THE RETRO COMICS EXPERIENCE!

BACK ISSUE!™

TWOMORROWS
August 2012
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JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA®

IN THE BRONZE AGE!

THE SATELLITE YEARS

INJUSTICE GANG

MARVEL's JLA, SQUADRON SUPREME

UNOFFICIAL JLA/AVENGERS CROSSOVERS

A SALUTE TO DICK DILLIN

"PRO2PRO" WITH GERRY CONWAY & DAN JURGENS

And the team fans love to hate — "JUSTICE LEAGUE DETROIT"!

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BACK ISSUE!
The Retro Comics Experience!

Volume 1,
Number 58
August 2012

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

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JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA

ISSUE

Dick Giordano cover art for *Limited Collectors' Edition* #C-46 (Aug. 1976), starring the Justice League of America. TM & © DC Comics.

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22,300 MILES ABOVE EARTH

FlashBack!

A Look Back at the JLA's "Satellite Years"

by Shannon E. Riley

After years of maintaining the status quo, Justice League of America entered the Bronze Age with a renewed energy, thanks to new creators, new members, and the introduction of an orbiting headquarters. Following is a closer look at the writers, artists, and storylines that turned the Justice League into true icons.

KEEPERS OF THE JLA CASEBOOK

JLA was fortunate to have a number of talented writers guiding the book out of the Silver Age and into the '70s. After charting the team's adventures for almost nine years, writer Gardner Fox left the series, making way for Denny O'Neil, who took the reins with issue #66 (Nov. 1968). Says O'Neil, "I didn't know until about 20 years later why there were assignments available, including *JLA*. ([Fox] had been dumped by management over an insurance hassle.) Julie offered me the gig and there was no reason not to accept." O'Neil ushered in significant changes fairly quickly: Martian Manhunter left in search of his people; Wonder Woman lost her powers and was given a leave of absence; Black Canary migrated from Earth-Two, joined the JLA, and gained her trademark "canary cry"; and a Joker-influenced Snapper Carr betrayed the team.

Dovetailing out of the Joker's discovery of the Sanctuary's loca-

Going Up?

The League heads north—22,300 miles north!—in the first Bronze Age issue of JLA, *Justice League of America* #78 (Feb. 1970). The issue guest-starred the Vigilante. Cover art by Gil Kane.

The Magnificent Seven

DC's Golden Age B-team, the Seven Soldiers of Victory, returned in the JLA's three-part anniversary epic from writer Len Wein, commencing in issue #100 (Aug. 1972). Cover by Nick Cardy.

tion in issue #77 (Dec. 1969), the team abandons their Earthbound cave and the satellite headquarters makes it first appearance in *JLA* #78 (Feb. 1970). Was O'Neil was influenced by a certain William Shatner/Leonard Nimoy TV show, or perhaps the Space Race between the US and the Soviets? Not so, says O'Neil. "I don't think I was watching *Star Trek* at the time and I certainly wasn't thinking about the Cold War. I just thought that a satellite was way cooler than a prosaic, earthbound headquarters." O'Neil's introduction of the orbiting satellite set the stage for unlimited story possibilities … and the writers that followed him would take full advantage.

Mike Friedrich, then just a college student, took over from O'Neil with issue #86 (Dec. 1970). His first story, "Earth's Final Hour," saw the team dealing with the threat of extinction-level global starvation. Friedrich

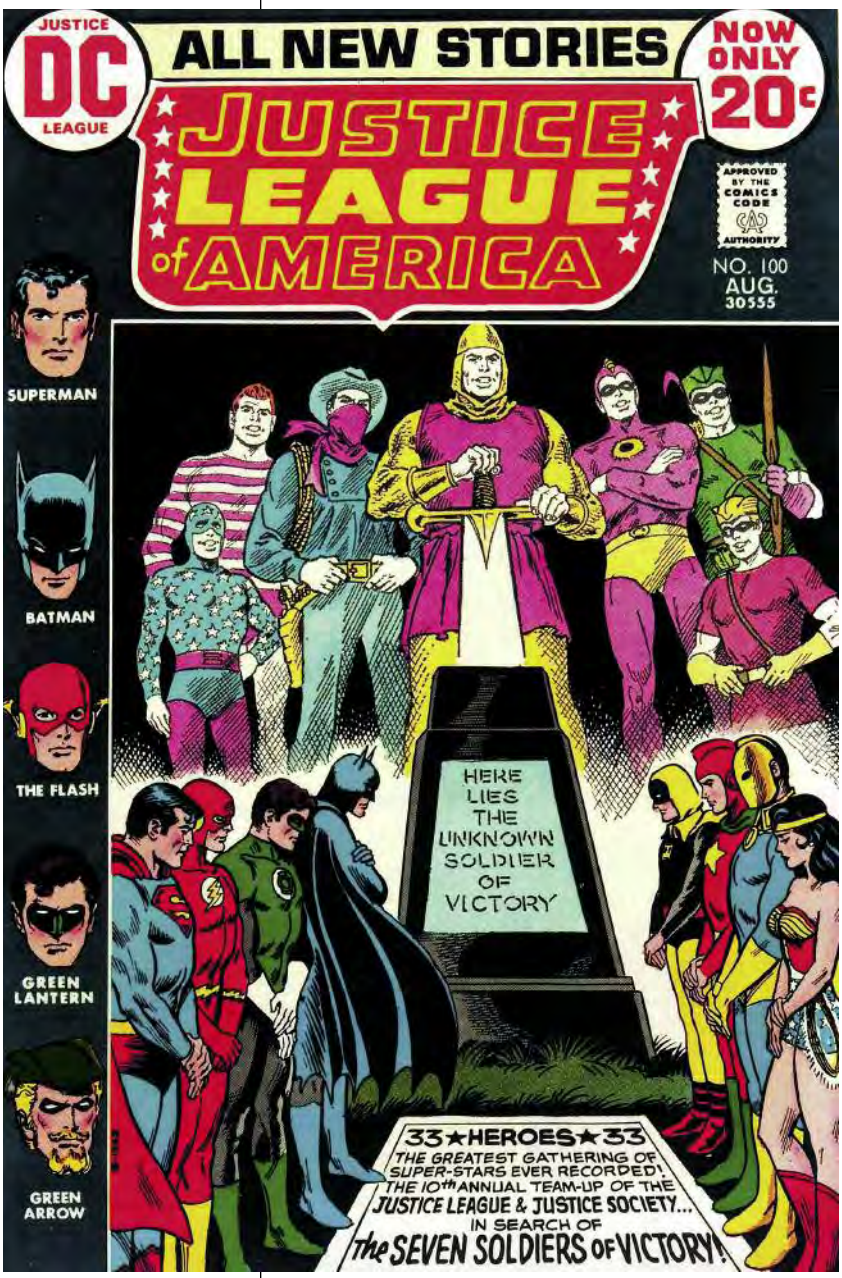
MIKE FRIEDRICH

brought with him a youthful exuberance and enthusiasm for the characters, as well as an acute awareness of the political climate of the times and a strong sense of social justice. Friedrich reveals that "the first [*JLA*] assignment came at the end of August of 1970, as I was about to return to California for my senior year of college. My memory was that I was surprised by the assignment, since I hadn't worked on a regular feature yet. I don't remember asking for it in advance." Unfortunately, there would be no guidance or mentorship from O'Neil, as Friedrich notes that he "didn't have much time to talk with Denny before I returned to California, so there wasn't any discussion regarding storylines. He hated writing the series, while I was more enthusiastic."

Aside from the world hunger story noted above, Friedrich dealt with pollution in "Plague of the Pale People" in *JLA* #90 (June 1971), unity and understanding between different generations (and aliens) in #91–92 (Aug.–Sept. 1971), and the horrors of war in "The Private War of Johnny Dune" in #95 (Dec. 1971). In his *Justice League Companion* interview with Michael Eury, Friedrich touched on the age gap between himself and Julie Schwartz. As a college student in the early '70s, Friedrich certainly had a unique perspective and outlook on the world—and it showed in his storylines. However, was it one that differed significantly from Schwartz's? Not necessarily, said Friedrich. "Julie was remarkably supportive of my political concerns (I realize now that he probably shared them, though we didn't have those kinds of conversations), but he was clear that they had to be part of an entertaining story."

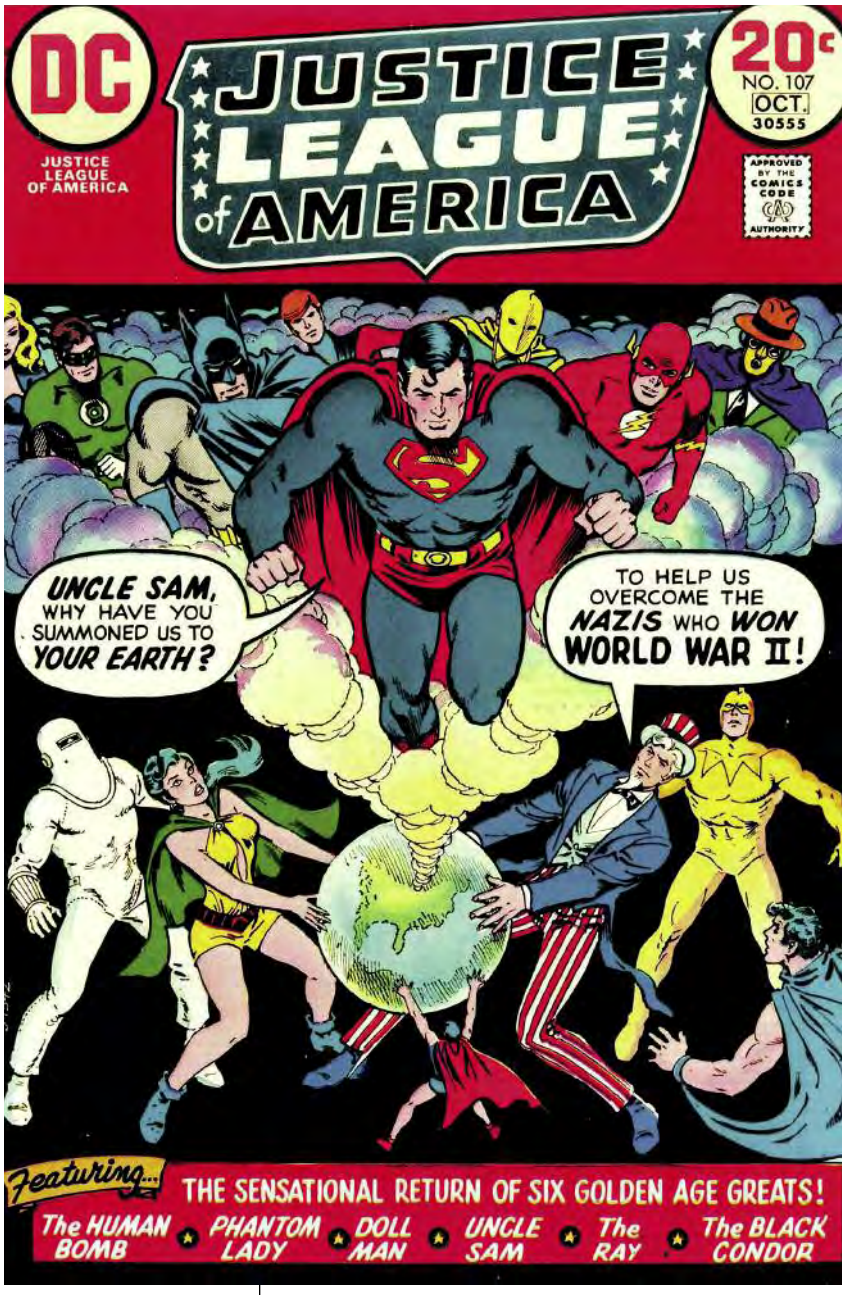
Friedrich's last *JLA* story was "Seeds of Destruction!" in #99 (June 1972), and he explained his exit thusly: "I impulsively decided to go work for Marvel and just as impulsively, DC decided I was off the book. How I made this transition is one of my embarrassing career moments." Nevertheless, Friedrich remains positive about his experience on the book and offers, "The fun of writing *JLA* flowed from the fun I had of reading it as a fan earlier—having all these great characters in the same panels and the same stories was an enjoyable challenge. The few moments I was able to succeed was when the characters really worked together with their unique personalities and heroic attributes, in ways that individually were not possible."

Len Wein kicked off an influential run on *JLA* with the three-part "In Search of the Seven Soldiers of Victory" in #100 (Aug. 1972), guest-starring the JSA and reintroducing the Seven Soldiers—the Star-Spangled Kid and Stripesy, Vigilante, Crimson Avenger, Shining Knight, and the Golden Age Green Arrow and Speedy—who had been absent from DC Comics for years. In *The Quality Companion*, Wein revealed in a 2011 interview with author Mike Kooiman that he had a soft spot for the Golden Age heroes, but surprisingly, they weren't on Julie Schwartz's radar at all. He recalls that his discussions with Schwartz about reviving the Soldiers "weren't *lengthy* conversations. Julie barely remembered any of those characters. [*laughs*] It was my suggestion to him to bring them in. I wanted to do something special for the hundredth issue of *Justice League*. So, aside from



Obsolete League

Looks like the World's Greatest Super-Heroes may be washed up in this awesome Neal Adams/Dick Giordano cover to *Justice League of America* #88 (Mar. 1971), guest-starring Aquaman's wife, Mera. Original art signed by Adams and courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).



Earth-Swastika??

That's what Wein wanted to call what we know as Earth-X, in his two-parter that brought back Quality Comics' super-heroes—now known as the Freedom Fighters. *JLA* #107 (Sept.–Oct. 1973) cover by Cardy.

getting in every member of the JLA and JSA, I thought about finding something else, and I remembered the Seven Soldiers. I'd read an article in a fanzine about them, so I looked them up in the office and thought they sounded like fun." Thanks in no small part to Wein, the concept of the Seven Soldiers would prove to have legs: Variations of the team would go on to appear in numerous DC projects, most notably in Grant Morrison's 2005–2006 metaseries *Seven Soldiers* and in the 2006 "Patriot Act" episode of the *Justice League Unlimited* animated series.

There were more Golden Age resurrections to come under Wein's watch, as Quality Comics characters Uncle Sam, the Human Bomb, Phantom Lady, Black Condor, the Ray, and Doll Man would make their DC Comics debut in *JLA* #107–108 (Oct.–Dec. 1973). In "Crisis on Earth-X," the JLA and JSA are mysteriously transported to a world where the Nazis won World War II. According to Wein, Earth-X was almost Earth-*Swastika*. As he explained to Kooiman, "When I designed it, it was a swastika and Julie said to me, 'No book I edit will have a swastika in it.' So he suggested just taking the ends off the swastika and making it an 'X.'" Regarding bringing these wartime heroes into the DC Universe, Wein added, "I was a fan of the Quality characters. As a comics collector, I loved the Lou Fine artwork. It was something DC owned and I said, 'Why don't we make use of those characters?'" The diversity of Uncle Sam et al. was also appealing to Wein, as he noted, "I always look for a certain balance when I'm writing super-hero teams. I want different kinds of powers, different personalities, so that I have interesting stuff to write. I went through it very carefully, picking a leader, Uncle Sam (a character I always adored, I don't know why); a 'flyer,' the Black Condor; a blaster [Human Bomb]; someone who fires rays [the Ray]; the sexy female [Phantom Lady]; and then the quirky power, like Doll Man." As for the team's sobriquet, Wein told Kooiman that "Freedom Fighters" was "an old name I'd been keeping since my fanzine days (in a publication called *Aurora*). I was going to create the characters when I was writing for fanzines, but that name never really got used, so I thought I've got this great name, why not use it here?" After their appearance in *Justice League*, the team would graduate to an ongoing series: *Freedom Fighters* debuted in 1976 and ran for 15 issues. Since then, iterations of the team have appeared off and on in DC continuity, most recently in two miniseries, 2006 and 2007's *Uncle Sam & the Freedom Fighters*, as well as a short-lived 2010 ongoing, *Freedom Fighters*. [***Editor's note:*** See *BACK ISSUE* #41 for a Freedom Fighters history.]

While Wein's run is memorable for bringing back beloved Golden Age characters and expanding the team's roster (more on that later), perhaps the biggest impact he had on *Justice League of America* was through his role as editor. This writer posits that the Wein-edited stories from issues #177–224 are among the series' best: "Quest for Genesis" in *JLA* #192 (July 1981), which kicked off the two-part secret origin of the Red Tornado; "Targets on Two Worlds" from #195–197 (Oct.–Dec. 1981), in which the Ultra-Humanite and the Secret Society of Super-Villains plot to destroy the JLA and JSA; the giant-size #200 (Mar. 1982), featuring a bevy of Silver and Bronze Age creators; "Crisis on Earth-Prime," a crossover with the All-Star Squadron and JSA in #207–209 (Oct.–Dec. 1982); and "Crisis in the Thunderbolt Dimension" from #219–220 (Oct.–Nov. 1983), which revealed that the Black Canary was actually the daughter of the original Golden Age heroine.

LEN WEIN

While Wein was still serving as ongoing writer, Martin Pasko saw his first work on *Justice League of America* appear in issues #111–112 (June–Aug. 1974), in which he scripted the two-page "Wanted: The Injustice Gang!" and "Amazo and His Creator," respectively. Pasko would then go on to script full-length stories in issues #122 (Sept. 1975) and #128–130 (Mar.–May 1976). He reveals how he came to

ROOTS OF *IDENTITY CRISIS*

To what lengths would you go in order to protect your loved ones? That was the basic premise of *Identity Crisis*, the 2004 limited series written by *New York Times* bestselling author Brad Meltzer and lavishly illustrated by the team of Rags Morales and Michael Bair. The complex, multi-layered drama features the murder of Sue Dibny at the hands of Jean Loring, who stages the attack to play on Ray (Atom) Palmer's fears for her safety in order to win him back. But perhaps more shocking was the big reveal of the League's history of *mindwiping* their enemies—and friends.

As the heroes gather to hunt for Sue's killer, it's revealed that Dr. Light had once broken into the team's orbiting headquarters and raped Sue. The team votes to have Zatanna mindwipe Dr. Light, turning him into a simpleton and instantly forgetting his memories. Batman returns to the satellite midway through the procedure and is enraged; panicked, the team votes to mindwipe the Darknight Detective, as well. Meltzer recalls of this key moment, "The mindwipe of Batman was the only thing I hid from DC. I never pitched them that because I was afraid they wouldn't let me do it. And I was telling [executive editor] Dan DiDio, 'Wait till you see what I'm doing to Batman … you'll be so surprised.' And he said, 'Don't surprise me. Tell me now.' To his credit, he saw the emotional impact immediately and let me run with it."

The mindwiping plot point has its roots in the Secret Society of Super-Villains (SSSV) storyline from *JLA* #166–168 (May–Aug. 1979). The Gerry Conway-scripted tale sees the SSSV swapping bodies with the League in order to escape being trapped in a void between dimensions. Meltzer retroactively posits in *Identity Crisis* that the villains took the opportunity to discover the League's secret identities … and why not? Meltzer notes, "I read [Conway's SSSV story] when I was young. *JLA* was the only comic that I tried to buy every issue of. My comic store sold comics 25 cents apiece and had a deal if you spent five dollars. I always spent the full five dollars, which was my allowance then." The novelist's passion for the League's Bronze Age adventures runs deep. Meltzer recalls that the "first comic I ever read was *JLA* #150 (which had Elongated Man save the day—and a Dr. Light flashback). *JLA* #100 (Seven Soldiers) was my favorite. Basically, anything from *JLA* #100–200, especially when Pérez came on the book. [The origin of] Red Tornado story, SSSV story … all of them just killed me."

BRAD MELTZER

Conway's take on *Identity Crisis*? "I thought it was a brilliant take on an obvious faux pas. There was a self-awareness of the absurdity of certain situations and back when I did that story, there would have been an unspoken acceptance of the fact that yeah, if you switch bodies with these guys, none of these guys would ever think to take their masks off and see who they were, right? [*laughs*] It's the same conceit that allowed Clark Kent and Superman to exist in the same universe, you know, which is that apparently nobody has a black Magic Marker that they can use to draw circles around Superman's eyes. So there are certain questions, I guess, that my generation of writers just chose not to ask because we accepted that reality … I've been rereading a lot of my stuff because I've had to write introductions to things and I was just reading my early issues of *Thor* and sort of cringing with the overwrought dialogue in it. But then I think to myself, 'Well, that was the house style, that was the era that we were writing in. I wouldn't write that way today but if I hadn't written that way back then, it would have looked wrong and people would have said you're failing. You know, you're not doing it right.' If I had played out all the logical consequences of some of the conceits that we had played with back in the day, we could never have had any stories because most of the stories would have ended with Superman basically knocking people through windows and that's it. [*laughs*] It's like, why does Superman need the Justice League? Seriously!"

Conway continues, "The brilliance of what Brad did was that he managed to both point out the absurdity of the situation and at the same time, explain—logically, how they would have dealt with it. And then, in addition to that, layered on an emotional and moral issue around the consequences of that kind of decision. But yes, 'If we had switched our bodies, the villains would have all known who we were. If they knew who we were, oh my God, they could blackmail us and destroy our lives and kill our families and so on. So we have to do something that is totally immoral to stop that.' In my era, there would have been no way to have brought up that kind of issue."

Shock deaths and controversial rape aside, *Identity Crisis* drew a line in the sand and made readers ponder, "What would you do if you knew that you had to protect your family?" Conway concurs, "Absolutely. And then the horror, of course, is that you can't ultimately protect people. Brad came to the same conclusion in his own different way that I came to with Gwen Stacy: Being a superhero means that the people closest to you are probably going to get hurt horribly."

As of this writing, it's been almost eight years since the series hit the shelves. Would Meltzer have done anything differently? "Nope," says the author. "The best part of *Identity Crisis*, for me, was and will always be how pure that creative process was. We spoke about the story, and they let me tell my story. I was just telling a 'small emotional story.' That's all they asked me to do. If I knew how big that launch would've been, I may've been too scared."

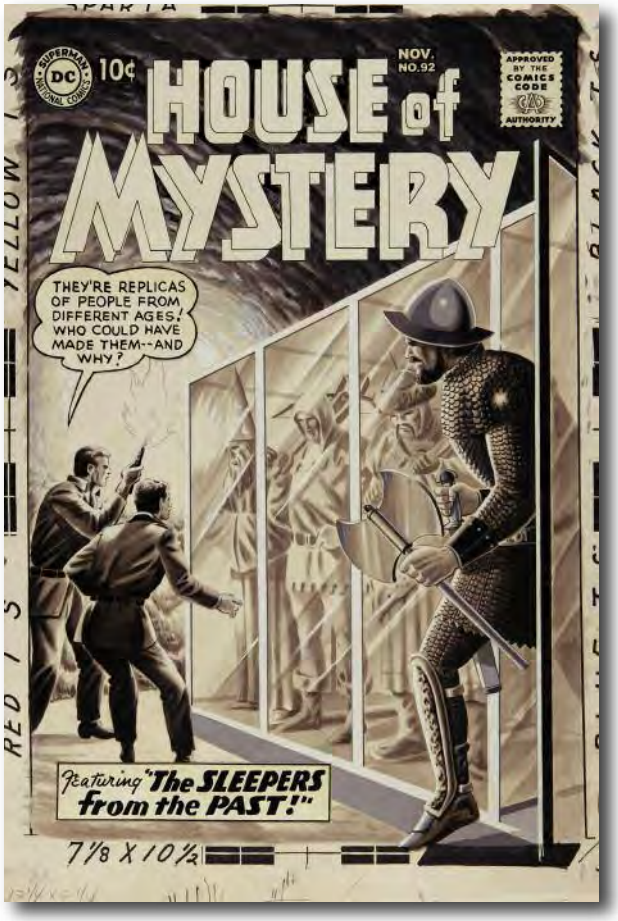
DICK DILLIN

compiled by Michael Eury

No illustrator had a Monitor Duty stint longer than *JLA* artist supreme Dick Dillin—but here's a look at some of the other comic books his art graced during the Golden, Silver, and Bronze Ages.

***Plastic Man* #54 (Nov. 1954):** Dillin, with his *Blackhawk* collaborator, inker Chuck Cuidera, illo Plas and imperiled, portly pal Woozy Winks on this Quality Comics cover.

***Blackhawk* #102 (July 1956):** Dillin drew *Blackhawk* for Quality Comics, then continued on the title when DC Comics acquired it. Inks by Chuck Cuidera.



***House of Mystery* #92 (Nov. 1959):** Dillin illustrated various covers at DC after joining the company. Washtone inks by Jack Adler. Original art courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions

***House of Secrets* #66 (May–June 1964):** Sheldon Moldoff inks Dillin on this *HOS* cover featuring DC's Hero and Villain in One Man, Eclipso.

Greatest Stories Never Told

The UNOFFICIAL JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA AVENGERS CROSSOVERS

by Michael Eury

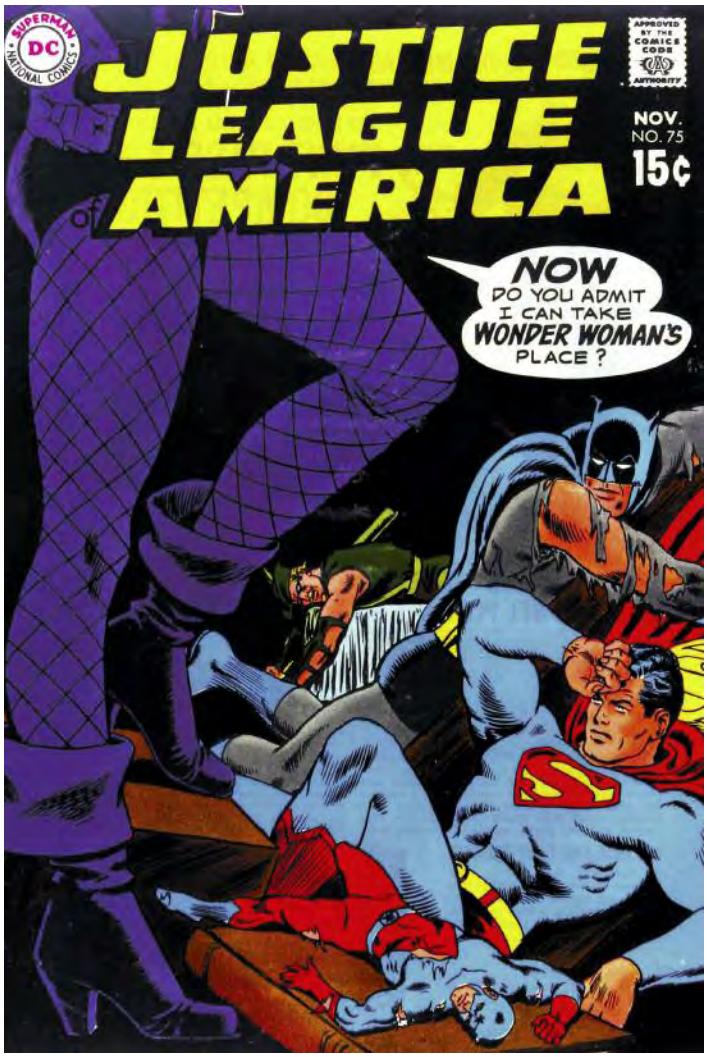
It took a looooong time before DC's World's Greatest Super-Heroes and Marvel's Earth's Mightiest Heroes crossed paths on anything other than newsstands. Efforts to produce a Justice League/Avengers DC/Marvel crossover in the early 1980s went south (see *BACK ISSUE* #1), and while both universes' champions put up their dukes in 1996's *DC vs. Marvel* event, it wasn't until Kurt Busiek and George Pérez's 2003 *JLA/Avengers* miniseries that your two favorite super-teams were finally in one adventure together!

But did you know that as the Silver Age was giving way to the Bronze, writers at both Marvel and DC Comics conspired to produce a JLA/Avengers "crossover" so top secret that even the readers of the actual crossover issues—*Justice League of America* #75 and *The Avengers* #70 (both Nov. 1969)—probably weren't aware of it?

The idea for this go-getters' get-together started at a 1969 party at the Upper East Side apartment of *Avengers* scribe Roy Thomas' wife at the time, Jean. Among the guests were the then-current and future writers of *Justice League of America*, Denny O'Neil and Mike Friedrich. As Roy Thomas related to me in a 2005 interview for my TwoMorrows Publications book, *The Justice League Companion* (*JLC*), "Mike gets this idea—he says, 'Why don't you do some kind of crossover?' I don't know if we decided we wouldn't tell our editors about it, but Mike proposed this and we thought it was a great idea. Of course,

When Titans Clash

Too bad there wasn't an official JLA/Avengers knock-down drag-out (followed by firm handshakes and a team-up) during the Silver/Bronze Age! It might've looked like this: (left) Detail from the cover of *Justice League of America* #56 (Sept. 1967), by Carmine Infantino and Murphy Anderson. (right) Detail from the cover of *Avengers* #70 (Nov. 1969), by Sal Buscema and Sam Grainger.



Secret Wars

(left) The unaltered cover to *Avengers* #70, revealing Roy Thomas' Squadron Sinister. (right) *Justice League of America* #75 is best known as the issue admitting Black Canary to the team, but it also features Denny O'Neil's entry in this unofficial superhero swap. Cover art by Infantino and Anderson.

we'd had a couple of drinks. [*laughs*]"

This was over a half-decade before the first actual crossover between DC and Marvel was published, the landmark *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man* tabloid-sized one-shot of 1976, so meetings between the two companies' characters had been the stuff of fanboy wishes and fanzine doodles. And those dreams would have to remain just that for the time being, as these conspirators determined that the JLA and Avengers wouldn't actually meet each other, but instead would tangle with analogs standing in for the other team's heroes.

And thus Thomas created the initial four members of the Squadron Sinister, each a Marvel counterpart of a DC hero: Hyperion (Superman), Nighthawk (Batman), the Whizzer (the Flash), and Dr. Spectrum (Green Lantern). According to Thomas, "I made up the Squadron Sinister and even designed the characters, drawing out sketches of what I wanted the costumes to look like. I wanted Hyperion's cape to hang on just one shoulder, etc.—I think I even had a color guide for them, with Dr. Spectrum and so forth—and I gave them to [*Avengers* artist] Sal Buscema. Later on, we did the Squadron Supreme, which was the good-guy version of the Squadron Sinister." (For more information about the Squadron Supreme, see the article beginning on page 33.)

ROY THOMAS

But Denny O'Neil's story in *JLA* #75 did not parrot Thomas' tale. Its villains, the Destructors, dark doppelgangers of the Justice Leaguers, were not the Avengers reimagined. O'Neil doesn't recall why he didn't take this crossover into the direction that Thomas did, but Roy theorizes that "I suspect, but I couldn't swear to it, that [Denny] just never really found the right words or time to suggest this idea to Julie [Schwartz, *JLA* editor, who was known for hammering out plots with his series' writers]. And without doing that, it was a little hard to work it into a story." So instead of meeting "the Avengers," the Justice Leaguers battled their own evil counterparts—some of whom just happened to employ gimmicks or use powers similar to the Avengers'! For example, as Roy Thomas recalls, "Denny had Batman fighting with a trash-can lid, a little like Captain America and the shield, and a couple of other things. It was just the most vague kind of hint of a 'crossover.' [*laughs*] I don't blame Denny. Maybe if I'd been working for Julie, I'd have trouble doing it, too."

In an interview for *JLC*, O'Neil admitted to me that his memories of the planning of the JLA/Avengers "crossover" are lost to time, but that

More Than Marvel's JLA SQUADRON SUPREME

with Ralph Macchio

by Michael Browning
conducted January 12, 2012

JLA ROLL CALL

SUPERMAN

BATMAN

GREEN LANTERN

THE FLASH

TM & © DC Comics.

SS ROLL CALL

HYPERION

NIGHTHAWK

DR. SPECTRUM

THE WHIZZER

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Longtime Marvel Comics writer and editor Mark Gruenwald knew the Squadron Supreme had the potential to be so much more than simply Marvel's version of DC's Justice League of America.

Gruenwald, who worked for Marvel nearly his entire career, was also a big fan of the JLA, so he knew that for the entirety of their published history, the Squadron had always been used just as analogs of the JLA.

Up until Gruenwald came along, Hyperion was the analog for Superman and Nighthawk was for Batman. Power Princess was Marvel's version of Wonder Woman, Dr. Spectrum was Green Lantern, and the Whizzer was the Flash. Arcanna was Zatanna. Tom Thumb was the Atom. the Golden Archer was Green Arrow and Lady Lark was his Black Canary. Nuke was Firestorm. Blue Eagle was Hawkman. Amphibian was Aquaman.

But Gruenwald saw something more in the SS. He saw the potential to do a story that had never been done at Marvel. A story that predated Watchmen, Marvels, *and* Kingdom Come, *and one that would be fondly remembered as the late scribe's best work in his long career at the House of Ideas.*

It was Gruenwald's idea to make the Squadron lineup more than just JLA rip-offs. He wanted to give each Squadroner a life and personality of their own.

In the 12-issue Squadron Supreme *limited series published from 1985 to 1987, Gruenwald brought a realism to Marvel Comics that had never been seen before and he used Marvel's own concept of "What If" by asking,* What if the Squadron Supreme were the Justice League of a real Earth?

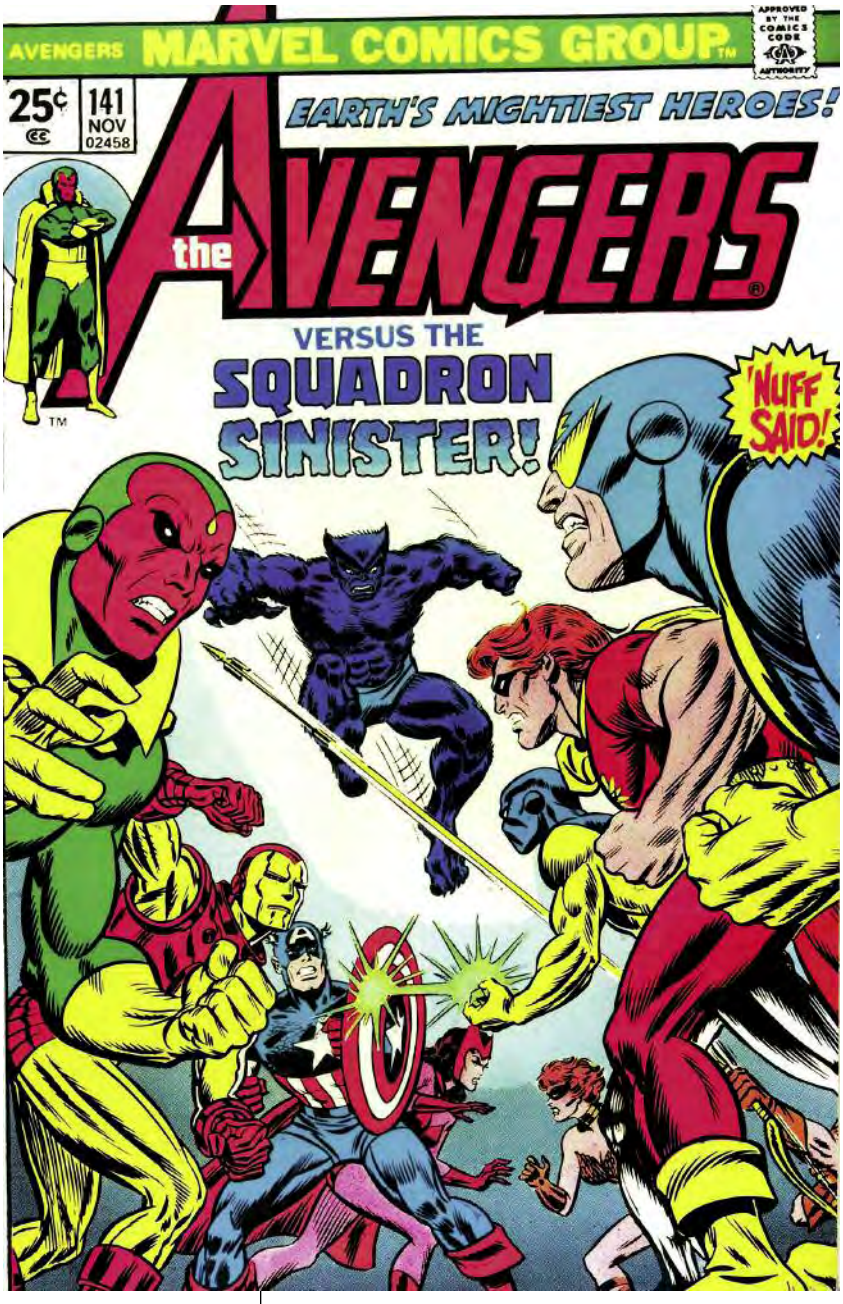
In the series, Gruenwald examined the goals and purposes of each member of the Squadron and saw what happens when one group gains too much power and takes away a nation's free will. He also dealt with real-world problems like what happens when one tries to modify the behavior of another to make them better, more upstanding citizens and the costly effects that superheroes' powers would have on their families if they lived in the real world.

You know, Marvel's version of Earth-Prime.

In the groundbreaking limited series, Hyperion decides that he knows best for the people and vows to end hunger, war, and crime in a year. Each issue of the series happens in a month of that year and readers get to see the real-world consequences of superheroes taking over the United States to make it a better place—or at least their vision of a better place.

Opposing Hyperion in his quest for utopia is Nighthawk, who believes that all men should have free will and that everyone should be allowed to chose their own destinies, rather than the government giving them everything they ever wanted and forcing them to be good people.

The two former friends are then put on opposite sides and the struggle



When Titans Clash

Writer Steve Englehart brought the Squadron not-yet-Supreme into the pages of *Avengers* #141 (Nov. 1975), the first issue penciled by George Pérez. Cover art by Gil Kane and John Romita, Sr.

begins. In the end, the Squadron is radically different, as Gruenwald shows that in every war there are casualties, and that changes—some good and some bad—come from conflict in the real world.

Gruenwald's Squadron Supreme series has been called "Marvel's Watchmen," but, in truth, it's a story about what happens when superheroes take it upon themselves to give people everything they ever wanted. It shows that sometimes getting what you want isn't always what's best. It's a story about superheroes becoming dictators, and how not everyone wants paradise forced upon them.

***Ralph Macchio** wasn't just the editor of the 12-issue miniseries—he was also Gruenwald's best friend and accomplice. He knew what Gruenwald wanted to do with the Squadron Supreme and he let him run with it.*

In this interview, Macchio talks about Gruenwald and how he made the SS into more *than just the JLA of the Marvel Universe.*

– Michael Browning

Crisis on Earth-M(arvel)

Writer Steve Englehart and penciler George Pérez—both of whom would soon be producing *Justice League of America* stories for DC Comics—offered this fun JLA homage on the splash to *The Avengers* #148 (June 1976), guest-starring the Squadron Supreme.

MICHAEL BROWNING: ***How did Mark come up with the idea for the Squadron Supreme story?***

RALPH MACCHIO: What Mark wanted to do was, he really wanted to deal with the idea of these characters really existing. I think—and I'm speculating here—but it may have been because we were involved with the New Universe, which was the idea of the "world outside your window," and he had created *DP7* for that, which was another really cool, landmark series, that he began to think in terms of "What if these characters who really were superpowered, what would it be like if they existed for real?" and "If you had a collection of characters as strong as the Squadron or the Justice League and one day they decided that it wasn't going to be enough just to stop some crime here or there but to virtually eliminate war, famine, and poverty, what road would that take you down?" and "At what point would it get to where these people would become benevolent dictators—but still dictators—because they would be making these decisions because they had this power, even if it was in the most altruistic of senses?" He wanted to carry that forward.

It was Gerald Ford, of all people, and he wasn't one of the great philosophers of all time, but he had a line that I never forgot: Someone was talking to him about the federal government and he said, "Remember something: A government which is powerful enough to give you everything you want is also powerful enough to take it all away." I thought

Bring on the Bad Guys!

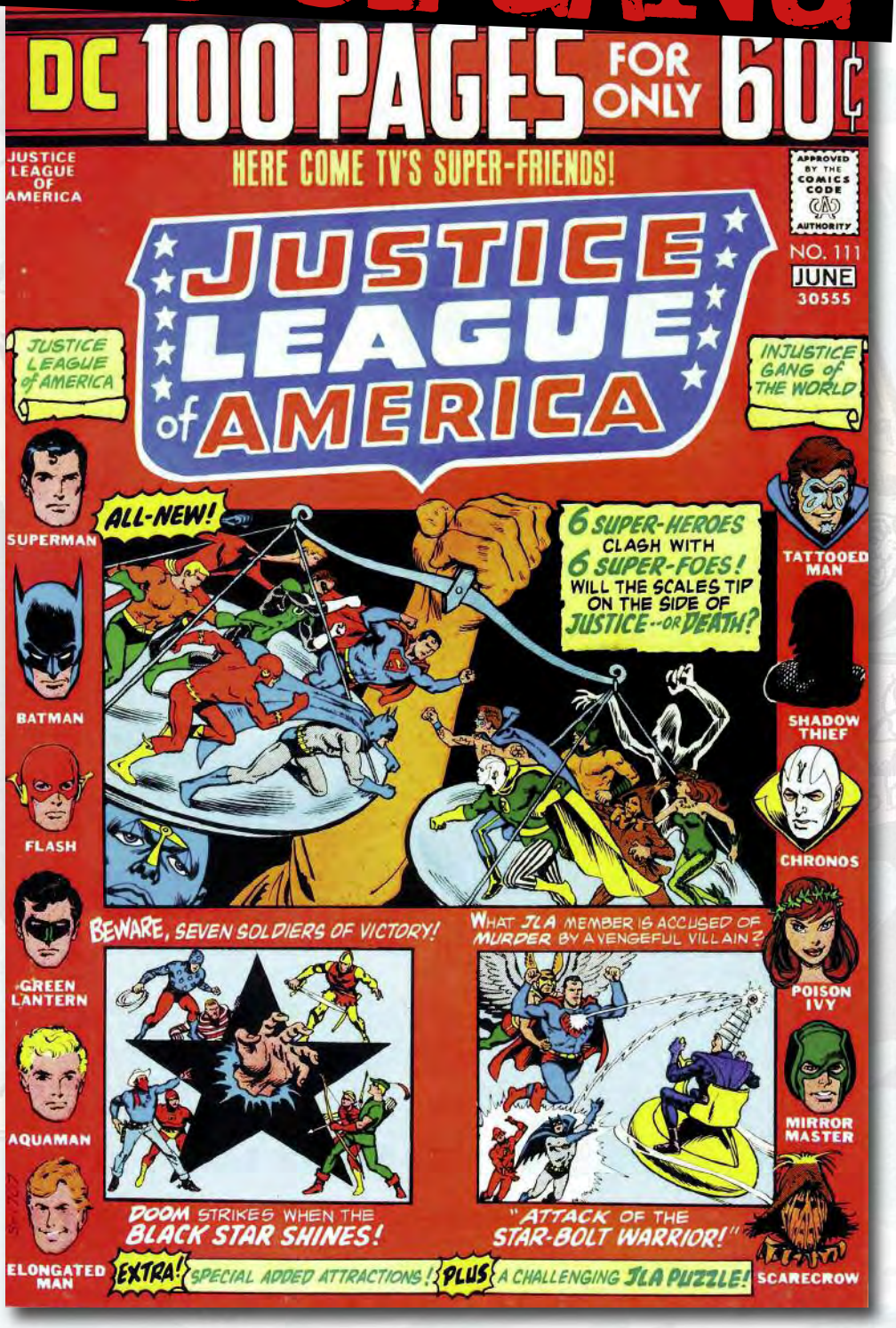
THE INJUSTICE GANG

by Dewey Cassell

It is the natural order of things. Since Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden, good has always been countered by evil. As the Joker told the Batman in the motion picture *The Dark Knight*, "You complete me." So it should come as no surprise that when a group of superheroes form a team, a rival team of supervillains is sure to follow.

The X-Men had the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. The Legion of Super-Heroes had the Legion of Super-Villains. The Avengers had the Masters of Evil. And the Justice League of America had the Injustice Gang of the World.

The Injustice Gang of the World first appeared together in issue #111 (May–June 1974) of *Justice League of America*, although most of its members had been around for a while. The Injustice Gang was created by writer Len Wein and artist Dick Dillin, and consisted of:



Scales of Injustice
Nick Cardy cover to *Justice League of America* #111 (May–June 1974), introducing the Injustice Gang of the World and their manipulator, Libra.

Chronos – supervillain with the ability to manipulate time. Nemesis of the Atom. First appeared in 1962 in *Atom* #3 (Oct.–Nov. 1962).

Mirror Master – one of the Flash rogues' gallery, who uses mirrors to commit crimes and evade capture. First appeared in 1959 in *Flash* #105 (Feb.–Mar. 1959).

Poison Ivy – female foe of the Batman who can control plants and possesses a deadly kiss. First appeared in 1966 in *Batman* #181 (June 1966).

Scarecrow – nemesis of the Batman, possessing a hallucinogen that causes people to experience their greatest fear. First appeared in 1941 in *World's Finest* #3 (Fall 1941).

Shadow Thief – wields a dimensiometer that allows him to shift into a two-dimensional, intangible shadow state. Enemy of Hawkman and Hawkgirl. First appeared in 1961 in *The Brave and the Bold* #36 (June–July 1962).

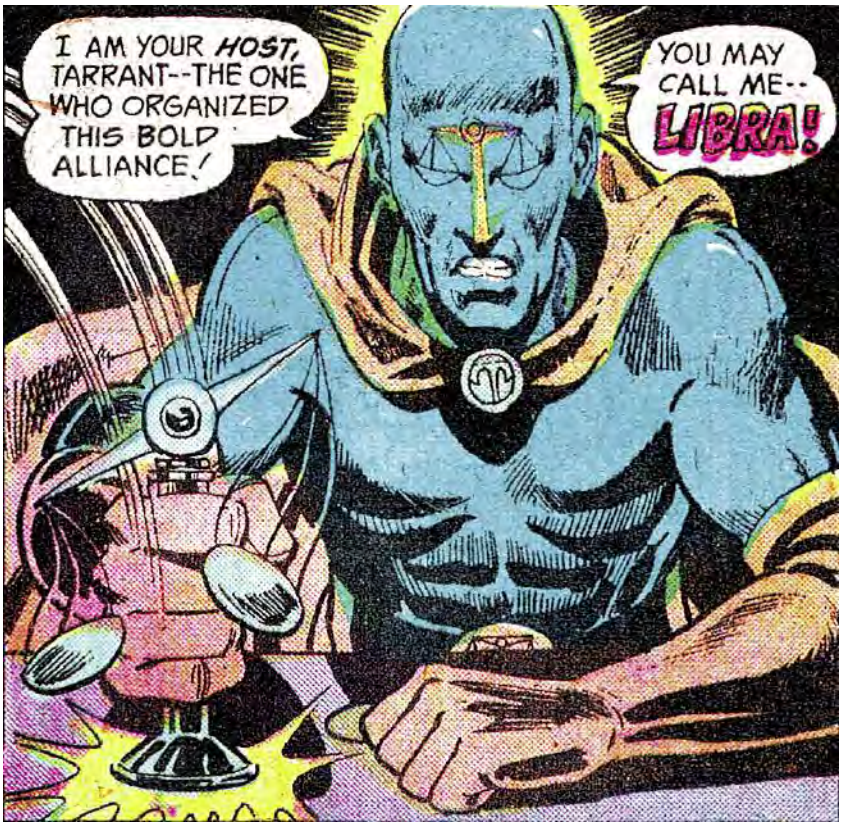
The Tattooed Man – criminal tattooed with a chemical enabling him to mentally create actual objects from the tattoos. Nemesis of Green Lantern. First appeared in 1963 in *Green Lantern* #23 (Sept. 1963).

Libra – organizer and leader of the Gang, and inventor of the "Energy Transmortifier." First appeared in *JLA* #111.

The story in *Justice League of America* #111 depicts Libra equipping the members of the Injustice Gang with a "Plan B" device, just in case they are defeated by the Justice League. The device absorbs half of the energy or powers of the JLA heroes and transfers it to Libra. In the course of the story, we learn that the battle with the JLA was just a test. Pleased with the results, Libra attempts to use the device on the universe itself, with the intent of becoming a god. Instead, Libra is absorbed into the universe and his essence is spread across the cosmos—an inauspicious start for the Injustice Gang.

Construct II, enemy of the Atom, attempted to reorganize the Injustice Gang, with the exception of Shadow Thief, in *Justice League of America* #143. Wonder Woman, her mind controlled by Construct, battles Superman while the Injustice Gang takes on the rest of the JLA, but they are defeated once again and Wonder Woman's mind is freed. The Injustice Gang even had its own satellite in this issue, which is apparently destroyed. Then in issue #158 of *Justice League of America*, the original Injustice Gang returns, under the direction of a mysterious leader ultimately revealed to be Abra Kadabra, Flash's foe from the future. The alien Ultraa has negated the powers of the JLA and plans to do likewise to the Injustice Gang, but he is thwarted and the Gang attempts to use alien artifacts to gain control of the Earth's energy resources, operating from the old JLA headquarters in Happy Harbor, Rhode Island. But when Ultraa loses his battle against the Gang, the JLA members regain use of their powers, and the Injustice Gang is once again defeated.

In 1997 and 1998, in the "Rock of Ages" storyline in *JLA*, Lex Luthor pulled together his own version of the Injustice Gang, this time with a more "A" list of supervillains, including the Joker.



Plucked from Limbo

Readers' first look at Libra, from *JLA* #111. Words by Len Wein, art by Dicks Dillin and Giordano. Decades later, Grant Morrison resurrected Libra for use in his *Final Crisis* series.

Justice League of America TM & © DC Comics.

Justice League Detroit

by Michael Browning

The 1980s saw a lot of changes happen in comics, especially at DC, where Frank Miller, John Byrne, Alan Moore, Marv Wolfman, and George Pérez revamped the DC Universe and changed it forever. Crisis on Infinite Earths, DC's company-wide event that would simplify its confusing multiverse into one universe, was on its way, and things would never be the same for the DC Universe.

But before all of that took place, changes were happening in the Justice League of America. Not only was the core group of characters slowly changing, but the tone and scope of the team's adventures were changing, too.

Gone were the universe-threatening villains, replaced with more down-to-earth menaces. The artistic reins had changed hands a few times since the death of longtime *JLA* penciler Dick Dillin—first to George Pérez, then, after Perez left to work on *The New Teen Titans*, to Chuck Patton. Also in the art mix were issues drawn by Marvel stalwarts Don Heck and George Tuska, both in the twilight of their careers. Heck and Tuska offered dependable art, but neither carried the big-name recognition of Pérez, and that didn't help the numbers.

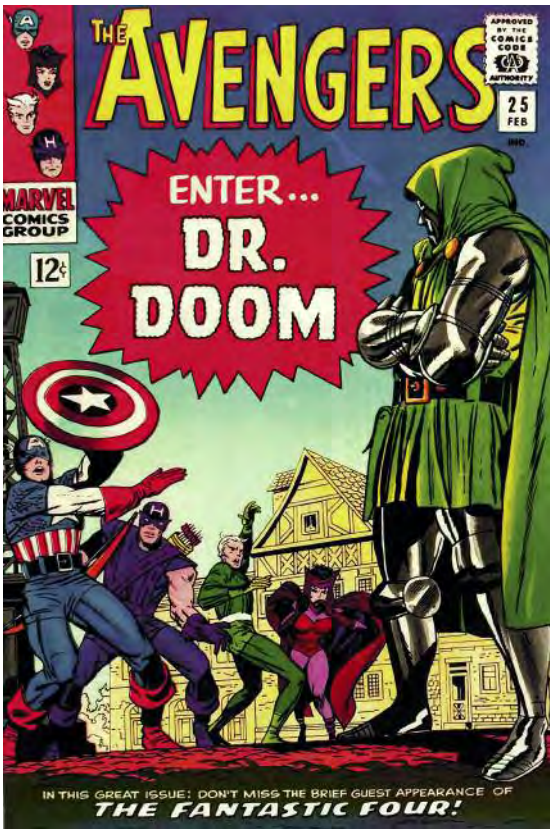
Sales were slipping on *Justice League of America*, DC's main team book that had been popular since it first banded together its headlining heroes in 1960. What had once been DC Comics' flagship team book was now limping along and trying to find a new audience.

Longtime *JLA* writer Gerry Conway saw the need to make wholesale changes in the group once known as "The World's Greatest Super-Heroes." By the 1980s, Pérez and writer Marv Wolfman's *The New Teen Titans* was almost as popular as Marvel's *Uncanny X-Men*, and Conway thought that maybe following Wolfman's and Perez's lead would help save the JLA. Conway, who brought about the legendary "Death of Gwen Stacy" story in *Amazing Spider-Man* over at Marvel and created Firestorm with Al Milgrom at DC, decided he was tired of having to deal with characters that were tied up in starring roles in other books. He also wanted to try to capitalize on the trend of younger, less-powerful heroes fighting more realistic villains.

He had already written Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, and the Flash out of *JLA* and was

Template Titans

Gerry Conway followed the cues of the streamlined Avengers (a.k.a. "Cap's Kooky Quartet") and New Teen Titans in his reimagining of the JLA as an urban super-team. *Avengers* #25 (Feb. 1966) cover by Jack Kirby and Dick Ayers; *New Teen Titans* #34 (Mar. 1983) cover by George Pérez.



focused on the B-team heroes, including Elongated Man, Aquaman, Green Arrow and Black Canary, Hawkman and Hawkwoman, Zatanna, and Red Tornado, but that still didn't bring the needed sales increases. Something had to be done.

HEROES IN THE HOOD

It was 1984, and the JLA was running against the wind.

The big, multiverse-changing crossover event, Crisis on Infinite Earths, would soon be underway, with appearances by the Monitor and Harbinger—and the menacing red skies—in almost every DC book.

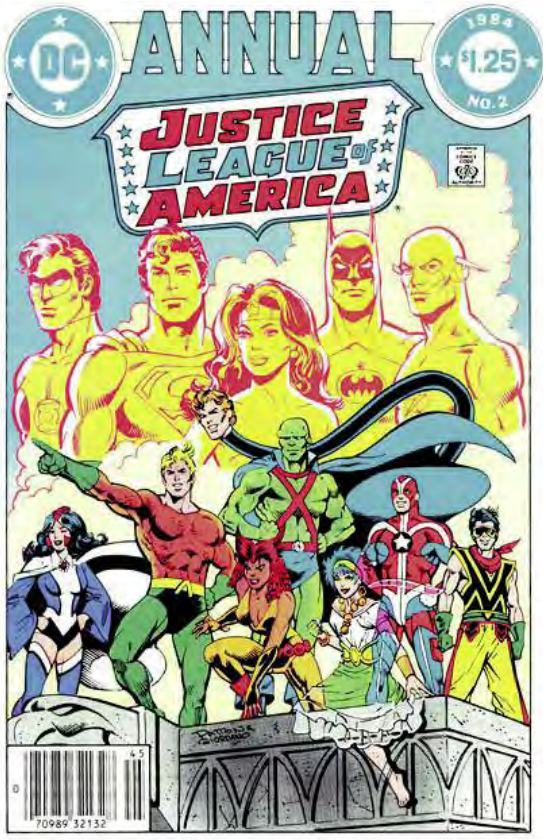
Gerry Conway didn't sit on his hands to wait for the Crisis. He met it head-on with a new group of heroes that were young, inexperienced, and untested, with the hopes that they, like the New Teen Titans, would catch on and be a runaway sales hit. Conway not only changed the lineup, but he also destroyed the status quo that he had written for so many years by demolishing the popular JLA satellite and kicking off a new era—in Detroit, Michigan.

"It was part of wanting to change things to where we could get it down to a more manageable group of people in a different mindset," Conway says. "And, again, I wanted to do something I hadn't seen at DC, which was a ground-level superhero team that was rooted in a neighborhood. We tend to write these titles where the heroes are located in New York or Metropolis and that's a big city, and it's sort of this unformed, realistic, vague sort of big town where you don't have a sense of neighborhood nor any interaction with the actual people who are around you. The Avengers were on Fifth Avenue, and who cared? You never got a sense of what was going on with the guy who ran the sandwich cart down on the street corner while these fights were going on, with the exception of Willie Lumpkin, who was the postman for the Fantastic Four. You never had any sense that there was anybody living anywhere near these people.

"I tried when I was writing *Amazing Spider-Man* to give Peter Parker neighbors in the apartment building that he was living in," Conway continues. "So I wanted to make these superheroes feel like they are part of the neighborhood, and my thought was to plunk them down in the middle of a city that was in deep, deep crap, a city that needs heroes. That was the driving impetus for me to relocate them from the satellite down to Detroit. I thought it was a good move, and it just didn't set the world on fire and DC didn't get behind it. They got behind it, but they didn't. It was like, 'Well, we'll see,' rather than, 'Yeah! Let's do this!' So that's why it came to kind of an ignominious end, because no one at DC was invested in it. There are way to move to a different storyline with books. Killing off half your cast and basically dumping on the previous year or two of storylines isn't the most sensitive way to do it. It was sort of like saying, 'Screw you! I didn't like any of this stuff anyway!' It was sort of like throwing a girlfriend off a bridge. [*laughs*]"

The changes began in *Justice League of America Annual* #2 (Oct. 1984), written by Conway and drawn by Chuck Patton and Dave Hunt, and things were never the same again.

The Annual picks up right after the ending of *JLA* #230, in which the satellite was completely destroyed during a two-part story arc entitled "The War of the Worlds 1984." A group of angry Martians came looking for J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter, and got more than they expected when the JLA showed up to take care of the invaders. But during the battle, the aliens tore through the satellite and left the JLA homeless.



Reconstruction
(left) Martians mix it up in *Justice League of America* #230 (Sept. 1984), its cover featuring powerful pencils by Chuck Patton, inked by Dick Giordano. (right) The new, untried League bows in *JLA Annual* #2 (Oct. 1984), with cover art by Patton and Giordano.

Conway, though, had a plan that he hoped would bring sales back up and excite new readers and longtime fans of the JLA.

"I had been writing the book for a number of years, and there were two impetuses behind it—one was economic and one was creative," Conway says. "The economic impetus was that JLA was no longer selling as well as it had. And the most popular book at DC at that point was *New Teen Titans*, so there was pressure to make the book more like *New Teen Titans*. And since nobody quite knew what that meant except to say that Marv Wolfman knew what he was doing with *New Teen Titans*. So the question became, *How do you accomplish that?* And this is where you get into the creative end of it: What *Titans* had going for it was cohesion as a team where the characters in the Titans interacted pretty much exclusively with each other, so you could develop storylines that involved the characters' personal lives and create drama and character development in that title, so much so that in *Batman*, we had actually written Dick Grayson out of the book so that he would be fairly exclusive to the Titans. With *Justice League*, as it was constituted prior to the JLA Detroit, you didn't have the same opportunities for exclusivity and character interaction and group dynamics.

"So from a creative point of view, I was already beginning to feel that there had to be some kind of change, that there had to be some way for me to focus more on characters who were exclusive to the book," Conway explains. "I had been trying to do that with some of the second-tier characters like Red Tornado, Zatanna, and Firestorm, giving them more room to move around and to develop stories around their personal lives because they weren't really seen in other titles. When the time came and we were looking at what we could do to shake up this book, the suggestion I had and other people had, because I don't think I was the only person who thought of it, was to find some way to make a core group of characters that would be exclusive to the *JLA* title so we could basically develop their personalities and their storylines and so on. And the idea also was, to be honest, to skew it a little bit younger in terms of the characters we were focusing on so that they would be closer to the Titans model in that sense.

"And that was the impetus—to find a way to basically move it away from an all-inclusive Justice League where any DC characters could just pop in and out of to a Justice League that had a core group that would constantly be the center," Conway says. "One of my inspirations was the way that Stan Lee reinvented the Avengers from the group that included Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, and Captain America to a less-powerful, but more-cohesive group, with Captain America, Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, and Quicksilver. Those were the two things I was looking at—*New Teen Titans* and Stan Lee's *Avengers*. I think Stan Lee felt the same constraints on *Avengers*. The thing that made Marvel great was the interaction of characters with each other in the sense that mattered. What happened between these two figures had repercussions in their lives and it was important. But that wasn't the case if Iron Man was appearing *The Avengers* and simultaneously in *Iron Man*, where Iron Man was having a storyline that was going over three or four issues that had nothing to do with what was happening in *The Avengers*. It reduced the credibility of both books, so Stan, I think, saw what he needed to do to create a group that was as cohesive as the Fantastic Four was, and that was the way it went. I think that was a good model."

Justice League, Then and Now with Gerry Conway and Dan Jurgens

by Philip Schweier

When DC Comics announced there would be a company-wide relaunch in September 2011, many new incarnations of long-time features were expected to undergo massive makeovers, including one of its flagship titles, **Justice League of America (JLA).** Over the years, the JLA has faced many challenges, from Starro the Conqueror to the Infinite Crisis.

But no menace is quite so fearsome as the constantly changing marketplace. Simply put, writing funnybooks ain't what it used to be. "The readership is different," says Gerry Conway, who was the writer for *Justice League of America* from 1978–1986.

"I had the advantage or disadvantage of writing for a readership that would pick up an individual story and then go away for three or four months and then pick up another individual story, so I had to write stories that were complete in one issue, or close to complete. I would do a lot of two-parters. Today, you're trying to keep people around for six issues, so it's a totally different mindset, a totally different structure."

Conway was among the writers who entered the market in the early to mid-1970s, in his case beginning with a story in *House of Secrets* #81 (Aug.–Sept. 1969). While the horror titles served as ample training ground for novice comic-book professionals in those days, Conway's true desire lay in writing superheroes, especially those of which he was a fan.

"I was at DC for about a year," he says, "and during that year I did about three or four issues, individual scripts." According to the website *Mike's Amazing World of DC Comics*, his first was *Justice League of America* #125 ("Men Who Sold Destruction," Dec. 1975). He would continue to write JLA adventures for issues, #126, 127, 131, 132, 133, and 134.

Thanks to a friendship with Roy Thomas, Conway was afforded a new opportunity at Marvel Comics,

Checkered Pasts

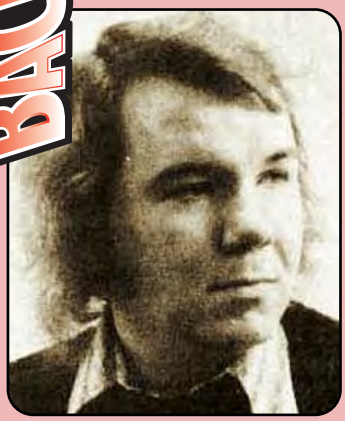
Continuing a cover theme started with *JLA* #1: (left) cover to the Conway–scribed *Justice League of America* #178 (May 1980) by Jim Starlin, and (right) writer/penciler Dan Jurgens—cover-inked by Murphy Anderson—on *Justice League America* #61 (Apr. 1992).

BACK ISSUE DATACARD

WRITER

Beginnings:
House of Secrets #81 (Aug.–Sept. 1969), "Aaron Philips' Photo Finish"

Milestones:
Amazing Spider-Man #111–149 (Aug. 1972–Oct.1975) / co-creator of the Punisher and Firestorm the Nuclear Man / *Justice League of America* (Feb. 1978–Oct. 1986) / screenplays for *Fire and Ice* (1983) and *Conan the Destroyer* (1984) / writer/producer on such shows as *Matlock, Hercules: The Legendary Journeys,* and *Law & Order*



Works in Progress:
Superman Beyond / *Jughead Double Digest* / *Richie Rich* / *Archie Comics*

Cyberspace:
Find Gerry Conway on Facebook

GERRY CONWAY

BACK ISSUE DATACARD

WRITER/ARTIST

Beginnings:
The Warlord #63 (Nov. 1982), "The Kaash'ban"

Milestones:
Booster Gold, creator/writer/artist 1985–1987, 2007–2011 / *Justice League of America*, writer/artist 1992–1993 / *Superman*, writer/artist 1991–1995, writer 1995–1999 / *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time*, writer/artist 1994 / *Captain America*, writer 1999–2000, writer/artist 2000–2002 / *The Mighty Thor*, writer 1998–2004

Works in Progress:
Superman, writer/artist 2012 / *Justice League International*, writer 2011–2012 / *Green Arrow,* artist 2011

Cyberspace:
www.danjurgens.com

DAN JURGENS

where he wrote such high-profile titles such as the *Fantastic Four*, and also scripted several Spider-Man stories for *Marvel Team-Up*. Polishing his skill at writing team books made Conway the perfect candidate for taking over the Justice League when he returned to DC a couple of years later.

A DREAM COME TRUE FOR CONWAY

"Julie [Schwartz, then editor of *JLA*] liked what I was doing and he was looking for a regular writer, someone who could handle a group book, write the different characters, as well as write in the style that he enjoyed," Conway says. "And we got along very well together, so it was kind of a fit when I came back looking for some regular assignments."

Beginning with *Justice League of America* #151 ("The Unluckiest League of All," Feb. 1978), he began a run that, with the exception of a few isolated issues, would last until #255 ("Rising," Oct. 1986).

For Conway, it was a bit of a dream come true: "I think *Justice League* was one of the very first DC titles that I became aware of as a kid. I can remember vividly reading the first Kanjar Ro Justice League story. I was probably seven or eight years old, so it made a great impact on me. *Justice League* was one of the two magazines I actually had fan letters in, when I was a fan (the other one was *Fantastic Four*), so that pretty much sums up my relationship with the book.

"I also really felt an affinity for the structure that Julie had created with Gardner Fox for Justice League stories at that time, which was the three-part storytelling where you introduce the menace, then you break your team up into individual teams, and then they went off and fought the menace from different angles. I really liked that structure and I liked being able to write the characters in these little 'mini-teams.' But I also brought the sensitivity of the Marvel style of soap-opera storytelling."

As a fan of DC Comics, writing the Justice League was a rather plum assignment as it gave Conway the opportunity to write for some of DC's biggest stars without being spread too thinly over multiple titles. "I'd always been a huge fan of Green Lantern and Flash," says Conway. "I really liked writing Batman."

While the core group may have appealed to him, he especially had an affinity for some of the peripheral characters, such as Red Tornado and Elongated Man—"the people who weren't getting the spotlight focused on them," explains Conway, "who didn't have their own titles. Partly, that's a selfish thing because it allowed me the opportunity to develop them more as characters in their own stories because they weren't being distracted by storylines being executed in other books."

Under Conway's pen, many of DC's lesser characters were developed more fully, such as Red Tornado and Martian Manhunter. "You write the characters," says Conway, "that you feel an affinity for, and also that interest you for some inherent conflict or challenge that they have as individuals and as a group. For instance, Red Tornado isn't even human, he's a machine. Is he a person or is he not a person? That appeals to me, the outsider

within the group. Martian Manhunter is kind of the same way—again, a character I was a fan of when I was a kid, that I wanted to see more of."

Another character that grew into her own was Zatanna. "She was one of the most powerful members," argues Conway, "and yet was probably seen as one of the weaker members because she's a girl, but if you really look at it, she's probably one of the most powerful members of the group because she can do literally almost anything. So I enjoyed playing around with those possibilities."

One character added to the roster of the Justice League during Conway's tenure was Firestorm, the Nuclear Man, which Conway created with Al Milgrom. The Nuclear Man debuted in his own title, but after only five issues fell victim to the infamous DC Implosion of the late 1970s. Afterwards, Conway introduced him to the Justice League in *Justice League of America* #179 ("The Siren Song of the Satin Satan," June 1980). "It was all part of my master plan," Conway kids.

"I'd sort of gotten Julie interested in the character first through doing stories in *Action Comics*, introducing him as a character in a Superman story," explains Conway. "I think he liked that character because he was kind of a young kid who provided a different energy to the group, plus he fit the Julie Schwartz/science-based hero thing. So it wasn't very much of a hard sell. Julie felt the book needed to grow and bring in new readers and bring in new material, so he was on board with that."

CONWAY ON MULTIPLE EARTHS

Since the dawn of DC's Silver Age and the introduction of the multiple earths, a common staple of the Justice League book was the annual JLA/JSA team-up. "Oh, I loved those crossovers," Conway says gleefully. "In fact, under me they started to expand to three issues. There was someth
concept that really appeale

Again, this goes back
"Most of the writing I did
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would be developed."

In Conway's opinion, it
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sense that anything else ha
one book to another. The annual crossovers offered readers a sense that there was a larger universe that would reconnect with the past by reintroducing a villain or storyline from DC's prior history.

eally, really enjoyed that," says Conway. njoyed it when they did the one-offs in Hourman or Starman, Dr. Fate or the t enthralled me, and then as a writer, to that playground, as I say, is just won-

it was, 'Oh, boy, I can't wait. It's

Conway attempted to raise the bar for is readers by expanding the crossover "It was the anchor of the year for me," n't say I planned my year around that I usually started thinking of what I was for the team-up next year around the as finishing up this year, and if I could lay in some groundwork for it, I would usually try to do that."

From a writer's point of view, Conway believes having that touchstone every year is a terrific struc-

Bewitched

Conway made Zatanna—seen on the *JLA* #166 (May 1979) cover penciled by the title's then-editor, Ross Andru, and inked by Dick Giordano—a significant member of the team.