

THE RETRO COMICS EXPERIENCE!

BACK ISSUE!



May 2012
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THE MIGHTY AVENGERS

AVENGERS IN THE 1980s • WEST COAST AVENGERS
HAWKEYE • MOCKINGBIRD • WONDER MAN & MORE
with BUSCEMA • HALL • MILGROM • PÉREZ • STERN

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Volume 1,
Number 56
May 2012

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

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BACKISSUE

The Retro Comics Experience!



TM

AVENGERS

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Detail from the cover of *Essential Avengers* vol. 6—which repurposed Gil Kane and John Romita, Sr.'s cover art from *The Avengers* #122 (Apr. 1974). © 2012 Marvel Characters, Inc.

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FlashBack!

THE ROWDY RESURRECTION AND RETURN OF

WUNDER MAN!

by Jerry Boyd

Dead Man

Simon Williams, Wonder Man, in a 1997 George Pérez commission done for writer Jerry Boyd (and colored by our designer, Righteous Rich Fowlks), is backed up by a quartet of *Avengers* comics in which he appeared: (top left) his premiere issue, #9 (Oct. 1964), cover by Jack Kirby; (top right) lying in state on the Rich Buckler/Joe Sinnott cover for #102 (Aug. 1972); (bottom right) #155 (Jan. 1977, cover by Kirby and Al Milgrom), continuing a tale started in *Super-Villain Team-Up* #9; and (bottom left) in his bright red duds in #162 (Aug. 1977), by the dynamic drawing duo of Pérez and Pablo Marcos.

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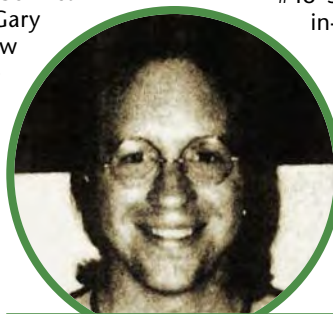
Tepid Reaction

When he returned to Marvel to write *West Coast Avengers* (see the Pro2Pro on page 60), Englehart didn't warm up to the once-dead Simon. Still, he recapped Wondy's origin in *WCA* vol. 2 #2 (Nov. 1985), with artists Al Milgrom and Kim DeMulder.

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Loose ends, forgotten subplots, unfinished story arcs—whatever you wish to call them, they sure can play heck with an incoming creative team after they've taken over an ongoing and successful superhero title.

In the early 1970s, Marvel Comics scribes Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, and Gary Friedrich made way for some new writers, fully expecting that the flower of Mighty Marvel would continue to flourish with this infusion of new blood. This new blood would take the House of Ideas into inspired, exciting directions, indeed. And Wonder Man, one of those "loose ends," would be revived through the talents of a new *Avengers* writer who'd previously been putting his energies into standard romance and horror stories—Steve Englehart.



STEVE ENGLEHART

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH!

Steve had been mightily impressed by the possibilities of the medium. On his college campus in the '60s, he'd shown "The Galactus Trilogy" (*Fantastic Four* #48–50) to friends. Selected by Marvel editor-in-chief Roy Thomas (after the Smiling One, Stan himself, got promoted to publisher), Steve got the keys to the front door of Avengers Mansion.

I asked Steve if part of the interview process included a *decent knowledge* of Marvel continuity. He recalls, "No, I think it sort of got there by osmosis. You had to go to New York and it was assumed that you knew what you were doing and what you were getting into. By that time, Gary Friedrich didn't want to write a six-page monster story, so they looked around and thought about

who could do that and other jobs. I had been doing some artwork but writing was part of me, obviously, and I was better at it than drawing. I got *Captain America* and *The Defenders* at the same time and I don't really recall Roy asking, 'Do you know who the Hulk is?' I was expected to know all of that. In those days, you knew the characters, had a feel for them,

Fear the Reaper

The Grim Reaper made his diabolical debut in Roy Thomas' *Avengers* #52 (May 1968; cover by John Buscema and George Tuska). The Black Panther spoiled his plans and became a team member by issue's end.

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FlashBack!

ROGER STERN'S

AVENGERS™

by Jason Shayer

Roger Stern was perhaps the most underrated writer for Marvel Comics during the 1980s.

Despite the volume and quality of his work, which included major titles like *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Avengers*, *Captain America*, and *Doctor Strange*, he never broke into the superstar category, like Chris Claremont, John Byrne, or Frank Miller.

What made Stern's five-year run on *The Avengers* so successful and memorable were his characters. Each character had their distinct attitude and direction, as well as flaws, which set them apart from the typical superhero stereotype.

Stern understood what it meant to be a hero: Being a hero, even at the power levels of the Avengers, required a human connection. It was never about their god-like powers or superhuman abilities—it was about their humanity with all of its strengths and weaknesses.

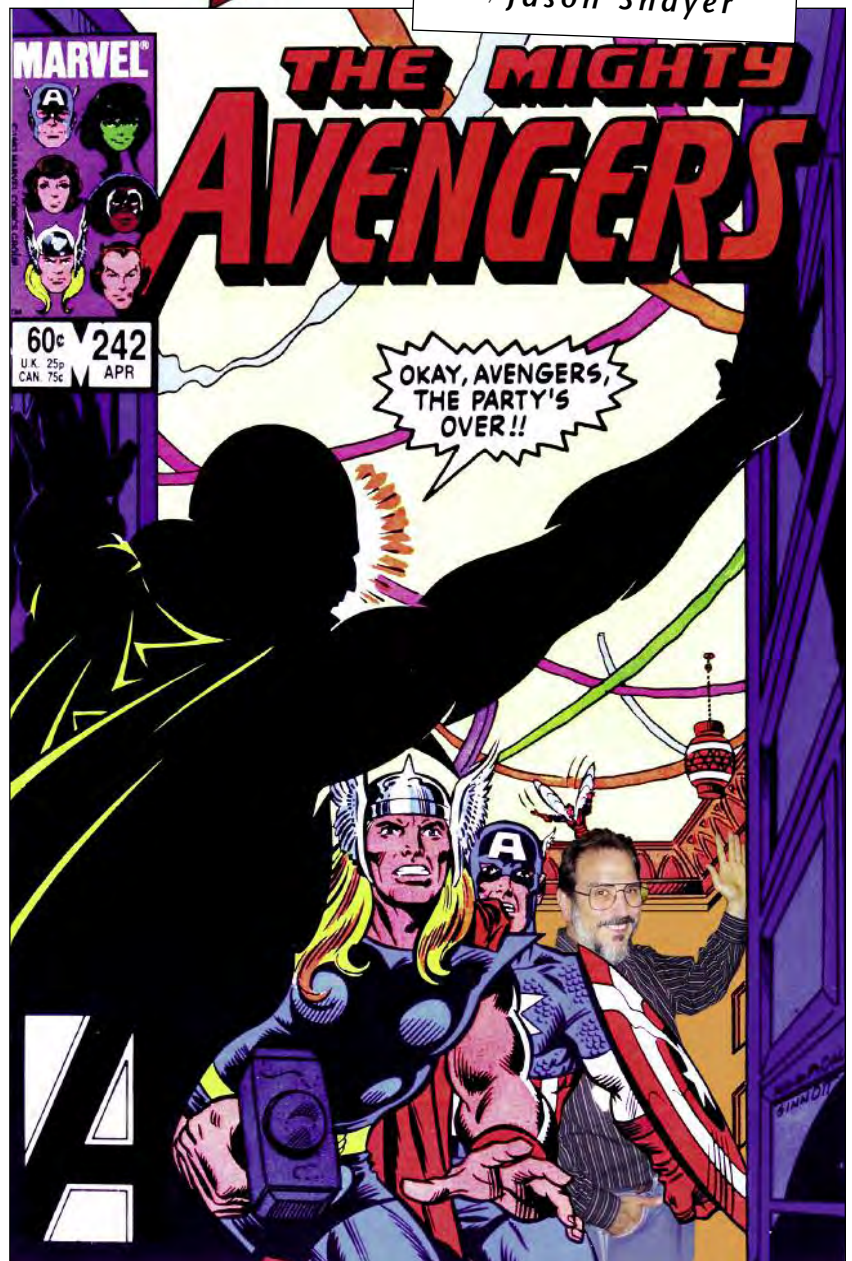
While he deftly handled the more popular and iconic characters like Captain America and Thor, Stern naturally gravitated toward the second-tier characters, like the Wasp, She-Hulk, and new recruits like Captain Marvel and Starfox. His approach balanced the team's roster and allowed him the storytelling flexibility to make broader changes to their lives, as they didn't have their own ongoing books. While these second-tier characters didn't possess earth-shattering powers, they reflected the heart and the soul of the Avengers.

This "Flashback" article will dive deep into Stern's work on *The Avengers* and walk you through some key character moments throughout his unforgettable run.

Wrong, Vision—The Party's Just Getting Started!

We take liberties with the gripping Al Milgrom/Joe Sinnott cover of *The Avengers* #242 (Apr. 1984) to celebrate the half-decade, full-throttle run on the title written by Roger Stern (seen waving, alongside members of Earth's Mightiest Heroes).

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ENTER STERN

On how he got the *Avengers* writing assignment, Roger Stern says: "I asked for it. Seriously, *The Avengers* was the first assignment that I actively sought out at Marvel. Before that, on *Doctor Strange*, *The Incredible Hulk*, or *The Amazing Spider-Man*, an editor had always asked me to write the series. But with *The Avengers* ... well, I'd edited the book for a couple of years, and it had always been one of my favorites. So when I heard that Jim Shooter was going to be stepping down from writing *Avengers*, I called Mark Gruenwald and tossed my hat in the ring."

Avengers #227 (Jan. 1983) kicked off with a test of Captain Marvel's powers that served as her audition for the team and as her introduction to the readers. Captain Marvel and her alter ego, Monica Rambeau, were created by Stern in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #16 (Dec. 1982). He had the idea of her becoming an Avenger in mind from the outset. Her 17-page origin was a fine example of how to concisely and effectively introduce a new superhero that hit all the necessary character marks.

"With Captain Marvel, I did my best to create a character in the Lee/Kirby/Ditko tradition, a down-to-Earth person who suddenly acquired extraordinary power," Stern says. "And I wanted her to be a straightforward, likable superhero. At the time, so many of the then-newly minted super 'heroes' didn't seem very heroic. We already had Wolverine and the Punisher. I wanted there to be at least one new character who wasn't homicidal or a jerk."

Captain Marvel was a rookie superhero with access to almost unlimited powers and Stern leveraged her perspective as a vantage point into his story for new readers. She was learning to use her powers and found



herself in awe of the legendary heroes that surrounded her, much like young readers might imagine themselves in the same role.

Stern paid particular attention to his female characters and developed them into strong, leading women that were great role models for young girls. Captain Marvel joined the team as an Avenger-in-training, and would gradually become more skilled with her powers and gain confidence as an Avenger, both of which would prepare her for her eventual leadership role.

THE REDEMPTION OF HANK PYM AND RENAISSANCE OF THE WASP

As the new regular writer, Stern didn't waste time getting settled in. He took on the Henry "Hank" Pym subplot, which had been dangling since Jim Shooter's tenure as writer, and had him face the public charges of kidnapping, theft of government property, and treason.

Stern cleverly used a psychiatrist, trying to determine Pym's mental fitness to stand trial, to flashback through Hank's past. Pym recounted his early history

Which Hand Do I Place on the Bible?

(above) Affable Al Milgrom shares with us his original, unused cover for *Avengers* #228 (Feb. 1983). Compare it with the inset of the published version to see how Hank Pym's hands were changed. (left) Brett Breeding's cover to *Avengers* #227.

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featuring
THE POWER OF
IRON MAN

MARVEL
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THE START OF A GREAT
NEW AVENGERS LINE

FlashBack!

Quips and Quivers:

by Adam Besenyodi



A Non-Superpowered Hero in a Superpowered World

Ace Archer
Clint Barton, Hawkeye, in an undated pen-and-ink commission by Bob Hall (colored by BI's own Rich Fowlks), courtesy of Edd Walker. Behind Hawkeye is a fantastic foursome of covers starring the Battling Bowman: (top left) his first appearance, *Tales of Suspense* #57 (Sept. 1964), cover by Don Heck; (top right) joining Earth's Mightiest Heroes in *The Avengers* #16 (Oct. 1965), cover by Jack Kirby and Dick Ayers; (bottom left) winging it solo in *Avengers* #189 (Nov. 1979), cover by John Byrne and Dan Green; and (bottom right) cover art by Mike Perkins for the miniseries *Hawkeye: Blindspot* #1 (Apr. 2011).

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Comics' First Hawkeye??

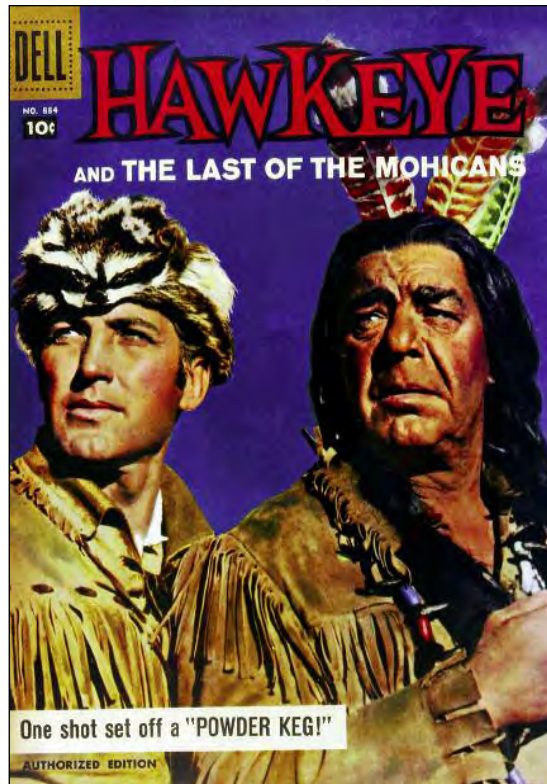
(center) What the--?!

Ye ed stumbled across this while looking for Hawkeye art for this issue and thought it too delicious to overlook. In 1958, Dell Comics' *Four Color* #884 published this adaptation of the short-lived (39 episodes, 1957–1958) TV series *Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans*. As this photo cover shows, it starred John Hart as Nat "Hawkeye" Cutler, a fur trader ...

and yes, that's the Wolf Man himself, Lon Chaney, Jr., as Hawkeye's American Indian ally, Chingachgook, the last of the Mohican tribe! Who says this isn't the **BACK ISSUE** Age of Useless But Too Cool Trivia?

(top) Ol' Eagle-Eye's quite full of himself as he bows in the Iron Man tale in *Tales of Suspense* #57. Words by Stan the Man Lee, illos by Debonair Don Heck.

Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans © 1958 Incorporated Television Company (ITC).
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In 1941, a certain comic-book company created an archer who employed trick arrows and didn't play well with others. The character would go on to join that comic universe's premiere team, have plenty of woman trouble, and marry a fellow superhero with a bird-themed name. Almost 25 years later, Marvel took that blueprint for DC's Green Arrow and created the same character. Hawkeye "was an example of how Marvel could take a DC character," *Avengers* and *West Coast Avengers* limited series penciler Bob Hall says, "and make him even better." He may have been "a blatant rip-off," according to Hall, but he was one that that "really worked."

What makes Hawkeye/Clint Barton so compelling is the depth of character added by his strengths and flaws. The staggering amount of egotism required of a non-superpowered superhero to be successful in the world he inhabits is repeatedly contradicted by the overwhelming insecurity

resulting from that same set of circumstances. Throw in habitual girl problems and a perpetual dose of money trouble, and you have decades' worth of material to mine.

Debuting on the pages of *Tales of Suspense* #57 (Sept. 1964), Hawkeye's insecurities manifest almost immediately. Hawkeye's archery show was a purposely unromantic distraction for a mistaken-intentions Coney Island Circus date between Iron Man's alter ego Tony Stark and his secretary Pepper Potts. However, the midway marksman is upstaged when Iron Man shows up to save an out-of-control flying pinwheel ride. Spurred on by "blazing jealousy" of Iron Man's heroics, the archer—Hawkeye—is inspired to create a costume and trick arrows. His first night out, he botches stopping a jewelry store robber, and the police blame Hawkeye. The mistaken-identity scenario leads Hawkeye right into the arms of Natasha Romanova, the Black Widow, who offers the archer her communist technology ... if he offs Iron Man.

Using explosive, rust-tipped, and nylon-rope-strand arrows, Hawkeye holds his own against Iron Man, but his "demolition blast warhead" arrow ricochets off the Golden Avenger and inadvertently nicks Black Widow. Hawkeye abandons his attack on a stunned Iron Man, grabs Natasha, and steals away by motorboat under cover of the fog.

GIRL TROUBLE

Hawkeye shows up in two more issues of *Tales of Suspense* over the next seven months, both times as Iron Man's foil and Black Widow's fool. "Originally I planned to use my talents to serve mankind!! If only I hadn't met the Black Widow," Hawkeye thinks while raiding Stark's factory for weapons plans in issue #60 (Dec. 1964), "and yet ... without her, life would be meaningless to me!" The charms of a woman and a few lies are all it takes for Hawkeye to commit treason.

Four months later, the Black Widow, who had previously fled to Russia, returns to once again bait Hawkeye into battling Iron Man. They fight to a draw on the pages of *Tales of Suspense* #64 (Apr. 1965), until Natasha is hurt and Hawkeye abandons the battle to rush her to safety, all while being chastised by the object of his affection for giving up on the fight because of his love. It's a love that never really completely fades, and is even proven to be at least somewhat reciprocated: In *Avengers* #211 (Sept. 1981), when Natasha and Hawkeye run into each other at the Avengers Mansion, the Black Widow wishes she and the archer had a chance to talk more, yet thinks, "I'm sure he doesn't care [for me] anymore!"

What begins as a crush for Hawkeye soon evolves into a pattern of unfortunate, and often unrequited, love interests, because from Natasha, he transfers his special brand of emotionally stunted love to Wanda Maximoff, a.k.a. the Scarlet Witch.

Meeting on the pages of *Avengers* #16 (May 1965), the team's first really big roster shakeup resulted in Captain America leading a trio of former villains: Hawkeye, the Scarlet Witch, and Quicksilver. Hawkeye immediately sets about hitting on his teammate with a brashness that speaks to the sexism of the day. That impudence habitually blinds Hawkeye to the reality of his romantic situations. He remains oblivious to the deep love that develops over the years between Wanda and fellow Avenger the Vision, and continues to pelt her with borderline sexual harassment behavior. But early '80s *Avengers* scribe Roger Stern sees things a bit differently. To him, "Hawk's not so much a sexist, as he is an all-purpose butt-head."

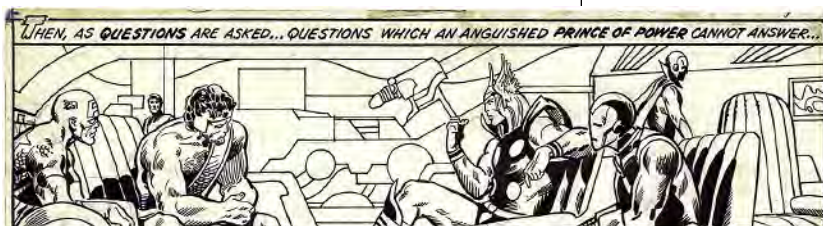
After his heroic return from the life-changing events of the Kree-Skrull War in *Avengers* #99 (May 1972), Hawkeye notices "ol' Wanda's as fine as ever" and chats her up. Wanda completely

shuts him down, telling him just how self-centered and unobservant he is. Undeterred by pointblank rejection, Hawkeye actually proposes to her! No bended-knee proposals for this roustabout, though: instead it's all about *him*. He informs Wanda that he's realized over the course of the war that he "might just be in love with you," and because of that, "There's wedding bells in your future!" Gotta love that confidence.

Hawkeye's delusion about their relationship begins to come to a head in *Avengers* #102 (Aug. 1972), when he decides to lay his cards on the table with Wanda once again by first making a remark about him being "the future father of [her] little witch-brood," then proceeding to tell her he's always "dug" her and that "it's time we let it all hang out!" Wanda attempts to let him know her heart belongs to another, but Hawkeye misappropriates the Women's Liberation Movement ("No more a that 'ladies first' bull") and plants a kiss on a very surprised Scarlet Witch. When she doesn't kiss him back, things start to sink in for the amiable



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Pulling on Heartstrings

Hawkeye tells the Scarlet Witch he's got a thing for her—overheard by the Vision—in *Avengers* #99 (May 1972). Words by Roy Thomas, art by Barry Windsor-Smith and Tom Sutton. Original art page courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

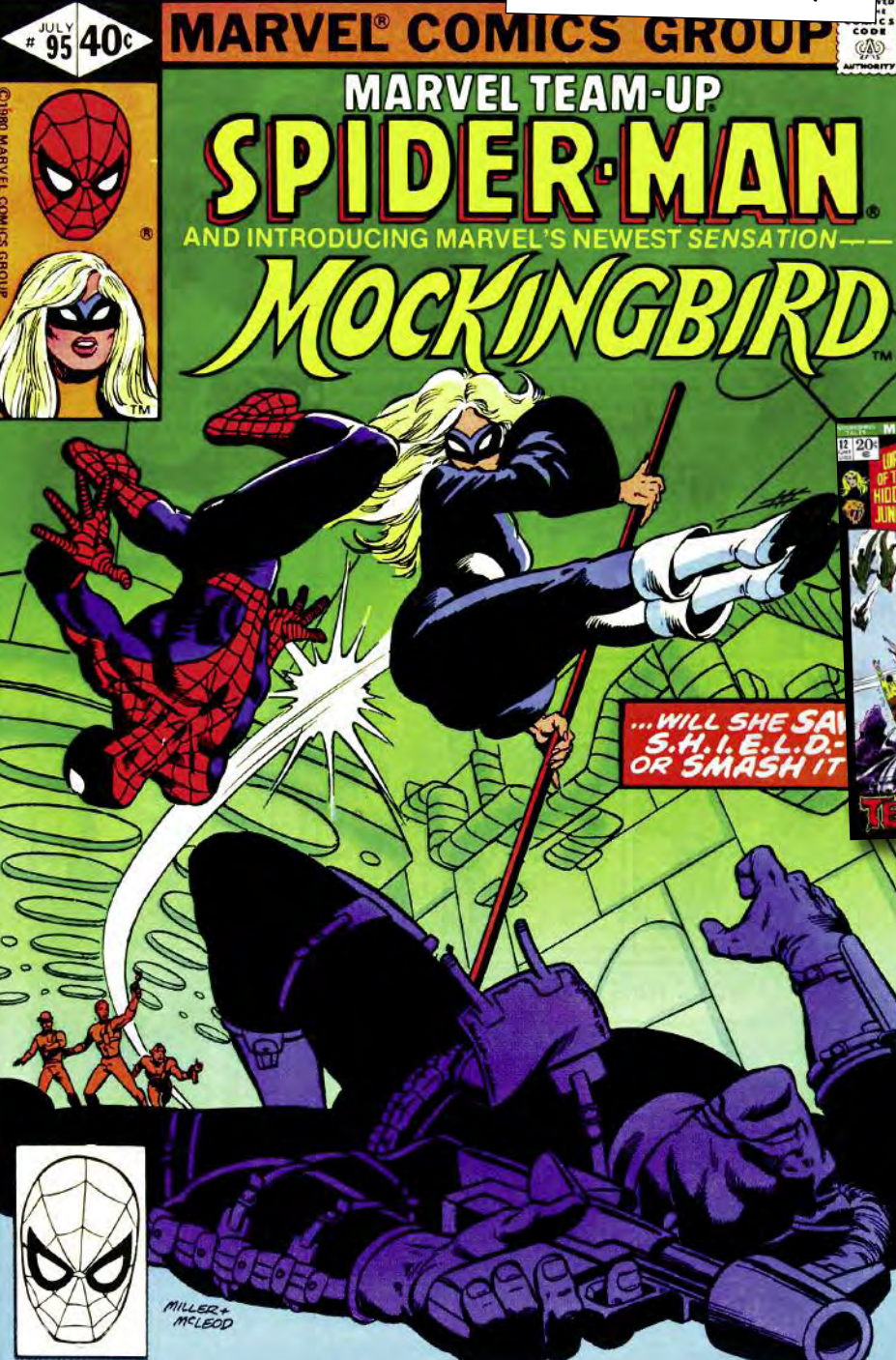
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Listen to the

FlashBack!

MOCKINGBIRD™

by Jarrod Buttery



Avengers Assemble! Thor, Iron Man, Hulk, Giant-Man, Wasp! Captain America, Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, Quicksilver! Black Widow, Hercules, Black Knight, Vision, Black Panther! And, more recently, Spider-Man, Wolverine, Doctor Strange, Iron Fist, Luke Cage! So ... where did this Mockingbird come from? That was the question asked by Mark Gruenwald in an editorial box in the letters page of *Marvel Team-Up* #95 (July 1980).

FROM THE EVERGLADES TO THE SAVAGE LAND

Our story starts with Marvel's muck-monster, the Man-Thing. As discussed in *BACK ISSUE* #6 (Oct. 2004), Man-Thing first appeared in *Savage Tales* #1 (May 1971), but the magazine was temporarily canceled and a planned follow-up for issue #2 wasn't published.

The follow-up depicted Dr. Barbara Morse and fellow scientists working to recreate the Super-Soldier serum that originally produced Captain America. They were also searching for missing colleague Ted Sallis who, unknown to them, had been transformed into the Man-Thing after the terrorist organization A.I.M. had tried to steal the serum.

This Len Wein/Neal Adams tale eventually saw print in the middle of *Astonishing Tales* #12 (June 1972). Marvel's Jungle Lord, Ka-Zar, had received a solo series in the title and, in issue #6 (June 1971), in a story by Gerry Conway and Barry Windsor-Smith, an unnamed brunette woman rushes to Ka-Zar's English estate. Admitted entrance by the butler, she demands, "Lord Kevin Plunder! Where is he? I must speak with him! 'Tis a matter of the fate of worlds!" When she is calmed, she admits, "Lord Kevin and I have never met, and yet I feel that I know him! You see, I can

...

"Marvel's Newest Sensation"

Marvel Team-Up #95 (July 1980) was the "first appearance" of the soon-to-be Avenger Mockingbird—but it was not the first time readers encountered her alter ego, Bobbi Morse. Cover art by Frank Miller and Bob McLeod.

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Backdoor into the Marvel Universe

An early appearance of the woman who would eventually become Mockingbird. Page 18 of *Astonishing Tales* #18 (June 1973), by writer Mike Friedrich and artists Dan Adkins and Frank Chiaramonte. Original art courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions.

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... can 'feel' people ... in my mind! And I know that unless I speak with him, Lord Kevin will die!"

That was Conway's last issue. When asked if he had any recollection of the scene, Conway admits, "Wow, wish I could help, but it was loooooonnnng ago and far away. You might ask Roy Thomas; I have a feeling he could have been involved in plotting those issues." Indeed, Thomas wrote issue #7 (Aug. 1971), wherein the aforementioned butler tells the brunette girl that Lord Kevin has returned to his jungle abode.

Issue #8 (Oct. 1971) opens with a light aircraft crashing into the Savage Land, and a blonde girl parachuting to safety. Ka-Zar finds the pilot, Paul Allen, who insists that they must find his fiancée, Barbara. Paul also reveals how they found the Savage Land: "All I have to go by is this map, which your servants back in England gave her," thus confirming that blonde Barbara is the unnamed *brunette* girl from the previous issues. Herb Trimpe was the artist for issues #7 and 8 and says, "It probably was a mistake on the part of the colorist. We tried to maintain quality in the time allotted,

but we had to make the deadlines to avoid late fees with the printer. Of course, there may have been other reasons for the sudden change in hair color."

Explanations eventuated in *AT* #12 (June 1972), written by Thomas. Dr. Barbara Morse and Dr Paul Allen were revealed to be "Part of a US Scientific Project, working at a secret lab in the Everglades, to achieve a certain ... biochemical breakthrough." They enlisted Ka-Zar to use his jungle abilities to search for the missing Sallis. The story then gave way to the seven-page Man-Thing flashback.

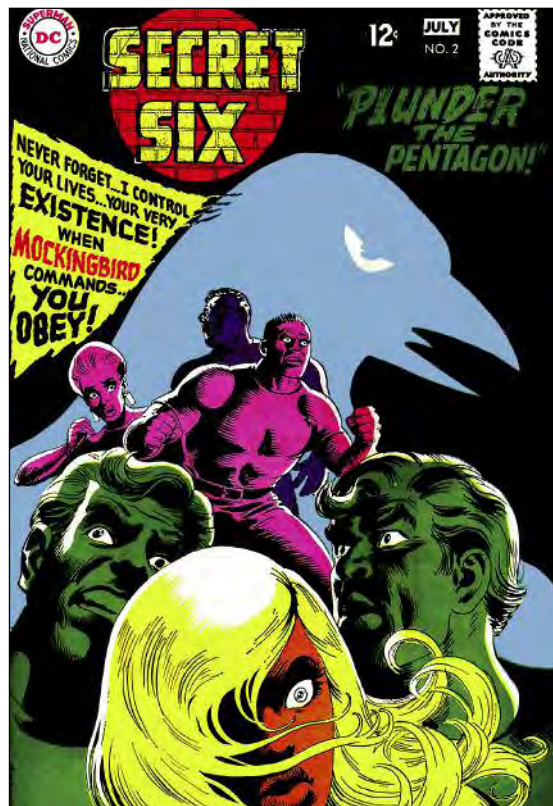
Roy Thomas recalls, "I know that I wanted to find a way to integrate that second Man-Thing story into *Ka-Zar*, but I don't remember any specific details." Although memories have faded over the years, it seems that whatever initial plans were held for Conway's mysterious brunette girl, Thomas saw an opportunity to change her to blonde Barbara Morse in order to make use of the unpublished Man-Thing story. Or we could be charitable and assume that, pursued by A.I.M., Barbara was wearing a wig and exaggerating her urgency in her first appearance.

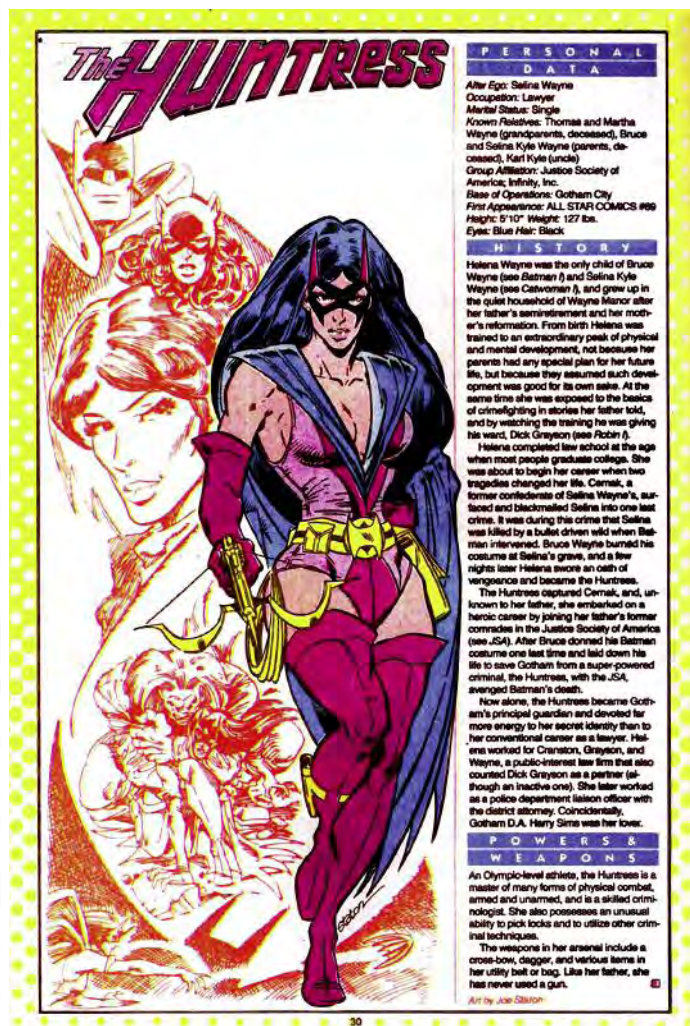
AT #13 (Aug. 1972) concluded the storyline. Not only was Barbara a biologist, but an agent of

Comics' First Mockingbird

Let's not forget that before Bobbi came along, DC Comics had its own Mockingbird, the mysterious puppeteer of the covert squad known as the Secret Six. Cover art to *Secret Six* #2 (June-July 1968) by Nick Cardy (who'd no doubt draw one gorgeous Bobbi Morse, if given the chance!).

TM & © DC Comics.





S.H.I.E.L.D. She was only pretending to love Paul Allen, who was, it turns out, working for A.I.M. Paul is killed by the Man-Thing, A.I.M.'s Everglades base is destroyed, and Ka-Zar admits he is sorry that he didn't get to know Barbara better.

A fill-in followed but a new direction accompanied new writer Mike Friedrich. AT #15 (Dec. 1972) finds Ka-Zar (and Zabu!) in New York, following A.I.M.'s trail and enjoying the hospitality of Barbara Morse. The façade of meek fiancée over, Barbara is the relaxed and confident character of later years. She flirts with Ka-Zar and invites him to "Call me Bobbi."

The nickname stuck and she is treated as co-star of the title. Nick Fury assigns Bobbi, Agent 19, the task of stopping A.I.M. and A.I.M.'s Super-Soldier: Victorious. At the end of issue #20 (Oct. 1973), with Victorious—not victorious—Ka-Zar returns to the Savage Land. Bobbi admits to herself, "Despite our differences, I'm still wrapped up in this guy! I've made my intentions plain, but I can't possibly see myself in his awful jungle."

Accompanied by Shanna the She-Devil, Bobbi returned to the Savage Land in *Savage Tales* #8 (Jan. 1975)—where she does not fail to notice the chemistry between the jungle characters. Writer Gerry Conway explained, in *BACK ISSUE* #43 (Sept. 2010), that he wanted to provide an alternative love interest for the Lord of the Savage Land. Ka-Zar and Shanna eventually married while Bobbi disappeared for a year.

HUNTED BY THE HUNTRESS

Barbara Morse could have disappeared from continuity altogether had not Mike Friedrich come to her rescue. According to the editorial from Archie Goodwin in *Marvel Super Action* #1 (Jan. 1976), Goodwin had proposed a new character: the Huntress. "I suggested the title and the notion of using S.H.I.E.L.D. to writer Mike Friedrich. He decided to draw upon a character he'd helped develop while scripting the color *Ka-Zar* comic, and wound up revamping her totally," wrote Goodwin.

Birds of Prey

(left) Barbara "Bobbi" Morse in her first costumed guise. Washtone-rich splash page to her one-and-only Huntress outing, from the black-and-white magazine *Marvel Super Action* #1 (Jan. 1976). By the Friedrich/ Evans/Springer team. (It's interesting to note that inker Frank Springer was the illustrator of DC's aforementioned *Secret Six* series—home of that *other* Mockingbird!) (right) While DC's original Huntress was a Golden Age supervillainess that debuted in 1941, Bobbi Morse relinquished her Huntress moniker in 1977 when DC introduced Helena Wayne as the Earth-Two superheroine Huntress. Seen here is Huntress' bio from *Who's Who* #10 (Dec. 1985); text by Len Wein, art by Joe Staton. (Of course, post-Crisis, the Huntress character has continued to change. Sheesh! All these Huntresses and Mockingbirds are enough to make your temples throb!)

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AVENGING THE LEFT COAST...



West Coast Avengers writers **ROGER STERN** and **STEVE ENGLEHART** recall working with these superhero “WACKOS”

by **Michael Aushenker**



Hawkeye. Wonder Man. Mockingbird. Tigra. Moon Knight. Even Iron Man (the Jim Rhodes version, anyway).

West Coast Avengers first appeared in 1984 as a four-issue limited series (Oct.–Jan. 1985) written by Roger Stern and drawn by Bob Hall and Brett Breeding.

A West Coast Avengers ongoing series soon followed, running 102 issues (Oct. 1985–Jan. 1994). It was originally written by Steve Englehart and drawn by Al Milgrom, through #41. John Byrne followed, writing and drawing the series from issue #42–57, and various creative teams followed Byrne until its 1994 finale. The title was renamed Avengers West Coast as of issue #47 in 1989.

The following is a parallax view of West Coast Avengers through separate interviews with writers Stern and Englehart conducted in August 2011.

– Michael Aushenker

ROGER STERN

MICHAEL AUSHENKER: *How did the West Coast Avengers four-issue miniseries come about? Was it based on solid sales for the regular Avengers series? How were you chosen to write this mini?*

ROGER STERN: I actually remember the origins of this project pretty well, because it happened to coincide with my birthday, back in 1983. I was attending a comic-book convention in Rome, Georgia, along with Mark Gruenwald, my editor on *The Avengers*. And while we were there, we batted ideas around for the project, which eventually became the *West Coast Avengers* miniseries. (“West Coast Avengers,” by the way, was just supposed to be a placeholder name. But we were never able to think of a better title. Sorry about that.)

Anyway, WCA was originally conceived as a fun little miniseries that would A) help expand the scope of the Avengers as a team, and B) solve a problem we’d been having with other editorial offices. See, at the time, there were a couple dozen Avengers—or former Avengers—and I had plans for most of the ones who didn’t have their own series. However, I had also limited the number of active Avengers in any given issue, in order to allow more space to each individual character and to avoid giving my artists interminable crowd scenes to draw. As a result, it seemed as if every time we turned around, some other writer would be glomming onto any Avenger who wasn’t currently on the active roster for one miniseries or another—and all too often under the supervision of someone other than Mark.

And there was little we could do to prevent this because we “weren’t using them.” I think that we even had to get permission to use the Beast in a story because he had become a Defender.

Star Power

Some of Marvel’s mightiest became Tinseltown Titans in this *Avengers* spin-off. Headshots by Bob Hall/Brett Breeding and Al Milgrom, grabbed from various *West Coast Avengers* covers.

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ASSEMBLE THEM ALL!

FlashBack!

AVENGERS ACTION FIGURES IN THE BACK ISSUE ERA

by Chris Franklin



Earth's Mightiest Megos

Courtesy of Chris Franklin, this article's writer, Mego's 8-inch action figures of a quintet of Quinjet-riders: (left to right) Falcon, Iron Man (with his '70s faceplate nose), Captain America, Hulk, and Thor.

Walk into any retail store with a toy department today, and you'll probably find figures based on Earth's Mightiest Heroes. The cinematic adventures of Iron Man, Thor, and Captain America have increased their profile so much that toys from each film are a sure bet.

But that wasn't always the case. During the childhoods of most BACK ISSUE readers, the selection of heroes wasn't nearly as great. Those characters that made it onto bubbled cards were a rare breed indeed. But the Avengers did assemble ... at least in part. In their early years of the 1960s, Avengers figures were pretty scarce, but that would change in the next decade. The story of who made it and who didn't, and why, is truly a tale to astonish. From Mego to Mattel and beyond, this is the story of the Avengers in plastic!

THE MEGO DECADE

The Mego Corporation released its World's Greatest Super-Heroes line in 1972. Utilizing 8-inch-tall bodies and removable cloth costumes, Mego produced figures of both Marvel and DC characters [as well as Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan and Robert E. Howard's Conan; at the time those savage heroes headlined their own series at DC and Marvel, respectively]. Between 1973 and 1976, Mego assembled five of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, starting, of course, with the First Avenger himself.

Mego's Captain America lacked the white lower-sleeve portion and red gloves of his comic-book uniform. Today, while most collectors agree

that while Captain America is a bit to be desired: "because he had an alien Heiler of the Mego variety have changed that,

Captain America was adapted by Mego, with flesh hands instead of plastic. To use whatever parts Mego figures have hairy patches, it still raises the eyebrows.

Tony Stark's alter ego Iron Man's fisted, cut over the plastic "claw." One oddity that puzzled intended the Iron Man to have a nose on his helmet.

Mego's Incredible Hulk standard Mego figure did not diminish the be short, but he's

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BACK ISSUE #56

"Avengers Assemble!" Writer ROGER STERN'S acclaimed 1980s Avengers run, West Coast Avengers, early Avengers toys, and histories of Hawkeye, Mockingbird, and Wonder Man, with art and commentary from JOHN and SAL BUSCEMA, JOHN BYRNE, BRETT BREEDING, TOM DeFALCO, STEVE ENGLEHART, BOB HALL, AL MILGROM, TOM MORGAN, TOM PALMER, JOE SINNOTT, and more. PÉREZ cover!

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