from the dream world, and exhibits a not-so-coded attraction to the heroine.

Back in the waking world, the Amazon's alter ego, Diana Prince, is given a promotion to major by Gen. Darnell, but despite the excitement, either as Diana or as Wonder Woman, she cannot stay awake. During another

Capitol Improvement

The Amazon Princess and friends soar over Washington, D.C., on the Ed Hannigan/Dick Giordano cover to *Wonder Woman* #300 (Feb. 1983).

TM & © DC Comics.

What do you get when you combine the two bestselling characters in the DC Universe? The answer is World's Finest Comics.

The series began as World's Best Comics #1 (Spring 1941), with Superman and Batman (with Robin) presented in their own solo stories; this format didn't change until issue #71 in 1954, when the heroes' features were combined into one. Superman and Batman had encountered each other before, most notably in Superman #76 (May 1952), and they were shown together from time to time in the Justice Society stories featured in All Star Comics.

In early 1970s, Batman stepped aside from most issues of World's Finest Comics as the title became a team-up magazine featuring Superman and other DC characters in a format similar to The Brave and the Bold, which featured Batman team-ups. This change did not last long, and soon the Superman/Batman team-ups returned until the end of the World's Finest series. [Editor's note: Superman would get his own team-up book with DC Comics Presents #1, July-Aug. 1978. For the full story behind Superman's team-ups, see BACK ISSUE #66.]

In 1983, World's Finest Comics celebrated its 300th issue with a multi-chapter, multi-guest-star story spanning time and space. The storyline began in World's Finest Comics #296 (Oct. 1983) and, in a small way, Batman and the Outsiders #1 (Aug. 1983). BATO #1 featured events that fractured the Batman/Superman friendship when Batman left the Justice League to form the Outsiders due to Superman's decision not to become involved with a foreign war in Markovia, home of Outsiders member Geo-Force. The first few issues of the BATO series focused on the problem, but left Superman and Batman at odds for the first time in their long history.

Writer **David Anthony Kraft**, famous for his magazine Comics Interview as well as many scripts for both DC and Marvel Comics, originated the WFC anniversary edition's story of an overpopulated world making an aggressive move to take over Earth through the transformation of five humans into the Pantheon. Also involved was **Mike W. Barr**, writer and co-creator of Batman and the Outsiders. Writer Marv Wolfman joined the festivities with a sequence involving his fan-favorite title, The New Teen Titans.

In the pages that follow, Kraft is interviewed about World's Finest's tricentennial issue, and Barr kindly shares his recollections as well.

— Randall C. Wiggins

RANDALL WIGGINS: *The storyline that leads from World's Finest #296 to 300 (Feb. 1984) is very unusual, but entertaining. How did you develop that story?*

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: A friend of mine was the editor, Roger Slifer. We started at Marvel on the same day and had worked together and so on. When he went to DC to edit *World's Finest*, he needed a fill-in issue because somebody was late or something. He offered me the opportunity to script Superman and Batman—how could I resist? And, very deceptively,

Your Two Favorite Heroes—Together!

...Actually, *apart*, due to a difference of opinion. The Ed Hannigan/Dick Giordano cover to *World's Finest Comics* #300 (Feb. 1984).

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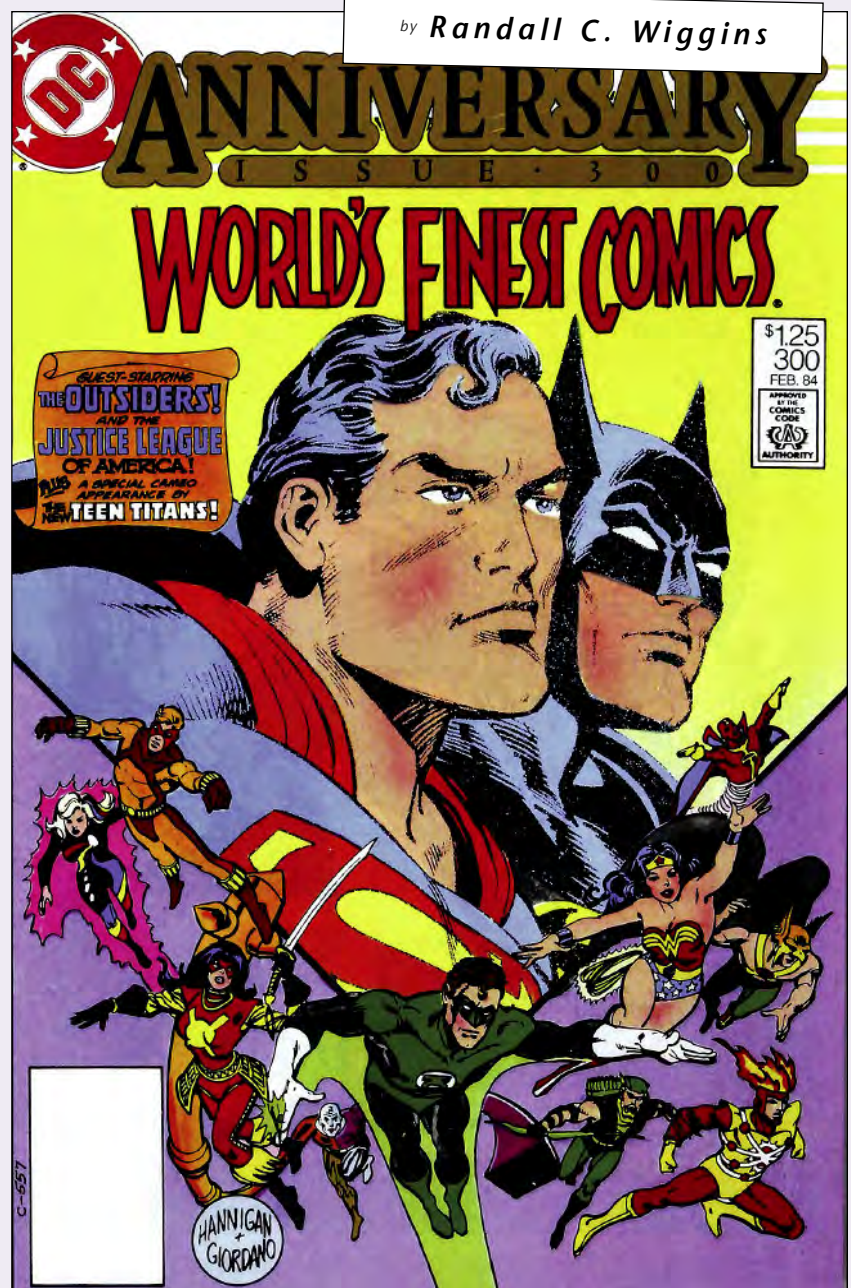
WORLD'S FINEST COMICS™

#300:

AN EPIC

IN THE MAKING

by **Randall C. Wiggins**



EMERALD REBIRTH

THE STORY BEHIND



GREEN LANTERN™

#200

by Daniel DeAngelo



STEVE ENGLEHART

Nineteen-eighty-five was a year of big changes for DC Comics as the company celebrated its 50th anniversary with the Crisis on Infinite Earths crossover series. Events in Crisis would have a huge impact on Green Lantern as the series approached its 200th issue (May 1986), but the book had already been undergoing major changes—even before the creative team of writer Steve Englehart and artist Joe Staton took over with #188 (May 1985). In #181 (Oct. 1984), writer Len Wein and artist Dave Gibbons had perennial GL Hal Jordan quit the Green Lantern Corps and replaced him with former backup GL John Stewart in the next issue. Of course, it was expected that Hal would eventually become Green Lantern again, but when Englehart took over as writer, he had his own ideas on how to resolve the story—ideas that would alter the book's status quo from #200 on. "I started thinking, 'Just because Hal comes back, why does John have to go away?'" Englehart reveals. "I thought, 'Why don't I have two of them?' After that, I thought, 'Why don't I have three of them and bring Guy Gardner back?' Then, I thought, 'Well, why not all of them? ... Why not just build this thing up to a point that when Hal comes back, it's as part of the Green Lantern Corps?'"

THE NEW GUY IN TOWN

"Guy Gardner had appeared maybe two or three times before," Englehart recalls. "The last time we saw him, he had brain damage and was a vegetable." During Crisis, the Guardians of the Universe become divided for the first time in history over whether or not they should get involved in the conflict. One of the Guardians who believes in taking action revives Gardner and grants him a power ring, but the character changed a lot from the version that longtime readers were used to. "I thought, if this guy is coming out of a coma, he might still have some brain damage," Englehart explains. "That led me to the idea [of him being] as volatile as he was." Staton, who designed the new Guy Gardner, adds, "I think Guy's haircut was the key to his character. While he was in a coma in the sub-acute care facility, he was given the most efficient 'do possible, which turned to be this bowl-cut/buzz-cut thing. The over-the-top elements of his costume flowed from the haircut." Englehart notes that he and Staton "came up with the new version of that character, which turned out to be a mistake, because DC won't give [us] any credit for creating that version because it was a pre-existing character."

Guy recruits a team of villains to help destroy the moon of Qward in the Antimatter Universe, which is believed to be the source of power for the evil Anti-Monitor. When the other Guardians explain that destroying the moon

Ringing in an Anniversary

Cover to Green Lantern #200 (May 1986), illustrated by Walter Simonson and colored by Anthony Tollin.

TM & © DC Comics.

Although the company began as Timely Comics in 1939, Marvel Comics as we know it did not exist until the release of *Fantastic Four* #1 (Nov. 1961). Alongside veteran artist Jack Kirby, writer/editor Stan Lee created the *Fantastic Four* partially as a result of his frustration with having to write the types of juvenile stories that were common in comic books at the time. Buoyed by the success of *Fantastic Four*, Lee, Kirby, and a host of illustrators that included Steve Ditko, Don Heck, and Werner Roth began to lay the foundation for what would become the Marvel Universe, creating exciting new heroes like Spider-Man, the Hulk, Iron Man, and the X-Men. Stan Lee treated the medium seriously by not talking down to his readers, imbuing his characters with distinct personalities, and presenting them with real-world problems. Lee felt that "[t]here's nothing wrong with comics as a means of storytelling. The best example I can give you is, what if Shakespeare and Michelangelo were alive today, and they said, 'Let's collaborate on a comic,' and Shakespeare wrote the copy and Michelangelo drew the pictures. Who in the world wouldn't buy a book like that and treasure it?"

Marvel Comics soon had legions of devoted fans and throughout the 1960s and 1970s attracted new creators like Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway, whose stories continued the expansion of the Marvel Universe. The company obtained licensing rights to properties from other media, including Robert E. Howard's *Conan* and the successful *Star Wars* film franchise. Marvel continued its rise to the top under the stewardship of editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, and by 1986, Marvel was the industry leader, representing more than half of the comic-book market, generating \$100 million in annual sales and producing between seven and eight million issues each month. The publisher's 25th anniversary attracted a lot of attention. Marvel Comics received some rare for the time exposure in the mainstream media: Entertainment trade magazine *Variety*, from which the above quote was taken, devoted several articles to Marvel Comics in its September 17, 1986 issue, covering the past and (then) present of Marvel. The anniversary was also featured in a segment on *20/20*, ABC's popular television newsmagazine, which featured the history of Marvel Comics, interviews with Stan Lee and Jim Shooter, and is the source from which the above sales figures were taken.

Tom DeFalco, former Marvel editor-in-chief, says that despite all of the attention that Marvel's 25th anniversary received, it was business as usual so far as the creators were concerned. "The person most

MARVEL'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY MONTH (NOV. 1986)

by Darrell Hempel



Frame Job

Cover to *Amazing Spider-Man* #282 (Nov. 1986), penciled by Rick Leonardi and inked by Bob Layton. This star-studded cover frame was used on Marvel's entire line of comics during this anniversary month.

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interested in doing anything [for the anniversary] was Jim Shooter," DeFalco says. "Nowadays, everything is an anniversary; back then, not so much. Shooter used Marvel's 25th anniversary as a launching pad for something new; that became the New Universe." The New Universe, Marvel's ambitious, yet ultimately unsuccessful attempt to further Lee's concept of comic-book stories in a real-world setting, was heavily promoted throughout the year in house ads and Jim Shooter's "Bulpen Bulletins" column.

Despite the fact that Marvel's main focus that year was the establishment of the New Universe titles, the company made sure to promote its 25th anniversary throughout the line. Marvel titles published in 1986 (cover-dated Apr. 1986–Mar. 1987) carried a special "Marvel 25th Anniversary" corner box logo. Several Marvel titles, including those in its Star Comics line, sported the same John Romita/Al Williamson-drawn frame cover, which featured many of the company's heroes surrounding a portrait of the title's star or a member of that title's team (see sidebar). "The covers were the closest thing to the big, event-type story," Tom DeFalco says.

Naturally, what was going on behind those special covers was pure Marvel magic. What follows is a brief synopsis of every Marvel and Star Comics title cover-dated Nov. 1986 that carried the special anniversary cover. As a personal aside, this then-13-year-old Marvelite enjoyed trying to track down every issue just to see the cover portrait. It was equally fun to revisit these stories while writing this article. I have tried to keep the synopses as spoiler-free as possible for those readers who have yet to complete their Marvel 25th anniversary collection.

NOVEMBER 1986: MARVEL COMICS A-X

Alpha Flight #40, by Bill Mantlo and David Ross, wrapped up the crossover with *Avengers* that began the previous month and features the wedding of Prince Namor the Sub-Mariner and Alpha Flight member Marrina, who establish the new undersea kingdom of Deluvia. Tom DeFalco and Rick Leonardi's *Amazing Spider-Man* #282 features a classic Marvel hero vs. hero slugfest when an injured Spider-Man faces the mutant-hunting X-Factor (actually the original five X-Men in disguise), who had been hired by J. Jonah Jameson to capture the Wall-Crawler. The issue also furthers the mystery of the Hobgoblin, as Joe Robertson tries to prove the innocence of longtime supporting cast member Flash Thompson, who had been accused of being the villain.

The now-classic, five-part "Under Siege" storyline by Roger Stern and John Buscema began in *Avengers* #273, in which the largest-ever Masters of Evil group, led by Baron Zemo, use a combination of subterfuge and force to take control of Avengers Mansion. *Captain America* #323, by Mark Gruenwald and Paul Neary, featured the introduction of the Super-Patriot, the man who would assume the role of Captain America the following year. The Super-Patriot believed that he would make a better symbol for America than Cap. Also in this issue, Captain America has been forced by S.H.I.E.L.D. to maintain a low profile in light of the negative public reaction to events in the previous two issues. *Care Bears* #7, part



TOM DEFALCO

of Marvel's kid-friendly Star Comics imprint, features a story by Howard Post that finds the Care Bears attempting to cheer up the saddest man in the world.

Classic X-Men was a reprint title that featured the earliest adventures of the new X-Men. Each issue also contained a backup story that complemented the main story. This backup in *Classic X-Men* #3, by Chris Claremont and John Bolton, gives insight into the background of X-Men member Thunderbird, who was killed in action in *X-Men* #95 (Oct. 1975), which was reprinted in this issue. *Cloak and Dagger* #9, by Bill Mantlo and Arthur Adams, sees the titular duo separated, with Dagger attempting to escape her life with Cloak by joining the circus, and Cloak embracing the darkness of his nature in the absence of his partner. Jim Owsley and John Buscema's *Conan the Barbarian* #188 features Conan

Weather Girl

Newbie Arthur Adams provided this Storm cover for *Classic X-Men* #3.

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AVENGERS™ #300

THE MIGHTY AVENGERS

CELEBRATE THEIR TRICENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY WITH A NEW LINEUP



[Editor's note: Looking for information about Avengers #200? See BACK ISSUE #56, our Avengers issue.]

With Avengers #300 (Feb. 1989), the Avengers became the second of Marvel's team books to reach the hallowed level of 300 issues. In this anniversary issue, writer Walter Simonson and artist John Buscema created an all-new lineup for the Avengers. It was one of the more unexpected lineups in Avengers history. BACK ISSUE spoke with Simonson and Ralph Macchio to discuss the formation and rapid demise of these new Avengers.

Captain America (as the Captain), Thor, Mr. Fantastic, the Invisible Woman, and the Forgotten One. "It seemed a nice mix of old and new, and it was a mix readers wouldn't have had any experience with or expectations for," Simonson says. "Which means they wouldn't necessarily have been able to guess in advance what sorts of stories I was going to tell, or how the stories or even the relationships between characters were going to develop.

"In its origins, *The Avengers*, to me, was a book about various rather different individuals who come together to help Earth and mankind," Simonson continues. "But they aren't necessarily completely at ease with each other, at least not until they've had a chance to settle in. The team in general has become more collegial over the years, but I always liked that slight edge to them. I was hoping to invoke a little of that earlier sense of story.

"I was writing *The Avengers* just about the time Marvel was moving to tie its continuity more tightly together. What that meant to me as a writer is that I was asked more or less continuously during my year on the book to alter my stories to match

other writers' continuity whose characters had their own books. It quickly became clear that I was going to be making adjustments in my stories pretty much on the fly as long as I had any characters in the book that had their own titles. So I thought that a lineup with fewer Avengers who had their own continuity might not be a bad idea."

Simonson began his roster change by disassembling the then current Avengers team over the months leading to *Avengers* #300. One by one the heroes exited the book, until there were none.

During the "Inferno" crossover (Marvel's 1989 event), the Captain teamed with longtime friends Reed "Mr. Fantastic" Richards and Sue "Invisible Woman" Richards against Nanny and the Orphan Maker. Simonson recalls, "I thought adding Reed and

by David Suiter



WALTER SIMONSON

Fantastic Five

Mr. Fantastic and Invisible Woman join two familiar faces and a "forgotten" one as the new team. Cover to *Avengers* #300 (Feb. 1989) by John Buscema and Tom Palmer.

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BACK seat driver

by Michael Eury

TEN YEARS OF

BACKISSUE

With this edition, we celebrate the tenth anniversary of BACK ISSUE.

When TwoMorrows publisher John Morrow approached me in 2003 about editing a startup magazine, his offer was predicated upon our nascent working relationship from the two books I had produced for him, *Captain Action: The Original Super-Hero Action Figure* and *Dick Giordano: Changing Comics, One Day At a Time* (not-so-subtle plugs!). *Comic Book Artist* had changed publishers and John wanted a new comics-history magazine to take its place on TwoMorrows' schedule. I had enjoyed working with John and his wife Pam on my books, plus, being a North Carolina native, I felt that the Raleigh (NC)-based TwoMorrows was a good fit.

But if you had *BI* today, I probably would have been shaped by the industry's long-term commitments. I had hopped from one job to another but adventurous souls. My Comics' staff, and I of *Legion of Super-Heroes* a decade might have been a family member from Oregon to battling cancer hearing loss, two have weathered In other words, but *BACK ISSUE* to some delight (books) while picking of the hows, why Ten years of Dreaded Deadlines punches. Our relationship same with a couple magazine due to overcommitment from my other work. And I still ache

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BACK ISSUE #69

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE! Revisit the 100th, 200th, 300th, 400th, and 500th issues of '70s and '80s favorites: Adventure, Amazing Spider-Man, Avengers, Batman, Brave & Bold, Casper, Detective, Flash, Green Lantern, Showcase, Superman, Thor, Wonder Woman, and more! With APARO, BARR, ENGLEHART, POLLARD, SEKOWSKY, SIMONSON, STATON, and WOLFMAN. DAN JURGENS and RAY MCCARTHY cover.

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from the sting of one particularly nasty letter of comment I received (on my birthday!) a few years ago. Still, overall, the experience of being your guide through the yellowing pages of Bronze Age funnybooks has been a blast—so much of one that I'm ready to keep plugging away here in *BI*-dom for at least another ten years.

BACK ISSUE itself has changed considerably during this time. The first issue was content-light and design-heavy, and it took a few issues to hone our look. Remember "Rough Stuff," the pencil-art showcase that graduated into its own magazine, then later came back, only to disappear again? Or issue #5's dueling Lynda Carter Wonder Woman (flip) covers by Alex Ross and Adam Hughes? How about the guest editorial written by my cat, Miss Edgewood, in our "Cat People" issue (#40)? I still crack up remembering the day I posed for a photo as the horror-comic host, the Fanboy Who Lives in His Mother's Basement (#52). It was exciting when #54 popped up on AMC's *Comic Book Men*. And readers are still talking about last year's "Tabloids and Treasures" issue (#61).

We were originally a black-and-white publication, and outside of a few, random full-color art-gallery insert sections, our first major innovation came when we added a regular 16-page color section with issue #40; that issue, we also went from bimonthly publication to eight times a year. Our metamorphosis into the magazine we are today began with #50, when we tried out full-color printing on glossier paper. With #52, that became our regular format.

A lot of comic books and comics publications have fallen by the wayside since 2003, and most superhero series have been rebooted (at least once). There aren't a whole lot of publications on the stands right now with issue numbers higher than *BI*'s #69. So to celebrate our milestone, on the following pages we'll take a look back at the covers and content of our previous editions.

Before we begin, however, THANK YOU for being a *BACK ISSUE* reader. Many of you have remarked to me that you enjoy *BI* more than current comic books. While I would encourage all of our readers to seek out some new favorites among the wealth of material on the stands today, I appreciate your regarding *BI* as a safe haven. So whenever you want to escape the realities of today by revisiting a time when Superman wore his red briefs outside his tights and the Fantastic Four had a snarky robot ally, you know we'll be here!